

**THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF
AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR
OF 1914-1918**

**VOLUME V
THE A.I.F. IN FRANCE:
DECEMBER 1917-MAY 1918**

THE
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE
IN FRANCE

DURING THE MAIN GERMAN OFFENSIVE, 1918

BY
C. E. W. BEAN

With 279 illustrations and maps

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PREFACE

THIS volume narrates the part played by the Australian Corps in the barring of the German advance upon Amiens in 1918, and the similar part of the 1st Australian Division in the saving of Hazebrouck. It also endeavours to explain the change of outlook which enhanced the spirit and performance of Australian soldiers throughout the last year of the war. Appendices describe the participation of Australians in the Mesopotamian and North-West Persian campaigns (including the rôle of the Dunsterforce during the retreat of the Assyrians from Urmia, one of the most terrible though little known incidents of the war); and the episode in which the great airman, Richthofen, met his death.

The main subject necessarily involves a more than incidental reference to the performance of the British Army in the greatest battle ever waged; and, in his endeavour to paint a true picture not only of those operations but of the motives behind the conduct of them, the writer is most deeply indebted to the British Official Historian, Sir James Edmonds, who with outstanding generosity placed the results of his own researches at the service of his Australian colleague, heedless of whether they would first be given to the public in his own volumes or—as some of them inevitably are—in this. Needless to say, the first volume of the British Official History dealing with 1918 was by far the most helpful of the published works consulted.

Next, the author desires to express his thanks to Captain G. D. Mitchell for permission to use an original record that richly deserves—and, in the interests of the A.I.F., should some day be given—publication in book form. A debt is also due to the admirable French Official History; to the French Ministry of War for the relevant extracts from the French records; to the *Reichsarchiv* for information from German official sources; to the Australian agents charged with the distribution of the Right Honourable A. Duff Cooper's *Haig* for advance copies of *Volume II* of that important work;

to the Consul-General for the United States in Sydney and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (U.S.A.) for help in identifying Americans mentioned in Appendix 5; to *Reveille*, the *Sun*, *Smith's Weekly*, and the *West Australian* for courteously broadcasting requests for information or photographs; and to very many ex-members of the British and Australian forces who, from the late Sir John Monash downwards, freely gave their assistance whenever required.

C. E. W. B.

SYDNEY,

8th June, 1936.

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CHRONOLOGY FROM 1st DECEMBER, 1917, TO 7th MAY, 1918

(*Italic type indicates events dealt with in this volume.*)

1917.

- Dec. 1—*Allied Supreme War Council inaugurated.* German East Africa cleared of enemy.
„ 9—Jerusalem taken.
„ 12—Roumania agrees to armistice.
„ 15—Russians sign armistice terms at Brest-Litovsk.
„ 20—Australia rejects conscription (second referendum).

1918.

- Jan. 8—President Wilson lays down his "Fourteen Points."
„ 20—Naval action outside the Dardanelles.
„ 27—*Dunsterforce leaves Baghdad for North-West Persia.*
Feb. 19—*Sir Henry Wilson appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff (in place of Sir William Robertson).*
„ 21—Jericho taken.
March 3—Peace treaty signed by Russia and Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk.
„ 5—Preliminary peace treaty signed between Roumania and Central Powers.
„ 13—Odessa occupied by German forces.
„ 21—*German offensive begins on the Somme (ends on April 5).*
Mar. 21-Apr. 2—Raid to Es Salt and Amman (Palestine).
March 26—*General Foch appointed to co-ordinate efforts of British and French Armies. Hébuterne occupied by 4th Aust. Brigade.*
„ 27—*Montdidier taken by Germans. 3rd and 4th Aust. Divisions go into line in front of Amiens.*
„ 28—*Germans attack at Arras. First action of Dernancourt.*
„ 30—*Germans attack at Morlancourt.*
April 1—R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. amalgamated and established as a separate service, the R.A.F.
„ 4-5—*Battle of the Avre. Second action of Dernancourt. First action of Villers-Bretonneux.*
„ 9-29—*German offensive on the Lys.*
„ 10—Third Military Service Act passed in Great Britain.
„ 12-15—*Battle of Hazebrouck.*

1918.

- April 15—Germans capture Bailleul.
 „ 17-19—*First Battle of Kemmel Ridge.*
 „ 23—British naval raid on Ostend and Zeebrugge.
 „ 24-25—*Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux.*
 „ 25-26—Second Battle of Kemmel Ridge.
- April 30-May 4—Second action of Es Salt.
- May 1—Sebastopol taken by Germans.
 „ 7—Final treaty of peace signed between Roumania and Central Powers.

CORRIGENDA

Page 103, line 2, for Schulenberg read Schulenburg.

Page 152, line 9, for 12/247th I.R. read 12/247th R.I.R.

Page 184, line 16, for north-west read north-east.

Pages 212, 215, for McNicholl read McNicoll.

Page 559, line 36, for 13th Bavarian Division read 13th Division.

Page 598, line 7, for brigadier-major read brigade-major.

Page 598, marginal caption, for 5th Brigade read 15th Brigade.

CHAPTER I

THE AUSTRALIAN CORPS

THE five Australian infantry divisions in France emerged from the Passchendaele fighting late in 1917 with intense relief. The Third Battle of Ypres, notwithstanding that for them it had been, until its last stages, a particularly successful one, had been most bloody throughout and in the last stage intensely painful; and, although constant fighting and the long training in the summer had rendered them a highly efficient force, their prospect was not bright. This battle had, for the moment, made a clean sweep of more than half their infantry. Of 55,000 casualties suffered by the two corps in 1917, over 38,000 occurred in that offensive, and before its end the anxiety of General Birdwood as to the possibility of maintaining both the four divisions of his own army corps (I Anzac) and the 3rd Division in General Godley's (II Anzac) became acute.

Moreover, it was not only in numbers that a falling off seemed probable. At least one careful and devoted observer of the A.I.F. seriously feared that the coming year might find the Australian soldier past the zenith of his quality also. With enlistment in Australia dwindling, the force would have to rely on the return to duty of its wounded and sick men. Not that these were likely to cause any perceptible change in the general physique—if the physical standard was lowered, it would be through the inferior physique of some of the new recruits.¹ The deterioration which was feared was a moral one. The A.I.F. would be feeding on itself, dependent largely upon its own used material; and there was all too good reason to believe that, whatever may have been the experience in previous wars, the old soldier would not prove the best reinforcement in this one. Strains such as those of Pozières, Bullecourt, and Passchendaele were apt to stretch men's nervous control beyond the possibility of early recovery. After such stresses, it was feared, the old elasticity of the "Diggers" might never quite be regained. Even on the

¹ A diary of the 42nd Bn. (3rd Divn.) says: "9 Jan., 1918. New draft 48. About 60 per cent. . . . were up to the standard of the original men. At least 7 . . . were unfit for service in the field; one man was 52 years of age, another 49, and one 46." (These had understated their ages when enlisting.)

Peninsula, within five weeks of the Landing, it had been found that, for a desperate effort, untried soldiers could be better than tried ones.² Moreover it was conceivable that, in such a war as this, the old soldier, even when not overstrained, might use his skill not only to defeat the enemy, but to avoid taking the necessary risks in a stiff fight; and readiness to accept risk had always been the first fighting quality of Australian troops.

At that time the intention of General Plumer, commanding the Second Army in Flanders, where both the I and the II Anzac Corps had been fighting, was to retain I Anzac during the winter on the Broodseinde heights, with II Anzac on its right. Although it was not generally realised at the time or afterwards, the plan of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, then was that they and the rest of the troops on that battlefield should keep the Germans under strain throughout the winter with occasional attacks when the weather permitted, and in the spring the Flanders offensive would be resumed with the object of forcing the German right to fall back from the coast. The initiative would thus be retained by the British for the Allies. Haig did not believe that the French Army would yet be sufficiently recovered to pass to the attack, but he considered it essential that the Allies should continue attacking. Success in Flanders, taken together with the gradual arrival of the Americans, might cause the Germans to recognise that their ultimate defeat could no longer be averted, and thus induce them to make peace.

For Birdwood's divisions, therefore, the prospect was that for a second winter in succession, after a year of the heaviest fighting and excessive casualties, they would remain in the crucial sector, committed to a struggle with both the enemy and the winter mud. From their experience of the previous winter, spent on the Somme battlefield, he and his staff knew that in such circumstances not even the most careful organisation could prevent a steady drain of sickness and casualties continuing in the A.I.F. during those months in which most corps were comparatively free from them. Had the A.I.F. dépôts in England been receiving from Australia reinforcement drafts at the rate then prescribed by the Army

² See *Vol. II, p. 215.*

Council, this would not have caused anxiety; but whereas, at the lowest estimate, 7,000 recruits monthly were required,³ the enlistments had for some time fallen below 5,000 and were steadily declining. The vast losses at Ypres had quickly absorbed every trained Australian reinforcement in England, as well as the 6th Australian Division, which for a time had been forming there; yet at the end of October, a fortnight before I Anzac left the Ypres battlefield, the Australian divisions were 18,000 men short. From the reinforcements then training, and the convalescents then hardening, in England, Birdwood hoped to receive during the winter 28,000 men, and from the sick and wounded still in hospital another 7,000, 35,000 in all. This would wipe off the shortage and provide 17,000 to make good the winter wastage. But, by the experience of the Somme winter, this wastage would be at least 25,000. Thus on the 1st of March, 1918, the divisions would still be 8,000 short, and the reservoir of trained reinforcements behind them completely empty.⁴

That the five divisions should be plunged into the stiffest fighting early in 1918, short of men and without a reserve of fresh reinforcements to replace the casualties, was a predicament to be avoided at almost any cost, even by breaking

³ It will be remembered that, after Pozieres, the War Office, endorsing an estimate from Generals Birdwood and White, had recommended the sending from Australia of a special draft of 20,000 and thereafter the increase, for three months, of the monthly *infantry* draft to 25 per cent. of the established strength of the units, that is, to about 16,500. (Previously the monthly requirement for *all* reinforcements had been 11,790.) In an attempt to secure these reinforcements, the Australian Government had appealed to the people, by referendum, for the introduction of conscription. When the referendum, taken in Oct., 1916, rejected conscription, the Australian Government telegraphed that the reinforcements required could not be provided, and suggested that the 3rd Division, which the War Office had threatened to break up, should be retained for the time being in England as a *dépôt* division to feed the other four. The War Office, however, preferred to send it to France, and asked Australia to do its best to maintain all five divisions. For six months after the 1916 referendum recruiting figures averaged 4,750 per month. In April, 1917, seeing that in spite of this decline the five divisions were not seriously below strength, the Commonwealth Government asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies to be advised of the minimum number of recruits required each month according to "present experience" of casualties. The reply, on May 24, was that the War Office required 15,000 *infantry* to be sent as soon as possible, so that they could be drafted from England to France in August, September, and October, and later 5,000, to be drafted to France during November and December. On the basis of this information the Australian Government had decided, in June, 1917, to launch an effort to raise 7,000 men monthly by voluntary recruiting. The figures, however, still continued to fall. The Government's efforts to maintain them are described in *Volume XI, Australia During the War*.

⁴ No reinforcements had sailed from Australia in August or September, 1917, and, although three drafts were sailing at the end of October and a few more early in November, these would not arrive until just before and after the new year, and, as four months were required for their training, would not be ready for France before the beginning of May.

up one of the divisions and using its personnel to maintain the strength of the rest. Such a step would have caused intense heartburning among the troops and also in Australia. The divisions were no longer mere accidental groupings of battalions; from harsh experience of fighting each had emerged as a definite entity, with a distinct character, firm comradeship, and fiery pride. If, despite regrets, one had to be disbanded, a vote of the force would undoubtedly have selected the youngest—the 3rd. But Birdwood never forgot that the Australian Government, which itself had formed that division in Australia when he was forming the 4th and 5th in Egypt, might be specially interested in its welfare; moreover, though it was now lowest in strength, it seemed fitter for the line than the 4th.

The 4th Division, which contained a larger proportion of troops from the "outside" States than any other division of Australian infantry, had the reputation of being, if anything, the most rugged, while the 3rd was perhaps the most carefully "broken in." The 4th had been more constantly used in 1917 than any of the others; after Bullecourt it had been transferred from I Anzac to II Anzac for the Battle of Messines, and so had missed the long rest given to the remainder of Birdwood's corps; but Birdwood had secured its return to I Anzac for the Third Battle of Ypres. After that offensive its commander, Major-General Sinclair-MacLagan, doubtless in order to emphasise its need of the long-promised rest, informed Birdwood that, at the moment, it was not fit for the line. There appeared, therefore, to be every possibility of this hard-fighting division being disbanded—however bitterly that fate might be resented—when a series of apparently unrelated circumstances suggested another solution.

When the Passchendaele operations were ending, Plumer, preparing to reduce his several army corps to three divisions each for the winter campaign, proposed that I Anzac (1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Divisions) should hand back the 4th Division to II Anzac (New Zealand, 3rd Australian, and two British divisions), which would then discard its British divisions. The commander of II Anzac, General Godley, desired some such change, but Birdwood protested to Plumer, "Surely this is absurd," he said. "You will give it (the 4th) to him to

train all the winter, and then give it back to me to fight in the spring, which would be unfair to the division, and to me, and to him." Plumer replied that he had no intention of returning the 4th to I Anzac in the spring, but would then bring the two corps up to four-division strength by adding a British division to each.

This plan, which Birdwood had successfully resisted before Third Ypres, was—as he had told Plumer then, and now assured him again—directly contrary to the expressed wish of the Australian Government, that its divisions should as far as possible be kept together under his command. The expression to which he referred was the outcome of a very strong persistent national feeling which originally had led to efforts for the formation of an "Australasian Army." In May 1916 W. M. Hughes, visiting France, had told Sir Douglas Haig that it was the wish of the Australian Government that the Anzac troops "should be regarded as an army and that General Birdwood should command it." The New Zealand Government had not supported these requests, but the British Government had intimated that every effort would be made to meet the desire for the formation of an "Australian army," "as soon as circumstances permit; and this," the War Office had added, "has always been our intention." Haig had refused to form that army on the reasonable ground that, at the stage that British organisation had then reached, six⁵ divisions were no longer sufficient for the purpose.⁶ The alternative, of putting all the Australian divisions in Birdwood's corps, he could not, he had said, adopt "as matters stood" without hampering the general plan of campaign. But, "if at any future time I can see my way to employing all the Australian forces together under his command for some special operation, I will gladly do so." He made only one "fundamental" proviso—"that nothing must be done which would hamper the Imperial⁷ forces in attaining the object for which the Empire is fighting."

There for the moment, in 1916, the proposal rested. But the desire for concentration in a single Australian command

⁵ There would have been six infantry divisions without the New Zealanders, for in May, 1916, the Australian Government offered to provide a sixth division. It was refused by the Army Council (*see Vol. III, p. 156*).

⁶ In the B.E.F. an "army" had originally comprised as few as four divisions; but by 1916 the number had risen to 8 or 10, and by 1918 the average was 14.

⁷ He meant those of Britain and dominions; by Australian usage, on the other hand, the Imperial army was that of the British Government.

was intense throughout the Australian force, particularly after the patent mismanagement at Bullecourt, and in the summer of 1917 it found expression through a new and strongly nationalist agency. This was a small group of Australian civilians in London of which the central and much the most influential figure was Keith Murdoch.⁸ Murdoch's connection with several of the events to be related in this and the next volumes was unknown in Australia and even in most parts of the A.I.F., but his influence during this and later phases of the inner history of the force was so important that some explanation of his position must be given.

Son of a Presbyterian minister of Camberwell in Victoria, and educated at the local grammar school, after travelling the world he entered journalism, in which he showed an outstanding capacity for seeing what news was required, obtaining it no matter what the opposition, and stating it in direct, forcible terms. In September 1914, when just twenty-eight, he nearly won the nomination of his fellow journalists for the appointment of Official War Correspondent, and less than a year later was sent *via* Egypt to London as manager of the United Cable Service, and in the interests of the Melbourne *Herald* and Sydney *Sun*. Through the friendship of the then Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, he secured a commission to inquire into certain postal matters, which gave him a semi-official status invaluable for his work, and led Sir Ian Hamilton to permit his visit to Gallipoli. The incidents of his carriage of Ashmead-Bartlett's uncensored letter addressed to the British Prime Minister, and of his own subsequent protest against Hamilton's conduct of the Gallipoli expedition, have already been described in this history.⁹

On Murdoch's arrival in London the association of his cable-service with *The Times* enabled him to call on the powerful support of Lord Northcliffe, and his protest brought him into confidential relations, which he afterwards maintained, with almost every important member of the Asquith Government. He was particularly friendly with Lloyd George, whose political aims his action incidentally served; and after the visit of Fisher's successor,¹⁰ W. M. Hughes, to London

⁸ Sir Keith Murdoch. Managing director, *The Herald* and *Weekly Times*, Melbourne. Journalist; of Camberwell, Vic.; b. Camberwell, 12 Aug., 1886.

⁹ *Vol. II, pp. 781-2.*

¹⁰ Andrew Fisher had been appointed High Commissioner in London.

in 1916, Murdoch became a constant intermediary between Hughes and Lloyd George, especially in any matter in which either of the principals saw reason for not using the official channel of communication, the Colonial Office. Thus Lloyd George's pleas for Hughes's presence at the Imperial Conference in 1917, and Hughes's urgent request for Lloyd George's help in arranging the sale of Australian flour in America, were sent through Murdoch. Moreover, Hughes relied almost exclusively upon Murdoch's advice as to the political interests of himself and his party among men and officers of the A.I.F., and, on the occasions of the two conscription referendums and of the Commonwealth elections of 1917, arranged through him the organisation of leading Australian civilians in London which carried out in the A.I.F. the campaigns for the "yes" vote and the "National" party. Murdoch established intimate relations with Birdwood, White, Monash, and most other leaders of the A.I.F., and, despite some hesitation on the part of G.H.Q., obtained, in the interests of his newspapers, permission to visit the Australian front as war correspondent whenever, from Bullecourt onwards, the Australians were involved in major operations.¹¹ These visits, which brought him into touch with every part of the force, from base to front line, and his subsequent relations with all ranks, there and in London, enabled him to gauge the private sentiments of the troops, and to use his influence with W. M. Hughes for what he believed to be their desires or their benefit. His confidential cables were sent to the Australian Prime Minister personally through E. A. Box,¹² the capable young chief of the High Commissioner's staff, who was Murdoch's most intimate consultant.¹³

Many of the matters referred by Hughes to Murdoch, or *vice versa*, were really in the province of the High Commissioner, and Murdoch's position was partly due to the sad, gradual collapse of Andrew Fisher's mental powers; but even stronger reasons were Murdoch's powerful personality,

¹¹ A similar right was thereupon asked for by the Australian Press Association, whose correspondent, Gordon L. Gilmour (of Sydney), was accorded the same privilege.

¹² E. A. Box, Esq. Private Secretary to Prime Minister, 1912/15; to High Commissioner, 1915/18; Official Secretary for Australia, in London, 1918/19. Of Trafalgar and Brighton, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 9 Sept., 1885.

¹³ They appear to have been sent at first at Murdoch's own expense, but later at that of the National party or the Government, whichever interest was concerned.

and the tendency of W. M. Hughes to keep vital communications in his own hands. Tall, strongly built but slow of movement, with the dark hair and heavy brow but twinkling eyes of his Highland ancestry, Murdoch, in mind and writings, corresponded curiously with his appearance. To wield great power was one of his keenest ambitions. His diplomacy was heavy and obvious, but masterful and usually successful. Where he knew he would be allowed to do so, he went bluntly to the point. When it came to a struggle, he frankly held that it was never worth while hitting unless with sledge-hammer blows, and his confidential cables were composed similarly to his newspaper reports; based largely on impressions, their terms were normally exaggerated but seldom failed to effect the desired disturbance. He was ardently Australian, but naturally his position and his methods—those of diplomacy and not everywhere trusted—aroused some bitter hostility. But his representations were addressed to politicians who dealt in the same currency, and his influence was used in what he, and those associated with him, believed to be the highest interests of the A.I.F. Indeed, as with W. M. Hughes and some other Australian civilians who came occasionally among them, Murdoch's admiration of the Australian soldiery rose almost to worship, and sometimes permitted him quite frankly to claim for them privileges beyond those of their British and other comrades. In the present instance Murdoch's action was the decisive factor in bringing about one of their cherished dreams.

The incidents of Bullecourt had aroused in some Australian leaders in France the feeling that the dominion forces should have direct access to the Commander-in-Chief. There existed also among Australians in London the impression that the War Office, for its part, would handle certain matters differently if it were aware of the Australian interests involved. A somewhat vague apprehension of these problems by Murdoch and his associates, among whom, in this matter, was the Official War Correspondent with the A.I.F., decided Murdoch and Box to urge the Australian Government to ask for the appointment of a senior Australian representative at the War Office, and also for the combination of all the Australian infantry divisions in one "Australian Army Corps" under Birdwood's command, and the staffing of that corps entirely

by Australian officers. Accordingly on July 11th Murdoch appended to a confidential cable, concerning the proposed sale of flour to the United States, a long and urgent appeal "on behalf of the whole of the A.I.F. in France" for the bringing together of the five Australian divisions into a single corps. "Our generals unanimously declare no real military considerations against it," he added.

In the matter of the "Australianisation" of the staff, the officer who in the past had most persistently worked for it, Colonel Dodds, was at the moment being transferred from Melbourne to Birdwood's headquarters, to control, under him, the personnel of the A.I.F.¹⁴ His influence could be counted upon. Moreover Birdwood, of his own initiative, had been steadily replacing by Australians many British officers of 1 Anzac and the divisions; but it was suspected that Birdwood's natural kindness and loyalty might render it difficult for him to displace some of his oldest associates. To force his hand Murdoch, on a suggestion from Surgeon-General Howse, advised the Australian Government to ask Birdwood to furnish the names of those British officers attached to the A.I.F. whom he considered indispensable. It was certain that he could not, without embarrassment, name more than one or two, if so many.

The suggestions for the "Australianisation" of the force represented accurately an intense desire of the troops, and the Australian Government telegraphed on July 30th to the Secretary of State:¹⁵

Commonwealth of Australia desires to invite the attention of the Imperial Government to the fact that the Australian Imperial Force, which at first consisted of only a few units, has now for some time

¹⁴ As D.A.G., A.I.F., taking the place of Colonel Griffiths, whose ill-health was causing anxiety.

¹⁵ Action with respect to the staff had already been suggested. On 23 Jan., 1917, the then Commandant of Administrative Headquarters in London (Colonel R. M. McC. Anderson) had written to the Defence Department: "Has it ever occurred to you to take up with the War Office the question of positions of high command being made available for our fellows in forces outside the A.I.F.? Whereas British soldiers secure fine preferment in our force, good appointments are not made available to our men in the British force. Why? It is manifestly one-sided." The Adjutant-General in Melbourne, Colonel Dodds, to whom this letter went, was then leaving for France, but both he and his successor in Melbourne, Brig.-General Sellheim, felt that the suggestion was impracticable, seeing that the A.I.F. had too few officers of high rank with the necessary qualifications. Sellheim recommended on April 4 that, before contemplating the transfer of A.I.F. officers to high commands in the "Imperial" army, the Australian Government should "aim at replacing 'Imperial' officers holding high A.I.F. appointments by our own officers, always provided the fighting efficiency of our troops is not thereby prejudiced." No action, however, appears to have been taken until Murdoch's message arrived in July, and it was certainly this message that was the actual lever.

exceeded 100,000 in the fighting line,¹⁶ and that it is desirable that the national feeling with regard to their troops should be given effect to more especially in the constitution of the fighting formations and the employment of Australian officers on the staffs, and also that, to ensure closer touch with Australian sentiments, the Commonwealth should provide a senior Australian officer for duty at the War Office with regard to Australian questions . . .

At the same time Birdwood was asked in a separate message to say which British officers on the Anzac staffs he considered indispensable, and was informed that the British Government had been asked to agree to the concentration of Australians under his command in purely Australian formations "and with Australian officers for commands and staffs." Birdwood, on receiving some weeks later a copy of the telegram to the British Government, pointed out that it did not formulate any clear request for the combination of the divisions under his command. The Australian Government had in the meantime received a deprecatory reply from the Army Council, to which its previous telegram had been referred by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and, on the suggestion of Major-General Legge, the Chief of the General Staff in Melbourne, had replied as follows :

Government of Australia is disappointed at the terms of your reply of 11 August from which it is evident that the Army Council is not in sympathy with the desire of this Government that Australian divisions should be grouped in one or more Australian corps, with Australian staff officers. This would be more acceptable to Australian sentiment than statement that Australian officers are regarded as interchangeable with British staffs, which has not previously been actually put into practice.

This telegram also was referred to the Army Council, which replied that the proposal was impracticable.¹⁷ Birdwood's telegram and two others from Murdoch now having come to hand, W. M. Hughes sent a stronger representation. On

¹⁶ The main Australian formations at the front in 1918 were: in France—1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Infantry Divisions; in Palestine—the Anzac Mounted Division (including one New Zealand brigade) and the Australian Mounted Division. Four squadrons of the Australian Flying Corps, two siege batteries, three companies of tunnellers, six railway operating companies, an "army troops" company of engineers, and many medical and smaller units also were at the front. The total of Australian fighting troops in France was 110,000. The total strength of the British Army in France was then 1,900,000, of whom about 1,500,000 were fighting troops.

¹⁷ "A single corps of five Australian divisions would be unwieldy both for tactical and administrative purposes." The formation of two Australian corps—i.e., one of two and one of three divisions—would be "uneconomical as regards staff and headquarters personnel."

Murdoch's advice (probably based on a hint from Lord Milner) he added the request that it should be referred "to my colleagues of the Imperial War Cabinet":

I desire to emphasise point that it is strongly desired by Commonwealth Government that all Australian troops should be grouped together under General Birdwood, and that Australian troops should be commanded and staffed by Australian officers, of whom most have had several years' war experience in addition to former peace training in Australian permanent and militia forces. This would appeal most strongly to Australian national sentiment, it is most keenly desired by the troops, the Commonwealth Government presses for it.¹⁸

This telegram brought action. On October 5th the Army Council¹⁹ wrote to Haig asking

in view of the reiterated request of the Commonwealth Government . . . whether you consider it practicable to accede to the proposal that the five Australian divisions should be grouped in one corps.

Both the Anzac Corps were then engaged in Third Ypres, but on the 19th Haig replied that he would go into the matter with Birdwood at the first opportunity. Actually Murdoch had made the same request to Haig in an interview at G.H.Q. on September 1st, and had received the reply which Haig now gave again—that, in his opinion, a corps of five divisions would be unwieldy, disorganising the system of reliefs. "It would affect the general conduct of operations so adversely that I regard it as both unwise and impracticable."²⁰

Haig's objection was entirely sincere. In his opinion the system of army corps of four divisions, two for the line and two to relieve them, appeared vital; he even included this principle among his chief recommendations to the British Government after the war. And now, when on October 29th he invited Birdwood, White and Howse to lunch and to confer with himself and his C.G.S., Lieutenant-General Kiggell, this consideration was obviously paramount. Haig also expressed the opinion that no one man could manage five divisions. Birdwood's reply was: "If the Australian Government had

¹⁸ He added—also on information from Murdoch—that he could not believe that the "strategical objections" were insuperable, inasmuch as the 4th Australian Division, which had some months previously been detached from Birdwood's corps, had, since the Government's telegram of Aug. 25, been returned to it "much to the men's satisfaction."

¹⁹ Murdoch, on enquiries from Hughes, ascertained that the matter had not, by Oct. 27, come before Cabinet; but Lord Milner had promised him that he would move in the matter if necessary.

²⁰ Haig received the wrong impression that Murdoch wanted Australia to be independent of Great Britain.

offered you its fifth division . . . with the proviso that you kept the five together, you would accept it, surely." Haig, though he did not relish the independence of Birdwood's attitude, was genuinely trying to meet Australian wishes and had hinted to Murdoch that the Australians might be regrouped in two corps. He also made it evident to him that he had been considering the possible advancement of Major-General Monash, whom he much admired, to the corps command, and the separation of that command from the office of G.O.C., A.I.F., which presumably Birdwood could still retain.

It was at this stage that Generals Birdwood and White put forward a solution suggested to them by the crisis in the reinforcement problem after Third Ypres. If the 4th Division was disbanded, no objection could be urged to combining the other four.

**Birdwood's
Plan**

Any disbandment was the last thing Birdwood wished; but could not one of the five divisions be temporarily withdrawn and, until recruiting improved, used as a *dépôt* division for reinforcing its sister divisions, if necessary? Such an arrangement had been approved in the case of the Canadian force.²¹ If the four other Australian divisions could be concentrated, this winter, in a quiet sector, it might be possible to bring up to strength not only them but their *dépôt* division, although this would receive no new reinforcements but only its own sick and wounded returning from convalescence. When fighting began again in the spring, the first division to incur heavy casualties would change places with the one till then acting as *dépôt* division. The Australian people would thus, at least, be given time to see whether, by acceleration of recruiting, the disbandment of a division could be avoided.

To the delight of its authors, this proposal was cordially accepted by Haig,²² who, on November 1st, decided that the

²¹ Its 5th Division was to be brought to France as *dépôt* division for the others.

²² It was put forward (by the leave of Second Army) in letters from General White to Brig.-General J. H. Davidson (24 Oct., 1917), and from General Birdwood to Lieut.-General Kiggell (27 Oct.). White wrote, "I am very loth to suggest any preferential treatment for Australian troops—the more particularly as we were somewhat favoured by a long rest and training period in the summer. This last did, I think, repay by results. But . . . as you know, these fellows of ours are not used to a tough winter (as you Scotchmen are), and a winter in conditions such as we had on the Somme last year would hit us very hard, and might raise casualties to a degree beyond our power of replacement." Generals Plumer and Harington were, of course, informed of the details of this correspondence.



I. THE BRIMS TURN UP

Part of the 3rd Division assembling at Neuve Église for presentation of medals
by General Birdwood, on 4th December, 1917

To face p 12

First War Memorial Official Photo No B11-566



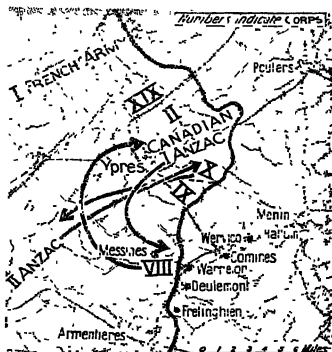
2. A COMFORTABLE HOME, WINTER 1917-18

Men of the 6th Brigade at the entrance of The Catacombs—a system of underground bivouacs dug by the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company beneath Hill 63 near Messines, and capable of holding two battalions.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No E4486.
Taken on 22nd Jan., 1918.*

To face p. 13.

1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Australian Divisions should be allotted to Birdwood's corps, while the 4th, temporarily withdrawn to an area near Boulogne, would act as its *dépôt* division. The corps would be transferred for the winter to the now quiet Messines front. Moreover, as it was to be used for the spring offensive, Haig hoped to give it, immediately before the offensive, a month's complete rest. Its name was changed from "I Anzac" to "The Australian Corps"; II Anzac, henceforth entirely British except for the New Zealand Division and the corps mounted troops, was renamed the XXII Corps.²³



This decision, which came as a complete surprise to the divisions emerging from Third Ypres, was everywhere hailed with delight. "Everyone is as pleased as punch," writes a diarist at corps headquarters. The 4th Division, if anxious as to its own future, welcomed its long-delayed rest. But it was in the 3rd, which had never yet been brigaded with the main body of Australian infantry, that satisfaction was keenest.

Everyone was brimming over with surprise and pleasure . . . (says the same diarist recording a visit to that division on November 6). Major Robertson²⁴ (in command of the 37th) . . . told me after dinner, "It was almost too good to be true; we were overjoyed—delighted."

The brims of the felt hats, which, to create *esprit de corps* by a distinction from other divisions, General Monash had caused to be worn unlooped,²⁵ were turned up the same day.

²³ In the spring, the New Zealand Division also finally left it. The Australian cyclists had gone to the Australian corps; the New Zealand cyclists and mounted rifles were withdrawn to their division and 80 of the Australian light horse that had formed part of the II Anzac Mounted Regiment were transferred to the Australian artillery. By General Godley's wish, in which General Birdwood concurred, there remained with it to the last two squadrons of the old 4th Aust. Light Horse Regiment who, with some British cavalry, now formed the XXII Corps Mounted Regiment.

²⁴ Major W. F. H. Robertson, 37th Bn. Stores clerk, Melbourne Electric Supply Co. Ltd.; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Albert Park, 17 July, 1888.

²⁵ This was one of Monash's rare slips.

In implementing this arrangement, which, on his recommendation, was "strongly favoured" by the Army Council, Sir Douglas Haig was even better than his word. The 3rd Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps,²⁶ then arriving in France, was allotted to the Australian Corps as the "corps squadron." The two Australian siege batteries—previously Nos. 54 and 55 (Australian) R.G.A., but henceforth Nos. 1 and 2 Australian—were sent to the corps as part of its heavy artillery. Occasion was also taken to man with Australian personnel all except one of its motor-transport companies.²⁷ As for the Australianisation of commands and staffs Haig, although, like the Army Council, he indicated that he would be sorry to see all interchange excluded, accepted the Australian Government's decision and, in this respect also, held loyally to his principle of fulfilling the dominion's wishes so far as he could do so without injury to the common cause.²⁸ After discussion with Birdwood, it was arranged that a number of junior Australian officers should, from time to time, be sent for experience to British brigade and divisional staffs; but henceforth no British officers were appointed to Australian staffs or commands in France, and the twenty or so who were

²⁶ Till then known as No. 69 (Aust.) Squadron, R.F.C.

²⁷ The Director of Motor Transport at G.H.Q. would not agree to convert the "K" (I Anzac) Corps Siege Park to an Australian unit, and the point was not pressed, though doubtless the intervention of the Australian Government would have carried it.

²⁸ Both Haig and the Army Council placed much value upon the arrangement, agreed to by the dominions in 1907, for common service of British and dominion officers upon an "Imperial General Staff." By this arrangement, although each of the forces concerned maintained its own staff, responsible only to its own government, nevertheless, by exchange of literature and of a small proportion of officers, the separate staffs contrived to think and work upon identical lines, and each was known as a branch of the Imperial General Staff. But—except for occasional exchanges—it had not been intended to staff the forces of any member of the Empire by other than its own officers. Haig, like the Army Council, now desired to maintain the system of interchange. "Frequent offers have been made to General Birdwood to employ Australian officers . . . on the staffs of British formations," he wrote. "The offers have, however, been consistently declined on the grounds that, until Australian formations are completely staffed by Australian officers, no Australian officers can be spared for British formations." The War Cabinet strongly supported interchange, "but without binding the Commonwealth Government in any way to receive a fixed proportion of British officers in Australian formations." The reply from Melbourne, again drafted by Legge, was that "strong feeling exists in Australia that Australian units should be self-contained. Conditions of service and personal characters of Australian troops different from British troops. Imperial conference recommended interchange as between British regular army and dominion forces, and Commonwealth still adhere to this provided that, before any such exchanges are made, Commonwealth is consulted. Subject to this, it is desirable that Australian officers should as far as possible form staffs Australian formations." This certainly was the wish of the troops.

not members of the A.I.F. but were still holding positions in it were reabsorbed into the British Army as soon as there could be found Australians suitable to take their places.²⁹ The Headquarters of the Australian Corps itself was still, somewhat anomalously, a British unit. Birdwood had already staffed it largely with Australians, and he now offered to have it made an Australian unit, but the Australian Government did not at the moment take up the offer, and a few British officers remained there. But Brigadier-General Coxen took the place of Brigadier-General Napier in command of the corps artillery; Colonel Foott replaced Brigadier-General Joly de Lotbinière as Chief Engineer, and the chief staff officers of the divisions were now all Australians. On the 5th of March, 1918, General Birdwood informed G.H.Q. that he could replace the last four British commanders who were not actual members of the A.I.F.—Major-Generals Walker (1st Division) and Smyth (2nd Division), and Brigadier-Generals Lesslie (1st Brigade) and Hobkirk (14th Brigade)—and, when suitable commands fell vacant in the British Army, these leaders were transferred to them. There remained till the end of the war five exceptions—Major-General Sinclair-MacLagan (G.O.C., 4th Division), Brigadier-General Anderson (C.R.A., 1st Division), Lieutenant-Colonels Marsh (1st Divisional Train), Ross (later G.S.O. 1, 1st Division), and Davies³⁰ (32nd Battalion), all of whom had been attached to the military forces in Australia before the war, and, except Davies, had been members of the A.I.F. since its formation by General Bridges.³¹

²⁹ As to the Australian forces in Palestine, where the change was not so complete, see *Vol. VII*, pp. 255-6.

³⁰ Brig.-Gen. C. S. Davies, C.M.G., D.S.O. Employed at Royal Military College, Duntroon, 1913/15; commanded 32nd Bn., A.I.F., 1917/18, 8th Inf. Bde., A.I.F., 1918/19, 1st Bn., The Leicestershire Regt., 1927/31. Officer of British Regular Army; of Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire, Eng.; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 6 Sept., 1880.

³¹ The leading commanders and staff officers at the end of January, 1918, were (British officers in *italics*):—

AUSTRALIAN CORPS HEADQUARTERS.

G.O.C.: *Lieut.-Gen. Sir W. R. Birdwood.* **General Staff:** Major-Gen. C. B. B. White (B.G.G.S.); (Operations) *Lieut.-Col. A. M. Ross;* (Intelligence) *Major S. S. Butler,* replaced by Capt. S. A. Hunn, 14 Jan., 1918. (Major Butler became chief of intelligence staff, Fifth Army.) **Administrative Staff:** *Brig.-Gen. R. A. Carruthers,* Lieut.-Col. G. C. Somerville (*vice Lieut.-Col. M. G. Taylor,* 16 Dec., 1917). **Artillery:** (B.G.R.A.) *Brig.-Gen. W. A. Coxen,* *vice Brig.-Gen. W. J. Napier,* 8 Oct., 1917; (B.G.H.A.) *Brig.-Gen. L. D. Fraser.* **Engineers:** (C.E.) *Brig.-Gen. Hon. A. C. de L. Joly de Lotbinière,* replaced by Colonel C. H. Foott, 17

Although this was a right and popular measure, all who knew them regretted to see the British officers go, and with good reason; although the A.I.F. undoubtedly owed most to the old Australian militia, its debt to its small quota of British officers was beyond computation, especially in the standards

March; (C.R.E., Corps Troops) Lieut.-Col. E. J. H. Nicholson. **Signals:** Lieut.-Col. R. M. Powell, replaced by Lieut.-Col. C. H. Walsh, 19 April, succeeded by Lieut.-Col. T. R. Williams, 8 June. **Machine Guns:** Lieut.-Col. L. F. S. Hore. **Mechanical Transport:** Col. W. H. Tunbridge. **Medical:** Surgeon-Gen. C. C. Manifold, replaced by Col. G. W. Barber, 8 April. **Ordnance:** Lieut.-Col. E. T. Leane, *vice* Lieut.-Col. R. H. V. Kelly, 9 Dec., 1917. **Veterinary:** Lieut.-Col. T. Matson. **Chemical Adviser:** Capt. H. W. Wilson. **Postal:** Capt. C. J. Fletcher. **Police:** Lieut.-Col. W. Smith. **Camp Commandant:** Major J. S. S. Churchill, replaced by Major W. W. Berry, 1 June.

DIVISIONAL COMMANDERS.

1st: Maj.-Gen. Sir H. B. Walker. **2nd:** Maj.-Gen. N. M. Smyth, V.C. **3rd:** Major-Gen. Sir J. Monash. **4th:** Maj.-Gen. E. G. Sinclair-MacLagan. **5th:** Maj.-Gen. Sir J. J. T. Hobbs.

SENIOR G.S.O.'S OF DIVISIONS.

1st: Col. T. A. Blamey (Col. J. G. Dill held this position from mid-Sept. to 10 Oct., 1917, and Lieut.-Col. J. D. Lavarack from 11 Oct. to 8 Nov., during the illness of Col. Blamey). **2nd:** Lieut.-Col. C. G. N. Miles, *vice* Lieut.-Col. A. H. Bridges, 11 Dec., 1917. **3rd:** Lieut.-Col. C. H. Jess, *vice* Lieut.-Col. G. H. N. Jackson, 20 Jan. (Lieut.-Col. J. D. Lavarack was for a few days with the 3rd Divn.). **4th:** Lieut.-Col. J. D. Lavarack, *vice* Lieut.-Col. D. J. C. K. Bernard, 19 Dec. **5th:** Lieut.-Col. J. H. Peck, *vice* Lieut.-Col. C. M. Wagstaff, 3 Sept. (All these Australian officers were permanent officers of pre-Duntroon days. The senior grade yet reached by a Duntroon graduate was G.S.O. 2.)

A.A. AND Q.M.G.'S.

1st: Lieut.-Col. H. G. Viney. **2nd:** Lieut.-Col. J. M. A. Durrant. **3rd:** Lieut.-Col. R. E. Jackson. **4th:** Lieut.-Col. R. Dowse. **5th:** Col. J. H. Bruce.

C.R.A.'S.

1st: Brig.-Gen. S. M. Anderson. **2nd:** Brig.-Gen. O. F. Phillips. **3rd:** Brig.-Gen. H. W. Grimwade. **4th:** Brig.-Gen. W. H. L. Burgess (N.Z. Staff Corps). **5th:** Brig.-Gen. A. J. Bessell-Browne.

C.R.E.'S.

1st: Lieut.-Col. A. M. Martyn. **2nd:** Lieut.-Col. J. M. C. Corlette. **3rd:** Lieut.-Col. H. O. Clogstoun, replaced by Lieut.-Col. T. R. Williams, 12 March, succeeded by Major H. Bachtold, 19 April. **4th:** Lieut.-Col. G. C. E. Elliott, replaced by Lieut.-Col. R. J. Dyer, 6 April. **5th:** Lieut.-Col. V. A. H. Sturdee, *vice* Lieut.-Col. A. B. Carey, 25 Nov., 1917.

A.D.'S.M.S.

1st: Col. R. B. Huxtable. **2nd:** Col. A. E. Shepherd. **3rd:** Col. A. T. White, replaced by Col. F. A. Maguire, 18 Jan. **4th:** Col. G. W. Barber, replaced by Col. A. H. Moseley, 8 April. **5th:** Col. M. H. Downey.

BRIGADE COMMANDERS.

1st Division: Brig.-Gen. W. B. Lesslie, replaced by Brig.-Gen. I. G. Mackay, 6 June (1st); Brig.-Gen. J. Heane (2nd); Brig.-Gen. H. G. Bennett (3rd). **2nd Division:** Brig.-Gen. R. Smith (5th); Brig.-Gen. J. Paton (6th); Brig.-Gen. E. A. Wisdom (7th). **3rd Division:** Brig.-Gen. C. Rosenthal (9th); Brig.-Gen. W. R. McNicoll (10th); Brig.-Gen. J. H. Cannan (11th). **4th Division:** Brig.-Gen. C. H. Brand (4th); Brig.-Gen. J. Gellibrand (12th); Brig.-Gen. T. W. Glasgow (13th). **5th Division:** Brig.-Gen. E. Tivey (8th); Brig.-Gen. C. J. Hobkirk, replaced by Brig.-Gen. J. C. Stewart, 23 March (14th); Brig.-Gen. H. E. Elliott (15th).

A.I.F. STAFF.

D.A.G.: Col. T. H. Dodds. **Commandant, Admin. H.Q., London:** Brig.-Gen. T. Griffiths. **G.O.C., A.I.F. Depots in United Kingdom:** Maj.-Gen. Hon. J. W. M'Cay. **Director of Medical Services:** Surgeon-Gen. Sir N. R. Howse, V.C.

set by them for personal conduct. They were far from being the only ones to furnish the troops with the exalted example of an "English gentleman"—there were many such among the born Australians of the A.I.F.; but it may safely be said that the influence of the British officer, from Birdwood and Walker downward, was in this respect outstanding. Such men as R. H. Owen,³² Duncan Glasfurd, and Oswald Croshaw, by their regard for duty as the paramount principle of their lives, by consideration for others which bred the same quality in return, by their noble standards whether in private or in public intercourse, exercised a continuing influence long after their service had taken its toll of their powers. Most of the British officers with the A.I.F. were men who, through experience abroad, had already shed the shell with which the middle class Englishman protects himself against strangers. They had acquired the habit of appreciating men by their qualities rather than by their adherence to forms and ceremonies, and many of the warmest encomiums on the Australian soldier are from their mouths. For his part the "digger," when once the barrier of mere formality was lowered, and their true qualities were seen, conceived a deep admiration and regard for them. The picture of Lesslie in his shirt-sleeves on Anzac Beach; of Glasfurd tracking the firing line across the 400 Plateau; of Walker, cap tilted over one eye, radiating confidence in the feverish days on Walker's Ridge; of Smyth directing reinforcements into Lone Pine tunnels as quietly as a ticket collector passing passengers on to a platform; of Cox at Damakjelic, yellow with sickness but unconquerably tough; of Clogstoun (of eyeglass fame) at Leane's Trench; of Ross, Gibbs, Bernard,³³ Jackson, Farmar,³⁴ Irvine, Austin, Wagstaff, Taylor,³⁵ Hobkirk, G. C. E. Elliott, Carey,³⁶ Jeremy-Taylor

³² Owen was an Australian by birth.

³³ Maj.-Gen. D. J. C. K. Bernard, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), 4th Aust. Div., 1916/17; B.G.S., Northern Command, India, 1930/34; Director of Recruiting and Organisation, War Office, London, since 1934. Of Castle Hacket, Tuam, Galway, Ireland; b. London, 22 Oct., 1882.

³⁴ Col. H. M. Farmar, C.M.G., D.S.O.; Lancashire Fusiliers. Bde.-Major, 86th Inf. Bde. (29th Div.), 1915; A.A. & Q.M.G., 3rd Aust. Div., 1916/17. Of Bloomfield, Co. Wexford, Ireland; b. Southampton, Eng., 15 June, 1878.

³⁵ Maj.-Gen. M. G. Taylor, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c., R.E. A.Q.M.G., 1 Anzac, 1916/17. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. London, 31 May, 1881.

³⁶ Brig.-Gen. A. B. Carey, C.M.G., D.S.O., R.E. C.R.E. 5th Aust. Div., 1916/17. Officer of British Regular Army; of Hendon, Middlesex, Eng.; b. Fermoy, Co. Cork, Ireland, 3 March, 1872.

Marsh and others, all of whom helped this Antipodean force with capable and devoted service—these memories are an integral part of its history. Irvine, Croshaw, and Higgon were killed leading Australian infantry, Glasfurd and Gibbs visiting them in the forward area. They were full members of that rich comradeship, and their memory is treasured by its survivors.

The Australian Government's request for the appointment of a representative at the War Office was dropped after both the Army Council and Birdwood had pointed out that the Commandant at Administrative Headquarters of the A.I.F. in London already acted as such a representative, and that the appointment of another could only cause much embarrassment to all parties.³⁷ It may, however, be remarked that if the Commandant had not been so close to the War Office, it would probably have been necessary for him to maintain a senior representative there.

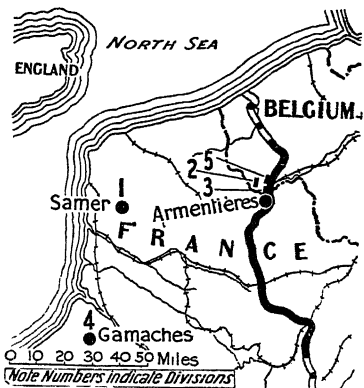
It was thus a national force more compact than hitherto whose 3rd and 5th Divisions on November 13th began to take over from the 8th, 33rd, and 30th British Divisions (VIII Corps) the southern and northern sub-sectors of the Messines front. The sector extended from the Lys, north of Armentières, to the Ypres-Comines canal south of Ypres. On the 15th, when control passed to the I Anzac Corps,³⁸ all the Australian divisions in France were for the first time united under a single command. Although the 4th Division was for the moment relegated to a G.H.Q. back area, Birdwood had the right to call for it at any time to replace an exhausted division; and, to avoid the notion that it was to be broken up, he insisted upon calling it the "reserve division," and treating it as such. He prayed G.H.Q. to do everything possible to help him to keep up the divisional spirit, "which is really very strong." To that end, he begged that its artillery should not

**A single
command**

³⁷ The Army Council would have agreed; but what duties the proposed representative was to carry out is not clear. When the War Office asked for particulars, the reply, drafted by General Legge, was: "While Birdwood is responsible for the fighting efficiency of the Australian Imperial Force, there are many questions concerning supply of war material from Australia, base and historical records, return of invalids to Australia, as well as subjects which are difficult to explain by cablegrams, and it is considered that the services of a senior Australian officer in London would facilitate decisions."

³⁸ It retained this name till 1 Jan., 1918. Headquarters were at Flêtre (*see Vol. XII, plate 429*).

be taken away for use as "army" brigades. Actually, unforeseen needs, and Haig's reluctance to dispense with any force of such proved value, caused its total career as "dépôt" or "reserve" division to be ended in three weeks. The division, eager for its long-promised rest, arrived at Gamaches, near Dieppe, on November 23rd. But it had barely settled down when, on November 30th, the Germans, counter-attacking after the Battle of Cambrai, broke through the British front, and on December 3rd the 4th Australian Division was ordered up to Péronne as the next available reserve. Here it remained, employing its stay in the devastated area³⁹ for much useful training, despite the bitter weather, and doing some work on the Fifth Army's scheme of defences, until the New Year. Then, the Second Army having to send two divisions to take over part of the line from the French, the 4th Australian Division was given to it in exchange, and forthwith, on January 12th, was put into the front line of the IX Corps at the southern end of the Ypres battlefield, with its right at Hollebeke cross-roads and its left on the Bassevillebeek at "Bitter Wood." The Australian Corps then took over this additional sector. The arrangement, intended to be temporary, proved permanent. The Australian Army Corps thus at last comprised five active divisions; and, by the irony of chance, when three months later a great emergency arose, it was the 4th Australian Division that was first thrown into serious fighting.



Position of Aust. Divisions, end Nov. 1917.

The probable tasks of the corps during the winter were explained by Birdwood in two letters addressed to his divisional commanders on November 5th and 7th. The corps front

³⁹ Laid waste by the Germans in their retreat to the Hindenburg Line in March, 1917. See Vol. XII, plate 430.

Winter Tasks and Anxieties

would be fairly long—12,000 yards—for two divisions; but there would be a third division in support and a fourth in immediate reserve, and the front should not be a difficult one, since the right would be covered by the River Lys. It would therefore be held lightly though safely, and every effort would be made to build up the strength of the divisions. "Our greatest enemies," wrote Birdwood, on the strength of his Somme experience, "are likely to be trench feet and throat and chest complaints." By arrangements for drying and changing socks in the trenches, and by football and other sports, cinemas, concerts, and canteens for the men in rear,⁴⁰ the health and comfort of the troops was to be particularly sought.

As a result of these instructions, for the next two months battalion football competitions were the supreme interest behind the Messines front. Guernsies with the regimental colours were provided from the battalion and corps funds. Sports grounds marked with flags and lined with eager crowds surrounded every camp.

The battalions are just like a lot of Oxford colleges in the October term (says an Australian diarist)—more keen on their football for the moment than on anything else in the world. The competitions are mostly by brigades.⁴¹

Representatives of the Australian Comforts Fund and the Y.M.C.A., which together helped to provide Christmas gifts, extra food, sporting clothes and material, writing rooms, and entertainments, worked to a scheme organised under the A.A. and Q.M.G.'s of the several divisions. A corps magazine, *Aussie*, much better suited to the taste of the "diggers" than the previous year's *Rising Sun*, was produced through the ability of Lieutenant Harris⁴² at the corps ammunition park, whose printing section issued it. This cheerful journal was an immediate success, and sold in great numbers.⁴³

The work and training of the Australian infantry was not hampered, as was that of the British during the winter, by the reorganisation of the divisions from a twelve- to a

⁴⁰ Australian soldiers, throughout their service, had the advantage of the admirably efficient organisation of the British Expeditionary Force Canteens, but at this time certain special canteens also were organised.

⁴¹ The diary adds: "22 Bn. starting a newspaper and a debating society."

⁴² Lieut. P. L. Harris, 23rd Bn. Journalist; of Sydney; b. Deniliquin, N.S.W., 9 Dec., 1885.

⁴³ For example, 10,000 copies of the first issue were printed, 60,000 of the second, and 100,000 of the third.



3. THE SMART SET

Concert party of the 4th Australian Division, at Baillieu, 13th March, 1918 (The "ladies" are camouflaged "Diggers.")

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E1986



4. TEA TIME AT NO. 2 AUSTRALIAN CASUALTY CLEARING STATION AT STELNWERCK, 30TH NOVEMBER, 1917

The sisters, from left to right, are: (*above*) C Locke Brown, L Stobo, Stewart; (*below*) F. I. Tyson, H M Homan, and Shepherd.

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E1280

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nine-battalion establishment. The only important change—apart from those already described—carried out at this time in the A.I.F. in France was the uniting of the four machine-gun companies of each division into a divisional machine-gun battalion. This—the last step in the gradual separation of the machine-guns from their original place in the infantry—was an outcome, partly of increasing specialisation, partly of the methods of 1917 by which the machine-guns had been used almost as artillery. The change was, within a few months, to be tested in warfare of a very different nature.

The training, for which Birdwood hoped that each division would obtain two months out of the line,⁴⁴ was, however, impeded by two circumstances. First, the division in active reserve, though stationed almost as far back as the 4th Division,⁴⁵ found the authorities unable to supply it with adequate training grounds; second, as will presently be told, the energy of the corps had eventually to be concentrated upon the fortification of its sector. However, casualties were few;⁴⁶ and, with sock-drying chambers beside the main forward tracks, a highly efficient laundry and baths organisation,⁴⁷ and keen recreation in the back areas, there was little sickness notwithstanding the frequent flooding of many of the front trenches.⁴⁸ Moreover, despite the fully justified anxiety as to the adequacy of future drafts from the Australian dépôts at Salisbury Plain, the actual rate of their receipt was well above that for the British divisions. Thus, between November 1st and February 28th the infantry strength of the four active divisions showed the rapid rise indicated in the following figures:

	<i>Nov. 1.</i>	<i>Dec. 31.</i>	<i>Feb. 28.</i>
1st Divn. ..	11,476 ..	12,694 ..	13,531
2nd Divn. ..	11,805 ..	12,583 ..	13,579
3rd Divn. ..	8,503 ..	11,626 ..	13,097
5th Divn. ..	10,192 ..	13,070 ..	13,577

⁴⁴ Haig's intention to give the whole corps a month's rest before the spring offensive was, however, not carried out; it would naturally be changed when the plan for an offensive was abandoned.

⁴⁵ In the Samer-Desvres area. See *Vol. XII, plate 439.*

⁴⁶ The most serious loss occurred in the far back area, at Desvres, where on 16 Dec., 1917, a train carrying the 32nd Battalion to the rest area telescoped, through the breaking of a coupling, one man being killed and 64 injured.

⁴⁷ See *Vol. XII, plate 434.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid, plate 441.*

Even the infantry of the 4th Division—though at first it received only its own ex-convalescents, and, on return to the front, it served in the most active portion of the sector—increased as shown below :

	<i>Nov. 1.</i>	<i>Dec. 31.</i>	<i>Feb. 28.</i>
4th Divn. . .	9,787	11,098	12,021

Yet this temporary recuperation could not remove deep anxieties concerning the future of the divisions. The object of the measures adopted had been to allow time for a revival of enlistment in Australia; but in the referendum taken on December 20th the Australian people rejected conscription by a somewhat larger majority than before. The soldiers' vote, taken about December 11th under arrangements made by Administrative Headquarters in London, was slightly more favourable than in 1916; it is believed that a majority of the troops actually in the front was against the measure, but that the vote from the camps and the transports turned the scale and produced a slight majority of soldiers in favour—103,789 being for, and 93,910 against. The reasons for the opposition among the fighting troops were apparently the same as before.⁴⁹ Some votes may have been influenced by the fact that, despite a recent suggestion from Australia,⁵⁰ no Australian soldier—even of those who had enlisted in August 1914—was given home leave. More were probably affected by an inclination, natural among soldiers who may not dispute the opinion of officers on most matters of government, to oppose the view of authority when they have the right to do so. In any case, the voting in Australia was final.

The system of voluntary enlistment must therefore continue. The bitter struggle over conscription had not helped it, and, after a feeble rise—to 2,815—in November, recruiting fell to 1,518 in March. There was therefore no hope of future drafts being sufficient to maintain the five divisions at their present strength after any serious fighting. It was obvious that some units would eventually have to be broken up; but Birdwood resolved to effect this, in the first place, in the same

⁴⁹ See Vol. III, p. 892; also Vol. XII, plate 432.

⁵⁰ See Vol. XI, p. 409. Actually Gen. Birdwood was, at this time, quietly arranging to give home leave to a very small proportion of officers and men—about 100 monthly—by the subterfuge of sending them as "submarine guards" on transports.

manner as the British were then doing, by reducing not the number of divisions, but the number of battalions in each infantry brigade.⁵¹ Only when replenishment by this method was exhausted would the disbandment of divisions be begun.

The fear that the A.I.F. would be forced to "feed upon itself" was well grounded; the present recovery of strength was not solely due to the normal course of reinforcement. It is true that some of the material still to be squeezed from staffs at the base was of first rate quality, but there was not much of it. As after Pozières, the Administrative Headquarters of the A.I.F. in London and the training staffs on Salisbury Plain were combed to obtain additional men for the front. Comparatively few could be drawn from the great offices at Horseferry-road; the Commandant, Griffiths—once gunner, now brigadier-general—had not been the man to permit evasion of duty; most of the routine work at the London headquarters was done by women,⁵² and the "fit" men were chiefly experts of the very fine staff of the pay corps, whose leaders were so overtaxed that one after another of them broke down in health, as, in the end, did Griffiths himself.

A larger source than Horseferry-road was the staff of the A.I.F. "base dépôts" at Salisbury Plain. This command was now held by Major-General M'Cay, who, after leaving the 5th Division, had been unemployed in London, and had been transferred to that command by Senator Pearce against the advice of Birdwood. Birdwood doubted whether M'Cay, notwithstanding his senior rank and great ability, was capable of maintaining content among his troops. Birdwood had therefore urged that Sir Newton Moore should be retained at the dépôts and M'Cay sent to Horseferry-road. M'Cay himself would have liked to control both these establishments through appointment to command all Australian troops in England. Such an appointment would have afforded the further prospect that its holder might become the administrative G.O.C., A.I.F., if, as now seemed likely, Birdwood was offered the next vacancy in the Army commands. These ambitions made M'Cay, at the dépôts, a most difficult partner for

⁵¹ From four to three. A somewhat similar reorganisation had been carried out by the French and Germans a year earlier.

⁵² See *Vol. XII, plate 248.*

Griffiths, at Horseferry-road, who, indeed at one time begged to be taken back to France with his former subordinate appointment. But Birdwood's proposal also had its drawbacks—it is certain that M'Cay would have been as difficult in the Horseferry-road command as at Salisbury Plain. In warning Senator Pearce that M'Cay would be unsuitable as G.O.C., A.I.F., if that post were vacated by himself, Birdwood quoted an opinion expressed by the High Commissioner for Australia in London that, whereas his office worked admirably in co-operation with Griffiths, if M'Cay were in charge he himself could hardly hope to carry on.

However, M'Cay was given the post at Salisbury Plain; and, after Birdwood had impressed upon him the necessity of amicable co-operation, he filled the base dépôt command loyally and ably. When the losses at Third Ypres brought a crisis in the supply of reinforcements, he reorganised his reinforcement and convalescent units, reducing the former from 15 battalions to 10 and later to 5, and thus saving a number of the training staff. As, however, the staffs were partly formed from unfit troops, but principally from officers and N.C.O's sent over from their units in France for a needed rest, the reinforcement thus provided consisted partly of war-worn personnel.

Inevitably it was from officers and men returning after convalescence that the reinforcements now largely came. And some observers were inclined to suspect that at such times the mere knowledge that men were greatly needed in France could not help having its subconscious effect upon the minds of the medical boards, with the result of lowering the standard of fitness ordinarily insisted on. Among the men returned to France, many had been wounded again and again, and there were undeniably some whose nerves or strength were unfit for the strain that was being put upon them. There is a recorded case of one who had served since the beginning of the war, and whom the original medical officer of his battalion, chancing to meet him in France returning after many wounds, pronounced to be suffering from acute overstrain, eye-pupils dilated, and thoroughly unfit for front-line service. Another infantryman,⁵³ who had received his first wound shortly after

⁵³ Pte A. P. Scott (No. 1302; 5th & 57th Bns.). Prospector; of Williamstown, Vic.; b. Mirboo North, Vic., 1 Jan., 1889. Died 7 Aug., 1934

the Landing, was, at the instance of his brother, taken out of the line immediately before a great attack into which he was uncomplainingly marching. Relieved of his heavy kit, and transferred to an easy job at a small headquarters, he was found barely to have strength even for this task, and shortly afterwards was discovered to be suffering from tuberculosis, which soon rendered him half-cripple and sixteen years later caused his death.

Another source of anxiety was one affecting the A.I.F. much more than the British or French Armies, and inseparable from the conditions under which it had been enlisted. By the Australian Defence Act, which in a few disciplinary provisions overrode the British Army Act⁵⁴ so far as Australian troops serving with the British Army were concerned, a soldier who refused to enter battle or deserted to the rear was not liable to suffer a penalty of death. The Defence Act (Section 98) said:

No member of the Defence Force shall be sentenced to death by any court-martial except for mutiny, desertion to the enemy, or traitorously delivering up to the enemy any garrison, fortress, post, guard, or ship, vessel, or boat, or traitorous correspondence⁵⁵ with the enemy; and no sentence of death passed by any court-martial shall be carried into effect until confirmed by the Governor-General.

In this respect the conditions of the Australian soldier's service differed at the end of 1917 from those of all others on the Western Front. In the British Army the death penalty, though its infliction was hedged with safeguards, was the recognised preventive of desertion and, in extreme cases, of insubordination. In the German Army it was much more rarely applied—indeed, the conditions were in some respects astonishingly similar to those of the Australian force⁵⁶—but

⁵⁴ This overriding of the Army Act by the law of the dominions, so far as dominions' troops were concerned, was provided for in the British Army Act itself, and was a basic condition on which dominion troops served with the British forces.

⁵⁵ This presumably means "or for traitorous correspondence," etc.

⁵⁶ Innumerable quotations could be made from German histories showing the difficulty of preventing "absence without leave" through non-application of the death penalty. Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary of 21 December, 1917, notes: "The administration of discipline by the English is very rigid. Whilst on our side there is known to me only a single case in which a soldier on account of aggravated refusal of duty in the face of the enemy was shot, I gather from a compilation of British orders which have been found, that at least 67 English soldiers have been shot under martial law in the period between 27 October, 1916, and 30 August, 1917."—*Mien Kriegstagebuch, Vol. II, pp. 303-4.* (It must not be assumed, however, that these figures are correct.)

the liability existed. But the Australian soldier was not liable, and the difficulty of applying one law to him and another to the British soldiers beside whom he served had arisen immediately the troops reached France. Birdwood had then recommended that,⁵⁷ if the distinction was legal, the Commonwealth Government should be asked to remove it. Haig forwarded this request with his endorsement to the War Office. The War Office apparently recognised the legality of the restriction, for, on the 9th of July, 1916, the British Government cabled asking the Commonwealth to place its oversea troops under the Army Act without limitation. The Australian Government, then about to plunge into its first bitter campaign for conscription, delayed its answer.

Meanwhile the intense stress of Pozières and of the subsequent winter on the Somme showed in a constantly increasing number of desertions by Australian soldiers. On the 11th of December, 1916, Birdwood again brought the matter before General Rawlinson, in whose army I Anzac was then serving. "I think," wrote Birdwood, "that the discipline of the Australian troops is likely to suffer when the men realise that they are not on precisely the same footing in all respects as all other soldiers serving in France." Rawlinson, in forwarding the request to Haig, expressed his own opinion in strong terms. In December, 1916, I Anzac had forwarded to his headquarters the files of three cases of desertion in each of which the brigadier and divisional commander had recommended that the death sentence should be carried out. As for "absence without leave," of 182 convictions recorded that month in Rawlinson's whole army, 130 were recorded against Australians.

I cannot be responsible for the maintenance of discipline among the Australian forces under my command (Rawlinson wrote to Haig) unless the required alteration of the law is made forthwith.

Haig, a fortnight before receiving this memorandum, had himself written to the War Office concerning the increasing number of Australians—young reinforcements or hardened men returning after convalescence—who were deserting on the journey from England to the front. He now forwarded

⁵⁷ At the end of May, 1916, a sentence of death, passed on a sergeant of the 1st Pioneer Battalion, was forwarded by Birdwood to Second Army Headquarters with this recommendation.

the papers to the War Office with his opinion that desertion was "assuming alarming proportions among the Australian troops," and that the amendment of the Australian law was a matter "of grave urgency." To crown these serious statements came in February 1917 a report from the police of the Fifth Army (which had lately extended its front to include the I Anzac sector) that, of 43 prisoners who during these few weeks had escaped from custody, 30 were Australians. Orders were issued that, whenever a prisoner escaped, the officer of his guard was to be court-martialled. The Army Council on February 3rd telegraphed to Australia: "The matter is of utmost gravity for discipline of whole army." But, on the recommendation of Senator Pearce, the Commonwealth Government at last replied that it had given serious consideration to the proposal for the full application of the Army Act to Australian troops oversea, but regretted that it was unable to agree.

In May 1917 the question again forced itself into prominence in the 4th Division. When, after its exceptionally severe trial at Bullecourt, the division was filled up with reinforcements and sent north for the Battle of Messines, the numbers absenting themselves without leave greatly increased. General Glasgow, of the 13th Brigade, the strongest commander in the force, and General Holmes, commander of the division, urged Birdwood to ask again for the law to be amended so as to permit the infliction of the death penalty in a few cases. The 4th Division had, while still training in Egypt, been forced to accept a large number of "hard cases" and ne'er-do-wells rejected by the 1st and 2nd Divisions;⁵⁸ and the persistent deserters were always men of this type—in some cases actual criminals who had enlisted without any intention of serving at the front, and ready to go to any length to avoid it.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See *Vol. III*, p. 292.

⁵⁹ At times action by these men called for instant treatment on unorthodox and dangerous lines; but officers faced by emergency had to act strongly and take the risk. When a draft was leaving Salisbury Plain for France, a hardened offender faced the commander of the Overseas Training Brigade (Colonel W. W. R. Watson) on parade, and said he would not go unless he was carried. Watson immediately had him tied to an ambulance and dragged with the draft until he begged to be released. In one case in France a man of foreign descent, under arrest, foully abused the young officer in charge of the guard, who took no notice until the man began to abuse his mother. The officer then ordered the man's handcuffs to be removed; knocked him down again and again until he apologised and saluted; and then reported to his brigadier his own offence—that of striking a soldier. Needless to say, he was told to forget it.

A few men—of a character recognised by their comrades as well as by their officers to be worthless to any community—by open refusal to go into the trenches were causing some of the younger as well as of the more war-worn of their comrades to follow their example. Sentences of death were constantly passed, but it was known to every Australian soldier that these must be commuted; and, harsh though some of the army prisons were, it was generally believed that all military prisoners would be released at the end of the war. With this prospect, some men “whose sense of honour was weak,” as Glasgow wrote, preferred imprisonment to front-line service. Birdwood told Holmes of the Australian Government’s decision, but he also forwarded these letters on May 22nd to Senator Pearce with his own opinion that possibly the infliction of the death sentence in one or two extreme cases would stop desertion.

After Messines desertion in the 4th Division continued, and General Godley, in whose corps the division then was, asked that, if the Australian Government would do nothing else, it should make it known that sentences of penal servitude passed by courts-martial would have to be served and would not be terminated at the end of the war. Godley’s representation went forward through Haig, who added his opinion that matters were then “much more serious” than at the time of his previous letters. In the first six months of 1917, he said, out of 677 convictions for desertion in the whole B.E.F. (62 divisions), 171 were in the five Australian divisions. The average number convicted in each Australian division was 34.2, and in each of the other divisions, British and dominion, 8.87. The New Zealand Government had now sanctioned the death penalty, and in the New Zealand Division only 8 men had been convicted.⁶⁰ As for “absence without leave,” the average number of convictions in the three resting Australian divisions in the Third Army had during three weeks been 21, and in its 22 other divisions 1.9. Though Haig feared chiefly a deterioration of discipline in the A.I.F., he was also concerned with the effect of the Australian example upon his other troops. He stated—and his word was a complete

⁶⁰ The death penalty was carried out only twice in the N.Z.E.F.

guarantee of performance—that the death penalty, if sanctioned by the Australian Government, would be “very sparingly” inflicted—only where desertion was most deliberate and an example badly needed. But he considered that, unless the Australians were put fully under the Army Act, their fighting efficiency would deteriorate “to an extent which may gravely affect the success of our arms.” Unless this step was taken, “I cannot,” he said, “be responsible for the serious consequences which may ensue in the future.”

Haig's recommendation for the full application of the Army Act went on to the British Government. At the same time Birdwood, to whom Major-General Monash had made representations⁶¹ similar to Godley's, wrote to Senator Pearce. Birdwood recognised that the Government, then striving, after the first rejection of conscription, to secure voluntary recruits, could not dash the enthusiasm of the nation by introducing a bill to apply the death penalty; but he suggested that, if at any time the flow of recruits was ensured by conscription, the Government should sanction not the full application of the Army Act, but the imposition of a death penalty for one offence—desertion.

G.H.Q. was not pleased with Birdwood's letter, since it conflicted with Haig's; but Birdwood's judgment was right. The Australian Government well knew that, without much more pressing reason than was afforded by the existing circumstances, the Australian people would not think of permitting this step to be taken. To impose the system of the death penalty upon men, who had gone out voluntarily to fight at the other end of the world in a cause not primarily their own, was not compatible with its sense of justice. The effect upon the flagging enlistment would be, as Senator Pearce wrote to Birdwood, and Hughes impressed upon the British Government, “disastrous.” The suggestion, Pearce wrote, “could not have come at a more inopportune time.” Therefore, although the Australian Government fully recognised the strength of the case, it again refused to alter the law.

Actually, on the day on which Pearce wrote to Birdwood (20th September, 1917), the I Anzac Corps struck, as the

⁶¹ During part of July Monash commanded II Anzac in Godley's absence on leave.

spearhead, the first of the series of clean, powerful thrusts which constituted so important a part of the second phase of "Third Ypres." Never before had the A.I.F. fought with such effect. It delivered blow after blow with complete success. But, when Haig endeavoured to continue that brilliant series in the autumn rains and mud, desertion increased. It was difficult even for the company officers and N.C.O.'s to say how far the practice really went, but, during the dreadful period that followed the Battle of Broodseinde, 53 cases were reported by the 2nd Australian Division, which bore the chief strain,⁶² and the true number was probably larger. The offenders were men who (as Birdwood wrote to Pearce) when their battalion was ordered into the trenches "quietly slipped away at night back to the rear," where they lay up for a few days and then reported back, either to the battalion when it came out or to its "nucleus" camp, or were arrested.

It was difficult to distinguish some of these cases from those of genuine "strays"; and, for conviction by court-martial, it was necessary to prove that the order to go into the line had actually been given to the accused man. There is no question that the action of a few worthless men constantly burdened the lives of many of their comrades, caused incessant trouble to N.C.O.'s and officers already weighted with battle duties, and disgraced their regiments and their nation. It was not the absence of these men from battle, but their example to the younger troops, that was harmful. Their absence was in some ways a definite advantage, but the unfairness of allowing criminals to avoid the dangers, into which better men had to be forced, made their discharge from the army an impossible penalty. They had to be caught and either hauled into the line or imprisoned. One effect of this system was that the practice of suspending military sentences, largely adopted in the British forces and those of the other dominions, could not be so general in the A.I.F. The result was that, according to a graph circulated in March 1918, nearly 9 Australians per 1,000 were in field imprisonment as against 1 per 1,000 in the British force, and less than 2 in the Canadian,

⁶² See Vol. IV, p. 890.

New Zealand, and South African. Haig was impressed by these figures, although he noted that before the introduction of the suspended sentence the figure for British troops had been 5.1. A fight between Australians and Portuguese soldiers at Wimereux near Boulogne called from him the judgment that the Australians' discipline was bad and—as his staff advised—their convalescent dépôts should be kept apart from those of other troops.

In spite of endless trouble, however, feeling in the lower ranks of the A.I.F. was overwhelmingly against any change in the law relating to the death penalty, an attitude which was much strengthened by the constant reading out, on parade, by order throughout the British Army, of reports of the infliction of the death penalty upon British soldiers—a ceremony which aroused in the Australians, officers and men, only a sullen sympathy and a fierce pride that their own people was strong enough to refuse this instrument to its rulers.

Birdwood's attitude in this matter was never a harsh one: to no leader could the required power have been more safely entrusted. His conscience would have been tortured by the necessity of ordering the shooting of any of his men. He recognised that for some, even though medically classed as "fit," service in the front line was, through excessive strain or other causes, physically or mentally intolerable. Early in 1918 he instructed battalion commanders to keep a careful look-out for such men and have them transferred to service in back areas.⁶³ To check desertion, the Government's refusal to change the law having been notified to him, he was now forced back upon almost the same sanction that Bridges had imposed before Gallipoli. Throughout that campaign the extreme penalty for Australian soldiers had been that of return to Australia in disgrace. This had ceased to be effective after Pozières—when, for some men, return even accompanied by disgrace was only too welcome.⁶⁴ But Birdwood now asked Senator Pearce that, when men were sentenced to death for desertion, their names, with particulars of their town of enlistment, might be published throughout Australia. This

⁶³ In certain other cases—for example, where, of several brothers, all except one had been killed—he sent "fit" men, on application, back to Australia.

⁶⁴ See *Vol. III*, pp. 870-1.

arrangement was agreed to, and was promulgated in January 1918 in A.I.F. orders. The first list was cabled early in March. The second conscription referendum had then failed, and with it disappeared any present chance of the application of the Army Act.

So this force, from whose expected deterioration the Commander-in-Chief feared possible danger to the success of the Allies' arms, entered its fourth year of war still possessing, alone among the armies, the privilege of facing death without a death penalty to ensure firmness; for its soldiers alone, in the world war, disgrace was the supreme penalty. With the withdrawal of the divisions into a quiet area, desertions practically ceased—the first list, cabled to Australia in March for publication, contained only two names, of men in the 2nd Division. But it was always in times of stress that the trouble cropped up, and the obvious probability was that it was merely dormant.

The anxieties of those responsible for the administration of the A.I.F. were not lessened by the growing certainty that the war was approaching its final stages, and that, whatever its issue, the problem of repatriating the oversea troops would have to be faced within two years, if not before. It was General White who urged that serious thought must be forthwith devoted to this problem. He already foresaw that one of the main difficulties for Australia would be to obtain shipping at a time when innumerable other interests, British and foreign, would be clamouring for it. On the suggestion of an officer of the 3rd Divisional Signal Company, Lieutenant Mayman,⁶⁵ he also instituted an inquiry into the educational system established by the Canadian Corps behind their lines (and known as the "University of Vimy Ridge") by which officers and men in that corps were already being trained for the professions and callings which they might follow in civil life.⁶⁶ While these matters were being considered, serious thought was turned upon a suggestion, which had not before been taken seriously, from the Director of Medical Services of the A.I.F., Surgeon-General Howse. Howse had urged

⁶⁵ Lieut. G. L. Mayman, 3rd Div. Sig. Co. Telegraphist; of Brunswick, Vic.; b. Carisbrook, Vic., 14 Jan., 1888.

⁶⁶ G.H.Q. also was taking up the question of affording some higher education to those British soldiers who wished for it.

that, the climate of Egypt being more suitable for Australians than that of Flanders, the Australian divisions would be more effective there, and the falling off of reinforcements would be partly balanced by decrease of illness. It was now put forward, as a further important consideration, that shipping would be saved. Owing to the submarine campaign, Australian reinforcements were at this time brought, by Admiralty arrangements to Egypt, and thence to England, from which, when trained, they returned to France. It had already been tentatively decided to save shipping by holding and training them in France;⁶⁷ and it was now argued that the convenience of all concerned would be still better met if Egypt and Palestine were made the special theatre of Australian operations, the British divisions there being returned to France, so that each force would be nearer to its homeland. If the rations and clothing of the Palestine force were drawn from Australia, shipping might be saved, and the end of the war would find the A.I.F. half-way home.

On January 28th Birdwood suggested this scheme in a letter to Senator Pearce, and asked that, if the Australian Government approved, it should propose the plan to the British Government. But though it had much in its favour, and the change would naturally have been welcomed by the troops,⁶⁸ the humiliation of making such a confession of weakness would have been deeply galling to many Australians. The Commonwealth Government had not adopted the suggestion when, in mid-April, the situation on the Western Front became acute, and Birdwood telegraphed to Senator Pearce to hold action upon it. All his divisions were by then thick in the fighting of 1918 on the Western Front, and any doubts as to their strength and the possibility of their full maintenance had to be ignored.

⁶⁷ To train in conjunction with the 4th Division. When this ceased to be a "dépôt division," however, the scheme fell through.

⁶⁸ The approaching transfer of the Australians to Egypt had been constantly rumoured; but the report was always held too good to be true.

CHAPTER II

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN AT MESSINES

DURING the winter of 1917-18 Australian divisions took their turn in holding the corps front as shown in the following table.

AUSTRALIAN CORPS		Divs.	Nov	Dec.	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr			
		Sector									
Northern	Hillst.	Hollbecke			4 Div	12 Jan-2 Mar	10 Div	2 Mar-5 Apr	9 Brit Div		
			Centre	Messines	5 Div	15 Nov-17 Dec	10 Div	17 Dec-1 Feb	5 Div	1 Feb-26 Mar	21 Brit Div
Southern	Ploegsteert		3 Div	4 Nov-16 Dec	2 Div	16 Dec-29 Jan	3 Div	29 Jan-8 Mar	2 Div	8 Mar-3 Apr	25 Brit Div
Armentières				3 Div	Dec. Jan 21-31						

Support Division: 2nd Divn., 15 Nov.-16 Dec.; 3rd Divn., 16-20 Dec. and 3-29 Jan.; 2nd Divn., 29 Jan.-1 Feb.; 1st Divn., 1 Feb.-1 March; 4th Divn., 2-23 March.

Reserve Division: 1st Divn., 15 Nov.-16 Dec.; 5th Divn., 17 Dec.-31 Jan.; 2nd Divn., 1 Feb.-8 March; 3rd Divn., 8-23 March.

Dépôt Division: 4th Divn., 15 Nov.-5 Dec. (detached to Fifth Army, 5 Dec.-7 Jan.).

On December 19th,¹ on representation from the commander of First Army, General Horne, that part of his line (largely held by the Portuguese) was unsafe, the 3rd Australian Division was, by decision of Haig himself, put in for a fortnight on the Armentières front, with the special task of improving the defences, the sector of the Australian Corps being temporarily extended to include this part of the line. During that fortnight, and later—from January 12th, when the 4th Division came in north of the canal, until March 26th, when one Australian division after another was suddenly moved south—the corps front (then 16,000 yards) was held with three divisions.

¹ The relief was begun on the 19th and ended on the 21st.

The German divisions on the Australian Corps front relieved each other as follows.²

Divs	Oct.	Nov	Dec.	Jan	Feb 72	Mar
AUSTRALIAN CORPS Northern	3BR				468	163
	1Bav R Div	9 Oct. - 10 Feb.			239 Div	28 Feb - 29 Mar
	1BR				467	8 Div.
	2BR				466	153
	153				76R	
	93	8 Oct. - 31 Jan			17R Div	31 Jan - 21 Apr
	8 Div				162	
	72				163	
	102			226R		
	32 Div	15 Sept. - 12 Jan.		49R Div	12 Jan - 24 Apr	
177			225R			
103			228R			
21B						
58D	12 Sept. - 14 Feb.				103	228R
19B					32 Div	15 Feb - 24 Mar
					177	
7B.					102	225R

Note: The numbers other than those of divisions indicate regiments (R-Reserve; B-Bavarian).

Throughout the winter of 1917-18, the back areas at Messines were extremely quiet. It is true that when the

Australian Corps took over the sector, it was expected that the British offensive would be

Winter Activities
 (i) **Fortification** renewed in the spring, and the orders were for the artillery to harass the enemy by all means, and for each brigade of infantry to prepare at least one raid. As a second task, the system of defences—which, as an inspecting engineer from G.H.Q. reported on November 19th, did not yet really exist—was to be pushed on with. But three weeks later the whole attitude of the British command was suddenly changed. Instead of themselves training for an offensive, all corps were to prepare for a German offensive in the spring. By an order from Haig of December 14th, this was to be effected principally by two means—first, the construction of a formidable defensive system, and, second, the conservation of the troops and the training of them for a defensive battle.

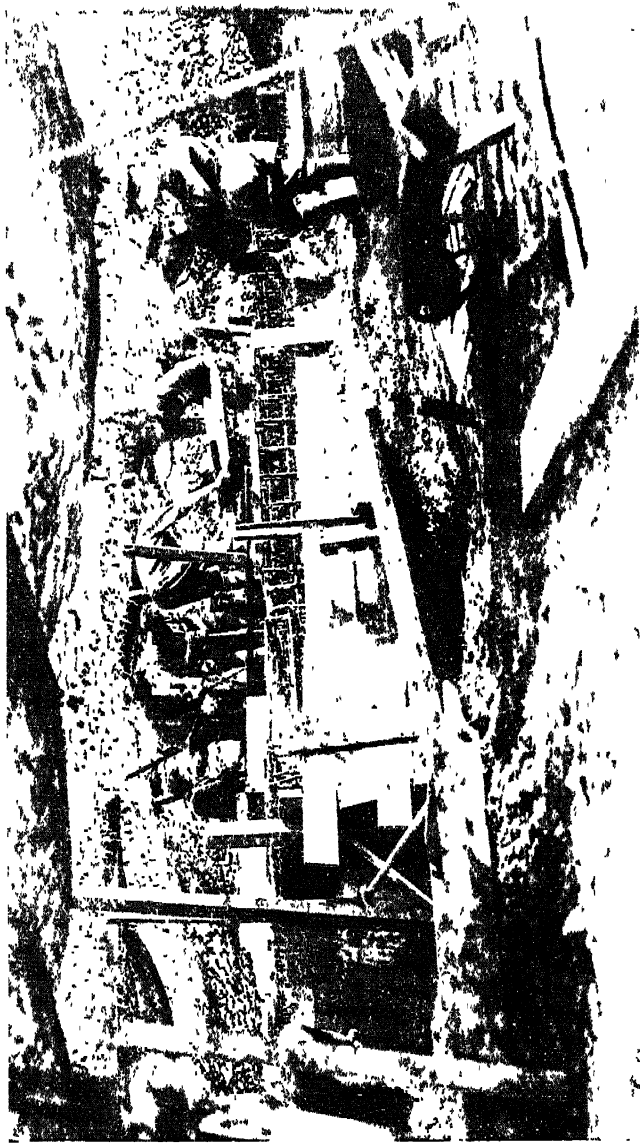
² The two line-divisions of the Australian Corps were opposed by the greater part of three German divisions, but as each Australian division had 12 infantry battalions, and each German only 9, the numbers of the troops were approximately equal. From about the end of November onwards most of the German regiments held their fronts with only six of their twelve companies in line, support, and reserve, the other three being out resting and training. The Australian divisions held the northern sectors rather more strongly than the southern, but all very lightly.

The new British armies had never yet been specially practised in defence, almost the whole of their instruction from 1915 onwards having been designed to fit them for the Somme, Arras, and Ypres offensives.

The main principle of defence on which Haig now insisted, as he had done when he so cautiously followed the German withdrawal from the Somme in February 1917,³ was organisation in depth. It was recognised that a powerful German offensive could not possibly be repulsed at the front line system. There were accordingly to be three systems, each comprising at least three lines. The present forward system was nearly everywhere to be held merely as an outpost-line, being dug, wired, and garrisoned strongly enough to stop any except major attacks, but held too lightly to resist an offensive on any great scale. It is true that its garrison was to fight on there at all costs, and, if any sector was penetrated, the local reserves were to counter-attack at once, without waiting for special orders. But, if these counter-attacks failed, more reserves were not to be wasted in attempting to recapture the forward zone; they were to be employed in trying to maintain the second system.

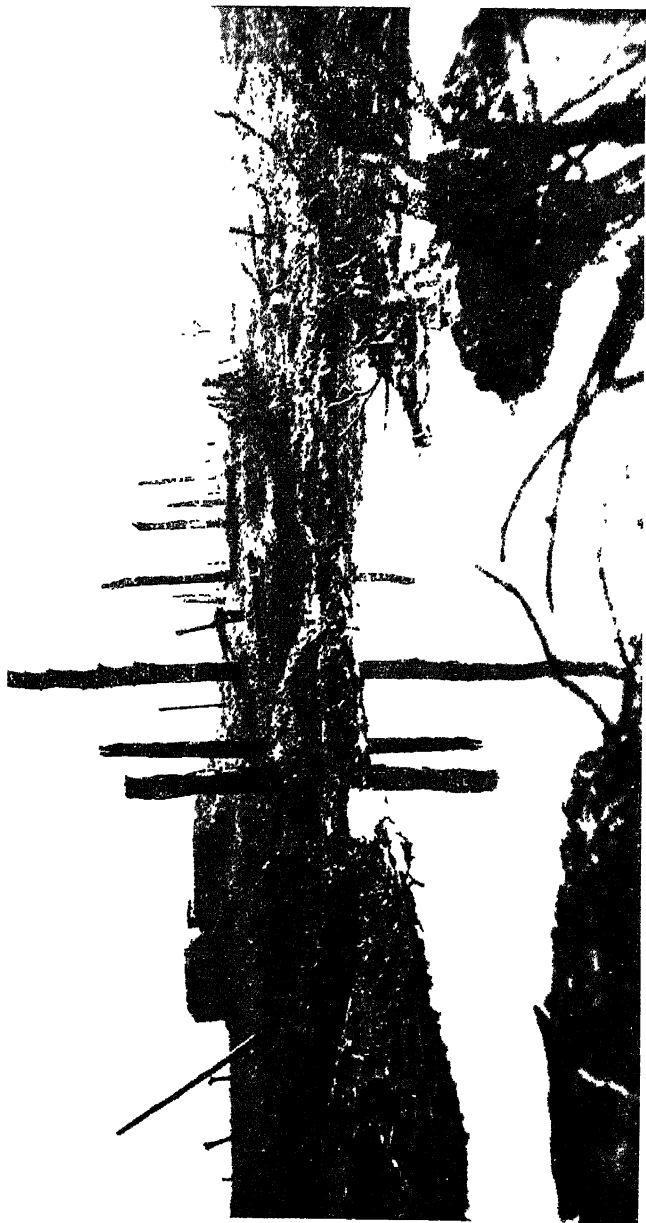
This system, usually two or three miles behind the forward zone, was known as the "battle zone," and was the ground on which the British commanders chose to give battle to the enemy attacking in force. Its defences were to be 2,000-3,000 yards or more in depth, lying along advantageous ground. The more important points in it were to be permanently garrisoned; the troops allotted for reinforcing it must be carefully exercised in that task, and plans worked out beforehand for bringing up reinforcing divisions to retake this line if captured. From two to eight miles behind it again was chosen a "rear zone," to be prepared for defence as labour became available. But the chief task would be the preparation of the battle zone; as soon as it was established, the garrison of the forward zone could be thinned, and the reserve increased. British officers were advised to read with particular attention the pamphlet on "the principles of command in the Defensive Battle" issued by Ludendorff when preparing the German Army for the defensive battles of 1917.

³ The original defences in the Bullecourt-Lagnicourt-Hermies area were constructed by I Anzac. (See *Vol. IV*, pp. 355-7.)



5. A CONCRETE SHELTER UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Men of the 1st Army Troops Company, Australian Engineers, building a "pillbox" at Wytchaete, March 1918.



6. PART OF THE FRONT-LINE SYSTEM, WYTSCHAETE SECTOR

Old German shelters and observation posts.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No E4484
Taken on 29th Jan., 1918.*

The Australian Corps, like most others, had already been working on a defence system designed by itself and by the army staff, and, as in many other sectors, this met the main requirements of the general plan. But with the changed outlook the urgency of pressing on with the work was obviously greater. The wire entanglements for the three lines of each system as well as for the advanced posts, the vast number of mutually supporting strong-points along each line, the dugouts and concrete pillboxes for sheltering the support and reserve garrisons, and the provision of communications called for heavy labour. This was the only period in which the Australian divisions undertook on a large scale the construction of defences with concrete.⁴ At one stage towards the end of winter it was found that some of the troops were being overworked, and that fuller results could actually be obtained by easing down.

This urgency, and the lack of training grounds, somewhat impeded the other main intended activity—instruction in methods of defence. Except that the thoughts of officers and men were definitely directed to the subject, and the 4th Division carried out some practice at Péronne, little teaching was achieved. The instruction given to the Australian soldier was still almost entirely that of attack. But unintended training of exceptional value was afforded by another activity, now to be described.

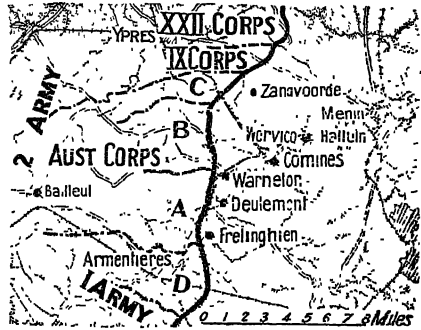
(ii) Miniature warfare

Shortly after the policy changed to a defensive one, an order arrived that raids should not be undertaken unless there existed special reasons for doing so. The artillery also was to avoid unnecessarily stirring up retaliation which might hamper the parties working on the defences. On the other hand patrolling, to ascertain the dispositions and intentions of the enemy, was to be energetically carried on.

The miniature warfare which resulted was, although only the lightest forces were involved, exceptionally interesting. The forward area of the Australian Corps comprised the ground won five months before in the Battle of Messines. This now bore the appearance of a wide moorland dipping gently from Messines ridge to the valley in which was the Ypres-Comines canal, and, farther south, to the Lys. Beyond

⁴ See Vol. XII, plate 442.

lay gently rolling farm country screened with innumerable tree-rows and hedges, with the twin spires of Comines Français and Comines Belge, dim in the Flemish haze, stabbing the horizon. Almost all this hedgerow country was in German occupation. In most of the sector the front lines lay on the sodden moorland flats, well on the near side of the canal. Only in the extreme north of the centre division's sector the canal, and for nearly three miles in the



A—Original sector of right division. B—Original sector of left division. C—Sector taken over by 4th Divn., Jan. 12. D—Sector of 3rd Divn., Dec. 19-Jan. 4.

extreme south the River Lys, formed part of the German front-line defences. Both sides had endeavoured to fortify their new fronts since the Battle of Messines, and the German systems, having been partly in existence before that battle, were fairly extensive and well wired. The British divisions had concentrated their effort upon digging and wiring a front trench and parts of a support trench, with communication avenues leading to them; but the rains of October and November had caught both armies with their trenches undrainable. The Germans were holding their front in accordance with the system enforced by Ludendorff after Broodseinde—with a wide, forward zone held only by a few outpost companies, and the main garrison withdrawn far back, partly behind the canal, partly in the Flanders Line between Houthem and Bas-Warneton. At Warneton itself, where the German front crossed the Lys, the enemy's line of resistance came sharply forward to the front line, and the place was strongly garrisoned. South of that, at Deulemont, Pont Rouge, and Frélinghien, the German line lay behind the Lys, whose brimming stream, fifty yards wide, wandered through the flats mostly on the German side of No-Man's Land. The British front had, before the Australians took over, become,

in most parts, completely uninhabitable as a continuous trench, but a number of small posts were maintained there, each usually consisting of an N.C.O. and six men. These were, in many cases, posted only at night, being withdrawn before full daylight to the nearest pillbox in rear, where the main garrison was stationed. The German posts were fewer and stronger, but they suffered equally from flooding.

No-Man's Land being in most parts 400 yards wide—and on the Lys nearly twice that—each side was much in the dark as to the precise position of its opponents' posts, and the attempts of each to locate them were continuous. The Germans relied on nightly cutting-out expeditions, made with a strength varying from about eight to over 100 attackers. The small British posts, thrust out in many places 200 yards or more from their supports, offered a fairly easy bait, and the Australians, entering the sector in mid-November, were warned that a number of these posts had recently been rushed and the garrisons killed or captured. In spite of some sharp fights, the same thing immediately happened to a couple of posts of the 5th Australian Division, which held the more difficult sector of the two, from Warneton northwards. Major-General Hobbs, with the support of Birdwood and White, obtained from the army commander (Rawlinson)⁵ somewhat reluctant permission to withdraw the advanced posts to a distance at which they could more easily be supported by the main outposts. The main outpost-line was within a few weeks transformed into a line of strong-points, each garrisoned by a platoon, and corps headquarters insisted that the advanced posts must be no more than 80-100 yards ahead of this, and that all neighbouring posts must be mutually supporting.⁶ If one was attacked, the garrisons of the supporting posts must at once counter-attack without waiting for further orders, and endeavour to cut off the enemy.

The one disadvantage of these changes was that the foremost wire entanglement, established by the earlier garrison, now lay far ahead of the listening posts, and at many points it was possible for enemy parties at night to cut through it

⁵ General Plumer had been sent to Italy and General Rawlinson for a few months took his place.

⁶ A similar order was afterwards issued to all the British armies.

without being heard. The new posts, however, were each protected with near and distant wire, and, as an early measure, a single wire was stretched along the whole front to prevent men from straying unwittingly into the German lines.

As a result of the new policy, although the Germans continued to undertake numerous raids, the Australians undertook few; indeed, in view of the general lightness of the German garrison, it would have been unprofitable to raid in strength except at Warneton and one or two other parts where No-Man's Land was narrow and the enemy garrison comparatively dense. Five such blows were struck during the winter, each time with sharp effect. Gas also was sent over at such points in "projectors,"⁷ and usually caused loss to the Germans. Otherwise the front-line operations on the Australian side consisted entirely of the ordinary nightly patrolling. Incidentally this was regarded as an education for the men and the junior commanders, and, with some brigades in the line, No-Man's Land at night swarmed with small patrols. Most had a definite object—to reconnoitre the enemy's wire, or to outflank an enemy patrol or cut out a small post, and, by capturing or killing some of the enemy, to identify the German troops then in the line.

These efforts became very bold—a striking example is furnished by the 4th Division. About February 10th, as no prisoner had recently been taken at the northern extremity of the front, Brigadier-General Glasgow told his battalion commanders that they must choose a point in the enemy's line for an early raid. That night the intelligence officer (Lieutenant Castles)⁸ of the 51st Battalion, then in the line, and his colleague (Lieutenant Barton)⁹ of the 52nd Battalion on which the task would fall, together with a scout (Private Whitfeld)¹⁰ of the 51st, crossed No-Man's Land, struggled through the mud of the Bassevillebeek valley, unhooking the loose German wire there, and then, by the light of their

⁷ See Vol. IV., pp. 280, 429.

⁸ Lieut. A. H. Castles, M.C.; 51st Bn. Civil servant; of Burswood, W. Aust.; b. Melbourne, 1890.

⁹ Lieut. I. J. Barton, M.C.; 52nd Bn. Farmer and grazier; of Brisbane, and Bowen district, Q'land; b. Blackstone, Q'land, 4 Jan., 1895. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

¹⁰ Pte. D. Whitfeld, M.M. (No. 5786; 51st Bn.). Station manager; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Fairfield, Longford, Tas., 19 March, 1883.

opponents' own flares, caught sight of a German machine-gun post behind "Hamp Farm." This appeared a possible objective for a raid, and the party was waiting to push round and reconnoitre it from the rear, when they heard a German patrol coming down the track on which they happened to be lying. Their first intention was to capture the patrol, but it would have been difficult to bring back the prisoners from that distance over several belts of wire. Accordingly, after waiting till the Germans, eight in number, were on them, they flung a couple of bombs and opened with their pistols, killing or wounding at least four. Flares immediately went up, and parties of Germans began to appear in several directions; but the Australians, being screened by the ground from the machine-gun at Hamp Farm, searched the injured Germans for documents, cut off the shoulder straps showing their regimental numbers, and then, recrossing the wire by rolling over it, came in with their information. "I see the 13th Brigade has too many officers!" was the comment of Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard, then of G.H.Q., who chanced to meet the commander of the 52nd Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Whitham) next day. A raid, always hated, had been avoided.

It was claimed and believed by the Australian infantry and by their commanders that before the winter ended they had almost complete control of No-Man's Land, and it has been stated that the practice thus gained went far towards creating the confidence and proficiency which marked the conduct of these troops later in the year. Yet the reader who turns to the published histories of the German regiments then opposing them will be surprised to find that several of these make precisely the same statement with regard to their own patrols. The 153rd Infantry Regiment speaks of the period as a fairly quiet one marked by "patrol undertakings so well—and rightly—loved," through which, it is claimed, that regiment's fame spread "far beyond the boundaries of its division and corps." The 72nd Regiment states that the patrolling of both sides was keen, and that, whereas the 72nd took fifteen prisoners,

our opponents, in retaliatory attempts, secured nothing, and merely left machine-guns and prisoners in our hands.

The 102nd Regiment says:

Our patrols . . . in consequence of their thrusting, ruled No-Man's Land, and . . . (co-operating with the regimental machine-guns and trench-mortars) obtained an ascendancy over the enemy.

Closer examination of these records, however, shows that, although the regimental leaders prided themselves upon the conduct of the little expeditions in which they constantly penetrated the abandoned Australian line and attacked the retrenched posts—and doubtless these were useful exercises—the parties comparatively seldom secured an identification, and almost always lost some of their own number; whereas, by the constant capture or killing and identification of members of these parties, the Australian posts and patrols, against which they came, continuously supplied their own commands with the names and members of the German regiments holding the front. Thus while, according to several of the German histories, the local dispositions of the Australians were at times obscure to them, their own were hardly ever unknown to the Australian command. The position is most frankly stated by the historian of the 163rd Infantry Regiment (17th Reserve Division), which from February 1st held the line before Houthem.

The enemy's situation was rather obscure, and consequently our patrols were zealously at pains to obtain the necessary identifications . . . (On the 25th, however, two men of the 5th Australian Division strayed into the 163rd's line and were captured. After this . . .) every day our patrols manœuvred about No-Man's Land with the greatest dash, but unfortunately these keen enterprises brought irreplaceable losses (in veteran soldiers) . . . The information obtained was often not in consonance with the great cost in human material.

The 226th Reserve Regiment (49th Reserve Division), which lay next to the 163rd, records:

We succeeded repeatedly in thrusting over the enemy's wire to his firing line, but the enemy infantry was always on its guard. As soon as the patrols were seen, the enemy sent out counter-patrols, usually in greater strength.

During these few months, as usual, a region new to most of the Australian divisions quickly became as familiar as their home towns or countryside in Australia.

Pond House, Estaminet House, Crown Prince Farm, and White Farm (says the history of the 41st Battalion) will hardly be forgotten by the scouts and the patrols of company men who nightly went the rounds of these outposts . . . Right along the bank of the Lys they

would go, carefully stealing along, stopping and listening at times, and rarely if ever coming back without some information. Perhaps it would be an enemy working party at the Laundry or machine-guns firing from the Dyeworks or Soaphouse, and . . . who has not assumed the prone as those machine-guns at the Arches let drive?

Opposite Deulemont, patrols crawled nightly across the wide Lys flats towards Pont Rouge and "Moat Farm." Although the enemy's line here and at Frélinghien lay just beyond the Lys, German patrols were often met on the near side, and during December one of the main objects of the 3rd Division's patrols was to ascertain how they crossed the river. On the night of the 7th a patrol of the 36th Battalion examined, under the nose of the enemy, the bridge at Pont Rouge, and found it to be a possible route; and German unit histories now show that this was the usual route, although patrols sometimes crossed by boat. Farther north the flats were even more marshy, and in rainy weeks the movement of patrols was difficult. Early in December the country froze, and the going became firm, but the cracking and creaking of the ice on the shell-holes, whenever it took a man's weight, furnished a new difficulty. At Christmas time snow fell. As the moon was bright, some patrols wore white overalls, and on December 28th, near Hollebeke, a white clothed party of the 8th Battalion met and fought a German patrol (153rd I.R.) similarly camouflaged. The Australian patrol reported that it fired and hit some of the enemy, but that the bright moonlight rendered impossible a subsequent search for any who might have been left dead or wounded; the German patrol claimed to have driven its opponents away.

Early in December, in pursuance of the offensive policy then ruling, the artillery of the northern sector (then held by the 5th Division) bombarded those points at which the chief German posts had been located, including "Rifle Farm," "Fly Buildings," "Bee Farm," "Wam Farm," "The Giant," and "The Twins." During and after these bombardments Brigadier-General Elliott—always a fighter—initiated several attempts by parties of the 15th Brigade to cut off the German post at Rifle Farm. These failed, but without serious loss. The most important raids were the few undertaken by the 3rd Division (Monash), which made a special practice of large-scale raiding, and which happened during parts of the

winter to be lying on the edge of Warneton, where, as stated above, the local German command thought it necessary to retain a strong garrison. Particulars of these small blows are given below. Though some of them involved a fair number of casualties on the Australian side, they were so sharply struck that two historians of the German regiments concerned wrongly argue that they were not raids at all, but attempts to seize the Warneton defences.¹¹

A summary of the minor operations of the Australian Corps and its opponents between the 14th of November, 1917, and the 19th of March, 1918, compiled from the available records of both sides, appears at the end of this volume.¹² According to this comparison, Germans attacking or approaching the Australian line left identifications on no less than forty-two occasions, but secured them only on ten. On the other hand, Australians approaching or attacking the German line secured identifications on fourteen occasions and left them only on seven. A search through other German records would probably show that the Australians were identified at a few other times, but, even allowing a wide margin for error, the figures are striking. The following examples are typical of these operations:—

GERMAN ENTERPRISES.

November 19. 5.45 a.m. The 102nd I.R. (32nd Division) attempted a raid on a considerable scale against the forward post of the 32nd Battalion (8th Brigade) near "Kiwi Farm." The Germans advanced in three parties. The history of the 102nd states: "The right assault troop, after getting into the enemy trench, suffered heavy loss by a shower of their opponents bombs." The left party could not penetrate the wire. The Australian post killed 3 and wounded 3 of the raiding party, and captured a prisoner of the 32nd Divisional Storm Detachment. The dead were identified from their papers as belonging to the 102nd and 103rd I.R. Four Australians were wounded.

November 22. By the coughing of the garrison, a German patrol had on November 21 discovered a somewhat isolated post of the 54th Battalion (14th Brigade) near "Spider House." At 6.15 on the following evening a party of an officer and 26 others raided it. They were at first driven off, but worked behind the post and presently attacked again from the rear, killing one and capturing four Australians, one of whom (Private West¹³), however, escaped. In the fight the post had killed one German and wounded several. On West's coming in

¹¹ See the histories of the 103rd I.R. and 226th R.I.R.

¹² *Appendix No. 2.*

¹³ Pte. C. S. West (No. 4281; 54th Bn.). Fibrous plasterer; of Dulwich Hill, N.S.W.; b. Botany, N.S.W., 16 July, 1899.



7. A TRENCH AT LA BASSE VILLE, WARNETON, IN JANUARY, 1918
The mud is churned up by trench traffic



8. A FATIGUE PARTY OF THE 22ND BATTALION BRINGING UP BARBED-WIRE IN FLOEGSTEERT WOOD ON 26TH DECEMBER, 1917

In the distance are "La Hutte" and "Strafer's Nest"

with the news a patrol went out, and the dead German—a man of the 93rd I.R. (8th Division)—was found. On the following night a German who had taken part in the raid was captured, and gave an account of it.

November 30. About November 28 the 72nd I.R. (8th Division) was ordered to find out what troops were opposed to it. A preparatory patrol accordingly sought for and found several passages through the main entanglements, north of the Blauwepoortbeek, and at 2.30 a.m. on the 30th an assaulting party (4 officers and 20 men) crept through and approached a post of the 59th Battalion (15th Brigade). Assisted by the constant rattle of a machine-gun, the Germans next crawled through the closer wire protecting the post, but the garrison, an N.C.O. and 7 men, being alert, this approach occupied two hours. From eight yards' distance the four German officers and the men nearest them charged. The history of the 72nd I.R. states that the Australians fought desperately "without a moment's thought of surrender," but that some of the German supporting party and pioneers came up, and the eight defenders were overwhelmed. "The extremely stubborn and bitter defence" so roused the German soldiers "that they could not be prevented from shooting down the whole garrison." The Australian supports now showed signs of counter-attacking, and so the Germans, having had (as their account says) 2 officers and 10 others wounded in the mêlée, withdrew taking with them one lightly wounded Australian, and leaving the 7 others for dead. The neighbouring Australian post saw the supporting body of Germans and drove them off, and a patrol then searched the scene of the action and found the 7 Australians, all wounded. A German cap and several weapons were picked up, but, on this occasion, nothing by which the raiders could be identified.

December 17. Sixteen Germans who had been sent out to reconnoitre the 8th Battalion's post (5 men and a Lewis gun) east of "Green Wood," with a view to raiding it the following night, succeeded in approaching it, and decided to surprise it at once and so avoid the necessity of raiding next day. They seized the post; but parties of the 7th and 8th Battalions at once counter-attacked, retook 3 men and the Lewis gun, captured 2 German officers—one mortally wounded—and 4 men, and killed 7 others. These belonged to the 153rd I.R. (8th Division) and 4th Pioneer Battalion.

December 26/27. A German patrol encountered a patrol of the 11th Battalion (1st Division) near Gapaard. The Australian patrol wounded and captured one of its opponents, a corporal of the 102nd I.R. (32nd Division).

January 4. 9.30 p.m. A picked party (one officer and 12 others) of the 72nd I.R. and 4th Pioneer Battalion tried to raid some posts of the 3rd Battalion near Houthem. They secured no identification, but reported that they had killed an officer and 5 men, and had themselves had 7 men hit and one missing. Actually, the Australians had two hit, but found a dead German of the 4th Pioneer Battalion.

January 27. A German patrol penetrated between two posts of the 3rd Brigade near Kiwi Farm. Five of its members were wounded. Their leader, going back to rescue one of them, was killed, and was found to belong to the 226th R.I.R.

January 29. A German patrol of 20 men met a patrol of the 44th Battalion near "Moat Farm," opposite Deulemont. The Australians chased the Germans, who escaped.

January 31. A patrol of the 1st Bavarian R.I.R. in the fog rushed a post of the 14th Battalion near Potsdam Farm. This post was garrisoned at night, but only two men were left in it by day. Both these were captured, the enemy thus discovering that the 4th Australian Division had come into the line along the Bassevillebeek.

January 30th and 31st. The Germans laid down bombardments of gas shell on Fusilier Dugouts near the same area, catching working parties and gassing 2 officers and 56 others of the 14th Battalion.

February 1. A patrol of 25 Germans met one of the 44th Battalion (an officer and 17 others) near Moat Farm. The Germans divided, and the Australians, cutting off one party of 15, captured two men of the 21st Bav. I.R.

February 23. 5.30 a.m. A company commander of the 226th R.I.R. with 8 men tried to raid a post of the 57th Battalion (5th Division) near Kiwi Farm. The post fired, hitting several Germans. In the afternoon German stretcher-bearers came out to pick these up. Thereupon an Australian N.C.O., removing his tunic so that the colour patch on his sleeve would not inform the enemy as to his unit, went out and joined them, and noted that a German officer and 5 men had been hit. The German account states that, after conference with "an English officer" in No-Man's Land, the wounded were brought in. The wounded officer died.

March 1. In the dark a patrol of the 103rd I.R. reconnoitred Moat Farm, west of the river near Deulemont. Presently an officer and 20 men of the 42nd Battalion entered the farm ruins from the other side, having first placed a covering party with a Lewis gun north of the place. The party heard and saw the Germans at the south-east corner of the moat. The latter fired a white flare, whereupon several of their *minenwerfer* laid a barrage around the farm, and a machine-gun opened. The Australians had to withdraw, swimming the moat. They were helped by the fire of their covering party, but two men were wounded. The German account says that a German was captured by the Australians, but, on reaching the British wire, shot three of his opponents and escaped.

March 1. During the relief of the 4th Australian Division by the 1st, several posts immediately south of the Ypres-Comines canal were raided by a party of 5 officers and 120 others of the 17th German Reserve Division. At one point a party of Germans, penetrating between two posts, reached a concrete "pillbox" which Major Henwood, a company commander of the 10th Battalion, had just taken over as his headquarters. Completely surprised, Henwood was captured; but, on its way back, the party which had seized him was seen by one of the posts between which it passed. Fire was opened, men were seen to fall, and a patrol of the 10th which afterwards searched the ground came upon Henwood, dead. The Germans captured 7 men of the 10th, which had 18 other casualties; and the 13th Battalion (4th Division) had 10 hit, including Lieutenant Luscombe¹⁴ killed. The Australians claimed

¹⁴ Lieut. C. L. Luscombe, 13th Bn. Accountant; of Petersham, N.S.W.; b. Darlinghurst, N.S.W., 8 Feb., 1888. Killed in action, 1 March, 1918.

to have killed a German officer and 26 men, and they captured prisoners from all battalions of the 76th R.I.R. and from the 9th Pioneer Battalion (17th Reserve Division).

March 8. 4.45 a.m. A German officer's patrol, about 36 strong, reconnoitring at Pont Rouge, met a patrol—26 of 18th Battalion under Lt. Maxwell. The Australians opened fire with a Lewis gun, and the Germans withdrew. Two were found dead and two were captured. They belonged to the 177th I.R. (32nd Division), which was thus proved to have taken over this sector.

AUSTRALIAN ENTERPRISES.

The following is an outline of the 3rd Division's undertakings against the Germans at Warneton:

Night of November 30-December 1. At 5.15 p.m., after three minutes' bombardment, together with diversion by the 5th Division and a smoke screen from Varley bombs on the southern flank, 3 officers and 70 men of the 39th Battalion (10th Brigade) raided near the railway west of the town. Two prisoners of the II/103rd I.R. were taken. The Victorians had 14 casualties (including Lieutenant Ramsay¹⁵ mortally wounded). They remained in the position twenty minutes, and afterwards reported that they had killed 30 Germans.

Eight hours later, at 1 a.m., a precisely similar party of the 40th Battalion (10th Brigade), similarly trained, raided at the same point with a view to catching the Germans repairing their line. This object was achieved. A full garrison, and a working party of the 12th Pioneer Battalion, were caught; 2 pioneers, and a man of the III/103rd I.R. were captured, and 70 others were said to have been killed. A small German counter-attacking party was shot down.

The historian of the 103rd I.R. wrongly concludes that this was no mere raid, but an attempt to capture the trenches. The 103rd lost 18 killed and 36 wounded; they captured one raider, but no dead or wounded man. The German account attributes this to "brilliant" organisation for the clearance of casualties. This raid caused the German command to reduce somewhat its concentration of troops at Warneton.

February 10. The supporting artillery had been temporarily strengthened by the addition of the 6th (Army) Brigade, A.F.A. Nine officers and 195 men of the 37th and 38th Battalions (10th Brigade) under Captain Fairweather raided south-west of Warneton, and penetrated to the second trench, capturing 33 prisoners (8 of them wounded) of the 228th R.I.R. (49th Reserve Division). The raiders claimed to have killed 102. They themselves had 39 hit, including Lieutenants Crowe¹⁶ and Dixon,¹⁷ and 9 men of the 37th were missing. The raid evoked General Birdwood's warm congratulations. German prisoners taken a few weeks later said that an Australian officer and a private had been captured in this raid; the officer refused to give any information, except his name, and the private would say no more than that his battalion were shock troops.

¹⁵ Lieut. C. J. A. Ramsay, 39th Bn. Paper ruler and bookbinder; of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Albury, N.S.W., 10 June, 1884. Died of wounds, 1 Dec., 1917.

¹⁶ Lieut. W. G. H. Crowe, 37th Bn. Bank accountant; of Prahran, Vic.; b. Jingellic Station, Upper Murray, Vic., 1892. Killed in action, 10 Feb., 1918.

¹⁷ Lieut. N. E. Dixon, 37th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Brighton Beach, Vic.; b. Prahran, Vic., 1891. Killed in action, 10 Feb., 1918.

March 3-4. A party of 10 officers and 225 others from all battalions of the 9th Brigade raided and captured an officer and 10 men of the 228th R.I.R. (49th Reserve Division) and a machine-gun. The raiders claimed to have killed 50 of the enemy. The history of the 226th R.I.R. wrongly describes this as another attempt to capture the defences of Warneton, and says that the 225th and 228th R.I.R.'s "quickly drove the English out." (On the same night the 5th Division raided at several points farther north and secured prisoners of the 49th and 17th Reserve Divisions.)

March 4-5. At 12.50 a.m. the 9th Brigade raided at the same points as those attacked on the previous night, the strength of the party again being 10 officers and 225 others. The enemy resisted strongly at the second trench, but the raiders reported that 40 Germans were "definitely" killed. Two men of the 228th R.I.R. were captured, but were killed on the way back. The Germans laid down a strong barrage and tried to counter-attack the flanks as the raiders withdrew. The Australians lost Captain B. G. Brodie mortally wounded, and had 32 other casualties, including 3 men missing.

On March 9th and 10th the activity of the German artillery on the Messines front began noticeably to increase, and the impression spread that this activity was connected with the approach of the date for the main German offensive.

CHAPTER III

THE ALLIES' STRIFE FOR A PLAN

WHEN in the second week of March the imminence of the great German blow began to impress the Allied troops, who for three months had been toiling to complete their successive defence lines against it, it would have shocked them to know how completely their military leaders and governments were lacking in any agreed view or plan of the coming operations. The council of the Allies, inaugurated in 1915,¹ had since proved as ineffective as a mere debating society. At one of its meetings, shortly before the Ypres offensive, forty-three representatives had been present. There had been a wrangle about sending a division from Salonica to Palestine . . . "Russians, Rumanians, Greeks, Portuguese, Siamese, and French had given vent to impassioned harangues, but nothing whatever had been settled"² even about that. One of the British delegates, Lieutenant-General Smuts,³ "had been shocked by the experience, pronounced it to have been the most futile exhibition of incompetence that he had ever witnessed, and said (afterwards) that such meetings really must be stopped."

Of the great Allied leaders, each one had been separately working for the adoption of the policy which he individually favoured and for which we have already seen each one striving in 1917. Pétain was as determined as ever to "wait for the Americans and the tanks." Haig, with Robertson in support, was for striking the Germans again in Flanders; Lloyd George for knocking away Germany's props; Painlevé for bringing the western armies by gradual steps—since the British would resist immediate action—under a French commander-in-chief. Of these leaders Lloyd George was, since the failure of the French Army, in the strongest position, and it was from his manœuvres among the plans of the others that there emerged

¹ See *Vol. II*, pp. 793 (note), 795. The smaller allies also now sent representatives.

² Callwell's *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, *Vol. II*, pp. 6-7.

³ General Rt. Hon. J. C. Smuts, C.H. Minister of Defence, South Africa, 1910/20, Prime Minister, 1919/24, Minister of Justice, 1933; commanded British force in East Africa, 1916/17; S.A. representative in Imperial War Cabinet, 1917/18. Barrister; of Doornkloof, Irene, Transvaal; b. 24 May, 1870.

the policy, such as it was, with which the Allies faced the critical campaign of 1918.

His first determination was to resist the course favoured by Haig—a continuation of the Ypres offensive. As to Haig's view, there was never any doubt. Provided **Haig** he had sufficient troops for an offensive, he intended to attack, and that attack was to be a persistence in the great effort that had been suspended for the winter. So convinced was Haig at this time of the correctness of his own judgment, that his main plans, when once made, became almost a religion. In October 1917, when resisting pressure from the French to take over an extensive part of their front, he urged on Pétain and Robertson that this would prevent the training of his troops for a renewal of the offensive in Flanders, which should be "the first and ruling feature of next year's general plan of operations on the Western Front." He wrote (October 17th)—

I am decidedly of opinion that the British efforts should again be concentrated on the Flanders front. . . . In my opinion there is no other part of the Western Front where such great strategical results are obtainable by the forces available next year.

Even "if Russia is unable to continue the war . . .," he noted (October 19th), "our offensive would still be . . . the wisest military policy." To Mr. Lloyd George, who shortly before had asked him what course he would advise if Russia made peace and the French and Italians were inactive, his answer was to the same effect. To Pétain he wrote that, if the French armies were in "a state to undertake "a great and sustained offensive," there would be "a fair case for consideration as to whether the Flanders Offensive or a main offensive on the French front should be given precedence." But Haig felt sure they were in no such condition.

Pétain's attitude was illuminated by his reply to these proposals from Haig, who saw him on October 18th. If **Pétain** Russia went out of the war, Pétain said, he could contemplate no offensive; Germany might reinforce the Western Front with forty-five divisions. His anxiety would then be concerning his power, without larger reserves, to withstand the German attacks. If Russia held on, he would favour three limited offensives—French, British, and Belgian—in the spring, but no main attack until

August,⁴ that is, presumably, when he expected to have received "the Americans and the tanks." Meanwhile Pétain stood, above all, by the general demand of his government and nation, that the British Army should take over a larger share of the Western Front. The particulars of this controversy will be touched on presently. But, as to Pétain's policy of the defensive, Haig noted that, even if Russia went out of the war, the vigorous prosecution of our offensive would still be not only possible but the wisest military policy. To leave the offensive to the enemy . . . would be unsound even from a defensive point of view.

Both in conference and in his written appreciation he urged on Pétain and upon the British Government his opinion that in 1918 the Flanders offensive should be renewed.

The responsibility for advising the government, however, did not rest with Haig, who was merely Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces on the Western Front, but with General Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, whose responsibility extended to all fronts. But Robertson, like Haig, urged a policy of concentrating all available strength on the Western Front and continuing to attack there, as the best way to prevent the Germans from attacking.² To Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, and to the War Cabinet, whom the persistence of Haig and Robertson had forced⁶ to a bitterly unwilling acquiescence in the "Passchendaele" offensive in the past summer and autumn, the prospect of being coerced into a continuance of the same methods next year was intolerable. And yet the Government did not feel itself strong enough to depose the two military leaders, who had much support in parliament and the nation, or, without some counteracting support, to decline to follow their advice. Lloyd George could not have secured unanimity in his cabinet for any such course; indeed, some of his conservative colleagues had made it a condition of their alliance that there should be no change in the military command.⁷ The result was that, in his

⁴ Pétain said that he would prefer the British help to be given elsewhere than in Flanders, but he left the choice of front to Haig.

⁵ This policy, from which he never wavered, is elaborated, for example, in a memorandum for the War Cabinet dated 19 Nov., 1917.

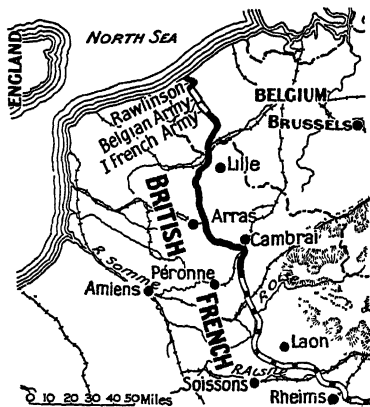
⁶ See Vol. IV, pp. 939-40.

⁷ *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Vol. IV, p. 2340.*

endeavour to mould the Allies' plans for 1918, he resorted to the indirect methods which were so strangely characteristic of him; and, contrary as these were to British tradition, he carried the War Cabinet with him.

In the first place, since reinforcements, if given to Haig, would be used in offensives on the Western Front, he resolved to withhold them. In spite of Robertson's repeated urgings upon the Cabinet to transfer to France and Belgium all troops not required for the bare defence of other fronts, he was determined that, even if the French should agree to a withdrawal of part of the force at Salonica, he would not send these troops to be consumed in an offensive in the West. Further, although at the end of its 1917 offensives the British army in France was 95,000 men short of its proper establishment, he was resolved not to send it the men for whom Haig asked. He maintained that, for defensive purposes, the British front was greatly over-insured.

Haig had barely explained⁸ to the Prime Minister and Cabinet his requirements—that his sixty-two divisions should be kept up to strength, and should not be forced to take over part of the French front—and his belief in an offensive policy, when he was informed that on September 25th Lloyd George had agreed with Painlevé upon the principle that the British should take over part of the French line. Haig was told to discuss the matter with Pétain. This was the reason for their meeting on October 18 at Amiens. Pétain, who said that he was acting under



⁸ To Lloyd George on Sept. 26 at G.H.Q. To Cabinet in a memorandum of Oct. 8.

orders from the French War Committee, asked Haig to relieve the Sixth French Army—with a front of six divisions—and extend the British line to beyond the Oise River. Haig would consent to take over only a four-division front, which he could do by transferring the divisions which during the Ypres offensive had been held ready under Rawlinson for the intended coastal attack in Flanders; any further draft upon his troops, he said, would prevent him from resuming the offensive in the spring.

For the moment the question of front extension rested there. But at the end of October, when the Germans broke the Italian front at Caporetto, Haig was ordered to send, first, two, and eventually six, good British divisions⁹ to Italy. This action was taken much against his will, both he and Robertson urging that Italy could be more effectively helped by a British attack on the Western Front.¹⁰ Actually only five divisions were despatched, the sixth being held back in the crisis resulting from the dangerous German counter-attack of November 30th, after the Battle of Cambrai. But Haig thus found his forces reduced to fifty-seven divisions.

On November 3rd he received a third blow in the shape of a letter from the War Office from which he concluded that, far from remedying his shortage of men before the spring, the government proposals would increase it by March 31st to nearly 250,000. It was this prospect, of an extreme shortage of men on his own side, and not the mere anticipation that the Germans would transfer to France the divisions made available by Russia's failure, that forced Haig to abandon his vision of a British offensive in the spring of 1918, and to face the certainty, which already had been borne in upon others, of a powerful German offensive. On November 15th he stated that the withdrawal of divisions to Italy would make impossible any serious British offensive in the spring, and on the 24th he warned the government that the threatened shortage of reinforcements, if unremedied, would force him

⁹ For reasons of Imperial policy, however, he was instructed that dominion troops must not be sent.

¹⁰ In this they were certainly wrong; the help that Italy required was moral, and nothing short of a decisive victory in France, which these divisions could not have secured, would have been an equivalent for this. Painlevé promised it instantly, and the opposition of the British military leaders merely made the British nation appear more reluctant than the French to help—which it was not.

to break up fifteen divisions so that the remainder might be brought up to strength. He added that he was strongly opposed to the alternative method of keeping up the number of divisions by reducing the number of battalions in each.

Following this protest, and others from Robertson, the War Cabinet referred the whole question of reinforcements to a special committee of its members upon "man-power." The gloom of Passchendaele, the Caporetto disaster, the sharp disillusionment after Cambrai, and the initiation of peace negotiations by the Russians had caused a wave of depression. The publication by the Russians of the secret treaties between the Allies for the partition of Turkey had inflicted a shock upon most of those who now learnt of them, and who contrasted them rather bitterly with the high sounding professions of the leaders who had made them. Moreover many thoughtful Englishmen doubted whether outright victory was now attainable, and whether continuation of the struggle would bring terms of peace any more profitable than could then be arranged. A letter from Lord Lansdowne, making the same plea—for an exploration of peace terms—that he had circulated in Cabinet a year before,¹¹ was published in the London *Daily Telegraph* on November 28th. In the discussions for the Russian armistice which were arranged for on that day, Trotsky, as Bolshevik Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, issued an invitation to the Allies to take part; and on Christmas Day Count Czernin, for the Central Powers, announced that those powers were ready to agree to a peace without indemnities and without annexations, provided that their opponents would at once join in the negotiations on the same basis. The Allies did not accept this offer; their reason was the same that had actuated their refusal of the Kaiser's proposal a year before. Addressing Congress on December 4th, President Wilson said that the time for negotiations would come "when the German people had spokesmen whose word we can believe."

It was very rarely that the Australian Government attempted to influence in any way the policy of the British Government in conducting the war. But it is worthy of note

¹¹ See Vol. IV, p. 12.

that on December 8th the Australian Prime Minister telegraphed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

I am seriously disturbed by the position on the Italian, Russian, and Western Fronts and desire to know the views and intentions of the War Cabinet re Trotsky's peace proposals and prospects on the Western Front and generally. I earnestly hope that His Majesty's Government will not waver in its resolution to press on at all costs. Though recognising the appalling difficulties . . . I am profoundly convinced that to recede one inch from the position taken up and set out by Lloyd George would be absolutely disastrous. Please communicate this telegram to members of the War Cabinet.

Six days later Lloyd George, dealing with the Lansdowne letter, insisted that there could be no true peace for the Allies without reparation. On January 5th, after consultation with Asquith and Grey, and with Sir Edward Kemp and General Smuts representing Canada and South Africa respectively, he fully discounted the effect of the secret-treaty disclosures by making at the trades' union conference in London a very fine statement of the British Empire's war aims.¹² Three days later President Wilson published an even more famous statement—of the "Fourteen Points" which must be conceded before the United States could think of peace. These included no condition as to reparation, but with one other exception¹³ were in general the same as Lloyd George's, and, though not in all respects cordially welcomed by the French, they thenceforth became recognised as the general basis upon which the Allies would consent to negotiate. The Fourteen Points were:

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

¹² At this time, following Trotsky's proposals, the French press was showing a tendency to insist upon the application of the principle of self-determination to such territories as German New Guinea (*see Vol. XI, ch. xxii*).

¹³ President Wilson's point as to "freedom of navigation" ran counter to traditional British policy, which claimed the right of interference with neutral ships in war time; but the proviso that the seas might be closed in war "by international action" left some room for an arrangement which might satisfy Great Britain.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

The German Chancellor, Count Hertling, and the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Czernin, replied with statements welcoming Wilson's more general proposals, but rejecting the particular ones. Germany would not consider the giving back of Alsace-Lorraine; Austria would not agree to the concessions to Italy, Roumania, Serbia, or Montenegro; and neither of them would consider the terms concerning Turkey. On February 11th Wilson, again addressing Congress, laid down four general conditions for the making of peace—insisting that territorial settlements must be based upon essential justice to the peoples concerned, and must have regard to their own will, provided that no new elements of discord were thus created. At that date Count Hertling found it easy to express in public his agreement with these generalisations; the immense effort upon which the German leaders and people were hanging very different hopes was shortly to be undertaken.

Lloyd George's inspiring reply¹⁴ to the Russian and German invitation availed more than any other factor to dispel such hesitancy as then affected the British nation. Yet that invitation caused him and the War Cabinet to put, first to Robertson and later to his successor, a searching confidential interrogatory as to whether the general staff could see a prospect of winning the war either in 1918 or 1919, and, if not, whether persistence in the struggle could be justified by the probability of its bringing any conditions of peace better than could be secured at that moment. Robertson answered that, if the American reinforcements could arrive quickly enough, their advent should be decisive in securing a favourable peace; but that this largely depended upon factors as to which the military staff could pronounce no expert opinion, namely—the extent to which the navy could cope with German

¹⁴ Made in several speeches and in a letter to the Labour Conference. Had the Allies' aims—to punish the breaking of treaties—been abandoned, he asked. Victory could be ensured by holding on till American help was effective. Was this the time for weakening?

submarines, the shipping position, the staying power of the other Allies, and the number of men to be supplied to the British armies during 1918. As to this last consideration, he pointed out that, while insufficiency in the navy or in shipping might lose the war, only pressure on land could win it. He concluded:

Our task is to do our utmost to ensure holding our own until America arrives, and meanwhile make every endeavour to expedite her arrival.

By Robertson and many others the British Government was at this time being urged to the bitterly unpopular task of further combing out "indispensables" and other men in civilian work. At one of the meetings of the Allied leaders, a protest from Foch, that the British Government was not making its utmost effort, brought an angry retort from Lloyd George, who threatened to withdraw the British delegation unless such comments were curbed. Critics were, perhaps, too prone to judge Great Britain's effort merely by the size of her army, forgetting that she had to maintain two other essential wartime services, those of a navy of 400,000 officers and men, and of the mercantile marine, besides the vast armament and shipbuilding industries. In addition, the more ships were devoted to war uses, the more labour was required for producing the internal food-supply. The "man-power" sub-committee had to consider the allocation of the man-supply to the navy, army, shipping, food- and coal-supply, and manufacture of armaments and ammunition. Its deliberations, however, seem to have been guided by a determination not to be unduly influenced by the demands of the British military leaders for enough men to enable them to maintain an offensive policy, or by their heavy forecasts of casualties. It actually sought from French sources an alternative estimate of the probable rate of losses; and, by the rather perfunctory decision set forth in its report early in January, the requirements of the army were subordinated in order of priority to those of the navy and air forces, shipbuilding, construction of aeroplanes and tanks, food production, and provision of cold storage accommodation for food-supply. The result was that, in place of 615,000 reinforcements—the number specified by the War Office staff as necessary for keeping the army up to strength in 1918—the committee left only 100,000

fit recruits allotted to the army in 1918. In addition it gave it 120,000 boys under 19, but these could not, under the existing regulations, be sent to the front.

None of these recruits would be available in France until late in the year. For facing the first blows, any shortage of reinforcements could only be met by drawing on troops already trained—divisions held back in England or troops in Mesopotamia, Salonica, Palestine, and Ireland—and diverting nearly all drafts to the theatre in which the German blows were imminent. The Minister of Munitions, Mr. Winston Churchill, urged such a policy:¹⁵

The Prime Minister however (he says) did not feel that, if the troops were once in France, he would be strong enough to resist those military pressures for an offensive which had so often overborne the wiser judgment of statesmen. He therefore held, with all his potent influence, to a different policy. He sanctioned only a moderate reinforcement of the army, while at the same time gathering in England the largest possible number of reserves. In this way he believed that he would be able alike to prevent a British offensive and to feed the armies during the whole course of the fearful year which was approaching.

Robertson and the Army Council, to whom a draft of the Man Power Committee's report was submitted, at once protested that, if no more men were supplied, the great German offensive, which was certainly impending, might exhaust the British before the Americans could effectively intervene. They warned the Government that it was "taking an unnecessarily grave risk of losing the war."

The War Cabinet sincerely believed that the commanders on the Western Front estimated their requirements far too high for purely defensive needs. The Germans, Lloyd George maintained, had managed to hold their front in the West when their numerical inferiority was as 2 to 3½. The War Cabinet doubted whether the Germans, with forces little more than equal, would commit their full strength to an attack. Haig, too, doubted whether they would attempt a final breakthrough,¹⁶ and a remark of his at the War Cabinet on January 7th was seized on by Ministers as an assurance that no German

¹⁵ For his memorandum of 8 Dec., 1917, to the War Cabinet, see *The World Crisis (1916-18, Part II)*, pp. 378-83.

¹⁶ As to the doubts of Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, see *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. 2, p. 289 (17 Nov., 1917).

attack could endanger his front.¹⁷ His subsequent explanations were waved aside and the suggestions of the Man Power Committee were approved.

The full import of its action can hardly have been recognised by the British Cabinet. Keen as was the concern expressed by the Colonial Secretary at the shortage of Australian recruits, the portion of its fit man-power which the British Government proposed to allot to its army in 1918 was not, in the total, incomparably greater than the number that the Army Council expected Australia to furnish. The proportionate rate of army recruiting in Australia at its worst never fell half so low. The decision, of course, involved the disbandment of some units to maintain the rest, and the War Cabinet resolved that this must be done, not, as Haig proposed, by disbanding divisions, but by reducing the infantry battalions in each division from 12 to 9.¹⁸ This course had long since been taken in the German and French Armies, and was, indeed, in consonance with the general progress of military thought inasmuch as it conduced to greater reliance than heretofore upon artillery and machine-guns, and less upon the infantry. But, whereas the Germans had adopted the change in order to increase the number of their divisions, as carried out by the British Government's order it meant a marked decrease in the fighting power of Haig's army. It would do no more than bring it up to strength on a lower, nine-battalion basis; if heavy losses were thereafter incurred, they could only be remedied by breaking up a number of divisions. Moreover the work of reorganisation would disturb the training and digging to be carried out in the short time still available. .

Lloyd George's policy at this juncture seems to have been affected by the belief that any further squeezing of British labour for the army would bring about **American reinforcements sought** revolutionary uprisings, of which symptoms had occurred in Wales and in the northern industrial centres. When Foch questioned the adequacy of the British effort, Lloyd George sharply asked him if he

¹⁷ Robertson wrote to him on the same day: "I am quite sure that the idea the Cabinet have now got is that you are perfectly all right, and that they need not trouble to give any more men than those they have arranged to give."

¹⁸ Or, if the divisional pioneer battalions are included, from 13 to 10.

wished to see revolution in England. Lloyd George's view apparently was that the United States, which was anxious to throw in its vast weight, should be assisted by every means to do so, and that it was from this brimming reservoir that all possible reinforcements should now be drawn. This led him to support the strong tendency already manifest in the British and French staffs to secure the assistance of American troops not as a collateral allied force, but as reinforcements for the British and French armies. These efforts are of peculiar interest to Australians since both the Canadian and the Australian leaders and governments had successfully combated—and were still resisting—the same natural tendency among the British authorities; and the pressure now exercised upon the Americans shows how little the British Government and military leaders had absorbed the lessons of self-government that they might have drawn from their dealings with the dominions.

The motive for the present pressure, however, was different. Any tendency to oppose the independence of the dominion forces had arisen partly from a desire to avoid duplication and other troubles of separate organisation, and partly from adherence to a British ideal of a single empire patriotism. The pressure on the Americans was almost solely due to tense anxiety to make their weight tell earlier than it could do if thrown in separately. France and Britain—but especially France—were being bled white for men. The United States had adopted conscription, and was proposing to support them eventually with forty-five infantry divisions—a force numbering, if all rear services are included, two million.¹⁹ But its transport seemed likely to take two years, and its training was almost as serious an obstacle as its transport. The United States had only a small regular army, and behind that a small national guard. The huge conscript army which was to follow would have to be trained from the beginning, and the national guard and even the regular army would require many months of instruction before becoming fit to enter the line on the Western Front. The American Government did not wish its troops to enter the trenches until

¹⁹ An American infantry division numbered 27,000 men, nearly twice the strength of a British one (on the new establishment).

sufficiently trained;²⁰ whereas the 1st Australian Division (roughly corresponding in composition to the American "National Guard" divisions) had been thrown into one of the most difficult operations of the war—the landing at Anzac—as an advanced guard, within six and a half months of first enlistment, and had fought a second great and difficult offensive within its first year, the 1st American Division, with a large nucleus of regular officers and men, was not considered fit to be put into a quiet sector until six and a half months after America entered the war, or into an important sector until twelve and a half months. The training camps in the United States for the new American divisions were not generally in full use until six months after America's entry—that is, until the time of Passchendaele; so that, however quickly the troops were transported, there seemed little prospect of their being fit for use until the late summer or autumn of 1918.

In July 1917 General Pershing, who as a junior major-general had been given command of the American Expeditionary Force, had been informed that, sailing as fast as shipping could be obtained to carry them, 21 divisions would be in France by the middle of 1918. But this programme had not nearly been maintained, and at the end of January 1918, instead of 9 or 10 American divisions, only 4 and part of a fifth had arrived. America had then been in the war ten months, and the Allies, worn with three years' struggle and with their decisive trial now immediately ahead of them, saw little prospect of American troops giving more than trifling assistance before that decision had occurred. This was deeply felt by every Allied soldier on the Western Front; and consequently, from the moment when the United States entered the war, the French and British military missions, which visited America under Arthur Balfour, Viviani, and Joffre, employed all their persuasiveness towards having American troops sent immediately for incorporation in the French and British armies. All the chief American leaders felt this constant pressure. It was continued in France on the arrival of

²⁰ This was part of General Pershing's instructions from the Chief of Staff at Washington. "While the entrance of our forces into the theatre of active operations will be left entirely to your judgment, it should not be unduly hastened."

General Pershing and, later, of the 1st American Division, in June; and it was resumed with especial emphasis now that the French and British found themselves facing the threatened German offensive with a grave shortage of men in their own ranks.

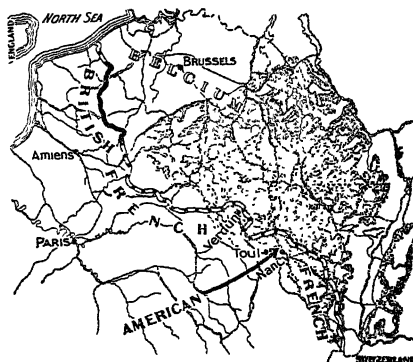
In November 1917 the British general staff, seeking all possible reinforcements, since its own government withheld them, pointed out that, while Pershing's army was being built up in France—according to the modified programme of the moment 18 divisions were due to be there in August—at least half of the 45 divisions would then still be in the camps in America waiting for ships. Yet the ships required for carrying three divisions (36,000 infantry, plus artillery, etc.) could—if the artillery and transport and similar units, which took up much space, were left till later—carry 150,000 infantry. It was reasonably argued that it was better for the infantry to come in and help to win the war by training and serving with the British and French than for the complete divisions to arrive after the war had been lost. It was therefore suggested that, if Great Britain offered, by special effort, to supply the additional ships,²¹ these 150 battalions should be brought over and trained with the British, the added battalions bringing the British brigades up to their old strength. When trained, the battalions would be combined to form American divisions, the artillery and transport for which would in the meantime have been brought over. The British Prime Minister agreed to put forward this proposal, and did so through the British ambassador at Washington, Lord Reading, on the December 2nd.²²

The earlier overtures had been uniformly resisted. The American Government and military leaders, like the Australian—and, be it said, the British themselves—were determined that their country must, if possible, have the credit of whatever efforts it made in the war, and were from the first determined that, unless amalgamation with the Allied armies seemed necessary to avoid far-reaching disaster, no American force

²¹ Already a great part of the American troops were being brought over in British ships; from March, 1918, to the end of the war 55.4 per cent. were carried in British ships, 42.15 per cent. in American, and 2.45 per cent. in French and Italian.

²² The proposal made by Lloyd George was that companies or, if not companies, battalions of Americans should be incorporated in British divisions, "and, if they desired, they could later on be recalled and posted to the American divisions."

should lose its identity. It was partly because amalgamation with the British would be more difficult to resist, partly because the lines of communication towards Nancy were convenient, that Pershing had arranged to take over from the French a sector towards the other end of the line from the British, about Nancy, south of Verdun. Here American army corps and armies were intended eventually to operate under their own commanders as independently as the British and Belgian armies in the north.



Through General Pershing's continued resistance to pressure, this general principle had been accepted by the British, and the proposals now made envisaged the eventual building up of a definitely American force. The American Government was not unsympathetic, and, though replying that it left the decision to General Pershing, gave him authority to use the troops as he thought best. Pershing, to whom Colonel House showed the plan, said that "it would not do at all." Early in January, however, at the request of the War Cabinet, then in the throes of its discussions as to man-power, Robertson took the matter up earnestly with him. Haig, whose understanding of this problem—doubtless through contact with dominion leaders—was sounder than Robertson's, suggested to Pershing that selected divisions in the southern part of the British line should be reinforced by American battalions, at first one to the brigade, but the number gradually increasing until the divisions became wholly American. The British battalions thus relieved would be broken up to reinforce the remainder of the British Army, and the Americanised divisions, gradually receiving American commanders and staffs as the change took place, would eventually form an American army on the southern

flank of the British. This would help to keep up to strength such divisions as he retained, and would be a means for meeting the constant demands of the French for the relief of their divisions on that part of the front.

Haig's loyalty to any agreement with the Americans would doubtless have been as complete as it was in his undertaking to the Australians, and, had the overtures been based throughout on his frankly sympathetic suggestion, they might have been met with equal sympathy and frankness by Pershing, who had no intention of agreeing to any scheme for merely replacing losses in British divisions, or of shipping only infantry. As it was, Pershing's reaction was tinged with a disingenuousness unsuspected by Haig, and perhaps more justifiable had he been dealing with a politician. In order to commit the British to an offer of additional shipping, he did not refuse outright, and even approved the arrangements concerning the earlier part of the proposed training. Later, in order to get his troops to France earlier than the American Government could otherwise send them, he arranged that the British should transport six complete divisions, of which the infantry were to be trained behind the British lines "by battalions, under such plan as may be agreed upon." Their artillery was to be instructed under American direction, using French guns (as did all other American divisions). The higher commanders and staffs were to be trained with British units and formations. When the battalions were sufficiently expert they were to be re-formed into their regiments, and when the artillery was ready the whole force was to constitute its own divisions.²³ This agreement, modified in the crisis that followed in March, was carried out. Although that event did not occur within the period covered by this volume, it may here be said that the British authorities went to great

²³ The American forces before the war comprised the regular army, 100,000 men (thirty regiments of infantry and fifteen of cavalry), maintained largely on the southern border, in the Philippines, and in quasi-police posts on the United States borders and Indian territories; and the National Guard, a militia of 126,000 officers and men territorially organised. On the entry of the United States into the war, a conscription act was passed and it was decided to raise divisions by (a) expanding the regular army, (b) expanding the National Guard, and (c) forming new divisions with no such basis. These last were known as the "National" army. Of the divisions which eventually served in France, the regular ones were numbered 1-7, the National Guard 26-42, and the National Army 76-93. (The 93rd, a division of coloured troops, did not serve as a division, its regiments reinforcing the French Army.)

General Pershing recommended that the United States should aim at putting 1,000,800 men into France by May 1918, the number to be increased eventually to

pains to equip these divisions with over 3,000 motor vehicles, and with boots, gas-respirators, steel helmets, rifles, and Vickers and Lewis guns; and Haig not unnaturally hoped that they would be left to assist him. Pershing, however, removed the majority, and only two, and a few troops from a third, eventually fought as part of the British Army.

Haig's policy had been checkmated; by withholding British reinforcements, the Prime Minister had prevented the least possibility of the B.E.F. being used for an offensive in the spring. By means equally indirect Lloyd George sought to secure support for his own plan of "knocking away Germany's props"—in other words, of an offensive against Austria or Turkey.

For the adoption of any such course, the primary condition was that the Prime Minister should rid himself of the influence of General Robertson, who stood firmly against the concentration of strength for any purpose except that of action upon the vital front in France and Flanders. Lloyd George had, however, managed to get partial support for one of his Eastern projects, in the shape of an admission obtained from General Robertson himself. After the successful advance to Baghdad, undertaken to satisfy the Government's desire for a "seasonable victory," the War Cabinet was rendered keenly anxious through reports, purposely exaggerated in Germany, as to the counter-measures about to be taken²⁴ against this isolated

2,000,000, for which purpose it would be necessary to raise some 3,000,000. Part of the 1st American Division arrived in France on 28 June, 1917, and the remainder in August; but the War Department could promise only 700,000 troops by June, 1918. The programme for the transport of divisions from America then was:

1917. October	..	..	..	2 divisions
November	..	..	..	3 divisions
1918. January	..	..	..	4 divisions
February	..	..	..	3 divisions
April	..	..	..	3 divisions
May	..	..	..	3 divisions
June	..	..	..	2 divisions

Total (with 1st Division)—21 divisions, 420,000 officers and men. With auxiliary troops, reinforcements, etc., the total would be 634,975.

The shipping available, however, proved insufficient for this programme, and by January 31 only four divisions (1st, 26th, 42nd, and 2nd) and part of another (41st) had arrived.

²⁴ General Falkenhayn and a—largely bogus—"Asiatic Corps" were being sent from Germany. On the other hand, owing to the state of affairs in Russia, the Russian commander-in-chief had intimated that no help could now be expected from him at Bagdad unless the British could feed any Russian troops sent thither.

expedition. Robertson, fearful lest the Government might be scared into sending further divisions to the Mesopotamian force, pointed out that the easiest and surest way of safeguarding it was to strike in Palestine. For the same reason, in March 1917, he had recommended that the capture of Jerusalem should be undertaken. Later, the shortage of shipping rendering it difficult to provide the troops and material required by General Allenby, now commanding in Palestine, Robertson went back on this advice, and, desirous though the War Cabinet now became to eliminate Turkey, he again and again met the Prime Minister's proposal with reasoned refusals to recommend it. On the other hand, Lloyd George, as the possibility of attacks against Austria through Italy and Serbia was gradually ruled out by the actual course of events, became increasingly determined in his advocacy of an offensive to thrust the apparently tottering Turkey out of the war.

It happened that Sir Henry Wilson was at that time in England, his restless intellect unemployed with any satisfying work upon the vital problems with which, like all other patriotic minds, it was incessantly grappling. He had warned Haig and others that, in these conditions, he would probably "get into mischief." He moved in the circles of high officials and members of the War Cabinet, constantly meeting them, and he found some, notably General Smuts, shocked at the incompetent direction of the war by the Allies. Wilson's imagination flew to the formation of a compact body—three Allied Prime Ministers, assisted by three principal soldiers—to control the whole war effort of their side. He also happened to be one of the few prominent soldiers who believed in attacking Germany by depriving her of allies, instead of battering at her principal front. On the 23rd of August, 1917, while Haig's armies at Ypres were staggering through the mud, this big, vivid Irishman was introduced by Lord French to the Prime Minister, and put to him both these projects. During the five "mud months"—mid-November to mid-April—he urged, British troops could effect nothing in Flanders, but, if transported to the Near East, where the weather was then perfect, they might strike Turkey out of the war. Wilson envisaged their return to Europe in time for the summer campaign.

For two months Wilson²⁵ rubbed these opinions into the political leaders, some of whom were thinking along much the same lines. The Prime Minister's views, in many particulars, almost coincided with his own, and, as Wilson was one of the few soldiers whose authority might counterbalance in the public mind that of Robertson, Lloyd George listened to him with special eagerness. On October 11th—when Haig had obviously failed, for this year, to clear the Belgian coast, and was now merely pitting his army against the winter mud and urging on the Government a continuance of the same offensive next year—Lloyd George took action. The outlook on the Western Front being apparently so hopeless, he induced the War Cabinet to refer the question of next year's operations not only to Robertson and Haig, but to Wilson and French, who, by the adoption of the medical analogy, were called in to advise as "specialists." The question put to them was, in effect, whether—assuming the French to be unable, as Haig believed, to take the offensive early in 1918—the British should

- (a) continue the offensive in the West with all possible concentration there, or
- (b) remain on the defensive in the West and endeavour to put Austria, Bulgaria, or Turkey out of the war, or
- (c) remain on the defensive until Russia had reorganised, and the Americans in France attained sufficient strength to count in the struggle.

Wilson—like his friend Foch, who impressed this view on him at the time—recognised that it was now too late to transfer troops from France to crush the Turks during the winter and return for the campaign of 1918 in France. His chief recommendation therefore was for the establishment of a superior war council to conduct the war effort of the Allies. Lord French, though his report was mainly powerful criticism of Haig, urged the same course. The two papers from the "special advisers" had just been handed in—through the Secretary for War²⁶—when the Germans broke through the Italian front at Caporetto.

²⁵ He had been given the "Eastern" (i.e., East of England) Command (with headquarters at the Horse Guards, London).

²⁶ The War Cabinet decided that Robertson must have an opportunity of seeing and commenting on them before presentation.

It was that disaster, and the reluctance of Haig and Robertson to send British divisions from France to Italy, that gave Lloyd George his opportunity to place these two leaders under the control of a "Superior Council" of the Allies, on the lines of that advocated by Sir Henry Wilson. Eleven days after his talk with Wilson in August, Lloyd George²⁷ had written to President Wilson urging his support for such a plan; and the establishment of a council on these lines was actually promised by the British Prime Minister on September 25th to Painlevé, who for some time had been urging a similar scheme by which General Foch would be "Head of the combined staff," pending the time when public opinion in Great Britain would be prepared to see him endowed with the full powers and title of commander-in-chief. The War Cabinet now decided to launch General Wilson's proposal at the conference of Allied premiers and military leaders hurriedly summoned at Rapallo on the Riviera to discuss the help to be given to Italy in the emergency.

The French and British premiers went to this conference with their proposal ready made.²⁸ Foch, the French military representative, would be "chairman" of the staff, and Wilson the British representative. Nevertheless there remained between the two governments a difference very difficult to surmount. For Lloyd George the new arrangement was also an indirect means of getting rid of Robertson, who had remained in office despite the Government's consulting Wilson and French over his head, an obvious invitation to him to resign. It was therefore necessary that in the establishment of the joint Allied staff Wilson should be given powers independent of Robertson and of the general staff at the War Office. Largely for this reason Lloyd George insisted that *all* members of the Inter-Allied Staff must be independent of the war departments of their own countries. But this meant that Foch must relinquish his present post of head of the French general staff in Paris.²⁹ Probably Lloyd George

²⁷ See *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Vol. IV, p. 2348.*

²⁸ The terms of the arrangement had been further discussed by Lloyd George and Painlevé in London on Oct. 11, and again between Oct. 31 and Nov. 3, when they arrived at an agreement to be placed before the other Allies.

²⁹ In May, 1917, when getting rid of Nivelle, the French Government had provided for a division of powers between Paris and G.Q.G. somewhat similar to that existing between Haig and Robertson, Pétain commanding its troops on the Western Front, and Foch going to the War Office (*see Vol. IV, p. 685*).

also feared that, if the chief of the French staff was also chief of the Allied staff, the domestic interests of the French War Office would have undue weight in the joint deliberations. This consideration also led him to insist that the Superior Council must not meet at Paris. On these two conditions he showed himself adamant, both in London and at Rapallo, and Painlevé eventually gave way. Foch was relieved from his duty on the general staff in Paris. The headquarters of the Superior Council were to be normally just outside Paris, at Versailles, but it might meet anywhere, and, in fact, first met at Rapallo when the conference ended.³⁰

Whatever may have been the views of those associated with the old system of control, and of the partisan press in England, the announcement by Painlevé and Lloyd George, at a reception on November 12th in Paris, of the steps taken towards unity of control, was probably welcomed by most thoughtful citizens of all the nations chiefly concerned.³¹ General Robertson himself had previously conceived that such a council of statesmen, assisted by the chiefs-of-staffs, might solve the problem of united control, and Haig at first was disposed to welcome the new organisation as a better channel for intercourse between the national armies than the existing ones.³²

But Lloyd George's devious methods carried the elements of their own undoing. Had he superseded Robertson by Wilson, and then summoned Wilson or his representative to the British seat on the Inter-Allied Staff, he would have made available for the assistance of that joint staff all the knowledge that could be furnished by the British staffs in England, France, Palestine, and elsewhere. But, by retaining Robertson and insisting that Wilson must be independent, he automatically cut off from the new staff all intimate connection with the existing staff in London and at the several fronts.

³⁰ Wilson, Robertson, and Foch had been taken to the Rapallo conference.

³¹ It was in Lloyd George's speech on this occasion that there occurred the oft-quoted passage: "When we advance a kilometre into the enemy's lines, snatch a small shattered village out of his cruel grip, capture a few hundreds of soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy. And rightly so . . . But what if we had advanced 50 kilometres beyond his lines and made 200,000 of his soldiers prisoners and taken 2,500 of his best guns, with enormous quantities of ammunition and stores? What print would we have for our headlines?" Far from causing indignation throughout the British Army, as has sometimes been averred, this outburst met with widespread agreement there.

³² Plans had also been made for a naval, a financial and economic, and a diplomatic branch of the Superior Council, to meet in London and elsewhere.

In spite of his insistence, the French and Italian Governments did not maintain this separation: immediately after Rapallo Clemenceau, the new French Premier, recalled Foch from the Inter-Allied Staff to his position as chief of the staff in Paris, and placed on the Allied Staff General Weygand, Foch's most intimate lieutenant. The Italian and American officers were the recognised representatives of the staffs of their respective armies. The only member of the Allied staff whose allegiance to it was undivided was Sir Henry Wilson. Naturally, under these circumstances, it was he who soonest set up his machinery, and to him fell the main work and the acknowledged leadership in the Versailles staff³³ during the first two months of its existence. One far-reaching problem after another was attacked by him and his few assistants, admittedly with keen vision and intelligence, the results being largely represented in the series of "joint notes" issued by the Inter-Allied staff. The new staff, however, inevitably tended to attack these questions as if they were new food for thought, instead of having been the daily bread and meat of Haig's and Pétain's staffs, whose most pressing responsibility had for weeks and even months past been the digestion of them. The result was that during the few precious months in which G.H.Q. and G.Q.G. were devoting their concentrated energy to useful preparation for the impending campaign of 1918, the studies of the Inter-Allied Staff were in many respects futile and the results largely valueless. Compared with the balanced predictions of Haig's intelligence staff, based on the carefully built up British system with its innumerable points of contact with the enemy and elaborate sifting and compilation, the forecasts of the Inter-Allied staff, worked out in Wilson's "war-games" with his assistants, were grotesquely, not to say dangerously, wide of the mark. When, a few months later, the estimates of G.H.Q. were being generally confirmed by a course of momentous events, those of Wilson's staff were so falsified that an endeavour was made to recall all copies of a map on which its forecast of the enemy's intention was diagrammatically shown.

³³ On Jan. 11 Wilson visited Clemenceau and explained to him his scheme for a "central reserve" under the control of the Versailles staff. Clemenceau replied that this meant "under Wilson" ("to which," notes Wilson in his diary, "I agreed").

But so right an instrument as the Inter-Allied Staff could not, despite Lloyd George's bending of principle to suit his needs, fail to produce some right result, and it arrived at one conclusion—urged in "Joint Note No. 14"—which alone more than counterbalanced all its failures. In "Joint Note No. 12" it had, on January 21st, stated its conviction—the same that Haig had acted on six weeks before, and Pétain much earlier—that it would be necessary to face a strong German offensive on the Western Front in 1918. Wilson's influence secured the coupling of this with a recommendation that Turkey should be struck out of the war, but this advice was subject to the condition that action should only be taken against Turkey if the Western Front could be rendered safe by keeping up the forces there to their present strength. Note 14, of January 23rd, was based on an opinion expressed in Note 12, that the Western Front could only be rendered secure by treating it as a single field of strategic action. The danger of a German offensive should be met by the formation of a united Allied reserve, consisting of divisions contributed by each of the armies, French, British, Italian, and, as it arrived, American.⁸⁴

The proposed arrangement—which had been a main object of Painlevé's policy, though it fell to Wilson, working separately, to secure its adoption—was considered by Haig, Pétain, and Pershing, together with Robertson and Foch, at a conference specially held next day at Compiègne, Pétain's headquarters. Haig and Pétain had anticipated the proposal, and, strongly disliked it—since it would obviously restrict their free use of their own forces. At a cordial interview on December 17th, they arranged between themselves to move part of their reserves to the help of whichever army was attacked. Pétain arranged that General Humbert (of the Third French Army, which was relieved in January by the British) should command the first projected reinforcement for the British front, and set him and his staff to produce the scheme for French intervention; while Haig ordered General Morland (X Corps) to work out the corresponding scheme

⁸⁴ Belgian divisions could not be included because, first, the Belgian Government had not been offered a place on the Superior War Council, and, second, the Belgians would not vest the command of their troops in anyone except their King. They were, however, asked to take over part of the British line, so as to free two British divisions for the reserve.

for the British. The plan eventually provided that, if the British were attacked near the point of junction, the French should come to their help with six divisions, as a first instalment. The proposals which Pétain had asked Humbert to study included the provision by the French of twelve divisions and twenty-five regiments of heavy artillery north of the Oise or even, if necessary, north of the Somme; or, if the British failed to resist the German blow, the use of twenty French divisions in counter-attack. This provision was not incorporated in the final scheme, but it is possible that Haig was aware of the suggestion.³⁵

Pétain and Haig now explained these intentions to the assembled generals, and the only matter upon which the conference agreed was that the French and British divisions sent to Italy should be brought back, the need for their presence there having obviously passed. But the Supreme War Council (as it was now called), meeting on January 30th, decided, after several days' discussion, to create the joint reserve, and determined that the command of it should lie with the Inter-Allied Staff, which was thus commissioned as an executive body, and assumed the title of the Executive War Board. As planned by Painlevé four months previously, the council appointed Foch to the presidency of the board.³⁶

Thus, from all the manœuvre and intrigue that accompanied the birth of the Supreme War Council, there had emerged one measure designed to meet the primary need in the coming crisis—that for a single control above the heads of all sectional commanders, to determine where the danger was greatest and to direct the joint reserves to that point. Yet this wise measure was to bring no direct benefit to the Allies. Within a month of its inauguration it had been struck dead by the sectional commanders-in-chief, and chiefly by the action of Haig. The Executive War Board, on which Foch henceforth

³⁵ See French *Official History, Tome VI, Vol. I, p. 87*, and *La Crise du Commandement*, by Gen. XXX, p. 125. The agreement envisaged also British help to the French, and involved many provisions which need not be set forth here.

³⁶ Painlevé had, as he explained to the French War Committee at the time, designed to give Foch this appointment with the object of making him the Allied commander-in-chief as soon as British opinion was prepared to accept this. It had been part of his design that Foch should co-ordinate the action of the French and British armies at their point of junction, behind which, according to his proposal, the reserve would be stationed.

played the chief rôle,³⁷ on February 9th asked the commanders-in-chief to consider the provision of the 30 divisions which the board required of them, namely, 10 from the British Army, 13 from the French, and 7 from the Italian. Haig, who strongly mistrusted the capacity of a committee to act promptly, at once informed his Prime Minister³⁸ that he could not find the divisions. In his formal reply, written on March 2nd, he pointed out that the German offensive against himself and the French was then imminent. He had already made his dispositions, and, if he were now to earmark the six or seven divisions required,³⁹

the whole of my plans and dispositions would have to be remodelled. This is clearly impossible, and I therefore regret that I am unable to comply with the suggestion contained in the Joint Note.

He added that he had arranged with the French "for the rapid despatch of six to eight British divisions" for Pétain in case of need, and that Pétain had arranged to give similar help if the British required it.

General Pétain at first promised the Executive Board eight divisions for its general reserve, but eventually he, too, after consultation with Haig, intimated that he could spare none. The Italian commander-in-chief alone promised the quota asked for. As the scheme was thus obviously rendered inoperative, the Supreme War Council met in London on March 14th to decide upon the action to be taken. By this time Haig had let both Sir Henry Wilson and Clemenceau (then Premier of France) know that he would resign rather than earmark the divisions for the reserve. Clemenceau himself was not wholly wedded to the system of the Executive Board, and told Haig that he would gradually set Foch aside. The German offensive was then evidently so closely imminent that, despite a protest by Foch, it was decided to postpone the allocation of any troops by Haig or Pétain to the general reserve.⁴⁰ Within a fortnight the extreme need for such a

³⁷ The members were now Foch (president), Wilson, Cadorna, and Bliss (U.S.A. Army).

³⁸ Owing to a misunderstanding, Haig did not receive the official letter from the War Board until Feb. 27. His statement to Lloyd George followed the receipt of an "advance copy" of the board's letter, sent to him by Wilson.

³⁹ That is, from the force in France; the others would come from Italy.

⁴⁰ It now comprised only the French and British divisions in Italy, and some Italian divisions there.

reserve was to be demonstrated by a disaster that shook the Allied armies more severely than any other blow sustained in the war.

So, whereas Lloyd George had blocked the policy of Haig and Robertson, Haig and Pétain succeeded in blocking that of Painlevé, Foch, and Wilson. For the British Prime Minister, however, the establishment of the Supreme War Council and of its assistant staff had been as much a means to the elimination of Robertson and the adoption of an "Eastern" policy as an end in itself. The objection of Robertson to his insistence upon the independence of the Versailles representatives gave Lloyd George the opportunity for removing him.⁴¹ On February 19th Sir Henry Wilson was transferred to his post at the War Office, and General Rawlinson was appointed to the staff of Versailles.⁴² It remains to be said that Wilson, who on November 5th had insisted that it was "the essence of the plan" that the Versailles representative should be "absolutely detached and independent," completely reversed his attitude when he found himself about to be appointed to Robertson's place. He now maintained—as Robertson had done—that the Versailles officer should be "someone junior to me," so as to "let me have a directing voice at Versailles." This was not, however, at the time conceded.⁴³

The ultimate objective of the British Prime Minister's manœuvring had been the adoption of an "Eastern" as against a "Western" policy—that is to say, to secure the initiation of an attempt to seek a decision on some other front

⁴¹ The steps by which this was actually done are difficult to distinguish; but, in effect, Lloyd George proposed to curtail the powers of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to those existing before Robertson's appointment in December 1915—in other words, to take from him the responsibility of issuing the Government's orders in regard to military operations. Subject to this, Robertson was offered whichever appointment he chose, at the War Office or Versailles. The other would go to Wilson. Robertson would accept neither. After further negotiations—including an offer to Plumer of the War Office appointment, which Plumer refused—Wilson was given Robertson's position, and Robertson eventually replaced him in the Eastern Division of the Home Command.

⁴² Rawlinson had been commanding in Flanders since Plumer had been sent to command the British forces in Italy. Plumer was now recalled to Flanders.

⁴³ Rawlinson opposed him later, taking Haig's view concerning the Inver-Allied reserve, and prevailed.

than that in France and Flanders, which he believed to be impenetrable to attack from either side. He now advocated an offensive against Turkey. In July 1917 General Allenby, the new commander in Palestine, had been asked what additional force he required for the taking of Jerusalem, but the vast demand which he then made had put the project temporarily out of question. In September Lloyd George reopened the matter, this time with a proposal to carry the attack to Aleppo and put Turkey out of the war. For this Allenby placed his requirements at thirteen additional divisions, and thus again put the project out of court; the finding not merely of the troops but of the shipping for them was beyond possibility. He was therefore merely instructed to do what he could with the troops he possessed—seven infantry and three cavalry divisions. Attacking on October 31st, and outflanking the Turks' Gaza-Beersheba line by a brilliant movement (in which the Australian and New Zealand mounted troops played a decisive part), he took Jerusalem on December 9th.

These impressive victories, which Allenby had won without the reinforcements previously demanded, gave Lloyd George an opportunity for renewing his efforts for the adoption of an "Eastern" policy. Fortunately for his plans, he had secured from Versailles while Wilson was still there an opinion in favour of that policy. Before the first Versailles meeting of the Supreme War Council on December 1st, at which the plans for 1918 were to be discussed, Lloyd George had arranged with Clemenceau, then newly elevated to the premiership of France, that the possibility of destroying Germany's allies should be considered, as a means to the subsequent concentration of full strength against Germany herself. Germany, indeed, had adopted this policy, with success, against Russia, though in that case the circumstances were materially different by reason of Germany's operating on interior lines. The matter was referred to the Inter-Allied Staff, which, as has already been mentioned, in its Joint Note No. 12 of 21st January 1918, recommended action against Turkey,⁴⁴ subject,

⁴⁴ It stated that an offensive which succeeded in putting Turkey out of the war would have "the most far-reaching results."

however, to the Allied forces in France being maintained "at their present aggregate strength." Armies in other theatres should contribute to the Eastern offensive all forces that could be spared.

When, however, these belated recommendations came up for discussion at the Supreme War Council on January 30th, Clemenceau was found to be flatly opposed to the project against Turkey. He urged that, as it was then obvious that the existing forces on the Western Front could not be maintained, this side-stroke must be dropped. Lloyd George, on the other hand, contended that the Allies' Western Front was over-insured. It was ultimately decided that the Palestine campaign was a matter for decision by the British Government alone; provided that the Government diverted no troops from the West, and took no action in Palestine for two months, it was free to determine how it could most effectively use its forces already in the East. The War Cabinet immediately sent General Smuts to discuss the matter with its commanders in the East. He returned to London on March 1st, having formed the opinion that the offensive should continue in Palestine but not in Mesopotamia, and that Allenby's force should be strengthened by two of the Mesopotamian divisions. The order for Allenby to attack was accordingly issued, but had barely reached him when it was cancelled in consequence of the German offensive in the West. He was then required to send to France all troops not needed for bare defence.

Six months later, the two Mesopotamian divisions having reached him, he again attacked with what troops he had, shattered two Turkish armies, reached Aleppo, and put Turkey out of the war. Whether this result, when envisaged a year earlier by Lloyd George and Wilson, could not have been wisely sought at that time, is a question as to which students of military history will probably always differ; but the chief obstacle to its adoption had been Allenby's expansive estimates of the force required.

Thus the plan of Lloyd George also, emerging at the eleventh hour from the clash of interests, with grudging approval and in a battered form, was no sooner adopted than it was abandoned. But by that time

Clemenceau's Policy

Lloyd George no longer exercised a preponderating influence in shaping the Allies' plans. From November 13th he had to share that rôle with an equally vivid personality. On that day Painlevé was defeated upon a side issue in the French Chamber of Deputies, and a ministry was formed by his most persistent critic, Georges Clemenceau. With Celtic capacity for focussing all his fiery energy upon a single objective, and determined to devote his few remaining years to seizing victory by the throat, this brilliant, caustic, old radical journalist began from the moment of his advent to exercise the freedom of a dictator in clearing away the complications against which Painlevé had been striving by careful and clever manoeuvre. Suspected traitors were arrested and tried. Clemenceau would have liked to see the Allied armies under a single command, but although the Americans desired this, and the Italians would have accepted it,⁴⁵ he, like Painlevé, was forced to recognise that British opposition was too strong. Several advocates of the system had turned against it. Pétain was now actually urging that he and Haig should halve between them the High Command in Belgium, France, and Italy. Lloyd George had told Painlevé that he and Lord Milner would welcome the appointment of a generalissimo, but that in England they were practically alone in that view. When attacked in Parliament by Asquith over the Rapallo agreement Lloyd George had to profess himself to be "utterly opposed" to such an appointment as likely to generate friction. He told Clemenceau that the establishment of the Executive War Board was the furthest step to which he could agree. Haig, when Clemenceau broached the subject at breakfast at G.H.Q., threw up his hands and exclaimed, "Monsieur Clemenceau! I have only one chief and can have no other: My King." Clemenceau had little faith in the Rapallo measures, but the British leaders would go no further.

⁴⁵ Clemenceau judged this to be the case although Baron Sonnino wrote that it would hurt Italian pride (Mordacq, *Le Commandement Unique*, p. 37).

On the other hand, to enforce the demand that the British should relieve the French Army of part of its front, Clemenceau did not hesitate to resort to an ultimatum. Indeed, since the adoption of a defensive policy, the French case was unanswerably strong. Although the two chief national armies on the Western Front were in September almost equal, the British having 806 battalions to the French 972,⁴⁶ the French held some 325 miles of front, the British 100, and the Belgians 12. The tenure of so wide a sector was the chief difficulty faced by Pétain in his endeavours for resting and training his troops, and in attempting to build up any sort of reserve for offensive purposes. On September 25th, as has been already stated in this chapter, Lloyd George had agreed in principle that the British must extend their front, and Haig, meeting Pétain on October 18th, had consented to take over a four-division front, but, having in view at that time his project of a spring offensive, refused to relieve the whole front (six divisions) of the Sixth French Army, as required, as a first step, by Pétain.⁴⁷ In their subsequent exchange of written opinions, the commanders merely confirmed these differences between their views. Haig reported the matter to his government and appealed to it to support his refusal to take over more than a four-divisional front, giving as his reason his intention to continue the offensive, and to prevent the initiative from passing to the Germans.

That Haig might be prevented from renewing the Passchendaele offensive in the spring was not, as we have seen, a prospect likely to trouble the Prime Minister. The extent of front to be taken over, however, could only be wisely decided in conjunction with the plans for next year, and it was therefore referred to the Rapallo conference, and

⁴⁶ The French artillery, however, was very much stronger in proportion.

⁴⁷ Haig indicated that he would like to have the First French Army still on his flank when he attacked in Flanders in the spring. Pétain, however, anticipated that the Allies would have to defend themselves against a German offensive. He intended not to leave the First French Army at Ypres, but to let its XXXVI. Corps take back the Nieuport sector from the British. Haig promised that, when this happened, he would use the four divisions of Rawlinson's coastal army to relieve part of the French Sixth Army on his right. Pétain, like Haig, always contemplated ultimately taking the offensive, but not till the German strength was spent and the Americans had arrived.

eventually to the Inter-Allied Staff. When, however, the Supreme War Council met in December at Versailles, Clemenceau was Premier of France, and he inquired why, the French having then relieved Rawlinson's army on the coast, the British had not taken over part of the Sixth French Army's line. Haig replied that he had been forced to use the coastal divisions in repelling the German counter-attack at Cambrai, and to send others to Italy. He further pointed out that the British were at that moment engaging their due proportion of the enemy's forces, since they and the Belgians were opposed by 66 active and 3 Landwehr divisions, while the French were pitted against 68 active and 11 Landwehr divisions.

So long as the British were maintaining the offensive, practically single-handed, and the Germans were concentrating their divisions against them, the British case against extension had been a fair one; but now that the Allies had reverted to the defensive it was impossible to sustain.⁴⁸ As the French parliament, nation, and press had for many months been expecting their army's front to be readjusted, and this was one of the primary measures of policy for which Clemenceau stood, he threatened to resign unless the British relieved the French Army not merely to the River Oise, but to Berry-au-Bac, nearly forty miles farther, thirteen miles from Rheims. Haig, informed of this by a cipher telegram from Robertson, arranged, at an early meeting with Pétain, that by the end of January the British would, if possible, extend some twenty miles—as far as the Oise. What farther extension should be undertaken later was referred, by Clemenceau's consent, to the Supreme War Council. The Inter-Allied Staff eventually recommended an extension beyond the Oise, but only to half the distance previously specified by Clemenceau, the actual point of junction being left to Haig and Pétain to decide. These subsequently resolved that the British should take only to Barisis, five and a half miles beyond the Oise, making the total extension about twenty-five miles.

⁴⁸ It is, however, worthy of note that the French General, Humbert, who knew the ground and fought over it in March and April 1918, informed President Poincaré in May that Pétain and Nivelles "had been guilty of a great fault in pressing for the extension of the British front."

Although the French still held some 300 miles against the British 125, it is probable that future students of the war will conclude that the course actually taken was the wisest. Pétain himself recognised—as he told the Supreme War Council on February 2nd—"that the part held by the British was the most vital along the whole front," and that the density of the garrison there must be double that in the French sector. He saw that the British



Government was keeping Haig dangerously short of men,⁴⁹ and any further extension would bring the weak point of the Allied defence—the "hinge" where the two armies joined—perilously close to Paris. Actually, the vital consideration was not the mileage of the respective fronts, so much stressed by the French, nor yet the density of the German forces on the British front, constantly emphasised by G.H.Q., but the probable direction of the coming German offensive. This seemed likely to be towards the Channel ports or towards Paris, these objectives being within reach and by far the most important of those open to the enemy's choice. It was a reasonable arrangement that the British should cover the one and the French the other, with reserves of each army near the "hinge," ready to assist wherever the main attack fell; the weakness of the plan was that the needs of the whole front were left to the judgment of sectional commanders who, as was abundantly proved throughout the war, could not be trusted to balance accurately the needs of their own and of the other sectors.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Haig's diary (quoted by Mr. Duff Cooper, *Vol. II*, pp. 222-3) states that even after the settlement between the two commanders-in-chief as to the extension of front, Pétain supported Clemenceau in a demand for more extension—not, as he privately told Haig, in order to trouble him for further action, but to assist Clemenceau in extorting more men from England.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Vol. IV*, pp. 139-41.

The extension of the British front was carried out, by January 14th, to the St. Quentin sector, and by January 30th to Barisis. Thus Clemenceau and Pétain had partly enforced their policy of concentrating all effort upon the security of the Western Front until American help should arrive—but without ensuring that Lloyd George should increase his endeavours for the safety of the British sector. Haig had now 125 miles to defend with 57 divisions; but these were much weaker than before, and, with reinforcements cut down to 100,000 for the year, any heavy loss must mean the further reduction of the force by many divisions.

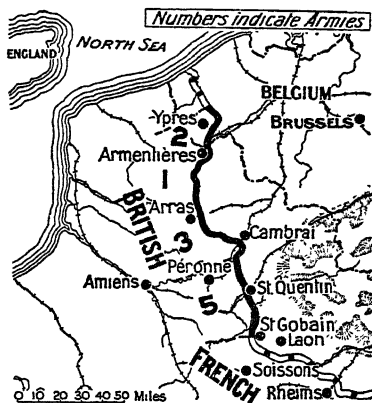
Haig's Appreciation The problem of the distribution of his weakened force depended, for Haig also, mainly upon where the Germans were likely to attack. Despite a keenly intelligent forecast given to him on December 6th by the then chief of his intelligence staff, Brigadier-General Charteris, he did not expect the German leaders to attack *à l'outrance*, and so "make a mistake which must lead to their complete collapse."⁵¹ Charteris, however, felt that, in the face of internal troubles and the shaky condition of their dissatisfied allies,⁵² the German commanders could not remain on the defensive. Intelligence reports showed that they had already begun to transfer part of their forces from Russia to the Western Front. On December 6th Charteris estimated that the Germans (who then had 152 infantry divisions in the West against 170 divisions of the Allies) would transfer thither during the winter "from 30 to 40" of their 93 divisions from the East; many of the others were unsuitable for the harsher fighting in France and Belgium. As the American strength would begin to tell in France after the middle of 1918, it appeared to him obvious that the German leaders, if intending to strike, must strike early—"not later," he anticipated, "than the beginning of March."

In the public dissatisfaction that followed the German counterblow at Cambrai, Charteris and several other seniors

⁵¹ *At G.H.Q.*, by Brig.-Gen. John Charteris, pp. 273-4. This view was again stated by Haig, to the War Cabinet, on Jan. 7.

⁵² Charteris wrote (Dec. 6) that the German Empire was "suffering acutely from shortage of food" and "the shortage in Austria-Hungary is believed to be even more acute."

of the staff at G.H.Q. were replaced;⁵³ but his successor pointed out, on January 7th, that the Germans would "assuredly" attack; that 15-20 divisions had already been transferred from Russia to the Western Front; and that the German command had just inserted a fresh army headquarters on the southern half of the Second German Army's front (that is to say, opposite the centre and right of the Fifth British Army); it would therefore be necessary to reckon with the possibility of attack in that sector also, an event previously considered unlikely. During January, although the weather was bad for flying and for observation, British airmen brought in photographs of numerous new aerodromes, dumps, railway sidings, and hospital camps in that same region, opposite the Third and Fifth British Armies. By the end of January fourteen new aerodromes had been found behind the Forest of St. Gobain, opposite the Fifth Army's right, and widespread and abnormal railway movements were from time to time seen there. The British intelligence ascertained from several



sources⁵⁴ that the commander of the new army (the Eighteenth) which had been inserted there was none other than General von Hutier, who had just conducted the enemy's successful offensive at Riga. So evident did the preparations seem to the airmen that on February 2nd Major-General

⁵³ The Government forced upon Haig, much against his will, important changes in the staff at G.H.Q. Major-General Hon. H. A. Lawrence, formerly commander of the 66th Division, became, first, chief of the intelligence staff, and, later, chief of the general staff, in succession to Charteris and Kiggell respectively. On promotion to C.G.S., Lawrence was succeeded by Brig.-Gen. E. W. Cox, who, on his death on 26 August, 1918, while bathing at Le Touquet, was succeeded by Brig.-Gen. G. S. Clive. Lieut.-Gen. Travers Clarke succeeded Sir Ronald Maxwell as Q.M.G. Of Brig.-General Charteris it may be said that, despite the fact that he may have strengthened Haig's undue optimism concerning the enemy's losses, his apprehension of affairs on his opponents' side was probably more accurate, his grasp wider, and his insight more uncannily penetrating than that of most, if not all, other chiefs of intelligence in the Great War.

⁵⁴ Including two obituary notices in German newspapers.

Salmond,⁵⁵ who had just succeeded to the command in France of the newly organised "Royal Air Force,"⁵⁶ ordered his special reconnaissance squadron to concentrate its efforts on the German back area opposite the Fifth Army. The commanders of the Third and Fifth Armies, Generals Byng and Gough, were equally certain that they were confronted by an early offensive.

But it was not unusual for local commanders, whether of companies, battalions, divisions, or armies, to be convinced of the imminence of attack on their particular fronts. G.H.Q. was less certain. It knew that somewhat similar preparations were being made in the valley of the Lys south and north of Armentières, and also on the French front, especially in Champagne near Rheims. By February 16th the British intelligence staff estimated that the Germans had 178 divisions on the Western Front, of which 110 were in the line and 67 in reserve, nearly half the line-divisions and half of the located reserve being opposite the British front. Of the rest of the located reserve, the greater part was near the French front in Champagne. On that day Haig told his army commanders at Doullens that he thought the main blow would be struck at the French. There were no signs, he then said, of a big offensive against the British front, but a small one might be in preparation against the First Army, and the difficulty of the British communications across the old Somme battlefield might tempt the enemy to attack there.

Of one thing Haig—differing in his opinion from the French and the Versailles staffs—felt certain: that the offensive—whether limited, as he anticipated, or intended to

⁵⁵ Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond, G.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O. Commanded R.A.F. in France, 1918/19; Chief of the Air Staff, 1930/33. Of London; b. 17 July, 1881.

⁵⁶ The necessity for the formation of the air force as a separate service had been emphasised by the German air raids upon London and the disturbance caused by the temporary recalling of air squadrons from France. Australian interest in those air raids is increased by the fact that they occasioned the extraordinarily gallant action of a young Australian airman, Lieut. W. G. Salmon (of Ballarat and Camperdown, Vic.). Salmon, who had been a member of the A.I.F., was then training as a pilot with a British squadron stationed at Dartford. On the occasion of the first great German daylight raid, he was in the air, but was unable to attack the enemy. He decided that this would never happen again, and when some 20 German machines came over London on 7 July, 1917, he took off and headed alone fairly into the midst of them. His midget machine was observed by thousands of spectators below (who did not know the meaning of the sight) to mingle with the crowd of great bombers, and then was seen to separate itself from them and fly towards the east. Within a few hundred yards of its home aerodrome, it crashed. Young Salmon had been badly hit, fighting one against 20, and had fainted just before reaching the aerodrome. He was killed in the crash.

be decisive—would be delivered early. It followed that it was unlikely to be launched in Flanders, where the ground remained wet until much later than elsewhere. It was not until late in February that the constant warnings from his air force and other sources of intelligence convinced him that the Germans intended to make a powerful attack between Arras and St. Quentin.⁵⁷ He then stated, at a conference of his army commanders at Doullens on March 2nd, that the coming attack was intended to draw in the British reserves. Despite all reports Haig did not believe that this would be the main attack, or would extend to the southern half of the Fifth Army.

By then G.H.Q. estimated that the German forces in the West had grown to 181 divisions, and during the following fortnight signs of attack became increasingly evident. G.H.Q. noted that by exhibiting activity with wireless, artillery, and aeroplanes the enemy was obviously trying to attract attention to the Lys sector, south of Armentières. On the other hand many signs in the Arras-St. Quentin area—the detection of large dumps, of many new light railways, and of an abnormal number of lights after dark in the back areas, the concentration of German air squadrons, and the statements of prisoners and deserters—made it certain that an offensive there was now very near. It was also learned—correctly, as was later ascertained—that the Kaiser's headquarters had moved forward to Spa. On March 10th the new chief of intelligence, Brigadier-General Cox,⁵⁸ stated⁵⁹ :—

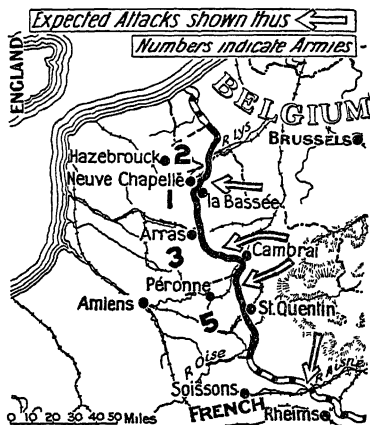
Between the Lys and the La Bassée Canal, the enemy is preparing an offensive, probably between Bois Grenier and Neuve Chapelle, with the object of retaining reserves in this sector and distracting attention from his main offensive farther south . . . It is very probable that the attack in this sector will precede the main offensive farther south and (it) may be expected daily . . . The imminence of the offensive in the Arras-St. Quentin area has been confirmed . . . There are also vague prisoners' statements pointing to the possibility of a minor offensive in the sector south of St. Quentin, but no other indications support this theory.

⁵⁷ It had just been discovered (on Feb. 25) that another German army headquarters—that of General Otto von Below, who had commanded the German force that broke through the Italians at Caporetto—had been inserted between those of the Second and the Sixth. Also on the body of a dead German airman there were found orders that he should photograph German areas behind Bullecourt. This seemed to indicate anxiety as to whether German preparations there were visible to British airmen.

⁵⁸ Brig.-Gen. E. W. Cox, D.S.O.; R.E. General Staff. War Office, 1916/17; G.S.O. (1), Intelligence, G.H.Q., France, 1918. Of London; b. Islington, Middlesex, Eng., 9 May, 1882. Accidentally drowned in France, 26 Aug., 1918.

⁵⁹ In the "Summary of Intelligence," issued weekly by G.H.Q.

On March 17th General Cox again stated the view that there would be a diverting offensive between Bois Grenier and Neuve Chapelle, and main offensives between Arras and St Quentin, on the British front, and in the Aisne-Suippe sector on the French front. There were still no signs, he said, of an offensive in Flanders, "but a local attack may be intended in the Gapaard-Warneton sector." The date of the German offensive could not be safely forecasted, although there were



definite indications that the Germans are completing their preparations for attack. The final warning will almost certainly be a short one. Up to the present it has not been given, and although we must be prepared for an attack at short notice, there is no reason to expect an offensive from day to day.

Haig, at this stage, was inclined to think that the Germans might offer terms of peace.

It is to be noted that the commander of the Fifth Army and the chief of his intelligence staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Butler,⁶⁰ were already convinced, not only that the attack would extend to the whole of the Fifth Army's front, but that it would be delivered upon March 21st. On the 18th and 19th of March statements of Alsatian and Polish deserters, of a captured flying officer, and of other prisoners impressed the intelligence staffs, not only of the Third and Fifth Armies but of G.H.Q., with the certainty that—whether or not a greater attack on the French was imminent—the principal offensive on the British front would be made in the Arras-St. Quentin sector on March 20th or 21st. They also knew that the divisions to make it were now crowding the area close behind the German line, that the Germans were in

⁶⁰ The same who from the Landing until the end of 1917 had been G.S.O.1 (Intelligence) of I Anzac. On 18 March, 1918, however, against the wish of his army commander, he was transferred to G.H.Q., his place being taken by Lieut.-Colonel F. S. G. Piggott.

a state of extreme tension, working feverishly on their last preparations, that gas shelling was an important part of the enemy's plan, and that the enemy was not relying upon tanks. The troops of the Third and Fifth Armies were warned to expect attack on either morning. To weary officers and men in the line, these warnings were far less impressive than they are to the readers of histories, for the simple reason that cautions not unlike them had been received on several other recent occasions, and no attack whatever had then happened; but at least everyone was placed on his guard, and the artillery carried out its full precautionary measures.

It will thus be seen that Haig's expectation, at the time when he was disposing his troops, was that the Germans would attack in three places—making a feint south of Armentières, and two powerful thrusts, one against the two southern British armies and the other against the French. This was also the expectation of the British War Office.⁶¹ Pétain appears to have believed that the main thrust would be against the French. Foch, on the other hand, had stated that it was the British who were more immediately threatened, and, recognising that they were weakest in reserves, he had, on his own responsibility, telegraphed on February 15th to the War Office urging that two British divisions should be brought back from Italy.⁶²

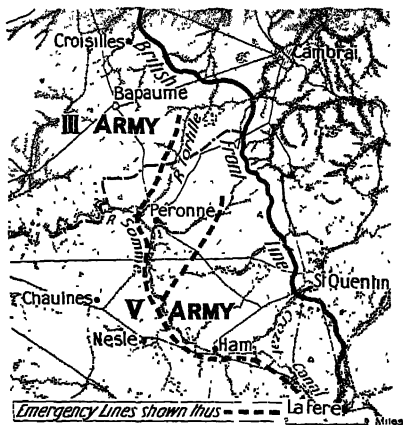
As Haig now awaited attack in the south, and feared no immediate danger in Flanders, he might have been expected to keep his main strength on and behind the front of the two southern armies, where it would also be available if required to render swift assistance to the French. The problem, however, was not simple. The most important objective in his area for the enemy was the Channel ports, close behind his northern flank. In that area, with the sea only from twenty to fifty miles in his rear, he could give no ground without

⁶¹ The diary of an Australian official then in London, whom it closely concerned, states under March 19: "Outside (the opera) X . . . told me that he seen Y at the War Office. Y told him that we expected an attack at once. They thought it would come in three places, he said. One against us, to tie us down, near Cambrai, and so occupy us that we couldn't help the French. Another small attack near Armentières, where we had to our surprise, he said, identified four or five divisions on the front of one division. The main attack away in Alsace against the French. The idea was believed to be to cause quarrelling between ourselves and the French by bringing about a situation in which we should be unable to take over more of the French line when they asked us to undertake the relief of portion of their front. (The rumours have all been of an attack near Rheims)."

⁶² This was eventually done.

danger. In the centre the Béthune coalfields also must be defended, since French industry largely depended on their output. On Haig's right, however, was a useless, shelterless area—the country devastated by the Germans in their withdrawal in 1917, and the old Somme battlefield—lying twenty-five miles deep behind the Fifth Army and the right of the Third. Here he could afford to retreat for many miles, and actually improve his tactical position by doing so. G.H.Q. considered the question of a voluntary withdrawal there, in order to forestall the blow. Such a manœuvre might, indeed, have proved brilliantly successful in tactical results, but strong objections were urged and were held to be decisive, and it was resolved to defend the line then occupied.⁶³

In these circumstances Haig resolved not to withdraw his strength from the north and centre, but to accept the probability of being driven back in the south, and to maintain at all costs the central buttress at Arras, which he regarded as the backbone of his whole line, and on which that withdrawal would pivot. For a line upon which to fall back in the south, if necessary, he ordered the construction of rearward defences along the Somme south of Péronne and along the



⁶³ The proposal considered was apparently one for withdrawal behind the Somme. This would involve two chief difficulties. First, important roads and railway communications passed through Péronne, and a withdrawal there might have hampered the Third Army's right. Second, the old Somme battlefield would be immediately behind the Fifth Army. A deeper withdrawal behind the wilderness of the old Somme battlefield does not seem to have been seriously considered, although—from the merely tactical point of view—it might have proved the masterstroke for which the weary nations were waiting, and for which this was, perhaps, the only opportunity ever offered to a British commander on the Western Front. On the troops the moral effect of a brilliant manœuvre by their leader would not necessarily have been depressing; the probable attitude of the French, however, would have been a most important consideration, since, by avoiding the main thrust, the British leader might have caused it to be directed against the French; he would also have given up land reoccupied by its French population, and have subjected Amiens to the risk of long-range bombardment.

Tortille north-east of it, with a very strong bridge-head at Péronne itself, this bridge-head to include the commanding height of Mont St. Quentin immediately north of the town.

These being his plans, Haig redispensed his forces as follows, chiefly by transferring divisions from the Second Army to the Fifth as the threat in the south became gradually more apparent :

	<i>End of January</i> Divisions	<i>March</i> Divisions
Second Army (known from December to February as the "Fourth Army," General Rawlinson in command)	18	14
First Army (Béthune front)	14 and 2 Portuguese	14 and 2 Portuguese
Third Army (Arras front)	15	16
Fifth Army (St. Quentin front)	10 and 5 cavalry	14 and 3 cavalry ⁶⁴

The allocation of divisions to reserve was :

Army	Mileage of front	Average Divisional Front	Divisions in Line	Divisions in Reserve
Second	23	4,500 yards	9	5
First	33	4,800 yards	12	4
Third	28	5,900 yards	10	6
Fifth	42	6,700 yards	11	3 and 3 cavalry divisions

Of the reserve, two divisions behind each army were retained in the hands of G.H.Q. In the centre Haig earmarked the Canadian Corps for the special purpose of counter-attack, should the vital pivot at Arras and Vimy Ridge be taken. Farther south, to conduct a counter-attack against the flank of the enemy if he penetrated to Bapaume, was the headquarters of the X Corps under Lieutenant-General Morland. Its divisions would be allotted to it when the occasion arose.⁶⁵

The work of fortification *in depth* proceeded not only behind the British front, but behind the French. But, whereas Haig did not apply that principle in the extreme form adopted since the Passchendaele fighting by Ludendorff—who held the forward zone with a mere screen, which was to withdraw before any serious attack and allow the defending artillery to

⁶⁴ The cavalry divisions had been reduced from 5 to 2, the Indian cavalry—comprising the greater part of two cavalry divisions—having been withdrawn from France for service in Palestine.

⁶⁵ When the crisis arrived, the 12th British, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Australian, and the New Zealand Divisions were allotted. Events, however, prevented their being used as intended.

place a barrage in front of the battle zone before the attack reached that zone—Pétain, on the other hand, aimed at placing his line of resistance even farther back.⁶⁶ This thorough-going plan, however, was more than the fiery old autocrat now at the head of the French Government could contemplate. Clemenceau would have no giving up of ground if he could avoid it. He believed in controlling the generals, and he ordered Pétain to modify the stringency of this order. Pétain managed to evade compliance, but the mere knowledge that the Premier had intervened is said⁶⁷ to have stiffened the resistance of some of Pétain's more conservative subordinates to tactics which they disliked, and Pétain's principle was not everywhere thoroughly carried out.

Nor, in the British sector, did the mere giving of Haig's order necessarily ensure that the whole of the projected defences would be constructed in time or in the manner designed. A close inspection had to be kept by corps, army, and General Headquarters of the progress of the work. There was found to be a tendency to concentrate on the front system and to postpone the completion of the battle zone. In December, for example, an adverse report went in as to the rearward defences of the 3rd Australian Division, even under so masterly an organiser as General Monash. Later, wire-entanglements which General Hobbs of the 5th Division had reported to have been duly constructed were found to be incomplete. Nevertheless by dint of driving and supervision the projected triple defence system was established in time along almost the whole of the British front except the sector lately taken over by the Fifth Army from the French. In that area the fortifications of the French had been slender;⁶⁸ and, in addition to strengthening these, this army had to construct the emergency defences at Péronne and along the Somme. Moreover the Fifth Army's sector was the widest and the most lightly held, and troops available for work were therefore proportionately fewer. Here, as elsewhere, divisions had to be given some rest, trained in defensive tactics, and

⁶⁶ In his directive No. 4 of 22 Dec. 1917 he ordered that the real defence should be made either at the intermediate or at the second-line system.

⁶⁷ See *La Crise du Commandement Unique*, by General XXX, pp. 106-8.

⁶⁸ Paul Maze, a Frenchman who acted as special intelligence officer to General Gough, notes (in *A Frenchman in Khaki*, p. 265) the neglected condition of the French line here. "A tenant who knows his lease is up," he says, "does not bother to repaint his house."

reorganised on the new nine-battalion basis. Yet the labour of construction fell mainly on fatigue parties of infantry—including “entrenching battalions,”⁶⁹ and pioneers—working under direction of the engineers. Although there were, on January 1st, over 300,000 “labour” troops in the B.E.F.,⁷⁰ practically the whole of them—British, Canadian, Chinese, Indian, South African, and prisoners of war—were necessarily employed on roads, railways, dumps, forests, and other tasks in rear; on January 1st not 2,000 were available for work on the defences, and by the middle of March, although General Pétain assisted by allowing Haig to take 12,000 of the Italian labourers raised for the French, the number had risen only to 17,000. The order in which the works were to be constructed was—

- (a) wire-entanglements;
- (b) shell-proof blockhouses and dugouts, observation posts, machine-gun emplacements, battle headquarters;
- (c) roads, tracks, communication trenches;
- (d) fire trenches.

In the Australian Corps the order to begin work on the rear zone was given on January 29th; on February 16th the corps defence scheme, which included measures against aircraft and tanks,⁷¹ was ordered to be put into force, and

⁶⁹ Entrenching battalions were reinforcements which, instead of training at the base in France, were now sent on for hardening at the front.

⁷⁰ At the end of 1917 the labour units were:—

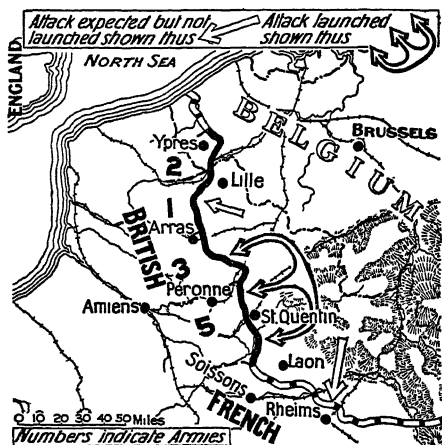
British, Canadian, etc.	.. ..	134,610
South African, Indian, Chinese, etc.	.. ..	98,574
Prisoners of war	.. ..	69,720

Of these, the prisoners of war could not, by the Hague agreement, be put to work on defences. Labour troops were mainly used on roads, railways, forests, dumps, workshops; and for building, quarrying, portering at wharves and medical stations, water-supply, laundries, drainage, and burials. In March the labour force had been increased by the arrival of 10,400 Italians. In addition, the breaking up of three battalions in every division had, after bringing the divisions up to their new establishment, provided a small surplus for meeting casualties, and this surplus was temporarily organised into 28 entrenching battalions for use in constructing defences.

⁷¹ Anti-aircraft defence was organised in zones. The defence of the forward area was the responsibility of the front-line divisions; the Australian Corps suggested the employment of Stokes mortars against aircraft, and, after some experiment, provided for this form of defence in the forward zone. The artillery was defended by machine-guns. The defences of the second zone and back areas included two batteries, each of eight 13-pounder guns mounted on motor-waggon. These guns would furnish three barrages—one forward, to prevent enemy aeroplanes from crossing the front line at normal altitude; a second continuous barrage, in rear; and a third, over dumps and headquarters. Four searchlight sections were also allotted to the corps. Birdwood was not satisfied with the anti-tank measures, which included the emplacement of a certain number of field-guns forward, in hidden positions, the issue of armour-piercing ammunition to some machine-guns and Lewis guns, and the undermining of the principal roads.

on the 24th final preparations were to be completed at twenty-four hours' notice.⁷² The Fifth Army was unable to do more than begin its work on the Somme-Péronne-Tortille defence line. But in the three front zones, at least, its wire defences were very strong; and by the middle of March the troops appear to have been disposed in depth as G.H.Q. had directed.

Thus, although the efforts of each Allied leader had largely been parried by his colleagues; although Lloyd George had nullified Haig's plan, and Clemenceau Lloyd George's; although the policy of security eventually agreed on by the two commanders-in-chief was hamstrung by the British War Cabinet's retention of reinforcements; although the machinery set up by the governments for weighing and meeting the needs of these commanders had just been destroyed by the commanders themselves; nevertheless the British and French Armies had at least made extensive preparations against the anticipated offensive.



On March 21st, shortly before 5 o'clock, the whole mighty force which had been expected to attack on three fronts—near Rheims, Arras-St. Quentin, and La Bassée-Armentières—was launched against the central of the three, from Arras to the Oise, held by the Third and Fifth British Armies.

⁷² The chief difficulty in putting in force the Australian Corps scheme lay in the fact that, although the original sector was held throughout the winter by two divisions, the defence scheme, by order of Army, provided for it to be held by three. Headquarters and communications for infantry and artillery had to be provided for both systems.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENESIS OF "MICHAEL"

THE events which enabled the German commanders to concentrate their efforts in 1918 upon the Western Front furnish the outstanding illustration, in the Great War, of the possible efficacy of a policy of "knocking away the props." In the last months of 1917, after a blow delivered by the Germans at Riga with six divisions taken from the West,¹ the military effort of the Russian people collapsed, and left the Entente bereft of its most powerful ally.

With this consummation, after three and a half years of marvellous effort with varying but latterly sombre prospect, an altogether new vista now opened before the rulers and people of Germany. The main barrier, which, on the east, had cut off their country from external supplies, had fallen. There seemed now to be a clear road for Roumanian and Russian grain, live stock, and oil; the opportunity for German influence to expand towards the East—a dream of German leaders and people before the war—appeared to be opening again. It was even possible that the diminishing man-supply for the armies of the Central Powers might be replenished from an immense reservoir—there might now be available not merely the prisoners of war previously lost to Russia (including 1,800,000 from the Austro-Hungarian armies) but the Poles and possibly the Ukrainian Russians. With Russia once out of the war troops could be transferred to the West, where the position of the Germans, so far as numbers were concerned, would be better than at any previous time in the war. And, while the army was making there a final effort to compel the Entente to seek peace, the submarine campaign would have a new object—not that of starving the British people into submission (in which it appeared to have failed), but that of so reducing the world's available shipping that the transport of the American armies might be prevented, or at least delayed sufficiently to render them negligible until late in the coming

¹ Ludendorff in *My War Memories*, Vol. II, p. 434, says: "To deal with Russia once and for all, and so gain a free hand on one side, six divisions were set free for the East. . . . It was only very unwillingly that the commanders on the Western Front gave up the divisions for the other front. They were unable to grasp the magnitude of the undertaking."

year. The campaign at sea, therefore, might still make an important contribution towards complete victory.

But this vista, though sufficiently bright to fill the German people with new hopes and, for the time being, greatly to modify their previously dispirited attitude towards the continuance of the war, was by no means so unclouded as it might appear at first sight. To begin with, although the Russian armies had so much dissolved as to be capable of no serious resistance, the Russian Government and people were by no means submissive; the propaganda of the Bolsheviks was more dangerous than their armies, and the frontier had to be held against it, even if third-rate troops would suffice for the duty. The Soviet leaders, aware of the intense anxiety of the German command to use its troops elsewhere, showed themselves highly intractable and made full use of the opportunity for propaganda which the peace negotiations afforded them. The Entente peoples, informed daily of the dilatory debates at the conference at Brest-Litovsk, were puzzled by the patience with which the German and Austrian leaders² endured these windy discussions. We now know that Ludendorff, fuming at the delay which was imperilling his projected blow on the Western Front, would have put an end to the parleying and struck the Russians again, forcing them to peace; but the Austrian and Hungarian peoples were so menaced with famine, and so near to the end of their will to continue the struggle, that their foreign minister, Count Czernin, at one stage threatened to make a separate peace if Ludendorff's demands were insisted upon.

The Russian delegates were well aware of these difficulties. The negotiations, suspended for ten days after Christmas in order to allow the Entente powers and their allies an opportunity, if they so desired, to come in, were resumed on January 4th with the invitation unaccepted. Immediately afterwards it became clear that the body then governing the Russians of the southern border, or "Ukraine," was determined to negotiate separately, although the state was within the Russian confederation. As the Ukraine contained the main wheatfields of Russia, and agreement with it would also open the way to

² Germany was represented by Herr von Kuhlmann, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and Austria by Count Czernin. General Hoffmann, under Kuhlmann, represented the German military leaders.

the Caspian oilfields, Persia, and Central Asia, the effort of the German delegates was now to make a separate peace with the Ukrainians and, if necessary, deal with the Russians later. The Bolshevik leaders involuntarily facilitated this process by attacking the shaky government of the Ukraine not merely with propaganda, but with troops. The Ukrainians on February 9th concluded terms with the delegates of the Central Powers, and appealed to them for help.

Much time, however, had been lost. Peace had still to be arranged with Russia and Roumania, and at this stage the Soviet leaders actually issued a wireless exhortation to the German Army to mutiny. Yet even now both the German and Austrian Governments dreaded to inform their peoples that the peace negotiations, on which so many hopes were depending, had collapsed. Under pressure from the military leaders, however, it was decided to present an ultimatum which, if rejected, would enable those leaders to strike the blow that would force the Russians to peace.

The answer from Trotsky, who now headed the Russian delegation, increased the confusion. He declared that Russia would not bind herself by agreeing to terms, but that the war was now at an end and the demobilisation of the Russian armies had been ordered. As this left his government entirely free to make war again, if it so chose, and as the Roumanians would not think of making peace until Russia did so, Ludendorff, at a conference on February 13th with the Kaiser, Count Hertling (Chancellor), and von Kühlmann at Homburg, obtained leave—against the wish of Kühlmann—to denounce the armistice; and on February 18th the Germans, notwithstanding the opposition of the Austrian Emperor, Charles, advanced both in northern Russia and in Ukraine. The Soviet Government immediately notified by wireless its submission, and on March 3rd peace with it was signed on the German terms.³

The advance in the Ukraine, which occurred at the same time, was undertaken ostensibly in order to help the local government. But, as the Bolshevik troops and propaganda

³ These involved, in the north, the control by Germany, through dummy governments of the border states of Esthonia and Livonia; and the "independence" of Poland, of which part, however, was given to the Ukraine, and the whole was occupied.

were active throughout that area, it was obvious that hardly a train-load of grain or livestock from it would reach Germany unless the Germans themselves collected these supplies. The Ukraine must therefore be occupied. As for the Roumanians, although they were now ready for peace, part of their army must be allowed to remain under arms as a protection against the Bolsheviks. The preliminaries of peace with Roumania were agreed upon at Buftea on March 5th, but the Austrian leaders were directly in conflict with the Germans concerning the terms.



The arrows show the German advance.

Thus at the beginning of March, although the formal warfare on the eastern front had ended, and the German command was enabled to proceed in the west without serious anxiety as to the east, yet the German people was far from being able to draw from the east the benefits that had been expected. In the occupied territory of Ukraine there was insufficient coal to supply the railways carrying the required

grain. The Germans therefore had to extend their advance to the coalfield of the Donetz basin, and meanwhile to send coal from Germany. Again, although the Austrians, who were to occupy the southern half of the territory, pushed quickly to Odessa, the Russian Black Sea fleet endangered navigation on the Black Sea, and forced the Germans eventually to extend their occupation still farther—to the Crimea. There, rather than hand over their ships, the Russian sailors sank most of them, and the Bolsheviki also scuttled the largest tank-steamer available for the transport of the Caspian oil.

Moreover, although it had been agreed that the food supplies from those regions should be partitioned on a fixed ratio between Germany and Austria, at the beginning of April it became known to the Germans, from a trustworthy source, that owing to the increasing imminence of famine in Austria the Emperor Charles had ordered the Austrian commander in Ukraine to requisition supplies, and, if necessary, seize them by force, regardless of the regular methods of the organisation set up there by agreement between the German and Austrian leaders. At the beginning of June wheat *en route* for Germany was seized by the Austrians on the Danube. "I know it is highway robbery," said the Austrian general who seized it, "but I had no other way out. Now the people of Vienna have at least eatables for fifteen days."⁴ When finally appealed to, the German Government made it a condition of helping Austria with food, that the Austrian authorities must cease to act separately from the German. The whole task of collection thenceforth fell on the Germans, and by this means they at least succeeded in securing the supplies of meat and horses which were indispensable to them during the summer of 1918.

As to the supplies to be drawn from farther east, the German commanders came immediately into conflict with their allies the Turks. The last thing that the Germans wished was to place the production and distribution of Caspian oil at the mercy of Turkish business methods, and the Turks had therefore been given by the peace terms only the Black Sea port Batum, through which part of the oil came by rail from

⁴ *Ursachen des Zusammenbruchs*, p. 164

Baku on the Caspian. The alternative terminus, Novorossisk, was controlled by the Germans. But in the new Russian republic of Azerbaijan, adjoining Baku, there was a strong element of Mohammedanism, and the Turks were naturally affected by this as well as attracted by the prospect of obtaining the actual oilfields on the Caspian. They accordingly entered into negotiations with the three local republics—Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—thereby deeply annoying the German leaders.



Enver's task (writes Ludendorff) was to fight England in the first place on the Palestine front, as I pointed out to him repeatedly in clearly worded telegrams. And now there was an opportunity of striking at the English in North Persia . . . it would have been a real service to have raised the inhabitants of Azerbaijan against them.

Consequently, when the Christian Georgians appealed to the German Government for assistance in their dealings with the Turks, it supported them so far as to ensure the recognition of Georgia as an independent state. This, however, did not prevent the Turks from endeavouring to secure the Caspian oil. They seized the stores at Batum, and marched with a division on Baku. But so dilatory were their proceedings that in August the British mission, sent under Major-General Dunsterville⁵ to reorganise resistance to German penetration of Asia, managed, with temporary success, to reinforce the defence of Baku, although the town was then in the hands of a revolutionary "Social Democratic" dictatorship.⁶ Germany was now short of oil reserves for its air force and motor

⁵ Major-Gen. L. C. Dunsterville, C.B., C.S.I. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of Somerset, Eng.; b. Lausanne, Switzerland, 9 Nov., 1865.

⁶ The Australian and New Zealand forces were largely represented in General Dunsterville's forces—indeed more largely, in proportion to their size, than any other part of the Empire. An outline of their rôle in its activities is given in *Appendix No. 5*.

transport, the limits of the Roumanian wells having been reached. Ludendorff was looking urgently for the supply from the Caspian, and he despatched German troops to assist in striking at the British there. Before they arrived, however, the Turks had begun to attack; and, after the spiritless Armenian levies had thrice left their few British comrades—supported only by a handful of loyal Cossacks—to face the whole offensive, Dunsterville's force had to evacuate Baku, and the Turks, under Enver Pasha's brother, Nuri, occupied it a few hours later. But Germany's prospect of securing Asiatic supplies was hardly improved by the occupation.

Nor did the German fighting forces receive from these fresh sources the new blood which had been hoped for. The attempt to raise from Ukrainian prisoners in German hands two divisions for service in their own country entirely failed, the troops proving disappointingly unenthusiastic in the cause of their "deliverers." In contrast, on the side of the Entente, the Czecho-Slovak prisoners, formerly captured by the Russians, had been formed by their national leaders⁷ into a fighting force which refused to cease fighting, but retired across Siberia, seizing the trans-Siberian railway, and thus preventing the return of many Austrian and some German prisoners to their own country. How was it, the German military leaders asked themselves, that these generous enthusiasms did not operate in favour of the cause for which they themselves stood?⁸ Even the German prisoners, who gradually returned from Russia, proved by no means eager for transference to the Western Front.

Nor, although heavy fighting had practically ceased in all the outer theatres except Palestine, could the German leaders obtain from their allies, Austria, Bulgaria, or Turkey, material assistance for an offensive on the Western Front. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, it is true, had, as early as October, asked the Austrian high command for help; but in the course of the negotiations they made their doubts as to the value of Austrian troops so evident—by asking first for labour units, and by

⁷ With the consent of the Russian Government.

⁸ "I had hoped," says Ludendorff, "that just as the Entente had derived some benefit from its prisoners, we should at least obtain some assistance from the sons of the land we had liberated from Bolshevik dominion." (*My War Memories*, Vol. II, p. 566.) See also the statement of Hindenburg quoted in Vol. IV. of this series, p. 2.

suggesting that Austrian troops should be sent east so as to free German divisions for the west—that the negotiations did not prosper. The Austrian leaders frankly desired to see Austrian troops given a rôle in the actual offensive, or, even if they were merely entrusted with a quiet sector, at least employed as a distinct Austrian army. In spite of the objections afterwards made by the Bourbon Empress, Zita, of Austria, whose influence was strong enough to affect the attitude of her husband, Hindenburg and Ludendorff could probably have secured the assistance of Austrian fighting troops if they had been willing to accept it in the form of a separate army. So slight, however, was the estimation in which they held it, that Ludendorff showed little concern at his failure to secure it. Austrian forces eventually helped to fill the gaps left by German withdrawals from the Eastern and Italian fronts.⁹ They also contributed some heavy batteries, but, since little ammunition was sent, the value of these was slight.

The Bulgarians were discontented. Part of their war aims had already been secured in the peace negotiations with Roumania, and other demands were meeting with opposition from the Germans. Moreover the Bulgarians objected to the withdrawal of German troops from the Macedonian front, and, if asked to send their own troops to France, they would possibly have refused. Ludendorff was in favour of bringing to the west the XV Turkish Army Corps, which for nearly eighteen months had been fighting beside the Germans in Galicia. In view of the weakness of the Turks, however, the German Government returned these troops to Turkey, where Enver Pasha at once directed them towards the coveted oilfields. It was therefore only to the German forces that Ludendorff could look for reinforcement in the west. Using them alone, he would have, by March, only 192 divisions on the Western Front against some 175 divisions of his enemy.¹⁰ For a decisive campaign the margin was dangerously small.

⁹ The Austrian divisions were much below strength until reinforced by a large number of prisoners returned from Russia.

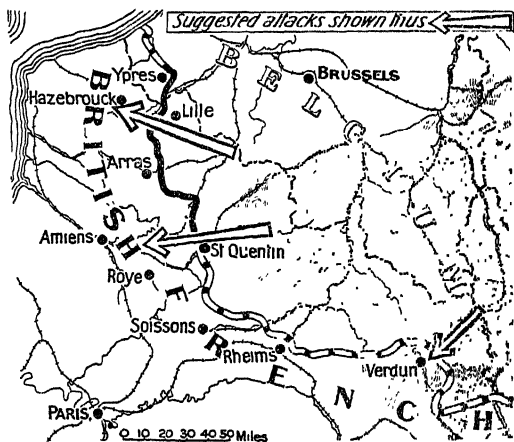
¹⁰ The increase in the German Army on the Western Front amounted, by March 21st, to 42 divisions; 53 were left in the "east and south-east," and one each in the Balkans, Turkey, and Germany. There were also 3 brigades on the Western Front and 13 in the east and south-east. (Gen. von Kuhl, in *Ursachen des Zusammenbruchs*, p. 143.)

But the problem which faced the German military commanders at the close of 1917 was not whether they should attack or remain on the defensive; it was whether they should attack or make peace. The war could not now be won, as had been hoped in 1917, by the submarine campaign alone; and if they remained passive on the Western Front, with the American army gradually arriving in France, they were merely waiting for the day on which the accumulated forces of the Entente would sweep through Germany. Such being the prospect, what likelihood was there that the Bulgarian people, already discontented and even leaning towards the Entente, the Austrians, almost desperately short of food and already simmering with the spirit of revolt, or even the German people, for all its high courage, would submit to undergo increasing privation and anxiety for another year with the certainty of overwhelming defeat and invasion facing them at the end of that time? What would have been the action even of a German army, open during the months of waiting to increasing propaganda from the Entente and dissolving influences from the homeland? Such a policy could only lead to complete triumph for the other side, and military disaster with all its accompaniments for the German army and people. The putting of Italy out of the war, which a year earlier would have freed large forces for the Western Front, could not now be achieved, if at all, in time to affect the issue; and similar success in Macedonia would merely release large forces of the Entente at present uselessly tied down there. If a defensive policy was the only alternative to making peace, the prudent course would be to negotiate at once for the best terms obtainable, which, however severe, would certainly be better than complete surrender.

It is arguable, and indeed probable, that, for the welfare of the German people, this would actually have been the best course to adopt; but no German leader could at that time have adopted it. Setting aside the certainty that such a step must have precipitated revolution and the displacement of the rulers who advocated it, the German people was at that time hardly more prepared than its rulers to accept the best terms which the Entente was likely to offer. If Russia had still

stood firmly against them, the German people might conceivably have agreed to the freeing of Belgium, Serbia, and other occupied territories, to some loss of colonies, to the dissection of Austria-Hungary into several independent parts, and even to some territorial concession to France in Alsace-Lorraine; but with Russia defeated, her borderlands occupied and practically annexed, and—except for the gradual arrival of the Americans—the war progressing more favourably for Germany than it had done since its commencement, such agreement was out of the question. The Allies' terms were, as Ludendorff says, "so severe that only a defeated Germany could have acceded to them."¹¹ Actually, therefore, there was no alternative to a decision to attack.

The plans for such an attack were discussed by Ludendorff at Crown Prince Rupprecht's headquarters at Mons on November 11th with the staffs of the German army groups holding the Western Front. Crown Prince Rupprecht and his chief of staff, General von Kuhl, responsible for the front facing the British, urged the stroke that had already been suggested during the Third Battle of Ypres—a thrust through the quiet, weak Armentières front, held in part by Portuguese troops, towards Hazebrouck and the Channel ports. This should be undertaken either as a counter-stroke, if the British again attacked in the north and committed their reserves



¹¹ Ludendorff learned, apparently in February, through Colonel Haefen (director of propaganda), from a subject of one of the opposing countries, what the terms of the Allies were.

and artillery in that low-lying country,¹² or as a straight-out offensive. Count Schulenberg, chief of staff to the German Crown Prince, responsible for the centre of the front, advocated an offensive against the French, at Verdun, and was supported in this by Lieutenant-Colonel Wetzel, Ludendorff's chief assistant, who pointed out that the French were the most dangerous enemy from a military point of view, but the most likely to be crushed by a single blow. After they had been dealt with, attention might be concentrated upon the English. Lieutenant-Colonel Bauer, also of Ludendorff's staff, favoured an attack at St. Quentin, in order to interfere, at least by artillery fire, with the enemy communications at Amiens.

Ludendorff summed up. The situation in Russia and Italy would allow the Germans to deliver a blow in the west, with forces practically equal to those of their opponents there. The reinforcements—some 35 divisions and 1,000 heavy guns—would suffice for one, but only one, offensive. No diverting attack, therefore, could be undertaken, and in any case a side-stroke at Verdun would lead into difficult country, and, while it was proceeding against the French, he might be struck by another British offensive in Flanders. The British were the driving force of the Entente, and the offensive must therefore be against them. The suggested thrust through Hazebrouck would be effective; but, if the spring was rainy, this operation could not well be undertaken until mid-April, and, in view of the arrival of the Americans, it was an indispensable condition that the attack must be delivered in February or early March.

Ludendorff therefore favoured the suggestion of an attack near St. Quentin; after gaining the line of the Somme from Péronne southwards, the thrust could be directed more north-westwards, with the left flank on the Somme, so as to roll up the British front. An objection from Count Schulenburg, who pointed out that the line of this attack would lie across the devastated region of the "Albrecht" withdrawal and of the old Somme battlefield, did not shake Ludendorff's conviction. General von Kuhl and Lieutenant-Colonel Wetzel followed up their suggestions by memoranda presented in mid-December. Wetzel urged that, if the attack must be

¹² Crown Prince Rupprecht was, at this time, correct in believing that Haig intended to attack there in the spring.

against the British, it should at least be a double one—first, a diversion at St. Quentin to draw in thither the British reserves, and then the main stroke through Hazebrouck; the obstacles in the west, he contended, were too great to be penetrated at a single blow. But Ludendorff held to his own view. Preparations for the Hazebrouck offensive, and for others, should be made at the same time as those for the main stroke; they would serve to screen the true direction of the coming attack, and might be made use of for subsequent thrusts if the first was held up. No decision was made at the moment, the Russian situation being still vague. But Ludendorff obviously favoured an effort to break through in a single stroke near St. Quentin.

By the 7th of January, 1918, the Kaiser had formally approved of this plan.¹³ Although the offensive could not be launched until peace had been made on the Eastern Front, the preparations were immediately begun. The movement of troops from east to west proceeded continuously, and by the middle of March, excepting four divisions delayed in Roumania, the whole of the forces summoned for the offensive had been concentrated, as planned, on the Western Front. Each division on moving from the east had left behind there all men over 35 years of age, as well as any disaffected elements—such as Alsace-Lorrainers—and had been filled up with hardened men withdrawn from the weak divisions remaining in the east.¹⁴ On arrival in the west many of these divisions relieved others, selected for their fighting value, and these underwent intensive training in the methods now laid down by the German staff for attack.

For the coming operation Ludendorff in a great measure abandoned the rigid methods which had so far been evolved on the Western Front. These had nowhere led to a breakthrough, although they constantly resulted in the penetration of the strongest defence-lines. For a real breach there was necessary, first, surprise, to prevent the enemy from preparing a reception for the attack, and concentrating a strong local

¹³ Apparently, however, the army commanders were not informed until Jan. 27; the order was issued on Jan. 26. See Crown Prince Rupprecht, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 322, Vol. III, p. 265.

¹⁴ These were then reinforced with Alsace-Lorrainers and drafts of young troops.

reserve; and, second, some method of advance that would not come almost automatically to an early stop through resistance on the flanks, and through the rapid exhaustion of the advancing troops. To meet these needs a new method of attack was worked out, and a description of it was circulated through the army in a pamphlet, *The Offensive Battle in Position Warfare*, which was to form the basis of intensive training during the winter just as Ludendorff's *Defensive Battle* had done in the previous year.¹⁵ Surprise was to be achieved by commencing the bombardment without registration or ranging, so that no shot should be fired before-hand to betray the concentration of artillery—a method already tried by the British at Cambrai¹⁶ and responsible, more, even, than the employment of tanks, for the surprise effected there. The masses of infantry for the assault would be kept well back until a day or two before the operation, and then would be brought up entirely by night, spending the last twenty-four hours in concealed positions at the front. Tanks were not used, except experimentally for "mopping up"; Ludendorff had not recognised their value or ensured their provision. "We had no tanks. They were merely an offensive weapon and our attacks succeeded without them," is his own account. The truth is that he had asked for them in October 1916, but had allowed the technical authorities to waste their time in endeavouring to produce a caterpillar tractor useful for carrying as well as fighting, the German leaders being then preoccupied with the need for motor-transport consequent upon the shortage of horses.¹⁷ The result was that the German Army in March 1918 possessed only 15 tanks of a

¹⁵ See *Vol. IV*, p. 411.

¹⁶ It was Colonel Bruchmuller of the Eighteenth Army who introduced this principle into the German operations. His suggestions were approved for all three armies but were fully adopted only in his own. Apparently (see *My War Memories*, *Vol. II*, p. 578-9) Ludendorff did not realise that the British staff had forestalled him in this innovation. He imagined that the Cambrai attack was preceded by "a short, heavy bombardment." Actually during great offensives the British artillery had frequently dispensed with preliminary "drum-fire," but only on that occasion with all artillery preparation.

¹⁷ The British high command, also, at one time, was inclined to think that tanks would be useful chiefly for the traction of material. The provision of fighting tanks was due to the enthusiasm of certain specialists in the service, and to the initiative of Colonel E. D. Swinton, Winston Churchill, and other intelligent advocates outside the department which should have been responsible.

cumbrous German model,¹⁸ untried in action, and a small number of captured English tanks, and only one section of these, near St. Quentin, was employed in the offensive.

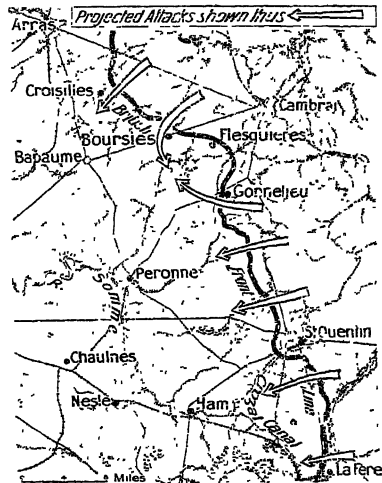
To ensure that the enemy's line would be penetrated and that the attack would keep moving, a wide departure was made from the infantry tactics hitherto practised. It is true that the opposing infantry and artillery were to be suppressed by a five hours' bombardment, largely of gas-shell, concentrated at one stage chiefly upon the artillery, and at another on the infantry; and that the lines of infantry, which would then advance, were to be covered by a barrage creeping at the rate of 100 metres in 6 minutes; and that this barrage, like that of the British at Third Ypres, would adhere rigidly to programme, whether the infantry could keep up with it or not.¹⁹ But the infantry was not to allow itself to be stopped by the holding up of other German troops on its flank. Wherever it penetrated it was to go on, fed from the rear and pushing out mushroom-wise to right and left, so as to envelop from the rear the enemy posts that were holding up the flanking troops. Moreover the divisions that launched the first assault must keep it going; they must not expect, as was now customary, to be relieved by a reserve division on the second or third day. As the advance progressed and the shorter-range artillery dropped out of action, the barrage would become thinner and eventually cease, but the batteries accompanying the infantry must come into action and others must be brought forward to fire on any obstacles. For economy of life, the fighting line would be kept thinner than in the early battles of the war, but would be constantly fed from behind. "We must not," writes Ludendorff, "copy the enemy's massed tactics, which offer advantages only in the case of untrained troops."

The artillery available would permit an attack on a front of 50 kilometres (31 miles), allowing some 100 guns to the

¹⁸ See *Vol. XII, plate 467*. The German authorities had undertaken the construction of 100 machines, but 80 of these were carriers. Steps were taken early in 1918 to build light tanks, and also to hasten construction by copying the English model, but they were too late.

¹⁹ "In spite of hard thinking and experiments," says Ludendorff, "it had been impossible to discover any means of controlling the barrage." The Germans, however, had long employed a flare signal for "lengthen barrage," used when their artillery was hitting its own troops. During the winter of 1917-18 the British adopted a flare signal for the same purpose.

kilometre, or one gun to 11 yards. The projected density of the guns was thus less than that of the British guns at Third Ypres (one to 6 yards); but the total number, over 5,000,²⁰ would be much larger than that of any previous concentration, and the bombardment at short ranges would be greatly intensified by the trench-mortars, of which the light and medium batteries were to move with the infantry. Ludendorff increased the front of his offensive by making it discontinuous: the face of the new British salient at Flesquières, opposite Cambrai, on the right centre of the front of the offensive, was not to be attacked. The Seventeenth German Army would strike north-west of it, between Croisilles and Boursies, and the Second and Eighteenth Armies south of it, from Gonnelleu to La Fère; the salient itself would be pinched out by these attacks. By such means the offensive front was extended to 70 kilometres (44 miles). The effort would be launched by between 40 and 50 divisions, and would thus be the greatest in the war.²¹ In order to keep its control in his own hands, instead of leaving the whole operation under the Crown Prince Rupprecht, commanding the northern group of German armies, Ludendorff placed the southernmost army (the Eighteenth, von Hutier) under the German Crown Prince, commanding the central group. The operation was given the code name "Michael."

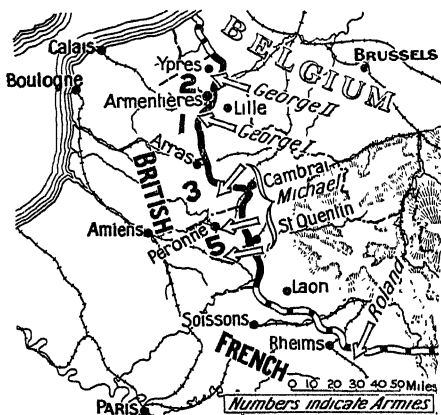


²⁰ Actually the Germans employed 6,473 guns and howitzers. The density of the British artillery on the Somme, 1 July, 1916, was a gun to 15½ yards; at Arras (9 April, 1917), a gun at 9 yards; at Messines, a gun to 7 yards.

²¹ Actually it was launched by 32 divisions in line, with 25 in reserve—57 in all. The original plan of the Allies' Somme offensive (1916) was for an attack on a 45-mile front by some 60 divisions; but in the actual offensive about 30 divisions (line and reserve) were employed on a 23-mile front. At Arras the British attacked with 21 divisions on a 14½ mile front; at Third Ypres with 35 divisions on a front of 15 miles. In each case these figures include the reserves.

The order to prepare the offensive was given on January 26th. "Michael" was to be delivered about March 20th, and was to be followed a few days later by "Archangel" and "Mars" against its southern and northern hinges, south of the Oise and at Arras respectively. The attack favoured by Crown Prince Rupprecht and von Kuhl, between Armentières and Lens towards Hazebrouck (code name, "George I"), and an attack north of Armentières at Messines and Kemmel (code name, "George II"), were to be prepared for possible delivery at the beginning of April. Preliminary arrangements were also to be made for "Roland," near Rheims, and for other attacks on the French front. "Roland" would be delivered if "Michael" was held up.

It was the preparations for "George" and "Roland," detected, as they were intended to be, by the opposing airmen, that gave the French and British commands the impression that those sectors as well as that of St. Quentin-Arras, were threatened, and that the German attack would be divided instead of concentrated. Although Ludendorff's attempt to conceal the preparations for his main attack entirely failed, the mere arrangements for the other offensives served as diverting demonstrations, which, without the expenditure of one man in useless infantry attacks, achieved their object more effectively than any diverting offensive on the Western Front had ever done. Haig and Pétain were deceived, and sharply surprised; and, as usual, surprise brought important results.²²



²² For an opportunity, recognised as such at the time, of employing similar tactics on the British side, see the account of the ill-fated feint at Fromelles. (*Vol. III. pp. 332, 444*).

CHAPTER V

LUDENDORFF STRIKES

ON March 9th and 10th the shelling of the country immediately behind a considerable part of the British front began noticeably to increase. In the sector of the Australian Corps in Flanders this shelling fell largely in the Douve valley and in the battery areas, which were bombarded with gas. Large Gotha aeroplanes bombed Bailleul, and German long-range guns shelled that town and the dumps and villages behind the lines.¹

Since December, the transfer of German forces from Russia, and the probability of a vast German offensive in the spring, had been known to the subordinate commanders and to the troops. Haig, and indeed most officers, realised only too well the depressing effect of constant expectation of attack, and by Haig's instructions² commanders encouraged their troops to look upon the coming offensive as the hoped for opportunity for inflicting great losses upon the enemy with a view to attacking him later and finishing the war. This was indeed Haig's own attitude throughout. Nevertheless for the troops the expectation involved some strain, discernible even among the Australians, confident as they were; during the early part of the new year the atmosphere had been (as an Australian diarist notes)

very quiet, but *very* electric. Because of the quietness everyone expects an attack . . . Our men don't think the Germans can get through, but they expect a bad time.

The knowledge that division after division of Germans was arriving from the Eastern Front, and that vast numbers of former prisoners must be daily rejoining the enemy, necessarily caused some uneasiness. Nevertheless the morale was strong. It is true that here or there during the Passchendaele offensive some embittered man, or one of weaker fibre, may have said "I'm ready to let Fritz keep what he has got, and to shake hands with him." But when the enemy, during his negotiations with Russia, had offered to confer with the Entente over peace terms, the general feeling in the Australian force

¹ It was not known at the time that two of these guns were on floats in the River Lys, and were nightly towed into position. They were manned by sailors.

² Issued on Dec. 14.

was against any weakening.³ By February it was certain that no main attack would come against Messines, but there were observed signs that it might be the scene of a subsidiary offensive. An attack at Hollebeke or "Ravine Wood," south of Ypres, also seemed probable,

but not even the officers responsible for that part of the line (says a diarist) expect any real offensive there—they cannot believe, from the signs, that the German will attack there. Some of them rather wish he would.⁴

The desire to ascertain the German intentions led to some raiding by the Australians, but generally, as the following particulars show, it was the attempts by the Germans that still supplied the necessary identifications.

AUSTRALIAN OPERATIONS.

March 10. A patrol of the 1st Battalion raided a German post at "Bulgar Road," but found it empty.

March 11. The 5th Division, after bombardment, raided two German posts—

- (a) South of The Windmill. The garrison tried to escape, but 3 men of the 225th R.I.R. were captured; 18 arc said to have been killed by the raiders (57th Battalion).

³ The diary quoted above states on Dec. 29: "Amongst the two battalions which I visited today, 35th and 34th, most of the officers seem to be sceptical of these terms (the German offer) or against them—a few think they will be discussed. . . . In the last battle one of them (the two battalions) lost all the officers who went over the top, and the other all except one—about half killed and half wounded. So it is a pretty strong conviction, that something in these terms is wrong, that would keep them stubbornly against agreeing to talk them over with a view to a compromise."

⁴ Among the orders issued at this time was one which quickly became famous. Lieutenant F. P. Bethune (before enlistment a Tasmanian clergyman, the same who, in the transport *Transylvania*, delivered the sermon mentioned in *Vol. III, p. 70*), then commanding No. 1 section of the 3rd Machine Gun Company in the "Spoil Bank" sector, protested to his commanding officer against an order to Bethune's comrade, Lieutenant J. C. Hoge (Brisbane), and Hoge's section to occupy a position which Bethune believed to be a useless death-trap. As he could not convince his superior, he submitted that, having made the protest, he himself with No. 1 section should be permitted to hold the place. This being agreed to, Bethune told his section what he thought of the place and called for volunteers. The whole section volunteered, but on their way up they were ordered to a better position "to be held at all costs." Bethune accordingly issued the following order to each of his men.

"Special Orders to No. 1 Section, 13/3/18.

- "1. This position will be held, and the section will remain here until relieved.
- "2. The enemy cannot be allowed to interfere with this programme.
- "3. If the section cannot remain here alive, it will remain here dead, but in any case it will remain here.
- "4. Should any man, through shell shock or other cause, attempt to surrender, he will remain here dead.
- "5. Should all guns be blown out, the section will use Mills grenades, and other novelties.
- "6. Finally, the position, as stated, will be held.

F. P. Bethune, Lt.

O/C No. 1 Section."

The post was visited that day by Lieut.-Colonel Milligan of the divisional staff, and Bethune's order thus reached higher altitudes and passed into history; he and his chery section survived their eighteen days' tenure of this post, encountering nothing worse than gas shelling. Bethune is now farming in Tasmania.

(b) North of the Blauwepoortbeek. The raiders (59th Battalion) captured 3 men of 163rd I.R. (14th Res. Div.).

March 14. The 5th Division again raided at two points:

(a) "Rifle" and "July" Farms, where 4 men of the 163rd I.R. were captured by the 60th Battalion.

(b) at "Datum House" near "Kiwi Farm." The 58th Battalion captured 2 men (226th R.I.R.) and reported 10 others killed.

March 18. A patrol of the 3rd Brigade found "Moat Farm" (south of "Belgian Wood") strongly held.

GERMAN OPERATIONS.

March 10. A German officer with two men, reconnoitring east of Deconinck Farm, stumbled upon a post of the 58th Battalion. The post fired, mortally wounding the officer and capturing him and one of his men (163rd I.R.).

March 13. Three Germans on patrol approached a post of the 24th Battalion at Warneton. The post killed one man (228th R.I.R.) and in retrieving his body shot another and captured the third.

At 10 p.m. a German raiding party, consisting of 3 officers and 120 men of the 70th I.R. (31st Division), were brought up from a rest area in order to raid the advanced posts of the 1st Australian Division south of the Ypres-Comines canal, near Hollebeke. They attacked at 12, and after driving back a 10th Battalion patrol, entered three posts but secured no prisoner. The 12th Battalion in the posts drove them off. The leader of the German party was killed, and 12 prisoners were taken. The prisoners said that they were raiding in the sector of the 76th I.R. (8th Division), whose commander had pressed for the operation.

March 15. A German patrol met one from the 19th Battalion near Moat Farm (opposite Deulemont). Lieut. A. Mainstone,⁵ who was killed, was missing, and eight of his men were hit.

March 19. Opposite Frélinghien a German patrol came upon a post of the 17th Battalion. The post fired, and a wounded man of the 102nd I.R. was afterwards captured.

On March 19th, for the purpose of harassing the enemy, 700 cylinders containing gas were fired from the 5th Division's front by a special company of the Royal Engineers. The history of the 226th R.I.R. says that 21 of its men were gassed, 9 fatally.

On March 21st, at 3.45 a.m., the 18th Battalion raided near Pont Rouge, but found no Germans in the position attacked. At 5.25 a.m. the general tension, which the German shelling had since about March 9th created on the Second Army's front, culminated in five minutes' "drum-fire," intended to "wake up the front." Under cover of this, raiding parties from most of the German regiments on the front attempted to enter the British lines. On the Australian front the following engagements occurred:

⁵ Lieut. A. Mainstone, M.M.; 19th Bn. Power house employee; of Redfern, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 22 March, 1891. Killed in action, 15 March, 1918.

Near "Grass Farm" a party of German raiders approached a post of the 5th Division. A patrol of the 31st Battalion lying in No-Man's Land saw them crossing towards the Australian lines. When they were 20 yards away the patrol opened fire and drove them back.

Near "Spider House" (east of Oostverne) two parties of Germans, each 30-40 strong, tried to raid a post of the 55th Battalion (5th Division). One of the German parties was caught by Lewis gun and rifle fire on the wire-entanglement; it was reported that 12 were killed, and a wounded man of the 162nd I.R. (17th Reserve Division) was captured. The other party was dispersed by rifle-fire from a neighbouring post before it reached the wire.

South of Hollebeke a party with a machine-gun approached the posts of the 53rd Battalion (5th Division) and opened fire, but did not attack. It was assumed that this was a "dummy" raid.

Near the canal a patrol of the 153rd I.R. (8th Division) was sent out to follow up the bombardment. Four men of the II/153 I.R. were captured by the 11th Battalion (1st Division).

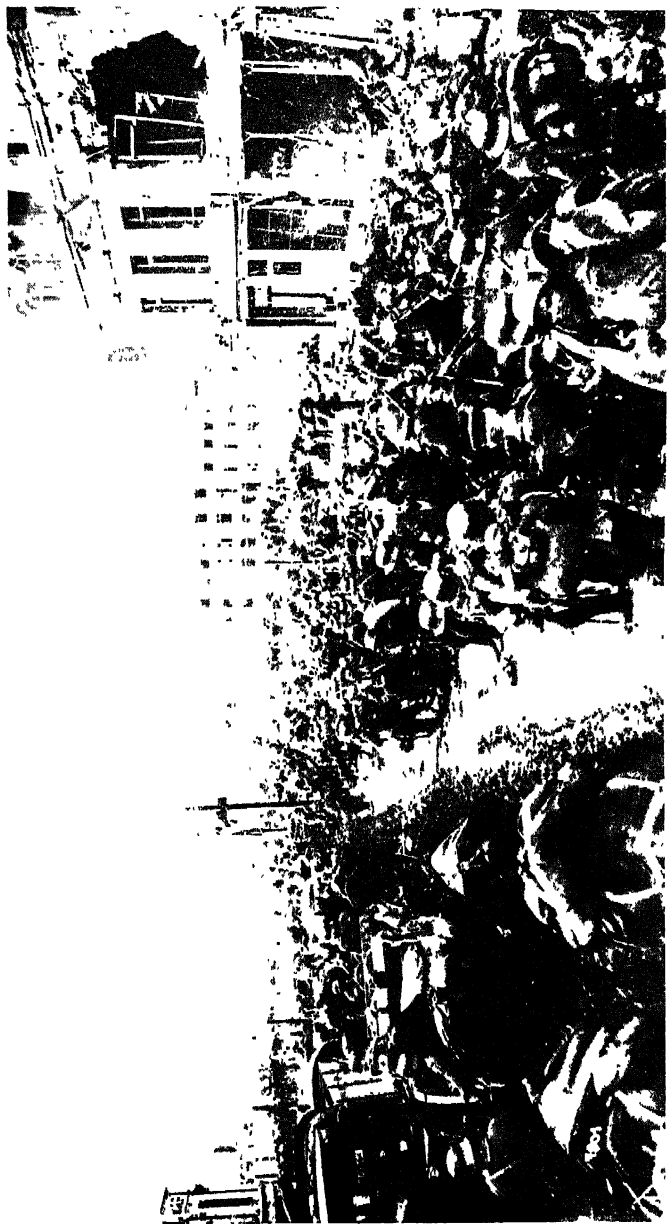
At "Top House" (east of Belgian Wood) the 72nd I.R. (8th Division) raided the 1st Australian Division. That division reported that the Germans attacked feebly and retired as soon as the Lewis guns opened. Nevertheless the enemy captured 4 men of the 2nd Battalion.

During this day the rear villages were sharply bombarded, but the interest of the troops still centred on their sporting competitions. At Neuve Eglise, despite the bursts of shelling, the 13th Battalion's tug-of-war team was engaged in a final practice for the battalion's athletic sports when a shell crashed, and men running to the spot found the whole team and its trainer⁶ killed or wounded.

At 9.59 a.m. news arrived at Australian Corps Headquarters—where Major-General White, chief of the general staff, was acting in charge, General Birdwood being on leave in England—that at 4.43 that morning an intense bombardment had fallen along the whole sectors of the Third and Fifth British Armies and upon the French front, but that no attack had yet occurred. At night came further news that an attack had been delivered at about 8 a.m.,⁷ and had reached the front line of the battle-zone at Lagnicourt, Doignies, and certain other places, but was held on the flanks. G.H.Q., it was said, considered the situation satisfactory. Similar *communiqués*

⁶ Lieut. N. J. Browne, M.C.; 13th Bn. Station hand; of Albury, N.S.W.; b. Thurgoona, N.S.W., 1891. Died of wounds, 22 March, 1918. (The shell was a British one, fired from a gun recently captured in Russia—part of the armament which Great Britain had by great effort sent to Russia, as the troops bitterly reflected.)

⁷ Actually, in some parts the preliminary bombardment lasted for five hours, from about 4.40 to 9.35 a.m. The German infantry advanced at different times in different sectors.



9. GERMAN RESERVES MASSED IN ST. QUENTIN, FOR THE GREAT BATTLE, MARCH, 1918

German Official Photo, reproduced by courtesy of the Reichsarchiv.

Just War Memorial Collection No. A3118.

to face p. 113.



10. THE MAIN STREET AT RIBFMONT BARRICADED AGAINST THE
GERMAN INVASION

Similar barricades were made as a precaution by the British in most villages immediately ahead of the enemy's advance. The old man was a veteran of the 1870-1 war, who refused to leave his home

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo. No F1047.
Taken on 29th March, 1918*

To face p. 113.

were published in England. They were so restrained that the general public realised only with difficulty that the great battle of the war had begun.

But every soldier on the Western Front knew. And in Flanders, although long-range guns continued to bombard Bailleul, Dranoutre, Neuve Eglise, and other centres of traffic behind the lines, and for several days a local attack was expected, the chief attention of the troops, Allied and enemy, was focussed upon the momentous events taking place east of Amiens, particularly in the well remembered country east of Bapaume, Péronne, and the old Somme battlefield.

The first feelings of many British observers not on the actual battle-front were similar to those of Haig. The diary of an Australian, then in London, says:

My heart and spirits jumped one hundred degrees—so the German was attacking after all—he was really going to do it. The bombardment was on a front of 50 miles! . . . I cannot say how relieved I felt . . . One has been hoping almost beyond hope that Ludendorff and Hindenburg were (as they were) so confident of their strength that they would commit Germany to a great offensive, in order to justify . . . the mailed fist method, . . . by which they and their system stand or fall. One hoped almost beyond hope that they would fling themselves upon our army [*i.e.*, on the Western Front], in order to justify their boasts to their people and [try to] end the war by an offensive this year. And they are doing it. One does not for a moment believe that they will succeed. The attack always loses more men than the defence; they will get 5, 10, perhaps 15 miles. They may very likely take Bapaume. But at the end of it their army will be brought up against an unbroken wall—a wall pushed back a few miles, but still barring them; and the German people (and the soldiers) will begin again to cry louder—"To what end? You have killed and wounded and wasted a million of our people, and what have you given us?" That is the best thing that could happen for us. Our men will be hammered—but at least they will lose less in defence than in attack. It is not an easy time for the actual battalions in the line. But it is better than an offensive. It is possible, of course, that a bigger attack will follow against the French; or an attack with tanks. But one cannot help rejoicing that the best has happened.

The news which arrived during the next few days, however, was such that, in spite of the hopeful tone of the *communiqués*, confidence began to give way to anxiety. There appeared in the daily bulletins village-names that were household words with the Australian Corps, scenes of famous fights in 1917 and 1916, far behind the British line recently held. On March 22nd it was stated that the Germans had broken through at Beaumetz, and were trying to pierce the line at

Vaulx-Vraucourt; the Fifth Army was falling back on the Somme south of Péronne. The enemy's progress seemed surprisingly rapid. The Australian divisions, particularly the two—3rd and 4th—which were out of the line resting, began to strain on the leash which held them idle in the north. "Somehow or other," says the diary of an Australian officer,⁸ "we all had the feeling that, if we could only get down there, it would be all right. Each man was confident that a call upon his division to hurry south could only be a matter of days, possibly of hours." Many of the leaders, including Birdwood, Monash, Glasgow, and Rosenthal, who were on leave, began to hurry back. General Birdwood came over by aeroplane.⁹ In particular the 3rd Australian Division, which had never yet fought in the Somme area, was excited by the prospect of going there.

The 3rd Division therefore received a chilling disappointment when, on March 22nd, it was ordered to move towards Ypres, where it was required as army reserve in case the German activity there was followed by a local attack. Next day the 4th Division was ordered south, but only into the First Army area at Busnes, behind the Portuguese Corps.¹⁰ But that day (23rd) Lieutenant-Colonel Jess, chief-of-staff of the 3rd Division, who in his general's absence was arranging its movements to Steenvoorde, happening to call in at Second Army Headquarters while passing, was hailed with excitement. The division was to move south. Jess hurried to Eblinghem, intercepted some trains carrying part of the 10th Brigade, and, to the delight of the troops notwithstanding the fatigue involved, sent the battalions marching towards their new entraining area near St. Omer. Next day, March 24th, when the artillery and transport of both divisions, going by road, were already on the move, the destination of the 4th Division also was altered. It was now to go to Hermaville, north-west of Arras, in the Third Army's area. As the enemy's

⁸ Lieut. K. H. McConnel, 1st Bn. Architectural student; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 5 July, 1896.

⁹ On March 25. The journey by air was a comparatively rare one—something of an adventure—in those days, except for members of the air force. Winston Churchill, when Minister for Munitions, flew over the Channel on a number of occasions.

¹⁰ The 12th (Army) Brigade of Australian Field Artillery also was ordered to this district.

systematic bombardment of the back areas had just broken the railway bridge at Chocques, the division was to be sent by bus; even this destination was afterwards changed, as will be presently told. These rapid changes were to cause the utmost discomfort to the troops, but the reason for them quickly became apparent.

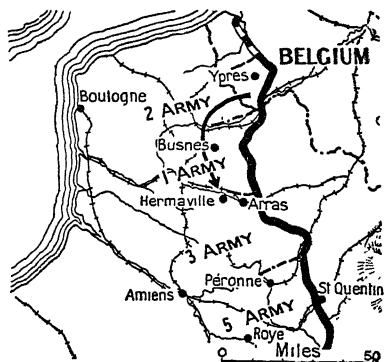
First, it became generally understood that although the Third Army, on the northern half of the front attacked, was resisting strongly, the Fifth had given way. This was

assumed to be the ground for Haig's special order, read to the troops on March 24th, but issued by him the night before:

We are again at a crisis in the War. The enemy has collected on this front every available division and is aiming at the destruction of the British Army. We have already inflicted on the enemy in the course of the last two days very heavy loss, and the French are sending troops as quickly as possible to our support. I feel that everyone in the army, fully realising how much depends on the exertions and steadfastness of each one of us, will do his utmost to prevent the enemy attaining his object.

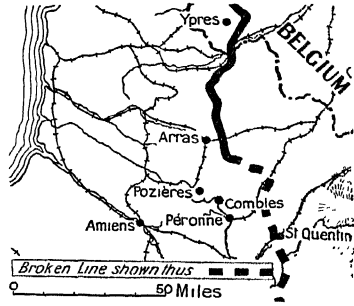
Second, on the evening of the 24th the troops were electrified by the news that the enemy was across the Somme south of Péronne, and next day by word that, north of it, he had reached the old Somme battlefield. Bouchavesnes, Combles, Sailly-Saillisel, familiar ruins, all within five miles of Pozières ridge where the A.I.F. had fought its bloodiest battle, were in his hands. In the mind of every man of the old I Anzac the same question arose: "Will he retake Pozières?" On the 25th came word of fighting in High Wood. High Wood was within rifle-shot of Pozières crest.

To the men of the two divisions, which (though few knew that both were going) were already on the move, the orders came as a direct summons, quite different from any previously made on them, to act decisively for the winning of the war.



The arrow shows the move ordered for the 4th Division.

At Fromelles and Pozières, at Bullecourt, even at Messines and Third Ypres, the troops had been called on for supreme efforts on the assurance of the higher command that these efforts were achieving valuable ends, and afterwards had been half-consoled for the immense cost and slight apparent result by asseverations that those ends had been partly attained. But here was a situation in which it was obvious that every effort must help directly towards beating the Boche. This, at last, was the job



for which they had come oversea. The battalions as they marched towards their entraining or embussing points, with the regimental bands playing "Colonel Bogey," or the men singing the old marching songs, swung along with a new spirit. "Australia is going to count for something, this time." On the morning of the 25th Brigadier-General McNicoll of the 10th Brigade gathered the brigade's officers round him on the road at Campagne in Flanders, and, to quote the history of the 40th Battalion,

with his map before him, he put the position plainly. He told us that the Fifth Army had been driven back, and were retreating everywhere, and that the British front was broken and the British and French armies were in danger of separation; that the German divisions were pushing forward with great rapidity; and he added the surprising information that a long-range gun was shelling Paris. He finished by saying that we would entrain the following morning, and would go straight into action, and that we would have the fight of our lives as the fate of the war now hung in the balance.

CHAPTER VI

HÉBUTERNE

THERE followed one of the most interesting weeks within the experience of the A.I.F., but one concerning which many of the reports since current are more than ordinarily inaccurate. It was noted even by British officers that the "Diggers," with their keenly inquisitive mentality, always knew more of their surroundings than did the general run of soldiers; but in the rapid successive movements in which their divisions, brought down one after another in the stream of reserves, were now involved, it was impossible for troops or staff to gather accurate knowledge of the vast operation. Without this knowledge no sound judgment could be based on many of the incidents witnessed in these crucial weeks. The present narrative will adhere to the principle generally adopted in this history, of disclosing first, as far as possible, only so much as was known at the time to the principal actors in each chapter, and later—in this instance, in *Chapter X*—raising the curtain that then hid many vital circumstances which records, British and German, have since revealed.

The British war correspondents and the press censor, in order to secure earlier and more accurate news of the crisis on the Somme, transferred their headquarters on March 23rd to a hotel in much-bombed Amiens. At Australian Corps Headquarters, despite the fact that the wise old leader of Second Army made special arrangements to provide his troops daily with the most accurate summary obtainable, so bare was the news that on March 24th the two official Australian correspondents also hastened to Press Headquarters, Amiens, for information. The intelligence that they secured when, stamping their feet after the cold drive, they opened the Press Officer's door is recorded in the diary of one of them.

We asked where the Germans were.

"Well, they're past Combles!"

"Past Combles! You mean on the old Somme battlefield!" we exclaimed.

"Yes," he said.

"Not truly! Then do you mean they're past Bapaume!"

"They haven't Bapaume yet," he answered.

We went in to see Lytton¹ (the chief censor)—he was with Cadge² (a press officer). He was clearly greatly troubled.

"Where's the nearest point they have got to?" I asked.

"Delville Wood," he said.

This was a staggerer . . .

"Haven't we any reserves—surely we must have!" I asked.

"No—I don't think there's a division between the Germans and here," Cadge said.

We said our divisions would surely be coming, and the N.Z.'s.

"How can they get here in time?" he asked . . .

About midnight Major Lytton ascertained that the 35th Division "was believed to be" somewhere between Amiens and the Germans, but there was talk of the enemy having put some of his cavalry through.³ The diary continues:

He has actually (the Paris newspapers say) been shelling Paris to-day with a long-range gun, which their 'planes have located at St. Gobain—over 70 miles—120 kilometers, scarcely believable . . . I hope that the Germans don't arrive here and wake us in the morning.

The day has been an exquisite spring day.

Monday, March 25.

Last night lorries were passing up the Boulevard, rumbling along almost all through the night. Several times I went to the window and looked out into the moonlight through the Boulevard trees to see which way these lorries were going. Once the line of traffic stopped in front of our house, and I could hear men talking—"70 miles" . . . "that's what they say" . . . That gun is rather a fortunate thing at the present moment. It gives people something to talk about . . .

With daylight this morning there were troops moving through Amiens, northwards up our Boulevard. They were New Zealanders. I can't say how glad I was to see them . . . They are the solidest, calmest looking troops in France.

That day, March 25th, the same Australian correspondents hurrying back to Flanders, past endless strings of motor lorries returning thither for more troops, came, first, at Third Army Headquarters (Beauquesne), upon General MacLagan, of the 4th Australian Division, who drove up as they were about to leave. By a fourth change of orders his division had just been directed to Basseux, eight miles south-west of Arras. While the correspondents were talking to him there came up a car of the 3rd Australian Division; two staff officers of

¹ Major Hon. Neville Lytton, O.B.E.; Royal Sussex Regt. Artist; of London and Paris; b. Calcutta, 6 Feb., 1879.

² Lieut.-Col. C. R. Cadge, O.B.E. Solicitor; of Loddon, Norfolk, Eng.; b. Loddon, 1 June, 1890.

³ See Vol. XII, plates 447-8.

that division⁴ were at the moment interviewing the administrative staff at army headquarters, and presently came out with the information that the 3rd, 4th, and New Zealand Divisions were all on their way to the X Corps, in G.H.Q. reserve, and would assemble between Arras and Albert; and that the 5th Australian Division also was coming. There was excited talk of their being formed into a corps, together with the Guards and perhaps a Canadian and another British division—such a force for attack as had never yet been seen. The correspondents then drove off. The same diary says—

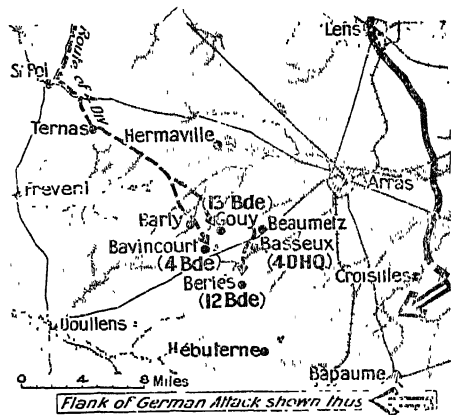
On the road near St. Pol—which has been very much blown about by shells at long range—we began to meet lorry after lorry of Australians coming down—first the 52nd (Battalion), then 51st, 49th . . . then 48th, 46th, 47th, 45th . . . Then the 3rd Divisional Artillery. The men, especially the artillery, looked wonderfully well—the strong type that is needed, clear-eyed, determined, independent boys.

The 4th Division had left Meteren, Merris, and other Flemish villages that morning; kit bags, sports trophies, surplus mess-equipment had been hurriedly stored there. Lewis and machine guns and ammunition were carried by the troops, as they might have to fight soon after arrival. The men were crowded, twenty-five in each lorry, and the constant traffic in fine weather had ground the roads to white powder which wrapped the whole route like a fog, and dusted the waggons and the men as with snow. But dust, jolting, crowding could not bate the spirit of the troops. When, late in the afternoon, the lorries with the leading brigade, the veteran 4th, turned sharply off the main road at St. Pol⁵ into the countryside south-eastwards, it came into an atmosphere of suppressed excitement. This country had been twenty-two miles behind the line, and till now was practically untouched by the war; but now St. Pol lay battered with heavy, long-range shelling, and far ahead, Bapaume way, a pillar of smoke smudging the blue sky showed where some dépôt—probably the great dump at Bapaume—was being burnt as the operations reached it. At Barly the creaking lorries came on the old

⁴ Major Wieck (G.S.O. 2) and Captain Pyke (D.A.A.G.).

⁵ St. Pol. had been shelled this day. At the *estaminet* at which General Brand (4th Brigade) was lunching, the landlady had decided to close her restaurant and depart with her staff; General Brand's meal was to be positively the last served. Lieut.-Colonel Whitham (in charge of the 13th Brigade), arriving at this moment, only managed to secure a meal by substituting himself, by arrangement with Brand, before the latter's order was completed.

people of the village standing in groups outside their cottages, piling mattresses, beds, washstands, and other household goods upon carts, about to abandon their homes. Then occurred a scene which was to be repeated—as the documents constantly record—many times in other villages during this and the next two days. As lorry-load after lorry-road of cheerful men bumped past, each crowd shouting and waving to the old



folk, these paused in their loading. Australian infantry had never been stationed in that region, but before long—spontaneously, as it seemed—they were recognised. The gazing villagers could be heard calling from one house to the other, “Les Australiens.” A few minutes later, as spontaneously, they began unloading their carts, and the furniture was carried indoors again. An old man said to one of the 13th Battalion, whose lorries halted there for a while, “Pas necessaire maintenant—vous les tiendrez.”⁶ “We’ll have to see the old bloke isn’t disappointed,” said the digger, when the remark was translated to him.

The orders now issued showed, that, at the moment, whatever hopes G.H.Q. might have concerning the use of its reserve corps (the X), into which these troops came, neither G.H.Q. nor Third Army, in whose area they were, knew at the moment where or how they would actually be used. The troops were to be kept close to their billets, so that they could be immediately assembled. Very little news could be obtained even by their staff, and MacLagan decided to take the precaution of picketing the roads and selecting an outpost position on which the Germans could be met if they came through. The 12th Brigade, whose billeting villages were nearest to

⁶ “It’s not necessary now—you’ll hold them.”

the front, was therefore ordered to picket all roads leading from that direction into the divisional area, and to reconnoitre a long ridge close in advance of its billets, and be ready to occupy this at a moment's notice.

But while the 4th and 13th Brigades, farther from the front, arrived early and were in their billets by 9 p.m., the 12th had been held up at Strazeele by strings of artillery moving towards the front across its route, and did not arrive from the north until nearly midnight after a bitterly cold drive. Ahead guns were firing and flares rising. Owing to the successive changes in its destination, the billeting parties had not yet come up. The battalions were dumped at Beaumetz; "the pig-headed officer in charge of the 'buses could not," says the 48th Battalion's diary in a rare burst of indignation, "see the necessity of going on" to the actual billets of the troops, a few miles farther;⁷ the infantry therefore had to assemble and march thither, and as its own waggons were not present⁸ and the divisional staff had made no arrangements for carrying the Lewis guns and ammunition, the battalions had to carry these. For an hour and a half the troops marched heavily laden—but not sorry to get warm—and it was thus 2 a.m. before they settled into billets. While they had been forming up at Beaumetz, a few heavy shells fell not far away, and the billeting parties on arrival spread the report that the enemy was only four and a half miles away,⁹ and advancing. Pickets had to be sent out to guard roads leading into the division's area, and officers and N.C.O's had to reconnoitre their proper sectors on the ridge which was to be held in an emergency. Till day-break the 48th Battalion waited ready for instant action.

The 12th Brigade had thus received very little rest, but by noon on the 26th—a clear, sunny day—the battalions of the 4th and 13th had well rested, and were waiting about their billets with orders to be ready to move at half-an-hour's notice, when there came the expected alarm.

⁷ The lorries of the 13th Brigade had taken its battalions right to their billets, a great assistance.

⁸ The regimental transport had to march from Flanders and was delayed by the alteration of route.

⁹ This was an exaggeration, but the scattered shelling warned the whole country of the enemy's approach. At Bavincourt a priest, with whom 14th Battalion Headquarters were billeted, opened to them his stock of wine, as his cellar might soon be destroyed.

We had just finished [lunch] says the diary of Lieutenant Mitchell,¹⁰ 48th Battalion, when an order came in: "Company commanders wanted at the double." In seven minutes the captain returned. He shouted to the company to turn out. As we were buckling on our equipments, the skipper grabbed a map and said, "German armoured cars are through to here, four kilos. away. Turn out the men in fighting order."

With a sensation of being about to die in the last ditch we got the men out in an incredibly short space of time. Stood to. Part of our battalion moved to their trench positions. The 47th marched out. [Colonel] Imlay commandeered a lorry and sent it down the road to be smashed up to block the road. We waited lined up. The strained feeling vanished, and we all licked our lips in anticipation.

A message had arrived¹¹ from Third Army that the Germans had broken through with armoured cars at Hébuterne, on the near edge of the old Somme battlefield. The 4th Division was to "do your utmost to block the roads" and intercept the cars. In the 13th Brigade, farthest from the front, all units stood to arms at their alarm posts. In the 12th nearest the enemy, the 47th and 48th Battalions each sent a company to man the allotted ridge, an excellent position already provided with old trenches, and patrols were despatched along the roads. The 4th Brigade—in huts and farmhouses at Saulty, Laherlière, Bavincourt, and Lacauchie—was ordered to move out and form a line in front of Souastre and Bienvillers, high on the same ridge farther south, three and a half miles north-west of Hébuterne. The artillery of the 4th Division, which had been in the line in Flanders on March 23rd, but by forced marches had now reached its division, was ordered to cover the troops.

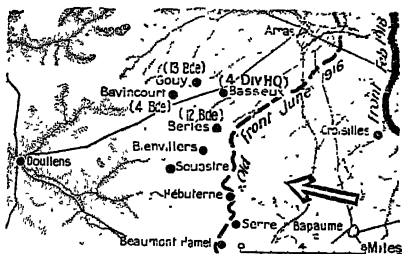
Meanwhile all the local main roads had suddenly become alive with scenes which have gone down in some Australian records as an episode in the "Fifth" Army's retreat. Lieutenant-Colonel Marks, commander of the 13th Battalion, noted:

Evidences of rout were not wanting, and along the road to Humbercamp we passed an endless stream of retreating transport and refugees. At times we passed staff officers retreating in great haste, and some of these warned us that the enemy were into Souastre with armoured cars.

¹⁰ Capt. G. D. Mitchell, M.C., D.C.M.; 48th Bn. Clerk; of Thebarton, S. Aust.; b. Caltowie, S. Aust., 30 Aug., 1894.

¹¹ The news actually arrived about noon, but the time given in several diaries varies greatly. Some of the regimental diaries have obviously been written up afterwards from private diaries.

The battalions of the 4th Brigade, moving at 12.45 to take position in front of Souastre and Bienvillers, emerged upon roads crowded by a retreating stream of villagers and military transport. The closeness of the enemy was evident in the civilians' manner. One old man carried his wife on his back, other villagers carted their aged sick



in wheelbarrows. As everywhere, they welcomed the swinging Australians. Half-eaten meals on the cottage tables showed how hurriedly they had left. The forces of British troops retreating were completely intermingled with one another, the men dead-tired, disheartened, and imbued with one intent—to get to some place where they could sleep. All said that “Jerry” was close behind them, with tanks. Of all within sight, the Australians were the only troops moving to the front. At one stage nine staff officers, crowded in a motor car, sped past to the rear. Doubtless they were merely hastening to establish a headquarters farther back, and carrying out the reorganisation of the troops, but in those circumstances speed gave the appearance of panic, and they had to run the gauntlet of an obviously stinging commentary from the “diggers.”

So definite were the statements as to tanks that Harry Murray, the hero of Mouquet Farm, Stormy Trench, and Bullecourt, now a lieutenant-colonel commanding the 4th Machine Gun Battalion,¹² “grabbed,” as he himself said afterwards, a platoon of his old battalion, the 13th, and hurried on ahead along the road to Souastre, from which these monsters were reported to be coming. A staff officer with the retiring troops could only tell him that the Germans were “coming on in numbers,” but he pushed on and presently, at the end of a clear stretch of road, saw a red motor car

¹² Lieut.-Colonel H. W. Murray, V.C., D.S.O., D.C.M., who had landed at Anzac as a private, 16th Battalion. In August 1915 he was given a commission in the 13th Battalion.

approaching, followed by some peculiar machinery manned by eight men in grey. Murray thought, "If these are the tanks, then Providence has delivered them into our hands!" and, stationing his men in the ditches on either side of the road, he ordered them to let fly at the crews as the enemy passed. A minute later he had to shout to his men not to fire. The red car was a motor tractor, which was dragging along a number of disc-ploughs of the French Agricultural Corps. The crews were eight men of that corps, who had been engaged in tilling the fields about Bapaume, and who were proudly bringing out their machinery.

No other sign of tanks was seen, and it afterwards became known that the alarm had been a false one. The Third Army staff attributed this and several other scares, that had occurred during the tense days of the retreat, to the work of supposed enemy spies. On March 24th it had warned all troops:

Man dressed as brigadier-general has at least on two occasions given orders to guns or troops to clear out as soon as possible when there was no reason for so doing. Probably enemy spy.

Now again units were warned that the Germans were sending into villages men dressed as British officers or civilians, who were attempting to create panic. The 3rd Australian Division on the afternoon of the 26th ordered its troops

not to take orders from anyone they did not know, no matter what rank. Persons spreading alarmist reports, such as the one about armoured cars, are to be arrested at once.

On the other hand in the A.I.F., and in Australia, this particular alarm has ever since been supposed to have been caused by the sight of the French disc-ploughs. But it seems certain that neither explanation is correct; any "staff officers" who spread this alarm were not German, nor did it originate with a glimpse of agricultural machinery, although when seen these tractors were doubtless assumed to be the "armoured cars," and so the panic spread further. But the truth as to its origin appears now to be definite, and, together with much else that was then unknown, is recorded later in these pages.¹³

So, while, some miles to the north, troops of the 12th Brigade—to quote the diary of the 48th Battalion—"waited (in their emergency position) anxiously, fully expecting action within an hour," the 4th Brigade, reaching Bienvillers and

¹³ See Chapter X, pp. 266-8.



II DESERTED AMIENS

The circus in the Boulevard Seine, Amiens, during the German offensive, 1918

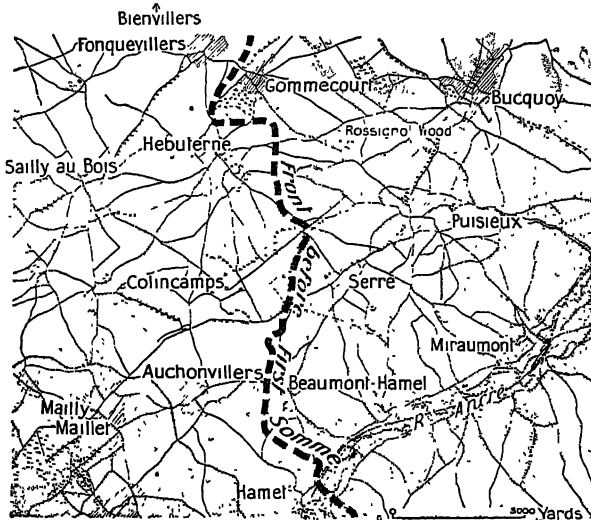
*Augst. War Memorial Official Photo No. E.4815.
Taken on 29th April, 1918.*



12 4TH BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS NEAR FONQUEVILLERS

Headquarters was beneath the road-bank in the distance. The photograph was taken on 1st April, 1918, when a number of Germans, just captured, were assembled there (Note the observation post in a tree near the entrance.)

Souastre at 2 o'clock, strung itself out across the high land south-east of those villages, the 16th, 13th, and 15th Battalions forming the outposts, and the 14th the reserve. Two battalions of British troops were already there; "a Yorkshire regiment," says the diary of the 15th, "had dug quite good posts with their entrenching tools. Another regiment was merely lying in the open with heaps of grass in front of each man." The allotted artillery—11th A.F.A. Brigade—was coming up, and the Australian infantry began to dig in, facing south-east. A mile and a half ahead of them, on the gradually descending ridge, lay the broken trees and houses of Fonquevillers; and, as far again beyond, high on the edge of the brown moorland of the old Somme battlefield, a cluster of battered trunks



marked the village of Hébuterne. To the left, in the head of a valley, a grey stubble of tree stumps represented Gommecourt, the peak of a famous salient in the old German line. Patrols under officers were sent out into Fonquevillers, while the brigade dug, but the digging had barely begun when Brigadier-General Brand received an order for the 4th Brigade to recapture Hébuterne, which was reported to be in the hands of the Germans. He at once directed the four battalions to concentrate at an old windmill, on the road from Bienvillers

to Fonquevillers, while patrols examined Hébuterne. Then he and his groom rode out after the patrols.

At 3.30, the battalions having concentrated in the Fonquevillers road and already waited there an hour and a half, the grizzled head, sheepskin coat, and chestnut horse of the brigadier were seen cantering back. "Colonels! Colonels!" he called. "Get your men assembled here just as they are." Then, as they thronged around: "Well, I've just ridden into the place we are to attack."¹⁴ For his hearers, who had been expecting a stiff fight, this changed the whole prospect. Brand had found Hébuterne apparently empty, but the 62nd British Division was said to be somewhere on the left, and a remnant of the 19th Division, said to be 500 strong, somewhere on the right (actually these appear to have been the British troops at Bienvillers). The 4th Brigade was to fill the space between them. As the troops had had no food since morning—their transport not yet having come up—and as tools also had to be distributed, Brand decided to give his battalions a hot meal before moving. They would then at once occupy Hébuterne and establish their line beyond it, 16th on the right (south-west), 13th in the centre (south-east), and 15th on the left (east). The 14th would be in reserve, close by brigade headquarters at Fonquevillers.

It was then 5.40, and, considering the tension of the moment and the vast issues at stake, he was indeed a cool commander—the future student may think too cool—who, with other commanders possibly in desperate straits on either flank of the gap, left this vital point open to the enemy while the cooks, then back with the transport, marched up with their chimneys steaming and gave his troops their evening meal.

The 13th Battalion's patrol which, under Lieutenant Cleland,¹⁵ had moved into Hébuterne at the same time as Brand,¹⁶ found its defenders—a small, completely exhausted remnant of the 19th Division—withdrawing through the village.

¹⁴ The details are chiefly from Colonel Marks's diary, now in the Mitchell Library.

¹⁵ Capt. L. W. H. Cleland, M.C.; 13th Bn. Paymaster; of Chatswood, N.S.W.; b. Artarmon, N.S.W., 3 March, 1895.

¹⁶ Other members of it were Lieut. A. B. Lilley, Sergeant A. Cormack, Corporals P. G. Stephens, J. Bales, and Privates A. J. Acton and A. W. Watson. (Lilley—who afterwards became Medical Superintendent of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney—belonged to Subiaco, W. Aust.; Cormack to Kogarah, N.S.W.; Stephens to Sydney; Bales—who subsequently became Mayor of Willoughby, N.S.W.—to Bexley, N.S.W.; Acton to Balmain, N.S.W.; Watson to Doubtful Creek, Casino, N.S.W.).

Tired groups straggled past at intervals and took up a new line close behind the western outskirts. The patrol found some abandoned stores and handed food to the "Tommies" as they passed down the main street. Even in the new line a sniper, firing from south of the village, was already worrying the British, some of whom, when they learned that they were to be at last relieved, broke down and wept. From a sunken road on the far side of the village the patrol fired at short range on Germans in the cemetery, Sergeant Cormack¹⁷ killing a number.

But it was 7.30 and growing dusk before the Australian battalions began their approach. By the time they moved through Fonquevillers it was night; the 13th Battalion leading here received word from its patrols that they had entered Hébuterne, and, soon after, that they had run into Germans at the southern outskirts. Rifle and machine-gun fire was coming down the main road as the three foremost companies pushed on and worked slowly through the broken village, examining every house and cellar. A platoon of Captain McKillop's¹⁸ company met a German patrol—shots were fired, Lieutenant Jones¹⁹ wounded, and two prisoners of the 49th I.R. taken.²⁰ The screen was now actually scouting behind the German outposts. By 11.40 the 13th had a line through the village, and by 2.30 a.m. was beyond it. Only the cemetery, on the extreme southern outskirts, was definitely held by the Germans. Here they had at least three machine-guns. Captain McKillop established his front in close contact with these. The 15th, pushing through the north of the village, found, holding the north-eastern corner, a weak company of the 9th Welch Regiment. It appeared to be entirely alone—no other British troops were seen by the 15th to right or left. But beyond the village an advanced party came upon a German machine-gun post; the crew ran and the gun was captured. On the southern outskirts the 16th

¹⁷ Sgt. A. Cormack, M.M. (No. 2885; 13th Bn.). Railway signalman; of Kogarah, N.S.W.; b. Wick, Caithness, Scotland, 4 Aug., 1891. Died of wounds, 30 March, 1918.

¹⁸ Capt. R. A. McKillop, M.C.; 13th Bn. Stock and station agent; of Cooma, N.S.W.; b. Tumut, N.S.W., 23 April, 1882.

¹⁹ Lieut. J. O'M. Jones, 13th Bn. Shipping clerk; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Albury, N.S.W., 29 Feb., 1892.

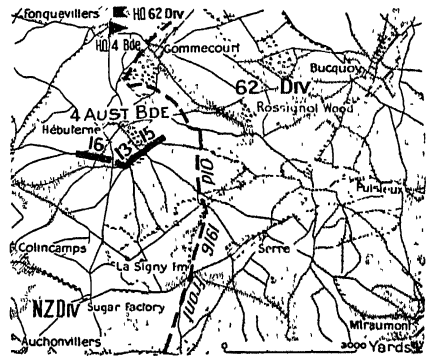
²⁰ Lieut. M. K. Nolan (Pott's Point, N.S.W.) of the 13th was mortally wounded.

formed a flank reaching far back to the west. To the south there was no contact with anyone, friend or enemy.

Thus, shortly after midnight on the 26th, Hébuterne was secured by troops who were not likely to give way if it was humanly possible to hold on. They were in abounding spirits; the villagers of Hébuterne had left their houses only a few hours before—the remains of their meals were on the tables; ownerless fowls and rabbits were in the yards. Whenever time and duty allowed, these luxuries were raided.

The "puzzies" of some platoons became carpeted with feathers. An old French quartermaster's store was found in a cellar, and, later, stores of wine were discovered. A couple of Germans are said to have been found drunk, but Brand records that no trouble occurred among the Australians. Such conditions of warfare had never before been known in the A.I.F., and the campaign took on the complexion of a picnic, or of a children's escapade, a world removed from the experiences of previous years. The conditions of the previous month in Flanders faded in memory like an evil dream.

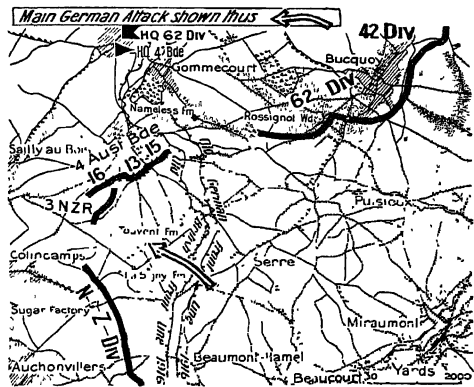
The 4th Brigade had at dusk been given orders to place itself under the commander of the 62nd Division, whose headquarters also were in Fonquevillers. Brigadier-General Brand was now also informed that the New Zealand Division was immediately south of him, and would swing up and close the breach on the flank. Accordingly, at 3.45 a.m., he ordered the 16th Battalion to swing round eastwards so as to extend a hand towards the New Zealanders. This was done before dawn, without opposition. Shortly afterwards, at day-break, a body of skirmishers came up over the open country to the south-west and took position to the right front of the 16th. They proved to be three companies of the 3rd Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade.



When day broke on March 27th the Australians found themselves looking out over the old Somme battlefield. Its flanks and depressions were clothed in long grass which waved in the gusts like the coat of a Shetland pony. Across the foreground, a roughness in the grassy surface, like the unevenness of some dug-out rabbit-burrow in an Australian paddock, indicated the site of the British support line of pre-Somme days, and beyond it the old network of trenches, British and German, extended in a belt two miles wide. Their grassy undulations were still deep enough to give useful cover, and the rusty wire-entanglements, looking like belts of russet weeds, still formed in parts a formidable obstacle. Actually the Australians were occupying some of the old British support trenches of 1916 and the Germans the old British front line. Hébuterne stood high, looking down several spurs and gullies leading towards the hidden valley of the Ancre. Due south on the same ridge stood Auchonvillers, said to be held by the New Zealanders. South-east, two miles away, on a plateau beyond the nearest depression, was the bare stump of Serre, and, a mile north-east of it, in a gully leading to the Ancre, Puisieux. On the heights a mile and a half north-east of this again lay Bucquoy, said to be held by the 62nd Division, and now forming the northern pylon of the gateway which the Germans had opened in the British front.

This once empty wilderness was quickly seen to be alive with movement such as Australian infantry had

never before watched from their front trenches. Far back on the moor were German waggon-lines, the men about them preparing to resume their day's advance. In the distance a



Position of 4th Bde., Hébuterne, before the German attack, March 27.

German battery, in the open, blazed at some movement behind the Australian line; the flash of each gun could be detected. Signs of German transport could be seen in several directions, and at 11 o'clock numbers of infantry appeared only three-quarters of a mile away, on the Serre plateau where the old German trench-line crossed it. They were deploying and obviously about to continue their advance. A brigade of British field artillery now in support to the 4th Brigade²¹ shelled them and sent them temporarily to ground, but shortly after noon they came on in wave after wave, advancing obliquely across the summit and flank of the spur in a direction which would take them past the southern edge of Hébuterne, as if they were making, as indeed they were, for the village of Sailly-au-Bois, some miles behind the junction of the Australians and New Zealanders. As these lines tried to sweep past the Australian front, the 15th and 13th poured into their flank at long and moderate ranges a fire which completely broke the attack.

The enemy could next be seen bringing up reinforcements, and at about 4 o'clock some 150 came in column over the Serre ridge near Touvent Farm. The machine-guns of the 4th Company were rushed into a position from which the gunners could see this movement, and, firing at nearly a mile's range, they, together with the British artillery, scattered the column. Parties of Germans continued to advance from cover to cover through the old trench area, and a few, moving by rushes, managed at various times to reach the German posts at the cemetery and near by, on the southern outskirts of Hébuterne.

The intelligence staff ascertained at once, through prisoners, that the attack south of Hébuterne this day had been made by the 24th (Saxon) Division, which, according to the method now adopted by the enemy of keeping the advance in motion, by constant reliefs, had on the previous night taken up the running from the 4th Division. Both belonged to the XIV Reserve Corps, the southernmost of the Seventeenth German Army. It was the 24th Division which on March 25 had seized the crossing of the Ancre at Miraumont.²² That night the 4th Division had relieved it, and at 4 a.m. on the 26th advanced with Colincamps, two miles south-west of Hébuterne, as its objective. Its southern wing, the 14th and 140th Regiments, supported by artillery—had reached Colincamps about 2.30 that afternoon, but had been thrown

²¹ The Australian artillery had been moved elsewhere, as described in the next chapter.

²² The division had fought against against I Anzac at Pozières, where its morale was considered indifferent (*see Vol. III, pp. 742, 769-70, 786n*).

out. The few prisoners taken by the Australians in Hébuterne that night belonged to the regiment forming its northern wing, the 49th. On its right the 3rd Guard Division had not come up, and a big gap had opened between the two.

It became clear on March 26 that, if the XIV Reserve Corps could only keep going, its advance would force the British to fall back from their vital positions farther north. To continue the attack, on the night of March 26 the 24th Division was put in again through the 4th Division at Serre, and the 39th Division was inserted in the gap on its right, and ordered to take Hébuterne next day. The artillery was to prepare the way for the attack; but at dawn, when it should have been in position on the Serre-Puisieux heights, part of it was still struggling along the crowded roads over the old battlefield.²³

The advance of the 24th Division on March 27 was (as stated above) directed upon Saily-au-Bois. The division assembled south-east of Serre, and, during its assembly on the sheltered side of the ridge, came under British shell-fire—which the Germans in this sector observed to be much livelier this day, especially on their northern flank. Nevertheless during the morning the battalions of the 179th and 133rd I.R.'s worked forward to their jumping-off position on the ridge between Touvent and La Signy Farms. The 39th Division had not yet come up on their right²⁴ when, at noon, the attack began. They immediately received fairly strong machine-gun fire²⁵ from the Australian and New Zealand positions. As the advance was completely exposed, the effect of this fire was "very powerful," and, together with the shell-fire, it caused progress to become slow, and drove the 133rd too far south. The 179th reached by 1 p.m. the Hébuterne-Auchonvillers road. The defence of the New Zealanders, in the Hébuterne-Colincamps road, is described in the German records as "determined," and the advance was stopped at about 3.30 p.m. at a little wood west of the road. The reserve regiment of the division, the 139th I.R., was thrown in to reinforce, but no further progress was made.

Meanwhile, the 39th Division had arrived, its southern regiment, the 126th, coming up at noon south of Serre behind the right of the Saxons, and attacking at 1.30. Its historian says: "Hardly had the light railway from Puisieux to La Signy (*i.e.*, the crest) been reached, when formidable gun and machine-gun fire breaks out from Hébuterne. Individual English batteries drive up openly on both sides of this village. . . . Covered by concentrated fire of our divisional artillery, however, the 172nd I.R. (the right regiment of the division) advancing with its right flank on La Louvière Farm, together with our regiment, succeeds in getting by 6 p.m. within about 450 metres distance of the strongly wired south-eastern edge of Hébuterne. Parts of the 4th company (I Battalion), with the company commander, Lieutenant of

²³ See histories of the 77th F.A.R. (p. 65), 80th F.A.R. (p. 202). The latter blames the German higher command for trying to get up large numbers of guns instead of fewer guns and more ammunition.

²⁴ In addition, the 39th Division failed to relieve the right regiment (49th I.R.) of the 4th Division, opposite Hébuterne. The 49th was accordingly ordered to withdraw without relief, and lie up behind the 140th on the Serre-Sugar Factory road. It claims to have withdrawn unnoticed by the Australians.

²⁵ "Frightful flanking fire" it is called in the history of the 139th I.R., which reinforced later.

Reserve Halbherr, at their head, force their way fearlessly into the edge of the village." This party, however, had to retire for fear of being cut off. Part of the III Battalion, which claimed to have reached the southern edge of the village, also had to fall back. The divisional artillery was now in position, and at 5 p.m. began systematic bombardment for a new attack, but the attempt was afterwards countermanded.

Farther to the north-east the 5th Bavarian and 3rd Guard Divisions were to have taken Bucquoy, but the Bavarians failed to attack and the 3rd Guard accordingly abandoned the enterprise. Its left regiment, however—the Lehr—managed to approach the right of the 39th Division.

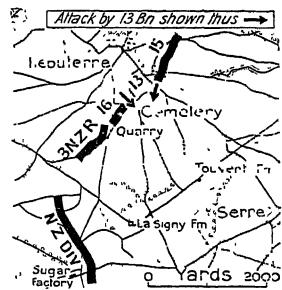
Some historians of the Saxon troops claim that this day they "tore a gap from Hébuterne to Colincamps,"²⁰ but that the flanking divisions were at the end of their strength and failed to take advantage of the opportunity. The commander of the Saxons, Major-General Hammer, said that he would "unconditionally" push through to Sailly as soon as his neighbours made sure of Colincamps and Hébuterne. He was reasonably safe in making the offer; actually, his own troops had only at one point reached even the foremost posts of their opponents—they captured from the New Zealanders a portion of one outlying sap. The attack was defeated without the least difficulty, although the Saxons made a tough resistance to the advance attempted by the New Zealanders that night.

During this day there came through to the 4th Brigade an order, the tone of which was noticeably invigorating. "It is to be distinctly understood that *no retirement* from our present position is permissible. All officers and ranks are to be made to understand this. Most stringent orders must be issued by all commanders to this effect, and officers who fail to observe the spirit of this order are to be relieved of their commands." This entailed no special action on the 4th Brigade's front, since the enemy troops who, according to German accounts, entered the "southern end" of Hébuterne village had actually only reached their own advanced post at the cemetery. The Australian position there, however, was not satisfactory. The 13th Battalion's right company, though close to the existing German post, could not see over the crest, and the 16th was farther back on the reverse slope, behind the alignment of the New Zealanders. Colonel Marks, the young commander of the 13th, saw danger in this, and called the attention of the brigadier, at the same time proposing that the 13th should that night (March 27th-28th) capture the cemetery. Brand arranged that the 16th should during the same night move forward a company into line with the troops on either

²⁰ See histories of 10th Hussar Regiment (p. 158) and 139th I.R. (p. 229).

flank. This company, moving first, was met with strong machine-gun fire, but established its front in alignment with the 13th's, close up against the enemy's. In the small hours the 13th attacked the cemetery. Under cover of a bombardment by Stokes mortars, the bombers of Captain McKillop's company crept out to assault frontally, while those of Lieutenant White's²⁷ company worked down an old trench from the north.²⁸ On being suddenly attacked, most of the German machine-gunners bolted.

The line was advanced on both sides of the cemetery, but into the cemetery itself McKillop's men could not penetrate. The enemy had, however, been shaken, for, when at dawn the 16th Battalion farther south sent out an officer's patrol, it found that the Germans on its front, hitherto only twenty yards distant, had gone, and a previously active strong-post in



some quarries close on its right was now entirely suppressed. The Western Australians at once advanced their line over the crest.²⁹ The New Zealanders failed in all attempts made that night to reach the Hébuterne-Sugar Factory road, but Captain Meikle's³⁰ company advancing shortly before noon on the 28th easily took the quarries.

During March 28th, according to the records of the Australian troops, the Germans made several half-hearted attempts to attack; at least, movements of their troops kept the 4th Brigade busily firing all day long at easy targets. These were mostly distant, except east of Hébuterne, where, after heavy shelling and trench-mortar bombardment, a party of about 50 attacked the 15th Battalion. Several machine-guns

²⁷ Capt. T. A. White, 13th Bn. School teacher; of Deniliquin, N.S.W.; b. Bendigo, Vic., 4 Nov., 1886.

²⁸ The brigade was very short of bombs, and those used in this attack were from an old dump (dating from 1916) found in Humbercamp; 500 had been taken to pieces and repaired by White and Sergeant H. J. Townsend (North Sydney).

²⁹ See sketch on p. 138.

³⁰ Capt. H. C. Meikle, M.C.; N.Z. Rifle Bde. Solicitor; of Auckland, N.Z.; b. Kuaotunu, Auckland, 15 Aug., 1894.

of the 4th Company caught them at short range and shattered the attempt.

The German records also have little to say of the development of this attack, although a formidable stroke was intended. In support of the crucial offensive launched this day farther north, at Arras, the XIV Reserve Corps was to maintain its pressure. Bucquoy was to be squeezed out by the 195th and 1st Guard Reserve Divisions, attacking north and south of it respectively, the 3rd Guard Division merely pinning the defenders down by minor assaults.³¹ The bombardment opened about 9 o'clock, but, as the Guard Reserve Division was not up in time, the operation was abortive. The 119th Division, put in on the right of the 39th, seized Rossignol Wood; at 10 a.m. the 39th Division (according to the history of its artillery) after careful bombardment moved again through the battery positions to assault Hébuterne. The attack failed, and a new one, ordered for noon, was cancelled. Both batteries and infantry were utterly worn out. "The overtired infantry," says the historian of the 4th Division's artillery, "could no longer go to the attack."

The 24th (Saxon) Division this day was under orders merely to hold the advanced positions reached by it. But even this proved impossible; the XIV Reserve Corps had subsequently to report that not merely had the general attack been stopped in face of the firm resistance offered by their opponent's "last strong reserves," but that the 39th Division had been pushed back on the southern edge of Hébuterne and the 24th on the Hébuterne-Auchonvillers road. To cap everything, there set in at 4 o'clock a dismal drizzle, which increased during the evening to steady rain, soaking the old battlefield. The Germans in this area had now to face the conditions so familiar on this and the Ypres battlefields to British troops, with muddy communications for miles behind them, while the back area of their opponents was, comparatively speaking, free from mud.

With the more important failure at Arras, the effort of their Seventeenth Army was temporarily brought to an end. "At last we have made for once a little pause in our advance," writes an officer of the 49th I.R. in his diary.³² In the XIV Corps the 3rd Guard, 4th, and 24th Divisions were worn out, and were ordered to be relieved. For the present the Seventeenth Army would undertake only piecemeal attacks and organised bombardments in order to prevent the Third British Army from reorganising "the existing chaos" of its forces.

The attack which drove back part of the Saxon division on the Auchonvillers-Hébuterne road was one made at 4 p.m. on the 28th, in the rain, by the New Zealand Division, employing the last of its battalions—the 4th Rifles—in another attempt to secure the whole length of the road. The line was advanced, but only two platoons on the left actually reached the objective. Moreover on the outskirts of Hébuterne, in

³¹ The 9th Grenadier Regiment (3rd Guard Div.) got into the village in the morning, but was thrown out in the afternoon.

³² Quoted in the history of his regiment, p. 264.

spite of the general failure of the German attack, German reinforcements still dribbled through to the cemetery, and, after dark on the 28th, could be heard digging in there. This night, however, the 13th Australian Battalion seized the cemetery. Its front was now in a good deep trench, protected by old wire, and looking out over the battlefield. One after another, eight Germans, unaware that the position had been taken, walked into the Australian posts there and were captured.

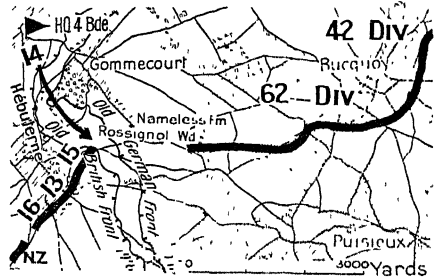
On March 29th the enemy's artillery became much more violent. But the situation south of Hébuterne, where on the 26th the dangerous gap had existed, was now entirely satisfactory. The Australians and New Zealanders were not merely holding their ground, but were continually nibbling into the enemy's. The only anxiety of the local command now concerned the sectors on the other side of the village. The German attack on March 27th had extended to that front also. This sector of the line ran eastwards across three spurs, the third being the bastion at Bucquoy, which the 62nd Division was holding, three and a half miles east-north-east of Hébuterne. The 62nd was also responsible for holding the two others—on the central one lay the small Rossignol Wood; on the western or Hébuterne spur the right of the 62nd should have joined the left of the Australians, 600 yards east of Hébuterne. These spurs allowed the Australians only a partial view of the 62nd's front, but both in the morning and afternoon of March 27th the New Zealanders on the Auchonvillers heights farther south observed large bodies of Germans apparently trying to outflank Hébuterne on the north. The New Zealand machine-gunners, firing at extreme range, saw these troops thrown into confusion, but farther east the Germans drove in the flank of the 62nd Division. The 4th Australian Brigade had been unable, so far, to find that flank, and the gap between them was now dangerously widened.

Major-General Braithwaite of the 62nd Division (who was no other than Hamilton's former chief-of-staff at the Dardanelles) was taking vigorous steps to have this gap filled. The 2/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was to counter-attack on his right, while the 4th Australian Brigade used part of its reserve in guarding its side of the gap at

Gommecourt. Brigadier-General Brand, being by then satisfied with the position south of Hébuterne, drew back two companies of the 16th from that flank to form his reserve, and, as the guard for Gommecourt, sent forward his existing reserve, the 14th Battalion. Captain Beamond's³³ company was despatched to support the 15th Battalion forming the northern flank of the brigade, and the other three companies were to move past Gommecourt and take up an emergency position echeloned behind that flank.

In bright moonlight, on the night of the 27th, the companies moved in artillery formation, with a screen of scouts ahead, the signallers unreeling telephone wires as they went. At Gommecourt they came upon a few British soldiers—of the K.O.Y.L.I. and the

13th Motor Machine Gun Squadron, and a trench-mortar battery of the 62nd Division—in two weak posts; leaving the two latter



to guard that "village," the 14th with a few of the K.O.Y.L.I. reached its intended position at 11 o'clock. Almost immediately upon its reporting this news by telephone and lamp signals, it was ordered to continue the advance and, before dawn, extend the flank of its brigade north-eastwards across the old No-Man's Land and old German front lines. As the troops now advanced in the dark, a hubbub arose at one point. Above it could clearly be heard the voice of Lieutenant Jack Garcia, a well-known fire-eater: "Surrender to you, you bastards?" and the bang bang of two bombs. His platoon had run upon a sentry group of the Lehr, and captured two of its members. Without other opposition the 14th extended the flank.

On the other side of the gap, apparently because the orders arrived too late,³⁴ the counter-attack by the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I.

³³ Capt. W. R. M. Beamond, M.C.; 14th Bn. Grocer; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Corio, Vic., 1 Sept., 1896.

³⁴ See *The History of the 62nd (West Riding) Division, Vol. I, p. 156.*

was not made. Part of the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I. was subsequently sent with four tanks to counter-attack, but, finding Rossignol Wood empty, returned. The rest of the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I. with half the 2/4th York and Lancaster and part of the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I. then counter-attacked before dawn on the 28th. At the same time (about 1.20 a.m.) Braithwaite ordered Brand to swing the 14th Battalion 500 yards farther to the south along the intermediate spur.

The 5th K.O.Y.L.I. (he wrote) will advance from the south end of Rossignol Wood³⁵ in line with your men. It is only the urgency of restoring this portion of the line that induced the G.O.C. to use your only reserve battalion for the purpose.

The attack on Rossignol Wood was launched at 4.15 a.m. on the 28th. On its right three companies, mainly of the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I., entered the wood. It was found that two tanks, abandoned there in the previous counter-attack, were now occupied by Germans as strong-points. The attacking force was cut off, and the gallant commander of the 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I.³⁶ was killed and practically the whole of the three companies was captured. The order to push southwards in conjunction with this attack apparently did not reach the 14th Battalion; but a patrol sent by the 14th over the spur to the ruined crucifix in the Puisieux-Gommecourt road along the valley between the Hébuterne spur and Rossignol Wood, found no sign of the 62nd Division's flanks. A dangerous gap therefore still remained.

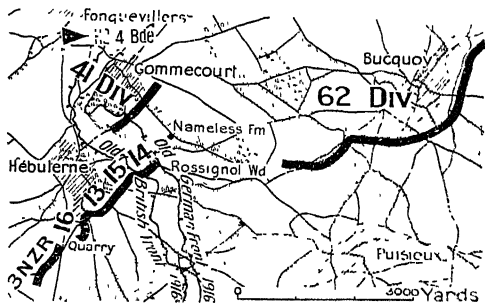
On March 28th about 8 a.m. the German artillery, in conjunction, as has been already mentioned, with the attack made this day at Arras, strongly bombarded the whole of the local front. The 62nd Division was attacked, and, as it now had only three companies remaining west of the wood, the IV Corps sent up a tired division, the 41st, which had been reorganising after the great retreat. It was to hold the emergency "purple" line,³⁷ which was being dug past the rear of Hébuterne and the front of Gommecourt. It was to an

³⁵ It would, of course, first have to complete the capture of the wood.

³⁶ Lieut.-Col. O. C. S. Watson, V.C., D.S.O. Commanded 2/5th K.O.Y.L.I., 1918. Farmer; of Berkshire, Eng.; b. London, 7 Sept., 1876. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

³⁷ Sir James Edmonds states that three lines were being dug or prepared behind the "purple" line—one east of Amiens, a second west of Amiens, and the Channel ports defences.

extension of this same line, farther north, that the Third Army, hard pressed by the day's offensive there, was then about to despatch its last reserve division.³⁸ But at the moment the staffs at Fonquevillers were aware only of the anxieties concerning their own front. The first evidence they received that the Germans again were penetrating their line appears to have been a report that some of the enemy with light machine-guns were filtering along the gully between Rossignol Wood and the Australians. The two brigades of the 41st Division, which had just come up to Gommecourt, were first ordered to clear these out, and later, when it became known that the Germans had captured the wood, one of the brigades (122nd) was directed to send two companies to retake it. But the officers' patrols reconnoitring for this counter-attack came back with word that the Germans had actually penetrated along that valley to "Nameless Farm," well behind the Australian flank. At



6 p.m. the 15th Hampshire had been ordered to send a company to take Rossignol Wood; at 6.15 the order was cancelled; at 6.25 it was renewed, and at 6.35 was again cancelled, the task being considered too great for one company. At 6.45 it was again received. At 11 o'clock the company was lined up and was advancing in wretched conditions, the dark being intense and the rain pouring, when a third counter-order was received. "Much to the satisfaction of all," as a report states, the enterprise was abandoned.³⁹

Only three weak companies of the 62nd Division remained west of the wood. A battalion—the 8th West Yorks—from

³⁸ The 31st Division (VI Corps) had been driven back by a strong thrust at Ayette on the previous day. On the 28th it was the XVII Corps farther north that was most strongly attacked, but both corps doubted whether they could hold unless reinforced. They were accordingly given the two reserve divisions, to be used very economically as the army had no more

³⁹ The same narrative says that it was afterwards ascertained that at this time Nameless Farm was held by 200 Germans.

the left brigade of that division was therefore brought round to recapture the wood. Brigadier-General Brand was to co-operate with it by clearing the Germans out of their old front system on the Hébuterne spur in front of the 14th Battalion. He might use, if necessary, his last reserve. The West Yorks attacked at 2.30 next morning (March 29th), but in the conditions of that night they could only reach the edge of the wood. From the company of the 14th Australian Battalion which was to co-operate, no report arrived; the battalion's signalling officer, Lieutenant Craven, sent up by Lieutenant-Colonel Crowther⁴⁰ to find why it did not move, came back to report that its task was hopeless—it was too dark to see, and the old trenches were deep in mud. An officers' patrol was sent out, which immediately met stubborn opposition, and returned. Another went out from the left rear across the spur to Nameless Farm. It found the place empty—the night which rendered impossible all British attacks in the old trenches had apparently been too much for the Germans also, and they had withdrawn; but it was clear that they had been there, for a German was found dead.

The Germans who thus penetrated between the British and the Australians were part of the 119th Division, which, it will be remembered, relieved this day the left of the 3rd Guard Division. Before this, the gap in the British line happened most fortunately to have been opposite the gap in the German line, which had only been closed by the Lehr Regiment late on March 27.

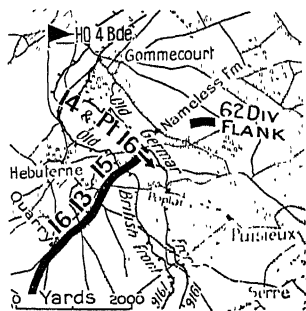
After visiting Nameless Farm, the 14th Battalion's patrol went on down the Gommecourt-Puisieux road to within 250 yards of Rossignol Wood. German snipers and machine-guns were firing from the wood, and the flank of the British could not be found. Next day (March 29th), however, the intelligence officers of the 4th Brigade (Lieutenant Davis)⁴¹ and 14th Battalion (Lieutenant Johnson)⁴² in an audacious daylight reconnaissance at last found the flank post of the 62nd Division some 300 yards from the north-west corner of the wood.

⁴⁰ Lieut.-Col. H. A. Crowther, D.S.O. Commanded 14th Bn., 1918. Schoolmaster; of Brighton, Vic.; b. Brighton, 29 July, 1887.

⁴¹ Lieut. H. B. Davis, M.C.; 13th Bn. Civil servant; of Fairfield, N.S.W.; b. Maclean, N.S.W., 22 Dec., 1894. Killed in action, 2 Oct., 1918.

⁴² Lieut. J. H. Johnson, M.C.; 14th Bn. Clerk; of Colac, Vic.; b. Colac, 19 April, 1888. Killed in action, 2 May, 1918.

Major-General Braithwaite's order that the Germans must be cleared from the minor spur in front of the 14th Battalion had not been carried out, and it was obvious that, until this was done, the recapture and holding of Rossignol Wood by the British must be a most difficult task. On March 29th, therefore, Brand went up to battalion headquarters and arranged that the operation should be undertaken with some force. Under cover of a barrage from artillery and trench-mortars, the two northern battalions were to bomb forward up several old parallel saps leading to the main trench held by the enemy (here one of the old front lines). The 14th was reinforced for the purpose by Brand's last reserve, two companies of the 16th under Major Parks.⁴³ At 3 p.m., while these arrangements were being made, the 14th observed the enemy assembling, apparently to attack, in the old trenches opposite its front. The Australians struck first. From the 14th a platoon, which happened exactly a week before to have won the competition for champion platoon of the brigade, was sent forward under the officer who had trained it, Lieutenant Hall,⁴⁴ and quickly bombed the enemy back for 200 yards. The fighting was stiff; Hall was killed, and the platoon lost fifty yards of its gain. The parties of the 15th and 16th also made their way up their respective saps, but on reaching the main German position found the enemy too strong and too well supplied with bombs for any headway to be made. At 8 o'clock the Stokes mortars, for which the attacking parties, despite the mud, had been carrying up ammunition, laid a barrage on the German position and at 10.30 another barrage was laid down, in which the artillery joined. But this fire was too light and too inaccurate to compensate for the fatigue of the infantry, and all attempts failed.



⁴³ Lieut.-Col. E. J. Parks, D.S.O., M.C. Commanded 16th Bn., 1918/19. Accountant; of Largs Bay, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 18 June, 1894.

⁴⁴ Lieut. V. E. Hall, 14th Bn. Clerk; of Ivanhoe, Vic.; b. Chewton, Vic., 4 Sept., 1894. Killed in action, 29 March, 1918.

At other times the muddy conditions of the old battlefield, added to these reverses, slight though they were, might have depressed the spirits of the troops; but in the present crisis they could see how every blow counted towards the winning of the war. At last the Australians were being used where their fighting spirit told. They had stopped the enemy easily; they could see that the Germans were disconcerted, prone to become bewildered and faint-hearted; in the maze of grass-covered trenches the German posts and patrols should be easily outplayed. The Australians therefore merely waited for better weather conditions and then continued to nibble at the German front, seizing a sap here, a length of sunken road there, battalions or companies acting on their own initiative. On the 30th the New Zealand Division made a sharp minor attack on a front of 1,200 yards in order to secure the higher ground in front of its centre, on the Hébuterne-Auchonvillers road and near La Signy Farm. "We did not go out to beat the Boche," said Major-General Russell afterwards, "but to get this place where we could overlook him." But the New Zealanders captured 230 prisoners and 110 heavy and light machine-guns, and, small though the operation was, the news of it came in those dark days like a tonic to the whole of the British Army and to the Empire.

Early on the night of March 31st two Germans of the 126th I.R. (39th Division) walked on to a post of the 13th Australian Battalion. One was shot and the other, after signalling his surrender, began to fumble in his pockets and was also immediately shot down, mortally wounded. In his pocket was a paper, which he had managed to tear in pieces, but which, when put together, was found to be an order for a redistribution of the German forces in the Hébuterne sector, to be carried out that night. It specified the new boundaries, the reliefs and other movements by which the rearrangement would be effected, and the positions of a number of headquarters. These particulars were at once communicated to the artillery, and during that night the British guns and machine-guns concentrated their fire upon the specified or probable routes and assembly points.

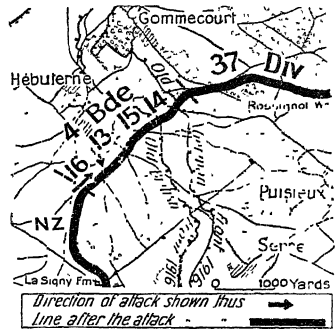
German prisoners afterwards stated that considerable loss was caused by this fire, and it is now known that the German staff recognised that their opponents must have heard of the relief. The Germans wrongly guessed that the knowledge had been imparted through a signal message carelessly sent "in clear" by the 20th German Division.⁴⁵ This was the division which had relieved the 24th, and opposed the brunt of the New Zealand attack on March 30. That attack had caused a regiment—the 49th—of the exhausted 4th German Division to be hurriedly brought back from rest at Irlès. Its companies were down to 60–70 men, and this order, together with the rain, "did not," as the regimental historian says, "raise the spirit of the troops." The 20th Division was to be relieved on the night of March 31 by the 39th, which thereafter, together with the 119th on its right, would hold the front line of the XIV Reserve Corps, from the Serre-Sugar Factory road to Rossignol Wood. Curiously enough, the only available narrative from the 20th Division⁴⁶ does not mention the difficulties of this relief, but says that the previous night (March 30), on which, twenty-four hours late, the 20th Division had relieved part of the 24th, was "one of the most fatiguing that the regiment experienced in the whole war."

On April 1st, Easter Monday, the 16th Australian Battalion carried out a small attack suggested to Lieutenant-Colonel Drake Brockman, its commander, by two of his company leaders, Captains Aarons and Ahrens. From their lines to the German posts immediately in front of them there ran, on the left, a sunken road and, on the right, an old sap. These two converged, and, where they met, the Germans maintained a strong garrison. At 1.30 in the afternoon bombing parties from the two companies began working down the road and sap. Ten minutes later, when they were approaching the junction, Aarons' company from the north opened on the Germans an intense barrage with rifle-grenades and Lewis guns. At a signal this barrage stopped, and the bombers, together with a party which had crept out during the barrage and was lying beyond the sunken road, rushed into the road, stationed posts to enfilade it, bombed the dugouts along it, and, together with the 13th, which had seized the opportunity to capture a length of trench on its own front, took 71 prisoners and 4 machine-guns. The enemy bolting back from these and neighbouring positions was shot down. The front was advanced well down the slope and now lay 250 yards beyond the village.

⁴⁵ This division had faced the 3rd Aust. and N.Z. Divisions at Broodseinde.

⁴⁶ *History of the 92nd I.R.*, p. 486.

This operation also came like an invigorating draught in the official *communiqués*; but the crisis at Hébuterne had already ended. The front now seemed to be settling down into trench-warfare. On the night of March 31st the 62nd Division had been relieved by the 37th, under which the 4th Australian Brigade now came. To the troops of this brigade the operations, from the first occupation of Hébuterne to the nibbling operations that ended the month, had been so comparatively easy that it was



difficult to them to realise that the danger at Hébuterne had ever been acute. They felt that the reported crisis was to some extent the outcome of the panic of which they had been the witnesses. They received immense appreciation for the "saving" of Hébuterne, and there can be no question that every British commander concerned was well satisfied to have that important height safe in the hands of this self-confident, dependable force. The commander of the IV Corps, Lieutenant-General Harper,⁴⁷ when other troops were several times relieved, refused to let the 4th Brigade go. In an order to his battalion commanders on April 9th, Brigadier-General Brand said:

All the higher commanders would have liked to see your men get a few days' rest, but the holding of Hébuterne is all important to the IV Corps. It has therefore been arranged that the 4th Brigade carry on

Brand wrote privately to Lieutenant-Colonel Marks of the 13th:

The Corps commander is afraid to let the defence of Hébuterne out of our hands.

The brigade was complimented and thanked by division and corps, and its work no doubt was vital. But actually it was not the 4th Australian Brigade that first saved Hébuterne,

⁴⁷ Lieut.-Gen. Sir G. M. Harper, K.C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 51st Div., 1915/18; IV Corps, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; b. Batheaston, Somerset, Eng., 11 Jan., 1865. Died 15 Dec., 1922.

and the brigade was not even aware of the critical events by which the village was saved; the story of those events must be deferred until we have seen how the remaining brigades of the 4th Division and those of the 3rd went into the promised "fight of their lives," with little or no more knowledge of antecedent events than had the 4th Brigade on its march to Hébuterne.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE AMIENS

DURING the night of March 25th, on which the pickets of the 4th Australian Division were, not without a grim eagerness, waiting for the Germans on the roads south-west of Arras, the 3rd Division had been entraining near St. Omer in Flanders to assemble next to the 4th. Some of its trains were intended to stop at Doullens on the main line of road and rail, due east of Arras, and twenty-one miles north of Amiens, and the troops to march thence towards Arras; other trains were to be switched at Doullens to the Arras branch line, and to empty their troops at Mondicourt-Pas, where they would be billeted immediately south-west of the 4th Division. The eight trains allotted for the division were due to leave from 9.10 p.m. onwards at three hours' intervals during the night and the next day; but, after the first trains had departed, carrying headquarters of the 10th and 11th Brigades and some advanced units, there was delay in the arrival of those for the rest of the division. The waiting battalions lay down at the roadside in the bitter cold; some companies were stowed into barns. During the morning of the 26th the trains again began to appear regularly. On the journey to Doullens the troops saw first evidences of the great battle in the south—a number of men who had been in the fighting, and several red cross trains full of wounded.

There was a most depressing atmosphere of hopelessness about them all (says the history of the 40th Battalion),¹ but we saw some New Zealanders who told us that their division had gone down, and that the 4th Australian Division was also on the way, so we bucked up considerably.

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

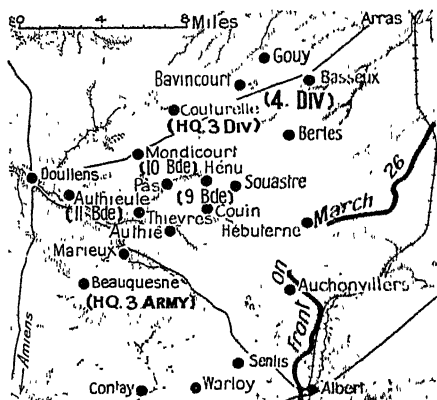
¹ *The Fortieth*, by F. C. Green, p. 113.

for several hours. It was nearly 11 a.m. before the advance party of the 10th Brigade, with Brigadier-General McNicoll and the machine-gun company, followed soon by another train with the 37th Battalion, reached Mondicourt.

Here, as elsewhere on that day, the unloading Australians found themselves unexpectedly plunged into an atmosphere of panic. Brigadier-General Rosenthal, who happened to be in Mondicourt making preliminary arrangements for the arrival of his brigade, wrote in his diary that this was due to the alarmist report of the arrival of German cavalry at Colincamps.

Then commenced what can only be described as a disgraceful withdrawal. When military forces retire, of course the civilians did the same, and very soon Mondicourt was deserted, the inhabitants having simply walked out and left everything behind them.

French civilians and British troops—largely of labour corps and railway companies, mixed with stragglers and wounded men—streamed continuously rearwards along the road from Pas, two miles away, which they said was now threatened by the German advance. Not many of them carried arms, but General McNicoll, apprehending that the situation was very serious, halted a number and ordered them, together with the 10th Australian Machine Gun Company, to defend Mondicourt until sufficient of the 10th Brigade arrived to safeguard its own detrainment. Meanwhile he sent out Lieutenant Bertram² (40th Battalion) and four sergeants on bicycles to ascertain where the Germans were.³



² Lieut. E. J. Bertram, 40th Btn. Clerk; of New Gisborne, Vic.; b. New Gisborne, 13 April, 1890.

³ Scouting parties of other battalions were similarly despatched later.

About the same time, just before noon, the first train of the 9th Brigade, previously destined for Mondicourt, after being held for three hours outside Doullens, was brought into Doullens station, where its troops were faced by an even more exciting situation. This quiet old town, with its pretty river and Louis XIV citadel, was the normal meeting place for Haig's conferences with his army commanders. It appeared that a particularly important conference was being held in the town hall at that moment, for (to quote a letter of General Monash, who passed through) "the Town Square was packed full of motor cars and brilliantly uniformed French and British officers."⁴ The Town Major—the officer responsible for the local defence—met the 9th Brigade's train with an urgent order from the chief-of-staff of the Third Army, Major-General Vaughan,⁵ for the protection of the town against the irruption of the supposed enemy tanks and cavalry. The advanced company of the 33rd under Captain Shreeve⁶ with part of the machine-gun company was to be sent east of Doullens at once, to cover the town.⁷ At 12.15 this order was cancelled by General Vaughan. About the same time there arrived General Monash himself. He had just seen, at Frévent, the commander of the X Corps, under whose orders his division came, and who was then trying to arrange for the concentration of several divisions east of Doullens, in order to re-establish the fluid line between Bucquoy (south-west of Arras) and Albert. Monash received from him a general direction to proceed to Doullens, concentrate his division in its allotted area, which lay east of the town, and await further instructions. He now directed Rosenthal—who, hearing that his troops had been switched to Doullens, had hurried thither—to safeguard the detrainment at that station. Monash then hastened to Mondicourt, through which troops and civilians were still streaming, and helped McNicoll to take similar precautions.

⁴ This, of course, is all that was heard by the troops at the time. The fuller story is told in *Chapter X*.

⁵ Lieut.-Gen. Sir Louis Vaughan, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), 2nd Div., 1915/16; B.G.G.S., XV. Corps, 1916/17; M.G.G.S., Third Army, 1917/19; Commandant, Staff College, Quetta, 1919/22. Of Cumberland, Eng.; b. Millom, Cumberland, 7 Aug., 1875.

⁶ Major J. W. Shreeve, 33rd Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Garfield, Vic.; b. North Melbourne, 25 Jan., 1880.

⁷ It was to take position near Thievres, so as to cover the two chief roads from Souastre, and to patrol towards that village.

Meanwhile at 12.30 the train with the leading battalion of the 11th Brigade, the 41st, also was switched into Doullens station, and the battalion detrained and marched through the town to its southern exit. The sight of the crowded traffic at the station cross-roads, and of the British military policeman there flourishing a Webley revolver as he controlled it, emphasised the emergency. The 41st crossed the little river and wound up the green hill beyond to the citadel overlooking the tree-lined Amiens road. The area in which this brigade was to have been billeted⁸ was said to be under shell-fire, and the troops were consequently held just outside Doullens. The Queenslanders sat on the grass beside the old citadel and quietly ate their lunch while they waited for the arrival of the next battalions of their brigade. An innkeeper in Doullens, about to leave the town, gave his stock of wine to the 42nd Battalion, which happened to be halted there on its march. Towards evening, when its third battalion came up, this brigade, the mere sight of which had done much to relieve the anxiety of the travellers along that road, marched eastwards to its changed billeting area, at Authieule.

General Monash, after assuring himself that his division was safely arriving, and ordering the brigades to picket the roads around their detraining and billeting area, to reconnoitre the countryside, and to be ready for any emergency, drove to his allotted headquarters at Couturelle,⁹ whence, at about 4 p.m., he went on to the 4th Division's Headquarters at Basseux, in order to co-ordinate his measures with General MacLagan's.¹⁰ He found that, although there was still excitement on the roads, which were being shelled, orders received at that headquarters provided ample safeguard against any local danger. The 4th Division had just been directed to send its 4th Brigade to

⁸ Brigade Headquarters was to have been at Couin, 2½ miles south-east of Pas, 9th Brigade Headquarters was to be at Pas, and that of the 10th at Couin.

⁹ Major Wieck had been here since the previous day, and other members of the staff had since arrived. News had now been received that there was no confirmation of a German break-through.

¹⁰ Instructions to picket roads, keep the men at their billets, and generally be ready for instant action were given by Third Army, but, independently of them, Monash and MacLagan had each taken these steps as a matter of soldierly precaution. In such circumstances divisional commanders had to act vigorously and to assume responsibility. The actual messages and correspondence, which have been preserved, however, show that divisional commanders this day were by no means so independent of higher authority as might be inferred by readers of Sir John Monash's book. *The Australian Victories in France in 1918.*

recapture Hébuterne, and its two other brigades—12th and 13th—were to follow at once and take position in close support and reserve at Hannescamps and Bienvillers-au-Bois respectively. All three would be close to the north-east of the 3rd Division's area, and their artillery, which had arrived by forced marches from Flanders, was with them. In rear, the 5th Australian Division would begin to arrive as soon as the 3rd had assembled. Returning to Couturelle, Monash also learned that an officer of the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company had come in there with the news that he had passed through Colincamps, six miles to the south-east of the 3rd Division's area, and had found there not Germans, but part of the New Zealand Division. Very similar news had come in from McNicoll's cycling scouts. The knowledge that the 4th, 3rd, and New Zealand Divisions were almost in line, with the 5th to arrive in rear, dispelled, from the minds of those Australians who knew it, any vestige of anxiety as to the local situation.

The order, referred to above, for the 12th and 13th Brigades of the 4th Division to march eastwards to Hannescamps and Bienvillers, had reached that division at 3.45.

**Employment
of
4th Division**

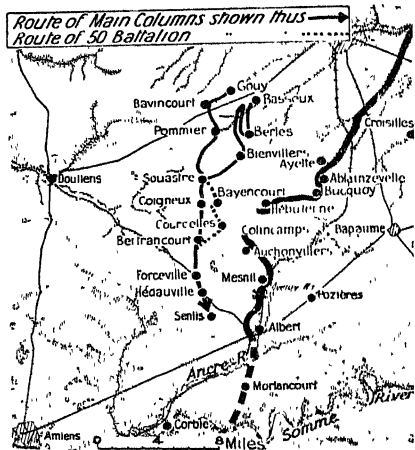
After the scare concerning the German armoured cars, the division had, at 1.15, been placed under the IV Corps, responsible for the front from north of Bucquoy to Hamel on the Ancre; the division was to close the gap between the 62nd Division and the New Zealanders. Its 4th Brigade was on the way to Hébuterne¹¹ and shortly after 5 p.m. the 12th Brigade started its march up to support, with the 45th and 46th Battalions and 12th Machine Gun Company leading. The brigadier, now General Gellibrand, went ahead in order to see that his troops took up the positions allotted to them. But at 6 o'clock, when the foremost battalions¹² were marching through Berles-au-

¹¹ The 11th Aust. Field Artillery Brigade was at first directed to support the attack, but this order was now countermanded.

¹² The 45th from Baillieulmont, and the 46th from Baillieulval, near Basseux.

Bois, a message from divisional headquarters reached them to halt where they were and await further directions. The reason presently became known—the division had received a sudden order, to turn around and march, with its two rearmost brigades and the whole of its artillery, to a totally different destination, the Senlis area, near Albert, sixteen miles south as the crow flies, but nineteen by the nearest road. The battalions were to return at once to their billets.

The 4th Division was urgently required at its new destination next morning. The most direct route skirted the battle area immediately ahead of the enemy's advance, and in many campaigns the choice of it would have been highly unsafe. In this offensive, however, the German troops had rarely made great advances at night, and the danger of their impeding the 4th Division's march was therefore slight. If the division was to reach the VII Corps at day-break, there was no time for a *détour*; the Germans, so far as was known, would be, at the nearest points, over three miles away to the left, and the brigades must provide for their own protection. The



troops were to march light, leaving their packs and, if the brigadiers so decided, even their last blankets, in store under guard. "Gentlemen," said Lieutenant-Colonel Leane to the officers of the 48th, "we do not even know that the road is clear or whether we can beat him (the enemy) to Albert. We must protect our flanks and be prepared for anything."¹² General MacLagan ordered the 12th Brigade to lead, passing a starting point at the exit of its billeting area at 8 p.m. The

¹² See narrative by Capt. G. D. Mitchell, *Reveille*, Aug., 1934, p. 5.

villagers who had welcomed the troops were bitterly distressed when they saw them preparing to move.

The inhabitants of our billet (wrote Lieut. Mitchell of the 48th in his diary) went into a fearful panic. There was weeping and wailing. They implored us: "Is it retreat? Is it retreat?" They begged us to stay and defend the place. They told us they had lived there for 36 years. They went from cupboard to cupboard picking out their most precious possessions. The skipper and others tried to soothe them.

As it was then 6.30, and three of the battalions had just reached their billets, where they had to take their evening meal and leave their packs, the order to the 12th Brigade to pass the starting point at 8 was obviously impossible of fulfilment. Upon this being explained to him, MacLagan ordered the 13th Brigade to lead the division, passing its starting point at 8.30. Word came back from Brigadier-General Glasgow, that this too was impossible. It was then arranged that both brigades should start as soon as they could. Their roads joined as Souastre, and whichever brigade, on reaching the junction, found the other marching ahead of it would halt there and follow on when the leading brigade had passed.

The night was perfect for marching, cold and clear with a bright moon. The 12th Brigade (this time, with the 47th and 48th Battalions at its head) reached Souastre first and consequently took the lead. So far the roads had been crowded with traffic moving constantly northwards, but from this point, where the route began to skirt the fighting zone, far less traffic was met. In the 12th Brigade the several battalions provided their own flank guards; in the 13th the 50th Battalion marched along a parallel road about a mile to the east, and so gave protection. The artillery detached several mounted patrols of their own men to ride on their flank. A few miles to the left the flares of the fighting line could be seen, rising and falling continuously. British aeroplanes hummed constantly over, as one after another flew to unload its bombs on the enemy; the crunch of the bombing and the rattle of machine-guns could be heard. The column moved through almost empty villages, the last of the fleeing inhabitants looking silently out upon it. Dawn found it still marching, 108 paces to the minute, with ten-minute halts in each hour. It will be remembered that the leading brigade, the 12th, had received

little rest—part of it literally none—during the night and day before. The diary of Lieutenant Mitchell records that his friend, Lieutenant Potts,¹⁴ “fell with fatigue. I helped him. He slept as he walked, and talked in his sleep.” No one, says the diary of the 48th Battalion, knew “where the enemy was, and by the time the trip was half over no one really cared much, as everyone was too utterly weary.” Actually at Aveluy Wood, three and a half miles east of their destination, a company of German infantry (12/247th I.R.) did push on during that night, crossing the Ancre at midnight, passing through the wood, and ambushing some British infantry that marched unsuspectingly along the Mesnil-Martinsart road. But this was a parallel route two and a half miles from the 4th Division's, with hills intervening, and therefore far beyond its ken.

At 6.30 on the 27th the head of the column marched into the well-remembered country between Warloy and Albert. A few “tired” shells¹⁵ met it in Senlis. The houses of the village stood empty, the inhabitants having evacuated it the day before. Here the division was to wait for orders,¹⁶ its headquarters having gone on to Baizieux, three miles to the south-west. The battalions breakfasted where they were—some of them in comfort in the houses of Senlis and Forceville, with wine, and poultry, and fires blazing up the chimneys; others by the country roadside, in a biting, cold wind. The 12th Brigade had marched on an average seventeen miles from its previous billets, as well as several miles before starting from them, and the 13th Brigade a little less. Barely one man per battalion had fallen out—in some battalions none—and those few came in with the tail of the column.¹⁷

¹⁴ Capt. R. E. Potts, M.C., 48th Bn. School teacher; of Cottesloe, W. Aust.; b. Aldgate, S. Aust., 24 Oct., 1889.

¹⁵ Shells from a long distance which fell with a drawn-out, gentler moan.

¹⁶ Gellibrand found in Senlis the headquarters of the 12th British Division (then holding the front beside the Ancre north of Albert), but they knew nothing concerning the 4th Australian Division's Headquarters, which were not yet on the telephone. Gellibrand accordingly sent on his brigade major (now Major Norman) to Baizieux. Gellibrand had come ahead by car leaving Colonel Leane to bring on the brigade, Major Moyes taking the 48th Battalion. At Senlis Leane rejoined the 48th.

¹⁷ The 12th Brigade column comprised 4th Div., H.Q., 12th Bde. H.Q., and battalions (45th, 46th, 47th, 48th), field company, and field ambulance, 4th Pioneer Battalion, and 26th Company, A.A.S.C.; the 13th Brigade column comprised that brigade's infantry (49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd Bns.) and attached units.

General MacLagan and his G.S.O (1), Lieutenant-Colonel Lavarack,¹⁸ had been told that, while their division marched, they were to pick up their orders from the commander of the VII Corps, into whose area, north of the Somme, they were going, although their division was not to be thrown into battle without orders from Third Army. The commander of that corps, Lieutenant-General Congreve,¹⁹ an experienced and distinguished leader, was, at the moment, changing his headquarters from Corbie, at the junction of the Ancre and Somme Rivers, to Montigny, a straggling village, six miles north of the Ancre, in the pretty valley of the Hallue. Here, in the otherwise deserted *château* that backed against its park, was the corps staff, newly arrived, with its baggage hurriedly piled in all the corridors. The whole place appeared to be in darkness except for "a bare salon of stately proportions," in a corner of which, seated at a small table with a map, lighted "by the flickering light of a candle," were the corps commander and the chief of his staff, Brigadier-General Hore-Ruthven;²⁰ and, with them, General Monash.²¹ An urgent order for the 3rd Australian Division to move to the VII Corps area had been issued at about 6.30 p.m., two hours after the similar order to the 4th. The three brigades, none of which had yet completed the detrainment of their last battalions at Doullens or Mondicourt, were to go by 'buses during the night, the arrangements being made directly by Third Army. While Monash drove to Montigny for instructions, the two chief officers of his staff at Couturelle, Colonels Jess and Jackson, had to work out where each unit would at that moment be,

¹⁸ Maj.-Gen. J. D. Lavarack, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c.; R.A.A. Brigade Major, 22nd British Div. Arty., 1915/16, 5th Aust. Div. Arty., 1916/17; G.S.O. (2), 1st Aust. Div., 1917; G.S.O. (1), 4th Aust. Div., 1918/19. C.G.S., Australia, 1935. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 19th Dec., 1885.

¹⁹ Gen. Sir Walter Congreve, V.C., K.C.B., M.V.O.; The Rifle Brigade. Commanded 18th Inf. Bde., 1914/16; 6th Div., 1915; XIII Corps, 1915/17; VII Corps, 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of Congreve, Staffs, Eng.; b. Chatham, Eng., 20 Nov., 1862. Died, 28 Feb., 1927.

²⁰ Brig.-Gen. Lord Gowrie, V.C., K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. B.G.G.S., VII Corps, 1918; commanded 26th Inf. Bde., 1918/19; Governor of S. Aust., 1928/34, of N. S. Wales, 1935/36; Governor-General of Australia, 1936; b. Windsor, Eng., 6 July, 1872.

²¹ Monash has vividly described the scene in *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, p. 26.

and to arrange for them at once to march to the Thievres-Marieux road, parallel to that in which the 4th Division was marching, but five miles farther west, and to be picked up by the 'buses there.²² The 11th Brigade (composed of battalions from the "outside" States) was to embuss as soon as possible, followed by the 10th (Victoria). The 9th (New South Wales) would move early next morning.

The 10th and 11th Brigades, which had been travelling since the evening of the 25th, were settling into their billets for a night's rest when the orders reached them. They trudged on at once to their embussing points, one or two hours' march away, and waited, but it was not until 3 a.m. on the 27th that the first 'buses arrived. In spite of the bitter cold, many of the men on climbing into them at once fell asleep.

Two hours later, in the dawn, they found themselves bumping into the dusty village of Franvillers on the Amiens-Albert road, high on the edge of the Somme country which was so familiar to the four other Australian divisions, but in which theirs, the youngest, though experienced in great battles in Flanders, had never yet served. British cyclist patrols were on the high ground looking out across the Ancre valley to the south-east. They were there to report any advance of the Germans on the hills between the Ancre and the Somme.

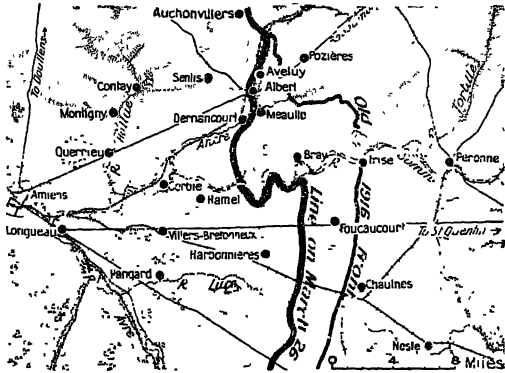
The Somme valley, a winding trough about 1,000 yards wide across the flat, after going for some 14 miles in a northerly direction from Ham to Péronne, bends at Péronne sharply westwards, and continues in that direction for 28 miles, to Amiens.²³ Amiens, a pre-Roman town, conquered in 57 B.C. by Julius Caesar, lies near the junction of the Somme with several rather smaller streams of similar character, which radiate to north- and south-east, each biting a winding course into the green, rolling, chalk uplands. The principal streams had long ago been canalised, but the flats beside them remained

²² 'Buses were to be supplied, in the first place, only for the infantry. General Monash, however, was extremely desirous that the field ambulances and other attached troops should not be separated from their brigades, and Colonel Jackson managed to secure 'buses for all. The embussing on the route was due to the insistence of Colonel Jess that the troops should not, as at first proposed by higher authority, march *back* to reach the 'buses. Monash from Montigny also telephoned to General Byng concerning these arrangements.

²³ See. Vol. XII, plates 460, 470, 499.

marshy, with many wide pans of water where peat had been cut. The meadows bordering the marshes afforded teeming pasture for cows and sheep, as well as areas for almost continuous plantation of lofty trees. Villages, at intervals of a mile or two at most, clustered along each stream.

To take three tributaries in order of nearness on the eastern side of Amiens, the first, the Avre, runs in from the south-east immediately before the city's outskirts. The two next, second and third, both run in from the north side 8 and 9 miles east of the city respectively. Of these the second — the Hallue — coming in from the north at Daours, had as yet been comparatively unimportant in this war, except that its villages—



Querrieu, Pont-Noyelles,²⁴ Montigny, Beaucourt, and others—afforded during the Somme battle well-known billets for troops and headquarters. The third tributary, the Ancre, flowed in from the north-east at the little abbey-town of Corbie.²⁵ The nearer part of the Ancre also had not yet been fought over; but at nine miles from the junction its channel turned, near the villages of Darnancourt²⁶ and Méaulte, abruptly northward past Albert to Aveluy, Hamel-sur-Ancre, and Miraumont. It was, generally, along this line (continued southward to the Somme a little east of Bray) that the French had finally held up the Germans in 1914, and here the front had lain until the British, taking over in 1916, had launched from it their part of the First Somme offensive.

When the Germans attacked in 1918, just as the north-south section of the Somme, south of Péronne, formed an important

²⁴ A battle was, however, fought here in 1870.

²⁵ See Vol. XII, plate 457. ²⁶ *Ibid*, plates 451, 462.

obstacle on the third and fourth days of their advance, so, locally, did the short north-south section of the Ancre on the fifth and succeeding days. It was to help in closing a breach in this barrier there that the 4th Australian Brigade had been rushed to Hébuterne on March 26th. On that day the VII Corps, then forming the right of the Third Army, had been understood to be holding a continuation of the Ancre line from Albert, near the bend of the river, across the high ground to the Somme at Bray, while the Fifth Army held the line from the Somme southwards. What crisis had called for the urgent despatch of the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions, their commanders did not know until it was explained to them by General Congreve on their midnight arrival at Montigny.

"As I stepped into the room," writes Monash to a friend a few days later, "General Congreve said, 'Thank Heavens—the Australians at last.'" What passed at the interview is described in Monash's book.²⁷ "General Congreve was brief and to the point. What he said amounted to this: 'At four o'clock today my Corps was holding a line from Albert to Bray, when the line gave way.'²⁸ The enemy is now pushing westwards and if not stopped tomorrow will certainly secure all the heights overlooking Amiens. What you must try to do is to get your division deployed across his path. The valleys of the Ancre [to North] and Somme [to South] offer good points for your flanks to rest upon. You must, of course, get as far east as you can, but I know of a good line of old trenches, which I believe are still in good condition, running from Méricourt-l'Abbé [on the Ancre] towards Sailly-le-Sec [on the Somme]. Occupy them if you can't get further east.'²⁹

It was the ten-mile tongue of downs running into the angle between the Ancre and the Somme that had been left almost undefended by this withdrawal, and the obvious danger was that the enemy would march along it and then turn northwards

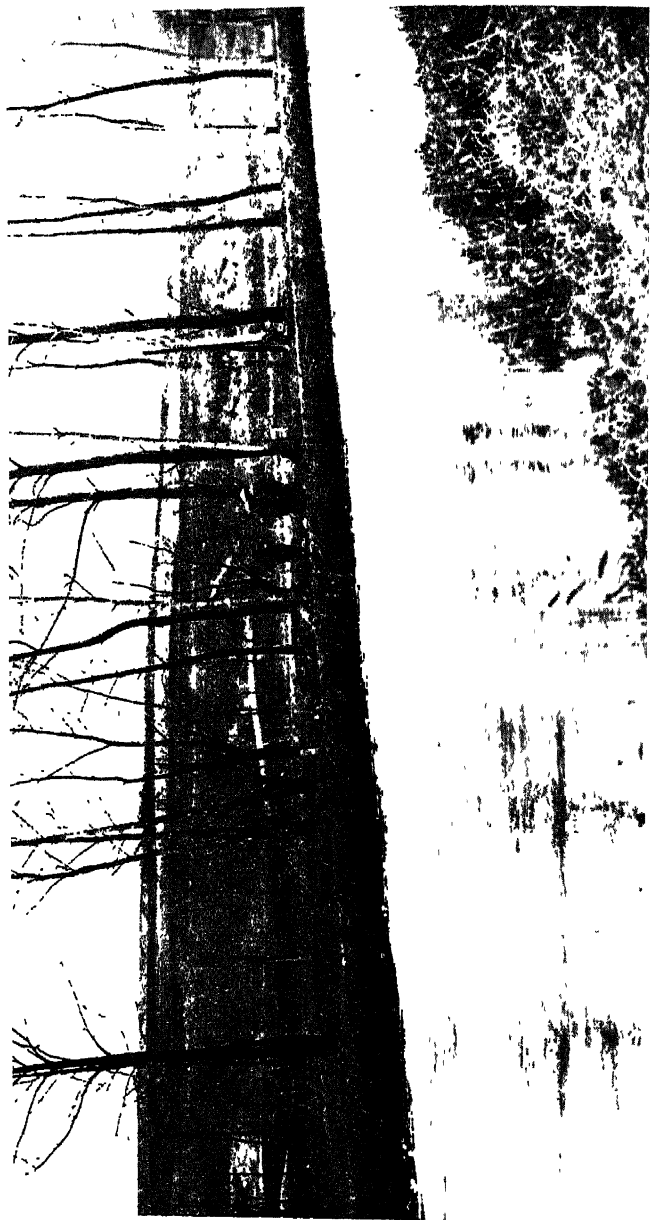
²⁷ *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, p. 26.

²⁸ This, of course, is Monash's paraphrase, written from memory. The actual notes of the interview show that Congreve said the retirement was due to a mistake in interpreting orders.

²⁹ Copies of notes based on these instructions and dictated immediately afterwards by General Monash to Major Wieck and Captain Pyke are among the Australian records. These sources, as well as a brief note by the general himself, have been used in compiling this account.



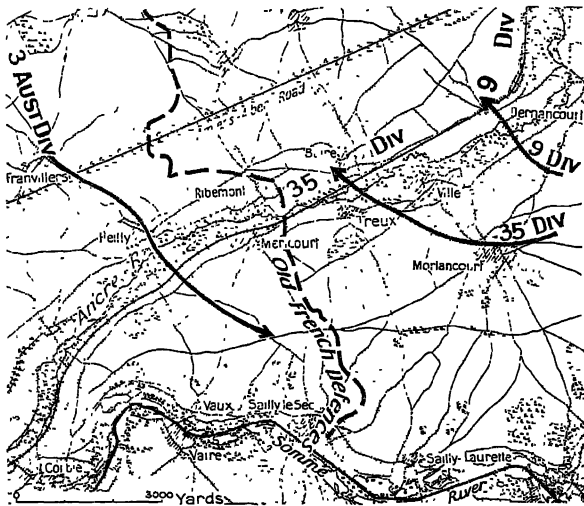
13. THE SOMME VALLEY, LOOKING EAST FROM THE HEIGHTS EAST OF CORBIE
A photograph taken during the fighting of March 30th (a rainy day) German shells can be seen bursting near Vaux. The Somme is on the extreme right



14. THE SOMME CANAL BETWEEN VAUX AND SAILLY-LE-SEC

Photograph taken from the southern bank on 31st March, 1918. The men on the river-bank belong to a machine-gun post on the northern bank.

across the Ancre behind the line of the Third Army, and southwards across the Somme behind that of the Fifth. The withdrawal had been due to a mistake in interpreting orders.⁸⁰ When news arrived of it, Congreve said, the divisions concerned—35th and 9th (Scottish)—had been ordered to hold on at all costs, but it was then found to be too late. It was not at that moment known where all these troops were—some might still be on the tongue between the rivers, but they were all pulling out of it northwards across the Ancre, and

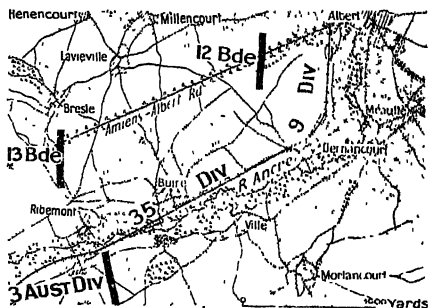


their artillery was already on the northern side. The 35th Division would be holding the line of the Ancre between Ribemont (opposite Méricourt) and Darnancourt, and the 9th between Darnancourt and Albert. The Somme-Ancre peninsula would not, however, be entirely undefended. Patrols of the 1st Cavalry Division from Corbie would keep contact with the enemy after daylight; and a force formed of reinforcements from the 9th Division, together with several hundred stragglers collected in Corbie, 2,000 in all, under

⁸⁰ General Congreve appears to have told Monash briefly of the several orders given to Major-General G. McK. Franks (*see pp. 271-2, 273-4*).

Brigadier-General Cumming,³¹ was being put into the old line of trenches of which Congreve spoke, to safeguard them until Monash's troops arrived. Down the high centre of the peninsula ran the road from Bray to Corbie. Monash was to put the first two arriving battalions (of the 11th Brigade), one on either side of it; when his second brigade (10th) came up, it could take over the sector north of the road, and he would then have his division across the peninsula with one brigade on each side of the road. The third would be held in reserve at Heilly on the Ancre, near his headquarters at Franvillers.

Congreve then gave an equally crisp order to Major-General MacLagan. The 4th Australian Division³² was to take up a line with one brigade (12th) on the heights a mile this side of the Ancre, immediately behind the 9th Division, and with the other brigade in support, two and a half miles in rear, behind the 35th Division, in the deep gully running north from Ribemont on the Ancre to Bresle and Laviéville. The Germans were certain to continue their attack in the morning; they



Intended positions of 12th and 13th Brigades (4th Divn.) and of 3rd Aust. Divn.

generally did so between 11 o'clock and noon, and attacked again between 3 and 5 in the afternoon; their method was quickly to find gaps and push through them. Their infantry, Congreve said, usually advanced in mixed order to within 600 yards of the British line and then lay down; machine-guns then crept up on its flanks, and the line found itself enfiladed; "then (say Monash's notes) their troops get up and walk

³¹ Brig.-Gen. H. R. Cumming, D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 91st Inf. Bde., 1916/17; 110th Inf. Bde., 1917/19. Officer of the British Regular Army; b. 9 Oct., 1867. Killed, in Ireland, 6 March, 1921.

³² At 6.33 p.m. on the 26th the division had been given unconditionally to the VII Corps, but Congreve recognised that this reserve must be carefully husbanded.

over us." The Somme valley was the critical place at this moment; the flank of the Fifth Army was believed to be still south of the Somme opposite Bray, but this was uncertain, and the retirement of the VII Corps had uncovered it. The Germans would doubtless try to work along the valley behind it, and to cross the river. It was important to hold the flats, and not merely to command them. All the bridges west of Bray had been prepared for blowing up, and must be blown up at the first sign of the enemy appearing near them on the southern bank. The crisis would probably have passed in 48 hours, possibly in 24; "but the situation is so serious that, if we fail to hold this line, Amiens may go."

With his usual forethought Monash had brought with him representatives of all departments of his staff, Major Wieck (general staff), Captain Pyke³³ (administrative staff), Major Vickers³⁴ (medical), and Major Hamilton³⁵ (commander of the divisional signal company), and two despatch riders. So that he might avoid loss of time in making his dispositions, Congreve gave him a room in Montigny Château with a telephone. MacLagan drove on to Baizieux Château. His chief general staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Lavarack, was already there. On the road he had passed a brigade of British siege artillery, which had been withdrawing before the German thrust. "You Australians think you can do anything," said its commander to Lavarack, "but you haven't a chance of holding them."

"Will you stay and support us if we do?" asked Lavarack. "Right you are," said the brigadier—and he did. MacLagan reached the *château*—a moderate sized country home, with a formal front garden and pool, untended but otherwise still free from any sign of war, and at 7.15 issued to Major Norman³⁶ of the 12th Brigade, who had hurried over from

³³ Major C. A. Pyke, M.C., V.D., D.A.Q.M.G., 3rd Aust. Div., 1916/17, D.A.A.G., 1917/18. Tea expert; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 10 July, 1888.

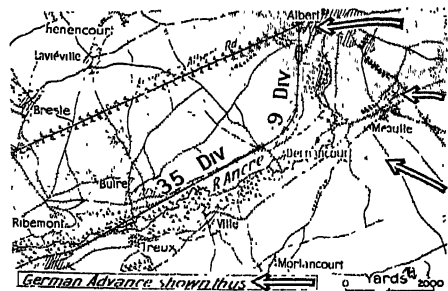
³⁴ Lieut.-Col. W. Vickers, D.S.O., V.D. D.A.D.M.S., 3rd Aust. Div., 1917/18. Medical practitioner; of Drummoyne, N.S.W.; b. Young, N.S.W., 11 March, 1884.

³⁵ Lieut.-Col. R. G. Hamilton, M.C., V.D. Commanded 3rd Div. Sig. Coy., 1917/19. Warehouseman; of Lindfield, N.S.W.; b. Newtown, N.S.W., 27 April, 1887.

³⁶ Brigade major; formerly Gellibrand's staff captain in the 6th Brigade. The other member of that famous trio, Major Plant, was now G.S.O. (2), 4th Division.

the head of the column then breakfasting at Senlis, the order to take up the support positions allotted by General Congreve.

Gellibrand accordingly made out an order for his leading battalions (47th and 48th) to move at 10 a.m. to occupy the prominence north-west of Dernancourt, behind the 9th Division, and called his unit commanders to meet him in Senlis at 9.15, but, at 9.10. a staff officer came up with urgent orders from the 9th Division to the effect that "a brigade of the 4th Australian Division, at present at Senlis," had been placed under the 9th Division and was at once to concentrate in the valley two miles south between Hénencourt and Millencourt. This message being confirmed within five minutes by one from VII Corps, Gellibrand directed the battalions to march at once, and himself went, as instructed, to the beautiful Hénencourt Château—a palace in form and extent—in which the 9th Division had for the moment its headquarters. This division had been in the thickest of the fight since the beginning of the German offensive, but the remnant of it—battalions reduced to single platoons, brigades equivalent to companies, the strength of its whole infantry now fallen to that of two weak battalions—was understood to be occupying the embankment and cuttings of the railway which curved past the near edge of Dernancourt to the near edge of Albert. It was also believed to be holding, by means of patrols or Lewis gun posts, the flats in front of the railway as far as the Ancre stream 500–1,000 yards away, as well as Dernancourt village, although this was in the sector of the 35th Division.



It was said that on the previous afternoon the Germans had tried to reach and cross this part of the Ancre, but that the

artillery of the 9th Division had caught them coming down the long open slopes behind Méaulte, and only a few had succeeded. The division's front along the railway, however, was nearly two miles long, and its infantry, strung out in a thin line of posts, was so exhausted that a break might occur anywhere. More than once during the evening and night of the 26th, a break had been reported where the railway was crossed by the Albert-Amiens road. The Germans had managed to place there a machine-gun which enfiladed the railway and caused a retirement of the nearest troops. As a reinforcement, the 17th Division (V Corps), which had just been withdrawn through the 9th, had been hurried up again into close reserve at Millencourt. The arrival of the 4th Australian Division enabled it to be dispensed with, and the Scots themselves, by a local counter-attack,³⁷ had stopped the gap. Like his troops, the divisional commander, Major-General Blacklock,³⁸ was entirely undefeated, and required no immediate movement of Gellibrand's brigade. Gellibrand was told that he would probably be required to relieve the 9th Division at dusk, and was instructed to obtain meanwhile from its brigadiers latest particulars of the situation.

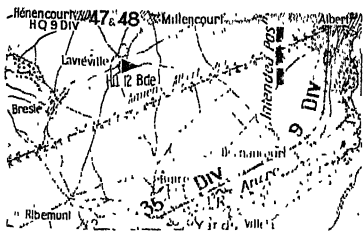
Hénencourt and Millencourt both lay on high land which curved northwards, at varying distance from the Ancre, to Auchonvillers (where the New Zealand Division was fighting), eight miles away. South of Millencourt a valley ran straight eastward to Albert, and south of this valley was the terminal feature of the ridge—a long, open down, running from south-west to north-east like a T-head, across the general direction of the heights. Along the otherwise bare summit of this hill, and slightly on its southern side, ran the straight, conspicuous avenue of the Roman road leading from Amiens to Bapaume; at the foot of the same side, and around the farther (or eastern) end, lay the meadowlands and tree-covered

³⁷ Made by the 11th Royal Scots, under Major A. C. Campbell, who was mortally wounded.

³⁸ Major-Gen. C. A. Blacklock, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. (He had returned from leave on March 25. Brig.-Gen. H. H. Tudor, the C.R.A., who, acting in command of the division, had conducted the heaviest part of the retreat, had reverted to his artillery command. As Blacklock had previously only been with the division a few days, he was on March 28 transferred to another division and Tudor reappointed to command the 9th.)

flats of the Ancre. The sides of the down were indented by two deep depressions, into the narrower and steeper of which the Amiens road dipped eastwards before passing over a minor rise into Albert; the other, a wide valley, ran south to Buire from the centre of the down; a third valley led past its western edge from Ribemont to Bresle, where it almost met a fourth which ran down on the northern side of the height to Albert. Near the top of these last two gullies, high and bleak on the neck joining Hénencourt heights with the down, was Laviéville, in which the two brigadiers of the 9th Division had their headquarters; it was said that the third brigadier, General Dawson³⁹ of the South African Brigade, had three mornings before held, as ordered, "at all costs," a position near Marrières Wood, and towards evening had been captured with a small remnant of his surrounded troops. Some 300 South Africans, who had been separated from their brigade before that action, had since been formed into a South African battalion and attached to the 26th Brigade. Gellibrand found the commanders of the two remaining brigades, 26th and 27th, and their staffs in Laviéville (which stood on the sky-line and attracted shell-fire); but they were as worn out as their troops, and he could gain little information as to the positions held or the units holding them.

At 11.3, while still at the 26th Brigade's Headquarters, Gellibrand received word from General Blacklock that an artillery observer had just reported British infantry falling back across the south-eastern part of the down, three-quarters of a mile north-west of Dernancourt. The Germans were said to have taken Dernancourt and to be pressing on, and Gellibrand was ordered to hurry forward at once his leading battalions and, by occupying a line across those heights astride the Amiens road, 1,000 yards west of the railway, to stop at



³⁹ Brig.-Gen. F. S. Dawson, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 1st S. African Inf., 1916; S. African Bde., 1916/18. Officer of South African Permanent Forces; b. Hove, Sussex, Eng., 13 Nov., 1873. Died 26 Oct., 1920.

any cost the enemy's further advance towards Amiens. Gellibrand asked whether he could give his troops a meal, but was told that there was not time. The order being most urgent, he with his brigade major immediately walked over to the area where the brigade was resting.

The 12th Brigade—after two full days and nights of work, travel, and excitement—had been settling down for rest at Senlis when the earlier order came, to move to Hérencourt. Of the events that followed that order, a vivid description has been preserved in the diary of Captain Mitchell of the 48th.

Dead weary, but pleased (he says), we moved out and along the road to Hérencourt. We topped a hill, and there on our left was the whole panorama of battle. Albert lay in the hollow. . . . A grey mist over the place, red shell bursts, and the smoke of many fires. All over the landscape shells were bursting. Batteries of artillery were galloping, limbers galloping in and out. Our guns blazing like Hell. Mounted men dashing all over the landscape. Wounded dribbling wearily back. Red Cross motors tearing along the road. Three 'planes down in the fields. Shells bursting down all the roads. A full-dress battle was in progress. . . . We moved on to Hérencourt. Broken buildings. A medley of men, horses, and guns. Staff in motors. No one knew what was happening. Our 'planes were overhead in clouds.⁴⁰ Through the centre of Hérencourt we wheeled to the left and up the Albert road. There were new shell-holes marking the road on each side and some actually on the road itself. . . . We reached the gully behind Millencourt and there we rested or tried to rest. The colonels and brigadier were unfolding maps. Runners flying in every direction. They said we were going in to hold; the Hun was advancing and his exact position was not known.

Actually, Brigadier-General Gellibrand did not at once see Lieutenant-Colonel Leane of the 48th, but he saw Lieutenant-Colonel Imlay of the 47th and sent to the 48th a staff officer carrying his verbal order for these two battalions to take up the line required, the 47th on the right, facing and overlooking Dernancourt, the 48th on the left, facing Albert. The 45th and 46th would be left near Millencourt, in reserve. Half the 12th Machine Gun Company would be attached to each forward battalion. Gellibrand mentioned the probability that the battalions would relieve the 9th Division that night, and added that, if ordered, this should be done by advancing in skirmishing order until they found the front line of the Scots, and then passing through and releasing it.

⁴⁰ That is, in swarms.

The 47th advanced immediately. The area was well known to the 4th Division, being part of its old training ground used during the "Somme winter" and the spring of 1917; the brigade had practised over it—in face of an imaginary enemy—similar movements to those which were made this day. The 47th extended into a wide artillery formation, with two companies leading and two following at a distance of 1,000 yards in rear. The colonel and adjutant were on horseback. Crossing the valley north of the down, the battalion was in full sight of Albert, hazy with the smoke of burning houses, the cathedral tower rising high above the roofs, and the well-remembered gilt figure of the Virgin still diving as in 1916 over the street below.⁴¹ Both here and later, when crossing the naked crest of the down, the troops could be seen by the enemy from the farther hills, and the ground was shelled.

The 48th, which should have been advancing on the left, had not yet started, but, the order being urgent, Colonel Imlay sent back to say that he was pushing on, and then moved cautiously ahead with the 47th alone. After advancing a little over a mile, the troops reached the avenue of the Amiens road and, on crossing it, perceived a crowd of men moving from the right front towards their southern flank across the south-eastern end of the down, half-a-mile ahead. Imagining that these were Germans, Imlay deployed his troops into line; some of the troops apparently opened fire on the supposed enemy, but Imlay at once sent over to make sure. The strangers proved to be British, mostly of Scottish regiments. "They said the German was on them," said Imlay, describing the incident afterwards, "but a word or two—'not to be b—— fools'—and the Scots came back with the Australians."

The 47th now advanced again, with the Scots on its right. Its troops were on the crest, in full sight of the semicircle of hills beyond the Ancre, but with Albert, Dernancourt, and the Ancre flats (where ran the front line) now hidden by the plateau or the curve of the forward slope. The obvious problem in these operations lay in the fact that, the moment

⁴¹ See Vol. XII, plate 206. (For its destruction see sketch on p. 406.)

the troops moved over that curve and began the descent towards the foot of the long bare slopes leading to the front line, they would offer an easy target not only to the opposing artillery, but to the machine-guns in the German front line. There being still no sign of the 48th, Imlay, soon after 1.30. stopped the line on the crest, signalled the position to brigade headquarters, and himself went forward along the Amiens road where the 48th should have been. After going two-thirds of a mile, he was fired on by a German machine-gun farther down the road. He returned and temporarily stationed several posts ahead.

Colonel Leane of the 48th* had shifted his battalion from its original rendezvous, which was under shell-fire, and Gellibrand, while personally delivering his order to the 47th, had sent a young staff officer of the 9th Division to tell Leane to bring up the 48th. That battalion was finishing its breakfast when this officer came up and asked for the colonel. On Leane making himself known, the stranger delivered his urgent order. Leane, a particularly cool and forcible—and always serious—commander, had fresh in his mind the scenes of panic of the previous day, and the numerous warnings from Third Army that alarms and false orders were being spread by Germans dressed as British staff officers—who were to be immediately arrested. He accordingly—and quite properly—asked this officer if he had a written authority. He had none, but said that an Australian brigadier had sent him.⁴² He could not tell the name of the brigadier and, when asked in what direction he proposed to lead the troops, he pointed away from Albert. Leane thereupon detained him, and let the battalion finish its meal while he himself went to find Gellibrand. On reaching him he learned that both the messenger and the order were genuine.

It was thus 1.30—and the 47th was already far on its way—when the 48th moved. It advanced in artillery formation over the same ground as the 47th,⁴³ and at once came in for

⁴² The story of these impersonations was now being contradicted by G.H.Q., presumably in consequence of such incidents as that which now happened. Referring to these reports, General Gough (in *The Fifth Army*, p. 301) says that he "never heard that we caught a single German behind our lines in British uniform." The British Official History now confirms this.

⁴³ The 48th moved on a front of 600 yards, with a depth of 2,000.

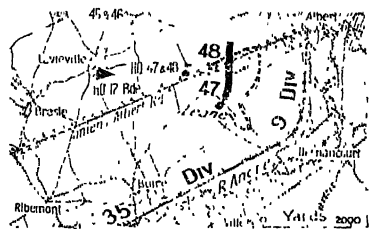
the shelling which the previous appearance of the 47th had probably helped to intensify.

Right across my path (says Mitchell's diary) burst four black shrapnel with harsh crashes. Hares were bolting madly about the fields. Shrapnel and H.E. were bursting all down the Amiens road and being liberally plastered about the landscape. We reached the top of a long rise [Laviéville down]. . . . Wounded were beginning to trickle back. A riderless horse came galloping madly down the Albert road, its flanks bathed in blood.

Leane, like Imlay, stopped his battalion for a while, choosing the cover of some old trenches. When they advanced again,

the shells fell on us in hail as we now moved (says Mitchell's diary). I saw a shell lob on our line and blow the men apart sickeningly. One man was blown off his feet—that was Yates,⁴⁴ D.C.M.—(he will recover). A long black object sailed twenty feet into the air. That was a Lewis gun. Seekamp⁴⁵ ["Sam Seekamp, lean, capable bushman," Mitchell calls him elsewhere] grabbed it as it fell. No one was killed that time. Our objective being unknown I stopped my line and we lay low.

Just on the other side of the Amiens road lay the 47th. Here, like Imlay, Leane left his battalion waiting while he went on to reconnoitre the lower part of the hill.



Leane's reconnaissance.

Thus by 2.30 on the 27th two strong battalions lay across the eastern end of the summit of the Laviéville down, astride the Albert-Amiens road, but out of sight of the presumed position of the front line.

I found a four-foot deep drainage pit on the side of the Albert-Amiens road (writes Mitchell).⁴⁶ The shells on the cobbles sent squalls of metal all over us. The lopped branches of the avenue kept falling round us. A hard-bitten Tommy corporal—old regular by appearance—blew up out of the rear and casually asked me for news of the front line. I could supply him with none, so he strolled out into the blue ahead, hidden time and again by the flame and smoke.

Whether the British still held the line ahead, down by the railway, and how far the Germans had advanced, the two battalion commanders were personally finding out.

⁴⁴ Pte. A. V. Yates, D.C.M. (No. 2064; 48th Bn.). Gold miner; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Clapton Park, London, 11 Aug., 1895.

⁴⁵ Cpl. H. Seekamp (No. 1985; 48th Bn.). Horticulturist; of Renmark, S. Aust.; b. Stockport, S. Aust., 14 Feb., 1885.

⁴⁶ In an account written in *Reveille*, July, 1934, p. 5.

Meanwhile the VII Corps had placed a third force across the road to Amiens. The other brigade of the 4th Australian Division, the 13th, had been marched up to the assembly area of the 12th, near Hénencourt, and shortly before noon General Glasgow, its commander, had gone forward to make inquiries of Brigadier-General Headlam,⁴⁷ whose composite brigade (the remnant of the 21st Division) was guarding the right of the 35th Division along the Ancre between Buire and Ribemont. Headlam told him that the enemy had just broken through at Buire.

Shelling was not very heavy (says the 13th Brigade's diary) and there seemed no reason why anyone should come back, but there were stray parties wandering about asking what had happened and what they were to do. General Headlam collected them and placed them in G.H.Q. line just west of Ribemont. One officer on being told to hold on there seemed surprised, and stated that previously his orders had invariably been to retire as soon as the Boche appeared. The news that 4th and 3rd Aust. Divs. were coming up seemed to encourage everyone.⁴⁸

Glasgow had summoned his battalion commanders to Bresle, and was there instructing them to bring their units into that valley south of the Amiens road, as previously ordered,⁴⁹ when an officer arrived with a cancelling order, which again was almost immediately cancelled by one doubtless due to the reported break-through. It directed the 13th Brigade to occupy the part of that valley north of the road, with its two forward battalions entrenched half-a-mile ahead across the rear end of the Laviéville down, immediately in front of Laviéville village. The VII Corps warned the brigade to see that its right was not turned by the Germans getting through at Buire, held by the 35th Division. Corps headquarters had just circulated⁵⁰ a strongly worded order from Third Army, not unlike that received about the same time by the 4th Brigade at Hébuterne:

The situation demands that the line of the Third Army be maintained at all costs. There must be NO withdrawal; if breaks occur the line must be linked up again on the general line of our present position with the aid of such troops as can be made available and which

⁴⁷ Brig.-Gen. H. R. Headlam, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 64th Inf. Bde., 1916/18. Of Manchester and North Yorkshire; b. Eccles, Lancs, Eng., 15 July, 1877.

⁴⁸ The war diary was written by an officer who took part in the incidents described.

⁴⁹ See p. 158.

⁵⁰ It appears to have been received by VII Corps on the previous afternoon and issued at once to the divisions chiefly concerned, but not generally circulated until 10 a.m. on the 27th.

are now beginning to arrive. Any local withdrawals owing to enemy irruption will be in the general direction E. to W. and NOT north-west, and must be temporary only, pending restoration of the line. . . .

In conformity with the second part of this order, corps headquarters told MacLagan that, if he was driven back, he should retire to a line of old French wire that ran along the western side of the Bresle valley. General Monash of the 3rd Australian Division was ordered to put his reserve brigade (9th) into the southern continuation of this old line from the Amiens road to Ribemont on the Ancre. It was part of the same line—variously known as the “Amiens defences” and the “G.H.Q. Line”—which from there southward to the Somme was being occupied by the leading battalions of Monash’s division.

Nor was this the only measure taken. The air force was, as on previous days, attacking with all possible force the enemy in the area of the reported break-through, and Third Army also sent up to Hénencourt a company of the new “whippet” tanks.⁵¹ At 1.35, however, long before their arrival, news had reached VII Corps from the 35th Division that Buire was securely held and that the division was counter-attacking Dernancourt.

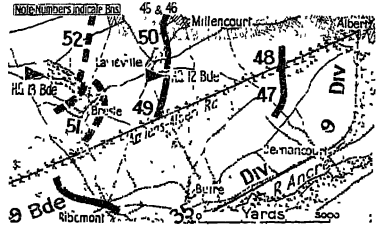
It seems probable that the Third Army’s commander (Byng) countermanded General Congreve’s provisions for possible retirement to the old French line, for, less than an hour after they had been made, Congreve, in a telephone conversation with army headquarters, affirmed that his policy was to hold the present front, but that, if he was to do so, he must put in the 4th Australian Division. He was apparently then told that it was improbable that any other reserve could be sent him. He forthwith ordered MacLagan to take over the 9th Division’s sector as soon as possible, releasing its troops as soon as it seemed safe to do so. Congreve now directed that if the Germans penetrated, the Laviéville line must “be held to the last.”

The 13th Brigade moved at once to the Laviéville position; it also had formerly practised on this ground the movement which it had now to make. Hénencourt and Laviéville were being shelled.

⁵¹ In consequence of the Hébuterne experience, the troops were to be warned not to mistake them for German

The troops moved (says the brigade's war diary) in artillery formation, in perfect order, as if for a field day—mounted officers were riding to and fro—anything more different from [its] previous warfare in France it would be difficult to imagine.

The 49th and 50th Battalions dug in across the open down, with the 51st and 52nd in shelter behind them. MacLagan gave the brigade the 4th Pioneer Battalion to dig trenches during the night along this vital line. He decided to release the 9th Division as soon as the forward battalions of the 12th Brigade could safely reach it.

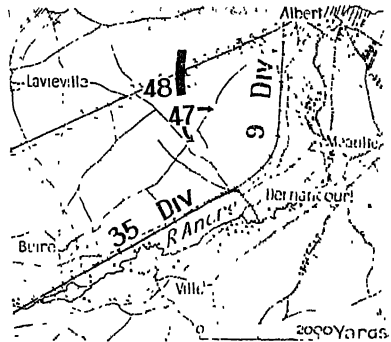


To those battalions the narrative must now return. At 2.30 they were lying on the forward edge of the Laviéville down, above Dernancourt and Albert, with a fragment of the 9th Division on their right. To repel the supposed break-through of Germans, the 35th Division had, as we have seen, arranged to counter-attack in the Ancre valley on the right, and as the orders from the 9th Division were definite—that the 12th Brigade should take up a line on the forward slope—Gellibrand had again ordered the 47th and 48th to do so, in conformity “with the advance on the right.” Thence they were to push forward posts to the railway embankment below, and to take special care to safeguard their flanks.

At 2.30, when this order was received, Colonel Imlay had just returned from his reconnaissance. The problem now set him was the difficult one which had to be faced in almost all the subsequent operations in that sector—how to get his troops safely down that bare slope in front of the Germans. After dark they would have been able to move as they liked, practically without danger, but the orders did not say that they could wait for dark. In their present position they would be useless to prevent the loss of the railway. They could only have been employed for counter-attack after it had once been lost. Gellibrand's order—that they must occupy a line well

down the forward slope—being definite and urgent, Imlay transmitted it to his forward companies. As these moved over the edge they came into view of the whole valley—the villages, the green curve of the railway embankment round the foot of the hill, the clustered houses of Dernancourt on the rich flats immediately beyond, the thread of the Ancre, and all the semicircle of green slopes in the background with Méaulte village straggling at their feet.

Almost at once the troops were furiously shelled and many were hit. The company commanders, Captains Williams and Symons,⁵² then dribbled them down piecemeal towards a sunken road that ran along the slope. This was not as far down as the intended position, but they found here an old straight trench, apparently dug for purposes of practising attacks in the days when the ground was in the French area, and this the troops occupied. They were no sooner in it



than some of the many aeroplanes which were that day in the sky came low overhead and fired into their groups with machine-guns, killing two men of the 47th. The 48th, then advancing, was similarly attacked and lost one killed and three wounded. The aeroplanes had British markings. G.H.Q. afterwards (April 18th) announced that "in no case throughout the duration of the war has it been proved that the enemy has ever attempted to fly machines bearing Allied markings"; but the troops naturally supposed them to be captured machines flown by German pilots, and some fired back at them. It was afterwards ascertained that the airmen were British, and had been told that any infantry seen east of Laviéville would be German. The fire from the troops helped to confirm them in this belief. The infantry had to lie very still to escape further attack. The 47th thus

⁵² Capt. C. A. Symons, 47th and 46th Bns. Warehouseman; of Melbourne; b. St. Minver, Cornwall, Eng., 22 June, 1880.

occupied the forward slope, but with considerable loss, Captain Williams⁵³ and 31 of his company on the slope above Dernancourt being hit, practically all by shell-fire, while Symons's company, on the left, lost 11.

The 48th, owing to its late start, was behind the 47th in the time of its movements, and Colonel Leane spent most of the afternoon personally walking round the forward slope with part of his staff.⁵⁴ He found that the British were still holding the railway, and indeed that no troops could leave it, any more than they could approach it, without risk of very severe loss. Leane, differently from Imlay, held that where a superior gave his junior an order to act under conditions which were known to the junior but not to the superior, the junior had discretion to carry out the order in the way most likely to avoid casualties. It is undeniable that this meant, sometimes, disobeying an order to act at once, and it would therefore have been a dangerous doctrine except for subordinates with outstanding qualities of courage and judgment. But Leane was Leane, and Gellibrand had the sense to know it. In spite of the orders, Leane decided not to move his troops down the slope till after dark.

Meanwhile, at 5.25, there arrived the expected order to relieve the 9th Division during the night. The main front line was to be that on the forward slope; but, in order to cover the crossings of the Ancre and to prevent the enemy from massing at the railway, the railway was to be held by posts thrust forward, and other posts or patrols farther ahead were to watch the Ancre bridges. The whole of the 9th Division was said to be in the forward area—26th (Highland) and 27th (Lowland) Brigades and South African battalion, as well as the engineers and 9th Machine Gun Battalion. At dusk guides from no less than eight of its battalions or parts of them, as well as from the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 35th Division, came to Imlay's and Leane's headquarters in some old trenches on the crest, beside the Amiens road, and said they had been sent to guide the relieving troops to the forward positions. Imlay ordered his two rear companies to move up and take over the positions of his two forward companies, and

⁵³ He and Lieut. L. L. Carter (Hobart) were wounded.

⁵⁴ His acting adjutant, Lieut. Downes, and two messengers accompanied him. Downes was wounded in the reconnaissance.

the latter to advance down to the railway, where each must establish three platoon-posts, keeping the other platoon to patrol the flats in front. The right company was to make certain, in particular, that the British troops on its right, belonging to the 35th Division, held firm.

Colonel Imlay did not believe that British troops were still holding the railway on his front; but, when, after dark, the companies of the 47th moved down there, they found the "poor old Scotties," as one account says, completely worn out, but still manning the railway, not in trenches, but in little one-man potholes scooped in the near side of the embankment. The section of the embankment north-west of Dernancourt, where it was pierced by the subway, was so high that from a considerable distance behind it nothing could be seen of the village except the church tower and an occasional roof-top. This sector, though properly that of the 35th Division, appeared to have been held by the Scots in addition to their own, and Williams's company of the 47th (now led by Lieutenant Goodsall)⁵⁵ took it over as well as its proper sector. The total frontage of the 47th was thus 1,600 yards, to be held by 180-200 men, and the posts had to be spaced with wide gaps between. In the 48th's sector, also, remnants of half-a-dozen Scottish battalions were found.

The skipper (Captain Carter) and I went off to get the lie of the ground (says Mitchell in his diary). . . . Darkness came down, and with the failing light the enemy shell-fire died away. We went back and collected our platoons. From the bank we moved forward by sunken roadways to the railway. Many hundreds of yards we went in the moonlight.

At last we reached our sector where the line formed a high bank. Small niches were cut in [it]. The garrison lined the top. The men we relieved were the 9th Royal Scots and K.O.S.B's. They asked, "Who are you?"

We told them, "Forty-eighth Australians."

"Thank God," they said. "You will hold him."

Just then the tall Scotty on top of the bank challenged in the darkness. "Who goes there?" The disgusted voice of his sergeant floated up from the foot of the bank. "Shoot the —— and challenge afterward."

Several of them sailed up the bank and started shooting into the moving shadows. . . . They had had to retire fighting for seven days because their flanks gave way. Four times they fought their way back through the enemy.

They departed wishing us luck.

⁵⁵ Lieut. W. Goodsall, 47th Bn. School teacher; of North Rockhampton, Q'land; b. North Rockhampton, 19 Sept., 1886.



15. THE AVENUE OF THE AMIENS-ALBERT ROAD ON THE LAVIÉVILLE DOWN
Showing the open plough land of the plateau across part of which the 12th Brigade moved
to support the 9th Division on 27th March, 1918. Headquarters of the 47th and 48th
Battalions were placed in a trench beside the road.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No. E-2301.
Taken on 23rd April, 1918.*

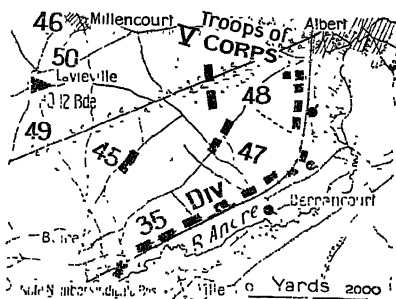


16. LAVIÉVILLE HEIGHTS (IN THE DISTANCE), SEEN FROM THE SOUTH-WEST ACROSS THE ANCRE RIVER NEAR TREUX

The arrows show where the 12th Brigade had to move down the hill to reach the railway embankment at Dernancourt. Dernancourt village and church tower are visible on the right. Albert lies hidden immediately to the right of the arrows, where a dip in the hills indicates the northward bend of the Ancre valley.

*Ancre War Memorial Official Photo No E2162b.
Taken on 7th May 1918.*

The 48th held its sector with a thin line of posts along alternate embankments and cuttings, but thrown back sharply from the railway as it approached Albert and the Amiens road. Here, at the mouth of a steep gully, the British had been unable to hold the railway. The Australian left, though supposed to be on the Amiens road, was south of it, on the side of this gully, in touch with several posts



of the V Corps also south of the road. The 12th Machine Gun Company placed eight of its guns on each half of the front, mostly along the railway. Its right gun was stationed with the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers near the Dernancourt railway arch. In case the tired British troops on his right gave way, Gellibrand after dark sent the 45th Battalion to take up a strong position on the heights behind his flank, overlooking Dernancourt and Buire. The divisional artillery had, during the day, reached the area Achieux-Lealvillers-Varenes. Here orders were received for its brigades to cover the front between Dernancourt and Albert; between Hénencourt and Millencourt the batteries of the 9th Division were already in action.

After dark on March 27th, therefore, Australian troops became responsible for barring the German advance on the front between Albert and Dernancourt established by the 9th Division.

We mounted the groups of sentries (wrote Mitchell). Then I stood on top of the railway and looked beyond. Lord, it was quiet. Not a bullet, not a shell. I could see a group of huts in front, and a river marked by trees. Over to the left was Albert, bathed in mists.

Farther north the tired troops of the V Corps had defeated German attempts to advance from Albert and south of Aveluy, but themselves failed in an effort to retake Albert. The narrative must now turn to the tongue of high land immediately south of Dernancourt, between the Ancre and the Somme, which had been left practically open to the enemy

by the withdrawal of the VII Corps divisions to the north of the Ancre.

The reserves who were being directed to this area were, as we have seen, the 3rd Australian Division. Its officers and men were full of keen interest in entering at last into that chief region of Australian experience on the Western Front—the Amiens-Somme country. And the critical events which caused the division's transfer to this countryside combined to make its arrival one of the most memorable incidents in the history of the A.I.F.

As the 'buses⁵⁶ carrying its battalions travelled southwards to the Amiens road just beyond Franvillers, where, in the cold dawn, the first troops clambered out very stiff and tired after thirty-six hours on rail and road, the villagers from all the nearest hamlets now exposed, or likely to be exposed, to the enemy were streaming out of that area in the opposite direction.

All down the road from here [Doullens] onwards (says the historian of the 41st Battalion)⁵⁷ was a motley crowd of refugees of all ages, especially noticeable being the womenfolk, young and old, dressed in their Sunday black, carrying bundles with all their valuable and personal belongings.

As far as the eye could see, especially along the road from the south-east, came carts lurching with towering loads, precious mattresses, bedsteads, washstands, picture frames, piled together with chairs, brooms, sauce-pans, buckets, the aged driver perched in front upon a pile of hay for the old horse; the family cow—and sometimes calves, or goat—towed behind by a rope or driven by an old woman or small boys or girls on foot. One old man, whose wife was too sick to walk, was wheeling her before him in a barrow. In this retreating stream there were also withdrawing, by order, British heavy artillery and transport. As the howitzers rumbled past the Australian infantry,

gangs of Tommies accompanying them (says the same historian) would stare . . . and vary their "Hy, lookout, Jerry's coming!" with sarcastic comments such as "You're going the wrong way, Digger—Jerry'll souvenir you and your —— band too."

⁵⁶ These were 'buses of the type used in London before the war.

⁵⁷ *The Forty-First*, by Lieut. F. W. MacGibbon, p. 80.

With the refugees were a certain number of British foot-soldiers withdrawing from the great battle. Some were labour troops, without arms, and it was not always easy in these days to distinguish which were stragglers who had lost their units, and which small parties of tired infantry under control; but they constantly impressed upon the Australians that "Jerry's" numbers were so overwhelming that it was hopeless to think of withstanding them.

Many Australian officers were anxious as to how this depressing outlook would affect their men. But—as constantly happened during this year of surprise—they found that they need have no fear whatever; even those Australian officers who knew their men best, and had themselves served in the ranks, were astonished at the reaction of the "diggers" to new situations. One such officer of the 56th Battalion (5th Division), which marched through precisely similar scenes two days later, has left a description closely resembling many others, written of the same days, by Australian regimental officers.

As I tramped at the head of my platoon, the rain driving into our faces and dripping from our steel helmets and greatcoats,⁵⁸ saw the crowds of fugitives hurrying past, and from the little band of my command heard whistling, laughter, and jokes, I was vastly proud of being an Australian soldier. . . . At one of our halts, when a group of middle-aged Tommies from a labour battalion asked for cigarettes and said in awe-inspired voices that it was impossible to stop the Boches—as "they were coming over in swarms," I overheard one of my platoon remark to his pal: "'Struth, Bill, we'll get some souvenirs now!" . . . Here, at last, was a straight-out job.

They knew (says the same account) that probably within a few days they would be thrown into a battle . . . against a mighty army flushed with success. Their manner would almost have led one to believe that they were about to participate in a sports meeting.⁵⁹

If anything, the evident apprehension of all around them roused an elation in these men. They distinguished themselves completely from the retreating troops. There may have been in it an element of vanity; "we Australians alone seemed to be marching towards the enemy," says the same writer.

Those who knew him (the digger) well enough to guess his thoughts were not surprised that they ran: "What! Let a bloody Fritz lick *me!*"

⁵⁸ Rain began to fall on March 28.

⁵⁹ *The Gallant Company*, by H. R. Williams, pp. 183 and 185.

But at this juncture there was much more in it than self-conceit, and the effect of this spirit upon the French villagers was striking. Their attitude towards the British soldiers in these days was surly to a marked degree. Many of the refugees could not smile, but shook their heads and muttered sourly, "No bon! No bon!" and the Australians at first were met by some of them with these gestures. Yet, as company after company of troops marched by at ease, "observing the usual march discipline, but laughing and joking all the while," their loose uniforms white with the dust of the journey, the inhabitants were vehemently moved. From the first appearance of the Australians in France, before their worth had been tested by a single battle, French people had acclaimed them as—like the Scots—being equal to their own fighters.⁶⁰ A singular sympathy, based partly on the comparative absence in both nations of the complexes attendant on social distinctions,⁶¹ existed between them, and was particularly strong among those villagers about Hazebrouck in the north and Amiens in the south, among whom the A.I.F. had chiefly been billeted. The 3rd Division found itself received in the Somme area as if it were marching home. In cottage after cottage the troops found on the walls photographs of Australians who, in the old Somme days, had been taken into the family circle, and who were still eagerly remembered. Lieutenant-Colonel Craven, then signalling officer of the 14th Battalion, says that when the 14th Battalion was marching to Hébuterne he heard the civilians cry, "Nos Australiens!"—"Our Australians!" Lieutenant Williams⁶² of the 56th, writing of the arrival of the 5th Division on March 29th at Louvencourt, says:

Old men and womenfolk . . . pressed around telling us that now the *bons Australiens* had arrived they (the villagers) would not depart. Never was our popularity so high.

⁶⁰ This statement, based on personal experience, was made to the writer in June, 1916, by Lieutenant-Colonel John Buchan, then with the war correspondents in France.

⁶¹ The belief of most British soldiers was that the Australians' popularity with the French was solely due to free expenditure of the lavish A.I.F. pay. This view, though a natural one, does not represent the whole truth.

⁶² Lieut. H. R. Williams, 56th Bn. Warehouseman; of Croydon, N.S.W.; b. Cooma, N.S.W., 21 June, 1889.



17. HEILLY VALLEY, BELOW FRANVILLERS, DOWN WHICH THE 11TH BRIGADE MOVED EARLY ON 27TH MARCH, 1918, TO TAKE POSITION

The photograph shows the wagon-lines of the 7th Brigade, Australian Field Artillery, which were shortly afterwards stationed there.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No. E1037
Taken on 5th April, 1918.*



18. BONNAY ON THE ANCRE, SHOWING THE RIDGE BETWEEN THE SOMME AND THE ANCRE
ACROSS WHICH THE 3RD DIVISION WAS THROWN

The Ancre flows through the trees beyond the village

Amst. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E2331
Taken on 28th April, 1918

One of the Australian war correspondents notes:

The units all tell one that the French people received them with open arms—sometimes with tears. . . . "Les Australiens and les Ecosais sont de tres bons soldats" an old Frenchman said to-day to Cutlack,⁶³ who had a ride in his cart.

So on March 27th on the road to Franvillers and Heilly the 3rd Division was met with demonstrations of welcome and affection. Women, who during the past night had seen the flashes of the enemy's guns, like summer lightning on the horizon, coming closer to their homes, and for the first time had heard the swish and crash of enemy shells, now in a revulsion of pent-up feeling burst into tears and raised a thin cry of "*Vive l'Australie!*" An old parish priest raised his hands and blessed the passing men. Some who had left their homes turned back, and others, who had not left, stayed on.⁶⁴ "Fini retreat, Madame," said one of the "diggers" gruffly, when the leading battalion was halted, and sat cleaning its rifles along the side of the Heilly street. "Fini retreat—beaucoup Australiens ici."

Monash's directions for the division's action, dictated by him at Montigny Château to Majors Wieck and Vickers and Captain Pyke, had then been carried by Wieck and Pyke personally to the column of 'buses that was bringing the troops. While waiting on the roadside to intercept the column, they wrote out from their notes these "instructions" by the light of a pocket torch. The document, copies of which, typed later, are with the records,⁶⁵ shows Monash's great powers of grasp and of lucid exposition at their best—the officers to whom they were read at the time recognised, with a flash of pride, the "old man's" masterly touch. The situation that called for each phase of action was clearly explained, and the action then crisply ordered.

The column not having arrived when the writing was finished, Wieck and Pyke drove on and came upon the leading brigade, the 11th, just embussing on the Thievres-Marieux road, not far from Doullens. Being unable, at first, to find the brigadier, Wieck, as minutes might be valuable, gave

⁶³ One of the official war correspondents.

⁶⁴ They had to be evacuated from Heilly, however, a few days later, the danger from shell-fire being too great.

⁶⁵ See *Appendix No. 3.*

provisional orders to a battalion commander with the leading troops.⁶⁶ Afterwards he found Cannan, and having read the order to him, went on with Pyke to the old headquarters at Couturelle, and thence back to Monash. Monash then drove with the advanced section of his staff to his new headquarters at Franvillers, where shortly after dawn they watched from an upper window the leading companies of the 11th Brigade march from the Amiens road down the steep grassy depression at the foot of which stood Heilly.

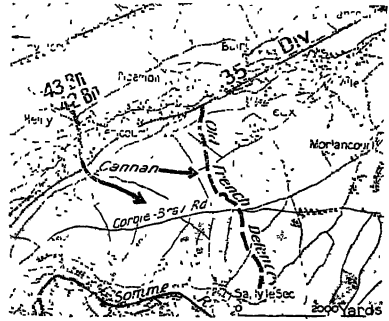
The leading battalion was the 42nd (Queensland), and the orders given to its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Woolcock,⁶⁷ were to report at Heilly Château. Having directed his battalion staff to see if they could find some rations for breakfast, Woolcock went to the stately *château* and found there a British brigadier, faultlessly dressed and groomed. This was General Cumming, who told him that he wanted the battalion to take over at once the whole line of old French defences between the Ancre and the Somme. In answer to a question, he said that there was no time for breakfast; the situation was too urgent. Woolcock returned to his officers on the village *place*, and showed them on the map the positions to be taken up. During his absence some rations had been found, and, as many of the houses stood open and empty, with food still on the tables, and a friendly British private, waving a bottle from an open window, indicated where ample wine was to be found, the battalion had managed to snatch at least a hasty meal, all the more valuable for its picnic spirit. Packs were taken off and stored, and Woolcock, returning from the *château*, explained the position to his officers in the village square. As he did so, Brigadier-General Cannan arrived.

It struck Cannan, as he came up, that he had never seen his men, during a roadside halt, so intent upon the cleaning of their rifles and Lewis guns as they were at that moment. There was a grimness about them, not often remarked in Australian troops except in actual battle. The fact was that they had never been charged with a task so obviously and

⁶⁶ Wieck believed that this was Lieut.-Col. Woolcock of the 42nd, but the latter has no recollection of the incident.

⁶⁷ Lieut.-Col. A. R. Woolcock, D.S.O. Commanded 42nd Bn., 1916/18. Accountant and business manager; of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 11 March, 1882.

directly related to all those aims for which they had volunteered to fight. Men who from childhood had been accustomed to make freely their own decisions were capable of taking firm decisions now, and not if they could help it would the Germans get through to these old folk and children who placed such evident trust in the A.I.F. uniform. Joining Woolcock and his officers, Cannan explained Monash's order, and then, after visiting the *château* and having a cup of tea with General Cumming, he and his staff returned to the village about 8 o'clock, just as the 42nd was moving.⁶⁸ The battalion crossed the little Ancre stream by the water-mill bridge, which some engineers were preparing for demolition, and extending into artillery formation advanced over the green fields. Neither General Congreve nor General Cumming had been quite certain whether the old French defence-system still existed in this sector—it might have been filled in by the farmers and the wire-entanglements taken away.⁶⁹ The advance towards it had therefore to be made with caution.



We could not tell how soon we might be on to him (says the historian of the 41st); at any moment, perhaps over the next rise, the whiz, whiz of his machine-gun bullets might greet us. This was real open warfare, fraught with novelty and excitement. Never before had we experienced anything like this.

While the 42nd, which was to take up the defence on the Somme side—the Ancre side having now been allotted to the 43rd—advanced diagonally towards the crest, Cannan and his

⁶⁸ The British guides had been waiting for battalions of the New Zealand Division, which originally had been directed to this area. Some of its transport arrived there, and, unaware of all the changes, marched on into the village of Ville-sur-Ancre and was captured by the Germans.

⁶⁹ The records show that Congreve, Cumming, and Cannan were all uncertain of its existence. The 35th Division had, on the previous day, sent a staff officer to survey the system, and a fairly detailed report of it had been presented by him, but had evidently not yet gone beyond the divisional headquarters.

staff⁷⁰ walked forward along the open, gradual, northern slope, looking for the old trench-line. The next two villages eastward on the north side of the Ancre, Ribemont and Buire, were associated with two corresponding villages on its southern side, Méricourt-l'Abbé and Treux, beyond which, in the marshes, lay a third village, Ville-sur-Ancre. It was said that the old trenches should be met with just beyond Méricourt, and here, in the open fields, Cannan at last found them, garrisoned by a handful of worn-out and dispirited troops, without food and in some cases without arms. As rifle bullets were then reaching these trenches from long range, Cannan was impressed with the necessity for manning them with the least possible delay by the 43rd Battalion, which would take over on this side of the peninsula. The VII Corps wanted the British garrison to be retained as support, but Cannan urged forward their feeding and pressed for their relief. He feared that their spirits might affect those of his own men.

Meanwhile the 42nd made for the other slope. As it passed the Ancre-side wood and cemetery, where lay Duncan Glasfurd, Owen Howell-Price, and several hundred Australians of the old Somme divisions, killed during the winter of 1916-17, a British aeroplane came low overhead and began to fire into the companies. The signallers waved their battalion signal—strips of white cloth—and the machine stopped firing, but circled suspiciously over as they climbed the hill. Here they came on a body of British cavalry, waiting in close reserve, and Woolcock's adjutant, Captain Dunbar (of Broodseinde fame),⁷¹ borrowed two horses on which he and his chief rode ahead to reconnoitre. At first no troops at all were visible ahead, except some cavalry patrols on the hills a mile or more away. Then, after passing the cross-road from Méricourt-l'Abbé to Sailly-le-Sec, they came upon a few scattered bodies of infantry in trenches.

The first party (said Dunbar afterwards) was a platoon composed chiefly of Scots. They refused to be relieved, but said they would come on with the Australians. Presently, north of them, was found a body of 100 British—mostly without rifles, with no machine-guns and no food. They accepted relief at once, poor beggars, and no wonder. . . . The Scots were finally persuaded to go back.

⁷⁰ Major G. A. Vasey, brigade major, and Captain J. H. Gard, staff captain. (Vasey belonged to Kew, Vic.; Gard to Hobart.)

⁷¹ See *Vol. IV*, p. 851.

The Corbie-Bray road at the top of the hill was being occasionally shelled in a vicious manner, but beside it were found the two British officers in charge of the line,

willing men (said Dunbar), who had fought through from the very first morning [of the German offensive]. One belonged to the Leicesters, and had lost his battalion on the first morning, but had fought on ever since. He was a good man, a major, and so was his captain, but they were utterly done. They had a "windy" headquarters scooped out just in a bank under a crossing on the road—which we did *not* take over—it was highly dangerous.

The 43rd Battalion (South Australia), coming up half-an-hour or more after the 42nd (Queensland), manned the series of posts, well dug but without protecting wire, that formed the line on the Ancre side of the Bray-Corbie road. Throughout this old French system the parapets had been flattened, and, as the defences were now overgrown with grass, the system was not easy for the enemy to see, although the country was open. The 42nd Battalion passed over the Corbie-Bray road to the Somme side of the ridge, one company taking over the position next to the road, a second making its way over the folded slopes beside the Somme flats. The third company, in accordance with Monash's order to guard the flats, followed behind the second. On this side the peninsula was much steeper and more folded. Its narrow plateau dipped suddenly into deep grassy gullies or chines, of which a succession, with steep, green terraced slopes, only here and there ploughed or wooded, fringed the Somme marshes. Across the river the slopes rose gently, and were crowned with the long line of trees of another Roman road, which ran, like a ruled line, from outside Amiens eastwards. The traffic to the Fifth Army's front could be seen passing along it through Villers-Bretonneux and Warfusée-Abancourt, which lay on that crest to the right rear and right front respectively.

The platoons of the right company of the 42nd, making their way round the steep folds on the northern side of the Somme, came upon the village of Saily-le-Sec, clinging to the foot of a broad spur close above the river flats. In the village were British cavalry,⁷² whose patrols were said to be in touch with the enemy out somewhere in front. The Queenslanders

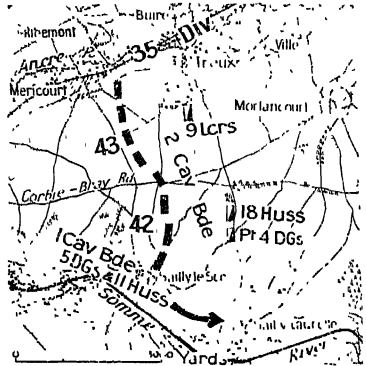
⁷² 5th Dragoon Guards, 11th Hussars, and 2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays). See *Chap. IX.*

at once dug in, making a series of posts up the open side of the spur above the village, and the reserve company was presently brought up to the village, and outposts of this company were stationed ahead on the flats.

Beyond the Saily-le-Sec spur a valley, longer than most, cut into the ridge almost as far as the Bray-Corbic road, on the other side of which a similar valley from the Ancre closely approached it. On the Somme side, beyond the foot of this valley, there peeped the next village, Saily-Laurette, which nestled in a farther gully, but with its cemetery and outlying houses topping the foot of a spur and confronting the posts at Saily-le-Sec.

It was about 11 o'clock when the two battalions of the 11th Brigade relieved Cumming's force on this emergency line. The rest of the 3rd Division was coming down as fast as its 'buses delivered it on the Amiens road at Franvillers. The 41st (11th Brigade) moved in artillery formation into a gully behind the 42nd, on the slope above the Somme. The 11th Machine Gun Company took position on that side also. The 37th and 38th, the leading battalions of the 10th Brigade (Victoria), followed through Heilly, and, in accordance with Congreve's orders, took over from the 43rd Battalion the line on the northern slope of the peninsula. The 43rd then moved over the crest and took over half the front of the 42nd on the southern slope. These movements took most of the afternoon to complete, but from 11 a.m. onwards the enemy's path down the peninsula was well barred by a garrison, however scanty, of troops tired only by travelling, and keen to meet the enemy. From the emergency line they watched eagerly for any sign of the Germans over the farther hills.

In a cup in the hills beyond a distant cross-spur there lay, invisible except from the north-west, the large village of Morlancourt, which the Germans were known to have occupied



on the previous evening. Patrols of British cavalry could be seen moving on the ridge that hid the village. The onlooking Australians had never before seen British cavalry in action, and they watched with interest all the more intense because this cavalry—the 2nd Brigade, supported by the 1st—included still a large remnant of the old regular army, and, for the first time, except at Cape Helles, infantry of the A.I.F. saw part of that army in battle. Beside the Somme at Saily-le-Sec the cavalry informed the Australian officers on the spot that they were about to “have a bit of a scrap” with some Germans who had pushed into Saily-Laurette.

Our officers (says an Australian diary) told the “diggers” to look out for it, and presently they saw the cavalry on the flats—cavalry patrols riding down scattered Germans, and a formed party of cavalry going into the village on horseback, and bringing out 18 prisoners.

“It was a fine sight,” wrote Private Schwinghammer⁷³ of the 42nd in his diary. “They proved far too good for the Hun,” says the staff captain,⁷⁴ who, with the brigadier, stood on the same ridge watching cavalry patrols galloping to outflank some distant enemy post.

Half-a-mile in front of the 38th, when it came in on the left, was a wood—variously known as “Marrett,” “Méricourt,” and “Treux” wood—immediately south of the hamlet of Treux, which lay south of the Ancre opposite Buire. The scouts of the 38th, who had preceded their battalion, moved through it, and from the farther side sighted the enemy between one and two miles away advancing in small groups without any scout-screen. Lieutenant Peters⁷⁵ sent back a report to Major Hurry,⁷⁶ and afterwards, in accordance with orders, having made all possible show with his eighteen men by firing from different positions inside the wood,⁷⁷ fell back to the old French line. This demonstration, and the cavalry

⁷³ Pte. V. G. Schwinghammer (No. 2639; 42nd Bn.). Clerk; of South Grafton, N.S.W.; b. South Grafton, 2 Oct. 1889.

⁷⁴ Capt. J. H. Gard, 40th Bn. Staff Captain, 11th Inf. Bde., 1917/18. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Hobart; b. Oamaru, N.Z., 21 Aug., 1886. Died of wounds, 31 July, 1918.

⁷⁵ Capt. C. H. Peters, M.C.; 38th Bn. Managing bookseller; of Melbourne; b. Clifton Hill, Vic., 25 Jan., 1889.

⁷⁶ Colonel G. Hurry, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 38th Bn., 1918. Solicitor; of Kyneton, Vic.; b. Kyneton, 15 Sept., 1868.

⁷⁷ The German advance was checked. On their way back to the main line the scouts found, in the old prisoner-of-war compound at Méricourt, the costumes of an entertainment troupe. They came in dressed as London policemen, “dudes,” and ladies in evening dress.

actions, were all the fighting that the division saw that day. But constantly, especially in the afternoon, German infantry and guns were seen moving from north to south across the front. From south of Dernancourt, through Morlancourt, over the crest, and down towards the Somme, the procession was for some time continuous. The 10th Brigade noted that "it looked as though" the Germans were crossing to the southern side of the Somme and intended to push their attack there.

Meanwhile the 3rd Division's reserve brigade, the 9th, had arrived. While it waited in Heilly valley, two British aeroplanes, after dropping near it two objects—at first mistaken for messages, but found to be "dud" bombs—opened fire with machine-guns, which missed the Australians but wounded two English soldiers. At 4 o'clock the brigade was moved, as already related,⁷⁸ on to the hill north-west of Heilly, where it found some English troops digging out part of the old French defence-line. The fourth battalion of this brigade was still in its 'buses, and the 3rd Pioneer Battalion was marching from Marieux. The 10th and 11th Brigades were for the time being covered mainly by British artillery firing from the north of the Ancre.

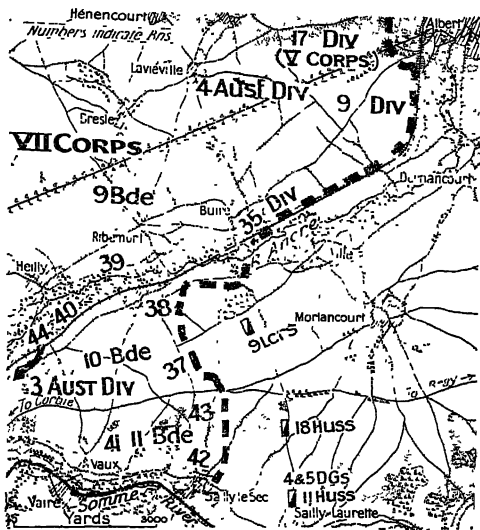
It was simply amazing (writes Major Wieck) how many British units, parts of the retiring troops, reported themselves [at divisional headquarters, Franvillers] saying that they were quite ready to fight so long as they could find someone to co-operate with or take orders from. They were mostly gunners, and their support at this time gave us a most comfortable feeling.

But the 7th A.F.A. Brigade was then arriving. It, too, was held north of the Ancre, its batteries taking over positions on the bare slopes north of Heilly. The only artillery directly behind the 3rd Division's infantry was "Y" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (13-pounders), of the 1st Cavalry Division.

The 3rd Division was thus strongly established across the front of the Germans about the same time as the 4th Division confronted those at Dernancourt, but much farther back, both relatively and actually. The 35th Division and Headlam's Force (21st Division), lying for two and a half miles along the Ancre valley from Dernancourt to Ribemont, linked the two. The commanders of the 11th and 10th Brigades, Generals

⁷⁸ See p. 168.

Cannan and McNicoll, had each been warned by General Monash that they would probably be required to advance their line as far eastwards as possible, and, as the cavalry patrols held the country in front for the depth of over a mile in the north and nearly a mile in the south, it appeared that the Australians would merely have to march forward and take it over. This situation, however, was now suddenly changed by the development of a new crisis in the main battle.



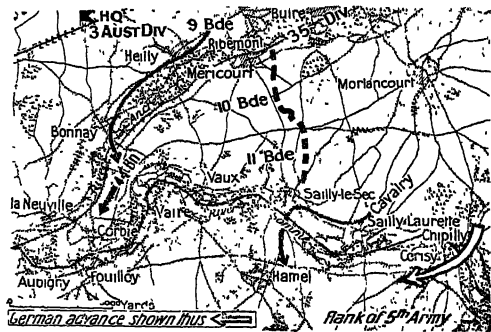
The River Somme had, since March 25th, been the boundary between the Third and Fifth Armies. The retirement of the VII Corps—now the southernmost of the Third Army—from the Bray-Albert line on the afternoon of March 26th had uncovered the left of the Fifth Army; and, although all the bridges thus made accessible to the Germans had been blown up, there was extreme danger of the enemy's managing to cross the river behind that army, and not merely turning its flank, but pushing on south of the Somme and then crossing northwards again behind the flank of the Third Army. General Congreve, acutely conscious of this danger, had impressed on Monash the need of watching that flank, and these anxieties were also present in a much more important quarter—at G.H.Q.—Sir Douglas Haig being determined that, come what might, the flank of the Third Army must be safeguarded. The Somme bridges immediately behind it were, during most of the 27th, guarded by part of the 1st Cavalry Division.

At 4.10 p.m., however, the Fifth Army informed G.H.Q. that the Germans had broken through its front at Harbonnières, three and a half miles south of the Somme. It was also reported by an airman that the Germans had crossed the Somme, as anticipated; they had built a temporary bridge at Cérisy, two miles east of Sailly-Laurette, and immediately behind the northern flank of the Fifth Army. The airman stated that they were moving south of the Somme towards Corbie.⁷⁹ G.H.Q. asked General Byng whether the Third Army could help. He decided on the swiftest measure—to send the 1st Cavalry Division. Haig authorised him to do this, provided that he still guarded the Somme crossings behind the flank of his army.

Accordingly the cavalry division was immediately ordered to withdraw its patrols from the front of the 3rd Australian Division, and to cross the Somme. General Congreve forthwith held an anxious conversation on the telephone with General Monash. He did not know, he said, whether the Fifth Army now had troops anywhere near the Somme. A prisoner captured by the cavalry at Sailly-Laurette had said that the objective of his division was Corbie—far behind the 3rd Division's flank. Monash told Congreve that the last battalion

—the 44th—of the 11th Brigade was just arriving, and that he would order General Cannan to distribute it so as to defend all bridges between Sailly-le-Sec and Corbie. He would also keep Cumming's Force as a reserve until the immediate danger had passed.

About 6 o'clock the earlier danger of a German break-through at Dernancourt having subsided, Monash was told to employ his reserve brigade, the 9th, then



⁷⁹ The German narrative of this and most of the preceding events is outlined, together with the British, in *Chapter X*.

near Ribemont, for guarding the southern flank. At 8.30 he was ordered to extend his watch over the bridges as far as Aubigny, a mile and a half west of Corbie. By order of the VII Corps, the second brigade of the 3rd Division's artillery, now arriving, was sent to cover this flank, taking position near Bonnay, north of the Ancre.⁸⁰

The situation at Harbonnières on the Fifth Army's front was afterwards found to be less serious than had been apprehended, but the German crossing of the Somme created an acute danger, and the transfer of the cavalry to the south of the river was therefore proceeded with. This meant that the area immediately in front of the 3rd Australian Division was, at dusk, suddenly left open to the enemy. It was ordered that the projected eastward advance of the division should not take place that night, but Monash warned his brigadiers to prepare to push their line forward.

The "fight of its lifetime" which the 3rd Division expected had not yet offered itself, and there were signs that the enemy in so vast an operation might simply ignore the comparatively small sector, from Hébuterne to the Somme, on which the British resistance had now been reinforced mainly by Australian and New Zealand troops, and, by sweeping past on the south, might leave them, for all their eagerness, helplessly outmanœuvred. Report had it that the Fifth Army, south of the Somme, was "practically non-existent"; for intelligent observers the chief hope, therefore, lay in the rumour that the French had available a reserve of twenty or thirty divisions, and in the news, now fast spreading, that the French general, Foch, known from the days of First Ypres as an outstanding fighter, had been appointed to the united command of the Allies' armies on the Western Front.⁸¹ The immediate task of the British was obviously that of holding on as far south along their line as possible, and so narrowing the sector of fluid line whose broken elements the French were hurrying to reinforce.

⁸⁰ This brigade was the 8th A.F.A. One of its batteries, however, was left with the 7th A.F.A. Brigade. The VII Corps at first ordered Monash to station the 8th Brigade south of the Somme, but on his representations the order was cancelled.

⁸¹ This news was known in the Army by March 28th, though not published in London until several days later.

But if the promised struggle had not yet arrived, the war was full of new adventure such as it had seldom afforded to Australian infantry. During the night of March 27th-28th most men of the 3rd and 4th Divisions were too tired to be interested in their surroundings. And yet their spirits were maintained by the picnic atmosphere. The artillery coming into position behind the green slopes on which the cows still grazed; the guns' crews, and the infantry supports bivouacking behind the grassy banks, and nursing hens or rabbits from the backyards of some neighbouring abandoned village; even the front-line infantry, cherishing a prospect of exploring and ransacking the abandoned British camp and casualty clearing station close* behind the front line on the hill facing Dernancourt—all these were brimming with cheerfulness. It was not easy for the authorities to determine, in this as in some previous movements of the main Western Front, where reasonable "salvage"—or use of abandoned property—ended and reprehensible looting began;⁸² but when a village lay so close to the lines that its contents were certain of destruction by shell-fire or decay if left there unused, and when these goods could not, without undue effort and danger, be collected and transported to the French authorities in rear, soldiers were allowed to take for reasonable use whatever foodstuffs or other comforts they could find. Indeed a prohibition, even if it had been equitable, could not well have been enforced. Only one such village lay within the Australian lines—Sailly-le-Sec, occupied by the supports of the 42nd. The diary of an Australian states:

They [the 42nd] could not imagine how it was that the Tommies had nothing to eat. Sailly-le-Sec was full of food. There were only 18 [French] people in the place, all between 50 and 80; they were old folk, who said they had their homes and belongings there—they did not mind dying, but they would not face the prospect of leaving their homes and going out to the world as paupers. Poor old creatures, all were sent out a few days later except one bedridden old lady of 80. A nephew obtained leave to stay with her; and there they were when the 41st (*sic*) Battalion was in its first time—and still there when it left—living not in cellars like our men but in the house. . . . There were magnificent feeds to be had in Sailly-le-Sec. The line ran through the

⁸² It was generally rumoured (but the report has been denied by reliable authority) that in the early days of the destruction of Ypres men had been shot for taking articles from houses, a practice that afterwards became universal.



19. SAILLY-LE-SEC ON 29TH MARCH, 1918

Some of the trenches of the old French line can be discerned on the hilltop above the centre of the village

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E4667.

To face p 188.



20. HEILLY CHURCH

It was from this village that the 3rd Division deployed to take up its line. The photograph, taken in May, 1918, shows a German boy prisoner with his Australian boy escort.

eastern edge of it, and three companies had bits of it—each company owned its bit and all that it contained. They gathered sheep and cows into the cellars. They [the troops] had three meals a day, cooked by cooks fished out of the platoons—one [meal] at 8.30, one at 12, one about 6—besides the two authorised meals sent up from the cookers. They gathered sheep into the cellars, and cows, . . . and when the battalion was relieved it left stores of mangelwurzels and fodder down there with these, and carefully closed and camouflaged the cellars with fallen bricks, and, when it came back for its next tour, found the sheep there, undiscovered [by other troops]. Indeed, its men, working [*i.e.*, on fatigue parties] with the relieving battalion, milked the cows—some of them—nightly.

There was also the adventure of exploration :

Next day (notes another diarist,⁸³ speaking of March 28) we explored the village which contained some fine homes, well kept and beautifully furnished. The lovely dresses and family treasures . . . paintings, statues, etc., were fine. The Mayor's house contained some fine wine. We filled our waterbottles with it and also brought many bottles back to the trenches. Nothing is more refreshing than sweet red wine, especially as our water was generally bad. Some got drunk, but not many. This house contained an excellent piano. Alas, in a few days' time all this was to be destroyed by shellfire.

Moreover, after the mud and confined routine of trench-warfare, even the landscape inspired a blessed content.

The country was really beautiful. Green fields and crops; and flocks of sheep and cattle browsed on the hills just in front of our trenches. The ground was free from shellholes.

Two hundred yards away on the green, lightly-wooded Somme flats was a cottage about which—actually *in No-Man's Land*—a white dress occasionally fluttered. According to the diary first quoted, its owner was

a girl of about 35. Neither the Germans nor we visited it [the cottage]. It was a difficult place to get at.

It was stated that this Frenchwoman was tending her mother there.

On the slopes opposite Dernancourt the old casualty clearing station became on later nights a hunting ground for men searching for blankets, preserved food, and other comforts. Exposed to German fire, it lay deserted by day, but at night twinkled, as one diary says, "like a White City" with the wandering candles of men seeking such treasure. Farther

⁸³ Pte. Schwinghammer, 42nd Bn.

back, in Ribemont, Méricourt, Laviéville, Buire, and Corbie, plundering was in full process before the Australians arrived; the wine cellars were the most obvious attraction, and the roadside ditches for miles around were already decorated with champagne bottles, in many places a bottle to every few yards. None of these places except Buire was in immediate danger of destruction, but their roads were barricaded with farming machinery as a precaution against an inrush of German horsemen or cars, and the houses had been abandoned by most of their inhabitants in panic.

The sacking of wine cellars was comprehensible and natural, but even hardened campaigners were shocked by the apparently senseless wreckage of the contents of many homes as far back as Corbie, miles behind the zone of acute danger. For more than a day many houses had lain abandoned on the routes of numerous stragglers from the retreating armies. With headquarters and all units changing their location as quickly as they did in those days, proper control had been impossible. Any thieving, half-drunken, or dull-witted jetsam from the retreat was free to enter, and, temporarily undeterred by British discipline, to pull out the contents of drawers, cupboards, and wardrobes, scattering their privacy in litter over the floors; to wrench down the curtains, and senselessly trample over the delicate embroidery. Probably the first emptying of drawers was the work of thieves searching for hidden money. For several days the regular occupants of billets in these towns were frequently disturbed by prowlers, whose intruding heads, suddenly appearing, would beg pardon and mumble an excuse about searching for something for an officers' mess, and be as suddenly withdrawn.

Such scenes—then occurring on the German side as well as the British—were deplored by the decent element in both armies.⁸⁴ In this wrecking the Australian soldier, notwithstanding his deserved reputation for freebooting, had little part; it was the work of men much more accustomed than he to repression and now suddenly loosed from restraint. But the Australians thoroughly relished the wine and the farmyard

⁸⁴ For comment, unusually understanding, on the ransacking of Albert by the Germans on March 28, see Rudolf Binding, in *A Fatalist at War*, p. 209.

loot. This phase was thought sufficiently important to deserve special record, and the Official Photographer, Captain Hubert Wilkins, tramped the forward area, securing photographs of the support companies plucking hens.

At one place (says a diary describing this tramp) he passed, near the trenches, a camouflaged pig—they had it carefully covered with branches. There was a certain amount of champagne even in the front line, and the men were enjoying this war as never before. . . . Three or four cows had been killed by shells outside Méricourt-l'Abbé but the men had not touched them—there were too many fowls, rabbits, pigs and goats. . . . A sergeant was there, too, carrying four fowls and a sack full of champagne bottles.⁸⁵

The first Australians to march into Corbie were the 44th Battalion (Western Australia), ordered thither at dusk on the 27th to guard the Somme bridges until the 9th Brigade could come up. At 9.30 p.m. Captain Longmore's company, which was responsible for the river-crossings at this town, arrived. Longmore was rather shocked to find the bridge to Fouilloy, the southern outlier of the place, guarded by two drunken British sentries. Leaving his company, he reconnoitred Fouilloy together with his officers. On their return they found a considerable part of their own company also drunk, or in process of becoming so. They made during the night such dispositions as were possible, and in the morning handed over to the 35th Battalion (9th Brigade), which, with the 33rd, had now marched up to take over the duty.⁸⁶ When clear of the town, Longmore halted his company, told its men "what he thought of them," and made them throw away all wine-bottles and empty their water-bottles on to the road. Within a few days town majors were appointed to the villages, with the duty of seeing that grain and wine stores were collected, properly guarded, and accounted for to the French Commission, and surviving live stock rounded up and driven to the rear. On March 30th in the fields about Ribemont a couple of horsemen rounded up the cows, and similar sights

⁸⁵ The same record states that Méricourt was shelled pretty heavily, and that cattle had been left by the inhabitants "shut up in stalls, without food, and so with the tame rabbits."

⁸⁶ It is recorded two days later of the 9th Brigade, also, that it "has had a good rest (and probably plenty of chickens, not to mention wine)". For the action of General Elliott in the matter, see p. 525.

—"so like *our* old country," as an Australian remarked—were for several days seen throughout the area.⁸⁷

So the looting quickly came to an end, but not the freedom of the life in this comparatively untouched country. Whether or not some of the adventures were mildly scandalous, it is impossible to exaggerate the effect of this new freedom on the spirits of the men. After years of trench conditions, the incidents of open warfare, for which the troops had always been trained, but which they had never before experienced, were as enjoyable as play. The 11th Field Company records with delight that it had to prepare some of the Somme bridges for thorough demolition, and that it not merely constructed three trestle bridges over the Ancre, but, in answer to a hurried call, put its treasured pontoons for the first time to serious use. The immediate effect of this fun was that the rainy, miserable conditions which prevailed for many days after March 28th could not depress the troops. This was campaigning as they had read of it in history and story-books. They were intensely interested in the whole great game now developing towards decision, and in their rôle in it, which was now obviously telling. So far as the Australian soldiers were concerned, the dismal outlook of trench-warfare never again cramped their spirits; through one development or another, the atmosphere of adventure remained with them from this time until their return to their own country.

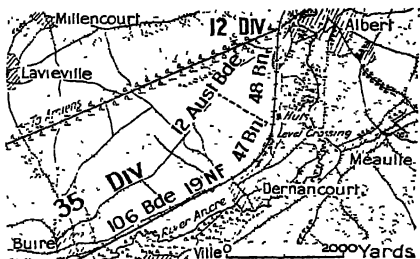
⁸⁷ The 3rd Australian Division alone saved 94 tons of wool carried from Ribemont mill by the 3rd Divisional Train and the 6th (Army) Brigade, A.F.A., and valued at £87,694. It also saved in Ribemont, Bonnaux, and other villages near the line 16,616 lb. of linseed cake (forage), 65,790 lb. of oats, 37,620 lb. bran, 49,150 lb. wheat, total value £975 16s. 6d., 214 head of cattle (£4,280), and £667 17s. worth of wine. Grand total value, £94,472 13s. 6d. More than 60 cases of clocks, table ware, linen, curtains, and other furniture were handed to the French Mission. The French authorities were exceedingly grateful for General Monash's effort in this respect, and their appreciation was expressed to G.H.Q.

CHAPTER VIII

DERNANCOURT, MARCH 28TH

THE forward companies of the 4th Division, which, since before midnight on the 27th, had been holding the railway between Dernancourt and Albert, kept a keen watch despite the fact that they had marched all the previous night, and had received little rest on the night before that. They naturally expected the Germans to continue the advance at dawn. The outpost-line was very thin, and at certain points along the railway there were wide gaps merely watched by sentry groups. On the straight section of line, along the flats between Buire and Dernancourt—the sector of the 35th Division—the railway rose gradually on an embankment, which, near Dernancourt, became very steep and was pierced by a subway through which the Laviéville road led out of the village. After curving on this embankment around the down, touching the orchards and other back-enclosures of Dernancourt, the railway ran into a shallow cutting, and thence northwards along lower or higher embankments across the folds at the foot of the hill.

In the first of these folds—where the railway ran out from the first cutting, across 100 yards of deep embankment, and then almost level with the country again—was a level crossing for a cart track. A platoon of the 47th Battalion's right company held the cutting south of this embankment—the garrison being in an old French practice-trench—and the southernmost platoon of the left company held the low bank north of it, but the embankment itself had no garrison. Two machine-gunners with a Lewis gun were placed at the level crossing, their nearest supports being the neighbouring post of Lieutenant Goodsall's company in



the cutting to the south; and, as an extra precaution, Captain Symons of the northern company had ordered his scout sergeant, S. R. McDougall,¹ and two men to watch the crossing, stationing them behind the embankment immediately north of the crossing.

During the night, patrols of the 47th going across the open flats had found that there were Germans on the Albert-Dernancourt road, which ran parallel with the front, 250-300 yards away. The night passed without sign of attack. As dawn drew near, the flats were covered with mist, but day began to break without any disturbance of the prevailing silence, and McDougall accordingly allowed his two men to "stand down" and curl up for a rest at the foot of the bank while he continued to watch. About the hour at which, as one account states, "it seems to become darker in the half light," the intelligence officer of the 47th, Lieutenant Reid,² and Lieutenant Robinson³ came past on their rounds. They had just walked on northwards, behind the embankment, when McDougall heard, from the mist, 50-100 yards ahead of him, the sound of bayonet scabbards flapping on the thighs of marching troops. He at once called to the two resting men. Lieutenant Reid hearing the voice shouted: "Is that you, Mac?" "Yes," was the reply, "come up here quick. I think they're coming at us." Reid ran up the bank. "By Jove they are!" he exclaimed.

There followed an incident peculiarly typical of this year's fighting—at all events so far as the Australian and New Zealand troops were concerned in it—arising partly from the more open nature of the action, and partly from the marked self-confidence of the troops. McDougall and his two men ran to summon the nearest files of their own company's platoon, 100 yards away to the left. McDougall ran along the top of the railway, and, as he did so, he could see in the half-light, through the mist, Germans advancing along the whole front towards the line. He quickly reached the platoon and, with

¹ Sgt. S. R. McDougall, V.C., M.M. (No. 4061; 47th and 48th Bns.). Blacksmith; of Recherche, Tas.; b. Recherche, 1890.

² Capt. G. C. Reid, M.C.; 45th and 47th Bns. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 30 Dec., 1895.

³ Lieut. E. Robinson, M.C.; 47th Bn. Printer; of Casino, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 1 July, 1886.



21. THE RAILWAY EMBANKMENT (RIGHT) AND CUTTING (LEFT) AT DERNANCOURT
The level crossing at which the Germans penetrated on March 28th is just beyond the left
of the picture. In the middle distance is the old British "cave" for German prisoners

*Photographed from the air by No. 3 Squadron, A.F.C. on 30th May, 1918
Lent by Captain K. A. Goodland, 29th Fin
Aust. War Memorial Collection No. 11059*



22. THE RAILWAY EMBANKMENT, DERNANCOURT, WERE HELD BY THE 47TH BATTALION
AND 19TH NORTHUMBERLAND FUSILIERS ON 28TH MARCH, 1918

The railway bridge is just outside the picture to the right The trees of Dernancourt
can be seen over the embankment

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E3804
Taken on 9th November, 1918*

seven of its nearest men, rushed southward along the rails again, intending to line the men out behind the unoccupied bank. German bombs were now flying over this, and one burst fairly upon two Australians who had just opened fire with a Lewis gun. They were badly hit, but the gun was undamaged. McDougall, who was still on top of the bank, had formerly been a Lewis gunner, and, like most of them (as he afterwards admitted), always itched to "grab" one of these weapons in a tussle. He now seized the gun and began to fire it as he went. He was well ahead of his party—three or four of whom were quickly killed or wounded—when two German light machine-gun teams started to cross the embankment seven yards away. McDougall, with his gun across his chest, at the "port," switched its fire straight into them, like water from a hose, blew away half the head of the nearest man, and shot down the rest. Seven of McDougall's opponents were killed; their guns pitched forward and were afterwards gathered by the 47th. Several other Germans who tried to cross the rails at the same time were shot down or scared away.

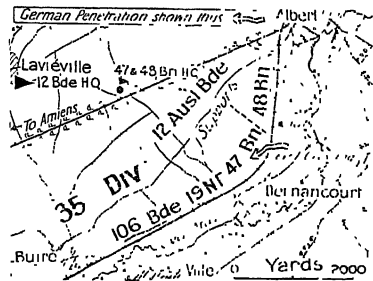
McDougall then ran along the outer edge of the embankment to see what enemy was there, and found himself looking down on some twenty Germans, crouching in pot-holes and shell-holes on their side of the bank, obviously waiting for the signal to cross the line. He hosed them with his gun as he went, and they immediately fled, McDougall then standing on the bank, with his gun at the hip, chasing them with its fire. Thirty yards away across the flat were some old British military huts, behind which some of this and other parties hid both when advancing and when fleeing. From these huts, and from farther north, came the fire by which McDougall's companions were hit.

In the meantime Lieutenants Reid and Robinson also had been organising resistance. The northern half of the embankment was now garrisoned, but the southern half was still open, and other Germans had surprised and captured the Lewis gunner at the level crossing, and marched on southwards along the rails. Seeing a light flicker near the southern cutting,

Sergeant Morris,⁴ in charge of two Vickers machine-guns farther along it, sent his scout, Private Casey,⁵ to investigate. The scout also was captured, but the sentry in the cutting challenged the body of men that was approaching and, not receiving the password in return, fired and raised the alarm.

The body of Germans which here had crossed the railway was about fifty strong, and the main part of it now headed south-westwards towards a bank on the open knuckle behind the right company of the 47th. If these Germans had taken cover quickly and opened fire, they would have placed the right flank of that battalion in a difficult situation. But they had not yet attempted to take position when they themselves were fired into from several directions. McDougall, seeing them in rear, switched his gun on to them. Its barrel casing

was then so hot that his left hand was blistered, but his mate, Sergeant Lawrence,⁶ held the gun and McDougall fired with his uninjured hand. Lawrence and another sergeant now started across the open, past the rear of the embankment, to take them prisoners. As the two men passed, there stood up



from a crevice in the bank behind them a German officer. He took a pace forward and levelled a revolver at their backs. A shout from McDougall, "Look out behind you!" caused Lawrence to swing round and fire his rifle. Through the suddenness of this action he tripped and fell, and the German missed and was immediately shot by the other sergeant.

The final stroke in this incident came unexpectedly from the neighbouring flank of the 48th Battalion. Here, in the first light of dawn, movement had been observed in front.

⁴ Sgt. A. E. Morris (No. 2021; 12th M.G. Coy.). Labourer; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Mt. Gambier, S. Aust., 1880.

⁵ Pte. A. R. B. Casey (No. 4259; 12th M.G. Coy.). Bookmaker's clerk; of West Perth, W. Aust.; b. Richmond, Vic., 1885. Died, 28 Jan., 1929.

⁶ Lieut. J. C. Lawrence, M.M., M.S.M.; 46th and 47th Bns. Station overseer; of Cloncurry, Q'land; b. Canally Station, Balranald, N.S.W., 15 June, 1887.

Our men were all up immediately (says the diary of Captain Mitchell) waist high over the railway line. Lewis guns and rifles blended in a chorus. The grey mobs on our front wavered and broke at a hundred yards. Away to the right, on the 47th's front, the fire was continuous. The massing movement in front was still going on. Our men were shooting and cursing furiously.

It was now half light. An exclamation caused me to look to our right rear. Coming over a rise a hundred yards away was a line of men. This was serious. Either the 47th were retiring or they were enemy broken through.

Realising the urgency of the situation⁷ I tore down the steep bank, plunged through the steep hedge half way down, and raced up to the skipper (Captain Carter). "Captain, I'll go across and find out the strength of these birds. . . ." "All right," he said, and as I was out over the top, "You are sure they are our chaps?"

"No," I yelled back. "I'm damned if I am."

Half way across, pistol in hand, I realised that they were Huns. With a yell of joy, rage, and delight I bounded forward, casting aspersions on their parentage and calling on them to surrender. They mustered together jabbering, their hands at their belts. (What I did not know was that the Lewis gunners and riflemen along the embankment, with their weapons levelled, cursed me for being in the way.) I reached the nearest, an officer. His hands were at his waist, unbuckling his equipment. "Up! Up! Up! Damn you!" I said, thrusting the long barrel of my Smith and Wesson in his face. He apologised in broken English, French and German. By this time a host of our men had gathered around. He explained that there was beer in his bottle and socks in his pack. . . .

The German party had already lost 2 officers and 20 men killed, and the remainder—the officer and 29 men—now surrendered. They had advanced about 150 yards from the railway; all who crossed it had been accounted for.⁸

Without unduly disclosing at this stage facts that were generally unknown to the British at the time, it may be stated, as indeed immediately became clear through the capture of prisoners, that the main attack this day was made by the 50th Reserve Division (the same which opposed the Australians on their first arrival at Armentières in April, 1916, and which had since met the 5th Division at Polygon Wood on 25 and 26 September, 1917). This Prussian division had taken part in the early fighting in the great offensive, at Vendhuile and Ronssoy. Later, on March 27, after several days' rest at Mametz,⁹ when the

⁷ Mitchell had been with the 48th when it was cut off at Bullecourt. "I came out . . . with an encirclement complex," he wrote afterwards, "and was prepared to go to no end of trouble to ensure that fire came from one side only."

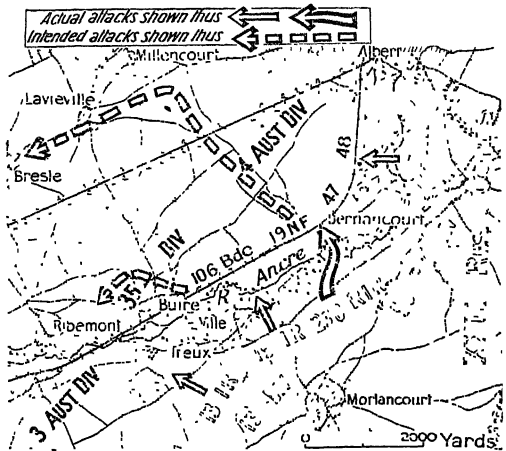
⁸ For his part in this action McDougall was awarded the Victoria Cross. Several Australians who had been captured by the Germans in their advance were recaptured during this fighting. One of them, Pte. A. R. B. Casey, dropped flat, as soon as the firing began, and quickly escaped. Another, Pte. R. D. Beale, had been ordered by a German officer to lead his column to where the Australians were weakest. It is said that Beale purposely led them to a strong point. In the confusion he also escaped.

⁹ In the old British hutted camps which the Australians had helped to build, and often occupied.

advance was held up at Albert and Dernancourt, it was marched up to Fricourt, and at 11.30 p.m. was ordered to attack the railway embankment next morning. The artillery preparation would begin at 5.15 a.m. and the assault would be delivered at 6.

The attack was to be made by the 229th R.I.R. on the right, advancing through the 9th Reserve Division north of Dernancourt, and by the 230th R.I.R. on the left, from the direction of Morlancourt.

The I Battalion of the 230th would cross the Ancre and seize Dernancourt, and its III Battalion would then pass through, and, together with the II and III/229th farther north, assault the embankment. Having captured this, the attacking force was to advance north-west, in rear of the Australians facing the 9th Reserve Division, and then turn sharply to the south-west and advance towards Amiens astride of the Albert-Amiens road. The II/230th would follow the III/230th for this purpose.



The II/230th would follow the III/230th for this purpose.

To the commanders of both regiments it seemed evident that these plans could only succeed if the embankment was held by a weak British rear-guard. Moreover they doubted whether, in the short time at disposal, the British position could be reconnoitred or adequately bombarded. Both of them presented these views to the brigade commander, General von Maltzahn, but they were informed by him that the order must be carried out. Actually the Second Army commander seems to have been swinging towards the same opinion as the front-line leaders, for at 3 a.m. on the 28th he ordered that the XIII Corps (Aveluy-Albert) and the XXIII Reserve (Dernancourt-Morlancourt) should not attack before noon, and afterwards again postponed the operation; but his orders did not reach the divisions in time.

The attack was therefore launched at dawn. It was the II/229th that came against the 47th Australian battalion, and from the regimental history it appears that the troops who penetrated the Australian line were advancing before their time. That narrative states: "The railway embankment, which was strongly guarded, could not be taken by frontal attack. The 6th company, which, in the dark, advanced too far, was for the most part cut off by the British and captured."

Although this dangerous irruption had been quickly and decisively ended, violent fighting with occasional short lulls continued along the whole front from Albert to beyond

Dernancourt. The German artillery fire, though at first it had hardly touched the front line, had been severe on the supports and the back area. All the villages were pelted with gas-shell and high-explosive, and the bombardment of Laviéville, in a cellar of which General Gellibrand had his headquarters, was a spectacle for all within view in the back area.¹⁰ On returning to his platoon of the 48th Lieutenant Mitchell noted: "The enemy were moving up in large numbers. Shell-fire was falling heavily behind us. Our men were up along the line shooting almost continually. We had carried in prodigious quantities of ammunition, and it was well. . . . It was now about 9 o'clock. Shell-fire was growing hotter and hotter. Two *minenwerfer* had come into action and were dropping their explosives promiscuously. Enemy machine-guns had us in a double enfilade. Our two Lewis guns on the forward edge of the railway were getting in great work and getting it hot, too. The enemy was in large numbers in our front and our fire was holding them in check. From the 47th messages were coming time and time again. 'Hard pressed, enemy attacking heavily.' I went down three times. I was in fear of the right flank going. I think our Lewis gun fire saved them. On my trips I passed many wounded and dead men. . . .

"A report came down: 'Cavalry seen massing on the right.' Had the right broken? we asked each other. Were the Boche pouring into our line and coming up behind us? We looked anxiously to our rear again and again. Lining the bank we were putting up rapid fire as the Hun attacked. The men would step down every now and again and clean and oil their rifle bolts. Things were hot, damned hot. Every minute or two someone else would go down. Dead and wounded were lying all round. The *minenwerfers* were throwing behind us and on top of the line. Stink, roar, and concussion. . . . At one stage all our four Lewis guns [of the company] were knocked out. One was blown completely to pieces. Pitt,¹¹ working like a Trojan, constructed

¹⁰ This shelling, says the diary of the 12th M.G. Company, "had its compensations." After the several bombardments the troops were able to help themselves to fowls, eggs, potatoes, rabbits, and other food, previously not available.

¹¹ Pte. J. Pitt, M.M. (No. 3116A; 48 Bn.). Labourer; of Sydney; b. Botany Bay, N.S.W., 1889. Died, 19 Feb., 1933.

two guns out of the wreckage. Lieutenant Whittle¹² was badly hit. . . . Lieutenant Holton¹³ came down from the left deadly pale, with a smashed arm. He asked the direction back. I showed him and cut off two bandoliers of cartridges he wore. He staggered away through the M.G. and shell barrage.

"At this stage some Huns from the other side of the embankment sneaked up to the foot and threw bombs. The 47th retaliated by throwing stones. Two Huns popped up and were shot dead. This made me think again. We had not a bomb to our name."

Mitchell crept out to where the kits of the German prisoners still lay, brought in all their bombs, and passed them along the line. "The enemy were now moving about in all directions. Things eased off. The day seemed to have lasted a week. I asked the time. 'Eleven o'clock.'"

The Germans who attacked the 48th were the III/229th R.I.R. The regimental historian says that this battalion, "on account of the difficult terrain and the tough defence," did not advance as intended. At 11 a.m. the commander of its 10th company reported that he was under a railway culvert (immediately north of the 48th's flank) with 3 officers, 8 men, and a heavy machine-gun, but without ammunition. Machine-guns on the heights beyond prevented him from working along the railway. If he was to proceed with clearing the embankment, he must have more troops.

The railway embankment opposite Dernancourt, where the shelling was generally heaviest, was not in all respects an easy position to hold, since it was not then entrenched, and the defenders, if they had to fire, could do so only by standing up high over the edge, or lying on the top, and firing over the rails. In this position they were completely exposed to shell-fire. This sector was held on the left by the 47th and on the right by the pioneer battalion of the 35th Division, the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers, reinforced at the railway arch north-west of the village by the right gun of the 12th Australian Machine Gun Company. The embankment here was deep, and the garrison was sheltering behind it from the shells when, at 9.30, noticing that the bombardment slackened, Lieutenant Pontin,¹⁴ commanding the right section of machine

¹² Lieut. J. Whittle, 48th Bn. Carpenter; of Wallaroo, S. Aust.; b. Wallaroo, 4 Apr., 1892. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

¹³ Lieut. E. G. Holton, 48th Bn. Gardener; of Highgate, S. Aust.; b. Kensington, S. Aust., 29 Aug., 1894.

¹⁴ Lieut. J. A. Pontin, M.C.; 12th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Sydney; b. Limerick, Ireland, 28 Sept., 1892.

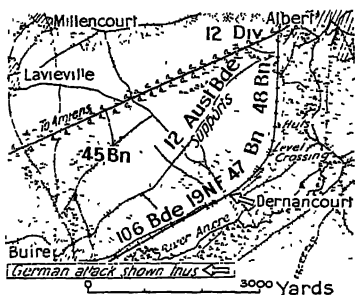
guns, who had stationed himself there, crawled to the top and was astonished to see a row of German bayonet-points showing over the edge of the farther rail. His report stated:

The officer in charge of the Northumberland Fusiliers¹⁵ and I held a hurried conference, and decided that our only chance was to bluff the enemy by charging him just as we were, hopelessly outnumbered. 2/Lieutenant Gibson¹⁶ was despatched to the rear to select a gun position for me to fall back on in case we were forced to retire.¹⁷ . . . Neither side had any bombs, and a few stones were exchanged, as though trying to test our numbers. . . . Private Gray¹⁸ was posted at the railway water viaduct, and shot dead the first two enemy who tried to come through. No others made the attempt.

At a signal from the infantry officer, we charged the enemy, my machine-gunners using their revolvers, and the Northumberland Fusiliers

their rifles and bayonets. Privates Bruce¹⁹ and Johnston²⁰ immediately dragged their gun up on the metals. The first three Germans who attempted to rush the gun I shot dead with my revolver at an 8 or 10 yards' range. Lieutenant Gibson's batman (Pte. Bigg²¹) and the No. 3 gunner, Pte. Sheehan,²² ably assisted me, and we caused the enemy many casualties from revolver fire. By now Pte. Bruce had his gun in action, and the Germans fell back in disorder under its demoralising fire. Those who escaped took refuge

in the houses of Dernancourt, and, as these are mostly made of lath and plaster, we continued to sweep them with machine-gun fire. . . . Pte. Johnston received a bullet in the shoulder, and Pte. Sheehan took his place as No. 2 gunner. Shortly after, Pte. Bruce (No. 1) was killed by a bullet through the head, but not before he had thoroughly broken up the German attack on the embankment.



¹⁵ Possibly the reference is to Lieut.-Colonel W. P. S. Foord, who himself was wounded during the action.

¹⁶ Lieut. J. H. Gibson, 12th M.G. Coy. Farm hand; of Quairading, W. Aust.; b. Sydney, 27 Oct., 1896.

¹⁷ In doing this Gibson was wounded, but he managed to crawl to a quarry on the slope behind, in which were the reserve machine-guns under Lieut. C. H. Hatcher (Perth, W. Aust.). Hatcher also was wounded, and the guns there were under Sergeant R. J. Tipping (Melbourne).

¹⁸ Pte. J. Gray (No. 2889; 12th M.G. Coy.). Mill hand; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust., b. Orkney, Scotland, 1892.

¹⁹ Pte. T. A. Bruce (No. 280; 12th M.G. Coy.). Carpenter; of Proserpine, Q'land; b. Bowen, Q'land, 1889. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

²⁰ Pte. W. G. Johnston, D.C.M. (No. 602; 12th M.G. Coy.). Farmer; of Manton, Q'land; b. Knebworth, Herts., Eng., 18 Apr., 1893.

²¹ Pte. S. Bigg (No. 276A; 12th M.G. Coy.). Selector; of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Bexley Heath, Kent, Eng., 1890.

²² Pte. J. J. Sheehan, M.M. (No. 430; 12th M.G. Coy.). Labourer; of Maclean, N.S.W.; b. Maclean, 1895.

This account naturally relates chiefly the part played by the machine-gunners, but it should be added that the "determined defence by the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers," as it was termed in the report from the neighbouring company of the 47th, drew admiration from all Australians who remarked it.²³

The Germans who had attacked in this sector were part of the 230th R.I.R. Its battalions reached their jumping-off position only just in time to advance, and the leading battalion, the 1st, fell far behind the barrage. It passed through the British barrage south of Dernancourt, and took the village in its stride, but on issuing thence received machine-gun fire from all parts of the railway. Part of the battalion reached the railway, but had no bombs and was forced to shelter behind the bank, where its machine-guns could not be properly used. Here the counter-attack of the Northumberland Fusiliers broke upon it and drove it back to the village. It lost heavily in the retirement, but its machine-guns, when once emplaced in the village, were effectively handled. The III and II Battalions had been unable to get through Dernancourt. As they reached the village a tremendous bombardment fell upon it. The companies made for the cellars, which were mostly intact, and sheltered there. One company of each battalion avoided entering the village, but all possibility of continuing the attack had then passed. "The English were posted unshaken on the railway embankment," says the regimental historian, "and between them and the village lay a completely open space. Whoever showed himself there was shot by English snipers."

As soon as he heard of that morning's attack, Lieutenant-Colonel Imlay of the 47th had sent two platoons of the right support company (Major Hannay's)²⁴ to reinforce the right flank. A platoon was afterwards also sent forward on the left, and, later, a party with the urgently demanded bombs. Movement down the bare slope was even more difficult than on the 27th. Lieutenant Nommensen,²⁵ leading the platoons to the right, was killed, and, although Imlay ordered his company commanders to send their men in rushes, if necessary, "well spread out," the bombs did not arrive till late in the day. Meanwhile Gellibrand had placed at Imlay's call the 45th Battalion, which, it will be remembered, he had moved during the night to a position north of Buire.

The commander of the Northumberland Fusiliers, feeling his hold on the railway insecure, had asked for reinforcement.

²³ Corporal W. M. Dodds of the Northumberland Fusiliers, who was afterwards killed, rushed his Lewis gun team to the left, and enfiladed the enemy in front of the embankment. Lance-Corporal G. Hogg acted with equal boldness, sniping from the meadows beyond the railway.

²⁴ Major D. V. Hannay, 47th and 45th Bns. Journalist; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. 10 Aug., 1878.

²⁵ Lieut. C. V. Nommensen, 47th Bn. Architectural draughtsman; of South Brisbane; b. Armadale, Vic., 1 Jan., 1895. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

and there were accordingly sent to him from the support battalion two companies of Highland Light Infantry. They arrived about the time of his attack, coming down the hill in plain daylight through the heavy barrage of the German artillery and under machine-gun fire. They reached the railway—at the cost of many casualties—and reinforced the garrison.

The British this day had available a strong artillery, that of the 4th Australian Division having registered during the morning,²⁶ while the 50th and 65th Brigades, R.F.A., were still in the line. They shelled the Germans attempting to rally and the supports which continued to move up. The enemy evidently had, on the 4th Division's front, two chief areas for assembly—one (opposite the front of the 47th Battalion) at Méaulte and Vivier Mill beyond Dernancourt; another (opposite the 48th) south of Albert behind a narrow wood that ran 200-600 yards distant from the front of that Battalion. All day long Germans were seen in and behind this wood, their officers and N.C.O.'s evidently attempting to muster them there for renewed attacks. Their trench-mortars were shooting from it, but the British artillery, at Colonel Leane's request, kept the copse steadily under fire, and any movement that emerged was stopped by the infantry and machine-gunners, who blazed all day at "wonderful targets." A machine-gun emplaced by the enemy on the bridge by which the Albert-Amiens road crossed the railway proved a serious annoyance, taking the garrison of the railway line in direct enfilade. Farther south the bombardment of the railway was more effective. But, with a loss of only 3 officers and 59 men, the 48th Battalion easily beat off every semblance of attack, and Leane, who was anxious to avoid exposing reinforcements on the bare hillside, sent to the railway only four men with two Lewis guns all day. Lieutenant Mitchell, who was in the thick of the fight, noted that these came through the barrage shortly after a party of stretcher-bearers had gone through in similar formation, and that "they were not machine-gunned."²⁷

²⁶ The batteries registered on Albert Cathedral. The S.O.S. lines of the 10th Brigade were on the wood south of Albert, and those of the 11th beyond Dernancourt. The batteries, still in the open, the pits not being ready, were detected by German airmen and were shelled.

²⁷ *Reveille*, 1 Sept., 1934, p. 31. In his diary he says, "Fritz must have thought they were stretcher-bearers too."

The Germans who had been massing for another attempt to break through the 48th were scattered through a rather strange occurrence. Mitchell relates how he was sitting in a dugout writing a report when "a sudden great tremor ran through the ground, followed by a deafening explosion on our own front. I ran up the bank and saw clouds of black smoke rise." An old British dump ahead of the line had been exploded by a chance shell. Germans were running in all directions, the Australians shooting them like rabbits, Lieutenant Potts, his head swathed in bloody bandages, leading the firing.

The history of the 229th R.I.R. says that the explosion of a dump by British artillery-fire caused a momentary panic to its III Battalion.

Farther south, the Germans advanced several times in waves from the old huts to the railway embankment on the left of the 47th and threw bombs over it. All the neighbouring Lewis guns of the 48th Battalion were constantly turned upon that sector, the 48th depending on its rifles to defend its own front. The Germans at the railway were cleared out by Lieutenant Schulz, who with about 25 men scrambled on to the bank and charged over it. They chased the enemy across the flat into the huts, and finally out from these. Finding that position too hot to hold, Schulz dribbled his men back by ones and twos, and himself returned about noon.

Farther south still, behind Dernancourt, German reinforcements had about 9 a.m. been brought by motor omnibuses actually through Méaulte and emptied out into the meadows near Vivier Mill. Engineers also were seen trying to place pontoons in position for emergency bridges over the Ancre, and were shot down, and their boats riddled, by the fire of two machine-guns of the 12th Company.²⁸

The 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division reported that the British in a counter-attack had destroyed the bridges in and north of Dernancourt, but that other bridges had been made and were, at 3.25 p.m., lying ready. Before noon the division had been aware that its attack was everywhere stopped. The assembly of troops in and near Dernancourt, however, continued.

On receiving early reports of this assembly, Colonel Imlay called upon the 45th Battalion to send one company to his support position. The attack showed that Dernancourt, which till then was supposed to be held by patrols of the 35th

²⁸ Under Corporal T. M. Kinnerk (Townsville, Q'land), who was killed this day.

Division, was in German hands. The village had accordingly been shelled; but at 12.30 the commander of the 106th Brigade (35th Division), to which the Northumberland Fusiliers were attached, hearing a report that the enemy was retiring from Dernancourt in small parties, asked that the artillery should lift its fire from the village at 2 o'clock, so that patrols from the Fusiliers might attempt to re-enter it; the brigade was too weak to undertake any other form of attack. The brigadier asked headquarters of the 12th Australian Brigade to co-operate by arranging that, when the Fusiliers went forward, the 47th Battalion should extend its flank, so as to thicken the garrison of the embankment as far as the railway arch; and that it should help to hold Dernancourt if the place was taken. Imlay was ordered to do this, and, the 47th being weakened by casualties, he directed the attached company of the 45th to move from the support position down to the railway opposite Dernancourt shortly after the attack commenced.

The attack was actually made by two companies of the Fusiliers, about 100 men in all. But, though Dernancourt had been heavily bombarded, the troops, on leaving the embankment to cross the intervening fields, were met with intense machine-gun fire, suffered many casualties, and fell back to the railway. At the same time the 4th Australian Division suffered, without necessity, the most serious loss incurred that day. The commander of the supporting company of the 45th had possibly received no special warning of the difficulty of getting his troops down the hill. At 5.20 p.m. Imlay reported:

The officer in charge of that company took them in artillery formation, and came under shelling. He then converged on a road and the trouble naturally came. He lost about 10 killed and 30 or 40 wounded . . . and they are lying along that road now. We have no stretchers to bring them on, but I have asked brigade to send me some and a party to remove all wounded to-night. I don't know how many got to the sector.

The shelling had started as soon as the reinforcements topped the rise. Lieutenant Mitchell, of the 48th, who watched the movement, says:

Bars of spattering machine-gun bullets lay across their path. Shells hounded them the whole way. Men fell at regular intervals. Their mates would kneel to inspect the fallen or pass on with a gesture of finality. One in four was the price left in their tracks.

The loss was caused mainly by machine-guns.²⁹ "The fire was so severe," wrote one of the 45th³⁰ afterwards, "that it was impossible to keep formation, but as everyone knew the objective, the railway, everyone went for it in his own way. A sunken road ran almost parallel to our course and quite a number were killed there, among others . . . the company sergeant-major." The survivors, after sheltering where they could, and taking the Lewis gun panniers from the dead, dodged on—from quarry to ditch, to some haystacks, to some huts—and reached the railway at the foot of which the dead of the Highland Light Infantry lay thickly. Seeing the 47th farther east at the cutting north-east of Dernancourt, they made their way thither. In leading them across the railroad, Lieutenant Terras³¹ and two others were shot dead, but at dusk the remainder crossed over to the trench, a welcome reinforcement, since the day's fighting had cost the 47th another 75 casualties,³² and the hold on the railway with a garrison so thinned, and which it was so difficult to reinforce, seemed almost precarious. All day officers of the 48th at the embankment were gradually extending their line into the 47th's sector on the right, so as to allow the 47th to concentrate on its right and thus replace casualties. The situation was much improved in the evening by the arrival of the greatly needed bombs, which enabled the posts to clear the last Germans from the embankment.

All day the artillery had fired on German troops obviously being rallied or reinforcing for further attack. At 4 p.m. there came from higher authority a warning of a probable attempt north of Albert. Gellibrand informed his last battalion, the 46th, that it might be required there, and ordered it to reconnoitre the spur north of the Amiens-Albert road.

²⁹ The diary of the 45th gives its loss as 48, including 11 killed.

³⁰ Pte. I. C. Galloway (No. 3779; 45th Bn.). Engineering apprentice; of Darlinghurst, N.S.W.; b. Alyth, Perthshire, Scotland, 13 Nov., 1898.

³¹ Lieut. J. S. Terras, 45th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Hornsby and Moss Vale, N.S.W.; b. Lesmahagow, Lanarkshire, Scotland, 22 March, 1885. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

³² About half this loss fell on the support companies. Lieuts. C. V. Nommensen and F. W. Lane were killed. In the 48th Capt. T. H. Elliot, raising his head to observe the enemy, and Lieut. J. Whittle were killed. (Nommensen belonged to South Brisbane; Lane to Lindsfarne. Tas.; Elliot to West Leederville, W. Aust.; Whittle to Wallaroo, S. Aust.)



23. OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 37TH BATTALION IN THE SUNKEN ROAD, MARRETT WOOD,
ON 7TH APRIL, 1918

First War Memorial Official Photo No. L1956

To face p 206



24. THE SUNKEN ROAD BEYOND MARRETT WOOD IN WHICH ON MARCH 28TH THE 37TH BATTALION FOUND THE POST OF LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS

The photograph, taken ten days later, shows a post of the 37th Battalion on the road-bank. The Germans were occupying the distant hill, over which they had advanced on March 28th. The way in which troops managed to bivouac in tolerable conditions (as compared with those of trench life) is also illustrated.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo, No. E4704.
Taken on 7th April, 1918.*

A company of whippet tanks had been warned for action there, and, if the 46th saw them advancing, it was to follow and counter-attack with them. This operation, however, did not take place.

Meanwhile, at about 4.30, the enemy had also been observed trickling large numbers into the outlying houses of Albert, a few hundred yards north-east of the 48th Battalion's left flank.

From German records it appears that these movements were due to an order from the commander of the XXIII Reserve Corps. On learning of the morning's failure, he had visited the headquarters of his divisions, the 50th Reserve and 13th, and after discussion decided to renew the attack at 4.30 with the support of the artillery of the 9th Reserve Division and any guns that the XIV Corps on his southern flank could spare. A difference of opinion then arose between the corps commander and the chief of the army staff, who favoured an attack down the peninsula, an operation which the corps commander disliked on account of the flanking fire that would be received. The decision was left to the corps commander.

Shortly afterwards the army commander—who must have been absent earlier in the day—called at corps headquarters and expressed his astonishment that, in face of his previous orders to the contrary, the corps was fighting a battle. However, the corps commander maintained that his attack northwards across the Ancre was not likely to be more costly than the army commander's plan of pushing along the peninsula; and, as it was found to be too late for a cancelling order to reach the troops, the direction to attack at 4.30 was allowed to stand. The need for more artillery support was recognised, and the 3rd Naval and 54th Reserve Divisions (XIII Corps) on the north, as well as the XIV Corps on the south, were ordered to help with counter-battery fire. No progress whatever resulted from the effort. The history of the 230th R.I.R. says that its III Battalion, with parts of the I and II, attempted to advance, but were stopped at the outset.

As for the concentration of Germans in the houses south of Albert, the British artillery was turned on and drove them out again. At 5 p.m. Germans who had been assembling on the 48th's front were seen to retire in two parties, and at 6.30 large numbers, including transport and cavalry, were observed marching away up the distant road towards Pozières and were shelled as they went.

These local signs, combined with the now general knowledge that the Germans had been sending troops southwards across the Somme, and that farther south, at the junction of the British and French armies, they were making their most rapid progress—towards Montdidier, on the Paris-Amiens railway—caused General MacLagan of the 4th Australian Division to believe, as did many others, that the Germans were now

weakening their forces on the British front, in order to attack the northern flank of the French. The impression received that day by the Australian troops, whose spirit throughout was one of entire confidence, was that the Germans, though appearing in the morning to be full of audacity, had become correspondingly depressed upon being so definitely stopped. A special reason for their good spirits was evident—their packs were full of British canteen and red-cross stores from Albert, chocolate, biscuits, cigarettes, socks, and parcels of comforts, including some from Australia together with letters conveying the good wishes of the girls who sent them. "The German has his tail well up before he meets our men," reported an experienced officer³³ at MacLagan's headquarters next day, "but, when he is once stopped and slathered, it goes down very quickly indeed." On the evening of the 28th the 47th Battalion was ordered to send a patrol to ascertain whether Dernancourt was held weakly, as headquarters suspected. The front-line troops knew that it was not—they had watched the Germans dribbling into the village all the afternoon, and, in spite of the effective fire with which they had picked them off, they themselves were being sniped with marked accuracy from the windows, 250 yards away. The patrol, sent out at 10 p.m., at once drew a concentration of machine-gun fire which settled all doubts.

The men of the 12th Brigade, who had now been moving, marching, digging, and fighting for three days and three nights almost without sleep, were in a daze of exhaustion; and, as after all such severe fights, battalion commanders had some apprehension of further attack. But the rain, which began with a drizzle at 4 in the bleak afternoon, and became heavier during the night, rendered the renewal less probable. Although opposite Dernancourt the tired garrison was kept on the alert all night by the constant squealing of pigs and howling of other animals in the village, morning came without any attack. It brought indeed a surprise of a different sort—brass music was heard not far away, and a German battalion with its band at the head and cooks at the rear appeared marching along the slope below Morlancourt. Rifles and Lewis guns opened simultaneously, and the battalion melted into the nearest cover.

³³ Captain Arthur Maxwell, of Messines fame, then on 4th D.H.Q.

Good news presently came through—that a great effort had been made by the enemy on the previous day 15-20 miles farther north, against the vital buttress of the British front at Arras, and had been completely defeated.

It is now known that the 50th Reserve Division, which had made the attack at Dernancourt, was not in a condition to continue it. The 229th R.I.R. had suffered 309 casualties, and the 230th 240. The 9th Reserve Division, instead of being relieved by the 50th Reserve Division, as it had hoped, had to continue in the line, the 229th R.I.R. being withdrawn to Méaulte. In the sector of the 230th, the II Battalion, having found shelter in the cellars of Dernancourt, was left to hold the front line and village. In this apparently unenviable duty it proved, says its historian, to have drawn the best lottery ticket. "Dernancourt abounded in poultry, and numerous pigs and sheep ran round it. In most of the houses there was wine. Before long a battle feast was in full swing. The II Battalion, in comradely spirit, gave up part of its treasures. . . . The 7th company, which lay farthest forward in the village, asked to be allowed to postpone the intended relief." Next day the 231st R.I.R. took over the northern part of the village, the 230th remaining in the southern part. At noon, Dernancourt was bombarded,⁸⁴ and, although the day was otherwise quiet, it cost the 230th 83 casualties.

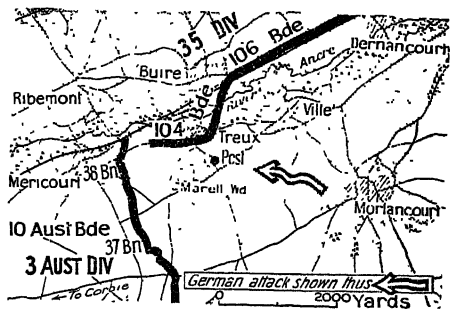
To the 3rd Australian Division, separated from the 4th only by the sector of the 35th Division, March 28th had brought very different experiences; but the extreme flank of the division was affected by the German attack. An attack on the whole front had been expected, but, the German line being much more distant than at Dernancourt, there was not the same tension or danger of surprise. Indeed, on the left near the Ancre, the front of the 35th Division overlapped and sheltered that of the 3rd Australian, the 35th having reoccupied Treux hamlet, south of the Ancre, opposite Buire, and guarded Marrett wood south-west of it, which after the withdrawal of the scouts of the 38th Battalion had lain open to the enemy. Late on the 27th General Monash had ordered the 10th Brigade to ascertain for itself whether the 35th Division really held the wood, and, if so, to take over the position.

Shortly before this message was received, Captain W. J. Symons, of the right battalion (37th) of that brigade, had sent a patrol around the wood, and found, in a deep, sunken road bordering its north-eastern corner, a post of thirty of the 18th Lancashire Fusiliers. Receiving his brigadier's

⁸⁴ The 50th and 65th Brigades, R.F.A., withdrew that day (March 29). The artillery of the 4th Aust. Division (10th and 11th Brigades, A.F.A.) extended their S.O.S. lines to cover the front. As observers detected much movement in Dernancourt, each field battery of the 11th Brigade fired 20 rounds into the village and the howitzer battery 40.

order, the commander of the 37th (Lieutenant-Colonel Knox-Knight)³⁵ at 2.20 on the morning of the 28th arranged to "hold the ground" with patrols until the 38th took it over. At 8 a.m., however, when the wood was still defended only by the Fusiliers, together with a few Australian snipers with a Lewis gun rather short of ammunition, Germans were seen on the spur ahead, which screened the Morlancourt valley. The enemy was two-thirds of a mile away, advancing in small parties over the more distant of the two folds of that knuckle. An appeal from the Fusiliers for support was passed by Captain Symons to the 38th. At 9.35 Brigadier-General McNicoll ordered the 38th to hasten its action, and at 10.30 VII Corps Headquarters, fearing that the attack on Dernancourt might spread to Treux, and that the tired British troops might not suffice, ordered the 3rd Division to take over the wood. At 11 Captain Fairweather's company was sent, and it occupied the wood by 11.35.

But the Germans had already attacked. About 9 o'clock several hundred skirmishers had come over the nearer fold of Morlancourt spur and had been stopped by the fire of the British artillery and of the Lancashire Fusiliers, assisted by the Lewis gun and snipers from the 10th Brigade. Some of the Germans scuttled into the village of Ville on the flats; a few of their scouts worked ahead and were shot in front of Treux Wood; the main part took cover on the Morlancourt spur.³⁶ At noon a second attempt was made by several



³⁵ Lieut.-Col. E. Knox-Knight. Commanded 37th Bn., 1917/18. Managing law clerk, and area officer; of Malvern Vic.; b. South Melbourne, 4 Feb., 1882. Killed in action, 10 Aug., 1918.

³⁶ There was some conflict in the reports at the time. About 9 a.m. it was reported that a German patrol was in or near the wood. At 8.30 two officers of the 38th went through the wood and reported, "Our snipers and observers have established themselves on the far side of the wood," and that the 37th had "posted a Lewis gun team on the right flank of the wood." The nearest Germans were apparently a machine-gun team on the outskirts of the village, but 800 yards from the wood. At 10.45 Lieut. C. H. Peters (38th) reported that the wood was occupied only by "our observers," and that the Lancashire Fusiliers held the sunken road.

German companies to continue the advance. But the Victorians were then strongly posted around the wood; some of them at once ran to a position from which they could better bring fire to bear; the artillery opened, and the Germans threw themselves down. At 12.45 they made a third attempt, but were immediately stopped by the artillery. At 1.5, all movement having ceased, the artillery slackened its fire. At 2.10 more lines of Germans appeared advancing over the farther fold of the knuckle and descending into the dip between the two. There they remained, out of view, and movement ceased.

German records show that the attack on Treux Wood was only part of what was intended to be a general advance by the 13th German Division in conjunction with the 50th Reserve Division on its flank. The 13th was apparently to attack with the 15th I.R. on the right, between Dernancourt and Buire, the 13th I.R. on the left, between Buire and Treux Wood, and the 55th I.R. following behind the right flank. This division, like the 50th Reserve, was to strike northwards, across the Ancre, and then turn westwards. The 15th I.R. advanced against the front of the 35th British Division. Its right reached Dernancourt church, and mingled with the 230th R.I.R. Farther west it twice attempted to reach Buire, without success.

The attack towards Treux was made by the 13th I.R., its III Battalion, with the I in support, advancing towards the village, and the II towards the wood. The advance began at 7 a.m., without any artillery support. The III, which, in accordance with orders, had worked up towards the village during the dark, found itself immediately caught in such flanking fire from north and south-west that it was unable to move. The II, according to the regimental historian, found Treux Wood "very strongly fortified and garrisoned." It was also enfiladed from the direction of the Bray-Corbie road at Hill 108, and stopped.

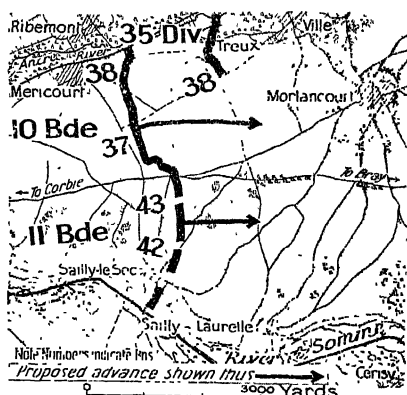
At 11.30 the 13th Division reported that it had "taken" Ville (which, however, had not been held by the British) but not Treux, and that another attempt was being at once made against Treux and Buire. The I/13th I.R. was put in between the III and II. In the regimental history, the failure of this attack is attributed to lack of artillery support. A third attempt was then arranged, to take place at 4.30, but it was without result, the artillery support being "entirely inadequate. The losses in these three vain attacks," adds the regimental historian, "were considerable. . . . This day it became recognised that the front now offered by the enemy could only be overcome in a carefully planned attack with strong artillery."

The German attempt to continue the advance across the Ancre between Albert and Buire on March 28th had thus been completely defeated.

CHAPTER IX

MORLANCOURT—MARCH 28TH AND 30TH

WHILE the left of the 3rd Australian Division was assisting the 35th British Division to repel the attacks on Treux, its right was watching rather perplexedly, from the folds above the Somme, scattered evidences of a battle which was apparently proceeding across the region southward from the river. At the same time preparations were in progress for immediately undertaking the projected advance of the division's line. Brigadier-General Cannan, who was visited during the morning by his divisional commander, General Monash, obtained from him the impression that this advance was intended rather as a demonstration—to impress the Germans with the fact that their progress in that sector was at an end. Cannan accordingly put forward a plan, already prepared, for a patrol action. The 43rd, holding the higher part of the slope above the Somme, would try to steal, by daylight patrols, the unoccupied portion of the knuckle in its front and possibly part of the next spur, in front of Morlancourt. The ground so occupied would afterwards be consolidated. Monash also visited General McNicholl, commanding his northern brigade, the 10th, and arranged for an advance on its front also.



It was probably after these visits, but before noon, that Monash received from VII Corps an important communication. It had been made known that the conference at Doullens had arrived at the decision—welcomed with intense satisfaction throughout the British Army—to give supreme control over

the Allies' forces on the Western Front to a single leader—the French general, Foch. Foch had evidently been discussing with General Byng of the Third Army the possibility of that army's passing to the offensive, and had apparently ascertained that he was favourable to an attack, when possible, astride of the Somme.¹ Particulars of the message now received by Monash are not recorded, but in a letter written on the 28th to Birdwood, whom he kept fully informed of his doings, he says:

I am now considering whether it will be feasible to push forward my line between the rivers in the direction of Morlancourt, as I understand that General Foch is anxious, in view of his future plans, that we should get as far in the direction of Bray as we can.

An Australian, who saw both Monash and MacLagan that day, notes in his diary that, south of the Somme,

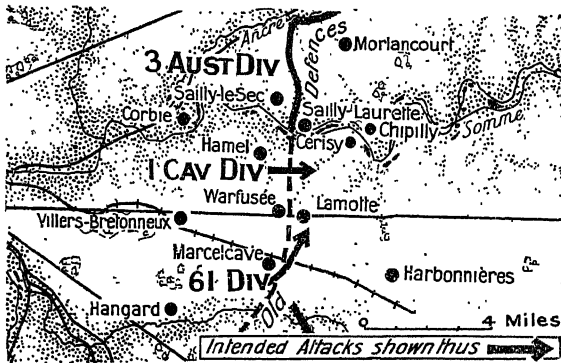
the Germans have only the remains of the 5th Army (whatever that is) and the 1st Cavalry Division in front of them. . . . Up at the 4th and 3rd Divisions we cannot get a word as to what the real position there is. Only they say that General Foch has promised that his army will concentrate somewhere there within the next few days. He wanted Monash to take the hill by Morlancourt at once, because from there his detrainment point was overlooked.

The critical position was obviously now south of the Somme, and the chief anxiety of all ranks at this time was whether the remnant of the Fifth Army would manage to delay the enemy long enough to enable the French divisions to come up before their intended assembly area was overrun. The Germans who crossed the Somme at Cérisy on the previous evening had seized the main Roman road behind the Fifth Army's left flank, and were now astride of it at Warfusée, the next village east of Villers-Bretonneux. Whether the left flank of the Fifth Army still existed was unknown. But the 1st Cavalry Division was holding an emergency line south of the Somme in continuation of the 3rd Division's. The old French defence-line, so far as it had not been filled in and ploughed over by farmers, continued there also, far across country southwards. Since March 26th, it had been garrisoned at widely scattered points by a small scratch force consisting of tunnellers, instructors from army schools, and 500 American engineers—some 2,000 in all,

¹ General Rawlinson on taking command of the Fifth Army that afternoon wrote to Foch: "I am in accord with General Byng on the subject of an offensive along the two banks of the Somme. It is not feasible for the moment."

first organised under General Gough's instructions by Major-General Grant, chief engineer of the Fifth Army, and now commanded by Major-General Carey,² whose headquarters were at the old army headquarters at Villers-Bretonneux.³ The Fifth Army's main line was still ahead of this in the south, and the 61st British Division was being brought up to Marcelcave, in this line south-west of Warfusée, in order to retake Warfusée.

But the 61st was a tired division, which had been engaged in the Fifth Army's operations since March 21st. To assist it, the 1st Cavalry Division would attack at the same time. As



the cavalry would then be operating east of the alignment of Sully-Laurette, General Congreve first asked the 3rd Australian Division to suppress the Germans in that village with artillery-fire. Later, at 11.20 a.m., on learning that the 61st Division was to have begun its advance at 11, he ordered the 3rd Division to send strong patrols to Sully-Laurette. If the village was found unoccupied, they were to seize it, but in any case they were to guard the left of the cavalry.

On these grounds Monash at noon ordered an advance by the whole line of the 3rd Division. The operation was to be carried out in two leaps, each of 1,000 yards: first, to a line on the forward slope of the cross-ridge which the division was

² Maj.-Gen. G. G. S. Carey, C.B., C.M.G.; R.A. B.G.R.A., XI Corps, 1915/17; commanded 139th Inf. Bde, 1917/18, 20th Div., 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Wiltshire; b. London, 13 Feb., 1867.

³ General Gough had shifted his headquarters on March 25 to Dury, south of Amiens.

already holding; second, to the crest of the next cross-ridge, immediately short of Morlancourt. The first advance was to be made by both brigades at 4 p.m., and the second at 7; but, on the right, the second advance would be fully attempted only if Saily-Laurette had previously been taken; if not, the right flank would be swung back north of the village.

With what strength each brigade should attack, and how its troops should be disposed, appears to have been left by Monash to the discretion of the brigadiers; but, possibly through lack of time, or difficulty of communication, or even through general inexperience in the sudden operations of open warfare, that prudent and normal procedure was not accompanied by close consultation between the brigadiers to whom it was committed or by such action from above as would ensure that the detailed plans of the two subordinates dovetailed. The attack thus took on an entirely different character in the two brigade sectors. General McNicholl of the 10th Brigade, as his left, at Treux Wood, was already on the first objective, decided to attack in the first stage by throwing a reserve battalion, the 40th, through his right battalion. In the second stage, his other reserve battalion, the 39th, would be thrown through his left, and, together with the 40th, would advance to the second objective. The history of the 40th,⁴ to the young acting-commander of which, Major Payne,⁵ the brigadier gave verbal orders, says that "it was anticipated that very little resistance would be met with, as the ground . . . was probably held by the enemy advance guard only. The object of the advance was to seize the high ground west of Morlancourt before the main body of the enemy came up." The division's front was now served by two brigades of field artillery, but both of these were north of the Ancre; one, a weak British brigade, the 189th, from a firing position a mile north of Ribemont, directly enfiladed the enemy; the other, the 7th A.F.A. Brigade, had, during the night, come into position in the valley behind Heilly, and could assist the advance by firing at long range from the rear. Under these circumstances, no elaborate artillery support

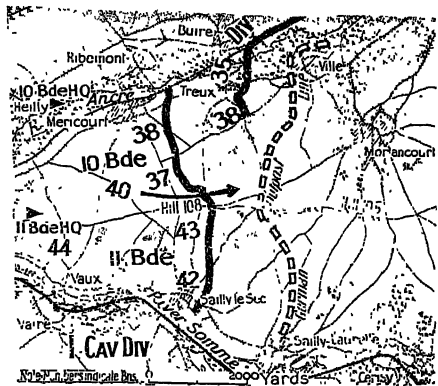
⁴ *The Fortieth*, by Capt. F. C. Green, p. 116.

⁵ Lieut.-Col. L. H. Payne, D.S.O., V.D.; 40th Bn. Commission agent; of New Town, Tas.; b. Burnie, Tas., 5 Nov., 1888.

was possible. The orders merely stated that the artillery "would be able to assist if required."

The 40th Battalion had camped in the trees south of the Ancre near Heilly station. At 3.40 it marched by platoons at fifty yards' interval, diagonally towards the centre of the peninsula, so as to advance with its right resting on the Corbie-Bray road. On reaching the crest, it opened into artillery formation, with two companies in front and two in rear, all advancing in sections in file. At this point there came into view not only the front line close ahead but the open plateau reaching to far beyond Morlancourt. Guns which the troops could actually see on the hill behind Morlancourt began to shell them with accuracy. The officers of the 40th understood that, at this stage, the support battalion (41st) of the 11th Brigade would be joining up on their flank, in order to make a similar advance on the southern side of the road; but no sign of it could be seen. The adjutant (Captain Green),⁶ who was on that flank of the advance, hurriedly ascertained through the 43rd Battalion, holding the existing front on that side of the road, that, according to the arrangements of the 11th Brigade, the 41st would not advance until dusk. Clearly someone had blundered.

As, however, the orders of the 40th were definite, Major Payne and his battalion pushed on, without support. Crossing the Sully - le - Sec - Treux road, from a quarter to half a mile behind the old French defences, the last of the companies extended into line. In spite of heavy shelling, the battalion advanced steadily over the open land. At 5.13 the first wave passed through the existing front, and the fire of German



⁶ Capt. F. C. Green, M.C.; 40th Bn. Clerk Assistant, Tasmanian House of Assembly; of Kingston Beach, Tas.; b. Mole Creek, Tas., 26 June, 1890.

machine-guns which hitherto had been but slightly felt became more intense. Most of them were at least 1,000 yards away, but, the ground being level, numbers of men were hit. At the same time there were seen, far ahead on the plateau south of Morlancourt, several columns of German infantry advancing from the opposite direction. They were a mile and a half away.

We continued on (writes Captain Green),⁷ wondering what sort of a mix up it would be when we met. . . . The enemy halted for a few minutes. He hesitated, deployed, came on a hundred yards, hesitated again, and then went to ground, presumably to dig in. His machine-guns were pushed out in front, and the enemy fire became heavier than ever.

The advance more nearly resembled that of the 2nd Australian Brigade in the Second Battle of Krithia (8th May, 1915) than any operation of Australian infantry in the intervening years. The enemy was distant, though more generally visible than at Krithia; the ground was open pasture, almost as level. As at Krithia, the advance was made towards the end of the afternoon in plain daylight. The artillery gave even less effective support;⁸ one battery, which presently opened, cast its shells 400 yards behind the Tasmanian line.⁹ The battalion came under both rifle- and shell-fire before it reached the existing front, and, on passing the outposts, advanced under a storm of rifle and machine-gun fire which, though less fierce than that whirlwind of Gallipoli, was nevertheless very deadly. Among the officers, Lieutenant Grubb¹⁰ was killed, and Lieutenant Chamberlain mortally wounded; Major Payne and Lieutenants Marshall,¹¹ Swan,¹² and A. Bertram¹³ were wounded. German infantry could now be seen digging a line of posts half-a-mile ahead. The right front company, which was advancing just north of the

⁷ *The Fortieth*, p. 118.

⁸ The diary of the C.R.A., 3rd Division, says that the 7th A.F.A. Brigade laid down a creeping barrage to cover its infantry. The infantry saw no barrage. The statement possibly refers to the attack at 7 p.m., but the records of the 7th Brigade make no mention of any creeping barrage. In any case it would have been very thin, and, if begun at 4 p.m., would have vanished before the infantry actually went through.

⁹ An existing message from the divisional artillery headquarters, timed 6.10 p.m., notes this short shooting; but the wording renders it doubtful whether the artillery was accurately informed of the infantry's position.

¹⁰ Lieut. W. E. K. Grubb, 40th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Stanley, Tas., 12 Oct., 1888. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

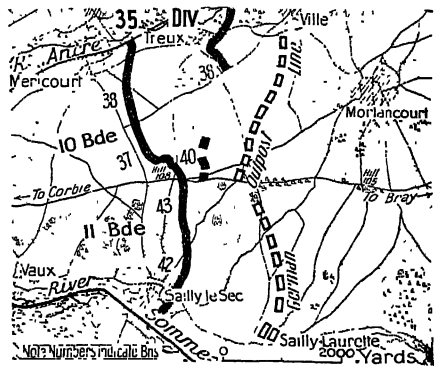
¹¹ Lieut. C. W. Marshall, 40th Bn. Foreman, Engineer's Branch, G.P.O., Hobart; b. Greenwich, Eng., 15 Dec., 1883.

¹² Lieut. R. A. Swan, 40th Bn. Orchardist; of Bagdad, Tas.; b. Hobart, 1876.

¹³ Lieut. A. Bertram, 40th Bn. Auctioneer; of Launceston, Tas.; b. New Gisborne, Vic., 9 June, 1884.

Corbie-Bray road, was being met with particularly accurate fire from a small copse half-a-mile distant beside the road. Captain Bisdee¹⁴ ordered his men to advance by section rushes. About 400 yards past the existing front line, the troops came upon a short length of old trench north of the road. Captain Bisdee gathered his company into this, and there the advance along the crest came for the time being to an end.

The left company, under Lieutenant Whitaker,¹⁵ also pushed on in short quick rushes until no less than two of its officers and 58 of its men had been killed or wounded. With the Germans firing at point blank from the Morlancourt spur, 400 yards away, it stopped on almost the same alignment as Bisdee's troops. The company which was following it, under Lieutenant Cane,¹⁶ seeing that Whitaker's line did not extend as far as the left of the battalion's proper frontage, had moved forward two of its platoons to the left front. Under intense fire these advanced some way into the valley before the Morlancourt spur, where, on seeing the right held up, they too stopped and dug in. By 5.30 the advance



had come to an end. At least 150 officers and men of the 40th had been killed or wounded. A drizzling rain had begun to fall. Major Payne reported that the 40th had reached, approximately, the line of the first objective. Actually it was 500 yards short of it; the difficulty of correctly gauging the depth of such an advance again recalls the experience of the 29th Division at Second Krithia.¹⁷

¹⁴ Capt. G. S. Bisdee, V.D.; 40th Bn. Sheep farmer; of Jericho and Sandy Bay, Tas.; b. St. George's, Hobart, 1 Sept., 1879.

¹⁵ Lieut. M. H. O. Whitaker, M.C.; 40th Bn. Student; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Launceston, 17 Dec., 1897. (Within a year, from April, 1917, he was wounded on four occasions.)

¹⁶ Lieut. C. H. Cane, 40th Bn. Company secretary; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 5 Sept., 1891.

¹⁷ See Vol. II, pp. 13, 14.

The sending of messages and bringing of ammunition over the open field was now the chief difficulty. At 6 o'clock three of the battalion's ammunition limbers were galloped across the open to within 300 yards of the front line, delivered their loads, and went clear again with no worse damage than a few bullet holes through the waggons.¹⁸ At the same time a runner panted up to Captain Bisdee with an order that he was to continue the advance at 7 o'clock in conjunction with the 41st. He replied that he had not been able to find the 41st, and could not advance until it came up.

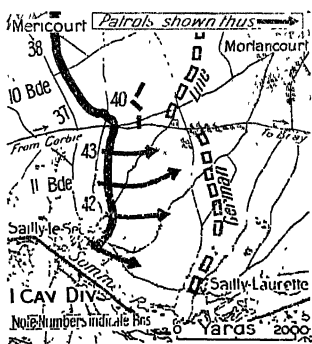
The Germans opposing the 40th Battalion's attack were the right of the 1st Grenadier Regiment (1st Division) and the left of the 13th I.R. The history of the 1st Grenadier says that at 5 p.m. "two or three English battalions attacked the right part of the regiment, and its northern neighbour. The attack broke up in the barrage of the artillery and in machine-gun fire, with heavy losses. Half-an-hour later the English had retired again to their starting point." (This belief, like Major Payne's, was, of course, mistaken.)

Although the Tasmanians had observed no movement by the 11th Brigade, an advance was made by it, but with entirely different methods. The plan of Brigadier-General Cannan for pushing out patrols to steal the unoccupied ground in his front has already been described. When, after his discussion with Monash, he received at noon the order to assist the advance of the cavalry, he had directed his right battalion, the 42nd (Queensland), to push forward posts as near as possible to Saily-Laurette. Later, at a conference with his battalion commanders, held about 3 o'clock, he further arranged that his left battalion, the 43rd (South Australia), should similarly send out two strong patrols to secure the unoccupied ground south of the crest. It was not until after these arrangements had been made that he received, at about 3.30 p.m., the order for the combined operation of the two brigades. He thereupon asked divisional headquarters whether the operations already planned by him after discussion with Monash would not meet the requirements without a second advance at 7 o'clock being ordered. Monash replied, by telephone, that Cannan must work with the 10th Brigade. Cannan thereupon issued an order that at 7 o'clock his two rear battalions, the 41st (Queensland) and 44th (Western Australia), should move

¹⁸ Driven by Drivers J. A. Robertson (Hobart), C. Hearps (Devonport, Tas.), and C. McIntosh (Beaconsfield, Tas.).

through the 43rd on the heights, and the 42nd on the slopes, respectively, and, if the resistance was not too serious, should establish posts, the 41st on the Morlancourt ridge, and the 44th at or beyond Sully-Laurette. If Sully-Laurette was not taken, the flank would be flung back north of it.

Probably through the shortness of the notice given, the earlier patrol movement, like most of the others in this day's operations, was late. It was not until 5.45—that is to say, some minutes after the 10th Brigade's troops, themselves more than an hour late, had finished their advance—that the neighbouring patrol of the 11th Brigade emerged. This was a platoon of the 43rd under Lieutenant Borthwick.¹⁹ It was immediately met, as had been the 40th Battalion, by intense machine-gun fire from the copse of trees on the crest. After a pause, taking advantage of the cover of some trees, Borthwick succeeded in working forward again, and about dusk—7 p.m.—placed a line of five posts not far short of the alignment of the copse from which the trouble was coming. South of him Lieutenant Oliver,²⁰ who had moved a little earlier, established a similar line on the farther slope of the valley leading down towards Sully-Laurette. German posts were on the spur above them, though several hundred yards away. Far down the valley to the right the 42nd Battalion had established two posts facing Sully-Laurette, with patrols a quarter of a mile ahead on the eastern side of the valley. One of the 42nd's patrols, under Sergeant Wheeldon,²¹ was seen and fired on by German machine-guns.



It had to lie low, and while it was so lying a German patrol came up and boldly called "Hands Oop!" "Hands Oop be b——," replied the Queenslanders. As they jumped up, the

¹⁹ Lieut. J. H. Borthwick, M.C.; 43rd Bn. Commercial traveller; of Henley Park, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 25 Nov., 1894.

²⁰ Major G. J. Oliver, M.C.; 43rd Bn. Bank clerk; of Milang, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 17 March, 1894.

²¹ Sgt. A. L. Wheeldon (No. 501; 42nd Bn.). Farmer; of Oakey, Q'land; b. Richmond River, N.S.W., 1892. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

Germans dropped their rifles and ran, but the Queenslanders (according to the patrol report) shot six, wounded two, and captured one, a stretcher-bearer of the 6/3rd I.R., 1st German Division.

The history of the 3rd (Prussian) Grenadier Regiment says that its patrol, consisting of an N.C.O. and six men, was sent out to ascertain the strength of the enemy, who was seen occupying strongly defended trenches on the opposite heights. According to this account, the patrol received heavy machine-gun fire, and only three men returned, one of them badly wounded.

At 7 o'clock, when the earlier patrols of the 11th Brigade were just finishing their work, the second phase of the operation was to be launched. A thin drizzle was falling, but in the northern half of the 10th Brigade's sector, the 39th (Victoria) Battalion, which had begun its approach march at 4.30, promptly moved up into alignment with the 40th Battalion. As it descended the slope in front of the Morlancourt spur, and, on the left, emerged from Treux Wood, it was met with fierce machine-gun fire; but, as usual in the dusk, this was inaccurate at long ranges, and only 2 officers and 4 men were hit. A small German post, which had evidently been thrust forward during the enemy's advance earlier in the day towards Treux Wood, was overrun, and a line was formed roughly along the first objective.

The 40th Battalion, after its costly advance in the afternoon, still waited for the 41st to move on its right. Major Payne had signalled by lamp²² to his brigadier:

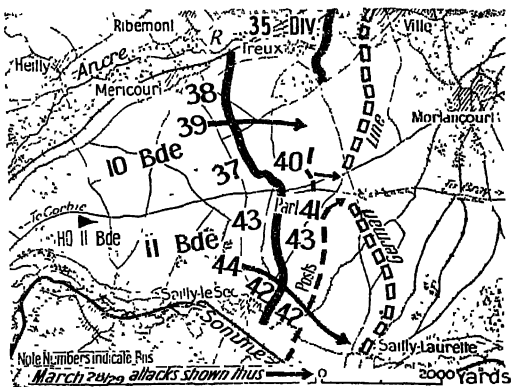
41st Bn. has not come up. Advance delayed on this account. Situation unfavourable. Casualties about one-fourth. Reserves used up. Enemy advancing and numbers increasing. Think advance not possible without greatly increased strength. Please send instructions. Waiting reply.

Brigadier-General McNicoll ordered the battalion to dig in where it was. At 8.30 the 41st, whose two foremost companies had begun their advance at 8, came up into touch with Major Payne and proposed that both battalions should advance. They were informed of McNicoll's order to dig in. Their own brigade confirmed this order, and they were accordingly guided to the posts already placed by the patrols of the 43rd, and were directed to dig these, and then leave one company to

²² Throughout the March-April fighting, telephone wire was scarce and troops had to depend more than hitherto on other means of signalling.

hold them under the command of the 43rd.²³ Meanwhile the left of the 41st was to help the 40th in an immediate attempt to work round the Germans in the copse who were holding up the centre of the advance. This attempt was made at midnight, a platoon of Bisdee's company of the 40th, under Lieutenant Brown,²⁴ working forward on the north, while two platoons of the 41st, under Lieutenants Boyce²⁵ and Robinson,²⁶ tried to move round on the south. Farther back, the main body of Bisdee's company moved slowly forward. Intense rifle and machine-gun fire broke out ahead. After an hour and a half, a message was received from Brown that he could not take the wood without support from artillery or machine-guns. His casualties had been heavy, and he was coming back. As Lieutenant Boyce and a number of his men also were hit, it was resolved that the immediate capture of the copse was not worth the probable loss, and the enterprise was abandoned.

Far down the gully to the right, the attempt of the 44th Battalion to take Saily-Laurette—if the resistance was not serious—was also undertaken, although the operation was, as elsewhere, late. The approach march for two and a half miles down the steep slopes above the river, over ploughed fields drenched in the soft rain, and down the sudden precipitous banks with which the slopes were occasionally terraced,



²³ The posts of the 42nd and 43rd on the far side of the valley, however, were not maintained, being dangerously advanced.

²⁴ Lieut. A. P. Brown, M.C.; 40th Bn. Labourer; of Glenorchy, Tas.; b. Glenorchy, 4 April, 1890.

²⁵ Lieut. L. A. G. Boyce, M.C.; 41st Bn. Engineering cadet; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. Burketown, Q'land, 20 June, 1897.

²⁶ Lieut. S. L. Robinson, M.C.; 41st Bn. Student; of Brisbane; b. Zillmere, Q'land, 3 April, 1897.

rendered orderly movement difficult; but about 9.30 the three companies taking part passed through the front line of the 42nd. Some 200 yards farther on they halted and reorganised. The night was dark; the men had their waterproof sheets slung round their shoulders against the rain. The country was entirely strange to all present; but each company commander had a small scale map, and they knew that there was a German machine-gun post in the cemetery at the near end of the village. Captain Longmore's company stayed in the old French trenches (which here were ahead of the Australian line) as support; the other two extended into waves and, with the scouts under Lieutenant Lintott leading, marched straight on the village.

As they crossed the flat 300 yards from the nearest houses a white flare was fired from the cemetery. A machine-gun from farther up the valley opened against the left, and rifle-shots and machine-gun bursts broke out fitfully, giving the impression that the enemy had seen movement but was not sure of its nature. When the front wave was some 100 yards from the bank above which lay the cemetery, a flare was fired and fell between the waves. Several machine-guns opened from the bank. The Australians threw themselves down, and the Germans, firing flare after flare, hammered with their machine-guns the lines of men lying almost beneath their muzzles. The German words of command could be heard. According to one report, there were six machine-guns firing, according to another seven. The commander of the left company, Captain Rockliff, an officer of great experience,²⁷ took charge of the situation and ordered a withdrawal through the supporting platoon. Two hundred yards farther back the companies were set to dig in. The German machine-guns were now firing short, and the work was unimpeded. The trenches were finished before dawn. A light garrison was then left in them. Longmore's company held the French trenches in rear, and the remainder withdrew. But Lieutenant Stephen²⁸ and 30 men had been killed, and Lieutenant Casey²⁹ mortally hit,

²⁷ Of the Landing, the Gaba Tepe raid, Leane's Trench, and Messines.

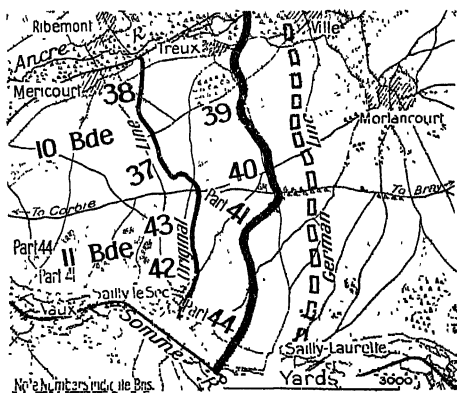
²⁸ Lieut. D. R. Stephen, M.C.; 44th Bn. Locomotive fireman; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Montrose, Scotland, 21 July, 1890. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

²⁹ Lieut. R. Casey, M.C.; 44th Bn. Blacksmith; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat West, 1892. Died of wounds, 7 April, 1918.

in front of the German position at Saily-Laurette, and another 60 had been wounded.

The historian of the 3rd Grenadier Regiment, whose I Battalion held the village and the heights above it, suggests that the Australians attacked Saily-Laurette under the impression "that the German posts on account of the bad weather might have withdrawn into the houses in the western part of the village." The covering parties of the 6th company of the regiment soon detected their approach. The attacking force was correctly estimated at two companies, and was allowed to come to within about 100 metres, when it was met with a sudden burst of rifle and machine-gun fire. Three machine-guns of the attached company, emplaced before the village, played a conspicuous part in defeating the attack, one of them firing 3,000 rounds. The regiment's claim to have counted in front of the position 37 dead is remarkably near the truth.

With this effort the attempt to advance the 3rd Division's line without artillery preparation ceased. The front now lay so far ahead of the supporting batteries that General Monash ordered both his artillery brigades forthwith to cross the Ancre, and take up advanced positions in the angle between that river and the Somme, the 7th A.F.A. Brigade (with one battery of the 8th attached) still covering the division's front, and the remainder of the 8th Brigade covering the crossings of the Somme and the ground south of the river. The batteries moved that night, and the welcome shots as they registered their targets were heard by the troops next morning. During that day they hammered the copse in front of the 40th Battalion, and when, after dark on the 29th, two platoons of the 37th Battalion (specially lent to the 40th) and a platoon of the 41st advanced to attack the copse, it was found that the Germans had abandoned it. Bisdee's company of the 40th dug three posts beyond it at the Treux-Saily-Laurette road. The outpost-line north of this point was advanced to the neighbourhood of the same road,





25. NORTHERN END OF THE SPUR, SCREENING MORIANCOURT, WHICH WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE 3RD DIVISION ON 28TH MARCH, 1918
Seen from the 10th Brigade's post in the sunken road at Marrett Wood. The Germans were occupying posts on the spur, which was not attained by the Australians in this attack

*Inst. War Memorial Official Photo No 14702
Taken on 7th April, 1918.*



26. ERECTING BREASTWORKS ON THE MARSHES AT BUIRE

Troops of the 3rd Division improving the defences on the Ancre flats on 18th April, 1918

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E2111

To face p 225

and on the south the 41st also advanced its outposts. Unaware of this advance, several parties of Germans wandered into the new line. Much movement could be seen ahead, and some of the prisoners were found to belong to a fresh division, the 18th, which, the prisoners said, was just taking over the sector. The 3rd Australian Division turned on the available artillery, to catch the German troops during the change.

German histories show that the relief had already taken place early on March 29, the 31st I.R. taking over the line of the 1st Grenadier. The historian of the latter states that it was withdrawn to Chipilly, where it lived grandly, in reserve, on potatoes and English jam and preserves, shot at occasionally "by comic English shells which never went off. No one worried about them." The German troops at Sailly-Laurette that day were equally well off, commandeering "pigs, calves, hens, rabbits, eggs, butter, dripping, wine, English jam, and white bread."³⁰

The 3rd Australian Division thus advanced its line to the first of its two objectives, the forward slope of the Sailly-le-Sec-Treux spurs, and at some points a little beyond—a total distance of half-a-mile on the right, and three-quarters on the centre and left—at a cost of some 300 casualties. The troops remained in high spirit notwithstanding the casualties and the wet weather, which turned their little outpost-trenches into pools. It is none the less true that these losses, incurred in merely stealing unoccupied ground, were on a scale which the Germans seldom incurred except in important attacks. The 40th Battalion suffered casualties comparable to those of the Prussian troops that temporarily pierced the Australian line at Dernancourt. The formal advances without full artillery protection were far more expensive, even at night, than the patrol operations. Thus, in the 11th Brigade's sector, the two companies of the 44th which stumbled upon the German outposts at Sailly-Laurette lost much more heavily than the patrols of the 42nd and 41st which actually secured most of the ground. There seems no doubt that where the operation was rather an approach than an assault, and especially when it was to be made in daylight and without appreciable support from artillery, most commanders with long experience in actual fighting tended to employ, as Cannan did, the patrol method. A formal approach by night proved economical of life in the case of the 39th Battalion, and would have been so

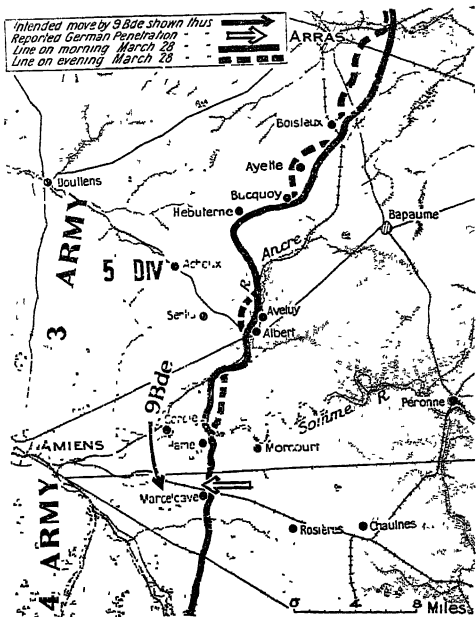
³⁰ *History of the 1/10th Foot Artillery*, p. 149.

in that of the 44th also had its advance stopped 300 yards from the enemy; by either of these methods all the ground actually won could probably have been secured almost without loss. But the A.I.F. in France was still inexperienced in open warfare. It is strange that McNicoll, an experienced commander who three years before had been dangerously wounded when bravely leading his troops in the deadly approach-attack near Krithia, should have been the one to adopt the same method before Morlancourt.

During March 28th it was difficult from the Australian side of the Somme Valley to determine precisely where lay the British front on the southern side; but **The Flank on the Somme** it was ascertained that the 1st Cavalry Division still held, with two dismounted brigades, its position in the old French trenches immediately south of the Australian flank.³¹ A mounted brigade was up near the Roman road, watching Warfusée, and ready to safeguard the flank of its division if the Germans penetrated the line farther south. The problem where to obtain reserves had been worrying the corps and army commanders all day. Early in the morning the VII Corps asked Third Army Headquarters for the 4th Australian Brigade, but was told that it was still required in the IV Corps line at Hébuterne. The V Corps also, lying between the VII and IV, was anxious concerning the sector immediately north-west of Albert, where some ground had been lost. The 12th British Division there had now been relieved by the 17th; but all divisions of this corps—17th, 12th, 63rd (Royal Naval Division), 2nd, and 47th—were worn with severe fighting. The 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had been kept by Third Army to meet the contingency which happened that day—the expected attack against Arras. By evening it had parcelled out both with the utmost care, “to be used economically.” The 5th Australian Division, whose leading brigade had by then arrived at Doullens, was the only reserve left in General Byng’s hands.

³¹ Some of Carey’s Force was there also. The horses of the dismounted brigades were in Fouilloy.

Such were the anxieties impinging upon the Third Army's commander from his own front when, during the afternoon, there arrived a report that the Germans had broken through the Fifth Army's front immediately south of the Roman road, near Marcelcave. Apparently General Davidson at G.H.Q. appealed direct to the VII Corps to send help, and General Congreve at once agreed to detach the 9th Australian Brigade, then guarding the crossings of the Somme. Its task would be to safeguard the vital position of Villers-Bretonneux south of the river, overlooking Amiens. While, however, Congreve was actually giving this direction to Monash on the telephone, a third voice struck in to the conversation.



Proposed move of 9th Bde. to Villers-Bretonneux.

Byng, on hearing of the proposed step, had rung up G.H.Q. and urged that the 9th Brigade was better employed where it then was, safeguarding the right flank of the main British Army,³² than committed to indefinite operations farther south. The question was referred to Haig, who decided that, 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 at that hour on a night

³² The Fifth Army (of which General Rawlinson took command this day) was acting under the orders of the French.

march. By his direction the 9th Australian Brigade was definitely allotted the task of protecting 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 5th 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 5th 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 28th, it was still uncertain whether the Germans had broken through the remnant of the Fifth Army. At 10 p.m. numerous men of the 16th and 39th Divisions, remnants of its previously surrounded left flank, of which till then little had been heard, came straggling over the bridges guarded by the 9th 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. The report of a break-through at Marcelcave which had caused so much anxiety since the previous afternoon was without foundation; the troops who had been observed retiring were only those of the 61st Division, withdrawing from their counter-attack upon Warfusée, which did not succeed. Actually, the whole front from Arras to the neighbourhood of Marcelcave was holding well. There, at least, it was evident that the tide was turning; and, having defeated Ludendorff's attempt to break down the Arras buttress, by which the flow of the attack was confined, Byng—as Gough, also, had done on March 26th³²—suggested a counter-attack. Not having infantry available, he suggested an advance with cavalry and whippet tanks in the direction of Bapaume. Haig had always intended to reply to the German offensive by some such manœuvre, and Byng now asked G.H.Q. whether he might so employ the Cavalry Corps, which he had recently sent to the Fifth Army's assistance, south of the Somme.

³² Gough telephoned to G.H.Q. that night that the Germans were tiring and offered to counter-attack if some fresh divisions were sent to him.

General Davidson, the officer at G.H.Q. to whom Byng spoke, replied that the cavalry was urgently needed in its present area. The Germans were now in front of the 1st Cavalry Division between Hamel and Warfusée, and farther south the enemy was pressing back the Fifth Army from Ignaucourt towards Démuin. Byng then asked that it should be made clear whether the Cavalry Corps was under himself or General Rawlinson (who on the previous day, with the staff of the Fourth Army, had relieved General Gough). That evening Haig definitely transferred the Cavalry Corps to Rawlinson's Army.

During this day, March 29th, General Monash asked whether the 9th Brigade might be directed, as well as watching the Corbie and Aubigny bridges, to guard his flank as far forward as Sailly-le-Sec. The reply—from Third Army—was that the situation on the Fifth Army's front was too critical; and at 5.34 G.H.Q., reversing the previous day's decision, took this brigade from him, and ordered it to march immediately to the rear of Villers-Bretonneux, where it would come under the XIX Corps, Fifth Army. To guard the bridges, a brigade of the 5th Australian Division, the 15th, under Brigadier-General Elliott, would be brought at once to Corbie.³⁴ It marched throughout the night, the bridges being guarded until its arrival next morning by a remnant of the 21st Division which was still in the VII Corps area.

The 29th of March had been a rainy, and, on most of the British front, a quiet day. On the Ancre side of the Somme-Ancre peninsula, the 3rd Division took advantage of this quiet to find out the whereabouts of the Germans on the spur between Treux and Morlancourt. The northern end of this spur was to have been taken by the 39th Battalion in the advance of March 28th, and it was thought that there might still be an opportunity of securing it. At 8 a.m. a patrol from Captain Fairweather's company of the 38th under Lieutenant Fitzgerald³⁵ moved cautiously to it, with scouts ahead and a flanking party. As they went, the Victorians saw a German

³⁴ The 15th Brigade had arrived at Lealvillers (north-west of Albert) on March 28. One of the trains, bringing the 58th Battalion, had been hit, just after passing St. Pol, by a German 14-inch shell which killed 16, including the whole of the quartermaster's staff of the battalion, and wounded 9; 8 horses also were killed and four trucks and the officers' carriage derailed.

³⁵ Lieut. G. E. Fitzgerald, 38th Bn. Clerk; of Northcote, Vic.; b. Abbotsford, Vic., 30 June, 1894.

bolt from a haystack to a sunken road near the crest fifty yards ahead of them. They at once rushed this road and found, only a few yards to their flank, some thirty Germans. A Lewis gunner at once enfiladed these and shot them down, and then engaged a larger number farther away. At this stage the Victorians observed to their rear five Germans sheltering behind a haystack. Three were at once cut off and captured, and then, as the main party of the enemy was evidently placing a machine-gun in position, Fitzgerald withdrew. He came in without losing a man.³⁶ The prisoners were of the 3/13th I.R. (13th Division), who had taken over these positions after the attack on Treux Wood. To the left, in the Ancre marshes, the 35th Division tried this day to get a patrol into Ville village, but found it firmly held. Captain Fairweather recommended that the 3rd Division should be content to hold its present front, since any attempt to go farther would involve heavy fighting.

On the other side of the peninsula, at Sailly-le-Sec, the front line troops became certain, from the movement visible behind the enemy's lines, that an attack was imminent. The night of March 29th—except for the minor **German attack** operation at the copse—was particularly quiet. **March 30** After that advance the 11th Brigade's front was still held by one company each of the 44th and 41st in the forward posts, with the 42nd and 43rd respectively behind them in the line taken up on March 27th. When daylight came many German aeroplanes and several anchored balloons were in the sky, and a number of German batteries, not previously active, began to fire fitfully, obviously registering their guns. Although the day was dull, rain still being about, it was noticed that the German artillery was similarly active over the Fourth Army's positions south of the Somme.

At 10.30 the fire south of the Somme changed to a bombardment which unmistakably heralded an attack, and at 11.50 the same occurred on the front of the 3rd Australian

³⁶ A subsequent patrol found 36 dead Germans and an abandoned machine-gun. On the afternoon of the 29th, Sgt. A. Levy (St. Kilda, Vic.), 39th Bn., attempting to patrol in the same area, was killed.

Division from the copse southwards. German aeroplanes swarmed overhead. The bombardment was severe while it lasted, but gave the impression that the German artillery did not know where the Australian posts were. It fell most heavily, therefore, on the villages.³⁷ Moreover, on the forward positions it was quickly over, and at noon there emerged opposite the left and right of the 11th Brigade's front large numbers of advancing infantry. On the right they appeared spreading from Sully-Laurette over the slope towards the flats like a large crowd dispersing after some football match in the village.³⁸ Actually they were carrying out their deployment. Though half-a-mile distant from the nearest Australian posts, and much farther from the old French line, they were met with intense fire. After the later waves there emerged some men leading a heavily-laden mule. It was quickly shot and went rolling down the green slope. Within ten minutes the advance was in complete confusion, and by thirty minutes from the start every German had been stopped or had run for shelter. Some of the snipers of the 44th, posted out far in advance, came running in,³⁹ but their posts were the only ones approached by the attack; no Germans came nearer than a point 300 yards from the foremost part of the 44th's outpost-line. The eastern slope of the valley was scattered over with their bodies.

Farther up the slopes they had appeared in waves, making, at first, towards the north-west. On the hill crest the 40th Battalion, which itself was not attacked, fired at long range into lines of the enemy moving south-west over the ridge, from Morlancourt to the southern slope. As the Germans next tried to descend the bare hillside into the gully between the opposing positions, the fire from the advanced company of the 41st under Captain Uren,⁴⁰ and from the main line behind it, soon stopped the advance. Officers could be seen

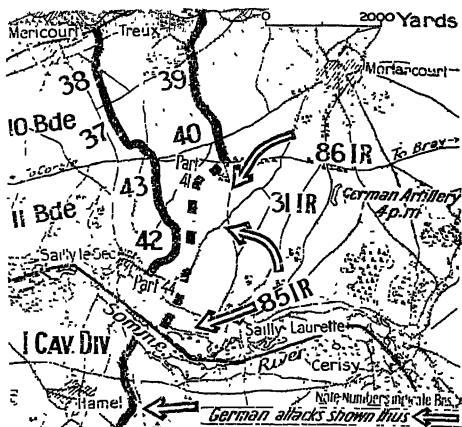
³⁷ Owing to the bombardment of Franvillers, the headquarters of the 3rd Division were this day removed to St. Gratien, three and a half miles farther west.

³⁸ See *Eggs-a-Cook! The Story of the Forty-Fourth* (p. 128), by Capt. Longmore, who was present.

³⁹ The posts from which these men came were fully garrisoned only at night, the troops that held them going back to the outpost line before daylight. One sergeant, W. Bridge, who had waited on, found himself for a time marooned by heavy fire in his trench, together with one German, who had reached it. Each eventually escaped. (Bridge, who was killed on 5 April, 1918, belonged to Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.)

⁴⁰ Capt. W. Uren, 41st Bn. Engineering apprentice; of Charters Towers, Q'land; b. Charters Towers, 27 Jan., 1894. Killed in action, 1 Sept., 1918.

trying to rally their men, but every attempt instantly drew such fire that it quickly ceased. The German light machine-gunners, however, worked most fearlessly, following the advanced skirmishers, establishing themselves in groups with three or four guns, and covering the riflemen while these dug in. The Australians, excited with opportunities for shooting such as most of them had never experienced, were freely exposing themselves, and most of the casualties among them were inflicted by these machine-guns.



If the Australians lost heavily on March 28th in attempting a long approach in attack-formation with little artillery support, the enemy found that method still more costly this day, since their opponents were well established. The slaughter did not end with the stoppage of the advance; the 40th Battalion north of the crest continued to fire on the broken remnants when they reappeared running back the way they had come. About 2.15 the enemy made a second attempt opposite the whole front of the 11th Brigade, moving reinforcements over the spur. Under the hail of fire which met them, some of these reached and crowded into the sunken road to Sully-Laurette, half-way down the slope, but they could not emerge from it in daylight. Several hundreds also attained some shelter on the Somme flats, on which the artillery was soon afterwards directed to fire. By 4 o'clock the only visible movement in most of the enemy's area was that of the stretcher-bearers working among the wounded.

About 4 o'clock the Germans made a third effort, bringing up a field battery to the crest of the spur just south of the Bray-Corbie road, only a mile from the Australian posts.

They wheeled their teams round as bold as brass (wrote an Australian who visited the line on the crest shortly afterwards). The team trotted off; and the guns were left just beyond the skyline. You could see with the naked eye the men walking round them on the skyline, quite carelessly, as our men do. . . . I found a couple of officers of the 3rd Divisional Artillery sitting on the side of an old trench with their signallers and telephones, trying to get the range of these guns. They tried them with shrapnel. But the light was so bad that we could not tell the position of the burst. . . . As we watched, a battery of four heavies somewhere behind us got on to them.

The heavy artillery was part of the 27th Brigade, R.G.A.⁴¹ which from the day of the 3rd Division's arrival had been attached to its artillery. The division's own artillery was now in its advanced positions, with two mobile batteries left free to shoot at any fleeting target. General Cannan asked for fire to be concentrated on the woods in the valleys behind the enemy's left. The 1st Cavalry Division also at 10.45 a.m. had sent a request for artillery-fire upon the Germans attacking south of the Somme. One of the mobile batteries galloped into position and turned its fire upon them, and during the morning the guns of both the 1st Cavalry and 3rd Australian Divisions constantly shelled bodies of the enemy that exposed themselves there. What was the situation on the southern side of the river during this battle, it was again most difficult for the 11th Brigade to determine. Fighting was evidently severe, and at one time the Germans seemed to have penetrated to Hamel village; but the intelligence officer of the 41st, who crossed the Somme to ascertain the position, learned from some of the 15th Brigade, now guarding the bridge-heads, that the British line was holding firm for two miles south of the river. He found the bridge-guards themselves were hoping "that the bastards would only come on."

At dusk in front of the 11th Brigade the Germans were seen retiring from whatever shelter their broken waves had reached. The cries of their wounded for stretcher-bearers could be heard all night. Captain Uren (41st) reported:

Improved morale was the result of the day's sport. It still rained, but the men remain in good spirits.

The total loss of the 11th Brigade was some 150, and the enemy's was obviously far greater. The 41st estimated that it "must have hit hundreds." Colonel Woolcock judged that

⁴¹ Two batteries of 6-inch howitzers and one of 60-pounders.

three or four battalions had attacked and had lost at least 500. As at Lagnicourt, the estimates increased the farther they went in distance and time. General Cannan estimated the German loss at "a brigade and a half"; General Monash at the time gave the estimated loss as more than a brigade, and, writing after the war, as 3,000 killed."⁴² The diary of the 3rd Division's artillery says: "The very lowest estimate of enemy killed is 4,000."

As was not unusual, these estimates were enormously over the mark. The day's result was nevertheless a severe blow to the Germans who attacked on the northern slopes of the Somme valley.

This attack, obviously intended to guard the flank of a larger operation farther south, was undertaken by the 18th Division, the 31st I.R. making the main assault, its right flank brushing the Bray-Corbie road. On its left the 85th I.R. attacked Sailly-le-Sec with one battalion, the III, while the I and II followed the 31st with the duty of turning southwards, after that regiment had broken through, and mopping up Sailly-le-Sec and Vaux from the north and north-west. On the heights the third regiment of the division, the 86th I.R., also followed the 31st.

The artillery supporting the attack was short of shells; moreover, part of the artillery north of the Somme⁴³ was supporting the attack south of the river. The divisional artillery, the 45th F.A.R., registered during the morning with very good conditions for observation, but just at noon, the time of the attack, it was hampered by a shower of sleet. "The English," says its historian, "had built up very good machine-gun strong-points." The 31st I.R. was late. Its history states that it was unaware of the existence of the British strong-points, and, in the face of their fire, and that of the British artillery, was stopped after about 200 metres. The 85th I.R. also, advancing from Sailly-Laurette, could not detect the machine-guns that were firing at it. "Nowhere did movement, or a column of steam from the hot barrel, betray them." The 31st I.R., having stopped, was reinforced by the II and III/86th, but the line could not advance. Finally, in order to pick off the machine-gun nests, several batteries of the 45th F.A.R.⁴⁴ were ordered up to within 500-600 metres of the front line, in order to fire on them direct. At this juncture, 3.15 p.m., the shortage of artillery ammunition was very serious. Some was brought up from abandoned positions south of Morlancourt, but the supply was so slow that little could be effected. Heavy British artillery from the north laid upon the battery positions and the infantry "very unpleasant fire. The batteries had many losses."

The precise losses of the 18th Division this day are not given; but as the total casualties of the 31st and 85th Regiments in the March offensive were 1,819 officers and men, the loss this day was obviously much less than some of their opponents imagined. Nevertheless

⁴² The figure apparently came from Cannan, who in one report spoke of "over 3,000" killed and wounded.

⁴³ For example, the 16th F.A.R. and the 1/10th Foot Artillery Regiment.

⁴⁴ The III Abteilung (Brigade) and a section of the 5th Battery.

narratives of the divisional infantry and artillery both state that the attack "was a miscarriage such as the division had never before suffered." "Spirit sank to zero," adds the historian of the 86th I.R. ". . . Was this the end? Was this offensive beyond our strength?"

On the night of March 30th the remainder of the 3rd Division's artillery came into line, and the 35th Division was relieved, the 4th Australian Division taking over with its second brigade (13th) the greater part of the 35th's line—along the railway to Buire—and the 3rd Division taking over Treux.⁴⁵ From the Somme to Albert the front was now held by the two Australian divisions. Each, it is true, temporarily comprised only two infantry brigades, the third in each case being detached to a neighbouring command; and the only reserve of the VII Corps, except the tired brigades of the 35th Division,⁴⁶ was the 15th Australian Brigade, also temporarily detached from its division to hold the Somme bridges. But the rest of the 5th Division was in army reserve at Senlis, and, with the line stoutly held farther north, it was evident that the British front north of the Somme was, at least for the present, fairly secure.

⁴⁵ The boundary between the 10th and 11th Aust. Infantry Brigades was shifted slightly northwards, in order to allow the 10th Brigade to take over Treux without undue extension of its front.

⁴⁶ The 9th and 21st Divisions, both exhausted by heavy fighting, were being sent to relieve the 1st Australian Division at Hollebeke.

CHAPTER X

“THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ‘FIFTH’ ARMY”¹

It is now time to lift the veil that hid from the arriving reinforcements the chain of events that had produced the situations into which they were flung. It may be taken as an axiom that, when an army is in the grip of a desperate struggle, any one moving in its rear tends to be unduly impressed with the disorganisation, the straggling, the anxiety of the staffs, and other inevitable incidents of such a battle; he sees the exhausted and also the less stubborn fragments of the force, and is impressed with their statements, while the more virile and faithful element, mainly fighting out in front, ignorant or heedless of all such weakness in rear, is largely beyond his view.

It is undeniable that during and after their race to the Amiens front the Australian divisions were witnesses of many incidents that impressed them with a lack of virility in a certain proportion of the British troops. Rumours depreciating the resistance offered by parts of the Fifth Army were widespread not only throughout the remainder of the British Army, but among the French population, and were even current in England. The Australian troops were the chief reinforcement sent to that army by the British command in the later stage of the retirement, and eventually occupied the whole of its remaining front as well as part of the Third Army's.

The Australian soldier was not an unfair critic. If the performance of a neighbouring unit excited his admiration, no one was so enthusiastic and outspoken in its praise; but, where performance fell short of its expectations, it was quite useless to attempt to gloss over to him such failure. He founded his opinion upon what he himself saw, and, whether

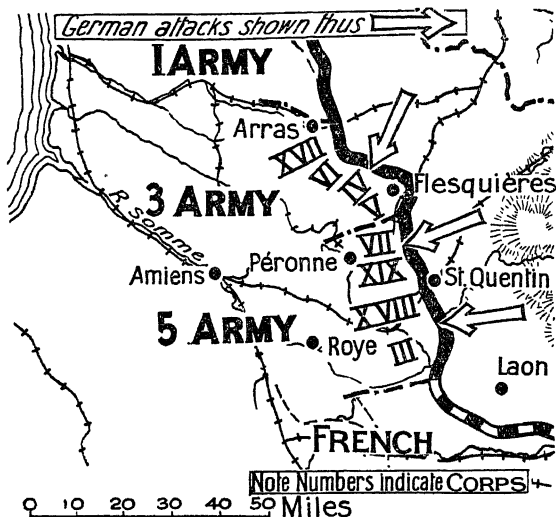
¹ This chapter was written before the appearance of the authoritative account contained in *Volume 1918 (I)* of the *British Official History*; but much use has been made of that history in checking, correcting, and amplifying it. This general acknowledgment is made in order to avoid troubling the reader by constant reference to footnotes.

his view was favourable or unfavourable, he expressed it, whenever the subject arose, with the freedom that had been his right and habit from childhood. A considerable part of the Australian infantry had passed through the scenes of panic near Pas and Hébuterne on March 26th, and in the home letters of Australian soldiers at this time the military censors found some statements so downright—and, probably, exaggerated—that the War Office telegraphed to the Commonwealth Government asking it to keep out of the newspapers these "scurrilous and unfair allusions to the conduct of United Kingdom troops," which were "doubtless founded on isolated occurrences incidental to every retirement."

There was little danger of such letters passing the Australian press censor; but a year later the troops themselves were returning to Australia, and their definite judgment of the differing qualities of those beside whom they had fought—English, Scots, New Zealanders, Americans, French—surprised and sometimes shocked their hearers, previously fed upon newspaper report. These judgments were largely formed in 1918, and they greatly influenced the opinion of most other Australians. At the same time many Australian soldiers—even among those who played a prominent part in the events—were too perplexed by the incidents of the German offensive to base upon them any firm judgment. This perplexity is evidenced in the question constantly asked at the time and still frequently heard where ex-soldiers meet: "What was the truth about the Fifth Army's retreat?"—under which name many of them include the scenes witnessed by them at Hébuterne, Mondicourt, and Doullens, which, of course, were far within the Third Army's area.

The data available in Australia do not suffice to answer that question, but the following points now seem to be fairly clear. The breach into which the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade was hurried at Hébuterne was a sudden development of one which opened between the flanks of the Third and Fifth Armies three days earlier, about the third night of the great offensive, and which appears to have been directly due to the previous policy concerning the salient of the British line, on both sides of which the German offensive was launched. This protruberance, around Flesquières and Villers

Plouich, had been formed by the Cambrai fighting in November 1917, and as early as December 13th Haig had recognised



that, if the Germans attacked, it was "unsuitable to fight a decisive battle in." He decided, however, to hold both this salient and that around Passchendaele

if they are not attacked in great force; and, in the event of attack in great force, to use them to wear out and break up the enemy's advancing troops as much as possible before these can reach our battle zone of defence, which will be sited accordingly as a chord across the base of each salient.

When it became evident that an offensive would be launched against the front of the Third Army, whose right flank the Flesquières salient formed, Haig ordered that the forward zone there should be held by a mere screen, sufficient to repulse raids, but that

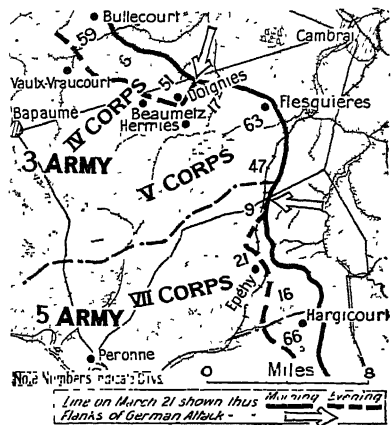
a determined resistance will be made in the Battle Zone in conjunction with troops operating on either flank.

The reader will recall that, when the blow actually fell, on March 21st, the Germans did not attack the salient in strength, their operations there being confined to weak, shallow assaults designed solely to keep the divisions of the V British Corps in position; the real thrust was made on either side, falling with tremendous weight

March 21

upon the IV and other corps of the Third Army to the north-west and the VII and other corps of the Fifth Army to the south. The first object of the Germans in this region was to drive in 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 by the 47th (London), 63rd (Royal Naval), and 17th (Northern) Divisions of the V Corps, with the 2nd Division, which had just been relieved after suffering 3,000 casualties through gas-shelling, and the 19th, in reserve. On the left the near flank of the IV Corps was held by the 51st (Highland) Division, and on the right were (in that order, from north to south) the 9th (Scottish), 21st, and 16th (Irish) Divisions of the VII Corps. During the first day of the German attack some of the front-line commanders in the V Corps, finding the attack easy to deal with—and not knowing that it was only intended to hold them—were well satisfied with the situation; but on the left the Germans, here as else-



where immensely helped by the fog, drove back the 51st Division; and, on the right, though the South African Brigade (9th Division) held out, the enemy thrust back the 21st and 16th Divisions. Employing his newly practised method of penetrating and then spreading out behind the opposing defences, by the evening he was driving from the north towards Hermies, in the battle zone of the IV Corps, and on the south had seized Hargicourt and was pressing on Epéhy.

The reader will remember that Haig had long since recognised that the Fifth Army, if seriously attacked, would have to fall back on the line of the Somme, maintaining its connection with the French by holding the Crozat Canal,

and with the Third Army by taking up a line along the Tortille.² As the Fifth Army's line had also been thrust back near its southern extremity, in the sector of the III Corps (58th and 14th London Divisions)—where the fog was thickest and so strong an attack had not been expected—the army commander, General Gough, foresaw the likelihood of an almost immediate retirement to the Somme line. He therefore directed his corps commanders to fight a delaying action, and not allow their divisions to become entangled in a decisive struggle for any position.

In the Third Army, as the German thrusts were threatening to close behind the Flesquières salient—though not so quickly as Ludendorff had hoped—General Byng, on the night of March 21st, ordered the V Corps to draw back from the forward zone of the salient into the battle zone. But this zone was already being attacked in the left rear, and all next

March 22

day the Highlanders of the 51st Division (IV Corps), together with the 17th Division (V Corps), had to fight off the enemy's northern pincer. The danger on the southern side now began to increase. The Fifth Army had by March 22nd been forced to use all its three reserve divisions—the 39th, in trying to stop a thrust through the 16th and 21st Divisions, on the VII Corps front; the 50th (Northumbrian), farther south, in occupying the rear zone of the XIX Corps, allowing the other divisions of the corps to re-form behind it; the 20th (Light) Division, farther south still, in taking up a line along the Somme through which the XVIII Corps would retire. But the 50th Division, which was holding a line of 10,500 yards, was in the evening driven out of the rear zone at points near each flank. It was ordered to fall back on a switch line in rear;

March 23

and at 9.20 on the morning of the 23rd the Fifth Army commander ordered the XIX Corps also to withdraw behind the Somme.

But the right of the Third Army was still in its salient—not, it is true, holding the forward trench-system, but only since midnight withdrawing from the battle zone to the rear zone (the old Beugny-Ytres line), which had been

² See *pp.* 88-9.

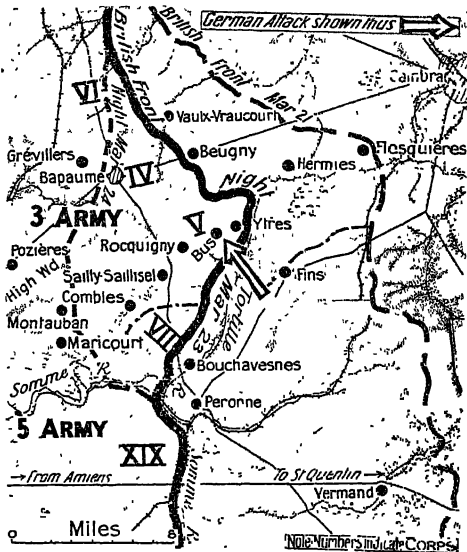
provisionally garrisoned by the battered 2nd Division. In other words, *in this salient, from which retirement should have been most prompt, it was actually most slow.* Naturally most of the local divisions did not press for early withdrawal; with their necessarily limited view, they tended to be well satisfied³ with the slowness of their own movement compared with the rapidity of the retirement on the flanks. It was from the high commanders, whose vision extended to the whole front, that earlier measures should have come.

From March 23rd the danger, that should have been obvious before, developed with alarming rapidity. That day the 17th (Northern) and 63rd (Naval) Divisions, which early that morning had still held the defences about Hermies, by dint of their own fighting and that of the 19th (Western) and 51st (Highland) Divisions on their northern flank escaped the northern pincer and duly withdrew to take position in the rear zone west of Bapaume. The 17th and 51st Divisions were to retire through this line and re-form behind it, while the 47th, 63rd, 2nd, and 19th⁴ (in that order, from south to north) occupied it. It was hoped to hold the connecting line from this zone about two miles south-east of Ytres, along the heights west of the Tortille River to the Fifth Army's bridge-head at Péronne. But, as the Fifth Army was retiring rapidly and the Third slowly, the slender human connection between the two—formed by the 9th Division on the left of the Fifth Army, and the 47th on right of the Third—was becoming so extended that gaps were showing in it, and Ludendorff's southern pincer, now making faster progress, had by noon this day reached Fins, immediately east of the rear zone on which the 47th Division was withdrawing. Connection was rendered more difficult by the fact that the boundary between the armies ran, not due west from the old front line, but south-west, and, in the hurried and difficult movements which now were necessary, the Third Army was unable to extend its flank southwards as it should have done. The retirement of both armies here tended to be westward, and the Fifth kept touch with the Third only by reaching out into the latter's territory.

³ This natural feeling is clearly evidenced in some of the divisional histories.

⁴ The 19th and 51st were now in IV Corps (the more northerly), the others in V.

In order that the Third Army's flank might, if possible, preserve touch, the 47th Division was, on the night of March 22nd, given a brigade of the 2nd Division—the 99th—which was sent to the point of junction on the Tortille. But on the night of the 23rd the Germans attacked here, and this brigade and part of the 47th Division were forced back to the west and north-west instead of retiring south-westwards. The night was one of wild rumours. The blowing up of the vast British *dépôt* behind Ytres, which was done without previous warning to the troops of the 63rd Division occupying the line in advance of the town, lit a conflagration which could be seen from half the battle-field. The defenders of Ytres held on, although other troops in rear thought that the Germans had seized the place.



The enemy did occupy the village of Bus, a mile behind it, and,

March 24

by the morning of the 24th, was at this point well in rear of the Beugny-Ytres line, and pouring into the Third Army's hinterland through the gap that had opened, within its territory, between the flanks of the two armies.

Hitherto the attention of G.H.Q., and—through its *communiqués*—of the Allied armies and peoples, had chiefly centred upon the southern half of the battle where the Fifth Army had retreated to the Somme line. This day, however, the most alarming news came from the northern half. Immediately north of the bend of the Somme near Péronne, the thinly drawn-out line which had connected the two armies

was breaking in several places. The South African Brigade of the 9th Division had received overnight the order to retire to, and hold "at all costs," the high ground west of Bouchavesnes, from which its sister brigades would extend the line to the army's northern boundary at Sailly-Saillisel. The brigade carried out this duty to the letter. From 9 a.m. on the 24th onwards the Germans attacked it in great force, but, instead of withdrawing when outflanked, as did its sister brigade, the 27th (Lowland), which had not received the same order, it fought on. By noon it was surrounded. The reader will remember that this was the day on which the war correspondents in Amiens were informed that only the 35th Division lay between Amiens and the enemy. The 35th was the second in the stream of reinforcing divisions ordered down from Flanders,⁵ and, as it hurried up piecemeal from the railheads at Heilly and Corbie, its two leading battalions were directed to retake Marrières Wood, immediately behind the South African position. The South Africans had heard that it was coming to their assistance, and, although field-guns and trench-mortars were brought against them by the Germans, they fought on in the hope that it might get through; at one time they imagined that they saw signs of its arrival. But its two battalions could reach no farther than the high land between Cléry and Maurepas, two miles from the surrounded troops. At 4 o'clock, when only 100 of the South Africans survived unwounded and their ammunition was almost finished, the Germans in great numbers charged the position, and, in the face of "a few scattered shots,"⁶ swept over and around the remnant, who then surrendered.

Most of the other troops responsible for keeping the connection between the armies were by then fighting miles back on the creviced moorland of the old Somme battlefield, entirely unaware of the continuance of this local struggle out on the brown horizon. The link was now broken. The 27th (Lowland) Brigade had fallen back fighting through Combles to Guillemont and Maricourt, and the 26th (Highland) from Sailly-Saillisel to Montauban, where it re-formed behind the

⁵ The first, the 8th, had already been used by Fifth Army farther south.

⁶ *The History of the 9th (Scottish) Division*, p. 280.

1st Cavalry Division, which General Gough on March 24th had sent hurriedly from his centre to his northern flank to assist in keeping touch. Most of the 1st Cavalry Division now fought as a dismounted brigade on the Fifth Army's flank. Of the Third Army's south flank troops, which on the previous night had still held the rear zone of the original defence system, the 47th Division (V Corps) had early evaded the Germans in its rear and retired to Rocquigny in the old German Bapaume line—the R.II line of 1917. Farther north, the 63rd, and 2nd (V Corps), and 19th (IV Corps) in the early morning held the Rear Zone, which the Germans were attacking about Beugny. The 17th (V Corps) and 51st (IV Corps) had duly re-formed behind them, and at 5 a.m. the 17th was ordered to send a brigade southward to Saily-Saillisel, to try and establish touch between the 47th Division, wherever that might be, and the 9th. But this brigade had barely passed the flank of its own division, when it came, according to the divisional historian,

upon a crowd of haggard exhausted men streaming back along a country road and moving westward. Some officers with them were doing what was possible to get them into some kind of order. They were about 1,500 in all, many of them wounded. It was a sign that for not a few the breaking strain was already past. . . .

The brigade found Saily-Saillisel already held by the enemy, but it gained touch with some part of the 9th Division north-west of that place.

As the Germans were obviously past the southern flank of the Third Army, the V Corps had already ordered the 63rd and 2nd Divisions to withdraw, through the 17th and 47th in the Bapaume line, to some position west of Bapaume. The great dump at Bapaume was fired, and by the early afternoon this movement had been carried out. Orders from above to re-establish the front by retaking Saily-Saillisel had been beyond any possibility of fulfilment. For the V Corps—the same that three days earlier had occupied the Flesquières salient—the only feasible course now was to continue the belated retirement with its broken line until a solid front could be re-formed ahead of the thrusting enemy. The 17th and 2nd Divisions were ordered to withdraw across the

Somme battlefield to the Bazentin-Martinpuich heights—scenes of the fighting in Pozières days. As the falling back of the V Corps exposed the right of the IV Corps, still holding the Rear Zone farther north, the 19th Division (IV Corps) was directed to retire through the 51st in the Bapaume line to Gréville, and at dusk the 51st in its turn withdrew through the 19th to Loupart Wood. Bapaume was left to the enemy, and the 19th Division, while retaining touch on its left with the VI Corps north-west of Bapaume, reached out its right arm, roughly along the line of the Bapaume-Albert road, towards the remnants of the V Corps—2nd, 47th, and 63rd Divisions—which had managed to disentangle themselves from the fighting and to assemble most of their surviving troops clear of the enemy for the night, at various points on the old Somme battlefield between Le Barque and High Wood.

The scene on the old battlefield on this critical day is recorded by an Australian diarist from a report by Captain (now Sir Hubert) Wilkins, then Official Photographer of the A.I.F., who went thither searching for the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company, which had been working for Third Army.⁷ The Albert-Bapaume road, and the few other routes across the moorland, were crowded with British transport slowly withdrawing.⁸

Down the roads came long lines of guns. There was no disorder. . . . Just two or three guns were firing. The British infantry was retiring down the Bapaume road in excellent order—tired, but not routed. The officers said they did not know where they were

⁷ The 2nd Aust. Tunnelling Company—to which was attached a section of the 179th (British) under Captain G. G. Sale—had been working for the V Corps holding the Flesquières salient, and its experience was an epitome of that of this corps. The company (according to a statement of its commander, Major E. N. Mulligan) was not required to retire until March 23, the third day of the battle, when the V Corps, its flank being turned, was forced to retire—first on the Rocquigny line, which it meant to hold; then on the Sailly-Saillisel alignment—then successively on le Transloy, Pozières, and Aveluy. "They did not dig a single yard of line; each time the retirement was ordered before work was to begin. The great dumps at Ytres and Sailly-Saillisel contained enormous supplies of shell, and we were not able to blow them up—we had no explosive and left it too late. At Bapaume the biggest dump of all—of supplies—could not be blown up but was burnt." On March 23 the company was ordered to blow up the ammunition dumps at Ytres, Bus, Lechelle, and Sailly-Saillisel. The dumps were to be exploded at 8 a.m. on the 24th, but the R.E. Park, from which explosives were to be drawn for the purpose, was already on fire and exploding, and the task could not be carried out by this company. On March 25 the company was ordered to mine the Albert-Bapaume road. Three mines were put in near La Boisselle. There was much difficulty in securing the necessary explosive. The work was carried out under Captain Sale, who eventually blew the mines at 6 a.m. on March 26. The 2nd Aust. Tunnelling Company withdrew to Mailly-Maillet and thence to Coutu-rette, from which it was ordered on March 27 to Querrieu (VII Corps).

⁸ See Vol. XII, plates 447-8.

intended to go. They were without orders except to retire to some position further back. . . . There were great numbers of men bivouacked on the reverse slopes of the hills. Wilkins spoke with the men. A few said—"Oh, he [the German] can have this country as far as I'm concerned"—but only two or three. The majority seemed to be anxious to get to some place where they could get a rest and then turn on to him. The one object they all had ahead of them was some place where they could get in behind a line—perhaps of other troops—and rest. . . . Our 71st Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, at Savy, told him [Wilkins] two interesting things—first, that the roads behind the German front were just as crowded with traffic as those behind our front. . . . Second, that the Germans were camped in very great numbers in the . . . country around Bapaume. Around Bapaume there were many German dead lying.

An Australian officer⁹ with the 180th Tunnelling Company R.E., which fought as infantry, speaking of the British infantry, said:

There was never any rout of the troops, so far as he knew. They were simply tired and too dead to offer any resistance. He had heard how, when the Germans got up, our men would get up too, and the two lines would stroll along at a distance from one another, each trailing its arms, the Germans as tired as our men. Someone would take a shot. Then down both sides would fall and shoot at one another for a bit, and then on again.¹⁰

But it was this day recognised by Third Army that the power of resistance in some of its troops was practically at an end. Its chief-of-staff telephoned to General Davidson at G.H.Q. that the troops were worn out, and that, if—as happened—they had to fall back, the new line should be held with fresh troops. The first reinforcement ordered¹¹ to this army from other parts of the British front was then arriving in the shape of the 42nd Division, which had been sent to the VI Corps, north of Bapaume. This night the 42nd was

⁹ Capt. A. L. Butler, 180th Tun. Coy., R.E. Mining engineer; of Hobart and Nigeria; b. Hobart, 30 June, 1885. (He had served with the Gold Coast Regt. in the Cameroons, in 1915.)

¹⁰ Often there was so little sign of where the front line lay that it was difficult to avoid entering the German lines without knowing it. On the morning of March 25 a sergeant and sapper of the 6th Australian Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company, who had been sent out from Albert with some Canadians in a train to destroy railway lines, bridges, and watering points, drove their train deep into the German line before being aware of it. "By the time we had pulled the train up," said Sapper J. E. Hughes afterwards, "German bayonets were sticking through the doors." He and Sergeant F. N. Hawken and the Canadians were captured. (Hughes, who died on 18 Dec., 1928, belonged to Summer Hill, N.S.W.; Hawken belonged to Sydney.)

¹¹ From First Army. It was not, strictly speaking, the first reinforcement to join the Third Army, since another reinforcing division—the 35th—previously sent to Fifth Army, had already been transferred to Third Army with the VII Corps.

put in, farther south than was at first intended, immediately north of the 19th, and was transferred to the IV Corps.

The narrative must now for a moment turn to the Fifth Army, on which, until this day, anxiety had centred. Its forces were much thinner, in proportion to its big front, than those of the **Fifth Army—** Third Army, and the Germans had **March 22** attacked it in far greater force than had been expected, especially on its southern flank by the Oise River.¹² Its outpost-line being there thinnest and the fog densest, the Germans broke through and spread out more quickly than elsewhere. The army had thus been forced to retire earlier than had been anticipated, and, although the arrangement between Haig and Pétain for mutual assistance¹³ was operating, it was becoming increasingly clear that it was insufficient. On Haig's request, made shortly after midnight on March 21st, Pétain authorised the first step laid down, namely, the reinforcement of the Fifth Army's right by a corps of three divisions under General Pellé—the first instalment of the French Third Army.¹⁴ Under the arrangement made in the winter the French divisions were to be given four days to assemble, and were then to be employed as a whole and not thrown in piecemeal. Haig's message now asked for this corps to be concentrated as soon as possible, and Pétain ordered Pellé to assemble south of the Oise and then cross it and help the British to hold the Crozat canal. In addition, as an immediate measure, at the request of Lieutenant-General Butler (III. Corps), the Sixth French Army, holding the front on Butler's right, sent its 125th Division across the Oise to support the 58th British Division, which, by arrangement between the commanders-in-chief, at once came under the French command. Haig was pleased,

¹² It had originally been anticipated that this ground would be too wet to permit of an attack so early in the year; German and English narratives agree that the attack was favoured by the unusually dry weather.

¹³ See *Chap. III, pp. 83 seq.*

¹⁴ Pétain on his own initiative had ordered this corps (the V) to move at noon on March 22.

and expressed his thanks and confident hopes based on this cordial co-operation.

The later events of that day, March 22nd, made it clear that nothing like four days could be allowed for the assembly of Pellé's corps. During the afternoon Pétain agreed with Haig that Humbert's whole army should come into the line as quickly as possible on the British right. The other corps allotted to that army—two infantry divisions, under General Robillot of the II Cavalry Corps—was accordingly warned, and Pétain ordered Humbert to take charge at noon next day of all troops, British and French, on the Crozat canal sector¹⁵ with a view to holding or retaking the Canal line and relieving the British there.

Late that night, when the first French troops (of the 125th Division) had just begun to enter the battle and the divisions of Pellé's corps were arriving at their assembly areas far in rear, Pétain was surprised by the receipt of a further request from Haig. The British commander, after saying that he was expecting developments in the northern sector of the battlefield, added that Gough's army had been ordered behind the Somme except at Péronne bridgehead, and asked Pétain, as an urgent matter, to relieve all parts of that army "up to Péronne." As the French Official History points out,¹⁶ the action so suddenly requested amounted to the taking over, in haste, of more than half the battlefront, and the worst half at that, and it came to Pétain as a shock. Its gravity was much increased by the fact that on this same night information¹⁷ reaching Pétain from his own front indicated that the Germans intended to strike, on March 26th at latest, a powerful blow in Champagne where the line ran nearest to Paris. The French staff calculated that the Germans still had in reserve 55 divisions—sufficient for a formidable offensive. Pétain had 33, but less than half of them were now behind the sector which appeared to be threatened.

¹⁵ His left would be just north of St. Simon, where the canal met the Somme.

¹⁶ *Tome VI, Vol. I, pp. 249-50.*

¹⁷ Prisoners had made statements to that effect, and papers found in the cradle of a German balloon, which had drifted (possibly by arrangement) from its moorings on March 20 pointed strongly to this intention. The local French commanders, Generals Franchet d'Esperey of the Northern Group of Armies and Gouraud of the Fourth Army, were convinced of the reality of the danger.

Pétain therefore decided to give Haig all help in his power short of reducing below the limit of safety the reserves for the Champagne front. He would form another army, to assemble at Montdidier, twenty miles south of Amiens,¹⁸ under General Debeney, and to take over most of the Fifth Army's remaining front; but it would be composed of reserves brought from the more distant areas,¹⁹ and therefore, although it would begin to arrive in two days, it could not complete its assembly in less than a week. Till then Gough's army must hold the line along the Somme with Humbert's army on its right. The two reinforcing armies, Humbert's (Third) and Debeney's (First), would form a "Group of Armies of Reserve" under General Fayolle; and, in order to secure co-ordination, Fayolle would be appointed at once to take command over Gough's and Humbert's armies.

Pétain was prompt in making these difficult decisions, which reduced his reserve to 27 divisions; but, almost before they were made, the face of the battle had again changed. The troops of the British III Corps who were trying to maintain a line on or near the Crozat canal, had their left flank turned early on the 23rd; the Germans had found part of the bridgehead at Ham undefended by troops of the XVIII Corps,²⁰ and had reached and crossed the Somme River four miles west of its junction with the canal. Some British cavalry and infantry, hurriedly collected, were sent to safeguard General Butler's left. Gough appealed to Humbert to come with all speed to the assistance of his southern flank. General Butler urged the leading commander of Pellé's troops to march the nearest French infantry straight on to assist. Pellé's battalions and regiments thus began to be thrown in piecemeal, as soon as they could be marched up, their artillery and ammunition train and other transport being a day's march or more behind them. Passing through the British during the afternoon, they met the Germans advancing far

¹⁸ On the easternmost of the two railways from Paris to Amiens, which ran down the valley of the Rivière des Treis Doms (the western branch of the Avre). The second railway ran along the valley of the Noye, a few miles to the west.

¹⁹ That is, from the Eastern Group (General de Castelnau) at Verdun and Nancy, and not from the Northern Group (General Franchet d'Esperey) at Rheims and Soissons.

²⁰ See sketch on p. 252.

west of the Crozat canal, and after some sharp fighting were thrown back as fast as their allies.

The line on which the southern wing of Gough's army was to have fallen back in extreme urgency had thus already been lost. Pétain now ordered Fayolle to hold a line in continuation southward of Gough's remaining front—if possible, some ten miles behind the Crozat canal; "at minimum" four miles farther back along the general line of the Canal du Nord, from Noyon beside the Oise to Nesle near the Somme.²¹

It was obvious that to employ a division, much more an army corps or an army, in this unorganised, piecemeal fashion was to waste a great part of its fighting power, especially in the case of French divisions, whose artillery was even more effective than the British²² and was more heavily relied on by the infantry. Humbert this day informed Pétain that he would require six more divisions to replace those which were being so rapidly used up. Anxieties were thus piling upon Pétain when, on the afternoon of the 23rd, he hurried to Haig's new headquarters in order to explain to him the measures with which he was meeting the British request.

Haig, like Pétain, had been surprised at the speed of the Fifth Army's retreat. That morning, on visiting Gough's headquarters, he learned with a shock that the Fifth Army was already behind the Somme, and Peronne abandoned. But Haig's invulnerable optimism and self-confidence, while sometimes a source of danger, were of supreme value during this critical week. He recognised that loss of ground mattered little provided that the enemy's advance was met by an unbroken front and was eventually held. On the previous evening (March 22nd) he had confided to Colonel Edmonds²³ his opinion that the enemy had sufficient force for three great attacks of which this offensive was the first.²⁴ Haig's opinion throughout was that, if the Allies held all three

²¹ French Official History, *Tome VI, Vol. I, pp. 251-2.*

²² This is evidenced by numerous German writers.

²³ Brig.-Gen. Sir James Edmonds, C.B., C.M.G., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), 4th Div., 1911/14; Deputy Engineer-in-Chief, British Armies in France, 1918/19; Officer-in-Charge, Military Branch, Historical Section, Committee of Imp. Defence, since 1919. Officer of British Regular Army; of Rimpton, Somerset, and London; b. St. John's Wood, London, 25 Dec., 1861.

²⁴ For Haig's attitude in this crisis, see *Field-Marshal Earl Haig*, by Brig.-Gen. J. Charteris, pp. 316-19.

attacks, as he believed they would, they would then themselves be in a position to strike the exhausted and depressed Germans and secure final victory.

Pétain's disposition was almost opposite to Haig's; extreme conscientiousness forced him to see probabilities at their worst. But both held by the arch-principle of the Allies' military policy—that, whatever happened, their two armies must stand together. Ever since Sir John French's proposal to draw out of the line in 1914, the main instruction to British commanders-in-chief had been to keep close contact with the French. This was a basic canon of Haig's faith, and now Pétain not only impressed him with his great anxiety to assist, but agreed that the one principle to be observed was that of ensuring the connection between their armies. Haig urged him to secure this by concentrating an additional force of twenty divisions near Amiens.²⁵ Pétain now divulged his expectation of a great and imminent attack in Champagne. Nevertheless he promised to do his utmost; the Germans, he said, were evidently trying to separate the two armies, and if they succeeded they would probably drive the British into the sea. This must be prevented at all costs, even if Haig had to withdraw his left from Flanders and uncover the Channel ports.²⁶

Haig appears to have been satisfied with the assistance promised. It was evident to him that Pétain, though deeply anxious at the prospect of a big offensive on his own front, was trying to give all help that he considered possible. Though not taking seriously Pétain's hint concerning the abandonment of the Channel ports, the British commander decided to provide what reserves he could near the Somme by drawing from his two northern armies. Accordingly the same evening he called their commanders, Generals Plumer and Horne, into conference to ascertain what additional reserves could be squeezed from them. Then, as always, General Plumer of the Second Army rose to the occasion and offered to hold the front in Flanders with eight divisions, thus setting free the New Zealand Division, and 3rd, 4th, and 5th Australian

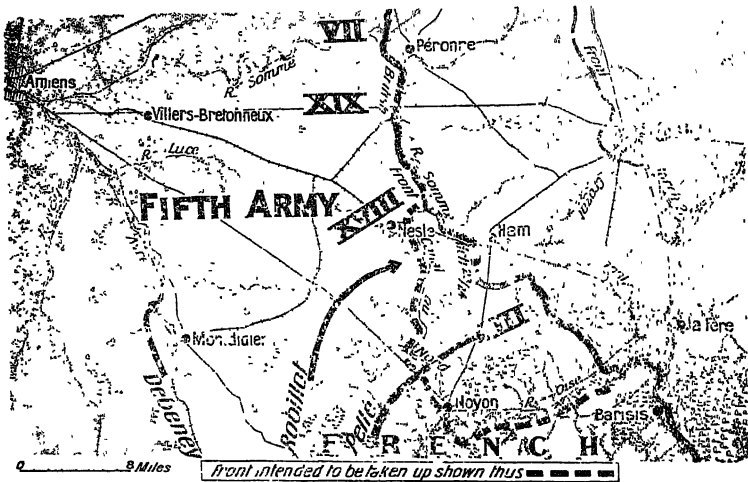
²⁵ A French writer notes that the number asked for was the same as that envisaged in some of Pétain's preparatory arrangements during the previous winter. (*La Crise du Commandement Unique*, by General XXX, p. 143.)

²⁶ See British Official History (*France and Belgium, 1918, Vol. I, p. 392*).

Divisions,²⁷ and, if the Belgians would take over part of his front, the 32nd British Division. The First Army would send the 12th Division. These six divisions, a most powerful striking force, would assemble near Doullens behind the Third Army and would comprise the X Corps, under Lieutenant-General Morland, in G.H.Q. reserve. Haig intended, if circumstances allowed, to use it for counter-attack.

That night found the British Commander-in-Chief still not unduly disturbed by the course of affairs. He had informed General Wilson (Chief of the Imperial General Staff) that the next few days, while the French were coming up, would be anxious ones. But the latest reports were that the French were arriving quickly.

On the day following these events, March 24th, although on the northern half of its remaining front the Fifth Army continued to hold the eastern bank of the Somme, farther south, at Pargny near Nesle, the 8th Division (XIX Corps) was driven back and the Germans crossed the river there.²⁸ It will be



²⁷ The 5th would, at first, be without its artillery.

²⁸ The 8th Division was the first reinforcement brought to the Fifth Army from another part of the British front. It came from Flanders, and was to be put into the defences west of the Somme in order to form a line upon which the XIX Corps could fall back. Its leading elements, arriving on the afternoon of March 22, had been pushed out beyond the river.

recalled that General Fayolle's immediate task was, with the French reinforcements, together with the right of the Fifth British Army, to stop the enemy "at minimum" at the Canal du Nord between Nesle and Noyon. But, with the Germans across the Somme north of Nesle, this line also was already turned. Generals Gough and Humbert therefore arranged to counter-attack on either side of Nesle next morning, Gough using a tired division, the 24th, previously withdrawn into reserve, and Humbert the second of Robillot's arriving divisions (the 22nd).

Such was the anxious position of the Fifth Army when, on March 24th, Haig heard of the gap that had opened north of the Somme between the Third and Fifth British Armies. The crisis on the British front was thereby heightened, but in spite of the natural apprehension of his subordinates as to what would happen when the Germans renewed their pressure against the tired and disconnected line next day, the Commander-in-Chief was satisfied that the six divisions which he was bringing south would well suffice to safeguard the line north of the Somme. The first two, which were now on their way, he had to allot to Third Army to buttress its broken front. (The Third Army gave one of them, the 12th, next day to VII Corps; the other, the New Zealand, was on arrival to assemble behind that corps in the Heilly-Dernancourt area as army reserve.) Haig transferred the VII Corps (less the 16th Division, south of the Somme) from the Fifth Army to the Third, so that the Somme River now became the boundary between the two armies.²⁹

The crisis north of the Somme did, however, influence Haig's attitude in one respect. Since March 23rd he had been doubtful whether he could spare any more reserves to strengthen the line south of the Somme. He was now convinced that this was impossible. Accordingly on the evening of the 24th he sent his chief-of-staff to settle on some

²⁹ This contravened the principle that both sides of any natural dividing feature should be held by the same force, so that movement there would be co-ordinated and not disjointed. Haig has therefore been strongly criticised for the decision. He possibly thought that, in the confusion of control, the river was the actual boundary, and that it was better to face the fact. He may also have hoped that, in case of connection with the French being broken, it would furnish a convenient flank.

line on which the Fifth Army should make a stand. If it failed to hold the enemy, Haig would withdraw his right (the Third Army) to the old 1915 front at Albert, and endeavour to stop the Germans by striking southwards at their flank as they drove on towards Amiens. Dining with Byng (Third Army) that night, he told him to keep touch at all costs with the main British position on his left at Arras, and outlined to him the plan of counter-attack. (The reader will recall the enthusiasm aroused at Third Army Headquarters on March 25th by the prospect of assembling the special force for this offensive.⁸⁰)

It does not seem to have occurred to Haig that the course which he provisionally envisaged for the British Army—a retirement away from the French—might bring about the separation of the two armies.⁸¹ Knowing—in view of the number of German divisions thrown against his own front—that no serious attack could be imminent against the French, he assumed that Pétain could stop the gap by merely using the considerable reserve still held behind the Champagne front. In the last resort, should separation become otherwise inevitable, Haig was bound by his original instructions from Lord Kitchener to consider the step suggested by Pétain—the abandonment of the Channel ports. Kitchener's order laid down that a retreat of the B.E.F.

should never be contemplated as an independent move to secure the defence of the ports facing the Straits of Dover. . . . The direction of the retreat should be decided, in conjunction with our Ally, with reference solely to the eventual defeat of the enemy and not to the security of the Channel.⁸²

For Haig, of all men, the literal obedience of such orders was a religion. He may have entertained a doubt as to whether the submarine menace had not vitally changed the conditions, but in the crisis in April he said that his policy was to keep touch with the French at all costs.⁸³ In any

⁸⁰ See p. 119.

⁸¹ The British Official History says that on March 23 General Byng told his corps commanders that it was not yet decided whether a retirement would be made north-westwards to cover the Channel ports, or westwards to keep in line with the French.

⁸² This injunction was subject to the qualification that conceivable circumstances might cause a retreat to the Channel "while acting in co-operation with the French Army" to be "strategically advantageous."

⁸³ Eventually the Admiralty, having no objection, Sir Henry Wilson had this principle reaffirmed. On April 26 Haig and Wilson agreed to abandon the Channel ports if necessary, but they could not get Foch to face the question.

case he regarded the proposed withdrawal of his flank merely as a delaying manœuvre, likely to give Pétain more time to send divisions from the south to sustain or re-establish the connection while he himself made his counter-attack from the north. He was puzzled as to why the Fifth Army had not made a firmer stand; the view of G.H.Q. (as imparted to Lord Milner next day) was—"The great mystery was the breakdown of the Fifth Army, which so far was not explained," the story not yet having been pieced together. "Broadly speaking, however, there was no doubt that this Army was shattered . . ." ³⁴ But Haig's characteristic confidence in the efficacy of his plans enabled him cheerfully to receive Pétain when, late that night, the French commander again came to Dury to see him.

To Pétain, on the other hand, the prospect that day appeared increasingly dark. Six French divisions were now in the battle; but, of these, those of Robillot's corps (previously "dispersed", General Palat states, "all over France") were arriving with only 80 rounds of ammunition on each infantryman, without entrenching implements, and with their artillery and transport one or two days behind them. If only Gough would make a determined stand on the Somme line, there would be a chance of bringing round and assembling in some sort of order the reinforcements summoned from the Eastern Group to safeguard the connection with the British Army. But Pétain now heard that the Fifth Army was retiring from part of the Somme line also. From French officers he was receiving alarming reports of its exhaustion and disorganisation. According to these, not merely did it fail to exhibit the "bulldog tenacity" expected from British infantry in defence, ³⁵ but its organisation and system of communication were so shattered that it was "incapable of serious resistance"; as an army, they said, it was practically non-existent. This estimate was not very different from that held and expressed by Haig's staff, but there was this vital difference in the outlook of

³⁴ Lord Milner's report on his visit to France.

³⁵ See *La Grande Guerre sur le Front Occidental* (Palat), Vol. XIII, p. 64; *La Crise du Commandement*, pp. 154, 167; *Le Commandement Unique* (Mordacq), p. 58.

the two leaders: Haig was convinced that Pétain could remedy the situation, whereas Pétain, faced, so he believed, in the next few hours by a powerful blow against his own front, now felt that, since the Fifth British Army apparently would not stand, the remedy lay beyond his power. To cap everything, two of his own divisions arriving—one of them for Debeney's army—had that day to be given to Pellé's corps (the first thrown into the battle), which Humbert reported to be already at the end of its strength.³⁶

On the evening of the 24th Clemenceau, as was often his custom, dined with Pétain at G.Q.G., and discussed the extreme gravity of the situation, for which each of them had made the provisional arrangements that seemed prudent. Clemenceau was prepared to withdraw the machinery of government from Paris—"We two, *mon petit*," he told General Mordacq, "will leave last, by aeroplane, to rejoin the armies." Pétain came to an even graver decision which, after Clemenceau had left, he hurried to impart personally to Haig at Dury, arriving there by motor car at 11 p.m.

When Pétain was shown into the presence of Haig and General Lawrence, Haig saw at once that he was "upset and very anxious".³⁷ Presumably in order to cheer him, the British commander did not wait for him to speak, but forthwith described the plans which he himself had just imparted to Byng. "Although," says a intimate French account of the interview, "his Third Army had, during the day, made a considerable withdrawal, he was concentrating behind it all his reserves—in the first place five divisions, of which four were solid Australian ones.³⁸ Thanks to this reinforcement he was hoping to stop the enemy's progress on that front at least temporarily. As for the operations south of the Somme, the British Commander-in-Chief, though following them, to be sure, with the most lively interest, nevertheless holds them since the previous day as a matter

³⁶ French Official History, Tome VI, Vol. I, p. 284.

³⁷ Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918, Vol. I, p. 448 seq., is the authority here used for details of this interview, except where other sources are cited. It has since been confirmed by Haig, Vol. II, pp. 252-3.

³⁸ The narrative (*La Crise du Commandement Unique*, p. 154), as often happens, wrongly includes the New Zealand Division as "Australian." The word should be "Anzac."

more especially concerning the French . . ." Haig asked Pétain to assemble as many divisions as he could on both sides of the Somme, at Amiens, to assist on the Third Army's right.

Then Pétain, obviously speaking under very great tension, informed Haig of his decision. He said that he did not believe that the principal German offensive had yet been launched, and he had already weakened the French Army by sending Haig part of its reserves. He gave bluntly his estimate of the state of affairs in the Fifth Army's sector. To him it appeared that, as he extended his hand to close the breach, so Haig withdrew his. He had accordingly that day informed General Fayolle that, although he should if possible keep touch with the British, his principal duty was to maintain contact with the French forces. Accordingly, if the Germans continued to press towards Amiens, he must withdraw to the south-west in order to cover Paris.

Haig realised at once that the effect of this order would be to allow the Germans to penetrate between the French and British Armies. He

asked General Pétain if he meant to abandon the British right flank. The French general did not speak but nodded his head, and then said, "It is the only thing possible, if the enemy compels the Allies to fall back still further."

Haig recognised that this signified a reversal of the fundamental rule of the Allies' strategy—that come what might, the two armies should hold together.

The decision fell on him as a thunderbolt. It is true that the course of action projected by Pétain for the French Army was precisely similar to that laid down by himself for the British—Pétain's withdrawal to the south-west was, like Haig's to the north-west, only to be carried out if the Germans drove on farther towards Paris. Moreover Pétain's subsequent report stated that the separation was to be only temporary—the Fifth British Army was to fall back fighting behind the Avre and the XXXVI French Corps from Flanders would thence hold the crossings of the Somme as far as Abbeville. "If we had temporarily to abandon contact with

our allies farther east by reason of the disorganisation of the British Army, it is in any case on this line of the Avre towards Amiens that the Commander-in-Chief envisages the restoration of contact." So wrote Pétain afterwards. But experience shows that provisional orders to withdraw, given at such times, are almost inevitably carried out; and Pétain's statements at the time prove that—to say the least—he envisaged a different possibility. "The Germans will beat the British in the open field", he said two days later to Clemenceau, "after which they will beat us too."³⁹

Both commanders clearly saw this contingency, but both withheld their reserves in anticipation of attacks elsewhere—Haig fearing that the main offensive would be extended to Arras; Pétain apprehending an attack in Champagne⁴⁰ endangering Paris. Apparently Haig would not give up the Channel ports nor would Pétain (or his Government) risk the breaking of the French front covering Paris, although they were actually preparing to abandon that city. Pétain's front was as yet entirely unattacked and had much ampler reserves than Haig's—27 divisions as against 4. The real issue was—which could best take the risk of detaching his reserves in order to avoid permanent separation of their armies?

The next twenty-four hours were to show that the German preparations in Champagne had, as Ludendorff intended, deceived the French staff. Less than eight weeks before the chief-of-staff of the German Eighteenth Army,⁴¹ in submitting his plan for attacking the Fifth British Army, had written:

It need not be anticipated that the French will run themselves off their legs and hurry at once to the help of their Entente comrades. They will first wait and see if their own front is not attacked also, and decide to support their ally only when the situation has been quite cleared up. That will not be immediately, as demonstrations to deceive the French will be made by the German Crown Prince's group.

³⁹ *Au Service de la France*, by Raymond Poincaré, Vol. X, p. 88.

⁴⁰ The French Official History says that a secondary attack was apprehended. Pétain gave Haig the impression that he feared that the main attack would fall there.

⁴¹ General von Sauberzweig. The letter is in *Die Märzoffensive 1918 an der Westfront*, by Major Fear, pp. 25-6, quoted in the British Official History (*Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918, Vol. I, pp. 145-6*).

Pétain had been completely misled. To Haig it seemed that his colleague was still desirous to do everything possible to help him, but that he was unstrung by anxiety—"Very much upset, almost unbalanced", Haig says in his diary. Two days later Haig noted that Pétain at the conference table at Doullens "had a terrible look. He had the appearance of a commander who had lost his nerve."⁴²

Pétain's decision entirely changed Haig's previously confident outlook. He saw his cherished prospect—of the Allies unitedly holding the enemy, and later delivering a concerted death-blow—suddenly converted into one of almost certain disaster and possible loss of the war. With the two armies parted and the Germans free to concentrate against either and within reach of the British communications, the situation would be almost desperate.

He at once made up his mind—Pétain's new decision must be reversed. Since Haig himself had been unable to shake it, he must get the control taken out of Pétain's hands. This could be done by the appointment of a commander-in-chief of the Allied forces, above both himself and Pétain, a step towards which the British Prime Minister, the lower ranks of the army, and the nation had for long been favorably inclined but the attitude of most British military leaders had always previously been hostile. Such a commander, Haig felt, would in this crisis keep in view the interests of the British front and army as well as those of the French; the man chosen for the position would almost certainly be Foch, whom Painlevé—and at one time Lloyd George—had marked for it; and Haig knew, from close association at First Ypres and the Somme, Foch's qualities as a fighter, and that he favoured above all things the unity of the two armies. A few hours before, Haig had telephoned asking the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Wilson) to come to France and confer with him. Now hurrying back to his headquarters, he told Lawrence, "to telegraph to Wilson requesting him and Lord Milner to come to France at once in order to arrange that General Foch, or some other determined general who

⁴² *Haig*, by the Rt. Hon. A. Duff Cooper, *Vol. II*, pp. 252 and 258.

would fight, should be given supreme control of the operations in France."⁴³

So Haig, whose antipathy to any notion of placing himself and the British Army under foreign command had previously provided the chief resistance to all such suggestions during his term, in this supreme crisis flung his objections overboard in order to save the situation for the Allies. His vigorous action did not end there. Fearing that there might be too much delay in whatever action was taken, and that the Allies might be driven apart before the new authority could prevent it, he wrote personally to Foch and Clemenceau, assuring them that he knew from the number of divisions identified on the present battle-front that there could be no danger of an attack in Champagne for many weeks to come, and urging the concentration of at least twenty French divisions astride of the Somme so as to ensure the union of the two armies. Foch himself had already taken what action he could: At 3 p.m. on the 24th, when he realised that each of the armies was tending to fight a separate battle, he wrote to Clemenceau urging him that it was now his duty to enforce unity, by means, apparently, of the Supreme War Council and Executive War Board.

It must suffice here to mention in barest outline the main incidents that now led up to the final establishment of a united command. Some indications of the impending trouble had already, on March 23rd, reached Lord Milner from the British staff at Versailles, which suggested that he should come over. That evening at the direct request of the Prime Minister, who also wanted someone to go to France to ascertain the position and appears to have made some mention of appointing Foch, Milner decided to do so. On the

⁴³ *Haig, Vol. II, pp. 253-4.* The present writer is indebted to Sir James Edmonds for the information, received by Sir James after his own account (*1918, Vol. I, p. 450*) was written, that the second message was actually telephoned. The precise terms of Haig's request must probably, therefore, remain in doubt. Lord Milner had already left London when the message was sent. Wilson received it, but makes no mention of it in his diary. The facts that he (1) certainly never mentioned to Milner such a request by Haig, and (2) noted that he himself subsequently persuaded Haig to accept Foch as the coordinating authority, prove that he did not understand that Haig had suggested the appointment of Foch. But that a request for some appointment was made was evidently known at G.H.Q., for General Charteris next day wrote in his diary: "D.H. has telegraphed home asking that a generalissimo for the whole western front be appointed at once as the only means of having Pétain overruled." (*Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 320.*)

Lord Milner was at this time member of the War Cabinet acting in *liaison* with Paris. Shortly afterwards he succeeded Lord Derby as Secretary of State for War.

following afternoon (24th) he crossed the Channel and called at G.H.Q. Finding Haig away, he went on to Versailles, which he reached early on the 25th. He thus missed Haig's telephone call and the news of Pétain's decision, which it would have conveyed. But from the British staff during the journey he learned the situation as G.H.Q. saw it on the afternoon of the 24th.⁴⁴ Meanwhile the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, had been rung up at 5 p.m. on the 24th by Foch, and at 7 p.m. by Haig; both told him of the German break-through between the Third and Fifth Armies, and both urged him to come over. He agreed to start early next day. During the night Haig's further message reached him, in what terms is not known.

Milner, according to his own report written for his colleagues, was sent for on the morning of the 25th by Clemenceau, who "was in great form and very full of fight" and maintained that the British and French Armies must, at any price, remain united, and that Pétain—and Haig also—must be pressed to do more. Clemenceau, though not disclosing that he was now determined at all costs to bring about unity of the Allied command, suggested that Pétain might be made generalissimo; but Milner objected that for this post the man was Foch. Clemenceau arranged to meet Pétain that afternoon at Compiègne, and desired Sir Henry Wilson, of whose arrival in France he had just heard, and Haig to be present, but Wilson had arranged to meet Haig about the same time at Abbeville. Milner, however, accompanied Clemenceau and Foch to Compiègne, and, together with Clemenceau, President Poincaré, and others, had the opportunity of comparing the attitude of Foch with that of Pétain. Pétain was "very pessimistic", and represented that, although he was bringing round nine divisions over and above the six set aside under the agreement, he could not neglect the danger of the Germans attacking towards Paris; Foch, on the other hand, was ready to take risks and throw in divisions "more quickly, even if in less complete formation." All who were present, except Pétain, appear to have emerged from this meeting with the determination that the allied armies must at all costs remain united.

⁴⁴ See *ante*, p. 255.

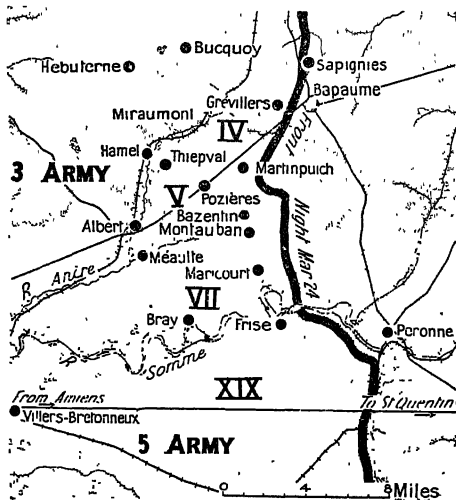
Clemenceau and Milner decided that there should be a conference with Haig and Wilson at 11 next morning, if possible, at Dury. Haig, having already a meeting with his army commanders at Doullens at that hour, asked that the conference of the allies should be held there afterwards, at noon; and so was arranged the famous meeting which took place there while the 3rd Australian Division was assembling in and near the town.

Leaving these deliberations of the high command, the narrative must go back thirty-six hours to the critical night of March 24th; and to the troops themselves

March 25 on what was now (by Haig's new order) the southern flank of the Third Army, spending their few hours of respite, after the confusion and rapid retreat of that day, in finding and occupying—so far as they knew of them—the positions allotted to them by the higher staffs. The troops north of the gap were to extend from Gréville

to Martinpuich and Bazentin-le-Grand, those south of it from Bazentin through Montauban to Maricourt, above the Somme. Brigades—some of them out of communication with their divisions and far from their proper sector—had to be assembled, and in some cases again shifted; and the men had to snatch, if possible, a few hours' rest,

while the signal service endeavoured to re-establish touch with their constantly moving headquarters. The weather during that week being fortunately as dry as at



mid-summer, transport, guns, wounded, and stragglers, in continuous columns, slowly wound clear of the old battleground, through Albert, Méaulte, and Miraumont.

But many of the infantry, particularly in the broken line of the V Corps, were now beyond the power of making an effective stand. Part of the 47th and 2nd Divisions, and probably others, gave way. It was next intended to hold the Pozières-Thiepval heights, but sections of the force were in such condition that it was out of the question for their commanders to maintain them there, with flanks in the air, and it was on the front of this corps—the original tenant of the Flesquières salient—and between it and the IV, that gaps now opened. A portion of the 12th Division, arriving this morning to cement the northern flank of the VII Corps to the southern flank of the V, found the troops already gone from Pozières ridge. The 2nd Division was falling back across the Ancre, and its commander stated that he did not think it could hold the crossings of that river. According to a report of the V Corps that evening, the division was "practically non-existent".

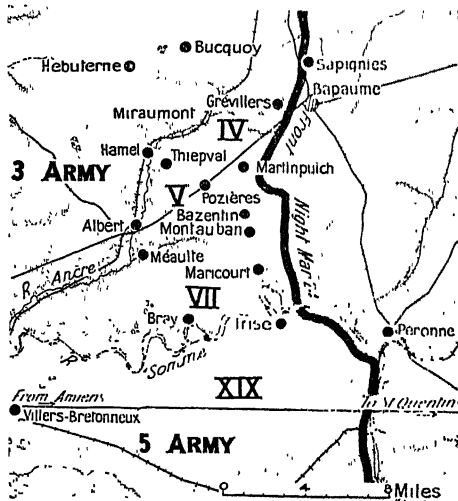
North of this retirement on the morning of March 25th the 19th Division (IV Corps), now with only 2,200 organised infantry, was still holding Gréville, close to Bapaume. As the Germans drove past its southern flank it gradually withdrew. But fresh troops of the 62nd (West Riding) Division⁴⁵—the same that was on the Australian flank at Bullecourt—were arriving to reinforce on the northern side of the break. Reaching Bucquoy at noon, this division marched forward along the roads crowded by retreating remnants to Achiet-le-Petit, north-east of which, through Sapignies, the 42nd Division was still maintaining the line which it had freshly reinforced the night before. But the break in the V Corps forced the Third Army to order that during the night (25th/26th) the divisions should withdraw and re-establish themselves on the next line for resistance—from Bucquoy, along the west side of the Ancre, and thence southwards through Albert to Bray. The preparation of this line had already been ordered by G.H.Q. on the afternoon

⁴⁵ From First Army.

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of March 23rd;⁴⁶ the sector of the VII Corps, along the Albert-Bray road, should be comparatively secure, and, the most urgent need having now developed farther north, General Byng transferred the 12th Division from that corps to the V to hold the west bank of the Ancre between Albert and Hamel.⁴⁷ Motor-drawn siege artillery, which, in so rapid a withdrawal, was a mere encumbrance, had been ordered to retire west of the Ancre.

On the morning of March 25th the Fifth Army, now officially reduced to the XVIII and XIX Corps,⁴⁸ still held—as Haig had promised Pétain that it would endeavour to do—its line along the Somme opposite Péronne. But on its southern flank the counter-attack, which Gough and Humbert had arranged for that morning with a view to restoring the line at Nesle, was a failure, the British 24th Division⁴⁹ attacking late, and the French 22nd Division not at all. The northern part of the Canal du Nord was lost, and, with the French on his right being driven south-west, and the Third Army on his left retiring west, Gough ordered the XIX Corps to withdraw, not so far as the Third Army's flank at Bray, but to Frise, five miles east of it. Thence, by holding the crossings of the Somme, his line would connect with that of the Third, Bray-Albert-Ancre-Arras.

The narrative now approaches the stage at which the foremost Australian reserves come into it—the 4th Division was already reaching the Basseux area—and the British divisions mentioned, many of them mere fragments, are the *dramatis personae* of the scenes described in previous chapters. The Third Army's intended line along the Ancre, was never fully established. Before dusk on the 25th the Germans were already across that stream at Hamel and Miraumont. At 9 p.m. Third Army ordered the New Zealand Division,

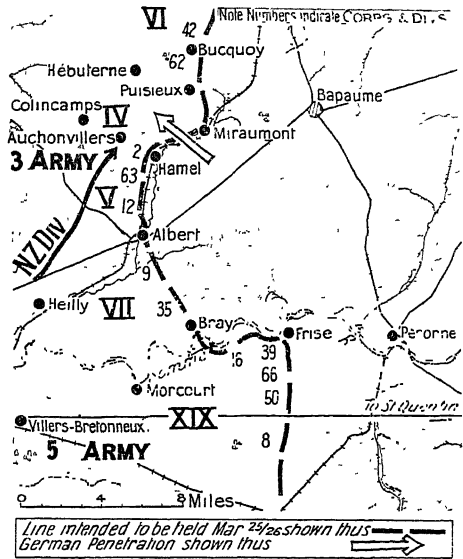
⁴⁶ It was to be known as the "Purple Line," and ran from Dernancourt northwards along the Ancre to Miraumont and thence in a wide re-entrant to Arras. Several miles behind it was established a "G.H.Q." line, incorporating in the south the old French defences of Amiens.

⁴⁷ Hamel on the Ancre, near Beaumont-Hamel, not to be confused with Hamel by the Somme.

⁴⁸ The VII had been transferred to Third Army, and the III was detained by the French to support their V Corps. The XIX Corps included the 16th Division, part of the original VII Corps.

⁴⁹ One of the divisions of the XIX Corps, which had been in the line on March 21.

then beginning to arrive at Heilly behind VII Corps, to move at once to the southern flank of the IV Corps and endeavour to establish a line where the Ancre crossings had been lost, from Hamel to Puisieux. As sufficient lorries could not be obtained, the leading New Zealand battalions were to march as soon as they arrived. About the same time IV Corps, wishing to get its heavy artillery out of the way, ordered it back to Doullens—it was largely these batteries, together with transport and labour



battalions that the advancing Australians passed. The IV Corps was to hold its line with its two freshest divisions, 62nd and 42nd, while the remnants of the 19th, 25th, 41st, and 51st would withdraw behind these to reorganise at Puisieux and Bucquoy, and thence to retire to positions in support at Gommecourt, Fonquevillers, and Hébuterne. Similarly, in the V Corps on the Ancre north of Albert, the battered 47th and 63rd Divisions would be relieved by the 12th and the 2nd by the New Zealand. The 17th Division of this corps was mingled with the VII Corps south-west of Albert, and was ordered to retire through Dernancourt to Hénencourt. The VII Corps comprised the 1st Cavalry and 35th Divisions as well as the 9th, and part of the 21st, reorganised under Brigadier-General Headlam.⁵⁰ The corps also included a scratch force of reinforcements, chiefly from

⁵⁰ Some 1,500 men of this division were thus organised as infantry with 8 machine-guns. The rest were kept in reserve.

its reinforcement camp, organised as eight⁵¹ battalions under Lieutenant Colonel Hunt⁵²; this had been fighting since the morning of the 25th. The commander of the 35th Division, Major-General Franks,⁵³ was charged by General Congreve with the responsibility of conducting the retirement to the Albert-Bray road, and the whole force was placed under his command. The corps had no reserve, the divisions then arriving from the north—4th and 3rd Australian—being directed to assemble as G.H.Q. reserve between Arras and Doullens.

During the night of March 25th-26th, while the retirement of Third Army to the Bucquoy-Ancre-Bray line was proceeding, the 24th (Saxon) Division⁵⁴ crossed the Ancre, and its patrols advanced through Serre and Puisieux. On the British side it was believed that posts of the 2nd and 19th Divisions were holding this region. But they were too scattered to resist penetration, and the leading company of the 1st New Zealand Rifle Battalion, when, after marching

all night from Pont Noyelles, it was
March 26 advancing at 10 a.m. as a screen west of Auchonvillers (2½ miles west of the Ancre), observed German troops east of that village and presently ran into a force of them near the sugar factory on the Auchonvillers-Hébuterne road. In that area they were advancing with confidence, and about this time their patrols reached Colincamps, more than a mile to the left front of the New Zealanders and four miles beyond the Ancre.

The New Zealand Division arriving hurriedly, battalion by battalion, became engaged in the most stubborn fighting, in order first to hold, and later to drive back, the Germans north and east of Auchonvillers. To Colincamps the Third Army sent a scratch company of fourteen tanks, which had been organised on March 21st at the tank training ground near Bray, and shortly after midnight on the 25th-26th had

⁵¹ Originally six.

⁵² Lieut.-Col J. P. Hunt, C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M.; Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Commanded 9th Bn., R.D.F., 1917, 1st Bn., Royal Irish Rifles, 1918/19. Member of British Regular Army; of Dublin; b. Dublin, 8 March, 1875.

⁵³ The same under whom parts of the 3rd and 5th Aust. Divisions had been employed at various times in 1916.

⁵⁴ This had fought against the Australians at Pozières. Its morale at that time did not impress the British.

been ordered up from the VII Corps area to Mailly-Maillet, near Auchonvillers. These tanks were of the new, faster and lighter type known as the "whippet", which had never yet been employed. At noon they moved through Colincamps village, from which the British posts were at that moment being forced back by the German patrols closely supported by a party of 300 enemy infantry. As some of the whippets raced round the wood on the eastern outskirts, these Germans, not unnaturally, broke and fled. A battery of the 2nd British Division, firing direct, silenced a machine-gun in the cemetery. Some of the tanks cut off and captured a number of the enemy, and others scouted in the direction of Hébuterne, towards which small parties of Germans were then advancing. The tank commanders noted that a few British posts were still there, but that the German patrols were already past them and were sniping their messengers. After manœuvring for a while in the open, the tanks withdrew, having thoroughly cleared the enemy from about Colincamps.

But the sudden appearance of the new tanks had another and an unintended result. Five miles to the north-east, north of the gap in the line, the 62nd Division (IV Corps), having fallen back at dawn, as ordered, from Achiet-le-Petit to Bucquoy, had been stubbornly holding that prominent site against constant attacks, but with increasing anxiety lest the Germans should penetrate to its right rear at Hébuterne. The scanty posts at Hébuterne belonged to the 19th Division, which, after hasty reorganisation during the night,⁵⁵ had reached there about dawn. This division, about a battalion in strength, was told that the New Zealand Division would relieve it, but would not reach it until noon. At 11.15 the appearance of the Germans streaming through the gap towards Colincamps caused the greatest anxiety. During these days the British artillery used to obtain information by sending out its own mounted patrols, and one of these,

⁵⁵ The history of the division says that late on the 25th "all officers on the staff or attached to divisional headquarters were summoned to a conference and were divided into parties (with orderlies and police attached) and were sent to different crossroads and likely lines of retreat between the Sugar Factory, S.E. of Colincamps, and Gommecourt, with orders to stop all stragglers of any units, collect them into parties, and march them to a position of assembly west of the Sully au Bois-Fonquevillers road." Arrangements were made for giving the men a meal at the assembly point. "Upwards of 4,000 of all ranks of various divisions were collected by this means by dawn on the 26th, including about 600 men of the 19th Division."

despatched by the 19th Division, on seeing the whippets, reported them as German tanks. The 19th Divisional Artillery ran forward some guns, to destroy them if the report were true. But meanwhile the rumour, telegraphed throughout the back area, and seemingly confirmed by the appearance of the French agricultural tractors, which were mistaken for the "tanks", had engendered a confusion of which the results lasted for days. In the villages in rear of Hébuterne, crowded with the transport that had just got clear of the old Somme battlefield, some order was given for part of this transport to retire. The historian of the 47th Division says⁵⁶:

All transport, including the 47th D.A.C., which was in the vicinity of Saily-Fonquevillers-Souastre, moved back, with or without orders, and for a time complete chaos existed. It was said that orders had been given to different units by spies dressed as British staff officers.

According to the diary of the IV Corps Heavy Artillery, a sort of panic had undoubtedly come over many troops in the area Souastre Henu. The heavy artillery were not involved in this except for a few battery waggon lines which retired to the rear.

Dewar and Boraston refer to the incident as the hurried falling back of individual units between Hamel and Hébuterne in what came to be known among the irreverent as the Pys to Pas Point to Point.⁵⁷

It was the same confusion that General Rosenthal noted at Mondicourt, and which met the 9th and 10th Australian Infantry Brigades arriving there and at Doullens, and through which the 4th Brigade marched forward to Souastre and Bienvillers, prior to being ordered to Hébuterne.

This panic nowhere extended to the front-line troops. Although in the afternoon no British line seems to have existed between the southern end of Hébuterne and the New Zealanders, yet some sort of front of irregular, scattered posts had been established from Gommecourt, around Hébuterne, to Souastre. This line was not strongly attacked; apparently the New Zealand Division, arriving battalion by battalion, two and a half miles farther south, fighting as hard as that magnificent force could fight, was now attracting the full attention of the penetrating enemy, and driving him

⁵⁶ *The 47th (London) Division, 1914-1919*, p. 177.

⁵⁷ *Sir Douglas Haig's Command, 1915-1918, Vol. II*, p. 121.

gradually back from around Auchonvillers. German patrols slipped between the posts of the 19th Division into Hébuterne, and, although the 19th easily drove them out, the report went through all headquarters concerned that the Germans had taken Hébuterne. The 4th Australian Division was ordered to retake it, using its 4th Brigade, and to move up the 12th and 13th Brigades to support. Late in the afternoon the British posts in front of Hébuterne fell back to behind the village where, after dusk, the 4th Brigade relieved them.⁵⁸ How it held that important position while the New Zealanders closed the gap to the south, and how, with the 42nd and 62nd Divisions and New Zealanders, it brought to a standstill the enemy's renewed efforts there has already been told.

The value of the 4th Brigade's efforts at Hébuterne has been very fully acknowledged by British commanders and writers, and particularly by the British and New Zealanders beside whom it fought; and the fact that for nearly a month the IV Corps would not entrust Hébuterne to other available troops is sufficient proof of the importance attached to its presence. That the tired troops who stopped the German advance before Hébuterne could not have continued to stop it is certain. Nevertheless, it was they who *did* stop it on the 26th; the German records place that fact beyond dispute.

All the available narratives of the German regiments concerned agree that from the 24th to the 26th of March the resistance offered by the British to the left of the Seventeenth German Army and the right of the Second had been much weaker than before. By capture of prisoners the German staffs detected in the withdrawing forces that intermixture of units and confusion which normally accompanies the collapse of an army. "If it goes on like this," noted an officer of the 49th I.R. in his diary,⁵⁹ "in 14 days we'll reach the sea."

But on March 26, south of Arras, near Bucquoy and Serre, a stiffening of resistance was noted. "In completely destroyed Serre," says the same diary, "we came on an English mounted patrol, which at once made off without our being able to get a shot at it. About 300 metres away we saw an English column withdrawing. Now we lay close on the edge of the devastated zone, and could already gaze on the promised land. To the right, ahead of us, lay the village of Hébuterne." But, two kilometres before this region untouched by war, "the Englishman holds his last trench ahead of us with colossal toughness." The Guard Corps on the right (opposed by the 62nd and 42nd British Divisions) did not get forward quickly enough.

⁵⁸ One post of the 9th Welch Regiment remained north-east of Hébuterne.

⁵⁹ *History of 49th I.R.*, p. 264.

"Twenty-four hours later it was too late. The resistance had so strengthened that we could no longer generally break it down. Unfortunately neither could the troops who relieved us."

The XIV Reserve Corps noted that Bucquoy was strongly defended, and the historian of the 80th F.A.R. observes that at Hébuterne "the English seemed to have planted themselves unusually firmly."

The "colossal toughness" was presumably largely that of the New Zealand Division, and the adjective does not exaggerate its quality; but the statement primarily relates to the front of the tired 19th Division, which had been fighting since March 22nd, and it is quite evident that it shares with the New Zealanders and with the 62nd and 42nd Divisions the credit of saving the situation on March 26th. It was the arrival of the Australians during the night that caused the effort of March 27th to be "too late." An abounding virility, which rendered impenetrable a previously precarious defence, and, mastering the failing spirits of the enemy, quickly developed into aggression, was the contribution of the 4th Brigade at Hébuterne.

By the afternoon of March 26th the Third Army was holding the enemy in check along practically its whole front north of Albert. But that same afternoon,

**New Crisis—
VII Corps**

actually before the 4th Australian Brigade reached Hébuterne, a more acute crisis arose in the VII Corps sector south of Albert. This corps had since morning been holding, as ordered, the line of the Albert-Bray road. In accordance with the usual precaution, G.H.Q., late on the night before, had laid down for its armies the next line on which, if forced to retreat, they should fall back. This time, apparently expecting the Fifth Army and the French to be driven back, and having learned from Pétain that, in that event,⁶⁰ the French Army would retire away from the British, Haig issued to Third Army a precisely similar instruction. If forced to retire, it was to swing back its right, pivoting on Arras, and withdraw in a north-westerly direction; the cavalry would protect its right flank, falling back towards Amiens and Doullens. This was consistent with his plan of subsequently striking with the X Corps into the German flank. Nevertheless it would mean temporarily uncovering Amiens; and, if the counterstroke did not succeed or was not

⁶⁰ That is, if the Germans "pressed their advance towards Amiens."

made, the British would probably have to fall back upon the Channel ports. At 2.20 a.m. on the 26th Third Army Headquarters forwarded Haig's provisional order to its corps, prefaced with the safeguarding clause:

Every effort must be made to check the enemy by disputing ground, and by holding to our present front line. It must be clearly understood that no retirement is to be made unless the tactical situation imperatively demands it.⁶¹

According to the almost invariable practice, a version of the order was telephoned to all corps of the Army in advance of the written order. Through some mistake, which has never been explained, General Congreve of the VII Corps took the telephonic version for a direction to fall back on the line of the Ancre, and it was telephoned to his divisions in the following form:

VII Corps will fight today on the line Albert-Bray in order to delay the enemy as long as possible without being so involved as to make retirement impossible. Retirement, when made, will be to the north of the Ancre, which will be held as a rearguard position, all bridges being destroyed after the crossing. . . . The retirement will be from the right, 21st Division *viâ* Méricourt l'Abbé, 35th Division *viâ* Ville, 9th Division *viâ* Dernancourt and Albert, the left of the 9th pivoting on Albert. Transport to move as early as possible Artillery will take up positions on the north bank of the Ancre to cover the crossing. Heavy Artillery will come into position north of the Albert-Amiens road, on the line Lavieville-Bresle-Baizieux. On reaching the new position the right of the 21st Division will rest on Ribemont, and will be covered by 2,000 details under Lieut.-Col. Hadow,⁶² Black Watch, who will previously have taken up a position on the line Heilly-Ribemont. . . . Left of 21st Division will rest on Buire, right of 35th Division on Buire left on Dernancourt, right of 9th Division on Dernancourt left on Albert, where touch must be maintained with V Corps. Divisional Headquarters 9th Divn. Millencourt, 21st and 35th Divns. Bresle, Corps H.Q. Montigny.

General Congreve himself spoke on the telephone explaining his wishes to Major-General Franks of the 35th Division, who was still in command of the force holding the Albert-Bray line, and although the written order from corps, when it arrived, was less definitely worded, Franks had no doubt of Congreve's intention.⁶³ He therefore directed that the right flank should retire first, and accordingly at 2 p.m. Headlam's Force (21st Division) began to withdraw. The right of the

⁶¹ Haig further insisted on this at the Army Commanders' conference at Doullens nine hours later. As an additional precaution he now ordered General Horne (1st Army) to send three Canadian divisions to support the centre of the Third Army, there he expected to be strongly attacked.

⁶² Lieut.-Col. R. W. Hadow, D.S.O.; The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders). Commanded 8th Bn., B.W., 1917/19. B. London, 22 April, 1883.

⁶³ *British Official History, 1918, Vol. I, p. 510.* The present account has drawn also upon the testimony of a member of Franks' staff.

35th Division followed, as eventually did the 9th Division, although its commander held that the order was only provisional. At 3 o'clock Franks informed Congreve that the Albert-Bray line had been abandoned and the withdrawal was in full swing.

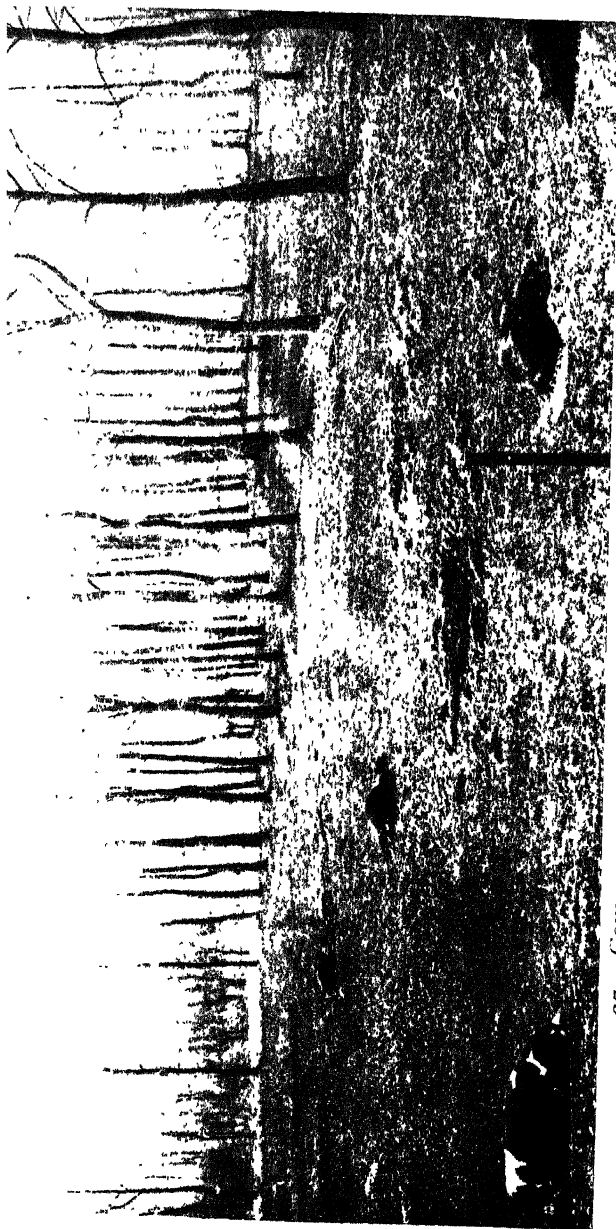
There is reason for belief that some word of the retirement had already reached Third Army Headquarters, for almost at the same time as the report from Franks there, reached Congreve a message from Third Army, timed 2.30 p.m., practically repeating the first paragraph of General Byng's order of the night before—that there should be no retirement unless it was imperatively demanded by the tactical situation. Congreve at once passed this on to Franks and ordered him to retake the line.

Third Army Headquarters, when informed of the retirement, was confronted by a situation of extraordinary difficulty. Not merely would this action place in an impossible position the flank of the Fifth Army, which was already far ahead and which it was particularly desirable to support; but also the conference sitting at Doullens that day had just reversed the policy of Pétain by appointing General Foch to direct the operations of both allies.⁶⁴ One of the first results of the change of policy was the issue of the order already cited,⁶⁵ that there must be “NO Withdrawal” of the general line and that any temporary local withdrawal consequent upon enemy penetration must be from east to west and “NOT North-west.” Behind the capitals and the underlining can be seen the spirit—if not the hand—of Foch,⁶⁶ and the whole British Army, from Haig downwards, welcomed it. All had been eager to hold on; at the army commanders' conference that morning, before the greater conference, General Byng had fought for maintaining his line at Bray; and just afterwards,

⁶⁴ The wording of the first draft of the agreement made between the allies at this conference was, at Haig's request, altered to admit of Foch's command being extended not merely to the sector in front of Amiens, and to the British and French Armies, but to the whole Western Front and the forces of all the Allies there. On April 3 at a conference at Beauvais the formula was altered by the inclusion of the American Army and Foch was given power of “strategic direction,” but each national C-in-C. was given the right to appeal to his government, if he considered that his army was endangered by any of Foch's instructions. On May 2 Foch was given limited powers over the Italian Army, and on May 14 received the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France. The Belgians never formally came in, but in practice accepted Foch's direction.

⁶⁵ See pp. 167-8.

⁶⁶ Actually the order appears to have been Byng's.



27. COWS KILLED BY SHELL-FIRE ON THE ANCRE MEADOWS

Such scenes were common during the days of the German advance. On the Ancre the surviving live-stock was rounded up by the Australian police at the end of March, and handed over to the French authorities

*Avst War Memorial Official Photo. No E2300.
Taken at Ribemont on 20th April, 1918.*



28. MEN OF THE 53RD BATTALION (5TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION) DIGGING RESERVE TRENCHES
ACROSS THE BACK COUNTRY AT HARPOUVILLE AT THE END OF MARCH, 1918

First War Memorial Official Photo No. E2265

To face p 273.

when Pétain and Clemenceau protested to Lord Milner that Haig intended to uncover Amiens and fall back on the Channel ports, Haig replied that Pétain had misunderstood him; he intended to make every effort to keep his flank at Bray, but could not maintain the line farther south, where Pétain had agreed to take it over. He had merely indicated what would happen if Pétain failed to assist him there. The issue between him and Pétain, indeed, had narrowed down to a simple point—each was convinced that he could not safely spare the reinforcements necessary for bolstering the line immediately south of the Somme, Haig because he was already pressed elsewhere to the utmost, Pétain because he feared that he would be. Foch—and the result was to prove that Haig and he were right—now took the risk that Pétain would not; and the confidence that Haig had felt, until the painful interview at Dury, was restored. Sir Henry Wilson, who about 4 o'clock saw the British Commander-in-Chief near Montreuil going for a ride, noted:

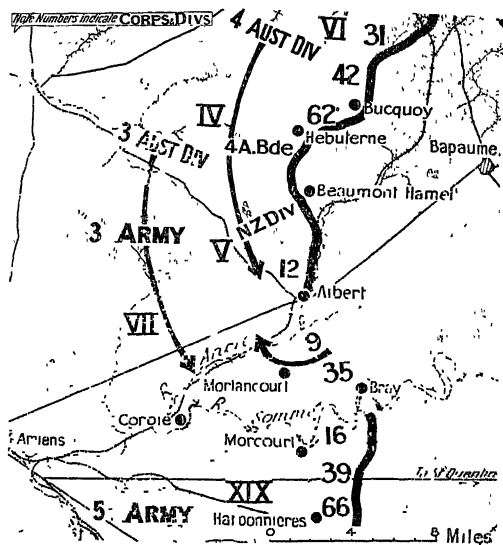
He told me he was greatly pleased with the new arrangements. . . . Douglas Haig is 10 years younger tonight than he was yesterday afternoon.

Foch's orders were that the British would "hold at all costs the line Bray-Albert," and the XIX Corps the continuation of that line south of the Somme.⁶⁷ Yet now, the first news that came in after the conference dispersed was that the right of Byng's army was, by mistake, abandoning Bray and carrying out the order that would uncover Amiens.

It was 3.40 p.m. when Third Army issued the formal order cancelling the G.H.Q. order of the previous night and substituting that for "NO Withdrawal." The VII Corps was to hold Bray at all costs, and reinforcements were at once directed to the Corps area. How the main body of the 4th Australian Division, when beginning to follow its 4th Brigade towards Hébuterne, was turned round and sent by forced march towards the VII Corps has already been told. General Franks had long since been informed by his brigadiers that any attempt to recapture the Bray line was hopeless; but towards evening, when the Third Army's order for Bray to

⁶⁷ That is a line from Bray through Rouvroy to Guerbigny (on the Avre west of Roye).

be held came through to him, together with the injunction that any temporary retirement must be west, along the Somme, and not north-west, across the Ancre, he directed that an attempt should be made to retake Morlancourt. The brigadier concerned told him that there was little chance of success; the attack was accordingly countermanded, and at this stage—apparently when it became certain that the Ancre-Somme peninsula was being evacuated by the VII Corps infantry—the 3rd Australian Division was allotted to the corps in order to safeguard that area, which Byng considered vital. Till its arrival the old



Frerch defence-line there was to be held by a mounted detachment of the 1st Cavalry Division. The remainder of that division, hurriedly remounted, was to support this detachment as soon as possible. The order cancelling the 35th Division's projected attack on Morlancourt arrived after the two battalions charged with the task were already advancing thither. One was stopped at the bridge at Ville, but the other advanced till it ran into Germans near Morlancourt. At this stage news of the cancellation reached it, and late at night it, too, withdrew to the Ancre line.

Apart from this grievous mistake,⁶⁸ the situation on the front of the Third British Army had during March 26th

⁶⁸ The result was at first most unfairly visited on General Franks, who was deprived of the command of his division. This injustice, however, was almost immediately rectified by his transfer to another important post, and General Congreve, who appears to have suffered a serious breakdown after the tremendous strain of the retreat, was returned to England.

**German change
of direction**

become much more satisfactory. Actually, notwithstanding even the events of the two previous days, the progress of the Seventeenth German Army had never approximated to Ludendorff's expectations; its comparative slowness, and the swiftness of the Eighteenth Army on the other flank of the attack had indeed, as early as March 23rd, induced him to make a vital change in his original plan. Possibly, as has been suggested, through undue yielding to the urgency of the German Crown Prince,⁶⁹ in whose group the Eighteenth Army was—but more probably through following his own reasonable policy of pressing on where his opponent was found to be weakest—he had on that day decided to give a new direction to the attack. Instead of swinging his centre north-westwards, as he originally intended, against the southern flank of the Third British Army, he would direct the main thrust where least resistance was being met—west and south-westwards. In place, therefore, of ending its advance at the line of the Somme south of Péronne, the Eighteenth Army was to continue its thrust against the Fifth Army and the French. With a view to separating them, the French Army, as well as the British, was to be driven back. March 24th, though a day of nightmare for the Third British Army, did not relieve Ludendorff of his increasing anxiety, and it is impressive evidence of the penetration and width of view of which Haig was capable, that, on this day of tense anxiety to both his army commanders, he judged accurately the difficulties of his opponent and was undisturbed until faced by the real danger—that Pétain would acquiesce in the separation at which Ludendorff was aiming.

The appointment of Foch, though it ended that acquiescence, did not end the danger. By March 25th Ludendorff had put into the Eighteenth Army the XXV Reserve Corps and a number of fresh divisions; and although on the 26th Foch might bravely declare "NO Withdrawal!" and, with cap on the side of his head, brusquely inform Gough, "There must be no more retreat—the line must now be held at all

⁶⁹ Among others, M. Hanotaux holds this view (*Histoire Illustré de la Guerre*, Vol. 16, p. 148).

costs," such gestures (as Captain Liddell Hart⁷⁰ has pointed out) were almost all the assistance that, for the moment, he could give. It is true that at Gough's headquarters he also found General Fayolle and gave him a written order first "to support, and then as soon as possible to relieve, the British Fifth Army;" and that he personally ordered Debeney to relieve the XVIII British Corps, which General Gough would then use as a reserve for the XIX. Foch intended that, when once the junction of the Allied armies was safe, the French reinforcements arriving behind Debeney should build up a powerful reserve for a great counterstroke. Very tactfully, he at first issued to Pétain no written order to reverse the previous policy; and without any such instruction Pétain, on the night of March 26th, cancelled his order of the 24th. Indeed, so far as the movement of reserves went, his course of action had changed on the night of the 25th.⁷¹ Receiving reports that the German artillery activity in Champagne had much decreased, and that four German divisions, previously held there in reserve, were on their way to the north of the Oise, he realised that he had been mistaken in expecting a German offensive in Champagne. He acted at once, and, before leaving for the conference at Doullens, had authorised the immediate movement of six divisions from Champagne to, or towards, General Fayolle, and the subsequent transfer of four others. They were to be replaced by reserves from the Eastern Group of Armies under General de Castelnau, which in their turn would be replaced by putting in line there three of the four first American divisions, which in this crisis General Pershing had hurried to offer, for use wherever required.⁷²

But none of these reinforcements could immediately affect the course of the Somme battle. What did help was the change in direction of the troops already at or near the front and Foch's brave attitude. The mere knowledge that unity of command had been achieved gave confidence wherever it

⁷⁰ Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart, *The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infy.* Military critic and historian; of London; b. Paris, 31 Oct., 1895.

⁷¹ See *French Official History, Tome VI, Vol. I, pp. 322-3.*

⁷² Pershing urged that the 1st should be considered fit for service in the Somme battle, and it was eventually sent thither; the other three—2nd, 42nd, and 26th—were put into line in the Eastern Group.

spread, and Foch's brave gestures stiffened the backs of commanders and simplified the duty of the troops.⁷³ Gough passed on Foch's order to his tired divisions, and—far from being "non-existent," as Pétain believed—they maintained in very hard fighting, throughout the 27th and until the morning of the 28th, a line not far short of that which Foch on March 26th had ordered them to hold. In the centre, the 8th Division not only held fast at Rosières without any withdrawal, but counter-attacked when Proyart was lost by the neighbouring troops, and later helped to counter-attack and temporarily recapture Vauvillers. The 16th, 39th, 66th, and 50th Divisions to the north of the 8th had been pressed back a little by the afternoon, as had the 24th Division and XVIII Corps (20th, 61st, 30th and 36th Divisions) to the south. But the resistance of the XVIII Corps was sufficient to allow the left group of Debeney's army—the 133rd Division and 4th Cavalry Division under General Mesple—to remain in reserve, ready to relieve the XVIII Corps after dark.

Farther south, in spite of all gestures by the high command, on the 26th the French line was most dangerously thrust back. Through Pétain's policy of barring the way to Paris, the right half of the new French front, along the Oise, now transferred to the Sixth French Army, was safely held. Fourteen French infantry divisions and three of cavalry were now on or close behind the battle-front, and five more infantry divisions arrived next day; but, of the fourteen, six together with two divisions of the III British Corps⁷⁴ were in the Sixth Army's stable line behind the Oise, and four more in the sector immediately next to them.⁷⁵ North of this Robillot, with his two divisions widely extended and nearing exhaustion, was still struggling to keep touch with Gough while the first two divisions of Debeney's army detrained behind the point of junction. But Robillot was swiftly driven south-westwards. The XVIII British Corps had been ordered by the French command to withdraw in the same direction.

⁷³ Fayolle, also, on the morning of the 26th, hearing of the loss of Noyon, had telephoned to Humbert: "We can't go on retiring indefinitely; men will have to stand and die where they are."

⁷⁴ The 58th, still in the line, and the 18th re-forming in rear.

⁷⁵ With these were the 1st and 2nd British Cavalry Divisions.

but Lieutenant-General Maxse,⁷⁶ after at first obeying this instruction, changed his direction to keep touch with the XIX British Corps, at the same time informing the French command. A gap thus opened between the French and British, but the first divisions of Debeney's army were already being placed in readiness along the Avre north-east of Montdidier, and were thus close on the north-west of Robillot's corps when the latter fell back.

Neither Robillot nor Debeney could carry out Foch's order to hold on at all costs, nor could Debeney immediately relieve the British XVIII Corps, though he now took it under his orders. At the same time the northern flank of Gough's Army was again exposed by the unintended withdrawal of the Third Army from Bray. To prevent the Germans from repairing the broken Chipilly-Cérisy bridge, and so crossing the Somme behind that flank, Gough sent forward from the old French line 300 men of Carey's Force with a Canadian motor machine-gun battery.

North of the Somme, the VII Corps front, towards which the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions were hastening, was now held by the troops whom they found there on their arrival behind it next morning (March 27th). Northernmost, the 9th Division, which since March 21st had been in the thickest of the fight, had mustered at dawn on the 26th only 1,540 infantry (including 120 engineers) and 20 machine-guns, and had since lost heavily while withdrawing through Méaulte. But it held a front of 3,000 yards from Dernancourt to the Albert Road, where its left touched the 12th Division. On its right the 35th Division had been fighting for three days and had suffered 1,500 casualties. The 21st, which like the 9th had been fighting for seven days, was represented by "Headlam's Force" at Ribemont, and by a scratch force of pioneers and "nucleus" parties under Lieutenant-Colonel McCulloch,⁷⁷ who had just withdrawn to the same village from the Somme-Ancre peninsula

⁷⁶ General Sir Ivor Maxse, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O. Commanded 1st Guards Bde., 1914; 18th Div., 1914/16; XVIII Corps, 1917/18; Inspector-General of Training, B.E.F., 1918. Of Sussex; b. London, 22 Dec., 1862.

⁷⁷ Maj.-Gen. A. J. McCulloch, C.B., D.S.O., D.C.M., p.s.c. A.A. & Q.M.G., and Cav. Div., 1915/17; commanded 9th Bn., K.O.Y.L.I., 1917/18; 64th Inf. Bde., 1918. Of Edinburgh; b. Edinburgh, 14 July, 1876.

south-west of Morlancourt. The 2,000 reinforcements and stragglers from Corbie, collected by Colonel Hadow and now under Brigadier-General Cumming, moved into the old French defences on the peninsula during the night of March 26th-27th. Ahead of them was the mounted screen of the 1st Cavalry Division, with its 2nd Brigade, now in support, close behind Cumming's Force, and its 1st and 9th Brigades farther back, behind the Ancre. The flank of the Fifth Army—the 16th Division (for which also this was the seventh day of battle)—was where the retreat of the VII Corps had left it, five miles ahead opposite Bray, beyond Méricourt-sur-Somme.

At 10.30 a.m. on March 27th, while the nearest Australians were several miles to the north, awaiting orders, the tired 9th Division found the Germans advancing across the flats between Dernancourt and Albert and entering Dernancourt. Some sort of panic occurred, and the 35th Division at Buire reported that troops of their own side were streaming back past them.⁷⁸ But these were rallied, and at noon the 106th Brigade (35th Division), advancing in artillery formation to reinforce the 105th between Buire and Dernancourt, found the front still held, and Lieutenant-Colonel Young⁷⁹ of the South African Battalion organising a counter-attack upon Dernancourt from which his troops had been driven out. A staff officer of the 35th Division, in whose sector the village really lay, went through it on a motor-cycle without finding the enemy there, and eventually the place was occupied by patrols of the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers, attached to the 106th Brigade. This brigade received the impression that the movement of large numbers of Australian and other troops on the open heights behind Dernancourt had helped to scare the enemy, who was observed to withdraw guns that he had brought up behind Morlancourt.

⁷⁸ The history of the 9th Division says that the retirement near Albert "was due to furious shelling, and to bombing by aeroplanes with British colours." Dernancourt is said to have been evacuated through shelling. A British officer who came in to Headquarters of the 4th Australian Division said that, at 11 o'clock, he was in the village about to eat his lunch, but had to leave his food on the table owing to the Germans entering the place. So far as he knew, there was no fighting.

⁷⁹ Lieut.-Col. B. Young, D.S.O.; Witwatersrand Rifles. Served in S.W. African Campaign 1914/15; commanded 3rd South African Infy. in France for periods 1916/18. Cyanide manager, Crown Mines, Johannesburg; b. Belfast, Ireland, 4 Nov., 1877.

Farther south, on the Ancre-Somme peninsula, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade had, early that morning, reinforced the cavalry screen and attempted to advance. It met almost at once large enemy forces moving down the peninsula. Its left was slightly driven back, but all day on the spur in front of Morlancourt it fought the stubborn action that was watched with so much interest by the arriving Australians. The enemy also advanced towards the 35th Division, appearing at 10 on the heights at Morlancourt, and wheeling north-westwards to move down the slopes towards the Ancre. It was this movement that caused the 106th Brigade to be ordered up from Laviéville, and a company of the Durham Light Infantry was sent across the Ancre to occupy Treux; but the enemy's advance was already being fired on by the artillery, to which the British records attribute the stoppage of both this attempt and others made later in the day in this sector and at Dernancourt.

German records show that the check which on March 26 had been felt at Hébuterne was on the 27th experienced as far south as the Somme. Everywhere it was felt the more deeply because of its occurrence just as the Germans were emerging from the dreary, difficult moorland of the old Somme battlefield into the cultivated and populated country beyond—"rich Picardy," as the historian of the 10th Foot Artillery calls it.

Undoubtedly on the V Corps front, between Albert and Aveluy, the Germans failed to make the best of their chances. North of Albert, for some unknown reason, the 54th Reserve Division at 10 a.m. on March 26, after taking Pozières,⁸⁰ ordered its regiments not to push on across the Ancre. It was not until late that evening that, in the well justified belief that the other side of the river was held only by a weak garrison, the pursuit was ordered to be continued to Hedauville and Senlis⁸¹—the very villages towards which the 4th Australian Division was then making its night march. In spite of a quarter of an hour's bombardment by the available artillery, the 248th R.I.R. found Aveluy too strongly defended to enter. Farther north, however, the 247th crossed the Ancre without difficulty, and one company pushed through Aveluy Wood and ambushed a party of British troops, which was marching unsuspectingly rearwards.⁸² The 247th could have gone farther had it been supported. As it was, on the morning of the 27th, British forces arrived and drove it back, and when next an advance was attempted the resistance was stiff. "This day," says the historian of the division's artillery, "there was apparent a distinct change. He [the British] seemed to have received fresh forces."

⁸⁰ Much prospective booty was lost to this division here when an English airman dropped a bomb which set fire to the big British camp at Pozières.—*History of the 247th R.I.R.*, p. 170.

⁸¹ *History of the 248th R.I.R.*, pp. 165-6.

⁸² *History of the 247th R.I.R.*, p. 167.

This front—that of the British V Corps—was held on the 26th by the 2nd and 63rd Divisions which had been fighting since March 21st, and by the 12th, which had been fighting and marching for two days, and the only reinforcement received on the 27th was the 17th Division, which also had been fighting since March 21st and now returned to V Corps.

Opposite the southernmost sector of the V Corps, and the northernmost of the VII, at Albert, the failure of the enemy to press the advance with full vigour was due to a different cause.

German histories show that this fair-sized town, of which most of the houses were then intact, was entered by the 3rd German Naval Division, following the left of General Franks' retiring force, at about 6 a.m. on March 26.⁸³ The right battalion of the 2nd Marine I.R. at once set to looting the canteen and shops, and there followed incidents which, described by Rudolf Binding in *A Fatalist at War* and by other witnesses, have since become known throughout Germany, where the failure of the offensive has sometimes been attributed to them. "To-day,"⁸⁴ says Binding, "the advance of our infantry suddenly stopped near Albert. Nobody could understand why. Our airmen had reported no enemy between Albert and Amiens. . . . Our division was right in front of the advance, and could not possibly be tired out. It was quite fresh." After finding that the brigade commander, also, knew of no reason why the advance should have stopped, Binding drove into Albert. "As soon as I got near the town I began to see curious sights. Strange figures . . . were making their way back out of the town. There were men driving cows before them on a line; others who carried a hen under one arm and a box of notepaper under the other. Men carrying a bottle of wine under their arm and another open in their hand. Men who had torn a silk drawing-room curtain from off its rod and were dragging it to the rear as a useful bit of loot. More men with writing paper and coloured note-books. . . . Men dressed up in comic disguise. Men with top-hats on their heads. Men staggering. Men who could hardly walk. . . . The streets were running with wine. Out of a cellar came a lieutenant of the 2nd (*sic*) Marine Division, helpless and in despair. . . . 'I cannot get my men out of this cellar without bloodshed.' . . . I saw, too, that I could have done no more than he." The vigour of the 3rd Naval Division's action during the next day or two was admittedly affected by these incidents.⁸⁵

⁸³ After overcoming (according to the historian of the 2nd Naval Infantry Regiment) the defence "of a few drunken Englishmen." Actually the town had been voluntarily abandoned, being indefensible; the troops retired to the high ground west of it.

⁸⁴ Binding gives the date as March 28, but it is quite obvious that he refers to the events of the 27th. In many details he is inaccurate.

⁸⁵ It is rather typical of German comment since the war that Binding finds the reason for failure in the supposed depravity of the troops ("the madness, stupidity, and indiscipline of the German soldier") rather than in the simple truth that the effort was beyond their strength. Under date of April 12, he says: "It is practically certain that the reason why we did not reach Amiens was the looting

It is just possible that if this division had pressed forward vigorously on the night of the 26th or early morning of the 27th it might have penetrated towards Millencourt, and it might have been necessary for the British command to use either the 17th British Division or a brigade of the 4th Australian in meeting its penetration. On the other hand, in view of what happened elsewhere this day, it is more than probable that the tired 12th and 17th British Divisions, with the 9th on their right, would have prevented it from penetrating at all. The attempt actually made by it was easily defeated.

Immediately south of Albert where the 9th Reserve Division had received the order to continue the pursuit, the advance on March 27 was attempted by the 19th R.I.R., which at 8.15 sent a composite battalion against the railway. The regimental history states that, advancing without artillery support, it was forced by strong machine-gun and artillery fire to take shelter. The German artillery was then turned on, and the attempt was renewed at noon, but again beaten. In the afternoon a company tried in vain to approach the railway. The losses of the regiment in these attempts are said to have been heavy. Farther south, the right regiment (55th) of the 13th Division failed to capture Dernancourt, but reached its southern edge. A company of the 19th R.I.R. managed to enter the village by surprise in the afternoon, but a counter-attack drove it out into craters and trenches beyond the village.

The fighting thus described in German accounts was taking place while the 4th Australian Division was breakfasting at Senlis and Millencourt and advancing across the top of the Laviéville down. The British troops involved were solely those of the 9th and 35th Divisions. The appearance of the 4th Australian Division on the heights in the afternoon can have had, at most, some moral effect.

Between the Somme and the Ancre the course of the operations on March 27th, as recorded by the Germans,⁸⁶ was even more surprising.

Here two German divisions, 13th and 1st, advanced down the peninsula. All regiments of the 13th Division—the 15th and 13th in front, and the 55th following after the 9th Reserve Division on the

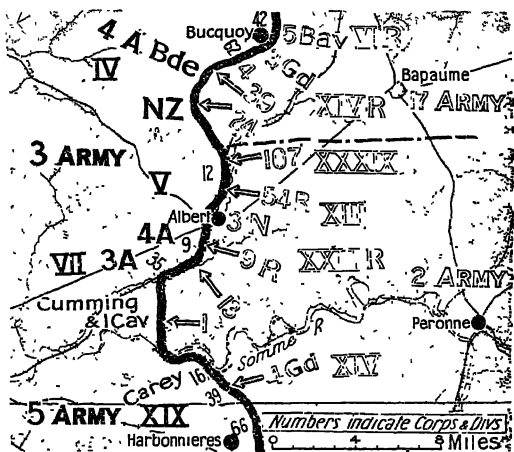
of Albert and Moreuil. The two places, which were captured fairly easily, contained so much wine that the divisions, which ought properly to have marched through them, lay about unfit to fight in the rooms and cellars. This was quite unforeseen; no other troops had been ordered to follow up, with the result that the enemy gained fresh footing. . . . The troops which moved out of Albert next day cheered with wine and in victorious spirits were mown down straight-away on the railway embankment by a few English machine-guns. . . .”

⁸⁶ The narratives chiefly referred to are the *History of the 13th I.R.* (pp. 296-7), and those of the 10th Fuss A.R., 16th F.A.R., and 1st Grenadier Regiment.

right—as well as the right regiment (3rd Grenadier) of the 1st Division, were to cross the Ancre between Dernancourt and Ville, and then wheel to the left and march south-west towards Corbie and Amiens. Meanwhile the left regiment (1st Grenadier) of the 1st Division was to march down the peninsula and, reaching the British position on the Sailly-le-Sec-Mericourt road, was to attack it. On breaking through, it would turn south-east, cross the Somme at Sailly-le-Sec, and march on Amiens. The 43rd I.R. of the same division, following in support, would cross at Sailly-Laurette.

But when, in the early morning, the whole movement began, in place of the slight opposition recently experienced—from infantry, machine-guns, and tanks—there presented itself this day "an entirely different picture."

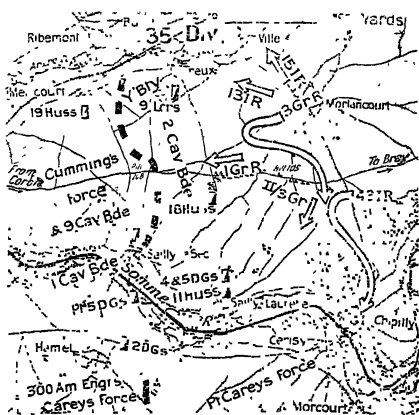
The advance from Morlancourt was met with strong artillery-fire and with intense attacks by British airmen. The British shelling was all the more effective since it came from the north of the Ancre, in enfilade. Of the air attack, a lieutenant of the 1st Grenadier Regiment (near the Bray-Corbie road) wrote: "We endure dreadfully angry hours by reason of heavy English artillery fire which a



Situation on March 27.

whole English air flotilla directs on us. The airmen, about 20 machines, fly quite close over us and bombard us with bombs or shoot us with machine-guns, which in spite of our digging in brings us losses. It is bitterly cold. The whole day we lie thus inactive." All the relevant regimental histories mention the severity of these attacks, which, with the resistance of other arms, completely checked that day's effort on the northern half of the peninsula. On the southern half, when, after artillery preparation which "was not recognisable," the skirmishing lines of the 1st Grenadier advanced, they met a "strong defence." By 8 o'clock they had reached only the Morlancourt-Sailly-Laurette road. The British picquets fell back on Hill 108—the Germans apparently knew nothing of the strength of the old French defence-line either here or south of the Somme. By 9.45 a.m. the advance had stopped at the copse on the Bray-Corbie road. Any movement by the Germans brought fire on them from British rifles and machine-guns on the ground 500 metres ahead, and from the British airmen, who now attacked; artillery north of the Ancre also enfiladed any attempted advance.

At this stage the commander of the 3rd Grenadier Regiment, Major von Johnston, who was advancing his headquarters towards Hill 108,⁸⁷ managed to get on to a telephone line to brigade, and informed General von Brauchitsch, commanding the infantry of the 1st Division, that the advance was at a standstill. He was at once ordered to abandon the attempt to go northward across the Ancre, and, instead, to lead his regiment southward to the Somme at Chipilly, whither the 43rd I.R. also had been diverted. There the two regiments would cross to Cérisy on the opposite bank, and take the British in rear. The artillery—16th F.A.R. and 10th Huss A.R.—was directed to support this operation.



Thus, early on March 27th—before the 3rd Australian Division reached the line—the enemy had been forced to abandon his first attempt to thrust along the peninsula, and his plan had, for the moment, been entirely changed. And the troops that brought about the change of plan were partly the British airmen and artillery, but mainly the handful of cavalry which, with some support from Cumming's Force,⁸⁸ furnished the "strong defence" on Hill 108.

It remains to follow the effort of the Germans to get behind the British line by crossing the Somme at Chipilly.

By noon the 43rd I.R., and the 3rd Grenadier following it, were on their way to that village, under galling attacks from British airmen, who harassed not only them but also the German batteries supporting the effort. Meanwhile the 1st Grenadier remained on the defensive, holding the peninsula in front of Morlancourt; it was not to cross the Somme unless the British in front of it retired. Its right, from which the 3rd Grenadier had been withdrawn, was reinforced by a number of machine-guns.⁸⁹ The 43rd I.R. found the bridge at Chipilly blown up and some British force holding Cérisy and the heights south of it. "A foot causeway was put together," says the regimental history, "and a crossing forced against the tough defence of the enemy."

⁸⁷ He had with him also the staff of the 1/10 Huss A.R. They stopped at Hill 105.

⁸⁸ The scouts of the 38th Australian Battalion helped to check an advance on Treux in the afternoon.

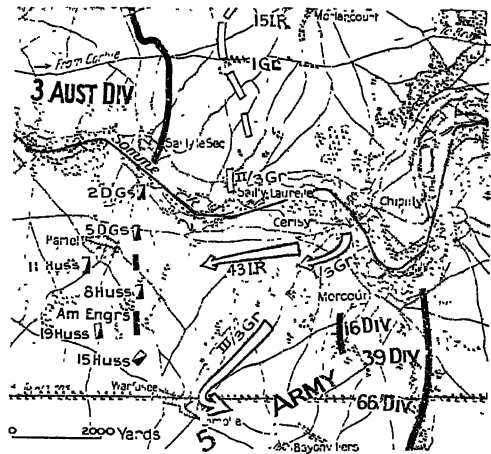
⁸⁹ Part of the 1st company of its own regimental machine-guns and two companies of M.G.S.S. Abteilung 31.

The Germans were now directly in rear of the Fifth British Army. They could see on the high land two miles to the south British batteries and transport retiring along the Roman road to Villers Bretonneux. The German artillery north of the Somme shot into these, and the 43rd I.R., advancing along the southern side of the river, drove the English flank guards from the spur south-west of Cérisy (Hill 66) back on to the old French line in front of Hamel. The 3rd company of the 43rd followed the retiring British, but was counter-attacked and forced back to the neighbourhood of the river. Three miles to the east the 4th (Prussian) Guard Division—facing the flank of the Fifth Army, which had now withdrawn to Morcourt—was completely unconscious that troops of its own side were operating not far behind its enemy's back, and therefore made no special effort to assist.

The air attacks were now affecting the 43rd. By 4.30 p.m., however, the III/3rd Grenadier⁹⁰ was passing through Chipilly, and Major von Johnston gave it his order to reinforce the left of the 43rd and to push on behind the Fifth British Army, heedless of its own flank being open. By 5 it was issuing from Cérisy with three companies in line and a fourth guarding its rear. British troops in the woods behind the Fifth Army's rear at Morcourt fired into its back, but, leaving its machine-gun company to suppress this fire, it pressed south-westwards up the spur leading towards the village of Lamotte, on the Roman road. In the gathering dusk could be seen a procession of

British transport retiring along the road. The battalion therefore continued to advance, and, detaching a platoon to suppress fire coming from the east, seized the village and captured party after party of British troops and transport—including, apparently, a brigade staff—who unsuspectingly marched into it. Others similarly marching in from Bayonvillers were shot down. The adjoining village of Warfusée was taken, but progress stopped at a farm beyond its western outskirts, which was twice captured by the Grenadiers and twice lost to British counter-attacks.

Meanwhile, at 5.45 p.m., the I Battalion also had crossed the Somme. It reinforced the 43rd, but Johnston retained the II north of the river to protect the batteries. One of its companies, the 8th, moved during the afternoon towards Saily-Laurette.



⁹⁰ The third battalion of this and other "grenadier" regiments was often known as the "Fusilier" instead of the "III" Battalion.

It was this company that caused the fighting that the Australians saw there. The patrols of the 2nd British Cavalry Brigade were driven out of the village, and a platoon of Germans searched the cellars and captured two British soldiers. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, however, was reinforced by part of the 1st,⁹¹ which turned the tables on the enemy. At dusk the British cavalry was ordered south of the Somme, and crossed at Sailly-le-Sec.

The II/3rd Grenadier now again advanced from Chipilly and occupied Sailly-Laurette and the spur north-east of it, making a few prisoners in the village. A patrol sent across the river to find touch with the 43rd I.R. ran into British troops, but the posts of the 43rd were nevertheless near by⁹² During the night a traffic bridge was built at Chipilly, and a brigade of German artillery crossed to the southern side.

In this fighting also, the "tough defence" of which the German accounts speak, apparently was that, first, of 80 men of the 16th Division—the detachment of Carey's Force advanced too late—and, later, of the Queen's Bays and other cavalry regiments hurried across the Somme. The fire turned on the III/3rd Grenadier from the Morcourt woods came from part of the 16th Division, half-surrounded on the flank of the Fifth Army.

The Third Army this day stopped almost completely all the enemy's attempts to advance. The commander of the northern group of German Armies, Crown Prince Rupprecht, accordingly decided to set the advance again in motion towards Doullens by throwing at Hébuterne three reserve divisions which Ludendorff had since March 23rd kept at his disposal. But Rupprecht's order to them had no sooner issued than he was informed that Ludendorff had countermanded it, as he was sending them south of the Somme. Bitter arguments followed. Crown Prince Rupprecht would be undertaking next day (28th) the important attempt⁹³ to widen the closing gate in the British front by breaking down its northern pylon at Arras. This had been part of Ludendorff's original plan,

**Arras and
Montdidier**

⁹¹ The 5th Dragoon Guards and 11th Hussars reinforced the 4th Dragoon Guards.

⁹² They were west of the Sailly-Laurette-Warfusée road.

⁹³ Known as Mars Nord and Mars Süd.

and the employment of the three divisions at Hébuterne would assist it. But Ludendorff was adamant. On March 27th, a new prospect had opened before the German armies south of the Somme. Pressing on the flank of the Third French Army, where Robillot's tired divisions had tried to stop them the day before, they had caused a split in the French front west of Roye. Retiring south-west from Roye, Robillot's troops swung away from Debeney's, who withdrew westward. A gap, which eventually extended to nine miles, opened between the two French armies. North of it lay Montdidier, on one of the two main railway routes from Amiens to Paris. Debeney's southern group (5th Cavalry and 56th Divisions),⁹⁴ driven back to that town late in the afternoon, was unfit to attempt the defence. Montdidier was therefore abandoned, and the Germans, after advancing nine miles, walked into it just before nightfall. Debeney implored Fayolle to send troops in motor-lorries to stop the passage of German cavalry through the gap.

General Fayolle was still diverting most of the arriving divisions to Humbert's army—three out of five went to it this day. One of them he had already placed under a newly arrived corps headquarters (XXXV), which he charged with the task of extending Humbert's left. He now gave it a second fresh division and sent the two by motor-lorry to fill the gap. By next morning they had linked up with Debeney's right behind Montdidier. But the situation was full of anxiety. Debeney's army—still only one complete infantry and one cavalry division, with parts of two other infantry and of one cavalry division also in the line and the rest of this infantry still detraining in rear—had to transfer its area for assembly from Montdidier back to St. Just on the only remaining direct railway from Amiens to Paris. The leading battalions of two more divisions would begin to assemble there next day, but the troops at hand were insufficient to safeguard contact with the Fifth British Army. The position of the Fifth Army was parlous—the Germans were behind its left, and, except for Carey's force, it was entirely without reserves.

⁹⁴ The VI Corps; his northern wing was Mesple's group.

Meanwhile the German thrust of nearly twenty miles in two days on the French front threatened to reach Amiens, now from the south-west, and to break the Allies' line; and it put a different complexion on the whole battle. Both sides realised this. But acute though the crisis was, Foch was now more preoccupied with building the reserve for his intended grand reply to the German offensive. He would station the arriving divisions first around Amiens, in view of the present need there, but later at Beauvais, 37 miles farther south. This task, he ordered, must now take precedence over the relief of the troops engaged in the battle. He wrote to Pétain that "not another metre of French soil" was to be lost, but added that only when the reserves were built up could reliefs be thought of. Pétain must therefore exhort his troops to hold on. Debeney's left must cling to the British right. Meanwhile—so Foch wrote to Haig next day—the diversion of French reinforcements to Montdidier had rendered it impossible to extend the French flank to the Somme and relieve the Fifth British Army. That army—now reduced to the XIX Corps⁹⁵ which had been fighting since March 21st reinforced only by the 8th Division—must struggle on and reorganise itself as it stood.

On the German side, reserves were still being moved towards Montdidier. This day Ludendorff directed southward the divisions for which Crown Prince Rupprecht asked in the north.⁹⁶

Crown Prince Rupprecht's attack at Arras took place next day and completely failed. The seven German divisions thrown into the main attempt⁹⁷ were crushed by four British divisions of the VI, XVII, and XIII Corps, while a powerful thrust on the remainder of the VI Corps front, and less formidable attacks against the IV, V, and VII British Corps also were defeated. Undoubtedly the stubborn resistance of these three corps

⁹⁵ General Humbert had transferred to it the 20th and 61st Divisions of the XVIII Corps; the 30th and 36th Divisions of the XVIII Corps were temporarily allotted to Mesple's group.

⁹⁶ There is some uncertainty whether they were actually sent south until after the attack on Arras next day. (See Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, pp. 359-60.)

⁹⁷ If the divisions holding the line are included, the number was nine, and there were also several in reserve.

was one of the essential conditions of the British defence at Arras; and in the local attacks about Hébuterne and at Dernancourt that day Australian and New Zealand troops played the decisive part. But the effort of the 54th German Reserve Division near Aveluy, which, despite heavy loss, could not approach its objective, was crushed entirely by the tired British divisions of the V Corps.⁹⁸

With the failure of the Arras offensive, by which Ludendorff had hoped to turn the flank of the British holding Vimy Ridge, all chance of further early progress by the Seventeenth German Army, in the north, disappeared. By next day recognition of this result was dawning on the German troops there.

"To anyone with insight," says the history of the 247th R.I.R., then at Aveluy, "there could be no doubt—the offensive was on the point of petering out. We were told, indeed, as a consolation that yesterday at Arras we had begun a new attack; but news of its result was not forthcoming. One could read nothing afterwards about it in the newspapers, but rumours trickled through that it had been a complete miscarriage."

Foch had forbidden the Fifth British Army (now consisting only of the XIX Corps) to withdraw, and, although the Germans were far past its right and directly behind its left, he maintained this injunction until late on the night of the 27th. But no mere words of command, even in capital letters underlined, could support such a front. He eventually permitted the withdrawal; but the left flank, cut off from its staff, had had to act for itself. Part of the 16th Division got through Warfusée before the Germans blocked the road there. The 39th Division escaped by making a detour south-west, to Harbonnières. By an astonishing feat three battalions of the 16th (Irish) Division on the half-surrounded left flank came through the enemy by marching in the dark along the Somme tow-path, crossing the river into German territory at Cérisy and recrossing it at Sailly-Laurette in front of the Australians, rushing the German picquets, and eventually

⁹⁸ These attacks were not specially intended to assist the Arras offensive. The commander of the Second German Army at 3 a.m. on the 28th directed that the projected attacks of the XIII and XXIII Reserve Corps, north and south of Albert, should not take place before noon, and, later, cancelled the order for them; but his telegrams reached both corps too late.

assembling together with other fragments behind the line of the 1st Cavalry Division. Small wonder that the Australians found many stragglers at Corbie!

Farther south the remainder of the army withdrew by daylight on March 28th, having maintained till then practically the position laid down for it by Foch on the 26th. The strain had been too great, and organisation could not be preserved; the troops were so exhausted as to be almost incapable of resistance. Nevertheless by midday a line had been swung back by the 8th, 50th, 66th, and 39th Divisions, connecting the right of the old position with Carey's Force in the old French line at Marcelcave. In the afternoon Mesple's group on the right and the right of the XIX Corps fell back also to the old French line. According to the corps commander's report, the 8th and 24th Divisions, temporarily out of touch with each other and with higher authority, crossed each other's paths and withdrew far beyond the line intended for them, part beyond the Avre, part even beyond the Noye.

Gossip emanating from G.H.Q. had from the first contrasted the fluidity of the Fifth Army with the stubbornness of the Third; and for days past British officers and men and even the French Army had cast the blame on Gough, who was supposed to have thrown in his reserves too soon and neglected his rear defences and the destruction of bridges. It is doubtful if any of these charges was justified; certainly the last was not.⁹⁹ Actually, it is doubtful whether Gough's qualities of courage and buoyancy ever gave better service than in this crisis. But the weight of distrust, which his methods in previous years had engendered, now bore him down. Although his leadership afforded far less ground for criticism in this retirement than it had done at Pozières, Mouquet Farm, or Bullecourt¹⁰⁰—the British Government forced Haig, much against his will, to supersede him and his staff. He was relieved this morning by Rawlinson and the

⁹⁹ The Royal Engineers of the Fifth Army destroyed 248 bridges. The bridges which were not destroyed were railway bridges, the destruction of which was, upon the insistence of the French railway authorities, left to the French. In several cases where bridges were destroyed, the Germans managed to trickle men across the débris. Foch (*Memoirs*, p. 360) implies that small permanent guards should have been maintained at the Somme crossings.

¹⁰⁰ The implication of Foch and of some French historians—even so good a one as Palat—that he lacked courage and dash, is ridiculous; those who fought under him constantly wished that he had less.

staff of the Fourth Army.¹⁰¹ The change probably had some efficacy; but, more important, the XVIII Corps was now being relieved by Mesple's Group. Its returning divisions, together with those of the III Corps from the Oise, now began to arrive behind the XIX Corps; and, although their artillery—which the French not unreasonably required—was in some cases not returned until much later, and the organised infantry of certain divisions was equivalent only to one or two battalions, they furnished, at last, some support to the XIX Corps south of the Somme. Thus on this morning the 61st¹⁰² from the XVIII Corps, despite representations that it was unfit to march more than two miles, was thrown in from Marcelcave, as already described, to counter-attack Warfusée, which it did with some initial success; and the 20th, a battalion strong, partly filled the gap left by the 8th and 24th on the extreme right of the British Army, near Démuin.

It will be remembered that this day the Australians north of the Somme were aware of fighting south of the river, but found it difficult to detect its progress. The troops there were the 1st Cavalry Division, with some American engineers of Carey's Force and a remnant of the 16th Division. They held the old French defences in front of Hamel, from which the cavalry was, if possible, to advance in co-operation with the 61st Division's counter-attack at Warfusée. The Germans also were attacking, and, though M. Hanotaux writes of the Fifth Army in these days that it "melts—it practically disappears", the histories of German units opposed to it tell a different story.

The German troops here attacking were the 4th Guard and 1st Divisions, and their orders were to seize Hamel village and the slope between it and Villers-Bretonneux; but, after covering the abandoned ground east of the old French line, the Guard division could make no headway. "In this line the English furnish resistance with remarkable toughness," says the history of the 5th Guard Grenadier. The 43rd I.R. (1st Division), which made an assault in the afternoon with the 1/3rd Grenadier in support, was stopped by artillery and machine-gun fire, and only after the operation had been begun did it discover that the British were holding a strong, well wired line. The 5th Guard Grenadier advanced to support the 43rd I.R., but, according to its own historian, could not get on. The attacks of British airmen were "very unpleasant." The divisional history says that, though the German guns were now up, the British airmen prevented sufficient ammunition from arriving.

¹⁰¹ The army, however, continued until April 2 to be called the "Fifth."

¹⁰² The same that fought beside the Australians at Fromelles.

There is no question that this result was mainly due to the presence of the 1st Cavalry Division. The Fifth Army's infantry was by this time in such a condition that the sight of any party of their own men retiring was likely to set up an unintended withdrawal which might spread from division to division. Thus on this day the sight of the men of the 61st Division retiring after their unsuccessful counter-attack, was apparently enough to bring back the neighbouring troops with them, and Marcelcave was abandoned.

On the centre of Fayolle's front the Third French Army, with its newly arrived XXXV Corps, and the right of Debeney's Army passed to the attack and regained some ground. The German offensive was progressing only at its very point—between Montdidier and the Somme.

The total failure of the Seventeenth German Army's attacks on March 28th, and of the Second Army's unintended¹⁰³ attempt to cross the Ancre, did not induce Ludendorff totally to abandon the effort against the Third British Army; but it was decided to wait for the Second and Eighteenth German Armies to make progress farther south, and five divisions were immediately withdrawn from the Seventeenth Army's area to strengthen them.¹⁰⁴ On the evening of the 28th the Second Army's commander (General Marwitz) decided finally to forgo his intention of pushing along the Corbie peninsula, and to transfer his main thrust to the region south-west of Warfusée. It was evident that on the now stable front north of this no further advance could take place until the British line had been systematically bombarded; and roads and railways across the old Somme battlefield were being repaired, so that the artillery might have sufficient ammunition for this purpose. The labour troops, however, were unenthusiastic.

"It should," says the history of the 247th R.I.R., "have been the most important duty of all to repair these roads as quickly as was ever possible, sticking to it day and night to the point of bodily exhaustion. But the labour troops allotted to the work made the business very comfortable for themselves. They smoked their pipes, conversed with one another, made long pauses in their extremely sluggishly performed

¹⁰³ See p. 198.

¹⁰⁴ Five were sent to Second Army, which, however, sent two divisions to the Eighteenth.

work, and, if anyone reproached them, gave cheeky answers and insisted that they had six hours' working time and would not work any more than that. There spoke a spirit so different from our own that it was of the deepest import for us."

The blow in the south was to be delivered on March 30th, the Eighteenth German Army this time striking southwards against the front of Humbert's army—to drive the French away from the British—and the Second Army westwards, towards Amiens. Ludendorff's intention was to split the French from the British and afterwards to crush the British.¹⁰⁵ The right flank of the attack on the 30th would extend only just north of the Somme. Farther north there would be only piecemeal operations—to prevent the Third British Army from reorganising "the existing chaos" until March 31st, when the whole advance would be resumed.

But these arrangements involved, for the first time since March 21st, an almost complete pause in the German attack on most of the front. The force available to Ludendorff at the moment was nearing the end of its strength. The offensive against the British and against Humbert's Third French Army had temporarily stopped, and, for the second day in succession, on March 29th Humbert counter-attacked, though without great effect other than moral, being quickly stopped by the enemy's innumerable machine-guns. The German command, for its part, tried to keep in movement the point of the thrust towards Amiens. In the afternoon the enemy struck at Debenedy's First Army, still in process of arriving,¹⁰⁶ and drove it across the Avre north of Montdidier, and also forced back the right of the Fifth British Army near Démuin and Moreuil (on the Avre, twelve miles south-east of Amiens). It was to meet the danger of a continuance of this thrust that the 9th Australian Infantry Brigade was this night taken from its guard over the bridges about Corbie and hurried to Cachy, south of Villers-Bretonneux, as a reserve for the Fifth Army.

¹⁰⁵ Crown Prince Rupprecht was informed of this decision by General von Kuhl, who was present at an O.H.L. conference on March 29.

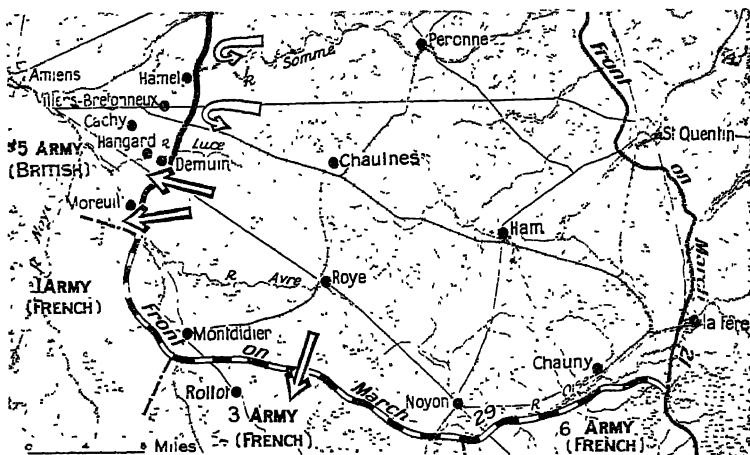
¹⁰⁶ The 29th French Division, from Flanders, and the 163rd began to arrive this day behind Mesple's group. The 133rd Division of that group had arrived, as had the 12th, 166th, and 56th of the southern corps (VI); the 127th would arrive next day, and the 162nd and 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division were now promised to Debenedy.

The great German attack of March 30th failed on its northern flank. The experience of the 3rd Australian Division has already been described, and no progress **March 30** was made against most of the Fifth British Army. The records of German units engaged show that immediately south of the Somme they were defeated almost as decisively as was the fresh division (18th) thrown against the Australians.¹⁰⁷

South of the Somme a completely fresh division, the 228th, had been put in, relieving the 1st. It was confident of pushing through to the green "promised land." It is related that, on coming into the line, its men could hear the cocks crowing in Hamel village. "You!" said one soldier, "we'll have you in the pot to-morrow." The German bombardment began at 11 a.m., but, as the history of the 35th Fusilier Regiment (228th Division) states, the strong defence-system now occupied by the English required the close reconnaissance that is necessary in trench-to-trench attacks. The British machine-guns were not suppressed, and the division received strong enfilade fire both from parts of the front that were not attacked and from the Australian positions north of the Somme. Farther south, even during the hour's bombardment, the 5th Guard Grenadier (4th Guard Division) could not work forward to its jumping-off line, owing to heavy machine-gun fire. The 228th Division seized some advanced trenches, and at one point penetrated to the support line but was thrown out by the British in counter-attack. In the afternoon a renewal of the attack was ordered, but the bombardment for it did not suffice. The historian of the 35th Fusilier Regiment says that his regiment lost more heavily on this day than on any other in the war. The 5th Guard Grenadier was completely exhausted and had to be relieved forthwith. The roosters of Hamel continued to line the British pots.

Farther south, however, on the crucial front the Germans again forced back the southern flank of the Fifth British Army, seizing Démuin and approaching Hangard Wood, not far from Cachy where the 9th Australian Brigade was. A battalion of that brigade was at once sent to counter-attack, with results which will be described in the next chapter. Farther south the Germans drove the First French Army out of Moreuil and took Moreuil Wood, part of which, however, was recaptured in a spirited attack by the Canadian Cavalry Brigade (of the 2nd Cavalry Division), which had been thrown in to safeguard the British flank. On the southern front the Third French Army was driven back, but only to a slight depth.

¹⁰⁷ The French *Official History*, an excellent work, errs strangely (*Tome VI, Vol. I, p. 375*) in saying that the attack was confined to the south of the Luce River.



The German attack on March 30.

Serious as was the stress upon the much tried troops straining to bar the enemy's effort to seize Amiens from the south, nevertheless there was evident to onlookers the imminence of a change similar to that which happened north of the Somme on March 26th and 27th; and the leaders on both sides recognised this. On March 31st¹⁰⁸ General Humbert expressed the view that the German offensive had definitely failed. Pétain was of opinion that the thirty divisions which he had now given to Fayolle would ensure success in the battle between the Somme and the Oise, and Fayolle believed himself to be completely master of the situation. The Fifth British Army was the only one to which ample reinforcements had not been sent. But Haig had agreed with Foch that, in order to build up the French reserve for counter-attack, the divisions at present fighting must continue to do so, and it appeared that the only reinforcements for which the Fifth Army could look were the divisions of the III and XVIII British Corps, which the French commanders were now ordered by Foch and Fayolle to transfer, as quickly as possible, to its area.

¹⁰⁸ The local events of March 30-1 are related in the next chapter.

The German effort, after its renewal for a single day on March 30th, paused again. The Allies could now await its recurrence, with some confidence; by March 31st the Third and First French Armies between the Oise and the Luce had 13 infantry divisions in line and 14 in reserve behind them, besides 5 others arriving for Foch's general reserve and 5 divisions of cavalry. Foch that day issued further orders for the creation of a British reserve north of Amiens, as well as of the prospective French reserves (Fifth and Tenth French Armies) at Beauvais. On April 3rd, in a "directive" to Pétain and Haig, he outlined his plan for the first use of these reserves: a double offensive—by the British, astride of the Somme, to clear the Germans from their proximity to Amiens; by the French, at Montdidier, to push the enemy back from the Paris-Amiens railway. This was not, it is true, intended to be a final or decisive counterstroke—that would come later; but it would drive the enemy back from the neighbourhood of Amiens, and would also serve—as Haig strongly desired—to draw in the reserves which both he and Foch thought the Germans now intended to employ in a new attempt to reach that city. The French also anticipated a German attack immediately south of the Oise.

As is now known, Ludendorff had indeed ordered the early launching of offensives on two new fronts of attack; but, despite the contrary advice of subordinate commanders, he had driven too close to Amiens to give up without further trial the hope of reaching it.¹⁰⁹ He abandoned that part of his recent plan which involved an attempt to push the French armies southwards, but directed the inner flanks of the Second and Eighteenth German Armies to concentrate their effort in another thrust towards Amiens. He now recognised that this renewal might achieve no more than to bring that vital railway centre under artillery-fire. The main attack in this direction was not to be resumed until the artillery could prepare the way for it with a bombardment devised similarly to that of March 21st. The preparations for this were hampered by the wet and the lack of railway communications

¹⁰⁹ See von Kuhl, *Der Weltkrieg*, Vol. II, p. 333.

across the old Somme battlefield. On March 30th, after urgent consultations as to the sufficiency of ammunition, a postponement for several days was ordered.

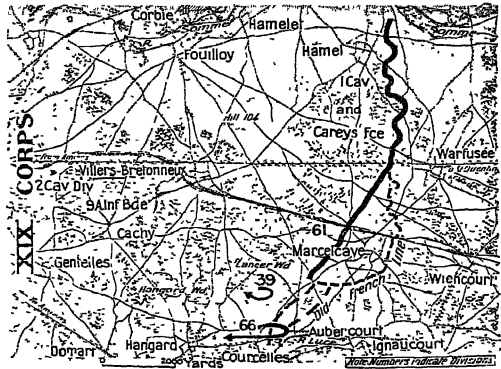
With the pressing back of its extreme right flank on March 30th the withdrawal of the Fifth Army ended. No attempt has here been made to describe the extremity of weariness to which the strain of ten days' continuous fighting and marching, with perhaps a fifth of the normal relief of sleep, reduced its infantry, but those Australians who fought on any front will add this background to the narrative. Gough's troops were not the volunteer army that charged the German machine-guns in July, 1916, on the Somme, or even the army that entered "Third" Ypres. But enough has here been extracted from German sources to show that its effectiveness in the late stages of the retreat was far beyond that with which it was credited at the time; that, when G.H.Q. and G.Q.G. believed it completely disorganised, its unrelieved remnant was stubbornly holding an almost equally exhausted enemy; that in maintaining the one condition vital to its side—a generally unbroken front—it was entirely successful; and that with reinforcements denied, its surviving wing still managed to keep the British right in touch with the arriving French.

Many of its battalions, when next seen by the Australians, had been two-thirds filled with newly fledged officers and boy-soldiers straight from English training dépôts. Inevitably, just as the divisions of March, 1918, were not those of the First Somme, so those of April, 1918, were not those of the Fifth Army's retreat.

CHAPTER XI

FIRST VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

WHEN the Germans attacked on March 30th, the British right was still south of the Luce, the first of the small confluent streams south of, and parallel to, the Somme. The old French defence-line, held by the 1st British Cavalry Division immediately south of the Somme, extended to this front also; the part of it around Marcelcave had been lost, but it was still held farther south at Aubercourt and Démuin, villages in the Luce valley, bordering either side of the stream. In the great attack on the 30th, however, when the French were for the second time driven from Moreuil, the remnants of the southern divisions of the British Army—66th and 20th—were forced back from both these villages. Early in the morning two brigades of the 2nd British Cavalry Division in reserve—the Canadian Brigade, supported by the 3rd—were hurried down to make sure of the line immediately north of Moreuil, which they did by a determined counter-attack at 10 o'clock. Farther north, where the retirement on the Luce had communicated itself to the troops even beyond Marcelcave, on the plateau in front of Villers-Bretonneux, the two exhausted divisions holding the line, 66th and 39th, themselves undertook a counter-attack. But the effort was far beyond the power of the remnants that made it. Part of the 66th Division succeeded in getting on to the spur on which Aubercourt lay, but was then driven back; and, as often



Note.—Démuin adjoined Courcelles.

happened in those days, the remnant of the 39th Division farther north, seeing this retreat, began to retire also. German reinforcements were observed massing at Aubercourt, apparently to continue the day's thrust. North of Marcelcave the 1st Cavalry Division steadied the line, but from Marcelcave to the Luce any determined attack by the enemy might cause the front to crumble. Lieutenant-General Watts¹ (XIX Corps) says in his report:

As it was clear that some of the depleted divisions now in the line were not really in a fit state for further action, and could not be trusted to maintain their positions against enemy pressure, I decided to employ the 9th Australian Brigade to counter-attack south-east to restore the situation about Aubercourt.

British troops of a somewhat different category—those from the III Corps which had been relieved by the French farther south and had received a few days, not of rest but of respite from actual fighting—were beginning to arrive, and the first of these divisions, the 18th, was to be put in immediately after the counter-attack, to hold whatever line the Australians had reached.

The 9th Brigade, on being detached from its division and hurried down to the rear of Villers-Bretonneux on the night of March 29th, had been informed that it would be placed under the 61st Division, then in the line opposite Marcelcave, and would be held ready for counter-attacking wherever the line broke. This brigade was a very interesting force. In common with the rest of the 3rd Division, it possessed a degree of orderliness beyond that of most Australian troops—the result of General Monash's careful handling; but also it exhibited the weakness of that division, the absence in it as yet of any universal tradition forcing commanders personally to supervise their troops in certain crises of battle. Thus, for a great part of its life, the 9th Brigade had been commanded by Brigadier-General Jobson,² a man of many fine and endearing qualities, of marked ability and absolute probity, but constitutionally incapable of facing battle

¹ Lieut.-Gen. Sir Herbert E. Watts, K.C.B., K.C.M.G. Commanded 7th Div., 1915/17; XIX Corps, 1917/19. Of Bournemouth, Eng.; b. Norwood, Eng., 14 Feb., 1858. Died 15 Oct., 1934.

² Brig.-Gen. A. Jobson, D.S.O. Commanded 9th Inf. Bde., 1916/17. Financial critic and public accountant; of Sydney; b. Clunes, Vic., 2 April, 1875. Died 7 Nov., 1933.

conditions. The result of such weakness was that not merely was such a commander inexperienced in the conditions and psychology of battle, but he could not be certain, from contact with his subordinates in time of trial, as to which of them were the more, and which the less, practical "front line" men. Accordingly, although the troops of the 9th Brigade in no way differed from the average run of New South Welshmen—first class material, and level throughout—the leadership was markedly uneven: where the battalion commanders possessed the necessary qualities they had, by selection and by forcing their standards on their subordinates, turned their battalions into outstanding fighting machines; but this quality did not run level throughout the brigade, and a small proportion of the officers were unsuitable.

At Messines Monash laid great trust in Jobson's leadership, but after that battle Jobson's attitude failed to satisfy him. In the actual matter of difference between them—an inclination on the brigadier's part to believe that his battalions had been overtried by comparison with others—Jobson was not altogether without justification; but he felt his own deficiencies, and, when Monash offered him an opportunity to resign, he was not sorry to accept. Birdwood thereupon sent to the 3rd Division one of his artillery commanders, who had been pressing a claim for promotion and who must first be tried in an infantry command—Brigadier-General Rosenthal. Rosenthal, in civil life an architect, with some reputation also as a singer, a man with a breezy, thrusting personality, and keen, simple enthusiasms—especially for the British Empire, its history, and its traditions—brought to the leadership of the brigade a robustness and audacity intensely welcome to its members. He had always been an ardent soldier, and in the old Australian militia had commanded the first battery to be armed with howitzers. His vigour at the Anzac Landing—when his cautious superior, General Hobbs, could see no positions suitable for field-guns, but Rosenthal had insisted that they could be placed in the front line and had secured Bridges' leave to emplace and command them there—had established his reputation in the A.I.F. Throughout he had given an example of spirited front-line leadership, and he

never hid his light under a bushel. He wore his heart, like his five wound stripes, consistently upon his sleeve. He loved not only to be in the front line but to be seen there.

To his brigade this type of leadership came like a fresh draught to a man thirsty for natural stimulant. A new life infused the force. The troops leapt at the breezy courage that was keen to test any danger before they entered it. Rosenthal was well aware that his officers were not yet of level quality, but it hardly needed the first test, at Passchendaele, to show that he was fortunate in having two battalion commanders marked beyond most others as fighting leaders. One, Lieutenant-Colonel Morshead of the 33rd, was a dapper little schoolmaster, only 28 years of age, in whom the traditions of the British Army had been bottled from his childhood like tight-corked champagne; the nearest approach to a martinet among all the young Australian colonels, but able to distinguish the valuable from the worthless in the old army practice; insistent on punctiliousness throughout the battalion as in the officers' mess, with the assistance of a fine adjutant, Lieutenant Jones,³ and an imperturbable second-in-command, Major White, and with his own experience of fighting as a junior subaltern of the 2nd Battalion upon Baby 700 in the Anzac Landing, he had turned out a battalion which anyone acquainted with the whole force recognised, even before Messines, as one of the very best. The other outstanding leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Milne of the 36th, was of an entirely different mould, a rugged Scottish-Australian mechanic, with little respect for polish or extreme formality but a high sense of duty—a noted fighter from the day when he too had led his men up the hills at the Landing.

On this tour of detached duty for his brigade, Rosenthal was unfortunate in that the British commanders under whom he was acting would not permit him to place his headquarters where he wished, up with his troops in the village of Cachy two miles south-west of Villers-Bretonneux, but held him at Gentelles a mile farther back, in close touch with themselves. The line lay only from two to three miles ahead of Villers-Bretonneux, and, as Cachy was liable to be severely shelled

³ Lieut R. C. Jones, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Draughtsman; of Deniliquin, N.S.W.; b. Deniliquin, 1889. Died of gas poisoning, 3 May, 1918.

in the daytime, the battalions were withdrawn during the day to the large wood, Bois l'Abbé,⁴ close behind Villers-Bretonneux. On subsequent nights when it was fine they spent the night here also; they returned to Cachy to sleep only if the weather was very wet. Rosenthal placed a forward brigade report-centre in the wood; and it was there that on March 30th—when the XIX Corps decided to use the brigade to restore the line near Aubercourt—he verbally gave to Colonel Morshead the order to carry out with his battalion the counter-attack.

Rosenthal directed Morshead to push his advance, if possible, to a line $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles away stretching from a copse half-a-mile short of Marcelcave on the left to Aubercourt, in the dip beside the Luce, on the right, a front of 2,700 yards. After occupying this he would extend his right, if he could do so, to Démuin, south of the stream. “When are we to do it?” asked Morshead. “Now.” “Any artillery?” “No.” “Do you know where the British line is?” “No.” “Can I have some troops to support me?” “Yes, the 34th.” The four companies of the 33rd after leaving behind their “nucleus” numbered only some 500 men—less than one to every five yards of the first objective, and the need for such a reserve was therefore obvious. Rosenthal told Morshead not to use the 34th if he could avoid doing so.

Morshead returned to the 33rd and, while he was instructing his company commanders in the wood, there rode up an officer of British cavalry, of which two brigades—the 4th and 5th⁵—were quartered farther back in the wood ready for any emergency. The stranger said that he was Lieutenant Barron⁶ of the 12th Lancers, and that his regiment had been

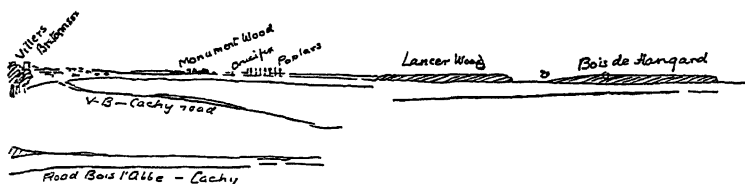
⁴ The foremost part of this wood was known as the Bois d'Aquenne, and the rearmost part, separated by a narrow glade, as the Bois de Blangy.

⁵ Of the 2nd Cavalry Division, which comprised at this time four brigades—the other two (3rd and Canadian) had carried out that morning's counter-attack at Moreuil Wood.

⁶ Lieut. E. A. W. Barron, M.C., 12th Royal Lancers. Landowner; of Woodstown, Co. Waterford, Ireland; b. Co. Waterford, 25 Oct., 1876.

ordered to assist the 9th Brigade by supporting its northern flank. Half-an-hour later the 33rd, ready to start, was formed in mass and Morshead spoke to it for five minutes. Then, at 3.14, it headed in column across the open plateau. At the same time the Lancers appeared, marching forward close on its right.

Before them lay the open plateau, copse and ploughland, between the Somme and the Luce. To the left front was the large village of Villers-Bretonneux, seemingly intact, with its church tower and villas partly hidden in the trees. South of it in the middle-ground were clustered a pine copse and large farm and a monument commemorating the battle fought there in 1870, and the poplars lining the road to Hangard.



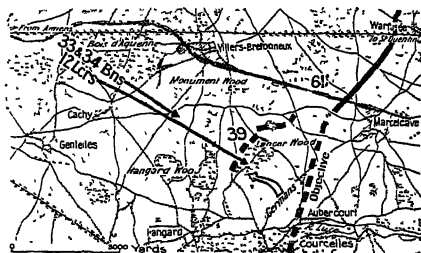
The country over which the 33rd Bn. marched.

Farther back there were, to the front, the distant woods of Warfusée (on the Roman road) and Marcelcave south of it; and on the right front, on either side of a distant dip in the plateau, two fair-sized woods—the nearer, due south of the Monument, that of Hangard, the farther unnamed on the maps issued to the brigade. The objective lay on a still more distant ridge screened by these. Beyond all these to the right front the plateau dipped to the hidden valley of the Luce. To the right rear of the marching troops the village of Cachy and its aerodrome stood out on the bare plateau, and a mile behind it Gentelles. Directly in rear of the column the Bois l'Abbé with its sparse, lofty trees clothed the slopes descending towards the valley of the Somme—here wide and open—and shut out any view of Amiens clustered about its great cathedral, nine miles to the west.

The same drizzle which partly screened the German efforts elsewhere on this afternoon had begun to fall, and, as the

two columns made across the ploughlands towards Hangard Wood, the cavalry began to draw ahead. The going was heavy, and the task

before the attack-battalion a formidable one. Almost all troops whom they encountered were going in the opposite direction, and reported that the enemy was in overwhelming strength. The



men of the 33rd knew that within an hour or two they must meet and attempt to drive back the victorious army of which so much had been heard; yet they marched as if to a picnic, full of excitement through the circumstance that a crack British cavalry regiment would be beside them in action.

As the situation was entirely unknown to him, Colonel Morshead sent forward a platoon of the IX Corps cyclists, which was at his service, to ascertain how matters stood upon both sides of the farther wood. In carrying out this duty the commander of the platoon, Lieutenant Gratwicke,⁷ was killed. Probably he encountered the enemy nearer than was expected, as did the cavalry, which, outpacing the infantry, also acted as a reconnoitring force. Morshead with his adjutant and scout officer rode ahead with the 12th Lancers and its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Fane,⁸ to reconnoitre the ground; to the young Australian commander this ride into action along with a famous cavalry regiment of the old army was an honour beyond his wildest dreams. On the way to the eastern wood

we passed (he wrote afterwards) several bodies of troops peculiarly and uselessly entrenched in queer places, and large bodies of stragglers. On reaching the wood we found the whole front line garrison (from) east of the wood withdrawing, although there was no hostile fire of any kind and no signs of attack. I met two brigadiers and a battalion commander in the wood, and informed them what was happening and

⁷ Lieut. P. C. Gratwicke; IX Corps Cyclists Bn. Shipping clerk; of Brixton, London; b. Brixton, 17 July, 1895. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

⁸ Col. C. Fane, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 2/7th Bn., The Sherwood Foresters, 1916; 12th Lancers, 1916/19. Officer of British Regular Army; b. Biarritz, France, 15 Sept., 1875.

asked them that they get their men back to the line at once. This they promised to do. The cavalry commander also helped in the matter by sending a squadron dismounted to re-establish the line. The infantry went forward with the cavalry but in a reluctant manner. During the whole time we were forward, men were constantly leaving the line. There seemed to be no effort to check this straggling. It was a proud privilege to be allowed to work with such a fine regiment as the 12th Lancers. Their approach march instilled in the men (of the 33rd) the utmost enthusiasm, and I am glad to say counteracted the effect of so much straggling.

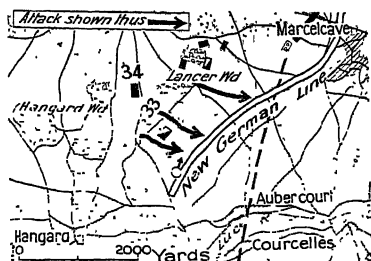
The cavalry had reached the wood about 4 o'clock, and their purpose in advancing through it was to secure the Australians a position from which to attack. This was distant over a mile from Aubercourt; the valley beyond the wood, and a wide bare spur beyond that, intervened. The Germans had already reached the southern and eastern edges of the wood, and the cavalry, attacking through it together with the remnants of the British infantry, now drove them out. Morshead, after marking with admiration the readiness of the cavalry to undertake this operation, expressed the feeling of himself and his men by calling the place "Lancer Wood," a name which, at his suggestion, was afterwards adopted in all British reports.⁹

The Lancers' advance drove back the foremost parties of Germans, but brought down on the wood and the valley south of it (leading to Hangard and the Luce) such a concentration of artillery-fire as made certain parts of the area almost unapproachable. Meanwhile, shortly after 4 o'clock the 33rd and 34th had reached the nearer wood (Bois de Hangard), where the 33rd deployed, and the troops then rested for an hour, waiting the order to advance. At 5 o'clock the attack began. It was made by three companies of the 33rd, the fourth following in reserve. The Hotchkiss rifles of the Lancers and some of their machine-guns were posted in positions to cover the flanks. To secure freedom from observation, the three attacking companies advanced under cover of Lancer Wood, the northern and centre companies passing through it in artillery formation, and the southern company working in single file under shelter of a bank that

⁹ The true name was the Bois de Morgemont.

led past its heavily shelled southern edge. From the eastern edge all three began to mount the bare spur separating them from Aubercourt.

The advance was very fast, the troops being eager to get to their task. For some minutes they were almost unopposed except on the right, but at 200 yards from the wood the whole line came in view of the new front which the Germans had established along the summit of the spur, from the southern end of which German machine-guns could enfilade the advance. Intense fire broke out. Such sections as were still in artillery formation at once extended and the whole line attempted to get at the enemy. As on several previous occasions when Australian infantry had to attack without the assistance of artillery, in their eagerness they did not think of trying to disconcert the opposing machine-gunners and marksmen by section rushes, that is, by groups alternately rushing forward and lying down to fire while others advanced. Losses were severe, and the right of the attack, under Captain Shreeve, was quickly stopped. The centre company (Captain Fry)¹⁰ got a little farther, and the left, although its commander, Lieutenant Pockley,¹¹ was killed, came close to the objective. The machine-guns of the 9th Company, which during a lull in the shell-fire had been hurried on their limbers through the wood, tried to suppress the enemy's fire, and eventually managed to drive some of the opposing machine-gun crews back over the crest. But the objective was not actually reached at any point, and the right was a mile short of it. The whole line lay below the crest of the spur and was enormously extended, about 300 men holding, with wide gaps, a front of nearly a mile.



The broken line shows the objective.

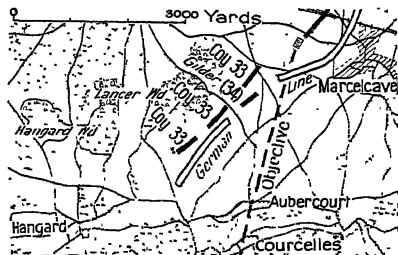
¹⁰ Capt. J. L. Fry, 33rd Bn. Building contractor; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, 31 July, 1887. Died 8 Feb., 1925.

¹¹ Lieut. J. G. A. Pockley, 33rd Bn. Grazier; of Wahroonga, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 14 Aug., 1891. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

It was at this stage that a young officer of the cavalry who was with Morshead urged him to let the Lancers charge the enemy, "Oh, let's have a go at them, Sir," he pleaded. "We'd dish them straight away." "Not I," replied Morshead. "What would your colonel say!" "Don't ask him," urged the youngster. "He's under your command, and if you order him he'll have to do it." Needless to say, the order would not have been given even if Morshead had the power; but such was the cavalry's spirit. Its machine-guns continued to guard the flanks until after nightfall, when Morshead received a note from Colonel Fane asking if the cavalry could further assist, in which case they would be most happy to do so. If there was nothing more they could do, Colonel Fane would be glad to follow the usual practice of the cavalry and withdraw his troops after dark. Morshead warmly thanked him, and the Lancers were withdrawn about 7 o'clock.

Morshead's first task after the attack had been to establish his line more firmly. In consequence of the furious shelling of the wood, the reserves and his headquarters had been unable to take up the positions planned for them, and had moved to the comparative quiet of the open fields near by. Casualties having been heavy upon the right, and a wide gap existing there, Morshead at 7 o'clock sent thither his reserve company. At the same time he asked the 34th to send a company to reinforce the left. The commander of this company, Captain Gilder, found by personal reconnoissance

that the German line there lay along the crest. At 8 o'clock, advancing silently in one line followed by a machine-gun of the 9th Company, his men drove the Germans out of their picquet-line, capturing two machine-guns, and then swept on and cleared them from their main line, a continuous trench. Passing this, the troops followed the fleeing enemy, but a German machine-gun farther north now opened on them,



mowing down a number including Lieutenant Parkes,¹² who, while his wounds were being dressed, was hit again and killed. Gilder decided to occupy the trench, and sent out patrols to find touch with the 33rd on his right. After a long search a patrol of the 33rd was met. Its leader, Lieutenant King,¹³ indicated where the line on the right lay, and said that it was hopeless for it to attempt a junction with Gilder's company. Gilder accordingly withdrew to the 33rd's line, 250 yards in rear, his troops filling a wide gap. Another gap was filled by two more companies of the 34th, and its last company was brought up into close reserve. Rain was still falling. Rifles and Lewis guns were difficult to clean. Maps became pulped and useless. But the troops were in high spirits. Ammunition and supplies were brought in limbers to the wood, and on pack animals to the advanced positions. The Germans driven back by Gilder's company did not detect his withdrawal, and the trench on the crest remained empty until 1.30 next morning, when a line of men appeared on the sky-line there. Intense fire was opened on them, and the figures vanished.

The Germans opposed to the 9th Brigade were the 19th Division, which was responsible for the attack made on March 30 down the Luce valley. The reader will remember that this was only part of an immense operation extending mainly along the French front, but involving also the British front as far as the north bank of the Somme. The 19th Division was, after bombardment, to drive the British from Aubercourt at least as far as the slopes west of Hangard village. By 11 a.m. its attacking regiment, the 91st, had reached the edge of this village, but it there found greater resistance and was rendered anxious by the British movements about Hangard Wood and Lancer Wood, which it interpreted as a threat to outflank it on the north. That flank was accordingly reinforced, first, by the II and III/91st, and, later, by part of the 78th I.R. It was possibly the III/91st, advancing just in time from the Luce valley, that caught the southern flank of the 33rd in enfilade. The regimental histories mention the strong counter-attacks in the afternoon—the I/78th reported that it had temporarily to fall back 300 metres "through the holding back of the neighbouring troops," but that in the evening it again reached its original line. The losses of the 91st were "considerable," but there is nothing to indicate what proportion of them was inflicted by the Australian attack.

¹² Lieut. R. Parkes, 34th Bn. Waiter; of Bexley, N.S.W.; b. Bexley, 1879. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

¹³ Lieut. R. C. King, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Clerk; of Gordon, N.S.W.; b. Wallerawang, N.S.W., 2 Oct., 1886.

In this action the Australians lost 9 officers and 191 others killed or wounded,¹⁴ and the cavalry 2 officers and 13 others. The full task was not accomplished, but it was understood that the intention of the British command was partly to increase the confidence of its troops and to diminish that of the enemy, and this was in some degree achieved. At dawn on the 31st the Australians were relieved by the 10th Essex and other troops of the 18th Division, and at once marched back to Cachy to resume their rôle of counter-attack troops. They were "drenched, and cold, but enthusiastic," the talk of all being the spirited support received from the cavalry, to whom Rosenthal sent his warmly appreciative report, while Morshead noted in his diary:

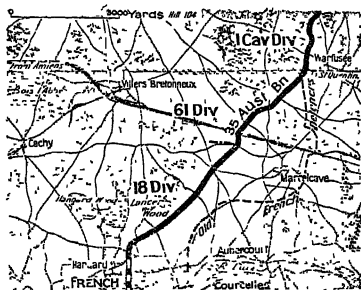
All ranks (of the cavalry) were eager to give every possible help to us. . . . One was able, too, to judge of the splendid work they are doing for the army at the present time, and they cannot be too highly praised.

The XIX Corps was now able to begin relieving part of its own tired troops by means of the divisions returning from the area taken over by the French, these being a little stronger and less exhausted. The first of them, the 18th, took over the sector north of the Luce, with its left opposite Marcelcave. The much-tried 61st still held from Marcelcave (where it had made its counter-attack on March 28th) to the Roman road. South of the Luce the 8th was still in the line, having relieved the cavalry at Moreuil Wood, and a small sector next to it was still held by the 20th Division. But the 14th, now returning from the French front, was on the night of April 1st put in to relieve both of these. The 1st Cavalry Division still held the northern sector, from the Roman road to the Somme. Thus, instead of the army's line being held by seven exhausted infantry divisions each of little more than battalion

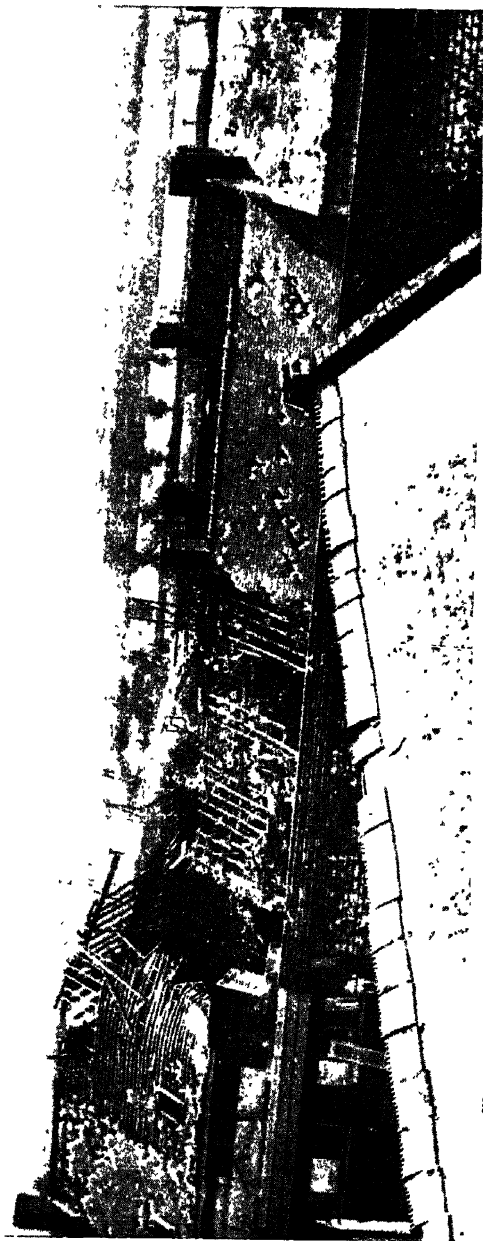
¹⁴ The 33rd lost 8 officers and 160 others, the 34th 1 and 27, and the 9th M.G. Company 4 other ranks. In the 33rd, besides Pockley, Lieutenants E. D. Slade (Wahroonga, N.S.W.) and J. B. Marsden (Lismore, N.S.W.) were killed, the former on the eastern edge of Lancer Wood.

strength, it would now be occupied by fewer but stronger ones, reinforced by the 1st Cavalry Division whose outstanding morale entirely differentiated its problems from those arising in other sectors. The name of the army was at this stage changed to Fourth, that being the title of Rawlinson's old command.

The events of March 30th had shown that the 61st Division was in extreme need of rest. Consequently, although the higher authorities had desired to reserve the 9th Australian Brigade—in the same way as they tried to reserve the cavalry—solely for counter-attack, and to avoid putting it in merely to hold part of the line, they were now forced to permit the 61st Division to use one of its battalions for this purpose. Accordingly, on March 30th, the 35th Battalion was ordered to take over that night the whole sector of the 61st Division, then held mainly by three tired squadrons of yeomanry, from the neighbourhood of Marcelcave to the Roman road. The troops understood that it had been found necessary to give twenty-four hours' rest to some tired unit 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 61st Division's headquarters itself was relieved next day, the 35th Battalion and its front passing to the command of the



neighbouring division on the right, the 18th. The weather was wet, and the tenure of the newly dug posts in the fields was a trying experience; but troops to relieve the 35th could not be found until another British division, the 58th (London), began to return from the French front. On April 3rd the first two battalions of this division, the 6th and 7th London, arrived at Amiens station and were lent to the 18th Division, which ordered the foremost of them, the 6th, to move that night into Villers-Bretonneux with the intention that it should take over the line from the 35th on the night of the 4th.



29. THE PLATEAU SOUTH-WEST OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX ON WHICH THE BATTLE OF THE AFTERNOON OF 4TH APRIL, 1918, WAS FOUGHT

The view is south-east from Villers-Bretonneux. In the distance on left are Monument Wood and the poplars along the Dénain road; beyond these Lancer Wood. The advance of the 36th Battalion started from the valley immediately south of the town and was directed on both sides of Monument Wood. (The trenches seen on the plateau did not then exist, the front having lain a mile beyond them.)

*Aut. War Memorial Official Photo No E2313.
Taken on 21st May, 1918, from the White Chatcau.*

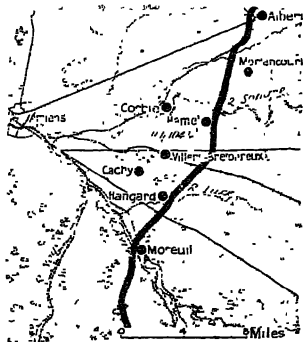


30. THE FRONT HELD BY THE 35TH BATTALION ON 4TH APRIL, 1918

The view is to the south-east, across the country east of Villers-Bretonneux. The line of the 35th Battalion's posts is marked on the plate by the white broken line. Marcelcave village on the right.

British Air Force Photograph; taken on 22nd July, 1918.

It thus happened that an Australian battalion was at the beginning of April responsible for the vital front, 2,800 yards in length, immediately protecting Villers-Bretonneux. That village was everywhere recognised as a crucial position, inasmuch as on its western edge the northern part of the tableland between the Somme and the Avre ended; and, although the southern half 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 the best observation; and, as the German effort in its last stages tended to concentrate itself upon seizing—or at least destroying by gun-fire—the Amiens railway junction, so Villers-Bretonneux received an increasing share of not only military but public interest. On April 1st 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 Foully, astride the Somme-Ancre junction, was more important than Villers-Bretonneux itself; and the 1st Cavalry Division, between the Roman road and the Somme, was therefore as much responsible for the defence of the vital point as was the 35th 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 35th'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 35th were the spreading villages of Marcelcave and Warfusée, half-a-mile in front of the battalion's right and left flanks respectively, and a couple of copses close to the front line. Behind the 35th, about half-way 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 troops 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 d'Accroche and the Bois de Vaire, were correspondingly situated.¹⁵ But there were few prominent landmarks in the 35th's sector—it was the Roman road and, farther south, the Chaulnes-Amiens railway, converging like two blades of a slightly opened scissors,¹⁶ 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 30th, the companies of the 35th, after filing through Villers-Bretonneux in the dark, had been guided to several headquarters, close behind the front line. One of these—a battalion headquarters in a 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,¹⁷ moving along the railway—which

¹⁵ Like the Bois l'Abbé and innumerable other woods in France, these were subdivided into parts known by different names. Thus the lower outlier of the Bois de Vaire was the Bois de Hamel, and that of the Bois d'Accroche was the Bois d'Arquaire. A small detached wood through which the British front line ran, just east of the Bois d'Accroche, was the Bois des Tailloux.

¹⁶ They crossed in the valley just in rear of Villers-Bretonneux.

¹⁷ Capt. G. G. Coghill, M.C.; 35th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Kensington, N.S.W.; b. Kempsey, N.S.W., 19 Aug., 1888.

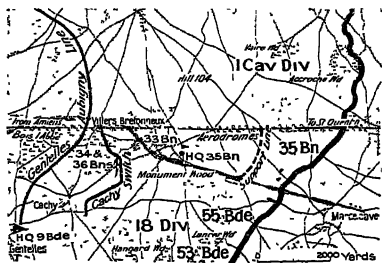
there emerged from the cutting and ran along an embankment—found only five junior British officers, crouched in a burrow in the side of the embankment, an exposed and strongly shelled position, and covered by a waterproof sheet. They said that their men were “out there,” indicating the plain south-east of the embankment; but Coghill’s company, proceeding cautiously towards Marcelcave with a line of scouts ahead, found no occupied line of posts. Some distance in front 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 N.C.O. 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. But the plough-lands were soft and the posts were quickly underground. Their security was much increased by the circumstance that, by picking up abandoned Lewis guns and panniers which lay around, the company was able to arm itself with double its proper quota of these; the same thing happened along most of the 35th’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—about thirty in all—rendered the defence a formidable one.

Ahead of the 35th—close on the north and distant on the south—lay the part of the old French defence-line lost by the British on March 28th; but north of the road this line was still held. The 35th’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 was only to be had at night. For the supports there was at first no shelter nearer than Villers-Bretonneux, and the first action of the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Goddard,¹⁸ after relieving the last fraction

¹⁸ Brig.-Gen. H. A. Goddard, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 17th Bn., 1915/16; 35th Bn., 1916/18; 9th Inf. Bde., 1918/19. Merchant; of Brisbane; b. Woodford, Essex, Eng., 13 Dec., 1869.

of yeomanry and other units under the 61st Division, was to order the digging of a support line a mile or more back, in front of the foremost 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 that 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 2nd the resting battalions of the 9th 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'Abbé. The 34th and 36th Battalions, working all April 3rd, made good progress with the digging, but the supply of barbed wire was short.

As the digging of the support line in addition to the holding of so extensive a front was taxing the 35th beyond reasonable limits, General Rosenthal obtained leave to send the 33rd to Villers-Bretonneux to support it. When the support line was finished, the 33rd would hold it and the 35th could send its own fourth company up to the line. Meanwhile all the 33rd and the reserve company of the 35th, 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 rear of the line.



Owing to his own distance from that town, and the constant smashing of the telephone lines, Rosenthal placed the whole force there under Colonel Goddard of the 35th, a leader not physically robust, and marked for the kindness and courtesy more than the virility of his methods, but nevertheless of long experience, having commanded the 17th Battalion at Quinn's Post 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 church, with its tall, dark red tower, the pretentious villas, two of them known to the troops as the "Red" and the "White" *châteaux*, and most of the lesser buildings were then intact except for the work of marauders in their interiors, which here, as everywhere else, shocked most of the incoming troops. The town, which had prospered on the home-spinning of wool, had been particularly well stocked with wine, and, when the 9th 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 35th Battalion, whose troops were spending miserable days in their rain-soaked trenches, the one great comfort was the hot meal which reached them every night from their cookers near company headquarters. This meal was supplemented by extras from Villers-Bretonneux, and on one occasion at least a few bottles of champagne reached company headquarters with the rations. The British commanders were particularly afraid of drunkenness among the Australians, and Major-General Lee¹⁹ of the 18th Division, when visiting one of his brigadiers, met a party of "diggers" carrying well filled sacks. The history of the 18th Division says:

The General, guessing what the sacks contained, attacked them with a thick oak stick, and caused cascades of red and white wines to flow freely down the Australians' backs. His action was resented, and a difficult situation was saved by the timely arrival of Australian officers.

Anyone who knows the normal reaction of Australians to such methods²⁰ will realise that, for a moment, the situation must have been tense indeed. It may be added that the order to salve or destroy all wine could never be completely carried out even when the leadership became severe. Hidden stores remained, and for months afterwards, in spite of careful policing, some liquor was available. A few cases

¹⁹ Major-Gen. Sir R. P. Lee, K.C.B., C.M.G.; R.E. Chief Engineer, I Army Corps, 1915/16, Fifth Army, 1916; commanded 18th Div., 1917/19. Of New Forest, Hants, Eng.; b. Luton, Beds., Eng., 4 Sept., 1865.

²⁰ It must be assumed that the party refused to disclose the contents of the sacks.

of drunkenness occurred, but, although Australians were stationed in the town in many subsequent months, there was no instance of serious indiscipline or breach of military duty.

General Rosenthal had been informed by the 18th Division that the 9th 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. On March 31st they increased their foothold north and south of Moreuil, again seizing that village and its wood, as well as "Rifle Wood" south of Hangard. Again the cavalry was called on, part of its 2nd Division being sent from Bois l'Abbé. Promptly counter-attacking on the morning of April 1st, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade retook Rifle Wood, and the 4th and 5th Brigades also seized their objectives, 100 prisoners and 13 machine-guns being captured.²¹ That night, through the intervention of Clemenceau, to whom Haig did not scruple to appeal in order to influence Foch, the French took over Hangard village and all the British line south of it. The 14th Division, which they relieved, was transferred northwards, and on the night of April 3rd itself took over from the 1st Cavalry Division the sector between the Roman road and the Somme.

Thus the front of the Fourth Army, with its single front-line Corps, the XIX, was now held by two divisions, 18th and 14th, both previously belonging to the III Corps; and the 58th Division from the III Corps was arriving at Amiens for reserve. When the 35th Battalion, which was still holding part of the line for the 18th Division, was relieved the front would be held, as intended, entirely by troops from the III Corps, and the III Corps staff would then take control. Lieutenant-General Watts of the XIX Corps had doubts whether the 14th Division was strong enough for its task, but the machine-guns of the 1st Cavalry Division were to remain in the line with it, and the 6th Cavalry Brigade (3rd Cavalry Division) stayed in close reserve. The exhausted

²¹ On April 2 three depleted battalions of the 18th Division tried to capture the southern part of the same ridge west of Aubercourt, which had been attacked by the 33rd Battalion on March 30. The right of the assaulting force, while approaching, were seen by the Germans and shelled to a standstill, losing 6 officers and 100 men, and the left, attacking on a mistaken signal, also failed.

24th Division was put into the reserve line. The front was now fairly well covered by artillery, the 18th Division having the field artillery of the 50th and 66th Divisions and the 14th Division that of the 16th and 39th. In addition certain batteries of Royal Horse Artillery were on either side of Villers-Bretonneux, and by April 2nd the XIX Corps had also 102 heavy or medium guns and howitzers of which 77 were in action. The French having now taken over all the front—and also the sector of the reserve line—allotted to them by the recent arrangement between Haig and Foch, the Fourth Army again came under the command of Haig.

On April 3rd²² German aeroplanes flew low over the front line, and, judging by their behaviour, Major Carr, commanding the front line of the 35th, assured Goddard's "staff officer" (Captain Connell),²³ who came round the battalion's line after dark, that the enemy would attack next morning. On the left Captain Sayers'²⁴ company had just been replaced by the former support company under Captain Light,²⁵ a less experienced soldier.²⁶ Major Carr walked along the line and impressed him with his own conviction that an attack was coming. In the small hours of April 4th the 7th Buffs, on the right of the 35th, 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 5.30 a.m., a heavy bombardment descended on all the villages behind the line and on the front itself, an attack was generally expected.

²² The history of the 18th Division says that on this day the German artillery-fire after several quiet days suddenly became heavy along the whole of the local front. Part of the centre of the 18th Division began to retire and the movement spread to its right brigade, next to the French at Hangard, but was stopped by the personal action of one of its very vigorous brigadiers. Reference to other British records, however, suggests that the report on which this statement is based really refers to the incidents of April 4th.

²³ Major H. J. Connell, D.S.O., M.C.; 35th Bn. School teacher; of Hamilton West, N.S.W.; b. Waverley, N.S.W., 12 June, 1884. Died, 31 Jan., 1934. (M.L.A., N.S. Wales, 1920/34.)

²⁴ Capt. (temp. Major) R. Sayers, M.C.; 35th Bn. Woolbuyer; of North Sydney; b. North Sydney, 11 Aug., 1891.

²⁵ Capt. P. F. Light; 35th Bn. Manufacturer; of Sydney; b. London, 24 June, 1871.

²⁶ Light's company had suffered 19 casualties through a shell-burst on its billet in Villers-Bretonneux on the day before.

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 14th Division were just settling into the old French defence-line, it was intense, those trenches being by now well ranged by the German artillery. About the scattered newly dug posts of the 35th Battalion and of the 55th, 53rd, and 54th Brigades (18th Division) to the south the shelling, though severe, was less accurate. Carr, standing with his second-in-command, Captain Hawkins,²⁷ 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 35th saw ahead of them parties of Germans, each about a platoon strong, assembling just this side of the back-gardens of Warfusée and Marcelcave, and climbing out of a sunken road between the two.

In the right company Captain 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 Lieutenant Warden²⁸ to take charge of the northern half of his troops, while he himself 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 Ferguson²⁹—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.

²⁷ Capt. S. W. Hawkins, M.C.; 35th Bn. Staff Captain, 9th Inf. Bde., 1917, 11th Bde., Aug.-Nov., 1918. Importer; of Clifton Hill, Vic.; b. Clifton Hill, 23 March, 1890.

²⁸ Lieut. W. W. Warden, 35th Bn. Bank clerk; of Milton, N.S.W.; b. Milton, 14 Aug., 1890.

²⁹ Lieut. D. G. Ferguson, M.C.; 7th Bn., The Buffs (East Kent Regt.). Of London; b. London, 1895.

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 to 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 their posts, with bayonets fixed. 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, Lieutenant Browne,³⁰ 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 his 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.

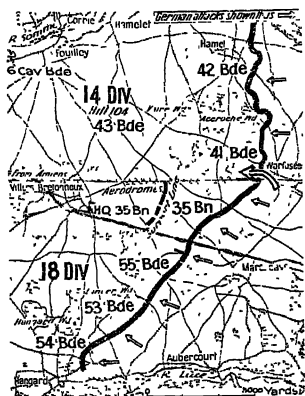
After three or four efforts the Germans previously attacking along the railway swerved to the south and concentrated their effort upon the line of posts of the 7th Buffs beyond Coghill's right flank. After the first of these attacks, the Buffs got out of their trenches and withdrew. Coghill, leaving his platoon commanders in charge, went some 500 yards across the fields until he found Lieutenant 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

³⁰ Lieut. R. V. Browne; 35th Bn. Travelling salesman; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Fitzroy, Vic., 11 April, 1893.

stand by you, Anzacs," they said. Coghill had already arranged for the 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 round and saw the line of the Buffs again retiring. Himself, as he 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 that the Germans had been sufficiently battered to weaken their efforts.

The centre and left companies of the 35th had opened with machine-guns, Lewis guns, 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 35th 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 them to ground. Farther south the advance was similarly checked. North of the Roman road, however, on the front of the newly arrived 14th 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 14th Division broke.

The 35th 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 them from the British front on the immediate left, and of others



advancing through the area abandoned by the 14th Division towards the aerodrome, where lay the still unfinished and unoccupied support line of the 35th. 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, Lieutenant Thomson,³¹ 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,³² 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 35th fell back farther—indeed, many of the troops did not see any support trench or even know that one existed. The four attached machine-guns of the 9th 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, Lieutenant Lockhart,³³ and sergeant, Lawton,³⁴ were the 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 Lance-Corporal Mackie,³⁵ who tried to save the gun.³⁶

Major Carr and Captain Hawkins of the centre company 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

³¹ Lieut. C. L. Thomson, 35th Bn. Bank clerk; of Wollongong, N.S.W.; b. Wollongong, 30 Jan., 1895. Killed in action, 4 April, 1918.

³² Pte. (A./Sgt.) A. W. Harrison (No. 2809; 35th Bn.). Carpenter; of Toronto, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 14 Dec., 1879.

³³ Lieut. C. D. Lockhart, O.B.E.; 9th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Ashfield, N.S.W.; b. Summer Hill, N.S.W., 14 Nov., 1894.

³⁴ Sgt. H. A. Lawton (No. 1756; 9th M.G. Coy.). Hardware assistant; of Wayville, S. Aust.; b. Wayville, 8 Dec., 1895.

³⁵ L/Cpl. D. F. Mackie (No. 553; 9th M.G. Coy.). Engineer fitter; of Rozelle, N.S.W.; b. Dundee, Scotland, 1883.

³⁶ A man who helped Mackie in the retirement was killed. Sergeant Harrison and his isolated post, after firing till their ammunition was gone, found the enemy all round them, and, though they "tried to make a show with their bayonets," were captured.

captured Germans, but a second glance showed that they were Light's company retiring. Carr sent a runner to inform Coghill, the commander of the right company, and ordered Lieutenant Barlow³⁷ 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 it 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 semicircle across the plateau to his left rear, but he resolved to hold on if possible. The Germans on his front had crept up to a culvert under the railway embankment from which they enfiladed with a machine-gun the line to 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 b—— well have to do it myself," whereupon one of his corporals, Wilson,³⁸ 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 down the machine-gunners 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 this time the Germans following the retirement of the centre company had seized the copse on Coghill's left, which had been defended by an advanced Lewis gun post, and had

³⁷ Capt. E. C. Barlow, 35th Bn. Ironmonger; of New Lambton, N.S.W.; b. East Maitland, N.S.W., 14 April, 1895.

³⁸ L/Cpl. J. R. Wilson (No. 2898; 35th Bn.). Boot trade supervisor; of Fitzroy, Vic., and Newtown, N.S.W.; b. Williamstown, Vic., 11 Sept., 1888.

passed through it to the cemetery where Carr's headquarters had been. From here they enfiladed Coghill's left half-company under Lieutenant 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. Lieutenant Lewis,³⁹ however, and his runner, Private Lack,⁴⁰ 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 7th 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 Captain Thomas⁴¹ insisted on maintaining under the railway bridge south-east of the town, in spite of an order to retire;⁴² thence Coghill went to Colonel Goddard's headquarters in Villers-Bretonneux and explained the position. Goddard ordered him out of the line.

To the south the attack upon the centre and right of the 18th British Division had been defeated, but northward, in the sector of the 14th Division, there was much confusion. The Germans who had broken through its right made for the two woods down the slope, overlooking Hamel. The 14th Division had one of its three brigades, the 43rd, in close support on the vital height, Hill 104, north-east of Villers-Bretonneux, and this brigade now sent forward the 9th Scottish Rifles, to hold, if possible, the nearer of the two woods (Vaire Wood). But the retirement of the 41st Brigade immediately north of the Roman road was precipitate; few of its troops could be rallied despite the efforts of officers of the 42nd Brigade, in front of Hamel, and it quickly became clear that the cavalry must again be called

³⁹ Lieut. H. T. Lewis, 35th Bn. Fireman; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Stockport, Eng., 13 Aug., 1882.

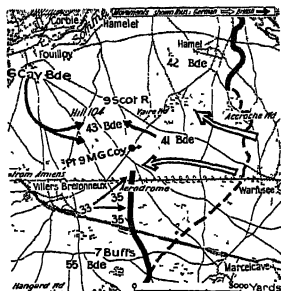
⁴⁰ Pte. E. C. Lack (No. 6830; 35th Bn.). Hotel porter; of East Sydney; b. Northampton, Eng., 1888.

⁴¹ Capt. H. S. Thomas, A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Sydney and West Maitland, N.S.W.; b. Lithgow, N.S.W., 17 March, 1883.

⁴² It was heavily shelled, and it was also feared that it might be overrun by a sudden German advance.

upon if disaster was to be averted. The 6th Cavalry Brigade was accordingly summoned up, mounted, from Fouilloy and Bois l'Abbé to the open valley just 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 33rd to send two companies to take up a support position north of the railway. Captains Fry and Smith⁴³ 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 35th, which had just fallen back, part of it under Major Carr lying on their northern flank, and the rest on their southern flank beyond the railway. It was then about 8 o'clock. At 8.15 Goddard sent up a third company of the 33rd, Lieutenant Farleigh's,⁴⁴ which, after the fighting on March 30th, was only fifty 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,⁴⁵ a first rate fighting leader. 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 14th Division. The two machine-guns that had successfully withdrawn from the front line were in this new alignment, and at 8 o'clock Lieutenant-Colonel 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 Lieutenant Ross,⁴⁶

⁴³ Capt. L. C. B. Smith, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Clerk; of Rockdale, N.S.W.; b. Rockdale, 20 Jan., 1895.

⁴⁴ Lieut. Alfred G. Farleigh, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Tannery manager; of Arncliffe, N.S.W.; b. St. Peter's, N.S.W., 26 Feb., 1885. Killed in action, 22 Aug., 1918.

⁴⁵ Major W. J. C. Duncan, D.S.O., M.C.; 33rd Bn. (now Indian Army). Bank accountant; of Inverell, N.S.W.; b. Inverell, 27 Jan., 1894.

⁴⁶ Lieut. W. J. S. Ross, M.C.; 9th M.G. Coy. Farmer; of Wellington district, N.S.W.; b. "Forest Vale," Wellington, 19 Dec., 1893.

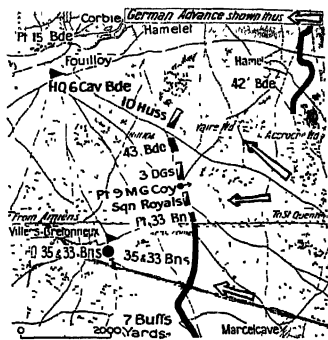
were to safeguard the left, and for that purpose stationed themselves with some of the 14th Division's troops far out in its area, about 1,000 yards from Vaire Wood.

The Australian front was thus by 9.30 a.m. made fairly secure, but the Germans were still pouring into the sector of the 14th 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. Duncan's company of the 33rd also poured its fire into the German advance and sent at least the nearer enemy to ground. From north of the Somme the artillery of the 3rd Australian Division had since dawn been shooting—some guns firing direct—at the German transport on the opposite heights and at German infantry attacking on the slope towards Hamel. Meanwhile, in response to an appeal from the commander of the 43rd Brigade on Hill 104, the two leading regiments of the 6th Cavalry Brigade—3rd Dragoon Guards and 10th Hussars—were sent up on either side of his brigade. In touch with some of the infantry of the 14th Division, they formed by 9.30 a.m. a line slightly ahead of the summit of Hill 104 and on the spur leading down from it to the rear of Hamel. But between the 3rd Dragoon Guards and the Australians north of the Roman road a space still remained open to the enemy. The commander of the 6th Cavalry Brigade lent to Lieutenant-Colonel Burt⁴⁷ (3rd Dragoon Guards) a squadron of his reserve regiment, the Royal Dragoons, to fill this gap. Captain Duncan and the commander of these troops at once decided to push forward to the second aerodrome. At 11.15, as they and the neighbouring 35th did so, the Germans were seen steadily advancing towards them. Duncan reported that he was sure his men could resist these. At the aerodrome the advancing Australians met a number of the enemy, but after close fighting around the huts the Germans were cleared, and by 11.35 Duncan's right was established there. This

⁴⁷ Brig.-Gen. A. Burt, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.M. Commanded 3rd Dragoon Guards, 1915/17; 6th Cav. Bde, 1917; 7th Cav. Bde., 1918/19; B.G.G.S. British Military Mission to Finland, 1919/20. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. London, 18 April, 1875.

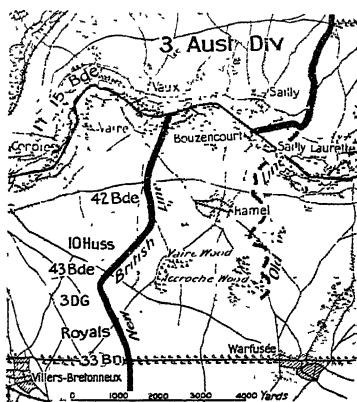
advance brought the cavalry's line up to the four Australian machine-guns which had been isolated for three hours since the British infantry left them. These guns, the 35th, 33rd, and cavalry were all now in touch, and Duncan reported that the enemy's movement seemed to have ceased.

The cavalry and 33rd Battalion had thus formed a switch line from the 35th Battalion's northern flank behind the 14th Division, and only just in time; for though Duncan believed the enemy advance to have ended, on the slope down to Hamel, hidden from troops on the plateau, it continued. The 43rd Brigade had previously ordered a reserve battalion, the 7th King's Royal Rifle Corps, to counter-attack from Hill 104 along the road towards Warfusée, but, as the battalion advanced, the sight of this powerful movement of Germans caused its officers to hold it back in line with the cavalry. In front of Hamel part of the infantry of the 42nd Brigade, which at first clung steadily to its trenches, was soon overborne by the headlong retirement of another part. The strong defences of the old French line were finally lost—in part, indeed, abandoned without waiting for the German attack. At 11.35 troops of the 3rd Australian Division north of the Somme observed Germans in Hamel. Ten minutes later the 15th Australian Brigade, guarding the Somme bridges, reported stragglers of the 14th Division entering Vaire, the next village in rear along the Somme. Half-an-hour later the flank brigade (11th) of the 3rd Australian Division reported that German machine-guns south of the river were firing into the valleys into its rear, most inconveniently for the battalion headquarters there. Brigadier-General Cannan asked leave to swing back his right, but he was permitted to move only one post. A brigade of British field artillery, the 189th, was given to Brigadier-General Elliott (15th Brigade) to cover the bridge-heads in case the



enemy tried to cross the Somme. Elliott, however, had already been notified that, as soon as his brigade could be relieved by a British one (104th, of the 35th Division), it was to be sent across the Somme to strengthen the Fourth Army's flank.

The 15th Brigade, in discharging its duty of securing the Somme crossings, maintained some posts south of the river around the village bridge-head of Vaire. Captain Ferres⁴⁸ of the 58th, whose company supplied these posts, realised that the troops of the 14th Division, though driven from Hamel, could easily bar the enemy's way on the next spur, leading down from Hill 104, at the foot of which his posts were situated. He tried with all his power to stop the retreat, but was frustrated partly by the action of British officers who told him that their orders were to withdraw. At noon, however, he received from Elliott an order "to stop all stragglers and compel them to fight." Armed with this he adopted vigorous measures, and soon collected about 500 officers and men, mainly of the Rifle Brigade. Most of the men (he reported at the time) were without rifles or equipment—they told him they had been ordered to "dump" all kit. In marked contrast to their attitude, detached parties of British cavalry eagerly offered Ferres their assistance. Fortunately there were many abandoned rifles in the area. With the help of the cavalrymen Ferres rounded up stragglers, brought forward ammunition, and collected rifles. Meanwhile the cavalry's Hotchkiss guns kept back the Germans. Lieutenant Hanna⁴⁹ of the 15th Australian Machine Gun Company, who had been watching from north of the Somme, also obtained leave to ferry one



⁴⁸ Lieut.-Col. H. D. G. Ferres, D.S.O., M.C.; 58th Bn. Grazier; of Emerald, Vic.; b. Ararat, Vic., 4 Sept., 1885.

⁴⁹ Lieut. H. G. Hanna, M.C.; 15th M.G. Coy. Grazier; of Walwa, Vic.; b. Walwa, 12 Dec., 1890.

of his guns across the river and there enfiladed German machine-gunners and troops who were thrusting forward both north of Hamel and from its western exits. Twice parties tried to advance towards him but suffered such loss that they turned back. At night Ferres asked Hanna to stay on and sent an escort to protect him.

By the energy of these officers and their men and of the assisting cavalry, a line was formed by 3 p.m. up the slope of the spur leading to Hill 104 and, later, along the flats half-way to Bouzencourt. The flight of the 14th Division's infantry came as a shock to the reinforcing troops, but Ferres was full of admiration for the cavalry; "no men," he reported, "could have done more than these cavalry men did."

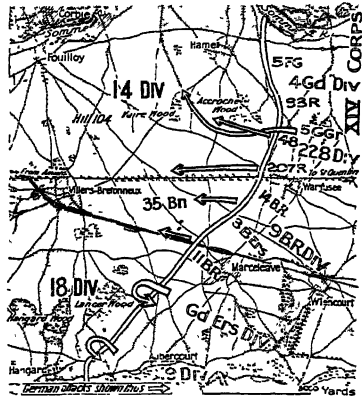
German authorities show that the resumption of the general offensive towards Amiens, which had begun with the substantial success above described, had been made possible by the work of sixty railway construction companies, which had now succeeded in reconstructing the railways sufficiently to allow the transport of a considerable amount of ammunition for the German artillery. The attack could thus be prepared for by a bombardment planned on the same lines as that of March 21, although much less formidable and lasting only half as long.

The effort to thrust the French south-westwards had been for the moment abandoned; the present stroke was directed solely towards Amiens and the second of the railways connecting Amiens and Paris, which ran down the Noye valley; the first, *via* the valley of the Avre, had already been cut at Montdidier. The front of the attack therefore extended over the southern $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the British front (that is, from the Somme southwards) and the northern $13\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the French front. North of the Somme, this day, no attack was allowed; operations there were to follow later.

On this 21-mile front the Germans struck with fifteen divisions, of which five attacked the British. Seven others were in close reserve. As before, the plan was for some of these divisions, supported by a large part of the artillery, to make breaches in the opposing line. Through these breaches detachments from other divisions, following closely behind the flanks of the penetrating troops, would move, and then, turning right or left, would take the rest of the defending line in rear and "roll" it up. Thus on the British front, which was attacked by three German army corps, the northernmost division (4th Guard), next to the Somme, was merely—by attacking with only two of its regiments—to hold the British at Hamel while the 228th (belonging to the same corps, the XIV) was to break through between the two woods and the Roman road. The third regiment of the 4th Guard Division, the 5th Guard Grenadier, would follow behind the right flank of the 228th, and then turn north-eastwards down the slope behind the defenders of Hamel. The 228th Division, having the

principal task in this sector, was given the artillery of three divisions. The bombardment, which was to begin at 5.30, and to continue for varying periods according to the projected action in the several sectors, would here be maintained for two hours, the *minenwerfer* there as elsewhere joining for the last quarter of an hour in an intense bombardment of the front line. The artillery preparation suffered by the southern brigade of the 14th British Division was therefore formidable.

South of the Roman road, opposite the 35th Battalion and the left of the 18th British Division, a holding attack was to be delivered. Another corps, the XI, had been inserted here, and the 9th Bavarian Reserve Division had been brought up from le Catelet to make the attack. It would assault with all three regiments, while the 228th Division on the north, and the Guard Ersatz Division on the south, broke through on either side of Villers-Bretonneux. Farther south, the 19th Division in the Luce valley was to deliver a holding attack, but its 78th Infantry Regiment was to follow the left of the Guard Ersatz and then roll up the British and French about Hangard, in front of the 19th Division. Presumably the tactics employed against the French were similar. Richthofen and his "Red Circus" were in the air this day on the Somme front.



Contrary to expectation of the Germans, the reply of the British artillery to this bombardment was at first comparatively weak, but short shooting by the German artillery itself nearly wrecked the attack at its outset. Part of the right regiment of the 228th, the 48th I.R., broke back, but was rallied and led forward by a spirited officer. The British front line was taken and the 48th pushed straight out to its objective. The 207th R.I.R., attacking immediately north of the road, made slower progress, but the history of the 48th claims that at 10.5 some of its own troops reached the edge of Villers-Bretonneux (the second aerodrome and some houses north of it are probably meant).

The forces which attacked south of the road were the 14th Bavarian R.I.R., 3rd Bavarian Ersatz I.R., and 11th Bavarian R.I.R., in that order from north to south. The attack here began at 6.30. It is claimed that the 14th, after forcing back the right of the 35th Battalion, "repelled counter-attacks" (presumably the successful advance of the 33rd Battalion to the aerodrome). The two other regiments, north and south of the railway, had to overcome "stubbornly defended strong-points and machine-gun nests," but towards 2 o'clock in the afternoon they followed the withdrawn line half-way to Villers-Bretonneux. Farther south, attacking the 18th British Division, the Guard Ersatz twice made its attempt to penetrate, but its opponents were unbroken, and its troops were barely able to leave their jumping-off line.

Meanwhile, on the northern flank, through the breach made by the 228th Division, there poured the 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment. It cleared Vaire Wood and started the rout which allowed the other two regiments of the 4th Guard Division to capture Hamel. At this stage, about noon, the British artillery-fire on this sector, till then slight, became strong. "In the 4th Guard Division," says the divisional historian, "there made itself specially felt strong flanking fire from north of the Somme. The enemy artillery was not sufficiently tied down there. The 5th Foot Guard (attacking Hamel) especially suffered under it."

On the first news of these successes the commander of the 4th Guard Division, Major-General Count von Finckenstein, suggested to the commander of the XIV Corps that the 1st Division, then waiting close in rear, should be thrown in to widen the "breach" north-east of Villers-Bretonneux. The suggestion was not approved—possibly (says the same writer) because the 1st Division was the last reserve on this part of the battle-field. The 5th Foot Guard, which in Hamel had captured 300 prisoners, among them a British brigadier in his headquarters, was ordered to attack the spur west of Hamel, and elsewhere other steps were taken to continue the attack.

At all British headquarters up to the highest the German success at Hamel caused much concern, and by noon there was arising keen anxiety as to whether a complete line now existed between the enemy and his vital objectives, and as to whether such a line, if established, was safe. The part held by the cavalry—on Hill 104 and the spur west of Hamel—was just above the headquarters of several brigades in Fouilloy, and of the 3rd Cavalry and 14th Divisions in Aubigny; and the sight of the batteries massed close on the western slope, in the new-sprung crop, with their gun-teams near by and the cavalry waiting in the hollow and occasionally detaching a squadron, mounted, to climb over the hill and disappear on a dash to reinforce the line, assured everyone that the enemy was still being faced on that vital position, although obviously he was dangerously close. But the state of affairs up on the shell- and bullet-swept plateau in front of Villers-Bretonneux could only be gleaned from occasional reports, most difficult to obtain. In those days commanders and staffs were all too accustomed to hear that such and such a line was held, only to learn later that it either had never been occupied, or had been abandoned before the news of its occupation arrived. But Captain Connell of the 35th (afterwards Labour member of Parliament for Newcastle, N.S.Wales), acting this day as Colonel Goddard's staff officer, by personally visiting the

The Afternoon Development

line of the 35th and 33rd Battalions found it to be well in position, forming a flank swung back from the left of the 18th Division (now a mile west of Marcelcave) to the right of the cavalry (at some cottages north of the aerodromes and the Roman road, 1,000 yards east of Villers-Bretonneux). This report went back at 3.30, reaching Rosenthal at Gentelles about 4.45, and relieving much anxiety at XIX Corps Headquarters. It was the basis of a reassuring message sent at 7 p.m. throughout the B.E.F.

But Connell's report had barely left Colonel Goddard's house in the now battered village before the situation entirely changed. The development is graphically described in the diary of an Australian who with a fellow officer had just heard Connell's message at Brigadier-General Rosenthal's headquarters at Gentelles and was walking thence across the open plateau towards Villers-Bretonneux.

There was a sound of heavy firing from the south (whither we had seen odd French artillery waggons moving through Gentelles). A barrage seemed to be falling fairly heavily on our side of the Bois de Hangard and Lancer Wood—largely shrapnel, but whether ours or German I could not say.

As we walked from Cachy towards the overturned lorry⁵⁰ on the V. Bretonneux Rd., we noticed men in small numbers coming up the road towards us, mostly without any arms; others moving back past the edge of the wood de l'Abbé. On the edge of the second swelling to the east of us, between the poplars [south of the Monument] and Lancer Wood there were numbers of little figures moving—groups of them everywhere. I wondered if it could be possibly a battalion advancing—but it was gradually borne in upon us that the whole countryside was retiring. Wilkins,⁵¹ whose eyes are better than mine, said that he could see men running on the further horizon. I saw only men walking. It was a drizzling day, not too good for a telescope, but I could see a man on a horse riding amongst the figures retiring on the second undulation. A chatter of machine-guns began from that direction, especially from the village. A white star-flare went up and fell by the poplars—I watched and saw that the next which was thrown up fell in front of the poplars and lay there burning. Evidently the Germans were advancing and marking their advance for their own artillery by the signal which meant . . . "Here we are."

Gun teams were moving by the guns just in front of us. . . . Presently back came a battery of 4.5 howitzers, very quietly, and settled in a slight dip south of the wood, just where we were. . . . Parties of British troops—parties of from three men to a dozen or more—were plodding rearwards, past the wood, off towards Cachy, off towards the rear, all away from the front. "Which is the road, Sir?" one

⁵⁰ This was a motor ambulance which had been running in the morning to clear wounded from Villers-Bretonneux. The road was exposed and it had been hit by a shell.

⁵¹ Now Sir Hubert Wilkins, the polar explorer.

party leader asked us. "What road?" I asked. "The main road," he said. Another asked: "Which is the road to Amiens?" ("Aymeens," as he called it). We asked two youngsters what they were retiring for. "There were too many Germans for us," they said simply.

The guns on the road in the wood were preparing to retire. The German had lengthened his artillery again and was shelling Cachy, and some into the wood, and occasional shells well along the main road towards Amiens. It seemed to me that he knew he had a broken crowd in front of him, and was turning his guns on to their retreat.

On arriving at the Roman road in the hollow half-a-mile behind Villers-Bretonneux, where that road entered the wood,

we found bunches of men, about 12 to 25 strong, walking back down the main road, other stragglers two or three together, artillery waggons, and a few men with bayonets still fixed. These were Australians—the first we had seen in the crowd. . . . They said the Germans had got round their flank. "We've been in five days without a spell," said a man of the 35th. "He gave us a lot of gas shell (his gas mask was still in his hand) and we are pretty well done up."

The Australians were easily stopped ("their rifles were choked with mud, but every single Australian carried a rifle"). Crowds of other Australians with rifles slung appeared walking back along the high railway embankment from Villers-Bretonneux.

There was a heavy rattle of machine-guns around the town [which could be seen straight up the road]. One Australian said that our machine-guns were trying to hold the Germans up by the town, but he thought the Germans must be in the town by now. . . . A score of cavalry with an officer came down the road towards the rear at a canter, pushing straight through the middle of the mob—looking rather panicked; I thought it was a very unwise thing to do, if not worse. At the same time a (British) gunner officer found two of his gun-horses and their driver retiring. "How dare you move those horses without my order?" he said. "Go back this instant," . . . and as the man turned his horse the C.O. gave it a cut across the quarters with his stick. A dozen battery teams were going up the road to their guns, clearly to pull them out—men were trooping down the railway and along the road, and it looked as though the old game was begun again and the German had had another break through. Everyone that we spoke to gave that account of it. A 33rd Battalion signaller, who was retiring carrying his telephone, told me that he understood that they had to retire to the rear of the wood. There was a line of trenches newly dug near the back of the wood—just here we met the first part of a formed body of troops marching up towards Villers-Bretonneux.

The two Australians went back to Corps headquarters in great gloom, calling at Corbie [Fouilloy] to tell General Elliott [15th Brigadel] what we had seen, so that if Villers-Bretonneux were taken he would not be caught in the flank. . . . I thought Villers-Bretonneux had gone, though I didn't say so.

The only reassuring signs were, first, that, though they had seen men of every battalion of the 9th Australian Brigade, they had not seen "anything like the whole brigade"; and, second, "the difference between our men and the British in the retreat—our men most easy to handle—quite easy to take back . . . the British, though only walking as if from a football match, . . . quite spiritless."⁵²

Very likely, I told MacLagan and Elliott, the 9th Infantry Brigade was making the fight of its history in defence of that village.

The next morning's *communiqués* said that the line was still in front of Villers-Bretonneux, but so doubtful was the diarist that he and Lieutenant Wilkins were not satisfied until they went up to Goddard's battered headquarters in the village.

It was a shocking sight—every house seemed to have been hit. [At Colonel Goddard's villa] the roof of the dining room was now all over the floor. There was a big crater of red bricks in the back yard, not 8 yards from the kitchen window. The kitchen door had fallen forward and hit [Colonel] Morshead on the back of the head. . . . There in the door, with two days' growth of beard, was Morshead.

The place was safely held. The 9th Brigade had indeed fought "the fight of its history." The story of that fight is as follows.

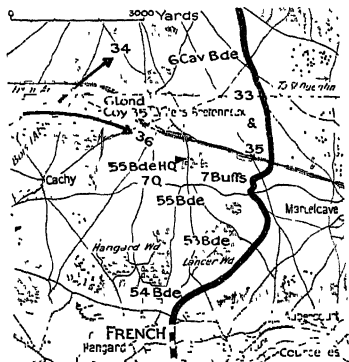
Immediately after the morning's battle, the XIX Corps had buttressed the front at Villers-Bretonneux by ordering forward from Bois l'Abbé⁵³ the two remaining **The 35th falls back** battalions of the 9th Brigade—34th and 36th—to defend the town if necessary on the north, south, and east. The corps commander suggested that they should be deployed to the north-west and south-west of the town, but Rosenthal felt that this formation would be unwieldy for launching a counter-attack, and begged to be allowed to keep them concentrated. He was given his way,

⁵² It is only fair to note that these British troops had experienced, in addition to the shocks of March 21, several depressing days of withdrawal and rear-guard fighting.

⁵³ The 36th had in the morning been savagely shelled in the wood, losing one officer and 10 others. To avoid further loss, Colonel Milne moved it first into the open, south of the wood, and, later, to the open space behind the wood.

and they were placed in the hollows north-west and south-west of Villers-Bretonneux. Advancing in open artillery formation, both reached the neighbourhood of the intended assembly positions without serious loss, notwithstanding the shell-fire on these hollows. The 34th rested behind the

terraces on the lower slope north-west of the village, somewhat north-west of the site specified. At 1.10 the Germans began a severe bombardment of this area,⁵⁴ lasting for over an hour. The 34th lost severely, many of its headquarters staff being hit.⁵⁵ At 3 p.m. Major Fry,⁵⁶ sent up from the nucleus, assumed command, but, owing to the dislocation at head-



quarters, the arrival of the battalion and its position were not punctually reported to Colonel Goddard in Villers-Bretonneux. The 36th, however, was immediately south of Villers-Bretonneux at the head of the steep, grassy gully extending from the Bois l'Abbé past that side of the town. Leaving his companies lying in formation ready for immediate counter-attack, Colonel Milne and his adjutant at 1.45 reported to Goddard's headquarters and awaited developments there. Another useful step had been taken through the helpfulness of Lieutenant-Colonel Benson,⁵⁷ commander of the 6th London, which had arrived and slept in the town the night before. When the bombardment began, Benson (who, incidentally, was an Australian) put his companies in cellars and placed

⁵⁴ Certain movements of reserves farther back had been seen.

⁵⁵ Among these were Lieut.-Colonel E. E. Martin, battalion commander, Major H. L. E. D. Wheeler, senior company commander, Lieut. Augustus G. Farleigh, adjutant, and several of the runners and signallers. (Martin belonged to Wellington district, N.S.W.; Wheeler to Newcastle West, N.S.W.; Farleigh to Arncliffe, N.S.W.)

⁵⁶ Lieut.-Col. W. A. le R. Fry, O.B.E., V.D. Colonial Treasurer, Aust. Military Administration, Rabaul, 1914/15; temply. commanded 34th Bn., A.I.F., for periods in 1918. Warehouseman; of Sydney; b. Bourke, N.S.W., 29 Nov., 1886.

⁵⁷ Lieut.-Col. C. B. Benson, D.S.O.; Oxford & Bucks Light Infy. Commanded 6th Bn., London Regt., 1917/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Sevenoaks, Kent, Eng.; b. Gympie, Q'land, 21 Aug., 1876.

his headquarters with Colonel Goddard's. News arriving during the morning that the Lewis guns of the 35th Battalion were choked with mud, Colonel Benson offered to change six of them for six of his own. Accordingly, with Australian guides, a party of eighteen Londoners took up their guns with 100 filled drums and spare parts to the Australian line. The party returned later with six dirty or damaged guns and 100 empty drums; two of the Londoners had been killed and five wounded.

Energetic steps had also been taken by the 55th Brigade immediately south of the Australians. Its commander, Brigadier-General Wood,⁵⁸ a senior officer of stout build and of most stalwart disposition, had his headquarters at the "Monument Farm." He had by him his reserve battalion, the 7th Queen's, and, during the fight, fearing that the Germans might get round his left, he placed one of his companies along the railway cutting there. Two more he held ready for counter-attack. At 10.30, learning that the Australian flank was ahead of the easternmost bridge over the railway cutting, his anxiety as to the flank was relieved; but, the 6th London, having been given to him as reserve, he now sent for one of its companies which he ordered to support the 7th Buffs, south of the railway. He also summoned Colonel Benson to his headquarters.

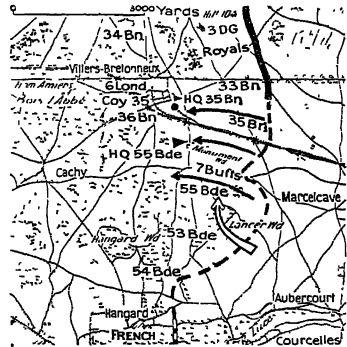
The battle on this front, however, appeared to have ended. In the posts of the 35th many of the tired men were half-asleep, when at about 4 o'clock some of those on the right saw the whole British line to the right of them retiring. There had been a heavy bombardment there earlier, but from the Australian flank nothing was visible that would furnish a reason for the withdrawal. It was afterwards ascertained that the Germans had broken through farther south, and that when they emerged from Lancer Wood, behind the right of the 53rd and 55th Brigades, these troops fell back, the movement spreading quickly until it reached the right company of the 35th Battalion.

There now happened an incident curiously similar to that which occurred with the same brigade seven months before at

⁵⁸ Brig.-Gen. E. A. Wood, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 55th Inf. Bde., 1917/19. B. 6 May, 1873; died, 20 May, 1930.

Passchendaele.⁵⁹ Lieutenant Warden, then commanding the right, ordered the men on that flank to move back and form a defensive flank. But the men of the 35th next in the line, seeing Australians retire, thought that a withdrawal of the whole battalion was in process, and began to fall back. The troops were exceedingly weary; the spirited leadership of Captain Coghill on the right flank was absent, and among some of the junior officers of the 35th there was an unusual element of weakness. The right of the 33rd and 35th simply got up and retired. As the movement spread northward, Major Carr and Captain Hawkins tried desperately to stop it, but some of the junior officers, in spite of their appeal, "would not heed." Carr and Hawkins accordingly divided the line between themselves, each endeavouring to steady half of it. They found it easy to stop the men nearest to them, but, when they moved on to rally the next party, those whom they left withdrew again with the general movement. The whole line of the 35th went. The two leaders were left alone. The Germans could now be seen south of the railway streaming towards Villers-Bretonneux. Carr with one machine-gunner halted for a time, firing at them, but soon there was nothing for the two officers to do but to follow their troops. Only the portion of the 33rd on the extreme left stood still.

No hint of all this reached Goddard's headquarters in Villers-Bretonneux until a quarter to five, when word arrived of the retirement of the troops on the 35th's right. Realising how thin were the reserves there, but feeling that the flank held by the cavalry was safe, Goddard at once decided to transfer the 34th Battalion from the north of the town to a position in rear from which it could safeguard the retreat, if

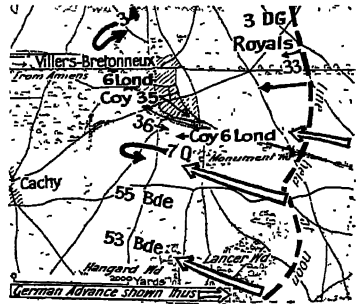


⁵⁹ On 12 Oct., 1917; see *Vol. IV*, p. 922.

necessary. But barely had this order gone out when a runner came in to say that the right of the 35th also had fallen back in disorder. On top of this arrived Major Carr, who called out to those in the room that the line had gone, and that he and Captain Hawkins had been "absolutely the last" of the 35th Battalion to leave it. Colonel Goddard's headquarters, he said, was now the foremost position occupied.

This news—which was true⁶⁰—caused the utmost consternation at headquarters. Colonel Morshead ran outside to see for himself, and was met by Captain Fry of his own battalion, who confirmed the statement so far as his part of the line was concerned; he had retired, he said, on an order passed down from an officer of the 35th.

For Goddard the moment was one of bitter disappointment and mortification. He turned to Colonel Milne of the 36th. "Colonel, you must counter-attack at once," he said. Milne, once a private in the old British Army, a stern and practical soldier, leapt to his feet, saluted, and went out. Goddard sent Connell, his staff officer—a mainstay throughout—to survey the position from the railway bridge at the south-eastern corner of the town where the Monument road crosses the railway cutting, and to rally the 35th there, if possible. Captain Sayers, a tall, spare New South Welshman, commanding the reserve company of the 35th which was still in cellars in Villers-Bretonneux, ran to lead out his men and hold up the Germans east of the town while the 36th was getting ready. Goddard gave a similar task to the four machine-guns that were still with him, and asked the companies of the 6th London, though not under his command, to assist. To avoid being caught in a trap, he wisely ordered his own headquarters back out of the town, and himself moved to



⁶⁰ Subject to the fact, which Carr did not know, that part of the 33rd on the left under Captain Duncan still held on.

the south-eastern outskirts to watch the counter-attack by the 36th Battalion. Colonel Morshead, who returned to him there, was directed to find the 34th and, if possible, bring it round the north of the town to counter-attack.⁶¹ In the first excitement at headquarters Carr also was vehemently ordered to counter-attack; he wandered around the forward area vainly seeking for any of his men with whom to carry out the order, and eventually, worn out, followed on after Sayers. Report, as completely unfair in his case as in General M'Cay's,⁶² attributed to him the responsibility for the failure of the line to hold, not only on this day but on the 12th of October, 1917,⁶³ at Passchendaele; actually he seems to have acted bravely and conscientiously in both these difficult crises, and the causes of failure were quite different.

To the troops of the 36th Battalion, resting at the head of the valley south of the town, the first notice of any trouble was the retirement through them, from 4.15 onwards, of British infantry, some of them without arms or equipment, who said that the Germans were coming on "in thousands." The companies of the 36th were already in position, Captain Bushelle's⁶⁴ on the left, Major Rodd's⁶⁵ in the centre, with Captain Tedder's⁶⁶ somewhat behind them on the right. By what seemed like a spontaneous movement on the part of the troops themselves, they now spread out behind the lip of the plateau and fixed their bayonets. They knew well that they must counter-attack, and asked the British to stay and join with them. The retiring troops, however, had passed the limit of their endurance, and efforts to rally them were fruitless.

General Wood of the 55th Brigade at the Monument Farm had heard of the withdrawal of the front line a little

⁶¹ Morshead had ordered Captain Fry of his own battalion to post Lewis guns so as to command all the roads into the village. Fry afterwards rejoined the 33rd.

⁶² See Vol. III, pp. 446-7.

⁶³ Vol. IV, pp. 921-3.

⁶⁴ Capt. J. E. W. Bushelle, M.C.; 36th Bn. Station overseer; of Sydney; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 3 May, 1892. Killed in action, 6 April, 1918.

⁶⁵ Lieut.-Col. B. B. Rodd, V.D.; 36th Bn. Insurance company manager; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 24 March, 1879.

⁶⁶ Capt. O. J. O. Tedder, 36th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Stanmore, N.S.W.; b. Young, N.S.W., 25 Dec., 1887.

earlier, an officer who was watching at an upper window having informed him at 4 o'clock that he could see the Germans advancing from the Marcelcave-Démuin road near Lancer Wood, and, soon after, that the whole British line was retiring. Wood had forthwith sent back his headquarters, but had ordered three companies of the 7th Queen's to form up in rear of Monument Wood for counter-attack, and himself stayed to organise the effort. At that juncture, however, the German artillery concentrated its fire upon the copse. Some of the outbuildings began to burn. The Queen's broke back, many of them passing through the 36th. A rattle of German machine-guns swelled out, and their fire was sweeping the crest at the head of the valley when Colonel Milne arrived, out of breath with running from Goddard's headquarters, and gave the order, "Company commanders to assemble at the double." One of his officers, Lieutenant Mailer,⁶⁷ who had just hurried across from the 33rd Battalion, told him that a party of British engineers on the railway bridge had asked if it was time to blow up the bridge. "It is all right, I'm watching things," said Milne.

A glance over the open country as he came had shown Milne clearly the direction in which his counter-attack must be made. Goddard's order was to advance astride of the railway cutting, but Milne perceived at once that it was south of the railway, by the Monument Farm and Wood, just ahead of his battalion, that the German onrush was taking place. He could see the enemy actually reaching the farm and beginning to fire across his front at a battery of British horse artillery far advanced at a cross-road half-a-mile to the south. Another battery was in the head of the valley immediately behind the 36th. The southern battery was engaged in a duel with the German infantry, and its teams were galloping up from the Bois l'Abbé to pull it out. Beside the railway itself the company of the 6th London, sent by General Wood to support the 7th Buffs, was retiring slowly, and some of the Buffs were being rallied. But south of them the farm and plateau were open and the Germans were flooding over the country. Milne therefore decided to attack with his whole

⁶⁷ Lieut. H. R. Mailer, 36th Bn. Farmer; of Trundle, N.S.W.; b. Coonamble, N.S.W., 31 May, 1893.

battalion south of the railway towards the Monument Farm and Wood. Speed was the chief requirement. As soon as his company commanders reached him, he gave them his verbal order:⁶⁸

The enemy has broken through in our immediate front and we must counter-attack at once. Bushelle, your company will be on the left. Rodd, "B" Company will be in the centre. Tedder, "C" Company will take the right, and I shall send immediately to the C.O. of the Queen's and ask him to co-operate. Bushelle, your left flank will rest on the railway embankment. The 35th are on the other side. Attack in one wave. "D" Company, under Captain Gadd, I shall hold you in reserve here in the sunken road. Get ready. There's no time to waste.

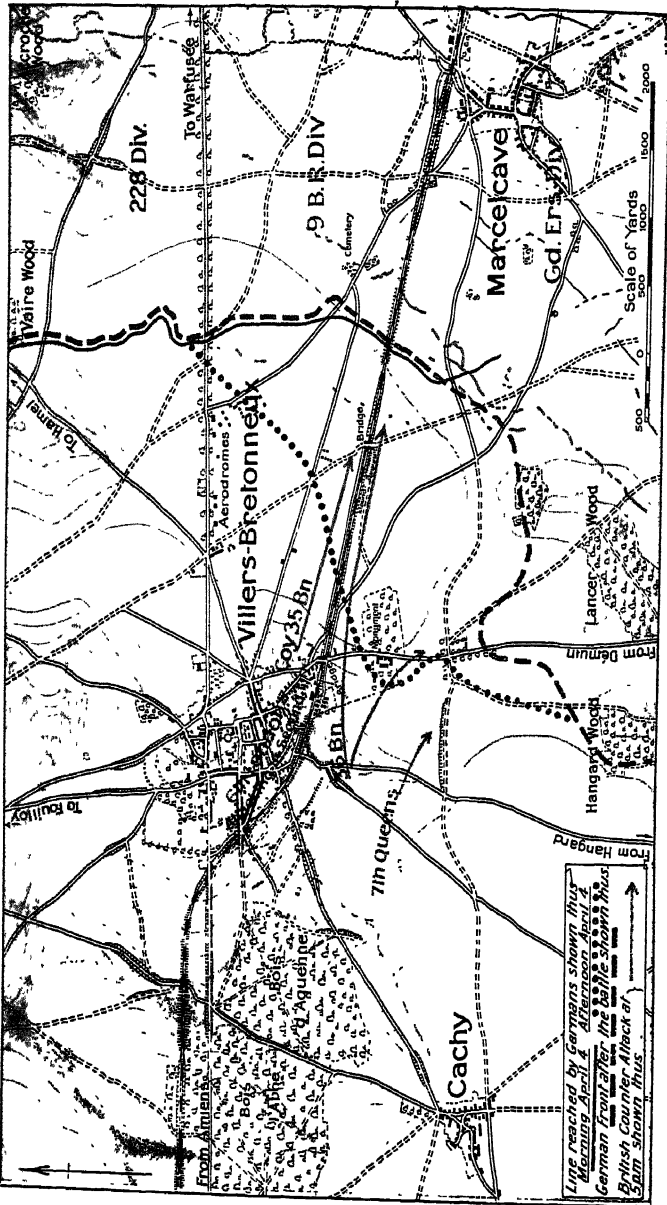
Captain Bushelle asked: "How far shall we go?"

"Go till you're stopped," replied Milne, "and hold on at all costs."

The attack-companies had already thrown off their overcoats and other surplus gear, but, while they were charging their magazines and making final preparations, Milne walked along the line. "Good-bye, boys. It's neck or nothing," he said. The companies moved off, Captain Tedder's starting a little behind the others and hurrying up on the right. Meanwhile, looking towards where the 7th Queen's should be, Milne saw a stoutly built figure, with overcoat and walking stick, rallying some British troops farther south on the same road. He sent his adjutant to ask the officer to join the 36th's right flank and help its advance. The adjutant found that it was Brigadier-General Wood himself rallying two companies of the Queen's. Wood agreed heartily, and, when the 36th advanced, forward went these companies, about 180 strong, on their flank. A similar request was made to the officer rallying the Buffs, but was declined.

Moving at a jog-trot, the 36th quickly passed the crest, and, as it did so, came in view of the advancing Germans who were at that moment emerging, apparently in five waves, from the Monument Wood, a quarter of a mile away. The pace of the 36th especially of Bushelle's company, was very

⁶⁸ This order is recorded by R.S.M. A. R. Horwood (Newcastle, N.S.W., and Melbourne), who was beside Milne, and wrote it out from memory some months later. Horwood had just previously been across to the Monument Farm in search of ammunition for his battalion.



FIRST VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, 4TH APRIL, 1918

The positions held by British and Germans before the battle are indicated by the red and blue trenches respectively.

fast, and at the sight of this grim line the enemy at once hesitated, and then turned and ran back into the wood.

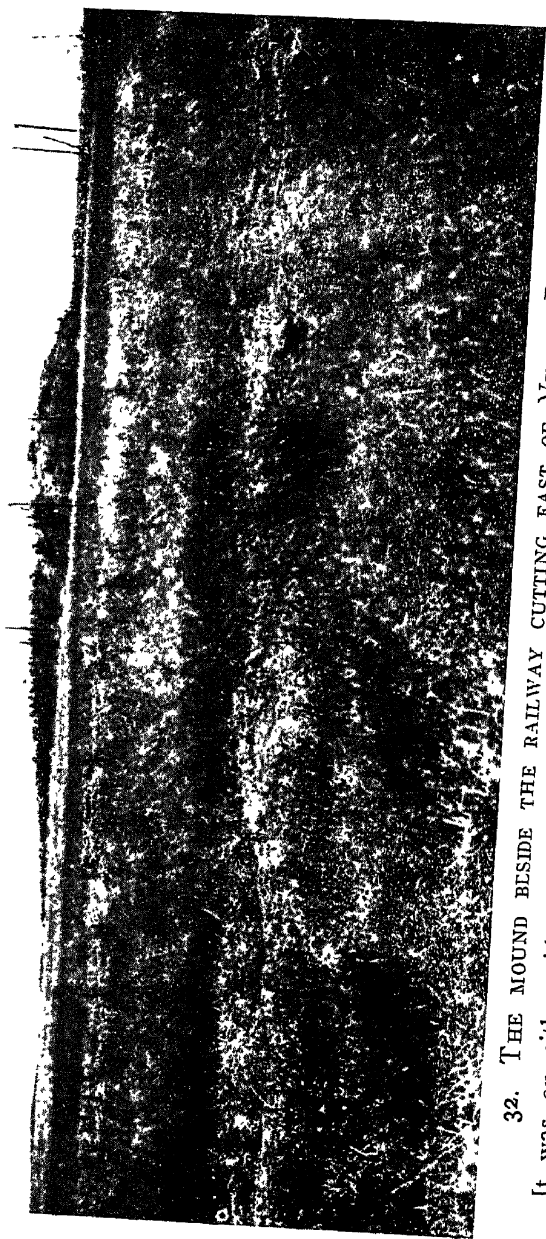
Meanwhile Captain Sayers of the 35th had run with Captain Connell to the railway bridge outside the south-eastern edge of the town, and thence went forward beside the cutting. They could see no Germans anywhere north of the railway, but numbers south of it, to the right front; and, nearer, a British officer and about 80 men walking rearwards south of the railway from a trench that they had been holding. Connell shouted across, asking the officer what he was doing. He answered that the troops on the right had retired. Connell said a counter-attack was coming, and asked him to wait. The officer and his men—probably the detached company of the 6th London—at once turned back and re-entered their trench. Milne was then getting the 36th into position, and a few hundred yards south of the bridge the nearest Germans were advancing. Connell waited while Sayers ran back into the village and led out his company. They came very quickly, and Connell helped Sayers to extend them immediately north of the railway. Germans could now be seen for the first time north of the railway also, rather more than half-a-mile ahead, and others on a long scrubby spoil-heap that rose along the southern side of the railway cutting west of the second bridge. As Sayers led off his company he saw the 36th, south of the railway cutting and well behind his right, move off also in artillery formation. When he had gone a hundred yards, the Germans ahead of him, who till then had been advancing towards him, stopped. Those on the mound settled down in good cover overlooking the whole plateau east of the town. They were presently seen mounting machine-guns there.

While the counter-attack thus advanced at swift pace, Sayers' company north and the 36th south of the railway, Captain Connell on his way back to the town met two companies of the 6th London coming out of it. He set them to advance several hundred yards behind the Australians. This they very willingly did, and, with the two other companies of the same battalion advancing also south of the railway, they formed (as Colonel Benson afterwards reported) "a second wave" of the counter-attack. Ahead



31. THE REGION WHERE THE COUNTER-ATTACK OF 4TH APRIL, 1918, ENDED
A shell is bursting against the mound beside the railway. The bridge can be
seen farther to the left. The trenches shown were made long after the fighting
described in this chapter (The direction of Bushelle's and Sayers' advance is
shown by white arrows)

Photographed from the air by No 3 Squadron, A.F.C., on 16th July, 1918. To face p. 142



32. THE MOUND BESIDE THE RAILWAY CUTTING EAST OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX
It was on either side of this mound that the counter-attacks of Captains Bushelle and Sayers ended.

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo. No. E2685
Taken on 10th July, 1918.*

at the cross-roads 200 yards south of the farm precincts. The fire of this gun was especially galling to the Queen's on the right flank, and deadly to the right of the 36th, which was forced to ground. At the same time Bushelle's and Rodd's companies, though farther forward, were held up by fire from the wood and from the haystack north of it. For the moment it looked as though the whole movement might be coming to a stop, and Major Rodd, seeing Bushelle a hundred yards to his left front, sent a messenger to him with a view to resuming the advance. An answer came back to the effect that he need not worry—the advance would go on. At this stage Rodd was severely wounded by a shot from the haystack, and after giving directions, as he lay on the ground, handed the control of his men to a sergeant. Bushelle carried forward the left, and the Germans in the wood, finding themselves out-flanked, began to run back in increasing numbers.

Meanwhile, near the southern corner of the orchard, the right company lay out of touch with the centre, and with only one officer left. But this youngster, Lieutenant Amess, was troubled with the same fear lest the attack might stop. He sent a runner to the nearest part of the centre company, which was held up 300 yards to his left, and himself went over to the Queen's in his right rear, to urge them to come up into alignment and then join in advancing past the wood. Three of his runners were killed, and Amess himself was hit for the second time by a sniper from Monument Farm; but he continued to lead and, by his arrangement, the three groups—centre, right, and extreme right—constantly gave covering fire while one or the other of them ran forward to fling itself down and give covering fire in its turn. They could see the Germans reinforcing from the depression to the south-east, near Lancer Wood, carrying machine-guns and settling behind the poplars. But the advance of Bushelle's company past the north of the farm and wood was now telling. The Germans in the wood broke back, leaving several of their machine-guns; and with this help, and advancing in the manner described, the right of the 36th under Amess managed to get past the difficult obstacle of the farm enclosures.

once. The higher commanders, to whom the occurrence was reported, having themselves spread those warnings, could only accord to the lance-corporal's action at such a time their entire support and approval. But there was found on the dead stranger no definite evidence whatever that he was German, and it seems all too possible that he was not, and that the rough justice of his end was one of the million minor tragedies of the war.⁷⁶

The front line was all too thin, and Milne was exceedingly anxious. Early in the night Lieutenant Amess, after being again hit, was half-carried by his batman to Milne's headquarters, and, though painfully wounded, was retained by Milne for a long and close examination as to the situation. Eventually with great reluctance Milne put his only reserve company, under Captain Gadd, into the remaining gap.⁷⁷ The 36th's left had driven back the Germans for at least a mile, and its right for nearly half-a-mile. The front was firmly held, but there was nothing behind it.

North of the railway cutting Sayers' company of the 35th advanced with equal success. The Germans immediately ahead of it numbered not more than 100. As the company approached some of them ran. Lieutenant Thompson⁷⁸ was wounded by a German at fifteen yards' range. Captain Sayers leapt among three of the enemy in a shell-hole; he hit one of them on the head with the man's own steel helmet, strangled the second, and the third escaped. The attack was now approaching the second railway bridge east of the village. The Germans ahead could evidently see the approach of the 36th, for some of them began to jump up and run back. Others from the 36th's front were running across the bridge to the northern side, and also established themselves strongly on the spoil-heap on the southern side of the cutting. Sayers' advance ended a little short of the bridge. North of him was the ground that had been held after the

⁷⁶ A few days later there reached the troops a general routine order (from G.H.Q.) saying that in a number of cases it had been established that orders, "at first attributed to enemy agents," had "in fact been given by British messengers, who had either really believed what they said to be true or else were affected with panic." The bearers were, in future, to be taken to the nearest officer in command and arrested by him, if necessary.

⁷⁷ This company's advance in the dark had to be most carefully carried out, there being hardly any guiding mark whatever and the ground being unknown.

⁷⁸ Lieut. T. E. Thompson, 35th Bn. Miner; of Weston, N.S.W.; b. Etherley, Durham, Eng., 19 Nov., 1893.

morning's fight by the companies of the 33rd, and, farther north, by the cavalry. Here, although the withdrawal of the 35th had at first spread to the two companies of the 33rd that were mingled with it, Captain Smith, commanding the more northerly of these, succeeded in holding his own men and stopping the movement from spreading farther northwards. As, however, the southern flank had gone and Germans could presently be seen moving to the second railway bridge, it was decided that the 33rd should swing back slowly to a position nearer to the town. This movement had been begun before Sayers' counter-attack emerged from the town. But besides Sayers' attack, two other independent movements were on foot, either of which would have rectified the position in that area.

First, Colonel Morshead of the 33rd, bearing Colonel Goddard's verbal authority to find the 34th and throw it in, came upon that battalion on the north-western outskirts of the town. It had just received from Colonel Goddard a second order to withdraw, this time across the railway, apparently to the line through Bois l'Abbé, but first to consult with the commander of the 6th Cavalry Brigade. Morshead directed Major Fry to come forward with him round the north of the town with a view to securing the front east of it.

Second, the commander of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, being informed that the Australian line was withdrawing, had sent an urgent appeal for help to the 7th Cavalry Brigade, then on its way from Boves. The 17th Lancers being sent to him, its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Melvill,⁷⁹ was asked to take a squadron and two machine-guns and ascertain the position and form a defensive flank, if necessary. Melvill has described the incident:⁸⁰

As we rode over the brow of the hill, I had no idea what we were going to do or what we were going to find. An amazing sight then burst into view. There were Australians as far as the eye could see, retiring in perfect order as on an Aldershot Field Day, with our dismounted cavalry doing likewise. About half a mile to our right the main Amiens Road divided them.⁸¹ I could see no signs of the enemy,

⁷⁹ Col. T. P. Melvill, D.S.O. Commanded 17th Lancers, 1916/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Bournemouth, Eng.; b. Castle Barracks, Cape Town, S. Africa, 13 Feb., 1877.

⁸⁰ In *Pomies and Women*, pp. 103-5.

⁸¹ The war diary of the 17th Lancers says that on reaching the crest "it was seen that the Australians were going forward again, but the line north of the road was retiring." The forward movement to the south was probably Sayers' counter-attack.

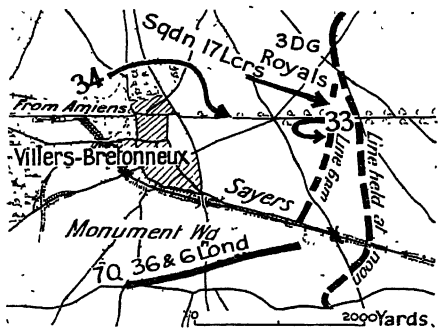
nor any apparent reason for the retirement. Behind me was Micholls's⁸² squadron in line of troop columns well opened out. . . . On our side of the road I noticed a biggish gap in the line, and for this I headed. As the retiring troops saw us pass through them, the whole line appeared to halt, as if with surprise at what they saw, then mechanically turn about and advance. It was a wonderful moment.

Although no Germans could be seen, we knew full well that they couldn't be far off, and the men behind me were fiddling with their lances in the hope of a chance to charge.

We were nominally galloping, but the going was so heavy . . . that it was in reality only a canter. Nevertheless, we soon found ourselves ahead of our own infantry, and we met a burst of machine-gun fire which emptied three or four saddles. Seeing a quarry⁸³ a couple of hundred yards ahead, I took our leading squadron to shelter in it, there joining hands with Billy Miles⁸⁴ and his dismounted squadron of The Royals.

At the quarry I dismounted, scrambled up the cliff-like edge on the German side, and peeped over.

Once more I was dumbfounded. It looked as if the whole German army was advancing unmolested in extended order across the plain, while on the road itself masses of troops marched in column of route.



Melville there sent back the horses,⁸⁵ and ordered up a second squadron with tools. Meanwhile the 33rd Battalion had leapt at the chance of turning and again advancing with the cavalry.

Seeing them gallop into action (reported Morshead) with swords and lances drawn, and moving quickly to where help was most needed, enthused our men tremendously. It is an honour to fight alongside such gallant troops.

All the Hotchkiss guns of The Royals and Lancers at the quarry suddenly opened, at a signal from Melville, upon the

⁸² Major M. G. Micholls, 17th Lancers. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. London, 2 July, 1881.

⁸³ The quarry was actually no more than a bank immediately east of some buildings north of the road.

⁸⁴ Lieut.-Col. E. W. T. Miles, M.C.; The Royals. Officer of British Regular Army; of Kington Langley, Chippenham, Wilts., Eng.; b. Chelsea, London, 25 Jan., 1884.

⁸⁵ Half-a-dozen horses were afterwards kept in shelter of the houses, and were killed in the bombardment next morning.

Germans. About the same time there arrived three cars of a Canadian motor machine-gun battery lent by the IX Corps and hurriedly sent up to defend Villers-Bretonneux. An uproar of machine-guns arose. The advancing Germans went hurriedly to ground. The 33rd, reaching the eastern edge of the nearer aerodrome, also opened fire. Another squadron of the Lancers was brought up, and touch was gained with Sayers, whose counter-attack had been made shortly before. Morshead, after coming round the village with Major Fry and the two leading companies of the 34th, happened to meet Colonel Burt of the 3rd Dragoon Guards (the commander of that section of the line) on the Roman road 500 yards east of the town. Burt arranged to cover the advance of the 34th to the line east of Villers-Bretonneux; but the front was now so quiet that the infantry had merely to walk into position.

A continuous line, albeit a thin one, had thus been re-established north as well as south of the railway. Colonel

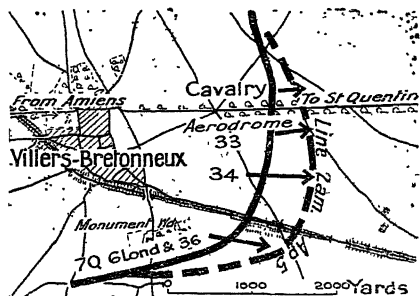
Night Advance— Burt was of opinion that the advance should
and After be continued to the trenches held during the morning, beyond the second aerodrome.

But, as the railway bridge and the spoil heap were seen to be occupied by the enemy and would be in rear of those trenches, Morshead feared that the troops would be shot out of the position, and the notion was temporarily abandoned. It was, however, decided immediately to reorganise the front, putting in the 34th next to the railway, moving the 33rd down next to it, south of the Roman road, and leaving the northern side of the road to the cavalry. General Watts of the XIX Corps had decided during the afternoon that the 14th Division was not in a condition to hold the line, and at 5 p.m. headquarters of the 3rd Cavalry Division was ordered to take control of its front, but was to be relieved as soon as possible by the 5th Australian Division (then at Acheux, north-west of Albert). The two reserve battalions of the 15th Australian Brigade (5th Division) from Bonnavy were already crossing the Somme at Fouilloy and taking over the left of the sector on the ridge leading down from Hill 104 to the Somme west

of Hamel. The 8th and 14th Australian Brigades were to hurry down forthwith.

Meanwhile Brigadier-General Rosenthal had come up to Villers-Bretonneux. He had left his headquarters at Gentelles on hearing, at 5.30, that numbers of stragglers, including some from his own brigade, were streaming back past the 9th Field Ambulance in Bois l'Abbé. After detaching Major Pain, his brigade major, to collect the stragglers, he went, in search of the 34th, around the north of the village, and thence up to Captain Sayers' position in the front line. It was by then dark, but he was impressed by the fact that the front line lay in a dip, overlooked by the railway mound. Returning to the village, where Goddard's headquarters had been reoccupied, he conferred with the battalion commanders and decided that the line must be advanced at once beyond the second railway bridge. The main task—the advance to, and north of, the bridge—would be undertaken by the 34th Battalion, part of which had not yet been engaged. The other battalions would move forward their fronts simultaneously.

This advance was made an hour after midnight, without any barrage. It was unopposed until the line reached the bridge. Here the right company of the 34th was fired on by Germans behind its right flank, between itself and the 36th. They were quickly fought down, and others fled leaving on the Mound and elsewhere twelve machine-guns, from four of which they had removed the breech-blocks. The 33rd and the left company of the 34th had sharp fighting at the second aerodrome, but seized the old support line beyond it. Farther north the



cavalry also advanced. Farther still, down near the Somme, the 15th Australian Brigade, after taking over the northern

half of the 3rd Cavalry Division's line, sent patrols as far as Bouzencourt, a hamlet opposite Sailly-le-Sec and just north of Hamel. It was found to be held by the Germans, and before dawn the 11th Field Company of the 3rd Division, which held the northern bank of the river there, blew up the Bouzencourt bridge.

German records show that the crisis in the afternoon was due to a successful thrust in the Luce valley area by the 78th I.R. (19th Division), which, put in after the Guard Ersatz Division had twice failed, and itself failing at the first attempt, at the second attempt drove back part of the 18th British Division and eventually, by dusk, took the greater part of Hangard Wood. Apparently the afternoon's effort was planned on similar lines to that of the morning, being preceded, at the intended points of rupture, by an intense bombardment lasting from 3 to 4 o'clock. The advance of the 9th Bavarian Reserve Division, opposite the Australians and the Buffs, was timed for 4.30, by which hour the 78th I.R. was through and the British line was in retreat. It was the 14th Bavarian I.R. that advanced between the Roman road and the railway, and met Captain Sayers' counter-attack. The 3rd Bavarian Ersatz I.R. crossed the railway and attacked Monument Wood, with the 11th Bavarian R.I.R. on its southern flank at the cross-road south of the Monument. The 11th was the only one of the three that held, or nearly held, its gains, the other two being forced back by the counter-attack to the old French defence-line. The retirement was checked by the bringing up of the 11/6th Guard I.R. (Guard Ersatz Division) from Wiencourt.

On the British side, with the 9th Australian Brigade and the cavalry, in spite of their considerable casualties,⁸⁸ holding the line from the Monument northwards, the fear of the Germans succeeding by direct attack on Villers-Bretonneux was much abated, but keen anxiety was felt as to the line farther south. Colonel Milne's long front—from beyond the second railway bridge to a point south of the Monument—was strengthened by transferring the southern company of the 34th to his side of the railway. Though this flank reached back for a mile, signs of the enemy's presence could be seen even farther to the south-west. How far the line there had been driven Milne did not know, nor, indeed, did the higher commanders. Actually, the enemy had seized not only Lancer but most of Hangard Wood, and the French had been thrust to the western outskirts of Hangard village. At Hangard Wood the thin line was reinforced at dusk by the 11th Royal

⁸⁸ The 9th Australian Infantry Brigade lost 30 officers and 631 others (for the details, see p. 354), and the 7th Cavalry Brigade 10 officers and 157 others. The 17th Lancers lost 2 officers and 21 others. The casualties of the 6th Cavalry Brigade are not stated in the available records.

Fusiliers, but, although a counter-attack was ordered, none could be made. Farther south when, early in the night, the French retook Hangard, the 54th Brigade swung forward on their northern flank, and 250 Germans and numerous machine-guns were captured. At one time part of the line at Hangard Wood fell back,⁸⁷ but was led forward again. The portion of the 7th Queen's on Milne's flank was completely worn out, and he arranged with its staunch commander to relieve it at 3 a.m. by a company of the 6th London, which was really Wood's own reserve, but which by force or circumstances and the willing spirit of itself and its commander, had acted under Milne's direction during the critical hours.

On this flank, therefore, the night was a most anxious one. The 36th and 6th London spent it in digging their line of posts beyond the Monument Wood, while the headquarters batmen, police, signallers, and gas personnel brought up ammunition and tools and carried away the wounded. At the 9th Field Ambulance in the Bois l'Abbé, Lieutenant-Colonel Jolley,⁸⁸ seeing the retreat in the afternoon along the Amiens road, and hearing from the retiring men a report that the village was isolated,⁸⁹ had sent Captain McLean⁹⁰ to make arrangements to clear the wounded. McLean galloped into the town and found there the medical officers of the 33rd and 35th, Captains Mailer⁹¹ and Thomas, with a cellar full of wounded. These two had tried to get touch with Goddard's headquarters and, finding it gone, had decided to stay on and, if necessary, be taken prisoners along with the wounded. McLean arranged to pick up the casualties after dark on the edge of the village, bringing up every form of transport that could be secured. Two big lorries, a number of motor- and horse-ambulances, limbers, and general service waggons were obtained. Splinters of glass in the village streets punctured half the tyres, and the procession over the cobble-stones made the noise of "a column of tanks"; but the wounded were

⁸⁷ Lieut.-Col. R. E. Dewing of the 8th Royal Berkshire had been killed in a counter-attack by that battalion there.

⁸⁸ Lieut.-Col. A. F. Jolley, A.A.M.C. Commanded 9th Fld. Amb., 1918. Medical practitioner; of South Yarra and Bendigo, Vic.; b. Windsor, Vic., 2 Nov., 1888.

⁸⁹ Australian soldiers were collected at the field ambulance and were soon afterwards led to the front by the brigade major (Major Pain).

⁹⁰ Capt. (tempy. Major) K. A. McLean, M.C.; A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Dandenong, Vic., 11 Oct., 1892.

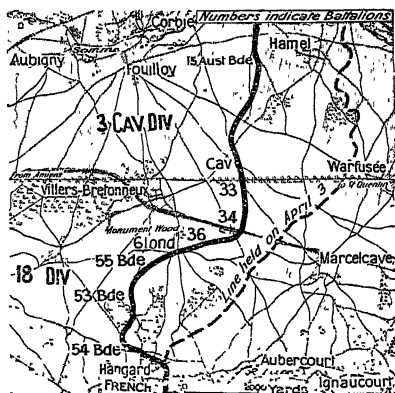
⁹¹ Major M. H. Mailer, M.C.; A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Moreland, Vic.; b. Carlton, Vic., 17 Aug., 1893

duly cleared some five miles down the Amiens road, beside which they were eventually unloaded on to the contents of some haystacks spread out for their reception. Some 700 are said to have been cleared by dawn.

Up in the front the night drew to an end without attack from the enemy, but when the troops were standing to arms in the grey of morning of April 5th Captain Gadd near the right of the 36th, turning his glasses towards the right, saw there a great movement of Germans from behind Hangard Wood marching northwards, across the British front and barely half-a-mile distant from it. The force, which looked to Captain Gadd like "a division in mass"—with officers leading on horseback and men in marching order with full packs—opened out, swung westwards to the railway, and then, at 800 yards' distance, formed left as if to attack the front held by the 36th. The Australian Lewis gunners opened, but no attack followed, the enemy apparently only attempting throughout the day to dig himself in behind a screen of outposts and snipers. The men of the 36th employed themselves shooting at all this movement, picking off machine-gun crews as they set up their guns, and shooting down trench-mortarmen who tried, wheel by wheel, to emplace a heavy trench-mortar. Under keen sniping the movement of Germans gradually ceased.

Nor, although they observed much movement and were for a time strongly shelled, did the 34th and 33rd north of the railway cutting observe any attack. But shortly after 1 p.m. both the 6th Cavalry Brigade and the 15th Australian Infantry Brigade, holding the line between the Roman road and the Somme, reported that the Germans, after

bombarding heavily for three-quarters of an hour,⁹² had advanced about 11.10 over the Bois de Vaire ridge. While



⁹² In this bombardment the 57th Battalion, near Hamel, suffered 52 casualties Lieutenant P. F. Nicholson (Essendon, Vic.) was killed.

on its sky-line, more than half-a-mile away, they were caught by artillery and machine-guns and were quickly shot back to their starting point. In the afternoon a strong party, endeavouring to reach Vaire, was routed and narrowly escaped capture through the enterprise of the post—four men strong—covering Lieutenant Hanna's machine-gun⁹³

The movement thus stopped was an attempt made by order of the Second German Army, which on the evening of April 4 had directed that the success of the previous day should be followed up by continuing the attack next day along the whole front in co-operation with an effort—already ordered—by the Seventeenth Army farther north. The XIV Corps was to push on to Fouilloy, outflanking Villers-Bretonneux on the north; the XI Corps was similarly to push past it on the south, putting in the 24th Division for the purpose⁹⁴

In the XI Army Corps this order—with which the movements seen by the 36th Battalion, A.I.F., may possibly have been connected—was eventually countermanded. The XIV Corps, however, had underrated the toughness of its opponents, and issued to the 228th Division an order impossible of fulfilment, to "place itself tonight (April 4/5) in possession of Hill 104; the 1st and 228th Divisions will move at 5.30 a.m. to attack or follow up the beaten enemy." But the seizure of Hill 104 by night attack without careful artillery preparation was, as the historian of the 48th I.R. says, "out of the question." Accordingly the plan was changed and the attempt was made at 11 on the 5th after an hour's intense bombardment. The brigades of the 16th Field Artillery Regiment had been brought up during the night to the two woods, and orders were given to direct fire chiefly upon the machine-gun nests at Villers-Bretonneux and Hill 104. But, as constantly happened when the positions attacked had been newly taken up, the shooting, despite its intensity, missed its objects. In the 228th Division the 48th I.R. found the opposing artillery and machine-gun fire too strong to permit of any progress. When the 35th Fusilier (228th Division) attempted to advance, "there poured out immediately upon the skirmishers such a hail of fire from machine-guns half-left that they had to lie down and dig in 100-150 metres from the jumping-off trench." Of the 1st Division, which was brought up to attack through the 4th Guard Division, both the 1st and 3rd Grenadier Regiments were barely able to get past their jumping-off lines.⁹⁵ The attack was broken off. Later an order was issued to renew it at 6 p.m., but this was cancelled by another order postponing the operation.

Of the German casualties in the operations described in this chapter, the available records give only those for two of the regiments that attacked Hamel—the 5th Guard Grenadier, which lost 6 officers and 272 others, and the 5th Foot Guard, which lost 10 officers and 210. In the same sector on April 5 the 35th Fusilier lost 8 officers and 179 others and the II/3rd Grenadier (1st Division) had 21 casualties. The German losses on the Australian front are not shown.

⁹³ See pp. 327-8. The incident is described on pp. 526-7.

⁹⁴ The army had several other divisions in reserve, the 15th, 20th, 54th, and 208th. The 200th (in O.H.L. Reserve) was ordered to rest at Froyart.

⁹⁵ *History of the 35th Fusilier Regiment*, p. 282.

The 9th Brigade in this fight lost 30 officers and 635 men.⁹⁶

Doubtless it was the desire to get Hill 104 that induced the Germans on April 5th to attack on the slope towards the Somme, but they had struck where the line was strongest. It was most urgent for the British command to relieve the overstrained troops south of Villers-Bretonneux, and G.H.Q. did this with more Australian troops from north of the Somme. On the night of April 4th, as the 2nd Australian Division was arriving in the Third Army area from Flanders, G.H.Q. diverted to the Fourth Army its leading brigade, the 5th.⁹⁷ For that night the brigade was put into the reserve line⁹⁸ north-west of Villers-Bretonneux, under the 14th Division; but immediately afterwards it was ordered to support the 18th Division farther south, and, later, to relieve the troops of that division and, under control of its staff, to prepare to retake the position lost on April 4th. The 9th Australian Brigade would co-operate on its left. As reserve for the southern half of the line, the XIX Corps detached from the 5th Australian Division its 8th Brigade, and ordered it to move to Boves, in readiness to relieve the 24th Division in the reserve line there. In the northern sector the 5th Australian Division was, during the afternoon of April 5th, ordered to relieve the 3rd Cavalry Division. The Fourth Army's front would thus, by the morning of the 6th, be held entirely by Australian troops.

The German offensive of April 4th, though it failed in its object, had driven back the Fourth British Army on its whole front, and at some points for nearly two miles. Immediately to the south, the XXXVI French Corps, which had taken the place of the Mesple Group on the British right, was driven back for as much as two miles beyond the Avre, west of Moreuil, the Germans capturing part of the Bois de Sénécât, from the eastern edge of which the outskirts of

⁹⁶ The strength of the 9th Brigade engaged was probably some 2,250. The detailed casualties were:

33rd Bn., 3 officers, 82 others.

34th Bn., 5 officers, 120 others.

35th Bn., 9 officers, 282 others (including 44 missing).

36th Bn., 12 officers, 133 others (including 1 missing).

9th M.G. Coy., 1 officer, 18 others (including 4 missing).

⁹⁷ This brigade had reached Allonville, behind the 4th Division, on the previous night. Another brigade of the division was ordered to relieve the 104th British guarding the Somme bridges.

⁹⁸ Locally known as the "Aubigny Line."

Amiens were visible. But here the deep penetration was only at one point, and, with French reinforcements steadily arriving, the danger had probably been less than at Villers-Bretonneux, the capture of which might, at the lowest estimate, have influenced the whole remainder of the spring campaign. The averting of this danger on this occasion must be credited largely to the 3rd Cavalry Division and the 9th Australian Infantry Brigade. Concerning the afternoon's fighting Colonel Benson of the 6th London, himself a participant, reported:

The counter-attack of the 36th Battalion, A.I.F., was got under way very rapidly and efficiently. . . . The greatest credit is due to the O.C. of the 36th . . . who organised and launched the counter-attack, and to his battalion for the spirited way in which it was carried out. This officer undoubtedly retrieved a very awkward situation.

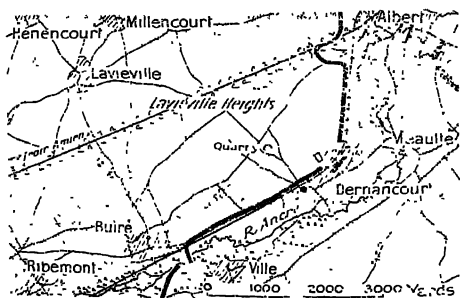
No one aware of the facts is likely to question that judgment. Milne's achievement was thoroughly recognised by Goddard and Rosenthal, but, before he could receive the full appreciation that was due to him, he was killed on April 12th by a shell which burst in his headquarters.

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF DERNANCOURT

ALTHOUGH the German effort to advance north of the Somme had not been renewed since March 30th on the 3rd Australian Division's front, or since March 28th on that of the 4th Division, the troops and commanders in that part of the line, like those farther north at Arras, daily expected to see it resumed.

The position of the 4th Division opposite Dernancourt was by no means an easy one to safeguard, and from the first the commanders responsible had been of two minds as to the best plan of defence. The reader will remember that in that sector the ground held was a salient comprising the prominent, mushroom-shaped end of the Laviéville down and the railway embankment and cutting that curved round its foot. The forward curve, brushing the outskirts of Dernancourt, was much the most difficult section, and it was recognised that, if the line there was breached, the railway embankment would be impossible to hold, inasmuch as an opponent penetrating anywhere could at once fire from the rear on the garrison of that salient. On the other hand it was considered important to hold the embankment, since, if it was not occupied, the enemy would be free to cross the Ancre and assemble large numbers in the ground hidden by the embankment, which was so high that from much of the ground held by the 4th Division all that could be seen of Dernancourt was its church tower and roofs.¹ But, if the troops on the embankment



¹ See Vol. XII, plate 462.

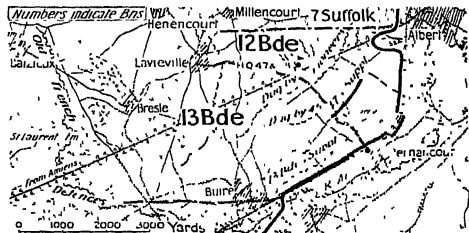
were attacked during the daytime, it would be impossible to send any reinforcement down the slope to them without almost annihilating loss, and if an attempt was made to withdraw them they were liable to be cut to pieces as they went up the slope. The obvious solution was—to hold the high ground in rear of the railway as the main position, but to keep outposts along the railway in order to deny it to the enemy unless he attacked in great strength.

This was undoubtedly the general principle behind the order given by Lieutenant-General Congreve to Major-General MacLagan when the 4th Division first arrived on March 27th, and further elaborated when the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade took over from the 35th Division the right sector, between Dernancourt and Buire. The order then ran:

The main line of resistance of the division will continue to be the forward slopes of the spurs running east and south towards the Ancre, and this line will continue to be covered by an outpost line along the railway line between Buire and Albert. The main line of defence will be designated the firing line and will be defended to the utmost, by counter-attack if necessary.

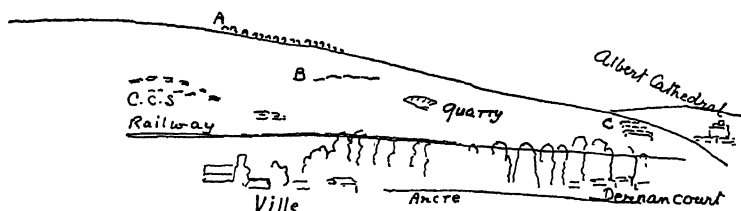
Great difficulty had, however, been caused by the fact that the position specified by Congreve for the main line was not at the upper edge of the slope, but more than half-way down the hillside—much farther, indeed, than the forward companies of the 12th Brigade had, in their first advance on March 27th, been able to attain. When on that day the two companies of the 47th attempted in daylight, as has already been described, to move down the forward slope to take up the support (*i.e.*, “main-line”) position as above specified, there had descended on them such a storm of shells and machine-gun fire that it was with difficulty that they reached the sunken road that circled the hillside, 500 yards short of the intended line. At the road the two companies had found and occupied what was known to them in their exercises in years before as the old French “practice trench”—an overgrown excavation running along the forward edge of the sunken road and in parts coinciding with the road itself. This was a most defective position, far too wide, without traverses, and, on the right, where the Laviéville-Dernancourt road ran through it, the view from it was shut out by a knuckle of the slope.

This support "trench", 1,100-1,400 yards behind the railway, was the defence relied on by the 47th in the event of the forward line giving way. Three hundred yards to its right rear, at the top of the slope, was an unoccupied trench, dug during the night after the brigade's arrival by the support battalion (45th) owing to warnings from VII Corps Headquarters that the 35th Division might be shaky. On the left the supports of the 48th on both sides of the ravine continued, though with a gap, the support line of the 47th. By a further order from General Congreve, a reserve trench had been dug by the 4th Pioneer Battalion 1,000 yards back from these, crossing the main height at a line drawn from Buire valley to the ravine near Albert, the object being to safeguard the rest of the height if the mushroom-shaped



end were lost. This "Pioneer Trench", which had been skilfully sited by the engineers at night and dug eight feet in depth and well traversed and fire-stepped, had an excellent field of fire at the top of the slope, and was so defensible that officers of the 47th in the support line wondered why it was not held as the main line of resistance and their difficult position a few hundred yards down the slope given up. A mile behind Pioneer Trench was a fifth line, of posts dug in front of Laviéville; and farther back, on the next chain of heights, the old French defence-line. In the less difficult sector held by the 13th Brigade, the 4th Pioneers had dug by night a support line consisting of a chain of posts along the lower part of the hillside, very much in advance of the alignment of the 12th Brigade's support line, being only 300 yards from the railway. These posts, being on an exposed slope, were not occupied, but the company to garrison them was held far behind on the rear slope, in the valley north of Buire.

Although the garrison of the railway opposite Dernancourt was nearly three-quarters of a mile from the infantry supports high on the hill behind, a number of machine-guns were, as usual, placed at intervals on the ground between. Positions on the slope, being difficult to find, four guns were stationed in a quarry or large chalk pit fairly in the middle of the slope, beside the Dernancourt-Laviéville road (the inter-brigade boundary), 800 yards above the railway. Four others were posted in a trench 350 yards to the left, both these batteries being 300 yards ahead of the support line of the 47th Battalion. In the 13th Brigade's sector two pairs of machine-guns were posted on the slope 600 yards above the front line, with a third pair towards the left in the front line and several others farther west. In the 12th Brigade the two larger batteries, whose positions on the central slope were held up like the bull's-eyes of targets before the German



- A. Trees on Main Road B. Sunken Road at Support line
C. Old Prisoners' Cage.

Heights east of Laviéville (seen from front of 3rd Aust.
Dirn. south of the Ancre).

artillery and machine-guns, had instructions that neither men nor guns were to be shown in daylight except in emergency. The guns therefore were normally only mounted at night, but if the S.O.S. signal was sent up, or if the infantry was driven back from the railway, it was the duty of the crews to accept all risks of exposure.

The railway embankment itself, held by a series of front-line posts, presented a peculiar problem for both the attacking and the defending sides. Its garrison was dug into the top

of the rear side of the bank. Their little one-man niches were difficult for the opposing artillery to hit; but the position was also difficult to defend, the only method as yet practicable being for the garrison to lie out on top of the embankment and fire over the nearest rail. To avoid this exposure and to secure command of the forward bank and of the ground immediately beyond it, parties of the 4th Pioneer Battalion had been set nightly both to tunnel and to sap forward under the rails, with the object of opening out small T-head trenches along the further crest of the embankment.

In the 12th Brigade's sector (Dernancourt to outskirts of Albert), the 47th and 48th Battalions had been relieved on the nights of March 29th and 30th by the 45th (N.S. Wales) and 46th (Victoria) respectively. The proximity of Dernancourt, with its back hedges almost touching the railway, was a cause of constant anxiety to the commanders and of constant interest for the troops, who looked straight into the village. To their surprise they noted that some old French people were still in it. On the afternoon of March 31st an old woman was seen at two points, carrying a bucket. Presently she appeared at the back door of a house near the eastern end.

She . . . pointed behind her as though the Germans were in her house (reported Captain Adams² of the 45th). We waved to her to come over, but she shook her head. She also appeared to be using very unladylike language, probably using insulting words.

As soon as it was dark Corporal Morgan,³ getting a Lewis gunner to cover him, led a patrol of four men to this house. Part of it had been smashed by a shell, but the rest was intact. The patrol tried the doors, but they were locked and no one inside could be aroused. By March 31st General MacLagan had decided that the concealment and shelter afforded to the Germans by the village created a danger too great to tolerate, and accordingly on the 31st arrangements were made

to destroy the village by shellfire at 5.30 p.m. tomorrow with a hurricane bombardment to last 15 minutes.

² Capt. W. G. Adams, D.S.O., M.C.; 45th Bn. Railway shed foreman; of Singleton, N.S.W.; b. Singleton, 25 Jan., 1897.

³ Cpl. R. Morgan, M.M. (No. 4517; 45th Bn.). Mailman; of Bathurst district, N.S.W.; b. Turondale, N.S.W., 12 Sept., 1896.

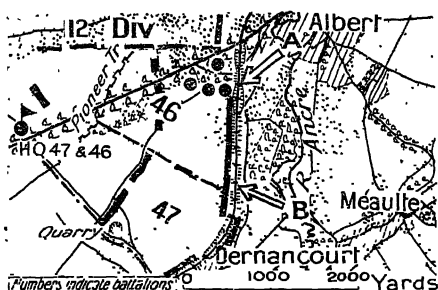
As the heavy artillery was afraid to throw its shells so close to its own infantry, part of the forward garrison was to be withdrawn to the flank before the bombardment, after which patrols would endeavour to enter the village. The shoot was duly carried out by all field-guns and some of the "heavies". After the quarter of an hour's inferno, the place lay unusually quiet, and, as soon as it was dusk, Lieutenant Young and a small party made their way towards the main street. They were immediately fired at through the archway of the first house, and found the Germans in strength along the street.

But somewhat strangely, although machine-guns and trench-mortars in the houses of Dernancourt caused annoyance, it was in the sub-sector of the northern battalion, between Dernancourt and Albert, that the enemy at this time showed most activity. On the morning of April 1st the northernmost company of the 46th was shelled by light artillery and trench-mortars, and immediately afterwards saw fifty Germans emerging from the hedgerows and trees and advancing towards a signal cabin near its last post on the railway. Behind the advancing troops was a rather larger covering party. Lieutenant Carter⁴ had his men already standing to arms, and such was the fire they turned upon the attack that it immediately withered. Five Germans were captured, a number were killed, and the rest, including the covering party, made back to shelter. The affair was over in ten minutes. Seeing a remnant of the enemy hiding in front, Corporal White⁵ of the 46th went out and bombed them, killing several and capturing another prisoner. They belonged to the assault detachment of the 3rd Naval Division, which, they said, had made the attack with the object of seizing part of the embankment and the signal house. The sky that day was full of German aeroplanes, and the diary of an Australian at Baizieux notes that "a full dress attack *must* come later."

⁴ Lieut. T. G. Carter, M.C.; 46th Bn. Grazier: of Barraba district, N.S.W.; b. Woolbrook, N.S.W., 24 May, 1891.

⁵ Cpl. J. J. White, D.C.M. (No. 1890; 46th Bn.). Of Arncliffe, N.S.W.; b. Rozelle, N.S.W., 1896.

Two days later, at the hour of the previous raid, the front of the 46th along the railway was again bombarded, on this occasion for ten minutes, and much more heavily, all kinds of light and medium artillery and trench-mortars eventually concentrating on it. On the firing of a green flare, a raiding force about half-a-company strong, extended in open order, emerged south of the



*A—Attack of April 1
B—Main Attack April 3*

wood near Vivier Mill and advanced towards the right company of the 46th. The moment the Victorians saw the movement, they clambered on to the track, and, most of them standing in order to clear the tall hedge beyond, poured rapid fire into the enemy behind whom a second half-company was now seen to be coming. The Australians standing on the railway furnished an easy target for German machine-guns firing from each flank, and for snipers, but went on shooting heedless of casualties. The Germans struggled on till a few were within bomb-throw, and then turned, and flinging away their arms and equipment, fled, as Captain Milne⁶ of the 46th reported, in "utter rout".

All were for chasing the enemy back to his former position, but I ordered a retirement to our side of the line owing to the casualties suffered by machine-gun fire from the right.

The 47th (Queensland), which had just returned and taken over from the 45th the sector opposite Dernancourt, helped to defeat the southern flank of this attack. Meanwhile German aeroplanes whirred overhead, and, on the northern flank, where the attempt had been made on April 1st, a smaller body advanced. "This crowd," wrote Milne, "were

⁶ Capt. G. E. Milne, M.C.: 46th Bn. Accountant; of Camberwell, Vic.; b. Hawthorn, Vic., 14 Dec., 1892. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

evidently a bit late in hopping over, and in consequence were easily mopped up." They had already fled back to some old trenches before the other force turned. This day the S.O.S. signal was fired by the forward companies and repeated by the supports; but the weather was murky, the posts were low, and neither signal was seen by the artillery above the smoke.

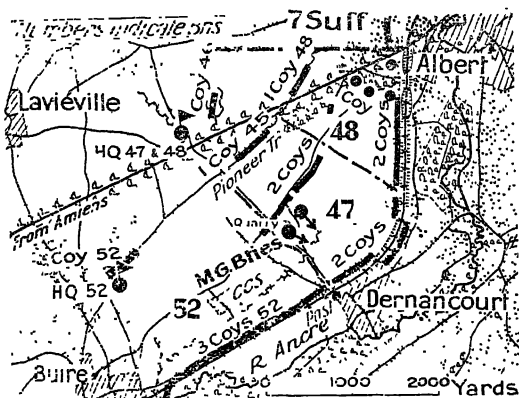
A prisoner of the I/1st Marine I.R., 3rd Naval Division, was taken, and German records show that the enterprise was a raid by that regiment against the railway. The embankment proved to be strongly held, and the raiders were therefore unable to blow up the dugouts there or carry out the other objects set for them.

The 46th suffered, chiefly through the bombardment, 51 casualties, including Lieutenant Jennings⁷ and 18 others killed. It is unlikely that the German casualties exceeded them.

These constant attacks and the great length of their front caused the battalion commanders to be apprehensive of garrisoning their forward line too weakly. The 4th Division's sector had been extended by taking over from the V Corps on the left a section of 500 yards including the Albert-Amiens road. Colonel Imlay of the 47th still held his front—now about a mile in length—with two companies, and kept two in the support trenches. But the 46th kept two along its 1,100 yards of railway, and a third bent back in platoon posts around the grassy ravine into the northern side of which the main road dipped near Albert. And when, on the night of April 3rd, the 48th (South and Western Australia) relieved the 46th, Colonel Leane, though always marked for his disinclination to crowd troops on his front, asked his brigadier's approval for keeping three companies there. His battalion, after its first innings, was too weak, he said, to hold its 2,200 yards of front line with less. His fourth company he kept in support in Pioneer Trench, and a company of the 46th allotted to him was held in trenches near his headquarters on the top of the down. Colonel Imlay

⁷ Lieut. W. H. Jennings, 46th Bn. Civil servant; of Newbridge, Vic.; b. Arnold's Bridge, Vic., 1890. Killed in action, 3 April, 1918.

(47th) had similarly a company of the 45th for reserve, stationed in Pioneer Trench. In the 13th Brigade's sector, the 52nd Battalion (Queensland and Tasmania) held the front line — 2,500



yards along the railway, from Buire to Dernancourt railway bridge—with three companies, while its fourth company, as has been mentioned, was in the Buire valley, ready to occupy support posts on the forward slope.

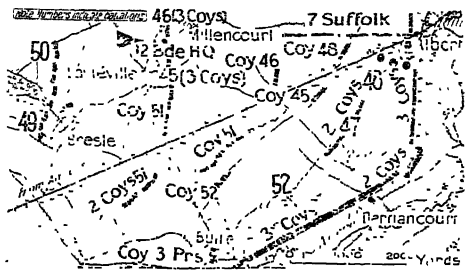
Such was the tenure of the Dernancourt front when, on April 4th, General MacLagan decided that the plan of defence might now safely be changed.

In view of the increased strength of the outpost line along the railway since its occupation by the division (he ordered) . . . the present outpost line on the railway is to be considered the main line of resistance of the division. . .

In making this decision, he felt some anxiety lest the British division on his left might be driven in, allowing the Germans to reach the height immediately behind his men. He therefore laid down a proviso that, if the Germans penetrated the line north of his division, the commanders of his forward troops might, if necessary, even without referring to him, decide to withdraw their line and make their main resistance, as under the former plan, farther up the hill.

The pioneers had not yet finished the new trenches and tunnels at the front line, and actually the new order caused no change whatever in the dispositions. But it had one important result—that when, late on the night after it had been issued, warning arrived of a probable attack next morning, the standing order for all troops of the 12th Brigade

was that they must resist to the last in their present positions. Whether any such order reached the forward battalion of the 13th Brigade is doubtful. The arrangements made by Brigadier-General Glasgow were that the forward battalion (52nd) should hold the railway with three companies, the fourth being kept in Buire valley ready to move into the support trenches. When it did so, its place was to be taken automatically by a company of the support battalion (51st); and the forward battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Whitham, was further empowered to call on the whole of the support battalion to reinforce him. Whitham met the peculiar problem of his front by deciding to fight in the forward line until driven out of it, and then to fall back to the support line and fight to the last there. He was well aware that this meant taking an unusual risk, but in the circumstances it seemed to him the least of any of the risks that must be taken. He therefore spent the night of April 4th in going round to every company and making sure that this plan was understood. The battalions in support and on the flanks were disposed as shown in the marginal sketch. In Buire was quartered a company of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion (3rd Division). The days had been fitfully rainy, the new trenches were undrained and muddy; but all the troops were in bouncing spirits.



During the whole of April 4th the garrison of this front could hear the artillery-fire of the great battle farther south, the sight of which was only hidden from them by the peninsula between the Somme and the Ancre. Late in the afternoon the senior commanders learned that a prisoner taken by the 3rd Division had stated that north of the Somme also an attack was impending, and that the troops for it were already in position. Later, at night, through Third Army came a

warning from the French G.Q.G.—apparently based on the report of a reliable spy—that “a converging attack will be made on Amiens tomorrow, April 5th, from the directions of Albert and Roye.” General Congreve at once ordered his two divisions (3rd and 4th Australian) to bombard at 7.30 next morning all places in which a German attack upon them would probably assemble. The heavy artillery also would take part. If the German bombardment started before 7.30, the artillery was instead to fire at once upon the German battery positions. The warning of attack reached the brigadiers of the 4th Division (Gellibrand and Glasgow) shortly before midnight, and they ordered the battalions in the line to send special patrols to watch for any movement of the enemy. In the 52nd Battalion Colonel Whitham (with his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Julin) had just been establishing *liaison* with the commander of the adjoining unit of the 3rd Division, and had seen the joint inter-divisional post furnished by picquets of both battalions on the Buire-Ville road, when the warning reached him. He at once ordered his reserve company (Captain Kennedy)⁸ to occupy the line of support posts on the forward slope. He then went on to his other companies and explained to each one his intention that, if forced from the front line, they should retire to the support line and fight there to the last. Until 2 o'clock he stood talking with Captain Fraser⁹ of his left-flank company by the Dernancourt railway bridge. “There will be no question of going back,” said Fraser, a tall, slight, rather delicate looking Scottish-Australian, formerly staff captain to General Brand; “its not in my mind as a possibility.” Whitham impressed on him that the order was seriously meant. “It leaves me perfectly calm,” was Fraser's last word to him. “I hope they come!”

Whitham—one of the nearest among Australian battalion commanders to Chaucer's “parfit gentil knight”—walked back across the hill, through the sprawling huts and tents of the old Edgehill casualty clearing station, now beginning to

⁸ Major W. Kennedy, M.B.E., M.C., M.S.M.; 52nd Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Hobart; b. Greymouth, N.Z., 24 Nov., 1884.

⁹ Capt. A. H. Fraser, M.C.; 52nd Bn. Staff Captain, 4th Inf. Bde., 1916/18. Civil servant; of Forestville, S. Aust.; b. Forestville, 17 June, 1894.



33. PART OF THE RAILWAY, OPPOSITE DERNANCOURT, HELD BY THE 52ND AND 47TH BATTALIONS ON 5TH APRIL, 1918

The railway bridge (X) marks the left of the 52nd Battalion, the 47th held the line to beyond the left of the picture. In the distance are the Ancres River and Méaulte village. (The trenches shown were dug by the Germans after the battle)

*Taken from the air by No. 3 Squadron, A.F.C., on 30th May, 1918.
Lent by Captain K. A. Goodland, 29th Bn
Aust. War Memorial Collection No A1058.*

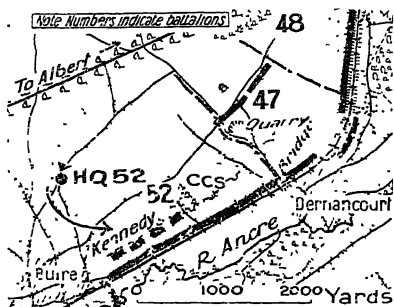


34. THE SECTION OF RAILWAY EMBANKMENT AT DERNANCOURT HELD BY THE RIGHT COMPANY OF THE 47TH BATTALION, 5TH APRIL, 1918

*Aust. 11th Memorial Official Photo. No. E3794.
Taken on 9th November, 1918, from the railway bridge.*

To face p 367.

be destroyed by German shell-fire. The weight of responsibility on the commanders of this dangerous front was heavy, and behind one of the tents of the C.C.S. he smoked a soothing cigarette. He had come that way in order to make sure that Kennedy's company had duly reached and occupied the line of support posts part of which ran through the C.C.S. He found the company not actually in the C.C.S., but occupying the four posts west of it.



The battalion commanders of the 12th Brigade were equally well prepared for attack. Colonel Leane of the 48th, one of the most experienced leaders in the force, had noted the fire of a number of German trench-mortars on his front line, and was convinced that they were registering for a bombardment. All three front-line battalions—52nd, 47th, and 48th—were informed by their patrols that Germans were moving in front in unusual numbers. Opposite the 52nd, between Dernancourt and Buire, the enemy had a number of footbridges across the Ancre, and in the small hours Lieutenant Denne,¹⁰ with a patrol of the 52nd's centre company, found thirty Germans near the footbridge closest to Dernancourt. To keep an eye on this movement, Captain Fraser at the railway bridge sent out Lieutenant Boase, part of whose platoon had an isolated Lewis gun post thrust out beside the road from the railway bridge into the village. Skirting the river together with Corporal Morrison¹¹ and four others, Boase heard much movement on the farther side. At one footbridge a dog growled and barked. A daylight patrol, sent out at 6.20 by Captain Williams¹² of the centre company of

¹⁰ Lieut. V. E. Denne, M.M.; 52nd Bn. Farmer; of North Bruny Island, Tas.; b. North Bruny, 17 Dec., 1885. Died of wounds, 26 May, 1918.

¹¹ Cpl. E. C. Morrison, D.C.M. (No. 2486; 52nd Bn.). Labourer; of Blessington, Tas.; b. Blessington, 5 Dec., 1889.

¹² Capt. H. R. Williams, 52nd Bn. Civil servant; of Eastwood, S. Aust.; b. Victor Harbour, S. Aust., 24 June, 1887.

the 52nd, with the same object, detected 200 Germans lying hidden in a dip west of Dernancourt into which the patrol could look from the west. Word was sent to two Stokes mortar teams of the 13th Light Trench Mortar Battery near the railway bridge, who fired ten rounds in that direction; but a message asking for artillery fire was too late to reach the batteries in time.

On the front of the 12th Brigade a patrol of the 47th found the Germans massing just east of the village, and one from the 48th reported that they were in unusual numbers on the road that ran through the flats 150 yards from the embankment. These two reports reached brigade headquarters shortly after 5. General Gellibrand arranged with the artillery to fire at a slow rate on its S.O.S. lines, ordered the infantry to send out Lewis guns to fire on the enemy seen, and directed the 45th Battalion to move up from Laviéville and dig in near Colonel Leane's headquarters on the plateau, the 46th coming from Millencourt to take its place. Lieutenant Taylor¹³ of the 47th, going out with a Lewis gun, fired into the Germans seen near Dernancourt, and the 48th took similar action on its front. At 6.20 both battalions reported that no Germans were then visible. The guns were accordingly turned on to the Albert-Bapaume road, on which traffic could be heard. A morning mist thickened in the Ancre valley, and was soon dense enough to hide all objects beyond 200 yards, although from the plateau the top of the opposite hills near Morlancourt was visible above it.

The British guns were barking, but the situation was otherwise quiet, when at 7 o'clock the bombardment for which all were waiting descended upon the whole area of the 4th Australian Division and on the British troops farther north. So sure were the front-line commanders of an impending attack, that Captain Fraser, near the railway bridge, had taken the step—most unusual in the A.I.F. in such circumstances—of stopping the breakfast from going out to his troops. The only surprise came with the realisation that the part of the 3rd Division's front lying immediately north of the River Somme, where the main blow was expected, was hardly

¹³ Lieut. H. Taylor, D.S.O.; 47th Bn. Builder and contractor; of Moorooka, Q'land; b. Edinburgh, Scotland, 20 Dec., 1893.

being shelled. But on the whole back area of the 4th Division the bombardment was intense, "the heaviest," reported Colonel Leane, "since Pozières"—and he had been in the thick of the Passchendaele fighting. The bombardment extended to the roads and villages as far back as VII Corps Headquarters at Montigny. The valleys sheltering the artillery were deluged with gas and high-explosive. The German guns were "area-shooting," not firing at particular batteries; but those of the 4th Australian Division, thrust forward down the valley between Millencourt and Laviéville to cover the 12th Brigade, were in the thick of it, and men and guns were constantly hit. The 45th Battalion, advancing across the open plateau, narrowly escaped a shattering experience, having just reached its intended position in rear of Leane's headquarters when this tornado descended. It quickly dug itself into comparative safety, only the last platoon being caught in the open and seriously cut about. The cheerful young veteran in command, Major Allen, reported that his battalion escaped lightly from that experience, with a loss of 4 officers (including Lieutenant Lindsay¹⁴ killed, and the medical officer, Major Garnett,¹⁵ mortally wounded) and 40 of other ranks.

The bombardment did not at first fall with such intensity on the front line. The telephone lines were, as usual, almost immediately broken, but the linesmen of the 47th and 48th Battalions for a time succeeded in restoring intermittent communication, and word came through that the forward garrisons of those battalions had so far seen nothing of any attack. The supporting field-guns—those of the 4th Division behind Gellibrand's brigade, and those of the 95th Brigade (21st Division) and 65th and 150th "Army" Brigades, R.F.A., behind Glasgow's—replied to the German bombardment by firing on S.O.S. lines, the plans for the precautionary bombardment at 7.30 having necessarily been abandoned. The German bombardment, except during certain marked pauses, appeared to grow in intensity. All telephone communication with the front broke down again. From the support lines and battalion headquarters the forward area was entirely hidden

¹⁴ Lieut. T. J. E. Lindsay, 45th Bn. Railway clerk; of Epping, N.S.W.; b. Harris Park, N.S.W., 12 March, 1890. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

¹⁵ Major W. S. Garnett, A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Stawell, Vic., 2 Oct., 1887. Died of wounds, 15 April, 1918.

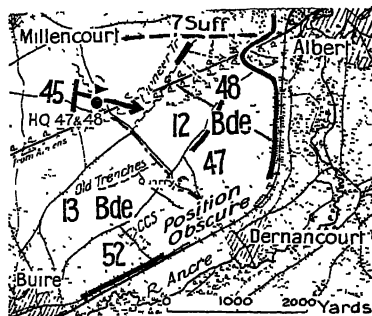
in fog, but a glimpse of the Morlancourt hilltop about 7.15 showed German infantry moving down from it. The right battalion—the 52nd—had no word whatever from its front. Lieutenant Julin, the intelligence officer, in its observation post on the shoulder above Buire, could only stare into the mist, and Colonel Whitham shaved and read the newspaper.

For hours no word of enemy action came from the front. Two officers calling at headquarters of the 4th Division at 10 a.m. were informed there that all was quiet. It began to appear that, notwithstanding the bombardment, the prophecy of attack must, as so often happened, have been false. The first news to the contrary to reach divisional headquarters arrived from the 3rd Division, which at 10.23 reported that some sort of attack had been made near Buire, where lay its extreme left and the right of the 4th Division. The next information came from Lieutenant Julin, who, from his observation post above Colonel Whitham's headquarters, heard at 8.45 rifle and machine-gun fire break out about Buire and at 9 noted that this noise spread to the whole front. The news reached 4th Divisional Headquarters at 10.35, and five minutes later came a report that at 9.25 the Germans had broken through the 48th at the other end of the line but had been driven out again. In the centre the position was obscure, but it was believed that a similar development had occurred on the 47th's front. An S.O.S. signal—the only one so far observed—had gone up from the 12th British Division north of the Amiens-Albert road. The German artillery at about 10.20 noticeably slackened its fire, although the back area and the battery positions continued to be furiously shelled. So far as was known, the 4th Division's troops had held their ground everywhere. Part of the Australian artillery had at 7.40 reduced its fire to occasional bursts on the S.O.S. lines.

At 10.30, however, startling information reached Colonel Leane of the 48th. Some of his observers, of whom he maintained a special staff to assist him in battle,¹⁶ reported that part of the 13th Brigade on the right was falling back. About

¹⁶ This staff was the old "scout platoon" of the battalion, which was supposed to be abolished under the new organisation introduced in 1917. Leane had twice been ordered to disband it, and had nominally done so. But a number of scouts had orders to report to him the moment the battalion went into action, and they were posted at various vantage points to keep him supplied with information.

the same time word came through from the commander of his right company, Captain Anderson,¹⁷ that the Germans had penetrated on the right of the brigade, and that he was relieving the left of the 47th in order to allow it to reinforce its right. Leane at once ordered half of his reserve company to reinforce his left company. One platoon was sent to the front line, which its leader, Lieutenant Potts, by dribbling his men down the hill a few at a time, reached in twenty-five minutes without a casualty. The other platoon, under Lieutenant Mitchell, was directed to a position in close support beyond the southern bank of the ravine. At the same time, as a precaution against the reported retirement of the 13th Brigade, Leane directed Major Allen of the 45th to move his battalion half-right, to the edge of the plateau overlooking the 13th Brigade's position, and to occupy there the vacant trenches dug by the battalion on the night of March 27th, from which it could stop any dangerous irruption on the right. But, as Allen was instructing his company commanders to do this, he received by telephone from brigade headquarters a contrary order—to support the troops ahead of him by moving two companies to Pioneer Trench. Allen, impressed by the wisdom of Leane's order, urged this on the brigade major (Major Norman), but was told to carry out the brigadier's order. Accordingly, the two companies were dribbled forward to Pioneer Trench, where they arrived at 1.30 without a casualty. In the light of later events it is certain that the step suggested by the experienced commander on the spot was better designed to meet the danger of the moment, which appeared to come from the 13th Brigade's area. Colonel Imlay (47th) reinforced his support line with a platoon of his attached company of the 45th.



¹⁷ Capt. F. Anderson, M.C.; 48th Bn. Electrician; of Adelaide; b. Mitcham, S. Aust., 28 Aug., 1895.

Brigadier-General Glasgow of the 13th Brigade, when telephoned to by Gellibrand and by Colonel Lavarack, chief-of-staff of the division, knew nothing of any break through his front, but promised to press for information. Meanwhile he ordered his support battalion, the 51st, to move up closer behind the 52nd; and the 49th, which till then had been held back with the 50th in divisional reserve, was restored to him and ordered up to the Laviéville line.

It was at this stage—about 11 a.m.—that rumours arrived that some of the 47th had fallen back on the right; and a runner, previously sent by Colonel Imlay to his support line, returned with the astonishing information that there were Germans in it. As the support line lay just over the edge of the plateau ahead of battalion headquarters, Imlay hurried out to see the situation for himself, and at once observed, three-quarters of a mile to his right front, a long string of men, among whom could be identified some with the colours of the 52nd, coming back over the crest. Imlay sent his Lewis gun officer, Lieutenant Robinson, to take charge of the right of the support line,¹⁸ and ordered out his headquarters staff under Lieutenant Smith,¹⁹ the assistant adjutant, to form a flank along the Millencourt-Dernancourt road. At the same time he directed the rest of the attached company of the 45th to reinforce the support line. About this time²⁰ one of his front-line companies managed to send through, by signal lamp, word showing that, though heavily attacked, its front line was still on the railway, unbroken. Imlay, a gallant and vigorous young commander, with a keen relish for a fine story of his command, has sometimes been criticised for leaping to the conclusion that the Germans at his support line had gained entrance not through his own front, but through that of the 52nd on his right; but all the evidence at hand pointed that way. He telephoned to General Gellibrand that the flank of the 13th Brigade was now 1,000 yards behind the right of the 47th's support line.

¹⁸ It had been reported that Lieut. Goodsall was badly wounded.

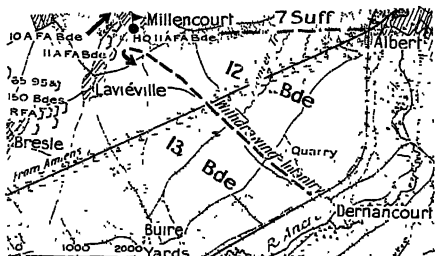
¹⁹ Lieut. H. G. Smith, M.C., D.C.M.; 47th Bn. Civil servant; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 24 Nov., 1891.

²⁰ The time is given in Imlay's report as "noon"; possibly that was the time of the receipt of the message; but, if so, its transmission must have been greatly delayed.

This account of the situation, repeated by Gellibrand to divisional headquarters, spread quickly through all the higher headquarters concerned. General Glasgow (13th Brigade) could neither confirm nor deny it, being practically without news from his own front, the valleys behind which were still heavily shelled. All that was certain was that the Germans were penetrating up the hill-slope northwards behind the front line of the 12th Brigade, with the effect of half cutting off its front line, which was known to be holding out in the north. It seemed clearly the duty of the 13th Brigade to mend the situation, and after triangular conferences on the telephone between themselves and General MacLagan, the two brigadiers agreed, on Gellibrand's suggestion, that the best plan was for a battalion of the 13th Brigade to counter-attack, with its left flank on the brigade boundary—the Laviéville-Dernancourt road—and close the gap in the front; the 12th Brigade, which had only three companies of one battalion (the 46th) in reserve, would join in on the left with its available force. General MacLagan promised the assistance of some tanks (of "C" Company, 9th Battalion, Tank Corps), which had been ordered up to the valley behind Laviéville. The 49th Battalion (Queensland) was allotted for the attack, and as its headquarters were at the moment beside Gellibrand's at Laviéville, the orders of its own brigadier (Glasgow) were passed to it, and the action of the brigades co-ordinated, by Gellibrand. Meanwhile, by 1.25, definite news had come to hand that the 47th and 48th had at last been forced to leave their front and had withdrawn, or were withdrawing, to the line of Pioneer Trench, giving up the northern and eastern portion of what has been here described as the mushroom end of the down. This meant that the 12th Brigade's support line, too, had been abandoned. What had happened to the two strong batteries of machine-guns on the forward slope, no one knew. The 52nd Battalion was still holding the south-western part of the mushroom; but there was obvious danger of the enemy getting command of the summit, and so of the valley behind the 52nd.

Enough had come through to indicate that the situation on the mushroom prominence was critical. Battery commanders and other senior officers of the artillery, straining to

help, came in constantly to headquarters of both brigades for news, which was vague and scarce. How acute the position was they fully realised when, at noon, without previous warning that matters were serious, Australian infantrymen and pioneers in retreat, without officers, passed back through the batteries of the 4th Division in the valley south-west of Millencourt. Lieutenant-Colonel Waite²¹ of the 11th A.F.A. Brigade, whose headquarters were in Millencourt, ran out and ordered some of these men to return to the front. "But where are we to go?" they asked, "and what are we to do?" The question was not easy to answer. The infantrymen at the batteries sat down behind the guns, and eventually, when someone was found to direct them, went forward again. But it seemed highly probable that there was a gap straight ahead of the batteries. Away on the left, north of the Albert road, the gunners could see a line of the withdrawn troops or of their supports, lying down behind the north-eastern spur of the main down. The 4th Division's batteries had suffered severely both in officers and men. At



9 o'clock Lieutenant Butters²² of the 41st Battery was wounded, and Captain Martin,²³ while attempting to dress the wound, was hit by a shell which killed them both. Lieutenant Harrison,²⁴ the signals officer, was killed, and Major Garling²⁵ (37th Battery), Lieutenant Pidcock²⁶ (42nd),

²¹ Lieut.-Col. W. C. N. Waite, D.S.O., M.C., V.D. Commanded 11th A.F.A. Bde., 1917/18. Livestock salesman; of Kensington Park, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 8 Sept., 1880.

²² Lieut. R. D. Buttercase (served as R. D. Butters), 41st Bty., A.F.A. Former member of British Regular Army; of Port Darwin; b. Uthrogie, Cupar, Fifeshire, Scotland, 25 April, 1881. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

²³ Capt. A. F. Martin, 41st Bty., A.F.A. Merchant, of Rose Bay, N.S.W.; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 28 Feb., 1889. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

²⁴ Lieut. J. L. Harrison, 4th Div. Sig. Coy. Motor mechanic; of Geelong, Vic.; b. North Richmond, Vic., 12 Feb., 1893. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

²⁵ Major T. W. Garling, 37th Bty., A.F.A. Clerk; of Lane Cove, N.S.W.; b. Neutral Bay, N.S.W., 15 Feb., 1894. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

²⁶ Lieut. J. W. Pidcock, M.C.; 42nd Bty., A.F.A. Bank official; of Sydney and Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Tatham, Richmond River, N.S.W., 24 June, 1893. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

and Lieutenant Linsley (110th) were mortally wounded. Of 14 officers and 139 others killed or wounded in the five artillery brigades supporting the 4th Division this day, the two Australian brigades—10th and 11th—lost 12 officers and 77 others. But the guns-crews were making the battle their own, and they fought as if they were in the front line. When, after the arrival of the withdrawing infantry, the gun-teams came up at the gallop, ready to pull out the guns, the gunners themselves waved them away with a shower of rough jests. It was known that the orders given to the division were that this crest was to be held to the last. Brigadier-General Burgess, the dour New Zealander commanding the artillery of the division, had received this order with the curt comment that the 4th Division's guns were geared only to move forwards, and this was undoubtedly the spirit of the men; not but what a situation might yet easily have arisen in which the best assistance that the guns could give to their infantry and to the Allies would have been given by coolly withdrawing, as hundreds of British batteries had in recent weeks been forced to do, and, after withdrawal, continuing to support their infantry in perhaps greater need.

At 1.15, on the assurance that no infantry of the 12th Brigade now remained on the railway, the barrage was shortened, and, by arrangement with the 3rd Division, some field-guns of the 35th Division which were under its command were set to sweep the railway embankment in enfilade. As a precaution the Third Army directed that the 35th Division, which had previously been ordered to join the V Corps, should postpone its movement for twenty-four hours. At 1.30, in the quarry behind Laviéville, General Gellibrand passed to Lieutenant-Colonel Denton of the 49th General Glasgow's order to hurry his battalion to the southern shoulder of the mushroom crest overlooking Dernancourt, adding that the position was critical, and that, if the 49th did not reach the crest before the Germans, it would have to drive them from it. Leaving Gellibrand to arrange the co-operation of his own battalions in the coming counter-attack, the narrative must now pass to the other side of the veil of battle, and show how widely different the events there had been from

anything reported to or imagined by the commanders anxiously piecing together the scraps of truth and rumour that had gradually penetrated to them.

When, at about 5.30 a.m., Captain Fraser of the 52nd Battalion first heard that the Germans were assembling on his front, he directed Lieutenant Williams,²⁷ **At the Front** commanding the two Stokes mortars near **Line** the little French cemetery, a short way behind the railway bridge, to fire on the houses and barns of Dernancourt; Lieutenant Boase, whose platoon held the bridge, volunteered to go out beyond it and check the fall of the shots. After eighty rounds had been fired, Fraser ordered the mortars to range on a point nearer to the embankment, and then stand by ready to open.

At 6.55 a German pineapple-bomb thrower beyond the Ancre fired a shot apparently aimed at these Stokes mortars, and with this the bombardment seemed to begin.²⁸ The German trench-mortars were evidently concentrating their fire on the railway bridge and the sector of the embankment immediately east of it held by the right of the 47th. Elsewhere the bombardment fell largely behind the front line, and in the 52nd's sector shells from the supporting British batteries near Laviéville were for a time the more dangerous, forcing the centre company (Captain Williams) to withdraw temporarily to its flanks.

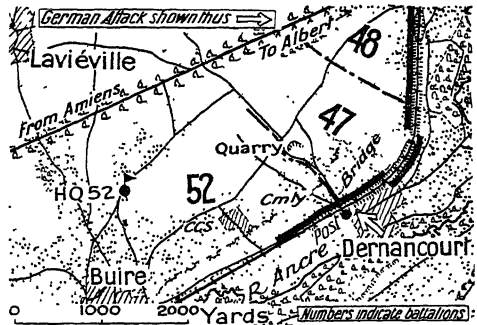
A few minutes after the shelling began Fraser's company, looking in the direction of the Ancre, saw a number of figures in extended order coming out of the mist. Fraser's right platoon, under Lieutenant Lade,²⁹ opened fire on them. On the left the Germans were coming down the village street, which would lead them straight under the railway bridge. Here

²⁷ Lieut. J. H. Williams, M.C.; 13th L.T.M. Bty. Clerk; of Ipswich, Q'land; b. North Sydney, 1892.

²⁸ Its commencement is given variously as 6.55 and 7 a.m. The fact that the British guns were firing at the same time made it difficult for Australian observers to distinguish the precise moment.

²⁹ Lieut. R. F. Lade, 52nd Bn. Barrister and solicitor; of Latrobe, Tas.; b. Launceston, Tas., 22 Sept., 1889.

Boase's platoon kept a secret post, with a Lewis gun, thrust out in a hedge a short distance on the German side of the embankment. The man at the gun quickly cleared the enemy from the road, but



numbers of others were advancing out of the houses and back-gardens on either side of it. The rest of the gun's crew used their rifles. Boase, running down the forward slope of the embankment to the post, found the Germans arriving within bombing distance, and the Lewis gunners exchanging bombs with a number of them, from twenty-five to thirty yards away. The fighting was desperate; some of the Australians stood fully exposed as they threw. From the right a second Lewis gun was steadily covering their flank. A German bomb burst between Boase's legs, and he fell, apparently dead, but Sergeant Murray,³⁰ who was with him, took command. The Germans, beaten in their first attempt, presently attacked again. The Lewis gun below the bridge was blown up by a trench-mortar bomb, but another, posted above the centre of the arch, took up the defence. The nearest machine-guns of the 13th Company, on the railway between Dernancourt and Buire, fired furiously on this attack at ranges of from half-a-mile and under. Stokes mortars and Lewis guns shot for all they were worth. In addition, as soon as the fight started, Fraser called for artillery support by firing his S.O.S. flares, but in the mist neither these, nor any others that went up that morning on the Australian front, were seen. The field artillery, it is true, replied to the German bombardment by laying down its S.O.S. barrage at a steady rate, and the heavy artillery shelled probable assembly points with gas;

³⁰ Sgt. W. Murray, D.C.M. (No. 3593A; 52nd Bn.). Clerk; of Maryborough, Q'land; b. Maryborough, 1894. Died of wounds, while prisoner of war, 19 May, 1918.

but the artillery was unavoidably blind. Fraser wrote: "Urgent. Get artillery on to Dernancourt at once, heavies etc." But his note did not reach Colonel Whitham until 10.25, and the deluge of shells which, if directed upon the village, might have shattered this offensive, never descended. The artillery, being quite without information, gradually eased its fire, the Australian batteries reducing theirs to occasional bursts upon the S.O.S. lines.

Shortly after 7.30 the movement of German infantry appears to have died down, but the enemy shell-fire continued unabated, and about 8.45 the bursts of *minenwerfer* bombs on the section held by the flank of the 47th just east of the railway bridge became intense; "pretty solid" was the description afterwards given of the experience there by one who went through it.³¹ At the same time the right company of the 52nd (Captain Stubbings), on the railway near Buire, saw several hundreds of the enemy emerging from the village of Ville, south of the Ancre. It was the fusillade then evoked from the 52nd that was heard by Lieutenant Julin in the 52nd's observation post, and reported to headquarters. These Germans continued to advance by rushes, and at 9 o'clock some of them crossed the river by bridges near a white mill-house, in the trees north-east of Ville, and attempted to make towards Dernancourt. An hour and a half later a remnant, which had evidently gone to ground, was seen withdrawing gradually to Ville in small parties. This process continued until noon, when all movement of the enemy near Buire appeared to cease.

Near the railway bridge there began at 9 o'clock a much more dangerous advance. The troops at the bridge were strongly attacked, and desperate fighting was evidently in progress farther to the east, in the 47th's sector; but, the posts being widely spaced, the troops on the flank knew no more than that the 47th continued to hold. The German barrage had now lifted from the embankment and fell near the support posts of the 52nd, 300 yards back, missing them but rending the huts and tents of the old casualty clearing

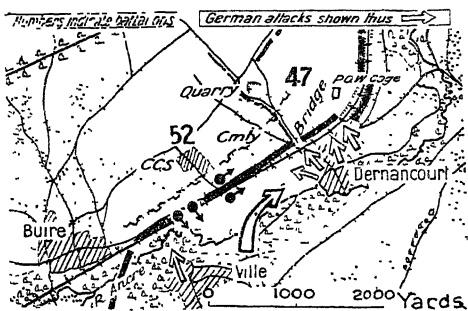
³¹ Pte. Essam, in a statement made on return from Germany. (3620 Pte. T. Essam, 47th Bn. Carter; of Alderley, Q'land; b. London, 14 Oct., 1883.)

station along that part of the slope. A German machine-gun, apparently on the tower of Dernancourt church, played over the heads of the attackers on to the garrison lying on the embankment.

An intense fire from many machine-guns on the flats and in the white mill-house was skimming the edge of the embankment and constantly scoring the hillside several hundred yards behind. But

the defending Stokes mortars, machine-guns, and Lewis guns, firing continuously, beat off the main attack. A number of Germans, unable to reach the embankment west of the village, began to dig in between the railway and the Ancre as if to form a flank there; but the fire of the two machine-guns farther west must have caused them severe loss. The machine-gunners could see the enemy still streaming out from the houses and back-gardens of Dernancourt towards the embankment, trying to reach a road that ran along their side of the railway. The gunners thought they shot them all, but some got through, for bombing began at the embankment.

At 9.30 the mist began quickly to lift. On the front of the 52nd the attack eased. But shortly afterwards there came along the back of the embankment to the post at the railway bridge seven men of the 47th, who told Sergeant D'Alton³² of the 52nd that the right company of the 47th had been blotted out. D'Alton hurried with them to Captain Fraser, who directed him to take them back to their post. D'Alton endeavoured to do so, but, although the party went far into the 47th's territory, they could find no living garrison. He accordingly returned to Fraser, and the seven men were temporarily attached to the post at the archway, now under Sergeant Morrison. Realising that the Germans might at any



³² Sgt. H. H. D'Alton, D.C.M. (No. 1597; 52nd Bn.). Locomotive fireman; of Queenstown, Tas.; b. Warracknabeal, Vic., 21 Nov., 1893.

moment cross the railway and outflank him, Fraser sent a Lewis gun from Lieutenant Bibby's³³ platoon to the cemetery to guard his flank, and then, remembering Whitham's instructions, wrote a hurried message to Captain Williams of the centre company of the 52nd, advising him to fall back on the support line, and saying that he himself and his men would continue to hold the embankment as long as possible to cover the movement.

Soon afterwards, scanning the ground where the 47th should be, Fraser saw a number of figures moving over the slope in rear of the embankment, near an old British prisoners-of-war compound on a knuckle opposite the farther end of the village. Turning his glasses on them, D'Alton said that they were Germans. At the same time fire came along the embankment from the 47th's old position, and the men of the 52nd manning the top of the railway bridge, who had come to the end of their bombs, at last broke, and ran down on both sides of the culvert and up the road past the cemetery towards the plateau. Fraser at once ordered the rest of his men to fall back to the support line, and himself dived into his headquarters, seized his "Babb" code and other secret papers, and, with Sergeant Murray, who had twice been wounded in the head but was still fighting, ran for the cemetery. Before he was half-way there, the enemy had a machine-gun set up behind them. Reaching a shell-hole near the cemetery, Fraser destroyed his papers, and then made another run for it. This time he had gone only a hundred yards when the machine-gun forced him again to cover. The German gunner kept his fire on the rim of the hole, and before Fraser could make another dash there were Germans around him and he was captured, as was Murray, who had again been hit.

It was just 10 o'clock when the left of the 52nd gave way. The story of the men of the 47th next along the embankment, through whom the Germans had broken, is unlikely to be ever completely known—a great number of them were killed or wounded, and many of the rest were dazed with the crash

³³ Lieut. L. H. Bibby, 52nd and 51st Bns. Jeweller's assistant; of Hobart; b. Melbourne, 10 Sept., 1892.

and blast of the bombardment and the acrid reek of the fumes. But from a few survivors, who came back many months later from imprisonment in Germany, parts of it have been pieced together.

Like the rest of the front on the railway, the sector of the 47th's right company was thinly held by widely spaced platoons, holding, opposite the north-west of Dernancourt, the steep embankment, and, opposite the north-east of the village, the cutting into which the railway there ran, and at either end of which was a level crossing. The right of the company was slightly strengthened by the presence of a working party of the 4th Pioneers, twenty-seven strong, and their officer, Lieutenant Pennefather.³⁴ Their night's work on the tunnels not having been finished when the alarm was given, these men stood to arms with the rest. The closeness of Dernancourt with its back orchards and hedges brushing the railway, enabled the enemy to emplace here as many trench-mortars and assemble as many troops as he wished, without detection. During the bombardment the wounded were carried to the pioneers' tunnel, whence some were taken away by the stretcher-bearers. Later, in their first rush the Germans managed to cross the railway between two of the posts. The left of the company saw this. Sergeant Ryan,³⁵ in charge of a post there, sent to the company commander for an officer, and Lieutenant Rose,³⁶ of another platoon, came up, but by then the right platoon and pioneers had driven out the Germans. Rose gave the order to hold on at all costs, and returned to his post. Soon afterwards came a second rush of Germans, but this was shot back without piercing the line.

For meeting such onslaughts, however, the posts were perilously thin. Lieutenant Cooksley,³⁷ commanding the right platoon, after lining out his men along the railway, was

³⁴ Lieut. R. V. G. Pennefather, M.C.; 4th Pioneer Bn. Licensed surveyor and civil engineer; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Cooma, N.S.W., 25 July, 1887.

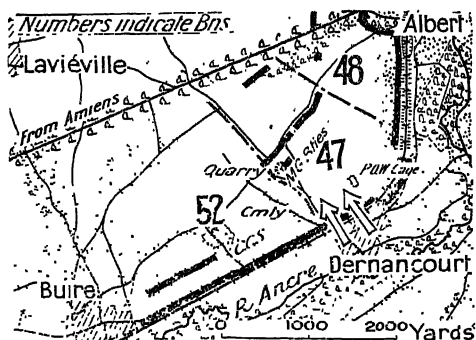
³⁵ Sgt. J. M. F. Ryan, M.M. (No. 2490; 47th Bn.). Mill overseer; of Bundaberg, Q'land; b. Broadwater, N.S.W., 1884.

³⁶ Lieut. D. C. Rose, 47th & 46th Bns. West African trader; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Inveraray, Argyllshire, Scotland, 8 Jan., 1873.

³⁷ Lieut. W. J. F. Cooksley, 47th Bn. Accountant; of Brisbane; b. Hendra, Q'land, 29 Nov., 1891. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

reaching for a rifle when he was shot through the head. Lieutenant Ulcoq³⁸ of the next platoon, and the pioneer officer, Lieutenant Pennefather, were both seriously wounded. Shortly before 10 o'clock the Germans made a third determined rush. The centre of this attack swerved before the resistance of one of the posts, but the wave split and swept over the embankment on either side. Some of the garrison, to escape death or capture, withdrew to a ditch or other shelter a short distance behind the embankment. Others, finding the Germans swarming over into their trench on either flank, and further resistance useless, surrendered. A certain number were captured in the pioneers' tunnel. Those who had tried to escape were quickly shot down or rounded up. Of the right half-company of the 47th not one man, except those who had previously been sent away wounded appears to have reached the supports.

The foot of the Laviéville down consisted of a number of gentle folds, and events happening in any one of these folds were hidden from parts of the line right and left. Moreover, although the fog was lifting, the shell-smoke



mingled with the misty air rendered it difficult to see at any distance. It is nevertheless evidence of a serious defect in the control that the commander of the right company remained for two hours unaware that his right had been attacked—not to say penetrated.³⁹ The men of the left company, however, presently found that they were being fired on from their right rear, and that Germans were in the quarry where one of the machine-gun batteries should have been. The intelligence

³⁸ Lieut. O. E. Ulcoq, 47th Bn. Clerk; of Yeronga, Q'land; b. Mackay, Q'land, 6 Feb., 1894.

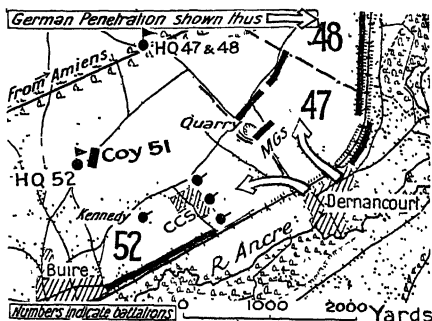
³⁹ He stated in the court of inquiry afterwards that no attack developed on his front before noon.

officer of the 47th, Lieutenant Reid, who was then with the centre company, hurried across to the right leading a platoon of the left company to reinforce.

Meanwhile, however, German infantry were pouring by the hundred into the interior of the Australian position. At first they streamed only over the embankment, but soon afterwards, when the left of the 52nd retired, they poured also through the railway arch. Lieutenant Julin, the intelligence officer of the 52nd, going forward from battalion headquarters to ascertain the situation, met a number of the left company of his battalion retiring to the old casualty clearing station, and, knowing nothing of the position, persuaded them to stop and lie down. But he then observed fifty or sixty men with knapsacks climbing the centre of the down half-a-mile away and well up the hill. They were bending low, and getting under a bank to escape fire from some source that Julin could not see. He noted that the machine-gun battery at the quarry was not firing, but almost at once, from the slope below it, a German machine-gun turned its fire squarely upon his party. He immediately withdrew them, with considerable loss, to a section of the support line that ran through the old C.C.S., but the German gun was high enough up the hill to enfilade this also.

It was in the posts of this line west of the C.C.S. that the support company of the 52nd under Captain Kennedy lay. Kennedy was a tall, thin veteran of the old 12th, formerly a sailor—a man of slow speech and few words, but entirely dependable in a tight corner and thoroughly trained, having been (like his battalion commander) an instructor of the Australian permanent forces. Nothing had occurred to cause him uneasiness until 10.15, when he saw Australians falling back up the slope above the C.C.S. He was just sending a patrol to discover who they were, when a message from Captain Williams of the centre company, holding the railway 300 yards below him, informed him that the left company had withdrawn, and asked what the centre company should do. Kennedy told Williams to hold on, and at once sent three platoons to form a flank up the hillside from

the left of Williams on the railway. One platoon, under Lieutenant Wilson,⁴⁰ a trusted scout of the old 12th Battalion at Anzac, touched Williams's flank at the railway. A second, under Lieutenant Rowe,⁴¹ garrisoned a trench east of the C.C.S. A third, under Lieutenant Rogers,⁴² was sent with Julin well up the hill to the north-east corner of the C.C.S., around which were a number of trenches dug long ago for shelter in air-raids. The fourth



platoon Kennedy kept with his headquarters in rear of the C.C.S. Added to his men were a number of Fraser's whom Lieutenant Lade continued to hold together, although his wrist had been smashed during the retirement through the cemetery. Others had retired straight up the hill and across the plateau.

By 11.15 Kennedy's troops had formed this flank, facing north-east. As the Germans worked along the railway part of Williams's company had withdrawn from it, but they returned and, although Kennedy's left flank up the hill was out of touch with any troops, the 52nd's line again became stationary.

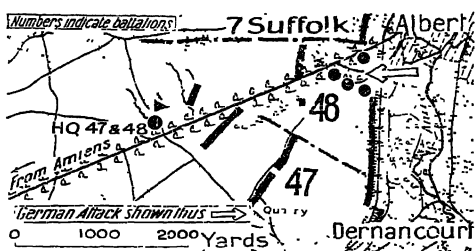
On the left of the divisional front also, where the 48th Battalion's left curved back across the precipitous gully down which the high-road ran into Albert, a movement of the Germans had occurred at 7.25, during the bombardment, two bodies of the enemy crossing the railway (which here was in their territory) and assembling low down the ravine where the rifles in the Australian posts could not get at them. At

⁴⁰ Lieut. L. L. Wilson, 52nd Bn Salesman; of Karoonda, S. Aust.; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 13 July, 1893.

⁴¹ Lieut. A. G. Rowe, 52nd & 50th Bns. Assayer; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Petersburg, S. Aust., 6 Feb., 1894. Died, 29 May, 1920.

⁴² Lieut. F. Rogers, 52nd Bn. Shipping clerk; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. North Kensington, London, 3 April, 1886.

9 o'clock, when the bombardment which had fallen with especial severity on the support trenches lifted, the German infantry attacked along the whole line, their pressure



being particularly heavy up the gully and at the south side of its entrance, against the post of the 48th that held the angle of the gully and the railway. The 48th was entirely ready, and wave after wave of Germans was shattered by Lewis gun and rifle-fire. The northernmost platoon of the 48th held a post at a farmhouse beside the Albert road, on the north side of the ravine. A number of Germans attempted to reach it, but they were completely beaten. By 10 o'clock the survivors of these constant attacks had dug in, as best they could under fire of rifles and rifle-grenades, in the lower part of the valley, leaving the line of the 48th unbroken.

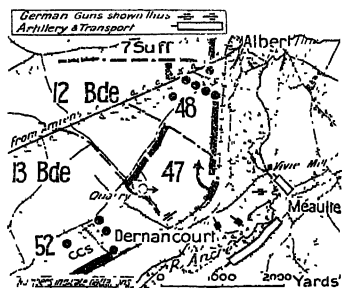
It was about that time, however, that men of the left company of the 47th observed the break-through of Germans on their right. Captain Anderson, of the 48th's right company, informed by Lieutenant Reid of the 47th, arranged with the commander of the 47th's left company (Captain Young)⁴³ to take over 140 yards of the 47th's front and so liberate the platoon with which Reid hurried to the right. Captain Young had also ordered Lieutenant Ward⁴⁴ to send a Lewis gun thither. These reinforcements did not reach the gap through which the Germans were streaming, but strengthened the posts immediately north of it. With the Germans pouring through far to their rear, the position of the flank posts looked hopeless, but they received orders to hold on and did so, firing on the enemy to front, flank, and rear, until, from the quarry where their own machine-guns

⁴³ Capt. C. E. Young, D.S.O.; 47th & 45th Bns. Grazier; of Charleville district, Q'land; b. Daylesford, Vic., 21 Dec., 1889.

⁴⁴ Lieut. L. N. Ward, M.C.; 47th & 48th Bns. Wool classer; of Charleville, Q'land; b. Charleville, 12 April, 1893. Killed in action, 19 Sept., 1918.

should have been, a Lewis gun was turned upon them. By that time half of the reinforcement that had been sent farthest to the right had been killed or wounded. Sergeant Ryan, now commanding the right post, with its Lewis gun out of action and its bombs all spent, saw that there was nothing for it but to attempt cutting a way through to the rear; but it was then too late—he and the survivors of his post were eventually captured.

At 11 o'clock, while the flank of the 47th was thus crumbling, its left company (Captain Young) was fighting stubbornly. To its front masses of German artillery and transport could be seen crowding up from Méaulte along the sunken road near Vivier Mill, and several field-batteries moving down over the open ground south of Méaulte. Two field-guns opened direct fire from behind the north-east corner of Dernancourt, and another from the flats north of it, directly in front of the company.



Captain Young himself, wiry, wizened little Queenslander, was picking off the guns' crews with a rifle. Away on the south-western flank of the battle, also, at about noon, men of the 52nd called out that they could see cavalry moving up the slope of the Laviéville down. A second scrutiny showed that these were gun-teams dragging field-guns. Shortly afterwards a gun that had crossed the railway opened fire from the flank and rear upon the portion of the 47th that had continued to hold the railway.

It was the close, direct fire of field-guns brought up in this manner that more than once gave the final blow to exposed and resisting posts that day. "He brought up field-guns and blew us out of our posts," the retiring men said when they came in. The flank, already crumbling, crumbled more quickly. As the portion of the hill behind was already in the hands of the Germans, Captain Young directed his company, together with the remnant of the right

company, to withdraw northwards through the area of the 48th, and across the head of the deep ravine. By the time most of the men were clear it was midday. "You'll be surrounded and captured if you don't get back," said a sergeant of the 47th to a support post of the 48th as he passed over it and into the ravine. But the front line of the 48th was not yet withdrawing. Captain Anderson, after conferring with the commander of the centre company, Lieutenant Pavy,⁴⁵ decided to wait for a short time in case the 47th counter-attacked to recapture the sector.

At 12.15, as the Germans were firing from his rear, Anderson gave the word for both companies to retire, platoon by platoon. The left company (Captain Cumming), holding both sides of the ravine by the Albert road, and the British north of the road, were still in position guarding the left. The Germans had made no progress in the ravine, and Cumming had urged that he could hold on indefinitely. But, as Anderson's company was retiring, it was considered necessary to withdraw also all posts on the spur south of the gully. Captain Cumming tried to signal information of this intention to the post of the 7th Suffolk Regiment north of the ravine, but could not attract its notice. A signaller, Private Tregoweth,⁴⁶ at once volunteered to run across the flat. In the hail of fire which his effort attracted, he was soon hit, but managed to drag himself to within 100 yards of the British post before he was entirely disabled. Some Englishmen at once ran out and carried him in, and the Suffolk then signalled for and received Cumming's message.⁴⁷ To protect his right, where the danger was greatest, Anderson stationed on the spur south of the gully a Lewis gun. Its position was an exposed one, but it had the crucial rôle of preventing the enemy from getting farther behind the two companies. During the delay since the 47th had gone, the enemy in rear appeared to have been extending his hold and there now began a most difficult withdrawal, in which the

⁴⁵ Capt. G. A. Pavy, 48th Bn. Accountant; of North Adelaide; b. Crystal Brook, S. Aust., 14 Aug., 1891.

⁴⁶ Pte. F. J. A. Tregoweth, D.C.M. (No. 1996; 48th Bn.). School teacher; of Norwood, S. Aust.; b. Woodside, S. Aust., 13 Sept., 1897.

⁴⁷ The diary of the 7th Suffolk records that it received by runner and flag signal at 2.50 p.m. from the left company of the 48th Battalion a message saying that the company had been ordered to withdraw.

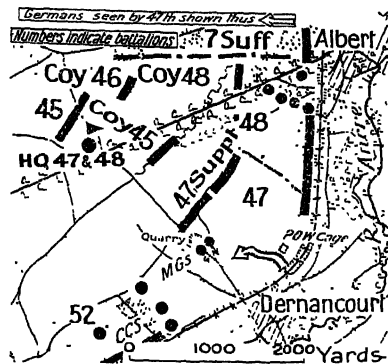
platoons would have to move round whatever position the Germans had secured behind them. Anderson's own right platoon would have to stay to the last as rear-guard, and then withdraw as best it could. Colonel Leane, on hearing Anderson's decision sent up Major Brearley⁴⁸ to establish, with any troops on the spot, the line to which the front would fall back.

The support line of the 47th, about the sunken road near the top of the down, had been held that morning by two companies—Lieutenant Goodsall's on the right, and Captain Symons' on the left.

The Withdrawal

They were occupying separate sections of the old French sap by the sunken road. The front line was at first hidden by the mist, but the sound of rifles and bombs there was continuous. Towards 11 o'clock the troops near the left of the support line, where it commanded a wide view, saw numbers of Germans pouring over the embankment where it was low, near the north-east corner of Dernancourt. Sergeant McDougall (the same who had stopped the attack on the level crossing on March 28th) and others turned their fire on these Germans, who swerved over the knuckle of the hill in order to escape it. McDougall had no anxiety; he was confident that the two batteries of machine-guns at and near the quarry would deal with this enemy.

The right support company (Goodsall's) was prevented by the ground in its front from having this view. No word whatever reached it from the front line, but, a few minutes after 11, Goodsall was astonished



⁴⁸ Major M. S. Brearley, 48th Bn. Musician; of Subiaco, W. Aust.; b. Geelong, Vic., 15 Sept., 1888.

to find Germans approaching on both flanks. About this time he received a welcome reinforcement from the supporting company of the 45th—a platoon under Lieutenant Allen⁴⁹ (brother of the battalion commander) being sent forward by order from Colonel Imlay. On its way from Pioneer Trench this platoon, to its surprise, had found itself under fire from Germans who had come up the hill-slope near the casualty clearing station. On reaching the 47th's support trench Allen, by order of Captain Symons, moved along to the extreme right and reinforced Goodsall just beyond the road to the quarry. The Germans were then getting round Goodsall's right, and Allen ordered twenty of his men to leave the trench and form a line to the right flank, in order to prevent encirclement; but no sooner was the line out in the open than a machine-gun was turned upon it, killing or wounding twelve men and forcing the rest back to the trench.

The Germans had suddenly appeared in front of the left company, at only 100 yards' distance. Company Sergeant-Major Hare⁵⁰ ordered a Lewis gunner, by name Maumill,⁵¹ to fire at them. Captain Symons, thinking the men seen must be Australian, ordered fire to cease, but Maumill, recognising them clearly as German, kept on. The rest of the garrison, as soon as they were sure of the oncomers' identity, joined in. But one Lewis gun was disabled, and, though fire was maintained, the enemy's movement could not be stopped. The old French sap was without traverses, and the enemy on the right had now brought up pineapple-grenade throwers and was enfilading the right of the trench with these and machine-guns. Anyone attempting to line the front bank was shot from the rear, round which the Germans were now pushing; the only direction in which men could fire was to the flank, and they were falling so fast that Goodsall and the officers with him—Lieutenants Smith⁵² and Allen—

⁴⁹ Lieut. J. H. Allen, 45th Bn. Railway clerk; of Hurstville, N.S.W.; b. Hurstville, 3 Nov., 1892.

⁵⁰ C.S.M. H. J. Hare, D.C.M. (No. 2961; 47th Bn.). Carter; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 24 Aug., 1886.

⁵¹ Pte. J. H. Maumill (No. 2898; 47th Bn.). Miner; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Beaconsfield, Tas., 15 Jan., 1883.

⁵² Lieut. J. E. Smith, 47th Bn. Ironmonger; of Cheepie, Q'land; b. Burrangong, Young, N.S.W., 10 Oct., 1892.

decided that the best course was to withdraw to the left along the trench and endeavour to escape encirclement. Captain Symons, however, to whom they applied for leave, replied that the orders were to hold the trench "at all costs".

They accordingly held on, evacuating only the extreme right of the sunken road, beyond the Laviéville-Dernancourt cross-road. But no defence was possible; the enemy could only be seen by lying out in the open, which meant certain death, and men were being quite uselessly killed; the dead and wounded of the 47th now lay everywhere underfoot. Finally, the three officers held another conference and decided to withdraw their men through Captain Symons' position. To their horror they found the Germans holding it, Symons and the survivors of his men having already gone. Several brave attempts were made to break through. One man, Private Rochford,⁵³ succeeded—another, who started with him, was immediately shot down. To avoid further useless loss of life, the officers decided to surrender.

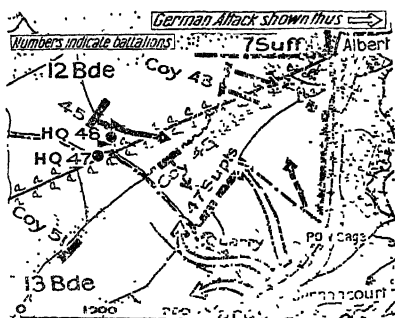
It was at 11 o'clock that Colonel Imlay of the 47th hearing that the Germans had broken through on the right, sent from his headquarters Lieutenant Robinson to take charge of the right flank of the support line. Robinson, passing the attached company of the 45th, asked its commander, Lieutenant Stuart Perry,⁵⁴ for reinforcements. Perry said he had already sent two platoons, and Robinson, on coming over the brow of the hill, found there a dozen men of the 45th lying in the open. They were the survivors of the second platoon sent by Perry. Their officer, Lieutenant MacDiarmid,⁵⁵ was killed, and they had been unable to reach the 47th. Looking down the hill to the left, Robinson saw a slightly larger party—probably that of Goodsall, Allen, and Smith—surrounded by Germans. He immediately sent a messenger to Perry with the news. Although this message does not appear to have come through, Perry led forward the

⁵³ L/Cpl. J. Rochford, M.M. (No. 2493; 47th & 48th Bns.). Timber cutter; of Fraser's Island, Q'land; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 23 June, 1898.

⁵⁴ Lieut. J. R. S. Perry, 45th Bn. Survey draughtsman; of Marrickville, N.S.W.; b. Marrickville, 17 Oct., 1889. Died, 22 Jan., 1925.

⁵⁵ Lieut. A. M. MacDiarmid, 45th Bn. Accountant; of Inverell, N.S.W.; b. Arncliffe, N.S.W., 6 Feb., 1891. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

rest of the company, but at the brow of the plateau, where it dipped towards the support trench, they were met by intense fire, which forced them to ground. On the pasture on which they lay stood a number of brushwood hurdles, lately used for penning sheep, but at the moment partly scattered.

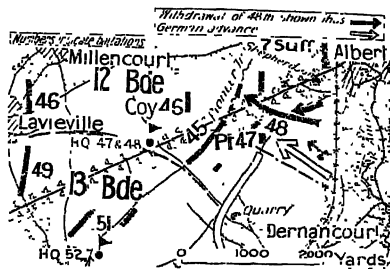


These gave some cover from sight. Three or four hundred yards ahead, just visible through the ground haze, was a perplexing amount of movement—how far of friends and how far of enemy it was impossible to judge. Actually, it was the rounding up by the enemy of the 47th's supports. Robinson's small party was captured, as were other small remnants, including a section of Symons' company under Lieutenant Marson,⁵⁶ farther to the left. By shortly after noon all but the extreme left of the 47th's support position was in possession of the enemy.

It was past this position that the two companies of the 48th from the railway, 1,000 yards below, now had to withdraw. The only way open to the main part of them was up the next spur to the north-east of that which the Germans had captured. Here the 48th had a platoon of its support company under Lieutenant Mitchell holding, on the southern edge of the ravine, an isolated post more or less in extension of the 47th's support line; the platoon could see a few of the 47th holding the top of the spur on its right. The front-line platoons now moved, one after the other, up this spur, covered by the Lewis gun on the prominence near its foot, and by the right flank platoon, which had to remain on the railway till the last of the others was clear. Finally came the turn of this platoon. Not all of it was able to extricate itself from the forward area, for the enemy was

⁵⁶ Lieut. H. F. W. Marson, 47th Bn. Farmer; of Toogoolawah, Q'land; b. Streatham, London, 3 Aug., 1878.

already on three sides of its right flank post. The last men made towards the heights. The barrage of their own artillery lay between them and their goal, and heading towards the support line they found Germans entrenched ahead of them. The enemy opened with machine-guns, and the Australians ran northward seeking escape in that direction. But there also they were met by heavy fire. Driven to shelter in an old gun-pit, they were eventually captured.



But the remainder of the two companies had gone clear, the neighbouring platoons of the left company also retiring when the troops from the railway reached them. Lieutenant Mitchell of the 48th, past whose support post on the southern edge of the ravine they withdrew, writes:⁵⁷

Our front line men retired on the flank of, and parallel to, large bodies of advancing German stormers. The last two Australians rivetted my attention. They moved back at a steady trot. As cover and opportunity offered, they stopped and ripped a magazine into the flank, cool and steady . . . a most perfect example of rearguard work.

As these companies passed, Mitchell's platoon became the front line. Just visible on its right was still a post of the 47th, under a young, rather haggard sergeant, the men lying in the open gazing down a wide valley into which Mitchell's platoon could not see. Mitchell went over to this post, and found himself looking on a panorama of the attack. Below him, in the triangle of low ground ending at the railway, were the enemy infantry, advancing "in hordes" with "cool, ordered determination".⁵⁸ On and beyond the railway were enemy field-guns in action, the flash at their muzzles being followed instantly by the burst of the shells close at hand. By the railway were German reserves resting, waiting the

⁵⁷ Reveille, July 1934, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Other observers also noted that the Germans were advancing quite unconcerned by any fire that met them.

order to advance. The men of the 47th beside him, themselves under heavy fire, were shooting at the more prominent groups of the oncoming enemy, but, as they fired into one, others would advance. Mitchell told the young sergeant that, so long as this post held, his platoon would protect its left.

Mitchell's post was now heavily engaged with Germans creeping up on its own front. Twice more he went across to the party of the 47th—the first time half its men lay motionless behind their rifles; the second time no one stirred. The Germans were now working round his post, but the reply to his report was still a curt "Hang on". The position was beginning to look black when an order arrived from Captain Imlay⁵⁹ to withdraw "to the line by the aeroplane". With the Lewis gunner staying behind to sweep all the visible enemy under cover, the platoon retired by successive groups; last but not one went the small Lewis gunner, Private Connaughton;⁶⁰ and last, in accordance with the proud procedure of the A.I.F., the officer. Mitchell had no notion where the "aeroplane" was, but, following his platoon across the ravine, presently saw "to my joy a good continuous trench line called Pioneer trench. . . . Had to step through wire to reach it." It was filled with a mixture of units from the front and support lines—not yet sorted out, but entirely confident.

It was then 1.30. The 4th Division's front line was still holding at its two extremities; on the left at the farm beside the Amiens road, the flank platoon of the 48th still resisted all attacks, its commander, Lieutenant Shepherdson,⁶¹ formerly Lewis gun sergeant of the battalion, still in charge, though at an early stage shot through the lung. On the right the 52nd was holding about half its former sector on the railway, with its left flank bent back at an acute angle up the hill.

⁵⁹ Brother of Colonel Imlay of the 47th.

⁶⁰ L/Cpl. W. J. Connaughton, M.M. (No. 4776; 48th Bn.). Mill hand; of Lion Mill, W. Aust.; b. Guildford, W. Aust., 1896. Killed in action, 14 May, 1918.

⁶¹ Lieut. H. M. Shepherdson, M.C., M.M.; 48th Bn. Cabinet maker; of Perth W. Aust.; b. Driffield, East Yorkshire, Eng., 18 Nov., 1892

Of the two machine-gun batteries in the neighbourhood of the quarry, no definite news had come back. Clearly they had now been overrun. Some of the wounded spoke of hearing them still firing long after the Germans were through, and the commander of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion,⁶² to which the divisional company (24th) now belonged, believed that the gun-crews and their officers had fought to the last. His story of a heroic defence was spread wide by the war correspondents, but later evidence raised doubts, and nine days after the attack there came back, in a daring escape through the German lines at Dernancourt, two Australians, Corporal Lane⁶³ and Private Ruschpler,⁶⁴ who had been part of the garrison at the quarry, and who told a quite different tale.

Each battery, it will be remembered, consisted of four machine-guns; they were on the slope between the front and support lines of the 47th Battalion, one actually in the quarry, the other spread out along a trench 350 yards farther to the left. They had been warned during the night that an attack was expected.⁶⁵

The bombardment fell thick around them, but caused no casualties in the quarry although about thirty shells exploded there. In addition, throughout the bombardment strong machine-gun fire swept the lip of the quarry, and when, at 9, the artillery lifted, this grazing fire became intense. Fog still hid the front line, but between 9.15 and 9.30 Corporal Lane, one of the two men who subsequently escaped, and who was then looking out, saw what he took to be hand-grenades bursting at the railway in the extreme right sector of the 47th Battalion. Still the guns and tripods, which had been completely dismantled at dawn, were not mounted.

The Germans had the quarry smothered in machine-gun bullets (said Lance-Corporal Whitnear⁶⁶ afterwards). We could not show our heads at all. . . . We did not get the chance to mount our guns.

⁶² Lieut.-Colonel Harry Murray.

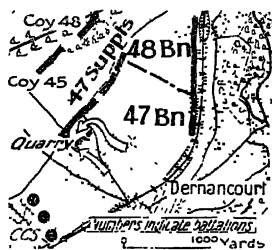
⁶³ Cpl. C. W. Lane (No. 372; 24th M.G. Coy.). Butcher; of Geraldton, W. Aust.; b. Church Stanton, Devon, Eng., 7 July, 1885.

⁶⁴ Pte. R. C. Ruschpler (No. 648; 24th M.G. Coy.). Bank clerk; of Artarmon, N.S.W.; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 25 Dec., 1894.

⁶⁵ For their orders, see p. 359.

⁶⁶ L./Cpl. W. H. Whitnear (No. 556; 24th M.G. Coy.). Locomotive fireman; of Kogarah, N.S.W.; b. Sheffield, Eng., 1888.

At 10.15 Corporal Lane, looking out from a special observation post, saw five or six men coming up the road from the railway arch. He took them for Australian infantry retiring, and called his officer, who looked through the opening and agreed. The corporal was about to take another look when his eye was caught by the spectacle of fifty Germans approaching across country from his left rear, only 150 yards away. He then saw three or four hundred of them down the valley on the same flank, near the old prisoners-of-war compound, advancing westwards. The machine-gun officer ordered out the guns, and Lane and others ran to get them into action. But, before this could be done, shots were fired from the rear bank of the quarry, and, looking round, they saw it lined by Germans, lying down with rifles aimed, and an officer standing directing them. Some fifty more appeared at the entrance of the quarry, which opened south-west. The machine-gunners, entirely at their mercy, were captured without firing a shot. The other machine-gun battery, several hundred yards to the left, had already been captured by the same method, being completely surprised by the enemy appearing unexpectedly behind it. The Germans did not even trouble to escort the prisoners, but told them to get back to Dernancourt; German troops were swarming past, and there was nothing to do but to obey or be shot.⁶⁷ An officer of the German battalion—the II/230th R.I.R.—which was then passing has written:



In the sunken road which leads from the railway embankment to the heights a group of Englishmen, probably shirkers, was collecting, which now came out to meet us with hands raised high. Our artillery

⁶⁷ The story of Lane and Ruschpler was interesting. After capture, while they were going down the hill towards Dernancourt, Lane found a wounded Australian. German troops were then beginning to march up the road towards the hilltop, and Lane called to a red cross man among them to attend to the Australian. The German came across and bound up the Australian's wounds. The wounded man said he could walk, and so Lane helped him on down into the village to the German aid-post, which was in one of the houses.

Ruschpler had been told off by the Germans to help a wounded German officer. He found the officer sitting with his orderly in a field before the village, which

must have shot very effectively against the hill in front of us, at least so far as moral effect goes, for the machine-gun nests on the slope, which would have been able to impede us materially, had left their guns in the lurch and vanished. Without a shot the heights in this sector of the battalion's attack were taken and occupied; with this the battalion at 10.30 had achieved its objective.

The writer was obviously not aware that the prisoners whom he saw were the crews of the machine-guns, and had been surrounded before capture; but, at least in his judgment as to the influence which the machine-gun batteries might have had upon the attack, no student of the battle will disagree with him. The machine-gun posts on this slope were, it is

was then being heavily shelled. This barrage was at the moment so ugly that the Germans could not get into the place. Some shells burst short, and presently the orderly, and one of several Australians who collected there with them, were wounded. When at length the fire slackened somewhat, Ruschpler and another Australian volunteered to fetch stretchers from the village, and, having secured one, carried the officer in. At the aid-post Ruschpler again met Lane, who was making himself useful there with the notion that he might obtain a chance to escape after dark.

The German doctor at the aid-post said that the place was becoming rather dangerous, and told them to take the wounded officer to a cellar a few doors away. They did so, and, on returning, also carried thither an Australian whose wounds had been dressed. They had barely got him out of the door when a shell from one of the British 18-pounders burst in the room, taking off the German doctor's head and doing great damage in the aid-post. The Germans, who till then had treated the two men very well, became very bitter. About 4 p.m. they were told to carry the doctor's body back to his billet at Méaulte. It was tied in a waterproof sheet, and slung on a pole, and they set out, escorted by two unarmed Germans. The road to Méaulte was very muddy, and by the time they were half-way there they were exhausted. The Germans relieved them, and carried the body to the outskirts of Méaulte, where, as the village was being shelled, they sat down beside the scaffold of a water-tank. The two Germans were sitting apart when a big British shell—a blind—just missed their heads. They called the Australians to leave the body and make a run with them into the village. They reached the doctor's billet, and ate his dinner, the two Germans refusing to eat until the Australians had eaten first. They all slept there, and next day the Australians joined a body of some 200 prisoners who were being marched back to Péronne.

After several days' work at Péronne, burying German dead and working in stores, they were sent forward to an old British prison camp at Bray in order to prepare an aerodrome at Cappy. Here they were within reach of British shell-fire, and one shell, meant for Bray, made a hole in the barbed-wire entanglement, through which, early on the night of April 12, the two mates escaped. They hurried back across country to Méaulte, where several Germans' on the roads hailed them; but they simply hastened on, crept up to the German front line on the Lavieville heights; and, when they saw that it had no wire, rushed through it between two sentries and reached the Australian line, fortunate not to be shot down by the Australian sentries as they did so.

The records relating to the Australian prisoners taken in the Battle of Dernancourt are especially interesting as indicating the impossibility of arriving at any sweeping judgment upon the attitude of the German (or probably any other) army towards prisoners. The records describe a number of actions of marked kindness and chivalry on the part of members of the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division towards their Australian prisoners, but also include evidence of quite uncommon brutality; so much so as to arouse the suspicion that this division bore some grudge against Australian troops, or else that the demeanour of the Australians, and possibly their answers, were resented.

Private J. A. O'Rourke (Cobram, Vic.; died 17 Aug., 1923) of Captain Symons' company of the 47th stated that, when the seven survivors in his part of the support trench were surrounded after a very hard fight, and surrendered, on

true, dangerously exposed; and, as the enemy had apparently detected them beforehand, and was able to deluge them with fire over the heads of his approaching infantry, the mounting of the guns and keeping of proper look-out were difficult. But the eight guns, boldly handled, should at least have been able to do much damage before they were overwhelmed. The court of inquiry found that neither post kept a sufficient look-out, and that the guns in the quarry should have been maintained ready on their tripods. The feeling in the A.I.F. was that the handling of the divisional machine-gun company, a comparatively new one, had on this occasion fallen far short of the standard expected of their corps. Two machine-guns of the 13th Company on the forward slope near the C.C.S. were also eventually captured by encirclement; but these guns had been mounted, although the gunners at first saw little to shoot at. One was disabled by a German sniper who worked round its left, and the gunner,⁶⁸ endeavouring to repair it, was seriously wounded. Two other guns of the 13th Company at the C.C.S. were half-encircled, but their commander, Lieutenant Tuckett,⁶⁹ by making a détour to the south, succeeded in bringing out one and getting it into action

climbing out of the trench they were asked by a German officer who they were. On Private F. Curtis (Tambourine, Q'land) saying "Australians," the officer drew his pistol and shot Curtis through the stomach. Curtis dropped, and the officer told two others of the group to carry him to the rear, where he died.

On the other hand, when another party of Australians including several officers was captured, one of the Australian officers, after taking off his equipment, found his revolver at his hip, and, not knowing what he was doing (for he had no recollection of the incident afterwards) wildly fired six shots at the German officer who had captured his party—fortunately missing him. The German officer, white with anger, wrenched the revolver from him and said: "Do you know I could shoot you for this?" Nevertheless, displaying a chivalrous restraint that would be rare in any army, he sent the party back unharmed. The captured Australians asked that they might be allowed to carry back their own wounded. This was not allowed—the Germans naturally had to be cleared first; but one of the doctors in Dernancourt treated the wounded alternately—one Australian for each German.

Private V. Savage (Toowong, Q'land) of the 47th's right company, wounded through the elbows and captured, on his way from Dernancourt to the rear asked some Germans for a drink. They asked, in turn, who he was, and, when he said "Australian," they hit him in the mouth and told him not to make a noise on pain of being bayoneted.

Captain Fraser of the 52nd, after capture, was on the road from Bécordel to Mamez, when a German artillery officer spoke to him in French, and said that the war was over. On Fraser's "replying," the German struck him across the face with his riding whip and rode on.

⁶⁸ Pte. A. V. Postle (No. 516; 13th M.G. Coy.). Clerk; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. Pittsworth, Q'land, 15 Aug., 1897.

⁶⁹ Lieut. R. J. Tuckett, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Pearler; of Melbourne; b. Royal Park, Vic., 1890.

again, although eight men of his detachment of eleven were either killed or wounded.

The most anxious position at this time was that of Captain Kennedy, whose company with three widely distributed posts formed the flank of the 52nd on the hillside in front of the C.C.S. The Germans were pushing up the gullies beyond his front, and, if they appeared on the hilltop behind and above him, his position would be desperate. Colonel Whitham of the 52nd ordered the attached company of the 51st, under Captain Kelly, to move up on to Kennedy's left, but, through some misunderstanding, although Kelly reported this done, it was not done, the position taken up by the company being on the reverse side of the slope, out of sight of Kennedy's line. As Kennedy continued to appeal for support on his left, Whitham sent up all the men he could collect at his headquarters under Lieutenant Wicks,⁷⁰ with three Lewis guns. Wicks duly went forward, and at 2 o'clock reported that some party of the 12th Brigade was on his left.

Actually this party was the remnant of Stuart Perry's company of the 45th at the sheep pens.⁷¹ Perry was a junior officer,⁷² and it happened that during the fight the arrival of another company commander, back from leave, displaced Captain Adams (a young railway foreman before the war), who during the previous week in front of Dernancourt had done the work of a superman. Adams was at once sent to the forward company. He found it reduced to Perry (who was soon afterwards wounded) and fourteen men. Perry said that he had then sent forward three platoons and wanted to know whether the remainder should attempt to move up. The racket of machine-guns was incessant, and some movement of troops, difficult to interpret, was occurring over the brow of the plateau 300 yards ahead. Adams, searching with his field-glasses from behind one of the hurdles, saw a number of Australians with their hands above their heads among

⁷⁰ Lieut. E. Wicks, M.C., M.M.; 52nd and 51st Bns. Civil servant; of West Guildford, W. Aust.; b. Collingwood, Vic., 20 March, 1893.

⁷¹ See p. 391.

⁷² Captain O. B. Dibbs (North Sydney), previously commanding the company, had been killed on April 1.

their German captors.⁷³ Any advance by his party was obviously out of the question, and he told Perry that their duty was to hold on and stop any further advance by the enemy.

After a short interval, during which the movements ahead ceased, an extended line of men was seen there, coming over the edge of the slope. They appeared to be wearing British helmets, and it seemed possible that some other party of Australians might be withdrawing. Adams, however, after careful scrutiny, made sure that, though some of the helmets were British, the men were German. Fire was at once opened; to get at them better, a Lewis gunner with the party, Lance-Corporal Bannister,⁷⁴ stood up and fired his gun from the shoulder of Lance-Corporal Squires.⁷⁵ The enemy's attempt to make ground on the plateau was thus stopped, and Bannister and Squires, continuing to shoot at intervals in the same manner, though themselves standing fully exposed, kept their opponents down. Eventually, however, Adam's party found itself fired on by a German machine-gun thrust forward along the Laviéville road directly on its right flank. The enemy was evidently pursuing the tactics by which he had isolated and captured the other parties. No other Australians were visible on the plateau, and Adams accordingly sent his men back one by one to join the rest of the battalion in Pioneer Trench, he himself and the Lewis gunner remaining to cover them. By 2 o'clock the withdrawal was complete, and the Australian front line on the plateau lay along Pioneer Trench.

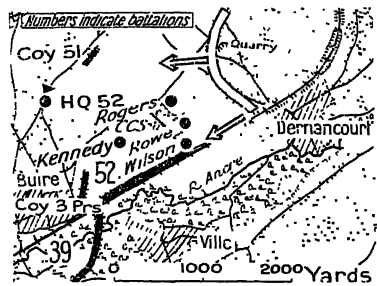
At about this time the 52nd, from which these events on the summit were hidden, saw strong bodies of the enemy moving up from the railway, obviously for a renewal of the attack. Captain Williams, whose company now held the flank on the railway, reported that 200 had come up to old trenches east of the C.C.S. Another force, estimated at two battalions, could be seen advancing northwards up the centre of the down as if to attack the 48th. The fire upon Williams's and Kennedy's companies increased. At 3.37 Williams reported

⁷³ The prisoners of the 47th were sent to the rear down the road by the quarry and under the railway arch.

⁷⁴ Cpl. W. J. Bannister, D.C.M. (No. 1912; 45th Bn.). Labourer; of Darlington, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 9 July, 1895. Died 20 July, 1929.

⁷⁵ Sgt. A. C. Squires, M.M. (No. 1409; 45th Bn.). Woodworker; of Alexandria, N.S.W.; b. Alexandria, 11 March, 1898

that he was losing men very rapidly and would be hard put to it to hold the railway. Men in the observation post of the 52nd could see both infantry and what they took to be cavalry assembling in the trees south of the Ancre. The "cavalry" again proved to be guns. At 4 o'clock the Germans began to thrust south-westwards along the railway, enfilading it with machine-guns. Wilson's platoon of Kennedy's company

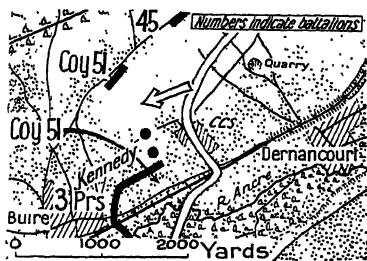


--its commander having been badly wounded shortly after noon--was dislodged and driven back along the embankment, together with the left of Williams's company. The two machine-guns of the 13th Company, on which the previous retirement had pivoted, had to withdraw 150 yards beside the railway. The centre platoon of Kennedy's company under Lieutenant Rowe, hitherto the main defence at the C.C.S., was now shot out of its trench by enfilade fire from the south, and Lieutenant Rogers and the mixed troops on the flank up the hill were driven to Kennedy's headquarters. Here the Lewis gunners managed to pin down the Germans in front of them, but numbers continued to advance along the sunken road higher up the hill. The hail of fire made it worse than useless to attempt swinging out a flank across the open; all that Kennedy could do was to switch the fire of his northern post upon the Germans up near the hillcrest, and keep the rest of his men shooting to the front. In spite of this fire, the Germans continued to creep round the hilltop. Some of them could be seen carrying a heavy object on a frame--possibly a trench-mortar. In front the Germans brought up a field-gun and opened fire with it. Down on the railway the two companies of the 52nd, still in position there, now found themselves under machine-gun fire from the rear, and, in parts, some panic occurred. The troops made back from the railway to the support trenches, and their officers had some difficulty in stopping them. Their position at the railway was abandoned, and part of it was occupied by the Germans.

“As the men came streaming back to the support line,” says the history of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion, “the enemy opened upon them savagely, at practically point blank range, from light guns in Dernancourt.” The retiring men took cover in the support posts and in a trench connecting these with Buire, already garrisoned by a company of the 3rd Pioneers who were firing at Germans attempting to cross the railway line to the C.C.S.

The situation on the right flank was an ugly one, with Kennedy fighting the Germans to the north, on the hill above him, and to the east, and the other companies, almost back to back with him, facing the enemy south of them at the railway. Fortunately the attack from the south was feeble. In the morning an advance attempted by 300 Germans through the open timber on the river flats, from Ville towards Treux, was quickly smashed by the fire of the 39th Battalion (3rd Division). This effort was now repeated, but less than a fourth of the previous number of the enemy appeared, and they were immediately stopped. The pressure on Kennedy's left flank on the hill, however, threatened to become unendurable, and he sent again to his colonel for help.

Colonel Whitham despatched to him at once a second company of the 51st under Captain Owen. The company was given a direction which would take it straight to Kennedy's left, and at 5.15 it passed Whitham's headquarters. But, as it rounded the hill, it came upon the right company of the 52nd (Captain Stubbings) just launching an advance to reoccupy its abandoned position on the railway. Owen's company joined the left of this advance and swept southwards to the railway, leaving Kennedy still unreinforced. At the railway reinforcement was so little needed that some of the troops there now turned their backs to the line and fired at the Germans high up the slope behind them, who were attacking Kennedy.

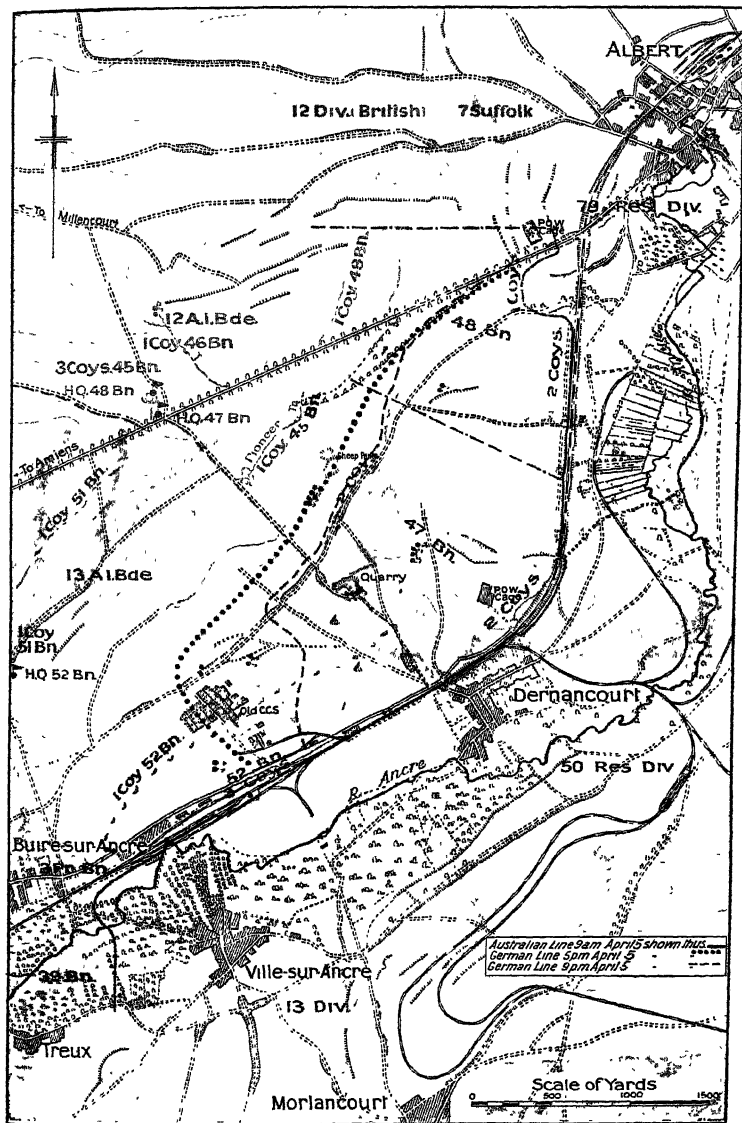


At 5.30 Kennedy saw what he had long feared to see, the heads of a line of men appearing over the hilltop directly above him.

At the other end of the 4th Division's line the left flank post of the 48th, with Lieutenant Shepherdson still in command, had at last, at 3.30, withdrawn from the original front line, retiring northwards to the first post of the 7th Suffolk (12th Division), a considerable distance from its left, and thence rejoining its battalion in Pioneer Trench. Orders had meanwhile come through to the 45th, 47th, and 48th Battalions reorganised in Pioneer Trench on this flank, and to the 52nd at the C.C.S. on the other, that a counter-attack by a battalion of the 13th Brigade was being arranged; this battalion would drive the Germans down the hill; the flanks were to support it with fire and to conform to its movement; the artillery would lay a barrage ahead.

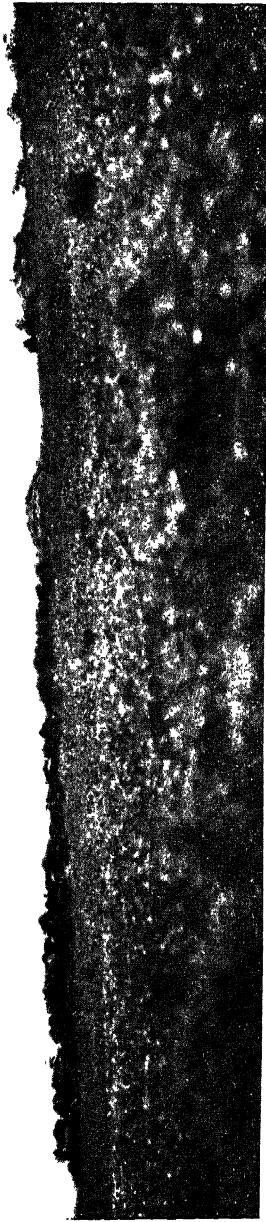
The Counter-Attack

This counter-attack had to be quickly staged, news of the situation that rendered it necessary having come through only about noon. The 49th had been sent forward from Laviéville towards its jumping-off line at 1.12, and, while it was on its way, the divisional commander (General MacLagan) and brigadiers settled the plan of attack. On two points they differed. MacLagan thought that use should be made of the tanks, but experience of the fatal unpunctuality and unreliability of these instruments at Bullecourt, caused his subordinates to reject any plan that might make the counter-attack dependent on them. They agreed, however, that, when the advance had been made, the tanks should come forward to circle the position and protect the troops digging in. The second difference was that, whereas MacLagan laid down that the object of the 49th must be to reach the railway, Gellibrand—backed up in this by Colonel Leane, on whose opinion he placed much weight—held that, in the 12th Brigade's sector, an advance so far down the slope was out of the question, and that the utmost that could be done was to retake the support line. MacLagan, possibly in accordance with direction from above, insisted on his point, and the order sent to the



SECOND DERNANCOURT, 5TH APRIL, 1918

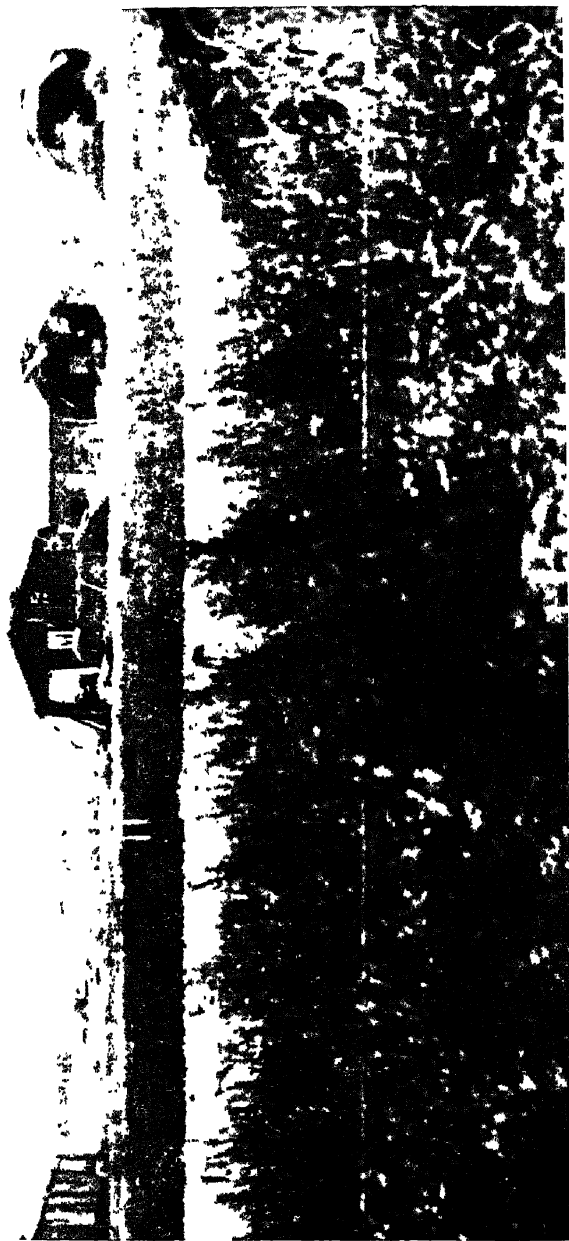
The dispositions are those existing at 9 a.m., when the German infantry delivered the main attack.



35. WHERE THE COUNTER-ATTACK ENDED, 5TH APRIL, 1918

View from the Australian front line on the slope above Dernancourt. An abandoned German machine-gun can be seen on the right—its position was too exposed to be afterwards reached by either side. (Captain Wilkins had to risk his life to add this photograph and plate 36 to the Australian records.)

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E2109.
Taken on 24th April, 1918.*



36. THE SOUTHERNMOST HUTS OF THE OLD CASUALTY CLEARING STATION, SHOWING THE AUSTRALIAN FRONT-LINE TRENCH DUG AFTER THE BATTLE

The view is from the railway in front of Buire

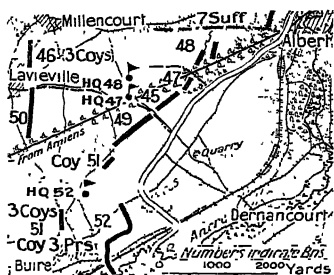
*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No L2499
Taken on 14th June, 1918.*

To face p 403

49th was that it should retake the railway. But Leane, who was in charge of the forward troops of the 12th Brigade, showing, as usual, an independence that would have been highly dangerous in a less capable soldier, directed their effort to ousting the enemy from the sunken road below the crest and reoccupying the support posts.

While these plans had been forming, the 49th had moved across the down to the valley north-east of Colonel Whitham's headquarters. Some time was lost through its taking a direction towards Buire, but this was corrected through a messenger from the 47th, and by 4 o'clock the battalion was lined out along a cross-road on the reverse slope of the mushroom prominence, and Colonel Denton, with his headquarters for the moment at a clump of seven tall trees there, had received Brigadier-General Glasgow's order for the operation. On his left were two companies of the 45th⁷⁶ under Captains Davies⁷⁷ and Holman,⁷⁸ with a third in support—Adams's company now mustered only eight men. Next was a remnant of the 47th, and, farthest left, the reorganised 48th in Pioneer Trench. That part of Pioneer Trench being in alignment with the support position farther south, the 48th was ordered by Leane merely to support the attack with its fire.

The fixing of the time for the assault was left to Colonel Denton, and by 4.45 he saw that the assembly was sufficiently advanced for an attack at 5.15. It was already past 5 when this decision was passed through Leane to the staffs in rear. Little time was thus left to get the information to the batteries, which, indeed, had found some difficulty in securing early information of the arrangements. Nevertheless at 5.15 they laid down on the



⁷⁶ At this stage Colonel Leane gave to the 45th the company of the 46th which he had till then held in reserve.

⁷⁷ Capt. E. Davies, M.C.; 45th Bn. Labourer; of Sydney; b. Kirkdale, Lancs., Eng., 1800.

⁷⁸ Capt. J. H. Holman, M.C.; 45th Bn. Engineering apprentice; of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Sunny Corner, N.S.W., 12 Oct., 1896.

old support line a bombardment which, though at some points slight, was at others fairly heavy. It was to last for six minutes and then move 500 yards farther down the hill. The quarry was specially shelled with 4.5-inch howitzers.

Of this counter-attack, one of the finest ever carried out by Australian troops, strangely little has been recorded. The infantry making it knew that their division was fighting with its back to the wall, and the artillery felt that every shot would help the infantry, part of which the gunners near Millencourt could actually see advancing. The troops went forward, "nominally in waves," as Colonel Leane said afterwards, "but actually in one line or throng." From the start, though partly covered by the swell of the summit, they were under dangerous fire; Lieutenants Mitchell⁷⁹ and Theo Perry⁸⁰ of the 45th and many others were killed immediately after leaving Pioneer Trench. But, as the line of determined men came over the crest of the hill into sight of the Germans only a few hundred yards ahead, there broke out what Colonel Imlay described as "a devilish fire, a tremendous tattoo of machine-guns."⁸¹ Groups of the enemy were ahead of the old support trenches, which were very strongly held, and they were firing unhindered, the British barrage falling behind them. Even back at Pioneer Trench, two of the eight men remaining in Adams's company, which was then climbing out to follow the advance, were killed by this whirlwind of small-arms fire. The forward line charged over the crest and was lost to the sight of those watching from the rear, but the fire of machine-guns continued.

It was at this moment that the advancing line of the 49th came into the view of the posts of the 52nd anxiously holding on near the casualty clearing station. Captain Kennedy, who felt a momentary fear that this might be a German attack from behind his flank, and eagerly scanned the figures to ascertain whether they were friend or enemy, noted an immediate easing of the fierce fire that had been lashing his position. Very soon it ceased altogether, most of the German rifles and

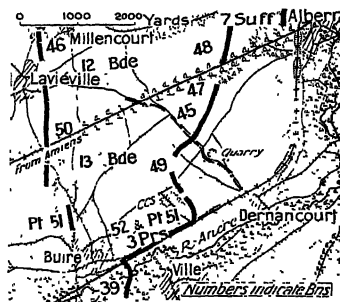
⁷⁹ Lieut. H. F. Mitchell, 45th Bn. Barrister; of Kangaroo Island, and Renmark, S. Aust.; b. Kensington, S. Aust., 11 Aug., 1885. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

⁸⁰ Lieut. T. W. Perry, 45th Bn. Engineer; of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Auburn, 9 May, 1895. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

⁸¹ Captain Davies of the 45th said afterwards that the machine-gun fire was the heaviest he had ever known; other accounts agree as to its intensity.

machine-guns being turned on the advancing line. In face of the storm of bullets, the attack came only slowly towards his flank, but it did come. By 6.30 the Germans were in full flight all over the ground in front, abandoning the C.C.S., and shot at, as they retired, by every weapon in the 52nd's partly-recaptured line on the railway. Dusk came on and from the 13th Brigade a report went back that the 49th had "just failed" to reach the railway.

It was, however, not until 9 o'clock that Colonel Denton of the 49th had any real news of his battalion's progress. The extreme right, he knew, had retaken the C.C.S. but had been stopped there. At 8 word reached him from the commander of his left company, Captain Gledhill,⁸² that the company was high up the slope, a little short of the old support line; it was indeed precisely in the position to which Leane had wished to send the 45th at noon, when his order clashed with Gellibrand's.⁸³ Gledhill said that he could see troops digging on his right, and the 45th Battalion was on his left. Two hours later there came through a message from the commander of the right company, Lieutenant Graham,⁸⁴ indicating that the 49th held a line from his position to Gledhill's but with a gap in it high up the hill. The commanders of the two centre companies, Captains Willenbrock⁸⁵ and Atkinson,⁸⁶ had been killed, as had half their junior officers.⁸⁷ A company of the 51st was placed in the gap. The right had crossed the sunken road, the enemy fleeing from that part of it and from



⁸² Capt. A. J. Gledhill, 49th Bn. Bank official; of Oakey, Q'land, and Melbourne; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 16 June, 1886.

⁸³ See p. 371.

⁸⁴ Lieut. J. L. Graham, M.C.; 49th Bn. School teacher; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Gympie, 28 Sept., 1894.

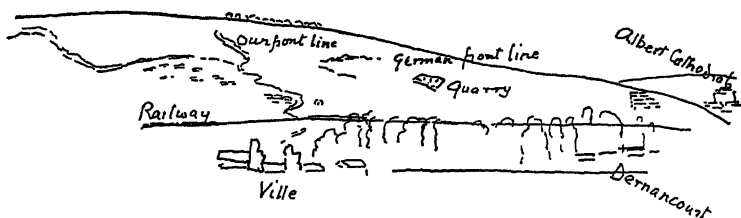
⁸⁵ Capt. J. H. Willenbrock, 49th Bn. Clerk; of Bundaberg, Q'land, and Sydney; b. London, 1888. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

⁸⁶ Capt. J. V. Atkinson, 49th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Coorparoo, Q'land; b. Coorparoo, 3 Dec., 1894. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

⁸⁷ Lieuts. R. G. T. Turner, W. Henderson, and T. C. Naylor were killed. In Graham's company Lieut. R. H. Verry was killed, and Lieut. W. M. Devine mortally wounded. (Turner belonged to Brisbane and Mackay, Q'land; Henderson to Perth, W. Aust.; Naylor to Bundaberg, Q'land; Verry to Coorparoo, Q'land; Devine to Toowoomba, Q'land.)

the C.C.S. The centre had quickly run into overwhelming fire and after a short, wild fight, by which the foremost enemy was cleared, was forced to ground, the Germans in front of it bolting away whenever opportunity occurred. Many of the Australian wounded were hit again on their way to the rear, and killed. On the left the 45th had been met by the same whirlwind of machine-gun fire but, as before, reached the sheep pens. The line was forced to ground 200 yards short of the 47th's old support position on the right and 400 yards short of it on the left. Near the C.C.S. the 49th captured half-a-dozen prisoners and four machine-guns; and the 12th Brigade took about the same number of each.

No more than the topmost edge of the slope had thus been regained; but this was not far short of the position that had first been designated by General Congreve for the main line of resistance, and was, in fact, the only position that had ever really been defensible. General MacLagan decided that his reserves were insufficient to justify any further attempt to recapture the line of the railway. The tanks, which were to protect the infantry while it dug in, did not arrive at Colonel Leane's headquarters until 8.10. It was then night; the



The line after the Battle of Dernancourt, as seen from the front of the 3rd Aust. Divn. (From a sketch made in May, 1918. Note.—The tower of Albert Cathedral was destroyed on April 16 by a shell from the British heavy artillery.)

officer-in-charge explained that he was not allowed to use his tanks in the dark, and they were accordingly returned to Laviéville. MacLagan was nervous lest the enemy should continue the attack next day with new troops. "The fighting has been harder than we realise," he said to the corps commander on the telephone. "I don't think, if we are hammered by artillery, we shall be able to hold the line." General

Congreve asked where the Germans were going to get the fresh divisions from; the information from the few captured prisoners showed that they had used up the only three that had been available.

General Congreve realised that the attack upon the Laviéville height was only part—though a most important part—of an effort made that day by the Second and Seventeenth German Armies on a front extending from Villers-Bretonneux to Bucquoy. The Seventeenth Army had indeed resumed the offensive, so long postponed, against Hébuterne and Colin-camps, as well as against the V British Corps at Aveluy Wood and Albert. The Germans had gained some ground at Bucquoy village and Aveluy Wood, and had retaken La Signy Farm⁸⁸ from the New Zealanders, but these trivial results from so great an effort did not justify anxiety. Congreve passed on to Third Army MacLagan's warning. The 6th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division, which was arriving from Flanders, was placed under orders to relieve the 12th, whose outpost-line was taken over during the night by the 46th Battalion from Laviéville. The forward garrison of the 7th Suffolk, which was left exposed by the 12th Brigade's withdrawal,⁸⁹ was brought back during the night behind a new line manned by the 7th Norfolk.

But in the morning no attack came. Late in the afternoon an otherwise quiet day was broken by an intense bombardment, started through the British artillery mistaking a German "double-green" flare for the British S.O.S. signal, two greens. The deluge of shells from both sides lasted for two and a half hours. On the afternoon of the 7th the 12th Brigade was relieved by the 6th. Colonel Leane, who had a hot meal waiting for his men in the empty aeroplane hangars at La Houssoye, noted, as after First Bullecourt: "It rained during the march . . . The men marched well and sang most of the journey."

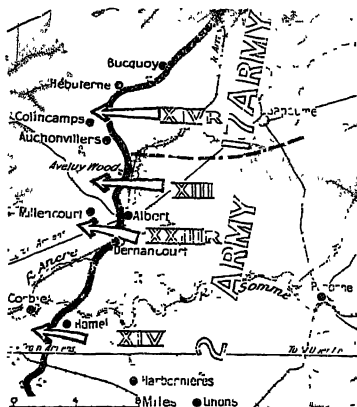
⁸⁸ See p. 141.

⁸⁹ This battalion had held its main position throughout the 5th, being driven back only from some of its outposts. It was at first suggested that the Australian flank should go forward again and protect the British flank, but this plan was wisely abandoned. Part of the 7th Suffolk, which was to form a flank, found the Australians already forming it.

German histories show that the attack at Dernancourt (known to its organisers as "Sonnenschein") had originally been ordered for March 31, but postponed from day to day until the shell-supply was satisfactory. It was to be delivered in concert with other attacks farther north, in which the Seventeenth Army would drive through on either side of Hébuterne to Colincamps, and the Second Army would seize the Auchonvillers-Millencourt ridge, getting round Millencourt on the north. "Sonnenschein" ("Sunshine") was to reach the line Hénencourt-Laviéville-Buire.

German Narratives

Before the delivery of these attacks, it had been hoped that, south of the Somme, the British front would be crumbling before the blow struck on the previous day by the Eighteenth Army and the left of the Second. At certain points that thrust had penetrated two miles, and on the night of the 4th the chances had seemed sufficiently good to warrant the continuance of blows south of the Somme also, although the exhaustion of the troops eventually caused the effort there to be restricted to a renewal of the assault near Hamel.

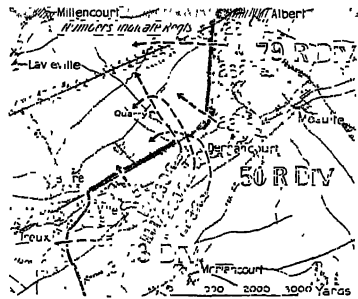


The German thrust at Aveluy and north-east of Albert—the sector held by the 12th, 47th, and 63rd British Divisions,⁹⁰ all tired and weak in numbers—was made by the XIII German Army Corps with three divisions, the 107th, 27th, and 3rd Naval, together with parts of the 79th Reserve and 21st Reserve. According to a narrative in the *Reichsarchiv*, the bombardment there began at 8 with half-an-hour's gas-shelling of the British batteries, followed by half-an-hour's bombardment of the infantry. The reply of the British artillery was weak, but the assault at 9 o'clock, although driving back the British outposts in and south of the wood, came up everywhere against fire from machine-guns posted over the ground in rear and not previously detected, and was stopped far short of its objectives.

The attack on the 4th Australian Division at Dernancourt was delivered by the XXIII Reserve Corps with three divisions: south-east of Albert, by the 79th Reserve Division (which also came against the southern flank of the 12th British); on either side of Dernancourt, by the 50th Reserve Division; and, between Dernancourt and Buire, by part of the 13th Division, another portion of which made an attempt upon the neighbouring part of the 3rd Division's front south of the Ancre, between Buire and Marrett Wood. The weight of the attack was directed against the railway bank held by the 47th and 48th Battalions, against each of which the Germans threw nearly the equivalent of a division, some additional storm troops also being employed. On this front the German plan was similar to that for

⁹⁰ The artillery of the 17th Division also was engaged.

"First Dernancourt" (March 28), but the artillery preparation was to last for two hours, instead of three-quarters of an hour, and was incomparably more severe, and the 50th Reserve Division, which had been rested for a week, employed all three regiments instead of two, and attacked on a narrower front. The crucial task was given to the 230th R.I.R., whose II Battalion, after assembling in cellars in Dernancourt, was to seize the embankment there, advance up the hill, and capture the 47th's support trenches and portion of Pioneer Trench south of the Amiens road. The III and I Battalions of the 230th, and the whole of the 229th R.I.R., were to assemble behind Dernancourt and follow the II/230th in that order.



Upon its reaching its objective, they would turn south-westwards. On their right would be the 79th Reserve Division, which in the meantime would have come up north of the Albert-Amiens road. They would then advance together towards Amiens. It was probably expected that the troops defending the railway between the north-east of Dernancourt and Albert would be overcome with little difficulty, being attacked in front by the 231st R.I.R. (50th Reserve Division) and 262nd and 261st R.I.R.'s (79th Reserve Division), as well as taken in rear by the thrust of the 50th Reserve Division. The 79th Reserve Division therefore attacked with two regiments, the 263rd R.I.R. being held in reserve. By a general order of Ludendorff dated March 30, single field-guns, following the infantry, were to attack machine-gun nests which held out and furnished the principal obstacle, and machine-guns were to be used to keep down the heads of men in the objective during the attack.

All depended upon the success of the II Battalion of the 230th R.I.R. The morale of the 50th Reserve Division was high. It was a Prussian Division and, according to the historian of the 230th,⁹¹ in spite of the losses suffered since March 21, "its keen offensive spirit was still alive. Moreover this time it had been possible sufficiently to prepare the attack, and there was no obvious ground for doubting the result, despite the somewhat difficult change of front" which was to be made when the 230th arrived near the Amiens-Albert road.

The artillery supporting the division had been given 16,000 gas shells for the preparatory gassing of the opposing batteries. The bombardment was to be most intense from 8.30 to 9. No. 3 company of the 3rd Jäger Battalion with four machine-guns, two trench-mortars and two field-guns, was attached to the 50th Division, and an assault detachment of the same battalion was allotted to the 230th for "certain enterprises" on the railway line. Possibly the attack on the 52nd's post at the railway shortly after the preliminary bombardment began was one of these. If not, the troops then engaged must have been covering parties of the 5th and 7th companies of the II/230th trying

⁹¹ *History of the 230th R.I.R.*, p. 219.

to protect the assembly of their battalion by driving away the Lewis gunners who commanded its jumping-off position. Most of the machine-guns of the 2nd company took station in houses in Dernancourt and covered the attack with their fire. The barrage of the British artillery was felt more severely on the Dernancourt-Albert front than elsewhere, but it was noted that the gas-shelling behind the lines there soon ceased.

Of the principal attack at 9 o'clock upon the 47th Battalion opposite the village, the available German records say only that it was met by strong machine-gun fire, partly coming from the flanks. "Nevertheless," writes Lieutenant Heilemann, "the 7th company succeeded in reaching the railway embankment and rolling its defenders up towards the left. By 9.50 it was in our hand. Its existing muddy-yellow garrison gathered together in little squads, and, with hands above their heads, like fleeing flocks of geese with raised wings, trotted through Dernancourt to the rear. Further advance, however, still involved difficulties on account of the machine-gun fire from the railway signal-cabin, which now would have taken us in rear. Captain Krug (the battalion commander) ordered a light *minenwerfer*, that had just come up, to be placed immediately on the embankment and take the machine-gun under its fire. A thousand hands tackled the job at once, and lifted the swaying mortar to the required position. A few well-aimed shots reduced the machine-gun to silence. Meanwhile the companies had deployed into lines of skirmishers and advanced farther." As they went up the hill they met the Australian machine-gunners, already captured—presumably by the 5th company—and passed the silent machine-guns. The crest was reached "without a shot," and at 10.30 the II/230th had finished its work.

Whether it was part of the 230th, or of the 231st—its sister battalion on the right—that captured the 47th Battalion's support trenches, is not indicated. Shortly after 10 o'clock the commander of the 230th advanced his headquarters to the railway embankment, and, when the severe bombardment of Dernancourt eased, the III Battalion, which had meanwhile come up into the cellars there, moved on across the railway and, marching up behind the II, carried through without difficulty its change of front. The I Battalion followed it and wheeled to the left at the quarry. The head of the 229th R.I.R., led by its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Thadden himself, reached the embankment at 9.45 before the railway was fully captured. It reorganised there, and at 11 its leading battalion, the III, with the attached machine-gun company, crossed the embankment to take position on the left of the 230th. At this stage British aeroplanes came overhead, and a few minutes later the troops of the I and II/229th, crowded behind the embankment, began to be deluged by shell including some of large calibre. (Actually, the request for this bombardment seems to have come at 11.30 from infantry or artillery-observers on the heights, who shortly before this had detected Germans "in masses" in Dernancourt, and asked for the village to be shelled by all artillery.) "To stay in this hell," says the historian of the 229th, "appears to be out of the question." Thadden ordered his regiment on to the cemetery, and himself led it over the embankment. As he reached the cemetery road he was mortally wounded by shrapnel. His first words on regaining consciousness were "Have we the cemetery?"

Meanwhile the III/229th reached its allotted position and tried to clear the C.C.S. Somewhat later the II Battalion came in on its left, and, with its own left on the railway, began to push towards Buire.

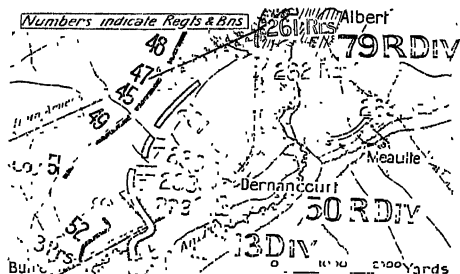
The whole 50th Reserve Division was now in position for its advance towards Amiens; but, instead of its being behind the line of resistance of its opponents there was a line of resistance west of it, and no 79th Reserve Division on its right. That division had attacked, but its southern regiment, the 262nd Reserve, coming against the right of the 48th Battalion, had

been driven back to its jumping-off trench, and the 261st about the Amiens road, had as little success. The historian of the artillery of that division says that most of its batteries this day were brought up to near Albert, and a gun of the 6th Battery was taken up to a position behind houses on the western edge of the town. When the infantry was held up by the southern posts of the 12th British Division on the Albert-Millencourt road, a gun of the 7th Battery was run out well ahead of the attack and, notwithstanding casualties to its crew, succeeded in clearing a copse and allowing the infantry to get forward.

On the southern flank of the battle the 13th German Division achieved nothing at all. It was its right regiment, the 15th, that was caught by machine-guns of the 13th Australian Machine Gun Company when trying to advance, together with some Jägers, from the trees of Ville towards Buire. The 55th I.R. could make no headway against the fire from Marrett Wood, although this was deluged for more than two hours with shell; and on the left the 13th I.R., which was to conform with it, accordingly stayed in its trenches.

Thus, for the second part of its task, the 50th Reserve Division had no support on either flank. A message was sent to divisional headquarters, asking for directions. Meanwhile, the staff of the 230th R.I.R. had established itself in the quarry, and, "precisely at the right time" (says the regimental historian), a brigade⁹² of the divisional artillery came up. "At 5 p.m., after a weak bombardment, the enemy passed to a counter-attack which was easily thrown back. But the great deficiency of leaders now became noticeable. At the cry of the retiring patrols, 'Tommy is coming,' the reserves of all three regiments, closely packed into the gravel pit, began to crumble away to the rear, and had to be vigorously brought forward again. The regimental staff . . . now drew back its headquarters to the railway embankment." A captured sergeant of the 229th described the Australian counter-attack as *sehr schneidig* (very dashing).

The German command did not dream of renewing the attempt to seize the crest. "The enemy's defence was so strong," says a historian of the participating units,⁹³ "that a farther advance was not to be thought of." The German infantry was at once redistributed in depth. The 263rd R.I.R. (79th Reserve Division) was brought up to fill a gap between that division and the 50th Reserve, and the Germans



⁹² The I Abteilung, 50th Reserve Field Artillery Regiment.

⁹³ The 63rd Reserve F.A. Regt. (with the 79th Res. Divn.).

passed for the time being to the defensive. The 230th had lost 236 officers and men,⁹⁴ the 229th 212; the total loss of the three divisions attacking the 4th Australian may therefore be estimated at between 1,300 and 1,600,⁹⁵ not a heavy toll for fighting of such intensity.

The casualties on the Australian side were 580 in the 12th Brigade, and about 500 in the 13th, besides 153 in the field artillery supporting the 4th Division.⁹⁶ That artillery fired during the engagement 27,588 rounds.

It remains to mention the part played in the battle farther north, at Hébuterne, by the other brigade—4th—of the same division. Between Hébuterne and Bucquoy the 62nd British Division, under whose orders the 4th Brigade was serving, had, between March 31st and April 2nd been relieved by the 37th, and this division had decided to attempt, early on April 5th, the recapture of Rossignol Wood. The 63rd Brigade, which was to make the attack, was to be assisted by eleven tanks. The 15th Australian Battalion, which, with a company of the 14th attached, lay next to that brigade in the line, was to connect with its flank near the Poplars. Farther south the 13th Battalion would try to divert the enemy's attention by raiding.

At 5.30 on the 5th the 63rd Brigade launched its attack in the muddy conditions of that day, but most of the tanks became stuck at the outset, five of them being ditched in the wide, grass covered trenches of the old battlefield. One, on the right, at the head of the British infantry, reached the

⁹⁴ Including its commander and medical officer.

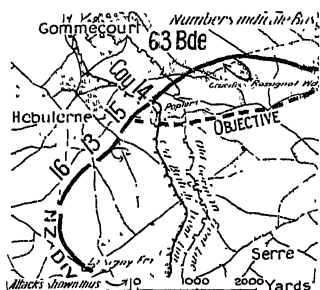
⁹⁵ In the 13th Division it would be comparatively slight. The 2nd Naval Regiment, attacking north of the Albert road, lost 160.

⁹⁶ The details of losses in the infantry were as follows:

<i>12th Brigade.</i>			<i>13th Brigade.</i>		
	Officers.	O.R.		Officers.	O.R.
45 Bn.	13	105	49 Bn.	14	207
46 Bn.	3	70	50 Bn.	—	61
47 Bn.	8	261	51 Bn.	3	58
48 Bn.	4	77	52 Bn.	8	146
24 M.G. Coy.	2	36	13 M.G. Coy.	1	26
12 L.T.M. Bty.	—	1	13 L.T.M. Bty.	1	1
	—	—		—	—
	30	550		27	499
	—	—		—	—

NOTE.—Figures for 13th Bde. include also casualties for March 31–April 4.

Crucifix⁹⁷ and went on to the objective from which, after subduing several machine-guns, it returned with a couple of prisoners. In all 141 prisoners were captured, but the wood, though entered, was not retaken; during the day the troops gradually returned to the jumping-off trenches.



The platoon of the 15th Australian Battalion which was to advance to the Poplars moved off down the old trenches at 5 o'clock, in order to oust a couple of German posts and get close to the barrage when it fell at 5.30. It was observed that when the platoon was just starting the German artillery laid a severe bombardment on the back area, from Hébuterne southwards. The platoon commander, Lieutenant Fewster,⁹⁸ found Germans assembling in the trenches immediately south of him, and his platoon was stopped by fire from a post high on the spur on his left, in front of the 8th Lincolnshire, who themselves were held up by a similar obstacle. The assembled Germans subsequently attacked the Queenslanders, but were driven off by bombing and rifle-fire. The attempt of the 15th to reach the Poplars thus failed; Captain Toft reported that he thought his men had run into preparations for a German attack.

The raid by the 13th Battalion went well. Under cover of Stokes mortars, which fired thirty bombs at the objective, two parties crept out down old saps and joined each other at a predetermined point, capturing a prisoner and a light machine-gun. All this time the German bombardment was thundering overhead, and the shells from the British artillery, replying to protect the front of the New Zealand Division immediately on the right, prevented the 13th from going to a second objective, farther out.

⁹⁷ On the road south-east of "Nameless Farm".

⁹⁸ Lieut. G. E. Fewster, 15th Bn. Farmer; of Brunswick, Vic.; b. Brunswick, 30 March, 1894. Killed in action, 4 July, 1918.

The German bombardment was extraordinarily vehement; according to the historian of the New Zealand Division, "it was perhaps the severest bombardment that the division as a whole experienced during the war." It fell with particular intensity between Hébuterne and Auchonvillers, upon the New Zealanders and the right half of the 4th Australian Brigade. Headquarters of the 13th Battalion had to leave Hébuterne village; but fortunately in that area the fire was not as accurate as it was heavy. The right battalion, the 16th (Western Australia), was in the thick of it, but the posts were seldom hit.

It did not require the tried and experienced company leaders, in whom this brigade was especially rich, to realize that an attack was coming. Shortly after 9 o'clock the troops saw it emerging over Serre ridge to the south-east and also in the valley between, where a line of the enemy was detected moving behind a smoke screen. At 9.27 Captain Aarons reported:

Cannot estimate number of Fritz attacking. Considerable forces though. Get artillery on whole front. . . . Fritz stronger in front of Ahearne [the right company commander] than me.

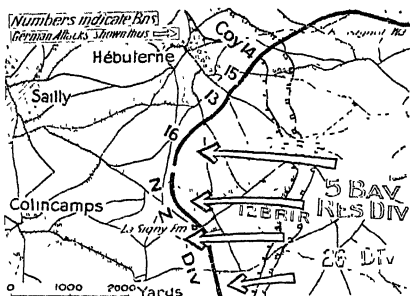
Shortly afterwards came a message from Ahearne:⁹⁹

Things are very hot. Postpone relief till further notice. It is impossible for them to come up. He is massing in front of Quarry and my right, but we don't want artillery support up to date. They are about 150 yards in front of me, but we can kill them as fast as they come. Keep look out for S.O.S. Don't be alarmed as we can kill em as fast as they come.

As in previous attacks the Germans, trying to pass by Hébuterne on the south, exposed their flank to the fire of the whole 4th Brigade. The centre battalion (13th), and even the 15th on the left, were shooting at them, a Lewis gunner of the 15th taking his gun out into No-Man's Land in order to fire into the German flank. A few of the enemy managed to creep up a sap towards the right-flank bombing post of the 16th, but they were quickly routed out

⁹⁹ Ahearne is the officer referred to on p. 142 and in *Vols. III and IV* as Ahrens. He changed his name during the war.

by fire from the Stokes mortars which burst their shells continually among the enemy. Aarons reported that about a battalion of the enemy was involved on this flank, but that only 200-250 of them had actually formed up. The attack began in two waves



but they got so knocked about that the balance [*i.e.*, the remainder] of the attack seemed to be on hands down, along saps, go as you please. Sort of Anzac rules.

On the New Zealand front the Germans, after taking La Signy Farm, tried to work along the saps under cover of fire from the trench-mortars, but the New Zealand line stopped every attempt.

German accounts show that the capture of Hébuterne and Colin camps—to which Crown Prince Rupprecht would previously have devoted his reserves had not Ludendorff overruled him—was the main object of the Seventeenth Army's attack, which was made with the further intention of assisting the thrust of the Second Army towards Amiens. The attack at Bucquoy was (according to the history of the 89th Grenadier Regiment, which undertook it) merely devised in order to take advantage of a gas bombardment laid on the British artillery there so as to assist the divisions attacking farther south; its success in penetrating to the western half of the village (from which part, however, the Germans were quickly ousted by the 42nd British Division) was unexpected.

The main attack, on Hébuterne and Colin camps, was known by the code-name "Loki," and was made by two divisions, the 5th Bavarian Reserve and the 26th, with two others attacking Auchonvillers. The preliminary bombardment for "Loki" lasted four hours,¹⁰⁰ beginning as elsewhere with the gas-shelling of the opposing artillery, and ending at 9 o'clock, when the guns passed to a barrage creeping at the rate of 300 yards in ten minutes. According to the history of the 126th I.R.—which had suffered in previous attempts, but merely garrisoned the existing line in this one—the 5th Bavarian Reserve Division, attacking south of Hébuterne, made "absolutely no headway," and the 26th "very little," the result being "precisely as in previous attacks of the XIV Reserve Corps." The artillery had been regrouped, and the batteries advanced at the beginning of the battle.

¹⁰⁰ According to several German accounts; some, however, say three hours.

The troops who came against the flank of the 16th Australian Battalion were those of the 10th Bavarian R.I.R. On their left was the 12th Bavarian R.I.R., with the 7th Bav. R.I.R. behind it to guard against counter-attack from Hébuterne. According to the historian of the 10th, that regiment on entering the line on April 4 had found the machine-gun fire from Hébuterne "most unpleasant." Attacking at 9 o'clock next morning, the first wave met machine-gun fire from the front and both flanks. Its right battalion (I) is claimed to have "reached its objective." Its left (III) broke up 150-200 metres from the start. Both had to lie all day under heavy fire. The divisional commander ordered another attack to be made at 5 p.m., but afterwards, on representations from the regimental commander, cancelled the order and withdrew the troops. The regiment lost 190 officers and men. "The attack had no prospect whatever of success," says its historian, "unless the enfilade fire of enemy machine-guns were eliminated by the preliminary bombardment and by the barrage."

The stroke against Amiens from north of the Somme had thus failed more completely than that south of the river. Of the bitter attacks that formed part of it, that which fell on the two brigades of the 4th Division at Dernancourt was the strongest ever met by Australian troops, and, by reason of the tactical position, one of the most difficult to resist. They were holding a low, protruding line with a bare steep slope immediately behind it and a village in the enemy's possession actually touching it in front. Until just before the battle it had been assumed that the railway embankment around the foot of Laviéville down would be untenable in the face of any strong attack, and the order had been to resist any such attack half-way up the slope. Although this order had been reversed, the conditions had not changed; and the one action that might have overturned the German arrangements—a concentration of artillery-fire on Dernancourt at the outset—was prevented by the fog, which, added to the bombardment, completely prevented the necessary information from getting through during the first hour of the attack. Towards the end of that hour the Germans effected their purpose of breaking through the posts of the 47th. The swift seizure of the heights and encirclement of the 47th's support line were directly due to the failure of the machine-gun batteries; but this in its turn was partly due to the exposure involved in attempting to hold a salient by occupying isolated

forward positions on a prominent slope. The almost complete absence of news of the rapid developments between 10 and 11 o'clock was largely due to the same cause.

Although the decision to make the railway embankment the line of resistance is obviously open to criticism, it is unlikely that the actual events were much affected by it, inasmuch as the earlier dispositions were not changed. Moreover, the support line was a badly disjointed one. The section dug for the 13th Brigade, far down the hill, was 750 yards ahead of the 47th Battalion's section, near the crest, and the 47th's was insufficiently linked with the 48th's. The pioneers, after digging the well-sited reserve line, had been used to strengthen the front line by tunnelling at the railway.

But, let the tactical judgments be what they may, neither side had the least doubt as to where success lay; this stubborn fight left the Australians overflowing with confidence, the Germans bitterly depressed. Two achievements stand out from it; first, that of the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division in achieving almost perfectly the first part of the task set to it, and, in the face of a stiff defence by first-rate troops, placing itself across the rear of the 12th Brigade's front line, in position to begin the further advance towards Amiens; and, second, that of the 48th Battalion, which, with a fragment of the 47th, for the second time in twelve months, after beating the enemy on its front, found him straight across its rear, and in masterly fashion proceeded to extricate itself, and to come coolly and proudly out of a perilous entanglement. Fine as was the performance of the whole 4th Division, which with two brigades in impossible defences received and repelled with but little bending the blow of two and a half German divisions, there was probably no man engaged that would not give the palm for that day's resistance to the 48th. A German war-correspondent wrote after this fight: "the Australians¹⁰¹ and Canadians are much the best troops that the English have." That statement was interpreted by G.H.Q. as merely an attempt to sow jealousy between the mother

¹⁰¹ This, of course, connoted also the New Zealanders and possibly all dominion troops.

country and the dominions, and possibly such a motive was not absent. The men of the 48th would probably be prouder of the tribute which seven months later some of their comrades found scratched in indelible pencil on two rough wooden crosses, erected by the German front-line troops (together with three or four crosses to their own dead) beside the 48th's old post on the southern edge of the ravine and preserved in the Australian War Memorial to-day:

“Here lies a brave English warrior.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² “Hier liegt ein tapferer Englischer Krieger.” Before these two crosses were taken for the War Museum others were erected in their place.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS—(I) APRIL 9TH-13TH

By April 6th it was as evident to the British troops as to the German that Ludendorff's thrust in the Somme region had, for the moment at least, practically ended. General Rawlinson of the Fourth Army was intent upon straightening out the kink in the line at the junction of the French and British armies, from which the Germans might at any time lever the British out of their position at Villers-Bretonneux. But the flanks of that position were growing strong. In the old VII Corps area, now taken over by General Birdwood and the staff of the Australian Corps,¹ the 2nd Australian Division, arriving from Flanders, on April 8th relieved the two brigades of the 4th Division which had been fighting on and off since March 27th at Dernancourt; and the 1st Division—the last to come down—was now moving up into support.

The two divisions now from Flanders, which to the end of their stay in that region had been harassing their opponents in the patrol warfare at Messines, had been relieved there by tired British divisions, most of which had themselves been relieved a few days before by Australian troops on the Somme or at Hébuterne: the 9th and 21st relieved the 1st Australian, and the 19th, and the 25th relieved the 2nd. The Australian officers and men were rather shocked at the condition of some of the battalions to whom they were handing over—the thin ranks had been expanded by a flood of very young recruits who, to the harder Australians, appeared as mere children, pink cheeked, soft chinned, giving the impression of being dazed by the grim conditions into which they were suddenly plunging. Their inexperience caused the reliefs in some cases to be long drawn out. The 1st Division's diary notes that the incoming divisions showed "some disorganisation . . . due to their recent losses" and were "still deficient in certain equipment." In the 2nd Division the diarist of the 6th

¹ They had left Flêtre in Flanders on April 3, handing over to the IX Corps, and took over from the VII Corps at Montigny at noon on April 6th.

Brigade records that the arriving British 7th Brigade (25th Division) had

lost a lot of Lewis guns and all light trench-mortars. Our line battalions left several of their Lewis guns and teams in with the new people until dawn. The 21st Battalion remained in reserve in the Catacombs until midday April 2nd.

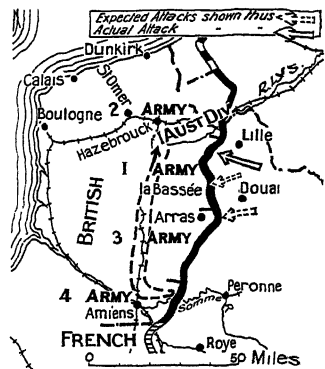
On the other hand the officers of the 28th Battalion, on hearing from Lieutenant-Colonel Birt² of the 8th Border Regiment, himself an Australian, the story of the fighting in the south, were aroused to "much enthusiasm."

The 1st and 2nd Divisions came to the Somme full of eagerness to take their share in dealing with the victorious Germans. The sector which they left had been entirely "out of it," fit only to be garrisoned by troops requiring almost complete rest. On their arrival near Amiens the French inhabitants gave them the same striking welcome that had greeted the earlier divisions, and there still appeared to be every prospect of their having an early chance of giving the enemy a knock. The British staff, acutely conscious of how narrowly the French and British armies had so far avoided separation, had no doubt that Ludendorff would resume the Somme attack; but they expected that as soon as the French reserves were drawn in there, or were temporarily immobilised by the cutting of the railways at Amiens, he would strike the British farther north. Haig's new Director of Intelligence, Brigadier-General Cox, on April 7th foreshadowed—and Foch agreed—that this blow would probably fall on the vital buttress of the British front—the Vimy-Arras sector. It was noted that only twenty German divisions were on April 7th available, but six others, which had been withdrawn from Flanders a week or so previously, would be ready in another week, as would a few that had attacked on March 21st. Since the beginning of April signs of concentration had been observed both north-east and south-east of Arras. Throughout the offensive the four Canadian divisions, together with other tried troops such as the Guards Division, had been kept in this

² Lieut.-Col. C. W. H. Birt, D.S.O. Commanded 8th Bn., The Border Regt., 1917/18. Sheep farmer; of Tambellup district, W. Aust.; b. Walkerville, S. Aust., 20 Nov., 1881. (Happening to be in England at the outbreak of war, Birt immediately enlisted, and on Sept. 22 was commissioned as a 2nd/Lieutenant in The Border Regiment. By June 1917 he was commanding his battalion.)

crucial region, and, among other minor measures, the 12th Australian (Army) Brigade of field artillery was at this juncture sent thither. As to the front farther north, G.H.Q. had no urgent apprehension. It was thought that a *feint* by three or four divisions against the Portuguese might be imminent, but the intelligence map for April 8th showed the German front between Givenchy, just north of the La Bassée canal, and Bois Grenier, south of Armentières, as held by only three German divisions, with no close reserves and very few reserves in the back area. North of the Portuguese the whole British front as far as the Ypres salient was held by divisions which, like those that relieved the Australians, had been exhausted in the Somme fighting and hurriedly filled up with reinforcements.

On April 10th, on which day the 1st Australian Division was already marching up to relieve the 3rd^a—its 3rd Battalion reaching Baizieux and its 2nd Brigade an area near Corbie—there reached its headquarters at 10 a.m. a disturbing message that on the previous morning the Germans had attacked the quiet front largely held by Portuguese troops between the La Bassée canal and Bois Grenier, and had penetrated four miles on a ten-mile front. Later arrived news that the attack had on April 10th been extended to the front north of Armentières, which the Australian Corps had just left. At 7.30 in the evening came a message from corps headquarters countermanning all moves previously laid down for the division, and warning it to be prepared to entrain next day, April 11th, for the north.

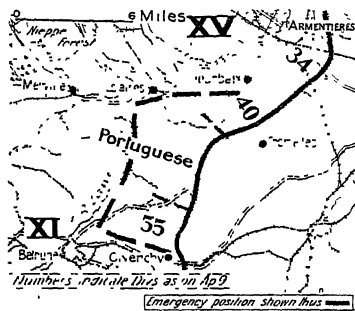


Although until the previous week G.H.Q. had been confident that the sector held by the Portuguese was unlikely to

^a The 1st Division's artillery had been ordered to relieve two British brigades in the 3rd Aust. Division's sector.

April 9—
"George I"

be attacked so early—the watery nature of the low-lying meadows being a great obstacle until the summer, and two rivers, the Lawe and Lys, confronting the enemy's further progress—the British commanders responsible for the front had been by no means so complacent. In December, as soon as a German offensive was foreshadowed, General Horne of the First Army had informed Haig of his opinion that the Portuguese would not withstand a German offensive. After this complaint their front was shortened; and, as the defence scheme was that the line of the Lawe and Lys, some miles behind them, should be garrisoned by British troops, Horne, at the time, expressed himself as satisfied. All fears, however, were not allayed, for early in February General Smuts, after a visit to France, reported to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, the weakness of the Portuguese front, and the War Cabinet instructed General Robertson to inquire into the risks involved in this and the plans made for meeting them. Haig then replied that it was expected that, if the Germans attacked there, they would gain part, if not the whole, of the Portuguese area. But



each British Corps would at once, on first sign of attack, throw back and man a defensive flank to the Rivers Lawe and Lys, and the line of these rivers would also be defended by British troops. . . . Providing the British troops held up the enemy's advance on both flanks and in rear of the Portuguese, the situation would tactically and strategically remain sound. The important positions which must be held are Givenchy-Béthune, the line of the rivers Lawe and Lys, Armentières; and British troops are responsible for holding them.

Nevertheless the subordinate leaders—Generals Horne of the Army, and Haking of the XI Corps—remained anxious. On top of all else they saw that the condition of the Portuguese troops had become bad, and was growing worse. The Portuguese Government was nominally maintaining an army corps of two divisions, but it kept these so short of reinforcements

that only one division, strengthened by a brigade of the other, could be maintained in the line; and the four brigades, which held an extensive front of 10,000 yards, were 139 officers and nearly 6,000 men short of their proper numbers. The men had grievances against their officers in respect of leave. One battalion had recently mutinied, yet British officers who had been in the line with them reported that the troops seemed dangerously overconfident and boastful. Add to this that the early months of 1918 had been so dry, and British engineers had so improved the drainage of the area, that the ground at Neuve Chapelle was now fit for the Germans to attack over.

On April 6th Haig was aware of the probability of a surprise attack by three or four divisions against this front, and on the 8th General Haking, under whom the Portuguese were, and the commander of the XV Corps, holding the neighbouring Armentières sector, made a strong representation of these facts, adding that "the position of the Portuguese troops in the line there was a bait to the German troops." They urged that the 50th Division, which had just arrived in the rear area from the battle south of the Somme, should relieve the Portuguese at once. This was sanctioned and the relief was fixed for the night of April 9th.⁴

But, before it had occurred, the Germans struck.⁵ The incidents that followed must be read in the light of a fact generally ignored in British accounts of the battle—that the Portuguese troops were conscious of no particular grievance against Germany; according to the Germans who afterwards interrogated them, "the notion of Germany was strange to them, and why they should fight against her was incomprehensible."⁶ Military leaders on both sides were strangely insensitive to the probable results of such a circumstance, although the British Army a hundred years before had seen them strikingly illustrated in the behaviour of a force of good material—Bylandt's brigade of Dutch-Belgians at Waterloo. Although a line of British infantry had been carefully ranged behind them, the whole of Bylandt's troops, on the approach

⁴ The 50th Division, coming almost straight from the Somme, had asked for an extra day to enable it to reorganise after receiving large drafts of boyish recruits. A brigade of the 55th Division was to relieve the southern Portuguese brigade.

⁵ They had, of course, no knowledge of the projected relief, their attack having been planned, and the date fixed, long before this was arranged.

⁶ Colonel W. Nicolai, *The German Secret Service*, p. 188.

of the French, had fled in what a British historian⁷ terms "disgraceful and disorderly panic."

Now, a century later, when, after a tremendous bombardment lasting four and a half hours, the Portuguese were attacked by four German divisions, with two others to follow and support if required, they offered only at a few points the slightest resistance, and then either surrendered in hundreds or broke and fled in a wild panic which took them in a few hours clear not merely of the battlefield but of the rear area. English, German, and even a couple of chance Australian eye-witnesses, agree as to the complete failure of their resistance. One German unit history says that Portuguese prisoners began to flow in before the German infantry attacked. The defence offered by a few brave men, whose difficulties were increased by the morning fog, caused hardly a moment's pause in the German advance until it came to the "village line,"⁸ about three miles behind the front, where the rush was suddenly checked. This line lay along a series of fortified villages immediately east of the River Lawe, which ran northwards into the Lys near Estaires. According to a plan, which had been practised, the 1st King Edward's Horse (The King's Oversea Dominions Regiment)—recruited from colonials resident in Great Britain, and from Britons who had lived in the colonies—and the XI Corps Cyclist Battalion, were rushed into these village defences to hold them until the two divisions—51st and 50th⁹—on which Haig was relying to hold the Lawe-Lys line, could get into position. Some British posts in the north were—according to the German histories—rather easily overpowered, but the accounts of both sides show that these two "corps" units carried out their task magnificently. A few Portuguese stayed with them for a short time, but a larger number helped themselves to the cyclists' bicycles as a means of accelerating their passage towards the coast.

This offensive, as the reader will remember,¹⁰ was the one originally planned (with the code name "George") by Crown Prince Rupprecht and his staff early in November 1917 as a possible counter-stroke if

⁷ Sir Edward Creasy, in *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*. The more sympathetic account given by Siborne (*The Waterloo Campaign, 1815, 5th Edition, pp. 396-7, 463*) furnishes several most interesting bases for comparison.

⁸ This was the front of the Battle Zone.

⁹ Both of these had been through the thick of the Somme battle.

¹⁰ See pp. 102 and 108.

Haig continued his thrust at Ypres, and afterwards put forward as their suggestion for the main German offensive in 1918.

When Ludendorff decided to attempt to crush the British Army with an attack elsewhere ("Michael"), "George" nevertheless remained on the programme¹¹ as a possible second stage. Preparations were made for it and also for part of "Mars" (against Arras) and "Archangel" and "Roland" (on the French front south of the Oise, and near Rheims respectively), these preparations also serving as demonstrations to mislead the British and French commands into expecting initial attacks in those sectors. Now, when those expectations had faded, "George" was sprung as a successful surprise upon the British and Allied commands. Its object had by this time changed. "Originally it was intended to deliver a finishing blow to the British front . . . shaken by the attack between Arras and St. Quentin. As, however, the successes of the Arras-St. Quentin attack did not correspond with the original expectations, the Armentières attack became a new and second link in a chain of assaults which were directed against England's defences."¹²

The advantage of attacking the Portuguese was realised by the German command—Crown Prince Rupprecht records on January 30 that thirty Portuguese in the absence of their officer had signalled to the Germans to come over to them, and had told them that they had had enough of the war; the English, they said, did not trust them and made them crowd their front line.¹³ Fear that the Portuguese might be relieved was one reason why Ludendorff desired to strike as soon as was compatible with careful preparation.¹⁴ The first day's stroke—"George I"—was made by the Sixth Army with four corps—from north to south, II Bavarian, XIX (Saxon), LV, and IV.¹⁵ In the north, the line before Armentières was, for the moment, only to be lightly attacked, but farther south the crossing of the Rivers Lys and Lawe must at all costs be forced on the first day. On the southern flank the British were to be driven back at Givenchy, north of the La Bassée canal, prior to a swift thrust at the vital railway and coal centres at Bethune, only five miles behind the line there.

¹¹ "George I," against the Portuguese and neighbouring sectors, was slightly modified in form and became "Georgette."

¹² Extract from a statement kindly furnished by the *Reichsarchiv* for the benefit of this history.

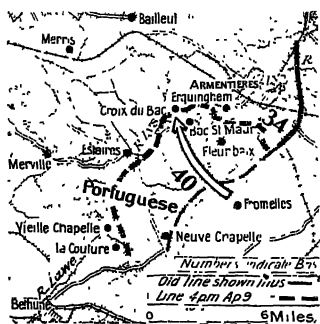
¹³ *Mein Kriegstagebuch, Vol. II, pp. 309-10.*

¹⁴ See *My War Memoirs, Vol II, p. 606.* Crown Prince Rupprecht had been doubtful whether an advance in these watery lowlands would be possible before the end of April, and more than once notes in his diary that it was only the exceptionally dry spring weather that made it so. Prince Rupprecht notes that he attacked "just in time to catch the Portuguese"

¹⁵ The Germans attacked with 14 divisions against 3: three divisions in first line and two in second against the 55th Division; four in first line and three in second against the Portuguese; one in first line and one in second against the 40th (but two from the Portuguese front also turned north against the 40th). The Germans had over 900 heavy guns and howitzers against 200. Colonel Bruchmüller superintended the artillery programme. The Germans also—although this was not realised by their opponents at the time—used some tanks. Four detachments were employed, partly captured British tanks, partly German ones of new pattern. None proved to be of any use this day—the German tanks were too clumsy, and the British stuck in the mud and seriously clogged the roads. As on March 21, the few tanks allotted were only to follow the attack and reduce resisting strong-points

But here a division of North English troops, the 55th (Crown Prince Rupprecht wrongly calls it "a particularly good Scottish division")¹⁶ put up one of the finest defences made by British troops in the war. Its left brigade fell back from its forward line but held on to its main line of resistance despite all attacks, and lengthened its flank for 2,000 yards across the nearest part of the area evacuated by the Portuguese. At nightfall it was still holding, and no less than 750 of the Germans who had penetrated parts of its front had been captured.

Thus, as in the earlier German offensive, the central buttress of the whole British front held, and subsequent pressure did not shake it. The division on the northern flank of the German thrust, however—the 40th (XV Corps)—was overcome, a result greatly assisted by two of the German divisions, which had advanced against the Portuguese, turning northwards, according to plan, and taking the British in flank and rear; and, although the reserve brigade of the 34th¹⁷ Division, in the Armentières area, and another from the 25th Division (which a few days before had relieved part of the 2nd Australian) were hurried across to assist in making a flank barring the enemy's northwards advance, the Germans managed to clear most of the 40th Division from its area south of the Lys. Pressing against the rear-guards as these withdrew across the bridges, the German infantry established machine-gunners in houses overlooking the crossings at Bac St. Maur before the bridges were destroyed. The main bridge there was blown up at 2.15 p.m. just as the Germans reached it, but an advanced



¹⁶ It is noticeable that German military writers, when recording particularly stubborn British resistance, tend to attribute it to Scottish troops. In this case Prince Rupprecht was possibly confused by reports of the presence of the 51st Division.

¹⁷ The 40th and 34th Divisions had both been through the previous fighting south-east of Arras. In the 40th, the 120th Brigade, which made a flank to try and bar the attack from the right rear, was under Brigadier-General C. J. Hobkirk, formerly of the 14th Australian Brigade.

party of them crossed on a footbridge,¹⁸ and secured a standing north of the river. At 4 o'clock the British remnant retired from Bac St. Maur to Croix du Bac, a mile north of the Lys. Nearer to Armentières the thin British garrison of that previously quiet sector was, in the afternoon, driven and manœuvred out of its former rear area at Fleurbaix, and by evening, although Armentières was still unattacked, the line south of it had been withdrawn close to its southern outskirts, ending with a sharp bend back to the Lys near Erquinghem.

This sharp bend was formed by two and a half battalions of the 40th Division, the battalion on the extreme flank being the 12th Suffolk; the rest of the line forward of the river consisted of units of the 34th Division, responsible for the defence of Armentières. After dark there was placed in the line on the flank, where it bent towards Erquinghem, a tiny detachment of the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company, forty in all, who had been doing special duty near Armentières with Lieutenant Neil Campbell¹⁹ in charge. Alarmed at their billets at Pont de Nieppe by a previously silent British battery firing directly rearwards over their heads, the tunnellers had reported to the 34th Division for orders, and by order and counter-order had been marched for miles, forward and backward, from one of its brigade headquarters to another, until after dark they reached a position towards which they had first been hurried. They were allotted to a scratch battalion of cooks, batmen, and various detachments, commanded by a Major Jackson²⁰ (himself a South Australian serving in the British Army), and known as "X" Battalion. The tunnellers posted a line of sentries and kept guard for the night.

Thus on the first day of this offensive the Germans had been completely held on the south; the 51st (Highland) and 50th (Northumbrian) Divisions had managed to deploy

¹⁸ Lieut.-Col. W. E. Brown, of the 18th Bn., Welch Regiment, with 100 reinforcements managed to cut the ropes of two of the three floating bridges, but could not reach the third. It was crossed by Lieutenant of Reserve Imiolczyk of the 22nd I.R. (11th Res. Div.), who had led a party of his own men and also of the 10th Ersatz Division. The 10th Ersatz was a division from second line thrown in from the Portuguese area to make sure of the Lys crossings.

¹⁹ Lieut. N. Campbell, 3rd Tun. Coy. Mining engineer; of Blackwood, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 11 Sept., 1882. Killed in action, 10 April, 1918.

²⁰ The records of this fighting are scarce, and further particulars are not yet available.

behind the desperately fighting cyclists and King Edward's Horse; and, although the 51st and 50th could not occupy the line intended, the German rush after the Portuguese having been too swift to allow of this, they were now facing the Germans in a line which ran partly in front of the Lawe, as originally planned, but partly behind it. Farther north, the Germans reached the Lys at Estaires and Saily but failed to cross; but the British reserves from the north found themselves unable to thrust back the enemy who had crossed at Bac St. Maur, and the German penetration continuing at this point determined the future course of the offensive.

The Second British Army was still sending its reserves to stop the flood. Part of the 29th Division, just coming out of the line in the Ypres salient, was rushed down by 'buses' from Poperinghe to face, behind Armentières, the Germans' northward advance. A brigade of the 25th Division was already fighting there, and a brigade of the 49th and a battalion of the 19th were directed the same way.

Thus the line north of Armentières, already thin and held by battle-strained divisions, was pouring its reserves into the neighbouring sector, when, at 3 o'clock next
April 10—
"George II" morning, the Germans laid a heavy bombardment on the whole area taken over from the Australians by those divisions a few days before.²¹ At about 5.30 the enemy attacked. It was again foggy, and the line in front of Messines was quickly overpowered; the belts of wire and concrete strong-points, built with so much thought and labour during the previous winter, were overrun in a few hours. At one point in this region the Australian Corps Heavy Trench Mortar Battery, which happened still to be in the sector, was busily firing when itself suddenly fired on by Germans fifty yards away behind its right flank. Its commander, Captain Darling,²² with three

²¹ The 21st Division, after relieving the southernmost troops of the 1st Aust. Division, had itself been relieved on April 7th/8th by the 19th Division extending northwards, so that the IX Corps front was now held by three divisions, 25th, 19th, and 9th.

²² Capt. F. B. Darling, M.C.; Aust. Corps H.T.M. Bty. Grain broker; of Canterbury, Vic.; b. Glenferrie, Vic., 29 Jan., 1892.



37 GERMAN INFANTRY IN ARMENTIÈRES, APRIL, 1918

*German Official Photo, reproduced by courtesy of the Reichsarchiv,
Inst. War Memorial Collection No. A3119*

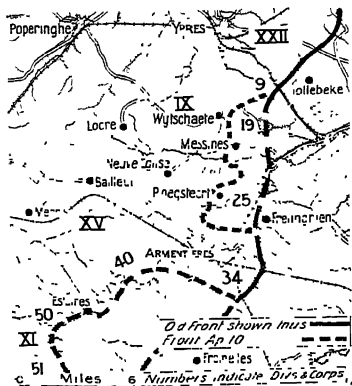


38. HAZEBROUCK

View from the church tower on 14th May, 1918, looking north-east towards the Mont des Cats, which is visible in the distance

men, conducted a fighting retreat from "Polka Estaminet," holding the enemy back with a medium trench-mortar until Gunner Welsh²³ was killed and Darling himself wounded at Oosttaverne Wood. Corporal Hughes²⁴ was killed while carrying his officer back;²⁵ the remains of the battery, under Lieutenants Bond²⁶ and Newland,²⁷ took three Lewis guns from the retiring infantry and settled down astride the Neuve Église road. Here Bond rallied a number of stragglers, and filling with them some trenches on both sides of the road formed in the evening one of the definite obstacles to the enemy's advance. Farther north, astride of the Ypres-Comines canal, was the 9th Division. It held up the flank of the German attack, and its South African Brigade (1,300 strong—mainly recruits) was put in under the 19th Division in the evening and retook Messines town and hill. It could not hold on, however, and Messines was shortly afterwards abandoned.

By 8.30 in the morning the Germans had actually reached Ploegsteert. There, among the artillery that had been trying to suppress the German batteries since the bombardment began, lay parts of the two Australian siege batteries, the rest of whose guns had been withdrawn to rear positions at Neuve Église before the Australian Corps left. Two of the remaining guns of the 2nd Battery were to have been pulled out during the night of April 9th, but in the



²³ Gnr. A. A. Welsh (No. 770; Aust. Corps H.T.M. Bty). Farm hand; of Shepparton, Vic.; b. Cottesloe Beach, W. Aust., 1896. Killed in action, 10 April, 1918.

²⁴ Cpl. W. J. M. Hughes (No. 326; Aust. Corps H.T.M. Bty.) University student; of Brighton, S. Aust.; b. Glenelg, S. Aust., 1895. Killed in action, 10 April, 1918.

²⁵ The fourth member of the party was Gunner W. P. Brown (Sydney). Gunner W. A. Furphy (Tullamarine, Vic.) had been sniped at the gun-position.

²⁶ Lieut. F. C. S. Bond, Aust. Corps H.T.M. Bty. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Bruthen, Vic.; b. Caulfield, Vic., 29 May, 1892.

²⁷ Lieut. H. L. Newland, Aust. Corps H.T.M. Bty. Police constable; of Laverton, Vic.; b. Camperdown, Vic., 19 July, 1891.

swampy ground in Ploegsteert Wood, lately soaked with rain, the tractors could not haul the guns. By hitching three tractors together, one gun-carriage had been got out during the night. Little was known of the previous day's fighting in the south, the first message that gave any indication of the gravity of the crisis there being an order, received during the night by a neighbouring battery (140th), to turn round its guns and shell the bridge at Bac St. Maur. By 7.15 a.m. on the 10th, while both the Australian batteries were still firing on Frélinghien, bullets from rifles and machine-guns began to reach them from the southern flank. British infantry appeared, retiring from the front, and passed through the gun positions in large numbers. Orders now came from corps headquarters that the position of the 2nd Australian Siege Battery should be temporarily abandoned. Caterpillar tractors, which had been trying to pull out its guns, were therefore sent on to withdraw the 1st Battery, whose own tractors were not yet up, and the crews of No. 2 withdrew. With great difficulty, under heavy fire by which Lieutenant MacBride²⁸ was badly wounded, the advanced guns of No. 1 Battery and the small stores and single gun-carriage of No. 2, were cleared, some Australian troops, who were near by, coming to their help. The gunners retired to the rear sections of the batteries at Neuve Église, which were still firing; but both batteries were almost at once ordered to pull back farther, to Locre, on the saddle of the ridge behind Mount Kemmel.

The Australian troops who had helped the artillerymen were apparently part of the 1st Army Troops Company of Australian Engineers, a newly formed unit which—like the heavy batteries, the 5th Divisional Reinforcement Battalion, and one or two other detached units—still formed part of the corps or army troops in this area after the Australian Corps had left. Some of these, together with many more similar bodies of British troops, were being hurriedly thrown in in place of the proper reserves that had been rushed on the previous day to help the First Army. The 1st Army Troops

²⁸ Lieut.-Col. H. W. C. MacBride, 2nd Siege Bty. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces (R.A.A.); of Sydney; b. Forest Lodge, N.S.W., 14 June, 1892.

Company, under Captain Croker, had been on the move since 2.30 a.m., when, in accordance with orders, it left Steenwerck. At 4.30 a.m. it was placed at the disposal of the 7th Brigade (25th Division) for the purpose of guarding against any attempt of the enemy to march north-west from the Lys through Ploegsteert behind the southern flank of the Second Army. But, by the time the company reached the neighbourhood of Ploegsteert, the Germans were already in that village. At 11.25 the Australians (among whom now was part of the heavy trench-mortar battery) got touch with a South Lancashire battalion in front of the village, and dug in there, and at 5.30 that afternoon they, together with the infantry on their left, were ordered to recapture the place. The company advanced, and within ten minutes had reached its objective, but, the troops on the left being stopped by intense machine-gun fire, it was then ordered to withdraw. It suffered only ten casualties, but its Sergeant-Major, E. J. Falloon,²⁹ was killed. The company was sent back to Romarin dump for the night.

During that night Lieutenant Bond's post, of trench-mortar men and some K.O.Y.L.I. on the Neuve Église road, had the Germans advancing against them, throwing numerous flares. Bond made his men hold their fire until the enemy was close, when his three Lewis guns blazed into them and drove them far back. In the morning, after bringing down a German aeroplane, Bond and his men were relieved by infantry.

The attack launched by the Germans on April 10th was "George II"—an offensive of the left wing of their Fourth Army between Warneton and Kemmel. This was intended to co-operate with the extreme right of the Sixth Army north of Armentières,³⁰ cut off Armentières, and drive swiftly towards the steep and isolated chain of hills—from Mount Kemmel (5½ miles away) to Cassel (20 miles)—which dominate the Flemish plain. From there it would turn against the British in the Ypres salient. The attack was to be delivered by five divisions culled from the local front. The original plan was that it should be undertaken only if the modified "George I," south of Armentières, had succeeded in crossing the Lys. But on April 7 the attack was ordered to be made in any case.

Early on the 10th this thrust of the Germans north of Armentières, as well as the drive from the south behind that

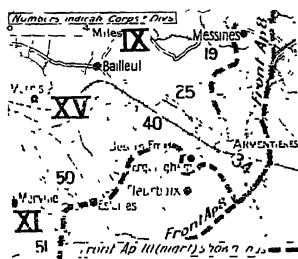
²⁹ C.S.M. E. J. Falloon, M.M. (No. 27; 1st A.T. Coy. Enrs.). Electrician; of Richmond, Vic.; b. Richmond, 30 Nov., 1887. Killed in action, 10 April, 1918.

³⁰ This was to seize the crossings at Frelinghien during the night of the 9th.

city, had made the position of its garrison, the 34th Division, precarious, and at 10 a.m. the order for withdrawal, which is said to have been suggested by the divisional commander on the previous night, was given.

The southern flank of the division was still west of Erquinghem, the 12th Suffolk holding the angle with the Australian tunnellers and the rest of "X" Battalion bent back on the extreme flank so as to face towards the River Lys in rear. The Germans were not then attacking the tunnellers, but there was fighting farther along the line and the enemy appeared to be advancing past the flank. Erquinghem was for a time intensely shelled. Campbell, a singularly fine leader, who had fought in the South African War and with the light horse in Gallipoli, was promoted to command a company of "X" Battalion. His junior, Lieutenant Dow,³¹ being left in charge of the tunnellers, walked across towards the river and discovered that no British troops were on his right. This caused great anxiety, and men were constantly sent out to patrol the area. One of these patrols (comprising Lieutenant Dow and Sappers Muir,³² Watson,³³ and Nunn-Pendle³⁴) ambushed and captured a German infantryman. A body of pioneers had by then come up 200 yards to the right, and the tunnellers' line was stretched to fill the gap.

At noon the Germans were clearly seen passing the flank 600 yards away. When they approached within 400 yards, fire was opened on them, driving them back to some trees, but they eventually occupied a farm close ahead. Campbell at one time thought of counter-attacking, but machine-gun and rifle fire became heavy and the enemy pursued his usual



*The position at nightfall,
April 10.*

³¹ Lieut. J. Dow, 3rd Tun. Coy. Assistant surveyor; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. St. Kilda, Vic., 15 April, 1882.

³² Spr. J. Muir (No. 5786; 3rd Tun. Coy.). Miner; of Merewether, N.S.W.; b. Minmi, N.S.W., 1893.

³³ Spr. J. A. Watson (No. 5858; 3rd Tun. Coy.). Labourer; of Victor Harbour, S. Aust.; b. Middleton, S. Aust., 1884.

³⁴ Spr. J. Nunn-Pendle (No. 4434; 3rd Tun. Coy.). Butcher; of Kalgoorlie and Sydney; b. Linton, Cambs., Eng., 29 Aug., 1888.

plan by bringing up field-guns to fire at short range on the detachments obstructing him. A British battalion which had come up on the left was enfiladed and battered by these guns. At 7.30 p.m. Campbell received a written order from the commander of "X" Battalion to retire and report to the commander of the 16th Royal Scots at "Jesus Farm". The runner bringing this message had called out to the troops as he came: "Jerry's over the Canal—get back quickly!" and a number of the men retired without waiting for word from an officer. Campbell, not being satisfied with the correctness of the order to withdraw, told Dow, to take charge of the company while he himself saw about the matter. He walked off towards headquarters, was lost to view behind a burning estaminet, and was never again seen by any of his men. The companies on either flank retired, but Dow, as ordered by Campbell, held on. He could not, however, keep his men, who gradually drifted until only four remained and the Germans were 100 yards away. Dow then withdrew, himself the last,³⁵ and, after collecting twenty-nine of his tunnellers in Erquinghem, and searching vainly for Campbell under the nose of the enemy, reached Jesus Farm at 8 p.m. There he found Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd³⁶ of the 12th Suffolk (another Australian), and to that battalion Dow and his Australians were attached during the remainder of the retreat, acting for much of the time as the battalion's rear-guard.

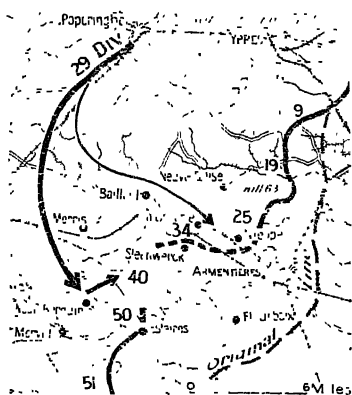
The message that had reached Campbell was probably a result of the order issued ten hours before by the high command, for the evacuation of Armentières. By 9.15 that night the last troops of the 34th Division to make good their retreat had crossed the Pont de Nieppe,³⁷ which was specially held open for them. Even after crossing the Lys their situation was by no means safe. The reserves that had been sent southward the day before to prevent the enemy from advancing behind Armentières could not hold him. Two brigades of the 29th Division—the third was still in the trenches at Ypres—had been bussed down from Poperinghe

³⁵ With him were Sappers J. T. Smitheram (Perth, W. Aust.) and E. Kelly (Booborowie, S. Aust.). The latter in withdrawing was killed. Smitheram died on 13 March, 1928.

³⁶ Lieut.-Col. L. Lloyd, D.S.O. Commanded 12th Bn., Suffolk Regt., 1918-19. Antiquarian; b. 1 July, 1879.

³⁷ The construction of machine-gun emplacements at this bridge was one of the tasks on which the Australian tunnelling detachment had been working.

to Neuf Berquin, across the path of these Germans, and were trying to get touch with the reserves of the forces that had been holding the line north of Armentières, which reserves, they were told, were preparing to resist about La Crèche. But they found themselves in touch only with scattered remnants of a dismembered garrison. The third brigade of their division, on emerging from



the line at Ypres, was sent to reinforce the IX Corps, driven back from north of Armentières. It therefore came under a separate command, though not many miles away.

The situation this day, April 10th, was most critical; for not a day's march ahead of the Germans, opposite the cracks now beginning to open in the British line, lay the crucial railway centre of Hazebroeck (13,000 inhabitants), through which ran the lines on which the British front in Flanders depended for, probably, half its daily food and munitions. The town was then protected only by natural defences: the Strazeele-Merris spur, running down in front of Hazebroeck from the Kemmel-Mont des Cats ridge, screened it on the east; and Nieppe Forest, eighteen square miles of woodland, protected it on the south. If the German gained these, it would be doubtful whether the British could continue to cover the Channel ports. Yet Haig had few rested reserves that he could send. Almost all of them were near Arras, where G.H.Q. had expected the attack to fall. The 31st Division, which had helped to repel the German attack south of Arras on March 28th, was on its way to patch the broken line in front of Hazebroeck. The 33rd Division, also from Arras, would follow it; the 5th Division, returning from Italy fresh,

The Threat to Hazebroeck

with four-battalion brigades, and under orders to relieve some of the Canadians at Arras, was diverted to the southern flank of the same break. The much-tried 61st Division was on its way from Fourth Army towards the area previously held by the Portuguese. But even with the arrival of these reinforcements there would only be fourteen British divisions facing nearly double their number of German ones.

Further help could come only from the French, and since early April Foch had shown the greatest reluctance in reinforcing the British. At first this attitude had been merely due to his desire to build up the reserve for his projected counter-attack—indeed the arguments of the previous winter were at one stage almost precisely reversed: it was now the British commander who was urging the French to take over part of his front, and the French commander who adhered to the plan of taking the offensive (though not at once³⁸) against the enemy. The basic motive of the reply was probably the same in each case—a desire to direct the offensive, for which purpose it was necessary to control the reserve which would make the offensive possible. Foch was assembling in this region two French armies in reserve, the Tenth (four divisions under General Maistre) behind Amiens, and the Fifth near Beauvais farther south. After April 9th, however, he began to realise, as Haig did, that the object of Ludendorff was to crush the British Army and that part of this force might have to be used for defence, but he suspected that the present offensive was only secondary—aimed at causing a further dispersal of his reserve. The main stroke, he thought, would fall any day at Arras. Consequently he steadily refused Haig's urgent and frequent requests that the French should take over part of the British line, though Sir Henry Wilson was brought from London especially to support it. Instead he decided to advance his two reserve armies. Thus by April 13th the head of the Tenth reached Doullens where it served as reserve for the Arras front, releasing British reserves, while the Fifth moved its leading divisions to near Amiens. Foch's reserve would thus be ready to meet the chief danger either at Arras or on the Somme front.

³⁸ Haig, as an alternative, urged Foch to counter-attack at once and relieve the pressure.

The only direct reinforcement that he would yet promise for Flanders was the 133rd Division, which on April 10th Pétain ordered to return thither after its engagements at Hangard.

On April 10th Haig issued to his armies the following order :

All armies will hold their ground and will employ all their resources to stop any advance on the part of the enemy.

French troops are moving north to the assistance of the British forces. The two leading divisions will cross the Somme west of Amiens on the 12th instant . . .

The 1st Australian Division will move by rail from the Fourth Army to the Second Army on the 11th inst in G.H.Q. reserve, and will be disposed, in the first instance, by Second Army to cover Hazebrouck³⁹

The 133rd French Division is moving by rail on the 11th instant to the neighbourhood of Bergues.

On the night of April 10th the two leading brigades of the 31st Division (the 92nd and 93rd) arrived by 'bus near Oulstersteene, six miles east of Hazebrouck. The 29th Division was three or four miles to the south-east of them, north of Estaires on the Lys. Next morning the two brigades

of the 31st were advanced across the flat country somewhat to the left of the 29th Division, and at 2 p.m. the 93rd Brigade was ordered to counter-attack the Germans whom it now found in front of it, and join up with elements of the 40th and 25th Divisions. This it did in the evening, driving back the Germans and gaining touch with at least some remnants of the troops responsible for holding the line on either flank. South of the 31st the 29th Division had all day been slowly retiring northwards, now driven back, now manœuvred out of its position.

Some sort of line, facing south and south-west, had thus been formed in front of the German thrust behind Armentières, but it was too thin and too exhausted to hold; on the southern flank—between the right of the 29th Division and the left of the 50th on the Lys near Estaires—the Flemish flats lay open to the enemy. Estaires itself had been lost.

³⁹ Haig's staff had entertained some doubt as to whether they should withdraw the 1st Australian Division from the south. The question was referred to Haig, who at once ordered it to Hazebrouck. General de Lisle (XV Corps) afterwards amused Haig by mistakenly claiming that he himself had saved the situation by directing this division to Hazebrouck.

How critical was the situation at this juncture probably only the British command fully realised. The British Army was practically at the end of its reserves. The French had ample reserves, but Foch was conserving them and forcing the British to use their strength to its limit—they had no alternative but to go on fighting to the end, whatever that might be, and Sir Douglas Haig this day himself wrote, for transmission to all troops of the B.E.F., the famous appeal which, however often it has been printed, is, by reason of its effect—at least upon the Australian troops—an essential part of this narrative:

To All ranks of the British Forces in France.

Three weeks ago to-day the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a 50 mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out! Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our Homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

D. Haig.
F.M.

Thursday

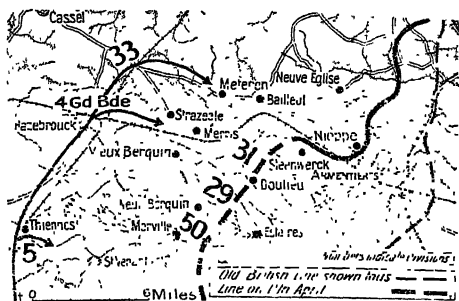
11 April 1918.

The issue of this appeal has been criticised as unnecessarily alarming. Among the Australians, however, it had precisely the result intended—that of stringing them to the highest pitch of determination. The British air force next day made the greatest effort yet undertaken by it;⁴⁰ and the effect on many other parts of the army was doubtless the same.

On April 11th there had arrived behind the main battle-front three reinforcing bodies; northernmost, at Caestre and Strazeele, the 33rd Division; at Strazeele (west of Hazebrouck) the last brigade of the 31st Division—the 4th

⁴⁰ See *The War in the Air*, by H. A. Jones, Vol. IV, p. 381.

Guards Brigade; and, opposite the centre of the offensive, at Aire and Thiennes, the 5th Division. One brigade of the 33rd Division (100th) was sent to Neuve Église, and the two others (98th and 19th) to Dranoutre (behind Neuve Église) and Meteren respectively. The 4th Guards Brigade, after debussing at Strazeele behind the line of its division (31st), was detached on the morning of April 12th for a separate and critical task.



The crisis was due to the simple fact that the British divisions which had been holding the Germans on and near the Lys and the Lawe since April 9th could hold them no longer; the 50th Division, which had originally been responsible for the northern half of the emergency line behind the Portuguese area, had, on the 11th, been unable to prevent parties of the enemy from pushing into Merville. Being no longer in a condition to clear the town of these, the 50th withdrew, and a gap opened south of Hazebrouck. But instead of pressing on into Nieppe Forest, less than two miles to the north-west, the Germans sacked the wine cellars of Merville—their shouts could be heard all night by the 50th Division outside the town. The gap, however, still lay open to them next morning; and at the same time the front farther south, till then stubbornly held by the 51st (Highland) Division and a remnant of King Edward's Horse, was broken. This front was to have been taken over by a reinforcing division, which had been rushed into a line some miles behind the 50th and 51st, and was now being brought forward in parts to relieve them. The relieving division, however, was no other than the 61st, which, after fighting with the III Corps early in the German offensive,

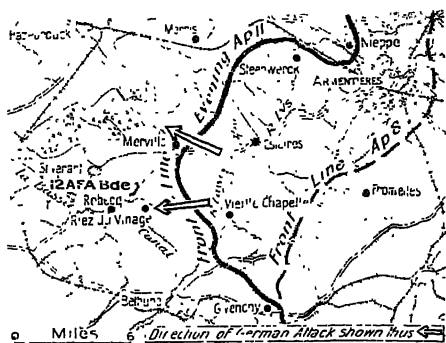
The Crisis of April 12

had made the counter-attack from Marcelcave on March 28th, already referred to,⁴¹ and, worn out, had been relieved by the 35th Australian Battalion on the night of March 30th.

Part of this division had taken over a sector from the Highlanders on the night of April 11th, but at dawn on the 12th the Germans, again assisted by fog, launched a sudden attack. The infantry

were driven back towards the hamlet of Riez du Vinage, in the cottages of which were the headquarters of two Scottish brigades. The 12th (Army) Brigade of Australian Field Artillery had on the previous day been sent up into

position behind these brigades, and its commander, Colonel Lloyd—under whom it was fast becoming an outstanding unit in the A.I.F.—had gone thither from his own headquarters in Robecq in order to co-operate with Lieutenant-Colonel Dyson⁴² of the 153rd Brigade. Lloyd had been outside the cottage watching the now visible enemy—the orderly with his horses was standing sniping at the Germans from behind a hedge—and Lloyd and Dyson and the headquarters clerks were preparing to withdraw with the infantry, when bullets passed through the wall of their office and upwards through the ceiling. Realising that these could only have come from close outside, they gathered up their papers and left. Dyson, who was lame, limped across the road, tapped on a cottage window and called through it to his colleague, Brigadier-General Dick-Cunyngham⁴³ of the 152nd Brigade: "Come on Dick—it's time to be going."



⁴¹ See pp. 214 and 291.

⁴² Lieut.-Col. L. M. Dyson, D.S.O.; R.A. Commanded 256th Bde., R.F.A., 1916/19; 153rd Inf. Bde., 11-13th Apr., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. London, 30 March, 1873.

⁴³ Major-Gen. J. K. Dick-Cunyngham, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Bde. Major, 14th Inf. Bde., 1914/15; G.S.O. (2), I Army Corps, 1915/16; G.S.O. (1), 51st Div., 1916/18; commanded 152nd Inf. Bde., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; b. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, 28 March, 1877.

Cunyngham waved and said he was coming, but he did not come: before he opened the door, the Germans were in the house. Lloyd, who had returned for Dyson's stick, left Dyson's cottage by the front door as the Germans entered at the back. With Germans firing at a few paces, one of them having set up a machine-gun on the road outside, some of the orderlies were hit; but Lloyd⁴⁴ and Dyson separately, dodging through ditches, survived to fight their way back on foot across the fields with a few Highlanders, who retired doggedly, almost sulkily, constantly facing about, but seldom firing except when they could hit their man. On the previous day a call had been made among the artillery brigades for officers to lead some remnants of the 51st Division, and Captain Rickard⁴⁵ (45th Battery) and Lieutenant Seton⁴⁶ (112th), now commanding some survivors of the Black Watch, helped, with two British colleagues, to maintain a line in front of the German advance this day. Of the eight batteries of the 51st Division, which were in advance of the Australian batteries, two were captured, the teams being shot down by machine-guns before they could get the guns clear.

The batteries of the 12th A.F.A. Brigade had been firing since before dawn, the 45th and 47th from just behind the Clarence rivulet, beside the back hedges of Calonne, and the 46th and 112th (Howitzer) from some distance away, beyond the Calonne-Robecq road. Though the rattle of rifles and machine-guns quickly approached, the two foremost batteries could learn nothing as to the course of events, the wires to brigade headquarters being broken. The brigade continued to fire, it is said, for an hour and a half after most other guns of their side in the neighbourhood were silent. Bullets whipped past them more and more thickly, and presently mud-covered infantry retired through them, saying that the Germans were close. White flares, by which the German infantry indicated its position to its artillery, began to fall a few hundred yards ahead. Patrols of artillerymen confirmed the infantry's

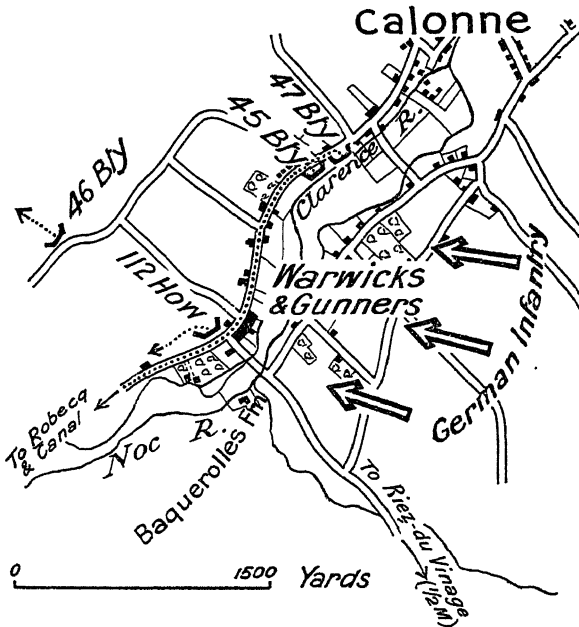
⁴⁴ He had signalled his orderly to "clear out" with the horses.

⁴⁵ Major A. L. Rickard, M.C.; 45th Bty., A.F.A. Accountancy student; of Wahroonga, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 18 Sept., 1895.

⁴⁶ Lieut. L. C. Seton, M.C.; 112th Bty., A.F.A. Station overseer; of Balranald and Coonamble districts, N.S.W.; b. Wellingrove, N.S.W., 19 Feb., 1886.

report. The German infantry was still hidden from the battery positions by the willows along the Clarence rivulet; but from the waggon-lines, a quarter of a mile down the Robecq road, the Germans were seen, and Sergeant George⁴⁷ of the 45th, grasping the situation, immediately brought up the teams to his battery. As they arrived, the gunners caught sight of the enemy, now only a few hundred yards to the south, advancing towards the only road by which the two batteries could withdraw to Robecq.

They at once limbered up, and moved to the road. Seven men of the Warwickshire Regiment (61st Division), voluntarily lining the road-ditch together with some of the gunners,⁴⁸



⁴⁷ Sgt. P. H. George, M.M., M.S.M. (No. 862; 45th Bty, A.F.A.). Master plumber; of Malvern, Vic.; b. St. Kilda, Vic., 11 Aug., 1894.

⁴⁸ Gunner A. Medcalf (47th) rallied some infantry to help the Warwicks, and then stayed on with them until night, when a definite line had been established. Gunners W. G. Parkinson and T. W. Kelly (45th) and G. T. White (112th) also fought with the infantry, and Gunner O. E. M. P. Cohen, medical orderly of the 47th formed an aid-post on the Calonne road, at which he tended the wounded infantry, retiring only with the last man. (Medcalf belonged to Glenalbyn, Vic.; Parkinson to Murrumbeena, Vic.; Kelly, who died on 21 July 1921, to Geelong, Vic.; Cohen to Elizabeth Bay, N.S.W.)

kept a covering fire on the Germans, of whom some could be seen shooting from the shoulder and others grouped about a machine-gun, while the batteries raced galloping across their front to the dangerous corner near Baquerolles Farm.⁴⁹ A couple of artillerymen had been wounded, and Lieutenants de Tuetey⁵⁰ (45th) and Doddemeade⁵¹ (47th) had their horses shot under them; but with the enemy only 200 yards away, and bullets flicking the road beneath the guns and causing the gunners on the limbers involuntarily to tuck up their knees, both batteries sped past the corner without more serious loss, and then reined in and withdrew quietly across the La Bassée canal. The 46th and 112th Batteries were able to retire by less difficult routes and without trouble, the 112th throwing out a mounted patrol of twenty gunners under Lieutenant Watt⁵² as rear-guard. The canal drawbridges were guarded by remnants of infantry and artillery posted by Dyson, Lloyd, and other officers, and the canal became for the moment the British front line.⁵³

The situation here was safeguarded by the immediate bringing up of the rest of the 61st and part of the 3rd British Division, and by the arrival of the 4th British Division next day. But the thrust had stretched still farther the line west of Merville. Towards this the 5th British Division was now marching—its first orders were to retake the town; and the mission of the 4th Guards Brigade was to link the 5th Division on the right with the 29th on the left, and hold the line long enough to allow the 1st Australian Division to reach Hazebrouck, detrain, and get into position around that city.

⁴⁹ This farm was afterwards reached by the Germans, but was retaken by the 61st Division.

⁵⁰ Lieut. H. R. de Tuetey, 45th Bty., A.F.A. Accountant; of Brisbane; b. Kensington, London, 22 Sept., 1891.

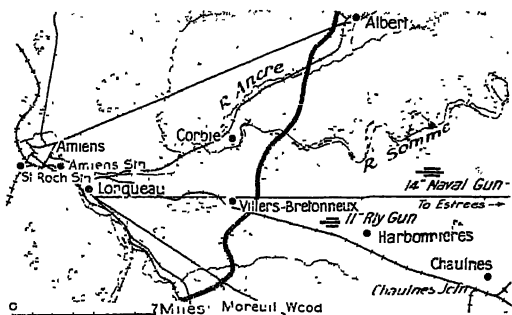
⁵¹ Lieut. E. V. Doddemeade, 47th Bty., A.F.A. Station manager; of Longreach district, Q'land; b. Milson's Point, N.S.W., 7 Feb., 1887.

⁵² Lieut. R. T. Watt, M.C.; 112th How. Bty., A.F.A. Wool-buyer; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 3 Jan., 1887.

⁵³ Lieut. F. Sharp (Islington, N.S.W.) and twenty gunners of the 45th Battery served as a guard at one drawbridge.

The main part of the 1st Australian Division was to reach Hazebrouck and take position on the 12th, it having been intended that it should leave Amiens on the night of the 11th. One of the intended results of the German drive towards Amiens was now uncomfortably felt. Since April 3rd German high velocity guns had been shooting at the railways there,⁵⁴ and the closer they came the better could they (as Crown Prince Rupprecht intended) shell "the main railway station and the railway bridge west of the town." As had happened when the British were trying to rush reserves to the Somme, the German shooting was so excellent that rail-transport arrangements of the British staff were seriously hampered. To start with, north-south trains were again rendered seriously late by the shelling of the line at St. Pol. Next, the 1st Australian Division was delayed at Amiens. Its 1st Brigade and most of the 2nd marched to that city on the afternoon of April 11th. The headquarters staff of the division and the commanders and staffs of both brigades, together with a company from the 2nd Battalion to load the trains, one from the 3rd to unload them on arrival, and some of the brigade-units, arrived late in the afternoon at St. Roch railway station, near the western end of the town. The remainder of the

1st Brigade, as it wound in, moved into the vacant Asylum for the Blind and other large empty buildings for a short rest before entraining. But at dusk, 7.30 p.m.—when the first train was in the station loaded with headquarters and troops, with kit piled on the platform—a German long-range gun began to shell the place. One shell whizzed over the engine



Amiens was shelled first by a gun on the railway, probably near Harbonnières. Later in the year it was shelled from the two positions shown.

⁵⁴ See Vol. XII, plate 470.

and exploded fairly among the men with the kits. While the bombardment continued, German aeroplanes arrived overhead and began to drop their bombs close by. Loading proceeded steadily. But, when the troops were ready, the train did not move. Brigadier-General Lesslie, who went to ascertain the cause of the delay, found the British engine driver in the engine, but the civilian French station staff had fled. "I don't know the 'points,' Sir," said the driver. "I can't start or we might get into worse trouble." The troops waited hour after hour until, after a search by Lesslie and others, the station staff was found in a cellar and was induced to return to work.

The first train then started, hours late. But, in the loading party of the 2nd Battalion, Lieutenant McCulloch⁵⁵ had been killed and 13 others hit, and the shelling continued. In the goods shed at the rear of the train some 40 men of the loading parties were killed or wounded, including Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant Brown⁵⁶ and 16 others of the 7th Battalion. The troops of the 1st Brigade resting in Amiens, and marching off at intervals during the night to their trains, escaped more lightly, but had some men and horses hit by bombs—the 4th Battalion had 20 casualties including three among its officers. Units of the 2nd Brigade were held just outside Amiens waiting by the roadside. The passage of some of the trains northwards was again interfered with at St. Pol, where, on the following evening, April 12th, a train carrying the 1st Battalion had to wait, with its engine detached, while German airmen bombed the station, some of the bombs falling close enough to wound a few men of the transport section at the tail of the train.⁵⁷

Thus, although the headquarters staffs of the 1st Division and 1st Brigade—together with the unloading company of the 3rd Battalion, the 1st Machine Gun Company, and the 1st Light Trench Mortar Battery—arrived at Hondelghem, beyond Hazebrouck, at day-break on the 12th, and the staff of the

⁵⁵ Lieut. C. V. McCulloch, 2nd Bn. Barrister; of Warrawee, N.S.W.; b. Strathfield, N.S.W., 1 Jan., 1892. Killed in action, 11 April, 1918.

⁵⁶ R.Q.M.S. C. G. Brown (No. 89; 7th Bn.). Baker; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Ham-
preston, Dorset, Eng., 9 Nov., 1890.

⁵⁷ On the 10th a train carrying the 4th King's (Liverpool) Regiment (33rd Division) had been hit at Doullens, two carriages derailed, and many men killed or wounded.

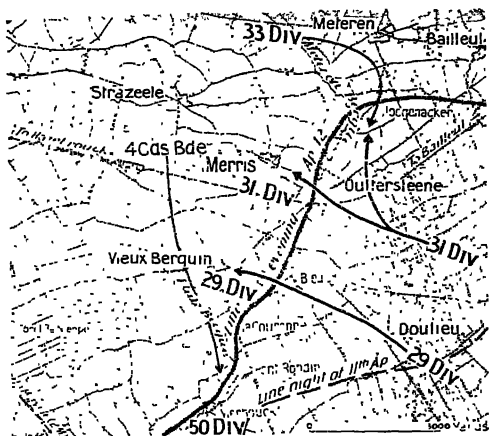
2nd Brigade with a similar force reached Hazebrouck soon afterwards, it was 2 p.m. before the next train carrying three companies of the 7th Battalion came up, and dusk before the next two trains with the 8th and 3rd Battalions arrived. It therefore fell to the troops already on or near the threatened front—part of the 33rd Division in front of Meteren, the 31st and 29th on the flats north-east and south-west of Doulieu, the 4th Guards Brigade covering no less than 5,000 yards south-west of these troops, and the 5th Division coming into action near Merville—to keep back during not only the 12th but the 13th of April the Germans then flooding towards Hazebrouck, and give the transportation staff time to get its trains to that town and the Australian troops time to take up a position protecting it.

The fighting which this task involved was perhaps the hardest on the British side in the Lys offensive, and some reference to it is necessary if the reader is to understand the condition of the soldiery whom the men of the 1st Division, on arrival, found in front of them. The 33rd Division, whose 19th brigade had spent the previous night near Meteren, pushed out, on the morning of the 12th, cyclist patrols under the commander of its machine-gun battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Seton Hutchison.⁵⁸ Hutchison, a leader of demonic energy and vehemence, whose influence in this crisis was afterwards officially rewarded, had instilled his own spirit into his young machine-gunners. He hastened south along the Meteren spur, through Oultersteene where the spur dips to the Flemish flats east of Vieux Berquin. On the flats he met the rear-guards of the 31st Division “in precipitate retreat without officers, and saying they had orders to retire.” In the several books in which he has described these events,⁵⁹ he mentions also his characteristic remedies. Hurrying back by bicycle and Ford ambulance to divisional headquarters, he secured authority to bring up his machine-guns, begged a lorry from some transport officer and, when the officer refused,

⁵⁸ Lieut-Col. G. S. Hutchison, D.S.O., M.C.; Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. Commanded 100th M.G. Coy., 1916/17; 33rd M.G. Bn., 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Inverness, Scotland; b. Hampstead, London, 20 Jan., 1890.

⁵⁹ *History of the 33rd Division*; *History and Memoir of the 33rd Battalion, Machine Gun Corps*; and *Footslogger*.

stunned him by a blow with his revolver, commandeered lorry and driver, and rushed eight machine-guns and their teams to hold the spur south of Meteren, where the retreating troops were again met with. He ordered these to turn and re-



take the rise behind them—and, when one officer refused, hit him and took charge of his troops. By these measures he quickly formed a line of resistance across the spur. This was reinforced by the battalions of the 19th Brigade, and in the afternoon the 1st Queens drove back the Germans along the spur. To the left the brigade reached out beyond Meteren, joining with the XXII Corps Reinforcement Battalion which continued the line towards Bailleul.

The 29th Division and elements of the 31st this day fell back across the flats through Bleu, south of Oultersteene, to Vieux Berquin, Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes-Robertson⁶⁰ of the 1st Border Regiment (an officer of outstanding energy and devotion) holding out during most of the day in the farm-houses at Bleu with the remnant of his own and of another battalion, 150 men in all. He personally superintended the whole of his force, visiting farm after farm, giving orders and ascertaining the position on his flanks. At dusk he carried out the retirement to Vieux Berquin—the unpretentious village which, together with Neuf Berquin, three miles south, and the poor hamlets connecting them, straggles beside the level road almost from Mont de Merris, on the spur in front of

⁶⁰ Colonel (temp. Brig.-Gen.) J. Forbes-Robertson, V.C., D.S.O., M.C. Commanded Newfoundland Regt., 1917; 16th Bn., Middlesex Regt., 1917/18; 1st Bn., Border Regt., 1918 and 1919; 155th Inf. Bde., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of Strathpeffer, Ross-shire, Scotland; b. 7 July, 1884.

Hazebrouck, to Estaires on the Lys. In Vieux Berquin Forbes-Robertson found no one north of him, but south of him, in that village ("the first cheering news that we had had for two days"), was the northern flank of the Irish Guards.⁶¹

The 4th Guards Brigade had marched south from Strazeele in the small hours of April 12th, and, as a first step, had taken position between la Couronne, on the road from Vieux to Neuf Berquin, and l'Épinette Farm, two miles to the south-west, about two miles north of Merville. At 11 o'clock Brigadier-General Butler was ordered to push his brigade forward beyond the little river Plate Becque to two hamlets—Pont Rondin and Vierhouck—half-a-mile or more ahead, where the 50th Division was supposed to be, and also to les Puresbecques, a mile from Merville. His two forward regiments—3rd Coldstream and 4th Grenadier—advanced with patrols ahead, but found no British troops anywhere. Instead, they were met with intense fire, and a gap opened between them. On the left the Grenadiers got into Pont Rondin, but from there could see Germans moving 1,000 yards behind their left flank. All day confused, independent fighting occurred among the scattered farmhouses, and by nightfall the brigade seems to have been forced back to the line occupied in the morning.⁶² The pioneer battalion of the 31st Division, the 12th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, some way to his left, north-east of la Couronne, had been placed under General Butler's orders. It had to fling back a flank as the 29th Division retired. Many of the troops seem to have known that they were fighting to gain time and enable the Australians to come up.

All this day the 5th British Division was moving towards Merville, one brigade southward through Nieppe Forest, another eastward along the southern edge of it. During the morning, General Foch having directed that the enemy should, at worst, he held on the line Kemmel-Neuve Église-Bailleul-Nieppe Forest-Hinges, the order to retake Merville was cancelled, and the division was directed to take up a line from

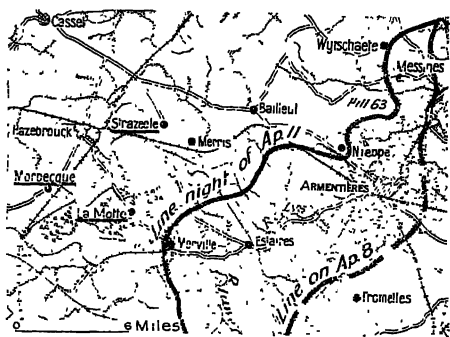
⁶¹ For his actions on this and the previous day he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

⁶² General Butler had sent two companies of the Irish Guards to each of his forward battalions.

Robecq through Nieppe Forest, to join with the emergency line to be formed by the 1st Australian Division around Hazebrouck. Its commander, Major-General Stephens,⁶³ however, urged that the line should be in front of the forest and not through it—indeed, by that time his men had already taken up this line, meeting neither friend nor enemy except a few stragglers of the 50th Division. The army commander agreed, and by evening on April 12th the 5th Division was in line with the right of the Guards Brigade. Its right was to have attacked the Germans on the flats north of the Lys canal; the enemy appears to have retired without waiting for the assault, but afterwards counter-attacked and was driven off.

General Walker and the chief staff officers of the 1st Australian Division had gone north by car on the afternoon of the previous day (11th). On their arrival at Second Army Headquarters at Cassel, the army commander, General Plumer, had explained to Walker his intention of keeping the division in army reserve and disposing it to defend Hazebrouck against any German attack from the direction of Neuf Berquin,

Merville, and St. Venant. For this purpose brigades were to dig and occupy three defensive "localities" at Strazeele, north-east of the forest, La Motte in the forest, and Morbecque north-west of the forest respectively. The divisional staff was temporarily allotted a headquarters at Cassel,



in the Hotel Sauvage,⁶⁴ and Walker issued an order for the 1st (N.S. Wales), 2nd (Victoria), and 3rd (outer States) Brigades to assemble at these places respectively, the 3rd

⁶³ General Sir Reginald Stephens, K.C.B., C.M.G., p.s.c. Commanded 25th Inf. Bde., 1915/16; 5th Div., 1916/18; X Corps, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Lechlade, Gloucestershire; b. London, 10 Oct., 1869.

⁶⁴ Next day it moved to Eecke, and on the 13th, after two further shifts, settled at le Grand Hasard, just south of Hazebrouck.

arriving after the others. The intervals between the "localities" were to be watched by patrols supported by machine-guns. Battalions were to move to their areas "covered by advanced guards," and "in readiness for prompt action either to front or flank at all times." The "localities" were chosen by the divisional staff together with the brigade staffs when these arrived in the leading trains on April 12th. With the exception of the 5th British Division, the troops then fighting before Hazebrouck were under the XV Corps, which till noon on this day had been the northernmost corps of the First Army, but at that hour was transferred to the Second.⁶⁵ The 1st Australian Division, though in Second Army reserve, would be in the area of this corps.⁶⁶

On the morning of the 12th the advance of the Germans through Merville, and a report that German cavalry patrols had been seen near Neuf Berquin, caused a change in some of the measures previously planned. If German uhlans thrust out from Merville and met no resistance, their patrols could be through Nieppe Forest and in Hazebrouck in an hour; and whether any British troops were across their path, and if so what troops, and where, no one in authority knew. In the years that have since passed, it has been possible to ascertain where many—perhaps most—of the remnants of the front-line divisions were at that and other times; but at the time itself there was confusion and obscurity. Few men near the front knew what troops were in any neighbourhood beyond their own; even if others were in the same country most of them would be lying under cover or hidden by the hedgerows. The commander of the 5th Division's artillery, on reaching La Motte in the forest, found the headquarters of no less than three divisions in the *château* there. "All was chaos," he wrote,⁶⁷ "no one knew what was happening, or

⁶⁵ Before the offensive it had been evident that the part of this corps south of Armentières, if driven back, must retreat northwards across the Lys towards the Second Army, on which the part of it defending Armentières would also, in emergency, fall back. It had therefore been arranged that the XV Corps and its sector should be transferred to Second Army on April 9, but the outbreak of the offensive caused the transfer to be postponed for three days.

⁶⁶ Lieut.-General de Lisle, who that day took command of the corps, had commanded the 29th Division in Gallipoli. Also, like General Plumer, he had seen something of the Australians in South Africa. His predecessor with the XV Corps, Lieut.-General Du Cane, had been appointed as Haig's liaison officer at Foch's Headquarters.

⁶⁷ *The Fifth Division in the Great War*, p. 210.

where any troops were." But an airman sent out by Second Army flew at 200 feet over the forest and brought back word that he could see no German cavalry along the road through it, but only a few mules and limbers north of it and scattered parties of British troops. The forest itself appeared to be empty.

It is now known, from the diary of Crown Prince Rupprecht,⁶⁸ that patrols of the 8th German Division reported the Nieppe Forest to be unoccupied by the British. Presumably these patrols had entered it. The Sixth German Army this day issued an order, "It is important that the high ground Bailleul-Meteren-Strazeele, the northern and western exits of the Forest of Nieppe, and the La Bassée Canal between Gouarbecque and Mont Bernenchon be reached *before* enemy reinforcements can become effective. All troops must be informed of the importance with regard to further success of a speedy advance on the 12th." Yet, according to Prince Rupprecht, the commander of the 8th Division held back his infantry and allowed the British reinforcements to reach the forest before him.

In this crisis—which therefore was possibly even more dangerous than was afterwards assumed—the XV Corps asked Second Army that the 1st Australian Division should not wait to assemble its brigades as they arrived, but should send them on to their allotted areas

**1st Division
Begins to
Support**

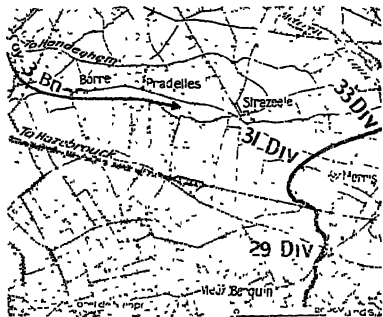
battalion by battalion, as they detain, brigade headquarters moving with the leading battalions. Treat as urgent.

Accordingly, Captain Blake's⁶⁹ company of the 3rd Battalion, which had arrived at Hondeghem station north of Hazebrouck at 10 a.m. to act as unloading party for the later trains, was at 2 p.m. hurried on to the headquarters which the 1st Brigade had just established at Borre, a small village on the ridge half-way between Hazebrouck and Strazeele. There it was ordered by General Lesslie—after a hot meal from its cooker—to dump its packs and greatcoats and then together with four guns of the 1st Machine Gun Company, move forward and take up a position defending Strazeele. It was 6.30 p.m. when Blake, leaving his company behind a hedge, went to reconnoitre, and found the position already

⁶⁸ *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. 3, p. 320.

⁶⁹ Capt. G. E. Blake, 3rd Bn. Station overseer; of Jimbour, Dalby, Q'land; b. Deniliquin, N.S.W., 21 Nov., 1888

held by some 2,000 men of the 40th Division, who, after fighting since April 9th, had been drawn up there as a reserve to the other troops. Calling at Strazeele station, down the slope south of the village, for picks and shovels which had been dumped there, the company in the dark dug in across the hillside north of the railway, and waited for the arrival of its brigade.



The anxiety with which the arrival of the division was awaited is evidenced in the following order issued by Second Army when this company reached the neighbourhood of Strazeele:

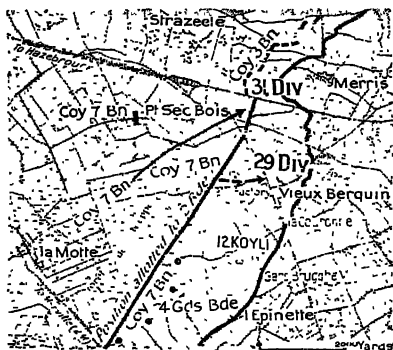
Relieving troops are close at hand. 1st Australian Division is now detraining near Hazebrouck to be followed shortly by 8th Division.⁷⁰ One French Division and French Cavalry Corps will arrive tomorrow. Our whole efforts must be directed to maintaining our present line, and preventing the enemy from breaking through. Our most dangerous point at the moment is between Meteren and Mersin and every effort must be made to stop the enemy in this locality. It is also of vital importance to stop the enemy's advance in the direction of Hazebrouck. For this purpose a general line is being made to connect with the 1st Army at Morbecque. Borre is also protected. Australian troops have reached Strazeele. Further defences are being organised on line Kemmel—Mont Rouge—Mont Vidaigne—Berthen—St. Sylvestre ready for occupation by reserve troops if necessary.

The 2nd Brigade (Brig.-General Heane) now began to come up more quickly than the 1st. The single company of the 5th Battalion which had arrived with the first train of that brigade was similarly sent at 3 p.m. to its brigade headquarters. But it happened that by then the second train for the brigade had also arrived, bringing three companies of the 7th Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Herrod), and it was this battalion which, on reaching brigade headquarters (le Grand Hasard), was at 5 p.m. hurried on through Nieppe Forest to take up, together with the 2nd Machine Gun Company, the whole front

⁷⁰ The 8th Division was to have entrained on the 14th. The order, however, was cancelled, and that division was sent to the Australian Corps instead.

of its brigade. This front was now—probably in consequence of the suggestion from the 5th Division—to lie just beyond the forest.⁷¹ Colonel Herrod marched to occupy the allotted sector—over 6,000 yards—with two companies, holding the third in support; but the order had barely been given when the withdrawal of the 29th Division, already referred to,⁷² caused the XV Corps to require the despatch of the third to the north-east to occupy 1,000 yards south of the railway near Strazeele—that is to say, the southern part of the line allotted to the 1st Brigade. The last company of the 7th, which had just detrained, was sent to Petit Sec Bois, close behind this flank, as a precaution in case the Germans broke through at Merris. The 7th Battalion was thus charged with taking up and picqueting a front, originally of 6,000 yards and now extended to 7,000. A strict injunction was passed to the officers that they must on no account advance farther, as the line to be formed by them was to be the army's main line of resistance—it was referred to that day as the "Army Line".

But no sooner had the companies gone forward than this order was modified by another, issued in fear that the retirement of the 29th Division might expose the left of the 4th Guards Brigade. This directed that one company should be sent forward to Vieux Berquin to connect the northern flank of the Guards at la Couronne with the 7th's own company that had just been despatched to the southern end of the 1st Brigade's sector. Having no other company that he could use, Colonel Herrod sent forward the company occupying the northern half of the 2nd Brigade's line, its place being taken by the 2nd Field Company of Engineers, which continued to dig the posts



⁷¹ Instead of through it. With this alteration, the plan of a reserve position of three "localities" apparently fell to the ground.

⁷² *Pp.* 446-7.

for the "army" line. The 7th was now scattered over nearly four miles of vitally important front, and, although it was vaguely known that the elements of British divisions were in existence 200-1,000 yards ahead along nearly the whole of it, officers and men were aware of an immense responsibility resting on them. At 9.25 p.m. the 2nd Brigade was informed that the situation had so far improved that the 8th Battalion, on arrival, could be allowed to take up its proper sector of the "army" line, and, when it had established itself there, the companies of the 7th holding from the railway to the flank of the Guards brigade might be brought back to the southern sector, then held by one company, close beyond the south-eastern edge of the Forest of Nieppe. It is not surprising that the troops of the 7th longed for the arrival of their sister battalion.

The train bringing the main body of the 3rd Battalion (1st Brigade) had arrived at Hondeghem by 8.30 p.m., and that bringing the 4th Battalion had reached Hazebrouck about 6.30. The latter train was here delayed until 8.30, when both units were detained. The 3rd was informed of the urgency of the situation, and, leaving packs and greatcoats at Hondeghem, waited for lorries which were to take it to Strazeele. The troops had known these areas since their first arrival in France and had many friends among the farm people and villagers. Part of the 1st Division had been in Merris and Strazeele only a few days previously, when starting for the south.⁷³ "The inhabitants of this part," says one diary, "were as pleased as those of the Somme to see the Australians come back; the men, as a matter of fact, met on the road up numbers of the families and girls—now refugees—who had been known to them up there, and they were feeling pretty keen on paying some of all this misery back to the Germans. One village watchmaker was trying to salve his stock of watches

⁷³ Several battalions had stored part of their paraphernalia in these villages before moving south; the 5th Australian Division's Detail Battalion rescued the band instruments of the 58th Battalion from Meteren on April 12.

when our men came in. He at once made up his mind, and handed watches out to them as they passed." "The place was brim full of drink of the very best," wrote General Lesslie many years later, "but there was not one intoxicated Australian in my brigade".

It was after midnight when the lorries arrived. At Strazeele a hot meal from the cookers was given to these companies also, and it was daylight on April 13th before they were distributed along a line of posts ahead of the village. The 4th Battalion, which marched to Strazeele, took position on the high ground north of it. Up here the front line was over half-a-mile ahead; in front of the 3rd it was formed by a mixed body mainly of the 31st Division, occupying trenches on the near side of Merris; in front of the 4th were the 1st Cameronians, the right flank battalion of the 33rd Division, which defended Meteren.

Farther south, the 2nd Brigade had been arriving earlier than the 1st. Its second battalion was the eagerly expected 8th; and it is a narrative most fortunately provided by an officer of this battalion, Lieutenant Joynt,⁷⁴ which gives the most vivid and accurate picture of the situation at this time, so far as the 1st Division was concerned in it. The open warfare which it describes was a rare experience for the infantry of the A.I.F.⁷⁵

It was about 7 p.m. on April 12th when the battalion's train reached a siding near Hazebrouck.

That it was reaching the battle zone was clear—crowds of refugees were seen carting away their goods, and wounded making their way back. The battalion began detraining, when a staff officer of the division came up and ordered them into the train again. The battalion officers gathered round him, and he said that the Germans were attacking Hazebrouck and "we" had to defend it and would try to take up "this position"—and with a blue pencil he drew a line across the map in front of Nieppe Forest. The 1st Brigade would be on the left, the 2nd in the centre, and the 3rd on the right. The divisional front would be 6-10 miles. The five British divisions who held the front were out in the blue, lost. "Nobody appeared to know where

⁷⁴ Major W. D. Joynt, V.C.; 8th Bn. Farmer; of Elsterwick and Flinders Island, Vic.; b. Elsterwick, 19 March, 1889.

⁷⁵ Two versions of this narrative exist—Lieut. Joynt's diary, and a record written by a friend. This is based upon the diary, but, as it is amplified in some detail after conversation with Joynt, and is yet both shorter and clearer, it is here quoted.

they were or even where the Germans were, but we were informed that the 31st Division with the 4th Guards Brigade, 29th, 40th, and 50th Divisions were out in front. No one knew if they were still fighting or whether they were all captured.⁷⁶ Our 7th Battalion had moved out earlier and had thrown out a screen to cover our digging in. Uhlan patrols (the staff officer said) had been seen to the south well round the southern flank."

Whether the statements were true or not (explained Lieutenant Joynt afterwards), that was the atmosphere.

They boarded the train and moved into Hazebrouck station, which was completely deserted—no R.T.O., the signal keys were missing.⁷⁷ Major Traill (senior major of the 8th) had much difficulty in getting the transport [i.e., in getting the waggons off the trucks]—as each man marched off the station he was made to take a pack, and every tenth man carried a roll of blankets. "We got these away from the station as quick as we could, as we feared instant shelling—we carried them out to the intended site of the brigade waggon-lines, about 1,000 yards from the station—we were not to see them again for seven days.

"It was then 8 p.m. and getting dark. Some good person had arranged for hot cocoa to be ready, and every man got a pannikin full; this was our meal for the next twenty-four hours.

"We rested in a field for two hours waiting for our horses, as company commanders had been ordered to go into action mounted; and as hot meals had been cooked in the cookers as the train steamed north, we waited for the waggons to arrive for the men to have a hot meal. Eventually the senior major arrived, blaspheming—he could not get the key to get the waggons to the siding. The French engine driver would not do it.⁷⁸ . . ."

The company commanders were resting with their platoons in bivouac, the men lying alongside their stacked rifles, shivering, anxiously waiting to know what was doing. In the distance the light from burning villages ["red reflections on the skyline," says another diary describing the scene]; and the noise of one British 60-pounder firing at intervals. No other sound of artillery or infantry. Sergeant Robertson,⁷⁹ who had been in the list to be left out with the nucleus, could not be found in the dark, and did not want to be found, and was not left behind. The night was fine, starlight and cold.

Runners from headquarters had come to fetch the company commanders, who found the colonel [Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell—one of the most active young battalion commanders of the A.I.F.] in a small farm 200 yards away. The windows were blinded by blankets, the room lit by candles. The colonel had probably been waiting for the men to get a feed. He explained the situation as far as he could, and showed on the map where the companies were to go and to dig in. The 8th Battalion was to take up a line covering about 3,000 yards—1,000 to each company. The fourth company, which was on a later

⁷⁶ This statement was, of course, inaccurate.

⁷⁷ Another account states that the station was being shelled, and most of the trains were taken to other detraining points.

⁷⁸ The waggons with the regimental transport were eventually brought to the siding, but too late to catch up the battalion before it marched.

⁷⁹ Sgt. A. C. Robertson (No. 354; 8th Bn.). Farmer; of Bena, Vic.; b. Port Albert, Vic., 1891. Killed in action, 14 April, 1918.

train, was to be the reserve. The left flank would be in the air, but the divisional staff had promised that the 1st Brigade would be up at daybreak and would go into action on Joynt's left. Mitchell ordered the battalion to move at once, headquarters following behind the leading company and going to a farm to which he pointed on the map. "We are going into a forlorn hope," he said "Joynt, you lead, and I hold you responsible for the safety of my headquarters. As you are marching out into the blue, take adequate precautions. We don't know at what moment you will stumble on the enemy, and we must also guard against confusing the 7th Battalion (who are out in front somewhere) with the enemy."

With 1,000 yards to defend with about 120 bayonets, Joynt called his platoon commanders together and told them off to jobs—Pitt,⁸⁰ Bourke,⁸¹ McGinn,⁸² and Fenton,⁸³ in that order from left to right. Fenton, the senior, was to cover—but not to hold—a big three-storied mill [later known as the "Factory"] on the right, beside the Rue du Bois, the road leading from Vieux Berquin to, and along, the northern edge of the forest. Joynt saw from his map that there would be trouble there and was anxious about it.

It was then 1 a.m. on April 13th. The battalion had waited two hours for its transport, and had to start without it, but obtained its reserve of tools—15 shovels and several picks to each company. It moved with the scouts out in front, but had to advance so quickly that the companies didn't attempt to leave the road. Joynt divided one platoon into sections, and then stood at the starting point with the platoon commander and sent off two men; then another two just before the others became invisible in the dark; then two more just in sight of them, and so on. He sent off two sections (14 men) thus; then two sections in file: then, fifty yards behind them, a platoon in file, with connecting files between, and then the two remaining platoons fifty yards behind each other with connecting files. Each platoon was to keep the men ahead in sight. This gave, in all, protection to about 200 yards' depth. There was no time for more precaution. The first two men would hear a noise and stop. The others in view of them would stop. The leading men would either presently move on of their own accord, or Joynt—who was in his element, going up and down the line—would send them on.

They went through empty villages, past empty houses. They were to go along in strict silence, but their spirits were up. Joynt told the men, before they moved forward, what the job was. The men were as proud as punch. The Australian units in the south had demonstrated immediately before this what they could do, and the 1st Division was quite sure it could do equally well. Moreover up to then the Australian units had always been on the offensive, but now the time had arrived when (as they had been told by Joynt) we were "to pick our own line of defence and wait for the Fritzes;"

⁸⁰ Lieut. J. G. Pitt, 8th Bn. Farm labourer; of Natimuk, Vic.; b. Streatham, London, 13 Feb., 1894.

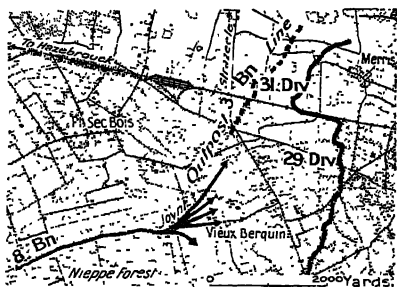
⁸¹ Lieut. J. Bourke, 8th Bn. School teacher; of Black Range, Stawell, Vic.; b. Richmond Plains, Vic., 28 March, 1885.

⁸² Lieut. L. C. McGinn, M.C.; 8th Bn. Baker and pastrycook; of Horsham, Vic.; b. Horsham, 31 Dec., 1893.

⁸³ Lieut. H. Fenton, 8th Bn. School teacher; of Elsternwick and Warrnambool, Vic.; b. Richmond, Vic., 11 June, 1876.

and they said, "By Cripes, this will do us." They had also wonderful confidence in their leaders—they knew the best pozzy would be taken up. "We knew, too," says Joynt, "that the situation was critical—we had the notion, 'By Cripes, we are going to be licked!' that there was nothing between us and the Channel Ports; and we felt 'It's on us!'"

The colonel and adjutant every now and then by carefully shaded torches examined the map at cross-roads and turnings—they were working entirely by it. The men of Joynt's company *would* gradually break into whistling. After much discussion they arrived at a cross-road [just beyond the north-east corner of the forest] where Joynt's company was to dig in. Joynt took his bearing by his compass and then directed his four platoons in several directions, and told them to go forward 1,000, 600, 400, and 200 yards respectively and dig in. His headquarters was in a farm by the side of the road leading from the forest. He left the two right platoons to dig in by themselves, and went along with the left platoons and placed them. When he came back he found the two right platoons (Fenton's and McGinn's) had gone forward 200 yards to take advantage of a copse and some buildings, and had thus formed a salient. Dawn was then breaking, shells began to fall in rear; there was little time to make changes now, and Joynt thought the buildings should be held, and so he approved of these dispositions.



Joynt's company headquarters was in a big, slap-up farm—plenty of good rooms, poultry, potatoes, cows. The boys had been milking cows, peeling spuds, cooking eggs for a feast—they hadn't had a meal for twenty-four hours. Colonel Mitchell was out in front inspecting Joynt's posts. In front was Vieux Berquin, with large buildings and a church tower dominating the whole front. Joynt walked down its main street where his left flank adjoined it. The village was very difficult to defend, and Colonel Mitchell, considering that Joynt's left post was too exposed, withdrew it 200 yards. The Germans were already shelling the village, and it was pitiful to see the old French men and women, who had evidently been left behind in the first panic of the civilians, coming slowly along the street, helping themselves with sticks while German shells fell within fifty yards of them. Already stragglers from the English divisions out in front were falling back in increasing numbers,⁸⁴ and machine-gun bullets were arriving. Joynt therefore hurried back to get his platoon commanders to stop the stragglers and put them in their posts. By the time he had done this it was nearly 11 o'clock and he returned to his headquarters and had breakfast.

⁸⁴ The British were collecting these and forming them into a line at le Paradis, facing south.

The companies of the 7th Battalion, out in the Vieux Berquin high street and in the 1st Brigade's sector, had been withdrawn, and at daylight the six miles of the army's emergency line were held by four Australian battalions—7th, 8th, 3rd, and 4th, in that order from south to north, the outposts lying behind hedges, in copses, in back-gardens or orchards of farmhouses or cottages, with company headquarters, reserves, and battalion headquarters in the farmhouses sprinkled over the country immediately in rear. One of the chief tasks of the artillery of each side during the next week or two was to set fire to the farms in its opponent's area by bursting incendiary shells on their thatched roofs. Thus all farms near the front line, except a few that chanced to be especially well hidden among trees, were certain to be reduced to ashes within a few days. Comparatively few casualties were so caused—at the first ranging shell-bursts the officers would get their men out, to line the ditches in the surrounding fields. The front posts were in trenches. On the flats these could not be dug deep, on account of water, and consequently the support companies of the 2nd Brigade, and later the 6th Battalion when towards dawn on the 13th it came up and dug in in the damp Forest of Nieppe, had to build themselves breastworks of turf and earth piled between wattled stakes. For the support line, where it ran through the forest, the best defence was really the concealment given by the trees.⁸⁵ There the chief danger was the possibility of a heavy gas-shoot, but the forest was large, the German ammunition-supply difficult, and the position of the Australian posts not yet known to the enemy, and this method, therefore, was not, at that time, seriously employed by him. La Motte village,⁸⁶ beside the main road through the wood, was, when the Australians arrived, practically untouched by shell-fire and still inhabited, and the great *château* was, as hitherto, a favourite headquarters. The destruction of the village, however, began almost immediately, as the German guns came within range. Here, as on the Somme, most of the larger live-stock was within a few days

⁸⁵ Lieut.-Colonel C. W. D. Daly of the 6th Battalion, when riding forward to reconnoitre at 5 a.m. on April 13, after seeing his battalion in position, was mortally hit by a fragment of shell in the abdomen.

⁸⁶ See Vol. XII, plate 184.

rounded up and driven to the rear, but the pigs, rabbits, and poultry, and also the flour, potatoes, and other stores were left to the troops. At least one of the farms in the front line was still inhabited: Lieutenant R. Anderson⁸⁷ of the 7th Battalion reported it as a nuisance—a light showed there by night and smoke by day. He found there three old bed-ridden French people and a younger woman who would not leave them, although shells came very close. "The cripples were sent out by stretcher," reported Lieutenant Dean⁸⁸ afterwards, "and on the following day a shell reduced their home to ruins."

While the rest of the 1st and 2nd Brigades arrived during the day and began to dig a second system of posts, behind the "Army" line; and while the 3rd Brigade followed, much behind time—for the shelling and bombing of Amiens again greatly delayed the trains⁸⁹—the four forward battalions watched the signs of fighting (very stiff fighting, in some parts) proceeding half-a-mile or so ahead of them. The 3rd and 4th Battalions, looking down the Strazeele spur across a few fields and hedges, to the roof-tops of Merris, could see British infantry in trenches just short of that village. These held on all day; but half-a-mile farther south, where the railway ran round the foot of the slope much as it did at Dernancourt, the Germans were evidently progressing. Most of the conditions were entirely different from those of Dernancourt—the hill-slopes crossed with tall hedges and tree-rows offered shelter behind which both sides could cross or climb them, and the Flanders plain was backed with no

⁸⁷ Lieut. R. Anderson, 7th Bn. Hairdresser and newsagent; of Cobram, Vic.; b. Liverpool, N.S.W., 1893. Died of illness, 14 Jan., 1919.

⁸⁸ Lieut-Col. A. Dean, 7th Bn. Articled law clerk; of Hawksburn, Vic.; b. Merino, Vic., 25 May, 1893.

⁸⁹ The 12th (Tasmanian, etc.) Battalion had a most trying experience. After marching into Amiens on April 12, it bivouacked during the whole afternoon in a large field near the citadel. At dusk German bombing planes came over flight after flight, delivering their loads of bombs, causing many fires and lighting up the country. The battalion was congratulating itself on having escaped when a brilliant parachute flare sprang into light in the sky above and hung there, illuminating the whole area below. A second and a third flare increased the illumination. The engines of aeroplanes above could be heard and the bomb explosions came nearer, twelve bombs falling within 200 yards but none on the troops. In the small hours of the 13th the battalion marched to St. Roch station, and at 4 o'clock entrained, but the train did not move. The civilian French staff were then again found to have taken shelter in cellars of the neighbouring houses. At dawn German aeroplanes came up again and bombed near by, and a big gun began to shell the place and brought down a tall chimney-stack. At 8.45, amid cheers, the train at last started, but only to be held up for two more hours in a cutting just outside the city. On the way north, near Robecq, it passed through British batteries firing from each side of the line. It was not till midnight on April 13 that it reached Hondzghem. (See *The Twelfth*, by L. M. Newton, p. 428.)

such gallery for German observers as was afforded by the Morlancourt hills. Touching the southern side of the railway



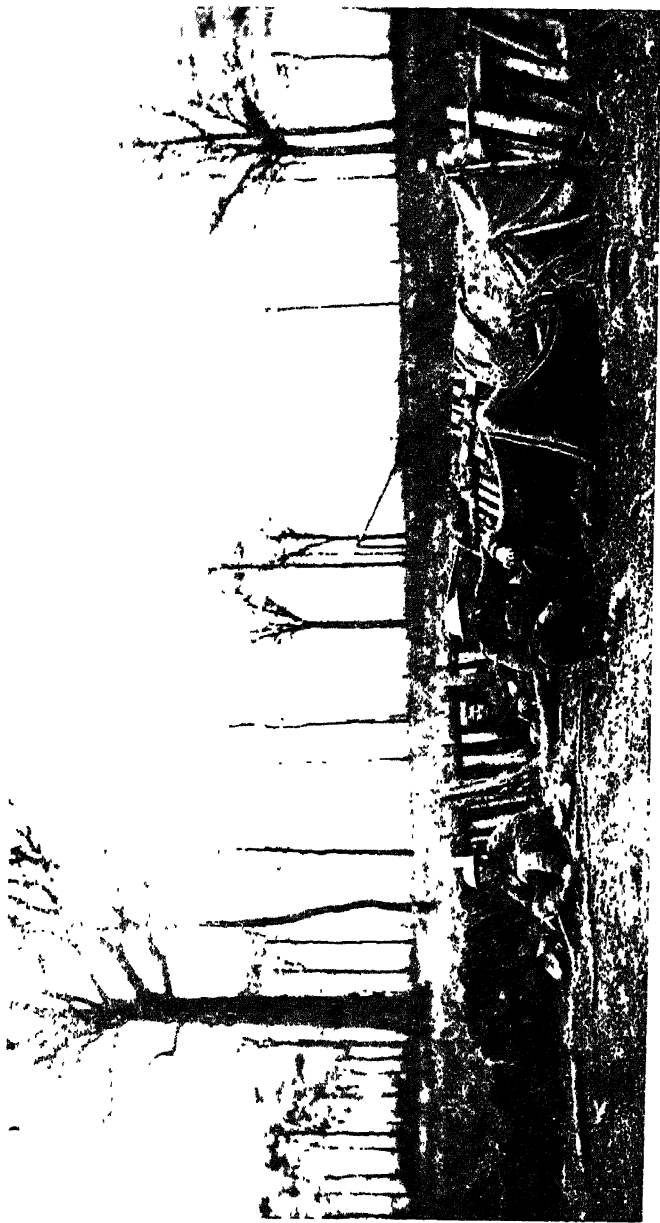
Morris (sketched in July 1918.)

Note.—The line marked "German" was held by the British on April 13.

was a small wood, "Celery Copse", into which the Germans were continually flowing around the northern flank of the trenches dug by the 29th Division defending Vieux Berquin; and at 11 o'clock the southern company of the 1st Australian Brigade on the hill, and the northern company (Joynt's) of the 2nd on the plain below, saw British troops being driven out of Vieux Berquin. The account previously quoted says:

Platoon commanders were now sending in messages that the 31st, 29th, 40th, and 50th Divisions were falling back in disorder . . . At 4 p.m. Pitt reported from the left that the 29th Division was falling back through his sector thoroughly demoralised, and that he found he could not rally them. Joynt went out . . . and found the plain to be alive with "Tommys" all over the place digging in for their lives on instructions from a major of the 31st Division—"a very gallant chap" who would insist in digging in in front of Joynt's line, as he said the Australians were there for support. Another major was riding up and down on horseback, till his horse was shot, stopping the stampede.

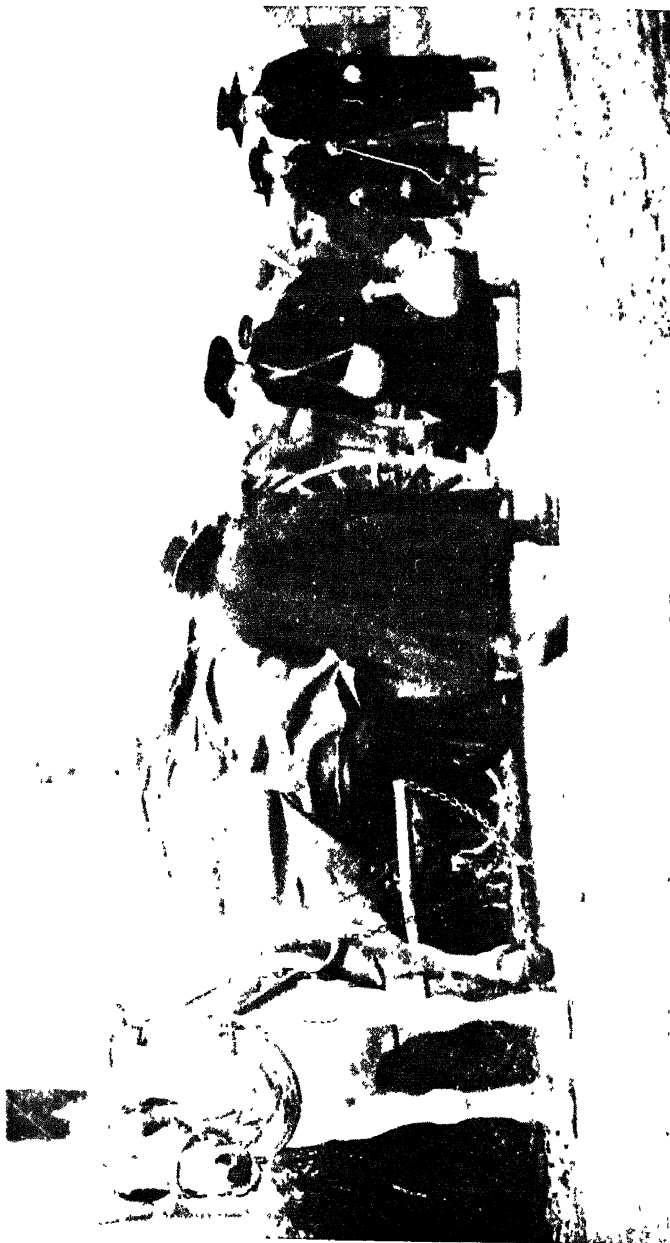
To Lieutenant McGinn's post facing Vieux Berquin there came from the village in the afternoon a senior British officer with two younger ones. "Boy, is this your post?" said the senior to McGinn. "Yes, Sir." "Are you going to make a fight of it?" "Yes, Sir." "Well, give me your rifle—I'm one of your men." And, taking a proffered rifle, he jumped into the post. He proved to be the colonel of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, and his companions were his adjutant and intelligence officer. He was bitterly disappointed with his troops who, he said, for the first time in the regiment's history had retired from a position which they were ordered to hold. As soon as dusk fell he went out to the village and, finding part of it unoccupied, collected a number of his men and led them out to hold it. "You can report," he said to McGinn, "that the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers held the village



39. A POST OF THE 7TH BATTALION AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF NIEPPE FOREST,
18TH APRIL, 1918

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No. I.2032.

To face p. 460



40. FRENCH CIVILIANS FLEEING FROM HONDEGHEM, 18TH APRIL, 1918

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E2034.

To face p 401.

to the last." All night the Australians could hear fierce machine-gun fire in that direction.

Farther south, in front of the southern flank of the 8th Battalion and of the whole of the 7th, the 4th Guards Brigade was fighting, its wide sector having been shortened during the night by the 5th British Division extending its flank northwards. The Guards were as much, in places, as a mile ahead of the Australians, and were holding a line of scattered farms. Shortly after day-break their right battalion, the 3rd Coldstream, was attacked, the German infantry being assisted by an armoured car, which came along the road south of Epinette Farm firing its machine-gun. It presently withdrew without having had much effect upon either side except to cause reports of its presence to flash widespread along the British front, and to bring a company of the Irish Guards to reinforce this flank also. But by 9 a.m. the 29th Division was being driven from Vieux Berquin, again exposing the northern flank of the Guards brigade, which the attached pioneer battalion (12th K.O.Y.L.I.) had extended to la Couronne. The German field-guns attached to the attacking regiments again were brought up to close range and fired direct on the British posts. Shortly after noon an outburst of intense machine-gun fire on the left told where part of the outflanked K.O.Y.L.I. was trying to retreat across the fields.

The Germans had probably got through and were enfilading them with machine-guns as they retired (says a narrative of the 2nd Australian Brigade). A tremendous number were scuppered.

The northernmost company of the 4th Grenadier Guards under Captain Pryce,⁹⁰ being almost surrounded, a company of the 2nd Irish Guards was sent along the cross-road towards la Couronne to assist it. This company also was outflanked, and both bodies were soon surrounded. The next company of Grenadiers was gradually cut off. The 8th Battalion, A.I.F., could see this fighting continuing long into the afternoon. Pryce, resisting to the end, was killed,⁹¹ and the surviving handful of his men was captured. Of the company of the Irish Guards, one N.C.O. and six men got back. Along the left and centre of the 2nd Brigade's front small

⁹⁰ Capt. T. T. Pryce, V.C., M.C.; 4th Bn., Grenadier Guards. Stockbroker; of Llanymynech, North Wales, and Maidenhead, Eng.; b. The Hague, Holland, 17 Jan., 1886. Killed in action, 13 April, 1918.

⁹¹ He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

parties came in throughout the afternoon. Seeing how stubbornly the Guards had been fighting, many of the Australian officers, although instructed to detain all troops for the present, offered to let these parties go back to battalion headquarters; but a sergeant, named Shaw,⁹² of the 4th Grenadier Guards, who had collected a number of his men, asked permission of Lieutenant Kerr,⁹³ 8th Battalion, to stay in the Australian front line until orders arrived for withdrawal. Kerr placed the party behind a hedge near Seclin Farm, and there they stayed until April 15th, when the order for their withdrawal came. Kerr afterwards reported:⁹⁴

The men of my company and battalion are full of admiration for the manner in which the Guards fought. We watched the fighting in the village and farms whilst consolidating our new line. The moral effect . . . was excellent.

By 6 p.m. on the 13th all formed bodies of the 4th Guards Brigade had passed through the 2nd Australian Brigade⁹⁵ except on the southern flank, where posts were still holding at Arrewage and Caudescure, some distance in front of the forest. The Guards' brigadier reported that the front of the 2nd Australian Brigade, which now became the front line, was very thin, and towards the end of the afternoon a British officer arriving from Nieppe Forest stated that the Germans had broken through there, and were advancing north of the forest. Brigadier-General Heane immediately ordered thither a company of the 7th Battalion and part of the 6th. The report, however, proved false—the front posts were entirely unconcerned and had not yet been in touch with the enemy.

On the hill to the north, across which lay the 1st Brigade, the line of the 31st Division, just west of Merris, held out all day. On the next spur northward, in front of Meteren, the 1st Queen's (33rd Division) was outflanked by Germans filtering along the *becque*, and had to withdraw for half-a-mile, but the Cameronians in front of the left flank of the Australians held, and the gap was closed by the bringing up of a very stalwart company from the 2nd New Zealand

⁹² Sgt. E. Shaw, M.M. (No. 13810; 4th Bn., Grenadier Guards). Member of British Regular Army; b. St. Mary's Nottingham, Eng., 1889.

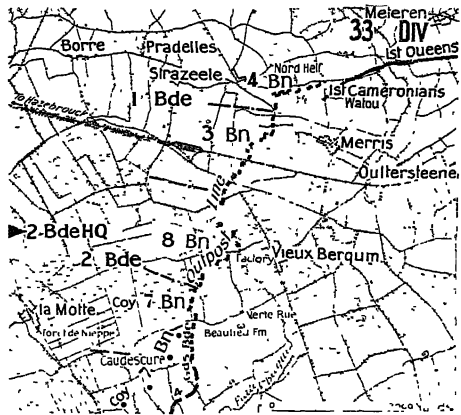
⁹³ Lieut. C. Kerr, 8th Bn. Electrical engineer; of East Camberwell, Vic.; b. Richmond, Vic., 10 June, 1888.

⁹⁴ *The Grenadier Guards in the Great War, Vol. III, p. 52.*

⁹⁵ Beaulieu Farm, on the road to Verte Rue and la Couronne, was one of the last positions held in front of this line.

Entrenching Battalion,⁹⁶ a reinforcement unit which had been temporarily attached to the 33rd Division.

At dusk on the 13th it was evident that before next morning most of the troops previously ahead of the Australian line would have withdrawn behind it. At 6 p.m. the XV Corps ordered General Walker of the 1st Australian Division to take command of the front at 9 o'clock next morning. He could relieve what troops he liked, but there was to be no withdrawal from his present position. Troops of the 11th East Lancashire and 10th East Yorkshire Regiments and fragments of the 29th Division were still on the nearer outskirts of Merris and Vieux Berquin, but General Walker felt that the existence there of small scattered forces would merely be a cause of confusion, and therefore asked that all should be brought back before daylight. Troops



were then maintained ahead only at two points; on the extreme left, south of Meteren, the Cameronians (33rd Division), being of opinion that their position was too good to give up, remained in it by arrangement with the 4th Australian Battalion, which moved up some of its posts in support; and, on the extreme right, part of the 4th Guards Brigade still kept an organised outpost-line from Caudescure to near Beaulieu Farm (Verte Rue) in front of the southern company of the 7th Battalion.

The narrative already quoted gives a picture of Captain Joynt's company headquarters during this night.

⁹⁶ See *The New Zealand Division, 1916-1919*, by Colonel H. Stewart, p. 377. The 4th N.Z. Brigade had been broken up in order to furnish reinforcements for the New Zealand Division.

The farm was full of colonels, and officers, and troops; but first the 40th Division was recalled, then the 31st and 50th, and Joynt was left, by morning, with only 29th Division men . . . He writes in his diary: "About midnight I had several commanding officers with their followers, officers and men, in my dining room all seated round the fire on chairs, lamenting the loss of their battalions and the show they had put up—and I, a subaltern, was triumphant, receiving and issuing orders like a Cook's Tourist agent. My batman reminded me that I had had nothing to eat since lunch, and laid the table . . . I invited the English officers to join me . . . only one, a major, availed himself of the offer. Somehow, one by one, they disappeared off into space until by morning only one of them was left, and he was fast asleep . . . the Intelligence Officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers, 29th Division. He was a real soldier, one of the good ones of the old school."

The men of the 29th Division in Joynt's sector—the last to be recalled from his posts—were sent to his headquarters and put into the kitchen,

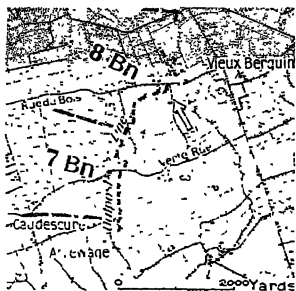
which was big and held many, and the Australians gave them hot tea and a feed. They were quite knocked out by fatigue and hunger; many hadn't had a meal for three days. They were then sent to a barn and were soon asleep in the straw. The Germans, during the morning of the 14th, opened with a field-gun firing incendiary shells at all farm houses along the line and burning them; but Joynt's farm had a tiled roof, and after a few shots the Germans left it alone. It caused him and his people a scare, and he ordered all out of it, and told the 80 men of the 29th Division to dig a trench 100 yards in rear behind a hedge; a very good sergeant-major of the Lancashire Fusiliers superintended the movement.

Soon afterwards, orders were received for these men to be withdrawn. Joynt's account and several others state that the Australians, for whom, since Gallipoli, the 29th Division had been an exemplar of all the military virtues, were shocked by the depreciation in quality of its personnel, which was also remarked upon by its own officers. It was recognised that its men had just been through a very "tough" experience; actually this regular division had been thrown into hard fighting so many times, and had lost so heavily, that its composition had several times changed and it was practically a new formation. But to Australians it was a shock to realise that the bearing of its troops was no longer different from that of many other divisions; and even Joynt did not fully appreciate the degree of strain to which it had just been subjected.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS—(II) APRIL 14TH-24TH

THE first attack on the 1st Australian Division's new front at Hazebrouck was made shortly after midnight of the 13th, when a company of Germans came marching up a cross-country lane leading from Verte Rue to the Rue du Bois, across the Australian front. Behind a hedge bordering this lane was a Lewis gun post¹ of Lieutenant Murdoch's² platoon of the centre company (Captain Fox's³), 8th Battalion. The approaching troops, who were seen at some distance, were allowed to march without alarm to within twenty yards, when the Victorians blazed at them from every barrel, and continued to pour a withering fire into the Germans, whose survivors panicked and fled. Murdoch and some of his men went out and found a German officer and twenty men of the 141st Infantry Regiment dead, and five abandoned machine-guns.



(Attack shown by arrow.)

Two nights later a sixth

The history of the 141st I.R. (35th Division) states that on April 13, when the I and II Battalions of the regiment were held up after taking Verte Rue, the reserve battalion—the III—was ordered to advance northwards on their right and seize Rue du Bois.⁴ The battalion advanced in almost full force, with only the 10th company in reserve. "Unfortunately," says the history, "no attack patrols were ahead of the front, and so it happened that, when the road had nearly been reached, machine-gun fire struck against the leading company. Many pressed back. Lieutenant Frey, who on that same day had taken

¹ Under L/Cpl. J. Schmidt (Quantong, Vic.).

² Lieut. I. G. Murdoch, M.C.; 8th Bn. (a younger brother of Keith Murdoch). Farmer; of Camberwell, and Shepparton district, Vic.; b. Camberwell, 17 Oct., 1892.

³ Capt. C. L. Fox, 8th Bn. Farmer; of Melbourne; b. East Grinstead, Sussex, Eng., 9 Dec., 1881.

⁴ That is, a few cottages along the road of that name.

command of the company for the first time, fell with many others into captivity (*sic*) with the English; to attack with this weak handful would be crazy. Only the 9th and 10th companies were still under the leadership of officers." The battalion, apparently fell back 700 yards south of the road, and its commander gave the order to dig in there, with the I Battalion on its left and the II behind the centre, in reserve.

With morning came the shelling, already referred to, of farms all along the front, and, at about 6.30, a really heavy concentration upon the village of Strazeele on the spur screening Hazebroeck from the enemy. About the same time German infantry were seen pouring into the wood (Celery Copse) at the foot of Mont de Merris. On that hill Lieutenant Champion,⁵ commanding the left company of the 3rd Battalion, was, for the sake of observation, maintaining some forward posts, one thrust out towards the old British trenches north-west of Merris, and another west of the village in a farm (afterwards known as "Gutzer Farm") which Lieutenant Jarvis⁶ had allowed one of his corporals to occupy with a Lewis gun crew. This corporal, by name Turvey,⁷ records:

**The Attack
of April 14**

We had scarcely got into position, and were gazing out . . . over the undulating country, when we saw miles of infantry slowly but surely goose-stepping⁸ towards us. Officers on grey horses were riding up and down the column . . . I sent one of my men back to H.Q. with a message . . .

The Royal Field Artillery, of which seven brigades were now covering the 1st Australian Division,⁹ turned on its fire which, a little later, on the front of Lieutenant Joynt's company at least, was "splendidly effective, shells bursting right over the Germans, who scattered." But a continuous

⁵ Lieut. C. H. D. Champion, 3rd Bn. Farmer; of Jandowae, Q'land; b. Launceston, Tas., 15 Sept., 1892. Killed in action, 14 April, 1918.

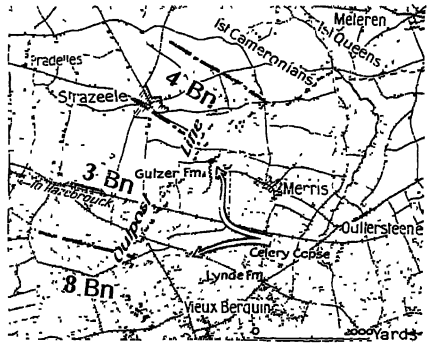
⁶ Lieut. F. J. Jarvis, 3rd Bn. High school teacher; of Sydney; b. Cambridge, Eng., 11 Oct., 1883. Died, 14 July, 1925, as the result of gas-poisoning during the war. (Jarvis was a rather remarkable young Englishman, of great poetic and literary ability, who had wandered about the Empire living by various jobs, mainly schoolmastering.)

⁷ Cpl. (temp. Sgt.) P. Turvey, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 2693; 3rd Bn.). Labourer; of Rylstone, N.S.W.; b. Wagga Wagga, N.S.W., 23 March, 1892.

⁸ The quotation is from *Reveille*, Nov. 1934. "Goose-stepping" is probably a conscious exaggeration, although the "parade" step may have been used for a few paces on receipt of the order to advance.

⁹ The artillery was divided into two groups: *Left Group* (covering 1st Brigade), under Brig.-General J. C. Wray of the 57th Divisional Artillery—28th and 64th Army Brigades, and 285th and 286th Brigades (57th Divnl. Artillery); *Right Group* (covering 2nd Brigade), under Brig.-General E. C. W. D. Walthall (34th Divisional Artillery)—19th Army Brigade, and two brigades of the 34th Divisional Artillery.

stream of Germans issued from the wood into cover of the railway cutting that led towards the posts of the 1st Brigade and thence made its way either northwards behind hedges to the trenches held by the British during the two previous days half-a-mile west of Merris, or westwards and south-westwards in waves of skirmishers to the farms close in front of the Australian line. Others streamed in column up the high road through Vieux Berquin and thence out of its western outskirts towards the posts of the 2nd Brigade. The Australian Lewis gunners and machine-gunners had such targets as were seldom presented to them, but mostly at long ranges of half-a-mile and over. As they were holding the last line of defence, both brigadiers (Lesslie and Heane) kept back most of their machine-guns in scattered positions behind the front line.



The first close contact on the 1st Brigade's front occurred at Lieutenant Champion's advanced posts. Corporal Turvey states that shooting at the advancing enemy from Gutzer Farm was "like firing into a haystack—one could not miss." The Germans "became very much unsettled in front," but "kept creeping up on both flanks," and were very close to the farm when Turvey came in from it, having previously sent back his men. The advanced platoon (under Lieutenant Desbois)¹⁰ about 200 yards from the old British trenches also disturbed the advance, using two Lewis guns previously taken from the withdrawing British troops together with ample ammunition. The Germans advanced in six waves, but the intense fire now poured upon them by the main Australian posts prevented them from passing the abandoned British position,

¹⁰ Lieut. D. R. Desbois, M.C.; 3rd Bn. Station manager; of Narromine, N.S.W.; b. Cooktown, Q'land, 8 July, 1891. (He had been keeping watch from the crest in front of his post.)

although they made several definite attempts to do so. By 10.30 they had settled into the old British trenches and into all the farmhouses near by.

At 10.30 the first German effort here had been completely beaten, and a lull occurred. Lieutenant Champion seized this opportunity to attempt the expulsion of the Germans from Gutzter Farm, from which his left, especially Desbois' post, was being badly sniped in enfilade. He arranged with a trench-mortar officer on the left for a covering bombardment with Stokes guns, and asked one of his platoon commanders, Lieutenant Prescott,¹¹ to take out his men and capture the farm. Prescott went forward at once, the neighbouring posts all opening fire to cover him. The daring advance which followed had a remarkable and unexpected effect. When Prescott and his men, only twenty strong, appeared steadily advancing, the Germans on all the neighbouring front began to run back "like a grey screen," as one eyewitness described it. The small party reached the farm and, on entering the yard, found fifty Germans there. The New South Welshmen opened fire at fifteen yards' distance and the Germans fled to a small gate at the far end, where most of them were shot down as they struggled to get through. Prescott's men cleared the house of Germans, but unseen by them thirty managed to escape from its precincts. They were observed by a neighbouring post as they scrambled through a hedge, and many of these also were shot. Prescott, however, found the farm untenable owing to the deadly fire directed upon it by German machine-gunners on the flanks. After six of his men had been killed and three wounded, he withdrew. Some of the dead were left behind. Hearing a report that a wounded man also might be there, a private named Reid¹² who had already gone out and brought one of the wounded through intense fire, volunteered to return and search the place, but was not allowed to do so.

The withdrawal of the Germans when boldly attacked gave the impression that—as Lieutenant-Colonel Moore of the 3rd Battalion reported—the German rank and file in

¹¹ Lieut. C. G. Prescott, M.C.; 3rd Bn. Articled law clerk; of Stanmore, N.S.W.; b. Burwood, N.S.W., 8 Sept., 1892.

¹² Pte. W. H. Reid (No. 3201; 3rd Bn.). Clerk; of Hornsby, N.S.W.; b. Mosman, N.S.W., 29 July, 1894. Killed in action, 15 April, 1918.

general lacked spirit, although their officers were "particularly brave in the assault" and the machine-guns, heavy and light, were skilfully handled. The infantry, wavering as soon as they met opposition, "gave our men excellent targets." At midday the battle eased, but at 2 o'clock Germans were again seen assembling, apparently a battalion opposite each flank of the 3rd Battalion. Shortly afterwards four waves of them left their trenches. The S.O.S. signal, immediately fired, brought down the British barrage, but against Champion's company the Germans came on. All day the subalterns of this company allowed attacks to come close before giving the order to fire, then meeting them with intense bursts which had demoralising effects. It is recorded that Lieutenant Desbois prevented his men from opening until the Germans were within thirty yards. In front of Lieutenant Jarvis's platoon there occurred an incident recorded by Corporal Turvey as the "finest example of bravery" in his experience.

A German officer, on foot, leading his men, yelled out something like "Forwich, Forwich,"¹³ but a volley from our lines sent him and many others to grass. However, he struggled to his feet and again called on his men to advance. Another volley sent him in a heap, and it seemed that he was done. But, to our utter amazement, he gallantly struggled to his feet, and, lurching unsteadily from one side to the other to get his balance, called again "Forwich, Forwich." This time he took the full count.

The attack did not reach the Australian posts; farther to the right the German troops could not face the infantry fire and hardly left their trench.

Between 2 and 3 o'clock the posts of the 3rd Battalion looking down on to the lowlands were astonished to see two companies of infantry in fours marching calmly towards them along the Vieux Berquin high road, where two field-guns also came into position only two-thirds of a mile away. Every barrel in sight was turned upon them; the infantry scattered into the houses along the roadside, and the guns were hurriedly withdrawn from view.

The history of the 12th German Reserve Field Artillery Regiment makes it clear that the two guns were a section of its 5th Battery, and were accompanying a battalion of their division up the Vieux Berquin high street, in spite of strong machine-gun fire from the left

¹³ "Vorwärts! Vorwärts!" ("Forward").

flank (*i.e.*, from the 2nd Brigade in front of Nieppe Forest). They advanced steadily (says this account) until the infantry deployed. Then, "before the position reconnoitred by Lieutenant Denke can be taken up, a regular rain of bullets calls a halt to the further advance." Denke was wounded, but Lieutenant Sachse at once took over, and with an N.C.O. brought the two guns into action 100 yards behind the infantry line. What they there achieved will presently be told.

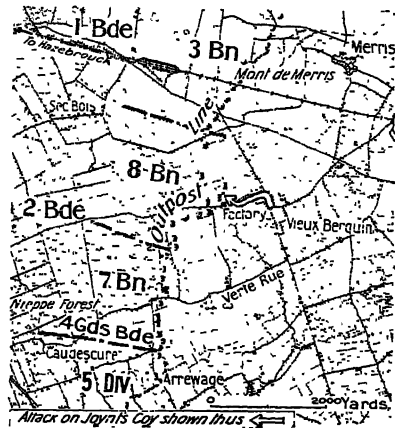
The posts of the 3rd Battalion noted that movement continued through Celery Wood and along the railway, but on the height the attack lulled. One N.C.O. of the 3rd took out his soap and razor and shaved. Lieutenant Jarvis—light-hearted young Englishman, replica of Inigo Jollifant of *The Good Companions*—after playing on his tin whistle "Australia Will Be There!", tried "Die Wacht am Rhein" in the unsuccessful hope of inducing the outraged enemy to come on. But all remained quiet here until 7, when a company of the enemy again attempted to assault. Champion's company (with whom also were some keen-spirited Yorkshire and Lancashire men of the 31st Division, who had willingly stayed on and called themselves "Lesslie's Own") had borne the chief weight of the enemy's efforts, and, having suffered about forty casualties, had been reinforced by a platoon from the reserve company. The attacking Germans were again shattered, but in this successful climax of his day-long effort Lieutenant Champion fell shot through the head.

On the lowlands, along most of the front of the 2nd Brigade, the Germans did not get near the posts; but at 2.30 p.m. a man covered with mud arrived at headquarters of the 8th Battalion and breathlessly told Colonel Mitchell that two of Lieutenant Joynt's posts had been annihilated, and that he, the only man left, had escaped by diving under water along a canalised rivulet behind them. As the man was thought to have been sent to headquarters by Joynt, his information caused alarm, and it was assumed from his description that the northern flank of the 8th had gone. Mitchell sent forward half his reserve company post haste, and Brigadier-General Heane supported it with two companies of the 6th Battalion.

Joynt, also, had heard that the Germans were attacking one of his posts—actually the southernmost, under Lieutenant Fenton, who, it will be remembered, had originally taken

position 200 yards farther out than had been intended in order to "take advantage of a copse and some buildings"¹⁴ (later known as "Ankle Farm"). South of this, 200 yards away across the fields, on the Rue du Bois was the three-storied factory—an outlier of Vieux Berquin—which Fenton's post had been ordered to cover but not occupy. The Germans had laid the neighbouring posts under sharp bombardment from field-guns and trench-mortars, and their infantry, creeping along ditches and hedges, had reached the factory and established in its upper story machine-guns with which they enfiladed Fenton's post, killing or wounding most of those who attempted to show their heads. The neighbouring post of Fox's company had been temporarily shelled out, Lieutenant Murdoch having been badly wounded, and the whole of the fields around were swept with intense machine-gun fire.

Hastening forward, Joynt found that the front line platoon commanders had already taken steps to cover the gap; on its northern edge Lieutenant McGinn and his men, at first unconscious of this attack, had been blazing, in high glee, at the Germans debouching from the Vieux Berquin street. Later, to make sure what had happened to Fenton's post, he sent out a sergeant, named Short,¹⁵ with orders first to carry out the reconnaissance, and then to mark out a new position 200 yards in rear. Short carried out both duties, though wounded on his reconnaissance, and McGinn then dribbled back his men to the new position, where they dug in under guidance of Short, who presently had his



¹⁴ See p. 457.

¹⁵ Sgt. G. R. Short, M.M. (No. 2783; 8th Bn.). Surveyor; of Colac, Vic.; b. Colac, 15 Oct., 1894. [Pte. J. H. Dehn (of Albert Park, Vic.) went with him on the patrol.]

elbow shattered by a bullet. The next post, under Lieutenant Bourke, threw out a flank southwards to keep touch with McGinn.¹⁶ Farther south the post of Fox's company had been re-established; and in the rear Lance-Corporal Stewart,¹⁷ in charge of the company signallers, had, on word from Joynt, collected the runners, signallers, and batmen at company headquarters, and strung them out in close support. The line was thus entirely safe, and the men and their officers were in high spirits when Lieutenant Power,¹⁸ commanding the first of the reinforcements, arrived panting at Joynt's headquarters. About the same time Lieutenant Johnstone,¹⁹ with a second platoon, rushed up to the north flank post under Lieutenant Pitt, asking what he should do to help. Pitt, whose view was limited by a hedge, did not even know of the loss of the posts. Thus, while the reports of the crisis travelled back through brigade and divisional headquarters into the official records of corps and army and thence into the *communiqués*—and probably into history—the officers on the spot were puzzled to find some use for the reinforcements. After dark, Joynt, hearing that McGinn's old post was empty,²⁰ suggested to Colonel Mitchell that he should use Power's platoons to recapture both the lost positions. Mitchell, however, reported to brigade headquarters that the old posts were now strongly occupied by the enemy with trench-mortars and machine-guns,²¹ and the notion was consequently abandoned. Joynt, going out to withdraw Power's platoon, which was in position for the assault,

found them all asleep—they were so overtired with all their travelling and marching that they could not lie down without falling off to sleep. Each man was lying face downward with rifle out in front—to wake them he had to go along and slap every man.

¹⁶ Pte. W. T. Parfrey (Bailleston East, Vic.), who volunteered to carry to Bourke an order from Joynt, and returned guiding the men, was shot dead when he stopped for a moment to report to Joynt.

¹⁷ Sgt. C. L. Stewart, M.M. (No. 1617; 8th Bn.). Clerk; of Alphington, Vic.; b. St. Kilda, Vic., 1880.

¹⁸ Lieut. F. D'A. Power, 8th Bn. Medical student; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Malvern, Vic., 18 Nov. 1895.

¹⁹ Lieut. T. W. Johnstone, M.C.; 8th Bn. Clerk and wood-worker; of Clifton Hill, Vic.; b. Armadale, Vic., 17 July, 1889.

²⁰ The Germans had reached it, but after dark two men from the left post, not knowing of the retirement, called at the post and came in to report that it was then empty.

²¹ A highly trusted officer of the 8th, Lieut. A. D. Temple (Ararat, Vic.), had arrived before the reinforcements, and this was possibly his report.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Fenton, with two British privates, had fought his way back, himself the last to leave his post, escaping through the orchard when the Germans were in the farm. Fenton had endeavoured to withdraw his platoon to an intermediate position, covered by the fire of Sergeant Robertson, who, with a captured German machine-gun, held one of his two small posts. Robertson, though wounded, carried out this duty alone under close fire from the mill by which he was ultimately hit again and killed. A few of Fenton's men got through, wounded. He himself was the only unwounded survivor of the platoon.²²

Next day the British heavy artillery, after much difficulty through their shells falling near and behind the front-line posts, found the range of the factory, and also of Vieux Berquin church tower, on which enemy observers had been seen, and destroyed them both.

The troops who attacked Joynt's and Fox's posts were part of the 12th Reserve Division, and certainly included the battalion and the two guns which the 3rd Battalion's fire had surprised in the main street of Vieux Berquin. After this infantry had deployed, the guns, brought into position 100 yards in rear of them, opened fire at point-blank range on some machine-guns ahead, particularly (says the history of the 12th Reserve F.A.R.²³) one at a *copse* and another at a *barn*. Both machine-guns were silenced, and one of the field-guns exhilarated the German infantry by setting fire to a barn with one shot, and getting on to the fleeing garrison with a second. The German infantry eventually occupied several of the posts, but one of the field-guns was seen and came under machine-gun fire, the bullets rapping against the shield and some of them piercing it. Although four gun-layers in succession were hit, the gun continued to fire on targets given to it by the company commanders. Another section of the same battery was brought up to a hedge less than half-a-mile from the opposing line. A British observer detected it, and directed his battery upon it, but a German soldier in turn detected him, whereupon the guns (says the German account) turned on "Mr. Smith," and chased him out.

Nowhere else, in spite of constant attempts to advance, did the Germans reach the Australian posts, which all day shot at the distant enemy attempting to press on with his advance. Indeed it was only late in the day, when most of his men had been killed or wounded, that Lieutenant Desbois'

²² That night the bodies of the enemy, which lay thickly in front, were searched by Private D. O. Morgan (Richmond, Vic.; died, 23 March, 1934), who brought in many valuable papers.

²³ *History of the 12th Reserve F.A.R.*, p. 138.

advanced post was withdrawn. To the north the 33rd Division, defending Meteren, was also strongly attacked; first at dawn, when the Germans drove back some posts of the much tried 1st Queen's, which held the line between two Scottish battalions,²⁴ and two or three times later in the day, when the Queen's again were forced out of part of their sector. Another line was taken up, the garrison being reinforced by a brave advance of some men of the New Zealand Entrenching Battalion supporting the demonic Hutchison's machine-gunners,²⁵ and the battle ended with Meteren still held. Farther to that flank the British this afternoon finally lost Neuve Église. To the south the 5th British Division beat off three attacks with the temporary loss of a few posts which were immediately recaptured.

German records make it plain that the battle of April 14—the first day of fighting for the Australians engaged—was for the Germans the third day of a stubborn battle in which progress had been so disappointing that, even on the night of the 12th, it was not without some consideration that orders had been issued to continue the attack.

The German Side

The original instructions given by Crown Prince Rupprecht to the Sixth Army had "laid it down as a condition of success that . . . on the second day the chain of heights [from Kemmel westwards] should already be attained."²⁶ He had even hoped that in the first few days the Sixth Army, following up the beaten enemy, might break through the St. Omer defences before British reinforcements could arrive from the south.²⁷ From the first, progress had dropped far behind these expectations, but yet had been fast enough to make it possible on April 12th that Hazebrouck or the chain of hills, or both, might be reached if the attacking troops pressed on.

April 12 started well for the LV Corps, the 8th Division reporting at about 2 a.m. that it had taken Merville and was marching on Hazebrouck, and the three other divisions farther south making at dawn their considerable advance almost to the La Bassée canal near Robecq. (It was the 68th I.R., 16th Division, that nearly overran the 12th Australian Field Artillery Brigade.) But on the other flank of the Sixth Army the II

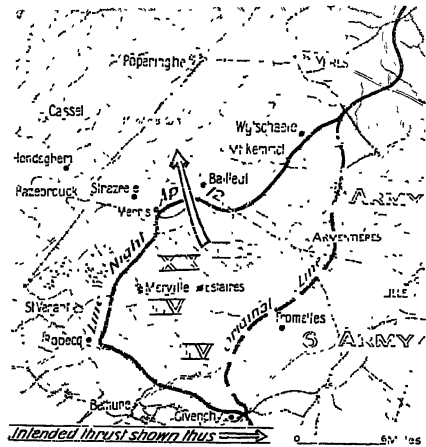
²⁴ The 1st and 5th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).

²⁵ Hutchison used his guns this day with terrible effect not only upon the enemy, but upon weakening troops of his own side.

²⁶ *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. 2, p. 382.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

Bavarian Corps was held up by the British at Steenwerck station, "stubbornly defended by machine-guns." The corps next to it on the south, the XIX, after advancing west of Douliou, was driven far back by the counter-attack of the 31st British Division, but nevertheless, with the 81st Reserve Division put in freshly on the right, the 42nd Division subsequently advanced three and a half miles northwards to the spurs at Meteren and Merris, thus reaching the foot-hills that led to the dominating height of Mont des Cats crowned by its



monastery, only $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles farther on. The 35th Division, pushing towards the north-eastern corner of Nieppe Forest, came (says the *Reichsarchiv*) "against strong opposition [that of the 4th Guards Brigade] and could not advance further than the line la Couronne-Vert Rue. Vieux Berquin was the scene of heavy fighting" (against the 29th Division). The 12th Reserve Division, sent forward from reserve, was ordered to attack north of that village, towards Hazebrouck, but had not reached the front line when night fell. Farther south, in the LV Corps sector, the 8th Division, though the 8th Bavarian Reserve Division was put in specially to cover its left flank, had missed its chance; when it attempted to push on, Nieppe Forest was already held by the British, and its progress ended two miles from Merville.

By this time the German command appears to have recognised that the offensive would not "develop to a 'break-through' operation on a big scale; it was too narrow, and, in particular, was restricted by the failure on its left wing,"²⁸ at Givenchy. But it was still moving, though far behind time, and another three and a half miles would bring the II Bavarian and XIX Corps from the foot-hills to the top of the Kemmel-Cassel ridge, behind Bailleul. Moreover the present position of the right flank of the II Bavarian Corps, on the Lys lowlands overlooked by the British at Bailleul and Neuve Église, was most undesirable. Crown Prince Rupprecht therefore decided that the attack should be continued on the 13th with the same objectives, a fresh impulse being given by putting in one of its best divisions—the Alpine Corps—under the II Bavarian Corps, with the special task of encircling Bailleul on the south-west.

Advances of three and a half miles, however, were no longer within range of possibility. The Alpine Corps "ran up against a Scottish division fresh in the line, which offered energetic resistance," and only reached Bailleul station. The right of the II Bavarian Corps made no

April 13

²⁸ Information from the *Reichsarchiv*.

progress, its left just reached the foothills. So incensed was Ludendorff at reports (brought to him direct by his intelligence officers with the infantry) of delays attributed to the remoteness of the corps headquarters, near Lille, that he relieved its commander at once by the commander of the III Bavarian Army Corps. In the XIX Corps, the 81st Reserve Division with difficulty pushed a few hundred yards closer to Meteren, and the 42nd firmly occupied Merris; but the 12th Reserve Division, which was ordered to pass through the 35th, south of the railway, and advance upon Strazeele and Borre, barely reached the front line at Lynde Farm (held by the 29th and 31st British Divisions), while the 35th Division merely completed the capture of Vieux Berquin and of Verte Rue. In the LV Corps the 8th Division reported that, after heavy fighting, it succeeded in getting into the edge of the forest—the statement was an error, for the edge of the forest was all day held by the 2nd Australian Brigade, with the 4th Guards Brigade, at first, in front of it. The 8th Bavarian Reserve Division similarly claimed to have just reached the wood in the sector of the 5th British Division. “The opposition of the enemy,” the *Reichsarchiv* states, “was everywhere extremely stubborn. He defended himself especially by means of skilfully built machine-gun nests, which could only be spotted at the last moment.” The effect of the British artillery-fire is said to have been slight. The German artillery, being attached to infantry battalions and even companies, and put in gun by gun, suffered proportionately heavier losses than the infantry whose casualties were “comparatively small.”

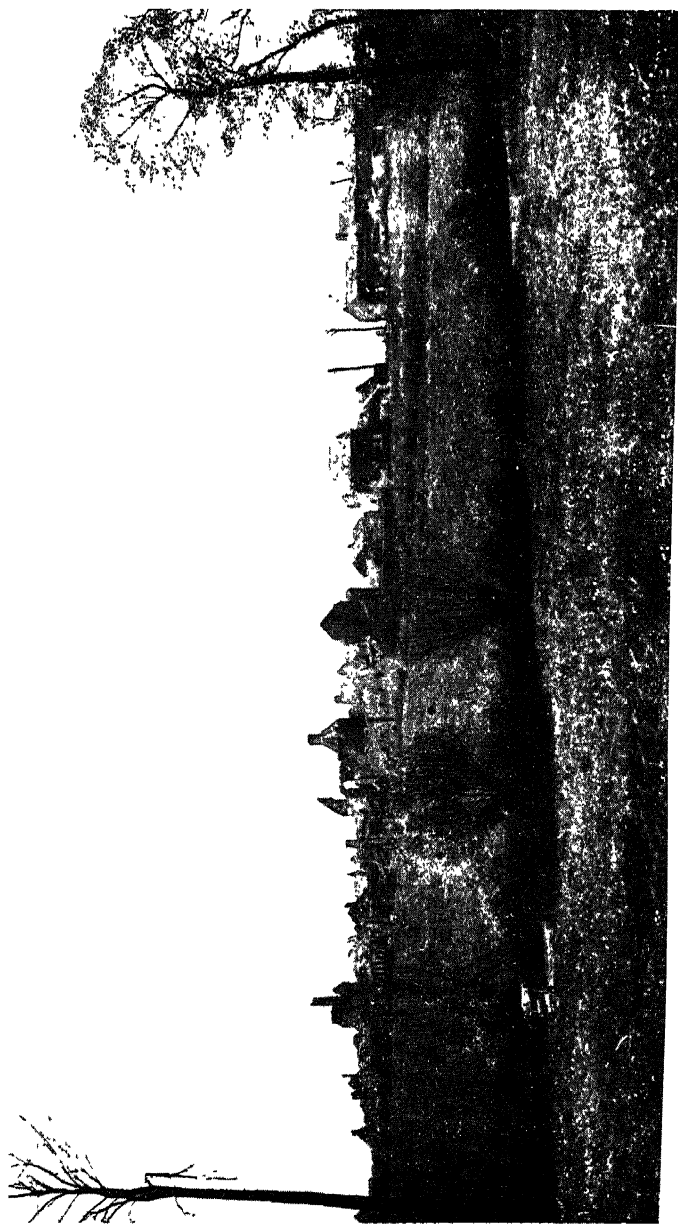
The general advance on this day had been barely half-a-mile; in some places, considerably less. Crown Prince Rupprecht, however, still hoped to seize Mont des Cats, and accordingly ordered that the attack should be continued, the Sixth Army “placing the heaviest pressure on its right flank in order to seize as speedily as possible the hills north of Meteren and at Strazeele, and to win ground in the direction of Godewaersvelde-Hazebrouck.” The attack was to be carried out “by encircling from the west.” Farther south the Sixth Army was now merely to try to push forward far enough to be able to damage by long-range artillery-fire certain railway bridges over the La Bassée canal.²⁹ Sixth Army accordingly ordered the II Bavarian and XIX Corps to resume the battle with vigour at 7 a.m. on the 14th after strong artillery preparation, each corps thrusting as far as it could. The LV Corps would attack the Forest of Nieppe, exerting the heaviest pressure with its northern flank. That flank and the neighbouring flank of the XIX Corps, opposite Nieppe Forest, were strengthened by the putting in of the 48th Reserve and 12th Divisions respectively, with orders to attack towards Hazebrouck. The front of the XIX Corps was now of practically the same length as that of the 1st Australian Division, but each of its flanks was slightly to the north of the opposite flank of the Australians.

German regimental histories show that the divisions which attacked from Merris on April 14 were, on the north, the 42nd, which had already been fighting there for several days, and, farther south, the 12th Reserve, which was fresh.

April 14

The 42nd advanced with its 131st and 138th Regiments in line. The first attack was to be delivered at 7 a.m., after a quarter of an hour's bombardment. At 10.50, in order to help the

²⁹ At Isberques and Gouarbecque.



41. STRAZEELE, ON 14TH MAY, 1918

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E2286.

To face p 476



42. HEADQUARTERS' COOK OF THE 3RD BATTALION, APRIL, 1918,
NEAR SEC BOIS

With the bread and a supplementary "ration."

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo. No. E2268.
Taken on 19th April, 1918.*

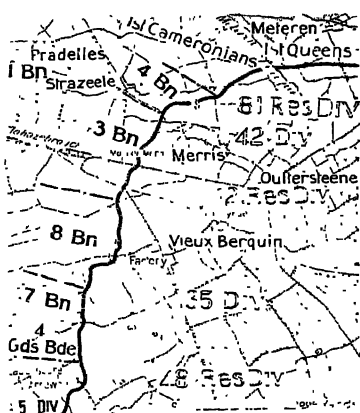
To face p. 477.

attack along, a reserve battalion, the II/17th I.R., was thrown in at the north-west end of Merris. A further effort appears to have been made at 1.30, but, according to German records, it stopped at the opposing "second line" (presumably the old British support line); the British in their "third line" (i.e., the Australian front line) made the two forward lines very dangerous with machine-gun fire.

The 12th Reserve Division, attacking south of the 42nd, had as its first objective Strazecele. It was the northern regiment of this division that crossed the railway and advanced on Mont de Merris, while its centre reached, about 11 o'clock, the farms south of the railway. "But the enemy is a tough one," says the historian of the 12th Reserve F.A.R. "In cleverly built-up machine-gun nests he flanks the infantry, especially from Strazecele station and Nieppe Forest. Also the enemy artillery in the direction of Borre was obviously reinforced. The attack refuses to progress and its continuation at 1.30 is accordingly ordered." As usual, German batteries accompanied the infantry, two coming to Lynde Farm, one to Lesage Farm, and two to the north-east corner of Vieux Berquin. By firing from these positions upon the Australian machine-guns, they tried to cover the attack at 1.30 on Mont de Merris. The 8th Battery, firing from Vieux Berquin, was bombed by a British aeroplane; the 9th, at Lynde Farm, noted that "the resistance this day was far stronger" than on the 13th. On the flats a section of the 5th Battery, supporting the infantry, managed to blow out two Australian posts, as already described.

The 12th Division (not to be confused with the 12th Reserve) was to go through the 35th, and marched up to Bleu in readiness, but it was not used, being ordered back at 6 p.m., its operation being postponed. The attack on the centre of the 2nd Australian Brigade along the edge of the forest was made by the 35th Division, which had been in the line since April 11. The history of the 141st I.R., which was to take Rue du Bois, says that the III/141st (the same that had run into the 8th Battalion the night before) suffered particularly from flank fire from the forest, and the I/141st also was gripped by it. "The enemy is strong, while our little handful is very exhausted." By nightfall the regiment, reinforced by a company of pioneers, was digging in with orders to act on the defensive.

The troops who attacked the southern flank of the 2nd Australian Brigade and the elements of the 4th Guards Brigade, were those of the 48th Reserve Division, a fresh reinforcement put in by the LV Corps with orders to thrust through the forest to Hazebrouck station. Its own artillery was away in the south, and there was little shelling



on either side. But (says a German account³⁰) when its two leading regiments attacked, there met them from all the windows of Caudescure, just outside the forest, such a hail of small arms fire that the attack came to a stop with heavy losses. A battalion of the third regiment was brought up closer, and the attack was attempted again, this time without artillery preparation; but it "broke up in machine-gun fire." Colonel Count Kielmannsegg, commanding the southern regiment (222nd R.I.R.), stated at a conference in the evening that it was useless to attack again without the previous total destruction of the village.

For the first time on the main front of the offensive, hardly any ground had been gained. The completeness of the defeat was not recognised at first; Crown Prince Rupprecht says that "in the course of the afternoon there came in an order, this time personally signed by Hindenburg, which . . . urged the Sixth Army to push on against the heights. The Kaiser, who called at headquarters of the Sixth Army, spoke in the same way. "But," adds Rupprecht, "of what use are any number of orders to attack if the troops have no longer the power to do so? . . . The C.G.S. of the Sixth Army expressed himself most pessimistically—the attack had to all appearances run to a standstill. It was questionable whether we should now succeed in winning the heights." The Sixth Army at any rate decided that the attack with its two northern corps—now the III Bavarian and XIX—should only be delivered after the most thorough artillery preparation. As it was obvious that this could not be completed by the next day, operations on this front were postponed until the 17th.

On the 14th, not only had the 1st Australian and 5th British Divisions completely stabilised the front between Hazebrouck and St. Venant, but in the sector south of this, at Robecq, the First British Army had thrust back the Germans over part of the ground gained by them on the 12th, the 4th Division retaking Riez du Vinage (the 12th Australian Field Artillery Brigade was that evening brought up again to positions close under Robecq³¹). Behind the Hazebrouck

**Pause on
Strazeele Front**

³⁰ *History of the 221st R.I.R.*, p. 244.

³¹ The batteries suffered here through heavy shelling from the German artillery; and as men were being uselessly killed, and the ordinary methods for their protection were not functioning, Colonel Lloyd organised a flash-spotting system of his own. They first put some men in Robecq church, and then some more in the church tower at St. Venant. The "diggers" sat in the very tip of the steeples, with a telephone wire between them, and worked all night with intense keenness noting the bearings of the flashes: "5.9 gun just fired," was one message from St. Venant steeple, "firing at this church." The results of the intersections were wired to the British heavy artillery, which succeeded in making a marked difference in the conditions at the battery positions. A third station was established, and all were eventually handed over to a field survey company.

front the first of the reinforcing French divisions, the 133rd, from Amiens, was now arriving and its leading troops were directed towards Meteren. On April 12th Foch had been prevailed upon to add General Robillot's II Cavalry Corps together with the 28th Infantry Division—all recently engaged in the south—to the 133rd for service in Flanders. On April 13th Haig's chief-of-staff, General Lawrence, informed the Second Army commander, General Plumer, that, although some more French divisions might reach him, it was unlikely that additional British divisions could be sent. Lawrence suggested that the time had come for Plumer to economise his force by withdrawing from the Ypres salient. The front line there had already been thinned, and Plumer agreed to withdraw to the Pilckem ridge, from which the great offensive of the previous year had been launched. On the 14th the orders for the withdrawal were issued; it would begin that night and finish early on the 16th.

On April 15th, for the first time since the start of the offensive, the German thrust south and west of Armentières was suspended. Behind the Hazebrouck front the 1st Australian Division's artillery, which had arrived the day before and gone into positions between Hazebrouck and Nieppe Forest, registered its targets.³² The 3rd Infantry Brigade and 1st Pioneer Battalion were working on the division's new reserve trench-system, on which were also engaged the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers, 5th Composite Battalion (a provisional British unit), 2nd Provisional Battalion, 78th Chinese Labour Battalion, 2nd Cavalry Field Squadron, and the 5th Australian Divisional Details Battalion, as well as the detachment of the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company which had fought as infantry at Armentières and since. The forward defence-zone—consisting of three systems

³² Part of the French artillery also appears to have been this day attached to the 33rd Division. The historian of the 12th German Res. F. A. Regt. says that the presence of French artillery this day was "unmistakable . . . its fire discipline and extreme suddenness of onslaught." The history of the 94th I.R. (38th Division) says that at Meteren "the constantly changing and brief—but correspondingly more vehement—bombardments" of the French artillery were particularly unpleasant, and were easily distinguished from "the little changing British bombardments, which lay always on the same spot." The final statement, though of course inaccurate, is evidence of the greater suppleness of the French artillery fire

dug by the two brigades in the line with their own engineers and infantry and some of the relieved British troops—was already half-complete. The work went swiftly ahead, the enemy's attention on April 15th being apparently turned farther to the north-east, where, in an attack delivered late in the afternoon, he took the Ravelsberg and Bailleul.³³ At Merris the Germans could constantly be seen moving between their posts, harassed by snipers and by machine-guns, of which Brigadier-General Lesslie had purposely obtained an additional eight from the reserve company (21st). Farther back they, like their opponents, were driving away live-stock from the farms. About Verte Rue, where the last posts of the 4th Guards Brigade had been relieved on the previous night by the right of the 7th Battalion, the Germans brought up a field-gun and trench-mortars, and at night, after bombardment, a party of them tried to raid a post of the 7th near Beaulieu Farm. It was driven off,³⁴ leaving a wounded man. A patrol of the Victorians by bringing him in found that the party which had attacked them belonged to the 222nd R.I.R. (48th Reserve Division).³⁵

Early on April 16th the Germans again attacked the line of the 33rd Division in front of Meteren, drove in the 4th King's (Liverpool) Regiment, who now held it, and entered the village. A counter-attack was made by two sections of a field company (11th), but throughout most of the day the divisional headquarters was uncertain whether Meteren had been regained or lost. One of the two companies of New Zealand reinforcements held out in front of the village until

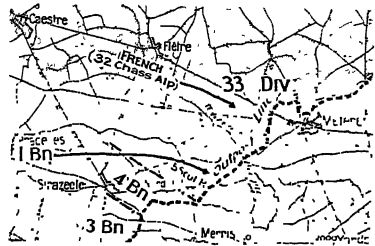
³³ In this area, chiefly at Bailleul, there had existed large stores of Australian Red Cross and Comforts Fund material. Vigorous efforts to save the former were made by Captains J. L. Kiddle and H. Norris and their staffs assisted by Colonel A. G. Butler, but 1,200 cases of comforts were lost. A dépôt of the Australian War Records Section containing many relics now in the Australian War Memorial Museum was salvaged by Lieutenant S. W. Gullett when the place was under heavy fire and had been abandoned by all other transport.

³⁴ Stokes mortars of the 2nd L.T.M. Battery helped by laying down a barrage. Lieut. F. J. Shrimpton (Geelong, Vic.) was mortally wounded this day.

³⁵ Early in the morning of April 15 a post of the 8th Battalion near the Rue du Bois heard a bicycle come rattling down it towards the front. When the sentry called to the rider to halt, the stranger increased his speed and ran into the barricade of farm waggons, placed there by the 8th when the German armoured car was reported farther south. He threw his bicycle over this, climbed over himself, raced off, and escaped in spite of the fire of a Lewis gun. There can be little doubt that he was a German prisoner who had escaped farther back, as they not infrequently did, and had stolen a bicycle.

it was completely cut off and was forced to surrender—this being the largest capture of prisoners made from the New Zealand forces during the war. By 3 p.m. it was known in the front line that the place was lost, and at about that time the 133rd French Division was asked to pass through the 33rd at dusk and restore the line by counter-attack. The 1st Australian Brigade would swing up its left and advance with the French. This movement would be carried out by the 1st Battalion from support, passing first through the flank of the 4th, and then through the 5th Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) now holding the line there.

The 1st moved from Pradelles at 6.30, and, crossing the ridge at Strazeele as night fell, waited for the French between Nordhelf and the Meteren Becque. The Germans laid a heavy barrage on Strazeele spur, a shell bursting among the platoon of Lieutenant Humphreys,³⁶ killing him and several others. But of the French battalion that was to co-operate, the 32nd Chasseurs Alpins, no sign was seen. It was afterwards learned that the operation order reached the French infantry only fifteen minutes before "zero" hour, when compliance was impossible. They advanced some hours later, but wisely limited their effort to the relief of the British troops



whom they found just short of the village. The 1st Battalion, after passing through hedges and ditches, found ahead of it the 5th Scottish Rifles, still holding part of their original line among the hop-fields near the Meteren Becque, and during the night relieved most of them, one company of the Rifles, however, still remaining in the front line.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sasse of the 4th Battalion had decided to take advantage of the artillery barrage that accompanied

³⁶ Lieut. R. G. Humphreys, M.M.; 1st Bn. Carpenter; of Haberfield, N.S.W.: b. Wollongong, N.S.W., 30 Dec., 1888. Killed in action, 16 April, 1918.

fear now was not for Hazebrouck, which seemed reasonably safe, but for Mount Kemmel, the summit nearest to the Germans and the highest point but two⁴² in the whole area, overlooking in almost all directions the plain of Flanders. In the opinion of most soldiers engaged, British, French, and German, it was a point so commanding that its tenure must—to say the least—profoundly affect the power of the British to retain their narrow foothold in Belgium. General Plumer and G.H.Q. discussed preparations for a retirement from Ypres to St. Omer, to be carried out if Mount Kemmel was lost. It was in this direction that French divisions now arriving were being sent; their 28th Division was to have attacked at Wulverghem (at the foot of Mount Kemmel) at the same time as the 133rd attacked at Meteren,⁴³ but in this case also the order appears to have been given too late.

Even the 1st Australian Division was to concentrate its strength on its left. After the loss of Meteren the 3rd Australian Brigade, which previously had been held in reserve behind the centre and southern flank of its division, was ordered to move around on April 17th behind the northern flank, ready to counter-attack anywhere it was required, the position which it left being taken up by the 31st Division.

From the early hours, April 17th was as turbulent a day in the Australian sector as the 15th and 16th had been quiet.

The Attack of April 17 At 3 in the morning Strazeele was sharply shelled, and at 9 there descended on the 1st Brigade's front a barrage which the diary of its centre battalion, the 4th, describes as "terrific." It was apparent to most observers, however, that the German artillery had not yet had time accurately to locate the positions in front of it. "He seems to have shot at pretty well

⁴² Mount Cassel and Mont des Cats are each a few feet higher.

⁴³ The 9th Division attacked with them, the 7th Seaforth Highlanders recapturing an area north of Wyttschaete. A platoon of South Africans got into Wyttschaete itself, but lost severely.

everything marked on the map," says one diarist, "farms, cross-roads, villages, even some hedges." The cross-roads at Strazeele were reduced by this bombardment to a crater-field resembling those of the Ypres battlefield; that village and the railway station south of it were thoroughly wrecked. The 9th Battalion (3rd Brigade), billeted in Borre on the ridge and road to Hazebrouck, had 15 casualties,⁴⁴ and the 12th in Pradelles, a mile nearer the front, had 30, the billet of Lieutenant King's⁴⁵ platoon being hit and he himself mortally wounded. In Sec Bois village, farther south, Lieutenant Rannard⁴⁶ (2nd Battalion) was killed. Lieutenant Trotman⁴⁷ (7th) was mortally wounded. During the bombardment far back a shell burst in the 2nd Brigade's ammunition dump (it is recorded that the sentry, Private Bratt,⁴⁸ on duty six yards away from the burst, sloped arms with a fine show of hardihood however he felt within, and marched up and down his beat as if nothing had happened). The bombardment missed the front-line posts, passing over them. The troops were at the top of their spirits—Major Burrett of the 3rd, holding Mont de Merris, said afterwards that he had "never seen the men so cheerful and confident."

At 10 a.m. the Germans attempted to attack up the valley of the Meteren Becque, between Merris and Meteren, but were met with a deluge of fire from the 4th and 1st Battalions (among whom were still three platoons of Captain Kirkwood's⁴⁹ company of the 5th Scottish Rifles, whom it had been impossible to relieve at dawn). The enemy was easily driven off. Farther south, opposite the 3rd Battalion, although the German officers could be seen leaping out of the trenches and

⁴⁴ See *Vol. XII, plates 472-3.*

⁴⁵ Lieut. E. B. King, 12th Bn. Engineering draughtsman; of Invermay, Tas.; b. Launceston, Tas., 1893. Died of wounds, 17 April, 1918.

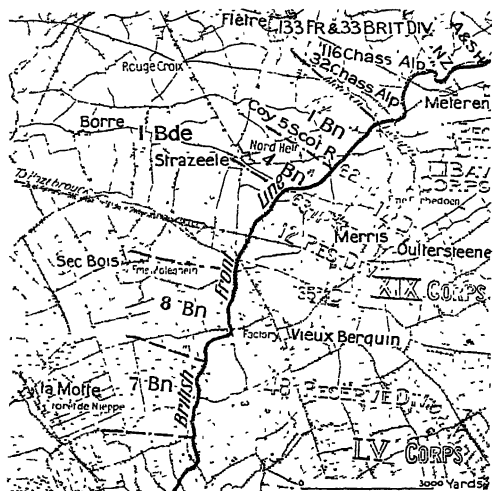
⁴⁶ Lieut. R. R. R. Rannard, 2nd Bn. School teacher; of Claremont, W. Aust.; b. Nagambie, Vic., 5 July, 1886. Killed in action, 17 April, 1918.

⁴⁷ Lieut. G. L. S. Trotman, 7th Bn. Law student; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Richmond, Vic., 27 Feb., 1888. Died of wounds, 17 April, 1918.

⁴⁸ Pte. T. W. Bratt (No. 1616B; 5th Bn.). Farm labourer and bush worker; of Corowa, N.S.W.; b. Manchester, Eng., 29 Dec., 1873.

⁴⁹ Colonel J. Kirkwood, M.C.; 7th Bn., The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). Drapery warehouseman; of Glasgow; b. Glasgow, 25 Jan., 1880.

trying to induce their men to follow, the barrage of the defending artillery and the fire of small arms was so intense that the German infantry standing along the trenches would not leave shelter. Two or three times the effort was repeated in both sectors; but the artillery was ready, and its swift barrages and the hurricane of rifle and machine-gun fire shattered every attempt.



Shortly after noon the German artillery-fire died down and the front became quiet until 3.30, when the enemy's shelling recommenced. At 5.30 another S.O.S. signal shot up from the 1st Brigade's front. The Germans had again attempted to leave their shallow jumping-off trenches. Trench-mortars, light and heavy, joined in the answering barrage. All day long these, together with the machine-guns, dispersed clusters of the enemy apparently trying to assemble for such efforts. The last attempt of the Germans failed as completely as the rest, but until 9 p.m. parties were seen moving opposite the front, affording constant chances to the Australian snipers. The 3rd Battalion estimated that at the railway embankment, where machine and Lewis guns enfiladed the enemy's approach, 700 Germans had been *killed* during the day, and the 1st Brigade with more justification assessed the casualties inflicted by itself at 1,500-2,000. The French with elements of the 33rd British Division⁵⁰ had also

⁵⁰ The troops engaged about Meteren were parts of the 4th King's, 1st Middlesex, 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the 5th Tank Battalion, the 2nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, and the French. The 32nd and 116th (French) Regiments of Chasseurs, holding the line west and south-west of Meteren, were not seriously attacked till 6 p.m., when the Germans (81st Reserve Division) penetrated some houses along the Flêtre road. They were thrown out by a counter-attack made by French and British troops.

shattered the German attack west and north-east of Meteren. The casualties of the 1st Australian Division were few.⁵¹ Lieutenant-Colonel Stacy of the 1st Battalion specially reported on the grit with which many wounded men of the 5th Scottish Rifles "stuck to their job . . . It was a great pleasure to be associated with them."

This day's offensive was, of course, the one originally ordered by Crown Prince Rupprecht for the 15th, but postponed on representations from the Sixth Army for a "most thorough" artillery preparation. The XIX Corps put in a fresh division, the 12th, to attack north-west of Merris through the existing lines of the 42nd, which was worn out. The 12th was to break through the British line at Nord Helf, just north of Merris on the Strazeele spur, and to push on north of Strazeele, some of its following troops being then detached to help in the capture of Strazeele. The first objective was the ridge between Borre and Rouge Croix, the second the saddle east of Eecke, overlooking the northern slope of the hill-chain. South of the 12th, the 12th Reserve Division would attack from the south-east the outskirts of Strazeele. South of it again the 35th Division would safeguard the flank by seizing Moleghein Farm, on the flats east of Sec Bois. The 12th Division would be followed by a close reserve, the 4th Division, which was to be assembled in readiness before dawn near the railway south of Merris. As a second reserve, for exploitation of possible success, the 39th Division was brought up to Neuf Berquin, where it also could support the 35th against an expected British counter-thrust from the forest. On the northern flank of the battle the III Bavarian Corps still had the 81st Reserve Division in line at Meteren, but with a fresh division, the 38th, behind it, ready for use.

The assault by the 12th and 35th Divisions was timed to begin at 10 o'clock after an hour's bombardment of the opposing infantry. The 12th Reserve Division, attacking Strazeele, would advance at 10.15. The LV Corps would not this day advance unless the British from Nieppe Forest counter-attacked the Germans passing north of the wood, or unless the main thrust succeeded; in the latter event, the 35th and 48th Reserve Divisions would follow the attack and penetrate into the forest from the north. The XIX Corps controlled 31 batteries of field-guns, 18 of light howitzers, 7 of 4.1-inch guns, 11 of 5.9 howitzers, and 2 of heavier howitzers, and the LV Corps assisted with 18 batteries.

Despite all these orders, the artillery preparation was completely inadequate. Not merely did the XIX Corps bring up barely two-thirds of the required ammunition—and that only after extraordinary efforts, some of it arriving at the batteries only ten minutes before "zero;" but the batteries of the 12th Division moved into position only on the afternoon and night of April 16, and without time for full reconnaissance, so that some of them at dawn on the 17th found themselves

⁵¹ The 4th Battalion had four officers hit—Captains P. W. Hay and R. M. T. Matthews, and Lieuts. A. A. Felton and N. D. Grant. Felton was killed by a German sniper. (Hay belonged to Wollongong, N.S.W.; Matthews to Melbourne; Felton to Hornsby, N.S.W.; Grant, who died on 16 June, 1927, to Tallangatta, Vic.)

in full sight of the Australians at Strazeele about three miles away. After hurriedly changing position, they began to shoot themselves in, but, in default of full reconnaissance, the only means that the observers had of locating the Australian trenches was information from the infantry that the opposing posts were "so-many metres south (or west) of Strazeele." The artillery accordingly ranged on the church or mill in the village, and then brought back its fire to the estimated distance, a "very unsatisfactory" method, as the historian of the 21st F.A.R. points out.

At 10 the artillery changed to a creeping barrage which the infantry, attacking at that hour, was to follow. The whole of Strazeele hill became clouded with smoke, and the artillery observers could see nothing. But about 11 o'clock the contact airmen reported that Strazeele and Nord Helf had been taken, and a considerable part of the artillery was therefore, at 12.30, ordered to advance—which was doubtless the cause of the marked lull that occurred about that time.

It was afterwards ascertained that the airmen's report had been based on the progress of the German barrage, which moved over hill and valley in accordance with a fixed time-table, irrespective of the infantry's movements. Actually, the creeping barrage, like the bombardment, had started behind the Australian outpost-line, and had never covered the German infantry. The northernmost regiment of the 12th Division, the 62nd, after assembling north-west of Merris, had worked forward during the bombardment, but even when doing so found itself under "lively fire." At "zero" its 5th and 6th companies starting to advance, and being met by intense fire, tried to get ahead by rushes, and meanwhile watched their barrage waltzing away from them into the Australian back area. The southern regiment, the 63rd, "on account of extremely heavy fire of enemy machine-guns, could not leave its jumping-off line."⁵²

The 12th Reserve Division also had failed to advance, the reason given being intense fire from the southern flank and the failure of the 12th Division to advance. An artillery officer of this division (Lieutenant of Reserve Rothkegel) signalled the infantry's position by firing flares from Merris church tower, although the tower was actually hit by a shell while he was there.

Towards 3 o'clock, in spite of conflicting reports, the corps staff grasped the truth. The 12th Division then ordered its regiments to attack again at 6.30 after an hour's bombardment. The reserve regiment, the 23rd, was brought up from Oultersteene, its III Battalion being sent to the 62nd and the I Battalion to the 63rd, and the second attack was launched. The III/23rd subsequently reported that it advanced about half-a-mile, the main body getting within 200 metres of Nord Helf, but being stopped by a fresh rain of shells and bullets from the flank. A few of the 62nd and 23rd were said to have reached the "park" at Nord Helf, one company commander of the 23rd being taken prisoner far ahead of his men, another killed, and a third wounded. The I/23rd and the 63rd could make only trifling progress. "The field was sown with dead and wounded. Enemy machine-guns from the flank had mown down whole ranks." The historian of the divisional artillery whose batteries, brought up close to

⁵² *History of the 23rd I.R., p. 249.*

Merris and Gerbedoen Farm, had been trying to pick off the opposing machine-guns, says: "Still a few enemy machine-guns and riflemen had not been fought down—they were again the Scots, already known to us at Arras, who did not allow themselves to be intimidated by any artillery fire, and the attack thus came to a stand with considerable losses." The "Scots" were clearly the mingled Scottish and Australian troops against whom the right of the 12th Division's attack came.⁵³

A third attempt was now ordered, to be carried out after dark, by surprise, without artillery preparation—the 12th Reserve Division was to push on, whatever its neighbour did. But nothing came of it. A further order was then issued for the attack to be continued next day, but both the XIX and III Bavarian Corps reported that they could not go on with it. The historian of the 62nd I.R. says, "the 17th April 1918 was for the regiment one of the bloodiest days in the whole war. All four company commanders attacking in the firing line were killed and three other officers as well. In all, the loss [of the 62nd] on this day amounted to 76 killed and 230 wounded. . . . The regiment suffered extremely in its fighting value and lost a great part of its most experienced and bravest officers, N.C.O's, and men." While this comment illustrates the great economy of life that was general in the German Army—for such loss in a heavy action would have been considered light by any Australian brigade—the toll on officers and other leaders was precisely what the Australians noted. The *Reichsarchiv* states that the losses were: 12th Division, 48 officers, 1,550 others; 12th Reserve Division, 89 officers, 2,958 others;⁵⁴ 4th Division, 1 officer, 102 others.

The 12th Reserve Division's artillery remarked that the shell-fire upon its area this day, though slow to start, was particularly heavy. The XIX Corps noted: "the enemy batteries, especially those with flanking fire from the south-west, could only be suppressed partially," their positions not yet being accurately known. (The batteries here referred to were presumably those of the 1st Australian Division, which had come into position on the 14th.)

The Germans now appeared to have changed the goal of their main effort from Hazebrouck to Kemmel, for on April 18th the Merris-Meteren front was quiet, while farther north several attacks were launched, though without much success. At the same time a last attempt was made, after very intense bombardment, to extend the southern limit of the offensive by driving back the British between Givenchy and Robecq. Although the line was at first penetrated, the 1st British Division, now in position there, had, by the evening,

⁵³ The 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were holding the line north-east of Meteren, and their presence may possibly have been reported by another German division. But two French battalions and one of New Zealanders lay between them and the sector attacked by the 12th German Division.

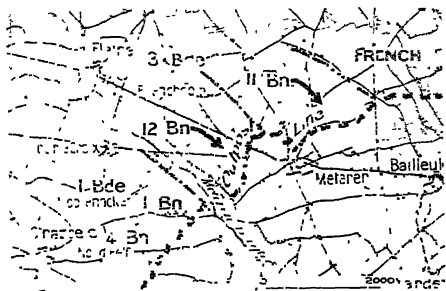
⁵⁴ The figures for this division include casualties suffered on previous days.

driven the enemy out. Second Army daily expected the offensive in Flanders to be renewed, and the Director of Intelligence at G.H.Q., Brigadier-General Cox, agreed, believing that Ludendorff was accumulating force for a decisive blow between Hébuterne and the Somme—to capture Amiens—but that he would not deliver it until he had drawn away all British reserves from the Arras-Amiens front. Plumer on April 17th pointed out that “our resistance must certainly be worn down” if the German attack was continued with fresh troops—the 19th, 25th, 33rd, 34th, 59th, 9th, and 21st Divisions should all be withdrawn for rest, but he had to go on using them.

Haig and Sir Henry Wilson represented the position to Foch, who then visited Plumer. Matters had come to this, that, if the British troops who had been in this fight from the beginning (and in the March offensive before that) could not be relieved, the British leaders would have to consider a voluntary withdrawal to St. Omer, their left being covered by flooding the lowlands. Part of the lowlands near Calais was actually flooded, and careful plans were now made by Haig's staff for removing, if necessary, the vast stores of ammunition and material in Flanders. But however prudent such a withdrawal might be, Foch would not think of it except as the possible result of some future defeat. Instead he added three more French divisions to another already promised for Flanders, thus making possible the relief of the IX British Corps, which now faced the main attack. In addition, the Tenth French Army would advance its head so as to be ready to assist at Bethune or Robecq, and the Fifth French Army would follow it to Villers Bocage, north of Amiens. The French force in Flanders would be organised as the Army Detachment⁵⁵ of the North, under General de Mitry. General Plumer now ordered three French divisions to relieve the IX Corps between April 18th and 21st. To take up its proper sector as the right wing of the force, the 133rd French

⁵⁵ That is, a force larger than a corps, but smaller than an army. For tactical purposes, it was under General Plumer. The II Cavalry Corps (General Robillot) had first entered the line, being allotted the 133rd and 28th Divisions of infantry as well as the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th of cavalry. On April 20 de Mitry's divisions, then three of cavalry and five of infantry, were redistributed to the II Cavalry and XXXVI Corps. By the end of April five more infantry divisions (some of them from Tenth Army) and headquarters of the XVI French Corps had been sent to Flanders.

Division at Meteren would side-slip slightly to the north-east; and the 1st Australian Division would do the same, its 3rd Brigade (General Bennett) going into the line on its northern flank, relieving parts of the 133rd French and 33rd British Divisions, while the 31st British Division would relieve the 2nd Australian Brigade opposite Vieux Berquin.⁵⁶ The 3rd Brigade was warned that the relief of the French around Meteren must be carried out with special care, as the Germans (according to information from a prisoner) would probably attack there, and the sector was one in which movement was difficult.⁵⁷ The diary of the brigade, however, records:



The taking over from the French has been much easier than expected, and they have done everything possible to make it easy for us.⁵⁸

Day after day the artillery laid down precautionary barrages along the front at dawn, but, notwithstanding some local fighting at the foot of Mount Kemmel on the 18th, the anticipated German stroke did not yet fall there or at Meteren. Army headquarters became anxious to secure prisoners from whom to ascertain the enemy's intention.⁵⁹ General Foch also sent Generals Plumer and Robillot a note urging that the time was ripe for making small counter-attacks, employing "concentration of artillery fire" but "relatively

⁵⁶ The XV Corps would then have two divisions in line, 31st and 1st Australian.

⁵⁷ Lieut. B. Vaughan (Lunawanna, Tas.) of the 12th Battalion was sniped as soon as the battalion went in.

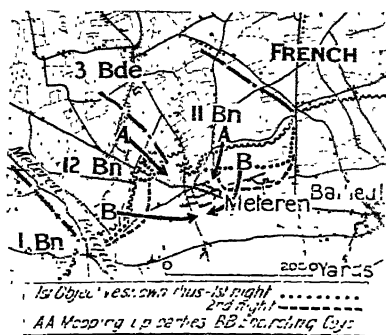
⁵⁸ "Our cumbersome organisation," the diarist adds, "seems to compare badly with theirs."

⁵⁹ These were easily obtained without formal raiding. On the 18th two Germans, with a donkey loaded with two large bags of loot from farms in the forward area, were allowed by the posts of the 7th Battalion to stroll along a road into its lines, still searching the farms. They were of the 38th R.I.R. (12th Reserve Division). On the same day the 1st Battalion secured a prisoner, and the 8th sent in a number of papers found on the body of an officer killed in front of its lines the day before. On the 19th the 1st Battalion took a prisoner (267th R.I.R., 11th Reserve Division). On the 22nd, when the 2nd Brigade was relieving the 1st, there walked into the line of the 5th Battalion two Germans (23rd and 62nd R.I.R.) carrying a most valuable booty—the whole of the mail for a company in their front line.

few infantry." Several small advances were made by the I Corps. It was also decided to take advantage of the peculiar position at Meteren—where the Germans, though on the spur, were half-surrounded by the opposing line—to deal the enemy a minor retaliatory blow. An attempt to recapture the village was undertaken by the 3rd Brigade.

The plan for this enterprise was obviously founded on confidence that the spirit of the Germans holding the village was so inferior that the place could be encircled and taken purely by surprise, without the preliminary artillery bombardment that almost invariably accompanied operations of such importance. From the outset, therefore, the plan was the contrary of those envisaged by Foch, whose direction does not appear to have reached the commanders concerned. To make the encirclement easier, the undertaking was divided into two stages: first, on the night of April 22nd, the 12th Battalion (Tasmania, Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott) and the 11th (Western Australia, Lieutenant-Colonel Rafferty) were to thrust their lines forward on each flank of the place as well as closer in the central sector; second, at midnight on the following night, the two other battalions of the brigade—9th (Queensland, Lieutenant-Colonel Newman) and 10th (South Australia, Lieutenant-Colonel Jacob)—were to attack the village defences from the south and north respectively. During this time the artillery would shell Meteren "at intervals." At 1.30 it would cease, and two "mopping-up parties," consisting of a company from the 12th and another from the 11th, would enter the village and clear it, firing green flares when the task

**Meteren—
April 22-24**



was finished. At 2 o'clock a company of the 9th from the south and one of the 10th from the north would move through the new fronts of their battalions and form a line of posts beyond the village, cutting it off.

The objective laid down for the first stage was a minimum, to be obtained at all costs, but the 12th and 11th were to push farther if it was found possible. On the flanks this night the operation took the form of more or less independent advances by small parties across hedges and fields. But in the centre, on either side of the main road into Meteren, Captains Jorgensen's⁶⁰ and Andrew's⁶¹ companies of the 12th, under cover of a lengthening bombardment by Stokes mortars, rushed in succession several houses and entrenched posts and made fourteen prisoners. A platoon of Jorgensen's company under Lieutenant Sayer⁶² quickly extended the gain by bombing along a trench south of the road, capturing a light machine-gun; but he was presently enfiladed by a machine-gun, and stopped. Lieutenant Hart, sent with a platoon to support him, was mortally wounded, and Hart's men were driven back. As dawn was approaching, the attempt to extend the gains had to be broken off, and Sayer withdrew. Hart was brought in during the day under a "white" flag.⁶³

Meanwhile, south of Meteren, Captain Holyman's⁶⁴ company, moving in several parties at several times through the hedges near the Becque, met and rushed two German posts. North of the village the 11th Battalion advanced its front practically without opposition—the German outpost-line not being reached—and dug a great length of new front line before dawn,⁶⁵ ready for the following night's attack. The eastern part of this trench, however, was too shallow to be

⁶⁰ Capt. W. R. Jorgensen, 12th Bn. Clerk; of Wayville, S. Aust.; b. Exeter, S. Aust., 14 June, 1894.

⁶¹ Major B. J. Andrew, 12th Bn. Staff Captain, 3rd Inf. Bde., 1916/17. Duntroon graduate; of Launceston, Tas.; b. East Melbourne, 15 Oct., 1894.

⁶² Lieut. W. S. Sayer, 12th Bn. Accountant; of Wynyard, Tas.; b. Richmond, Vic., 6 Jan., 1877. Killed in action, 23 April, 1918.

⁶³ So says the battalion diary, which is probably correct. White flags—made of handkerchiefs or shirts—were constantly used by Australian stretcher-bearers instead of red cross flags, of which there was no provision in the British front lines. The use was quite improper, the white flag meaning a desire to parley, but the signal was frequently respected by the German infantry.

⁶⁴ Capt. I. N. Holyman, M.C.; 12th Bn. Shipping clerk; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Devonport, Tas., 9 July, 1896.

⁶⁵ This movement was much helped by the French on the left who, despite the fact that their 321st Infantry Regiment was being relieved by the 401st, advanced a strong-post protecting the 11th's left. The right flank of the 12th was similarly helped by the 5th Battalion sending out Lewis gunners to keep the Germans clear.



43. A POST AT MOLFUELIN FARM ON 18TH APRIL, 1918

Its members are keeping themselves warm with bedspreads taken from the farm
Inst. War Memorial Official Photo No. E1750. In face p. 492



44. LEWIS GUNNERS OF THE 3RD BRIGADE TAKING RANGES FROM THE RESERVE LINE NEAR
BORKE, ON 17TH APRIL, 1918

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E2089

To face p 193

occupied by day, and was held after dawn only by a Lewis gun post.

The first stage had been successfully finished with slight loss—33 casualties in all; and 30 prisoners, including an officer, had been captured.

The prisoners—mainly of the 38th and 81st Reserve Divisions—included a number of Poles; the heart of many of them, probably, was not in the fight, and their morale was estimated by the examining intelligence officer as poor.

Though only the minimum objective had been reached, the prospects were judged to be good.

During the day which followed, April 23rd, parties of the enemy unsuccessfully attempted to reach and attack the new posts of the 12th Battalion by crawling forward along the ditches north of the main road. At nightfall others tried to thrust back the advanced posts south of Meteren, but were easily beaten. On the Australian side during the day the company commanders of the 9th and 10th, entrusted with the principal task that night, went up to see their colleagues of the 12th and 11th and to acquaint themselves with the position. At nightfall their companies had a hot meal and immediately afterwards moved up to the front posts, which they could not approach by day. The Germans were shelling strongly, and it was nearly midnight when the relief was complete.

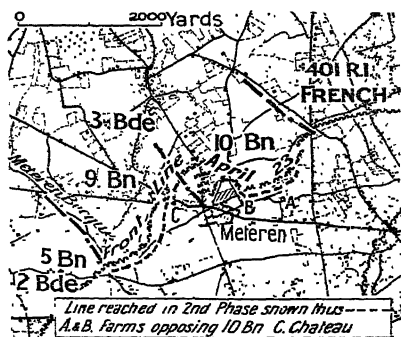
The development of the operation in its second stage was as nightmarish and disordered as in the previous stage it had been smooth. On the way up the 9th Battalion lost eleven men through shelling. At midnight the three companies of the 9th that were to advance at that hour duly moved. There was no artillery barrage, but it was understood that artillery support would be available if required during the attack. It was bright moonlight, and the centre company, advancing across fields towards the village from the south-west, was seen by the enemy. Flares went up from all parts of the German front; machine-guns opened from a large house known as the "château," at the western end of the village, and also from the hedges behind which the enemy was evidently posted in strength. The flank companies managed to push forward their flank posts, but the centre could not dislodge the Germans from hedges or houses. An appeal was then made for artillery-fire to batter these positions, but this

had to be refused through fear of hitting friendly troops. Stokes mortars were turned on, and their shells were well directed, but they could not silence the machine-guns, and a second effort by the centre company failed. The best it could do was to push up its flanks towards the objective and get touch with the other companies.

North of the village the companies of the 10th assembling for the attack had found that the line established by the 11th on the previous night was not precisely where it was intended to be, nor were the company frontages exactly as had been reported. Captain Heming, commanding the left company of the 10th, was also warned by his colleague of the 11th that a farm opposite the right of his company was strongly held. He was advised to bring a Stokes mortar against it, and at the eleventh hour he also decided to attack it with two platoons instead of one. On top of this arrived news that part of Major Rumball's company, in the centre, would be twenty minutes late; the commander of Heming's flank platoon delayed his own advance in order to keep touch with it.

As there was no artillery barrage, these changes were not so disturbing as they would otherwise have been, and subsequent events proved that the importance of the farm had not been overrated. The Germans were entrenched behind its hedge, and the attacking companies, after advancing for fifty yards in sheltered ground, came under intense fire from this position and from machine-guns on both flanks. The flank companies were stopped. In the centre, Rumball's men came into cross-fire between this farm and another on their right front. They extended, rushed forward 100 yards, and remained there waiting for the two farms to be taken.

Captain Heming now, like his colleagues south of the village, ordered his Stokes



mortar to bombard the westernmost farm and hedge, but the machine-guns were not suppressed. Lieutenants Fenn⁶⁶ and Schneider⁶⁷ and many N.C.O's and men—over 35 in the company—were hit. Heming sent Lieutenant Gatliff⁶⁸ to take charge, and telephoned to the battalion commander for artillery support, but none forthcame until dawn was about to break, and then only a few shots.

Long before this the time—1.30—had arrived for the two “mopping-up” companies to enter the village. Not one German post either north or south of the place had been taken since the attack started, and as these parties had to advance at that hour the task confronting them was really that of capturing the village. The party of the 12th was to make its entry north of the main road near the western end of Meteren; the party of the 11th would enter from the same side a little farther to the east. As several houses in the village were now in flames, the direction of the objective was unmistakable. The party of the 12th, under Lieutenant Reed, was almost immediately met by machine-gun and trench-mortar fire. It tried to rush the machine-guns but failed, Reed being killed and 28 of his men killed or wounded. The headquarters of the attacking company in a neighbouring farm was shelled and burnt,⁶⁹ and the brave effort failed disastrously. Farther east, the party of the 11th, under Lieutenant Davison,⁷⁰ tried to enter the village at 1.50, but found the 10th Battalion held up ahead of it. Davison accordingly organised bombing teams to attempt to capture the opposing machine-guns, but Lieutenant Wood,⁷¹ Sergeant Ferguson,⁷² and two men having been killed, and Lieutenant Stahl⁷³ and ten others wounded, this effort also was defeated.

⁶⁶ Lieut. C. B. Fenn, 10th Bn. Librarian; of Adelaide; b. Fullarton, S. Aust., 29 Sept., 1896.

⁶⁷ Lieut. F. J. W. Schneider, 10th Bn. Student; of Glenelg, S. Aust.; b. Oakbank, S. Aust., 26 April, 1895.

⁶⁸ Lieut. M. P. Gatliff, 10th Bn. Salesman; of Camberwell, Vic.; b. Geelong, Vic., 14 April, 1892. Accidentally killed, 8 April, 1927.

⁶⁹ The company commander, Captain E. Y. Butler, removed his headquarters to another farm.

⁷⁰ Lieut. H. Davison, 11th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Melbourne, 12 Aug., 1885. Died, 23 Nov., 1933.

⁷¹ Lieut. S. M. Wood, 11th Bn. Civil servant; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 31 May, 1884. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.

⁷² Sgt. J. A. Ferguson (No. 3048; 11th Bn.). Carpenter; of Geraldton, W. Aust.; b. Ravensbourne, N.Z., 1889. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.

⁷³ Lieut. F. J. F. Stahl, D.C.M.; 11th Bn. Linotype mechanic; of Mandurama, W. Aust.; b. Mandurah, W. Aust., 14 May, 1894.

The mopping-up parties, like the assault parties, were thus bitterly engaged in close fighting, without the least chance of success, when, at 2 o'clock, the time arrived for the fourth companies of the 9th and 10th to move out on the east and complete the encirclement of the village. The company of the 9th was quickly stopped by machine-gun fire. At this stage, on attempting to capture the "château" from which the impeding fire came, Lieutenant Wheatley⁷⁴ was killed. The company therefore lay ahead of the line, waiting for the capture of the village before it continued with its task. On the north the encircling company of the 10th, under Captain Partridge of Pozières fame,⁷⁵ ran into its sister companies lying out short of their objective, with no cover and under a constant illumination of flares rising from the German posts. Partridge's leading platoon, under Lieutenant DuRieu,⁷⁶ pushing forward to the front line, had half its men hit, and DuRieu himself, going out farther to reconnoitre, was wounded. The second platoon, moving to the front line, which Partridge decided to reinforce, lost a third of its men. Success being then obviously out of the question, Partridge conferred with Major Rumball, and at 3.30 withdrew his company to the old outpost-line.

Meanwhile dawn was approaching, and in daylight the position of parts of the line, especially north of the village, overlooked by the farmhouses, would be impossible. The system of attaching field-batteries to the infantry—to advance with it and knock down such houses about the ears of their occupants or bring direct fire on other stubbornly resisting posts—was recognised by the British, but not so regularly practised as by the Germans. The commanders of the advanced platoons of the 10th—Lieutenants Fenn, Pennington,⁷⁷ Sharland,⁷⁸ Jackson,⁷⁹ and Blake⁸⁰—had found touch

⁷⁴ Lieut. A. W. Wheatley, 9th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Morningside, Q'land; b. Brisbane, 1890. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.

⁷⁵ See Vol. III, p. 513.

⁷⁶ Lieut. D. T. DuRieu, 10th Bn. Clerk; of Maylands, S. Aust.; b. Broken Hill, N.S.W., 20 Nov., 1890.

⁷⁷ Lieut. F. E. Pennington, M.C., D.C.M.; 10th Bn. Electrical engineer; of Carlton, Vic.; b. Albert Park, Vic., 1893.

⁷⁸ Lieut. W. D. Sharland, M.C.; 10th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Unley Park, S. Aust.; b. North Adelaide, 9 June, 1892.

⁷⁹ Lieut. A. H. Jackson, M.M.; 10th Bn. Orchardist; of Renmark, S. Aust.; b. London, 1891. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.

⁸⁰ Lieut. W. H. Blake, M.C.; 10th Bn. Carpenter; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Sydney, Jan., 1891.

along their front.⁸¹ About 3 o'clock those in the centre saw the flanks—opposite the two farms—retiring, and learned from Lieutenant Blake that the right had been ordered back. They accordingly also withdrew, and on this side of the village day-break found the whole force back in the old outpost-line. South of the village, where contact was not so close, the 9th Battalion maintained the posts dug during the night, the company charged with encirclement withdrawing behind them before dawn.

The garrison of the northern side of Meteren consisted of five companies of the 94th I.R. (38th Division). The historian of that regiment says that the attack was most vigorous against its right, but was held up forty metres from the front-line posts. The commander of the 8th company was killed. Another officer brought in two prisoners. The *Reichsarchiv* states that the taking of these prisoners confirmed the discovery—previously based on statements from the New Zealand reinforcements captured on the 16th at Meteren—that the 1st Australian Division was in the line here.⁸²

The second phase at Meteren cost the 3rd Brigade 160 casualties, and the whole minor operation about 200.⁸³ The sharp repulse was undoubtedly a shock to the division, and although the spirit of the troops was much too high to be perceptibly affected—as their own actions, to be related in the next volume, most brilliantly showed—it was evident that the Germans, even though their spirit might be weaker than of old, had been treated too lightly. Without the help of the artillery the only chance of success lay in surprise; but the first night's operation, drawing the line closer round the village, could only indicate to the enemy that an attempt to capture it would follow, and the operation on the second night found him keenly alert. In spite of the probability of this, it had apparently been assumed that each step of that night's attack would succeed; and although first the assault, and then the attempt to "mop-up," failed, the action went on step by step at set hours, each step after the first only making the failure more expensive. The help of the artillery, kept in reserve to overcome obstacles, was not available when

⁸¹ Lieut. J. M. McInerney (Mt. Gambier, S. Aust.; killed in action, 28 June, 1918), Rumball's second-in-command, also had been round among them.

⁸² On April 18 the finding north-west of Bailleul of a dead body, apparently of an officer of the 9th A.I. Brigade, led to the belief that the 3rd Australian Division also was up there, but the mistake was soon discovered.

⁸³ In addition to the officers already mentioned, Lieutenant J. Sprott (Broken Hill, N.S.W.) was killed.

required. The consequent burning of fingers was a useful lesson to the division even in the ensuing months when the audacity of its exploits was setting a new standard for the army.

The divisional commander, General Walker, after discussion with Brigadier-General Bennett, decided, subject to approval of XV Corps (General de Lisle), to "consolidate the positions gained"—which at first were thought to be more extensive than they actually were—and thoroughly to deal with the village and its garrison by trench-mortar and artillery fire, deferring any further infantry action until the time was ripe for an offensive. G.H.Q. was still awaiting an attack on Kemmel as prelude to the expected renewal of the thrust in the Somme region, where many signs of an approaching attack had been detected. Actually that attack, which must now be described, came first.

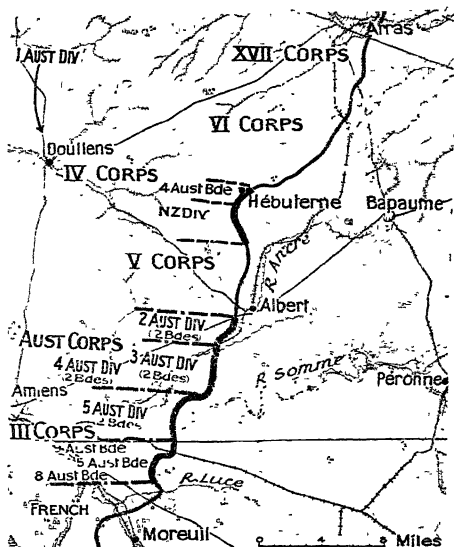
CHAPTER XV

HANGARD WOOD AND SOMME, APRIL 5TH-23RD

THE great German spring offensive of 1918 ended with the British line in the Somme region entirely held by Australian troops. Indeed, Anzac divisions and their detached brigades were then holding almost exactly half of the 34 miles of British front between Arras and the Luce.

The extension of Australian infantry, brigade by brigade, across the Fourth Army's front was due to the almost daily recurring fears of a German breakthrough to Amiens, and the necessity for buttressing the much-tried British infantry with reserves of first-rate quality. The reader will recall that, in consequence of the crisis on March 29th,

the 9th Australian Brigade had been detached from its division, the 3rd, and ultimately made responsible for the safety of Villers-Bretonneux. Next, in the crisis of April 4th, the 15th Brigade (5th Division) was ordered across the Somme and, with British cavalry, assigned to the holding of the new line between the Somme and Villers-Bretonneux. On the same day the 5th Australian Brigade, coming with the 2nd Division straight from Flanders, was detached to hold the reserve line (known as the "Aubigny Line") behind the northern flank of the Fourth Army. And when on the



following day the 5th Australian Division was ordered to cross the Somme and take over the cavalry's sector as well as that of the 15th Brigade, its 8th Brigade was detached from it to be sent farther south and replace the tired 24th Division as reserve behind the southern sector of the Fourth Army's line. At the same time the 5th Brigade was ordered to take over the whole front between Villers-Bretonneux and the French. "I feel happier about the general situation," wrote the army commander, General Rawlinson, in his diary that day, "and I now have three brigades of Australians in reserve, so I think we shall be able to keep the Boche out of Amiens." The extension of the Australian Corps to the southern bank of the Somme was Haig's own plan, and he also desired that an Australian division should be kept near Corbie in order to retake Villers-Bretonneux if it was lost by the neighbouring corps.

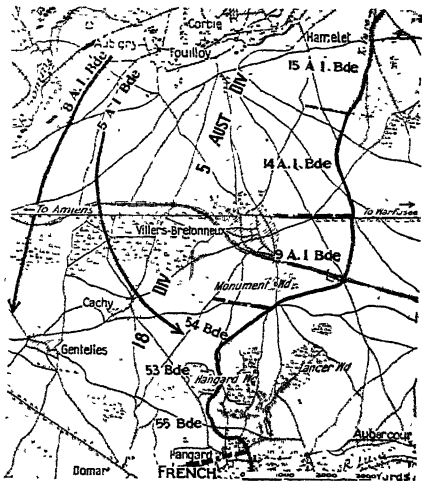
Although the position at Amiens was better than before as regards reserves, it was weaker tactically, the Germans having driven two dangerous dints into the line, and their artillery being able to approach at least a mile nearer to the city than hitherto. South of the Luce the French front, running back far behind the alignment of the Fourth Army's, still offered the Germans a constant temptation to strike from that direction towards the Cachy plateau behind Villers-Bretonneux and the Fourth Army's right flank. These anxieties Haig represented to Foch, who himself had continually in mind his intended counter-offensive, to be delivered by the Third and First French and the Fourth British Armies. This stroke would not merely clear the Moreuil-Montdidier re-entrant, but the thrust of the Third French Army from the Oise region would threaten the German communications. For the French attack, however, Pétain considered that 41 divisions would be necessary,¹ and only 30 were available. For the time being, therefore, the project had to be limited to an attempt by the First French and Fourth British Armies to clear the Germans from their dangerous proximity to Amiens. Foch accordingly issued his instructions for this to be done in two steps. The first would consist of two small preliminary

¹ *French Official History, Tome VI, vol. 1, p. 422.* The scheme of offensive had been broached in Foch's instructions of April 3 (see pp. 288, 295, and 435).

operations carried out as soon as possible separately—one by the French in order to clear the Germans from part of the west side of the Avre; the other by the Fourth Army, to “clean up the woods and ravine north and north-east of Hangard.” The second step, to be taken as soon as possible after the first, would be a combined offensive to regain the line Moreuil-Démuin-Aubercourt-Warfusée.

The ravine, which the British were to clear in the preliminary operation, was the one into which the Germans had penetrated when on April 4th they swept the 18th British Division out of Lancer Wood (which lay on one side of it) and part of Hangard Wood (which covered certain folds on the other side). In the same battle Villers-Bretonneux, farther north, had been snatched back from the enemy's grasp by the British cavalry and the 9th Australian Brigade, but the village of Hamel, near the Somme, remained in his hands. On the other flank the village of Hangard (near where the ravine, above referred to, opened into the Luce valley) had been captured by the Germans during the day, but retaken by the French at dusk. The right of the 18th Division had gone forward with the French and captured a number of prisoners at the south-western end of the ravine, but the line still remained west of the valley, and the 9th Australian Brigade, after retaking Monument Farm and the mound by the railway, had its right flank bent back for no less than a mile almost due west across the plateau to keep touch.

The precise line held by the 18th Division was on the morning of April 5th still uncertain and a cause of some anxiety. It was known that the Germans were in Hangard

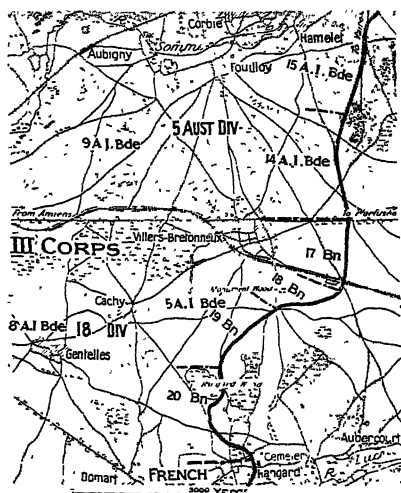


Wood, but this wood extended for nearly a mile and comprised two unequal parts, the western small, the eastern large, the two being joined by a narrow neck like the handle of a dumb-bell. During April 5th it was found that the 18th Division was holding the western part, from which it reached forward a short right arm to join the French at Hangard copse on the spur (Hill 99) above Hangard. This village was out of sight from all but the flank post of the British line north of it, since it lay on the southern side of that spur, beside the Luce.

French reinforcements steadily arriving rendered the French line here fairly safe; but the British troops were exhausted, and at about noon on the 5th it was decided to use the 5th Australian Brigade to relieve all front-line troops then under the 18th Division—including the 9th Australian Brigade—and to straighten the line by retaking the eastern part of Hangard Wood. This enterprise was the one referred to in the arrangement with Foch as the separate operation of the Fourth Army for "cleaning up the woods and ravine north and north-east of Hangard." Meanwhile the 9th Brigade would be given a few days out of the line in reserve behind Villers-Bretonneux. The sector from Villers-Bretonneux to the French flank would still be controlled by the commander and staff of the 18th Division.

The reliefs took place on the night of April 5th. The morning of the 6th, therefore, found the front line of the Fourth Army under command of a British corps, the III, but entirely held by Australian infantry, the 5th Australian Division (Major-General Hobbs)

occupying its northern sector from the Somme to a point on the Roman road a mile east of Villers-Bretonneux, and the



5th Australian Brigade (under Major-General Lee, of the 18th Division) with all four battalions in line occupying the southern, from the Roman road to the flank of the French on the slope a few hundred yards above Hangard. On the morning of April 7th control of the Australian Corps was transferred from Third to Fourth Army, which now consisted of two corps—III and Australian²—the front of both being held by Australian infantry.

The attack upon Hangard Wood by the 5th Brigade is a particularly interesting example of the way in which an operation, readily sketched with a sweep of the pencil by higher authority, and formulated in a fluent order ("Fourth Army to clean up woods and ravine north and north-east of Hangard"), came to the test of all military operation orders with some harassed company commander standing in the dawn among the bullets on the actual country and wondering how he could fulfil there the designs implied in his instructions. It seems certain—though there is no means of testing the supposition—that the operation was devised and explained on the small scale (1 in 40,000) map on which it still looks beautifully practicable; possibly, indeed, no other map was then available. The 5th Brigade, which was now to carry it out, came like its sister brigades from Flanders straining on the leash to throw its weight into the fight; and when, early in the afternoon of April 5th, General Lee visited Brigadier-General Smith and explained to him the task for which it was proposed to employ his brigade, even Smith—superficially the hard, unsentimental business man—was all eagerness to do whatever was required. This mood, like that of M'Cay before Fromelles, was not one which would prompt him to question the practicability of the operation proposed by the staff on the spot, which knew the situation and the ground. The formal order from the XIX Corps for the brigade to take over the firing line of the 18th

² XIX Corps handed over its front to III Corps (which had held the right of the British line in the main German offensive) at 8 p.m. on April 5; VII Corps handed over to Australian Corps at noon on April 6.

Division arrived at 7 o'clock on the 5th, and half-an-hour later came the telegraphic order from the 18th Division for the attack upon Hangard Wood. This was to be undertaken at latest by April 7th. General Smith accordingly decided to launch it on the 7th, at dawn.

The officers and men of the brigade were in magnificent fettle though bodily tired, the two nights following their journey from the north having been spent in the slow process of reliefs, first in the Aubigny line, and second in the outposts. On the western slopes of the ravine the relief was particularly difficult, since the two battalions allotted to that part found fighting still in progress there. On the afternoon of the 5th the Germans, after bombardment, had driven the French out of the cemetery east of Hangard village, and the 6th Northamptonshire out of the neighbouring posts on Hill 99. When the 19th and 20th Australian Battalions arrived on the slopes above the gully, the Northamptons and French had just counter-attacked under a barrage. The valley was being shelled, and it was again, at first, uncertain where the posts had ensconced themselves. It turned out that the counter-attack had succeeded, but the Northamptons had afterwards found their positions untenable through the enfilade machine-gun fire from the German part of Hangard Wood on the next fold of the ravine, immediately north of them. The posts eventually found and taken over by the Australians were therefore those to which the British had been driven back in the battle of April 4th and 5th.³ Farther north the guides for the 17th and 18th Battalions had an almost equally difficult task in feeling out far ahead over the plateau to find the posts established by the 36th and 34th Battalions in their counter-attacks on the evening and night of the 4th.

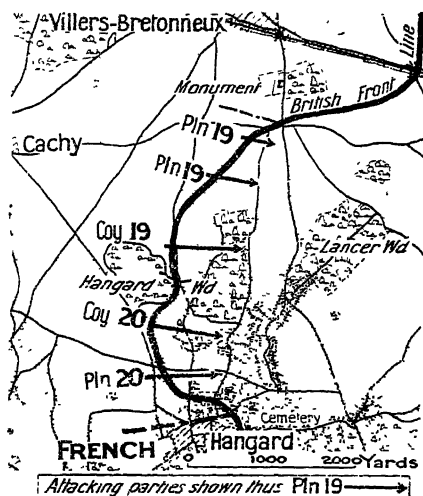
April 6th was—as often happened after battle—a quiet day. Rain fell in the afternoon and evening—not enough to make the going difficult, but wetting the cramped pot-holes in

³ The Germans also were evidently doubtful as to the line held. In the small hours of the 6th Lieut. J. S. Coolahan—big, brave, raw-boned Irish-Australian of the 5th Machine Gun Company—is said to have collided in the dark with a German outside the support company headquarters. Coolahan “grabbed the Jerry,” wrote Captain V. B. Portman, “and threw him into the ‘bivvy’ like a bundle of skins.” Next morning a party of Germans appeared on the edge of the German part of the wood, but was quickly dispersed.

the chalk, that served for trenches. The night was bitterly cold. It was not until about midnight that the companies concerned were informed of the attack which they were to carry out before dawn.

The attack of the 5th Brigade on Hangard Wood was to be made with very slight forces. A post of one platoon—about twenty-five strong—was to be thrust out from the southern end of the re-entrant, on the spur 99; and two similar posts were to be put out from the forward reaching line on the plateau, south of Monument Wood. These would form the flanks of the attack; the capture of Hangard Wood, on the upper slopes of the gully half-way between them, was to be carried out by two companies—one from the 20th attacking the southern half of the wood, and one from the 19th the northern half. Some machine-guns of the 5th Company were attached to them. The officers were told that the wood had been reconnoitred by aeroplanes, which found it only lightly held by the enemy; and that their duty was to push through it and, before dawn, dig in along the road that skirted its farther side. They would there, it was said, find a good, clear field of fire of 400 yards. The platoon posts already mentioned would protect their flanks. They must hold out during the day and would be reinforced on the following night. A tape was laid by the 7th Field Company, A.I.F., across the open immediately in front of the British half of Hangard Wood.

On this, in the small hours of April 7th, the attacking company of the 19th under Captain Wallach lay down. In spite of their keenness, some of the tired men immediately went to sleep.



The right attacking company, Captain Portman's⁴ of the 20th, was not yet in touch with Wallach's when the hour for the attack, 4.55,⁵ arrived and the barrage, which was furnished by the British field artillery began.

Something—the available records do not suffice to show what—was wrong with the barrage. On Captain Wallach's front there was none. In case some mistake had been made in timing, he and Lieutenant Lipscomb,⁶ who was with him, decided to wait one minute before launching the advance. But still nothing recognisable as a barrage descended; such shells as arrived were few and fell raggedly. Wallach's second-in-command, Lieutenant Storkey,⁷ had fallen asleep and roused himself to find, with a shock, that the company had gone. It was then seventy-five yards ahead of him, crossing the quarter-mile of open country that sloped gently down to the wood. He hurried to overtake it.

There was no opposition from directly ahead, but from some point in the wood on the right front came a murderous fire of unseen machine-guns. Wallach's company was suffering great loss—Wallach himself was badly hit through both knees, Lieutenants McDonald⁸ and Bignell⁹ were killed; at least twenty-five per cent of the company were hit before its leading groups managed to reach the wood, and scramble through a wire fence into the thick undergrowth.

The wood was entirely young growth, mostly about head high, with taller saplings here and there. Lieutenant Storkey, now commanding the company, had four of his men behind him, and Lieutenant Lipscomb, who was now with him, had six. As they plunged through the bush they were continually being caught and firmly held up by military telephone wires, left there by one side or the other during the recent operations. The party pressed on trying to get in rear of the force, whatever it was, that had been firing at their company crossing the open.

⁴ Capt. V. B. Portman, M.C.; 20th Bn. Journalist and accountant; of Darlinghurst, N.S.W.; b. Darlinghurst, 18 Aug., 1892.

⁵ "Summer" time. The true time was 3.55.

⁶ Lieut. F. N. Lipscomb, M.C.; 19th Bn. Farmer; of Normanhurst and Gunnedah, N.S.W.; b. Normanhurst, 28 Dec., 1892.

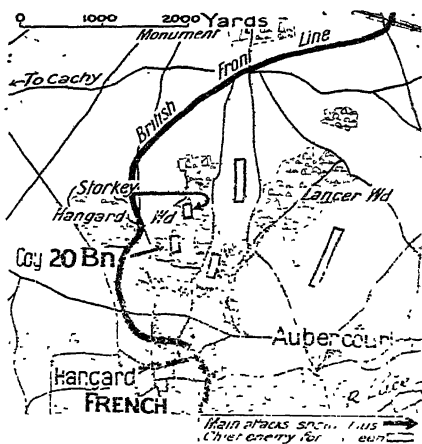
⁷ Capt. P. V. Storkey, V.C.; 19th Bn. Law student; of Vacluse, N.S.W.; b. Napier, Hawke's Bay, N.Z., 9 Sept., 1891.

⁸ Lieut. J. G. McDonald, 19th Bn. Carpenter; of West Maitland, N.S.W.; b. Stockton, N.S.W., 27 Feb. 1891. Killed in action, 7 April, 1918.

⁹ Lieut. L. H. Bignell, 19th Bn. Salesman; of Flemington, Vic., and Marrickville, N.S.W.; b. Flemington, 28 April, 1891. Killed in action, 7 April, 1918.

They could hear these machine-guns south of them, still working their hardest. The twelve Australians, making their way round to the east and south, suddenly came upon a clearing—probably a track through the bush—reaching to the south and rather behind them. Along the western side of it, in half-a-dozen short trenches—each apparently a machine-gun post—were nearly 100 Germans, riflemen and machine-gun crews, with their backs to the party, firing for all they were worth at such portions of Wallach's company as were still struggling across the open.

As the Germans were seen there was a yell, and some of the enemy, looking round, caught sight of the Australians emerging into the open behind them. The situation called for instant action—either attack or be annihilated—and Storkey's decision was immediate. Shouting as if the whole battalion was following, he at once led a charge upon the rear of the Germans, himself at one flank of his ten men, Lipscomb at the other. The Australians had only twenty yards to go. Before the nearer



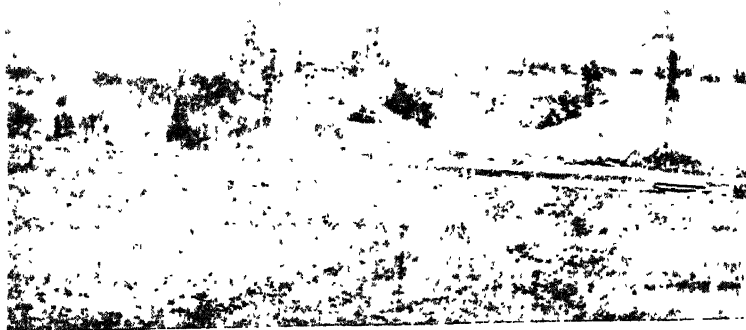
Germans could realise what was happening, the New South Welshmen "got in quickly," as Lipscomb wrote, "with bombs, bayonet, and revolver." The Germans in the nearer trench at once put up their hands, but those in the farther ones hesitated. They had only to swing round one of their machine-guns and the Australians standing close above the northern part of their line could have been annihilated. But Storkey's confident manner made them uncertain as to what forces might not be in the surrounding bush. On the first sign of hesitation to obey his order to surrender and climb out of the trench, he immediately shot three with his revolver (which

then jammed) and some of his men slipped the pins from their bombs, rolled a couple into the trenches, and then ducked away to avoid the explosion. In all 30 Germans were killed, and the remainder, 3 officers and about 50 men, were made prisoners and were at once sent to the rear, the two escorting Australians carrying back one of the machine-guns.

With the clearing away of this section of the defenders, the opposition to the advance of Wallach's company practically ceased. Storkey and Lipscomb pushed on through the wood with their men in search of the road and the "clear field of fire" which were to mark their objective. Meanwhile Portman's company of the 20th to the south of them also had launched its attack. Ahead of it the Germans were holding the wood with a thin chain of machine-gun posts, each containing two guns. These opened fire but were easily dealt with in the scrub, some of the crews being bombed and killed and others fleeing. Although the leader of the left flank, Lieutenant Blyth,¹⁰ was mortally wounded, his men pushed on through the bush, extending to the left in an endeavour to find touch with the 19th. Thus most of the company presently emerged on the eastern side of the scrub, where the knuckle, on which the wood here lay, dipped suddenly to the ravine. But at the south-eastern corner, where the growth was sparse and the half-bare slope fell into the branch ravine separating the wood from spur 99, the advance could make little headway; enfilade machine-gun fire from the far side of the valley was too deadly, and the flank was held up seventy yards inside the edge of the wood.

Portman's company, like Wallach's, was now in the region of its objective; but Wallach's was faced by a tactical problem, which proved quite insuperable—where to dig in? Storkey and Lipscomb hunting for the "good field of fire" found a road, but the wood continued beyond it to the bottom of the depression. Although the scrub thinned as it dipped into the valley, it was still so thick at ground level that a man entrenched in it would be unable to see beyond the muzzle of his rifle. Ahead, about 400 yards away, was an open knuckle capped with a trench-line along which at least two companies

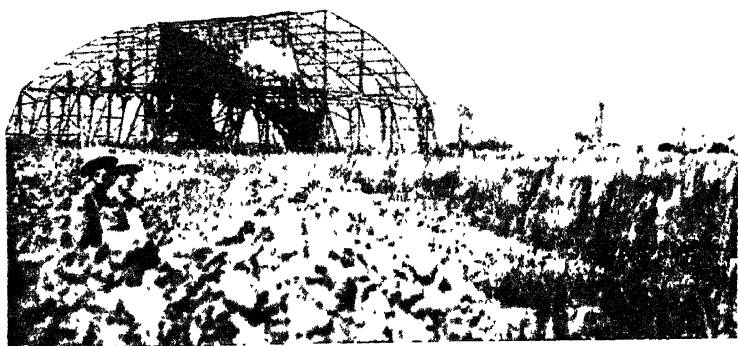
¹⁰ Lieut. E. P. Blyth, D.C.M.; 20th Bn. Book salesman; of Bondi, N.S.W.; b. Hobart, 1893. Died of wounds, 8 April, 1918.



45. THE SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF HANGARD WOOD

Part of the western half of the wood. Headquarters of Captain Portman's company were at the chalk pit.

Lent by Capt V. B. Portman, 20th Bn.



46. ONE OF THE HANGARS ON THE AERODROME EAST OF
VILLERS-BREIONNEUX

The photograph was taken on 23rd June, 1918. In April the hangars were still covered with fabric.

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E4911.

To face p. 508.



47. THE SOMME VALLEY FROM THE AIR (LOOKING EASTWARDS FROM ABOVE HANFL) Saily-le-Sec is just outside the left-hand bottom corner of the picture. In the first loop, just beyond the black line (the later British front) on the northern side of the river, is Saily-Laurette, above it, on the southern bank, is Certisy.

*British Air Force Photo : taken 31st July, 1918,
sent by Corporal F. P. Addy, 4th Bu.*

of Germans could be seen deploying, apparently ready to counter-attack. Obviously the Australians could not be meant to entrench themselves in the bottom of the valley with the Germans above them; yet in the scrub, where they were, it would be even more dangerous. After casting about desperately for some tenable position in which to hold on, the two officers decided that there was none. Obviously a blunder had been made in the selection of the objective. After consultation, Storkey ordered his men to return to the starting point of the attack.

For the southern company the position was not quite so difficult. Its position was high on the edge of a spur, and the thin scrub allowed a good field of fire. But it also laid the Australian line bare to the fire of German machine-guns on the big spur opposite, that screened Aubercourt; and the ravine—which ahead was difficult to see into, and around the right flank was completely hidden from view—allowed the Germans to approach and get round both flanks unseen. Several hundred Germans had immediately appeared assembling on the spur which screened Aubercourt, and at 6 o'clock, under cover of intense machine-gun fire from there, the enemy attacked from the ravine on Portman's right. The platoon under Lieutenant Treacher,¹¹ which was to have advanced on the southern side of that valley, had been unable to get near its objective.¹² The Germans annihilated the extreme flank of Portman's company, but did not press on, as they might have done, behind the remainder. Lieutenant Coolahan¹³ who, with a runner, Private Callaghan,¹⁴ accompanied this flank in order to find a place for a machine-gun, was mortally wounded. The gun-crew, anxiously waiting in rear of the wood, saw his runner coming apparently "from the back of the enemy."¹⁵ Coolahan had sent him to fetch

¹¹ Lieut. A. R. Treacher, 20th Bn. Journalist; of Sydney; b. Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Eng., 1896.

¹² According to one account, its orders arrived too late. It met intense fire and was stopped almost at once.

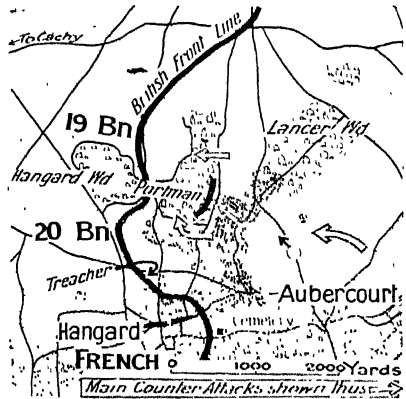
¹³ Lieut. J. S. Coolahan, M.C.; 5th M.G. Coy. Salesman, of Tamworth and Drummoyne, N.S.W.; b. Keepit, Namoi River, N.S.W., 30 Oct. 1882. Died of wounds, while prisoner of war, 3 May, 1918.

¹⁴ Pte. H. J. B. Callaghan (No. 674A; 5th M.G. Coy.). Bank clerk; of Cooma, N.S.W., and Millthorpe, W. Aust.; b. Petersham, N.S.W., 1895. Killed in action, 7 April, 1918.

¹⁵ From an account by Cpl. T. J. Coy (Molong, N.S.W.).

Corporal Noble,¹⁶ in charge of the gun. He got through, but Noble, returning with him, found their officer apparently dead. Callaghan was killed; Noble, wounded, returned to his gun—two other crews of the 5th Company tried with fire from farther back to prevent the Germans from entering the southern edge of the wood, and probably they delayed the movement.

Recognising the danger on his right, Portman sent Sergeant Clifton¹⁷ with half-a-dozen men to hold a shooting box on his right front, which seemed to offer the only cover there. About the same time there came up an officer of the 19th, who said that he was retiring, having no support on his left. That flank, however, was not yet threatened. Portman therefore moved back some of his men on the right and set them to dig in facing southwards. Their entrenching tools—the only imple-



ments they had—made little impression in the chalk, and they were not under cover when, at 7 o'clock, the Germans were seen assembling in the depression ahead. The Lewis gunners fired into these and they fell in heaps. Twice this happened, and the frontal attack was thus shattered. But the Germans were now again active on the right. A machine-gun opened from close behind the flank, cutting the Australians down. Corporal Paul,¹⁸ having detected its position, was sent with two men to work behind it and destroy it with rifle-grenades. Presently its fire ceased, but machine-guns from the direction of Hangard now swept the crest. The Germans on the right surrounded the shooting box and began to filter behind the

¹⁶ Sgt. J. N. Noble, M.M. (No. 1797; 5th M.G. Coy.). Horse dealer, and cook; of Young, N.S.W.; b. Geelong, Vic., 26 Feb. 1880.

¹⁷ Sgt. M. Clifton (No. 829; 20th Bn.). Groom; of Glen Innes, N.S.W.; b. East Bergholt, Suffolk, Eng., 1894. Died of wounds, while prisoner of war, 9 April, 1918.

¹⁸ Cpl. W. D. M. Paul (No. 6558; 20th Bn.). Dairy hand; of Scone, N.S.W.; b. Avonbridge, Stirling, Scotland, 13 Jan., 1898.

main position. The 19th having gone success was hopeless; Portman ordered his men to retire to the old front line. The party in the shooting box could for some time afterwards be heard fighting. Portman and a number of his men stayed on in the western edge of the wood, shooting down the Germans as these came on, and covering the retirement of the wounded.¹⁹ The commander of the 20th, Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Bennett,²⁰ ordered the company in his old front line to reinforce Portman; but the latter was now himself wounded, the position was a dangerous one, and in the evening the last party was withdrawn from the wood.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Storkey of the 19th, making his way, half-frozen, to his battalion commander to report his return with his men from their impossible objective, was ordered to take them back again at once and reoccupy it. He replied that there were probably few of them left to take, and that he would not take them; he would go himself, if ordered, but not until he had fully explained to the brigadier the nature of the task set him. The appearance, at that moment, of fifty-three figures in grey uniforms being escorted across a neighbouring slope—his prisoners—saved an awkward situation.²¹ He was not sent forward again, but spent most of the rest of the day in bringing in the wounded of his company who lay in many of the shell-holes west of the wood.²²

The attack of the 5th Brigade, carried through with the greatest dash in face of very heavy loss to the small number engaged, completely failed to secure its objective for one reason: the northern half of the objective was untenable. The only means of holding the wood on the 19th Battalion's front was to go 400 yards beyond it and seize the top of the minor spur on which Storkey saw the enemy assembling. The 5th Brigade was congratulated by Rawlinson, who assured it that the enterprise had been "well planned and well carried out, and is a most valuable success at this particular time."

¹⁹ These were sent round by the neck of the wood, where they were covered by the Lewis guns of the 19th.

²⁰ Major J. H. McDonald was in charge of the 20th in the forward area.

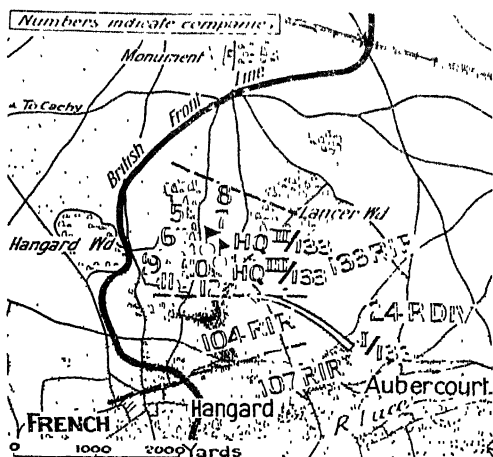
²¹ In due course Storkey saw General Smith, and the information, which was gratefully received, may have affected the plans for the next attack. For his gallantry in this action, Storkey was awarded the Victoria Cross.

²² On eventually returning to their trench, Lipscomb was wounded and Storkey shaken by a shell which burst on top of it and killed a signaller, Pte. A. A. Barling (Woollahra, N.S.W.).

For once in the history of the A.I.F. the latter part of this assurance, so regularly made after any action that tactically failed, is to some extent borne out by the narrative from the German side which is now available. The wood against which the two attacking companies had been launched with the information that it was "lightly held" was actually garrisoned by two German battalions, the II and III/133rd I.R., belonging to the 24th (Saxon) Reserve Division, which relieved the 19th after the battle of April 4-5. Each battalion held the forward edge of its section of the wood with two companies, and kept the two others in support, probably on the minor spur in the northern sector, and in the ravine in the southern sector. Storkey's attack appears to have wiped out the two northern companies, for the historian of their regiment is obviously in the dark as to their fate. Their dead were found in the trenches. "Many," says the German narrative, "were hit through the head and clubbed—some from behind. An evil enemy had been at work."²³ The commander of the 6th company, who was captured, said that he himself had intended to initiate an attack to improve the line, but the Australians attacked first. On both his flanks gaps had existed through which they broke. When this happened he sent back several urgent messages for reinforcements, but no help arrived before he found himself surrounded. The troops seen by Storkey on the minor spur north-west of the road were probably the two reserve companies (7th and 8th) of the II/133rd, and possibly also two from the I Battalion which were sent from near Aubercourt to reinforce the II. The 8th company came further forward shortly after 5 a.m. and eventually reoccupied the front line.

The attack of Portman's company came against the two forward companies of the III/133rd. It drove back both, the two company commanders

being wounded, one of them mortally. Of the right company, both the officers who succeeded to the command were hit, one after the other. Just ahead of Portman's company, when the advance stopped, but out of sight in the ravine, were the headquarters of both German battalions. The enemy who so quickly counter-attacked here was the two support companies of the III/133rd, and in addition two companies were sent thither also by the I Battalion. The German loss was unusually heavy; the historian of the 133rd says that the sacrifice of life this day



²³ There is no truth (as its author himself could have discovered from the survivors) in the innuendo that the prisoners had been murdered.

prevented the regiment from taking part in the subsequent attacks upon Hangard village. In its tour at Hangard Wood (April 5-17) it lost 660 officers and men—an extraordinarily high figure for a German regiment engaged in such comparatively minor operations.²⁴

The two Australian battalions engaged lost 151 officers and men in the operation.

General Butler of the III Corps in his report attributed the failure to the effect of enfilade fire from “German machine-guns south of the river (Luce),” and his conclusion was “that any attack on this front must be accompanied by an advance on the south of Hangard” so as to prevent this. Although the facts do not support this reasoning,²⁵ there is no doubt that the operation would have been easier as part of a more extensive attack. The local combined-attack by the Fourth British and First French Armies—the second phase under Foch’s directive²⁶—was to be undertaken on April 9th, the object being to thrust forward the French line between Moreuil and the Luce, and the British line between the Luce and Monument Wood. The difficulty of this thrust would lie, on both fronts, in the capture of a number of copses and woods; but on the British front, this time, the troops were to be given at least a tenable objective—the wide spur above Aubercourt and beyond Lancer Wood. The operation was a considerable one, and Rawlinson conceived that the 5th Australian Division, south of the Somme, though not on the front of the main attack, might divert the enemy’s attention by simultaneously advancing the line north of Villers-Bretonneux also. It was arranged that this feint should be launched by two brigades, while the Fourth Army’s part in the simultaneous attack astride of the Luce was also to be carried out by two brigades—the 175th, of the still arriving 58th Division on the left, and the 5th Australian

²⁴ The proportion of killed, 129, and missing, 111, was also high; the German historian says that most of the missing were prisoners.

²⁵ It will be obvious to the reader, from study both of the narrative here given and of the map, that German machine-guns south of the river can have had nothing to do with the repulse of the 5th Brigade, whose right was a mile from the nearest of them. Fire from the big Aubercourt spur, north of the river, was severe, but could probably have been combated had other circumstances been favourable. It was the impossibility of holding the objective set for the left company, and the weakness of the attacking force and of the barrage, that caused the failure of the attempt.

²⁶ See pp. 500-1.

Brigade on the right. On the night of April 7th the 175th accordingly relieved the two left battalions of the 5th Brigade in front of the Monument. On the French front the XXXI Corps relieved the XXXVI, and a famous offensive division of French colonials, the Moroccan Division, was brought up in reserve.

But, the French not being ready, the operation was put off, first to the 10th, and later to the 13th. Meanwhile on the 9th there fell the surprise of the German offensive on the Lys. The 1st Australian Division, just coming into close support north of the Somme, had to be hurried back to Flanders; and, as there was now only enough force to hold the Somme-Ancre line defensively, the plan of a diverting attack by the 5th Division was abandoned. That division would assist the attack on the Luce merely with an artillery bombardment. Only the 5th Brigade would now attack with the French.

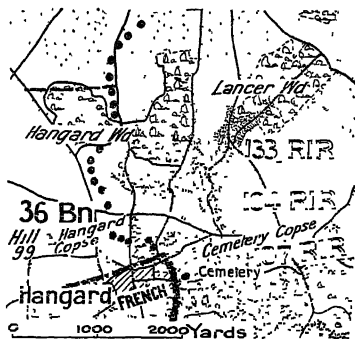
Meanwhile, as had been daily expected from the statements of prisoners, the Germans attacked Hangard. The attempt was made by the two regiments of the 24th (Saxon) Reserve Division which had not been involved in the fighting of April 7th. In a first effort, on the evening of April 9th, small German parties penetrated the village and temporarily captured the cemetery east of it, but they were thrown out by a French counter-attack. Men of the 20th Battalion were greatly impressed with the spirit of the French infantry, who in the thick of the bombardment were continually jumping up to get a shot at the enemy. At dawn on April 12th, a very heavy bombardment again descended on the village and the hill north of it, and the same two German regiments—104th and 107th R.I.R.—again attacked, but in much greater force. The front of the 5th Australian Brigade was at this time held by two battalions, the 34th and 36th, lent by the 9th Brigade, with two battalions of the 18th Division, 7th Royal West Kent and 10th Essex, in close support for counter-attack. The outpost-line of the 36th extended from Hangard Wood southwards and then eastwards around the northern flank of the jutting spur 99, at whose southern foot lay Hangard village. The right flank post, which was shared with the 165th French Regiment of Infantry, looking north and

north-eastward straight across the ravine separating this promontory from the German half of Hangard Wood, the southern edge of which was on the opposite height, 600 yards away. Lieutenant Colyer,²⁷ in charge of this post, maintained an intimate understanding with the French, whose nearest officer he used to visit every morning.

This morning, on his way back from that visit, Colyer was killed. Sergeant Barber²⁸ took charge of the post, but it was smashed in the bombardment and every man in it killed except Barber, who was

buried but managed to work himself free. The valley at this stage was full of shell-smoke. Captain Gadd sent up his reserve Lewis gun crew to replace the one that had been lost. About 7 o'clock the smoke blew away and German infantry was seen pouring both from the north-east out of the southern end of Lancer Wood, and from the south-east by way of the wooded flats of the Luce, and converging upon Hangard village. The S.O.S. signal went up and the French artillery concentrated upon the ravine in front of the 36th a bombardment so furious that an attack—by the 104th R.I.R.—from Lancer Wood was split into parties which clustered, as if bewildered. Some nevertheless came along the northern flank of the spur against the right of the 36th, but were there swept with rifle and machine-gun fire, and fled, the attack on the northern slope being thus ended.

In the Luce valley, however, the 107th R.I.R. had got into Hangard, the French being quickly driven from all parts except the *château*, which the Germans could not take. At this stage the French posts next to the Australians began to dribble back, and proposed to retire to a position around the southern flank of the hill, overlooking the village. They asked Sergeant



²⁷ Lieut. H. M. Colyer, 36th Bn. School teacher; of Sydney and West Maitland, N.S.W.; b. Queanbeyan, N.S.W., 11 Jan. 1887. Killed in action, 12 April, 1918.
²⁸ Sgt. L. W. Barber, M.M. (No. 3275; 36th Bn.). Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Granville, N.S.W.; b. Granville, 1894. Died, 9 Sept. 1934.

Barber for the support of three Lewis guns to cover the withdrawal. Barber told them that the orders were not to retire except by command of the division—which was, in effect, the arrangement made by General Debeney with General Butler (III Corps) on April 6th. “You dig in where you are (west of Hangard copse) and ‘box on’ with us,” said the Australians, “and we’ll give you all the help we can.” Lewis guns were turned upon the village; and, cheered by the Australians as they did so, the French rallied and went forward again to their posts behind the copse.

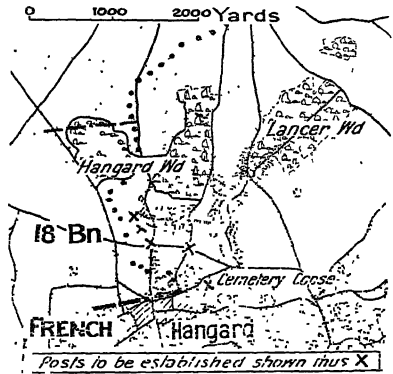
Shortly after this, about 10.15, a company of the Royal West Kent was sent to the right of the 36th to co-operate with the French in an immediate counter-attack. The French did not get into Hangard. Part of the Royal West Kent, on coming under fire on its way to the Australian front line, wavered, but about half the company went on and dug in behind the junction of the 36th and the French. So matters remained until 6.30 p.m. when the Germans, reinforced in the village, took the *château*, capturing 75 Frenchmen and releasing some Germans. Immediately afterwards the Germans noticed that in the copse above the village, where the British and French lines joined, there was a stir foreshadowing a counter-attack. At 7 the French artillery threw a bombardment on the village, and at 7.20 the 10th Essex,²⁹ who had come steadily up over Hill 99, went straight through the German position, as did the French on their right. The Essex lost more than half their strength, but held on. Hangard was retaken but not the cemetery or the copse 200 yards north-east of the cemetery.

This fighting caused the abandonment of the projected combined attack which the French and the III Corps were to have made next day.³⁰ In the small hours of April 15th a minor assault was undertaken at the point of junction in order

²⁹ It was during the preliminary steps for this counter-attack Lieut.-Colonel J. A. Milne of the 36th was killed. Headquarters was in a trench slit. Milne and the leading members of his party had just reached it when a shell exploded, killing Milne, his adjutant, Captain T. R. Macnee, and an officer of the 10th Essex, and six other ranks, and wounding Major J. A. McDowell and three others. Lieut.-Colonel C. W. Frizell of the 10th Essex took command of the 36th until Major F. G. Grant arrived. (Milne belonged to Wide Bay district, O’land; Macnee to Balman, N.S.W.; McDowell, who died on 4 Feb., 1932, to Randwick, N.S.W.; Grant to Cremorne, N.S.W.)

³⁰ This day or the next the Germans captured an order containing the plans for this joint attack, but it had already been countermanded.

to recapture the cemetery and the cemetery copse. While the French went for the cemetery, the 5th Brigade went for the copse, which was to be connected with the Australian line by throwing a chain of four other widely separated posts around the northern slope of promontory 99. To protect the main thrust from interference by the Germans at Hangard Wood, half-a-mile away across a deep gully open to the enemy, the three nearer posts were to be stationed, if possible before the attack, which was to be carried out by parties from the 18th Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Murphy). The two nearest were duly dug in before the attack. Lieutenant Thompson,³¹ responsible for establishing the third—north-west of the village near a road-junction which was found to be strongly defended—



decided that this could not be wisely attempted before "zero" hour. The fourth was to be stationed at a farther road-junction north-west of the village; the copse was 500 yards south-east of this again, so far round the lower slope of the spur as to be out of sight of the Australian position.

The party for the copse—Lieutenants Frewin and Gascoigne-Roy³² with 50 of other ranks—made their way from the Army boundary along a sunken road north of the village until they could clearly see the black outline of cemetery copse some 200 yards ahead, and then extended in two waves across the open pasture, facing the copse. Gascoigne-Roy, who led the first wave, had been over part of the ground on the previous night, and no serious opposition was expected. Approaching the copse the party divided into three, Gascoigne-Roy leading one portion past the northern end of the wood,

³¹ Lieut. H. H. Thompson, 18th Bn. Carpenter; of Sydney; b. Smithtown, N.S.W., 1888. Died of wounds, 15 April, 1918.

³² Lieut. R. H. Gascoigne-Roy, 18th Bn. Clerk; of North Sydney; b. Narrandera, N.S.W., 27 June, 1896.

Lieutenant Frewin, who was in charge, leading another past its southern end, and Sergeant Bishop,³³ with eleven men, going through it. They were covered by a barrage of Stokes mortar shells.

In this advance Gascoigne-Roy had just reached the mouth of an open glade running north and south through the wood when one of his corporals, W. Mapperson,³⁴ pointing to the left rear, said there were "hundreds of Germans" there. The officer could not see them, but Mapperson averred that he could, and the party accordingly made an immediate rush in that direction. They came from behind upon a trench manned by 30-40 Germans who immediately surrendered and were sent back as prisoners under escort.

On going forward again Gascoigne-Roy's party found shots coming from the glade. In answer they fired "five rounds rapid" and then charged. They found a deep depression in which had been a German company headquarters. A few Germans were still there, but the rest had fled. Gascoigne-Roy and his men now moved through to the eastern edge of the wood, and in the open on the other side met the troops under Frewin and Bishop, who had encountered little opposition. The whole neighbourhood was quiet. The officers again divided the patrol into three and, as ordered, set it digging three posts in the open fifty yards beyond the wood. The French were to fire a flare when the cemetery was taken, but no such signal was seen, and the old trenches leading in that direction were at this time empty. A Lewis gunner, Private Price,³⁵ was stationed to guard this flank. Another was urgently needed for the left. Moreover, the party had brought few tools; a supply of these and also of ammunition was to arrive by a carrying party of forty men under Lieutenant Duncan, now due. Lieutenant Frewin himself started back to see to these matters, but did not return. Private Scoullar³⁶ was sent after him, but was presently found badly wounded.

³³ Sgt. C. G. Bishop, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 2333; 18th Bn.). Labourer; of Albury, N.S.W.; b. Urana, N.S.W., 12th Sept., 1895. Died, 17 Sept., 1931.

³⁴ Cpl. W. Mapperson (No. 5071; 18th Bn.). Labourer; of West Wyalong, N.S.W.; b. Echuca, Vic., 1894.

³⁵ Pte. C. Price (No. 5094; 18th Bn.). Farmer; of Wollongong, N.S.W.; b. Wollongong, 1884. Died, 23 Feb., 1934.

³⁶ Pte. M. S. Scoullar (No. 321; 18th Bn.). Labourer; of Finley, N.S.W.; b. Daysdale, N.S.W., 1895. Died of wounds, 15 April, 1918.

Meanwhile a lance-corporal, C. A. Porter,³⁷ patrolling, came on a German officer and two men, also patrolling, and captured them. The officer would give no information, but one of his men said that the Australians had been seen and that he had been sent out to discover the extent of their line.³⁸ The Australians for their part were unaware that any force of Germans was near them until, near dawn, they saw a line of men climb out from some trench very close ahead, and line out. The New South Welshmen, whose trenches were then four feet down, immediately opened fire. The enemy scattered, and a stiff fire-fight began. Till then the Germans had seen only the left post, but Price's gun blazing on the right now showed them the extent of the opposition. Their machine-guns—at least four—concentrated upon him, but he kept up intense fire. Several German trench-mortars also were in action, but burst their bombs in rear along the edge of the wood.

At this stage, just as it was growing light, the leading men of the longed-for carrying party appeared round the northern edge of the wood where they ran into heavy fire and were scattered. Leaving Sergeant Grey³⁹ in charge of the newly established position, Gascoigne-Roy rushed out to re-organise and lead the carriers, but as he started to move them forward he was badly wounded. He told their officer, Lieutenant Duncan, that the party had only forty yards farther to go. But by the time Duncan attempted the advance the Germans, under cover of their machine-guns, had apparently rushed at least the northern post. The attempt was given up, and a second reinforcing party of 35 men subsequently sent was stopped by deadly machine-gun fire from the north. Lieutenant Duncan, returning, carried Gascoigne-Roy to a safer position from which he was eventually rescued.⁴⁰ Frewin lay out, mortally wounded. The southern posts could be heard holding out till 6.25 a.m., when there was the sound of a German cheer and the place again became silent.

³⁷ L/Cpl. C. A. Porter (No. 1986; 18th Bn.). Tailor and mercer; of Wellington, N.S.W.; b. Wellington, 7 Aug., 1896. Killed in action, 15 April, 1918.

³⁸ He was an opera singer, by name Hans Herrig. Gascoigne-Roy, having no men to spare, sent him and his men off to the rear carrying Private Scoullar. Scoullar died, and it is possible that these prisoners escaped.

³⁹ Sgt. M. A. Grey (No. 2650; 18th Bn.). Railway night officer; of Petersham, N.S.W.; b. Glen Innes, N.S.W., 3 May, 1889. (Grey commanded the second wave of the advance.)

⁴⁰ By Lieut. J. Maxwell, scouting round with an N.C.O. (Lieut. J. Maxwell, V.C., M.C., D.C.M.; 18th Bn. Boilermaker's apprentice, of West Maitland and Marrickville, N.S.W.; b. Forest Lodge, N.S.W., 10 Feb., 1896.)

The site for the fourth post, which was to have connected that at cemetery copse with the others, was at a cross-road high on the turn of the ridge, open to view from three sides. It was this position which the southern platoon of the 20th Battalion had been unable to approach on April 7th, and now Lieutenant McLaren's⁴¹ party of 30 men, when almost upon it, was discovered by the firing of a flare which fell fairly among the men, who were immediately shot at by a strong German garrison. McLaren and 22 others were hit, and the attempt failed, but the wounded managed to get clear. Farther back, Lieutenant Thompson's party of 20 men, advancing to establish the third post, had to cross a sunken road lined with poplars. Here they found a strong German garrison, asleep under waterproof sheets in niches in the road-bank. The Australians jumped down among them, bombing and bayonetting the shelters; and the surviving Germans fled into the ravine, towards Hangard Wood, leaving no less than five machine-guns. Thompson was mortally wounded, but Sergeant De Saxe⁴² with the rest of the party held the position until daylight, when the Germans, led by an officer with a stentorian voice, could be seen assembling with a view to cutting off the party. When this threat endangered his position De Saxe withdrew his men.

The 18th Battalion's attempt therefore completely failed. Of 5 officers and 175 others who took part, 4 officers and about 80 men had been hit. But the French retook, and held, the cemetery.

German records show that Frewin's patrol, and the French attacking the cemetery, came against the 107th R.I.R., and the parties at the two cross-roads against the 104th R.I.R., both of the 24th (Saxon) Reserve Division. The history of the 107th says that the commander of its I Battalion, which, with part of the II in close support, held the copse and cemetery, could on this night obtain no clear information as to what was happening on his front. He accordingly brought up the rear elements of the battalion to his headquarters. Then, "suddenly, as if they had grown out of the ground, 20 metres ahead of battalion headquarters there appeared attacking Australians. All such machine-guns and *minenwerfer* as were at hand were turned on the attacker and barred any farther advance of the enemy." The Australians, says this narrative, were shattered by machine-gun fire. A counter-attack by the German headquarters orderlies, batmen, and other details, as well as

⁴¹ Lieut. N. V. McLaren, M.M.; 18th Bn. Electric crane driver; of Sydney; b. South Brisbane, 4 Oct., 1892.

⁴² Lieut. R. De Saxe, M.M.; 18th Bn. Dental mechanic; of Thornleigh, N.S.W.; b. Parramatta, N.S.W., 1892.

by other elements of the battalion, was then organised and the assailants were thrown out of the copse, 26 Australians being captured; but the cemetery could not be retaken. It is noteworthy that in all the Hangard operations the loss of the 107th R.I.R. amounted to 494, considerably less than that of the 133rd, whose only fighting there was against the 5th Brigade on April 7.

General Rawlinson was still most dissatisfied with the situation of the French on his right, south of the Luce. On April 15th he informed Haig that all his corps and divisional commanders concerned agreed that, unless the French advanced, the safety of Amiens might be compromised.

For the last ten days (Rawlinson wrote) I have represented this continuously to the French authorities and have received promises that action will be taken to recover the triangle Berteaucourt-Démuin-Moreuil.

If this was done, he added, the line on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau would be very strong and Amiens made secure. Eventually on April 18th the First French Army without British assistance made an important attack, intended to drive the Germans back across the Avre. Its success was only partial, the enemy being forced back about half-a-mile on several miles of front and at the junction of the Avre and Luce.

Meanwhile there occurred a reorganisation of the Fourth Army's whole front; as part of this the 5th Australian Brigade was removed from Hangard Wood. It returned to the Australian Corps on April 19th with a most generous tribute from the British commander, Major-General Cator⁴³ of the 58th Division, under whom it was then serving.

All the fighting work they did here was splendid; one and all, from Brigadier-General Smith downwards, were all out to help and we found them first class to work with. . . . I have never had the good luck to be with Australians in this war, but I think I can safely say that they are quite one of the best fighting units I have come across.

No one who studies the work of this brigade could disagree—its spirit was magnificent. Nevertheless it had not been well employed, its strength and fighting spirit being wasted in rather useless local enterprises, the most important of which was defectively planned. This defective handling probably contributed to the marked recurrence of that normal trouble of the A.I.F.—absence without leave—in the ranks of the brigade at this time.

⁴³ Major-Gen. A. B. E. Cator, C.B., D.S.O.; Scots Guards. Commanded 37th Inf. Bde., 1916/17; 58th Div., 1917/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Trewsbury, near Cirencester, Glos.; b. Trewsbury, 12 April, 1877. Died, 18 Nov., 1932.

With this relief the problems of the Hangard Wood sector ceased for the moment to have any direct connection with the operations of the A.I.F.; and at this time there was beginning a chain of events which greatly clarified the views of the Allies as to the apprehended offensive against Amiens, the main present cause of anxiety. To these incidents the narrative must now turn.

The 15th Australian Infantry Brigade, which on April 4th had been detached from the 3rd Division, under which it was then serving, and sent across the Somme, had a remarkable leader. Although **Brig.-Gen. H. E. Elliott** it is not correct to claim, as has been done, that Brigadier-General Elliott was chiefly responsible for the course of the brilliant operation to be described in the next chapter, his presence was so important a condition that an understanding of him is essential to any comprehension of it. Universally known in the A.I.F. as "Pompey," he was a man who in other times might conceivably have played the part of a Cromwell. Coming of Scottish stock which had contributed distinguished leaders to the British army and navy—and proud of these antecedents—he had from youth thrown himself with passionate seriousness into the Australian militia services and had been decorated for bravery in the South African War. He was one who could clothe the most tedious exercises of peace-time service with the romance of military history, and in the dullest drill could picture himself as one of his own forbears, campaigning under Marlborough or Wellington and faced with problems of, say, picqueting the camp at night, or dealing with half-treacherous villagers. *Field Service Regulations*—that handbook which General Bridges had described as being as useful to most Australian militia officers as the cuneiform inscription on a Babylonian brick—was, for him, alive from cover to cover, each paragraph illuminated by some scene from military history with himself as the central player; his dearest ambition, far beyond hope during most of his life, was to conduct an advance like that

of Clive on Arcot or a retreat like that of Moore to Corunna. Even during the war, he sometimes gave the impression of boylike playing at soldiering. Yet no one was more wholly in earnest, and his powerful will and personality and control over his troops made him always a factor to be reckoned with in the A.I.F.⁴⁴ They knew that he would fight tooth and nail against any order committing them to an attack that he believed to be impossible; he had saved them from one such trial near Flers in the mud of October 1916. From daily experience they trusted completely to his competence. If "the Old Man" said an operation was possible, then it was possible for the 15th Brigade.

His attitude naturally led him to centre his interests on his own command. Though he was a solicitor by profession, his military career meant everything to him; his pride in his own powers and achievements was intense. But, unlike most egoists, he extended his interest to every man in his brigade, and, after his brigade, to the whole of the A.I.F. These proclivities—and his personal experience of troops of the British "New Army" at Fromelles, in the open warfare beyond Bapaume, at Polygon Wood, and lately in the Third and Fifth Armies—led him to be contemptuous of their fighting power; and this, together with a hot-headed tendency to use his brigade as if it were independent of the rest of the B.E.F., caused not infrequent trouble, and was a chief cause of his being eventually excluded from higher command in the A.I.F. Nevertheless he was an outstandingly strong, capable, and sympathetic leader; and in his directness and simplicity, and in a baffling streak of humility that shot through his seemingly absorbing vanity, there were elements of real greatness.

Elliott's leadership had created a remarkable brigade. His battalion commanders were chosen, when possible, from the youngsters who had served under him as officers either in the 7th Battalion at Mena and Anzac, or in the militia before the war. He was a good judge of them, although prone to be affected by transient enthusiasms. But, however warm his

⁴⁴His peculiar seriousness in matters of detail is said to have been instilled by his old chief, Major J. S. Stephen of the 5th Aust. Inf. Regt.

favour, any "careless" omission to apply the rules of *Field Service Regulations* was apt to result in the battalion commander responsible being temporarily placed under arrest. "It is nothing," remarked one of them with pardonable exaggeration to the Official War Correspondent in 1918, "for the brigade to march in with all four of us riding at the tails of our battalions under arrest." But, when one of them, who had been so punished on parade, came to Elliott afterwards and asked to whom he should hand over the battalion, the brigadier looked up in surprise. "Go away and don't be a fool," he said. This might hardly seem a condition favourable to discipline, but within the 15th Brigade Elliott's manner was perfectly understood. The summary shootings and hangings which he threatened to inflict were beyond the powers of Haig or Hindenburg. His own officers and men accepted these threats good-humouredly. Playing at war, as he did, he attributed his men's obedience to fear. "They are terribly afraid of me, poor fellows," he wrote, "which is just as well, for there is very little they are afraid of." Actually what moved them was deep respect and affection for his nobility, his virile leadership and soldierly thoroughness. As for his threats, "We knew," said one of them, "that it was only the old man's manner of speaking." But naturally, when his orders or actions affected troops outside the brigade, trouble was likely to result; and that it never became serious was due to the tact of his staff, and the generous patience of his seniors, in particular Generals Hobbs of the 5th Division and Brudenell White, chief of the corps staff.

The brigade that was produced by these methods was, at this time, at the zenith of its form; a magnificent instrument, fit, like Cromwell's Ironsides, for the hardest military tasks. From the moment of its arrival at Lealvillers behind the Third Army on March 28th, Elliott had shown it that he regarded the task for which it has been summoned—that of helping to stop the German offensive—as the sternest business. His first step was to have all *estaminets* in the place picketed. A keen watch was kept upon looting, and the drinking of strong liquor was prohibited. When next day the brigade was ordered to the Somme to take the place of the 9th in the task specially imposed by Haig—of watching the Somme

crossings—it made its march of from twenty to twenty-five miles without turning a hair. Naturally it was tired next day; but when Elliott, going round the positions, found many officers, including some of the battalion staffs, asleep instead of fortifying the crossings, “I told them,” says his diary, “that I proposed to put them under trial by court-martial.” During these days the constant looting of Corbie for drink caused him the keenest anxiety; the front south of the Somme was unlikely to resist a serious blow, and at any time his brigade might become responsible for safeguarding the flank of the British Army by desperate fighting at the crossings. The drinking in Corbie, which he alleged to be chiefly the act of British stragglers, must be put down, but Elliott would not make an example of common soldiers while officers—as was daily done—were taking all the wine they wanted for their messes. He accordingly ordered the apprehension of all officers found taking wine from Corbie. That day a British staff-captain, making off with his brigade mess-cart full of champagne, was arrested and handed over to the nearest Assistant Provost Marshal. Elliott then issued an order that anyone caught in this offence would be “summarily and publicly hanged in the market square.” His diary says,

I told them (his officers) I was quite aware it might be illegal, but I was determined to stop the looting and consequent demoralisation and trust to the King's pardon in case of illegality.

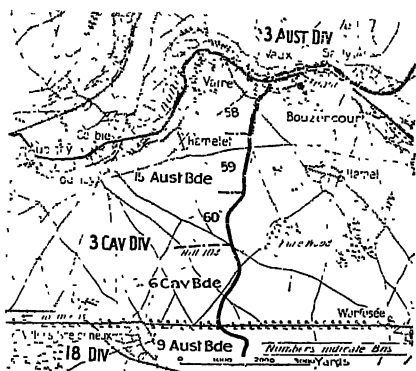
“This order,” he wrote, “had immediate effect, and I never had the slightest trouble afterwards.” The order does not appear to have reached the ears of higher authority, but the arrest of the staff-captain did. Elliott had appealed through Hobbs to Birdwood to allow an example to be made of any senior officer caught looting in Corbie. Birdwood refused, but said he would speak to Rawlinson, which he did, and the Commander-in-Chief took special steps to stop looting by officers.

The 15th Brigade was no sooner in contact with the enemy than its presence began to have marked effect. The activity

of Captain Ferres's company on April 4th in conjunction with the British cavalry in stopping the retirement of the 14th Division has already been described. That night the brigade took over the front and from the first day adopted an aggressive attitude. Its line lay along the spur which ran down from Hill 104—the northern shoulder of the Villers-Bretonneux position—to the Somme, close to the edge of which it reached forward along the flats towards the hamlet of Bouzencourt, north of Hamel. Along most of the front lay a valley leading down to Hamel; on the other side of this Vaire Wood, high on the edge of the plateau, and Hamel village on the flats, were held by the Germans.

It will be remembered that Lieutenant Hanna's machine-gun on the Somme flats in front of Vaire was safeguarded by a post

of four men sent by Captain Ferres of the 58th Battalion.⁴⁵ At 2 p.m. on April 5th these men saw thirty Germans under an officer coming towards them from the direction of Hamel. Catching sight of the post, the Germans immediately took cover and began to set up a machine-gun, obviously preparatory to attacking. The corporal in charge of the post, D. A. Sayers,⁴⁶ set two of his men to fire at the Germans from the front, while he and the remaining man crept down a drain to the flank of the attacking party with a view to cutting it off. As soon as he reached a position commanding the rear of the Germans, the small party opened rapid fire by which seven of the enemy were hit. The German officer could be seen directing his men to withdraw to a sunken road, in which the Australians could not have reached them.



⁴⁵ See pp. 327-8, and 353.

⁴⁶ Sgt. D. A. Sayers, D.C.M. (No. 3402; 58th Bn.). Engineer; of West Geelong, Vic.; b. Geelong, 1888.

Sayers forthwith ordered his party to charge. He himself, as he advanced, firing from the hip, shot the officer, whose men then fled, with the four Australians firing at them. Six Germans were killed and two who were left wounded were brought in by the Australians, none of whom was hurt.⁴⁷

When on April 6th the 5th Australian Division took control of the sector from Villers-Bretonneux to the Somme, the 14th Australian Brigade coming in south of the 15th, the German posts opposite the front of the division were still distant. During the previous night the 15th Brigade had made some ground towards Bouzencourt and both brigades were now ordered to advance their fronts looking into Hamel gully, the 15th opposite Hamel itself, the 14th opposite Vaire Wood. At a conference held that day Elliott arranged with his battalion commanders that the method should be to make reconnaissance by day, and then advance by night, in bounds of about 500 yards each night, the rear companies moving through the forward ones on each occasion and digging a new line of posts in front. It was characteristic of Elliott's optimism that he believed at this time that by this process he could not merely approach the German front, but actually "make Hamel untenable," and his orders envisaged pushing in this manner to the old French line east of the village.

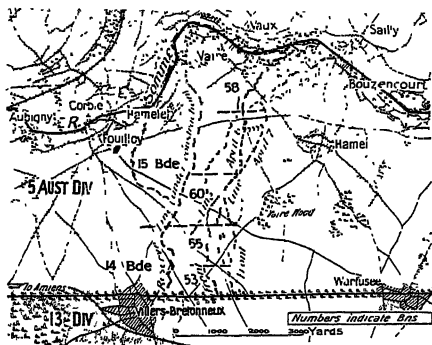
The entry of Bouzencourt was attempted that night, but was prevented by lively machine-gun fire. Thus the first step in the advance did not take place until the morning of April 7th, when Captain Ferres of the 58th, taking with him Lieutenants Hanna and Linton Smith⁴⁸ of the 15th Machine Gun Company, an N.C.O., and four men, made his way forward, near the southern bank of the Somme, into Bouzencourt hamlet. At the first large farm they found a number of horses, cows, pigs, and fowls, and, indoors, five French women and two children, with two wounded men—a French civilian

⁴⁷ The Germans carried off their machine-gun, but left some spare parts and the ammunition and flares. Many of them carried British gas respirators, evidently found in Hamel. Lieut. Hanna, who saw the incident, reported at the time that "the 4 men . . . did a very plucky thing in charging the German attacking party (numbering 30)." The men with Sayers were Privates J. Stokes, W. E. De Forest, and W. F. Cox. (Stokes belonged to Geelong, Vic.; De Forest to Combienbar, Vic.; Cox, who died on 18 May, 1919, to Fairfield, N.S.W., and London.)

⁴⁸ Lieut. H. B. L. Smith, 15th M.G. Coy. Bank manager; of Hampton, Vic.; b. Maffra, Vic., 3 March, 1880.

and a British soldier. Ferres sent back for stretcher-bearers, and himself, after searching the village, which was littered with abandoned British equipment, pushed on for nearly half-a-mile to the old British support trench, which was similarly bestrewn. Here he sighted parties of Germans moving about the open north of Hamel. On his return he arranged for a platoon of the 58th to occupy the farm. The bridge leading to Saily-le-Sec having been blown up, this platoon and a machine-gun crew were ferried across the Somme after dark, covered by a party of the 42nd Battalion (3rd Division) holding the opposite bank. The civilians were escorted back to the lines. General Elliott arranged for the bridge, which, though wrecked, was almost passable, to be repaired, but only the northern end of the village was at first occupied. On April 9th two officers of the 57th, who had been ordered to reconnoitre the village, were nearly ambushed by a German patrol in a farm at the other end, one, Lieutenant Gowenlock,⁴⁹ being mortally wounded.⁵⁰ Thenceforth that end of the village also was held.

Meanwhile, on the night of April 7th, other parts of the line had been advanced (as shown in the marginal sketch), not only by the 15th but by the 14th Brigade, which came against one German post whose occupants fled, leaving a machine-gun. The new line of Australian posts was not at once detected by the enemy, who continued to shell the old one. The latter now in parts became the support line, and the reserve battalions were employed in vigorously digging a third line behind it.



⁴⁹ Lieut. E. S. Gowenlock, 57th Bn. Tram conductor; of Paddington, N.S.W.; b. Pyrmont, N.S.W., 1890. Died of wounds, 10 April, 1918.

⁵⁰ The two officers noticed a German move at one of the windows of the farm before they reached it. Lieut. A. G. Staley (Fitzroy, Vic.) then tried to cut off the Germans, sending for support to the 51st Battalion, which was guarding the river crossing. The Germans, however, managed to get away.

The reserve battalions of the 14th Brigade asked that, rather than be withdrawn each night, they should stay up there and daily send down to the flats a small number of their men "for a wash and a clean up."

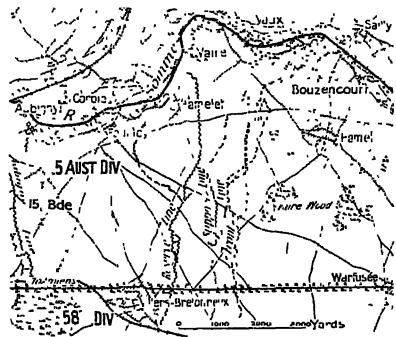
This was the situation when preparations had suddenly to be made for the feint on Hamel, to be almost immediately undertaken in connection with the projected Anglo-French offensive at Hangard. General White, who called on General Hobbs and explained the plan, was opposed to the feint, believing that it would merely lead to a useless frittering away of strength, and General Hobbs agreed with him. As, however, it was part of a bigger scheme, three alternative plans were drawn up—first, for an advance a mile deep to capture Vaire Wood and Hamel, to be undertaken by the 5th Division alone; second, for a deeper advance, almost to Warfusée, an operation only possible if the troops at Monument Wood advanced also; third, for a still deeper attack involving the capture of Saily Laurette by the 3rd Division north of the Somme, and of Lancer Wood by the British to the south. On April 9th, in forwarding these plans, Birdwood pointed out that the losses of the 5th Division would probably be considerable, and it was for the higher command to decide whether, in view of the then available man-power, the results would be worth them. By April 10th General Butler of the III Corps had informed Hobbs that troops on the south could not help, and it was therefore clear that only the smallest of the three attacks could be undertaken. The date fixed was the 11th, and, as the 15th Brigade had suffered somewhat in the wet ground by the Somme, it was relieved on April 9th by the 8th Brigade. The 14th and 8th were to attack.

The German offensive in the north, however, which was expected to be followed by a heavier blow on the Somme, greatly reinforced the objections from the Australian Corps. The 1st Division, then newly arrived in corps reserve, had to be turned round and railed back to Flanders. The 8th British Division also, which was lent to the corps in its place, was twice put under order to go north, and the order was twice cancelled. It was evident that the 5th Australian Division might require all its strength in the defence of its sector.

The order for the attack on Hamel was accordingly cancelled, and the division was directed to concentrate its effort upon completing the new front defences north of Villers-Bretonneux, and its section of the reserve line, from Bois l'Abbé to Aubigny. Between this and Amiens three other reserve lines⁵¹ were being dug by "Army" troops. The work on the Aubigny line fell largely to Elliott's brigade, now in reserve on the Somme meadows near Blangy-Tronville. At the same time the engineers were busy bridging the Somme at a number of points, so as to enable the guns to be withdrawn in emergency or the troops to be reinforced.

The speed with which these defences extended, especially the trench-lines over and around Hill 104, was noted by the Germans holding the posts opposite.⁵² For the Australians south of the Somme this week, April 9th to 16th, was by no means uncomfortable.

Most of them were still living in or near the almost intact villages close behind the front, and the food left by the civilians was not yet finished. As for headquarters, the little *château* occupied by Elliott—and after him by General Tivey, of the 8th Brigade—in Fouillois



was, Elliott wrote, "the finest residence I was ever in anywhere." It contained rare collections, including one of butterflies, which he induced the French authorities to salve. In the garden was a Cootamundra wattle in bloom "which I took for a sign of victory." And his mechanics salvaged and repaired for him an abandoned French motor-car, which he

⁵¹ The "Bois" line, Blangy-Tronville line, and Glisy line. It was found helpful at this stage to call reserve trench-lines after the neighbouring villages, etc. (rather than by such names as "corps" or "army" lines), so that newly arrived troops could quickly find them in emergency.

⁵² The history of the 1st Grenadier Regiment twice mentions this activity, which is also remarked on by the historian of the 479th I.R.

took with him, when he left, to his headquarters at Blangy Tronville. Battalion commanders of the 14th Brigade were living in almost equal comfort in Villers-Bretonneux.

Plenty of food, clothes, wines, etc. in the town (noted an officer of the 53rd⁵³). Our troops lived like lords in those early days. Our headquarters moved into a stately chateau in the town, and there drank from costly glass and china, had records on the gramophone, selections on the piano, played billiards and sat in easy chairs, and slept in sheets with beautiful eiderdown quilts over them. Several sent souvenirs away, but somehow I didn't like to take anything unless it was necessary, such as food. The officers had one big dinner, and I believe it was a fine affair—poultry, soup, puddings, wines. . . .

Corbie and the Somme crossings were now held by the 13th Brigade (4th Division), of whose conduct Elliott was strongly critical:

Disgusting instances of looting by British troops and by our . . . 13th Brigade under General Glasgow come to light. Our own troops (15th Brigade) are extremely well behaved. Very little drunkenness.

The more general view of the conduct of the 13th Brigade is expressed by one of its medical officers, Captain R. L. Forsyth:⁵⁴

An advance party went up to Corbie where they endured awful hardships! The machine-gun fire was incessant—our boys would use them to shoot pigeons. They had nothing to drink but Beaune and Champagne and no food except their rations and pigs and ducks and fish.

It is true that rifle-shooting at pigeons on the roofs had to be checked by Glasgow, who, actually, was quite as good a disciplinarian as Elliott. It was realised that the comfortable villages might at any time be smashed by German artillery, and units were prepared to leave them quickly and bivouac in the fields—a mode of life by no means so uncomfortable as that in the old trench lines, since even the watery little outpost trenches on the Somme flats could be lined with straw from neighbouring haystacks. Battalion headquarters, however, for which no deep dugouts yet existed in this region, were subject to unusual risk, being often recognisable on air-photographs by the concentration of tracks about them;

⁵³ Lieut. J. G. Ridley, M.C.; 53rd Bn. Bookseller and stationer; of Darling Point, N.S.W.; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 8 Sept., 1896.

⁵⁴ Capt. R. L. Forsyth, A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 31 Dec., 1882.

and in the constant bombardments many were hit.⁵⁵ Similar conditions on the German side were resulting in marked losses among the unit commanders there also.

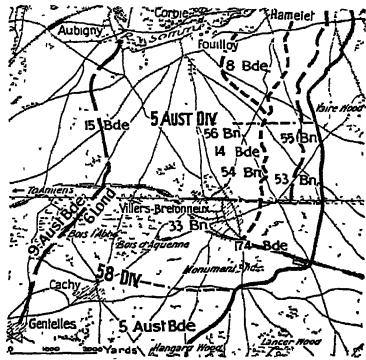
On April 16th the hitherto vague foreshadowings of a new German offensive on the Somme became suddenly definite. A Bavarian prisoner taken by the French said that Villers-Bretonneux was to be attacked that day. The III Corps ordered the 5th Australian Division to be prepared immediately to retake the town, if captured, by attack from the north. The 14th Brigade at once moved the 54th Battalion to the valley north of the town, in readiness. Its men slept in their equipment. Elliott of the reserve (15th) brigade on his own initiative kept one of his battalions in the Aubigny line, a mile west of the town, in constant readiness to retake the place.

But, instead of attack, there descended upon the forward areas next morning, April 17th, shortly before dawn a steady drenching of gas-shells. On Villers-Bretonneux and Bois l'Abbé they were pumped in continuously, sometimes at a rate of one in every two seconds. Cachy and the trenches before and around Villers-Bretonneux also were thickly drenched. The intense shelling lasted from 4 until 7 o'clock. Most of the Fourth Army's line was still held by Australian troops, but the 58th Division was occupying the 9th Brigade's old sector south of the Roman road. The 58th Division kept a battalion, the 6th London, in the Bois l'Abbé, constantly ready for counter attack, and the 9th Australian Brigade still supplied, as standing garrison of Villers-Bretonneux, the 33rd Battalion. This and several battalions of the 14th Australian Brigade holding the line to the left front of the town had their headquarters in what were supposed to be "gas-proof" cellars there.

When it was realised that the enemy meant to soak the town in gas, the garrison was ordered out into trenches around

⁵⁵ The destruction of headquarters of the 34th and 36th Battalions on April 4 and 12 has already been mentioned. Early on April 9, in a heavy bombardment (possibly associated with the "diversions" for the Lys offensive or the attack on Hangard), the headquarters of the 55th on Hill 104 were hit. Lieut.-Colonel D. McF. McConaghy—young veteran of Anzac—and his intelligence officer, Lieutenant H. E. G. Staples, being mortally wounded, and the adjutant, Captain N. B. Lovett, killed. McConaghy's second-in-command, Major B. D. Jack, who was away as *liaison* officer with the 9th Brigade, was killed in the same bombardment. (McConaghy and Staples belonged to Sydney; Lovett to Wongarbron, N.S.W.; Jack to Malvern, Vic.)

its outskirts. But the damage had already been done. Two cellars in which troops were billeted had been hit; but, apart from this, everywhere they moved or rested there were débris sprayed by the shell-bursts and shell-craters soaked with the chemical. Though at first unconscious of injury, the men who had removed their masks immediately after the shelling ceased, and those whose clothes had become impregnated by contact with these surfaces, began to feel the effects, particularly in the eyes and the tender surfaces under the arms and in the crutch. At first comparatively few casualties were apprehended; but towards noon men began to pour from Villers-Bretonneux and Bois l'Abbé, their eyes streaming, their bodies painfully inflamed. The 33rd Battalion and the 6th London lost a considerable part of their strength; the whole detachment of the 5th Australian Pioneers guarding the road-mines in the village was gassed; the 53rd and 55th Battalions (14th Brigade), the detachment of the 8th Australian Machine Gun Company in front of the town, the 54th lying in readiness to counter-attack, and particularly the various battalion headquarters occupying supposedly gas-proof cellars in the village, were all seriously affected. By midday Major Lucas,⁵⁶ commanding the 54th, his medical officer, and the whole of his headquarters⁵⁷ were out of action. The headquarters of the 53rd followed, Lieutenant-Colonel Cheeseman holding on until late in the afternoon when he too succumbed.



The gas-shelling was repeated in the evening, from 4 to 7 and next day. Officers and men had received a staggering object lesson in the need for precaution, and the later bombardments were both less severe and less effective. But in the 56th, which now came into the line, Lieutenant-Colonel

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⁵⁶ Major C. R. Lucas, 56th Bn. Judge's associate; of Waverley, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, N.S.W., 4 June, 1887.

⁵⁷ In the case of Lieut. F. W. Reid (Hobart) the injury was fatal.

Oatley, trying to stay at his post until the 24th, was so injured that he died a year later.⁵⁸ It was estimated that on April 17th the Germans had thrown into the area 20,000 gas-shells—mustard, “sneezing gas,” and phosgene—of which 12,000 fell in Villers-Bretonneux and Bois l’Abbé.⁵⁹ The 33rd Battalion lost 21 officers (commander, padre, and medical officer included) and 250 of other ranks, and on April 18th had to be relieved by the 36th; the 14th Brigade lost 22 officers (including 3 medical officers) and 287 others; the 8th Machine Gun Company 5 officers and 28 others. The total Australian casualties must have amounted to some 50 officers and 600 men; the total casualties for the III Corps certainly exceeded the official estimate of 40 officers and 1,000 others.⁶⁰

The incident was at once explained by a Bavarian prisoner, who said that the gas officer of his regiment had told the troops that Villers-Bretonneux was to be well gassed as a prelude to an attack upon it. The assaulting troops, however, were to avoid the gas-drenched areas. By this time the British airmen also had detected signs of a coming attack. On the photographs taken by them there appeared behind the German lines in the Somme region the “little square objects, thought to be waggons with trench-mortar ammunition” which had been observed on the Cambrai front before the great German offensive. In addition, guns had been registering the roads. An Australian who had visited G.H.Q. noted on April 18th:

The Germans are expected to attack south of the Somme (towards Amiens) certainly—against Villers-Bretonneux; not so heavily between the Somme and Albert; but heavily north of Albert. The attack might extend to Arras and involve an attempt to get Vimy Ridge.

⁵⁸ Major H. G. L. Cameron (60th) took over the 56th Battalion, Major P. T. Roberts the 53rd, and Major A. C. S. Holland (55th) the 54th. (Lieut.-Col. F. D. W. Oatley. Commanded 56th Bn., Mar.-Apr., 1918. Grazier; of Umeralla, Cooma, N.S.W.; b. Double Bay, N.S.W., 8 Nov., 1884. Died, from effects of gas poisoning, 28 March, 1919.)

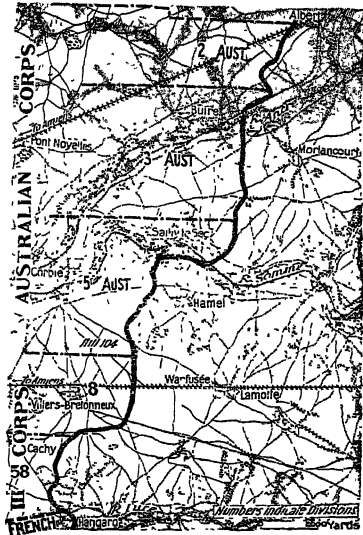
⁵⁹ Lieut.-Colonel H. F. White noted that the Germans wasted a considerable part of their shelling on the “Cachy Switch” trench, between Cachy and the gully south of Villers-Bretonneux. This trench happened to be almost unoccupied, and the incident indicated how such dangers might have been diminished by the deliberate construction of dummy trenches, a method too little employed by the British.

⁶⁰ This includes the Australian cases. The 14th Field Ambulance (Lieut.-Colonel C. W. Thompson) found that the lorries in which casualties were being brought to the advanced dressing station became themselves impregnated, and the men in them were affected by this. The ambulance established a centre for gas cases, many men receiving a change of clothing (borrowed at first from the baths at Daours until the Foden lorry had treated a sufficient supply). Patients were stripped and washed, or went under a shower; others had their eyes bathed and gargled their throats. Tender surfaces were dusted with sodium bicarbonate

The Australian Corps, however, would no longer be responsible for the defence of Villers-Bretonneux and the right of the British line. The 58th Division had long since arrived, and the detaching of Australian brigades with the III and IV Corps was an emergency measure, not to be continued longer than was necessary. On April 14th General Rawlinson, for the first time since assuming his recent command, managed to make a tour of inspection of the Australian Corps.

They are a splendid body of men (he noted) and Hobbs and Monash are both very good commanders. They are ready for any emergency, which is comforting; for Butler's III Corps, which has recently been reinforced, has little or no chance of training its drafts and is short of officers.

"I have staked my reputation on our keeping Villers-Bretonneux," he told Monash. The detached brigades would now be returned to Australian Corps, which in return would send to III Corps the 8th British Division. (The III Corps would then comprise the same divisions that had formed it on March 21st, except that the 8th had replaced the 14th.) At this juncture, reverting to a sound military principle, Haig decided that both sides of the Somme must be held by the Australian Corps. Rawlinson accordingly reorganised his front, so that each corps should have one main duty: the Australian Corps would be responsible for defence on the Somme; the III Corps would defend Villers-Bretonneux. The Australian Corps therefore extended its flank to the south side of the river, so as to include the 5th Division. By an application of the same principle, the left of that division was now extended north of the river, while its right was withdrawn



and starch. Severe cases were sent to the C.C.S., lighter ones to rest at the collecting station (15th Field Ambulance) at Les Alençons, or back to their units. Ground impregnated with mustard gas was sprinkled when possible (which was very seldom) with chloride of lime.

northwards, but so as just to include the summit of Hill 104,⁶¹ a mile north-west of Villers-Bretonneux. The whole sector in front of the town and of Monument Farm was now occupied by the 8th Division with two brigades (each now consisting of three battalions, as against four in the Australian divisions). The 58th Division held with one brigade the rest of the British line, through Hangard Wood to the flank of the French. General Butler issued to his troops an order emphasising the honour and importance of the task now entrusted to the III Corps—the defence of the Villers-Bretonneux plateau and of Amiens. The battle must be fought out, he said, on the present front, and the British Empire was watching the issue.

The readjustment of the front was finished by the night of April 21st. Signs of the imminence of a German offensive were constantly evident. Among these was the activity of German airmen. The red triplanes of Richthofen's pursuit flight were still present and were responsible for the loss of many British airmen. Machine-gun posts of the 15th Company noted:

Apr. 12: A 'plane with a red body was conspicuously prominent yesterday afternoon.

Apr. 13: Aeroplane activity very great. There was one enemy squadron of eight triplanes. Three of our 'planes were seen to fall in enemy lines

On the morning of April 21st there was much fighting in the air in which Richthofen's squadron was again involved. While chasing a British scout over the Australian area in the Somme valley, Richthofen himself was dived upon by a third aeroplane containing the Canadian airman, Captain Roy Brown,⁶² who thought he saw his then unknown opponent collapse under his fire. Brown then swerved from the chase, but the two others continued on for a mile low along the valley, Richthofen firing bursts from his machine-gun at the fleeing scout and closely following its movements though himself the target of many Lewis guns, machine-guns, and riflemen. As the two rose to clear the hill east of Corbie, Richthofen turned and then swerved and crashed, shot through

⁶¹ The flank was at first to have lain 500 yards farther north, but this was altered on April 20.

⁶² Capt. A. R. Brown, D.S.C.; No. 209 Sqn., R.A.F. Student; of Carleton Place, Ontario, Canada; b. Carleton Place, 23 Dec., 1893.

the region of the heart, almost certainly by some bullet from the ground. The incident is described in detail in an appendix.⁶³

That night information of the coming attack became still more definite. A sergeant-major of the 4th German Guard Division was captured by the 8th Division, and—possibly by a trick—was induced to disclose that his division had just relieved the 9th Bavarian Reserve in front of Marcelcave and would attack at 3 o'clock on the 23rd. Strong "counter-preparation" was undertaken by the British artillery that night, as had also been done the night before, and the troops stood ready, but dawn passed without attack. That day some doubt arose as to whether the offensive was really impending in that region—it was opposite Arras that the enemy was said to be accumulating divisions. Nevertheless in the afternoon the villages in the area behind Villers-Bretonneux suffered a heavy gas-shelling, which caused 90 casualties to the transport and details of the 55th Battalion in Aubigny; and a couple of deserters, Alsations from the 77th Reserve Division, newly brought from Russia, and an artilleryman of the Guard Ersatz Division captured by the French said that the relief by the assaulting divisions was already complete; the attack had twice been postponed, but now the infantry were ready and the teams standing by the guns, prepared to advance; some batteries had been brought up to Lancer Wood; the bombardment would fall early on the 24th, would last for two and a quarter hours, and would consist largely of gas-shelling; and the attack would be assisted by fifteen new German tanks, already in position near the front line. A British airman reported the trenches at Hangard Wood crowded with troops crouching and trying to conceal themselves. The artillery was turned on at once. Units were warned. And that night the British guns again pounded the probable routes and assembly points opposite the front of the III Corps.

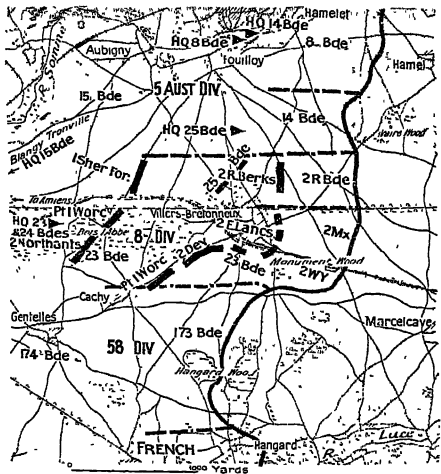
⁶³ *Appendix No. 4.*

CHAPTER XVI

SECOND VILLERS-BRETONNEUX—(I) THE GERMANS SEIZE THE VILLAGE

THE night of April 23rd at Australian Corps Headquarters north of the Somme, at Montigny, was resonant with gun-fire. After three fine, cold days, the clouds fleeting across an almost full moon looked threatening with rain. The bombardment was mainly from the artillery of the V Corps, covering an unsuccessful attempt by the 35th and 38th Divisions north-west of Albert to regain the line of the Ancre. Towards morning a mist came on, growing denser as dawn approached, and at 4.45 (as foretold by prisoners) there descended on the British front south of the Somme, between Villers-Bretonneux and Hangard, intense artillery-fire, including gas-shells of all kinds but especially mustard. The shelling extended along the French front as far as the Bois de Senecat, six miles south-west of Hangard.

The 8th British Division's sector in front of Villers-Bretonneux was then held (from north to south) by the 25th Brigade north of the Roman road, with the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade in the front line and the 2nd Royal Berkshire in support; and by the 23rd Brigade south of the Roman road, with the 2nd Middlesex between the road and railway, the 2nd West Yorkshire from the railway to cross-ways south of the Monument, and the 2nd Devonshire as counter-attack battalion in the Cachy Switch and the gully south of the town. The garrison of Villers-Bretonneux was the 2nd East Lancashire, of the



northern (25th) brigade. The 24th Brigade, in reserve, had the greater part of two battalions in the Aubigny (or Gentelles) line running through the Bois l'Abbé, and a third, together with the divisional pioneers (the 22nd Durham Light Infantry), back near Blangy-Tronville. Between Monument Wood and Hangard—the sector of the 58th (London) Division—the front line was held by the three battalions of the 173rd Brigade, with the 174th in support. Of the latter, one battalion, the 2/10th London, was attached to the forward brigade for purposes of counter-attack. The 175th Brigade was in reserve. In order to give its units as much rest as possible the III Corps was disposed in small bodies in great depth. The 18th (Eastern) Division had been withdrawn after the fighting of April 4th, the intention being to rest it and train its new draft; but several of its battalions had been used for counter-attacks at Hangard, and, though most of it was now behind the Avre, a detachment, known as "Shepherd's Force,"¹ together with a brigade of its artillery, had to be maintained in front of Cachy as a special protection for that village.

The 8th was a particularly good British division—at this time when extra Lewis guns were issued to the best trained divisions, the 8th was one of three British divisions, exclusive of dominion ones, chosen to receive the first allotment. But it had lost 250 officers and 4,693 of other ranks—half its infantry—in the March offensive; since Ludendorff's stroke, Lloyd George had been pouring into France the reinforcements which during the winter he had withheld. The allocation of man-power to the army having kept so low, it was now necessary to reduce the age at which boys were drafted to France. Sir William Robertson states that 140,000 reinforcements—

were then hurriedly scraped together and sent out, the number including, contrary to the undertaking given in Parliament on January 14, many youths under nineteen years of age.²

¹ Commanded by Major S. F. Le F. Shepherd, 6th Bn., Northamptonshire Regt.

² Sir Henry Wilson noted (*Vol. II, p. 81*) that "from March 21 to March 29 we have lost 114,000 infantry. We . . . will have sent out by April 4 101,000. They had some 20,000 out there, but we have sent all boys of 18½ who are trained."

These boys were now appearing. One of the Australians who saw them writes in his diary:

For two days companies of infantry have been passing us on the roads—companies of children, English children; pink faced, round cheeked children, flushed under the weight of their unaccustomed packs, with their steel helmets on the back of their heads and the strap hanging loosely on their rounded baby chins.

Beside these words in the diary is the sketch here shown.

The 2nd West Yorks, holding the front south of the railway, had received 11 officers and 700 of other ranks as reinforcements, and the 2nd Middlesex, between the railway and the Roman road, almost as many. The history of the



18th Division says that the 7th Queen's—the battalion which went forward with the right of the 36th in First Villers-Bretonneux—now consisted, to the extent of 60 per cent, of lads under nineteen, who till a week before had never fired a shot. Rawlinson realised that he was making too harsh a demand of these boys in thrusting them into battle on the Western Front without even a few weeks of hardening in less tempestuous areas; but Foch's insistence upon the tenure by the British Army of this sector between the Somme and the Luce, and Haig's determination to maintain reserves near Arras, had made it necessary.

This morning Amiens and villages near the Amiens front were being bombarded; shells were bursting on the roads, the woods, and the known and probable battery positions. All troops under this fire, and almost all within sight or hearing, guessed that it was the prelude to the expected attack. At 4 o'clock Major-General Heneker³ of the 8th Division ordered his reserve brigade (24th) and pioneers (22nd Durham Light Infantry) to man the reserve trench system. Major-General Cator of the 58th Division ordered his reserve brigade—174th—across the Avre to Gentelles. But to no commander was the bombardment a challenge for such vigorous activity as to Elliott of the 15th Brigade, now

³ General Sir W. C. G. Heneker, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 54th Inf. Bde., 1915; 190th Inf. Bde., 1916; 8th Div., 1916/19; G.O.C., Southern Command, India, 1928/32. B. 22 Aug., 1867.

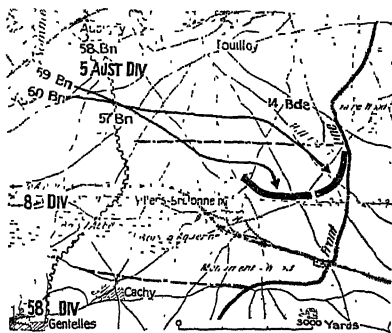
in reserve to its division. During most of the previous fortnight, while the sister brigade—the 14th—was responsible for the northern front of Villers-Bretonneux, Elliott had, by arrangement with the divisional commander, kept a battalion in part of the Aubigny line in the Bois l'Abbé, a mile in rear of the town, with orders to be continuously prepared to recapture Villers-Bretonneux if lost. He had made his staff and battalion commanders study the ground, models of which had been constructed at his order, and he had laid down a plan for the operation. When, on April 20th, the 8th Division took over the southern part of his area, only one platoon arrived to relieve the battalion kept for counter-attack. Its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Scanlan, accordingly refused to accept relief; but upon Elliott's making representations through his divisional commander, General Hobbs,⁴ the reply came from III Corps that General Butler had authorised altered arrangements for the three-battalion brigades of the 8th Division. The relief was at once completed, but Elliott, now more firmly convinced than ever that the town, if attacked, would be lost, kept one of his battalions, the 59th, in constant readiness to counter-attack. He also persuaded General Hobbs to order the 5th Pioneers to dig back from the Aubigny line on his right flank a long trench, ostensibly for communication, but actually as a switch, for the defence of the flank if the enemy broke through.⁵ On first sign of attack, the 59th and 60th Battalions, which would be first on his roster for counter-attack duties, were to send patrols towards Villers-Bretonneux to ascertain whether the British still held it.

Accordingly now, before dawn, as soon as the bombardment fell, the whole 15th Brigade stood-to-arms. Elliott ordered the 59th and 60th to send out their patrols, and at 4.50 issued a provisional order containing his plan of counter-attack. This, if required, would be made by the 59th and 60th north of Villers-Bretonneux, up the parallel two spurs leading

⁴ The headquarters of General Hobbs were at the *château* at Bussy-les-Daours, 3½ miles west of Corbie. Those of Elliott were at Blangy-Tronville.

⁵ General Hobbs later decided to have a similar switch dug from his front line on Hill 104. His C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel L. F. S. Mather, surveyed it on April 23 and the digging was begun the same day. It was afterwards called "Pioneer Trench."

to the town and to Hill 104 respectively. On reaching a road near the top, the line would pivot on its right until it faced nearly south-east, and would then descend obliquely, ignoring the town on its right and making towards the Roman road. The right companies would next swing round to confront Villers-Bretonneux, and face south-west, and would help towards "pocketing" the enemy as shown in the marginal sketch. The 57th would be ready to support the attack, its probable rôle being to swing round the southern side of the town and cut off the enemy in it, or at least squeeze him out. At 6.30, as the front had then become quieter, and



no word had arrived of any attack, Elliott ordered his battalion commanders to give their men breakfast and as much rest as possible, but to remain ready for instant action.

The heavy German bombardment and the mist had induced a "fog of battle" unusually impenetrable for even so severe an action. At 7.10 the latest news from previously captured prisoners—that the Germans would attack at 6 a.m.—was telephoned by the staff of the 8th Division to Brigadier-General Coffin⁶ of the 25th Brigade, who at once passed it to the commander of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade holding the front north-east of the town. A message came back that no attack had taken place, and no S.O.S. signal had been seen. But barely a minute later arrived word that the right company of the battalion, on the Roman road, had given way; the centre company was reported to be holding its ground. General Coffin ordered his support battalion, the 2nd Royal Berkshire, to launch a company in counter-attack.

⁶ Major-Gen. C. Coffin, V.C., C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 25th Inf. Bde., 1917/18; 36th Div., 1918/19. Of Devonshire; b. Blackheath, Eng., 10 Feb., 1870. (He had won the Victoria Cross in the Third Battle of Ypres, 31 July, 1917.)

Meanwhile the 8th Division's commander, Major-General Heneker, had heard at 7.20 from the commander of the town garrison a rumour that the Germans had attacked with tanks beside the railway, and shortly before 8 this was confirmed by a man from the trenches. Some troops were said to be still holding out in front of the village. Whether the 23rd Brigade, at the Monument, was involved in the fighting was still unknown. No British general had ever yet had to deal with an enemy employing tanks, and both Heneker and the corps commander, General Butler, at once turned to their own tanks for meeting them. Heneker ordered three heavy tanks, which were kept in close reserve in the Bois l'Abbé, to go forward at once; and Butler allotted to the 58th Division seven light ("whippet") tanks. Hearing that the left of the 58th Division had been driven back, Butler ordered Major-General Cator to restore its line by throwing in his reserve brigade, and to send forward a field-gun to deal with the tanks.

While these preparations were being made by the British commanders, Brigadier-General Elliott's earliest patrol, going out from the 59th's position under Lieutenants Christian⁷ and Callander,⁸ had sent him clear information. Each of these officers had been directed to take with him half-a-platoon including a Lewis gun section. Both patrols made separately, through fairly heavy shell-fire on the lowlands, for the gully east of the town, where the railway from Villers-Bretonneux (half-a-mile beyond, on the hill) crosses the Cachy-Fouilloy road. Here they met a number of British infantry, wounded and unwounded, retiring, who told them that the Germans had broken through and were coming on with tanks. The patrol officers had orders to reconnoitre a line⁹ on the edge of the plateau, just short of the town. They accordingly went on, passing, where the railway emerged from the cutting, a group of British artillerymen under a young officer (Lieutenant Butler)¹⁰ with a forward gun in action. The

⁷ Lieut. J. C. Christian, M.C.; 59th Bn. Actor; of Northcote, Vic.; b. Abbotsford, Vic., 18 June, 1890.

⁸ Lieut. R. Callander, M.M.; 59th Bn. Draper; of Numurkah, Vic.; b. Numurkah, 31 March, 1892.

⁹ The north-south grid line through "O.28 central" on the map.

¹⁰ Lieut. (Temp. Capt.) A. I. Butler, M.C.; 83rd Bde., R.F.A. Train manager; of Reading, Eng.; b. 8 July, 1896

valley round the north, west, and south of the town-plateau was being heavily shelled, but the line to be reconnoitred was empty and no

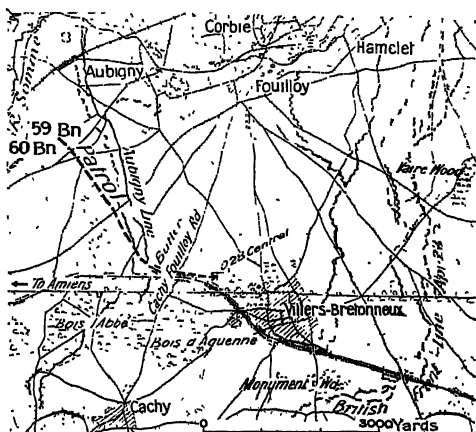
German was seen.

The patrols, now acting as one under the senior officer, Christian, sent a message reporting the position and returned (with two extra Lewis guns which they had picked up) to the Aubigny line, 1,300 yards

back, for orders.

They were immediately directed to go back to the grid line, collect all possible stragglers, and hold on to the position at all costs.

They moved at once, and by keeping close to the railway embankment reached, without casualties, the rise leading to the town. Again passing Butler and his field-gun, they told him they were to form a line on the western edge of the village—by which assurance he was obviously much relieved.¹¹ On the upper edge of the next hill were a number of men, who were found to be part of the East Lancashire and West Yorkshire from in and beyond the village. They were digging a line at right angles to the railway, but, as this lay short of the grid line specified in his orders, Christian took his patrols forward and dug in on the intended position 150 yards ahead. Numbers of British troops came past, but most of them,

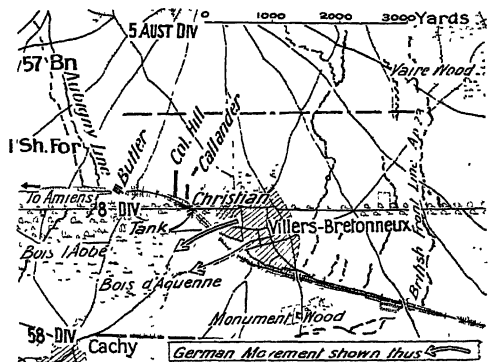


¹¹ Butler belonged to the 18th Division, and was in charge of a section of "B" Battery, 83rd Brigade, R.F.A., which was still maintained with Shepherd's Force (see p. 539) in close support. His two guns were kept well forward, behind the railway embankment west of Villers-Bretonneux. In the German bombardment that morning one of them was put out of action, and at 7 a.m. machine-gun bullets began to arrive at their position. Next came wounded men who said that the Germans were in the town, and "we then saw the first of the (German) tanks coming along the valley. There were about five about 2,000 yards away (i.e., on the plateau east of Cacy), and they were followed by small batches of German infantry. My remaining gun engaged these and the Boche infantry scattered like rabbits." Four tanks crawled on towards Bois l'Abbe, and turned into a dip in the valley and passed from view. Butler now ran his gun on to the railway bank to protect the withdrawing troops, but they retired (he says) past him, leaving his gun exposed.

Christian reported, were without arms or equipment, and therefore useless for defence. Some, however, were collected, and a line was dug with its right on the railway, where Christian placed his Lewis gunners. They were under machine-gun fire; the Germans were now in the town and could be seen advancing from it to the south-west, running over the bridge that crossed the railway cutting on the south-western outskirts. Thence they swarmed across the valley (the same from which Milne had attacked on April 4th) and into the wood.

His tank came along the railway line (adds Christian) and stopped under the bridge in O 28.d.¹² This made our right flank very dangerous, but by sniping we were able to keep him down in the cutting.

A number of the Lewis gunners were now hit, and Christian's numbers being so small, he decided to withdraw to the line of British troops behind him. Here he met Lieutenant-Colonel Hill¹³ of the East Lancashire, who was organising the position, and the two of them decided upon a line of defence and combined their forces.



It was at first hoped to extend the flank south of the railway, but the Germans in the railway cutting and the wood made this impossible. The flank was therefore swung back along the railway.

¹² This bridge, by which the Amiens road crossed the railway at the west end of the town, was 200 yards ahead of Christian's right flank. Lieutenant Butler says (*History of 18th Division*, p. 323) that at 9.45 a German tank appeared again 200 yards from the railway bank. He slewed round his gun and fired when it was 100 yards away. The first round fell short; the second, percussion shrapnel, hit the tank. A large cloud of smoke appeared and the tank turned and retired into the depression. A third round burst under its tail. The gun was then withdrawn, some of the infantry lining the railway bank at Butler's request to cover him. He had fired 100 rounds, and lost only one driver killed.

¹³ Lieut.-Col. G. E. M. Hill, D.S.O. Commanded 2nd Bn., East Lancashire Regt., 1915/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Tavistock, Devon; b. Tavistock, 21 Feb., 1876.

I had considerable difficulty in holding a line (wrote Colonel Hill long afterwards). There were no trenches of any sort . . . and the Germans got round my right flank and fired into us from behind with a machine-gun. Just as things were looking rather blue a very cheery subaltern of your people (A.I.F.) turned up with a patrol. His name was Christian. He and his men helped to stop the Germans who attempted to rush us just after C. turned up.

Callander and his men, who had been sent by Christian 500 yards to the left, were not withdrawn, but combined themselves with a platoon and a half of the 2nd Royal Berkshire whom they found there. Callander's men were completely out of contact with any troops on their left, but kept touch with Christian by patrolling. Other small parties coming in, Colonel Hill's force, including the Australians, numbered eventually about 100 and held on all day, furnishing one element of certainty in an otherwise vague position.

Before 7.20 the absence of news of any attack had created in some quarters the impression that, after all, nothing very serious was occurring. From that hour reports began to arrive, but most of them vague. The battalion beyond the Monument was now reported to have been driven in, and word arrived that the Germans were using *flammenwerfer* as well as tanks, and were advancing towards the village, but that some troops were still making a stand in front of it. Shortly after 8 Elliott received the first message from Christian informing him of similar reports, but adding that no definite information was obtainable. At the same time the 57th Battalion in the Aubigny line informed Elliott that a British artillery officer, passing through on his way to withdraw his guns, had said that the Germans were half-way through Villers-Bretonneux. Elliott passed this information to the 24th Brigade as "entirely unofficial," and on ringing up headquarters of the 5th Division at 8.50 heard that "the situation is all right so far as it knows." He ordered the 57th to find out the artillery officer's name with a view to having him dealt with for "spreading alarmist reports." At the same time, as the Germans had certainly made some progress, and the "alarmist report" might be true, he asked divisional headquarters whether it was left to his discretion to counter-attack. General Hobbs replied that he might act without orders within his own area or if urgently appealed to by British commanders on his right; in such case he might act at once and inform Hobbs of the steps taken.

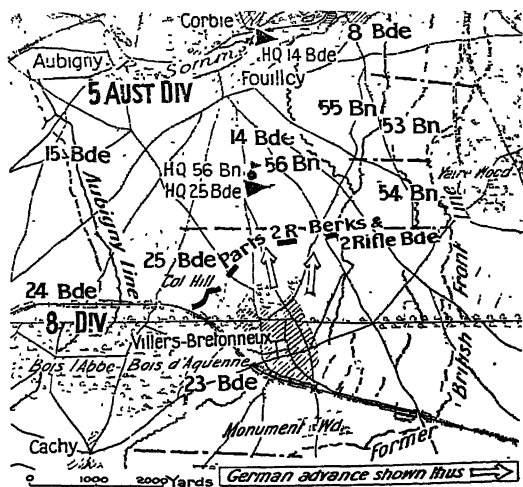
It already seemed clear that the use of Elliott's brigade to help the British would involve no danger to the 5th Division's front, the main attack being evidently south of it. It is true that the 29th Battalion (8th Brigade) immediately north of the Somme reported at 8.30 that at 4.30 an attempt had been made by 300-400 Germans on the Somme flats to raid it. The attack had been beaten off. But this was recognised, even on the spot, as merely a diverting attack.

Actually it was a feint made by the 85th I.R. (18th Division). The history of the supporting artillery says that it was "unsuccessful owing to the enemy's machine-gun fire being too strong."

The 14th Brigade on Hill 104 knew that only its right battalion was involved in the heavy bombardment. It had practically no other information except a message from the British brigadier on its right that his right flank had bent back a little to conform with the left of the 23rd Brigade, which had "given ground slightly."¹⁴

But, at 8.35, the whole face of the situation was changed by the receipt of an astonishing report from the 56th Battalion, which from its reserve position on the rear spur of Hill 104 could see Villers-Bretonneux. The Germans, it said, held Villers - Breton-

neux; their machine-gun fire was coming from there down the Fouilloy road and the Germans were now advancing from the northern edge of the village towards the 14th Brigade (that is, behind the front, towards Fouilloy, Corbie, and the Somme).



¹⁴ The quotation is from the 14th Brigade's war-diary.

The 25th Brigade was trying to fall back and cover the flank of the 14th. There were indications that a strong attack was in progress on the other side of the town, for British field-guns could be seen "firing point-blank" in that direction. The 56th had from an early stage placed itself astride of the Villers-Bretonneux-Fouilloy road, and was standing fast there.

This news electrified all the headquarters concerned. Captain Holmes¹⁵ of the 14th Machine Gun Company, to whom the Rifle Brigade's retirement had been reported by Lieutenant Leslie,¹⁶ commanding the flank machine-guns, at once went up himself and got the British to form a line of posts behind the flank of the 54th; but both these young troops, who were almost without officers, and the 2nd Royal Berkshire, who continued the line farther west, were constantly reported by Australian officers and N.C.O's who visited them that day to be badly shaken and probably liable to panic¹⁷—not an unnatural condition with very young and raw soldiers in such an action. Nor, in some cases, were their junior officers of the type capable of handling such a situation. The 54th kept its reserve company in readiness instantly to take the place of this line if it gave way. The 56th Battalion and the reserve machine-guns secured the rearward spur of Hill 104, defending the rear and the road to Fouilloy and Corbie; the reserve battalion, 55th, of the 14th Brigade was prepared either to counter-attack Villers-Bretonneux from the north or to support the flank line. The troops watched with admiration the British field artillery which, standing in the open west of Villers-Bretonneux, hammered from close range the German troops there.

The historian of the 39th German Field Artillery Regiment says: "An enemy battery on the slope west of the northern part of Villers-Bretonneux with notable dash, standing out against our infantry fully in the open, constantly caused it great trouble." The III Brigade of the 39th F.A.R. was ordered to suppress it by a bombardment with gas-shell.

It was at about this time that the effort was made by the 2nd Royal Berkshire to counter-attack Villers-Bretonneux

¹⁵ Capt. C. H. Holmes, M.C.; 5th M.G. Bn Clerk; of Canterbury, Vic.; b. Albert Park, Vic., 9 July, 1891.

¹⁶ Lieut. A. N. C. G. Leslie, 14th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Campsie, N.S.W.; b. Darlington, N.S.W., 6 Feb., 1897.

¹⁷ This is frequently mentioned in reports from Elliott's patrols, and from officers of the 14th Brigade.



48. THE RAILWAY CUTTING AT THE WEST END OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

The view, south-eastwards, is from the bridge on which the Amiens road crossed the railway at the western entrance of the town. It was beneath this that a German tank faced Colonel Hill's position, and here the flanks of the German 228th Division and 4th Guard Division joined. (Villers-Bretonneux lies mainly north of the railway, but a few houses extend south of it.)

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo, No. F.1787.
Taken on 25th April, 1918.*

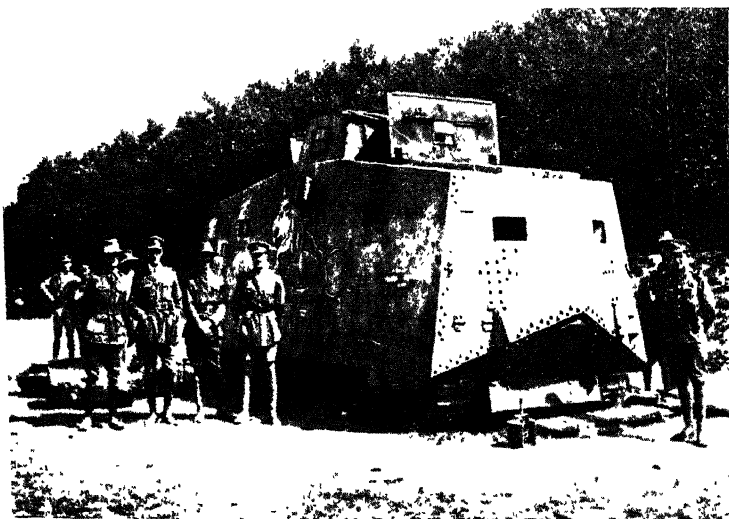


49 A POST OF THE 35TH GERMAN FUSILIER REGIMENT IN VILLERS-BRETONNEUX ON 24TH APRIL, 1918



50. THE GERMAN TANK "LOTTI" MOVING THROUGH VILLERS-BRETONNEUX ON 24TH APRIL, 1918

Photos from the History of the 35th Fusilier Regiment



51. A GERMAN TANK (FOUND LATER IN MONUMENT WOOD)

Photographed behind the British lines after its capture on July 14th by the 26th Battalion, A.I.F. (The tank in the Quarry had already been salvaged by the French.)

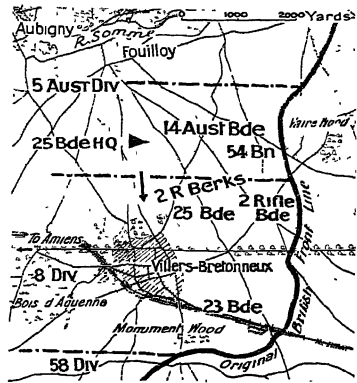
*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No. E28;6.
Taken on 4th August, 1918.*

To face p 549.

from the north, as ordered by Brigadier-General Coffin, but the 25th Brigade had then neither the strength nor the organisation for a vigorous thrust. The Germans were occupying the whole northern edge of Villers-Bretonneux and the plateau afforded them a perfect field for machine-gun fire. This project therefore remained abortive.

While the British and Australian officers on the spot were taking these and other measures, the telephone between General Hobbs and his reserve brigades was hot with Elliott's requests for permission to intervene. His eagerness was satisfied with the granting of permission to

move his battalions to the starting line for his projected counter-attack, in which position they would also be serving the useful purpose of joining the right flank of the 14th Brigade with such troops of the 8th Division as might be west of the town. While Hobbs repeated to the 8th Division the offer of assistance already made, Elliott ordered his battalions to move in accordance with his prepared plan, and to get touch with units on either flank. Characteristically, he appears to have said nothing of the order being provisional; so far as his battalions and the Chestnut Troop of Royal Horse Artillery (which was placed under him) knew, the counter-attack was "on." The third battalion (57th) was to advance behind the right rear of the leading two, and, "ultimately attack, if required, along the railway to the right of Villers-Bretonneux, clearing it by an enveloping movement." Elliott, who had received reports of unnecessary withdrawals of British troops, added: "All British troops to be rallied and re-formed, as our troops march through them, by selected officers, and on any hesitation to be shot." The outrageous nature of the implication does not seem to have been realised by him. As



The arrow shows the abortive attack by Royal Berks.

one of his battalion commanders afterwards said, "Of course we knew that this was only one of the 'Old Man's' figures of speech," but in this instance it was a dangerous one. Not merely did it concern forces outside his brigade, but—according to Elliott himself—it was intentionally issued to troops some of whom were indignant at the actions of a weaker element among the British infantry and artillery. Captain Gollan,¹⁸ Elliott's brigade-major, sent a copy of the order to divisional headquarters, and several hours later Elliott received from Hobbs a curt order forthwith to cancel the offensive sentence. Elliott's action was, to say the least, a gross error of judgment and quite unnecessary; for, order or no order, his company and platoon leaders would, in the last resort, have tried to steady the defenders, whether their own men or the British, by threats of shooting.¹⁹

Elliott further ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Layh of the 57th to represent him in the forward area, should immediate action be required, and to organise a system of continuous patrols, using a troop of the 13th Light Horse allotted by General Hobbs. This organisation was shortly afterwards placed by Elliott under a spare battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Watson,²⁰ who as "special intelligence

¹⁸ Capt. H. R. Gollan, D.S.O., M.C.; 54th Bn. Staff Captain, 15th Inf. Bde., 1916/17; Brigade-Major, 1918/19. Journalist; of Geelong and Melbourne; b. Gawler, S. Aust., 29 Aug., 1892.

¹⁹ On April 15 Elliott had issued another characteristic order, relative to the spreading of alarmist rumours. G.H.Q. had been discovering that the supposed "Germans dressed in British uniform," who were charged with spreading alarmist rumours or orders to retire, were invariably—when the case could be investigated—found to be officers or men on the British side, who acted either *bona fide* but in mistake, or in panic. A general routine order was therefore issued enjoining a new procedure to be "strictly observed." Any person so suspected was to be brought at once before the nearest commanding officer, who, if he thought the message or order unjustifiable, was to arrest the man for trial by court-martial. The 5th Australian Division on coming into the line was, like most others, apprehensive of these dangers, and its staff, overlooking the new order from G.H.Q., published on April 9 a strong warning to the troops against the supposedly prevalent ruses. Its attention was, however, immediately called to G.H.Q.'s instructions, and the first order was accordingly chased by a second setting forth the G.H.Q. order and the reason for it. But this did not satisfy Elliott's conception of the requirements. In the order, issued on April 15, to all his battalions, after setting forth the new procedure, he added: "Should the battalion be in action, and no satisfactory explanation be forthcoming from the man concerned, he will be summarily shot by order of the battalion commander, and a record of action taken forwarded in writing to these headquarters."

²⁰ Lieut.-Col. C. V. Watson, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 58th Bn., 1918. Civil engineer and architect; Examiner of Patents, C'wealth Attorney-General's Dept.; of Hawthorn, Vic.; b. Horsham, Vic., 2 June, 1882. Died, 10 Feb., 1930.

officer" sent back a stream of accurate news²¹ through an advanced report centre to which a buried cable had been laid. Elliott was thus exceptionally well informed throughout most of the day.

Meanwhile the 8th Division had replied to Hobbs's offer with the intimation that it "was quite able to deal with the situation." Hobbs received the impression that his offer was unwelcome, a not unnatural reaction if the British headquarters concerned had any hint of Elliott's attitude. The 60th Battalion was already beginning to move to the starting point, and the 59th was about to do so, when they received the order to "stand fast." Elliott could now only wait fuming while the 8th Division all day telegraphed to them its postponed or revised plans for counter-attacks. Judging from the nature of the British reserves, both Elliott and Hobbs felt certain that their own troops, after long delays, would have to carry out the counter-stroke which they had been prepared since before dawn to initiate.

The narrative must now pierce the mist of battle and give some notion of what had been happening to the young troops who that morning held the posts on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau.

Attack on 8th Division

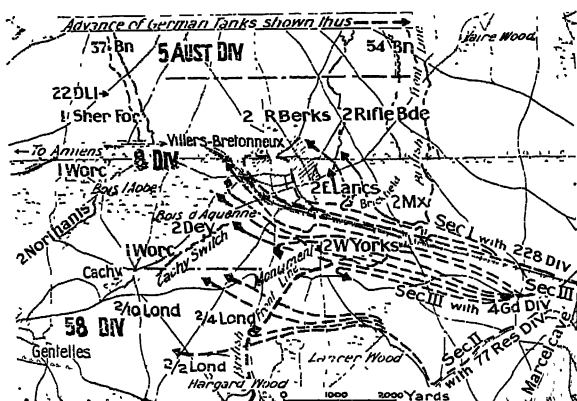
The British front line of posts, like the Australian farther north, was normally approachable only by night, no continuous front line or communication trenches having been dug, and any attempt to visit the posts over the bare surface by day meaning almost certain death. The German bombardment, at least on the Australian front, was heaviest on the supports, the front line being dealt with largely by *minenwerfer*; but on the supports the concentration was terrific. In the report of the 8th Division the general shell-fire is described as being the heaviest ever experienced by the division. The British artillery on its side carried out "counter-preparation of exceptional intensity by guns of all calibres."²² The thickening mist was made denser by smoke,

²¹ The war diary of The Chestnut Troop, R.H.A., which was this day under Elliott's orders, notes as one of the lessons of the action, "Rapidity with which attack orders were got out on 24th inst., made possible by use of well trained cavalry (Aust. Light Horse), who quickly located extent of enemy gains."

²² *The Eighth Division in War, 1914-1918*, by Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Boraston, p. 202.

and by 6 o'clock objects 100 yards away were invisible in its white blanket.

Out of this white wall there suddenly loomed up, north of the railway and at certain points between the Monument and Cachy, German tanks. They were slightly bigger and faster, but more cumbersome than the British ones, and, the conditions of mist and ground being perfect for them, they came steadily on, entirely unaffected by the Lewis gun bullets hurriedly poured upon them by the startled infantry. The details of this terrifying trial of the young British troops are material



for the British history; but how hopeless was their task may be gathered from the narrative of an officer of the 2nd Middlesex whose company held the front immediately north of the railway. This writer—apparently the company commander—was with a platoon in the support trench when, after the bombardment (which he, too, describes as the heaviest in his experience), he was startled by

a sudden, accurate and deadly fire on his support platoon. . . . The nature of this machine-gun fire was unusual; it raked the parapet and any man who put his head up was shot down immediately. . . . Suddenly the machine-gun fire ceased, the writer put his head up and saw an enormous and terrifying iron pill-box . . . bearing straight down on him.²⁸

²⁸ *The Army Quarterly*, Jan. 1930, pp. 381-2. A photograph of one of the German tanks is given in *Vol. XII* of the present history, plate 467.

The tank passed right over him as he crouched in the trench, its caterpillar tracks three feet above his head. As soon as it was clear, he stood up and fired with his revolver at the water-jacket of its rear machine-gun, that being apparently its only vulnerable part, and then turned to face the party of German infantry which was following the tank. These tried to rush the trench, but were shot down by his youngsters. Two more tanks, however, now appeared coming from the front line. Resistance being hopeless, the officer and his men tried to escape by the railway cutting which ran past their right and close round the southern edge of the village. The first tank, moving beside the cutting, fired at them. The officer, who was here wounded, managed to get clear, rallied a small party, made for some abandoned field-guns and took away their sights, and then fell back on the wood in the valley, where he met his brigadier with a British tank-officer coming forward to ascertain the true state of affairs. On his telling them of the German tanks, the brigadier ordered the tank officer to attack them.

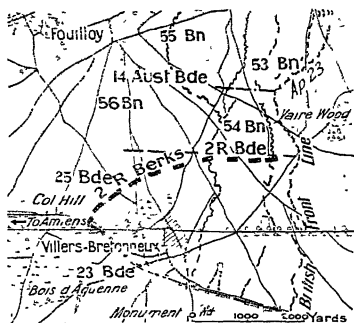
Wherever the German tanks made the assault, the British front line was broken—in most places immediately. They reached the front trenches almost unseen, straddled them or moved up behind them, and had the infantry at their mercy. Their sudden appearance created panic—as would have happened with all troops—and, though some brave men fought stubbornly, whole companies were cut off and surrendered. The Germans claim to have captured this day a total of 2,400 British prisoners.²⁴ A considerable part of the front line thus disappeared, and the German infantry, which actually followed the tanks although it was apparently meant to precede them, passed through the gaps and began to move in rear of the companies that were still resisting. The leading tank referred to in the description quoted above actually kept on its way beside the railway around the south and west of the town, letting the German infantry into this part, although they were held up²⁵ at the brickyards east of the village, and at many

²⁴ *Der Grosse Krieg 1914-1918*, by M. Schwarte, Vol. III, p. 456.

²⁵ Probably by part of the reserve company of the 2nd Middlesex, part of the 2nd East Lancashire, and machine-gunners. The doings of the tanks are recorded in *The Army Quarterly*, July 1934, pp. 308-313, and *The Royal Tank Corps Journal*, July, 1935, p. 70 (Major-General J. F. C. Fuller).

points farther north. Finally, returning through the village, it helped two other tanks to take the brickyards in flank and rear, and widened there the gap through the defences. Part of the penetrating German infantry turned northwards, behind the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, north of the Roman road. Portion of that battalion was cut off; the rest, next to the Australians, fell back and, after trying to stop the enemy at the support and reserve trenches, withdrew northwards on the Australian flank, and formed, with many wide gaps, a thin line at right angles behind it, facing southwards. Meanwhile the three German tanks pushed on to the northern outskirts of the town.

South of the railway six tanks advanced. One broke down near the British front line but the other five subdued the British supports at the Monument—where one monster broke the final resistance of a strong-post by pushing down a wall—and then moved on towards the deep gully south of Villers-Bretonneux, where the wood began. It should here be said that the eastern part of this lofty but open timber was known as the Bois d'Aquenne, the Cachy-Fouillooy road dividing it from the Bois l'Abbé which was part of the same "forest."²⁶ These tanks outflanked the garrison of Villers-Bretonneux (2nd East Lancashire) to the north of them and the counter-attack battalion (2nd Devon) in Cachy Switch to the south. The first that the commander of the Devons knew of the German attack was the appearance of the nose of one monster over the parapet of his headquarters. The two northern companies of his battalion, where Cachy Switch ran to the edge of the valley, were scattered into the Bois d'Aquenne, and the two companies in the southern part of the Switch, on the plateau between the



²⁶ A third portion, at the western extremity two miles away, was known as the Bois de Blangy.

wood and Cachy, found themselves enfiladed by machine-guns ensconced in the deep, sunken cross-roads on the southern rim of the valley.

A mile in front of the Switch, between the Monument and Hangard Wood, four more tanks had broken through the northern battalion (2/4 London) of the 58th Division.²⁷ Its fragments fell back far across the plateau, the centre battalion (2/2nd London) at Hangard Wood swinging back with them and losing the wood except at its south-western corner. The commander of the support battalion (2/10th London) at once counter-attacked, and the retreat stopped, actually a few hundred yards east of Cachy; but, for some time, the higher headquarters were uncertain whether or not Cachy had been lost. The French reported that Hangard was attacked but was still held.

On the northern flank, only the southern battalion of the 5th Australian Division, the 54th, was within the area of intense bombardment. The two flank front-line posts of Captain McNab's²⁸ company, which lay next to the 2nd Rifle Brigade, consisted of platoons under Lieutenants Harvey²⁹ and Winterbottom.³⁰ These were about 50 yards apart; and 30 yards from the flank post, Harvey's, lay the first post of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, close behind which was stationed a British machine-gun. Shortly after the bombardment began Harvey, who expected an attack, thought he saw Germans come up to the thin wire-entanglement in front of the line.³¹ He therefore went over to the Rifle Brigade's post, told the officer-in-charge that he was going to investigate, and moved out to

²⁷ At 8.45 one of these tanks ran into some "undermined ground," turned over on its side, and was afterwards said to have been blown up by German engineers.

²⁸ Capt. D. A. McNab, M.C.; 54th Bn. Clerk; of Lidcombe, N.S.W.; b. Rookwood, N.S.W., 23 July, 1889.

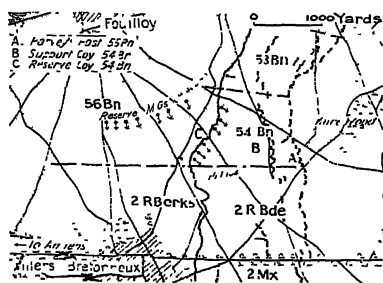
²⁹ Lieut. C. W. Harvey, M.C.; 54th Bn. Share farmer; of Little Swamp, Tambar Springs, N.S.W.; b. Camberwell. London. 6 Nov., 1893.

³⁰ Lieut. C. T. Winterbottom, 54th Bn. Orchardist; of Mangrove Mountain, N.S.W.; b. Padiham, Lancs, Eng., 11 Nov., 1876.

³¹ Earlier in the night he had seen a German patrol in front, and, having arranged with his Lewis gunner, he fired a flare. The Lewis gun pinned the Germans down, and Harvey went out and captured them. They were carrying a number of water-bottles, and one who could speak English told Harvey that they had been told that it was possible for them to go into the village and fill their bottles with wine. It seems probable that they were confusing Villers-Bretonneux with Hamel or Warfusée.

the wire. No German was visible, but he remained sure that an attack was imminent. His sergeant, C. S. Joyce,³² suggested that the bombardment might be "just an ordinary strafe." "Did you ever see one like that?" replied Harvey, pointing to the band of shells bursting along the rear. The company's support trenches were completely destroyed by this fire, the troops there, however, being saved by Captain McNab, who moved them back in time to the reserve trenches. Being somewhat short of ammunition Harvey, with Joyce and a corporal, again visited the next British post, but found it empty of men, as was also the machine-gun post, although the machine-gun remained. Close to it a *minenwerfer* bomb had torn a great crater. Harvey returned with the ammunition that he required, and sent a section to occupy the British trench. Immediately afterwards he was surprised to see approaching from the rear, through the bombardment on Hill 104, a solitary figure. It was Captain McNab going the round of his posts. Harvey reported to him the situation, and sent with him two men in case he was hit and left unaided.

As day dawned, the first movement seen by the flank posts was that of an aeroplane which was heard very close and suddenly appeared low overhead; flying so close and swift that no one could distinguish its markings, and then zooming into the fog. About 7 o'clock the mist cleared, and Vaire Wood became visible across the valley. From it there was moving



into the valley a line of Germans. They passed out of sight there but presently reappeared on the edge of the near slope, 150 yards away, beyond the wire, and began to set up a machine-gun. Harvey ordered one of his men to fire the S.O.S. signal—a rifle-grenade, which should have burst into a

³² Sgt. C. S. Joyce (No. 2432; 54th Bn.). Clerk; of Gladesville, N.S.W.; b. Wellington, N.S.W., 15 Oct., 1875.

string of three flares. The youngster was a reinforcement and, instead of firing the grenade with a blank cartridge, he inserted a live one which blew it to pieces.

But Harvey's men, for whom this was the longed-for opportunity to meet the German offensive, clambered into the open and, standing full height, fired from the shoulder into the advancing line. On the right also could be seen parties of Germans in single file, passing the flank and making towards Villers-Bretonneux, which was hidden from the Australian front line by the curve of the crest. As the "diggers" shot into these, the enemy machine-gun in front got into action. It would probably have swept down the standing men had not a rifle-grenade fired by Harvey burst fairly among its crew. The German party withdrew and did not return. The Lewis gun in the old British post on the right blazed into the Germans on the flank until smashed by a shot from the Rifle Brigade's trenches to the south—the first sign that this line had been seized by the enemy. Thereafter German firing came from the right rear, but Harvey was aware of a line of British troops directly behind his flank. Some time afterwards the Germans endeavoured to enfilade him with a machine-gun at the cross-roads at the head of the valley, a quarter of a mile to his left front; but his left Lewis gun answered them shot for shot, and later, catching their gun's crew in the open, so handled it that all trouble from that quarter ceased.

It was known to the highest British and French commands early in the day that the German attack extended from Villers-Bretonneux to Castel, and the great importance of Villers-Bretonneux at once focussed the eyes of all commanders on the battle. Even Foch, at noon, issued a direct order to Rawlinson to recapture the town as soon as possible. But it was also obvious that this attack was not a general resumption of the "Michael" offensive, but a local attempt to reach or endanger Amiens.

**The
German Side**

It was not, however, known that the principal object of the German attack was to divert attention from the operations in Flanders, where a final attempt was to be made next day to capture Kemmel.

After the war German narratives disclosed that the Michael offensive had really ended on April 4 and 5—the Battle of Dernancourt on the 5th being actually the last flicker of it. Even the effort to reach Amiens on April 4 and 5 was undertaken only through the strong will of the supreme command—the front-line commanders would already have abandoned the attempt.³³ The Lys offensive—designed to further weaken the English and possibly drive them from the Channel ports—had by then been ordered by Ludendorff. The German forces on the front of the “Michael offensive” were to revert to a general defensive, but, in order to prevent their enemy from detecting the change, they were not to dig in or protect their fronts with barbed-wire. Moreover, to divert attention from the Lys front, the Seventeenth and Second Armies were to make limited attacks as soon as possible.

On April 7 Ludendorff suggested that these attacks should be made near Hébuterne, at the Albert bridge-head, and in the Somme-Luce area, and said that the last-named attack must be delivered by April 12 at latest.³⁴ The two armies concerned, however, reported that for a fortnight any major operation must be out of the question. One reason for this, according to the German historian Schwarte, was the constant counter-attacks and bombardments in the Luce area (including, of course, the operations of the 5th Australian Brigade) which “tried the (German) troops to a very high degree.” It thus happened that the only diversion for the Lys attack, apart from keen artillery bombardments, was a successful thrust made on April 6 by the right flank of the Seventh Army—against the French at the southern hinge of the “Michael” advance.³⁵ On April 12 at a conference at Avesnes Ludendorff explained that the attack at Villers-Bretonneux was also required to blunt the sharp German salient driven into the French front south of the Luce. He strongly desired another diverting attack, north of the Somme, but Crown Prince Rupprecht had not sufficient force for both offensives. Even the Somme-Luce attack had to be planned as three phases: advances, first to the line Hamel-Cachy-Domart; then to Fouilloy-Cachy; finally the mopping up of the triangle between Somme and Ancre.³⁶

The main operation was undertaken by three corps, XIV Reserve (south of the Somme), XI (astride of the Luce), and LI (south of the Luce). Each of these was to have received one fresh division, and was also specially to rest some of its own divisions. The arrival of the fresh divisions was delayed, and the attack was postponed, first (as already mentioned) to April 20th; then to the 23rd; finally, for more thorough preparation, until the 24th. In the end only one completely fresh division—the 77th Reserve, from Russia—was available. Other divisions were given short rests—the 228th, 5 days; 4th Guard, 12 days; 208th, 18 days; Guard Ersatz, 5 days; 13th, 10

³³ *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-18*, by General von Kuhl, Vol. II, p. 333.

³⁴ Crown Prince Rupprecht, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 373.

³⁵ This attack (“Archangel”) was delivered earlier than at first intended. It did not greatly disturb the French, who fell back to the Ailette.

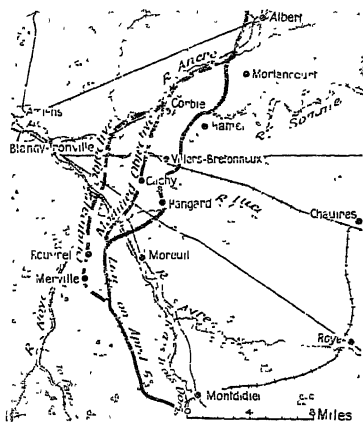
³⁶ Records of the Second German Army show that it had previously envisaged an advance, first to the line Fouilloy-Cachy-Domart, and later to the line Corbie-Aubigny-Blangy Tronville-Gentelles Wood-Fouencamps-Rouvrel-Merville.

days. The Guard Ersatz received 1,000 reinforcements. Of the divisions which meanwhile held the line, the 19th and 9th Bavarian Reserve would furnish reserves for the battle. The 1st Division continued to hold the line south of the Somme, but one of its regiments was allotted to the battle reserves. The 243rd Division was shifted northwards to opposite Hill 104, and, though already ten days in the line, would swing forward on the northern flank of the attack. The objective was finally reduced to the line Villers-Bretonneux-Bois d'Aquenne-Cachy-Hill 105 (beyond Domart)-Berteaucourt-Thennes; but, if the two divisions attacking Villers-Bretonneux succeeded, their success was to be exploited.

Villers-Bretonneux, the principal goal, was to be assaulted by the 228th and 4th Guard Divisions, both of the XIV Corps. The 228th, advancing astride of the Roman road, would attack the town from the north, east, and south-east. The 4th Guard Division, advancing from the south-east into the valley south of the town, would attack from south-east and south. After finding touch in Villers-Bretonneux with the 228th, the 4th Guard Division would swing west to seize the Bois d'Aquenne. In the sector of the next corps (the XI) the 77th Reserve Division was to take, first Hangard Wood and then Cachy. Next on the south, the 208th Division would seize Hangard village and copse, and Hill 99 beyond them. South of the Luce, the Guard Ersatz would take Hourges and cut off the French retreating from Hangard. The 208th would then seize Domart and, together with the Guard Ersatz, advance upon Berteaucourt. The 13th Bavarian Division (right of the LI Corps) would attack west of the Avre, towards Castel.

On the northern flank, Hill 104 was not to be attacked in the first assault—the 243rd Division (north of the Roman road and at Vaire Wood) would merely swing forward its three regiments to make a flank for the 228th. But, as soon as Villers-Bretonneux was taken, the 228th was to advance northwards and seize Hill 104 from the south in conjunction with an attack by the 243rd from the south and east. North of the Somme, the XXIII Reserve Corps would keep down the British artillery there by bombardment, and carry out a strong raid about an hour before the main attack began.

The three divisions attacking on the Villers-Bretonneux-Cachy plateau—228th, 4th Guard, and 77th Reserve—were each assisted by tanks.⁸⁷ The preliminary shelling of the town, woods, and trenches with mustard gas, begun on April 17, was to continue at intervals until the attack; and—a bold departure from the usual practice—in the intense



⁸⁷ The allotment is shown in the sketch on p. 552.

bombardment for two and a quarter hours preceding the attack all these targets, as well as the opposing artillery, would be shelled with gas—chiefly mustard.³⁸ The preliminary bombardment was to include Hill 104, whose garrison was also to be kept under fire during the attack. The German staff noted the “systematic and powerful” activity of the British artillery during the nights preceding the operation, and, significantly, an ammunition train at Wiencourt was hit by a British aeroplane bomb. To many Germans this seemed to indicate that information of the coming attack had reached their opponents, but some attributed the activity of the artillery to the influence of the French, who were wrongly suspected of exercising the command in this sector.³⁹

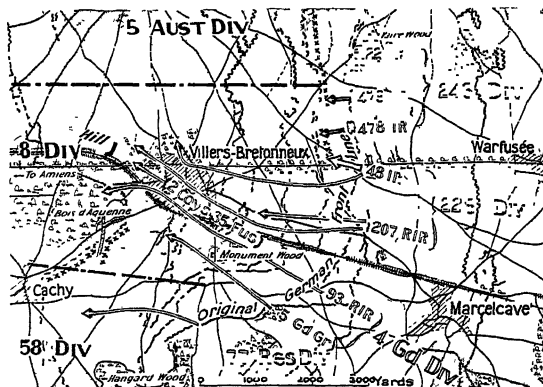
The attack of the 228th and 4th Guard Divisions and of their tanks met with complete success. Part of the 207th R.I.R. (228th Division) pushed on after its tanks straight through the British front north of the railway. Farther north, part of the 48th I.R. of the same division, apparently without tanks, broke through near the Roman road. “The prisoners,” says the historian of the 10th Foot Artillery Regiment, “were mostly young people who only fourteen days before had set foot on French soil.” The infantry who turned northwards behind the 2nd Rifle Brigade were two companies of the III/48th allotted for that task; the rest of the leading troops pressed on into the north of the town; the penetrating battalion of the right regiment—the I/48th—advanced very rapidly and, according to its historian, in spite of hand-to-hand fighting among the houses, it reached the northern outskirts by 7.20. The left regiment, the 207th, was equally swift, reaching the western outskirts at about 8. Farther south the 4th Guard Division, however, was delayed by tough resistance about the Monument; and, even when the tanks had subdued this, the 93rd R.I.R. and 5th Guard Grenadier lost heavily in crossing the open, since (according to German accounts), although many young English troops were rounded up without difficulty—one tank capturing 175—others fought most stubbornly. Eighty British, counter-attacking south-east of the town, captured twenty Germans but in turn were captured by two companies of the Guard Grenadier. Although the town was burning, its garrison maintained deadly machine-gun fire upon the Guard regiments advancing south of it.

Thus, although the 228th Division early broke into Villers-Bretonneux, it was not until about 10 o'clock that the regiments of the 4th Guard Division reached the edge of the town and the valley south of it. The 93rd R.I.R. made contact with the 207th R.I.R. in the town and thence streamed out again over the bridges south-westwards into the valley and the Bois d'Aquenne. Between 10 and 11 a.m. the left regiment—5th Guard Grenadier—accompanied by five tanks, entered the valley direct, the infantry then pressing on into the wood. Opposite the right of Colonel Hill's position, at the western extremity of Villers-Bretonneux, a gap had opened between the 207th and 93rd, but it was filled some time after 10 o'clock by two companies of the reserve regiment of the 228th Division, the 35th Fusilier, whose II Battalion was in close support. According to the regimental history, one of these

³⁸ It was usually assumed that the attacking infantry would not be thrown into places that had been recently shelled with gas. For the bombardment each German field-battery had 1,000 rounds of high-explosive and 1,000 of “yellow cross” (mustard gas), and each field-howitzer battery 1,000 H.E. and 750 yellow cross.

³⁹ *History of the 10th Foot Artillery Regiment*, p. 157.

companies, after reaching the crossing of the Roman road over the railway, seized just beyond it a house containing two British field-guns



one of which they turned on their opponents. Fire from a higher part of the ridge near by, however, forced them to abandon the place. Several of the tanks which reached the same area reported that they fired on and drove back British reinforcements. The field-batteries allotted to the regiments of each division pushed forward to positions near the Monument, where some of them were seen by the British when the mist rose, and came under machine-gun fire from Hill 104.

Farther south still the 77th Reserve Division, with its four tanks helping to direct it, advanced steadily until it had crossed the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road; but there its right was stopped, and the left of the Guard Division, pushing on into the valley and Aquenne Wood, drew farther and farther ahead of it. The III/5th Guard Grenadier, which was close in support, was ordered to fill the gap. The left of the 77th Reserve Division was stopped some distance before Cachy, but two tanks went on towards the village. The left of the 77th and the 208th Division, with no tank to assist, made only trifling headway against the right of the 58th British Division and the French at Hangard. South of the Luce the Germans failed at Thennes; but, beyond the Avre, they drove the French to the Avre-Luce junction and the north-eastern corner of the Bois de Senecat.

The troops who attacked the 54th Australian Battalion were part of the 243rd Division, which, on the extreme northern flank of the attack, swung forward its line from Vaire Wood to keep touch with the 228th in Villers-Bretonneux. Its southern regiment, the 478th, attacking the 2nd Rifle Brigade, had (says its historian) hardly climbed out of its trenches than it was stopped by withering machine-gun fire from Hill 104. Next to it the II/479th, facing the southernmost Australian company, crossed the head of the valley in the mist, despite a light artillery barrage and indirect machine-gun fire. But, on its coming in sight of the posts, the fusillade swelled to "extremely vigorous, well-aimed fire which occasioned very heavy losses."⁴⁰ It tried to dig in on the edge of—and partly in—the wire-entanglement.

⁴⁰ *History of 479th I.R.*, p. 72.

The second wave remained sheltered by the edge of the valley, 150 metres in rear. The British barrage descending, "what remained of the first wave" tried to fall back on the second. By shortly after 7 o'clock the 479th was stopped, waiting for the British barrage to lift, and asking for artillery support against the machine-guns ahead. The commander of the 478th also had asked for all possible artillery fire upon Hill 104, and ordered his attached battery to suppress the machine-guns by direct fire.

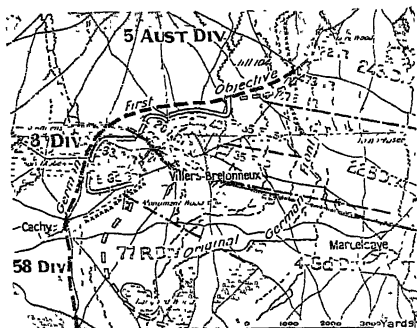
Meanwhile in Villers-Bretonneux the I and III/48th I.R., which had got through to the northern outskirts of the town, were beginning to carry out the second part of their duty by turning northwards and attacking Hill 104. The German artillery, however, evidently had no knowledge of their success, for as they launched this advance it laid—as requested by the 478th—a heavy bombardment on the ground over which they were moving, and also behind them, on the eastern edge of the town, preventing the entry of the II/48th I.R., which should have reinforced them. They were also met by rifle and machine-gun fire from ahead. The tanks, which should have accompanied them, do not appear to have been there. The movement stopped, and the companies were withdrawn to the northern edge of the town. The 2nd Rifle Brigade, which had been holding up the advance, was at about this time overcome—not by the renewed bombardment, but through being outflanked after the loss of the brickworks farther south—and the rest of the 48th I.R., and 478th, went forward. The 243rd Division thus linked its flank with the troops in Villers-Bretonneux. The II/48th also was now able to enter the town.

But it was then too late for any movement of either side to be possible on Hill 104—the field for machine-gun fire was too good. The three battalions of the 48th dug-in in depth to defend the northern edge of the town, with the 478th in a series of posts across the ground to the north-east.

As British prisoners said that a counter-attack would probably come from Hill 104, the local commander of the 48th seized the two remaining companies of the II/35th Fusilier and placed them in gaps in his line.

All day reports came in to the headquarters of the

German divisions concerned and of the XIV Reserve Corps that Hill 104 had been taken. Like those concerning the mythical advance of the two British tanks at Bullecourt,⁴¹ these messages were most detailed. Observers said they could see the infantry moving up the slope and getting into the trenches on the summit. They "could be definitely recognised by their steel helmets, they had put out sheets for aeroplanes, sent lamp messages, and so forth." Many German histories indeed still say that Hill 104 was taken. Deceived by the reports the German



⁴¹ See Vol. IV, pp. 318-20.

artillery lengthened its range and left the hill untouched. "Actually," as the historian of the 479th I.R. says, "no German attacking party set foot on Hill 104 either from the east or attacking north from Villers-Bretonneux."

The 14th Brigade's troops in support and the British remnants on the flank north of Villers-Bretonneux could see, what the 14th Brigade's outpost-line could not see, that the Germans attempting to advance from the town behind the 14th Brigade's line had been driven back to the hedges and plantations forming its outskirts.⁴² Facing them were, first the British groups on the northern and western edges of the same plateau—the northern ones so thin and scattered that many watching Australians were not aware that this line existed; and, second, the support company of the 54th, and the whole of the 56th, very strong and confident, waiting on top of Hill 104 and along its western spur respectively. With them were all sixteen guns of the 14th Machine Gun Company, besides some British machine-guns, and there was therefore little fear of the loss of the hill.

There now occurred a long pause while General Heneker of the 8th Division developed his projected counter-attacks. The first one ordered, that of the 2nd Royal Berkshire⁴³ from the north, was, it will be remembered, found impossible, necessitating, as it did, an advance over the plateau in face of a host of machine-guns. General Heneker next ordered the reserve battalion (2nd Devon) of his southern brigade (23rd) to retake the western third of the town. This undertaking eventually devolved upon a battalion (1st Sherwood Foresters) lent by the reserve brigade (24th),⁴⁴ and had not been begun by noon.

Actually the two first counter-attacks to be made were those of the tanks, which had been sent up in accordance with the earliest orders of the divisional and corps commanders. The first of these strokes was delivered by the three heavy

⁴² See Vol. XII, plate 466.

⁴³ Support battalion, 25th Brigade.

⁴⁴ The first order was that, while the 2nd Devon attacked, the Foresters were to occupy Cacy Switch. As, however, the remnant of the 2nd Devon was already in Cacy Switch, it was decided to keep it there and attack with the Foresters.

tanks kept by the 8th Division in Bois l'Abbé. Brigadier-General Grogan,⁴⁵ commanding the 23rd Brigade, and the commander of this section of tanks, Captain J. C. Brown,⁴⁶ had met in the Bois d'Aquenne shortly after 8 o'clock the company commander of the 2nd Middlesex, whose account has been quoted in this chapter. Thus securing some accurate information, Grogan ordered Brown to take his tanks at once to the vital reserve line across the plateau—Cachy Switch, a trench most vulnerable to tank attack—and stop the Germans before they reached it. The tanks accordingly skirted the south of the wood, climbed on to the plateau, passed through the German barrage, and almost ran over their own men in the Switch. An infantryman, however, stepped up to one of them and called through the flap: "Look out! Jerry tanks about." The commander of the tank, Lieutenant Mitchell,⁴⁷ opened the loop-hole and at once saw, 300 yards away, a "squat-looking monster" approaching, with two waves of infantry following. Farther to left and right crawled two more of these "armed tortoises." Two of the British tanks were "females"—that is, armed only with machine-guns. They were immediately fired on by a gun from the leading German tank, and, being hit and having no gun with which to reply effectively, they withdrew. Mitchell, whose tank was a "male" (carrying two six-pounder guns), fought a duel with the German, manœuvring so as to bring first one gun and later the other to bear upon it. Eventually Mitchell took the risk of stopping, so as to give his gunner a better platform, and at once hit the opposing tank three times in succession. Its crew left it, and he then turned to fire case shot at the infantry, and to shoot at the two other German tanks, which were still advancing. As soon as he fired at one of these, it turned and made off, and, to his surprise, the third followed it. His own tank was now shot at by artillery

⁴⁵ Brig.-Gen. G. W. St. G. Grogan, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 1st Bn., Worcester Regt., 1915/17; 23rd Inf. Bde., 1917/19; 238th Bde., North Russia, 1919. Officer of British Regular Army; of Fifeshire, Scotland; b. Devonport, Eng., 1 Sept., 1875.

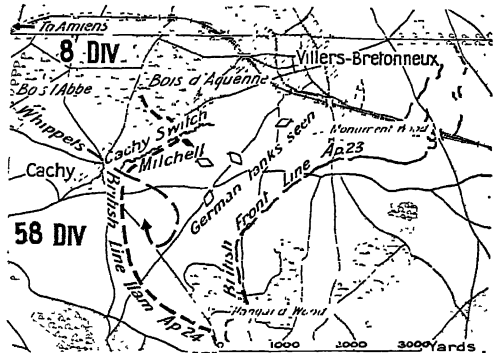
⁴⁶ Capt. J. C. Brown, M.C.; 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Of Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland; b. Ravensdale, Dundalk, 31 May, 1884. Killed in action, 8 Aug., 1918.

⁴⁷ Lieut. F. Mitchell, M.C.; 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Bank clerk; of London; b. St. Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Is., 16 Nov., 1894. (See his accounts in *Everyman at War*, pp. 231-8, and *Tank Warfare*, p. 184 seq.)

and was eventually hit. Mitchell then withdrew his men, and his tank was afterwards repaired and brought in.

As Mitchell retired, at about noon, he saw seven British light tanks—"whippets"—coming speedily into action past Cachy. These

were the force⁴⁸ allotted by General Butler to the 58th Division, and had been ordered by its commander to "clear up" the situation in front of Cachy. They made past the north of that village across the plateau to the



undulation leading southwards to Hangard Wood. On this ridge they quickly came on a line of Germans in shell-holes, with many light machine-guns. Rattling on, they surprised, on the reverse slope, a couple of battalions forming up in the open. These they scattered in all directions, and then turned upon groups of the enemy in shell-holes, chasing them, firing at them, even running down some and crushing them. The heavy German tanks, as well as the field-guns accompanying the German infantry and some *minenwerfer*, fired on the whippets and put four out of action, the crew of one being killed; but the casualties to personnel were only five in all, and whatever further thrust towards Cachy the Germans were then contemplating was foiled; it was not till late in the afternoon that they attempted a new advance there.

The German tanks reported that they rallied a retirement of the 77th Reserve Division in front of Cachy at 11.30 a.m., and destroyed two tanks; and an advanced field-battery of the 4th Guard Division claimed to have hit three. The whippets scattered part of the front line and supporting troops and increased the gap between the 4th Guard and 77th Reserve Divisions, but whether they really caused the 400

⁴⁸ "X" Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, Tank Corps.

casualties, which British observers estimated them to have caused, may be seriously doubted. German regimental historians are usually frank as to losses suffered, and in this case the available records, though mentioning the tanks, say nothing about the casualties, which, if severe, they would hardly fail to notice.

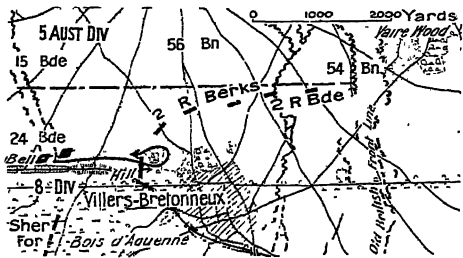
This attack occurred about noon. At the same hour the 1st Sherwood Foresters were moving south of the Bois l'Abbé to reach the south-western corner of the Bois d'Aquenne, where they would make their counter-attack. Brigadier-General Grogan and the commander of the Foresters had gone up and ascertained the position of the enemy. But the battalion ran against a number of machine-guns of the 5th Guard Grenadier, which had been pushed on ahead of their infantry into the wood, and against the flank of the I and II Battalions of that Regiment, which were then thrusting through the empty northern half of the timber. Lieutenant-Colonel Moore⁴⁹ of the Foresters was badly wounded, and the counter-attack entirely failed. News of these events was very slow and vague, but the battalion was reported to have fallen back through the wood to the narrow road forming the boundary between its two parts—Bois l'Abbé and Bois d'Aquenne. The road was shelled and the battalion lost heavily.

Meanwhile General Heneker at 11 a.m. had ordered the commander of his northern brigade (25th) to prepare a counter-attack with the 2nd Royal Berkshire and "two companies" of the 2nd Rifle Brigade from the north against the town. Upon the brigadier's consulting the two battalion commanders, all agreed that the operation was impossible. After long delay it was accordingly cancelled. But one male and one female tank—Lieutenant Grove's⁵⁰ section of the 1st Battalion—which had been allotted to the 8th Division and ordered to co-operate with this attack, duly arrived at 1 p.m. north of the railway, in the valley half-a-mile west of the town. Grove found that the infantry there knew nothing of any order to counter-attack, and the male tank was hit

⁴⁹ Lieut.-Col. R. F. Moore, D.S.O., M.C.; 1st Bn., Notts and Derby Regt. (Sherwood Foresters). Killed in action 30 May, 1918.

⁵⁰ Capt. C. F. S. Grove, M.C.; 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Structural engineer; of New Malden, Surrey, Eng.; b. London, 19 Dec., 1891. Killed in action, 8 Aug., 1918.

by a forward German gun. Lieutenant Bell,⁵¹ commanding the other, was asked by the local infantry to withdraw as it was attracting shell-fire. Grove, however, sent it forward again, and at about 4 o'clock it reached the thin line, formed by Colonel Hill's men, Christian's and Callander's patrols, and the 2nd Royal Berkshire, near the edge of the village. Passing through, it cleared a number of German machine-guns from the ground about the north-western outskirts and, despite intense machine-gun fire from the houses, rounded a small outlying copse—the furthest point that the Germans here had reached. The enemy ran back from the copse and the British line on this side of the village⁵² advanced about 150 yards to the position which Christian had first occupied, and to the copse. This spontaneous attack by the troops on the spot was



the only counter-attack carried out with success by the infantry of the 8th Division, and was the only one that could have been so carried out. The orders for the others had become impossible of fulfilment long before the troops could have launched them.

German records show that the male British tank of Grove's section was disabled by a hit by one of two field-guns of the 2/39th German battery which their commander, Sergeant-Major Jarocz, had actually brought through to the western edge of Villers-Bretonneux. The history of the 35th Fusilier Regiment says that part of the 93rd R.I.R. in the valley south of the Roman road also retired in front of the tanks, but, with the support of these field-guns, the 5th company of the 35th Fusilier held its position, and the 93rd advanced again.

⁵¹ Lieut. S. C. Bell, 1st Bn., Tank Corps Railway clerk; of Lincoln, Eng., b. 28 July, 1889.

⁵² The remnant of the 2nd East Lancs. under Colonel Hill, and the right post of the 2nd R. Berkshire. Hill was out of touch with headquarters, runners being unable to get through. Christian, however, reached headquarters, and sent him a message, "Hold on, help is coming." Christian's patrol had signalled back to its brigade by lamp, but no answer could be obtained to its signals.

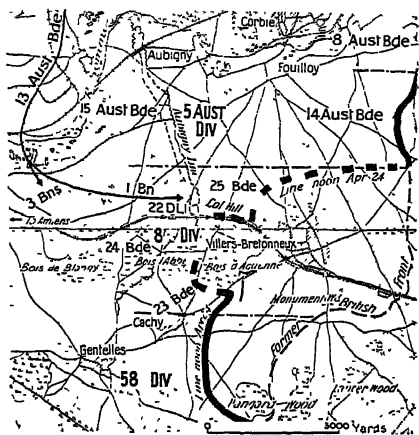
CHAPTER XVII

SECOND VILLERS-BRETONNEUX—(II) THE COUNTER-ATTACK

As soon as the news that Villers-Bretonneux was lost reached the higher headquarters, orders showered down for its immediate recapture. As often happened, the lower commander had usually issued his order before that from his superior arrived.

Final plan of counter-attack

The order from General Foch, for example, came about midday,¹ but General Rawlinson had already taken the vital measures. At 9.30 a.m., as soon as he was informed of the loss of Villers-Bretonneux, he ordered the nearest Australian reserve brigade—the 13th,² billeted at Querrieu, Pont Noyelles, and Daours, north of the Somme as Army Reserve—to march south at once to the III Corps, “to assist in the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux, which was imperative for the security of Amiens.”³ Like Elliott’s, this brigade had early that morning been ordered to be ready to move, but some hours later had been informed that no German attack had followed the bombardment. It was now at first directed to Lamotte-Brebière, on the Somme opposite Glisy, where were Headquarters of the 8th Division, but the destination was almost immediately changed to Blangy-Tronville, the next village up-river, through which the route was shorter. At 10.40



¹ See *French Official History, Tome VI, Vol. 1, p. 490.*

² Belonging to the 4th Division. It had been at Corbie acting as reserve for guarding the Somme crossings (under 3rd Division) but on April 22 became Army Reserve.

³ The quotation is from the war diary of the III Corps General Staff.

General Butler promised the brigade to General Heneker. One of its four battalions must take the place of the 22nd Durham Light Infantry (Pioneers), which had just been ordered to advance from the reserve line and support Colonel Hill. The other three might be used for counter-attack. General Glasgow's battalions were warned at 9.40; packs and blankets were at once stored, and at 10.15 the order issued to march at 11.15. Ten minutes later the rear battalions were heading down the pretty valley of the Hallue on the eight-mile journey that was to end near Bois l'Abbé.

General Rawlinson—as indeed he was bound to do if he was to retain Haig's confidence—insisted throughout that Villers-Bretonneux must be retaken that night at the latest; and at 11.30, while the counter-attack by the Sherwood Foresters was still undelivered, he directed that General Heneker should get touch with General Hobbs of the 5th Australian Division with a view to arranging a double counter-stroke, north and south of the town, to take place at 2 o'clock.⁴ The III Corps had previously stopped Elliott's preparations by the intimation that the 8th Division itself would undertake the attack on both sides of the town; Hobbs had also offered some hours before to attack the town, if desired, with the two reserve battalions of the 14th Brigade, which were closer to it than the 15th Brigade. Heneker, however, was impressed by the advice previously received from Brigadier-General Coffin (25th Brigade) that on the open plateau north of the town any attempt to advance in daylight with hurried artillery preparation would result only in very heavy loss. On the other hand Heneker believed that, the moon being full, the attempt might be successfully made at night. He accordingly pressed the postponement on General Butler, who agreed.

By this time it was understood that the efforts of the 8th Division to counter-attack, which had dwindled to the attempt by the Sherwood Foresters, had failed. It was therefore urgent to arrange the night attack. General Hobbs, fuming at the apparent delay in taking adequate steps, telephoned to General Birdwood impressing him with the need for urgent action. At 2.50 Hobbs was again rung up by General Butler,

⁴ Rawlinson told Foch that a counter-attack would be launched at that hour.

who told him that a request was being made for the help of the 5th Australian Division in an operation to be undertaken by the 8th Division. Hobbs at once warned Elliott to move the 15th Brigade to a position of readiness in the valley north-west of Villers-Bretonneux. At 3 o'clock Hobbs was informed that his division was being placed under the III Corps for the forthcoming operation. Ten minutes later he telephoned to General Butler his suggestion as to the way in which his division should assist the 8th. He proposed to strike with three battalions of the 15th Brigade in a south-easterly direction past the northern side of Villers-Bretonneux (that is, in accordance with Elliott's general plan).

The troops are now well on the way (he added).⁵ Can I give definite orders to the Brigadier? Will the 8th Division attack along the railway from west to east? Anyway, I will get our people assembled in 24 Central (the valley north of the town).

Although Hobbs could for the moment obtain no answer to his questions, the main plan for the forthcoming counter-attack had long since been determined—probably it was settled at 11.30, when Rawlinson directed that the 5th Division should be asked to assist the 8th. The *liaison* officer of the 5th Australian Division at Heneker's headquarters has stated that Heneker's chief staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Armitage,⁶ made the suggestion which was then put forward, that the attack should be launched by two brigades, one on each side of the town, ignoring the town itself and meeting beyond it. Probably the same plan—a common and fairly obvious one for attacks on villages and small towns—had suggested itself to most of the commanders and staffs concerned; indeed Elliott had all day been itching to carry out his own similar plan. Whoever made the suggestion, General Rawlinson not only approved of it, but explained to Butler on the telephone precisely how he wished the attack to be done, and sent a member of his own staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Beddington,⁷ to Heneker's

⁵ In this statement Hobbs was wrong (as will be seen). The conversation is quoted from a note taken at the time.

⁶ Major-Gen. C. C. Armitage, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O.(3), 14th Divn., 1915/16; G.S.O. (2), G.H.Q., 1916, G.S.O. (1), 1917; G.S.O. (1), 8th Divn., 1918; Commandant, Staff College, Camberley, since 1934. Of Honley, Yorkshire; b. Huddersfield, Yorks., 12 Dec., 1881.

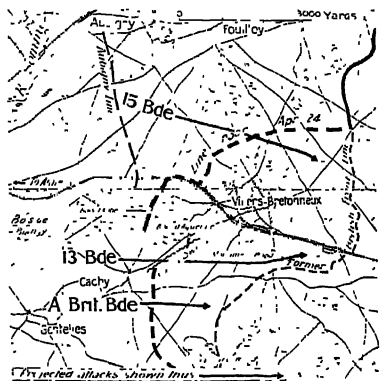
⁷ Lieut.-Col. E. H. L. Beddington, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., p.s.c.; 16th Lancers. G.S.O. (3), 2nd Cav. Divn., 1914; G.S.O. (2), Indian Cav. Corps, France, 1915, 2nd Cav. Divn., 1916, Fifth Army, 1916; G.S.O. (1), 8th Divn., 1916/17, Fifth Army, 1917/18, Fourth Army, 1918/19. Of Much Hadham, Hertfordshire; b. London, 7 Jan., 1884.

headquarters to see that there should be no mistake in this. Both Rawlinson and Haig tried to get from the French the assistance of the French Moroccan Division, which was in reserve behind the British right. General Debeney promised this, if the counter-attack could be postponed for a day, but Rawlinson was determined that the blow should fall before the Germans had settled into their new positions.

It has been seen that General Hobbs could at first obtain no information as to the 8th Division's part in the plan. Finally, at 3.30, he rang up Heneker, who said that the 8th Division's attack would be made south of the town, and that the attacking forces were to meet on the farther side. Heneker added the expected but exciting information that, for its part in the operation, the 8th Division would be using the 13th Australian Brigade. "Zero" hour would be 9 p.m. As to the time, Hobbs, being by no means certain that the 15th Brigade could successfully attack in the dark, telephoned to General Butler, who replied that the hour would probably be 8. Hobbs then rang up Elliott, who said he was glad to have the 13th Brigade on his right. He was ready to attack by moonlight, and would prefer to do so without artillery preparation.

The reason for General Heneker's delay in furnishing details of his intentions probably was that the 13th Australian Brigade, which was to make the attack for him, had never seen the ground, and its commander, Brigadier-General Glasgow, insisted upon gaining a clear notion of the situation, and completely satisfying himself as to the plans, before he undertook an operation of such extraordinary difficulty as a deep night attack over terrain unknown to himself or his troops. Many of the leaders who by 1918 had won their way to command Australian brigades and divisions—Monash, Elliott, Brand, Gellibrand, Rosenthal, Smith, and Glasgow—were men of powerful personality; but Glasgow was the strongest of them all. An Australian counterpart of the best type of English country gentleman, transparent as his own Queensland sky, but rugged as the Queensland hills, he was slow and even shy in giving his opinion; but when he spoke, his good sense, force of will, and honesty of purpose carried their way in councils of war as they did years afterwards in

the Federal Cabinet. On his being ordered to report to General Heneker at Glisy (on the Somme flats a mile west of Blangy-Tronville), General Monash lent him a car and shortly before noon he arrived there. Heneker told him that Villers-Bretonneux had fallen; that the Germans were in Bois d'Aquenne and possibly in Cachy, but that the reserve line, Gentelles-Aubigny, was intact. After dropping one battalion at this line, north of the wood, he must take the other three on to the Bois de Blangy (the western outlier of the Bois l'Abbé). There, he said, they would probably be used for counter-attack, but it was also possible that they might be attacked there. Glasgow, for whom the vital matter was to settle upon a safe starting line of the probable counter-attack, now asked if the Cachy Switch and the Bois l'Abbé were held by the British. "We have troops through the wood here," replied Heneker, pointing to the map, "and here—and others in Cachy Switch here—but of course the situation is changing from moment to moment. I can't be sure of it." Glasgow recognised



that Heneker could not tell him what he wanted to know, and decided to act for himself. "Oh, I can easily find out about that, Sir," he said. "I'll go up there myself and come back and see you."

He left at once, and, sending his intelligence officer, Captain Clark,⁸ back to meet the battalions and give their commanders verbal orders as to their destinations and probable task, he and his brigade-major and inseparable companion, Major Roy Morell, drove to Blangy Wood, near which, under a high railway bridge in the fields, were headquarters of the 23rd and 24th Brigades. Here were the two brigadiers,

⁸ Capt. T. G. Clark, M.C.; 50th Bn. Student; of Norwood, S. Aust.; b. Norwood, 6 April, 1896.

Haig⁹ and Grogan, both of whom had for ten hours been bearing the heaviest strain of this crucial day. Four weeks later Brigadier-General Grogan won the Victoria Cross for magnificent personal leadership when his brigade was again attacked, on the French front. This day, both he and his colleague were well-nigh exhausted, but at that moment there came in a staff officer, "a younger man," said Glasgow afterwards, describing the incident, "one of those efficient young English Regular Army officers—you know the type. He came in wringing the sweat from his forehead as he took off his tin hat, but perfectly collected and competent. 'Here's the man I want,' I said, and took him aside. 'You may be able to tell me—I want to know if you have troops in this Cachy Switch, south of the wood? Have you been up there?' 'Yes, I have just come back from there.' 'Are your men in it?' 'Yes.' 'Can I be certain they'll hold?' 'Yes, I'm sure they will.' 'Well, how about this trench through the wood? Are you there?' 'Yes, there are a lot of men in it.' 'Will they hold?' 'I feel sure they will.' 'Well, I want you to get someone through to them to tell them to hang on whatever they do. There'll be troops up to them in two hours' time.'"

Glasgow returned at once to Glisy, and as he came over the last rise looking down to Blangy-Tronville and the new bridges made by the Australian engineers across the Somme, there was the head of his brigade just crossing the river. The battalions contained a large proportion of young recruits recently received to make good the losses of Dernancourt, but they were marching full of confidence, helmets cocked, cigarettes in mouths. Another Australian who saw them noted:

Passed at Noyelles our 51st Battalion—very strong and looking grand.

"Poor chaps," thought Glasgow. "They're in for a tougher time than they realise." He now saw the battalion commanders personally and told them that they would probably have to attack, and where. They moved on in artillery

⁹ Brig.-Gen. R. C. Haig, D.S.O.; 16th Lancers. Commanded, 2nd Bn., Berkshire Regt., 1916/17; 24th Inf. Bde., 1917/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Sunningdale, Berkshire, Eng.; b. Kensington, London, 1 Feb., 1873.

formation across the Somme flats, a German airman following them closely for part of the way, and firing at them ineffectually with his machine-gun.

The history of the 478th I.R. says that German airmen came back with the report that they had seen columns of all arms on the move towards the scene of action.

It was 2.30 when General Glasgow returned to General Heneker at Glisy, and resumed the conference upon the plans. He told Heneker that he had decided to start from a north-south line—said to be clear of the enemy—between the wood and Cachy village, and to attack eastwards, south of the wood, and past the south of Villers-Bretonneux. “But you can’t do that,” was the reply. “The corps commander says the attack is to be made from Cachy.”

Glasgow said he could not do it that way. “Why, it’s against all the teaching of your own army, Sir, to attack across the enemy’s front. They’d get hell from the right.” Attacking eastwards he would have his right protected and could do something to protect his left by dropping troops as he advanced, to deal with the wood. “Tell us what you want us to do, Sir,” he said, “but you must let us do it our own way.” It was therefore settled that the attack should be made as he desired. He preferred to have no preliminary bombardment or creeping barrage, which would merely give warning of the attack and could not be effective since the German positions were unknown, and many of the British guns had retired and had not yet shot themselves in. The artillery would, however, assist during the advance by bombarding Villers-Bretonneux, the railway, and the Monument for an hour after the start, and then, lifting its fire to a line well beyond that of the old British front. A brigade (54th) lent by the 18th Division to the 58th would be advancing on Glasgow’s right. On his left, after ignoring Villers-Bretonneux and passing the Monument, his brigade would meet the 15th Australian Brigade which would have advanced past the north of the town—the meeting point to be at the old British front line 600 yards north of the railway. The Germans in the town and the Bois d’Aquerne would thus be cut off, but would be “mopped up” by two battalions of the 8th Division

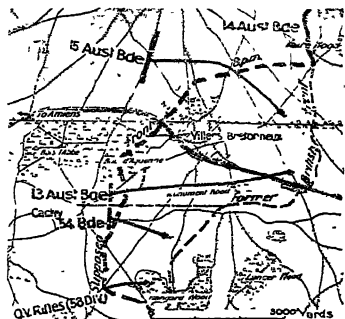
lent to the Australian brigadiers for the purpose—the 2nd Northamptonshire to Glasgow, and the 22nd Durham Light Infantry (Pioneers) to Elliott.

As Glasgow was leaving he asked: "What about the time? You must co-ordinate that, Sir." On being asked what time he proposed, he said 10.30. Heneker replied that this would not do—could he start at 8? On Glasgow pointing out that at this hour the light would be too clear—indeed only a few minutes past sunset—Heneker again mentioned the corps commander, who "wished it done at 8."

"If it was God Almighty who gave the order, we couldn't do it in daylight," burst out Glasgow. "Here is your artillery largely out of action and the enemy with all his guns in position."

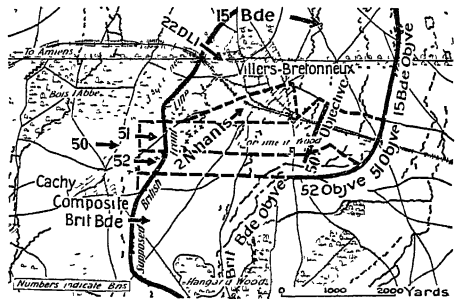
Heneker said that all the other troops would be ready at 8, but he referred the matter to General Butler; and, after Glasgow had been asked successively whether 8.30, 9, or 9.30 would suit him, he eventually agreed to meet the corps commander's view to the extent of conceding half-an-hour and attacking at 10.

As it was then four o'clock, Glasgow asked for a car to be sent to fetch his battalion commanders and Lieutenant-Colonel Latham¹⁰ of the 2nd Northampton to meet him at Glisy. Meanwhile a few maps, roughly printed by III Corps but accurate and up-to-date, were obtained, and the battalion boundaries and objectives marked on them. Glasgow issued these to his battalion commanders—one map marked for each battalion—and explained that he would attack eastwards with two battalions in the front line—52nd on right, 51st next to the wood—and the 50th following close behind. They were to ignore both wood and village, the 51st going 4,000 yards



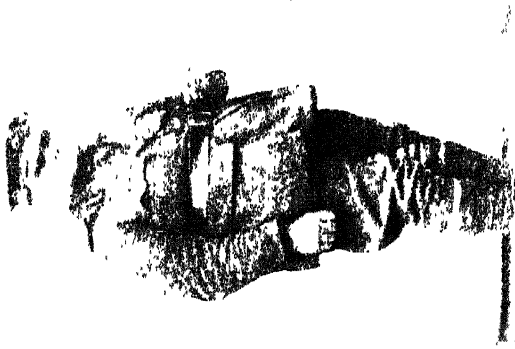
¹⁰ Lieut.-Col. S. G. Latham, D.S.O., M.C. Commanded 2nd Bn., Northants Regt, 1917/18. Works manager; b. Kemp Town, Sussex, Eng., 24 April, 1872. Killed in action, 25 April, 1918.

straight to the old line beyond the Monument, the 52nd dropping its companies south of the Monument where the line swung back. The 50th would stop 1,000 yards behind them, just beyond the Monument. The 2nd Northants, after passing the Bois d'Aquenne, would attack Villers-Bretonneux from the south-west and clear the southern half of it—the 22nd Durham Light Infantry would be carrying out a similar service for the 15th Brigade in the northern half. Jumping-off tapes were to be laid at once by the intelligence



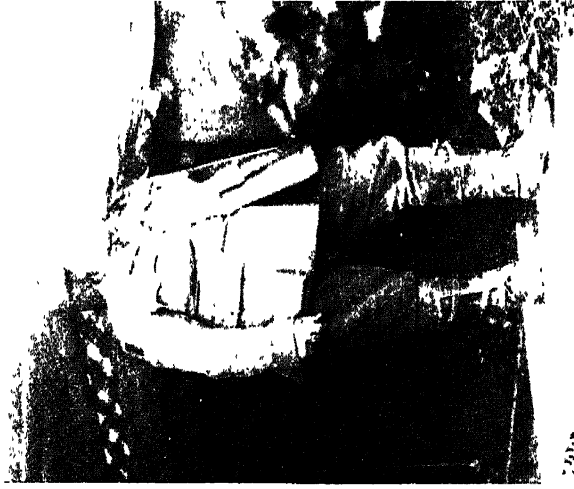
officers of the brigade and battalions. As the battalion commanders departed, a copy of Glasgow's brief written order was handed to each of them. One precaution was particularly stressed: the colonels of the two leading battalions must keep close touch with one another. They arranged to move each on the inner flank of his troops, and to meet at four points during the advance—wherever the troops crossed a road or other easily recognised landmark. Their headquarters were eventually to be established together in the dip beyond Cachy Switch. Following the same principle, when his subordinates left at 7.5 p.m. to motor back to their battalions, Glasgow went to Blangy-Tronville to establish his headquarters with those of Elliott.

It was the first opportunity the two brigadiers had obtained of comparing their plans. Elliott, like Glasgow, had reported to General Heneker during the afternoon, but what passed at their conference is not recorded—except that the effect of this second strong personality and of Elliott's brusque and dominant methods seemed rather to over-power the divisional commander. Elliott had already directed his battalions to carry out the counter-attack as ordered by himself in the morning. This plan, however, was modified upon General



BRIGADIER-GENERAL WILLIAM
GLASGOW, 13TH BRIGADE
Aust. War Memorial Official Photo.
No. E2135. Taken on 25th April, 1918.

52. THE BRIGADIERS CHIEFLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
VILLERS-BRETONNEUX



BRIGADIER-GENERAL H. E. ELLIOTT,
15TH BRIGADE
Aust. War Memorial Official Photo
No. E2855. Taken on 9th August, 1918

THE COUNTER-ATTACK, SECOND



53. VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, SEEN FROM THE POSITION SECURED BY THE 51ST BATTALION
SOUTH OF THE TOWN

The 15th Brigade, advancing on the other side of the town, first met opposition near the wood seen in the centre (The trenches shown were dug later)

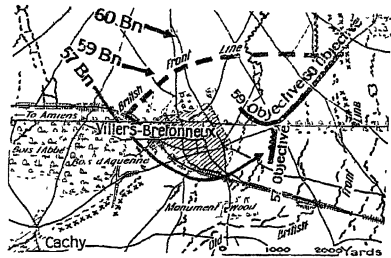
*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E.2687a.
Taken on 11th July, 1918.*

Heneker's informing General Hobbs that the 13th Brigade was not strong enough to retake the front as far north as the Roman road. Elliott agreed to cover that front down to 600 yards north of the railway, and to this end ordered his third battalion, the 57th, to attack round the south of the town and meet its sister battalions on the far side, where its left was to join the centre of the 59th, as shown in the marginal sketch.

This arrangement was in accordance with his cherished scheme: but so many alterations had been made to that plan during the day that, realising that his battalion commanders might be confused, he summoned them to a conference—collecting them, and later sending them back, in his salvaged French motor-car.

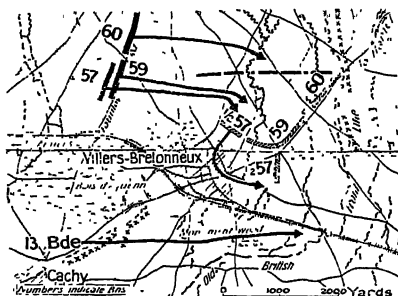
On their arrival he explained his final plan: assemble at Cachy-Fouilloy road; advance at 10 o'clock up the valley north-west of the town to the first objective (Villers-Bretonneux—Hamelet road); swing forward the left; advance to the second objective, as in his original plan, the 57th swinging round the south of the town and prolonging the line of the 59th by establishing itself on that part of the final objective which lay south of the Roman road. Precisely what instructions Elliott now gave as to the position of the final objective it is difficult to ascertain, and on this point there afterwards arose a difference of opinion which might have had serious results. But Elliott's instructions to the guiding officers of the 56th were characteristically downright and definite—they were to place the attacking troops in the old British outpost line that had been lost that morning. He warned his battalion commanders, however, that junction with the 13th Brigade could only be ensured by prompt and vigorous patrolling, upon the necessity of which he was particularly emphatic.

The conference was just breaking up when, about 8 o'clock, Brigadier-General Glasgow arrived at Elliott's headquarters and, learning of Elliott's plan, at once objected that the 57th



would be crossing the advance of the two British battalions which were to "mop up" the town, and that in the dark it would inevitably find itself fighting with them, and possibly with the 13th Brigade. He suggested that the 57th should follow the right flank of the 59th past the north of the town, and then be used not only for joining the 13th Brigade but also for "mopping up" the town from the east. Elliott saw the force of the objection, and adopted this scheme. He now told his battalion commanders that the 57th must pass round the north of the town, tucked behind the right of the other two battalions. Two of its companies would then come up on the right of the 59th, and take position south of the Roman road; the other two would be dropped in rear to face the town and protect the rear. If all went well, these two at dawn would clear the Germans from the eastern end of the town, and then come out to support the southern end of the front line. Four machine-guns from the 14th Company and four from the 25th Company (A.I.F.), and two sections of Stokes mortars¹¹ would accompany the two leading battalions (59th and 60th). In the 14th Brigade, the 54th Battalion undertook to hold its present line unbroken, and the 56th, which knew

well the ground to be retaken, sent thirty-two guides—that is, one to accompany every platoon of the 59th and 60th—under Lieutenants Watt and Threlkeld.¹² These would accompany the 15th Brigade throughout the battle, acting under the general direction of Captain Plomley (who had been temporarily in charge of the 56th).



Note.—The objective is here shown as understood by 59th Bn. (see pp. 606-7).

¹¹ Of the 15th Aust. Light Trench Mortar Battery.

¹² Lieut. L. K. Threlkeld, 56th Bn. School teacher; of Gundagai, N.S.W.; b. Temora, N.S.W., 16 Feb., 1896.

It was past 8 when, this conference having ended, the commanders of Elliott's battalions got back to their troops and gave their company commanders the latest instructions for the attack. Their bivouacs were near the Somme banks, two miles from the assembly position, and so hurried was the start that in the 57th the commander of the reserve company had to promise his platoon commanders to instruct them during the march—there was no time beforehand. The battalion commanders of the 13th Brigade had returned to their troops a little earlier. From Heneker's headquarters they had sent word for their company commanders to be ready assembled to meet them, and to have their companies meanwhile prepared to move. The battalion intelligence officers also were to have their scouts ready to go ahead and tape the starting line. All assembled under the rain-proof sheet of the headquarters of the 2nd Northamptonshire in Blangy Wood, and by candlelight Lieutenant-Colonels Christie¹³ and Whitham of the 51st and 52nd and Latham of the Northants gave their orders while the seconds-in-command marked maps for their company commanders. "I was much impressed by the calmness of the Australian officers," wrote Captain Essame,¹⁴ the adjutant of the Northamptonshire, in an account of the battle.

The company commanders had only ten minutes to instruct their platoon commanders—the march to the starting point had then to begin. There was no time for reconnaissance; they had never seen the ground for the attack or the approach, and moved by map direction alone, each company independently, skirting the south of the wood. Meanwhile the brigade intelligence officer, Captain Clark, with Lieutenants Julin (52nd) and Phillips¹⁵ (51st) and their eight scouts, went forward to tape out the starting line, the left of which was to rest on the southernmost point of Aquenne Wood, 300 yards east of the Cachy-Fouilloy road.

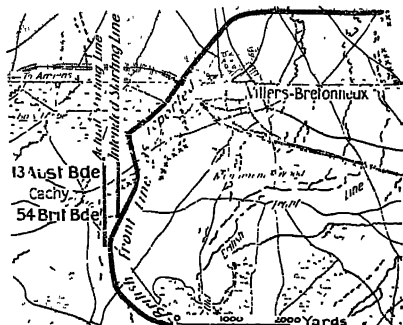
¹³ Lieut.-Col. R. Christie, D.S.O. Commanded 51st Bn., 1917/19; afterwards wing commander in R.A.A.F. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Bundaberg, Q'land; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 5 Aug., 1883.

¹⁴ Major H. Essame, M.C., p.s.c.; 2nd Bn., Northants Regt. Student; of London; b. Exeter, Eng., 24 Dec., 1896.

¹⁵ Lieut. N. C. Phillips, 51st Bn. Labourer; of Dampier, W. Aust.; b. Meningie, S. Aust., 6 Dec., 1889. Died of wounds, 17 May, 1918.

The battalion commanders had told the company commanders (as they themselves had been instructed, and as some records of the higher staff still aver) that the woods on their left were practically free from the enemy, the British troops having been told to clear them in the afternoon. They were therefore to be ignored—the battalions would make straight for Monument Wood, which would form a good direction mark. Flank guides would be the woods and valley close on the left and the Cachy-Marcelcave road on the right. As the cross-road immediately in front of the Monument had to be reached by 11 o'clock, when the artillery would lift from it, speed was necessary. The front line must push on at all costs, leaving trenches to be mopped up by the second line, and all Germans met before reaching the Monument road would be "dealt with rapidly." Repeated five minutes later by the company commanders for their men, the order ended—in the words of little Captain "Billy" Harburn¹⁶ of the 51st: "The Monument is your goal and nothing is to stop your getting there. Kill every bloody German you see, we don't want any prisoners, and God bless you."

Meanwhile the intelligence officers were at work near the starting point. It was not dark until 9 o'clock, and they were surprised to find themselves sharply fired on from the corner of the wood beyond the Cachy - Fouilloy road where, according to the information and maps received from the 8th Division, it was free of the enemy. They accordingly asked an N.C.O. of the 1st Worcestershire, who with a party of ten



occupied a neighbouring trench, to drive the Germans in a little. Together with four of the Australian scouts this party lined the edge of the wood, and temporarily suppressed the enemy's fire.

¹⁶ Capt. W. R. Harburn, M.C.; 51st Bn. Bank clerk; of Cottesloe, W. Aust.; b. Auburn, N.S.W., 28 Sept., 1895.

The Germans were actually holding the whole of the Bois d'Aquenne with a considerable part of two regiments, the 93rd R.I.R. occupying the northern part of it and the Roman road on its northern edge, and all three battalions of the 5th Guard Grenadier, with their 2nd and 3rd Machine Gun Companies, holding the southern part. The history of this regiment says that at 8 o'clock it was observed that the "English" were preparing to counter-attack. Reserve Lieutenant Reusch, commanding the 3rd Company, disposed "his few available riflemen and machine-guns" so that they "shot down the enemy, who had already begun his deployment, or compelled him to fall back." (Probably they saw Captain Clark and his companions determining the points for the flanks, which the intelligence officers did before dark.)

Fortunately the dark came on rapidly, the moon being covered at this stage by clouds so that the blackness was soon—with rare intervals—intense. The intelligence officers with the remaining scouts laid the tapes southwards from the corner abovementioned, 300 yards in rear of the line previously intended. In the meantime the battalions had been on the move.

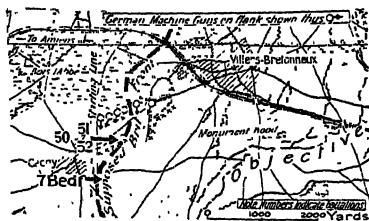
At the top of the long slope (wrote Captain Forsyth, medical officer of the 52nd) we took to ploughed ground and shuffled and halted along. Woods appeared on our left and the only sound was from our right front where crash and flash monotonously lit up a little village, Cachy. We toiled on taking an incredible time to go a few kilos . . . We could see absolutely nothing and toiled out into the black . . . until Cachy was very near on our right. We came to a long straggling line of men seated on a tape.

It was 9.45, a quarter of an hour before "zero" hour, when the leading companies of the 52nd had reached the tape. They had passed large numbers of British soldiers retiring—part of the 23rd Brigade had been ordered to withdraw and re-form behind the wood. Many called to the Australians, "Jerry's coming." "Give 'em hell, Aussie," said one, "they've knocked us rotten." The 52nd found upon its right the 7th Bedfordshire, left battalion of the 54th Brigade. On the left the leading company of the 51st arrived at 9.53. As that battalion was pushed into place by Lieutenant-Colonel Christie, who was there ahead of it, a flare was fired by the enemy and a machine-gun opened from the wood directly left of the line. Christie, who, as arranged, had met Lieutenant-Colonel Whitham of the 52nd, had agreed with him to delay the advance for ten minutes to give the 51st time to deploy. At 10 o'clock the British artillery opened on Villers-Bretonneux and the region near it, and the sky became rimmed with glare. At 10.5 the answering German barrage began to fall

sharply on the area of the assembly. At 10.10, when the two front companies and support company of the 51st were in position—with the reserve company deploying behind them, and the head of the reserve battalion (50th) just visible coming up from the rear—the word to advance was given.

The whole field (wrote Forsyth) was soft . . . and covered with men hurrying forward in what looked like disorder. The lights [flares] died out and I plodded forward with a thin line of men about me into the dark. Again the lights sprang up in front of us and an officer shouted "Still." I could see a long single line of men standing motionless as far as I could see in either direction, and, as the light faded, the darkness in front started to tap, tap, tap, and bullets whistled round and the line shuffled forward with rifles at the ready like men strolling into fern after rabbits. The whistle of bullets became a swish and patter, and boys fell all round me, generally without a sound.

The wood on the left lay on the slopes descending from the Cachy plateau; the platoon next to it, forming the left of Captain Harburn's company, was under Lieutenant Sadlier.¹⁷ He had been telling his men: "If you hear any noise in the wood, don't 'get the wind up'—it will only be a few Tommies cleaning up the Germans there." But the advance had hardly begun when flare after flare shot up from the trees and a number of machine-guns opened from behind the undergrowth enfilading the line with intense fire. Many of Harburn's company were hit. The flank troops all dropped to the ground and lay there till the flares died out, when they at once began to advance again, only to be illuminated by another sheaf of flares, and again swept by intense machine-gun fire. Again they stopped, and, as the machine-guns completely enfiladed the line, further advance along the slope direct to the Monument, in accordance with orders, was apparently impossible. The companies to the



right, on the plateau, were out of sight, but on the slope the men could only stay as still as possible, a yard or two between them. Each flare showed many groups of five or six, lying,

¹⁷ Lieut. C. W. K. Sadlier, V.C.; 51st Bn. Commercial traveller; of Subiaco, W. Aust.; b. Camberwell, Vic., 1892.

kneeling, or half-kneeling, all up the hillside, and it looked as if the advance might be permanently held up. The sergeant of the platoon next to Sadlier's, a tall, dark, lithe Western Australian, "Charlie" Stokes,¹⁸ crept up to Sadlier and asked him what he was going to do. "Carry out the order—go straight to our objective," replied Sadlier. "You can't do it," said Stokes, "you'll all be killed." "Well, what can we do?" "Collect your bombers and go into the wood and bomb those guns out."

It seemed almost certain death to attempt this, but it might save the situation. Sadlier accordingly sent his runner to warn Harburn and the rest of the company that the platoon would clear the woods and might be late at the objective, but the runner could not find them—the groups on the hill, he found, were not living men, but dead. The support company, however, was now close behind, and Sadlier, finding one of its officers, asked him to push on and take up the space that would be left in the main line. Then, having located the nearest German machine-gun, he stationed a Lewis gunner to fire on it, and passed the word to bombard the wood with bombs and then rush it.

His attack was extraordinarily bold and the German gunners obviously were not expecting it. Before they recovered from the surprise, the Western Australians were in among the trees, fighting wildly in the dark, advancing through the fringe of the wood, firing and being fired at around bushes and trees, stumbling on unsuspected posts. Sadlier—and Stokes, who had secured a bag of bombs—were the leaders. To suppress the first German machine-gun they fired rifle-grenades over the trees—lacking cup-containers, they had to rest the handles against their bayonets. The gun stopped firing and they rushed it. In the first scuffle a German who had held up his hands¹⁹ shot Sadlier through the thigh, and in the struggles with machine-gunners farther on Sadlier was

¹⁸ Sgt. C. A. Stokes, D.C.M. (No. 2253; 51st Bn.). Horse driver; of Subiaco, W. Aust.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 30 July, 1885.

¹⁹ Private J. Mulqueeny (Burswood, W. Aust.) states that this big German, doubtless unaware of what he was doing, was shouting "Kamerad" and holding one arm in the air while with the other he went on firing his gun. He was shot by Sadlier with his revolver.

hit again, and eventually had to go to the rear. Some of the German guns were firing tracer bullets, intended for use against aeroplanes, and the tension was heightened by the circumstance that the Western Australians could see the phosphorescent streams of bullets into which they were moving. Few of the machine-gunners showed any thought of surrender, but Sergeant Stokes led on from one German gun to another. With his men, previously six, reduced to two, and his bombs all spent, he met Corporal West,²⁰ who found some German stick-bombs, and with two of these Stokes blew out another machine-gun crew. He captured the gun, and went on to attack and eventually subdue two more machine-guns. Corporal Browne²¹ with a Lewis gun also worked into the wood, suppressed a machine-gun, and was coming out from the trees again when he met a number of the enemy in evident confusion. He ran back into the wood and shot them down. The extreme flank of the 50th under Lieutenant Nuttall,²² following in support of the 51st, became involved in the fighting in the edge of the wood, as did the flank of the 2nd Northamptonshire, hurrying forward more than an hour later.

By this audacious attack all the machine-guns along that edge of the wood were eventually silenced—six were picked up there afterwards—and a great danger was removed from the flank of the advancing brigade.²³

The force that Sadlier had attacked was portion of the I Battalion, 5th Guard Grenadier, holding the south-western and southern edges of the wood, and also part of the 5th Foot Guard just arriving to relieve it. The 5th Guard Grenadier had lost heavily and was hampered by its own artillery persistently shelling the wood, and by the reek of the morning's gas bombardment. Nevertheless its commander, and the leader of the II Battalion on its right, had organised the line there in two sections, and each had been reinforced by two companies of the III Battalion. Captain von Chappuis of the I Battalion had also been reinforced by the 3rd Machine Gun Company of his regiment, and had stationed a number of its nine guns with the companies

²⁰ Sgt. S. R. West, M.M. (No. 2746; 51st Bn.). Farmer; of Dumbleyung, W. Aust.; b. Rockhampton, Q'land, 12 March, 1898.

²¹ Cpl. C. T. Browne, M.M. (No. 3021; 51st Bn.). Farmer; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Deniliquin, N.S.W., 1885.

²² Lieut. P. E. Nuttall, M.C.; 50th Bn. Window dresser; of Kyneton, Vic.; b. Kyneton, 8 Dec., 1888.

²³ Sadlier and Stokes were recommended for the Victoria Cross, which was richly deserved by both. Higher authority, however, awarded it to Sadlier alone, partly (it is said) in recognition of the action of the whole party, which fought with extraordinary dash. Stokes received the D.C.M.

holding the southern edge of the wood. Late in the evening the battalions of the Guard Grenadier had been informed that they were to be relieved by the I and II Battalions of the 5th Foot Guard. These had by 4 p.m. come up to the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road, where they waited for a time in close reserve with the III Battalion behind them just south of Monument farm. The I and II Battalions were on their way to carry out the relief, and two companies of the III were moving to the Domart road to replace them, when the bombardment descended on Villers-Bretonneux and the Monument, and the Australians attacked. The 3rd and 4th companies, destined for the western edge of the wood, reached it without difficulty, but the 2nd directed to the south-western corner, and the 8th which, with the 5th, was to line its southern edge, ran into a "strong enemy" there, and were met with bombing and rifle-fire. The 5th took up its place at the south-east corner of the wood before the attack reached there.

While these incidents were happening on the flank, the line on the plateau to the south was advancing under a strong fire of machine-guns from left and front and, particularly, from the right front. The dark, however, prevented this comparatively long-range fire from being as deadly as it would have been by day. Presently, however, shots were fired from close in front. Someone said "Bomb the bastards." A few grenades were thrown, a rush made, and the line came on a trench manned, not by Germans, but by a fragment of the 2nd Devon and 1st Worcester, who had not heard of the counter-attack and thought the Germans were attacking them from the rear.

This trench was the "switch" that ran diagonally north-eastwards, and here the medical officer of the 52nd established his aid-post behind a long heap of mangold-wurzels.²⁴

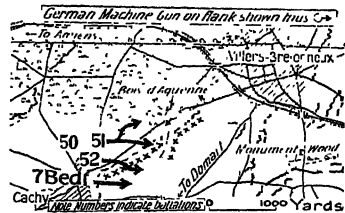
The bullets were very thick (he wrote afterwards) and men lay all around. I turned and bolted behind the mangold heap shouting to the boys; they followed, and we crouched while the machine-gun fire got worse till the top of the heap sizzled and spattered. From every side boys came crawling in . . . and I started to tie up and send back anyone that could crawl. Out of the dark came another line of men advancing. A sub. swinging a revolver howled at us to get on, but I quietened him and he wanted to know "What the something we were doing there." . . . Villers-Bretonneux, which had just been smouldering, now broke into flames and a great big storied building blazed and lit up the scene a little. I went on bandaging . . . when a third wave passed. Again a sub. challenged us and asked if any unwounded man was there. I said "No," but as

²⁴ Captain P. B. Sewell (Malvern, Vic.), medical officer of the 50th, was killed near Villers-Bretonneux. Captain Forsyth of the 52nd afterwards moved his own post to Cachy, where he found Sewell's men. The bearers of the 13th Field Ambulance took all the wounded from his post by 4 p.m. on the 25th. Forsyth himself was wounded.

a matter of fact a little man had sat down in front of me for about three minutes . . . The bullets were still thick. I leant forward and put my hand on the boy's shoulder . . . He said he wasn't hit but was just done up. "Well," I said, "we are all going up in a minute with one of these shells. You are just as safe with the boys." He nodded and said he believed I was right, and went after them. He was the only boy I saw hesitate that night . . . A little Tommy corporal came stumbling in, weeping like a kid and holding his arm. "Pain bad," says I. "No, Sir," he squeaked, "this is nothing, but I can't get the boys to go forward." He had evidently been trying to rally a very young platoon with a bullet in his arm. A wounded digger soothed him. "Never mind, kid," he said, "the boys will hunt Fritz without yous kids."

Some distance ahead of the Cachy Switch was the strong diagonal line of wire originally constructed for it, and, as this was approached, the fire became close and deadly. It was evident that the Germans attacking that morning had established their outpost-line on the other side of the wire. Five or six machine-guns were firing through it, and others from distant positions in the south-east; but most deadly by far was a gun away to the left flank where the wire, running towards Villers-Bretonneux, dipped into the hollow south of the town, and a single German machine-gunner was firing from one of the sunken roads that crossed there, directly along the Cachy road and the wire. The Australians nearest to him were the remnant of Sadlier's platoon, now under Sergeant Dagnall.²⁵ The line was temporarily stopped. The nearest Australians tried first to get round the open on the right of the gun; next round the open on its left. Eventually Sergeant Stokes, in his skilful assault upon gun, silenced and captured this one also.

It had caused dreadful loss along the entanglement; but long before it was stopped the battalions had passed that obstacle. Captain Harburn had found Captain Cooke²⁶ of the right company of the 51st, and, to prevent a permanent stoppage, they had together



²⁵ Sgt. T. N. Dagnall (No. 2529; 51st Bn.). Station hand; of Geraldton, W. Aust.; b. Liverpool, Eng., 25 Dec., 1889.

²⁶ Capt. C. E. A. Cooke, 51st Bn. Electrician; of Boulder, W. Aust.; b. North Fitzroy, Vic., 29 July, 1891. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.

decided to blow their whistles and rush the wire. Their men obeyed the signal, gaps were found, and the troops streamed through them.

With the shells bursting and Very lights going up (says Corporal Steadman,²⁷ who led a bombing section) it was just like daylight. The machine-gun fire was the worst that ever happened on any front. By sheer luck I found a gap in the wire and led my section through.

A great part of the force had simply to struggle through the strands; the entanglement was constructed "apron fashion,"²⁸ and each man struggling with the wires tightened them, making it more difficult for others. Among the officers Captain Cooke was killed here, and Captain Stubbings (52nd) and Lieutenants Chanter,²⁹ Read,³⁰ Haslam,³¹ Fraser,³² and Wilkes³³ (51st) were wounded. Next day the wire was lined with the dead of the two battalions.

The wire ran diagonally, and the line naturally tended to swing parallel to it. The British heavy guns and bombing aeroplanes, however, had now started fires in Villers-Bretonneux, and these formed a fixed landmark, by which officers quickly corrected the direction. A gap which opened between the two front companies of the 52nd was filled by a supporting platoon under Lieutenant Hatton.³⁴ For a few minutes after passing the wire the line lay down engaging in a fire-fight with the German posts. Then part of the 52nd worked forward and outflanked the Germans, and the whole line rushed them. The enemy—a weak line of machine-gun posts in small bits of trench—was killed, surrendered, or ran away, and the advance continued. The 7th Bedford at this stage were in touch with the right of the 52nd, and advancing as quickly.

²⁷ Cpl. E. Steadman (No. 3444; 51st Bn.). Wood machinist; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Durham, Eng., 25 Jan., 1886.

²⁸ See *Vol. VII*, sketch on p. 146.

²⁹ Capt. J. R. C. B. Chanter, 51st Bn. Commercial traveller; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Moama, N.S.W., 1 Aug., 1888.

³⁰ Lieut. C. W. Read, 51st Bn. Draughtsman and computer, W. Aust. Govt. Survey Dept.; of Guildford, W. Aust.; b. Guildford, 24 April, 1881.

³¹ Lieut. H. A. Haslam, 51st Bn. Bank clerk; of Katanning, W. Aust.; b. Rochester, Vic., 8 May, 1894.

³² Lieut. M. A. Fraser, 51st Bn. Accountant; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Braidwood, N.S.W., 21 April, 1889.

³³ Lieut. A. J. Wilkes, 51st Bn. Auctioneer; of Tingoorra, Q'land; b. Cabarlah, Q'land, 8 Aug., 1894. Died, in New Guinea, 1933.

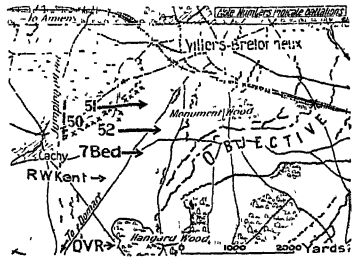
³⁴ Lieut.-Col. N. G. Hatton, M.C., M.M., V.D.; 52nd Bn. Commercial traveller; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. Toowoomba, 10 April, 1895.

The German posts that had been rushed had been formed by two companies of the III/5th Guard Grenadier in the attempt to connect the flank of its division (in the wood) with the right of the 77th Reserve Division, which had swung too far to the south in front of Cachy. They were out of touch with it, and were about to be relieved by the 7th company of the II/5th Foot Guard, whose commander had just visited them and gone back to bring up his platoons.³⁵

The plateau was still brightly illuminated by German flares rising continuously from positions ahead, as well as from Villers-Bretonneux to the left front and from Aquenne Wood in the left rear. In front of the centre and right the 52nd met, about 500 yards beyond the German outposts, another line of posts in shell-craters. These troops fled before the attacking line reached them. But after the first line had passed over the position, Captain Kennedy's company, advancing in the second line, heard a machine-gun in action close ahead, and saw a bright stream of tracer bullets being fired into the backs of the first line by a German machine-gun crew, who had been overrun there. "There they are, boys," shouted Lieutenant Rogers, and the Germans in the posts were rushed and killed.

These posts apparently formed the northern end of the outpost-line of the 77th Reserve Division, which had been stopped in the morning west of the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road. It had afterwards been routed by the whippet tanks, but at 5 o'clock the reserve regiment, the 332nd I.R., had advanced about 300 yards, across the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road, and supported the two forward regiments (419th I.R. and 257th R.I.R.). This division had come straight from Russia, and was unused to the severity of the fighting on the Western Front and much shaken by the artillery-fire.

Some 500 yards beyond these posts was a stronger force whose position was made clear by the flares rising from it and the fire of its machine-guns. Actually it was a body of infantry with a number of machine-guns (estimated at eight) occupying a system of pot-holes on a front of about 100 yards, just east of the road to Domart.³⁶ Here took



³⁵ See p. 589.

³⁶ Some Australian accounts indicate that the position was a quarter of a mile farther east, near the road to Hangard Wood. The German narratives, however, are here followed.

place another fire-fight lasting for several minutes. The Australians were not close enough for bombing, but several of their Lewis guns took the enemy gunners under fire, and then, with "a wild yell," the line went at them. The Germans at once ran with the Queenslanders and Tasmanians after them.

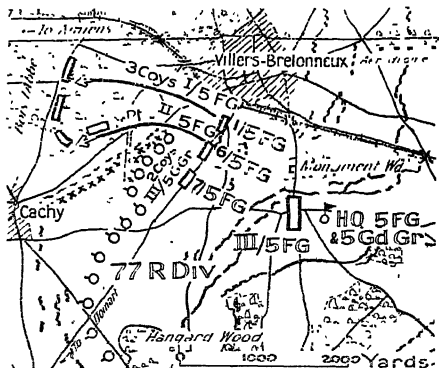
It is almost certain that the Germans here met were the 7th company of the 5th Foot Guard; and the fight, of which the Australian records are brief, is vividly described in its history.

It will be remembered that the 5th Foot Guard had been the support regiment of the 4th Guard Division, and that its I and II Battalions were relieving the 5th Guard Grenadier when the storm broke on them. The 1st and 6th companies, however, were kept back in reserve to these battalions, and the III Battalion formed the regimental reserve in the Monument area behind them, with two of its companies somewhat advanced. The 7th company had gone ahead with the duty of relieving the posts of the Grenadier that were protecting the southern flank of its division across the plateau.

Thus, of the 5th Foot Guard, apart from the five companies that had reached or were reaching Aquenne Wood—whose experience has already been referred to—it was the 7th company which first met the 13th Brigade's advance. Shortly after 8 o'clock its commander, Reserve Lieutenant Roszbach,

had gone forward with his platoon commanders to find the position of the flank posts. Machine-gun fire, evidently from the British in Cachy Switch, had forced them to jump from shell-hole to shell-hole, but they happened to come right upon the pot-hole in which was Reserve Lieutenant Brosig, commanding the 11th company of the Grenadiers. He told them that he had only some three sections left, with which he was holding 150 metres, and the 12th company on his right had about the same. He believed the rest of the battalion was on his left. He feared that a counter-attack was imminent, and said that his men were in no condition to resist it.

Roszbach decided to go back and feed the 7th company before bringing it up; but, first, he and one platoon commander went on to reconnoitre the right of its future position while the two other platoon commanders were sent to find the 77th Reserve Division on the left. These two after passing the last posts of Brosig's company, which had bent their line back as a defensive flank, could find no one at all. They had given up the search when, 300 yards to the left rear of Brosig's flank, they were challenged by a machine-gun



post which proved to be covering the right flank of the 77th Reserve Division. They hurried back to their company, close in front of the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road. The field-kitchen had just reached that road, and the men were unbuckling the cooking vessels, when the British bombardment descended. Flares rose to the west of them; a lively fusillade broke out from the position of the Grenadier Machine-guns rattled, and above the din they caught the sound of a loud cheer. That settled all doubt—the expected counter-attack had been launched.

The 7th company, carrying its dixies, at once made for its rifle-pits and waited. It could not shoot as the Grenadier were in front, but the rifle-fire ahead weakened and died out. The front line had evidently been taken. Men of the Grenadier came running back through its line, and were halted and took position behind. The three light machine-guns of the 7th company and two heavy machine-guns attached to it were hurriedly mounted. By this time the Australians could be seen 100 yards away. The machine-guns opened and the attackers immediately in front took cover in shell-holes. But by the light of flares numbers of others could be seen pressing forward on the left, where the gap was. The two heavy machine-guns were at once switched round on to these, while the light machine-guns tried to keep down the enemy ahead, and the riflemen to pick off "the few daring 'Englishmen' who nevertheless attempted to push forward" there. Lieutenant Rossbach and his platoon commanders directed the shooting and fired flare after flare to keep the scene illuminated.

But the two heavy machine-guns were not enough to stop the attackers on the left. The flares showed them still advancing 200 yards to that flank, and at this stage it was seen that others were driving back the right of the company. Despite the three light machine-guns, the attackers in front also were now beginning to move. The company's right was bent back and the three light machine-guns were now standing ahead like a wedge. "In spite of uninterrupted fire, the attacking troops came constantly nearer."³⁷ Ammunition was running short. The British barrage, falling behind throughout the attack, was little hindrance, but "as the machine-guns slacken, the enemy constantly storms forward," especially on the right, one wave after another. On the left he was already behind the company.

The two heavy machine-guns were now firing to the left, two light ones to the right, and one straight ahead, but the attacking waves could not be stopped. The right gave way. "Around we hear only the loud cheers of the English. The last belt of machine-gun ammunition now has to be used. Again the machine-gun fire strikes the onrushing English. The leading men fall but others charge on. These too are mown down, but new waves always come on cheering in their place and rush forward into our machine-gun fire." Those in front could still be stopped, but not the flanks. Their Lewis guns "hammer with tracer bullets" into the German line, the brilliant streams of phosphorescent missiles mowing this way and that with most demoralising effect.³⁸ The right flank broke; "the fusillade was drowned in an English cheer." One machine-gun after another

³⁷ The account quoted is that of Company Sergeant-Major Elfeldt, who took part. (*History of 5th Foot Guard*, p. 416.)

³⁸ There is no mention of this in any Australian record, although there is constant mention of the use of these bullets by the Germans. Possibly they were used—intentionally or not—by both sides.

became silent, its ammunition ended. "With a loud cheer" the attackers came on again. The defenders gave way, dragging off their machine-guns. "All round one can hear only loud English cheering. As the line gives way, the English machine-gun fire strikes it from front and flank. The tracks of tracer ammunition comb this way and that, crossing one another, claiming their victims. In addition, British artillery-fire striking into our ranks increases the confusion . . . The English follow hard on our heels. With great uproar they sweep through the dark night. Where at some points an attempt is made to put them on their defence, their machine-gun fire soon breaks the resistance, and mows down many of our troops."

Beyond this point no flares were rising—the 52nd chased the fleeing parties far into the dark, between the Monument and Hangard Wood.

The 51st, on the left, had reached the oblique wire in front of Cachy Switch later than the 52nd. It had also suffered more severely in getting through it. Many officers and N.C.O's, seeing by the action of others that troops were passing through a gap in the wire on the right of the 51st, led their men thither, but, Captain Cooke and most of the officers of the right company being hit here, this company was not reorganised; and, although at least one surviving platoon commander, Sergeant Keeley,³⁹ led his party back to what he judged to be its proper position, the right of the 51st thenceforth went forward in small groups, scattered over a wide front, some making south-east, mixed with elements of the 52nd. The left company of the 51st, Captain Harburn's, was much weakened by the fighting in the wood behind its left. On his men's sighting a number of the enemy, who put up their hands, Harburn gave the order "No prisoners." "I did not know what to do with them," he said afterwards. To make up his strength, he went back to Captain F. Smith of the support company, secured the assistance of Lieutenant Earl and part of that company, and asked Smith to get the commander of the following battalion (the 50th) to send forward his left company. While the message was on its way, Harburn hurried back to his company which, like others, had veered to the right at the wire and become disorganised. He immediately reorganised it—in the words of a comrade, "grabbed every man he could get, formed small parties of ten in artillery formation, and pushed them up to the left,"

³⁹ Sgt. J. A. Keeley, M.M. (No. 1967; 51st Bn.). Postal assistant; of Busselton, W. Aust.; b. Albany, W. Aust., 7 June, 1898.

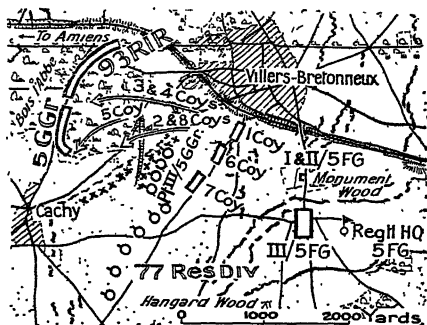
which was then still held up by the solitary German machine-gun in the sunken road. The men fell in, ten here, ten there. Harburn blew his whistle and they advanced as a company, about forty strong, with three Lewis guns, and two machine-guns of the 13th Company.

They had hardly started, and Harburn was still pushing his parties into place, when there "seemed to rise out of the ground" in front of them a force of Germans, estimated to be 200 strong, who advanced firing from the hip with rifles and automatic rifles. The Australian line immediately fell down, in a rough semicircle, Harburn spacing the men out. His right flank was firing but not the left, as he wished the enemy to come close. They were almost past his left when, behind him, over the edge of the rise east of the wire, appeared the left company of the 50th, led forward in answer to his request. The Germans immediately began to run, but the Australians were too close to let many escape. A number were killed; about sixty surrendered and were sent to the rear, and six more machine-guns were taken.

It seems probable that these troops, and those previously met and shot down, were the 2nd and 8th companies of the 5th Foot Guard marching up to relieve the Guard Grenadier in the wood. Together with the 5th company they now fell back on the sunken road that ran diagonally through the valley east of the wood, where facing to their rear, they formed a guard for the companies in the wood.

At some stage the 51st also met and routed the 6th company of the 5th Foot Guard. Its experience is described in the regimental history by its commander, Reserve Lieutenant Krüger. It was in reserve on the Domart road, farther north than the 7th, and it too was getting its rations from its field-kitchen "when an unexpected and frightful bombardment with high-explosive and shrapnel sets in."

Carrying parties and relieving troops were all confused. Engineers detailed for constructing wire-entanglement, and part of the 5th Guard Grenadier already relieved, "arrived in plain tumult and said the English were on them—and unfortunately they were right. Shots came from point-blank range. One heard an uproar and saw troops running this way and that. But were they friend or enemy?"



To the left, under the wavering light of the flares, the 7th Company could be seen holding out. The 6th company was very weak, having only some 36 rifles and two light machine-guns; but Krüger, after ordering one of his platoon commanders with a few men to collect stragglers, led the remainder forward in accordance with orders. Germans and "English" were so mingled ahead that he could not fire. He ran into a machine-gun firing "tracer" ammunition at thirty yards' range into his left from behind a heap of earth. Under-Officer Brünger fired at it a flare, which stopped the machine-gun, and he then turned his own light machine-gun into the "mass of Tommies." But after going some 300 yards the advance was stopped. Brünger and many of his men were killed; Krüger was wounded, and his account of the fight ends there. The battalion's medical officer who attended him was afterwards among the missing. This company, too, apparently was routed.

The left of the 51st was now on the edge of the valley south of Villers-Bretonneux. From the town came heavy fire across the valley, the Germans having lined with rifle and machine-guns the railway embankment that runs like a rampart around part of the south-western side of the town. Others also were firing from Aquenne Wood, in rear. Harburn sent Lieutenant Earl into the valley to cut off any who might be retreating to Villers-Bretonneux. Earl, advancing towards the village, met and scattered a body of the enemy. Two of Harburn's men, Lance-Corporal Burt⁴⁰ and Private Helyar,⁴¹ with a Lewis gun, also wandered into the valley and came suddenly upon forty Germans posted with four machine-guns. The two Australians were at first under the impression that these were a company of their own men. The Germans, apparently unnerved by their sudden appearance, surrendered.

These were possibly some of the same troops that had been driven off by Earl. They would be either a portion of the 5th Foot Guard, or parts of the Guard Grenadier or 93rd R.I.R. held back in support.

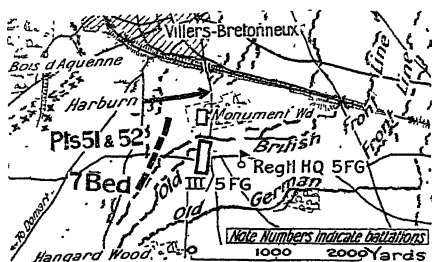
Harburn did not lead his own troops into this valley. With one subaltern, Lieutenant Town,⁴² and about forty men he pushed on, skirting the depression, towards the open area north of Monument Wood, whose trees he could now clearly see on his right front. The wood was strongly held, but

⁴⁰ Lieut. C. E. R. Burt, D.C.M.; 51st Bn. Labourer; of Solomontown, S. Aust.; b. Dergholm, Vic., 27 April, 1894.

⁴¹ Pte. R. Helyar, D.C.M. (No. 4525; 51st Bn.). Sleeper hewer; of Nannup, W. Aust.; b. Modewarre, Vic., 28 Dec., 1891.

⁴² Lieut. C. J. Town, 51st Bn. Farmer; of Corrigin, W. Aust.; b. Brighton, Sussex, Eng., 21 Nov., 1894. Killed in action, 25 April, 1918. (Lieut. J. F. Barrett, D.C.M., had been mortally wounded in the encounter with the German company. He belonged to Capel, W. Aust.). Town was a young Englishman, of great stature and strength.

its occupants were firing south-westwards at the 52nd and the 7th Bedford, and were apparently unaware of Harburn's company, which was receiving fire chiefly from the town and embankment, now in its left rear. The company pushed on, catching occasionally a German or two, sometimes passing an abandoned machine-gun. A solitary anti-tank field-gun was found and an abandoned field-kitchen; and, as the company headed north of the wood, between it and the town, it came upon a battery of four German field-guns, with a few dead around them but no living German near.



Here, on the road between the Monument and eastern outskirts, Harburn left Town, and himself walked across to the 52nd south-west of Monument Wood. Town was meanwhile to attempt an entry into the wood.

Harburn found the 52nd more than half-a-mile away and somewhat to his right rear. After it had rushed the strong German position near the Domart road, the German flares that hitherto had illuminated the plateau for it, had suddenly died out and the whole region became dark, lighted only at intervals when the moon passed between clouds. Farther to the right the Bedfords were now being held up by machine-gun fire. The right of the 52nd swung towards these guns, chasing the fleeing enemy across the Hangard Wood-Villers-Bretonneux road and entering the Bedfords' territory. Part of the left, under Lieutenant Henderson,⁴³ entered the wood or orchard at Monument farm. Sergeant Keeley with his party of the 51st, also making towards the wood, reached a quarry in which were several British wounded who had lain there since the previous morning, and a German tank, lying upon its side. The area immediately south of Monument farm was strongly held and the attack tended to pass it to

⁴³ Lieut. D. J. Henderson, 52nd Bn. Cleaner, S. Aust. Railways; of Petersburg, S. Aust.; b Stirling West, S. Aust., 27 April, 1897.

the north or south, which, if the attacking force had been stronger, was the best way to capture it.

German narratives show that, when the attack started, the advanced companies of the reserve (III) Battalion of the 5th Foot Guard at once fell back on its two rear companies south of the Monument. The whole battalion and the 3rd Machine Gun Company took post in the trenches there, prepared for any emergency. But flares appear to have been wanting; at all events the 10th company had none, all the carriers having been hit. The ground ahead was seething with men, but the battalion could not tell who they were or what was happening, and therefore could not fire. The commander of the 10th company, Reserve Lieutenant Iversen, says that he prayed he was not in for an experience like that of October 4th at Broodseinde!⁴⁴

He had sent asking for flares "at all costs." The tumult ahead became continuous. Twice he ordered a machine-gun to fire high, and immediately came yells of "Don't fire! Germans here!" Fugitive grenadiers came in, and shortly afterwards shells of the German artillery burst on their own men—probably a result of some scare report carried back by other fugitives. At this critical moment three flare-cartridges, wet with sweat, were slipped into Iversen's hands; a young ensign, von Falkenhayn, who had previously come up to the trench against orders, had heard the demand, and had returned and brought them. He was mortally wounded in the act of handing them over, but the first flare, instantly fired, revealed "a dense crowd of khaki uniforms and 'plate'-helmets" into which the German machine-guns at once poured their bullets.

"But the Englishman, too, is tough," writes Iversen. "His bombs fall thick as hail under our noses, and with all his own daring he brought up a swarm of machine-guns into position immediately ahead of us." The III Battalion, however, held its ground and the advance at that point was stopped.

At this juncture, the Bedfords and the right of the 52nd being very near to their final objective, Major Craies,⁴⁵ commanding the reserve company of the 52nd, came up and grappled with the task of establishing the line. He found the 52nd split into two. The right, which had swung towards the front of the Bedfords, was close to its objective, south of the Monument, beyond the road leading to the centre of Hangard Wood, and a patrol under a sergeant, T. W. Folkard,⁴⁶ very soon located the left. Craies advanced one of his own platoons under Lieutenant Ivory⁴⁷ across the

⁴⁴ When the Australians overran his division in front of Ypres (*see Vol. III, pp. 846-74*).

⁴⁵ Major W. A. Craies, 52nd Bn. Clerk; of Townsville, Q'land; b. Townsville 19 May, 1886. Died of wounds, 25 April, 1918.

⁴⁶ Sgt. T. W. Folkard, M.M. (No. 2654; 52nd Bn.). Station hand; of Tambo, Q'land; b. Richmond, Surrey, Eng., 19 April, 1881. Died of wounds, 24 April, 1918.

⁴⁷ Lieut. C. J. Ivory, 52nd Bn. Labourer; of West Kentish, Tas.; b. West Kentish, 1 Dec., 1891.

road and filled the gap. On the south he found the Bedfords digging in 200 yards beyond the road; their officer was satisfied that they were on their objective—actually, they were at the old British support line. They were very few, and had only two officers left—Lieutenants Tysoe⁴⁸ and Scott;⁴⁹ moreover, the Royal West Kent and Queen Victoria's Rifles were not up on their right, having started late and been stopped far short of the objective by intense machine-gun fire from the northern end of Hangard Wood. At this stage several salvos, possibly from an advanced German battery, burst among the Bedfords and they retired. Their nearest officer asked the Australians for assistance, and Sergeant Wright⁵⁰ and Corporal Aylott,⁵¹ taking about twenty men, went over to steady them, and helped them to dig near the Domart road, 500 yards behind the position previously reached which, unsupported on the right, they could hardly have held.⁵²

In these circumstances Craies decided that the 52nd's objective, round Monument Wood, was unattainable. He therefore ordered the forward companies back to a line facing the orchard of Monument farm, the right extending back across the Hangard Wood road towards the Domart road to keep touch with the Bedfords. With Captain Churchill Smith of the 50th, whose company was with him there, he set himself to organise the line, withdrawing the two original forward companies into support, and distributing his own and Captain Kennedy's as a line of outposts. All officers of Kennedy's company had been hit, but Sergeants White,⁵³ Doyle,⁵⁴ and Roberts⁵⁵ carried on their tasks.

⁴⁸ Capt. W. Tysoe, D.S.O., M.C.; 7th Bn., The Bedfordshire Regt. Of Northampton, Eng.; b. St. Lawrence, Northampton, 24 June, 1893.

⁴⁹ Lieut. E. J. Scott, M.C.; 7th Bn., The Bedfordshire Regt. Student; b. 5 April, 1897.

⁵⁰ Sgt. H. R. Wright, D.C.M. (No. 3190; 52nd Bn.). Assistant battery engineer; of Waratah, Tas.; b. Macquarie Plains, Tas., 5 July, 1895.

⁵¹ Cpl. F. C. Aylott, M.M. (No. 17; 52nd Bn.). Carrier; of Ipswich, Q'land; b. Ipswich, 1890.

⁵² Many of the 52nd's officers had been hit, but Sergeants T. W. Folkard, M. O'Keefe, A. Nicholas, Corporal F. C. Aylott, Lance-Corporal E. A. S. French, Privates T. E. Bennett, E. W. Hukins, and others stepped into their places and carried out the reorganisation. (Folkard belonged to Tambo, Q'land; O'Keefe, who died of wounds on 11 June, 1918, to Narrogin, W. Aust.; Nicholas to Collie, W. Aust.; Aylott to Ipswich, Q'land; French to Toowoomba, Q'land; Bennett, who died on 12 April, 1930, to Riana, Tas.; Hukins to South Brisbane.)

⁵³ Sgt. A. W. White, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 3312; 52nd Bn.). Engine cleaner, S. Aust. Railways; of Ridleyton, S. Aust.; b. Ridleyton, 31 Jan., 1897.

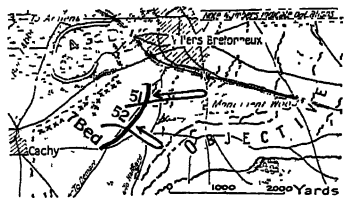
⁵⁴ Sgt. A. A. Doyle (No. 646; 52nd Bn.). Cook; of Port Pirie, S. Aust.; b. Tibooorra, N.S.W., 1895.

⁵⁵ Sgt. W. E. Roberts (No. 1726; 52nd Bn.). Labourer; of Springsure, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, Q'land, 1893.

It was here that Harburn found the 52nd. He asked "their officer" to advance and support him at the Monument, but the answer was that, as the Bedfords were not coming up, the line could not extend further. After some discussion, Harburn decided to fall back on to the left of the 52nd. He found Lieutenant Town and his men still on the road north of the Monument.

At this time continuous firing could be heard on the other side of Villers-Bretonneux, but Harburn's "Company" was far beyond touch with any friendly troops.

Harburn took his men back half-a-mile until he came to the same road near which, farther south, the 52nd lay. Here he stayed at the head of the valley south of the centre of Villers-Bretonneux. The position was not an easy one; the northern flank was open and the Germans were directly behind—a German machine-gun in some tall house 500 yards away was firing from the left rear. Lieutenant Earl with twenty men and two Lewis guns was stationed to protect the flank. With Sergeant Glenroy,⁵⁶ Earl fetched two boxes of bombs from a dump found in the valley, and Sergeant Francis⁵⁷ went out and brought in a supply of food from the German "cooker."



Thus the line of the 13th Brigade was established. Lieutenant Henderson (52nd), finding that no one came up to his party in the orchard, retired to this line, bringing back a few prisoners. Sergeant Keeley in the quarry with the German tank, on sending out a patrol before dawn, discovered that the line was on the rise behind him, and withdrew to it. Other advanced parties did the same.

By 1.5 a.m. Glasgow and Elliott at Blangy-Tronville had known that the 52nd Battalion was in touch with British troops near the Monument. By 1.31 Colonel Whitham of the 52nd heard from Lieutenant Julin, his intelligence officer,

⁵⁶ Sgt. C. Glenroy, M.M. (No. 2925; 51st Bn.). Farmer; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Perth, W. Aust., 28 July, 1894. Died, 19 June, 1926.

⁵⁷ Sgt. B. Francis, M.M. (No. 653; 51st Bn.). Miner; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Nottingham, Eng., 7 April, 1897.

that his front line was connected up with those of the 51st and of the Bedfords, but that on each flank of these no other troops were in touch. The telephone line from brigade headquarters was by then through not merely to the headquarters of Whitham and Christie (51st) in Cachy Switch,⁵⁸ but to the 52nd's front line. At 4.55 Colonel Christie gave the brigadier-major on the telephone the approximate position of the line—from a quarter of a mile to a mile short of the objective, but a mile within the recent German line and in a position to squeeze out the Germans then in Villers-Bretonneux if the 15th Brigade reached its objective. To the efforts of that brigade—of which nothing had been seen by the 13th Brigade—and of the two British battalions which were to enter Villers-Bretonneux, the narrative must now turn.

As soon as Brigadier-General Elliott definitely knew that the counter-attack was to be made at night, he had issued an order that white arm-bands must be worn, and “all rules for night operations . . . enforced until dawn.” Of the subsequent postponement from 8 until 10 p.m. he took advantage by directing that a hot drink should be given to the men shortly before moving, and further reconnaissance made of the ground. The hot drink was, of course, tea; both Australian brigades followed the fixed rule of the A.I.F.—to which few exceptions were ever made—that there should be no issue of alcohol before an attack;⁵⁹ cool heads were far too essential, and it had also been noted that the stimulus of strong liquor was followed too soon by an opposite reaction. Where the rum ration was available, the usual practice was to send it forward as soon as possible after the fight, to serve as a tonic for the troops when the main effort had ended.

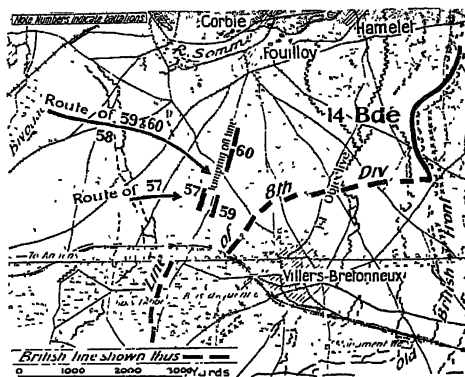
⁵⁸ This was the work of the signallers under Lieutenants M. C. Crocker (Toowoomba, Q'land), 52nd Bn., and A. G. Baker (Perth, W. Aust.), 51st Bn. Battalion headquarters was to have been in the depression ahead of the Switch, but this was found to be under lively machine-gun fire.

⁵⁹ For a similar decision, even when the men were ill, see conference of 3rd Battalion officers before Lone Pine (*Vol. II, p. 502, footnote 12*).

It was Elliott's misfortune that the mere fact that he had prepared so early for this attack now contributed to his difficulties. Had he not during the day issued so many instructions to his battalion commanders, he would probably have taken the risk of dispensing with a final conference with them. As it was, the calling of that conference was a necessity, and, even with the aid of the salvaged motor-car, it was 8 o'clock before the colonels were back with their battalions. And, though they had telephoned to their company commanders to assemble for instructions, the 59th Battalion could not start its approach march until 8.30 or the 60th until 9.10. The battalion commanders were to form a joint headquarters in a quarry behind the spur of Hill 104.

The distance to the assembly area, beside the Cachy-Fouilloy road, was less than two miles, but the intense dark and the gas lying on the low ground rendered the approach slow. Realising that such difficulties were probable, Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall of the 60th, after seeing his battalion off from the bivouac, and making sure that the ammunition party had full instructions, visited the starting point on his way to the quarry, and found his apprehensions correct. It was then fifteen minutes past the starting time (10 p.m.). His own

battalion was there, waiting for the 59th to come up in touch with its right. Captain Bursey's company of the 59th, which was to have been next to it, was missing. The right company of the 59th, under Captain Young,⁶⁰ and the leading company of the



57th under Captain Morgan,⁶¹ had duly arrived and the

⁶⁰ Capt. E. M. Young, M.C.; 59th Bn. Book-keeper; of St. Kilda, Vic.; b. St. Kilda, 22 Sept., 1894.

⁶¹ Capt. R. A. Morgan, 57th Bn. Blacksmith; of Footscray, Vic.; b. Footscray, 11 June, 1890. Killed in action, 25 April, 1918.

intelligence officers were scouring the area to find the others. The German barrage, answering the British bombardment, had just begun to fall.

During this phase of the war Norman Marshall appears to have stood less high in Elliott's estimation than he did at Passchendaele, his knowledge of the *Field Service Regulations* relating to open warfare not having satisfied the exacting standards of his chief; but in this moment of anxiety for all present—with a counter-attack that might affect the course of the war already fifteen minutes late, and part of the troops for it not yet in sight—it was he who took hold and for the rest of the night controlled more than any other man the 15th Brigade's part in the operation. Immediately deciding to wait for information as to the whereabouts of the rest of the brigade, he directed that no start must be made without word from him.⁶² Next, using for his eyes the intelligence officers—particularly Lieutenants Gannon⁶³ and Pizzey⁶⁴ of his own battalion,⁶⁵ and Doutreband of the 57th—and himself moving everywhere he was needed, he quickly ascertained that the reserve company of the 59th under Captain Smith⁶⁶ had just come up. He sent for Smith and ordered him to take the place of the missing company.⁶⁷ Captain Morgan's company of the 57th would support him, as would the reserve company of Marshall's own battalion (60th), if necessary. While Smith's company was being placed in position, all the remaining companies except Bursey's arrived. Word of this was sent to Marshall, and shortly before midnight—nearly two hours late—the brigade advanced.

The movement which it must carry out was exceedingly complicated—to advance past the town with half the right

⁶² Marshall soon afterwards met Lieut.-Colonel Scanlan of the 59th, and informed him of the action taken.

⁶³ Lieut. W. R. Gannon, 60th Bn. Farmer; of Jumbunna, Vic.; b. Korumburra, Vic., 1894. Died of wounds, 6 Sept., 1918.

⁶⁴ Lieut. C. E. Pizzey, M.C.; 60th Bn. Student; of Northcote, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, Vic., 3 Sept., 1894.

⁶⁵ Pizzey was Lewis gun officer, but was employed throughout these operations as an additional intelligence and orderly officer.

⁶⁶ Major G. S. Smith, M.C.; 59th Bn. Grain buyer; of Hawthorn, Vic.; b. Timaru, N.Z., 22 March, 1888. Died, 31 July, 1924.

⁶⁷ Captain Smith had already arranged with Captain Young (commanding the 59th's right front company) to take this step. Before that, Young had decided to spread his own company over the whole of the 59th's allotted frontage.

battalion and all the support battalion tucked behind the right flank of the line; and then, after passing the northern outskirts, at the first objective to change direction south-east, half the support battalion now coming up on the right of the two front-line battalions, while part both of that battalion and of the 59th began near that point to drop behind the advance and face to the rear and flank in order to screen the advance from interference from the town. Marshall had ordered Lieutenant Doutreband, as well as his own officers, to work out carefully the compass bearings for the changes of direction, and these bearings were given to Captain Smith when his company took up the rôle of the missing one.

The advance to the first objective—a little more than a mile—was up the open valley north-west of the town, and during most of this phase the movement would be well behind the existing British line. But at the top the right flank would have passed through the British and be approaching the Germans positions around Villers-Bretonneux. Each battalion was disposed on a two-company frontage, the 57th on the right following behind the other two; and the pace was very swift. A few British troops, through whom the left of the 59th passed, proved to be the existing front line—most of the Victorians saw none. Near the head of the valley the German shelling died away and the troops entered a thin mist, and, just before reaching the edge of the plateau, came to the road which was their first objective.

Every company commander here checked his flanks and direction; Colonel Marshall had now gone to his headquarters, but Colonel Scanlan saw to the alignment of the 59th. Captain Peacock's company of the 57th was already on the right of the line, and Captain Morgan's was being moved up thither. Scanlan's second-in-command, Major Kuring, hurried to the left to see that the 60th swung forward. Ahead of the left of the 59th he found the missing company. It was afterwards learned that, soon after starting from camp, Captain Bursey had been warned by a sentry that a depression ahead had been drenched by German gas-shells. He had therefore diverted his company, which then lost its way in the dark; but it had caught up the advance at the first objective, and was now precisely in the position to which

it was to swing. Its scouts had reported that there were Germans close ahead, and the platoons had moved up to within a short distance of the screen and were waiting in a trench for the word to advance.

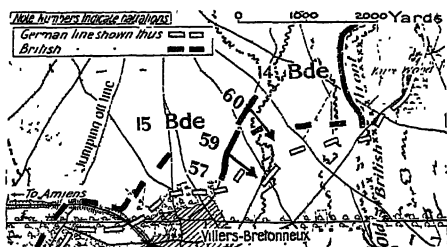
Kuring sent a guide to lead up the 60th on to its flank. Until now so silent had been the advance that some of Bursley's troops were unaware that the rest of the force was near them—"we were under the impression," one of them wrote, "that we were out on our own." The first intimation that there were other troops on their flank was the cry of a wounded Australian "which was very reassuring to us."

Immediately after that cry, babel broke loose. What had happened was that during the short pause the scouts—one section of each front-line platoon—had moved ahead to protect the halted companies and to form the screen in their next advance. Villers-Bretonneux, close on the right flank, was easily visible by the light of a large house burning behind the neighbouring trees. The scouts of Lieutenant Telfer's⁸⁸ platoon reported that small bodies of men were moving about close in front, and Captain Young, being certain that these were German, extended his company and placed its right together with that of the 57th on the edge of the orchards or plantations. At this stage some noise occurred, and the Germans in some post ahead, either hearing this or seeing men in the light of the conflagration, fired two flares, one of which fell fairly among the moving Australians and lay there burning. Every man remained motionless, but they had been seen, for a machine-gun opened, close ahead, firing very erratically and high.

At once, "in a calm, easy voice," as one of his N.C.O.'s records, Young gave the word to charge. There went up from the unleashed line a shout—a savage, eager yell of which every narrative speaks—and the Australians made straight for the enemy. From that instant there was no holding the attack. The bloodthirsty cry was caught up again and again along the line, and the whole force was off at the run. "That ended any further attempt at checking direction," reported Colonel Scanlan. The companies of the 60th, just being

⁸⁸ Lieut.-Col. G. S. Telfer, M.C.; 59th Bn. Farmer; of Lindenow, Vic.; b. Coongulmerang, Vic., 15 Sept., 1889.

swung forward at Kuring's direction, were in it with the rest. The Australian officers and N.C.O.'s during the next half-hour showed all the capacity that was in them, checking, guiding, and finally halting and marshalling these wild cattle; for the time being their men had thrown off the restraints of civilised



intercourse and were what the bayonet instructors of all armies aimed at producing by their tuition—primitive, savage men. Extracts from the records which Elliott afterwards collected from every battalion, company, and platoon will illuminate the spirit of this onslaught.

Men said "they had not had such a feast with their bayonets before," reported Colonel Watson, Elliott's special intelligence officer.

With a ferocious roar and the cry of "Into the bastards, boys," we were down on them before the Boche realised what had happened (wrote Sergeant Fynch⁶⁹). The Boche was at our mercy. They screamed for mercy but there were too many machine-guns about to show them any consideration as we were moving forward.

With a cheer that would have turned a tribe of Red Indians green with envy we "hopped the bags"⁷⁰. . . Here the enemy got wind of us coming, and the night was turned to day by his numerous flares, and he opened a terrific machine-gun barrage, but . . . in very few instances did the enemy put up a fight and when he did he was quickly dealt with. Each man was in his glee and old scores were wiped out two or three times over.

These three men (the first German machine-gun crew) were either bayoneted or shot (wrote another of Young's company). Here and there a Fritz would hop out of trench or shell-hole only to fall riddled with bullets and then to be bayoneted by the boys as they came up.

There was no thought of stopping (says another) until we suddenly realised that we were too far advanced, and were liable to be cut off on the flanks, and so the order was passed along to retire back in line with the other battalions on our flanks.

⁶⁹ Sgt. R. A. Fynch (No. 1707; 59th Bn.). Plasterer; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Abbotsford, Vic., 1891. Died of wounds, 4 July, 1918.

⁷⁰ As most of the present generation know, this is soldier slang for "leapt over the parapet" to start an attack.

The chief events in this half-hour, which ranks with perhaps two others⁷¹ as the wildest in the experience of Australian infantry, are now fairly well established. The main fighting was on the right, where the brigade brushed past the village and broke the German line immediately north-east of it. All the enemy's numerous machine-guns in the northern outskirts of the town were firing furiously, but for the most part high or wildly. Across the plateau north of Villers-Bretonneux the Germans were in the old British reserve trench, the good continuous system recently dug by the 5th Australian Division. In some parts the attack found the German supports just running forward, on the alarm being given, to strengthen the garrison, which had opened fire at various points with rifles and machine-guns. Where the 59th was skirting the village Lieutenant O'Brien,⁷² badly wounded, called out, "Carry on, boys, I'm hit." The main trench there was rushed, such Germans as stayed in it being mostly killed. Far back at the quarry an hour later there arrived a Victorian with a prisoner; "Sergeant Parr⁷³ said to save this one, Sir," said the escort. Later, as the men tired of killing, prisoners came back by droves.

The most serious resistance came from in front of the right immediately after this trench was passed. Here a machine-gun was firing from beside a haystack, while some member of the post threw flares to keep the Victorians illuminated. A number of men were killed, and that part of the line was forced to ground until a daring soldier, Private Hodgekiss,⁷⁴ ran around the stack and killed the gunner.⁷⁵

The right of the attack had also to pass through a belt

⁷¹ The first phase at the Landing at Anzac, and the attack of the 5th Brigade on Mont St. Quentin. Lieutenant Christian noted a marked reaction among the men a few days later, in the form of excitability and high nervous tension. Several of his men came to him with the same remark: "I can't help thinking of that chap I bayoneted."

⁷² Lieut. A. S. O'Brien, 59th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Sandhurst, Vic., 29 May, 1894.

⁷³ Lieut. A. Parr, D.C.M.; 59th Bn. Farmer; of Lelang, Cavendish, Vic.; b. Beeston, Notts, Eng., 1894. Died of wounds, 1 Oct., 1918.

⁷⁴ Pte. D. Hodgekiss (No. 5402; 59th Bn.). Labourer; of Mildura, Vic.; b. Port Woolunga, S. Aust., 1885. Died, 8 May, 1924.

⁷⁵ Pte. L. Doody (Kerang, Vic.) is reported to have taken a prominent part in suppressing a machine-gun at the same stage.

of wire. On the left, in front of the 60th, the Germans closer to the flank of the 14th Brigade and to the British posts put up hardly any resistance. Lieutenant Simpson,⁷⁶ commanding the left company, Lieutenant Veale,⁷⁷ of the northernmost platoon, and Lieutenant Watt, one of the guides from the 56th, were constantly on the look out for the flank of the 14th Brigade, with which they were to gain touch; but, except for a machine-gun post of the 14th Company, passed at the beginning of the second advance, they saw nothing of it. Captain Bursey of the 59th knew that he started exactly in position, Lieutenant Olver's⁷⁸ platoon happening to pass over a trench containing a board marked with the "map reference" of the locality, o.24.d.3.o. But, when once the rush started, the 60th bore too much towards the 59th, where the fighting was heavier. Both battalions swept obliquely towards the Roman road, pulling Germans here and there out of the shell-holes in which they crouched or surrendered, and bayoneting them. Most of the enemy were fleeing, shaken, apparently, by the first wild cheer. They were followed until a cross-road was passed, and on the far side of it, south of the Roman road, appeared the huts and big canvas hangars of the old aerodromes.⁷⁹

Here an officer of the 59th came along the front shouting that the objective had been passed. The men were excited, unearthing a handful of Germans and British captives in some houses near the Roman road, and searching for Germans in the hangars; but north of the main road their officers and N.C.O's quickly obtained control. Men of the front, reserve, and support companies of all three battalions were there. Casualties had been slight—barely 150 in all, it is said. The enemy's artillery had ceased to trouble the troops since they broke into the German front. Except for blind, distant machine-gun fire, mainly from the village behind them,

⁷⁶ Lieut. J. L. Simpson, 60th Bn. Clerk; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Horsham, Vic., 22 Sept., 1892. Killed in action, 26 April, 1918.

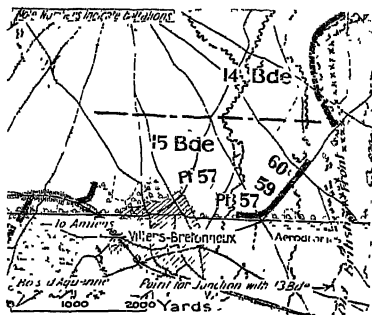
⁷⁷ Lieut. P. J. Veale, 60th Bn. Battery manager; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Sandhurst, Vic., 18 Jan., 1888.

⁷⁸ Lieut. H. Olver, 57th and 59th Bns. Grocer; of North Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Murtoa, Vic., 4 Nov., 1887.

⁷⁹ See *Vol. XII*, plate 465.

opposition had ceased. The 59th and 60th reorganised swiftly, and so effectively, that in one company at least—Captain Smith's of the 59th—every man is said to have been placed in his proper platoon.

As soon as the order to stop had been given, however, question was raised on the right as to whether this instruction was correct. The guides on the extreme right knew that the old British front line was still far ahead, near the other side of the aerodrome, on which the huge, dark shapes of the steel-framed, canvas hangars now confronted the right of the line, across the Roman road; and, although officers



of the 59th Battalion had definitely been informed that the cross-track (the Hamel road) was the second objective, those of the 57th and the guides had been as definitely directed to go on to the old British front line. Captain Morgan, senior officer of the two companies of the 57th, which were on the right of the 59th, reorganising beside the Roman road, told his officers and men that two more trenches were still to be taken. The confusion was due to Elliott's having in his previously telegraphed orders given to his brigade the objective provided for in his own plan—the Villers-Bretonneux–Hamel road,⁸⁰ which the advance had now reached. Apparently at the conference, quite properly, he told his battalion commanders that their final objective was the old British front line, and in the 59th Battalion it had been assumed that the old front line was situated along this road. Actually it did so lie on the left of the sector. The two guiding officers from the 56th were near that flank, and their assurance that the old line had been reached, confirmed the belief of the officers of the 59th farther south,

⁸⁰ By his original plan the battalions might even stop short of this road provided that they reached a position ensuring that the Germans would be squeezed out of the town.

where as a matter of fact the old front line was nearly 1,000 yards ahead.⁸¹

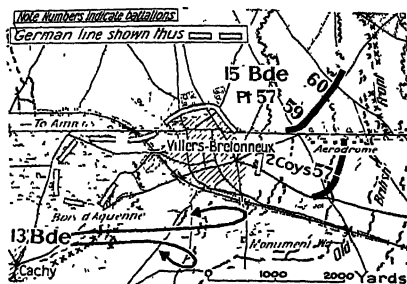
Throughout the developments that resulted from this confusion there was felt, more than at any other time during the attack, the need for the presence of some senior officer to co-ordinate action; but neither Colonel Marshall nor Major Aitchison⁸² (57th), who exercised such capable control shortly afterwards, had yet arrived, and Major Kuring (59th), then rightly establishing his headquarters in the first captured trench, had not yet learned of the difficulty. Consequently, after fifteen minutes' halt, while the 59th and 60th continued their reorganisation on the Hamel road, Captains Morgan and Peacock of the 57th, whose companies had been allotted for establishing the front south of the Roman road, crossed that road and went on. A couple of platoons of the 59th on their left flank, led by Lieutenant Telfer, advanced with them. After going 200 yards to the south, the officers wheeled their line to the left so as to face the huts and hangars of the aerodrome. The force was here formed into two waves, and immediately advanced through the aerodrome. A few shots were fired. In the hangars were captured, half-asleep, two large parties of Germans, comprising the greater part of a company. The leading wave went on over the slight swelling in the plateau until it dipped towards Warfusée. There Captain Morgan ordered it to dig in; the second wave began to dig a support line in rear of the hangars.

The two companies had now reached the neighbourhood of the old British outpost-line; their right flank lay beyond a haystack a little north of the railway, and was actually about 1,500 yards past the farthest point reached by the 13th Brigade attacking the Monument. No sign could be seen of that brigade. The northern flank of the two companies was estimated to be 700 yards in advance of the 59th. Some officers of that battalion came up and insisted on taking back

⁸¹ Elliott himself was never aware of the discrepancy. "Certainly," he wrote afterwards replying to a criticism, in *The Remaking of Modern Armies* by Captain Liddell Hart (p. 303), "I never departed from the objectives given me by the higher command." Yet comments made by him years afterwards indicate that he then thought that by reaching the Hamel road his brigade had attained its objective. It is just possible that, as General Butler of the III Corps suggested in his report, Elliott believed the old front line to have lain there. But whatever his belief he had placed the responsibility upon the guides, who had the knowledge.

⁸² Major R. McL. C. Aitchison, 57th Bn. Salesman; of Brunswick, Vic.; b. Geelong, Vic., 7 Nov., 1889.

a number of their men who were digging in with the left of the 57th. Captain Peacock, in charge of that flank, thinking that the 59th had mistaken its orders or position, made his way back to Captain Smith, its senior company commander, and



persuaded him to order his line forward. Smith was about to do so when figures were seen coming from the front. They were the two companies of the 57th. After they had dug for fifteen minutes, Morgan had found the enemy outflanking them on the northern side, and, considering their position unsafe, had ordered them to fall back to the first enemy trench. It was then about 2.30 a.m. on the 25th.

The 59th had thoroughly reorganised, and Captain Smith, after conference with Captains Peacock and Morgan (57th), and Young (59th), and Lieutenant Threlkeld (one of the guiding officers from the 56th), decided that it was unsafe to go farther. "There would have been little difficulty in reoccupying the old line (astride the Roman road) had our flank been even partially secure," Smith reported afterwards.⁸³ Captain Young was for digging in according to Elliott's general plan, with the flank curved back on the northern edge of the Roman road, and this course was adopted. Captain Southwell⁸⁴ continued Young's line, bending his company back to face the town. Smith decided to keep his company (the reserve of the 59th) forward and fill a gap between Young's and Bursey's. The two advanced companies of the 57th, now that the plan of extending the line across the Roman road had been abandoned, fell back to the first captured trench-line in rear of the 59th—the position which they were to have taken up as reserve under the order issued by Elliott at 9.5 a.m.

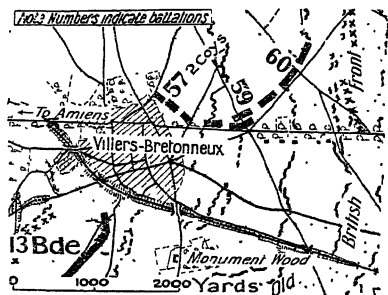
⁸³ He added that if the two companies of the 57th had remained forward and formed a right flank, he would have gone on.

⁸⁴ Capt. B. C. S. Southwell, 59th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Moonee Ponds, Vic.; b. Launceston, Tas., 26 Nov., 1882.

The two rear companies of the 57th, under Captain Elliott⁸⁵ and Lieutenant Morrow,⁸⁶ had been charged with the highly difficult task of changing direction as soon as the first objective was reached, and wheeling in a nearly complete semicircle so as to face the edge of the town and protect the advance of the rest. Before the start there had been little time to impart these orders, but Lieutenant Morrow had informed his N.C.O.'s (says Sergeant Wilkinson⁸⁷) that

he would tell us more on the way, so I took the opportunity of learning all I could while we halted (at the first objective).

Machine-gun fire from the town was furious, but as yet wild and high, and the burning house was of great assistance in keeping direction. Officers and N.C.O.'s duly led their platoons round in a wide semicircle; in Morrow's company some who had received no orders and had no notion where to go were helped by Major Aitchison, second-in-command of the battalion, who came up with the intelligence officer and scout sergeant⁸⁸ precisely at this juncture when his guidance was wanted. The two companies actually reached the exact position intended, some of them occupying small German trenches evidently dug the day before, others digging in. Aitchison shifted some of the platoons so as to extend the left to the Roman road near the flank of the 59th, about 700 yards east of the town. A little farther east Young's company of the



59th placed a small post on each side of the main road. Many Germans came along the road from the town "apparently

⁸⁵ Capt. L. W. Elliott, D.S.O.; 57th Bn. Clerk, and aerated water manufacturer; of Carlton, Vic.; b. Carlton, 22 Dec., 1891.

⁸⁶ Capt. T. W. Morrow, 57th Bn. Agricultural machinery manufacturer; of Mentone, Vic.; b. Parkville, Vic., 22 April, 1883.

⁸⁷ Sgt. A. J. Wilkinson (No. 4627; 57th Bn.). Pork butcher; of Golden Square, Vic.; b. Serpentine, Vic., 16 March, 1896.

⁸⁸ Lieut. R. Doutreband and Sgt. W. H. J. Baskiville. (Doutreband belonged to Middle Park, Vic., and Sydney; Baskiville, who died on 18 March, 1925, was of Bathurst, N.S.W., and New Zealand.)

quite unconcerned, smoking cigarettes," and from the other direction arrived a party of them pulling a hand-cart with trench-mortar shells. All were allowed to approach, and then abruptly challenged and made prisoners.

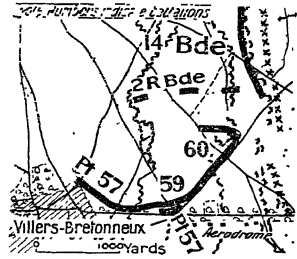
Major Aitchison went on to look for the forward companies, and, with something of a shock, came upon them almost at once, in the old British reserve-trench, behind the front north of the road. He spoke strongly to the leaders until the reason was explained to him, and then ordered up both companies to make a flank for the 59th a little north of the Roman road. They moved accordingly and dug in before dawn about fifty yards in front of the centre of the 59th, which served as a support line for them. Ahead of them, just south of the road, was the aerodrome. Major Aitchison there left them with orders that a patrol should be sent to the south to see if it could find the flank of the 13th Brigade.

The companies of the 60th Battalion, which formed the left of the attack, had, from the first wild charge, headed too much to the south, closing on to the 59th, which also crowded slightly too far to the right. Consequently, though Lieutenants Simpson and Veale of the 60th's left company continually searched in the dark for the flank of the 14th Brigade, they reached the Villers-Bretonneux-Hamel road without seeing a trace of it. When the advance stopped, patrols immediately sent out could discover nothing of it. Germans were found north of the flank, and Simpson therefore swung back his company to face north-east, with its left 600 yards to the rear of the Hamel road. Farther south, Major Kuring of the 59th, seeing that the troops were too thick in the centre, despatched to the left flank half of one of the support companies of the 60th (Captain Arter's⁸⁹). These platoons extended the flank westward to nearly half-a-mile. Simpson was just taking out a patrol—a corporal, A. Stewart,⁹⁰ and four men—when a large party approached. On being halted, it proved to be hostile; a burst from a Lewis gun prevented it from fleeing, and twenty Germans with four light machine-guns were captured.

⁸⁹ Capt. J. H. Arter, 60th Bn. Farmer; of Carrajung, Vic.; b. Old Normanton, Derby, Eng., 18 Jan., 1890.

⁹⁰ L/Sgt. A. Stewart, M.M. (No. 3323; 60th Bn.). Seaman, in W. Aust. pilot service; of Albany and Fremantle; b. Footscray, Vic., 18 July, 1894.

Colonel Marshall, hearing from one of his intelligence officers (Lieutenant Pizzey) that this flank had had to dig in short of the objective, at once came round the line; it was then near daylight, and, being of opinion that it should now be easier to find the 14th Brigade's flank, Marshall directed



that Simpson's company should send out yet another patrol under an officer, while one of his own intelligence officers (Lieutenant Gannon) endeavoured to lead a scouting party from the flank of the 54th to meet it. Simpson's patrol ran into a German post, which surrendered to him, but before he entered it all the patrol except himself and his sergeant⁹¹ were hit by machine-gun fire from another German post. Being prevented by this fire from returning to his company, Simpson dragged his wounded into the trench, killed the Germans, made comfortable his own wounded men, and held the post all day, sniping several of the enemy. Gannon's patrol found some British infantry behind the flank of the 14th Brigade, and started out from that position to meet Simpson, but was immediately fired on by a German post 100 yards ahead, one of the patrol being killed. It was clear that Germans were firmly dug in between the two brigades, and further efforts to link up were abandoned until nightfall.

German accounts of the swift attack north of Villers-Bretonneux are as meagre as those of the attack south of it are complete. At midnight forward observers of the III/48th I.R. north of the town reported that a strong force was concentrating in the valley to the north-east, to barrage which (by indirect fire) two platoons of the heavy machine-guns of the 35th Fusilier had been specially disposed. The historian of each regiment concerned says that the attack broke through its neighbour. Actually it burst through the 478th I.R. north-west of the town, missing most of the 479th (which continued to intervene between the 15th and 14th Brigades) but carrying away the 8th company of the 35th Fusilier Regiment, which linked its division (228th) in the town with the 243rd Division extending to Vaire Wood. The troops past whom the assault had brushed on the northern outskirts were the 48th I.R. (228th Division). Farther east, the 7th

⁹¹ Sgt. W. E. Acton, D.C.M. (No. 4726; 60th Bn.). Sailor and labourer; of South Melbourne; b. Godstone, Surrey, Eng., 2 May, 1896.

company of the 35th Fusilier, directly east of the town and south of the Roman road, occupied old British trenches there, collected the stragglers who streamed from the town, and (according to its regimental historian) counter-attacked and drove back the Australians from the south of the road. The 207th I.R., holding the western end of the town, was unaware of the attack until some time after it had occurred, but the energetic commander of the II/48th I.R., Captain Teichmann, who now controlled the troops of his regiment in the forward area, was quickly aware that he was almost cut off. He placed his 5th company, which was too weak to counter-attack, facing rearwards north of the Roman road, and with heavy fire from its rifles and machine-guns into the rear of the 15th Brigade it hampered the further progress of the attack.

By 4 o'clock on April 25th—the third anniversary of the Landing at Anzac—the two Australian brigades had established themselves—not, it is true, upon the objective set them, completely cutting off the town, but so near to it that it was certain that the enemy, unless he dislodged them, must withdraw his troops from the town and wood, if indeed it was still possible for them to escape. To render their withdrawal more difficult, two machine-guns of the 25th Company (A.I.F.) under Lieutenant Rooney⁹² were ordered by Major Kuring to cover the level space east of the village, while two others, and five captured German machine-guns, fired towards the front. In support, under Lieutenant Watson,⁹³ four guns of the 14th Company protected the front, while four more German machine-guns were turned to the rear, covering the village. Four guns of the 24th Company (A.I.F.) also came up. On the other side of the town, the 13th Brigade had two machine-guns of the 13th Company with the 51st Battalion, 750 yards south-west of the railway station, two more with the 52nd opposite the Monument, four others under Lieutenant Cowley⁹⁴ firing on the southern entrances to the town and the exits from the wood, and another eight under Captain Cory⁹⁵ in readiness in and near Cachy Switch.⁹⁶

⁹² Lieut. G. W. Rooney, 25th M.G. Coy. Commercial traveller; of Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Surrey Hills, 8 April, 1891.

⁹³ Lieut. N. E. B. Eglese, M.C. (served as L. E. Watson); 14th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Double Bay, N.S.W.; b. Wollongong, N.S.W., 15 July, 1895.

⁹⁴ Lieut. T. E. Cowley, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Commercial traveller; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Liverpool, Eng., 12 Oct., 1890.

⁹⁵ Capt. W. M. B. Cory, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Gazier; of Warwick, Q'land; b. Clermont, Q'land, 10 Nov., 1884.

⁹⁶ Lieutenant F. S. Burt (of Carnarvon, W.A., pastoralist), whose guns were with the 51st and 52nd, was killed, but his teams carried on under Cpl. R. L. Davie. Light trench-mortars went forward with each brigade, but were not used.

It will be remembered that, while the Australians were to enclose Villers-Bretonneux, the town was to be cleared by two battalions of the 8th Division, the 22nd **Clearing of the town and wood** Durham Light Infantry, attached to the 15th Brigade, attacking it from the north, and the 2nd Northamptonshire, attached to the 13th Brigade, entering it from the south. The Australian commanders assumed that these units would have a comparatively easy task; and as the night went on, and the enemy's fire from the town, and even from Bois l'Abbé, continued actively, the impression spread that their operations had not been vigorously attempted. General Heneker, on being informed at 4.15 by Elliott that he suspected the 22nd D.L.I. had not moved at all,⁹⁷ ordered the 2nd Royal Berkshire to clear the town as soon as possible in their stead. Brigadier-General Glasgow, also, afterwards reported that during the attack nothing was seen of the 2nd Northamptonshire; it was subsequently learned that the battalion was late in leaving the Aubigny line,⁹⁸ and that at an early stage its commander (Lieutenant-Colonel Latham) and adjutant (Captain Essame) were wounded—the former mortally. It was assumed by General Glasgow and others that the battalion's plans had been disorganised by this mishap.

Actually, both the Northamptonshire and the Durham Light Infantry, though very late, had attacked, the former (now under command of Major Forster),⁹⁹ following the 51st and 50th Battalions, having caught up with them at the wire in front of Cachy Switch. After passing the wire with severe casualties, the Northampton swung north-eastwards towards the town, the outskirts of which overlapped the railway on the other side of the valley. It was at this stage that its

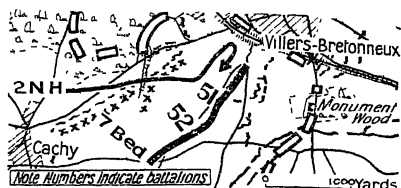
during the actual attack. The 59th Battalion took its two attached mortars (15th L.T.M. Battery) forward with the infantry. The officer-in-charge of them, Lieutenant A. C. Davies (Malvern and Officer, Vic.), was mortally wounded; his men joined in the charge, and most of the trench-mortar shells were dropped. The 57th and 60th held their attached trench-mortar parties back at battalion headquarters until the line was established, which proved much the better plan. The 13th L.T.M. Battery found all targets out of range.

⁹⁷ Colonel Layh (57th) had reported that they apparently had not advanced.

⁹⁸ It had occupied part of this line at the southern edge of Bois l'Abbé.

⁹⁹ Major H. T. Forster, D.S.O., M.C.; Royal Berkshire Regt. (attached 2nd Northants). Member of British Regular Army; b. Christchurch, Hampshire, Eng., 14 Nov., 1878. Killed in action, 29 May, 1918.

colonel and adjutant were hit, but the subsequent advance was comparatively easy until the line entered the head of the gully south of Villers-Bretonneux, when it was seen in the light of flares that rose from the town and the Bois d'Aquenne, and intense fire was opened on it from the railway embankment. The advance was stopped and the Northampton sought safety on the plateau farther east. From here a second attempt was



made, but was met by machine-gun fire and the advance ended behind the 13th Brigade's flank. Major Forster now found Captain Harburn and arranged to dig in at right angles to Harburn's flank, which was open through the failure to meet the 15th Brigade. Before the fight ended, the Northamptonshire had lost 285 officers and men.

The 22nd Durham Light Infantry also started late, its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel James,¹⁰⁰ (himself an Australian), not having reached Elliott until 9.30 p.m. James, whose battalion had just been moved up to the west of the village, warned Elliott that it would be late, but was told that this did not greatly matter provided that the battalion "mopped up" the north of the town during the night. Its patrols found the eastern outskirts strongly held, and attempts made by two companies to approach were met by intense fire, and were therefore not strongly pressed.

The history of the 35th Fusilier Regiment, whose 6th company was in support at the western end of the town, says that at 5 a.m. a man of the 207th I.R. came in with news that the enemy had broken in between the 11th and 12th companies of his regiment. The 6th company at once counter-attacked and reoccupied the line. At about the same time the 5th company defeated with loss an attack by the British west of the village, the German officers personally serving the light machine-guns. The attack first referred to appears to have been made by the 22nd D.L.I.

The fact was that the task allotted to the attached British battalions was far from being as easy as Australian

¹⁰⁰ Lieut.-Col. B. C. James, D.S.O.; Devonshire Regt. Commanded 8th Bn., Devon Regt., 1916/18; 22nd Bn., D.L.I., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of Port Hedland, W. Aust., and North Devon, Eng.; b. Clare, S. Aust., 25 March, 1882. Died, 2 July, 1930.

commanders assumed. While the thrust of the two Australian brigades was directed where the Germans did not expect it, the 22nd D.L.I. and 2nd Northampton had to strike where the blow was expected, and the Germans were in strength with great numbers of machine-guns and fully prepared. Nevertheless the British efforts were not wasted, since even the attempt by the 22nd D.L.I. probably served to mystify the enemy as to the true direction of the main thrusts.

Dawn drew near without any apparent diminution in the strength of the Germans holding the town, although those in the Bois d'Aquenne became noticeably less active. To the flank of the 57th and 59th Battalions of Elliott's brigade, where it faced westwards towards the town, the machine-gun fire of the 48th I.R. from houses and hedges on the outskirts had been most galling, especially while the brigade's line was being organised. About 4 o'clock, Captain Southwell of the 59th sent a party to raid a neighbouring house. As the Australians reached the place and lined out, eighteen Germans were discerned leaving it and creeping in single file, holding each other's coat-tails, along a passage beside the building. Alarmed by some sound, they dashed in panic for the cellar. A bomb was thrown in, and they presently surrendered. The place was a medical aid-post; the German doctor in charge was allowed to return to it, and, with his orderly and one Australian, tended the German wounded who lay within. As the light began to grow, German snipers in other houses and in the hedges became more active. On the western flank Lieutenant Levy¹⁰¹ of Elliott's company of the 57th took out a patrol of a dozen men, killed several Germans, and captured and brought in two heavy machine-guns and five prisoners. A patrol of the same company under Sergeant Liddicut¹⁰² captured another machine-gun. Opposite the next company (Morrow's, of the 57th), although the Germans in parts sniped keenly, killing a sergeant and wounding several men, a white rag was seen waving in a hedge. Lieutenant Money¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Lieut. C. J. Levy, 57th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Hunter's Hill, N.S.W., 2 Dec., 1894.

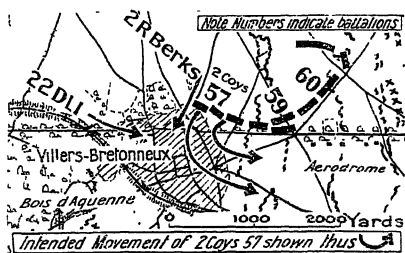
¹⁰² Sgt. G. H. R. Liddicut, M.M. (No. 2447; 57th Bn.). Blacksmith; of Stawell, Vic.; b. Wal Wal, Vic., 12 Sept., 1893.

¹⁰³ Lieut. W. A. Money, M.C., M.M.; 57th Bn. Farmer; of Melbourne; b. Islington, London, 9 Aug., 1895.

got leave to go out with four men, and a German officer and 51 men surrendered to them.

In the event of the town not being cleared by the 22nd D.L.I. during the night, these companies of the 57th were to undertake the task at daylight; and Lieutenant Levy on returning advised Captain Elliott that it was now practicable. Major Aitchison, who had come back in order to see to this, directed that Elliott's and Morrow's¹⁰⁴ companies (the latter now under Lieutenant Carnegie¹⁰⁵) should carry out a left wheel, sweeping through the eastern half of the town and finally emerging from its eastern edge to take up a line in front of it. After seeing the movement begun at 6 o'clock, Aitchison and his sergeant returned to battalion headquarters, shepherding the prisoners.

When just about to start his company on this manœuvre, Carnegie was badly hit. He was able, though with difficulty, to describe the outlines of the plan to Lieutenant Rena,¹⁰⁶ who then led forward the company. Farther west Elliott's company, entering the town where the Hamelet and Fouilloy roads converged, met there a company of the 2nd Royal Berkshire allotted for the same duty, and the two pushed on together. Every now and again a machine-gun opened on them from one of the houses. The Lewis gunners were set to fire on these buildings from the front, while other men made their way round and bombed them from the rear. On finding themselves surrounded, the Germans surrendered. This process repeated itself as the troops advanced. Some of the Lewis gunners



¹⁰⁴ Morrow was missing, and was afterwards found to be badly gassed and shocked. He pluckily returned to his company the next evening and (according to the report of Lieutenant Rena) "refused to go out of the line . . . but spent a night of agony in the line."

¹⁰⁵ Lieut. W. B. Carnegie, 57th Bn. Meat inspector; of Canterbury, Vic.; b. Beith, Ayrshire, Scotland, 2 Jan., 1882. Died, 2 May, 1935.

¹⁰⁶ Lieut.-Col. J. A. Rena; 57th Bn. Electrical engineer; b. New York, 21 June, 1893. (He was one of the few who had been permitted to join the A.I.F. overseas. He had been working with the Marconi company on mast construction near Cairo when he became a member of the 2nd L.H. Regt. at Maadi in January, 1915.)

finally brought their guns to bear on a central cross-road ahead, while other parties working up two streets that converged thither, drove sixty Germans into this trap and captured them. In a factory on the left flank Lieutenant Falconer's¹⁰⁷ platoon also had captured six *minenwerfer*. By the time the main street was reached, the number of prisoners had amounted to 150. Rena's company on the left had captured at least as many, and, having a shorter distance to wheel, finished its task fairly quickly. Both companies, having the further duty of establishing a line east of the town, were much embarrassed by the number of the prisoners—the process of detaching men to escort them threatened to prove too great a drain on the force. Fortunately, on the main road, at the rear entrance of the town was found a company of the Durham Light Infantry, just arrived from the northern outskirts. Captain Elliott handed over to it all his prisoners; farther to the east, Rena had similarly passed his prisoners to the 2nd Royal Berkshire.

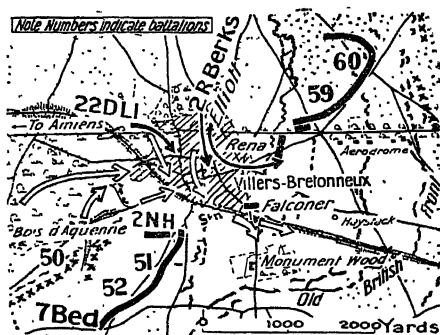
The two companies of the 57th were thus left free to complete their left wheel and move out east of the town. Lieutenant Rena, having finished the first part of his task by 9 o'clock, stopped at some old British trenches south of the Roman road just beyond the town, waiting for Elliott's company to come up on his right. His position happened to be in continuance of a front which Aitchison had already allotted to Captain Morgan's company, then still north of the road. Rena's left flank platoon under Lieutenant Money found touch with the 59th,¹⁰⁸ and Rena protected the right by throwing back a platoon, and picked out a suitable position for Elliott's company, to which Aitchison now sent an urgent message.

Elliott's platoons had just finished clearing their part of the town of all Germans whom they could find, and Lieutenant Falconer, commanding the left platoon, had formed up his sections to move in the new direction and started to advance eastwards, when he heard brisk machine-gun fire in his rear. The sound was that of Lewis guns, but, suspecting that the users were Germans, he decided to go back and deal with them. He found many Germans in scattered parties, some of which fought stubbornly. After clearing these and handing the

¹⁰⁷ Lieut. D. Falconer, 57th Bn. Iron merchant; of Neutral Bay, N.S.W.; b. Montrose, Scotland, 17 Nov., 1885.

¹⁰⁸ Money had with him, for use, a captured machine-gun.

prisoners to the British troops, or sending back large numbers under the escort of single Australians, he was informed by a German who spoke excellent English that a number of the enemy under several officers were in the road leading to the railway station. Suspecting that this was the centre of resistance, Falconer turned thither after stationing a Lewis gun to guard his rear. He had now with him only a Lewis gunner (Private Patten)¹⁰⁹ and four other men, but was manœuvring to seize the house referred to, when a loud rattle of rifles and machine-guns broke out from the bridge over the railway at the end of the street. Hurrying thither he found three of his men¹¹⁰ on the bridge, engaged in a fire-fight at close range with very large numbers of Germans who were moving eastwards along the far side of the railway, across his front. Patten brought his Lewis gun to the bridge, and the small party, taking cover in crescent-shaped formation, kept the enemy under steady fire. Without knowing it, Falconer was now commanding the Germans' only avenue of retreat from the town and wood.

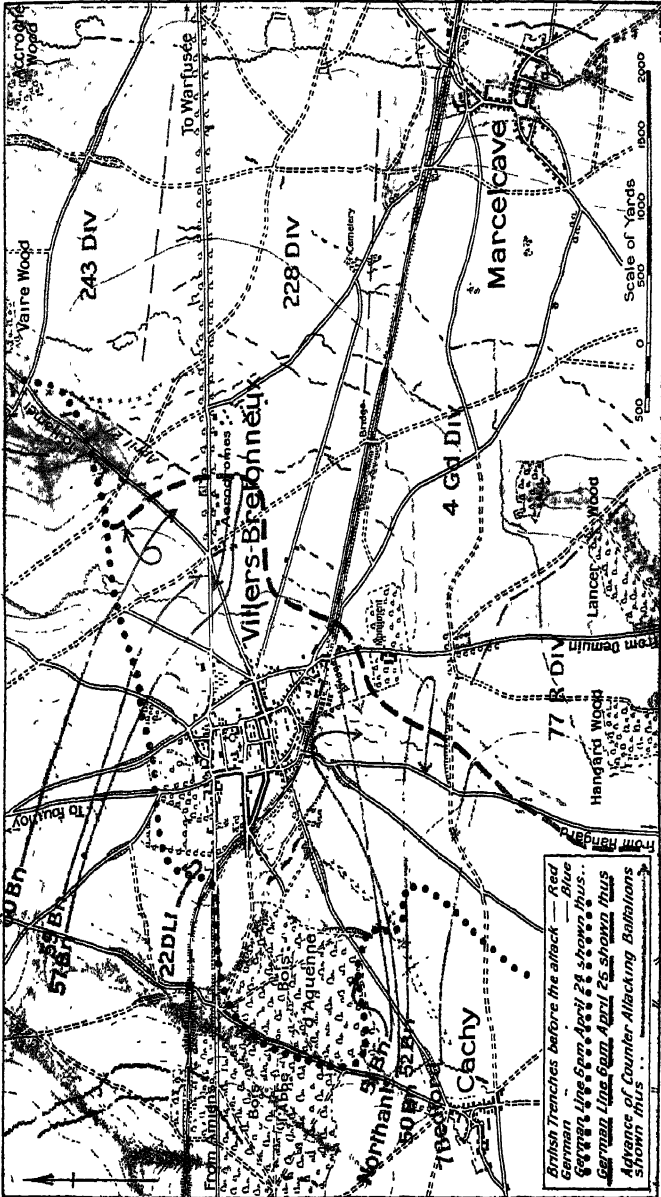


The enemy (says his report) then appeared to realize that we only consisted of a very small party, and, as there were easily 200 of them around the far end of the bridge, they started to creep round my left flank. I kept the position until it looked probable that we would be cut off, and then proceeded to fall back in short bounds, covering each bound with the Lewis gun.

He sent a message to Captain Elliott for reinforcements with which to clear this enemy, and then, after getting another platoon to protect his rear, and having collected most of his own men, he started again for the bridge. But Captain Elliott, not receiving his message, sent him an urgent order—which

¹⁰⁹ Cpl. W. Patten, M.M. (No. 3914; 57th Bn.). Farm labourer; of Stawell, Vic.; b. Daylesford, Vic., 27 March, 1894.

¹¹⁰ Cpl. J. P. Flynn (Apsley and Skene's Creek, Vic.), Private M. J. Harvey (Amphitheatre, Vic.), and Private Ford.



SECOND VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, 24TH-25TH APRIL, 1918
 Showing the limits of the German advance and the direction of the several units in the counter-attack.

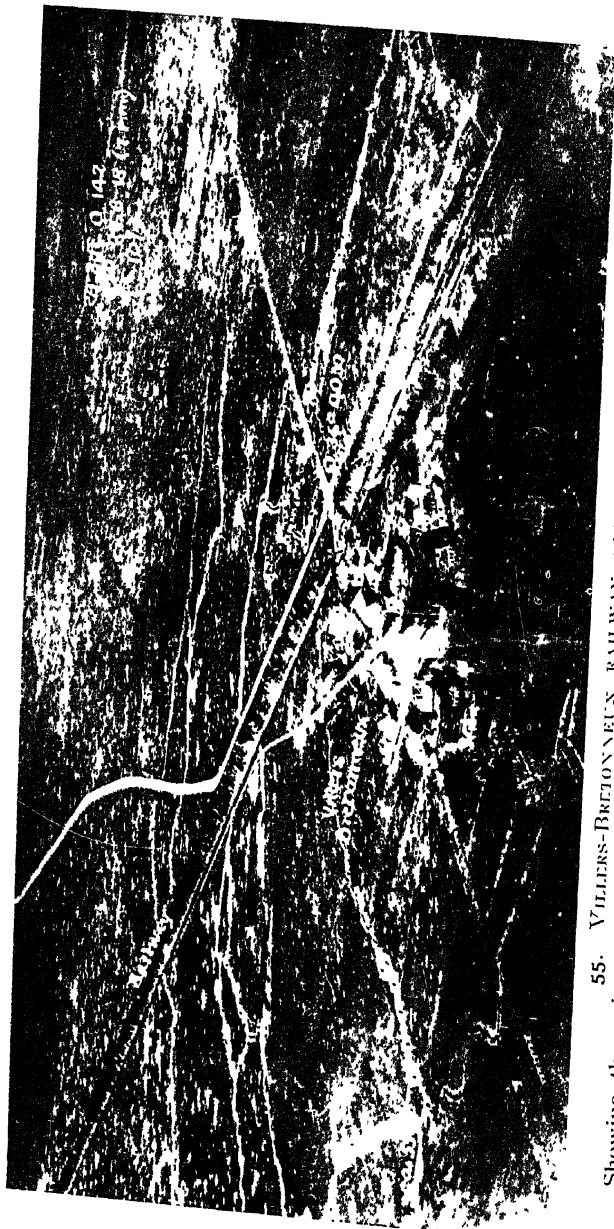


54. THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE BOIS L'ABBÉ ON 1ST MAY, 1918

The view is westwards from near the position occupied on April 24th by the German machine-gun which did so much damage along the wire of Cachy Switch. The Australian machine-gunners in the foreground are looking across the valley towards Villers-Bretonneux

Aust. War Memorial Official Photo. No E2305.

To face p 618



55. VILLERS-BRETONNEUX RAILWAY STATION AND BRIDGE

Showing the point at which Lieutenant Falconer's party fired on the enemy retreating from the town and from Bois l'Abbé. The photograph was taken two months later. At the time of the April fighting only a few short trenches existed there, and the Monument Farm buildings and wood, which can be seen in the upper right-hand quarter of the photograph, were comparatively speaking intact

Taken from the air on 26th June, 1918, by No. 3 Squadron, A.F.C.

now reached him—to move to the eastern edge of the town. On his arrival there Elliott told him that the British troops were to complete the mopping-up of the town—Elliott's company was required to establish part of the line east of it. It was then about 10.30, and, learning from Falconer that the southern half of the town was fairly clear of the enemy, Elliott sent two platoons under Lieutenant Levy to take position south of Rena's company, but kept Falconer's platoons behind them in houses and trenches on the outskirts to guard against a possible attack from the direction of the bridge. Then, entrusting his company until dusk to Lieutenant Levy, Captain Elliott himself went back to explain to headquarters the rather complicated situation.

The history of the 35th Fusilier Regiment states that at 3 a.m. the commander of the 228th Division, hearing of the retirement of the 4th Guard Division, ordered the 228th Division back to the old British trenches on the eastern outskirts of the town, and at 4.30 ordered the jumping-off line for the previous morning's attack to be held at all costs. These statements are inconsistent with other records, but, whether they are true or not, most German accounts agree that until 7 o'clock the German troops holding the northern and western edges of Villers-Bretonneux had received no such order. At that hour, it is said, a "strong attack" (actually that of the mopping-up companies of the 57th Battalion and 2nd Royal Berkshire) against the I/48th I.R. between the Fouilloy and Hamelet roads forced its way into the town. The men of the II/48th at the north-eastern corner now saw numbers of their own I Battalion and of the 207th R.I.R. and 93rd R.I.R. retiring through the town behind them, making for the station. The house in which Captain Teichmann had his headquarters—with which also were those of the II/35th Fusilier—was under aimed machine-gun fire and almost surrounded, and Teichmann accordingly gave orders for withdrawal, "which was carried out fighting and without haste." It was about 8.30 before the two companies of the 35th on the western outskirts withdrew, Reserve Lieutenant Priese having first blown up some captured trench-mortars. The two field-guns under Sergeant-Major Jarocz were pulled out from the position after most of the infantry had gone, the Germans man-handling them in quarter-mile stages for 3,000 yards.

Brigadier-General Elliott, as usual, straining on the leash, had obtained leave to move his reserve battalion, the 58th, up to the reserve line north of Villers-Bretonneux in case an opportunity offered for pressing on into German territory. Actually, however, as soon as the mist cleared, machine-guns, as on the previous day, prevented almost any movement on the plateau. At 8 o'clock Major Aitchison, returning from headquarters of the 57th Battalion to its two companies north

of the Roman road, found that, owing to intense machine-gun fire from the eastern edge of the town, the companies had not crossed the road. Twice in the early morning large parties of Germans had tried to approach from the east, over the ground south of the road, but were stopped by fire. A large party trying to leave the town by the main road had also been stopped by an Australian machine-gun firing directly down it; but while Aitchison was present, at 8.30, the German posts on the eastern edge of the town retired over the open south of the Roman road in spite of keen enfilade fire from the Australian line north of the road. At that time the "mopping-up" companies of the 57th had not yet emerged from the town, and it was clear that, for the moment, the urgent task was to establish the line south of the road. Aitchison accordingly told Captain Morgan to make ground there as soon as the chance occurred.

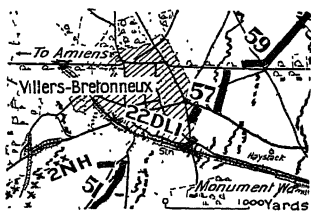
The movement, seen by Aitchison, of German troops from east of the town was doubtless the retirement of the 7th company of the II/35th Fusilier Regiment, which had been occupying the old British trenches there. The movement from the east towards the town was the first counter-measure taken by the nearest staffs outside the town on learning of the danger of encirclement to the troops in Villers-Bretonneux.

When first reports of this danger had come through, the 228th Division still had two battalions of the 35th Fusilier Regiment in reserve. Shortly after dawn an officer of this regiment, Reserve Lieutenant Krause, managed to get through to Captain Teichmann of the 48th, and at 6.20 Krause returned with a message from him: "I ask urgent relief as I am surrounded. Attack as quickly as possible on both sides of the Roman road. The enemy will then be driven into my arms." The commander of the 35th, Lieutenant-Colonel Tietze, decided to put in his III Battalion south of the Roman road, and asked the 48th I.R. to put in the III/48th north of the road. The III/48th, however, was already in Villers-Bretonneux. Tietze would not put in the I/35th, this being the last reserve of the division¹¹¹ and the situation of the 4th Guard Division being still, he believed, obscure. Consequently at 7.20 the III/35th advanced alone south of the road, with orders to attack the southern flank of the Australian line there. Moving on a two-company front, it met the rearward parts of the II/35th on their way back from the town. The commander of the retiring battalion agreed to cover the southern flank of the III while the latter advanced; but after going 300 yards under artillery and machine-gun fire, finding no German troops to right or left, the III stopped. The forward companies of the II/35th under Reserve

¹¹¹ This is the account given in the history of the 35th. It seems more probable that the decisions were those of the divisional commander.

Lieutenant Priese, now wounded, afterwards came through—doubtless along the railway cutting—from Villers-Bretonneux, and remained in support.

Shortly after the advance of the III/35th Fusilier was stopped, Captain Morgan of the 57th Battalion tried to carry out Aitchison's instructions. One of his platoons lined the road, fifty yards ahead of his trench, to give covering fire while others crossed the road. At the very start, however, the attempt met intense machine-gun fire from buildings on the aerodrome. Several men were immediately hit, and the plan was abandoned. The two companies that had cleared Villers-Bretonneux, however, extended half-way from the road to the railway and, except the safe avenue afforded by the railway cutting, all exits from the town were closed to the enemy. An hour later a company of the Durham Light Infantry reached the east end of the village with orders to fill the gap south of the 57th. Lieutenant Falconer advised its commander first to oust the German posts from around the bridge and asked for leave to help him, which however was refused. The Durhams cleared the Germans from the south-eastern end of the village, but lost sixteen men in the process, and eventually dug-in in the station yard.¹¹² Throughout the morning the posts of the 15th

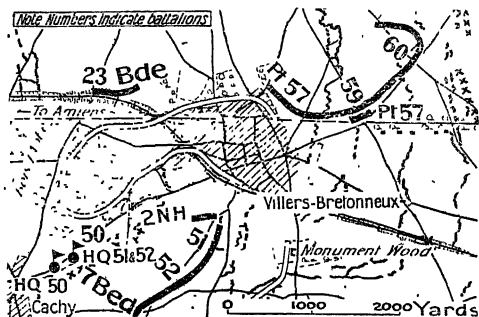


Brigade could see Germans, who had retired by the railway, withdrawing past the haystack which the 57th had reached the night before.

South of Villers-Bretonneux, dawn had found the 51st Battalion and 2nd Northampton well in sight of the station bridge but some 750 yards south-west of it. Lieutenant Earl's post on the left, and a post under Lieutenant Nuttall of the 50th farther in rear, shot down with their Lewis guns numbers of the Germans who streamed back there. The

¹¹² In the whole fighting the D.L.I. lost 3 officers and 186 of other ranks.

Germans still held the town and railway, a quarter of a mile north of the 13th Brigade, and the wood in the valley half-a-mile in its rear. Until dawn machine-guns were shooting from the wood behind the headquarters of the battalions of the 13th Brigade, and flares from the wood constantly fell on or near the road in rear of these headquarters. After dawn these flares still rose. But at 6 o'clock there came to the headquarters of the 51st and 52nd Battalions at Cachy Switch a tank officer, Lieutenant



Houlton,¹¹³ who had been ordered to deal with any German tanks in front of the Switch and to help in clearing the Germans from Villers-Bretonneux. He said that he had three tanks back near the wood, but that his instructions were vague, and he asked Colonel Christie (51st) if he could suggest a definite task. Christie desired him to clear the wood; and, saying that he was "glad to have a job," Houlton returned to his tanks. About 7 o'clock the Australians saw Germans running from the timber as the tanks worked through it and along its eastern edge into the valley south of the town. The tanks found the machine-guns in the wood, rounded up parties of the enemy in the valley, and returned at about 8 o'clock driving their prisoners before them. The battalions of the 23rd (British) Brigade,¹¹⁴ which had reorganised during the night, had been ordered to reoccupy the wood, but at dawn German machine-gun fire had stopped them near the position held throughout the previous day by Colonel Hill (2nd East Lancs.).¹¹⁵ The 2nd West Yorkshire now

¹¹³ Lieut. S. Houlton, 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Of Derby, Eng.

¹¹⁴ Which originally held the Monument front. At this time the 2nd West Yorkshire was able to muster only 7 officers and 85 men, the 2nd Middlesex 3 officers and 54 men, the 2nd Devonshire 6 officers and 300 men.

¹¹⁵ Hill's force was withdrawn by order at 1 a.m. on the 25th.

sent a detachment round to the south of the wood, and, by working in from there, the Bois d'Aquenne was easily re-occupied. By 9.30 these troops and the Sherwood Foresters had taken 75 prisoners, and the wood was reported to be clear.

German narratives say that the wood had been held throughout the night by the 4th Guard Division, its 93rd R.I.R. occupying the northern part, and the 5th Foot Guard the southern. At 3 o'clock there reached headquarters of the 5th Foot Guard information that the troops were still holding out, their rear protected by the 2nd, 5th, and 8th companies lining the Cachy-Villers-Bretonneux road (actually the other companies in the wood had not been attacked). The commanders of the I and II/5th Guard Grenadier, returning to the Monument area on relief from the wood, were seized on by the commander of the 5th Foot Guard, Major von Kriegsheim, and set to collect all troops at hand, and, with the III/5th Foot Guard, to counter-attack in a south-westerly direction from the Monument. Major von Kriegsheim threw his own powerful personality into the preparations, building up with engineers, headquarters troops, and others the shaky line there. But shortage of leaders, mixture of units, and strong fire of all arms from their opponents made it impossible to launch the counter-attack.

To prevent the troops in the Bois d'Aquenne from being cut off, Kriegsheim planned another counter-attack—this one to be launched at dawn from the southern edge of Villers-Bretonneux, but the opposing machine-gun fire rendered this also abortive.

So far the German reaction of which those on the British side had seen evidence had been that of the troops and staffs in the German forward area. From now onward, however, measures taken by the higher staff began to be apparent. On the German side, as occasionally happened to most troops during the war, the immediate prelude to disaster was an influx of telegrams congratulating the attacking divisions upon the splendid nature of their success. The XIV Reserve Corps, however, at sundown on the 24th was aware of a weak spot at the point where the left of the 4th Guard Division and the right of the 77th Reserve Division, farther back, should have joined—the commander of the Guard division knew that this was insufficiently covered by the III/5th Foot Guard. At 1.20 a.m. corps headquarters received news that a British counter-attack had driven through this weak junction, forced back the 5th Foot Guard, and reached the southern edge of Villers-Bretonneux, and that the only formed troops ahead of it were weak reserves of those same troops on the Villers-Bretonneux-Démuin road. The XI Corps had no word as to the counter-attack and no troops available to reinforce its right, and the XIV Reserve therefore had to provide these.

Two battalions of the 1st Grenadier Regiment (1st Division) were accordingly ordered to Marcelcave, to counter-attack south of Villers-Bretonneux. The Second Army at the same time ordered the 9th Bavarian Reserve Division up to the rear of Warfusée. About this time word arrived that the 228th Division on the northern side of the town also had been attacked; but it was understood to be holding out, and, as it still had two battalions of the 35th Fusilier in reserve,

the main reserve of the XIV Reserve Corps—the 74th I.R. (19th Division)—and two battalions of the 1st Grenadier Regiment (1st Division) were sent to the 4th Guard Division. That division was ordered to use these reserves in counter-attacking at 6 a.m. in co-operation with the 77th Reserve Division, to which the XI Corps had then given the 78th I.R. (19th Division).

While the necessary movements were being carried out, there arrived from the 228th Division at 5.20 the shattering news that “after repelling two attacks” its right flank also, and the front of the 243rd Division “on Hill 104,” had been driven in by a third onslaught. About the same time it was learned that the regiments reinforcing the 4th Guard Division could not be in position to attack at 6, and “zero” hour was accordingly postponed, first to 7.30 and then to 8. At this stage for the first time the corps commander learnt that the British counter-attack during the night had reached the Roman road east of Villers-Bretonneux.

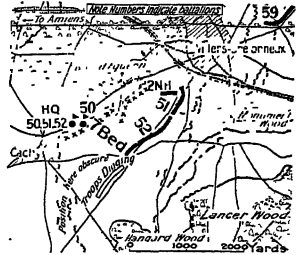
Meanwhile, however, the thick morning mist had helped the advanced German troops to avoid the worst disaster. Most of those in the Bois d'Aquenne managed to retire to the railway station—the 5th company of the 35th Fusilier at that stage covering them by lining the railway embankment at the south-western edge of the town. At 8 o'clock, after most of these troops that were able to get clear of the town had been withdrawn, the forward elements of both divisions retired from their position along the railway cutting under heavy fire, which caused great loss. The tail of the 5th Foot Guard withdrew from the south-eastern outskirts to a point half-way between the railway station and the Monument, where the flank of the Guard division remained, facing north. Farther south Major Kriegsheim had established a line from the Monument towards Hangard Wood, facing west, his headquarters being a couple of hundred yards in rear of the crossways south of Monument Wood.

At 9 o'clock there came to him the commanders of the 1st Grenadier Regiment and 74th I.R., which had been due to attack at 8 o'clock, and close after them arrived their regiments, wave upon wave. As they streamed up, the mist lifted and British fire was poured upon them. It was clear that the British expected an attack, and the German commanders on the spot realised that, without preparation, success was out of the question. The reinforcements were therefore used to strengthen the existing front, where they were shelled with great intensity, numbers being buried by the bursts and dug out again. The 9th Bavarian Reserve Division (the last reserve of XIV Corps), which at the same time was coming up behind the 228th, was found to be in no condition to attack. The order for the operation, the main object of which had been to relieve the troops in the Bois d'Aquenne, was accordingly cancelled.

While these events, largely unknown on the British side, were proceeding, at 8 o'clock the mist rising from the plateau in front of Cachy disclosed a number of troops digging-in between a quarter and half a mile to the south-west of the 13th Brigade and rather behind its right flank. The Royal West Kent was

Closing gaps
April 25

to have occupied this area, and as the troops seen were standing up fully exposed, digging as unhindered as labourers in peacetime, it was generally assumed that they were British. From the first, however, some suspicion existed as to their identity, and Colonels Whitham and Christie telephoned to Glasgow's headquarters asking that an inquiry should be made of the 54th Brigade. Their doubts were increasing when at 9 o'clock there arrived at their joint battalion headquarters an officer of the 2nd Northamptonshire¹¹⁶ bringing two blindfolded Germans, who carried an astonishing message. It appeared that they had come in with a white flag to the posts of the 7th Bedford on the right of the 52nd, and that



Lieutenant Tysoe had ordered one of his men to take them on to his battalion headquarters. For some reason their escort lost them, and they wandered—not too well blindfolded—until they fell into a post of the Northamptonshire, which sent them to Major Forster, who was then with Christie and Whitham. The senior German, a sergeant-major of the 332nd I.R. (77th Reserve Division) speaking excellent English, said,

My commander has sent me to tell you that you are confronted by superior forces and surrounded on three sides. There are two Guards and another division. He desires to know whether you will surrender and avoid a big loss of life. If you do not surrender he will blow you to pieces by turning the heavy artillery on to your trenches.

This demand, though a complete surprise, seemed much less absurd to those in the front, who could actually see the situation, than to the higher staffs in the security of the rear. That there were Germans on three sides of the 13th Brigade was only too true; and, although those in the wood were by then being finally cleared, a formidable force appeared to be establishing itself behind the right flank, and all officers and men in the forward area felt certain that a strong counter-attack from that direction was impending. That a shattering bombardment would be laid on the recaptured area was all too probable. Whitham, after consulting Christie, Salisbury, and Forster, told the sergeant-major to inform his commander

¹¹⁶ Said to have been Captain Mason (possibly Lieut. J. W. Mason).

that, while they thanked him for his courtesy, they had no intention of accepting his offer. The German was noticeably anxious to return to his own lines, but as he had been able to see too much through his bandage, they decided to send him on to brigade headquarters. At this stage, about 10 a.m., there arrived a corporal of the 2nd Bedfordshire with a third German who, like the first two, had come from the direction of Hangard Wood, and who carried a written message.¹¹⁷

The officer who commands the troupes there has to come *at once* in direction of the english Tank with the german soldier.

Commander

von Linsingen.

Brigadier-General Glasgow, informed of the incident on the telephone, said: "Tell them to go to Hell." When the third German was informed that he was being sent off as a prisoner, his delight was unconcealed.

It had occurred to all concerned that these demands to surrender were very possibly "bluff." Subsequent events proved this to be so, and the sergeant-major had to stand trial by court-martial on May 3rd at Fourth Army Headquarters for his part in a misuse of the white flag to cover a military ruse. But for a time anxiety as to the unknown troops now entrenching on the right was sharpened. Men were sniped from there; a search through field-glasses in clearer light showed that the intruders were wearing boots of German pattern. Warning after warning was sent to brigade headquarters. The staffs of the 58th Division and 54th Brigade maintained that the troops were British, but in the forward area the contrary signs were now definite. The strangers had set up machine-guns. In Switch Trench Lieutenant-Colonel Salisbury ordered Captain Cory of the 13th Machine Gun Company to get his eight guns ready for them, and a subaltern of the British artillery turned his two anti-tank field-pieces upon them. Two of Cory's machine-guns also opened fire.

Aeroplanes and, eventually, late in the afternoon, the three remaining whippet tanks attached to the 58th Division were

¹¹⁷ The message is now in the Australian War Memorial Museum. The commander of the II Battalion, 419th I.R.—of the Division (77th Res.) but not of the Regiment (332nd) to which Sergeant-major Brückner belonged—was Captain von Linsingen. The sergeant-major apparently told Lieutenant Tysoe that he had been promised military reward if he succeeded in persuading the British commander to surrender.

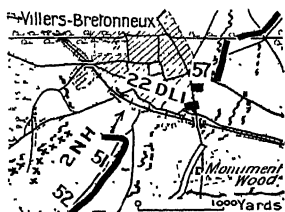
ordered to ascertain the truth. At 5.35 p.m. Colonel Whitham and his colleagues "had the joy of seeing" the tanks rolling out north of Cachy. Their young commander asked where these Germans were supposed to be. The direction being given to him, he immediately wheeled his tanks half-right, raced to the position, circled round it in spite of terrific machine-gun fire, scattering part of the enemy, who fell back. Within fifteen minutes he had returned, having finished his task. The subsequent report of Colonel Hardress Lloyd says that the tanks found "no organised British line" in front of Cachy; that some "isolated parties of the Bedford Regiment" were discovered 200 yards west of the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road, and that the enemy's trench-line, crowded with his troops, lay on the same side of that road, 100 yards beyond the Bedfords. There was no sign of any British line beyond. In spite of this, the report adds, the commanders of the 58th Division and 54th Brigade still maintained that the British line was east of the road. That belief had, as will be explained later, unfortunate results.

The bombardment by the German artillery, which all expected, descended on the whole front line with tremendous intensity at 7 o'clock and continued for an hour. But the Germans opposite Cachy, most of whom had remained in their trenches while the tanks circled them, attempted no attack.

German records show that, as well as the 78th I.R., the 91st I.R. (19th Division) had been given to the 77th Reserve Division for counter-attack, but the order countermanding the operation had reached them at 11 a.m., just before it was to be launched. Instead, therefore, of attacking, the two regiments relieved during the following night the portion of the 77th Division north of Hangard Wood.

But it was to another gap that the attention of the higher British commanders had chiefly been given—the one immediately south-east of Villers-Bretonneux, between the two Australian brigades. At 10 a.m. this still extended for some 500 yards on each side of the railway, and Brigadier-General Glasgow ordered his support battalion (50th) in Cachy Switch to fill it, and then push out patrols with a view to capturing Monument Wood. Colonel Salisbury was afterwards informed that three tanks would assist, clearing first the east end of the village, and then the Monument, and finally returning to

bring up the 50th Battalion. But, like other commanders, Glasgow had little conception of the volume of machine-gun fire, especially from Monument and Hangard Woods, that swept the open fields on the plateau whenever anything moved there by daylight. To reach the railway the 50th Battalion, then in trenches several hundred yards behind the 51st, would have to cross 400-800 yards of open plateau. Even messengers going singly could barely get through to the battalion's position, and Colonel Salisbury therefore did not attempt to carry out the order. The 2nd Northamptonshire, however, which was closer to Villers-Bretonneux and was ordered to establish a support line through the railway station behind the intended position of the 50th, pluckily carried out its movement. The town itself was by then reported to be clear, but the Northamptonshire had to cross 150 yards of level plateau before reaching the gully south of it. Major Forster decided to make this in one rush, each man running his fastest. This was an occasion on which English athletics proved valuable, most of the distance being covered before the Germans realised what was happening. A storm of fire was then opened, but only a dozen of the slower runners were caught. The battalion, after working along the railway to the station, was fired on from buildings north of it, but occupied the station and linked with the 51st south of it.

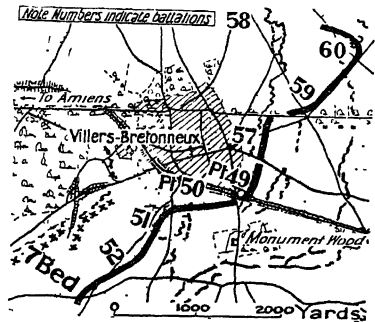


Meanwhile Glasgow, who was impatient at the delay of the 50th in carrying out his orders, was informed by Salisbury that the operation was impossible. Salisbury suggested that the gap between the brigades should be closed at dark. The tanks did not arrive; Brigadier-General Elliott had told their officer (Lieutenant Hunnikin)¹¹⁸ that he required only one, to assist at the south-east corner of the village. This tank (under Lieutenant Butler)¹¹⁹ arrived there about 8 p.m., but it was of the old pattern, and after nearly eighteen hours of almost continuous movement it had become so hot that not

¹¹⁸ Capt. F. S. Hunnikin, M.C.; 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Engineer; of Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex, Eng.; b. Paddington, London, 15 Jan., 1889.

¹¹⁹ Lieut. J. Butler; 1st Bn., Tank Corps. Of Bournemouth, Eng.; b. Kingston-on-Thames, Eng., 17 Nov., 1890.

merely did its engine break down but the breeches of its six-pounders would not close, nor could cartridges be forced into the guns. It therefore proved useless. During the night, however, two patrols of the 50th Battalion, under Lieutenants Langsford¹²⁰ and Hale,¹²¹ moved from opposite sides of the gap. Hale found some of the enemy near the railway, but the patrols met, and at 1 a.m. two reinforcing companies from the 49th¹²² under Captain Hallam, guided down from the village by Hale and Lieutenant Noad¹²³



(57th), filled the gap north of the railway, while Lieutenant Beresford (50th) formed a line of posts south of it.

German records show that early on April 26th a scare occurred at headquarters of II/11 Bavarian R.I.R., now east of Villers-Bretonneux; supports were rushed up, but it was found that little ground had been lost.

Thus by the small hours of April 26th the line east of Villers-Bretonneux was complete. Farther south, opposite

April 26

Cachy, the position was still obscure and no fresh British troops were available. But at this stage an end was put to all doubts by the coming in of a magnificent French colonial division—the Moroccan, consisting of white and half-white French oversea troops—which since April 21st had been held in readiness for decisive action at the junction of the two armies. On the evening of April 24th General Humbert had placed it under the orders of General Debeney, who, although Hangard had been lost that day by the French, allotted it for counter-attack in the Cachy area, in order to secure the Villers-Bretonneux plateau to

¹²⁰ Lieut. W. W. Langsford, 50th Bn. Chemist's assistant; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Petersburg, S. Aust., 1894.

¹²¹ Lieut. W. J. Hale, 50th Bn. Pharmacy student; of Manly, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, N.S.W., 6 April, 1894.

¹²² Two trench-mortars and a section of the 13th M.G. Company also were attached to the 50th for this operation.

¹²³ Lieut. C. S. A. Noad, M.C.; 57th Bn. Actor; of South Yarra, Vic.; b. Brunswick, Vic., 7 March, 1892.

which Foch attached so much importance. If, as Sir Douglas Haig and General Rawlinson had tried throughout the 24th to arrange, this division could have advanced simultaneously with the Australians, there can be little doubt that both Monument Wood and the Bois de Hangard would have been taken. But this could not be managed, and not until 11 o'clock on the morning of the 25th was General Daugan ordered to bring his division across the Avre. It was, as its war diary records, "in superb condition and the troops impatient to attack." The order was to advance—if possible, that night, if not, on the morning of the 26th—and seize a line from, and including, Monument Wood on the left to Hangard Wood on the right. It would operate with four regiments in line—the 8th Zouaves to seize Monument Wood, and the 4th and 7th Tirailleurs and the Foreign Legion to recapture the ground between it and Hangard Wood. Hangard Wood was to be attacked by tired British troops,¹²⁴ temporarily under French command, and it was proposed that in the first place only its western edge should be seized, the wood being afterwards attacked by the French from the north, assisted by British tanks, and British infantry from the west. Farther south two battalions of the 131st French Division would attempt to recapture Hangard village. The commander of the French Corps, General Toulorge, was given a free hand with the plans but was to consult with the III British Corps.

The reconnoitring parties of the Moroccan Division, coming up on the afternoon of the 25th, found that they could obtain no precise information whatever as to the position of the British line. On the left the Australian guides allotted for leading up the 8th Zouaves were late, and although they afterwards met the column, which had moved without them, the French commander reported that they "were of no help whatever, being completely ignorant as to the position of the elements to be relieved." The haste with which the arrangements were finally made caused even greater troubles. At a conference with Generals Rawlinson and Debeney on the morning of the 25th, General Butler of the III Corps had advised strongly against any attempt to advance the whole Moroccan Division over open ground registered by the German artillery. The commander of the Moroccans would have

¹²⁴ The 10th Essex and 7th Queen's (18th Division, but lent to the 58th Division).

liked a postponement until the 27th. As this was denied him, he decided that, in view of the vagueness as to the British line, the only safe method was to assemble his troops during the night of the 25th along the foremost position known to be British; to arrange that all British troops ahead of this should withdraw; then, at 6 a.m., to lay down a barrage in front of the French infantry, which would forthwith advance on its objectives. A night attack without knowledge of the ground was held by the French command to be "unthinkable." The British "whippets" having reported that the German trenches opposite Cachy were full of troops, it was thought the Germans were planning an attack, and, to anticipate this, "zero" hour was advanced from 6 to 5.15 a.m. on the 26th.

In the small hours of that morning the tired troops of the 51st and 52nd Battalions and of the 7th Bedford in the advanced line received word that the French infantry was behind them, and they were now to retire through it. The 50th Battalion, on the left, was to swing forward as the French advanced, and connect the French flank with the Australian line north of the railway.

The details of the costly attack by the Moroccan Division, which followed, form no part of this history, for which the barest outline must suffice. In front of Cachy the French troops were to assemble on the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road, "this being considered," says the French commander's report,¹²⁵ "according to information from the English, as clearly behind the firing-line."

But on the approach march (the report continues) the leading battalions of the two centre regiments (7 and 4 Tirailleurs), after having passed the English outposts established 200 metres east of Cachy, ran into the enemy who had advanced to the west of the Villers-Bretonneux-Domart road, and had dug trenches and established machine-guns.

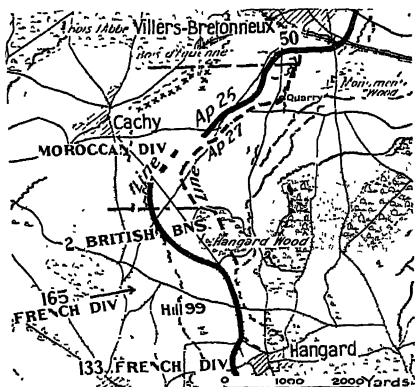
These were the Germans whose presence Colonel Whitham and his colleagues had vainly reported in the morning, and whom the tanks had afterwards circled without being able to convince the higher authorities. The assembly of the Tirailleurs was hampered by the consequent machine-gun fire; warning was given to the enemy; and, more serious even than this, the attack started far short of the barrage, which was consequently useless. The swift advance of masses of French

¹²⁵ Courteously made available by the French Government.

infantry in daylight across the open plateau before Cachy was watched with admiration by the astonished Australians to whom the operation seemed—as it was—plainly suicidal. A storm of machine-gun fire broke out from both the Monument and Hangard Wood, but the French pushed on between them until a counter-attack north of Hangard drove back their centre. The Foreign Legion entered Hangard Wood, but could not hold it, and, although another attempt was made on April 27th, with the assistance of British tanks and infantry, only part of the western half of the wood was recaptured. All efforts to retake Hangard village failed.

On the northern flank of the first French attack the 8th Zouaves, owing (it is said) to lack of information from their Australian guides, started too far back, and the fire from the Monument further delayed the advance. The 50th Battalion, waiting to swing up with the flank, which was late, was sent to ground by the fusillade; the Zouaves presently reached the 50th, but did not attempt to go farther. Some ground was, however, gained west of the Monument orchard, for here on the night of May 15th the 37th French Division managed to salve the German tank in the quarry that had been reached and subsequently abandoned by Sergeant Keeley of the 51st and which was regained by the Moroccans.¹²⁶ The Germans west of the Domart road also were cleared by the Tirailleurs, and the front firmly established, but at the cost of nearly 3,500 casualties to the Moroccan Division.

The attempt to seize Monument Wood was to be renewed at 8.45 a.m. on April 26th after



¹²⁶ Two German tanks were eventually captured: (1) "Elfriede," in the quarry south-west of the Monument (U.5.C.8.7), salved by the French on May 15; (2) "Mephisto," in the orchard east of Monument Farm (U.6.B.1.2), captured by the 26th Battalion on July 14th.

further bombardment by two batteries of French '75's, but the German fire was then still too severe.¹²⁷ Later in the morning two platoons of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, then in close support as counter-attack battalion, were sent out from the railway by their brigade-major as a patrol, to seize three houses along the road leading to the Monument. They were met by undiminished fire, their commander, Lieutenant McGee,¹²⁸ being killed and 26 others hit. Finally, late in the afternoon, arrived orders from the III Corps for a combined advance on the front north and south of the railway with the object of seizing Monument Wood and retaking the front line lost on April 24th. The attack on the Monument was to be made by the 1st Sherwood Foresters and the 1st Worcester; but their commanders, on being brought to General Heneker's headquarters to learn the plans, stated that their troops were too exhausted, and the order was wisely cancelled.

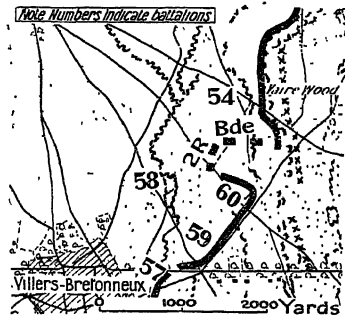
The attempt to regain Monument Wood being now for a few days abandoned, the chief task remaining for the Australians was to improve the unsatisfactory junction between the 15th and 14th Brigades on Hill 104. It will be remembered that the left flank of the 60th Battalion had missed the right of the 54th, and had consequently been swung back westwards, and that patrols moving out from each side of the gap to effect a junction had run into German posts.¹²⁹ Another effort was made on the night of the 25th, Captain Plomley of the 56th offering to assist Lieutenants Pizzey and Gannon. Going out from the flank of the 54th, he found that the German posts in the gap were being shelled by their own artillery, which evidently was unaware of their position. Passing west of them he came upon a post of the 2nd Rifle

¹²⁷ At the brigade and divisional headquarters concerned, misunderstanding was at first caused by incorrect reports that the French had reached and seized Monument Wood.

¹²⁸ Lieut. T. McGee, 2nd Bn., The Rifle Brigade. Killed in action, 26 April, 1918.

¹²⁹ See pp. 610-11.

Brigade with no one on guard or in charge and the men quite unaware of their position. But with three others, it was actually bridging the gap. These withdrew during the night, but, as the position of the flank was now located, the 15th Brigade extended its front to replace them, and just succeeded by daybreak on the 26th in forming a continuous, though deeply indented front. That evening, when the III. Corps' order for a combined advance on the Monument arrived, Brigadier-General Elliott proposed to clear the enemy from this re-entrant at the same time; and, when the larger project was cancelled, the 60th was ordered to undertake the smaller task, the plans for which had already been arranged by Colonel Marshall.



It was carried out in the small hours of April 27th. The left-flank platoon of the 60th was first led around to the 14th Brigade's sector and placed on the left of the objective by Lieutenant Gannon. Then, at 2.19 a.m., a Stokes mortar under Corporal Gilmore¹⁸⁰ fired 24 shells—12 upon a known enemy post in the re-entrant, and 12 upon a post farther back—and at 2.20, as the last shell went over, Nichol's¹⁸¹ and Simpson's companies advanced.¹⁸² The Stokes mortars had shattered the nearest German machine-gun crew and caused the neighbouring enemy posts to keep their heads down; but flares were fired from posts beyond, and when the Victorians had gone 100 yards they were seen and an intense fire was opened on them. The platoons at once flung themselves to ground, and continued the advance by rushes. As red flares rising from the

¹⁸⁰ Cpl. W. S. Gilmore (No. 386; 15th L.T.M. Bty.). Labourer; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 1889.

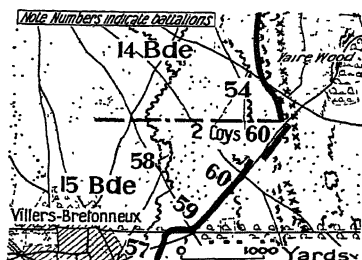
¹⁸¹ Capt. S. J. Nichol, M.C.; 60th Bn. Builder; of Footscray, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 2 Jan., 1894.

¹⁸² The general formation was a screen of scouts in front followed by a line of sections, each in single file; a support company followed, and some of its sections joined in the attack.

German posts were evidently a call for artillery barrage, Lieutenant Dyke¹³³ of the right company, which was less strongly opposed than the left, rushed his platoon ahead to evade it. A Lewis gun corporal on the right fired rifle-grenades to cover them, and, as soon as the left came up, the right company charged the German posts. The Germans ran with this company pursuing them across the Hamel road and 200 yards beyond the objective.

In the left company, which was short of its own officers, the flanks were led by the intelligence officers, Lieutenants Pizzey and Gannon. Advancing in the re-entrant, notwithstanding severe casualties, the platoons charged the first German post as soon as their rushes had brought them within range of it. A number of Germans fled to posts farther back. Lieutenant Pizzey set a Lewis gunner to engage these from the front, while several men worked round to bomb the Germans from the rear. In spite of the uproar his orders were obeyed, and when the subsequent rush was made, the Germans again fled, the Victorians swinging round on them the heavy machine-guns found abandoned in the trench. The road was crossed and another post seized. Patrolling southwards, Pizzey now found the company commander, Lieutenant Simpson, consolidating a line of posts along the same road. Next, scouting to the north, he found the flank-post of the 14th Brigade. The line was complete and lay upon its objective; and twelve machine-guns and a few prisoners had been captured.

The Germans were already shelling the Hamel road, and at dawn numbers were seen "wandering wildly" about the ridge beyond the valley, half-a-mile away. At 7 the enemy's artillery opened a furious bombardment which fell fairly on the new positions.



¹³³ Lieut. J. Dyke, 60th Bn. Painter, of Richmond, Vic.; b. Gosport, Hants, Eng., 21 Mar., 1876. Died, 23 Oct., 1935.

An hour later his troops were seen assembling for counter-attack; the support company at once moved up, but machine-guns of the 25th Company (A.I.F.),¹³⁴ captured German machine-guns, Lewis guns, and the artillery (which, after first shooting short, fell accurately on the enemy) caused the gathering enemy to scatter, and the threat faded.

Another alarm had occurred in the 243rd and 9th Bavarian Reserve Divisions. A counter-attack was ordered for the afternoon, but it failed to start.

This "straightening" operation had been a necessary one, and had been successfully carried through without the help of artillery; but it did not avoid the losses that so often accompanied these minor sequels to important engagements—actually it cost the 60th Battalion more casualties than the main attack. The Stokes mortar bombardment, although it destroyed the first enemy machine-gun crew, gave warning to others, and in the subsequent rushes officers and men fell thickly. In this advance and the subsequent bombardments, 90 officers and men were hit, including Lieutenants Simpson, Bowen,¹³⁵ Holgate,¹³⁶ and Bayliss¹³⁷ killed, and Captain Nichol and Lieutenants Heron, Walker,¹³⁸ O'Connor,¹³⁹ Gribble,¹⁴⁰ and Chambers¹⁴¹ wounded.¹⁴² To avoid the shell-fire which fell on the Hamel road, the 58th Battalion, on taking over the sector that night, dug in a hundred yards ahead of the 60th's line.

¹³⁴ One of these advanced with the attack. Guns of the 15th and 8th Aust. M.G. Companies also were in the line.

¹³⁵ Lieut. C. E. Bowen, 60th Bn. Solicitor; of Richmond, Vic.; b. Wood's Point, Vic., 1872. Killed in action, 27 April, 1918.

¹³⁶ Lieut. E. S. Holgate, 60th Bn. Auctioneer, and stock and station agent; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Miner's Rest, Vic., 8 July, 1888. Killed in action, 27 April, 1918.

¹³⁷ Lieut. W. A. Bayliss, 60th Bn. Wood machinist; of Richmond, Vic.; b. Coburg, Vic., 1885. Killed in action, 27 April, 1918.

¹³⁸ Lieut. H. Walker, 60th Bn. Railway fireman; of Benalla, Vic.; b. Mokoan West, Thoonia, Vic., 16 Sept., 1886.

¹³⁹ Lieut. D. J. O'Connor, 60th Bn. Clerk; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Cork, Ireland, 27 Nov., 1888.

¹⁴⁰ Lieut. F. W. Gribble, 60th Bn. Tailor's cutter; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 21 Feb., 1892.

¹⁴¹ Lieut. H. W. Chambers, M.M.; 60th Bn. Farmer; of Milloo, Vic.; b. Rochester, Vic., 5 Aug., 1882.

¹⁴² Heron's platoon was eventually commanded by two lance-corporals, F. W. Knights (Rochester and Echuca, Vic.) and F. R. Wrigley (Scarsdale and St. Kilda, Vic.), of whom Wrigley with most of his Lewis gun team were killed in the subsequent bombardment.

The battle had cost the 13th Brigade far heavier casualties than the 15th—in all, 1,009 as against 455.¹⁴³ The 51st Battalion alone lost 365 officers and men, chiefly in skirting Bois l'Abbé and in passing the wire near Cachy Switch. The casualties suffered by the Germans in the counter-attack cannot be dissected from those incurred in attacking, except as regards the 614 prisoners all of whom were captured in the counter-attacks. The 77th Reserve Division lost nearly 3,000 men, the 4th Guard Division 2,000, the 228th probably 1,500, and 243rd under 500. If the casualties of the reserves amounted to 1,000, the total would reach 8,000 for the Villers-Bretonneux-Cachy front—or, if an extra 30 per cent must be allowed to cover light cover casualties not included in the German totals, 10,400.¹⁴⁴ As the 8th British Division lost 133 officers and 3,420 others, the 58th Division 153 and 3,377, the 18th 117 and 2,329, and the Australians 2,473,¹⁴⁵ the balance of loss was, as usual, against the Allies, even had the 3,500 Moroccans not been wasted in their magnificent but entirely useless daylight advance against the German machine-guns. With one circumstance the Australian reader may be satisfied, that the Australian casualties, if fairly severe, brought a result out of all proportion to their severity. That result must be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴³ The details are:

13 Bde.			14 Bde.			15 Bde.		
Offrs.	O.R.		Offrs.	O.R.		Offrs.	O.R.	
49 Bn. ..	5	140	H.Q. ..	—	11	57 Bn. ..	10	119
50 Bn. ..	14	240	53 Bn. ..	2	39	58 Bn. ..	1	64
51 Bn. ..	13	352	54 Bn. ..	1	66	59 Bn. ..	4	114
52 Bn. ..	12	225	55 Bn. ..	3	131	60 Bn. ..	13	128
L.T.M. ..	—	8	56 Bn. ..	3	82	L.T.M. ..	1	1
Total ..	44	965	Total ..	9	329	Total ..	29	426

The 13th M.G. Coy. lost 2 officers and 28 others. The casualties of the 5th Division, apart from those of the 14th and 15th Bdes., were: 8th Bde. 4 officers, 184 other ranks; 5th M.G. Bn. 5 and 90; Artillery, 2 and 174; others 1 and 81. Total for 5th Divn. 50 officers, 1,284 o.r. Over 500 of these were due to gas. Including 100 of the 175 casualties in heavy artillery and Corps units, the total Australian casualties for the action amount to 2,473.

¹⁴⁴ It has been estimated by the British Official Historian that, in order to include those of the wounded who did not leave the Corps area (who are omitted by the German method of calculation) 30 per cent must be added to the German casualty statements. See *Vol. IV, p. 943 footnote*; and *Military Operations. France and Belgium, Vol. I, pp. 496-7*.

¹⁴⁵ A large number of the 5th Division's casualties were due to men's being gassed in the German bombardment.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESULTS OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX. MONUMENT WOOD

THE counter-attack on Villers-Bretonneux brought great fame to the Australian infantry. Before sunrise this bold, clean stroke, though it fell short of the completeness aimed at, had rescued the Allies from the anxious situation existing at sunset. The swiftness and finality of the decision which it imposed upon a critical and peculiarly bloody action—for on the narrow British front alone there occurred more than 20,000 casualties, British and German—and the success attained in spite of the flouting of some of the usual rules for such operations have caused it to be not infrequently cited as the most impressive operation of its kind that occurred on the Western Front. There exists ample evidence of the impression made on the General-in-Chief of the Allies. Speaking after the unveiling of a memorial to Australian soldiers in Amiens eighteen months later, Foch referred to their "altogether astonishing valiance" in this counter-attack. The high command, he said, had merely the task of living up to the standard imposed by such soldiers.¹

The credit of planning it has been claimed for most of the leaders concerned. Sir Douglas Haig, who ate a picnic lunch at III Corps Headquarters while watching General Butler making his arrangements over the telephone with Hobbs and Heneker, was much struck by the corps commander's calm and methodical procedure. As was observed in the last chapter, the plan of capturing a small town by thrusting past it on each side, leaving the clearing of it until later, is a fairly common one; and it was unusually applicable on this occasion, in consequence of the protusion of the German front around the principal objective. Probably the plan suggested itself to almost everyone concerned. But as Brigadier-General Elliott, in the week before the 8th Division came into the line, had more or less established it as the ready made scheme

¹ Brigadier-General Grogan, of the 23rd British Brigade, who was in an even better position to know the nature of the achievement, has generously described it as "perhaps the greatest individual feat of the war—the successful counter-attack by night across unknown and difficult ground, at a few hours' notice, by the Australian soldier."—*Reveille*, 1 Aug. 1936, p. 8.

for recapturing Villers-Bretonneux, urging it, either personally or through General Hobbs, on most of his superiors, there may be justification for the claim, which he constantly made, to have been its real author.

It is to be noted that the counter-attack was in no sense an immediate one. It is true that throughout April 24th Elliott was straining at the leash to make it by daylight. But, had he done so when once the mist had lifted, it is hardly conceivable that it could have ended in anything but repulse, probably attended with heavy casualties. British leaders were only then learning that the recent arming of the German infantry with the light machine-gun had immensely increased the volume of fire with which such attacks were now met unless the machine-guns were subdued by bombardment or tanks or hampered by the dark or by fog. It was General Heneker who, following the advice of Brigadier-General Coffin and the battalion commanders of the 25th Brigade, prevented the wasting of the 15th Brigade at midday, and induced General Butler, despite Rawlinson's pressure, to acquiesce in postponement until evening.

But, even so, the start would have been made too early. It was the rugged determination of Brigadier-General Glasgow that saved the army and corps commanders and everyone else concerned from what would have been the tragic mistake of launching the attack, as General Butler urged, at 8 o'clock (summer time), when there was still a full hour's twilight and the enemy could not have failed to receive not only good warning of the assembly of the troops but news of their progress during the attack. Even as it was, the scouts going forward to lay the tape were seen by the Germans. Had Glasgow insisted upon his own proposal, to attack at 10.30, the success of the operation would probably have been even greater than it was. The two Australian brigadiers, who were under Heneker's orders for this operation, were men of quite outstanding strength, and their forcefulness was not wholly relished by him—amid all the telegrams of congratulation that afterwards reached the two brigades, there came no message from the divisional commander to whom they had been lent.² But, without Glasgow's stamina in holding to his

² Two senior members of the 8th Division's staff, however, rode over and thanked Glasgow for the 13th Brigade's effort

point against the pressure of a hierarchy of commanders, the effort would have been futile. The value of colonial "independence" was also shown in the very frank advice offered by an N.C.O. to Lieutenant Sadlier—advice which led to the decision to attack the wood, and by doing so probably again saved the enterprise.

It may occur to the reader that, of all the commanders responsible for the operation, it was the one least mentioned in most narratives of it, Brigadier-General Glasgow, whose good sense and level judgment most happily influenced the result. Elliott's temperamental independence was undoubtedly, on this occasion as on others, a danger to the success which his fighting spirit and soldierly skill so largely helped to win. The cherished plan (which on Glasgow's advice he abandoned), of sending his third battalion around the southern side of the town, could hardly have failed to lead to disaster. The attack by the 15th Brigade departed from the plan finally set by the higher command in two important respects—it was two hours late, and there was some doubt as to the second objective. For the second of these errors Elliott may have been responsible; and some of his superiors discovering afterwards the discrepancy in the orders, attributed to it the escape of a large part of the Germans from encirclement.³ It has also been argued that the task of the 13th Brigade was rendered more difficult both by the lateness of the 15th Brigade and by the discrepancy as to the objective.

Yet it is hard to see how, in the actual circumstances of that night, either of these departures from the plan had any effect in causing the result to fall short of completeness. It is true that the 13th Brigade attacked first, but the forces opposed by it were out of sight of those confronting the 15th Brigade, separated from them by the town and the wood. The German forces north and south of the town were without intercommunication, and actually—as their own records make plain—fought two entirely separate actions. It does not appear that a single rifle or machine-gun from Elliott's front was turned upon Glasgow's, or *vice versa*, nor is it easy to see how they could have been. There is no record of the

³ See *The Remaking of Modern Armies*, by Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, p. 303; and Elliott's comment (p. 607 of the present volume).



56 A POST OF THE 5TH AUSTRALIAN MACHINE GUN BATTALION ON HILL 104 ON 26TH APRIL, 1918

This shows the level nature of the plateau and may illuminate the difficulty of advancing there against machine-guns by daylight. (Some of the gunners evidently objected to the presence of the Official Photographer, probably expecting that he would draw shell-fire upon their post)



57. MONUMENT WOOD (IN THE DISTANCE) SEEN FROM THE WESTERN END OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

The attack was launched from the trenches near the other end of the town. (The view is from an observation post in a house beside one of the railway bridges. The distant white parapets mark the 13th Brigade's line after the counter-attack.)

*First War Memorial Official Photo No F-4834
Taken on 21st May, 1918.*

German artillery having taken advantage of the separation of the counter-attacks to concentrate upon either area: information as to what was happening reached the German staffs concerned much too late to affect the issue. As for the doubt, whatever its cause, as to where the second objective lay, although this might well have led to Elliott's flank missing that of the 13th Brigade, actually it was his flank—the two companies of the 57th—that temporarily reached the objective, and the flank of the 13th Brigade that fell short of it. Captain Peacock of the 57th, who so nearly succeeded in bringing forward the whole line of the 15th Brigade to its objective, maintained then and since that the forward position at the old British front line could, and should, have been held; but it would obviously have been a most difficult one after day-break. However that may be, its tenure, far from closing the gap through which the Germans escaped, would actually have widened it. It was Elliott's luck that such mistakes as were made that night actually operated in favour of success.⁴ On the other hand, his clever disposition of his right flank, so that it first gave rear protection and subsequently wheeled through the nearer half of the town and cleared it of Germans, resulted precisely as he intended and greatly helped towards the result. But the use of the 57th for mopping-up was due to Glasgow's advice.

The war-diary of the Chestnut Troop, R.H.A., notes as one of the features of the action "extreme keenness of Australian infantry to get at enemy and marked ability to use their rifles and machine-guns." Of the performance of the two Australian brigades, it is difficult to make any fair comparison. Of the skill and dash of the 15th Brigade, a German officer of the 228th Division spoke with admiration. His four machine-guns, he said, were turned on its line the moment it was detected. The line dropped, but, as soon as the guns were turned elsewhere, it rose and advanced again. He swung his guns round to meet it, and again it dropped. This happened three or four times, and then he found an Australian machine-gun firing from behind his flank. Thus, he said, the attack was on his troops and round them and

⁴ In the diary of the Chestnut Troop, R.H.A., the opinion is expressed that the lateness of Elliott's attack "very greatly assisted" the element of surprise so far as the 15th Brigade was concerned.

past them almost before they realised that they were confronted by a critical situation. On the other hand, the 13th Brigade had a much more difficult task—to attack by night over completely unreconnoitred country, trailing its flank past the big wood fringed with machine-guns, through a diagonal wire-entanglement also defended by machine-guns, and, ignoring the wood and village on the flank, to assault so difficult an objective as Monument Wood. The resistance met by the 13th Brigade was much greater, and began at a much earlier stage in the advance than that confronting the 15th; its battalions had to force their way at every step by stiff and even desperate fighting, employing, as German accounts show, the same clever tactics as the 15th. The companies of the 4th Guard Division this day mostly fought to the end, without thought of surrender, and to drive them out of position after position, as the 13th Brigade did, was a remarkable achievement. The staff of the Moroccan Division acted on a well recognised rule when they refused to think of attacking by night over unknown ground. The 13th Brigade broke that rule and achieved success, accurately keeping direction in spite of having to attack with its left on an uneven slope and of having to pass through the diagonal wire—a truly wonderful result probably attainable only because the woods and the fires in Villers-Bretonneux furnished excellent landmarks. The British battalions attacking from Cachy had no such clear guides.

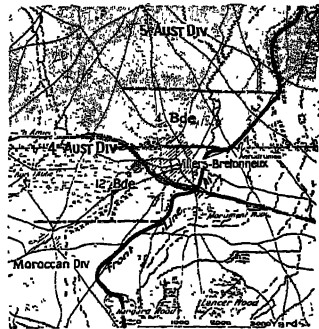
For the Germans the offensive of Villers-Bretonneux was one of those costly feints which, like the attack at Fromelles by the British (19th July, 1916), brought a result precisely opposite to the one designed. Von Hindenburg says that the intention was to keep the French from reinforcing at Kemmel.

We therefore first renewed our attacks at Villers-Bretonneux on April 24th, hoping that the French commander's anxiety about Amiens would take precedence of the necessity to help the hard-pressed English friends in Flanders.

Actually, as in the case of Fromelles, until the attack was made the intention of the side making it was uncertain, and the preparations for it did cause anxiety. But when once the blow fell it immediately became clear that it was purely local, and fear of a powerful offensive on that front was

diminished. It would have been far more effective and mystifying if the preparation and apparent concentration of troops and artillery had been continued, even for several weeks, and ended without action. Only the expensive methods of the French in their daylight attack on April 26th prevented the disadvantages of the operation from falling almost entirely upon the German army which initiated it.

“Second Villers-Bretonneux” barely recaptured the town; the Australian lines lay close beyond it, and, notwithstanding the attack by the Moroccan Division, Hangard and Monument Woods remained in the enemy’s hands. A sudden, sharp assault by the Germans might at any time jolt the Allies from the Villers-Bretonneux plateau on which they had a bare foothold. Foch was determined to drive the enemy, as soon as possible, to a safe distance, but the Moroccan attack had shown that any attempt to advance between the Hangard and Monument Woods was hopeless while those woods remained untaken. Accordingly they were to be recaptured by a special operation as soon as possible. At Haig’s request Foch had on April 26th decided to relieve the British as far north as Hill 104, leaving the Australian Corps on the right of the British line, adjoining the French. Meanwhile, on April 27th and 28th, the 4th Australian Division took over—apparently as a temporary measure—the line in front of Villers-Bretonneux held, before the German attack, by the 8th British Division. The 4th Division brought in its 4th Brigade (newly back from Hébuterne) to relieve the 15th (5th Division) in the sector of 1,200 yards north of the road, and the 12th Brigade to relieve all troops of the 8th British, 5th Australian, and Moroccan



Divisions between the Roman road and a point west of the south-west corner of Monument Wood, on a front of 2,500 yards south of the road. On April 27th the 37th French Division was allotted by General Debeney to his XXXI Corps for the purpose of relieving the 4th Australian Division, and its commander called on General MacLagan with a view to planning the relief. Next day, however, General Foch asked whether the Fourth Army was strong enough to hold Villers-Bretonneux without French aid; in that case, he said, he would move some of his reserves northwards, as he had previously intended. Rawlinson replied that in a few days he would be able to keep "an Australian division in reserve in the Somme valley," but till then he required a French reserve at hand. He asked again that Hangard Wood should be retaken. The British boundary, therefore, was left unchanged. The Australian right remained facing the Monument and covering Villers-Bretonneux; and General MacLagan was warned that in a few day's time, when the French attacked Hangard Wood, his division was to take Monument Wood.

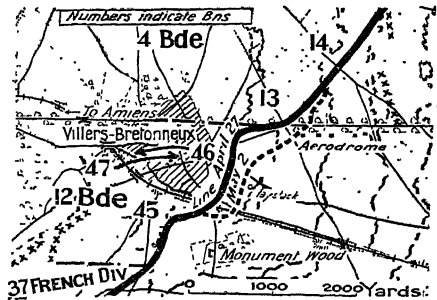
Meanwhile, the foothold being so narrow and so important, its extension was almost as urgent as had been the similar extensions at Anzac in Gallipoli. The 12th and 4th Brigades were accordingly ordered to steal from the enemy all annexable ground. In particular, it was desired to advance the line north of the Monument so as to assist in the capture of the wood, which was to be undertaken on the night of May 2nd or 3rd.

The attempt to edge forward began at once. The 13th Battalion sent forward its patrols by night among the old huts and ghostly hangars of the aerodromes, capturing a prisoner in the houses north of the road, and finding the two nearest hangars empty, but the farther ones defended. The 46th Battalion sent a patrol to a haystack⁵ and some farm buildings near the brickfield, but found them too well garrisoned for capture by these methods, although some of the posts to the north were easily advanced as much as 500 yards. A second advance by patrols was accordingly made on the night of April 30th, the 13th Battalion north of the road moving at the same time as the 46th south of it. The

⁵ This was half-a-mile farther back than the haystack reached by the 15th Brigade in its counter-attack.

13th succeeded, but its patrols, according to order, set fire to the covering of some of the hangars and the patrols of the 46th approaching the farm were detected against the light of these fires, and were beaten back. Farther south the 45th advanced its post along the railway cutting for 350 yards east of the station bridge.

As it was urgent for more ground to be gained before the attack on the Monument, an order issued that the effort should be continued on the night of May 1st, the 47th taking the place of the 46th. This time the 13th further advanced its line, but the 47th met strong opposition at the farm and its patrols fell back. The 45th on the right was very close



to the enemy posts and found further progress impracticable; but in the sector of the 47th during the following day Lieutenants Storey⁶ and Parsons⁷ of the 47th, after themselves reconnoitring the ground, succeeded in guiding out their men again to safeguard the flank of the 13th.

The Germans facing these thrusts were three battalions of the newly arrived German Jäger Division, and their records show that they were somewhat puzzled by this activity. The 1st Reserve Jäger Battalion, between the Roman road and the brickfield, noted (according to its historian) that the earlier effort looked like a powerful reconnaissance, but that the advance on the night of May 1 had a more extensive objective. The sky was full of German signals calling for artillery barrages, which were accurately laid. This battalion expended 410 bombs and 28,000 cartridges in that night's fighting. The ground was wet and the German infantrymen had been ransacking the hangars (and two abandoned aeroplanes) for material for improving their dugouts. They conjectured that they had been seen at this work, and that this prompted their opponents to set fire to the hangars. The reason for the difficulty of the Australians' advance was that they were now butting against a fairly well established outpost-line. Several of their number, who clung on after daylight, close to the German

⁶ Lieut. G. P. Storey, M.C.; 47th Bn. Pastoralist student; of Brisbane; b. Maryport, Cumberland, Eng., 11 Dec., 1893.

⁷ Lieut. F. E. Parsons, M.C.; 47th Bn. School teacher; of Caveside, Tas.; b. Deloraine, Tas., 29 June, 1890.

posts, were captured.⁸ The 1st Reserve Jäger Battalion had 15 casualties on its first day in the line, and 27 in the later fighting. The history of the 2nd Jäger Battalion, which on May 2 relieved the 1st, notes that the days were quiet, "but by night our opponents, Australians, were very active."

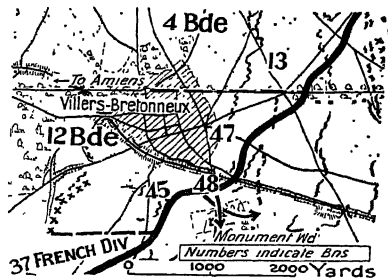
The line was thus advanced until on the Roman road it lay more than half-a-mile east of Villers-Bretonneux. From here on May 2nd it ran south-westwards through the corner of the aerodrome to the railway about a quarter of a mile south-east of the town; thence it led almost due east, first along, and then a little south of, the railway cutting. Here it faced, at 150-250 yards, the northern edge of Monument Wood (a large orchard) and of the small orchard west of the farm. After passing this it bent abruptly south-west, facing obliquely the western side of the orchard.

The attack on Monument Wood and Orchard was to be made by the 12th Brigade. It happened that Brigadier-General Gellibrand was on sick leave, and the brigade was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Raymond Leane of the 48th, whose own battalion was temporarily commanded by Major Allen of the 45th. According to the order issued by Australian Corps, the attack was being undertaken in order to co-operate with the French attack on Hangard Wood; but when on April 29th General Birdwood met the French commander he found that the latter did not propose to launch his assault at the same time as the Australians, but after daylight. He promised, however, to cover the right of the Australians by swinging forward the flank of his northernmost division, the 37th (which relieved the left half of the Moroccan Division). On April 29th the capture by the 46th Battalion of a German who had lost his way proved that the battleweary Bavarians⁹ recently holding that part of the line had been relieved by the German Jäger Division, first rate troops fresh from Italy. The discovery at first suggested to the British command that the enemy might be preparing for another attempt on the Amiens front.

⁸ The 1st Reserve Jäger Battalion here lost on April 29 a messenger dog. "Even the good food at battalion headquarters could not hold him," says its history—he carried a message into the lines of the 13th Battalion, whose pet he became. He died later in quarantine in England, and his stuffed body is now in the Australian War Memorial Museum.

⁹ The 9th Bavarian Reserve Division, which had relieved the 228th.

Colonel Leane knew that his brigade was faced by a difficult undertaking, and accordingly, adhering to his principle of allotting the worst tasks to himself or members of his family,¹⁰ he gave it to the 48th. He chose to attack at moonrise—the time at which he had assaulted Leane's Trench in Gallipoli. The present attempt would be made from the north, where the Australian line ran much closer to the Monument than on the west. Two companies, cramped into a narrow assembly area south of the railway, would sweep through the wood from north to south, and dig in beyond its southern edge. A third, starting behind them but facing south-east, would advance from west to east through the wood previously cleared by the leading companies and dig in beyond its eastern side, with left flank touching the posts of the 45th on the railway line. Part of the fourth company of the 48th would follow the others as a "mopping up" party, its special duty being to clear the cellars of the "Chateau."



It was hoped that the attack would come as a surprise, and to that end the artillery preparation was to be limited to an intermittent bombardment of the objective during the day, and, immediately before the attack, an intense shelling for two minutes by all available guns. To prevent the enemy from taking this for a sign of an immediate assault, similar bombardments were frequently laid on the Monument and other posts during the preceding days without any infantry action. But on the night of the attack the 48th would follow on the heels of the bombardment. An Australian diary notes on May 2nd that the critical time would be when "the 48th Battalion had to form up in the dark in front of the railway cutting . . . If they do this successfully without being seen, they will make a surprise attack." As the assembly

¹⁰ See, for example, his decision at Bullecourt, *Vol. IV*, pp. 307-8.

area was very cramped and close to the enemy, the troops, were cautioned to make no noise; but a serious difficulty lay in the fact that the 48th after the intense fighting at Dernancourt had had its thin ranks replenished by a flood of Australian recruits who were almost ludicrously raw. Each company would attack in three waves, each of one line, and would fire green flares on reaching its objective. The same diarist says:

. . . . There are many machine-guns in the chateau (or farm) or the wood, and a trench all round and a trench through the copse, but the machine-gun nests have been heavily bombarded—at least the copse has, today; and the chateau has been demolished by a shell.

Leane believed that the 48th, if successful, must expect a vehement counter-attack accompanied by fierce shelling of the copse and probably by tanks; but it would be a great advantage that, just when this was about to be launched, the French would strike at Hangard Wood and cause a dispersion of the enemy's shelling. In order to help the battalion to dig in, two heavy British tanks would come out at dawn, and patrol around the wood; and two others would be waiting in the Bois d'Aquenne ready, if the infantry fired a special flare signal, to come out and meet the German tanks. For dealing with a counter-attack by German infantry, four whippet tanks were held in close reserve.

The 48th remained quietly in Cachy Switch until the night of the operation. The hospitable French-Moroccans on its flank kept inviting every Australian, who came their way, to share with them the bottles of wine of which they kept bringing sackfuls from Villers-Bretonneux. The officers and N.C.O.'s of the 48th, constantly going up to the railway cutting to study the assembly area and its objective, were continually invited by men of the Foreign Legion and by Australians in the town to share a bottle. "Anything to drink?" asked Lieutenant Mitchell of a man of the 45th as he passed. "No, only wine," was the cheerful reply.

The assault was to be launched at 2 in the morning of May 3rd, and at 11.15 on the night of the 2nd the 48th slowly wound in single file from Cachy Switch to the town and thence along the railway to its assembly area.¹¹ The troops

¹¹ Each man carried four sandbags, four bombs, and 220 rounds of ammunition.

had to move out from the railway cutting over the front-line posts and take up their lines in No-Man's Land. During the march up, the plateau had constantly been illuminated by flares rising from the German lines, and, although there was no fear that the troops could be seen before they left the railway cutting, the enemy was evidently alert. Indeed the patrol enterprises of the previous nights, the last of which the enemy interpreted as a formal attack, could have had no other effect. When once the railway cutting was left, the troops were close under the enemy's eyes; but, in spite of the rawness of many of them, all went silently and well until two minutes before "zero," when a flare shooting up from the orchard revealed some of them on the left standing up and moving about on the starting tapes. German machine-guns at once opened on them.

Two minutes later came the time for the bombardment. To the troops themselves—as also to headquarters—there was always something very comforting in the order that the enemy position would be bombarded with "all available artillery" before an attack; but, as occasionally happened, the expectant officers and men were puzzled when, at "zero" hour (as Lieutenant Mitchell wrote)

a brigade of our guns opened weakly with a shrapnel barrage. Some shells dropped short among us. The enemy flares were going up madly. The shells ceased to fall. We looked around in astonishment. Was that the barrage?

Major Moyes of the 48th has recorded that it was difficult to discern when the barrage began and ended; and at 2.2, the time for the advance, most officers and men on the spot were for a moment uncertain whether some mistake had not been made in the timing, and the real barrage might not begin at any moment. However, Captains Imlay and Cumming gave the order to advance; their juniors repeated it, and in the light of numerous flares the troops rose and began to cross No-Man's Land. They were at once met by machine-gun fire whose intensity impressed all who heard it. Major Allen of the 48th, a young veteran of Gallipoli, describes it as "the heaviest I have heard." Captain Imlay of the left front company was almost immediately hit. Both his company,

and Cumming's on the right, were quickly held up. In front of Imlay's company could be heard (so Mitchell noted) a German "with a voice like a bull" giving fire orders.

Seven or eight M.G.'s opened immediately. The ground was flailed with bullets. Large groups of Germans clambered up on to the parapet. About every sixth one was flinging stick-bombs like a machine. The infantry were firing their rifles from the hip. Wire entangled us. We reached a complete line of uncut wire. The fire alone rendered our job impossible. So to my party—about eight men—I said "Get down." We were just outside the bomb curtain.

The greater part of both companies had the same experience, and lay in shell-holes, firing at the Germans from just outside the enemy's wire, the ragged trees ahead illuminated by flashes and by white and coloured flares, and the acrid, musty smell of bomb-fumes adding to the feeling of nightmare. Captain Cumming, who at Dernancourt had disobeyed Leane's first order to retire, now finding his men faced by uncut wire on the northern front of the position, led some of them round to attempt an entry on the western side and was killed there. But in the centre, where the road past the wood ran between the main orchard and the enclosure with the farm ruins, several parties found no opposition. Lieutenant McDowall,¹² on the right of Imlay's company, moving along this road past some empty buildings, soon found himself clear of the fierce machine-gun fire from farther east, and was able to get through a "double apron" entanglement¹³ of barbed-wire and re-form his party beyond it. The orders were to keep touch with the flanks, and no troops could be seen to the east; but, as the ruined farm screened any troops who might be to the west, McDowall moved on, expecting to gain touch with the right when he had passed the farm. His party moved past the whole wood without meeting friend or enemy until faced by Germans in a trench almost at his objective. The Australians drove these off, and were here joined by a small party of Cumming's company who had followed the same route. No others could be seen and McDowall, desiring to indicate his position to any other bodies

¹² Lieut. M. B. T. McDowall, M.C., M.M.; 48th Bn. Agriculturist; of North Adelaide; b. North Adelaide, 21 June, 1894.

¹³ For an apron entanglement, see *Vol. VII, sketch at p. 146.*

in the neighbourhood, now fired his success signal—two green flares.

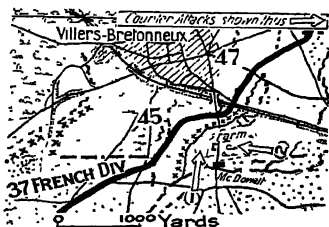
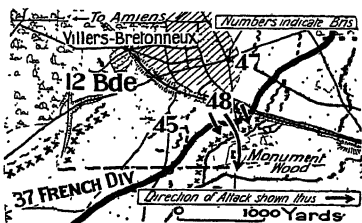
Behind these two groups—which comprised some twenty men in all—a portion of the mopping-up party, under Lieutenant Stoerkel, also following the road, reached the farm which was to be “mopped-up,” and, after rolling a bomb into the cellar, captured two officers and twenty men there, and sent them back as prisoners. Sentries were stationed to guard the cellar entrances and to keep away scattered Germans who were moving through the wood.

Meanwhile McDowall advanced his party to its objective—a second trench beyond the wood. He could still see no other Australians, but a German machine-gun, previously unsuspected, opened suddenly almost in contact with his right. His men bombed and silenced it. A large party of the enemy was now detected advancing west of him, towards Cumming’s company. As a precaution McDowall withdrew his party to the first of the two trenches.

Looking straight back, he saw German flares rising 1,000 yards behind him, in front of his own company, showing that it had been unable to advance. He then decided to withdraw farther while the way was open; as his men moved off, another large party of Germans

was seen advancing towards him from the east of the wood. His party, which had with it a Lewis gun, lined the road and opened fire, and the Germans stopped. But others were now advancing directly up the road on McDowall’s flank, and he accordingly gave the order to fall back to the Australian line.

His success signal had been seen from there; and, although the hopes first raised by the successful assembly had quickly been dimmed by the roar of machine-gun fire, which from



2.2 until 2.35 was unabated, and by the messages telling of the wire-entanglements, they now began to revive. Major Allen, hearing of the capture of the farm, sent messages to his companies in an endeavour to arrange that a line should be retained along the road, including the farm, and linked to right and left. The western side of the German position, however, had never been captured, and the plan would therefore have been impossible even if the troops had been well enough organised to receive and carry out the order. Actually, the one or two remaining officers were reached by the order only when, with daylight approaching, they returned with their men to the original front line before dawn made their retirement impossible.

At 4.30, recognising that the attempt had failed, Major Allen sent his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Arnold,¹⁴ to order a withdrawal, and at the same time despatched a warning to the heavy tanks, of which two—a male and a female—were to move out at 5 o'clock to patrol the wood. Unfortunately this message failed to reach the tanks. Lieutenant Mitchell, who had now been placed in charge of the front line, records that he observed a commotion on the right, and then saw a heavy male tank swiftly approaching the Monument trees.

An enormous Jäger—he looked about 8 feet high—raced up to it with a big grenade in his hand. It was the bravest, maddest thing. The tank gun belched as he was within inches of the muzzle, and the gallant German was scattered in pieces.

For some twenty minutes the tank crawled in circles over the wire, shooting and beating off another attack upon itself, and then returned unhurt. The female tank (armed only with machine-guns) next came out and disappeared behind the trees, where sounds of fighting and bombing occurred. The tank became disabled; part of the crew was killed and the remainder captured.

Now arrived the time for the Australian stretcher-bearers. Before the tank fight, as soon as it was realised that wounded were lying in No-Man's Land, some of them had as usual gone out, waving a scrap of white cloth for a red cross flag,

¹⁴ Lieut. T. F. Arnold, M.C., D.C.M., M.M.; 48th Bn. Sheep farmer; of Ceduna, S. Aust.; b. St. Francis Island, S. Aust., 5 May, 1897.

and had brought in a wounded man. Now, immediately the tank fighting ended, some more walked out in the same manner.

A big German officer (wrote Mitchell) climbed out of his trench and roared, "Do you want to surrender." "Surrender be ———," was chorussed back in pure Australian. Whether Fritz possesses a sense of humour or not I don't know, but he replied, "I do not understand French. Talk in English."

As he remained in No-Man's Land, I thought it was time I took a hand, so I went out and met him in the centre. We saluted.

The German was a tall youngster, with overcoat buttoned up to the neck. He and Mitchell made arrangements for a formal armistice, to last for forty minutes. "And," said the German, "when we wish to continue war, we will fire three shots in the air."

The Australians buried their dead in No-Man's Land and brought in a dozen wounded men; the German officer was minded to keep one wounded man found near the German parapet, but eventually handed him over, and enemy stretcher-bearers could be seen carrying away their own casualties. Mitchell's men did not attempt to recover rifles or other fighting gear, but brought in the paybooks and identity discs of the dead. The Germans gave them Captain Cumming's body, wrist-watch, and papers—so Mitchell says—"intact."¹⁵ Finally Mitchell told the German officer that no more time was necessary, and thanked him. The boy replied that more time could be allowed, but Mitchell desired none. Then these two, now the only ones standing in the open, saluted, walked back, looked at each other for a moment from their respective parapets, and dropped under cover.

German records show that—apart from the fact that, during the week after the British counterstroke, an attack was naturally expected at this crucial point—the Germans had no special anticipation of this operation. The position was held by part of two battalions—the 20th Reserve Jäger Battalion defending the western side, and the 11th Jäger Battalion the northern. The 20th had taken over the line on the night of April 30, with three companies forward and a fourth behind the southern flank. Its headquarters were in the cellar of the farm, the buildings of which were smashed by the British artillery during May 2. The attack reaching the farm took the staff by surprise. Two officers were killed there, the adjutant mortally wounded, and two officers (one

¹⁵ In gratitude Mitchell allowed the Germans to come across No-Man's Land and carry back one of their men, recently killed on the Australian side. As soon as their officer was out of hearing, the German stretcher-bearers asked for, and were given, cigarettes.

of the 20th and an artillery *liaison* officer) and a number of N.C.O.'s captured. The force which immediately counter-attacked from the south was the 2nd company, and part of the 1st and 11th Jäger assisted. Later, the female tank which entered the wood was put out of action by a Jäger exploding a bomb-charge under its petrol tank after one of his comrades had been wounded in throwing one on to its roof. The whole attack cost the 20th Reserve Jäger Battalion 10 officers and 136 men; it captured 19 prisoners (9 Australians, 6 men of the Tank Corps, and 4 Frenchmen of the 37th Division—presumably a French patrol).

Once again—as with the 5th Brigade at Hangard Wood—the attacking companies had achieved the result, most unusual in operations of this sort, of inflicting almost as many casualties as they suffered: the 48th lost 12 officers and 143 others, among those killed being Captain Cumming and Lieutenants Ferguson,¹⁶ Garland,¹⁷ and Luetchford.¹⁸ The 12th Machine Gun Company, which covered the whole operation with guns firing from houses in the village and positions on the flanks,¹⁹ also lost 5 men. Of the 37th French Division three companies of the 3rd Tirailleurs attempted to advance on the flank of the 48th but were met by heavy machine-gun fire and driven back, losing about 50 men. The plan of attacking Hangard Wood had already been abandoned.

With this unsuccessful effort the Second Battle of the Somme, which for most of the British Army had ended on April 5th, closed also for the French and British forces in front of Amiens. In the north, on April 25th, the day after the German thrust at Villers-Bretonneux, the Fourth German Army in Flanders attacked Mount Kemmel, then held by the French, and captured it.²⁰ The British line was consequently further withdrawn in front of Ypres²¹ and strong attempts

**End of
Somme Battle**

¹⁶ Lieut. A. S. Ferguson, 48th Bn. Lawyer; of Medindie, S. Aust.; b. Launceston, Tas., 17 Feb., 1888. Killed in action, 3 May, 1918.

¹⁷ Lieut. H. G. Garland, D.C.M.; 48th Bn. Journalist; of Alberton, S. Aust.; b. Port Adelaide, 15 Dec., 1893. Killed in action, 3 May, 1918.

¹⁸ Lieut. D. F. Luetchford, M.M.; 48th Bn. Clerk; of Claremont, W. Aust.; b. Clapham, London, Eng., 1891. Killed in action, 3 May, 1918.

¹⁹ The guns allotted to companies of the 48th were wisely kept back by their commanders.

²⁰ The 9th (Scottish) Division again came in for very heavy fighting on the northern flank of this attack, which drove it back towards Voormezele.

²¹ To behind Zillebeke Lake.

were made to recapture Kemmel hill. Several efforts by both sides during the next fortnight left the Germans still in possession; but the capture of the hill was followed by none of the far-reaching effects anticipated by the commanders on both sides. The further withdrawal in Flanders, previously contemplated, was not carried out by the British, and the end of the battle found the Germans, though well enough situated on the heights, in ill plight farther south, entrenched in low wet land and badly overlooked. The attempt of the British Navy, made on April 23rd, to close the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge by the most daring raid of the war, was only in part successful, and was effective rather as a marvellous demonstration of morale and a threat of disturbing possibilities than by reason of any tactical achievement.

CHAPTER XIX

RESULTS OF THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE BRITISH

WITH these events the great attack that had been foreshadowed throughout the winter of 1917-18—and the greatest in history—ended. In an earlier chapter of this volume an attempt was made to describe the mutually destructive efforts of the numerous Allied leaders to establish a plan with which to meet that threat, ending, precisely a week before the blow fell, in a compromise by which the final quietus was given to the earlier plan for a joint reserve. The Supreme War Council then decided instead to trust to the judgment of two sectional commanders-in-chief and to their mutual arrangements for safeguarding the Western Front until the Americans arrived in sufficient force to make the issue of the war certain. Such—for what it was worth—was the Allies' main plan for 1918.

The reader has seen that this plan—as might have been expected from the strife which evolved it—broke down within ten days of being approved, and precipitated the Allied cause at once into a crisis in which there seemed to be actual danger of “the loss of the war”—that is, of being forced to accept a harshly negotiated peace. The one saving factor was the determination of the French and British—from private to field-marshal, from peasant to Prime Minister—to hold together in trouble, a general resolution which, despite temporary failures here or there under intolerable strain, eventually carried them safely through.

But the security thus far gained had been won through confusion disastrous to the British Army. Although Ludendorff failed in his full intention, to crush that army, he had struck it exceedingly hard. In the double offensive he had employed no less than 141 German infantry divisions of which he had thrown 109 against 55 British divisions and one Portuguese.¹ The French, throwing 41 divisions into the battle, and the Belgians, taking over a section of the British

¹ The total strength of the B.E.F. was then 58 British and 2 Portuguese divisions.

line, had enabled the British to weather the storm; but the cost to the British Expeditionary Force had been 302,879 men (28,138 killed, 181,338 wounded, and 93,403 missing and prisoners).² Practically all British divisions in France and Belgium had been involved in the battle once, and half of them twice. Eight were so reduced that they had to be withdrawn from the line and (as Haig's despatches record) "temporarily written off as fighting units," most of their troops being used to replenish others, while two more, though still used, had to be left below strength. The French had lost 92,000, the total casualties of the Allies thus totalling 395,000. The actual balance of loss, as so often happened, was probably well against the attacking side,³ but the dislocation of the British army was far beyond anything that was suffered by the Germans.

Even in the Australian force, though its losses—15,083 between March 21st and May 7th—were not comparable with the British, shortage of reinforcements necessitated the beginning of a dreaded reorganisation, which it may be well to describe before summarising the wider results of the battle. By a strange chance, in the A.I.F. the heaviest share of the fighting had fallen to the 4th Division, which five months earlier had so barely escaped from being marked for disbandment; the next heaviest fell to the 3rd. As anticipated, the drafts of new recruits and of returning wounded were insufficient to maintain these divisions on a twelve-battalion basis. Accordingly the scheme of reduction, already thrashed out at a conference called by Birdwood on February 2nd, and provisionally agreed to by the Australian Government, had now to be partly applied. In particular, the recruits from Queensland were insufficient to keep up the ten battalions raised in whole or part by that State. It was decided that in each of the three brigades—9th, 12th, and 13th—on which the fighting at Villers-Bretonneux and Dernancourt had chiefly

² These figures are for the period 21 March-30 April, 1918. *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire*, p. 358.

³ The German casualties are given as numbering 378,769. With the 30 per cent allowance made by the British Official Historian for casualties not evacuated from corps areas, the figure is increased to 490,000.

fallen, one battalion must be disbanded in order to bring its three sister battalions up to strength: the 36th (New South Wales)⁴ and 47th and 52nd (mainly Queensland, but with some Tasmanians) must go.

It was fully realised that disbandment would be a heavy blow to the units on which the sentence fell; the ordinary Australian, intensely loyal to his own codes but—until enlistment—bound by few traditional loyalties, had absorbed the *esprit de corps* zealously encouraged by his leaders with a seriousness which now embarrassed the authorities, raising in the minds of some commanders the slightly disturbing problem of how their men would react to the order to disband. In this respect it was a disadvantage of the improvised organisation of the A.I.F. that the infantry had been raised as single battalions and not as regiments. When a battalion was disbanded an entire entity vanished; its tradition, which was now a very precious possession, would be in danger of extinction, and the shock would be felt not only by the members of the battalions themselves, but in Australia by their families and the local committees, and even by certain home towns. The Australian Defence Department had originally objected to such disbandment on the ground of the loss of tradition, and directed that, if it became necessary, the battalions should not be dissolved but nominally "withdrawn," their names and part of their staffs being transferred to the training battalions for their brigades in England. At least their names and records would thus be maintained, and the battalions could more easily be revived, if not during the war, then afterwards in Australia.

This plan was now adopted. The names of the three battalions—together with their assistant-adjutants and their quartermasters—were allotted to Australian training units in England,⁵ and their records to the Australian War Records Section (which by the wisdom of Generals Birdwood, White, and Griffiths had been established in May 1917, with head-

⁴ At a conference on April 22 Major-General Monash (3rd Division) and Brigadier-General Rosenthal decided that, if 500 New South Wales reinforcements could be obtained within a fortnight, the four battalions of the 9th Brigade should be retained; on April 29 the 36th Battalion was informed that it would be broken up next day.

⁵ Thus "D" Company, 9th Training Battalion, now had "36th Bn." prefixed to that title.

quarters under Captain Treloar⁶ in London, to receive and preserve the historical records of the A.I.F.).⁷ These measures were supplemented by others taken by the commanders of the units concerned. Brigadier-General Glasgow quietly arranged that in his brigade the men of the disbanding battalion—the 52nd—should previously be kept rather shorter than usual in the matter of new clothes and edible and other comforts, but, on arriving at their new unit, should immediately be given a good dinner and fitted with new clothes and gear. In all three battalions the decision was explained frankly to the troops as being inevitable and in the interest of the whole force.

All the three units now to be disbanded belonged to the younger half of the A.I.F., having been formed early in 1916 under the scheme of reorganisation by which the A.I.F. had been doubled; but all had fine traditions. It was the 36th that, under Milne, had recently charged with such magnificent spirit in First Villers-Bretonneux; the 47th that had penetrated far beyond the objective at Messines and had borne the brunt of both attacks at Dernancourt; the 52nd that, under dreadful shelling, had clung to the fragment of trench won at Mouquet Farm, and had now just emerged from its most famous achievement in the counter-attack in Second Villers-Bretonneux. Lieutenant-Colonel Imlay of the 47th records that, on the day on which the news of the disbandment was broken to the 47th, informal indignation meetings were observable on all sides; but all the officers and N.C.O's were completely loyal to the larger interests of the A.I.F. and its Allies. The officers had their new battalions chosen for them; the men, where possible, were allowed some choice; and, when

⁶ Major J. L. Treloar, O.B.E. Director, Aust. War Memorial, since 1920. Military staff clerk; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Port Melbourne, 10 Dec., 1894.

⁷ These had previously been sent with the records of the British Army to the United Kingdom (where they had been stored in the Records Office at Chancery Lane, London) or to the base. But Sir Max Aitken (afterwards Lord Beaverbrook) had already secured for the Canadian force the custody of its own records; and when, with his help, similar application was made on behalf of Australia the War Office readily agreed. It insisted only upon the retention of copies; and in return for these Captain Treloar secured copies of the relevant British records. Trophies also were now separately allotted. Captain Treloar, previously confidential clerk to General White, sat as Australian representative on the Trophy Committee and the Committee of the Imperial War Museum; and, as he was very young and most of the British members were of high rank—generals, admirals, and senior public servants—he was specially raised to the rank of major. (See also the *Preface to Vol. XII.*)

the order was given, they marched quietly away to assume their new loyalties.⁸

Despite the rushing in of reinforcement drafts, the total effective Allied Force on the Western Front had decreased **General** by two divisions since the offensive began, **Results** and the Germans, whose force had been increased by 14, now had 206 divisions facing 173.⁹ It was estimated on May 1st that 64 of the German divisions were in reserve—only ten less than on March 20th; and by May 16th the number would be 82. As the Allies' reserves were only 57 divisions, they must prepare to receive another tremendous blow. But the German leaders had been making immense demands on the spirit and energy of their troops—qualities which could not last for ever; and the Allies had one chief source of hope and confidence—if the Americans maintained the programme of transportation lately promised, time was now fast running in the Allies' favour. They had made great drafts on their reserves; after withholding reinforcements until something near disaster had been suffered, the British War Cabinet necessarily went to the other extremity. The stream of reinforcements, which before the offensive had been kept down to a trickle, suddenly swelled, the floodgates being opened to let through a flow of 180,000 recruits within a month. Thus most of the British divisions had been kept in action, but largely by means of boy-soldiers. A big proportion of these were good material, but all, if they were to be used, should have been subjected to a gradual hardening process during the previous months instead of being hurled straight into some of the hardest fighting of the war. By the procedure adopted, the value of most British divisions was for a time needlessly lessened and their losses necessarily increased.

⁸ The 36th Battalion was disbanded on April 30, three companies and headquarters going to the 33rd, and the remaining company to the 34th and 35th. The 47th was officially disbanded on May 26, but actually on May 25-27, being divided almost equally between the 45th, 46th, and 48th. The commander of the 52nd was informed of its fate by General Glasgow on May 15. The information was passed to the companies, which were next day marched out from their position in the reserve trenches and almost equally divided between the 49th, 50th, and 51st. Colonel Whitham shortly afterwards took over the 49th from Colonel Denton.

⁹ 103 French (of lower strength than the others), 52 British (active divisions), 12 Belgian, 4 American, and 2 Italian. On March 21 the Germans had 192 divisions in the West, the Allies 175 (99 French, 58 British).

Further the War Cabinet put into operation a scheme already arranged by the War Office of bringing over part of the British troops from Palestine, replacing them by Indian units. Early in April the 52nd Division, and early in May the 74th, sailed from Egypt. In addition, General Allenby was asked to send from his other divisions twenty-three British battalions, to be used for bringing up to strength some of the divisions in France that had been temporarily withdrawn. Moreover on April 9th, as soon as Parliament met, Lloyd George introduced the Third Military Service Act, raising the military age to 50, and in some cases 55, years, and enabling certificates of exemption to be ignored in times of emergency.¹⁰ Other parliamentary business was held over until the bill was passed, in ten days. As for the losses in artillery, the previous energy of Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, and others in the Ministry of Munitions, and the continuous efforts of British manufacturers and their workers, had put the Ordnance Department in a position to replace these within a few days of their occurrence.

But much the most far-reaching of the emergency measures was the expediting of the programme of transport of American troops. When the Germans struck, although the United States had been for a year at war, only four effective American divisions were in France, and only one in the line. When during that crisis the American leaders—under a bombardment of urgent petitions from the statesmen and generals of the Allies—realised that if these tremendous German blows continued to fall the huge armies then preparing in the United States might be too late, President Wilson agreed to recommendations formulated by the Versailles staff on March 28th: first, that (until the Supreme War Council otherwise directed) American effort should be concentrated upon pouring into France infantry and machine-gunners, leaving the bulky artillery and transport units to come later; and, second, that, for the present, American units should be allowed to serve in the armies of the Allies. These were the requests which, in one form or another, the Allies had been urging and General Pershing opposing throughout the previous winter,¹¹

¹⁰ Under the act conscription could be applied to Ireland by Order-in-Council.

¹¹ See pp. 63-6.

the American commander anticipating—and with reason—that if he allowed American troops to be “temporarily” incorporated in the British and French Armies, there would be great difficulty in forming an American Army in France at all. Now, by setting his face stubbornly against the extension of the new procedure for more than a month at a time—instead of for four months, as the Supreme War Council urged—he secured its limitation in the first instance to the shipments in April and May. In each of these months 120,000 American infantry and machine-gunners were to be brought over, but, through his insistence, artillery and other services would also be transported if shipping space proved to be available. In return for the British effort in finding extra ships, half these troops were to be trained by the British in accordance with the previous arrangement for the six divisions which this plan superseded.¹² On May 2nd, after a further strenuous tussle—the Allied leaders stressing the urgency of their plight, and the British Government promising a still greater provision of shipping—Pershing agreed to extend the system, with some modifications, for June. Already, in the height of the March crisis, he had consented to allow the American divisions then trained in France to be inserted in the Allies’ line wherever required.

Thus, although a marked lull now occurred, the Allies were far from being out of the wood; American help was, at the end of April, still almost entirely prospective—it cannot be said that it had yet perceptibly lightened the burden upon Haig’s troops. But the American uniform was becoming recognised as advanced parties visited the front, and here and there a company of engineers or a field ambulance served, for experience, behind the British fighting units or, in emergency, with them. And in May, in consequence of the arrangements above described, large bodies of American infantry began to appear in the areas behind the British front, bringing a glad and increasing assurance to all who saw them. Such was the situation left by Ludendorff’s great enterprise.

¹² See p. 65.

No one who seriously endeavours to form a true judgment on the events described in this volume is likely to conclude that the conduct by the Allied armies and their leaders of this defensive, so amply foreseen, was above serious criticism. The Australian people, farthest removed from the scene, adopted throughout the war the only attitude that could possibly help the common cause—that of refraining from criticism, however serious the situation, and regarding these emergencies only as a further summons to increase recruiting.¹³ And—except for the strong expression of its desire that the Australian divisions in the main theatre of war should be employed, as far as possible, together—the Australian Government till now had entrusted the disposal of its forces entirely to the British Government and the commanders-in-chief in the field, and had accepted their decisions without question. Indeed, any criticisms of them published in Australia were strongly resented there.¹⁴ But the Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, and the Minister for the Navy, Joseph Cook, on arriving in England in June for the session of the Imperial War Cabinet, learned from several quarters that recent events had given grave cause for doubting the capacity of the British military leaders. In particular Mr. Lloyd George endeavoured to enlist the Prime Ministers of Canada and Australia in an effort to have Haig removed from the British command in France.¹⁵ They for their part had no intention of becoming catspaws for this purpose without evidence that their own national forces were detrimentally affected by faults in Haig's leadership; but the confidence of the dominion representatives in that leadership was deeply shaken by these statements. And now that reasoned judgment may fairly be formed, the British and overseas peoples are interested to know, and have a right to know, who, if anyone more than another, was chiefly responsible for the distressing experiences suffered by the British Army in March 1918 and for the danger which then threatened the Allies' cause.

¹³ The steps now taken to that end, though only slightly successful, and the reasons for their comparative failure, are fully set forth in *Vol. XI* of this series, dealing with *Australia during the War*.

¹⁴ As, for example, were some critical remarks made by Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett in lecturing.

¹⁵ This incident is fully described in *Vol. XI (chap. xvii)*.

At the time it was believed in some quarters that the immediate cause of the crisis in March—the failure of the Fifth Army to hold out nearly as long as had been anticipated—was largely attributable to a lack of stamina in some of its divisions. In an earlier chapter of this volume that contention has been tested by reference to such data as are available in Australia—in particular, to the German regimental histories; and these show that the resistance of the elements of the Fifth Army, at least at the time when Pétain and even G.H.Q. considered that army almost valueless, was surprisingly stiff. Undoubtedly the so-called wearing-down battles of First Somme and Passchendaele had exhausted the British man-supply at a quicker rate than the German, but there are grounds for the belief that they damaged the Germans more seriously in morale. Ludendorff says that in 1918 the German soldier was incapable of achievements that would have been practicable earlier in the war. If the British resistance was definitely more uneven than hitherto, the Germans on their side—especially when tired and with their first enthusiasm evaporating—were more easily stopped. Both sides were palpably showing the effect of nearly four years of the most exhausting war ever fought; but it is probably beyond the power of any historian to balance the results so surely as to determine which of them was more severely affected. It may, however, be guessed that future students will conclude that the German Army was still, as it had been throughout the war, in proportion to its size the most powerful and effective of the great armies involved.

It is much easier to judge of the leadership. Here the Germans had possessed the immense advantage—how great, the present study of the Allies' difficulties may have shown—of a completely unified command at least on the Western Front; and it was an advantage to their military leaders—though whether, in the long run, to the army and nation may well be disputed—that the political chiefs, who differed from them, were in practice subordinate rather than paramount like those of Great Britain and France. There is no doubt that—as Haig throughout correctly judged—Hindenburg and Ludendorff in this offensive set the war-strained man-power of Germany to a task beyond its strength, and that the

depression, which quickly followed any failure to attain their exaggerated expectations, brought them slowly but certainly nearer to the possibility of a fatal counterstroke. If, however, Ludendorff failed to grasp the human problem involved, he solved most brilliantly some of the tactical and strategical ones. By solving the extraordinarily difficult problem of achieving a large measure of surprise in one of these great, long prepared offensives, and by inventing a tactical method—infiltration—which freed the German infantry from the rigidity that had hitherto bound the tactics of the Allies, Ludendorff presented his opponents with a problem to which—so far as resistance in their prepared trench-systems was concerned—there was no answer. Even with his army weakened through the policy of Lloyd George, Haig had been confident of at least holding the Germans for many days before they reached the Somme. But Ludendorff, by deceiving his opponents with preparations in three sectors—and more—and then flinging his whole strength against one of these, had actually placed it beyond the power even of a Napoleon to stop the rapidity of his advance in the first stages.

But dangerously weak though Haig's army was when attacked in immense force on an extended line with only 18 divisions in reserve,¹⁹ yet the total preponderance of German strength in the West was not so great that the combined Anglo-French reserve (57 divisions) should not, if wisely placed and controlled, have been sufficient to stop Ludendorff's thrust, possibly on the Somme line, but at all events without the extremes of haste, confusion, and anxiety that actually attended its use. The best answer to the problem that faced the Allies on March 21st was the possession of an adequate reserve, controlled by some authority capable of forming an accurate judgment as to where, in that theatre of war, it was most urgently required. The student is thus brought back to the fact that ten days before the blow fell, the two Allied commanders-in-chief rejected the plan for some measure of unification of the command and the provision of a joint reserve. The plan of divided command on which they relied broke down completely within four days of the first test, just

¹⁹ That is to say, 8 in G.H.Q. reserve and 10 in Army and Corps reserve.

as it did in the only previous crisis comparable with this one, when in August 1914 Sir John French under similar strain proposed to withdraw the British Army out of the line and brought about the hurried intervention of Lord Kitchener. Now, as before, in face of an enemy striving for a decision, one leader was faced with disaster if the other did not cling to him, while the other was crushed by the double anxiety of safeguarding the front or army for which he was personally responsible and of ensuring the safety of his colleague. In short, to expect the commander of a section, however large, to be able to balance fairly the danger and needs of his own and other sections was to ask too much of human nature; as Sir Henry Wilson had written when his opinion was called for by the War Cabinet in October 1917:

Human nature being what it is, and our commanders-in-chief and chiefs of staffs being what they are—all men of strong and decided views, all men whose sole energies are devoted to their own fronts and their own national concerns—we get as a natural and inevitable result a war conducted not as a whole, but as a war on sections of the whole . . . and the stronger and the better the various chiefs, the more isolated and detached the plans.

That in 1918 the French commander judged wrongly—as did the British leader in 1914—simply means that he was the one who, under this impossible system, was required to decide that the dangers of the neighbouring front or army justified him in ignoring what he believed to be a grave threat to his own. Precisely a year earlier it was Haig who, despite Nivelle's requests or orders, had held back British divisions to meet an imaginary threat in Flanders.¹⁷ With divided control the Allies must have lost the Lys battle if, by a miracle, their security survived the Somme.

What prevented the Franco-British reserves from stopping the progress of the Germans much earlier was the defective machinery for their use; and for this deficiency, which should have been most obvious to the military leaders, they themselves, and not the politicians, were responsible. The truth is that not many strong men, already established in a supreme command, are capable of willingly subordinating themselves to a colleague; and though Haig accepted the principle affirmed by Lord Kitchener that, in general, the French commander-in-chief should prescribe the strategy, he

¹⁷ See *Vol. IV*, p. 139.

had persuaded himself that formal subordination to a generalissimo could only lead to useless friction without achieving more real unity. The trouble attendant on Lloyd George's over-hasty adoption of Nivelle as generalissimo in February 1917 had confirmed him in this view, and since the autumn of that year even Pétain had swung to it.

There were very real dangers in any thoughtless unification. Amalgamation of the armies, for example, would have resulted in irremediable trouble through the difficulties, not merely of supplying the mingled forces with their separate ammunition and other material, but of handling and leading men with different social habits, ideals, and outlook. If only through national pride, amalgamation would have been as unacceptable to the French and British as it was to the Americans and the dominion forces. But amalgamation was not contemplated in the proposals for joint command, nor, in spite of the mixing of allied forces that occurred in certain crises, was there ever any serious danger of it so far as the British Army was concerned. A more real danger—though it did not prevent unity of command in Gallipoli or Salonica—was that the generalissimo might be unduly swayed by the interests of his own country or army. But, though Nivelle and Pétain were directly responsible to the French Government, Foch considered himself responsible to the Supreme War Council, and statements by Mr. Lloyd George and even M. Poincaré support his view;¹⁸ and although M. Clemenceau once advised Foch “not to try that game,”¹⁹ and Haig himself, rather surprisingly, seemed to recognise Foch's national allegiance by frequent appeals to Clemenceau to influence the generalissimo's decisions, Foch acted with an independence that aroused Clemenceau's antagonism. The problem of Foch's responsibility was never settled, and sooner or later, if the war had lasted longer, trouble must have arisen from it. But, with American influence increasing, the responsibility of the generalissimo to the combination of the Powers rather than to his own government would surely have been established beyond possibility of doubt.

¹⁸ Georges Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory*, pp. 77-84; Painlevé, *Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain*, pp. 265-6.

¹⁹ Liddell Hart, *Foch*, pp. 377-8.

To the Executive War Board—the alternative devised for securing unity—this danger of undue national influence did not attach, but suspicion that the board's action might be hampered by the usual defects of committee-control was not unnatural, and the commanders-in-chief resisted it. How far the actual source of Haig's objection was antipathy to the elevation of Foch and Wilson into a virtual generalissimo; how far fear of delays through committee-control; how far apprehension of interference with his plans through the earmarking of divisions for the proposed reserve, probably he himself could not have told. His comment on Foch's appointment—that he could deal with a man but not with a committee—expressed a genuine feeling, but he could have met his own objection at any time by urging the appointment of a generalissimo; while it seems certain that if he and Pétain had supported the Executive War Board instead of killing it, Foch and Rawlinson, who would have controlled the Board, would have used their reserve much earlier than Pétain, and the danger involved in Pétain's order for a withdrawal away from the British would have been avoided.²⁰ Not until suddenly faced with probable disaster to his army and the Allied cause did Haig recognise the need for unity of command; possibly even then he accepted it only because it was the necessary means for securing one vital decision. But he is entitled to the full credit for that acceptance. When the crisis came, he was big enough to throw over in one moment all considerations of his own power and dignity, and his constitutional quibbles about serving only the King, and swiftly brought about the long overdue solution.

It seems, therefore, that the chief military error in the arrangements of Haig and Pétain was this defective provision for control of the required reserve. Other mistakes were undoubtedly made, the chief being the slowness of Byng's Third Army in retiring from the Flesquières salient, which Haig himself, as soon as it was formed, had recognised as likely to be a source of great weakness and of continual anxiety. It has been maintained, and is possible, that just as Byng was too slow in his early retirement, so Gough was too

²⁰ It may be urged that, as finally proposed, the reserve would have comprised but few divisions; but this circumstance itself was due to the resistance of Haig and Pétain. Moreover an authority for overruling Pétain would have been in existence.

fast. But Gough's army had been attacked with a strength altogether unexpected by Haig. Its divisions were holding more extended fronts, and their reserves were fewer than would presumably have been the case if the German attack upon them—and its strength—had been earlier anticipated. This was due not to any failure of the British intelligence system, which fully detected the preparations, but to the cleverness of Ludendorff and his staff. To some extent Ludendorff may here have been aided by Haig's confidence—not fully shared by his subordinates—that any German attempt to break through on the Western Front offered so little hope of success that Ludendorff would refrain from committing his full strength to the offensive.

Haig has also been criticised for distributing his reserves evenly behind his four armies. But through the extension of his line he was able to keep only eight divisions at his own disposal, and he could not safely leave either the Channel ports, or the Bethune coalfield,²¹ or the vital buttress at Arras devoid of all except local reserves. Whatever mistakes Haig made in his dispositions, he never, even under the greatest strain, made the one which might speedily have been fatal, of weakening his front at Arras, the importance of which he appreciated clearly throughout. And if future criticism of his leadership in this phase of the war concentrates chiefly on the defective arrangements for the Allies' reserves and for co-operation in their use, it will not fall into the mistake, often made by contemporary critics, of failing to see his immense positive contribution: his magnificent strength under the shocks of this storm, the imperturbability of his judgment, and the element of real greatness in the objectiveness of mind and attitude which enabled him, not only to appreciate the enemy's side of the problem, but, in the climax, to seek the victory of the Allies' cause by means of a diminution of his own power and dignity. Haig rarely exhibited a spark of brilliance; but of how many another great military leader can it be said, as of him, that, when once plunged in such a tornado, every step that he took was apparently right?"²²

²¹ The extreme importance of this coalfield for the French manufacture of munitions was insisted upon by the French.

²² Although the policy of occupying the Flesquières salient was Haig's, he can hardly be held responsible for the too slow retirement when the battle began.

For the extremities of danger and suffering in which that tempest involved the British Army, the prime responsibility may be laid by future students upon other shoulders. Since the reasons urged by the French Government for the extension of the British front before this battle seemed to the British Government impossible to resist, and the extension was agreed to against the advice of the British military leaders, it follows that the Government should have taken all possible steps to ensure that the army was adequate to hold the extended line; and, inasmuch as Haig warned the British Government that his army was being kept too short of reinforcements for safety, whereas the Prime Minister contended that the British front had been "over-insured" and acted on that contention by withholding reinforcements, the immediate responsibility for the safety of the front had clearly been assumed by the Prime Minister. This course may, in rare crises, be necessary, since the ultimate responsibility always lies with the government; but was it necessary in this situation?

The apparent reasons for Lloyd George's attitude have been described in an earlier chapter. While the Passchendaele offensive was still in progress he knew—indeed Haig, full of confidence, had laid the plan before the War Cabinet—that if Haig received during the winter the reinforcements for which he asked, he would expend them in not merely renewing the offensive, but renewing it at Passchendaele. The War Cabinet had been unable to stop the Passchendaele operations in the previous autumn, fearing that the public outcry against interference with the generals would be too strong for it. Lloyd George now decided that, if he could not get rid of Haig or veto his plans, he would at least, by withholding reinforcement, deny him the means of carrying them out.

The British Prime Minister and War Cabinet were not alone in thinking that Haig was so wedded to his schemes for offensive that he would have spent on them all the troops the country could give him. A considerable part of the army felt this also, not without bitterness; and had it also realised that he was resolved to continue the Passchendaele offensive in the spring, that bitterness would unquestionably have found expression in England. Had the War Cabinet frankly prohibited that or any other major offensive in the spring, it

would have been on safe ground. The mere suspicion that Haig could devise no better plan than that of renewing, after five or six months' interruption, those detested operations would have wrecked any reputation that he possessed with his soldiers for strategical competence; indeed, his reputation can survive it even now only through the knowledge that at other times his earnestness made him ready to learn by his mistakes.

The main defect of his plan was not that of choosing Flanders for a battle ground; under summer conditions the Flenish theatre of war is easier than most—Ludendorff chose it not only for his attack on the Lys but for his projected final offensive which was never launched. Haig's fault was that, having evolved a practicable plan, his eager self-confidence became so wedded to it that he pursued it irrespective of vital changes in the conditions. His method, which defeated itself in the rain of October and November 1917, would almost certainly have led to disaster in the spring of 1918. He would have flung away the chance of surprise, allowing the Germans a whole winter to prepare the proper counterstroke at his flank, which Crown Prince Rupprecht did in fact prepare, and which eventually became the Lys offensive. And that stroke would have caught the British Army partly exhausted and reduced by casualties. There was, therefore, ample reason for the prohibition of the project of this offensive or indeed of any other, since they would have left the British Army in the condition eventually reached by the German—worn out and unfit to withstand a determined blow.

But the course taken by the British Government in preventing Haig's project, not by direct instruction but by weakening the British Army in France, is unlikely to avoid the merited censure of posterity. It is doubtful, in the first place, whether Haig would have resisted such an instruction; and it is still more doubtful whether, after Passchendaele, any political leader or any newspaper would have supported him, if he had resisted; and, had they done so, it would hardly have required the peculiar capacity of Lloyd George—with such a "brief"—to annihilate opposition in Parliament.

But the Prime Minister chose another method. "I never believed in costly frontal attacks either in war or politics," he

wrote afterwards.²⁵ "if there were a way round." The analogy is not a good one, for on the battlefields his country's success would have been the deciding motive, whereas in this struggle it was the Government's. Rather than endanger his Ministry by giving an outright direction, he took the responsibility of adopting measures which in the opinion of Haig and Robertson—though his own was contrary—would endanger the British front. That these measures left Haig's army weaker than it might have been is undoubted. How many men could have been sent to France before March 21st can never be known, but nearly 200,000 (including many under 19 years) were sent in the month following. Between November 1st and February 28th each British division in France received on an average 3,626 infantry, each Australian division, despite the shortage of Australian recruits, 5,616. If in December the British Government had (as Winston Churchill wished at the time) frankly prohibited Haig from attacking, and thereafter had strained every nerve to support his defensive measures, the result of March 21st might have been far different. Both the Third and Fifth Armies would have been stronger, and the Third, at least, might have stopped the Germans at its battle zone.

It is true that the positive contribution of Lloyd George to the solution of the Allies' difficulties in this crisis was very great. He fought for the Allied Reserve and for unity of command—both, as it proved, vital factors in the final victory. But his brilliant gifts were largely wasted through the obliquity of his methods. Haig's chief critic has been his former Prime Minister. Unlike his critic, Haig afterwards felt and admitted that he had made mistakes; and those who served under him in those crucial months, and who benefited by his magnanimity in the climax at Doullens, have not failed to note that the story of those tense times is not marked by any similar sacrifice of private interest on the part of his chief political critic.

What part in these momentous events did the A.I.F. play? It has frequently been claimed that the Australian infantry divisions stopped the advancing Germans in their previously

²⁵ *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Vol. IV, p. 2274.*

victorious progress towards Amiens and also towards Hazebrouck. In the chapter of this volume dealing with the

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Part**

Fifth Army's withdrawal it has been shown that, if this claim means that the Germans continued to advance until they came up against Australian troops hurriedly brought to the rescue, and that these were the troops that first held up the enemy on the line on which the offensive ended, it is not literally true of any important sector of the Somme front; at Dernancourt the Germans had been held on that line for a full day by the 9th and 35th Divisions before the 4th Australian Division took over the front. As for the 3rd Division's front between the Somme and the Ancre, German narratives prove that, owing to the British cavalry's resistance, the plan of attempting to advance there had been abandoned and the attack diverted to the south of the Somme before the Australians became responsible for the front line. German records make it clear that even at Hébuterne the advance had been stopped by the tired defenders before the 4th Brigade relieved them—and this is none the less true although the British afterwards abandoned the village and would almost certainly have been driven back farther when the attack was renewed next morning. The New Zealand Division, arriving some hours earlier, did bring to an end the enemy's advance near Auchonvillers. But except at Hazebrouck—where the 1st Australian Division stopped the enemy's progress as completely as did the 5th Division on its right and the 33rd Division on its left—and, apart from such minor incidents as the checking of the Germans by Captain Ferres' company at Vaux on April 4th, the great German offensive was nowhere literally brought to a stop by Australian troops. On practically the whole front taken up by them the stoppage had already occurred.

Undoubtedly the knowledge that they were about to be relieved by "the Anzacs" helped these British troops to hold out; but there is not the least ground for assuming that other fresh British reserves, had they been available, would have failed to hold the Germans as firmly as the Australians did. The performance of such divisions as the 55th and 33rd, and even of some tired ones, for example the 9th, is sufficient proof to the contrary. It was the fortune of the Australian

divisions not to have been subjected to the first onslaught, and to be brought into the battle as reserves at the stage at which the exhaustion of the attacking troops and the difficulties of reinforcing and munitioning them were sufficiently pronounced to render progress against efficient reserves impossible. On the front of Fayolle's army, where the reserves were later in arriving, the German progress towards Amiens continued for some days after the Australian and other troops barred it farther north; and here the French reserves and British cavalry, when they did arrive, played a prominent part in safeguarding the city. The five Australian divisions effectively played their rôle as part of the reserve of the British Army.

But, when that is said, no one who came in contact with them or with the New Zealanders in those dark days will deny that there was a special value in their presence. "May we be quickly relieved and may the relieving troops be Australians," writes a British soldier describing his feelings in that crisis. Some British leaders at the time and some British military writers since have attributed the effectiveness of the Australians to the fact that they, like the Canadians, were grouped constantly in the same army corps—which, however, does not apply to the New Zealanders, or, in this campaign, to the 1st Australian Division. Much also has been made of the fact that their brigades still contained four battalions; and although throughout this fighting most of the Australian divisions fought minus one brigade, which might be held to balance that advantage, it is undeniable that these were favourable conditions. But it was none of these points that impressed the hard driven British troops and commanders who welcomed them on the actual battlefield. It was the abounding willingness and virility of the troops themselves, and the calibre of their officers, largely men promoted from the ranks. Writing to General Monash (3rd Division) after their troops had been working together on the Somme, Major-General Mullens²⁴ of the 1st Cavalry Division said:

As you know we had a curious collection of units to deal with. It was a very real relief to know that I had your stout-hearted fellows on my left flank. . . . It was a pleasure and an honour to be fighting alongside troops who displayed such magnificent *moral*.

²⁴ Major-Gen. R. L. Mullens, C.B., p.s.c. Commanded 2nd Cav. Bde., 1914/15; 1st Cav. Div., 1915/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Langham, Essex; b. Teddington, Middlesex, 25 Feb. 1871.

A major of the British artillery fighting with the Fifth Army said,

the Australians who came up near Hangard Wood were the first cheerful, stubborn people he had met in the retreat.²⁵

After fighting beside Brigadier-General Elliott and his men at Villers-Bretonneux and in later fights, the Chestnut Troop of the Royal Horse Artillery, commanded by Major van Straubensee,²⁶ repeating the courtesy extended by the Troop to two Regiments of The Rifle Brigade in the Peninsula War, invited Elliott and the officers of his four battalions to be honorary members of their mess "as a permanent record of the regard and admiration we had for them"—feelings which, as has been shown, were equally entertained by Australians for all the British regulars of the old Army that fought beside them in these operations.

Mention has already been made of the demonstrations with which the Anzac troops were everywhere met by the French people, who paid them the peculiar compliment of likening them to their own. As Captain G. H. (now Sir Hubert) Wilkins stood by the roadside watching the French infantry with their (by British standards) ramshackle transport arriving to support Plumer's tired divisions, two French women, standing behind, tapped his arm:

Francais soldiers good soldiers, like the Australians (one of them said). Not much salute, march all over the road, officers talk with the men like Australians, but good soldiers.²⁷

The Germans who met dominion troops, also, were aware of a special spirit in all of them. The statement of a German correspondent after the Battle of Dernancourt, that the Australians and Canadians were much the best troops the British had, has already been referred to.²⁸ British intelligence officers, who some days after the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux were examining a sergeant-major of the 4th Guard Division

²⁵ Diary of the Australian Official War Correspondent.

²⁶ Lieut.-Col. A. W. van Straubensee, D.S.O. Commanded "A" Bty. (The Chestnut Troop), R.H.A., 1918/24. Officer of British Regular Army; of Spennithorne, Yorkshire; b. Meerut, India, 18 March, 1884.

²⁷ The appearance of these Frenchmen impressed other Australians than Wilkins. One notes in his diary: "The French troops whom we saw in the north looked splendid, bronzed men, almost all of a good age—25 to 35. Their transport horses are ragged and skinny and look as though they are dying."

²⁸ P. 417. New Zealanders were doubtless also meant. The German comment in the Battle of Arras (quoted by Crown Prince Rupprecht) concerning the outstanding performance of these troops is cited in *Vol. IV*, p. 542.

on behalf of the Tank Corps, in order to ascertain particulars of the enemy's tanks, elicited the following statement:

It was generally considered that the Australian troops were about the finest in the world, and the Germans were loth to attack them.

It would not be true to say that this opinion of the Australian troops was general throughout the German Army; the 4th (Prussian) Guard Division happened to have been one of their most constant opponents and had met them last at Broodseinde. General von Kuhl appears to have considered the Canadians to be the best troops the British had, while his chief, Crown Prince Rupprecht, constantly notes also the fighting value of the Scots. There was no force whose name was dreaded throughout the German Army,²⁹ nor was that army, any more than the British, composed of material likely to admit such terrors. But there is no doubt that the oversea divisions—and perhaps the “Anzacs” in particular—were now regarded as especially tough opponents, invariably daring and stubborn elements in the British Army; so that, for example, if they were concentrated to a marked extent on any part of the British front, the German staff would tend to suspect that the British command for some reason desired to have specially dependable troops there.

And how far did the British command actually use them in this manner? In an interview with an Australian official, the officer at G.H.Q. responsible for drafting the daily *communiqués*, Major-General Dawnay, denied that there existed in the British Army either “storm troops,” or any distinction between divisions of greater and of less fighting capacity. This contention was not literally true, for record exists of a discussion between G.H.Q. and Third Army on March 30th in which it was laid down that the Guards Division should not be used “to bedrock” owing to its value as a counter-attacking division. It was recommended that it should accordingly change places with the 56th Division; and two days later General Lawrence instructed the Third Army

²⁹ The supposed interview with a General von Roon—purporting to describe the demoralising effect upon German infantry of the presence of Anzac infantry and artillery in the later stages of the war—which received wide publicity in Australia and elsewhere, is a journalistic *canard*. No General von Roon existed, either on the Kaiser's staff or off it; and inquiries, courteously made by Captain J. J. W. Herbertson through Vice-Admiral von Freyberg, Colonel Nicolai (Chief of Intelligence during the war), and General von Tieschowitz (formerly of the Kaiser's staff), have disclosed no grounds for the statements made therein. Nevertheless there is ample evidence of what the Germans thought of the Anzacs.

that it should consider the employment of Canadians and Australians for counter-attack.

But it was true that British policy, both in and out of the army, was wholly against the establishment of such distinctions; and so, most emphatically, were the principles of Foch. It is possible that there existed in some quarters an unauthorised tendency to regard the case of the Guards Division as a special one; the general policy was, however, as General Dawnay stated. But so had it been in the German Army. Ludendorff states that in preparing that army for the great offensive

we were unable to equip all divisions equally with stores and horses, and had in the beginning to confine ourselves to those which were destined to open the attack. . . . General Headquarters regretted that the distinction between "attack" and "trench" divisions became established in the army. We tried to eradicate it, without being able to alter the situation which gave rise to it.

Such a distinction must tend to lower the morale of whatever section is regarded as less fit for active fighting; and, if the distinction ran in any marked degree on national lines, it would arouse in both parties mortification and jealousies—and that, not only among the soldiers but amidst their home people. These feelings were sure to be fostered by enemy propaganda and used to increase the internal difficulties of an opponent affected by them. Such propaganda was, in fact, used by both sides, the Germans trying to create dissatisfaction in the British dominions by declaring that their troops were given the most difficult tasks, the Allies endeavouring similarly to foster it among the Bavarians and other sections of the German Army. G.H.Q. therefore, even if it had recognised the existence of such distinctions in fighting value, would publicly have ignored it.

Nevertheless the development that had occurred in the German Army was equally inevitable in the British, although, through the comparative absence of supply difficulties, it was much less marked. There is in an Australian diary a note recording that when, in the spring of 1918, it was decided to increase the number of Lewis guns to 24 per battalion³⁰ in all divisions sufficiently trained to use them, all five Australian divisions were included in the very limited number to receive

³⁰ In addition to four for use against aircraft.

the first issue. Moreover in Haig's disposition of his forces, it cannot have been by accident that, throughout the whole of the British defensive, the Canadian Corps was maintained (as was the Guards Division) in position for counter-attacking if the Germans captured the position which he considered vital—at Vimy and Arras; or that it was the 1st Australian Division which, by his own direction, was sent to safeguard Hazebrouck; or that the Australian Corps, after first being placed across the Somme (with a proviso that "one Australian division" should be ready to retake Villers-Bretonneux if captured), was, after the recapture of that place, shifted southwards to hold it throughout the rest of the defensive period.

It was sometimes stated—though, so far as is known, only by those without experience of them—that the Australians, though recognised as most valuable for attack, were not so highly estimated as defensive troops. A more rigid discipline, it was argued, and a less vivid intelligence, would furnish better resistance. As Australian infantry did not happen to be present at any of the greatest German attacks in France or Belgium, speculation sometimes arose at their own mess-tables as to how far they would have withstood these blows. Actually, as anyone knew, who was in a position to compare their experiences with others, they had been amply tested—their peculiarly stubborn resistance to the German counter-attacks (accompanied with some of the heaviest bombardments ever experienced³¹) at Pozières and Bullecourt, where they never lost a trench which they had once firmly gained; the performance of the 1st Division, strung out on a 13,000-yard front at Lagnicourt; the conduct of three battalions of the 4th Division attacked by two divisions at Dernancourt—these could leave no real doubt. If further argument was needed, it might even, perhaps, be furnished by the actions of the only dominion formations that were involved in the earlier part of the offensive—the South African Infantry Brigade and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.³²

³¹ The bombardment laid down by the German artillery on March 21 was, of course, extraordinarily severe. But a statement of some 70 British officers quoted in the *British Official History* (1918—I, p. 259) says that it "was not as heavy as had been expected."

³² Of the resistance of dominion infantry to attack, the action of the Canadians at Ypres in April 1915 is the outstanding example. Whether the ranks of King Edward's Horse, which made so fine a stand in the Lys battle, were still filled by colonists is not shown by the available evidence.

At all events the Commander-in-Chief, upon whom lay the responsibility if he selected the wrong troops for those duties, entrusted to Australian divisions throughout the remainder of the German offensive the immediate defence of both Amiens and Hazebrouck; and he wrote on April 15th to Birdwood:

The right of our line in close connection with the French is so vital to me that I must keep reliable troops there, and I cannot tell you with what confidence I contemplate the situation in that part of my front as long as the Australian Corps are holding it.

The Australian troops were indeed at this time animated by a spirit in some ways different from any that had previously impelled them. Starting the year with an unpromising prospect—fresh reinforcements failing, men returned from hospital forming an ever-increasing proportion of the drafts—they had exhibited, not the signs of overstrain that some onlookers feared, but a buoyancy and initiative beyond all expectation and the perpetual wonder of their own officers. Every day brought fresh examples of it. Undoubtedly it arose from their perception that now, at last, their efforts were visibly counting towards the stopping of the Germans, the protection of the French people, and the winning of the war. They met their opponent with a spirit which not merely barred his advance but began every day to throw him back by the loss of a few posts here, a length of trench there. The German was counter-attacked at Hangard Wood and Villers-Bretonneux by troops who had been thirsting to get at him; and, though it is untrue that these troops stopped the great offensive, it is a fair claim that, by their part in the defence of Villers-Bretonneux and Dernancourt and in the subsequent counter-attacks, they saved Amiens.

The source of whatever qualities emerged in the Australian infantry under the test of the Great War will be discussed in the next—and final—volume of its history. But one important result of Haig's recognition of the forcefulness of his colonial troops must be here mentioned. On April 4th, upon Foch's proposing an Anglo-French counter-offensive—and while it was still hoped that this might be made on a grand scale, the French attacking between the Oise and the Luce, and the British between the Luce and the Ancre—Haig ordered that General Birdwood of the Australian Corps (then

in Third Army) should at once get in touch with General Rawlinson (Fourth Army), to whom an officer would be sent from G.H.Q., for a conference upon the project. As the reader will recall, the German attack on the Lys and the consequent drain on British and French reserves, caused the plan of this counter-offensive to dwindle for the time being to the attack undertaken by the French on April 18th near the Luce and the Avre. And when the Germans were finally stopped at Kemmel, their reserves were still so large that Foch's offensive obviously had to be further postponed.

But on May 16th Foch again proposed the project to Haig, who agreed and promised to study his part. A few days later Generals Birdwood and White were visited at Bertangles by Rawlinson, and, closeted in their office, were warned that the matter in hand was so secret that no paper concerning it was to be typewritten, but any correspondence or notes written by their own hands. The project was then broached to them; they were informed that the Australian Corps would attack along the Somme; that the Canadian Corps would be brought down to attack south of it, between the Australian right and the French; and that the offensive was to strike deep, the method employed being to pass supporting divisions through the attacking ones. Birdwood and White were told what force of tanks, artillery, and aeroplanes would probably be available; and they were asked, under the specified conditions of secrecy, to draft plans for their part in the offensive.

Of the plans sent by Generals Birdwood and White to G.H.Q. no copy was kept at the Australian Corps, and apparently the proposal was then again shelved, and their suggestions—and even the fact that they had been asked for them—remained unknown at least to the Australian staff. But how, after the Germans had spent their remaining energy against the French, the project was resuscitated, and with what consequences, will be the main subject of the last volume of the history of the Australian infantry divisions in France.

APPENDIX No. 1

EXPANSION OF THE FIELD ARTILLERY OF THE A.I.F.

The gradual development of the field artillery of the A.I.F. and the numbering of its batteries and brigades are puzzling to outsiders, but the following explanation may help towards an understanding.

The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions were at first provided with artillery on the low establishment of thirty-six 18-pounders (and no howitzers) to a division.¹ They were organised in 4-gun batteries as follows:

<i>1st Division</i>	<i>2nd Division</i>
1st Brigade (1, 2, 3 Bties.)	4th Brigade (10, 11, 12 Bties.)
2nd Brigade (4, 5, 6 Bties.)	5th Brigade (13, 14, 15 Bties.)
3rd Brigade (7, 8, 9 Bties.)	6th Brigade (16, 17, 18 Bties.)

Before transfer to France, in order to bring the Australian artillery to the normal New Army establishment, it was increased by adding one battery to each brigade of field-guns and also by forming for each division a howitzer brigade (consisting, however, of only three 4-gun batteries). At the same time a large number of new batteries had to be formed for the new divisions,² each division now having 60 guns.

1st Division. 1st Bde. (1, 2, 3, 22); 2nd Bde. (4, 5, 6, 23); 3rd Bde. (7, 8, 9, 24); 21st How. Bde. (101, 102, 103).

2nd Division. 4th Bde. (10, 11, 12, 19); 5th Bde. (13, 14, 15, 20); 6th Bde. (16, 17, 18, 21); 22nd How. Bde. (104, 105, 106).

3rd Division (formed in Australia). 7th Bde. (25, 26, 27, 28); 8th Bde. (29, 30, 31, 32); 9th Bde. (33, 34, 35, 36); 23rd How. Bde. (107, 108, 109).

4th Division (formed in Egypt). 10th Bde. (37, 38, 39, 40); 11th Bde. (41, 42, 43, 44); 12th Bde. (45, 46, 47, 48); 24th How. Bde. (110, 111, 112).

5th Division (formed in Egypt). 13th Bde. (49, 50, 51, 52); 14th Bde. (53, 54, 55, 56); 15th Bde. (57, 58, 59, 60); 25th How. Bde. (113, 114, 115).

At the time of the arrival of the I Anzac Corps in France the British organisation was in process of change, howitzer brigades being abolished and their batteries being distributed to the 18-pounder brigades, each howitzer battery displacing one field battery. The displaced 18-pounder batteries (which, in the A.I.F., were the last batteries of each brigade) were formed into new brigades (which, in the A.I.F., took on the numbers of the old howitzer brigades).³ In the Australian and some British divisions, which had only three howitzer batteries, one of the four brigades in each division was then without a howitzer battery. The organisation was then:

1st Division. 1st Bde. (1, 2, 3, 101); 2nd Bde. (4, 5, 6, 102); 3rd Bde. (7, 8, 9, 103); 21st Bde. (22, 23, 24).

2nd Division. 4th Bde. (10, 11, 12, 104); 5th Bde. (13, 14, 15, 105); 6th Bde. (16, 17, 18, 106); 22nd Bde. (19, 20, 21).

3rd Division. 7th Bde. (25, 26, 27, 107); 8th Bde. (29, 30, 31, 108); 9th Bde. (33, 34, 35); 23rd Bde. (28, 32, 36, 109).

4th Division. 10th Bde. (37, 38, 39, 110); 11th Bde. (41, 42, 43, 111); 12th Bde. (45, 46, 47); 24th Bde. (40, 44, 48, 112).

5th Division. 13th Bde. (49, 50, 51, 113); 14th Bde. (53, 54, 55, 114); 15th Bde. (57, 58, 59); 25th Bde. (52, 56, 60, 115).

¹ See Vol. III, p. 37.

² It will be noted that the new field batteries were given numbers over 18 (that being the number already existing). But the howitzer batteries were numbered from 101, and the howitzer brigades from 21. Some of the new field batteries were irregularly allotted, 19-21 going to the 2nd Division and 22-24 to the 1st.

³ It is said that in at least one case the guns and the title of the batteries, but not the men, were exchanged.

It will be seen that the reorganisation was not quite regular, the newly formed 18-pounder brigades in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Divisions being allotted howitzer batteries, and one of the older brigades in each case going without; whereas in the 1st and 2nd Divisions howitzer batteries were given to all the old brigades and the new brigades went short.

In July 1916 the Army Council decided to "standardise" all brigades, and Australia was asked to raise an additional howitzer battery for each division—five in all. By the wish of the Army Council notified shortly afterwards, these were created from Australian artillery reinforcements in England (although by then special personnel had already been raised in Australia). The 3rd Australian Division, which was training at Salisbury, formed its own. These additional batteries were numbered 116-120; but only that of the 3rd Division (the 118th) had joined its brigade (the 9th) when the artillery was again reorganised in preparation for the spring offensive of 1917. To economise battery commanders, whose numbers were short, all batteries were raised from four guns to six, the number of *divisional* brigades being reduced by half, but "army" brigades (three in number in the A.I.F.) being formed. (The "army" brigades were thenceforth moved wherever required, not being permanently tied to any infantry division.) In the A.I.F.—

In 1st Division the 1st and 2nd Bdes. absorbed the 21st Bde. and the 116th (new) How. Bty.

In 2nd Division the 4th and 5th Bdes. absorbed the 22nd Bde. and the 117th (new) How. Bty.

In the 3rd Division the 7th and 8th Bdes. absorbed the 23rd Bde. including the 109th How. Bty.

In the 4th Division the 10th and 11th Bdes. absorbed the 18-pdrs. of the 24th Bde. and part of the 119th (new) How. Bty.

In the 5th Division the 13th and 14th Bdes. absorbed the 18-pdrs. of the 25th Bde. and the 120th (new) How. Bty.

The 3rd and 6th (Army) Bdes. (surplus from the 1st and 2nd Divisions) absorbed the 15th Bde. and the 115th How. Bty.

The 12th (Army) Bde. was given the 112th How. Bty., and absorbed half of the 9th Bde. which included the 118th (new) How. Bty.⁴

There were thus left over half of the 9th Brigade, part of which had not yet crossed from England but part of which (including the 118th Battery) was in France. The unused part of this brigade was broken up and used as reinforcements.

The brigades thenceforth were as follows:

1st Division. 1st Bde. (1, 2, 3, 101); 2nd Bde. (4, 5, 6, 102).

2nd Division. 4th Bde. (10, 11, 12, 104); 5th Bde. (13, 14, 15, 105).

3rd Division. 7th Bde. (25, 26, 27, 107); 8th Bde. (29, 30, 31, 108).

4th Division. 10th Bde. (37, 38, 39, 110); 11th Bde. (41, 42, 43, 111).

5th Division. 13th Bde. (49, 50, 51, 113); 14th Bde. (53, 54, 55, 114).

Army Bdes. 3rd Bde. (7, 8, 9, 103); 6th Bde. (16, 17, 18, 106); 12th Bde. (45, 46, 47, 112).

After this final reorganisation each divisional artillery comprised 48 guns and howitzers, and each "army" brigade 24. A division holding an important sector was always, if possible, reinforced by several "army" brigades and/or by the artillery of other divisions whose infantry was out of the line.

⁴ A circular of the General Staff of I Anzac Corps states that part of the 119th How. Bty. went to the 112th.

APPENDIX No. 2

THE STRIFE FOR IDENTIFICATIONS ON AUSTRALIAN CORPS FRONT, 14TH NOVEMBER, 1917,
TO 19TH MARCH, 1918

(I) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO GERMAN ACTIVITY

(Note.—Only encounters of some importance, or those from which identifications resulted, are here listed)

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1917. Nov. 14 ..	Patrol south of Bee Farm bombed post of 53rd Bn. Two Germans lost way and wandered into 55th Bn. Officer's patrol of 153rd I.R. raided post of 56th Bn. A German corps order says that the post defended itself "most stubbornly."		Two Germans of 93rd I.R. (8th Div.) left dead. Two Germans of 72nd I.R. (8th Div.) captured.
Nov. 18 ..	Germans in three parties raided post of 8th Bde. near Kiwi Farm, reaching the trench but being heavily bombed.	One Australian captured.	Three Germans (of 102nd and 103rd I.R., 32nd Div.) killed and a man of storm detachment of 32nd Div. captured. A wounded machine-gunner of 93rd I.R. (8th Div.) captured.
Nov. 19 ..	Raiding party (officer and 23 men) approached post of 54th Bn. north of Bee Farm but was driven off.		
Nov. 21 ..	Strong patrol of 19th Bav. I.R. (5th Bav. Div.) tried to raid post of 3rd Div. near Pont Rouge. Australians tried to cut off some of its members, but these escaped.		
Nov. 22 ..	Raid by officer and 26 men on isolated post of 54th Bn. near Spider House. At second attempt the Germans got in.	Four men of 54th Bn. captured, but one of these (Pte. West) escaped.	A dead German of 93rd I.R. found; and next day one of the raiding party captured.

(I) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO GERMAN ACTIVITY—continued.

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1917. Nov. 22 ..	Raid by 177th I.R. (32nd Div.) on post of 5th Div. failed to secure identification.		
Nov. 24 ..	A German ration party strayed towards a company H.Q. of 54th Bn. The sentry (Pte. Casimir ¹) secured their capture, after a fight.		Two Germans of 93rd I.R. captured and two shot.
Nov. 26 ..	A German sergeant lost his way north of Gapaard.		Sergeant wounded, captured, and found to be of 102nd I.R.
Nov. 27 ..	Two patrols of 177th I.R. and storm troops tried to raid 8th Bde. east of Steignast Farm, but driven off.		Found to belong to 177th I.R. The leader and some others were hit, and 177th I.R. was identified.
Nov. 28 ..	A German patrol moved west of Lys near Pont Rouge. Two patrols of 9th Bde. tried to cut it off.		Machine-gunner of 7th Bav. I.R. (5th Bav. Div.) killed.
Nov. 30 ..	Patrol of 10 Germans tried to raid post of 56th Bn. east of Green Wood. They were seen but allowed to approach and then fired on.	Wounded man of 59th Bn. captured.	Two of 153rd I.R. (8th Div.) killed.
Dec. 2 ..	Raid by 72nd I.R. on post of 59th Bn. which "fought desperately."		19th Bav. I.R. identified from German caps left behind.
Dec. 3 ..	Patrol of 20 crossed Lys at Pont Rouge and met one from 9th Bde. which drove it off.		Man of 102nd I.R. captured.
	A man of 102nd I.R. strayed into Australian lines near Gapaard.		

Dec. 5 ..	Patrol of 177th I.R. ambushed and seized a contact patrol (2 men) of 30th Bn. One, Pte. Sterling, ² tried to escape, was shot, dragged along, and left for dead, but got away. A German private wandered into 60th Bn. lines.	Pte. Barclay ³ captured.	Man captured (93rd I.R.).
Dec. 7 ..	Raid on post of 8th Bn. east of Green Wood. Parties of 7th and 8th Bns counter-attacked and retook all prisoners except one.	Four Australians captured, but three re-taken.	Seven Germans killed, and two officers and four others (of 4th Pioneer Bn. and 153rd I.R.) captured.
Dec. 20 ⁴	Raid on post of 2nd Div. opposite Frelinghien driven off. Later Germans tried to establish a bridge-head here, but were repelled with loss. The Austrians searched for their dead, but these had been carried away. Raid by 72nd I.R. on post of 6th Bn. east of Joye Farm. The neighbouring posts counter-attacked, but the Germans got clear in the fog.	The garrison was captured.	A man of 14th I.R. (4th Div.) was captured and two were killed.
Dec. 24 ..	A reconnoitring patrol ran upon post of 3rd Div. south of l'Épinette. It was allowed to approach and then fired on.		A wounded corporal of the 102nd I.R. was captured.
Dec. 26 ..	A German patrol met one from the 1st Div. near Gapaard.		
Dec. 28 ..	Patrol of 153rd I.R. wearing white overalls met one of 1st Div. similarly clothed.		

¹ Pte. Casimir Guillaume (served as 2628 G. Casimir, 54th Bn.). Baker; of Nièvre, France, and Bathurst, N.S.W.; b. Fourchambault, Nièvre, 23 March, 1869. Died of wounds, 3 Sept., 1918.

² Pte. R. G. Sterling (No. 4654; 30th Bn. & 6th M.G. Coy. Railway clerk; of Orange, N.S.W.; b. Orange, 25 April, 1898.

³ Pte. L. C. Barclay (No. 5137; 30th Bn.). Compositor; of Cessnock, N.S.W.; b. Adelaide, 1899.

⁴ This day the Germans threw 12 gas bombs or projectors into the lines of 2nd Div. south-west of Warneton.

(I) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO GERMAN ACTIVITY—continued.

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1918.			
Jan. 3 ..	A German found killed on 2nd Div. front.		Ascertained to belong to 21st Bav. I.R. (5th Bav. Div.).
Jan. 4 ..	Attempted raid by 72nd I.R. and 4th Pioneer Bn. (8th Div.) on posts of 1st Div. Raiders afterwards reported loss of 7 hit and 1 missing.		A dead man of 4th Pioneer Bn. found east of Wambecke.
Jan. 18 ..	German patrol near Factory, south-west of Warneton, lost one of its men to a patrol of 2nd Div.		He proved to be of 228th R.I.R. (49th Res. Div.), which had just relieved 32nd Div.
Jan. 20 ..	Man of 226th R.I.R. (49th Res. Div.) wandered into lines of 1st Div. near Blauwepoortbeek.		He was captured.
Jan. 20 ..	Four Germans, probably deserters, were fired on by post of 1st Div. north of the Wambeck.		Two were killed and two captured—of 72nd I.R. and 4th Pioneer Bn.
Jan. 21 ..	Patrol approached post of 2nd Div. near Factory south-west of Warneton.		Officer of 424th I.R. ⁵ and a man of 228th R.I.R. killed.
Jan. 26 ..	German found killed near Hollebeke.		Ascertained to belong to 93rd I.R. (8th Div.).
Jan. 27 ..	Patrol entered lines of 1st Div. near Kiwi Farm.		Five wounded and leader killed (226th R.I.R.).
Jan. 29 ..	German approached 4th Div. post north of Hessian Wood. Patrol, 20 strong, met patrol of 3rd Div. near Moat Farm, opposite Deulemont, who chased it. Dead German found east of Wambeck.		Killed (1st Bav. R.I.R., 1st Bav. Res. Div.). The Germans, 15 strong, ran away, dropping their bombs, and escaped. Proved to belong to 4th Pioneer Bn. (8th Div.).

Jan. 31 ..	Patrol of 1st Bav. R.I.R. rushed a post of 14th Bn. near Potsdam Farm.	The two men in the post were captured.	Two men of 21st Bav. I.R. captured.
Feb. 1 ..	Patrol of 21st Bav. I.R. met one of 3rd Div. which cut off part of it.		
Feb. 2 ..	Two Germans strayed into post of 5th Div. near Gapaard.	Garrison captured.	Two of 163rd I.R. (17th Res. Div.) captured.
Feb. 5 ..	Raid on post of 4th Div. near Belgian Wood.		
Feb. 7 ..	A Polish corporal strayed into 8th Bde. lines north of Wambeek.		Captured (162nd I.R., 17th Res. Div.).
Feb. 8 ..	An officer and N.C.O., reconnoitring 8th Bde's wire near the Wambeek, were fired on. The officer escaped, though wounded.		N.C.O. captured (163rd I.R.).
	Man found killed near Hollebeke.		
Feb. 9 ..	Attempted raid on 3rd Div. at La Basse Ville driven off by supports.		Proved to be of 76th R.I.R. (17th Res. Div.).
Feb 23 ..	Patrol of two men ran into listening post of 5th Div. near March Farm.		Patrol was captured (162nd I.R.).
Feb. 25 ..	Patrol of 26th R.I.R. tried to raid post of 5th Div. near Kiwi Farm.		The leader and 5 men were hit but were not identified.
Mar. 1 ..	Attempted raid on pillboxes of 4th Div. north of Hessian Wood.		Two men of 466th I.R. (239th Div.) captured.
	A large party raided southern posts of 4th Div. and northern posts of 5th Div. between Ypres-Comines canal and Hollebeke and captured part of garrison but was caught on retiring.	Seven of 10th Bn. captured.	On 4th Div. front a German officer and several men were captured (76th R.I.R. and 9th Pioneer Bn., 17th Res. Div.). 5th Div. captured a man of 76th R.I.R. and a light machine-gun.
Mar. 5 ..	Attempted raid by 25th R.I.R. on 5th Div. near the Windmill failed.		Man of 225th R.I.R. was found killed.

⁶ Probably a reinforcement of 228th R.I.R.

(I) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO GERMAN ACTIVITY—*continued*.

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1918. Mar. 8 ..	Strong patrol of 177th I.R. crossed Pont Rouge and ran into similar patrol of 2nd Div.		Two Germans killed, two captured (177th I.R., 32nd Div.).
Mar. 10 ..	Officer's patrol reconnoitring east of Deconinck Farm was fired on by post of 5th Div.		Patrol was captured (163rd I.R., 17th Res. Div.).
Mar. 13 ..	Patrol of 228th R.I.R. strayed into post of 2nd Div. at Warneton.		Two killed, one captured (228th R.I.R., 49th Res. Div.).
Mar. 15 ..	Strong raid on 1st Div. south of Ypres-Comines canal.	Leader killed, and eight others hit.	Leader killed, and 12 of 70th I.R. (31st Div.) captured.
Mar. 19 ..	Patrol of 2nd Div. near Moat Farm (opposite Deulemont) was met by German patrol.		Wounded man of 102nd I.R. (32nd Div.) captured.
Mar. 19 ..	Patrol came on a post of 2nd Div. opposite Frelinghten which fired.		

Number of encounters, etc., listed: 54. Germans secured identifications on 10 occasions and left them on 42.

(II) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO AUSTRALIAN ACTIVITY

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1917. Nov. 15 ..	Three men of 5th Div. Salvage Coy. wandered into German lines in fog.	All three were captured.	

Nov. 21 ..	A dead man of 153rd I.R. (8th Div.) was found. Patrol of 53rd Bn. tried to enter German post at Wam Farm, but found garrison too alert.	153rd I.R. identified.
Nov. 30 ..	Raid by 39th Bn. on railway near Warneton.	Two of II/103rd I.R. captured.
Dec. 1 ..	Raid by 40th Bn. at same point.	One Australian was captured.
Dec. 5 ..	15th Bde. (after reconnaissances by Lieut. Heron, ⁶ 60th Bn., and others) tried to raid Rifle Farm but found Germans too alert.	Two of 12th Pioneers and man of III/103rd I.R. captured.
Dec. 6 ..	60th Bn. tried to ambush German post at Rifle Farm, but failed.	
Dec. 7 ..	Patrol of 9th Bde. searched the Pont Rouge.	
Dec. 8-9 ⁷	"Dummy" raids by 3rd and 5th Divisions.	
Dec. 18 ..	Patrol of 1st Div. penetrated line of 177th I.R. east of Steignast Farm, but was cut off.	Three Australians captured.
Dec. 21 ..	A man of 1st Div. strayed into German lines east of Steignast Farm.	He was captured by 177th I.R.
Jan. 30 ..	An Australian patrol approached post of 72nd I.R., which drove it off. (No mention in Australian records. ⁸)	One of the Australians was captured (unit not stated).

⁶ Lieut. C. V. Heron, 60th Bn. Bank official; of East St. Kilda, Vic.; b. Brighton, Vic., 21 Nov., 1896. Died of wounds, 27 June, 1918.

⁷ On the morning of December 9 the commander of the 177th I.R. was killed by an Australian sniper, when visiting his post north of Warneton.

⁸ This is mentioned in the *History of the 72nd I.R.*

(II) ENCOUNTERS DUE TO AUSTRALIAN ACTIVITY—*continued*

Date.	Nature of Activity.	Australians Identified by Germans.	Germans Identified by Australians.
1918. Feb. 10 ..	Raid by 37th and 38th Bns. at Warneton.	An officer and man were captured by the enemy.	33 Germans (228th R.I.R., 49th Res. Div.) were captured.
Feb. 19 ..	Patrol of 13th Bde. met a German patrol on Bassevillebeek.		Four Germans killed proved to belong to 468th I.R. (239th Div.) and 3rd Bav. R.I.R. (1st Bav. Res. Div.).
Mar. 1 ..	14th Bde. raided post at Groenelinde Cabaret.		Seven of 162nd I.R. captured
Mar. 3 ..	Patrol of 8th Bde. tried to penetrate enemy wire east of Gapaard, but failed. Patrol of 3rd Div. met German patrol in Moat Farm, opposite Deulemont.		A German is said to have been captured, but escaped.
Mar. 5 ..	3rd Div. repeated raid at Warneton.	Several wounded of 3rd Div. were missing.	An officer and 10 men (228th R.I.R.) were captured.
Mar. 5 ..	5th Div. raided (a) at Kiwi Farm, and (b) south-east of Green Wood.		(a) Two of 226th R.I.R., and (b) two of 162nd I.R. were captured.
Mar. 5 ..	3rd Div. repeated raid on Warneton.		228th R.I.R. was identified.
Mar. 11 ..	Raid by 5th Div. on post south of Windmill.		Three of 225th R.I.R. captured.
Mar. 14 ..	Raid by 5th Div. on post north of Blauwepoortbeek.		Three of 163rd I.R. captured.
Mar. 14 ..	Raid by 5th Div. on Rifle and July Farms.		Four of 163rd I.R. captured.
Mar. 14 ..	Raid by 5th Div. at Datum House, near Kiwi Farm.		Two of 226th R.I.R. captured.

Number of encounters, etc., listed: 25. Australians left identifications on 7 occasions and secured them on 14.

APPENDIX No. 3

INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN BY MAJOR-GENERAL SIR JOHN MONASH TO THE 3RD AUSTRALIAN DIVISION FOR TAKING UP A LINE ON THE SOMME-ANCRE PENINSULA, 27TH MARCH, 1918.

THIRD AUSTRALIAN DIVISION

Divisional Headquarters,
27th March, 1918.

INSTRUCTIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE MOVE OF THE DIVISION TO THE FRANVILLERS SECTOR.

SITUATION:

On the morning of the 26th March the line ran ALBERT-BRAY. Orders were to hold the line but to retire in the face of a serious attack.

At 4.0 p.m. 26th orders were issued to hold the line at all costs. Orders could not be got to the troops in time, and the line was withdrawn to ALBERT and some point West of BRAY. The situation on this line is much confused and the position South of the SOMME is obscure.

ORDERS RECEIVED:

Orders have been received by the Division to hold a line of wire and trench roughly conforming to the MERICOURT-SAILLY-LE-SEC Road with both flanks on the rivers (*i.e.*, ANCRE and SOMME). Tonight, 26th/27th, this line is being held by about 2,000 mixed Infantry.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN:

The Divisional Commander has decided that one Brigade will hold this line South of the CORBIE-BRAY Road, and one Brigade to the North of it.

The Brigade in reserve will be at HEILLY. D.H.Q., Pioneer Battalion and Div. Machine Gun Company at FRANVILLERS.

Divisional Artillery to move to BEHENCOURT.

HOW LINE TO BE OCCUPIED:

The Battalions of the 11th Brigade will debus at Cross-roads South of FRANVILLERS.

The first battalion will cross the river at HEILLY and move by the cart-track across the spur and occupy the line South of the CORBIE-BRAY Road.

The second battalion will move up the gully near MERICOURT and occupy the line north of the CORBIE-BRAY ROAD.

The River Valley will be actually held and not merely covered, and the position will be organised in depth.

The third battalion will be held in support of the Right Wing.

Brigadier-General CANNAN will command all troops in the Sector and will not allow any to leave until D.H.Q. consents.

READJUSTMENT:

On the arrival of the 10th Brigade it will at once take over the line North of the CORBIE-BRAY Road, and the 11th Brigade Battalion will be moved to its own Brigade Area.

GENERAL:

All bridges over the SOMME East of BRAY have been destroyed; those further West have been prepared for demolition and will be blown up if the enemy advances.

South of the SOMME the position of the left flank of the FIFTH ARMY is obscure, but it is said to be South of BRAY.

NORTH OF THE ANCRE:

The 39th Division hold the line. H.Q. at LAVIEVILLE.

The 4th Australian Division has two Brigades near BRESLE. H.Q. at BAIZIEUX.

ENEMY METHODS.

The Boche attacks up valley and hollows and is quick at finding a gap. He gets his M.G.s forward and uses them in enfilade. His Infantry wait at 600 yards for the M.G.s to get to work.

The next 48 hours are regarded as critical.

ARTILLERY:

There is practically no Artillery directly covering our line, but we have many guns slightly further North, and they can give some help.

The enemy has not many guns.

Our Vickers Guns should be mainly on the RIGHT.

MAPS:

No 1/40,000 available.

S.A.A.:

Sub-Park to carry as much S.A.A. as possible, and to move to the new area quickly.

TRANSPORT & PACKS:

Transport should be sent down as early as possible.

D.H.Q.:

Divisional Headquarters will close at COUTURELLE at 8 o a.m. and will move to FRANVILLERS.

(Sgd.) GEO. F. WIECK,
Major,
for Lieut.-Colonel G.S.

APPENDIX No. 4

THE DEATH OF RICHTHOFEN

While the circumstances concerning the death of so famous an ace as Cavalry Captain Baron Manfred von Richthofen must be considered of some historical importance, undue prominence has been given to them by the conflict between the evidence of the British-Canadian pilot, Captain A. R. Brown, and other airmen, who thought that Richthofen, while chasing an opponent, had been shot from the air by a third airman (Brown), and the statements of many of the eyewitnesses, probably thousands in number, who watched the incident from the ground and believed that the fleeing British airman was saved by a shot from the ground when there were only two airmen in the fight, all other planes being then out of the picture. An official inquiry made at the time decided, on the strength of the medical evidence and such other data as were available, that Richthofen was killed by Captain Brown, and the official historian of the British air force, writing in 1934, holds that this conclusion is justified; and there—so far as this volume is concerned—the matter might have been left, if the Australian soldiers had not elsewhere been very widely and publicly accused of wanting to “grab the credit” which in fairness belonged to another force.

Actually, much though the “digger” loved to be given the credit for his own achievements, he was particularly fair in his judgments; and was as enthusiastically appreciative of any fine feats of his neighbours as he was outspokenly critical of any that fell below the standard he expected them (and himself) to maintain. Certainly many of those whose statements are quoted below would rather have seen Richthofen fall to a shot from his old opponents in the air than to one from the ground, for which the “credit,” if any, was slighter; and all would have borne witness to Captain Brown’s feat, had they seen it. But, after they had actually seen what is described below, the statements of the air force came to them with a shock, and, though entirely *bona fide*, created a widespread doubt as to how far observation of such incidents, made from fast moving and manœuvring aeroplanes, could be relied upon. And from that aspect, also, the incident is enlightening and worthy of study.

The following is an abstract, as far as possible complete, of the relevant first-hand evidence available concerning Richthofen’s death on 21st April, 1918, near Vaux-sur-Somme. The sources and dates of the statements are given so that the reader may be enabled to weigh their varying value.

The Meeting in the Air

5th Brigade, R.A.F., Summary (22 April, 1918):

About 11 a.m. yesterday morning Captain Brown, D.S.C., whilst on high offensive patrol, near Vaux-sur-Somme, dived on a triplane which was firing on Lieutenant May.¹ It had followed Lieutenant May down to about 500 feet. . . .

Report of Captain A. R. Brown, 209th Squadron, R.A.F. (21 April, 1918):

Engagement with red triplane. Time, about 11.00 a.m. Locality, Vaux-sur-Somme. . . . Dived on pure red triplane which was firing on Lieutenant May. . . .

¹ Capt. W. R. May, O.B.E., D.S.C.; No. 209 Sqn., R.A.F. Motor demonstrator; of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; b. Carberry, Manitoba, 20 March, 1896.

Report of Lieutenant W R May, 209th Squadron.

I went down and was attacked by a red triplane which chased me over the lines low to the ground. While he was on my tail Captain Brown attacked.²

The Fight

5th Brigade, R.A.F., Summary:

It (the red triplane) had followed Lieutenant May down to about 500 feet. Captain Brown fired a long burst into it and it went down vertically and was observed to crash by Lieutenant May and Lieutenant Brown.

Captain Brown's Report:

Dived on pure red triplane which was firing on Lieutenant May. I got a long burst into him and he went down vertical and was observed to crash by Lieutenant Mellersh³ and Lieutenant May.

Report of Lieutenant F. J. W. Mellersh, 209th Squadron:

I was forced to return to our lines at about 50 feet. Whilst so returning a bright red triplane crashed quite close to me and as I looked up I saw Captain Brown's machine.

Lieutenant W. R. May's Report

While he (the red triplane) was on my tail, Captain Brown attacked and shot it down. I observed it crash to the ground.

Report of Captain O. C. le Boutillier,⁴ No. 209 Squadron.

I fired on red triplane which was shot down by Captain Brown and crashed our side of lines.

Captain A. R. Brown in "My Fight With Richthofen":⁵

(After telling how he saw May, returning, according to orders, to Bertangles, being chased by a red triplane which gained on him despite—or partly because of—May's agile manœuvring; and how, having himself risen to 3,000 feet, he realised that the critical moment had come, and dived)—Brown says: I was in perfect position above and behind. It was a mere matter of straight shooting. Neither plane was aware of me I had dived until the red snout of my Camel pointed fair at his tail. My thumbs pressed the triggers. Bullets ripped into his elevator and tail planes. The flaming tracers showed me where they hit. A little short! Gently I pulled on the stick. The nose of the Camel rose ever so slightly. Easy, now, easy! The stream of bullets tore along the body of the all red tripe. Its occupant turned and looked back. I had a flash of his eyes behind the goggles. Then he crumpled—sagged in the cockpit. My bullets poured out beyond him. My thumbs eased on the triggers. Richthofen was dead. The triplane staggered, wobbled, stalled, flung over on its nose and went down. The reserve trenches of the Australian infantry were not more than 200 feet below. It was a quick descent. May saw it. I saw it as I swung over. And Mellersh saw it.

Gunner George Ridgway,⁶ 29th Battery, Aust. Field Artillery (who was on the brick-stack near the Bray-Corbic road, and had therefore a more extensive view than most Australians in the area) said, in 1934, that while engaged in repairing a telephone line at the brick-stack he heard machine-gun bullets fall around and saw that three aeroplanes had broken away from the crowd of machines that were fighting several thousand feet up. When the three were several hundred feet from the ground, he saw that the first was British, the second German, the third British. The first plane was dodging to escape the second. The third was following above the second, at a slightly greater interval. The third then passed out of the picture but the other two went on.

² A Lieut. L. A. Mellor wrote to the *Melbourne Herald* on 26 Feb., 1930, giving as an officer of No. 209 Squadron, a similar account. Efforts to confirm his account by reference to the squadron's records in London have, however, proved fruitless despite a search kindly made by the authorities there.

³ Sqn. Leader F. J. W. Mellersh, A.F.C., p.s.a.; No. 209 Sqn., R.A.F. Student, of London; b. Esher, Surrey, 22 Sept., 1898.

⁴ Capt. O. C. le Boutillier; No. 209 Sqn., R.A.F.

⁵ This was published in a number of American journals in 1927-28, the story being told in five parts of which the third deals with the fight. Captain Brown, on being asked in 1935 if the narrative in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* was correct, was unable to confirm it or otherwise, not having read that paper at the time.

⁶ Gnr. G. Ridgway, M.M. (No. 22974; 29th Bty., A.F.A.). Labourer and surveyor's assistant; of Lang Lang, Vic.; b. Lang Lang, 27 Nov., 1894.

*Lieutenant J. A. Wiltshire,*⁷ 23rd Battalion, A.I.F., said, in 1934, that from a point near the Mericourt-Corbie road, 3 kilometres south of Heilly, he saw three aeroplanes dive out of the air-fight. His recollection was that one German 'plane was following two British. (This is an error.) "One British 'plane dived out toward the Somme. The other, with the German on his tail, continued toward the ground, out of my sight" (but reappeared later over the crest as told below).

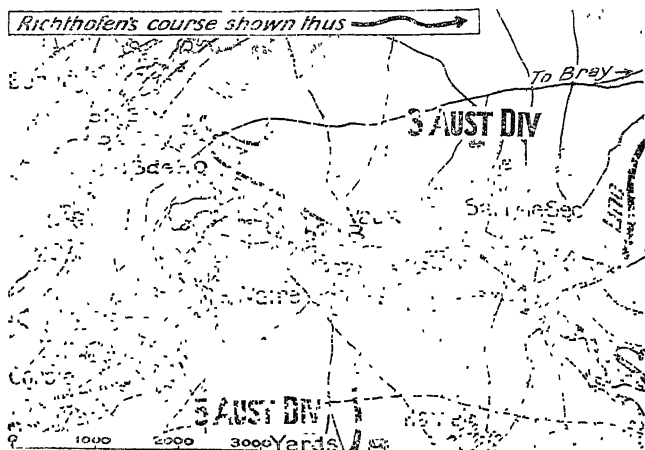
Continuation of Chase after Captain Brown had left the Fight

(The order of the statements is, as far as possible, that of the time at which the fight was observed.)

(1) Observers in or near Vaux

*Lieutenant J. Quinlan,*⁸ 55th Battery, Aust. Field Artillery (1929): I was an artillery observation officer on the southern bank of the Somme when I saw Richthofen chasing one of our 'planes. Richthofen was very close to the hunted 'plane when I first noticed him and his machine-gun was in action. I left post to see end of combat and noticed Richthofen suddenly lose control of his machine. A third 'plane was certainly there, but not close enough to engage with Richthofen. (In a second statement Lieutenant Quinlan says: "Richthofen appeared to be intent upon finishing the hunted 'plane. His machine-gun was in action until just prior, say 200 to 300 yards before his crash. The third 'plane was at that time practically over Corbie Church . . . from 800 to 1,200 yards distant and . . . hundreds of feet higher. Every Lewis gun was potting at Richthofen and everyone claimed the honour of eventually bringing him down.")

Diary of Captain R. L. Forsyth (Medical Officer of 52nd Battalion, A.I.F., in Vaux-sur-Somme). Forsyth, standing at the back door of his billet, saw Richthofen attack May. "The red triplane . . . was evidently better managed, as our boy got lower and lower and finally came skimming along a few hundred feet above



the earth with the big 'plane on his tail. I ran through the house to the front door just in time to see him almost tip the tiles of our gate, and after him, lower than I have ever seen a 'plane, came the big triplane. Julin with me gave a yell and grabbed for his revolver. . . . Over the village they went and skimmed up the hill behind it, the triplane stuttering its gun off in short gasps at what looked like a 30-foot range. At the brow of the hill our boy turned sharply and the triplane . . . swept sideways at once."

⁷ Lieut. J. A. Wiltshire, M.C.; 23rd Bn. Station overseer; of Caldermeade, Vic.; b. Longwood, Vic., 15 Feb., 1893.

⁸ Lieut. J. Quinlan, 55th Bty., A.F.A. Station overseer; of Burrowa, N.S.W.; b. Cobar, N.S.W., 18 June, 1881.

Corporal J. E. Maclean,⁹ *52nd Battalion scouts* (billeted in Vaux) wrote in 1935: My companions and I were startled to hear a 'plane flying so low that it seemed almost on the roof. We rushed out in the road in time to see a 'plane flying very low and skim over the houses, followed by a red three-decker German 'plane. The German fired a short burst while overhead, apparently without effect. The Britisher soon disappeared over the brow of the hill in a south-westerly direction and was quickly out of sight. The German 'plane did not go beyond the crest of the hill, and turned for his own line.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Whitham, *commanding 52nd Battalion* (in Vaux), wrote in 1933: I was an eyewitness only of the passage of the two 'planes—the British Sopwith Camel and Richthofen's red triplane—as they passed over Vaux-sur-Somme travelling westwards. I did not see the triplane crash—this occurred over a mile W.N.W. of Vaux. I am very definite on the point that two 'planes only came down the valley. . . . Both these 'planes came from the east and downwards. They "flattened out" as they passed over Vaux-sur-Somme, less than 100 feet from the valley level. It seemed certain that both would crash into the spur immediately west of the sharp bend of the Somme where it turns southwards towards Corbie, but we saw the leading 'plane rise at the spur, closely followed by the triplane. The triplane seemed to be definitely under control of its pilot as it passed over Vaux. . . . I cannot be sure whether Richthofen was firing at the Camel at this stage as the noise of both engines was very great, but I heard machine-guns firing from the ground farther west down the valley.

Major Blair Wark,¹⁰ *V.C.*, *32nd Battalion*, stated in 1933 that he saw the chase, and that "beyond question there were only two aeroplanes present, one a British 'plane, being pursued, and second a red triplane which was following it, firing keenly. No other 'plane was near, and there could be no possibility of the pilot already having received a wound such as that which killed him."

(2) Observers on hill, or in or near the wood

Lieutenant Wiltshire (who from near the crest of the Somme-Ancre peninsula had seen Richthofen disappear on the south side, chasing May): Within minutes, from the east, they appeared over the rise, and, flying about 40 feet from the ground, passed almost overhead. The British 'plane was flying up and down, the German trying to imitate and giving quick bursts with his gun. The German seemed to crouch forward as he gave each burst. The British 'plane steeply chased a group of trees and swooped down over the Ancre. . . . Lifting over the trees the German 'plane gave up the chase, and, banking to his left, straightened his 'plane towards his line and commenced to climb.

Lieutenant D. L. Fraser,¹¹ *Intelligence Officer, 11th Aust. Infantry Brigade* (in wood on hilltop at J.19.c.75.65), reported on 21 April, 1918, that he "saw two aeroplanes approaching, flying westward directly towards a wood at a height of about 400 feet above level of River Somme over which they were flying." Just after the British machine reached the edge of the wood, Fraser heard a strong burst of machine-gun fire from the flats below the south-east corner of the wood. "Immediately afterwards the red painted enemy machine appeared overhead, flying very low and unsteadily, probably not more than 200 feet from the ground. . . . Flying as if not under complete control, being wobbly and irregular in flight, it swerved north. . . ."

Brigadier-General J. H. Cannon's note, 21 April, 1918: "About 10.45 a.m. an enemy triplane chasing a triplane of ours flew about 100 feet above these headquarters. Our 'plane was not firing at the enemy though the enemy was firing at ours."

Lieutenant G. M. Travers,¹² *52nd Battalion, liaison officer with 11th Brigade*, reported (23 April, 1918) that he was observing from near J.19.c.8.5 (11th Brigade H.Q.) when he heard 'planes approaching from the direction of 26 central, and a Vickers gun firing from the ground. "The first 'plane which came into view was one of our own, and less than 20 paces behind him was an enemy 'plane painted red. The red 'plane was overhauling our 'plane fast, and both were flying so low that they almost crashed into the trees at top of hill. Almost directly over the spot where I was lying the enemy 'plane swerved to the right so suddenly that it seemed almost to turn over. Our 'plane went straight on"

⁹ Cpl. J. E. Maclean (No. 3383A; 52nd Bn.). Civil servant; of Mt. Lawley, W. Aust.; b. Auckland, N.Z., 8 May, 1893.

¹⁰ Major B. A. Wark, V.C., D.S.O.; 32nd Bn. Quantity surveyor; of Pymble, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 27 July, 1894.

¹¹ Lieut. D. L. Fraser, 42nd Bn. Colliery owner, assayer, and metallurgist; of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Claremont, London, 9 Aug., 1875.

¹² Lieut. G. M. Travers, M.C.; 52nd Bn. Farmer; of Bundaberg, Q'land; b. Lovington, Somerset, Eng., 18 Jan., 1881.

Sergeant C. B. Popkin,¹³ *24th Aust. Machine Gun Company* (in charge of Vickers gun at J.25.a.8.9), reported on 24 April, 1918, that two 'planes' flew very low from the east towards his gun. As soon as he was free from the risk of hitting the British 'plane' he fired on the German, which at once banked and gave up the chase.

Private G. Sowerbutts,¹⁴ *44th Battalion*, observing for the 11th Brigade, hearing the engines, saw two 'planes' flying along the valley, and shot at Richthofen's engine when he passed over. He says (in 1930) that, when Popkin fired, "I thought the gunner had got him as he gave a swerve to the right, but he straightened out again and went on after the English 'plane'. I saw him cross the Bray-Corbie road and heard the Lewis guns from the batteries firing. . . ."

Among the records are statements of Captain G. L. A. Thirkell, Lieutenant G. L. Mayman, and at least fifty other eyewitnesses to the same effect as the nine last quoted. None saw a third aeroplane in the chase, and, when it was learned that Captain Brown claimed to have shot Richthofen, the impression (even of some of those who afterwards met Captain Brown when he subsequently visited Cannan's headquarters) was that he must have been the pilot of the leading machine and was claiming to have hit Richthofen by firing back over the tail of the 'plane'.

(3) Other ground observers

(a) British

Lieutenant J. R. Payne,¹⁵ *159th Brigade, R.F.A., 35th Divisional Artillery (The Daily Mail, 26 April, 1935)*: The German ace had tailed one of our Camels to the ground in our lines. They both taxied along as far as the Albert-Amiens road [apparently an error for the Bray-Corbie road]. . . . Here our 'plane' lobbed over, while Richthofen did his Immelmann turn to make for his own lines.

Lieutenant D. J. Jenkins,¹⁶ *212th Siege Battery, R.G.A.*, writing in 1929, said that from his observation post in the copse on the plateau, half-a-minute before Richthofen's death, he saw "the German ace . . . sitting alone in his red triplane some 200 feet above the Somme and at about only 120 yards' distance from me. . . . Licut. W. R. May was zigzagging and Richthofen was keenly following him less than 50 yards behind the tail of May's machine. Suddenly Lieut. May turned left across the copse . . . and I thought they would both crash in the tree-tops." Explaining how his attention was called to the incident, he says: "Machine-gun firing from the air and from the ground caused me to look out before me and I saw these two machines pass hurriedly across my field of view about 150 feet above the Vaux road." This officer's impression was that May decoyed Richthofen across the hill.

(b) German

The *History of the 238th Field Artillery Regiment (p. 75)*, and of the *10th Foot Artillery Regiment (p. 156)*, whose observers were watching, mention that Richthofen was chasing a British plane, and describe the crash in a way which indicates that the narratives are based on observation; but they say nothing of any third aeroplane.

The Turn and Crash

Major L. E. Beavis,¹⁷ *commanding 53rd Battery, Aust. Field Artillery*, whose guns were slightly on the northern side of the crest of the peninsula, with their two anti-aircraft Lewis gun posts ahead of them, wrote (5 May, 1931): "A telephone message came from the battery observation post, situated near the stone windmill on the north side of the Somme, about midway between the battery and the air-fight, that a British aeroplane and a red aeroplane which was pursuing it were flying in the general direction of the battery. In a very short time the aeroplanes appeared in view flying low along the west-east valley of the Somme. Keeping on this general course . . . brought them . . . close to the crest

¹³ Sgt. C. B. Popkin (No. 424; 24th M.G. Coy.). Carpenter; of Palmwoods, Q'land; b. North Sydney, 20 Sept., 1890.

¹⁴ Pte. G. Sowerbutts, M.M. (No. 5194; 44th Bn.). Farm hand; of Bridgetown, W. Aust.; b. Kirkham, Lancs., Eng., 7 Feb., 1889.

¹⁵ Lieut. J. R. Payne, 159th Bde., R.F.A. (35th Divn.). Builder; of Coningsby, Lincolnshire, Eng.; b. Victoria Barracks, Belfast, 6 Oct., 1891.

¹⁶ Lieut. D. J. Jenkins, 212th Siege Bty., R.G.A. Insurance manager; of Streetly, Staffordshire, Eng.; b. Stafford, 1 Oct., 1883.

¹⁷ Lieut.-Col. L. E. Beavis, D.S.O., p.s.c., p.a.c. Commanded 53rd Bty., A.F.A., 1917/18. Duntroon graduate; of Bathurst, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, 25 Jan., 1895.

of the transverse spur on which we were stationed. At the time I estimated their height as 150 feet. The British Sopwith Camel was deviating to right and left for protection, and the red 'plane was trying to keep dead on his tail. The Lewis gunners were standing to their two guns, which were mounted on posts and fitted with A.A. ring sights, and as soon as the Sopwith Camel was clear of the line of fire the guns opened fire. Immediately the red triplane turned sharply to the north, became somewhat unsteady in its flight, then went about N.E. and hit the ground 400 yards N.N.E. of where the Lewis guns were. There was no third 'plane . . . within a radius of at least 2,000 yards."

Similar evidence was given on the day of the fight, or since, by the Lewis gunners (R. Buie¹⁸ and W. J. Evans,¹⁹ and Bombardier J. S. Secull,²⁰ N.C.O. in charge), and Lieutenants J. C. Doyle,²¹ A. B. Ellis,²² and J. J. R. Punch²³ of the 53rd Battery, all eye-witnesses. Other details given are that the turn occurred after both guns had opened fire, Buie from ahead, Evans from Richthofen's left; and, that, as the 'plane banked, further bursts were fired into it (from Richthofen's left), knocking scraps of metal and wood from the machine

Sergeant C. B. Popkin (in charge of Vickers gun at J.25.a.8.9) reported, 24 April, 1918: The German plane banked, turned round, and came back towards my gun. As it came towards me, I opened fire a second time and observed at once that my fire took effect. The machine swerved, attempted to bank, and make for the ground, and immediately crashed.

Lieutenant G. M. Travers reported that, after Popkin first fired, "the enemy 'plane was quite out of control and did a wide circle."

Diary of Captain R. L. Forsyth: "At the brow of the hill . . . the triplane ran into a direct stream of bullets from a machine-gun in amongst a battery. He swept away sideways at once, very low, turned sharply as if going to attack the gun, and nose-dived to earth"

Lieutenant J. C. Doyle, 53rd Battery, said (in 1930): "When directly over our No. 1 (Lewis) gun the 'plane staggered, side-slipped into a 'bank,' and in the bank swerved in a 3/8ths circle towards his lines, and after sailing some hundreds of yards side-slipped and crashed into a wurzel heap."

Other observers say that after sharply swerving the 'plane rose; many thought that the pilot had turned home and was trying to gain height; after about 400 yards it swerved northwards again and dived more steeply but not steeply enough to wreck it, and landed "with engine roaring full-out" against a wurzel heap just beside the Bray-Corbie road. The petrol tank was broken in the crash, but not the wings. The standing orders were that troops were not to show themselves on this height, which was in view of the enemy; but the curiosity of the men was too great, and from all directions—even from Vaux, a mile away—they streamed towards the 'plane. The pilot was in it, dead, with many wounds mostly caused by the crash (but also possibly from splinters knocked from his plane by bullets).

German observers, seeing the rush of men to the spot, have reported that Richthofen was murdered after landing (e.g., *History of 238th Feld-Artillerie Regt.*, p. 75). Actually the rush was for souvenirs; and eagerness increased tenfold when the intelligence officer, Lieutenant Fraser, running up with the first half-dozen, undid Richthofen's safety belt, had him lifted out, and, examining his papers, found his name. A

¹⁸ Gnr. R. Buie (No. 3801; 53rd Bty., A.F.A.). Fisherman; of Brooklyn, Hawkesbury River, N.S.W.; b. Brooklyn, 8 Aug., 1893.

¹⁹ Gnr. W. J. Evans (No. 598; 53rd Bty., A.F.A.). Shearer; of Hughenden, Q'land; b. Queanbeyan, N.S.W., 1891. Died, 18 April, 1925.

²⁰ Bdr. J. S. Secull (No. 27532; 53rd Bty., A.F.A.). Carpenter; of Melbourne; b. Preston, Vic., 1895.

²¹ Lieut. J. C. Doyle, 53rd Bty., A.F.A. School teacher; of Bangalow, N.S.W.; b. Ulladulla, N.S.W., 19 March, 1892.

²² Lieut. A. B. Ellis, M.C.; 53rd Bty., A.F.A. Grocer; of Bunyip, Vic.; b. Mornington, Vic., 6 Dec., 1887.

²³ Lieut. J. J. R. Punch, M.C.; 53rd Bty., A.F.A. Farmer; of Dalby, Q'land; b. Sydney, 24 Oct., 1892.

signaller of the 3rd Division writes: "We of course didn't know who he was, but we saw he was dead, so lifted him out and laid him on the grass." After mentioning the souvenirs, he adds, "but it was then found out who he was, and the padre of the 8th Field Artillery Brigade collected them all from the souvenir kings. . . . We got the propeller and cut it up. . . . By the time we got the propeller off an officer of Tivey's crowd (8th Aust. Infantry Brigade) arrived and chased us away." Fraser got Captain Adams,²⁴ 44th Battalion, to put a guard over the body and the 'plane, but the German artillery quickly laid a barrage on the place and made it dangerous to approach. Richthofen's body, wrapped in a blanket, was taken to the battery lines, and after dark was fetched by a party of No. 3 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, to Poulainville aerodrome.

The Medical Inquiry

At the aerodrome, as reports claiming to have shot him came both from Captain Brown (who made the claim before he knew Richthofen's identity) and from the 53rd Battery, an informal post-mortem was held to discover by surface examination the cause of death. The reports were as follows:

The four medical officers mentioned below agreed that there was only one bullet wound, which entered at the right armpit at the level of the ninth rib, passed through the body from right to left, and came out a little higher in the front of the chest.

*Colonel T. Sinclair,*²⁵ *Consulting Surgeon, Fourth Army,* reported: The bullet appears to have passed obliquely backwards through the chest, striking the spinal column, from which it glanced in a forward direction and issued on the left side of the chest about 2 inches higher than its entrance on the right and about in the anterior axillary line. . . . These facts were ascertained by probing.

*Captain G. C. Graham*²⁶ and *Lieutenant G. E. Downs,*²⁷ *medical officers attached to the air force,* in a joint report said that the bullet entered in the posterior fold of the right armpit and came out "slightly higher" and "about half an inch below the right²⁸ nipple and about three-quarters of an inch external to it." They thought that the bullet passed "straight through the chest from right to left and also slightly forward." They did not agree that it struck the backbone, as the exit would in that case have been larger. They gave as their opinion that the bullet must have come from a gun "in roughly the same plane as the German machine, and fired from the right and slightly behind the right of Captain Richthofen," and that the wound "could not have been caused by fire from the ground."

Colonel G. W. Barber, D.D.M.S., Australian Corps, made a separate examination and furnished a report to General Birdwood describing the same wound and saying that it was just such as would have been inflicted by fire from the ground whilst the machine was banking. Writing in 1935, he says, "A bullet hole in the side of the 'plane coincided with the wound through the chest, and I am sure that he was shot from below while banking."

Inquiries kindly made in 1935 by Mr. L. R. Macgregor,²⁹ Australian Trade Commissioner in Canada, and his assistant, Mr. R. R. Ellen,³⁰ showed that, although the seat of Richthofen's machine, now in the

²⁴ Capt. E. C. Adams, 44th Bn. Stationmaster; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Laura, S. Aust., 13 Feb., 1882.

²⁵ Col T. Sinclair, C.B.; R.A.M.C. Consulting Surgeon, Fourth Army, 1915/18. Of Belfast, Ireland; b. Belfast, 17 Dec., 1857

²⁶ Capt. G. C. Graham, R.A.M.C.

²⁷ Lieut. G. E. Downs, R.A.M.C.

²⁸ This is probably a mistake for "left."

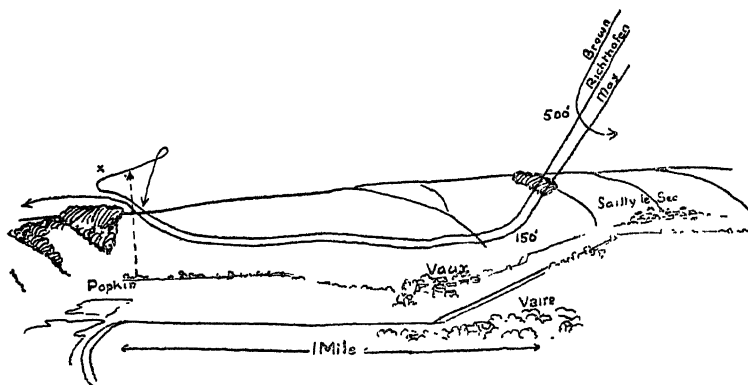
²⁹ L. R. Macgregor, Esq. Aust. Trade Commissioner in Canada since 1930. Public servant; of Queensland; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 4 May, 1886.

³⁰ S.Q.M.S. R. R. Ellen (No. 5818; A.I.F. H.Q.). Public servant; of Footscray, Vic.; b. Buckland Valley, Vic., 17 July, 1897.

Canadian Military Institute, Toronto, contains many holes, it is impossible to decide whether they are bullet holes, although it is believed, after inspection, that they are not.

Conclusions

It will be seen that Richthofen, before reaching Vaux, was dived on by Captain Brown, who thought that he killed him; that Captain Brown's immediate report that Richthofen "went down vertical" was mistaken, and shows that Brown saw nothing of the chase that followed; that Richthofen actually went on chasing Lieutenant May for almost exactly a mile, attempting to follow his manœuvres and firing bursts from his machine-gun; that on rising to cross the ridge and coming into the presence of the numerous batteries beyond it, and under close fire from rifles and machine-guns, he for some reason abandoned the chase and suddenly swerved eastwards and, after quickly rising several hundred feet, swerved northwards again and crashed; and that apparently none of the observers who saw the pursuit after it approached Vaux knew of a third 'plane being in any way involved in it. It is also clear that Sergeant Popkin's gun, *when first fired*, and those of the 53rd Battery, cannot have sent the fatal shot—since it came almost



The broken line shows the direction of Sergeant Popkin's fire at the time when he himself believed he hit Richthofen. X—Point at which Richthofen was fired on by Lewis guns of 53rd Battery.

directly from the right and from below the aviator—although they may well have caused him to turn; but that scores of other men were firing and, when Richthofen banked and turned back, Sergeant Popkin (who now opened again) was in position to fire just such a shot as killed Richthofen. (Private R. F. Weston,³¹ who helped Popkin, wrote, on the day of the event that their previous burst did "some damage," but that the second burst "was fatal." This was when Popkin himself,

³¹ Pte. R. F. Weston (No. 600; 24th M.G. Coy.). Clerk; of Randwick, N.S.W; b. Malvern, Vic., 3 Nov., 1891.

according to his statement also made at the time, "observed at once that my fire took effect."³²)

It is just conceivable that Richthofen might have contorted his body in such a way that Captain Brown, though above and behind him, could have inflicted a wound such as that described; but it is surely inconceivable that, with such a wound in the region of the heart, he should have continued for a mile his intensely purposive flight, closely following the movements of the fugitive airman and endeavouring to shoot him.³³ Certainly no one who watched from the ground the last minute of that exciting chase with only two 'planes in the picture will ever believe that Richthofen was killed by a shot from a third aeroplane which no one from Vaux onwards observed. A British artillery officer (P. Hutton³⁴) wrote to the *Daily Mail* in 1935: "As anti-aircraft officer on the spot I claim to be in the best position to judge. . . . Later in the day the Air Force came to me for confirmation of their claim, which was then the rule, but I could not substantiate it."

³² The historian of the British air force does not appear to have noted this statement when he says that shots from this gun could not have entered Richthofen's body from the right hand side. A glance at the sketch map above shows that this is incorrect.

³³ The history of the British air force (*The War in the Air, Vol. IV, p. 394*) gives as "the likeliest explanation" that the German leader rallied for a few brief moments after he was mortally wounded in combat, and then died fighting.

³⁴ Lieut. P. Hutton, R.F.A. Of Northampton, Eng.



THE REGION OF THE BRITISH OPERATIONS IN MESOPOTAMIA AND NORTH-WEST PERSIA
(Mountains are shown only where necessary for the reader's guidance.)

APPENDIX No. 5

AUSTRALIANS IN MESOPOTAMIA

CHAPTER I

THE SIGNAL UNITS, 1916-17

THE most adventurous experience of any portion of the A.I.F. was probably that of the 670 Australians who, in scattered units or as individuals, took part in the operations of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on the Upper Tigris and Euphrates and among the valleys and villages of Kurdistan, or who served with the "Dunsterforce" in Persia, Russia, and Armenia around the Caspian Sea.

Very little has been heard of the work of Australians in Mesopotamia, less by reason of their small numbers than because they were mainly technical troops. That indeed was the sole reason for their presence. India, in spite of its immense population, was astonishingly short of modern technical resources. For example, it contained only four aeroplanes at the beginning of the war, and the pilots and pupils of the local aviation school, from which an Indian flying corps was to have been recruited, were given up to the British War Office.¹ When, therefore, the War Office, months later, was able to send out two aeroplanes for the Indian Government's expedition in Mesopotamia, that Government had to borrow pilots and mechanics from Australia and New Zealand. It was a similar difficulty, in providing wireless apparatus and experts, that necessitated the presence of Australian signallers in Mesopotamia.

As for the aeroplanes, the adventurous and tragic fate of the First Australian Half-Flight, sent in response to an appeal received in February, 1915, has been described in another

¹ See *British Official History: The Campaign in Mesopotamia*, by Brig.-Gen. F. J. Moberly, Vol. I, pp. 63, 68.

volume of this series.² The first request for wireless personnel came on 27th December, 1915—for a troop of wireless signallers³ (to be mounted on arrival in Mesopotamia). It was at once supplied, a similar unit going from New Zealand. Next, early in 1916, came an appeal for trained nurses for the military “station” hospitals in India—560 nurses were eventually sent,⁴ as well as 44 dispensers and a small headquarters. On 6th March, 1916, the Indian Government asked that the two Anzac wireless troops then serving in Mesopotamia should be expanded by a third troop and a headquarters (both from Australia) to form a squadron. On 15th January, 1917, Australia was asked for a signal squadron for the Indian cavalry division then being formed in Mesopotamia, New Zealand being at the same time requested to send a cable section. By that time, however, the New Zealand Government’s policy was to concentrate its effort on the Western Front. Australia sent the signal squadron, and, in answer to a further request made in August, 1917, an additional wireless troop for service in Ford motor-cars. The New Zealand wireless troop was replaced by Australians, the 1st (Anzac) Wireless Signal Squadron thus finally becoming the 1st Australian Wireless Signal Squadron.

In all, 558 Australian signallers were sent to Mesopotamia although nothing like that number was ever there at one time. At most times during the campaign, so long as the troops were in settled country behind the lines, the network of military telegraph lines (generally known as “land lines”) carried most of the crowd of messages on which the control of the Mesopotamian army depended. But, whenever an expedition struck out in the enemy’s country or into such wildernesses as Kurdistan or North-West Persia, the staff depended on aeroplanes and on the small mobile wireless stations for its communications; and seeing that from the end of 1916 the Anzac squadron took over nearly all the mobile wireless work (the British squadron, then the 2nd

² *Volume VIII, The Australian Flying Corps*, by F. M. Cutlack. A fuller account (*Guests of the Unspeakable*) is given by one of its officers—now Lieut.-Colonel Hon. T. W. White, Minister for Trade and Customs—who was eventually captured by the Turks.

³ One officer and 53 of other ranks.

⁴ The first fifty were sent from Egypt to India, and thence later to England for which they had originally been destined. An account of the service of these nurses and dispensers is included in Keast Burke’s *With Horse and Morsé in Mesopotamia*.

Wireless Signal Squadron, undertaking most of the base and lines-of-communication duties), the Anzacs were a necessary part of nearly all the adventurous expeditions that marked the latter history of the campaign. Without unduly stressing the importance of these fifteen or twenty little sections in a force of over 200,000 men, it may truly be said that the formation of this wireless network was a basic condition of some of the most interesting operations of Generals Maude, Marshall, and Dunsterville. An admirable account of it is given in the regimental history of the Australian units in Mesopotamia⁵ by Keast Burke,⁶ based on the official as well as upon private records; but it is due to them that at least some notion of their achievement and of the manner in which it fitted into the vast operations in the East should be given in the present work. For an account of their daily experiences—of the frizzling heat which for four months in the year caused all movement outside tents and billets—except the watering of horses—to be forbidden in the four middle hours of the day, reducing the camps of both sides to the semblance of cities of the dead; heat that could strike men down even inside the great “Egyptian pattern” tents, through canvas and mat ceilings; of the flies whose swarms exceeded those of Gallipoli; of the mosquitoes, sandflies, and malaria, of the native camp-followers, the long monotonous rationings, groomings, waterings, and camp troubles, the short excitements of sightseeing in Ancient Babylonia and Persia and modern Baghdad—for an account of all these the reader must be referred to Keast Burke’s narrative. The description of the work of the wireless squadron here given is based largely on that book, the strategical background being sketched in mainly from the excellent British Official History of the Mesopotamian Campaign.

When in December, 1915, the first request for a wireless signal troop arrived in Australia, the operators were at once found from the Marconi school in Sydney and the signallers’ dépôt at Broadmeadows in Victoria, and the drivers (nearly half the strength of the troop) from the army service corps

⁵ *With Horse and Mose in Mesopotamia*, one of the unit histories published under the Defence Department’s unit history scheme.

⁶ Spr. E. K. Burke (No. 20555; 1st. Aust. Wireless Sig. Squ.). University student; of Roseville, N.S.W.; b. Christchurch, N.Z., 16 Jan., 1896.

camp in New South Wales (Moore Park) and the artillery school in Victoria. The men were eager for this new service. The unit—then known as the 1st Australian Pack Wireless Signal Troop—sailed on 5th February, 1916, from Melbourne, and, after transshipping at Colombo and Bombay,⁷ landed at Basra on the 19th of March, 1916. There it went into camp at Makina Masus (becoming "C" Troop of the 1st Wireless Signal Squadron, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force), and was organised in four sections, each forming a wireless station with 7 operators and 6 drivers (including the N.C.O's in command) all mounted, with 5 horses additional to carry the gear. The sets were of half-a-kilowatt power, and were divided into five loads each carried on one horse—first, on a special frame, the small generator, petrol driven and air-cooled, with alternator; second, the sending and receiving apparatus; third, the rigging; fourth, the mast, in sections; and, fifth, the spare parts and petrol. The New Zealand contingent, arriving in April, furnished another four sections for the same troop. "A" Troop—a British unit—was meanwhile carrying on the work at the front,⁸ 150-200 miles away.

At this time the Mesopotamian campaign had been brought to a standstill through the unfortunate results of the rush for Baghdad, attempted by the section of the force on the River Tigris in November, 1915. The expedition had originally been undertaken upon the entry of Turkey into the war, its object being, first to protect India by averting the chief dangers of Arab hostility and of German and Turkish attempts to stir Persians, Afghans, and Arabs into war; second, the protection of the Anglo-Persian oil-supply at the head of the Persian Gulf. Of these, the defence of India was then the more important; when, in September, 1914, the staff at the Admiralty suggested that Indian troops should be sent to defend the oil works, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of

Origin of Campaign

⁷ Here there was a difficulty over a messing allowance, which was first paid to the Australians in the same way as to British troops in India, and later demanded back from them.

⁸ "B" Troop was in India.

the Admiralty, advised against it. "We shall have to buy our oil from elsewhere," he wrote. Steps were eventually taken to protect the works, but in the military plans of that time this was treated as a secondary duty.

The chief danger to India lay in the fact that Persia, though neutral, afforded an almost open avenue for Turkish and German agents to the Afghans and other mountain peoples on the north-west frontier to whom the plains and cities of India provide much the same temptation that those of ancient Italy furnished for the Goths and Vandals. At the outbreak of war a mission of 32 secret agents—some of them German officers⁹—was sent to stir the Afghans and others to aggression. It was their plan to urge the Moslems to Holy War, and to foster revolutions aiming at the unity either of all Mohammedans or of the races akin to the Turk.¹⁰ To the instigators it mattered nothing that the two movements last referred to were contrary to each other; the Germans, and even the young Turks, used any lever that served.

A strong Persia might have prevented this belligerency, but the Persians afforded a striking example of a nation that will not fight. The Persian citizen would endlessly parley, threaten, protest, demonstrate; he would carry rifles and flags, wear uniforms, and make the boldest show, and even kill. But he would not run a soldier's risk of being killed. There was no Persian army; and the armed Persian bodyguards, and even the *gendarmes* organised and drilled by Swedes and other Europeans, would not stand up to any attack worthy of the name. Consequently the great powers during their life-and-death struggles in the Great War treated Persia as they liked. Russian armies from the Caucasus and Caspian fought Turkish armies from Anatolia and Mesopotamia backwards and forwards across Persian provinces, eating and destroying the crops and looting and burning towns. German agents stirred Kurdish or Arab tribes and even raised armed levies to attack and turn British consuls out of Persian towns. The

⁹ Extracts from the diary of one of these Germans are given in the *British Official History* (Vol. I, pp. 341-5).

¹⁰ The two last cited were known respectively as the Pan-Islam and Pan-Turkic Movements; but, so far as these movements affected the Mesopotamian campaign, they were largely mere names for the active intrigues of the German agents Wassmuss, Niedermayer, Zugmayer and others, to counteract which Major W. H. I. Shakespeare, H. St. John B. Philly, Lieut.-Col. G. E. Leachman, Major E. B. Stone, and other famous political agents worked on the British side.

British and Indian Governments in self-defence placed a thin cordon of Indian garrisons in East Persia (known as the East Persian cordon)—despite which German agents reached the Afghans and the Indian border tribes. The Persians feared and hated the Turks, but they feared and hated the Russians more, and consequently welcomed the Germans and their schemes; but the one step which constant German pressure never succeeded in inducing them to take was to join the Central powers and fight. Whether their nation was, in the end, the better or the worse for that failure is a question outside the scope of this work. It says much for the prestige of British authority in Central Asia that the Germans failed similarly with the Afghans.

In the early stages of the campaign in Mesopotamia the British commanders there found it difficult to maintain that prestige among the peoples in their neighbourhood without constantly pressing forward. The two rivers flow through a region which, except for the strip watered by their floods, is nearly all desert, but transport being then almost entirely by boat, was comparatively easy so long as the available boats were sufficient and break-downs were avoided. Each advance used to impress the inhabitants ahead with the extent of British power, and might even occasion demonstrations of favour; but each stoppage, leaving the demonstrators in Turkish power, brought reaction. The most obvious exhibition of British strength would be the capture of Baghdad, the "second capital" of the Turkish Empire, the administrative centre of the whole region, and, incidentally, lying astride one of the easiest routes for German penetration into Persia. Consequently, after several advances up the Tigris and Euphrates, the British authorities—the local commander and British and Indian Governments and staffs all sharing the responsibility—decided to offset the Gallipoli failure by capturing Baghdad, then only fifty miles ahead of the British force on the Tigris. They had in Mesopotamia only two divisions (6th and 12th) of the Indian Army, but the Turks also had only 9,000 regulars facing the British in Mesopotamia, the main part of their Eastern forces being then, as throughout, opposed to the Russian Caucasus Army. For the Turks that army,

**First Thrust
for Baghdad**

thrusting through Armenia, was the greatest danger; and in addition, 20,000 Russians were fighting them through western Persia, and had come within 150 miles of Baghdad. The British hoped to co-operate with these forces. As very large Turkish reinforcements were expected to be sent to retake Baghdad, if captured, two more Indian infantry divisions—those then in France—were to reach Baghdad early in 1916, after its projected capture.

But the first Turkish reinforcements unexpectedly reached Baghdad about November 14th, a week—and possibly only a week—too soon. Through their arrival, which was unknown to him,¹¹ Major-General C. V. F. Townshend¹² and the 6th Division, after successful fighting, were first stopped, then forced to retire, and finally surrounded at Kut-el-Amara, 200 miles from Basra.¹³ The two Indian divisions from France—the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut)—and the additional 13th British Division (from Egypt after Gallipoli), were vainly employed during the early months of 1916 in successive attempts to relieve him. At the time when the first Australian wireless unit arrived at Basra, these attempts were in progress up the Tigris. Townshend, who had had supplies for two months, had been assured that his force would be extricated; and the Turks below him were, indeed, by desperate fighting turned out of several positions. But their troops were very different from the second-rate forces encountered earlier in the campaign, and the promise proved impossible to carry out. Transport facilities and supplies were lacking; a great part of the reinforcements was held up at Basra. Several Turkish lines, including the practically impregnable positions at Sanniyat (between the Suwaikiya marsh and the Tigris) and near Es Sinn, still barred the way.

The British front on the Euphrates was then at Nasiriyeh, and, except for filibustering on the part of the local Arabs, was almost completely quiet. It was towards this that on 25th April, 1916 (the second Anzac Day), the first of the Australian pack-wireless

**Wireless
Stations Move**

¹¹ They were seen by an airman, Major H. L. Reilly (Bedford, Eng.), on the 20th; but his aeroplane and he fell into the hands of the Turks; and Townshend attacked on November 22 without this knowledge.

¹² Major-General Sir Charles Townshend, K.C.B., D.S.O. Commanded 6th Indian Inf. Div., 1915/16. Officer of British Regular Army; b. 21 Feb., 1861. Died, 18 May, 1924.

¹³ With Townshend was a brigade (30th) of the 12th Division.

stations set out from Basra on a most trying 140-mile march with part of the infantry, which about this time was formed into a new division (15th) for the Euphrates.¹⁴ A month later a second Australian station was sent up by boat (being piloted across Lake Hammar by the aid of Miss Gertrude Bell¹⁵) to Nasiriyeh. Later, when an advance was made up the river to Samawa, a wireless detachment sent on one of the boats satisfactorily managed the communications. The first station had been kept down river at Khamisiya. Two New Zealand stations were despatched in May 1916 to important centres on the Tigris. Two other stations were sent out in June with a force to punish desert Arabs near Basra. Long before then—on April 29th, while the 15th Division was on its march over the desert—the 13,000 troops at Kut (including a few of the Australian air mechanics) had been forced to surrender to the Turks, through whose inefficiency nearly a third of them died before the war ended.

The Russian Caucasus Army in February had dealt the Turks a powerful blow at Erzerum, and General Baratov from the Caspian, early in June, reached

After Kut

Khaniqin—as close to Baghdad as were the British. That month a Cossack patrol actually reached the British on the Tigris, after a desert march of 200 miles. But having captured Townshend the Turks were able to turn part of their force¹⁶ against Baratov, and quickly drove him back towards the Caspian. The summer—the worst season for campaigning in Mesopotamia—being at hand, Lieutenant-General Lake,¹⁷ now commanding there, could not help when appealed to, but wisely used the time in improving his base and communications, and asked for two brigades of “Colonial

¹⁴ The 12th Division had been broken up; one of its brigades formed part of the 15th Division. Another new division, the 14th, was at this time formed on the Tigris. The cavalry—6th Brigade—was early in 1916 commanded by an Australian, Brig.-General R. C. Stephen.

¹⁵ Miss G. M. L. Bell, C.B.E., a famous student of the East and author of many works upon it. Attached to Military Intelligence Dept., Cairo, 1915; to Liaison Office of Arab Bureau in Iraq, 1916; Assistant Political Officer, Baghdad, 1917; Oriental Secretary to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 1920/26. Daughter of Sir Hugh Bell (of Dorman, Long & Co.); of Rounton Grange, Northallerton, Yorks., Eng.; b. Washington Hall, Durham, 14 July, 1868. Died, 12 July, 1926.

¹⁶ Including the 2nd Turkish Division from Anzac.

¹⁷ Lieut.-Gen. Sir Percy Lake, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., p.s.c. C.G.S., India, 1912/15; commanded Mesopot. Exped. Force, 1916. Officer of British Regular Army; of Preston, Lancs, Eng.; b. Tenby, Wales, 29 June, 1855.

Mounted Rifles¹⁸ to help him before the offensive was resumed. The War Office (which took over control from the Commander-in-Chief, India, in February of operations, and in July of administration) was unable to reinforce him; but both the War Office and Major-General Maude of the 13th Division, who was appointed by Sir William Robertson in August as Lake's successor in command of the whole force, adhered to the same policy of thorough reorganisation and preparation before again attempting any advance. Maude formed his four divisions¹⁹ on the Tigris into two army corps, and the two Indian cavalry brigades were to be combined in the cavalry division for which Australia was asked to supply the signal squadron.

As in Sinai and Palestine after Second Gaza, the preparations were now as thorough, the supply as lavish, as they had previously been defective. In the Australian

Reorganisation contingent—one small cog in the great wheels²⁰—the entire organisation was changed on the arrival

In Wireless

wireless squadron under Major Sutherland,²¹ and an additional troop. The wireless stations were now organised as the 1st (Anzac) Wireless Signal Squadron, containing two Australian troops and one of New Zealanders, each troop comprising four stations. About half of these were fitted with a more powerful apparatus (1½ kilowatt), carried on six-horse limbered waggons—two waggons to each set. The others remained pack stations. All the men were mounted, some very wild horses being at first allotted to the squadron. The Australian drivers were, of course, experienced horsemen, but a proportion of the operators had to be taught by British cavalry instructors.

For training in their wireless duties, the operators now made a practice of taking down the Turkish and Russian

Interception wireless messages as well as the press wireless—German, British, French, and

¹⁸ Later the use of Australian light horse brigades in Mesopotamia was mooted.

¹⁹ Now the 3rd, 7th, 13th (British), and 14th. The 15th was on the Euphrates. Among the troops sent to Mesopotamia in 1916 were the battalions of the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade and the 21st and 26th Indian Mountain Batteries, all from Anzac.

²⁰ By December, 1916, there were 100,000 combatant troops in the force.

²¹ Major A. R. Sutherland, V.D. Commanded 1st. A. & N.Z. Wireless Sig. Squ., 1916. Bulder; of East Malvern, Vic.; b. Bannockburn, Vic., 25 June, 1872.

Indian. The enemy's cipher messages were, of course, unintelligible to the operators and, indeed, to the staff; but the operators learned to locate the hostile stations and recognise the station calls—DAS, Damascus; SMR, Samarra, and so forth. The messages were ultimately handed to the British signal staff, which did not at first consider their receipt worth mentioning to General Maude. It is said that when the matter reached his ears, he expressed some displeasure at this omission. He at once asked the War Office to send an expert at deciphering, and meanwhile had two of the Australian stations charged with the duty of intercepting all enemy wireless.²² The expert, Captain Clauson,²³ solved the riddle of the first enemy code within twenty-three hours of his arrival. The two stations were kept constantly at this work. "Thereafter," writes Keast Burke, "despite daily changes, and enciphering of a most complicated kind, every enemy message arrived at I (Intelligence) Branch as surely and certainly as if it had been addressed to them." The uncanny power which this information, over and above that secured by his other means of intelligence, gave to him is one of the outstanding features of the Mesopotamian campaign.

The Director of Signals had been impressed by the work of the pack station that had accompanied the 15th Division. The Anzacs' resourcefulness in areas where spare kit was unobtainable was particularly marked. When the starting handle of a petrol engine was lost or broken, they would start the machine with a twirl of a waist belt. Their capacity for extreme effort in crisis was outstanding. Their operation of their little sets was so skilful that they normally communicated over many times the distances then set down in the *Field Service Pocket Book*. Later, during the second expedition to Kirkuk in Kurdistan, when, in vile weather, it was urgent to communicate with distant headquarters, the sergeant of the wireless detachment dried his drenched set by means of a blowlamp and then, though the officer in charge could catch no Morse through the earphones, succeeded in detecting distant signals. The squelching of horses' hoofs in the mud

²² A special experimental station was also afterwards sent out from Great Britain, but the Australian intercepting stations continued this duty to the end.

²³ Capt. G. L. M. Clauson, C.M.G., O.B.E.; Somerset Light Infy. Asst. Secretary, Colonial Office, since 1934. University student; of London; b. Valletta, Malta, 28 April, 1891.

near by was sufficient to obliterate the faint sounds; but troops were brought up to keep the surrounding area quiet, and working in a tent with two coats held over his head to drown all other sound, the sergeant got the required communication—each group of the cipher being sent nine times—though he finished in a condition approaching collapse.

Undoubtedly the Anzacs were particularly fitted for mobile work. But it was for other reasons—apparently partly by arrangement between the British squadron (No. 2) and the Anzac squadron to take it year and year about—that the British squadron was now transferred to work on the base and lines of communication, and the Anzacs to work at the front. Accordingly in October, 1916, when movements preparatory to Maude's renewal of active operations began, the Australian and New Zealand stations were directed to the forces on the Tigris where the main effort was evidently to be undertaken. The sicknesses of the hot season in this as in later years made great inroads on the strength of the squadron. Lieutenant Clarke,²⁴ commanding the New Zealand Troop, had died, as had several men, and Major Sutherland, Captain White,²⁵ and a number of men had been invalided to Australia.²⁶ Captain Marr²⁷ now commanded the squadron. By December, 1916, two stations had gone to G.H.Q., two to the headquarters of each army corps (I and III), one to each of the cavalry brigades, 6th and 7th (now forming a provisional division), and one to the headquarters of this division. Three New Zealand stations were on the forward section of the line of communications.

More than most commanders, General Maude kept his future plans closely to himself, even his most intimate staff being often unaware of them. He also maintained close personal control not only of preparations, but, so far as possible, even

**Maude's
use of Wireless**

²⁴ Lieut. W. R. H. Clarke, N.Z. Pack Wireless Troop. B. Hawera, N.Z., 24 Nov., 1887. Died of illness, 8 July, 1916.

²⁵ Maj. S. J. White, O.B.E., M.C. Commanded 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn., 1918/19. Of Elsternwick, Vic.; b. Richmond, Vic., 1 Dec., 1886.

²⁶ Some of these afterwards returned to the front.

²⁷ Major Hon. Sir Charles Marr, K.C.V.O., D.S.O., M.C., V.D. Commanded 1st A. & N.Z. Wireless Sig. Sqn., 1916/18; Member of Aust. House of Representatives, 1919/29, and since 1931; Minister for Home and Territories, 1927/28; for Works and Railways, 1932; for Health and Repatriation, and in charge of Territories, 1932/35. Electrical engineer, Radio Branch, P.M.G.'s Dept., Sydney; of Carlingford, N.S.W.; b. Petersham, N.S.W., 23 March, 1880.

of columns sent out on detached operations. This he effected constantly through the employment of the wireless stations, through which the column commanders had to report to him, usually, every hour.²⁸ To those harassed leaders this order must have proved embarrassing, but for the wireless sections it meant the invariable participation of at least one station—usually of several—in the most interesting operations of the campaign. Such operations naturally fell to the cavalry, later associated with the armoured cars, which were launched from time to time “into the blue.” The pack wireless sets could be erected in seven or eight minutes, and were constantly set up by the side of the column during marches, the sections despatching the wireless traffic as long as required, and then catching up the column again as best they could. Continuity of reception was achieved by a method of relays known as “stepping up,” which was brought to a high point of efficiency by the Anzac squadron. This was practised particularly by the three stations that usually accompanied the cavalry, the rearmost station dismantling as soon as the foremost station had set up and begun to transmit. The stations left behind to catch up the column usually were provided with a cavalry escort also dropped by the rear-guard, but sometimes had to depend on themselves for any necessary protection. It may be added that in the earlier years of the campaign the cavalry was a less effective instrument than was generally expected; in the last year it showed what this arm of the service, properly wielded, could do.

By December Maude had finished his preparations, and on the night of the 13th he struck his first blow. Sir William Robertson, at the War Office, had at first favoured withdrawing and acting on the defensive, but, on the advice of Maude and General Monro²⁹ had finally sanctioned a single move which would strengthen

²⁸See *British Official History: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, Vol. III, 263n, 281.*

²⁹Newly appointed Commander-in-Chief in India.

the British position on both rivers, and might cause the Turks to withdraw. This was a short dash across the desert from the Tigris to the Shatt-el-Hai, a channel connecting the two great rivers, once a centre of much irrigation and fertility,³⁰ and still leading through a district from which the Turks drew supplies. All the night of December 13th-14th the cavalry headed across the desert. Dawn found them on the Shatt-el-Hai. Thence they advanced at once towards the Tigris above the Turkish position at Kut. While transmitting messages during this advance, "G" wireless station came under fire from a Turkish monitor³¹ on the river. Both the cavalry and the station had to fall back to the Hai. During this time the strong Turkish positions facing the infantry were under furious bombardment.

The flank of the Turks had been threatened, but not turned, and they continued to hold their line from Sauniyat to Kut. An attempt on December 20th to bridge the Tigris farther up was stiffly opposed, and was broken off by General Maude (using his wireless stations). But Maude's active left flank was only seven miles from the enemy's line of communications; and Robertson desired that the 100,000 troops of the force should do something more than merely keep quiet 40,000 Turks. Maude was therefore now authorised to attack, provided the probable casualties were not over 25 per cent. of the infantry engaged. A series of infantry attacks in January and February cleared the enemy from the right bank of the river. During this interval the cavalry raided the desert Arabs once at Ghusab's Fort and twice at Hai; endeavoured to get round the Suwaikiya marshes by a wide flanking movement on the north close to the foot-hills—an effort foiled by torrential rain; and covered "raids" by the artillery against the enemy line of communications. On all their dashes the cavalry columns kept touch with headquarters by means of "C," "D," "G," "H," or "L" wireless stations.³²

³⁰ The great irrigation systems of Mesopotamia were ruined in the 13th and 14th centuries by the Mongols, who turned this rich region into desert.

³¹ Said to have been one captured from the British at Kut.

³² Stations "A" to "H" were then Australian, and "I" to "L" New Zealand. "A" and "F" were busy on interception at G.H.Q. and I Corps Headquarters respectively. "B" and "E" were at the headquarters of III and I Corps.

But it was on February 23rd—when the troops forming Maude's western flank finally crossed and bridged the great river at Shumran, actually behind the Turks, while after several attacks, part of the infantry forced the Sanniyat position—that the climax came, and with it dramatic success. Early next morning, hoping to cut off the enemy, Maude ordered the cavalry to cross the Tigris and keep constant touch with him by wireless—indeed, "D" wireless station was the first of the mounted troops to cross; "C," "H," and "L" followed with the cavalry, but the cavalry could not get round the rear-guard of the now retiring Turks. Next day the rear-guard still checked the cavalry and armoured cars in the marshes. The cavalry commander, who had to report to Maude hourly by wireless, was now ordered by him to strike across the plain in the hope of cutting off part of the enemy farther back, but the troops were too tired and their opponents too quick. The British monitors under Captain Nunn,³³ however, came through on the 26th, caught up the retreat, and harassed the fleeing enemy, who eventually abandoned his gunboats and many barges, much land transport, some ammunition, and even money. (On the 27th near Aziziyeh the men of two wireless stations, dismounting, rushed two Turkish store-barges at the river bank.) After waiting for the 14th Division, the cavalry on February 29th entered Aziziyeh, where, fifty miles from Baghdad, the pursuit was broken off while General Maude waited for a week, much against his will, for the necessary supplies. At this stage, all the Australian wireless stations were, for once, in camp together.

Maude now had only some 10,000 Turks ahead of him. About 400 miles to the north the Russian Caucasus Army was again preparing to attack; and in Persia **Baghdad** Baratov was advancing. Consequently Maude sought and obtained leave to capture Baghdad, and on March 5th he moved. After the cavalry had run into—and charged—a strong Turkish position at Lajj, the Turks withdrew behind the Diala River which here flows into the

³³ Vice-Admiral W. Nunn, C.B., C.M.G., C.S.I., D.S.O.; R.N. Commanded H.M.S.'s *Aurora* and *Curlew*, in Harwich Force, 1917/19; H.M.S. *Ramillies*, 1924/25; of London; b. Ripon, Yorkshire, 10 Dec., 1874. (An officer well known in Australia. The incident is described in his book *Tigris Gunboats*.)

Tigris from the Persian ranges 100 miles to the north-east. Several efforts to cross it failed but a column (with pack wireless) had been transferred to the western side of the Tigris to turn the Turkish right there. This diverted part of the Turkish force, and by March 10th the 13th Division (with its attached wireless section) had bridged the Diala. That night the Turks abandoned Baghdad, and early next day, 11th March, 1917, the British advanced guard entered the city. The cavalry division was sent beyond it. "On both banks," says Burke, "the wireless men were among the first troops in." The big German wireless station, whose tall masts had been seen from a distance on the previous day, had been completely destroyed, with all its gear. But by the afternoon of the 11th two Anzac wireless sets were operating. One of these was an improvised set in the British Residency building, and the operators were surprised to find themselves in touch with Basra at their first call. The first message was one announcing Maude's success and in the afternoon there came back a reply bearing the congratulations of the King. For three or four days, until the land line was established, the chief telegrams to and from G.H.Q. went through this station.

Little rest was now possible for two reasons. First, it was necessary to drive the Turks up-river before they could cut the bunds which confine the flood waters and whose breach might render impassable large parts of the lowlands. The 7th Division (with "G" station) was accordingly pushed on, and, after meeting the enemy west of the Tigris at Mushahida, drove him by March 15th fifty miles beyond Baghdad—the wireless, as usual, having been employed by Maude in an effort to urge on the operations. To ensure the same security on the Euphrates, which here runs only thirty miles to the west, the 7th Infantry Brigade (with the same station brought down by forced marches to join it) was on March 18th sent to Falluja on that river. Maude had also hoped to reach it before the Turkish Euphrates force from

Samawa, 170 miles to the south, slipped past, but he had not been able to advance in time. The Turks had escaped and had cut the embankment of the canal joining the rivers. The British, however, took precautions in good time and the cutting merely rendered navigation easier for them on the Tigris.

The second cause of urgency lay in the need for working with the Russians, whose commander in the Caucasus, the Grand Duke Nicholas, launched four columns south-west of the Caspian to co-operate with the British. They were advancing through Kurdistan from Saqqiz and Bijar, and about the Caspian-Baghdad road; it was hoped that the British might even cut off the XIII Turkish Corps³⁴ of which the 2nd Division was fighting Baratov on this road, or at least help the Grand Duke to thrust to the Tigris farther north at Mosul, which became the Turkish base after the loss of Baghdad.³⁵

The famous road from Baghdad to Persia and the Caspian (with its branches towards Armenia and Central Asia) runs first along the Diala, and then, entering Persia near Khaniqin in the foot-hills, switchbacks over range after range of Persian mountains, some of them, especially at the Pai Taq pass, at that time snow-covered. The farther half of the road, from Hamadan (300 miles from Baghdad) to the Caspian, had been excellently made by a Russian company, which had held it as a concession, but the nearer half was difficult and was now being torn up in places by the Turks. An immediate attempt made by the 7th Cavalry Brigade and most of the 3rd Indian Division to cut off the Turks near Khaniqin proved too slow, the XIII Turkish Corps beginning to slip across the Diala and into the hills behind the flank of the XVIII Corps, which faced Maude in the Tigris region. Fearing that the two Turkish corps would co-operate against him, Maude, by wireless, recalled the 7th Cavalry Brigade and now sent the whole cavalry division (with which went "C," "H," and "L" wireless stations) towards Delli Abbas

The Persian Road

³⁴ The XIII Corps contained the 2nd and 6th Divisions, each about 4,500 strong.

³⁵ The German railway to Baghdad was planned to reach the Tigris at Mosul, but was still 130 miles short of it. The final section of the line, from Samarra to Baghdad (75 miles) had been completed.

to cut off the XIII from its neighbour while the 3rd Division ("E" station) tried to prevent the Turkish retreat. Both British columns, however, were greatly hampered by having to bridge canals. Meanwhile, learning that the XVIII and XIII Corps were intending to join near the Tigris and attack him there, Maude decided to defeat the XVIII on the Tigris first. Attacking it at the end of March with the 13th British Division ("F" station) under Major-General Cayley, he drove it back to the Adhaim River—the next tributary to the north. But the XIII escaped the British and Russian pincers, abandoning Delli Abbas and retreating into the foot-hills east of the XVIII. On April 1st, higher up the Diala, the British were joined by a squadron of Cossack cavalry. But it was a solitary detachment, over thirty miles from its nearest supports, and short of food though in excellent spirits.

Maude now saw in front of him the opportunity of the campaign. If he continued to press the XVIII Corps, whose

**The Best
Chance Lost**

morale was low, and the Russians struck at the XIII and at Mosul, as they had intended, there was a chance of practically ending the struggle. But on the day after his entry to Baghdad there occurred in European Russia the great revolution, and by April its results had sufficiently influenced the Caucasus Army to cause it to abandon the offensive through Kurdistan. Its commander intended to hold his present line through the mountains there. Meanwhile Maude decided to attack the XVIII on both sides of the Tigris,³⁶ the cavalry still having the duty of keeping away the XIII Corps. West of the Tigris the Turks were quickly defeated; east of it the XIII Turkish Corps, now that the Russians were inactive, advanced against the British right, but after several days' fighting was driven back into the hills (the Jabal Hamrin). The 13th Division then, on April 18th, crossed the Adhaim and shattered the part of the XVIII Corps that had been defending the line of that river. Three days later the 7th Indian Division west of the Tigris attacked again, driving the enemy in two days beyond Samarra, the whole of the German railway from there to Baghdad and much rolling stock being thus captured.

³⁶ The 13th British Division east side, 7th Indian Division ("F" Station) west side. "E" Station (waggon) had now replaced "F" at XIII Corps Headquarters.

On the Adhaim, the XIII Corps, making a second effort to help the XVIII, was attacked and driven back into the hills, the 2nd Turkish Division, however, giving its pursuers a sharp rap in the final engagement on April 30th.

The road from Baghdad to Persia was now left open by the Turkish retreat, and the Russian leaders from Persia conferred with Maude in Baghdad on April 22nd. They were faced by only some 2,300 Turks of the XIII Corps, and Maude, who had already sent supplies to Baratov promised the Russians two months' provisions if they would attack. An Australian wireless station ("A") was also now sent to join the Russian headquarters in Persia—the British *liaison* officer having pressed for it. It reached Qasr-i-Shirin, the first Persian city on the Caspian road, on 24th April, 1917. But Maude was no longer confident that the Russian leaders could give the expected help, however willing. He had been warned that the Turks might eventually concentrate 200,000 troops—mainly from the Caucasus front—against him. The Indian Government undertook to support him by raising twenty-four new battalions.

The summer of 1917 was now approaching. The British on the Tigris had advanced 75 miles from Baghdad; the Turks were near Tikrit, 30 miles farther on. In May British trains were running to Samarra. The force settled down to its summer rest, but a number of minor expeditions were undertaken. A small force (accompanied by "D" station) was at once sent to examine the Hindiya barrage, built for the the Turks by British contractors in order to irrigate the neighbouring region—a scheme which, as often happened with the Turks, had never reached complete fulfilment. The British started work upon it forthwith, and also began to draw upon the grain crops of Mesopotamia. The Euphrates, from Nasiriyeh to Falluja, was also brought into control, and "C" pack wireless station worked the communications for a cavalry column sent to punish plundering Arabs along that river. In mid-summer, with the thermometer at 130 degrees in the shade, the 7th Infantry Brigade (with "G" station attached) moved against the next Turkish position up the Euphrates at Ramadi. As that place was

reached, however, a fierce dust storm came on, and so unfavourable were the conditions that the attack was countermanded and the column returned, sniped at, at close range, by Arabs. It had effected nothing except (as fortunately turned out) to give the local Turkish commander a false sense of security.³⁷

After two feeble efforts—on the Diala and in Kurdistan—the Russian Army not merely ceased to advance, but fell back, abandoning the Baghdad end of the Persian road which the Turks reoccupied; and Maude learned from the War Office and from his intelligence staff that the Turks together with a German force—the whole under General von Falkenhayn—intended to attack him down the Euphrates as soon as winter arrived. The news was true—Enver Pasha had persuaded the Germans to attempt with him the recapture of Baghdad. A new Turkish army, the Seventh, was being organised under Mustapha Kemal; this, with the German “Asiatic Corps” (actually only a regiment of infantry with other arms added) and the Sixth Turkish Army already in Mesopotamia, would form the “Yilderim” (Thunderbolt) force under Falkenhayn. The British Government naturally could not contemplate another Kut; and Sir William Robertson, fearing that it might be stampeded into sending large forces to Mesopotamia, advised that the surest way to defend Baghdad was to attack in Palestine. Meanwhile he suggested that—according to British policy—all possible encouragement should be given to the Arabs, and that the disintegrating Russian Army in Persia and south of the Caucasus might be fed, supplied, and directed by Maude, or even paid with British and American funds. The British *liaison* officer with that army telegraphed that British gold might keep the Russian forces in Persia “but will not make them fight. The old Russian Army is dead, quite dead. Our efforts therefore to resuscitate it stand useless.”³⁸

The Turks were now actually drawing supplies from the district on Maude’s immediate right, vacated by the Russians.

³⁷ Of the other Anzac wireless stations “A” was then with the Russians at Kermanshah (and was renamed “AA”). A new “A” was at Baghdad; “B” at Baghdad; “E” (7th Divn.) at Samarra; “F” (8th Bde.), Istabulat; “I,” “J,” “K” on lines of communication; “L” and “H,” Ruz, Baqubah, and Baghdad.

³⁸ *The Campaign in Mesopotamia, Vol. IV, p. 37.*

Maude accordingly sent the 37th Brigade (with "H" station) to occupy Balad Ruz, and in August two columns, from Ruz and Baquba, were pushed out (with "C" and "D" stations) to prevent the Turks from entrenching at Shahraban near the Diala. The wireless men came under fire but lost only horses. The Persian road was still closed, and the Australian wireless station "A" (now renamed "AA") at Baratov's headquarters was now part of the Russian force in Persia, completely cut off from the British in Mesopotamia.

It was fairly evident, therefore, that Maude would have to face without Russian assistance the intended Turco-German offensive. The demands made by him in this crisis seem as modest as those afterwards made by Allenby appear excessive; he was satisfied with the promise of a number of additional battalions from India—where voluntary recruiting was now producing a great reserve of reinforcements, and would eventually result in his original four divisions being increased by three.³⁹ A small item in the reorganisation of the force was rendered possible by the arrival at the front on July 14th of the signal squadron raised in Australia for the Indian Cavalry Division.⁴⁰

By September it became obvious that the intended Turkish effort to retake Baghdad had been seriously delayed; actually —though this was not yet realised by the British—it had for the time been abandoned. **Maude's Defensive—Ramadi** The threat of a British offensive in Palestine caused Falkenhayn to realise that the original plan was unsafe, and with difficulty he forced Enver to divert his Yilderim Army to Palestine. Mustapha Kemal, for similar reasons, resigned his command. On the British side the notion of the Russians reaching Mosul had been given up. Maude was to remain on the defensive.

But the defensive was to be an active one, and he was determined to get in the first stroke, his interior lines offering him excellent opportunities. He therefore began his 1917-18 campaign in September with a second attempt on the Turkish

³⁹ One, the 15th, was already concentrated at Baghdad; the 17th had been concentrated there by September; and the 18th was forming at Baghdad by November.

⁴⁰ The squadron, which was under Captain W. H. Payne, had been formed at the engineer camp, Moore Park, Sydney, and had left Port Jackson on May 9. Its transport, the *Port Sydney*, was escorted out of Fremantle by the Japanese cruiser *Kasuga*. In Mesopotamia the usual half-dozen camp followers were attached to it.

position on the Euphrates, at Ramadi, where, it was understood, the Turco-German attacking force would probably concentrate. The Turkish commander held a strong position—a ridge with his left on the river and his right on a lake. Feinting east of the river, Maude sent a cavalry column (with "C" station) across the desert to the western flank, part of the infantry following. For the desert march 12,000 gallons of water were carried by Ford cars. By the small hours on September 28th the Turks were completely outflanked. The attack was launched, the cavalry made a dash across the Turkish rear. By the afternoon they were directly behind the Turks, shelling them, while "C" station, under shrapnel fire, reported the situation.⁴¹ (It is recorded that, although the pellets were churning the dust around him, Sergeant Longton,⁴² who was sending the message, "never missed a dot or wavered on a dash." "We're lucky—they never fall in the same place twice," he said to the mechanic, Sapper Murray Parkes,⁴³ working on the engine beside him.) The Turks, finding themselves surrounded, vainly tried to break through the cavalry in rear, and the whole garrison, nearly 4,000 strong, was captured.

This sweeping success for the time being crushed the Turkish defence on the Euphrates—the 12th Indian Brigade (with "G" station) penetrated 35 miles, to Hit, without finding the enemy.

Maude followed this up at once with an attempt made from his other flank to cut off part of the extended line of the **Mandali and Daur** Turkish XIII Corps, thrown out across the Diala and the Persian road. In September he had retaken Mandali and on October 18th advanced with several columns of infantry and cavalry. The 7th Cavalry Brigade (with "H" pack station as its only means of communication⁴⁴) straddled the Persian road in the foot-hills.

⁴¹ The Cavalry Divisional Signal Squadron was not employed with the 6th Cavalry Brigade in this battle, but an officer and a few men were attached to the force for experience. "G" pack station was with the infantry. "F" station had replaced "G" at Falluja.

⁴² Sgt. W. H. J. Longton, M.S.M. (No. 14328; 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn.). Railway telegraphist; of Seddon, Vic.; b. Yarraville, Vic., 1895. (The quotation is from *With Horse and Morse*, p. 63.)

⁴³ Spr. M. Parkes (No. 17539; Cav. Div. Sig. Sqn.). Commercial traveller; of Waverley, N.S.W.; b. Liverpool, N.S.W., 22 Jan., 1890.

⁴⁴ "I" and "L," New Zealand stations, were with the infantry in this operation. "A" (new station) was at Baghdad, as was "B." "D" was working for III Corps; "E" at Samarra; "G" at Ramadi; "J," Hindiya; "K," Aziziyeh.

But the Turks, probably warned by the dust raised by the troops, slipped away behind the foot-hills to Kifri. A feeble advance, made by them along the Tigris in order to divert the British from pursuing this attack, ended as soon as a column was sent against it.

Maude now seized the chance of striking the enemy on the Tigris at Daur. The cavalry division (with "C", "F", and "H" stations) tried to repeat the Ramadi success, advancing up creeks in an endeavour secretly to outflank and cut off the enemy, the wireless stations operating with half-masts to avoid detection; but the cavalry (some of whose Australian despatch riders using their motor-bicycles acted as pilots preceding the armoured cars during the night march) erred slightly in direction, ran into the flank of the enemy, and was held up. The column was also bombed from the air, and although the 7th Division on November 2nd seized the Turkish position and three days later captured Tikrit, the Turkish XVIII Corps escaped after burning part of its stores.

In the midst of these successes due to his capacity and driving power, General Maude died on November 18th of cholera. His death gave rise to a strange situation, for, owing to his habitual secrecy, neither his staff nor Lieutenant-General Marshall⁴⁵ of the III Corps, who succeeded him, had any knowledge of his plans. The situation, however, had been much simplified by General Allenby's success in Palestine, where, on October 31st, Beersheba had been taken and the Gaza-Beersheba line forced. News now arrived that five Turkish divisions from Aleppo and part of the reinforcement from Germany had gone to Palestine. Any early attempt by the Turks to retake Baghdad was, therefore, obviously out of the question. The Russian forces south and west of the Caspian were, however, melting. The Cossacks seemed staunchest in the Allies' cause, and in October General Prjevalski, commanding the Caucasus Army, spoke of sending 15,000 of them, who, it was hoped, might take the place in

⁴⁵ Well known to many Australians at Gallipoli, where he commanded a brigade of the 29th Division.

Persia of Baratov's troops; but in November occurred the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd. The Cossacks were likely to be required in their own region; but in Baratov's army one volunteer group of rather more than 1,000 Cossacks—horse, foot and guns, doctors, and nurses—had determined to stand by their leader—a heroic figure, Colonel Bicherakov—who was standing by the Allies.⁴⁶ Baratov sent him to intercept some of the Swede-trained Persian *gendarmerie*, who had gone over to the Turks; and, carrying out this mission along the Baghdad-Caspian road, Bicherakov had come through, in November, to Maude's flank. As he was there, cut off from his own force, the British temporarily maintained his troops. He had with him a Russian wireless section, and on November 26th some more Australian operators were sent to handle for him all English messages.

General Marshall was now informed by Sir William Robertson that his chief duty was to secure by active defence the British influence in the Baghdad region. Further, if his supplies were sufficient, he was to help with them the Russians who were keeping the Turks out of Persia; to economise shipping, he must live as far as possible on the country; and he might have to give up part of his force for service elsewhere.

General Marshall's first action was to attempt, by attacking with a number of columns, to outflank and crush the Turks on the hills (the Jabal Hamrin) between himself and Persia. The cavalry division (with "C", "F", and "H" stations, and its Australian signal squadron) was to penetrate those hills near Chai Khana by the Adhaim, on the Turkish right. But the cavalry were seen by an enemy aeroplane, and the passes were strongly guarded. Elsewhere the Turks were driven back⁴⁷ but nowhere surrounded. The end of the Persian road was cleared. Bicherakov's Cossacks (with their wireless, and the attached Australians) had fought on the flank of these operations, and finally occupied Qasr-i-Shirin, where the road entered Persia.

The Bolshevik Government in Russia had now arranged with the Germans an armistice of which one of the terms was

⁴⁶ They were known as the Partizanski (or band of irregulars). Their wireless station was "8SD."

⁴⁷ "D," "I," and "L" stations were attached to I Corps H.Q. and the infantry.

that both their armies were to withdraw from Persia. The Bolshevik Government was not universally accepted in Russia; but it was clear that Baratov's army was becoming worthless, and neither Turks nor Germans were likely to abandon their efforts to penetrate Persia. Moreover, in addition to German propaganda, which was exceedingly clever, Bolshevik propaganda was penetrating everywhere. The Pan-Turk and other revolutionary movements were again flaming up, and at this stage the British Minister at Teheran suggested that General Marshall should take over from the Russians the task of protecting the Persian road. This, however, would mean an extension of his communications by 500 miles—twice the direct distance from Baghdad to Basra. The project was therefore impossible without a great increase in Marshall's force—especially in his motor-transport. Moreover as, at this time, the Russian peace negotiations had thrown the Allies upon the defensive, and reserves were needed to meet the great German attack to be expected in 1918, the War Office desired a reduction of it rather than any increase; and in December the 3rd (Lahore) Division was sent to Palestine.

Sir William Robertson indicated that, for barring entry to Persia, another—and a highly ingenious—method was being adopted. Meanwhile early in January, at Baratov's request, Bicherakov's group went on to Kermanshah in the hope of rallying some elements of the Russian Army there. At the same time a column under Lieutenant-Colonel Matthews⁴⁸ of the 1/4th Hampshire (with "D" station) was sent to protect the near end of the road at Khaniqin. From there Colonel Matthews and part of his column (with an improvised station "VIS" in Ford vans) went on to meet the now returning "AA" wireless station, which had been so long cut off with the Russians. That station, originally at Qasr-i-Shirin, had had to accompany the Russians eastwards when they left—and looted—that town, retiring before the Turks. In withdrawing along the great road through the hills, the Russians were raided by Kurds and suffered many casualties. The Australian transport sergeant, S. J. Ryan,⁴⁹ took part in the

⁴⁸ Col. C. L. Matthews, D.S.O.; Durham Light Infy. Commanded 1/4th Bn., Hampshire Regt., 1916/19. Officer of British Regular Army; b. Stoke Bishop, Bristol, Eng., 27 Aug., 1877.

⁴⁹ Sgt. S. J. Ryan, D.C.M. (No. 14257; 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn.). Mail contractor; of Armidale, N.S.W.; b. Dumaresq, N.S.W., 15 Oct., 1879.

fight, in which his gharis were robbed. At Kermanshah, to which the force withdrew, the station was short of supplies, and its men began to be regarded with some hostility by the Russians, owing to German propaganda, which blamed the British for continuing the war; but it eventually secured money through the British consul (Lieutenant-Colonel Kennion⁵⁰), and was also greatly helped by the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Stead,⁵¹ American missionaries, and Mr. and Mrs. Durie⁵² of the Imperial Bank of Persia.

In the new year came the order for its relief. Colonel Kennion, with some Persians whom he had raised to "guard" the road, escorted the station to the Pai Taq pass where Matthews met it.⁵³ About the same time Bicherakov's group (with its handful of attached Australians), flying its skull-and-crossbone pennants and singing Russian part-songs, passed, going the other way. "A good-hearted mob", the wireless men called them.⁵⁴ To help in keeping open the nearer part of the road, an advance party of the 1/4th Hampshire with a New Zealand station ("I") moved in January to Qasr-i-Shirin. A second column, under Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges⁵⁵ of the 14th Hussars (with "F" station), reached Qasr-i-Shirin on January 18th; and on the 20th the operators of "F" were sent with an advanced platoon of the Hampshire to the Pai Taq pass where, in summer kits, they camped close to the snow level.

While some of the advanced wireless stations were thus sharing the experiences of the columns thrust out into wild country, the headquarters stations were still carrying on their vital work of intercepting all enemy messages within their range and handling the more exacting and important traffic of wireless communication for the higher staff.

⁵⁰ Lieut.-Col. R. L. Kennion, C.I.E. Officer of Indian Foreign and Political Dept.; of Petersfield, Sussex, Eng.; b. Egremont, Cumberland, 16 Dec., 1866.

⁵¹ Rev. F. M. Stead; of Canton, Minnesota; missionary at Kermanshah, since 1902. Dr. Blanche Stead; of Chicago, Illinois; Medical missionary at Kermanshah, 1902/22; died, 21 Feb., 1922. (Mr. and Mrs. Stead at one time housed the Australians and Mrs. Stead even cooked for them.)

⁵² Mr. and Mrs. R. N. Dewar-Durie.

⁵³ The scene is described by Edmund Candler, the British war-correspondent, in *On the Edge of the World*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ *With Horse and Mors*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Lieut.-Col. E. J. Bridges, M.C.; 14th (King's) Hussars. Officer of British Regular Army; of Charlwood, Surrey, Eng.; b. Ewell, Surrey, 12 April, 1882.

CHAPTER II

SERVICE IN DUNSTERFORCE AND MESOPOTAMIA, 1918-19

THE plan adopted by the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet (led by Lord Curzon), as an alternative to any attempt to guard Persia with British troops, was to send a handful of British officers and N.C.O's of picked quality to organise and lead any elements of the Russian forces or of the civilian population in Trans-Caucasia that were ready to continue resistance to the Turks. An endeavour to effect the same object with British forces might well have required the despatch of an additional army.

Not unnaturally, the War Office had no very clear understanding of the feeling then animating the Russian soldiery, particularly towards any stranger who urged them to continue a hateful and trying war which their government had formally ended. It was not, however, from the Russian Army, as such, that the War Office was sanguine of obtaining effective help, but rather from the Georgians, Armenians, and Assyrians—Christian inhabitants who had been fighting for the Russians and who had everything to fear from the entry or re-entry of the Turks into their countries, an event which, for the Armenians at least, would mean wholesale massacre. The British mission, therefore, was to make its way to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia (where Lieutenant-Colonel Pike⁵⁶ was attached to headquarters of the Caucasus Army), in order to organise a force to replace the main part of that army.⁵⁷ Baratov's weakened force in north-west Persia would be supplemented by a separate Persian force, to be raised under the orders of General Marshall of the Mesopotamian force.

⁵⁶ Lieut.-Col. G. D. Pike, M.C.; 9th Gurkha Rifles. Officer of Indian Regular Army; b. 2 June, 1880. Accidentally killed, at Vladikavkaz, Trans-Caucasia, 15 Aug., 1918.

⁵⁷ The French were organising the remnants of Russian forces *north* of the Caucasus.

The choice of the picked leaders who were to compose the mission was left largely to Colonel Byron,⁵⁸ who had fought in the South African War, and who decided to make the selection chiefly from the dominion forces. The project was kept a close secret—for months the mission was known as the “hush-hush” party. So it was that on the 3rd of January, 1918, the commander of the Australian Corps, General Birdwood, and the Canadian, New Zealand, and South African leaders received from the War Office a request to assist Colonel Byron, who was being sent to France to secure officer volunteers for “a very important and difficult mission.” “We well realise,” said the letter to Birdwood, “how difficult it is for you to spare good officers, and especially the kind of officers we want, but from Colonel Byron’s explanation you will realise what a big question is involved—nothing more or less than the defence of India and the security of our whole position in the East. If we can only stem the rot in the Caucasus and on the Persian frontier and interpose a barrier against the vast German-Turkish propaganda of their Pan-Turanian scheme, which threatens to inflame the whole of Central Asia including Afghanistan, our minds will be at rest as regards Mesopotamia and India, the latter of which is practically bled white of Indian troops.”

Colonel Byron, who brought this letter himself, pointed out that, with the collapse of the Russian Caucasus Army, both sides of the Caspian Sea and the way across it, from Baku to Krasnovodsk, and thence to Central Asia, were open to the enemy. But it was believed that, with clean, daring, resourceful leadership, parts of the local forces could be reorganised sufficiently to hold their ground with ease in view of the poor quality of the forces that the Turks were directing to those regions. It would probably be impossible to keep open communication with the contingent; if it managed to pass the Persian road from Baghdad to the Caspian, and thence through Baku to Tiflis, the gates might close behind it. It must expect to be left to do the best it could; but it would

⁵⁸ Brig.-Gen. Hon. J. J. Byron, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded Q’land Artillery, 1895/99; member of Union Senate, South Africa, 1910/20, of House of Assembly, 1921/35; served in German South-West African campaign, 1914/15, and subsequently in East African campaign; second-in-command, Dunsterforce, 1918/19. B. County Wexford, Ireland, 1865. Died, 17 Feb., 1935.

be given a leader of the quality required, and a capable staff of British officers experienced in the East. It was expected that a call for officers for "what may be a hazardous enterprise, requiring initiative, resource, and courage, and power of dealing with and managing men"⁵⁹ would keenly appeal to many officers, of whom from twelve to twenty were required from the A.I.F. in France, a similar number from the Canadians, twelve from the New Zealand force, and a number from the South Africans.

In the A.I.F. the appeal, made by Birdwood in a secret letter to each of his five divisional commanders on 3rd January, 1918, brought instant response. Birdwood asked for men of "exactly" the class of Major "Harry" Murray, the most famous fighter in the force (who, he suggested, might himself care to volunteer). About four were required from each division, and by January 8th the names were in. A number were interviewed by Byron. To four outstanding men—Major Murray, Captain Jacka, and the brothers Captains A. M. and D. S. Maxwell, all of the 4th Division—Birdwood, in spite of his own previous suggestion and Byron's urgency, refused leave; but the twenty chosen, with one or two exceptions (due to insufficient insistence upon qualities other than mere daring), were "the cream of the cream" of the Australian regimental leaders. On January 11th they were ordered to London.

On January 10th there reached Birdwood a request for forty N.C.O's of "relatively similar qualities." He objected that he was already short of reinforcements, and the War Office consequently reduced the Australian quota to twenty.⁶⁰ These were sent to London by the 20th. Here the twenty officers had already reported on January 14th to the Tower of London, where they joined some 14 Canadian, 10 New Zealand, and 12 South African officers, as well as 20 British (mostly from Klondyke, California, and other distant parts). In Palestine also General Chauvel, Birdwood's deputy in the A.I.F. command there, had been asked to furnish a fraction of a quota to be sent by Allenby's force. Chauvel, adopting

⁵⁹ With an allowance of £1 a day for food—which they must find for themselves.

⁶⁰ They were to be given (when they did not already have it) the rank of sergeant and to be allowed 10s. a day for food.



58. No. 7 PACK WIRELESS SET OPERATING WITH THE 7TH CAVALRY BRIGADE IN MESOPOTAMIA IN 1918

The column was between the Adhaim River and the foothills. The Bengal Lancers shown are the rear-guard of the column; on realising that the wireless section was being left without protection, the officer-in-charge brought his lancers back.

*Taken by Sapper J. H. Brier, 1st Aust. Wireless Signal Sqn.
Aust. War Memorial Collection No. H16844.*



59. No. 9 (WAGGON) WIRELESS STATION WITH COLONEL SWEET'S COLUMN, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 1918
Climbing the pass between Kala Jukh and Hissar in Kurdistan on the way to Zenjan
(Colonel Sweet is in the foreground on the left watching his troops)

*Taken by Sapper E K Burke, 1st Aust Wireless Signal Sq.
Aust. War Memorial Collection No H16843.*

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different principles of selection, detached two officers and five N.C.O's of the Light Horse.

The party in London had to live near the Tower and report daily, meanwhile buying the required outfit;⁶¹ but the secret of their destination and duty was perfectly kept until January 28th, the day before they sailed, when Colonel Steel,⁶² of the General Staff at the War Office, fully explained it to them. Until they reached the Persian Gulf, the N.C.O's, who left London on January 29th with the officers, knew nothing of their destination except that the Mission was sometimes entitled the "Baghdad Party". With them went 11 Russian officers and one Armenian. After travelling across France and Italy to Taranto, and thence to Alexandria, they were joined by another quota of 20 officers and 40 N.C.O's from Palestine and Egypt. Going by Suez, and Koweit, they reached Basra on March 4th, whence they moved in two batches to Baghdad, and by March 28th were occupying their camp at Hinaidi, four miles from the city. Here sightseeing ended, and intensive training commenced; lessons in Russian and Persian had been begun on the voyage.

The leader of the expedition, whom the main party had not yet seen, was Major-General Dunsterville. The original of "Stalky" in Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.*, he had pursued a patriotic and adventurous career in the East. He was widely travelled, and a fine linguist with a keen friendship for the Russians. The call had come to him when serving on the north-west frontier of India. He had reached Baghdad on January 18th, and his staff—chosen mainly from British officers in India and Mesopotamia—and also the local quota for his force, now officially known as the "Dunsterforce", began to arrive at once.

It was with a view to the carrying out of the tasks of this Mission that General Marshall had just pushed out his posts **Dunsterville's Preliminary Dash** to guard the nearer part of the Persian road from which the Russians had retired.

⁶¹ This cost up to £80, of which the Government paid £25 10s.

⁶² Colonel R. A. Steel, C.M.G., C.I.E., p.s.c.; 17th Cavalry. G.S.O. (2), Indian Army Corps, France, 1914/15; G.S.O. (3), 35th British Div., 1915; G.S.O. (2), War Office, 1916, G.S.O. (1), 1916/18. Officer of Indian Regular Army; b. 6 Oct., 1873. Died 13 July, 1928.

Marshall was frankly opposed to the whole undertaking, which he regarded as a "mad enterprise," devised by the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet to meet purely imaginary dangers, and hampering the conduct of his main campaign.⁶³ However, as it was ordered, he had to assist. Dunsterville, on arrival at Baghdad, decided that, in view of the increasingly uncertain conditions in the whole region, it was urgent for him to gain touch with the British representatives in Tiflis without delay. Accordingly on January 27th—two months before his London party reached Baghdad—he started with his first party, drawn from Mesopotamia and India, of 11 officers, 2 clerks, and 41 drivers in 41 Ford vans. The advanced detachments of Marshall's army newly posted along the road watched this party going through.

The rapid diminution of the Russian Army's resistance caused the spearhead of Turkish activity again to be directed towards the Caspian, where Turks and Germans each wanted to seize Baku for their own purposes, while both renewed their efforts to enter Persia. It is true that, partly owing to quarrels between these allies, their progress towards the Caspian was exceedingly slow, while farther south, after April, the resistance of Armenians, Assyrians, and a few Russians stopped their advance near Urmia, 250 miles from the Persian road, so that only agents and single emissaries got through to Persia. Persia, however, was fermenting with democratic feeling, which enemy agents were using for their own purposes, and, if trouble was to be avoided in India, it was urgent to steady the nation.

This task, as it turned out, fell largely upon the Dunsterforce. In the first place, General Dunsterville with his handful of officers and Ford vans, found it, for the time being, impossible to reach Baku, though he succeeded in getting 600 miles on the way. After leaving the last British outpost on the Pai Taq heights, he passed, despite great difficulties on the route,⁶⁴ the three large Persian towns of Kermanshah (where were Bicherakov and his group, with Australian wireless men), Hamadan, and Kazvin—each of roughly 50,000 people.

⁶³ See *Memories of Four Fronts*, by Lieut.-General Sir William Marshall, pp. 282-7.

⁶⁴ The greatest was provided by the Asadabad pass, between Kermanshah and Hamadan. It is 7,600 feet high, and was then deep in snow.

The party then pushed on along the last bare, barren watershed, that of the Elburz mountains, on the other side of which the road plunged through amazingly different country—the jungle which led down to Resht and the neighbouring port of Enzeli on the Caspian. These slopes were the home of the Gilani or Jangali people, among whom a genuine patriot, Mirza Kuchik Khan, had raised revolution with the cry of “Persia for the Persians.” He was being advised by German and Austrian officers, who were using his earnestness for purely German ends; and, though they were letting through thousand upon thousand of Baratov’s disbanding and undisciplined Russians, it was uncertain whether the road would be open to a British party. But, although heavily armed warriors were passed near Resht, no opposition was offered, and on February 17th Dunsterville and his small party reached Enzeli, which was in the hands of a Bolshevik committee.

Here Dunsterville was first faced by a circumstance which handicapped him greatly throughout. His duty was to take no side in the revolution and merely to support and organise the local people in resisting the invasion of the Turks and Germans. But the British Government had refused to recognise the Bolshevik Government, and in consequence the Bolsheviks were hostile and inclined to suspect that Dunsterville was working for their overthrow. The local Bolshevik committee in charge at Enzeli at once asked him to explain the presence of himself and his men, and, though he assured them that he had no counter-revolutionary aims, he knew they were hostile. His intelligence staff, the efficiency of which throughout was marvellous, discovered within a few hours that Kuchik Khan was pressing for the party’s arrest. He also found that the full object of his mission, supposed to be so closely secret, was perfectly well known to the Bolshevik committee,⁶⁵ which had orders to stop him at all costs. After carefully ascertaining the position through his intelligence staff, and reluctantly rejecting a plan of seizing a steamer and going on to Baku despite the Bolshevik gunboats, Dunsterville decided that, as his success depended entirely on securing the goodwill of the Trans-Caucasians, his only wise

⁶⁵ Probably the Germans had an equally efficient intelligence system at Tiflis.

course was to withdraw along the road by which he had come, organise (with his main party, which would soon be arriving) the local "front" in Persia, and wait for a possible further chance of reaching Tiflis. He cleverly escaped arrest, withdrawing his party very early on February 20th, and returned to Hamadan.⁶⁶ His reason for choosing this town as his headquarters was that, by means of the net of wireless stations established by the Mesopotamian force and the Russians, he was there in touch with Baghdad.

Both General Dunsterville and General Marshall knew at this time that it was hopeless to look to Baratov's Russians to safeguard the Persian road; Bicherakov's Cossacks were the only part of that force which was prepared to go on fighting, and it was said that even of these a third was pressing to return home. Bicherakov on February 11th flew to Baghdad and informed General Marshall that his Cossacks would remain as rear-guard of Baratov's withdrawing army corps until February, when they, too, would leave; he thought that British troops had no chance of success among the war-weary Russians at Tiflis.⁶⁷ General Marshall was reluctant to take the responsibility for safeguarding the Persian road, holding that a thrust to Mosul would be its best protection, but Sir William Robertson informed him that the road must be guarded. General Dunsterville, back in Hamadan, advised that, whatever the Persian politicians might say, the Persian people would welcome British protection of their frontier, and urged that he himself should stay in Persia and secure the people's friendship, while waiting for another chance of reaching Tiflis. A telegram from Sir Henry Wilson (who at this stage replaced Robertson) stated that the Government had approved this policy. The garrison of the road would be increased. The Government, on the advice of General Smuts, who had visited Egypt in order to advise it as to future policy in the Eastern theatre, had decided to remain on the defensive

⁶⁶ The British official historian says that it was afterwards discovered that the Jangalis tried to get the homeward-bound Russian troops to consent to their ambushing the party, but the Russians refused.

⁶⁷ See *British Official History: The Mesopotamian Campaign*, Vol. IV, p. 110.

in Mesopotamia, and transfer another division⁶⁸ and some artillery from there to Palestine, where the attack was to be pressed. While in Persia Dunsterville would be under Marshall's orders as regards the command of troops, but in matters of politics must be guided by the British minister at Teheran.

To establish British influence among the local Persians—into whose country neither he nor the Russians, Turks, or Germans had any legal right to intrude—General Dunsterville chose the typically British method of undertaking to relieve the disastrous famine which, partly as a result of the campaigns of the Turks and Russians through north-west Persia, was afflicting the inhabitants there. The Mission was well equipped with money, and by employing the poorer sections of the population upon road work, and facilitating the supply of wheat (which—by customary procedure—was being hoarded by wealthy Persian purveyors⁶⁹) this small force of British officers gradually established among the poorer citizens a firm friendship for the British Empire. The chief opponents were the wealthy wheat owners and the politicians of the so-called "democratic party," which generally represented aims similar to those of Kuchik Khan, and was similarly supported by German money and propaganda. There was a clear possibility that this "democratic" movement might overthrow the Persian Government, admit German influence, and set ablaze Afghanistan and the Indian frontier, which was the German object. The leaders of the movement went to the length of declaring that the wheat supplied by the English was poisoned, and their adherents occasionally fired sneaking shots by night at the houses occupied by Dunsterville and his officers; but the improvement in the conditions of the famine-stricken people at Hamadan through the Mission's work was so obvious, that the presence of the British became strongly based on the people's goodwill.

Equally effective was the intelligence system established by Dunsterville's experienced staff. By this means he was kept

⁶⁸ The 7th (Meerut) Division was sent.

⁶⁹ Dunsterville even used methods of "bluff"; for example the sending of "private" telegrams in English concerning a supposed project of importing large stores of wheat from Mesopotamia caused the local wheat hoarders to release their stores and so brought down the price.

aware not only of the feeling of the people, but apparently of the contents of 'all telegrams, not to say of important letters, that passed through the region of the Mission's activities. The knowledge thus gained gave him an enormous advantage in dealing with any local opposition; and after the move of Bicherakov's detachment in March from Kermanshah to Kazvin, nearer the Caspian (where the Cossacks barred the road along which the Jangalis were threatening to advance on Teheran), this intelligence system enabled the Mission to stop completely the passage of German and Turkish agents. A number were arrested and were guarded as prisoners by the handful of 1/4th Hampshire now sent to Hamadan. To assist in policing the roads and similar duties, the Mission raised and drilled Persian "Levies." It was recognised that these would be useless for any fighting against the Turks, for which purpose a different force was raised. This was recruited from among the warlike tribes in the mountains to the north-west, nearer to the Turkish border, and was known as the "Irregulars." It was to be used in resisting any Turkish advance from Armenia towards the Persian road. Dunsterville bought from Baratov a great part of the withdrawing Russian Army's weapons and supplies; but quantities of arms were also sold by the Russian soldiers to the Persian population and to the Kurdish robber tribes in the hills, which had never before been so well equipped for mischief.

At the end of March, when the Russians, except Bicherakov at Kazvin, had withdrawn, the flank of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force was extended to Kermanshah, the 36th Brigade becoming responsible for that end of the road. For service beyond Kermanshah Dunsterville borrowed a platoon of the 1/4th Hampshire and a squadron of the 14th Hussars. Despite the anxiety of Bicherakov and his Cossacks to get home, this most loyal leader had now agreed with Dunsterville to remain until British troops took the place of his detachment. He asked the British to pay only his actual expenses, insisting that he and his men were not mercenaries. It was only his solid force at Kazvin that was overawing the Jangalis, although batches of Dunsterville's mission now began to reach Hamadan. The second of them—20 officers and 20 N.C.O's—arrived by Ford cars on April 3rd. The later

parties—each including a number of the Australians—made the journey from the Persian border by marching, each officer camping at night in his own 40-lb. tent, and the sergeants camping in twos or fours in larger tents. The marches had to be made as in mountain warfare, with flanking parties working over the hills and strong guards for the mule-transport; but, although the third batch—some 60 strong—passed on the road a most formidable looking body of 1,500 standard- and arm-bearing Persian troops, the march was not in any way opposed except by a few wild shots from some Kurds, caught in the act of raiding a party of nomads. The third batch reached Hamadan on May 18th, and the fourth—80 officers (including the Russians) and 150 N.C.O's under Lieutenant-Colonel Keyworth⁷⁰—on May 25th. The march was a stiff one, and an Australian officer records with pride a statement that in the fourth party, of the 14 who completed the journey entirely by foot and without a rest, 10 were Australians.⁷¹

When the main body of the Dunsterforce reached Hamadan, the original party had already been at work for four months, and in that lapse of time not only the local but the general situation had greatly changed. The German victories in France, begun on March 21st, had resounded, even in Persia. In Trans-Caucasia the cause of the Georgians, whom Dunsterville had hoped to assist, had been taken up by the Germans, who were actually befriending them against the Turks. At the same time the Turks were being welcomed by the neighbouring Tartars. In May the Germans commandeered part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The Turks had pounced on an excuse to denounce their terms of peace with Russia, and Enver's brother, Nuri Pasha, arrived to organise among the Tartars an "Islam Army" for seizing Baku and thrusting into Persia. Both Germans and Turks obviously aimed at the capture of the oilfields at Baku, and the prospect of Dunsterville's getting to Tiflis appeared to

⁷⁰ Colonel R. G. Keyworth, D.S.O.; R.A. Officer of British Regular Army; of Teignmouth, South Devon, Eng.; b. Bishopsteignton, South Devon, 24 Jan., 1873.

⁷¹ *With Horse and Morsé*, p. 105.

be slight. Yet the position offered compensating advantages. The Turks and Germans were quarrelling. In face of the German pressure, the Bolsheviks asked the British to help in reorganising their Black Sea Fleet, and there now appeared some likelihood that they—as well as the Armenians—would welcome British help in protecting Baku. By defending that town and, if possible, controlling the shipping on the Caspian, the object of Britain and her allies in this region might still be attained. But the tide of Turks eastwards, into the region now undefended by Russian armies, was setting strongly.

Both Sir Henry Wilson and the Commander-in-Chief in India were of opinion that the summer—the worst campaigning time in Mesopotamia, but the best in the Caucasus—should be used for supporting Dunsterville with reinforcements as strong as the supply problem would permit. In order to maintain activity on its chief front, the Mesopotamian force had struck the Turks very hard in *March on the Euphrates*.⁷²

The Euphrates Advance

At first the Turkish force there fell back quickly before the advance of the 15th Indian division, abandoning the bitumen fields at Hit. The Turkish commander was thereupon superseded, and, when a fortnight later the same Indian division—together with the new 11th Cavalry Brigade and a light armoured car brigade—attacked again at Khan Baghdadi, twenty-two miles beyond, the Turks held on stubbornly and thus allowed the cavalry to reach, by a long *détour* over the desert ridges, a strong position four miles in their rear. After hard fighting, the infantry seized from the front the successive positions of the Turks, whose whole force of 4,000, after failing to break through the cavalry, surrendered.

There followed a rapid and adventurous advance by the cavalry (Brigadier-General Cassels⁷³) and armoured cars (Lieutenant-Colonel Hogg⁷⁴) in an effort to rescue the British

⁷² With the attacking force went several Anzac wireless stations (now known by numbers instead of letters). No. 4 (formerly "D") was with the 15th Division and Nos. 3 ("G") and 10 ("J") with the cavalry. No. 39 was established in the field from Nos. 3 and 4.

⁷³ General Sir Robert Cassels, G.C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., p.s.c. B.G.G.S. Mespot. Exped. Force, 1917; commanded 11th Indian Cav. Bde., 1917/19; Commander-in-Chief, India, since 1935. Of Ayrshire, Scotland; b. Bombay, India, 15 March, 1876.

⁷⁴ Colonel J. McK. T. Hogg, 2/39th Garhwal Rifles. Officer of Indian Regular Army. B. 20 May, 1869.

air force commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Tennant,⁷⁵ who, with another officer, had been shot down and captured by the enemy on the eve of the attack. With the armoured cars went an improvised Australian wireless station (No. 39) in a van. After an exciting pursuit of sixty miles past Haditha to Ana, where the Turkish commander and staff were captured, No. 39, on setting up, found itself beyond wireless range, and had to return to Haditha. The armoured cars went on, and next day overtook the fleeing escort and recaptured the officers over 100 miles behind the front which had been broken two days before—a truly remarkable achievement.

On his other flank General Marshall safeguarded the Mesopotamian end of the Persian road by driving back in April the 2nd Turkish Division,⁷⁶ whose proximity to the road had been creating much unrest among the Kurds and Persians.

**Southern
Kurdistan** At the end of April five columns pushed out into the low-ridged plateau between the Jabal Hamrin and the mountains of Kurdistan. This country in spring, covered with grass and flowers, with many rich crops, was a paradise for the troops. The 6th Cavalry Brigade (with Nos. 8 and 11 pack wireless stations) by a long march towards Tuz Khurmatli tried to place itself astride of the road by which the Turks would retire towards Kirkuk, while the infantry attacked the enemy's front at various points. But the Turks retired with little fighting through Kifri, and, though some were caught by the cavalry, the remainder occupied a strong position near Tuz before the cavalry reached it. This was attacked some days later, the cavalry again trying to outflank the enemy despite resistance at the crossings of the Aq Su. The Turks finally made off, but the cavalry rode down a number, 1,300 prisoners and 12 guns being captured.⁷⁷

On being informed by the War Office that it desired him to push this advance to Kirkuk in order to impress the Persians and Afghans as well as the local population, and

⁷⁵ Lieut.-Col. J. E. Tennant, D.S.O., M.C.; R.A.F. (formerly Scots Guards). Commanded R.A.F. in Mesopotamia, 1916/18. Of Yr. of Innes, Elgin, Scotland; b. North Berwick, Scotland, 12 Oct., 1890.

⁷⁶ "Division" was then a misnomer for these Turkish formations. The 2nd was probably under 4,000 strong.

⁷⁷ No. 1 Station (III Corps Advanced H.Q.), No. 10 (13th Division), and No. 12 (38th Inf. Brigade) also took part.

to divert part of the Turkish forces from their impending thrusts through Armenia and towards the Caspian, Marshall immediately arranged for a further advance on that town. This began on May 4th. Kirkuk, which was reached on the 7th, was found abandoned by the Turks, who left there 600 wounded and sick. Marshall had not sufficient troops or transport for continuous occupation of the town, and, after a short pursuit, the British withdrew to Tuz and Kifri. The same wireless stations had accompanied this expedition, and they came in for commendation. All had horses shot. No. 11 managed to get touch with No. 2 (Main Headquarters, III Corps) at Baquba, 110 miles away over hilly country.⁷⁸ In April a punitive expedition⁷⁹ was also sent against a tribe who were in German pay, the Sinjabis, near the Persian road at Qasr-i-Shirin, and no more trouble came from that quarter.

The War Office was meanwhile pressing Marshall to support Dunsterville with a brigade of infantry and a brigade of artillery. Against this Marshall urged that, beyond Kermanshah, 1,000 infantry in Ford cars together with a large force of armoured cars would suffice to enable the Caspian to be reached by June, after which control of that sea might be gained by arming steamers. If he proved wrong, the force suggested by the War Office could be sent later. The War Office acquiesced and promised him ten additional motor transport companies to help in the supply.

**New Move
to Caspian**

At this juncture the Trans-Caucasian Bolsheviks, now thoroughly alarmed by the threat to Baku, decided to regard the Jangalis as enemies, and asked Bicherakov to crush them. Bicherakov agreed, provided the British helped. The Bolsheviks reluctantly assented, and this gave Dunsterville the chance which he awaited. Bicherakov, who was straining to reach the Caucasus before it was too late, wanted the British to control the Caspian; and on May 24th Dunsterville proposed to accompany him with all the available Dunsterforce as far as Baku, starting on May 30th. The War Office at first stopped him, and ordered him to secure the road and try to

⁷⁸ During both the Tuz and Kirkuk operations the 7th Cavalry Brigade engaged in a diversion in the Tigris valley.

⁷⁹ Part of the 26th Mountain Battery went with this.

gain naval control of the Caspian (a small naval force being sent to him); but on June 1st it authorised Marshall to permit Dunsterville or others to go to Baku. The guarding of the road, must, however, come first.

The threat to the road came partly from the Turkish forces 200 miles to the north-west of it, at Tabriz and near Urmia, and partly from the Jangalis who were actually on the road at Manjil, between Kazvin and Enzeli. As protection against the former, Dunsterville sent parties of his officers and N.C.O's to organise, if possible, irregular bodies of local Kurds to bar the two central tracks through arid and mountainous Kurdistan. These parties (accompanied by British pack-wireless stations) made for the two main towns on those routes, Zenjan and Bijar, about 100 miles north-west of Kazvin and Hamadan respectively; Sehneh, similarly placed on a southern route from Urmia to Kermanshah, remained unoccupied until General Marshall sent thither a column in July. Dunsterville's parties for Zenjan and Bijar were despatched shortly after the fourth batch of his force reached Hamadan. The Bijar party, under Major Starnes,⁸⁰ a New Zealander of fine calibre, included all the Australian officers that had yet arrived and most of the New Zealand ones. Both parties started by the route to Zenjan, their destination being kept secret even from their members until they were well on their way thither. The first party, for Zenjan, was, shortly after arrival, sent on another seventy miles to Mianeh, 100 miles from Tabriz. The second, for Bijar, dropped some of its members at Zenjan and then made for Bijar by a track known to exist, but of which the last British intelligence reports were dated 1842. It reached its goal on June 18th.⁸¹

The danger to Baku had now increased. The only local forces opposed to the Turkish advance were those of the Armenians and Bolsheviki in front of that

Baku place—said to be 11,000 strong (with 100 machine-guns and 33 guns). Bicherakov decided to wait no

⁸⁰ Major F. Starnes, D.S.O., O.B.E.; Canterbury Bn. Farmer; of Lower Monterey, N.Z.; b. Motueka, N.Z., 11 Oct., 1888.

⁸¹ Its second-in-command (Captain S. G. Savige), its supply officer (Captain R. H. Hooper), and its transport officer (Captain F. E. Williams) were Australians. Hooper almost immediately escorted to Hamadan a political prisoner and a number of starving deserters from the Turkish Army, and guided back a party of the 14th Hussars and a convoy with money (200,000 krans). (Savige belonged to Hawthorn, Vic.; Hooper to King Island, Tas.; Williams, a Rhodes scholar, to Unley, S. Aust.)

longer, and although Lenin's Central Government refused to allow the British to proceed to Baku its influence there was uncertain, and Dunsterville proposed to go on and see what could be arranged. On June 12th Bicherakov moving from Kazvin scattered the ineffective Jangalis at Manjil bridge, and a few days later reached Enzeli. He at once, by steamer, visited Baku, and, by the process of becoming Bolshevik, not only secured leave to embark his troops but was appointed commander of the Red Army in the Caucasus. This achieved, he returned to Enzeli.

Dunsterville, in touch with him and with the Armenian National Council in Baku—a very capable body—was pressing for a brigade of infantry and artillery to be sent so that he could show a British force in Baku if opportunity arose, but Marshall, firmly in opposition, informed him that he could look for no increase in his force. The 1,000 mobile infantry—two companies each of the 1/4th Hampshire and 1/2nd Gurkhas, two mountain guns (21st Battery), and supplies, all in 500 Ford vans—came along the Persian road towards the end of June, and the road was now taken over from the Russian road-company and guarded by the British as far as the former Jangali headquarters at Resht. Posts were established, and tolls collected for road upkeep; and travel became almost as safe as in England.

But both Sir Henry Wilson and the British Government now complained that the efforts to close the Caspian and Persia to the enemy were insufficiently vigorous, and expressed a doubt whether Marshall realised its importance. Dunsterville was to be asked to say definitely what support he wanted for seizing control of the Caspian and destroying the oilfields—two objectives which the War Office continually impressed on him. Dunsterville was all for pushing on, but not for destroying the fields—a not unnatural attitude since such destruction might reasonably be regarded as treachery by the leaders and people whom he was offering to assist against the Turks. Marshall telegraphed that he was preparing to furnish the 39th British Infantry Brigade and a brigade of artillery, as desired by Dunsterville, who had frequently assured him that such a force could live on the country.

Bicherakov now took his Cossacks to Baku. A handful of British troops replaced them at Enzeli, and Dunsterville waited eagerly for word from him that the townspeople or government of Baku had swung towards British intervention. The town had for some time been divided into two parties on this question, the Bolsheviks being opposed to British help, the Social Revolutionaries favouring it, while the local Russian fleet—a number of gunboats—though Bolshevik, tended to be less hostile than the politicians. For Dunsterville the situation was extraordinarily delicate. The government of Enzeli being Bolshevik, any attempt to suppress it would arouse the opposition of the fleet and the Bolsheviks at Baku, and create difficulties for Bicherakov. Yet the War Office—though relying on Dunsterville's diplomacy to do the work of an army—was suggesting with increasing impatience to the diplomat the measures which he, on the spot, should take. It mistrusted Bicherakov and was persistently anti-Bolshevik. Dunsterville was to remove the Enzeli government, strike at the Bolshevik influence, and push on with his plans. The British consul at Baku was as strongly opposed as Dunsterville to this course; but, as the wireless at Enzeli was Bolshevik, it was most difficult for Dunsterville quickly to communicate these views. Wireless sections were to be sent to him as soon as possible, in order to render him independent of Russian assistance in this respect.

Fortune soon favoured his plan. On July 25th 2,500 Jangalis attacked the small garrison of Hampshires and Gurkhas at Resht and were most thoroughly beaten. Ten days later, after securing correspondence proving that the Bolshevik Committee at Enzeli was intriguing with the Jangalis against the British, Dunsterville arrested and removed the committee, basing his action on grounds so good that he was afterwards able to satisfy the authorities in Baku as to his action. At the same time he seized the Enzeli wireless station, and Australian operators were brought up from Kazvin.

Meanwhile the awaited change had occurred in Baku. The Turks were now advancing on the oilfields; and the attempts of Bicherakov and his Cossacks (together with four armoured cars attached to him by Dunsterville) to stop them at a distance from the town had been rendered useless by the indiscipline

and intrigues of the Red troops.⁸² Finally on July 25th the best of the Red leaders came to Bicherakov and promised to reorganise. The following day the local Bolshevik leaders resigned and the Social Revolutionaries formed a "Centro-Caspian" Government, gave Bicherakov the military command, and called in British help. The fleet was for Bicherakov, and transports had already been despatched to Enzeli.

Dunsterville decided to send his chief intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Stokes,⁸³ with what troops he could spare, to announce that others were coming—the brigade of infantry and the artillery for which he had asked were then on the Persian road at intervals back to railhead. Meanwhile on July 29th the Turks again attacked Baku; the local forces retired, leaving Bicherakov's detachment—the only troops who fought—without ammunition or food; and, when the enemy was 3,000 yards from the wharves, Bicherakov decided to fall back to Derbend, 150 miles to the north, where he asked Dunsterville to join him. After his withdrawal, an unexplained panic appears to have seized the victorious Turks. They fled, and the Armenian defenders, taking heart, pursued but allowed them to keep their hold on a strong line about five miles from the town. Learning that Baku was still held, Dunsterville now sent thither Colonel Stokes and 44 of the Hampshire. Though disappointed with these numbers, the local forces were encouraged by their arrival. Other parties of the 39th Brigade, armoured cars, and artillery were sent on as they arrived at Enzeli. To make sure of transports in case withdrawal from Baku became necessary, Dunsterville and Stokes secured three steamers.⁸⁴ Anxieties as to the land communications were lightened when on August 12th Kuchik Khan made peace, to become henceforth one of Dunsterville's best agents for supplies.

⁸² Among other results, by abandoning a post they had caused the loss of one of the British armoured cars.

⁸³ Colonel C. B. Stokes, C.I.E., D.S.O., O.B.E., p.s.c.; Skinner's Horse. G.S.O. (1), Mespot. Exped. Force, 1917, Dunsterforce, 1918; *Liaison Officer*, Allied Forces in Caucasus, 1919; Chief Brit. Commissioner in Trans-Caucasia, 1920/21. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of London; b. Mussoorie, United Provinces, India, 27 Oct., 1875.

⁸⁴ The *President Kruger*, *Kursh*, and *Argo*.

The Dunsterforce—or rather so much of it as could be spared from urgent duties elsewhere—now entered on its main task, the attempt to turn the local Armenian and Russian forces at Baku into an effective army. These troops, of whom there were found to be between 6,000 and 10,000 divided into 22 battalions controlled by five independent political organisations, were holding across the Baku peninsula a line about 18 miles long. the southern 8 miles lying on a line of cliffs, the rest on lower country, part of which was a salt lake. Between the salt lake and the cliffs the defences included a height known as "Dirty Volcano,"⁸⁵ which was the pivotal point in the right sector. As batches of the 39th British Brigade arrived from Mesopotamia, they were put in to hold vital positions—chiefly in the left sector and at Dirty Volcano; but, when all available parts of the brigade had reached Baku, the British infantry totalled little over 1,000, and the British artillery one battery.⁸⁶ As the Turks were some 14,000 strong, and were already in some of the villages behind the right of the line, the British were far too few to undertake, as the local government hoped (but had never been promised), the whole defence. The issue therefore hung directly upon whether or not the Dunsterforce officers (as advisers to the local commanders) could lick the local infantry and artillery into shape. Eventually the infantry were organised in brigades, each consisting of three local battalions and one British. Several Australians of the Dunsterforce were among the officers engaged in this effort—Captain Lord⁸⁷ with the artillery; Captains McVilly, Judge, and Cameron⁸⁸ with the infantry.

The task proved superhuman. The town-bred Armenians and other local troops talked largely about shedding their blood in defence of their women and children; but when—as happened on August 26th and 31st and September 14th—the enemy attacked, they mostly melted away to the city or failed to support, leaving the British to do the fighting. The aptest

⁸⁵ A second height near it, shown in the map in the *British Official History* as "Mud Volcano," was apparently in the Turkish lines. Some accounts, however, apply this name to "Dirty Volcano."

⁸⁶ There were also three armoured cars, half a machine-gun company, and two aeroplanes.

⁸⁷ Capt. W. F. Lord, M.C., M.M.; 1st Div. Arty. & Dunsterforce. Student teacher; of East Malvern, Vic.; b. Mansfield, Vic., 14 Jan., 1894.

⁸⁸ Capt. E. C. B. Cameron, 13th M.G. Coy. & Dunsterforce. Farmer and grazier; of Wellcamp, Q'land; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 7 Sept., 1889.

summary is furnished by a document presented to Dunsterville by the revolutionary crew of one of the Russian steamers when the episode was over. "We have witnessed with intense admiration the heroic conduct of your brave British soldiers in the defence of Baku. We have seen them suffering wounds and death bravely in defence of our town, which our own people were too feeble to defend."⁸⁹

Thus on August 26th the Turks took Dirty Volcano, and forced back the right of the line, the handful of British infantry there—and they alone—losing heavily. On the 31st the Turks drove back the right again—one Russian battalion on this occasion fighting well in the retirement. Dunsterville now told the local "dictators" that, as their troops would not fight, he would, without further warning, withdraw his force whenever it was necessary to save his men from being uselessly slaughtered. Next day he gave them notice that the British would leave Baku that night. The dictators replied that the British could only be allowed to leave at the same time as the local troops, and after the evacuation of the women and children; and the Russian gunboats were ordered to fire on the British if the transports attempted to leave port. Dunsterville had faced such threats before, as he faced them later, with success; but this time, owing to the confusion in the town, he decided that it would be unfair to withdraw and leave his "allies" planless. He stayed on, and during the next fortnight the situation became more hopeful. The local troops, especially the artillery, showed signs of improvement. Bicherakov sent down 500 Cossacks, and promised another 5,000 in a fortnight. The Russian colony at Lenkoran (on the Caspian coast 130 miles south of Baku)—to which Dunsterville had sent from Baku Lieutenant-Colonel Rawlinson⁹⁰ and a few of the Dunsterforce and Australian wireless operators—had 4,000 men ready to raid the Turkish lines of communication. Moreover increasing dissatisfaction with the dictators had stirred a movement among the citizens to place the management of the town in the hands of the British.

⁸⁹ The crew asked to be taken over as a body and granted British nationality.
⁹⁰ Lieut.-Col. Sir Alfred Rawlinson, Bt., C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O. Served in R.N.V.R. and R.G.A., 1914/16; b. 17 Jan., 1867. Died, 1 June, 1934. (Brother of General Lord Rawlinson.)

On September 12th an Arab deserter from the Turks at Baku reported that they would attack on the 14th. That morning news of the attack was awaited with more confidence; but the first message received was "that the battle was over, and the victorious Turks were advancing at a run, without opposition, on the town."⁹¹ The local troops could not be induced to press a counter-attack, but the British and Bicherakov's handful hit the Turks so hard that during the day they were held out of the town. Dunsterville, who had kept his steamers ready at the wharf, informed the dictators that he would have to withdraw the British contingent that night. In the general confusion he was told to make what arrangements he pleased. The withdrawal took place after dark, one of the Australians, Captain McVilly, being charged with part of the staff work. At nightfall, when the fighting eased, the dictators changed their mind and tried to prevent the withdrawal. But it had been well managed. The 7th North Staffordshire (the battalion that nearly reached Hill "Q" at Anzac on 8th August, 1915) held the enemy to the last; troops, guns, and ammunition were safely embarked,⁹² and though someone of the crew suddenly turned on all the lights of Dunsterville's ship, and the guardship tried to sink her and afterwards six times hit the little *Armenian* which followed with Colonel Rawlinson and his officers holding the crew to their work with pistols, all the ships and the troops in them got safely away to Enzeli. Two Australians, Major Suttor⁹³ and Sergeant Bullen,⁹⁴ who had only just arrived at Baku and had not been notified of the withdrawal, were left behind, but managed to escape on a ship with refugees across the Caspian to Krasnovodsk. A small British guard at the aerodrome retired with Bicherakov's contingent to Petrovsk.

The Baku section was not the only part of the Dunsterforce which, in the end, came in for fighting of a most desperate nature. Shortly before Dunsterville started for Baku, a British airman flew across to the Christian Assyrians (locally named the

**The
Urmia Crisis**

⁹¹ Dunsterville, *The Adventures of the Dunsterforce*, p. 297.

⁹² Some armoured cars and Ford vans were left.

⁹³ Major H. B. Suttor, 7th L.H. Regt. & Dunsterforce. Grazier; b. Hamilton, Waikato, N.Z., 23 July, 1880.

⁹⁴ Sgt. A. L. Bullen (No. 1799; 7th L.H. Regt. & Dunsterforce). Motor driver; of Narrabri, N.S.W.; b. Killne, Somerset, Eng., 1892.

"Jelus"⁹⁵) and Armenians who were then successfully resisting the 5th and 6th Turkish Divisions at Urmia. These were under an Assyrian leader, Aga Petross; the airman carried an offer from Dunsterville to assist by sending northwards from Bijar a party with machine-guns, ammunition, and money.⁹⁶ Aga Petross was to detach part of his force to break through the besieging Turks south of Lake Urmia, meet the convoy, and escort it to Urmia. The party, which started from Bijar on July 19th, was under Captain Savige (of Bullecourt fame), but was escorted by a squadron of the 14th Hussars under Colonel Bridges. Savige's party included five officers and fifteen sergeants of the Dunsterforce (half of them Australians or New Zealanders) and three British batmen. The convoy, which carried £45,000 in Persian silver, twelve Lewis guns, and 100,000 rounds of ammunition, was under Major More.⁹⁷

On July 23rd, the appointed date, the party reached the place for the meeting, Sain Kala, but there was no word of the Assyrians. Two days later, there still being no news of them, Colonel Bridges decided that he must withdraw on account of the shortage of grain for his horses. To Savige's party this decision caused intense disappointment, and its officers at once volunteered to get through to Lake Urmia and obtain news of the Assyrians—"I thought we were not giving them a chance," he writes. The proposal was not approved; but by the time the withdrawal had reached Takan Tepe, fifty miles back, Savige had succeeded in obtaining permission

⁹⁵ The defenders of Urmia came from three main sections. First the Christian (Nestorian) Assyrians of the Urmia villages, of whom 25,000 had (largely through the efforts of an American missionary, Dr. Shedd) survived a "siege" by the more numerous Moslem inhabitants during the first Turkish occupation. They were then saved by the Russians reaching Urmia in May, 1915. Second were the other Nestorian Assyrians from the Hakkari Mountains who, after declaring war on the Turks in 1915, had to fall back towards the Russians who had not reached them. These mountaineers, numbering 35,000, stayed at Salmas, north of Urmia, and the local population (whom they plundered) called them the "Jelus." When the Russian Army crumbled, the Turks in April, 1918, drove from Van 20,000 Armenians, who joined this body. Non-Bolshevik Russian officers reorganised these two sections which resisted at Salmas until June, when they fell back on the other at Urmia. A British officer came from Tiflis with proposals for organisation and assistance which, however, were not followed up and only incensed the local Persians. But the three sections, combined under Aga Petross, resisted fourteen Turkish attacks. On July 8 arrived the British airman, Lieutenant K. M. Pennington, but the local arrangements to meet the English were dilatory. (*See The Measure of a Man* by Mrs. Shedd, and "The Assyrians" in *Headway*, Mar. 1936.)

⁹⁶ Dunsterville had wished to send a much larger force.

⁹⁷ Lieut.-Col. J. C. More, C.I.E., D.S.O.; 51st Sikhs. Officer of Indian Regular Army; b. 13 Feb., 1883.

for his party and convoy to stay there (a proceeding which afterwards saved many thousand lives), the cavalry squadron being left by Colonel Bridges as their escort. From this place, Savige judged, they would still have a chance of reaching the Assyrians if these broke through after all; meanwhile the party would organise a local force with which it hoped itself to break through and reach Urmia.

The raising of this force had barely begun when, on August 1st, a native arrived with news that a great battle was being fought south of the lake. Savige realised that this was the attempt promised by Aga Petross, and next day he heard that the Christians were coming. He moved forward immediately, and on the evening of August 3rd the Assyrians rode into his camp—a magnificent spectacle, troop after troop of cavalry, each preceded by its white cross on a red banner, before the finest of which rode Aga Petross⁹⁸ himself. The march towards Urmia began next morning. At dusk, when again coming in view of Sain Kala, Savige, leading the column,⁹⁹ was surprised to see ahead a crowd of women in brightly-coloured dresses—a sight unknown in Mohammedan villages. Aga Petross, coming up, was obviously struck with horror. "My God," he said, "here are my people!"

The crowd, when questioned, said that the Turks had broken into the city, and they themselves had been forced to flee. They knew nothing more. There had been 80,000 of them at Urmia, and many, if not all, were obviously on the road driving their flocks and herds along with them. It was then too late to take action that night, and Savige had to wait for dawn and further news.¹⁰⁰

At dawn (August 5th) Savige and Captain Reed,¹⁰¹ riding forward, were appalled to see the crowds coming ceaselessly southwards. These said that the end of the multitude was

⁹⁸ He had been in Canada and England and, before the war, represented—and, it is said, faithfully served—the Turkish Government in his district. An account of his able leadership in this break-through is given by Captain Savige in *Stalky's Forlorn Hope* (p. 125).

⁹⁹ With Major More and Captain Reed, another intelligence officer.

¹⁰⁰ Savige now heard from an educated Assyrian that the disaster had its origin in a conspiracy between those sections of the garrison of Urmia which were foreign to the town. Having no attachment to the place, these parties plotted that, on receipt of news (by their special messengers) that Aga Petross had opened a way to the British, they should leave their posts and follow him. On July 30 Dr. Shedd learnt that a retirement had begun. He managed to check it until nightfall, but an all-night conference with their leaders ended with nothing achieved, and at dawn on the 31st Dr. and Mrs. Shedd followed the multitude.

¹⁰¹ Capt. George S. Reed, formerly connected with an English mission in Persia.

some miles away, covered by a rear-guard formed and inspired by an American missionary, Dr. Shedd,¹⁰² in an effort to hold back the Kurds and Persians who constantly raided the rear of the column, murdering the fugitives, and carrying off the young girls for sale for Turkish harems. On Savige's return, as the higher commanders did nothing, he begged for and obtained leave for his party (which volunteered) to go out and fight as rear-guard while the cavalry protected the main body. Savige chose for the rear-guard two officers (Captains Scott-Olsen¹⁰³—an Australian—and Nicol¹⁰⁴—a New Zealander) and six sergeants (comprising one Australian, Sergeant Murphy,¹⁰⁵ two Canadians, a New Zealander, and two British sergeants), with three Lewis guns and six days' rations. Aga Petross promised to furnish 100 men, but, seeing the day wasted without action, these had gone off to guard their families. At dawn Savige and his companions rode on without the promised support.

After riding fifteen miles through crowd after crowd, who wildly hailed them as deliverers, Savige's party realised that they were reaching the tail of the retreat. Wounded women and others, abandoned by their families, struggled past as best they could. In some vehicles were Mrs. Shedd and several of the mission workers, making all possible efforts to encourage and help the withdrawing people; and, lining a ridge ahead, was Dr. Shedd with twenty-four armed refugees waiting for the next arrival of the raiders. Savige relieved him, but took on his refugees, and pushed forward to check the enemy in some rougher country farther on. Six miles ahead they came on a village (either Karawaran or Miandoab) outside which they saw the tethered horses of the Turks who were looting it.

The stand made by Savige and his eight companions that evening and during half of the next day against hundreds of the enemy thirsting like wolves to get at the defenceless throng was as fine as any episode known to the present writer

¹⁰² Rev. Dr. W. A. Shedd. Presbyterian missionary in Urmia, Persia, 1892/1918. Of Marietta, Iowa, U.S.A.; b. Seir, Persia, 24 Jan., 1865. Died 8 Aug., 1918. Mrs. Shedd had been at Urmia since 1903.

¹⁰³ Capt. E. G. Scott-Olsen, M.C.; 55th Bn. & Dunsterforce. Officer of mercantile marine; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, 15 May, 1893.

¹⁰⁴ Capt. R. K. Nicol, M.C.; Wellington Regt. & Dunsterforce. House decorator; of Belmont, Lower Hutt, N.Z.; b. Wellington, N.Z., 27 Oct., 1894. Killed in action, 7 Aug., 1918.

¹⁰⁵ Sgt. B. F. Murphy, D.C.M. (No. 1764; 28th Bn. & Dunsterforce). Horse breaker; of Cue, W. Aust.; b. Geraldton, W. Aust., 17 June, 1889.

in the history of this war. For full details the reader must be referred to Savige's own account; here it can only be said that the marked feature of the fight was that every Dunsterforce man knew that he could rely on each of his fellow members, however far they were separated, to carry out his part whatever the cost.

Savige's handful, with twelve refugees, drove the enemy from the village, and after pushing forward, and punishing 100 tribesmen who raced on horseback about the valley ahead, fell back six miles and spent the night in another village. The fleeing Christians had murdered and raided in these villages as ruthlessly as the enemy had raided the Christians.¹⁰⁶ At dawn—with the retreating waggons still in sight down the valley—the fight began again. While the rear-guard was about to take an early meal, 150 horsemen approached from the enemy's direction, and others were seen advancing over the hills behind both flanks. While the mules were being loaded, Savige rushed his main party to a ridge behind the village to keep the Kurds back. A Canadian sergeant, W. T. Brophy,¹⁰⁷ emptied the drum of a Lewis gun into 200 who had approached in ignorance, and set horses and men rolling and kicking on the ground. In the village the pack-mules were shot; Sergeant Murphy left the place last, galloping out with his Lewis gun on the saddle. Captain Nichol, who had walked back to the village to help, was killed and brave efforts to retrieve his body failed.

From that time onwards hour after hour the rear-guard just succeeded in keeping the pressing enemy away from the slowly retreating column. A very few refugees still stayed with Savige and "fought magnificently," but most of them dropped the Lewis gun drums and disappeared. Many of the strongest men among the Christians, and the best armed, were leading the flight miles in rear. During the weeks of dreadful retreat that followed, they persistently seized the best mounts, leaving behind their women and children to struggle on foot and often to fall into the hands of the Kurds. They had fought stoutly enough in the defence of Urmia, but

¹⁰⁶ Farther back the British cavalry had to protect the Persian villages. In at least one instance armed Turkish fugitives had to be used for this service.

¹⁰⁷ Sgt. W. T. Brophy (No. 642,141; 75th Canadian Bn. & Dunsterforce). Of Collingwood, Ontario; b. Collingwood, 20 March, 1897.

now that they were in British protection Aga Petross had little influence with them; even some Russian mountain gunners with their guns pressed on among the fugitives.

On this first day Savige and a native leader once, by threat of shooting, induced a dozen armed Christians to charge with them at the Kurds pressing the column. Savige shot one raider with his revolver and they were temporarily scared away. Meanwhile a message had been sent asking the officer of the Hussars to reinforce; and after seven hours of desperate fighting, now driven back on to the tail of the column, the rear-guard heard English shouts behind, and saw twelve cavalymen lining the next ridge in rear. They were not the whole force that Savige had asked for, but a party that had been policing the road along which the crowd was streaming. Their sergeant happened to intercept Savige's message, and, on reading it, came with admirable decision straight to help the party, which was almost completely exhausted. This reinforcement, with its well-controlled fire, had immediate effect. Later the arrival at last of fifty of Aga Petross' men caused the Turks to make off, and enabled Savige's party to be relieved. Reeling in their saddles, they rode into the night's camp just as the main body of cavalry, for whose assistance they had been praying, rode out to assist.

On the same day Dr. Shedd, relieved of his long anxieties, had reached the British camp with "a buoyancy," says his wife, "that I had not seen for months." Two hours later he became ill. The retirement could not stop, and after a terrible night he died by the road, of cholera.¹⁰⁸

From that day onwards the protection of the refugees and the retiring convoy did not call for such desperate fighting, though before all the refugees reached safety they were raided many times, the Kurds on the flanks trying like wild dogs to dash in among them and secure loot or cattle and escape amid the hills before the escort could reach them. Of the escort itself they were now shy. The cavalry were sent to guard the money, while Savige's party again brought up the rear. Their greatest distress lay in the necessity for leaving behind to the Kurds many weak and wounded women and

¹⁰⁸ He was hastily buried in the gully where he died. A year later Mrs. Shedd managed to revisit the place and transfer his remains to the Christian cemetery at Tabriz.

children, who, abandoned by their men, could not keep up. To have stayed and died with them would merely have meant leaving the rest of the refugees at the mercy of the enemy. The kindness of killing them, civilised custom refused. Before the crowd reached Bijar a big raid projected by 400 tribesmen from the hills flanking the route was averted by a demonstration with Aga Petross' horsemen.¹⁰⁹ After perhaps the most dreadful retreat in the war, on August 17th the rear-guard reached Bijar. What with overstrain and sickness Savige's party was at the end of its tether; only four of its members, it is said, were able to serve again in the war. The further retreat was guarded mostly by others.¹¹⁰ Of the 80,000 Christians that fled from Urmia, some 50,000 eventually reached the Persian road, their path to and along which was lined with the corpses of the weaker members that died by the way.

It was decided to enlist at Bijar a number of Aga Petross' soldiers with the object of retaking Urmia; but Lieutenant-Colonel McCarthy, a South African, who was sent up with the Assyrian leader to make the attempt, found these warriors leading the retreat, and no orders or exhortation could check them. He returned to Hamadan to "stop them even if I have to use machine-guns to do it." Outside Hamadan the strongest men were "enlisted"—according to one account,¹¹¹ by sending a platoon of the 1/4th Hampshire in extended order through their camp with fixed bayonets to round them up. The remainder—whose transport crowded the Persian road just when clear communications were needed for the crisis at Baku—were sent to a concentration camp at Baquba near Baghdad. The recruits were formed at Abshineh, near Hamadan, into the "Urmia" (or "Native Christian") Brigade of some 2,000 cavalry and 3,000 infantry, commanded¹¹² by Captain Henderson¹¹³ and staffed and trained by other Dunsterforce

¹⁰⁹ The British cavalry were then on patrol at Takan Tepe.

¹¹⁰ Excellent accounts of their experiences are given in *Reveille* (the journal of the Returned Soldiers' League, N. S. Wales) of April, 1933, and subsequent dates, by Captain T. Kelsey, Connaught Rangers. Cholera, smallpox, typhus, and malaria were raging. The whole of the medical work for the multitude at Bijar fell upon one man, Dr. Baynes. Some Russian nurses gave fine service, but the Russian doctors fled with the stronger refugees.

¹¹¹ Captain E. W. Latchford, *Reveille*, 1 Aug., 1932.

¹¹² Colonel McCarthy was the titular commander, but was mainly employed elsewhere, and Henderson, the brigade-major, actually filled the position.

¹¹³ Captain G. S. Henderson, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.; Manchester Regt.; b. 5 Dec., 1893. Killed in action at Hillah, 24 July, 1920.

officers or N.C.O's, Captain Latchford (A.I.F.) being staff-captain. Among the tasks of the staff were those of stopping the native Christians from leaking to Baghdad, or robbing and killing the neighbouring Persians; of trying to satisfy G.H.Q. as to the precise numbers of the force, of which the keeping of a daily tally was beyond all possibility; and of satisfying the visiting Relief Commission. The inspecting officer from G.H.Q., fortunately, was understanding. "All right, my boy, do your best," he told Henderson. "I'll explain things down below, but, for, goodness sake, don't shoot anybody! The Archbishop of Canterbury is interested in these people, and we must look after them as best we can." The Relief Commission told G.H.Q. that the brigade was in good hands, but noted that no arrangements were made for the men to have a hot bath!¹¹⁴

The methods of discipline employed by the Dunsterforce officers and N.C.O's had an oversea directness in them, and Latchford likens the keen training methods to those of "young sheepdogs practising on the fowls." The native officers were given blue arm-bands, the native N.C.O's red. But they were still far from understanding their elementary responsibilities, when the threat of a Turkish thrust in the direction of the Persian road caused two of the battalions to be hurried to distant stations, the third following in October to Bijar.

Their story may here be traced to its end. When, owing to Allenby's progress in Palestine, the threat to Persia died away, they were brought back to Mesopotamia to refit with the object of retaking Urmia. The armistice caused this project to be abandoned, and the Brigade was disbanded. After the war an attempt at repatriating some of the Assyrians failed. Others enlisted in the Iraq levies employed by the British during their control of the country under mandate. This increased the Assyrians' tendency to arrogance, and enmity arose between them and the Iraqis. Consequently when, in 1932, the British left Iraq, this section of the Assyrians became the victims of another massacre. The surviving 20,000 were gathered into a refugee camp at Mosul, and the League of Nations, after exploring the possibility of

¹¹⁴ See Captain E. W. Latchford, "With the Dunsterforce Irregulars," *Reveille*, 1 Aug., 1932.

settling them in Brazil and British Guiana, accepted the offer of the French Government to allow their transplantation in Syria.

To return to the time of the Baku crisis—in conformity with their advance on that vital centre the Turks also pushed forward, 2,000 strong, from Tabriz and on September 5th drove back the posts of the Dunsterforce from beyond Mianeh. After occupying that place, they advanced towards the Kazvin road. Parts of the 39th Brigade and of the artillery intended for Baku had at the end of August been diverted, despite Dunsterville's urgency, to Bijar, and a column (Sweet's¹¹⁵) was now hastily organised and sent from Hamadan to Zenjan, setting out on September 14th, the day on which Baku was evacuated. Australian wireless stations in Persia were at this time being replaced by British stations whose apparatus was in motor lorries; but No. 9 station, just relieved in Hamadan,¹¹⁶ was called on to accompany this column, and, though it was a "waggon" set, it made the difficult journey by routes fit only for pack animals.

The evacuation of Baku also rendered most difficult the position of the handful of the Dunsterforce and Australian wireless men in Prisheb near Lenkoran,¹¹⁷ where the Russians naturally felt themselves "let down." The local troops under Major Hunt beat back one raid by the Tartars,¹¹⁸ but on October 18th Hunt had to save his party by making a bolt with it to Enzeli in a stolen Russian motor lorry. The Australian operators stayed on at Enzeli and worked the wireless there until February 1919.

With the evacuation of Baku General Dunsterville's command ended, his force in north-west Persia now becoming part of the "Norperforce," commanded (under General

¹¹⁵ Under Lieut.-Colonel E. H. Sweet. (Lieut.-Col. E. H. Sweet, C.M.G., D.S.O.; 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of Crowthorne, Berkshire, Eng.; b. Broadleigh, Wellington, Somerset, 1 June, 1871.)

¹¹⁶ The Australians in Hamadan owed much to the kindness of Miss Florence Murray and Mrs. S. S. Funk, of the American Mission there.

¹¹⁷ Lenkoran being controlled by Bolsheviks, the party had to go on to Prisheb. Nevertheless the Lenkoran Bolsheviks called in the Australian mechanic to repair their wireless.

¹¹⁸ These troops were Russian colonists and therefore of sturdy fibre.

Marshall) by Major-General Thomson,¹¹⁹ under whom the efforts to secure naval control of the Caspian continued. At this juncture the situation was entirely changed by the great victories following General Allenby's attack of September 19th in Palestine, and by the continuous advance of the Allies begun on September 15th in the Salonica theatre. The Turkish army which Enver had been wasting in the Caucasus and Persia was the only Turkish reserve; divisions had to be constantly withdrawn, and danger of further advances of the Turks towards the Persian road speedily vanished.

The work of the Dunsterforce proper had now ended. Its officers were given the choice of returning to their former units, of joining Indian battalions, or of continuing to serve with Norperforce. Almost all its Australian members had left for Australia by March 1919.¹²⁰ Although the Mission had failed in its original purpose, it succeeded in barring hostile agents from entrance to Persia at a critical juncture. The averting of the Jangali menace—a very serious one at the time—was due largely to Bicherakov; but that splendid soldier would not have been there had not Dunsterville established with him the loyal relationship which induced him to remain. The Dunsterforce gave the British a magnificent name through the parts of the Orient in which it operated; and for those to whom British honour is a tradition worthy of maintenance, it must always be a matter for satisfaction that the conduct of the Empire's activities in those regions was in the hands of one so sensitive to its implications as General Dunsterville. As for the other members of his Mission, as things turned out, its duties being largely famine relief and the organisation of supply, a staff skilled in Oriental languages and with knowledge of the country and its people would probably have been more suited for the bulk of the work. But this grand body of

¹¹⁹ Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Thomson, K.C.M.G., C.B., M.C. Commanded 1st Bn. Seaforth Highlanders, 1915/16; 35th Indian Inf. Bde., 1916/17; 14th Indian Div., 1917/18; Norperforce, 1918; 51st (Highland) Div., 1927/31. Officer of British Regular Army; of Muckairn, Taynuilt, Argyll, Scotland; b. County Down, Ireland, 2 Dec., 1877.

¹²⁰ The exceptions were Captains E. W. Latchford and C. G. K. Judge who had volunteered, and been sent, to serve with the British Military Mission under Major-General A. W. Knox, assisting Admiral Kolchak's White Russians in Siberia. Captain J. M. O'Brien also served with this mission until March, 1919. Captain Judge left it in August, and Captain Latchford in November, the Australian Defence Department having pressed for their return. Captain O. W. Turner remained at Enzeli and Baku with the British Army in occupation, and returned to London in October, 1919.

fighters adapted itself excellently to its tasks; and, whenever it came to taking responsibility in dangerous enterprises, and to desperate fighting as at Sain Kala and Baku, the special quality of the Dunsterforce was fully displayed.

In Mesopotamia, during the months of the Baku crisis, there were no large operations. On the contrary, the army

there had been used partly as a reservoir of trained troops for employment elsewhere.¹²¹

Mesopotamia
After Baku The cavalry division had been broken up in April, its brigades being afterwards used separately; the Australian signal squadron, whose commander, Captain Payne,¹²² had died of smallpox, was employed for expanding the wireless squadron (now commanded by Major White,¹²³) when the New Zealanders left.

General Marshall, whose force now consisted of the 13th British and 14th, 15th, 17th, and 18th Indian Divisions, and three cavalry brigades, was informed on October 2nd by the War Office that, owing to the Allies' victories in Palestine and Bulgaria, the Turks might shortly ask for an armistice. He was accordingly to press forward on the Tigris and possibly also on the Euphrates, where a cavalry raid might help Allenby's cavalry in an advance on Aleppo. Marshall pointed out that his efforts were limited by the fact that nearly all his transport was in Persia, but he would plan an advance up the Tigris. The suggested thrust towards Aleppo, 350 miles from his railhead, was impossible with the transport available.

When the offensive up the Tigris was launched, the Turkish Government had already asked the British Government¹²⁴ for an armistice. The position attacked was a line astride Fat-ha gorge, where the great river breaks through the Jabal Hamrin.

¹²¹ Twelve Indian battalions were sent to Salonica and sixty companies to India to become the nucleus of sixty new battalions. With these it was hoped to replace another forty British battalions in Salonica, and to re-expand the Mesopotamian force.

¹²² Capt. W. H. Payne. Commanded Cav. Div. Sig. Sqn., A.I.F., 1917. Deputy General Manager, Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd.; of Artarmon, N.S.W.; b. Orange, N.S.W., 14 Jan., 1887. Died, 10 Dec., 1917. (Payne was succeeded in the command of the squadron by Lieut. L. L. Gill, of Launceston, Tas.)

¹²³ Major Marr had gone to Australia on leave in April, 1918, and notice was received that he would not be returning.

¹²⁴ By sending General Townshend to Mitylene on October 20.

Lieutenant-General Cobbe¹²⁵ (I Corps) intended to turn the enemy's eastern flank, but the Turks withdrew on October 24th northwards, to Mushak, fifteen miles back, where next day they were found again, near the Mosul road west of the Tigris. The fords of the Little Zab, east of the Tigris, had now been cleared of them by the 11th Cavalry Brigade, and on the right flank possible reinforcements from Kurdistan were being kept away by a light force (with No. 8 station) under Brigadier-General Lewin¹²⁶ advancing from Tuz Khurmatli to Kirkuk and eventually to Altun Köpri, which the Turks abandoned.

On October 26th, when the new 17th Indian Division attacked the Turks at Mushak, the mobile forces were launched on one of the most difficult and effective cavalry operations of the war. Part of the 11th Cavalry Brigade (General Cassels) made a détour through desert country to the east, passing over the Jabal Hamrin at Ain Nukhaila (where water had been carried fifty miles in Ford vans, and No. 13 Motor Wireless Station with a column under Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges was heavily bombed). After a long forced march Cassels' horsemen crossed the Tigris by a difficult ford above Sharqat, far in rear of the Turks, and at 8 p.m. reported by wireless their position across the Turkish line of retreat. Meanwhile the Light Armoured Motor Brigade (generally known as the L.A.M.B.) also had made a wide détour through the desert on the western flank, accompanied by the famous British political officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Leachman.¹²⁷ Thence some of the cars had, in full daylight, run into the Turkish lines from the rear, and were mistaken by the enemy for a friendly unit until they suddenly shot down the mules tethered there. Not content with this, the brigade towed a length of the Mosul telegraph line, poles and all, into the

¹²⁵ General Sir Alexander Cobbe, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.S.I., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded I Indian Army Corps, Mesopotamia, 1916/19; Military Secretary, India Office, 1920/26, 1930/31; commanded Northern Army, India, 1926/30. B. 5 June, 1870. Died, 29 June, 1931.

¹²⁶ Brig.-Gen. A. C. Lewin, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.; 19th Hussars. Officer of British Regular Army; of Cloghans, Tuam, Co. Galway, Ireland; b. 26 July, 1874.

¹²⁷ Lieut.-Col. G. E. Leachman, C.I.E., D.S.O.; Royal Sussex Regt. Officer of British Regular Army; of Petersfield, Hampshire, Eng.; b. Petersfield, 27 July, 1880. Murdered, in Mesopotamia, 12 Aug., 1920.

desert. With all these columns went Australian wireless detachments, pack or motor.¹²⁸ That under Lieutenant Goodman,¹²⁹ with the armoured cars, got touch with Lieutenant Houston's¹³⁰ detachment east of the river, attached to Cassels' force, and with distant Baghdad, but through mechanical troubles could not communicate with the station under Captain Hillary¹³¹ at Headquarters of the I Corps, which was making the infantry attack. The gaps in the chain had to be filled in by sending messages by air.

The 17th Division's attack was held up, but at night the Turks fell back to Sharqat.¹³² There followed two most trying days—in which the 17th Division in difficult country, with part of the 18th on the eastern flank, hung on to the retiring enemy and attacked, while the cavalry and cars, reinforced by some Indian infantry of the 18th Division, after a forced march of thirty-four miles, in critical fighting barred the way on the north. (It was during this fighting that the commander of the Light Armoured Brigade, Major Sir T. R. L. Thompson,¹³³ tried to repeat his achievement of running into the Turkish lines. He found himself in No-man's Land between Cassels' force and the Turkish rear-guard. His car was disabled by a shell and he was captured. It was known that he had with him the secret list of the Playfair cipher keywords for the following week. An order was therefore immediately sent out to all parts of the force that the complicated emergency cipher must be used. This cipher, however, was known only to the wireless officers and men, and for some time all enciphering and deciphering—usually the duty of staff officers—had to be done by them in addition to their already exacting work with the moving columns. The Australians rose admirably to the crisis, receiving special commendation from the director of signals. Even when, later, the emergency

¹²⁸ Stations Nos. 7, 8, 10, and 13; No. 14 was with the 17th Division, and No. 5 at I Corps Headquarters as control station under Captain M. J. Hillary.

¹²⁹ Lieut. C. W. Goodman, 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn. Electrical engineer; of Adelaide; b. Hampstead, London, 30 Dec., 1893.

¹³⁰ Lieut. R. Houston, 1st Cav. Div. Sig. Sqn. & 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn. Electrical engineer; of Leeton, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 20 Aug., 1885.

¹³¹ Major M. J. Hillary, D.S.O., O.B.E.; 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn. Accountant; of South Yarra, Vic.; b. Carrieton, S. Aust., 20 Feb., 1886.

¹³² The ruins of the ancient Asshur.

¹³³ Lieut.-Col. Sir Thomas Thompson, Bt., M.C., p.s.c. Commanded Light Armoured Motor Brigade, Mesopotamia, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. London, 12 May, 1881.

cipher was made available to the general staff, their help was sometimes called in; and the picture of a "digger" sergeant exhorting a despairing junior staff officer (who happened also to be a peer) not to take it to heart as he himself would "fix the —— thing" for him (which he forthwith did) is said to be one of the bright memories of the campaign.

Meanwhile from farther north a Turkish regiment hurried down in an endeavour to break the investment, but was foiled by the 7th Cavalry Brigade which after brilliantly accomplishing a swift march of fifty miles charged and captured it.

As a result, at dawn on October 29th,¹³⁴ the whole of the Turkish Tigris Group surrendered. General Cassels, with a flying column, largely cavalry and armoured cars (accompanied by four Australian wireless stations under Lieutenant Goodman) was ordered to push on as fast as possible to destroy the rest of the Sixth Army, but on November 1st, twelve miles south of Mosul, it was met by a Turkish party bearing news that an armistice with Turkey had been arranged as from noon on the previous day. Mosul was occupied on November 10th (the Australians took over the relatively powerful Turkish wireless station there). Far north at the Caspian on the 17th the Norperforce in conjunction with Bicherakov reoccupied Baku.¹³⁵

Although active operations had ended, mobile wireless stations were urgently needed by the military administration of turbulent Kurdistan. The Australian Government asked for the return of its stations, but this meant withdrawing at one stroke nearly all the mobile wireless in Mesopotamia. It was eventually arranged that the last troop ("D") furnished by Australia, which had only been at the front for eleven months, should remain for the present, the places of married men being taken by single ones from the rest of the squadron.

¹³⁴ The Turkish commander, 11,322 men, 51 guns, and 3 steamers were captured in this fighting.

¹³⁵ The British naval contingent had by then made arrangements to control the Caspian with an armed flotilla.

On the 1st of February, 1919, "D" Troop began to operate as a separate unit (Captain Sandars¹³⁶ being now senior officer at headquarters and Lieutenant Goodman in charge in the field). In May two of its stations moved from Kirkuk and Mosul into the heart of Kurdistan at Amadiya and Zakho (on the Turkish frontier) respectively. The garrisons—partly of native Christians—were dangerously weak and weakly posted among turbulent and treacherous Kurdish tribes; and on July 15th, shortly after the garrison of Amadiya had been moved to a better position twenty-three miles away on the Suwara Atika pass (whither the wireless station had followed it on June 28th), news came through that the British political officer at Amadiya and his staff had been murdered. A column—company of Indian infantry, mountain gun, machine-gun, and wireless station, accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Leachman—was at once sent from Suwara, but found the Kurds in position far too strong and had to withdraw again (after the wireless station, under fire, had notified Mosul of the situation). This failure set the district aflame. Somewhat similar troubles had occurred at Zakho, a political officer being murdered.

Two columns—Nightingale's¹³⁷ and Lumb's¹³⁸—were accordingly organised from the 18th Division, and in August began to operate from Suwara and Zakho respectively (each with an Australian pack wireless station). Nightingale's column, working through mountains 7,000 feet high, surprised one of the ringleaders in his village at Bermaneh; but the Kurds on August 14th boldly attacked Suwara, and, although they were repelled, the garrison at one time was in considerable danger, Sergeant Rodd¹³⁹ working his wireless station to summon help from the column 21 miles away while the Kurds were actually lying under one of the masts of his aerial (which they omitted to cut down) and firing at the tent in which he was operating.

¹³⁶ Capt. C. L. Sandars, 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn. Radio-telegraphist; of Melbourne; b. Tamworth, Staffordshire, Eng., 29 Jan., 1893.

¹³⁷ Major-Gen. M. R. W. Nightingale, C.B., C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O.; 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles. Commanded 54th Indian Inf. Bde., 1917/22. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of Rondebosch, South Africa; b. Sidmouth, Devon, Eng., 15 April, 1871.

¹³⁸ Colonel F. G. E. Lumb, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.; Royal Garhwal Rifles. Officer of Indian Regular Army; b. 10 Jan., 1877.

¹³⁹ Sgt. A. T. Rodd, D.C.M. (No. 20597; 1st Aust. Wireless Sig. Sqn.). Telegraphist; of Bega, N.S.W.; b. Bega, 25 Aug., 1882. Died 2 Jan., 1936.

Lumb's column, after moving against several villages, was raided by Kurds, who managed to enter its lines. Throughout August and September the two columns moved constantly against the elusive Kurds and their strongholds in this wild country, Indian detachments being more than once ambushed, and Lumb's column once, at Quovrak, stubbornly attacked. The wireless had often to be erected on exposed hilltops in order to ensure reception of its messages. Atmospherics were most troublesome, and the three stations¹⁴⁰ had constantly to relay each other's messages. The wireless men did not belie the Anzac reputation, for the Australian sergeant with Lumb's column received from the column commander the following note: "It may interest you to know that the splendid way you and your men have worked has been noted by all of us. Show them this and tell them that I consider that the soldierly conduct of the station has been the example of the whole column."

General Cassels also went out of his way to express personally his thanks to all the troop, which incidentally with an establishment for four stations was effectively operating five.

The Australian wireless sections in Kurdistan could not be released until these columns returned. It was not till early October that the British wireless squadron raised the necessary reserve stations; and on October 14th the last of "D" Troop returned to Baghdad.¹⁴¹ On November 9th the troop reached Karachi, and on the 20th of December, 1919, its homeland, the last Australian unit to have been engaged in fighting connected with the Great War. The Australian and New Zealand signal units in Mesopotamia, though frequently under fire, were so fortunate as to lose no life through enemy action; malaria, smallpox, typhus, cholera, enteric, dysentery, and heatstroke were deadlier, and two officers and eighteen of other ranks of the wireless and signal squadrons died in service oversea.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Nos. 13, 14, and 24—the last named, formerly British, but taken over by the Australians. No. 16, in Mosul, was the sole means of G.H.Q.'s communication with the columns. (See Vol. XII, plate 688.)

¹⁴¹ See Vol. XII, plate 696.

¹⁴² The losses of the other Australian or New Zealand units in this theatre were nine members of the First Half-Flight, two Australians (Sgts. W. Davis and C. Olson) and four New Zealanders of the Dunsterforce, and four Australian nurses in India. (Davis belonged to Kensington, N.S.W.; Olson to Footscray, Vic.)

A.I.F. MEMBERS OF THE DUNSTERFORCE.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Served at</i>
Cameron, Capt. E. C. B., 13th M.G. Coy.	Hamadan, Enzeli, Baku.
Fraser, Capt. W. A., 41st Bn.	Hamadan, Abshineh, Bijar, Baquba.
Hitchcock, Capt. A. P., 6th M.G. Coy.	Hamadan, Sultan Bulaq, Kazvin, Menjil.
Hooper, Capt. R. H., 58th Bn.	Hamadan, Kermanshah, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar.
Judge, Capt. C. G. K., 4th Bn.	Hamadan, Kazvin, Enzeli, Baku.
Latchford, Capt. E. W., 38th Bn.	Hamadan, Abshineh, Bijar, Baquba.
Lay, Capt. P., 8th Bn.	Hamadan, Abagarm, Rezan, Kazvin, Kermanshah.
Lord, Capt. W. F., 2nd F.A. Bde.	Hamadan, Kazvin, Enzeli, Baku.
McIver, Capt. W. F., 59th Bn.	Hamadan, Kazvin.
McVilly, Capt. C. L., 40th Bn.	Hamadan, Kazvin, Enzeli, Baku.
Mills, Capt. C. F., 4th Div. Engrs.	Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Jama-labad.
O'Brien, Capt. J. M., Camel Corps.	Hamadan.
Savige, Capt. S. G., 24th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Sain Kala, Miandoab.
Scott-Olsen, Capt. E. G., 55th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Sain Kala, Miandoab.
Seary, Capt. E. N., 50th Bn.	Hamadan, Krasnovodsk.
Sorrell, Capt. J. H. A., 45th Bn.	Hamadan, Rezan, Kermanshah, Bijar, Abshineh.
Stackelberg, Capt. F. W., 33rd Bn.	Hamadan.
Stewart, Major R. J., 34th Bn.	Hamadan, Bijar, Zenjan.
Suttor, Major H. B., 7th L.H. Regt.	Hamadan, Kazvin, Enzeli, Baku, Krasnovodsk, Sehneh.
Turner, Capt. O. W., 25th Bn.	Hamadan, Enzeli, Baku.
Williams, Capt. F. E., 32nd Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Bijar, Khorkora.
Withers, Capt. R. B., 13th Bn.	Hamadan, Bijar, Abshineh, Zagheh.
Abotomey, Sgt. W., 1st Bn.	Hamadan, Bijar. (Died, 1 Oct., 1920.)
Arthur, Sgt. G., 21st Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Resht, Enzeli, Prisheb.
Ashmore, Sgt. L. W., 31st Bn.	Hamadan.
Barnett, Sgt. J., 42nd Bn.	Hamadan.
Battese, Sgt. V., 12th Bn.	Hamadan, Bijar.
Bell, Sgt. P. R., Camel Corps.	Hamadan.
Bullen, Sgt. A. L., 7th L.H. Regt.	Hamadan, Enzeli, Baku, Krasnovodsk, Sehneh.
Carnegie, Sgt. R. M., 20th Bn.	Hamadan, Sultan Bulaq, Enzeli, Baku.
Carson, Sgt. W. E., 8th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar.

A.I.F. MEMBERS OF THE DUNSTERFORCE—*continued.*

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Served at.</i>
Davis, Sgt. W., 17th Bn.	Hamadan, Sultan Bulaq. (Died, 7 July, 1918.)
Deery, Sgt. J., 10th F.A. Bde.	Hamadan.
Doherty, Sgt. C., 12th L.H. Regt.	Hamadan, Sultan Bulaq, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Abshineh.
Kerr, Sgt. L. A., 11th L.H. Regt.	Hamadan.
Lehmann, Sgt. C. C., 11th L.H. Regt.	Hamadan, Baku, Bijar.
McGorm, Sgt. A. H., 50th Bn.	Hamadan, Kermanshah.
McKane, C.S.M. J., 45th Bn.	Hamadan, Abagarm, Bijar, Sul-tanabad, Delatabad.
Miller, Sgt. W., 5th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar.
Murphy, Sgt. B. F., 28th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Sain Kala, Miandoab.
Olson, Sgt. C., 29th Bn.	Hamadan. (Died, 6 Sept., 1918.)
Parker, C.S.M. G., 15th Bn.	Hamadan. (Died, 10 Aug., 1921.)
Schultz, Sgt. W., 57th Bn.	Hamadan, Abshineh, Bijar, Baquba.
Smith, Sgt. H. J., 40th Bn.	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Sain Kala, Abshineh, Baquba.
Tait, Sgt. T., 44th Bn.	Hamadan.
Wallis, Sgt. C. T., 38th Bn. (served as C. T. Wallace).	Kermanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin, Zenjan, Bijar, Takan Tepe, Sain Kala. (Died, 24 June, 1936.)
Whalley, Sgt. C., 54th Bn.	Hamadan, Bijar. (Died, 29 July, 1920.)

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