

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES

ALTHOUGH the vast requirements for reinforcements on the Somme forced Haig to give up the plan for the important side-stroke at Messines, he was still very anxious that forces holding the rest of the British line should endeavour, by all possible activity, to pin down the German divisions on their front and prevent their being brought round to meet his strokes upon the Somme. An appeal had been sent to the First, Second, and Third Armies to endeavour to achieve this result by continuing their programme of raids. On July 3rd General Plumer of the Second Army passed on this appeal to his corps commanders, at the same time informing them that, for the sake of the Somme offensive, strict economy in ammunition was necessary. On the 5th, after the discovery that the 13th Jäger Battalion had been sent south from the front of the II Anzac Corps, he reiterated the appeal. Accordingly, General Godley on July 7th issued to the II Anzac Corps—which, now that the 4th Division was leaving for the Somme, comprised only the New Zealand and 5th Australian Divisions—the following order:—

It is imperative that raids and all possible offensive should be undertaken at once by both divisions of the corps in order to make a certainty of holding on our front such German troops as may now be there.

Raids must therefore take place immediately and must be on a larger scale than has hitherto been attempted—about 200 men or a company. . . . The Corps Commander wishes to impress on divisional commanders, and begs them to impress it on their subordinates, that we must fight now, at once, in order to give help to our comrades fighting desperately in the south, and that however little we may be ready, or however difficult it may be, we should never forgive ourselves if we did not make the necessary effort, and, if necessary, sacrifice, to help them.

Such instructions obviously imposed upon the divisional commanders the duty of straining every nerve to undertake immediate operations, even if these were likely to involve loss. Although the 5th Division had not at that time reached the front area, its commander, General M'Cay, consented to launch one or more raids with his inexperienced troops.

Subsequent events caused this intention to be abandoned, and the whole raid-programme of the corps during the next ten days had to be provided by the New Zealand Division.

These small enterprises could no longer be carried through with the comparative ease of the earlier series. The enemy expected them, and had learnt how they could be anticipated and repelled. On the night of July 9th a party of Maoris of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion attempted to steal silently into the enemy's lines, it being considered that they were especially suited for such methods. They found, however, the wire uncut, and, upon repeating the attempt at another point the following night, they narrowly escaped being cut off by two parties of the enemy who were creeping, with equal stealth, round their flank. The next night, July 11th, a raiding party of the 2nd Battalion, Otago Regiment, found the enemy's wire insufficiently cut, and failed; on the 13th a company of the 1st Otago attempted to raid, but found the Germans—in this case belonging to a Saxon division,¹ and therefore supposed to be of weaker morale—entirely ready. Some of the New Zealanders, with splendid determination in the face of machine-gun fire and bombs, forced their way through a gap in the enemy wire, but eventually the whole were most bloodily repulsed.² On the following night, when a trench-raid was launched by the 4th Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade, after a heavy and carefully planned bombardment, the raiders entered without difficulty, but found the trench so thoroughly obliterated that the traces of the enemy were insufficient to enable his dispositions to be ascertained.

Raiding was therefore at this time no easy process. Moreover, it is difficult to see how it could cause any serious anxiety to the enemy, and German accounts now available make it quite evident that it did not. If the enemy forces were to be pinned to this front until the stroke at the Somme had penetrated deep enough to be decisive, some more impressive action was obviously called for.

It happened that at this juncture there was in contemplation an attack with a very different object. It has already

¹ The 24th, XIX Corps.

² The loss was 52 killed or missing, and 123 wounded. Four officers were killed, four wounded. Only six of the party returned without wounds.

been mentioned³ that on July 5th prospects of a break-through on the Somme appeared to Haig so promising that he ordered the other armies to prepare attacks in case the enemy was thoroughly beaten there. In that event the Third Army, on the northern flank of the battle, would launch an offensive; but Haig on July 5th also ordered—

The First and Second Armies should each select a front on which to attempt to make a break in the enemy's lines, and to widen it subsequently.

He pointed out that the German armies on the Somme might contemplate withdrawal, and in that case the First and Second British Armies, by attacking, "might turn the retreat on the Somme into a general retreat."

In considering what answer he should make to this suggestion, General Plumer of the Second Army ruled out the previously-projected offensive at Messines as being then impracticable; similarly, an offensive at Ypres, though contemplated as a possible operation at some future date, would be premature. On all that part of the front, Plumer said, the enemy showed "no sign of weakening his forces. . . . On the contrary he is working very hard to strengthen his defences." Farther south, however, where the Second Army joined the First opposite the Sugar-loaf Salient, the Germans held their front more lightly. Plumer was aware that an attack in this sector had previously been advocated by General Haking, the experienced and distinguished officer commanding the northernmost corps—the XI—of the First Army,⁴ and had agreed that the I Anzac Corps, when undertaking its series of raids, should also take a small part in Haking's attack, if delivered. The operation had not eventuated; but Plumer now, writing to the commander of the First Army, suggested a somewhat more extensive project:

Dear Monro,

. . . the only place I can attempt to "make a break" would be somewhere on my right—in conjunction with your left. If it should happen that your left was the place you chose, we might make a joint arrangement. . . .

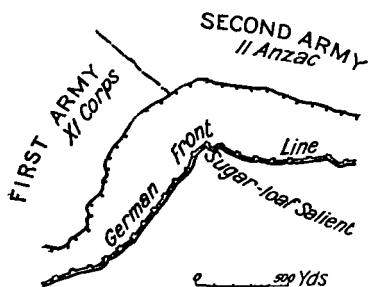
Yours very sincerely,

HERBERT PLUMER.

³ See pp. 317-318.

⁴ See pp. 258-259.

Plumer considered that this plan "presented possibilities" if the German garrison of the sector was "still further weakened," but he could spare only one division for the offensive, and informed G.H.Q. accordingly. Monro, at a conference of his corps commanders on July 8th, directed Haking to draw up plans for such an offensive, and to assume (for the purposes of his scheme) that his corps, being the northernmost of the First Army, would be reinforced by a division from the Second Army, together with some of that division's artillery. Haking's scheme, which was an ambitious one, aiming at the capture—partly by means of a feint—of the Fromelles-Aubers Ridge a mile behind the enemy's front, was presented to Monro next day. It was, however, rejected, Monro being of opinion that the capture of the Aubers-Fromelles Ridge, though of great advantage if the rest of the front was to remain stationary, would be of little assistance in case of the advance on the Somme, for which he had been asked to prepare. He therefore informed G.H.Q. that his objectives in such an event would be Hill 70 near Loos and, possibly, Vimy Ridge, which would be of great value if Haig broke through in the south. Haking was accordingly informed on July 12th that he would not be ordered to carry out his project.



By then, however, the situation on the Somme had changed. The capture of Mametz Wood having taken longer than had been anticipated, the Germans had been able to bring up reinforcements, and a minor offensive elsewhere was now required, not so much for the purpose of testing the enemy's strength and perhaps driving him back, as for that of pinning his forces to their existing fronts and preventing their movement to the Somme. On the eve of the second great effort on the Somme, to which he attached

high hopes,⁵ Sir Douglas Haig received information that the Germans had transferred to that front from the Lille-Lens area some nine battalions as reinforcements. Nothing would be more likely to prevent further transfers than a threat, made by the First and Second Armies, of a British advance upon Lille. The general staff, now looking into the several operations recently suggested, concluded that the attack on Aubers-Fromelles, undertaken as "an artillery demonstration," would "form a useful diversion and help the southern operations." The First and Second Armies could concentrate at their point of junction an artillery force of some 288 field-guns and 72 field-howitzers—equivalent to the artillery of six divisions—which, together with a few "heavies," could keep up a show of preparation for at least three days upon a front of 15,000 yards. The action could, "for the present, be purely one of artillery," combined perhaps with a few raids,⁶ but designed to force the enemy to believe that an important offensive was contemplated. This bombardment could be arranged to take place after the projected offensive of July 14th on any date "when it becomes evident that this front is likely to be milked."

It will be observed that this scheme was very different from that for which Haking had been asked to draw plans. His object had been to seize with infantry an important ridge, and his method to make a feint with strong bombardments farther south, and then—when the enemy had moved some of his guns to the area bombarded—to disclose his artillery on the true front of attack, and, after four hours' bombardment, to advance. The attack now suggested was of quite another character—a boldly advertised, prolonged bombardment, with the object of holding the enemy in suspense, expecting an infantry offensive that would

⁵ On July 12, writing to his army commanders, he said that their activity had been very effective in preventing the transfer of German reserves to the Somme. "The result is that we have maintained, and can still maintain, superior forces at the decisive points, and, despite the great strength of the enemy's defences, we are already more than half through them. There is justification for feeling confident of breaking through the remainder in the near future."

⁶ It was pointed out that, if 330,000 rounds were made available, each gun could be allotted 300 per day for three days. With this, it was claimed, each gun could cut wire on 50 yards of front, and still have ammunition sufficient to break down the German parapet.

probably not take place. It was, however, suggested that a scheme should be worked out for an infantry advance to the Aubers Ridge, in case this might "at a later stage" become advisable.

On the eve of the offensive of July 14th the deputy-chief of Haig's general staff, Major-General Butler,⁷ was sent northwards to the headquarters of the First Army to propose a demonstration on and near Haking's front. He took with him from G.H.Q. Major Howard⁸ of the general staff, and at Chocques saw Sir Charles Monro, and afterwards, in conference, Major-Generals Barrow⁹ and Harington, chiefs-of-staff of the First and Second Armies. This conference agreed that a demonstration could most suitably be made in the sector suggested, each army being able without difficulty to concentrate there a force of infantry and artillery and to provide ammunition. It was decided that an infantry attack should form part of the demonstration, the First Army probably providing two divisions, and the Second Army one. The bombardment was to begin on July 14th with all the artillery then on the spot, and was to last about three days. Haking's plan would in general be adopted, and he would command in the operation. G.H.Q. would provide a supply of shells additional to that which the two armies could allot from their ammunition reserves. General Butler afterwards, at La-Motte-au-Bois, discussed these plans with Generals Plumer, Godley, Harington, Franks,¹⁰ and Gwynn, and Plumer gave his assent to the operation, pointing out that he had already discussed it with Monro.

⁷ Lieut.-Gen. Sir R. H. K. Butler, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., p.s.c. Commanded 2nd Lancs Fusiliers, 1914, and 3rd Inf. Bde., 1914/15; Chief of Staff, First Army, 1915; Deputy C.G.S., G.H.Q., British Armies in France, 1916/18; commanded III Army Corps, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Northern Ireland; b. Bombay, India, 28 Aug., 1870. Died, 22 April, 1935.

⁸ Col. H. C. L. Howard, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (2), G.H.Q., British Armies in France, 1916; G.S.O. (2), 19th Division, 1917; G.S.O. (1), 48th Division, 1917/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Wygfair, St. Asaph, North Wales; b. 30 Aug., 1882.

⁹ Gen. Sir G. de S. Barrow, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., p.s.c. Chief of Staff, Cav. Div. and Cav. Corps, 1914/15; commanded Mhow Cav. Bde, 1915, and 1st Indian Cav. Div., 1915; Chief of Staff, First Army, 1916/17; commanded 4th Cav. Div., 1917/18. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of South Devon, Eng.; b. Naini Tal, India, 25 Oct., 1864. (See also *Vol. VII* of this series.)

¹⁰ Maj.-Gen. Sir G. McK. Franks, K.C.B., p.s.c. Commanded 31st Heavy Bty., R.G.A., 1914; A.A. and Q.M.G., and Cav. Div., 1914/15; M.G.R.A., Second Army, 1915/17; commanded 35th Division, 1917/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Ballyscaddane, Knocklong, Co. Limerick, Ireland, b. Edinburgh, Scotland, 16 Oct., 1868.

Haking's scheme of attack was therefore approved, its object (according to the First Army order issued on July 15th) being

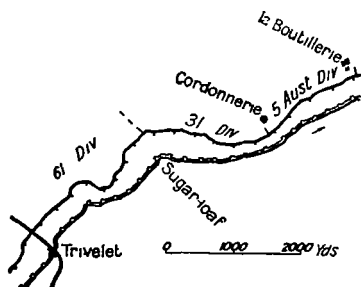
to prevent the enemy from moving troops southwards to take part in the main battle. For this purpose (it was added) the preliminary operations, so far as is possible, will give the impression of an impending offensive operation on a large scale, and the bombardment which commenced on the morning of the 14th inst. will be continued with increasing intensity up till the moment of the assault.

It may be noted that this order cast aside the intention of secrecy. On the contrary, the operation was to be advertised, the demonstration beginning with the bombardment—a wise policy if no subsequent assault had been intended, but suicidal if the intention was to deceive the enemy by a subsequent successful infantry attack. The force available was to be Haking's own corps and—lent by the Second Army—the 5th Australian Division. The operation was to take place as soon as possible.

On July 8th—the very day when Haking was instructed to draw up his plan—the 4th Australian Division had been suddenly ordered to follow the rest of the I Anzac Corps to the Somme. This decision had not been arrived at without hesitation. The Chief of the General Staff at G.H.Q., on receiving Murray's comments upon the training of the 4th and 5th Divisions, had written to General Plumer expressing doubt whether they would be "sufficiently trained to justify their employment in offensive operations on a large scale during the next few months." Birdwood, on the other hand, held that the infantry of the new divisions would prove as well trained as that of their predecessors, and he had been allowed to take the 4th into his corps on condition that, if in General Plumer's opinion it proved insufficiently trained for the tasks likely to be undertaken by Birdwood's corps, it should be re-transferred to II Anzac, again changing places with the New Zealand Division. When permission was finally given for the 4th to follow the 1st and 2nd to the Somme, the division was directed to leave behind its artillery, which was considered too inexperienced for employment in that battle. The 5th Division, ordered up to relieve the

4th, began on the same day its first march towards the front area, encountering the troubles common to almost all new divisions unused to the cobble-roads.¹¹ To hasten the despatch of the 4th Division, the relief was accelerated, the three brigades of the 5th (8th, 14th, and 15th) taking over from those of the 4th (4th, 12th, and 13th) in that order from north to south on the nights of July 10th and 11th. While his battalions were settling down to the strange sights and sounds of the front, and while the half-fledged artillerymen of the 4th Division were inducting those of the 5th into the elaborate defence-system, M'Cay at noon on July 12th in Sailly *château* took over from General Cox the command of that sector. Late next evening he was summoned to General Godley's headquarters at La-Motte-au-Bois and informed that his division, being the southernmost in the Second Army, would for a few days be handed over to the tactical control of the XI Corps and First Army for the purpose of attacking the German line. The supplying of its ammunition and food would, however, still be a responsibility of II Anzac and Second Army.

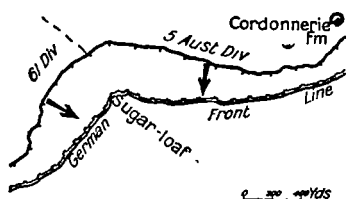
The fact that his division, though last of the A.I.F. to arrive in France, would be the first in serious action, gave M'Cay much gratification. Haking's plan, as then explained to him, was to seize 6,000 yards of German front line—from the Fauquissart - Trivelet road to a point opposite the Boutillerie—with three divisions: the 61st and 31st, of Haking's own corps, would assault the south-western and northern fronts of the Sugar-loaf; the 5th Australian Division would extend the front of attack as far



¹¹ See p 112. In the 15th Brigade, which, through a miscarriage of arrangements, had to march at one stage two and a half hours without a halt, large numbers of men "fell out." In the 8th Brigade the 29th (Victoria) Battalion, which included many young soldiers and had to march nineteen miles carrying a weight of 70 lb per man, was similarly affected. The marching was in most cases far better on the second day than on the first.

as Boutillierie. None of these divisions would have been considered fit for present use in the Somme offensive, the 5th Australian being too new, the 61st a numerically weak¹² Territorial division recently arrived from England, and the 31st lately engaged on the Somme and withdrawn exhausted. The assault being ordered for July 17th, the necessary movements of these divisions were about to begin when, at 2 a.m. on the 14th, Haking learnt that the field-artillery provided for him by Second Army was not, as foreshadowed, that of three divisions but only of two—and those the 4th and 5th Australian, which lacked experience and full training. Furthermore, instead of 300,000 shells for his field-guns, and 30,000 for the 4.5-inch howitzers, he was to receive only 200,000 and 15,000 respectively; he would, moreover, be short of medium trench-mortars, the men of the Australian batteries being considered too raw for employment, except as reinforcements for trained batteries. He therefore wisely decided to narrow his front of attack to 4,000 yards, and to attack with two divisions, the 61st striking at the Sugar-loaf, as already arranged, from the west, and the 5th Australian Division (instead of the 31st) from the north, with its left flank at Cordonnerie.

Each division would now be supported by two divisional artilleries, besides some thirty heavy guns, and a few extra trench-mortar batteries; the Australians would be given fewer trench-mortars than the 61st, but



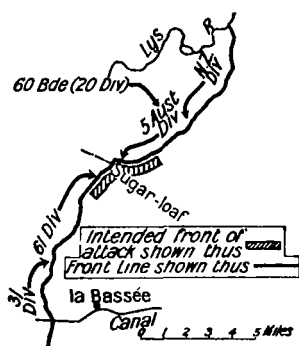
more heavy guns and an additional brigade of field-artillery lent by the 31st Division. The total artillery would be 258 field-guns and howitzers, 64 heavies, and 70 medium trench-mortars, in addition to two 12-inch howitzers on railway trucks, and one or two long-range guns allotted by the headquarters of the

¹² The 61st was sometimes referred to as a "second line" division; by this was meant that it had been used to supply reinforcement drafts to other divisions in France, and had thus been depleted of some of its best elements.

Armies.¹³ In order to enable the 5th Division to concentrate, as required, at the extreme south-western end of its front, its neighbour, the New Zealand Division, was to extend to the right, and a British brigade—the 60th—of the 20th Division was brought down from the Ypres area to be temporarily sandwiched between them.¹⁴ The 5th Australian Division would then be massed on the north and the 61st on the south of the old army-boundary.

Attending a conference at XI Corps Headquarters at Hinges on the morning of July 14th, M'Cay learned of the change in the plans, and at a subsequent conference on the 16th Haking issued his final instructions. His plan—in all essentials the same that he had originally devised—

was that each division should attack with all three brigades



¹³ This provision amounted to a field-gun or howitzer to every 15 yards of front, and of 800 rounds for each field-piece. Other guns were allowed (in all): 6-inch howitzers—4,500; 60-pounders—4,440; 9.2-inch howitzers—1,000; 12-inch howitzers—240; 6-inch (long-range) gun—180, 9.2-inch (long-range) gun—30. The allotment of guns and trench-mortars was:

To 61st Division.
 Artillery and trench-mortars of 61st Division.
 Artillery of 8th Division.
 7 medium trench-mortar batteries.
 1 heavy trench-mortar battery.

To 5th Australian Division
 Artillery and trench-mortars of 5th Aust. Division.
 Artillery of 4th Australian Division.
 Three field-batteries of 31st Division.
 5 medium trench-mortar batteries.

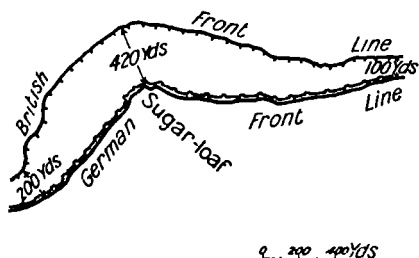
The guns supporting the divisions appear to have been:

			61st Division.		5th Aust. Division.
Field artillery—					
18-pounders	..	..	96	..	114
4.5-inch howitzers	..	..	24	..	24
Total	..	..	120	..	138
Heavy artillery—					
60-pounders	..	..	12	..	24
6-inch howitzers	..	..	10	..	10
9.2-inch howitzers	..	..	4	..	4
Total	..	..	26	..	38
Medium trench-mortars	..	..	50	..	20
Heavy trench-mortars	..	..	2	..	—

¹⁴ This brigade chanced to be one which seven months previously had held the front opposite the Sugar-loaf, and had taken part in the unsuccessful assault south of that salient on 25 Sept., 1915.

in line, and each brigade with two battalions. They were to go no farther than the enemy's support lines, except to take two ruined farms, Ferme Delangré and Ferme Delaporte, which formed strong-points just beyond the 5th Division's objective; and the order to take these was eventually countermanded.¹⁵

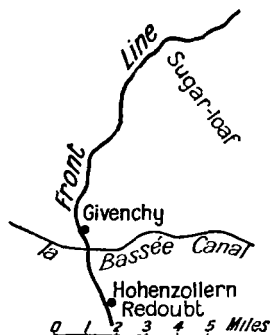
It was obvious that a plan of assault upon so well established and organised a trench-line must be based upon a sufficient preparatory bombardment; by no other means could troops crossing No-Man's Land be preserved from the enemy's machine-guns, whose cross-fire barred its passage. The bombardment must therefore destroy these, or at least force the enemy to hide his head while the attack was approaching. But the method employed at the beginning of the Somme battle—bombardment of the front trench until the moment when the infantry advanced, the guns then lengthening range on to a line in rear—had on some occasions proved terribly ineffective: where the infantry must advance more than 200 yards before reaching the enemy's position, the Germans had had time to perceive the easing-off of the shell-fire and, before the assault reached them, had emerged from their dug-outs, set up their machine-guns, and swept it away. These facts had been circulated by G.H.Q.; and, seeing that opposite the point of the Sugar-loaf No-Man's Land was 420 yards wide, narrowing gradually to about 100 on the extreme left and varying between 400 and 200 on the right, Haking directed that, while the artillery was still bombarding the enemy's front line, the attacking troops must emerge from their trenches and deploy as closely as possible to the enemy's.¹⁶ Heeding another warning from the Somme, he arranged that, although the enemy's artillery was known to be weak, its ascertained battery-positions should be shelled by a



¹⁵ The order was countermanded on the afternoon of the actual attack.

¹⁶ As the 36th (Ulster) Division had done at Thiepval. See pp. 310-11.

proportion of his heavy guns before and during the action. The plan of an ostentatious three-days' bombardment was, as a matter of fact, not carried out by Haking except farther south.¹⁷ There, to induce the Germans further to weaken their artillery, feint bombardments would be laid down at "touchy" points by the 39th Division at Givenchy, north of La Bassée Canal, and by the I Corps south of the canal as far as the "Hohenzollern Redoubt."¹⁸ In a letter read to all troops on the eve of the day appointed for the assault,¹⁹ he explained, first, the reason for the operation, and then the methods. In describing the latter he said that the feint bombardments in the south would be continued on the morning of the offensive



whilst our guns along the front of our real attack will be getting the exact range of the enemy's trenches without attracting undue notice. When everything is ready, our guns, consisting of some 350 pieces of all descriptions, and our trench mortars, will commence an intense bombardment of the enemy's front system of trenches. After about half-an-hour's bombardment the guns will suddenly lengthen range, our infantry will show their bayonets over the parapet, and the enemy, thinking we are about to assault, will come out of his shelters and man his parapets. The guns will then shorten their range, and drive the enemy back into his shelters again. This will be repeated several times. Finally, when we have cut all the wire, destroyed all the enemy's machine-gun emplacements, knocked down most of his parapets, killed a large proportion of the enemy, and thoroughly frightened the remainder, our infantry will assault, capture, and hold the enemy's support line along the whole front. The objective will be strictly limited to the enemy's support trenches and *no more*.

The rearmost trench of the enemy's front system, it was explained in the orders, would probably be found at from 100 to 150 yards beyond the German front line. Haking believed that, for an advance so limited, the two allotted battalions of each brigade would suffice. The remaining

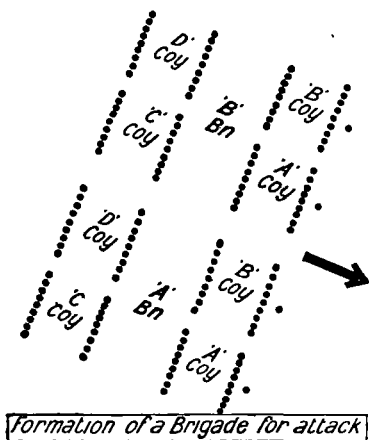
¹⁷ The concentration of artillery on the front of attack was not, in fact, observed by the German staff until July 16 and 17.

¹⁸ To the north the New Zealand Division was to co-operate during the actual operation by making two raids.

¹⁹ July 17 was at that time the day appointed. The issue of this letter, to ensure that the troops had some knowledge of the object and plan of the operations, was probably a wise step. The eleventh-hour postponement of "zero"-day, it is true, gave the enemy some chance of obtaining knowledge of the plans; but—except from the reports of his sentries and observers—he did not obtain it.

two were therefore not to be used for assaulting, unless with his express consent, although half of one of them in each brigade could be called on to furnish carrying-parties following the assaulting waves; the remainder would thus be available afterwards to relieve the exhausted fighting troops in the captured line, or to carry forward the operation to Aubers Ridge, if this were then decided on.

The frontage of the 5th Division in the attack—slightly under 2,000 yards—would be rather less than that of the 61st, although the latter lacked a third of its proper numbers, while the Australians were at full strength. Each brigade would thus occupy from 600 to 700 yards of front, and each assaulting battalion from 300 to 350. In passing Haking's orders to his brigadiers, M'Cay apparently reckoned that the men composing each line should be two yards apart, and therefore suggested that the attack should be made in four lines or "waves," each battalion having two half-companies (*i.e.*, 200 men) in each wave;²⁰ that the first wave should move across No-Man's Land to the enemy's wire, and there lie down ready to attack, the subsequent waves following at intervals of 100 yards. To ensure punctuality, he ordered that his first and second waves must be ready in their own front trenches three hours before the assault; the third and fourth were to assemble in the reserve (or "300 yards") line, from which they must move forward in time to enter the front line just when the earlier waves left it. Similarly, the carrying-parties (half of the several "third" battalions) following farther in rear



²⁰ Taking the battalions at 800, the extension actually works out to one and a half yards per man. The companies being "in depth" (*i.e.*, the second half-company in a subsequent wave following—and eventually reaching—the first) the men would find themselves under officers whom they knew. The deployment of each battalion on a front of two companies was in accordance with a direction from Haking.

must reach their front line, and stand ready beside their loads, precisely when the last assaulting wave went over. The rest of the "third" battalions²¹ must at the same time come forward and hold the front and "300 yards" lines as garrison, while the "fourth" battalions were to take up positions of readiness in the Rue du Quesnes, one and a half miles in rear. During the action six trenches were to be dug across No-Man's Land, two by each brigade, to provide safe communication with the captured position. Stress was laid by M'Cay upon the need for barricading the trenches on the outer flank—or on the inner flank of a brigade in the event of its neighbour failing—and for blocking enemy communication trenches leading out of the new front. He also ordered that the first wave must take the first German trench, the second wave passing over it to the defence-line next beyond,

and so on till all works of enemy first line system . . . are taken. . . . It is the rearmost row of enemy's first line that is to be at once fortified and held when it is taken.

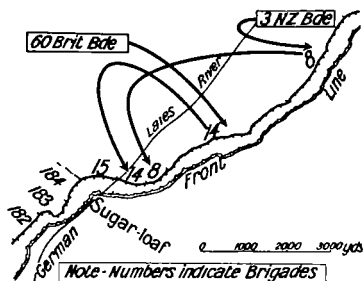
As soon as the first wave had thoroughly cleared the enemy from his front line, it was to "advance farther" and reinforce the other waves. To safeguard the Vickers machine-guns and Stokes mortars, the possible loss of which was at that time seriously regarded, M'Cay directed that they might be brought forward "when it is fairly clear that we hold practically all these trenches," while the Lewis guns might be advanced after the last waves of their battalions. As soon as any machine-guns had been set up in the captured area, they were to fire a short burst in order to impress the enemy.

The precise position of the line in the captured trenches was to be signalled to aeroplanes—which would fly over to obtain "contact"—by lighting flares, and to the artillery by erecting flags or screens of red cloth.

The movements of the two divisions to their "jumping-off" areas for the attack began at once. Six battalions of the 5th Australian Division had still not seen the front trenches, and the other six had been there for two days and nights, when, on July 14th M'Cay's first order for the operation was issued, directing the concentration of his three

²¹ As will be seen, in the 30th Battalion only one company was available for this duty, three being allotted for work in connection with the assault.

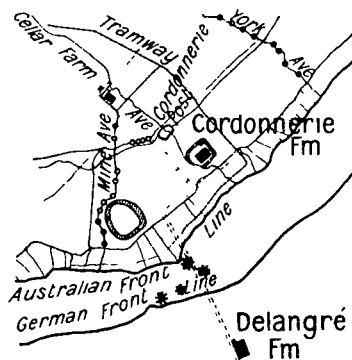
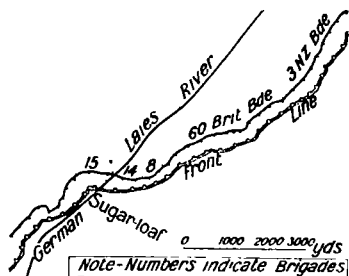
brigades in and behind less than the front then held by the southernmost of them—the 15th (Victorian), commanded by Brigadier-General Elliott. The time allowed for preparatory movement was extraordinarily short, and the procedure entirely strange to most of the troops and staff. But during the nights of July 14th and 15th the 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade on the left relieved the 8th Australian Brigade, which came out to billets in Fleurbaix. Farther south the 60th (British) Brigade, under Brigadier-General Butler,²² relieved the 14th—which withdrew to Bac St. Maur—and the north-western part of the 15th. The 15th with two battalions (57th and 58th) then held the front from which the 5th Division's assault was to be launched. On the next night, July 16th, the 8th and 14th Brigades (in that order from north-east to south-west) passed their attacking battalions into the left and centre respectively of the front held by the 15th Brigade, the latter then shrinking to the right so as to occupy its proper front of attack. A mile or more behind each brigade's front was its "third" reserve battalion, and, farther back still, its "fourth." The 61st Division had meanwhile been carrying out somewhat similar movements farther south. Thus at day-break on July 17th both divisions were in a position at least to attempt the launching of the offensive ordered for that day.



It must not be supposed that these and other preparations, crowded within two-and-a-half days, had been carried through without exhausting labour. The two nights had been spent by most of the troops in carrying out the slow movements of relief, and, in addition, the whole of the necessary rifle and machine-gun ammunition, hand grenades, trench-mortar bombs, sandbags, more than a thousand picks

²² Brig-Gen the Hon L J P Butler, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (2), 4th Div., 1915; commanded 60th Inf Bde., 1916/17, and 4th Guards Bde., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army, of Tiverton, Devon, Eng., b. London, 22 April, 1876.

and shovels, and a large quantity of engineering stores for use in the captured trenches had to be carried on waggons to the rearward dumps, and thence by hand to the trenches. Of the five communication trenches, which were apportioned between the brigades, that of the 14th, "Brompton Road," was found by Colonel Pope to be full of water for three-quarters of its length.²³ By intense effort, eventually working through the whole night of July 16th, the 14th Field Company (which itself was to participate in the following day's attack) succeeded in laying a dry duckboard-path through the whole trench. Farther south the 5th Pioneer Battalion laid a tramway to the front line, in order to facilitate the carrying up of stores. The artillery of the 4th Division (which upon being relieved had been immediately ordered back for attachment, in improvised emplacements, to the artillery-groups of the 5th) was mostly—but not entirely—in position by dawn on the 17th, and ready to begin registering its guns on the enemy's wire and parapets. The 57,000 rounds required for the 18-pounder field-guns had been placed in position.²⁴ The five trench-mortar batteries—three British and two Canadian under the command of Major Sir John Keane²⁵—had arrived and occupied the positions



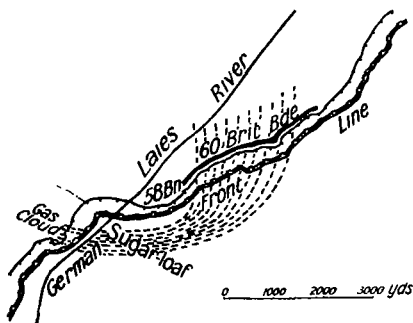
²³ The engineers of the 1st Australian Division, after commencing to improve it, had abandoned the attempt in consequence of the difficulty of freeing it from water.

²⁴ This represents roughly the 5th Australian Division's share of the 200,000 rounds allotted to Haking for the operation. The 5th Division had also 13,000 which, it was understood, were not to be used.

²⁵ Lieut-Col. Sir John Keane, Bt., D.S.O.; R.A. Senator of Irish Free State since 1922; of Cappoquin, Co. Waterford, Ireland; b Dublin, 3 June, 1873.

hastily prepared for them; but some of these were too far from the enemy's trench, and not all the trench-mortar bombs had yet reached the front area. The repairs to communication trenches were not yet finished, nor were the dumps of ammunition and grenades for the infantry complete. Finally, the troops themselves were so worn out after the last tiresome night-long approach through congested communication trenches²⁶ that upon reaching the front line many dropped down and were immediately fast asleep. Nevertheless, parties had to be at once sent out to reconnoitre the enemy's wire, and also to clear a passage through their own.

The strain on part of the force had been increased by the fact that the first night of the relief had been a disturbed one. First, about 9 p.m. the 61st Division discharged a gas-cloud, which not only called forth a sharp enemy bombardment, but, floating over the salient, drifted back into the British line opposite its northern face, causing casualties in the incoming 60th British Brigade. Second, the German retaliatory bombardment appeared, about 9.15 p.m., to shift to a point near the left of the intended front of attack, where the 58th Australian Battalion was about to be relieved by the 6th Oxfordshire. For two hours the sector about Mine and Cellar Farm Avenues was furiously shelled, both those communication trenches and the front-line defences being in parts levelled. This outburst had, as a matter of



fact, nothing to do with the gas attack, but was the bombardment for a German raid, which had been in preparation before the 5th Division, or probably even the 4th, entered the line.²⁷ During the uproar Germans—reported to be ten in number—were observed crossing No-Man's Land; a

²⁶ For example, it took the 31st Battalion from 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. to move from its billets in Fleurbaix to its allotted sector.

²⁷ It was called the "Kulmbach" enterprise, and was led by Lieut Harder

bomb-fight occurred in the trenches of the 58th, and three members of an Australian Lewis-gun team with their gun were afterwards found to have been captured. As usual, the thoroughness of the bombardment caused heavy loss in the thickly-garrisoned front area (5th Division—42 killed, 118 wounded, 4 missing; 6th Oxfordshire—10 killed, 19 wounded).

From German sources it is now known that the raiding party (2 officers and about 95 non-commissioned officers and men of the 21st Bavarian R.I.R.) encountered a series of mishaps, due to the short shooting of their own guns, the sudden gas-attack, the explosion of one of their own trench-mortar bombs, and the "tough resistance"²⁸ of their opponents, which combined to cause what their historian calls "heavy loss"—10 killed, 22 wounded. From the prisoners, according to the German records, it was gathered that the 5th Australian Division "has occupied the 1st Australian Division's position . . . for the last three days." The enemy learned nothing of the 4th Division's having been there, nor indeed of its presence in France, and received no indication whatever of an intended attack.

It was on the following day, July 16th, that the bombardment—registration and wire-cutting—by the artillery, which then began seriously, first suggested to the staff of the German division holding the sector that an operation of some importance might be imminent. The raids, it was recognised, had been merely demonstrations designed to divert attention from the Somme, and, although German suspicions had previously been aroused by the digging of what were called the "Australian" saps in No-Man's Land,²⁹ work on them had ceased since the beginning of July. On the 16th, however, the increase in the artillery-fire was obvious. The artillery commander of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division observed that a group of light batteries had that day been emplaced in forward positions behind the British lines, and next day another group. It was also noted that on the 16th the bombardment was chiefly wire-cutting south of the Sugar-loaf, which led the divisional intelligence officer to report to Sixth German Army Headquarters that a small infantry enterprise was expected in that sector. In the German front line, however, the impression at first existed that the bombardment was merely retaliation for the previous night's raid.³⁰

At this stage the attitude of the British G.H.Q. towards the projected offensive underwent a remarkable change. It is evident from the records that Haig's staff, far from pressing for the demonstration to be made, regarded its

²⁸ *History of the 21st Bavarian R.I.R.*, p. 49.

²⁹ These were the saps dug by the 1st Pioneers (see p. 274). The report of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division on the Battle of Fromelles, after referring to this work and to the increased activity in June, says: "All this was, however, merely demonstration, and found sufficient explanation in the big Franco-British offensive which began on July 1." The raids which followed in July "could not be regarded otherwise than as demonstrations to keep us occupied. Any signs denoting an enemy attack on even a moderate frontage were completely wanting. The 'Australier Stellung' had not been worked upon for some weeks."

³⁰ *History of the 21st Bavarian R.I.R.*, p. 49.

probable results with deep misgivings, and it seems certain that some members of the staff would gladly have seen the orders cancelled. The "purely artillery" demonstration, which some of the staff had favoured, was a very different affair from the projected infantry attack now ordered. It is true that the general on the spot, Haking, was confident of the success of his plan, but the staff must have been acutely conscious of the fact that, three weeks before, Haking had launched a strikingly similar operation on a smaller scale with disastrous results.³¹ The local attacks made in the same area and for much the same purpose in May and September, 1915,³² had signally failed. Whether the doubts of Generals Birdwood and White, who were in daily contact with G.H.Q. and made no secret of their adverse opinion,³³ helped to foster this hesitation can only be conjectured. It is, however, almost certain that it was greatly increased as the result of a visit paid by one of Haig's staff, Major Howard, on July 14th to the scene of the proposed attack. Howard laid before the chiefs-of-staff of the First and Second Armies a summary of the arrangements made by themselves with General Butler on the previous day,³⁴ and obtained an expression of their concurrence; but he himself, after visiting the front line with the Australian Brigadier-General Elliott and inspecting from a point in No-Man's Land the flat sweep of meadow—400 yards wide—across which the troops must advance to attack the Sugar-loaf, and after considering the artillery and ammunition available, formed the opinion that the attack could hardly fail to end in disaster. Having fulfilled his mission—to ascertain whether all staffs were in agreement—he reported the

³¹ This assault, suggested by Haking in the same document which contained his original proposal for the larger operation, had been delivered on June 29 by the 116th Brigade of the 39th Division. The intention was to attack, cut off, and permanently hold the "Boar's Head Salient," two and a quarter miles south-west of the Sugar-loaf Salient. The right battalion reached and held for a time the enemy's support line; the left penetrated the enemy's trench at only a few points. All were subsequently forced to withdraw with heavy loss. Major the Hon. Neville Lytton, who was present, concluding an account, naturally coloured by the feelings of a participant, says (*The Press and the General Staff*, p. 42): "The Divisional general was ungummed, but it seemed to us that there were others who were responsible, and, if they had lost their commands after this failure, possibly greater disasters might have been avoided, for a similar experiment was made a little later on with two divisions and the result was exactly the same. Naturally in the Communique our attack appeared as a successful raid . . ."

³² See p. 109.

³³ See p. 443.

³⁴ See p. 333.

arrangements to G.H.Q. But it may be presumed that his grave fears were also at least verbally represented, for Sir Douglas Haig, before whom the report was laid, noted at its foot:

Approved, except that infantry should not be sent in unless *an adequate* supply of guns and ammunition for counter-battery work is provided. This depends partly on what guns enemy shows.

D.H.

15 July '16.

On July 16th, the eve of the date then fixed for the assault, General Butler himself revisited Chocques and, at a conference with the two army commanders and their chiefs-of-staff, pointed out that Haig did not wish the infantry to attack at all unless the commanders were satisfied that they had sufficient artillery and ammunition not only to capture, but to hold and consolidate, the enemy's trenches. He also discussed the other resources and added that the information at present in possession of G.H.Q. concerning the transfer of German reserves "did not impose the necessity for the attack to take place to-morrow, 17th, as originally arranged."

These doubts were answered by General Haking. A report of the conference states that he

was most emphatic that he was quite satisfied with the resources at his disposal; he was quite confident of the success of the operation, and considered that the ammunition at his disposal was ample to put the infantry in and keep them there.

Monro, after conversation with the others, gave the assurance that he was satisfied the attack could take place. The other point raised by G.H.Q. was then put forward: the operation was now not urgent; had it not better be postponed or cancelled and perhaps undertaken later "if the necessity arose"? All the commanders present, however, were unanimously against a postponement. They said that the troops were worked up to it, were ready and anxious to do it, and they considered that any cancellation or change of plan would have a bad effect on the troops now.

General Haking, it is recorded, was most emphatic on this point. General Monro and he jointly gave their assurance that, unless it was to the advantage of the main

battle that this operation should *not* take place, they considered the orders should hold good. On the matter being put in this way, the envoy from G.H.Q. agreed that there was nothing in the general situation to prevent the operation taking place.

Thus, at the urgent wish of the local generals, the plan of this attack was allowed to stand. But when Haking asked whether, in the event of great success, he might push on to Aubers Ridge, the answer given on behalf of Haig was "No"; the objective was to be a strictly limited one, and the Commander-in-Chief did not intend to embark in more extended operations, "however inviting."

Nor did General Butler's caution cease at that stage. In the afternoon heavy rain fell, and he accordingly returned to Chocques to ascertain what effect this would have on the artillery preparation. He did not see Monro, but impressed upon his staff that, "if the weather, or any other cause, rendered a postponement desirable, it was to be clearly understood that it was in the power of the Army Commander to postpone or cancel the operation at his discretion." Haig was informed of all his actions, and approved.

Haking, before he gave his assurance at the conference, had discovered, to his disappointment, that some of the heavy batteries sent to him were newly-arrived units which had never before fired in France. He still maintained, however, that the preparation by his guns would be adequate, hoping (as he afterwards explained) that he would have the afternoon of July 16th and the morning of the 17th "to get them accurately registered, and to have some practice before the main operation commenced." But the afternoon of the 16th proved so rainy that the "heavies" were unable to register; and at 4 a.m. on the 17th, the time when the final seven-hours' bombardment should have started, a heavy mist lay upon the country. The hour was accordingly put off, first until 8, and then till 11. At 9 a.m., as the air was still too misty, Haking wrote to the First Army commander advising with great reluctance that the operation should be postponed. He added:

The infantry and field artillery, who are to carry out the attack, are not fully trained, and G.H.Q., from what was said at your

conference yesterday, do not appear to be very anxious for the attack to be delivered. . . . I should be glad to know if you wish me to carry it out tomorrow on the same programme. It is important, with these new troops, that this information should be given to me as early as possible, so that I can issue such instructions as will minimise any loss of moral owing to postponement.

As a matter of fact the news, as it gradually filtered down parts of the line, where the weary infantry was waiting for the offensive to commence, was received with intense relief by both divisions, whose men were well-nigh worn out with the hurried preparation. The army commander decided that the assault should not be undertaken for at least two days. This lucky postponement made it possible to give some rest to the assault-battalions, one of which in each brigade was sent back from the front line to villages in the rear area, and part of the other to the reserve lines. Refreshment was thus given to the abounding spirit of the Australian infantry, who, though realising their rawness, and somewhat bewildered by the extreme haste of preparation, which many suspected of being unsound, nevertheless welcomed the chance of getting at their chief enemy. In the 15th (Victoria) Brigade General Elliott changed his assault-battalions, relieving the 58th—which had suffered heavily in the German raid—and 57th by the 59th and 60th. The other brigadiers made no such change. The artillery proceeded with registration and with the cutting of the German wire, which was now examined each night by patrols; the dumps at the front line were completed; the trench-mortars received all their bombs; and the portion of the assault-battalions still holding the front line had a day or two in which to grow acquainted with trench-life and with the region of the attack. All were to be allowed good meals, and, if possible, a sleep immediately before the assault—if the assault, as expected, took place.

Monro, however, in agreeing to the postponement, had decided to cancel the whole operation. In an urgent despatch he informed Haig of this decision, and asked for leave to inform Plumer. In answer, he received the following:

The Commander-in-Chief wishes the special operation mentioned in the above letter (*i.e.*, Monro's despatch) to be carried out as soon

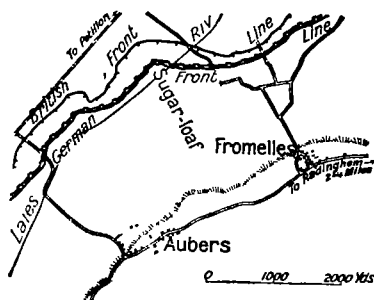
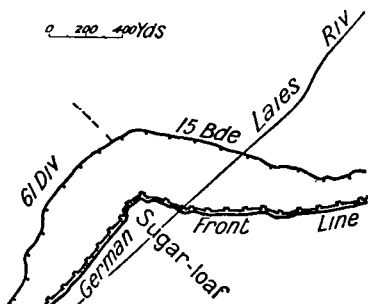
as possible, weather permitting, provided always that General Sir Charles Monro is satisfied that the conditions are favourable, and that the resources at his disposal, including ammunition, are adequate both for the preparation and execution of the enterprise.

The reason for this decision does not appear in the available records, but it may be inferred that the most recent intelligence of German movements showed that a holding attack was again required. It is known that Haig was then apprehensive of a German counter-attack on the Somme—it actually fell next day. The form of his telegram was obviously determined by his principle of standing to a decision already given. As Monro had already given his opinion that the resources were sufficient, it was a foregone conclusion that the operation would now take place. Suggested first by Haking as a feint-attack; then by Plumer as part of a victorious advance; rejected by Monro in favour of attack elsewhere; put forward again by G.H.Q. as a "purely artillery" demonstration; ordered as a demonstration but with an infantry operation added, according to Haking's plan and through his emphatic advocacy; almost cancelled—through weather and the doubts of G.H.Q.—and finally reinstated by Haig, apparently as an urgent demonstration—such were the changes of form through which the plans of this ill-fated operation had successively passed. It was now definitely ordered. Haking arranged that the seven-hours' bombardment should be begun at 11 o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, July 19th, and the infantry attack at 6 p.m. Thus the assault, originally planned to be delivered before noon, was now to be made three hours before dusk.

The weather continuing fine, this time-table was adhered to, the heavy guns continuing until late in the morning of the 19th their endeavours to register on the enemy's line. The enemy's front-line defences were situated on the lowlands drained by the "River" Laies, whose straight ditch-like course, running close behind the south-western face of his Sugar-loaf system, emerged from its north-western face into No-Man's Land.⁸⁵ There, crossing obliquely the front of the 15th Australian Brigade, it entered the British trenches at that brigade's left flank. Probably through blockages

⁸⁵ See Vol. XII, plate 191.

of this stream in No-Man's Land, the German front system and communications had been flooded much more generally than the British; but the trouble had been largely overcome by the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, which, through the installation of electrical pumps and construction of dugouts, had made parts of the line dry and comfortable even in winter. The area also differed from that of the British in the presence, a mile behind the front line and parallel to it, of a low but abrupt ridge, along which, connected by a main road to Lille, lay the villages of Aubers, Fromelles, and Radinghem, and a strong rear system of defence. On this ridge were numerous observation posts overlooking the flats, and also the battle-headquarters of the regiments holding the line, corresponding roughly to the advanced-headquarters of the Australian and British brigadiers.



The German division holding the sector had been, like twelve other reserve divisions, raised immediately after the outbreak of war from untrained men under or over military age, with a proportion of fully trained but elderly reservists. Like the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division, now on its northern flank, the 6th Bavarian had originally formed part of the hurriedly-raised force with which the Germans had attempted to break through the British in the First Battle of Ypres; from that sector it had been sent, in March, 1915, to its present front. It comprised two brigades—the 12th and 14th Bavarian Reserve—each of two regiments, each regiment having three battalions. The regiments held the front from the north southwards in the following order:—

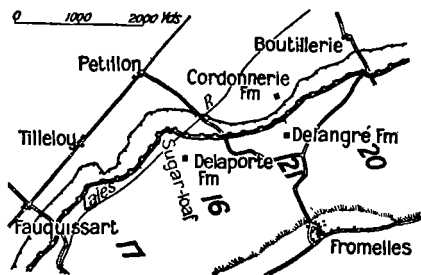
Opposite Boutillerie-Cordonnerie: 20th Bavarian R.I.R.

Opposite Cordonnerie-Petillon: 21st Bavarian R.I.R.

Opposite Petillon-Tilleloy (i.e., the Sugar-loaf): 16th Bavarian R.I.R.

Opposite Tilleloy-Fauquissart: 17th Bavarian R.I.R.

Each regiment appears to have had one battalion in the front-line system; half of a second in a series of detached posts 800 yards in rear, with a few platoons in advanced strong-posts, such as Ferme Delangré; the remaining half partly in the second defence-line on Fromelles Ridge, and partly in billets as regimental reserve; the third battalion as brigade or divisional reserve in villages some three miles back. The second battalion supplied carrying and working parties for the trenches and tramways. The divisional front was covered directly by eighty or ninety guns, of which about a quarter were heavies.



These dispositions of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division were well known to the British XI Corps Intelligence. Those of the 5th Australian and 61st Divisions (from north to south) were:—

		Reserve Battalions.		Assaulting Battalions.	German.
		"Fourth" Battalion.	"Third" Battalion.		
5th Australian Division	8th (Mixed) Brigade	29th	30th	32nd (W.Aust.) 31st (Q'land and Vic.)	21st Bav. R.I.R.
	14th (N.S.W.) Brigade	56th	55th	54th	
	15th (Vic.) Brigade	57th	58th	53rd	
	184th Brigade	one battalion	4th Oxfords	60th 59th 2/1st Bucks. 2/4th Royal Berks.	
61st Division	183rd Brigade	one battalion	one battalion	2/4th Glos.	16th Bav. R.I.R.
	182nd Brigade	one battalion	one battalion	2/6th Glos.	
				2/6th Warwicks 2/7th Warwicks	

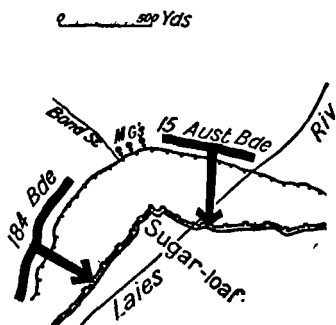
The actual Sugar-loaf was held by the 16th Bavarian R.I.R., and the capture of that angle, including its northern

face as far as the opening of the Laies River, was part of the duty of the 184th Brigade, which had its left flank on the old army-boundary at "Bond Street." The Australian attack was to be southwards, and consequently the attacking lines of the 184th British and 15th Australian Brigades would at first be separated by a gap of 300 yards, which, however, would be gradually closed as they advanced. In this gap were stationed, on the Australian parapet, four machine-guns

of the 15th Brigade and five Lewis guns of the 58th Battalion with the duty of sweeping the parapet of the Sugar-loaf until the advancing lines gradually masked their fire. Of the Australian assaulting battalions, the 60th had not yet been in the front line on the Western Front; the 32nd and 54th had been there for part of a day, and the 59th somewhat longer; the 31st and

53rd for two days. The 14th and 15th Brigades, however, contained about twenty-five per cent. of well-seasoned men from the old 1st and 2nd Brigades, and the majority of their officers and N.C.O's had fought at Anzac. The 8th, on the other hand, though long and carefully trained, was entirely new to fighting. The two battalions, however, with which Brigadier-General Tivey³⁶ intended to launch his assault were composed of his older and most hardened men: the 32nd, containing many Western and South Australian miners and farmers, occupied the most difficult position, on the left of the whole attack, the 31st, partly composed of Queensland miners and bush workers, being next to it.³⁷

The effect of the artillery in cutting the enemy's wire was reported by the patrols, which crossed No-Man's Land



³⁶ Maj.-Gen. E. Tivey, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 8th Inf. Bde., 1915/18; 5th Aust. Div., 1918/19. Stockbroker; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Inglewood, Vic., 19 Sept., 1866.

³⁷ Gen. Tivey's choice of his assaulting battalions was partly determined by these considerations, and partly by the fact that the 29th (Victoria) and 30th (N.S.W.) Battalions had been sent first into the line and the 31st and 32nd were due for the next task.

during the night of July 18th, to be as follows: opposite the left Australian brigade (8th)—cut in places; opposite the centre (14th)—judged to be intact. Patrols of the right brigade (15th) could not approach the wire, as the enemy in the Sugar-loaf had scouts or sentries stationed eighty yards in front of his line. The morning of the 19th was bright, and, after more registration by the heavies, the bombardment commenced at 11 o'clock, the programme being:

- 11-11.30 a.m. Registration by divisional artilleries and trench-mortars.
- 11.30-1 p.m. Registration and bombardment by 9.2-inch and 12-inch howitzers, and registration by 6-inch howitzers.
- 1-3 p.m. .. Wire-cutting by 18-pounders.
- 3-6 p.m. .. Wire-cutting by 18-pounders and medium trench-mortars. Bombardment by 18-pounders, 4.5-inch howitzers, 6-inch howitzers, and (from 4 p.m. onwards) by 9.2-inch and 12-inch howitzers.
- 6 p.m. .. Artillery to lift to "barrage lines" (that is, to lengthen range, the field-guns placing a curtain of fire about a hundred yards or more beyond the objective, and the howitzers bombarding communication trenches, cross-roads, and villages farther back).

By an alteration of the original plan, the artillery of the 61st Division, though lifting from the enemy's front line at 6 o'clock, was to continue firing on his support trench until 6.5, so that the infantry would be better covered. Brigadier-General Christian, temporarily commanding 4th and 5th Australian Divisional Artilleries, decided that, in consequence of their inexperience, it would be unwise to make the change in their case, and they were therefore at 6 p.m. to lift straight to their "barrage lines."

It will be seen that the bombardment was mainly registration until 1 p.m., the field-artillery then beginning to cut wire and practically all guns bombarding from 3 o'clock onwards. As the day went on the infantry in the front trenches could see with delight that havoc was being wrought in parts of the German breastwork, especially by the trench-mortars. Ragged gaps began to be apparent. Yet artillery observers noted with some anxiety that in the actual apex of the Sugar-loaf the enemy's defences did not appear to have been greatly injured, and that certain parts of his entanglement, especially opposite the 15th Brigade, had not been cut. Accordingly Haking's artillery commander, at 2.35, ordered

more rounds to be fired at the Sugar-loaf; but the message reporting intact wire west of the Laies was received only at 5.10 p.m., too late for remedy.³⁸

During the day the Australian assault-battalions concentrated at the starting positions, the three from billets commencing their march early in the afternoon. Each man carried, besides his rifle-ammunition and rations, two bombs and also two empty sand-bags for use in constructing new defences. In some units only the companies which would form the first two lines had been provided with steel helmets, those in the third and fourth waves wearing their felt hats.³⁹ By 2 o'clock the battalions from billets were reaching the "300 yards" line, and some of the companies allotted for the first two waves were continuing on through the communication trenches to the front line, in almost exact accordance with the time-table. At this juncture the enemy's artillery, which till then had replied only slightly, began to answer the increasing British bombardment by shelling the communication trenches and reserve and support lines of both the attacking divisions. In the Australian area the ammunition- and bomb-dump of the 31st Battalion was blown up,⁴⁰ and the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Toll,⁴¹ and most of his signallers, messengers, and the medical staff of the battalion were wounded. Mine and Pinney's Avenues, main approaches for the two flank-brigades, were blown in at points near the firing line, but Cellar Farm and V.C. Avenues, nearer the outer flanks, were shelled chiefly with shrapnel, and the four waves of each brigade assembled in the front and reserve lines without serious loss. The 15th Brigade reported them in position at 3.25, the 14th at 3.45, and the 8th at 4 o'clock. In the meantime, probably in answer to the bombardment at 3 o'clock, the enemy's fire upon both these trench-lines sharply increased. An unspoken

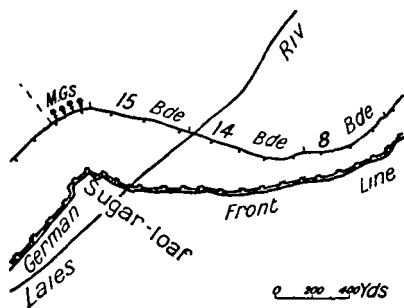
³⁸ Across the message (in possession of the Australian War Memorial Library) is a note by the staff of the 15th Brigade—"Told R.A. (Artillery). Too late."

³⁹ This was the only occasion on which the Australian felt hat was largely used in action on the Western Front. Some of these hats, picked up years afterwards in front of the Sugar-loaf, are now in the Australian War Memorial.

⁴⁰ The bombers saved half of this dump by dashing in and throwing out burning boxes.

⁴¹ Col. F. W. Toll, D.S.O., M.B.E., V.D. Commanded 3rd Bn., A.N. & M.E.F. (New Guinea), 1914/15; 31st Bn., A.I.F., 1915/18. Company manager; of Mount Molloy, Q'land; b. Bowen, Q'land, 18 Jan., 1872.

suspicion suggested itself to most men and officers that the Germans—whether through spies, or by detecting the Australian movements—“knew something.” The same shell-fire was falling on the 61st Division, where the forward battery-positions also were heavily shelled. It is now known that the enemy, by ordinary observation, anticipated the operation. On July 17th the increased bombardment by the Australian artillery caused him to expect a minor attack on that front as well as on the 61st Division's. On the 18th he had further observed parties of men carrying forward boxes, assumed to be of hand-grenades, and rolls of material, apparently mats to facilitate the passage of troops over wire-entanglements. A warning had accordingly been sent to the two reserve battalions of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, and fatigue parties had been detailed to carry bombs to the German front line. At 7.15 a.m. on July 19th the divisional commander, General von Schleinitz, ordered a battalion of his reserve—the 1/20th Bavarian R.I.R.—to move up to Fournes, three miles from the line, for use, if required, by his 14th Brigade facing the 5th Australian Division. At 1 o'clock the sudden increase in the British bombardment being noted, the garrisons of the second line were ordered to stand to arms. According to the Bavarian narrative,⁴² an answering bombardment was laid by the German artillery upon their opponent's force in its assault trenches. At 3.15 troops—probably some of the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company who were trying to create a “pipe-pusher” sap⁴³—were observed in the saps in No-Man's Land opposite the Sugar-loaf, and fire was directed upon that area. But in the Australian lines it was upon the left wing, held by the 8th and part of the 14th Brigades, that the bombardment



⁴² *Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege, 1914-1919*, p. 290.

⁴³ See note on p. 361. (A photograph of such a sap is given in Vol. XII, plate 330, where it is wrongly called a “Russian” sap.)

fell most heavily. Moreover on that flank, where No-Man's Land was narrow, the Australians were now suffering severely through the falling among them of an increasing number of their own shells. Even during the morning the 8th Brigade had been hit by such stray shots, one of which shattered a party of the 8th Field Company engaged in cutting a sally-port through their own parapet. Some of the guns were undoubtedly firing erratically, and, with artillery so new to its work, the error could not readily be traced or prevented. The defect was the direct outcome of the rapidity with which this artillery had been raised in Egypt.⁴⁴ In the 8th Brigade the casualties through the fire of both artilleries became dangerously heavy; the German cannonade at certain times swelled to "barrage" fire in response to Haking's ruse⁴⁵ of lifting the bombardment and then bringing it down heavily again. Although the enemy's infantry does not appear to have been affected, some of his artillery groups were deceived into thinking that the attack was being launched, and laid down a curtain of fire against it. During the last of these outbursts, at 5.25, one company commander of the 54th Battalion, Captain Taylor,⁴⁶ had his arm blown off by a shell.⁴⁷ Towards 5 o'clock the German artillery had eased somewhat; but at 5.25 there duly began in the British and Australian lines a series of movements immediately preceding the assault. In the Australian area the 14th Brigade, having inadequate communication trenches, sent its third and fourth waves at 5.25 and 5.31 over the open fields between the "300 yards" and front lines. At the same time,⁴⁸ the infantry of the 61st Division began to file out from its front trenches through sally-ports leading into No-Man's Land.

It was with this manœuvre that the infantry operation really began. The sun of a bright summer afternoon was

⁴⁴ Premature bursts, due to unskilled work in the new shell-factories of Great Britain or those of America, also caused a few casualties in the artillery.

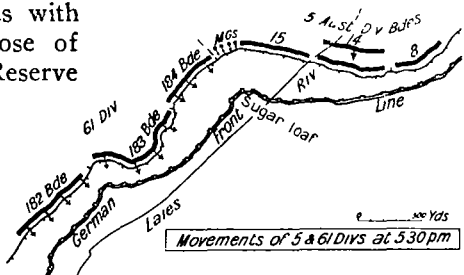
⁴⁵ See p. 339. Carried out at 3.25, 4.4, 4.29, and 5.21 p.m.

⁴⁶ Capt. H. Taylor; 54th Bn. Clerk; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b Goulburn, N.S.W., 23 Sept., 1891. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁴⁷ Capt. C. B. Hopkins (of Warrnambool, Vic.), a young Duntroon graduate, who had given up the position of Staff Captain, 14th Brigade, for the command of the 14th Light Trench Mortar Battery, also was killed about this time.

⁴⁸ At 5.30.

still fairly high, and the enemy, observing the movements which were obviously the commencement of the attack, opened heavily upon the front and reserve lines with all available guns—those of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division being supported for the occasion by the flanking batteries of the 50th (Reserve) and 54th Divisions to the north and south respectively.



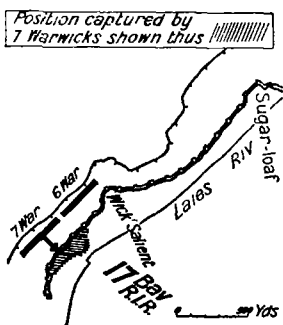
The history of the Bavarian army states:⁴⁹ "The backbone of the assault—when it finally left the trenches at 5.30 p.m. (*sic*)—was thus broken." The waves of the 14th Brigade, however, arrived without heavy loss at their own front line. There, it is true, casualties became dangerously high—especially in the untried 8th Brigade. For the first time in the war an Australian attacking force was actually meeting the contingency most dreaded by commanders: its intentions had been discovered, and the enemy barrage was crashing upon its assembly position with the object of destroying the attack. "The first thing that struck you," an N.C.O. of the 14th Brigade afterwards said, "was that shells were bursting everywhere, mostly high-explosive; and you could see machine-guns knocking bits off the trees in front of the reserve line and sparking against the wire. . . . When men looked over the top they saw No-Man's Land leaping up everywhere in showers of dust and sand . . . rather confirming our fears that the Germans knew something." But the enemy's available artillery, totalling 73 light and 29 heavy pieces, was not sufficient in such circumstances to break two divisions. At this juncture the British bombardment also was greatly increased; the other side of No-Man's Land was barely discernible through the dust and smoke.⁵⁰ But here and

⁴⁹ *Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege*, p. 290.

⁵⁰ See Vol. XII, plate 193.

there, taking a hurried glance over the parapet, men drew comfort from the sight of the German breastwork "going up" in shreds. When at 5.43 the first of the Australians moved boldly over the top, the fighting spirit of most of them, including the 8th Brigade, in spite of harsh losses, had not been seriously affected.

The 61st Division was in a less fortunate position. The strength of its battalions was only 600, and, although it had carried out a number of successful raids, and possessed an artillery more experienced than that supporting its neighbour, its infantry was still inexperienced and of much slighter physique than the Australian. Its staff had ordered that, instead of moving over the parapet, the infantry should emerge into No-Man's Land through a large number of narrow sally-ports.⁶¹ On the extreme right, where the enemy trenches had been so utterly destroyed by the bombardment that the British could afterwards find no shelter in them, this method succeeded, most of the 182nd Brigade emerging practically unobserved. Hardly a shot was fired at it, and the right battalion—2/7th Warwickshire—easily captured the opposing trenches. In front of the left battalion, the 2/6th Warwickshire, lay an angle of the German lines known as the "Wick Salient." Here the 11th Company, 17th Bavarian R.I.R., quickly aroused by its commander, Lieutenant Reichenhardt, left its shelters and carrying three machine-guns, raced the 2/6th Warwicks for the breastwork, which it succeeded in reaching when the British line was but fifty yards distant. The Warwicks were thus (according to their own account, which exactly agrees with the enemy's)⁶² "faced at the last moment with

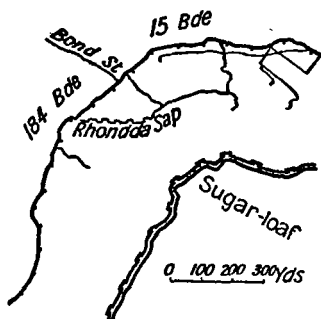


⁶¹ Australian commanders were opposed to this, some of them remembering the difficulties of the 6th Battalion attacking German Officers' Trench in Gallipoli on 6 August, 1915 (see Vol. II, pp. 599-605).

⁶² From the report of the 61st Division. See also *History of the 17th Bavarian R.I.R.*, p. 48.

machine-guns handled with great bravery from the top of the parapet," and were repulsed with a loss of 9 officers and 220 men.

The 183rd and 184th Brigades had each, before beginning to deploy, suffered under the German bombardment. The 183rd had therefore reinforced its line; but, at 5.30, immediately it commenced to file out into No-Man's Land, it had been observed by the enemy and brought under heavy machine-gun fire. Both of its assault battalions, the 2/4th and 2/6th Gloucestershire, had thus lost heavily; part of them appears to have been late in making the subsequent advance, and, the German machine-guns again opening, the enemy's breastwork was reached only at one point, north of the Wick, by a few of the 2/6th Gloucestershire. The 184th Brigade, which formed the right-centre of the attack and was to seize the Sugar-loaf, was heavily shelled just before deployment, losing 140 men. Its two battalions were hurriedly reorganised, and at 5.40 began to file out of their sally-ports. The 2/4th Royal Berkshire on the right were at once seen and shattered by German machine-guns, their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Beer,⁵³ being killed while directing his men out. In front of the 2/1st Buckinghamshire, however, near the apex of the Sugar-loaf, there extended into No-Man's Land a long trench, "Rhondda Sap." This had been dug long before with the intention of meeting similar saps which, ever since Haking in June suggested the assault, the Australian pioneers had been digging from their side, so as partly to bridge the re-entrant.⁵⁴ These works had not yet been finished; but, making use of the Rhondda Sap, the 2/1st Buckinghamshire managed, under machine-gun fire, but without heavy loss, to creep out



⁵³ Lieut.-Col. J. H. Beer. Commanded 2/4th Royal Berks. Regt., 1916. Farmer; of Kenton, Devon, Eng; b. Kenton, 6 Sept., 1879. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁵⁴ See pp. 135, 275-6.

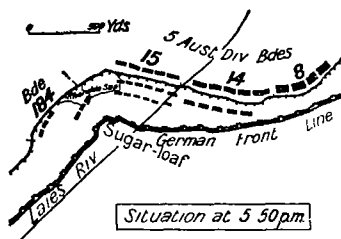
into position not far from the Sugar-loaf.⁵⁵ Upon assaulting, the centre and right of the 184th Brigade—comprising the right company of the Buckinghamshire and the survivors of the Royal Berkshire—were at once stopped by the Sugar-loaf machine-guns, which, as was already evident, had not been destroyed, nor even wholly silenced, during the British bombardment. On the left, however, Captain Church,⁵⁶ leading his company, was killed as he reached the German breastwork, and, according to some accounts, a small section of the western face of the Sugar-loaf was entered, if not captured. The staff of the 61st Division was very soon aware of the success of the division's right, and the failure of the centre. But as to the assault on the Sugar-loaf, reports of artillery observers seemed contradictory—at 6.23 it was stated that the 184th Brigade was "in"; but afterwards, "Germans holding parapet strongly all along. No sign of our people." Further news could not yet be obtained, since all forward telephone lines had been cut by the enemy's bombardment, and from that part of the attack no messengers returned.

The fate of the 15th Australian Brigade's assault on the northern front, next to the flank of the 184th, was equally difficult to ascertain. Differently from those of the 61st Division, the Australian waves left their trenches by moving over the parapet, all ready deployed. As No-Man's Land varied in width, the several units moved out at different times, the hour being fixed by the battalion commanders.

⁵⁵ Here, and at two other points much farther south, the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company, which worked in Haking's area, had been ordered to prepare to break the surface of No-Man's Land by thrusting forward from Rhondda Sap, beneath the surface, a pipe filled with explosive. The enemy had at 3 o'clock observed troops, opposite the Sugar-loaf, in the forward saps known to him as the "Australian Trench," and had turned his bombardment upon them, thus cutting the electric leads to two of the pipes. The commander of the 3rd Tunnelling Company, Major L. J. Coulter (of Grenville, Vic.), and six of his men were wounded in attempting to fire them. The second-in-command, Captain A. Sanderson (of Perth, W. Aust.), however, with Private L. A. Street (of New Town, Tas.), repaired the wires and fired the charges in the one case; and Lieutenant O. R. Howie (of Collie, W. Aust.), assisted by Sergeant M. J. M. Kerby (of Ballarat, Vic.) and Lance-Corporal W. A. McKay (of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.), under equal difficulties, fired the other. The third was blown by Lieutenant B. Priestman (of Western Australia), assisted by Corporal W. A. Bayes (of Queenstown, Tas.), and Lance-Corporal E. E. Jackson (of Underwood, Tas.). The craters thus formed—long straight ditches, five or six feet in depth—provided ready-made communication trenches part of the way across No-Man's Land, and proved useful during the subsequent collection of the wounded. A similar pipe had been blown by the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company on the occasion of General Haking's previous attack upon the Boar's Head Salient.

⁵⁶ Capt. H. Church; 2/1st Bucks Regt. Barrister-at-law; of Chesham, Bucks., Eng.; b. London, 24 March, 1883. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

Thus, near the Sugar-loaf, where No-Man's Land was wide, the 59th and 60th Battalions went over the parapet at 5.45; the 53rd is stated to have crossed it at 5.43; the 54th at 5.50; the 31st and 32nd at 5.53. So, when the first wave of the 15th Brigade went out at 5.45, the artillery would for another quarter of an hour be pouring its full bombardment upon the enemy's front trench-system. If things were working out as planned, the German machine-guns should be out of action and the garrison of



the Sugar-loaf penned by shrapnel in its dugouts, so that the advancing waves could cross No-Man's Land without interference. General Elliott, who, characteristically, had been among his men in the front line genuinely relishing the danger, had been impressed by the bombardment laid down by the field-artillery. "Boys," he had said, "you won't find a German in the trenches when you get there." Yet from the moment the waves of the 15th Brigade crossed their own parapet, all ordinary methods of military communication appeared to fail, and there descended upon those waiting at its headquarters that complete absence of news which was one of the normal conditions of modern battle. Elliott was then at "Trou Post," only a few hundred yards in rear, and, like all others in the Australian lines, was listening anxiously for the first sound from the enemy's garrison. At 5.50, over the roar of the artillery, was detected a feeble musketry. At 5.55 a machine-gun was heard firing from the direction of the Sugar-loaf. It was evident that the enemy was standing to some of his guns in spite of the bombardment. Successive waves of the 15th Brigade were leaving the parapet at five-minutes' intervals, and German shrapnel was now descending sharply on Elliott's front and reserve trenches. At 6.2, immediately after the artillery lifted its fire, the sound of musketry was increased. Observing officers of the artillery reported occasional glimpses of the 59th and 60th advancing across the flats: at 6.9 they could

be seen, still short of the German trench. By 6.15 the musketry had died down and, judging from this and other subsequent signs that the Germans had been driven from their trenches, Elliott reported at 6.30 that the attack appeared successful. Yet no definite word came back. At 6.34 and 6.40 the observer of the 114th Battery could still see troops advancing in No-Man's Land, but only half-way across. Telephones had gone forward with the fourth wave, but the wires were shattered by shells, or their bearers killed. Sergeant Gates⁵⁷ and Private Finnie,⁵⁸ of the 60th Battalion signallers, after all the rest of their party had been put out of action, returned and took forward another party. Again all were hit, including Gates, who nevertheless made a third attempt but by that time could find no trace of the battalion commander or of any other officer and returned completely exhausted. About 6.40, however, there came in a few men with news from No-Man's Land. One proved to be Major Layh, second-in-command of the 59th, who had been sent back by Lieutenant-Colonel Harris⁵⁹ to say that the battalion (forming the right of the Australian attack) could get no farther than half-way across No-Man's Land. The other arrivals were wounded men belonging to the 60th Battalion on the left. They said they had crossed the first line of German trenches and reached the second line, some fifty yards beyond, and that the 14th Brigade had seized the enemy's position farther to the left. Elliott accordingly sent Layh back to Colonel Harris with a message that, as the rest of the line appeared to have succeeded, the 59th must make another attempt. At the same time he despatched Lieutenant Doyle⁶⁰ to obtain touch with Major McCrae⁶¹—the fine young leader (member of a well-known literary and artistic family) whom Elliott had specially obtained from his own old battalion, the 7th, to command the 60th. But

⁵⁷ Lieut. W. H. Gates, D.C.M.; 58th Bn. Fitter; of Ballarat, Vic; b Ballarat, 23 June, 1892. Died, 7 March 1939.

⁵⁸ Lieut. C. P. Finnie; 58th Bn. Master mariner; of Sandringham, Vic; b. Nottingham, Eng, 16 Sept., 1882

⁵⁹ Lieut.-Col. E. A. Harris. Commanded 59th Bn., 1916. Farmer and grazier; of Donald, Vic.; b. Mount Jeffcott, Vic, 18 Mar., 1880.

⁶⁰ Major D. B. Doyle; 60th Bn. University student; of Hawthorn, Vic; b Toorak, Vic., 27 July, 1894.

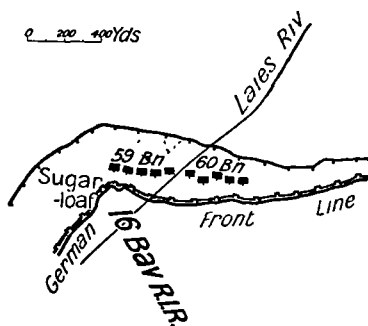
⁶¹ Major G. G. McCrae. Commanded 60th Bn., 1916. Architectural student; of Hawthorn, Vic.; b. Lower Hawthorn, 18 Jan., 1890. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

no traces could be found of him. At that moment—though none knew it in the Australian lines—McCrae and his whole staff and almost every officer and N.C.O. of his battalion were lying dead or wounded on the low fields round the Laies. Doyle got touch, however, with the 59th and returned with a message from Layh that the battalion could not advance farther.

The trenches are full of the enemy (wrote Elliott, forwarding the news at 7.18 p.m. to the divisional commander). Every man who rises is shot down. Reports from wounded indicate that the attack is failing from want of support.

Pending the receipt from M'Cay of leave to throw in part of another battalion to carry the attack farther, Elliott ordered the 59th to dig in where it was; and, hearing that Colonel Harris had been put out of action by the near burst of a shell, he placed Layh (like McCrae, a trusted officer of the original 7th) in command.

By this time the returning wounded were beginning to make known the story of the attack, which may be told in a few words. The first wave, as it clambered on to its breastwork, had before it, in the sector of the 59th Battalion, a large triangular patch of thickly-overgrown uneven ground—in reality, the tumbled foundations and orchard of an old farm. Farther out, marked through the haze of dust by a succession of willow stumps running obliquely through the gentle green ridges and furrows of the once cultivated flats, was the straight line of the Laies. The wave moved down the slope of the parapet and then through the protecting barbed wire, which had been well cut by patrols; crossed the old farm ditch, which had been specially bridged; and was making its way through the grassy hummocks of the farm and orchard when it came under gradually increasing rifle-fire. So long as the line was moving



through the slightly broken ground^{*} this had comparatively little effect. On the left, the 60th was easily crossing the Laies, which was only two feet in depth except where widened by craters. As the wave went forward it tended to swing towards the Sugar-loaf, from which came an increasing fusillade. When, about half-way across, the troops emerged between the grassy drains, machine-guns from the Sugar-loaf, now on their right front and flank, opened with such intensity that the line quickly withered. The 59th, being almost opposite the salient, was stopped first; the line of the 60th, part of which crossed the Laies, pressed almost to the German wire before it shrivelled.

The records of the 16th Bavarian R.I.R., which faced them, attributes the repulse of these Australians and of the neighbouring British to the determination of that regiment to sustain, in spite of the fire playing upon it, continuous observation from its front-line trenches. As soon as one of its men, killed or wounded, fell from the parapet, another took his place. Thus rifle and machine-gun fire was kept up, and officers had a good grasp of the situation. "Riflemen of the 16th Bavarian R.I.R., lying at and west of Rouges Bancs," says the official historian,⁶² "coolly, eagerly awaited the approach of the enemy and shot him down with heavy loss."⁶³ Officers were marked leading their men, and were quickly picked off.

The fragments of the first wave of the 15th Brigade sought what cover they could in shell-holes or in the channel of the Laies. Its later waves, which followed at five-minutes' intervals, were under heavy fire from the moment they topped the parapet, and on reaching the grassy undulations half-way across No-Man's Land were shattered by the same deadly machine-guns. When, about 5.55, the third wave crossed the parapet, expecting to see advancing before it at least one of the preceding lines, it could observe no movement anywhere; only the unkempt pasture, perfectly still, with the dead scattered thickly. It went forward searching for the place where, it was imagined, the previous waves must be lying ready to make the final rush. Like its predecessors, it was

⁶² *Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege*, p 290

⁶³ There was an impression among the Australians, at the time, that some of these machine-guns and snipers were in front of the German trenches and a German newspaper account spoke of one machine-gun in such a position having fired 14,000 rounds. The official German records, so far as they have been studied for the present narrative, do not confirm this notion.

stopped by the withering fire from the flank. But here and there a group, led by some surviving officer or N.C.O., pressed forward until it found itself alone, having apparently passed all the dead. In front lay the enemy's parapet, 150 yards distant, fringed by a line of Germans standing out shoulder high and, as a survivor⁶⁴ afterwards stated, "looking as if they were wondering what was coming next." Lieutenants Gibbs⁶⁵ and Carr⁶⁶ of the 59th are said to have been killed on the German wire; and according to one account Captain Aubrey Liddelow⁶⁷ of the 59th, a Victorian schoolmaster, although wounded, actually reached the German parapet with a few men, but, the position there being hopeless, withdrew them into shell-holes to await support.

With the fourth wave went the battalion commanders and their staffs. In the 60th these fell almost immediately: Major McCrae, receiving a bullet through the neck, was killed eighty yards from the Australian trench. Farther out his second-in-command, Major Elliott,⁶⁸ an ex-Duntroon cadet only twenty-two years of age but of splendid promise,⁶⁹ was mortally wounded through the chest. The adjutant, Lieutenant Wrigley,⁷⁰ and the signalling officer, Lieutenant Smith,⁷¹ were both wounded. In the 59th Major Layh survived, but practically all the company officers in both battalions were hit in this engagement, and the great majority of the N.C.O.'s: in the 60th three company commanders were killed, and the fourth dangerously hit

⁶⁴ Maj. T. Kerr (of Maffra, Vic.), 60th Bn., who was in the third wave.

⁶⁵ Lieut. R. H. M. Gibbs, M.C.; 59th Bn. Medical student; of Colac, Vic.; b. Warracknabeal, Vic., 4 Feb., 1892. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁶⁶ Lieut. E. T. Carr; 59th Bn. Woolbuyer; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Geelong, 13 Sept., 1889. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁶⁷ Capt. A. Liddelow; 59th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Malvern, Vic.; b. Gippsland, Vic., 10 Nov., 1876. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916. (When later one of his wounded men begged Liddelow to return with him for medical attention, he answered: "I'll never walk back into safety and leave the men I have led into such grave danger—we'll wait for reinforcements." He was presently killed by a shell.)

⁶⁸ Maj. T. P. Elliott, 60th Bn. Duntroon graduate, of Sydney; b. 18 Jan., 1894. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁶⁹ His brigadier's opinion of him is recorded: "Everyone thought he would have made a Kitchener."

⁷⁰ Lieut.-Col. H. Wrigley, M.C., 60th Bn.; 2nd/6th Bn., A.I.F., 1939, commands an A.I.F. bn., 1940 Public servant, of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Scarsdale, Vic., 1 Dec., 1891.

⁷¹ Lieut. J. H. Smith, 60th Bn. Clerk; of Royal Park, Vic.; b. Albert Park, Vic., 10 June, 1887. Died of wounds, 19 July, 1916.



27 AIR VIEW OF THE OPPOSING LINES AT THE 'SUGAR-LOAF' SALIENT, FROMELLES

Photographed before the battle. The nearer line is the British, the sector shown being practically that of the 5th Australian Division on the 19th of July, 1916. Facing it is the German front line, with the Sugar-Loaf Salient on the right. Fromelles can be seen near the dark wood at the right-hand top corner. The summit of its ridge is marked by the line of trees bordering the main road (across the top of the picture)

British Air Force Photograph, lent by Maj Gen Hon Sir H. Murray
 Aust. War Memorial Collection No. E5990



28. MEN OF THE 53RD BATTALION WAITING TO DON THEIR EQUIPMENT FOR THE ATTACK, 19TH JULY, 1916

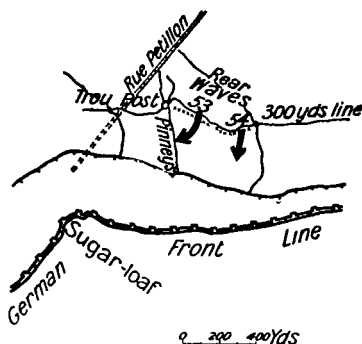
Only three of those here shown came out of the action alive, and those three wounded.

Taken by L/Cpl C. H. Looking, 53rd Bn
Aust War Memorial Collection, No. 43042

To face p 367

through the head.⁷² Layh received Elliott's message to dig in, but the area was chiefly peopled with the dead and wounded. Those of the latter who could move tried to drag themselves to shelter. The unwounded were few and scattered, and, under such fire, organised work among them was impossible.

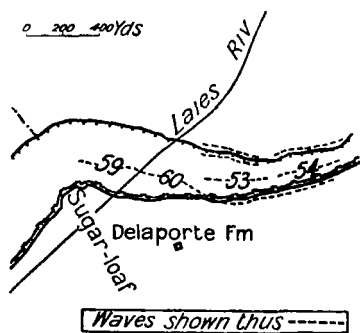
On the left of the 15th Brigade went the 14th (New South Wales). The experience of that part of it which was nearest to the 15th was in some respects similar. It was this brigade which had sent its rear waves at 5.25 from the reserve to the front line across open country. During that preliminary advance men on the right of these, including some of the Lewis gunners of the 53rd, becoming involved in some of the wire of the "300 yards" line, which had not been adequately cut, and afterwards running forward to escape shell-fire, lost formation. Part clambered



⁷² Of the officers of the 59th, Captain A. Liddelow, Lieutenants J. C. Bowden, E. T. Carr, F. L. Cousins, R. H. M. Gibbs, H. C. Howard, A. D. Morrow, and W. H. Vaile were killed or died of wounds; and Lieut.-Col. E. A. Harris, Captains G. W. Akeroyd, F. R. Hewitt, K. G. McDonald, and Lieutenants A. C. Anderson, H. A. L. Binder, D. W. Fair, J. W. Fenton, J. D. Haddow, R. Liddelow, and G. R. Stockfield wounded. Of the 60th, Majors G. G. McCrae, T. P. Elliott, Captains E. A. Evans, H. O. Ground, H. McD. Plowman, and Lieutenants A. C. McKinnon, J. M. Rhind, J. H. Sterling, J. H. Smith, E. E. Wright were killed or died of wounds; and Captains H. C. Piercey, T. Kerr, Lieutenants C. H. Roberts, G. B. Russell, J. L. Simpson, and H. Wrigley wounded.

A. Liddelow (schoolmaster) was of Malvern, Vic.; Bowden (bank manager) of South Yarra and Kyabram, Vic.; Carr (woolbuyer) of Geelong, Vic.; Cousins (school teacher) of Tarnagulla, Vic.; Gibbs (medical student) of Colac, Vic.; Howard (photographer) of Chelsea, Vic.; Morrow (bank accountant) of Ballarat, Vic.; Vaile (bank manager) of Hawthorn, Vic.; Harris (farmer) of Donald, Vic.; Akeroyd (clerk of courts) of Melbourne and Swan Hill, Vic.; Hewitt (estate manager) of Solomon Islands; McDonald (bank manager) of Hamilton, Vic.; Anderson (mental hospital attendant) of Newcastle, N.S.W.; Binder (farmer) of Koo-wee-rup, Vic.; Fair (ledgerkeeper) of Shepparton, Vic.; Fenton (articled law clerk) of Melbourne; Haddow (school teacher) of Surrey Hills, Vic.; R. Liddelow (accountant) of Melbourne; Stockfield (bank clerk) of Surrey Hills, Vic.; McCrae (architectural student) of Hawthorn, Vic.; Elliott (Duntroon graduate) of Sydney; Evans (timber clerk) of Camberwell, Vic.; Ground (oil expert and accountant) of Hawthorn, Vic.; Plowman (manufacturer) of Malvern, Vic.; McKinnon (farmer) of Kingston, Vic.; Rhind (farmer and grazier) of Geelong, Vic.; Sterling (lawyer) of Flemington, Vic.; Smith (clerk) of Royal Park, Vic.; Wright (detective) of Waverley, N.S.W.; Piercey (dental surgeon) of Burnie, Tas.; Kerr (farmer and grazier) of Maffra, Vic.; Roberts (electrician) of Hawthorn, Vic.; Russell (tobacco manufacturer) of Melbourne; Simpson (clerk) of Ballarat, Vic.; and Wrigley (public servant) of Ballarat, Vic.

over a breastwork lying in front; this, however, proved to be not that of the front line but Pinney's Avenue, which here ran diagonally and was already crowded with men almost beyond the possibility of movement. Thus the 53rd Battalion, which formed the right-half of the 14th Brigade's attack, was at some disadvantage before the assault. Its first wave is recorded to have left the trench at 5.43, and, moving across No-Man's Land, to have lain down in front of the German wire. Its right, however, was exposed not only to fire from the front,⁷³ but to the same enfilade as the 15th Brigade. When the bombardment lifted, the Germans, firing and bombing from their front line, held up the right of the battalion in front of the trench until the arrival of the second wave. Farther to the left the other flank of the 53rd, and the whole wave of the 54th, swept over the enemy's parapet without trouble, finding the front trench somewhat dishevelled with artillery-fire and the enemy cowed and crouching in their dugouts. Two machine-guns were captured. The first wave stayed there temporarily to rout the enemy from his shelters, while the three succeeding lines went straight on, as ordered, seeking the trench which they were to convert into their new firing line.



In both the 53rd and the 54th the loss of officers during the first twenty minutes of the advance had been extraordinarily heavy. In the 53rd the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Norris,⁷⁴ and his staff safely crossed No-Man's Land with the fourth wave; but, as the party moved

⁷³ In particular, a German machine-gun firing down the Rue Delvas (the road leading obliquely across No-Man's Land on the right of the 53rd) is thought to have caused havoc. The fact that many dead afterwards lay beside the road gives support to this conclusion. The gun was captured at an early stage by the 54th, and progress became easier.

⁷⁴ Lieut.-Col. I. B. Norris. Commanded 53rd Bn., 1916. Barrister; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 31 July, 1880. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

forward from that trench towards the enemy support line, a machine-gun was turned upon it, and Norris, his adjutant, and several others were killed.⁷⁵ Shortly afterwards the senior company-commander, Major Sampson,⁷⁶ was also killed. Major Croshaw,⁷⁷ the second-in-command, had been allotted the special duty of acting as *liaison*-officer between the battalion and the brigade, and, by personally reconnoitring the position, keeping touch with the brigadier, and endeavouring to furnish supplies, he faithfully carried out this task. The leadership of the battalion in the firing line consequently fell upon Captain Arblaster,⁷⁸ a very young but active officer who had passed out of Duntroon with the second batch of cadets, served in Gallipoli, and was now the senior company-commander surviving in the 53rd. Similarly in the sister battalion, the 54th, although its commander survived, Major Roy Harrison, the second-in-command, who with his signallers was leading the first wave, was shot dead in No-Man's Land; all the company commanders, all their seconds-in-command, and six junior officers were killed or wounded—about half of them before leaving the Australian line.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ After Norris was hit, a signaller, Frank Leslie Croft (of Newtown, N.S.W.), endeavoured to bring him to the shelter of a trench, but failed.

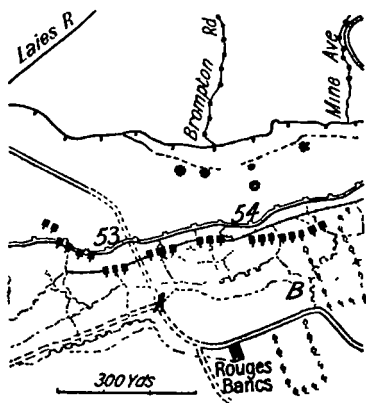
⁷⁶ Major V. H. B. Sampson; 53rd Bn. Insurance clerk; of Sydney; b. Upper Manilla, N.S.W., 12 May, 1888. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁷⁷ Lieut.-Col. O. M. Croshaw, D.S.O. Commanded 53rd Bn., 1916/17. Officer of British Regular Army; of Chislehurst, Kent, Eng.; b. Blackheath, Kent, Eng., 11 March, 1879. Died of wounds, 26 Sept., 1917. (Croshaw was one of several British officers who were attached to the A.I.F. in Egypt during the reorganisation, February, 1916.)

⁷⁸ Capt. C. Arblaster, 53rd Bn. (previously 8th L.H. Regt.). Duntroon graduate; of Footscray, Vic.; b. Pennyroyal, Vic., 21 Feb., 1895. Died of wounds while prisoner of war, 24 July, 1916.

⁷⁹ Of the 53rd Battalion's officers, Lieut.-Colonel Norris, Major V. H. B. Sampson, Captain H. Paulin, Lieutenants G. E. Allan, C. T. Collier, H. L. Moffitt, C. E. Mudge, B. J. Nelson, W. E. Noble, A. E. Pratt, and T. N. Rickard, were killed during this fight; and Captains C. Arblaster, F. R. Ranson, D. Thomson, Lieutenants T. Francis, A. E. Jackson, C. A. Jhonson, N. B. Lovett, H. C. W. Pain, W. E. Smith, and A. O. Thompson wounded. Of those in the 54th, Major R. Harrison, Captain H. Taylor, Lieutenants T. P. Ahern, C. A. Boone, H. J. Hall, and J. G. Strangman were killed; and Major R. D. Holman, Captains J. Hansen, B. D. Jack, C. S. Lecky, Lieutenants R. G. Downing, A. H. Hirst, A. G. Morris, E. T. Sadler, C. E. Shaw, H. C. Sudbury, O. J. O. Tedder, and H. H. Young wounded. Lieut. J. T. Lang, 53rd Bn., had already been wounded in cutting the wire in No-Man's Land. Lieut. J. M. d'Alpuget of the 54th was killed on July 17. Of these officers, Paulin was of Goulburn, N.S.W.; Allan (law clerk) of Bondi, N.S.W.; Collier (solicitor) of Roseville, N.S.W.; Moffitt (accountant) of Gisborne, Vic.; Mudge (tailor) of Perth, W. Aust.; Nelson (theatrical treasurer) of Neutral Bay, N.S.W., and Dunedin, N.Z.; Noble (blacksmith) of Wollongong, N.S.W.; Pratt (clerk) of Northbridge, N.S.W.; Rickard (public servant) of Ryde, N.S.W.; Arblaster (Duntroon graduate) of Footscray, Vic.; Ranson (draughtsman) of Strathfield, N.S.W.; Thomson (member of Aust. Permanent Forces) of Sydney; Francis (civil engineer) of Ipswich, Q'land; Jackson (joiner) of South Ashfield, N.S.W.; Jhonson (bank clerk) of Parramatta, N.S.W.; Lovett (school teacher) of Wongaroon, N.S.W.; Pain (manager) of Sydney; Smith (engineer) of Ashfield, N.S.W.; Thompson (fitter) of Penrith, N.S.W.;

Thus, although these two battalions seized the enemy front line without difficulty, the waves pressing forward to occupy their final objective found almost all their well-known leaders absent and themselves faced by a problem of extreme difficulty. For, as they passed clear of the enemy's front breastwork and its adjoining alleys and shelters, expecting to see, fifty or a hundred yards beyond, the second breastwork marked on the maps—similar to their own support line—they found instead, stretching away to the distance, only low open fields covered with coarse grass and traversed here and there by hedges or rows of trees. Away to the left were the broken white walls and tree-stumps of Delangré Farm, which according to the original plan was to have been taken by the 8th Brigade; to the right front were one or two similar clusters receding into a distant background of trees and hedgerows. They pushed on across the fields, as an eye-witness⁸⁰ afterwards said, "advancing in the long grass as if shooting quail, strolling on and taking a 'pot-shot' every now and then at Germans who were ducking from shell-hole to shell-hole as we went on." Imagining that the breastwork must be hidden by the grass or a fold in the ground, the troops expected every moment to be met with fire from it. Here and there they came upon odd fugitive Germans cowering in grass-covered shell-holes.



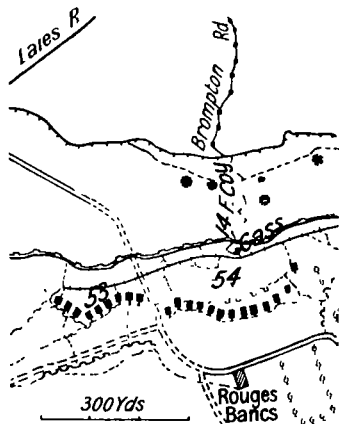
Harrison (bank clerk) of Sydney; Taylor (clerk) of Newcastle, N.S.W.; Ahern (wood-turner) of Northcote, Vic.; Boone (clerk) of Mosman, N.S.W.; Hall (clerk) of Sydney and Uranquinty, N.S.W.; Strangman (insurance manager) of Gordon, N.S.W.; Holman (officer of Aust. Permanent Forces) of Sydney; Hansen (draughtsman of Adelaide; Jack (medical student) of Malvern, Vic.; Lecky (bank clerk) of Longueville, N.S.W.; Downing (agricultural student) of Ashfield, N.S.W.; Hirst (shire clerk) of Gordon, N.S.W.; Morris (clerk) of Sydney; Sadler (grazier) of Dubbo, N.S.W.; Shaw (commercial traveller) of Melbourne; Sudbury (salesman) of Punchbowl, N.S.W.; Tedder (commercial traveller) of Stanmore, N.S.W.; Young (estate agent) of Woollahra, N.S.W.; Lang (engineering apprentice) of Burwood, N.S.W.; and d'Alpuget (accountant) of Woollahra, N.S.W.

⁸⁰ Col. Toll, 31st Bn.

and at varying distances behind the line they stumbled upon a watery ditch or drain, in which some of the enemy had taken refuge. Crossing this, and shortly afterwards a second, they pressed on until the foremost men had gone at least 300 yards beyond the enemy's line. By this time their leaders realised that the second and third trenches must either have been non-existent in that part of the front or else were represented by these two ditches. Accordingly the surviving officers stopped their men at the farther ditch (marked "A-B" in the marginal map) and ordered them to begin rendering it defensible by cleaning it out, filling their sandbags, and placing them along its edge.

Meanwhile the first wave was clearing the shelters in and immediately behind the front line. They found that, besides the small concreted cavities in the front breastwork, the Bavarians had provided, in an alley ten yards back, a number of roomy sunken dugouts, covered with four feet of earth. Ten yards farther still were several deep comfortable chambers, approached by stairways tunnelled from ten to twenty feet down into the clay. Some of these stairways led to galleries in which troops could rest dry in winter and secure under the heaviest shell-fire. Some contained wounded or sheltering men, and most of them supplies of cigars, flares, and stick-bombs. In one such chamber, wall-papered, panelled, fitted with two bunks, an arm-chair, a stove, and electric light, Colonel Cass of the 54th established his headquarters.

As soon as the front trenches had been captured and cleared of the enemy, and a number of prisoners sent back, most of the first wave moved on, in accordance with orders, to assist in improving the forward defence line. Meanwhile half of the 14th Brigade's "third" battalion, the 55th, began the all-important work of carrying to the captured front line sandbags and ammunition from its



dumps, established by that brigade in the old front line. Major Holland⁸¹ and Lieutenant Stutchbury⁸² supervised the supply from a rear dump to those in the old front line; thence Lieutenant Palmer⁸³ transmitted them to the old German front line, now practically empty of troops; Lieutenant Robinson⁸⁴ further despatched them to various sections of the 54th, and Major Croshaw, during at least part of the night, to the 53rd. At the same time a sap across the old No-Man's Land was already being dug by two sections of engineers of the 14th Field Company, under the instructions of Major Bachtold⁸⁵ and Lieutenants Fry⁸⁶ and Ferguson,⁸⁷ about the centre of their brigade sector.⁸⁸

The 8th Brigade, which formed the left of the attack, had while waiting in the front line suffered more severely than the rest of the Australian troops. The reason for this was partly that it lay on the flank, and partly that its front line, running closer to the enemy than that of the other sectors, not only received special attention from him, but also, as has already been stated, caught a number of the shells of its own artillery intended for the enemy's wire. During the few minutes immediately preceding the assault, the fire upon this sector, largely from German batteries to the north-east, was intensified. Thus a high proportion of the total casualties of the 31st Battalion occurred before the assault began.⁸⁹ Probably the 32nd suffered as severely. Yet,

⁸¹ Brig. A. C. S. Holland, V.D. Commanded 53rd, 54th, 55th, and 56th Bns. for various periods during 1918. Insurance broker; of Ashfield, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, 20 Sept., 1889.

⁸² Major E. W. Stutchbury, M.C.; 55th Bn. Public servant; of Drummoyne, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 28 Feb., 1894.

⁸³ Capt. H. L. Palmer; 55th Bn. Clerk; of Petersham, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, N.S.W., 1893. Killed in action, 11 March, 1917.

⁸⁴ Lieut. N. A. Robinson, 55th Bn. Civil engineer and surveyor; of Beecroft, N.S.W.; b. Auckland, N.Z., 26 Feb., 1896.

⁸⁵ Lieut-Col H. Bachtold, D.S.O., M.C. C.R.E., 3rd Aust. Div., 1918. Civil engineer; of Sydney; b. Stanningley, Yorks, Eng., 22 Aug., 1891.

⁸⁶ Lieut. H. W. Fry, M.C.; 14th Fld Coy., Engrs. Civil engineer; of Turramurra, N.S.W.; b. Willoughby, N.S.W., 16 Nov., 1887.

⁸⁷ Lieut. J. S. Ferguson, 14th Fld. Coy., Engrs. Architect; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 24 Nov., 1892. Died of wounds, 27 July, 1916.

⁸⁸ The original intention of digging two saps for each brigade had been modified.

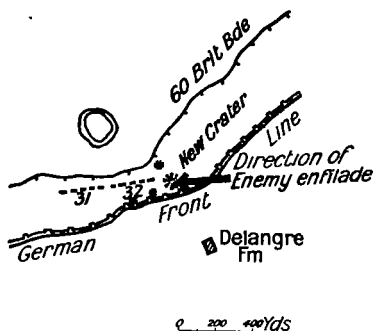
⁸⁹ Among the officers of the 31st Captains S. K. Fisher and W. Sharp, and Lieutenants W. Macpherson and J. F. O'Rourke were then wounded. The battalion's loss at this stage has been estimated at 400. Probably this is a heavy exaggeration, but the casualties were very serious. (Fisher belonged to Silverleigh, Q'land; Sharp to Brunswick, Vic., Macpherson to South Melbourne; and O'Rourke to Brisbane.)

when at 5.53 the first wave of the brigade—31st (Queensland and Victoria) on the right, and 32nd (Western and South Australia) on the left—moved over the parapet towards the enemy's wire, their fighting spirit was manifestly all that their leaders could wish. The left was met by a vicious fusillade, partly from the front, but mainly from the line farther east, in front of the 60th British Brigade, which was not attacking.

To give some protection against this fire, a mine containing 1,200 lb. of ammonal was exploded at 6 o'clock in No-Man's Land just beyond the flank, it being hoped that the upturned edges of its crater would catch some of the machine-gun fire.

Had the wind been favourable, gas was also to have been discharged on the front of the 60th Brigade, but the direction of the breeze prevented this from being done. The bombardment, however, had been extended so as to fall upon the enemy on this flank, and the 60th Brigade had been asked to pin him down with its rifles and machine-guns. This instruction was duly carried out; but (according to the diary of the 6th Oxford and Bucks. Light Infantry) "after the explosion of the mine the enemy manned his parapet north of Farm Delangré, and displayed much daring in his endeavour to bring fire to bear on the assaulting Australians."

Officers and men of the 8th Brigade were, however, animated, from the brigadier to the last reinforcement, by one chief desire—to show themselves in their first action not inferior to the older troops who had fought at Gallipoli; and both battalions advanced without hesitation. The enemy at first faced this attack, and losses were heavy. Major Higgon,⁹⁰ leading the first line of the 32nd, was desperately



⁹⁰ Major J. A. Higgon, 32nd Bn., A.I.F. Officer of British Regular Army; of Pembrokeshire, Wales; b Scolton, Treffgarne, Pembrokeshire, 11 Nov., 1874. Died of wounds, 19 July, 1916 (Higgon was one of several British officers who were attached to the A.I.F. in Egypt during the reorganisation, February, 1916)

wounded; in the 31st, while crossing No-Man's Land, Lieutenants Hudson,⁹¹ Cox,⁹² and Spreadborough⁹³ were killed, and Major Clements,⁹⁴ Captain Robertson,⁹⁵ and Lieutenant Goudie⁹⁶ wounded. But as the first wave approached, with the second advancing a hundred yards behind it, the enemy on the parapet dwindled to a few scattered men, threw some bombs, and then disappeared. The Australians, clambering up the German parapet, saw numbers of the enemy running away across the open country in rear. In the alleys and dugouts of the front system, a few, perhaps rallied by an officer or N.C.O., tried to hold their ground. One Bavarian subaltern, bomb in hand, was shot by Lieutenant Drayton⁹⁷ of the 31st, who came face to face with him round a traverse. The crew of one of the enemy machine-guns, of which at least three were found in the sector, were just leaving their gun when an ex-gunner of the Australian permanent artillery, by name Weakley,⁹⁸ leapt over the parapet beside them. The rearmost men turned to face him, but he had accounted for four in succession when he was killed by shrapnel which burst overhead. A number of prisoners were eventually captured.⁹⁹ This fighting made the passage of No-Man's Land much easier for the subsequent waves, which passed over the enemy's front line while the bombing of dugouts was still proceeding, and emerged, as the 14th Brigade had done, into the grass meadows beyond. As in the sister brigade, except for a long built-up communication trench on the extreme left, leading back past the high-banked earthworks at Delangré Farm 300 yards beyond, the men could find no defence even remotely resembling

⁹¹ Lieut. A. Hudson, 31st Bn. Tea buyer and expert; of Sydney; b. Greenwich, Eng., 25 Feb., 1875. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁹² Lieut. H. Cox; 31st Bn. Insurance manager; of Wangaratta and Brighton, Vic; b. Albert Park, Vic., 27 Jan., 1875. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁹³ Lieut. E. W. Spreadborough; 31st Bn. Schoolmaster; of Warwick, Q'land, b. Warwick, 12 Dec., 1874. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁹⁴ Major C. E. Clements; 31st Bn. Area officer and penal warder; of Coburg and Benalla, Vic; b. Sydney, 28 May, 1878. Died of wounds, 22 July, 1916.

⁹⁵ Capt. G. G. Robertson, 31st Bn. Duntroon graduate; of Bradshaw's Creek, Vic; b. Bradshaw's Creek, 7 Aug., 1894. Died of wounds, 20 July, 1916.

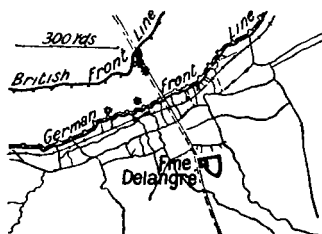
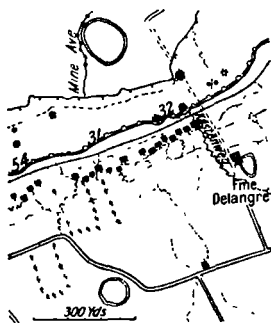
⁹⁶ Lieut. A. Goudie, 31st Bn. Grazier; of Yannathan, Vic; b. Yarraville, Vic., 19 Nov., 1886.

⁹⁷ Capt. F. Drayton; 31st Bn. Clerk; b. Boulder City, W. Aust., 6 July, 1889.

⁹⁸ Pte. P. Weakley (No. 318; 31st Bn.) Wharf labourer; of Brisbane; b. Adelaide, Jan., 1884. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

⁹⁹ Thirty-five were retained in the trench all night, as there were no men available for conducting them to the rear. They were sent to the Australian lines when the enemy counter-attacked next morning.

those breastworks, which were the only "trenches" the 8th Brigade had seen, except in Egypt. Part of the left of the 32nd was under the impression that its duty was to attack Delangré Farm, the countermanding order apparently not having reached the front-line troops. The German resistance from that place, was however, too strong and advance in its direction failed; but the remainder of the objective had to be sought. The sketch-maps with which some of the company commanders had been provided showed, on this flank, a crowded system of second and third trenches crossed like a gridiron by short communication alleys and all connected on the left with the main communication trench, which the troops could see, and over which some of them now swarmed. But of the grid-work nothing could be found, unless it was represented by several watery ditches met with in the grass. With some doubt Major White¹⁰⁰—one of the few officers who survived unhurt¹⁰¹—called back Captain Halkyard¹⁰² (who, with some



Trenches as shown in British maps (summer of 1916)

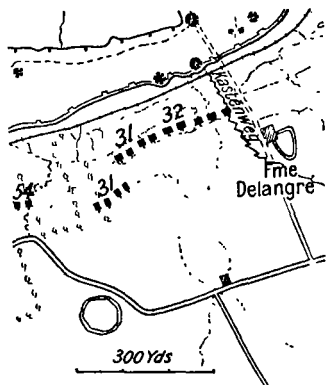
¹⁰⁰ Major A. R. White, M.C.; 32nd Bn. Draughtsman; of Mount Lawley, W Aust.; b. Sydney, 31 Oct., 1886.

¹⁰¹ Of the officers of the 31st and 32nd Battalions, there were killed or wounded—in addition to those mentioned elsewhere—the following: 31st Bn—(wounded) Captain E. Russell (medical officer), Lieutenants M. E. Dening, R. K. Hibbs, and J. R. S. MacLeod; 32nd Bn.—(killed) Lieutenants J. Benson, R. T. Griffen, F. Hulks, and A. Paterson; (died of wounds) Lieutenant J. Ion; (wounded) Captains F. C. Lloyd, C. S. Tratman, Lieutenants A. Campbell, J. B. O'Connor, A. T. Rogers, and C. B. Thomas.

Russell (medical practitioner) was of Stanthorpe, Q'land; Dening (student) of Tokyo, Japan, and Brisbane, Q'land; Hibbs (mercantile clerk) of Caulfield, Vic., MacLeod (bank official) of Melbourne; Benson (tramway employee) of Cheltenham, S Aust.; Griffen (clerk) of Riverton, S Aust.; Hulks (member of Aust Permanent Forces) of Woollahra, N.S.W.; Paterson (storekeeper) of Trayning, W Aust; Ion (member of Aust. Permanent Forces) of Leederville, W Aust; Lloyd (public servant) of Goodwood Park, S. Aust.; Tratman (hospital secretary and radiographer) of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust; Campbell (grazier) of Broadford, Vic.; O'Connor (painter) of Millicent, S Aust.; Rogers (member of Aust. Permanent Forces) of Coolgardie, W. Aust.; and Thomas (clerk) of St. Peters, S Aust.

¹⁰² Capt. C. L. Halkyard; 32nd Bn. Duntroon graduate; of South Yarra, Vic; b. South Yarra, 5 Oct., 1895.

men, had gone beyond these drains) and, stationing the front line of the 32nd in the farther of two ditches, with the big communication trench on its left, anxiously referred to the second-in-command of the battalion, Major Hughes,¹⁰⁸ who at that time came up. Hughes agreed that, according to the meagre description in the battalion's orders, this must be the objective; but the ditch (he afterwards said) "was not a fire-trench or, if it had been, had been flooded and dis-used for a considerable time. It was obvious that there was no protection there for our men." To the right front could be seen part of the 31st pushing farther ahead, and the two officers therefore had serious doubts whether they were far enough forward.



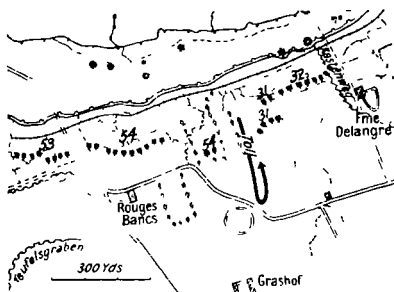
The British shells were falling close in front, and little was visible through the dust of their bursts. Hughes, moving cautiously forward to reconnoitre, was almost immediately wounded. He refused to be carried out of the fight, but crawled to a position just behind the trench, so that, without being in the men's way, he could direct them; but he was practically unconscious, and the control of the front line on this flank lay thenceforth with Captain White.

The troops which Major Hughes had seen to his right front were the rear waves of the 31st with Colonel Toll, who, in consequence of their heavy casualties, had combined his third and fourth waves before leaving the Australian trench, and led them out together. On reaching the German line, as no word of success had yet come back from the second wave, he had decided to leave in the German front line only enough men to establish Lewis-gun posts, and to go forward himself with all the rest. It had so happened that in front of him there were even fewer traces of rear defences than

¹⁰⁸ Major J. J. Hughes, 32nd Bn. Public servant; of Adelaide; b Port Pirie, S. Aust., 11 Oct., 1875.

elsewhere. Some way across the open they had found a ditch or "creek" of stagnant water, waist-deep, between high thistles, and containing the bodies of a few dead Germans. So full was this channel that the enemy had been accustomed to cross it on foot-bridges, on one of which stood a soldier of the 31st ineffectively prodding with his bayonet at a German who disappeared entirely beneath the water at each thrust, and, putting up his head at intervals, asked for "Officer" and disappeared again. He was rescued and sent to the rear by Lieutenant Trounson,¹⁰⁴ Lewis-gun officer of the 31st, who was strolling past with his machine-gun over his shoulder. Beyond this ditch the 31st passed only a shallow sap, where little more than the sods had been turned, and in which were some wounded Germans who surrendered. Others could be seen, all making for Delangré farmhouse, the ruins of which were now close to the extreme left of the line.

At this stage a German machine-gun opened from somewhere in the middle distance, which was obscured by trees and hedgerows,¹⁰⁵ and the troops accordingly took cover in this furrow, where, firing a few volleys at fixed range in the direction of the sound, they silenced the gun. As no recognisable support trench had been met with, Toll, after consultation with Major Eckersley,¹⁰⁶ decided to place his front line there, and sent by pigeon¹⁰⁷ a message to his brigadier:



6.30 p.m. Four waves well over 200 yards beyond enemy's parapets. No enemy works found yet, so am digging in.

¹⁰⁴ Capt. L. J. Trounson, M.C.; 31st Bn. School teacher; of Ararat and Hollybush, Vic; b Maryborough, Vic., 22 Aug., 1895.

¹⁰⁵ The Germans, for night-firing on the Australian communications, had constructed a machine-gun position not far from Les Clochers, in a position known as the "Hofgarten." According to the historian of the 21st Bavarian R.I.R., this helped to check the advance. It was never (he says) discovered by the British or Australians, "so cleverly had it been covered with a screen of trees and shrubs" (*History of the 21st Bavarian R.I.R.*, p. 44).

¹⁰⁶ Major P. A. M. Eckersley. Commanded (temporarily) 31st Bn., 1916/17; 14th Training Battalion, 1918. Clerk; of Clayfield, Q'land; b. Ipswich, Q'land, 17th Dec., 1866.

¹⁰⁷ The pigeons, of which both Toll and Cass sent several, were at the divisional pigeon-loft within seventeen minutes of their despatch from the front line; this method of communication with headquarters was much the quickest.

Then, leaving Eckersley and the adjutant, Lieutenant Bernard,¹⁰⁸ to supervise the digging, but taking his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Still,¹⁰⁹ and a messenger named Eddie¹¹⁰ with the pigeon-basket, he strode on through the curtain of fire of the Australian artillery to make sure that the objective was not still ahead. After advancing another 200 yards without seeing any defence-line, he came out upon a road, which he recognised as being far beyond the objective. Several hundred yards farther still could be seen barbed-wire entanglements—probably those protecting a German strong-point, known as "Grashof,"¹¹¹ then in course of construction near the farm of La Biette. Toll knew that this could not possibly be the "support-line" referred to in the operation orders, and it appeared to be a strong position. Small parties of the 14th Brigade could be seen away on the right.¹¹² Toll tried to communicate with them, and Bernard went out to obtain touch, but was almost immediately shot. Toll, returning, found that Major Eckersley's line was still out of touch with any troops on either flank. The sun was setting, and from Ferme Delangré and the houses of Les Clochers village beyond there came the incessant chatter of machine-guns. The enemy's artillery had found and was effectively shelling the unprotected troops, who were also caught by occasional shells from their own artillery. The men were consequently under no small strain, and German reinforcements could be seen moving from the rear to Delangré Farm. Concluding that the advanced position was unsafe, Toll decided at 7.14 to make his main position the old

¹⁰⁸ Capt. V. D. Bernard, 31st Bn. Bank clerk; of Mackay, Q'land, b. Brisbane, 10 June, 1895.

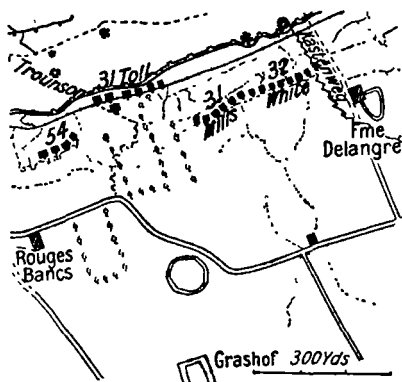
¹⁰⁹ Lieut. G. A. Still, M.C.; 31st Bn. Surveyor; of Maryborough, Q'land; b. Reigate, Surrey, Eng., 4 Jan., 1883 (Still had been buried by a shell before the attack and afterwards lost his sight in one eye.)

¹¹⁰ Sgt. R. Eddie (No. 663; 31st Bn.). Typewriter mechanic, of Yarraville, Vic; b. Port Melbourne, 1894.

¹¹¹ See sketch on p. 399.

¹¹² These included a machine-gun of the 8th Company which had been carried forward by Private W. D. Jeater and another man, who were searching for the German line. They had actually crossed it, full of water (they thought it was "a creek"), and were facing a distant rampart—probably that of the unfinished communication trench to Rouges Bancs—from which the Germans were firing with machine-guns. Jeater and his mate shortly afterwards fell back on the old German front line, the only tenable defensive work they had passed.

German front line,¹¹⁸ that being the only defensible work he had seen;¹¹⁴ but he subsequently arranged with Major Eckersley that part of the battalion should remain as a covering force 150 yards in front, in general alignment with the 14th Brigade. One company under Captain C. Mills¹¹⁵ had, as it turned out, already taken up such a position in an unfinished length of the same derelict trench which, several hundred yards farther east, had been occupied by Captain White of the 32nd. Eckersley fell back upon this, and, on his being wounded in the head, the command of the advanced line of the 31st was assumed by Mills. Out of touch with him across the grasslands, a quarter of a mile to the right, lay—although he did not know it—the left flank of the 14th Brigade, which was in touch, through the old



German front line in its left rear, with the right post of the 31st under Lieutenants Trounson and Drayton. Drayton placed a smaller post in an old communication sap in front of his position, to give warning of any approaching counter-attack; but this was far in rear of Mills, across the gap between whom and the 14th Brigade no trench existed: the space was unoccupied, and Mills, though in constant touch with White on his left and with Toll in rear, was unable even to ascertain the position of the Australian line beyond the break.

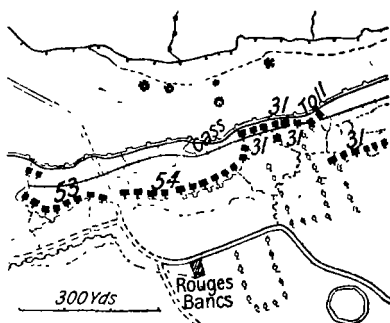
¹¹⁸ A few of the 32nd Battalion who were with this advanced line appear to have taken this order as applying only to the 31st, and remained where they were. These, together with Lieutenant Bernard, whose leg had been broken, were captured next morning by the Germans. Pte. J. E. V. Lowe (of Sydney) of the 31st, who had been badly wounded, was carried back by Lieut. Aland under severe fire the whole way to the old German front-line.

¹¹⁴ One of his sergeants, F. Law, had pointed out to him the existence of a ditch farther back, but Toll regarded it as unsuitable for a main defensive position.

¹¹⁵ Lt.-Col. C. Mills, O.B.E.; 31st Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Auburn, Vic.; b. Heatherton, Vic., 17 July, 1876. Died, 21 April, 1937.

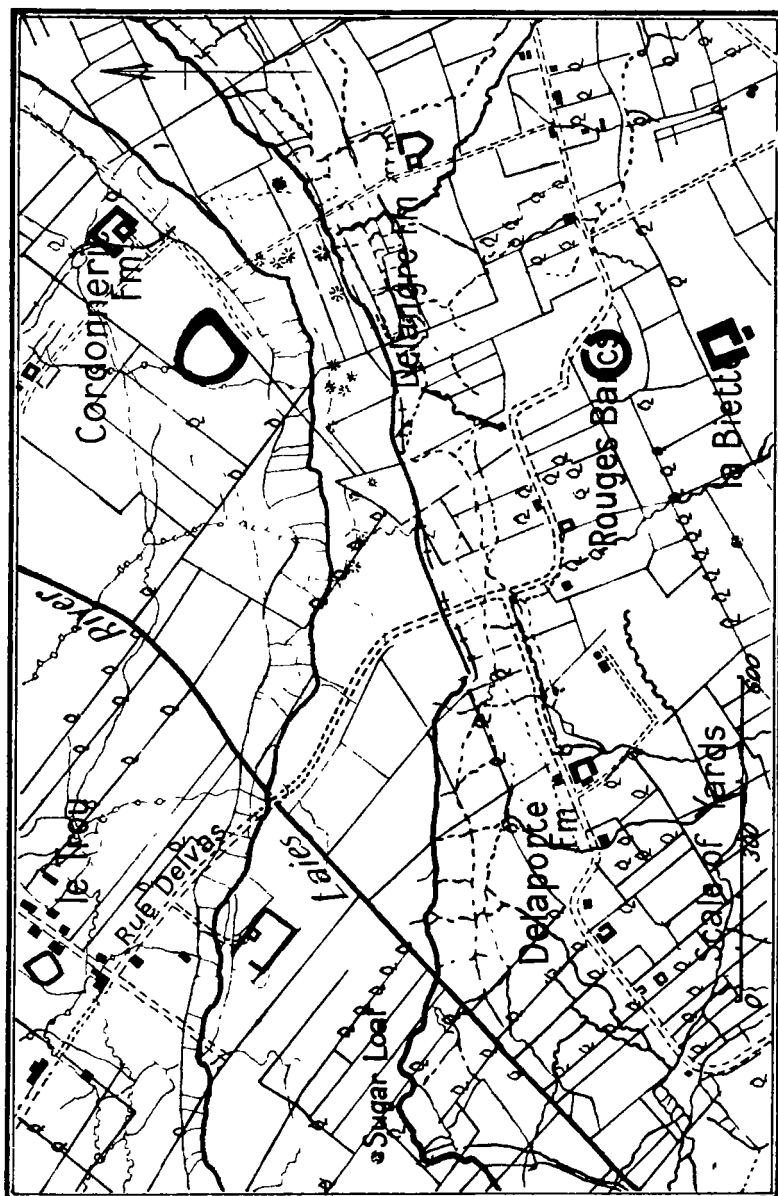
The chief reason for the lack of connection between parties digging the advanced line was the thinning out of the waves by heavy casualties early in the operation. Moreover officers were few, and from the ditches it was difficult to see far to right or left. The haze was increased by the fact that about 8 o'clock two more ammunition dumps, in the old lines of the 8th and 14th Brigades respectively, were set on fire. The dense smoke, rolling across the battlefield from the Australian rear, was at first mistaken by Toll for gas, and the alarm was given. Away on the left front the village of Les Clochers was burning, and British shells had ignited part of Delangré Farm. The smoke haze actually served as a useful screen for the passage of some of the Australian machine-guns across No-Man's Land.

About 7 o'clock, when Toll withdrew from his advanced line, that of the 14th Brigade also, finding itself under the shells of its own artillery and a certain number of casualties occurring, was withdrawn by its officers to the intermediate ditch, assumed to be the second German trench.¹¹⁶ In this, as in the drains occupied by the 8th Brigade, there was eighteen inches of water and mud. Such was the advanced position which the two brigades, not continuously, but in a series of mostly isolated

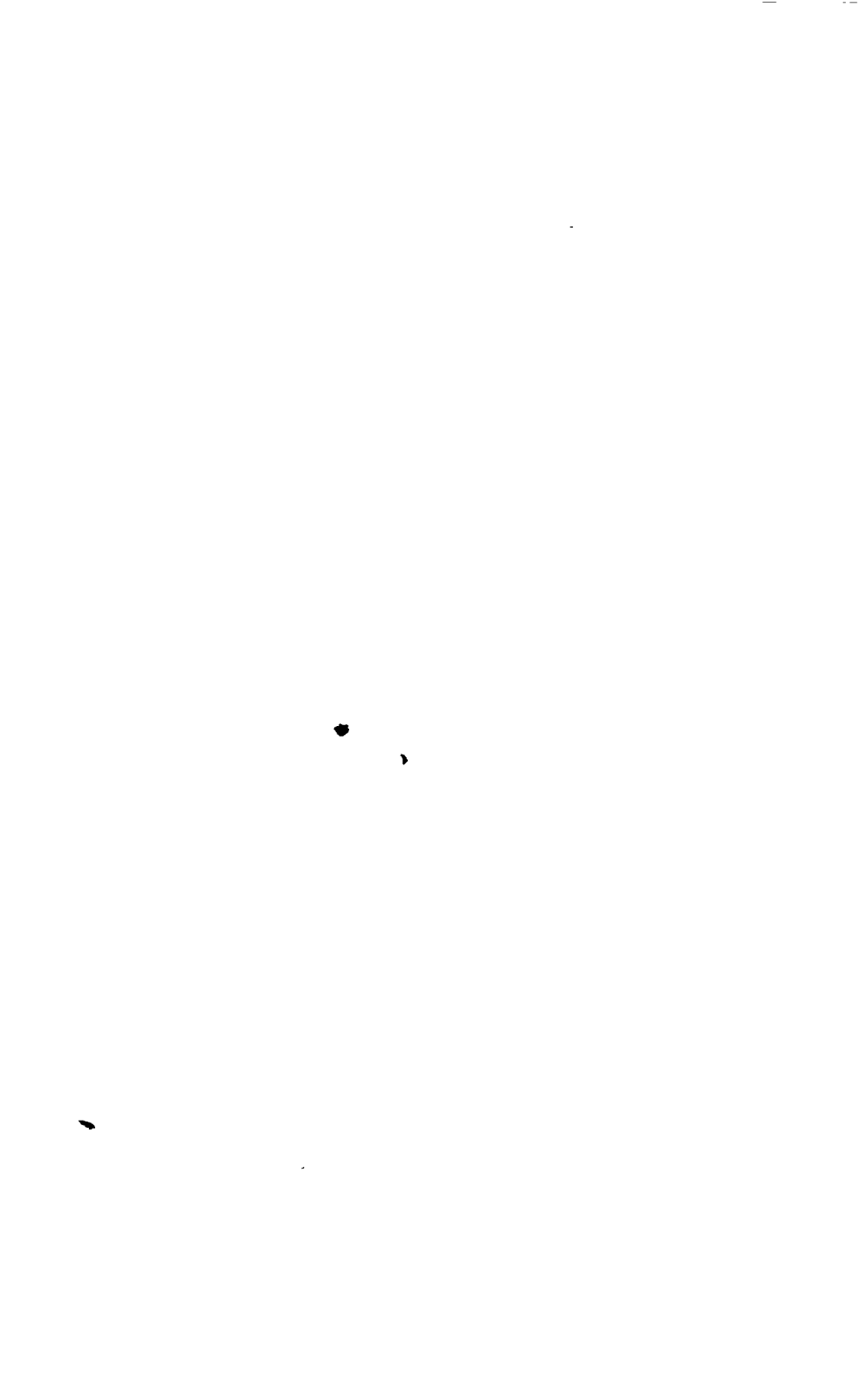


groups, set about converting into a new firing line at nightfall on July 19th, the artillery, at 7.30, increasing its rate of fire to cover them against counter-attack. The artillery commanders were uncertain of the infantry's position, but there is no question that it was occupying precisely that which was intended. The water channels—to which

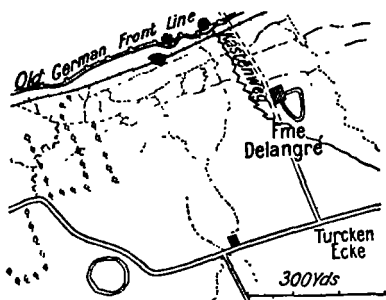
¹¹⁶ At 7 o'clock an artillery observer reported: "150 of our infantry came out of Rouges Bancs farm (N.15.b 88.) and walked into hostile trenches at N.9.b 8.4. (in front of Cass's headquarters). They appeared to have men in dark uniforms, probably prisoners." It is probable that what was seen was the retirement from the front ditch, which was not far short of Rouges Bancs farm.



THE BATTLEFIELD OF FROMELLES, SHOWING THE GERMAN TRENCHES CAPTURED BY THE 5TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION ON 19TH JULY, 1916



even to this day, those who saw them invariably refer as "the ditches," or "the drains," or sometimes "the creek"—were actually the abandoned relics of the extensive trench-system commenced by the Bavarians in the summer of 1915, but abandoned in autumn when flooded by the rising of the Laies. Such diggings almost immediately became overgrown with long grass and rank herbage, and were indistinguishable from ditches, except in some parts where traces of the old revetting were still visible; a few sections were indeed ditches forming part of the system draining the fields, but had been used as trenches by the enemy in the early days of the war. During the night, as the drainage channels throughout the area were opened or choked by shell-bursts, the water rose in them as it did in the Laies, which by morning was running deep. The only communication trench in this area which had been passable during the winter of 1915-1916 was that of which the 8th Brigade had seized the mouth just short of Delangré Farm. Being solidly built with earth-filled ammunition chests, it was known as the "Kastenweg" ("Chest Way"). It had been built over the system of early gridironed trenches,¹¹⁷ of whose existence most of the present garrison of Bavarians were probably unaware, and the embankments forming its sides actually blocked their ends. This was

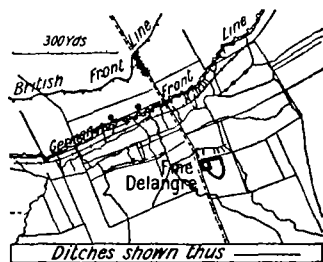


*Actual condition of battlefield July 1916
(Water logged trenches shown thus -----)*

easily discernible in the aeroplane-photographs from which the British trench-maps were drawn, and could have been discovered, had there been time for close study, even by the inexperienced staff of the 5th Australian Division; but the British general staff had been slow to develop specialist

¹¹⁷ That is, those in which the 32nd lay.

instruction in the interpretation of air-photographs,¹¹⁸ and the abandoned trenches had consequently been shown on the map as if they were part of the enemy's main occupied system. Whereas, therefore, Haking and his staff assumed that the troops would be transferring the sandbag parapet from one side to the other of an inhabited trench-line, the 8th and 14th Brigades, often knee-deep in water, were endeavouring to fill their few sandbags with mud dug from their grassy ditches. Being short of shovels, the men worked at first with entrenching tools, and so clayey was the soil that it had often to be pulled off the spade with the fingers. To build up in this fashion a defensible breastwork seemed to many of the workers an almost hopeless task.



Trenches as shown in British maps (summer of 1916)

This difficult process was also constantly hampered, especially on the left, by absence of materials. The original carrying parties—in the 14th Brigade, half the 55th Battalion; in the 8th Brigade, half the 30th—had crossed No-Man's Land with their first loads of sandbags and ammunition on the heels of the fourth wave. But with the commencement of the attack the enemy had brought his artillery-fire heavily down upon the old No-Man's Land, which was also much swept by machine-gun and rifle bullets, making the carriage of supplies across the open very dangerous and burdensome. The scene at about 6.30, when the first fatigue parties were crossing, has been vividly described by an N.C.O. who was wounded while carrying forward some of the Lewis guns of the 53rd and the brigade machine-guns.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ In the I Anzac Corps a junior staff-officer (Lieutenant Herbertson) and a war correspondent had at first been left to discover, mainly by themselves, the interpretation of obscure points in the air-photographs of the corps front. At a later stage a junior New Zealand clerical officer, attached to the corps air-squadron, and the draughtsmen (N.C.O.'s) of the corps topographical section became, by sheer practice, the experts chiefly relied on by the corps staff, others were similarly developed in the artillery.

¹¹⁹ The leader of this party was Lieutenant Briggs of the 14th Machine Gun Company. Seeing that some of the guns of the 53rd were late, he suggested that they should go with him. "He was very cool," says the report, "smoking a cigarette. He shouted 'Are you ready?' and waved his hand, and over they all went." Later in the action Briggs was killed.

The moment they cleared the top of the parapet it became hideous with machine-gun fire. There was a slight slope—our line (of men) ran down it, and then went splash into the ditch up to their waists in water. It was slimy, but it gave some protection. The leading Lewis gunner turned to the right and led the guns along the ditch, and then to the left along a continuation of it, which ran straight towards the German line. It was very good protection for the guns. About 40 yards along it the leader got hit in the neck by a machine-gun bullet. He choked—one of the gunners tied him up, and, with another, they lay there for half-an-hour or longer. The ditch was full of wounded and dying men—like a butcher's shop—men groaning and crying and shrieking. Ammunition was being carried up by pairs of men, the boxes being carried on sticks. One man would go down, and crash would go the box into the water. Shelling was very heavy. The engineers (14th Field Company) were digging a communication trench at this point beside the stream; the wounded were hopping over into this, and the engineers were having an awful time trying to dig the trench. So many men were falling that things were clearly wrong; but, when the word about retiring came along, the men received it with: "What—retreating? Not on your life!" At the same time, things were so broken that they had a sort of fear that it was true.

Many of the carrying parties, on reaching the old German front, were sent on with their loads to the groups digging in the ditches; the commanders of these scanty parties welcomed the arrival not only of the loads, but of the officers and men, whom in many cases they set to dig across the gaps. The carriers, especially in the 8th Brigade, were only too eager to stay and join in what was, for most of them, their first fight. The result was that hardly any organised parties of the 30th Battalion, and comparatively few of the 55th, returned for a second load. The officers of the latter appear to have been told that, if urgently required at the front, they might stay there, and, hearing of the extreme need for leaders, Lieutenant Palmer, who was organising the 14th Brigade's supply from the Australian trench, did not attempt to get them back. But Lieutenant N. E. F. Pinkstone,¹²⁰ Sergeants Panton¹²¹ and Matthews,¹²² Privates Hassett,¹²³ Perkins,¹²⁴ Chadwick,¹²⁵ and

¹²⁰ Capt. N. E. F. Pinkstone, 55th Bn. Journalist; of Cootamundra, N.S.W.; b. Cootamundra, 6 Feb., 1894.

¹²¹ Lieut. A. W. Panton; 55th Bn. Farmer; of Gunnedah, N.S.W.; b. Kempsey, N.S.W., June, 1894.

¹²² Lieut. A. R. Matthews, D.C.M.; 55th Bn. Lorry driver; of Sydney; b. Surry Hills, N.S.W., 25 May, 1887.

¹²³ Pte. J. Hassett (No. 3588; 55th Bn.). Wickerworker, of Redfern, N.S.W.; b. Surry Hills, N.S.W., 2 Nov., 1885.

¹²⁴ Cpl. J. A. Perkins, M.M. (No. 3150; 55th Bn.). Tram conductor; of Sydney; b. Hull, Yorks., Eng., 15 Dec., 1893.

¹²⁵ Lieut. L. Chadwick, M.C., M.M.; 55th Bn. Orchardist; of Galston, N.S.W.; b. Castemaine, Vic., 1 March, 1896.

a few others worked through the night, taking forward supplies and leading carrying parties formed from odd men of all units. It is recorded that Sergeant Panton crossed No-Man's Land on this duty at least a dozen times.

In spite of these difficulties the fairly numerous reports reaching M'Cay from most parts of his front about 7.30 were satisfactory: in the 14th Brigade, Major Croshaw of the 53rd had just returned with news that the troops were digging in 150 yards beyond the old German front, but that reinforcements were badly needed. At 7.36 a similar message was received from Colonel Cass of the 54th. The pigeon messages, sent by Colonel Toll of the 31st during his journey out in front of the line, had duly come to hand, together with another sent after his retirement saying that he could hold the old German front line "if reinforcements are sent over urgently." The fact that part of the 31st was farther out was indicated in a message sent at 7 p.m. by Lieutenant Walker¹²⁶ of the 8th Machine Gun Company:

Major Clements and Captain MacPherson¹²⁷ wounded. Am in bent position under Captain Mills in drain 200 yards (in) front of enemy's front line trenches. Own shrapnel hitting us and enemy finding range. Digging in.

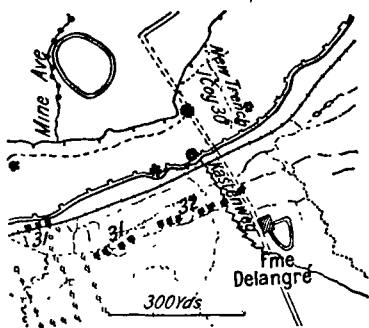
Farther still to the left two companies of the 32nd reported about 7.35 that they were holding the German third line, and that the enemy artillery now had their range. They asked for the support of their own guns.

The reports were entirely silent as to the situation on the flanks, where the chief danger really lay. The 8th Brigade, forming the left of the whole attack, had been ordered by M'Cay to exercise special care in barricading all trenches leading out of the position, whether on its flank or towards the German rear. Of the measures arranged by the 32nd for this purpose no record is available, but the bombing officer, Lieutenant Chinner, was to be responsible for blocking and holding the old German front line on that flank. To a

¹²⁶ Lieut. R. Walker; 8th M.G. Coy. Labourer; of Anthony's Lagoon, Northern Territory; b. Dublin, Ireland, July, 1878.

¹²⁷ Capt. W. Macpherson, 31st Bn. Member of Aust Permanent Forces; of South Melbourne, Vic., b. Auldearn, Nairn, Scotland, 25 Feb., 1872.

company of the 30th, working under the engineers, had been allotted the still more difficult task of joining up that flank to the old Australian firing line by digging a trench across No-Man's Land to the extreme left of the captured position. This would be, not a communication trench, but part of the new front line. It was therefore to start from the existing front line, some distance beyond the left of the attack. When the assault was launched, the allotted troops began to emerge at this point, but found that the barbed-wire in front of the Australian line had not been sufficiently cut. An opening was, however, presently found, and the first section of the working party passed through it and began to cross No-Man's Land. To ensure the trench being dug in the right direction, there went with this section Sergeant Garland,¹²⁸ carrying a sign-post which he was to plant on the German parapet at the easternmost point captured by the brigade, and Lieutenant Lees¹²⁹ with tape and pegs to mark across No-Man's Land a "traversed" line for the trench. As the enemy was still in possession of his front fifty yards beyond the point towards which these men were making, and towards



which their men would be strung out for digging, the task obviously involved extreme danger. Garland had almost reached the far side of No-Man's Land when he was shot dead; but Sergeant Harrison,¹³⁰ who was in charge of the first party, and a few men crossed No-Man's Land unhurt. The survivors were lined out near the old German trench, and, taking advantage of such partial cover as was afforded by shell-holes, began to dig a series of potholes, the intention

¹²⁸ Sgt C. S. Garland (No. 2038; 30th Bn). Mining overseer; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b Carcoar, N.S.W., 16 Oct., 1886. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

¹²⁹ Lieut. J S Lees; 30th Bn. Farmer; of Goulburn, N.S.W.; b Wanaaring, N.S.W., 4 Sept., 1890. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

¹³⁰ Lieut. F. W. Harrison; 30th Bn. Jeweller; of Melbourne; b Albert Park Vic., 22 Feb., 1895.

being, as the excavations extended, to send out more men to connect them into a continuous trench. Lieutenant Lees, however, was very soon killed, and, of the handful of men working on the farther side of No-Man's Land, Privates Rich¹³¹ and Tisbury,¹³² while digging, were shot dead by snipers in the German line.

On the side of No-Man's Land nearer to the Australian trench, the work had met with even greater difficulty. The two digging-parties which were to follow the first were met, as they passed through the gap in the entanglement, by the fire of a German machine-gun which was evidently laid on to that point, but which the first party, emerging unexpectedly, had escaped.¹³³ The second and third parties were thus practically annihilated. It was noted, however, that the gun caught the men about the knees, it being apparently fixed, or possibly so screened that it could not fire lower. Thus Captain Allen,¹³⁴ second-in-command to Major Beardsmore,¹³⁵ whose company was making the attempt, and a sergeant of engineers, keeping low and protected in a measure by the bodies of the fallen men, were able to push forward sandbags, gradually screening part of the deadly passage way; and so, in spite of almost overwhelming difficulties, the work on this trench proceeded. The taping of its course had proved out of the question, but the officers concerned—Lieutenants Farr¹³⁶ of the 8th Field Company, and Lees and Cadden¹³⁷ of the 30th—dispensed with this proceeding as unnecessary, since an irregular trace would give sufficient protection against enfilade.

¹³¹ Pte. D. C. Rich (No. 1134; 30th Bn.). Baker; of Williamstown, Vic.; b. Rutherglen, Vic., 21 Dec., 1894. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

¹³² Pte. C. F. Tisbury (No. 1623; 30th Bn.). Clerk; of Leyton, Essex, Eng., and Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Clapton, London, Eng., 1892. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

¹³³ Immediately outside the Australian trench were the remains of an old front-line system long since abandoned by the British, but which broke the even surface of the ground and afforded some protection as far as the Australian entanglement.

¹³⁴ Capt. R. A. M. Allen, M.C.; 30th Bn. Medical student; of Roseville, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 20 May, 1893.

¹³⁵ Col. R. H. Beardsmore, D.S.O., M.B.E., V.D. Commanded 32nd Bn., 1916/17. Public servant; of Strathfield, N.S.W.; b. Petersham, N.S.W., 12 Aug., 1873.

¹³⁶ Capt. T. A. L. Farr; 13th Fld. Coy., Engrs. Junior assistant engineer; of Cottesloe, W. Aust.; b. London, 13 June, 1894. (Farr had previously served in the infantry—see Vol. II, p. 305.)

¹³⁷ Lieut. R. L. Cadden, 30th Bn. Wool clerk; of Beecroft and Bondi, N.S.W.; b. Caulfield, Vic., 4 Sept., 1889. Died 28 Dec., 1917.

The other danger-point on the left, the long communication trench (Kastenweg), was to be cleared and held by part of the bombers of the 32nd. While these were driving remnants of the enemy up its channel, Lieutenant S. E. G. Mills,¹³⁸ though shot through right wrist and left leg when crossing No-Man's Land, had led the left of the 32nd more swiftly across the open to the right of the trench. The fleeing Germans had broken through a gap in the parapet of the Kastenweg and been shot down as they ran towards Delangré Farm, and Mills with the bombers and others had blocked the trench. Its high ramp automatically sealed and protected the left ends of the 32nd Battalion's ditches. A machine-gun of the 8th Company¹³⁹ was placed on it by Mills, to whom Major White gave control of this flank,¹⁴⁰ and as an additional precaution Sergeant Lewis¹⁴¹ was ordered to construct by its side, well in advance of the 32nd's front, an observation post to give warning of the enemy's approach up the trench.

Thus on the left both the Kastenweg and the old German front line were held, the latter apparently up to a point slightly east of the Kastenweg. Some sort of a barrier appears to have been made and held by the bombers of the 32nd under Lieutenant Chinner,¹⁴² and a machine gun under Lieutenant Lillecrapp¹⁴³ posted, but there was dangerous vagueness among the senior commanders as to the steps taken, and there is no record of other special measures to guard against a German irruption, although it was here that counter-attacks were especially to be expected. The Germans were close,¹⁴⁴ and the sound of bombs came constantly from that direction.

¹³⁸ Capt. S. E. G. Mills, M.C.; 32nd Bn. Farmer; of Albany, W. Aust.; b. Dundas, N.S.W., July, 1881. Killed in action, 25 Oct., 1917.

¹³⁹ This company was commanded by Captain T. R. Marsden (of Sydney), who throughout the night was most active in controlling and supplying his guns.

¹⁴⁰ White had also Captains J. M. Hutchens and C. L. Halkyard and Lieutenants J. Ion and T. P. Hagan. Lieutenant A. Paterson was killed leading the first wave in No-Man's Land, Lieutenant J. Benson at the objective; Captains C. S. Tratman and F. C. Lloyd had been wounded in No-Man's Land. White's own headquarters were in the foremost ditch on the right of the 32nd's sector.

¹⁴¹ Sgt. C. F. Lewis (No. 407; 32nd Bn.). Clerk; of Payneham, S. Aust.; b. Mylor, S. Aust., 6 Oct., 1896.

¹⁴² Lieut. E. H. Chinner, 32nd Bn. Bank clerk; of Peterborough, S. Aust.; b. Peterborough, 15 Jan., 1894. Died of wounds, 20 July, 1916.

¹⁴³ Lieut. M. A. Lillecrapp, 8th M.G. Coy. Bank clerk; of Adelaide; b. Georgetown, S. Aust., 1895.

¹⁴⁴ It was among these that two carrying platoons of Major Purser's company of the 30th unsuspectingly fell, having headed too far to the left in traversing No-Man's Land. The trench was then crowded with Germans, apparently in

On the right flank of the Australians the obscurity and danger of the position were, if possible, greater. It was assumed that part of the 15th Brigade was "in"; an artillery officer reported having seen Australians in part of the sector attacked by its left battalion, the 60th. Statements by some of the wounded tended to the same conclusion, and Colonel Cass of the 54th, now in the German lines, received through the 53rd on his right some report that it was in touch with the 60th. Finding presently that he was connected also with the 31st on his left, he assumed that both flanks were secure, and thenceforth devoted his energy to the obtaining of sandbags, ammunition, and reinforcements for the scanty parties consolidating the front. In actual fact, however, the 53rd, almost leaderless except where Captain Arblaster was digging his advanced line, was at that moment discovering that Germans and not Australians were occupying the trenches on its right. Part of the 53rd started to build a sandbag barricade, either in the front line or its communications, but at 6.30 Lieutenant Pratt,¹⁴⁵ in accordance with orders, took them forward to Arblaster's advanced line, where men were urgently needed. Captain Murray¹⁴⁶ of the 53rd had, at an early stage, led forward another part of the first wave. There still remained, however, in the old German front line some of the bombers of the 53rd, who, on the extreme right of the battalion's sector, were holding back the enemy bombers. But the old German front line at the back of this small party was now practically empty, and the Germans were attacking with superior numbers. At 7.2 the staff of the 14th Brigade received by a signaller a message either from these troops or from the advanced line:

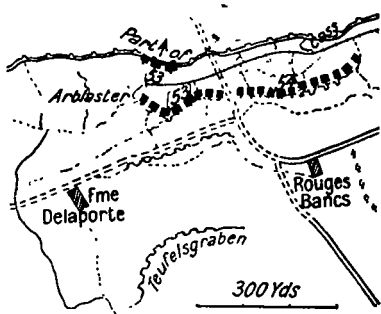
"A" Company 53rd wants reinforcements. Can't hold position unless reinforced.

preparation for a counter-attack, and both the platoon commanders—Lieutenants J. Parker (of Lismore, N.S.W.) and A. Mitchell (of Mosman, N.S.W.)—were killed and their parties shot down. Private F. W. Raysmith, a boy of sixteen, alone reported to his company commander unwounded. (Raysmith was from Newcastle, N.S.W. He had enlisted, as did many others, by overstating his age. He continued throughout the night to carry forward urgently-needed supplies and was eventually wounded.)

¹⁴⁵ Lieut. A. E. Pratt; 53rd Bn. Clerk; of Northbridge, N.S.W.; b. Auckland, N.Z., 1894. Killed in action, 19 July, 1916.

¹⁴⁶ Brig. J. J. Murray, D.S.O., M.C., V.D. Commanded (temporarily) 55th Bn, 1918. Commands 20 Inf. Bde, A.I.F., 1940. Salesman; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 26 April, 1892.

None of their own side were within sight on either flank, and the small party, which had captured twenty Germans, was itself reduced to only seven unwounded men. Its commander therefore ordered that, after throwing all its bombs, it should take its prisoners back to the Australian trenches. This was done, and with the bombers there probably withdrew any of the 60th who had reached the German line with the 53rd. It is also likely that the order to withdraw



reached other troops, for at this stage there was passed to some of the wounded in No-Man's Land and to men digging the 14th Brigade's communication trench the shouted word—"We are retiring!" Even in the Australian line Captain Gibbins¹⁴⁷ of the 55th, coming forward with his company to garrison the front trenches in place of the attacking waves, found troops retiring. "No good—you can't get up there," said their leader. "The 55th can!" was Gibbins's reply as he led his men on.

A report that the 53rd were retiring reached M'Cay at Sailly shortly after 7 p.m.; but in the German trenches Colonel Cass of the 54th, and even the rest of the 53rd, knew nothing of it, nor did the few wounded Australians and Germans who were left lying in dugouts in the abandoned sector. The fight appeared to be going well; many of the wounded, on their way to the rear, were "cock-a-hoop." The medical officers were told of "glorious victory—hundreds of prisoners—stoush¹⁴⁸ for old Fritz."¹⁴⁹ But at the front the shattered waves of the 15th Brigade were pinned down in No-Man's Land, and on the right flank of the 14th a section of the old German front line,

¹⁴⁷ Capt. N. Gibbins; 55th Bn. Bank manager; of Ipswich, Q'land; b. Ararat, Vic., 22 April, 1878. Killed in action, 20 July, 1916

¹⁴⁸ Boxing-slang for "heavy blows."

¹⁴⁹ See an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* by the late Lieut.-Col. C. MacLaurin (of Rose Bay, N.S.W.), 26 July, 1919

after being temporarily seized, was now lying unoccupied by either side. A hundred yards beyond, in the open fields, Captain Arblaster and the advanced flank of the 53rd, utterly ignorant of the new situation in their rear, but fending off with small bombing parties the Germans whom they knew to be in the old trenches on their right, were busily digging their new front line.