

1st Anzac Corps and the Battle of Pozières Ridge, 1916

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Abstract

The first major action of the 1st Anzac Corps on the Western Front was the Battle of Pozières Ridge, which was conducted from 23 July to 3 September 1916. During this time the three divisions of 1st Anzac Corps rotated in and out of the line twice, each time conducting one or more offensive operations against heavily-defended German positions. At its conclusion, the fighting around Pozières and Mouquet Farm had to its record a very high casualty rate for only the most modest of territorial gains.

This thesis examines the series of operations conducted by 1st Anzac Corps during the six weeks of the Battle of Pozières Ridge. These operations are more representative of the Somme than the large attacks like the ill-fated first day or the night attacks of 14-15 July. On any given day during the Battle of the Somme only a small percentage of the line was engaged in fighting the enemy – almost invariably in the same kind of limited, set-piece attacks made by 1st Anzac Corps at Pozières and Mouquet Farm.

The particular focus of this thesis is on the agency of mid to low levels of command in the military hierarchy during this battle. Detailed reports, orders and message of the battle survive in the archives in the Australian War Memorial which are in so many cases simply unavailable for other contemporary British or Dominion formations. They allow a detailed examination of the fighting in this area that is simply not possible in so many cases because of a scarcity of records at lower levels. They reveal

a wide range of operational approaches at brigade, battalion, and in some cases company level. They also, importantly, describe the point at which diversity and innovation could not have any impact at these lower levels as a result of problems at a higher level of command.

After some initial success, 1st Anzac Corps began conducting operations that diminished in scope, with shorter objectives, smaller attacking forces and serious problems with coordination between the artillery and the infantry. Forward movement was increasingly limited and only correlated to Reserve Army's strategic vision in the vaguest of terms. The Australian memorial at the Windmill carries the words of Charles Bean, who said 'Australian troops... fell more thickly on this ridge than on any other battlefield of the war'. This study of the battle reveals that more often than not, this was an unnecessary waste of lives and resources for the most negligible of gains, if any gains were made at all.

Statement

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Meleah Hampton, 2 April 2014

Contents

ABSTRACT	II
STATEMENT	IV
LIST OF MAPS	VI
ABBREVIATIONS	VIII
NOTES	IX
...ON MEASUREMENTS	IX
...ON NOMENCLATURE	IX
... ON QUOTATIONS.....	X
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XI
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. ‘A GENERAL CONFUSION OF UNITS’: THE CAPTURE OF POZIÈRES BY THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN DIVISION, 23 JULY 1916.	26
CHAPTER 2. ‘MET WITH VERY HEAVY MACHINE GUN FIRE’: GORDON LEGGE, THE 2ND AUSTRALIAN DIVISION AND THE OG LINES.	65
CHAPTER 3. ‘WITHOUT REST OR RELIEF’: 4TH AUSTRALIAN BRIGADE’S RUSH OF SMALLER OPERATIONS.	107
CHAPTER 4. ‘HE WILL NOT MOVE FORWARD TONIGHT’: THE 13TH BRIGADE DEMONSTRATES THE DANGER OF ONGOING OPERATIONS AND LOW MORALE.	147
CHAPTER 5. ‘OUR ARTILLERY BARRAGE HAS NOT LIFTED SUFFICIENTLY’: THE EVER DIMINISHING OBJECTIVE LINE.	181
CHAPTER 6. ‘MOUQUET FARM IS CAUSING MANY CASUALTIES AT PRESENT’: THE DANGER OF IGNORING THE OBVIOUS	223
CHAPTER 7. ‘THE HEROES THEY ARE’: THE END OF THE 1ST ANZAC CORPS AT POZIÈRES.	253
CONCLUSION	287
APPENDIX	308
1ST ANZAC CORPS ORDER OF BATTLE 23 JULY – 3 SEPTEMBER 1916.....	308
BIBLIOGRAPHY	311
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL, CANBERRA.....	311
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE, LONDON	316
LIDDELL HART CENTRE FOR MILITARY ARCHIVES, KING’S COLLEGE, LONDON.....	317
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA.....	317
DIARIES AND MEMOIRS	318
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES	318
OFFICIAL HISTORIES	318
BOOKS AND BOOK CHAPTERS	319
JOURNAL ARTICLES	322
UNPUBLISHED SOURCES.....	322

List of maps

All maps unless otherwise stated have been modified from situation maps found in AWM 4. Plotted lines have come from coordinates given in operational orders and reports.

MAP INDEX

MAP 1. THE FORTIFIED VILLAGE OF POZIÈRES.	28
MAP 2. THE CHANGE OF DIRECTION IN ATTACK AT POZIÈRES.	31
MAP 3. ARTILLERY LIFTS FOR THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN DIVISION ATTACK 23 JULY 1916.	33
MAP 4. INFANTRY DISPOSITIONS FOR THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN DIVISION ATTACK 23 JULY 1916.	35
MAP 5. SITUATION AT DAYBREAK 23 JULY 1916.	45
MAP 6: 1ST AUSTRALIAN DIVISION'S SITUATION ON 25 JULY 1916.	61
MAP 7. 2ND AUSTRALIAN DISPOSITIONS FOR THE ATTACK ON 29 JULY 1916.	68
MAP 8. 7TH BRIGADE'S SECTOR DURING THE OPERATION OF 29 JUNE 1916.	81
MAP 9. 26TH BATTALION'S MANOEUVRE TO COVER THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE 6TH AND 7TH BRIGADES.	84
MAP 10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2ND DIVISION'S RENEWED ASSAULT, 4 AUGUST 1916.	93
MAP 11. ARTILLERY LIFTS FOR 2ND DIVISION'S OPERATIONS OF 4 AUGUST 1916.	100
MAP 12. DISPOSITION OF THE 4TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION, 7 AUGUST 1916.	112
MAP 13. PARK LANE TRENCH.	114
MAP 14. LIFTING BARRAGE FOR 15TH BATTALION'S ATTACK ON PARK LANE, 8 AUGUST 1916.	118
MAP 15. POINT 78 IN RELATION TO THE SUFFOLKS AND THE 15TH BATTALION.	122
MAP 16. OBJECTIVE LINE FOR ATTACK OF 9 AUGUST 1916.	127
MAP 17. OBJECTIVES FOR 13TH & 16TH BATTALION OPERATIONS, NIGHT 10/11 AUGUST 1916.	132
MAP 18. 50TH & 13TH BATTALION OBJECTIVES 12 AUGUST 1916.	140
MAP 19. ARTILLERY LIFTS FOR THE ATTACK OF 12 AUGUST 1916.	142
MAP 20. 13TH INFANTRY BRIGADE LINE, 13 AUGUST 1916.	148
MAP 21. BIRDWOOD'S OBJECTIVES AS LAID OUT IN HIS 'FUTURE PLANS' OF 12 AUGUST 1916.	150
MAP 22. RESERVE ARMY'S OBJECTIVES AND THE EXTENDED SALIENT.	154
MAP 23. OBJECTIVE FOR 14 AUGUST AFTER FINAL MODIFICATION.	155
MAP 24. ARTILLERY BARRAGE MAP FOR OPERATION OF 14 AUGUST 1916.	160
MAP 25. OPERATIONS "A" AND "B".	183
MAP 26. 1ST BRIGADE POSITIONS PRIOR TO 18 AUGUST ATTACK.	187
MAP 27. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESERVE ARMY'S OBJECTIVE AND THAT OF THE 1ST BRIGADE.	190
MAP 28. DISPOSITIONS FOR OPERATION "B".	198
MAP 29. DISPOSITIONS FOR ATTACK OF 21 AUGUST 1916.	209
MAP 30. POINTS 27 – 77 – 54 ON THE LEFT AND POINTS 95 – 36 ON THE RIGHT.	228
MAP 31. 6TH BRIGADE'S POSITIONS AT THE APEX OF THE SALIENT, 23 AUGUST 1916.	230
MAP 32. POINTS 12, 42 AND 73 – THE OBJECTIVE OF THE THIRD OPERATION.	233
MAP 33. 6TH BRIGADE'S MODIFIED POSITIONS FOR THE OPERATION OF 26 AUGUST 1916.	235
MAP 34. POINTS 27 AND 12 AT MOUQUET FARM.	236
MAP 35. 24TH BATTALION'S MODIFIED OBJECTIVES FOR 26 AUGUST 1916.	238
MAP 36. BARRAGE LIFTS FOR OPERATION OF 26 AUGUST 1916.	239

MAP 37. OBJECTIVE OF OPERATION OF 29 AUGUST.	254
MAP 38. ARTILLERY LIFTS FOR OPERATION 29 AUGUST 1916.	255
MAP 39. 16TH BATTALION'S PLAN TO CAPTURE MOUQUET FARM, 29 AUGUST 1916.	259
MAP 40. RESERVE ARMY'S OBJECTIVES FOR 1ST ANZAC CORPS IN OPERATION ORDER NO. 24, 29 AUGUST 1916.	264
MAP 41. 1ST ANZAC CORPS' MODIFIED OBJECTIVE FOR ATTACK OF 3 SEPTEMBER 1916.	266
MAP 42. ARTILLERY BARRAGE FOR ATTACK OF 3 SEPTEMBER 1916.	268
MAP 43. THE CONFLICTING DIRECTIONS OF THE ATTACK PLANNED FOR 3 SEPTEMBER 1916.	269

Abbreviations

AMGC	..	..	..	..	Australian Machine Gun Company
Arty	..	..	..	..	Artillery
Bde	..	..	..	..	Brigade
BGHA	..	..	..	..	Brigadier General Heavy Artillery
Bn	..	..	..	..	Battalion
Brig.-Gen.	..	..	..	..	Brigadier General
Coy	..	..	..	..	Company
Div	..	..	..	..	Division
GHQ	..	..	..	..	General Headquarters British Army
GOCRA	..	..	..	..	General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery
GSO	..	..	..	..	General Staff Officer
IO	..	..	..	..	Intelligence Officer
LHCMA	..	..	..	..	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
Lieut.-Col. / Gen.	..	..	..	..	Lieutenant Colonel / General
NCO	..	..	..	..	Non-commissioned officer
OC	..	..	..	..	Officer Commanding
RFC	..	..	..	..	Royal Flying Corps
RMO	..	..	..	..	Regimental Medical Officer

Notes

...on measurements

All measurements in this thesis maintain the use of the imperial scale as found in primary documents. Conversions may be carried out using the information below.

<u>Imperial Measurement</u>		<u>Metric Equivalent</u>
1 inch	=	2.54 centimetres
1 yard	=	0.91 metre
1 mile (1760 yards)	=	1.6 kilometres
1 pound	=	0.45 kilogram
1 ton	=	0.9 metric ton

...on nomenclature

The usual form for naming formations and units is as follows: First Army, I Corps, 1st Division, 1 Brigade, 1st Battalion. However, I have chosen to use the naming conventions of the 1st Anzac Corps at the time of the fighting at Pozières and Mouquet Farm. The most notable difference comes with the name of 1st Anzac Corps itself – Anzac is an acronym and the name of the corps can be correctly rendered as I ANZAC. Corps headquarters most commonly referred to itself as I A. & N.Z.A. Corps in its own documents, but all divisions, brigades and units below referred to it almost invariably as “1st Anzac Corps” – hence the reason that this is the name in use in this thesis. The British corps on the flanks of the Australians preferred the use of the roman numeral, which is reflected in the text. Similarly, although “1 Brigade” is now considered the correct form of naming brigades, all documentation in the 1st Anzac Corps refers to its brigades as “1st Brigade, 2nd Brigade” etc, and that is again the form retained in the text.

... on quotations

While all quotations cited within this thesis are of course taken verbatim from the original source, in some cases I have modified the presentation of the words. Abbreviations have generally been rendered in full – for example, where the original writer has hurriedly scribbled ‘Coy’ or ‘co.’ for company, the full word is represented in text when quoted here. This is simply for ease of reading. The meaning of the word itself or the order of the wording of the message or quotation has not been altered in any way. Similarly, it was standard practice during the war to capitalise the names of places in the middle of text (handwritten or typescript) to minimise the chance of misreading during or after battle – for example ‘the 4th Battalion will take DOT TRENCH tonight’. These capital letters have also been removed so as to avoid unintentional emphasis on certain words for the modern reader. These place names were also misspelled in a colourful variety of ways – “Moquet Farm” and “Posiers” being favourites. Other writers preferred the French – notably for “Ferme du Mouquet”. Different writers may variously use forms of words in messages or documents which were even then becoming archaic, for example “shew” for “show” or “to-night” for “tonight”. In each of these cases, the modern variant was used or inserted. These and other spelling errors or inconsistencies have been corrected to the standardised, modern spelling and the English name used unless otherwise indicated.

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