

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

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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 Pozieres 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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Introduction

‘...all we have to do is take a break
from researching the reports and plans of the generals
and look into the movements of those
hundred thousand men who were directly involved in the events themselves,
and all the apparently insoluble questions can be resolved once and for all
with extraordinary ease and simplicity.’

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
Vol IV, Pt III, Chapter 19

The Battle of Pozières Ridge began on 23 July 1916 with a successful operation in which 1st Anzac Corps captured the small French village of Pozières. It ended on 3 September 1916 with 1st Anzac Corps’ final attempt to take Mouquet Farm, just over one mile to the north west of Pozières. The battle lasted exactly six weeks, during which time the three divisions of 1st Anzac Corps rotated in and out of the line twice, each time conducting at least one offensive operation against heavily-defended German positions. These operations generally took place on an extremely narrow front and were easily seen by the Germans, who could pour accurate artillery and machine-gun fire onto the attacking troops from a number of different directions. The attacks were all generally conducted with the same basic structural approach of infantry advancing behind lifting artillery barrages, and from the same direction with very similar objectives. This makes them an ideal candidate to understand the British

tactical approach on the Somme, from the higher levels of command to the lowest, in all its complexity.

The Battle of the Somme, the major British offensive of 1916, is most often remembered for its 'big days' – the infamous 1 July with its huge numbers of casualties, the night attacks of 14-15 July, and the first use of tanks on 15 September. But there were another 138 days of the battle outside of these three operations. The bulk of the Somme campaign was a grim series of frontal assaults by the Allies and desperate counter-attacks by the Germans.¹ On any given day 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. Fourth Army, to the immediate right of the Australian sector and responsible for the greater part of the British offensives on the Somme, also conducted repeated relatively small-scale attacks on an 'endless repetition of place names', those such as Delville Wood and High Wood, largely through the use of similar uncoordinated, brutal frontal assaults.² So, too, did other parts of Reserve Army, on the left of the Australians. Yet there have been very few studies of these ongoing, small-scale operations, and what they mean in the context of the campaign on the Somme, or in the context of the capability of any of the armies on the Western Front in 1916.

The attack in trench warfare was a more complicated matter than it had first seemed. Early attacks by infantry in either a single line or a series of closely spaced lines, such

¹ Fred R. Van Hartesveldt. *The Battles of the Somme, 1916: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 19.

² John Terraine. *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980, p. 122.

as in the battles along the Aisne and at Ypres in 1914, failed with heavy casualties. Infantry attacking in this manner proved ideal targets for entrenched machine-gunners and even riflemen. But the long, continuous nature of the Western Front meant that flanking manoeuvres were impossible and the only way of attacking the entrenched German invaders was by frontal assault. And so, as the simple approach was failing, some sophistication began to be introduced into the British art of attack. 1915 saw experimentation with a large variety of tactical methods with varying levels of success. Crucially it saw the rise to prominence of artillery support in the attack, and also the absorption of auxiliary arms such as trench mortars, Lewis guns, machine-gun barrages, gas, smoke screens, air observation and increasingly complex signals networks into a more integrated approach to the basic infantry attack.³

This gave commanders in 1916 a broader range of options for devising attacks than ever before, which is demonstrated by the variety of tactical approaches on the first day of the Somme. Some British divisions continued to attack in single lines while others adopted complex approaches in which the infantry advanced in widely spaced formations or even in waves. Some were given additional firepower in the form of machine guns and trench mortars to augment their rifles and bayonets, while others went forward under the cover of a lifting artillery barrage. But no matter what formation was adopted on 1 July 1916, almost all failed because of the simple fact that their main adversaries – distant artillery and well-emplaced machine-guns – had not been dealt with by the artillery. To the south, however, one or two divisional commanders had attempted to protect their troops by firing a heavy curtain of

³ Paddy Griffith. *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1994, p. 53.

artillery shells in front of them. Here some ground was gained at reasonable cost. There were later successes, too. During the night of 14 July, Rawlinson's Fourth Army made some gains under the cover of darkness. These lessons did not go unappreciated, but in 1916 the British Army was still seeking consistency in approach and the ability to advance their lines in preparation for a major breakthrough attack.

Research in these matters almost invariably begins with the official histories of the war. The British Official History of the War series was produced by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence in the 1920s, 30s and 40s under the supervision of Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds.⁴ The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, published between 1920 and 1942, is a 12-volume series written and edited by the official historian Charles Bean.⁵ These works are 'official' only in the sense that their authors were the first to be allowed access to the official records, which are now freely available to researchers. Both of these describe the fighting around Pozières and Mouquet Farm, but the more important of the two is Volume III of the Australian series, simply because it does so in much more depth. Bean devoted several chapters to 1st Anzac Corps' endeavour to capture Pozières Ridge in 1916 and produced an extremely detailed account of the battle from many years of painstaking research. The works of Charles Bean retain absolute dominance over Australian military history, with the Official History of Australia in the war providing the base of research for a huge number of recent publications. But Bean's primary aim in writing was to answer a series of very Australian-centric questions, namely:

⁴ Capt. Wilfrid Miles. *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916. Vol. II.* London: Macmillan, 1938.

⁵ C.E.W. Bean. *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Vol. III. The A.I.F. in France.* Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1929.

how did the Australian people – and the Australian character, if there is one – come through the universally recognised test of this, their first great war?... what did the Australian people and their forces achieve in the total effort of their side in the struggle?... what was the true nature of that struggle and test so far as Australians took part in it? How well or ill did our constitution and our preparations serve us in it?⁶

These parameters put limitations on the Australian official history as a source. In creating his record for the nation, Bean was overwhelmingly concerned with accuracy. His level of detail in the Official Histories has been correctly described as ‘meticulous and astonishingly thorough’.⁷ Bean wrote that he tried to write from ‘the point of view of the front line soldier as well as of the Commander-in-Chief’, but by trying to ‘keep a general picture clear while painting so rich an amount of human incident’,⁸ as he put it, his account of the Pozières and Mouquet Farm fighting is very often difficult (if not impossible at times) to follow. The overwhelming detail obscures the battle’s chronology and over-arching themes. Bean has written ‘a monument to great-hearted men; and for their nation, a possession for ever’,⁹ but he has not written the last word in studies of the war. A great deal of analysis of the fighting method at all levels of command is missing. His personal opinion on the superiority of the Australian soldier clouds much of his judgement. And the context is either skewed or missing in many cases – either the broader context of the campaign or of the

⁶ C.E.W. Bean. ‘The Writing of the Australian Official History of the Great War – Sources, Methods and Some Conclusions’, *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal & Proceedings*. Volume 24, Part 2, 1938, p.90.

⁷ Bill Gammage. Introduction to *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol. IV*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983, p. xxviii.

⁸ Bean, ‘Writing of the Australian Official History’, pp. 91-93.

⁹ Bean, *Official History, Vol. VI*, p.1096.

capability of the British or even Australian military forces during 1916. With its proximity of events and narrow perspective, the Official History of Australia in the War should provide the *first* word, and not the sole foundation for all future discussion and study of the war.

Another specialised body of literature that holds information about the fighting at Pozieres Ridge at battalion level are the unit or 'regimental' histories. These were published after the war, usually by interested senior officers in a semi-official capacity. The authors were allowed access to the official records under a scheme supervised first by Charles Barrett and then by Charles Bean. They were partly funded by sales of the *Anzac Book* which had been published in 1916, and partly by public subscription.¹⁰ Apart from some soldier memoirs, unit historians were among the first to interpret the battle, but again were working within limitations. The purpose of all of these histories is consistently to 'be an interesting souvenir for all members of the battalion and relatives and friends of those who made the great sacrifice'¹¹ by relating 'stirring stories and exploits of its members'.¹² These books fail to analyse the battalion's record in battle against the context of the war. And according to Captain Walter C. Belford, author of the 11th Battalion unit history, *Legs-Eleven: Being the Story of the 11th Battalion AIF in the Great War*,¹³ this was quite deliberate and appropriate:

In the first place it must never be forgotten that a battalion or other unit history is the story of that battalion or unit, and does not or

¹⁰ Bean, 'Writing of the Australian Official History', p. 88.

¹¹ '16th Battalion History', *The Daily News*, Perth, 23 November 1929, p.6.

¹² 'The "Dinkums": History of the 27th Battalion', *The Mail*, Adelaide, 29 April 1922, p.3.

¹³ Belford, Walter C. *Legs-Eleven: Being the Story of the 11th Battalion (AIF) in the Great War of 1914-1918*. Perth, W.A.: Imperial Printing Co., 1940.

should not include more than casual or occasionally more particular references to any other unit, and this only where such references are necessary for the better understanding of the story. In the second place, a battalion history is written primarily for the members of the battalion concerned, and naturally it cannot have much appeal to the general public... it must never be forgotten that a battalion history is not a war history, but the story of a unit recruited from a certain area, whose formation, personnel and war-time experiences are described with as little reference to other units as possible.¹⁴

To compile their volumes these authors made public appeals to ex-members of the battalion to provide 'a short description of any incident of importance (such as acts of gallantry in the line, experiences in training and rest areas, statistics, humorous incidents worthy of note etc.).'¹⁵ An old soldier raised concerns in 1936 about the process of writing the 11th Battalion's history, saying 'very few [men] could or would be able to sit down and write their war experiences without first having a good think over things, and at this stage, when so long a period has elapsed, not many would be too confident of dates, places, etc.'¹⁶ While the best of these volumes, as *Legs-Eleven* is, can be very informative about a battalion's involvement and experience of the war, they are always prone to inaccuracy, self-censorship, and even boasting. Given the limits of their intended audience, unit histories are more revealing about the experience of the war rather than the context in which these men were fighting.

¹⁴ 'Toxites' (pseudonym of Captain Walter C. Belford), 'Unit Histories', Perth *Western Mail*, 22 February 1940, p.2.

¹⁵ 'Twelfth Battalion History', Launceston *Examiner*, 17 March 1924, p.4.

¹⁶ '11th Battalion History', Perth *Western Mail*, 30 July 1936, p.2.

The modern scholarly approach to study of the Battle of the Somme has taken one of two directions. This may seem an unusually small number of categories in which to place what is quite simply an enormous number of studies, but as Sir Michael Howard said in 1993, historians have 'let themselves be diverted, either upwards to a discussion of high strategy and a debate over the rationale for those operations; or downward to compiling battlefield memoirs and analysing the nature of trench warfare'.¹⁷ The situation has hardly changed in the ensuing years, and the result of this is that almost all of the studies purporting to be of an operational nature undertake their subject from one of two perspectives – top-down, or bottom-up. These two approaches can be best described by the questions they seek to answer. A top-down approach is concerned with understanding the role of high command in the operational conduct of the Somme. It remains analytical of the highest levels of command; GHQ, Army, corps, division and occasionally brigade and battalion level. It is also concerned with the role of the political leaders above these levels. The bottom-up approach asks different questions of its materiel. These works are concerned with the experience of the soldier and what it was like to be there, frequently avoiding an analysis of operations apart from those having a negative effect on the living conditions or life expectancy of the soldier. These two perspectives have dominated the study of the Somme for the last 90-odd years, at different times and with different results, but little innovation.

The simple vastness of the enterprise is one of the reasons that almost all operational studies of the British campaign take a 'top-down' approach. The Somme was an

¹⁷ Michael Howard. 'World War One: The Crisis in European History – The Role of the Military Historian', *The Journal of Military History*. Volume 57, No. 5, Special Issue (October 1993), p. 137.

enormous undertaking involving as many as 55 divisions of infantry along 18 miles of front. It lasted more than four months. The top-down approach concentrates on the largest of the formations of the British Army – Armies, corps, and divisions – to describe and analyse the battle. To attempt to get an overview of the battle without running to hundreds of volumes, this seems reasonable. But it limits knowledge of the battle to an understanding of the actions of a very few commanders and the consequences of their decisions. And, as Bean found in writing the Official History, commander's reports are prone to important inaccuracies.¹⁸ The top-down approach also provides a very simple reason for the focus on the three major operations within the Somme campaign. While the first day of the Somme involved a large number of divisions across a broad front, the rest of its days did not. The vast majority of the attacks made during the Somme campaign involved no more than one or two divisions – or fewer – across a mile or less of front. These small attacks can easily slip under the radar of a wider top-down approach to the war as seemingly insignificant to the bigger picture. Even Bean with his attention to detail struggled with the deterioration of scale in the fighting around Pozières Ridge, writing 'the series of battles which ensued... cannot be described with the minuteness hitherto employed'.¹⁹ He had still a month of fighting to describe – nearly half of the campaign for 1st Anzac Corps. Rather than representing an insignificant factor of the main battle, these 'insignificant days' *are* the battle. The days that are given the most prominence are in fact the least typical. And yet this is generally not recognised in the historiography.

¹⁸ Bean, 'Writing of the Australian Official History', p. 91.

¹⁹ Bean, *Official History, Vol. III*, p. 728.

The Battle of Pozières Ridge is a regular feature of top-down studies of the Somme. However, particularly in those studies that emphasise the 'big days', such as A.H. Farrar-Hockley's *The Somme*,²⁰ which devotes significantly more than half of its pages to the planning and conduct of 1 July, the Australians at Pozières and Mouquet Farm are not the focus of any serious study – indeed, any study at all. Instead they are mentioned in terms of little more than Gough and his use of the phrase 'at all costs'.²¹ Studies at a high level can also skew interpretations of events. For example, in his work also entitled *The Somme*, Gary Sheffield credits Walker with the Australian success at Pozières as a result of having 'taken the trouble to consult with British divisions to glean their lessons of recent fighting'.²² This comes from his closer study of Pozières in a book chapter, which compares the actions of the 1st Australian Division's commanding officer, Lieutenant General Harold Bridgwood Walker, with that of the 2nd Australian Division's commanding officer, Lieutenant General James Gordon Legge, particularly in regard to Walker's management of higher command's unrealistic expectations.²³ This chapter is a fine case study of divisional command on the Somme. However, in the context of the Battle of Pozières Ridge, it fails to address the differing interpretation of Walker's orders by his brigade commanders, which had a critical effect on the battle, and is in fact not at all representative of the Australian experience at Pozières in late July 1916, or in the six weeks to follow. These problems are simply a matter of the scope of the study, and so while some important ideas have been raised, so have a number of questions

²⁰ A.H. Farrar-Hockley. *The Somme*. London: Pan, 1966.

²¹ Farrar-Hockley, *Somme*, p. 200.

²² Gary Sheffield. *The Somme*. London: Cassell, 2003.

²³ Gary Sheffield. 'The Australians at Pozières: Command and Control on the Somme, 1916.' David French & Brian Holden Reid (eds.) *The British General Staff: Reform & Innovation*. London: Routledge, 2002.

The most extended treatment of Pozières and Mouquet Farm within a wider, top-down study of the Somme is in Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson's *The Somme*.²⁴ The chapter on Pozières and Mouquet Farm again comes from the top-down approach and is used specifically to understand the role of the highest levels of command on the Somme. In this chapter there is not room to deal with the six weeks of battle comprehensively, and so case studies are drawn out to make important points about the leadership of the British commander, General (later Field Marshal) Sir Douglas Haig and the commander of the Reserve Army, Lieutenant General Sir Hubert Gough. Prior and Wilson's conclusion was that 'Gough and Haig bear a heavy responsibility for the Mouquet Farm fiasco', Haig in not playing a coordinating role between Reserve and Fourth Army, and Gough in driving his troops into a narrowing salient.²⁵ While in one respect this point of view is true, it casts the 1st Anzac Corps as a pawn of the British with no hand in its fate at all. This is simply not the case – so many of the failed battles of mid to late August 1916 are as much the responsibility of Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood, commanding officer of the 1st Anzac Corps, as Gough or particularly Haig. While the study of (and criticism of) high strategy is warranted, it is only one part of the story of Pozières and Mouquet Farm, and can only give a limited understanding of how and why the battle turned out as it did.

There is another reason for the stranglehold 'top-down' approaches have on the study of the Battle of the Somme, which is the preoccupation First World War historians and authors have had with the actions of Douglas Haig as the most senior commanding officer of the British Expeditionary Force. His actions during the war

²⁴ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson. *The Somme*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005.

²⁵ Prior & Wilson, *The Somme*, p. 184.

were under debate almost as soon as the war ended, owing, according to at least one staunch supporter, to a 'failure to get the period of Haig's leadership in correct perspective', and was perhaps a symptom of a general 'pessimistic mood' in British society following the war.²⁶ Nevertheless, it took some time for the debate to see full expression in the written record. By the early 1930s even writers who had generally been positive about Haig in the early post-war years such as Sir Basil Liddell Hart became increasingly critical of Haig.²⁷ Lloyd George's memoir of the war years, which appeared in mid 1930s, was savage in its assessment, saying 'he was a second-rate Commander... not endowed with any of the elements of imagination and vision which determine the line of demarcation between genius and ordinary capacity'.²⁸ The 1960s saw debate over the role of Haig blossom with two works which continue to polarise the issue. Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* presents an argument for the inadequacy of the British generals, using an examination of 1915 in particular to establish a problem he claims continued through 1916 and on to the end of the war.²⁹ On the other hand, John Terraine's *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* takes the opposite view and argues that Haig was an extremely competent general who deliberately used a strategy of attrition in the successful defeat of the Germans on the Western Front.³⁰

²⁶ George A.B. Dewar (with Lieut.-Col. J.H. Boraston). *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*. Vol. I. London, Bombay & Sydney: Constable & Co., 1922, pp. 11 & 5.

²⁷ B.H. Liddell Hart. *Reputations*. London: John Murray, 1928 is the volume to first suggest criticism of Haig. Liddell Hart's criticism is more evident in *A History of the World War*. Boston: Little Brown, 1934 – first published in 1930 as *The Real War*.

²⁸ David Lloyd George. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*. Vol. II. London: Odhams Press, 1938, p. 2014.

²⁹ Alan Clark. *The Donkeys*. London: Hutchison, 1961.

³⁰ John Terraine. *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier*. London: Hutchison, 1963.

This debate has continued to the current day with virtually every book written on the British on the Western Front drawing conclusions about Haig's leadership. These conclusions about Haig and his strategy may range from 'savage condemnation to warm praise',³¹ but they are always a major focus of analysis. More often than not, Haig is seen as the equivalent of the British Army – success in the field is absolutely the result of success by Haig, and vice versa. This seriously neglects the influence of the lower levels of command and does not investigate the extent to which they were granted autonomy or had any influence on proceedings. It seems so far to have been impossible to draw conclusions about the actions of the British Army on the Western Front without directly relating them solely to the actions of Haig.

The alternative to a top-down approach has been to move away from operational analysis altogether and take a bottom-up approach. This approach seeks to answer the question of the experience of the man in the field. What was it *like*? While this kind of approach, exemplified by works by Bill Gammage,³² Lyn Macdonald³³ and Peter Hart,³⁴ sheds a great deal of light onto the experiences of individual soldiers, it does not link their experiences with the broader tactical and strategic plan. This is largely a result of the sources that this approach relies upon, namely the personal diaries and memoirs of lower levels of command during the war. This is a total departure from operational studies, because, in the words of one ex-serviceman, the ordinary soldier

³¹ Van Hartesveldt, *Historiography & Annotated Bibliography*, p. 14.

³² Bill Gammage. *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*. Australia: Penguin, 1974.

³³ Lyn Macdonald. *Somme*. London: Michael Joseph, 1983.

³⁴ Peter Hart. *The Somme*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005.

neither knew where he was, nor whither he was going, he could have no plan because he could foresee nothing... though his movements had to conform to those of others, spontaneously, as part of some infinitely flexible plan which he could not comprehend very clearly even in regard to its immediate object.³⁵

An individual soldier was privy only to very specific information relating directly to the objectives he and his unit were to carry out. These bottom-up studies generally do not place the information these individuals were privy to into an extended understanding of the mechanics of the battlefield, but rather use their sources to discover the experience of the individual soldier – to describe the living conditions and experience of fighting during the First World War.

Similarly, studies of small-scale operations within campaigns – such as the Battle of Pozières Ridge as a part of the Battle of the Somme – have been largely avoided by academic historians. But while academia has paid little attention to these battles, non-academic authors have been researching and writing about them. The best of these recount smaller operations such as those at High Wood and Mametz.³⁶ But the focus of these publications is to tell the story of an event, usually with some kind of parochial motivation – that is, in order to give prominence to the story of a single unit or formation, or indeed a nation's involvement in the war. There are two books of this nature on the battles around Pozières and Mouquet Farm in 1916. The first was written by journalist Peter Charlton in 1986 entitled *Pozières 1916: Australians on the*

³⁵ Frederic Manning. *Her Privates, We*. London: Peter Davies, 1930. p. 14.

³⁶ Terry Norman. *The Hell They Called High Wood*. London: William Kimber, 1984 and Colin Hughes. *Mametz: Lloyd George's Welsh Army at the Battle of the Somme*. Gerards Cross: Orion, 1982.

Somme.³⁷ Charlton consults a wide range of secondary sources and a few primary sources to tell the story of the Australians in 1916. The book does not limit itself to the attack on Pozières on 23 July 1916, but discusses most of the actions the Australians were involved in during 1916, including all of the attacks towards and against Mouquet Farm, and, less relevantly, the ill-fated attack by the 5th Australian Division near Fromelles on 19 July 1916. But the primary focus of this book is to tell of the experience of the Australian formations and what those experiences meant for them *as Australians*. It is intended to tell a story that contributes to a sense of national identity. It does not identify Australians as a part of a British Army, which they were; in this book they are always separate, unique and at the mercy of 'limited and inadequate' British generals.³⁸ As such, this book presents a solid narrative but does little to advance our understanding of the conduct of the war on a wider level, or the role that the 1st Anzac Corps had to play within it. Twenty-five years later, a second book on precisely the same topic was written by Scott Bennett, entitled *Pozières: The Anzac Story*.³⁹ It is a sad indictment on Australian military history that a book so very similar in approach to another work but far less sophisticated in execution should be able to be published. This second work has a remarkably similar title, the same basic structure – including the incongruous chapter on Fromelles – and a similar focus on the 'Australianness' of the battle. These constitute the only two monographs specifically and solely on events at Pozières and Mouquet Farm, and again do little to contextualise the event within the wider framework of the campaign or the war.

³⁷ Peter Charlton. *Pozières 1916: Australians on the Somme*. London: Lee Cooper with Secker & Warburg, 1986.

³⁸ Charlton, *Pozières 1916*, p. 292.

³⁹ Scott Bennett. *Pozières: The Anzac Story*. Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe, 2011.

One of the most important developments in the recent historiography of the First World War has been the development of the 'learning curve theory', which arose in the 1980s and 1990s among British historians. This is the idea that 'the record of command during the war described a "learning curve",' in other words, that a mixture of lessons taken from earlier battles like the Somme and Passchendaele combined with the 'wearing out' effects of the fighting on the German Army helped the Allies to achieve victory in 1918.⁴⁰ This is evident in the works of historians such as Gary Sheffield, who wrote that it was possible to view the Somme

as a necessary, even an inevitable battle that hurt the Germans more than the British and pushed them towards making strategic decision that would eventually lose them the war... In this view, the Somme was the "muddy grave" of the Imperial German Army.⁴¹

A stronger assertion suggests that the Somme experience actually taught the British (and, of course, the French) valuable lessons for the future conduct of the war.⁴² This view has not been limited to British historians. Canadian Tim Travers, although preferring to begin his analysis of British successes of 1918 with an examination of the Battle of Third Ypres in 1917, conceded, too, that the Somme was part of the net result of a victory for the Allies in 1918.⁴³ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, however, have concluded that the learning curve was 'an astonishingly uneven one'⁴⁴ in a number of their works, notably *Command on the Western Front: the Military Career of*

⁴⁰ Jay Winter & Antoine Prost. *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005 (English translation), p. 75.

⁴¹ Sheffield, *The Somme*, p. xii.

⁴² William Philpott. *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*. Great Britain: Little, Brown, 2009, pp.439 and following.

⁴³ Tim Travers. *How the War Was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One*. Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2005, p. 181.

⁴⁴ Winter & Prost. *The Great War in History*, p. 75.

*Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918.*⁴⁵ Many tactical innovations were not GHQ-generated or even -endorsed ideas. Different tactics were tried, discarded, tried again and applied in a generally haphazard manner by different units at different times – and what is frequently overlooked – by different levels of command. The learning curve theory is increasingly being discredited because of too many examples of this unevenness. But while learning at all levels of command was uneven and stilted throughout the war, it is indisputable that by 1918 the British Army had put together a systematic approach to warfare that was able to break even the strongest German defences at will. There was development going on within the British Army, but it does not necessarily stand to reason that the only manner in it could have happened was to have had its genesis with the highest levels of command before moving down to the lowest levels of the army.

What is missing between the top-down and the bottom-up approach, and indeed in the exploration of the learning curve theory, is an appreciation of the action and agency of mid to low levels of command in the military hierarchy during battle. The rapid and massive expansion the British Expeditionary Force had undergone since 1914 meant there were more levels of command between Haig as field marshal and the soldier in the field with bayonet in hand than there had ever been before. Almost all officers were in command of dramatically larger formations than they had been before the war, if they came from a military background at all. Orders had to pass through Army, corps, division, brigade and battalion headquarters before being issued to company commanders, and thence to platoons and their sections. Each of

⁴⁵ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson. *Command on the Western Front: the Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

these levels of command had to adapt the orders given to become more specific for the simple reason that the highest levels of command could not be responsible for every tactical manoeuvre over every small piece of ground. Each could therefore interpret orders given in a number of ways, having an impact on the end result of the battle, or at least the conduct thereof. And so it is not logical simply to draw a direct line between orders given by the highest levels of command and the end result of a battle.

Eventually GHQ would issue pamphlets to disseminate these ideas BEF-wide, but in 1916 this practice was in its early days; it was unevenly applied and frequently ignored by those who received the information.⁴⁶ Developments often happened *in spite* of the actions or understanding of commanders at the upper levels. An example of this is General Sir Henry Horne, an artillery officer who commanded XV Corps in 1916. His corps was responsible for some of the earliest examples of creeping artillery barrages, and in fact fired one on 1 July with good effect. XV Corps went on consistently to develop their creeping barrage tactics, and apply them in future operations in order to provide their infantry protection in their advance. And yet Horne stated in September 1916 that he ‘could never follow what is the value of a creeping barrage’.⁴⁷ Clearly appreciation of the value of the creeping barrage came from elsewhere within his corps; more importantly, this ‘elsewhere’ had the wherewithal to develop and apply this tactic without the understanding of the upper

⁴⁶ General tactical advice was being distributed by memo as a form of order. For example, “O.A. 256”. Memorandum from Lieut.-General L.E. Kiggell, Chief of the General Staff. 16 July 1916, AWM 26/40/1, which gives instruction for an infantry advance under cover of a lifting barrage – the same tactic which enabled some ground to be gained in the southerly part of the attack on the first day of the Somme. Set-piece attacks, it suggested, should be conducted under ‘a well-directed barrage maintained close in front of advancing infantry’ which in turn should be careful to ‘not uncover the first objective until the infantry are close to it’.

⁴⁷ Prior & Wilson, *The Somme*, p. 224.

echelon of command. So the learning process was not a straightforward one, and not one that necessarily filtered from the strategy-makers at the top to the fighters at the bottom. How and where this tactical appreciation arose is precisely the kind of question that a continued 'top-down' approach to the study of the First World War cannot answer.

The least common studies in First World War military history attempt to supply an appreciation of the action and agency of these mid to low levels of command in the military hierarchy. These studies are rare simply because in so many cases there are very few sources available at that level. The best way to overcome this so far has been to use sources such as the pre-war Field Service Regulations booklets and memoranda, training notes and other forms of information dissemination during the war. Paddy Griffith relied on these sources when writing *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18*, a work that stands almost alone in analysing lower level actions in the First World War.⁴⁸ However, in testing principles derived from these sources he is generally constrained to the use of post-action reports generated at battalion level or higher, or from personal memoirs and recollections, bringing an edge of the 'top-down' study to his work. Andy Simpson has studied the role of command at an intermediate level in his book *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18*.⁴⁹ This book makes some important advances in our understanding of the increasing flexibility of the corps level of command during the war, but again avoids detailed operational analysis of

⁴⁸ Griffith. *Battle Tactics*, 1994.

⁴⁹ Andy Simpson. *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18*. London: Spellmount, 2005.

lower levels to demonstrate how this worked in the field. Overall, however, these quality operational studies of lower-level units are few.

To really understand how battle worked at brigade or battalion level and below requires recourse to a 'thick description' of battle – the event itself. The concept of a 'thick description' was popularised by the work of Clifford Geertz in the field of ethnography. Geertz took the term from British metaphysical philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who used it to refer to the idea of 'understanding and absorbing the context of the situation or behaviour'.⁵⁰ While ethnography and metaphysical philosophy are not two disciplines immediately associated with operational military history, the principle of a layered and detailed qualitative study as described by Ryle is appropriate to produce a description of a battle to the lowest levels of command. In order to truly understand the process of not just fighting a battle, but of learning and development throughout a campaign, it is important to plumb the depths of the military hierarchy *during battle* to discover not only what army and corps commanders were ordering, but how those orders were taken up, developed and passed on by brigade and battalion commanders, and what battalion, company and even platoon commanders were doing with them in the field. With the unexpected stalemate on the Western Front, both 'new technological and managerial problems' needed to be overcome by all armies.⁵¹ Part of the process of understanding how these 'managerial problems' were overcome in the British Army is to study the entire managerial machine of the military. The upper levels have been described and

⁵⁰ Joseph G. Ponterotto, 'Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept "Thick Description",' *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Sept. 2006), p.538.

⁵¹ Ian F. W. Beckett. 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Brian Bond et al, *Look to Your Front': Studies in the First World War*. Padstow: TJ Press International, 1999, p. 5.

debated in minute detail, but the debate now needs to move on to include lower levels of command.

Yet, as previously mentioned, there are generally very few sources available to write a 'thick description' of a battle, or to understand the role lower levels of command played in the overall adjustment to trench warfare conditions during the First World War. Battalion war diaries, particularly for British units in 1916, usually give only very brief daily summaries of events, and regularly do not contain reports or even orders. The records of the fighting around Pozières and Mouquet Farm are different, however. The Australian War Memorial in Canberra has a startling wealth of information on these battles, including some lower-level reports and, most importantly, more than 5000 messages written in the field of battle. These messages were written by a variety of different men for the purposes of managing the battle. They range from the adjutant of the 7th Battalion advising the commanding officer of A Company to have his men dump their great coats when leaving the trench near Sunken Road,⁵² to 1st Anzac Corps informing divisional commanders that Germans had been reported massing for counter attack by neighbouring units.⁵³ In these messages, individual writers such as Captain Ferdinand Medcalf of the 11th Battalion or Captain Hugh Pulling of the 13th suddenly take on a great deal of importance in terms of the operational conduct of certain attacks where previously they have scarcely rated a mention in the literature. The messages are usually in the form of a pink message slip, but can be a mud-smeared corner of paper. Some are illegible due to the shaky hand writing them under heavy shellfire. They are generally signed,

⁵² Message from Capt. H.E. Bastin (Adj. 7th Bn) to OC A & B Coys, 23 July 1916, 4.25am, AWM 26/55/1.

⁵³ Message G.1263. from 1st Anzac Corps to 1st, 2nd & 4th Divs. & BGHA. 13 August 1916, 11.15pm, AWM 26/50/16.

addressed, dated, and include the time they were written. These messages make it possible to reconstruct the Battle of Pozieres Ridge in detail that has simply not been possible before.

These detailed records form the basis of this study. They have enabled a thorough study of the actions of the 1st Anzac Corps in a way that has not been done previously. The 1st Anzac Corps, comprising the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, conducted more than ten offensive operations against the Germans in the six week period from 23 July to 3 September 1916. Each division held the front line twice during this period, conducting attacks against the German line each time. All of these operations were conducted by the same basic means – a series of lifting artillery barrages behind which the infantry advanced onto either one or a series of objectives. They demonstrate some of the critical factors in battle that had to be appropriately ordered and executed for infantry units to have been able to function in the field – without a strong and appropriately paced artillery barrage, for example, the infantry could do very little. But they also demonstrate that with the appropriate framework, very small units of men, and even individuals, could have an impact on the course of an operation. Brigadiers or battalion commanders interpreted orders in a variety of different ways with impunity and again could make the difference between success or failure. However, without a solid foundation to the battle supplied in the artillery barrage and basic objectives in orders from Army or Corps, lower levels of command were much more restricted in what they could hope to achieve.

It must be noted that while these messages provide a remarkable level of detail of the battle, there are still gaps in the record. Sometimes several hours' worth of messages are missing from the record, or most or all of those for a company or battalion in a particular operation. In these cases little more can be done other than note the lack of messages in relation to the analysis, which in that case would be based on reports at the lowest level available. One of the biggest missing pieces of the puzzle is that of personal intention, particularly of higher level commanders such as Gough and Birdwood. While Reserve Army did make clear the direction in which they wished the attack to go, not all events fit those written intentions. However, there is enough evidence to suggest the thought processes behind orders given, and it has been made clear in text where such suggestions have been made.

The most notable absence in this study is the German. The Germans used a variety of defences in the Pozières-Mouquet Farm area. In Pozières village they had strongly fortified houses, cellars and windmills. The German second line of defence, incorporating the OG lines running to the north and east of the village, were prepared, deep trenches with deep dugouts. They also used a kind of early chequerboard defensive system in areas where trenches had been blown flat by the artillery by placing machine gun crews in shell holes at irregular intervals. At Mouquet Farm the Germans had deeper and more heavily fortified dugouts than Pozières village and could reinforce them via tunnels whose entrances were hundreds of yards to the north. The important factor in all of these methods of defence for the purposes of this study was that each type of defence was enormously successful, no matter what form it took. Even the British GHQ recognised that 'counter attacks can be dealt with by the

Artillery and Vickers Guns placed in rear covering gaps'.⁵⁴ Well-placed machine guns with alert crews could stop any attack the 1st Australian Corps was capable of mounting without the careful planning, preparation and execution of a combined-arms attack. Nor are the German counter-attacks part of this study. There were many during this period, ranging from large-scale operations to short raids by twenty or so men. The purpose of this study is to look at offensive operations conducted by the 1st Australian Corps on the Somme in 1916 in close detail and at as low levels of command as possible to provide a "thick description" of how at least one part of the British Army fought on the Somme.

Despite experience from the Gallipoli campaign, Australian units were still taken by surprise by the conditions on the Western Front. Douglas Haig noted after their arrival to the Pozières sector 'the situation seems all very new and strange to Australian H[ead] Q[uarters]. The fighting here and shellfire is much more severe than anything experienced at Gallipoli!'⁵⁵ The 1st Anzac Corps was like most of the British Army, struggling with the manner in which to conduct this new kind of warfare in 1916. Although authors like Charlton and Bennett would make the case that the two Anzac corps of 1916 were distinct and quite unique from the British army, there are more similarities between them and formations of the new Kitchener Armies of the British Expeditionary Force than otherwise. They were equally inexperienced, their training was based on British principles and their command structure was the same as the British. They were inserted into British Armies – in July, August and September 1916 1st Anzac Corps was a part of the newly-created

⁵⁴ 'General Staff Circular No. 42,' 4th Aust. Div., 25 August 1916, AWM 26/59/9.

⁵⁵ Haig's Diary. Entry for 25 July. In *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds.), London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2005. p. 209.

Reserve Army under Lieutenant General Sir Hubert Gough. This study should be considered more representative of the British Army in 1916 than of any form of Australian separateness or perceived superiority or inferiority.

Chapter 1. 'A general confusion of units': The Capture of Pozières by the 1st Australian Division, 23 July 1916.

The Battle of Pozières Ridge began with an operation to capture the village after which the ridge was named. Today it hardly looks like a significant landmark among the gently rolling fields around Albert, but the small amount of advantage it gave in observation to the north and west was considerable in terms of trench warfare. Their position on the high ground around Pozières gave the enemy 'a marked advantage in command and observation and cover[ed] from view a considerable part of his second line of defence.'⁵⁶ Its capture would give the British an advantage in both artillery observation and a view into the German second and third lines of defence. Pozières was one of a number of villages heavily fortified by the Germans as part of their second line of defence and was the first important obstacle in gaining control of the ridgeline.

Pozières was bordered to the north- and south-east by the main trench lines of the German second line, known in this sector as the OG – Old German – Lines. These were two roughly parallel trenches that were a part of the German second line of defence on the Somme. The nearest to the village was known as OG1 and the one furthest away, OG2. Several significant communication trenches ran from the village back to these main lines of defence as well as forward to advanced posts. Perpendicular to the OG Lines the main thoroughfare through the village, the Albert-Bapaume Road, ran

⁵⁶ 'Plans for Offensive by the Fourth Army', G.X.3/1. 3 April 1916, in Brigadier J.E. Edmonds (ed.), *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916. Appendices*, London: Macmillan, 1932. p. 64.

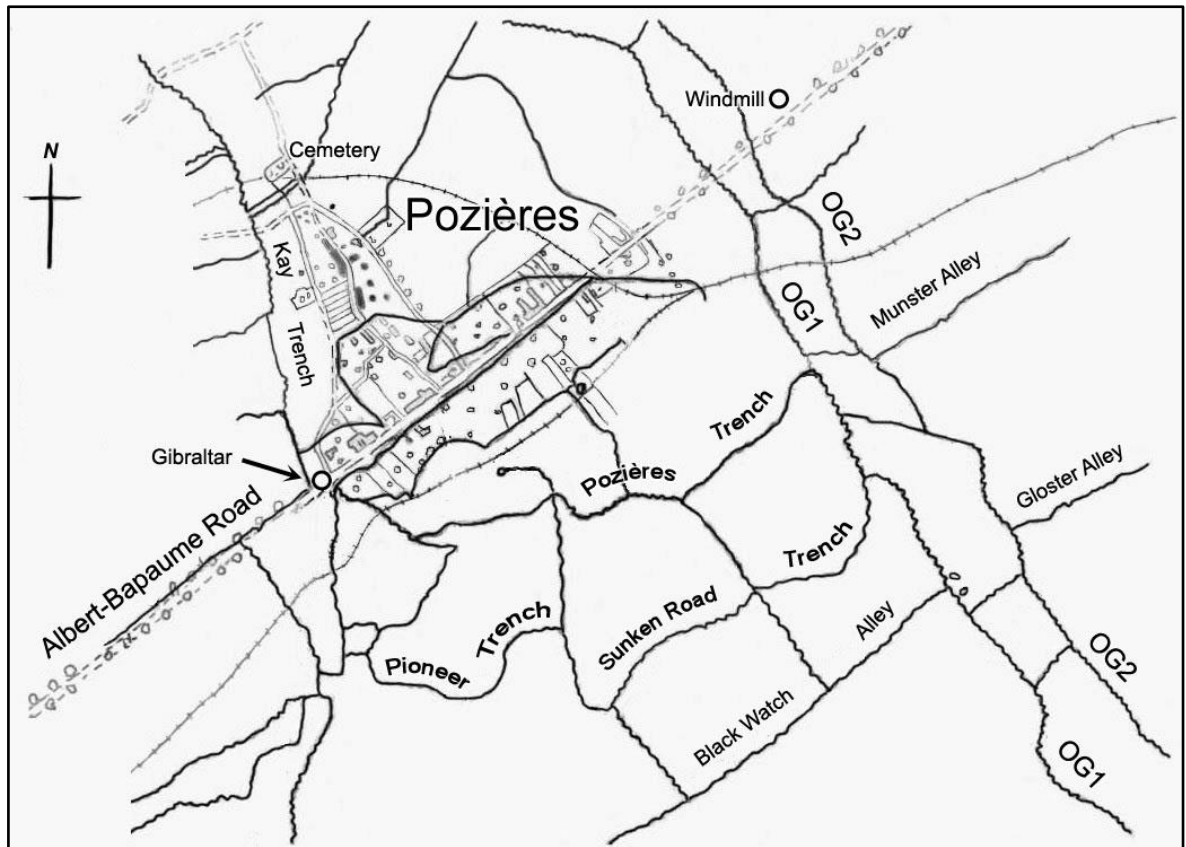
from the south west diagonally through the southern edge of the town. To the north west of the road the main part of the village was home to an extensive German trench system. This was protected to the west by a strong trench covered by rows of barbed wire known to the British as K or Kay Trench. Along the south-eastern edge of the village, on the other side of the Albert-Bapaume Road, all of the garden enclosures behind the houses were entrenched and had strong points built into them. Several lines of advanced trenches protected the village from attack from that direction, including Pozières Trench and Black Watch Alley. At the point between these two axes of defence stood Gibraltar, which was at the south-west point of the village. This fortified cellar with machine gun position stood above the Albert-Bapaume Road and gave a direct view down Mash Valley, which, with Sausage Valley on the other side of the road, formed the main thoroughfare into the sector.⁵⁷ By the time Reserve Army was given the task of capturing the village it was described to have been ‘very much knocked about by our artillery fire and all that remained undamaged were cellars,’ but the deep underground fortifications and extensive trench network ensured the village continued to be a very formidable objective.⁵⁸

At midnight on 17 July 1st Anzac Corps was transferred to the Reserve Army which had been formed just two months before. The following day General Headquarters issued an operation order to Fourth and Reserve Armies for an attack to take Pozières. This operation had been informally discussed on previous occasions and was now formalised through the issue of Reserve Army Operation Order No. 11.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Gerald Gliddon. *The Battle of the Somme: A Topographical History*. Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994, p. 347.

⁵⁸ ‘Short Account of the Taking of Pozières,’ AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁵⁹ General Staff War Diary, entries for 17 & 18 July 1916, WO 95/5.



Map 1. The fortified village of Pozières.

This order also marked out a new boundary between the two armies. This new divide ran roughly north to south just over a quarter of a mile beyond the eastern edge of Pozières village. Here at the far right of Reserve Army's sector of operations, the 1st Anzac Corps was given responsibility for conducting the next major operation against Pozières.⁶⁰ The commander of Reserve Army was Lieutenant General Hubert Gough, an impetuous and aggressive commander who had risen quickly to the level of army commander, and could hardly resist rushing into battle immediately after receiving orders.⁶¹ Despite being required to negotiate the timing of his assault on Pozières with operations by Fourth Army on his right flank, Gough called spur of the moment

⁶⁰ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 11,' 18 July 1916, AWM 26/41/60.

⁶¹ Gary Sheffield and Helen McCartney. 'Hubert Gough', in Ian F.W. Beckett and Steven J. Corvi (eds.) *Haig's Generals*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2009, p. 77.

conferences without representation from Fourth Army and planned for attacks as early as 19 July,⁶² the 20th or the 21st.⁶³ And yet 1st Anzac Corps was simply not ready, not as a result of any fault on its part, but because it was still in the process of moving into the sector. Gough did what he could to move the process along by deliberately by-passing Corps command. Reserve Army Headquarters took the place of 1st Anzac Headquarters, yet to reach the Somme, by taking direct control of the 1st Australian Division, the first of 1st Anzac Corps' divisions to reach the sector and therefore the one assigned the task of taking Pozières.⁶⁴ But battalions of the 1st Australian Division were only just entering the front line on the night of 18/19 July⁶⁵ and the divisional artillery to be used in the attack was not even in position to start registering targets until 20 July, much less take part in an assault before 22 July.⁶⁶ The objections of Major-General Harold Bridgwood Walker, the officer commanding the 1st Australian Division, as to the lack of preparedness of his troops meant that delay was inevitable.⁶⁷ The date of the attack was finally, after several conferences, compromises and withdrawn orders, settled for 23 July 1916.

This operation was to differ markedly from those conducted previously. Instead of attacking the village from the west or the southwest along the Albert-Bapaume Road, the Australians were going to attack the village from the south east, at right angles to

⁶² 1st Aust. Div. Arty War Diary, entry for 18 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

⁶³ 1st Bde War Diary, entries for 20 and 21 July, AWM 4/23/1/12.

⁶⁴ 1st Anzac Corps, 'Summary of Operations for Week Ending 6 p.m. Friday July 28th, 1916,' AWM 4/1/29/6.

⁶⁵ Smyth (OC 1st Bde), 'Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,' 29 July 1916, p.1, AWM 4/23/1/12.

⁶⁶ 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of Pozières,' 30 July 1916, p. 1, AWM 4/13/10/22.

⁶⁷ See Sheffield, 'Australians at Pozières: Command and Control on the Somme, 1916,' in David French and Brian Holden Reid (eds), *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation c.1890-1939* London, Cass, 2002, pp. 112-26.

the Albert-Bapaume Road and parallel to the OG Lines. Both Gough, as army commander and Walker at divisional level claim responsibility for the change in direction but with no reference to what advantage they expected to achieve by doing this. Walker stated in his report that he was given the choice of direction for his operation,⁶⁸ but Gough indignantly denied this. In a letter to the British Official Historian many years later he stated that:

I gave Walker no choice in that matter... he got from me clear & definite orders what he was to do (to take Pozières) & how broadly he was to do it – only the details of the attack were left in his hands – and the details he carried out thoroughly well.⁶⁹

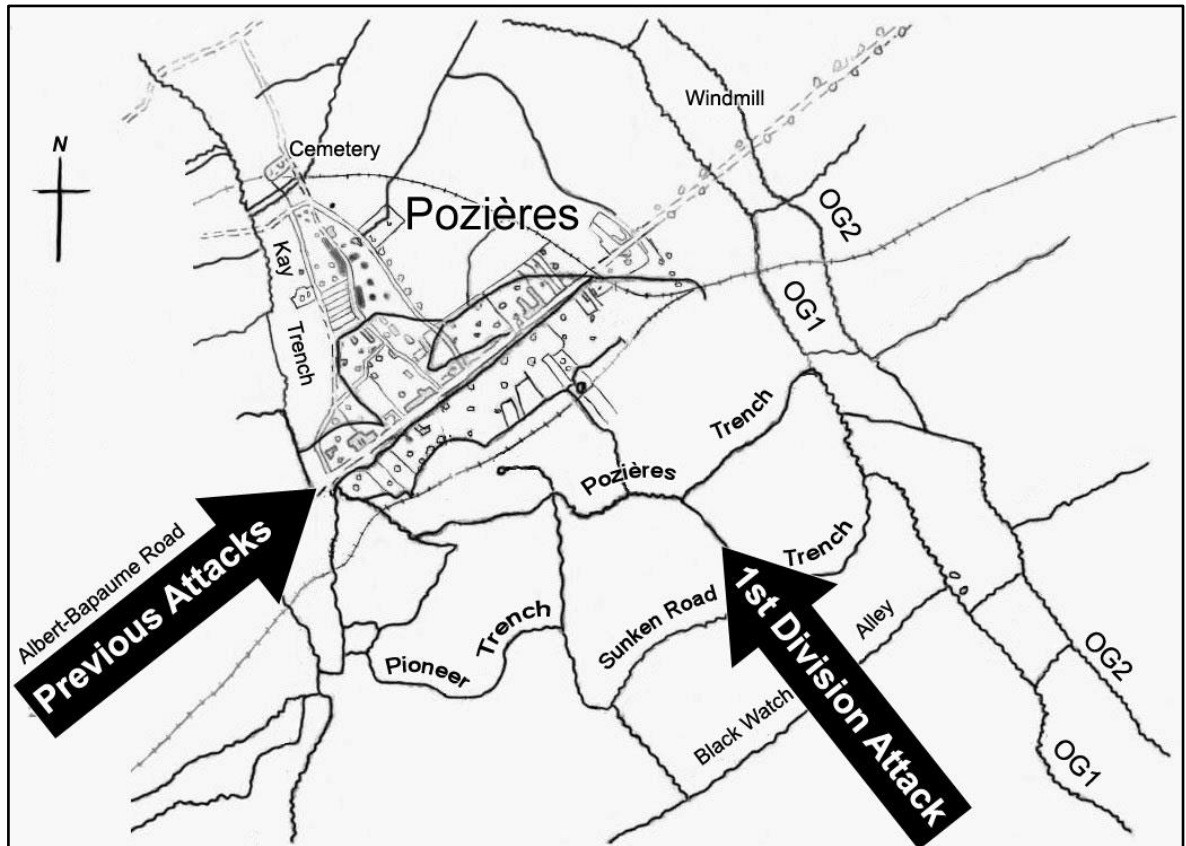
While the change in direction seems to have been considered a critical factor in success at Pozières, it also caused considerable complications. The first and most important of these was that it diverted the operation away from a frontal assault on the OG Lines in favour of an attack on the village. Instead of attacking the main defences in the area head on, this operation would take a swipe out of the German second line by focussing on an outpost – the village of Pozières – to the main German line of defence – the OG Lines. These would be attacked in part, but were a secondary consideration to the village itself.

The second complication inherent in this change of direction was to do with the boundary between Reserve and Fourth Armies. Because the border ran behind and in

⁶⁸ 'Report on the Operations of First Australian Division at Pozières,' p.1, AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁶⁹ Gough to Edmonds, 16 June 1938, CAB 45/134. Gough's strident denial would have held more clout had he not mixed up the directions – he claimed he insisted on and carried that the attack would be from the south-west instead of the south-east.

parts almost parallel to the Australian front line, there was little to no depth in the back lines. All traffic into the battlefield had to filter along Black Watch Alley. The



Map 2. The change of direction in attack at Pozières.

ground to the south-east of this trench was in Fourth Army's sector and could only be used by the 1st British Division.⁷⁰ Due to the lack of depth behind the front line, waves of attacking infantry could not be evenly spaced behind each other waiting to jump off, but instead were spread out along Black Watch Alley and beyond to the village of Albert. The dominant features of Black Watch Alley were simply shell holes and bodies which made judging the correct position from which to turn left into the

⁷⁰ Sinclair-Maclagan (OC 3rd Bde), '3rd Brigade Report on Operations About Pozières 19th-26th July, 1916,' p.3, AWM 4/23/3/9.

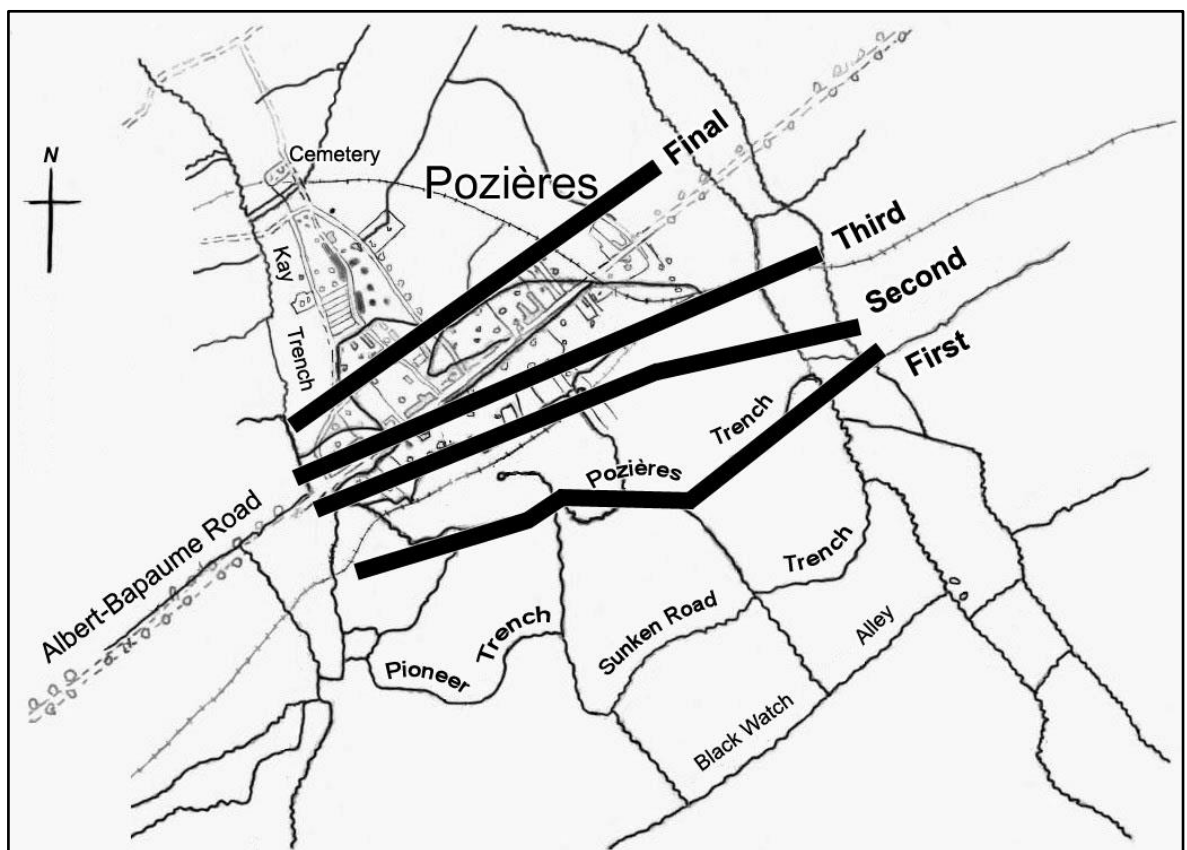
fight difficult for those entering the battlefield. The extreme right of the line suffered most from this configuration, with formations having to move along a mile of trenches, behind and parallel to the front line and including the full length of Black Watch Alley, before turning left to enter their area of operations.⁷¹ Even troops positioned closest to the left flank arrived worn out from the march in.⁷² Positioning of troops took longer because the approach was so difficult. Late and lost troops, as well as those exhausted before they reached any point of combat, proved to be an ongoing problem.

The orders issued by Reserve Army were for an attack by the 1st Australian Division under cover of a lifting artillery barrage. This basic structure, with various modifications, formed the basis of all operations to follow. As with the other divisions in the corps, the 1st Division had yet to participate in a major operation on the Western Front, and were heavily reliant on guidance from Army headquarters for the tactical structure of the assault. The plans for the lifting artillery barrage were clearly articulated by Reserve Army headquarters, acting in its temporary role as corps command as well. Hereafter the barrage would be worked on between both Army and corps headquarters – Army gave the basic structure and instructions for the heavy artillery, but the divisional artillery usually worked to a plan devised by Corps. On 23 July 1916, the artillery plan took the form of three lifts followed by a standing barrage. The first objective, Pozières Trench, was to be subjected to three minutes' fire. After this the barrage would lift onto the second objective, the back of the enclosures along the Albert-Bapaume Road just over 400 yards away, for half an hour.

⁷¹ 'Report on the Operations of First Australian Division at Pozières,' p.1, AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁷² Major J.R.O. Harries (3rd Bn), untitled report on operations at Pozières, 23 July 1916, p. 3, AWM 26/53/21.

It would then move onto the third objective, the road itself which was 450-500 yards further on again, for another half an hour. Finally the barrage would fall onto the north side of the Albert-Bapaume Road for an extended period of time to protect the infantry, who were expected to be consolidating their gains at that time, from counter-attack.⁷³ Each battery was allocated between two and five rounds per gun per minute of shrapnel in the preliminary barrage, slowing their rate of fire to two rounds per gun per minute, half shrapnel, half high explosive, for the three lifts of the barrage.⁷⁴ The artillery would provide the timetable for the entire attack, which



Map 3. Artillery lifts for the 1st Australian Division attack 23 July 1916.

⁷³ 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Order No. 31,' 21 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

⁷⁴ 'Table of Artillery Tasks attached to First Australian Divisional Artillery Order No. 31,' 21 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

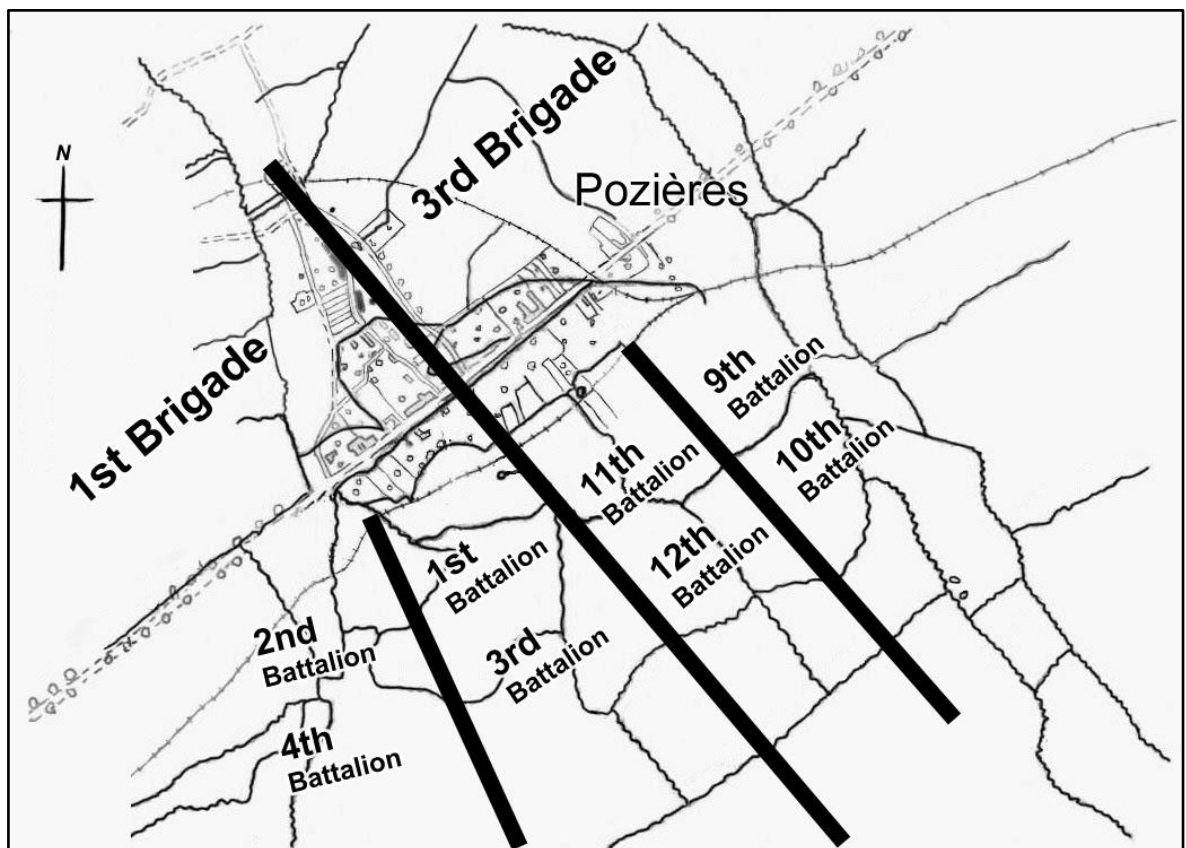
would begin with the bombardment on the first objective at 12.28am. This was a strictly limited-objective affair, with no move beyond the Albert-Bapaume Road to take place until further notice. In particular, the orders specify that the O.G. lines had to be strongly held and consolidated before an advance into the village could be made.⁷⁵

The infantry for this operation were evenly deployed along the line. The 1st Australian Brigade was designated the left half of the line, the 3rd Australian Brigade the right, leaving the remaining brigade of the division, the 2nd, in reserve. Each brigade put two battalions across their front, with two behind. The infantry plan was inextricably linked with that of the artillery. A wave of troops was to ordered to take one of the artillery objective lines and consolidate it as the barrage lifted. So the troops detailed for the first objective, eight companies from four battalions, were to wait as closely as possible to the barrage, rush the objective as the barrage lifted from the first to the second objective, and stay there to consolidate the position. The second wave, also comprising eight companies, but with additional contingents of engineers, pioneers and at least four Vickers machine guns, moved up while this was happening, waiting to move through the first objective to rush the second.⁷⁶ A third wave of troops would then move through the second in the same manner. Importantly, each of these lines were to stay on their objective and consolidate it into a strongly defended position rather than continue to push forward as far as possible. Divisional orders designated positions for at least eleven strongpoints to be constructed by the engineers and pioneers accompanying the second wave at various

⁷⁵ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 13,' 21 July 1916, AWM 26/41/61.

⁷⁶ '3rd Infantry Brigade AIF Memo of Instructions with Brigade Operation Order No. 21,' 22 July 1916, AWM 4/23/3/9.

points in the advance.⁷⁷ What this meant was that this operation was to be conducted in depth. Three waves of infantry resulted in three captured lines being consolidated into defensive positions at the end of the operation. The expectation was that the artillery would pull the infantry forward through by creating space for them to work – the best case scenario was that the German defences would be destroyed and the defenders within killed, but even keeping Germans in their trenches, heads down and away from their machine guns and rifles was an advantage of the utmost importance. The three consolidated objective lines then meant that a German counter-attack was very unlikely to succeed in breaking through a newly-won line, and maximised the chances of success in this limited-objective operation.



Map 4. Infantry dispositions for the 1st Australian Division attack 23 July 1916.

⁷⁷ 'First Australian Division Order No. 31,' 21 July 1916, AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 1.

The orders given by 1st Australian Division for the battle of Pozières were a straightforward development of Reserve Army orders. But the two brigades most closely involved in the attack – the 1st and 3rd Brigades – interpreted and passed on divisional orders in two very different ways, which would have broader implications for the success of their combined assault. Both brigades were commanded by experienced British officers. The 1st Australian Brigade was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nevill Maskelyne Smyth, a 47 year old career soldier who had served in India, Egypt, the Sudan – where he won the Victoria Cross – and South Africa as well as more recently in the Gallipoli campaign. Lieutenant Colonel Ewen George Sinclair-Maclagan, commanding the 3rd Australian Brigade, had also had experience in India and in South Africa – where he had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order – and the Dardanelles campaign. Both had attended conferences with Divisional command at least once,⁷⁸ and both based their operations on the basic model of attack as outlined by Reserve Army and the 1st Australian Division. By the time this tactical model passed through brigade headquarters, a second line of infantry had been added to each assault wave. Half of the wave would spearhead the attack, while the second half would follow up closely to provide support where needed. Importantly, while the basic form of attack prescribed by division is present in both orders from both brigades, the manner in which it is applied was very different between the two.

The most straightforward adaptation of tactical orders from division was made by Smyth at 1st Infantry Brigade headquarters. While in his assault each wave of infantry

⁷⁸ According to their respective brigade war diaries, Sinclair-Maclagan attended a conference on 20 July [3rd Bde War Diary, entry for 20 July 1916. AWM 4/23/3/9.] and Smyth attended one on 21 July [1st Bde War Diary, entry for 21 July 1916. AWM 4/23/1/12.]

would be structured with two lines of infantry, these lines featured no further in his orders in any practical way.⁷⁹ The emphasis in his orders are on the waves themselves. On the other hand the 3rd Brigade, under Sinclair-Maclagan, put much more emphasis on separate roles to be played by these small structural lines within each wave of infantry; as a result 3rd Brigade orders quickly become confusing. Here each objective was to be rushed by the first line of each wave, with the second coming behind to help consolidate gains. But Maclagan sometimes assigned infantry lines to attack objectives they do not belong to – for example, a line belonging to the second wave of infantry might be assigned to attack the third objective. This resulted in a ridiculously bewildering state of affairs in which the orders gave directions to the effect that the taking of the second objective would be ‘by 3rd and 4th [line], closely supported by 5th [line], the 6th [line] being used if necessary to push home the attack. This objective when gained will be consolidated by 3rd, 4th and 5th [lines]’.⁸⁰ The confusion is surely self-evident – a map and a pencil are essential to decipher who should be where, when. Command must also have been confusing. Here the third and fourth lines of infantry would be from one battalion and the fifth and sixth from another. Who was in command of this? In particular, who decided if the 6th line would be used? How were they in contact? It is certainly not made clear in the orders. Managing a cross-over between lines and waves would have been bad enough within the one battalion without crossing over between battalion commands. How Sinclair-Maclagan expected this arrangement to be followed in the field is unclear. While both brigade plans follow the broader scheme laid down by division, the difference

⁷⁹ ‘1st Australian Infantry Brigade Operation Order No. 21,’ 22 July 1916, AWM 4/23/1/12.

⁸⁰ ‘3rd Infantry Brigade AIF Memo of Instructions with Brigade Operation Order No. 21,’ 22 July 1916, AWM 4/23/3/9. The order reverses use of the terms ‘wave’ and ‘line’, so each objective would be attacked by a line of infantry comprising two waves. However, for the purposes of consistency later in the thesis, I have reversed the terms here.

between the simple adherence applied by 1st Brigade and the intricate movements of small units in the interpretation of 3rd Brigade is enormous, and would have serious implications under battle conditions.

One thing to note at this point is the disposition of troops for this attack. The term 'divisional attack' would imply that around 12,000 men would attack the objective. While this was technically true, the placement of formations at Pozières demonstrates that the spearhead of the line was much more thinly applied than would first seem. With the 2nd Brigade in reserve, and as much as two or three miles from the front, only two thirds of the division was at the forefront of the attack. But because each of the two brigades in the front line was broken down into waves to effect the leapfrog manoeuvre, the number of men actually strung along the half mile-long front was just eight companies' worth. And with each line being broken into two waves – even in the simply-applied 1st Brigade plan – this is halved again. What this means is that effectively 1,000 men out of 12,000 of the division form the foremost part of the line. Or, in other words, one battalions' worth of men out of the eight battalions of the leading brigades was directly opposite the German lines. But while the very front part of the line was thinly held, the emphasis here is always on depth. Another three lines of eight companies each were to follow, meaning that the front line would be about 6-800 yards deep and held by as many as 8,000 men. The attack plan was such that the imperative was on maintaining this depth. Every gain had to be strongly consolidated by improved trenches and the construction of strong points, and each wave of attacking infantry was specifically instructed not to move forward from their objective unless otherwise ordered.

The artillery barrage – ‘a treffic [*sic*] hail of shrapnel mixed with high explosive shell’⁸¹ – began at 12.28am on 23 July 1916. Each of the lifts of the barrage took place on time and without any major problems.⁸² On the left, the simple attack plan of the 1st Brigade worked well. The sector had been divided into two halves. On the brigade’s left, the 2nd Battalion provided the first and second waves of the attack, followed by the third and fourth waves made up by the 4th Battalion. On the right of 1st Brigade’s sector the 1st Battalion similarly formed the first and second waves, while the 3rd Battalion followed up acting as the third and fourth waves. Each of the attacking lines of infantry moved forward as timed and by 8.50am the three objective lines were in various states of being consolidated and the brigade was seeking to move beyond the Albert-Bapaume Road.⁸³

But a simple explanation of events such as this belies the complexity of the battlefield here. To begin with, not all troops behaved according to orders given, in the infantry or in the artillery. On the extreme left end of the line, Lieutenant S. R. Thurnhill of the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade pushed forward his 18 pounder gun from a position at the head of Sausage Valley to a location on the Bapaume Road.⁸⁴ His crew then fired 115 rounds, starting at zero hour, which enfiladed the main road through the village, providing a kind of direct-fire horizontal barrage to protect the infantry and demolish

⁸¹ ‘Short Account of the Taking of Pozières,’ AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁸² ‘First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of Pozières,’ 30 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

⁸³ Smyth (OC 1st Bde), ‘Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,’ 29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/1/12.

⁸⁴ ‘First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of Pozières,’ 30 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

enemy barricades.⁸⁵ It seemed that its appearance was so unusual that the Germans did not manage to stop the gun, and it and its crew were later withdrawn to a crater without casualty.⁸⁶ Despite the fact that this was completely outside of the artillery firing plan, it seems to have been effective and Thurnhill earned himself and his crew nothing but admiration.⁸⁷

All infantry formations did not necessarily attack from their prescribed positions, either. An aggressive policy by the 2nd Battalion on the far left put a platoon ahead of the first two objective lines to a position in which the platoon was more or less on the Albert-Bapaume Road itself.⁸⁸ They had managed to eject a German patrol from some old gun pits and maintained their situation because they were to the left and ahead of the first fall of the artillery barrage and were therefore missed. But this unscheduled advance had mixed results. The fire from this platoon helped protect the flank of the 2nd Battalion as they rushed the German strongpoint Gibraltar at the south-west end of the Albert-Bapaume Road. But their situation was too far forward and unsupported, and they had to be withdrawn when the third barrage hit their position. Oddly, this was attributed to the barrage fired from the heavy guns falling short rather than the platoon being well ahead of their designated position.⁸⁹ The record does not show which company this platoon came from, or under whose authority

⁸⁵ 'Report on the Operations of First Australian Division at Pozières,' AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁸⁶ 'Short Account of the Taking of Pozières,' AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2. See also 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Narrative of Events,' AWM 4/13/10/22 and 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of POZIÈRES,' 30 July 1916, AWM 4/13/10/22.

⁸⁷ This event was widely reported – not a single negative comment on it was found.

⁸⁸ Smyth (OC 1st Bde), 'Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,' 29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/1/12.

⁸⁹ Message from Smyth (OC 1st Bde) to 1st Aust. Div., 27 July 1916, AWM 4/23/1/12.

they advanced to where they did.⁹⁰ Most likely, as in the case of Captain Thurnhill, individual initiative led to this group departing from the plan and acting alone.

But multiple acts of individual initiative without reference to the battle plan were not necessarily what was required. This was a set-piece attack with a strict timetable and detailed list of tasks to be achieved. It was to be made by large numbers of men working in lines and in depth and as such required group coordination. As previously mentioned, the first waves of attacking troops on the left of the divisional frontage were formed by companies of the 2nd Battalion which were leapfrogged through by the 4th Battalion, and from the 1st Battalion which were leapfrogged through by the 3rd. It would appear from messages that an informal arrangement was in place across the division whereby overall command of a sector was retained by the officer commanding the first battalion in the attack. So, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Borlase Stevens, the officer commanding the 2nd Battalion at the far left of the divisional line, was to retain command of his sector even as the lines from his battalion had completed their attacks and companies from Lieutenant Colonel Iven Giffard Mackay's 4th Battalion had moved through and were assaulting the third objective. But, as with the brigade level of command, the two halves of the 1st Brigade line functioned in slightly different ways. And, informal arrangement or otherwise, Stevens did not work in conjunction with Mackay at all. In fact he did not seem even to consult with him in the field, but by-passed the need to deal with 4th Battalion headquarters altogether by requesting Brigade Headquarters to issue orders to them on his behalf, such as requesting 4th Battalion platoons to move position or for

⁹⁰ Harries (3rd Bn), untitled report on operations at Pozières, 23 July 1916, p. 3, AWM 26/53/21. Harries noted in his report that heavy shells were falling on C Company at the front left as he was moving into position. He does not make comment on where the shells were coming from.

companies from the 4th's final wave to move forward to assist his own men in digging in.⁹¹ This worked both ways, because by the next day Stevens was complaining to Brigade headquarters that 'nothing further can be obtained nor has any attempt been made to keep in touch with me',⁹² which would indicate that there was little communication between his headquarters and others. He gradually lost control of the situation through a lack of communication keeping him in close cooperation with his reserve formations.

Fortunately this sector, being at the extreme left of the 1st Australian Division's line, faced the least determined German defences. The main German line of defence at Pozières was the OG lines. The village was itself merely an outpost to that main line. Although the 2nd and 4th Battalions had had to deal with the strongpoint known as Gibraltar in their sector, a German position that had caused so many casualties in previous attacks against Pozières, this was the extreme end of the advanced fortifications of the German second line of defence, and the most likely to be evacuated in the case of a determined assault. Both commanders kept what control of their battalion they could, and enough cohesion was maintained in the attack in this sector which, when combined with a very strong advance on their right flank, ensured that this operation did not disintegrate in the confusion of battle and the infighting of command.

On the right flank of 1st Brigade's sector the situation was completely different, and demonstrates how well the informal command arrangement of the first battalion

⁹¹ Messages from Stevens to CER 1st Bde, 23 July 1916, 2.45am and 6.47pm. AWM 26/53/21

⁹² Message from Stevens to CER 1st Bde, 24 July 1916, 1.50am, AWM 26/53/21.

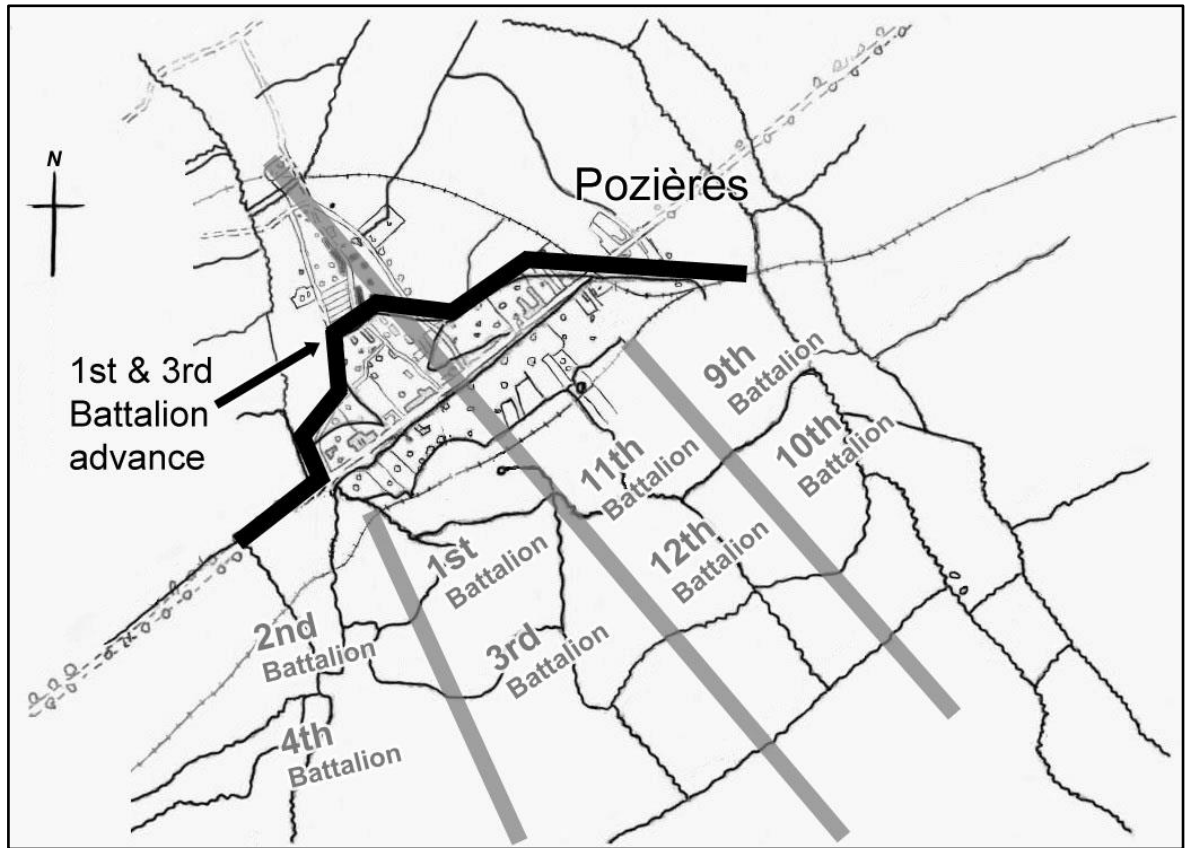
commander retaining control throughout each step of the leapfrog manoeuvres could work. The commanders in question were Lieutenant Colonel James Heane in command of the 1st Battalion (and therefore the first two lines of attack), and Lieutenant Colonel Owen Glendower Howell-Price commanding the 3rd Battalion, which would follow with the third and possible fourth lines. These two commanders worked closely together, even sharing headquarters. Early in the battle the 1st Battalion was having problems receiving information as to troop locations. Heane took control of the situation by leaving headquarters together with a group of bombers, staff and signallers to go to the front line and find out the situation for himself. He left the 3rd Battalion commander, Howell-Price, at battalion headquarters with the remainder of his and Howell-Price's staff to exercise command over the sector. Heane found Lieutenant Richard Stewart Burstal in the German first line and sent him to the second and third lines to ascertain information about their situation and report back. Burstal complied and reported success in each line.⁹³ On his return, Howell-Price handed back overall command to Heane. As a battalion commander Heane could be expected to stay in his headquarters as a central location to receive messages and issue orders. Heane's actions show individual initiative – but unlike that of Thurnhill and the unknown platoon of the 2nd Battalion, this initiative had the purpose of maintaining structure and cohesion of the fighting unit as the primary method of advancing the line.

In this sector strict attention was paid to structure in other ways as well, which is particularly evident in the assault by the 3rd Battalion. Before attacking the third objective, C and D Companies of the 3rd Battalion under Howell-Price paused about

⁹³ 1st Bn War Diary, entry for 23 July 1916. AWM 4/23/18/9.

100 yards short of it to form up into their two waves – the third and the fourth of the operation – and ensure that they were working in the right direction. Once the objective was taken, communication was established to the right and left, information obtained by patrols pushing forward, and a communication trench dug to maintain contact with the rear.⁹⁴ In the end the fourth wave (made up of the second half of the 3rd Battalion) did not have to go ahead as all of the objectives were taken without complication. This meant that this final wave of infantry remained in its jumping-off position instead of moving through the lines from where the 1st Battalion was consolidating to the third objective where the rest of the 3rd Battalion was operating. Heane as sector commander again prioritised structure by reorganising the battlefield once all objectives had been taken by reorganising the units under his control. This meant moving the remainder of the 3rd Battalion forward at the same time as moving parts of the 1st Battalion back to eliminate this split and consolidate command structures in the field. Heane used initiative to create a strong web of communication and to confirm the command structure in his sector, making it clear to all what was expected and how communication was to be maintained. Unlike Stevens, he was able to consolidate his position as sector commander, establish firm control and make effective manoeuvres as needed on the battlefield while creating an effective working relationship with Howell-Price. It is telling to note that while the least resistance was met in the sector on the far left, that of the 2nd and 4th Battalions, the greatest gains were made in the right of 1st Brigade's sector, where Heane and Howell-Price of the 1st and 3rd Battalions paid strict attention to structure and cooperation.

⁹⁴ Howell-Price (OC 3rd Bn), 'Report on operations by 3rd Bn from night of 22nd/23rd July to noon on 24th July,' 24 July 1916, AWM 26/53/21.



Map 5. Situation at daybreak 23 July 1916.

By the end of the night, the 1st Brigade had taken all objectives, including the German strongpoint of Gibraltar at the south-western edge of the village, and had pushed some patrols north of the road.⁹⁵ With daylight to aid observation, messages were received that a German retreat was in evidence. A straightforward assault plan combined with a general adherence to structure meant that the 1st Brigade was organised enough to occupy the north side of the Bapaume Road when the opportunity presented itself.⁹⁶ The advanced positions made it a straightforward matter to infiltrate the rest of the village, which was taken entirely within three days.

⁹⁵ 'Short Account of the Taking of Pozières,' AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

⁹⁶ 'Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,' p. 3, AWM 4/23/1/12.

The work of consolidation was carried out to a satisfactory degree, with trenches made habitable and deep enough to protect infantry from the firestorm of shellfire which continued unabated. The line was continuous, and by 26 July had joined with the British 48th Division on the left. Operations in the 1st Infantry Brigade's sector can be considered a complete success.

But while the attack by 1st Brigade was a success, but it was not matched on either flank. The 48th British Division on the left flank had placed the 5th Battalion Warwickshire Regiment of the 143rd Brigade on the boundary with the 1st Australian Division. This battalion had been given the task of keeping in touch with the Anzac troops 'wherever possible'.⁹⁷ It did not prove possible at all. Their attack came from right angles to the Albert-Bapaume Road and so approached the village from the west. Despite the belief of the 2nd Australian Battalion that they had joined up on both flanks within half an hour of zero – one flank of which must have been with the English – they had not.⁹⁸ The Warwicks attacked on several occasions with bombing parties or Stokes trench mortars, and with artillery cooperation for two larger attacks, one at 7.30am on and one at 4.30pm on the 24th, but they were held up by a strongpoint and failed to join up with the Anzac Line.⁹⁹ As a result the Australian left flank was 'in the air', or unconnected, and was prevented from linking with the 5th Warwicks by strong fire from a trench running down the western side of the village and the strongpoint that the Warwicks had been unable to capture. While not a problem for the immediate situation, this was a significant barrier to linking up in the

⁹⁷ Message BM.475, dated 23 July 1916, Appendix 3, WO 95/2755.

⁹⁸ Message from Harry Gordon Vernon to HQ 2nd Bn, 23 July 1916, 12.55am, AWM 26/53/21.

⁹⁹ 1/5 Bn Royal Warwickshire Regiment War Diary, entry for 23 July 1916, WO 95/2755.

future, as the strongpoint held three machine guns and had approximately 300 men in the vicinity, many of them in the western trench, able to reinforce it.

On 1st Brigade's right flank the 3rd Brigade had had a much more difficult task. To start with, being situated at the furthest point from the entry to the battlefield, the 3rd Brigade had to negotiate as much as a mile of pitted, destroyed ground before making the left turn to take its positions. This brigade was attacking the village in the same direction as the 1st Brigade, from the south-east to the north-west, but their advance was flanked by the main trenches in the German second line – the OG Lines. Here German strong-posts had been constructed at the junction of the OG Lines and Sunken Road Trench, a British trench that lay mid-way between Black Watch Alley and the first objective, Pozières Trench. These strong-posts had so far proven impervious to attack. Furthermore, the Germans put up a spirited defence of these lines, which was very different to their willingness to retreat in the face of the 1st Brigade attack at the far end of the outpost village. It was into this battlefield of well-established defences and determined opposition that Sinclair-Maclagan sent his Brigade with their extremely complicated plan of attack.

As previously stated, the main threat to the success of operations in this area was the German second line of defence – the OG Lines. These trenches were 3rd Brigade's to deal with. Some attention had been paid to the threat of the OG Lines and their strong-posts on the right prior to the main assault. The OG Lines were attacked by two raiding parties of the 9th Battalion on the night of 21 July. Each party consisted of 51 men and an officer, one party being assigned to OG1 and the other to OG2. Their

duty here was to capture the OG Lines to a point near the tramline. To get there each party would have to attack two heavily defended German strongpoints.¹⁰⁰ To accomplish this formidable task the parties from the 9th Battalion received a total of 14 mortar rounds and a light artillery barrage that failed to eventuate. While they had only 40 yards to cover before reaching the enemy trenches, they were in full moonlight and under enemy shrapnel fire. Once in the enemy lines they were met with a strong resistance from grenades, and their reserves were prevented from supporting them by heavy machine-gun fire. The raid failed with heavy casualties.¹⁰¹

However, despite the detrimental effect this strongly-held pair of German trenches had just demonstrated it could have on an advance at Pozières, no supplementary operation was conducted against it in the lead up to the main operation. And while the preliminary assault on the position was a dismal failure, further plans to take this position did not seem to recognise the serious threat it posed. No additional fire- or man-power was assigned to its capture, and minimal emphasis was placed on the capture of the OG Lines in orders. The 9th Battalion was ordered to designate just one company from their first infantry wave for the major divisional attack to enter the OG Lines and ensure their capture. One company of the 10th Battalion would serve as a reserve to this force.¹⁰² They were given no extra help in the form of a special artillery barrage or mortar support, but were to attack as a part of the main assault. In fact, it almost seems as though divisional and brigade command took the ostrich approach to this formidable obstacle. But hiding their heads in the sand through not providing an

¹⁰⁰ 'Operation Memorandum No. 12,' 21 July 1916, AWM 4/23/26/19.

¹⁰¹ 'Report on Operations Carried Out by 9th Battalion Commencing 19th July and Concluding 0400 25th July 1916,' AWM 4/23/26/19.

¹⁰² Sinclair-Maclagan (OC 3rd Bde), '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Pozières 19-26th July 1916,' 30 July 1916, AWM 4/23/3/9.

appropriate force to attack the OG Lines did not in any way lessen the threat from these German defensive lines.

The 11th Battalion on the left and the 9th on the right provided the first and second waves of the attack of the 3rd Brigade. Both battalions formed up carefully in their waves in the half hour before the artillery barrage began.¹⁰³ But despite this initial attention to structure, the battlefield became disorganised shortly after the first lift of the barrage. On the left of the sector, furthest from the OG Lines and where 3rd Brigade saw the most success, the 11th Battalion's first wave failed to establish a line on the first objective. Instead of consolidating their gains, the majority of men in that wave rushed on to the second objective and into their own artillery barrage. Ill-disciplined groups of soldiers became further disorganised as they went after parties of Germans, chasing them through what was left of the village.¹⁰⁴ While officers managed to pull some of them back to start establishing a defensive line, the second line of troops leapfrogging through them could not find the next objective and, as with the first wave, rushed into their own barrage, which was now falling on the south side of the Albert-Bapaume Road.¹⁰⁵ The second objective corresponded to the back of the enclosures along the south side of the road and was almost impossible to locate among the pitted and shelled ground. When 11th Battalion officers arrived, they could not identify their location, or the trench line that supposedly ran along the back of the enclosed yards of the village. Lieutenant W.H. Hallahan reported '[a] line is

¹⁰³ 'Narrative of Operations at Pozières from 19th to 25th July 1916 of 11th Battalion AIF,' AWM 4/23/28/16.

¹⁰⁴ Sinclair-Maclagan (OC 3rd Bde), '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations About Pozières 19th-26th July, 1916,' AWM 4/23/3/9.

¹⁰⁵ 'Narrative of Operations at Pozières from 19th to 25th July 1916 of 11th Battalion AIF,' AWM 4/23/28/16

being formed on the N[orth] E[ast] side of the wood. There was no line of trenches here at all'.¹⁰⁶ At 1am 11th Battalion Headquarters reported a

general confusion of units looking for [the second objective] trench.

Lieutenant Rogerson sent back word he is trying to straighten out [the] tangle and entrench [the] northern side of [the] wood.¹⁰⁷

Rogerson was later recommended for decoration for his 'untiring... efforts to consolidate positions as they were captured'. During the process he was buried by shell bursts twice but continued on in his work until he was 'rendered insensible by the burst of a very high explosive shell'.¹⁰⁸ He was so badly shell shocked that he was repatriated to Australia with severe neurasthenia, ending his war.¹⁰⁹

Rogerson's experience was quite typical for the 11th Battalion's company commanders and junior officers. Although in places the first and even second objectives were reported taken, a flurry of messages sent between 1.30 and 1.45am indicate a very high rate of officer casualties and a desperate need for reinforcement. At 1.30am 2/Lieutenant Reginald Hemingway sent a report to say 'Campbell... is wounded. Wants reinforcements from 12th Battalion'.¹¹⁰ Ten minutes later he added, 'Milner reports first line taken. He is wounded. Urge 12th Battalion be sent forward. Two Company commanders out of action'.¹¹¹ At 1.45am another message came from the Lieutenant Elliott of D Company: 'Captain Wathers and [my]self wounded. Former

¹⁰⁶ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn) to AZC 3rd Bde. 23 July 1916, 4.25am. (Report from Hallahan contained within), AWM 26/55/1.

¹⁰⁷ Message from 11th Bn to AZC 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 1.00am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹⁰⁸ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards: 1st Aust. Div., 27 July – 6 August 1916, AWM 28/1/6.

¹⁰⁹ NAA: B2455, ROGERSON EDWARD.

¹¹⁰ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn) to AZC 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 1.30am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹¹¹ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn) to 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 1.40am, AWM 26/55/1.

needs immediate attention'.¹¹² By 2am Hemingway could only report to 3rd Brigade headquarters 'regret nearly all my officers casualties.'¹¹³ Captain Leone Sextus Tollemache at 3rd Brigade headquarters was forced to request the nucleus of 11th Battalion officers left behind with 1st Division to be sent forward to make up for the losses.¹¹⁴

In the meantime, without officers to sort out the mess, units were badly muddled together. The third wave, comprising A and D companies of the 12th Battalion, left for the third objective around 2am, leaving B and C companies as reserve to this sector.¹¹⁵ Once they reached the front the officer commanding D Company, Captain Alan Vowles, found the line to be about 50 to 150 yard to the south of the road. It extended to a position about 100 yards short of the boundary with the battalion on their right in the next sector. Vowles found that the right flank, which should have been protected by the advance of the 9th and 10th Battalions, was completely in the air, and had to swing his company around to form a defensive flank facing the OG Lines.¹¹⁶ The reserve force of B and C Companies were committed to the battle shortly before 3am to try to reinforce this tenuous line.¹¹⁷ But while the units in the field were highly disorganised, and panicky messages were being sent back for reinforcements, some organisation had taken place and a continuous, if short, line was being held.

¹¹² Message from Elliott, (OC D Coy 11th Bn) to OC 11th Bn, 23 July, 1.45am. AWM 26/55/1.

¹¹³ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn_) to AZC 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 2.00am. AWM 26/55/1.

¹¹⁴ Message from Tollemache (3rd Bde) to 1st Aust. Div., 23 July 1916, 2.48am, AWM 26/54/12.

¹¹⁵ Message from 12th Bn to 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 2.05am. AWM 26/55/1

¹¹⁶ Vowles (OC D Coy, 12th Bn), 'Report on capture of Pozières', AWM 4/23/29/17.

¹¹⁷ Message from Sinclair-Maclagan (OC 3rd Bde) to 11th Bn, 23 July 1916, 2.52am. AWM 26/54/12.

What had happened to the right of Vowles? This sector, the far right of the operation, was the one with the most potential setbacks at the outset of the assault. Here the 9th Battalion formed the first two waves of the attack, and the 10th Battalion the third and fourth. Troops attacking the line here had to travel the farthest up Black Watch Alley to reach their jumping-off point and had the OG Lines menacing their attack from the right, with just two companies assigned to reduce this threat. The 9th and 10th Battalions operating in this sector had ongoing problems with identifying their location, both on entering the battlefield and in attacking their objectives. Not only were Black Watch Alley and Pozières Trench severely knocked about by shellfire, OG2 had been so damaged that the party of the 9th Battalion attacking it could not identify it at all and became lost in the darkness. A further two parties also failed to locate the trench.¹¹⁸ While the party attacking OG1 had better success and were able to take the first German strong point when the barrage lifted, their support was running late. The 10th Battalion group had been held up by a heavy barrage of gas and high explosive shells from the German artillery, which made their arduous journey to their position even worse, and were over an hour late. The situation in OG1 was by no means secure, and A Company under Lieutenant William Francis James McCann of the 10th Battalion was immediately sent to help. McCann pushed on to within a few yards of the major strongpoint at the junction of OG1 and Pozières Trench, but was unable to advance further. Despite a party under command of Lieutenant Arthur Seaforth Blackburn coming to support this attack, and even a Victoria Cross awarded to Blackburn for his gallantry, the post remained untaken.¹¹⁹ It would take another three

¹¹⁸ 'Report on Operations Carried Out by 9th Battalion Commencing 19th July and Concluding 0400 25th July 1916, 'AWM 4/23/26/19.

¹¹⁹ 10th Bn War Diary, entry for 22-25 July 1916, AWM 4/23/27/9.

days and a major advance through the village before the OG Lines were clear to the Albert-Bapaume Road.

In the rest of the 9th and 10th Battalion's sector, the part between the rest of the Brigade and the OG Lines, there was similarly little success to be had. The rest of the 9th Battalion, attacking the objective lines in front of the village, became disorganised quickly – the second wave could not even form up correctly and become jumbled – and suffered a high number of officer casualties.¹²⁰ It was clear to Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Harricks Roberts, the officer commanding the 11th Battalion that there was a serious problem on his right flank; at 4am his staff sent a message to 3rd Brigade to say '[a]m not in touch with 9th [Battalion] and can find out nothing about them. Am afraid something wrong there. Have you any word. Am concerned about there being no troops in this line'.¹²¹ Darkness had caused a problem and the companies became disoriented, veering away to the left. It would appear that most of the 9th Battalion ended up somewhere behind the 11th Battalion, leaving the right flank of the 11th and the left flank of the assault on the OG Lines dangerously without support.¹²² The 9th Battalion, through becoming lost and disorganised, had ceased to be an effective fighting unit within hours of the start of battle. By 4.30am all reserve troops immediately designated for the attack were forward, and a battalion of the 2nd Brigade (the 7th) had to be called up to act as reserve.¹²³ The attack on Pozières is usually discussed in terms of success, but on the right flank there was a huge drain on

¹²⁰ 'Report on Operations Carried Out by 9th Battalion Commencing 19th July and Concluding 0400 25th July 1916, 'AWM 4/23/26/19.

¹²¹ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn) to AZC 3rd Brigade, 23 July 1916, 4.00am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹²² 'Report on Operations Carried Out by 9th Battalion Commencing 19th July and Concluding 0400 25th July 1916, 'AWM 4/23/26/19.

¹²³ 7th Bn War Diary, entry for 23 July 1916, AWM 4/23/24/17.

resources and still a large gap in the line within hours of the beginning of the battle, and the operation's success was far from guaranteed.

It was individual action that saved the enormous problems on this flank from having a detrimental effect on the rest of the assault on the village, but not necessarily the sort of individual gallantry displayed by the Victoria Cross-winning Blackburn. While the 9th Battalion was missing in action, the nucleus of officers from the 11th Battalion sent forward to replace officer casualties reached the front line. Several members of this group took it upon themselves to organise the line and establish firm

communications with their headquarters in the rear.



Figure 1: Captain Ferdinand George Medcalf

Image AMWA43324 courtesy of the Medcalf family and the Army Museum of WA

Captain Louis Leon Le Nay, the 11th Battalion Lewis gun officer, worked together with Lieutenant Sydney Trevor Forbes and Captain Walter Cheyne Belford to establish a line about half a mile in front of their original position. Forbes organised the line while Le Nay and Belford put in a strong post in front of it.¹²⁴ Le Nay then sent a number of detailed situation reports which give as much information as

he had to hand as to troop locations, and conducted several reconnaissance patrols.¹²⁵

Captain Ferdinand George Medcalf was another, called in shortly before the attack went ahead to take over after the death of another officer in Black Watch Alley early

¹²⁴ Message from Forbes (11th Bn) to OC 11th Bn, 23 July 1916, 2.40am. AWM 26/55/1.

¹²⁵ Message from Hemingway (11th Bn) to AZC 3rd Bde. 23 July 1916, 4.00am, also message from 11th Bn to AZC 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 6.15am, also message from Hemingway to 3rd Bde, 23 July 1916, 7.10am, AWM 26/55/1.

in the bombardment.¹²⁶ He had been in charge of a line of troops designated to take the first objective, but rather than rushing forward to the second objective as so many men of this line did, he reported that at 1.10am he was 'holding and digging in first objective... don't know anything of second or third objective'.¹²⁷ After this line was established, he had word of a group of about 400 men of various battalions establishing a weak line further forward, and took it upon himself to go to it and take command.¹²⁸ Once there, he reported, he 'made a personal reconnaissance of the country to the north of the road and village', sending back a sketch of the land around him, and an indication that he intended to stay there and carry on the work of consolidation.¹²⁹ Medcalf in fact became the primary conduit of messages into and out of the field in this sector for some considerable time after 5am on the 23rd. Roberts, commanding the 11th Battalion, even entrusted him with responsibility of acting on behalf of himself or Sinclair-Maclagan, sending messages such as the following sent at 5am:

Orders have been given for 12th Battalion which are forwarded [they] are to push on and take their objective and consolidate it. Give them orders accordingly and say such are from the Brigadier... Good luck. Thanks for your work.¹³⁰

Messages for individuals were passed via Medcalf as the most reliable means of communication, and he in turn regularly supplied headquarters with full situation reports, often written from reconnaissance patrols he personally made into no man's

¹²⁶ Bean, *Official History: Vol. III*, p. 508n.

¹²⁷ Message from Medcalf to OC 11th Bn, 23 July 1916, 1.10am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹²⁸ Message from Ross (OC 16 Ptn, 11th Bn) to OC 11th Bn, 23 July 1916, 4.30am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹²⁹ Message from Medcalf (top part of message containing address torn away), 23 July 1916, 4.45am, AWM 26/55/1.

¹³⁰ Message from Roberts (OC 11th Bn) to Medcalf, 23 July 1916, 5.00am, AWM 26/55/1.

land.¹³¹ In this way one man among thousands could almost single-handedly be responsible for turning the tide of the battle.

Other men were also trying to consolidate positions at various points in or near the objectives. What made the actions of Medcalf, Forbes, Belford and Le Nay different was that they prioritised communication with their headquarters and their flanks. They established as firm a picture of the situation as possible and kept their headquarters updated, which put them into an ideal position to effect change when needed. Le Nay and Medcalf were given the responsibility between them, as the two men best apprised of the situation, to decide among themselves how machine guns were to be used in various strong points constructed in and near their positions.¹³² Medcalf was later awarded the Military Cross for his gallant action in protecting defensive works from a German raiding party and repairing his trench. He also received the Distinguished Service Order, in part for putting a hostile machine gun out of action, but also for taking charge of the firing line, consolidating the line and reconnoitring the enemy's position and reporting back. It was this, more than his acts of personal bravery, that had the biggest impact on the battle in that it enabled the restructuring of a battlefield that had become highly and dangerously disorganised.¹³³ Le Nay, too, was recommended for a Military Cross, and although he was not awarded one, the citation, which was for 'rendering valuable assistance in reorganising and placing detached parties and machine guns in position' and for being 'untiring in his

¹³¹ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards, 1st Aust. Div., 23 to 26 July 1916, AWM 28/1/5 Pt. 3.

¹³² Message from Le Nay to Medcalf, 23 July 1916, 6.10pm, AWM 26/55/1.

¹³³ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards, 11th Bn, AWM 28/2/305.

efforts to obtain information of the enemy and submit[ting] valuable reports' demonstrates some recognition of the valuable work he did that day.¹³⁴

The situation at day break on 23 July was not even across the front. The 1st Brigade had achieved its objectives and was in a good position to attack the rest of the village which lay to the north of the Albert-Bapaume Road. The 3rd Brigade, however, was still conducting small-scale attacks on the OG Lines, and had an extended gap in its line between these attacks and the 11th Battalion in the centre. As the morning brightened into day, the 1st Brigade spent time consolidating gains and pushing the line forward where possible, while the 3rd Brigade worked on closing the gap by extending the line from the 11th Battalion's stronger position towards the OG Lines. Consolidation work continued throughout the day of 23 July and the work of clearing Germans out of cellars was being carried out using phosphorus bombs. At all times the line was subjected to a German bombardment and work was carried out under heavy shellfire.¹³⁵ But by 3.45pm on the 23rd all Divisional Artillery had stopped firing on the village of Pozières to allow the infantry to enter.¹³⁶ This was a decision made by Reserve Army, which coordinated the infantry advance on the village with the lifting of the standing barrage. The troops to take the village were from the 8th Battalion, acting as a reserve for 1st Brigade.¹³⁷ They attacked from the far left of the divisional line, largely as a result of the success on this side of the line. The village of Pozières was now secured.

¹³⁴ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards, 1st Aust. Div., 23 to 26 July 1916, AWM 28/1/5 Pt. 3.

¹³⁵ 'Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,' p.3, AWM 4/23/1/12.

¹³⁶ 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of Pozières,' 30 July 1916, p. 1, AWM 4/13/10/22.

¹³⁷ 8th Bn War Diary, entry for 23 July 1916, AWM 4/23/25/19.

From this point the remaining objective was to secure the northern and western edges of the village and establish a perimeter. This, it was decided, was to involve another division-wide attack under cover of a hastily-arranged artillery barrage just forty eight hours after the initial attack on the village of Pozières.¹³⁸ However, there were significant problems communicating these orders from division to brigade. A series of conferences between commanders at various levels were convened to discuss plans; but as to when and between whom these conferences were held is not clear. According to the 4th Battalion war diary, commanding officers were called to a conference at 1st Brigade Headquarters at 10pm on the night of 24 July to discuss plans to effect these orders, without formally issuing them.¹³⁹ Bean claims that the written order for this attack fixing the date for 26 July arrived during this meeting.¹⁴⁰ But the 8th Battalion's account records that at 8.20pm on the night of 24 July the commanding officer attending a meeting at brigade headquarters where battalion commanders 'were given a general idea of operations to be carried out at 0320 the next morning'.¹⁴¹ The result, however, was that the 1st Brigade commander, Smyth, was under the impression that the attack was to go ahead in the pre-dawn hours of the 26th, when in fact it was intended to go ahead in the early hours of the 25th. Ultimately the problem lay with the original divisional order, which contained the wrong date,¹⁴² and a message to correct the problem that went astray. Sinclair-Maclagan messaged Smyth at 11.45pm on 24 July to confirm 'Div[isional] Order No. 37 said operation 26th [of this month] but this was a mistake and was corrected to

¹³⁸ Message G.302 from Blamey (1st Aust. Div) to 1st, 2nd, 3rd & 5th Bdes, and Div. Arty, 24 July 1916, 4.05pm, AWM 26/51/26.

¹³⁹ 4th Bn War Diary, entry for 24 July 1916, AWM 4/23/21/17.

¹⁴⁰ Bean, *Official History, Vol. III*, p. 571.

¹⁴¹ 8th Bn War Diary, entry for 24 July 1916, AWM 4/23/25/19.

¹⁴² '1st Australian Division Order No. 37', 24 July 1916, AWM 4/1/42/18 Pt. 2.

25th in later message' – just hours before the assault was to begin.¹⁴³ This put Smyth on the back foot and a rush was on to recall the battalion commanders to brigade headquarters. The commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions could not be found, and so the meeting was between the commanders of the 1st, 4th and 8th Battalions.¹⁴⁴ The meeting was not concluded until 1.30am.¹⁴⁵ The situation was a shambles. One half of the planned assault was almost completely unprepared – and it was the half of the line that had been the most organised, 1st Brigade's sector. Commanders of the 3rd Brigade's sector on the right, although aware of the attack, were still very poorly organised, and struggled to effect preparations for the assault.

It was the sector with prior organisation that saved the renewed operation. Because lines of communication were established and working, and the front was well-manned and well-connected, the 1st Brigade's command structure could more efficiently send orders and effect organisation with little notice, and in fact the bulk of the village was taken by attackers from this side of the line moving northwards and then to the east to secure the right flank and make good the right side of the village up to the OG Lines. Once again the 3rd Brigade struggled to advance in an assault. They, too, had suffered from delays in issuing orders, but at a lower level. While Sinclair-Maclagan was aware of the time the attack was to go ahead, his force lacked the ability to communicate that information to his battalion commanders in the field in a timely fashion. Visual signalling was in use for only the most basic messages, and a runner took a minimum of an hour to get to battalion headquarters in the line. So the 11th Battalion did not receive notification of the time of the attack until forty minutes

¹⁴³ Message from Sinclair-Maclagan (OC 3rd Bde) to 1st Bde, 24 July 1916, 11.45pm., AWM 26/54/12.

¹⁴⁴ Bean. *Official History, Vol. III*, p. 571.

¹⁴⁵ 4th BnWar Diary, entry for 24 July 1916, AWM 4/23/21/17.

after the attack and its protective barrage had begun. Roberts later reported to 3rd Brigade headquarters, 'time to attack received forty minutes after time – I can't get into touch with my units under thirty minutes. I did my very best but could not carry out the orders, so far as I can see no one but artillery had a chance'.¹⁴⁶ The assault on the far right was to be carried out by the 5th Battalion and two companies of the 7th Battalion, under the protection of the same artillery barrage.¹⁴⁷ Most of the 7th Battalion did not arrive to their position until 2.20am – twenty minutes after the attack was supposed to have started.¹⁴⁸ Traffic policing caused significant problems for 7th Battalion's companies – the 5th Battalion began filing out early and blocked the 7th from moving in their allotted time period. They could not begin to move until ten minutes after the assault was supposed to begin, and as a result they had to rush into the battle without forming up in assembly positions or giving definite directions for the attack.¹⁴⁹ These two companies quickly became lost and disorganised, and took no further part in the assault. The 5th Battalion, having bought some extra time by gaining the advantage on the roads, arrived in better time and were able to make their way into what was now a lightly defended position in OG1. But too many men designated for consolidating this objective excitedly rushed on to attack OG2, and the battalion became disorganised. In the end a withdrawal left the Australian troops in control of the position in OG1, with a thinly held line of no more than 130 men.¹⁵⁰

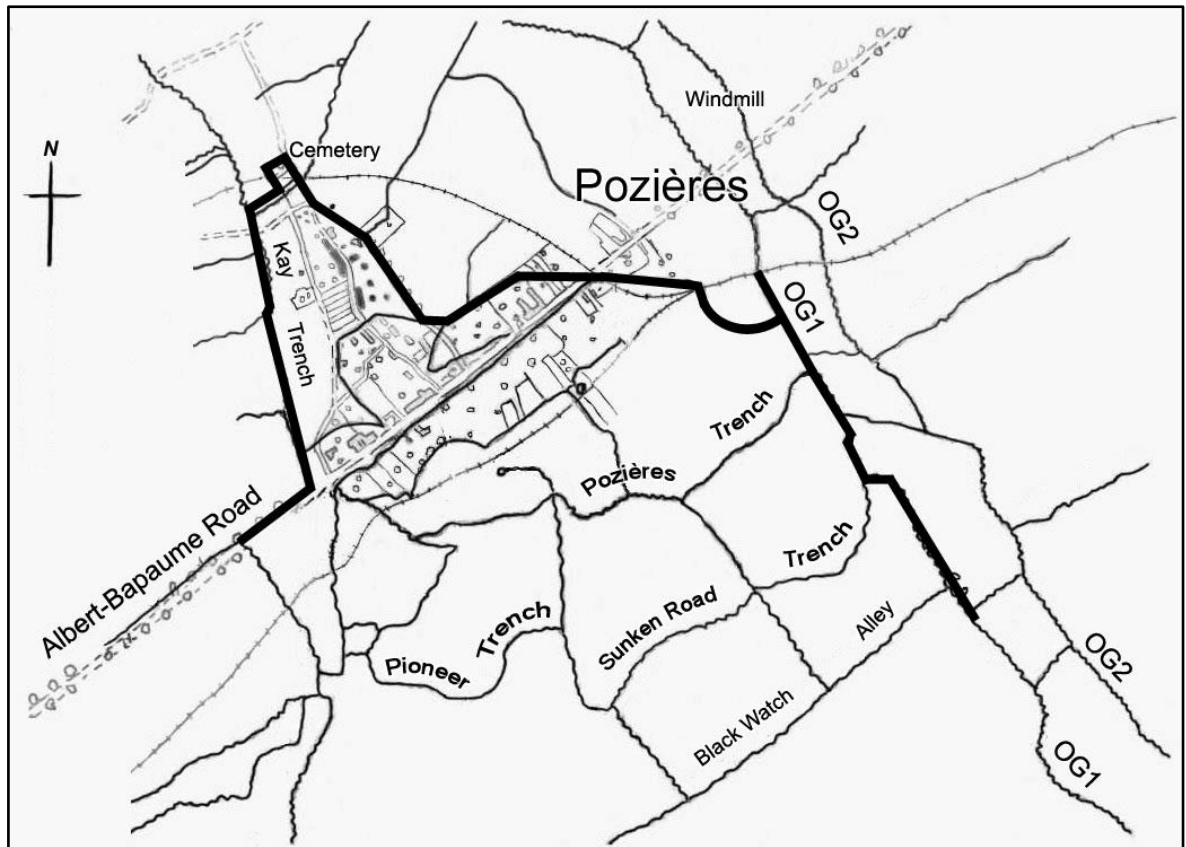
¹⁴⁶ Message from Roberts (OC 11th Bn) to 3rd Bde, 25 July 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/55/1.

¹⁴⁷ Orders in message from Bastin, (Adj, 7th Bn) to OC Coys. 24 July 1916, 9.45pm, AWM 26/54/3.

¹⁴⁸ Message from Lieut. Arthur Norman Hamilton (7th Bn) untimed, unaddressed report dated 25 July 1916, AWM 26/54/3.

¹⁴⁹ 7th Bn War Diary, entry for 25 July 1916, AWM 4/23/24/17.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum from OC 5th Bn to OC 2nd Bde, 29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/22/17.



Map 6: 1st Australian Division's situation on 25 July 1916.

The Battle of Pozières resulted in the capture of a tactically valuable village which offered an improved range of vision for British artillery observers, and a good jumping-off point for further attacks. But, contrary to what a higher-level examination of this battle can demonstrate, the capture of the village was not a straight-forward matter of one division attacking and capturing all objectives. There were a number of significant problems during the battle both caused by and dealt with at lower levels of command that caused the attack to seriously falter and resulted in an uneven, gap-ridden line. Despite being 'only' a divisional attack, both preparation and execution of the operation were incredibly complicated, and even simple traffic control and movement of units in and out of the field could cause significant problems. Communication problems became apparent from as early as 1.30am on 23 July, an

hour into the first operation.¹⁵¹ While telephone lines between brigades and artillery batteries remained intact, almost all lines forward of this level of command, that is, to battalion headquarters, liaison officers and forward observation officers, were severed and heavy shell fire meant that any repairs were short lived.¹⁵² Despite the best efforts of signallers to continue to repair the wire, all stocks of telephone wire had run out by 8.22am without consistent communications ever having been established. Divisional Headquarters was advised by a visual station during the night which could not function during the day, and struggled to handle complicated situation reports.¹⁵³ Shell fire, smoke and haze also interfered with lamp signalling, and in fact, some success with pigeons notwithstanding, the only truly reliable means of communication proved to be runners. Messages were frequently sent in duplicate by separate runners as the casualty rate among these men was extremely high. There were a number of examples of runners arriving only to succumb to wounds received on the way,¹⁵⁴ and others arrived with addenda to their messages asking that they might receive a meal or rest as they had made the dangerous journey a number of times and were on the point of exhaustion. Commanding officers forward in the field did not always prioritise communication with their commanding officers and higher command continually struggled for a picture of what was happening. Some lag was to be expected, but as communication was almost always inconsistent and unreliable, it was more difficult than it needed to be.

¹⁵¹ 145th (British) Bde War Diary, entry for 22/23 July 1916, WO 95/2760.

¹⁵² 'First Australian Divisional Artillery Report on the Artillery Co-operation in the operations which resulted in the capture of Pozières,' 30 July 1916, p. 1, AWM 4/13/10/22.

¹⁵³ Smyth (OC 1st Bde), 'Short Account of the Operations of 1st Australian Infantry Brigade Resulting in the Capture of Pozières,' 29 July 1916, p.1, AWM 4/23/1/12.

¹⁵⁴ Untitled, undated letter from Brig.-Gen. N. M. Smyth, p. 3, AWM 4/23/19/15.

But there was another way to control the battlefield, and that was reliance on structure and planning. The sector with the most success, the left, made it a priority to keep structure as closely as possible, and follow the orders given. So in this sector there seems to be a much lower incidence of men rushing on to an objective beyond the one they were given. Commanders on the left, too, gave a high priority to maintaining their structure in the field and establishing a strong, consolidated line wherever possible. Here troops were able to attack at relatively short notice because of established infantry lines, with well-established communication routes. They were aware of where they were, and where they should be going. That is not to say that they were not somewhat muddled – not every individual in this sector remained with his company – but company commanders found company-sized groups of men and made them a cohesive unit. It should be remembered that the left of the line was attacking lightly held trenches and had the easiest approach to their sector, and so arrived in a lesser state of exhaustion. This may have made it easier to maintain these structures and links, but at all times they also demonstrated a concern for actively maintaining them that it helped their effort immeasurably.

It is in the matter of structure that individuals could make the most difference to the conduct of the battle overall. While Arthur Blackburn won a Victoria Cross and many other medals were won that day for very brave deeds, none was more important than the medal won by Ferdinand Medcalf. He is an excellent example of the impact of an individual who prioritised communication and structure could have on the conduct of the battle. Without him and the unit of men he collected and organised, the right sector of the battlefield would have been in worse disarray than it was, and higher

command would have lost one of their major conduits of information into and out of the battlefield. The first move in the Battle of Pozières Ridge demonstrates just how critical attention to structure and communication was in battles in 1916.

The assault on the village of Pozières on 23 July was secondary to what had become the main thrust of the Somme Offensive, which was being conducted by Fourth Army to the south and east. The attack did not directly contend with the main defences in this area – the OG lines – but rather took a swipe out of them by having its main thrust northwards – almost parallel to these primary lines of defence. Despite this, the village of Pozières was a clearly and oft-stated objective of the British Army, and its capture was somewhat of a triumph for Gough and Reserve Army. It had been conducted under Haig’s policy of ‘keeping the enemy occupied’ in the north while the main attack was going on to the south. With this objective in mind, the capture of the village was deemed to have been successful – not only did it gain ‘a considerable amount of ground’, it also ‘fulfilled its role of holding the enemy to his positions, and by causing him to anticipate an attack has prevented him from withdrawing troops or guns for action against the Fourth Army’.¹⁵⁵ The foundation supporting the ongoing use of the 1st Anzac Corps in operations in this sector had been laid.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Summary of Operations of Reserve Army up to 6pm on 28th July, 1916,’ 29 July 1916, p. 4, AWM 26/43/37.

Chapter 2. 'Met with very heavy machine gun fire': Gordon Legge, the 2nd Australian Division and the OG Lines.

Now that the village of Pozières was secure, the British GHQ began to toy with the idea of expanding operations from the Thiepval-Ginchy-Morval line, which mostly fell within Fourth Army's sector of operations, and investigations began for an extension of the general assault to the north. On 30 July the Reserve Army was ordered to 'make all necessary preparations for delivering an attack on the front River Ancre-Serre' about the middle of August.¹⁵⁶ This represented a significant departure from the previous position of GHQ.¹⁵⁷ Previously the action of Reserve Army was very much secondary to with the main assault conducted by Fourth Army. Now, however, the attacks on this front began to take on the character of being an end in themselves, and an important step in this proposed northwards extension. The extended plan relied on II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps breaking through the OG Lines and cutting off the German garrison at Thiepval.¹⁵⁸ Both these Corps were in Reserve Army, and given the importance of this action to future plans, they now found themselves with a central role. Gough's Army no longer had to fit in with action conducted by Fourth Army, but were preparing to take on an increasingly important and autonomous part in the future projections of the British GHQ.

¹⁵⁶ OAD 87. Kiggell to Reserve and Third Armies, 30th July 1916, WO 158/333.

¹⁵⁷ Haig to Robertson, 8 July 1916, WO 158/21.

¹⁵⁸ 'Memorandum on the Policy to be Pursued by the XIV Corps,' 30 July 1916, WO 158/333.

In the end, this broad extension of the line to the north was not to eventuate for some months. However, it did leave the fighting in the Pozières-Mouquet Farm-Thiepval area with a much greater degree of importance than it had had when it was simply 'keeping the enemy fully occupied' north of Contalmaison.¹⁵⁹ Reserve Army was no longer acting as an adjunct to action by the Fourth Army, but had its own, independent objectives. In fact, it had become so important that the General Staff allocated half of all future consignments of rifle grenades, light signals, flares and other armaments to be divided equally between Fourth and Reserve Armies, even though Fourth Army held at least twice the length of line than that held by Reserve Army.¹⁶⁰ Although not able to expand into the broad-fronted assault envisaged by optimists in the highest levels of command, Reserve Army's offensive did gradually expand to the left, away from the boundary with Fourth Army. The focus of operations also moved away from 1st Anzac Corps' sector to the left where II Corps had three divisions in the front line. Gough's intention was 'that the centre and left [of II Corps] shall both be brought forward as the right [division of the corps] advances'.¹⁶¹ This meant that the main thrust of this new plan would be conducted by II Corps' 12th Division, holding the line to 1st Anzac Corps' immediate left. They were to work their way 'methodically northwards', past Mouquet Farm, to a point directly north of Thiepval, and then circle back to their left to assault that village from the east and north. Their advance would pull both 1st Anzac Corps on their right, and the other divisions of II Corps on their left 'steadily forward' with them.¹⁶² The Australian

¹⁵⁹ Haig, to Robertson, 8 July 1916, WO 158/21.

¹⁶⁰ 'Summary of Action Taken by Operations Section, General Staff, GHQ, BEF', 27 July- 6 August 1916, AWM 26/40/3.

¹⁶¹ Memorandum SG.406/171 from Malcolm (Reserve Army) to II Corps, 30 July 1916, WO 158/334.

¹⁶² 'Outline of Plan of Attack on Thiepval,' II Corps, 28 July 1916, WO 158/334.

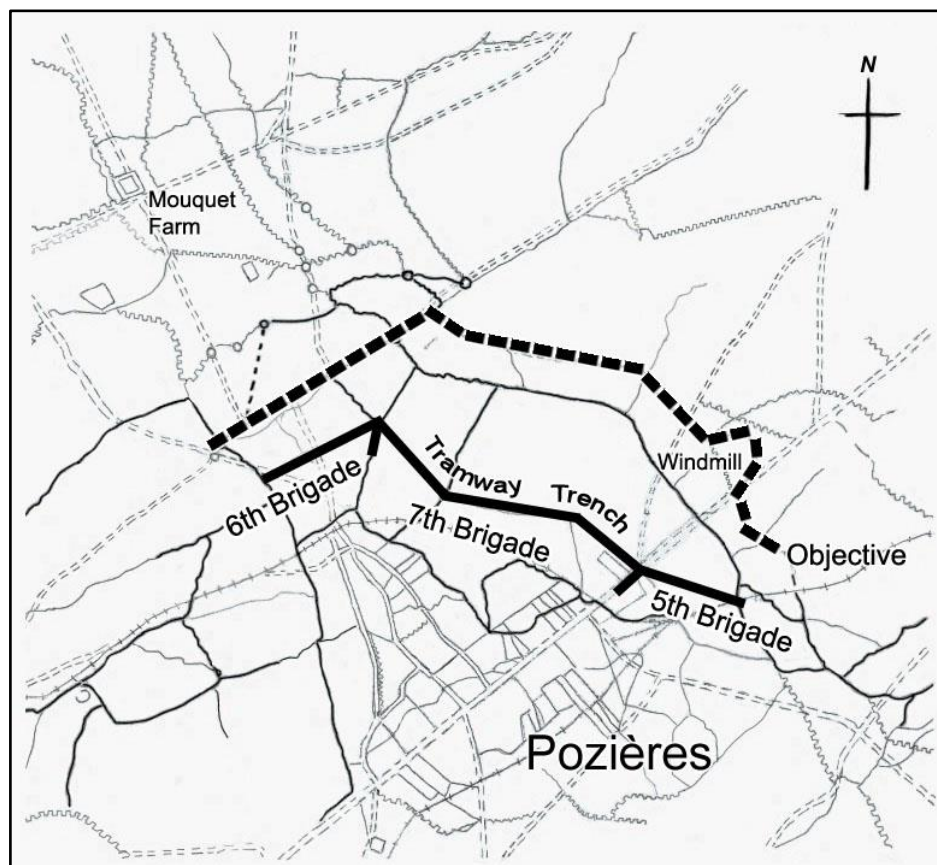
position on the Somme was no longer primarily in support of Fourth Army, but increasingly in support of the 12th Division.

It is important to note that this is simply a change in aspiration – it did not look very different in terms of action on the ground. The 12th Division struggled to advance as much as 1st Anzac Corps did. In fact, for some time the attention of 1st Anzac Corps, intended to cooperate with the left, was more often turned to the right as the OG lines and Munster Alley continued to elude them. But it is equally important to note the small disconnect between Reserve Army and Fourth Army at this stage, and to understand the shift in 1st Anzac Corps' importance to Reserve Army. They were no longer the only means available to Gough of conducting an attack within the broader strategy of the Somme Offensive. They were now becoming a support to what was hoped would become a larger attack on the left. Yet 1st Anzac Corps' action could still be seen to have value for both flanks. The observation to be had from OG 1 and 2, and the windmill to the northeast of the village, continued to give the Germans a considerable advantage in observation. Reserve Army General Staff considered that

the capture of Pozières... is an important gain, but the Windmill N[orth] E[ast] of it and the high ground about OG 1 and 2 must be secured in order to obtain observation for ourselves and to deny it to the enemy. This must be considered the next task of the Reserve Army, and when completed will greatly assist the troops on our right as well as our own forward movement.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ 'Summary of Operations of Reserve Army up to 6pm on 28th July, 1916,' 29 July 1916, p. 4, AWM 26/43/37.

Accordingly, preparations for taking these positions began. Gough was impatient, but the 1st Australian Division was for the moment exhausted and had to wait for relief by the 2nd Australian Division. Commanded by Major-General James Gordon Legge, this division was ordered to press on with the advance as soon as possible. Legge took over command of the line at 9am on 27 July 1916,¹⁶⁴ and quickly put together plans for an attack on the OG Lines, the control of which was vital for any further northerly advance. Three Battalions of the 7th Infantry Brigade would form the spearhead to this attack, assaulting OG1 and OG2 on a front of about 900 yards to the north of the Albert-Bapaume Road. To their left, flank protection would be provided by a battalion



Map 7. 2nd Australian dispositions for the attack on 29 July 1916.

¹⁶⁴ 1st Anzac Corps War Diary, entry for 27 July 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

of the 6th Brigade attacking at right angles to the main advance. On the right, one battalion of the 5th Brigade would support the 7th Brigade attack by assaulting the OG Lines south of the Albert-Bapaume Road. Gough allowed the 2nd Australian Division less than two days to plan, prepare for and execute this assault. This was a very short amount of time allowed to prepare for what was an operation against the strongest German trench defences in the area, and so has drawn much criticism on this basis. But there is another problem here – the plans themselves.

On the surface, orders for the 2nd Australian Division assault on the OG Lines look very similar to those given by the 1st Australian Division for the attack on Pozières, because of the inclusion of similar fundamental elements. Planned for just after midnight on 29 July 1916, the basic structure of this attack was for four lines of infantry to advance on a staggered set of limited objectives, at night, behind a lifting artillery barrage, with emphasis again placed on consolidation of ground gained.¹⁶⁵ However, a closer look at the plans will demonstrate that this similarity is only superficial. The emphasis of the 1st Division's attack was depth and firepower. Its artillery plan was central to the assault and had undergone 'careful elaboration' in conjunction with any developments to the infantry assault plans.¹⁶⁶ The 1st Division's infantry held the front line lightly, with just eight companies spread along the front of attack, and were reliant on the artillery barrage as the primary means of getting forward. But importantly, they held the line in depth, because another three waves of infantry with the same composition followed. This assault was carefully crafted to

¹⁶⁵ 'I A. & N. Z. A. C. Operational Order No. 16,' 26 July 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

¹⁶⁶ *Official History, Vol. III*, p. 483.

take advantage of previous success,¹⁶⁷ using technology to advance the infantry as far as their set objective and no further.

This first assault of the 2nd Division came less than forty hours after Legge assumed command of the front line.¹⁶⁸ Certainly Legge proved less resistant to pressure from Reserve Army than Walker had been. But 1st Anzac Corps headquarters had taken back its rightful place in between Army and division in the chain of command at noon on 23 July 1916, and its commanding officer, Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood, did not voice concern over the short period of time allowed for preparation either. And while Legge did not protest the short amount of time given to organise what would become a rather large attack, he also apparently failed to question or modify any artillery programme delivered from Army and corps. Reserve Army issued some orders to II Corps for their contribution to the barrage, but left the orders for 'wire cutting, preliminary bombardment and subsequent artillery lifts' up to the staff of 1st Anzac Corps.¹⁶⁹ In fact, it seems Legge may have made last minute moves to attack without artillery at all – moves which were promptly reversed by higher command. Haig recorded in his diary for 28 July 1916:

General Birch in the evening reported that the Australians had at the last moment said that they would attack without artillery support and that "they did not believe machine gun fire could do them much

¹⁶⁷ It would appear that the chief of staff of the 1st Australian Division, Lieutenant Colonel T. A. Blamey actively sought information from experienced divisions prior to the attack on the village of Pozières. For more discussion on this point see Sheffield. "Australians at Pozières." pp. 115-116.

¹⁶⁸ He assumed command at 9am on 27 July and the assault went ahead at midnight 28/29 July – 39 hours later.

¹⁶⁹ 'Artillery Arrangements No. 2 Reserve Army,' attached to Reserve Army Operation Order No. 15, 28 July 1916, WO 95/518.

harm"! Birch at once saw Gough who arranged that the original artillery programme should be carried out.¹⁷⁰

This little episode is not evident in the orders and reports filed after the battle, but it is consistent with Legge's attitude to artillery support, as will become apparent. But regardless of the truth of this sad indictment on Legge's understanding of battle, the plan concocted between Reserve Army and 1st Anzac Corps was woefully inadequate. The preliminary bombardment was aimed at OG1, the first objective, and was timed to last only a single minute.¹⁷¹ The infantry had to be in position before it was fired, which involved leaving Tramway Trench and moving as close as possible towards the first objective, OG1.¹⁷² This forward movement would have to be achieved without a protective artillery barrage. The men would then have to lie out in the open, without protection, to wait for the preliminary barrage on the first objective to start, hopefully neutralising the German threat within, then rush the trench as the barrage lifted on to the next objective. The first lift of the artillery was designed to lift the barrage on to the second objective OG2 for ten minutes. Another two minor lifts would take place within the next five minutes, giving the second wave of infantry a chance to attack OG2 and bringing the final standing barrage to 200 yards beyond this final objective. This barrage programme was not only shorter – lasting only 16 minutes in total before reaching the standing barrage – and further away from the infantry, but lighter than that of 1st Division, too, at a rate of only two rounds per gun per minute, instead of two to five rounds. Yet, despite some indication that a 'number of alterations' were

¹⁷⁰ Haig Diary, entry for 28 July, Sheffield & Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters*, p. 210.

¹⁷¹ '1st Australian Divisional Artillery Order No. 38,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/53/2. This order gives 'zero' as midnight, but message BM.657 from 1st Australian Divisional Artillery to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 21st, 5th and 6th Field Artillery Brigades at 1735 on 28 July (in same file) changes this to 12.15am.

¹⁷² For example, the 26th Battalion expected to leave the jumping-off trench at midnight and take 15 minutes to reach the location of the preliminary barrage. '26th Battalion Operational Order No. 17,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

made to the artillery orders, delaying their issue until 5.15pm on the 28th,¹⁷³ there was no lengthening or strengthening of the barrage in any way by divisional command.

Pozières at this time was the centre of an artillery duel that rained shellfire on the village and its immediate vicinity almost constantly. Reserve Army batteries tried to engage their German counterparts around Le Sars and Courcelette, and although the Army claimed this 'reduced to some extent the hostile bombardment of Pozières and vicinity',¹⁷⁴ this was not felt by those in the front line, or indeed anywhere in or near the village. The newly-won Australian position in Pozières was precarious as a result of this accurate artillery fire from the German artillery. The Australian artillery – still that of the unrelieved 1st Australian Divisional Artillery – found it difficult to establish observation posts in the village as a result, and shellfire also prevented communication to artillery batteries from the front line almost entirely, offering little hope of a speedy response from the big guns to specific threats and problems. This accurate German fire was probably guided from observation posts in the OG lines and the Windmill, which made the capture of these positions all the more important.¹⁷⁵ However, in the meantime this same fire was continuing to hamper preparations for the coming battle. New communication trenches were often 'rendered useless' through being destroyed by artillery fire before they could be completed,¹⁷⁶ and in most places the front line consisted of a few unconnected trenches and strongpoints.

¹⁷³ 1st Aust. Div. Arty War Diary, entry for 28 July 1916, AWM 26/53/2.

¹⁷⁴ 'Summary of Operations of Reserve Army up to 6pm on 28th July, 1916,' 29 July 1916, p. 3, AWM 26/43/37.

¹⁷⁵ 'Reconnaissance Report by Captain A. Anderson, 110th Brigade, 1st Field Artillery Battery, 1st Aust. Div. Artillery,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/53/2.

¹⁷⁶ Message from 2nd Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps, 17 July 1916, 5.03pm, AWM 26/56/5.

Not only that, but the men of the newly-arrived 2nd Division were unfamiliar with the ground and frequently became lost before they could arrive at a location to work, and there were no large-scale maps of the new trenches to assist. The only answer lay in familiarisation and the use of guides from the 5th Brigade, which had been in the line longer, but all of this took time and meant that preparations were not as advanced as they could have been when the assault took place.¹⁷⁷

The lack of observation posts in the village meant that preliminary artillery bombardments were based on scanty information, specifically regarding the results of their attempts to cut German defensive barbed wire emplacements. Patrols were sent out as soon as 2nd Division took over the line to provide information to Divisional Headquarters in order 'to ascertain the condition of the enemy's wire and the extent to which the bombardment has been effective'.¹⁷⁸ These reports returned with mixed messages, in some cases giving information that parts of the wire had been effectively destroyed, but in other cases indicating that equally large tracts of wire remained untouched. Most concluded that the wire, although 'knocked about',¹⁷⁹ was 'still an obstacle'.¹⁸⁰ However, the fact that some wire *had* been destroyed seems to have resulted in an unwarranted sense of optimism at Divisional Headquarters. Legge simply continued on as planned in the hope that further wire-cutting activities 'would have increased the gaps and made new ones' by the time the operation was to begin.¹⁸¹ But observation of the wire could not be obtained by artillery observation

¹⁷⁷ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

¹⁷⁸ 2nd Aust. Div. secret memorandum G.1/87, 27 July 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

¹⁷⁹ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

¹⁸⁰ Message G.250 from 2nd Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps, 11.55am, in 'Summary of Operation Messages. Midnight July 27th to Midnight July 28th, 1916,' AWM 26/50/15.

¹⁸¹ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

officers without established forward posts,¹⁸² and so there was always ongoing official uncertainty as to whether the wire had been cut further. Despite continuing suggestions from patrol reports that the wire would cause a problem, no attempt was made to increase or modify the barrage in places where the wire was noted to be particularly strong, nor was more time allocated for the establishment of appropriate observation posts to get more accurate information on the situation. And in fact the post-battle reports demonstrate that ‘the wire had not been cut in very many places’ at all, and portions of the line had not even been touched by shellfire in any way.¹⁸³ This was a serious situation that needed much more attention than it received.

While artillery plans for 2nd Australian Division’s operations were markedly dissimilar to 1st Australian Division’s assault, Legge was somewhat limited in his ability to modify the arrangements, had he desire to do so. However, his infantry attack was also very different from that of the 1st Australian Division. Like 1st Division’s attack it was based on four waves of infantry advancing on staggered objectives, with orders to consolidate gains taken. But unlike 1st Division, the four waves would all start from the same trench, Tramway Trench, at almost exactly the same time. There were only two objectives for this attack, OG1 being the first and OG2 the second, and so the original four infantry waves were squashed together. Waves “one and two” were both assigned to take the first objective together and waves “three and four” were assigned together to the second. In a way each wave of infantry acted as the lines had during 1st Division’s attack on Pozières. All four of these waves

¹⁸² ‘Reconnaissance Report by Captain A. Anderson, 110th Brigade, 1st Field Artillery Battery, 1st Aust. Div. Artillery,’ 28 July 1916, AWM 26/53/2.

¹⁸³ Paton (OC 7th Bde) ‘Attack on German Trenches on the Ridge North of Pozières by the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade on the Night of the 28th/29th July,’ 29 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

were to leave Tramway Trench at midnight with no more than 50 yards between them,¹⁸⁴ and move to within 150 yards of first objective before the preliminary barrage took place.¹⁸⁵ In practice this plan meant that each infantry formation was two to four times as densely populated as any used by the 1st Division.

But there was a further complication. In the 1st Division's attack one company belonged to one wave and worked as a single unit in a line across the front together. With the 2nd Division, however, one company was divided into four to assault one single area of the German trench system. So, for example, A Company of the 26th Battalion was given the task of attacking the extreme left side of 7th Brigade's sector, and would form all four waves of infantry in this sector to attack both OG1 and OG2. To do this each platoon from A Company would form each of the four attacking waves, and follow each other closely into battle.¹⁸⁶ This added complication becomes particularly apparent in the role of the company commander. Half of his company had orders to attack and consolidate the first objective, OG1, while the second had separate orders to leapfrog through the first part and attack and consolidate the second objective, OG2. The company commander was expected to maintain control of both waves completing different tasks. This was yet another way of approaching infantry deployment, but was pressed onto all brigades by divisional command instead of brigade commanders being allowed to deploy their infantry as they preferred. Smyth would have had no scope to apply his straightforward interpretation of divisional orders here, and instead each brigade of the 2nd Division

¹⁸⁴ '28th Battalion Report on Operations 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁸⁵ '7th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 20,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁸⁶ '26th Battalion Operational Order No. 17,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

was faced with carrying out complicated orders more in the manner of Sinclair-Maclagan on 23 July 1916.

The arrangements of reserve troops was also problematic for this attack. The 6th Brigade on the left had a good supply of reserves. A force comprising half of the 22nd Battalion and half of the 24th Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Smith, the commanding officer of the 22nd Battalion, was waiting in Kay Trench, within easy reach of 6th Brigade's front lines. But the 7th Brigade, which was conducting the lion's share of the attack, had placed their reserve, the 27th Battalion, in Sausage Valley – well over half a mile from the front line. They were therefore not in close support, nor were they able to be easily or quickly organised into a support role as much of the battalion was occupied with carrying duties immediately before and during the operation.¹⁸⁷ On the right of the line, the 20th Battalion conducted most of 5th Brigade's small-scale assault on the remaining uncaptured part of the OG Lines. The supply of reinforcements was uneven across the line, and again demonstrated some problems in the preparation for the coming battle.

What these differences in basic approach amount to is an essential disparity between the action of the 1st Australian Division and the plans of the 2nd Australian Division. Certainly both battles were based firmly on a series of basic, prescribed battle elements – a lifting artillery barrage, infantry attacking in lines and so on – but the incorporation of these elements into an infantry plan is completely different. This not only demonstrates another way in which a basic standardised approach to battle

¹⁸⁷ '7th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 20,' 28 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

could be interpreted and applied differently on the Western Front in 1916, it also gives some indication that there was no information shared between the two divisions, despite their being in the same Corps. Furthermore, there were some demonstrable inconsistencies in the headquarters of 1st Anzac Corps. Although not involved at the outset of the operation against Pozzières, Birdwood must have had access to the orders and plans for that first attack. Yet he still seems to have failed to notice the huge differences between the two, must less recognise the problems inherent in the second. The fundamental difference here is that the first attack relied heavily on firepower to advance the infantry in the field – the 1st Australian Division’s emphasis was on a strong barrage with thin but deep infantry formations. The 2nd Australian Division’s attack plans demonstrate that Legge was relying on manpower to conduct the advance – a light, quick barrage with two thickly populated infantry lines making the main thrust of the assault. This is an important distinction. The operation of the 2nd Australian Division to take the windmill and the OG Lines is an infantry assault, not a coordinated, combined-arms attack, and no matter how much more time there had been allowed for preparation, this plan in any form, if fundamentally unchanged, would have gone on to cause problems.

In the last few hours of 28 July 1916, all battalions seem to have arrived in position in good time and in good order, notwithstanding the problems associated with finalising preparations under such heavy artillery fire. It was a ‘difficult and complicated task’ to assemble battalions of as many as 1000 men in forward lines at the right time, all the while in the dark under fire, and so what seems to be only a small success should

be emphasised.¹⁸⁸ In part this was due to battalions sending company commanders to visit the ground over which the attack was to take place, to ensure they were as familiar with the ground as possible.¹⁸⁹ At 12.14am on 29 July the artillery, too, proved able to begin its barrage on time. It went on to make all its projected lifts on time and without problems. But the infantry operation that followed did not succeed. On the left the 6th Brigade made some gains, but the assaults of both the 7th Brigade in the centre and the 5th Brigade on the right failed completely, and with heavy casualties. The 7th Brigade's attack was the main thrust of the entire operation. When this central assault began to fail, the progress of the supporting attack by the 6th Brigade on the left faltered, and only partial success was achieved. On the right, where even more problems were encountered with intact wire and alert enemy fire, the 5th Brigade failed even to reach the first objective. So what went wrong?

One of the first indications of trouble came from the Germans. Their ongoing fire soon made it clear that most of the Australian forces forming up in the forward lines had been discovered by German observers in advanced listening posts.¹⁹⁰ This was evident all along the line, from the far left, where 6th Brigade headquarters reported that the Germans 'were well aware of our attack from the first',¹⁹¹ to the centre, where the Germans opposite the 7th Brigade sent up a number of green flares and began firing machine guns from about 11.42pm,¹⁹² to the far right.¹⁹³ The 25th

¹⁸⁸ 'Attack on German Trenches on the Ridge North of Pozières by the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade on the Night of the 28th/29th July,' 29 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁸⁹ 7th Bde War Diary, entries for 25th & 26th Bns, 29 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁹⁰ 'Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,' undated, AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁹¹ Gellibrand (OC 6th Bde) 'Report on Operations 28/29 July 1916. 6th Australian Infantry Brigade,' B.1/90, 29 July 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

¹⁹² 'Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

Battalion was the only one to have reported to have assembled undetected.¹⁹⁴ All along the rest of the line the alerted Germans let off a large number of flares and put the assaulting troops under heavy machine gun, rifle and shrapnel fire.¹⁹⁵ This fire did not have much practical effect on either the 6th or 7th Brigades, because it was generally too high to find a target among the infantry, and was as such more a nuisance.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it was a dangerous indicator that the German defenders would be alert and ready as the operation went ahead. On the right the situation was worse. Here, where troops of the 5th Brigade were detected early, a very heavy and very accurate machine gun fire was brought to bear on them, shortly followed by an artillery bombardment which included gas and lachrymatory shells. This caused heavy casualties before companies could even reach their jumping-off places.¹⁹⁷

The significance of this observation by the Germans – and the ongoing hostile fire in particular – is that it is a good indication that the artillery barrage was inadequate. Not only was the role of the artillery here to cut defensive wire emplacements, but the barrage was also intended to keep the German defenders sheltering in dugouts and trenches, rather than locating attackers and firing machine guns at them. Prior to the one-minute preliminary barrage, there had been ‘a certain amount of bombardment in order to avoid there being a very remarkable silence prior to the intense bombardment’, although it was not planned to be heavy.¹⁹⁸ This it proved to be completely useless. Not only was it too light to keep the enemy under cover – troops

¹⁹³ 20th Bn War Diary, entry for 28 July 1916, AWM 4/23/37/12.

¹⁹⁴ Walker (OC 25th Bn) ‘Report on operations of 25th Battalion,’ 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Brief Report on Operation Carried Out on 28/29th July 1916’, undated, AWM 26/57/27.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,’ AWM 26/58/9.

¹⁹⁷ 20th Bn War Diary, entry for 28 July 1916, AWM 4/23/37/12.

¹⁹⁸ Message BM.657 from Bridges (GSO1 2nd Aust. Div.) to 7th Bde, 28 July 1916, 5.35pm, AWM 26/56/5.

reported that 'up to 14 minutes past twelve [the artillery fire] was not heavy enough to keep [the] enemy down'¹⁹⁹ – but it also failed to fool the Germans who could plainly see troop movements in the Australian front lines. At every part of the line defensive fire was started before or immediately following the one-minute preliminary bombardment, and in many cases actually grew stronger as the attack went on,²⁰⁰ meaning that the artillery had had no impact at all in protecting the advancing infantry or preventing the German infantry from defending their position.

In the centre, at the forefront of the attack, Brigadier General James Paton, officer commanding the 7th Brigade, was able to report that 'the difficult and complicated task of assembling the three Battalions concerned in the attack at the appointed place at the right time was most successfully carried out'. The 'four waves had passed through [Tramway Trench on their way to the front line] in almost perfect order... [leaving] no doubt whatever that the attack was successfully launched'.²⁰¹ The 26th Battalion was on the far left of 7th Brigade's sector, the 25th in the centre, and the 28th on the right. The experience of these three battalions mirrored that of the brigades on their flanks.

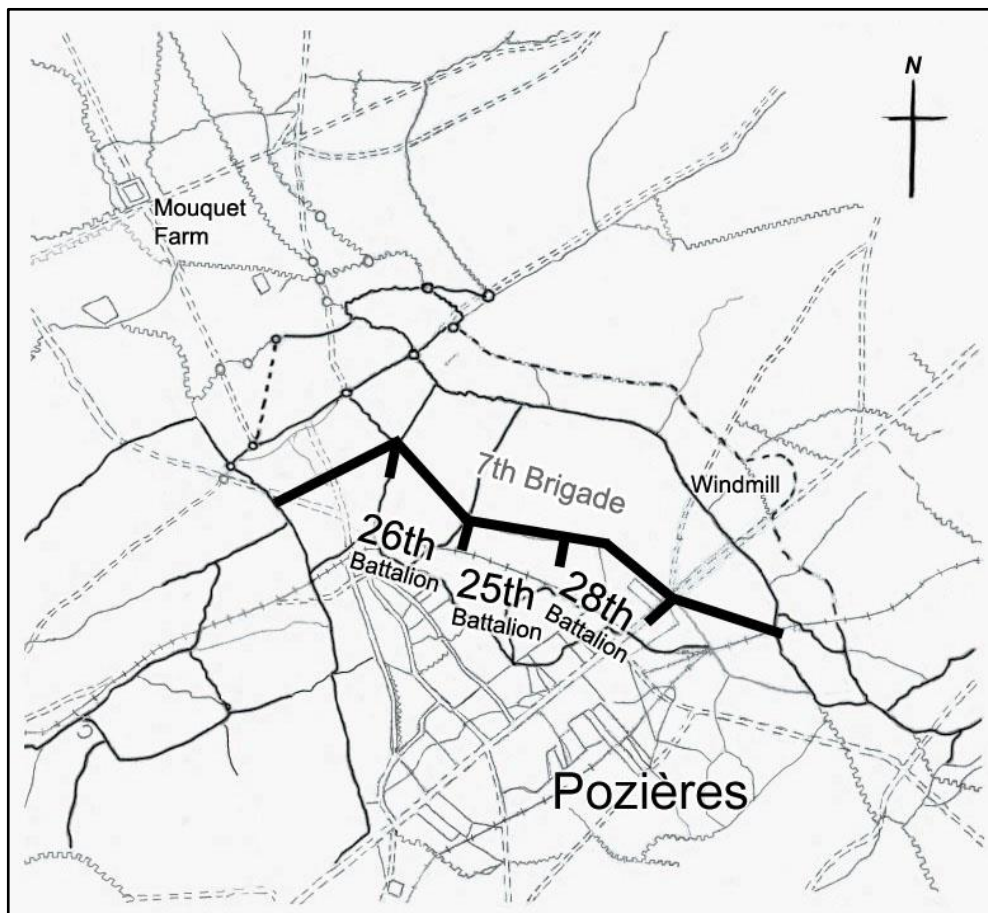
While some success was achieved on the left with the 6th Brigade, on the right the operation was disastrous – no gains at all for a high number of casualties. And so the 26th and the left of the 25th Battalion saw some initial success in their operation.

¹⁹⁹ Walker (OC 25th Bn) 'Report on operations of 25th Battalion,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰⁰ Rudford, (OC 7th AMGC) 'Report of CO 7th Machine Gun Coy of Operations on Night 28th/29th July 1916', AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰¹ 'Attack on German Trenches on the Ridge North of Pozières by the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade on the Night of the 28th/29th July,' AWM 26/58/9.

Although both battalions reported that the wire had not been cut in many places, there were enough gaps in the wire to get into their first objective, OG1, with minimal resistance. But trouble arose when the second wave of men moved through to take the second objective, OG2. The second wave of the 26th Battalion found that the enemy wire was undamaged, and a significant obstacle.²⁰² Not only that, but this trench was strongly held and actively defended by alert machine gun crews.²⁰³ Isolated groups of the four companies of the 26th Battalion got no further than the wire in front of OG2 before they were forced to retire to their position in OG1 because



Map 8. 7th Brigade's sector during the operation of 29 June 1916.

²⁰² Cales (IO 26th Bn) & Ferguson (OC 26th Bn) 'Intelligence Report on attack of night 28th 29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰³ 25th Bn War Diary, entry for 28/29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/42/12.

the second objective was so strongly defended.²⁰⁴ Lieutenant Colonel James Walker, commanding the 25th Battalion, also reported that his men reached the first objective 'without very much trouble or many casualties', finding it 'very shallow, only about three feet deep, [which] caused some confusion as to whether it was the real objective or not'.²⁰⁵ In fact, parties from the 25th Battalion found themselves faced with little or no wire to negotiate here, with OG1 itself only lightly held and without defensive machine gun fire coming from it.²⁰⁶ But again, as the second wave moved through they encountered staunch resistance from OG2. B Company under Captain Nix of the 25th Battalion came into trouble only five yards from OG2. Later reports state his company

were met with very heavy machine gun fire which caused a great number of casualties. The waves approached to within about five yards of second objective when in addition to machine gun fire a considerable number of bombs were thrown. Capt[ain] Nix tried to re-organise this line to assault second objective but had not sufficient men left as they were being shot down fast so the order to fall back on to first objective was given. On reaching first objective again he had no men left at all and had to come back to position held by 6th Brigade. Captain Nix thinks that the best part of his Company are casualties.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ 'Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰⁵ Message PL.2 from Walker (OC 25th Bn) to 7th Bde, 29 July 1916, 2.29am, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰⁶ Walker (OC 25th Bn) 'Report on operations of 25th Battalion,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁰⁷ Message PL.2 from Walker (OC 25th Bn) to 7th Bde, 29 July 1916, 2.29am. AWM 26/58/9.

A small party from C Company of the 25th Battalion did actually succeed in entering OG2 through gaps they had managed to cut in the wire, but again were forced to retire to OG1 when they realised that the rest of the line had not been entered.²⁰⁸ Otherwise, all attempts to take OG2 by the 25th and 26th Battalions failed.

But a bigger problem soon became evident on the left of the line. The boundary between the 7th Brigade and the unit to their left, the 6th Brigade, was a perpendicular angle. The join came where the OG lines met with the trench known as Tom's Cut and a road that would soon be named for Major Edward Brind, a company commander of the 23rd Battalion. To account for this angle in the objective line, the battalion at the far left of the 7th Brigade's sector, the 26th Battalion, was obliged to turn to the north west as they advanced. But a significant portion of the 26th Battalion lost direction because, having to 'go off at an angle, [they] soon made the angle too big'. Two companies on the left of the 26th Battalion became mixed in with troops of the 23rd Battalion on the right of 6th Brigade's sector.²⁰⁹ As the attack went forward, more and more of the 26th Battalion moved too far to the left, with units continuing to get lost in the rough ground²¹⁰ and machine gun fire,²¹¹ until the trend for leftward movement began to affect companies of the 25th Battalion. Most of the 26th Battalion ended up more than two-thirds of the way into 6th Brigade's sector, from where they were later withdrawn.

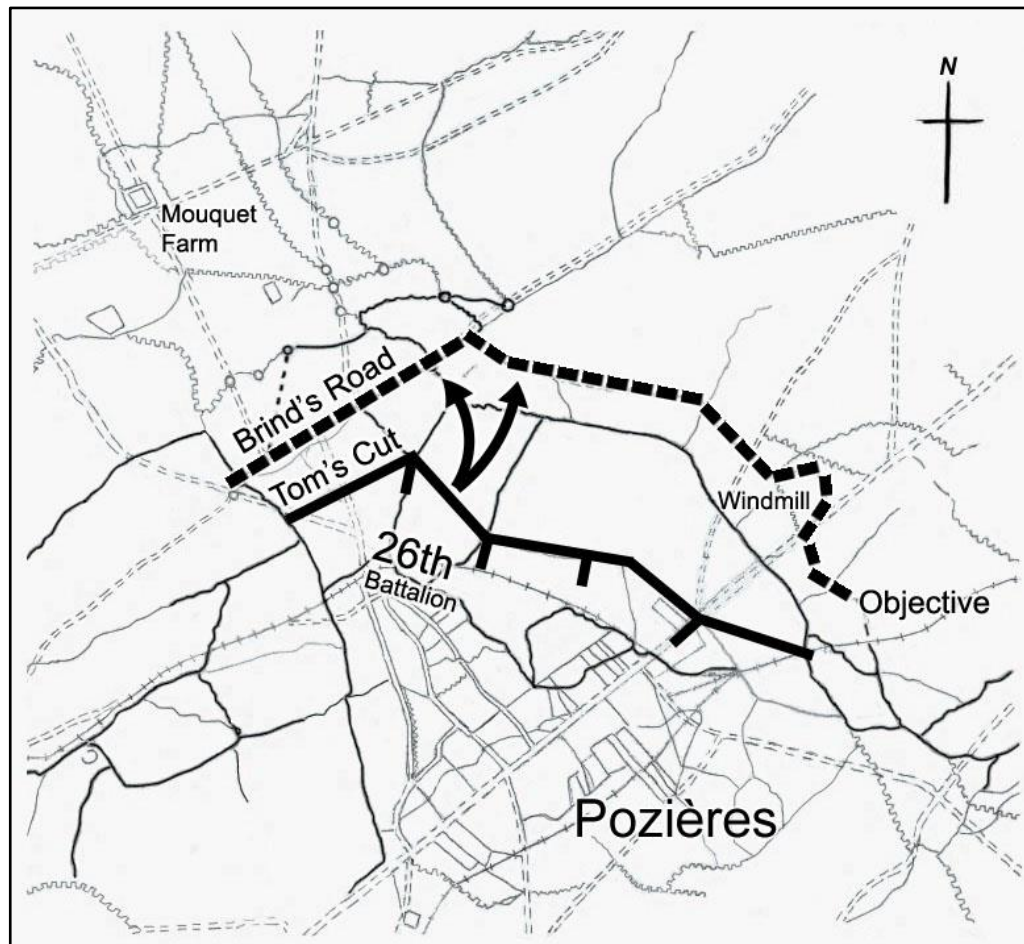
²⁰⁸ 25th Bn War Diary, entry for 28/29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/42/12.

²⁰⁹ Caless (IO 26th Bn) & Ferguson (OC 26th Bn) 'Intelligence Report on attack of night 28th 29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²¹⁰ 'Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²¹¹ Ferguson (OC 26th Bn), 'Report on the Attack 28/29th July 1916,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

The 23rd Battalion of the 6th Brigade on the left of this attack had also managed to launch their operation on time. Their first wave was preceded by patrols, and despite



Map 9. 26th Battalion's manoeuvre to cover the boundary between the 6th and 7th Brigades.

coming under heavy fire from machine guns, rifles and artillery, encountered demolished wire in front of their attack²¹² and took their first objective 'without difficulty'.²¹³ The first platoons reached the second objective within half an hour and even those that lagged behind were occupying the second objective around 2am.²¹⁴

²¹² Gellibrand (OC 6th Bde), 'Report on Operations 28/29 July 1916. 6th Australian Infantry Brigade,' 29 July 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

²¹³ 'Brief Report on Operation Carried Out on 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/57/27

²¹⁴ 6th Bde War Diary, entry for 23rd Bn, 29 July 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

They were materially assisted in their efforts to consolidate their positions by the companies of the 7th Brigade that were drifting to the left. Nevertheless, the inability of the 26th and 25th Battalions of the 7th Brigade to make good OG2, and indeed the serious thinning of the line caused by the drift to the left, meant that the 23rd Battalion's left flank was dangerously exposed.²¹⁵ Efforts were made to plug the gap with companies from the 22nd and 24th Battalions, but the situation in 7th Brigade's sector was too serious. Within hours of the start of the attack, the two right battalions of the 7th Brigade were scattered across two sectors and suffering badly from heavy casualties, and the battalion of the 6th Brigade conducting their operation had been able to hold only a small advance.

If the situation was bad on the left, it was catastrophic on the right. The 28th Battalion on the far right of 7th Brigade's attack had reached their jumping-off position at 11.30 without casualty.²¹⁶ As with the other parts of the line, before the assault could begin, the German troops opened up a heavy artillery and machine gun fire which caused a number of casualties. Despite this, the infantry of the 28th were able to move forward in good order. But when their attack was launched they discovered that no wire defences on their front had been touched by the artillery barrage at all, even in front of OG1. They were all completely intact. The men of the 28th Battalion were forced to stand in no man's land trying to cut or force a path through the wire, and met with many casualties from heavy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire.²¹⁷ These were solid defences – the wire was staked up to a height of 3 feet in some places. As each wave of the 28th advanced it met the same problem, causing crowding and confusion in the

²¹⁵ 'Brief Report on Operation Carried Out on 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/57/27

²¹⁶ Leane, (OC 28th Bn), '28th Battalion Report on Operations 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²¹⁷ War Diary of 7th Bde, entry for 28th Bn, 29 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

heavy machine gun fire. The 1st Australian Divisional Artillery were firing short into their own infantry here as well, causing some of the Australian casualties and accounting for the untouched state of the wire.²¹⁸ Communication was impossible here due to a heavy and effective German barrage between the front and brigade headquarters,²¹⁹ and it was not until some wounded men made it back far enough to send a report that word of the failure reached battalion headquarters. There is no recorded instance of any opening being found in the wire and no troops made it into even the first objective.²²⁰

To the south of the Albert-Bapaume Road, the 5th Brigade was in an even worse predicament. Bizarrely, they had not been allocated any part of the artillery barrage, and had to rely on trench mortars to support their attack. These had not been able to silence the enemy machine guns at all.²²¹ In fact, the Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery reported that it had been 'placed in reserve, and took no active part in the operation', when it was supposed to have been used in 5th Brigade's sector.²²² The brigade conducted the assault with the 20th and 17th Battalions. Their advance to the jumping-off line had also been observed by the enemy and came under heavy machine gun and artillery fire which included gas shells. They managed to reach their allocated position by 12.15, but flares lit the attacking troops so well that the German fire was deadly accurate. It caused the infantry to become disorganised even before

²¹⁸ Leane, (OC 28th Bn), '28th Battalion Report on Operations 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9. It must be said that officers of the 1st Australian Artillery Brigade disagreed, and thought that what was reported as friendly fire must have come from 'hostile guns from the Thiepval direction' 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, p. 5, AWM 26/56/4.

²¹⁹ 28th Bn War Diary, entry for 29 July 1916, AWM 4/23/45/16.

²²⁰ Leane, (OC 28th Bn), '28th Battalion Report on Operations 28/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²²¹ 5th Bde War Diary, entry for 28 July 1916, AWM 4/23/5/13.

²²² Report in reply to BM.101 by Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery to 7th Bde, 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

they could form up appropriately. The first two waves made it out of the trenches but failed to reach OG1 as a result of the hostile fire. The third failed as they left their trench when 'heavy cross machine gun fire was opened and immense numbers of flares thrown', causing heavy casualties before they could advance at all.²²³ Eventually an officer from the 20th Battalion reported that they were unable to continue the attack, and as the 17th Battalion, at the extreme right end of the operation needed the support from their flank, the 5th Brigade's assault was at an end. The 28th Battalion, too, was gradually withdrawn from just after 2am, their attack also an abject failure.²²⁴

The kind of individual initiative that had been able to have such dramatic consequences in the attack on Pozières had no effect here. There are examples of men taking remarkably brave steps to facilitate an advance. Even an examination of a single battalion gives examples of men like Lieutenant Victor Thomas Symes Warry, a company commander of the 25th who was commended for bravery in leading his men to a gap in the wire, and standing in the open to direct more through.²²⁵ There were others too, like his fellow company commander Lieutenant John Lyall Smith, who had managed to find one of the two narrow gaps in the wire before pausing to direct his men to it.²²⁶ Platoon commanders 2/Lieutenant Louis Walter Teitzel, 2/Lieutenant Thomas Joseph Carey, 2/Lieutenant Robert Stuart O'Hea, 2/Lieutenant Aaron McIntyre and 2/Lieutenant James Monteagle Brown were all mentioned in despatches for 'great gallantry in leading their platoons on [the] night of 28/29th July

²²³ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, p. 3, AWM 26/56/4

²²⁴ 5th Bde War Diary, entry for 28 July 1916, AWM 4/23/5/13.

²²⁵ Recommendation file for honours and awards, 2nd Aust. Div., 27 July – 6 August 1916, AWM 28/1/69.

²²⁶ Walker (OC 25th Bn) 'Report on operations of 25th Battalion,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

in the attack on Pozières Ridge' with particular mention of the fact that 'they were seen organizing the men as much as possible and encouraging them on'.²²⁷ This is exactly what Medcalf and Le Nay had done so effectively for the 3rd Brigade only days previously but with one important difference – at the end of the attack, all of these men were dead. Individual initiative and attention to organisation could not function in battle on the Western Front outside of a framework of carefully applied firepower. Without cut wire and an effective protective barrage, all of the bravery and initiative in the world could not protect them from alert defenders and accurate machine gun fire.

This absolute failure on the right spread to the left of the line, where the situation was precarious. Somewhere in the vicinity of the 26th Battalion the order to retire was given. The origin of this order could not be identified, although Paton, commanding the 7th Brigade, suspected 'it may have been given by an officer who did not live to return'.²²⁸ The 2nd Australian Division had banned the use of the word 'retire' in any context, and so this order should not have been generated from any official source, and certainly should not have been acted on. But the situation was so precarious, and the line was so strongly defended, that the men retired anyway.²²⁹ The order was only confirmed by Brigade command once Paton had clearly identified that the left flank 26th Battalion was far out of position to the left, long after the main body of the 26th was in advanced retirement.²³⁰ In the 6th Brigade area, rumours of a general retirement were also being heard. But the commander of the centre company of the

²²⁷ Recommendation file for honours and awards, 2nd Aust. Div., 27 July – 6 August 1916. AWM 28/1/69.

²²⁸ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

²²⁹ 'Report of Attack Carried Out by 26th Battalion AIF on Night of 28th/29th July 1916,' AWM 26/58/9.

²³⁰ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

attack, a Captain Smith (probably Robert Frederick Maberley Smith, later awarded the Military Cross for his actions), declined to withdraw without confirmation from Brigade headquarters and instead continued to consolidate his isolated position, and make situation reports. Eventually though, given that the 7th Brigade was unable to make another attempt on the OG Lines, the Brigade commander, Lieutenant Colonel Wilfred Kent Fethers, issued an official order for withdrawal.²³¹ And with that action, the entire attack was over, and a failure.

Haig famously stated after this unsuccessful attempt that some of the divisional generals in the Anzac Corps were 'so ignorant and (like many Colonials) so conceited, that they cannot be trusted to work out unaided the plans of attack'.²³² While the apparent slight on 'colonials' has attracted much debate, there is another point to be had here, which is that Haig clearly expected divisional generals to be able to work out plans for operations themselves, or at least with the aid of no more than their own staff. Although plans were usually submitted for approval by the next most senior level of command – at all levels of army command – it would appear that there was still a requirement for self-sufficiency in the eyes of GHQ. This was about to change for the 2nd Australian Division. Legge and his apparent over-confidence had been identified as the main fault in the 2nd Division's disastrous attack by GHQ,²³³ and he was to be closely supervised the next time. Haig himself would become involved in preparations. Birdwood and the Brigadier General of the 1st Anzac Corps, Cyril Brudenell White, also began a close supervision of Legge through a series of

²³¹ 'Brief Report on Operation Carried Out on 28/29th July 1916,' 29 July 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

²³² Haig Diary, entry for 29 July, Robert Blake (ed.). *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952, p. 156.

²³³ C.E.W. Bean. *Two Men I Knew: William Bridges and Brudenell White, Founders of the AIF*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1957. p. 137.

instructional letters and memoranda.²³⁴ Reserve Army took a much firmer stance in refusing to allow their artillery plans to be materially changed by either 1st Anzac Corps or Division.²³⁵ But at the same time, it had been determined that the 2nd Division would have to stay in the line to conduct the next assault. Haig went to visit 1st Anzac Corps' headquarters at Contay, where he informed Birdwood and White that 'you're not fighting Bashi-Bazouks now – this is serious, scientific war, and you're up against the most scientific and most military nation in Europe.'²³⁶ Something in 2nd Division's approach would need to change.

The next operation, therefore, would be deliberately undertaken. The date of this attack would in fact be 'determined by the progress of preparation' instead of being rushed through as it had been for the last assault.²³⁷ Early plans set the structure of the operation. Once again the 6th Brigade would attack on the left with a single battalion, all of the 7th Brigade would again assault the middle of the line and two battalions of the 5th Brigade would advance on the right. This time the divisional attack would be coordinated with a wider operation to be conducted by with the 12th Division of II Corps on the left, who were attacking Ration Trench, and the 23rd Division of III Corps on the right, who would be assaulting Munster Alley.²³⁸ But although coordinated as to time, the direction in which the series of attacks would take place on a broader scale were not really connected. Commanders had little requirement to coordinate their methods across corps boundaries, or indeed even

²³⁴ Contained in AWM 26/50/15.

²³⁵ Malcolm to Brudenell White, 30 July 1916, AWM 26/42/1.

²³⁶ Bean, *Two Men I Knew*, Sydney, p. 137.

²³⁷ 'Points to be Placed Before GOC 2nd Div,' 29 July 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²³⁸ Memorandum S.543 from 1st Anzac Corps to 2nd Aust. Div., 4 August 1916, *also*. Memorandum S.552 from 1st Anzac Corps to BGHA, 7th Sqn RFC, & 13th Kite Balloon Section RFC, 4 August 1916, both AWM 26/50/15.

their objectives or the direction of their operations. 12th Division's attack in particular was to take place *behind* the Australian operation, on a trench the 1st Anzac Corps had long since passed the entrance to. Coordination on the right flank had little more benefit than stretching the German response more thinly, and existed only in the time the two operations would take place.

The preparation undertaken by the 2nd Australian Division was based on what the divisional staff perceived were the major problems with their recent failed attack. They clearly identified three main problems – namely, that the assault had been at night with little preparation, that in many places the wire was uncut, and that the operation had been discovered by the Germans before it could be launched.²³⁹ The first of these was dealt with simply by timing the next assault for 9.15 in the evening, which in the late French summer was still light enough to see without being full daylight.

To try to resolve the problem of insufficient artillery preparation and uncut enemy wire, the artillery would be given more time to prepare the ground for the next assault, both with wire cutting work and general demolition of enemy positions. Better observation of the wire enabled the General Officer Commanding the Royal Artillery (GOCRA) at 1st Anzac Corps, Brigadier General William Napier, to make better judgements of the efforts required to destroy the wire entanglements that had caused so many problems for the 2nd Division. He concluded that 4,800 rounds of heavy howitzer ammunition would be needed against the two OG trenches in the area

²³⁹ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, p. 5, AWM 26/56/4.

of attack and estimated this could be done 'by 9 batteries averaging 540 rounds each, and could be done in one day.'²⁴⁰ Even more than this was used in the event. Four preliminary bombardments were ordered in which roughly a third of Napier's projected totals would be fired each time. Each bombardment was fired over an hour-long period, one on 31 July, two on 1 August and another on 2 August.²⁴¹ With accurate ranging, and a period for observation between bombardments, the artillery preparations were much more adequate for destroying wire than they had been before.

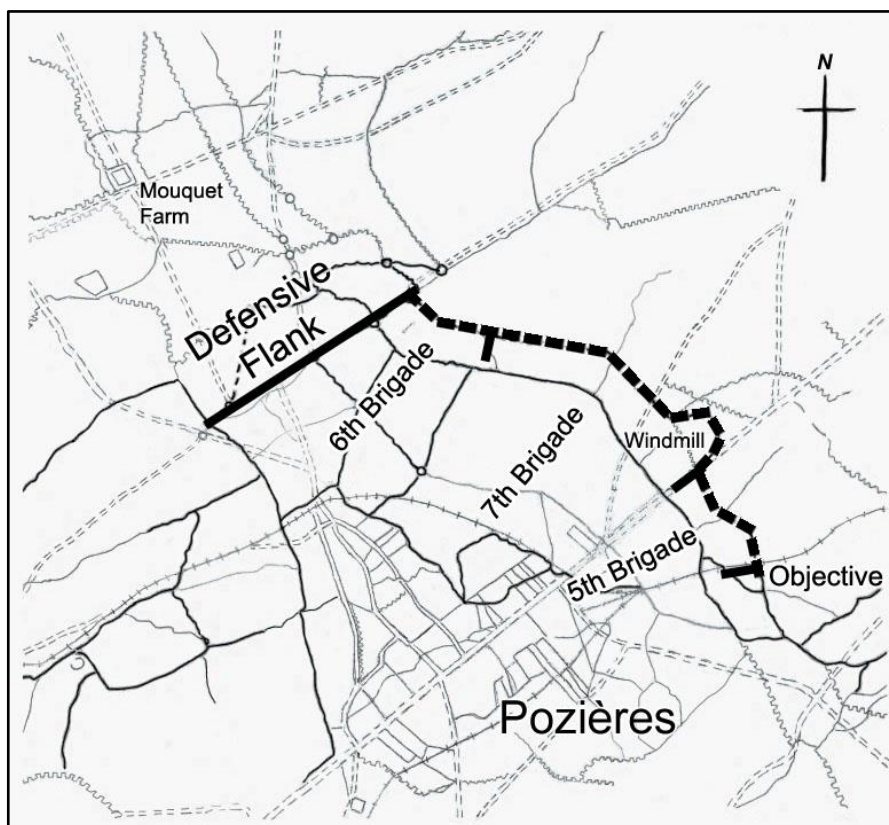
The final problem identified by the 2nd Australian Division, the discovery of the operation by the German defenders, was to be dealt with by the construction of a new forward line to facilitate the assault. This was intended to reduce the amount of open ground the infantry would have to cover between their jumping off point and the first objective. The new forward line was intended 'to hold the troops required for the capture of OG1, [that is] the first two or three "waves",' while subsequent waves would form up along the tramline further back.²⁴² A well-established jumping-off point had not been available for the previous attack, leaving infantry to assemble in the open and causing the operation to be discovered early, and so this answer seemed to be a reasonable solution.

²⁴⁰ Memorandum S.498 from William Napier, BGRA, 30 July 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁴¹ 'Preliminary Artillery Arrangements with a View to Attack on OG1 and OG2 Lines NE of Pozières,' 30 July 1916, AWM 26/42/1.

²⁴² Message G.1111 from Bridges (GSO1 2nd Aust. Div.) to 7th Bde, 1 August 1916, 5.00pm. AWM 26/56/5.

However, as has been noted, the failure of the 2nd Australian Division received attention from higher levels of command, which would also bring changes to bear on this subsequent operation. For example, while Haig attributed the failure to a general ‘want of thorough preparation’, he also considered that among other causes, the fact that ‘[t]he attacking troops were not formed up square opposite their objective’ caused major problems.²⁴³ And so the next front of attack was not only shorter, but omitted the angle between the 6th Brigade’s front and that of the 7th Brigade. All brigades making the new assault would attack in the same direction, towards Courcelette, instead of the 6th Brigade making their assault towards Thiepval, that is, at ninety degrees to the others. As such, the OG Lines formed the only objective for the new operation.



Map 10. Objectives for 2nd Division’s renewed assault, 4 August 1916.

²⁴³ Haig Diary entry for 29 July 1916, Sheffield & Bourne (eds.). *Douglas Haig: War Diaries & Letters*, p. 210.

Haig also felt that a large part of the problem had been Legge's over-confidence²⁴⁴ and so made a point of emphasising to Gough and his senior staff officer Neill Malcolm 'that they must supervise more closely the plans of the Anzac Corps'.²⁴⁵ Haig was concerned about the weakness of the artillery bombardments accompanying the attack, particularly the minute-long preliminary bombardment. He made moves to rectify this for future actions by visiting Birdwood and his Brigadier-General, Cyril Brudenell White and pointing out that 'Pozières village had been captured thanks to a very thorough artillery preparation', and requesting them to consider doing the same this time.²⁴⁶ While Haig may have been misinformed about some of the details of events of 29 July,²⁴⁷ he demonstrated a clear understanding of some of the main problems of that operation, and took responsible steps to rectify them through sensible recommendations and open discussions with all of the relevant subordinates.

The preparations of the 2nd Division received a great deal of scrutiny at 1st Anzac Corps Headquarters, too. Most of the early operational arrangements for attacks on the Somme were commonly made in person by generals making rounds of each other's headquarters,²⁴⁸ and so, in the absence of precise written records, just how close the supervision was will never be known. However, a number of memoranda from 1st Anzac Corps to Legge exist in the archives, and show that Birdwood and

²⁴⁴ Bean, *Two Men I Knew*, p. 137.

²⁴⁵ Haig Diary entry for 29 July 1916, Sheffield & Bourne (eds.). *Douglas Haig: War Diaries & Letters*, p.211.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Bean, *Two Men I Knew*, p. 137.

²⁴⁸ For examples of this, see diary entries July & August 1916. Philip Howell papers, 6/2/161, LHCMA.

White regularly visited 2nd Division to give instructions,²⁴⁹ request detailed information on proposals for offensive and defensive works,²⁵⁰ and make assessments of the divisional staff work even in matters as small as the supply of flares.²⁵¹ Gough put a great deal of pressure from Army level to set an early date, but the prerequisite for this assault was the completion of all preparation tasks. For the first time Birdwood deliberately resisted pressure from Gough and Malcolm to hurry along in order to ensure the appropriate conditions were met, although there were concerns. Lieutenant Colonel A.H. Bridges, GSO1 of 2nd Division, wrote to the 7th Brigade to say 'after due consideration the corps commander has recommended to the Army commander that the attack be postponed... this gives us a bit more time for preparation and more time to the Bosche too!!'.²⁵² There was an extended delay in executing the plans, however. The first serious date set for an assault was 2 August 1916, but that had to be delayed because 2nd Division's preparations were not advanced enough, causing the wider operation to also be postponed.

The main cause for the delay was construction of the new forward line, which was painfully slow. Each night work parties went forward, but the work they were doing was hampered by severe artillery fire, and subsequent large numbers of casualties in the working parties both moving forward and labouring on the new position.²⁵³ This was not helped by 2nd Division again relying heavily on manpower and designating much larger parties to do the work than necessary, attracting enemy shellfire and

²⁴⁹ Memorandum S.490 from Brudenell White to Legge, 30 July 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁵⁰ Memorandum S.494 from Brudenell White to Legge, 30 July 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁵¹ Memorandum S.490a from Brudenell White to Legge, 31 July 1916, AWM 26/50/15

²⁵² Message G.1114 from Bridges (GSO1 2nd Aust. Div.) to 7th Bde, 2 August 1916, 11.40pm, AWM 26/56/5.

²⁵³ 'Report on Action of 4/5th August, Part II,' 14 August 1916, p. 1, AWM 26/56/4.

subsequent casualties.²⁵⁴ This shellfire also destroyed much of the new construction, which then had to be done again under the same trying conditions.²⁵⁵ Working parties were sometimes seriously delayed through becoming lost in the featureless landscape, and on occasion retired without reaching the right position and beginning work.²⁵⁶ These conditions were not necessarily understood by those at a higher level of command. Legge wrote to Paton at 7th Brigade headquarters to complain about a trench under construction, saying

[t]his trench to be dug tonight is most important, and I do not think your officers quite realised it last night. I would like you to put a Senior officer in charge tonight and see the thing through. We may have to put up with some casualties, but all ranks should know that the work is to save our men in the attack.²⁵⁷

The unfair idea that the delay was simply the result of forward officers slacking off was widespread at 2nd Division headquarters. Bridges also wrote to the 7th Brigade to stress that working parties should be commanded by a battalion commander because '[t]he work is important and a senior officer is necessary to push it in spite of obstacles'.²⁵⁸ Battalion commanders struggled to manage with unreasonable orders under the difficult conditions. Some ignored the size of working parties stipulated in orders, and sent smaller groups forward to limit casualties, which was tolerated as long as the work was demonstrably advanced.²⁵⁹ Under ongoing pressure, the new forward line was more or less completed by 2 August,²⁶⁰ but continued to require

²⁵⁴ Memorandum G.1/98 from Paton (OC 7th Bde) to Legge, 31 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁵⁵ 'Report on Action of 4/5th August, Part II,' G.3/19, 14 August 1916, p. 1, AWM 26/56/4.

²⁵⁶ Message BMA.227 from OC 19th Bn to 7th Bde, (partial message in file) AWM 26/56/5.

²⁵⁷ Message G.417 from Legge to Paton, 1 August 1916, 4.15pm AWM 26/56/5.

²⁵⁸ Message G.1111 from Bridges to 7th Bde, 1 August 1916, 5pm, AWM 26/56/5.

²⁵⁹ Memorandum G.1/98 from Paton to Legge, 31 July 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁶⁰ General Staff War Diary, entry for 2 August 1916, WO 95/518.

ongoing work under heavy shellfire to repair constant damage until the operation could go ahead.²⁶¹

The problem of enemy wire emplacements also continued. Preparations were taking place during hot, fine weather, which was suitable for aeroplane observation once the morning mist had burned off about 11am.²⁶² These conditions were ideal for aircraft to monitor the artillery's attempts at wire cutting. Early reports from aircraft and also infantry patrols showed that neither of the OG Lines had yet 'been sufficiently done in' by artillery fire, particularly in front of OG2, where there was 'good deal of wire still standing'.²⁶³ Patrols just north of the Bapaume Road found that the wire was in good condition, 'following no definite pattern and running from 2 to 6 feet high and approximately 30 yards wide'. The wire was taut and staked as much as 6 feet high, and showed signs of being regularly re-positioned.²⁶⁴ To deal with this even more artillery ammunition was allotted – all medium and heavy howitzer ammunition left over from the daily allotment was now to be used against the wire. In fact, any unused ammunition required an explanation given to the Army commander himself; not using enough ammunition was now considered as bad as using too much.²⁶⁵ By the time the jumping off trench was completed on 2 August, some reports from aeroplanes and Forward Observation Officers indicated that wire-cutting work was good, with low, regular shell bursts in the right area.²⁶⁶ But it took some time for the positive reports to be confirmed. For example, on 1 August reports were made from

²⁶¹ 1st Anzac Corps General Staff War Diary, entry for 2 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁶² 1st Anzac Corps BGHA War Diary, entry for 31 July 1916, AWM 26/52/25.

²⁶³ Napier, Memorandum S.498 dated 30 July 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁶⁴ Extracts from Patrol reports, 31 July 1916, AWM 26/56/5.

²⁶⁵ Memorandum 434/19 Staff Officer RA, 1st Anzac, 31 July 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁶⁶ Beasley, 'Summary of reports by various FOO's and Liaison Officers', 2 August 1916, AWM 26/57/4.

aerial photographs that 'the whole of the second line trench (OG2) ... has been obliterated' to the extent that it was felt that it would be 'be sufficient for strong patrols with Lewis Guns to go forward and occupy' it.²⁶⁷ Yet a day later reports were made that the wire in front of OG1 was still uncut in places and 18 pounder fire was reported to be falling short of it.²⁶⁸ Other reports indicated widespread destruction of the wire, with only small patches intact.²⁶⁹ Forward Observation Officers had a difficult task in observing the wire – they could report that 'the bursts were low and regular', but could not see the effect of the fire on the wire itself, especially at more distant locations like OG2.²⁷⁰ But the artillery preparations were much more adequate for destroying barbed wire emplacements than they had been before. And command was willing (albeit very reluctantly) to wait for more positive reports before launching an operation. The extended effort put into the job of wire cutting eventually began to pay off, and despite a number of delayed starts, it was felt eventually that the wire was in such a condition as permitted the conduct of an assault on the enemy line.

Reserve Army had coordinated most of the preliminary artillery preparations,²⁷¹ including a number of barrages designed to get the German defenders used to a pattern of shelling that could then be used to mask the next assault. Artillery instructions explained that

²⁶⁷ Message SG 406/187 Reserve Army to 1st Anzac Corps, 1 August 1916, AWM 26/42/1.

²⁶⁸ 'Extracts from Patrol Reports. 31 July/1 August,' 2 August 1916, AWM 26/56/5.

²⁶⁹ 'Extracts from Report on Observation of Enemy Trenches from Our Lines,' 2 August 1916, AWM 26/56/5.

²⁷⁰ Seys, 'Report of Operations from 12.0noon 1st August to 12.0 noon 2nd August 1916,' RA 434/6, 2 August 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁷¹ Malcolm to Brudenell White, 30 July, 1916, AWM 26/42/1. *For wire-cutting programme see also: '1 A. & N.Z.A.C Operational Order No. 18,' 2 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.*

The object of the[se] bombardments is not so much to kill the enemy, although that is fervently hoped for, but to “drill” him and get him thoroughly accustomed to a certain set procedure which in the ordinary course of events leads to nothing. Then, when the proper moment arrives, certain novelties will be introduced which may cause complete surprise.²⁷²

These ‘novelties’ consisted primarily of a lifting barrage followed closely by lines of infantry, as in all of the attacks by the Australians in this area so far. To match up with this habituation, all fire on OG1 and 2 would cease fifteen minutes before ‘zero’ on the night of the next operation against the lines.²⁷³ It was hoped that the German defenders would stay in their shelters, unsuspecting and unprepared for an assault.

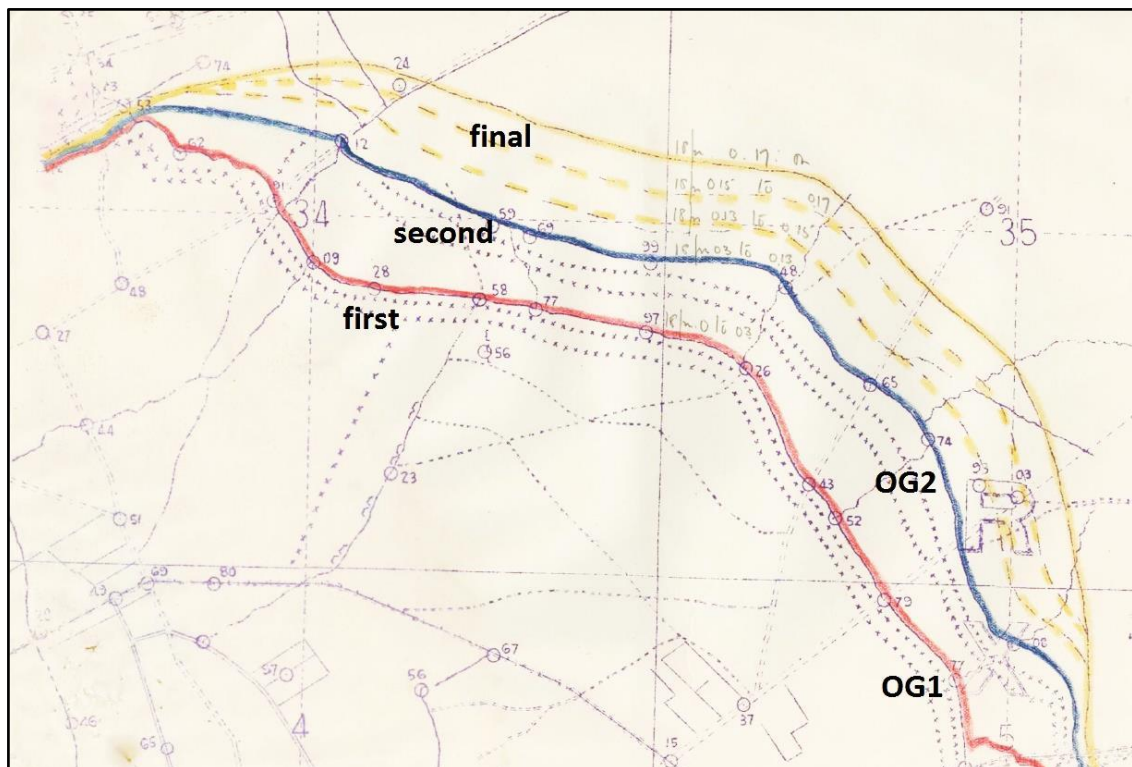
Finally preparations for battle were deemed sufficient to renew the offensive, and an operation was confirmed for the evening of 4 August 1916. The bombardment programme, which would dictate the timing of this operation, was drawn up under the close supervision of the Army commander. Birdwood was warned to guard against ‘the risk that Legge may want a different time of bombardment to that which has been drawn up in outline here’.²⁷⁴ The first barrage of shells was to fall on the first objective, OG1, for three minutes. After that the first lift would take the artillery barrage to OG2, the second objective for ten minutes, while the infantry followed, attacking OG1. Following that there would be three short lifts of fire every two minutes until the barrage finally fell 300 yards beyond OG2 while the second wave of

²⁷² ‘Artillery Instructions No. 6,’ 31 July 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁷³ 1st Anzac Corps GOCRA ‘Operation Order No. 2,’ 3 August 1916 AWM 26/52/17.

²⁷⁴ Malcolm to Brudenell White, 30 July, 1916, AWM 26/42/1.

infantry were attacking this objective. Each lift of the barrage was about as strong as the 1st Division's attack in terms of the quantity of shells fired per minute, but the actual artillery programme itself was again much shorter – only seventeen minutes would elapse before the barrage reached its final position.²⁷⁵ In comparison, each lift of the 1st Division's barrage lasted half an hour – longer than the entire programme here. So while there is a demonstrable recognition that artillery was important to advance the infantry, and a major part of the adjustment of the plan for the renewed 2nd Division attack, there seems to be little standardisation in barrage patterns from one assault to the next. At least this barrage was considerably stronger than the one that had preceded it, and benefitted from an extended period of time and good weather for observation and ranging. Its speed was another matter.



Map 11. Artillery lifts for 2nd Division's operations of 4 August 1916.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ 1st Anzac Corps GOCRA, 'Operation Order No. 2,' and 'Special Map Distributed Herewith,' 3 August 1916, AWM 26/52/17.

²⁷⁶ AWM 26/52/17.

While changes had been made to the original plan in the form of extended preparation time and a strengthened artillery barrage, the plan for the infantry itself changed very little. This was once again at the hands of Legge, although the plan should have been monitored by Birdwood at corps headquarters. The infantry once more were assigned four lines, which again in practice operated in two main waves against the two objectives.²⁷⁷ And yet again each of the brigades conducting the assault showed remarkably little variation in their method of attack. This was the result of 2nd Division's staff work which showed a marked tendency to rely on manpower to forward their advance. The infantry lines were even more thickly populated than before, with the length of line previously attacked by three battalions of the 7th Brigade now being assaulted by four – three battalions of the 7th Brigade plus another of the 6th. This represented an increase in infantry in each attacking wave of 25%. This time the companies were better arranged, with one company per wave, or in other words being deployed in breadth not in depth. But very little else had changed, except to make the trenches even more crowded and the infantry an even greater target for German artillery and machine guns.

On 4 August at 9.15pm the artillery began its barrage, and fired all lifts on time. Without exception, none of the attacking battalions found wire emplacements strong enough to form an obstacle in front of them. In almost all cases the both objectives were taken without a prolonged struggle. Importantly, the German soldiers that were encountered were found while they were still in or were just leaving their shelters

²⁷⁷ 'Amendments to 6th Australian Bde Order No. 30,' 4 August 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

and dugouts in the trenches.²⁷⁸ The habituation barrages of the artillery had been completely successful in creating a false sense of security among the defenders, and therefore had achieved the goal of ensuring they were unprepared. However, the German artillery caused some problems for the attackers. The 22nd Battalion on the far left came under heavy shell fire and suffered considerable casualties.²⁷⁹ These casualties did not prevent the battalion from reaching the assembly trenches, but they did delay the attack slightly, and the first wave was late in launching its attack by three minutes.²⁸⁰ The second wave of the 7th Brigade assault suffered under a heavy German barrage, too, with heavy casualties.²⁸¹ In neither case were the attacking troops prevented from taking either objective, in spite of the high casualty rate. This German shellfire was not in response to the attack being discovered before it could be launched. The German infantry was almost entirely unprepared for attack and the 22nd Battalion went on to encounter little resistance.²⁸² By the early hours of 5 August, the OG Lines had been secured, and the work of consolidating the ground gained was well underway. A German counter-attack around 4am on 5 August was easily repelled from the newly-consolidated positions despite being conducted in force. This operation, although extremely costly in lives, could be considered a success.

Higher levels of command had accurately pinpointed some of the biggest problems – the lack of time to construct appropriate jumping-off places, discovery of the assault,

²⁷⁸ Paton (OC 7th Bde), '7th Australian Infantry Brigade report on operations,' 5 August 1916, p. 2, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁷⁹ 6th Bde War Diary, entry for 22nd Bn, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/57/27.

²⁸⁰ 'Report on Action of 4/5th August Part II,' G.3/19, 14 August 1916, p.5, AWM 26/56/4.

²⁸¹ Paton, '7th Australian Infantry Brigade report on operations,' 5 August 1916, p. 2, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁸² 'Report on Action of 4/5th August Part II,' G.3/19, 14 August 1916, p.5, AWM 26/56/4.

an extremely weak artillery barrage and an inconsistent line of objective. Haig, Gough and Birdwood had all worked towards ameliorating some of these problems – Haig made recommendations as to the front to be attacked; Gough coordinated the preliminary artillery barrages; Corps designed the lifting bombardment. And with these changes, the assault succeeded. The preliminary bombardment destroyed a large part of the German defences and habituated the defenders into staying down instead of preparing for an attack. The lifting barrage was accurate enough for the infantry to follow closely, and prevented German machine gunners from manning their posts in time to stop the infantry. But while this operation was a success, it was not an unmitigated one. The 2nd Australian Division suffered a huge number of casualties – in fact in twelve days in the line they lost 6848 officers and men, a casualty rate that would not be matched by another Australian division in one spell in the front line for the rest of the war.²⁸³ For the second time in a week the 2nd Australian Division had conducted an infantry-heavy assault, made by two heavily populated waves of soldiers. There were frequent reports of crowding in the trenches, which caused confusion and delay. These delays could be serious; two companies of the 28th Battalion could not move forward to Tramway Trench to form a garrison because a glut of Pioneers blocking forward saps and held them up for two hours.²⁸⁴ Even before the assault could go ahead the third and fourth waves of the 6th Brigade were forced out of the trenches by casualties, and had to cross open land under heavy shellfire to reach their assembly lines.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ C.D. Coulthard-Clark. *No Australian Need Apply: The Troubled Career of Lieutenant-General Gordon Legge*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988, p.151.

²⁸⁴ Leane, report by OC 28th Bn to HQ 7th Bde, 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁸⁵ 'Report on Action of 4/5th August Part II,' 14 August 1916, p.5, AWM 26/56/4.

Staff of the 2nd Division had drawn the right conclusion following their first attack, reporting that 'it is a mistake to crowd many men into a line after it has been captured'.²⁸⁶ But they did not heed their own advice, and on 4 August the lines were even more crowded than they had been on 29 July. The plan seems to have been to thin the line once the objectives were secure, and to that end orders were given around 7.30 on the morning of 5 August,²⁸⁷ but only to send men back when it was possible.²⁸⁸ The definition of 'possible' was left to front line commanders. Forward commanders proved resistant to this order, and showed a marked preference for using large working parties to consolidate new forward positions instead of thinning the line before all the work was done.²⁸⁹ At more than one man per yard of trench in each infantry wave, it was almost impossible for the German barrage to miss, and so this reliance on manpower of the 2nd Division was directly responsible for the huge casualty rate suffered both during the attack and during the consolidation phases of the operation. They could recognise that it was a mistake to crowd too many men into a line, but in fact 2nd Division had failed to draw many practical lessons from that first failed operation at all.

Yet this overcrowding and reliance on manpower was not the problem for which Legge drew criticism. Instead the delay in preparation, materially responsible for the positive result of the operation, drew fire from Reserve Army. Before the second operation even began they had launched an enquiry into the cause of the delay.²⁹⁰ Birdwood deferred answering Gough's queries as much as possible in order to give

²⁸⁶ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

²⁸⁷ Message BM.98 from Hinman (7th Bde) to 27th Bn, 5 August 1916, 7.30am, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁸⁸ Message BM.101 from Hamilton (7th Bde) to 2nd Aust. Div. 5 August 1916, 7.55am, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁸⁹ Leane, 'Report by OC 28th Bn to 7th Bde HQ,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/58/9.

²⁹⁰ Memorandum SG 406/193 from Malcolm to 1st Anzac Corps, 3 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

Legge the best chance of planning the new assault without additional pressure.²⁹¹ Despite Legge accurately pinpointing that one of the causes of the delay was the difficulty in constructing the new forward line in the dark under heavy fire,²⁹² Birdwood hinted that the delay came because Legge was inexperienced and he and his staff were directly responsible.²⁹³ Birdwood had identified an accurate source of the problems, but an inaccurate reason for them. Yet Legge's position was saved, but not by a defence of his capability. Birdwood, while making it clear it was not his intention 'of retaining any officer in high command who is proved unfitted' – despite suggestions that Legge was likely to prove exactly so – also made it clear that he should be 'given full opportunity to prove his capability for command' solely because he was one of only two Australian senior officers at the time. He made it very clear to Gough that the Commonwealth government were 'very desirous that Australian officers should, if they are found capable, be given the opportunity of filling higher commands' and therefore insisted that Legge be allowed to keep his job in order to give him a 'fair trial'.²⁹⁴ Far from being victimised for his Australianness, Legge continued on in his command of a division only because of it.

An assessment of the actions of the 2nd Australian Division has more often than not been mixed together with allegations of bungled British generalship and discrimination against Australian officers.²⁹⁵ But this should not be allowed to cloud what was going on here. Most of the problems evident in the first assault by the 2nd

²⁹¹ Memorandum S.545 from Birdwood to Reserve Army, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁹² Memorandum G.152 from Legge to Birdwood, 6 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁹³ Memorandum S.545 from Birdwood to Reserve Army, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁹⁴ Memorandum S.545 from Birdwood to Reserve Army, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

²⁹⁵ See Bean *Two Men I Knew*, pp.139-142, Charlton *Australians on the Somme*, Coulthard-Clark *No Australian Need Apply*, pp. xi-xii and pp. 153-160, or for an account riddled with inaccuracies, John Laffin *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One*, Gloucester & Wolfeboro: Sutton Publishing, 1992, pp. 87-89.

Australian Division were generated at divisional level, and were insurmountable at lower levels. While some problems could be corrected at higher levels, particularly regarding artillery barrages, others, such as the overcrowded infantry plan, were not. Even when corps and army level took a much more managerial approach to the second assault, these problems were not removed and went on to cause further operational complications. This is particularly evident in the case of the sheer number of infantry used to effect both the first and especially the second operation which can be closely linked to the enormous casualty figures for the 2nd Division's first period in the line. Legge and his staff had had a clear demonstration of the difference artillery barrages could make in the success or failure of operations on the Western Front. Whether or not they had learnt that lesson, or any others, would remain to be seen on their return to active operations later in August.

Chapter 3. 'Without rest or relief': 4th Australian Brigade's Rush of Smaller Operations.

The 2nd Australian Division was exhausted at the end of its second operation, and its relief was imperative. So at 9am on 7 August 1916 the 4th Australian Division, commanded by Major General Herbert Vaughan Cox, took over the front line.²⁹⁶ This, the last untried division in 1st Anzac Corps, spent just over a week in the line and was pressed into immediate and constant service from the moment it arrived. This was in part due to the increasing impact of the German policy to counter-attack and retake lost ground at all costs, meaning the defensive role of 1st Anzac Corps was increasingly more active in nature. But offensively, too, this division was the most active yet. In fact, the story of the 4th Australian Division's first spell in the front line is very complicated indeed. At least twice they participated in larger operations ordered by Reserve Army, but corps, division and even battalion commanders took their own initiative to conduct operations on a number of separate occasions, in some cases nightly. The division conducted more than six battalion-sized or larger offensive operations in their eight days in the front line, and as many smaller ones. At the same time, their situation in the front line was the most precarious the three divisions had yet faced.

Reserve Army's plan for a general movement to the north by II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps had resulted in a reasonably pronounced salient in the Australian sector. The

²⁹⁶ General Staff War Diary, entry for 7 August 1916, WO 95/518.

point of this salient was almost directly north of the village and left the Australians with more than half a mile of trenches on either side protruding into German-held territory before leading back to a connection with the British 12th Division of Reserve Army on their left, and the 23rd Division of Fourth Army on their right. The 4th Australian Division was dangerously exposed to German machine gun and shell fire, which could pour into its position from three sides. This salient presented a distinct strategic problem that required coordination by Reserve Army, if not GHQ, to ensure it did not continue to push out further and endanger those holding it even more.

But rather than tightly coordinate the efforts of his army, Gough issued a memorandum on 3 August 1916 which did the opposite. In it he urged corps commanders to 'impress upon their subordinate leaders the necessity for the energetic measures and offensive action which the present situation requires' by having 'Subordinate Commanders... think out and suggest enterprises instead of waiting for orders from above'. Gough described the Somme campaign as 'a great and decisive battle and not... ordinary trench warfare,' and his answer to continuing this battle was for all units to 'press the enemy constantly and... continue to gain ground as rapidly as possible'.²⁹⁷ However, this plan left little space for a broader coordination of effort. Instead of bringing together a broad-fronted attack targeted to manage his front and lessen the threat to areas such as 1st Anzac Corps' salient, Gough was rushing his units into hasty and ill-thought out enterprises which were to be initiated far below his level of command. Gough had effectively removed himself

²⁹⁷ Memorandum SG.43/0/1 by Army Commander, Reserve Army, 3 August 1916, pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

from organising a broad operational strategy in favour of urging haste on a small, disjointed scale.

At the same time, this memorandum demonstrates an understanding of some of the factors that had caused so many problems for 1st Anzac Corps in its recent operations. It clearly states that a lack of preparation could cause fatal problems for an operation, so it was 'conceded that preparation must be thorough and careful'. And Gough identified the use of 'too small forces' as a primary cause of problems in the attack, and recommended that instead of 'avoiding loss and then having to repeat the attack later', larger bodies of soldiers be sent into the attack rather than holding on to 'the hope of avoiding loss' by sending in smaller units.²⁹⁸ His directions also recognise the need to 'bring into play by surprise a concentration of all the means at our disposal, especially Artillery and Trench Mortars', thereby relying on firepower to at least some degree to advance the infantry. But these were mere concessions in the face of the one single important point in this pivotal directive, which was that 'it must be impressed on all leaders that rapidity, energy and offensive action are now of the utmost importance to our cause'. Every action had to be executed 'with resolution and energy,' and any objective was better than none, for 'every yard of ground gained has great consequences, both material and moral'. Reserve Army staff seem to have had the impression that the front was manned by a group of lazy, indolent procrastinators, with the accusation that 'at present there is a tendency to undue delay and to wasting precious time... days pass without plans being matured'.²⁹⁹ This completely failed to recognise the difficult, slow nature of preparation under shellfire

²⁹⁸ Memorandum SG.43/0/1 by Army Commander, Reserve Army, 3 August 1916, pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

which was being clearly reported regularly to divisional and corps commanders. Gough, while paying lip service to what were proving to be critical factors in successful attacking on the Somme – firepower and preparation – was in fact promoting the opposite – hasty assaults using large concentrations of troops in a small area to bludgeon the German defences no matter the cost of life.

The 4th Australian Division was the first to be in the front line under this new directive. The formation arrived at a time when the major obstacles in the area – the fortified village of Pozières and the OG Lines – were under control, but the entire area was still under ongoing heavy artillery fire. To make matters worse, on the left of the Australian line shellfire appeared to those at the front line to come from the rear because of the position of German guns in Thiepval pouring fire into the salient from the side.³⁰⁰ An increasing determination of the Germans to re-capture lost ground saw the 4th Division compelled to defend against numerous German counter attacks in sizes from twenty men to two battalions during their time in the front line. Parts of the line, particularly on the flanks, repeatedly changed hands, although usually only by a matter of yards. This territorial uncertainty was made worse by the fact that the 1st and 2nd Australian Division's operations had brought the 1st Anzac Corps' line to the edge of the known landscape. The German defences facing the 4th Australian Division were almost completely unknown. Aerial photographs could identify the major obstacles and newly dug trenches, but in many cases the Germans' positions were as tenuous as the Australians' own. Letters found on German prisoners described a trench system so blown up by shellfire it had ceased to exist in places.

³⁰⁰ Message BM.626 from 4th Aust. Div. to all bns, 9 August 1916, 4.38pm, AWM 26/60/6.

One prisoner wrote 'it is indeed not to be called a trench, it is more of a sap. We have always to lie or sit, we must not stand, for then we can be seen.'³⁰¹ Another wrote,

now for the eleventh day we have been sitting in this horrible filth and have been waiting day after day for the longed for relief... each of us is crouched in a little hole that he has dug out for himself as a protection against possible splinters and stares at nothing but the sky and the back wall of the trench and the airmen circle over us and try to do some damage.³⁰²

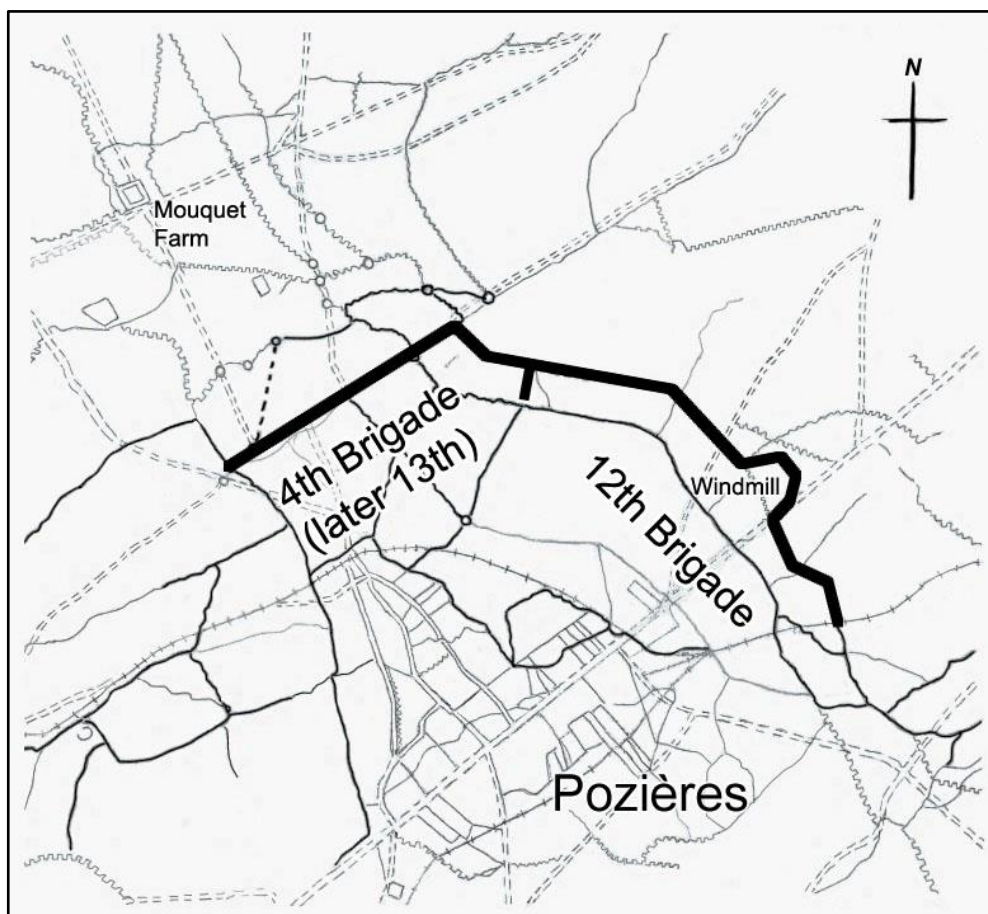
The vast majority of these destroyed trench lines and advanced positions could not be identified from the air with any certainty, and so the 4th Division were forced to send out patrols continually to map the landscape and identify German strongpoints and potential targets.

With the OG Lines under control, most of the 4th Australian Division's offensive focus was on the left of the line where it faced Mouquet Farm. This was in accordance with Reserve Army's overarching plan for 1st Anzac Corps to advance to the north. The 4th Division, comprising the 4th, 12th and 13th Brigades, initially placed the 4th Brigade in their active area of operations, and later replaced it with the 13th Brigade. On the right of the 4th Division line, along the OG Lines where the 12th Brigade was in control, was also active during this time. However, its operations were either in response to German counter attacks or in support of Fourth Army operations. Defensively, the division held the front line with thinned out units armed with Lewis

³⁰¹ Letter found on German prisoner, dated 4 August 1916, 'First Anzac Intelligence Summary No. 24, from 6pm on 16th to 6pm on 17th August 1916. Part II, Information from Other Sources', AWM 4/1/30/7 Pt. 2.

³⁰² Letter found on German prisoner, dated 2 August 1916, *Ibid.*

guns, calling on artillery to break up any massed formations of German soldiers seen preparing to attack. The cooperation with flank units on the right usually only happened informally as the result of the commanding officer of the battalion on the boundary between the two noticing the attacking formations were hard pressed and volunteering his men to assist the British. These operations will not be examined here. The 4th Australian Divisional headquarters always focussed on the operations on the left of the line, which formed the most important part of fulfilling their offensive strategy. As such the attacks in that area are the most important examples of their work in the early part of August 1916 in the context of this study. Nevertheless, during this period operations on the right continually sapped the strength of the battalions of the 12th Brigade, almost always to no good purpose.



Map 12. Disposition of the 4th Australian Division, 7 August 1916.

The first operation conducted by the 4th Australian Division was on 8 August 1916, one day after Cox took over command of the line. Reserve Army had ordered 1st Anzac Corps to make an attack while Fourth Army was assaulting the French village of Guillemont. It was clearly stated that this operation was to be conducted in order 'to distract the enemy's attention from the point of attack and to diminish hostile artillery fire at that point'.³⁰³ Guillemont was just over five miles away to the east of the Australian line. Along the rest of Fourth Army's front bombardments were to be carried out, also with the intent of distracting the enemy, but no active operations would be conducted between the Fourth Army attack on Guillemont and any operation conducted by Reserve Army.³⁰⁴ This operation, then, was intended to be little more than a diversionary tactic. The objective was a German trench known to the British as Park Lane which, at its furthest, was no more than roughly 250 yards from the Australian jumping-off trench. The operation itself was small, on a front of around 900 yards, but it received a reasonable amount of preparation and artillery support. On the left the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment would support the operation by attacking a German strongpoint on their boundary with 1st Anzac Corps.³⁰⁵ These two assaults were designed to be simultaneous.³⁰⁶ There would be no need for cooperation on the right flank because the Australian operation did not extend across the entire front of 1st Anzac Corps' sector. Park Lane was a useful objective for future operations towards Mouquet Farm in that it was more or less parallel to the road running in front of the farm buildings and was consistent with any

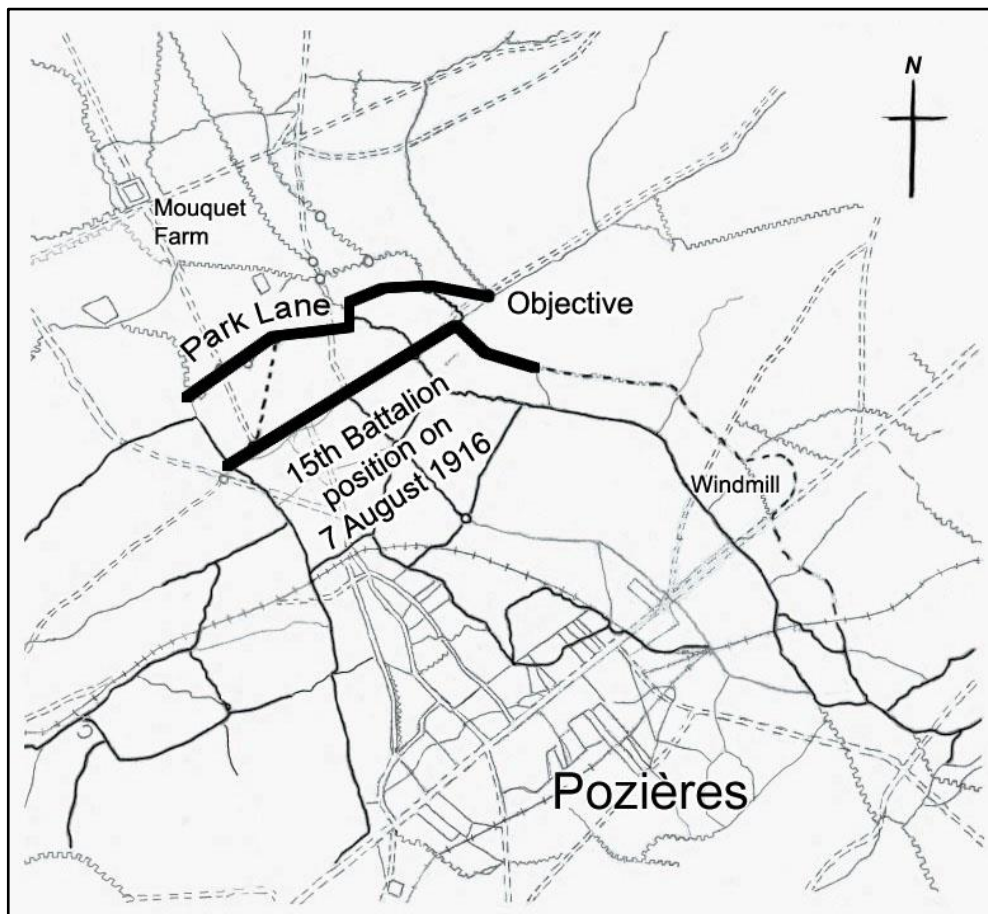
³⁰³ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 17,' 7 August 1916, AWM 26/42/3.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 11,' 8 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

³⁰⁶ '1st Anzac Corps Operational Order No. 21,' 7 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

future advance the 1st Anzac Corps would take to the north, if Reserve Army's strategic vision was realised. But it was no more than that – a useful step on the way. The objective was not a particular source of German resistance, nor did it represent a major advance. The primary reason for this operation was as a diversion – the capture of Park Lane would merely be an added bonus.



Map 13. Park Lane trench.

Birdwood, however, saw the plan as a much greater opportunity for his corps and was remarkably optimistic about his chances for success over and above the objective given. He indicated to Gough that he may well be able to push on to Mouquet Farm, far beyond the objective line. This caused some consternation in Reserve Army and in

the end Gough's chief of staff rang 1st Anzac Corps headquarters to say that the 'Army Commander does not wish us to push on further than the objective given in last Reserve Army order... as II Corps is not in position to go further'.³⁰⁷ While Birdwood had been stopped this time, the directive to take energetic measures and offensive action meant that unless Reserve Army headquarters kept a very careful eye on their subordinate commanders, they would be able to press ahead with operations that disadvantaged other units within the Army, destroyed men and materiel destined for further large-scale operations, or simply failed to follow the operational strategy of the sector in the future.

The operation designed for 8 August was assigned to the 4th Infantry Brigade, which had until quite recently been led by Brigadier-General John Monash. Monash already showed the marked inclination towards instilling a high degree of organisation and detailed preparation into his troops which would so characterise his later military career, both in training and in preparation for operations. He had also instilled a culture of collaboration within the brigade, and so its battalions, the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th, tended to share ideas, experiences and, if possible, equipment among each other to ensure problems were not repeated or compounded. A simple example of this is when the 15th Battalion made suggestions to the 13th Battalion about how many stretcher bearers would be required for their operation on 10 August, and where to get them.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Handwritten note re telephone call signed RHS, 7 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

³⁰⁸ Message ST.229 from 13th Bn to RMO, 13th Bn, 10 August 1916, 8.40pm, AWM 26/60/6.

Following Monash's promotion to command of the 3rd Division in mid-1916, temporary Brigadier General Charles Henry Brand carried on this tradition of meticulous preparation. He took 'minute care and soldierly thoroughness [in] his methods of training his new brigade',³⁰⁹ and made a point of personally supervising battalions on the training field as they practiced in dummy trenches under actual artillery barrages. Each of the battalions was made familiar with the processes of forming up in jumping-off trenches, moving into the attack as the barrage lifted, advancing in waves and leapfrogging through each other. Importantly, all of the specialist roles, variously, 'scouts, wire cutters, wiring parties, Lewis guns, bombers, stretcher bearers and runners,' were specifically taught and drilled in their roles as a part of these larger exercises.³¹⁰ Every man was taught grenade throwing and how to dig silently and rapidly in the dark.³¹¹ By the time it arrived in the field, the 4th Brigade was as well prepared for battle on the Western Front as it could hope for.

This attention to detail is quite evident in the preparations of the 4th Brigade for the operation on 8 August. Officers made a 'careful reconnaissance' of the position to be attacked while it was still daylight and in turn made sure that 'all ranks were thoroughly acquainted with landmarks which defined their objectives and direction of attack, also distances to objectives' as far as time permitted.³¹² There was 'a steady bombardment of the trenches to be attacked' carried out during the 7th and 8th, and two further heavy bombardments were ordered on the trenches leading to

³⁰⁹ Bean, *Official History, Vol. III*, p.707.

³¹⁰ 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 3 August 1916, AWM 4/23/4/11.

³¹¹ 15th Bn War Diary, entry for 2 August 1916, AWM 4/23/32/17.

³¹² 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 15th Bn, 8 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

Courcelette, the most common source of German reinforcement.³¹³ This operation was to take ground in a north-westerly direction. But 2nd Division's operations of just days earlier had been towards the northeast. This change of direction of offensive operations seemed to take the Germans by surprise, and they did not harass preparations as severely as they had for the 2nd Division's recent assaults on their line. Despite a number of small German attacks on the 4th Brigade's line, usually with flamethrowers and bombs,³¹⁴ preparation was able to be conducted reasonably unhindered.

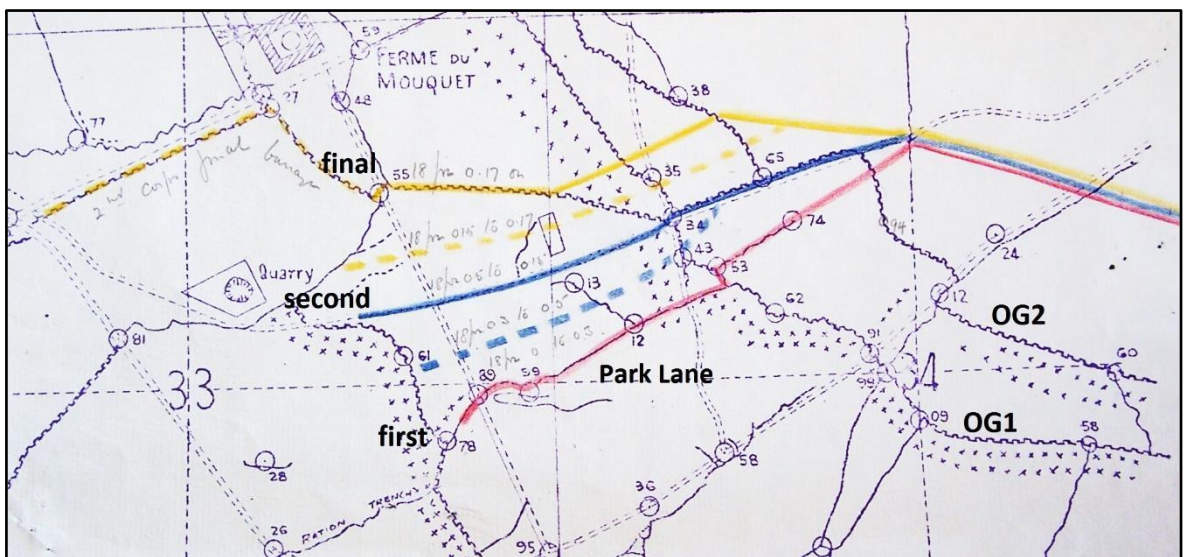
Once again, this operation was based on the elementary formula of an artillery barrage supporting a closely integrated infantry operation. But once more the 4th Australian Division showed the divisional capacity to interpret the basic barrage model in a distinctive manner. The artillery barrage for the attack of 8 August 1916 was the strongest yet fired on I Anzac Corps' front. The barrage would fall on Park Lane, the objective of this operation, for three minutes, before lifting away to a second artillery objective line. It would then stay on the second objective for ten minutes before lifting to a final line between 150 and 300 yard from the infantry's objective.³¹⁵ Instead of lifting from objective to objective in one jump, the barrage was to pause midway for a two to five minutes. So while the artillery barrage of the 1st Division during the capture of Pozzières moved around 100 yards with each lift, these 'half' lifts meant that the barrage lifted no more than 50 yards each time. Ostensibly this would mean that the infantry could stay much closer to the protective curtain of shells – but

³¹³ 'Artillery Order. No. 3,' 7 August 1916, AWM 26/52/18.

³¹⁴. 'Summary of Operations of Reserve Army up to 6pm 11th August, 1916.' 8 August 1916, p. 2, AWM 26/43/37.

³¹⁵ 'Artillery Order. No. 3 by GOCRA 1st Anzac' and attached map, 7 August 1916, AWM 26/52/18.

for one critical factor. The artillery barrage started *on* the only objective for the operation. The infantry could not attack this objective until the artillery lifted away from it, and so every artillery lift after the preliminary bombardment on the objective line was outside of their area of operations. What appeared on the surface to be a sensible, well-constructed lifting barrage for the purpose of infantry coordination was in practical terms for naught. The artillery's sophisticated lifts benefited nobody because there was nobody there to follow them. The 4th Division, seemingly having proved so far to be the most reliant of the three divisions of 1st Anzac Corps on firepower to advance, in fact failed to demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental reason for a lifting barrage – an integrated plan that used the firepower of the artillery to protect the infantry as they crossed no man's land, *taking* them to the objective.



Map 14. Lifting barrage for 15th Battalion's attack on Park Lane, 8 August 1916.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ AWM 26/52/18

The 4th Infantry Brigade's infantry plan for 8 August was much weaker than previous operations, again demonstrating the divergence in approach between divisions. The narrow front on which the assault was to be conducted was assigned to a single battalion, the 15th, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James Cannan, with the support of a single company of the 16th Battalion. The modest objective gave no opportunity for a series of infantry advances. Instead they would have to capture the single objective, Park Lane trench, in a single rush. To do this, Cannan deployed his infantry in waves. His orders do not survive in archives, but the 15th Battalion war diary notes that the

attack was launched in three waves – two platoons of each company in first wave, one platoon of each company in second and third wave. [The] first wave was accompanied by a proportion of Lewis Guns and preceded by scouts.³¹⁷

In preparation for the assault, the first two waves were formed up in no man's land 'on an alignment parallel to [the] objective prior to [the] commencement of our intense bombardment'.³¹⁸ It is not possible to tell from existing sources how far apart these waves were from each other on deployment, or the distance they were meant to maintain from each other in the attack. However, it seems that each of these waves were each intended to reinforce the other as they reached the single objective line. This is in direct contrast to the waves of infantry in 1st Division's attack on 23 July, in which each wave attacked one in a series of objectives, maintaining a deep series of defended lines once the attack was over. On this occasion, once this final line was secured and it had been consolidated it was to be held 'as lightly as possible', its

³¹⁷ 15th Bn War Diary, entry for 8 August 1916, AWM 4/23/32/17.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

defence reliant on Lewis Guns pushed out into no man's land, with no series of defended trenches behind.³¹⁹

In the context of the extremely limited operation planned – only just more substantial than a raid – this limited use of infantry was reasonable. Nevertheless, the plan was a substantial departure from recent experience. From 1st Division's three objectives for artillery and infantry, to the 2nd Division's two objectives, this operation was being conducted against a single objective line. It took a weak series of three waves of infantry and deposited them into a single objective in strength (it was hoped), before thinning them out for defence of the newly- captured line. There was no depth to this attack, and although there was an increase in the strength of the artillery support for it, there was little need for complex coordination between arms. The blunt force of the artillery was hoped to carry the infantry through, providing an adequate diversion to the Guillemont operation and a small territorial gain to 1st Anzac Corps.

The operation went ahead as timed at 9.20pm. The 15th Battalion, well prepared with officers and other ranks 'thoroughly acquainted with landmarks which defined their objectives and direction of attack [and] also distances to objectives', made good time and were able to reach their objectives all along the line and begin digging in.³²⁰ Communications between 4th Brigade headquarters and 15th Battalion headquarters had been cut almost immediately, and so, as with almost all of these operations around Pozières, brigade headquarters struggled to keep contact with the men of the 15th Battalion in the field. Brigade command could glean information from the noise

³¹⁹ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 11,' 8 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

³²⁰ 15th Bn War Diary, entry for 8 August, AWM 4/23/32/17.

of bombing and machine gun fire 'in [the] direction of [the] objective' which seemed to be far enough in that direction to warrant the assumption that it had been reached, but for a number of hours that was all.³²¹ Finally, at 1.45am on 9 August the 4th Division could report that the '15th Battalion commander states he has every reason to believe he has made good his objective but is concerned about his left'.³²² Within hours of the launch of the attack the 15th Battalion had in fact taken all its objectives, albeit some with heavy casualties, and was waiting for support to arrive from the left.

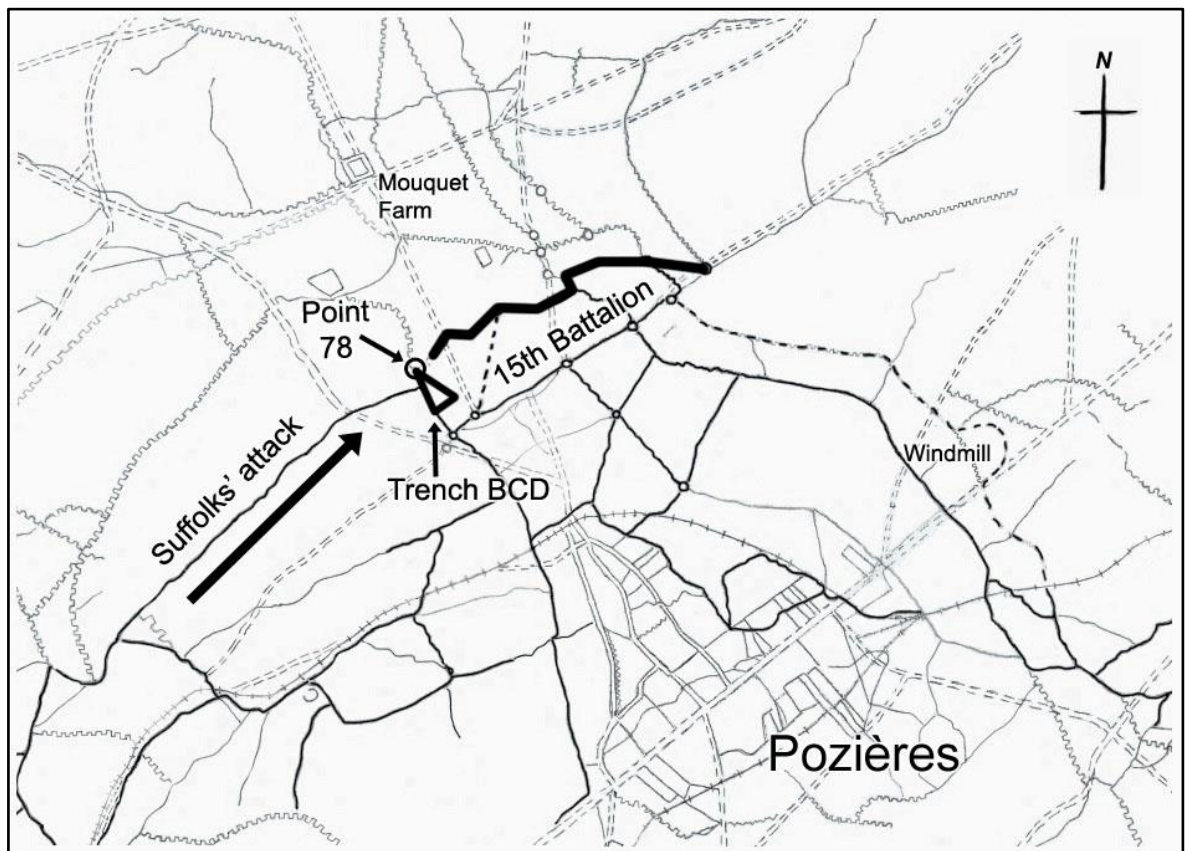
As previously mentioned, a small operation was being conducted by the 7th Suffolks of the British 35th Brigade in support of the left flank of the 15th Battalion's operation. The Suffolks' orders were for a small assault on German positions incorporating one platoon moving up the north side of Ration Trench, one on the south, and one with bayonets at the ready rushing along the trench itself.³²³ There was no artillery barrage for this operation, which would be supported by a trench mortar bombardment alone. On the boundary between the two operations was a German strongpoint known by its map coordinates – R.33.d.7.8, or Point 78. Once this point was taken, the Suffolks were to meet up with the Australians on the boundary of their area of operations. Point 78 was a strong German emplacement heavily fortified with machine guns, the capture of which had been assigned to the Suffolks, whose bombing attack up Ration Trench ran towards it. By the time the operation was to ordered, the Suffolks had become aware that Point 78 was in fact a triangle of trenches and a more extensive defensive position than first thought. As a result, they

³²¹ Message G.765 from 1st Anzac Corps to Reserve Army, II Corps, III Corps, XIV Corps & 7th Sqn RFC, 9 August 1916, 12.25am, AWM 26/50/16.

³²² Message Ga.529 from 4th Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps, 9 August 1916, 1.45am, AWM 26/59/6.

³²³. 'Orders by Lieut. Col A.H. Wilson DSO', 8 August 1916, WO 95/1852. These orders had been issued verbally some hours earlier.

ordered two platoons of their A Company to attack the other points of the triangle. The Suffolks began referring to Point 78 as 'Trench BCD', in order to reflect the fact that this position was much more extensive than had been previously known. But although the threat from this stronghold was increasingly recognised, the Suffolks' attack never evolved into more than a strong bombing raid up a trench.



Map 15. Point 78 in relation to the Suffolks and the 15th Battalion.

The Suffolks' flank operation, as with the Australians' main operation, was launched in good time. The Suffolks had also suffered from a lack of communication during the battle, and so it was not clear for some time that their attack had been seriously held up, a problem that endangered the successful part of the 15th Battalion's operation

along several hundred metres of front. At 10.05pm, forty five minutes after 'zero' hour, the Battalion Grenade officer reported 'no definite information so far but we seem to be progressing'.³²⁴ But three hours later it was apparent that this was not the case. The officer in charge of the right sector of the Suffolks' attack, Captain Norman Leith-Hay-Clark, reported just after 1am that

I have no information of A Coy other than that they did not succeed in their attack... I am informed that Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Collins & Sgt. Myer Watts are wounded – I understand that the remainder of the Company are lying out in front of the old Anzac line on the "no man's land" in front of BCD trench which is strongly held by Germans.³²⁵

The Germans had been seen moving around openly on their parapet, and most of the men lying in the open in front of them were presumed to be dead or wounded.³²⁶ But whether alive or dead, these troops lying out in the open prevented the Suffolks from using their trench mortars. With no solid information as to the position of his men, Leith-Hay-Clark could not, or would not, order the use of his trench mortars at all, and the attack was conducted almost entirely without heavier fire support. The battalion's operation report reads,

the assault was well carried out, but the bombardment had been insufficient, and all three waves were destroyed by machine gun fire, only one Officer, 1 NCO and 12 unwounded men came back. The Officer and men concerned deserve credit for the correctness of their

³²⁴ Message GT.15 from G.H. Taylor (Bn Grenade Officer, 1/7th Suffolks) to Adjutant, 8 August 1916, 10.05pm, WO 95/1852.

³²⁵ Message from Leith-Hay-Clark (OC Right Sector Suffolks) to OC 7th Suffolks, 9 August 1916, 1.07am, WO 95/1852.

³²⁶ Message from Leith-Hay-Clark to OC 7th Suffolks, 9 August 1916, 1.14am, WO 95/1852.

assault from a narrow crowded Trench after a very severe 24 hours' previous shelling.³²⁷

After a promising departure from the jumping off trench, the attack was a disaster. The Suffolks got to within 60 yards of Point 78 but could go no further.³²⁸

The consequence of this situation was that the left Australian flank was dangerously unsupported. Captain Leith-Hay-Clark came across two officers of the 15th Battalion just after 3am and reported that they

appear to be misinformed of my position... [the] two officers... stated that they received information from our brigade headquarters that "A" and "D" Companies Suffolks had made good their objective – I fortunately met them before any error could take place.³²⁹

As a result of this chance meeting, the 4th Brigade sent an officer and 20 men of the 16th Battalion to support the British and to try to re-establish appropriate lines of communication. But the situation simply could not be cleared up. By 5am 'definite information' was received that the Suffolks had not and could not make good their objectives.³³⁰ When the Australians tried to link up with the Suffolks they met with uninterrupted machine gun fire from Point 78, which was able to enfilade their line for a considerable distance. In the early hours of the morning they reported

owing to Suffolks not being able to take [Point] 78, left Company 15th Battalion suffered heavily in taking their objectives [Points] 89

³²⁷ '7th (Service) Bn The Suffolk Regiment Operations 8th and 9th August 1916', WO 95/1852.

³²⁸ 'Summary of Operations of Reserve Army up to 6pm 11th August, 1916,' p. 2, AWM 26/43/37.

³²⁹ Message from Leith-Hay-Clark to OC 7th Suffolks, 9 August 1916, 3.10am, WO 95/1852.

³³⁰ 15th Bn War Diary, entry for 8/9 August 1916, AWM 4/23/32/17.

and 99 [in Park Lane] and position became untenable so withdrew to original line.³³¹

Lieutenant Colonel Cannan had been forced to withdraw his men on the left from this position and consolidate the remaining line as best he could.³³² News of this situation finally filtered through to the British 35th Brigade by means of gossip coming through the Suffolks battalion. A telephone call was put through to the 4th Australian Brigade to strongly object to their action, and a liaison officer sent from the Suffolks to Cannan to 'point out the folly of this' withdrawal.³³³ Lieutenant Colonel A.H. Wilson, commanding the 7th Suffolks agreed, reporting that 'with the holding of Point 89 [by the Australians] and the capture of Ration Trench the enemy were caught in a trap, the taking of Point 78 only locked in the jaws of the trap.'³³⁴ Given the machine guns in Point 78 could pour an inordinate amount of fire into either side of the jaws of this 'trap' at will and had so far proven impregnable, this assessment was ludicrous. Fortunately, all objections sent by the British units either arrived too late or were ignored and the withdrawal of the 15th Battalion on the left was successful. At dawn they held around two thirds of their final objective line on the right,³³⁵ but on the left the Australian and the Suffolk infantry were in their original trenches, blaming each other for the failure on the boundary between them.

The failure of the Suffolk battalion on the night of 8/9 August cannot and should not be attributed to any sort of generic inability in the field. Theirs was a very small-scale

³³¹ Message Ga.531 from 4th Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps, 9 August, 5.25am, AWM 26/59/6.

³³² 15th Bn War Diary, entry for 8/9 August 1916, AWM 4/23/32/17.

³³³ 35th Bde War Diary, entry for 6am, 9 August 1916, WO 95/1847.

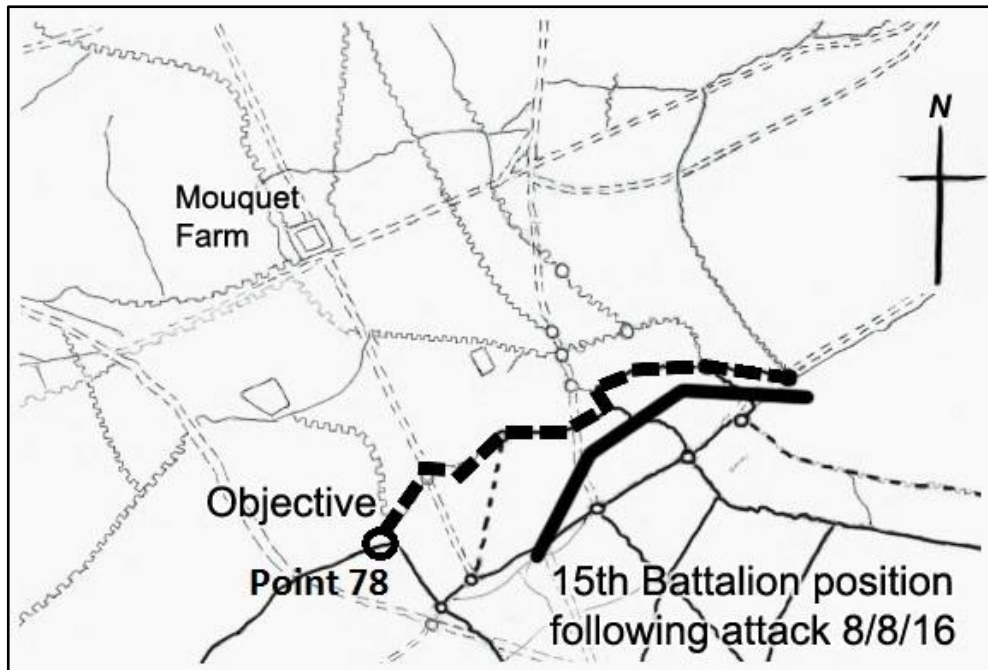
³³⁴ '7th (Service) Battalion The Suffolk Regiment Operations 8th and 9th August 1916'. WO 95/1852.

³³⁵ 'Weekly Operation Report of 4th Australian Infantry Brigade Period to noon Friday 11 August, 1916,' AWM 26/60/6.

assault, with just a few platoons of infantry and one squadron of bombers ordered to work their way up Ration Trench towards Point 78. Because of the size of the operation and the fact that they were enfilading their target, they did not have an artillery barrage to follow, rather a small lifting barrage fired by trench mortars.³³⁶ This was simply not enough fire power for the job at hand. Trench mortar fire was ineffective against the strong German emplacement, and the barrage itself was much too short. The Australians had outrun much of the deeply established German wire defences in their various advances by this stage, but there was still heavy barbed-wire emplacements facing the Suffolks. The trench mortar barrage, where it was fired, had little to no effect on it, making their job even harder. None of this could be rectified for the simple reason that they were fighting along a trench that was too close to their own front line. The threat from Point 78 was not reduced, and the German machine guns there made short work of the attacking Suffolk infantry.³³⁷ Although the Australian and British brigades had shared their preparation plans with each other, and were overtly ordered to conduct a joint operation, their actual methods of attack were entirely different. This was not one operation across two divisions, but more closely resembled two simultaneous but distinct attacks. The failure to closely connect these two operations, or to provide enough firepower to reduce the threat from Point 78 and support the infantry of the 7th Suffolks as they advanced, was the primary cause of failure here.

³³⁶ 'Orders by Lieutenant Col A. H. Wilson DSO,' 8 August 1916, WO 95/1852.

³³⁷ 35th Bde War Diary, entry for 9 August 1916, WO 95/1847.



Map 16. Objective line for attack of 9 August 1916.

Point 78, then, was the most obvious problem with this operation. But although a strong German position, it was not a major threat to the general security of the line in 1st Anzac Corps' sector, although it was certainly causing a large number of casualties in the new advanced line and preventing its completion. Nevertheless, once this advanced line had been withdrawn to a safe distance, and the men holding it were generally out of reach of the German machine guns in the strong point, this threat was dramatically reduced. The only reason to make a second attempt to capture this point would simply be to reach the previous night's objective. It should be remembered that this operation had been ordered as no more than a diversionary operation in support of Fourth Army's efforts at Guillemont, which had, in any case, completely failed.³³⁸ A second attempt at the capture of Park Lane was not necessary in the sense of the wider campaign. A charitable observation might be that any attempt to recapture Point 78 would bring a more solid connection between the 4th Brigade on

³³⁸ Prior & Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 219.

the right and the British 35th Brigade on the left, but this was not of great concern at the time as the line was solidly joined further to the rear. A less charitable observation would be that it would be a better reflection on corps or divisional command if all of the objectives of the previous night's operation had been achieved. But regardless of motivation, during the day of 9 August 1st Anzac Corps hastily arranged another attack to correct the shortfalls of the night before.³³⁹ There could have been any number of reasons behind this operation's implementation: a need to report that all objectives were captured; an attempt to straighten the line; a knee-jerk reaction to an obvious threat; or a simple failure to re-evaluate the strategic importance of another (potentially costly) operation. It is impossible to say at this remove which, or how many, of these reasons were behind Birdwood's decision to order a second operation to capture Point 78 and the failed left of the Australian line. But it is possible to say that this operation was borne of no pressing strategic or tactical requirement.

Wedged as it was between the two sectors of operation, Point 78 could not have been the true focus of either battalion in the previous operation, but had to be a flank attack for one or the other. Some adjustment to the boundary and traffic areas for the left flank of the operation would be necessary the new attack. The 4th Australian Brigade and the 35th Brigade on their right appealed to their divisional commanders to rectify the issue.³⁴⁰ The divisional commanders were given leeway to resettle the boundary between themselves by corps command, and they decided to put the strong

³³⁹ '1st Anzac Corps Operation Order No. 22,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

³⁴⁰ 35th Bde War Diary, entry for 9 August 1916, WO 95/1847.

point in the Australian sector for the next assault.³⁴¹ The 4th Brigade determined to use the 16th Battalion under command of Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Alfred Drake-Brockman for this follow-up attack. Again, there was little need for preparation in the form of digging jumping-off trenches as the German artillery fire, although still heavy, was not targeting the area from which the attack would be launched and the damage it caused was minimal. Once again the 7th Suffolks would provide support by bombing up Ration Trench, but as the northerly part of this trench was now in the Australian sector, they would not be required to advance as far as they had, but rather to simply make contact with the Australians when the German strong point was captured.

This operation was not markedly different to the one before, but suffered from a lack of time to prepare both the artillery and the infantry for the assault. There was not sufficient time to organise a lifting artillery barrage at all. Instead the artillery would provide a bombardment onto (or very near to) the objective, while a sort of lifting barrage would be provided by trench mortars.³⁴² Similarly the infantry of the 16th Battalion conducting the attack were wedged in between the 7th Suffolks and the line still held by the remnants of the 15th Battalion and did not have the space to form up in more than one wave. Quite simply the plan was that at midnight

the intense bombardment of the objective will be commenced. Prior to the barrage lifting the first wave will move forward as close to the barrage as possible and rush the trench the moment it lifts. As soon

³⁴¹ '1st Anzac Corps Operation Order No. 22,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

³⁴² '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 12,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

as the line has been secured it will be consolidated and held as lightly as possible.³⁴³

There was to be no finesse to this operation, which was little more than a large-scale raid. The 16th Battalion was in place and ready for the operation to go ahead at midnight. All of its officers and senior non-commissioned officers had had the opportunity to make personal reconnaissances of the front line during the day of the 9th in preparation for the attack, as per the 4th Brigade's usual practice.³⁴⁴ The units of the 16th managed to leave their jumping off trench in good time and within three hours could report most of the objective had been captured.³⁴⁵ An hour later reports confirmed 'everything successful. Have joined up with 15th Battalion on my right flank and Suffolks on my left flank. Am consolidating positions.'³⁴⁶ The 16th Battalion was responsible for the capture of as many as 70 prisoners and a number of German machine guns. A link between the Australians and the Suffolks was established and, once the 7th Suffolks removed a block at the end of their most easterly trench, for the first time a solid connection was made between the I Anzac Corps and II Corps in the forward lines.³⁴⁷

With all objectives captured, this operation was ostensibly a success. It also fulfilled the brief to 'think out and suggest enterprises' instead of waiting for instruction. What this operation did not do was meet any major strategic requirement, nor did it meet or advance any particular tactical need. This operation to take Point 78 was little

³⁴³ '4th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 31,' 9 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁴⁴ 16th Bn War Diary, August 1916, AWM 4/23/33/9.

³⁴⁵ Message AD.102 from 16th Bn to 4th Bde. in 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 16th Bn, 10 August 1916, 2.50am, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁴⁶ Message AD.104 from 16th Bn to 4th Bde, 10 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

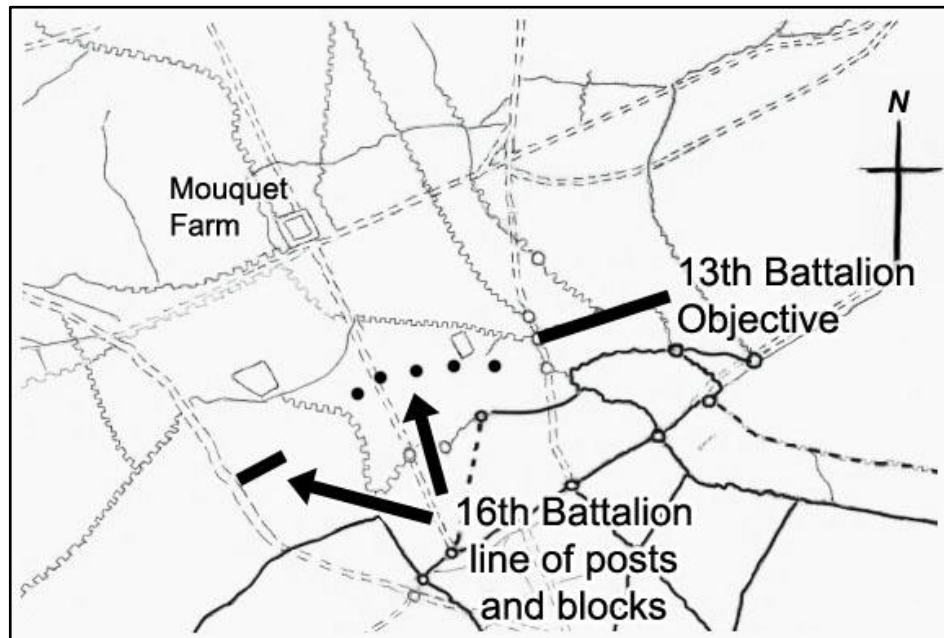
³⁴⁷ 12th Div. War Diary, entry for 10 August 1916, WO 95/1823.

more than a raid. But importantly for the 4th Brigade, it cemented in the headquarters of the 4th Australian Division the idea that these smaller, close-range operations could be successful. Suddenly, a rush was on to conduct more of these smaller operations. At 4.30am on 10 August 1916, even as the 16th Battalion's operation was ending, the 4th Brigade sent a message to the 13th Battalion to arrange an operation for the following night against a very small portion of trench slightly forward of the Australian front line. 13th Battalion headquarters was told 'so far 13 Battalion has only 70 casualties and though doing all the carrying of rations etc. for the Brigade is practically fresh'. Brand went on to take matters out of the hands of the commander of the 13th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Edward Tilney, by adding, 'am arranging for 13th Battalion officers to reconnoitre ground today'.³⁴⁸ This suggested operation was formalised at divisional level around 4.30pm on 10 August with the issue of Operational Order No. 13. This order formally endorsed the planned operation for the 13th Battalion and prescribed another to be undertaken by the 16th Battalion against a similarly small series of objectives. It would appear both operations were simply to be conducted for the sake of continuing the small advance of the night before. Neither objective line was wider than 300 yards, nor was either against a particular landmark or strong point.³⁴⁹ The 16th Battalion had already suffered a number of casualties in the attack against Point 78, although not as many as other recent operations simply as a result of the smaller scope of their attack. The 13th Battalion had not yet moved into the front line and was still preparing to relieve the 15th Battalion which had been pushed to the right to facilitate operations of the 16th Battalion against Point 78. Neither was particularly prepared to push ahead with

³⁴⁸ Message BM.650 from 4th Bde to 13th Bn, 10 August 1916, 4.28am, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁴⁹ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 13,' 10 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

an assault, no matter on what scale, but had to scramble during the early evening to prepare to go ahead.



Map 17. Objectives for 13th & 16th Battalion operations, night 10/11 August 1916.

These smaller operations were emphatically different to anything conducted by 1st Anzac Corps since its first major operation on the Somme at Pozières weeks before. They were small, limited in scope, and only a battalion or smaller in strength. Even the planned attack of 8 August was on this small scale, although the 4th Brigade had had enough preparation time to incorporate other arms. The hurriedly-planned operations of the 16th and 13th Battalions that followed were organised with such little preparation time that it was not possible to have machine guns and trench mortars in place with enough time to be useful to the infantry in the field. At the very least there continued to be a marked reluctance to send the infantry forward for even a simple raid without artillery support wherever possible in the 4th Australian

Division. But 4th Division's two planned operations for 10 August were not even connected. The two battalions conducting them were not obliged to synchronise their operations, and were openly advised that each would operate independently of the other.³⁵⁰ There is little or no evidence of any influence from the experience of the 1st or 2nd Australian Division in this little series of operations – either in the planned attack of 8 August or in the follow-up operations of succeeding days.

On the night of 10/11 August the operations of the 13th and 16th Battalions went ahead as arranged and both battalions successfully gained their objectives. The 13th Battalion had attacked with two Companies in the front line (A and D Companies), and a third in close support (B Company). At 1am on 11 August, the battalion reported, the

bombardment commenced and [the] first wave moved into no man's land. At 1.03am the Barrage lifted and A and D Companies advanced. Word [was] received at 2am that we were in our objective and consolidating. Operations [were] seriously impeded by a dense fog. Enemy replied with a Heavy counter bombardment at 3.04am. Soon after about forty Germans made a bomb attack ... but were driven off leaving about twelve killed.³⁵¹

The 16th Battalion, too, launched their operation at 1am, and at 2.50 reported that they had taken their objectives and were constructing the strong posts and links they had been ordered to establish. The battalion had established some strong points in advance of their front, but struggled to maintain a constant garrison of them as a

³⁵⁰ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 13,' 10 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

³⁵¹ 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 13th Bn, 11 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

result of the ongoing heavy shellfire. As the sun came up they withdrew from one of these advanced posts, but maintained control of the position by constantly patrolling it during daylight, and re-occupying it during the night.³⁵²

These reports of success belie a serious situation in the front lines. These ongoing operations were taking their toll on the 4th Brigade, which had suffered many casualties as a result. Artillery fire was still extremely heavy from both sides, which also extracted a toll, and meant that shell shock was becoming a common occurrence. The 16th Battalion had conducted two attacks in two days and was struggling with casualties. But even the 13th Battalion, fresh to the front line, struggled with the conditions and was quickly in a parlous state. This battalion had spent the previous three or four days providing working and carrying parties to the front line before conducting this operation. They then had to defend their newly-advanced line against the German bombing attack and heavy counter bombardment. Over the following day the battalion continued to come under heavy and increasingly accurate artillery fire. But instead of simply holding their new front line, companies of the battalion actively sought opportunities to push ahead, even without direct orders to do so from above. One such company of the 13th Battalion advanced a small distance to establish a new strong point, but found themselves confronted with an enemy bombing party on 12 August. Although they managed to take 15 prisoners, the advance proved untenable and they withdrew.³⁵³ These small back-and-forth movements set the front line into a constant state of flux.

³⁵² 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 16th Bn, 11 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁵³ This was D Company on the left. 13th Bn War Diary, August 1916. AWM 4/23/30/22.

There was little coherence in the strategic vision for this sector by 12 August. One operation was suggested by brigade command while another arose with divisional headquarters. At other times battalion commanders like Tilney ordered small-scale operations to advance small portions of their own front line. All of this was, of course, sanctioned by Reserve Army's directive to maintain offensive spirit and engage in operations at all levels as often as possible, but it did very little to prevent exhaustion in the troops in the front line. Tilney described the situation on 12 August 1916:

Owing to all my front works being new and only partially dug the troops are practically unable to obtain sleep during day, and incessant digging operations go on throughout night. Tonight's operation will prevent any rest being obtained. The result is that the men and officers are becoming very fagged. I am of opinion that, for safety sake, it is necessary to relieve the Battalion tomorrow at latest.³⁵⁴

The constant shellfire and movement of the line also caused serious problems with the supply of rations and ammunition. A battalion or company designated as ration or ammunition carriers might suddenly be called forward to reinforce the line, resulting in front line units receiving blunt messages such as the one Tilney received on 13 August: 'It will be necessary for you to make your own arrangements for your rations tonight. The Battalion which carried this morning is going up to the line and is not available.'³⁵⁵ But the day before (12 August) supplies for the 13th Battalion had not been received because the company assigned ration carrying duties had been

³⁵⁴ Message ST. 258 from Tilney, (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁵⁵ Message SC.800 from 4th Bde to OC 13th Bn, 13 August 1916, 2.10pm, AWM 26/60/6.

required to act as reserve to the 16th Battalion.³⁵⁶ The men of the 13th Battalion went more than 36 hours in the front line without food or water. Other materials were also in short supply. Tilney requested wire, 'corkscrews,'³⁵⁷ picks, shovels, chloride of lime, Lewis Guns and extra magazines' at 5pm on 12 August. Other companies reported 'practically no picks or shovels' and could not borrow any from neighbouring units, who were similarly undersupplied.³⁵⁸

Not only was supply challenging in the face of the constant movement and readjustment of the line, but it was difficult for battalion headquarters to know where these front-line companies were at any given time. Tilney reported in the late afternoon of 12 August 'my available strength for Front Line is not more than 500 including C Company which has not yet arrived nor can I get in touch with it.'³⁵⁹ The situation in the front line, too, was confused. Captain Hugh Douglas Pulling, the officer commanding D Company on the left of 13th Battalion's sector, struggled both to maintain a working relationship with his fellow company commanders and also to maintain a cohesive line across the battalion's front. During August 12 he took on command of all units in the front line, sending the message:

I don't know whether I am right [to take over], but I am trying to supervise the three Companies for two reasons. One that Chook³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ Message ST.255 from 13th Bn to 4th Bde, 12 August, 7.00am, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁵⁷ Posts for holding up barbed wire.

³⁵⁸ Message from Pulling (OC D Coy, 13th Bn) to OC 13th Bn, 12 August 1916, 9.35pm, AWM: EXDOC20.

³⁵⁹ Message ST.264 from Tilney, (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 12 August 1916, 5.00pm, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁶⁰ Probably Captain John Keith Henderson, KIA 14 August 1916. Pulling refers to him as "Bob" Henderson in a message sent to the CO 13th Bn, at 9am on an unspecified date, AWM 26/60/6.

doesn't know much about where he his – and two Murray won't keep still and moves about everywhere.³⁶¹

Little could be done about the problems with his fellow company commanders in the field at that time and it took a great deal of energy on the part of Pulling and other officers working with him to establish and maintain a cohesive line. Pulling, like Medcalf, became not only an important conduit of information into and out of the front line, but made important decisions as to how the attack would go ahead, such as when he and Captain Francis Maxwell Barton 'conferred... and... decided to reduce the distances the 1st and 2nd waves [of A Company] are to go out before the barrage by about half'.³⁶² Pulling was equally energetic in establishing and maintaining a strong defensive line, and was later awarded a Military Cross for his work in the front line from 10 to 15 August 1916. Not only did he command the first wave of three attacks during the 13th Battalion's time at the front, but he commanded the whole of the line in his sector 'without rest or relief', and it was noted that 'his presence always inspired the men, who kept cheerfully to their work under the frightful shelling and most trying conditions for six days'.³⁶³ With this the situation in the freshest of 4th Brigade's battalions, it was clear that the brigade would have to be relieved. Its battalions began to be revolved out of the line on 12 August.

The 4th Brigade's small operations had to date extended the salient to the extent that they could now fit three battalions in the front line and one in close support.³⁶⁴ For support during the relief period, and to prevent gaps in this extended line, the brigade

³⁶¹ Pulling, Hugh Douglas (Major), MC. AWM: EXDOC019.

³⁶² Message from Capt. F.W. Barton, OC A Coy, 10 August 1916. AWM: EXDOC021.

³⁶³ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards, 4th Aust. Div., 1916-1918. AWM 28/2/81.

³⁶⁴ 'Weekly Operation Report of 4th Australian Infantry Brigade Period to noon Friday 11 August, 1916,' AWM 26/60/6.

was given the services of the 50th Battalion. The 50th Battalion belonged to the 13th Brigade, also of the 4th Australian Division, which would soon take over the front line. Before the 13th Brigade could do so, however, the 50th Battalion came under the orders of Brigadier General Brand and 4th Brigade headquarters. The 50th battalion was handed over to the 4th Brigade for service from 11 August and began to relieve the 16th Battalion within 24 hours. Under cover of a heavy fog, most of the 50th were able to get through to the front line, although 'violent and continuous' enemy shell fire held up part of the relief.³⁶⁵ They were placed into the far left of the line against the boundary with II Corps. Not only did the 50th Battalion have to move into the front line under heavy shell fire, the battalion also had to contend with embarking on a new operation immediately. At this time Reserve Army had been planning a general operation for three or four days, timing it to begin on the evening of 12 August.³⁶⁶ For reasons which remain obscure, the 4th Brigade chose to employ the 50th Battalion for this assault together with the 13th Battalion, regardless of the fact that as the attack began the 50th had only been in the front line for two hours, had already suffered 'fairly heavy' casualties from the German barrage on the way into the front line,³⁶⁷ and was being asked to work under the command of another brigade which operated quite differently from its own.

The 13th Infantry Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas William Glasgow, was somewhat different in its approach to training and preparation to Brand's 4th Brigade. It was considered 'probably the least experienced group in the I

³⁶⁵ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 50th Bn, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

³⁶⁶ 'Preliminary Artillery Arrangements with view to attack on 12th August, 1916', undated, WO 95/518.

³⁶⁷ 13th Brigade War Diary, entry for 50th Bn, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

Anzac Corps' and had yet to conduct so much as a trench raid.³⁶⁸ Like the 4th Brigade, the 13th had participated in a number of large-scale training operations under an actual artillery barrage prior to entering the front line at Pozières.³⁶⁹ But the majority of its training focussed on route marching and bayonet fighting rather than giving particular attention to the roles of specialist in these sorts of operations. The training of specialists seems to have been kept separate from the larger group exercises altogether.³⁷⁰ And while each battalion in the brigade experienced one full-scale exercise before entering the front line, attack practices were usually undertaken by groups no larger than a company, ostensibly because suitable ground was generally not regularly available for training by larger units.³⁷¹ In direct opposition to the training doctrine of the 4th Brigade, the function of the infantry within a large, integrated, mechanised battlefield was considered of no more than average importance in the training of the 13th Brigade, on a par with route marches and rifle training. This difference in training between the two brigades would soon become apparent with the 50th Battalion of the 13th Brigade having to work under the command and expectations of Brand and the headquarters staff of the 4th Brigade.

For this new operation, Reserve Army's focus was on the left of 1st Anzac Corps, where two brigades of the British 12th Division were ordered to conduct an assault to straighten their line. Initially designed to be a broad-fronted attack, at the last minute the attack by the British 37th Brigade on the left of the 12th Division's sector was modified by Gough to involve no more than the capture of a small portion of trench

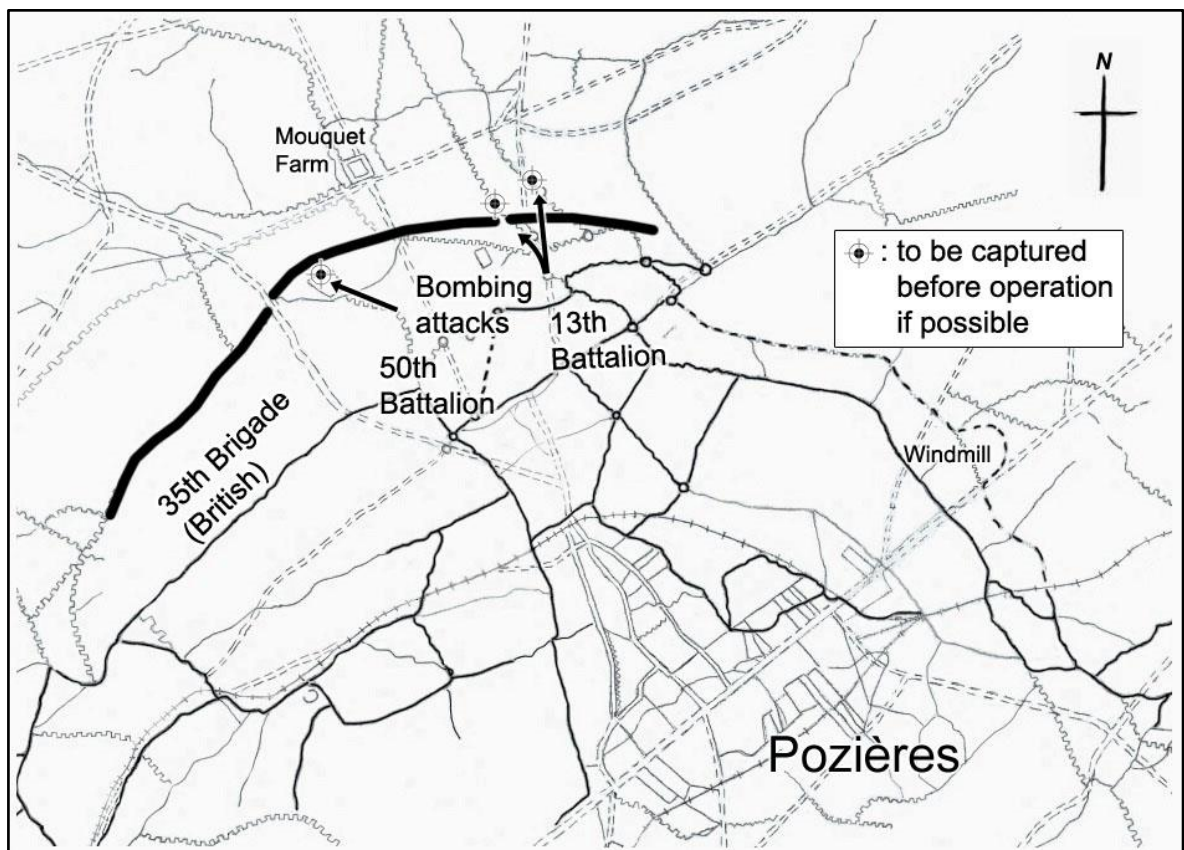
³⁶⁸ Bean, *Official History, Vol. III*, p.839.

³⁶⁹ '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Training Memo. No. 28,' 27 July 1916, AWM 4/23/13/6.

³⁷⁰ See 13th Bde War Diary, entries for 2/3/4 August 1916, AWM 4/23/13/7.

³⁷¹ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 15-24 July 1916, AWM 4/23/13/6.

through a small number of ‘minor attacks... with a view to keeping the enemy busy on this front’.³⁷² The most important part of the action would be conducted by the 35th British Division in the centre of the operation, and the 50th and 13th Battalions of 1st Anzac Corps on the right. These two battalions were to conduct an assault on their objective line that synchronised with the attack of the 35th Brigade on their left, but orders issued by 4th Division and the 4th Brigade the day before the attack say that ‘as much ground as possible will be made good towards [tomorrow night’s] objective’ *before the operation went ahead*,³⁷³ indicating that ‘if it is possible to reach any of these objectives by bombing it should be done’.³⁷⁴ This would remove the infantry



Map 18. 50th & 13th Battalion objectives 12 August 1916.

³⁷² 12th Div. War Diary, entry for 13 August 1916, WO 95/1823.

³⁷³ ‘4th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 33,’ 11 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁷⁴ Memorandum from 4th Aust. Div. to 4th Bde, 11 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

from both their protective barrages and cooperation from their flanks, isolating them in the technology-driven battlefield and meaning that the entire burden of capture was on their shoulders alone. Even given a chance to pause and prepare to cooperate in a broader-fronted operation, both Cox and Brand showed a clear preference for ad hoc, small scale operations to try to take their objectives.

Bombing parties were pushed forward to little effect as far as taking these forward positions was concerned. But because these parties were operating between the Australian line and their objective, they were in danger from their own artillery barrage when the arranged operation went ahead. Orders given had to allow for the 4th Brigade to 'ascertain the exact position these parties will be in when the attack takes place, so that the Artillery may be informed and the attacking troops notified'.³⁷⁵ It is not possible to say from extant records whether or not this was successfully managed, but at 10.30pm on 12 August the operation went ahead as planned, with the infantry advancing under cover of an artillery barrage that once again landed on the objective before lifting away.

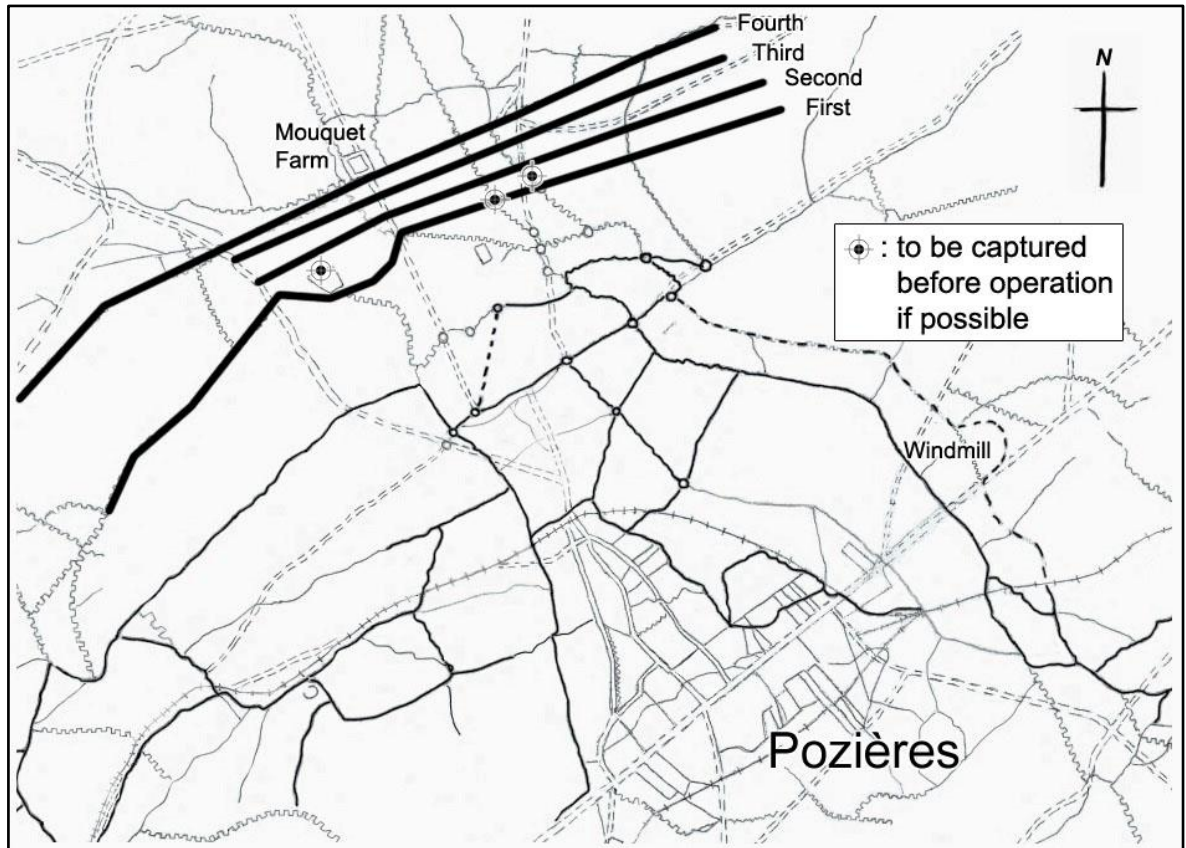
The British operation was partially successful; importantly for 1st Anzac Corps' story the greatest gains were made in 35th Brigade's sector on the right against the corps boundary.³⁷⁶ Both the 50th and 13th Battalions were also able to advance to their objectives, with the 50th successfully capturing 750 yards of trench³⁷⁷ and the 13th

³⁷⁵ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 14,' 12 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

³⁷⁶ 12th Div. War Diary, entry for 13 August 1916, WO 95/1823.

³⁷⁷ '50th Battalion Summary of Operations for period 12-15 August,' 18 August 1916, p. 1, AWM 26/61/15.

making similar gains along with securing a large supply of enemy shells and two large German dugouts.³⁷⁸



Map 19. Artillery lifts for the attack of 12 August 1916.

As a result of this operation both the 50th and 13th Battalions advanced their line a small distance. But within a very short time the 50th Battalion ran out of critical supplies. A lack of supplies had affected various units in the front time at different times for some weeks, but there was a new, more ominous reason for the shortages experienced by the 50th Battalion. At last the Germans had the measure of the change in direction of 1st Anzac Corps' operations. Their artillery had been slow to notice

³⁷⁸ 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 13th Bn, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

that the new operations were not advancing in an easterly direction from the OG Lines towards Courcellette and Bapaume, but were now headed towards Thiepval to the north-west. But as the experience of the 50th Battalion during the relief demonstrated, the German artillery was now concentrating on the new area of operations and was hampering work in a way it had not been able to do since the 4th Australian Division entered the line. The constant heavy enemy bombardment meant that parties carrying food and water forward to the 50th Battalion found it very difficult to get through. Despite 'numerous fatigues doing their utmost to provide those necessities,'³⁷⁹ only seven tins of water had arrived for the entire battalion by the morning of 13 August. The battalion continued to sustain reasonably heavy casualties as a result of the artillery bombardment, and work was slowed by a lack of tools.³⁸⁰ The 50th Battalion was in a similar position to that faced by the 13th Battalion just a few days earlier, with 4th Infantry Brigade headquarters demonstrating little or no ability (or indeed desire) to ameliorate their conditions.

Following the withdrawal of his men, the officer commanding the 4th Infantry Brigade, Brigadier General Brand, submitted some notes on his recent successes to the 4th Division. He made many important points about his successes coming from a reliance on things like receiving early information of the task at hand so it could be disseminated to all concerned in good time, 'resolute patrolling of no man's land' and personal reconnaissance by every officer, and being aware of the enemy's habits

³⁷⁹ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 50th Bn, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

³⁸⁰ '50th Battalion Summary of Operations for period 12-15 August,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

before launching an operation.³⁸¹ One of his particularly interesting tactics was to have his first infantry wave thicker than succeeding waves. He felt that

The first wave must get its objective; if it hesitates chaos follows in the rear. Men want to feel that their mates are on their left and right. The necessary cohesion is secured [with enough men. It is] only human nature for men to hesitate when alone and ignorant of what is taking place.³⁸²

‘Good leaders,’ he added, ‘are essential in [the] front line. A few calm words from them stop men from pushing forward into our own barrage’.³⁸³ But while Brand noted that ‘confidence in the artillery was an important factor’ in the successes of the 4th Brigade, he made no comment on the nature of the barrages fired as a part of his operations. To date they had been inappropriately fired – landing first on the only objective of the attack before carefully moving away in a series of timed lifts. The timed lifts were completely pointless without having infantry to follow them, and the artillery might as well have stopped making them after the first movement off of the objective line. Experience had increasingly demonstrated that the more closely the infantry and artillery worked together, the greater the potential for success, particularly in large-scale operations such as that at Pozzières. There was only so much Brand’s confident, cohesive first wave of infantry could achieve in the face of unhindered German machine guns – and that was very little indeed. Morale without firepower was all but redundant on the Western Front. But Brand was not alone in failing to understand the importance of firmly connecting the plans for the lifting

³⁸¹ C.H. Brand, ‘Notes on successes of 4th Australian Brigade,’ 16 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

artillery barrage with the infantry in the field, as became apparent when the 4th Division renewed its operations after the relief of the 4th Brigade.

The story of the 4th Brigade's first period in the front line at Pozières is complicated and busy. This short period sets an alarming precedent for future action by the 1st Anzac Corps. From 9 to 12 August, any perceived opportunity to keep up forward momentum was seized at a number of different levels – Army, corps, brigade and even battalion. These operations, no matter at which level they arose, were all narrow-fronted, small-scale attacks against very close objectives. There was little finesse to these attacks. The artillery bludgeoned the objective and then lifted to a short distance away to protect the infantry rushing it. Where these attacks were not successful, they were generally poorly supported by artillery, such as the Suffolks' operation which relied on lighter fire from trench mortars instead. But this was not the norm. The 4th Australian Division established that this method could be efficacious – all of their smaller operations were more or less entirely successful in capturing their objectives. But while the 4th Division could celebrate 'success' on a regular basis, it was extremely limited in scope. Their advances never encompassed their entire front, rarely if ever taking in more than 500 yards of the front line. The advance in these small areas were equally small – around 150-200 yards forward and no more. The threat from one or two German strongpoints was reduced, but these did not threaten the line as it stood and operations to attack them should only have been undertaken either in conjunction with, or in preparation for, another large-scale operation. Apart from a more solid point of contact with the 7th Suffolk Battalion on the left, nothing that happened while the 4th Brigade were in the front line advanced

the general strategy of northward movement in any meaningful way, or materially benefited the position of the 1st Anzac Corps.

In the meantime, the 4th Brigade had exhausted itself through this constant jockeying for position. The 15th and 16th Battalions were depleted through the conduct of one or more of these small assaults on the German line, and the 14th Battalion had suffered from a series of strong German counter-attacks not dealt with here. The 13th Battalion, as has been demonstrated, was in a similarly depleted state through supply problems and battle casualties, and within hours of its arrival in the line as reinforcement, the 50th Battalion, too, was suffering heavily. By 12 August 1916, the 4th Brigade had suffered 1283 casualties.³⁸⁴ Small scale success came at a cost, and a very serious cost at that when compared to the limitations of the achievement. But nevertheless it meant that regular reports could be made of objectives achieved and lines advanced, and the example of this period would prove dangerously seductive in the future.

³⁸⁴ 'Casualty report to 12 August 1916,' AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

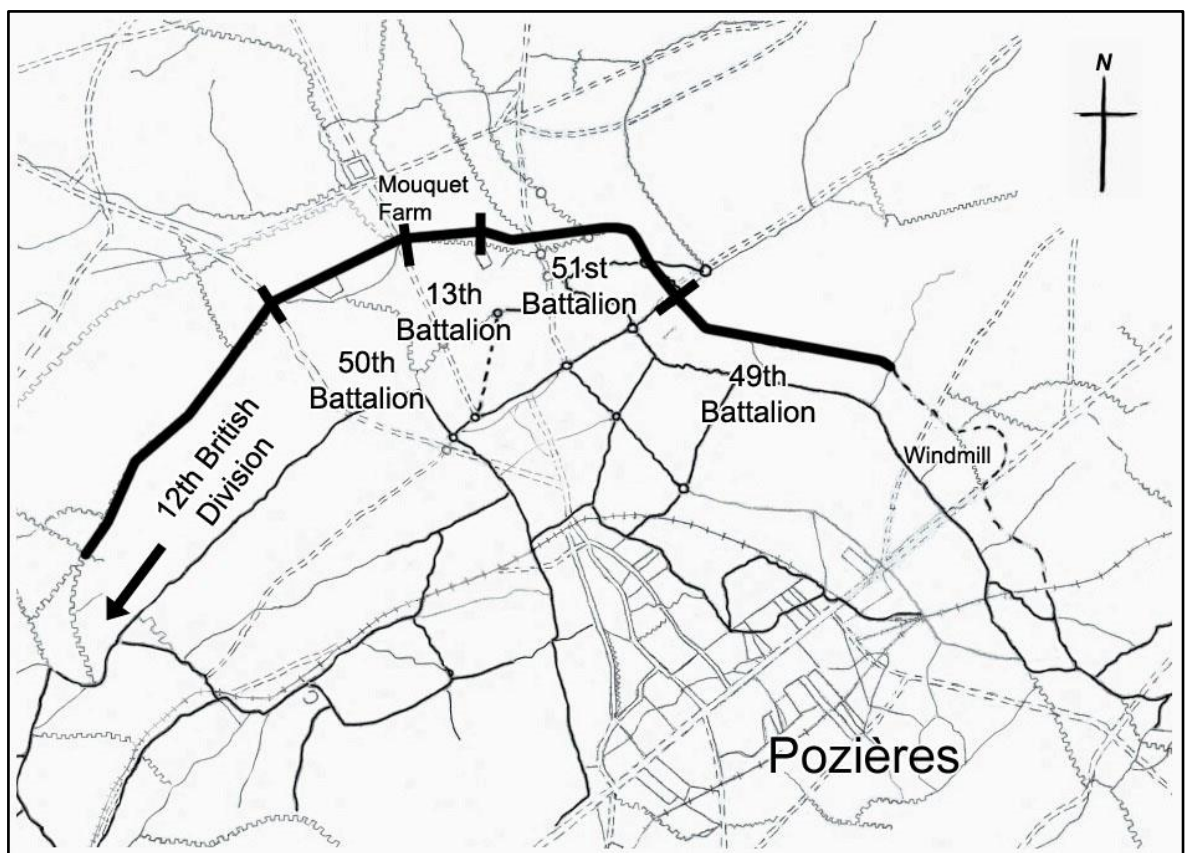
Chapter 4. 'He will not move forward tonight': the 13th Brigade demonstrates the danger of ongoing operations and low morale.

The 4th Australian Division did not change its tactical approach in the second half of its first spell in the front line, and continued to prosecute small-scale operations in a north to north-westerly direction. If these operations were not ordered at Army and corps level, operations were created by the division itself. The loose correlation to Reserve Army's overall plan for northward movement was slowly slipping, and operations were being conducted on such a small scale that had they not been so costly they would be inconsequential. In fact, the second part of the 4th Division's spell in the front line established the idea that small-scale attacks were a successful and useful approach to operations on the Somme even more firmly both within the division and indeed at 1st Anzac Corps headquarters. And yet, this short period of time would be another very costly period for 1st Anzac Corps not only in terms of both of men and materiel, and also, in a very serious way, morale.

On 13 August 1916 the 4th Brigade was replaced by the 13th Brigade.³⁸⁵ Two battalions remained in the line following the departure of the 4th Infantry Brigade. The 50th Battalion remained at the front and reverted to its usual brigade, and the 13th Battalion of the 4th Brigade was temporarily transferred to command of the 13th Brigade and also remained in the line. Once the relief was complete, the north west part of 1st Anzac Corps' line was held by the 50th Battalion on the left, next to

³⁸⁵ 1st Anzac Corps War Diary, entry for 13 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

the boundary with II Corps; the 13th Battalion in the centre; and then the 51st Battalion on the right and at the apex of the salient. The remainder of the line, comprising the OG Lines facing the village of Courcelette, was held by the 49th Battalion in a predominantly defensive role. But although a new brigade headquarters was in charge of the front line, the approach to battle changed very little.



Map 20. 13th Infantry Brigade line, 13 August 1916.

The 50th, 13th and 51st Battalions would soon be called on to continue the series of small operations to the north west. The 4th Division's ongoing reliance on these small attacks to inch the line forward caused a great deal of difficulty for the battalions in the front line which had had little or no rest. Both the 50th and especially the 13th

Battalion were feeling the effects of front line exposure and exhaustion. The 50th had suffered some 100 casualties on its way into the front line, and was finding it 'very difficult to take food and water up' to its men.³⁸⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Tilney had already requested relief of his 13th Battalion. On 12 August he wrote to 4th Brigade headquarters to say

I find that C Company has been working almost continuously for the last two days and nights. The rest of the Battalion has done the same. Tonight and tomorrow will make 72 hours without sleep. I think this is approaching the limit of human endurance. Of course if it is absolutely necessary to hang on another night we will do so.³⁸⁷

His plea fell on deaf ears, and his battalion would spend more than just 'another night' in the front line. The two most worn out battalions in the line would be a major component of the next operation of the 4th Australian Division.

On 12 August a memorandum from 1st Anzac Corps to the 4th Division spelt out its future plans. Simply put, the energies of the corps were to be 'limited to the occupation of a line in the vicinity of Mouquet Farm'.³⁸⁸ Even the major objectives of the entire corps had come down to arbitrarily-drawn positions on a map no further than 200 yards away. Birdwood considered his allotted frontage 'considerable for the troops available', and sent a request to Army Headquarters to have the boundaries of his sector of operations brought closer together.³⁸⁹ Birdwood's solution was to extend II Corps to the right to take over more of the line from 1st Anzac Corps. It should be

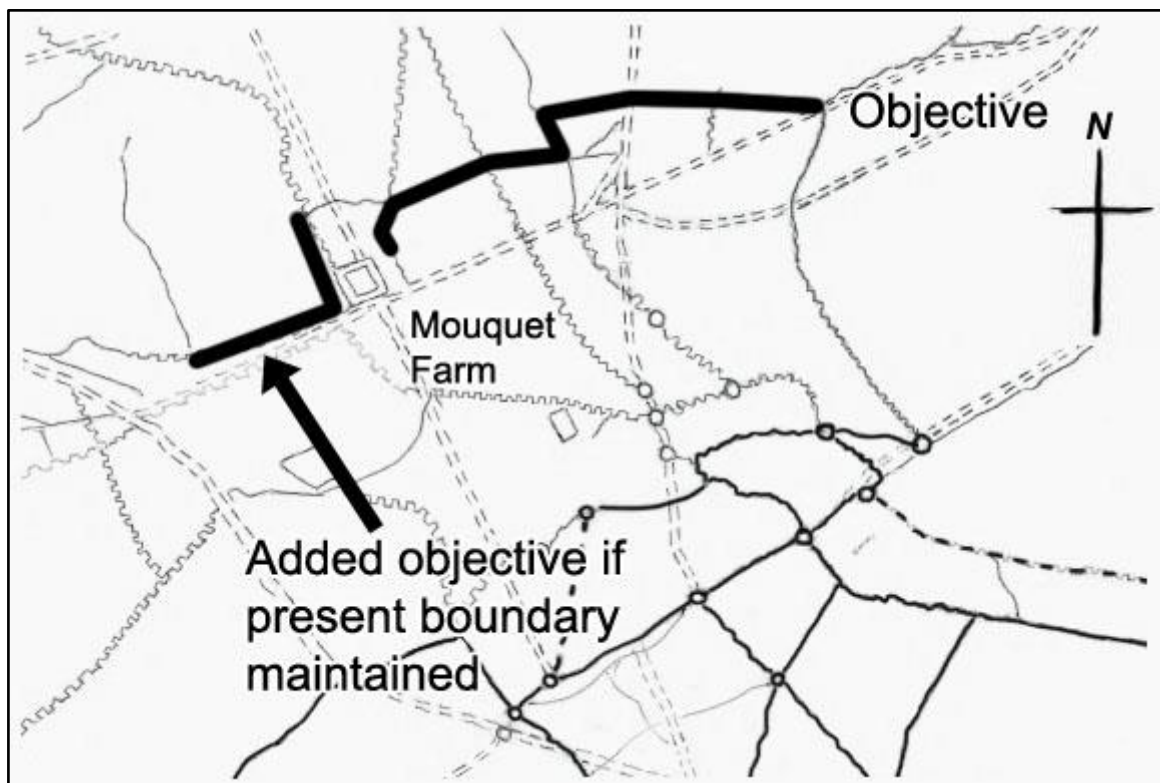
³⁸⁶ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 50th Battalion, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

³⁸⁷ Message ST. 268 from Tilney (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 12 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/60/6.

³⁸⁸ Brudenell White to 4th Aust. Div. (S. 637), 12 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

noted that at this time II Corps was holding at least five times the amount of front line that 1st Anzac Corps was, although it was not attacking along the full length of its front.³⁹⁰ It is significant that the portion of the line Birdwood wanted to pass off to II Corps contained Mouquet Farm, the one major obstacle in his area of operations. However, perhaps sensing it was not realistic for II Corps to take over yet more of the front and that his request would be turned down, Birdwood also put in place contingency plans just in case 'the present boundary between us and the adjoining Corps is to be adhered to'. In that case 'then our attack must be extended to the left.'³⁹¹



Map 21. Birdwood's objectives as laid out in his 'future plans' of 12 August 1916.

³⁹⁰ Situation map, 12 August 1916, 4.00 am, WO 153/185.

³⁹¹ Brudenell White to 4th Aust. Div. (S.637), 12 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

This extension included the farm buildings of Mouquet Farm. This is the first time 1st Anzac Corps directly faced the prospect of attacking the fortified compound of Mouquet Farm. Although Reserve Army had given an objective line that had included the farm once before, it had quickly dropped out of the advance that time and had not reappeared since. And despite Birdwood's bluster on 7 August about advancing far beyond the farm, there had been no concerted attempt to take it, prepare to take it, or include it in any of the small operations that had been going on in the interim period. And its inclusion now was tentative at best. The ruined farm buildings of Mouquet Farm itself were only encompassed by the 'extended' attack which would take place only if the present boundary between 1st Anzac Corps and II Corps was to be maintained. Unfortunately for Birdwood, any attempt to change the allotted front of 1st Anzac Corps did not succeed, and they continued to hold the full salient to the north of Pozières. Mouquet Farm would have to be dealt with in the next major operation.

The coordinates in Brudenell White's memorandum came from a Reserve Army order for the next operation, Operation Order No. 19.³⁹² This attack was planned for the night of 14 August 1916 and was part of a wider operation that crossed the boundary between II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps, as the operation of 8 August had. Once again the cooperation across the boundary line was minimal for II Corps. While 1st Anzac Corps was to push forward to a line as far as 400 yards away in some cases, II Corps would support them by pushing forward 'a strong bombing attack... with a view to joining up with the left of the [1st Anzac Corps] attack.'³⁹³ This bombing attack was to

³⁹² 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 19', 13 August 1916, WO 95/518.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

be pushed up an existing but as yet uncaptured trench 400 yards to the north west of Skyline Trench.

If this plan sounds familiar, it is because it is almost exactly the same as previous operations devised by Reserve Army. The objective line was different, but the method of a stronger attack by 1st Anzac Corps with a weak supporting attack on the left flank by II Corps was exactly the same tactic that had caused problems on 8 August. In that particular operation the 7th Suffolks had suffered from the lack of an artillery barrage to protect their advance, causing heavy casualties and preventing the battalion from reaching its objective. This plan differed only in that the corps further to the left of Reserve Army's line was to cooperate to discharge gas and smoke in the direction of the German trenches if the weather permitted.³⁹⁴ Reserve Army's objective as given in Operation Order No. 19 was set to extend the salient. The greatest advance was to be made by the 51st Battalion in the centre of the line. This battalion was to have advanced some 400 yards and force 1st Anzac Corps to turn back a defensive flank on the right. This would add some 450 yards to the front line in their sector. There is no evidence in official papers that there was any recognition that this would stretch 1st Anzac Corps further, despite complaints that at 1200 yards the line was already 'considerable for the troops available' according to 1st Anzac Corps headquarters.

In the event the objective was modified a number of times, the first by Reserve Army to reduce the distance of the objective on the left.³⁹⁵ The objective line there now began at the current position of the line before advancing away to Mouquet Farm.

³⁹⁴ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 19', 13 August 1916, WO 95/518.

³⁹⁵ MacMullen, HQ Reserve Army to II Corps et al, 14 August 1916, AWM 26/42/3.

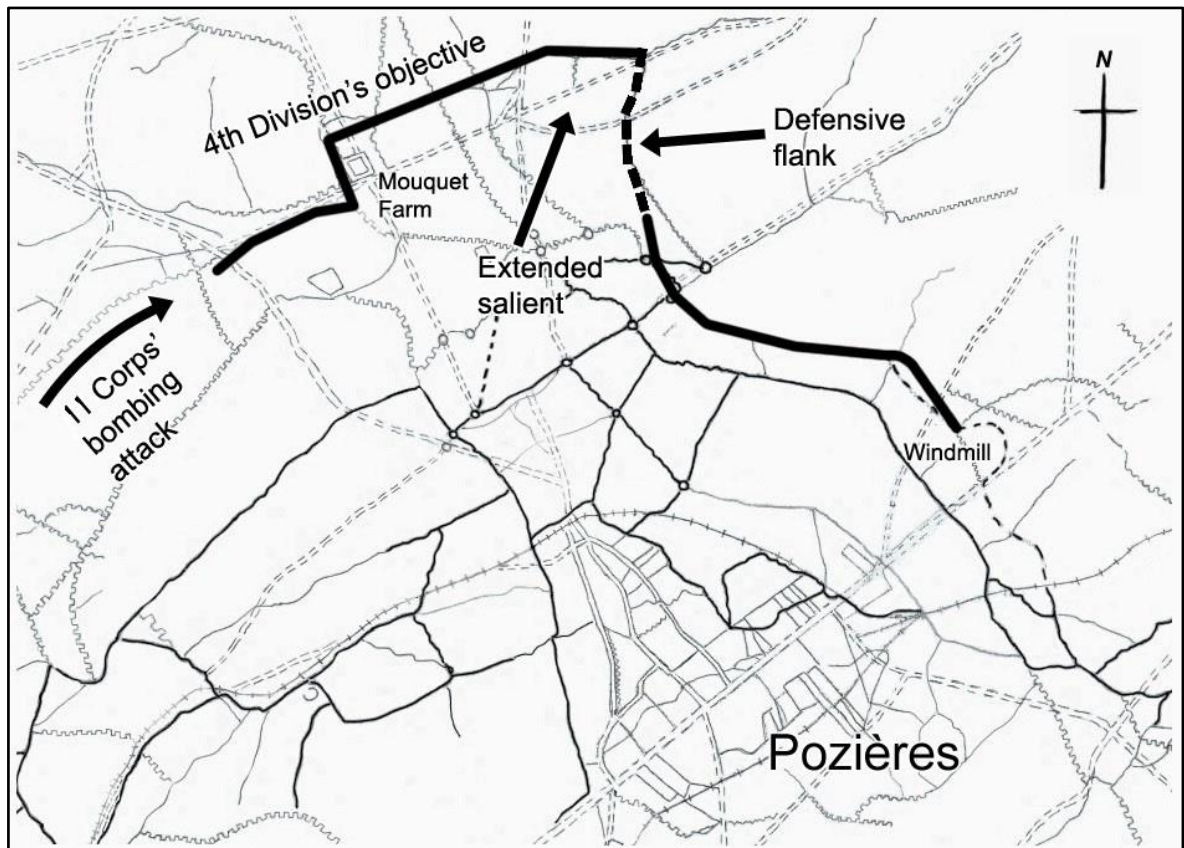
Birdwood did not modify the line further as it passed orders down to division, but instead rather passively left it to Major General Cox to decide whether or not the new operation should include the farm itself.³⁹⁶ Cox decided to exclude it by further shortening the distance to the objective.³⁹⁷ And so yet another operation conducted by 1st Anzac Corps omitted the most significant defensive feature of the immediate vicinity. The main part of the advance was to be made by the 51st Battalion at the apex of the salient. The advance here as laid down by Reserve Army did not change, and the 51st Battalion continued to make the biggest forward leap of the operation with an objective as much as 400-450 yards away. The end result of all this was that if the plan succeeded, the line would continue to form a sharp salient – Birdwood’s original objection to the position of his corps.

The left sector of this operation made even less sense than the continued advance at the apex. Here the 13th Battalion, instead of taking Mouquet Farm, as it had originally been designed to do, would now, if successful, end up skirting around the south side of the farm. But further modifications to the left of the 13th Battalion can only be described as bizarre. On the boundary with II Corps, where the 50th Battalion held the line, the plan was for the men in the jumping off trench to leave their position and move back 250 yards to facilitate a close barrage. The battalion’s objective then became their own original front line positions. The 50th Battalion formed a link between the bombing attack of the 145th British Brigade to their left and the advance of the 13th Battalion on their right, but there was simply no need for them to move.

³⁹⁶ ‘1st A. & N.Z.A. Corps Order No. 24 by Lieut.-General Sir W.R. Birdwood,’ 14 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

³⁹⁷ ‘4th Australian Divisional Order No. 16,’ 14 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

The plan for them to participate in the operation with such reduced objectives made no sense at all.



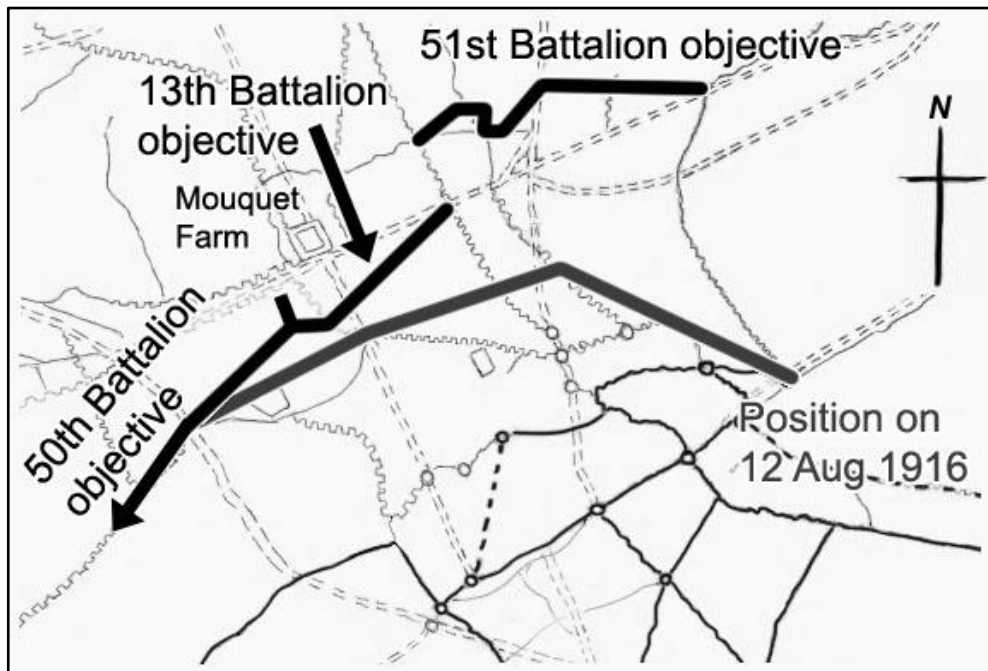
Map 22. Reserve Army's objectives and the extended salient.

The reason for the reduction in the objective on the left appears to have been a series of concerted German counter-attacks against the 145th Brigade in the area of the corps boundary between II Corps and the 1st Anzac Corps.³⁹⁸ Most of these counter-attacks were unsuccessful. A more serious assault on the night of 13 August pushed the British out of Skyline Trench and the adjacent Sixth Avenue for a period of time.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ 1st Anzac Corps War Diary, entry for 14 August 1916, AWM 26/50/16.

³⁹⁹ '4th Australian Division Operations Summary for Week Ending 18/7/16 [sic],' 18 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 3.

The Germans then retained control of two points on the junction of the Australian and British line. The 12th British Division had been relieved earlier that day, and as a result of the counter-attacks and ongoing heavy German artillery fire, plans for attacks to coordinate with the Australian operation 'did not mature'.⁴⁰⁰ Even before



Map 23. Objective for 14 August after final modification.

before the German counter-attacks became more frequent, there was continued uncertainty over just how well the line was established in this area. On the morning of 13 August Lieutenant Colonel Tilney had reported that it was 'impossible to define [my] exact position owing to obliteration of landmark and trenches'.⁴⁰¹ This is the area in which the objective was modified for the Australian attack. The reduction in the objective on the left may have dealt with uncertainty felt about the situation in

⁴⁰⁰ 48th Div. War Diary, entry for 13 August 1916, WO 95/2745. The 48th Division had relieved the 12th Division earlier that day.

⁴⁰¹ Message ST.271 from Tilney (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 13 August 1916, 9.15am, AWM 26/60/6.

this sector, but did nothing to flatten the salient, or deal with 1st Anzac Corps headquarters' concern about the extension of its front line. II Corps' participation was reduced further to pushing forward 'strong offensive patrols'; it would only occupy trenches found to be empty, instead of actively joining the larger operation.⁴⁰² As always, although some significant problems were thrown up with the planned attack for 14 August, Gough, in his impetuosity, much preferred to push on rather than reassess or rewrite (and therefore delay) his plans.

The final plan consisted of an operation that was reduced to a degree that defied operational logic at all. The main thrust of the attack advanced the line 400 yards in a direction that was only vaguely related to the encirclement of Thiepval as envisaged by Reserve Army earlier in the campaign. It also extended 1st Anzac Corps' line, despite Birdwood and his staff considering their troops thinly stretched as it was. The most serious concern, however, was that the areas of greatest resistance received the least attention. On the left of the line the Germans were resolutely and repeatedly conducting counter-attacks, and seriously destabilising the British line. Mouquet Farm was also a significant threat that had been repeatedly demonstrated to be a considerable obstacle full of Germans with machine guns and troops. These would be left slightly behind the advance of the 51st Battalion should all go to plan, and could threaten the newly-advanced line with enfilade fire. None of this was taken into account, nor was it raised as either a potential problem before the operation went ahead, or a factor that had been of concern in after-action reports. The weaknesses in not pushing the attack on the left or simply in advancing too far on the right went unnoticed.

⁴⁰² MacMullen for Major-General GS, Reserve Army, 14 August 1916, AWM 26/63/11.

This situation is particularly noticeable in relation to Mouquet Farm. Mouquet Farm is a familiar name to Australians interested in the history of the First World War even today, and has a sort of iconic presence in many later studies as 'Moo-Cow Farm' or 'Mucky Farm',⁴⁰³ a place of great significance to Australian soldiers of the Great War. It was certainly a significant feature of the battlefield, particularly once the village of Pozières was secured. But Mouquet Farm was simply never a significant feature of operational orders. Even three or four weeks after the Australians began operations along Pozières Ridge Mouquet Farm was not an objective, and those who may have thought they were attacking the farm were simply attacking in the direction of it. Mouquet Farm itself remained beyond all objectives and therefore strictly out of reach. Even on the rare occasions it appeared in Reserve Army orders there was no acknowledgement that this position was different from any other part of the stated objective. It was simply not accorded the particular attention it required as a threat to the projected advance. Bizarrely, Mouquet Farm seems to have been almost wilfully ignored by 1st Anzac Corps.

And yet the farm was well known to be a hub of German infantry activity, with large numbers of soldiers repeatedly seen moving towards it.⁴⁰⁴ In early August a map had been drawn of the farm using information from an old French woman who was a

⁴⁰³ While both Charlton and Bennet, and other less academic Australian works such as those published on the internet, state with confidence that Mouquet Farm was always known to the Australians as 'Moo-cow Farm' or 'Mucky Farm', neither term is present in any orders, reports, messages or any other official documents relating to operations in the area. Soldiers were more likely to render the name of the farm "Mokay," "Mouquette" or "Mouque", and even then these spelling errors decrease as the soldiers became more familiar with the name. More persisted in using the French name 'Ferme du Mouquet'.

⁴⁰⁴ '1st Anzac Corps Summary (Intelligence) No. 14. From 6pm on 6th to 6pm on 7th August, 1916, Part I,' AWM 26/52/4.

refugee from the area, but that information had yet to be widely disseminated.⁴⁰⁵ Counter attacks, some of considerable size, were reported to have been launched from the rubble of the farm compound on more than one occasion.⁴⁰⁶ On 11 August a strong German counter attack against the 16th Battalion issued from the destroyed buildings, with observers reporting the 'enemy leaving Mouquet Farm in large numbers... leaving the farm and spreading fanwise [to form] a thick line'.⁴⁰⁷ This defensive network was a serious problem to any future advance – much more than Point 78 had ever been – and yet its capture was only implied in infantry orders through the placement of the objective line. It was photographed from the air on a number of occasions,⁴⁰⁸ and every now and then had some mortar rounds aimed at it.⁴⁰⁹ The Heavy Artillery also used it as a kind of practice target and scored a number of direct hits.⁴¹⁰ But no special measures to attack it had ever been incorporated into infantry orders, and on the occasions the farm dropped out of the objective line, no particular procedures seem to have been taken to maintain a safe distance until it could be dealt with. Should the 13th Battalion's operation succeed, their front line would be less than 10 yards from the ruined walls of Mouquet Farm's buildings.

The attack on 14 August with its reduced objective line was, as always, planned to be conducted under an artillery barrage. The barrage for the operation would take place in three lifts. It would begin on the road running along the southern face of the farm

⁴⁰⁵ '1st Anzac Corps Summary (Intelligence) No. 14. From 6pm on 6th to 6pm on 7th August, 1916, Part I,' AWM 26/52/4.

⁴⁰⁶ '1st Anzac Corps Summary of Operations for Period 4th to 11th August, 1916,' p.2, AWM 26/50/16.

⁴⁰⁷ 'Report on Enemy Attack on 16th Bn 11-8-16,' 12 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴⁰⁸ '1st Anzac Corps Summary (Intelligence) No. 14. From 6pm on 6th to 6pm on 7th August, 1916, Part II,' AWM 26/52/4.

⁴⁰⁹ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 16,' 14 August 1916, AWM 26/59/6.

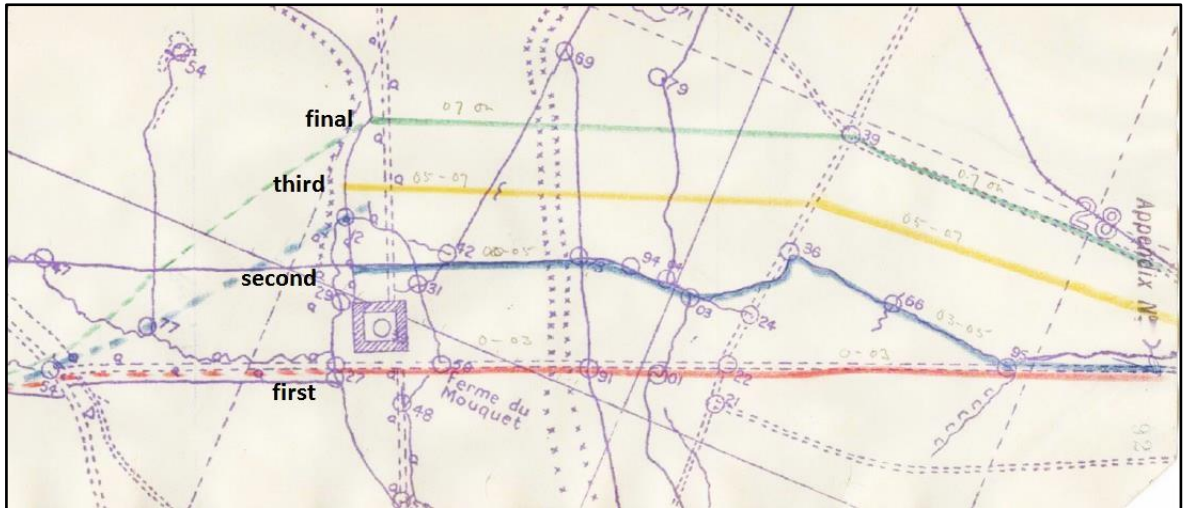
⁴¹⁰ 'Extracts from War Diary 45th Heavy Artillery Group, Subperiod from 7th to 15th August 1916,' AWM 26/50/4.

buildings at 10pm. After three minutes it would lift 100 yards to just beyond the farm buildings for two minutes, then another 100 lift for another two minutes, and finally, seven minutes into the attack, it would fall on a line about 200-250 yards to the north of the farm buildings, or as much as 300 yards from the objective line.⁴¹¹ Mouquet Farm would receive one bombardment by heavy trench mortars at an unspecified time,⁴¹² but otherwise received no special attention from the artillery, the barrage lifts of which were mostly directed beyond it. Given the failure of trench mortars in recent operations, this was entirely inadequate. But worse than this, the artillery plans bore almost no resemblance to those of the infantry. The closest point of correlation between the two was the 51st Battalion. In most places the 51st Battalion had the benefit of their objective being under the second lift of the barrage, giving them the cover of one lift as they crossed no man's land. That first fall of the barrage was almost 400 yards from their jumping off trench, however, and so even this small 'benefit' was of no use at all. The 13th Battalion's objective was mostly around 80-100 yards short of even the first fall of the barrage, and so they would never be able to closely work with the artillery plan. As for the 50th Battalion's sector, in which the infantry was being withdrawn in order to facilitate a close-falling barrage, there were no concrete orders given for the barrage at all. The barrage map indicates through some dotted lines that it was unlikely to fall anywhere near the infantry at all.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ 'Time Table for Attack on Night of 14th/15th August 1916', and barrage map attached, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

⁴¹² '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 16,' 14 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

⁴¹³ 'Time Table for Attack on Night of 14th/15th August 1916', and barrage map attached, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.



Map 24. Artillery barrage map for operation of 14 August 1916.⁴¹⁴

Reserve Army had ordered that at 'Zero an intense fire of 18-pounders at the highest possible rate consistent with accuracy will open on the whole front of attack' but that the 'details as regards the actual distance behind the objectives of assault to which the barrage is to be lifted finally will be mutually settled by the GOC's RA⁴¹⁵ of the Corps concerned'.⁴¹⁶ This means that this inadequately applied artillery barrage was the work of 1st Anzac Corps. But the barrage was then further weakened by Cox as commander of the 4th Division. The Germans were known to be using advanced posts in order to break up infantry attacks, and so Reserve Army had arranged for 'an advanced barrage by 18pdr guns... to form part of the attack by the 4th Australian Division on the night of the 14th August'.⁴¹⁷ There had been no chance to bombard the objective for any period of time before the attack due to the nightly operations of the division, although strong points like Mouquet Farm and the Quarry had been

⁴¹⁴ AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2

⁴¹⁵ General Officers Commanding the Royal Artillery.

⁴¹⁶ 'Artillery Instructions No. 21. Reference Reserve Army Operation Order No. 19,' 13 August 1916, p.3, WO 95/518.

⁴¹⁷ Malcolm to 1st Anzac Corps, 16 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

bombarded on at least four occasions before 12 August.⁴¹⁸ But Cox determined that he would prefer the German front line to receive as much of the main barrage as possible, and specifically requested that this arrangement be altered. The number of guns firing this advanced barrage was therefore reduced from forty eight to sixteen.⁴¹⁹ This left few guns to deal with any advanced posts established by the Germans until the infantry stumbled upon them as they crossed no man's land.

The infantry plan was quite straightforward and was to take place in two waves. At 10pm, as the artillery barrage commenced, the first wave moved forward and prepared to rush the trenches as the barrage lifted.⁴²⁰ The line they rushed was the final objective, so again the only role the second wave of infantry had left to play was close support to the first wave. Once again, aside from a small portion of the line at the far right of the attack, every lift of the artillery barrage would take place beyond the infantry operation. The first lift took the barrage beyond Mouquet Farm, the strongest point of German resistance in the line. And so while this operation was on the surface an integrated plan between the artillery and the infantry, yet again it shows that the 4th Australian Division failed to grasp the true purpose of lifting artillery barrages – to accompany the infantry as they crossed no man's land. The division continued to apply firepower, but failed to integrate it with its infantry plan beyond a shared 'zero hour' between the two. Instead of protection from German machine guns and rifles, the best the infantry could hope for was that the inadequate barrage would prevent German reinforcements reaching the front line, but, given 1st Anzac Corps Intelligence was not yet aware that Mouquet Farm could provide

⁴¹⁸ 'Artillery Order No. 5 by GOCRA, 1st ANZAC,' 12 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

⁴¹⁹ Malcolm to 1st Anzac Corps, 16 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

⁴²⁰ '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Operation Order No. 8,' 14 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

reinforcements for the German line via an extended system of tunnels, they could not know that even this slim hope was in vain.

The infantry were in place and ready to go on time, and so at 10pm on the night of 14 August the operation commenced. Almost immediately it was evident that on the right of the line, where the 51st Battalion was making the longest advance, the barrage had been almost completely ineffective. This was the sector in which the barrage started 400 yards from the jumping-off trench. D Company, in reserve, recorded 'four enemy Machine Guns were still firing at the time' that the other three companies moved forward.⁴²¹ Unsurprisingly, A Company on the farthest right of the advance failed completely. B Company on the left and C Company in the centre made an advance to within 60 yards of a previously uncharted German trench, probably near their objective, and attempted to dig in on a front of 300 yards.⁴²² With them were some Lewis gunners,⁴²³ but even this extra fire power could not protect the group from 'very deadly' rifle and machine gun fire that had not been suppressed at all by the inadequate barrage. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Murray Ross, commanding the 51st Battalion, could only make the assessment that 'there was little chance of the line being held at day-break'.⁴²⁴ The final straw was when the officer commanding B Company realised that he was no longer in touch with the 13th Battalion on his left, and so retired. As the post operation report states:

this exposed the whole line and a general retirement was ordered –
lack of support on the left and the weak numbers at the objective

⁴²¹ '51st Battalion Operation Report August 13th -17th 1916', 15 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Summary of Operations, Period 12th to 16th August inclusive,' 20 August 1916, AWM 4/23/13/7.

⁴²⁴ '51st Battalion Operation Report August 13th -17th 1916,' 15 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

decided [the officer commanding B Company] to come away. Several detachments however dug in at various points and held on; these had to come away by daybreak on the morning of the 15th.⁴²⁵

The 51st Battalion's operation had failed completely, simply the result of an artillery barrage that was too distant from the jumping-off trench to provide any protection for the infantry in the field at all.

In the centre Tilney, commanding the 13th Battalion had, as ordered, attacked in two waves. Three companies attacked side by side, with two platoons of each company in each attacking wave. Although they, too, got away in good time, as they advanced the first wave of infantry came across an unexpected trench about seventy five yards from the 'hopping out trench', which delayed their advance. Another trench 150 yards further on was captured by A Company, who found it to be full of Germans. Around the same time Captain Pulling reported from the front of the advance that he had 'eleven Fritzes here, a machine gun [has also been] captured and destroyed.'⁴²⁶ Captain Hugh Pulling was still acting as the main focus of the messages and plans of the 13th Battalion. His continued cheerfulness and reliability both in sending and receiving messages and in organising men of both his and neighbouring companies were an important factor in the cohesion of the 13th Battalion both during the operation itself and during the period of consolidation that followed. A message from 13th Battalion headquarters in reply to him stated '[f]rom all accounts we have done excellently... The boys must have done wonders'.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ '51st Battalion Operation Report August 13th -17th 1916,' 15 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴²⁶ Message from Pulling, (OC D Coy 13th Bn) to OC 13th Bn, 14 August 1916, 11.15pm, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴²⁷ Message from 13th Bn to Pulling (OC D Coy 13th Bn), 14 August 1916, 11.55pm, AWM 26/60/6.

It was becoming clear that the 13th Brigade had neglected some of its reconnaissance duties. When it became apparent to brigade staff that their unit was about to be sent into the line, they had sent a number of officers forward to reconnoitre the road to Pozières Cemetery through Mash Valley.⁴²⁸ Knowledge of this route was clearly important for any unit entering the battlefield, but there is no evidence of widespread reconnaissance any further forward, or of potential objectives or German strongpoints, or indeed of a broad dissemination of any of this sort of information to subordinate officers. Specialist units made a point of reconnoitring prior to the attack: for example the 13th Australian Machine Gun Company made sure all officers saw the position of guns to be taken over and the officer commanding the 4th Australian Machine Gun Company consulted about his experience in the line.⁴²⁹ But it cannot be assumed that this higher level of preparation also occurred in the infantry units. During the battle this became increasingly apparent, with the 51st Battalion digging in along a line they could not locate in relation to the original objective, and the 13th Battalion coming across unexpected trenches and obstacles on their way. This was particularly frustrating for the 13th Battalion who were operating in a different brigade to their home unit. Whereas the 4th Brigade was particularly diligent in its preparation and reconnaissance, the 13th Brigade was proving that it was much less so.

Having managed to advance through several unexpected obstacles, the 13th Battalion found itself increasingly isolated. The congratulatory message to Captain Pulling

⁴²⁸ 51st Bn War Diary, entry for 9 August 1916, AWM 4/23/68/6.

⁴²⁹ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 13th AMGC, 10 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

about having 'done wonders' carried the added warning, '[b]e careful old chap as 51st and 50th don't seem to have met with same success'.⁴³⁰ Shortly afterwards, around midnight, it was confirmed that

neither [of] the two flank Battalions had come up, and that in consequence our right and left flanks were exposed. [At] 12.45am [we were] heavily counter-attacked from front and flanks compelled to retire onto our original lines.⁴³¹

Pulling proved to be the only hope the battalion command had of fixing the situation. He had been the most reliable in maintaining lines of communication and getting regular situation reports back to battalion headquarters, and therefore was given the responsibility of steadying the rest of the battalion. He was advised to 'try and get word to front to consolidate what they take, and if flanks (50th and 51st) do not come up to build strong points on flanks with Lewis Guns'.⁴³² Pulling reported around midnight that 'reports [have] come in from [the] 51st Battalion who don't seem to be advancing at all and rather disorganised,' and at the same time that the 'enemy seems quiet'.⁴³³ The reason for the quietness soon became apparent when the Germans counter-attacked in force. Pulling's next situation report read

I have to report that all our men have had to return to our original trenches owing to the fact that there was no one on either flank and a counter-attack in force drove our men out... the stunt has eventuated into a very successful raid on our part as we killed a lot – captured a number of men and one machine gun but owing to flanks we have

⁴³⁰ Message from 13th Bn to Pulling (OC D Coy 13th Bn), 14 August 1916, 11.55pm, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴³¹ Message ST.290 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 15 August 1916, 1.14am, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴³² Message from 13th Bn to Pulling, 14 August 1916, 11.55pm, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴³³ Message from Pulling to OC 13th Bn, dated 14th August 1916, midnight (should read 15 August 1916), AWM 26/60/6.

gained no ground. We are ready for any eventuality now and awaiting further orders from you.⁴³⁴

Isolated and under pressure, there was little else Pulling and the men of the 13th Battalion could do. Tilney reported '[a]m further strengthening original position as far as possible owing to [the] exhausted condition of [the] battalion. Our strength [is] now well under 400'.⁴³⁵ The 51st Battalion's failure to advance had caused the problem on the 13th Battalion's right, but on the left the 13th similarly could not make contact with the 50th Battalion. Completely disconnected, Tilney had had no other option but to complete their withdrawal.

What had happened on the left of the 13th Battalion? On 14 August the 50th Battalion had had the hardest time of the three. Not only had their preliminary operation failed on the far left the night before, but they had been on the receiving end of a German counter attack during the day which resulted in heavy machine gun fire being brought to bear on them from the left.⁴³⁶ Their position from the outset of the operation was 'badly enfiladed and [came] in for heavy shelling'.⁴³⁷ Some troops had to be evacuated from the left of the line before the main operation went ahead.⁴³⁸ A 'terrific bombardment' was kept up on their lines all day with 'enemy guns blowing trenches and saps to pieces'. This resulted in 45 men being killed and another 105 wounded before midday.⁴³⁹ The barrage also wreaked havoc on the battalion's ability to keep up the supply of food, water and ammunition to the front line. Out of a party of

⁴³⁴ Message from Pulling (OC D Coy 13th Bn) to OC 13th Bn, dated 14th August 1916, 12.15am (should read 15 August 1916), AWM 26/60/6.

⁴³⁵ Message ST.290 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 15 August 1916, 1.14am, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴³⁶ '50th Battalion Summary of Intelligence Received,' 15 August 1916, p.4, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴³⁷ Message EK.39 from 50th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 2.50am, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴³⁸ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 14 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴³⁹ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 50th Bn, 14 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

sixteen men sent to get water and food to the front line in the afternoon, fifteen became casualties before they could complete their task.⁴⁴⁰ Water became particularly scarce in all parts of the 50th Battalion's line, and messages frequently mention the desperate thirst of the men in the front line.

50th Battalion headquarters was heavily shelled throughout the afternoon and into the evening of 14 August. The battalion received a further blow in the form of the evacuation of their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick William Hurcombe, with shell shock around 6pm.⁴⁴¹ Hurcombe was an experienced soldier who had been commissioned in the South Australian Garrison Artillery in 1894, served as a major in the Boer War and was the original second in command of the 10th Battalion on its formation. He served in this capacity with the 10th Battalion throughout the Gallipoli campaign, following which he was appointed commander of the 50th Battalion. However, after thirty six hours of shellfire at Mouquet Farm his nerves gave out and the 49-year-old officer was evacuated, never to return to the front line.⁴⁴² The situation of the 50th Battalion was dire before the operation even began.

Command of the 50th Battalion was taken over by Major Ross Blyth Jacob. He inherited a situation in which one of his companies was completely isolated and another contained only thirty five men by the time the attack began. They were

⁴⁴⁰ '50th Battalion Summary of Intelligence Received,' 15 August 1916, p.4, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁴¹ Message BM.411 from Ridley (Bde.-Maj. 13th Bde) to 4th Aust. Div., 14 August 1916, 3.00am, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁴² R.R. Freeman, *Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred: A Memorial History of the 50th Battalion AIF 1916-1919*. Norwood: Peacock Publications, 1991. p.1.

hungry, thirsty and shell-shocked, but despite this the men of the 50th Battalion was able to move into their makeshift jumping off trench on time and moved forward as ordered. They were also largely able to reach their objective in good time. However, the artillery barrage continued to fall too close to their position instead of moving on to that of the German defenders. As a result, almost as soon as they left their trench the men of the 50th ran into heavy rifle and machine gun fire which had not been subdued by the artillery barrage. Having lost touch with the 13th Battalion and therefore having dangerously unsupported flanks, the 50th Battalion, too, was forced to retire.⁴⁴³

There had been tension between 13th Battalion and the 50th Battalion since their first joint operation under 4th Brigade command. During that operation, the 50th Battalion had reported that their objective had been gained.⁴⁴⁴ But, the 13th Battalion staff felt that the 50th had not reached their objective and that as a result they had had been forced to throw back their left flank to connect with them.⁴⁴⁵ Captain Pulling was advised to 'do all you can to push the 50th along'⁴⁴⁶ despite the fact that the 50th Battalion staff stubbornly maintained that they were in the right place. The 13th Battalion reported that they were 'compelled to throw back our left to connect with 50th Battalion who said they were perfectly sure they had reached their objective.'⁴⁴⁷ Both battalions had proven more than willing to blame the other for any problems they encountered, and regularly sniped about each other through messages to

⁴⁴³ '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Summary of Operations, Period 12th to 16th August inclusive,' 20 August 1916, AWM 4/23/13/7.

⁴⁴⁴ Message G.321 from 4th Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps, 12 August 1916, 3.15am, AWM 26/59/6.

⁴⁴⁵ Message ST.270 from 13th Bn to 4th Bde, 13 August 1916, 7.55am, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴⁴⁶ Message from 13th Bn to Pulling (OC D Coy 13th Bn), 13 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/60/6.

⁴⁴⁷ Message ST.286 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 11.05am, AWM 26/60/6.

brigade headquarters. The relationship between the 13th and the 50th Battalions had become so bad that the two could not communicate effectively before the operation even began.

In order for the upcoming operation to go ahead, the front line had been reorganised on 13 August, in part to give the 13th Battalion more room.⁴⁴⁸ But the 13th Battalion's front trenches became seriously congested when their line shortened to only 200 yards by sideways movement of the 50th and 51st Battalions. Tilney reported

Find now that owing to congestion in trenches my frontage is only about 200 yards. Am squeezed in on both flanks by 50th & 51st Battalions. 51st Battalion is also congested with three Companies in front.⁴⁴⁹

Note that this message excuses the situation of the 51st Battalion by stating that their trenches too were overcrowded. The entire situation, in Tilney's eyes, was the fault of the 50th Battalion. He clearly stated that the '50th Battalion were unable to hand over more than 200 yards of frontage last night and as a result we are hopelessly jammed between 50th and 51st Battalions with all communications choked'.⁴⁵⁰ Pulling, who had long since become the primary conduit of information into and out of the 13th Battalion's sector was contacted to say

the Colonel wants you to squeeze in as much as you can to the left of hopping out trench... We will get in touch with 50th and try and

⁴⁴⁸ Message BM.370 from Ridley (Bde.-Maj. 13th Bde) to 51st, 13th and 50th Bs 13 August 1916, 5.20pm, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁴⁹ Message ST.285 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 10.55am, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴⁵⁰ Message ST.286 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 11.05am, AWM 26/60/6.

make them move, but in meantime see what “Chook”⁴⁵¹ can do by talking to the company commander on his left.⁴⁵²

The disorganised 50th Battalion only reluctantly moved its companies to the left after brigade intervention, earning them no friends on their right. The battalion was showing significant signs of demoralisation, and would deteriorate further before the battle began.

The 50th Battalion were counter attacked by German troops in the early hours of 14 August, and the 13th Battalion were ordered to ‘assist 50th Battalion if demanded’.⁴⁵³ Given the already exhausted and over-extended condition of the 13th Battalion troops, this was trying news indeed. The 50th Battalion in the meantime were exhorted on a number of occasions during the counter attack to ‘hang on’ by 13th Brigade headquarters, and seems to have been in some danger of crumbling altogether.⁴⁵⁴ On at least one occasion the 50th Battalion headquarters sent the 13th Battalion a message encoded according to the 13th Brigade code book – a brigade the 13th did not belong to, and could not be expected to hold the codes for. The 13th Battalion sent a snippy reply to the effect that ‘we have not a copy of your code but were able to get a glimpse of that of [the] 51st Battalion’.⁴⁵⁵ The 50th was suffering the most from shell fire and the attendant shell shock due to being the closest to the German artillery batteries at Thiepval which could enfilade their lines. Their left flank was further threatened by a loss of contact with the British division on the left, which,

⁴⁵¹ Probably Captain John Keith Henderson, OC C Coy, 13th Bn.

⁴⁵² Message from 13th Bn to Pulling (OC D Coy 13th Bn), 14 August 1916, AWM: EXDOC022.

⁴⁵³ Message BM.391 from Ridley (Bde.-Maj. 13th Bde) to 13th Bn, 14 August 1916, 3.35am, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁵⁴ For example, message BM.392 from Ridley to 50th Bn, 14 August 1916, 3.35am, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁵⁵ Message ST.289 from 13th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 3.30pm, AWM 26/60/6.

it was felt, was 'not keeping touch as well as they may'.⁴⁵⁶ Some officers of the 50th, both at headquarters and in the field, were seriously shaken by their situation and increasingly began to use the word 'anxiety' in their messages in reference to various situations. The loss of Hurcombe only worsened the situation, and the staff work at headquarters began to suffer.

But the morale of the 50th Battalion would sink even lower, and would result in perhaps the most serious incident in the field in 1st Anzac Corps' time at Pozières. Just prior to the operation on 14 August, headquarters of the 13th Battalion received a worrying report, which said

We hear from [our] front Company that Major Herbert of 50th Bn states that he will not move forward to-night. Can you confirm as this action would jeopardise the whole operation. Please treat as very urgent.⁴⁵⁷

Major Mervyn James Herbert was in command of B Company with Lieutenant Victor Gillard Driden as second in command, and Lieutenant Randall Lance Rhodes as his staff. They were situated on the right flank of the 50th Battalion's sector on the boundary with the 13th Battalion. At about 8.30pm on 14 August Dridan's arm was shot off and he was forced to lie in a shell hole in the front line for some thirty six hours before he could be evacuated for help.⁴⁵⁸ Dridan was hit at around the time B Company would have received word of Hurcombe's evacuation due to shell shock.

⁴⁵⁶ Message from 50th Bn to 13th Bde, 14 August 1916, 6.22am, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁵⁷ Message ST.288 from 13th Bn to OC 50th Bn, 14 August 1916, 9.10pm, AWM 26/60/6.

⁴⁵⁸ Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, Lieutenant Victor Gillard Dridan, 50th Bn, AWM 1DRL/0428. Dridan was later stretchered out but a shell struck his party, killing the stretcher bearers. Although Dridan ran the rest of the way to the casualty clearing station, he died of his wounds shortly afterwards.

Lance Rhodes had been buried and unburied by shell fire four times that night, displaying 'great bravery and coolness under heavy fire' before having to be evacuated with a serious wound to his shoulder.⁴⁵⁹ He remained remarkably cheerful and even sent an optimistic message to Herbert to say '[e]verything going well. Have stopped three different pieces of shell with great success,'⁴⁶⁰ but he became badly shell shocked and had to be evacuated. Rhodes later recalled walking out of the front line surprised to find himself 'crying to myself as if my heart would break; the tears were running down my face and you would have thought I was a kid of two that had lost a lollie'.⁴⁶¹ These blows, combined with a lack of supplies and the severe shell fire contributed to a rising sense of panic in B Company, ultimately leading to the allegation that Herbert was going to refuse to advance.

Although a great deal of time and effort was spent in gauging 'morale' during the First World War, it was not often that a situation this desperate arose in the AIF immediately preceding an operation. Tilney, in receipt of the news, wrote to Hurcombe, not realising he was no longer in command.

Dear Colonel Hurcombe,

One of my Company Commanders on my left flank has reported that one of your Company Commanders (Major Herbert) states he will not advance tonight. If this happens it will jeopardise the whole operation. Colonel Ross suggested my writing you a private note re

⁴⁵⁹ Recommendation File for Honours and Awards, 4th Aust. Div., AWM 28/1/180.

⁴⁶⁰ Message from Rhodes to Herbert, 14 August 1916, 4pm. Private collection courtesy of Ashley Ekins.

⁴⁶¹ Captain [sic] Lance Rhodes in Freeman, *Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred*, p.64.

the matter. Could you take steps to ensure that the Company advances. I understand it is the Company on your Right flank.

Yours, L.E. Tilney.⁴⁶²

The situation seems to have been dealt with privately, if at all. Certainly the event was not made public, and no reports of it exist at a higher level of command. There is no evidence that anything was done in the confusion of last-minute preparations and the change of command at 50th Battalion headquarters. Neither is there any direct evidence to say whether or not Herbert went ahead with his determination to deliberately hold back the advance.

Despite any direct evidence of desertion or mutiny of its commander, B Company of the 50th Battalion did not do well. Captain Harold Edwin Salisbury Armitage, the officer commanding C Company, later reported that

Major Herbert must have become a casualty early in the shelling for a block ensued at [the] head of [his] company – in fact it almost amounted to a panic. I ran forward to find out what was wrong and found men running in all directions. I steadied them and tried to find D Company but was unsuccessful. I found the quarry and started with great difficulty to form the line up. We were under severe fire from artillery (not barrage) and a machine gun on the left was causing trouble – result many casualties. We stayed about twenty or thirty minutes trying to get in... considering the casualties, the fire, and the fact that I was not connected to any flank, and also the slow

⁴⁶² Message from Tilney (OC 13th Bn) to Hurcombe (OC 50th Bn), August 1916, 8.14pm, AWM 26/60/6.

progress made – I decided to return to our original position. This I did and consolidated especially the left... Are we likely to be relieved today – the men are deplorably knocked about.⁴⁶³

In Armitage's own words, the 'stunt was very disastrous'.⁴⁶⁴ But even with the extensive problems with shell shock and catastrophically low morale in the 50th Battalion, some exemplary company commanders were able to work hard in the field to stop the 'disastrous stunt' from turning into a rout. Armitage took control of the panic resulting from Major Herbert's disappearance and reorganised the line with Captain Murray Fowler. The two were able to consolidate a line a little short of the objective, and give their precise location back to brigade headquarters.⁴⁶⁵ However, the animosity between the 50th Battalion and the 13th continued, with Armitage complaining that the 13th had 'instead of inking left last night – went straight out to the front' and were therefore to blame for any problems in keeping touch.⁴⁶⁶

What had happened to Major Herbert and his company? This situation was kept very quiet, and no reports in relation to Herbert or his actions are present in the written record of the battle. But Captain Pat Auld later recalled seeing Herbert in a dugout at the quarry, 'sitting at a table surrounded by a gloomy selection of officers and men belonging to technical units, sitting disconsolately in silence.'⁴⁶⁷ Herbert had been active in the line previously, organising his men and keeping them busy to maintain their morale. The behaviour that followed was likely to have been some form of shell

⁴⁶³ Report in message from Armitage (OC C Coy 50th Bn) to 50th Bn, 15 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Captain Pat Auld in Freeman, *Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred*, p.68.

shock. Armitage's report listed Herbert among the missing of the battle, but before the message could be sent Armitage's lieutenant, Noel Loutit, amended the message to say that Herbert was 'all right'.⁴⁶⁸ He had just arrived back just in time to be struck off the missing list.

But there was only so much a company commander could do in the front line to turn a disastrous situation into a successful operation. Neither Armitage with the 50th Battalion, nor Pulling with the 13th, could change the course of an operation with fatal flaws in its plan from the start. Two problems condemned the attack of 14 August. The first was that the artillery barrage was not strong enough to subdue enemy rifle and machine gun fire. From their first attack on 7 August, the 4th Division had been rushed, bullied and propelled into a series of operations resulting in hastily-organised barrages. These barrages were not necessarily particularly weak, but they were swift-moving every time and almost always fully beyond the objective line, providing only a minimum of effective protection to the infantry in the field. The other major problem was that this operation suffered badly from the three battalions in the line failing to keep touch with each other. Some of this was due to the animosity between the 13th and 50th Battalions in particular, but in many cases can be attributed to the simple fact that the centre battalion came from a different brigade and did not share code books with the others. However, given that in most of these operations the infantry could not get ahead due to unsubdued German fire, this is less the fault of the battalion commanders, and more the responsibility of those plotting the inadequate artillery barrages.

⁴⁶⁸ Report in message from Armitage (OC C Coy 50th Bn) to 50th Bn, 15 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/61/15.

The entire situation – rushed attacks, high casualties, heavy shell fire, poor supply lines and confusion in the field – had a terrible effect on the battalions conducting the operation. Casualty figures were extremely high. The 13th Battalion had already been ‘approaching the limit of human endurance’ according to its commanding officer, and many of its surviving men had been several days without any sleep before the operation even went ahead. Their front line was somewhat muddled and had been for a number of days. The 50th Battalion had suffered 341 casualties, including its commanding officer and another six officers, one who would later die of his wounds. The 51st Battalion had lost at least six officers and nearly 300 men dead, wounded, shell-shocked or missing.⁴⁶⁹ Men of all battalions were exhausted, hungry, under incredibly heavy shell fire, and without sleep. The 13th Infantry Brigade was finished, and needed immediate relief.

While the 4th Australian Division began their time in the line with a reasonably well-planned operation conducted by a competent brigade, by the end of their first tour of the front line they had devolved into conducting hasty, ill-prepared operations with artillery support that can only be described as completely inadequate. The commanding officer of the 51st Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Murray Ross, submitted a tactical appreciation of his battalion’s recent fighting. His concern was that ‘many lives are lost in approaching the firing line and to suffer casualties before going into action is very demoralising’. His answer to this problem was to properly consolidate and fix communication trenches before going into action, otherwise, he

⁴⁶⁹ ‘13th Australian Infantry Brigade Amended Casualty Return,’ 21 August 1916, AWM 4/23/13/7. The officer to die was Lt. V.G. Dridan.

said, 'it is a gross mistake to keep on a series of small offensives'.⁴⁷⁰ The rush of small-scale operations did mean that there was a minimum amount of time to prepare between each attack. But the lack of communication trenches prepared in no man's land was only one side of a multi-faceted problem. The unceasing flow of operational orders for small-scale attacks was simply destroying the 4th Division.

1st Anzac Corps Headquarter was aware that the 4th Division would need relief, and that the 1st Division would have to come back into the line 'on or about the 15th' of August.⁴⁷¹ And yet there was no recognition that this flurry of activity had been particularly detrimental to the force. Ross also included in his report the opinion that 'it is sound and quite easy to gradually advance the firing line by means of patrols and strong points put out at night'.⁴⁷² This may have been the case in parts of the line that were not particularly heavily fortified, as in the case of the front facing the 51st Battalion during their recent operations. But small patrols would not reduce the threat from major obstacles like Mouquet Farm. Indeed, Pozières village and the OG Lines had just proven major obstacles to attack that had needed significantly more than active patrolling and quick construction of strongpoints. The consequence of constant raids, patrols and small-scale operations was a force that was as exhausted and demoralised as the 13th Brigade was when the 4th Division was withdrawn. Their supply lines could not be firmly established through the shellfire, the constant need for working parties and the persistently shifting front line, and so they were hungry, thirsty and lacking other vital requirements for their work. There was a constant flow of wounded men coming out of the front line even when the battalions

⁴⁷⁰ '51st Battalion Operation Report August 13th -17th 1916', 15 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

⁴⁷¹ Message S.634 from 1st Anzac Corps to 1st Aust. Div., 12 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/50/16.

⁴⁷² '51st Battalion Operation Report August 13th -17th 1916', 15 August 1916, AWM 26/61/15.

were not attacking anything. The 50th Battalion's experience of shell shock, disorganisation and possible mutiny demonstrated the real dangers of low morale in the field. Units that failed to advance, even a single company, seriously undermined the potential for success of any operation.

Other problems with the approach of the 4th Australian Division went unheeded or misunderstood as well. Although the division appeared to rely heavily on firepower to get its infantry ahead, in fact, the modifications made by Major General Cox to the basic artillery structure supplied from Reserve Army demonstrably weakened the assault on 14 August, and was a direct contributing factor to the failure of the operation. As Reserve Army pointed out, the infantry of I Anzac Corps had

failed on only two occasions. On both those occasions the artillery programme has been altered almost at the last minute, at the request of the Divisional Commanders, and in each case fundamental principles have been disregarded.⁴⁷³

The first of these occasions was the first attack of the 2nd Division against the OG Lines when Legge almost succeeded in launching an attack without artillery cover at all. This, the second occasion where artillery was particularly noted to be responsible for a failed operation, was less the result of a last-minute alteration to part of the plan and more a complete misapplication of the artillery. The barrage was not only too weak and swift-moving, but it completed all of its movements outside of the infantry's area of operations. And the 4th Division had been applying artillery in this manner unnoticed from its first operation. Nevertheless, this warning from Reserve Army was

⁴⁷³ Malcolm to 1st Anzac Corps, 16 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

a clear lesson to be taken forward by the divisions of 1st Anzac Corps. They would have to return to the 'fundamental principles' of artillery application.

But the other consequence of these small-scale operations was success – of a very misleading kind. Certainly the line was always in motion, sometimes 100 yards forward, at other times backwards and then forward again to its original position. But none of the operations conducted by the 4th Australian Division had the potential to advance the line in a significant manner. They did not even deal with the major German defensive work near their line much less advance to any meaningful objective in terms of the wider campaign. The idea that these attacks were a viable tactical alternative to determinedly advancing the line was short-sighted at best, but it was one that would stay. Still, many of the small-scale attacks made by the 4th Division managed to succeed. This was particularly true if they were conducted by the 4th Brigade, who had units who managed to reach 'their objective on five successive nights'.⁴⁷⁴ And so while the actions of the 4th Australian Division had once again reinforced the message that the artillery barrage had to be effective and strong before any measure of success could be achieved in a major operation, the division had also seen a string of limited successes by diminishing the size of the attack. That these successes were on an almost inconsequential scale and came at a high cost in casualties seems to have been an almost trivial factor in assessing one against the other. The 4th Division's period in the front line set an extremely dangerous precedent for the 1st Anzac Corps and its ongoing operations.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Notes on successes of 4th Australian Brigade,' 16 August 1916, AWM 26/60/6.

Reserve Army decided not to renew operations in 1st Anzac Corps' sector until 18 August 1916 to give the 1st Division a chance to relieve the exhausted 4th Australian Division and for 48th Division to 'clear up the situation' in their sector.⁴⁷⁵ But the ongoing problems with getting any form of momentum towards Thiepval from this direction were encouraging Gough to look elsewhere for inspiration. Some of his points to be considered for upcoming operations included concentrations of mortar fire on the points to be attacked and the use of smoke. It was felt that perhaps the Germans, who had 'been attacked very often by night... may be more easily surprised by day,' ⁴⁷⁶ a concept that had been tried a number of times by both the British and French armies, generally with disastrous results. In the desperate search for new ideas, it was suggested that there was a 'possibility of combining an attack over the open from West and South'.⁴⁷⁷ This idea seems to have been originally applied to the situation on the boundary of II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps. It would soon be applied to operations against Thiepval. The efforts of the 1st Anzac Corps, once attention had turned to attacking Thiepval from a different direction, would soon be entirely in vain.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Notes of Conference at II Corps Headquarters, 15/8/16,' 15 August 1916, AWM 26/42/3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 5. 'Our artillery barrage has not lifted sufficiently': The Ever Diminishing Objective Line.

With the 4th and 13th Brigades of the 4th Australian Division exhausted, the division was replaced by the 1st Australian Division, which had seen success a long four weeks earlier when they captured the village of Pozières. Now the division would be called upon to push the line northwards in connection with Reserve Army's articulated plans of 28 July. It will be remembered that these plans focussed on the 12th Division on the left of 1st Anzac Corps being the primary source of movement, with the Anzacs on the right protecting the flank and generally moving 'methodically northwards'.⁴⁷⁸ Accordingly, Reserve Army headquarters ordered an attack to be conducted simultaneously by II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps. The next operation was ordered by Gough to take place on 18 August 1916, the same day as an operation by Fourth Army.⁴⁷⁹ There was potential for this operation to either advance the agenda of the Reserve Army by adhering closely to the plan of 28 July, in which the II Corps would spearhead an attack that would encircle Thiepval and assault it from the north. Or equally the operation could closely adhere to the attack being conducted by Fourth Army on the same day and act in concert to support the right. While Fourth Army's operation did not extend to the boundary between it and Reserve Army, it included the German intermediate line south of Martinpuich, a village a little over four kilometres to the east and north of Pozières.⁴⁸⁰ A synchronised operation by Reserve

⁴⁷⁸ 'Outline of Plan of Attack on Thiepval,' 28 July 1916, WO 158/334.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 20,' 17 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

⁴⁸⁰ 'First Australian Division Order No. 47,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

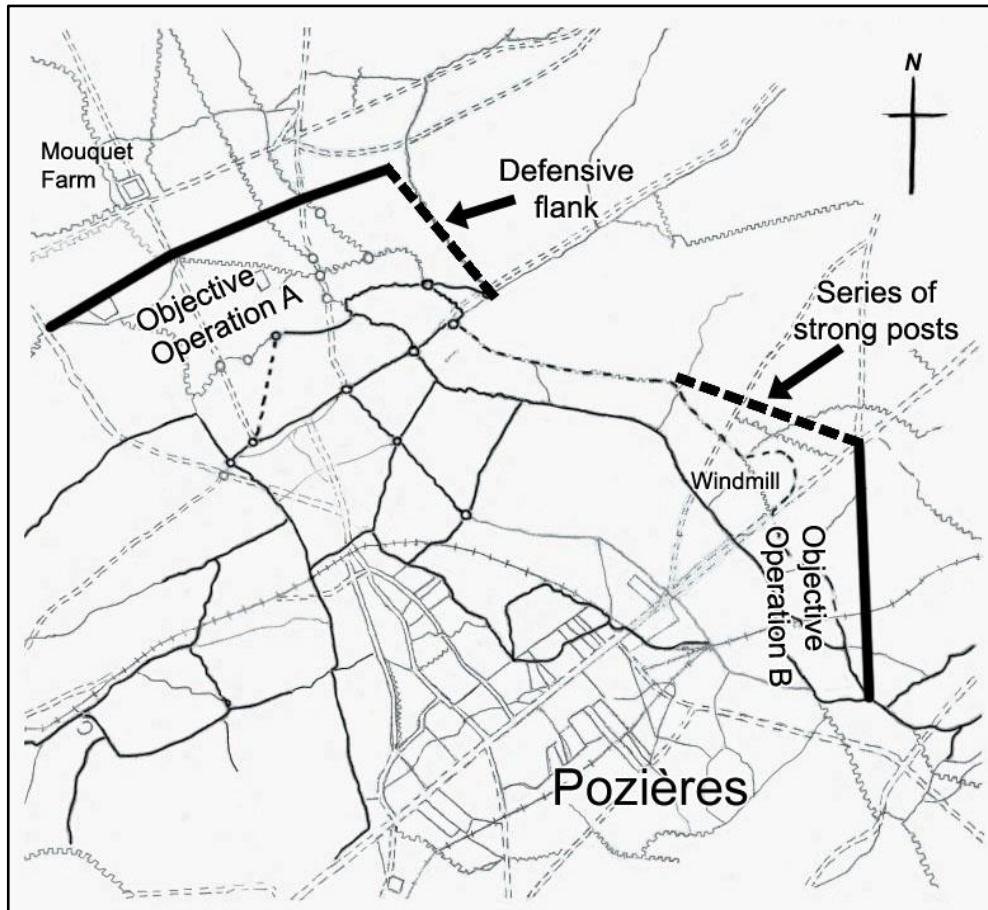
Army could have had material benefit in tying up German reserves, or taking advantage of a broader front of operations than had previously been available.

However, Reserve Army's plan made no attempt to coordinate its operation to that of Fourth Army. Although on the same day, there was nearly six hours between the jumping off time for Fourth Army at 2.45pm and 1st Anzac Corps at 8pm.⁴⁸¹ But neither can this operation be said to be a serious attempt by Reserve Army to advance to the northwest as per their own strategic plan. II Corps, which had been envisaged as advancing 'methodically northwards past Farm du Mouquet towards the Crucifix... ultimately to attack Thiepval from the east and north'⁴⁸² was ordered to make no more than an extremely limited advance from one trench system to another. Their objective line in fact did not even bring them as far north as the salient still held by 1st Anzac Corps on their right. While these limited advances could certainly be deemed 'methodical', using them to effect an encirclement of Thiepval would take weeks if not months if continued on this scale, and would use up an enormous amount of manpower. But they were repeated on the right. 1st Anzac Corps' prescribed operation was similarly on an extremely limited scale, and in two unconnected areas. The first of these, known as 'Operation A,' was a small advance in front of Mouquet Farm that was designed to rectify the shortfall of the failed 14 August attacks and bring the Australian line up to the road that ran in front of Mouquet Farm. On the right, 'Operation B' was against a 'series of trenches from [the]

⁴⁸¹ MacMullen for Maj.-Gen., General Staff Reserve Army to 1 Anzac Corps, 17 August 1916, AWM 26/42/43.

⁴⁸² 'Outline of Plan of Attack on Thiepval,' 28 July 1916, WO 158/334.

junction of Munster Alley to [a point] on the sunken road north of the Bapaume Road,' which was an advance of no more than 150 yards.⁴⁸³



Map 25. Operations "A" and "B".

These two operations are a major departure from the previous operations conducted by 1st Australian Division. In its first spell in the line the division had advanced more than 500 yards and successfully captured an entire village. Now even the German strong post at Mouquet Farm was not a feature of their objectives. This strong post, although formidable, was hardly on the scale of the fortified village of Pozières. Their new pair of operations, although bigger, were much more akin to the hurried, raid-

⁴⁸³ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 20,' 17 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

like operations of the 4th Australian Division. The northerly movement once again did little more than extend an already marked salient and hardly advanced the line at all. On the right, where Operation B should have been coordinated with Fourth Army's operations against Martinpuich,⁴⁸⁴ little ground would be gained. The operation could hardly be considered a coordinated cross-Army assault either, given that it was occurring on a very small front four kilometres away from the far left flank of the main operation which was to have been carried out six hours earlier. In reality, Operation B had nothing to do with Fourth Army's attack at all. These two separate operations planned for the 1st Australian Division were tentative movements at best, and would gain no more than simply the next trench line.

On receiving orders from I Anzac Corps, Major General Walker recognised that Operation A, or the attack towards Mouquet Farm was 'on a different front and is not necessarily part of the same operation' as Operation B, the assault on Munster Alley and the sunken road. He sensibly suggested that the second operation should be synchronised with that of Fourth Army, and that the attack against Mouquet Farm should be treated as an entirely separate operation. These suggestions went unheeded by Birdwood and his staff. Walker also raised concerns with the objective line in front of Mouquet Farm which, he pointed out, 'constitutes a wedge driven along the main ridge and as it advances is susceptible to enfilade fire from both flanks'.⁴⁸⁵ This attack was in danger of forming another salient on one side of an already established salient and creating too many corners in the front line into which

⁴⁸⁴ Memorandum S.671 from Walker (OC 1st Aust. Div.) to 1st Anzac Corps HQ, 17 August 1916, p. 1, AWM 26/51/30.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

the Germans could fire from a number of different directions. Yet once again his objection was ignored.

But although able openly to express sensible observations (even if they were to go unheeded), Walker clearly failed to inform Birdwood that his division was not prepared to undertake either operation. The battlefield in which the division was to operate was a muddle of shell holes and partial trenches. The Germans were by now aware of the change in operational direction, and had extended their artillery coverage of the area to regularly take in both sides of the salient. The front line trench was destroyed in parts leaving gaps in the line, and many established communication trenches had ceased to exist in the interminable shellfire.⁴⁸⁶ The line was not clearly mapped, and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Blamey, Chief of Staff for the 1st Division admitted to suffering from 'vagueness... both as to our own and hostile positions' which he was trying to rectify through the increased use of battalion and brigade Intelligence Officers.⁴⁸⁷ Even those at 1st Anzac Corps headquarters were forced to acknowledge that 'some doubt existed as to [the] exact position of our trenches', although this uncertainty did nothing to delay either operation.⁴⁸⁸ Walker wrote a memorandum on the 17th to say that 'if due preparedness is to be permitted, the main operation should now be postponed till or after the 20th'.⁴⁸⁹ But this rather passive assertion of his difficult position met a negative response. Although Reserve Army had more than once issued notes to the effect that all preparation should be

⁴⁸⁶ 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 16 August 1916, AWM 4/23/1/13.

⁴⁸⁷ Memorandum S.678 from Blamey (General Staff 1st Aust. Div.) to 1st, 2nd & 3rd Bdes. 17 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

⁴⁸⁸ 1st Anzac Corps War Diary, entry for 18 August 1916, AWM 26/50/17.

⁴⁸⁹ Memorandum S.671 from Walker (OC 1st Aust. Div.) to 1st Anzac Corps HQ, 17 August 1916, p. 1, AWM 26/51/30.

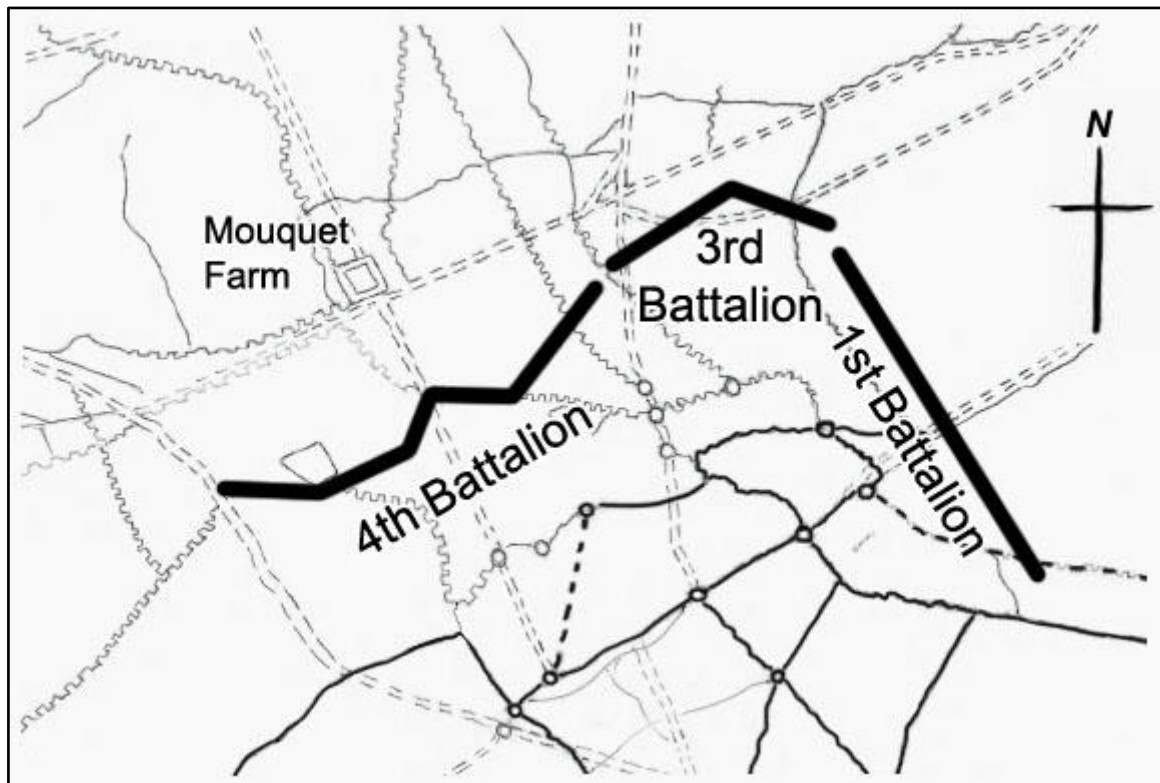
complete before an operation launched, Walker was absolutely not allowed the time he considered necessary. Even though he had been successful in obtaining a delay in July against Pozières on the grounds of being unprepared, this time Walker's 1st Division was obliged to advance entirely on Reserve Army's terms simply because it was 'considered too late to alter Artillery arrangements'.⁴⁹⁰ This was a specious argument at best, given that 24 hours had proven more than enough time to postpone or cancel artillery orders in the past. But Walker still failed to have his suggestions and requests heard, and plans for the operation went ahead.

The assault towards Mouquet Farm, 'Operation A', was allocated to the 1st Infantry Brigade, which had held the left of the line at Pozières. This time they held the area the 50th, 13th and 51st Battalions had just vacated. The 4th Battalion was on the far left of their sector, directly opposite Mouquet Farm on a thousand-yard front facing north-north-west, and in touch with the 145th British Brigade on its left. Next to them came the 3rd Battalion in the middle of 1st Brigade's sector and the most northerly formation, holding 500 yards of line facing north. Finally the 1st Battalion formed a 750-yard-long defensive flank on a line turned back towards the OG lines, at roughly 90° to the rest of 1st Brigade's line and facing north east.⁴⁹¹ The attack towards Mouquet Farm would be conducted by the 3rd and 4th Battalions pushing to the north and north west. Each battalion was assigned German trenches opposite to seize and hold. It must be stressed that these objectives were very close to their own line, some 50 yards ahead, others no more than 100 yards. Not one position constituted a major landmark, being no more than map coordinates, dugouts, two strong points

⁴⁹⁰ 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 18 August 1916 AWM 26/53/24.

⁴⁹¹ '1st Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations near Mouquet Farm – August 15th to 19th 1916,' p. 23, AWM 26/53/24.

and a few small trenches or trench junctions. The objective once again failed to encompass the primary German defensive position at Mouquet Farm.



Map 26. 1st Brigade positions prior to 18 August attack.

The operation was preceded by an hour-long bombardment of the German positions with heavy guns,⁴⁹² following which a lifting barrage would be fired using the familiar three-lift pattern. But this was to be the briefest barrage yet. Most batteries firing this barrage were instructed to employ the quickest rate of fire possible, but each lift lasted only a minute before lifting 50 yards further on. A standing barrage was then ordered to last until further notice, depending on the outcome of the operation.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² '1st Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 29,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

⁴⁹³ 'Table of Artillery Tasks,' accompanying First Australian Divisional Artillery Order No. 45, 18 August 1916, AWM 4/13/10/23.

The barrage was to begin 50 yards forward of the jumping off line.⁴⁹⁴ This meant that in some cases the barrage began on the objective itself, where it was just 50 yards on from the starting positions. In other cases, where the objective was slightly further away, it reached it on the second lift. As with recent operations conducted by the 4th Australian Division, the artillery plan and the infantry plan were disconnected.

The most concerning aspect of this barrage plan was that it was not consistent with the capability of the artillery. At this stage of the war, the artillery did not have the ability to fire accurately at a target at almost any distance. A variety of factors affected the flight of an artillery shell once it left the gun, from weather conditions to inconsistently produced or poor-quality ammunition to barrel wear.⁴⁹⁵ Artillerymen were not so much aiming for a particular point as an area around the particular point. This meant that the infantry were obliged to keep a certain distance from the artillery's particular objective to avoid an expected amount of variation in the fall of shell during a barrage. The safety distance at this stage of fighting on the Somme was 200 yards.⁴⁹⁶ This means that where the barrage started on an objective 50 yards from the front line the infantry were within its zone of fire and were in danger of being hit by their own artillery. But instead of lifting objectives and barrages to a more appropriate distance, increasingly corps and divisional command turned to withdrawing their front line for the barrage before sending the men forward as it lifted. But this tactic had not yet become common practice, and was not applied here,

⁴⁹⁴ '1st Anzac Corps Order No. 29,' 17 August 1916, AWM 4/1/29/7 Pt. 2.

⁴⁹⁵ Jackson Hughes, *The Monstrous Anger of the Guns: The Development of British Artillery Tactics, 1914-1918*, PhD thesis: University of Adelaide, 1994, p. 91.

⁴⁹⁶ Message CO.9 from Durant to 4th Bde, 29 August 1916, 9.35am, AWM 26/60/9.

and so the men in the front line for this operation were in danger from the moment the barrage began to fall.

The 1st Brigade commander, Lieutenant Colonel Smyth, ordered a very different attack from the one that he had conducted on 23 July when his brigade was on the left of the line at Pozières. It is probable that this was the result of this operation being on a small scale against such a close target, particularly in comparison to his previous experience weeks earlier. Instead of organising his infantry into waves as he had before, Smyth ordered the infantry to advance as strong patrols with bombers. They would 'push up and occupy' various points in the objective⁴⁹⁷ which would form the basis of the new line to be consolidated by parties following the initial patrols. This operation had some of the basic elements seen in all of 1st Anzac Corps' operations on the Somme to date, particularly in respect to being based around an artillery barrage which the infantry were required to follow closely.⁴⁹⁸ But the artillery barrage was radically different to the one with which Smyth had worked previously and this is clearly reflected in the diminution of his infantry plans. Smyth clearly saw this operation as much more akin to a large-scale raid, and organised his infantry accordingly, relying on patrols and groups to work their way forward instead deploying bold waves of infantry behind a curtain of artillery shells.

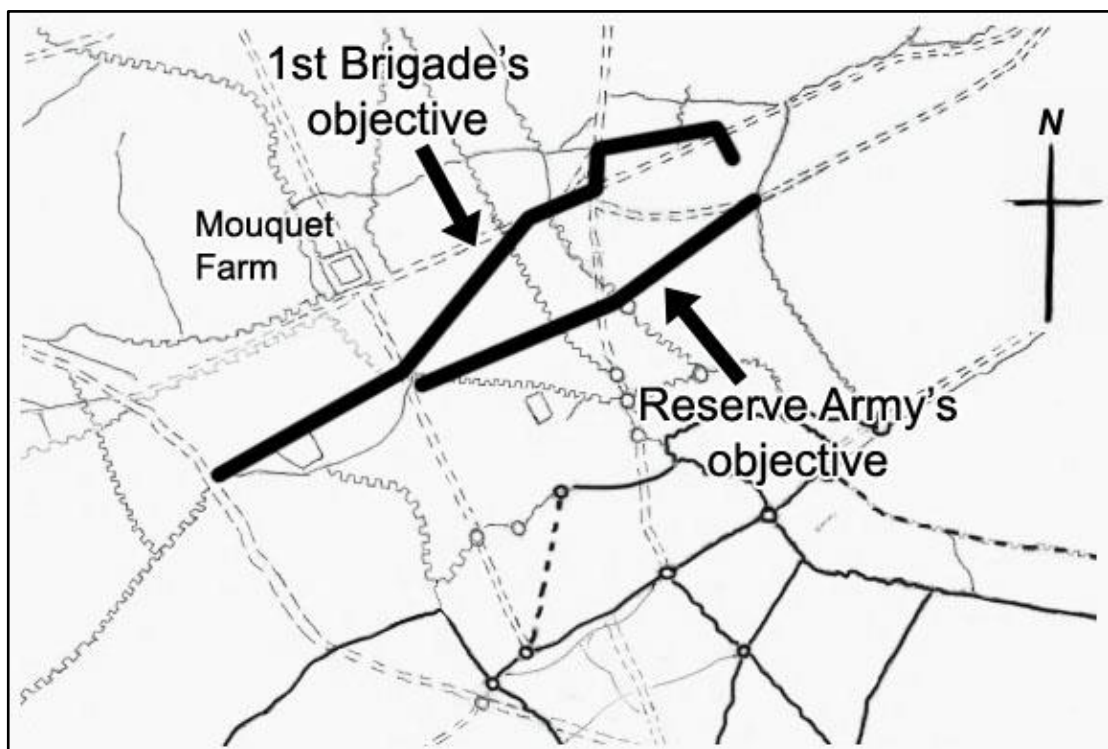
The objective for this operation towards Mouquet Farm was changed from the one issued by the Reserve Army⁴⁹⁹ to the version received by the 1st Brigade.⁵⁰⁰ A little

⁴⁹⁷ 'Provisional Orders for Operation to Take Place This Evening,' 18 August 1916' AWM 26/53/24.

⁴⁹⁸ 'First Australian Division Order No. 47,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

⁴⁹⁹ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 20,' 17 August 1916, AWM 26/42/4.

over half of the objective line given by Reserve Army – that on the right – was already in Australian hands, and in some cases comfortably behind their front line. The objective line given in I Anzac Corps' orders, while not exactly the same as Reserve Army's, is more or less similar.⁵⁰¹ But either Walker or Smyth modified the orders for the 1st Brigade to put the objective some distance ahead of any part of the projected advance that lined up with his division's current position. In this way his men would try to make a material advance which would bring the brigade almost up to Mouquet Farm. This change in the objective is not necessarily purely of Walker's initiative. Most orders were the result of face-to-face meetings between commanders in conferences or meetings to discuss the future. Written orders, especially at higher



Map 27. The difference between Reserve Army's objective and that of the 1st Brigade.

⁵⁰⁰ '1st Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 29,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵⁰¹ '1st A. & N.Z.A.C. Order No. 29,' 17 August 1916, AWM 26/50/17.

levels, were usually in confirmation of what had been decided in these meetings, and it is quite likely that at least Walker and Smyth had personally discussed this matter. Regardless of how this shift in objective was generated, the move demonstrates that the geographical objective was not the important thing here. Instead, there was an impulse to advance with the Reserve Army and 1st Anzac Corps that was so strong that it disregarded overall strategy, ignored the poor preparation of the attacking troops and the lack of any coordination or breadth to the attack and the state of the weakened infantry division. Clearly what was important to Army, and therefore to corps, was that the division make a move forward, no matter the size of the movement, or exactly to where it went.

Operation A was timed to begin at 9pm on the evening of 18 August 1916 following an hour-long preliminary bombardment. The battalions of the 1st Brigade had been in the line since 16 August, and so were at least prepared by being in position. On the left, the 4th Battalion was subjected to a heavy bombardment from the German artillery about an hour before the assault went ahead which caused a number of casualties and quickly began to 'interfere with [the] supply of bombs and preparations'. To ameliorate the 4th Battalion's position, a number of reinforcements were sent forward, including Major Rowlands, 102 other ranks and a Lewis Gun from the 2nd Battalion. Fifty more men and a Vickers gun were later sent forward to join them.⁵⁰² The 4th Battalion was somewhat delayed in starting the attack because of this heavy shellfire, although their exact time of departure from the jumping off trench was not recorded. But by 9.15pm A Company of the 4th, on the far left of their sector, had 'advanced their line and established [a] strong point' in the prescribed

⁵⁰² 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 4th Bn, 18 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

area.⁵⁰³ However, given that they were protected only by a weak, swift-moving and distant barrage, they had suffered 'considerable casualties' in capturing their line as the result of German sniping and a heavy barrage.⁵⁰⁴

The barrage supporting the assault of the 4th Battalion had been particularly ineffective in reducing the threat from two strong points, which were strongly garrisoned and protected by a number of machine guns and wire. These two German positions were largely responsible for breaking up the attack in several places.⁵⁰⁵ In the centre of the 4th Battalion's line C Company made some territorial gains before consolidating a trench that was probably just short of their objective. On the right, D Company had been heavily reinforced with new recruits. Together with the bombing platoon, they had advanced to a German barricade in a trench shared by the two sides. Here a bomb fight ensued during the course of which the 4th Battalion's bombing platoon suffered from a lack of support. The new recruits in the company, rather than supporting their bombers by engaging the enemy with rifle fire, withdrew to their jumping-off trenches. Nor did the inexperienced reinforcements ensure a constant supply of bombs to the advanced party, who quickly ran short. The Germans, who had been almost driven off by the attack, returned to the barricade and the Australian bombing platoon was forced to withdraw.⁵⁰⁶ The efforts of two lieutenants, Isaacs and Boileau, who 'endeavoured by personal effort to rally the men', could not induce the new infantry to leave the relative safety of their trench, and the attack in

⁵⁰³ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Iven Mackay, Officer commanding 4th Battalion to 1st Infantry Brigade,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵⁰⁴ Message from 1st Bde to 1st Aust. Div., 18 August 1916, 10.00pm, in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively,' p. 7, AWM 26/51/30.

⁵⁰⁵ Memorandum from Walker (OC 1st Aust. Div.) to HQ 1st Anzac Corps, 19 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

⁵⁰⁶ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Iven Mackay, Officer commanding 4th Battalion to 1st Infantry Brigade,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

this sector failed.⁵⁰⁷ The right flank of the 4th Battalion advance was not helped by the fact that the 3rd Battalion was seriously delayed. This particularly enabled the Germans to focus the attention of all of their bombers in the area on the bomb fight with D Company and the 4th Battalion's bombing platoon.

The 3rd Battalion's advance had been delayed because during the afternoon and evening of 18 August the battalion had apparently been repeatedly subjected to fire from their own heavy artillery. The problem of shells falling short in that sector had been reported a number of times and was investigated by staff of the Anzac Heavy Artillery. Earlier that day they had registered their guns on the target using an aircraft to observe the fall of shell and ensure that each gun was ranged accurately. Their response, after 'a most careful check' was to say that 'it appears these must be enemy shells'.⁵⁰⁸ Without specific information as to time and location of incidents, or without verification of the types of shells falling, it was difficult for the artillery to do more, and despite repeated reports of shells falling short, the problem was treated as 'improbable' throughout the battle.⁵⁰⁹ However, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Owen Glendower Howell-Price, was convinced it was his own shells falling short, and sent a number of messages during the afternoon requesting that the range of the heavy guns being lifted. Some Anzac guns must have been involved in the problem because when, just before the preliminary barrage began at 8pm, heavy shells again fell on a large proportion of the front trenches, the number

⁵⁰⁷ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Iven Mackay, Officer commanding 4th Battalion to 1st Infantry Brigade,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵⁰⁸ Message from 1st Aust. Div. to 1st Bde, 2nd Bde & Anzac Heavy Artillery, 18 August 1916, 2.35pm in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively,' AWM 26/51/30.

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum from Walker (OC 1st Aust. Div.) to HQ 1st Anzac Corps, 19 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

falling increased with the onset of the barrage itself.⁵¹⁰ Much of that fire fell on the jumping-off position, breaching the front line in at least three places and causing a number of casualties.⁵¹¹ The situation was so serious that Howell-Price, an experienced and competent commander, reported again at 8.35pm that the 'barrage is on my line which is now about demolished... I am doubtful whether we shall be able to carry out our stunt laid down tonight as a consequence'.⁵¹² The problem was exacerbated by there being no heavy artillery liaison officers at Brigade headquarters,⁵¹³ so communication between the two was too slow to correctly identify the source of the problem. However, despite Howell-Price's regular reports of a serious problem, there was no question of stopping or delaying the operation. The infantry were forced to wait for the barrage to lift, reporting to 1st Brigade as late as 9.45pm that they were 'unable to push ahead as our artillery barrage has not lifted sufficiently. The heavies continue to fall short.'⁵¹⁴ The barrage finally lifted enough around 10pm, and twenty minutes later the infantry were reorganised enough to advance nearly an hour and a half late.⁵¹⁵

On the left, where the 3rd Battalion was supposed to have been in touch with the 4th, the patrol assigned to conduct the attack left the jumping-off trench, but it, too, 'was

⁵¹⁰ 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 3rd Bn, 18 August 1916 AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹¹ '1st Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations near Mouquet Farm – August 15th to 19th 1916,' p.23' AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹² Message from Howell-Price (OC 3rd Bn) to Adjutant 1st Bn, 18 August 1916, 8.35pm, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹³ '1st Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations near Mouquet Farm – August 15th to 19th 1916,' p. 23 AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹⁴ Message from Howell-Price (OC 3rd Bn) to 1st Bde, 18 August 1916, 9.34pm, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹⁵ 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 3rd Bn, 18 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24. Other reports state that the shellfire continued until 10.20pm, at which time the infantry attacked immediately. Given the confusion caused by the shellfire in the line, the scenario in which some time was taken to reorganise seems the most likely

unable to push out sufficiently owing to the barrage not lifting enough'.⁵¹⁶ Shells from the 1st Anzac Corps Heavy Artillery were falling no more than 100 yards from the firing line, which brought the barrage dangerously close to the advanced jumping-off position. As they moved through the centre of the 3rd Battalion's sector, the patrol did not encounter many Germans, but neither did they come across a German trench. Without an already-established trench line or strong post to capture and consolidate to their own advantage, this patrol could not build one able to withstand enemy fire in the time they had available, and so its commander made the decision to withdraw. Again, after a tentative start delayed by a poor artillery barrage, a solid enough gain could not be made and the assault failed.

The only unit of the 3rd Battalion to get well away was the patrol on the right. There the barrage lifted enough for the group to advance to their objective point and beyond. The patrol managed to push out a considerable distance, encountering 'the enemy in strength about two hundred yards from our line'. They engaged this party, but were outmanoeuvred when the Germans sent 'out a strong flanking party of about thirty men', and so withdrew to their own trenches.⁵¹⁷

Some gains had been made by the 1st Infantry Brigade, mostly on the left where the 4th Battalion had achieved some of its objectives, but the cost had been enormous. The Brigade reported having lost more than 480 men by 9am on 20 August, most of

⁵¹⁶ 1st Bde War Diary, entry for 3rd Bn, 18 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

⁵¹⁷ Report from Howell-Price (OC 3rd Bn) to 1st Bde, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/53/24.

them in this operation.⁵¹⁸ Despite the fact that the operation was to have been conducted by no more than a series of strong patrols, the entirety of the 1st Brigade had been drawn into the line, leaving only one company to act as brigade reserve at 11pm.⁵¹⁹ The 1st Brigade's strength had been seriously completely sapped by this action. The obvious failure came with the artillery barrage which almost completely failed to support the infantry in any way. Having begun on or very near the objective line, it swiftly lifted away, leaving the German defenders ample time to train their machine guns and bombing teams towards the small packets of soldiers approaching their line. As patrols failed, more were sent forward in support and so many men were drawn into the fight without forming one cohesive effort that systematically approached the objective. The overall plan as devised by upper levels of command had once again failed the men in the field.

On the right of the 1st Australian Division's line, the smaller operation against the trenches around Munster Alley, "Operation B", was given to the 2nd Infantry Brigade. As with the 1st Brigade on their left, the 2nd Brigade was given the objective of capturing nothing more than a series of map coordinates and suspected German strong posts.⁵²⁰ Simply put, they were to push the line straddling the Albert-Bapaume Road out to a point about 100 yards further along the road. This attack was also timed to begin at 9pm, synchronised with the 1st Infantry Brigade's disconnected operation on the left, despite Walker's conviction that Operation B should have coordinated with Fourth Army's operations some distance to the right. In this operation the 7th

⁵¹⁸ Message from "Q" to 1st Aust. Div., 20 August 1916, in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively.' p. 6, AWM 26/51/30. Total figures: 18 officers & 464 other ranks.

⁵¹⁹ Message from 1st Bde to 1st Aust. Div., 18 August 1916, 11.00pm, AWM 26/51/30.

⁵²⁰ 'First Australian Division Order No. 47,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

Battalion on the left, and the 8th Battalion on the right would advance following a barrage timed to lift 'fifty yards a minute for three minutes after zero'⁵²¹ – similar to that of Operation A, but fired by fewer batteries.⁵²² As with the other barrage, it would begin 50 yards from the jumping off trench, before making each lift of 50 yards, meaning that somewhere between the preliminary barrage and the second lift the artillery, it would be completely clear of the infantry's area of operations and would complete its lift programme independently of their operation.

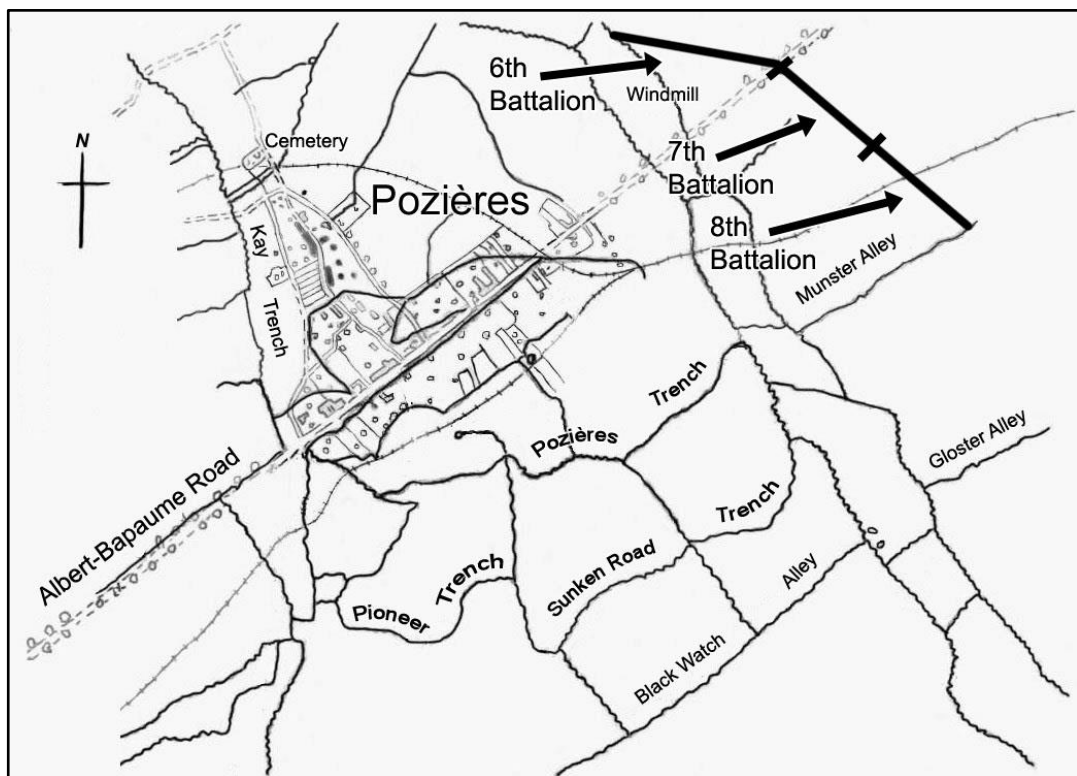
The 2nd Brigade had been in reserve at Pozières, although many of its units had gradually been absorbed into the front line as the original attacking units weakened, and so the brigade had had some experience of front-line conditions. However, its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Gordon Bennett, had yet to lead his men in a set-piece attack. He took a different approach to that of Smyth and the 1st Brigade by choosing not to attack with infantry patrols. Instead he ordered waves of infantry to follow each other in a much more orthodox battle plan. The main attack was to take place south of the Albert-Bapaume Road, where the 7th Battalion on the left and the 8th Battalion on the right formed the main attacking force.⁵²³ Each battalion was organised into four waves of infantry and a reserve force. Two companies of each battalion would be in the forefront of the attack and supplying the waves, each one being formed of half of a company. One company followed in support and the final company of each battalion waited further back in reserve. These infantry lines were ordered to follow the lift of the artillery barrage closely, while the support units

⁵²¹ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [*sic*],' 26 August 1916, p. 5, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵²² 'Table of Artillery Tasks,' accompanying 1st Aust. Div. Arty Order No. 45, 18 August 1916, AWM 4/13/10/23.

⁵²³ '2nd Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 39,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

would follow and consolidate any gains. Trench mortars were used to strengthen the artillery barrage, firing from the 44th Brigade's sector directly at a designated German strong point.⁵²⁴ Bombing parties strengthened the first infantry wave and further assisted with the assault on strong points.⁵²⁵ Finally, the left flank would be protected by the 6th Battalion who were to 'move forward and complete the line from the left of the 7th Battalion' to the original lines.⁵²⁶ This method of attack is in fact very similar to that of the 1st Brigade on 23 July. It relied on a battle plan of waves of infantry following a barrage, but it did not make some of the mistakes made previously by not overly complicating the movement plans for infantry waves, nor did it overpopulate those waves. Bennett was taking his first operation very seriously.



Map 28. Dispositions for Operation "B".

⁵²⁴ '2nd Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 39,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵²⁵ 'Operation Order by Lt. Col. C. H. Jess OC 7th Battalion,' undated, but refers to assault of 18 August 1916. AWM 26/54/7.

⁵²⁶ '2nd Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 39,' 18 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

Preparation for Operation B was 'much restricted by the activity of the enemy's artillery and also by the urgency for rapid progress in our constructional work.'⁵²⁷ On 16 August, while repairing OG2 in order to gain touch with the 1st Brigade, men of the 2nd Brigade discovered an 'old and battered' German trench that covered part of the area they were supposed to build strong posts as a part of Operation B. Bennett decided to have his men dig a line along this part of the objective before the attack went ahead. Extra Lewis guns were put into the front line to free as many men as possible to dig this new line. On the left and right flanks of the brigade sector this new trench was 'well made, deep and narrow' but in the centre progress was very slow.⁵²⁸ At the same time, existing saps were extended and new ones pushed forward to advance the line as much as possible prior to the attack.⁵²⁹ And as the day of the operation drew near, work began on a new jumping-off trench across no man's land from the eastern end of Munster Alley to the Windmill.⁵³⁰

Working parties frequently had to take cover for extended periods, and found during the night of 17 August, 'the shelling and machine gun fire was so severe that the working parties had to be withdrawn, with very little progress made.'⁵³¹ Somehow the Brigade managed to construct the jumping-off trench from Munster Alley to the windmill during the day of the 18th.⁵³² This trench, known as Dot Trench, had the

⁵²⁷ F. W. Le Maistre (OC 5th Bn), 'Report on Operations POZIERES from 15th to 21st August 1916,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵²⁸ 'Report on Operations of 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade from 15th to 22nd August 1916,' AWM 26/54/7.

⁵²⁹ 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 16 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³⁰ Le Maistre (OC 5th Bn), 'Report on Operations POZIERES from 15th to 21st August 1916,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³¹ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [sic],' 26 August 1916, p.3, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³² 'Report on Operations of 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade from 15th to 22nd August 1916,' AWM 26/54/7.

added benefit of straightening the line and reclaiming some dead ground.⁵³³ In most positions this new trench was adequate for cover, although it was very shallow and there were gaps in places, and in the 7th Battalion sector it was only big enough for one man carrying a full pack at a time. Here, 'to pass, one had to crouch in the bottom of the trench while the other clambered over,' and so the infantry forming up into waves had to leave the trench to get into the right order.⁵³⁴ Again, against the odds the assaulting troops were reported to be in the correct position when the bombardment opened, and, according to divisional reports advanced closely behind the barrage as it lifted.⁵³⁵ However, despite the employment of an infantry plan that had had demonstrable success in the recent past, and an apparently successful start to the operation, as the sun rose daylight revealed the operation to have been an almost complete failure. While the 6th Battalion, in its role of flank support, had achieved all of its (very limited) objectives, the 7th Battalion had only managed to reach part of its objective line, and the 8th Battalion, despite having made three separate attacks, was back in its original lines, having suffered heavy casualties.

What had happened? Divisional reports that the assaulting troops followed the barrage closely may be somewhat exaggerated. Orders had been issued to the battalions without the time of attack included. This was normal practice to prevent the Germans from having advance warning of any impending operation in the case of orders being captured beforehand. The time of assault – “zero hour” – usually

⁵³³ F. W. Le Maistre (OC 5th Bn), 'Report on Operations Pozières from 15th to 21st August 1916,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³⁴ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [sic],' 26 August 1916, p.3, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³⁵ Message from 2nd Bde, 19 August 1916, 5.15am in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively,' pp. 50-51, AWM 26/51/30.

followed by message separately. However, in the case of 2nd Brigade's operation, even the barrage timetable did not reach the front troops early enough for the 7th or 8th Battalion to coordinate with it without receiving formal orders from brigade. The men in the front lines were in a desperate situation simply by being there, and were almost completely unprepared for action when the orders finally arrived.

The 7th Battalion was under heavy enemy shell fire when in the jumping off trench, which included small calibre shells enfilading their position on the left. Despite the heavy barrage, however, little damage was done to Australian trenches. Nevertheless, B company suffered considerably. Platoon commander Lieutenant Eric Woodruff Hill sent a message in the early evening to say 'Shelling eased off considerably. Jumping off trench in fair order. About six [men of] B Company buried – remainder pretty shaken'.⁵³⁶ Although the shelling had eased, it was still heavy enough to cause casualties and damage. Hill's company commander, Captain Frederick James Hoad, reported around the same time as Hill that the 'enemy [are] shelling our front trench we are being enfiladed on our left flank trench slightly damaged. About six men being [sic] buried. Men are shaken.'⁵³⁷ The front line troops were finally withdrawn by their platoon or company commanders to OG2 to avoid what was described as a 'sheer waste of men'.⁵³⁸ Captain Hector Ernest Bastin reported on the implications this would have for the operation:

⁵³⁶ Message HEB.218 from Hill (7th Bn) to 2nd Brigade, 5.25pm - undated but corresponds to 18 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵³⁷ Message from Hoad, (OC B Coy 7th Bn) to OC C Coy (7th Bn), 18 August 1916, 4.50pm, AWM 26/54/7

⁵³⁸ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [sic]', p.4, AWM 26/54/7.

URGENT Will require at least two hours' notice from operation unless troops are to be packed into forward trenches forthwith so it is necessary to hold forward line thinly to avoid casualties and majority of troops are well in rear and have to dribble into their place through battered communication trenches.⁵³⁹

But at 8pm, more than two hours after the above message had been sent, the barrage timetable had not yet been received by the 7th Brigade. A further message was sent to them to say the barrage timetable 'has not been received. As it takes at least half an hour to communicate with Companies could durations and localities be phoned to me using [code]'.⁵⁴⁰ Even with the dramatic lessening of the time the 7th Battalion was prepared to work with, they were required to make do with even less. The timetable did not reach battalion headquarters until 8.45pm,⁵⁴¹ giving them no more than 15 minutes' notice of the one feature of the battle on which all other timings depended. The 8th Battalion found the jumping off trench a more tenable position, but they, too, received the barrage time table far too late to communicate it to their attacking companies – just 10 minutes before the barrage was to commence. This was a serious oversight and meant that all of the infantry involved in the attack, although well positioned and prepared prior to the assault, did not have time for a final coordination with the barrage timetable. In the event the moment the barrage lifted was unmistakeable to the infantry, and they were able to move forward with it,⁵⁴² but with little confidence and no idea what was to come in the way of ongoing artillery support for their assault.

⁵³⁹ Message from Bastin (Adj, 7th Bn) to 2nd Brigade, 18 August 1916, 5.45pm, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴⁰ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [*sic*]', p.4, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴¹ 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 7th Bn, 18 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴² 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 8th Bn, 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

The German defenders in this sector were alert to the possibility of an imminent attack, probably through observation of the construction of the new jumping off trench.⁵⁴³ Once the attack commenced they put down an extremely heavy barrage on the area around Munster Alley. This was slightly misplaced, however, and caused particularly heavy casualties in the 44th British Brigade on the right instead of on the attacking Australian troops.⁵⁴⁴ But there were further problems with the Australian artillery barrage. As with the 1st Brigade, a continuous stream of messages emanated from the front line throughout the day of the 18th reporting artillery shells falling short. In the past the artillery had vehemently denied the possibility that their guns were doing the damage as often as possible; in this case, though, an Artillery Liaison Officer was with the 2nd Brigade and corroborated the reports.⁵⁴⁵ As a result, in some places the bombardment was successfully lifted.⁵⁴⁶ In other areas, however, even after a lift had been requested by the infantry artillery fire was reported as falling in the same place hours later.⁵⁴⁷

The German infantry had responded quickly to reports of an assault by moving forward clear of the barrage, and using shell holes as emplacements for machine guns to defend against the attackers.⁵⁴⁸ This was a very early example of a 'chequerboard

⁵⁴³ 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 8th Bn, 19 August 1916. AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴⁴ Memorandum from Walker (OC 1st Aust. Div.) to HQ 1st Anzac Corps, 19 August 1916, p.2, AWM 26/51/30.

⁵⁴⁵ Message from 1st Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac Corps & Anzac Heavy Arty, 18 August 1916, 7.20pm, in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively,' p.6, AWM 26/50/17.

⁵⁴⁶ Fragment of message sent on 18 August 1916 to OC C Coy 7th Bn, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴⁷ Message from Hill (7th Bn) to 7th Bn HQ, timed 5.25pm, undated but corresponds to 18 August 1916. AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Care Herman Jess, Officer Commanding 7th Bn, on actions of B Coy on the night of 18 August 1916,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

defence', part of the elastic defence-in-depth formally adopted by the German Army in late September 1916. Experiences such as those at Pozières and Mouquet Farm were, in August 1916, teaching the Germans that their defence had to rely on firepower and not large numbers of troops.⁵⁴⁹ These tactics were particularly effective when combined with the somewhat ineffectual barrage fired by the Allied artillery supporting the 2nd Infantry Brigade. Because the Germans were not concentrated in their trench lines, but instead scattered through random shell holes their positions were very hard to hit, and there was little success in even getting them to keep their heads down.

The overall consequence of the ineffective artillery fire was that German strong posts remained undamaged, and their machine gun crews were ready and waiting for the attackers.⁵⁵⁰ Ultimately, both the 7th Battalion and in particular the 8th Battalion ran into a 'most hellish machine gun fire... [and] were also heavily bombed and shelled'.⁵⁵¹ The 8th Battalion diary records a stark story of a failed operation.

As the barrage lifted the attacking companies moved forward and the right of "A" Company immediately came under a heavy fire from Bombs and Machine Guns. The centre and the left also suffered severely from M[achine] Gun fire from the left. The fire was so heavy that the line withdrew and was reformed and again attacked, but, as enemy strong points and trenches had apparently not suffered from our Artillery fire, they had an immense superiority of

⁵⁴⁹ Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: US Army Command & General Staff College, 1981, p. 12.

⁵⁵⁰ 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 8th Bn, 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁵¹ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Care Herman Jess, Officer Commanding 7th Battalion, on actions of B Coy on the night of 18 August 1916,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

fire and our attack was again beaten back. I then ordered "D" Company to reinforce "A" and made a further attempt but though the line reached the enemy position it could not gain a footing and returned to Dot Trench. Our left Company was under a galling fire from both flanks and could make no progress and also fell back on their original position.⁵⁵²

The 8th Battalion attempted to advance in the face of this fire three times during the night, each attack failing with heavy casualties. They gained no ground at all. The 7th Battalion were able to advance a little on the left, meeting up with the right of the 6th Battalion and digging in across the Bapaume Road. But for the gain of just tens of yards, the 7th Battalion suffered enormous casualties, worst of all in the already weakened B Company, which, of the 111 men who went forward for the assault, had only 37 answer roll call the following morning.⁵⁵³ In the four days from 16-20 August the 1st Division suffered the loss of an estimated 57 officers and 1524 other ranks.⁵⁵⁴

These two operations had failed miserably. A long list of casualties had resulted in only the most negligible of gains. The strength of two of the three brigades of the 1st Australian Division was seriously compromised through casualties. And yet the 1st Division was not to be relieved, nor was action in this sector stopped. The 1st Infantry Brigade was relieved at 3.30am on 20 August by the 3rd Brigade, a unit depleted by casualties from the July operations. The 3rd Brigade arrived into a front line almost completely unprepared to stage another assault. Hostile shell fire had destroyed

⁵⁵² 2nd Bde War Diary, entry for 8th Bn, 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁵³ 'Report from Lieutenant Colonel Care Herman Jess, Officer Commanding 7th Battalion, on actions of B Coy on the night of 18 August 1916,' 19 August 1916, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁵⁴ 1st Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 20 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

communication trenches and stores of ammunition; bombs, grenades, water and many other supplies were very low in the front line.⁵⁵⁵ There was nowhere for supports or reserves to form up, and the continuous passage of carrying parties trying to rectify the shortage of stores in the front line, not to mention the ongoing damage from the ever-present shellfire, 'greatly hampered' the work of fatigues repairing the damage.⁵⁵⁶ Despite a great deal of hard digging throughout the day and night of the 20th, men were still regularly exposed to view as they moved about the battlefield.⁵⁵⁷ The exact position of the front line was still unclear on the morning of 21 August, when patrol reports of the location of the enemy line differed from aerial photographs.

The 1st Division had this time been relying on aerial photographs more than they had in their last period in the front line. Photographs of German positions taken from the air were passed on to brigade and divisional artillery commanders, some photographs making it into company commander hands. By 20 August the 7th Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps was flying daily sorties to provide the most up-to-date photographs possible, and could supply images within four to five hours of a demand for them.⁵⁵⁸ But commanders in the field were still inclined to rely on patrol reports, and had to scramble to assimilate information sent through from other sources. The positions of trenches, strong points and German troops seen on photographs were still painstakingly reinforced by patrol reports, and patrols were made aware of what they should expect, where they should find it, and whether or

⁵⁵⁵ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' pp. 49-50, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 50.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 49-50.

⁵⁵⁸ 1st Aust. Div., General Staff, 16 to 22 Aug 1916, entry for 20 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

not the information on photographs was being corroborated by that provided by the patrol. As an example, Captain Leone Sextus Tollemache, the Brigade Major of the 3rd Brigade sent a message regarding a patrol conducted on 21 August:

Ref[erence] your patrol reports of this morning. You must see there is no mistake about the enemy line. He has two distinct lines of trench... THIS IS THE OBJECTIVE TO BE TAKEN AND HELD. He also has a good trench... which is probably that to be seen "lightly held" by patrol last night. Your first two waves will pass straight through the first trench (leaving the clearing parties of the second wave to clear it up) and push straight into the main objective. See that all ranks are carefully warned.⁵⁵⁹

Even more care was being taken than before to see that men were in the correct position and aware of their objectives and potential obstacles as much as possible during their time in the line and before the operation went ahead.

An attack date as early as 20 August had been considered, but had to be postponed because of the sheer impossibility of getting through preparations and a major relief in time. So the attacking brigade was granted another 24 hours, during which time patrols were pushed forward to ascertain the exact position of the line.⁵⁶⁰ But little more could be done with just one extra day, and the line was still woefully unprepared to stage another assault. Despite the fact that Gough clearly stated that

⁵⁵⁹ Message from Tollemache (Bde Maj 3rd Bde) to 3rd Brigade, 21 August 1916, 10.30am, AWM 26/55/4.

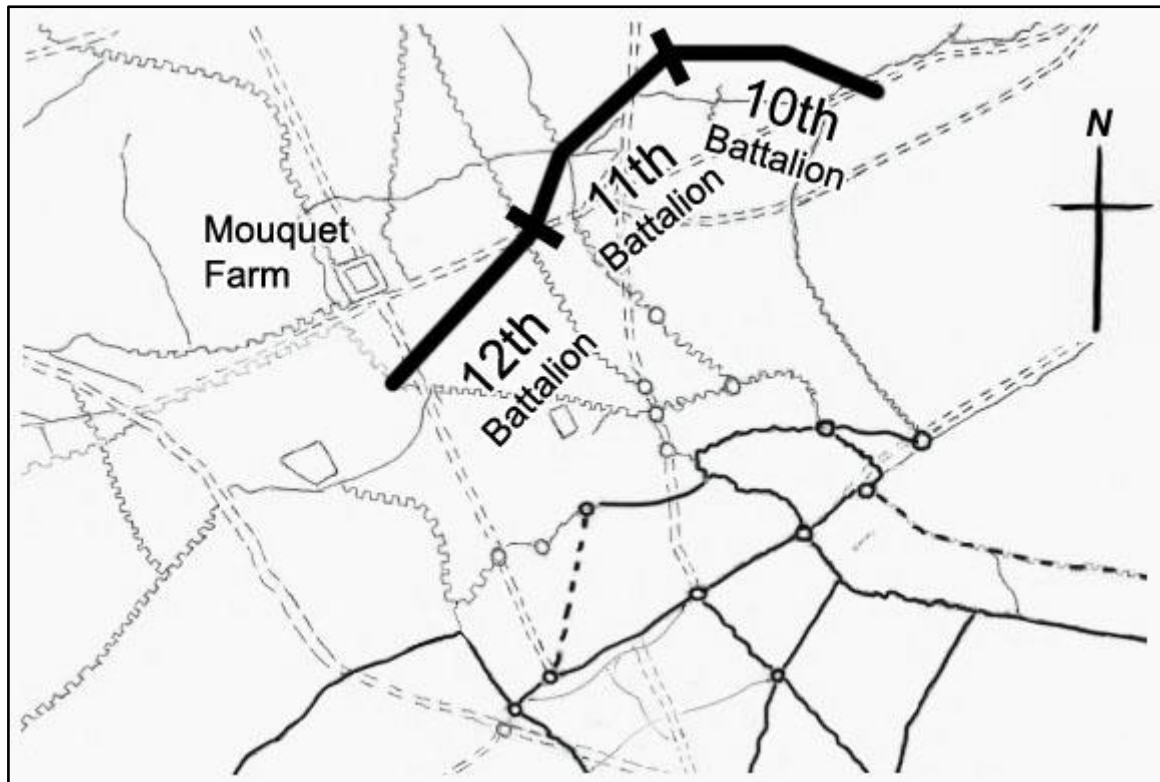
⁵⁶⁰ 1st Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 20 August 1916, AWM 26/51/30.

'preparation must be thorough and careful' in his memorandum of 3 August,⁵⁶¹ preparation was always of secondary importance to the ever present imperative to push on with operations – wherever and however – as soon as possible, or sooner.

This new operation to be conducted by the 3rd Brigade on 21 August 1916 was to be a little earlier in the day than the previous two, at 6pm instead of 9.⁵⁶² In the French summer, this was the difference between attacking in late afternoon daylight and the soft darkness of early evening. The objective was very similar to that of the 1st Brigade's attack, falling just short of Mouquet Farm once again and advancing no more than 100 yards from the jumping-off positions. In most places the objective made very little sense to the surrounding geography, but skirted in front of Mouquet Farm and very roughly followed the road to the north east. On the left the 12th Battalion would make the attack, in the centre a small force of the 11th and on the right the 10th Battalion would once again make the largest advance. This meant that the salient the I Anzac Corps was operating in would yet again be pushed further to the north, putting the 10th Battalion in particular into a very narrow bulge into the German lines. This was a remarkable plan given the problems with enfilade fire the 2nd Brigade had seriously suffered from, and the regular reports that the salient was stretching the 1st Anzac Corps too far.

⁵⁶¹ Reserve Army SG 43/0/1, 3 August 1916, pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

⁵⁶² '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p.51, AWM 26/55/4.



Map 29. Dispositions for attack of 21 August 1916.

Despite the fact that both brigades that had participated in the operations of two days before had repeatedly complained about ineffective artillery barrages, the artillery plan was weakened. Many messages had been sent throughout the operation that had specifically mentioned the inadequacy of the barrage as the primary cause of failure. All went ignored. At least the redundant artillery lifts beyond the objective had been removed in the plan for this next operation. But there was to be no preliminary bombardment at all, and no bombardment of the objective.⁵⁶³ The only artillery support this operation could expect was a standing barrage of one hour falling just beyond the objective as the operation went ahead. This was yet another variation of the basic artillery plan by Reserve Army and 1st Anzac Corps, and once again

⁵⁶³ 1st Aust. Div. Arty 'Report on Operations from 16th to 23rd August 1916,' 23 August 1916, AWM 4/13/10/26.

inadequate – but for a different reason. The standing barrage beyond the objective simply prevented the Germans from reinforcing their front line troops, but it did not keep them under cover. Without the initial bombardment of the objective followed by a lift away to the standing barrage, the German defenders could man their machine guns at will as the infantry crossed no man's land. Although the 3rd Brigade were under the impression that the leading lines of infantry would attack under cover of a five minutes' barrage,⁵⁶⁴ the barrage would in fact offer them very little protection. None of the considered reports and recommendations made by brigade or battalion commanders on the use of artillery in recent operations was taken into consideration for the artillery plans for this renewed operation. If any lessons were taken from the immediate past, they are hard to find in the artillery orders given to the 3rd Brigade.

Lieutenant Colonel Sinclair-Maclagan at least did not underestimate the task at hand as Smyth had. Nor did he make the overly-complicated plans for manoeuvre he had at Pozières, although this was surely as much the result of the extremely limited objectives as personal preference. Like Bennett, Sinclair-Maclagan deployed his infantry in four waves. The 10th and 12th Battalions on the flanks attacked with two companies in the first two waves and another two in the following waves,⁵⁶⁵ but the 11th Battalion in the centre was to attack with just two raiding parties of fifty each in the first two waves, with another two raiding parties in reserve.⁵⁶⁶ Because there was only one objective, the main actors would be the infantry of the first and second waves. The first wave was to leave the jumping-off trench and attack the objective,

⁵⁶⁴ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁶⁵ The 10th Battalion's frontal attack was strengthened by an extra platoon from their rear companies.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

while the second wave followed about fifty yards behind, helping to consolidate gains. The third wave was assigned a mobile support role of assisting wherever an attack was held up, potentially carrying the first and second waves forward with it. The commander of this third wave was given leeway to decide on the spot whether to make a general deployment of his wave of infantry, or to send a portion of his line of infantry to areas that were locally bogged down.⁵⁶⁷ The waves of infantry were carefully coordinated to work with each other, but had no artillery plan to coordinate with at all.

This was a carefully-made infantry plan which, had it been more integrated with available fire power, had the potential for success. But once again the Germans were aware of the imminent attack. Following a period of British domination of the skies, there had been an increasing number of German aircraft over the Somme in August 1916, and on 21 August at least six enemy aircraft were reported to have crossed over the lines and been seen flying over Sausage Valley with impunity.⁵⁶⁸ German prisoners captured during the battle later reported that these planes 'saw the movement of troops getting into position and [so the Germans were] ready for the attack when it was launched'.⁵⁶⁹ The first indication to the Australians that their attack might have been discovered came when the German artillery put a 'specially severe bombardment' onto the forward lines from 5pm.⁵⁷⁰ This caused so many casualties in the 10th Battalion on the right that their third and fourth waves had to

⁵⁶⁷ 'Brigade Operation Instructions No. 1, 3rd Australian Infantry Brigade to accompany Operation Order No. 29,' 21 August 1916, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁶⁸ Message from 1st Aust. Div. to 1st Anzac RFC, 21 August 1916, 9.35am, AWM 26/50/17.

⁵⁶⁹ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p.50, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 51.

reinforce the front line before the operation began, and left the battalion with only two platoons in reserve.⁵⁷¹ The German artillery fire confused the front line and weakened the force going forward, endangering the entire operation.

Once again, the planned artillery barrage was almost completely ineffective. The 10th Battalion again experienced the worst of the problem when the artillery barrage in its sector failed entirely to negate German rifle and machine gun fire. The fire did not pause in the slightest as the artillery barrage began. All of the officers of the 10th were hit on leaving the jumping off trench except one – and ‘he was hit immediately on reaching the objective’.⁵⁷² On the left and in the centre of the 10th Battalion line some men somehow managed to make it to the objective, but then came under enfilade fire from the Germans to their right.⁵⁷³ In this direction a German strong point was untouched by the barrage, and was heavily manned by infantry and ‘several machine guns both near the point and to the north east of it’.⁵⁷⁴ These caused serious casualties among the bombing platoon and a company of the 10th detailed to cover the right flank – only three men out of two bombing teams remained alive and unwounded. On the left the advanced parties were ‘losing casualties steadily and had become [a] very weak [force] for the [length of] front held and felt the pressure on their flanks’ from the moment they advanced. Despite the entire battalion reserve coming forward to reinforce them, eventually the remnants of the 10th Battalion fell back. This battalion, already depleted and only able to field roughly 620 men out of

⁵⁷¹ ‘3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,’ p.51, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* p. 52.

⁵⁷³ Message from 10th Bn to 3rd Bde, 21 August 1916, 7.56pm in ‘Reports on Operations 21/22 Aug 1916,’ p. 1, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁷⁴ ‘3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,’ p. 52, AWM 26/55/4.

1000 in the firing line from the start of the battle, suffered 346 casualties, including 10 officers, in less than 24 hours. This was attributed to the heavy shellfire before the battle commenced, the enormously high rate of officer casualties, and the oblique and enfilade shell fire on the salient further extended by their attack.⁵⁷⁵ The 10th Battalion had been almost entirely destroyed in just two short periods of time spent in the front line.

On the left the 12th Battalion had quite a different experience, having gone 'over the parapet as [the] artillery barrage started and obtained their objective with very little opposition'.⁵⁷⁶ The battalion deployed in four waves of infantry, each comprising one company. Their first two infantry waves (A and D Companies) left the jumping-off trench three minutes apart and secured their objectives, causing the Germans to retire with 'some of the enemy moving to the trenches on the flanks and some retiring over the open'.⁵⁷⁷ In fact, the Germans were so willing to withdraw and the battalion encountered so little opposition that 'the left were carried away in pursuit of the flying enemy, entered the Mouquet Farm and bombed the dugouts, securing a few prisoners', and eventually fell back in line with the right.⁵⁷⁸ A third wave of infantry, B Company, moved forward half an hour after the operation began and were directed to the right, where they filled a gap in the line and joined the rest of the 12th Battalion in consolidating their new position.⁵⁷⁹ The fourth and final wave of infantry, C Company,

⁵⁷⁵ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' pp. 52-55, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁵⁷⁷ '12th Battalion AIF, Report on Operations Near Mouquet Farm', entry for 6.00pm 21 August 1916, AWM 4/23/29/18.

⁵⁷⁸ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p. 53, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁷⁹ '12th Battalion AIF, Report on Operations Near Mouquet Farm', entry for 6.00pm 21 August 1916, AWM 4/23/29/18.

remained in the original front line and continued to hold it in order to provide some depth to the defence.

As previously mentioned, Mouquet Farm has entered Australian military lore as the 'unachievable objective', repeatedly attacked and always lost. But the farm, once again strictly outside the objective here, had yet to be part of the objective of any operation that had gone ahead. But that is not to say that Australians had not been in the farm. Bean credited Lieutenant William Paton Hoggarth of the 50th Battalion as being the first Australian to reach Mouquet Farm.⁵⁸⁰ He had entered the southern part of the ruined farm buildings in the operation of 12 August.⁵⁸¹ Since then others had entered the ruined compound, albeit briefly, and now men of the 12th Battalion were able to enter without too much difficulty. There is something strange about this. A major obstacle was repeatedly entered but no attempt was made to order its permanent capture. In fact, orders were always given to withdraw from Mouquet Farm, often well before the men there were repulsed by Germans. The farm would prove to be very difficult to capture because of the myriad tunnels and dugouts underneath it from which the Germans would rise and fire machine guns before sinking back down underground. But at this stage there was very little idea in 1st Anzac Corps that the defences beneath the farm were so extensive and so Birdwood's reticence to advance and capture the farm is a marked contrast to his determination to push the line forward in frequent, small-scale operations.

⁵⁸⁰ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Volume IV: The AIF in France, 1917*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson (1933), 1936, p. 213.

⁵⁸¹ Bean. *Official History, Vol III*, pp. 755-756.

The wild advance of part of the 12th Battalion's force threatened their operation, and the threat became more marked when it was realised that the battalion's right flank was completely unconnected. The two raiding parties of the 11th Battalion, forming the link between the attacks of the 12th and 10th Battalions, were not there. This was not a case of their operation failing. Through a 'concatenation of circumstances,' the 11th Battalion had not even arrived in the line when the operation went ahead at 6.00pm on 21 August 1916.⁵⁸² The commander of this battalion, Stephen Harricks Roberts, was informed on the evening of 20 August that his men were to take part in the attack roughly 24 hours later. But at this time the entire battalion, 'less HQ Signallers, pioneers, regimental police, some batmen and a few others' were permanently on fatigues, most at the Chalk Pit acting as carrying parties trying to alleviate the serious shortages of equipment in the front line.⁵⁸³ These duties were only taken over by the 2nd Battalion at 3pm on the 21st. Roberts felt, quite rightly, that the battalion would not have time to continue on in its task until 3.00pm, depart for the front line, reorganise and conduct an attack by 6.00pm. Therefore he tried on a number of separate occasions to negotiate with the commandant at the Chalk Pit and with various officers at Divisional headquarters for the relief to happen earlier, if not in the morning then by midday at the latest. Yet when a large party of men of the 11th Battalion, including its bombers and machine gun crews, were formed up ready to return to battalion headquarters for deployment at 11.30 that morning, they were ordered forward to the front line with a load of bombs by a brigade officer. The rest of

⁵⁸² '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916.' p. 50, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁸³ Roberts (OC 11th Bn) to 3rd Bde. The date at the top of the first page of the typed copy in file says August 19th 1916, but this is incorrect. The document is correctly dated with the signature on the last page as 23 August 1916, AWM 26/55/4.

the Battalion could not be found, presumably 'up in the line on similar duties'.⁵⁸⁴ The designated party of men did not return until 3.30pm, at which point they were immediately turned around and sent back to the Chalk Pit to collect bombs and rifle grenades for their own attack, and then sent forward again. The situation was so confused and the need for manpower so desperate that the Brigade Officer at the Chalk Pit was 'not aware that he was sending men required for the attacking party up to the front'.⁵⁸⁵ Nor was the brigadier in charge of the 3rd Division, Sinclair Maclagan, aware that any men of the attacking party were working on fatigues that day at all. While Roberts estimated that 'if no hitch had occurred the attacking party would have got into position in time', it was heavily shelled and had at least two of its officers buried on the way, one twice, and the men scattered by the heavy fire.⁵⁸⁶ The 11th Battalion was unable to attack until 8.00pm, two hours after the operations on its flanks went forward.⁵⁸⁷

One of the major problems facing by the 1st Division on their second spell in the line was a shortage of manpower, even before experiencing heavy casualties from operations in their second stint. The division had suffered a significant number of casualties following the capture of the village of Pozières, and despite a steady flow of reinforcements, most of the division's battalions were still under strength. Fatigue and carrying parties took up a bigger percentage of the reduced battalions than ever, and often when called on could not be found, or were still completing a task. Headquarters often lost track of how large a proportion of, for instance, a company

⁵⁸⁴ Roberts (OC 11th Bn) to 3rd Bde, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁸⁵ Sinclair Maclagan to 1st Aust. Div., 25th August 1916, AWM 26/55/6.

⁵⁸⁶ Roberts to 3rd Bde, 23 August 1916, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/55/4.

⁵⁸⁷ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p.51, AWM 26/55/4.

would be taken up by what could be considered the simple task of carrying supplies to the front line. So when, for example, the commander of A Company of the 7th Battalion, Captain James Frederick Bowtell-Harris, was rebuked by 7th Battalion headquarters for only sending 'sixteen other ranks to [the] Brigade dump [to form a carrying party] when you were ordered to make available all the men in your company',⁵⁸⁸ he had to remind 7th Battalion headquarters that 'all my men are still out on fatigue in accordance with your instructions... they are on their way to the firing line at present'. This left A Company too weak to provide support to the 7th Battalion. A company of the 5th Battalion was made available to fill this role, but 'the advance was impracticable and neither officers nor NCOs were familiar with the ground', and they did little more than dig trenches.⁵⁸⁹ In fact, at that time A Company had just 32 men in or near the front line, its remaining 100 men on divisional fatigue in Puchevillers.⁵⁹⁰ Units were constantly being borrowed like this, and could not be called on when needed.

The brigade tried to cover the missing 11th Battalion by inserting two platoons of the 9th Battalion while the 11th was located and reorganised. The report of the officer commanding the 9th demonstrates just how chaotic and disorganised the front line was:

...at 1630 (4.30pm)... these platoons moved off but owing to the congested state of the trenches a delay occurred and the rendezvous was not reached until 1755 (5.55pm) five minutes before the attack

⁵⁸⁸ Message from Bastin (Adj. 7th Bn) to Bowtell-Harris (OC A Coy 7th Bn), 18 August 1916, 3.50pm, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁸⁹ Message from Bowtell-Harris to 7th Bn, 18 August 1916, 6.47pm, AWM 26/54/7.

⁵⁹⁰ C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [*sic*],' 26 August 1916, p.7 AWM 26/54/7.

was timed. On arrival great confusion existed and there was only one trench which was filled with 11th Battalion, Engineers, etc. Apparently no one was in charge and the Senior Officer in charge of the Platoons was told they would not be wanted. However he waited and sent an Officer to me informing me of the situation. I informed Brigade and asked for instruction. I received this message which was as follows: "OC two platoons sent to assist 11th Battalion has just returned. He states 11th Battalion had full complement. These platoons now in jumping off position. Please advise what they had better do".⁵⁹¹

The situation was farcical. The officer commanding the two platoons of the 9th somehow had the impression that there was a full complement of the 11th Battalion in the line, when there simply was not. Given that nobody appeared to be in charge the information he acted on was surely false. The parties from the 9th Battalion returned from the front line and were later employed elsewhere, and nothing was done to fill the gap between two larger attacks. These small ad hoc operations of the 1st Anzac Corps were now threatening the very stability of their sector and their ability to continue to make attacks on the German line. There were simply not enough men to do all of the jobs required to be done by a division, and not enough time to do them. This situation had been building for some time, with men always under pressure to prepare the front line and be in formation in time for an operation. They had finally failed to do so.

⁵⁹¹ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p. 51, AWM 26/55/4.

The right flank of the Anzac sector where the 2nd Brigade was holding the line was not untouched during this time either. The 7th Battalion in particular continued to conduct both large raids and small attacks on their objective for days following their initial failed assault. Depleted by casualties and requests from division for working parties, the reserve battalion of the 2nd Brigade was reduced to a force of very few men. At 8.35am on 21 August the 1st Division ordered more carrying parties from the 2nd Brigade's reserve Battalion to assist the 3rd Brigade.⁵⁹² Pushed to the limit, Lieutenant Colonel Bennett sent the following message back:

[The] working party... referred to has been detailed. I beg to point out that when these men leave my Reserve Battalion there will only be approximately 137 rifles in reserve of very tired men who only came out of the line at 1.30am this morning [and] have been in since the 15th which has completely knocked them out. Should my Brigade still continue to hold the line at 12 noon I consider that it is not safe to deplete the reserve as proposed. Moreover the men are so tired that I would respectfully suggest that this working party be detailed from some other force especially in view of the Brigade having to march on [the] 22nd. I wish the question of the depletion of reserve brought specially to the notice of the GOC of the Division.⁵⁹³

At no point was the aim of these attacks reappraised or reconsidered at upper levels. It would appear that simply because an objective had been given by I Anzac Corps, the

⁵⁹² Message G.859 from 1st Aust. Div. to 2nd & 3rd Bdes, 21 August 1916, 8.35am in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & Martinpuich respectively. Summary of Messages,' p. 11, AWM 26/51/30.

⁵⁹³ Message from 2nd Bde to 1st Aust. Div., 21 August 1916, 9.24am in 'Operations of 1st, and 2nd, Aust. Inf. Brigades towards Mouquet Farm & MARTINPUICH respectively. Summary of Messages,' pp. 12-13, AWM 26/51/30.

1st Division was determined to take it, no matter what the cost. The cost, in the end, was a very significant proportion of the division's fighting strength, for the partial attainment of what was simply a line on a map. While the 2nd Brigade's strength was sapped, the 3rd Brigade, too, was seriously reduced by casualties, making 'further offensive operations on any but a small scale... out of the question, especially as the men were short of sleep and shaken by shell fire'.⁵⁹⁴ This was an exhausted division.

The brigade commanders of the 1st Division had each approached their tasks in a different manner. Smyth saw his first operation of this period in particular as a large raid, and deployed his infantry accordingly. Bennett acted in the completely opposite manner, choosing to deploy his infantry in standard wave formation, maintaining strength through the formation of his men, while avoiding overcrowding his infantry lines. Sinclair-Maclagan's operation was a mixture of the two – two operations using waves of infantry joined by a series of large raiding parties. No matter the formation adopted by brigade, however, no approach could work more effectively than the others. This was because the brigadiers had been hamstrung by a series of completely inappropriate artillery barrages from corps command. Somehow the logic behind lifting artillery barrages had been lost, and they were now being applied in a totally inappropriate manner. Each lift of the barrage had been originally designed to protect the infantry as they advanced between objectives. The barrage would first fall onto an objective before moving forward, keeping the Germans away from their machine guns and off of their parapets until the very last moment so that the attacking infantry could get across the ground as unhindered as possible. Now that the barrages were

⁵⁹⁴ '3rd Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations about Mouquet Farm and Pozières. 19th to 23rd August 1916,' p.54, AWM 26/55/4.

beginning on the only objective and making a series of lifts afterwards, the plans of the artillery and the infantry were completely disconnected. The infantry stood no chance against the unchallenged machine guns of the German defenders.

The fault of this situation lay with 1st Anzac Corps. While Reserve Army continued to have some input into the artillery barrages for operations ordered by Gough, the Army headquarters was convinced that 1st Anzac Corps would be advancing further than they actually did. On 20 August a memorandum from Army was issued with a 'forecast of future operations... with a view to enabling Corps Commanders to arrange their minor undertakings and to adjust the reliefs of their troops'. This memo stated that 'all efforts of the Reserve Army will be directed towards the capture of Thiepval'.⁵⁹⁵ It was predicted that, with the 1st Anzac Corps pressing on with its 'preliminary operations' it should have reached a line of trench running 800-1000 yards to the north of Mouquet Farm by 25 August. By the 26th the corps was expected to have shifted to the left in the line by taking over from the 48th British Division and be prepared shortly afterwards by 'putting in an attack upon Thiepval from the south-east'.⁵⁹⁶ 1st Anzac Corps was not in any way capable of participating in even the first part of Reserve Army's plan. Gough expected the corps to have advanced more than 800 yards in four days, when they had barely managed to advance that far since the initial capture of Pozières some four weeks earlier. Birdwood's operations were so reduced in scope by this stage that his men were almost always threatened by their own artillery fire on the first objective because it was so close to their jumping off trench. The outlook of 1st Anzac Corps was increasingly limited in scope and it had

⁵⁹⁵ Memorandum SG.46/0/25 from Reserve Army to II Corps, V Corps, I Anzac Corps, XIII Corps & 3rd Cavalry Division, 20 August 1916, AWM 26/63/11.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

reduced the ability of their infantry to succeed in the field to naught. Reserve Army's hope that 'the capture of Thiepval will be accomplished by the 1st September'⁵⁹⁷ by this means was simply fantasy.

The combination of Gough's insistence that units press forward as much as possible, and Birdwood's willingness to do so only in the most limited of manners was costing the Australian forces of the 1st Anzac Corps more than they could pay. The 1st Australian Division on its second tour to the front line was completely finished. Battalions like the 10th were now well below half of their establishment figure, and the men who had not been killed or evacuated wounded were shaky and exhausted. There was no possibility of leaving the 1st Division in the line much less using it to conduct another operation now or in the near future. As a result, the division was withdrawn on 23 August 1916 and replaced by the 2nd Australian Division. By 28 August the 1st Division was in billets in Hoograaf in Belgium⁵⁹⁸ and would not participate again in fighting on the Somme for some months. Between 5 and 23 August the division had suffered 2,654 casualties.⁵⁹⁹ They had advanced the line no more than 400 yards.

⁵⁹⁷ Memorandum SG.46/0/25 from Reserve Army to II Corps, V Corps, I Anzac Corps, XIII Corps & 3rd Cavalry Division, 20 August 1916, AWM 26/63/11.

⁵⁹⁸ Divisional Headquarters were established at Hoograaf by 10am on 28 August, 1916. 1st Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 28 August 1916. AWM 4/1/42/19 Pt. 1.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Statement of Actual Casualties from 9am 5th August 1916 to 23rd August 1916'. AWM 4/1/43/9.

Chapter 6. 'Mouquet Farm is causing many casualties at present': The Danger of Ignoring the Obvious

By 9am on 23 August, Major General Gordon Legge's 2nd Division was back in the line, and formal command of 1st Anzac Corps' sector put back into his hands.⁶⁰⁰ From the first day the 2nd Division arrived in the line, Birdwood and his staff⁶⁰¹ were aware that 1st Anzac Corps' time around Pozières was coming to an end, and that as a part of this process the 2nd Division would soon be relieved by the 4th Australian Division.⁶⁰² Birdwood was equally aware that his remaining two divisions whole would soon be relieved by the Canadians and removed to Belgium. In the period immediately before Legge's division moved back into the front line, Reserve Army had given no specific direction regarding operational objectives or ordered any attacks. But despite the looming withdrawal – or perhaps because of it – and without a demonstrated understanding of the problems in recent operations, Birdwood continued to plan and conduct small-scale, costly operations.

It is clear that by this time Birdwood thought he had hit upon the answer to forward movement on the Somme. His operations had become more and more uniform, and shared two major characteristics. The first feature of this series of battles is the closeness of the objective. Typically the Australian infantry was now aiming to attack a distance of around 50-100 yards from their current position. The objective could extend further in some areas, but never for the greater part of the section of front

⁶⁰⁰ '1st Anzac Corps Summary of Operations for Week Ending 26-8-26,' 26 August 1916, AWM 26/50/18.

⁶⁰¹ G.1/148. Memorandum from 2nd Aust. Div, 24 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶⁰² 2nd Aust. Div. War Diary, second entry for 23 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

being attacked. While Birdwood had been made responsible for an important first phase of Reserve Army's master plan – to move his corps to the north as a preliminary manoeuvre in the capture of Thiepval – he was not following this order with any resolve. Certainly his advances were tentative at best. The operations were focussed in the direction of Mouquet Farm, but the short objectives were by no means a significant step towards even clearing the German dugouts in and immediately beyond Mouquet Farm, much less pressing on towards Thiepval. By late August there had simply been no great purpose in 1st Anzac Corps' operations for several weeks.

The other major characteristic of this series of battles has to do with artillery support. Birdwood and his divisional commanders continued to rely on artillery barrages in the orders he handed down to division, but they were quite different to those used initially in the Pozières battle, or even in 2nd Division's operations against the OG Lines. These barrages lifted about 50 yards from line to line, characteristically moving on to the next line of fire within two to four minutes. More like a creeping barrage, these artillery plans were intended to allow the infantry to follow closely behind all the way to the objective, rather than bombard the objective and then lift to allow the infantry in. But they began *on* the objective, and so despite lifting slowly away could never be followed by the infantry. These two tactical features are firmly ingrained in the ongoing action of the 1st Australian Corps until its withdrawal and underwent little or no further modification.

There had been a number notes disseminating 'lessons learned' in recent operations between commanders in early to mid-August. The most important of these had been

summarised by Haig on 13 August 1916. This memorandum of general instructions contained some useful principles, such as the need to have 'sufficient depth in assaulting columns' and careful attention to lines of communication. Haig also stated that 'isolated advances by detachments, pressing forward beyond the reach of support, should be avoided... the enemy can concentrate against these small bodies [and] the most gallant men are lost in vain.' But patrols of infantry and bombing platoons were regularly sent forward in advance of the leading wave of infantry during operations, and advanced posts were often established in no man's land well ahead of the front line by 1st Anzac Corps. Certainly there had not been sufficient depth to an attack in 1st Anzac Corps' sector for some weeks. Some of the principles simply could not be followed. For example, when Haig wrote about '[t]he necessity of foreseeing and providing for defensive requirements on the flanks in all attacks, large or small. This includes arrangements to close gaps opening in advance,'⁶⁰³ there was an assumption that there would be enough men present and sufficiently unwounded to be able to effect this. And yet, even Haig was aware that

unnecessary congestion is sometimes caused by one Brigade or one Battalion, as the case may be, being automatically relieved in the line by a fresh Brigade or Battalion without regard to the fact that the unit being relieved may have lost a large number of its effectives and is holding the position with very possibly half the strength of the relieving unit.

⁶⁰³ O.B. 1782. Memorandum signed Lieutenant-General R.G. Butler for Chief of the General Staff, 13 August 1916, p.1, AWM 26/40/4.

It would seem that Reserve Army and the 1st Anzac Corps paid little, if any, attention to this message, given that many of the principles laid out in the memorandum were completely absent in subsequent operations.

One of the most emphasised points in Haig's memorandum was to do with flanks. While it was important to ensure that 'flanks are sufficiently well protected', Haig wrote that

the advance must not be delayed by large bodies of troops hanging back for those on their flanks, who may be checked, to come on. On the contrary, every effort must be made to turn the flanks of centres of resistance and surround them, and to continue the attack.⁶⁰⁴

There were some fundamentally contradictory ideas at play here. If isolated advanced detachments were to be avoided, surely the advance should be delayed due to large bodies of troops hanging back on an advanced unit's flanks? What these general instructions, and others like them, did in practice was to effectively condone almost any approach. Certainly Reserve Army and its formations were able to act with impunity without any regard to this memorandum at all. Once again, while ideas and tactical principles were being shared, there was no oversight of how they were implemented, if at all.

As previously demonstrated, Gough had welcomed offensive plans developed by lower-level commanders, and would continue to do so. Given this free rein to plan

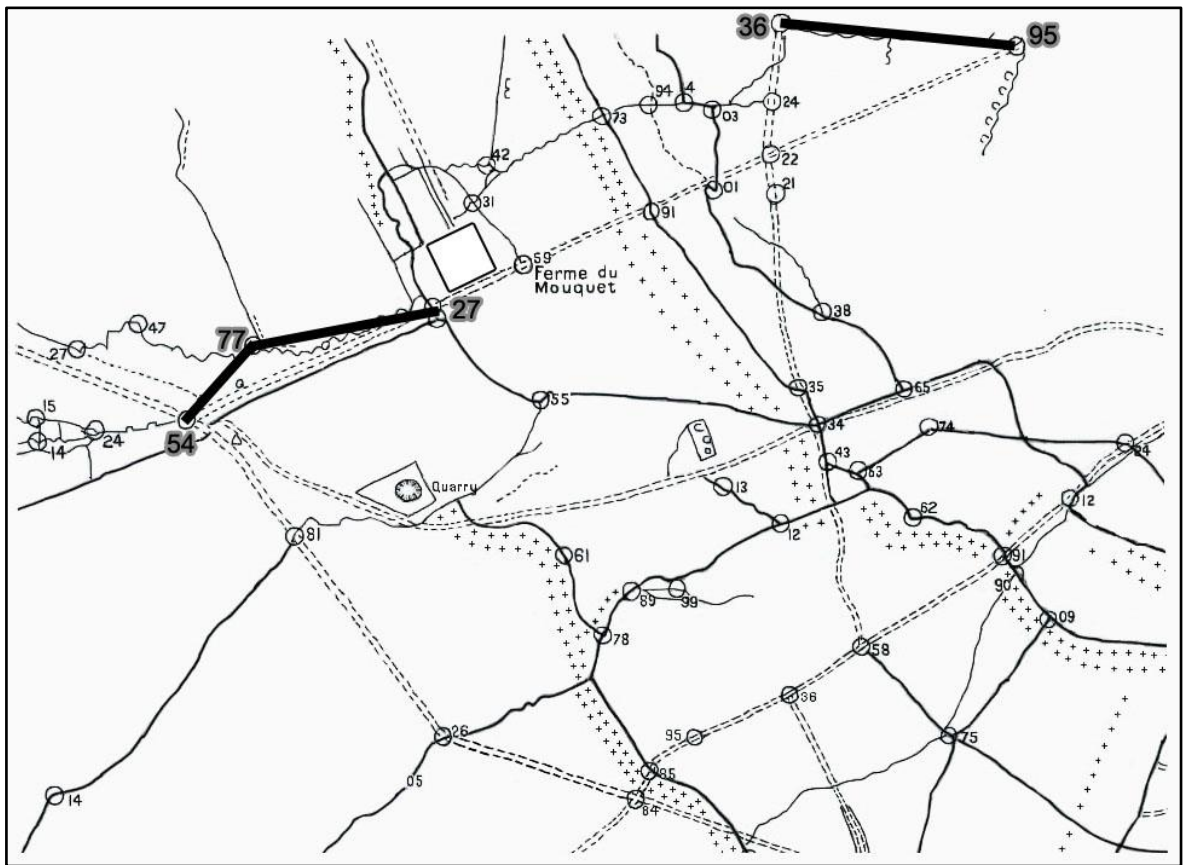
⁶⁰⁴ O.B. 1782. Memorandum signed Lieutenant-General R.G. Butler for Chief of the General Staff, 13 August 1916, p.2, AWM 26/40/4.

operations, Birdwood's first intention for the 2nd Division was to capture a small triangle of German positions to the left of Mouquet Farm, and a short piece of trench to the right. Unsurprisingly, these two objectives were very close to the existing Australian position. In fact, once again, such was their insignificance in terms of the overall situation, it is not possible to discuss them without the use of map coordinates. The small triangle of German trenches was known as Points 27 – 77 – 54,⁶⁰⁵ and the points on the right were, as mentioned, a line between points 36 and 95. Equally, and again as before, none of the objectives in this projected operation could be said to be causing any more than the usual threat to the current position, and so the plan did not particularly contribute to a safer defence of the line. Given that this had happened four or five times previously in a very similar fashion, there is absolutely no evidence of any process of weighing the benefit of the objective against a potential cost in lives or materiel at corps or even divisional level.

The 2nd Division, to conduct the attack, had been seriously depleted by its first experience of major operations on the Somme and had been incompletely reinforced or resupplied since. It surely could not have gone unrecognised at 1st Anzac Corps headquarters that the 2nd Division was in danger of ending up in the same state the 1st Division was currently in – massively understrength and withdrawn from active operations having gained very little. Birdwood's plan was extremely limited in scope and could barely be said to adhere to Reserve Army's overall strategy of northward movement. The most that could be said of the projected advance was that it would straighten the line somewhat. At what cost seems not to have mattered at all. This is

⁶⁰⁵ At this time numbered points on maps were invariably read from right to left, so Point 54 was in fact the most westerly point, and Point 27 closest to Mouquet Farm.

entirely characteristic of the turn offensive operations had taken within 1st Anzac Corps.



Map 30. Points 27 - 77 - 54 on the left and Points 95 - 36 on the right.

Of further concern with this plan, and those to follow, is that none paid adequate attention to the threat Mouquet Farm posed to operations in this area even though the Australian line was within yards of it. Although they still could not be sure of exact numbers, 1st Anzac Corps headquarters was by now well aware that the farm compound housed a sizeable German garrison. Australian soldiers had been in the farm compound itself and seen dugout entrances, and it had been noted that German machine guns could be withdrawn from the area around the farm and apparently vanish, giving further evidence of well-established and well-fortified underground

shelters. On 24 August the 24th Battalion reported that men in a bombing post within twelve yards of the farm saw 'numbers of Boche... Between 300 and 400 enemy passed... along [a] low trench ...[and]... disappeared into Mouquet Farm which must consist of a series of deep underground tunnels and dugouts.'⁶⁰⁶ And yet once again on 26 August 1916 Mouquet Farm itself was not an objective of the operation. The operation against the triangular trench 27-77-54 on the left brought the line to the south-west corner of the farm buildings. There would be no attempt to connect these two points by taking the farm compound itself. Nor does there appear to have been any consideration whatsoever of the implications of having such a potentially formidable position in the middle of a disconnected Anzac line. This lack of foresight and acknowledgement of wider operational implications is quite simply remarkable.

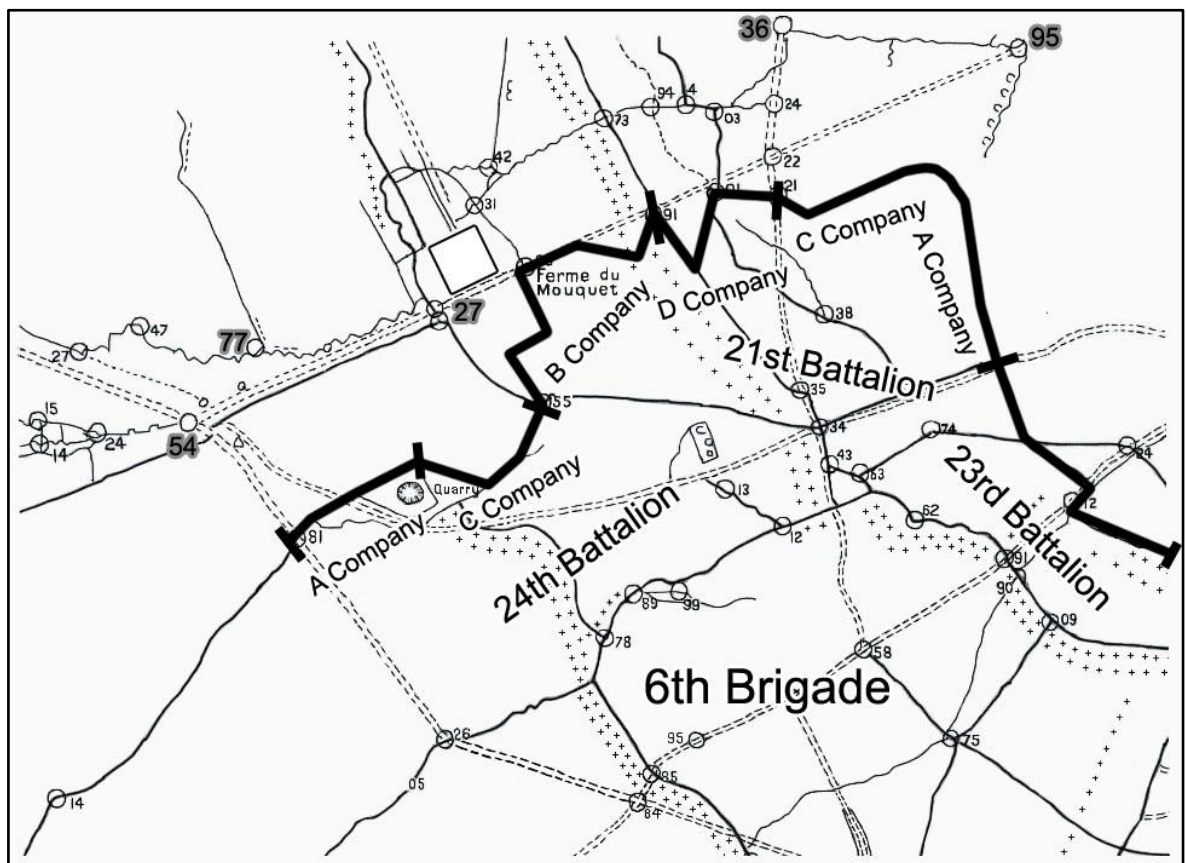
When the 2nd Division entered the line again, the men found much of the front remained the same as it had been the last time they were there – from Munster Alley along the OG lines to the north there had been no change. This sector was given to the 5th Brigade, which would only defend the line and not try to advance it.⁶⁰⁷ The biggest change to the Anzac position came in the centre of their line, where previous efforts had managed to extend the salient northwards. Here there had been an advance of roughly 4-500 yards since 25 July. The line had also been extended to the left a short way, with Australian troops taking over control of some of the more northerly parts of Skyline Trench from the division next door.⁶⁰⁸ This northern area of 1st Anzac Corps' sector continued to be the focus of their future operations from

⁶⁰⁶ 24th Bn War Diary, entry for 24 August 1916, AWM 4/23/41/12.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Report on Operations from 9am 23rd August to 6pm 25th August,' AWM 26/56/8 and also 'Report on Operations of 5th Australian Infantry Brigade from 31st to 27th August 1915,' 4 September 1916, AWM 26/57/22.

⁶⁰⁸ 2nd Aust. Div. War Diary, second entry for 23 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

the time the 2nd Division came into the line on 23 August, until the time the 4th Division was relieved in early September and the corps as a whole retired to Belgium. The 6th Brigade, under Brigadier General John Gellibrand, held the line in this sector for the 2nd Division, and had found that the salient had extended the line so much they were obliged to put three battalions into the front line instead of the two proposed by division.⁶⁰⁹ The 7th Brigade formed the divisional reserve, and was distributed through Tara Hill, Sausage Valley and the brickfields.⁶¹⁰



Map 31. 6th Brigade's positions at the apex of the salient, 23 August 1916.

⁶⁰⁹. 6th Bde, 'Report on Operations, 22/3rd to 26/7th August 1916,' 28 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶¹⁰ 2nd Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 9am 23 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

The 2nd Division immediately commenced the by-now usual activity of construction or consolidation and improvement of front and communication lines on taking over the sector.⁶¹¹ The entire sector was repeatedly and considerably damaged by shell fire, and deepening and strengthening of the trenches was an ongoing requirement.⁶¹² Work, too, was constantly hampered by shellfire; not only were trenches badly damaged, they were often found to be shallow and unfinished.⁶¹³ The situation was so fluid that there was an ongoing need to continually ascertain the position of both Australian and German trenches on the map. The ground had become so churned up that aerial photographs were of little assistance. It was reported that it was only 'with the utmost difficulty that [a] line of trenches can be picked up and marked on [the] map with any degree of certainty'.⁶¹⁴ The 6th Brigade commander, Brigadier General John Gellibrand found on assuming command that that he had

taken over an incompletely consolidated position without any communications worth speaking of, and that means terribly slow work in getting about and [getting] information. Many places can only be reached by going round three parts of a circle.⁶¹⁵

The situation was worse in the forward lines – the area from which any new operation would launch – and was the area least mapped or understood. Gellibrand reported that

⁶¹¹ 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' AWM 26/56/9.

⁶¹² Wellington (5th Bde), 'Progress Works Report to 9am 23 August 1916,' AWM 26/57/22.

⁶¹³ 'Precis of Patrol Reports on Night 23rd/24th August,' 24 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶¹⁴ Message from Savige (6th Bde) to HQ 2nd Aust. Div., 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶¹⁵ Letter from Gellibrand to Bridges, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

I am not at present in a position to report definitely on the actual line held by this Brigade or on the amount of work required to complete consolidation and provide some form of communication trenches.⁶¹⁶

In fact, it was not until the afternoon of 23 August that the exact position of the apex of the line could be definitely marked on a map.⁶¹⁷ Gellibrand wrote to Bridges at 1st Anzac Headquarters to say he hoped 'that the 24th will not be the date of any push from here before essential preparation and reconnaissances are satisfactory.'⁶¹⁸ As he noted, and Haig had before him, 'communications are the whole business – nothing must be attempted till this is put straight.'⁶¹⁹ This required well-established trench systems for messengers to be able to move around the battlefield under cover. A message would take an hour and a half to be run from the front line to brigade headquarters – which had no telephone communication to speak of to the forward lines. With most trenches in a partially-destroyed condition the burial of telephone cables would take a long time.⁶²⁰ It should be noted that the 1st Australian Division cannot be blamed for the state of the front lines, either. The shell fire continued to be heavy, consistent and accurate, and destroyed any works undertaken within days, or even hours, and the 1st Division had struggled with exactly the same problems during their period in possession of the front line too.

So this new operation would consist of two small-scale, more or less unconnected operations to suit Birdwood's aspirations alone, conducted by a depleted force over

⁶¹⁶ Memorandum from Gellibrand (OC 6th Bde) to HQ 2nd Aust. Div., 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

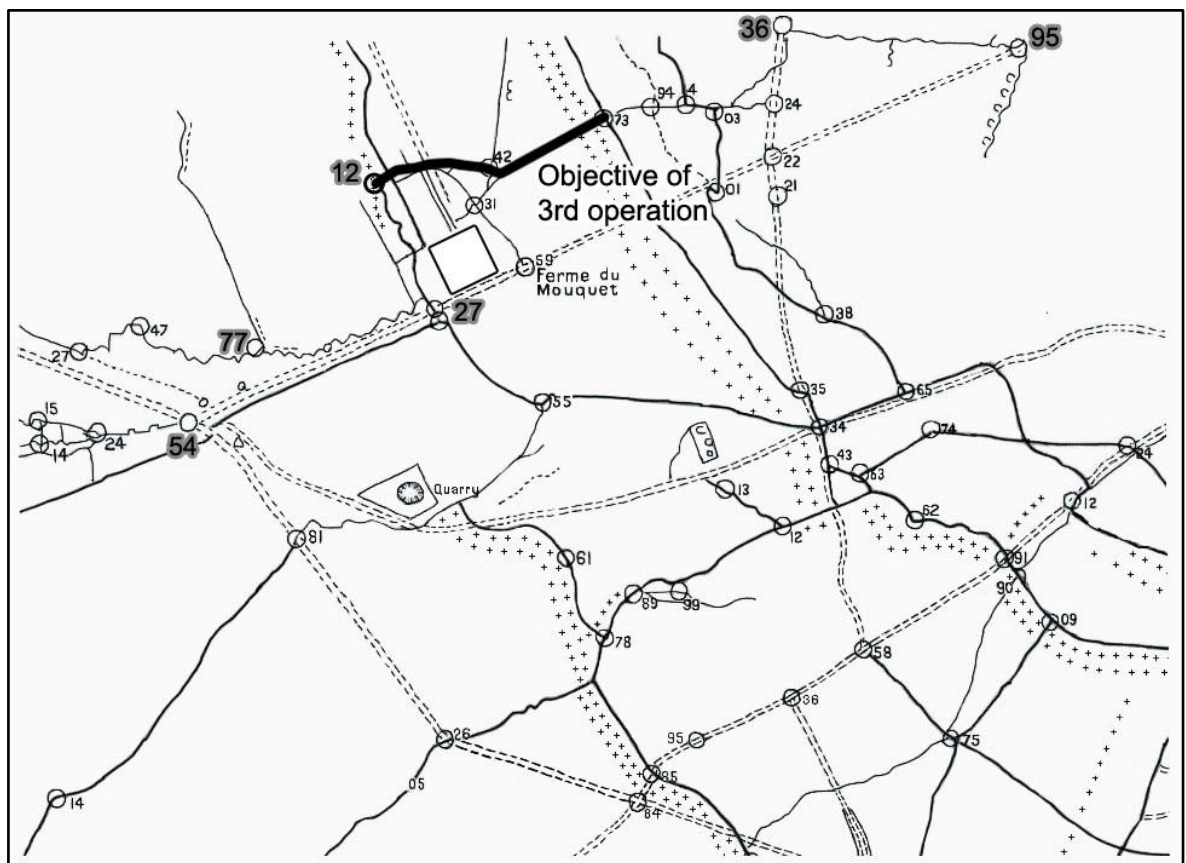
⁶¹⁷ 'Report on Operations, 22/3rd to 26/7th August 1916,' 28 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶¹⁸ Letter from Gellibrand to Bridges, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶¹⁹ 'Notes for Col. Bridges' note on back of handwritten draft of letter from Gellibrand to Bridges, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶²⁰ Letter from Gellibrand to Bridges, 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

seriously difficult and unprepared ground. The bulk of the plan, including the objectives and artillery cooperation, were provided by corps and grew over the space of some days from a 'strong raid' to a small attack. Initial plans were to take the points by having the infantry probe forward through advancing posts or 'by bombing alone, if no other course is open'.⁶²¹ The plans gradually developed over time into the by-now familiar format of a small operation, really only just bigger than a large raid, against very limited objectives. These two operations were so isolated that a third operation, a large raid in the vicinity of Mouquet Farm, had been incorporated into the attack the day before it was due to go ahead in order to protect the right flank of the attack against Points 27 - 77 - 54.⁶²² Once again, this new attack was against a



Map 32. Points 12, 42 and 73 - the objective of the third operation.

⁶²¹ Memorandum from Brudenell White to 1st, 2nd and 4th Aust. Divs., (undated - Appendix 1), AWM 26/56/9.

⁶²² '1st A & NZAC Order No. 35,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/50/18.

single German trench that could only be identified by using map coordinates. The positions in question here were points 12, 42 and 73, roughly parallel to the farm track that ran along the southern side of Mouquet Farm's building compound.⁶²³ But because of the last-minute inclusion of this third operation there was no time to construct an assembly trench for the extra troops assigned to the task, and the attacking troops had to filter into the front from a trench running towards the quarry.⁶²⁴ Although Bridges wrote that 'considerable importance is attached to the capture of points 73, 42 and 12 and in view of the barrages arranged the capture will probably not be so difficult as it appeared at first',⁶²⁵ this operation continued to remain of secondary importance and was not incorporated into the lifting artillery barrage for the other operations. It would, however, benefit from a standing barrage beyond the objective.⁶²⁶

Despite growing out of what was felt to be an operational necessity to protect the operation against Points 27 - 77 - 54 on the left, this raid was planned to be an entirely separate operation. It was more or less the strong patrol advances envisaged in early plans. It was determined that the 24th and the 21st Battalions should change places in the line to conduct this attack. A and C companies of the 24th Battalion would be relieved by the 21st Battalion at the far left of the sector, and the 21st Battalion would then, with the support of B Company of their battalion, attack Points 27 - 77 - 54. The relieved companies of the 24th Battalion would move over to the

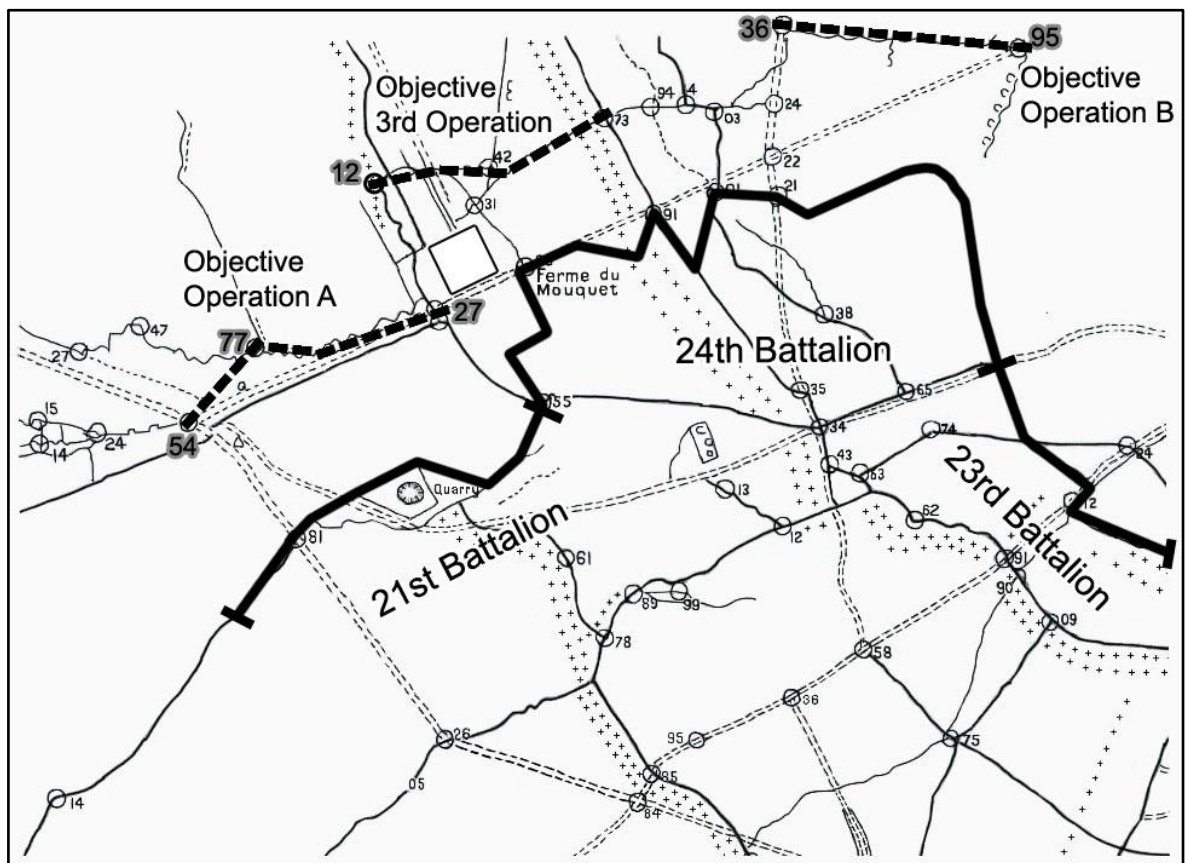
⁶²³ Memorandum from Brudenell White to 1st, 2nd and 4th Aust. Divs., (undated, Appendix 1), AWM 26/56/9.

⁶²⁴ 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' pp.2-3, AWM 26/56/9.

⁶²⁵ Memorandum from Bridges to CRA, 2nd Aust. Div., CRA Lahore Arty, CRE, 6th Bde, 25 August 1916 AWM 26/56/8.

⁶²⁶ 'Operation Order No. 10 by Brigadier General L.D. Fraser, CMG. Commanding 1st Anzac Heavy Artillery,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/52/28.

recently vacated positions of the 21st Battalion.⁶²⁷ No arrangements were made to maintain contact between the two forces conducting the attack, either when the attack was launched, or when it had achieved its objectives. The two operations on the left were deliberately separated by a 200-yard gap in the objective lines between point 27 and point 12. Between them, once again unaccounted for by any offensive plans, lay Mouquet Farm. On the right the operation against were to be separated by as much as 250 yards.



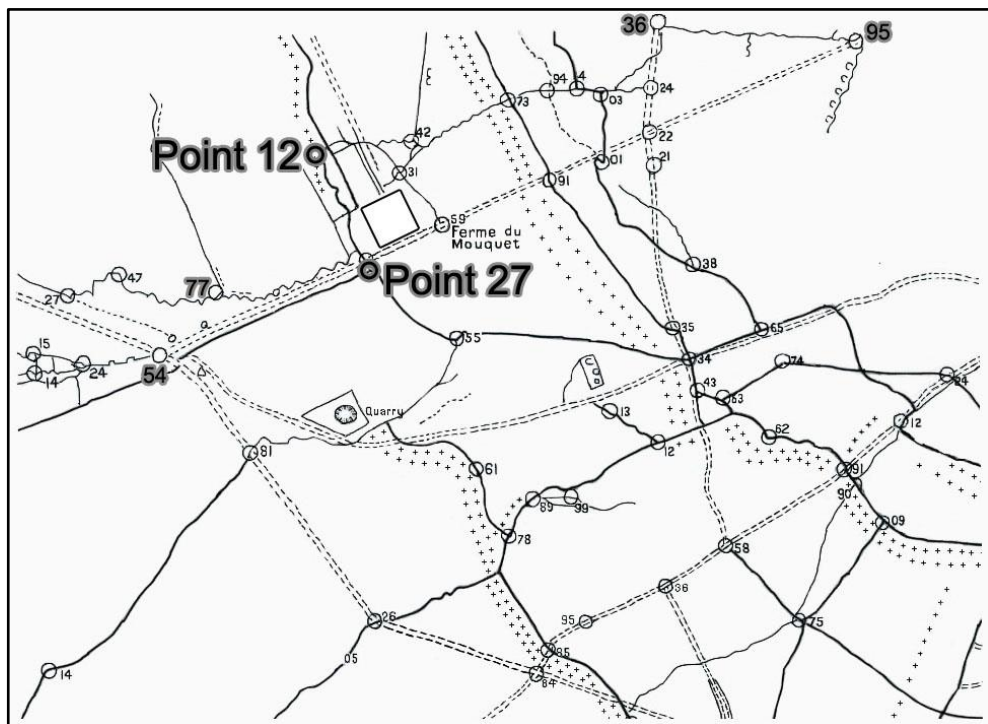
Map 33. 6th Brigade's modified positions for the operation of 26 August 1916.

The developing plans continued to draw criticism from Gellibrand. Two of the main points to be captured were Point 27, roughly on the south west corner of the Mouquet

⁶²⁷ '6th Aust. Infantry Bde. Operation Order No. 38,' 23 August 1916, AWM 4/23/6/12.

Farm building compound and the most easterly point of the German triangular trench, and Point 12, about 100 yards to the north of it.⁶²⁸ It was not proposed to join these two points, but rather to push them out as strongpoints ahead of the main line, which would skirt Mouquet Farm's boundaries to the south.⁶²⁹ Gellibrand's reservations were clearly expressed this to 1st Anzac Corps headquarters on several occasions. He was also the first to raise serious concerns about the potential cost of such an operation, writing that

the establishment of a post near 12 or even 27 is likely to prove costly at present. The position of my present left flank at the quarry is by no means satisfactory as it is said to consist of 300 yards of



Map 34. Points 27 and 12 at Mouquet Farm.

⁶²⁸ Memorandum from Brudenell White to 1st, 2nd and 4th Aust. Divs., (undated - Appendix 1), AWM 26/56/9.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

obliterated and unoccupied trench. I do not consider an attack on 27

– 77 – 54 to be feasible with the means at my disposal.⁶³⁰

All of Gellibrand's objections were ignored or overruled.⁶³¹ Once again a brigade commander had been handed a plan he could do very little with. No further objection by Gellibrand is apparent in the written records – but that should not be taken to imply that he did not continue verbally to point out the problems with this plan for his brigade. But any objections, if there were any, fell on deaf ears, and plans began to be wrought in earnest for an attack on the line during the early hours of 26 August.

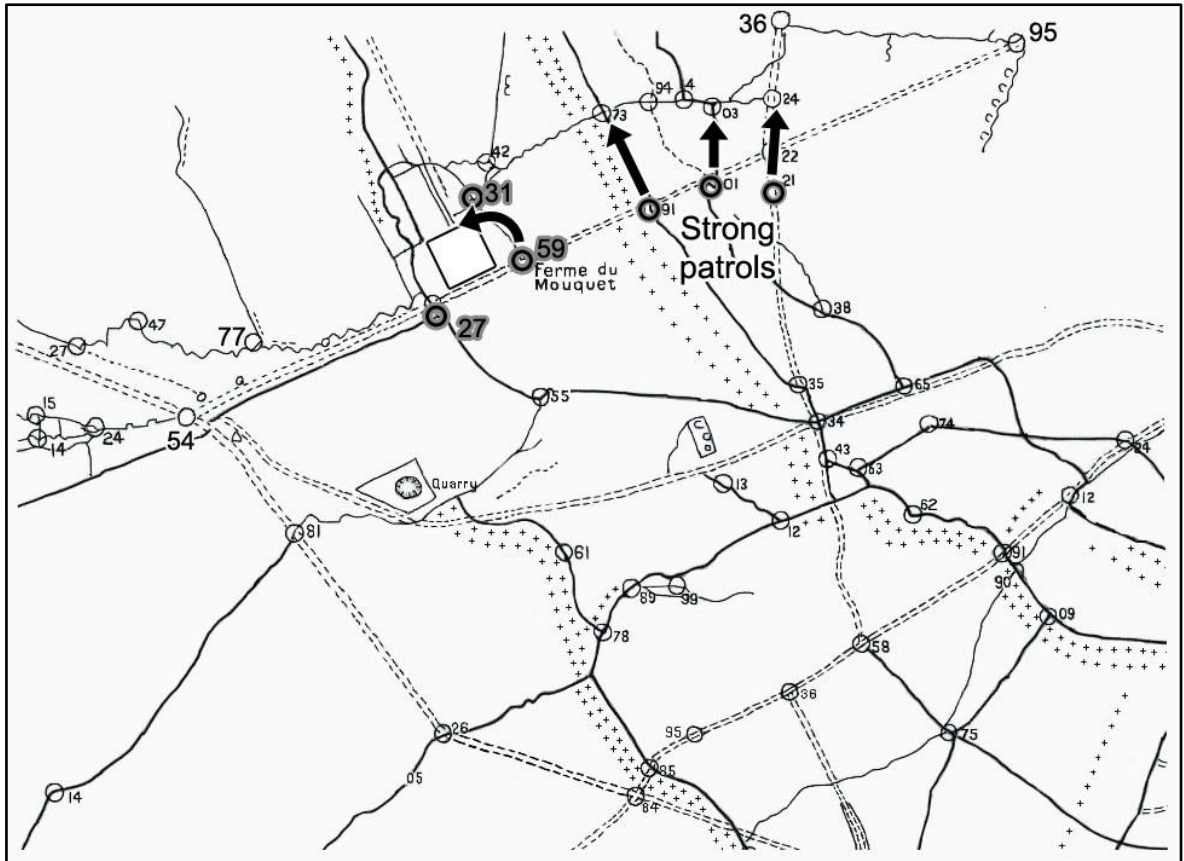
On 25 August 1916 the 1st Anzac Corps issued orders that bore almost no resemblance to these preparations. Regardless of plans to conduct two or three operations at various points in the line, or Bridges' note that considerable importance was to be attached to the capture of points 73, 42 and 12, from this time on the main purpose of any operation was to capture the German trench at Points 27 – 77 – 54. At all other points along the line, 'posts will be established in advance of the present front' and nothing more.⁶³² The attack on Points 12, 42 and 73 failed to materialise in corps orders, as did Operation B against the trench between Points 36 and 95.

This change was reflected in the artillery barrage, the orders for which were issued on the same day. On the right there were no lifts at all, and the artillery planned to remain firing on the trench at Points 36 – 95 for the entire duration of the operation.

⁶³⁰ Memorandum from Gellibrand (OC 6th Bde) to HQ 2nd Aust. Div., 23 August 1916, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶³¹ '1st A & NZAC Order No. 35,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/50/18.

⁶³² '6th Aust. Infantry Brigade Operation Order No. 39'. 25 August 1916. AWM 26/56/9.



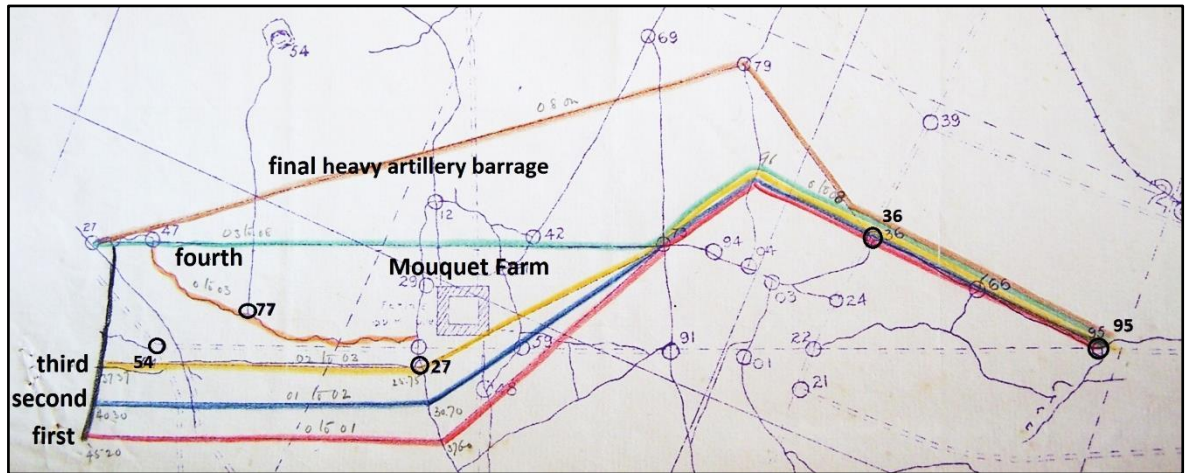
Map 35. 24th Battalion's modified objectives for 26 August 1916.

The rest of the barrage was planned to be fast-paced and light, with just three lifts (one per minute) of roughly 50 yards on the left flank, after which the artillery was to make an enormous lift of some 200 yards to beyond Mouquet Farm, onto the line of Points 12, 42 and 73.⁶³³ Heavy artillery would initially bombard this same distant line from three minutes before the attack commenced to two minutes after, and from then would lift to a line even further away, between 200 and 500 yards from the objective.⁶³⁴ After a period in which 1st Anzac Corps had been ordering its artillery to fire its barrages first onto the objective and then made a series of lifts carefully beyond the infantry's area of operations – and thereby helping them not at all – the

⁶³³ 'Addenda to Artillery Order No. 9 by GOCRA 1st ANZAC,' and barrage maps, 25 August 1916, AWM 26/52/20.

⁶³⁴ 'Operation Order No. 10 by Brigadier General L.D. Fraser, CMG. Commanding 1st Anzac Heavy Artillery,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/52/28.

lifts for this operation were finally planned to fall in front of the objective and lead the artillery up to it.



Map 36. Barrage lifts for operation of 26 August 1916.⁶³⁵

Despite this, however, the artillery barrage was still of very little use to the infantry. The lifts up to the objective were so close together it would be possible for the entire program to have been fired and moved onto the standing barrage far beyond the farm before fire even moved beyond the 'safe zone' that allowed the infantry to operate without coming under their own fire. The safe zone for infantry was considered to be 200 yards from the intended barrage line,⁶³⁶ and the objectives for the operation planned for 26 August were uncomfortably close to that, or well within it, all along the line. Again, some of the infantry in positions opposite Mouquet Farm were so close to the first objective of the barrage that they would be forced to temporarily withdraw from the front line to facilitate the fall of shells without being killed

⁶³⁵ AWM 26/52/20.

⁶³⁶ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 31 August 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

themselves.⁶³⁷ When combined with such close objectives, this kind of barrage prevented the infantry from employing leapfrogging techniques as used on 23 July, and instead could only encourage them to attack a single objective *en masse*. This tactical degeneration had been evident in most of the 4th Division's small scale operations, when the objectives were too close to the assembly trenches to safely fire a bombardment, but although perhaps ostensibly improved here, the plan was still largely detrimental to the infantry.

Legge's opinion of the artillery plan was that it was heavy enough to win him the day. He wrote that 'in view of the barrages arranged the capture [of these points] will probably not be so difficult as it appeared at first.'⁶³⁸ But this was hardly the kind of barrage that would gain Legge's division automatic victory. On the left it was far too close to the infantry's area of operation, too fast-lifting, and then stood at too great a distance from the final objective. On the right it was not a lifting barrage at all, merely a bombardment of the objective that would not allow the infantry into it until the barrage was over.

Legge ordered his infantry to cooperate with the artillery by watching the barrage 'closely and keep[ing] as close as possible to it up to the objective'.⁶³⁹ But once again 2nd Division's plan crowded a large number of infantry into dense waves for the attack. Two lines of infantry (each nearly half a battalion in strength) on a 4-500 yard front were assigned to the attack on the left. Even with the battalions depleted by

⁶³⁷ '1st A & NZAC Order No. 35,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/50/18.

⁶³⁸ Message from Bridges to CRA, 2nd Aust. Div., CRA Lahore Arty & CRE, 6th Bde. 25 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶³⁹ 'Second Australian Divisional Order No. 43,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

their first tour of the front line, this was at least one man per one and a half to two yards of trench, and gave the Germans plenty of targets at which to aim their machine guns. It was only once the objective was occupied that the troops were to be thinned and defence would rest heavily on parties of Lewis gunners and bombers sent forward to advanced positions in shell holes.⁶⁴⁰ While Legge's comment on the barrages at least demonstrates a more welcoming attitude towards the use of artillery than he had exhibited previously, it demonstrates a failure to recognise the inadequacy of the artillery schedule to the planned operation.

The 21st Battalion was given the main task of attacking the triangle of strongpoints formed by Points 27 – 77 - 54. This attack would be unsupported on both flanks as the division on the left did not propose to participate in the operation by attacking from Skyline Trench,⁶⁴¹ and the operation against Points 12, 42 and 73, even if it had gone ahead, would have been 200 yards to the far side of Mouquet Farm. No special measures were taken to extend the attack across corps boundaries despite recognition that 'the operation...will be greatly affected by the [action of the] division on the left', and no contingency was put in place beyond the construction of a defensive flank.⁶⁴² This operation of the 6th Brigade for 26 August 1916 ostensibly appeared to be a coordinated series of attacks along the front line, but in reality it comprised a pair of raids that had grown a bit too large for the name, with an emergency operation to fix what were considered dangerously exposed flanks in between them, and then a last-minute, serious reduction in plans for any action on

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Memorandum from 2nd Aust. Div., 24 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶⁴² Memorandum from Brudenell White, General Staff 1st A&NZAC to 1st, 2nd and 4th Aust. Divs., 22 August 1916, AWM 26/56/9.

the right. 'Coordination' is far too strong a word for this last-minute muddle of changing plans.

The time set for zero hour was 4.45am.⁶⁴³ This time was carefully fixed for a number of reasons – the first was simply to try to throw the Germans off guard given that previous operations had all been held either at night or at sunset. But it also was intended to give the assaulting troops a chance to assemble under cover of darkness, and then make their advance with the half-light of dawn. The half-light, it was hoped, would also mask the activity of consolidation, giving the men the best of both the concealment of darkness and light to see by. Wires were run out along the ground on both flanks of the assembly trenches to ensure the men attacked in the right direction, which was of critical importance in the darkened, featureless battlefield.⁶⁴⁴ 2nd Division had already ordered the improvement and construction of a trench to serve as an assembly point for assaulting troops for the impending operation. And, at the same time the 6th Brigade were constructing this trench, they were improving communication trenches, 'clearing up the situation' in the northern tip of the salient, preparing for full use of machine guns and Stokes Mortars, and making arrangements for the special protection of the left flank, which would be unsupported.⁶⁴⁵

Accordingly, at 4.45am on 26 August the two attacking waves of infantry from the 6th Brigade left their assembly positions to attack points 27 – 77 – 54.⁶⁴⁶ On the left the 21st Battalion with one company of the 22nd Battalion on their flank attacked the

⁶⁴³ 'Second Australian Divisional Order No. 43,' 25 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶⁴⁴ 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' p. 3. AWM 26/56/9.

⁶⁴⁵ Memorandum G.1/148 from Second Aust. Div., 24 August 1916. AWM 26/56/8.

⁶⁴⁶ 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' p. 3, AWM 26/56/9.

triangular trench. The 21st Battalion deployed A and B Companies in the front line followed by two platoons of C and D Companies in a loose wave formation.⁶⁴⁷ It was a disaster. In all areas the light, swift artillery barrage failed to keep the German defenders in their trenches, and rifle and machine gun fire fragmented the organised lines of Australian infantry as they advanced. The men clumped into groups, and a number of parties were forced to withdraw. Others managed to push through to the final objective, but then promptly overran it and followed the barrage to its final distant position instead of staying behind to consolidate their objective. In the rear reserve companies from the 22nd Battalion then lost their way and went on with the leading waves of the attack, meaning that there were no close reserves available to make anything of the furthest advances. Thanks to their 'superiority of numbers and... machine gun fire,'⁶⁴⁸ the German defenders were able to keep most of the attacking waves of infantry at bay. Despite promising early reports, by 7.30am the 21st Battalion was reporting that they had 'been stopped and driven back at places. Front line being heavily shelled. Enemy appear to be advancing in strength'.⁶⁴⁹ German machine guns in Point 54 in particular were causing heavy casualties, and holding up the advance on the left.⁶⁵⁰ Apart from a small gain around Point 77 and scattered, disorganised advanced parties, the entire attack was floundering.⁶⁵¹

To the right of the 21st Battalion, the 24th Battalion conducted a number of small operations with raiding parties and strong patrols. Their objectives were to assist the

⁶⁴⁷ 21st Bn War Diary, entry for 26 August 1916, AWM 4/23/38/12.

⁶⁴⁸ 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' p. 3, AWM 26/56/9.

⁶⁴⁹ 2nd Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 26 August 1916, AWM 26/56/8.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ 'Report on Operations, 22/3rd to 26/7th August 1916,' 6th Bde, 28 August 1916, p. 2, AWM 26/58/3.

21st Battalion in attacking Point 27, 'cooperate against... Mouquet Farm and Point 31', and push strong patrols forward from a number of points to the right.⁶⁵² A working party was to link the points 27 and 59 along the southern edge of the destroyed buildings of Mouquet Farm. At the same time, two bombing parties attacked Mouquet farm 'as a diversion'.⁶⁵³ While Mouquet Farm was apparently easy to dismiss from a high level of command, it formed an unavoidable hazard for the men in the field. Without strong artillery support or a better plan, the best Gellibrand and his battalion commanders could do to try to negate the immediate threat from the farm was to assault it with small parties of infantry, even though it did not form an officially designated objective of the operation in any way. This time the proximity of the farm to the objective demanded that the farm be attacked, simply because the strong German garrison there threatened the operations both to the left and the south of the position. Officers of the 24th Battalion reported that the 'Heavy Artillery had failed in making any impression on the farm', and that it was 'exceedingly strong [and] holds a garrison of 400 men'. Mouquet Farm 'made progress impossible' for the 24th Battalion's activity in that sector at all.⁶⁵⁴

Before the operation began the 24th Battalion had been forced back to accommodate the artillery barrage, and only managed to reoccupy their original positions three minutes after zero hour.⁶⁵⁵ The working party sent to link Points 27 and 59 went forward under command of Lieutenant John Austin Mahony shortly afterwards. As they began to work on the road in front of Mouquet Farm, Mahony became aware that

⁶⁵² 'Report on Operations from 23rd-28th August 1916,' p. 3, AWM 26/56/9.

⁶⁵³ 24th Bn. War Diary, entry for 4.48am, 26 August 1916, AWM 4/23/41/12.

⁶⁵⁴ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' p. 5, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the two parties sent into Mouquet Farm 'as a diversion' had been held up by a 'heavy fusillade of "Potato Masher" Bombs. Evidently,' reports added drily, 'the Boche had come to the surface in Mouquet Farm.'⁶⁵⁶ The raiding party in the farm was running dangerously low of bombs, and Mahony's group were drawn into the action. The sergeant from whom he had had the report led Mahony and his party into the farm but could not find an officer. Lieutenant Mahony

went direct to where brisk bombing was going on on his right and we found three deep German dugouts full of Germans who were snipers. We settled these by throwing bombs down the dugouts and by opening rifle fire.⁶⁵⁷

Mahony then left to try to reposition another party of the 24th Battalion who had advanced too far.⁶⁵⁸

At 10.20 in the morning Major Eric Clive Plant, Brigade Major of the 6th Brigade sent a message to the 24th Battalion to say,

The situation now demands that an energetic bombing attack be directed against Mouquet Farm which is causing many casualties at present. Two teams of selected men each under an officer will attack

⁶⁵⁶ 24th Bn War Diary, entry for 26 August 1916, AWM 4/23/41/12.

⁶⁵⁷ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' p. 4, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁵⁸ On his return, rifle fire from Mouquet Farm made any further progress impossible, and the entire party withdrew.

it from the south and south east sides as soon as possible. The importance of silencing the post is a matter of urgency.⁶⁵⁹

Finally, for the first time a formal order to enter Mouquet Farm had been given. Unfortunately it came in the middle of an operation as a last minute solution to a major problem. After making enquiries, 24th Battalion Headquarters received the disheartening news that

[t]he Brigadier is unable to give you artillery preparation and coordination you asked for. The only thing that you can get is the assistance the T[rench] M[ortar] Battery can give you.⁶⁶⁰

Smythe tried to contact trench mortar officers, but found they had all gone to Sausage Valley to try to find ammunition for their mortars.⁶⁶¹ Nevertheless, he replied

Believe I can effect an entrance to Mouquet Farm but it is essential to provide reinforcements of men and bombs... D and B Companies are too weak to provide reinforcements or carriers. I will be unable to hold out long unless this is arranged for.⁶⁶²

Smythe was still preparing his party to go when relief arrived.⁶⁶³ But others managed to follow Mahony's example and get parties of men into Mouquet Farm during the early hours of the morning in spite of the lack of support from either artillery or trench mortars. Sergeant Robertson of the 24th Battalion led a bombing party into it

⁶⁵⁹ Message BM.19 from Major Eric Clive Plant (Brigade Major, 6th Bde) to 24th Bn, 26 August 1916, 10.20pm, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶⁰ Message PX.70 from 6th Bde to Lieutenant Smythe, 24th Bn, 26 August 1916 (untimed), AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶¹ Message from Lieutenant E.V. Smythe, 24th Bn, to "CO", (undated, untimed), AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶² Message from Lt. E.V. Smythe to OC 24th Battalion, undated, AWM: EXDOC026.

⁶⁶³ 'Operations of 24 Bn while in Poziers Trenches from night Aug 23rd to Aug 27th 1916,' p. 7, AWM 26/58/3.

but could not stay long. His party managed to throw bombs into the German dugouts during the operation to keep the defenders undercover. Running out of bombs, he and his party went back to collect more, but found they 'could not regain entry into Mouquet Farm owing to M[achine] Guns which now opened up for [the] first time [and] from the German bombing parties'.⁶⁶⁴

Other parties were doing much the same. Eight men of the 24th under 2/Lt George David Pollington advanced into the farm but had to retire. Pollington was later awarded the Military Medal for his

gallant and skilful conduct of a patrol at Mouquet Farm and his gallant efforts to establish a point [there]... when [his position] had to be given up under heavy fire on the 26th August, he... engaged the enemy at Mouquet Farm with bombs contributing materially to relieve the pressure of the German bomb attacks.'⁶⁶⁵

All of these groups were forced out, however, because it was 'impossible to dig as machine gun fire and bombs were directed against [them] from Mouquet Farm'.⁶⁶⁶

These small parties, approaching from either side of the farm used all the bombs at their disposal, and were close enough to throw them at Germans above ground and pour rifle fire down the entrances of the German dugouts. All was to no avail. German troops in the farm continued to hold up the 24th Battalion advance on Point 27 on the

⁶⁶⁴ 'Operations of 24 Bn while in Poziers Trenches from night Aug 23rd to Aug 27th 1916,' pp. 3-4, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶⁵ Recommendation File for Honours & Awards, 2nd Aust. Div., 23 - 27 August 1916, AWM 28/1/72.

⁶⁶⁶ 24th Bn 'Report on Operations 25th & 26th August 1916,' 27 August 1916, p.2, AWM 26/58/3.

left, and both the 21st Battalion's attack on Point 77 and the men of that battalion who had overrun their objective and were near Point 12 on the right.⁶⁶⁷ When artillery fire was finally brought back from the far-away standing barrage line, it fell into the attacking infantry, causing further casualties. Major George Matson Nicholas, the officer commanding the 24th Battalion, estimated that 'one in three [shells] hit the bosh [*sic*] [and] about one in three hit us in behind our line'.⁶⁶⁸ Reports failed to get through, and the artillery did not lift, continuing to cause heavy casualties among the Australian infantry for some time. The resistance given by the German defenders in the farm proved so strong that ground could not be gained anywhere near it.⁶⁶⁹ By 11am the only troops available to Gellibrand as brigade commander were two very depleted companies of the 22nd Battalion – comprising only 100 men between the two instead of the customary 500 or so – and a similar number in the 21st. Gellibrand write 'in view of the numbers of the enemy in front and the strength of posts 54 and 27, no less than the condition of the troops at hand I decided to restrict our action maintaining the line... at [Point] 77 and to the Eastward.'⁶⁷⁰ The bulk of the operation had failed.

The only indication that any offensive action was taken by the 23rd Battalion, facing this German position, is a message from Major William Brazenor at 8.30pm on 26 August to say 'I am sending out a patrol to establish a post as far forward as possible towards Point 95'.⁶⁷¹ Thirty men were then sent to sap out towards the patrol.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Operations of 24 Bn while in Poziers Trenches from night Aug 23rd to Aug 27th 1916,' p. 5, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶⁸ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' p. 6, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁶⁹ 6th Bde 'Report on Operations, 22/3rd to 26/7th August 1916,' 28 August 1916, p. 2, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ Message from OC 23rd Bn to 6th Bde, 26 August 1916, 8.30pm, AWM 26/58/3.

2/Lieutenant Robert Lloyd Tremain, one non-commissioned officer and five other ranks worked their way out into no man's land.⁶⁷² At 11.30pm Lieutenant Tremain was reported missing, never to be seen again.⁶⁷³ Beyond this small patrol, the 23rd Battalion's role was simply to provide support to the 24th Battalion, which in turn was to provide support for the 21st.

1st Anzac Corps reported this shambles to be 'partially successful' – but it was considerably less than that. Certainly Australian troops occupied point 77 on the left of Mouquet Farm, but Point 27 at the southwest corner of the farm remained in German hands, as did the farm itself, Point 54, and most of the rest of the objective. Parties that had rushed ahead of the objective had fallen back to a position on the west side of the farm and managed to hold on for some time, but were under constant, heavy fire from rifles, machine guns and bombs that came from Germans inside the farm itself.⁶⁷⁴ Parts of the 2nd Division front line had been so destroyed they amounted to no more than a 'line of shell holes'.⁶⁷⁵ The failures of the 2nd Division were attributed to 'the enemy's superiority of numbers and his machine gun fire,'⁶⁷⁶ neither of which had been subdued at all by the inadequate artillery barrage, and by the failure to address the threat the Mouquet Farm compound posed. This operation gave the clearest picture of that threat to date. Birdwood and 1st Anzac Corps' headquarters could now be absolutely without doubt that there were dugouts of a considerable size under the farm.⁶⁷⁷ The 24th Battalion reported that the farm

⁶⁷² Brazenor, Patrol Report, 26 August 1916, AWM 4/23/40/11.

⁶⁷³ 5th Bde War Diary, entry for 23rd Bn, 26 August 1916, AWM 26/57/22.

⁶⁷⁴ 'Report on Operations from 23rd - 28th August 1916,' p. 3, AWM 26/56/9.

⁶⁷⁵ 1st Anzac Corps War Diary, entry for 26 August 1916, AWM 26/50/18.

⁶⁷⁶ 'Report on Operations from 23rd - 28th August 1916,' p. 3, AWM 26/56/9.

⁶⁷⁷ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' p. 7, AWM 26/58/3.

held a garrison of four hundred men, using the farm for protection during the day and actively manning the trenches at night.⁶⁷⁸ Not all of the Germans present in the farm were needed to protect the dugouts, either, given that a number of reports were made of the appearance of apparently new troops such as those who met Sergeant Robertson. There were enough reserves to keep the defence strong against a considerable attack.

What is interesting to note is that the farm was, and remained, approachable. Men like Mahony, Robertson and Pollington could lead their parties into or very near to Mouquet Farm and return alive. What they could not do was remove it from German possession, or remain there for any period of time. Nicholas, the 24th Battalion commander, described Mouquet Farm as 'an impregnable post garrisoned heavily', and expressed relief that his men were relieved before any more 'desperate sallies' could be made against it, although groups such as Lieutenant Smythe's party of twelve detailed to try would have done so had the relief not intervened.⁶⁷⁹ What cannot be ignored is the cost of this operation in manpower. After the operation the men of the 6th Brigade were exhausted. Nicholas reported that

the five nights and four days in the trenches was a very severe test...

the men were not physically fit to hold off a determined counter

⁶⁷⁸ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' p. 7, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Operations of 24 Bn while in Poziers Trenches from night Aug 23rd to Aug 27th 1916,' p. 7, AWM 26/58/3.

attack or to make a [last] desperate attempt on a place that had withstood the attack that Mouquet Farm has done.⁶⁸⁰

The 24th Battalion marched out with 200 men.⁶⁸¹

Even had every line of objective been taken, the result of this operation would have been less than negligible as far as the broader context of the operation was concerned. Within one month the actions of the 1st Anzac Corps had deteriorated from a purposeful, broad-scale attack which succeeded in taking an entire village of strategic significance, to piecemeal, extremely costly and ultimately pointless operations of very limited, if any, value. The 2nd Australian Division was finished, and was sent to Belgium to join the 1st Division, having suffered as many as 5,000 casualties in the fighting at Pozières, around 1,300 of which came from this small set of operations. This should have been a clear indication that there was something lacking in the approach to taking Mouquet Farm at some level – Army or Corps at the very least. 1st Anzac Corps was bludgeoning the front line with its infantry to a very great cost. Yet somehow the almost total failure of this operation was glossed over, despite reports that the 6th Brigade lost a total of 27 officers and 869 other ranks out of a fighting strength of 99 officers and 2,952 other ranks in four days of fighting, or nearly 30% of their strength. The toll could have been even greater had not the Germans stopped firing on parties of stretcher bearers in no man's land and started sending the walking wounded back to their own lines for treatment,⁶⁸² or indeed if larger attacks had been ordered for the 24th and 23rd Battalions. The only positive

⁶⁸⁰ Nicholas (Maj. G.M., OC 24th Bn), Untitled document (war diary entry?) begins 'night 22...' pp. 7-8, AWM 26/58/3.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸². 6th Bde 'Report on Operations, 22/3rd to 26/7th August 1916,' 28 August 1916, p. 3, AWM 26/58/3.

factor from all of this, woefully inadequate as it was, was that some men had been able to enter the farm for a short period of time before being driven back. Nevertheless, even faced with such blunt figures and such minimal success, the general consensus in 1st Anzac Corps still seems to have been to do very much the same, but *more*. This would have serious consequences for the 4th Australian Division, which began relieving the broken 2nd Division on 27 August 1916.

Chapter 7. 'The heroes they are': The End of the 1st Anzac Corps at Pozières.

General Cox took over command of the front line once his brigades were in place at noon on 28 August 1916. His 4th Brigade had relieved the 6th Brigade at noon the day before, and within eight hours of Cox assuming command, had attacked two of the points, 27 and 54, using one and a half companies and a bombing section. These were two points in the German triangular trench on the left that the 2nd Division had held briefly but ultimately were forced to relinquish. Although the 4th Brigade report tried to put a positive spin on the result – 'much valuable information re enemy positions was obtained'⁶⁸³ – unsurprisingly, this small scale, ad hoc operation failed as a result of a consolidated enemy counter attack using superior numbers.⁶⁸⁴ But it was a concerning sign of what was to come.

On 28 August Birdwood issued another order to the effect that 'the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade will tomorrow attack the enemy' – another attack planned on his own initiative.⁶⁸⁵ It was left to the GOC of the 4th Brigade to 'take special measures for the capture and consolidation of the position'.⁶⁸⁶ These objectives were less tentative than before. The objective for this attack was continuous, stretching roughly 1200 yards across the apex of 1st Anzac Corps' sector, with Mouquet Farm about one third of the way from the left boundary of the attack. The farm was within the objective line – Point 29 was to be taken, which was on the north western corner from the

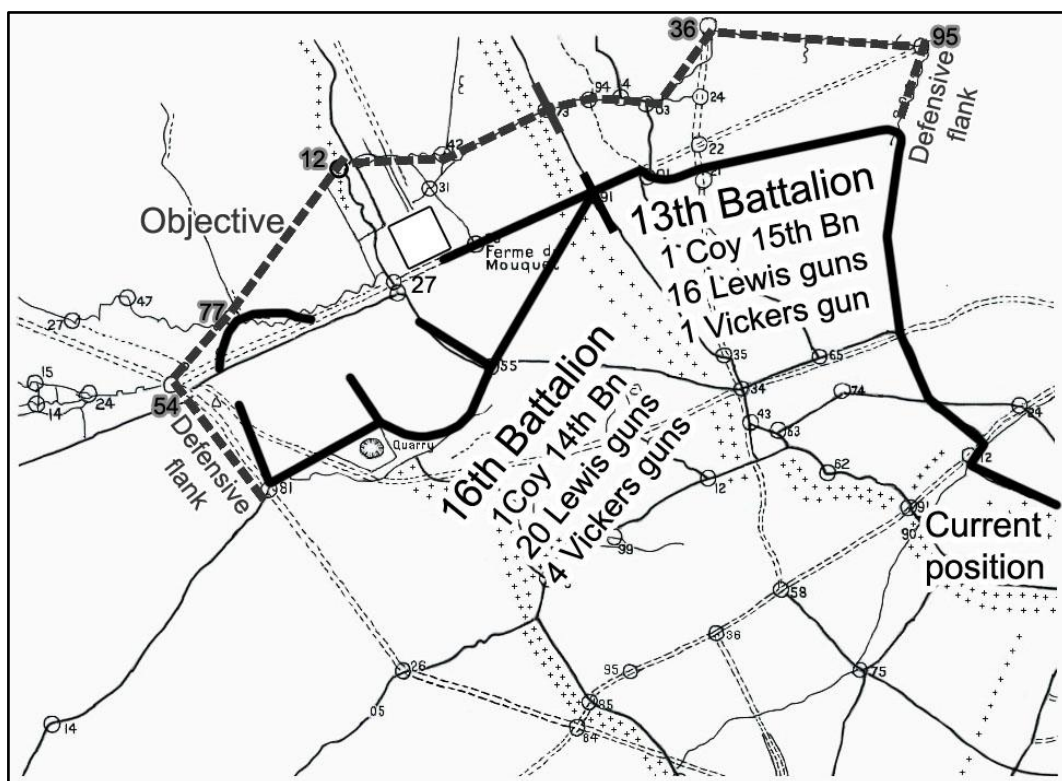
⁶⁸³ 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 28 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁸⁴ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 28 August 1916 AWM 26/59/11.

⁶⁸⁵ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 20,' 28 August 1916, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 3.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

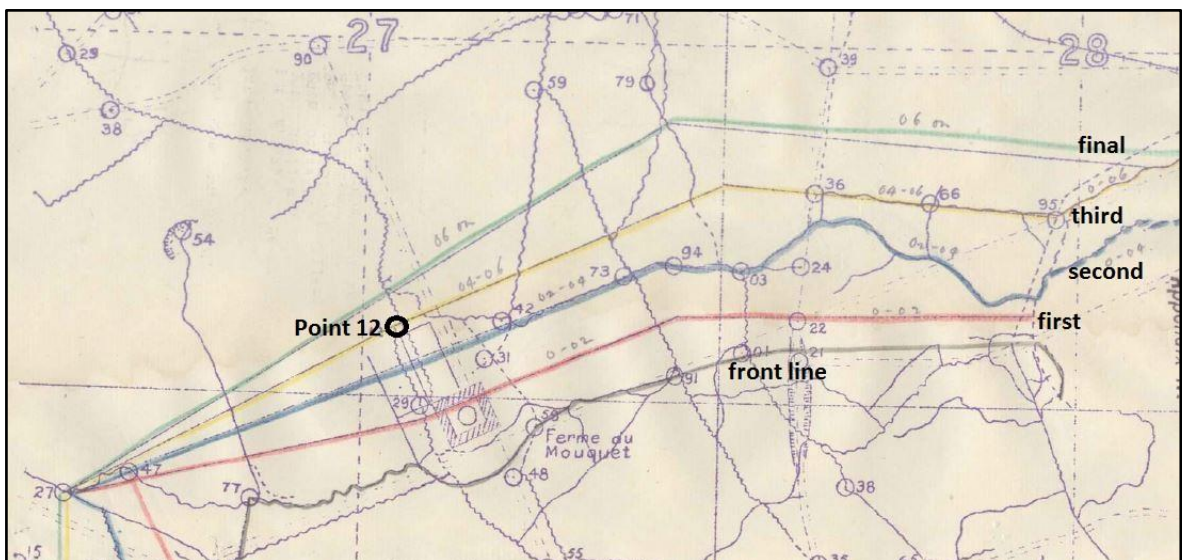
compound, and from there the objective stretched northward to Point 12, about 200 yards to the north. But while a much more confident hand had drawn the continuous objective line across the map, it was still very close to the current position – 300 yards at the furthest – and so once again the advance was only a very small bite out of German-held territory. Cox divided the line in two and gave the left 600 yards to the 16th Battalion, supported by one company of the 14th Battalion, and the right half to the 13th Battalion, supported by one company of the 15th Battalion. The 13th Battalion had 16 Lewis guns and one Vickers gun to take into the attack, while the 16th Battalion, which had the more formidable task of capturing the Mouquet Farm compound, received 20 Lewis Guns and 4 Vickers guns.⁶⁸⁷ The infantry would at least be going into the battle more heavily armed than ever.



Map 37. Objective of operation of 29 August.

⁶⁸⁷ '4th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 39A', 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

The artillery barrage for this operation, as designed by corps, differed only very slightly from the operation of just a day or two before. Once again it conformed to what had become the norm. The lifts were very quick, just two minutes on each line, and in most places they were just 50-100 yards apart. The difference was that the final standing barrage this time was much closer to the final objective. In most places this meant about 50-100 yards from the objective, although around Point 12 it was dangerously close – about 30 yards away – and to the left of the 13th Battalion's sector it was quite distant, being 2-300 yards to the north.⁶⁸⁸



Map 38. Artillery lifts for operation 29 August 1916.⁶⁸⁹

The front line companies were so far forward that they came under their fire from their own field artillery regularly from the moment they arrived in the front line. Heavy rain set in on the day of the operation and the heavy guns in Albert were firing

⁶⁸⁸ Barrage map, Appendix 48, AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 3.

⁶⁸⁹ AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 3.

short, probably as a result of the weather. The different atmospheric conditions of damp weather could affect the flight of the shell in the air as much as the rain, and cause it to fall in a completely different location than it would have otherwise. The 13th Battalion were alarmed to have two sixty pound shells land within their lines without going off in the afternoon before the operation,⁶⁹⁰ and the 16th Battalion reported that 'some of our own [heavy] shells lobbed as much as 200 yards in rear of our own lines'.⁶⁹¹ Part of the problem in attempting to adjust the barrage was ambiguous messages sent from the front line. When Captain Douglas Gray Marks sent back a message from the front line to say 'many of the shells were falling too short and some fell in our trenches. Please ask artillery to lengthen range. This refers more particularly to Northern Sector of line held by us', a pencilled reply on the message indicates that this was 'Very indefinite. No good result from such a message. Action taken however'.⁶⁹² As predicted, the action taken was not very effective.

Since the 4th Division had been in the line earlier in August, operational objectives and the attendant artillery barrages had moved closer and closer to the jumping off trenches of the attacking infantry without comment. The first person who seemed to notice the barrage would be a problem was Major J.M.A Durant, commanding the 13th Battalion who on 29 August sent a message to the 4th Brigade to say 'I have just received the barrage map – from personal observation I am sure that the first barrage is too close to our front line.'⁶⁹³ He later added

⁶⁹⁰ Message ST.411 from 13th Bn to HQ 4th Bde, 29 August 1916, 2.15pm, AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁹¹ 'Our Operations:- 16th Battalion', 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁹² Message ST.415 from Capt. D.G. Marks (13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 29 August 1916, 6.20pm, AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁹³ Message CO.9. from Durant (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde, 29 August 1916, 9.35am, AWM 26/60/9.

Have just received the artillery order, and can well understand why they have caused us so many casualties (12) this afternoon. They were bombarding points with 9.2", 8" and 6" which were only 30 to 50 yards from our advanced sap heads. As the safety limit is 200 yards we should have been warned of this so that we could have temporarily withdrawn the garrisons of the posts affected. We did get a warning but it arrived too late (1.20pm). The men have had a shake-up, but I am sure they will rise to the occasion like the heroes they are.⁶⁹⁴

But this was not a matter of 'rising to the occasion like a hero'. No man, whether a hero or otherwise, could survive the blast of an artillery shell. Durant's men were sitting ducks under their own artillery fire. Finally the utter lunacy of ordering artillery barrages that could clearly be expected to hit their own men had been addressed directly and yet, as with other matters, no action was taken to rectify the situation and the 13th Battalion continued take casualties from their own fire. This situation, which had become so commonplace as to be almost the norm, was treated as a simple exception.

The infantry making the attack for this operation were heavily augmented with firepower in the form of machine guns. On the right the 13th Battalion, attacking with an additional company of the 15th Battalion, took with them sixteen Lewis guns and one Vickers gun. On the left, the sector that included Mouquet Farm, the 16th Battalion and their additional company of the 14th Battalion were fortified with

⁶⁹⁴ Message CO.9 from Durant (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde. 29 August 1916, 9.35am, AWM 26/60/9.

twenty Lewis guns and four Vickers guns.⁶⁹⁵ Brigadier General Brand, having been given little directive as to how to attack the most formidable obstacle in his path, decided that

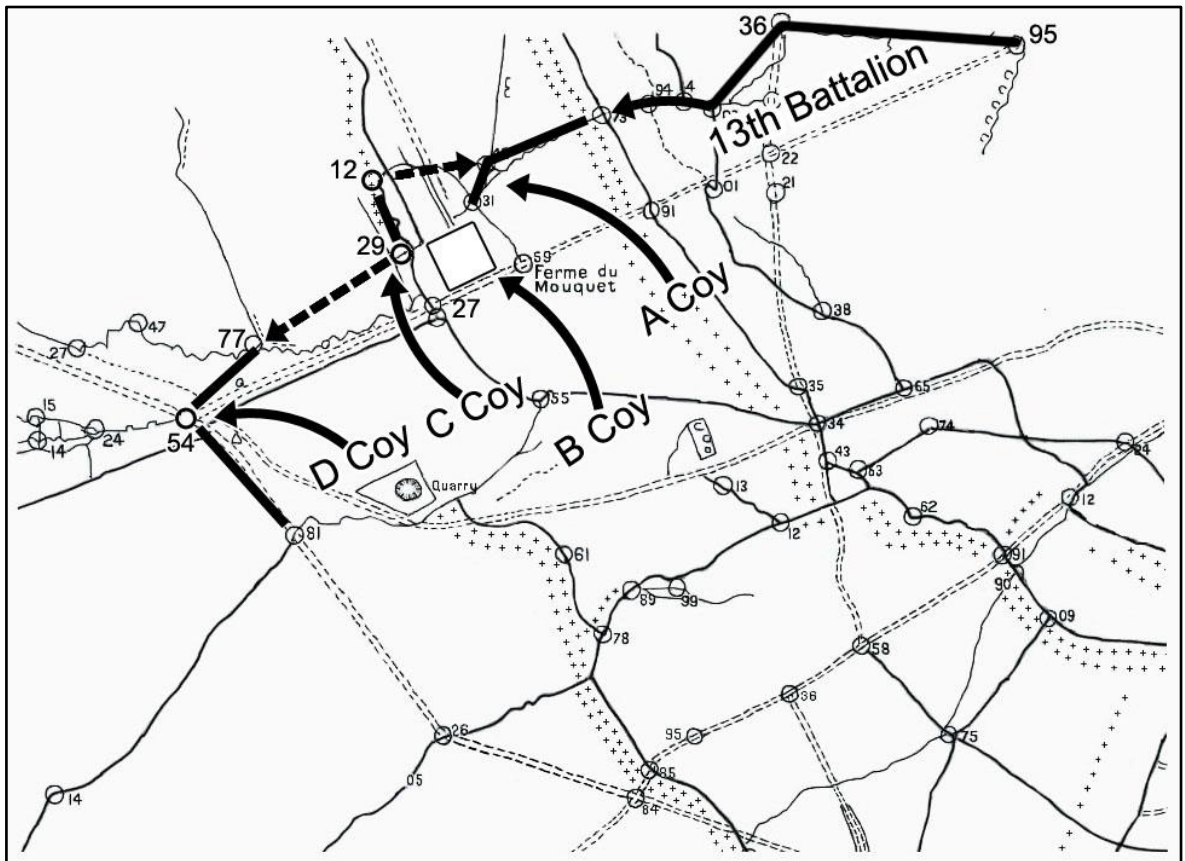
the attack on Mouquet Farm itself will be delivered by three companies distributed in depth with one company in immediate support and complete arrangements made for clearing the cellars and dugouts in, and immediately north of the Farm... as rapidly as possible.⁶⁹⁶

Apart from providing the infantry with additional firepower to carry with them during their assault, no further arrangements were made for attacking the farm from a distance with artillery or trench mortars. When Brand passed the order down to the 16th Battalion, its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Drake-Brockman held a conference of 'Company Commanders, Specialists and Commanding Officer re[garding the] attack on Mouquet Farm'. It was there decided that the battalion would approach the battle in the following manner. Each company was assigned a single objective and would then turn to its flanks to form a link with its neighbour. D Company would attack point 54 on the far left, and then turn to the left to make a defensive flank and to the right to reach the recently captured strongpoint at Point 77. Mouquet Farm itself would be attacked by B Company and the battalion bombing platoon, while A Company would attack another very small trench between Points 31 and 42 to the north east of the farm before turning to their right to make contact with the 13th Battalion at Point 73. C Company would attack a small trench running between Points 29 and 12 from the north-western corner of the old farm buildings

⁶⁹⁵ '4th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 39A', 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

before turning to both flanks to make contact with D Company on the left and A Company on the right.⁶⁹⁷ This was unmistakably an infantry-based operation which once again closely resembled a large raid more than a small, set-piece battle.



Map 39. 16th Battalion's plan to capture Mouquet Farm, 29 August 1916.

The heavy rain during the day of the attack wreaked havoc with the front line. The 4th Brigade war diary recorded that it

soon reduced the trenches to little better than quagmire; the mud in most places being over knee deep while the parapets, weakened and softened by the wet, fell into the trenches when the slightest weight

⁶⁹⁷ 4th Bde War Diary, entry for 16th Battalion, 29 August 1916. AWM 26/60/9.

was put upon them. These conditions obtained during the whole of the following day and night, making digging an impossibility and causing much discomfort and hardships to the troops.⁶⁹⁸

These problems did not seem to matter in the slightest to the higher levels of command, and the operation went ahead as planned at 11pm. The 13th Battalion operation report notes that they 'found that with the exception of the left flank the line had advanced very little since [the] Battalion was relieved on [the] morning of [the] 15th [of] August.'⁶⁹⁹ Both the 13th Battalion and the 16th Battalion were able to get into position on time, and the attack began with the artillery barrage at 11.00pm.

On the right the 13th Battalion reported that 'each company reached its first objective but was forced to withdraw after hard fighting owing to weakened strength due to casualties'.⁷⁰⁰ The four companies of the 13th Battalion were in the end not reinforced by the added company of the 15th Battalion as the commanding officer decided with less than an hour before the assault began 'to hold them in case of any further developments'.⁷⁰¹ The four remaining companies of the 13th Battalion followed up the barrage closely. Although one message states that 'barrage fire last night very good',⁷⁰² in reality it was so thin that the German guns were not silenced at all. The force reported 'heavy machine-gun and rifle fire and showers of bombs' against them as they went.⁷⁰³ A 13th Battalion patrol which tried to connect with the 16th Battalion on the left met with heavy opposition from bombers. They were in

⁶⁹⁸ 'Narrative of Operations by 4th Australian Infantry Brigade North-West of Pozières during Period 26th August – 2nd September 1916,' AWM 26/60/9.

⁶⁹⁹ 'Appendix to War Diary No. B.1', 13th Battalion, 31 August 1916. AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰⁰ Message ST.425 with situation report to 4th Brigade, 30 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9. (first page only)

⁷⁰¹ Message ST.421 from Capt D.G. Marks to Capt H.D. Pulling, 29 August 1916, 10.30pm, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰² Message ST.427 from Capt D.G. Marks to 4th Bde, 30 August 1916, 2.55am, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰³ 13th Bn, 'Appendix to War Diary No. B.1', 31 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

most cases forced to resort to hand-to-hand fighting for their successful entry into their objectives.⁷⁰⁴ Finally around midnight, the additional company of the 15th Battalion was fed into the front line to reinforce an unstable situation. All company commanders were told to 'be satisfied to hold [the] 1st objective'⁷⁰⁵ but each of their companies were seriously depleted by casualties and the line they held was shaky at best.

On the left the 16th Battalion had been able to establish 'an excellent jump-off place on the whole line'.⁷⁰⁶ They, too, found that 'the barrage of shrapnel was well delivered, but the volume was quite insufficient,' but nevertheless they

gained quite a considerable amount of ground during the barrage...
at the lifting our men rushed the different objectives and in all cases
reached the same except Point 12 North of Mouquet Farm.⁷⁰⁷

But they lasted just an hour before retiring.⁷⁰⁸ There were two main problems in maintaining their new forward positions. The first was a very heavy enemy barrage that fell on the old German front line almost as soon as the attack began. But worse was the attacking force of Germans who came out of tunnels in the Farm and attacked the men of the 16th Battalion from the rear.⁷⁰⁹ With considerable losses, the 16th Battalion had no other option but to retire. This then left the 13th dangerously unsupported with heavy machine gun fire enfilading their lines from Mouquet Farm

⁷⁰⁴ 13th Bn, 'Appendix to War Diary No. B.1', 31 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰⁵ Message from Capt D.G. Marks to OC "D" Coy, 15th Bn, 30 August 1916, 12.47am, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰⁶ AWM 26/60/9. Intelligence Report: 'Our Operations:- 16th Battaion', 29 August 1916. p.1.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ 'Our Operations:- 16th Battalion', 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

and from a position on their right.⁷¹⁰ They had suffered so many casualties both in the fighting and as a result of friendly fire that they could only hold the objective very thinly. Heavily shelled and aware of the withdrawal of the 16th Battalion, the 13th Battalion companies were also compelled to retire, too weak to hold the line.⁷¹¹ The 1st Anzac Corps was now conducting attacks that were failing because there simply was not enough troops available even to do no more than hold the captured line.

These operations had been the result of orders arising at 1st Anzac Corps headquarters. While these piecemeal attacks were going on, plans were afoot for a widespread British attack involving large portions of Fourth Army and Reserve Army's front. It would be the first operation on the Somme deliberately planned to be conducted on the same day by Reserve and Fourth Armies.⁷¹² But that is not to say that cooperation with his right flank was Gough's foremost priority. Instead, Reserve Army's primary focus was on an attack on enemy trenches north and south of the River Ancre by the 49th and 39th Divisions, separated from Fourth Army by the frontages of II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps.⁷¹³ Both II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps were intended to participate in the wider operation, but for the first time, their portion of the front was not the focus of Reserve Army operations, and any battle plans for them had to wait for the results of their run of small operations. On 29 August 1916 Reserve Army Operation Order No. 24 finally issued objectives for both corps, five days after orders for the 49th and 39th Divisions appeared.⁷¹⁴ Significantly, this order

⁷¹⁰ 13th Bn, 'Appendix to War Diary No. B.1', 31 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² Prior & Wilson *Somme*, p.173. Operations of 22/23 July, although conducted simultaneously by Reserve and Fourth Armies, were accidentally coordinated, not intentionally.

⁷¹³ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 22', 24 August 1916, WO 95/518. This order was for an operation on the 30th of August which was later modified due to bad weather to 3 September 1916.

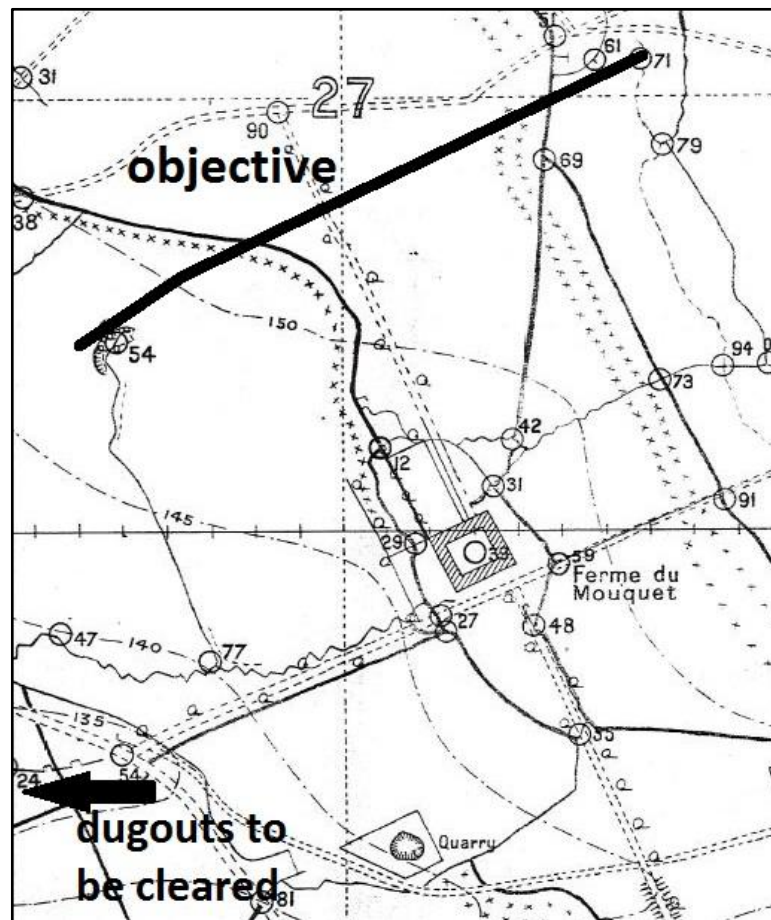
⁷¹⁴ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 24,' 29 August 1916, WO 95/518.

confirms that Gough's primary interest in this operation was his attack around the River Ancre, and not cooperation with Fourth Army on the right. II Corps and 1st Anzac Corps were to conduct very minor operations to extend Reserve Army's operations closer to the boundary with Fourth Army. II Corps' attack connected with neither the Ancre operation on their left, nor 1st Anzac Corps' attack against Mouquet Farm to their right. The 1st Anzac Corps, similarly, was to conduct its assigned operation in isolation, not being required to coordinate with either flank.

A closer examination of 1st Anzac Corps' objectives as defined by Reserve Army Operation Order No. 24 support this. Their objective as given by Reserve Army was a line roughly 4-500 yards beyond Mouquet Farm at the southern point the network of German strongpoints known as the Zollern Redoubt, or Feste Zollern. Once again, this objective can only be effectively described by the use of maps because there was nothing there. The line, about 600 yards long, roughly correlated with a rumoured German trench, but in effect it had little tactical significance in real terms. What is important to note about this objective is that the direction of movement to achieve it is to the north west – towards Reserve Army's long-term goal of Thiepval and emphatically away from operations conducted by Fourth Army to the right. To confirm this, additional objectives for the operation are the clearance of a few small pockets of German trenches to the left of the current corps line. While the Australian operation was the closest to coordinating with Fourth Army, between the two lay the 1st Canadian Brigade between the Australians and the Army boundary (and not ordered to attack)⁷¹⁵ and on the other side of the Army boundary III Corps, which also

⁷¹⁵ 1st Canadian Brigade War Diary, entry for 3 September 1916. AWM 26/46/24.

would not be conducting any offensive operation.⁷¹⁶ So although this can be called the first real attempt to coordinate operations across the fronts of Reserve Army and Fourth Army, in reality the coordination was in no more than the timing of the two, not in any singularity of purpose or effort. By the time orders were passed down to 4th Australian Division, which would be conducting the operation for 1st Anzac Corps, they were given to understand that they would be participating in ‘a big attack by the allies between the Ancre and Somme from the N[orth], E[ast] and S[outh] of Thiepval,’ rather than an operation that extended into Fourth Army’s sector and the French area of operations south of the Somme.⁷¹⁷



Map 40. Reserve Army's objectives for 1st Anzac Corps in Operation Order No. 24, 29 August 1916.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁶ 'Reserve Army Operation Order No. 24,' 29 August 1916, WO 95/518.

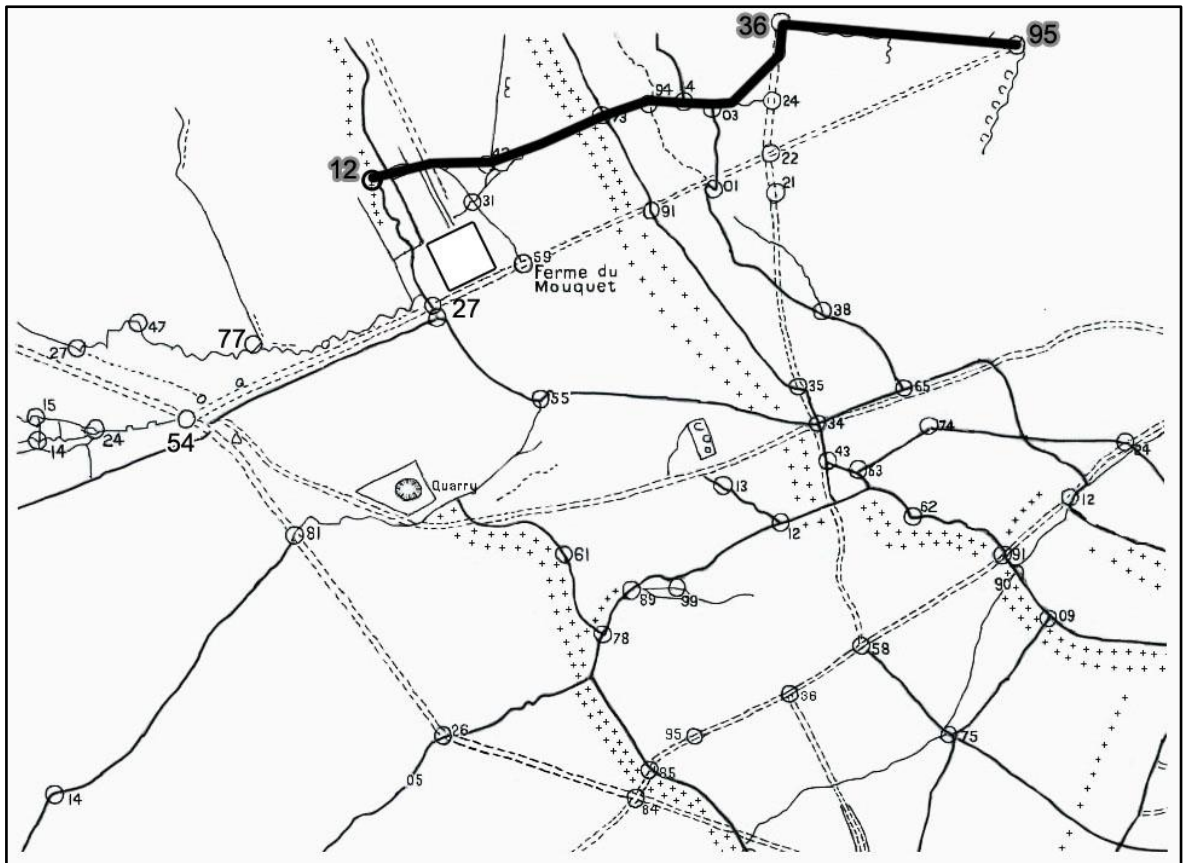
⁷¹⁷ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 31 August 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷¹⁸ AWM: G5831.S65, Sheet 7:15:8.

Army command's attention to a distant part of the line and an overall lack of focus seems to have given Birdwood extra leeway to alter the orders given him. The first thing he did was to bring the objective much closer to the current 4th Division front line, once again in line with the current trend. 1st Anzac Corps Order No. 42 issued on 1 September 1916, which gave Australian units first warning of the impending operation, dramatically altered the objective as given by Reserve Army.⁷¹⁹ Instead of attempting Reserve Army's projected advance of more than a quarter of a mile, Birdwood's objective was no more than 200 yards from the current position. The front of this attack was exactly the same as the objective for the recent unsuccessful attack by the 4th Division, making it twice as long as the objective ordered by Reserve Army. The general thrust, as feeble as it was, of the operation was more or less still to the northwest, but with gaps between the operations of 1st Anzac Corps and II Corps, the line became weaker through poor boundary connections threatened by German strongpoints.⁷²⁰ How this dramatic difference went through without Gough's notice or modification is unclear. However, the fact that the changes carried meant that either the modifications were decided by and agreed upon verbally between Gough and Birdwood, or the operation on this right flank was of such little significance to Gough that there was no need to comment. While the former is probably correct, the fact that such widespread changes to the original plan went through without formal comment is an indication that the objectives of this operation were of little material importance to the overall plan.

⁷¹⁹ '1st A.&N.Z.A.C. Order No. 42,' 1 September 1916, AWM 4/1/29/8.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*



Map 41. 1st Anzac Corps' modified objective for attack of 3 September 1916.

Recent operations had clearly indicated that the greatest threat to any operation in this area came from Mouquet Farm. As the 4th Brigade were undertaking their operation, reports were starting to make their way through to 1st Anzac Corps from 2nd Division. Intelligence gathered from captured prisoners confirmed once again the fact that there were extensive cellars and bunkers under the farm holding at a minimum a number of German companies.⁷²¹ They also confirmed that the farm was connected by tunnels to other German strongpoints nearby.⁷²² Lieutenant James Stanley Rogers, the intelligence officer for the 4th Brigade, reported, 'I am of the opinion that this place has been tunnelled underground and is practically a

⁷²¹ 'Report on MOUQUET FARM by 2nd Australian Division,' 31 August 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷²² 4th Bde War Diary, entry 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

fortress'.⁷²³ Reports from the 4th Division following earlier operations confirmed that 'the enemy positions were held in such strength that it required a considerably stronger force to mop up the enemy in his dugouts and prevent him from attacking us in numbers.'⁷²⁴ This was the most formidable part of the line to be captured, and Birdwood's approach continued to be, to say the least, unusual.

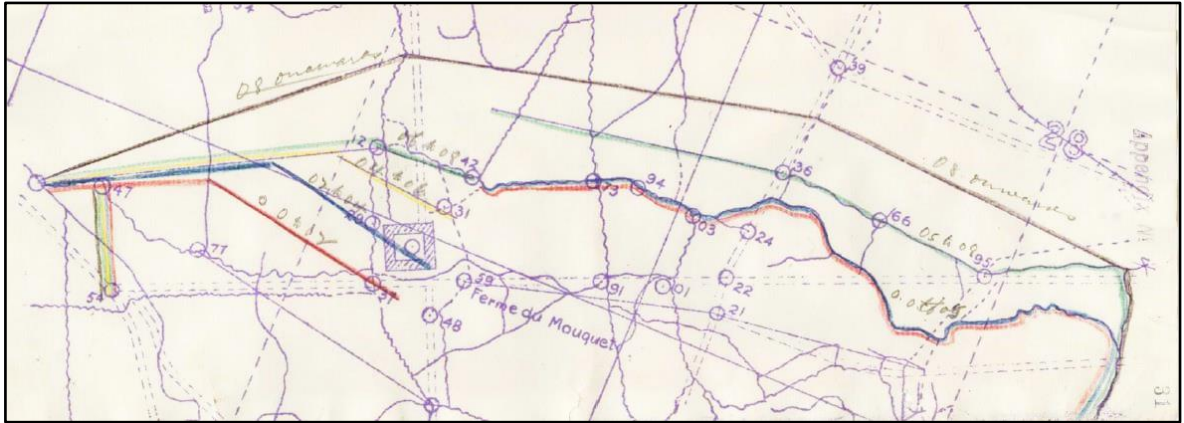
For the third time in a week and a half the artillery plan was almost unaltered, and continued to be light and fast-paced.⁷²⁵ The barrage for the attack of 3 September was designed to move through three objectives to its final standing barrage within eight minutes. This had not been modified in any way to account for the more detailed knowledge of Mouquet Farm from recent operations. There were no plans beyond this barrage to protect the infantry from German counter attack, which meant no plans to deal with reinforcement from underground, as it was now painfully clear the Germans were able to do at will. This plan drew nothing on the lessons of recent operations, from the success of the barrage but the near-failure of Sinclair-Maclagan's overly intricate infantry movements in the taking of Pozières, to the obvious problems of relying too heavily on infantry in the operations of Legge's 2nd Division, or the repeatedly demonstrated difficulties in providing effective artillery cooperation to operations against close-range objectives. Nor did it take into account the good understanding the Australians now had of Mouquet Farm, its garrison and its defences. In short, it was a bizarrely inadequate attempt to advance the line a few hundred yards in a mildly useful direction, to the material benefit of neither the

⁷²³ 'Our Operations:- 16th Battalion,' 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷²⁴ 'Narrative of Operations by 4th Australian Infantry Brigade North-West of Pozières during Period 26th August - 2nd September 1916,' p.2, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷²⁵ 'Time Table for Attack on 3rd Sept 1916,' AWM 26/52/21.

overall British operation of 3 September 1916, nor to the operations of Reserve Army, or even to operations of the neighbouring II Corps.

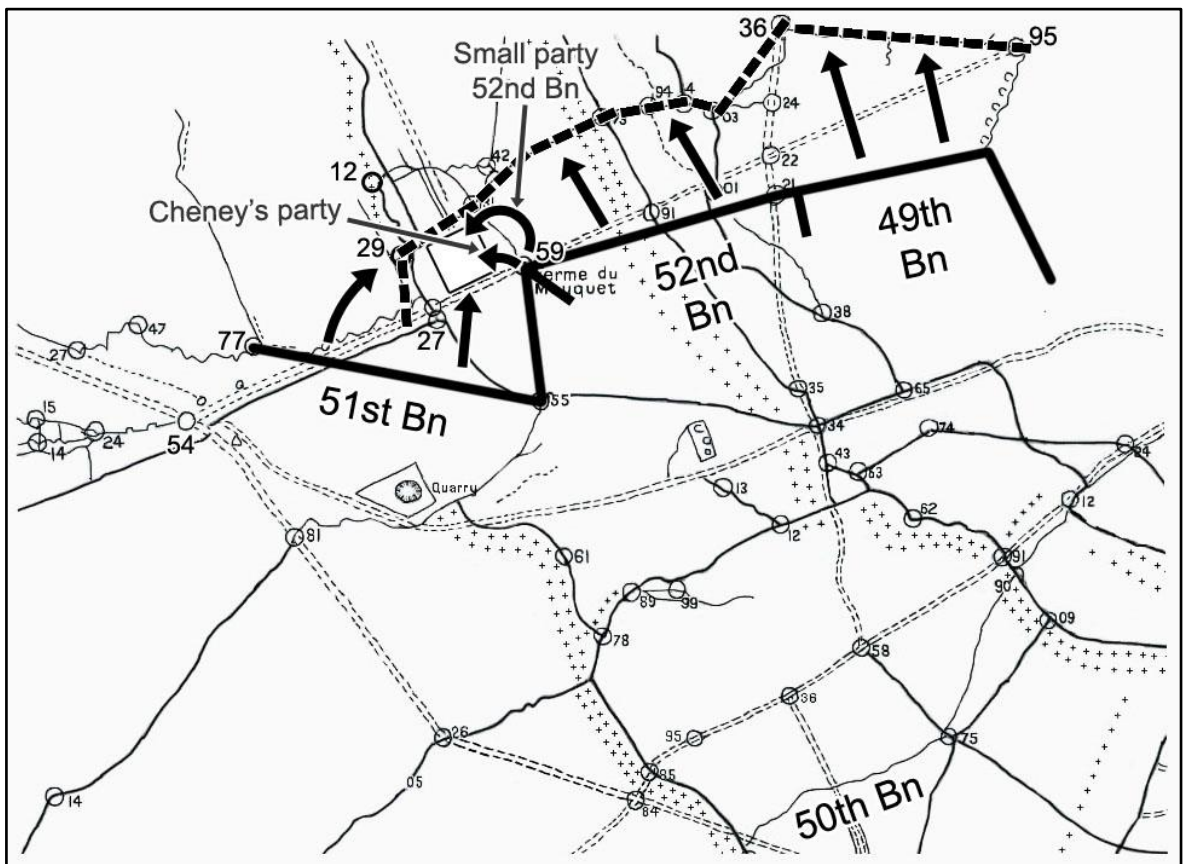


Map 42. Artillery barrage for attack of 3 September 1916.

The attack was to be conducted by the 13th Infantry Brigade. To do this, the front was divided equally between the 51st Battalion on the left, the 52nd in the centre, and the 49th on the right (with the 50th Battalion in Park Lane and Tom's Cut in reserve). The artillery barrage should really be considered two barrages timed together. The right two thirds of the barrage was to accompany the attacks of the 52nd and 49th Battalions in advancing in a north-north-westerly direction. The left third of the barrage was to cover the 51st Battalion in an advance to the north east. Their operation started from the most southerly point and they were to use this to advance on Mouquet Farm from a completely different direction to the rest of the operation extending to the right of the farm. Neither flank of the 52nd Battalion was particularly well connected with the neighbouring unit. On the left was the 13th Cheshire Battalion, 400 yards away,⁷²⁶ and on the right the 52nd Battalion was working in a

⁷²⁶ Ross (OC 51st Bn), 'Report on Operation at Mouquet Farm 1st/4th September 1916,' AWM 4/23/68/7.

different direction and would be ahead of the 51st's right flank from the start of the operation. What this means is that the main attack against a German strongpoint recently described as 'practically a fortress' was to come from a single battalion on a front of no more than 400 yards, with no effective protection on either flank. Its potential for success was extremely limited.



Map 43. The conflicting directions of the attack planned for 3 September 1916.

Lieutenant Rogers, the Intelligence Officer of the 4th Brigade, had reported that 'our Battalion [making the attack] could take [the fortress of Mouquet Farm] easily... but it certainly requires another big Unit to mop it up' – apparently confusing 'taking' the farm with 'temporarily holding' it. But this plan was a far cry from using 'another big

Unit to mop [the Farm] up'.⁷²⁷ The most they would have would be a very small force consisting of 2/Lieutenant Edward Lloyd Cheney of the 50th Battalion with 30 men, one bomb team and two Lewis Guns to be used if necessary,⁷²⁸ and another small party of the 52nd Battalion attacking from their objective once they had reached it.⁷²⁹ Nor was this plan taking into account what was known of the farm and its strength, and is very complicated with at least two thirds of the force of the entire operation in a different direction from the force attacking the primary objective.

Once again the ground would be more or less entirely unprepared in terms of a jumping-off trench and additional communication saps. The recent heavy rains also continued to have a negative effect on the state of the front line. Any preparations undertaken were very slow largely as a result of 'bad weather, and sodden state of the ground and deep liquid mud in the trenches [and]... the exhausted state of the troops', although as always there was a propensity to point the finger at 'a lack of determination on the part of certain officers to see the work through' as the primary culprit for a lack of preparation.⁷³⁰ Like the 2nd, the 4th Australian Division was exhausted. By the time they had been relieved from their last period in the front line in mid-August, the division had suffered four and a half thousand casualties.⁷³¹ Not only was the division weaker, but now back in the line in early September, they reported that 'the enemy are in considerably greater strength in every way now than they were when we were in the line last month'.⁷³² The 14th Brigade had been in the

⁷²⁷ 'Our Operations:- 16th Battalion', 29 August 1916, AWM 26/60/9.

⁷²⁸ 13th Bde War Diary, entry for 50th Battalion, 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷²⁹ '4th Australian Divisional Order No. 23,' 1 September 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷³⁰ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 1 September 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷³¹ 'Casualty Report to noon 15 August 1916,' AWM 4/1/48/5 Pt. 2.

⁷³² 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 1 September 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

line for only one night, but with 'the expected severity of the coming battle', it had to be relieved in favour of a Canadian Brigade, such was its poor state.⁷³³ As previously mentioned, the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade had entered the line taking over the far right of the line to the boundary with Fourth Division.⁷³⁴ These Canadian units had been placed under the command of the 4th Australian Division while the rest of the Canadian Division was in the process of moving into the sector. Some companies of the 13th Canadian Battalion were provided in case of dire need,⁷³⁵ but the attacking force was still very thin. There were very few, if any, surplus reinforcements to provide carrying parties, mopping up parties or general reinforcement, and attacking battalions had to thin their attacking troops to provide these other requirements. In order to provide a reserve, the battalions taking part were ordered to leave 'a small garrison – say one rifle per ten yards' in the front line as a battalion reserve.⁷³⁶ This attack was very reliant on infantry to make the advance – the barrage was swift and light, and artillery struggled to penetrate the deep bunkers below the farm – but the state of the 4th Australian Division seriously endangered the success of the plan.

The attack on Mouquet Farm by the 51st Battalion was to be 'delivered in depth and strength.'⁷³⁷ But with no 'big unit' allocated to help with mopping up the farm, the battalion had to provide its own 'strong mopping-up party for dealing with dugouts and strong points in and around the farm.'⁷³⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Ross, commanding the battalion, chose to deploy all four of his companies on pre-laid tapes side by side

⁷³³ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 2 September 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷³⁴ 1st Canadian Div. War Diary, entry for 1 September 1916, AWM 26/46/22.

⁷³⁵ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 2 September 1916, AWM 26/59/11.

⁷³⁶ Message BM.54 from Glasfurd (OC 12th Bde) to 49th, 51st and 52nd Bns, 2 September 1916, 2pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷³⁷ '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 16', 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

across their allotted portion of the front, and have them follow the barrage together.⁷³⁹ B Company and the battalion bombing sections formed the spearhead of their attack, and would push through to Point 12. A Company's orders are less clear, but it appears they were to form a close support within the operation, and probably to enter and assist with mopping up the dugouts below the farm.⁷⁴⁰ D Company, on entering the attack on the left, was to push through to Point 12 as well. In many respects they had the hardest task, because on the way through they had to turn back to the west to create a defensive flank facing Thiepval, with their backs to Mouquet Farm. C Company, on the right, was given the responsibility of making contact with the 52nd Battalion. This included meeting up with Cheney's small party ordered to push into the Farm from Point 59 and to assist in mopping up.

The small raiding party of the 52nd Battalion that the advanced parties of the 51st Battalion were supposed to meet in the Farm was very small indeed. Lieutenant Colonel Miles Fitzroy Beevor, commanding the 52nd Battalion, allotted just two platoons of B Company to directly participate in the attack on the farm from Point 59.⁷⁴¹ Beevor would not lead his battalion in the attack, however. At about 4pm on the day before the operation was to go ahead Beevor was wounded and command of the battalion fell to Major Denis Arthur Lane.⁷⁴² The rest of 52nd Battalion's operation, the left half of the 'secondary attack' on the right of the farm, was to run alongside the

⁷³⁹ Message from OC 51st Bn to OsC A, C & D Coys, Capt. Christie & Lt. Morton. 2 September 1916, 2.00pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ 'Operation Order No. 21 by Lieut.-Colonel M.F. Beevor, OC 52nd Battalion AIF,' 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21. These two platoons were given roughly 80 yards of front extending to either side of Point 59 from which to make their attack (R.33.b.4.8 to R.27.d.6.0). This patrol probably also had the assistance of two teams of grenadiers, incorrectly recorded as accompanying D Company 'for attack on the Farm' Operation Order No. 21.

⁷⁴² Maj. D.A. Lane (OC 52nd Bn)'52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on ATTACK on MOUQUET FARM,' 9 September 1916, p. 15, AWM 26/61/21.

line of the destroyed buildings but not enter the ruined compound itself because, it will be remembered, it ran in a different direction to the main operation against the farm. Beevor had taken Brigade's orders and interpreted them in a very straightforward manner. From left to right, C, A and D Companies would attack on fronts of less than 100 yards each side by side.⁷⁴³ C Company's attack ran alongside the farm, A Company was in the middle, and D Company was obliged to liaise with 49th Battalion on their right. Once each company had gained their objective, they were to send parties to bomb along German communication trenches running northward, and then stops would be put in to block German access.⁷⁴⁴

To their right, however, the 49th Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Maxwell de Flayer Lorenzo interpreted 13th Brigade's orders in a completely different manner. He assigned his advancing troops two objectives, the additional line being between 100 and 30 yards from the final objective. It should be noted that this was a straight line on a map, and once more did not correlate with any known features on the battlefield. It did, however, correlate to the first lift of the barrage. Lorenzo assigned A Company to attack and consolidate the first objective, following which, all but one platoon of B Company would push through to form a screen in front of A Company's consolidation efforts.⁷⁴⁵ A second wave formed by C Company, which would attack the final objective, and D Company, which would provide another screen in the manner of B Company.⁷⁴⁶ Although these two battalions had received the same

⁷⁴³ 'Operation Order No. 21 by Lieut.-Colonel M.F. Beevor, OC 52nd Battalion AIF,' 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21. This was derived directly from '13th Australian Infantry Brigade Order No. 16', 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁵ They were specifically forbidden from participating in A Company's assault unless asked by the A Company commanding officer.

⁷⁴⁶ '49th Battalion Headquarters Order No. 9,' 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

orders from 13th Brigade, once again their commanding officers had the leeway to interpret them in vastly different ways. While Lane's operation for the 52nd Battalion was very straightforward, Lorenzo chose to deploy his infantry in depth, putting four thin lines of infantry between his original jumping-off trench and the final objective.

There were two problems with Lorenzo's plan for the 49th Battalion. One was simply that having objectives that did not correlate with obvious geographical features made an operation almost impossible to keep on track. If the men were somehow successful in locating the correct position to 'capture' and hold, they were obliged to dig their own defences under enemy fire to do so. Picks and shovels would be carried through and dropped on each objective by B and D Companies as they pushed through to provide their forward defensive screen. But the defensive positions would need to be dug under fire with only the protection afforded by a thin screen of troops to their front and a light, fast-moving barrage overhead. But a bigger problem facing the 49th was that although using waves of infantry had worked in the past, the tactic required coordination with an appropriate barrage to be of most use, and this one simply moved too quickly. 49th Battalion orders state that 'C Coy will attack 2nd objective and prior to the barrage lifting will tuck in as close to the barrage as possible'.⁷⁴⁷ This gave A Company, leading the charge, three minutes (the time between the first and second lift of the barrage) to reach their intermediate objective line, have B Company move through to drop off picks and shovels, and consolidate their line. This complicated operation was not taking into account the nature of plans at higher level, in particular artillery plans, and the infantry waves stood in danger of disintegrating without proper protection.

⁷⁴⁷ '49th Battalion Headquarters Order No. 9,' 2 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

But somehow the 49th Battalion made this plan work. Lorenzo carefully prepared his infantry for their task, personally going over

the work that each company had to do. Company Commanders then carefully explained to their platoon commanders, who then passed information on to all ranks so that every man in the attack knew approximately what he and the remainder of the Battalion had to do.⁷⁴⁸

On the morning of 3 September 1916 the operation began on time at 5.10am. Lorenzo reported at 6.25, '[h]ave taken both objectives' – although not without problems, as the rest of his message reveals. 'Meeting with much bombing opposition from flanks both right and left. My front not in touch with 52nd. Casualties difficult yet to estimate. Am consolidating front line.'⁷⁴⁹ But there was potential for a real problem in that the plans laid at various levels did not match each other. The artillery were already obliged to arrange for the infantry to withdraw in order to fire their scheduled bombardments because so many forward posts were within 200 yards of the objective – too close to avoid friendly fire.⁷⁵⁰ The 49th Battalion had already experienced times in the lead up to the operation when the artillery fell short, causing casualties and damage to front line trenches.⁷⁵¹ Wedging infantry waves into an attack where there was almost not enough room to fire a bombardment, much less accurately fire a lifting barrage in close coordination with the troops, was not going to provide them with enough protection, nor materially assist their operation. It was

⁷⁴⁸ Operation report in message to Headquarters 13th Bde, 31 September 1916, AWM 4/23/66/4.

⁷⁴⁹ Message J.38 from Lorenzo (OC 49th Bn) to 13th Bde, 3 September 1916, 6.25am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁵⁰ 4th Aust. Div. War Diary, entry for 31 August 1916. AWM 26/59/11.

⁷⁵¹ Message J.24 from 49th Bn to 13th Bde 2 September 1916, 7.20pm. AWM 26/61/21.

going to put them in danger of running into their own artillery fire, or running behind time. And, in the event, C Company of the 49th Battalion was indeed a little late to attack the second objective, although this seems to have surprised Lorenzo, who reported that they were delayed 'for some reason not explainable'.⁷⁵² Although the 49th Battalion gained its objectives, it was seriously depleted by the attack and by 9am reported 'we have the whole line but not enough men to man trench. Please send some men if they can be spared.'⁷⁵³ Urgently in need of men, officers, supply and tools, the Battalion was finally forced back following the withdrawal of the left flank.⁷⁵⁴

The primary focus of the operation happened at the other end of the line from the 49th Battalion. Here the operation also 'commenced punctually at 5.10am', and the artillery barrage was on time and on target.⁷⁵⁵ In the main area of operations, the front of the 51st Battalion, the attacking force was well-prepared. Tapes had been pegged out on the line from which the attack was to be launched, and the entire battalion had filtered out between 11pm and 2am the night before to lie in the open in lines one behind the other. Each company was deployed in two waves – the first consisting of three platoons and the second company headquarters, company bombers, the Lewis gun section and the final platoon carrying picks and shovels. They filtered into their attack positions one after the other. First came B Company, to make the furthest advance, then D Company intending to swing to the left, C Company

⁷⁵² 'Report on operations by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Maxwell de Flayer Lorenzo,' 9 September 1916, AWM 4/23/66/4.

⁷⁵³ Message J.49 from 'Armour' (49th Bn) to 'Prize' (13th Bde), 3 September 1916, 9.07am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁵⁴ 'Report on operations by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Maxwell de Flayer Lorenzo,' 9 September 1916, AWM 4/23/66/4.

⁷⁵⁵ 13th Bde, 'Summary of Operations near MOUQUET FARM – period 1st – 5th Sept 1916,' AWM 26/61/22.

ordered to make contact with the 52nd Battalion and finally A Company in close support.⁷⁵⁶ Although laid out in waves as described by the battalion commander, they all moved off together when the assault began, rather than staggering their departure from the tapes. The battalion encountered very little opposition entering the Farm compound, and within a very short time had managed to capture as many as sixty prisoners, clear three dugouts and destroy two machine guns.⁷⁵⁷ Just over two hours into the operation, the 51st Battalion sent the message 'Farm taken and at present held. Twelve prisoners taken and others in dugouts which are being dealt with... About 30 enemy killed in farm. Position beyond this obscure and have had no news of 52nd yet.'⁷⁵⁸ But the small party of the 52nd Battalion had made it into the farm. At around the same time they were reporting 'two platoons of B Company in Mouquet Farm. Five Prisoners captured including one with a machine gun.'⁷⁵⁹ Although apparently not making much of an impact in the eyes of their neighbouring battalion, the commanding officer of this raiding party, Major McPherson, could add 'PS: 51st Battalion in Mouquet Farm and beyond in some strength.'⁷⁶⁰

But this was when the formidable nature of Mouquet Farm as a defensive position became apparent. Despite their numbers, the 51st Battalion was never able to entirely stamp out resistance. The first troops to enter the farm reported they were 'being shelled from [a] source not yet apparent',⁷⁶¹ but more confusion was to follow. Entrances to dugouts were extremely hard to discover in the pock-marked ground, an

⁷⁵⁶ Ross (OC 51st Bn). 'Report on Operation at Mouquet Farm 1st/4th September 1916,' AWM 4/23/68/7.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.* The second machine gun was accidentally destroyed by shellfire after capture.

⁷⁵⁸ Message DEA.18 from Ross (OC 51st Bn) to 13th Bde, 3 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁵⁹ Message from McPherson (OC B Coy 52nd Bn), top of page torn off removing address, 3 September 1916, 7.25am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶¹ Message DEA.17 from 'Tiger' (51st Bn) to 'Prize' (13th Bde), 3 September 1916, 6.40am, AWM 26/61/21.

advantage the Germans used to fire machine guns or rifle grenades unexpectedly, or even to lob 10lb bombs at the Australian troops trying to clear the compound, and then sink silently back into the ground.⁷⁶² There was also rifle fire and bombs coming from shell holes in every direction.⁷⁶³ It cannot be known how much of was a result of Germans manning the holes, and how much was from the three different attacks converging on the farm from different directions.

Even worse was the increasing awareness that neither flank was supported or in touch with the unit on either side. Ross later claimed he had 'not the slightest doubt' (his emphasis) that the advance went precisely as ordered and the 51st Battalion reached the correct objectives of Points 12 and 42 around Mouquet Farm.⁷⁶⁴ He blamed the 52nd Battalion for not meeting up with his right flank. By 9.30am the 51st Battalion commander reported his three most advanced companies

will have to come in on to [the] Farm unless supported on [the] right as they are in the air. A few of [the] 52nd Battalion [are] in touch with my support line at Mouquet Farm front line [but we are] not joined to [the] 52nd [Battalion]. Communication trenches [are] being dug slowly but surely. All front line Lewis Guns are out of action. Shelling very severe. [The] 52nd Battalion are going back and exposing my right they appear to be very weak.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶² Ross (OC 51st Bn), 'Report on Operation at Mouquet Farm 1st/4th September 1916,' AWM 4/23/68/7.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁵ Message DEA.22 from 51st Bn to 'Prize' (13th Bde), 2 September 1916, 9.30am, AWM 26/61/21.

This proved to be the last straw for the 51st Battalion's tenuous advance. At around 11am B Company of the 50th Battalion found that the 51st had largely left the farm and were in the nearby quarry, with an 'isolated post near Mouquet Farm [from which] every party sent out so far has been wiped out'.⁷⁶⁶ Isolated on both flanks, and without substantial reinforcement, the attack of the 51st Battalion had failed.

What had happened in the centre? Both the 51st Battalion on the left and the 49th Battalion on the right had reported reaching their objectives in a timely fashion.⁷⁶⁷ Bean wrote in the Official History that 'for some reason the commander of the 52nd [Beavor]... had not made his junior officers reconnoitre the ground over which they were to attack', hinting that this was the source of a problem for their advance.⁷⁶⁸ But battalion reports indicate that on 1 September one officer and one non-commissioned officer from each company went with the signalling officer to make a reconnaissance of the communication trenches and forward lines.⁷⁶⁹ This was probably the most the battalion could do with time permitting. When battalion orders were issued at 1pm on 2 September, Beavor personally went through them with his company commanders to ensure they understood the plan.⁷⁷⁰ The 52nd Battalion had taken equal - if not more - care in forming up as the other battalions. Their jumping-off trenches were 'only trenches in name and afforded little cover [having been] heavily shelled during [the] night of 1st and 2nd September'.⁷⁷¹ But each company was supplied with a guide to lead them out to their jumping-off position, and tapes were

⁷⁶⁶ Message from B Coy 50th Bn to HQ 50th Bn, 3 September 1916, 11.15am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁶⁷ Message J.38 from Lorenzo (OC 49th Bn) to 13th Bde, 3 September 1916, 6.25am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁶⁸ Bean, Vol. III, p. 847.

⁷⁶⁹ Lane (OC 52nd Bn), '52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on ATTACK on MOUQUET FARM,' 9 September 1916, p. 14. AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.15.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*

laid over open ground on the route in so that any loss of direction could be avoided.⁷⁷²

The battalion intelligence officer, Lieutenant Arthur Mainwaring Maxwell

was sent along the companies [as they waited side by side on the tapes], to synchronise watches for the second time, make certain all were in their correct positions and assist Company Commanders with any information required as to their front and objective.⁷⁷³

This was not without risk on his part, as Maxwell was 6ft 5in tall⁷⁷⁴ and must have had to take particular care to not present a target or warning the Germans as he crept along the jumping off tapes. As with the left of the line, the battalion was broken into lines for the purpose of forming up prior to the assault, but the entire attacking force left the trenches at the same time. This time was reported as 5.14am – four minutes later than the attack to their left.⁷⁷⁵ There is little to find in the final preparation and deployment of the 52nd Battalion to account for what happened next.

The battalion report says ‘the assault was delivered with much spirit and dash, and in cases a short but fierce and bloody hand to hand conflict ensued, bayonets and rifle butts coming into free play’.⁷⁷⁶ It was reported by Lieutenant Colonel Lorenzo of the 49th Battalion that the right flank of the 52nd had joined with their left flank sometime between 6.25 and 7.00am on 3 September.⁷⁷⁷ But the situation regarding the 52nd Battalion’s advance on their objective was in fact far less clear than these

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷⁷³ Lane (OC 52nd Bn), ‘52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on ATTACK on MOUQUET FARM,’ 9 September 1916, p. 16. AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁷⁴ Bean, Vol. III, p. 847.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁷ Messages from Lorenzo (OC 49th Bn) to 13th Bde – first timed J.38, 3 September 1916, 6.25am. and J.39, 3 September 1916, 7.00am, AWM 26/61/21.

reports would indicate. The first reports to come through from Major Lane were urgent requests for more men. At 7.07am he asked for a 'fatigue party of as many men as are available for taking up ammunition etc. to firing line' and marked the message 'urgent'.⁷⁷⁸ Around the same time Lieutenant Duncan Struan Maxwell, Arthur's brother and commanding officer of A Company, confirmed they were in touch with the 49th Battalion and had captured a number of prisoners. But he, too, ended his message with a simple but telling request: '[w]ant more bombs and men'.⁷⁷⁹

Almost no messages came from the companies in the line other than A Company. It took nearly a week of investigation to determine what had happened to C and D Companies. It was later discovered that C Company on the left, the closest to Mouquet Farm and, therefore, the 51st Battalion's operation, had pushed too far forward and found themselves under their own artillery barrage. Their company commander, the grandly-named Captain Ralph Ratnevelu Raymond Ekin-Smyth, was able to regain control and begin to draw his men back towards their objective, but he was mortally wounded in the process and the company again pushed forward into their barrage.⁷⁸⁰ When a company of the 50th Battalion went forward to try to reinforce the 52nd Battalion, they could not find them, and only heard rumours of 35 men and one sergeant still in the field from the 51st Battalion – probably the remnants of C Company. C Company, it was reported, 'as an organised unit ceased to exist'.⁷⁸¹ On the right of the 52nd Battalion's operation, D Company fared worse. The company began

⁷⁷⁸ Message from Lane (OC 52nd Bn) to Officer in Charge, Pioneer Bn, 3 September 1916, 7.07am, AWM 26/61/21. His request does not seem to have been met.

⁷⁷⁹ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) to HQ 52nd Bn, 3 September 1916, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁸⁰ NAA: B2455 SMYTH RALPH RATNEVELU RAYMOND EKIN.

⁷⁸¹ Lane (OC 52nd Bn), '52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on ATTACK on MOUQUET FARM,' 9 September 1916, p. 15. AWM 26/61/21.

from the correct position, and Maxwell reported that he saw Captain Harry Edward Moncrieff Massey, D Company's commander, about 20 yards from their objective. But, he added

They should be on our right but apparently their officers became casualties... that is the last I have seen of him – and with the loss of direction which followed they entered the new trench with us. We were held up for perhaps half an hour, and then succeeded in pushing to the right through D Company's objective and joining up with the 49th.⁷⁸²

It appears that every officer in D Company became a casualty within the first two hours of battle. Like C Company, D Company of the 52nd Battalion 'ceased to exist as [a] tactical unit'.⁷⁸³ But in the case of D Company, there were not enough survivors even to accurately piece together what had gone wrong. While the Battalion report states that 'each company seized the objective,'⁷⁸⁴ this claim simply cannot be true.

A Company alone persisted in the attack. Its commander, Lieutenant Duncan Maxwell became the focus of the operation, because many of the messages intended for the destroyed C or D Companies made their way through to him.⁷⁸⁵ With exceptional courage and attention to maintaining the plan, Maxwell pushed his company through to what he believed was the objective by 7.50 in the morning. Unsurprisingly, he failed to gain touch on either flank, and was forced to distribute his company along as

⁷⁸² Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) Addressee taped over in file, 3 September 1916, 3.52pm, AWM 26/61/21. Massey was later determined to have been killed in action.

⁷⁸³ Lane (OC 52nd Bn), '52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on ATTACK on MOUQUET FARM,' 9 September 1916, pp. 15-16. AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 15.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

much as his battalion's front as he was able.⁷⁸⁶ He managed to cover A and D Company's sectors, but could not reach much further to the left, accounting for the few sightings of 52nd Battalion men by the 51st in Mouquet Farm. At around 11am he reported

we have about 2 officers, 8 sergeants, 81 others. Can give you no casualty list as most casualties occurred in No Man's Land. Captain Littler is I believe Dead. Sgt. Swift is dead... You can see by our frontage and number of men we want reinforcements. Are we to expect relief tonight?... want reinforcements if we are to hold tonight.⁷⁸⁷

Relief would take two days, and Maxwell's small force, augmented by one company of the 13th Canadian Battalion,⁷⁸⁸ somehow managed to hold the line. Maxwell continued to make 'clear, concise and frequent' reports – as previously demonstrated an invaluable task for a company commander to undertake during battle, and reportedly 'carried on without rest from 2nd to 5th of September under exceedingly trying conditions'.⁷⁸⁹ Maxwell was later awarded the Military Cross for his conspicuous gallantry, particularly in holding his position through three German counter-attacks and for displaying 'great courage and initiative throughout, and set[ting] a splendid example to his men'.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁶ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) to OC 52nd Bn, 3 September 1916, 10.52am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ Message D.48 from 'Money' (52nd Bn) to 'Prize' (13th Bde), 3 September 1916, 11.45am, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁸⁹ Lane (OC 52nd Bn), '52nd Battalion 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, Report on Attack on Mouquet Farm,' 9 September 1916, p. 18. AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁰ 'Notification of award of Military Cross, Base Records Office AIF,' 25 April 1917, NAA: B883, NX12610. Duncan Maxwell went on to serve in the Second World War as brigadier commanding 27th Brigade of the 8th Division, was taken prisoner by the Japanese in Singapore, and spent four years in prisoner of war camps in Taiwan and Japan.

Although Maxwell had reported that he had gained the objective, his only map had been lost when the man carrying it was killed. When on the following day Maxwell met up with Captain Fortesque of the 49th Battalion. Fortesque was carrying an aerial photograph of the battlefield, and Maxwell realised he was much further east of his objective than he had initially thought. All messages sent by him were based on this error.⁷⁹¹ Fortesque, on meeting up with Maxwell's company, ordered the company commander to move forward to his original objective, but Maxwell refused for two reasons. He wrote, 'Firstly, our own artillery was shelling it; secondly, I believe it to be occupied by Germans... [and]... I do not think I have sufficient men to occupy, hold and improve it, even if it were possible by reason of our artillery merely stopping shelling.'⁷⁹² Not only that, but the small advance would leave him unable to signal aircraft and would leave his left flank in a more precarious position than it already was.⁷⁹³ His company was massively stretched by trying to hold as much of the battalion's front as possible. They never managed to stretch the whole way to make contact with the 51st in Mouquet Farm. Maxwell and his men were forced to fall back towards the 49th Battalion by 4.30pm on 4 September 1916,⁷⁹⁴ and were relieved the following day.

Through the success of the 49th Battalion and the efforts of Lieutenant Maxwell's A Company, the right of the attack managed to hold the line for some time. But the 49th

⁷⁹¹ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) to 52nd Bn, 4 September 1916, AWM 26/61/22.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*

⁷⁹³ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn), top off message with address torn off, 3 September 1916, 12.37pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁴ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) to HQ 52nd Bn, 4 September 1916, 4.31pm, AWM 26/61/22.

suffered from heavy casualties among its Lewis gun crews, and had taken a considerable number of casualties. Under pressure, Lieutenant Colonel Lorenzo suggested that the 'Canadians be asked to string out and take over my line... This will relieve pressure on me'.⁷⁹⁵ Maxwell could not spread his force out towards Mouquet Farm because, as he reported, 'we have all we can hold in event of a counter attack now'.⁷⁹⁶ Lorenzo as commander of this overall force managed to get the position consolidated, the defences on the captured German trenches turned around and some communication trenches under construction during the day following the operation. This was remarkable given how weakly the line was held. Efforts to reinforce it were largely unsuccessful. A Company of the 50th Battalion under Captain David Todd was sent forward but only about 35 men joined the 49th Battalion in the front line.⁷⁹⁷ Lorenzo was largely unsuccessful in getting messages through, and the 13th Brigade was for a time sending messages to the 1st Canadian Brigade asking if they could 'give us any information about [the] 49th Battalion [as] we haven't heard [from them] for some time'.⁷⁹⁸ Maxwell continued to be the main conduit of information to brigade from the front line, finding out as much as he could about other units in order to provide the best picture of the situation possible to 13th Brigade Headquarters.⁷⁹⁹

Each of these operations saw some success, but each time it was short-lived. Each time the operations were to take close-range objectives under a light and fast artillery barrage. The Germans were usually not forced to keep their heads down and stop

⁷⁹⁵ Message J.54 from Lorenzo (OC 49th Bn) to 13th Bde, 3 September 1916, 12.27pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁶ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn), top off message with address torn off, 3 September 1916, 12.37pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁷ Message J.57 from Lorenzo (OC 49th Bn) to 13th Bde, 3 September 1916, 2.27pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁸ Message BM.81 from Ridley (13th Bde) to 4th Aust. Div., 3 September 1916, 2.12pm, AWM 26/61/21.

⁷⁹⁹ Message from Maxwell (OC A Coy 52nd Bn) Addressee taped over in file, 3 September 1916, 3.52pm, AWM 26/61/21.

firing during these barrages, and the infantry were forced into desperate hand-to-hand fighting to gain ground. Many units were crippled by casualties, and at least two were reported to have 'ceased to exist'. And yet there were very little changes to the basic approach in the last weeks of 1st Anzac Corps' tenancy of the line. Because the infantry could get into their objective there was a tendency to assume a lack of moral fibre was the only reason they could have been ejected by German counter-attacks, and so the basic offensive approach did not appear to need examination. And when given a request to try something different, as with Reserve Army's longer-range objective for the operation of 3 September 1916, Birdwood demonstrated his marked preference to try to take no more than the next trench by dramatically reducing the line. This operational approach was the sum of learning by 1st Anzac Corps during the Battle of Pozières and is a sad indictment on Birdwood's understanding of fighting at the Somme, and of his willingness to sacrifice his men rather than take advice from subordinates like Gellibrand or Durant, or re-examine his own methods. The learning process would have to happen elsewhere.

Conclusion

The Battle of Pozières Ridge lasted precisely six weeks. In that time the 1st Anzac Corps, in whose sector most of the fighting took place, advanced the British line just over a mile and a half in a north-westerly direction, from a position just south east of the village of Pozières up to the edge of Mouquet Farm to the north of the village. The most successful phase of the battle was its first. On 23 July 1916 the 1st Division of 1st Anzac Corps advanced from Black Watch Alley, some 1500 yards to the south east of Pozières, to the south side of the Albert-Bapaume Road which ran through the southern edge of the village, capturing a number of strong points in the houses, cellars and yards along that side of the road, and Gibraltar, a significant strong point at the south-western edge of the village itself. Over the next two or three days, the Division was able to push through the main part of the village, which lay to the north east of the road, and eject German defenders from houses, trenches and other strongpoints to take possession of the entire village.

This first attack, while successful, failed to deal with the major German defences in the Pozières sector – the OG Lines. These heavily fortified trench lines ran more or less parallel to the direction of the operation, that is, from the south east to the north west. The 1st Division's attack had taken a section of this, the German second line of defence on the Somme, but had left the main part of the defensive line to the north of the village intact. And so, when the 1st Division was relieved by the 2nd on 27 July 1916, the OG Lines became the primary objective in the area. The 2nd Division took two attempts to capture these lines, struggling to make headway against uncut

barbed-wire defences and German defenders who were well aware of the coming attack and well-armed with machine guns. It was not until the second attack on 4 August that the division successfully captured the lines and secured the right flank of the Australian operations.

From this point on the OG Lines were held more or less in a defensive capacity only, and the main focus of operations shifted to the north west. This conformed with Reserve Army's overall plan to advance in a northerly direction to take the village of Thiepval, some two miles from the centre of Pozières. The first major German defensive position in this direction was the fortified buildings and yards of Mouquet Farm, which lay approximately half a mile on from the northern-most point of Pozières. The 4th Division, on its arrival to the line on 7 August 1916, began a complicated series of operations that inched the line towards Mouquet Farm. Each of these operations was conducted on a small front with smaller objectives and achieved a slight modicum of success in advancing the line, but at a high cost in men and materiel. On its relief some nine days later, the 4th Division had advanced the line to within 5-600 yards of Mouquet Farm.

Each of the three divisions returned to the front line once more before the 1st Anzac Corps was replaced in the line by the Canadian Corps. Even Charles Bean, with his determination to put as much detail into the Official Histories as possible, had to preface his chapters on what happened next with the statement 'the series of battles which ensued, repeating as they did within a narrower area [than] most of the horrors of the Pozières fighting, cannot be described with the minuteness hitherto

employed'.⁸⁰⁰ With the 4th Division's small-scale success as an example, and official sanction from Reserve Army to 'think out and suggest enterprises instead of waiting for orders from above,'⁸⁰¹ 1st Anzac Corps embarked upon a series of operations, sometimes in conjunction with Army plans, sometimes of their own conception, but always on a small scale against ever-closer, decreasingly significant objectives.

In fact, the period encompassed by the Battle of Pozières Ridge, 23 July to 3 September 1916 demonstrates a marked deterioration in tactical approach by 1st Anzac Corps. The operation which took the most amount of ground, the attack on the village on 23 July, was the most tactically sound. The infantry advanced in three waves, each wave creating a consolidated line of defence on its objective as the next wave moved through. They were preceded by an artillery barrage that lifted from objective to objective to cover the exposed infantry as they advanced across no man's land. Importantly, each objective was at least four hundred yards from the one that preceded it. The 'safety zone' for artillery fire that the infantry had to keep to at this time was two hundred yards, which in other words meant that any shell fired as part of an artillery barrage could not be expected to land more accurately than two hundred yards either short or long of the objective. By making each lift of the barrage more than 400 yards apart, the infantry could function effectively in their particular objectives without being hindered by their own artillery. The artillery barrage was heavy, and contained a mix of shrapnel and high explosive that was both damaging to the German trenches and forced the infantry into their dugouts. Each lift remained on the objective for half an hour, giving the infantry time to capture their objective and

⁸⁰⁰ Bean, *Official History, Vol. III*, p. 728.

⁸⁰¹ SG.43/0/1. Memorandum by Army Commander, Reserve Army. 3 August 1916. pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

begin the work of consolidation while the next wave moved through, formed up in the correct place and prepared to follow the next lift. The infantry were then able to advance across open ground without challenge from alert and ready machine gun crews. The other important point to be made about this advance is that it was significant – on 23 July the 1st Brigade advanced as much as 1500 yards towards the village, took all its objectives and captured a position from which effective aid could be given to the 3rd Brigade. In the next day or so the 3rd Brigade was then able to match the 1st Brigade's advance. This distance would not be equalled again in the next six weeks.

The operations of the 2nd Division were less about capturing territory and more about securing the right flank of 1st Anzac Corps' advance. But tactically these operations marked a significant deterioration in planning. The 2nd Division did not rely as heavily on firepower to advance and secure their objectives as had the 1st Division. On one occasion they tried seriously to diminish the strength of the planned artillery barrage and even allow to do away with it altogether. Instead, the 2nd Division threw huge numbers of men into crowded infantry waves to attack first OG1 and then OG2 in a two-lift attack. The 2nd Division artillery barrage was both weaker and moved too fast for the infantry to keep pace and failed in most cases to keep the German infantry under cover. The infantry were often forced to advance across open ground in the face of withering machine gun fire that caused extremely heavy casualties. Not only that, but preliminary bombardments and the lifting barrage itself had usually failed to cut the German barbed wire between the 2nd Division and its objective. So not only were infantrymen exposed to machine gun fire on their way to

their objective, but they were forced to stand up and try to cut a way through belts of barbed wire. The first of these operations was an abject failure. The second, with a slightly strengthened artillery barrage and more time to prepare, succeeded in capturing its objective. It should come as no surprise, however, that the Division suffered 5,327 casualties during its nine days in the front line.

The period of time the 4th Division spent in the front line marks yet another downturn in the tactical approach of 1st Anzac Corps and its divisions in the attack. The division was called into action from their second day in the line, when they participated in a small operation designed to distract the Germans from a larger attack by Fourth Army at Guillemont. As a result some of the objectives of that operation were untaken, and this unleashed a series of small-scale, extremely limited objective attacks at various points in the line. The earliest were to capture these unsecured objectives, but as time went on various commanders simply seemed to randomly select points in the line and attack on a narrow front without any attempt at coordination. Sometimes the attacks were ordered by Gough, sometimes by Birdwood or Cox, and on occasions they were even ordered by battalion commanders. Most achieved at least a modicum of success, and even if parts of the attacks failed, a hurriedly-organised second operation within 18-24 hours usually managed to advance the line further. From this point on, operations were always on a smaller scale, and against coordinates on a map rather than objectives of significance to the wider campaign.

After 8 August 1916 the divisions of 1st Anzac Corps experienced a kind of 'tactical cliff' as they rotated through the lines. The series of operations conducted by the corps, using each of its divisions in turn, demonstrates an incremental lack of determination to adhere to Reserve Army's strategic goal of moving beyond Thiepval. Instead the objectives gradually deteriorated, becoming less and less relevant to any overarching plan. Any movement achieved was minimal and only correlated to the planned northward movement on Thiepval in the vaguest of terms. In fact the objective of many attacks became so limited in distance that the infantry were obliged to withdraw from their current positions, moving backwards to avoid being hit by their own artillery fire during preliminary bombardments and even the first fall of the lifting barrage. By late August, even when given the chance to capture Mouquet Farm, Birdwood chose instead to allow a divisional commander, Cox, to decide whether or not its capture would be appropriate. With Gough's attention increasingly on action to the left of 1st Anzac Corps, and Birdwood's failure to instigate any determined attempt to advance the line in accordance with Reserve Army's clearly articulated plans for northward movement, the action of 1st Anzac Corps slowly descended into pointlessness. Futility is a word that is often overused in relation to the First World War, but cannot be avoided in this instance.

From the time of 4th Division's first spell in the front line, the infantry became increasingly the most important element on the battlefield. This was not because, as in the case of Legge, they were overemphasised in the plans or far too heavily deployed in the field. It was simply because from early to mid-August there appeared in orders an increasingly pronounced disconnection between the plans of the artillery

and the plans of the infantry. The disconnection began on a very small scale in the operations of the 4th Brigade around 8-10 August, when, despite the presence of an apparently reasonably well-timed barrage, the fall of shell was initially too close to the infantry and then lifted too far away to be of any practical assistance to them at all. Within days even this tenuous connection was lost, and barrages regularly began on the infantry's final objective before undertaking a carefully planned series of lifts to a final barrage – none of which happened within the infantry's area of operation. None of the careful lifts was of any use to them whatsoever, and the barrage might just as well have lifted to its final position straight away. Even the most carefully laid of artillery plans were, in the end, to no avail at all. This is difficult to notice without carefully plotting all of the map coordinates in the orders, without which operations often look to be well-supported by artillery, particularly in the case of the 4th Division. It was not that the artillery was not present, or was not firing heavily enough, it was just that their barrages were in the wrong place, and did not work with the requirements of the infantry in the field. This problem was never picked up at 1st Anzac Corps headquarters, where most of these plans were written or finalised, but the entire logic behind having a lifting barrage in the attack was slowly lost over time, and did not reappear.

The infantry themselves, slowly detached from their main form of firepower support and having to fend for themselves in the field, were put under further pressure by the hurried, small-scale series of operations thrust upon them. Because the next operation was rarely more than a day or two away the men in the front line were forced to make preparations as quickly as possible, digging new jumping-off trenches,

repairing damaged ones, making reconnaissance patrols and forming working and carrying parties. All of this was conducted under some of the heaviest shellfire experienced anywhere on the Western Front. Lieutenant Colonel Jess, in command of the 7th Battalion wrote that he 'personally was a witness on one occasion when the strong point was blown in, and can realise the nerve wracking effect of such frequent occurrences.'⁸⁰² The horror of this situation should not be underestimated. Men were buried by shell blast, dug up and buried again. Others dug through corpses, old and new, to reach them. Extended periods of heavy shellfire had a soporific effect, creating men effectively sleepwalking through their duties. Grown men cried like babies without knowing why. Shell shock, nerves, the shakes, all were treated with respect and understanding from men who understood the arbitrary human response to living within a roaring inferno. But men in the front line were also often poorly supplied, particularly with water, as a result of shellfire cutting supply lines to the most forward positions. They were more often than not remarkably valiant in the face of extreme adversity. But their morale was seriously tested, and on at least one occasion broke down as a result of the cumulative effect of these ongoing problems.

Some of these problems were the responsibility of Gough and his headquarters at Reserve Army. Gough's impetuosity was largely responsible for the push to hurry operations through, particularly in the early days. Only on a very few occasions was it possible to thwart him – notably when Walker insisted on extra days to prepare for the attack on Pozzières before 23 July, and when Haig intervened following the dramatic failure of Legge's first operation on the night of 28 July. But generally the rush to

⁸⁰² C.H. Jess (OC 7th Bn), '7th Battalion AIF Report on Operations 15th/21st August 1915 [*sic*],' 26 August 1916, p.9, AWM 26/54/7.

attack went unmodified and gradually became a feature of operations generated at corps and lower levels. There became a kind of culture of rapidity within the corps. And yet Reserve Army paid lip service to the need for thorough and careful preparation, and many of its memoranda 'conceded that preparation must be thorough and careful' as in Gough's Memorandum of 3 August 1916.⁸⁰³ This was truly no more than lip service however – the most important point to be had from that document was that units of Reserve Army must 'press the enemy constantly and... continue to gain ground as rapidly as possible', which was totally at odds to the slower, methodical process implied through 'thorough and careful preparation'. The real problem arose when, in the same document, Gough gave his approval to having 'Subordinate Commanders... think out and suggest enterprises instead of waiting for orders from above'.⁸⁰⁴ This gave Birdwood and others the opportunity to press ahead with their small-scale operations with minimal reference to the overall plan. By this simple directive, Gough effectively removed himself from organising a broad operational strategy in favour of urging haste on a small, disjointed scale. This gave more than enough scope for 1st Anzac Corps' deterioration into its confusing, muddled rush of small-scale operations.

And yet on a number of occasions Reserve Army issued orders to the 1st Anzac Corps for operations which had a number of elements that were slowly being demonstrated as being key to success. The most noticeable of these was the operation against Pozières which, as mentioned, had good distances between its objectives, maintained defence in depth as the operation went ahead, and achieved a significant gain in

⁸⁰³ SG.43/0/1. Memorandum by Army Commander, Reserve Army. 3 August 1916. pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

terms of territory. On subsequent occasions when Reserve Army issued similar orders they were always changed, particularly in terms of territorial advance, by corps or divisional commanders. This was a particular failure of 1st Anzac Corps and Birdwood, who was in fact quite tentative about making a determined advance in any direction, or indeed to attack any major obstacle, such as Mouquet Farm. He always failed to intervene, particularly in gaining extra preparation time for his divisional commanders. The only time he did intervene was in the case of Gordon Legge, when, in order to retain the confidence of the Australian Government, he insisted that Legge not be replaced.⁸⁰⁵ This was a decision that was not based on any particular operational factor at all; at other times Birdwood seemed to agree with Gough that Legge was inexperienced and directly responsible for the failed attack.

1st Anzac Corps was also particularly responsible for the deterioration of artillery tactics such as the lifting barrage. It is clear from this short period of time that Birdwood was out of his depth as a commander, but able to manage through a policy of meekly passing on orders from Army and leaving it to divisional commanders to make alterations, or making the alterations himself in favour of shorter objectives and apparently easier to reach targets. The increasing number of smaller operations was particularly suited to Birdwood's tentativeness because it meant that his corps could regularly report success – even if only very localised – without running the risk of a large-scale, unmistakable failure. With Gough satisfied that at least Birdwood was impressing upon his 'subordinate leaders the necessity for the energetic measures

⁸⁰⁵ Birdwood to Reserve Army, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/50/15.

and offensive action which the present situation requires',⁸⁰⁶ despite gaining no significant territory, Birdwood had little incentive to reassess his method of command or the tactics of his corps.

The three divisional commanders of 1st Anzac Corps displayed quite different approaches to the operations assigned them by Army and corps. Walker, in command of the 1st Australian Division, was perhaps the most proficient of the three. Certainly he was the most outspoken, and stood up to Gough when the Army commander tried to rush his division into action before it was adequately prepared. But on other occasions he did not stand up to Birdwood or succeed in gaining more time for preparation while his division was in its second period in the front line. Walker had confidence in his brigade commanders and left them to organise their infantry plans as they saw fit. His orders demonstrate a solid understanding of the role artillery could play in the actions of the infantry, but again too often he allowed his concerns regarding orders from corps or Army to be overridden by Birdwood. The clarity of purpose he displayed in the attack against Pozières diminished over time, and the general confusion of 1st Anzac Corps' later period in the line about Pozières affected his division as well.

Nevertheless Walker's overall approach was quite different to Legge's approach to command of the 2nd Australian Division. Legge micro-managed his brigade commanders by issuing orders that gave them very little leeway in interpretation or application. He also demonstrated a poor understanding of the mechanics of the

⁸⁰⁶ SG.43/0/1. Memorandum by Army Commander, Reserve Army. 3 August 1916. pp. 1-2, AWM 26/42/1.

attack in trench warfare, with a serious underestimation of the importance of firepower in advancing across no man's land and far too heavy an emphasis on the role of the infantry. His tactics cost his division dearly in both the lives of his men, and the esteem of his senior commanders. However, although he was closely monitored following the failure of his division's first operation against the OG Lines in late July, his basic problem of overcrowded infantry lines and diminished artillery barrages was never directly addressed.

Cox of the 4th Australian Division was perhaps the most interesting of the three. Every operation of his division was conducted behind an artillery barrage, which seems to indicate that he more than anyone clearly understood the important role firepower had to play in breaking the deadlock on the Western Front. And yet most of the barrages fired during his time in the line were completely inappropriate and, as discussed, did not coordinate with the infantry action at all. Cox was also the first to preside over the small raid-like attacks that became the norm during the latter part of 1st Anzac Corps' approach to operations, and he seemed to struggle to appreciate the role broad-fronted, deep assaults – like that on Pozzières – had in gaining significant amounts of territory.

Just as divisional commanders demonstrated a marked ability to act as individuals, brigade commanders, too, could demonstrate initiative and individuality in their role. And as divisional commanders were limited by corps command, brigade commanders were limited by the division in which their formation belonged. However, at this level the scope within which brigade commanders could work was much more limited, and

depended heavily on the actions of their divisional commander. Brigade commanders in the 1st Division benefited from Walker's hands-off command style, which gave them leeway to interpret their orders in different ways. As a result we have the example of Smyth and Sinclair-Maclagan at Pozières who, given the same orders from division, deployed their infantry in very different ways – to the detriment of Sinclair-Maclagan's 3rd Brigade. But again, they were absolutely at the mercy of the plan they were given to work within. Legge's brigade commanders were much more restricted by the orders they received and could do little in terms of innovation or individual interpretation of those orders. This was due both to the detail of the orders in terms of infantry movement – the composition and action of each infantry wave was detailed by division – and also struggled to achieve success because of the poor preparatory bombardments and lifting barrages of the artillery. In some cases, the preparation work of the brigadier had a latent effect on their brigades when in battle. The 4th Infantry Brigade materially benefited from Monash's extensive and detailed training programs which were continued by his successor, Brand. In contrast, the 13th Infantry Brigade, like the 4th Brigade a member of the 4th Australian Division, was not trained in such minute detail by its commander, and a comparison of the two demonstrates a noticeable difference, particularly in the ability of individuals in the field to understand their role as circumstances evolved during battle.

Battalion commanders are often considered to have little impact on the course of the battle once it began, having lost control as soon as the whistle sounded for their men to leave their jumping-off trench. But during the Battle of Pozières Ridge many battalion commanders demonstrated that they were able to keep close control of

their men and have a material effect on the outcome of the battle. The most stellar example was that of Heane and Howell-Price at Pozières. These two battalion commanders were able to cooperate within the same sector to excellent effect, and their battalions made the greatest advance on 23 July 1916. Heane left his headquarters on at least one occasion to make a personal reconnaissance of the front line to be better able to command his men, and Howell-Price paused his force in no man's land and personally made sure his wave of infantry was in the correct formation before joining the assault. Certainly other battalion commanders were not as active in their role, some preferring to stay in headquarters and wait for reports. In other cases, notably that of the 50th Battalion, problems with battalion command streamed down into companies. When Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hurcombe was evacuated with shell shock the battalion felt the impact of his loss. Major Ross Jacob had some difficulty adjusting to his sudden promotion to battalion commander, and some of his company commanders, such as Major Mervyn Herbert, struggled to maintain their morale. Battalion command was in many ways one of the most dynamic on the field because it was the first to encounter reports of companies being blocked or of counter attacks arising in the field, and therefore the first to respond. Battalion commanders could have a significant effect on events, or very little as in the case of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Stevens at Pozières, whose headquarters was overrun by another battalion, leaving him out of the loop and disconnected from events. The experience and influence of the battalion commander during the Battle of Pozières was not at all uniform across the corps.

The infantry in the field during the battle had to contend with an enormous number of variables – many of which were thrust upon them as a consequence of orders given at higher levels of command. So many good junior officers, non-commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers were lost simply because of the hazardous situation in which many ill-thought-out schemes placed them. Major Durant, the officer commanding the 13th Battalion, once said that he was sure his men would be able to ‘rise to the occasion like the heroes they are’, which was hardly realistic in the face of modern technological warfare.⁸⁰⁷ Many men were killed in the process of behaving like heroes, like Lieutenant Victor Warry, a company commander of the 25th who was mown down by machine gun fire while standing at a gap in the wire in front of the OG Lines trying to lead his men through. And yet, if the artillery barrage suppressed the German defenders sufficiently, and the men could find shelter from the constant shellfire, there was scope for individuals in the field to materially alter the course of events. The right flank at Pozières was in serious danger of breaking down completely but was saved by the actions of Captain Ferdinand Medcalf, who organised several strongpoints and short lines of defence before acting as the primary conduit of messages into and out of the front line in that sector. Captain Hugh Pulling similarly took control of the 13th Battalion’s sector in early August in the face of two of his fellow commanders struggling in their role. He, too, became the focus of all information into and out of the field, and was commended for sending ‘reports in much sooner’ than those of his neighbouring battalions.⁸⁰⁸ He provided a stabilising and cohesive influence. Even at the lowest ebb of the 50th Battalion, individuals like Captain Harold Armitage and Captain Murray Fowler were able to stop a panicky retreat of men from a completely demoralised company and re-form the front line.

⁸⁰⁷ Message C09 from Durant (OC 13th Bn) to 4th Bde. 29 August 1916, 9.35am. AWM 26/60/9.

⁸⁰⁸ Message from Capt. D.G. Marks to Capt. H.D. Pulling, 11.55pm, 14 August 1916. AWM: EXDOC023.

While these individuals were reliant on so many factors being right before they could survive for any significant period in the front line, with each factor being in their favour they could have an extraordinarily disproportionate influence on events.

One of the problematic aspects of studying an operation like the Battle of Pozières Ridge is that in the end there is almost no evidence of learning from this experience. Certainly there were countless memoranda, notes and messages written with clearly expressed 'lessons learned'. But these written notes resulted in no practical examples which indicated that what was being written about was actually being absorbed and implemented. While Gordon Legge wrote in his report on the action of 28/29 July that 'it is a mistake to crowd many men into a line after it has been captured,'⁸⁰⁹ there is no evidence that he made any effort to modify the numbers of men in his leading waves of infantry during an attack in either the first or the second period of time the 2nd Division spent in the front line. Similarly 'lessons learned' on objective distances, artillery barrages, infantry waves and myriad other parts of battle have almost no examples of having been carried out even after the problems were clearly noted. Each operation marks a deterioration – in artillery application, in infantry deployment, in the scope of the operation both in depth and breadth, and in preparation times – from the one before. It is a matter for further study to see if the articulated 'lessons' were digested and employed at a more distant remove from events here, but it can be certain that even though many potential improvements were clearly articulated during the six weeks of the battle, they were not implemented in any plans.

⁸⁰⁹ 'Report on Action of 28th/29th July. Part I,' G.3/19, 14 August 1916, AWM 26/56/4.

Equally those individuals who demonstrated a high degree of understanding or competence at various times, such as Walker, or the many company or battalion commanders who have been noted as particularly competent, did not seem to learn anything during the course of the battle. They brought their already-established skills to the operation, and remained as they were, unable to extend their positive influence beyond their personal sphere of operations. The constant, desperate rush to attack as quickly as possible seems to have been largely responsible for the failure of any number of commanding officers at all levels to digest the results of recent events and modify their actions, sensibly or otherwise, in response.

This study has demonstrated that even an in-depth approach such as that of Paddy Griffiths, which relies heavily on the conclusions of the report-writers, can miss important points evident in the conduct of the battle according to messages written during the action. In particular Griffiths is wrong when he writes of creeping barrages as either 'present' or 'absent' without discussing the added nuance of the objectives, speed, or weight of the barrage, or the method of integrating the infantry plans with it. But more importantly, this study poses a significant problem for the argument that the Battle of the Somme was a necessary stepping stone on the way to the victorious battles of 1918. The evidence that a process of learning and incremental improvement in approach to battle in the British Army was underway in 1916 is simply not there in this instance. More research would be necessary to pinpoint where exactly this learning was underway – if at all. Further study may indicate that a return to the reports of 1916 was made in 1917 or even later, although this, too, seems unlikely. Many of the elements needed to conduct a successful attack on static

positions are evident in the Battle of the Somme, but the unevenness with which they were applied, and now the evidence of no learning at all in 1st Anzac Corps during the campaign must relegate the Somme to an uneasy position closer to 'futility' than 'necessity' in our understanding until further evidence comes to light.

Mouquet Farm itself was not captured until 26 September. Although initially not involved in active offensive operations towards the farm, eventually the Canadian Division that replaced the Anzacs was also drawn into a number of small-scale operations in the same direction. And yet Mouquet Farm was not captured until the position was overtaken by an advance in the lines to either side of it. On 26 September the 6th East Yorkshire Pioneer Battalion was working in the vicinity of the farm digging communication trenches. The farm's downfall was ignominious to say the least:

'No. 16 [platoon] under Lieutenant Coultas could not start work owing to the Mouquet Farm being still held by the enemy. He therefore attacked the farm in order to try and [get] them out, eventually after about four hours and smoke bombs had been thrown down the entrances of the farm, one officer and 35 other ranks gave themselves up.'⁸¹⁰

Mouquet Farm was finally, irrevocably, in the hands of the British. In the effort, Lieutenant Coulter was another to lose his life. If Pozières Ridge was part of the battle that had to happen on the way to success, it was a costly path indeed.

⁸¹⁰ War Diary of 6th East Yorkshire Regt (Pioneers), entry for 26 September 1916, WO 95/1804.

The Battle of the Somme is largely told and remembered through its longer set-piece battles – 1 July, 14 July, 15 September. But for its other 138 days this was not how the battle was fought. At Longueval, Pozières, Mouquet Farm, Delville Wood, Ginchy, Guillemont, High Wood, and Intermediate Trench the Somme was characterised by small-scale, disjointed, interminable attacks as described in the Mouquet Farm operations. This was the warfare that most soldiers on most days of this battle were required to fight. That is, if there is a typical day on the Somme it was characterised by small groups of men struggling forwards towards ill-defined objectives on a moonscape battlefield. These troops might or might not be protected by artillery fire but were almost as likely to find their own shells landing among them as those of the enemy. Their task was to winkle out machine guns and enemy troops in undisclosed positions, firing from head-on or from a flank in numbers that were usually unknown. In the course of these actions they would be subjected to fire from enemy artillery batteries whose location and number would also be unknown to them and were even unknown to their own artillery. The attacking troops were more often than not exhausted before they began, forced by the haste with which most operations were mounted to work hard to prepare their jumping-off positions before going 'over the top'. Although the attacking force might start in appropriate strength, it would almost always suffer casualties to such a degree that it dwindled away to pitifully small numbers with no hope of holding the front captured. Or the infantry waves were so thickly packed that they formed excellent targets for enemy machine guns or riflemen, and larger numbers were lost to a similar end result. The fronts of attack were usually too narrow or so disjointed, and again operations so rushed that it was never possible to deploy into the measured attack formations adopted for the large

set-piece battles. In these battles men would scamper forward over a shell-cratered wilderness in the faint hope that they would have some support their right and left.

It must be hammered home that on the Somme *this* was the war the infantry knew. And the war they knew had three overwhelming features. The first was that the nature of the operations they were unfortunate enough to be required to conduct were so rushed, so disjointed, so-ill-thought out, so badly integrated with fire power, that on most occasions they did not stand a decent chance of success. The orders, whether they come from on high or from more proximate levels of command were impossible to fulfil. This was not the way to fight a battle or even a war. The infantry in the Mouquet Farm battles were martyrs rather than soldiers – required by cloud-cuckoo-land plans to lay down their lives without, in many cases, even getting to grips with the enemy. The second feature of these battles is equally lamentable. That is even if by some miracle an objective was captured and the line was advanced it was to no purpose. It did not matter a jot to the overall campaign if Mouquet Farm fell or not. It was not the key to Thiepval (which was still in enemy hands after Mouquet Farm was captured) or to anywhere else. When it was eventually captured nothing followed. The German line in this sector did not collapse, or withdraw. Thiepval was captured from a completely different direction. The capture of Mouquet Farm was inconsequential.

The third factor goes to the intention of the operation. The campaign was decidedly not in the accepted sense one of attrition. In attrition the aim is to wear the enemy down at a faster rate than one's own troops. This could not be the case in these hastily

arranged battles. The fact is that they were prepared in such haste that there could be no over-arching aim. The number of men committed to battle was never at any time carefully chosen to further the aims of attrition. Those who fought were those who happened to be there. While very occasionally reports spoke of heavy German casualties, these were the consolation of a failed operation, not the success of a pre-planned attritional battle. Attrition in fact requires careful planning to induce or force the enemy to commit sufficient forces to create an imbalance of sacrifice. An imbalance was achieved here, but almost certainly on the wrong side. It was the enemy who could commit just enough machine guns, riflemen and artillery to hold up an attack; the attackers committed whatever they had available. Mouquet Farm, in terms of planning, objectives and casualties was not even a road to nowhere. If continued it was the road to oblivion. The 1st Anzac Corps could here hardly recover from such an experience with any speed. None of Haig's armies could recover if this went on too long. New methods would have to be employed or the war would be ended by attrition – but not in a way that favoured the Allies.

Appendix

1st Anzac Corps Order of Battle 23 July – 3 September 1916

1st Australian Division Major General Harold Bridgwood Walker

- **1st Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General Nevill Maskelyne Smyth**
 - **1st Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel James Heane
 - **2nd Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Arthur Borlase Stevens
 - **3rd Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Owen Glendower Howell-Price
 - **4th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Iven Giffard Mackay

- **2nd Infantry Brigade** **Lieut.-Colonel Henry Gordon Bennett**
 - **5th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Frank William Le Maistre
 - **6th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Clarence Wells Didier Daly
 - **7th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Care Herman Jess
 - **8th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Graham Coulter

- **3rd Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General Ewen George Sinclair Maclagan**
 - **9th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel James Campbell Robertson
 - **10th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Stanley Price Weir
 - **11th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Stephen Harricks Roberts
 - **12th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Charles Hazell Elliott

2nd Australian Division Lieutenant General James Gordon Legge

- **5th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General William Holmes**
 - **17th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Edward Fowell Martin
 - **18th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Evan Alexander Wisdom

- **19th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel William Kenneth Seaforth Mackenzie
- **20th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Alexander Windeyan Ralston

- **6th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General John Gellibrand**
 - **21st Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel William Dempster Forbes
 - **22nd Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Robert Smith
 - **23rd Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Wilfred Kent Fethers
 - **24th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel William Walker Russell Watson

- **7th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General John Paton**
 - **25th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel James Walker
 - **26th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel George Ferguson
 - **27th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Walter Dollman
 - **28th Battalion** Major Alan William Leane

4th Australian Division **Major General Herbert Vaughan Cox**

- **4th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General Charles Henry Brand**
 - **13th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Leslie Edward Tilney
 - **14th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Charles Morland Dare
 - **15th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel James Cannan
 - **16th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Edmund Alfred Drake-Brockman

- **12th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General Duncan John Glasfurd**
 - **45th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Sydney Charles Edgar Herring
 - **46th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Geoffrey Trollope Lee
 - **47th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Robert Eccles Snowden
 - **48th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Raymond Lionel Leane

- **13th Infantry Brigade** **Brigadier General Thomas William Glasgow**
 - **49th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Francis Maxwell de Flayer Lorenzo
 - **50th Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Frederick William Hurcombe
(later Major Ross Blyth Jacob)
 - **51st Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Arthur Murray Ross
 - **52nd Battalion** Lieut.-Colonel Miles Fitzroy Beevor

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- 23/1/13 1st Infantry Brigade – August 1916.
- 23/2/16 2nd Infantry Brigade – August 1916.
- 23/3/9 3rd Infantry Brigade – July 1916.

———23/4/11 4th Infantry Brigade – August 1916.

———23/5/13 5th Infantry Brigade – July 1916.

———23/6/12 6th Infantry Brigade – August 1916.

———23/13/6 13th Infantry Brigade – July 1916.

———23/13/7 13th Infantry Brigade – August 1916.

———23/18/9 1st Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/21/17 4th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/22/17 5th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/24/17 7th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/26/19 9th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/25/19 8th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/27/9 10th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/28/16 11th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/29/17 12th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/29/18 12th Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

———23/30/22 13th Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

———23/32/17 15th Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

———23/37/12 20th Infantry Battalion – July 1916.

———23/38/12 21st Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

———23/40/11 23rd Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

———23/41/12 24th Infantry Battalion – August 1916.

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