

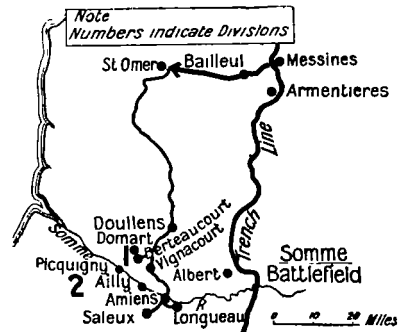
## CHAPTER XIV

### OPERATIONS AT POZIÈRES—JULY 14<sup>TH</sup> TO 22<sup>ND</sup>

DURING the sudden preparation for the action at Fromelles the three divisions of the I Anzac Corps, ignorant almost to a man of what was happening in the north, had concentrated in the quiet area twenty-five miles west of the Somme battle-front. After marching to the Flemish abbey-town of St. Omer, they had been carried by train, the 1st Division to the old defended borough of Doullens, eighteen miles north of Amiens, and the 2nd to

Longueau and Saleux, a few miles south-east and south-west respectively of the same city. The 1st, as it arrived, marched off to billets in the villages of Domart and Berteaucourt; the 2nd passed at intervals on July 11th and 12th through the streets of Amiens to Ailly, Picquigny, and neighbour-

ing villages in the beautiful and peaceful valley of the Somme.<sup>1</sup> Amiens was then a miniature Paris, far beyond shell-range, practically undamaged, the important streets and boulevards thronged with a bright population not visibly affected by the war; hotels, shops, cafés, *cabarets*, and newspaper kiosks carried on a brisk trade, the light blue uniforms of the French brightening the sombre crowds of black-coated civilians and khaki-clad British. From many of the rolling hill-slopes on which the Australians drilled, the faint blue-grey shape of the cathedral could be seen rising high above the mists of the valley. The surrounding region was largely rolling pasture-land, much more open than the crowded agricultural lowlands of Flanders. The farmers lived chiefly in the villages, many of whose streets were bordered by barns



<sup>1</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 190.

with rough timber roof-beams and cracked walls of white-washed mud and straw. The back gardens and orchards with their protecting hedges and copses gave to each hamlet, from the distance, the appearance of a wood.<sup>2</sup> The wheatfields were ripe, their edges brilliant with poppies and corn-flowers. The woods, which were few and small but well tended, were thick with their dark summer foliage.

The people of Picardy, having harboured a succession of divisions, each of which had moved away after a few days, at first seemed somewhat less friendly than those of Flanders; prices of chocolate and other trifles in the tiny shops appeared excessively high. Moreover the frequent changes and the crowding of units into poor hamlets, especially in areas near the front, rendered some of the billets dirty and uncomfortable. The kindness of the villagers, however, soon shone through these conditions, and there sprang up between them and the Australians a strong mutual affection and admiration which, as in Flanders, was the cause of some remarkable scenes in the last year of the war.

The Anzac headquarters, down to those of the brigades, having since their arrival in France been provided with fleets of powerful touring motor-cars, made the move from the north by road, most officers travelling by car, clerks and orderlies following in lorries which brought the office furniture and stores. Thus Birdwood's headquarters were transferred on the morning of July 10th from Bailleul to Vignacourt, in the centre of the concentration area. The 1st Division moved almost at once into the same village and those around it, leaving Domart and Berteaucourt vacant for the 4th, whose infantry began to arrive from the north on July 13th. Having left its artillery at Armentières, the 4th had been provided with the British regular artillery of the Lahore Division, whose infantry had some time previously left France.<sup>3</sup>

Thus by July 14th there had been concentrated in the area west of the Amiens-Doullens road the three divisions of the I Anzac Corps, all keen, like their predecessors in the district, to be moved into the Somme battle. "They usually stay here

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<sup>2</sup> See plate No. 33.

<sup>3</sup> This artillery had recently been attached to the 3rd Canadian Division south-east of Ypres, whose own gunners had for a time been left to train in England but had now joined up.



about three days," said the Town Major<sup>4</sup> at Vignacourt to a group of junior officers of the I Anzac Corps, who were lunching at the small village inn on the morning of their arrival. Yet when, on July 13th, the 1st Division moved a stage eastwards, there was a perceptible sadness among many of the inhabitants, who of late had watched many similar units march away, to return a week or two later lacking a large proportion of the familiar jolly faces.

From the day when the Australian troops had arrived in the area, a certain number of the staff and senior regimental officers had, by permission, been making excursions of the utmost interest to the scene of the great battle, twenty-five miles to the east. Here they found themselves among defences no longer of the sandbag-breastwork type to which they had grown accustomed in Flanders, but genuine trenches, dug deep in earth or chalk, and, with their output looking like mole-hills, across hill and valley.<sup>5</sup> Examining the old German positions near Fricourt and La Boisselle, where the line of each trench was in some places represented only by a trodden pad, winding through a barely-traceable depression in the crater-field, they received at one glance a lasting impression of the obliterating bombardments which characterised the latest phase of warfare. At the same time the survival—in spite of a few splintered entrances—of the dark timbered shafts leading down to deep dugouts, and the presence, among the exposed foundations that had once been La Boisselle, of half-ruined cellars reeking with the foul acid-sweet smell of the dead, told of the resistance to be expected from German garrisons, even after such a test. British soldiers engaged in the current fighting, when asked its nature, referred constantly to the enemy's "barrage," a new and predominant battle-condition, as yet known only vaguely and by name to most Australian troops. It appeared that the "barrage" resembled a curtain, or fence, which, when they attacked, might be dropped at any time in rear of them. When once the barrage fell, everything on the forward side of it was

<sup>4</sup> The designation of the British officers controlling the billeting arrangements and certain other relations with the inhabitants. The positions were filled by elderly officers, or by those otherwise incapable of more active service.

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 201, 228.

cut off and hidden until such time as it was raised again. If it fell in the rear areas, ambulances or supply-waggons on their way towards the fighting troops must stop and wait; if it fell close behind an attack, it cut off the attacking waves from their reserves, and brigade head-quarters from its assaulting troops. As soon as the Germans had news of an assault, they would lay down this barrage so that the reserves should be held up and they would have only the front waves of the attack to deal with. It followed that the only sure method by which British commanders could ascertain the fate of their assaults, and the position of the advanced line, was by "contact" aeroplanes, one or more of which, at stated intervals after the first advance, would fly low over the battle-front, sometimes sounding a Klaxon horn to attract the attention of the troops below. The latter were provided either with flares to be burnt in shell-holes out of view of the enemy, or with mirrors with which they could flash to the airman when they saw him. Experiments had been made with small, bright tin discs sewn upon the back of the men's tunics. These were usually visible to the airman; but the method, though helpful to the air force, was detested by the infantry, who imagined that the discs were easily detected by the enemy. The troops were also told that, if they rolled up their sleeves to the elbow and waved their arms, the contact airman would distinguish them, and this was a method which they much preferred.

Besides introducing the British Army to the enemy's barrage as a constant dominant condition,<sup>6</sup> the battle was, at terrible cost, educating the staffs of both sides to a more skilful employment of the barrage in attack. The British were beginning to recognise that a bombardment thrown far ahead was little protection to attacking infantry, and big "lifts" of the barrage had been followed by failure. For this reason assaults were now being made in several short stages, with a succession of objectives. When the infantry attacked the first objective, the barrage was lengthened to fall upon the second, which was so close in front that the bombardment falling upon it was a sufficient protection for the infantry "consolidating" the first. The bombardment

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<sup>6</sup> Heavy barrages had, of course, been experienced in other battles.

was thus serving two purposes, first to destroy the enemy's trench next to be attacked, and second to force the nearest enemy to keep his head down, thus protecting the infantry from counter-attack while they dug in or "consolidated"—that is, converted the captured trench into a position suitable for themselves. After allowing time for the first objective to be thus rendered defensible, the barrage moved from the second objective to the third, the attacking troops at the same instant advancing upon the second—and so forth until the assault ended, when the barrage would for a time rest 100 or 200 yards ahead of the men digging in at their final objective. Troops were now taught that before attacking they must creep as close to the objective as their own bombardment would permit, even at the risk of a few casualties from their own shells, so that, upon observing the lift of the artillery-fire from the enemy's trench, they could instantly advance and enter it before the garrison had set up its machine-guns. It was perhaps not sufficiently realised that the possibility of applying this bold method depended largely upon the spirit and temperament, and also the freshness, of the troops. Also, if the bombardment was insufficient, the enemy might stand to arms in spite of the shell-fire<sup>7</sup> and defeat even the swiftest attack. To prevent positions, when once captured, from being lost by enemy counter-attack, it was now the rule that each objective should be attacked by a separate line of men.<sup>8</sup> Thus the first line, on capturing the first objective, was left to consolidate and hold that objective, while the second line, sweeping through it, lay up a little beyond, close behind the barrage, and presently attacked and consolidated the second objective. If there were a third, a third line would then move through, ready to carry out the assault upon it. An additional precaution now being adopted was for special parties of engineers to follow shortly after the assaulting waves, with the duty of constructing in each objective fixed "strong-points," in which, even if surrounded by enemy counter-attack, troops might still hold out. These lessons were hurriedly learned by the Australian staff and commanders from those engaged in the battle and from

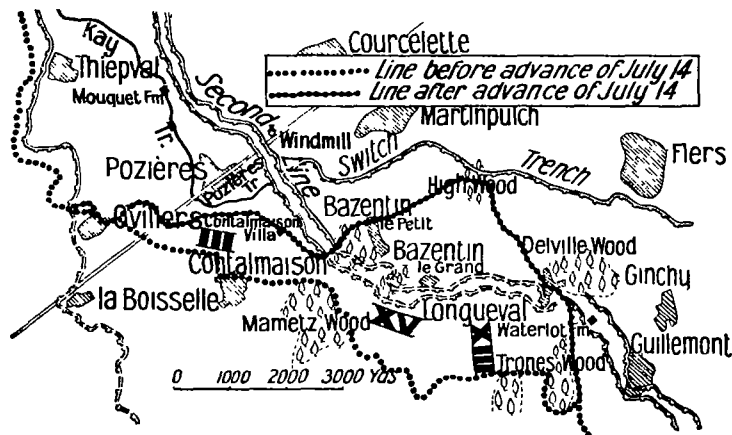
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<sup>7</sup> As the Bavarians in the Sugar-loaf did at Fromelles.

<sup>8</sup> Each line might consist of two or more "waves."

memoranda circulated by G.H.Q., and the new methods of assault were practised by the brigades in the fields and downs of their billeting areas.

It was on the third day after the arrival of the two Anzac divisions in the back area that the great battle of July 14th



occurred, and, as during the day news arrived of the capture of a large sector of the German second line, interest ran high, there being a general expectation that the 1st Australian Division, which had now been moved to villages east of the Amiens-Doullens road—one stage nearer to the front—would with other troops be sent forward to extend the gap in the enemy's line, or push out towards open country. But the day wore on without the receipt of such orders. British officers of the corps staff who, during these days, visited G.H.Q. received the impression that the I Anzac Corps was considered a valuable reinforcement, and that either the Fourth or the Reserve Army would be glad to obtain it. The outstanding difficulty at the moment seemed to be the restriction of the battle-front by the stubborn German defence of a village on the Albert-Bapaume road. This was Pozières, which was then holding up the flank of the Fourth Army. On July 11th, before this place had yet been attacked, General Rawlinson, in conference with the Commander-in-Chief, had

emphasised his opinion that "Pozières was the key of the area." The heavy batteries of the Reserve Army on that flank—and among them the two Australian—were very largely engaged in shelling it, and, from the time of the arrival of I Anzac, it had been rumoured that Rawlinson hoped to employ the Corps in its capture. The chief medical officer of I Anzac, Colonel Manifold, was already in communication with Rawlinson's director of medical services concerning the system and routes by which the wounded would be evacuated, and the 1st Division had on July 16th begun to march east, followed stage by stage by the 2nd, when on the 17th an order arrived allotting the corps not to the Fourth, but to the Reserve Army under General Gough.

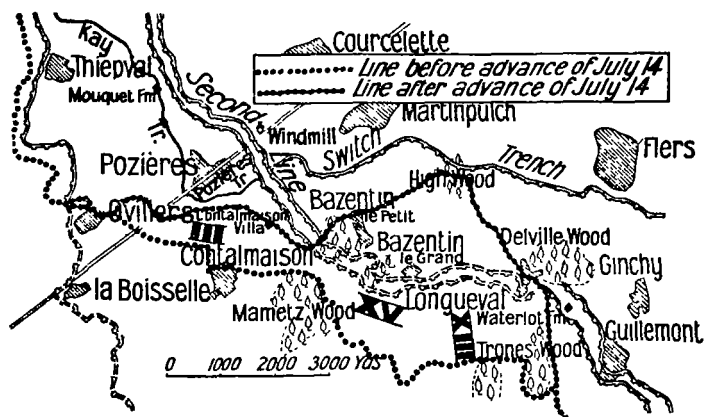
The explanation lay in a change of the Commander-in-Chief's plan. When on July 14th the Fourth Army had attacked the southern portion of what, for want of a better name, may be called the "Second-line" Ridge, the III Corps



on the extreme left flank of the advance was charged with securing, not the second line or the summit, but certain positions in front of them, "pressing forward" from Contalmaison to Contalmaison Villa (three-quarters of a mile to the north-east) and in the direction of Pozières (a mile to the north). North of the Albert-Bapaume road the Reserve Army, which was already a mile beyond the old German



front, was merely to keep touch with the left of the Fourth. But here, on its extreme left, the grand attack had failed. Although farther to the south-east, on a three-mile front between Bazentin-le-Petit and Longueval, the XV and XIII Corps had seized the second line—a strong double trench running almost continuously along this ridge from the Ancre to the Somme—and the 7th and other divisions had gone far beyond it, here, farther west on the same ridge, both that line and Pozières village close in front of it remained in the



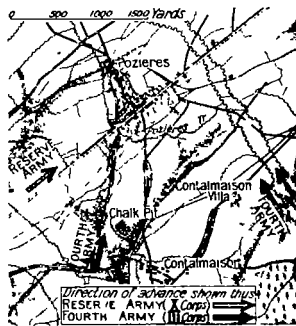
enemy's hands. Pozières was a minor agricultural hamlet appearing as a line of trees on the wide, open, slightly-swelling surface of the hill-top.<sup>9</sup> Its small houses, with orchards and hedges at their back, fringed for three-quarters of a mile the main Amiens-Bapaume road<sup>10</sup> where it approached the summit of the ridge. The two trenches of the second line lay a quarter of a mile beyond, and behind them the Pozières windmill, then a mere heap of stone,<sup>11</sup> on the actual summit—a point not perceptibly higher than other parts of the ridge, but actually one of the highest on the battlefield, and known to the Germans as "Hill 160." The village had been incorporated in the German second-line system by the hurried

<sup>9</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 209.

<sup>10</sup> See plate No. 39 and Vol. XII, plates 219-220.

<sup>11</sup> See plate No. 51.

digging of a single trench (known to the British as "Pozières Trench") around its southern outskirts. This connected at the south-west corner of the hamlet with part of the "intermediate" defence line, a strong "switch" between the first and second systems (known to the British as "K," or "Kay," Trench)<sup>12</sup> leading past the western outskirts of Pozières northward to Mouquet Farm (a large homestead formerly belonging to the proprietor of several of the neighbouring farms), Thiepval, and the "Schwabens Redoubt." Pozières thus formed a bastion of the second line, its strength arising from the fact that it lay on an open projecting plateau of the ridge, and consequently, both from the village and from the second line in rear, there existed a clear gently-graded field of fire for many hundred yards in all directions. Kay Trench, on its western outskirts, looked straight down Mash Valley, rendering the movement of the X Corps from the west very difficult. But the III Corps had been feeling towards the place with patrols from the south ever since the capture of Contalmaison on July 10th; on the 12th the 1st British Division had established a post in Contalmaison Wood, and on the 13th patrols of the 34th Division visited the "Chalk Pit," two-thirds of a mile from the south-western end of Pozières. The advance over the gently-folded approaches was



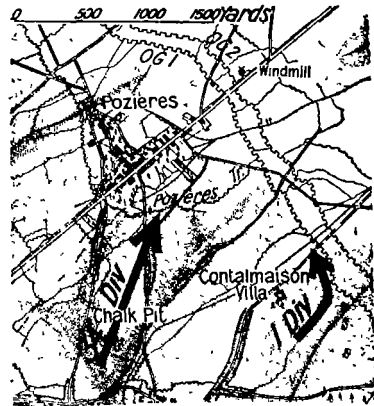
hampered by uncertainty as to where the enemy's troops would be found, since there existed many trenches from which a small German outpost could maintain a fairly strong resistance. As the Reserve Army, which was approaching it from the west, had for the moment by Haig's orders been forced to confine itself practically to bombing and patrol attacks, the British thrust towards Pozières was made chiefly by the Fourth Army, that is, from the south-west and south.

<sup>12</sup> It was sometimes also called "Western Trench."

Advancing thus during the great general effort of July 14th, a patrol of the left (34th) division of the III Corps reported that it had penetrated actually to Pozières Trench close outside the southern outskirts of the village, and had found it unoccupied. About the same time the centre (1st) division reached and occupied Contalmaison Villa. In consequence of the great success achieved farther to the right, the XV Corps decided, if possible, to penetrate over the crest to Martinpuich, and asked that the III Corps should at the same time widen the breach in the German second line. The 1st Division was accordingly ordered to bomb and force its way up the German second line and its tributary communication trenches, the 34th assaulting Pozières Trench over the open from the south and, if possible, entering the village. This plan of double attack was generally adopted in future operations against Pozières, since, unless the advance was simultaneously pushed up the German second line, the troops attacking Pozières Trench were liable to be terribly enfiladed from those formidable defences, which were known to the divisions attacking along them as the "Old German" (or "O.G.") Lines, the front trench being called "O.G.1," and the support "O.G.2."

Since the XV Corps postponed its assault, the attack by the 1st Division on the O.G. Lines was also deferred; but, in consequence of reports that enemy troops had

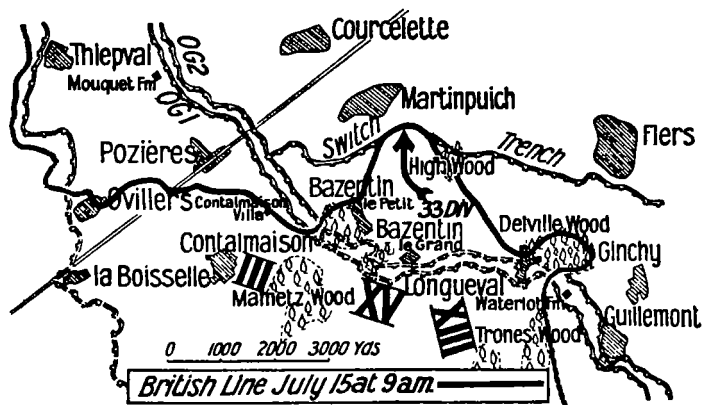
been observed streaming from Pozières, the operation against that place was undertaken by strong patrols. It was to be preceded by a bombardment of Pozières village; but, as three different artillery staffs<sup>13</sup> were issuing orders for it, much difficulty was found in ensuring that the barrage should fall



<sup>13</sup> Those of the III Corps, X Corps, and 34th Division (See *The Thirty-fourth Division, 1915-1919*, by Lieutenant-Colonel J. Shakespear, p. 60)

clear of the attacking troops. Eventually it was arranged that at 6 p.m. all shell-fire should be lifted north of the main road, in order to leave clear the southern half of the village. Upon the attack being made, three platoons of the 111th and 112th Brigades<sup>14</sup> succeeded in reaching Pozières Trench, but after dark were driven out. Two companies of the 8th East Lancashire were ordered to retake it, and were afterwards understood, though wrongly, to have done so.<sup>15</sup>

The great general success of the operation of July 14th seemed for the moment to portend that the decisive crisis of the whole offensive might be at hand. The effort to extend to the utmost the important gains was naturally continued on the following day. The objectives were: eastwards—for the XIII Corps on the extreme right—the ruined villages of Ginchy and Guillemont, Waterlot Farm, and Delville Wood; northwards—for the XV and III Corps—the Switch Trench, the O.G. Lines, and Pozières, with Martinpuich, in the valley beyond the crest, as a more distant goal. The attempt met with varying success: eastwards, the XIII Corps was stopped by the German barrage, except at Longueval, where the 9th (Scottish) Division,<sup>16</sup>



<sup>14</sup> These were two brigades temporarily lent to the 34th by the 37th Division. The Tyneside brigades, which had preceded the Australians at Armentières, were not engaged on the Somme during the tour of the I Anzac Corps.

<sup>15</sup> The German official account (*Somme Nord, Part II, p. 49*) says that a patrol of 40 of the 8th South (*sic*) Lancs. tried to get into Pozières in the sector held by the 11/27th I.R., but was driven out, losing about 30 men.

<sup>16</sup> Including the South African Infantry Brigade. The 18th Division also was engaged in Delville Wood.

which on the previous day had taken that village, seized most of Delville Wood. Northwards the hold of the XV Corps on "High Wood" was maintained, but the Germans could not be cleared out from the northern extremity of the wood, and their fire held up the attack of the 33rd Division on the Switch Trench immediately west of the wood. The 33rd captured 1,000 yards of that trench three-quarters of a mile to the west. But farther left, in the area of the III Corps, the attack of the 34th and the 1st British Divisions in the neighbourhood of Pozières, though twice delivered—at 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.—again failed. The 34th Division on this occasion attacked after an hour's bombardment, the task of the 112th Brigade being to take the first trench and the village, after which the 111th was to pass through and seize the O.G. Lines about the windmill. The plan of assault partly depended upon the mistaken assumption that the 8th East Lancashires had a platoon in Pozières Trench. The main force started from a point no less than 1,300 yards south of the village, about half of its long approach, however, being hidden from the enemy. An hour after the launching of the assault it was reported that the troops were fighting through Pozières; but early in the afternoon it became apparent that this report also was mistaken, the 112th Brigade having been stopped by machine-guns. Upon its falling back, the 10th Royal Fusiliers, who were following, pushed through, and one company succeeded in reaching a detached orchard at the extreme south-western end of the village, the rest digging in 400 yards from the outskirts, where the curve of the hill just hid them from Pozières Trench. Major-General Ingouville-Williams,<sup>17</sup> commanding the division, himself visited the Chalk Pit, a few yards in rear of this line, and decided that the place should be again bombarded for an hour, from 5 to 6 p.m., and then attacked by the 10th Royal Fusiliers from the south-west. Accordingly at 5 o'clock the bombardment was commenced by the divisional

<sup>17</sup> Gen. Williams was killed a week later by a shell near Mametz. (Maj.-Gen. E. C. Ingouville-Williams, C.B., D.S.O. Commanded 34th Div., 1915/16. Officer of British Regular Army, of Brook Lodge, Fermoy, Ireland; b. 13 Dec., 1861.)



33. THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD SEEN IN JULY 1916 FROM A BRITISH KITE-BALLOON

The view is from near Bécourt, looking north-east to Bapaume. The old British forward trenches occupy the foreground. The blurred streak beyond is the German front line, battered by the British bombardment. The woods on the right are those of Fricourt, Mametz, and Bazentin. Fricourt is on the near side of the lowest wood, on the extreme right. Bapaume is barely visible, lying near the horizon in the centre, but the Roman road leading to it can be seen towards the top of the left half of the picture.



34. A BATTALION OF THE 2ND DIVISION ON THE MARCH, LATE SUMMER, 1916

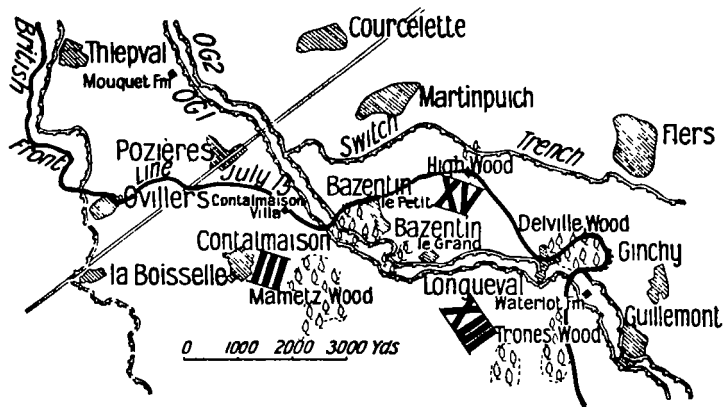
*First War Memorial Official Photo No. FZ109*

*To face p. 461*

field-artillery, 100 heavy pieces<sup>18</sup> joining in at 5.30. A British artillery officer, who was watching, wrote:

This was the biggest bombardment of it (Pozières), by all our heavies, I have ever seen. The whole place went up in brick dust, and when it was over no trace of a building could be seen anywhere. It was a wonderful sight, huge clouds of rose-coloured, brown, bluish black, and white smoke rolling along together with flashes of bursts, the whole against a pale green-blue sky and bright evening sunlight.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the moment the shell-fire lifted, the Germans were seen (by a British airman who was flying above) to race for their machine-gun positions, and, reaching them before the unsuspecting British infantry had covered half the distance, they quickly stopped the advance.<sup>20</sup> The 1st British Division, whose task was to co-operate by advancing up the second German line and the communication trenches in rear, found the O.G. Lines so battered by shells as to be much exposed to machine-gun fire and was checked—in the morning, by



*Position on evening of July 15.*

<sup>18</sup> Forty of the Reserve Army, as well as sixty of the Fourth.

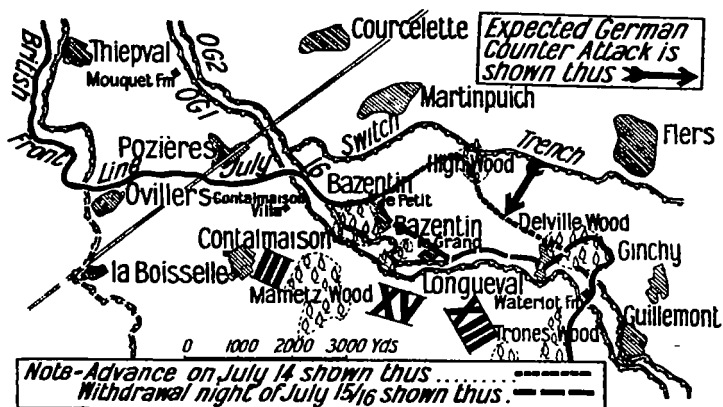
<sup>19</sup> *The Thirty-Fourth Division, 1915-1919*, pp. 62-3. Major G. E. Manchester (of Sydney), in his history of the Australian Siege Brigade in the Great War, states: "During the bombardment of Pozières from 12th to 15th (July) inclusive, all natures of howitzers, including 12 inch and 15 inch, had been used, the general rate of fire being 8 to 25 rounds per hour per howitzer."

<sup>20</sup> The historian of the Royal Fusiliers states "At this point there was an unfortunate mischance. The rockets (i.e., the signal to attack) failed, owing to dampness; and the battalion did not start in unison. Some advanced, others still waited, and the blow failed. Most determined and repeated attempts were made to rush the village, but nothing could live in such machine-gun fire." (*The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War*, by H. C. O'Neill, p. 119) The 112th Brigade in this day's fighting lost 1,034 officers and men, and the 10th Royal Fusiliers 249—total 1,283.



the presence of Germans in Bazentin Wood,<sup>21</sup> which was supposed to have been long since cleared; in the evening, by machine-gun fire from German positions to the east of the O.G. Lines.

Thus the III Corps had made practically no advance. The XV Corps (33rd Division) had been unable to keep its hold upon the Switch line; and the sole important gain of July 15th was that of the XIII Corps (9th Division) in and around Delville Wood. Rawlinson now recognised that the reinforcements lately brought up by the Germans were amply sufficient to prevent his obtaining any more results from the offensive of July 14th, and therefore directed that isolated attacks exploiting that success should now cease. Both Haig and he, impressed by the strength of the enemy's reinforcements, suspected that the Germans were preparing a heavy counter-stroke against the flank of their advance at Longueval.<sup>22</sup> The advanced line in High Wood, being out of sight of other parts of the British front, and therefore dangerously exposed, was withdrawn on July 16th, and preparations were immediately begun for delivering, after strong



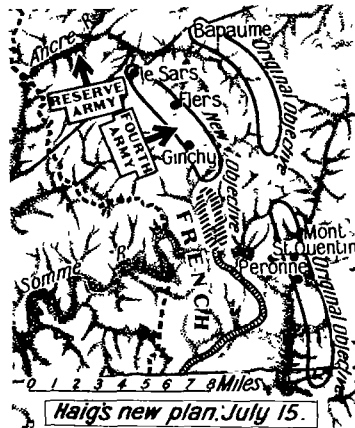
artillery preparation on a wide front, another powerful blow—the third in the Somme battle—somewhat similar to that of the 14th.

<sup>21</sup> The diary of the III Corps says "Mametz Wood," but it seems probable that this is a mistake.

<sup>22</sup> Rawlinson, indeed, expressed a hope that the enemy would deliver an early counter-attack.

The increasing German strength, however, made it obvious that this must be quickly dealt; and, even so, it may have appeared to Haig doubtful whether the original object—penetration to the Bapaume-Péronne heights, followed by an attack northwards up the enemy's line—was any longer attainable. Possibly for this reason he was now tempted to make the northward thrust at an earlier stage than had been formerly contemplated. Provided that the Fourth Army could reach the eastern end of the "Second-line" Ridge at

Ginchy, and the neighbourhood of Flers and Le Sars at its north-eastern foot—all of which points were within a mile and a half of those reached in the last advance—the Reserve Army might be brought to the northern face of the salient so formed, and ordered to initiate the second phase of the original plan by attacking northward up the front of the Germans facing the Third Army. This modification was actually decided



upon, explained to the army commanders, and promulgated on July 15th. Steps were taken for carrying it out by reinforcing the Reserve Army with two army corps, comprising six fresh divisions; but within a few days it was given up—apparently on the realisation that to abandon the eastward advance meant a complete departure from the original scheme of co-operation with the French.<sup>28</sup> It was argued, possibly by Foch, that the French would soon be able to take a more important part in the battle, since the German

<sup>28</sup> Precisely what led up to the double change of plan is unknown, there being an obvious omission in the otherwise apparently frank and careful work of Mr G. A. B. Dewar and Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Boraston—*Sir Douglas Haig's Command, 1915-1918*. They ignore the first change of plan, merely mentioning (*p* 118, *Vol I*) that it was one of two alternatives then possible. They add that "to have adopted" it "would have meant abandoning the idea of continuing the offensive as a joint operation in close association with the French . . . These considerations decided the British Commander-in-Chief to turn away from the attractive scheme of a British attack northwards, and to devote his main efforts to gaining further ground to the east in co-operation with the French." Yet the

pressure on Verdun was relaxing and more French troops would be available for the Somme, and that the carrying out of the original plan of thrusting north of the river to Mont St. Quentin and Péronne was therefore not impossible.<sup>24</sup> Whatever the true reason for this change and counter-change, the eventual decision was<sup>25</sup> to continue the main thrust eastwards. One such offensive would in any case have been necessary in order to give the Reserve Army room to manœuvre. This offensive, at first planned to take place on the 17th, was deferred until the 18th in order to coincide with an advance to be made that day by Foch's army north and south of the Somme. "Everything," says the diary of the Fourth Army, "was working up to a big battle. How long it would last, was impossible to say."

In the plan for this third great attack the capture of Pozières formed a part, but, in the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, only a secondary one. Haig believed in the military maxim that a mediocre plan consistently followed is better than a brilliant one frequently changed. Having on July 3rd decided to strike with his right, and proceed more slowly with his left,<sup>26</sup> he now—as would be expected by all who knew him—held firmly to that decision. It is true that he recognised that his hold on the main ridge was too narrow; "desirous though I was to follow up quickly the successes we had won, it was first necessary to widen this front."<sup>27</sup> But his chief anxiety was to widen it by extending

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former decision was undoubtedly arrived at, and steps initiated for carrying it out. The XIV Corps (6th, Guards, and 20th Divisions) from Ypres at once changed places with the VIII Corps (38th, 4th, and 29th Divisions). The II Corps (then without divisions) was to take over for the time being the divisions of the X Corps, and, according to one official diary, the II Corps and I Anzac Corps were to undertake the northward thrust. There appears to be some evidence that the abandonment of the change of plan occurred after further consultation with Foch. Incidentally it was during these days of apparent uncertainty that the later conferences concerning the projected attack at Fromelles were being held.

Curiously enough, a similar alteration of plan on the part of the French seems to have been suggested by General de Castelnau, who, immediately after the first French successes of July 1 and 2, urged that the French attack should be directed southwards from the salient formed. The plan was not adopted (*French Headquarters*, by Jean de Pierrefeu, p. 76.)

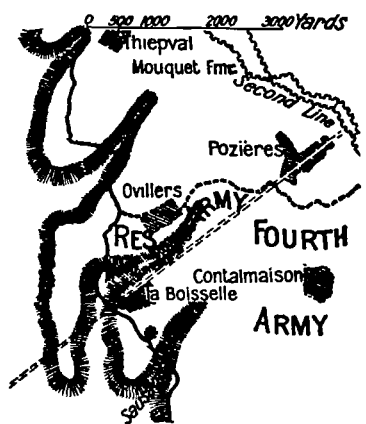
<sup>24</sup> It was proposed to bring in another French corps north of the Somme.

<sup>25</sup> In the absence of other authority, the account given by Dewar and Boraston is accepted as conclusive on this point.

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 316-317.

<sup>27</sup> *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches*, p. 31.

the other flank, striking deeper towards Ginchy. "The villages of Pozières and Thiepval," he says, ". . . had still to be carried. An advance further east would, however, eventually turn these defences, and all that was for the present required on the left flank of our attack was a steady, methodical, step-by-step advance as already ordered." The piecemeal method, it may be observed, was not proving effective or inexpensive. Pozières had by July 16th already been three times assaulted without success, and still formed a buttress narrowing the front of the British offensive. Even Ovillers, in the old German front system three-quarters of a mile north of La Boisselle, was until July 16th still actually uncaptured, the Reserve Army having since July 7th<sup>28</sup> been practically restricted to bombing attacks upon it,<sup>29</sup> and a German garrison, part of which had been there since July 2nd, still holding out, though practically surrounded, in the northern part of the village. Stronger efforts were being made against Pozières, partly because it lay on the front of the Fourth Army, and partly because, by seizing its site at the head of Mash Valley, the British would automatically get rid of the main obstacle to their advance near Ovillers, lower down. The other advantages to be obtained by its capture were obvious: the British front



Original British Line shown thus ———  
Position near Pozières morning July 16 - - - - -

<sup>28</sup> Before that date the attack on Ovillers had been vigorously pressed over the open. On July 1 the 8th Division failed with heavy loss, due largely to the width of No-Man's Land. The 12th Division being then brought in seized part of Ovillers on July 7, and was withdrawn on July 8 after losing 4,765 officers and men. Ovillers was finally taken on the evening of July 16.

<sup>29</sup> To assist these attacks, the heavy artillery was employed in blowing-in trench-junctions not far ahead of the attacking troops. The Fourth Army "Intelligence Summary" on July 7 recorded that, in these delicate operations, the fire of the 55th (Australian) Siege Battery—in accordance with the directions of an aeroplane of the 13th Squadron, R.F.C.—was "exceedingly accurate." The bombing attacks on Ovillers were much hampered by the mud.

on the Second-line Ridge would be greatly widened, and the way opened for an even more important extension by an assault northwards along that ridge, with the object of rendering Thiepval also untenable by the enemy. Incidentally the driving of the enemy from Pozières and Ovillers would enable field-guns to be placed in Mash Valley,<sup>30</sup> which at present was closed to them; and, if the second line just beyond Pozières were also seized, much of the enemy's observation would be closed, and there would be obtained by the British a wide outlook over the German rear.

Unfortunately the weather now fell rainy, with "thin, low, driving black fog, as cold as October,"<sup>31</sup> and these conditions—the same which caused the two days' postponement at Fromelles—practically stopped all fighting; airmen were unable to photograph the new enemy works so that they could be mapped and bombarded. Consequently<sup>32</sup> the projected eastward thrust was again postponed until the 19th, the attack by the III Corps on Pozières, however, remaining fixed for the 18th. At midnight on the 16th, a comparatively quiet day on the rest of the front, the 3rd Brigade of the 1st British Division attacked from the front—that is, from the area north of Contalmaison—a sector of the O.G. Lines. These were found crowded with German dead, and were seized, without strong opposition, almost as far as the junction with Pozières Trench.<sup>33</sup> This advance might materially assist the force attacking the village; and Brigadier-General Page Croft,<sup>34</sup> whose brigade—the 68th—had been lent to the 34th Division for the main assault, asked that an additional advantage might be obtained by the seizure of Pozières Trench on the evening of the 17th, allowing the assault on the village next morning to be launched from that more favourable position. This request being approved, the 12th

<sup>30</sup> In order to fire on Thiepval and Courcellette.

<sup>31</sup> From an Australian diary of the time.

<sup>32</sup> On July 17.

<sup>33</sup> From a reference in the diary of the III Corps it might be inferred that this sector was not captured until midnight on the 17th. According to the other available diaries, however, the attack occurred at midnight on the 16th.

<sup>34</sup> Brig.-Gen. Sir Henry Page Croft, Bt., C.M.G. Commanded 68th Inf. Bde., 1916/17; of London; b. Ware, Herts., Eng., 22nd June, 1881. (The 68th Brigade belonged to the 23rd Division.)

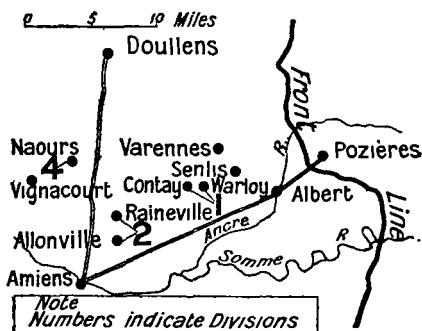
Durham Light Infantry at 8 p.m. on the 17th made the preliminary attack. The bombardment included the fire of heavy guns and trench-mortars, but, when it lifted, the advancing infantry, before it had gone more than seventy yards, was met with the fire of "at least ten machine-guns," coming not only from a concrete structure at the south-western end of the village and from the ruins in the main street, but also from the O.G. Lines. Some of the troops reached the barbed-wire in front of Pozières Trench, which was not entirely cut, and their dead remained hanging in it. "The enemy also," Page Croft reported, "had a very big barrage on the trenches of the attackers." The assault failed, rendering almost hopeless the outlook for the extensive operation next day. Page Croft represented this to the higher staff, recommending that Pozières Trench should be pounded systematically by "heavies," and its capture made a special operation. Nevertheless his three remaining battalions prepared for the assault.

On that day, however, Haig had decided to relieve the Fourth Army of the duty of attending to this flank,<sup>85</sup> by transferring to the Reserve Army the task of operating against Pozières. The projected assault by the III Corps, Fourth Army, was therefore abandoned. The 68th Brigade set to work to dig a complete trench facing the Pozières defences, and the troops allotted to the Reserve Army for the reduction of the place were hurried from the rear areas to take over part of the front of the III Corps, replacing the 34th Division and part of the 1st. The III, XV, and XIII Corps (Fourth Army) would at the same time shrink slightly eastwards. In consequence of the congestion of the roads in the French and British salient north of the Somme, this movement would take several days; and all large offensive operations on that front were necessarily postponed until it could be completed.

The force allotted to the Reserve Army for the seizure of Pozières was the 1st Australian Division, which was by then in the area around Contay and Warloy-Baillon, three stages east from Vignacourt and twelve miles from the

<sup>85</sup> The ostensible reason, and possibly the real one, was to leave the Fourth Army more men for the main offensive farther east.

battlefield, with most of the 2nd Australian Division following two stages behind it, and the 4th a stage behind that. The order given to General Gough was to "carry out methodical operations against Pozières with a view to capturing that important position with as little delay as possible"; and being both temperamentally and through consideration of the urgent needs of the situation im-



patient of any delay, he decided not to wait until the staff of the I Anzac Corps could come up and take control of the sector, but to carry out the operation with the 1st Australian Division acting directly under himself and the staff of the Reserve Army. His greeting to General Walker, when the latter was summoned to his headquarters, was: "I want you to go into the line and attack Pozières tomorrow night!" The first operation would be an assault on the trenches in front of the village; if it were successful, the village itself would be attacked in a second operation on the night following. Walker was given the choice of striking at Pozières from the south-west—the plan now preferred by the staff of the Reserve Army—or from the south-east. If he chose the former method, his division could be allowed more space for forming up, but the enemy would be close upon the left of both its assembly ground and its advance. If he preferred to attack from the south-east, his division must squeeze itself on to its assembly position from the west, since all routes to the south were already too congested by the traffic of the Fourth Army and the French.<sup>46</sup>

The Anzac veteran, receiving the impression that somewhat hasty or ill-considered action might be imposed upon him, argued desperately for a postponement. In any case there was obvious need for his division to be hurried into the line. It was ordered to move that day to the villages

<sup>46</sup> The accuracy of this account has been disputed, but is confirmed by the evidence of contemporary diaries.

of Senlis and Varennes. and on the 19th through Albert to the battlefield, taking over that night the new front line which Page Croft's brigade was busily digging south of Pozières. The division was hurriedly instructed as to the organisation necessary behind the battlefield for collecting prisoners of war in barbed-wire enclosures (afterwards known as "cages"), controlling traffic, and systematically collecting stragglers, of whom recent experience had shown that a considerable number might, after the action, be found in rear of the fighting area. The headquarters of the division was to proceed on July 19th to Albert, in the centre of which town the intact Château Lamont, with its fine gardens, lay ready for it. The reconnoitring of Pozières, and consideration by the generals and their staffs of the plan of attack, then began.

Walker, though well aware of the difficulties entailed by the narrowness of the approaches, nevertheless chose to attack Pozières from the south-east, thus avoiding (as he explained to a member of the Reserve Army staff whom he had taken forward for the purpose) the exposure of his left flank to German fire throughout the operation. Attacking from the south-east, his exposed flank would be the right; but it should be safe, since the neighbouring part of the O.G. Lines—from which alone, by the lie of the land, flanking fire could come—was to be captured in the same operation. The divisional staff had been informed that the frontage of a division in attack should be 1,000 yards; but the front allotted to Walker at Pozières was a mile, his objective being slightly narrower than that of the 5th Division at Fromelles. He decided to attack with two brigades, keeping the third in reserve. As was becoming the practice with commanders of the A.I.F., he entrusted the most difficult part of the operation to country troops, or at least those from the less settled of the Australian States, whom he considered the most hardened. Accordingly the 3rd Brigade (Queensland, South and Western Australia, and Tasmania) was ordered to the right of the line, where the two O.G. trenches, as well as part of Pozières Trench, must be subdued. The 1st Brigade (New South Wales) was to attack Pozières Trench upon the left. The 2nd (Victoria)<sup>27</sup> was to be retained in reserve. In

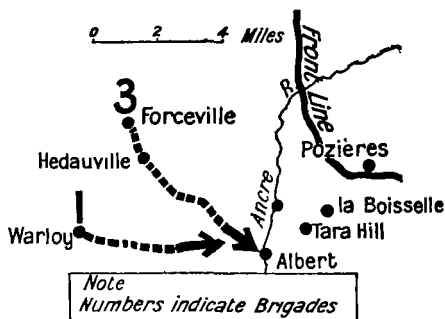
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<sup>27</sup> This brigade possibly contained a slightly higher percentage of city men than the 1st, and fewer from "outback."



pursuance of these orders, on the afternoon of July 19th the 3rd moved off from its country billets at Hedauville and Forceville, closely followed by the 1st from Warloy.

The Australian brigades which thus marched through the last of the green country towards the open waste of their first great battlefield in France were, on the whole, well rested and in high spirits. To the average British soldier, as well as to people at home, the reports of the



Somme battle appeared almost wholly favourable. It is true that the great results announced on July 1st and 14th had in each case been followed only by more heavy fighting. But the public, and even the army—except the divisions which had taken part on July 1st—had little conception of the cost, or of how far the results fell short of the intentions. Two great blows had undoubtedly been struck; the British were for the first time making headway through a firmly-established enemy position; the lines which most of the troops had believed impregnable were being slowly penetrated. This was a valuable achievement, but, to the army and people who had yearned so long for success, the intermittent advances on the Somme often signified far more than they were worth; and, as the *communiqués* of G.H.Q.—prepared for enemy consumption—were rose-coloured, and unfavourable comment was suppressed by the then censors, the average citizen or soldier entertained few misgivings. The optimism of the Australian troops would have thriven on far less encouragement.

We are on the way (wrote one of them<sup>28</sup>) to the Somme valley, where a big push has been going on successfully since the 1st of July. . . . The firing line is continually moving up as we attack an objective each day. Only at one point is the advance held up, Thiepval. . . . Many English regiments pass us who have been relieved from the front area. . . . They have been very successful and are all singing as they march along, every man wearing a German helmet. . . .

<sup>28</sup> Sgt. A. L. de Vine (of Maroubra, N.S.W.), 4th Bn.

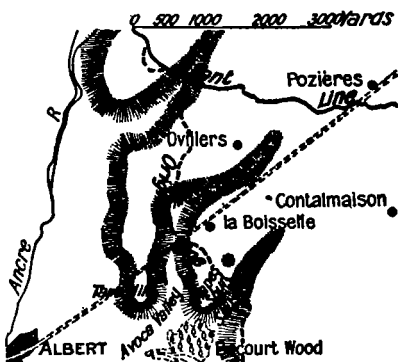
The great majority of the troops, even in the 1st Division, were comparatively new, having joined the battalions during the reorganisation in Egypt and never yet experienced a great offensive, three months' trench-service at Armentières notwithstanding. During "spells" in billets, however, a fair amount of battalion drill had been possible, even in spite of the increased fatigues consequent on the remodelling of the trench-lines. The grounding which many had previously lacked had thus been to a large extent supplied; and the battalions which had been reviewed by the Australian Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, and the High Commissioner, Andrew Fisher, near Fleurbaix in June,<sup>39</sup> though not perfectly trained, were probably as nearly so as most of the British divisions employed in the battle. On this, their first entry upon the great battlefield of which they had heard so much, they again experienced some of the feelings of new boys joining a great school; but they had absorbed, as thoroughly as was possible in the time, the lessons of the Somme and the new forms of attack and defence evolved by their predecessors in the battle and passed on to them by army staffs. In physique and morale they were not surpassed. It is true that in their first long march through Picardy, their feet being then soft with months of trench work, several of the brigades had distressed their commanders by a woeful exhibition of march-discipline. In one brigade so numerous had been the stragglers that General Cox ordered the battalion commanders to ride in rear of their units until further orders. The effects of undue carousal in the new billeting area had also

<sup>39</sup> See plate 23 and Vol. XII, plate 176. W. M. Hughes addressed the battalions of the 1st Brigade in an orchard, himself standing on a waggon. The tenor of his speech was that the thoughts of the Australian people were all with their men at the front, and that, whatever happened, those at home would not forget them or their dependants, either during the war or after. Hughes, however, had not yet the popularity with the Australian soldier which he attained at the close of the war, and the effect of his fine address was, as so often happens, largely spoiled for the troops by the fact that they were kept waiting for several hours before he appeared. On the occasion in question he observed in the ranks of the 2nd Battalion W. J. Johnson (of Auburn, N.S.W.), formerly a Labour member of the Federal Parliament, who, in spite of his somewhat advanced age, was serving as a private in the infantry. When Hughes, who had recently been receiving courtesies from civic and other authorities all over the British Isles, shook hands with his old friend, the latter asked with a smile: "Well, Billy, have they made you a Doctor of Divinity yet?" Johnson, who bore cheerfully and without complaint duties for which he was really too old, was mortally wounded about noon on July 23 at Pozzières, being hit in the head by a fragment of shell, in the trench held by his company.

for the first day or two been visible. But after these *contretemps*, inseparable from military life, the brigades had marched exceedingly well; and many, who saw their columns swinging along cheerfully between the sunlit hedges to snatches of old marching-songs or whistled tunes, turned to watch them out of sight and wonder what were the conditions in that far southern continent to produce generally such fine specimens of men. At the last stage before Albert the steel helmets (or "tin-hats"), till then carried on the pack, had been donned, the brigades leaving behind their felt hats and caps, together with packs and blankets—all of which were stored under guard of a few men in certain village barns; the troops still carried their water-proof sheets and overcoats, rolled and slung bandolier-fashion, and also their haversacks, in which were stowed, besides rations, their razors and other such necessaries. As a distinguishing mark for the 1st Australian Division, squares of pink cloth had at this stage been sewn on the tunics between the shoulder-blades. Leather gaiters and "Sam Browne" belts were, by order, discarded by officers, who, save for the stars or other insignia on their shoulder straps, must go into battle dressed precisely like their men.

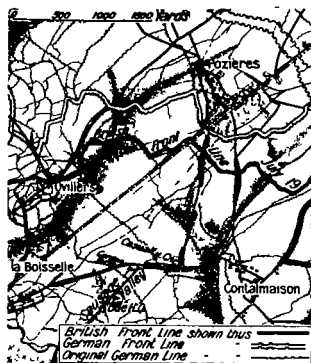
Such were the brigades which passed through villages crowded with British troops fresh from the battle; dipped down to the red-roofed city of Albert, low in the valley of the Ancre; were directed by traffic-control men through its congested and battered, but not yet ruined, streets, over the narrow brick bridge (little more than a culvert); wound to the right beneath the shadow of the great red-brick church of Notre-Dame-de-Brebières, from the broken tower of which the gilded statue of the Virgin and Child hung at right angles, as if diving into the street far below; and presently rested for their tea beside the Bapaume road, at the foot of a long, bare, grassy slope, "Tara Hill"—the last green country intervening between them and the battlefield. Guides from the 2nd and 68th British Brigades, holding the line opposite Pozières, were here to meet and lead them over the sidelong tracks to which the troops south of Pozières were necessarily

restricted; and at 6 o'clock the 9th Battalion (Queensland) led off round the slope of Tara Hill, down into "Avoca Valley" (a lower bend of Mash Valley), over the next hill ("Chapes Spur"), on the lower end of which lay the dense green cluster of Bécourt Wood, and down again into the long shallow dip of Sausage Valley,<sup>40</sup> invariably known to the Australians as Sausage "Gully," which for the next six weeks was to be the main avenue of approach to the Australian fighting area, its constant traffic and



busy life recalling to some of the troops their memories of the beach at Anzac. The route here used by transport was not a regular road, but a bare track worn by thousands of wheels, passing round the edge of Bécourt Wood and then skirting the western side of Sausage Gully not far from the great chalk mine-crater south of La Boisselle;<sup>41</sup> thence,

for a mile, along the bottom of the valley,<sup>42</sup> winding between a sea of old shell-holes, past line after line of old German trenches—the scene of famous, but entirely-forgotten, fighting of a fortnight before. Troops passing through this area by day were immediately struck by the fact that it was flayed of most of its former covering of grass, the white chalk-earth or red-brown soil showing bare and crossed in every direction by hundreds of dusty tracks; the outlines of the trenches and



<sup>40</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 209, 211.

<sup>41</sup> This was a still larger crater than the one, observed by many visitors to the Somme area, beside the Bapaume road.

<sup>42</sup> Here it coincided with the line of a pre-war track.

of the old shell-holes were worn down by recent bombardments and by the feet of thousands of men. In wet weather every track and shell-hole grew slimy with white or red mud. Both slopes of the gully were allotted to the reserve battalions, whose troops bivouacked in old trenches or in craters. Near the crests were numerous field-batteries in their firing positions, while across the main track lower down the valley were ranged four old 4.7-inch guns, whose blast constantly shocked troops or transport marching up or down the valley,<sup>43</sup> and was stated to have blown more than one unsuspecting rider off his horse. Lower down still were the enplacements of heavier guns, mostly covered with a loose canopy of netting, in which tufts of dyed raffia had been tied to screen the monster below from the observation of enemy airmen.<sup>44</sup> A trench tramway from the outskirts of Albert had now reached a point near the head of the valley, and a supply-dépôt had been formed there known as "Gordon Dump," its name being the only relic of "Gordon Post," the scene of famous fighting by the 34th Division on July 1st. On the opposite bank, among the tumbled remains of German trenches, was the entrance to a deep and especially well-furnished enemy dugout, now used as headquarters of a British brigade.

Sausage Valley ended at a cross-road which came from La Boisselle and was allotted as an alternative route for the Australian troops and their transport.<sup>45</sup> Its farther (or northern) side was protected by one of those low natural banks or "lynchets," which are common in the chalk country of England or France, formed not by intention, but by the result of hundreds of years of ploughing, which has gradually altered the surface level of the fields, sometimes causing stretches of road to be sunken, or the sloping country to be terraced with steep scrubby banks separating several expanses of ploughland.<sup>46</sup> This particular bank was just sufficient

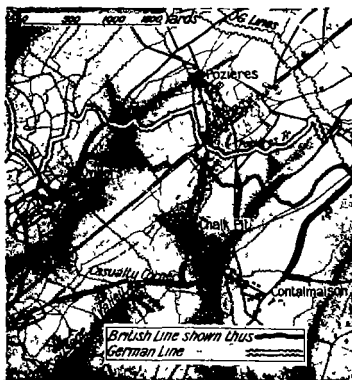
<sup>43</sup> See plate No. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Open-work camouflage was used, so that the outlines should be concealed and there should at the same time be no harsh dark shadow which would betray the position in an air-photograph.

<sup>45</sup> It was by this road from La Boisselle that most of the 1st Brigade approached the front.

<sup>46</sup> See *The Old Front Line*, by John Masefield, pp. 34-5.

to give partial protection to men behind it; a wayfarer coming across the battlefield by day saw, over it, the hilltop reaching bare and almost level for a mile, to where a line of ragged copse straggled across a wide sector of the horizon—the back gardens and orchards of Pozières.<sup>47</sup> From that road-bank forward any troops who moved by day across the open would be in full view both of Germans in front of the village and of those beyond it in the O.G. Lines, whose parapet could just be seen east of it rimming the sky-line. The new British trenches in front of Pozières could barely be distinguished by anyone standing at the head of Sausage Gully, but the left of them could be reached

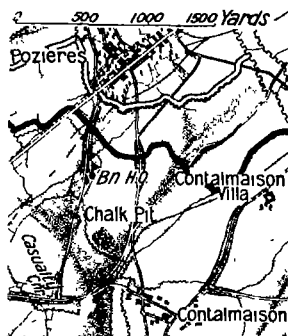


from that point by a tortuous communication trench—partly old German reserve-line, and partly new trench dug by the 34th Division. Usually, however, troops making their way to the front turned sharply to the right along the road, which almost at once became enclosed between steep banks. Moving between these over the spur forming the right of Sausage Gully, and thence down towards the next dip, which the road crossed on an embankment or causeway, they would at once behold on the far side of that valley, only a few hundred yards ahead, the ruins of Contalmaison. Men making towards the south-western end of Pozières did not proceed across Contalmaison valley, but turned sharply to the left at a steep cut in the road-bank—the site of a medical aid-post, and afterwards known—both for that reason and from the danger of the position—as “Casualty Corner”<sup>48</sup>—and headed along an open white cross-road straight for that end of the village. This road led through a wide shallow depression (really the

<sup>47</sup> The lower sketch in *Vol. XII* (plate 210) was made, and the photograph (plate 216) taken from this point.

<sup>48</sup> See *Vol. XII*, plate 212.

head of Contalmaison valley) out of view of the enemy. In the gentle slope on its right, half-a-mile forward, there opened out the white quarry known as the "Chalk Pit,"<sup>49</sup> in which had been established a small forward dump of grenades, and another medical aid-post. A quarter of a mile beyond this, in a low bank some distance to the right of the road, had been cut a narrow chalky niche, serving as battle-headquarters for a battalion. Two hundred yards north of this point the road became slightly sunken and ran on between low banks into the trees of Pozières. In this sunken track (sometimes known later as "Dead Man's Road")



the troops repulsed in former attacks had tended to congregate. The new British lines before Pozières, with their one or two short avenues of communication—narrow irregular trenches cut through the turf and the brown top-soil—ran out into its banks. The hedges and back gardens of the village, in German hands, were 300 to 400 yards distant,<sup>50</sup> and 150 yards nearer lay the red parapet and wire of Pozières Trench. At the western end the Bapaume road formed the left boundary of the front line to be taken over by the Australians, the front from there westward to Ovillers being occupied by the 48th Division. That division, covered by its own and some heavy artillery, was during the coming operation to attack the German position north



<sup>49</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 207

<sup>50</sup> Except for an outlying orchard on the Bapaume road at the western end of the village

of its own, and thence bomb forward along a series of communication trenches leading to the north-western end of the village.

Such was the area through which by night the 3rd and 1st Australian Brigades were guided to relieve the 2nd and 68th British Brigades respectively. As they moved, platoon by platoon, over the strange open approaches—their faces and figures occasionally illuminated to a bold crude ochre against the dark by the orange flashes of the guns on their right, or pale grey in the light of the flares gently drooping<sup>51</sup> over the dark moorland to their left—the troops frequently caught the whine of small German shell approaching, but plunging with a gentle “pat” into the earth. These were at first judged to be “blind” (or, in soldiers’ slang, “duds”) and little notice was taken of them. It was presently suspected, however, that their explosion might be connected with a slight aromatic smell which pervaded some parts of the track. They were, in fact, a new form of gas-shell containing phosgene, insidious and highly dangerous if bursting close to a man who was not wearing a mask.<sup>52</sup> The III Corps had reported such shell falling on July 14th in and around Bécourt Wood, and a warning had been issued; but, before the incoming Australian brigades recognized their nature, Lieutenants White<sup>53</sup> and Graham<sup>54</sup> of the 1st Battalion, and several men, were gassed.<sup>55</sup> In other parts of the route, especially near Pozières, there was observed a sweet odour not unlike that of hyacinth. On later days when parts of the area were deluged with this scent it was discovered to be caused by “tear-shell,” painful to the eyes and blinding them with tears, but not otherwise harmful.

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<sup>51</sup> See *Vol. XII, plate 208*.

<sup>52</sup> Phosgene produced on the heart a delayed effect, not infrequently fatal twenty-four hours after the actual gassing.

<sup>53</sup> Capt. B. G. White, 1st Bn. Farmer; of Upper Brisbane Valley district, Q'land; b. San Fernando, Trinidad, 2 April, 1884.

<sup>54</sup> Lieut. F. A. Graham, 1st Bn. Of Ingleburn, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 20 Feb., 1893.

<sup>55</sup> Lieut. F. E. Everitt (prior to enlistment, a student at Moore Theological College, Newtown, N.S.W.), of the same battalion also, was mortally wounded during this relief.



In spite of these experiences the relief was without much difficulty carried out by the 1st Brigade,<sup>56</sup> the 2nd Battalion shortly after midnight taking over the front trench opposite the south-west end of Pozières, with the 1st Battalion south of the village on its right, and the 3rd and 4th back at Sausage Valley in the reserve area. The 3rd Brigade, taking over the line south-east of the village, had to move across Contalmaison valley, and, when approaching the north-western corner of that village, turned north-eastwards into the only completed trench then existing in that area west of the O.G. Lines—a communication trench originally dug by the Germans along the spur south of that on which Pozières lay, and named (after the unit of the 1st British Division which had recently seized it) "Black Watch Alley."<sup>57</sup> This was 600 yards south of the German front line, but still constituted the main British defence in this sector, since the more advanced line which was being dug on the far side of the intervening valley,<sup>58</sup> 200 yards from the Germans, was in part incomplete. Black Watch Alley led to the O.G. Lines, which were held by the 1st British Division up to a point 500 yards north-west of that junction. The Australians were to take over for the battle the British posts in both O.G. 1 and 2, but the 1st British Division would normally continue to hold O.G.2, and also O.G.1 as far as Black Watch Alley. That division, however, had just ascertained that its posts were not so far forward as was previously believed, and had asked for this part of the relief to be postponed for another night to permit of their being advanced. Accordingly only Black Watch

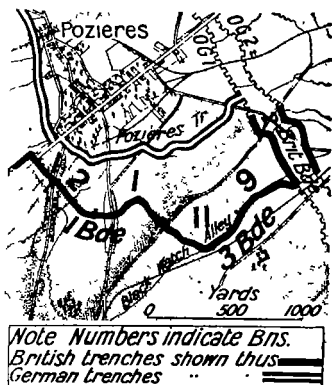
<sup>56</sup> Writing in 1917 Brigadier-General Page Croft, in *Twenty-two Months under Fire* (p. 225), states "This day was most unpleasant, as the front system and the Sausage Valley were shelled all day long; and from 5 p.m. the enemy poured gas shells into the Sausage Valley, so that all the gas drifted down to the lowest ground where my dugout was situated, and by which a whole Australian brigade had to come. In brigade headquarters our eyes were streaming for at least seven hours, and the gas was more unpleasant than the usual tear shells, with the result that we had to keep our helmets on the whole time, and the relieving brigade of the 1st Australian Division had the very unpleasant and difficult task of marching up on relief in the dark, in their gas helmets. The relief, notwithstanding, was admirably carried out, and rarely have we known greater efficiency in any relief than that by the Anzacs on this occasion"

<sup>57</sup> The system, largely adopted by the old regular divisions, of naming positions after the units which captured them, left the trench-maps of this and other battlefields covered with names recording the magnificent fighting which had occurred there—for example, at Ypres, "Black Watch Corner," "Cameron Coverts," "Northampton Farm."

<sup>58</sup> The eastern branch of the head of Contalmaison Valley. This branch was sometimes known (from a sunken road which ran through it) as "Sunken Road Valley" In the western branch lay the Chalk Pit and Dead Man's Road.

Alley and the unfinished "jumping-off" trenches in front of it were taken over that night. The companies of the 9th and 11th Battalion carrying out this relief were subjected to a desultory barrage of gas-shell. Some of the relieving platoons, having to wear their gas-masks, through which it was difficult to see, could proceed only at funeral pace, halting, shifting, and halting again in the congested sap, lighted by the enemy flares which rose and fell close ahead of them. Before dawn on July 20th the whole front from which Pozières was to be attacked, except the head of O.G.I., had been occupied by the 1st Australian Division—1st Brigade on left, and 3rd on right. The pioneers were surveying the exact relative positions of the British and German lines near Black Watch Alley, concerning which General Walker was not satisfied. The artillery had during the same night taken over, in their positions near Sausage Valley and "Bailiff Wood," the guns of the 19th Division, which had been supporting the 34th. The artillery of the 34th Division would still support the right of the 1st Australian Division, and the 1st British Division to the east.

From the moment of their entry upon this battlefield, the Australian infantry found the conditions widely different from any within their previous experience. The whole front area was dangerous through intermittent shell-fire, and casualties at once began to occur much more frequently than at Armentières. Certain routes near the line were liable to be heavily shelled at any moment, and troops using them were never quite free from tension. Gusts of furious bombardment occasionally buried the north-western corner of Contalmaison in clouds of black and grey smoke and of brickdust, barring for a time all passage of the roadway. This, it was realised, was a foretaste of the much-heard-of



German "barrage," which was likely to be experienced in far greater intensity as soon as the principal battle again flared up. The cross-road at the head of Sausage Valley, and the open road leading thence past the Chalk Pit to Pozières, were frequently shelled either with 5.9-inch projectiles, which tore craters ten feet wide in the road-banks or the neighbouring fields, or with ugly bursts of "black shrapnel"—high-explosive shells timed to explode in the air with black smoke and a harsh dry crash and project their small fragments not forwards, like true shrapnel, but in all directions. The Chalk Pit road especially was recognised as an ugly dangerous avenue, along which a man would walk with as much speed as he decently could. Some tension existed even back in Albert, where, on the night of July 20th, the Château Laniont and the streets around were shelled by heavy howitzers, causing the divisional headquarters to move next day to No. 12, Rue Pont Noyelles.

The British trenches in front of Pozières, which were true trenches—resembling excavations for gas- or water-pipes—and not breastworks as at Armentières, lacked dugouts or shelters other than the shallow "puzzies" in their sides. Describing the position taken over by his company, Captain Harris<sup>59</sup> of the 3rd Battalion afterwards wrote:

We found the trench to be deep and strong and well traversed, but there was no shelter of any kind there except holes scraped in the forward face just deep enough to allow a man to sit up and rest in a rather cramped position. At company headquarters, which was a slightly deeper scrape than usual, rather like a niche in a cathedral for the accommodation of a saint's statue,<sup>60</sup> I found the company commander, an Oxford don, and formally took over the trench and trench-stores. The latter consisted of a few picks and shovels and about an eighth of a jar of rum.

The trenches were at present not heavily shelled, but evidences of recent fighting lay around. On the flank of the trench above described lay a section of sap "literally choked with dead bodies, British and German." In the sector of the other brigade the one main trench, Black Watch Alley, was in parts a filthy channel, half-filled with liquid yellow mud and

<sup>59</sup> Maj. J. R. O. Harris, 3rd Bn. Schoolmaster; of North Sydney; b Windsor, Berkshire, Eng., 4 Dec., 1877.

<sup>60</sup> See plate No. 36 (the troops are British), and Vol. XII, plate No 198

obstructed by corpses which there had been as yet no time to remove. The energies of pioneers, engineers, and working parties of infantry had been concentrated on the nightly digging, nearer the enemy, of new "jumping-off" trenches for the attack, a work upon which G.H.Q., in a circular recently issued to all its armies, insisted as indispensable for success. Two pioneer officers, Lieutenants Jenkins<sup>61</sup> and Bardin,<sup>62</sup> had duly surveyed by daylight the position for these trenches. Jenkins was mortally wounded, but Bardin brought in an accurate plan, on which Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholson<sup>63</sup> of the 1st Pioneers personally laid out the jumping-off trench-line in the difficult sector on the right, where his men undertook the digging. The only adequate trenches in that area were those of the wide old German second-line—O.G. 1 and 2—with their deep, well-lined dug-outs and massive traverses, which, though subjected to constant enfilade with German shrapnel, afforded fairly comfortable shelter to the British troops who still furnished their garrison.

The new conditions were, however, in some respects at first welcomed by the Australians. Over and above the change and excitement, the troops were much less closely confined than at Armentières. During every big operation and for days afterwards it was unnecessary to observe extreme caution in order to hide individual movement from the enemy. Even in the front line it was generally possible to glance over the parapet without danger. The use of periscopes was almost unknown during the Battle of the Somme, and indeed was never again so general among Australians as in the old lines at Armentières and Anzac. In the rear areas under enemy observation, although the movement of a platoon or a ration-party, if observed, might call down an ugly barrage, it was usually possible for troops to stand, even in groups, watching a bombardment or an

<sup>61</sup> Lieut. E. E. Jenkins, 1st Pioneer Bn. University student; of Malvern and Ivanhoe, Vic.; b. Ararat, Vic., 6 Jan., 1888. Died of wounds, 20 July, 1916.

<sup>62</sup> Capt A. H. Bardin, M.C.; 1st Pioneer Bn. Architect and land surveyor; b. Rathmines, Dublin, Ireland, 1886.

<sup>63</sup> Lieut.-Col. E. J. H. Nicholson, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 1st Pioneer Bn, 1916/17; C.R.E., and Aust Div., 1917, C.R.E., Aust. Corps Troops, 1917/18. Mineral buyer; of Claremont, W. Aust; b. Gravesend, Kent, Eng., 17 April, 1870.

air-fight, without the enemy firing upon them; on days of actual fighting, the German artillery was far too busy with the attacking troops to attend to any but urgent targets. The farther areas, in which bivouacked the reserve battalions of the front-line brigades, or the advanced battalions of brigades coming to relieve them, were now practically free from the enemy's observation, the French and British flying corps having almost entirely suppressed his air-patrols.<sup>64</sup> For two days the men of the Australian reserve battalions roamed at will over the ruins of La Boisselle, exploring its dugouts still crowded with German and British dead, and incidentally learning many of the new conditions of the battlefield without any interference from the enemy. It is true that one or two German balloons occasionally appeared above the horizon, to be hurriedly hauled to earth on the approach of British or French airmen; and, perhaps once or twice a week when the sky was brilliant, an enemy aeroplane, or sometimes a flight, moving so high as to be barely visible, would be seen overhead, slowly passing, as one soldier put it, "like a louse crawling on a blue quilt." The enemy, however, had practically "been deprived of his eyes," with the result that a mile or two behind the battle-line of the Allies the bare slopes became covered with the bivouacs of troops, horse-lines, and dumps, until they resembled a huge scattered fair, or a new-found mining-field in which, after dark, hundreds of camp fires twinkled in every direction.<sup>65</sup> Another offset against the greater tension of the Somme lay in the fact—not at first realised—that the troops were henceforth almost free from the constant danger of poison-gas in cloud form: under such bombardment as the enemy was now receiving, the instalment of gas-cylinders would have been too difficult and dangerous for him. Henceforth he was likely to confine himself to gas-shell, which, though more effective, was not nearly so much dreaded by his opponents.

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<sup>64</sup> A French airman was, however, shot down by several German machines over the O. G. Lines on the morning of July 20, and fell near the trenches of the 9th Battalion, A.I.F. The Australian brigades which witnessed the incident were consoled the same evening by seeing a German aeroplane shot down by a British airman.

<sup>65</sup> These were the incinerator fires and those used for cooking. Their number was not greatly reduced even when G.H.Q. issued an order that such lights must be suppressed.

At a very early stage the state of affairs in the forward area convinced Generals Walker and MacLagan that any attempt to hurry forward the attack on Pozières without allowing time for thorough preparation might result in both failure and the wrecking of their troops. Jumping-off trenches within 200 yards of the enemy had not been completed even for the first wave, and the 9th Battalion, which was to advance along and beside the O.G. Lines, had not yet been able to place its companies in position. Fortunately Generals Birdwood and White, who, though as yet given no responsibility on the battlefield, were most courteously consulted by the Reserve Army authorities,<sup>66</sup> had secured several modifications in the plans, among which was a postponement of the attack to the night of July 21st. They also obtained consent for the extension of the first operation to more important objectives than the trenches in front of the village, their reason being a well-founded conviction that the 1st Australian Division would put into the advance an impetus sufficient to carry it at least half-way through the village. Thereupon Pozières Trench became merely the first objective; the second, to be taken half-an-hour later, was the edge of the orchards—or, rather, a newly-begun German trench which was supposed to skirt them. A convenient guiding-mark to this objective was a disused line of light railway, visible just in front of it.<sup>67</sup> The third objective, to be attacked half-an-hour after the second, was the southern side of the main road, from the isolated orchard west of the village to the O.G. Lines east of it near the windmill. The 1st Brigade would capture the western half, the 3rd Brigade the eastern, including the O.G. Lines. West of this front the 48th Division (X Corps) would attack in the manner already described.<sup>68</sup> East of it the 1st British Division (III Corps) would assault “Munster Alley.”

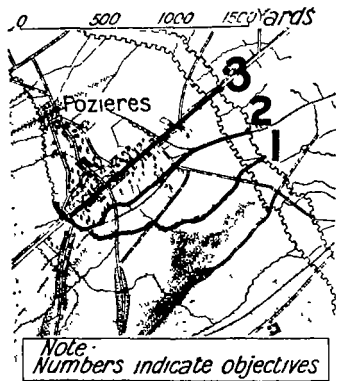
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<sup>66</sup> The headquarters of I Anzac was on July 19 moved forward to Contay.

<sup>67</sup> This light railway ran from Bapaume through Le Sars to Martinpuich, and thence, crossing the O.G. Lines 200 yards south of the Bapaume road at a point marked by two trees, to the south-eastern end of Pozières. Here it divided into three branches. The one mentioned above skirted the south of the village and passed on to La Boisselle. The central prong ran into a copse at Pozières, feeding a battery. The third prong skirted the north of the village and passed on to Oulliers. Both the northern and southern branches became important landmarks. (A fragment of the old rails, shattered by bombardment, is in the Australian War Memorial collection.)

<sup>68</sup> See pp. 476-7.

The addition of objectives up to the main road necessitated a sweeping alteration in the orders and careful elaboration of the plans for the artillery barrages. Of these there would now be four main phases—first, a hurricane bombardment of Pozières Trench and the O.G. Lines for two minutes before the infantry attacked; then half-an-hour's bombardment of the second objective while the infantry attacked and consolidated the first; then half-an-hour's bombardment of the third objective while the infantry attacked the second; finally a

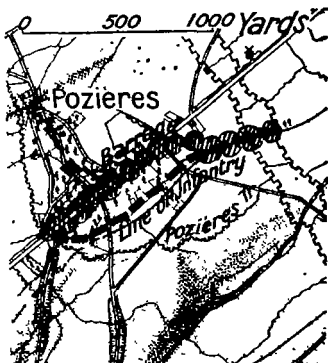


barrage 100 yards north of the main street while the infantry seized and entrenched along its southern side, which was the third objective. The bombardments that were to follow the first, while not so furious, would serve as fairly solid barrages, the field-guns firing at the rate of one and a half rounds per gun per minute;<sup>69</sup> this would give one burst per minute on each fifteen yards of front, in addition to the shells of the 4.5-inch howitzers and other heavier pieces beyond and the barrages on the flanks. As for the action of the infantry, under the system which the troops had been practising,<sup>70</sup> each objective would be seized by a different line. In each brigade the two front-line battalions would furnish the first two lines of attack, half of the two support battalions being allotted to the third wave and their other halves held as immediate reserves. Each line consisted of two waves. While one was consolidating the position it had gained, the next would move through it and lie down as close as possible to the shells bursting on the next objective, ready to attack that objective as soon as the barrage was observed to lift. Inasmuch as the barrages were to be laid down not only by the artillery of the 1st Australian Division firing from the south-west over its troops, but also by that of the X Corps and 25th Division firing more from the west (in some cases

<sup>69</sup> The rate was changed in a subsequent order to 2 rounds per minute

<sup>70</sup> See pp. 452-4.

almost in the face of the attack), and as three separate staffs<sup>71</sup> were responsible for the somewhat hurried drawing of the plans, General White was acutely apprehensive of a blunder. Though not officially concerned, since the division was then acting directly under the staff of the Army, he discovered, on the eve of the intended action, that the proposed line of the barrage after its second lift fell fairly across that laid down for the right of the infantry. Birdwood's artillery commander, Brigadier-General Cunliffe Owen, was accordingly at once sent to Walker's headquarters, and the plans were again changed, the barrage-lines being straightened and the artillery of the X Corps restricted to zones of fire on the flanks of the attack, or at a safe distance ahead. To permit of these and other changes, the date of the operation was at the last moment, for the second time, deferred for twenty-four hours.



Brigadiers were informed late on the afternoon of July 21st. Current opinion being then in favour of night operations, at least where heavy machine-gun fire was anticipated and the objective was close and well-marked, the assault was ordered to be delivered at half-an-hour after midnight on the morning of Sunday, July 23rd.<sup>72</sup>

It will be evident from this narrative that the projected seizure of Pozieres had at times been regarded as a separate

<sup>71</sup> Those of Reserve Army, X Corps, and 1st Australian Division. The artillery of the 25th Division, but not its infantry, was in the line under command of the X Corps

<sup>72</sup> The time originally fixed was 11 30 p.m. on July 22, but Walker secured the extension in order to give his troops on the right more time to move into position along their narrow and only approach—Black Watch Alley. Half-an-hour being allowed for the capture of each objective and preparation for the next advance. the programme was:

1st barrage, 12.28-12.30 a.m., followed by attack on 1st objective, 12.30.

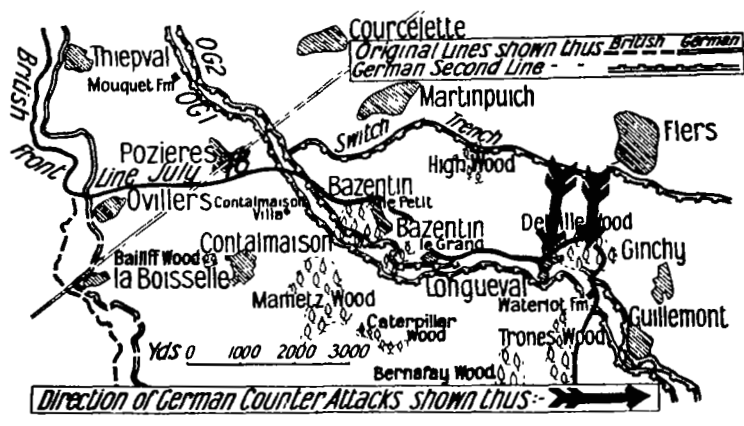
2nd barrage, 12.30-1 a.m., followed by attack on 2nd objective, 1 a.m.

3rd barrage, 1-1.30 a.m., followed by attack on 3rd objective, 1.30 a.m.

4th barrage, 1.30 a.m., to continue for half-an-hour, protecting troops while they dug in, and then gradually to diminish in intensity (unless otherwise ordered)



operation, independent of other large operations on the battlefield and not even simultaneous with them.<sup>73</sup> The reasons appear to have been that the attacks of the Fourth Army had to be fitted in with those of the French; that it was not always easy to provide sufficient artillery and ammunition for simultaneous operations on a wide front; and that each army and often each corps had its special problem. While the offensive in question was being planned, the Fourth Army had, by the action of the enemy, been set a special and difficult task, the expected German counter-attack<sup>74</sup> having on the afternoon of July 18th fallen with tremendous weight upon Delville Wood. The South African Brigade, after very heavy loss, had been driven out of the wood, and part of the 3rd Division from the north of Longueval. The recapture of both places was immediately



<sup>73</sup> It had already been tentatively fixed for the following dates:

For July 17, to be coincident with attacks by the XIII Corps on Guillemont and Ginchy, and the XV Corps on the Switch Trench. The weather caused postponement.

For July 18, coincident with a wide offensive by the Fourth Army, Reserve Army, and French. The weather again caused postponement of the wider offensive.

For July 18, as a separate operation. The preliminary attack failed, and the task was handed over to Reserve Army.

For the nights of July 20/21 or 21/22, apparently as a separate operation. Postponed because the arrangements of the 1st Australian Division and the artillery were not complete.

At 12.30 a.m. on July 23, as a separate operation, an offensive by the Fourth Army against the Switch Trench and Ginchy being launched a few hours earlier.

<sup>74</sup> See p. 462.

attempted, and, in order to relieve pressure, the projected offensive against the Switch Trench was forthwith undertaken by the Fourth Army in conjunction with an attack by the whole of the French Sixth Army on July 20th.<sup>75</sup> The British attacks met at first with partial success, but afterwards—except for some gains at High Wood—completely failed; it was not until July 27th, after desperate fighting, that Delville Wood was recaptured.

It was during this difficult time that the offensive of July 23rd was planned and launched as a single great stroke, the Fourth Army at the last moment postponing the "zero" hour of its northward attack to coincide with that of the Reserve Army's assault,<sup>76</sup> and the French also attacking on their front north of the Somme. The Pozières operation would form the extreme left of the main assault; but on its left again the 48th Division (X Corps) was to endeavour to keep touch by securing, as the Australians advanced, part of the series of communication trenches running westward from "K" Trench north of the Bapaume road to the old German front-line system. These had originally been intended as thoroughfares between the first and second systems, but now served as "switches" along which the German front line in that sector naturally lay.<sup>77</sup>

One local advantage by which it had been hoped to assist the right Australian brigade at the point of junction of the two armies was not secured. The posts in the O.G. Lines which the 1st British Division had hoped to hand over were not attained either by it or by the 1st Australian Division



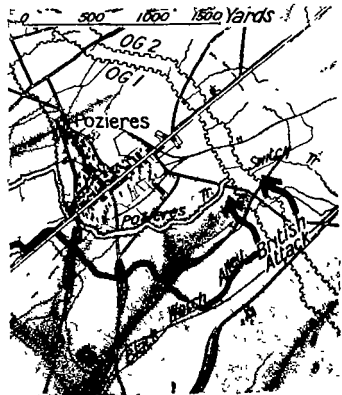
<sup>75</sup> The XX French Corps north of the Somme, and the XXV Corps south of it, advanced well, but the I Colonial Corps, between the two, failed.

<sup>76</sup> One slight discrepancy remained: the intense bombardment immediately preceding the Fourth Army's assault would last four minutes instead of two, a circumstance which might be somewhat confusing to the troops at the point where the two armies joined.

<sup>77</sup> They were known as "1st" to "6th" Avenues.

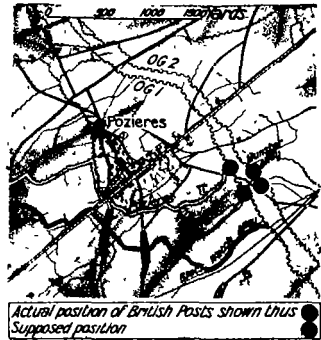
before the main operation. These points were of some importance, being those where Pozières Trench ran out of O.G.1 and the Switch Trench out of O.G.2. The two junctions happened to lie opposite each other, though separated by the interval between the two O.G. trenches—at this point 150 yards. Several attempts had already been

made to seize the junction of Switch Trench and O.G.2. On July 18th the Munster Fusiliers (of the 3rd British Brigade) attacked it simultaneously with an attempt to capture part of the Switch. The Munsters reached the junction, and their name was thenceforth given to the neighbouring portion of the Switch—"Munster Alley." They were soon afterwards driven from that position, but it was thought that the point



where Pozières Trench and O.G.1 forked had been attained and consolidated. Such positions, however, were no longer easy to identify, the incessant bombardment falling on

Pozières and its neighbourhood having destroyed many of the surrounding landmarks.<sup>78</sup> Thus the 2nd British Brigade discovered that both its own front posts and those of the Germans were still some distance south of the junction. This was the reason for postponing the Australian relief in the O.G. Lines, and, on the night of July 19th, the 1st Northamptonshire (2nd British Brigade) attempted



under cover of a Stokes mortar bombardment to capture

<sup>78</sup> The Reserve Army had informed the 1st Australian Division that O.G.1 would be handed over to it, up to and including the communication trench running between O.G.1 and O.G.2 just beyond that point. The point actually attained was just short of a similar communication trench between the two lines, 120 yards farther south.



35. THE KING INSPECTING THE ENTRANCE OF A DUGOUT IN THE OLD GERMAN FRONT-TRENCH SYSTEM ON THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD, AUGUST 1916

*British Official Photograph*



36. BRITISH INFANTRYMEN ON THE SOMME OCCUPYING TRENCHES SIMILAR TO SOME OF THOSE IN WHICH THE AUSTRALIANS RELIEVED THEM

*British Official Photograph*

*To face p 488*



both junctions. No sooner had the mortars begun to fire than the enemy opened with machine-guns, of which at least six in various parts of the area were covering the spot. The assault failed, the British party on the parapet of O.G.1 being all killed or wounded, and those attacking O.G.2 suffering heavily. At 3.30 a.m. another attempt was made by bombing along the O.G. Lines, but the German bombers were in strength and retained their posts. The Northamptonshires lost sixty-five in all,<sup>79</sup> and, when Captain Knightley's company of the 9th Australian Battalion that day took over the front in O.G.1, the advanced British posts in both trenches were still 150 yards short of the desired positions. A third attempt was accordingly made at 2.30 a.m. on July 22nd by the 9th Battalion. It had been intended first to bombard the German posts thoroughly with two Australian medium trench-mortars, and then, at the moment of assault, to stifle the machine-guns by a light barrage of the 18-pounder shells thrown beyond the objective. The commencement of this barrage would be the signal for the attack. Two parties, each of fifty-one men, under Lieutenants Monteath<sup>80</sup> and Biggs<sup>81</sup> respectively assembled at the heads of the positions in O.G. 1 and 2, the British garrison in the latter trench making room. At 1.55 the trench-mortars began to fire, but ceased at 2.10 a.m., having come to the end of their ammunition, of which, through some grave error, only fourteen rounds were at hand. At 2.25 Monteath and Biggs led out their men and lay up, as ordered, forty yards beyond, waiting for the barrage. The night, however, was continuously disturbed by the slow bombardment of Pozières and by the constant reply from the enemy, and, as not infrequently happened in later fights, it was impossible to distinguish the light barrage from the other shells bursting intermittently around. After waiting until 2.32 Monteath reported that he could see no barrage, and was then ordered by Major

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<sup>79</sup> Munster Alley was gained at one point, but could not be held, as the junction with O.G.2 remained uncaptured

<sup>80</sup> Capt C. D. Monteath, M.C ; 9th Bn. Accountant; of Benalla, Vic.; b 3 Sept, 1888

<sup>81</sup> Capt F. J. Biggs, 9th Bn. Engineering student; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 1 Oct, 1895.

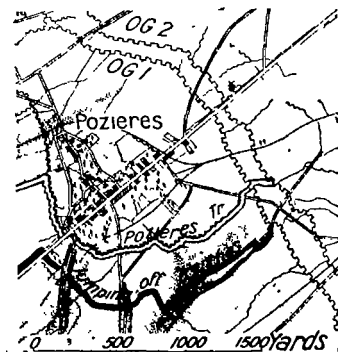
Salisbury, who was in charge of the enterprise, to advance. Monteath's party made their way in the moonlight up the wide hollow of the empty trench, and were, as they thought, about half-way to the point where they would meet opposition, when there burst among them a succession of "egg-bombs"—small egg-shaped missiles, hand-thrown, and often used by the Germans against an enemy who was beyond the range of their heavier stick-bombs. The Australian party, crowded in the trench, fell literally in heaps. A few jumped out of the trench into shell-holes on either side, and thence endeavoured to bomb the Germans. Monteath and Lance-Corporal Ross<sup>82</sup> managed to get far enough forward to see whence the opposition was coming. A bomb's throw ahead the trench appeared to come to a dead end, being blocked by a ramp or mound of earth from behind which the enemy were evidently throwing. The Australians outside the trench were suddenly driven back into it by a fierce fire of machine-guns at close range sweeping the open. Monteath, with the survivors, endeavoured to hold on, but the ability to do so depended on the receipt of a continuous supply of bombs. Machine-guns sweeping the exposed area rendered the task of carrying forward a supply almost impossible. Sergeant Browne,<sup>83</sup> in support, handed over his platoon to his corporal, and attempted to cross the open with bombs, but was immediately killed. The attack failed, as did also that in O.G.2, resulting in heavy casualties. The reserves were then brought up and a fresh attempt organised; but day was breaking, and, upon the leader climbing out of the trench, the enemy machine-guns opened so promptly that the enterprise, being obviously hopeless, was countermanded.

Meanwhile the successive postponements of the 1st Australian Division's main enterprise had given time for the 1st Pioneers and engineers on the right, supplemented by working parties from the reserve battalions on the left, to complete the "jumping-off" trenches. In spite of casualties several sections of long straight excavation were thus provided for

<sup>82</sup> Cpl P. H. Ross (No. 4282; 9th Bn.). Farmer; of Brisbane and Maryborough, Q'land; b. Edinburgh, Scotland, 9 Aug., 1885

<sup>83</sup> Sgt. P. G. Browne (No. 3270A; 9th Bn.). University student; of Brisbane; b. Gwambegwine Station, Taroom, Q'land, 8 June, 1895. Killed in action, 22 July, 1916.

the assembly of the waves prior to the assault.<sup>84</sup> The systematic bombardment of Pozières by heavy artillery in preparation for this attack had begun at 2 a.m. on July 19th, and among the units participating was one of the Australian siege batteries, which happened to be moved that day to Fricourt<sup>85</sup> so as to enfilade the O.G. Lines. The bombardment continued intermittently for four days, the targets on July 19th being largely roads and barricades, and on the 21st houses, trenches, and strong-points. On



the front of the III Corps (Fourth Army) farther east the bombardment fell mainly on the Switch Trench, the O.G. Lines, and their approaches; but the weather, though now fine and warm, was not favourable for air-photography, and shortly before the attack the III Corps staff was informed by its front-line troops that the enemy had been observed in new positions much in advance of the Switch. On the Pozières front the Germans had commenced a second-line near the outskirts of the orchards, but Reserve Army had ordered the Australian field batteries—which began to register on July 19th—and machine-guns to keep this area under fire throughout the night of the 20th, and the excavation seems

<sup>84</sup> In the right brigade's sector on the first night the pioneers had, without casualties, dug a trench a foot deep; on the second night, though suffering casualties, they dug deep enough to obtain cover; after the third night parties under Major Holland were able to work in these trenches during daylight.

<sup>85</sup> The two Australian siege batteries and their headquarters were not always together. The 36th (Australian) Heavy Artillery Group Headquarters had originally taken them both to France—the 54th (later 1st Australian) equipped with 8-inch howitzers, and the 55th (later 2nd Australian) with 9.2-inch howitzers. On arrival at Maroeuil, near Arras, the group headquarters controlled those batteries and three British. In June, 1916, it moved to Bouzincourt, near Albert, where the group headquarters controlled on June 14 six British siege batteries and only one Australian (55th). These batteries were then firing on Pozières, Courcellette, and Thiepval. On July 5 the 36th Group and 54th and 55th Batteries, then near Mailly-Mailly, formed part of the quota of the Fourth Army's artillery which was transferred to Reserve Army. On the 19th the 55th Battery moved to Fricourt and was shortly afterwards transferred to the 45th Heavy Artillery Group, which was temporarily allotted to the 1st Australian Division. Of necessity the group headquarters, though an Australian unit, was at this stage often commanded by British officers. It was not permanently reunited with both its batteries until the organization of the Australian Army Corps at the end of 1917. (*Australian Siege Brigade in the Great War*—in manuscript form—by Major G. E. Manchester.)



to have been abandoned. The 1st Australian Division's medium and heavy trench-mortars<sup>86</sup> in the Chalk Pit also fired during the following days, but through heavy casualties and other difficulties were forced to cease.

During these days some of the Australian infantry, both in the reserve area and in certain parts of the front line from which the village was visible, had their first opportunity of observing at close range the tremendous power of the new British artillery. The strain of the bombardment had put an end to any sniping in Pozières; although upon actual attack the garrison might be ready to rush to its machine-gun positions, it had given up all notion of carrying on individual shooting during the day. It was therefore possible—even from an advanced post of the 2nd Battalion, only eighty yards from the orchards of Pozières<sup>87</sup>—to watch the bombardment practically without danger, except from the huge flakes of British heavy shell which flew back overhead after some of the more powerful bursts. Although it was mid-summer, only one of the ragged tree-trunks in the copses and back gardens which screened the village retained its curtain of leaves; the rest had been stripped and shredded by the bombardments of the past ten days, and through the bare stems could be seen the pink or white ruins of a few remaining walls. Every minute, when some heavy projectile burst in the débris, dense pink and grey clouds rolled upwards, gradually melting into dust-haze. Above the dry trees there exploded occasionally, four at a time, shells of a strange type embodying some new experiment in the devilry of war—forming grey-green clouds, each emitting a long tongue of orange flame which leisurely unrolled itself earthwards and then vanished.<sup>88</sup> Intermittent bursts of shrapnel threshed the dry ground and sent little whirls of dust hurrying through the copses or along the line of the main road behind the

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<sup>86</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 217.

<sup>87</sup> The 2nd Battalion had sent forward patrols along a sap leading to the enemy's line, and established a barricade or "bombing-stop" at this point. Most of the 1st Brigade's front line—taken over from the 68th Brigade—was well down the slope of Contalmaison Valley, and therefore out of sight of the Germans. From Black Watch Alley, however, Pozières and the O.G. Lines were visible.

<sup>88</sup> These were "thermite" shells intended to set fire to trees and ruins. The 1st Battery, A.F.A., fired 119 on July 21, but the shells on that occasion had no incendiary effect.

trees. Yet under this protracted torture men had been observed, more than once, moving through the wood, apparently small parties sent to reinforce; and a single figure had been observed hurrying over the uneven ground, and afterwards returning, evidently a messenger from some occupied point to another.

During the afternoon before the fight the Australian infantry destined for the attack sat in their cramped trenches<sup>89</sup> under the hot sun, cleaning their rifles, packing their haversacks, writing home letters, or snatching their last sleep before the battle. To prevent the battalions from being crippled, as had often happened in earlier battles, by the loss of practically all their officers, a proportion of those in each unit had on the previous day been ordered back to Albert. These included the second-in-command, assistant adjutant, and at least one of the senior officers of each company. In the front line only twenty officers of each battalion were left, these including its commander and adjutant, but not the quartermaster, whose post was at the advanced ration-dump possibly a mile in rear of the trenches, and the transport officer, who commanded at the regimental transport lines farther back and daily brought up the rations to the dump. During July 22nd the officers remaining at the front carefully checked their watches at stated hours by those at brigade headquarters. Telephone wires were laid to the new headquarters, which, for the 1st Brigade, would be the cramped niche, previously mentioned,<sup>90</sup> in the bank beside the Chalk Pit road, and, for the 3rd, a deep German dugout below a cellar at the north-west corner of Contalmaison. Phosphorus bombs, for smoking the enemy out of dugouts, had been distributed, one to each man, and two Mills bombs, one to be carried in each side-pocket. At 7 p.m., as the sun neared his setting, the bombardment of the Fourth Army along the battle-front to the east began. Three hours after dark the artillery of the Reserve Army, which, after several hours' bombardment, had eased at sundown, increased its fire on and around Pozières.

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<sup>89</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 198, for a scene typical of this day.

<sup>90</sup> See p 476.