CHAPTER XVI

THE TAKING OF POZIÈRES (II)—GERMAN BOMBARDMENT BEGINS

General Walker, whose objective had so far included only the part of Pozières lying south of the main road, drew up in conjunction with Colonel Blamey, now his chief of staff, an operation order for the immediate capture of the rest of the village by a regular attack preceded by barrage. For this purpose the 3rd Brigade was strengthened by a battalion—the 7th—of the 2nd Brigade, still in reserve; and the 1st Brigade by the 8th Battalion. The troops were to advance in extended formation through Pozières at 4 p.m. From an early hour, however, General Gough of the Reserve Army suspected—probably from reports of artillery observers¹—that the Germans had entirely abandoned the place. The day was at times cloudy, and the contact airman, who at dawn had flown boldly low down over the village, seems to have been unable to furnish a definite report;² but the artillery of the X Corps was asked to keep a sharp watch upon Pozières,³ it being explained that, if the supposition of its abandonment was correct, the 1st Australian Division would be ordered to push through the village, and the 48th Division to meet it near the cemetery, just beyond the north-western outskirts. At midday an airman,⁴ making a long careful reconnaissance, located the Australian front line with fair accuracy,⁵ and reported:

The whole of the village of Pozières north of the Road appeared deserted . . . all trenches in Pozières village were empty.

¹ Observers of the 48th Division had reported Germans running away near the windmill and others withdrawing northwards from the village. The Australian heavy artillery reported that their own infantry were marching through Pozieres.

² The flying corps reported that it had seen no flares; but, when this aeroplane came over, green flares were certainly lit in some of the front trenches though probably not along the whole front. There was, however, no doubt as to the position of the Australian front line, the reports from the infantry being numerous and accurate.

³ Major J. W. Povah, of the 25th Divisional Artillery (X Corps), went round part of the Australian front line during the morning, as did Major H. C. Harrison of the 71st Siege Battery (III Corps).

⁴ Apparently of the 4th Squadron, R.F.C., which constantly carried out its patrols in a most daring manner during this fighting.

⁵ He placed it, however, 300 yards too far forward in O.G.1.
On the other hand he saw Germans close beside the western border of the village, holding 500 yards of "K" Trench ("intense rifle fire," he reported, "was going on near this trench"), and also along part of Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) near the point where the 48th Division had seized it.

This report convinced Gough that Pozières was empty and that the Australian infantry had only to send forward patrols in order to complete its capture. He therefore issued orders that the artillery should cease firing so that patrols might enter the village and, if they met with no opposition, hold it; "K" Trench was to be bombarded by the heavies until 5 o'clock, when the 48th and the 1st Australian Divisions were to push forward from their respective positions, and endeavour to join each other on the north-western outskirts of the village. Walker, therefore, with some reluctance, first postponed, and shortly afterwards abandoned, his plan of a formal advance. He immediately informed both the front line brigades of the airmen's reports, and ordered them to push forward patrols to reconnoitre and occupy the village in the manner suggested by the army commander.

This order reached the brigade headquarters about 3 o'clock. From that point all messages had to be carried by men running for the most part over the open. About midday the German artillery had shortened range so as to include in its barrage the northern end of the Chalk Pit road, where, slightly sunken between banks, it entered the south-western corner of the village. For the first time part of the front

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*Walker, however, had already somewhat changed his plan by giving General MacLagan permission to advance the 3rd Brigade as opportunity offered, and by withdrawing from it the assistance of the 7th Battalion.

*Sometimes called Dead Man's Road
line—its extreme left—was under bombardment. The 2nd Field Company digging a strong-point there in the open withdrew its men into the trenches for two hours; a sergeant of the 4th notes in his diary:

Sitting down under heavy H.E. shellfire inactive is...very nerve shattering.

Through this bombardment the message containing the airman's report and the consequent orders reached most of the battalions about 4 or 4.30. To some of the front-line infantry, who throughout the day had been sniped at by parties of Germans still hidden in Pozières, it was rather exasperating to be informed that the place was empty. It is true that the snipers who had caused a number of deaths in the early morning had mostly been silenced. Near the eastern end of the village a private of the 11th "prospecting" by himself had brought in five prisoners singlehanded, and Corporal Lyon, after a similar excursion, seven. Lyon had also observed a number of Germans in the artillery dugouts beyond the northern hedge and was convinced that, if the place were visited, a much larger haul could be secured. His officers, however, decided to defer the attempt, at any rate until after dusk. In the western sector a patrol of the 3rd Battalion, going out early through the barrage, had accounted for several snipers, and another patrol later brought in nine prisoners. The chief nests of the enemy were in "K" Trench and in the artillery dugouts; from the latter, Germans were constantly endeavouring to

*Sgt. A. L. de Vine.

withdraw, and a Lewis gunner of the 3rd Battalion, climbing upon the ruins of a house so as to overlook the ground north of the village, shot down a number as they ran.

On the extreme left an attempt had been made to secure one important point north of the main road. Here, as day broke, Captain Herrod of the 2nd Battalion had perceived a white structure ten feet in height, standing some 150 yards beyond the road on the western edge of the village. One of his officers, Lieutenant Waterhouse, observed a German entering the place. As the light increased, it was seen to be a defence-work of reinforced concrete with a low, square block tower at its western end. From its side the barrel of a machine-gun protruded. Patrols were already searching beyond the road, but, as this place looked especially dangerous, Herrod ordered Waterhouse and ten men to make their way round to its far side and rush it while he himself with Corporal Campbell and a few men engaged it from the front. This plan succeeded. The place was found to be occupied by three officers and twenty-three men, with three machine-guns mounted. A German sergeant had his thumbs on the buttons of one gun when the Australians reached him. All the occupants surrendered.

It was found that the concrete covered the entrance to a large cellar, from which a stairway led down to a second and deeper chamber. Apparently, the place had been used as an observation-post—two range-finders and a large number of Zeiss field-glasses were found there, besides four machine-guns, two kettle-drums, a number of revolvers, helmets, telephones, and other military gear. Being reinforced with

12 One German officer had been shot through the abdomen and afterwards died.
13 According to one account, eighteen pairs.
14 The prisoners, who belonged to the 159th Infantry Regiment and had only lately come into the line, knew that Australians were opposed to them. They said that they had learnt this from the Australian infantry, who had shouted across at them, apparently from their new trenches in the village.
a steel grid, the concrete tower was exceedingly strong, and continued to stand practically undamaged after every trace of the house itself had been utterly blown away. The Australians named it "Gibraltar"; but the British barrage still fell too close to permit of its being safely held. Water-house therefore brought back the prisoners and machine-guns to the headquarters of his battalion, which at that time was a log structure in the small wood beside the Chalk Pit road.

Gibraltar, now empty, stood only fifty yards east of the southern end of "K" Trench. During the afternoon Germans had been seen creeping up that trench, apparently trying to regain the dugout. They had been fired on and driven off. The commanders of the 2nd and 4th Battalions holding that part of the line—Lieutenant-Colonels Stevens and Iven Mackay—had both asked that the range of the guns be lengthened, and this request had also been signalled to an aeroplane at 8 a.m. Many soldiers along the front were of opinion that most of the Germans had withdrawn at a very early hour, and, had the artillery range been lengthened then, the village could have been easily occupied. It was fairly evident, however, that some of the positions had been reinforced or reoccupied during the morning by the German force sent forward to counter-attack and possibly by others. Gough's orders did not reach the last of the batteries till about 3.30 p.m., and it was at least 5 o'clock before the battalions, acting as the order reached them, began to send out their patrols.

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36 See Vol XII, plate 232. The tower can be seen in plate 40 of this volume.
37 It still stands beside the road to Pozières, just at the south-west entrance of the village.
38 During the first week of the Australian occupation, however, it was generally known as "The Cement House."
39 This structure was not nearly as strong as "Gibraltar," being merely a look-out covered with heavy logs. Beneath it was a large cellar. In the first attack seven Germans had been found here.
40 One gun had been throwing its shells very short, and it was several hours before this could be corrected. It was by a burst of shrapnel from his own side that Lieut. MacCarthy (see note 13 on p 302, and note 27, p 302) was killed.
41 At 2.30 p.m. a number of Germans were seen coming over the horizon half-a-mile north of the village (see p 547 text and note 40).
42 This happened to be the intended hour for a second German counter-attack that was to have been delivered by parts of the 157th and 27th Infantry Regiments after a preparatory bombardment lasting from 3 to 5 p.m. (see p. 547). However, the counter-attack was countermanded at the last moment.
received the 8th Battalion as a reinforcement and decided to
use it in taking the village, but in the meanwhile he ordered
the 2nd Battalion to seize Gibraltar. The scouts and bombing
platoon of that battalion accordingly crossed the road and
entered the southern end of "K" Trench, which was found
to be much broken down, but in general four feet in depth.
In that sector it contained no deep dugouts, the only shelter
being small boarded niches. Of the wire-entanglement on its
western side, only the stakes remained. Lieutenant Trott and
his bombers made their way up the trench driving out
a small German patrol. The scouts were spread out beyond
Gibraltar, and at about 6:15 p.m. Major Mather of the
engineers and Colonel Stevens fixed the line for a trench
incorporating that strong-point in the Australian position.
The Germans, sniping from a short eastern "tributary" of
"K" Trench not far ahead, severely wounded Mather; but
part of the 2nd Field Company and two companies of the
2nd Battalion were strung out along the intended line and
dug in, a platoon of the 4th Battalion being brought up to
guard the left by occupying a short sap on the western side of
"K," while the bombers blocked the main trench.
The right of the new position was bent back and joined
that of the 4th and 3rd Battalions along the road. From the
3rd a patrol had been sent out and returned with the report
that the Germans were strongly holding the artillery dugouts
beyond the northern hedge-line. These battalions received
no orders to take action, nor were the front-line companies

23 An incident that occurred at this juncture deserves to be recorded. Colonels
Stevens and Mackay had left their headquarters and walked forward up Dead
Man's Road (the sunken end of the Chalk Pit road) to its junction with the main
road for the purpose of making hurried plans for the advance of their men, and
instructing the company commanders. As they stood at this desolate corner (the
most actively shelled in Pozières), surrounded by shredded tree-trunks and the
dead, a panting messenger stumbled up to them with an envelope marked "Urgent
and secret." They hurriedly tore it open. The message read: "A number of cases
have lately occurred of men failing to salute the army commander when passing in
his car, in spite of the fact that the car carries his flag upon the bonnet. This
practice must cease." The sending of this message at such a time was of course
a mistake of either the divisional or the brigade staff.

24 Capt. W. A. Trott, M.C.; 2nd Bn. Railway clerk; of Manly, N.S.W.; b
Newtown, N.S.W., 17 May, 1894.


26 Captain G. Drake Brockman (of Guildford, W. Aust.), Lieutenant J. E. G.
Stevenson (of Brisbane) and Corporal P. G. Creen (of Coleraine, Vic.) and others
of the 2nd Field Company were with this party.
of the 3rd, holding south of the road, along the centre of the village, informed that an advance was to be made by the 8th. Several false alarms of enemy attacks had been raised through the firing of enemy flares in front, and, as a consequence, the tired men were standing to arms when a number of indistinct figures were seen passing across the front not fifty yards away. It was with the utmost difficulty that the men were restrained from firing at them. An N.C.O. of the 3rd bravely walked forward and ascertained that they were a company of the 8th about to commence a northward advance. That battalion had, at 7 o'clock, been directed by General Smyth to send forward two companies to push through the existing front and form a new line of strong-posts across the northern extension of the village. About 11 p.m. its companies had moved into Pozières, marching in single file up the main road from the south-west, until their head was immediately in advance of the front trench held by the 3rd. Here the whole line was to turn to the left and sweep northwards through the ruins. Their commanders, Captains Traill and James, had received no maps, and the orders first given to them when summoned to their battalion headquarters were "to go as far as they could." Traill urged that this was dangerously vague, and was eventually instructed to form a line 300 yards north of the main road. Leading their men in the dark to the western end of Pozières, the company commanders were able to recognise the main road by fallen remains of the roofs on either side. The village was absolutely
quiet, hardly a flare rising as the platoons assembled along the highway, and, after fixing bayonets, climbed over the heaps of rubble representing the old dwellings and past the church of which one remnant, the chancel window, was still standing. Not a German was seen. Almost on the outer edge of the ruins the right company stopped with its left flank near an orchard at the northern outskirts, and its right bent back towards the front of the 3rd on the Bapaume road. The left company, under Traill, went on to the neighbourhood of the cemetery beyond the northern extremity of the village; but, recognising that he was ahead of his objective, Traill withdrew his men to a line some distance north of the church. The main northern extension of the village had thus been occupied without opposition, although afterwards a number of Germans were observed in shell-holes a few hundred yards north-east, between the village and the O.G. Lines, and a wild outbreak of enemy fire came from that direction. The dawn air-patrol of July 24th reported the Australian posts duly in position—"small new semicircular trenches" north-east of the church and just south of the orchard.

The 3rd Brigade, farther east, had tried to advance in strict accordance with the method prescribed, the patrols, however, being instructed that they should not persist if strong resistance was encountered. At 4.25 p.m. Lieutenant-Colonel Roberts of the 11th passed this order to Captain Medcalf in his front line, but protested without avail to MacLagan that his men were too few and exhausted, and advised that the advance should be undertaken by the 12th, which still had

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30 I remember scrambling over a small plough (wrote Pte. Bourke of the 8th) and a roller and wondering where the old Frenchman was who had owned them.

31 Its commander, Captain James, was mortally wounded by Australian machine-gun fire from the rear which was grazing the mound by the church.

31 This may have been connected with the second German counter-attack, which was launched at 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. against the north and east of Pozieres (see pp. 548-9), but of which there is no mention in the 8th Battalion's records.
part of its strength in reserve. Meanwhile the patrols of the 11th had crossed the road under Lieutenants Hallahan and Forbes, who were guided by Corporal Lyon towards the artillery dugouts that he had seen earlier in the day. On catching sight of the Germans beyond the hedge, Forbes called to them to surrender, and a number held up their hands; but commotion was immediately seen in the trench, as if an officer had run up, and a shot was fired. Forbes therefore arranged that he himself should creep with a party round the left or front of the dugouts while Hallahan led his men to their rear. Both Forbes and Lyon were killed as they struggled through the hedge, and several others were hit. The trench being mostly roofed in, and the resistance stubborn, Hallahan brought back the patrols and Colonel Roberts reported that he considered it inadvisable to renew the attack without the co-operation of the 3rd on his left, which, he found, had no orders to attack.

On the extreme right of the village the patrols were not sent out until nearly 8 p.m., when dusk was falling. At that hour Margetts and Vowles sent forward two parties, each of thirty men under an officer, that on the right being under Lieutenant Laing, the vigorous young Scottish-Australian who from the first had guarded this flank. Laing and his men had been especially stung by snipers hidden in ruins and back hedges north of the road; one Australian was killed by Laing's side immediately before the patrol started, and all were eager to hit back.

In my opinion (Laing afterwards wrote) the time we then had compensated us for all we suffered before and afterwards. My men came out in one line, no hurry about it. The patrol I had told off to guard my right flank went straight out (i.e., to the east) and we went straight for the village (north).

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See p. 534.
The main patrol passed over the road near the northern prong of the light railway.\(^4\) It was from this area that the sniping had come, and several Germans in the ruins, surprised by the sight of men advancing with bayonets, started up and bolted or tried to surrender. One, jumping on a bicycle that lay against the wall of a wireless station, made his escape in spite of the bullets that followed; another fired three times at Laing, and was then shot by a man of the 12th. It was idle for men so caught to expect mercy.

Another (wrote Laing) tried to give himself up (from the wireless dugout) as soon as he saw our chaps on him. "Come out you . . .," yelled one of my men. I heard him, rushed back shouting at the chap to shoot the swine or I would—so he got him. Altogether we killed 6 and captured 18 down the dugouts. The men had great sport chucking bombs down any hole they saw.

The patrol of Margetts' company farther to the left appears to have been less successful; but Laing's vigorous attack had cleared the ground north of the 12th. Margetts and Vowles immediately went across to assure themselves of this, and, having settled upon a line for their companies, returned to lead them up. Snipers from the direction of the O.G. Lines were still active, but Vowles, leading his men forward under shelter of a cross-road hedge, lined them out on the desired position. Margetts did not return, and the news soon spread that he—who had fought with his battalion unwounded from the Landing until it left Gallipoli—had been

\(^4\) See note 67, p. 483. On the street near this point stood a German ambulance waggon, evidently abandoned some days before where a burst of shrapnel had caught it, the two horses dead beside the pole, four dead men on the stretchers within, and one at the door of the waggon, apparently killed when he was being put in.
killed by a chance shell. His men, however, were brought forward, and the two companies dug a long semicircular trench through rubble heaps and back gardens close to the northern hedge-line, making use in parts of an old German work, and bringing each flank back to the road. The 11th Battalion then came forward and assisted in digging the left of this work, and during the night a communication trench was made from its centre leading back across the road, like the stalk of a mushroom.

While Vowles was superintending the formation of the extreme right of the advanced position, where the new line had incorporated an old German trench beside the tramway, he almost stumbled into the dark stairway of a dugout that had been previously bombed and then forgotten. Eighteen prisoners were now taken from it, including one who stated that he was the commandant of Pozières. The dugout, which was a large one with three entrances, was full of surgical dressings and was afterwards known as “the Medical Dugout,” and the trench as “Tramway Trench.” They were incorporated in the new

— Margietts appears to have been hit while standing outside the trench south of the road. One account states that Serg J. A. N. Clark (of Launceston, Tas.) and Pte. L. J. Brown (of Ulverstone, Tas.), both of the 12th Battalion Lewis gun section, were killed by the same shell. Margietts asked to be pulled down into shelter from shell-fire and, knowing his hurt was mortal, told his helpers to “look after the boys.” (See Vol XII, plate 231.)

On discovering the dugout Vowles ordered another bomb to be thrown in. As all was then quiet, two men began to descend the stairs, but hearing voices they came back. Vowles shouted “Parlez vous Francais?” A voice below replied “Oui!” and the head of a German appeared at the bottom of the stairs. When motioned to come up, a number of Germans, some wounded, mounted the stairs saying that there was a captain below. Vowles sent for him. This officer, a dapper figure in long grey coat, informed Vowles through Laing, who interpreted, that his name was Ponsonby Lyons; his grandfather had been an Englishman. Seeing the stars on Vowles’s shoulders he asked who he was and added: “I am the commandant of Pozières.” “Tell him that he was the commandant,” said Vowles to Laing, “but that I shall be happy to relieve him!” The German saw the joke. He was sent to the rear with 17 others. These are the 18 prisoners referred to by Laing when describing the fight (see p. 541). German records confirm that Captain Lyons commanded the 11/24th I R (see p. 524) and that he was captured at Pozières.
line north of the road, forming its extreme right, and were to prove of the greatest value in subsequent fighting.

After these movements had been initiated, more messages arrived from the headquarters of Reserve Army and of the 1st Australian Division to the effect that later information confirmed the report that Pozieres had been vacated by the enemy, and urging that the order to occupy the village must be fully carried out. The authorities in rear also believed that the 48th Division had reached “K” Trench at a point 600 yards ahead of the Australians, a signal lamp having been observed flashing, apparently from the junction of that trench with Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben): “5th Warwicks here.” The achievement seemed possible, since the 143rd Brigade, consisting of the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th Warwickshire, had been endeavouring to bomb towards “K” to join the Australian flank. A company of the 7th Warwicks was accordingly now sent round to Pozieres with orders to enter “K” Trench from that end and force its way to the supposed position of the 5th. It found, however, that the Australians were already in “K” Trench and had been ordered to join up with the 5th Warwicks at their supposed position by attacking at dawn. The 7th Warwicks were therefore withdrawn.

At dawn a bombing party of the 2nd Battalion under Lieutenant Trott moved up “K” Trench, anticipating that the 5th Warwicks would be bombing from the front or left front to meet them. Trott’s party stumbled on Germans before it expected them, a bomb falling suddenly in its midst and causing momentary confusion. It was then found that the enemy had barricaded the trench and dug a T-head sap, forming a strong defence. The Australians extended into craters and carried on the bomb-fight; but, as Trott could see no sign of the 48th Division, he was ordered to construct a barricade and hold his present position,
200 yards north of the main road. The 5th Warwicks afterwards reported that their attempts to advance had been held up 400 yards west of “K” Trench; both Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) and “K” near that point were, indeed, solidly held by the Germans.

Information as to the progress of the troops through Pozières came back very slowly, and during the night General Walker therefore ordered an advance to be made under cover of a bombardment at day-break. On subsequently receiving news that the 8th Battalion, at least, had reached the line intended, this bombardment was reduced to a barrage, to be laid down at 3.30 a.m. north of the village. The order fixing this hour, however, was sent out by the divisional staff so late that it did not reach the battalion commanders until 4 o’clock or later. Consequently no advance from the positions already reached in the village was attempted; nor was any progress made in the O.G. Lines beyond that achieved by Blackburn the day before. Accurate information of the precise position in that corner was still extraordinarily difficult to obtain. The frontal attack that was to have been made by the Australians from south of Pozières had been postponed till the following night, but the 1st British Division had decided to attack Munster Alley, and the 1st Australian Division agreed to co-operate. Neither the British nor the Australian attack was delivered; the 1st Loyal North Lancashire managed to get two companies into position for assaulting Munster Alley by 3.30, but the scouts who were sent ahead met such a storm of machine-gun fire that, daylight being at hand, the attempt was abandoned. In the O.G. Lines an attempt was made at

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87 Walker sent an officer from divisional headquarters with orders to ascertain the situation by a personal visit.
88 See p 330.
40. THE BACK GARDENS OF POZIÈRES SHATTERED BY BRITISH AND GERMAN BOMBARDMENT

Viewed from south of the main road near "Dead Man's Road". In the distance can be seen the old German concrete shelter at the strong-point "Gibraltar". The sandbags of an Australian trench, dug in the first attack, can be seen in the foreground.

Anzac War Memorial Official Photo No. FZ97
Taken on 28th August, 1916

To face p. 544
41. The site of part of the trench-line dug by the Australians on 23rd July, 1916, through the "houses" and back yards south of the main road

The photograph, taken three months later, shows how entirely obliterated were both trench-line and houses. (The pipe-line here shown was laid after the battle.)
24th July, 1916] TAKING OF POZIÈRES

3.30, after bombardment by a trench-mortar, to seize the German strong-point lying between the two trenches. But the attacking troops apparently lost their way in the shell-torn ground, and, though they suffered few or no casualties, became so disorganised that another company of the 10th, under Major Shaw, was ordered to carry out the assault. However, he was impeded by the bringing back of wounded and by the dead bodies which blocked the trench, and it was not until 6.30 a.m. that he reached the front post in O.G.1. By that time it was broad daylight, and this attempt also was abandoned.

The village of Pozières had thus been captured, although a gap existed between the posts of the 8th at its northern end and centre and that of the 12th at its eastern end. On the other hand most of "K" Trench on the left, a wide sector of the O.G. Lines on the right, and the artillery dugouts just beyond the centre of the front were strongly held by Germans who fired from those positions on any movement visible to them. Only its own front-line troops realised how far the 12th Battalion had advanced in the north-east of the village. For purposes of defence the whole line was, indeed, exceptionally well situated. Beyond Pozières to the north and east the open plateau of the hill-top rose gently for half-a-mile, bordered by the O.G. Lines whose parapet—in German possession—rimmed the horizon. The slightly spoon-shaped stretch of intervening ground had once

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40 An officer and 45 men of the 9th Battalion.
41 This fine Tasmanian battalion, under Colonel Elliott, was usually the last in the brigade to report its position after an advance, but it could generally be assumed to have reached its objective. "I'm not a bit anxious about old Charlie Elliott and the 12th," said the brigadier, during a hard-fought battle at Ypres on 20 September, 1917. "So long as I don't hear, I know things are going all right!"
been cultivated but now resembled open pasture. It was entirely devoid of trees, hedges, or other cover except that afforded by shell-holes thickly interspersed through the herbage, and by the artillery dugouts north of the village hedge, and two much battered communication trenches leading from the direction of "K" to the O.G. Lines. In order to counter-attack, an enemy force must approach over the crest (which was continuously watched from Ovillers, Black Watch Alley, and elsewhere by artillery observers of the 25th British and 1st Australian Divisions) and sweep across the open in the face of fire from the artillery, from Lewis guns along the whole front, and from Vickers machine-guns mainly in rear. Thus, provided the Australian line was not crushed by artillery-fire, and was kept supplied with food, water, and ammunition, it had little to fear. Supplies had again gone forward, 200 men of the 2nd Australian Division having at dusk on July 23rd been allotted to take over that duty from the 2nd Brigade.

The narrative of events on the German side must now go back and be continued from the time of the failure of the first counter-attack (by the III/157th) early on July 23. The general policy of German defence on the Somme had been indicated by the commander of the 117th Division to his troops upon their entering the battle at Pozières. His order directed that not an inch of trench must be abandoned to the enemy. Every effort must be made to strengthen the position, and if the enemy penetrates, to drive him out at once by an immediate counter-attack. Sectors adjoining a sector must aid by flanking fire and infantry attack without waiting for orders. The infantry will so occupy the sector that rear trenches are continuously manned to act as reserves for counter-attack.

This embodied the general policy of the German defence. In accordance therewith the divisional commander now directed that his troops must carry out further counter-attacks with the greatest despatch, and under all circumstances must drive their opponents from the captured positions. A reserve company of the 11th R.I.R. was therefore sent up to help that regiment to clear Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) of the British; as to the Pozières front, orders were issued at 11 a.m. that the 157th Regiment (117th Division) and 27th Regiment (7th Division) must deliver a combined counter-attack. It was at this time believed that the 157th was holding the line of the main street—where indeed some of its troops were in dugouts although Australians were roaming through the neighbouring ruins. The artillery was, therefore, at 11 a.m. directed to keep the ground south and south-west of Pozières under fire and to lay down a barrage in front of the right flank of the 7th Division, so that the

The northern of these, the German "Ganter Weg" (known to the Australians as "Tom's Cut"), now formed part of the German front line. The southern afterwards formed part of "Centre Way."

An additional 200 was afterwards detached from the 2nd Division for this purpose.
Australians should be prevented from pushing reinforcements into the village. The resulting barrage was that which fell on Casualty Corner and Contalmaison Valley during July 23, but missed the front-line troops.

The position, while this counter-attack was in preparation, was as follows: the three companies of the III/157th occupied the artillery dugouts and other positions in or near the north of Pozières which they had taken up when their early counter-attack failed. Of the I/157th, the 3rd company and part of the 4th still held firm in "K" Trench, while the 1st and 2nd faced the British in Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben). Another part of the 4th company with three machine-guns under Lieutenant Ertels had in the early morning fallen back on Gibraltar. At 5 a.m. Ertels' comrades in "K" could still hear his machine-guns firing; but, though Lieutenant Roske of the 3rd company succeeded in making his way up "K" Trench to within a short distance, he could not reach him. During the day it became clear that the Australians had penetrated farther than was previously thought; the eastern extremity of the village was reported to be in their hands, and it was discovered that during the previous night they had reached the crest near the windmill.

The combined counter-attack was to be made at 5 p.m. on July 23, after two hours' bombardment. The III/157th was to attack from the north of Pozières with three companies, while two companies of the II/62nd (7th Division), specially allotted to the 27th, advanced from the main road near the windmill. Before 5 o'clock, however, it was evident that the bombardment had been insufficient. The group commander, von Armin, afterwards reported that it had failed to destroy the opposing machine-guns, and had not rendered the opposing infantry ripe for attack. (Actually it had not fallen on them except in the area of the 4th Battalion at the south-western corner of the village.) Moreover, the preparatory movement of troops had been observed by British artillery; the two companies of the II/62nd had lost a third of their strength in coming up the Bapaume road, and were in no condition to take part. The loss of the 157th also had been severe. The attack therefore was postponed. The evening report of the 117th Division stated that the Australians now held all Pozières up to the main road; and that in Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) the 11th R.I.R., after twice attacking the British with grenades and winning 130 yards of trench, had been

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44 The 10th, 11th, and 12th companies; the 9th was still uncommitted.
45 Actually at this time it was not.
46 At 2:30 p.m. it was reported by artillery observers of the III (British) Corps that Germans were advancing across the open towards Pozières cemetery. The heavy artillery of the III Corps and field artillery of the 1st British Division were informed of this. From 2:35 to 3:50 the 8th Battery, Australian Field Artillery, was firing on the crest north-east of Pozières where the Germans "were reported to be reinforcing." These were probably the two companies of the 62nd.
again driven back. The divisional commander now expressed the opinion that the attack must be renewed at once—during the night of the 23rd—even if it meant putting in the last reserves; otherwise his opponents would have time to strengthen their two positions (in Third Avenue west of Pozieres, and in Pozieres), and counter-attack would become still more difficult.

New troops were then arriving in the back area, the IX Reserve Corps (comprising the 17th and 18th Reserve Divisions) from near Lens being on its way to relieve von Armin's IV Corps. On the outbreak of the battle of July 23 several advance battalions of this corps had been moved up to Warlencourt, Eaucourt-l'Abbaye, and Gueudecourt, villages close behind the German line, and at 5 p.m. the I and II Battalions of the 86th R.I.R. (18th Reserve Division) at Warlencourt and Le Sars were placed under the administrative control of the 117th Division. As the II/157th—the reserve in Courcelette—was to be used this night in relieving the much-tried I/157th in Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) and "K" Trench, the I/86th was ordered to Courcelette as reserve in emergency, but not to be used for the projected counter-attack. To set free for this attack all available troops of the 157th, the brigade commander (Colonel Weise) sent up his last reserve, the 5/22nd R., to the rearward trenches. This left the 7th, 9th, and remnants of the 10th, 11th, and 12th companies of the 157th to undertake it, together with two platoons of the II/62nd and two companies of the 26th I.R., which were ordered to assemble at 10 p.m. for that purpose in trenches north of Pozieres. The counter-attack on the British in Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) was to be undertaken by the 11th R.I.R., which would assault from the west of the breach in the line.

Of these counter-attacks, that on Third Avenue (Schwarzwaldgraben) was reported to have made headway, but not to have driven through to the 157th I.R. east of the breach; that against Pozieres was for some reason delayed. The night was a wild one; the artillery-fire was so heavy that the relief of the tired I/157th by the II/157th, though ordered by von Armin, could not be carried out. The I/86th R.I.R. had retired from Courcelette, apparently through misinterpretation of an order. The Germans north of Pozieres were, moreover, uncertain of the position of the Australians. It had previously been reported to lie along the main road; but a patrol of the 2nd Musketeer Battalion near the cemetery, on going forward to discover, heard men, presumably in the north of the village, talking and digging and, on challenging, received a reply in English. According to the German official history, the thrust of the Australians through Pozieres had before midnight caused the remnants of the III/157th to fall back on the O.G. Lines, abandoning the switches from which the counter-attack was to have been launched and thereby much increasing the difficulty of preparation.

47 The bringing up of the IX Corps became known at once to the British staff through the capture of prisoners.

48 The 26th I.R. which had been previously engaged in very heavy fighting in Longueval and Delville Wood, was now organized in six companies, each consisting of two of the original companies. Two of the new companies were now allotted to the 157th, but one of these (attached to II/157) was not brought up till next day. In the prisoner's statement from which these facts are obtained the location is not stated, but as a later patrol picked up an "English" cap and shovel, it seems probable that the Australians were Traill's company of the 8th, which advanced too far and then withdrew (see p. 539).
The company of the 26th which was to attack from O.G.1, north of the Bapaume road, had arrived on the previous evening and received (according to the regimental history) the order to attack at 4 a.m., the signal being the firing of fifteen red flares. At 4 o'clock this company began to climb out of its trench in order to attack; but, as there was no sign of co-operation by the troops on its right, its commander called a halt, and reported the fact to the nearest senior officer of the 157th. Upon ascertaining that the statement was true, the latter countermanded the order to attack. Yet an effort had been made. The 157th afterwards reported that the troops had been duly lined out upon tapes laid to mark their starting position, but that the advance at 3 a.m. (sic) was met by an intense shell-fire and lively machine-gun fire, and melted away. It seems possible that it was caught in the barrage which, under the abortive plan of attack, the British and Australian artillery had laid down at 3.30 north of the village. A few Germans are said to have reached the western part of the village, but to have been driven thence to its northern edge by the Australians. After the failure a hopeless attempt was made to reorganise and attack again. This also broke down.

The German plans for recapturing Pozières had thus by the morning of July 24 already thrice failed—the early morning assaults on July 23 and 24, through the artillery or machine-gun fire of their opponents; and the intended operation on the afternoon of July 23, through the failure of their own and the success of their enemy's artillery. Far from driving back their opponents, the Germans had been continuously forced back, their staff learning at 7.10 a.m. on the 24th that Pozières up to its north-west corner was completely in the hands of the Australians, who during the night had established themselves in several nests north of the main road. Facing the Australians was still a line of the 157th Regiment extending from the extreme north-western point of the village along communication trenches to the O.G. Lines.

It has been seen that the Australian position in Pozières was exceedingly strong from the point of view of defence. The whole purpose of the Pozières operations, however, was to attack, and early on July 24th the 1st Australian Division received from General Gough through I Anzac Corps a telegram urging action:

Army commander considers it essential you should get remainder of village promptly and by determined effort.

By an order issued later in the day Gough explained his policy—to gain the "Second Line" ridge east and north of Pozières, and then drive northward along its summit past Mouquet Farm until the down-slope into the Ancre valley was reached,\textsuperscript{60} "thus cutting off Thiepval and getting observation over Courcelette and Grandcourt." The I Anzac Corps would be

\textsuperscript{60}The wording of the order (issued at 2.30 p.m., July 24), was: "Further operations of the Reserve Army will be conducted with a view to establishing ourselves at Mouquet Farm and on the high ground in X5, R35, 34, 27, 21, thus cutting off Thiepval," &c.
responsible for all operations east of and including "K" Trench—that is, for all fighting along the ridge—II Corps continuing its effort to bomb up the trenches west of "K." The general strategy of aiming at the isolation of Thiepval by driving a long sharp salient in its rear will be discussed when its effects come to be described. Gough's order stated that there were indications that, with the exception of the O.G. Lines, the stretch of country to be captured was not strongly held.

If delays occur (he added) reinforcements will certainly be brought forward, so that it is most important to act with vigour.

The 1st Australian Division was expected on that day to clear Pozieres as far as the cemetery and establish posts about half-way across the open space north-east of the village in or near the two communication trenches that traversed it, and also at the junction of the Bapaume and Courcellette roads east of the village. The division would then be facing the O.G. Lines for 1,000 yards north of the Bapaume road, and the next phase would be an attack upon that position. Artillery observers were, therefore, to establish themselves as soon as possible in positions from which they could see the wire in front of the O.G. Lines.

Birdwood appears to have asked that the II Corps (48th Division) should be directed northwards against the ridge north of Pozieres cemetery—that is, east of "K" Trench as well as west of it—while his corps attacked north-eastwards against the O.G. Lines.
The immediate operation for the 1st Division was, therefore, to secure a "jumping-off line" for the next phase by making "a determined attack." This was, it will be noted, the method which General Walker had intended to employ on the previous day when his plans had been superseded by General Gough's. In conjunction with the III Corps the 1st Australian Division was already charged with making, on the night of July 24th, the postponed frontal attack upon the portion of the O.G. Lines south of the Bapaume road—a sector 600 yards in length which had been part of the 3rd Brigade's objective in the first attack. The division being thus faced with two important operations, it was arranged to carry them out during the ensuing night, but not simultaneously, since the troops for both attacks had to use the same approaches. The assault on the O.G. Lines was to be made at 2 a.m. and the advance through the village at 3.30. For the former the 3rd Brigade was strengthened with the 5th Battalion and half the 7th, both from the 2nd Brigade, still in reserve; for the advance through Pozières the 1st Brigade still had, in addition to its own troops, the 8th Battalion, of which only two companies had yet moved through Pozières. To link the two advances, part of the 5th Field Company of engineers was, during the night, to dig the advanced strong-post at the junction of the Courcelette and Bapaume roads east of Pozières; and thence the 12th Battalion would extend itself along the main road to the O.G. Lines. To the left of the 12th, the 11th Battalion would seize the artillery dugouts and form a line through their farther end to connect with the troops making the main advance to Pozières cemetery. The northern prong of the old railway marked out the required

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43 See pp. 530 (sketch) and 544.
44 Detached from the 2nd Australian Division.
line round the north of Pozières as if by intention, and officers of the 11th Battalion were accordingly directed to dig in along it. On each flank of the whole operation, part of a British division would be attacking—the 1st British Division against Munster Alley, and the 48th up the communication trenches west of “K.”

The 24th of July was beautifully fine, and there was ample time for the preparation of the projected double attack. Having twice seen the dawn break, the front-line troops were very tired, but in high spirits and still practically untouched by the enemy barrage. About 7 o’clock on the 24th, however, the German artillery shortened its range, some batteries apparently adopting the line of the main road as the line for their barrage, while others shelled the south-west of Pozières, especially the low road-cutting through which the Chalk Pit road debouched into the main street. One battery of 5.9-inch howitzers in particular began systematically to enfilade the trench-line south of the main road, sector by sector, the salvoes coming from the direction of Courselette, and, at this stage, flying over the 3rd Brigade sector to burst in that of the 1st. The ground had already been much shattered by the British bombardment, and though the trench-walls had thus far stood without revetting, any shell bursting in the ground near by closed them together as one might close a book, or else tumbled them in, burying and half-burying the men in loose soil. Wherever this happened, the men left unhurt were next moment digging furiously to extricate their mates; and, though these were often exhumed alive even after being completely buried, their nerves naturally had been subjected to a most violent shock. As the whine of the salvoes could be heard and the shells actually seen for a few seconds

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[24th July, 1916]
before the explosion, the speculation as to where each would fall caused an intense nerve-strain, especially in those who had once been buried. Except at the south-west end, on which field-guns and 4.2-inch guns were also used, and on the Chalk Pit road, which was drenched with tear-shell, the bombardment was not intense; but it continued hour after hour from morning until late in the afternoon, easing for three hours at midday but afterwards gradually extending to the old line of the 11th in Pozières copse, which was still occupied by Captain Medcalf and some of the supports. The troops who on the previous night had pushed to the north of the village escaped heavy bombardment, most of the shells falling behind them. The line near Gibraltar suffered more severely, and was in a bad way, only half the rations having come through. Major Rowlands\(^6\) of the 2nd reported "eight men with shell-shock, praying to be paraded before the doctor."\(^6\) The troops there held on; but where the front bent back to the Bapaume road Captain Gilder's\(^5\) company suffered such casualties that it was withdrawn, Gilder himself being badly shell-shocked. Next to it, in the trenches of the 4th Battalion nearly everyone has been buried at least once and we are kept busy digging ourselves out of the blown-down trench.\(^3\) Colonel Mackay asked his company commanders to consider whether casualties might not be lessened by advancing across the road, but the opinion was that it was safer to stay where they were. Of the 3rd Battalion sector, next on the right, Captain Harris, its commander, afterwards wrote:

Most of the firing was enfilade, and as the line ... ran parallel and close to the main road, our position was accurately marked down. As fast as one portion of the trench was cleared another was blown in. There were no dugouts in which men on post could take shelter, and the only thing to do was to grin and bear it. The shells, which were dropping almost perpendicularly, could be clearly seen in the last 40 feet of their descent, and the whole trench was methodically dealt with. The bombardment lasted all day, and during its worst period four shells a minute were falling in or near the company's sector. ... The wounded were so many that the stretcher-bearers, who were working like heroes, could not

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\(^5\) Captain Traill, however, was seriously wounded by a shell
\(^5\) The 2nd Battalion in "K" Trench was also under fire of some of its own heavy artillery, whose shells fell short. Its men were cheered, however, to observe that the German garrison in the same trench north of them was for a time heavily shelled by the German artillery.
\(^5\) Diary of Sgt. de Vine
get them away. The men who were not wounded were kept busy digging out men who were buried alive by the explosions caving in the trench sides. I had occasion to bless my "tin hat," for in our portion of the trench the parapet was composed of the debris of a ruined house—and a shell pushed over a barrow-load of bricks on to my head with no other ill effect but some bruises on the shoulders. The Colonel (Owen Howell-Price) was up and down the line all day, setting a magnificent example. I had been dazed by a series of explosions too close to be pleasant and at 7 p.m. the Colonel sent me down to Battalion headquarters.

The extreme difficulty of clearing the wounded was, in that part, met by the resource of a middle-aged private named Jenkins—a soldier who had been constantly in "hot water" when out of the line.

During the heaviest of the bombardment this man constituted himself the attendant of those wounded men who could not be removed. Under heavy shell-fire he raised a shelter for them where there was a little more protection than in the trench, and took them over one by one across the open. He looked after them with the utmost tenderness, expended the last drop of water in his bottle to alleviate their thirst, and, when a small quantity of fresh water was brought up, refused a drink himself in order that his patients might have more. He cheered them up by telling them that the stretcher-bearers would soon be along... and I firmly believe kept several of them alive by his efforts. Every single one of these wounded men was eventually taken out and recovered; but at the end of the day he himself, when taking along a dixie of tea to the sufferers, was blown to pieces by a shell.

In the 1st Brigade sector the barrage fell most heavily and regularly upon the sunken end of the Chalk Pit road (sometimes known as Dead Man’s Road). On its shattered banks the corpses both of Australians and of the British who had preceded them lay sprinkled over with the dust of shell explosions, which painted roadside, tree-stumps, and foliage with one dry dun self-colour. So severe were the losses of parties bringing up water and rations along this track that Colonel Stevens of the 2nd Battalion recommended its entire avoidance. Near by, in the miserable niche that served as headquarters for that brigade, the eyes of officers and clerks smarted and streamed from the effect of tear-gas. Standing at

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63 After his nerves had been somewhat refreshed by a sleep at battalion headquarters (a German dugout in Contalmaison Valley), Captain Harris was climbing the dugout stair to return to the front when an incident occurred which (he states) "terminated my further interest in proceedings. When I arrived at the top of the dugout I was met by the explosion of a 'whizz-bang' (77-mm shell) which just hit the top of the parapet, killed a man who had just stepped out of the dugout in front of me, and knocked me down to the bottom of the steps with the dead man on top of me.


65 The track, however, continued to be used.
the narrow dugout entrance, Major Biddle, liaison officer for the artillery, was wounded—at exactly the same spot Captain Herbertson, liaison officer for the engineers, had been killed on the night of July 22nd. Runner after runner was killed in the dangerous trench and on the road outside it.

The plumes of dust and shell-smoke spurting intermittently from among the trees and ruins of Pozières were visible all day in that portion of the battle area, and reports of the shelling were received not only from the troops on the spot, but from artillery observers of British divisions on the flanks. An aeroplane was sent up in the morning to endeavour to counter the bombardment by directing the fire of some 12-inch howitzers upon the enemy guns then shelling the village. At 6.20 p.m., however, the 34th Divisional Artillery (III Corps), whose own front was described as having been quiet all day, reported the shelling of Pozières, adding:

Our artillery is not replying and considerable damage is being done to trenches and rather severe casualties to men.

The Anzac Corps accordingly asked the II Corps (whose staff had that day relieved that of the X Corps on the left of I Anzac) to "turn on" batteries to counter the fire. About that time the shelling eased. The trench-line, which had been dug during the previous day—a good seven or eight feet deep along the south of the road—had been so wrecked that the reserve companies of the 4th, going forward to relieve its front companies, "got lost in the ruins of the village, finding it quite impossible to recognise any semblance of our trench."

The reason for this bombardment is given in the German records. The failure of the three previous counter-attacks on Pozières was attributed by the German staff to inadequate preparation by their artillery, whose bombardments had so far left their opponents unaffected and "completely in possession of their defensive strength." The commander of the 117th Division, therefore, at 8.25 this morning (July 24) ordered the divisional heavy artillery to bombard the whole of Pozières except its north-west corner. At 9 o'clock the army commander, who was still determined that the village must be recaptured, sent him an order pointing out the importance of its possession and the necessity of establishing a barrier to any British

66 The II Corps at 7 p.m., upon an order from Reserve Army, fired twelve rounds from 15-inch howitzers into Courcellette in retaliation for the shelling of Pozières.
67 Diary of Sgt. de Vine.
advance north of it. The Australian advance was threatening the western flank of the 11th R.I.R. The front was accordingly reorganised, the sector of the 117th Division being shortened by the relief of the northern battalion of its 22nd R.I.R. from the line near Thiepval. The two companies thus relieved were placed in two switch trenches behind the threatened flank. The whole strength of the 117th had now been distributed in a series of positions, one behind the other, with a view to blocking any British advance northwards along the Second Line ridge. But its 157th Regiment was in desperate condition:

No communication with the artillery. The posts crumbled in through enemy artillery-fire; day and night no rest, no sleep, supply system defective; having no deep dugouts, absolutely unprotected against fire from enemy artillery, trench mortars, and aircraft. Only after increasing delays could help be brought those who were wounded or buried.

The only troops with which the division could have organised a new counter-attack were the 1/86th R.I.R., which had been ordered back to Courcelette and placed, now apparently without restriction, adjacent to the 48th British Division.

According to one account, the sectors of the two other regiments of the 117th Division (11th R.I.R. and 157th I.R.) were also narrowed. In front of the 48th British Division the 11th R.I.R. was distributed as far back as Mouquet Farm, three-quarters of a mile to the north, with a company of the 22nd R.I.R. half-a-mile farther in rear, holding a knot of trenches known as the "Feste Zollern". Further east the tired 1/157 and III/157 still held the front line opposing the right of the 48th Division and the Australians; but the two companies of the 22nd R.I.R. from the front line near Thiepval were now stationed in Ganter Weg ("Fourth Avenue") and Gierich Weg ("Fifth Avenue") and "Park Lane"), two communication trenches lying between the front and Mouquet Farm. One company of the II/157 had been sent forward to strengthen the III/157; the rest of the II/157, with part of the 22nd R.I.R., lay in support trenches north and north-east of Pozières (the main support position was the O.G. Lines).
under the 157th Regiment, but had suffered loss from artillery-fire. Although the German army commander rightly apprehended that Thiepval was threatened, and therefore laid importance upon the recapture of Pozières, he did not wish to risk a repetition of previous failures. Strong and ample bombardment and fresh troops were obviously necessary. Given these, it was thought that, with careful organisation, the village could be retaken with comparatively little loss and without undue expenditure of ammunition.

In these circumstances von Below decided to await the arrival of the IX Reserve Corps, which that day would take over this part of the line from the IV Corps, and to entrust to its commander, General von Boehn, the responsibility for future operations against Pozières. Von Boehn's divisions (consisting of troops from Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and the Hanseatic towns) were already moving up, the 18th Reserve Division behind the 7th, and the 17th Reserve Division more to the east, behind the 8th. At midday on July 24 he took over command of all troops detailed for the recapture of Pozières, including those of the 117th and 7th Divisions, and delegated the task of recapturing Pozières to Major-General Wellmann of the 18th Reserve Division, which was about to take over the front of the 7th. Any infantry of the 117th Division north-east of Pozières was to be relieved; and for the relief of the worn-out 27th in the O.G. Lines General Wellmann chose the 86th R.I.R., which, with the two battalions still under its control, would be responsible for the main counter-attack. Its other battalion (though under the 157th Regimental staff) would also attack from the sector of the 157th, north of Pozières, which was added to Wellmann's command. The artillery of the 117th Division was retained to assist in supporting the counter-attack, which would not be delivered until 4.30 p.m. on July 25. This hour was chosen because previous attacks made at dawn had failed.

This regiment was from the Danish border, one of its home-towns being Angeln, one of the birthplaces of the "English" race. It was commanded by Lieut.-Col. Burmester.