CHAPTER VI
THE ADVANCED GUARDS

Bapaume had been occupied practically without a struggle, although, in the official communiqué, the suppression of a few snipers was reported as "stiff fighting," an exaggeration which originated in the reports of the 5th Australian Division. The troops who seized the place were well aware that the published reports made too much of the fight. Nevertheless, the occupation of Bapaume aroused among them, as throughout the whole army, a glow of elation whose warmth it is difficult to recapture in a written account. During half of 1916, while the British Army had been waging the most terrible struggle in its history, this town had been the goal. In the first intention merely the point at which the "breaking-through" to be achieved in the first few days would be completed, it had, like Achi Baba in Gallipoli, gradually come to be looked upon as a goal in itself. Staffs of corps and even of armies had tended to become engrossed in efforts to gain the few acres of mud and débris which led up to it; and tens of thousands of the flower of the British nation devoted the last weeks of their lives to an all-absorbing endeavour "to reach Bapaume."

Consequently, when the news of its fall began to spread—even while the 30th Battalion on the morning of March 17th was still exchanging shots with the distant enemy in the green pastures beyond the town, and a persistent machine-gun in a small copse north of it was holding up the advance of the 6th Brigade—staff officers, war correspondents, and official photographers began to stream to the place. On March 18th the tide of visitors flowed so strongly as to arouse caustic comment from the working parties of Australian pioneers toiling to bridge or fill-in gaps blown by the Germans in the Albert-Bapaume road.

1 The division reported: "We entered Bapaume at 7.30 a.m. after a fight at the Old Factory. We now have a company in Bapaume and are close on heels of enemy, fighting all the way." No exaggeration was intended, but the desire of G.H.Q. to emphasise the notion of the German defeat caused the report to be included in the communiqué. Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary remarks: "The enemy communiqués contain lies concerning our withdrawal."
By many of these sightseers the day will probably never be forgotten. All came by car along the only road possible, the old Roman highway from Amiens to Bapaume, past the railway siding and huts newly planted on the desert upland that had once been Pozières, down the long muddy slope to the tangled wreckage of Le Sars (now fast disappearing to fill in holes in the road), past the Butte of Warlencourt, and across the bottom of the valley where the Germans had blown a huge crater in the roadway. Ever since the enemy's withdrawal on March 11th from Grévillers, the 2nd Pioneer Battalion, engineers, and working parties of infantry had been making a semicircular by-track on the rim of this crater—the hole being too deep for immediate filling-in—and also digging a détournature of a dry ford across the Thames Ditch where the culvert at Le Coupe Gueule had been blown up. Other craters higher up the road were being similarly dealt with, and light Decauville lines extended—one of them to meet the old German railway beside the Bapaume road. The road was already fit for light traffic, and the visitors sped up the eastern side of the valley, within sight of battered Le Barque and Thilloy lightly veiled in half-shredded trees, until shell-holes became rarer, the slope greener, and the gables of Bapaume came in view on the summit to the right, nested behind dark pines and green ramparts, with the smoke of burning houses tumbling eastward in dense grey and white columns. Near the old German pioneer park, half-a-mile short of the northern outskirts, the tourists left their cars and walked across the grass to the town. Although the houses had been systematically destroyed, their sides in many instances blown out, and shavings and tar spilled about the rooms and on the furniture to encourage the conflagration, some refused to burn. The arcaded and balconied town hall and many buildings around the main square were practically intact, and for the first time the Australian troops and many of their visitors found themselves assisting in a scene of the type
made familiar by old battle-painters. This was war as a man
had read of and pictured it in the days before enlistment—
before his boyhood’s notions had given way to an impression
of warfare as a mere distortion of city life, at its zenith of
discomfort in the trenches. The Germans were almost equally
exhilarated by the change. According to an officer of their
artillery, then withdrawing, the night of March 17th

reminded one of pictures of the war in Russia. Everywhere the last
explosive charges were blowing up. All around the villages were
burning. . . . For a few days the soldier on the Western Front
participated in a miniature reproduction of the war of movement.

On the British side the elation increased when troops and
visitors passed into the green countryside beyond Bapaume.
It is true that from all villages within sight and from many
beyond the horizon long plumes of smoke were trailing; that
the trees along at least one side of every road—and, where
time had permitted, along both sides—had been felled, the
village houses blown down, and mines exploded to form huge
craters at important crossways. The old inhabitants might
not have recognised the landscape. But its life was just
stirring under the first breath of the wonderful European
spring, and to troops coming straight from the Somme battle-
field it had a freshness and beauty such as few had imbibed
from any similar scene.

Motoring along between green banks and trees had a delightfully
fresh feeling (noted an Australian visitor on March 19). We passed
groups of our men in the remains of German dugouts by the roadside
—every dugout blown down and the woodwork apparently taken away.
. . . We skirted round a crater and passed Favreuil on the left
and found ourselves blocked by a crater at the entrance of the tiny
village of Beugnatre. It was the first time I realised how complete
the German demolition had been. He was blowing down every single
house as he left the villages—the side walls were blown out of them
and the roofs lay flat on the ground. Beugnatre had been utterly
destroyed. He is doing it in order to refuse us billets, and in order,
perhaps, to make the French people tired of the war. It is a sight
that makes you monstrously angry—this fat-headed, wrong-headed race
with its fixed idea that the smallest military need justifies the greatest
civil destruction. If I'm not wrong though, he's very mistaken in the
French people.

The Australians entered this new phase of the war in
bounding spirits. The misery of the winter was forgotten.
They were now in that land of mystery which had been the

other side of the enemy's line. To peer at the evidences of German occupation, dugouts, billets, beer-gardens, observation posts, the old positions of batteries and dumps—was a pastime of fascinating interest. It is true that practically everything of military use had been cleared away. The lower commanders, on being asked to furnish for G.H.Q. any evidence that the Germans had been forced prematurely to abandon the area, could find nothing of importance. Here a heap of trench-mortar ammunition had been left, there some helmets, greatcoats, rifles, a cart belonging to a machine-gun unit. Brigadier-General Wisdom frankly replied:

The enemy has systematically removed everything of value, such as rails of light railways, etc., and the amount of stores abandoned in the advanced guard area is practically nil.

"They had cleared everything," wrote an Australian journalist, "as clean as a dog licks a plate." Nevertheless, it was of poignant interest to compare the condition of the roads with that of the routes behind the British front, to inspect the bivouacs and "cubby-houses" in the grassy moat of the Citadel, furnished with glass windows, chairs, tables, and even curtains, from the town. Near the Cambrai road one palatial dugout had been left intact—a complete warren with two or three entrances and several chambers "with pink, white, and silk curtains drooped and lining the walls, a plush settee, and a blue plush table-cloth—all cut out of curtains from some French house."

The Germans, unlike the British, used the French cemeteries for the burial of their dead; in that north of Bapaume was a newly-sprung crop of their graves, and the invaders had also foolishly raised there a solid stone monument to the dead of a well-known German corps. Much bitterness was aroused among the French by the planting of these monuments in their graveyards, and soldiers as rough-hewn as the Australians, looking on the havoc wrought by the enemy in his

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1 The roads were of course infinitely better than those on the old battlefield, immediately in rear of the British. It was noted, however, that at a few points (e.g., in Beugnâtre and near supply dépôts) they seemed to have given way, and it was afterwards ascertained that during the retreat much congestion had occurred near Queant.
2 The British, being in a friendly country, could not furnish their bivouacs from comparatively intact towns.
3 Extract from an Australian's diary
The period of open warfare that occurred after the fall of Bapaume resembled that which followed the Battle of the Marne in this respect—that it was limited by the existence of a strong defensive line at a distance of from seven to twenty-seven miles beyond the position held by the Allies on March 17th. After the R.I.I line was passed, few defences except those around villages would be met until that immensely strong position was reached. But there the resemblance ended. The enemy's withdrawal was deliberate, not the immediate result of a great defeat; and, although there was evidence that the Hindenburg Line was not quite complete, it was already being occupied by the main body of Prince Rupprecht's army without haste or pressure, and there was no hope of rushing the enemy out of it. The task was merely to drive back, by methods of open warfare, the rearguards left by the enemy in the belt of country west of that line. The southern flank of the Third Army and most of the Fifth had only six to eight miles of open country in front of them. The Fourth Army and the French had considerably more. But this green landscape was in reality only a wide No-Man's Land, and Haig, believing that the retreat merely prefaces a violent counter-thrust, guided his policy by two objects—first, to permit no interruption of his impending Arras–Vimy offensive, but rather to concentrate all possible strength in it; second, to give the Germans no opening for a successful counter-stroke, and to have ample reserves in hand to meet one if

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*The propaganda which spread tales of German brutality—true and untrue—was doubtless responsible for this. Although the cases are not similar, it should in fairness be stated that the Germans respected the memorials of their opponents, at any rate so far as Australian experience went. The numerous Australian monuments at Pozieres, when captured by the Germans in 1918, were in no way damaged, except by the marks of battle. (Several are now in the Australian War Memorial.) Moreover, Australians who died behind the German lines were buried among the German dead; their graves were found to have been marked by precisely similar crosses and to have been tended as carefully as those of the Germans.

†According to the British Official History (Military Operations, Vol. I, p. 322), there is no evidence that any entrenchments had been prepared by the Germans along the Aisne until their armies began to fall back. The British tactics in following the retreat were based on the assumption that there did exist a chance of forcing the enemy out of the Aisne positions.
attempted. For both these ends as many divisions as possible were to be withdrawn from the line, and the armies following the enemy, though directed to "maintain pressure" on him "and harass his rear-guards," were to do so "with the minimum number of troops required." They were to seize all local opportunities of causing the enemy loss, but Haig suggested that this should be achieved "especially by artillery fire." Attacks in force, which would "be met by rear-guards fully prepared," were not likely to be worth while and, if they became necessary, must be "well prepared and supported by artillery." The point chiefly emphasised was that the whole British line should go forward cautiously, securing our positions firmly as we advance and avoiding the committal of large forces in attacks before our communications are established or adequate preparations for assault have been made.

Subject to this cautious policy, the left of the Fifth Army would assist the Arras thrust. Its northern flank must therefore, as soon as possible, reach the Hindenburg Line, in order to strike that line from the south while the Third Army attacked from the west. In preparation for this stroke Gough was to advance his artillery to "the general line Beugny-Mory-Hamelincourt," within range of the sector to be attacked. If, however, it became clear that the artillery could better assist from some other army's front, 20 of the 35 siege batteries allotted to him would be moved elsewhere. It was left to Gough to keep G.H.Q. informed as to his plan for employing this artillery and particularly as to the date on which it would be ready to begin bombarding the Hindenburg Line. The Fourth Army had no such task. Its left would be hampered by lack of roads, its right by the crossing of the Somme. It was merely to cover the flanks of the Fifth and French Armies as they advanced.
These orders obviously entailed that particular care should be taken to perfect communications across the morass of the old Somme battlefield before the armies began to advance beyond it: the danger of counter-attack would be most serious if they hurried on after the enemy with this wilderness behind them preventing the supply of food, guns, and ammunition. The Fourth Army was also faced with the task of crossing the Somme River south of Péronne, and with the risk that the enemy might wait until part of the troops had crossed and then attack before the remainder could assist. Accordingly it was ordered that for the present the main body of the Fourth and Fifth Armies should advance no farther than the line Ablainzevelle–Bapaume–Péronne–River Somme, where, not far beyond the edge of the old battlefield, they would fortify themselves under cover of their artillery while the roads were being remade across the slough behind them and round the craters everywhere blown by the Germans, and while railways were laid.

It will be seen that, while the advance of the Fourth Army was likely to be slow, the left of the Fifth Army must go forward as quickly as was compatible with Haig's injunctions as to caution. Gough accordingly decided to follow the enemy across the open country with small columns of horse, guns, and foot, each division in the line furnishing one column which would act as its advanced guard, while the main body held the defensive position ordained by Haig. The Fourth Army commander, General Rawlinson, on the other hand, decided to maintain touch with the enemy by means of his cavalry alone; his infantry would be held back while the roads were repaired and the Somme cautiously crossed.

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8 He had already on March 15 warned his corps commanders of this decision (see p. 113).
9 It is interesting, in view of General Monash's advance over the same country in 1918, to note that Rawlinson was instructed by Haig to "bear especially in mind the advantages of gaining possession of Mt St. Quentin." This height, overlooking Péronne, was, however, abandoned by the Germans without resistance.
The Fifth Army, to assist it in keeping touch with the enemy on the Arras flank, was given the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade; the Fourth Army had to rely upon its "corps" mounted troops—a regiment of cavalry and two companies of cyclists in each army corps. The 5th Australian Division, which formed the right of the Fifth Army, was warned of this decision, so that it would be prepared for a weaker advance by the XIV Corps on its flank.

While these plans were filtering through to the front in a series of orders and instructions issued between March 16th and 18th, the British and the French farther south began to flood through the positions now abandoned to them by the withdrawal of the enemy on March 17th. At 10 o'clock that morning General Gough set the direction for his army's advance—north-east, "to cut off the Germans in front of the Third Army"—and fixed the boundaries for each of its three corps. Headquarters of I Anzac had at 8.40 a.m. laid down the objective to be first reached by its troops—the villages lying immediately beyond the R.II line, from which the troops would look out over the Bapaume plateau. From this line patrols were to be sent to other villages lying a mile or more beyond. For patrolling, a squadron of the corps cavalry (13th Light Horse Regiment) was allotted to each division. The objective was early attained, and all day, in the bright cold sunlight bathing the green country, the Australian brigades, each employing only a few extended companies in its front line, endeavoured to reach the places to be attained by the patrols. But north of Bapaume the line

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10 From left to right—V corps, II Corps, I Anzac II Corps was withdrawn on March 20.
11 From left to right—Biefvillers, Avesnes-les-Bapaume, Bapaume, Riencourt
12 Sapignies, Favreuil, Beugnatre, Frémicourt, Haplincourt.
13 Captain Scott of the 19th Battalion, for example, had only one company (Captain Sadler's) holding the front of the 5th Brigade.
of the 2nd Australian Division was held up by machine-guns chattering from the village of Sapignies and from two copses farther south, and its centre and left could not quite reach the Arras road. Across the country ahead straggled a russet line of wire-entanglement—that of the "Barbarossa" (R.II.a) Line—and the 8th Brigade (5th Division), which had attained its objective beyond Bapaume, was faced by some force firing from behind this obstacle. South of Bapaume Brigadier-General Elliott's 15th Brigade met fire of small arms from two neighbouring villages, Bancourt and Riencourt, and "tired" shells, whose wail could be long heard approaching, fell about the Péronne road, which was reached about 8 o'clock. The opposition evidently came from small parties, and far ahead, in the meadows beyond Bancourt, could be seen a patrol of German cavalry. "Uhlans!", exclaimed the elated Victorians. Aeroplanes were constantly in the sky, the British machines having evidently been sent out to ascertain the extent of the German retreat. But the Germans had on this day concentrated a sufficient air-force to oppose them, and the infantry saw no less than four British machines sent to ground in the area of the I Anzac Corps. This sight was repeated on March 25th, the infantry looking on with keen sympathy, since it was understood that the British air force was holding back its new machines for the coming offensive, and was deliberately fighting the Germans with other models, "easy meat" for the little red scouts of Richthofen's squadron.

At noon on the 17th Generals Hobbs of the 5th and Smyth of the 2nd Australian Divisions were warned that the method of advance would probably be to throw forward a small column from each division.

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14 It was the rule to take up a line beyond towns and villages, since they served as easy marks for artillery.
15 Actually it was a detachment of the 6th Curassier Regt.
16 This, at least, was the statement made to some A I F. officers by Lieutenant C. W Short of the 3rd Squadron, R F C., who warmly defended the supposed policy of the British air staff. Floyd Gibbons, in *The Red Knight of Germany*, says that the absence of more efficient machines was due to the new models not being ready. The British Official History (*The War in the Air, Vol. III*) indicates that the new models were coming forward, but their pilots had not yet acquired the experience necessary to put the new aeroplanes to their best use. Lieutenant Short's statement undoubtedly represented the general belief in the R F C. A few days later, when over the lines in one of the old machines, this very gallant officer was killed.
and the two columns were accordingly organised during that afternoon and evening. Each was commanded by a brigadier and comprised the whole, or part of, his brigade. The leaders chosen were two specially marked in their respective divisions for driving force—Gellibrand of the 6th Brigade and Elliott of the 15th. Their columns were similarly composed, except that, whereas General Smyth (2nd Division), having his 7th Brigade in reserve, was able to allot to Gellibrand the whole of 6th Brigade, General Hobbs (5th Division), with all three brigades in line, could at first give Elliott only two battalions of the 15th Brigade and half its engineer and machine-gun companies. Each column was given some light horse and a battery of field artillery. Their composition was thus as follows:

**Left (2nd Division)**
- Brigadier-General J. Gellibrand.
- 6th Aust. Inf. Brigade
- Troop of 13th Light Horse
- 12th Battery, A.F.A.
- Half of 6th Field Company
- 6th Machine Gun Company
- One bearer subdivision, 5th Field Ambulance

**Right (5th Division)**
- Brigadier-General H. E. Elliott.
- Half of 15th Inf. Bde. (59th and 60th Bns.)
- Squadron of 13th Light Horse
- 54th Battery, A.F.A.
- Half of 14th Field Company
- Half of 15th Machine Gun Company
- One third (one tent subdivision, one bearer subdivision) of 15th Field Ambulance
- Half brigade section of Divnl Ammunition Column

Gough had strongly impressed on his corps commanders that the corps cavalry and cyclists must be used for their "legitimate functions," and that troops must reconcile themselves to advancing with their flanks in the air. Birdwood's order accordingly laid down that each column must be responsible for guarding its own flanks, but must be in signal communication with the columns right and left of it. They were to "act promptly and boldly against detached bodies of the enemy."

It was obvious that, in spite of their name, the columns would be carrying out a task different from that ordinarily undertaken by advanced guards, inasmuch as the main body would not be advancing close behind them. On the contrary,

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17 The remainder of the 15th Brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart of the 57th Battalion, was withdrawn from the line and, under the name of "Stewart's Force," acted as reserve for the 5th Division.
it would be stationary and the columns, as they drew away from it and approached the formidable forces in the Hindenburg Line, would incur the risk of suffering strong blows without having assistance at hand. It is true that their artillery was to be increased as the enemy's resistance grew stronger, but if they rushed too far ahead there was danger, and little to be gained from it, since they were only operating against the enemy's rear-guard. Writing, therefore, on March 18th, General White, who throughout this phase was the constant adviser of the divisional commanders, pointed out to them the danger, and suggested that it should be overcome by setting their advanced guard commanders to attain each day a definite line, not too far advanced to be easily reached with ammunition and food, and with supporting troops if required.  

In spite of these limitations, the operations of the three weeks which followed were those of open warfare, and are of especial interest because, with the exception of certain fleeting phases in Gallipoli and in the final advance in 1918, they were the only operations of that nature experienced by the infantry of the A.I.F. Each of the brigadiers chosen was elated with the opportunity of exercising this interesting semi-independent command. Each was an experienced soldier: Gellibrand, formerly a British regular, trained at the Staff College, and with a record of service in South Africa, had recently attracted attention by his energy in pressing on the retiring Germans. Elliott, a Victorian solicitor and a keen military student, had also served in South Africa, where, though a junior, he received on one occasion special commendation from Lord Kitchener. Both he and Gellibrand possessed an exceptionally strong hold upon their subordinates—Gellibrand more particularly on his officers, Elliott on his men. Both were men of marked character and courage, but each required holding. While Gellibrand could be trusted to play hard and in the full spirit of "the game," his decisions were apt to be on unexpected lines. As for Elliott, both Birdwood and White knew that the opportunity of at last employing his force according to the teachings of military

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18 He also warned the 2nd Division that the 5th would probably have to hold back its right owing to the slower pace of the Fourth Army's advance.

19 Kitchener telegraphed: "Please tell Lieut. Elliott that I am very pleased with his conduct and that of his men in driving off Conroy and saving horses."
history would raise him to the seventh heaven of delight, but there lurked a fear that he might be so intent upon delivering his own tactical strokes that the objects of higher commanders, or the requirements of the forces on his flanks, might be disregarded.

The country in which the columns were to operate sloped gently down towards the enemy. By March 17th the whole of Gough’s line had climbed on to the watershed on whose summit Bapaume lay, and all the divisions of the Fifth Army now looked out over open farm-lands dipping north-eastwards to several head-streams of the River Scheldt—from west to east, the small Rivers Cojeul, Sensée, Hirondelle, and Agache. To these streams numerous smaller sources trickled their waters, wearing gentle valleys nearly all leading north-east. There were few woods or scattered farmhouses, the farmers in this part of France living almost entirely in the villages. Except the orchards and back gardens of these hamlets, the fields were not hedged or fenced, and the only feature on the open country was an occasional copse of low scrub and here and there a red-brick sugar factory or distillery. For the I Anzac Corps the most important roads were one leading from Bapaume north-eastward through Beugnâtre to Vaulx-Vraucourt and other villages, and the Roman road which ran like a ruled line from Bapaume eastward through Frémicourt, Beugny, and Boursies to Cambrai. Along the former Gellibrand’s column would advance, along the latter Elliott’s. In front of Gellibrand, after Beugnâtre was passed, nearly all the villages lay hidden in valleys; in front of Elliott nearly all stood out upon higher ground. Along the right flank of Elliott’s advance would lie a valley—that of the Grand Ravin—running due east past Hermies (eight miles from Bapaume) and thence on to join the Scheldt a few miles southward of Cambrai. Cambrai itself—the original objective for the Arras offensive—lay hidden in the Scheldt valley, fifteen miles east of the I Anzac sector; but Bourlon hill, a few miles short of it, covered with woods like the wool on a negro’s pate, could be seen from any high point on the Anzac front.

Into this country the advanced guards started at once. Elliott’s assembled on the night of the 17th at “Factory

\[\text{The large trees had mostly been felled by the Germans, much of the timber had probably been used on the Somme.}\]
THE AREA FROM BAPAUME TO THE HINDEBURG LINE.

This shows the boundaries and sphere of operations of the two advanced guards of the I Anzac Corps when following the German withdrawal in March 1917.
Corner," north of Flers, and late in the night commenced to cross the old winter front lines by the road past Luisenhof Farm to Ligny-Thilloy. On reaching the Bapaume-Péronne road at the crest of the ridge, south of Bapaume, the 59th Battalion, under Colonel Layh, forming the vanguard, extended into line, gradually opening out with its scouts in front and Major McIntyre’s squadron of the 13th Light Horse farther ahead as a screen. About day-break on March 18th it passed through the outposts near Bancourt and moved forward with its left company north of the Cambrai road. The transport and guns had been unable to keep pace with the column, and during the morning Major Wieck, Elliott’s brigade-major, found them hopelessly bogged near Luisenhof Farm. An effort to drag them through by doubling the teams merely sank the waggons deeper, and Wieck therefore now sent them back through Bazentin and Martinpuich to come forward again along the Bapaume road. To supply Elliott’s immediate need for artillery, General Hobbs sent him, instead of the bogged guns, a battery which happened to be close to Bapaume. The battery originally allotted, the 54th, was then ordered to move, when it could, with the rest of the 5th Divisional Artillery—13th, 14th, and (attached) 2nd Brigades—by the road from Gueudecourt to Beaulencourt; it eventually joined Elliott on the 21st, on which day the last field-guns of the division were still being hauled through the morass. Elliott’s headquarters on the night of March 18th went without its rations, and no battery was available for him that day; otherwise his advance was not impeded by this miscarriage.

The leading battalion of the column, the 59th, had been bivouacking in Flers when its commander informed his company commanders, to their great surprise, that he expected them to be seven miles in advance by the following evening.

Captain K. G. McDonald, who had to straighten the line, states that it consisted of half-platoons in column at 100 yards’ intervals. The left company gave the direction.

The 4th Battery, part of the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade, which had already taken up positions between Thilloy and the Bapaume road.

The 55th Battery joined Elliott on March 10, and the 54th next day. The 3rd Field Artillery Brigade crossed the old battlefield early by carefully picking a route across country between the shell-holes

Elliott’s column, like the rest of the 5th Division, had to avoid the use of the Albert—Bapaume road except in extreme emergency. The Luisenhof Farm road, which, through faulty reconnaissance, was first tried, proved impossible, and the Flers—Gueudecourt—Beaulencourt road was eventually used. It was presently discovered that the old foundations of the road remained even in the worst places, but had been covered deeply with mud. When once this mud was removed and the shell-holes had been temporarily bridged or filled in with bricks from the shattered villages, the road would carry both guns and horse-transport.

The railhead for the supplies of the 5th Division was still at the “Quarry” near Longueval. From there motor lorries carried the rations to an advanced
The plateau and its many villages were now in view, and, almost immediately after the advance began, the light horse, whose small patrols were cantering about the country with the intention of attracting fire and so locating the enemy, were shot at. Apparently by some twenty rifles, from Frémicourt, the first village along the Bapaume–Cambrai road. Elliott, who had with him certain of the officers and men of his own and other Victorian militia units, had trained his troops carefully for this class of warfare, impressing on them the advisability of enveloping the enemy’s flanks. Before the advance he had explained to Colonel Layh and Major McIntyre (both officers of the old militia) his intention that patrols should feel for the gaps between the enemy’s detachments and, by penetrating, either cut them off or force them to retire. The light horse patrols, however, when they attempted to close around Frémicourt, were met by the fire of rifles and a machine-gun firing from a railway station out in the fields between that town and Beugny (the second village along the Cambrai road).

The line of the infantry was meanwhile approaching; but on this first day of open warfare all troops felt uncomfortable when crossing country in face of even a handful of the enemy. The line tended to advance jerkily, with long intervals under cover, and also to swing round towards any point from which fire came. Thus, all three front-line companies of the 59th drew in towards the village. Meanwhile, however, the intelligence officer of the brigade, Lieutenant Salmon, who was acting as Elliott’s liaison officer with the light horse scouts,

dump at Bernafay Wood. A brigade pack-train was organised from the officers' horses and from the pack-horse establishment of each brigade, and during the early days of the German withdrawal both supplies and ammunition for the field-guns were sent on pack animals across the old battlefield as well as to the troops who were following the enemy. One day's reserve of supplies for the advanced guard was immediately dumped at Bapaume, and a second day's reserve at Frémicourt, where an advanced dump of shells for Elliott's artillery was also formed. Thus, although for daily rations from the Quarry to the troops six handleings were necessary, and the distribution by the pack-train in the country east of Bapaume was sometimes irregular, the troops going short once or twice, two days' supply was from the first available in case of emergency over and above the daily ration from the rear.

By March 21 the Gueudecourt–Beaulencourt road was fit for horse-waggons, and by the 28th the divisional Decauville railway from Ginchy (worked mainly by two companies of the 5th Pioneer Battalion) had been pushed through to Beaulencourt. The brigade ammunition dumps were at once transported by this means to the other side of the old battlefield. This and other measures eased the strain upon the pack-train, whose animals had been showing the effects of constant work, night and day.

Captain R. A. Salmon, M.C.; 57th Bn. Bank clerk, of Ballarat, Vic., b Ballarat East, 30 Jan., 1892. (Major R. G. Legge, Elliott's staff-captain, was also with the light horse patrols.)
left them to join the first infantry patrol that came along, and with it entered and searched Frémicourt, finding no trace of the enemy. Near the farther end of the town, however, a machine-gun was heard very close. Salmon's party raced at full speed towards the sound, but, although keenly searched for, the Germans escaped without being seen. A larger party of the 59th, under Lieutenant Robb, then came up, and, the two groups joining forces, charged towards the railway building in the fields before Beugny from which fire was now coming. The fire ceased, but on reaching the crest of a rise the Australians found their way barred by the wire of the R.III line, behind which stood a number of Germans. These jumped into the trench and opened fire. The advance was thus stopped at the crest, and Salmon went off to report the position to his general. Meanwhile, at 7.30, patrols of the light horse working round Frémicourt wounded a German and captured two who were making a belated attempt to escape. The main line of the infantry, moving on both sides of the village, soon came up.

The drawing in of the 59th towards Frémicourt necessitated some reorganisation, after which the advance continued. The left was still held up in front of Beugny by rifles and a single machine-gun, and the right centre by similar fire from near the bleak buildings of Delsaux Farm, a large solitary homestead half-a-mile south of that place. In both cases the fire obviously came from the strongly wired R.III line. The wire made encirclement by mounted troops impossible, and the advance was stopped. Colonel Layh therefore brought up his reserve company on his right, and at 3.45, having been reinforced by a company from the main guard (60th Battalion), deployed and commenced to envelop Delsaux Farm.

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27 "We started off (says Salmon) in successive waves, but got tired of that formation, and all ran on together in a jolly fashion of our own. Everyone was in great form. The change from the Somme mud to the green sward had put new life into us, and the advance was carried out in a picnic spirit."

29 Throughout this day the 15th Brigade signallers under Lieut. N. O'Brien (of Brisbane) kept the advancing companies in communication with Colonel Layh. This was only achieved by salting and using miles of German telephone wire. The brigade orders, however, were based mainly on the accurate information brought in, throughout these operations, by Lieut. Salmon.

30 The village, having been a headquarters, was at once thoroughly searched for papers, but nothing of value was found.

31 Delsaux Farm stood between the two trenches of the R.III system. A photograph of the farm and the country in front of it is given in Vol. XII (plate 299).
From the prisoners taken near Frémicourt it was known that these Germans formed part of a line of isolated machine-gun posts whose nearest supports were said to be three and a half miles in rear, at Doignies. Pinning the Germans down by fire at close range from the front, the infantry crept forward on the flanks. Some distant fire was received from the right, but the line continued to advance, except near the farm itself. Here the enemy had a machine-gun firing from a large crater in a road which crossed the R.III line. The field of fire for this gun was perfect, but the troops opposite it, advancing by sectional rushes, reached the shelter of a bank, and two Vickers machine-guns of the 15th Company were also brought up to suppress it. About 5 p.m. the flanks of the Australian attack began to creep round, and the German officer in charge accordingly ordered his men to withdraw. He gallantly remained to the last, and was starting to follow across the open, swinging a walking-stick, when he was shot dead. The attacking Victorians, although their casualties during the whole day amounted only to eight, were almost worn out by the weight of their packs, which they carried throughout, and the Germans escaped with the loss of four killed. But in this officer’s dugout was found an operation order—marked “not to be taken into the front line”—disclosing the disposition and intention of the enemy’s rear-guard in this and the neighbouring sectors.

This order amplified the intelligence already received from the Frémicourt prisoners. It showed that the Australians were now confronted by troops different from those that had faced them since early November. The two Guard divisions of the Guard Reserve Corps had vanished, apparently withdrawn into reserve. Instead, Elliott’s column was confronted by a battalion of the 38th Division, with a battalion of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division to the north facing Gelli-brand’s column, and one of the 4th Ersatz Division to the south, facing the XIV British Corps cavalry. The XIV German Reserve Corps,
to which the 2nd Guard Reserve Division belonged, was still, as during the Somme battle, responsible for the "A" Group of the First German Army; the Guard Reserve Corps staff still had charge of "B" area (38th and 4th Ersatz Divisions) until March 23, when it was relieved by the staff of the IX Corps. As the front of the I Anzac Corps expanded during the advance, its left, moving north-eastwards, became engaged with the divisions of "A" Group, which fell back more to the east, towards Quéant. The right of I Anzac then still confronted part—though only the northern part—of "B."

These divisions now occupied the Hindenburg defences, but in front of that line they had posted a screen consisting of one battalion per division, together with certain supports. Part of the duty of this screen had been to cover the last stage of the retirement, but it was still, by simulating the appearance of strength, to delay the British and

impede attempts to reconnoitre the Hindenburg Line. It was not to offer "lasting resistance," but to repel "fairly strong reconnaissances." It was disposed in a line of outposts occupying a string of villages a few miles in front of the Hindenburg Line, and was supported by small reserves and by artillery, split up for purposes of deception into single-gun batteries. But in advance of it had been stationed a forward screen, weak in numbers but of specially picked troops, holding a series of posts along R.III and patrolling the ground in front of it. When, at 11 p.m. on March 17, the last rear-guards of the R.II garrison had withdrawn from the Barbarossa wire and, at 3 a.m. on the 18th, its main guards had left R.III, it was these two screens that took over the fight. So far, Elliott had been in contact only with the light advanced screen of the 38th Division, consisting of 230 \textit{sturm} and other picked troops, with three machine-guns and a troop of cavalry,

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\* See Vol. III, p 915 "A Group" now became known also as the "Quéant Group," and "B" as the "Cambrai Group."
\* See p 130
disposed in four posts on a front of two and a quarter miles, and in small reserves. Its headquarters were in Beaumetz, and its orders were "to hold R.III against fairly strong reconnaissance patrols," to "harass and trick" the British patrols wherever they felt forward, and to capture prisoners. "Every step forward must cost the Englishman heavy losses." The main screen lay farther back, east of Beaumetz, and consisted, in the 38th Division's sector, of the III Battalion of the 94th Infantry Regiment, supported by two companies of the 95th. Its line lay round the villages of Louverval, Doignies, and Hermies, with reserves in Demicourt and Boursies. These rear-guards had general orders to blow up their remaining billets before leaving, and the Cuirassiers were instructed to "see that sufficient dung lies ready beside the wells," presumably for purposes of pollution.

Despite the Australian efforts, the Guard Reserve Corps Headquarters, which was still in charge of the troops in this sector, records: "The enemy followed slowly."

As Beugny had not yet been taken, the 59th Battalion bivouacked for the night behind the R.III wire, the picquets being stationed generally opposite the gaps, with sentry groups out on the far side. The dispositions were orderly, and lucid reports and sketches, sent in by well-trained company commanders, gave Layh a clear grasp of the situation. His left was in loose touch with Gellibrand's column, whose advance, having been even less seriously opposed, had been deeper. Only on the right was there ground for anxiety. The Australian infantry on March 17th and 18th advanced far ahead of the infantry on either flank, and, although on the north this was quickly rectified, on the south the British infantry was being held back by a definite order not to patrol more than 1,500 yards beyond Rocquigny. Whereas the I Anzac Corps had behind it much the best road in the whole region—the Albert-Bapaume highway—and had been able to push on with road and railway repairs during the preliminary German retirements, the XIV Corps possessed none of these advantages.

Its difficulties may be judged by the fact that one gun of the battery sent to support its cavalry patrols

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40 Each was about 40 strong. One was at Beugny, another at Delsaux Farm. The cavalry were of the 6th Cuirassier Regiment.

41 Ludendorff says: "Poisoning of wells was forbidden." The pollution of wells by horse-dung was possibly not considered to amount to poisoning, for some wells were undoubtedly treated in this manner. The medical authorities of the British Fourth Army certified that those at Barleux contained arsenic, but, on further tests being made, this was found to be a mistake.

42 The corps staff had actually foreshadowed that it could not advance beyond its defensive line before April 1.
disappeared into a shell-hole full of water on the Sailly Saillisel-Le Transloy road." As the corps cavalry patrols were very weak, Elliott protected his flank by occupying Haplincourt to his right rear. The main guard (60th Battalion) was brought up to Frémicourt.

General Hobbs's orders for the following day left Elliott free to exercise almost unfettered discretion until he reached about the line of Lagnicourt and Doignies—six miles north-east of his original starting-point. At that stage he was to report and await further orders. Late in the night there reached the front an order sent out by General Gough with the object of hastening the approach of his left flank to the Hindenburg Line. This injunction, to support the cavalry "and drive in all enemy detachments to the Hindenburg Line," concerned Gellibrand's column more closely than Elliott's, but Elliott was informed by his divisional commander that an additional battalion would be held ready to support him. He was warned to protect his right flank, where only British cavalry was operating, but was left free to adopt his own tactics with one restriction—that he must act within the boundaries allotted to his division.

In order that the mistake of the previous day—swerving in towards opposition—should not be repeated, Elliott this day ordered that each company should be allotted a particular frontage and should not change the direction of its advance without special orders. The light horse at day-break moved out towards Morchies, Beaumetz, and Bertincourt—a village lying on slightly higher ground in the territory allotted to the XIV Corps on Elliott's right. They passed Beugny, although it was still held by the enemy, but were soon fired on from left, centre, and right, the fire on the right coming from the villages of Lebucquière and Vélu. At 10.30 the 60th Battalion, strengthened by a company-and-a-half of the 59th, after marching up from Frémicourt, moved through the outposts of the 59th and took up the duties of the vanguard, the rest of the 59th remaining in the R.III line as main guard. The left flank, under Captain Doyle, advancing north of the Cambrai road with scouts 500 yards in front and then two

*See p 177.*
platoons followed by a company—all in artillery formation—was fired on from Beugny.\textsuperscript{45} The scouts returned the fire but moved on round the village in time to see the Germans withdrawing along the road to Morchies. A platoon under Lieutenant Walker,\textsuperscript{46} pushing quickly on, was hampering their retirement with its fire when a body of German cavalry appeared on its left. The cavalry, though easily checked by rifle-fire, eventually took up a position near Maricourt Wood, on the line of junction of Elliott’s and Gellibrand’s columns. Field-gun shells also came from that direction. Elliott’s column continued for a while to advance slowly. The centre and right, under Captain Kerr,\textsuperscript{47} next came under fire from a strong machine-gun post on the Cambrai road, and from another near his right boundary. By noon the 60th was held up in a curved line facing these enemy detachments. Lebucquière, Vélu, and Vélu Wood to the south were a formidable obstacle, and the light force could not outflank them on the south in consequence of fire from Germans on the corps boundary. Elliott accordingly sent another company of the 59th to strengthen his right, and half-a-company to protect his flank, and, if possible, to occupy Bertincourt in spite of the fact that this was beyond his boundary. Meanwhile the 4th Battery had arrived and shelled the Germans both in Vélu and near Bertincourt. The latter withdrew to Bertincourt, from which they kept up an ineffective fire, and the advance continued. Patrols entered Lebucquière and Vélu on the heels of the enemy, who had set fire to these places and withdrawn. The vanguard threw

\footnote{\textsuperscript{45}“Diamond formation” was largely used in these operations, especially upon the approach of hostile aeroplanes. The companies would advance with their platoons disposed diamond-wise, and the platoons with their sections disposed in the same way. On the approach of an enemy aeroplane the men in each section would extend into diamond formation.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{46}Lieut. E. L. Walker, 60th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Essendon, Vic.; b Ascot Vale, Vic., 20 Oct., 1897.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{47}Major T. Kerr, M.C.; 60th Bn. Farmer and grazier; of Maffra and Sale, Vic., b Denison, Vic., 5 Oct., 1888.}
posts around both villages and Vélu Wood; but Bertincourt was still held by the enemy, whose flares rose from it during the night. The troops on both flanks being then far in rear, Elliott’s advance ceased for the night, the light horse being sent back to Frémicourt.

The advanced line of I Anzac was now far beyond that of the Fourth Army, but still only four miles beyond Bapaume. About midnight General Gough sent out a second call for more energy on his left. As this did not concern the right, corps headquarters proposed that the 5th Division should merely advance to Morchies. General Hobbs, however, had already agreed to a suggestion of Elliott that on the 20th he should take Beaumetz also. Elliott formulated the plan, proposing to employ both his battalions, 59th and 60th. The project would necessitate the swinging up of his right, and as Bertincourt, half-a-mile south of that flank, was still in German hands he decided that he must seize this village even though it was beyond his boundary. Though Hobbs, on being informed, thought the action unnecessary, he concurred, and notified the 20th British Division, in whose front it lay. To form Elliott’s reserve, the 20th (Victoria) Battalion of the 8th Brigade (General Tivey) was sent up to Frémicourt.

Though the main German rear-guard line was some distance beyond Beaumetz, the village had been the headquarters of the light screen, and fairly stubborn resistance by light forces might therefore be expected. At 8 a.m. the light horse were strongly fired on both from there and from Morchies; but Bertincourt was found empty, and was occupied by the light horse. The infantry could now advance, and moved out at 11 o’clock. The previous night had been a vile one—wet, dark, and bitter—and the day was cold, with occasional snowstorms. The men of both battalions were now almost exhausted with their long continued effort. Nevertheless, advancing on a wide front, the 59th about midday occupied Gellibrand’s centre was well advanced, but his right in R.III did not advance until dusk.

49 On the left the 60th’s line was held by platoon-posts with sentry groups 100 yards in front.

50 They were relieved at 9.30 a.m. by cavalry of the XIV Corps.

51 This appears to have been the case also with the light horse detachments, which at first were somewhat overworked by the commanders of both the columns.
Morchies, from which the Germans, after some firing, withdrew. Parties of the enemy could, however, be seen running to their positions in front of Beaumetz and digging posts in the open beyond both its flanks. About 2 p.m. the centre of the 60th was stopped in front of the village by heavy fire, but the widely spread flanks continued to work slowly round it. At 3.30 the 4th Battery fired on the place, and Germans began to run from it. By 4.30 the 60th were already closing around it when German reinforcements were seen moving along the railway line from Hermies, two miles to the right front, towards the south of Beaumetz. As they would descend upon the rear of the 60th's right company, the attacking Victorians were recalled, and a line short of the village was occupied for the night. The 60th was utterly worn out, and was immediately relieved by the 29th, but the skilful attack had achieved its object. When before dawn on March 21st a small party was sent to Beaumetz the village was found empty and, despite some initial trouble from a machine-gun on the flank, was quickly occupied by the 29th.

Elliott's line now lay close in front of Morchies and Beaumetz, with the main German rear-guard position, which he had not yet attacked, 60 yards beyond. His right was nearly two miles ahead of the Fourth Army's left, and his skilful and vigorous advance brought congratulations from Generals Gough, Hobbs, and Birdwood, although the latter sharply reprimanded him for his breach of orders in occupying Bertincourt. Gough was more intent upon thrusting with

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62 During the previous night a young officer of the 60th, Lieut. M. D. Knight (of St. Kilda, Vic.), while visiting his posts, had lost his way and entered a village which he thought to be Beugny. He presently recognised that it was held by the enemy and discovered that he was in Morchies. After much difficulty he made his way back between the German sentries. (He was killed in action on 6 July, 1918.)

63 Gellibrand's had attacked it early on the 20th (see pp 178-86).

64 On the night of March 20 Elliott learned that the British cavalry, which had relieved his troops in Bertincourt, had left that village. He therefore again ordered a platoon of his own infantry to occupy it. Corps headquarters was informed, and Elliott was ordered to hand the place over to British cavalry, but on the arrival next day of a small British patrol he refused to do so, insisting that the garrison must be strong enough to beat off German patrols. This view seems to have been adopted, for on March 21, after request by Birdwood, the XIV Corps ordered the 20th Division to occupy the village as an infantry outpost. The order was not carried out until the 23rd, and Elliott kept a guard there until that day. If Beaumetz was to be taken, the occupation of Bertincourt seems a reasonable precaution; there was, however, every reason why it should not be attempted without notice being first given to I Anzac and XIV Corps Headquarters. The 20th British Division was notified by Hobbs, but it was then discovered that this division had no control over the British cavalry who were patrolling in the Bertincourt area. These received their orders direct from XIV Corps Headquarters, which might have ordered them to attack Bertincourt without knowledge that the Australians were holding it.
his left than with his right, but Elliott’s last advance had brought his column into position to assist the next move by the left column—an attack on part of the enemy’s main rear-guard line at Lagnicourt. Pending that stroke, General Hobbs, in accordance with the policy of prudence imposed by Haig on the whole line, forbade Elliott to advance from his present position without further orders—another restriction against which Elliott chafed. March 21st and 22nd were spent in quietly consolidating and preparing to help the attack on Lagnicourt. A second battalion of the 8th Brigade, the 30th (New South Wales), was allotted to Elliott to relieve the 59th in the Morchies sector, north of the Cambrai road, the 29th holding the Beaumetz sector south of it. A larger allotment of artillery—the whole of the 14th Brigade—had now been given to him. Half-a-company of the 1 Anzac Cyclist Battalion had been brought up, and the two remaining infantry battalions of Elliott’s own brigade (the 57th and 58th, Victoria) were in their turn about to relieve the 29th and 30th.

The night of the 22nd was quiet, but early on the 23rd a “fighting patrol” of the right company of the 29th found the German position crowded with troops, and had just returned to its post on the right, which was separated by a wide gap from those in the village, when, at 4.35, a bomb exploded to the north, followed by other explosions all along the battalion’s front. The right flank posts were standing to arms, and, opening fire, held off what appeared to be two waves of

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53rd, 54th, 55th, and 114th (howitzer) Batteries. The 4th Battery was now recalled to its proper brigade.

65 The 60th was in reserve, preparing for the Lagnicourt attack. The 59th was right flank guard. The 15th Light Trench Mortar Battery also had been brought up, but neither of the Australian columns found it easy to employ its trench mortars in this class of warfare.

66 The patrol was under Lieut N L. Jackson (of Port Melbourne, Vic; killed in action on 23 July, 1918), and included two NCOs and fourteen men.
the enemy, but then found Germans moving in their rear. They accordingly fell back towards the south-west corner of Beaumetz, and ten minutes later, on seeing the enemy advance through the village, withdrew about half-way to Lebucquière. Meanwhile, at the eastern exit of the village, a machine-gun officer, Lieutenant Trevan, who was in the act of taking one of two local guns to an advanced emplacement for daylight sniping, found himself and his men surrounded by a crowd of German infantry. They charged through it, and, with some loss, carried their gun back. The northern company of the 29th had been driven from its posts, and one of its officers reached the headquarters of Colonel Clark of the 30th, in Lebucquière, with a report that the 29th had been cut to pieces and the Germans were moving on Lebucquière. Meanwhile the 30th, north of the Cambrai road, had also been attacked. While Colonel Clark was telephoning to his right company for information as to the bombing which he could hear, the company commander, Lieutenant Adams, broke off the conversation with: "They're coming at me—I must go." A party of the enemy approaching from Beaumetz had from the rear rushed the company's right post in a crater on the Cambrai road, killing the garrison and seizing the Lewis gun.

The report that Beaumetz had been lost reached Elliott in Frémicourt about 5.30. He immediately ordered the 59th in Bancourt to move up and restore the line, and the 57th in Riencourt-les-Bapaume to stand ready. By 6.30, however, he knew that the troops on the spot were turning defeat into success. Although the Germans had broken through both flanks of the 29th and their southern party had entered the village from the Australian rear, they had encountered in its

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80 Except two, who feigned death while the Germans trod over them.
streets deadly fire from Lewis guns. Captain Booth¹ of the left company had his headquarters in the village, and stiff fighting took place. Major McArthur,² commanding the forward companies, with his headquarters staff watching the fight from Lebucquière, suddenly saw an Australian officer (Lieutenant Harrison³) with a dozen men dash round the south-eastern outskirts and charge the enemy who were holding a knoll west of the town. There was a short bayonet tussle—the shouts and screams could be heard—and the enemy fled back towards their supports who were approaching from the Cambrai road. North of that road, Lieutenant Adams with the right of the 30th, and Lieutenant White with its support company, were also counter-attacking. The Germans fell back, and Adams's party bombed them out of their crater on the Cambrai road. The 29th recaptured its neighbour's lost Lewis gun; and by 5 o'clock, except south of Beaumetz, where the Germans had seized the crater on the railway crossing and established a machine-gun post, the former line had been entirely recaptured. No reserves⁴ had been used, and the Australians had suffered only slight loss—12 killed, 38 wounded. The men in two advanced listening-posts of the 29th had been captured by the enemy; but, as against this, 11 Germans had been taken and over 50 lay dead in the streets and about the village.

The audacity of this German attack affected Elliott like a personal affront. "I'll teach these beggars to leave me alone," he said, and, in defiance of the injunction that he must advance no farther until ordered to do so, he actually issued orders for an immediate assault on Doignies and Louverval. By his instruction, no word of this order was at first sent to divisional headquarters, and consequently the troops on either flank and their artillery were not warned. The proposed operation—a daylight advance, with little artillery support, against the main German outpost-line—offered every chance of a severe repulse. Eventually the brigade-major, Wieck, informed the brigadier

³ Lt. H. A. Harrison, M.C.; 29th Bn. Clerk; of Kew and Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Port Fairy, Vic., 23 April, 1894. (His men were a few light horsemen from New South Wales, who had joined the battalion on the previous night.)
⁴ The reserve company of the 29th was sent forward, but by that time the village had been cleared. Orders to counter-attack were also given to the 59th Battalion
that, if the latter did not notify divisional headquarters of the impending attack, he himself would do so. After a few moments' silence Elliott agreed. Major-General Hobbs was informed, and, hurrying to Elliott's headquarters, cancelled the operation. What passed between them was known to them only; but, despite Elliott's magnificent qualities of leadership—in some ways unequalled in the A.I.F.—not every superior could, like Hobbs, after so flagrant disobedience have continued to accord to him his confidence and support.

The Germans, having failed to recapture Beaumetz, shelled it persistently during March 23rd, causing considerable loss. That night the 57th Battalion relieved the 29th, and the 58th the 30th. At 4 a.m. on the 24th the Germans launched a second attempt to retake the village, this time after an hour's bombardment. They again attacked on both flanks, and, as before, their right, advancing up the valley leading into the village from the north-east, drove back the outposts there and reached that edge of the village. This time, however, they did not penetrate it, the few Australians from the posts continuing to hold the houses and the cemetery, on the eastern edge of the town. At day-break a portion of the attacking force was seen sheltering in the sunken way leading from the cemetery to the Cambrai road. An Australian machine-gun fired from the cemetery straight into this party, killing and wounding a number, and thus again, without the assistance of reserves, the garrison drove the enemy clear of all except two or three cottages by the side of this road. Men continued to be hit during the day by shots fired from these buildings, until Lieutenant Trevan, looking for a position for his machine-gun, located two German snipers in the nearest house and shot both. Some of the enemy still remained in the last cottage on this road. Trench-mortars were sent for, but

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*65 A telegram cancelling it was first sent. Leave was subsequently given for an attack on Doignies and Louverval that night, in accordance with a plan already discussed by Elliott with Birdwood, but this permission was soon afterwards revoked. The 59th and 60th Battalions, which had moved up on receipt of Elliott's order, were sent back.

*66 Among those killed was Capt Booth, whose company had held the town.

*67 It had originally been emplaced on the trees felled across the sunken road, but had been slightly withdrawn.

*68 General Elliott warned his squadron of light horse and the cyclists and 59th Battalion, but there proved to be no need for their employment.

*69 Trevan shot the first with the last cartridge in his rifle. The other ran, but Trevan, using the rifle of the dead German, shot him also. These two snipers had accounted for at least eight Australians.
before they arrived a field-gun was brought up to within 500 yards and, with a single high-explosive shell, wrecked the interior of the house and suppressed the opposition. The line on that flank was thus completely recovered.

On the southern flank the Germans had attempted to attack from the direction of the crater at the railway crossing. Their advance had been immediately held up, and they were observed, after day-break, crowded into the sunken road leading to the crossing. A machine-gun at Vélu station, 900 yards along the same railway, was turned upon the mass, and it became disorganised. As this foothold, less than half-a-mile south of the edge of Beaumetz, still afforded the enemy a tempting vantage-point from which to counter-attack, Elliott obtained permission to capture it. This was achieved by an advance of the 59th Battalion across the open from Vélu at 3.45 the same afternoon—

a very pretty little attack (Elliott afterwards wrote) . . . brilliant sunshine, green meadows, with overhead artillery and machine-gun fire, the men moving in artillery formation under shell-fire and then breaking into lines of scouts and skirmishers as they came under musketry fire. They advanced by rushes, the sections supporting by covering fire.

The 59th suffered 40 casualties, mostly slight, but the Germans at the crater fled; a large number were caught in the open by the 8th Battery, and others by a machine-gun. Intense fire was poured upon them, and it was believed at the time that few could have escaped. Seven prisoners were made. That night the line north-east of Beaumetz was slightly advanced through the capture, by a party of the 57th, of an isolated farm-house at the junction of the Beaumetz–Quéant and Cambrai roads, the 58th farther north conforming. The casualties of Elliott's column in the fighting of March 23rd were 78, and on the 24th 73.

The German policy during this stage of the operations is now well known, and proves, if proof were required, that Haig's soldierly precautions against exposing his advancing armies to a counter-thrust were justified to the hilt. Both Ludendorff and Hindenburg had longed to hit back suddenly and inflict a sharp defeat on the forces following them, so as "to wipe out our confession of weakness by a great tactical success." The Crown Prince Rupprecht favoured a blow

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10 Single guns in advanced positions were used throughout the Beaumetz operations.
11 This house is shown in the plate opposite, and in Vol XII (plate 298).
12 The 8th Battery had been sent to Elliott on the afternoon of March 23.
13 On March 23 the 20th and 30th Battalions lost 50 killed and wounded, and the 15th Brigade 28. On March 24 the casualties were all in the 15th Brigade.
north and south of St. Quentin to crush the following troops after
they had crossed the Crozat and St. Quentin Canals. The com-
manders of the First and Second German Armies both approved of
this plan because, unlike an attack
on the English crossing the Somme,
it could be delivered from the Hinden-
burg Line. Ludendorff, how-
ever, reluctantly decided that the
German Army had then neither the
numerical nor the moral strength
for a major counter-stroke; Prince
Rupprecht had to confine himself
to a plan of attacking the French,
when they crossed the Crozat
Canal, and of damaging by small
thrusts the forces approaching
elsewhere. Advanced detachments
of the French, pressing forward
eagerly in the hope of saving their country-side from devastation, far
out-distanced the Fourth British Army, and on March 21 threw
light forces across the Crozat Canal. The orders from Prince Rupprecht
were to wait until a fairly strong force with artillery had crossed, but,
not understanding this, the XVII German Army Corps attacked early
next morning, and, although the French were driven back across
the canal, few prisoners were taken. The plan for a fairly
formidable stroke thus miscarried. Subordinate commanders had,
however, on March 19 been ordered to take immediate advantage of
enemy indiscretions, and to hold up the advance in the country west
of the Hindenburg Line so that the troops working upon its defences
might remain as long as possible undisturbed. It was accordingly
decided to hold the line of villages—Henin, Croisilles, Ecoust-Longatte,
Noreuil, Lagnicourt, Louverval, Doignies, Hermies—longer than had
previously been intended. On March 20 the Guard Reserve Corps
ordered its divisions not to allow their opponents to cross this line.
The corps staff noted that the Australians were then very close to
Beaumetz—a fact which occasioned the issue of the corps order. The
divisions were ordered to reinforce their rear-guards, and did so by
sending up several companies of infantry and a few guns. By then,
Beaumetz had just been abandoned, and, though it was not in the
main rear-guard line, the 38th Division was ordered to retake it. The
first counter-attack was made by a detachment of the divisional storm-
troops, together with the 5th and 6th companies of the 95th I.R.

Although the French appeared to the Germans astonishingly slow in discovering
the withdrawal, they had by March 19 advanced twenty-five miles, and near Ham
captured a German convoy.

One account states 230. Prince Rupprecht's diary for that day says 60.

Prince Rupprecht states (Mein Kriegstagebuch, Vol. II, p. 117) that the attacks
were to be in the nature of sallies by the outposts of a fortress.

It had been found necessary, at a late stage, to add important outworks, enclosing
the villages of Queant and Fromville, and, farther south, fringing the Canal du
Nord near Hermies. This new German "Balcony Trench" practically formed part
of the Hindenburg Line, and is so designated in many sketches in this volume.

See p. 258

The German official communiqué implied that Beaumetz was given up in
accordance with the plans. If this is true, the plan was immediately changed.
On one of the Germans shot by Lieut Trevan was found a diary with the entry:
"22nd March Arrived Bourges. Are to go forward to-night or to-morrow to
recapture Beaumetz, which has been given up to the English too soon. Frid. 23rd
March—Beaumetz held too strongly, probably another attempt to-day"
These attacked in two bodies, each about 100 strong, advancing from north-east and south-east respectively, but were beaten back (says a German account) with severe loss by machine-gun fire in the village. The counter-attack next day was headed by a detachment, fifty strong, from the "2nd Company, 1st Sturm Battalion," specially brought up from near Valenciennes. This was supported by the remaining two companies of the 95th I.R., sent up from Bourlon with orders to hold the village when the storm-detachments should have captured it. These companies lost their way and could not find the 5th and 6th companies. They wandered over the open south-east of Beaumetz, and had just extended to advance when they came under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire and withdrew. The storm-troops made their way along the Cambrai road and entered Beaumetz, but failed through strong machine-gun fire in the village.

On March 24th a change came over the operations of the Fourth Army, through the employment by it of the 5th British Cavalry Division, temporarily and somewhat reluctantly allotted to it by Haig in order to hasten the advance. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, a body of especially enterprising troops, with the Umballa brigade on its flank, quickly advanced the line, and by March 28th, when the division was withdrawn, the Fourth Army's front, though not yet as close to the Hindenburg Line as that of the Fifth Army, ran straight from Bertincourt to the neighbourhood of Savy, three and a half miles south-west of St. Quentin.

Elliott's column had, since the capture of Beaumetz, been confronted by the main line of the German rear-guard in Doignies, Louverval, and Hermies, held by outposts much stronger than those previously encountered in following up the German withdrawal. Before, however, describing the final task of the column—the forcing of this outpost line—the narrative must turn to the left column of I Anzac, which since March 21st had been somewhat less advanced than the right.

When on March 17th the order to form the advanced guards was received by the divisions, Brigadier-General Gellibrand, appointed to command the left (2nd Division's) column, already had one of the allotted battalions, the 23rd, holding the advanced line north of Bapaume. Its patrols, continuing, as part of the advanced guard, the operations in which they were already employed, ascertained at 11 p.m. that the Germans, who had all day been opposing

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79 Haig wished to keep his cavalry intact for the Arras offensive.
it from the copse and the neighbouring belt of wire, had vanished. Ahead, the village of Favreuil was found silent and deserted, and was forthwith occupied by the 23rd. Farther north, patrols of the 5th Australian and 6th British Brigades,\footnote{Both brigades were ordered to patrol to Sapignies (which was in the British area—fire from it had held up the British cavalry which was already out on the afternoon of March 17). The patrols wisely carried out the task together.} sent to Sapignies, observed Germans moving through the village with lanterns, evidently setting fire to places marked for destruction. Before dawn on the 18th this village also was found clear. As the advanced line of the 2nd British Division still lay far in rear of the Australian, General Smyth ordered the 5th Brigade to safeguard Gellibrand’s left by holding a line of posts from Favreuil westwards to the British flank. At dawn on the 18th Gellibrand’s restless young officer of engineers, Captain Gilchrist, exploring roads and wells, moved through the village of Beugnâtre, three-quarters of a mile east of Favreuil;\footnote{From wheelmarks made since a shower of rain, it was evident that Germans had withdrawn from it since midnight.} patrols also finding the place clear, the 23rd Battalion occupied it. The 29th Lancers\footnote{Of the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade} reported the enemy holding the R.III line half-a-mile farther on; but the cavalry farther north were able to turn the flank of these rear parties, and late in the morning, when Gellibrand sent his light horse, now increased to a squadron, to seize two prominent knuckles looking down on the large combined village of Vraucourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt, R.III had been abandoned. British cavalry could be seen patrolling well to the left front towards Mory. The enemy parties in Gellibrand’s area retired as soon as the Australians approached, and the light horse reached the two hills, unhindered, except by the long-range fire of a machine-gun from Vaulx-Vraucourt. Early in the afternoon the 21st Battalion, which had marched forward from reserve, took up the task of the vanguard, and, passing through the 23rd, which became the main guard, moved upon that village.
The Germans facing Gellibrand were part of a screen similar to that which faced Elliott. The last parties of the 1st Guard Reserve Division had withdrawn from the Barbarossa wire at 11 p.m. on the 17th, their duties being taken over by a screen from two divisions holding the Hindenburg Line behind that sector. Thus the parties to Gellibrand's right front were those of the 91st R.I.R., while those directly in front belonged to the 119th R.I.R. (26th Reserve Division). The withdrawn troops of the 1st Guard Reserve Division believed that they had inflicted heavy loss on the troops attacking them near the "Monument" (5th Australian Infantry Brigade), but actually the loss had been very slight.

The direction of Gellibrand's advance was north-eastward, straight down the long knuckles or the shallow valleys between them. It was in the longest of these valleys, about two miles ahead, that the large village of Vraucourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt lay. Two miles farther on still was the line of hamlets—Lagnicourt, Noreuil, Ecoust St. Mein-Longatte, Noreuil being in the same valley as Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the other two on either side of it. Ecoust-Longatte was just to the left of I Anzac's line of advance, in front of the neighbouring corps, which was also confronted by Croisilles and Henin. All these villages, except part of Ecoust-Longatte, lay in valleys; and about a mile beyond, across valleys and spurs, was the Hindenburg Line, which it was Gough's object to bombard.

On the afternoon of the 18th the 21st Battalion headed out with its three leading companies marching along as many diverging roads, which quickly brought them into positions west of Vaulx-Vraucourt. Patrols of the right company moved forward through and around the village, and on the far side surprised some of the enemy who were about to withdraw to Lagnicourt. The Victorians followed them, firing. Patrols scoured the open ground to the north, sighting

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83 Photographs of Vaulx-Vraucourt, Lagnicourt, and Noreuil are given in Vol XIII (plates 300, 306, and 307)
84 Some were in the act of shaving. Others had their packs on, and were evidently moving off to Lagnicourt.
a few small German cavalry patrols. Information as to these German parties was also given to the company commanders by a British airman, who landed his machine for the purpose at the company headquarters behind Vraucourt. Early in the night the 21st established a line of posts around the two villages, both ends thrown back in loose touch with the columns on either flank.85

Gellibrand's column had at this stage out-distanced all others on the British front. His position roughly corresponded to that of Elliott two days later, after the capture of Beaumetz, in that—although he did not know it—the main German rear-guard position lay immediately ahead. But there now reached him from 2nd Divisional Headquarters orders based partly on Haig's directions for the establishment of the defensive Bapaume-Péronne line, and partly upon General White's letter cautioning the divisional commanders against too rapid an advance by their columns. General Smyth, always a prudent commander, ordered Gellibrand to fortify Beugnâtre, Favreuil, and the spaces between them,86 to keep at least two battalions ahead of the advanced batteries, and to move up the reserve battalion as soon as bivouac space could be found for it. Soon after these orders there followed a request for a report showing how far they had already been carried out. These instructions were urgent, and from their nature Gellibrand assumed that, for some reason unknown to him, a defensive attitude was required. He accordingly ordered back the posts beyond Vaulx-Vraucourt, but later, recognising that the urgency was not so great as he had imagined, allowed them to remain. These steps had hardly been taken when there reached him, at 1.57 on the morning of the 19th, a "secret priority" message containing orders of precisely opposite tenor.

This came from Fifth Army Headquarters. News had arrived there that villages were in flames beyond the Hindenburg Line, and this suggested that the enemy might intend to withdraw farther. A strong motive could be supposed for this, since it would entirely dislocate the Arras offensive, which the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line would only in part avoid. As the British command was intent upon

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85 The light horse withdrew before dusk to water at Bapaume.
86 Wire was to be transferred from the German defences to fill these gaps.
15. BAPAUME AFTER CAPTURE
Transport halted at the Town Hall

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E594

To face p 176
16. The north-easternmost house of Beaumetz, in which the last party of Germans held out on 24th March, 1917, until the building was wrecked by a field-gun brought forward.

In the background are the trees along the Cambrai road. (See also Vol. XII, plate 298.)

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No. E530.
Taken on 20th April, 1917.
delivering the blow for which so great preparations had been made, G.H.Q. was rendered anxious, and Haig ordered that tests should at once be made by the Third Army, by raiding at various points in front of Arras. But, before that order was issued, Gough, at 11.30 p.m. on March 18th, ordered that the left of his army, in conjunction with the right of the Third, must at once probe to the Hindenburg Line.

The enemy appears to be holding line approximately Vélu, Morchies, Lagnicourt, St. Léger, Boyelles with advanced detachments. Fires are reported at St. Quentin and other places east of the Hindenburg Line. The Lucknow Cavalry Brigade will be pushed forward vigorously at daybreak to Ecoust St. Mein and Croisilles, drive the enemy from these places, and occupy them, throwing out flanking detachments to Lagnicourt. Divisional advanced guards must support the cavalry and drive in all enemy detachments to the Hindenburg Line.

This order, practically unchanged, was sent on to Gellibrand. As it turned out, however, the British cavalry patrols on March 19th were at once held up by the enemy in Ecoust St. Mein, Croisilles, and Henin. No flanking detachment was sent to Lagnicourt, and there was thus no opportunity for the infantry to support them. Germans entrenching themselves between Gellibrand’s and Elliott’s columns gave some trouble. Two guns each of the 12th and 13th Batteries were brought up behind Vaulx-Vraucourt and turned upon these Germans and upon others south-west of Noreuil. Numbers of the enemy were reported to be working or manoeuvring on the hillside close beyond it. The 23rd Battalion was at nightfall again brought forward, this time to share the front with the 21st. The line of posts was pushed well out beyond the twin-villages, which were being constantly shelled by the enemy. Gellibrand and his brigade, which needed rest, were to be relieved during that night and the next day by the 7th Brigade under General Wisdom, whose two leading battalions (25th and 26th) were now close behind the front. Unfortunately, before the relief took place, serious confusion was to occur.

87 St. Quentin was in reality not beyond the original Siegfried Line.
88 German cavalry was seen both north of Vaulx-Vraucourt (where it was fired on by a patrol of the 21st) and south-east of the village. Here a patrol of Gellibrand’s light horse was fired on from Vaulx Wood. A troop of light horse was sent to reinforce the posts of the 21st at Vaulx-Vraucourt. During the day the posts were engaged in firing on Germans entrenching themselves south-west of the wood and also a few hundred yards north of the village.
On March 19th Gough personally visited the forward area. Parts of the Hindenburg Line were now actually in sight, the russet bands of its great entanglements and chalky spoil heaps from the dugouts marking some of the heights on the horizon. Yet the day's progress had been far less extensive than had been anticipated in Gough's operation order of the previous night. It is true that messages from the front contained ample evidence of an enemy screen holding the villages ahead, but of its strength little was known. Not being satisfied that his order had been energetically complied with, Gough late in the 19th issued a direction that it was to be carried out next day. At 10.35 p.m. I Anzac was informed by telephone that the Fifth Army hoped the troops would get on next day to Lagnicourt and Noreuil. General White at once passed on the order by telephone and endeavoured to postpone the relief of the 6th Brigade, but found that it was too late. The staff officer (G.S.O.2) on duty at the 2nd Division's headquarters, however, rang up Gellibrand and informed him of the wishes of the higher commanders that he should "push on." A written order, modifying in this direction the previous orders, would be sent to him.

There is no doubt as to the purpose of the corps commander: General White had visited Headquarters of the 2nd Division only that day and explained the intention of adhering to the cautious principle of an advance "by bounds" —a method similar to that of a looping caterpillar, patrols being sent forward to occupy certain points, the supporting troops coming up to the patrols, and the patrols then going forward again. The main-guard was to be brought up to the present outpost line and held ready for vigorous manœuvre. But Gellibrand, as the staff of the 2nd Division was well aware, had strongly favoured heavier pressure on the Germans throughout their retreat, with the object of forcing them to

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89 A note in the diary of the General Staff, 2nd Division, states: "G.O.C. 6 Bde. (Gellibrand) informed of corps commander's wishes re pushing on. He said patrols would reconnoitre Noreuil and Lagnicourt, leaving at 4 a.m., and that they would be occupied, if this could be done without serious opposition." The formal modified order was duly sent to Gellibrand, but, of course, could not arrive in time to affect any operations immediately undertaken by him. It prescribed that the day's work would be that of sending mounted patrols to ascertain whether Lagnicourt, Noreuil, or Longatte were occupied in strength. If detachments of the enemy were met, Gellibrand was to deal with them vigorously, supporting the light horse with infantry, and advancing on a wide front so as always to envelop the enemy's flanks, avoiding direct attack on machine-guns if any other course was possible.
enter the Hindenburg Line not at their leisure, but as a beaten foe. From the urgency of the message passed to him he at once inferred that he was now required to do what he had so far been restrained from doing, namely, to take the risk of attempting to rush the enemy out of these villages. The staff, he assumed, must intend him to act at once; otherwise he would have been instructed to wait for the relief which would occur that day. Moreover, if the defences of the village were still incomplete, action now might avert casualties later. If, on the other hand, the places were strongly held, the attempt could not be expected to succeed. It must therefore be in the nature of a reconnaissance in force, the commanders taking careful precautions with a view to withdrawing their men if strongly opposed. It also seemed to Gellibrand that the effort must be made before daylight. In plain day, with only two batteries of artillery in support, no troops could hope to approach these villages.

But, seeing that only five and a half hours of darkness remained, Gellibrand's intention must be carried out, if at all, with extreme speed. The commanders of the 21st and 23rd Battalions, who had just stationed their new posts around Vaulx and Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the light horse squadron commander, who had withdrawn his troops for the night to Favreuil, were hurriedly summoned, and a plan of attack explained to them. This plan was daring and ingenious. The land, as already stated, ran in valleys and spurs all leading from the British position through that of the enemy. The valley on Gellibrand's right led to Lagnicourt, two miles away on the western side of the depression. The next valley on the west contained Vaulx-Vraucourt and, farther down, Noreuil. West of Noreuil again was a third depression on the summit of whose western side lay Longatte and Ecoust St. Mein, really a single village. As the columns on each side of him were not sufficiently advanced to enable him to attack the outer villages, Gellibrand decided to surround the one in the centre, Noreuil. Although not more than a mile separated any of these villages from the next, it might be possible by night to pass undetected along the spurs between them. Accordingly the 23rd Battalion, moving down the spur east of Noreuil, would establish two companies on the Noreuil side of the spur, cutting off the village, and would station the other two
somewhat more to the rear on the Lagnicourt side of the spur, to keep off interference from that quarter. The 21st Battalion would make a similar advance along the spur west of Noreuil, two or more companies joining hands with those of the 23rd beyond Noreuil and the remainder holding off interference from Longatte and Ecoust. The lie of the spurs would screen the outer companies from fire from Noreuil, and at the same time allow the inner companies to throttle Noreuil without coming under fire from Ecoust-Longatte or Lagnicourt. Patrols of light horse were to precede the infantry. As the Germans had been firing from Vaulx Wood, the two outer companies of the 23rd were to clear it before moving to screen off Lagnicourt. The main operation was to commence at 3 a.m.

Clever though they were, these plans set an impossible task. Troops little trained for open warfare, tired with many days' work, and new to their positions, were to be hurriedly collected and marched out on a prolonged and intricate night advance without special reconnaissance at least by the infantry officers, most of whom knew the ground only from a hurried glance at the map. The forward companies had settled into their new posts and the reserve companies were bivouacked for a night's rest in rear of the village when, after midnight, the first word of the intended reconnaissance reached them. Lieutenant-Colonel Bateman, commander of the right battalion, the 23rd, at once summoned his company commanders to his headquarters.

The night was wet and dark. It was after 1 o'clock before this conference could be held, and at least two company commanders protested that their men could not be assembled in the time allotted. The plans were explained. The movement against Noreuil would be undertaken by the two companies at present holding the outpost-line; the two support companies

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80 Verbal orders reached the battalion commanders at 12.15 a.m.
would, as a preliminary, clear the Bois de Vaulx and then advance on Lagnicourt. Gellibrand's young engineer, Captain Gilchrist, who was present, and who strongly affirmed that both villages were held only by snipers, would guide the leading company beyond Noreuil. But, in the hurried announcement of the plans, the company commanders received the impression that Lagnicourt was to be not merely engaged, but captured. Later, when it became evident that the troops could not be collected by 3, the starting hour was postponed by Gellibrand until 4, when it would still be dark. Both battalion commanders were asked to inform the brigadier if they could not assemble their troops by that hour. At a late stage word came from Colonel Forbes of the 21st that owing to the bad weather he had been unable to do so; he therefore asked if the operation could be cancelled. But by then the 23rd had moved, and the 21st had to go forward late.

A cold rain was drizzling as the support companies of the 23rd wound their way in single file through the streets of Vaulx-Vraucourt, littered with the débris of demolished walls. They succeeded in finding their way to the assembly-ground, but dawn was already breaking when their waves silently advanced, without artillery barrage, against Vaulx Wood. The Germans may have withdrawn at the approach of the scouts, for the companies passed through without a shot being fired. But when they moved down the depression beyond, to attack Lagnicourt, a mile distant, flares were rising from that village and a machine-gun opened there. Here the two companies separated to continue their attack down opposite sides of the valley.

It had been intended that, after clearing Vaulx Wood, they should form up behind the two outpost companies, and that all should move together in the main advance. But the leading outpost company, under Captain Pascoe, in whose area the point of assembly lay, after waiting for a quarter of an hour for the rest of the battalion, which did not arrive, had been ordered by Colonel Bateman to begin the advance. The light

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92 Gilchrist commanded the half of the 6th Field Company which was serving with Gellibrand, but in practice he worked as an officer of the brigade staff.
93 It is doubtful if this order reached the leading company of the 23rd.
94 This was true time. "Summer" time came in on March 24.
horse detachments, which were expected to patrol ahead, had not arrived, but this company met no opposition until it had almost reached its objective. At daybreak it was crossing in single file the low ground beside Noreuil. Pascoe, who had no instructions as to what he should do on reaching the objective, had given the order to push on, when a machine-gun post was seen on the high ground close ahead. The troops accordingly extended to outflank it.

Machine-guns both in Lagnicourt and Noreuil could now be heard firing in some other direction, and flares were rising. The two Lagnicourt companies, though out of sight of Pascoe, had advanced down their valley. The right company (Lieutenant Moss), moving over level open ground straight towards the main defences of the village, was stopped by fire from which, having no shelter, it suffered heavy loss. Probably it diverted the enemy's attention from the next company (Captain Rossiter), which advanced, practically without opposition, along the west side of the depression, past that edge of Lagnicourt. Two German machine-gun posts—one in a sunken road on its right, and the other in the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road ahead—fled to the village as it approached. The company reached the latter road, which also was sunken, and lined it. The light was now clear. Lagnicourt seemed from this side to be weakly held, and Captain Rossiter, after stationing a post on the crest to guard against interference from Noreuil, led

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88 The company had moved at first in fours; then, approaching a suspected machine gun post, it had extended. On passing the site of the post and finding it abandoned, it formed fours again. Approaching Noreuil, whence flares were rising, it halted.

89 The battalion commander went off to his headquarters, and Captain Pascoe called his subalterns together for final directions. While speaking to them, he realised that there "was something on their minds." He found that they were "not impressed by the statement that Noreuil was occupied only by a few snipers." The number of flares rising, and a machine-gun chattering, rendered these doubts natural, but the light was increasing, there was no time for hesitation, and he could only say: "You have my instructions—we are going to see this thing through." The characteristic reply from the four subalterns was: "You bet!" From this point the company proceeded in single file.

87 They had formed up on the Noreuil–Morchies road in the Lagnicourt valley, but out of touch with one another.


100 The Vaulx-Vraucourt–Lagnicourt road.
his men to the right straight down the road towards Lagnicourt. The enemy seemed unaware of his presence, for a German soldier strolling casually up the road almost walked into him. The man fled, but was shot down, and possibly the shots called the enemy's attention, for Germans with machine-guns came running through the village. As the Victorians rounded the last bend of the road, they ran straight into the fire of one of these guns. The leading files were killed; those following escaped by creeping back up the road under cover of its muddy banks. Thus, in spite of uncertainty as to the plans, two companies of the 23rd had reached approximately their intended positions. The third (Moss's) was held up in front of Lagnicourt. The fourth, which should have advanced with Pascoe's, had lost its way.

The task of the 21st was more difficult, since the defended villages on that flank lay closer together and the depression between them, shown on the map, hardly existed. Starting at 4.30 from the Vraucourt sugar factory, the battalion marched along the sunken road towards Ecoust and Longatte until, about day-break, its leading company (under Captain O. A. Jones, of Mouquet Farm fame) was stopped by shots fired into the advance party by a German post in a mine-crater farther up the road. This post was at about the point where the second and third companies were to leave the road and strike across country to enclose Noreuil. They climbed out on the right side of the road, as the fourth had already done, and, deploying their platoons one behind the other, continued to advance. As the light was increasing, they presently turned right, towards Noreuil.

But this turn was made too soon, with the result that they headed towards the southern, rather than the northern, end of the village. Moving over the spur, they came into such heavy machine-gun fire from left and front that losses were severe. Men tended to fling themselves down, and the advance could only proceed by rushes. Captain Sale tried to organise the centre company into groups which would alternately cover with Lewis-gun fire each other's advance, but to improvise this system under a sharp fusillade,
with officers and N.C.O's falling, was no easy matter. When one group rose, others, instead of firing, rushed forward also, offering an easy target. At this stage a snow-storm descended, half blotting out the targets, and the advance was stopped, the three companies forming a rough line with its right 500 yards south-west of Noreuil. Meanwhile Captain Jones's company was splendidly fulfilling its task. After rushing the Germans in the crater, most of whom fled, it had pushed on until in close touch with the enemy's outposts round Ecoust and Longatte. Here, continuously engaging the enemy, whose snipers caused much loss, it dug in.

The plan had thus failed; indeed, Captain Pascoe's company of the 23rd had already been recalled from the other side of Noreuil, an order from Colonel Bateman for withdrawal having reached Pascoe as he was beginning to envelop the machine-gun post already mentioned. He succeeded in falling back with the loss of only one man killed to the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road, already held on the right by Captain Rossiter's company. Despite the indignation of Captain Gilchrist, who strode up and down the road-bank protesting, the withdrawal was continued, on orders from Colonel Bateman, back to the starting-point. This hazardous movement was partly screened from the enemy by the snow-shower which fell at about 5.30.

Being still uncertain whether Noreuil was strongly held, Colonel Bateman now sent the withdrawn companies over the spur to move against it from the front. As the troops reached the skyline, they came under fire from machine-guns in the far side of Noreuil and also from their right, where the enemy

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102 Under Captains J. W. Pearce, F. Sale, and E. M. Bland. (Pearce belonged to Ballarat, Vic.; Sale to Melbourne; and Bland to Brighton, Vic.)
103 One of its Lewis gunners, Private B. Collins (of Berwick, Vic.), silenced with his gun an enemy machine-gun, and then dashed in, threw a bomb into the shelter of the crew, and brought back the lock of the German gun. On the left flank Lieut. W. E. Hardwick met another German post.
104 P 182.
105 Although Gilchrist thought that the road could have been held, this would have involved extreme risk.
had re-established himself on the spur which they were crossing. They nevertheless pushed some way down the slope, studded with small manure-heaps, behind which they presently threw themselves. An enemy battery was sharply shelling them. Gilchrist, moving boldly from one party to another, quickly grasped the situation, and telephoned to Gellibrand. About the same time, at 8.20, a message reached Colonel Bateman from some of the company officers who had found the 21st also held up. It stated that no further advance could be made without very heavy casualties. He accordingly abandoned an intention to have the effort renewed at 8.30 and Gellibrand, on being informed, ordered the troops to fall back and dig an outpost-line half-a-mile in advance of the previous night's positions. This withdrawal from close contact with some of the enemy's posts was difficult, but Gellibrand's advanced guns assisted by suppressing the dangerous machine-gun farther along the spur and, by dribbling men back in twos and threes, the infantry extricated itself with slight loss.

Divisional and corps headquarters were quite unaware that an important operation was being attempted. The first news came in telegrams from Gellibrand:

5.30 a.m. Advance guard moving forward to establish a line running north-west and south-east through Noreuil and co-operating with troops on flanks in support of 13th Light Horse patrols.

Untimed. 23rd Battalion reach Noreuil at 5.30 a.m.

9.33. Line of villages in my front held by infantry with machine-guns and artillery. Casualties in closing on villages are about 150. Am now falling back to the general line . . . (there follow particulars of the line taken up).

At 11.45 Gellibrand reported that he thought Noreuil was held by 150 Germans with from four to six machine-guns. Longatte also was held by the enemy. The Germans were supported

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106 A battery of German field-guns, several 4.2's, and a trench-mortar were firing.
107 The three companies of the 21st in front of Noreuil had independently made a second effort. Capt Pearce had suggested to his colleagues that the companies should reorganise in dead ground occupied by his own men near Vraucourt Copse. The second attempt was made after this reorganisation, but was stopped by machine-guns.
108 The artillery observers also directed these guns on such other parties of the enemy as they saw.
by both field and heavy artillery, and he would therefore wait for the divisions on his flanks to close up before trying again.

To Birdwood and Smyth the unexpected news of this engagement and of the casualties suffered—which were eventually found to be more than twice as severe as Gellibrand at first believed, totalling 13 officers and 318 others—came as a shock, especially as 50 men were missing. Despite White's advocacy, Gellibrand never regained with Birdwood the high opinion and confidence which his vigour in previous stages of the pursuit had won. To the troops, whose morale, notwithstanding their previous labours, was very high, no blame could be attached; their performance calls rather for astonishment, and suggests that, if the attack had been deferred till the following night, the plan clearly explained and the ground closely reconnoitred, the operation—confused nightmare though it was when so hastily initiated—might have succeeded. The true blame appears to lie mainly with Gellibrand, who, reading into the order an imaginary implication, undertook a hazardous operation with insufficient time for its performance, but partly with the staff of the 2nd Division, which, knowing Gellibrand's inclination, had forwarded Gough's order in a manner that left an opening for misinterpretation as to the method of its performance. Gough probably did require some risk to be taken, and he accepted the result of this action and that of the cavalry, who also were prevented by machine-guns from penetrating between Henin, Croisilles, and Ecoust, as conclusive. At a conference between him and his corps commanders on the evening of March 20th it was agreed: "It is evident that we cannot ' rush ' the defence any further than we have now done. The line of villages Beaumetz-Lagnicourt-Noreuil-Ecoust St. Mein-Croisilles must be carried before Hindenburg Line can be attacked. This to be done independently by Corps as their artillery can be got up."

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109 Only 38 were killed. Among these were Lieutenant D. S. Evans (of Ballarat, Vic.), acting-adjutant of the 23rd, who was shot when going out to Rossister's company before Lagnicourt, and Lieutenants E. N. Haiggar (of Sarsfield, Vic.) of the 21st and P. J. Rodriguez (of Broome, W. Aust.) of the 23rd.

110 A number of the 23rd were captured, some unaware of the order to retire, others unable to carry it out.

111 The battalion commanders may be criticised for not having immediately pointed out that the time for assembly was too short, but Gellibrand was not one to whom such a statement could be lightly made.

112 On March 24, however, at a conference with Haig, he stated his belief that the Hindenburg Line in his front was held by the Germans as a rear-guard position.
A careful narrative of this fight from the German side is given in the history of the 119th R.I.R.\textsuperscript{113} (26th Reserve Division), whose third battalion held, with two companies and six machine-guns,\textsuperscript{114} Noreuil and Ecoust-Longatte. The villages were regarded as outposts of the Hindenburg Line, and since the morning of March 18 no German forces except patrols and small posts had been in advance of them. The orders of the two companies were to repel mere reconnaissances, but, if more heavily attacked, to fall back, without serious resistance, on the Hindenburg Line. Further south, Lagnicourt was held by the III/91st R.I.R. (2nd Guard Reserve Division) with one company and three machine-guns. The garrison of Noreuil and Ecoust had, for immediate support, two guns of the 26th Field Artillery Regiment, emplaced in a railway cutting close behind Ecoust.

On March 18 the patrols of the 119th R.I.R. had watched the Australian light horse and infantry advancing on Beugny and Vaulx, and after the capture of St. Léger on the 19th the garrisons of Ecoust and Noreuil realised that they might be attacked next day. At 4 a.m. on the 20th (according to the German account\textsuperscript{115}), while it was still dark, a patrol of the 121st R.I.R.\textsuperscript{116} in the road leading from Vraucourt sugar factory to Ecoust ran into the advanced party of the 21st Australian battalion advancing under cover of the trees felled along the road. The Wurttembergers manned the crater and held it, but presently, observing the attacking waves opening out, and being short of ammunition, fell back on the picquet of the 12th company. Other advanced German posts kept up a "murderous" fire, but their machine-guns had only 2,000 rounds, and they too fell back. The field-guns in the railway cutting now opened, but, although their guns caused some confusion, they could not stop the Australian advance. The position, says the German narrative, was "critical,"\textsuperscript{117} for mere rifle-fire "could make no impression." But at this juncture the observers of several German batteries happened to visit the 12th company commander. Their batteries were forthwith turned on, and to this the writer attributes the repulse of the 21st's attack, and of its renewed effort at 9 a.m.

Opposite the 23rd, at Noreuil, the alarm is said not to have been given until 4.45, when an advanced post on the Noreuil-Morchies road saw the Victorians making along the ridge towards Lagnicourt. The forward posts with their machine-guns ran back to the picquets on the edge of the villages, and, as at Ecoust, some of their abandoned positions were occupied by the Australians. A platoon of the 9th company of the 119th R.I.R. was hurried forward to reinforce, and later, both at Ecoust and Noreuil, definite counter-attacks were made to regain the lost positions. The German artillery threw a barrage on and in rear of the captured crater on the Ecoust road, while a "storm-detachment," twenty strong, endeavoured to rush it.

\textsuperscript{113} Das Württ. R.I.R. Nr. 119 im Weltkrieg, 1914-1918 by Matthaus Gerster, pp. 73-5.

\textsuperscript{114} That is, those of the 3rd M.G. Company of the regiment. There were also attached to the battalion a half-squadron of the 20th Uhlan Regiment, and a platoon of the Wurttemberg Cyclist Company.

\textsuperscript{115} The time must actually have been a little later.

\textsuperscript{116} Parts of this regiment used to relieve or reinforce parts of the 119th R.I.R. in Noreuil.

\textsuperscript{117} The Australians observed fires to break out in the villages, as if the Germans were preparing to abandon them. According to the German account, a pioneer "lost his head," and destroyed several wells, rendering the water afterwards undrinkable.
attempt twice failed. An 8-inch howitzer was then turned upon it, and the fourth shell is said to have burst inside the crater, killing the whole of its garrison—ten Australians. The neighbouring part of the Victorian line having retired, the Germans reoccupied the post. The counter-attack at midafternoon by thirty men of the 9th and 11th companies on the party of the 23rd who were cut off near Noreuil was facilitated by the action of a German leader who, seeing a Lewis gunner preparing to fire his gun, threw a bomb which burst among the Victorians, wounding a number. The Germans claim to have captured there thirty-one prisoners and three Lewis guns. "The lack of their (the Australian) artillery," says the German account, "reversed itself bitterly on them." Contrary to the Australian belief at the time, the German company defending Noreuil lost not a single man.

The relief of the 6th Australian Infantry Brigade was at once completed, and the operations against Noreuil and Lagnicourt were entrusted to the 7th and its commander, Brigadier-General Wisdom. Of the line of villages specified in Gough's new order, Beaumetz, which was in front of the main German outpost-line, was captured, as has been already narrated, by Elliott's column on March 21st. All the others formed part of the main rearguard line, and it was at first intended to attack the whole of them simultaneously. For this purpose the V Corps (which had now extended its flank so as to relieve the II Corps, north of I Anzac) was ordered to co-operate with I Anzac by assaulting Croisilles and Ecoust at the same time as I Anzac struck at the adjacent Noreuil and Lagnicourt; but from day to day the 7th British Division had to postpone the operation. On March 24th, as the villages confronting the British were largely protected by entanglements, whereas opposite the Australians there was little wire, it was decided that the

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118 The German accounts attribute the final retirements opposite both villages solely to German shell-fire. Actually the withdrawal was consequent upon an order given by the Australian commanders.

119 The 11th company, 119th R.I.R.

120 An isolated belt was, however, being set up near Noreuil, and a barbed wire fence protected some of the posts south of Lagnicourt.
latter should wait no longer, but should attack on March 26th. The British were now merely to bombard Écoust at the hour of the attack. The Australians therefore dropped the plan of attacking Noreuil, but would bombard that village to give the impression that it was being assaulted, and would direct their attack upon Lagnicourt alone. The field artillery of the advanced guard was gradually increased to two brigades, the 4th and 5th, grouped under Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd of the 5th. In addition, three siege batteries and two of sixty-pounders had reached Beugniètre and Sapignies.

From March 20th to 26th the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade lay in front of Lagnicourt and Noreuil, actively patrolling in preparation. The brigade was hardly recognisable as the same body that had threaded its way to Flers in the rain and dark before the nightmare operations of November 5th. With the changes in command which followed that action, the moral atmosphere, as well as the physical, seemed to have brightened; the self-confidence of the troops had been further heightened by the decisive success of their swift, determined attack at Malt Trench. The change to green sweet country, and the excitement of open warfare, had further sharpened their spirits. The men, coming from the “outer” States, included a fair proportion of country-bred Australians, and at this juncture the cutting edge of the 7th Brigade was probably keener than that of almost any other in the A.I.F. On the day after it took over, it was further enlivened by watching a combat between four British and five German aeroplanes, “like magpies fighting” (as an Australian put it), only a few hundred feet above the Lagnicourt valley. The men of the 26th were cheering and their officers trying to keep them down, when a German machine came to ground several hundred yards in front of the posts. Several Queenslanders, already racing towards it, succeeded in shooting the pilot, who had started to run down the valley. They found him lying wounded, and to their great elation, as they prepared to carry him to their lines, he told them that he was Prince

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121 As in Elliott's column, field-guns were sent farther forward, either singly or in sections, to "snipe" for the vanguard, returning to their batteries at night.


123 The 24th, 115th, and 140th Siege, and 24th and 122nd Heavy, Batteries.
Frederick Charles of Prussia. They divided his cap, gloves, and goggles with a couple of light horsemen who also raced up. He was carried to the aid-post; before his death a few days later, in hospital, he thanked the Australians and others concerned for their kindness and "good sportsmanship." He, too, was "a sport," he said.

In the course of their scouting, the 26th and the light horse occupied a particularly useful post, till then held by the enemy, at a crossing of two sunken roads about half-way down the valley towards Lagnicourt. From this vantage-point patrols of the Queenslanders nightly crawled out to make certain that the Germans had not withdrawn their rear-guard. On the night of the 21st an officer with one companion ran into a German post in the north-western entrance to the village. The following night another patrol probed the line of German posts in the same area, while a third close on its right, examined the orchard hedges, behind some of which the Germans defending the village were evidently entrenched.

124 Other particulars of the incident are as follows. The prince (according to one of his fellow officers) commanded the 41st Reconnaissance Flight. He was a keen airman, but was not allowed to join a fighting squadron. This day, however, he had telephoned to the commander of a fighting formation and asked if he might fly with him. He received permission, but, being unused to flying in formation, lost his companions in a cloud, and was thus deprived of their protection. He was flying a green single-seater Albatros, painted with skull and cross-bones, when, in a duel so close that they nearly collided, he was shot down by Lieutenant C. E. M. Pickthorn (of London) of No. 32 Squadron, R.F.C. His engine stopped and he landed 200 yards in front of the post near Vaulx Wood. Corporals B. G. James (of Newmarket, Q'land) and E. J. Powell (of Perth, Tas.; killed in action on 2 Sept., 1918), 26th Battalion, shot him, and Private C. H. H. Hall (of Campbell Town, Tas.) and another ran out and captured him calling at the same time for stretcher-bearers. Two or three light horsemen galloped up, and it was while these were bending over him that he told them, between his groans, that he was a prince. Major R. G. Legge (of Sydney) and Captain S. W. Neale (of East Kew, Vic.; died of wounds on 29 Sept., 1918) now came up, and the wounded prince, having evidently heard stories circulated as propaganda, asked Legge to ensure that he should not be maltreated by these Australians.

125 That from Noreuil to Morchies, and that from Lagnicourt to Beugny. On March 20 a patrol under Sergeant S. Smith (of Cardiff, Wales, and Hobart, Tas.; died 21 Dec., 1925) of the 26th Battalion found the post occupied by the enemy, but next day it was found empty and was seized. The light horse patrol then rode on down the valley to ascertain if the Germans were still in Lagnicourt. Further down, rifle and machine-gun fire was turned upon them, and, before they got clear, 3 men and 4 horses were killed. That afternoon the Germans tried to reoccupy their post, but were repelled, one being captured.

126 The Germans also were making special endeavours to find out the intentions of their opponents. Early on March 23 the post of the 7th Brigade in Vraucourt Copse was heavily bombarded and a number of Germans were afterwards seen running forward, and were shot down. The history of the 119th R.I.R shows that this was a raid attempted by it which "went wrong and brought losses."

127 Under Lieut. F. Brand (of Rockhampton, Q'land). The patrol was challenged and fired on at fifty yards. On another patrol Corporal E. V. R. Lee (of Ballina, N.S.W), with a companion, crawled through the hedges to a long barn, which was found to be empty, though beyond the German outpost-line.

128 Under Sergeant W. D. Brown (of South Burnie, Tas.).
Sergeant Hickling and Corporal Roberson found the enemy establishing an outlying machine-gun post south-west of the village.

These bold reconnaissances made known to the troops the defence which they might encounter. The patrol reports were checked by aeroplane photographs, of which a good supply now reached the infantry battalions. Moreover the flying corps had established, immediately behind brigade headquarters at Beugnâtre, a landing-ground at which pilots called hourly to confer with the brigade staff. Thus when, on the day before the attack, Captain Cherry of the 26th, watching the place closely, became convinced that there was a trench round its south-eastern corner, a request was made for investigation from the air. A car arrived almost immediately, bringing Lieutenant Cleaver of the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C., and another officer. They asked what question Cherry wished to have answered, motored back to Beugnâtre, flew from there over the village, and within two hours of the request had dropped near battalion headquarters a map marked with the German trench.

The plan of attack was for the 26th (Queensland and Tasmania) to send one company round the right of the village and another round its left, to establish a combined line of posts 800 yards beyond. A third would sweep through the village, and a fourth company was to follow it and “mop up” any Germans left in the place. A company of the 28th (Western Australia) was lent to the 26th for the preliminary duty of clearing the ground ahead of the assembly position and routing out a machine-gun previously located there. This company, with a second in close support, would afterwards act as reserve. On the left of the 26th, the 27th (South Australia) was to advance with two companies along the spur between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, seize the road connecting the villages, and throw a line of outposts beyond, while on the extreme

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120 Sgt. J. R. Hickling (No. 76; 26th Bn.) Station hand; of Eulo, Q’land; b. Thargomindah, Q’land, 24 March, 1892.
122 On the night of the 24th, however, the gun was found to have been dismounted.
left a third company extended along the ridge to form a flank looking down on Noreuil. The 25th (Queensland), which under the original plan would have attacked Noreuil, would now merely swing up its right flank to connect with this line. On the right of Lagnicourt General Elliott’s column would assist by advancing its left to the Lagnicourt-Beaumetz road and then throwing out a line of posts 1,000 yards farther to the Doignies road, continuing south-eastwards the line of the 7th Brigade. The two chief attacking battalions (26th and 27th) of the 7th Brigade were to assemble in the Noreuil-Morchies road across the Lagnicourt valley, and to make the advance from there to Lagnicourt, three-quarters of a mile away, under cover of field artillery whose eighteen-pounders, opening at 5.15 a.m., would play for twenty minutes on the village outskirts, its howitzers and the heavy batteries meanwhile shelling the chief cross-roads both in the hamlet and in the country beyond. By then the infantry should have caught up the barrage, which would now advance north-east at the rate of 50 yards in two minutes, with the infantry behind it. The advance would have commenced in the dark, and would end about daybreak. The battalion of Elliott’s column on the right would have no prearranged barrage as protection, but a battery of field-guns and one of howitzers were to shoot as it required them.

The night was one of drizzling rain, and so dark that any troops stirring away from well known roads were likely to become lost. The task of moving the companies into position was therefore most difficult, and at the starting hour the left company of the 26th had not arrived and its whereabouts were unknown. The second-in-command of the battalion, Major Robinson, who because of these difficulties had been sent by Lieutenant-Colonel Travers to the starting

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134 Watches had been advanced on March 24 to “summer” time; 5.15 was therefore really 4.15.
135 In order to deceive the Germans into imagining that Noreuil also was being attacked, a similar barrage was laid round it by four batteries (the 4th A.F.A. Brigade). The barrage on Lagnicourt was provided by six batteries grouped under Colonel Lloyd’s 5th A.F.A Brigade, and by two of Elliott’s column, the 54th and 55th, which enfiladed the roads south-east of the town.
136 These were the remaining batteries (53rd and 114th) of the 14th A.F.A Brigade. They were also to fire upon any good target that offered Elliott’s heavy howitzers (88th Siege Battery) and sixty-pounders (26th Heavy Battery) were to fire on villages and strong-points ahead of his column.
137 Both Captains Cherry and Cooper lost themselves in trying to find battalion headquarters.

Trees on the Ecoust road in the distance.

_Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E430._
18. The street in Lagnicourt up which Captain P H Cherry's party advanced on 26th March, 1917

The road-signs were painted by the Germans.

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4581
Taken on 16th September, 1917
point, at once hurried two platoons of the "mopping up" company to the vacant flank. But as soon as the barrage fell the commander of the missing company, Captain Cooper, was able to guide himself by its flashes, and with his men punctually reached the left edge of the village. On the other flank of the 26th, however, more serious miscarriage occurred. The 15th Brigade's left battalion was not in touch with the 26th at the starting point, nor could it be seen. The two flanks, which were to advance together, had arranged for close co-operation throughout the assault. The right company commander of the 26th reported the situation and hastily strung out part of his second wave along the empty position to his right.

In spite of these difficulties and of the comparative thinness of the artillery barrage, the attack by the 7th Brigade went almost precisely as planned. The right company of the 26th under Lieutenant Lloyd, when passing the south of the village, was suddenly dazzled by a searchlight turned full upon it from a German outpost south of the town. Thrown into brilliant light, the troops hesitated and halted, but a Lewis gunner of the company turned his gun upon it, firing from the hip. The light was almost instantly cut off, and within half-a-minute of the stoppage the advance continued. Few Germans were met, and Lloyd duly closed round the north-east of the village. Captain Cooper's company, mixed with half the reserve company, similarly made its way round the western side, though losing some men by sniping shots as it swept past. Lagnicourt was thus quickly enclosed, but the centre company, which, under Captain Cherry, was to sweep through the village itself, did not appear. Lieutenant Stapleton of the right company, on reaching the far side of the place, captured several Germans, including a cripple serving in the medical corps, who, when questioned, said that the village was held by 300 to 400 men. As only 450 were actually attacking

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120 This was of course due to the comparative slightness of the artillery force. The shell-bursts of the heavy artillery appeared to predominate.

121 About 300 yards south of the village on the Lagnicourt-Morchies road. A German barbed-wire fence was also encountered, but did not stop the advance.

122 The operator may have been killed, for a German was afterwards found dead beside the searchlight; there was a bullet hole through its tripod.

123 The fact that this cripple, with one foot several inches shorter than the other, should have been recruited impressed those who saw him with the difficulty existing in Germany of maintaining her army at strength.

124 The true number was probably 250, including the posts on its flanks.
it, the line of Australian posts beyond it waited with some anxiety for the appearance of Cherry's party. They knew it was fighting its way through, for Germans, singly or in twos and threes, constantly came breaking out of the town and were captured or shot down.\(^{144}\)

Captain Cherry had met with tough resistance. He had advanced with his company in two divisions, himself leading the right along the Beugny road into the south-west corner of Lagnicourt, while Lieutenant Hamilton,\(^{145}\) moving on the left of the road, attacked the hedges on the western outskirts. They were to meet in the small open space in the centre of the village. As they approached the village Hamilton's platoons received, from the orchard hedges, fifty yards in front of them, the full effect of the defending machine-guns. Many men fell, but Hamilton, who was one of the first to be hit, shouted to Lieutenant Bieske,\(^{146}\) who was with the party, to take charge. Bieske accordingly led the men forward again, but the movement was at once fired on by a machine-gun, and only Bieske and five men reached the German trench behind the nearest hedge. The Germans fled from it, but from the defences of the hedges to the left a machine-gun was still firing. Bieske and his small party made their way to its flank and bombed it out of the trench without further loss.

Meanwhile Captain Cherry, moving up the road into the village, was fired at from the first house, a large farm built round a courtyard. The Germans, whose breakfast was unfinished, were firing from windows and doors, and for a few minutes the Australians were checked. Then Cherry's bombers rushed both gates of the court, and a Lewis gunner, Private Nutt,\(^{147}\) firing his gun from the hip, reached the door of the barn and hosed the interior with bullets.

After clearing this farm Cherry moved on up the main street of the village, a straggling road of greasy, putty-coloured

\(^{144}\) One of those so shot, while trying to escape by running along the road to Quéant, was found to be an officer, Captain Rudolf Guesse. It is believed that he was the commandant of the garrison in this sector. A German signaller carrying the wireless apparatus was captured. A "listening" plant—for overhearing telephone conversations—was also captured


\(^{146}\) Lieut H. H. Bieske, 26th Bn. Miner; of Ballarat, Vic, and Mount Morgan, Q'land, b. Geelong, Vic., 28 Nov., 1892

\(^{147}\) Cpl C. H. Nutt, M.M. (No. 4488; 26th Bn.). Labourer; of Mareeba, Q'land; b. England, 1892.
mud, bordered with farmers' houses and barns. He was at once shot at from some stables but headed straight into the stable yard, whereupon the Germans there surrendered. Cherry's Lewis gunners carried their weapons slung, and fired as they went; the barrel-casings became so hot that they could only be aimed by holding the slings. As the party approached the central space of the village, it was found that this now consisted of a great chalk crater blown at the cross-roads and stoutly defended by Germans who fired from its rim. The only approaches were up the streets which were commanded both from the crater-rim and from the loopholed houses beyond. Lieutenant Corner, who had gone ahead, was killed a few yards from its rim. Cherry was checked, and at first decided that trench-mortars must be brought up before he could successfully rush the crater. He accordingly sent for them, but afterwards, chafing at the necessary delay, decided to make the attempt under cover of Lewis gun fire and bombardment with rifle-grenades.

The rush succeeded; but Cherry was astonished to find, lying at the bottom of the crater, Lieutenant Bieske with a broken leg. Cherry's first thought was that it must have been Bieske's party against whom he had been fighting. It turned out, however, that Bieske, entering the village and being unable to find Cherry, had brought his five men across the village to its eastern outskirts. There, intending to join up with Lloyd, he made towards a sound of voices and ran into a big German officer, whom he captured. Germans began to bolt away from all sides, and, in the excitement of following them, Bieske forgot his prisoner, who suddenly grappled with him. The German, though much heavier, was flabby and faltered. “I

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148 See Vol. XII, plate 306.
149 Lieut F. W. Corner, 26th Bn Farmer; of Mosman, N.S.W., b. South Shields, Eng., 19 Sept., 1894 Killed in action, 26 March, 1917.
whipped a 'flying mare' on him," said Bieske afterwards, and as soon as the German fell he was shot by another of the party. In the dim light figures were now seen ahead. To make sure that they were Australians. Bieske went on to a corner of the road, and immediately found himself facing from their left rear the Germans in the crater who were opposing Cherry. Being entirely without cover, he rushed at them with his revolver and, just as their rifles flashed, leapt clean over their heads and, with a shattered ankle, rolled to the bottom of the crater. This unexpected attack, proving that there were Australians in rear of them, caused the Germans to hesitate. They left the crater, apparently to reconnoitre, but returned to it only to be overwhelmed by a charge of Cherry's men, and bayonetted.

At 6.30 the Australians digging at the line of posts beyond the village raised a cheer as they saw Cherry's company emerging from the buildings to join them. After still another stiff fight with Germans in dugouts by the roadside he had forced his way through. His orders were to fall back at this stage into reserve, but, conceiving that the Germans had not retired far and were preparing to counter-attack, he took the responsibility of retaining his troops out in front to strengthen the right company (Lloyd's) and especially its right-hand post in the Doignies road, where no touch had yet been obtained with the 5th Division.

The 27th Battalion had lined up on the same road as the 26th, and had hurried to its objective. A few Germans were met in the sunken road between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, but were killed or dispersed by Captain Friedriehs, who with his bombers enthusiastically led the right company along the

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150 Bieske's wound was dressed by a German medical orderly, who, with some of Bieske's men, at Major Robinson's orders put him on a door and carried him to the rear. On the way they were all hit by a shell, by which three of them lost their legs.

151 During this stage Col. Travers received from Cherry three messages, which are quoted in one record as follows.

1) "Held up by strong point. Have you any Stokes?"
2) (half-an-hour later) "Can't wait for Stokes; having a 'go' at it; will report result later."
3) "Got them with Lewis guns and rifle bombs from the flanks. The lot killed. Damned good."

Cherry had no anxiety as to the other companies—he felt certain of finding them in position.

Lagnicourt side of the ridge. A number of Germans hurrying up the road ran into this company also, and were captured. A post was thrust far along the ridge, enclosing the stump of Lagnicourt mill. Captain Bice's company occupied part of the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road farther to the left. Here, observing that this flank had closed in to the right as it advanced, Lieutenant Davies placed a post 200 yards farther down the road, overlooking Noreuil. The flank was joined to the old front line by Lieutenant Beddome's company stringing along the crest to the left rear. On the right touch was gained with the 26th, but on the extreme left the 25th was prevented by machine-guns in Noreuil from swinging up its right.

About 7.30, after the first few messages telling of the success of the 27th, came others to the effect that Germans, evidently from Noreuil, were appearing on the left of the troops in the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road. Keen sniping came from Noreuil, and under cover of it the Germans were evidently building up a line just divided by the crest from that of the 27th. Their line, only fifty yards away at some points, might make its rush attack at any moment, and the danger was great, for many of the rifles of the South Australians were choked with mud. A fair number of men were being hit from Noreuil, and four of the Lewis guns on the ridge were reported to have been destroyed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Slane of the 27th was, however, well informed of the situation by each of his company commanders, and about 8 o'clock he telephoned the information to the 12th Battery (Major St. Clair). The battery, which had been trying to keep down the snipers in Noreuil, now turned

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183 The subaltern leaders of the first wave of the 27th were Lieutenants W. L. Davies and A. B. Durdin; of its second wave, Lieutenants G. Ward and A. R. Burton. (Davies belonged to Kent Town, S. Aust.; Durdin to Forrestville, S. Aust.; Ward to Glenaroua, Vic.; Burton to Nadda, S. Aust.)
186 According to one report, at the post near the windmill every weapon was dugged except one captured Mauser.
188 He had a direct line of telephone to this battery.
its fire in enfilade upon the line of Germans on the open crest. They were also under fire from a machine-gun of the 7th Company on the far left flank. Meanwhile the Germans had made one dangerous movement. An officer had appeared leading an advance against the left in the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road. When he was shot, the heart went out of the counter-attack. Under the covering fire of St. Clair's battery, the Australian flank crept forward at some points over the crest, so that it could fire towards Noreuil. There, under a scattered shelling, it held on throughout the day, and the Germans gradually withdrew.

The 26th Battalion around Lagnicourt was not seriously affected by this early counter-attack; but, about 9 o'clock, the enemy began to shell the village more heavily, and continued till 10.30. Meanwhile the troops in front of the village could see in the distance, near Pronville, Germans estimated at 1,000 strong, lining up in small groups near the foremost entanglements of the Hindenburg Line. Their officers appeared to be showing the ground over which they were to attack. Word was sent to Colonel Travers, who telephoned the information to his supporting battery, the 14th (Major Fanning). But the original message had taken forty minutes to arrive, and, when the place was shelled, the Germans had already left it. Soon afterwards, a message arrived from Cherry saying that the enemy was counter-attacking, and asking for artillery support. Travers sent forward the second company of the 28th; its third and fourth companies were afterwards allotted to him, and were sent on towards the front. General Wisdom at 11.30, and again at 12.25, appealed

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160 Two of these guns, under Lieutenant W. Hargrave (of Glen Forrest, W. Aust.), were attached to the 27th Battalion. The second, near the windmill, also fired at the foremost Germans, and was shifted to enfilade them.

161 They established posts behind felled trees or other barricades farther down the roads leading into Noreuil.

162 He was at first inclined to believe that the enemy was not more than a company strong, and that the threat was not dangerous.

to his colleague, General Elliott, to attack the enemy's left. Wisdom reported afterwards that the launching of his counter-stroke was delayed by the impression that Elliott's troops held the Doignies road.

Be that as it may, before the later companies of the 28th had arrived, an acute crisis had come and passed. Lloyd's and Cherry's companies of the 26th were disposed in posts at an average distance of 300 yards beyond the northern and eastern outskirts. Most of these posts were dug into the banks of sunken roads radiating from the village, and looked out over fields bare except for thickly sprinkled manure heaps. At some posts men had been set to level the nearer heaps which interfered with their field of fire. But, when the Germans advanced, hidden from many of the Queenslanders by the curve of the hill, and reappeared on a wide front only 300 yards away, these heaps greatly assisted their further progress. On the ridge to the left of Lagnicourt two attached machine-guns under Lieutenant Beggs, opening at 800 yards, completely stopped the counter-attack in that sector; but on the right of Lagnicourt the flank post under Lieutenant Stapleton, 400 yards down the Doignies road, still watching for a sign of the 5th Division, had now to withdraw closer to the village, since a single German sniper establishing himself among the trees farther along the road could have placed it out of action.

Working from one manure-heap to another, the Germans steadily approached and began to fire from front and flank into the northern posts, some of which merely lay in the open behind the heaps. The Lewis guns were frequently clogged with mud, and the men, whose hands and cartridges were smeared with clay, could not keep their rifles from choking.

In addition to part of the 28th, he had the 19th Battalion (5th Brigade) in reserve.

Lieut. J. Beggs, 7th M.G. Coy. Sleeper Hawer; of Nanga Brook, W. Aust.; b. Kerang, Vic., 17 March, 1886. (One of these guns, however, should, according to the orders from the 19th Battalion, have been on the eastern side of Lagnicourt.)

At one time men were seen farther along the road, and were at first thought to be Australians (which they possibly were). Afterwards it was conjectured that they had been Germans.

The effect of the heavy German bombardment is said to have been partly averted by the action of Captain Cherry, who, observing that the Germans were firing yellow flares to show their position to their artillery, himself promptly fired some of the same lights, which he had found near by. Whether for this reason or another, the German artillery lengthened its range and shelled the farther part of the village.

At one time seven of these were out of action. In one post a man was kept at work cleaning rifles with a torn-up German blanket.
On top of all else, some of the posts were fired into by supporting batteries on the right, which seemed to be unaware of their position. The jamming of a Lewis gun on the left gave the enemy the opportunity to penetrate between the posts there. Two others, thus outflanked, drew back closer to the village. Lieutenant Humphrys, in charge of a fourth, had sent back to ask if he should withdraw, and had been ordered by Lloyd to hold his position at all costs. This post accordingly held, until Humphrys had been killed, the Lewis gun had jammed, and ammunition had failed, when, with the Germans now on all sides of them, the survivors under Sergeant Hickling surrendered.

Meanwhile, the southern flank of the Germans had crossed the Doignies road, which the 5th Division was to have held, and worked round the right of the Lagnicourt posts. The first reinforcement from the 28th had by then arrived, and a platoon commander, Lieutenant Jerry, had hurriedly stationed four posts among the manure-heaps south-east of the village. But the enemy, still advancing with skill and bringing a machine-gun, practically annihilated these and pressed back the Australian flank to the edge of the village.

To the Australians north and east of Lagnicourt, fighting with their backs against the village, and with the Germans almost touching some of the posts, the situation seemed almost desperate. Cherry and the other officers, after conferring as to a possible withdrawal, decided to hold on, but it seemed

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169 The area of the 5th Division on the right also was, through the same cause, shelled by batteries on the left.
likely that the next step must be an attempt to charge back through the encircling enemy. At this stage, however, the enemy's spirit gave way. His troops on the left, within a stone's throw of success, began to fall back, followed by increasing fire from the Australians. The German machine-gunners on the right took shelter in some dead ground, where they were presently captured, together with the gun, by Jerry and a single other survivor of his party. The rest of the German line, in close contact with the Australian posts, ebbed and withdrew over the slope on which the Australian artillery was now laying a scattered barrage. Later in the day a long line of Germans was seen digging 1,000 yards from the Australian posts.

Thus, by outlasting the enemy when both sides were at the limit of their endurance, the Queenslanders had defeated this dangerous attack. The Germans could not have penetrated as they did had the battalion of Elliott's column been in its prearranged position. To the attack by that battalion, the narrative must now turn.

No commander in the A.I.F. was more eager than Elliott to assist to the utmost any force acting on his flank, and on this, as on other occasions, he was anxious to do even more than was asked or expected. On March 21st, as soon as the order for participation by his column was received, he ordered the 60th (Victoria) Battalion to prepare for the attack. Its officers were sent up to reconnoitre the ground, and between them and the 26th Battalion there were arranged plans for exceptionally thorough co-operation. Their flanking companies were to assemble and advance together, and their final posts on the Doignies road were to be in close touch. On the evening of March 24th the 60th stood ready to carry out these arrangements, when the operation was postponed.

At this stage the elaborated plans were dislocated by a simple change—the 58th Battalion was substituted for the 60th. For some reason, difficult to trace, it was not until seventy-five minutes before the assault that this change was known to the commander of the 26th. No mutual arrangements had been made with the 58th, but its two attacking

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companies duly advanced, independently of the 26th, to their first objective, and then sent forward detachments to form posts on the Doignies road. Neither company, however, met with full success. The right was strongly resisted by enemy posts on that road, and failed to reach it, and the left was fired on by German machine-gunners holding an isolated position in a crater between the left of the 58th and the right of the 26th. The left-flank post was reported to have been established with some difficulty about 600 yards from the flank of the 26th, but the German machine-gun fired at it from the left rear, and, when morning mists cleared and the German counter-attack was seen sweeping from Pronville across the front, this post withdrew. Others farther east fired on the passing Germans, and Elliott, on receiving Wisdom's appeal, placed the 58th Battalion under his command, sent up the 59th with orders to counter-attack the enemy's left, and summoned, for further assistance if required, a battalion from the 8th Brigade. Elliott had arranged that a telephone line should be laid direct between Wisdom's brigade and his, but, for some unknown reason, this was twice disconnected in the signal office of the 7th Brigade, and messages had to travel back through a hierarchy of headquarters before reaching the adjoining brigade. Much time was thus lost. But at this stage the delay made little difference, since even before Wisdom's appeal had been made—much more before any action by Elliott resulted—the German attack had been driven off.

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173 The Lagnicourt-Beaumont road.
174 The main point d'appui between Louverval and Lagnicourt, held by one of the four companies of the 111/91st R.I.R. and three machine-guns, lay on this part of the road.
175 On a captured map, three machine-guns are marked near this point.
176 The faulty liaison during the counter-attack was the occasion of a sharp difference between Wisdom and Elliott. Wisdom is said to have reported that the number of the prisoners would have been greater if he could have induced Elliott to deliver a prompt counter-stroke against the left of the counter-attacking Germans. Elliott, on the other hand, pointed out that he had caused the telephone to be laid from the 58th to the 26th Battalion, “but had difficulty in preserving communication owing to lack of interest at the 2nd Division end. On two occasions linesmen found the line had been disconnected from the switchboard and dropped. The 15th Brigade sent a liaison officer to the 26th Battalion, but no liaison officer was supplied in return.” Elliott also, at 10.20, placed the 58th Battalion under Wisdom's control. Thus the faulty liaison during the battle was clearly not due to any fault of Elliott.

These claims and counter-claims were reported to General Gough when he visited the front area, but their importance is merely academic, since the course of the action was not in fact affected by these events. Elliott throughout wrongly believed that his 58th Battalion was on its objective, and had so informed Wisdom. Wisdom, for his part, did not learn of the German counter-attack until about the time when it was defeated. Consequently, as so often happened, the appeal for help and the energetic measures taken in answer to it all occurred too late to affect the operation.
afternoon the 58th Battalion seized the Doignies road, capturing on the left the troublesome German machine-gun and its crew.177

At about 9.30 that night the Germans bombarded the road, and the southernmost detachment of the 58th was driven in. At the same time the front post on the Cambrai road, in the farmhouse captured by the 57th,178 was so heavily shelled that twelve of its garrison of forty were killed or wounded, and the remainder retired. The shelling here preceded a raid by the enemy.

Captain McDonald179 of the 59th, who had been sent up with his company during the counter-attack on Lagnicourt, happened to be on his way back to Beugny, when this news reached him. On his own initiative, he at once returned to the front and reoccupied the farm. At dusk on the 27th a party of the 58th, advancing partly through Captain Cherry's position and partly across the open to the Doignies road, surprised and captured a post which the enemy had established there also.180

The action at Lagnicourt, at a cost of 377 casualties to the Australians, brought the Fifth Army at one point through the screen of villages and close to the Hindenburg Line. The enemy did not renew his attempt to capture the village, but heavily shelled the buildings, the surrounding roads, and the post of the 27th near the windmill. By one shell, bursting in a sunken road east of the village, Captain Cherry,181 Lieutenant Jerry, and other officers were killed.182

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177 Three men of the 94th R.I.R. With them were seven men of the 91st R.I.R who had taken refuge in the crater on the retirement of the German counter-attack.

178 See p. 171.


180 The 58th captured there a searchlight and machine-gun.

181 Cherry's work on this day was recognised by the award of the Victoria Cross.

182 In the 28th Battalion in this fight there were also killed Lieutenants W. E. S. Cook (of Perth, W. Aust.), G. Eyre Powell (of Walebing, W. Aust.), and A. H. Tiegs (of Rockhampton, Q'land); in the 58th, Lieutenant E. R. Pearson (of Middle Park, Vic.). The 26th Battalion casualties were 8 officers and 134 others; 27th Battalion, 43 others; 28th, 6 officers and 76 others. The 7th Brigade thus lost 14 officers and 253 others. In the 15th Brigade the loss was 5 officers and 105 men. The total loss was therefore 19 officers and 358 others.
It is now known that on March 23, in consequence of the order that the rear-guard line was "after all" to be held, the 2nd Guard Reserve Division decided to attach all three machine-gun companies and the light trench-mortars of the 91st R.I.R. to its rear-guard battalion (III/91st R.I.R.), which held Lagnicourt and the line south-east of it. It was also decided to remodel the defences of Lagnicourt, abandoning the existing trenches and secretly fortifying positions 150 yards farther back in the houses of the village. Wire obstacles were to be placed unobtrusively, and a point d'appui was also to be constructed between Lagnicourt and Louverval (in front of Elliott's column). Although this line was now to be held for some time, Lagnicourt contained no deep dugouts. They were accordingly to be at once begun, and in the meantime, in order to cause the British artillery to scatter its shells rather than concentrate them, the old trenches and outpost positions were to be maintained as dummy defences, and at night parties were to be sent out to dig ostentatiously other works.

On the morning of the action the III/91st R.I.R. had two companies facing the 7th Australian Brigade, one facing the 58th Battalion, and one in reserve. These were supported by the three machine-gun companies and the trench-mortars of the regiment, and by three advanced batteries of field artillery, besides heavier guns firing at long range from just behind the Hindenburg Line. The headquarters of the III/91st R.I.R. were in the village. A map captured in Lagnicourt indicates that the point d'appui between Lagnicourt and Louverval lay opposite the right company of the 58th Australian Battalion, and that this battalion, which had to advance without special barrage, was confronted by many more machine-guns than the troops attacking Lagnicourt itself, an advance from this flank having probably been expected. The counter-attack organised after the loss of the village was preceded by several hours' shelling by the artillery of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, supported by that of the 26th Reserve Division on the north and the 38th Division on the south. For the assault, the III/91st R.I.R. was reinforced by the I/15th R.I.R. (of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division), which counter-attacked from Pronville.

183 It was evidently one of these parties which was discovered by Sgt. Hickling of the 26th (see p. 191).
184 According to the map, nine or ten machine-guns could bear on the 58th, and only two or three on the 26th Battalion.
The outpost battalion of the 119th Regiment (26th Reserve Division) co-operated by an advance from Noreuil. The German staff incorrectly believed that their troops retook the northern part of Lagnicourt as well as the high ground near the windmill; the lack of further success was attributed to the fire of the Australian machine-guns on that ridge.

For the resistance to the left flank of the Australian attack, the III/119th R.I.R. was responsible. The advanced posts of the 10th company, then garrisoning Noreuil, were driven back on their picquet, which at once built up a line of riflemen to protect the flank. Two more companies were brought up, but it was found impossible to retake the posts. The commander of the XIV Reserve Corps, General von Moser (whose sector confronted the 2nd Australian Division), notes in his diary that some pressure was put upon him to recapture Lagnicourt by a strong reinforcement of infantry and artillery. He firmly objected, holding that it was not part of his duty "to make further sacrifices for the maintenance of ground in front of the Siegfried (Hindenburg) Line." Nevertheless he states that his first anxieties as corps commander (he had taken command on March 18) began from that day.

The night before the capture of Lagnicourt was marked by the blowing up of the town hall of Bapaume by a mine placed there by the Germans and operated by a chemical fuse, set more than eight days before. When first Bapaume was entered, the cellars of this building had been searched, and a mine had been found and removed. The truth—that a hidden mine had been left as a trap, in the hopes that a division would place its headquarters there—had not been suspected. No high staff had occupied the place, but about thirty men, including those employed at the coffee stall of the Australian Comforts Fund, and two visiting French deputies, Captain R. Briquet and M. Albert Taillandier, were sleeping there when the explosion occurred, bringing down the tower and walls in a deluge of shattered masonry. The two deputies and the Comforts Fund men were killed, but large fatigue parties, digging furiously throughout that night and the next day, rescued alive six of

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185 The 3rd Machine-Gun Company of the 119th R.I.R. (6 guns) was in course of relief by the 1st, and the guns of both were consequently available.
186 A steel wire was suspended in acid. The acid, eating through it, released a spring operating a striker, and thus fired the mine.
187 A German prisoner had said that it was mined (see p. 87).
188 Probably because it was too obvious a target for the long-range gun which still shelled the town.
189 See Vol. XII, plate 275. Others included were three officers of the 13th Field Company, seven members of the 15th Light Horse Regiment engaged in traffic control, and nine men of the 20th Battalion.
the others. A German wireless operator captured in Lagnicourt said that he had just received instructions to keep his eyes open for any sign of explosion in the direction of Bapaume. He added that similar mines had been laid elsewhere. Before this warning could be circulated, at 12.37 p.m. on March 26th, the luxurious dugout system on the edge of Bapaume, in which Gellibrand and Wisdom had in turn placed their headquarters, was entirely destroyed by a similar mine, two signal clerks and the records of the 7th Brigade being buried. Most of the 7th Brigade staff had fortunately advanced to Vaulx-Vraucourt. Orders were given that dugouts or houses left intact by the enemy must be avoided both by staffs and by troops.

The Comforts Fund men, being under the tower, were killed instantly. The officers of the 13th Field Company and men of the 13th Light Horse, imprisoned in different cellars, were confident they would be dug out, and merely “turned in” to sleep until rescued. Among the units which supplied large digging parties were the 13th Field Company, and 18th, 22nd, and 30th Battalions.

Lieut N. E. W Waraker (of Brisbane; killed in action on 22 Sept., 1917), bombing officer of the 7th Brigade, was blown from the dugout entrance, unharmed. Digging parties, working desperately day and night, were unable to save the signallers or to recover the records. The current diary of the Official War Correspondent, on which this work is partly based, was found during the digging.

For some of the numerous traps afterwards found, see p. 247, footnote 125. Not many Australians were caught by them. At Vaulx-Vraucourt a party of the 2nd Battalion, billeted in a house, was poking a stick up the chimney on the chance of discovering hidden valuables, when a packet of high explosive fell on to the hearth. It had obviously been placed there to explode if a fire was lighted. The fairly widespread indignation among the troops at the enemy’s supposed unfairness in leaving behind these traps was difficult to understand, inasmuch as the Australians themselves had left at Anzac many similar surprises for the Turks—who, in their turn, were strangely indignant. The devices were in some cases unnecessarily cruel, but they effectcd a legitimate object—that of hampering the enemy’s movements by impressing him with the necessity for caution.