CHAPTER XVI

HOLDING THE GAINS AT MESSINES

Long before sunset on June 7th the final British objective had been won along practically the whole battle-front. The plan had been fulfilled with a swift completeness far beyond that of any major achievement of the British Army in France until that day. The German press, inspired by the high command, laid stress on the supposed immensity of the loss inflicted on the British, and the enemy’s commanders, and even German historians to this day, appear to have been under the impression that the Oosttaverne Line (the German “Sehnen Linie”) remained in their own hands. Actually the British loss had been slighter than in most offensives—although, for the whole battle, it seems, on the crude figures, to have slightly exceeded that of the Germans; and the Oosttaverne Line, except for one or possibly more short lengths, was held by the British.

From the moment when the attacking troops reached it, they were on the look out for the expected German counter-attack. Though they hardly realized it, part of the main counter-attack had already been defeated, but other parts of it afterwards fell on them—almost immediately at Huns’ Walk, and, during the night, near Oosttaverne.

At Huns’ Walk, the advanced and isolated portions of the 47th and 37th beyond Hun House were watching the enemy form up in the trees at Steignast Farm and the Douve valley. The barrage had ceased, and machine-gun fire from these trees and from hidden pillboxes was intense. Digging-in was made difficult, and most of the officers were hit. Artillery assistance was obviously required, but most foolishly, when the contact aeroplane came over, the troops, fearing to show their position to the enemy, failed to fire their flares. Their precise position was therefore unknown to the staffs in rear, and runners and

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1Investigations made by the British Official Historian into the figures for casualties on the Somme, 1916, suggest that those given for British casualties may have been somewhat in excess of the true total. (See Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916, pp. 483, 496.)
stretcher-bearers, by whom at first they had sent messages, could not now cross the open. About this time, however, at some position in the first Oosttaverne Line, a quarter of a mile behind the advanced front, a keen half-Chinese Australian, by name Shang, managed to get a Lucas lamp into working order, and, at the order of an officer there, sent a message asking for the assistance of the artillery. To the surprise of those who watched, an answering signal showed that the message had been received.

It had hardly been sent when, about 5.30 p.m., an extended wave of Germans was seen advancing from the trees followed by other waves, the movement being covered by machine-gun fire. The Australian officers lined their men along the hedge and, when the leading Germans were a hundred yards away, gave the word to fire. Their men stood up and shot till some of their rifles became too hot to work. One powerful fellow even fired his Lewis gun from the shoulder. The counter-attack in front melted, but presently it was seen that the Germans were still advancing on the left, and fire was switched thither.

Soon afterwards the troops observed a heavy barrage drop behind them. A few German shells were falling around, and officers and men at first imagined that the barrage in rear also was German. Presently, however, the sound of the British guns firing caused them to realise with horror that it was their own. Soon afterwards, either through an order to search forwards, or through other guns joining in, the British barrage burst upon them in full force. Their position was deluged with shell. Roots were torn from the hedge and tossed in the air, shrapnel began to crack overhead. A tree

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8 Pte. C. J. Shang, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 25844; 47th Bn.). Clerk; of Cairns, Q’land, b Fortitude Valley, Q’land, 4 Aug., 1884.

9 It is stated in Private Gallwey’s diary that, in order to allow fire to be directed on the left, two Australians lay on the surface and allowed a Lewis gun to fire over them. Both were killed.
split and crashed. Fragments of steel swished along the ground and lay smoking. Men were being killed and wounded. Lieutenant Schulz, before he was wounded,4 checked more than one attempt to retire, but, according to Gallwey, a surviving officer eventually gave the word to fall back on the New Zealand line. Some of the wounded implored the troops not to leave; one man begged to be shot before they did so. But the advanced line ran back, every man for himself, through the British barrage. Many were killed. Farther north, despite their efforts to hold their men, Captains Williams (47th) and Allen (45th) eventually caught sight of one another standing out alone along the Oosttaverne "support line," from which their force had fled. "They would stand all the enemy fire you liked to give them," said Williams long afterwards, "but they would not put up with being shelled by their own guns." A remnant still occupied the old Oosttaverne front line, but most went straight through to the Black Line, which the New Zealanders were still digging.

At headquarters of the 47th south of Messines, Lieutenant-Colonel Imlay5 had from the first the greatest difficulty in ascertaining what had happened. His intelligence officer, Lieutenant Scott,6 who had been sending excellent reports from an intermediate position, was killed when going across to the 45th for information. As almost all messages then ceased, Imlay sent up Lieutenant Bremner,7 who succeeded in getting in touch with most of the organised remains of the 47th in the Oosttaverne Line. When, as will be told later, the barrage was shortened by the Black Line commanders, this remnant also was brought back. During the night part of the 47th was reorganized behind the Black Line, but many men, finding no sign of their unit, went as far as the old British front line and slept there, worn out. In the morning they went up again to find their battalion.

This retreat occurred shortly before dusk, and created some anxiety for the New Zealand commanders in the Black Line.

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4 On being badly wounded in the face, he handed over command to Sergeant-Major W. Parry (Lottah, Tas.). To save the stretcher-bearers, he walked unassisted to the rear.
5 Lieut-Col A. P. Imlay, D SO Commanded 47th Bn, 1917/18. Mercantile manager, of Sydney; b Comongin, Q'land, 1 Feb., 1885.
7 Capt N F. Bremner, D.S.O.; 47th Bn. Electrical mechanic, of Toowoomba, Q'land, b. Toowoomba, 23 Dec., 1891.
One of them, believing that the Australians had been driven from the Oosttaverne Line and that his own position would be attacked, asked for the barrage to be shortened to cover his troops, and between 8 and 9 o’clock, if not earlier, this was done. The barrage fell upon those of the 45th and 47th who still remained in “Owl Trench,” and drove them out. On the right the shelling had caused part of the 37th Battalion (3rd Division) to fall back from the open north of the Douve, but part still held the first Oosttaverne trench south of Huns’ Walk. Lieutenant Roadknight, who had been sent up to ascertain its position, was then in charge, and Major Story, in control at Bethléem Farm, received a message from him written at 8.40 p.m.

D Company on right, 47th Battalion on left, have gone and our own shells landing behind us on right and left. What shall we do?

To which Lieutenant Murdoch, who had held the trench from the first, added:

Do you know what this barrage is for? Our men were driven out, as far as I can see, by our own artillery fire.

Major Story sent back the messenger with a verbal order for the 37th also to withdraw. It happened that a premature report of the falling back of the 37th had caused General Monash, after inquiry, to shorten the 3rd Division’s barrage also, and at 9 o’clock the shells began to fall heavily on the part of the battalion that was still holding on. But shortly afterwards Major Story’s messenger arrived, and Roadknight and Murdoch withdrew their men through their own barrage. The company of the 40th in the Douve valley on their flank, however, did not receive Story’s order. Captain McVilly of the 40th, who with another company had been brought up to work on the Black Line, was horrified to hear that the barrage

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8 See Vol. XII, Plate 341.
was to shorten, and protested that the advanced company was still out. At the same time there came in from it Sergeant Cranswick, sent by its only remaining officer, Lieutenant Loane, to ask for orders. It was immediately brought back. Major Story, who had not wished the barrage to be shortened, asked his brigadier (McNicoll) first, that it should be lengthened to the afternoon's objective, and, later, that it should be still further lengthened so that the 37th might go back to the advanced line.

Thus, owing to the action of its own artillery—for which defects in the maps, over-eagerness of the infantry, over-anxiety of some of the staffs and commanders, and a dangerous degree of inaccuracy in the barrage were responsible—the whole of the final objective between the Blauwepoortbeek valley and the Douve had by 9 p.m. been left open to the enemy.

German narratives imply that the whole of the line thus left empty was reoccupied by German troops, but this is almost certainly wrong. The counter-attacking German troops, whom the 47th had in part repulsed, belonged to the 1st Guard Reserve and 5th Bavarian R.I. Regiments, which had been coming up throughout the afternoon. The 18th Bavarian I.R. was relieved that night by the III/1st Guard Reserve Regiment, which took over the Oosttaverne Line in the Blauwepoortbeek valley.

As a result of similar causes to those that forced the retirement near Huns' Walk, the northern section of the II Anzac troops was plunged into almost equal difficulties. Here the position had been strengthened since 5 p.m. After the capture of Van Hove Farm Captain Maxwell had asked the two unengaged tanks to move forward towards Joye Farm. While working down the Wambeek valley both became ditched, but, as they were in a position to serve as forts opposing any attack up the valley, their crews stayed and manned them throughout the night. Fragments of the 33rd Brigade, which came up and asked their way, were directed by Maxwell to fill the gaps. While seeking for such troops on his left flank, he obtained touch with some on the

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Black Dotted Line of the IX Corps. Although these could not come forward, they were a safeguard to the left.\(^{14}\)

Since 5 p.m. the 13th Brigade’s advanced line on the Wambeek had been troubled by the short-shooting of a heavy battery on its left and of eighteen-pounders on its right. Several messages had been sent asking for range to be lengthened, but it had not been altered up to 8.30 p.m., at which time, as we have seen, a withdrawal of some Australians near Huns’ Walk caused the commander of the New Zealand sector of the Black Line to call down his barrage and shorten its range. Although the German artillery was shelling heavily at the same time, no movement of enemy troops was seen by the New Zealanders; but fragments of the 49th Battalion in the Blauwepoortbeek valley—and probably some of the 25th Division in their rear—did observe German infantry moving forward near the Oosttaverne Line blockhouses in that valley. Word spread that the enemy was counter-attacking.\(^{18}\) At 8.5 the 47th Battalion, which was being attacked on Huns’ Walk, asked for artillery-fire, and at 10.10 the artillery along almost the whole front of II Anzac was firing on its S.O.S. lines. On Maxwell’s left at first only the foremost troops were shelled by their own guns, but on his right the shelling deluged the country in rear, even including parts of the Black Dotted Line. In a rearward strong-post of the Sherwood Foresters the officer of the Royal Engineers in charge of the digging was killed. The 6th Border were driven out of Van Hove Farm, and withdrew in rear of the Oosttaverne Line. Captain Maxwell

\(^{14}\) The intelligence officer of the 33rd Brigade had told Maxwell that there were troops back along the railway line in the Wambeek valley. The 6th Border afterwards obtained touch here with the 12th Royal Irish Rifles holding the 36th Division’s Black Dotted Line. These were forbidden by their orders from reinforcing in the Oosttaverne Line.

\(^{18}\) The diary of the 1st Auckland (N.Z.) Battalion, dealing with the alarm of a German counter-attack at 8.30 p.m., says “Our own artillery appeared to fall short of the Green (i.e., Oosttaverne) Line, and the Australians came back through the Black Dotted Line and Black Line, where they reorganised. No enemy were observed from the Black Line.”
brought back his men temporarily into the first Oosttaverne trench or, in some places, into the wire just short of it, and then, as repeated messages had failed to correct the artillery range, set out himself to headquarters to have it lengthened.

On his way Maxwell found the headquarters of two battalions of the 33rd Brigade—the 6th Border and the 6th Lincolnshire—and, after explaining the position as he knew it, he asked for such reinforcement as the front line needed. The officers and troops in that area were obviously uncertain of the position, and constantly apprehensive that the front line would give way. After delivering his message, Maxwell was returning past a battalion headquarters when he was surprised to hear the command, “Load!” “Fire!” “See them on the right there!” Rushing forward with a furious question as to what was going on, Maxwell found himself facing a British battalion commander, who said that the line had fallen back and that he was directing fire on the advancing enemy. The young Tasmanian offered to go down to this target himself in order to prove that the men seen were not German; immediately afterwards a flare revealed them, and a patrol found them to be a party of British machine-gunners searching behind the lines for a new position.

This state of affairs behind the line gave rise to a period of extraordinary obscurity among the directing staffs. For nearly two hours there flew around the back area, and along telephone lines to all headquarters, rumour after rumour of withdrawal, and alternately contradictions. The 25th Division brought back its barrage also. Not till shortly after

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18 At 8.15 the 1st N.Z Brigade reported: “Many Australians came back through Black Dotted Line.” At 8.40 a forward observation officer reported a strong counter-attack in progress. Later it was stated that the counter-attack had been stopped at the Black Dotted Line. A New Zealand battalion informed its brigade that it had been driven off the Black Dotted Line (actually two of its posts had to come back through being shelled). At 10.10 came reports that the 1st N.Z. Brigade was falling back, and also the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions. Most of these messages were true of some small sector or portion of the troops but not of the front or troops in general.
10 o'clock was it definitely known that, although the troops at Huns' Walk had been shelled out by their own guns, those north of the Blauwepoortbeek were still holding on, waiting only for their guns to lift in order to finish consolidation. The corps commander, General Godley, was much disturbed by the action of his subordinates in bringing back the barrage, and ordered it to be again laid east of the Oosttaverne Line. "The 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions," his order continued, "will reoccupy all ground vacated."

Looking back after the event it is easy to see that this element of confusion in an operation singularly free from muddle was due to the extreme caution of General Plumer's plan. In order to make certain that the main objective when once gained should be retained against the formidable counter-attacks expected, a defensive system—the Black and Black Dotted Lines—was established there independent of whatever line might be reached farther ahead. The advanced (Green) line was taken and held by other troops, but it was the staffs of divisions holding the Black Line who, under the now nominal superintendence of the army corps, really controlled the artillery covering the Green Line. For the sake of the safety of the ridge this "leap-frog" organisation, usually a device employed only for an attack, was maintained for several days. No doubt the Black Line system made the ridge safe. The most powerful counter-attacks could have been beaten off. But no counter-attack came near it.

No counter-attack in the Blauwpoortbeek valley is mentioned in the available German records. The Germans, however, apparently received some impression of a British attack, for the Bavarian Official History refers to an assault "with masses of infantry and tanks" about 7 o'clock. It is conceivable that the bombardment was due to this mythical threat. There is evidence, however, that some of the enemy did advance in the Blauwpoortbeek valley, and were driven back by the shortened barrage.

The troops who actually had to deal with the counter-attacks made elsewhere this night were those in the advanced line, and they had to do this with the artillery constantly acting at the call of other divisions behind them, which were unaware of their situation and were charged with a separate and vital duty. The fact that the staff of the 25th Division knew little of the Australians, and did not fully trust their battle discipline, added an additional complication. It is likely that
some of the New Zealand staff, also, had less faith in the Australians than in their own troops, and, although General Holmes and the brigadiers of the 4th Division shared their respective headquarters with their New Zealand colleagues, and no staffs ever worked with better mutual understanding, this system was bound to break down. For the present, however, the defect remained unremedied.

General Godley’s order to reoccupy all ground vacated was intended to apply mainly to the vacated sector at Huns’ Walk, concerning which the facts were by then fairly well ascertained. The failure in the Blauwepoortbeek valley was only just becoming known to the commander of the 13th Brigade, Brigadier-General Glasgow, and the gap there was supposed to be a comparatively small one. At 10.10, hearing of the thinness of Maxwell’s line, he sent two companies of the 51st Battalion to reinforce the 52nd; it was not till 10.35 that he learnt that hardly any part of the 49th had reached its objective in the valley. He then despatched the rest of the 51st to reinforce it and to close the valley to the enemy by throwing back a flank towards the New Zealanders in the Black Line. The 51st being thus split up, its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley, was sent forward to control the 52nd, Captain Stubbings, however, remaining at its headquarters to assist him. Meanwhile the 13th Machine Gun Company under Captain Duchatel, and part of the 13th Field Company under Lieutenant Norman—with a company of the 6th Lincolnshire on the north and Berriman’s party of the 49th on the south—formed a rearward line of strongposts on either side of the spur between the Wambeek and Blauwepoortbeek. This line was in front of the Black Dotted Line held by the 11th Cheshire, but connected with it in the

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17 His order at 10.45 p.m. said “south of the Blauwepoortbeek.”
18 Urgent messages had been sent by Glasgow, asking for news, but headquarters of the 49th itself knew little. Lieutenant R. Colvin (Rockhampton, Q’land; died 9 March, 1925), signal officer of the 49th, who had been sent forward to get information, was hit.
19 Lieutenant R. F. Finlason (Boulder, W. Aust.), intelligence officer of the 13th Brigade, brought in about this time an accurate report of the situation.
21 Major C. F. Duchatel, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Mining student; of Charters Towers, Q’land; b. Albury, N.S.W., 2 Apr., 1892.
Blauwepoortbeek valley. Captain Calder's\textsuperscript{23} company of the 4th Pioneers, working to the exceedingly effective standard of Australian pioneers, dug during the night a communication trench 1,000 yards long past Despagne Farm down Blauwepoortbeek valley to a point in the German wire.\textsuperscript{24} In this wire they captured two Germans attempting to mend the entanglement. It was afterwards realised that the Oosttaverne trench here was held by the Germans, the southern flank of the 13th Brigade not being so far south as had been reported.\textsuperscript{25} A man of the 52nd,\textsuperscript{26} who tried to return to the front that way, walked straight into the enemy and was captured. The forward end of the communication trench, therefore, remained for the time being unfinished and unused.

About dusk parties of the enemy were seen approaching the line north of Captain Maxwell’s position, and at 11.30 a feeble counter-attack took place on his flank. Flares could be seen and machine-gun fire heard further north. A few Germans entered the

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\textsuperscript{24} A communication trench was also dug by this battalion past the southern edge of Messines. Major C. C. Riddell (Melbourne) of the 12th Field Company, though stunned by a shell on his way forward, reconnoitred the foremost area of the 13th Brigade with a view to directing this and other work.

\textsuperscript{25} Some party of Australians visited the Oosttaverne Line in this gap, but withdrew to the north-west. Another party reached the wire and withdrew. Their tracks are clearly shown in aeroplane photographs. The parties were possibly those of the 49th Battalion with Lieutenant Beaman (see p. 634), or patrols of the 51st.

\textsuperscript{26} Pte W. J. E. Cheeseman (No. 2147; 52nd Bn.). Farmer; of Deeford, Q’land; b. London, 28 Oct., 1890.
now empty length of the Oosttaverne Line on Maxwell's left, but ran back on the approach of the patrol which was maintained there. During the night the company of the 6th Lincolnshire came up, as promised, and Maxwell put them into the old German front line on his right, intentionally mixing them with his own men on account of their apparently tired and nervous condition. In the early morning of June 8th he at last gained touch on the north in the Oosttaverne Line with the 57th Brigade (19th Division), which had seized the trenches at Oosttaverne and was patrolling southward along them.

The counter-attack during the night on Maxwell's flank and on the British east of Oosttaverne was made by the 11th German Division, which was hurried forward into a gap between the 7th and 1st Guard Reserve Divisions. The 7th Division, from Gheluwe, had originally been directed to retake Wytschaete. But it had farther to go than the 1st Guard Reserve, and after marching eleven miles in great heat it found the nearest crossings of the Ypres-Comines canal barraged by British artillery. It therefore altered its course, but was seen from the air and fired on while still east of the canal. It had consequently to be reorganised, and arrived very late. On being placed under the orders of the 35th Division, it received conflicting orders from that division and from corps headquarters. The corps, however, decided that the 35th Division's orders should operate, and the 7th Division was directed to attack, together with the 35th and 2nd, the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge. One battalion of it, the III/165th I.R., advanced about 7.30 p.m. towards Joye Farm (on Maxwell's front), but only occupied "the neighbourhood of" the Oosttaverne Line.

On its being reported that the British had already pierced this line "on a fairly wide front," General von Laffert, commanding the XIX German Corps, was actually in favour of withdrawing at once across the canal and the Lys River on the whole battle-front. This course was rejected. The 11th Division was brought up during the night and placed between the 7th and 1st Guard Reserve, and with the 7th it "succeeded in closing the gap at Oosttaverne." It was evidently reported that the 7th had retaken the Oosttaverne Line in this area, but this, so far as the observation of the 13th Australian Brigade went, was not the case.

Active measures were in train to oust the Germans from the section of the objective still uncaptured south of the 13th Brigade. The retaking of the "ground vacated," ordered by General Godley at 10.45 p.m. on the 7th, was to be effected by the 3rd and 4th Divisions each pushing up their inner flank; the 3rd Division putting in the 44th Battalion, held till then in reserve.
in the catacombs under Hill 63; the 4th Division similarly throwing in the 48th. Both these battalions contained Western Australians—the 44th (temporarily lent to the 10th Brigade under General McNicoll) being as yet untried except in raids, the 48th, which was employed by its own brigade (12th, General Robertson), being a veteran of Pozières and Bullecourt. To avoid repetition of the previous night’s confusion, Godley ordered that there should be no barrage on, or short of, the objective; the standing bombardment beyond it would merely be thickened at the hour of the attack. The commanders of the 3rd and 4th Divisions and their brigadiers were to confer as to the time of starting. General’s Monash and Holmes decided upon 3 a.m.

General Monash had on the previous morning warned Brigadier-General Cannan (11th Brigade) that the 44th Battalion might be required to support the 10th Brigade, which was believed to have lost heavily. Major Connelly, brigade major of the 10th Brigade, spent the night on the Black Line arranging for the attack now ordered, and the 44th was on its jumping-off line in time; but on its left it could find no trace of the 48th, with which it had been ordered to find touch before the start. It accordingly advanced alone to the wire of the Oosttaverne Line, but there Captain Rockliff, an experienced Anzac leader, stopped the advance, and Captain Longmore safeguarded the left by swinging his supporting company on that flank back towards the Black Line. On the right Captain Bryan’s company reoccupied the trench, partly dug on

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28 An attempt to ascertain the position, and, if possible, secure the ground, was first to be made by patrols. A patrol of the 40th found that the Green Line immediately north of the Douve was unoccupied.


30 He had served in the 11th Battalion at the Landing, in the raid on Gaba Tepe, and at Leane’s Trench (see Vols. I and II).


the day before by the 37th and 40th, leading back to the flank of the 9th Brigade in the Douve valley. In the shell-holes around Rockliff's company the dead and wounded of the 37th and of the Germans lay thickly, and before long the new troops suffered the same experience as their predecessors: their own barrage came down upon them. Rockliff at once drew back the line a short distance and dug a new trench, thus escaping with only two or three casualties. Until the following afternoon his new position was undisturbed by the artillery of either side; but efforts to get the fire of the supporting guns lifted from the Oosttaverne Line ahead of him were unsuccessful. On June 9th and even on the 10th the troops on this flank were kept out of their objective by their own artillery.

The position of the 44th after its advance was promptly and accurately reported both from the ground and from the air. At the same time it became known at the headquarters concerned that the 48th had not attacked; its orders had been received too late. At dusk on the previous night two of its companies had been sent to strengthen the battalions of its brigade that had made the afternoon attack, Lieutenant Stabback's to the 45th and Captain Mayersbeth's to the 47th. Shortly before midnight, on receipt of the order to attack, the remaining two were similarly distributed, Lieutenant Allen's going to the 45th and Captain Cumming's to the 47th. At this stage the commanders of those two battalions (occupying blockhouses on the southern shoulder

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83 It was ordered that the 37th should "co-operate" with the 44th in this advance. The order, in that form, does not seem to have reached Major Story, but, even if it had, the companies of the 37th were so exhausted, and reorganisation in the dark on the Black Line was so difficult, that the instruction would not have been easy to carry out. Captain Giblin's company of the 40th was returned to its own battalion. On receipt of further orders, the 37th went up during the night of June 8 and reinforced the 44th, but, in consequence of the decision to relieve its brigade, was immediately withdrawn.

84 Here Private W. H. Opie (Claremont, W. Aust.) of the 44th excited admiration by his brave work as a stretcher-bearer. His mate was shot through the head, but Opie continued to bring in men until himself wounded.

85 Some of the guns whose firing here gave so much trouble were those of an Australian (army) field artillery brigade; others belonged to heavy batteries. At 11 p.m. on the 9th Lieutenant R. Skinner (Geraldton, W. Aust.), now commanding Captain Longmore's company, sent word that he was in shell-holes close to the Green Line, and would move forward as soon as the artillery lengthened. "Can anything be done," he asked, "to lengthen the artillery fire?"


of Messines Ridge) were under the impression that these reinforcements were to dig on the Black Line until dawn (4 a.m.), and would probably then be ordered to advance. The two earlier companies were thus employed digging in, and the later ones had just arrived, and their commanders were asking for instructions at the two headquarters to which they had been directed, when, between 2.40 and 2.50 a.m., messengers stumbled in with orders that the attack should be launched at 3 o'clock. Lieutenant Stabback, with the 45th, hurried to get his company lined out, but although his men were ready at 2.55 no other company was there, and he returned to tell Colonel Herring (45th) that the advance had been rendered impossible. Captain Cumming, who was being instructed by Colonel Imlay (47th), received notice of zero hour a little later than Stabback, and both Imlay and he recognised that his troops could not be formed up in the time available. Imlay therefore told him to line out his company in the Black Line, beside Mayersbeth's and the reorganised portion of the 47th, and then to prepare for the attack by pushing forward his men—by two's and three's, if necessary, and from shell-hole to shell-hole—as far as he could. Meanwhile Imlay would arrange for a new bombardment, and when it descended Cumming should launch the final advance.

Cumming duly led his men\(^{39}\) to the Black Line, and found Mayersbeth. The front was exceedingly quiet, and therefore, after widely extending their men, they simply climbed out of the trench and advanced in line. The sky was now light and shots began to ring out from unseen German snipers ahead. A distant machine-gun or two, and presently a field-gun, opened. North of Huns' Walk the line of men, after going 150 yards, came, to its complete surprise, upon a very old trench, not marked on the maps, possibly a relic of the First Battle of Messines. It afforded sufficient shelter for

\(^{39}\) He had with him also half of Lieutenant Allen's company, which had missed its way to the 45th.
a jumping-off trench; the troops settled into it, and the remnant—about 80—of the 47th, reorganised under Captain Williams, joined them. Meanwhile Lieutenant Stoerkel of Cumming’s company moved out to patrol, taking Sergeant O’Brien and a private named Wall.

In front there was a dip, and, although many snipers, and a machine-gun in some trees north of Huns’ Walk, were firing spitefully, the three men worked down the depression to Oxygen Trench, 200 yards ahead, and returned with the news that it was empty. Cumming at once sent a platoon by the same route to occupy it. From there a row of willow trees, somewhat widely spaced, gave sufficient cover to allow the same three scouts to reach the first Oosttaverne Trench (Owl Trench). They reported this, too, to be empty, although fierce machine-gun fire came from the clump of trees beyond. Cumming sent forward another platoon, this time in extended order. As it reached the Oosttaverne Line entanglement, a German machine-gun on its left opened fire, but the troops got through with only four casualties. Cumming now brought up the rest of his company. Mayersbeth’s company followed, and Captain Williams (47th) advanced to Oxygen Trench in support and to guard the flanks.

Meanwhile the same patrol of three went out to discover the supposed support trench, and the enemy. The Germans were now almost silent, and this silence together with the absence of any visible sign of the enemy, led the Australians to suspect a trap. But the three scouts reached the existent portion of the Oosttaverne support trench, and, on their report that no Germans were there, Cumming sent on thither a platoon of his company and one of Mayersbeth’s. These were heavily fired on but reached the trench with few casualties, and found there a Lewis gun team of the 47th which had not retired when the artillery shelled out the rest of the troops on the previous night.


That is to say, the platoon first sent to Oxygen Trench. The 48th was still short of men after First Bullecourt, and the company was organised into two platoons.
For the fourth time the same three went out, but they were presently seen returning, O'Brien and Wall supporting between them their wounded officer. Not a shot was then being fired at them. At this stage there came up to the Oosttaverne Line the two companies of the 48th (under Lieutenants Stabback and Allen) that had been allotted to the 45th. At 3 a.m., when Stabback had reported the failure of the arrangements for the attack, Colonel Herring had instructed him to withdraw his troops temporarily to cover. But while carrying out this order Stabback had seen the advance of the other companies to their jumping-off trench. Thinking that they were about to advance unsupported, he had obtained leave to visit Colonel Imlay (47th), who suggested that Stabback's companies should join in the operation on the left flank of Mayersbeth and Cumming. At that moment word had arrived from Cumming that Owl Trench had been found empty. Stabback, sending word to Herring, at once led the two companies forward.

They came up in loose formation, under erratic machine-gun fire but without a casualty. Like his colleagues, suspecting a trap, Stabback probed to the left along the first Oosttaverne trench. The blockhouse taken by Muir of the 45th the night before was found empty, but a little farther down the trench could be seen the helmets of Germans, and sniping shots were received from close range. Stabback organised a bombing party and suggested to Colonel Herring that it should attack down the trench towards the Blauwepoortbeek. Herring, however, ordered that this operation should be postponed until after dusk; meanwhile, he said, he would send Captain Allen (45th) to organise it.

Thus, north of Huns' Walk, through an exceptionally fine combination of enterprise and cool judgment on the part of battalion and company leaders, the objectives seized in the original attack had been reoccupied before the Germans had taken advantage of the previous
night's withdrawal. South of Huns' Walk, it is true, the British barrage had kept the 44th just outside the objective, and not until late in the morning did the forward troops of that battalion know that the 48th had now come up and gone far beyond their left. The left of the 44th was then ordered to advance and join up, and about 1 o'clock, in bright daylight, with barely a rifle-shot or shell going over, the left company in two waves went forward 150 yards and, to its great surprise, found the linked shell-holes, that represented the first Oosttaverne trench, empty except for the crowded dead of the evening before. It did not advance to the Oosttaverne support line of which, indeed, on that front very little existed.

The available German records make no mention of these attacks. It is evident that the higher commanders understood that the Oosttaverne Line was still in German possession, and from the regimental histories it would seem probable that even the local commanders believed that their troops were in it—a circumstance which would explain why the Australians in the line suffered so little from German artillery-fire. The German troops were newcomers in the area; most of them had never seen the Oosttaverne Line, and, occupying shell-holes, blockhouses, and farms near its support "trench," some of them may have supposed that they occupied the line itself.

At any rate the staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's group of armies imagined that the line was theirs, and on June 8 the sole question was whether they should continue to hold it "as long as possible," a course favoured by von Kuhl; or withdraw to the "Houthem-Warneton Line" a mile in rear, close in front of the canal, as now suggested by Fourth Army; or fall back at once on the "Flandern Stellung" beyond the Lys and the canal—the course to which Crown Prince Rupprecht himself now leaned. It was admitted that the Oosttaverne Line was in many ways inferior to the position on Messines ridge; but the recapture of the heights, which on June 7 was to be achieved "at all costs," was now becoming recognised as impossible, and Crown Prince Rupprecht feared that even the Oosttaverne Line must be given up as soon as the British had advanced their artillery. Decision was, however, deferred until the situation should become clearer.

Actually, in the southern half of the battlefield, only one fraction of the Oosttaverne Line within the limits of the British attack still remained in German hands—in the valley of the Blauwepoortbeek. With the valley commanded by half the 51st, elements of the 49th (13th Brigade), the 11th Cheshire, and behind them the New Zealanders, there was no danger; but the difficulty was to ascertain the position and
round off the line. The 49th Battalion, which was supposed to be lying in the valley, had been ordered to swing up its right in co-operation with the attack (which did not occur) at 3 a.m. by the 48th. But the 49th had suffered terrible loss in the first assault; its only organised party was the handful of men holding the refused southern flank of Captain Maxwell's position. It is true that its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul, was informed that he might use for the attack at 3 a.m. the two reinforcing companies of the 51st; but the order was not issued until 1 o'clock, and, as the precise situation of the troops in the Blauwepoortbeek valley could not be ascertained in the dark, it had no result.

Major-General William Holmes, commanding the 4th Australian Division, was not one who would be content to allow a situation to remain vague if he could personally unravel it. At 3.50, hearing that no troops except those of the 3rd Division had advanced at 3 o'clock, and being unable to find out the reason, he had motored to the headquarters of his two brigadiers, Robertson of the 12th and Glasgow of the 13th. On finding that they could tell him nothing, "Well, now," he said, "it seems the only way is for us to go up and see. Get your hats and come along." They went to Messines, and there learnt from Colonels Ilay and Herring of the first stages of the 48th Battalion's progress. The position of the 13th Brigade (Glasgow's) had then been further ascertained by Colonel Ridley, newly sent to the 52nd, who as his first act went with Captain Stubbings round Maxwell's front. The 52nd Battalion, with parts of the 33rd Brigade scattered among it, still held practically the whole of the 33rd Brigade's objective, but only 200 yards of its own. It was decided, with the concurrence of General Godley, that the IX Corps should be asked to take over at dusk its proper front, and that the 52nd, on relief, should move round to the south of the 49th and, with it, drive the Germans out of the gap on the Blauwepoortbeek. The commander of the 33rd Brigade at first refused to believe that the Australians were

44 Those of Captains C. E. A. Cooke (Boulder, W. Aust.; killed in action on 24 Apr., 1918) and E. D. McBurnie (South Melbourne).

45 General Glasgow, himself an outstanding "front-line" leader, has stated that to him and to his brigade-major, Major R. Morell, these five days at Messines were the most harassing in the war.
holding his proper sector, but Glasgow convinced him by personally going round the front with one of the British battalion commanders. The 4th Division's request was therefore agreed to.

During the day the enemy's effort on and north of Maxwell's front was feeble. There was, it is true, evidence that a large body of Germans was lying somewhere east of the Oosttaverne Line on Maxwell's left, and they continually tried to establish a line close enough to attempt a counter-attack. After the artillery had ceased to fire short, Maxwell had re-established his advanced line near Joye Farm, interspersing posts of the 6th Lincolnshire with those of Australians. About 8 a.m. a column of British infantry in fours had marched down to Polka Estaminet, a little beyond his left, and he had arranged that they should link with his flank by means of a chain of posts along and east of the first Oosttaverne trench. In placing these they routed out from shell-holes some Germans, who fell back on Van Hove Farm and began to snipe. One of Maxwell's men, going out to a position from which he could snipe in return, ran into 80 of these Germans, who had been lying in shell-holes on the 52nd's left front and shooting into the rear of the advanced posts of the Lincolnshire near Joye Farm.

Maxwell thereupon arranged with the British commander on his left that each should send a party about 20 strong to cut off these Germans. Lieutenant Boase (52nd) led the party from Maxwell's front (Odour Trench). They walked straight over to the Germans, fought them with bombs for a minute or two, easily out-throwing them, and then drove
them off helter-skelter, bombing them with German bombs and shooting them down. Few appeared to escape, but the enemy still showed much persistence and individual bravery in trying to build up a line. Small parties kept trickling forward over the spur north of the Wambeek, and in the afternoon, when their concentration appeared dangerous, Maxwell fired the S.O.S. signal. As the barrage thus called for did not fall, he obtained touch with the artillery by telephone.\(^47\) The bombardment then laid down broke up this concentration, the Germans running back over the ridge. Some of Maxwell's men, going out to search for their own wounded, found German dead lying thickly about the shell-holes, and brought back 40 prisoners. The Lincolnshire had beaten off part of the same German attack. Thus ended the enemy's activity in that quarter so far as the Australians were concerned.\(^48\)

Meanwhile, in view of the success of the whole offensive, Generals Godley and Monash were already preparing for those local improvements of the line which would naturally follow. Chief among these was the capture of the Oosttaverne Line immediately north and south of the Douve and at the Potterie Farm. The heavy artillery was accordingly ordered to bombard the Potterie system from 6 to 6.30 p.m. That afternoon, however, was a much disturbed one on the 3rd Division's front. Reports reaching General Monash indicated that the 44th Battalion was not where he believed it to be, in line with the 48th on Huns' Walk.\(^49\) He pressed for precise information, but it was difficult to obtain; although the 3rd Division perhaps surpassed other Australian divisions in the careful carrying out of orders by subordinates, it lacked as yet their general high standard of personal supervision in battle by commanding officers. Well trained though its leaders were, some of them (as those whose practice was different often complained) were content to acquiesce in the

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\(^47\) A telephone line had been run forward to the Australian position by the 9th Sherwood Foresters in support.

\(^48\) A small attack at dusk (about 9 p.m.) that day was, however, reported by the 9th Sherwood Foresters.

\(^49\) This was before the left of the 44th moved forward to join the 48th.
theory, with which General Monash possibly agreed, that the commander's duty in time of battle was to remain strictly at his headquarters.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, in too high a proportion of units, reconnaissance at critical times, or even during the pauses in an action, tended to be left to intelligence or other staff officers, who did not carry with them the powers of decision and of spurring to effort, which officers in command would have possessed.\textsuperscript{51}

On this occasion Lieutenant-Colonel Peck, G.S.O. (2) of the division, was sent. Formerly commander of the 14th Battalion, Peck was one of the best officers in the A.I.F. While he was on the way to the advanced command posts behind this difficult corner, there began a German bombardment never to be forgotten in the 10th Brigade. Lieutenant-Colonel Mansbridge of the 44th, Major Maudsley\textsuperscript{62} of the 38th, and Major Story of the 37th occupied advanced headquarters near Schnitzel and Bethléem Farms, where the Black Line descended the southern shoulder of Messines Ridge, ending in a carefully planned redoubt dug by the 38th Battalion in the Douve valley. In spite of their weariness, the 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th Battalions, and pioneers and engineers, were still at work on the new trench-system and its communications. Four German airmen, who had been over, must have easily marked down the new works; and the 3rd Division and the New Zealanders were now to suffer some of those results.
which afterwards caused the British to avoid (as the Germans already did) the digging of continuous trenches on a battlefield. From about noon the German artillery massed on the southern flank began to bombard the southern shoulder of the ridge. Colonel Mansbridge, apprehending a counter-attack, was rendered doubly anxious by General Godley's rigid instruction that the barrage must not in any circumstances be brought back on to the Oosttaverne Line. He was told, however, that if the Germans penetrated his line he must rely upon machine-guns and trench-mortars to deal with them, and that these were being sent up to him. About this time the German bombardment became intense, and at 3.10 the headquarters in rear were shocked by the arrival at the pigeon-loft of a bird with a message purporting to come from the 44th:

We are driven out of trenches. Wires all cut.

Shortly afterwards an observing officer of the 3rd Division reported that white flares were being sent up in the direction of the 44th's sector. General Monash at once informed the chief-of-staff of the army corps, Brigadier-General Gwynn, adding his opinion that the Germans had established themselves in the knot of the Oosttaverne Line trenches south of Huns' Walk. General Godley's rigid order against shortening the artillery barrage, Monash said, prevented him from dealing with this intrusion. Gwynn maintained Godley's order, but advised that the existing barrage should be thickened. At 3.58 word was received from the senior officer of the 38th Battalion, Major Maudsley, on the Black Line, that the position there was quiet and nothing was known of any reason for the pigeon message. An hour later an observer reported that Germans could be seen massing to attack the 48th, north of Huns' Walk, but not the 44th south of it, and that the Black Line had been "blown to blazes." And at 6.15 the 44th reported that it was still holding its proper front. Captain Rockliff, who was in its forward line throughout, afterwards stated—

The 44th's line was at no time in danger. . . . It was all the time perfectly sound. The messages and rumours which got back were unfounded, and it is not clearly known where they came from.

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58 By Brigadier-General McNicoll, at 2.47 p.m.
Colonel Mansbridge, the battalion commander, a veteran of Anzac, said afterwards that the alarming message was sent without his knowledge or authority. It is conceivable, however, that it came from someone at his headquarters, which was in the open and suffered nerve-wracking bombardment, being driven from shell-hole to shell-hole.

The bombardment increased again shortly after 5 o'clock. Captains Fairweather and Trebilcock (38th), holding the Black Line in the Douve valley, reported that the dust and smoke hid everything. At 6.25 Fairweather sent word that the Germans were counter-attacking in force "on the right of the Black Line." He was a reliable officer, and apparently meant only that there were signs of such an attack in front of the 9th Brigade on his right; but his brigadier and divisional commander naturally assumed him to mean that the Germans had penetrated the advanced (Green) line in his own sector, in the Douve valley, and were attacking the Black Line. General Monash had again at 4.45 consulted corps headquarters as to bringing back the barrage if the Germans got through, but had received the same instruction as before—the barrage must be kept east of the Oosttaverne Line. It was laid down there in great strength until about 8.20, when both brigades asked for it to slacken.

Colonel Peck had then come back with his report. Through a tremendous shelling he had reached and returned from the advanced command posts. He brought definite information that Captain Rockliff and three and a half companies of the 44th were holding the advanced line, with the 37th and 38th on the Black Line in support. Just before Peck reached him, Colonel Mansbridge had learned from Rockliff about the Germans massing opposite the 48th, and Peck himself had seen not only these but distant German observers on the tower of Warneton church, apparently directing the bombardment. Except for the obvious inability

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64 In these barrages the work of Captain R. L. Kenihan, medical officer of the 44th, who himself was wounded but carried on, and of the whole medical personnel, was especially heavy. The conduct of Captains J. S. Yule (R.M.O., 37th), W. I. Clark (40th), K. S. Parker (45th), H. Powell (50th), and several other medical officers, and of Chaplains J. E. N. Osborn (35th) and J. Best (39th) was also recorded with admiration. (Kenihan belonged to Millswood, S. Aust.; Yule to Kalamunda, W. Aust.; Clark to Hobart; Parker to Manly, N.S.W.; Powell to Malvern, S. Aust.; Osborn to Toowoomba, Q’land; Best to Ballarat, Vic.)

65 Colonel Mansbridge was badly shaken by the overwhelming strain of this day, and was never afterwards really fit for active service. He was subsequently sent to England for staff duties.
of the supporting counter-batteries to keep down this fire, all was well with the 3rd Division's front.

German narratives, especially the regimental histories, speak of frequent English "attacks" on the Oosttaverne Line in the Douve sector, and it is evident that bombardments of that line, and movements of working or carrying parties, were interpreted as assaults. A British bombardment, which itself was sometimes caused by a German flare signal being mistaken for a British, would be immediately answered by the German artillery, which imagined that its infantry was being attacked. Thus the German bombardment after 5 o'clock was apparently in response partly to the barrage quickly thrown upon the enemy opposite the 48th, and partly to the British bombardment of the Potterie.

Half-an-hour after Peck had made his report, another tremendous bombardment broke out, "the heaviest we have yet heard," as a diary of the 3rd Divisional Headquarters notes. This was mainly to the north of the 3rd Divisional front; but it was nevertheless becoming evident that the forward troops of the 3rd Division, who, with the New Zealanders, were suffering the constant bombardment of the British flank, must before long be relieved. The 3rd Division alone had had to struggle through the horror of the approach march in Ploegsteert Wood. It was now General Monash's intention that both the 9th and 10th Brigades should relieve their tired front-line battalions by their support ones, which were fresher and stronger; and in preparation for this he ordered them to give their support battalions a few hours' rest.

The order, however, had barely been issued when, in conversation with Brigadier-General McNicol, he learnt of the condition of the 10th Brigade. In the heavy shelling of the afternoon its front-line and support battalions alike had suffered heavily. They could muster for effective work not more than 250 men each, and those were tired and strained. Rest and reorganisation seemed necessary before the brigade would be of value, and General Monash therefore decided to withdraw it right back to the Nieppe area. The 11th Brigade would take over its front; the 9th Brigade must arrange its own reliefs. General Cannan (11th
8th June, 1917

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Brigade) kept his 44th Battalion in the front line, which it was already holding for the 10th Brigade, and moved the 42nd (Queensland) to the Black Line in support. The 10th Brigade marched to the back area where it was, fortunately, found that its loss did not approach that which had at first been feared.

The threat of a German attack on the front of the 48th Battalion that afternoon had been so evident that, besides over twenty Lewis guns in the front line, and two Vickers machine-guns of the 12th Company, every battery covering that front was ready when, about 5 o'clock, the enemy began to advance from Steignast Farm. Whether he was counter-attacking, or merely advancing to occupy a position which he believed to be empty or held by his own troops, is not clear. Whatever the attempt, it was easily defeated. On the right half of the II Anzac front the only Australian troops short of their objective now were Rockliff's company of the 44th, whom their own artillery still kept out of the Oosttaverne Line.

But in the left sector of II Anzac the gap in the Blauwepoortbeek valley still remained. On the southern edge of that depression the 48th Battalion (12th

NIGHT OF JUNE 8—
Northern Anzac Front

Brigade) was held up by Germans in a blockhouse of the Oosttaverne Line, while the northern edge was barely topped by the right flank of the 13th Brigade. It will be remembered that the 52nd Battalion was to be relieved at dusk by the 33rd Brigade, and then brought round on the right of the 49th to close this gap. On the southern side of the gap Colonel Herring (45th),

88 When asked on June 9 for carrying parties for the army corps, Lieut-Colonel G. H. N. Jackson (G.S.O. 1, 3rd Division) replied: "Cannot ask 10th Brigade, reduced to 1,000 strong and now reorganising." Actually the brigade had lost few, if any, more men than the 9th. Its casualties were 1,363, and those of the 9th, when relieved four days later, were 1,666. From a tactical point of view, the wisdom of its withdrawal so far to the rear was questioned by General Godley; and, on the moral side, the 9th and 11th Brigades, which were thus left to bear alone the burden of three more days' fighting, felt the decision to be unfair. Careful investigation of the facts, however, shows that the 10th Brigade was, on June 8, undoubtedly the most worn and disorganised of the three. The shelling that afternoon had split many of its elements, and musters which indicated that its strength had fallen to a little over 1,000, were believed to indicate approximately its true condition.

89 These were specially placed to cover the left flank of the brigade.
who controlled the 48th in that sector, was sending Captain Allen with a remnant of his own battalion to bomb northwards along the Oosttaverne Line and connect with the attacking 52nd. At dusk the 9th Sherwood Foresters duly arrived to take over, together with the 6th Lincoln, the 52nd's line. But at 8.45 the Germans, observing this or some other movement, fired alarm signals, and their barrage came down along the left of the II Anzac front. The 25th Division, holding the Black Line on that flank for II Anzac, reported at 8.55 that the Germans were attacking, and, at 9 o'clock, that they had been seen to enter the front line. An S.O.S. signal was fired by some troops in rear of the 52nd. The British barrage descended, even the artillery of the 3rd Division being eventually drawn in, and for two hours the battlefield was deluged with terrific shell-fire.

This occurred at precisely the hour at which company commanders of the 52nd—in view of their intended attack later in the night—had been instructed to withdraw "whatever happens." Some of them duly withdrew their men, through the barrage, the troops naturally running their hardest for shelter, and suffering losses although they ran. Some men were inevitably "rattled" by this process, and, although adjacent brigades had received early warning of the relief, the sight of the troops running gave rise to a score of alarmist reports that the 4th Division was retiring in confusion. Captain Maxwell, on the other hand, having had experience of the nervy condition of some of the supporting troops, kept his section of the 52nd in the front line until the bombardment

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68 It was for this reason that Herring had ordered Lieutenant Stabbback (48th) to withhold his attack (see p. 652).

69 A British officer who, believing this, tried to stop the withdrawal was shot through the leg by some exasperated and reckless man of the 52nd. This crime, a grave one according to any law, military or civil, was apparently not officially reported by the officer, but word of it leaked out some time later. The officer happened to have been connected with the personal staff of the Commander-in-Chief, and considerable scandal was caused by the incident.
eased, and then personally warned all headquarters in the area close behind him before he brought his troops through. He withdrew later without difficulty.

Although this bombardment was reported—and believed—to cover a strong German counter-attack, the troops in the British front line knew that it did not. German accounts show that the enemy infantry reported that they were being attacked, and that it was believed that the British had broken through in the Wambeek valley. The II Battalion of the 2nd Guard Reserve Regiment, and the II Battalion of the 51st I.R., were thereupon ordered to counter-attack, and it was reported that they had held up the British attack east of the Oosttaverne Line, and established a line round the gap. Actually the British and Australians had seized the Oosttaverne Line twenty-eight hours before, and were merely continuing to occupy it. It was the alarm on the German side that caused the bombardment.

The wild disturbance of the night put beyond question any possibility of attacking, as had been intended, down the Blauwepoortbeek. The 75th Brigade (25th Division), without the knowledge of the 4th Division, again shortened its barrage on to the Oosttaverne Line, fortunately, however, shelling only the gap and the area in rear of it. In the general bombardment, Colonel Paul of the 49th was wounded. Both he and Colonel Ridley (temporarily commanding the 52nd) had decided to use for their attack the companies of the 51st attached to their respective battalions. But these companies were much scattered in the bombardment. A jumping-off tape was duly laid by Captain Duchatel (13th Machine Gun Company), but, as only part of the 51st arrived, Captain Bardwell of that battalion decided to postpone the operation. The tape was carefully rolled up again, and the 51st withdrew to its position guarding the valley.

South of the gap the 45th Battalion, now organised as one company, with Captain Allen as its front-line commander, carried out its attack by bombing along the trench. Lieutenants Muir, McIntyre, and Young led the assault, and

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60 For example, the History of the 5th Bavarian I.R., p. 85; History of the 1st Guard Reserve F.A.R., p. 161.
61 Major W. L. Arrell (South Brisbane) took his place. Captain C. Blakney (Hobart) of the 52nd also was hit during the relief.
63 Lieut. T. A. McIntyre, 45th Bn. Carpenter; of Berry, N.S.W.; b. Jasper's Brush, N.S.W., 1887. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.
gained ground until they were held up by the enemy at a concrete blockhouse. They then barricaded the trench, and at Captain Allen's order McIntyre scouted across the Blauwe-poortbeek valley west of the Oosttaverne Line and gained touch with the 51st. 65

At 12 p.m., when the confusion of this second night had been cleared up, General Godley issued a more definite order that the barrage must not "under any circumstances whatever" be shortened without reference to corps headquarters; but he also cut at the root of the confusion by changing the system by which until now, while the 4th Australian Division held the front line, other divisions—the 25th and New Zealand—had occupied the two defensive lines close in rear of it. The divisional commanders—Holmes (4th Australian) and Russell (New Zealand)—recognised the impracticability of this system, and at 3 a.m. on the 9th Godley ordered that the New Zealand Division, whose loss had been much the heaviest, 66 should be withdrawn, and that the corps front should, from 9 that morning, be held by three divisions—the 3rd and 4th Australian, and the 25th—each controlling both its front and its hinterland. It mattered little that the troops could not be changed until the following night—the system was changed immediately, the 1st New Zealand Brigade coming for this day under control of the 4th Division, and the 13th Australian Brigade under the 25th Division. The 13th Brigade would be relieved by troops of the 25th Division that night (9th); but before coming out it was to make its twice-postponed attack on the gap by the Blauwepoort-beek, the 12th Brigade again bombing down to meet it.

65 It was on this patrol that McIntyre found Captain W. L. Young's body (see p. 632).
66 Amounting to nearly 5,000. The 3rd Division had then lost about 3,000, the 4th probably 2,000, the 25th about 3,000.
The Second Army had been in possession of Messines Ridge for two days. The anticipated counter-attacks had proved too feeble to arouse anxiety, and accordingly the "rounding off" of the position now began. As early as the evening of June 7th General Monash had submitted to corps headquarters a plan for a formal advance at dusk on June 9th or 10th to the as yet unattacked portion of the Oosttaverne Line, south of the Douve. General Godley, however, intended to launch a few days later a much more extensive advance south of the ground already won, with the object of endangering the whole remainder of the German position in the angle west of the River Lys, and forcing the enemy to withdraw from it. This operation would be carried out by the New Zealand Division, which was being strengthened by its new 4th Infantry Brigade. In preparation, the divisions holding the present battle-front were now ordered to endeavour to occupy, by sending out patrols, the Oosttaverne Line north and south of the Douve, including the Potterie Farm. The right flank would be thrown back to a rise on which lay a small building, "Thatched Cottage." The advance was to be made without artillery action. This order was issued by corps at 9.25 a.m. on June 9th and by the 3rd Division at 10. The 11th Brigade was to carry it out north of the Douve, the 9th Brigade south of it.

Since June 7th the 9th Brigade had suffered no counter-attack of any sort. Before dawn on the 9th some 20 Germans were seen approaching the right-flank crater, possibly to ascertain if it was occupied. Where the trenches were destroyed, these Germans had to move across the open and they were easily driven off with small-arms fire by the local garrison of the 33rd Battalion under Lieutenant Campbell. In spite of harassing shell-fire

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Note: Maps and diagrams are not transcribed as they are not legible in the image.
from the south-east, the 33rd and 34th were well dug in and well organised. The order to establish the posts reached them about noon, and at 1.40 the 33rd's patrol, 20 strong, under Lieutenant Thomas, moved out to establish the post on the right flank at Thatched Cottage. Creeping in two parties up old trenches and drains, the patrol reached the cottage, bayonetting a sniper. The German intermediate trench-system which ran past the cottage was found empty, and a post was quickly established.

Both from this post, however, and from the lines of the 44th Battalion north of the Douve, Germans could be seen reinforcing the Oosttaverne Line from the Potterie northwards. North of the Douve, where that line was partly held by the 44th, the enemy was taking position east of it, behind the hedges and trees. This movement continued from 10 o'clock until shortly after 4, when the Germans on both sides of the Douve were seen advancing, and others concentrating behind the Potterie. Apparently they were merely building up a line of posts, for no counter-attack followed. But the German front opposite the 34th and 44th had certainly been reinforced.

When at 4 o'clock the 34th Battalion began its patrol operation by sending forward a few scouts to draw fire, not a shot came from the Potterie system. But five minutes later when the two patrols, each 25 strong, left the trenches, a number of machine-guns immediately opened on them. The leader, Lieutenant Jeffries, and several men were hit. The German line was obviously held in strength, and Corporal Jackson, who then took

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*It was separately reported by Captain C. L. Biles and Lieutenant W. J. Stables (Perth, W. Aust.) of the 44th.*


charge, abandoned the attempt and brought in the wounded. North of the Douve the 44th, on discovering early in the day that the 48th was still ahead of it in the fragment of the support line at Huns' Walk, had swung up its left flank, its tired troops then digging a trench where the Oosttaverne support line should have been—the third trench they had dug in two days. But south of this, both in the Oosttaverne Line ("Undulating Trench") and in a sap west of it, they were fired on by strong German posts.

Despite their many references to mythical attacks on the Potterie system, the available German narratives do not specifically mention this, the first actual attack on that system. Since the immediate counter-attack attempted on June 7 by parts of the I and II/9th Bavarian I.R. had failed, the Germans south of the Douve had been reinforced by the I and II/11th Bavarian I.R. (16th Bavarian Division) and parts of the 5th Bavarian R.I.R. On the night of June 8 the 11th Bavarian I.R. had begun to relieve the 9th, and it was probably part of the 11th that was seen moving in the Potterie system.

North of the Douve the dispositions of the 1st Guard Reserve Division had been changed, and it was now holding its front with three regiments, (from north to south) 1st Guard Reserve Regiment, 2nd Guard Reserve Regiment, and 64th R.I.R. It was against the 64th R.I.R. that the patrols of the 44th Battalion came.

While the patrols of the 44th were operating, a separate party under Lieutenant McKeon of the 47th was sent out by Colonel Imlay (47th) to ransack "Hun House," which, on a captured German map, was marked as a battalion headquarters. This patrol ran into some Germans who were barricading the trench near by. The Germans fired their signal for artillery protection, and the barrages of both sides came down. It was in this bombardment that Rockliff's company of the 44th suffered its principal loss.

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78 "Ungodly Avenue"

74 Lieut. F. J. McKeon, 47th Bn. Clerk; of Longreach, Q'land; b. Barcaldine, Q'land, 31 Oct., 1890

75 Besides three men of the 47th, this patrol (according to a record of the 48th) included Sergeant M. P. O'Brien and several "choice spirits" of the 48th. Their task took them out across the front of the 44th. On tumbling upon the Germans, they emptied their revolvers at them, but the enemy replied with bombs, and the patrol had to lie in shell-holes for three hours. It returned safely after dark through the lines of the 44th, bringing a bag of documents taken from a dead officer of the XIX German Corps.

76 Captain W. T. Bryan (Perth, W. Aust.) and Lieutenant G. H. Hughes (Boulder and Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.) were killed. Lieutenant E. Hocking (Boulder, W. Aust.) was killed by a sniper the same day. Lieutenant R. E. Walsh (Newstead, Tas.) had been sniped on June 8.
Thus only one post of the 3rd Division—at Thatched Cottage—was established before dark on June 9th. But after dark the 36th Battalion relieved the 34th south of the Douve and established two posts half-way to the Oosttaverne Line, and the 33rd placed an additional post further south. North of Huns’ Walk the 48th Battalion had strengthened the advanced line during the day by digging posts across the open (as shown in the marginal sketch), under cover of fire from two trench-mortars brought up by Lieutenant Coward. An air-patrol reported that no Germans could be seen about the farms east of the Oosttaverne Line, and the 4th Division was therefore ordered to patrol to Gapaard Farm, Les Quatre Rois Cabaret, and Steignast Farm. The country beyond the Oosttaverne Line, however, proved to be well held by German posts, and the patrols of the 47th returned after the loss of half their men.

At points where two communication trenches crossed the Messines-La Basse Ville road.

Under Sergeant C. S. Crowley (Barraba district, N.S.W.; later lieutenant; died of wounds on 25 June, 1918). An anti-tank field-gun was found in a neighbouring ditch.

The maintenance of advanced posts by the 48th in the open near the position of the supposed support line was one of the most striking achievements of the operations on the Oosttaverne Line. On the 8th during daylight a patrol under Sergeant H. C. Whittle (Pinnaroo, S. Aust.) was sent to select positions for these posts. Whittle made three journeys, under fire, each time taking out and placing a post, whose men took food with them. Sergeants Whittle and P. Symes (Perth, W. Aust.) afterwards went out to visit these posts and ensure that they were digging, and on these journeys took water to them, as did Lance-Corporal J. G. Hogan (Adelaide). Whittle did not attempt to creep, but walked straight out, after the fashion of the men of Anzac, taking his chance of the bullets, and looking calmly around. While he and Symes were out they heard a call, and found a man who had been wounded in the first attack on the Oosttaverne Line. They returned for a stretcher, and went out and brought him in. Sergeant J. G. Polkinghorne (Silverton, N.S.W.) also patrolled the advanced line, and Lance-Corporal D. H. Fisher (Unley, S. Aust.) drove back with rifle-grenades a neighbouring German post.


That of the 45th, under Lieutenant Muir, tried to reach Gapaard, but found German posts intervening.
Farther north the attack by the 13th Brigade down the Blauwepoortbeek took place at 10 p.m. General Glasgow had decided to employ for it his reserve battalion, the 50th (South Australia). A jumping-off tape was to be laid on the same line as previously, but the officer charged with this duty lost his way. The troops, however, lined up, and at 10 o'clock the attack was launched. In this sector also the German line had been reported by an airman as appearing to be empty, and just before the attack there was received a report that a British artillery officer had walked round the Oosttaverne trench on the whole front of the division and met no enemy. Lieutenant-Colonel Salisbury of the 50th was also informed that the 12th Brigade had this day bombed from the south almost to the bottom of the valley, reducing the gap from 650 to 450 yards.

All this information was misleading. The 45th Battalion had indeed that afternoon made another bombing attack. Taking advantage of the fact that the Germans in the blockhouses remained quiet—and probably slept—by day, the attacking party approached the first blockhouse and put in a barricade. But they had barely begun it when the Germans, tumbling out of their shelters, came at them, bombing furiously. The nearest part of the 48th, under Lieutenant Rafferty, joined Captain Allen in keeping up a constant supply of grenades to the fighters. The main difficulty was to avoid the fire of machine-guns not only in the blockhouse ahead, but in other positions close by and also among the trees to the east. These guns supported the German post and prevented any attempt to surround it. Lieutenant Barton, taking forward more bombers, was killed by this fire. The enemy failed to seize the barricade, but the Australian advance had been only slight.

The 50th had, however, already been constantly engaged in carrying supplies for the rest of the brigade. In the afternoon attack on June 7 one carrying party of the 50th under Lieutenant J. O'Donohue actually reached the Oosttaverne Line before the attacking troops, dumped its loads there, and on its way back met the attack coming forward. It had 200 men carrying that day, and two officers, Lieutenants C. G. Edwards (South Geelong, Vic.) and M. M. McGregor (Ballarat, Vic.), were wounded in this service. (McGregor was again wounded on 25 Apr., 1918, and died on May 3.)


The night attack by the 50th was to be made without an artillery barrage and in strict silence, no shot being fired except by order of an officer. The battalion's waves were, however, detected as soon as they started. Flares rose from the German blockhouses in the valley. The enemy's barrage came down behind the South Australians, setting fire to an old German ammunition-store and so lighting up the ground. Machine-guns opened from the blockhouses on both flanks of the gap, and from Deconinck and Delporte Farms farther down the valley. The 50th reached the wire, but found it to a large extent unbroken. Some men dropped into shell-holes, others fled back to their starting point. On the extreme left of the attack part of Captain Churchill Smith's company made its way through an opening in the entanglement and, reaching the trench close to where it was already held by their own side, extended southwards along it until stopped by fire from the nearest blockhouse on that side of the valley. A few South Australians also held on at a small concrete shelter just short of the wire, but, on being seen by the Germans in the morning, they were shot out of it with the loss of half their number. From the south Captain Allen and Lieutenant McIntyre with the remaining fragment of the 45th, desperately weary, made another bombing attack after the nearest blockhouse had been bombarded by a Stokes mortar of the 12th Brigade. Again three German machine-guns, firing from positions away from the blockhouse, stopped the attack before it had gone a dozen yards.

The 13th Brigade was to have been relieved before dawn on June 10th by the 25th Division. But daylight arrived before the situation could be ascertained. Relief was then impossible; moreover Generals Holmes and Glasgow were not content

670 THE A.I.F. IN FRANCE [9th-10th June, 1917

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65 See Vol. XII, plate 342

66 With this party was Lieutenant E. H. Price (of Mitcham, S. Aust.), who had received in his cheek two pieces of German shell. In spite of this painful wound, he carried on in the trench until Churchill Smith insisted on his going to the rear.
to hand over to the relieving brigade the task which for three nights had remained unfinished. Holmes himself at dawn went up with General Robertson (12th Brigade), the brigade-major (Major Lee), Captain Allen, and a major of artillery to the 45th’s barricade, and through a periscope viewed the nearest German blockhouse forty yards away. He decided to have the Blauwepoortbeek valley and its farms and defences, including the blockhouse, bombarded during the day, and to renew the attack immediately after dark. The 52nd Battalion, which was this day rested in the old British front line west of Messines, would help the 50th in a final attempt. The 45th would again endeavour to bomb down to meet them. It was to be relieved afterwards by the 48th, which also was resting; and, if the 50th and 52nd finished their task, they too might be relieved before dawn by the 25th Division, but only if this could be done without hurry.

The hour fixed for this attack, 10 o’clock, was earlier than Colonel Salisbury of the 50th desired, for it meant that the tape must be laid, and the 52nd approach over Messines Ridge, while there was still light enough for the Germans to see these proceedings. As Salisbury feared, Lieutenant Rogers of the 50th, while trying to lay the tape, was wounded, and the 52nd was seen on the ridge and very heavily shelled, Captain Stubbings being wounded. The control thus devolved on Captain Maxwell. The huge Tasmanian, six-feet five in his socks, himself crawled out and laid the tape. Three hundred yards away the Germans in the blockhouses were firing flares, and thrice a machine-gun shot at him; but he duly laid the tape for the 52nd, and about half the battalion reached it. The other half, by a mistake of the guides sent by the 50th, was led on to an old tape farther back, originally laid down to guide tanks. On the left, on the 50th’s front, the tape had not been laid, but that battalion knew the ground and lined out punctually.

The artillery had during the day accurately bombarded the German trench and Delporte and Deconinck Farms, and had put some shells into the German wire; and, when at 10 o’clock

87 It had been relieved on the previous night by the 46th.
89 Lieutenant H. K Mendoza (Brisbane), its adjutant, was killed next day, while the battalion was on its way to rest.
The covering barrage fell, the advancing 50th found the wire somewhat better cut than on the night before. The Germans bombed the troops as they approached, but on the left Churchill Smith's company, already ensconced in the Oosttaverne Line, suppressed with bombs and Lewis guns the opposing machine-gun post on that flank. Owing to the barrage the enemy fire was less than before, but Lieutenant O'Donohue was killed, Captain Wilton lost an eye, Captain Seager was hit in the face by a piece of bomb, and Lieutenants Noblett, Keats, and Rogers also were wounded. Nevertheless rifle-grenadiers kept down the enemy while their mates worked through the wire, and as these approached the Germans threw down their rifles and fled.

The 50th thus seized most of their objective, but the two nearest companies of the 52nd were only forming on the tape when the assault began. Before they were clear of the jumping-off line, the German barrage was down on them. On their front the wire was practically uncut, and the Germans were bombing it. Lieutenant Pearce was killed and, except for a few men who penetrated on the flank of the 50th, the 52nd's direct attack failed. Some of the men, however, were reorganised and, with one of the companies that had been wrongly guided, they were passed into the Oosttaverne Line through the portion captured by the 50th. Thence they worked southward into the valley; at about 1 o'clock a message arrived from them saying that they must be very close to the

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60 These Germans, in one of four artillery emplacements just beyond the first Oosttaverne trench, had turned a machine-gun on the previous night's attack. During the 10th they tried to send a man to the rear, but the 50th shot him. A German then tried to send a signal message with flags, but half-a-dozen shots at once stopped him. That night, when the 50th bombed this shelter, the grenades bounced harmlessly from the concrete, but they kept its garrison quiet.


65 Seventy-five rifles were found there; to save ammunition, some were used by the South Australians in sniping.

45th Battalion. But they were stopped by fire from the blockhouses in the farm ruins on the southern slope.

The 45th had again, as ordered, launched a bomb attack, but its officers on the spot knew that the effort was hopeless. The artillery had fired, but had not hit the impeding blockhouse.97 Even on the previous night the men had been so tired that they fell asleep as they dug their trench; a man would put in his shovel, fall asleep, and have to be shaken before he could drag it out.98 Captain Allen himself would not have ordered the assault. But when Colonel Herring during the afternoon telephoned to Lieutenant McIntyre, who had already led three attempts, and told him that the strong-point must be taken, McIntyre, knowing this was his death-warrant, answered simply: "All right, Sir; if it is to be taken, it will be taken." At 10 o'clock he and his men went straight for it, "over the top." The surrounding machine-guns opened as usual. Five yards from the blockhouse McIntyre and Sergeant Stevenson99 were killed, and the attack failed. The 48th immediately afterwards took over the trenches. The 45th had kept its spirit to the last. It had entered the battle in greater strength than any other Australian battalion and came out the weakest, having lost 16 officers and 552 men.

On the same night the new thrust on the right flank—against the Oosttaverne Line across and south of the Douve—was continued, this time with artillery assistance. South of the Douve the line of posts established the night before provided a jumping-off line half-way to the objective. The objective was bombarded from 5 to 6 p.m. by heavy artillery, but, possibly through over-wear of the guns, their shooting was extraordinarily erratic.

97 This blockhouse is shown in Vol. XII, plate 341.
98 The 45th having then only three company officers in the line, the adjutant, Lieutenant A. L. Varley (Inverell, N.S.W.), had gone up there and assisted consolidation. In 1940, as Liet.-Col., he commands 2nd/18th Bn., A.I.F.
99 Sgt. A. L. G. Stevenson (No. 3479, 45th Bn.). Engineer; of Penrith, N.S.W.; b Redfern, N.S.W., 1894. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.
North of the Douve shells from some of the "heavies" fell among the troops holding the captured part of the Oosttaverne Line; south of it they fell on the posts 250 yards short of that line, and even on the Black Line, 500 yards behind the front. In the northern post of the 36th they shattered a Lewis gun team.

The natural dismay thus caused had passed before dusk, but at nightfall a new bombardment, this time from the German artillery, descended heavily on the 3rd Division's front. It was probably caused by the 4th Division's attack, whose starting time—10 p.m.—had not been co-ordinated by corps headquarters with that for the 3rd Division, 11 p.m. The bombardment caught the 43rd Battalion, which was coming up to relieve the 44th and to carry out with two companies the attack north of the Douve. South of the Douve it also caught the 200 men of the 36th, whom Lieutenant-Colonel Milne was sending forward for the operation on his front. It also fell on the left party of the 33rd. The 43rd got into position, though with loss. In the 36th Major Wells, who had just deployed his force, was wounded. Many of his troops were killed, wounded, or scattered. But remnants were re-formed by Lieutenants Ewing, Herps, and Lowden, and when the five minutes' covering barrage fell, the attack duly went forward.

The right party of the 33rd under Lieutenant Thomas, after shooting a few of the enemy, established its post at 11.10 at "Fuze Cottage" in the Oosttaverne Line, 600 yards ahead. The party next to it, under Lieutenant Clarence, after having an N.C.O. killed in the bombardment, advanced, but not swiftly enough to keep pace with the barrage. On

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100 General Monash had thought that the 4th Division was attacking at 9 o'clock, and that the disturbance would have subsided before the 3rd Division attacked.

101 One of the fighting leaders of the 9th Battalion at the Landing, now commanding the 36th.

102 Major W. Wells, M.C.; 36th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney; b. Home Rule, N.S.W., 17 April, 1884. (On Major Wells being wounded, Captain C. J. Doig, North Sydney, took charge. Doig was killed at Bony on 1 Oct., 1918.)

103 Lieut. W. T. Ewing, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Station overseer; of Glen Innes, N.S.W.; b. Glen Innes, 23 Feb., 1893


its reaching the Oosttaverne Line, a machine-gun opened fire from a dugout twenty yards along the trench. The bombers immediately attacked, and the Germans abandoned their gun and fled into the Douve valley. The 36th, advancing behind a perfect barrage, met feeble resistance near the Douve, and slightly more at La Potterie.\(^{107}\) North of the Douve Lieutenant Wald's\(^{108}\) company of the 43rd rushed and bayonetted some machine-gunners who opened fire on the right, and seized the gun. Lieutenant Daley's\(^{109}\) company met little or no opposition. The Oosttaverne Line was occupied and, on the left, posts were established beyond it. Thus by midnight on June 10th the Oosttaverne Line had been taken as far south as Potterie Farm.\(^{110}\)

The history of the 64th R.I.R., which faced the 43rd Battalion, states that the assembly of troops on its front had been detected, and that, as soon as these troops began to move, the artillery barrage came down heavily and promptly. It is wrongly claimed that the attack was beaten off, and that any Australians who entered the German trench were killed or captured.\(^{111}\)

\(^{107}\) Where Lieutenant Ewing advanced, the Germans were holding shell-holes and opened fire when the Australians were thirty yards away. The 36th at once charged; about ten Germans were killed, but a larger number retreated and took position again some distance ahead. They were driven further by Lewis gun fire. Two of their machine-guns were captured.


\(^{110}\) The somewhat dangerously advanced southern post at Fuze Cottage had afterwards to be withdrawn. In going forward the 33rd's party had passed an enemy outpost, of whose precise position the party was unaware, although it was known that some of the enemy had been in the neighbourhood. The runners who were sent back with word that the Australian post had been established came upon these Germans, and had to lie low, and the message thus failed to get through. Captain C. H. Linklater (Wollstonecraft, N.S.W.), who was waiting for news before sending up a party of the 33th to take over the post, then went forward himself with a runner. He walked into the Germans and, fighting them with his revolver, was mortally wounded and made prisoner. Shortly before day-break a messenger arrived from Lieutenant Thomas asking if the post was to hold on or withdraw. As it was then too late for its relief by the 35th, and the post had no food, Lieutenant A. H. Fletcher (Armadale, N.S.W.), now in command of the company, fired a pre-arranged signal for withdrawal. The post came in at 3.15. Linklater died in a German hospital, the enemy who captured him having evidently managed to get clear before daylight.

\(^{111}\) History of 64th R.I.R., p. 114. The time of this attack is given as "about 10 p.m." and it is possible that the fighting thus attributed to the 64th R.I.R. is that which really occurred at that hour in the Blauwpoortbeek valley. In that case either the 64th was not where it is generally supposed to have been, or its historian has misread the report of a sister regiment's action.
The Germans captured in this attack\textsuperscript{112} were, as usual, sent back to divisional headquarters, and when being examined, at 8 a.m., they made the surprising statement that by this time along the whole front their troops would have retired. The garrison, they said, had been ordered to withdraw to the Warneton Line, three-quarters of a mile in rear, and was to be in occupation of it by 1.30 that morning. They themselves had seen the order, but, before it was carried out by their posts, the British bombardment had fallen, causing confusion, and in this state the attack had caught them. Their statement was immediately forwarded to corps headquarters, and to the forward-line troops.

Meanwhile the 4th Division also had received a striking report sent at 4.53 from Colonel Salisbury’s headquarters near the Blauwepoortbeek. It said that Captain Seager of the 50th had sent word that the Germans could be seen leaving their support position. A machine-gun was still firing from a concrete blockhouse on the left, but the 50th was attacking it. Lewis gunners were firing on the retreating enemy, and the 52nd was sending a patrol down the stream. At 5.30 a German aeroplane flew over that sector dropping white and red lights, and the Germans came forward a little, having perhaps withdrawn too far. But the trench and blockhouses by the Blauwepoortbeek were found empty. Captain Mayersbeth of the 48th, who had relieved the 45th south of the gap, remarked a strange inactivity beyond the barricade, and, himself walking down the trench, found the first blockhouse empty except for two dead Germans and an abandoned field-gun. The 52nd, whom he met lower down, told him that the Germans had gone. Patrols of both brigades searched the fortified farm that had caused so much trouble in the Blauwepoortbeek, and found there another German field-piece. The enemy had taken the breech-blocks from both guns.

The decision of Crown Prince Rupprecht to withdraw had been arrived at on June 10. The existing Warneton Line was not suitable for continued occupation, but the troops were to retire to the general line Klein Zillebeke—Houthem—Bas Warneton—Deulemont, and hold on there while a new permanent line, west of the Flandern Stellung, was constructed. All German accounts say that the withdrawal was carried out during the night of June 10 without disturbance. Officers’ patrols were left behind to deceive the British.

\textsuperscript{112} A few men of the 11th Bav. I.R. (with two runners of the 9th Bav. I.R.) and a few of the I/1st Guard Reserve Regiment.
With this withdrawal the Battle of Messines practically ended. Corps headquarters at once ordered up its mounted troops, but infantry patrols meanwhile had been probing out to the front. Before the 13th Brigade was relieved by the 4th on the night of June 11th, the 52nd Battalion had stationed a post at Deconinck Farm. The 11th British Division (IX Corps), which now took over the line north of the Blauweepoortbeek, was assisted by a patrol under Lieutenant Noblett (50th Battalion) to occupy Deport Farm.

Farther south Captain Reginald Jones of the 14th established posts beyond Gapaard Farm. At Huns' Walk the Germans held up a little longer the patrols of the 15th, but by June 12th the 4th Brigade had advanced the outpost-line through the fields and hedges south of Gapaard. Seven hundred yards beyond could be seen the wire of the Warneton Line.

The 4th Brigade, which had taken over the whole front of the 4th Division as well as that of the 3rd Division north of the Douve, was itself

\[\text{Line of posts, June 12.}\]

118 Captain Maxwell himself guided the relieving troops (14th Bn.) to a blockhouse beyond Deconinck on the Gapaard road. It was the last battle achievement of this fine officer. The strain to which he had subjected himself, since the days when, as a trooper of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, he twice fainted at his sniping "poxy" at Quinn's in Gallipoli (see Vol. XII, plate 92), became too great. When, on August 18, a friend, Captain B. H. Arnott (Strathfield, N.S.W.), whom he was to rejoin in half-an-hour in the front line, was killed by a shell while taking a different track to the front, Maxwell collapsed. Later General Glasgow, then commanding the 1st Division, chose him for his aide-de-camp.


120 Six abandoned field-guns were found in this sector.

121 The 15th dug a new trench for 300 yards south of Huns' Walk, beyond Hun House.

122 These posts were placed entirely by the infantry. The corps cavalry regiment and cyclists were hurried forward on June 11, but, through no fault of their own members, they were rather the playing thing of corps headquarters than a useful instrument for the operation. Unlike the infantry, who knew the country and the work, they had but vague information and orders. They worked dismounted, a party of cyclists holding the re-established post beyond Thatched Cottage, and some of the Otago Mounted Rifles a post further north. The remainder appear to have reached the front line, but to have taken no part in the active patrolling.

123 At 10 o'clock on the night of June 11, while the relief of the 11th Brigade by the 4th was in process, the German artillery, as before, laid down a barrage, causing loss. Lieutenant W. S. Fitzpatrick (Sydney), 13th Battalion, was killed.
relieved by a brigade of the 25th British Division on the night of June 12th. The southern brigade of the 3rd Division, the 9th, exhausted by constant digging as well as fighting, was on June 12th assisted by burial parties and carriers from the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade. The two British battalions that had held the quiet front south of the offensive as far as the Lys were also relieved by the new 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade.

It was intended that the New Zealanders should attack that front in three days' time, but at 9 a.m. on the 12th New Zealanders were seen wandering over the German trenches south of the 9th Brigade's flank. They proved to be one of the burial parties sent out by the 9th Brigade. After burying the dead in the old No-Man's Land, where not a shot was fired at them, they had gone on, without knowing it, into the German lines. The trenches were empty, and patrols afterwards sent out by the 4th New Zealand Brigade discovered that, except for covering parties, the enemy had withdrawn from his whole front between there and the Lys.

The withdrawal on this front had really been carried out thirty-six hours before, on the same night as on the main battle-front. During June 11 the area had been held only by officers' patrols. That night the 4th Bavarian Division, holding this sector, was relieved by the 22nd Reserve.

The New Zealand Division relieved the 3rd Australian on the night of June 12th, and, after several days of difficult patrol-fighting ending with a formal attack, routed the German posts from most of the area in front of the Warneton Line.

Such is the story of the Battle of Messines, so far as the Australians took part in it. From both the German and the British point of view, it was only a preliminary operation, a clearing of the flank for the great thrust that was to be made presently from Ypres. Already on June 10th the headquarters of the Fifth British Army, which was to make that thrust, had opened at La Lovie in Flanders. Already the XIV Corps, the unused reserve for Messines, was on its way to Ypres with two of its divisions. Already—though it would have greatly disturbed Sir Douglas Haig to know it—the commander of the German armies opposing him recognised the British intentions.

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119 Of the 57th Division, lent to the 3rd Australian Division.
120 General Gough had actually moved thither on May 31.
The object next before us (noted Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary on June 12) is to win the battle now beginning to develop at Ypres. That the English are striving for a decision here is certain.

Nevertheless Messines meant far more to both sides than a mere subsidiary fight. Although even the frankest of German historians121 does not face—or perhaps does not know—the full truth of this defeat, the German official history says that the British stroke "fully succeeded," that the Messines salient "had been lost with dreadful casualties," and that "French confidence began to grow again." General von Kuhl describes the battle as "one of the worst tragedies in the world war."122 For the British the result was a revelation—how welcome, only those know who can fully recall their own feelings at the time—that the British staff could plan and carry through a first-rate stroke with brilliant success. To the Australians who took part, the British higher leadership in this fight was as heartening as that in the Bullecourt operations had been depressing. It is true that Haig's intention to capture the bulk of the German guns in the afternoon attack was not fulfilled, most of the guns lying behind the Oosttaverne Line.123 Moreover, especially in the later phases, mistakes were made, partly due to the inexperience even of the Second Army staff in such offensives. No small part of the careful work of the 3rd Australian Division—for example, except on the extreme right, the digging of communication trenches across and beyond the old No-Man's Land—was labour wasted. During the disturbance of battle communication trenches so far back were unnecessary, and the employment of troops upon them merely increased the numbers exposed to the German artillery on the southern flank.124

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121 For example, the compiler of the official history Schlechten des Weltkrieges, Vol. 27, Flandern 1917. His account, though confined to two pages, is obviously an honest attempt to face the facts of this episode, but it contains important errors as to the mining, the counter-attack of June 7, and the supposed retention by the Germans of the Oosttaverne Line until June 10. Although the truth as to the British attack is now well known, German unit histories consist largely of stories of the beating back of attempts that were never made.

122 Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Vol. II, p. 114. The historian of the 18th Bav I.R. says that the battle was one of the most dreadful and depressing experiences of the regiment in the war.

123 Their position is noted by Crown Prince Rupprecht, Vol. II, p. 188.

124 The chief engineer of the division, Lieut.-Colonel H. O. Clogstoun (of Anzac fame), whose report emphasised this point, also stated that the connecting up of the Australian trench-tramways with the old German ones was unprofitable, at least in battle-time. Another defect in the arrangements was the reliance by the Second Army upon a pipe-system for water-supply up to the old British front. The pipes were too often broken by shelling. It is interesting to note that water was partly obtained by boring in rear of Hill 63. Such work along the whole British front
But the impressive success of the British mining operations, the clearness of the plans, the overwhelming bombardment, the counter-battery fire which during the first stage stamped out most of the enemy's artillery, the effective observation maintained by the British air force, the transport of material and food by improvised pack-trains—which, at least in the 47th Battalion, came by June 9th right up to the front line, delivering a hot meal to the tired troops there—the swift and comparatively smooth evacuation of the wounded gave Australians a confidence in the

was carried out at this time by the Australian Electrical Mining and Mechanical Boring Company (the old headquarters section of the Mining Battalion) stationed at Hazebrouck. On June 7 when the Red Lodge bore became choked for example, the Director of Mines, Major Edgeworth David (then Geologist on his staff) and Captain S. B. Hunter (Moorooduc, Vic.) to report, and then arranged for Major R. V. Morse (North Melbourne, N.S.W.; died 26 Jan., 1925), commanding the R.E.M.M.B. Coy., to have telemirage officers from G.H.Q., Major R. S. Stokes, R.E., noted in his diary that the commander of a British tunnelling company (Major Wraith) had "nothing but praise for Morse and his men, whose efficiency and devotion to duty are a matter for his enthusiastic commendation. If a pump goes wrong, it is out of the mine, back to the shops in 24 hours. The Australians do not work by hours, but by contract—to keep the water down."

The German batteries beyond the southern flank, however, were not destroyed, and, as in the fighting at Arras, the British counter-battery work was chiefly effective during the first attack. After enemy batteries took up new positions, the British could not suppress them, probably because they could not so easily find them. The German counter-battery fire was weak, but a large dump on Hill 63 was exploded on June 7, and fires caused in several batteries, including the 37th Australian. On June 14, through the blowing up of a dump near Wulverghem, 16 men of the 110th Howitzer Battery were killed and 5 wounded. Corporal J. C. Browne (West Tamworth, W. Aust.) and Gunner A. E. Maher (Grenfell, N.S.W.) gallantly rescued some of the wounded from within a few yards of the blazing ammunition.

Since the end of April the British airmen in the Second Army, as elsewhere, had regained the upper hand. On May 8 Lieutenant C. H. Alexander (Armidale and Neutral Bay, N.S.W.; killed at Messines on June 8), of the 9th Light Trench Mortar Battery, wrote: "When last I commented on our position in the air I was not able to say anything very complimentary, but the outlook is now very different. We seldom get a sight of a Hun machine nowadays, and the sky as far as we can see is constantly patrolled by our fliers. . . . Many of our fellows counted as many as five such victories (in the air) here one morning."

In a description of this night of terrible bombardment Private Gallwey says that two petrol tins of steaming hot tea reached his party in 'Oxygen Trench.' "We hardly knew whether we were drinking hot tea or hot petrol. . . . Nevertheless, being hot, it was very refreshing." On previous nights the pack-train came as far as battalion headquarters near Messines. The pack-train was formed by withdrawing drivers, animals, and equipment from battalions, field companies, and signal companies. That of the 4th Division was manned by some 195 drivers and others. The list of those mentioned for outstanding work is headed by Private W. Berry (Young, N.S.W.; died 31 July, 1919), 14th Battalion. In the 3rd Division the pack-train consisted of four troops (one for each brigade and one for divisional purposes), each consisting of 2 officers and 100 others with 164 horses, 66 pack saddles, and 48 saddle attachments. The loads varied from 100 to 200 lb. During the wild night of June 8 Captain R. W. Dewson (Hobart; killed in action on 7 May, 1918) took 90 mule-loads of ammunition to Schnitzel Farm. Sergeant W. Appleby (Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; died 29 Jan., 1938) took forward 52 mule-loads from Ploegsteert Wood. From Schnitzel Farm the loads were taken forward by hand. In the 4th Division the work of carrying parties of the 46th Battalion under Lieutenant R. I. Brittain (Tyenna, Tas.) of the 40th, evoked special admiration.

Owing to Hill 63 standing in the middle of its front, the II Anzac Corps had two lines of clearance, a northern to Bailleul, and a southern largely to Trois Arbres. The twelve field ambulances of the four divisions, and one motor ambulance column, were available for working the system. The wounded were brought
staff such as had been engendered by no previous operation excepting perhaps the skilful evacuation of Gallipoli. As for the showing of the 3rd Division, its spirited yet controlled advance in precise accordance with plan, in spite of the powerful effort of the German artillery to crush this flank during the approach march and afterwards, was altogether admirable. The comparative severity of the fighting on the southern flank is shown by the fact that the II Anzac Corps suffered more than half the 26,000 casualties incurred on the British side in this battle.

To the regimental aid posts by regimental bearers, specially increased in the 3rd Division by twenty per battalion. In the 40th Battalion the band was still being used for stretcher-bearing, but, as none of its members were hit, and the band was especially required during rest after battle, this practice was afterwards discontinued.

From the R.A.P.'s evacuation was carried out by the field-ambulance bearers. On the southern route there were two collecting stations for "walking" wounded ("Hyde Park Corner" and Touquet Berthe under Majors E. F. Lind, of Williamstown, Vic., and J. J. McMahon, of Kew, Vic.), and an advanced dressing station at "Charing Cross" (under Major S. R. Burston, of Adelaide)—the whole three under Lieutenant-Colonel M. H. Downey (Parkside, S. Aust.) of the 11th Field Ambulance; and a corps main dressing station for 300 "lying down" cases at Pont d'Achelle, under Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. Maguire (Sydney), 9th Field Ambulance, with a collecting station for 400 "walking" wounded beside it. So as to leave the field ambulances mobile, the six bearer subdivisions which carried out the evacuation were provided by taking one from each of six different field ambulances—the 4th, 12th, and 13th (4th Australian Division), and 9th, 10th, and 11th (3rd Australian Division). All these bearers were under Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Purdy (Sydney) of the 10th Field Ambulance, at Charing Cross. The tramways were used, where possible, for "lying down" cases. The arrangements on the northern route were similar, but the personnel mainly New Zealand and British.

The ambulance bearers encountered heavy shell-fire. Sergeant A. T. Wilkins (Newcastle, N.S.W.), 4th Field Ambulance, himself wounded, led his bearers through the severe artillery-fire on June 8, as did Captain R. C. Winn (Sydney) of the same ambulance, who lost a foot through his wounds. In the southern area the advanced dressing station at Charing Cross in Ploegsteert Wood was in the midst of batteries, and was heavily shelled (as had been foretold by General Monash, who wished it to be placed away to the flank). Wounded were brought from loading points to the main dressing station by wheeled transport returning empty from the dumping point, and by a few cars of the field ambulances. Antitetanic serum was given here, and slight cases were diverted to divisional rest stations at L'Estrange (for sick) and Steenwerck (slight wounds and shell-shock).

From the main dressing station the motor ambulance column carried the stretcher cases to the casualty clearing stations at Bailleul and Trois Arbres, walking wounded being taken by 35 specially allotted lorries; these ran a five minutes' "bus service from the main dressing station to the rest station and casualty clearing stations, and in two days carried 5,000 walking wounded.

Near Bailleul was No. 2 A.C.C.S. and three British stations, and at Trois Arbres No. 3 A.C.C.S. (it had been there for nearly a year). Australian nurses were working in them. No. 2 A.C.C.S. in 48 hours admitted 2,830 patients, and cleared 2,579. Many serious cases reached the stations within three hours of being wounded; 1,025 operations were performed. During the Messines offensive No. 1 A.C.C.S. was bombed by enemy airmen seeking to hit the railway or other targets. Sister R. Pratt (Mumbannar and East Malvern, Vic.) was hit by a fragment of a bomb, and several sisters were injured by flying fragments of glass, but as in all such cases, the sisters behaved bravely and coolly. The 11th British C.C.S. at Bailleul lost at this time 35 killed and 59 wounded.

The II Anzac casualties, including those of the 25th British Division, were about 13,000; those of the IX Corps about 4,000. Those of the X Corps are not stated, but would be about 8,000. The loss in the divisions of II Anzac was...
N.Z. Division—150 officers and 4,828 others; 25th Division—158 and 3,221; 3rd Aust. Division—112 and 4,010; 4th Aust. Division—108 and 2,589. Particulars of casualties in the Australian infantry are:

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The 3rd Divisional Engineers lost 77, A.A.M.C. 56, artillery 29, pioneers 164. In the 4th Division the engineers lost 29, A.A.M.C. 29, artillery 27, pioneers 66.

The German casualties were estimated by British G.H.Q. at 39,000. Figures recently supplied by the courtesy of the Rechsurarchw show that the actual loss was: 21-31 May—1,963; 1-10 June—19,923 (including 7,548 missing); 11-20 June—5,501; 21-30 June—1,773. The British figures are in most cases those of casualties incurred in the period June 1-14. The corresponding German figure would therefore be about 23,000. It has been ascertained from the Rechsurarchw that the calculations made by the Germans as to their losses in single actions rest on reports sent in by the troops every ten days, and that these include all casualties. German unit histories gave the following details. In the 3rd Bavarian Division, the 17th Regiment, opposite the 25th Division and New Zealanders, lost 34 officers and 1,151 others, and the 18th—opposite the New Zealanders and 10th Australian Brigade—4 officers and 1,084 others. In the 4th Bavarian Division, the 9th Regiment (opposite the 9th Australian Brigade) lost 26 officers and 850 others. The casualties of the rest of the 4th Bavarian Division, of the 1st Guard Reserve Division, and of elements of the 7th and 11th Divisions and 16th Bavarian Division that came against II Anzac, are not shown in available records.