

CHAPTER X

"PEACEFUL PENETRATION"—ITS CLIMAX ON THE SOMME

AFTER a successful battle on a great scale, even on the strongest fronts in France and Gallipoli, there usually followed at least a few hours in which the foremost infantry of the attacking side were uncertain as to precisely where the outposts of their opponents would be found. The successful infantry would have suddenly burst into the trenches, or sunken roads, of an area which, till the last few hours, had been forbidden and unknown ground to them; as unattainable as the sources of the Amazon, or the mountains of the South Pole. Around them would lie evidences of the enemy garrisons that recently had barred the entrance to the forbidden part of the world—equipment marked with strange initials; food or tobacco from the region that navies above or below water were trying to starve; letters and postcards in foreign tongue from the people there, telling those at headquarters who could read them of conditions as to which the Allies longed to discover the truth. Behind or on either flank would lie the reverse sides of slopes and ridges of which, till then, the advancing side had seen only the motionless, expressionless fronts. And here or there, from the trench or road occupied, there would lead out another trench or a cross-road—often overgrown with grass, sometimes recently trodden, sometimes long unused—into the country in which, somewhere, the enemy now lay. Such trenches would have been blocked as a matter of course, forty or fifty yards ahead, by the victorious troops during consolidation, generally with two successive barricades, and guards stationed behind the rearmost of these. But patrols would have gone cautiously along them as far as the protective barrage allowed; and, at least where the invaders were Australian troops, the need for obtaining infor-

mation, reinforced by curiosity, the itch for adventure, and an overpowering eagerness for souvenirs to take home to Australia, would lead enterprising spirits to thrust far down them, welcoming risks with the spirit of explorers for whom unknown dangers might lie behind any corner or rise.

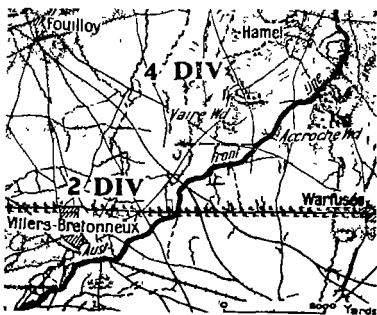
After comparatively minor actions, such as that of Hamel, this interval for adventure had usually been short; the front soon became closed by two lines of outposts¹ whose alertness and instant shooting rendered patrolling highly dangerous. Even though by July 1918 both sides were holding their foremost lines much more thinly than hitherto, the outposts were ordered to be so placed that movement screened from one would come under deadly machine-gun fire from its neighbours. But the green crops covering much of the country and now two or three feet high greatly impeded the view.² They were cut as soon as possible by the garrisons on both sides, working at night with sickles, but as a rule only for twenty or thirty yards in front of the posts. The Australians—commanders and men—who in May had been distinctly apprehensive of the danger of the crops screening German attacks, were now finding that, on the contrary, opportunity was constantly being given to themselves to prowl round the posts of their opponents. If the German posts were well sited and the garrisons alert, the procedure was always dangerous, but it was difficult for either side to ensure alertness throughout the long, hot summer days.

On the day after the Battle of Hamel it was quickly evident to many Australians in the outpost-line that the German front was unusually disorganised. Nowhere in recent months had the Germans here dug or wired any rear line of defence—the only system deserving the name was the line of old French works which still reached out across the country. The defences in the foreground were mainly small bits of old British or German trench dug without system and generally unpro-

¹ In earlier years of the war the lines would have been continuously garrisoned trenches.

² And also the range of bullets. Experiments by Second Army proved that through 60 yards of green, dry crop only 57 per cent. of bullets apparently penetrated, and of these most were deflected in their direction. Through 200 yards of crop only 8.5 penetrated. If the crop was wet, the protection it afforded was even greater.

tected by wire. The right of the Hamel advance had cut diagonally across a number of these on the portion of the Villers-Bretonneux plateau that lay north of the Roman road; and here, where the tanks on the previous day had thoroughly disconcerted the enemy's small posts and groups, the Australians for some days found the best region for their excursions.



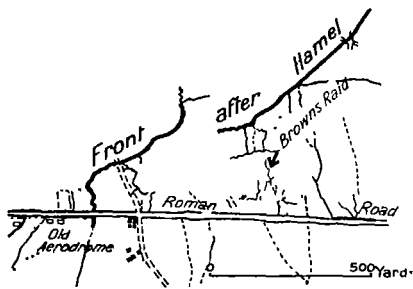
The view was limited by a slight crest 200 yards ahead of the new posts; beyond it a depression led down northwards to the steep gully at Accroche Wood. Several of the old German communication trenches ran into the depression, and on the morning of July 6th two Victorian snipers, in search of a good position, moved out along one of these saps until they came on a German, obviously the sentry, asleep. They shot him, but the position was too dangerous for them to occupy. In the meantime, however, the chief staff officer of the 2nd Division, Lieut.-Col. Miles,³ who on July 5th went round the new front, and the commanders of the front-line battalions of the 6th and 7th Brigades, who had met and conferred there, decided that the outposts should be advanced in order to secure a better view. Maj. Reed⁴ of the 21st himself went a long way down another sap, and during the afternoon of the 5th, while the snipers kept watch for any Germans that showed their heads, parties advanced along all the trenches running towards the enemy in this area and established posts in them 200-300 yards out and others in the open between these. One of the parties of the 21st, after thus penetrating a small trench-system 700 yards north of the Roman road, came into fire of a German machine-gun post; Lieut. Weir and his platoon rushed the posi-

³ Lt.-Gen. C. G. N. Miles, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), 2nd Aust. Div., 1918, Commandant, Royal Military College, Duntroon, 1935-39, Adjutant-General, Australia, 1939. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Brisbane, b. Brisbane, 10 Nov. 1884.

⁴ Lt.-Col. A. E. Reed, D.S.O., V.D.; 21st Bn. Accountant; of Melbourne; b. Clunes, Vic., 29 Mar. 1888.

tion after dark, the Germans withdrawing before them. The 7th Brigade had similarly pushed down part of the trenches south of the Roman road.

The 6th (Victoria) Brigade was to be relieved next day by the 5th (N. S. Wales), and, during the night while the Victorian garrisons were digging and settling into the new positions, the advance parties of the New South Welsh battalions (a few representatives of each company and of battalion headquarters) arrived at the front. Next morning one of the incomers, Sergt. Walter Brown⁵ of the 20th Battalion, was walking round the trench seized by Weir's party when a sergeant of the 21st, with whom he was hobnobbing, told him that his men were still being troubled by German snipers in some position close "over there." After waiting in vain for half an hour for these Germans to disclose themselves by firing another shot, Brown



walked on along the empty trench saying that he would see if he could "have a pot at them" himself. The trench soon became shallow, and seventy yards across the open, in the direction which the Victorian sergeant had indicated, he saw a mound. Presently a shot was fired, apparently from the mound. Guessing that this place was the source of the trouble, Brown decided to go out to it. He dropped his rifle, picked up two Mills bombs, and ran towards it. As he went another shot was fired—he was not sure whether he was the target. He stopped and threw a bomb at the mound, hoping that it would kill or scare any Germans there while he made his rush, but it fell short. Dropping down in some broken ground, he waited to see what would happen. As several minutes passed

⁵ Sgt. W. E. Brown, V.C., D.C.M. (No. 1689, 20th Bn.; and NX35,492; 2nd/15th Fld. Regt., A.I.F., 1940). Grocer; of Hobart, Tas., and Petersham, N.S.W., b. New Norfolk, Tas., 2 July 1885.

and the place remained without sound or movement, he got up and ran to it.

He found himself standing over one end of a small, kidney-shaped trench, empty, but with the entrance of a dugout gaping towards him at its far end and a machine-gun standing on the parados in the middle, its belt trailing from the breech. Brown jumped into the trench and ran to reach the dugout entrance before any one could emerge. As he reached it a German appeared in the entrance and began to step from it. Brown swung a blow at his jaw, and the German, crying "Kamerad" as it struck him, was knocked down the stair. Brown backed to the machine-gun, holding his only bomb ready to throw. At this moment, probably hearing movement behind him, he turned and received a surprise: at the other end of the trench, where he had jumped in, was another dugout entrance and Germans just emerging from it. He could not throw his bomb, for when it had burst he would have been at the mercy of the survivors. He therefore held it threateningly—and they at once put up their hands. He ordered them to pass out over the parapet, which they did, scowling, while he perforce kept turning his head so as to watch first one entrance and then the other. Thirteen Germans in all emerged and trotted across to the Australian line, some German post opening with a machine-gun as they went, and Brown following the prisoners, bomb in hand. The Victorians took charge of them. Presently German shells began to burst around.

Actually Brown had captured an officer and twelve men of the 137th I.R. (108th Divn.). They belonged to its I Bn. and on the day of the Hamel attack had been holding the support-line posts. After that battle these posts found themselves to be the front line. The one captured by Brown appears to have been subsequently thrust farther forward; it had not been rationed since the battle, and the spirit of its garrison was low.

Brown himself, unaware even that there was an officer among his captives, picked up his rifle, went back to his "pozzy," and dismissed the incident from his mind—so far as he was allowed to do so by some of the men in the trench who growled that he had "drawn the crabs"⁶ on them. Nevertheless word of the incident spread like fire, for an officer of

⁶ Soldier slang for drawing shell-fire.

the 21st presently came along the trench and asked him if he was the man who had gone out. Later when his own battalion, the 20th, came in, his company commander, Lieut. Cameron,⁷ asked: "What the devil have you been doing up there?" The incident was quickly known in every part of the corps. The 1st Australian Division at Hazebrouck heard it. As will presently be seen, General Monash made it the basis of a direction to all his divisions.

But, while the unconscious subject of these reports was sitting quietly in his niche in the ground,⁸ some probing of trenches by individual Diggers continued and in the afternoon a small German post near Accroche Wood was rushed.

The 265th R.I.R. (108th Divn.), south of the Roman road, noted that Hill 104 "seethed with Tommies, probably staffs who wanted to get their bearings." The regimental history recording this fact says that the British attacked the 137th in the afternoon. The historian of the 15th I.R. (13th Divn.) farther north says that the Australians made new thrusts at 9.30 (probably Brown's sortie), 10.30, and 11 o'clock, all being defeated, and "Tommy" in the last case being "sent home with bloody heads."⁹

Actually any Australian activity was purely the work of single men or small parties continuing on local initiative the activity of the previous day.

Much more important undertakings were, indeed, simmering in the minds of some of the higher leaders. The advances at Hamel and Ville were barely over before plans for repeating those successes were suggested by Hobbs, Monash, and Rawlinson. Actually, on the day of the Battle of Hamel, General Hobbs suggested for the next project an advance on

**Plan for
another
Hamel**

⁷ Brig. C. E. Cameron, M.C.; 20th Bn. Clerk; of Turramurra, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, N.S.W., 13 Sep. 1894.

⁸ Brown was awarded the Victoria Cross. He had been previously decorated, after Passchendaele, and was indeed the type of man certain to distinguish himself in this way if he survived. Born at New Norfolk, Tasmania, in 1885, and working as a grocer when the war broke out, he had enlisted in the infantry, but, in order to get to the front more quickly, seized a chance of transfer to the light horse and then, on arrival in Egypt, entered the camel corps. When serving with this corps in Egypt, being determined to reach the infantry in France, he managed to be sent to Cairo on a plea of having lost his false teeth. At Cairo he succeeded in obtaining a transfer to the 20th Bn. reinforcements, and, after serving in the 55th Bn. at Fiers, and for a short while in a field butchery, he was transferred in August 1917 to the 20th Bn.

⁹ The German account says that after this the "English" came out with Red Cross flags and, "in spite of the misuse of the flag which we had already experienced with this opponent," the bearers were allowed to work unharmed.

the Morlancourt heights and the raiding of that village. He proposed that the troops for this purpose should be obtained by reinforcing his division with two American battalions distributed by platoons, and at the same time transferring the Ville sector to the III Corps. General Monash immediately rejected the proposal on the ground that its achievement was beyond the available resources of the corps, especially in artillery, and that undertakings elsewhere offered more valuable and attractive results.¹⁰ He considered, however, that a more restricted operation on Morlancourt heights might be worthy of consideration later, and asked Hobbs to prepare plans for it.

On July 7th Monash wrote to Rawlinson:

There are under consideration several tempting proposals for exerting further pressure upon the enemy for the improvement of our position. . . .

They could not, however, be entertained, because the infantry holding his front was some 4,000 fewer than when it took over the sector. He therefore asked that the III Corps, whose front was much more densely held, should take over the sector of his northern brigade.

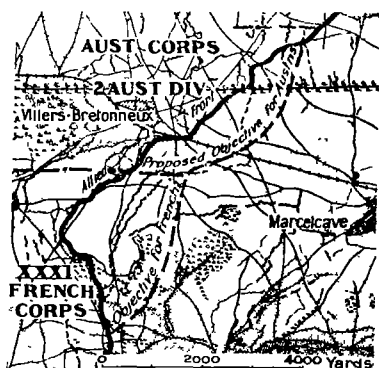
This was not then possible; but there was one project favoured by both Monash and Rawlinson, which might ultimately have a similar effect. This was an advance by the right of the Australian Corps in order to straighten the bight now existing in its line on the plateau in front of Villers-Bretonneux, south of the bulge created by the Hamel advance. The ground there was suitable for tanks, which would help to lessen casualties. Indeed, though the corps was being worn down by constant activity, Rawlinson and Monash both considered that the repetition of such strokes as the Battle of Hamel would be justifiable employment for it. Moreover both of them hoped that the line would ultimately be shortened (though, as will be explained, temporarily lengthened) by the proposed operation. Rawlinson therefore urged it upon Haig, when he met him prior to an army commanders' conference on

¹⁰ Other reasons were that the III Corps could not then carry out the relief, that the objective was too shallow for tanks to be used with advantage, and that the mere raiding of Morlancourt was too unimportant an achievement for such an effort. Br.-Gen. Elliott wished to take Morlancourt by the method he constantly urged, of "pinching it out."

July 5th. The commander-in-chief refused; the proposal, he said, would extend the line at a moment when reserves were very small. He told Rawlinson nevertheless to prepare a statement of the plan.

Further formal attacks being thus for the moment ruled out, Monash resorted to other methods, presently to be described. Meanwhile, after discussion on July 6th with Maj.-General Rosenthal of the 2nd Division, he drew up, and on July 7th sent to Rawlinson, the written statement of the plan for which Haig had asked. It made clear that the main object was to shorten the line by filling in not only the re-entrant on the Australian front, south of Hamel, but the deep gulf existing on the Australian right as the result of the German success against the exhausted divisions of the Fourth Army in the attacks on Villers-Bretonneux. Most of this indentation was now held by the French, who after the second German attack had taken over the line to a point near Monument Wood.¹¹

The great difficulty in the way of straightening this front was that of arranging for simultaneous action by the two allies. Monash therefore recommended that the process should be undertaken by each separately, the Australian Corps advancing its front first. This advance would render much easier that of the French, which should follow "after a very short interval of time." It was, however, urgent that the French should not fail to act, since otherwise the Australian thrust would result in "an awkward, and, in some aspects, a very undesirable salient." Monash's plan therefore suggested two objectives: the first (known as the "Red Line") "to be considered only as the first stage of a comprehensive operation" to be achieved by the Australian Corps; in the



¹¹ See Vol. V, p. 644.

second stage of that operation, to follow as soon as possible afterwards, the XXXI French Corps would gain the "Blue Line." The Australian Corps front on the Red Line would be 4,500 yards in extent, but when the French came up it would be reduced to 3,000. The Australian attack would be carried out with the methods employed at Hamel, a battalion of tanks and nine brigades of field artillery taking part. Very careful preparation would be necessary in order to disguise the front of attack.¹² The corps would be ready to deliver it on July 17th.

In forwarding this plan to Haig on July 9th Rawlinson said that it had originally been suggested that the allies should attack simultaneously,

but, from past experience of the difficulties of fitting in times and dates suitable to both armies, I am very averse to this, and would much prefer the arrangements whereby the Australian attack will be put in some three or four days previous to the French attack.

Before writing to G.H.Q., Rawlinson had seen the commander of the First French Army, General Debeney. At the moment Debeney's preoccupation obviously was with another and probably, to the French, more important re-entrant, where the Germans had penetrated across the Avre between Castel and Moreuil, and he was intending to attack there in a few days' time. "If this is successful," Rawlinson wrote, "and especially if the Australian operation is successful," Debeney would probably agree to Monash's plan; in an endeavour to overcome Debeney's initial reluctance, Rawlinson had promised to lend him tanks. Rawlinson added that he was "very anxious" for the French to advance, as it would shorten the Australian front by nearly a mile, "which is of very considerable importance to the Corps."

At this stage of the war there was available to commanders of Australian troops another method of carrying out on many parts of the front fairly extensive operations
Meanwhile— —Joffre would have called these "nibbling,"
"Nibbling" and there is certainly no better exemplification
 of that principle than in this process, invented and initiated by

¹² Monash added: "It is hoped that, in this, novel expedients will suggest themselves after fuller consideration of the matter."

the Australian troops themselves, of "peaceful penetration."¹³ General Monash was as impressed as were the front-line troops by the disorganisation evidently created in the local German front by the Battle of Hamel, and on July 6th Sergt. Brown's sortie furnished additional proof of it. In circularising an account of that exploit to the troops on the day of its occurrence,¹⁴ Monash said:

An examination of these prisoners showed to a striking degree the state of utter demoralisation to which the enemy troops had been brought as the result of our operations. It was difficult to imagine men exhibiting greater dejection and a poorer morale. . . . They had been sent forward aimlessly to assist in forming an outpost-line to cover the remainder of their battalion. They had been left without food or water and utterly cut off, not knowing either our situation or that of their own troops. They were indeed quite helpless and fell an easy prey to our enterprise.

Examination of other prisoners, the circular added, had disclosed that similar confusion existed at other points and extended a considerable distance to the rear. Monash stated that he wished regimental officers to be aware of these conditions

in order to stimulate them to spare no effort, immediately after a battle, to exploit our successes to the utmost by the incessant harassing of the enemy and the mopping up of small posts.

At the same time, in conference on July 6th and 7th, he told Maj.-General Rosenthal that, although his troops at Villers-Bretonneux must not undertake any operations likely to cause severe casualties, they should endeavour to push forward posts wherever possible. There was some evidence that the two German divisions facing the right of the Australian Corps were being relieved.¹⁵ The most favourable time for pressure should therefore be the next few days, before the new divisions were well acquainted with the ground. Rosenthal issued an order to his brigades, informing them of the objective—the "Red

¹³ The process was, of course, also separately discovered by others. For example, four British soldiers at Pacaut Wood on June 15 cleared several German posts, capturing 20 Germans and 2 machine-guns. Doubtless all dominion troops also used the method, which was known to the British as "winkling" (extracting wrinkles from their shells). German regimental histories also tell of occasional German feats of this kind. But when all is said it was never, so far as is known, practised in a manner comparable to its use by the Australians and New Zealanders.

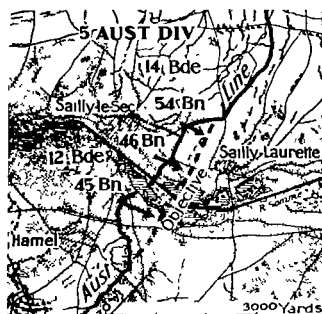
¹⁴ The circular refers to Brown as a man "of the 21st Battalion," this being the unit that had reported the incident.

¹⁵ They were the 13th and 108th. The 108th was in fact relieved a few days later. The 13th remained in the line.

Line"—which the divisions might be set to reach in a full-dress attack in the near future, and adding that its ultimate attainment would be materially helped by immediate attempts to push forward by patrolling. This meant that the brigadiers must take steps to infuse a definite purpose and additional vigour into the peaceful penetration that was already being carried out by their troops.

This nibbling was also in progress along the rest of the corps front where, in the days following Hamel, two other minor objects were being sought: first, to straighten the re-entrant left on the flats and southern slope of the Somme Valley between the northern end of the Hamel advance and the line on the Morlancourt heights; second, to push forward a few posts west of Accroche Wood so as to get a better view of the slope down which the wood lay. The advance on the flats was made by the two front-line battalions of the 12th Brigade in a small operation on a front of 2,500 yards astride of the Somme on the night of July 7th, as follows:

South of the river, where two companies of the 45th (N.S.Wales) made the attack, no opposition was expected, and, though several small German posts were met, none resisted. The companies making forward in the dark on the hillside south of the river found a dump of German barbed-wire with the necessary screw pickets, which greatly helped for wiring the new posts. Under cover of a party stationed 100 yards ahead, the whole of the 45th dug the posts or carried or erected the wire, and in the early morning a platoon of the 50th connected the 45th's right with the 50th's left, high on the Hamel ridge.¹⁶ North of the river, where two companies of 46th (Vic.) advanced, lay German posts which were expected to offer resistance. The artillery and Stokes mortar barrage was, however, very good and the Germans, after throwing a few bombs, ran back. Close beyond the objective was found a more troublesome post under a German company sergeant-major. It was rushed on the following night by a platoon under Lt. Pinsent.¹⁷ Farther north, on the flank of the 5th Divn., a German



¹⁶ Much difficulty was experienced in adjusting the protective barrage so as to clear the connecting post.

¹⁷ Lt. H. C. Pinsent, 46th Bn. Packer; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, 4 July 1894.

post, reconnoitred by the company commander, Capt. McNab, and Lt. Pickup,¹⁸ on the night before, was taken by a party of McNab's company led by Pickup.¹⁹ The line now ran close in front of the Saily-Laurette cemetery, where the 44th Bn. had received a sharp knock in its night attack on March 28.²⁰ The Australian casualties in the whole advance were about 70. North of the Somme 24 unwounded prisoners of the 201st R.I.R. (43rd Res. Divn.) were taken.

The posts opposite Accroche Wood were pushed forward on the same night by the 16th Battalion, which had recently relieved the 13th. The night being disturbed with heavy shell-fire,²¹ the work was unfinished but one post was maintained forward to deny the ground to the enemy. Crops of wheat close by the post, however, rendered its tenure somewhat precarious. At 11.30 next morning it was heavily bombarded with *minenwerfer* and by rifle-grenadiers who crept up amid the wheat. The garrison, after half of its twelve men were killed or wounded, withdrew to shell-holes in rear and opened fire on the Germans when, a few minutes later, they raided the trench. The Germans swept the place with machine-gun fire during the day, and at dusk the Western Australians, having lost two more men, made their way back to the old firing line. That night patrols tried to recover the bodies of the dead from the now empty post, but the rustling of the crop twice advertised their close approach and strong German patrols prevented their reaching the ground. General Brand decided to abandon the effort to advance the posts, but a week later, after the 3rd Division had relieved the 4th, the task was again undertaken by the inner flanks of the 39th (Victorian) and 40th (Tasmanian) Battalions (10th Brigade). The companies pushed out during the night of July 14th and, with covering parties ahead, two new posts were dug for the flank of each battalion.²² But the difficulties were as great as before. One of the posts of the 39th lay in a cleared patch between two belts of crop. At 10.30 in the morning it was suddenly fired on by a machine-gun from the crop on the right. A Lewis gunner, Pte. John-

¹⁸ Lt. F. A. Pickup, 54th Bn. Clerk, of Windsor, N.S.W.; b. Windsor, 21 Jan 1898.

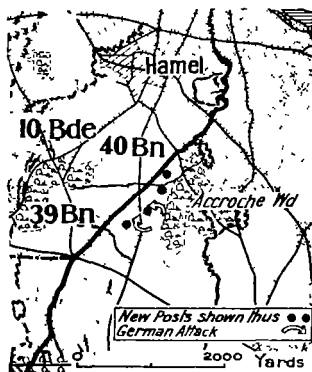
¹⁹ Both McNab and Pickup were slightly wounded, but went on with their work. The left flank was protected by a patrol under Lt. J. D. MacGregor (Sydney).

²⁰ See Vol V, pp. 223-4.

²¹ Due to the 12th Bde's advance astride the Somme.

²² Those for the 40th were dug by parties from the 37th (Vic.).

ston,²³ turned his gun on the enemy, but stick-bombs now came over from the crop on the left, killing one man, wounding several, and damaging the gun. Sergt. McEwan,²⁴ in command of the post, withdrew his men including the wounded, himself covering their retirement by firing from the hip with a Lewis gun. The other post of the 39th also withdrew. Both were re-established the same afternoon and were not again attacked by the Germans. But the incident is notable as almost the only one in which the enemy successfully used against the Australians the tactics which were now, daily—in the north often hourly—used against him by the Australians.



For by now on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau there had developed a state of affairs which two months before, when the 48th Battalion made its gallant, costly attempt to seize the Monument Farm and grounds, would have been beyond belief. General Monash's order—to see what could be done there by peaceful penetration—had caused Brig.-Genl. Wisdom of the 7th Brigade to meet Lieut.-Col. Chalmers of the 27th Battalion (South Australia) on July 7th at the front line where it crossed the Villers-Bretonneux-Marcelcave railway. The plateau on which they looked out was covered mainly with green crops—largely with wheat two or three feet high; but except for the tops of distant woods most of the eastern landscape was screened by a slight swelling of the ground 150 yards east of them and also on their right, south of the railway cutting, where, beyond a small belt of wheat, protruded the broken stumps and hedges of the Monument Farm orchard

²³ Pte. J. E. Johnston (No. 486; 39th Bn.). Butcher, of Redbank, Vic.; b. Redbank, 23 June 1894. Died 19 Apr. 1920.

²⁴ Lt. F. J. McEwan, M.M., 39th Bn. Hotel keeper; of Ararat, Vic.; b. Homebush, Vic., 1883.

(universally called "Monument Wood") together with the ruins of the little 1870 memorial and of the big farm. On this swelling, which curved far round to the right rear towards Hangard Wood, lay the German outposts. The nearest of them was in the crop immediately north of the cutting, and the whole scene was so still under the hot summer sun that, as Wisdom afterwards said, he

felt that for half a pin he would go over and look at them himself. He asked Chalmers if he thought he could have a go at them.²⁶

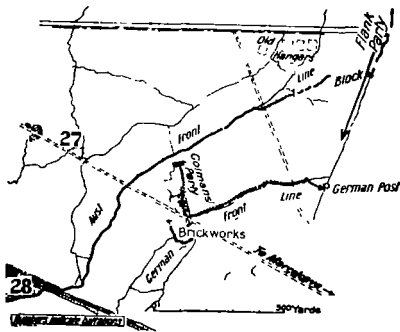
The general's enthusiasm as to the chance of a daylight raid induced Chalmers to send for a likely officer, the youngest in the battalion, Lieut. Colman,²⁶ an Adelaide student who (with a couple of air-photographs that were passed to him) examined the German front line, first from a house-top in Villers-Bretonneux. It seemed to him that the best chance of reaching the German line without being fired on—the only hope of success—was offered by the existence in front of it of an old orchard, immediately north of the road to Marcelcave. He had often watched this place bombed by the Australian heavy trench-mortars, and he now crept carefully out through the wheat, two feet high, until suddenly stopped by the sight of a parapet close ahead, and on it a German helmet. Watching for any other sign of the enemy, he waited for hours until a vast explosion between him and his own line warned him that the heavy trench-mortars were at work again. He had passed in the crop an old trench to which his party could creep during the coming night, to wait there for the chosen hour—10 a.m. He accordingly returned to tell his colonel that he would "give it a go." A small flanking party was to come down from the position won on July 4th by the 25th Battalion in the old German front line farther north²⁷ and endeavour to join him. The battalion staff obviously thought the scheme a wild one; if held up, Colman was to get his party back as best he could and an attack would be made later with proper artillery preparation.

²⁶ The quotation is from the diary of an Australian to whom Wisdom described the incident a few days later.

²⁶ Lt. W. R. G. Colman, M.C.; 27th Bn. Mining-engineer student; of Albert Park, S. Aust., b. Woodville, S. Aust., 10 Apr. 1897.

²⁷ See pp 298-9.

That night Colman took out his platoon except for three or four whom he replaced by volunteers—the party being 27 strong. While they lay cramped in the assembly trench from 3 to 10 o'clock, he visited the left company, whose commander, Lieut. Lampard, cheered him by saying he believed the German front line to be unoccupied by day. Lampard promised, if the raiders penetrated to opposite his sector, to "help to the last ounce."



Just before 10 a.m. a single rifle-shot ringing out in the assembly trench seemed likely to rouse the enemy—one of the party unable to stand the strain had shot himself in the foot.

At 10 the party crept on through the crop and Colman, with Sergt. Carter²⁸ and L.-Corpl. Boughen²⁹ for bayonet men and a couple of others, rushed the post that had faced him in his reconnaissance. It was empty. Immediately ahead now lay the orchard, and, after bringing the rest of the party up to the post, Colman, again with four or five men, crept forward behind the trees. At fifty yards this shelter ceased, and they found themselves looking, across the Marcelcave track, at a brick-pit the size of a field, in whose steep sides many shelters had been cut. Near its far end, a hundred yards away, were openings on the top of its northern and southern banks where the German front trench ran into them. No one stirred there; the small party, though now quite unsheltered, reached the northern opening without interruption, and the rest of the platoon was again called up.

Colman left his Lewis gunner, Pte. Crocker,³⁰ at the trench entrance to watch the opening in the southern bank and then

²⁸ Sgt R J Carter (No. 4684; 27th Bn.). Engineer, of Marion, S. Aust., b. O'Halloran Hill, S. Aust., 8 Jan. 1898.

²⁹ Sgt. F. R. Boughen, M.M. (No. 2372; 27th Bn.). Blacksmith; of Mundoora, S. Aust. b. Mundoora, 12 Apr. 1891.

³⁰ Cpl. C. Crocker (No. 6056; 27th Bn.). Orchardist, of Ramco, River Murray, S. Aust; b. Adelaide, 16 May 1891.

moved north-eastwards along the German front line, dropping a man every thirty yards or so. There were scraps of food in the trench, empty cartridges, and good shelters, but no Germans. After going some 600 yards, when only six men were left, Colman looked over the parapet to his left front and saw the flanking party moving down its trench, which cut his diagonally and went on to the German rear. To block the continuation of this trench, Colman and his two bayonet men at once crept across to it. When thirty yards away they saw a heavy machine-gun mounted, pointing along it. They rushed this and found the trench at once alive with Germans "trying to grab rifles and pull on their equipment." The three men threw in each his two bombs and then others from their pockets. The flanking party was running up as were some of the men who had been left in the other trench; 8 Germans had been killed and 13 surrendered. Colman scribbled a message to Lampard (whose men he could see waving at him in the Australian line 500 yards back):

Established block. Think you could get up overland if you come quickly.

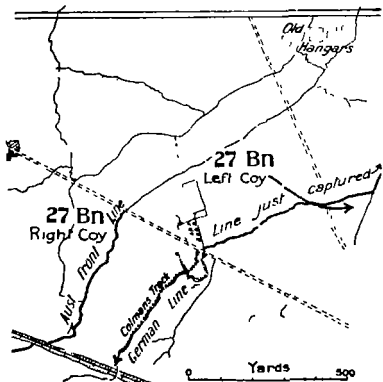
He saw Lampard run out to meet the runner and seize the message, and within half a minute the left company was streaming overland to the new front. It was then 10.40.

Returning to the orchard Colman found Capt. Hosking,³¹ commander of the 27th's southern front-line company, there with a telephone to battalion headquarters. Wisdom's orders were that, if penetration proved as easy as it looked, the 27th's patrols should filter as far as possible down the opposing trenches, getting the 28th, south of the railway line, to help there if necessary. Col. Chalmers asked Colman if he would now tackle the trench on the southern side of the brickfield. Colman said he would, and at 12.18, with the same two bayonet men but covered now by two Lewis gunners, he entered it, the rest of the platoon following. Some distance down it the three leaders found asleep two Germans, whom they sent quietly back, and, farther on, two more. One of these called out in German, and, with their bayonets at his throat, continued to shout, apparently warning his friends ahead.

³¹ Lt.-Col. W. S. Hosking, D.S.O., M.C.; 27th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Adelaide, b Parkside, S Aust., 7 Sep. 1889

The damage was done (writes Colman). He was too good a soldier to murder—we let him live.

Looking out from the trench Colman saw four or five Germans running away along it carrying a machine-gun. He raced after them in the open, firing, but they reached the railway cutting and disappeared. Shouting to each other, so as not to be mistaken for Germans, he and the rest of his party joined up. A light machine-gun and a *granatenwerfer* were captured there. Capt. Hosking's company came round and occupied the trench. The German support trench, 100 yards farther east, was captured without opposition.



The right flank, which was open to Germans holding the continuation of the same trench-line south of the railway, was guarded by placing a post beside the railway cutting, in the former No-Man's Land. At 7.45 that evening a party of Germans tried to re-enter their old front line but were driven off, two being killed and five (with a machine-gun) captured.

German accounts show that the trench first seized by Colman was held by 16 men of the III/265th R.I.R. (108th Divn.), under a company sergeant-major. The position was one with which the Germans only had communication by night. "The Australians," says the history of the 265th, "must have skilfully crept up by using an old trench, so that even the neighbouring N.C.O's post observed nothing, notwithstanding the midday light. An officer's patrol sent out under Lt. David finds the trench previously occupied by the picket now held by a hostile garrison, and is beaten off by machine-gun fire and bombs."

South of the Marcelcave track the front had been held by part of the 97th I.R. The history of that regiment says that its weakened companies could no longer hold their allotted front against the vigorous attacks made during these days. The two regiments were ordered to retake the lost sector on the evening of July 9.

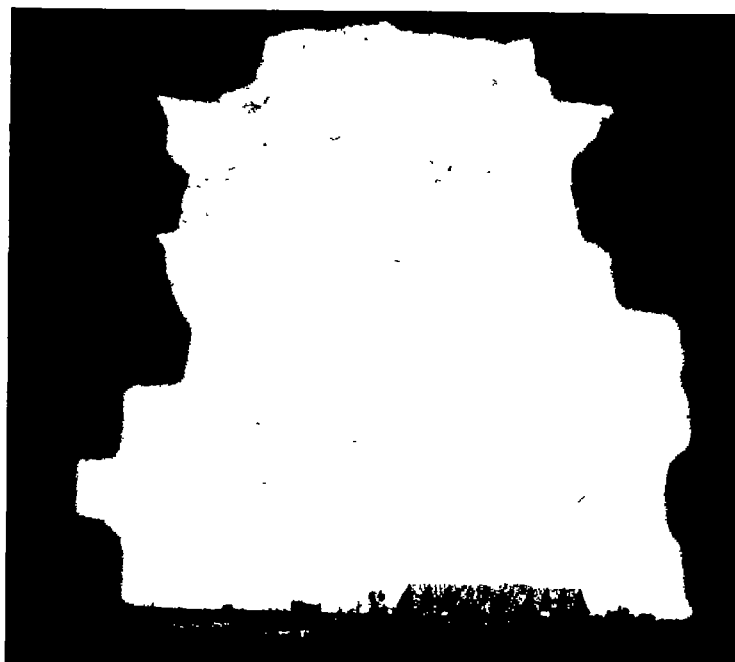
Meanwhile, however, Brig.-Genl. Wisdom had arranged with Col. Currie of the 28th Battalion (Western Australia) south of



18. THE CLAY-PIT EAST OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

Captured by the 27th Battalion by "peaceful penetration" on 8th July, 1918

First War Memorial Official Photo No. E2686
Taken on 14/V 11th



19. THE HANGARS EAST OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

These lay on an old British aerodrome south of the Roman road, and were the scene of many raids and much "peaceful penetration", the ground on which they stood being gradually captured by this means. The photograph was taken from the eastern outskirts of Villers-Bretonneux on June 21st (on which day a raid took place)

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E2663



20. THE CROPS AT MONT DE MERRIS

Photographed on 17th June, 1918 from the parapet of an Australian post (Note the field-gun, which had been captured by the 11th Battalion)

Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4903

To face p 353

the railway opposite Monument Farm and Wood, for a similar sortie there if leave for it could be obtained. At 7 a.m. on the 9th Wisdom again came up to the front line at the railway, and there told Currie that the required permission had been granted. Currie hastened to his headquarters and saw his scout officer, Lieut. Coburn,³² who said he was sure the German line south of the railway could be taken. A party from the railway cutting would make the entry at the northern side of the farm grounds a little east of the Villers-Bretonneux-Démuin road, which, leaving the town by the railway bridge, bisected the orchard, and ran past the monument and the farm ruins. The Official War Correspondent describes how a visitor from the army staff looked over the ground with Currie later that morning. "I suppose you'll be having a battle there before long," he said. "This afternoon," was the answer. "What do you think we are putting in?"

The visitor shook his head. "A job for a brigade, wouldn't it be?" suggested Currie.

"Well, I dare say it would. What are you tackling it with?"

"An officer and eleven men are going for the right half and an officer and six men for the left."

The visitor whistled. "What have you got on the left flank?"

"An N.C.O. and four men are going out to look after that."

"It's the damndest bit of cheek I ever heard of," said the visitor laughing, "and I'm not going to swear it won't come off."

At 2.35 p.m., clouds now coming up and rain threatening, the Newton mortars fired—as they frequently did—a few of their formidable shells into Monument Farm. Their present object was to cause any Germans there to lie low, while Coburn at the head of some forty men—attackers and moppers-up—crawled southwards from the railway along a listeners' sap through the crop to the point where it had been mown down by the Germans in front of their line. Coburn knew that he was heading for a German post, its position being marked by an old limber³³ that lay there in the German wire. Through the

³² Lt. A. P. Coburn, M.C.; 28th Bn. Engine-driver; of Hawthorn, Vic.; b Bendigo, Vic., 8 July 1888.

³³ Probably one belonging to the German battery overrun there in the night attack on April 24-25 by Capt. Harburn's company of the 51st; see *Vol. V*, p. 594

last blades of the crop the leading Australians could see the German sentry in his heavy helmet looking out quietly from his trench, turning his head idly now to the left, now to the right, now gazing up at the clouds drifting over the sun.

After waiting

a minute for

the Newtons to

cease, Coburn

rose and called,

"Come on!"

The party

rushed the

trench twenty

yards away.

One of the

Western Aus-

tralians after-

wards told how

the German sentry gazed at the oncomers in astonishment, and

then, with his mate beside him, dashed away along the trench.

The Australians found it empty: a machine-gun lay in a

niche wrapped in its cover. The sentry and his mate could

still be seen along the trench, running fast in the direction

of the farm.

Eleven of Coburn's scouts had been chosen to form the party for seizing the trenches to the right of the point of entry.

A few of these now

went by a German

communication trench

to the support line,

which they then scoured

while their mates under

Coburn were moving

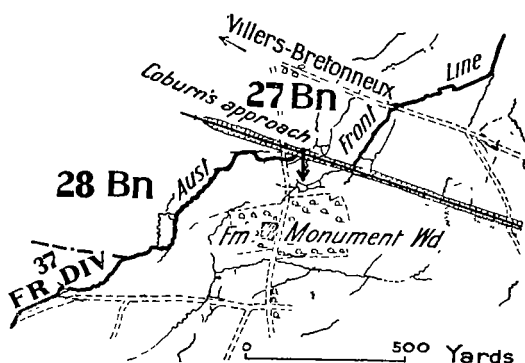
down the front trench.

A separate party of six

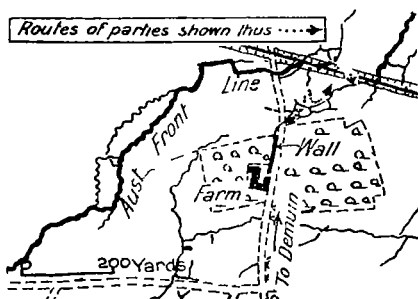
men under Lieut. Love-

day³⁴ moved up the Ger-

man front line towards



Eleven of Coburn's scouts had been chosen to form the party for seizing the trenches to the right of the point of entry. A few of these now went by a German communication trench to the support line, which they then scoured while their mates under Coburn were moving down the front trench. A separate party of six men under Lieut. Loveday³⁴ moved up the German front line towards



³⁴ Lt A. C. Loveday, 28th Bn. Clerk; of Fremantle, W. Aust; b. Fremantle, 8 Jan. 1895. Died of wounds, 12 Aug. 1918.

the left, to meet an N.C.O. and four men who would enter the same trench at the railway cutting and work south-westwards. This latter party, as it approached its point of entry, caught sight of a German sentry above the cutting, who clearly also saw the Australians. But then looking round he caught sight of Loveday's party coming up the trench behind him, and fled through the cornfields in rear, running like a schoolboy in a race. The left sector was cleared without fighting. Mopping-up parties, each of nine men, were following both Coburn and Loveday; and precisely fifteen minutes from the start the men of the left line-company of the 28th in the Australian front trench opposite the captured sector saw Coburn come out on to the Démuin road and give the expected signal for it to walk across No-Man's Land and occupy the German support trench between the Démuin road and the railway, which it did forthwith.

Meanwhile in the right sector the handful of Coburn's scouts in the German support trench to the right found this channel growing shallower and leading into the open. Far down in the orchard the two Germans were still running towards a hole in the long farmyard wall that bordered the far side of the road through the orchard—they were evidently making for some local headquarters at the farm. The scouts from the shallowing support trench ran across to Coburn's main party exploring the front trench.

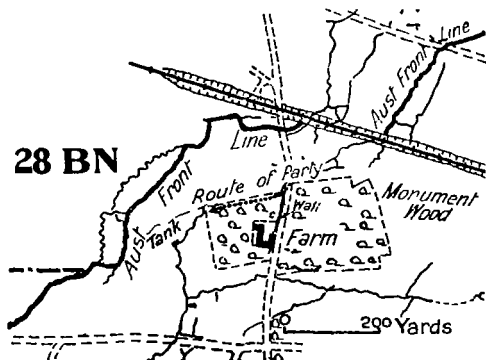
In the neighbourhood of the farm wall this trench also petered out. But the hedge bounding the north side of the orchard continued westward and evidently its ditch had at some time been used as the front trench. Coburn's party ran along the open grassland behind it. As they approached the corner where it turned at right angles southward, a shower of stick-bombs fell among them and burst, killing one man. A shot rang out and another man was wounded.³⁵ The rest of the small party flung themselves down, mostly in the open, for there were no shell-holes, and bowled bombs at the Germans who were in a trench. But the German stick-bombs could be thrown farther than the Mills. The Australians had

³⁵ According to the Official War Correspondent's account, while the Australians were moving towards this corner a party of Germans had been seen moving through the orchard to strengthen this post.

managed to shoot a couple of their opponents when there came up, panting, a last member of the party. He was a rifle-grenadier, and, at the first explosion of one of his grenades behind them, the Germans ran.

Their trench was that which rounded the western side of the orchard and into this the Australians now followed them, but, though running fast, could not catch them. On reaching a point,

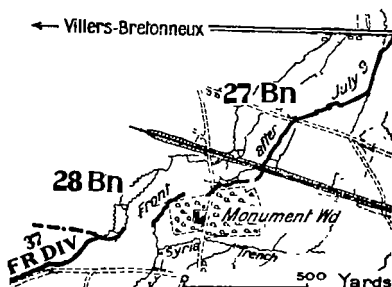
several hundred yards down the trench, where a British tank lay derelict on the parapet, Coburn tied a piece of a blue and white signal flag to the tank—the sign for the second company of the 28th to walk over and occupy the old German front line, which it did at once with rifles slung and many of the troops smoking. It was then twenty-four minutes from the start of the attack.



The right party went fifty yards farther, the last of the running Germans being, for a while, still in sight ahead of them and others now visible far off in the orchard, running away from the farm—in all the Western Australians estimated that they saw 90 of the garrison running from different parts of the position. A Stokes mortar of the 7th Light Trench Mortar Battery, which had been standing ready to shell any machine-guns that might oppose the advance, was not called upon for that purpose, and instead flung fifteen shells after the running men. Beyond the tank a double barricade was put in. Patrols went out into the "wood," and numbers of private prospectors found their way to the farm in search of souvenirs. As far as the farm wayfarers were screened by its ruins. Beyond it the patrols were shot at from "Syria Trench"—the old work originally dug by the 9th Brigade around the south and east

of the orchard after the 36th Battalion's counter-attack in the first battle of Villers-Bretonneux (4th April 1918). The farm cellars were found intact with chairs, beds, some old British staff papers, a piano, and two deep dugouts below; but the Germans had taken away their own papers and telephone.

This position which two months before, when bristling with machine-guns, had been taken and lost by the Western Australians of the 48th Battalion at so heavy a cost—their bodies still lay thickly before the trenches—had passed to their sister battalion within half an hour at a cost of one man killed and two wounded; ten Germans were killed and three machine-guns and two trench-mortars captured. The Official Australian War Correspondent telegraphed that this result was not due to absence of a German garrison adequate to resist the Western Australians, but to the fact that the German infantry had



bolted at their mere approach. The Germans jumped out and scurried to the rear hatless, coatless, weaponless. For a time yesterday the Australians were walking over the country where the German front trenches were exactly as they might stroll about the meadows in rest. . . . Australians have never witnessed such a scene as yesterday before Villers-Bretonneux.

It was decided to probe the "wood" and see whether Syria Trench could not be occupied also; but the patrols were sharply fired on from it,³⁶ and as the division's orders were not to "buy into a fight"—Col. Currie told his patrols, "Your motto will be 'boldness with caution'"—the advance for the moment ended.

Rather surprisingly, the immediate answer of the Germans had been delivered north of the railway; a white flare went up there, and from 4.30 p.m. the German artillery threw shells of all kinds on to the Australian slope of the crest. This fire

³⁶ The patrols found in the orchard a derelict tank "either French or a whippet" Some time later it was recognised as German (*See p. 366*).

afterwards extended to the ground captured south of the railway. There at about midnight the men of the 28th in the newly captured trench west of Monument Farm saw what they assumed to be a German working party lining up to the south of them. A Lewis gun was turned on and the figures disappeared. About the same time, nearer to the other flank where the trench petered out near the Démuin road, a passing Australian told Sergt. Freddy⁸⁷ of the 28th that Germans were in the Australian line—he had seen one of the 28th's posts falling back. Freddy brought up two of his men and the three crawled cautiously to a point from which they could see the road and the farm wall. No answer was returned to their calls, but two Germans were coming towards them from the hole in the wall as if to cut them off. The party threw three bombs and then barricaded the trench so as to stop any further penetration. It was found that the Germans had bombed a post of the 28th, wounding all its occupants, and this post and another had withdrawn. But by the morning the Germans were gone. North of the railway also a large party of Germans tried to approach the new post of the 27th at the Marcelcave track, but was fired on and dispersed.

Reports of the three incidents just related reached divisional headquarters interspersed among other messages telling of peaceful penetration in the area near the Roman road, and it was not realised at the time that any concerted German counter-attack had been delivered. But during the afternoon of the 10th there was seen lying out between the orchard and the south-western end of the captured trench a young German, evidently one of the supposed working party that had been fired on during the night. On being brought in by the Western Australians he gave the information that this party also had been assembling to counter-attack.

Actually the German command had arranged for a combined and fairly extensive counter-thrust. The histories of the two southern regiments of the 108th Divn. (265th R.I.R. and 97th I.R.) show that as soon as each of their sectors was broken into, on July 8 and 9 respectively, the commander of the divisional infantry, which was about to be relieved by that of another division, insisted that the lost ground

⁸⁷ Sgt. G. Freddy (No. 2382; 28th Bn.). Sawmill hand; of North Dandalup, W. Aust., b. Port Adelaide, 14 Feb. 1876.

must immediately be recaptured. North of the railway the attempt was to be made on the evening of the 9th by two companies of the I Bn., 265th, supported by one of the III.³⁸ At 7 p.m. that day the commanders of the 1st and 2nd companies, Lts. Smidt and Grünwälder, summoned to conference at regimental headquarters, found "a whole council of war assembled there including even officers of the brigade." The regimental commander greeted them with the words, "These are the officers who will ensure a good departure³⁹ for the regiment." Nevertheless, although Smidt, who knew the ground, and was supported by Rechtern, urged that the objective trenches were wrongly marked on the map and should be attacked from the south to avoid flanking fire, the staff overruled him. Shortly after 10 p.m. the companies were ready to attack the trench north of the railway, one from the flank, the other frontally. The "annihilating bombardment" was to fall at 10.20, but Smidt "waited for it," he says, "alas, in vain. Not a shot fell." He ordered the advance, his only direction being by the light of his opponents' flares. As he advanced he "counted not ten shots of our artillery. Then it ceased again. . . . On approaching the picket trench (the old German support trench) we were seen by the enemy sentries there who quickly withdrew to the main trench. Advancing at the double the 2nd company then occupied this bit of trench. Hardly had we set foot in it when suddenly strong machine-gun fire, especially from the right flank, accompanied by artillery and trench-mortar fire, set in, evidence that the enemy had expected us. The 1st company suffered particularly by this fire, for it had meanwhile advanced against the main line of resistance. . . . On account of the fire it could get no further and therefore remained lying in contact with the 2nd company about 100 yards short of the main line of resistance." Smidt's vital duty was to ensure that the attacking companies were not encircled from their northern flank, but he presently learned that the 97th I.R., which was to have advanced on their southern flank, had not done so, and that this flank also was open. Fearing that in the morning the two companies would be "checkmated," just as the company sergeant-major's picket had been on the day before, he reported the position to Rechtern. He was ordered to hold the picket trench and hand it over to the relieving company. The 1st Company had lost 15 men, Smidt's (2nd) company none.

The co-operation of the 97th I.R. must have been greatly hampered by the events of July 9 on its own front at Monument Wood. Its history says that, after the harassing days of early July, there followed on July 9 "an extremely strong attack"—this being, of course, the silent raid of Lts. Coburn and Loveday with their 40 men—"against the outpost-line and rolled it up." Possibly part of Syria Trench also was abandoned but reoccupied before the Australians could know of it, for the same history says that "a determined counter-attack under Lt. Linn retook nearly the whole of the captured line." The real counter-attack south of the railway was made by the III Bn. during the night, "as the higher command insisted that the whole forward zone must be recaptured." This battalion, which is said to have been barely 300

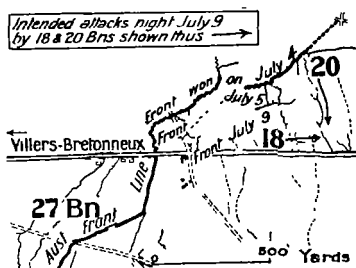
³⁸ Under the direction of the forward battalion commander, Capt. Rechtern—strangely enough the same officer who had led the counter-attack above Saily-Laurette on June 11 against the 27th Aust. Bn. (See pp 230-9).

³⁹ That is to say, an honourable relief.

strong, temporarily retook the two posts at the Démuin road.⁴⁰ At this stage XI Corps Headquarters ordered the abandonment of all attempts to regain the old line. The "picket trench" north of the railway was apparently not retained by the 108th Divn., and the situation was "still obscure" when the division was relieved.

For the next three days, the resistance of German posts about Monument Wood having temporarily stiffened, the chief field of peaceful penetration was in front of the 5th (N. S. Wales) Brigade, farther north astride of the Roman road where, after relieving the 6th Brigade⁴¹ on the night of the 6th, the New South Welsh battalions had incessantly continued the probing begun by their predecessors. Although its course was intricate this fighting affords a most interesting illustration of peaceful penetration in its most difficult phase.

On the night of July 7 both the front-line battalions, 20th and 18th, dug a new line of posts 200 yards ahead; those of the 18th Bn., north of the Roman road, were to be completed on the night of the 8th; but the peaceful penetration by the 27th Bn. during that day necessitated still farther advance, which was made by the 18th pushing a party down one of the old communication trenches on its left, and other parties digging a diagonal line of posts across the crop-land to the Roman road, an advance of 500 yards from the objectives of the Hamel attack. On the night of the 9th the left battalion (20th) was to thrust down a parallel but longer "communication trench" a quarter of a mile farther east, the 18th helping it by pushing forward to enter the same trench near the Roman road. Several sections of old trenches intervened, and Lt. Clayton⁴² of the 18th, moving out with his platoon diagonally from the Roman road, and joining another platoon of the 18th under Lt. Jones⁴³ several hundred yards north of it,



⁴⁰ The incident, however, is barely recognisable in the vastly exaggerated account given in the history of the 97th I.R. (p. 76), which says that the battalion "succeeded in recapturing nearly the whole of the old outpost-line and holding it. As the enemy nevertheless continuously received reinforcements, the little band had to withdraw about 250 metres on the morning of July 10."

⁴¹ It had also taken over part of the front occupied by the 7th Bde. during the Battle of Hamel.

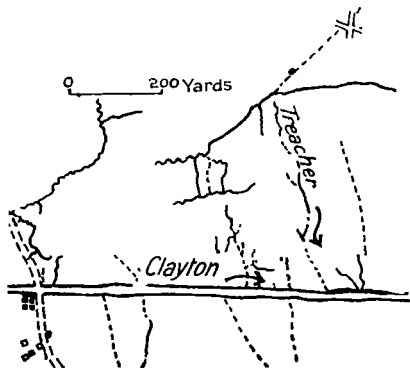
⁴² Lt. G. J. G. Clayton, M.C.; 18th Bn. Station overseer; of Harden, N.S.W.; b. Demondrille, N.S.W., 1893. Killed in action, 30 July 1918.

⁴³ Lt. W. F. Jones, M.C.; 18th Bn. Master painter, of Sydney; b. London, 21 Jan. 1888.

crawled close up to a German post north of the road and then bombarded it with rifle-grenades while Jones's platoon lay out in the crop to the left covering his attack. Each platoon had two Lewis guns (which was now the regular provision) and about twenty men, and under the bombardment and the fire of these guns the garrison of the German post, whose orders doubtless were to fall back if seriously attacked, could be seen and heard leaving their trench which Clayton then occupied.

Flares now shot up from another German trench not far beyond. It was therefore bombarded in the same manner. The enemy's artillery gave no answer to the flares of the German infantry, and after three minutes the latter again with shouts ran back, this time to the southern side of the Roman road. Clayton again advanced and occupied their trench, and ordered up Jones's party. As it came it was heavily fired on by German machine-guns in a third trench, a little beyond Clayton, and some men were killed.

Clayton believed that he was in his objective—the "communication trench" down which the 20th were advancing; but the 20th's party, after thrusting about 300 yards, came to a point where for a considerable distance no trench existed and were stopped by a German post in the continuation of the same trench beyond. On the following night (July 10-11) Capt. Broadbent's⁴⁴ company of the 20th endeavoured to continue the thrust. The German post which had held it up was first located by a small patrol led out at 11 p.m. by Lt. Balmahno.⁴⁵ A strong patrol, three officers and thirty-five men in all, led by Lt. Treacher, next crept southward at 2 a.m., intending to bomb and rush the position. The patrol was organised in seven parties, bombing parties in centre, Lewis guns on flanks.

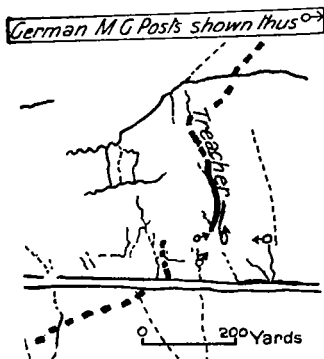


In these enterprises success and the lives of the attackers depended on the nerves and self-control of every man, and unfortunately through the tension or through mistake after going fifty yards, when still too far from the enemy, one of the leading men threw his first bomb; the others then threw theirs and the volley exploded uselessly forty yards short of the enemy. The burst aroused the Germans, at least four of whose machine-guns swept the ground, one firing from close on the party's right rear, where the Germans had evidently established a new post unseen by the Australians though actually between those of the 20th and 18th Bns. The rearmost parties had not yet left their own trench, but, of the men with Treacher, eight were quickly killed

⁴⁴ Capt. J. A. Broadbent, M.C.; 20th Bn. Bank clerk; of Greenwich, N.S.W.; b. Redfern, N.S.W., 6 Oct., 1890

⁴⁵ Lt. L. C. Balmahno, 20th Bn. Seaman; of Sydney; b. Devonshire, Eng., 1892.

or wounded, and he gave the word to "get back."⁴⁶ The party succeeded in bringing back only two wounded men—the rest lay out and, as the hurricane of "whizz-bang" shells, and trench-mortar bombs, and the wild firing of flares began to die down, their constant calls for stretcher-bearers were irresistible. As day began to break some of the company stretcher-bearers climbed out, carrying a white flag. On seeing them the Germans fired a white rocket and all shooting immediately ceased. Four pairs of bearers collected the bodies of the dead and wounded. While they did so the trenches of both sides became lined with men standing or sitting on the parapets. Four Germans presently came forward from the post that had been attacked, and Lts. Treacher, who had been slightly wounded by a bomb-handle, and Holmes⁴⁷ and two men went out to meet them, and stood talking with the Germans, two of whom were N.C.O's, until the collection was finished, when the Germans saluted and both parties withdrew. A Lewis gun was fired into the air, the crowds on each side disappeared, and firing was resumed.



The Australian officers had noted the position of the German posts in the neighbourhood, and advised that the trench attacked was too strongly held to be assaulted except under a barrage. The German N.C.O's had wisely rolled up their shoulder straps, and their unit could not be ascertained, but the posts discovered were sprayed with machine-gun fire on the following night.

There was good reason for the German N.C.O's caution—the post attacked was held, not by the troops (108th Divn.) who on the previous day had faced the 20th, but by part of the III/152nd I.R., belonging to the 41st Divn. This had been serving near Hébuterne and, after about a month's rest, had that night taken over part of this front.⁴⁸ The informal armistice drew an order from regimental headquarters to the effect that, "owing to a peculiar case," their opponent must not be allowed to recover his dead or wounded or bury his dead close in front of the German front line under cover of the Red Cross flag. "We require the enemy's dead and wounded," said the order, but added that if they were near the opposing line their recovery was permissible. A similar order would possibly have been drawn from Australian headquarters had any reports of the armistice reached it, but, by orders from intermediate headquarters, they did not.

During the armistice the 20th could see a row of Australian heads not in the long trench which Clayton thought he had reached, but 180

⁴⁶ The use of the order "retire" was generally forbidden owing to the possibility of its being given by the enemy.

⁴⁷ Lt. G. S. B. Holmes, 20th Bn. Draughtsman; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. Fortitude Valley, Q'land, 23 Oct. 1892.

⁴⁸ The post to Treacher's right rear was possibly that held by Lt. Bartels, who was specially rewarded by the local command for beating off an attack by firing his machine-gun alternately to front and rear of his trench.

yards west of it, in one of several shorter parallel trenches. The 17th Bn. which had meanwhile relieved the 18th, was ordered to oust the intruding post that had caused most of Treacher's losses, but a patrol sent out on the following night after a bombardment by Stokes mortars, found that they had already gone. A post which had been thrust out by the 18th south of the main road,⁴⁹ somewhat short of the supposed position of Clayton's flank, was withdrawn, the German front line being actually behind it. Here the posts of the 18th had also been advanced east of the old aerodrome, and those of the 27th had pushed forward into alignment.⁵⁰ Their inner flanks lay near some old buildings of the aerodrome—one of the few landmarks that stood out from the long grass and crops. In that area it was exceedingly difficult even for those on the spot to determine precisely what points had been reached.

The resistance to the 5th Brigade also had now stiffened and, except for a successful raid by Lieut. Tripp⁵¹ of the 20th, who with three men crept out and rushed a German post on the night of the 12th, activity ceased for the moment in that region, only, however, to break out again on the front of the 7th Brigade at the Monument.

It was on July 11th, during this short lull in peaceful penetration, that there took place at Australian Corps Headquarters a conference with the army commander to discuss the plan for the full-dress attack on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau, now sanctioned by Haig. Monash and Rosenthal with their chief staff officers and artillery commanders, and those of the tank and air force brigades of Fourth Army, assembled at Bertangles Château, and Monash explained his plan.

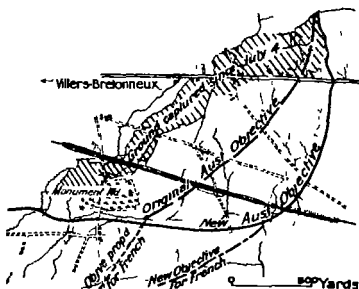
However, he added, the Australian infantry had already taken by peaceful penetration about a quarter of the objective, and had even gone beyond it on the northern flank, forming an awkward salient. The objective would have to be altered, and in view of the poor fighting quality of the German divisions it might be extended. The vital factor was how far the French would take part and the Australian line would be shortened—which was necessary owing to the Corps strength "having fallen considerably." Monash pointed out that the old French

⁴⁹ Capt. C. H. Kaepfel (North Sydney and Armidale, N.S.W.) of the 18th had reconnoitred a German trench here on the night of July 10 and found it empty.

⁵⁰ The 28th Bn. also sent a patrol along the edge of the railway to cover their right. After a bombing encounter it returned, as intended.

⁵¹ Lt. H. W. Tripp, 20th Bn. Storekeeper, of Sydney; b. Tuckenhay, Devonshire, Eng., 7 Mar. 1893.

defence line just short of Warfusée would be a good position to hold, but Rawlinson decided that, in view of the uncertainty of early co-operation by the French, the objective should not be extended so far. The alternative was adopted of placing it half a mile east of the line laid down in the original plan—an extension which Monash had already on the previous day authorised for attainment by peaceful penetration. Only two battalions would now attack, and the plans of their action, and as to the tanks, barrages, and smoke screens were outlined.⁵² The preparations were to be complete by July 17th, but the date of attack would depend on what action the French would undertake. Meanwhile Rawlinson would see Debeney, and the Australian infantry would continue its exploitation but avoid becoming involved in a general battle.



On the very day of this meeting peaceful penetration was set going again by the discovery by patrols at 11 a.m. that the Germans had, at least temporarily, abandoned their front line south-west of Monument Wood where the Australian line joined the French.⁵³ Patrols again found Monument Farm and most of the orchard empty,⁵⁴ as was the entrance of Syria Trench

Nibbling again

The historian of the 2nd (Prussian) Grenadier Regiment, right flank unit of the 109th Divn. which held the German salient between Monument Farm and Hangard Wood, says that at this time "the activity of the enemy decidedly increased. In particular, it took the shape of strong attacks against the troops on our immediate right, and repeated thrusts of fairly strong detachments against the right flank of the Grenadier."

⁵² The rôle allotted to the tanks, Monash said, would be more extensive than at Hamel, since all ranks now felt more confidence in them. The objective would be enclosed in a box-barrage, with one smoke shell in every ten, and the tanks and infantry would "mop up" the area.

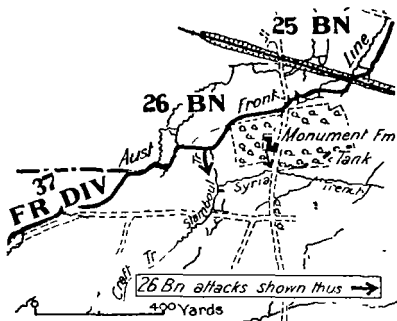
⁵³ It was known as "Stamboul Trench," and its southern extension as "Craft Trench."

⁵⁴ Thirteen boxes, which proved to be tank traps containing explosive, were found on the road north of Monument Farm.

On July 10th, despite the supposed success of the counter-attacks by the neighbouring 108th Divn. at Monument Wood, the 2nd Grenadier had to throw back its right flank.

The 26th (Queensland) Battalion came in, well rested, on the night of July 13th. As soon as the relief was complete, shortly after midnight, a party under Lieut. Gibson pushed 100 yards down "Stamboul Trench" and erected a barricade opposite the south-western corner of the orchard. At the same time patrols of the left company moving down the D  muin road to the southern edge of the wood met no Germans but could hear them working a quarter of a mile to the south. Obviously some retirement had taken place. During the morning the commander of the right company together with the battalion commander, Maj. Robinson, explored Stamboul Trench almost to its junction with Syria Trench, where they found a German post. For a mile to the south-east the plateau furnished no sign of German movement. Accordingly Robinson on his return arranged with his company commanders to assault Syria Trench. At 6 o'clock, covered by the fire of two Stokes mortars and some Lewis

guns, Gibson's party attacked the German barricade in Stamboul Trench. The Germans fought hard, using stick-bombs with extra slabs of explosive wired on to them, but they were overpowered, five being killed, two captured, and others wounded. Meanwhile two other attacking parties, which had assembled in the orchard near the Farm enclosure, entered Syria Trench from the north. It was unoccupied where they jumped into it, but some Germans fled before them as they pushed westward to join Gibson. The trench junction was taken, and a block built beyond it⁵⁵ and also east of the D  muin road. During the night two feeble counter-attacks



⁵⁵ Cpl. O. H. Schafer (Childers, Q'land; killed in action, 2 Sep. 1918) played a conspicuous part in building the block and in its subsequent defence.

were easily repulsed.⁵⁶ The left company of the 26th also had sent out patrols south of the railway, and after dark established posts in touch with those of the 25th north of the cutting. Monument Wood was thus taken, and in it the disabled German tank "Mephisto," the first to be captured by the British.⁵⁷

Curiously enough it was not until a week later that the Australian Corps realised, on information received from the staff of the 37th French Divn. adjoining its flank, that on the night of July 10 the Germans had voluntarily withdrawn their outpost-line from their deep salient in front of the French at Cachy, and fallen back on a line more than 1,000 yards in rear of the tip of the former salient. German histories confirm the statements of prisoners at this time, that this was due to the constant advances of the Australian troops on their northern flank, and the fear that the French would deliver just such an attack as Monash and Rawlinson were now endeavouring to arrange. By leaving patrols and sentries behind, the Germans hoped to deceive the French, but the withdrawal (says the history of the 26th R.I.R.) was discovered by the French in two days.

By peaceful penetration the Australian infantry had now secured practically the whole of the objective originally set for their corps in Monash's plan for an Anglo-French offensive on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau; only the extended objective authorised by Rawlinson at the conference on July 11th remained to be taken by them. Consequently by far the most urgent matter was now to induce the French to carry out the part assigned to them in the plan—to which they had never yet definitely agreed. On July 12th the First French Army had made its advance on the Avre, capturing Castel and the heights west of Moreuil and taking 500 prisoners; but General Debeney held to the view that decision as to participating in an advance south of Villers-Bretonneux must be left by him to the discretion of the XXXI Corps commander, General Toulorge. Rawlinson's urgings had thus far failed to induce action.

The commander of the 2nd Australian Division, Maj.-General Rosenthal, who on July 15th, as was his practice, went

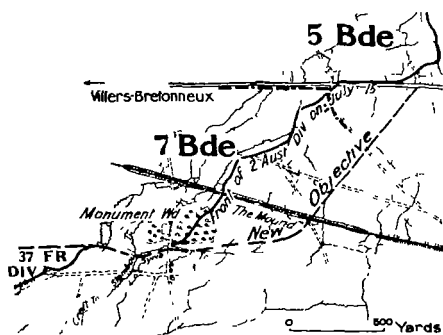
⁵⁶ The two Stokes mortars, under Lt. A. H. Stewart, were brought up to Stamboul Trench from which they shelled Germans reported to be assembling at positions, suspected to be strong-points.

⁵⁷ See note on p. 357. It had been disabled on April 24 (see Vol. V, pp. 552, 632n). It was now salvaged on the night of July 22 by British tanks in conjunction with a working party of Queenslanders. See Vol. XII, plate 467.

the whole tour of the newly captured front, was impressed by the opportunity now offered for inducing the local French commanders to undertake a substantial advance.⁵⁸ He accordingly asked Monash that day for leave to arrange the matter with the subordinate French commanders, with whom he was on excellent terms. The officers and men of the French colonial units (37th Division) next to the Australian flank had watched the excursions of the Diggers with frank admiration. "French officers," says an Australian machine-gunner who was stationed there,⁵⁹ "told me they had never seen such daring daylight tactics, and thought they evidenced high class infantry." The French colonials themselves were capable of audacious raiding in daylight: at noon on July 2nd, according to a German account,⁶⁰ a French patrol had got through part of Hangard Wood and "lifted" three Germans, who were resting in the gully behind it, without the neighbouring posts seeing anything of the occurrence.⁶¹

Rosenthal during his tour also was struck by the excellence of the new Australian front except at one point. Close ahead beside the railway cutting could be seen a long, scrub-covered hummock of spoil—the same "Mound" which the 9th Brigade had reached in its counter-attack on April 4th. Rosenthal realised that this must be occupied, but the task would require only a continuance of the advance for 1,000 yards astride of the railway.

At 5 o'clock that evening (July 15th) Rawlinson with the chief of his general staff, Maj.-General Montgomery, met Mon-



⁵⁸ They were already having a communication trench dug across the old No-Man's Land.

⁵⁹ Cpl. F. L. Fitzpatrick, 6th M.G. Coy. See *In Good Company*, by W. A. C. Carne, p. 315.

⁶⁰ *History of the 26th R.I.R. (109th Div.)*, p. 334.

⁶¹ They did hear suspicious sounds and vainly opened fire.

ash and Rosenthal at the latter's headquarters at Glisy. Monash explained the position of the Mound, and defined the line enclosing it which he now wished to attain—an objective slightly more extensive than the original one, but much less than that authorised on July 11th. "No doubt," he said, "within a week we can get the whole by penetration without set attack"; but owing to the uncertainty of French co-operation Rawlinson ordered that the front must not be advanced farther than the line of the Mound for the time being. And, as he considered it "hopeless to induce the French Army command expressly to order these operations and arrangements,"⁶² he empowered Rosenthal to ask the French regimental and divisional commanders to undertake, with the help of the Australians, penetration southwards along Stamboul-Craft Trench, which, when taken, would be held by the French.

The advance to the Mound was to be made by peaceful penetration, and the attempt began the same night (July 15th-16th). A party of the 25th Battalion moved out through the crop-land by the Marcelcave track to enter and capture, if possible, an old semi-circular British trench dug after April 4th 600 yards north of the Mound. The 25th first established a less advanced post along the road and succeeded in entering the old trench; but, while digging in, the party was attacked from the south by some forty Germans with bombs. More than half its members including one officer (Lieut. Rerden⁶³) were killed or wounded, and it was driven out.

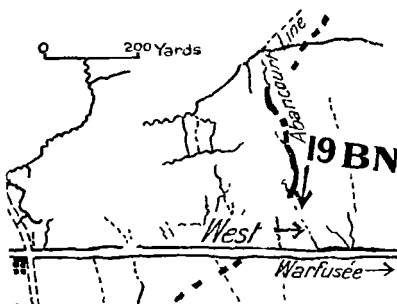
On the same night the 5th Brigade was to advance the line of posts between the left of the 25th Battalion and the Roman road, at the same time seizing north of the road the "communication trench" in which the 20th Battalion's party had been stopped on the night of July 11th. This time the 19th Battalion was to bomb down the trench while the 17th from the front attacked a German strong-point in a parallel trench 100 yards west of it on the Roman road. Two platoons of the 17th duly rushed the strong-point, the Germans running as they approached and leaving two men dead. At dawn Lieut. West with four men went forward and jumped into the next trench

⁶² The quotation is from a signed draft of the decisions.

⁶³ Lt. P. H. Rerden, 25th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Middle Brighton, Vic.; b. Carlton, Vic., 15 Aug. 1892.

—the same down which the 19th was to bomb. The 19th, however, was not yet near, and West and his men were faced by a number of Germans who killed or wounded the whole party except one. The Germans here, despite the recent warning order from their regimental headquarters, showed themselves most friendly to the Australian stretcher-bearers, pointing out to them where the wounded lay, and allowing them to bring in Lieut. West, who was mortally wounded and unconscious, in exchange for a wounded German.

On the following night (July 16th-17th) the 19th Battalion completed its task. As so often happened, the explanation of earlier difficulties was found in the fact that part of the long communication trench was less continuous than appeared on the maps,⁶⁴ consisting of little more than a series of rifle-pits. At 2 a.m. on July 17th parties of the 19th Battalion, led by Lieuts. Sell and Hayes,⁶⁵ worked round to front and rear of it. The Germans, seeing themselves in danger of being surrounded, ran back leaving a number of dead. Three were captured:



This thrust, although the attacking parties were unaware of it until afterwards, broke into the preparations for a German counter-attack. Prisoners captured near the Roman road on July 12-13 and since had belonged to the 41st Divn., which, as already stated, had come in on July 10—just when the line of its predecessor (108th) was being overrun by Australians. The historian of its centre regiment, the 18th I.R., says that its position suffered in being "absolutely devoid of cover. The troops are merely put into shell-craters or newly dug holes in the earth in the midst of the wheat-fields. The Australians reared in the bush are able with ease to creep up and capture single posts."

The northern regiment, astride the Roman road, was the 152nd I.R., and its history claims that on the night of July 15 the Australian attack was beaten off; but the fact that the regiment was ordered to counter-attack next day, in conjunction with the 18th I.R. on its left, is evidence that the divisional commander concluded that part of the forward zone

⁶⁴ The continuous trench that appeared on air-photographs was apparently only a foot deep; the real position was a line of rifle-pits immediately west of it.

⁶⁵ Lt. M. Hayes, M.C.; 19th Bn. Miner; of Tingha, N.S.W.; b. Tomingley, N.S.W., 12 July 1893.

had been lost, and was worth retaking. The enterprise was known as "Buzzard". In the evening Lt. Harmjanz reported that the Australian trenches were strongly garrisoned, and an attack must be expected. The order for the counter-attack, however, still stood, and the 152nd was preparing to deliver it with a composite party from all battalions when the 19th Bn.'s attack caused the pickets to fall back on to the main line of resistance. The light machine-guns for the "Buzzard" attack were abandoned and a heavy machine-gun was barely saved.

The 17th Battalion this night adjusted its posts south of the road, endeavouring to make sure that it occupied the line set for it. But the patrols of the 7th Brigade in the railway sector had been unable to gain ground, and the fact that the Germans were now, for the first time in months, zealously digging and wiring a definite line of defence behind their advanced posts, evidently with a view to falling back on it and putting an end to peaceful penetration, convinced Generals Monash and Rosenthal that the best way of advancing the line to the Mound was by formal assault. Accordingly at very short notice it was arranged that the two line-battalions of the 7th Brigade—both Queensland units—should attack at 9.45 on the night of July 17th, the 25th north of the railway and the 26th south of it (where the Mound lay). The barrage would be provided by the artillery normally supporting the division; its own two brigades had just come round from the left flank of the corps to rejoin it, and, with two British "army" brigades, carried out this task.⁶⁶

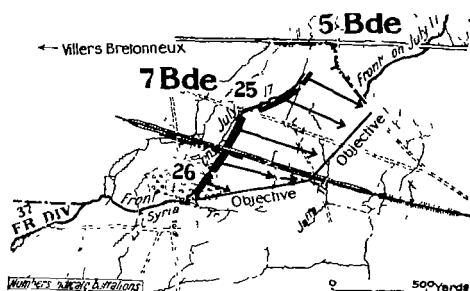
The barrage was well laid but thin.⁶⁷ The three attack companies of the 25th Battalion, advancing through the wheat on a front of 1,000 yards north of the railway, quickly took the old semi-circular trench where patrols had failed two nights before; but when advancing beyond they found that the German posts, scattered in the crop and firing through the shell-bursts, had to be captured in each case by manoeuvring. This the platoons duly did, though necessarily losing the barrage in

⁶⁶ The attack followed a rearrangement by which the divisional artilleries of the corps rejoined their own divisions. The fact that artillery of a division stayed in a sector much longer than infantry, and that after rest the infantry could seldom be returned to their old sector, made it impossible to keep the field artillery for long with their own divisions. They were now largely supplemented by "army" brigades. The 2nd Divisional Artillery, forming the Right Group, fired south of the railway, the 14th and 86th (Army) Bdes. north of it. The 23rd (Army) Bde., part of the left group, was resting.

⁶⁷ Probably the guns actually firing were not more than one to 30-35 yards of front.

the process.⁶⁸ Lieut. Ryan⁶⁹ was killed by a burst of machine-gun bullets.⁷⁰ The German posts, says Lieut.-Col. Davis's⁷¹ report, "in every case put up some show of fight. In two cases, as we approached, . . . the garrisons left the trench and came out to meet us, a hand-to-hand struggle ensuing." The German machine-gunners resisted to the end, but as a rule the riflemen, after exchanging a few shots, fell back on the next post, where the fight began again.

On the parapet of one post were found no less than five machine-guns. A party of Australian machine-gunners under Lieut. Loone,⁷² taking forward its two guns with the attack, found Ger-



mans still in the objective trench, and, though having itself suffered heavy casualties in the barrage, captured several including an officer who was working his machine-gun.

With the barrage lost and few landmarks existing, it was most difficult to decide when the objective was reached. One young officer, after placing his platoon in the trench that he believed to be his objective, walked out with his batman through the crop to find touch on his flanks. Seeing a party at work he went towards it and, being challenged and replying in English, was received by a volley of shots and bombs which wounded both. As the platoon was heavily fired on and was evidently in advance of the line on its flanks, the officer withdrew it to the semi-circular trench. The southern company

⁶⁸ In the course of these tussles Lt. S. J. Smith put out of action with bombs two German machine-guns, and, among others, Sgts. C. Brooker and W. Greening, Cpl. H. O. Schinkel, and Ptes. G. Cargill and C. H. Marks were outstanding. (Smith belonged to Brisbane, Brooker to Toowoomba, Q'land, Greening to Auchenflower, Q'land, Schinkel to Cannon Hill, Q'land; Cargill to Red Hill, Q'land; Marks to Catherine Hill Bay, N.S.W.)

⁶⁹ Lt. H. J. Ryan, 25th Bn. Resident magistrate; of Port Moresby, Papua; b. Tipperary, Ireland, 31 Jan 1878. Killed in action, 17 July 1918.

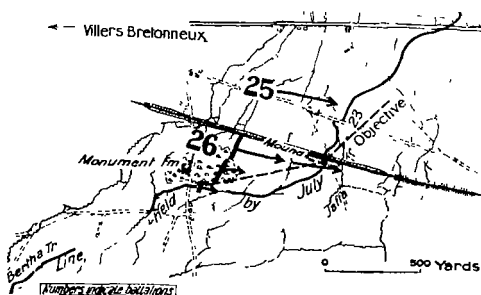
⁷⁰ Lt. C. A. Auchterlone (Gympie, Q'land, killed in action, 10 Aug. 1918) took Ryan's place and led with notable success.

⁷¹ Lt.-Col. W. M. Davis, M.C. Commanded 25th Bn., 1918; 26th Bn., 1918-19. Fitter; of Brisbane; b. Wauchope, N.S.W., 18 Mar. 1888.

⁷² Lt. F. Loone, 22nd M.G. Coy. Tram conductor; of Sydney, b. Scottsdale, Tas., 1886.

had, by mistake, stopped in a western branch of the German support line ("Jaffa Trench"), which was its objective.⁷³ The posts established by the 5th Brigade on the previous nights, though not so far advanced as they were then believed to be, secured the left. As soon as the general line of the 7th Brigade was known the posts of the 5th also pushed out. At dusk on the 18th the line was surveyed and linked up.

South of the railway the 26th Battalion (Queensland and Tasmania) had no less than 500 yards to go from its starting line in the orchard to the first German trench, on which the barrage was consequently kept for the first six minutes. Here too the curtain of shells was noticeably thin, and when Capt. Murphy's company reached the western end of the Mound a German machine-gun there continued firing through the barrage at the advancing troops. It was seen by Lieut. Borella, leading his platoon in the first of the two waves. He ran ahead of his men into the barrage, shot the two gunners with his revolver, and captured the gun.⁷⁴ The attacking companies were shot at by many other machine-guns, but fortunately their crews for the most part fired nervously.⁷⁵ The objective for the left company of the 26th was the road that bridged the railway and passed over the Mound near its eastern end. This road, however, was so cut up by shell-fire that Borella's party passed over it without seeing it and, pushing on in search of it, suddenly came on a trench full of Germans, who were obviously surprised. The Queenslanders showered bombs into it, and a Lewis gunner,



⁷³ The mistake, says Davis, was fortunate, as the company had then only two officers and twenty-two men and must have failed had it attempted to attack the eastern branch.

⁷⁴ For his leadership during the whole fight Borella was awarded the Victoria Cross.

⁷⁵ Capt. Murphy, however, was wounded, and Lt. R. McL. Smith killed, and there were casualties among the men (including those of the two machine-gun crews under Lt. A. J. Prichard). (Murphy belonged to Brisbane; Smith to West End, Brisbane; Prichard to Charters Towers, Q'land)

firing from the hip, sprayed bullets into the Germans, who quickly disappeared into dugouts. A few bombs were rolled down the stairs and thirty Germans came out as prisoners.

The trench that Borella had seized was actually Jaffa Trench, 200 yards beyond his objective. No sooner had the prisoners been taken than the two dugouts there burst into flames—Borella assumed that they were fired by the Germans in order to burn papers and maps that might have been left there. The two platoons with him were now reduced to about twenty men, with several Lewis guns.⁷⁶ He could see and hear the 25th Battalion engaged in heavy fighting north of the railway, far behind him. The flames of the burning dugouts illuminated his few men and would have caused them to be easy targets. Accordingly he withdrew to shell-holes on the edge of the illumination. During the next hour German reinforcements continually came up, and, foolishly assembling against the light of the fires, offered well-silhouetted targets to Borella's men.

The southern company of the 26th had dropped a line of posts connecting this position with the old one south of the orchard—resistance was met only in Syria Trench,⁷⁷ where a few prisoners were taken. In that trench a strong-post which might have barred the right of the advance, had earlier been surrounded and taken by three parties from another company.⁷⁸ Notwithstanding the muddy ground, carrying was excellently performed—for the 25th by a company of the 27th, and for the 26th by a company of the 28th; all the shells for the two Stokes mortars that went forward under Lieut. W. L. Miller⁷⁹ duly reached the front, sixty for each gun. The four machine-guns, despite casualties in their crews,⁸⁰ got through with all ammunition. The new line was quickly consolidated. Lieut. Whittaker,⁸¹ and the signallers of the

⁷⁶ Sgt. L. J. Briggs (Longford, Tas., died 18 Feb. 1932) and Pte. A. H. Homan (Fingal, Tas.) were conspicuous.

⁷⁷ Sgt. A. H. Armstrong (Manyung, Q'land) was conspicuous here.

⁷⁸ Of the garrison, 5 were killed and 5 captured; 2 machine-guns were taken.

⁷⁹ Lt. W. L. Miller, 25th Bn. and 7th L.T.M. Bty. Station manager, of "Murrungundy," Dubbo, N.S.W.; b. Pine Ridge, N.S.W., 19 Nov. 1883.

⁸⁰ In addition to the casualties among Loone's machine-gunners, those with the 26th, under Lt. Prichard, also suffered from machine-gun fire.

⁸¹ Lt. P. J. Whittaker, M.C.; 26th Bn. Mechanic, of Kangaroo Point, Q'land, b. Guildford, W. Aust. 17 July 1895. Died 17 May 1936.

26th, had their telephone lines through to the objective within a few minutes of its capture.

Towards dawn, when Borella had watched about two companies of the enemy leaping, one man after the other, over some obstruction as they filed into Jaffa Trench, he observed them passing from hand to hand objects which, seen against the glare of the burning dugouts, he judged to be bundles of stick-bombs. As a counter-attack was obviously impending, he trickled his men a few yards back, just out of bomb-range, and fired the S.O.S. signal for artillery support. North of the railway similar action was taken by the 25th Battalion, which could see the Germans, thought to be 250 strong, moving along Jaffa Trench towards the Mound, and others creeping up in the crops. The S.O.S. signal brought down the barrage upon them—and also on Borella's party, which was far ahead of its objective—and rifles and Lewis guns opened at short range.

Although the Germans continued to dribble forward for ten minutes or more, no attack followed. Throughout the day, however, the German artillery heavily shelled their old firing line and also the Mound, and late in the afternoon numbers of the enemy were seen reinforcing. At 8.30 p.m. they began dribbling forward into the crops along their whole front. At 9 o'clock, when it was estimated that over 500 of them lay out ahead of the line, the German artillery opened heavily. Through the smoke and dust Lieut. Borella and his advanced party could see large numbers of the enemy advancing. Three machine-guns firing tracer bullets concentrated on Borella's position, forcing his men to keep low. The moment they eased, his party was up shooting and Borella fired the S.O.S., this time taking the precaution of ordering his men back to the true line of his objective. The artillery answered almost at the same moment. The Australian rifles and machine-guns again opened, at point-blank range and in good light. In the midst of this turmoil a British airman flew again and again at the enemy through the shell-smoke, firing his machine-gun. The counter-attack faded out like the first, and plainly with heavier loss.⁸²

The 7th Bde's attack had fallen on the centre and southern regiments of the 41st Divn. The history of the centre regiment (18th) says

⁸² Companies of the 27th and 28th which had moved up into support were not required to reinforce.

that, after beating back two attacks, its left company had to swing back, the company commander (Lt. Berndt) being wounded and captured. The line of the southern regiment (148th) was more deeply penetrated, the Australians reaching the eastern edge of "Acacia Wood" (the Mound) and throwing down the dugout there a phosphorus bomb which killed the acting commander of the III Bn. and his adjutant.

The 41st Divn. recognised that the advance had given the Australians "a favourable position especially as regards observation." Its records say that an immediate counter-attack threw the Australians back to the western part of the Mound. (This refers, of course, to Borella's withdrawal of his troops to his objective.) The division, however, ordered that the main line of resistance must be captured, and, in order that it might throw in its own reserves, was given the 137th I.R. (108th Divn.). The counter-attacks were attempted, as already described, at dawn and at 9 p.m.; the troops failed to reach the Australian position, but dug in (says the historian of the 18th I.R.) confronting their "always battle-eager" opponents. The 41st Divn. lost on July 17 and 18 nine officers and 285 others.

Two German officers and 68 men were captured.⁸³ The casualties of the 7th Australian Brigade in the attack were reported to be 6 officers and 123 others; but in the shelling on subsequent days the loss on both sides was considerably increased.⁸⁴

Further advance by the 2nd Division was now a forbidden activity—the French had still to come up on the flank. On the 16th⁸⁵ Rosenthal wrote: "I anticipate in a few days to have a nicely straightened line and the French will have ditto." That sturdy leader, however, on visiting the Mound on the morning of the 19th, resplendent in red staff cap and gorget patches, and accompanied by an equally conspicuous figure—the new commander of the 6th Brigade, Brig.-Genl. Campbell Robertson (who felt he could not don his steel helmet unless the divisional commander did likewise)—attracted the attention of a German sniper, who, with a single shot, severely wounded him.⁸⁶ On July 18th patrols of the 3rd Tirailleurs and 3rd Zouaves had felt their way into "Bertha" and "Krauss" Trenches, and on the night of the 21st bombing parties of the 23rd Battalion

⁸³ There were also taken 2 anti-tank field-guns, and 4 heavy and 11 light machine-guns.

⁸⁴ The 41st German Div. stated its loss for the week ended July 25 as 15 officers and 472 others.

⁸⁵ After visiting Generals Toulorge and Simon (37th Div.).

⁸⁶ The bullet hit Rosenthal in the thumb and forearm, severing an artery. The general was exercising, for him, particular caution—he had been warned against the deadly sniping at the east end of the Mound, and consequently was viewing the landscape from the western end. He tried to have his injuries dealt with locally, but General Howse (D.M.S., A.I.F.) packed him off to England.

assisted by thrusting down Stamboul and Craft Trenches,⁸⁷ where they established themselves together with the French who, however, were still a full mile behind the general alignment of the Australian front.

To summarise—barely had Haig's consent been given to the undertaking of a second "Hamel" than the object of it, so far as this could be effected by the Australian Corps, vanished: two infantry brigades, mainly by peaceful penetration, had secured the ground, 1,000 yards deep on a front of 4,500, while the formal plans for taking it were being made by the higher command. Their loss during the fortnight was 437—only 16 more than that of the two neighbouring brigades holding the line near Hamel. As for the Germans concerned—"this sort of warfare," says the adjutant of the 265th R.I.R., relieved on July 10th, "cost us more than a regular attack."⁸⁸

The policy and orders by which the action of the German troops throughout this phase had been governed were unknown until revealed by documents captured some weeks later.⁸⁹

**Influence
on German
tactics**

It will be remembered that in consequence of events at Ypres in September, 1917, Ludendorff changed his defensive policy from one of relying solely on counter-attack divisions to one of clinging tenaciously to the front line with considerable forces; and that a few days later, after the Battle of Broodseinde, he dramatically changed it again to one of holding the front with light outposts and, if seriously attacked, abandoning it and dislocating the assault by temporarily withdrawing, possibly for half a mile, to a real line of resistance in front of which the barrage of his artillery was to be quickly laid.⁹⁰ But, as Pétain found in the French Army, so did Ludendorff in the German, that it was one matter to order the adoption of this elastic system of defence, and quite

⁸⁷ Four Germans and two machine-guns were captured in this action. The 6th Bde. had relieved the 7th on the night of July 19.

⁸⁸ *History of 265th R.I.R.*, p. 281.

⁸⁹ The catastrophic events of the following month resulted in many of the official German records for this front coming to an end in July. Some of them, however, fell into the hands of the British staff.

⁹⁰ See Vol IV, p. 881. His problem had been how to keep the German infantry intact from the terrific creeping barrages which on September 20 and 26 and October 4 had shattered both the garrisons in front and the support divisions trying to move up from the rear to counter-attack.

another to ensure that all subordinates adopted it. On the 26th of June, 1918, being ever more pressed by shortage of numbers for the offensive, and probably sensitive to the losses incurred of late by front-line garrisons in resisting the numerous minor attacks,⁹¹ Ludendorff renewed his insistence on it.⁹² "Now more than ever," divisions in the line must use a policy of "elastic avoidance, even on so-called 'unhealthy' fronts." It would often be impossible to make the front line continuous—it should comprise centres of resistance concealed, as far as possible, from observation.

No-Man's Land must be secured by mobile patrols in order to render enemy enterprises difficult in it.

But if the enemy attacked and part of the line was lost, he added, German commanders of all ranks must carefully consider whether it was really necessary for them to order that it should be retaken; "very often troops are, in the end, quite happy without the possession of a particular piece of ground or trench."

Two days after the issue of this order, the 152nd French Division of Mangin's army, together with part of the 11th Division and tanks, penetrated 2,000 yards and took 1,200 prisoners. On the same day two British divisions attacking near Hazebrouck captured over 400.⁹³ On July 3rd Mangin's troops again made a small attack, capturing 1,100 prisoners, and next day the Australian Corps in the Hamel fighting captured 1,600. On July 6th Ludendorff made his order more peremptory.

The enemy's repeated breaks-through during the last few days, and the large numbers of prisoners which he has thus unfortunately captured, demonstrate that our forward defence is too dense and that the depth of the outpost zone is not sufficient⁹⁴ . . . outpost zones from

⁹¹ Largely those of French and American troops between the Oise and the Marne, and of Australians at Morlancourt and Hazebrouck.

⁹² As the German policy was then offensive, he laid even more insistence on light "modern" methods in attack. His reason was, as previously stated to von Kuhl: "Munitions are ample, men are scarce."

⁹³ The 1st Aust Div also assisted (*see pp. 403-7*).

⁹⁴ He added "The enemy has imitated our surprise concentration of artillery fire, and has thereby obtained successes similar to our own. We must do our utmost to think out the correct reply to this." The surprise concentration of artillery had, however, been employed by the British command in the Battle of Cambrai, 20 Nov 1917. It would be surprising if Ludendorff did not realise this. In his *War Memories* (p. 494) he admits the "surprise" and the "heavy bombardment." Possibly he undervalued the part of the artillery in that action.

100 to 200 metres in depth do not suffice; they are only permissible if our positions are strongly organised and if very strong artillery support is available. They must be deeper, *i.e.*, 500 to 1,000 metres or more, especially where the position has not yet been developed and the available artillery is weak.

The troops actually in the outpost-line, he said, should not be disposed too deeply; the posts, patrols, and pickets there must be prepared to carry on "an active outpost warfare" with the help and support of fire from the rifles and artillery defending the main line behind them. "This warfare does not differ from an attack against hostile nests, in which it is necessary to work round the strong-points" (he was, in fact, enjoining on his troops just such tactics as the Diggers were practising). The troops must be alert and must reconnoitre. But when an enemy attack was systematically prepared by artillery, there must be no attempt to resist at the outpost-line—the forward zone must be abandoned. A new main line of resistance might have to be formed later, but German commanders and troops need not fear that they would thus lose many kilometres of ground. "The Entente . . . are just as hard up for men for such attacks as we are." Attacks by the French and British should only give a welcome chance of inflicting losses, he said, for they generally attacked in dense lines. Therefore, if there was any doubt whether the garrison of the outpost-line should be withdrawn or maintained,

the decision should be to withdraw it. It is always better to accept this loss of ground than to incur losses in the outpost zone.

Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary that day asks how can Ludendorff's new instruction be carried out with the weak troops of the trench divisions? "We will be continuously forced back with a considerable loss of men who through this isolated method of warfare are taken prisoners by the enemy. That our enemy attacks us generally in dense lines has long ceased to be the case." Nevertheless all German commanders immediately passed on the effect of the order to their troops. Second Army, in enjoining that the forward zone must be increased to 500-1,000 metres in depth, excepted the Ancre and Avre bridge-heads, and directed that the change must be concealed so that the enemy would not conclude that the Germans were acting merely on the defensive. XI Corps (south of the Somme opposite the right half of the Australian Corps) laid down that the

forward zone must be lightly held, the outposts to give way before any fairly strong attack. The zone must contain strong-points, where the ground favoured them, and scattered machine-gun nests; and the position of the main line behind it must as far as possible be concealed from the enemy. If the main line was pierced, it must be retaken by the troops in reserve.

The day of this order, July 8th, was the very one on which patrols of the 27th Battalion seized the forward line of the 108th Division between the Roman road and the railway. The 108th Division was, as already stated, then in process of being relieved by the 41st, whose commander that day carefully explained to his subordinates the order from army and corps. Next day (probably again repeating an order from XI Corps) he had to issue the following:

At 11 a.m.⁹⁵ on 8 July the enemy penetrated the forward zone of the 108th Divn. by means of large patrols without artillery preparation, and at 10 p.m. on the same day with artillery preparation astride the Marcel-cave-Villers-Bretonneux railway. He occupied the trench where our most advanced outpost lay, and apparently captured the occupants, comprising 15 men. The larger part of the forward zone has been lost.

A few days later the Second Army commander, General von der Marwitz, in an order referred to the same incident:

In one place there was neither visual nor any other connection between the outpost-line and the company, so that the removal of the former by the enemy was not even noticed: counter-attacks followed too late and were a complete failure.

To prevent recurrence of such losses the commander of the 41st Division, in his order of July 9th, directed:

The pickets must protect their flanks and rear by continuous observation as our enemy, who has grown up in the Australian bush, wriggles up to our posts with great dexterity from the flank and rear in order to overwhelm us. In the case of the present trench division (108th) it has often happened that *complete* pickets have disappeared in the forward zone without a trace. . . . I expect the (41st) division to remember its good reputation in undertaking the serious task which has been set it here.

On the day on which this order was issued, the small patrols of the 28th Battalion seized the German front and support lines at Monument Wood, which were, of course, much more lightly held than when the 48th attacked there on May 3rd, the garrison having probably been thinned out again after Luden-

⁹⁵ The German time was noon.

dorff's recent order. The events of July 9th were capped by those of the French attack at Castel on July 12th, when (according to Crown Prince Rupprecht) the two southernmost divisions of the Second German Army evacuated their forward zone and the bridgehead there. But it appears to have been chiefly the state of affairs in front of Villers-Bretonneux that caused the commander of the Second Army on July 13th to order what was really a reversal of the spirit in which Ludendorff's order had been carried out. He complains that the trouble was due to haste and thoughtlessness in putting that order into force.

During the last few days the "English" have succeeded in penetrating or taking prisoner single posts or pickets. They have gradually, sometimes even in daylight, succeeded in getting possession of the greater part of the forward zone of a division.

The tactical situation of a great part of the army front zone has, owing to this, been considerably impaired. The reason for this has chiefly lain in the fact that the garrisons of the forward zone were immediately set out in accordance with the orders of the army dated 6th July, before the local conditions had been accurately examined and before the principles for the conduct of the fighting in the forward zone could be instilled into the troops. [Here follows the reference, already quoted, to the capture of 15 men on July 8.] Co-operation with the artillery by means of special batteries for the forward zone has not yet been worked out.

Marwitz then describes the function of the troops in the forward zone—that of delaying the attacking troops and preventing surprise of the main-line garrison—in very different wording from that of Ludendorff:

Troops must fight. They must not give way at every opportunity and seek to avoid fighting; otherwise they will get the feeling that the enemy is superior to them. . . . The best way to make the enemy more careful in his attempt to drive us bit by bit out of the outpost-line and forward zone is to do active reconnaissance and carry out patrol encounters oneself. In this respect absolutely nothing seems to have been done. If the enemy can succeed in scoring a success without any special support by artillery or assistance from special troops, we must be in a position to do the same.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ On the German side prizes were being given for prisoners. On July 2 the commander of the neighbouring 202nd R.I.R. (43rd Res. Div.) at Hamel, had announced: "As daily reports show that enemy patrols are to be found every night in No-Man's Land . . . I will give three weeks' leave to the first man who brings in a prisoner or equipment enabling us to identify the regiment holding the opposite sector." Marwitz's order of July 13 advised commanders to encourage their troops, for the sake of morale as well as to secure information, to undertake such expeditions. (This is what the Germans opposed to the Australians had attempted during the winter of 1917-18, with curious results—see *Vol. V*, pp. 41-4.) But von der Marwitz adds that he recognises the difficult situation of his infantry—that is, presumably, of the "trench" divisions.

It was on the morning after this order was issued, July 14th, that the Germans made, near Accroche Wood, their one partly successful cutting-out expedition against the posts advanced by the 39th Battalion.⁹⁷ The XI Corps, in passing on Marwitz's directions, added that the troops must at all costs be made to feel superior to the Australian enemy.⁹⁸ On July 25th, after the next fighting, in which the Mound was taken from his troops, the commander of the 41st Division reported: "The fighting power of the 18th and 148th I.R. is diminished as the result of losses in the last engagements, the constant state of readiness, and the almost unbroken period in line for all companies." He expected further local thrusts by the Australians on both sides of the Roman road, but was looking forward to the readjustment which would take place when the new line of resistance (then being prepared close behind the present one) was ready.

There is evidence for concluding that German commanders in contact with their forward troops on the Villers-Bretonneux front noted a feeling that their opponents possessed the ascendancy, and feared that their men—in view of the deterioration in their quality and of other current developments—would be demoralised by interpreting Ludendorff's policy as a sanction for abandoning any stubborn resistance at the front line. This attitude had long been marked also on the Morlancourt front, where, though Australian commanders held the conditions unsuitable for any attempt to imitate the operations at Villers-Bretonneux, silent raids as well as more formal thrusts had placed the enemy under heavy and constant strain.

So far as is ascertainable from the records available in Australia, comparable events were occurring on only two other parts of the British front—the sectors of the New Zealand Division near Hébuterne and of the 1st Australian at Hazebrouck. To the last-named the narrative must now revert.

⁹⁷ See pp. 347-8.

⁹⁸ The official estimate of their Australian opponents given by the 13th Div to its troops in an order of July 11 was "*The enemy belongs to the Australian Army Corps, is exceedingly alert, strong in artillery and trench-mortars, very fond of making attacks and raids with or without artillery assistance . . . He works energetically and eagerly on his trenches and wire and thrusts posts and machine-gun nests forward into No-Man's Land.*"