CHAPTER XI

"PEACEFUL PENETRATION"—ITS CLIMAX AT HAZEBROUCK

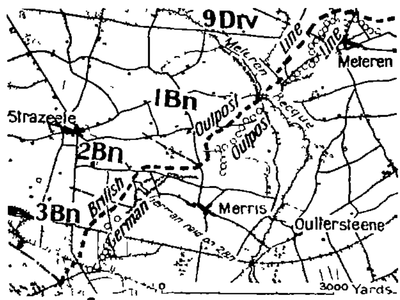
If the successes achieved by peaceful penetration on the Somme had in the end more important tactical results, on the front of the 1st Division at Hazebrouck their moral effect was even greater. It has already been stated that German divisions sent by the higher command to this supposedly quiet front were finishing their month's tour there with such relief as has caused more than one of their historians to write: "Our bloody tour in the line at Merris had found its end."[1] When this narrative left it the 1st Australian Division, in order to obtain some rest for its troops, was holding a diminished front with only one brigade; and its troops and commanders—as, also, the German —were contemplating with some anxiety the growth of the green crops close in front of and around the trench-lines and outposts.

Here, as on the Somme, these crops were quickly found to give extraordinary advantages to adventurous troops; but here in Flanders exploring expeditions also found convenient cover for their approaches in the network of hedges and ditches which in Picardy was absent. Soon after Sergt. Bruggy's "one-man" raid on May 22nd[2] the patrols found the German resistance more alert; on the night of May 25th the enemy was reported to be much more aggressive than usual. At dusk he even tried to raid some posts of the 2nd Battalion north-west of Merris. The bombardment from guns and trench-mortars had fallen mainly behind its targets. A flare was then fired by the Germans, evidently as a starting signal; but its light also illuminated their own party running in a single line towards

[1] *See p 60.*

[2] *See pp 54-5* On the next night the Royal Engineers fired 1,178 drums of phosgene at Merris during a British bombardment; 11 Germans were killed and 121 gassed of whom 16 died.

the posts. Fire was opened and the Germans were driven into shell-holes 100 yards away.[3] As usual an Australian patrol searched the ground afterwards in the hope that the enemy raiders would have left some dead or wounded whose unit could thus be ascertained, but on this occasion none was found.[4] On the night of the 26th Australian reports stated that the Germans were "very alert" and "working hard" on their forward defences. On that of the 27th, when a patrol, fifteen strong, under Lieut. Chedgey,[5] of the 1st Battalion tried silently to rush a post in the valley of the Meteren Becque, the party was seen approaching and the Germans shot and bombed vigorously until it had almost reached them, when they ran scattering. They left nothing by which they could be identified, and Chedgey's party, in which himself and seven others were wounded, had one of its men missing.



The temporary stiffening of the German defence was explained when on this same night a patrol under Lieut. Nixon,[6] 3rd Battalion, managed to rush a machine-gun post on the southern slope of the Mont de Merris, killing a couple of Germans and capturing three. The prisoners were found to belong to a fresh division, the 13th Reserve,[7] which had just relieved the 12th Division.

The captured men of the 57th R.I.R. said that they had been told that they were coming to a quiet front for a rest after their harsh experiences at Kemmel. The historians of the two other regiments of the division each mention that the front was imagined by the command

[3] The failure is noted in the history of the artillery of the 12th German Div.

[4] On the same night the Germans raided the 9th (Scottish) Div, which had now taken over the front about Meteren on the left of the 1st Australian. Here, after intense bombardment, the Germans had the luck to take some prisoners.

[5] Lt H V. Chedgey, 1st Bn Solicitor, of Arncliffe, N S.W.; b. Waverley, N S W, 31 May 1892.

[6] Lt. J. S Nixon, 3rd Bn Grocer, of Redfern, N S.W.; b. Seskinore, County Tyrone, Ireland, 23 Apr. 1886.

[7] The prisoners were of the 57th R I R The division included also the 13th and 39th R I R's.

to be "comparatively quiet." "But we did not notice anything of the sort," adds the historian of the 13th R.I.R., "and if we entertained any idea that the enemy would be diverted by the great new German offensive begun on May 27 (in Champagne) . . . . and so allow us to prepare in peace for the launching of our offensive—the 'Hagen' attack planned to take place later (in Flanders)—from the first day of our appearance in this sector we were forced to face a different and uglier truth." After describing the bombardment by artillery and aeroplanes that tortured the troops, this account says: "To us in the front line, facing the enemy, it seemed grotesque that the men of our support battalion, at the cost of losses on the bombarded roads of approach, had to bring up engineer stores and ammunition for the 'Hagen' attack, while the front line battalion in the incomplete main line of resistance could scarcely hold its position." The historian of the 39th R.I.R. says that the truth, that the sector was not a quiet one, became evident at once. "Opposite, overlooking us, the 'English,' wideawake and keen on enterprises, who in sporting spirit took every target under fire, active and virile crept up in the high corn and made the lives of our posts and patrols very difficult."

The first formal enterprise now undertaken by the 1st Australian Division was a small but costly one carried out by the 10th Battalion (South Australia) in order to push forward on the southern side of the spur (here called "Mont de Merris," the tops of the ruined roofs and brick walls of Merris three-quarters of a mile lower down being just visible above the crops). The troops came in fresh on May 28th, the 3rd Brigade that day relieving the 1st. The advance began forthwith and was divided into two stages as follows:

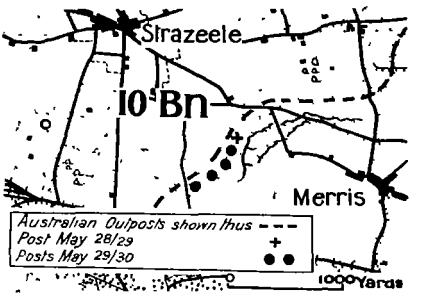
On the night of 28th May a post was put out on the left of the 10th Bn, a feat easily achieved though in course of it a German post had to be taken. On the next night, under a barrage of artillery and trench-mortars, a line of German outposts south of this was attacked by a company. The field artillery was to lay down during the night several short "crash" bombardments, one of them at 11.30, the hour for the attack. This crash, lasting for a minute, fell upon the company of the 10th lying ready—2 officers and 20 men were hit by their own shells. But the barrage of the trench-mortars and of an improvised battery of rifle-grenadiers organised by Lt.-Col. Neligan from cooks and others at his headquarters, was excellently laid, and the three attacking platoons went on. Though at some posts the Germans clambered out of their trenches to resist them, and others poured in a heavy fire from Gutzer Farm and another house on the southern flank, the posts were seized. They had to be consolidated under fire. The Germans twice counter-attacked during the process but were beaten off.

Casualties had been heavy—Lts. Reid[8] and Goode[9] leading their

[8] Lt. H. W. Reid, M C ; 10th Bn. Engineering draughtsman; of Omeo, Vic ; b Hinnomunjie, Vic , 16 Oct. 1890.

[9] Lt. A H. Goode, 10th Bn. Warehouseman, of Adelaide; b Adelaide, 8 Oct. 1881

platoons were both wounded badly, and later the company commander, Lt. Hill, and Lt. Corcoran,[10] whom he sent up to replace casualties, were mortally hit. Lt. Blake, though wounded in the barrage, bombed a German machine-gun nest that was causing casualties, and brought back the lock of the gun. Lt.Smith,[11] sent up with a platoon of another company to reinforce, was also wounded. The 1st Divn.'s casualties this day were 8 officers and 89 others killed or wounded, mostly through this operation. The line was advanced about 150 yards on a front of 700.[12] One prisoner, of the 57th R.I.R., was taken.



The stubbornness of the opposing Germans was noticeable for some days longer. On the night of the 30th Sergt. Turner,[13] a well-known scout of the 12th Battalion, with a patrol of ten some distance south of the railway found a German post and, after discussion, decided to rush it. It contained four Germans, all of whom fought toughly. Three were killed, but the fourth escaped and gave the alarm, thus preventing the party from searching the bodies for marks of identification. The Tasmanians had to withdraw quickly with the captured machine-gun. Next day (May 31st) on the other flank of the division's front, Pte. Knight[14] of the 9th Battalion, after crawling through the wheat crop to examine a trench which Lieut. Gower believed to be empty, lifted a sack on the parados and found in the niche beneath it a German N.C.O. resting. The German at once raised a shout for his comrades. Knight shot him, but men now came running along the trench towards him. The first was about to throw a bomb, but Knight shot him and dashed into the wheat. The Lewis gunners and snipers

[10] Lt T. L. Corcoran, M.C.; 10th Bn. Guard. S Aust. Railways; of Mt Gambier, S Aust; b. Mt Gambier, 7 Aug. 1890 Died of wounds, 30 May 1918.

[11] Lt R. G. Smith, M.C., 10th Bn. Clerk; of Unley, S. Aust.; b. Unley, 24 Feb 1892.

[12] The 12th Bn also moved forward a post on the southern flank.

[13] Lt. G W. Turner, D.C.M., M.M.; 12th Bn. Brass-turner, of Launceston, Tas., b Young Town, Tas., 10 Jan. 1892.

[14] Pte. R. P. Knight, M.M. (No. 714a, 9th Bn.) Labourer; of Bellingen, N.S.W., b Lewisham, London, Eng., 21 Jan 1900

in the Australian posts were on the look-out, and, seeing the Germans running along their trench, opened fire, forcing them to keep down and so allowing Knight to escape without harm.

At this stage there was undertaken the first of several more important attacks made by the 1st Division during the summer, with the object of seizing the main defences of Merris, which were none other than the old trench-lines, originally dug during the Battle of the Lys by the British, on the top of the ridge north-west of the village. The attack was first proposed on May 14th, when the British intelligence received the impression that the German commanders were thinning their front here in order to rest and train their troops for some impending blow. It was desired to pin these troops down, and British Second Army at first envisaged a rather extensive operation, with Merris village as second objective, the whole front of the 1st Division being advanced and Meteren being seized by the 9th (Scottish) Division on the left at the same time;[15] but, probably through lack of resources, it was eventually decided that the undertaking should be much smaller: the Australian brigade that was holding the line would carry it out, attacking only the Mont de Merris position. The flanking divisions should merely create diversions, the 29th Division on the right seizing some farms on the Vieux Berquin lowlands, and the 9th Division on the left feigning an assault on Meteren.

The main advance was made on the night of June 2nd by the 3rd Brigade's reserve battalion—the 11th (Western Australia). The following is an account of the action:

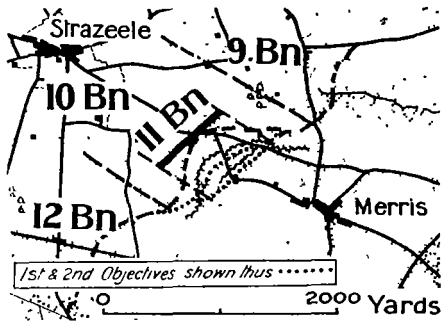
Mont de Merris

The 11th lined up on a jumping-off tape laid for 800 yards across the spur, in most parts close behind the outposts of the 10th, a platoon of which was also to go forward on each flank. The control of the sector for the night was transferred to Lt.-Col. Newman of the 11th.[16] The operation had been closely studied by officers and men with aeroplane photographs and a model of the ground, and a practice had been carried out the night before near Pradelles, actually at times under German shell-fire. In this attack—probably in consequence of the experience on May 29th, and in view of the fact that part of the first German trench was only 130 yards away—the field artillery barrage was laid fifty yards short of

[15] Maj.-Gen. Walker and Br.-Gen. Lesslie (whose brigade, the 1st, was at one time intended to make the attack) both desired this.

[16] For this night the "nucleus battalion," formed from the nucleus left out of the fight by each battalion of the brigade, came up and served as brigade reserve. The 8th Bn. (2nd Bde.) was in close support.

the second objective (the chord trench), the first trench being bombarded only by light and medium trench-mortars and by rifle-grenadiers, including again Neligan's improvised "headquarters battery" under the regimental sergeant-major, E. A. Holland.[17] The Stokes mortars of the 1st Light Trench Mortar Battery were added to those of the 3rd, and these combined to throw more than 2,000 shells during the engagement. The medium trench-mortars shelled the second objective and a nest held by the enemy in front of it on the right, and the heavy artillery threw its fire farther back.



The troops of the 11th were led up to the starting position by guides of the 10th, whose intelligence officer and scouts also laid the tapes, and the assembly of the troops though close to the enemy was carried out so silently that no suspicion of it seems to have been aroused. It was barely finished when, at 1 o'clock, the barrage fell; many reports afterwards described it as excellent. The troops, with white arm-bands to distinguish them in the dark,[18] moved in sections in file, with a light screen of riflemen ahead, and, after getting close to the shell-bursts, the two companies forming the first wave rushed the first trench as the barrage uncovered it. It was found to be well garrisoned; on the left, where it ran through a hop field, some of the posts fought, but on the right about eighty Germans in all surrendered. When, at 1.10, after allowing eight minutes for the clearing of the first objective, the barrage lifted from the chord trench, the second wave advanced upon this. To guide the troops the artillery every minute burst one incendiary shell, giving a brilliant glare, at a bend of the Merris road, straight ahead of the centre. In this stage the German posts met with were scattered ones. The advancing platoons worked round them, according to their now almost automatic procedure, and one after another was quickly taken. The platoon of the 10th on the right seized Gutzer Farm, surprising a machine-gun crew north-west of it, and later pushed up a trench on the right, taking 21 prisoners. The success signal—a rocket bursting into red, green, and red—was seen by observers of the 3rd Brigade at 1.47.[19]

As constantly happened in these small, shallow, formal advances, scattered German machine-gun nests, mostly at some distance in the country beyond the objective, continued to fire, their bullets causing loss among the men digging in.[20] The barrage had slackened at 1.30 and

[17] Warrant Officer E A Holland, D C.M. (No. 503; 10th Bn). Miner; of Broken Hill, N.S W , b. Mile End, S. Aust., 8 Aug. 1889. Member of Coronation Contingent, 1937. Died 30 Nov. 1940.

[18] After nightfall also the posts of the 10th Bn. had been marked with flags in order to prevent an attack upon them by mistake.

[19] The success flares to be fired by the foremost troops would not go off, and this rocket was therefore probably late

[20] In silent patrol operations they might not have been aroused

ceased ten minutes later, the task of protecting the troops being then taken up by Lewis gunners and rifle-grenadiers thrust out in front of the line. Sgt.-Maj. Holland of the 10th with his improvised battery helped materially to cover the diggers at this stage.[21] Patrols worked everywhere and some of the nearer nests were rushed. The platoon of the 10th digging on the right flank found itself less advanced than the 11th, and at 2 o'clock moved forward into alignment. Farther south the left company of the 12th Bn. had seized the chance of swinging its flank far forward and, largely through the work of Sgt. Vickers,[22] sixteen prisoners were taken. The platoon of the 10th on the extreme left also had taken many prisoners and its patrols secured that flank. Vickers guns in forward positions protected the right. Parties of the 10th carried supplies and, with engineers, dug a communication trench. By 3 30 the front was quiet. At dawn the observer in the contact aeroplane, on tooting his horn for flares, saw them shine out below him all along the line of the Australian objective. The 29th Divn. took Lug and Ankle Farms west of Vieux Berquin.

The small affair had been a thorough success; the 3rd Brigade had about 100 casualties, chiefly in the 11th Battalion;[23] 5 German officers and 253 others with 27 machine-guns and 17 trench-mortars were captured[24]—here again instruction previously given in the working of German machine-guns proved useful.

Headquarters of the III Bavarian Army Corps reported that its Meteren front had been attacked, the action extending as far south as the Bailleul-Hazebrouck railway. The 79th and 81st Res. Divns. (at Meteren) had apparently reported that the English trenches opposite them were filled with men, but that the German machine-gun fire had prevented these from launching their attack. The Corps staff evidently suspected that the activity was a feint except where the attack actually fell—in front of the centre regiment (13th R.I.R.) of its left division (13th Reserve) and the two adjoining companies of the 39th and 57th R.I.R's on the north and south respectively. These troops, the report says, accurately enough, were overrun, encircled, and caught in flank and rear. The historian of the 13th R.I.R. says that its II Bn. had just taken over the front from the III, after a long march, and had not yet got its bearings, "which perhaps explains the heavy losses." Res.-Lt. Buschaus and a few men held out for a short time in the main line of resistance. Then "with a cheer he throws himself against the enemy established in rear of him, but only four men break through and reach Merris, and they are the only ones able to tell us what had happened." Of the rest—three companies and one platoon—and their commanders, "nothing whatever is heard." Two platoons of the 8th company and two heavy machine-gun crews were farther back, in the west of Merris

[21] Holland was wounded

[22] Sgt W. Vickers, D.C.M., M.M. (No 1480, 12th Bn.). Winch driver; of North Dandalup, W. Aust.; b. Eaton Constantine, Shropshire, Eng., 17 Sep. 1896.

[23] It lost 4 officers (including Lt. A. R. Retchford, of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust., who was killed) and 87 others.

[24] An anti-tank gun also lay abandoned, in the new No-Man's Land.

and the hedges south of it, and these got touch with the 57th farther south. Later two companies of the I Bn. came up on the north and occupied the hedges astride of the Strazeele-Merris road. Of the right flank regiment, 39th R.I.R, Res.-Lt. Franke and his company were captured. The commander of the 1st company, farther north, tried to counter-attack, but his ration parties were away, leaving the company much too weak. The gap was blocked by half the 3rd company, whose commander was killed while doing this.

The total loss was reported by the Corps to be 15 officers and about 396 others, of whom 10 officers and about 330 others belonged to the 13th Res. Divn.

Corps headquarters recognised that the ground was valuable—its troops had lost their view over their opponent's lines and its artillery the control over his approaches. It was therefore at first intended that the 13th Res. Divn. should counter-attack. Later, as its fighting value was considered too low, it was decided to throw in the 4th Bav. Divn. instead. On June 5, however, the Corps decided against making any counter-attack; the disadvantages suffered "were not so great as to justify the sacrifice which the recovery of the lost ground would certainly entail." Accordingly the relief by the 4th Bav. Divn. was countermanded.

The flank of the III Bavarian Corps lay near the railway. It was south of this, in the sector of the 44th Res. Divn, that the 29th Brit. Divn. had attacked. The history of the 208th R.I.R. mentions the loss of two farms and of the factory.[25] A counter-attack made by the 208th on the following night after a short bombardment was stopped by the British barrage.

It had been intended that the 12th Battalion, farther south on the railway, should on the next night quietly advance its posts there, which were now well behind the alignment of the front. In trying to capture a tree-lined field south of the railway, however, Lieut. Wertheimer[26] met German posts that were keenly alert. He was killed and his party might have been cut off had not Lieut. Wardlaw[27] and Sergt. Turner and some men moved out from the railway and fired into the enemy's flank while the patrol got clear. The night was much disturbed by artillery fire, and it was not until June 5th and 6th that the 2nd Brigade, having relieved the 3rd, quietly advanced its outposts here a quarter of a mile.

All German accounts say that the duty of the German divisions holding this and the neighbouring fronts in Flanders

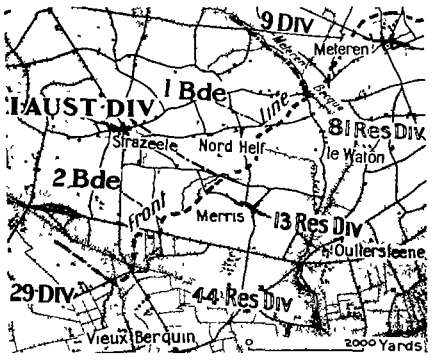
[25] Two German N C O's, however, who had been captured in the first attack, returned with an English officer, whom they, turning the tables, had made prisoner; and another German prisoner got away from behind the British line with a Lewis gun

[26] Lt A. T. Wertheimer, 12th Bn. Surveyor's assistant, of Bellerive, Tas.; b. Carlton, Vic., 17 Apr. 1894. Killed in action, 4 June 1918.

[27] Lt. Hon. A. L Wardlaw, C M.G., 12th Bn Station manager; of Ringarooma, Tas., b. Avoca, Tas., 23 July 1887. Died 24 Dec. 1938.

was to prepare their sectors as the leaping-off ground of the great attack that was to be made against the British as soon as the Allies' reserves had been sufficiently diverted by the offensives on the French front. Meanwhile the trench divisions were to hold the line, despite shortage of reinforcements, while the army for the offensive trained and rested in rear of them. The British command in Flanders, being aware that this large force, varying from 26 to 31 divisions, was resting behind Crown Prince Rupprecht's front, and seeing that hospitals, aerodromes, railway sidings, dumps, roads, and bridges had long since been made ready by the enemy in evident preparation for delivering a great attack, was in constant expectation of it; and whenever, as happened before each German offensive in the south, prisoners spoke of some big thrust impending, Second Army and its corps sent out warnings and ordered instant readiness. These orders were often regarded by the troops, who had to spend the supposedly dangerous nights in manning their battle-positions, as due simply to the strained nerves of the high command—headquarters, in their language, "had the wind up"—but German histories have proved the expectations to be exceedingly well grounded.

One such warning had foreshadowed a probable offensive on May 25th; and early in June, when the German offensive of May 27th on the Aisne had drawn reserves thither, an early attack in the north was considered most probable. On June 3rd the 1st Division issued a warning that the enemy "may become active any day." The order added that, as the army commander, General Plumer, attached great importance to the Strazeele spur, he had decided that the 1st Australian Division must now reoccupy its front there with two brigades. Accordingly, on June 8th the



1st Brigade came in and took over the northern half of the 2nd Brigade's front, with its left on the Meteren stream.[28] Each brigade had a front of about 2,300 yards; each put two battalions into the line (half in the outpost-system, half in the support line 1,000 yards in rear). The trench strength of the companies averaged, probably, at most 90 men. On the other side of No-Man's Land the German 13th Reserve Division held a considerably shorter front[29] normally with three battalions (one from each regiment) in the front line, and three in support one or two kilometres in rear. Its companies averaged little more than 50, with about 70 light-machine gunners per battalion. The strength of the Australians was, therefore, about the same as that of the Germans in the forward area, but their division had many more troops in rest. On the other hand the German divisions here were relieved each month, whereas the 1st Australian was continuously in the line from April until the beginning of August.

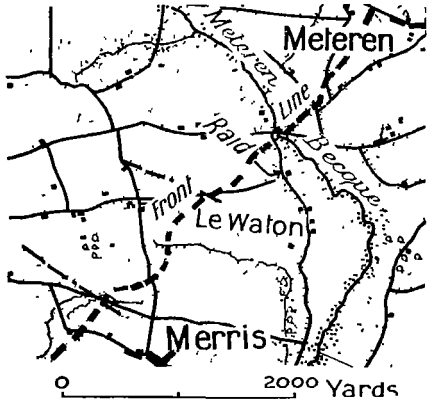
The German attack expected early in June fell, as the reader will recall, on June 9th, not in Flanders, but upon the French at Noyon. In spite of this Prince Rupprecht still maintained his big reserve, and the threat to the British Army in Flanders increased in proportion as its reserves were constantly drawn away to the French. Prisoners indicated that an offensive would be launched on June 16th; later the day mentioned was June 25th. Each day passed without any blow falling, but it can be understood how keen was the staff to have a constant stream of prisoners for information.

It is safe to say that, during these anxious months, from no other sector came such a stream of prisoners as from that of the 1st Australian Division. No sooner had the 2nd Brigade relieved the 3rd than its rested troops, who knew that raids, which they hated, would otherwise be necessary, began their incessant "exploring." Their opponents, apparently, were be-

[28] The 1st Bde was now under Br.-Gen Iven Mackay, formerly of the 4th Bn, Br-Gen. Lesslie, who had been with the force since 1914, having on June 7 been given command of the 190th Bde of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Div.

[29] The 1st Aust. Div held from the Meteren Becque in the north to the Plate Becque south of the railway. Its left flank captured prisoners from the 81st Res Div., its right flank, south of the railway, from the 44th Res. Div. The sector of the 13th Res. Div. lay between these, it was some 1,200 yards shorter than that of the 1st Australian—that is, 3,400 yards as against 4,600. (The history of the 13th R I R. gives the width of its divisional front as about 2,000 metres, and of the regimental front as 500, but this appears to be an understatement.)

coming weary, for in the records of the ensuing week mention of the enemy's resistance is markedly absent. Soon after dawn on June 7th Corpl. Reilly[30] of the 5th Battalion, from a post 200 yards from the bank of the Meteren Becque,[31] together with Corpl. Schwab[32] and Pte. Gardner[33] crept 200 yards through the crop to where a patch of it had been mown, evidently in front of a German post, and then, quietly looking about them, saw two Germans asleep in a shell-hole only a biscuit-throw away.[34] They crawled to the sleeping men, awakened and captured them, and returned with the prisoners, not a shot being fired at the expedition.



Three hours later, in a post a quarter of a mile from the Becque, Sergt. Morrison[35] of the 5th decided (as he said afterwards, "for a bit of sport") to see if he could extract some Germans from another post whose position—close beyond a road through the crop—he and his men knew. After arranging with a fellow sergeant to open fire with a Lewis gun if the expedition was attacked, he, with L.-Corpl. Simms[36] and Pte. Hastings,[37] crawled 100 yards to the road. Here their comrades, watching in the Australian post, saw them stand up to look round above the crop, and then evidently enter the trench. Morrison, who

[30] Lt. J. V. Reilly, D.C.M.; 5th Bn. Orchardist, of Blackburn, Vic.; b. Dundrum, Dublin, Ireland, 14 Feb 1896.

[31] This was before the 1st Bde. took over the northern sub-sector.

[32] Cpl. E. Schwab, M.M. (No. 1612, 5th Bn.). Labourer; of Camberwell, Vic.; b. Surrey Hills, Vic., 13 Apr 1892.

[33] Cpl. T. H. C. Gardner, M.M. (No. 584, 5th Bn.). School teacher; of Kew, Vic. b. Nundah, Q'land, 4 June 1894.

[34] The post was screened by leaving a few inches of crop.

[35] Sgt. A. T. Morrison, D.C.M. (No. 907; 5th Bn.). Mechanic; of Ripponlea, Vic.; b. Northcote, Vic., 21 Sep. 1889. Died 24 Jan 1938.

[36] Lt. W. A. M. Simms, M.M.; 5th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Richmond, Vic.; b. Tranmere, Cheshire, Eng., 30 Jan. 1897.

[37] Pte. S. P. Hastings, M.M. (No. 5707, 5th Bn.). Labourer, of Geelong, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 18 Dec 1882.

went along it, afterwards reported that ten yards down the trench he saw

> one German asleep and another round the corner packing his kit. Bailed them up while they kicked like blazes. In a second dugout was a stretcher-bearer, and in a third a sergeant and corporal. The sergeant was nasty and tried to get the stick-bombs and Mills grenades.[38]

The spectators saw four Germans appear successively, holding their hands above their heads and, a few yards farther along, two more.

> Morrison got on the parapet and motioned them to walk along the trench towards our line. They were unwilling, so Morrison threw clods of dirt at them.[39]

He brought all six back, and then went out to rejoin his mates who meanwhile had found three more and a machine-gun. The Germans in the neighbouring posts were now aroused and firing at the intruders, but, though a machine-gun opened, the party with its prisoners returned safely to the Australian line.

Barely had this happened when, at 10.45 Lieut. Parker from another post close down by the Becque set out with three men to capture a post in the crops only 250 yards north-east of the trench raided by Morrison. When twenty yards away the four Australians were seen, so they rushed the post at once. They found it to be a garrisoned trench; in a brisk fight they killed or wounded eight of the enemy. They then retired unharmed, but without having been able to identify their opponents.

That night on the centre of the division's front two large patrols of the 6th Battalion under Lieut. McIntosh[40] and Coy. Q.M.Sgt. Kirby[41] tried to raid two German posts in the new enemy line astride the Strazeele road. The Germans ran but the Victorians brought back a machine-gun from one post and a German pack from the other.

---

[38] These were British bombs found by the Germans at Merris.

[39] The quotation is from an account in *Reveille*, April, 1938.

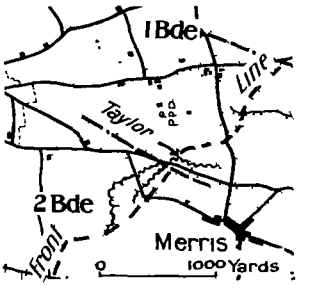
[40] Lt. W. A. McIntosh, M.C.; 6th Bn. School teacher; of Geelong, Vic., b. Geelong, Vic., 3 May 1893.

[41] C.Q.M.Sgt. H. Kirby, D.C.M. (No. 102, 6th Bn.) Labourer, of Kew, Vic., b. Kew, 6 Mar. 1895. Killed in action, 23 Aug. 1918.

The sallies of the 5th Bn. were made against posts of the 267th R.I.R., belonging to the 81st Res. Divn., which in May had been inserted between the Meteren and Merris sectors. It reported a company sergeant-major and ten men missing. The regiment assumed that the post attacked by Morrison had then been retained by the Australians, and its history states that on the 10th, just before the division was withdrawn, two parties of the 267th led by officers counter-attacked the post. As they approached they were scattered by artillery fire, but one party entered the trench and reoccupied it. "Thirty" Australians were said to have been seen withdrawing from it. (At 1.30 a.m. on the 10th one of the 1st Aust. Bn.'s posts, after being bombarded, saw Germans moving on its front and drove them off.)

The posts raided by the 6th Aust. Bn. were held by the 13th Res. Divn.

It was at this stage that the 1st Brigade took over the northern half of the divisional front. On its second night in the line, the intelligence officer of the 4th Battalion, an audacious youngster, Lieut. Taylor,[42] coming back fresh from a reconnaissance, said that he had found himself looking along a trench containing about twenty Germans. "Well," said Col. Sasse, who overheard this talk and probably judged it to be rather wild. "How about it, Taylor? Do you think you can take it on?" Taylor said he thought he could. The trench in question was the northern end of that forming the old German salient on Mont de Merris—when the salient was captured on June 3rd this part of the trench still ran on like a communication trench into the German lines. Accordingly at 9 next morning (June 12th) Taylor with six men crept out through the crop. After stationing one man to cover them, he and the other five cut the German wire and then leapt into the trench and found themselves, surely enough, among twenty or thirty of the enemy. A wild fight followed. The party having killed, as they estimated, about ten, tried to bring away two. But, seeing them to be so few, the Germans counter-attacked, bombing, and opening heavy fire. The prisoners were killed, but Taylor and his men, though hampered by slight wounds, got back, bringing



[42] Lt. R. E. Taylor, M.C.; 4th Bn. Public servant; of Waverley, N.S.W., b. Madras, India, 13 June 1893.

a Bavarian cap and a shoulder strap marked with a "5." It was at once suspected that the 13th Reserve Division had been relieved by the 4th Bavarian.

This was true; that division had taken over the sector on the previous day. The 13th Res. Div. which a month before had come to Merris for a rest, "gladly," as the historian of the 13th R.I.R. remarks, "left the uncomfortable and costly position." "There was nothing but joy," says the history of the 39th R.I.R., when the relief took place; owing to their losses, six of its twelve companies had to be combined to form three. General Plumer's intelligence staff noted: "A fairly good Bavarian division has replaced an exhausted division in the Merris sector." The incoming division was commanded by Prince Franz of Bavaria, a brother of Crown Prince Rupprecht.

The stiffening of resistance experienced three weeks before, when the 13th Reserve Division took the place of the 12th Division, was now again remarked when the fresh troops came in. It happened, however, that, except at the old "communication trench" entered by Taylor north of Merris, where encounters were constant,[43] Australian activity was for the moment chiefly called for south of the railway against the 44th Reserve Division, whose main front was opposed to the 29th British. Here, on the edge of the flats at the southern foot of the ridge, the Australian line still required advancing, and this was carried out in a small operation, as follows:

At 1 a.m. on June 13 two companies of the 7th Bn., behind a barrage laid by artillery, trench-mortars, and machine-guns, pushed forward 500 yards on a front of 650 yards. As the objective, a line of shell-hole posts scattered across the fields, was reached, a machine-gun in one of them swept the platoon led by Lt. Edgoose,[44] hitting him and many of his men. The troops here were pinned down by its fire, but a corporal, J. F. Walters,[45] took charge and held on. Lt. Smedley[46] of the support

[43] A scout, Pte. L. S. McDougall (North Sydney), who had visited this trench with Lt. Taylor, several times afterwards guided Lt. J. H. Thomas (Hurlstone Park, N.S.W.) to it, and a raid was arranged in which Sgt. A. Grant (Annandale, N.S.W.) was to crawl out to within a few yards of the trench and then give a signal on which several parties would rush it. At the time arranged the parties waited, but a shot was heard followed by several bomb explosions. No signal went up, and Thomas brought back his parties. Grant, trying to get very close to the trench, had been seen by the Germans, who wounded him before he could blow his whistle. Cpl. W. J. Pearce (Tallangatta, Vic.), who was with him, took the whistle, but he too, before he could use it, was wounded. The Germans had a very active commander here, after this attempt he had wire put out and dug a T-head trench.

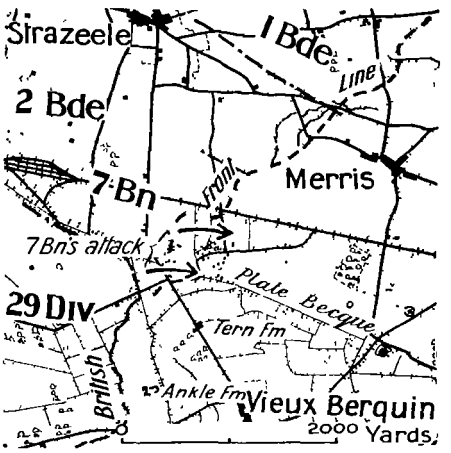
[44] Lt. P. I. Edgoose, 7th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Box Hill, Vic., b. Costerfield, Vic., 7 Aug. 1886.

[45] Sgt. J. F. Walters, D.C.M. (No. 4619; 7th Bn.). Chauffeur; of Warrnambool, Vic.; b. Warrnambool, 1894.

[46] Lt. F. J. Smedley, M.C. 7th Bn. Commercial traveller, of Hawthorn, Vic., b. Carlton, Vic., 25 Mar. 1876. Died of wounds, 20 Aug. 1918.

platoon, seeing the trouble, at once went forward with a number of his men, reinforced Walters' party so as to outflank the post, and then rushed it.[47] The Victorians in all lost 20 men, and they captured 47 prisoners of the II/205th R.I.R. (44th Res. Divn.)—mostly young and small men—together with nine machine-guns and a trench-mortar. They found that the German posts had been carefully roofed over and covered with sods, for the sake of concealment.

On the following night the 29th Division undertook a raid against Tern Farm and its tree-lined enclosure, 400 yards south of the Plate Becque on which the 1st Australian Division's flank rested. The 5th Battalion was asked to engage the German posts on the northern flank. Corpl. Chambers[48] accordingly took out three men from the right flank post to find and raid a German post on the track near the channel (or ditch) of the Plate Becque. After advancing on either side of the road, but well away from it, for several hundred yards, and passing a barbed-wire fence, the Victorians ran into a large party of the enemy. There was some bombing and Chambers withdrew his men, himself, after the practice of the A.I.F., retiring last to cover them. He was not seen again. The raiders of the 29th Division also were foiled by running into a large party with which they exchanged fire. Almost immediately afterwards a German bombardment descended on the front of the 29th Division and on that of the 2nd Australian Brigade, and, following it, parties of Germans counter-attacked the farms taken by the 29th on June 3rd. Immedi-



[47] Six Germans were killed there and 15 captured. It was Cpl. Walters who, with a private named Robins (St. Kilda, Vic.), bombed and captured the machine-gun under cover of fire by Pte. G. Roberts (Tatura, Vic., killed in action, 9 Aug. 1918) from the flank.

[48] Cpl. E. M. Chambers (No. 373; 5th Bn.). Bookbinder, of Ascot Vale, Vic.; b. Ascot Vale, 17 July 1892. Killed in action, 14 June 1918.

ately to the north a counter-attack was also launched against the posts established on June 13th by the 7th Battalion and now held by the 5th. At one point two outposts, in one of which the Lewis gun had choked through becoming red hot,[49] fell back and two prisoners were taken by the Germans. The enemy then got through to a picket of Capt. Hastie's company, to be driven off leaving seven men and a machine-gun in the Australians' hands.[50] On the front of the 29th Division the Germans retook Lug and Ankle Farms, and also Fantasy Farm,[51] but abandoned the latter the same day.

The attack on the 29th Divn. was made by storm parties of the 208th R.I.R., the regiment which had lost these positions on June 3. It had since been relieved by the 206th, but the attacking troops were brought up from rest at Sailly-sur-la-Lys and Douhieu. Their enterprise was named "Panthersprung" and 17 British prisoners were taken.

On the Australian front it was the 205th R.I R. that attacked. Some of its captured men said that, if the attack failed (as it did), it would be repeated by a battalion, since the ground was required by the Germans as the jumping-off position for an attack on Hazebrouck to be undertaken in a few days' time.

The Australian brigade commanders, called by General Walker to divisional headquarters, agreed that signs of an impending German offensive were accumulating, and it was decided to assume battle-stations on the night of the 15th. On the 15th Lieut.-General de Lisle of XV Corps visited the headquarters of his divisions to ensure that they were ready, and the order issued that it was most important to get more prisoners.

These came with unexpected suddenness. At 5.30 on the afternoon of the 15th Lieut. Maddox of the southern company of the 5th took out five men to search for Corpl. Chambers, who had been missed on the previous morning. Each member of the party took a revolver and bomb,[52] and as they were going well into the enemy's territory each had stripped himself of anything by which his unit could be identified. They went along the track north of the Plate Becque and found the Ger-

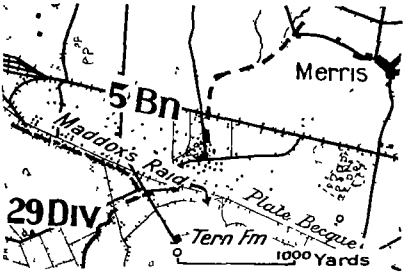
[49] It fired 13 successive magazines

[50] The total capture is said to have been 9 prisoners (3 badly wounded) and 2 machine-guns.

[51] Called by the Germans "Stachelhof" It had originally been occupied by the 8th Bn., A I.F. on April 13.

[52] One man also carried a rifle and bayonet.

man post, where Chambers was supposed to have been captured, to be empty. They then crossed the stream by a plank bridge and came on a fence newly strung with barbed-wire. Beyond it lay a crop of peas. At the fence Maddox left three of his men, and with the other two (Sergt. Lucas[53] and Pte. Merrin[54]) had crept forward through the peas for sixty yards, when a shot was fired at them. They at once made a rush in the direction from which it came, and found themselves faced by three sentries stationed in posts, which, like those recently taken by the 7th, had been carefully roofed over and so well concealed that they could hardly be recognised even at that distance. As Maddox charged he beckoned to his "supports"—the three Victorians in rear, who indeed were already running up.[55] The sentries at once surrendered, but the six Victorians found themselves in a nest of about eight posts, each holding two men. Had the Germans been alert the attackers could easily have been overwhelmed, but by threat of bomb and revolver they quietly emptied six of the posts, only one German, a sergeant, resisting. When his niche was reached he began calling for help, but was forced from his dugout by the boot of Pte. Merrin and the butt of Maddox's revolver. The party returned with twelve prisoners.[56]



Meanwhile the 29th Division by counter-attack had won back its previous gains except at Lug Farm, which was not

[53] Sgt. A. H. G. Lukes, D.C.M. (served as No. 313, A.H.G. Lucas; 5th Bn.) Warehouseman, of Prahran, Vic., b. St. Austell, Cornwall, Eng., 13 Nov. 1888. Died 29 Jan. 1934.

[54] L.-Cpl. A. M. Merrin, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 280; 5th Bn.). Painter; of South Melbourne, Vic., b. Kilkenny, Ireland, 1893.

[55] They were Cpl. E. W. Jacobe, L.-Cpl. J. D. Jackson, and Pte. Shepherd (Jacobe belonged to West Melbourne, Jackson to Melbourne.)

[56] Six of them were N.C.O's. The Australians were doubtless rather disgusted by the showing of these men, and on the long way back several revolver shots were fired near their heels, resulting in a wild race for the Australian lines—an incident which was considered amusing but certainly did not represent treatment that captured Australians would have appreciated at German hands.

retaken until the night of the 19th. The expected German attack did not come—indeed the Australian infantry, as usual, could not be persuaded of its imminence, since they could see no evidence of it. The minor attacks on the 29th Division's front, however, contributed to an important decision. For some time past it had been planned that the right of the Second Army together with the left of the First should carry out an extensive minor attack, advancing the line between Vieux Berquin and the neighbourhood of Merville to the Plate Becque, which here made a semi-circle southwards, in front of the British lines, and so offered a convenient objective. The date had been fixed, June 20th; the 29th Division was to make the assault in the Second Army's sector and the 5th Division in the First Army's. The enterprise was nicknamed "Borderland," and would be carried out under command of the XI Corps (First Army). But the 29th Division had been in the line with only a fortnight's rest since the difficult and costly fighting of the Lys offensive. Its infantry had for the past week been harassed by an inconvenient project for a cloud-gas attack, for which 4,000 cylinders had been installed in the support line, and the front line had to be nightly vacated waiting for a favourable wind.[57] On top of these factors the Spanish influenza, then raging,[58] and the fighting at the farms had so reduced the troops that, on the eve of the attack, it was decided to postpone it, and let the task be undertaken by a fresher division,[59] the 31st, by which the 29th was now relieved and to which it handed over the plans.

The 1st Australian Division continued—as it did for three months—its peaceful penetration and minor attacks. South of the railway at dawn on the 16th Lieut. Davis[60] of the 5th Battalion with three men, when trying to find a German trench newly dug there, ran into some of the enemy. In a *mêlée* three Germans were shot but Davis and two men were wounded. As

[57] The gas was finally discharged by daylight on June 17, quite uselessly (for the Germans could of course see its approach in ample time) but to every one's relief.

[58] This was not the severe form of pneumonic influenza, which supervened at the end of the summer, but a feverish disturbance, acute for a few days and then quickly passing.

[59] Since April 10 the 29th had lost in action 5,000 officers and men. It was now given a month's rest and received 6,500 reinforcements

[60] Lt. H. S Davis, 5th Bn. Farmer; of Yarram, Vic.; b Sandy Bay, Tas., 1893 Killed in action, 16 June 1918

Davis could not get back, one of his men, Pte. Bursill,[61] stayed with him, but the neighbouring Germans, knowing his position, kept the ground under fire and, though many efforts were made to reach and bring the two back, all of them failed. Long afterwards it was realised that both were killed. On the 18th the 3rd Brigade having now taken over the sector, a party of the 9th Battalion seized and occupied a German post near this point, the garrison running away as the Queenslanders approached. Shortly after midnight on the following night (June 19th-20th) the ground desired on both sides of the railway was easily captured by a company of the 9th advancing under cover of a barrage. On the left the 11th Battalion also thrust forward two posts. During the advance south of the railway the Germans in the troublesome position there managed to stop for a time one platoon of the 9th, but another, crossing the railway from the ground gained north of it, came upon the enemy's position from flank and rear and captured it.

Concerning this small operation the historian of the 9th Bav. I.R., which lay north of the railway, says that the attacking force, estimated at two companies, came against the inner flanks of that regiment and of the 205th R.I.R. (44th Res. Div.), and wrongly claims that it was beaten off. (It is true, however, that afterwards two small parties of the 9th Bn. tried unsuccessfully to surround the next post to the south.) Apparently it was not until the following night that headquarters of the 9th Bav. I.R. was aware of the advance along the railway. The regiment lost 2 officers and about 40 men.

A few hours later, at 8.45, on the top of Merris ridge, where the 1st Brigade since taking over there had found the posts of the 4th Bavarian Division alert and difficult to approach[62] and in the old "communication trench" trouble had been constant, an attack was made by part of Capt. Higinbotham's[63] company of the 3rd Battalion as follows:

---

[61] Pte L. G. Bursill (No. 540a; 5th Bn.). Labourer, of Maryborough, Vic.; b Maryborough, 7 Apr. 1894. Killed in action, 16 June 1918.

[62] On the night of June 17, Lt C. L. Smith of the 3rd Bn. with three men, working down through the crops in a dip leading to the distant Meteren Becque north of Merris, did succeed in rushing a post, whose garrison (5th Bav R I R.) ran. At 3 a.m. a German machine-gun opened from the flank, and a party of Germans from the post tried to retake the position but was driven off. Lt A. D Arnold (Glenorie, N.S.W.) and two men waylaid some Germans moving between their posts. Three appeared to be hit, but none was captured. Early on June 20, when the 9th Bn advanced south of Merris, the 2nd Bn. also pushed forward two posts a mile north of the village, 9 men were hit in the German artillery barrage as the parties moved out.

[63] Capt L. H. R. Higinbotham, 3rd Bn. Grazier; of Armidale, N.S.W.; b. Glebe Point, N.S.W., 27 Dec. 1889. Died of wounds, 21 June 1918.

While four Stokes mortars burst their shells on and beyond the ground to be attacked, Lt. McDonald[64] led his platoon against the "communication trench" from the north, and Lt. Taylor[65] a platoon from the south. The New South Welshmen had to get through wire and the German posts north and south of the trench opened with machine-guns. Men were hit in each party, Taylor being mortally wounded as he reached the trench, but the parties entered it as well as driving the Germans from two posts north of it, the enemy mostly running after firing a few shots. A barricade was at once built across the trench. The Bavarians almost immediately counter-attacked, but the barricade was held by four Australian bombers and the Germans made no headway.

Then, apparently because his men would not advance, a German leader in a cloth cap, who had been trying to put more vigour into the assault, climbed out upon the parapet at the side of the trench and advanced waving them on. As apparently his men still hesitated, he picked up a rifle and, with the Australians in the trench firing at him, coolly shot down one after another, at a few yards' range, three of the four New South Welshmen who were bowling bombs over the block. He then fell shot through the neck, and the spirit of his men failed. The barricade was held. At 3.30 in the afternoon, and again at 4.30 and 10.40 p.m., the Bavarians attacked, the last mentioned attempt being made by a company after a bombardment of the area. This time, when leading up reinforcements, Capt. Higinbotham was mortally hit, but the position was still retained. The Bavarians made a final, fifth, effort at sunset on the 22nd after forty-five minutes' bombardment of the place. Twice they came on, but each time were beaten off by the fire of Lewis guns and rifles.

The attack of June 20th cost the 3rd Battalion 38 casualties, and in the holding of the trench first and last the battalion is said to have lost 100 men.

The German regiment concerned here was the 5th Bav. I.R., but no account is given in its history even of the bravery of its leader at the barricade. Probably he was an N.C.O. and his magnificent effort may have been largely unperceived by his own side

Meanwhile on the night of June 20th Coy. Sgt.-Maj. Kinchington and two men bombed the Germans out of a post on the ridge north of the "communication trench," but could not stay there owing to the fire of a machine-gun on the flank. Next night a party of the 11th under Lieut. Inman,[66] covered by a barrage, raided a farm at the bend of the Strazeele-Merris road west of Merris. A machine-gun had been firing there,

[64] Lt. C. J. McDonald, M.C.; 3rd Bn. Blacksmith's improver, of Bowral, N.S.W.; b. Bowral, 27 May 1895. Died of wounds, 19 Sep 1918

[65] Lt. F. W. Taylor, 3rd Bn. Bank accountant; of Turramurra, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 14 May 1894. Died of wounds, 22 June 1918

[66] Lt. E. S. Inman, M.C.; 11th Bn. Grocer; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Emerald, Vic., 12 Dec 1893.

but L.-Corpl. Cross,[67] searching the house, found neither men nor gun. Inman with two men[68] then explored a sunken road farther on; it too was empty, but from there Inman saw the gun firing sixty yards farther away still. Determined to capture it, he went on but met three Germans of the 9th Bavarian I.R.—one he killed and the others he brought back;[69] the machine-gun lay under the bombardment of the Australian Stokes mortars, and so was unapproachable. The party set fire to the farm and was back with its prisoners within seventeen minutes of the start.[70]

On the night of the 22nd, 480 gas projectors were fired by the engineers north of Merris; and on that of the 23rd, under cover of a barrage, Maj. Gilder's and Capt. Collingwood's[71] companies of the 2nd Battalion, between Merris and the Becque, together with two companies of South Africans[72] of the 9th Division on the other side of the stream, advanced the outpost-line 200-300 yards on a front of slightly over a mile. Some German posts in the centre of the advance held out until two of the platoons which were following the others as "moppers-up" seized them. The chief difficulty was met by some platoons of the 3rd Battalion advancing on the right flank. One of these (Lieut. Loveday's) came at an early stage under artillery fire and had every man except its sergeant hit. Lieut. Smith[73] rushed up his platoon to take its place, but he also had every man hit and was himself killed by a shell.[74] Their objective was eventually held by another platoon. The 2nd Battalion took 11 prisoners[75] and the South Africans 29. On the same night the 3rd Battalion south of the Strazeele road easily beat off an attempt twice made by the enemy to raid.

[67] L.-Cpl. W. J. Cross (No. 5084; 11th Bn.). Labourer; of Augusta, W. Aust., b. Karridale, W. Aust., 7 Apr. 1889. Killed in action, 22 June 1918.

[68] Sgt. W. O. Reed and L.-Cpl. D. J. Emery. (Reed, who belonged to Coolgardie, W. Aust., died on 11 Sept. 1938. Emery belonged to Perth.)

[69] He had wounded one of these.

[70] So far it had no casualties, but the Germans now shelled the place heavily, killed 3, wounded 3 including Inman, and temporarily buried 3

[71] Maj J. J. Collingwood, M C, M M.; 2nd Bn. Mine manager; of Inverell, N.S W., b. Camberwell, London, 13 Apr. 1882.

[72] Now reduced to a battalion, though the brigade preserved its name

[73] Lt C. L. Smith, M C, 3rd Bn. Builder's labourer; of Newtown, N S.W., b. St. Peters, N.S.W., 24 July 1893. Killed in action, 24 June 1918.

[74] The 3rd Bn. lost 3 officers and 32 men, the 2nd 2 officers and about 30, the South Africans 2 and 26.

[75] Mostly of the 5th B I R. (4th Bav Div), but including 2 of the III/268th R.I R. (81st Res. Div)

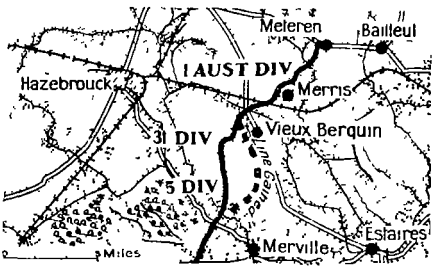
From the history of the 5th Bav. I.R., which faced the 2nd Bn.'s attack, it appears that of the outposts in the forward zone of its right company (9th) only two men escaped. The left company (12th) immediately counter-attacked, and the battalion commander ordered an effort to be made from the main line of resistance of the right company, but the fire of "the numerous machine-guns brought up by the enemy" shattered the attempt. A substitute-officer with three sections of the 10th company then came up; the company had been on its way to relieve the 9th, when the bombardment heralding the attack fell suddenly and fairly upon it, killing its commander and eight men. The losses of the 9th were so heavy that its commander merely kept this reinforcement in the main line to secure that position.

This attack, says the history of the divisional cavalry, was "extremely costly" to the troops on whom it fell. The 5th B.I.R. had 143 casualties. The position of the front line afterwards was uncertain, and therefore the posts on June 27 put out newspapers and cloths which were photographed from the air.[76]

The raid on the 3rd Bn. was made by the 9th B.I.R., whose history says that it failed through strong fire of rifle-grenades and machine-guns.

"Borderland"

On June 28th—a warm summer day, cloudy and working up to a storm in the afternoon—the two British divisions on the right[77] carried out their "Borderland" attack, the most important undertaken by British—as distinct from dominion—troops during these months.[78] Practically the whole objective was reached, the 31st Division taking 254 prisoners and the 5th 165.[79] The 1st Australian Division was not supposed to have any part in this operation, but two days earlier it was asked to simulate an attack on Merris by laying down at the starting hour, 6 a.m., a barrage, partly of smoke,



[76] At this stage the Sixth German Army boundary was moved northwards, the two divisions in contact with the Australians—the 4th Bavarian and 44th Reserve—were transferred from III Bavarian Corps (Fourth Army) to XIX Corps (Sixth Army).

[77] The 31st was temporarily transferred to XI Corps, First Army.

[78] On June 14 the 3rd Brit. Div. also had attacked on the old Lys battlefield, between the River Lawe and La Pannerie, advancing 450 yards on a front of 3,500 and capturing 200 prisoners and 20 machine-guns.

[79] Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary says that one German trench division—the 32nd—completely failed. The higher command then sent it to Lorraine.

along most of the divisional front and blowing horns and firing flare signals.[80] "There will be no set infantry action," said the order of the 3rd Brigade.

But the battalion then holding the line south-west of Merris, the 10th (South Australia), was commanded by Lieut.-Col. Wilder-Neligan, the same who as orderly-room sergeant had taken hold (with Maj. Salisbury) of the leaderless 9th Battalion at the Landing. Neligan, an adventurous young Englishman, born of well-to-do parents, favoured in peaceful life by every circumstance except his restless, reckless nature, had now, like many others, found his natural vocation in war. Transferred to command the 10th, he had within a few months infused into that battalion a special eagerness noted by all close observers. Now, to sit quietly by while a favouring barrage played on the Germans in front, was a rôle that he, though at the time suffering the onslaught of influenza, could hardly have tolerated. His brigadier, Gordon Bennett, was also a young front-line leader, who had taken grip of the troops around him at the Landing and in the Battle of Krithia. It was arranged that the front-line companies of the 10th should have fighting patrols ready for, at least, raiding.

> Our artillery (wrote Neligan) at no stage is (to lay its barrage) less than 200 yards in front of our present front line. This is an opportunity for a few daring men. The detail and opportunity is left to the company commanders concerned

But Neligan's company commanders well understood that if ground could be gained they were to gain it.

The 10th had two companies in line, the southern under Maj. Rumball, the northern under Lieut. Jenkins.[81] From the centre of Rumball's front, when the barrage came down, Sergt. Leathley[82] and four men with a Lewis gun crept through the crop to within twenty yards of a German post which, for the first five minutes, was being bombarded by rifle-grenadiers and Stokes mortars. When this bombardment lifted, three of the party, covered by a Lewis gun, rushed

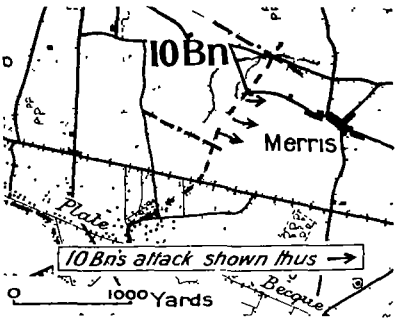
---

[80] The barrage was to last till 6.20 and be repeated from 6.50 to 7.5.

[81] Capt. W. R. Jenkins, 10th Bn. Bank accountant; of Norwood, S. Aust; b. Semaphore, S. Aust., 18 Jan 1892.

[82] Sgt. T. C. Leathley, M.M. (No. 2187; 10th Bn.). Commercial traveller and decorator, of Henley Beach, S. Aust., b. Garstang, Lancs, Eng., 6 Apr. 1879.

the post, capturing one German, and shooting two who were running away. The post was at the corner of a hedge, and the party going on took several more prisoners. As soon as news of this reached Rumball he ordered another platoon under Lieut. Bennett[83] to move forward and clear the hedge, which it did, taking 20 prisoners. Meanwhile farther south, on his own initiative, Lieut. Scudds[84] of the same company with one man, prowling forward to the edge of an adjoining field, had made five prisoners.



The German artillery fire had cut the telephone wires, but at 7 o'clock Rumball's runners brought Neligan news of these events and word that Rumball intended to advance his posts. The wires having now been repaired, Neligan directed that Jenkins's company should advance in conformity. A message shortly came back that it had tried to go forward but machine-gun fire was too heavy. Neligan then took the responsibility of sending it a definite order to advance. He put Rumball in charge of both forward companies, and directed Capt. McCann of the support company to send up two platoons to help him. At the same time he brought up the reserve company, Capt. Hurcombe's,[85] to the support position. The advance of the left company was carried out about 8 a.m. behind a smoke screen and barrage laid down by Stokes mortars and rifle-grenadiers, and not a man was hit. The troops of Rumball's left post—a platoon under Lieut. McInerney[86]—who advanced about the same time, also reached without casualty the hedge

[83] Lt. W. S. Bennett, D.S.O., M.C.; 10th Bn. Life assurance official; of Kew, Vic., b. Balwyn, Vic., 30 Apr. 1879.

[84] Lt. H. W. Scudds, M.C.; 10th Bn. Motor mechanic; of Adelaide, b. Stirling East, S. Aust., 12 Aug. 1895.

[85] Maj. R. K. Hurcombe, M.C.; 10th Bn. Storeman; of Mile End, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 19 Aug. 1889.

[86] Lt. J. M. McInerney, 10th Bn. Secretary and dispenser, Mt. Gambier (S. Aust.) Public Hospital; b. Bendigo, Vic., 2 June 1888. Killed in action, 28 June 1918.

beyond which they were to dig in, but when digging began they were suddenly fired on by a machine-gun at close quarters. McInerney was killed, but survivors of the party took refuge in a ditch, where some of them decided to make a rush back to the Australian lines. In doing so a couple were captured by Germans who had got to the hedge behind them, but Corpl. Russell[87] held on. Another platoon digging near the hedge also was fired on by a machine-gun quietly brought up near by. A corporal, Phillip Davey,[88] crept out and, throwing some bombs into the hedge, put half the gun's crew out of action Having used all his bombs, he went back to the old outpost-line for more, and then, creeping out again, killed the rest of the crew and captured the gun. Meanwhile at about noon Maj. Rumball, learning of the withdrawal of most of McInerney's men, led up the remnant together with a reserve platoon and re-established the post.

By this time, from numerous reports, Neligan realised that the new outpost-line was being dug close in front of a number of German posts. He decided to take these and, at a conference with the company commanders, arranged to do so at 6 o'clock under cover of a smoke barrage largely provided by the Stokes mortars and his own rifle-grenadiers firing smoke bombs. Through the artillery officer at his headquarters he arranged for the artillery to help The barrage proved perfect. The front-line companies advanced in line of sections behind it; the Germans ran, and the Lewis gunners pushed ahead to fire at the retreating figures. The trench-mortars kept neighbouring enemy machine-gunners from shooting, and a smoke screen of ground flares and smoke grenades protected the troops from sniping as they dug in. The operation having been safely launched, Neligan handed over the conduct of the fight to Maj. Shaw and "went sick." After dark, food and supplies were brought up actually to the outposts by the transport drivers and their mules.

The 10th Battalion had captured 500 yards of the enemy's

[87] Cpl S H Russell (No 313; 10th Bn) Miner, of Port Lincoln, S Aust ; b. Port Lincoln, 1889.

[88] Cpl P. Davey, V C , M M. (No. 1327; 10th Bn.) Horse driver, of Exeter, S. Aust., b. Goodwood, S. Aust , 19 Oct, 1896.

front line and 35 prisoners with 6 machine-guns and 2 trench-mortars at a cost of about 50 casualties. On the following night in the small hours, McCann's and Hurcombe's companies having then taken over the new line, the Germans struck back. At one point, where a party of them were seen by a runner to be advancing between the posts, McCann with his messengers and signallers and reserve platoon advanced across the gap, and their opponents fled, throwing away rifles,[89] pistols, and ammunition, and leaving some dead of the 9th B.I.R. and a machine-gun. On the northern flank of the 10th a party of the enemy, approaching from a house on the Merris-Strazeele road, captured a trench forming the left of one of Hurcombe's outposts, but soon afterwards Hurcombe, coming on some of the men who had fallen back, attacked with them[90] and part of his reserve platoon. At their approach the Germans left the post and ran.

The commander of the 9th Bav. I.R., whose posts had been taken, appears to have been under the impression that his troops had beaten off a first attack at 6 a.m., but that a second thrust, about 8.30, had penetrated his two centre companies. The regiment lost 87 men, and could not (says its history) drive out the enemy.

There is indeed much evidence that by this time the 4th Bav. Divn. was losing its capacity for resistance, and that its staff was realising the fact. Like its predecessor, instead of quiet it had found in this sector extreme tension. "The whole terrain in and in front of the line was covered," says the historian of the 5th B.I.R., "with high crops which made it impossible to get any view from the posts and permitted an enterprising enemy to creep up to within a very short distance of the posts—and the British, New Zealanders (*sic*), who lay opposite the regiment here *were* enterprising. Regard for justice demands recognition of the fact that the enemy here was an unusually daring and enterprising soldiery which often pressed our front line heavily and 'grabbed' many a post from us. . . .[91] The weeks that the regiment spent in this sector were no light ones, and the regiment, which had performed so brilliantly in the attack on the Kemmel, learnt again here in

[89] Twelve rifles were picked up here and others in front of the post.

[90] Sgt. J. Mooney (Unley, S. Aust.; died 20 Nov. 1919) and two men, sent by Lt. G. S. Lightbody (Norwood, S. Aust.) also bombed the Germans.

[91] The history of the division's cavalry (*3rd Bav. Chevaulegers Regt.*, by Col. Max Fels) also says: "The enemy here opposed to the division was—a sense of justice compels the admission—an exceptionally daring, tough, and enterprising soldiery." The history of the divisional artillery says "The period 13-30 June is characterised by this feature, that the enemy was exceptionally active in infantry warfare, and almost daily patrol enterprises or attacks occurred, most of which brought to the enemy some gain of ground." The Bavarian field artillery was almost continually under the fire of its opponents' guns and had to withdraw its battery positions eastwards.

its own person the lesson that nothing exhausts the troops so much as having to defend a tactically unfavourably sited and imperfectly constructed position."

The same account says that air, gas, and artillery attacks were constant, and that the young German reinforcements showed the effect on their nerves, and often lost their heads in gas bombardments. They had always to be posted between two veterans, and even these may not always have been reliable —in fact, some prisoners contended that the recruits were better. The commander of the 9th B.I.R. on July 25th told his regiment that, while touring the line that morning, he

> came across complete sections fast asleep, in spite of its being dawn and misty. These sections had removed their equipment and had not the faintest idea of the country, dispositions, their orders, or the troops on their flanks.[92]

About the same time (according to prisoners) the divisional commander, Prince Franz of Bavaria, inspecting the I Battalion of that regiment, at rest in Fleurbaix,

> talked to the men very seriously about the extraordinary state of things in the front line, and said the constant reports he received from regimental commanders of "English" raids and the nightly losses of prisoners were becoming a disgrace to the division.[93]

At dusk on July 4th the 9th Bavarian I.R. tried to regain the ground lost by it on June 28th. At 9 a heavy bombardment descended on the whole front of the 1st Australian Division, and parties of Germans were presently seen advancing, but the defending fire of all arms, including rifle-grenades and Stokes mortars, was so prompt and intense that only at two points did the enemy reach the wire.

Papers afterwards taken from the dead showed that the 9th B.I.R. had attacked. The history of that regiment says that the assault (Wurzburg) was made by "brave volunteers" forming four storming parties.

---

[92] The quotation is from a captured order.

[93] Quoted from the Second British Army's intelligence summary, of July 2. The summary says that Prince Franz told the regiment that it should strengthen its defences, make more use of its rifles, and fire as soon as it saw a patrol advancing. According to prisoners, however, after the prince had gone, the men commented that it was very well to speak of strengthening their defences, but the constant fire of their opponents, who had observation over their positions, prevented this. The commander of the 9th Bav. I.R., in his order of July 25 quoted above, said that no advanced post must contain less than two, or preferably three, men. A third of the forward troops should be in the outpost-line, two-thirds in the main line of resistance. In each post all troops must keep watch by night, and at least one man by day.

The causes of failure are said to have been "too short artillery preparation, strong enemy artillery and machine-gun fire, and not least also the toughness of the enemy."

Still the front-line troops of the 1st Australian Division continued their depredations—a raid, two small formal advances, and a series of extraordinarily daring patrols.[94] On

[94] The following is a summary of the chief enterprises during these days:

June 29. A patrol went 300 yards into German territory north of Merris, but could not capture the German patrol that it was seeking. (Prince Franz had been urging that his division must itself undertake active patrolling, and one or two German patrols were seen about this time, sometimes in No-Man's Land, but on one occasion at least behind the German outpost-line.)

At 4 30 this afternoon Sgt. W. H. Sheppard (Ararat, Vic.) 8th Bn., crawled through the crop and located a German listening post half a mile north of Merris. He surprised the two men in it, but they would not return with him and were therefore shot. Another German post being alarmed, Sheppard had to return quickly. (He was killed on 9 August 1918.)

June 30. In the small hours the 8th Bn.'s posts north of Merris were advanced 200 yards, the enemy retiring before the Victorians, and only a little machine-gun fire being met with.

July 2. At 11.30 p.m. a party (3 officers and 40 others) of the 8th Bn under Capt. G. T Lovett (New Town, Hobart, Tas) covered by artillery and trench-mortar barrage, raided in the same area A number of Germans were shot, and 7 prisoners and 2 machine-guns of the 9th B.I R. taken. As some difficulty occurred in bringing in the prisoners, they too were shot. (Lovett was killed on 1 August 1918.)

On the same night farther north near Le Waton, Lt. K. J. D. McKenzie (Broadford, Vic.) with 11 of the 7th Bn. twice visited a German post but found it empty.

July 3. In the afternoon Lt. W. L. Tucker (Huntly, Vic.) of the 7th with one man crept through the crop to a post near the one just mentioned. At 30 yards' distance he saw that it was manned by 12 Germans These brought a machine-gun into action and wounded him, but his men pushed out a Lewis gun to cover him Though he lay out till dark, the Germans made no attempt to capture him, and he was then able to get back. (Tucker died of his wounds on July 25.)

July 4. At 8.55 p m. the Bavarians made their "Würzburg" attack, above described.

July 7. At 5.40 p.m. Lt. E. J. Archer (Annandale, N.S.W.), 6th Bn., with two men scouting north of Merris found a German post. They returned to get six other men and then stalked it When they were within thirty yards, a machine-gun opened from it and bombs were thrown. In a brisk fight 9 Germans were killed or wounded, but 3 survivors fought on until another had been shot. The Victorians brought back the two prisoners and destroyed the machine-gun.

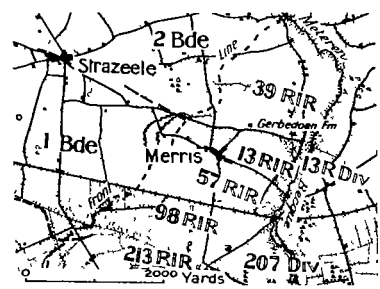
At 7.30 Lt. H. J. Southey (Kew, Vic) and two men supported by a Lewis gun crept out along a ditch and entered the same trench to see if the Germans had re-manned it. Four Germans were found there, one was killed and three captured.

July 8. At 7 a m Capt. L. G. Campbell (Black Rock, Vic.) leading a patrol of four of the 6th Bn., accompanied by an American officer who was in the trenches for experience (Lt Mitchell), crept towards a German post close to Taylor's "communication trench." They intended to surround the post, but before doing this were seen and at once decided to rush the Germans. The garrison fled but six were shot and the patrol brought back a light German machine-gun. The returning party was fired on from some neighbouring trees, and later the Germans could be seen bombing the empty post before they reoccupied it Another patrol entered the "communication trench" but found the enemy here in strength and alert.

At 9 a m on the southern slope of the ridge, where the 1st Bde had by then relieved the 3rd, Lt W J Court (North Sydney) and four of the 4th Bn. crept out to capture a post which had been discovered on the previous night near a farm building 500 yards in front of the line The post, when reached, at first seemed to be empty, but on looking closer they found a sergeant and private of the 9th Bav. I R whom they captured These prisoners, in conversation with a pre-

the night of July 3rd the sound of much traffic and the unusual sight of two large German patrols south of the railway aroused the impression, which proved correct, that the 44th Reserve Division was being relieved; and on the night of the 9th a small advance at the junction of the 1st and 2nd Brigades on the northern outskirts of Merris (for these excursions were now approaching the village itself) met unexpected opposition, and of the 19 prisoners taken it was found that 8 belonged to the 13th Reserve Division. Some Bavarians captured the night before had—as is explained in the footnote—disclosed that the 4th Bavarian Division was about to be relieved. It was now discovered that the 13th Reserve was coming back to the sector that it had quitted a month before with such outspoken pleasure.

The 13th Res. Divn. had enjoyed a most satisfying rest for a month at Waerschote and Lembeke, but when that month ended, says the historian of the 39th R.I.R., "the direction of march was again towards Merris, to the familiar but unloved sector. . . . The situation had altered little, or rather had become still more troublesome—especially the activity of the infantry was still livelier." "The British," says the history of the 13th R.I.R., "daily increasing in strength[95] and apparently quite unharmed through our U-boats, had continually attacked our line and had forced it back several hundred yards up to the outskirts of Merris village." The division considered the holding of Merris to be the vital safeguard for itself and the flanking divisions. All forward posts were now to be at least four men strong, and machine-guns of the M.G.



tended German who was placed in the same room after their capture, let fall the information that their division was to be relieved on the following night.

July 9. At 11.30 p.m. the two flank companies of the 4th Bn. (1st Bde.) and 6th Bn. (2nd Bde.) attacked, covered by a barrage of artillery and light and medium trench-mortars. The barrage was good, but the Germans, who were found to be holding a number of small posts for some distance on both sides of the road to Gerbedoen Farm, fought stubbornly at certain points with machine-guns and bombs and had to be attacked from the rear before they were subdued. A party pursued them beyond the cross-roads north of Merris, but returned to dig in on the line laid down. Several German posts were taken one after the other, Lt. W. V. Diamond (Eagle Junction, Q'land) and Sgt. J. B. Maguire (Chiswick, N.S.W.) of the 4th Bn., attacking each from its flank. The advance of 200-300 yards incidentally secured the remainder of the old "communication trench," and resulted in the discovery of the return of the 13th Res. Div. to the line.

[95] Actually the 1st Aust. Div.'s infantry fell from 12,400 in April to 11,400 in June.

Sharpshooter Detachment were placed in the main line of resistance to cover gaps between them "and especially to defend the important village of Merris." The commander of the group of armies, Crown Prince Rupprecht, noted in his diary after the small Australian attack on the night of the 9th: "In this position we ought not to allow ourselves on any account to be driven back farther in view of our preparations for attack."

In the 1st Australian Division word was at once sent out that this German division was back again. Prisoners of the 57th R.I.R. said that the morale was not bad, but the division had been reinforced by many new drafts, and it remained to be seen how these would act. The Australian divisional intelligence summary pointed out that now was the time for exploiting the change of the garrison opposite. On the afternoon of July 10th two N.C.O's of the 6th Battalion, Sergt. Lockhart[96] and Corpl. Farrell,[97] creeping out through the crop entered an enemy trench just south of the Strazeele-Merris road. Moving along it they presently sighted a German post, which they proceeded to stalk. They had almost reached it when a German N.C.O. saw them and leapt towards his machine-gun. Before he could work it the two Victorians rushed the post and captured the whole garrison, eight men, whom they escorted back. This audacious exploit was completed by the bringing in later of two machine-guns from the position, a heavy one by the 6th Battalion and a light one by the 4th.[98]

July 11

But it was next day that peaceful penetration found its climax. During July 10th the 1st Battalion, astride of the railway, had been informed by its brigadier that it would shortly have to launch a raid. Its commander, Lieut.-Col. Stacy, also had told his companies[99] that he was dissatisfied with the number of patrols sent out nightly, and that "great opportunities" also existed by day when the enemy was "far from alert."

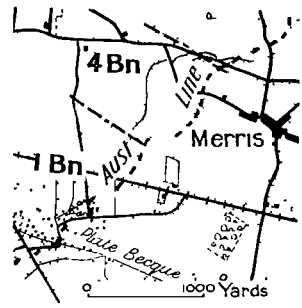
[96] Sgt. J. A. Lockhart (No. 4664; 6th Bn.). Clerk, of Golden Square, Vic.; b. Bendigo, Vic., 17 Mar. 1892. Killed in action, 23 Aug. 1918.

[97] Cpl. J. H. Farrell, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 2612, 6th Bn.). Butcher; of Garvoc, Vic., b. Panmure, Vic., 28 Apr. 1889. Died 28 Sep. 1938.

[98] That night—another evidence of temporary German activity—a German patrol was seen west of Merris, and another enemy party brought up a machine-gun into No-Man's Land and opened with it. Four Australian Lewis guns were turned upon it, and a patrol going out found it abandoned and brought it in

[99] Almost in the words used by Br.-Gen. Lesslie six weeks before.

Ahead of the left company of the 1st (Capt. Somerset), which had one post north of the railway and two south of it, there rose amid the crops, 250-300 yards away, two houses in hedged enclosures on either side of the railway. Somerset ordered that daylight patrols should be undertaken; and for his two northern posts these cottages and their hedges were the obvious centre of interest. The northern post and the cottage and field that faced it in the middle distance were both slightly north of the railway; but the centre post and the small enclosure south of the railway both bordered on the railway whose embankment, nine feet high, was fenced by a hedge and ditch that offered a good chance of passage eastwards or westwards for careful men. The centre post lay behind a slight rise which hid the enclosure from it, but the place could be watched from a shell-hole under the railway hedge, forward of the rise. Lieut. Gaskell,[100] whose platoon took over the post that night (July 10th-11th), was told by the outgoing commander that he thought the house south of the railway was occupied. At 3 a.m. Gaskell and Corpl. London[1] went out, as the dawn patrol, to the shell-hole and from there kept watch with field-glasses. They fired several rifle-grenades around the house, but neither they nor Sergt. Scott,[2] who with a companion relieved them at 5 o'clock, saw any movement near the house. Gaskell, however, was told by Lieut. Morley,[3] commander of the platoon in the northern post, that Germans had run from the house when the grenades burst around it.



North of the railway Morley, who had a patrol[4] out during

[100] Lt. G E. Gaskell, M C , 1st Bn. Clerk; of Fitzroy, Vic ; b Perth, W. Aust., 11 May 1895. (He had been in the Army Service Corps since 1914 and had only been commissioned and transferred to the infantry in June 1918.)

[1] Cpl. A London, D C M., M M. (No. 3380; 1st Bn.). Butcher, of Richmond, N.S.W., b. The Slopes, N.S W., 24 Dec. 1895

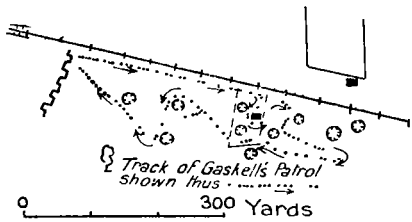
[2] Sgt. D. H. Scott, D.C.M., M.S.M. (No. 5086a; 1st Bn). Shop assistant; of Cobar, N.S.W.; b. Bourke, N S W., 26 Sep. 1895.

[3] Lt. C. R. Morley, 1st Bn. Industrial chemist, of Lindfield, N S W.; b. Darlinghurst, N.S W , 7 Sep 1889

[4] Sgt. N. H Langford and two others.

the night vainly searching the railway and crop for some enemy post that could be raided, sent his early morning patrol —a sergeant, J. H. Coppin,[5] and one man—along a ditch that led conveniently straight from his post to the northern enclosure. The cottage was at the south-eastern corner of this enclosure, and the two scouts observed puffs of smoke rising from above a wall there—apparently somebody was enjoying a pipe or cigar behind it. Both platoon commanders reported their observations to Somerset, and, as it seemed that both areas contained Germans, he ordered Morley and Gaskell to go out again with patrols and search the hedges and shell-holes there.

The day was cloudy, with rain threatening. Each platoon commander took very few men. Gaskell, who got away first, chose Sergt. Scott and Corpl. London, who had already been patrolling, and one other man. Each carried a rifle, several bandoliers of ammunition, and four bombs, and Gaskell and Scott also had revolvers.



They went along the ditch,[6] well hidden from the north by the embankment and by the high crop, which grew right up to the ditch, from the south. On reaching the corner of the enclosure, they saw that it was covered only with grass, in the middle of which, on the eastern side, stood the house. Gaskell and the corporal crept along the railway ditch to a point north of the house, and then lay covering the enclosure with their rifles, while the sergeant and private crept southwards around the outside of the hedge, making a full tour of it until they came to the back of the house. They then entered the building. It had been lately lived in—some playing cards had been left there but nothing by which the occupants could be identified.

Gaskell, while waiting, could see some very large shell-holes in the crop a little east of the enclosure. These might

[5] Sgt. J. H. Coppin, M M. (No 1408; 1st Bn). Government employee; of Sydney; b Geraldine, Canterbury, N Z, 1893. Died of wounds, 23 Aug 1918

[6] The ditch was on the southern side of the railway hedge.

contain Germans. He accordingly sent Sergt. Scott to clear them; Scott had to crawl across an open space behind the house, but he reached them and found that they had never been occupied.

If, therefore, Germans were in the area, they must be between the enclosure and the Australian lines. Accordingly the whole party—in the "diamond formation"[7] used by most small patrols in this fighting—crawled across the grass to the south-western corner of the field, and lay here behind the hedge, Gaskell searching through his field-glasses for any sign of the enemy to the west and Scott similarly searching to the south. Rather more than 100 yards to the west Gaskell saw the rim of a shell-crater on which new earth seemed to have been thrown, and two other craters some distance beyond. The party accordingly crawled to within thirty yards of the nearest crater—by cautiously raising his head now and then above the crop Gaskell could steer straight for it. He was now certain that the crater was occupied—the proof being that the crop had been used as a latrine. He was equally sure of the second, another hundred yards on, since green crop had been strewn on its rim to camouflage it. The corporal and private were accordingly left as a covering party, chiefly to guard the rear, while Gaskell and Scott crawled to the rim of the first crater so quietly that both put their heads over it before they were seen.

It was a machine-gun post, and in it with a revolver strapped to his waist was a German, evidently supposed to be on guard, but actually squatting down, talking to another man who lay on the bottom of the shell-hole. Gaskell and Scott pointed their revolvers at the Germans who both scrambled to their feet, holding their hands up and calling "Mercy." The Australians with threats made them keep quiet and Gaskell then asked where the other posts lay. They pointed to the third shell-hole, of which he was till then doubtful, 100 yards to the south-west. The prisoners, who were very willing to obey as soon as they understood what Gaskell wanted, were told to pick up their machine-gun and accompany the two Aus-

[7] The four members were stationed at the points of the diamond, the commander usually associated with the leading scout the other two men moving in support.

tralians back to the covering party—London and the private. Here they were left while Gaskell and Scott undertook the hazardous task of stalking the other two craters. They first, together, approached the southern one. Four Germans were in it with a machine-gun, and they had probably heard some noise, for they were alert and, when rushed, fired several shots; but the two Australians also used their revolvers, and the Germans gave in.

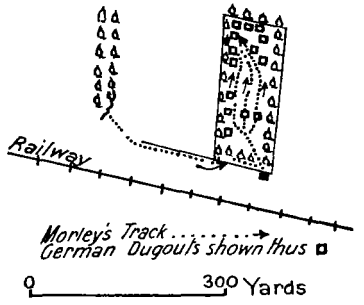
Gaskell could now see men moving in the third crater, evidently wakened by the shots and preparing to defend their post. Accordingly, leaving Scott with the new prisoners, he went on at once, alone. He came on the post so quickly that its garrison was not ready, and though they were eight, including a company sergeant-major, with a machine-gun, and they fired at him, he wounded several (including the leader, hit through the wrist) and they then surrendered. On each occasion the Australians by throwing a bomb could have shattered the whole garrison, but a single bomb explosion would have awakened every German within hearing, whereas a few revolver shots would not. These Germans were hurriedly disarmed, and then the whole number, carrying their three machine-guns, made straight over the top to Gaskell's post in the Australian line. Germans in some houses 250 yards to the south fired at them without hitting any. Apparently others nearer, in the crop, slept on.

When the fourteen prisoners reached him, Capt. Somerset ordered that all shell-holes in the neighbourhood of the three raided machine-gun posts should be cleared. Accordingly the patrol[8] searched through the crop all the shell-holes near the three just raided. The sentries had been captured and there was now less need for care. The shell-holes were generally approached from the front, and many were found to contain the sleeping quarters of one or two men—usually a hole let into the forward side of the crater and covered over with a waterproof sheet. Some of these shelters were difficult to detect even when the searcher was standing over the crater. Eighteen more Germans were pulled from them, the only opposition

[8] Two of its members had been sent back with the prisoners. Two men were now taken out instead of them

coming in the form of shots fired from houses 200 yards to the south, by which one Australian was hit.

Gaskell's patrol had within three and a half hours cleared the German front for 250 yards south of the railway, taking 32 prisoners and 3 machine-guns. On the other side of the line Morley had an even more spectacular success. He, also, took out with him the earlier patrol and one other man,[9] and, creeping along the ditch and hedge to the south-western corner of the large enclosure, left one man there to keep watch while the others went on and surrounded and searched the house. This too was found empty. The field which stretched north of them, however, they knew to be occupied. Morley had now called in the man that kept watch and all four crept cautiously across the grass of the field towards its western hedge. Near the hedge they saw a dugout, and one of the party reaching its opening had the occupants covered with his revolver before they saw him or could give the alarm. Two more dugouts were quietly seized in the same way. The prisoners, being an embarrassment, were quickly sent off in charge of the N.C.O.

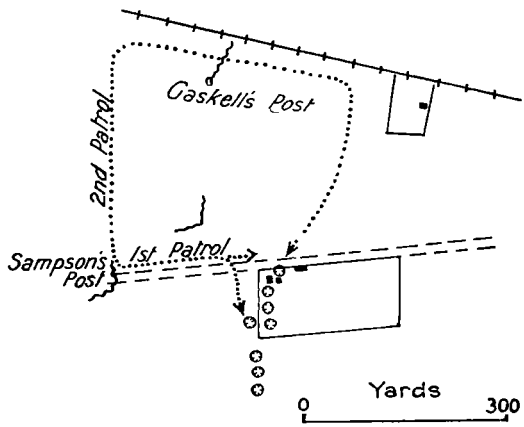


Morley and the two others then worked northwards up the field, the officer in the centre and his companions a dozen yards on either side. This enabled them to capture three more dugouts simultaneously. So far the patrol was noiseless, but at two more dugouts at the northern end of the field some of the occupants tried to defend themselves and several shots had to be fired. This aroused men in other shelters and Morley had to act instantly. The patrol threw bombs into the north-western corner of the field, where most of the enemy were, and closed in, cutting off the Germans' retreat. Unnerved by the

[9] The patrol included a youngster, Pte. A. E. Rostron, whose grandfather, Pte. Duncan Allan (born in Glasgow in 1851) also served in the Australian infantry in France. (Both belonged to Lawson, N.S.W. Rostron was killed in action on 18 Sep. 1918, Allan died on 21 Dec 1930.)

bombs the enemy surrendered. Twenty-five had now been captured in the field. Subsequently Corpl. Wood[10] and two men captured eleven more—in all thirty-six prisoners and four light machine-guns were taken from the field and safely brought in.

Two small patrols of Somerset's company[11] had thus captured the whole garrison of the German front line opposing them—68 men and 7 machine-guns. One Australian had been wounded. It was decided to advance the company's line; Corpl. London and one man went out to guard for the time being the ground cleared by Gaskell, and three Lewis guns were sent there in the afternoon. But before the outposts could be safely advanced, the German posts on either flank of the captured ones would have to be taken. This was ordered. Meanwhile word had gone out that the 1st Battalion was overrunning the German front, and other battalions were eager, and were spurred to do the same. The position now most necessary to seize was the farm 200 yards south of the posts raided by Gaskell, and from which his party had been sniped. This farm lay opposite the left platoon post of the southern company of the 1st Battalion, Capt. MacGregor's.[12] It had been intended to raid this farm—Lieut. Sampson, the platoon commander, had been out there during the night and had seen some of the enemy



[10] Sgt. G. F. Wood, M.M. (No. 5256, 1st Bn). Clerk; of Rockdale, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 1894.

[11] In addition to those mentioned by name, Cpl. R. Cooney (Kensington, Vic.) and Pte. S. Ayoub (Coonamble, N.S.W.) were prominent in these actions.

[12] Capt. R. I. C. MacGregor, M.C.; 1st Bn. Farmer; of Boree Creek, N.S.W., b. Mussoorie, India, 22 July 1892.

there. At 10 a.m., before any order arrived to seize the place, Sampson took a patrol of four men to examine it. They crept up a ditch to within forty yards and then, spreading out at five yards' intervals, approached the farm hedge. As no shots were fired at them Sampson sent Corpl. Leighton[13] and two men to see if a long hedge south of the farm was wired, while he and Corpl. Villiers[14] examined the precincts. This was being done when Sampson and Villiers heard shots in Leighton's direction. They hurried towards the sound to find Leighton's party with seven prisoners returning to the Australian line under fire from a German post 100 yards farther south. Sampson and Villiers covered their comrades' retirement.

By this time news of the peaceful penetration near the railway was coming in; and with the decision to advance the outpost-line came the necessity for clearing all other German posts near the farm raided by Sampson's party. He was ordered to do this by making a long détour with his platoon through the farm captured by Gaskell, and descending from there upon the rear of the Germans near the southern farm. This he did, posting two Lewis guns to cover him if necessary, and advancing very quietly in two lines.[15] He thus arrived within thirty yards of two German posts, south of the farm he had visited in the morning, before they saw him. The Germans then opened with rifles and machine-guns, but Sampson's platoon at once charged, killing several Germans, and capturing 9 as well as 2 light machine-guns. In trying to advance farther his southern flank was heavily fired on, 4 men being hit. He therefore placed a post south-east of the farm and from this patrols of three or four men afterwards worked southwards behind the next German posts and captured three of them.

Fire from farther south was still worrying this flank. A patrol of four men under Lieut. Mitchell,[16] sent out before sunset to advance the next post on the right, found itself under

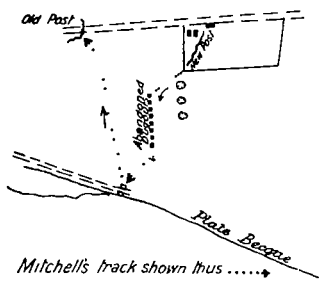
[13] Cpl. A. D. Leighton, D.C.M. (No. 6590; 1st Bn.) School teacher, of Rylstone, N.S.W., b. Yelma, N.S.W., 27 Sep. 1895. Died of wounds, 11 July 1918.

[14] Cpl. A. E. Villiers (No. 1469, 1st Bn.). Commercial traveller; of Double Bay, N.S.W., b. Hawthorn, Vic., 1 Nov. 1895.

[15] The second line, under Sgt. G. Abraham (Sydney, died 11 Oct. 1937), was to watch the flanks, especially the left, and to reinforce if necessary.

[16] Lt. S. O. Mitchell, 1st Bn. Clerk; of Kogarah, N.S.W., b. Carlton, N.S.W., 23 Aug. 1897.

this fire and was ordered by Capt. MacGregor to clear these Germans if possible. After a long and cautious approach from Sampson's new position, it reached without causing alarm two German posts on either side of the track along the Plate Becque.[17] In order to surprise the garrison it had to attack both posts at once. The sentry in the nearer one, sitting in his trench, was shot at the same time as a bomb was exploded in the farther post. The Germans there fought, and a hostile party also approached cautiously through the crop farther down the Becque, and could not be stopped by shots fired by the patrol, which was also bombing the posts. Fortunately the Germans in the twin posts, 14 in all, surrendered in time to be hurried away by the five Australians before the approaching enemy attempted to attack.[18] Nine Germans were believed to have been killed in the posts and three wounded. The German supports were presently seen jumping into the empty posts.



The two southern platoon commanders of MacGregor's company found that the enemy posts ahead of them near the Plate Becque were most difficult to outflank, although Sergt. Baylie[19] tried three times to effect this. Lieut. Laracy[20] and two men of the southernmost Australian platoon eventually brought in two Germans from south of the Becque after shooting several. MacGregor's company had in all one man killed and three wounded.[21]

---

[17] Here the Germans had cut the crop for 40-80 yards in front of the posts.

[18] Nor did this party fire as the prisoners were being taken away.

[19] Sgt. W. H. Baylie (No. 7A; 1st Bn). Farm labourer; of Ulmarra, N.S.W., b. London, Eng., 18 May 1894. Died 27 Sep 1919

[20] Lt. F. P. Laracy, M.C.; 1st Bn Chemist's assistant; of Toowoomba, Q'land, b. Toowoomba, 1891. Lost in s.s. *Leinster*, which was torpedoed in the Irish Sea, 10 Oct. 1918.

[21] Among those who were prominent in this company's operations were Sgt. G. S. McInnes, L.-Cpl. C. J. Gilchrist, and Pte W. F. Eagles (with Lt. Sampson), Sgt. L. Wilkins (with Lt. Mitchell), L.-Cpl. A. J. Bruce (with Lt Laracy, on July 11 and 12), and Sgt. R. H. Hart and Pte. H. H. Kempe (McInnes, who died on 11 Sep. 1936, belonged to Jones Island, Manning River, N.S.W., Gilchrist to Orange, N.S.W.; Eagles, killed 12 July 1918, to Albury, N.S.W.; Wilkins to Blenheim, N.Z., and Redfern, N.S.W., Bruce to Wanganella, N.S.W.; Hart, killed 23 Aug. 1918, to Collie, W. Aust.; and Kempe to Cessnock, N.S.W.)

North of the 1st Battalion the outposts of the 4th Battalion had watched with elation the prisoners constantly trickling back from the 1st Battalion's excursions. On the previous night it had been arranged that a patrol of the 4th should go out at 9 this morning to examine a hedge in front of the battalion's right. It brought in 3 prisoners. A second patrol then searched the area between this hedge and the next post, and another (2 N.C.O's and 4 men) working from the second post captured 7 Germans and a machine-gun. L.-Corpl. Hedley[22] and two men moved thence to a post 75 yards northward; the eight Germans in it were ready for them, but on Hedley's beginning to pull the pin from a bomb they put up their hands.

About 3.30 p.m. (wrote Sgt. Langford,[23] 1st Bn.) the men were walking about the open and so far not a shot was fired at us. . . . The sun was shining brightly, and not even the sound of a shell.

About that time, however, the Germans in Merris, on the crest to the left, began to be generally aware of what was occurring and in that neighbourhood movement about the crops became difficult. Patrols sent out by the left of the 4th were quickly seen and fired on, but late in the afternoon a small patrol of the left company brought in three more prisoners.[24]

North of Merris the 2nd Brigade also was active. Lieut. Robertson[25] of the 5th Battalion with three men going out at 11 a.m. opposite le Waton surprised two sleeping Germans. But their terrified cries aroused all the neighbouring posts, so that they had to be shot and the patrol got back with difficulty.[26] The Germans on this brigade's front were alert and, despite many efforts, no other prisoners were made.

But the outposts of the 1st Brigade had by their own enterprise captured over 1,000 yards of the 13th Reserve Division's line with 120 prisoners, including 3 officers, and 11 machine-

[22] L.-Cpl R. Hedley, M.M (No. 2613, 4th Bn). Sheep overseer; of Coonamble, N.S.W.; b. Chesters, Roxburghshire, Scotland, 5 Jan. 1889

[23] Sgt. N. H. Langford (No. 3092, 1st Bn.). Photo. engraver, of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Neutral Bay, N.S.W., 9 Sep 1894.

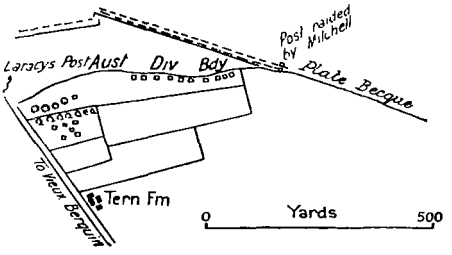
[24] Capt. A. S Allen was mortally wounded by machine-gun fire after the patrolling, in which he was active, ended.

[25] Lt D. Robertson, 5th Bn. Teamster; of Horsham, Vic., b. Glasgow, Scotland, 7 Apr 1888

[26] It brought one of their shoulder straps showing them to belong to the 39th R.I.R.

guns. The supporting artillery had to suspend its fire during the day because (as the war diary of the XV Corps heavy artillery states) "no one knew where they (the Australian infantry) had gone on their marauding expeditions."[27]

Except on the extreme right the posts that had made the raids were advanced and dug in during the night. On the right the process continued next day. In the morning, during a fall of rain, Lieut. Laracy with five men entered a field across the Vieux Berquin road on the 31st Division's front, and, working in the same way as the patrols of the previous day, cleared it of 28 Germans (of a fresh division, the 207th) and 4 machine-guns. It happened that, when this news arrived, the commander of the British battalion holding that sector, the 11th East Yorkshire, was visiting Col. Stacy to discuss an intended attack upon Tern Farm, a quarter of a mile south of the Becque. Stacy suggested that the East Yorks should endeavour to capture Tern Farm at once, while the 1st Battalion pushed forward its right north of it. This was agreed, and in due course the southern platoons of the 1st tried to outflank the German posts on and south of the Plate Becque. They shot a number of Germans and Laracy captured 7 more, but the twin post reoccupied by the German supports after Mitchell's raid and two others south of it gave much difficulty. An N.C.O. and one man were sent to get round the latter, and one of the garrisons was in the act of surrendering to them, when the German officer in the other post called on the men to fight. On this occasion no covering or supporting party was at hand to open fire or run forward at the nick of time, giving the appearance of reinforcements. The Germans fired, killing the private and wounding the



[27] The history of the 36th H.A.G. (Australian Siege Brigade), which was firing over the Australians on June 21, contains a somewhat similar note. The 2nd Australian Siege Battery formed part of the brigade

N.C.O., who managed to get back although the German officer and two men tried to cut him off.

However, the Australian posts on the right were advanced, though not so far as was intended;[28] 35 more prisoners had been captured this day, at higher cost to the battalion than those of the day before—2 Australians being killed and 6 wounded. The 31st Division seized Tern Farm, and during the day captured 58 prisoners.[29]

Of the 155 prisoners, 1 officer and 50 men belonged to the 57th R.I.R. (13th Res. Divn.) lying between Merris and the railway, and 2 officers and 90 men taken south of the railway belonged to the newly arrived 207th Divn.[30] Some prisoners said that the patrols were helped by British contact aeroplanes which fired at the posts and made the garrisons keep low.

The history of the 57th R.I.R. has not been written, but that of its sister regiment, the 39th R.I.R., says: "Seeing that opposite us lay an Australian division with 21 (*sic*) battalions, it was no work of art with constantly fresh forces to operate against the 9 battalions of our division greatly diminished in fighting strength as they were." (Actually, with its 12 battalions, the 1st Aust. Divn. held a considerably longer line than the 13th Res., and had been for three months unrelieved. Its outposts were about the same strength as the German ones, but disposed by platoons and not scattered.)

Of the peaceful penetration in the 207th Divn.'s sector, the history of one of its regiments (209th R.I.R.) says that on the night of July 11 "the enemy tried his luck in the sector of the 98th R.I.R. on the railway south of Merris" and about 2 p.m. next day "he succeeded, without our front line battalion observing it at the time, in forcing his way in fair strength into the north part of Vieux Berquin. . . . and taking prisoners the 5th and 6th companies of the 213th and parts of the 8th." A man of the 98th, captured a week later, said that a battalion commander had been dismissed as the result of these incidents and for saying that his battalion was too tired to return to the line.

Second Meteren

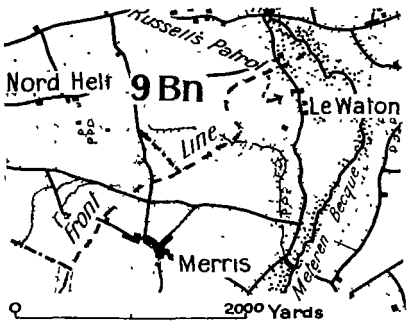
Continuance of such collapse would have meant the end of local resistance, and it is no wonder that the Australian patrols for a few days afterwards found the German posts keenly alert, their machine-guns chattering, some firing indirect and others sweeping No-Man's Land whether patrols were there or

[28] Those south of the Plate Becque were handed over to the 31st Div.

[29] In the Meteren sector also the 9th Div carried out three raids and captured 7 prisoners.

[30] Two officers and 60 men belonged to the 98th R I R, and 30 men to the 213th R I.R.

not.[31] It is true that on the night of July 12th the 6th Battalion under a light barrage advanced some of its posts north of Merris and next day south of the village two men of the 2nd brought in two Germans. That night far out near "Celery Copse" Sergt. Delaney[32] of the 3rd with a dozen men waylaid and suddenly blazed into a company of Germans, causing a number of casualties, but had to withdraw on the approach of another. But elsewhere patrol after patrol found itself resisted when previously the Germans would have been surprised. The enemy was now putting larger garrisons in his advanced posts, and seemed to have brought forward part of his previous supports. It was not until July 16th that patrols of the 3rd Brigade, which had now relieved the 2nd north of Merris, were able to get through the German posts near the Meteren Becque at Le Waton and renew their prowlings behind them. Here a young officer of the 9th, Lt. Russell[33] having previously found a German post empty by day, decided to ambush the garrison coming to man it by night. After dark on July 16th he lay with his patrol for an hour and a half across the track leading to it, but no enemy appeared, and he was just searching the trench before returning, when the Germans came along the track behind him. Russell, who had sent Sergt. Preston[34] and two men to try and



[31] This day Germans were seen moving in front of a post of the 1st Bn. when Chaplain G. Prickett (Stockport, Eng.) happened to arrive Believing that the Germans were hungry and would surrender, the chaplain (with Pte. E. Francis and another) walked out towards them with food, but was quickly driven back by machine-gun fire.

[32] Sgt. W Delaney (No 1317; 3rd Bn). Labourer, of Lithgow, N S.W.; b. Bathurst, N.S.W, 26 July 1893

[33] Lt. S. H. E Russell, M M.; 9th Bn. Farmer, of Alstonville, N.S W.; b. Standish, Gloucestershire, Eng, 9 Mar, 1896. Killed in action, 20 July 1918. (Son of Reuter's war correspondent, H. W—later Sir Herbert—Russell, and grandson of the novelist, Clark Russell. He was one of the many splendid youngsters who emigrated to Australia in the years before the war, and had been working on a farm on the north coast of N. S. Wales)

[34] Sgt. H. Preston (No 2871, 9th Bn). Farmer of Ulmarra, N S W; b. St Albans, N S.W., 6 Apr 1896

locate the Germans, thought these were his scouts returning, and called to Preston. The reply came in German, so the patrol opened with rifles and bombs. The Germans at once called out "Australia," evidently hoping to pass for an Australian patrol. In a mêlée several of them were hit. A patrol searched the area next day and found a dead guide of the 39th R.I.R.[35] Russell explored the whole area again by daylight on the 18th and brought in many papers. The Germans in a neighbouring post watched his patrol with curiosity but did not fire, and the party walked back across the open.[36]

Word had reached the 1st Division that the long envisaged attack on Meteren would be made by the 9th Division on the morning of July 19th.[37] As in the "Borderland" attack the 1st Division was to undertake no important action on its front; indeed, this time its available artillery, trench-mortars, and machine-guns would be helping to cover the 9th Division, and there would not even be a diverting barrage on the Australian front.

At this stage Second Army intelligence staff had information from prisoners that final preparations were being made by Crown Prince Rupprecht's forces to attack the Ypres-Kemmel-Hazebrouck front. A German officer taken near Dickebusch on the 14th[38] was tricked into revealing that for two days his company had been bringing up the trench-mortar ammunition for it. Incidentally it was noted that the Germans had built across Meteren Becque many bridges large enough to take vehicles, and that whenever one was destroyed it was immediately repaired. It so chanced also that on the Second Army's side, in order to keep the 1st Australian Division continuously in the line, one of its two forward brigades had again been drawn back into support on July 14th, an attached brigade (87th) of the 29th Division taking over the southern quarter of the front at the railway, while the 3rd Brigade with two

[35] The patrol brought back one of his shoulder straps; another patrol, unaware of this, brought back the other one.

[36] Later on the same day Lt. T. J. Sheedy (Nambour, Q'land) of the 9th Bn. and three men made an even longer journey through the same area, but found no Germans

[37] This was the third of Second Army's minor offensives. On July 14 British troops had attacked at Ridge Wood in the Dickebusch sector and taken their objective and 258 prisoners.

[38] In the attack mentioned in the previous footnote.

battalions in line extended over the northern three-quarters of it.[39] As the impending German attack was said to have been fixed for July 18th or 20th, the 2nd Brigade, in rest, was put upon two hours' notice to move. Meanwhile the 1st Australian and 31st Divisions were, if possible, to secure some prisoners at the time of the 9th Division's attack on Meteren.

The patrols of Russell and others determined Brig.-Genl. Bennett of the 3rd Brigade and Lieut.-Col. Mullen of the 9th Battalion to try something much more important than this order implied. If the 9th Division's attack went well, the Queenslanders with their left protected might by peaceful penetration get a platoon behind the German posts near the Meteren Becque, and, if this succeeded, the platoon could work south-westwards behind the German front, co-operating as it proceeded with other platoons which would attack in flank and front or "mop-up." For this operation a company in the support line under Lieut. Salisbury[40] was detailed, but the platoons in outpost near the Becque would help the break-through, and, when once the ground had been won, all the outposts would advance and dig in.

The 9th Division attacked at 7.55, and at 8.15, seeing that it was progressing well, Salisbury's platoons advanced, each in the form of patrols. The first, which was to break through, moved through the crops in four patrols, but when 150 yards out was stopped by fire from a post in the hedges to its left, between le Waton and the Becque. The patrols began to work west of this post, through ruined cottages; but meanwhile the two Australian outposts nearest to the Becque had advanced, the left platoon (Lieut. Knowles)[41] working astride the Becque with the South Africans, and the next (Lieut. Hamilton)[42] advancing along hedges and through the wheat until stopped by the same machine-gun post that held the penetrating platoon. A Lewis gunner,

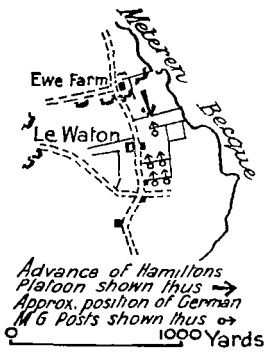
[39] The 3rd Bde now had a front of about 3,300 yards, facing two German regiments and part of a third

[40] Lt. R. B. Salisbury, M C.; 9th Bn. Salesman; of Sandgate, Q'land; b. Lilley, Q'land, 15 Sep 1891.

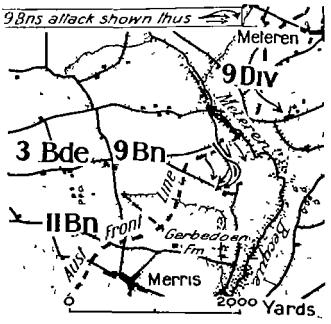
[41] Lt. H. N. Knowles, M.C.; 9th Bn. General merchant, of Brisbane, b. Clayfield, Q'land, 8 Sep. 1892

[42] Lt R. G Hamilton, M C ; 9th Bn. Grazier; of Moura Station, Dawson district, Q'land; b Dalby, Q'land, 8 Apr. 1890 Died 27 May 1927.

L.-Corpl. Young,[43] worked from shell-hole to shell-hole round its eastern flank and, when thirty yards away, charged at it firing his gun from the hip, killed the crew, and captured the gun. Two guns in a farther hedge next stopped the platoon's advance, but Young took these under fire from a flank and the platoon charged and captured guns and crews. This platoon had then reached its objective, but another machine-gun beyond had to be rushed by some men under cover of two Lewis guns and bombers before the outposts could dig in.



This fine advance made the opening for the penetrating platoon. After chasing some of the fleeing enemy until these dropped into their distant support trenches, the platoon mopped up le Waton and Salisbury's second platoon arrived and swung south-westwards, advancing along the Germans' front while the first platoon moved along their rear. Presently a check was caused by a post at a cross-track, but, while the Lewis gunners fired above the crops from the hip, or with guns rested on their comrades' shoulders, the bombers crept closer. Some of the German garrison then gave signals of surrender, others threw bombs, but wildly, and the Queenslanders rushed the post without a casualty. Here Salisbury's third platoon came up and joined in the advance on a large post 200 yards farther along the line. Adopting the same methods the three platoons gradually closed in, and, when the one in rear came near enough to bomb, this post also was rushed and the garrison captured. The outposts of



[43] Cpl. J. E. Bartle, D.C.M., M.M. (served as No. 2924, J. E. Young, 9th Bn.). Axeman, of Tambourine Mountain, Q'land, b. Mackay, Q'land, 13 June 1895.

the right line company were coming forward as the attack moved on, and some of them now joined in the capture of the last German post on the 9th Battalion's front. The 11th Battalion was to try to advance its flank if the 9th succeeded, but, as might be expected, it found the Germans keenly alert and suffered (its diary says) "a fair amount of punishment."[44]

The 9th Division's attack was entirely successful; it captured Meteren and 354 prisoners with 38 machine-guns. But this success was notably extended by the 1st Australian Division, whose improvised advance, without covering artillery barrage, secured nearly a mile of additional line with 97 prisoners and 16 machine-guns. The 9th Battalion lost only 25 in the advance,[45] but in the shelling of the next few days its casualties were increased to 140.[46]

The 9th Divn. captured the garrison of Meteren and so shattered the 81st Res. Divn. that, far from counter-attacking, it had to be relieved that night by the 12th Divn. Opposite the Australians the 13th Res. Divn. lost 5 officers and 141 others including most of the III/39th R.I.R., then holding the front line. In one of the posts near le Waton Substitute-Officer Scheidt, seeing the enemy in "thick masses" advancing through the corn, fell back after a fight in which he was wounded Later, being attacked in rear by Australians whom he had watched penetrating the line and working in rear of other companies, he brought some of his own men out, apparently the only officer to do so. He died of his wounds.[47]

The support battalion on Oultersteene Ridge lost heavily by artillery fire. After dark its patrols tried to reach the old main line but found it strongly held. The new front had to be reinforced by engineers, a company of sharpshooter machine-guns, and two companies of the 13th R.I.R.[48]

Prisoners amply confirmed the reports that an offensive in Flanders was imminent.

---

[44] Lt. M A McGuire (Leederville, W. Aust.) was killed, as was Lt. J. Moss (Fremantle, W. Aust.) when bringing up his platoon to support, a counter-attack having been foreshadowed in an intercepted German wireless message. (Moss and three others were killed by a shell) The 11th had 19 casualties during the day.

[45] When the Australian outposts were advancing, Lt. J. P. Tunn (Red Hill, Q'land) of the right front-line company was seriously wounded through a very brave action. His platoon was passing through a wire-entanglement when one of the men, tripping over it, dropped a Mills bomb out of the cup discharger of his rifle. Tunn dived at it and caught it, but himself tripped on the wire at the same instant and dropped it again. He managed to get to it again and held it on to the ground, where it exploded blowing off his hand and wounding him in the head. No one else in the platoon was hit.

[46] Twenty-one of these were caused by an accident on the night of July 20, when 850 drums of gas were fired by the British Engineers over the heads of the outposts Several of the drums fell close behind posts outside the precautionary area, and, only partly bursting, continued to leak gas for many hours.

[47] German records say that the 81st Res. Div. lost 13 officers and 320 men. These figures apparently do not include men with light wounds, not sent to hospital.

[48] *See History of the 39th R.I.R., pp 177 et seq.*

This advance brought the 1st Division's line almost to Gerbedoen Farm, on the north-eastern outskirts of Merris.

Merris

During the afternoon of the 19th the Germans could be seen manning what seemed to be a main line some distance ahead of the new Australian posts; and at 4.45 p.m. next day parties were observed moving in the hedges of Gerbedoen Farm, and thence working towards the Australian line. The enemy's barrage came down, but, as his infantry could easily be stopped by rifle-grenades and Lewis guns, the Australian company commander concerned would not fire the S.O.S. The enemy continued to trickle forward, but the 1st Division's artillery, which at 5.40 laid its fire on these Germans, was well directed and at 7.15 they withdrew.

The history of the 39th R.I.R. shows that this was not a counter-attack. Lt Schletz of the 3rd company was merely establishing his flank posts in the hedges near Gerbedoen Farm. On the other hand he and the 4th company, which lay next to him, both believed that the Australians were attacking them. The losses of the 39th were fairly heavy this day, including two officers killed. Counter-attacks by the 12th Divn. against Meteren failed.

At 7 p.m. on July 21st the left of the 11th Battalion, covered by a two minutes' burst of fire from artillery and trench-mortars, advanced to the neighbourhood of Gerbedoen Farm and cross-roads,[49] the 9th Battalion at the same time thrusting forward its posts another 150 yards, beyond le Waton.[50] Gerbedoen Farm itself was not captured though it was reported to have been so.[51]

On the night following this thrust the 11th Battalion was relieved by the 10th. It was characteristic of Lieut.-Col.

July 22 and 23

Neligan that, coming in when Merris had been outflanked on the north, he was determined to outflank it immediately on the south also and, if possible, get his patrols completely round it after dark, and so capture the place. Neligan's instructions to his patrols were:

[49] Just before the bombardment the commander of the attacking company, Capt. J. S. D. Walker (Woollahra, N.S.W., and Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.), who had been sent up on the 19th owing to the battalion commander's belief that the attack that day required a most vigorous leader, was killed. Command was taken by Lt L. G. Riches (Mt. Barker, W. Aust.).

[50] The three prisoners taken belonged to the 8/13th R.I.R.

[51] The German fire of all arms was heavy. The work of Lt. W. A. W. Gudgeon (Bunbury, W. Aust.) was particularly praised.

As far as possible "buying into a fight" must be avoided. . . . It is infinitely better to take prisoners silently than to enter into a bomb-fight which must invariably draw attention to your patrols.

The rifle-grenade is the infantryman's only artillery when operating in this manner; *but*, should trouble occur, the company commander always has at his disposal light trench-mortar batteries (*a*) to knock out the "snag," (*b*) to cover his retreat if the "snag" is of such dimensions as to render the game not worth the candle. . . .

The Golden Rule—cautious leading by fearless men; not Daring overriding Caution. . . . Always bear in mind that battalion headquarters must know what you are doing as neither you nor B.H.Q. are running this war on "your own."

Neligan had fellow spirits in Lieut.-Cols. Selmes and Lloyd, at that time commanding the 1st and 12th (Army) Brigades, Australian Field Artillery, which were supporting him.

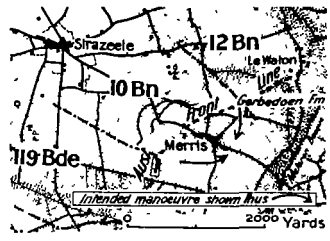
At 8 a.m. on July 22nd patrols went out from the battalion's flanks. On the north Lieut. Sharland and twelve men, moving from the cross-roads 400 yards north of the village and making gradually south-eastwards, penetrated between Gerbedoen Farm and Merris, capturing a machine-gun post and eight Germans. In accordance with plan a second party—Lieut. Graham Smith and twelve men—now pushed out ahead of this. At the same time, working out from the southern flank, Lieut. Lightbody[52] reported that there seemed to be no Germans within a quarter of a mile. He established a post in a field 250 yards out. But as by this time the Germans were aware of Graham Smith's patrol, at which they were sniping from either the church or the monastery of Merris, Neligan decided to postpone further patrolling till dusk. The northern patrol returned, but on the south Lightbody thrust 100 yards farther out, and Lieut. Chittleborough[53] located a small German post 250 yards north-west of him.

At 9.50, an hour after sunset, activity began again. This time on each flank full platoons moved out, the leading one to establish the first post, the second to push out from there, until eventually platoons from north and south would meet on the road leading out of Merris across the valley to Oulter-steene. Neligan arranged that every minute a shell, from 4 5-inch and 6-inch howitzers alternately, should drop into Merris

[52] Lt. G. S. Lightbody, M.C.; 10th Bn. Public servant; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 1896.

[53] Lt. A. P Chittleborough, 10th Bn. Clerk; of Adelaide, b. Walkerville, S. Aust, 15 July 1895.

in order to suppress its garrison and also give German headquarters the notion that their front there was intact. When the platoons joined beyond the village this shelling would cease and Merris would be "mopped-up" by a party coming on its garrison from the rear.



At 11.10 reports were received from the leading patrols that all was going well. But at that hour a very heavy German barrage descended on the 10th Battalion's existing outpost-line. The men there moved forward and escaped harm, but the divisional commander now learned for the first time that his front-line brigade was making an attempt to surround Merris. Brigade headquarters appears to have known something of Neligan's scheme, but nothing had been known by division. It happened that the 1st Australian Division had a comparatively new commander; three weeks before, to the deep regret of his officers and men, Maj.-General Walker—last of the British officers to leave the A.I.F.—had been given a British command,[54] and Brig.-Genl. Glasgow of the 13th Brigade, strongest of all Australian commanders, had come from the south to succeed him. Now, learning at 11.50 that patrols were beyond Merris, and having heard nothing of any arrangements to support or maintain them, Glasgow ordered that they were not to stay out there on any account. Brigade headquarters replied that Merris had probably already been captured. Glasgow then directed that, if the patrols were established east of Merris and communication with them was assured, they should stay there and dig in, but not otherwise.

The German barrage, however, had cut communication with the patrols. Neligan, though he believed they were about to join hands beyond the village, could not give this assurance and he consequently ordered their withdrawal. This was easily carried out by the southern platoons, which had captured a few prisoners, but met practically no resistance. Capt. Hurcombe of the northern company, on the other hand, was faced by

[54] That of the 48th Div. in Italy.

great difficulty. Lieut. Graham Smith's platoon, moving towards the Oultersteene road, had found itself faced by a German machine-gun post from which there fired two heavy machine-guns. Smith had divided his patrol, attacked both flanks, and taken the post. He was still some distance north of the Oultersteene road when he again found Germans, assumed to be a working party, ahead of him. An officer could be heard lining out the enemy party, which presently attacked. It was at this juncture that Neligan's order to withdraw arrived. Hurcombe superintended the operation—the advanced troops fell back fighting hard, and covered by the two captured guns which fired more than 600 rounds.[55] A number of Germans were made prisoners, but in these operations, apparently, all were shot. Eight South Australians were hit, Lieut. Scott[56] being killed.

The officer whom the South Australians could hear organising his men seems to have been Capt. Heinrich, commander of the front-line battalion of the 13th R.I.R., who, when its 8th company was "overturned" near Gerbedoen Farm, led up all the remnants he could gather of this company, and some of Sharpshooter Detachment 19. The regimental history describes their "brilliantly dashing counter-attack which was completely successful. The enemy was thrown back with heavy loss and sought again his old line." The 1st company was brought up but did not have to be used. Farther south the 5th and 6th companies had three officers wounded but were said to have "bloodily repulsed" the attack (evidently that of Neligan's right flank. Actually the total casualties of the 10th Bn. were only nine.)

The policy of the Allied commanders lately had called for larger offensives by their troops than hitherto. On the day after this attempt an attack on Oultersteene ridge by three divisions was considered by XV Corps. The capture of Merris would be a preliminary step. Later it was decided to take Merris immediately, and Neligan was ordered to do it on the night of July 29th, before his battalion left the line. This time the support companies were used, one filing out on each flank, platoon after platoon.[57] They were to be preceded by a barrage creeping through

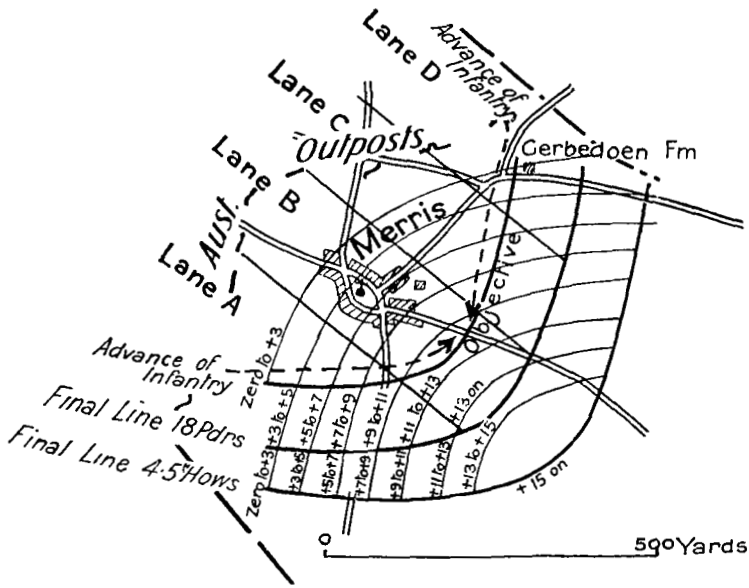
[55] The guns had to be blown up with bombs and abandoned

[56] Lt. C. J. Scott, M.C.; 10th Bn. Draper's assistant; of Gawler, S. Aust.; b. Port Broughton, S. Aust., 4 Oct. 1896. Killed in action, 22 July 1918

[57] Each platoon was to have two scouts ahead and flank guards with Lewis guns. Platoons followed one another at 150 yards' distance, advancing between the lanes of shell-bursts laid down by the guns. Each rifleman carried one No. 23 and one No. 36 grenade, and each rifle-grenadier eight No. 36's. Each section had a bill-hook and a pair of wire-cutters.

Merris and 1,000 yards on either flank of it.[58] This barrage would start at 12.15 a.m., the fire of the eighteen-pounders gradually becoming stationary as it reached a line 200 yards beyond the objective around the village, that of the 4.5-inch howitzers (on the flanks) eventually remaining 200 yards farther ahead, both then forming a stationary barrage around the infantry

July 29-30



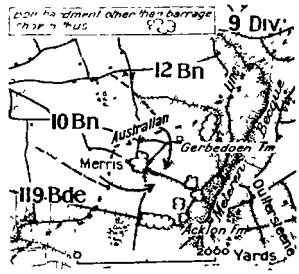
Sketch map showing the lines of the creeping barrage at Merris, July 29th-30th.

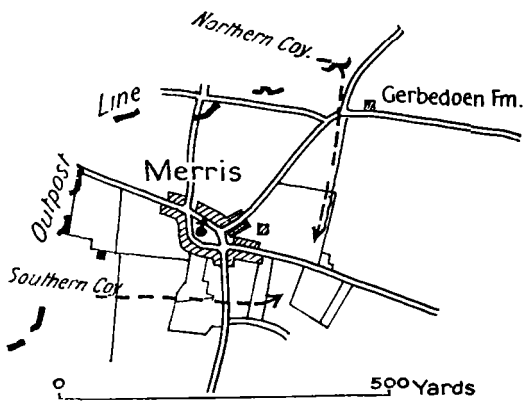
until 4.15 a.m. Trench-mortars and rifle-grenadiers would join in the barrage and also bombard German posts on the flanks.[59] Machine-guns from the flanks would spray the area beyond the barrage. The heavy artillery would

[58] The barrage was laid down in four "lanes" by the following brigades (from right to left). 64th (Army) Bde., R.F.A.; 1st A.F.A. Bde., 12 (Army) Bde., A.F.A., 179th (Army) Bde., R.F.A. A machine-gun north-east of Gerbedoen Farm was specially "smothered" by the fire of two guns of the 179th Bde.

[59] Seven Stokes mortars of the 3rd A.L.T.M. Bty. fired no less than 1,500 shells in this attack. Neligan managed to arrange that Lt. A. W. L. Macneil, a commander famed since Bullecourt for his determination and capacity, should control them.

lay its fire beyond Gerbedoen, on and towards Oultersteene, and on part of the railway. But Neligan's special device was the shelling of Merris itself, behind his two attacking companies, by a battery (the 101st) of 4.5-inch howitzers and by Stokes mortars. These would fire into the village until 1.15, an hour from the start. Then for five minutes two field-guns of the 12th Brigade would drop incendiary shells into the place—a sign that fire on it would cease, whereupon, at 1.20, his headquarters platoon would enter it from the rear with a free hour for mopping-up. At 2.15 the same field-guns would fire incendiary shells at Acklon Farm, near the railway, a signal to the moppers-up to leave the village; at 2.30, a slow bombardment of the village by the 101st (howitzer) battery would be resumed, in the hope of making the Germans conclude that their front was intact.





While the left company, Hurcombe's, was on the way to its starting point, a chance German salvo exploded among the last platoon, killing an N.C.O. and wounding Lieut. Graham Smith and nine others. This platoon was to have moved through all the others, as those ahead successively formed their posts, and to have met the last platoon of the southern company on the Oultersteene road. It was now brought to the lead to form the first post instead. The company, thus reduced to a fighting

strength of 70, filed out into the deep wheat crop north of Gerbedoen Farm, and was lying ready when the barrage started.[60]

It immediately filed southwards along the road towards Merris, over two large felled trees, until it reached a cross-road on the other side of which there ran south-westwards a tall hedge leading for half a mile to the Oultersteene road. Germans at the cross-road fired on the leaders, but a bomb suppressed them; nine surrendered and were sent straight to Hurcombe's headquarters. The first platoon was here dropped behind the long hedge; the other continued to advance behind the hedge. At intervals some German post on the other side of it fired at them, but it was easy for Lewis gunners to scramble through it on the flank of these Germans and keep their heads down, when they would quickly surrender on receiving a few bombs. At thirteen minutes from the start the barrage passed the farthest objective. By twenty-five minutes Lieut. Pennington with his platoon beside the Oultersteene road, having joined with the sergeant leading the foremost platoon from the south, sent up a rifle-grenade flare, the signal of success.[61]

Merris was thus enclosed by eight solid platoon posts, each containing two Lewis guns and at least one captured machine-gun;[62] but many Germans were still in the area. Hurcombe, hurrying forward with his company sergeant-major[63] and two runners, with bombs and wire, was challenged by Germans behind the hedge and one of the runners was wounded. After a bomb-fight Hurcombe obtained a Lewis gunner from the next post and, helped by his fire along the enemy's side of the hedge, attacked and captured 22 Germans and 6 machine-guns. Parties went out as far as the barrage would let them, and 15 more Germans were afterwards taken from the hedge.

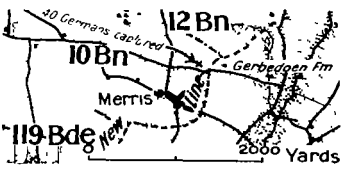
[60] By some mistake one battery opened 3½ minutes before the rest, but the subsequent barrage was good.

[61] These flares, however, burst too low and were difficult to distinguish from German flares. The heavy artillery was to make craters in the roads beyond Merris in which the posts could shelter; none, however, were found close enough to be of use.

[62] Some of the posts on the right were at first harassed by the shooting of some of the supporting field-guns and machine-guns. This fire, however, was quickly lifted. Communication, provided by buried cable, by 5-legged ladder lines, and by two wireless loop sets, was excellent.

[63] Apparently Sgt. A. G. Neave, M.M. (No. 131; 10th Bn.). Railway porter, of Murray Bridge, S. Aust.; b Semaphore, S. Aust., 6 Oct. 1890

It was plain that the enemy was unaware of what had happened. One Australian waiting beside the Oultersteene road made prisoners of nine Germans coming back from the village, and Pennington captured two runners from there, one carrying a message from a company commander saying that the British had attacked but the situation was obscure. About 20 Germans coming from the east strolled at various times into the posts—one an officer, walkingstick in hand, who with his runner strode right on to a Lewis gun before he saw it and threw his hands up. At 2 o'clock, in the morning mist, an Australian messenger, sent back from one of the northern posts for water, walked into about forty Germans close to the old Australian line. He was captured and was asked where the Australian posts lay, but pretended that he did not understand. Later, when the Germans saw they were cut off, he advised their officer to surrender, but was told that the Australians must come and take them; he shouted to the nearest Diggers, who forthwith did so.[64]



Behind all this, at the proper time,[65] the headquarters batmen, orderlies, and cooks under the sergeant-major[66] and a young officer—a newly promoted signaller—had walked into Merris down the road from the north-east to the church and so out to the west of the village. It was shattered and apparently empty—some of the ruins were still blazing from the thermite shells. For some minutes the only living thing they met was a cat, which on seeing them fled wildly. The streets would have been difficult to find if in past days some of the men had not, as they said afterwards, "drunk champagne in the cafés there." Next they came on eight or nine Germans sitting behind a wall, who at once stood up and surrendered with protestations of friendship—one kissed a batman. Farther on the platoon col-

[64] Lt. C. R. Allanson (Elsternwick, Vic.), Neligan's intelligence officer, had also nearly walked into these Germans, who were standing about apparently lost. He reported their position to Hurcombe, who also took steps to have them captured.

[65] Some of the incendiary shells, which were to be the signal, appeared to ricochet. The signal, however, was clear enough.

[66] Apparently No. 116, R.S.M. E. G. Wilson, D.C.M., M.M. Cabinet-maker; of Hindmarsh, S. Aust.; b. 14 Mar. 1893.

lected about twenty. In the ruins of the Asylum were found three dugout shafts; as the Germans did not emerge when summoned, phosphorus bombs were thrown down and the dugout was burnt. Finally the keenly watched-for bursts of thermite shells on Acklon Farm were seen, and the platoon came out—a crowd of prisoners carrying five of their own machine-guns came in escorted by the regimental sergeant-major, smoking his pipe, and a stretcher-bearer.

In the early morning the troops had a hot meal, food containers having been placed in the advanced dumps[67] before the attack started and being carried forward when the position was consolidated. About dawn Germans were seen firing in front of the northern posts. Sergt. Faint[68] went out and shot one through the head, whereupon the rest walked in as prisoners to the nearest Australian post leaving their machine-gun which Faint then brought in. Several German parties which were already in position in front of the new line, or tried to establish themselves there, were surrounded and killed or captured by officers or others of the 10th working in ones and twos with the ordinary tactics of peaceful penetration.[69] One German outpost west of Merris held out at dawn but was captured by an N.C.O. and five men, a German officer and 27 others with 5 machine-guns being captured after a number had been killed.[70] Only one sign of counter-attack appeared—thirty Germans in formation were seen coming from the east towards the new outpost-line. The Lewis gunners swept them away.

---

[67] Supplies, stores, and ammunition had previously been dumped on each flank of the battalion. (Each dump contained 20 coils of French wire, 40 coils of barbed "concertina" wire, 100 short corkscrew pickets 20 boxes of S.A.A., 5 boxes of bundled and packed S.A.A., 50 boxes of No. 6 grenades and 20 of No. 23, 20 tins of water, 2 boxes of Very lights, 50 shovels, 15 picks, and 32 filled Lewis gun magazines.) In a third dump, central to both the others were 200 boxes of grenades, 80 coils of wire, and 200 boxes of S.A.A.

[68] Sgt. W. Faint, M.M. (No. 355; 10th Bn.). Engine cleaner, of Hindmarsh, S. Aust.; b. Hindmarsh, 27 Dec. 1895. Killed in action, 11 Aug. 1918.

[69] Among others Lts. F. E. Pennington, W. D. Sharland, and G. S. Lightbody, Sgts. W. Faint, E. W. Mann, C. R. McIvor, A. G. Neave, and C. A. Williams, L.-Cpls. F. T. Elvidge and D. J. Melville, and Ptes. W. A. Cilento, D. Winter, A. Bache, and H. E. Beaton were conspicuous in this work. (Pennington belonged to Carlton, Vic.; Sharland to Unley Park, S. Aust.; Lightbody to Adelaide, Faint to Hindmarsh, S. Aust.; Mann to Alberton, S. Aust.; McIvor to Broken Hill, N.S.W., Neave to Murray Bridge, S. Aust., Williams, who was killed on 11 Aug. 1918, to Wirrabara, S. Aust.; Elvidge to Adelaide; Melville to Parkside, S. Aust., Cilento to Port Adelaide; Winter to Port Wakefield, S. Aust.; Bache to Port Victoria, S. Aust., Beaton to Lucindale, S. Aust.)

[70] The Stokes mortars also destroyed a house in which a number of Germans were sheltering on the edge of the village.

Four officers and 175 others had been captured[71]—more than there were Australians in the attack; and the first identification, reaching brigade headquarters half an hour from the start, disclosed the surprising fact that the 13th Reserve Division had gone—the prisoners belonged not to a "trench division," but to the 4th Division, one of the large number that had long been kept in reserve for assault.

It was on July 29 that the infantry of the 13th Res. Divn. "was able to leave this unpleasant sector."[72] The historian of one of the incoming regiments[73] says that the outgoing division had been "fought out." "A dreadful line had to be taken over; of trenches actually there was no trace." The XIX Corps on July 26 had ordered changes in the defensive policy somewhat similar to those carried out on the Somme. The intention to attack had now—as will be explained in the next chapter—been abandoned. The main line of resistance had been withdrawn to the former artillery defence line at Oultersteene. The front-line battalions were to hold this, using the wide forward zone in front as a sort of battleground for patrols and pickets, whose duty was to ensure that the troops in the main line should not be surprised. Troops in the forward zone, when fighting, might be supported by machine-guns, trench-mortars, and assault parties from the main line.[74] In the forward zone standing organisation was useless (says the history of the 140th I.R.); orders had to be given according to the situation. "Reserves were set apart everywhere as counter-attack companies."

The 4th Divn., which came from ten weeks of rest, cinemas, and practice in attack, had heard that the sector was active and rather dangerous, but coming in on the night of the 28th found it unexpectedly and most pleasantly quiet. Of the attack which struck it suddenly on the following night, its staff, apparently, could afterwards obtain little information. The blow had fallen on the inner flanks of the southern (14th) and centre (140th) regiments. The history of the former makes the claim—so commonly met with in German regimental histories when dealing with this stage of the war—that part of its troops (who actually were not attacked) by heroic fighting managed to set a limit to the advance (which in truth had reached with ease the entire objective). The 8th company of the 14th I.R. in front of Merris and the 6th in the village were captured, as was most of the II/140th I.R. on the northern outskirts. A counter-attack by three companies of the I/14th I.R. and one of the 140th was ordered. "But meanwhile dawn breaks, and the companies advancing in daylight receive fire so strong that they have to be content to support the foremost elements of the II/14th" (the former garrison of the sector). The commander of the left counter-attacking company, Lt. Zander, was killed. Further British attacks, though only local, against Oultersteene, were expected, and the German reserves were too slight to undertake more counter-attacks. "The

[71] Nine others were found two days later in the cellars of Merris.

[72] *History of 39th R I R, p. 180.*

[73] *History of 140th I R., p. 191*

[74] On the other hand in the event of strong attack the higher command—or, in emergency, the forward battalion commander—might order the forward zone to be abandoned and the barrage to be brought back.

Division," says the history of the 140th I.R., "which had patiently to bear severe censure one account of the loss of Merris, ordered with a heavy heart a withdrawal of our line, which was to be carried out at once."

The 4th German Division lost 14 officers and 270 others,[75] and the 10th Australian Battalion 1 officer and 34 others (of whom only 4 were killed). The 10th had only two companies —about 160 men—in the attack; the other two held the old outpost-line, which now became the support line. Yet their opponents had not been tired troops, but good ones, well rested and thoroughly trained. Nor should it be lightly assumed that these could easily have made a better showing; it was indeed noted that the resistance was tougher than usual. But when pickets in a new position at night, after challenging an enemy in front, suddenly find a machine-gun firing from close by straight along their trench or from behind their flank, they can do little else but lie low; and when immediately afterwards bombs from unseen throwers crash over or among them, the crisis is one from which the best soldiers may not be able to extricate themselves. When once surprise is effected by bold and skilful men with a good sense of the ground, even tough adversaries may be almost impotent. Haig's Inspector-General of Training is said to have described this attack as "the best show ever done by a battalion in France." Brig.-Genl. Knox,[76] accompanying General Glasgow to an observation post at Meteren on the day after the fight, said, "Your fellows have done some jolly good things, but this is the best of them. . . . It is simply a tragedy that you are leaving us, simply tragic."

For, despite the efforts of XV Corps to keep the 1st Australian Division continuously on the Hazebrouck front, the order for its relief had come at last—indeed the danger to Hazebrouck, which had caused Haig to send it there, was now vanishing. Its famous Gallipoli colleague, the

[75] These were probably the figures stated in its report at the time. The history of the 140th I.R. gives the loss of that regiment as 7 and 250. If this is correct the divisional casualties were over 300.

[76] Gen. Sir Harry Knox, K.C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), 15th Div., 1915-17; B.G.G.S., XV Corps, 1917-19; Adjutant-General, War Office, 1935-38. Officer of British Regular Army; of Ireland; b. Newcastle, Co. Down, Ireland, 5 Nov. 1873.

29th Division, relieved it between July 31st and August 2nd.[77]

It is a fact of much significance that the events in the Australian sectors at Amiens and Hazebrouck were most closely paralleled on the front of the New Zealand Division near Hébuterne, where, beginning on July 5th, a campaign of peaceful penetration brought about results closely similar to those achieved by the 2nd Australian Division at Villers-Bretonneux.[78] The reader should of course realise that the efforts here recorded represent only a fraction of the number of attempts made to secure prisoners, which were constant by night and day; but a careful analysis of the available records, German[79] and Australian, shows that, whereas the Australian enterprises during these months almost daily achieved astonishing success and rarely met with repulse, the German efforts were few, hardly ever successful, and frequently—as German accounts make clear—disastrous.[80] The full value of the aggressive defence by the Anzacs during the four months of peaceful penetration was not generally known in the B.E.F. or by the British public; the very general opinion was that they were getting too much credit. But G.H.Q. and the headquarters of the Armies concerned were aware of the facts.[81] In Second

[77] The brigade of the 29th Div. that had been put in to help the 1st Div. had been replaced on July 18 by the 110th Bde., 40th Div, which had been temporarily disbanded but since made up to strength as a "garrison" or "semi-mobile" division with "Garrison Guard" battalions formed from Labour-company men of "B.1" physique. These were men to whom great credit is due for the patriotism with which they faced their tasks, and they enabled part of the 1st Division to get a fortnight's rest. Nevertheless, some of the Australians who served beside them have never been able to agree that the employment of such troops was a wise or useful step. The 29th Div., on the other hand, was now reported by XV Corps to be in a good state of efficiency, and on July 30 it was ordered to relieve the 1st Aust. Div.

[78] In the second half of July the New Zealand Division gained by this means 500-1,500 yards on a front of 4,000 yards. Its most famous raider, Sgt. R C. Travis (whose correct name was Savage), 2nd Otago, was killed on July 25. (Sgt. R. C. Travis, V.C., D.C.M., M.M., 9/523, 2nd Bn., Otago Regt Sheep farmer and horse breaker; of Opotiki and Gisborne, N.Z; b Otara, Opotiki, 6 Apr. 1884). The Canadian divisions were mostly out of the line during much of this period and their activity, when in the line, though most valuable, took rather the shape of formal raiding, which doubtless was more suited to their front.

[79] The records comprised in German regimental histories are fairly complete and detailed.

[80] A list of minor operations not covered in this volume will, if possible, be included with the General Index.

[81] And also the neighbouring divisions. The 9th Div.'s commander generously wrote after Meteren: "During the last two months we have admired the successful activity of your troops in defence . . . We sincerely hope that the 1st Australian Division may be on our flank when active operations are resumed" The history of the 29th Div. says. "The 1st Australian Division on our left were setting us a splendid example"

Army the number of American intelligence officers and men sent to train with the 1st Australian Division was more than four times as great as that sent to others. On the Somme Fourth Army ordered that the divisions of III Corps should send officers and men to the Australian Corps for experience in patrolling, the Australian divisions in return sending patrol leaders and scouts to give instruction to the patrols of III Corps.[82]

But the most striking appreciation came from an unusual source. The commander of the Second Army, Sir Herbert Plumer,[83] asked General Glasgow to bring some of his senior officers to a small memorial service on August 4th, the anniversary of Great Britain's entry into the war. When it was over the old chief asked Glasgow to gather his officers aside, and then, calling them round him, said: "You are leaving my army. I am sorry that I cannot inform you where you are going or what you are going to do. I am sorry to lose you, but I wish you success. You know, gentlemen, that it is not my practice to make eulogistic speeches—there will be plenty of time for that after the war. At the same time I would like to tell you that there is no division, certainly in my army, perhaps in the whole British Army, which has done more to destroy the morale of the enemy than the 1st Australian Division."

[82] Possibly some of the instructors were selected for their fighting prowess with insufficient regard to other qualities advantageous to an instructor. At any rate, with the inevitability of Greek tragedy, Australian pride had a calamitous fall. An officer and 12 other Australians were attached to each brigade of the 58th Div. on the Dernancourt front for three weeks. A prisoner was wanted by one of these brigades, and its commander, instead of keeping the Australian instructors distributed among his own scouts, allowed them on July 22 to be employed as a raiding party. A small British patrol attached acted as covering party. After some slight preparation the patrol tried to cut out a German post on the only part of the Dernancourt front where this was feasible—in front of the extreme Australian flank in the Ancre lowlands. The party lost direction and was challenged by an Australian listening post. The two listeners heard the commands, "Prepare to rush," "Rush!" One of them was then killed by a revolver shot, but the other got to the Australian line. The attacking party came under fire from the listeners, from the main line, and from the Germans. Five of the instructors were killed and their officer and three others wounded—all Australians

There has been noted only one other case in which, during the months of peaceful penetration, an Australian patrol attacked an Australian post. This was on the night of June 7, when a small party of the 34th Bn. returning in front of the left of the 14th, was reported by one of the listening posts. Lt. Ramsay Wood with a Lewis gunner and three others went out towards the post and was twice challenged by the patrol, "Who are you?" Thinking this might be a German ruse, Wood told his men to take cover before answering At that moment the patrol opened with rifles and bombs. Capt. Rule of the 14th writes (*Jacka's Mob, p. 288*): "Our lads are inclined to look down on the 3rd Division, which is a bit newer than the others, but this crowd fought like mad cats and dished our boys." Two of the 14th were wounded before a flare went up and the mistake was discovered. The patrol leader, Pte. A. Christie (Dubbo, N.S.W.), appears to have taken every proper precaution.

[83] On Plumer's visits to the 1st Div. he would ask, "What's this your fellows have been doing?" and would depart without comment, but his shoulders shaking with suppressed chuckles