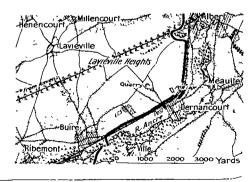
CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF DERNANCOURT

Although the German effort to advance north of the Somme had not been renewed since March 30th on the 3rd Australian Division's front, or since March 28th on that of the 4th Division, the troops and commanders in that part of the line, like those farther north at Arras, daily expected to see it resumed.

The position of the 4th Division opposite Dernancourt was by no means an easy one to safeguard, and from the first the commanders responsible had been of two minds as to the best plan of defence. The reader will remember that in that sector the ground held was a salient comprising the prominent, mushroom-shaped end of the Laviéville down and the railway embankment and cutting that curved round its The forward curve, brushing the outskirts of Dernancourt, was much the most difficult section, and it was recognised that, if the line there was breached, the railway embankment would be impossible to hold, inasmuch as an opponent penetrating anywhere could at once fire from the rear on the garrison of that salient. On the other hand it was considered important to hold the embankment, since, if it was not occupied, the enemy would be free to cross the Ancre and assemble large numbers in the ground hidden

by the embankment, which was so high that from much of the ground held by the 1th Division all that could be seen of Dernancourt was its church tower and roofs.1 But. if the troops the embankment



1 See Vol. XII. plate 462.

were attacked during the daytime, it would be impossible to send any reinforcement down the slope to them without almost annihilating loss, and if an attempt was made to withdraw them they were liable to be cut to pieces as they went up the slope. The obvious solution was—to hold the high ground in rear of the railway as the main position, but to keep outposts along the railway in order to deny it to the enemy unless he attacked in great strength.

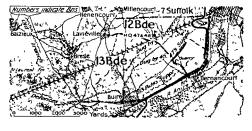
This was undoubtedly the general principle behind the order given by Lieutenant-General Congreve to Major-General MacLagan when the 4th Division first arrived on March 27th, and further elaborated when the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade took over from the 35th Division the right sector, between Dernancourt and Buire. The order then ran:

The main line of resistance of the division will continue to be the forward slopes of the spurs running east and south towards the Ancre, and this line will continue to be covered by an outpost line along the railway line between Buire and Albert. The main line of defence will be designated the firing line and will be defended to the utmost, by counter-attack if necessary.

Great difficulty had, however, been caused by the fact that the position specified by Congreve for the main line was not at the upper edge of the slope, but more than half-way down the hillside—much farther, indeed, than the forward companies of the 12th Brigade had, in their first advance on March 27th, been able to attain. When on that day the two companies of the 47th attempted in daylight, as has already been described, to move down the forward slope to take up the support (i.e., "main-line") position as above specified, there had descended on them such a storm of shells and machine-gun fire that it was with difficulty that they reached the sunken road that circled the hillside, 500 yards short of the intended line. At the road the two companies had found and occupied what was known to them in their exercises in years before as the old French "practice trench"—an overgrown excavation running along the forward edge of the sunken road and in parts coinciding with the road itself. This was a most defective position, far too wide, without traverses, and, on the right, where the Laviéville-Dernancourt road ran through it, the view from it was shut out by a knuckle of the slope.

This support "trench", 1,100-1,400 yards behind the railway, was the defence relied on by the 47th in the event of the forward line giving way. Three hundred yards to its right rear, at the top of the slope, was an unoccupied trench, dug during the night after the brigade's arrival by the support battalion (45th) owing to warnings from VII Corps Head-quarters that the 35th Division might be shaky. On the left the supports of the 48th on both sides of the ravine continued, though with a gap, the support line of the 47th. By a further order from General Congreve, a reserve trench had been dug by the 4th Pioneer Battalion 1,000 yards back from these,

crossing the main height at a line drawn from Buire valley to the ravine near Albert, the object being to safeguard the rest of the height if the mushroom-shaped



end were lost. This "Pioneer Trench", which had been skilfully sited by the engineers at night and dug eight feet in depth and well traversed and fire-stepped, had an excellent field of fire at the top of the slope, and was so defensible that officers of the 47th in the support line wondered why it was not held as the main line of resistance and their difficult position a few hundred yards down the slope given up. A mile behind Pioneer Trench was a fifth line of posts dug in front of Laviéville; and farther back, on the next chain of heights, the old French defence-line. In the less difficult sector held by the 13th Brigade, the 4th Pioneers had dug by night a support line consisting of a chain of posts along the lower part of the hillside, very much in advance of the alignment of the 12th Brigade's support line, being only 300 yards from the railway. These posts, being on an exposed slope, were not occupied, but the company to garrison them was held far behind on the rear slope, in the valley north of Buire.

Although the garrison of the railway opposite Dernancourt was nearly three-quarters of a mile from the infantry supports high on the hill behind, a number of machine-guns were, as usual, placed at intervals on the ground between. Positions on the slope being difficult to find, four guns were stationed in a quarry or large chalk pit fairly in the middle of the slope, beside the Dernancourt-Laviéville road (the inter-brigade boundary), 800 yards above the railway. Four others were posted in a trench 350 yards to the left, both these batteries being 300 yards ahead of the support line of the 47th Battalion. In the 13th Brigade's sector two pairs of machine-guns were posted on the slope 600 yards above the front line, with a third pair towards the left in the front line and several others farther west. In the 12th Brigade the two larger batteries, whose positions on the central slope were held up like the bull's-eyes of targets before the German



A. Trees on Main Road B Sunken Road at Support line C. Old Prisoners' Cage.

Heights east of Laviéville (seen from front of 3rd Aust. Divn. south of the Ancre).

artillery and machine-gunners, had instructions that neither men nor guns were to be shown in daylight except in emergency. The guns therefore were normally only mounted at night, but if the S.O.S. signal was sent up, or if the infantry was driven back from the railway, it was the duty of the crews to accept all risks of exposure.

The railway embankment itself, held by a series of frontline posts, presented a peculiar problem for both the attacking and the defending sides. Its garrison was dug into the top of the rear side of the bank. Their little one-man niches were difficult for the opposing artillery to hit; but the position was also difficult to defend, the only method as yet practicable being for the garrison to lie out on top of the embankment and fire over the nearest rail. To avoid this exposure and to secure command of the forward bank and of the ground immediately beyond it, parties of the 4th Pioneer Battalion had been set nightly both to tunnel and to sap forward under the rails, with the object of opening out small T-head trenches along the further crest of the embankment.

In the 12th Brigade's sector (Dernancourt to outskirts of Albert), the 47th and 48th Battalions had been relieved on the nights of March 29th and 30th by the 45th (N S. Wales) and 46th (Victoria) respectively. The proximity of Dernancourt, with its back hedges almost touching the railway, was a cause of constant anxiety to the commanders and of constant interest for the troops, who looked straight into the village. To their surprise they noted that some old French people were still in it. On the afternoon of March 31st an old woman was seen at two points, carrying a bucket. Presently she appeared at the back door of a house near the eastern end.

She . . . pointed behind her as though the Germans were in her house (reported Captain Adams² of the 45th). We waved to her to come over, but she shook her head. She also appeared to be using very unladylike language, probably using insulting words.

As soon as it was dark Corporal Morgan,³ getting a Lewis gunner to cover him, led a patrol of four men to this house. Part of it had been smashed by a shell, but the rest was intact. The patrol tried the doors, but they were locked and no one inside could be aroused. By March 31st General MacLagan had decided that the concealment and shelter afforded to the Germans by the village created a danger too great to tolerate, and accordingly on the 31st arrangements were made

to destroy the village by shellfire at 5.30 p.m. tomorrow with a hurricane bombardment to last 15 minutes

² Major W G Adams, DSO, MC, 45th Bn, and 2nd/1st Bn AIF, 1939. Railway shed foreman, of Singleton, N.S.W., b. Singleton, 25 Jan, 1897

² Cpl R. Morgan, M M. (No 4517; 45th Bn). Mailman; of Bathurst district N.S.W.; b Turondale, N.S.W., 12 Sept., 1896.

As the heavy artillery was afraid to throw its shells so close to its own infantry, part of the forward garrison was to be withdrawn to the flank before the bombardment, after which patrols would endeavour to enter the village. The shoot was duly carried out by all field-guns and some of the "heavies". After the quarter of an hour's inferno, the place lay unusually quiet, and, as soon as it was dusk, Lieutenant Young and a small party made their way towards the main street. They were immediately fired at through the archway of the first house, and found the Germans in strength along the street.

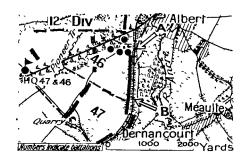
But somewhat strangely, although machine-guns and trench-mortars in the houses of Dernancourt caused annovance, it was in the sub-sector of the northern battalion. between Dernancourt and Albert, that the enemy at this time showed most activity. On the morning of April 1st the northernmost company of the 46th was shelled by light artillery and trench-mortars, and immediately afterwards saw fifty Germans emerging from the hedgerows and trees and advancing towards a signal cabin near its last post on the railway. Behind the advancing troops was a rather larger covering party. Lieutenant Carter had his men already standing to arms, and such was the fire they turned upon the attack that it immediately withered. Five Germans were captured, a number were killed, and the rest, including the covering party, made back to shelter. The affair was over in ten minutes. Seeing a remnant of the enemy hiding in front, Corporal White⁵ of the 46th went out and bombed them, killing several and capturing another prisoner. They belonged to the assault detachment of the 3rd Naval Division, which, they said, had made the attack with the object of seizing part of the embankment and the signal house. The sky that day was full of German aeroplanes, and the diary of an Australian at Baizieux notes that "a full dress attack must come later."

⁴Lieut. T. G. Cartei, M.C.; 46th Bn. Grazier; of Barraba district, N.S.W.; b. Woolbrook, N.S.W., 24 May, 1891.

⁶ Cpl. I J White, D C.M. (No. 1890; 46th Bn.). Of Arneliffe, N.S.W.; b Rozelle, N.S.W, 1896.

Two days later, at the hour of the previous raid, the front of the 46th along the railway was again bombarded, on this

occasion for ten minutes. and much more heavily, all kinds of light and medium artillery and trenchmortars eventually concentrating on On the firing of a green flare, a raiding about force half-acompany strong, extended in open order, emerged south of the



A-Attack of April 1 B-Main Attack April 3

wood near Vivier Mill and advanced towards the right company of the 46th. The moment the Victorians saw the movement, they clambered on to the track, and, most of them standing in order to clear the tall hedge beyond, poured rapid fire into the enemy behind whom a second half-company was now seen to be coming. The Australians standing on the railway furnished an easy target for German machine-guns firing from each flank, and for snipers, but went on shooting heedless of casualties. The Germans struggled on till a few were within bomb-throw, and then turned, and flinging away their arms and equipment, fled, as Captain Milne⁶ of the 46th reported, in "utter rout".

All were for chasing the enemy back to his former position, but I ordered a retirement to our side of the line owing to the casualties suffered by machine-gun fire from the right.

The 47th (Queensland), which had just returned and taken over from the 45th the sector opposite Dernancourt, helped to defeat the southern flank of this attack. Meanwhile German aeroplanes whirred overhead, and, on the northern flank, where the attempt had been made on April 1st, a smaller body advanced. "This crowd," wrote Milne, "were

⁶ Capt. G. E. Milne, M.C.; 46th Bn. Accountant; of Camberwell, Vic., h. Hawthorn, Vic., 14 Dec., 1892. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

evidently a bit late in hopping over, and in consequence were easily mopped up." They had already fled back to some old trenches before the other force turned. This day the S.O.S. signal was fired by the forward companies and repeated by the supports; but the weather was murky, the posts were low, and neither signal was seen by the artillery above the smoke.

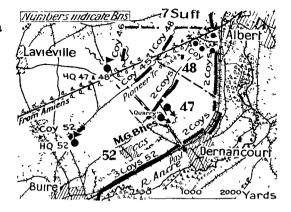
A prisoner of the I/1st Marine I.R., 3rd Naval Division, was taken, and German records show that the enterprise was a raid by that regiment against the railway. The embankment proved to be strongly held, and the raiders were therefore unable to blow up the dugouts there or carry out the other objects set for them.

The 46th suffered, chiefly through the bombardment, 51 casualties, including Lieutenant Jennings⁷ and 18 others killed. It is unlikely that the German casualties exceeded them.

These constant attacks and the great length of their front caused the battalion commanders to be apprehensive of garrisoning their forward line too weakly. Division's sector had been extended by taking over from the V Corps on the left a section of 500 yards including the Albert-Amiens road. Colonel Imlay of the 47th still held his front-now about a mile in length-with two companies, and kept two in the support trenches. But the 46th kept two along its 1,100 yards of railway, and a third bent back in platoon posts around the grassy ravine into the northern side of which the main road dipped near Albert. And when, on the night of April 3rd, the 48th (South and Western Australia) relieved the 46th, Colonel Leane, though always marked for his disinclination to crowd troops on his front, asked his brigadier's approval for keeping three companies there. His battalion, after its first innings, was too weak, he said, to hold its 2,200 yards of front line with less. His fourth company he kept in support in Pioneer Trench, and a company of the 46th allotted to him was held in trenches near his headquarters on the top of the down. Colonel Imlay

⁷ Lieut W. H. Jennings, 46th Bn Civil servant; of Newbridge, Vic; b. Arnold's Bridge, Vic, 18co. Killed in action, 3 April, 1918.

(47th) had similarly company of the 45th for serve, stationed Pioneer Trench. In the 13th Brigade's sector, the 52nd Battalion (Queensland and Tasmania) held the front line - 2,500



yards along the railway, from Buire to Dernancourt railway bridge—with three companies, while its fourth company, as has been mentioned, was in the Buire valley, ready to occupy support posts on the forward slope.

Such was the tenure of the Dernancourt front when, on April 4th, General MacLagan decided that the plan of defence might now safely be changed.

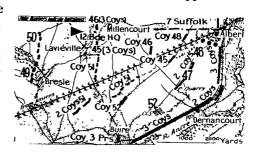
In view of the increased strength of the outpost line along the railway since its occupation by the division (he ordered) . . . the present outpost line on the railway is to be considered the main line of resistance of the division . .

In making this decision, he felt some anxiety lest the British division on his left might be driven in, allowing the Germans to reach the height immediately behind his men. He therefore laid down a proviso that, if the Germans penetrated the line north of his division, the commanders of his forward troops might, if necessary, even without referring to him, decide to withdraw their line and make their main resistance, as under the former plan, farther up the hill.

The pioneers had not yet finished the new trenches and tunnels at the front line, and actually the new order caused no change whatever in the dispositions. But it had one important result—that when, late on the night after it had been issued, warning arrived of a probable attack next morning, the standing order for all troops of the 12th Brigade

was that they must resist to the last in their present positions. Whether any such order reached the forward battalion of the 13th Brigade is doubtful. The arrangements made by Brigadier-General Glasgow were that the forward battalion (52nd) should hold the railway with three companies, the fourth being kept in Buire valley ready to move into the support trenches. When it did so, its place was to be taken automatically by a company of the support battalion (51st); and the forward battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Whitham, was further empowered to call on the whole of the support battalion to reinforce him. Whitham met the peculiar problem of his front by deciding to fight in the forward line until driven out of it, and then to fall back to the support line and fight to the last there. He was well aware that this meant taking an unusual risk, but in the circumstances it seemed to him the least of any of the risks that must be taken. He therefore spent the night of April 4th in going round to every company and making sure that this plan was understood. The battalions in support and

on the flanks were disposed as shown in the marginal sketch. In Buire was quartered a company of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion (3rd Division). The days had been fitfully rainy, the new



trenches were undrained and muddy; but all the troops were in bouncing spirits.

During the whole of April 4th the garrison of this front could hear the artillery-fire of the great oattle farther south, the sight of which was only hidden from them by the peninsula between the Somme and the Ancre. Late in the afternoon the senior commanders learned that a prisoner taken by the 3rd Division had stated that north of the Somme also an attack was impending, and that the troops for it were already in position. Later, at night, through Third Army came a

warning from the French G.Q.G.—apparently based on the report of a reliable spy-that "a converging attack will be made on Amiens tomorrow, April 5th, from the directions of Albert and Rove." General Congreve at once ordered his two divisions (3rd and 4th Australian) to bombard at 7.30 next morning all places in which a German attack upon them would probably assemble. The heavy artillery also would take part. If the German bombardment started before 7.30, the artillery was instead to fire at once upon the German battery positions. The warning of attack reached the brigadiers of the 4th Division (Gellibrand and Glasgow) shortly before midnight, and they ordered the battalions in the line to send special patrols to watch for any movement of the enemy. In the 52nd Battalion Colonel Whitham (with his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Julin) had just been establishing liaison with the commander of the adjoining unit of the 3rd Division, and had seen the joint inter-divisional post furnished by picquets of both battalions on the Buire-Ville road, when the warning reached him. He at once ordered his reserve company (Captain Kennedy)⁸ to occupy the line of support posts on the forward slope. He then went on to his other companies and explained to each one his intention that, if forced from the front line, they should retire to the support line and fight there to the last. Until 2 o'clock he stood talking with Captain Fraser® of his left-flank company by the Dernancourt railway bridge. "There will be no question of going back," said Fraser, a tall, slight, rather delicate looking Scottish-Australian, formerly staff captain to General Brand; "its not in my mind as a possibility." Whitham impressed on him that the order was seriously meant. "It leaves me perfectly calm," was Fraser's last word to him. "I hope they come!"

Whitham-one of the nearest among Australian battalion commanders to Chaucer's "parfit gentil knight"-walked back across the hill, through the sprawling huts and tents of the old Edgehill casualty clearing station, now beginning to

^{*} Major W. Kennedy, M.B.E., M.C., M.S.M.; 52nd Bn. Member of Aust Permanent Forces; of Hobart; b. Greymouth, N.Z., 24 Nov., 1884.

* Capt A. H. Fraser, M.C.; 52nd Bn. Staff Captain, 4th Inf. Bde., 1916/18 Civil servant; of Forestville, S. Aust.; b. Forestville, 17 June, 1894.



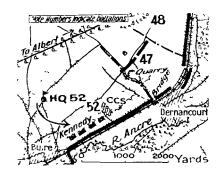
33. Part of the railway, opposite Dervancourt, held by the $52 n\bar{D}$ and $47 \tau H$ Battalions on 51 H April, 1918

The railway bridge (×) marks the left or the 52nd Battahon, the 47th held the line to beyond the left of the picture. In the distance are the Ancre River and Méaulte village. (The trenches shown were dug by the Germans after the battle.) Taken from the an by No. 3 Squadron, 4FC on 30th May, 1918 Lent by Captan K. 4 Goodland 29th Bn 4nst War Memorial Collection No. A1058

34 THE SECTION OF BAILWAY EMBANKMENT AT DERNANCOURT HELD BY THE KIGHT COMPANY OF THE 471H BATTALION, 5TH APRIL, 1918

fust II ar Memonal Official Photo No E3794 Laben on 9th November, 1918, from the sailean bridge

be destroyed by German shell-fire. The weight of responsibility on the commanders of this dangerous front was heavy, and behind one of the tents of the C.C.S. he smoked a soothing cigarette. He had come that way in order to make sure that Kennedy's company had duly reached and occupied the



line of support posts part of which ran through the C.C.S. He found the company not actually in the C.C.S., but occupying the four posts west of it.

The battalion commanders of the 12th Brigade were equally well prepared for attack. Colonel Leane of the 48th, one of the most experienced leaders in the force, had noted the fire of a number of German trench-mortars on his front line, and was convinced that they were registering for a bombardment. All three front-line battalions—52nd, 47th, and 48th—were informed by their patrols that Germans were moving in front in unusual numbers. Opposite the 52nd, between Dernancourt and Buire, the enemy had a number of footbridges across the Ancre, and in the small hours Lieutenant Denne, 10 with a patrol of the 52nd's centre company, found thirty Germans near the footbridge closest to Dernancourt. To keep an eye on this movement, Captain Fraser at the railway bridge sent out Lieutenant Boase, part of whose platoon had an isolated Lewis gun post thrust out beside the road from the railway bridge into the village. Skirting the river together with Corporal Morrison¹¹ and four others, Boase heard much movement on the farther side. At cne footbridge a dog growled and barked. A daylight patrol, sent out at 6.20 by Captain Williams¹² of the centre company of

Lieut. V. E. Denne, M.M; 52nd Bn. Farmer; of North Bruny Island, Tas.;
 North Bruny, 17 Dec., 1885. Died of wounds, 26 May, 1918.
 Cpl. E. C. Morrison, D.C.M. (No. 2486; 52nd Bn.). Labourer; of Blessington, Tas;
 Blessington, 5 Dec., 1889.

¹² Capt. H. R. Williams, 52nd Bn. Civil servant; of Eastwood, S. Aust, b. Victor Harbour, S. Aust., 24 June, 1887.

the 52nd, with the same object, detected 200 Germans lying hidden in a dip west of Dernancourt into which the patrol could look from the west. Word was sent to two Stokes mortar teams of the 13th Light Trench Mortar Battery near the railway bridge, who fired ten rounds in that direction; but a message asking for artillery fire was too late to reach the batteries in time.

On the front of the 12th Brigade a patrol of the 47th found the Germans massing just east of the village, and one from the 48th reported that they were in unusual numbers on the road that ran through the flats 150 yards from the These two reports reached brigade headquarters shortly after 5. General Gellibrand arranged with the artillery to fire at a slow rate on its S.O.S. lines, ordered the infantry to send out Lewis guns to fire on the enemy seen, and directed the 45th Battalion to move up from Laviéville and dig in near Colonel Leane's headquarters on the plateau, the 46th coming from Millencourt to take its place. Lieutenant Taylor¹³ of the 47th, going out with a Lewis gun, fired into the Germans seen near Dernancourt, and the 48th took similar action on its front. At 6.20 both battalions reported that no Germans were then visible. The guns were accordingly turned on to the Albert-Bapaume road, on which traffic could be heard. A morning mist thickened in the Ancre valley, and was soon dense enough to hide all objects beyond 200 yards, although from the plateau the top of the opposite hills near Morlancourt was visible above it.

The British guns were barking, but the situation was otherwise quiet, when at 7 o'clock the bombardment for which all were waiting descended upon the whole area of the 4th Australian Division and on the British troops farther north. So sure were the front-line commanders of an impending attack, that Captain Fraser, near the railway bridge, had taken the step—most unusual in the A.I.F. in such circumstances—of stopping the breakfast from going out to his troops. The only surprise came with the realisation that the part of the 3rd Division's front lying immediately north of the River Somme, where the main blow was expected, was hardly

¹³ Lieut H. Taylor, D.S.O.; 47th Bn. Builder and contractor; of Moorooka, Q'land, b Edinburgh, Scotland, 20 Dec., 1893.

being shelled. But on the whole back area of the 4th Division the bombardment was intense, "the heaviest," reported Colonel Leane, "since Pozières"—and he had been in the thick of the Passchendaele fighting. The bombardment extended to the roads and villages as far back as VII Corps Headquarters at Montigny. The valleys sheltering the artillery were deluged with gas and high-explosive. The German guns were "area-shooting," not firing at particular batteries; but those of the 4th Australian Division, thrust forward down the valley between Millencourt and Laviéville to cover the 12th Brigade, were in the thick of it, and men and guns were constantly hit. The 45th Battalion, advancing across the open plateau, narrowly escaped a shattering experience, having just reached its intended position in rear of Leane's headquarters when this tornado descended. It quickly dug itself into comparative safety, only the last platoon being caught in the open and seriously cut about. The cheerful young veteran in command, Major Allen, reported that his battalion escaped lightly from that experience, with a loss of 4 officers (including Lieutenant Lindsay14 killed, and the medical officer, Major Garnett,15 mortally wounded) and 40 of other ranks.

The bombardment did not at first fall with such intensity on the front line. The telephone lines were, as usual, almost immediately broken, but the linesmen of the 47th and 48th Battalions for a time succeeded in restoring intermittent communication, and word came through that the forward garrisons of those battalions had so far seen nothing of any attack. The supporting field-guns—those of the 4th Division behind Gellibrand's brigade, and those of the 95th Brigade (21st Division) and 65th and 150th "Army" Brigades, R.F.A., behind Glasgow's—replied to the German bombardment by firing on S.O.S. lines, the plans for the precautionary bombardment at 7.30 having necessarily been abandoned. The German bombardment, except during certain marked pauses, appeared to grow in intensity. All telephone communication with the front broke down again. From the support lines and battalion headquarters the forward area was entirely hidden

¹⁴ Lieut. T J. E. Lindsay, 45th Bn. Railway clerk; of Epping, N.S.W.; b. Harris Park, N.S.W., 12 March, 1890 Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

15 Major W. S. Garnett, A A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Stawell, Vic., 2 Oct., 1887. Died of wounds, 15 April, 1918.

in fog, but a glimpse of the Morlancourt hilltop about 7.15 showed German infantry moving down from it. The right battalion—the 52nd—had no word whatever from its front. Lieutenant Julin, the intelligence officer, in its observation post on the shoulder above Buire, could only stare into the mist, and Colonel Whitham shaved and read the newspaper.

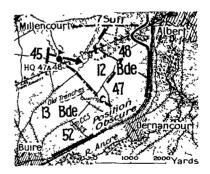
For hours no word of enemy action came from the front. Two officers calling at headquarters of the 4th Division at 10 a.m. were informed there that all was quiet. It began to appear that, notwithstanding the bombardment, the prophecy of attack must, as so often happened, have been false. The first news to the contrary to reach divisional headquarters arrived from the 3rd Division, which at 10.23 reported that some sort of attack had been made near Buire, where lav its extreme left and the right of the 4th Division. The next information came from Lieutenant Julin, who, from his observation post above Colonel Whitham's headquarters, heard at 8.45 rifle and machine-gun fire break out about Buire and at o noted that this noise spread to the whole front. The news reached 4th Divisional Headquarters at 10.35, and five minutes later came a report that at 9.25 the Germans had broken through the 48th at the other end of the line but had been driven out again. In the centre the position was obscure, but it was believed that a similar development had occurred or the 47th's front. An S.O.S. signal—the only one so far observed—had gone up from the 12th British Division north of the Amiens-Albert road. The German artillery at about 10.20 noticeably slackened its fire, although the back area and the battery positions continued to be furiously shelled. So far as was known, the 4th Division's troops had held their ground everywhere. Part of the Australian artillery had at 7.40 reduced its fire to occasional bursts on the S.O.S. lines.

At 10.30, however, startling information reached Colonel Leane of the 48th. Some of his observers, of whom he maintained a special staff to assist him in battle, 16 reported that part of the 13th Brigade on the right was falling back. About

¹⁶ This staff was the old "scout platoon" of the battalion, which was supposed to be abolished under the new organisation introduced in 1917. Leane had twice been ordered to disband it, and had nominally done so. But a number of scouts had orders to report to him the moment the battalion went into action, and they were posted at various vantage points to keep him supplied with information.

the same time word came through from the commander of his right company, Captain Anderson,17 that the Germans had penetrated on the right of the brigade, and that he was relieving the left of the 47th in order to allow it to reinforce its right. Leane at once ordered half of his reserve company to reinforce his left company. One platoon was sent to the front line, which its leader, Lieutenant Potts, by dribbling his men down the hill a few at a time, reached in twenty-five minutes without a casualty. The other platoon, under Lieutenant Mitchell, was directed to a position in close support beyond the southern bank of the ravine. At the same time, as a precaution against the reported retirement of the 13th Brigade, Leane directed Major Allen of the 45th to move his battalion half-right, to the edge of the plateau overlooking the 13th Brigade's position, and to occupy there the vacant trenches dug by the battalion on the night of March 27th, from which it could stop any dangerous irruption on the right. But, as Allen was instructing his company commanders to do this, he received by telephone from brigade headquarters a contrary order—to support the troops ahead of him by moving two companies to Pioneer Trench. Allen, impressed by the wisdom of Leane's order, urged this on the brigade major (Major Norman), but was told to carry out the brigadier's order. Accordingly, the two companies were

dribbled forward to Pioneer Trench, where they arrived at 1.30 without a casualty. In the light of later events it is certain that the step suggested by the experienced commander on the spot was better designed to meet the danger of the moment, which appeared to come from the 13th Brigade's area. Colonel Imlay (47th)



reinforced his support line with a platoon of his attached company of the 45th.

¹⁷ Capt. F. Anderson, M.C.; 48th Bn. Electrician; of Adelaide; b. Mitcham. S. Aust., 28 Aug., 1895.

Brigadier-General Glasgow of the 13th Brigade, when telephoned to by Gellibrand and by Colonel Lavarack, chief-of-staff of the division, knew nothing of any break through his front, but promised to press for information. Meanwhile he ordered his support battalion, the 51st, to move up closer behind the 52nd; and the 49th, which till then had been held back with the 50th in divisional reserve, was restored to him and ordered up to the Laviéville line.

It was at this stage—about II a.m.—that rumours arrived that some of the 47th had fallen back on the right; and a runner, previously sent by Colonel Imlay to his support line, returned with the astonishing information that there were Germans in it. As the support line lay just over the edge of the plateau ahead of battalion headquarters, Imlay hurried out to see the situation for himself, and at once observed, three-quarters of a mile to his right front, a long string of men, among whom could be identified some with the colours of the 52nd, coming back over the crest. Imlay sent his Lewis gun officer, Lieutenant Robinson, to take charge of the right of the support line,18 and ordered out his headquarters staff under Lieutenant Smith, 10 the assistant adjutant, to form a flank along the Millencourt-Dernancourt road. At the same time he directed the rest of the attached company of the 45th to reinforce the support line. About this time²⁰ one of his front-line companies managed to send through, by signal lamp, word showing that, though heavily attacked, its front line was still on the railway, unbroken. Imlay, a gallant and vigorous young commander, with a keen relish for a fine story of his command, has sometimes been criticised for leaping to the conclusion that the Germans at his support line had gained entrance not through his own front, but through that of the 52nd on his right; but all the evidence at hand pointed that way. He telephoned to General Gellibrand that the flank of the 13th Brigade was now 1,000 yards behind the right of the 47th's support line.

¹⁸ It had been reported that Lieut Goodsall was badly wounded.

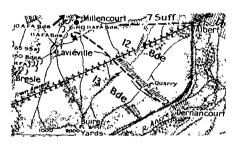
¹⁹ Lieut, H. G. Smith, M.C., D.C.M; 47th Bn. Civil servant, of Hobart, b Hobart, 24 Nov, 1891.

⁴⁰ The time is given in Imlay's report as "noon"; possibly that was the time of the receipt of the message; but, if so, its transmission must have been greatly delayed

This account of the situation, repeated by Gellibrand to divisional headquarters, spread quickly through all the higher headquarters concerned. General Glasgow (13th Brigade) could neither confirm nor deny it, being practically without news from his own front, the valleys behind which were still heavily shelled. All that was certain was that the Germans were penetrating up the hill-slope northwards behind the front line of the 12th Brigade, with the effect of half cutting off its front line, which was known to be holding out in the north. It seemed clearly the duty of the 13th Brigade to mend the situation, and after triangular conferences on the telephone between themselves and General MacLagan, the two brigadiers agreed, on Gellibrand's suggestion, that the best plan was for a battalion of the 13th Brigade to counter-attack, with its left flank on the brigade boundary—the Laviéville-Dernancourt road—and close the gap in the front; the 12th Brigade, which had only three companies of one battalion (the 46th) in reserve, would join in on the left with its available force. General MacLagan promised the assistance of some tanks (of "C" Company, 9th Battalion, Tank Corps), which had been ordered up to the valley behind Laviéville. The 40th Battalion (Queensland) was allotted for the attack, and as its headquarters were at the moment beside Gellibrand's at Laviéville, the orders of its own brigadier (Glasgow) were passed to it, and the action of the brigades co-ordinated, by Gellibrand. Meanwhile, by 1.25, definite news had come to hand that the 47th and 48th had at last been forced to leave their front and had withdrawn, or were withdrawing, to the line of Pioneer Trench, giving up the northern and eastern portion of what has been here described as the mushroom end of the down. This meant that the 12th Brigade's support line, too, had been abandoned. What had happened to the two strong batteries of machine-guns on the forward slope, no one knew. The 52nd Battalion was still holding the south-western part of the mushroom; but there was obvious danger of the enemy getting command of the summit, and so of the valley behind the 52nd.

Enough had come through to indicate that the situation on the mushroom prominence was critical. Battery commanders and other senior officers of the artillery, straining to help, came in constantly to headquarters of both brigades for news, which was vague and scarce. How acute the position was they fully realised when, at noon, without previous warning that matters were serious, Australian infantrymen and pioneers in retreat, without officers, passed back through the batteries of the 4th Division in the valley south-west of Millencourt. Lieutenant-Colonel Waite21 of the 11th A.F.A. Brigade, whose headquarters were in Millencourt, ran out and ordered some of these men to return to the front. "But where are we to go?" they asked, "and what are we to do?" The question was not easy to answer. The infantrymen at the batteries sat down behind the guns, and eventually, when someone was found to direct them, went forward again. But it seemed highly probable that there was a gap straight ahead of the batteries. Away on the left, north of the Albert

road, the gunners could see a line of the withdrawn troops or of their supports, lying down behind the northeastern spur of the main down. The 4th Division's batteries had suffered severely both in officers and men. At



9 o'clock Lieutenant Butters22 of the 41st Battery was wounded, and Captain Martin,28 while attempting to dress the wound, was hit by a shell which killed them both. Lieutenant Harrison,24 the signals officer, was killed, and Major Garling²⁵ (37th Battery), Lieutenant Pidcock²⁶ (42nd),

²¹ Lieut Col W C. N. Waite, DSO, MC, V.D. Commanded 11th AFA. Bde, 1917/18. Livestock salesman; of Kensington Park, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 8 Sept , 1880

²² Lieut R D Buttercase (served as R D Butters), 41st Bty, A F.A. Former member of British Regular Army; of Port Darwin, b. Uthrogle, Cupar, Fifeshire, Scotland, 25 April, 1881. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

²⁸ Ca,t. A. F. Martin, 41st Bty. A.F.A. Merchant, of Rose Bay, N.S.W; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 28 Feb., 1889 Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

28 Lieut J L. Harrison, 4th Div. Sig Coy. Motor mechanic; of Geelong, Vic.; b. North Richmond, Vic., 12 Feb., 1893. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

28 Major T. W Garling, 37th Bty, A.F.A. Clerk; of Lane Cove, N.S.W; b. Neutral Bay, N.S.W., 15 Feb., 1894. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

38 Major T. W. Beldesch, M.C., and Phys. A.F.A. Pagel official, of Sudana and

³⁰ Lieut. J. W Pidcock, M C.; 42nd Bty., A F A Bank official; of Sydney and Newcastle, N.S W; b. Tatham, Richmond River, N.S W, 24 June, 1893. Died of wounds, 5 April, 1918.

and Lieutenant Linsley (110th) were mortally wounded. Of 14 officers and 139 others killed or wounded in the five artillery brigades supporting the 4th Division this day, the two Australian brigades—10th and 11th—lost 12 officers and 77 others. But the guns-crews were making the battle their own, and they fought as if they were in the front line. When, after the arrival of the withdrawing infantry, the gun-teams came up at the gallop, ready to pull out the guns, the gunners themselves waved them away with a shower of rough iests. It was known that the orders given to the division were that this crest was to be held to the last. Brigadier-General Burgess, the dour New Zealander commanding the artillery of the division, had received this order with the curt comment that the 4th Division's guns were geared only to move forwards, and this was undoubtedly the spirit of the men; not but what a situation might yet easily have arisen in which the best assistance that the guns could give to their infantry and to the Allies would have been given by coolly withdrawing, as hundreds of British batteries had in recent weeks been forced to do, and, after withdrawal, continuing to support their infantry in perhaps greater need.

At 1.15, on the assurance that no infantry of the 12th Brigade now remained on the railway, the barrage was shortened, and, by arrangement with the 3rd Division, some field-guns of the 35th Division which were under its command were set to sweep the railway embankment in enfilade. As a precaution the Third Army directed that the 35th Division, which had previously been ordered to join the V Corps, should postpone its movement for twenty-four hours. At 1.30, in the quarry behind Laviéville, General Gellibrand passed to Lieutenant-Colonel Denton of the 49th General Glasgow's order to hurry his battalion to the southern shoulder of the mushroom crest overlooking Dernancourt, adding that the position was critical, and that, if the 40th did not reach the crest before the Germans, it would have to drive them from it. Leaving Gellibrand to arrange the co-operation of his own battalions in the coming counter-attack, the narrative must now pass to the other side of the veil of battle, and show how widely different the events there had been from anything reported to or imagined by the commanders anxiously piecing together the scraps of truth and rumour that had gradually penetrated to them.

When, at about 5.30 a.m., Captain Fraser of the 52nd Battalion first heard that the Germans were assembling on his front, he directed Lieutenant Williams,²⁷ commanding the two Stokes mortars near the little French cemetery, a short way behind the railway bridge, to fire on the houses and barns of Dernancourt; Lieutenant Boase, whose platoon held the bridge, volunteered to go out beyond it and check the fall of the shots. After eighty rounds had been fired, Fraser ordered the mortars to range on a point nearer to the embankment, and then stand by ready to open.

At 6.55 a German pineapple-bomb thrower beyond the Ancre fired a shot apparently aimed at these Stokes mortars, and with this the bombardment seemed to begin.²⁸ The German trench-mortars were evidently concentrating their fire on the railway bridge and the sector of the embankment immediately east of it held by the right of the 47th. Elsewhere the bombardment fell largely behind the front line, and in the 52nd's sector shells from the supporting British batteries near Laviéville were for a time the more dangerous, forcing the centre company (Captain Williams) to withdraw temporarily to its flanks.

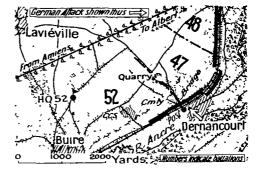
A few minutes after the shelling began Fraser's company, looking in the direction of the Ancre, saw a number of figures in extended order coming out of the mist. Fraser's right platoon, under Lieutenant Lade,²⁹ opened fire on them. On the left the Germans were coming down the village street, which would lead them straight under the railway bridge. Here

²⁷ Lieut J. H. Williams, M.C.; 13th L.T.M. Bty. Clerk, of Ipswich, Q'land; b North Sydney, 1892 Died 30 Nov. 1938

²⁸ Its commencement is given variously as 6 55 and 7 am. The fact that the British guns were firing at the same time made it difficult for Australian observers to distinguish the precise moment

²⁹ Lieut. R F. Lade, 52nd Bn. Barrister and solicitor, of Latrobe, Tas.; b Launceston, Tas., 22 Sept., 1389.

Boase's platoon kept a secret post, with a Lewis gun, thrust out in a hedge a short distance on the German side of the embankment. The man at the gun quickly cleared the enemy from the road, but



numbers of others were advancing out of the houses and backgardens on either side of it. The rest of the gun's crew used their rifles. Boase, running down the forward slope of the embankment to the post, found the Germans arriving within bombing distance, and the Lewis gunners exchanging bombs with a number of them, from twenty-five to thirty yards away. The fighting was desperate; some of the Australians stood fully exposed as they threw. From the right a second Lewis gun was steadily covering their flank. A German bomb burst between Boase's legs, and he fell, apparently dead, but Sergeant Murray, 30 who was with him, took command. The Germans, beaten in their first attempt, presently attacked The Lewis gun below the bridge was blown up by a trench-mortar bomb, but another, posted above the centre of the arch, took up the defence. The nearest machine-guns of the 13th Company, on the railway between Dernancourt and Buire, fired furiously on this attack at ranges of from half-a-mile and under. Stokes mortars and Lewis guns shot for all they were worth. In addition, as soon as the fight started. Fraser called for artillery support by firing his S.O.S. flares, but in the mist neither these, nor any others that went up that morning on the Australian front, were seen. field artillery, it is true, replied to the German bombardment by laying down its S.O.S. barrage at a steady rate, and the heavy artillery shelled probable assembly points with gas;

³⁰ Sgt. W. Murray, D.C.M. (No. 3593A; 52nd Bn.). Clerk; of Maryborough, Q'land; b. Maryborough, 1894. Died of wounds, while prisoner of war, 19 May, 1918.

but the artillery was unavoidably blind. Fraser wrote: "Urgent. Get artillery on to Dernancourt at once, heavies etc." But his note did not reach Colonel Whitham until 10.25, and the deluge of shells which, if directed upon the village, might have shattered this offensive, never descended. The artillery, being quite without information, gradually eased its fire, the Australian batteries reducing theirs to occasional bursts upon the S.O.S. lines.

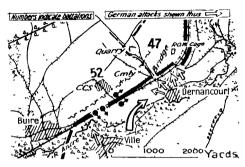
Shortly after 7.30 the movement of German infantry appears to have died down, but the enemy shell-fire continued unabated, and about 8.45 the bursts of minenwerfer bombs on the section held by the flank of the 47th just east of the railway bridge became intense; "pretty solid" was the description afterwards given of the experience there by one who went through it.³¹ At the same time the right company of the 52nd (Captain Stubbings), on the railway near Buire. saw several hundreds of the enemy emerging from the village of Ville, south of the Ancre. It was the fusillade then evoked from the 52nd that was heard by Lieutenant Julin in the 52nd's observation post, and reported to headquarters. These Germans continued to advance by rushes, and at 9 o'clock some of them crossed the river by bridges near a white mill-house, in the trees north-east of Ville, and attempted to make towards Dernancourt. An hour and a half later a remnant, which had evidently gone to ground, was seen withdrawing gradually to Ville in small parties. This process continued until noon, when all movement of the enemy near Buire appeared to cease.

Near the railway bridge there began at 9 o'clock a much more dangerous advance. The troops at the bridge were strongly attacked, and desperate fighting was evidently in progress farther to the east, in the 47th's sector; but, the posts being widely spaced, the troops on the flank knew no more than that the 47th continued to hold. The German barrage had now lifted from the embankment and fell near the support posts of the 52nd, 300 yards back, missing them but rending the huts and tents of the old casualty clearing

³¹ Pte. Essam, in a statement made on return from Germany. (3620 Pte. T. Essam, 47th Bn. Carter; of Alderley, Q'land; b. London, 14 Oct., 1883.)

station along that part of the slope. A German machine-gun, apparently on the tower of Dernancourt church, played over the heads of the attackers on to the garrison lying on the

embankment. Αn fire from intense many machine-guns on the flats and in the white mill-house skimming edge of the embank ment and constantly scoring the hillside several hundred vards behind. But



the defending Stokes mortars, machine-guns, and Lewis guns, firing continuously, beat off the main attack. A number of Germans, unable to reach the embankment west of the village, began to dig in between the railway and the Ancre as if to form a flank there; but the fire of the two machine-guns farther west must have caused them severe loss. The machine-gunners could see the enemy still streaming out from the houses and back-gardens of Dernancourt towards the embankment, trying to reach a road that ran along their side of the railway. The gunners thought they shot them all, but some got through, for bombing began at the embankment.

At 9.30 the mist began quickly to lift. On the front of the 52nd the attack eased. But shortly afterwards there came along the back of the embankment to the post at the railway bridge seven men of the 47th, who told Sergeant D'Alton³² of the 52nd that the right company of the 47th had been blotted out. D'Alton hurried with them to Captain Fraser, who directed him to take them back to their post. D'Alton endeavoured to do so, but, although the party went far into the 47th's territory, they could find no living garrison. He accordingly returned to Fraser, and the seven men were temporarily attached to the post at the archway, now under Corporal Morrison. Realising that the Germans might at any

²² Sgt. H. H. D'Alton, D.C.M. (No. 1597; 52nd Bn.). Locomotive fireman; of Queenstown, Tas.; b. Warracknabeal, Vic., 21 Nov., 1893.

moment cross the railway and outflank him, Fraser sent a Lewis gun from Lieutenant Bibby's³³ platoon to the cemetery to guard his flank, and then, remembering Whitham's instructions, wrote a hurried message to Captain Williams of the centre company of the 52nd, advising him to fall back on the support line, and saying that he himself and his men would continue to hold the embankment as long as possible to cover the movement.

Soon afterwards, scanning the ground where the 47th should be, Fraser saw a number of figures moving over the slope in rear of the embankment, near an old British prisoners-of-war compound on a knuckle opposite the farther Turning his glasses on them, D'Alton end of the village. said that they were Germans. At the same time fire came along the embankment from the 47th's old position, and the men of the 52nd manning the top of the railway bridge, who had come to the end of their bombs, at last broke, and ran down on both sides of the culvert and up the road past the cemetery towards the plateau. Fraser at once ordered the rest of his men to fall back to the support line, and himself dived into his headquarters, seized his "Babb" code and other secret papers, and, with Sergeant Murray, who had twice been wounded in the head but was still fighting, ran for the cemetery. Before he was half-way there, the enemy had a machine-gun set up behind them. Reaching a shell-hole near the cemetery, Fraser destroyed his papers, and then made another run for it. This time he had gone only a hundred yards when the machine-gun forced him again to cover. The German gunner kept his fire on the rim of the hole, and before Fraser could make another dash there were Germans around him and he was captured, as was Murray, who had again been hit.

It was just 10 o'clock when the left of the 52nd gave way. The story of the men of the 47th next along the embankment, through whom the Germans had broken, is unlikely to be ever completely known—a great number of them were killed or wounded, and many of the rest were dazed with the crash

²³ Lieut. L. H. Bibby, 52nd and 51st Bns. Jeweller's assistant; of Hobart; b. Melbourne, 10 Sept., 1892.

and blast of the bombardment and the acrid reek of the fumes. But from a few survivors, who came back many months later from imprisonment in Germany, parts of it have been pieced together.

Like the rest of the front on the railway, the sector of the 47th's right company was thinly held by widely spaced platoons, holding, opposite the north-west of Dernancourt, the steep embankment, and, opposite the north-east of the village, the cutting into which the railway there ran, and at either end of which was a level crossing. The right of the company was slightly strengthened by the presence of a working party of the 4th Pioneers, twenty-seven strong, and their officer. Lieutenant Pennefather.84 Their night's work on the tunnels not having been finished when the alarm was given, these men stood to arms with the rest. The closeness of Dernancourt with its back orchards and hedges brushing the railway, enabled the enemy to emplace here as many trench-mortars and assemble as many troops as he wished. without detection. During the bombardment the wounded were carried to the pioneers' tunnel, whence some were taken away by the stretcher-bearers. Later, in their first rush the Germans managed to cross the railway between two of The left of the company saw this. Ryan, 35 in charge of a post there, sent to the company commander for an officer, and Lieutenant Rose, 86 of another platoon, came up, but by then the right platoon and pioneers had driven out the Germans. Rose gave the order to hold on at all costs, and returned to his post. Soon afterwards came a second rush of Germans, but this was shot back without piercing the line.

For meeting such onslaughts, however, the posts were perilously thin. Lieutenant Cooksley,87 commanding the right platoon, after lining out his men along the railway, was

²⁴ Lieut. R. V. G. Pennefather, M.C.; 4th Pioneer Bn. Licensed surveyor and civil engineer; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Cooma, N.S.W., 25 July, 1887.

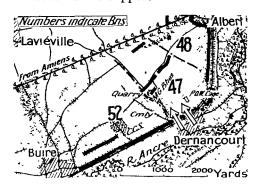
²⁸ Sgt. J. M. F. Ryan, M.M. (No. 2490; 47th Bn.). Mill overseer; of Bundaberg, Q'land; b. Broadwater, N.S.W., 1884.

³⁶ Lieut. D. C. Rose, 15th, 47th, & 46th Bns. West African trader; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Inveraray, Argyllshire, Scotland, 13 Jan., 1873.

²⁷ Lieut. W. J. F. Cooksley, 47th Bn. Accountant; of Brisbane; b. Hendra, Q'land, 29 Nov., 1891. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

reaching for a rifle when he was shot through the head. Lieutenant Ulcoq38 of the next platoon, and the pioneer officer, Lieutenant Pennefather, were both seriously wounded. Shortly before 10 o'clock the Germans made a third determined rush. The centre of this attack swerved before the resistance of one of the posts, but the wave split and swept over the embankment on either side. Some of the garrison, to escape death or capture, withdrew to a ditch or other shelter a short distance behind the embankment. Others, finding the Germans swarming over into their trench on either flank, and further resistance useless, surrendered. A certain number were captured in the pioneers' tunnel. Those who had tried to escape were quickly shot down or rounded up. Of the right half-company of the 47th not one man, except those who had previously been sent away wounded appears to have reached the supports.

The foot of the Laviéville down consisted of a number of gentle folds, and events happening in any one of these folds were hidden from parts of the line right and left. Moreover, although the fog was lifting, the shell-smoke



mingled with the misty air rendered it difficult to see at any distance. It is nevertheless evidence of a serious defect in the control that the commander of the right company remained for two hours unaware that his right had been attacked—not to say penetrated.³⁹ The men of the left company, however, presently found that they were being fired on from their right rear, and that Germans were in the quarry where one of the machine-gun batteries should have been. The intelligence

²⁸ Lieut. O. E. Ulcoq, 47th Bn. Clerk; of Yeronga, Q'land; b. Mackay, Q'land 6 Feb., 1894.

⁸⁹ He stated in the court of inquiry afterwards that no attack developed on his front before noon.

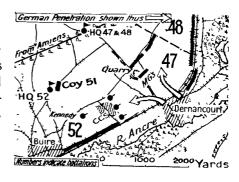
officer of the 47th, Lieutenant Reid, who was then with the centre company, hurried across to the right leading a platoon of the left company to reinforce.

Meanwhile, however, German infantry were pouring by the hundred into the interior of the Australian position. At first they streamed only over the embankment, but soon afterwards, when the left of the 52nd retired, they poured also through the railway arch. Lieutenant Julin, the intelligence officer of the 52nd, going forward from battalion headquarters to ascertain the situation, met a number of the left company of his battalion retiring to the old casualty clearing station, and, knowing nothing of the position, persuaded them to stop and lie down. But he then observed fifty or sixty men with knapsacks climbing the centre of the down half-a-mile away and well up the hill. They were bending low, and getting under a bank to escape fire from some source that Julin could not see. He noted that the machine-gun battery at the quarry was not firing, but almost at once, from the slope below it, a German machine-gun turned its fire squarely upon his party. He immediately withdrew them, with considerable loss, to a section of the support line that ran through the old C.C.S., but the German gun was high enough up the hill to enfilade this also.

It was in the posts of this line west of the C.C.S. that the support company of the 52nd under Captain Kennedy lay. Kennedy was a tall, thin veteran of the old 12th, formerly a sailor—a man of slow speech and few words, but entirely dependable in a tight corner and thoroughly trained, having been (like his battalion commander) an instructor of the Australian permanent forces. Nothing had occurred to cause him uneasiness until 10.15, when he saw Australians falling back up the slope above the C.C.S. He was just sending a patrol to discover who they were, when a message from Captain Williams of the centre company, holding the railway 300 yards below him, informed him that the left company had withdrawn, and asked what the centre company should do. Kennedy told Williams to hold on, and at once sent three platoons to form a flank up the hillside from

the left of Williams on the railway. One platoon, under Lieutenant Wilson,⁴⁰ a trusted scout of the old 12th Battalion at Anzac, touched Williams's flank at the railway. A second,

Lieutenant under Rowe.41 garrisoned a trench east of C.C.S. A third, under Lieutenant Rogers,42 was was sent with Julin well up the hill to the northeast corner of the C.C.S.. around which were a number of trenches dug long ago for shelter in air-raids. The fourth



platoon Kennedy kept with his headquarters in rear of the C.C.S. Added to his men were a number of Fraser's whom Lieutenant Lade continued to hold together, although his wrist had been smashed during the retirement through the cemetery. Others had retired straight up the hill and across the plateau.

By 11.15 Kennedy's troops had formed this flank, facing north-east. As the Germans worked along the railway part of Williams's company had withdrawn from it, but they returned and, although Kennedy's left flank up the hill was out of touch with any troops, the 52nd's line again became stationary.

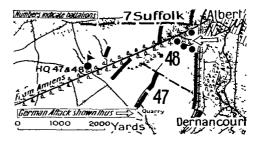
On the left of the divisional front also, where the 48th Battalion's left curved back across the precipitous gully down which the high-road ran into Albert, a movement of the Germans had occurred at 7.25, during the bombardment, two bodies of the enemy crossing the railway (which here was in their territory) and assembling low down the ravine where the rifles in the Australian posts could not get at them. At

⁴⁰ Lieut. L L Wilson, 52nd Bn Salesman, of Karoonda, S. Aust.; b. Paddington. N.S.W., 13 July, 1893

⁴¹ Lieut A. G. Rowe, 52nd & 50th Bns Assayer; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b Petersburg, S. Aust., 6 Feb., 1894. Died, 29 May, 1920.

⁴² Lieut. F. Rogers, 52nd Bn. Shipping clerk; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. North Kensington, London, 3 April, 1886.

o'clock, when the bombardment which had fallen especial severity οn support trenches lifted, the German infantry attacked the whole along line, their pressure



being particularly heavy up the gully and at the south side of its entrance, against the post of the 48th that held the angle of the gully and the railway. The 48th was entirely ready, and wave after wave of Germans was shattered by Lewis gun and rifle-fire. The northernmost platoon of the 48th held a post at a farmhouse beside the Albert road, on the north side of the ravine. A number of Germans attempted to reach it, but they were completely beaten. By 10 o'clock the survivors of these constant attacks had dug in, as best they could under fire of rifles and rifle-grenades, in the lower part of the valley, leaving the line of the 48th unbroken.

It was about that time, however, that men of the left company of the 47th observed the break-through of Germans on their right. Captain Anderson, of the 48th's right company, informed by Lieutenant Reid of the 47th, arranged with the commander of the 47th's left company (Captain Young)48 to take over 140 yards of the 47th's front and so liberate the platoon with which Reid hurried to the right. Captain Young had also ordered Lieutenant Ward44 to send a Lewis gun thither. These reinforcements did not reach the gap through which the Germans were streaming, but strengthened the posts immediately north of it. With the Germans pouring through far to their rear, the position of the flank posts looked hopeless, but they received orders to hold on and did so, firing on the enemy to front, flank, and rear, until, from the quarry where their own machine-gunners

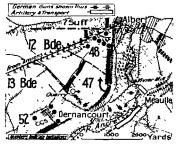
⁴³ Capt C. E. Young, D.S.O.; 47th & 45th Bns. Grazier; of Charleville district, Q'land, b. Daylesford, Vic., 21 Dec., 1889.

⁴⁴ Lieut L. N Ward, M.C. 47th & 48th Bis. Wool classer; of Charleville, Q'land, b. Charleville, 12 April, 1893. Killed in action, 19 Sept., 1918.

should have been, a Lewis gun was turned upon them. By that time half of the reinforcement that had been sent farthest to the right had been killed or wounded. Sergeant Ryan, now commanding the right post, with its Lewis gun out of action and its bombs all spent, saw that there was nothing for it but to attempt cutting a way through to the rear; but it was then too late—he and the survivors of his post were eventually captured.

At II o'clock, while the flank of the 47th was thus crumbling, its left company (Captain Young) was fighting stubbornly. To its front masses of German artillery and

transport could be seen crowding up from Méaulte along the sunken road near Vivier Mill, and several field-batteries moving down over the open ground south of Méaulte. Two fieldguns opened direct fire from behind the north-east corner of Dernancourt, and another from the flats north of it, directly in front of the company.



Captain Young himself, wiry, wizened little Queenslander, was picking off the guns' crews with a rifle. Away on the south-western flank of the battle, also, at about noon, men of the 52nd called out that they could see cavalry moving up the slope of the Laviéville down. A second scrutiny showed that these were gun-teams dragging field-guns. Shortly afterwards a gun that had crossed the railway opened fire from the flank and rear upon the portion of the 47th that had continued to hold the railway.

It was the close, direct fire of field-guns brought up in this manner that more than once gave the final blow to exposed and resisting posts that day. "He brought up field-guns and blew us out of our posts," the retiring men said when they came in. The flank, already crumbling, crumbled more quickly As the portion of the hill behind was already in the hands of the Germans, Captain Young directed his company, together with the remnant of the right

company, to withdraw northwards through the area of the 48th, and across the head of the deep ravine. By the time most of the men were clear it was midday. "You'll be surrounded and captured if you don't get back," said a sergeant of the 47th to a support post of the 48th as he passed over it and into the ravine. But the front line of the 48th was not yet withdrawing. Captain Anderson, after conferring with the commander of the centre company, Lieutenant Pavy.45 decided to wait for a short time in case the 47th counter-attacked to recapture the sector.

At 12.15, as the Germans were firing from his rear, Anderson gave the word for both companies to retire, platoon by platoon. The left company (Captain Cumming), holding both sides of the ravine by the Albert road, and the British north of the road, were still in position guarding the left. The Germans had made no progress in the ravine, and Cumming had urged that he could hold on indefinitely. But. as Anderson's company was retiring, it was considered necessary to withdraw also all posts on the spur south of the gully. Captain Cumming tried to signal information of this intention to the post of the 7th Suffolk Regiment north of the ravine, but could not attract its notice. A signaller, Private Tregoweth.46 at once volunteered to run across the flat. In the hail of fire which his effort attracted, he was soon hit, but managed to drag himself to within 100 yards of the British post before he was entirely disabled. Englishmen at once ran out and carried him in, and the Suffolk then signalled for and received Cumming's message.47 To protect his right, where the danger was greatest. Anderson stationed on the spur south of the gully a Lewis gun. position was an exposed one, but it had the crucial rôle of preventing the enemy from getting farther behind the two companies. During the delay since the 47th had gone, the enemy in rear appeared to have been extending his hold and there now began a most difficult withdrawal, in which the

⁴⁶ Capt. G. A. Pavy, 48th Bu. Accountant; of North Adelaide, b. Crystal Brook, S. Aust., 14 Aug., 1891.
46 Pte. F. J. A. Tregoweth, D C M. (No. 1996; 48th Bn.). School teacher; of Norwood, S. Aust; b. Woodside, S. Aust, 13 Sept., 1897.

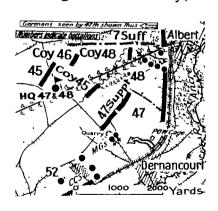
⁴⁷ The diary of the 7th Suffolk records that it received by runner and flag signal at 2.50 p m. from the left company of the 48th Battalion a message saying that the company had been ordered to withdraw.

platoons would have to move round whatever position the Germans had secured behind them. Anderson's own right platoon would have to stay to the last as rear-guard, and then withdraw as best it could. Colonel Leane on hearing Anderson's decision sent up Major Brearley⁴⁸ to establish, with any troops on the spot, the line to which the front would fall back

The support line of the 47th, about the sunken road near the top of the down, had been held that morning by two companies-Lieutenant Goodsall's on The right, and Captain Symons' on the left. Withdrawal They were occupying separate sections of the old French sap by the sunken road. The front line was at first hidden by the mist, but the sound of rifles and bombs there was continuous. Towards II o'clock the troops near the left of the support line, where it commanded a wide view, saw numbers of Germans pouring over the embankment where it was low, near the north-east corner of Dernancourt. Sergeant McDougall (the same who had stopped the attack on the level crossing on March 28th) and others turned their fire on these Germans, who swerved over the knuckle of the McDougall had no anxiety; he hill in order to escape it.

was confident that the two batteries of machineguns at and near the quarry would deal with this enemy.

The right support company (Goodsall's) was prevented by the ground in its front from having this view. No word whatever reached it from the front line, but, a few minutes after II, Goodsall was astonished



⁴⁸ Major M. S. Brearley, 48th Bn. Musician; of Subiaco, W. Aust., b. Geelong, Vic., 15 Sept., 1888

to find Germans approaching on both flanks. About this time he received a welcome reinforcement from the supporting company of the 45th—a platoon under Lieutenant Allen49 (brother of the battalion commander) being sent forward by order from Colonel Imlay. On its way from Pioneer Trench this platoon, to its surprise, had found itself under fire from Germans who had come up the hill-slope near the casualty clearing station. On reaching the 47th's support trench Allen, by order of Captain Symons, moved along to the extreme right and reinforced Goodsall just beyond the road to the quarry. The Germans were then getting round Goodsall's right, and Allen ordered twenty of his men to leave the trench and form a line to the right flank, in order to prevent encirclement; but no sooner was the line out in the open than a machine-gun was turned upon it, killing or wounding twelve men and forcing the rest back to the trench.

The Germans had suddenly appeared in front of the left company, at only 100 yards' distance. Company Sergeant-Major Hare50 ordered a Lewis gunner, by name Maumill,51 to fire at them. Captain Symons, thinking the men seen must be Australian, ordered fire to cease, but Maumill, recognising them clearly as German, kept on. The rest of the garrison, as soon as they were sure of the oncomers' identity, joined in. But one Lewis gun was disabled, and, though fire was maintained, the enemy's movement could not be stopped. The old French sap was without traverses, and the enemy on the right had now brought up pineapple-grenade throwers and was enfilading the right of the trench with these and machine-guns. Anyone attempting to line the front bank was shot from the rear, round which the Germans were now pushing; the only direction in which men could fire was to the flank, and they were falling so fast that Goodsall and the officers with him—Lieutenants Smith⁵²

⁴⁹ Lieut. J. H. Allen, 45th Bn. Railway clerk; of Hurstville, N.S.W.; h. Hurstville, 3 Nov., 1892.

⁸⁰ C S.M. H J. Hare, D C.M. (No 2961; 47th Bn). Carter; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 24 Aug., 1886.

⁶¹ Pte I H Maumill (No 2898, 47th Bn). Miner; of Launceston, Tas; L. Beaconsfield, Tas., 15 Jan., 1883.

⁶² Lieut. J. E. Smith, 47th Bn. Ironmonger; of Cheepie, Q'land; b. Burrangong, Young, N.S.W., 10 Oct., 1892.

decided that the best course was to withdraw to the left along the trench and endeavour to escape encirclement. Captain Symons, however, to whom they applied for leave, replied that the orders were to hold the trench "at all costs".

They accordingly held on, evacuating only the extreme right of the sunken road, beyond the Laviéville-Dernancourt cross-road. But no defence was possible; the enemy could only be seen by lying out in the open, which meant certain death, and men were being quite uselessly killed; the dead and wounded of the 47th now lay everywhere underfoot. Finally, the three officers held another conference and decided to withdraw their men through Captain Symons' position. To their horror they found the Germans holding it, Symons and the survivors of his men having already gone. Several brave attempts were made to break through. One man, Private Rochford, succeeded—another, who started with him, was immediately shot down. To avoid further useless loss of life, the officers decided to surrender.

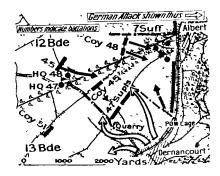
It was at 11 o'clock that Colonel Imlay of the 47th hearing that the Germans had broken through on the right, sent from his headquarters Lieutenant Robinson to take charge of the right flank of the support line. Robinson, passing the attached company of the 45th, asked its commander, Lieutenant Stuart Perry,54 for reinforcements. Perry said he had already sent two platoons, and Robinson, on coming over the brow of the hill, found there a dozen men of the 45th lying in the open. They were the survivors of the second platoon sent by Perry. Their officer, Lieutenant MacDiarmid.55 was killed, and they had been unable to reach the 47th. Looking down the hill to the left, Robinson saw a slightly larger party-probably that of Goodsall, Allen, and Smith—surrounded by Germans. He immediately sent a messenger to Perry with the news. Although this message does not appear to have come through, Perry led forward the

⁵³ L/Cpl. J. Rochford, M.M. (No 2493; 47th & 48th Bns.). Timber cutter, of Fraser's Island, Q'land, b Maryborough, Q'land, 23 June, 1898

⁵¹ Lieut. J. R. S. Perry, 45th Bn. Survey draughtsman; of Marrickville, N.S.W., b. Marrickville, 17 Oct., 1889. Died, 22 Jan, 1925

ss Lieut A. M. MacDiarmid, 45th Bn. Accountant; of Inverell, N.S.W; b. Arncliffe, N.S.W., 6 Feb., 1891 Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

rest of the company, but at the brow of the plateau, where it dipped towards the support trench, they were met by intense fire, which forced them to ground. On the pasture on which they lay stood a number of brushwood hurdles, lately used for penning sheep, but at the moment partly scattered.



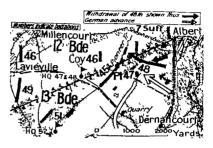
These gave some cover from sight. Three or four hundred yards ahead, just visible through the ground haze, was a perplexing amount of movement—how far of friends and how far of enemy it was impossible to judge. Actually, it was the rounding up by the enemy of the 47th's supports Robinson's small party was captured, as were other small remnants, including a section of Symons' company under Lieutenant Marson, 56 farther to the left. By shortly after noon all but the extreme left of the 47th's support position was in possession of the enemy.

It was past this position that the two companies of the 48th from the railway, 1,000 yards below, now had to withdraw. The only way open to the main part of them was up the next spur to the north-east of that which the Germans had captured. Here the 48th had a platoon of its support company under Lieutenant Mitchell holding, on the southern edge of the ravine, an isolated post more or less in extension of the 47th's support line; the platoon could see a few of the 47th holding the top of the spur on its right. The front-line platoons now moved, one after the other, up this spur, covered by the Lewis gun on the prominence near its foot, and by the right flank platoon, which had to remain on the railway till the last of the others was clear. Finally came the turn of this platoon. Not all of it was able to extricate itself from the forward area, for the enemy was

⁸⁶ Lieut, H. F. W. Marson, 47th Bn. Farmer; of Toogoolawah, Q'land, b Streatham, London, 3 Aug, 1878.

already on three sides of its right flank post. The last men made towards the heights. The barrage of their own artillery

lay between them and their goal, and heading towards the support line they found Germans ensconced ahead of them. The enemy opened with machine-guns, and the Australians ran northward seeking escape in that direction. But there



also they were met by heavy fire. Driven to shelter in an old gun-pit, they were eventually captured.

But the remainder of the two companies had gone clear, the neighbouring platoons of the left company also retiring when the troops from the railway reached them. Lieutenant Mitchell of the 48th, past whose support post on the southern edge of the ravine they withdrew, writes:57

Our front line men retired on the flank of, and parallel to, large bodies of advancing German stormers. The last two Australians rivetted my attention. They moved back at a steady trot. As cover and opportunity offered, they stopped and ripped a magazine into the flank, cool and steady . . . a most perfect example of rearguard work.

As these companies passed, Mitchell's platoon became the front line. Just visible on its right was still a post of the 47th, under a young, rather haggard sergeant, the men lying in the open gazing down a wide valley into which Mitchell's platoon could not see. Mitchell went over to this post, and found himself looking on a panorama of the attack. Below him, in the triangle of low ground ending at the railway, were the enemy infantry, advancing "in hordes" with "cool, ordered determination". On and beyond the railway were enemy field-guns in action, the flash at their muzzles being followed instantly by the burst of the shells close at hand. By the railway were German reserves resting, waiting the

⁵⁷ Reveille, July 1934, p. 30.

so Other observers also noted that the Germans were advancing quite unconcerned by any fire that met them

order to advance. The men of the 47th beside him, themselves under heavy fire, were shooting at the more prominent groups of the oncoming enemy, but, as they fired into one, others would advance. Mitchell told the young sergeant that, so long as this post held, his platoon would protect its left.

Mitchell's post was now heavily engaged with Germans creeping up on its own front. Twice more he went across to the party of the 47th—the first time half its men lay motionless behind their rifles; the second time no one stirred. The Germans were now working round his post, but the reply to his report was still a curt "Hang on". The position was beginning to look black when an order arrived from Captain Imlay⁵⁹ to withdraw "to the line by the aeroplane". With the Lewis gunner staying behind to sweep all the visible enemy under cover, the platoon retired by successive groups; last but one went the small Lewis gunner, Private Connaughton;60 and last, in accordance with the proud procedure of the A.I.F., the officer. Mitchell had no notion where the "aeroplane" was, but, following his platoon across the ravine, presently saw "to my joy a good continuous trench line called Pioneer trench. . . . Had to step through wire to reach it." It was filled with a mixture of units from the front and support lines—not yet sorted out, but entirely confident.

It was then 1.30. The 4th Division's front line was still holding at its two extremities; on the left at the farm beside the Amiens road, the flank platoon of the 48th still resisted all attacks, its commander, Lieutenant Shepherdson, 61 formerly Lewis gun sergeant of the battalion, still in charge, though at an early stage shot through the lung. On the right the 52nd was holding about half its former sector on the railway, with its left flank bent back at an acute angle up the hill.

⁵⁰ Brother of Colonel Imlay of the 47th.

⁶⁰ L/Cpl. W. J. Connaughton, M.M. (No. 4776; 48th Bn.). Mill hand; of Lion Mill, W. Aust.; b. Guildford, W. Aust., 1896. Killed in action, 14 May, 1918. ⁶¹ Lieut. H. M. Shepherdson, M.C., M.M.; 48th Bn. Cabinet maker, of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Driffield, East Yorkshire, Eng. 18 Nov., 1892

Of the two machine-gun batteries in the neighbourhood of the quarry, no definite news had come back. Clearly they had now been overrun. Some of The wounded spoke of hearing them still firing Machine-Guns long after the Germans were through, and the commander of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion, 62 to which the divisional company (24th) now belonged, believed that the gun-crews and their officers had fought to the last. His story of a heroic defence was spread wide by the war correspondents, but later evidence raised doubts, and nine days after the attack there came back, in a daring escape through the German lines at Dernancourt, two Australians, Corporal Lane⁶³ and Private Ruschpler,⁶⁴ who had been part of the garrison at the quarry, and who told a quite different

Each battery, it will be remembered, consisted of four machine-guns; they were on the slope between the front and support lines of the 47th Battalion, one actually in the quarry, the other spread out along a trench 350 yards farther to the left. They had been warned during the night that an attack was expected.65

The bombardment fell thick around them, but caused no casualties in the quarry although about thirty shells exploded In addition, throughout the bombardment strong machine-gun fire swept the lip of the quarry, and when, at o, the artillery lifted, this grazing fire became intense. Fog still hid the front line, but between 9.15 and 9.30 Corporal Lane, one of the two men who subsequently escaped, and who was then looking out, saw what he took to be hand-grenades bursting at the railway in the extreme right sector of the 47th Still the guns and tripods, which had been Battalion. completely dismantled at dawn, were not mounted.

The Germans had the quarry smothered in machine-gun bullets (said Lance-Corporal Whitnear⁶⁶ afterwards). We could not show our heads at all. . . . We did not get the chance to mount our guns.

⁶² Lieut -Colonel Harry Murray.

⁶⁵ Cpl. C. W. Lane (No. 372; 24th M.G. Coy.). Butcher; of Geraldton, W. Aust.; b. Church Stanton, Devon, Eng., 7 July, 1885.
⁶⁴ Pte. R. C. Ruschpler (No. 648; 24th M.G. Coy.). Bank clerk; of Artarmon, N.S.W.; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 25 Dec., 1894.

⁶⁵ For their orders, see b. 359.

ee L./Cpl. W H. Whitnear (No. 556; 24th MG. Coy). Locomotive fireman; of Kogarah, N.S.W.; b. Sheffield, Eng., 1888.

At 10.15 Corporal Lane, looking out from a special observation post, saw five or six men coming up the road from the railway arch. He took them for Australian infantry retiring, and called his officer, who looked through the opening and agreed. The corporal was about to take another look when his eye was caught by the spectacle of fifty Germans approaching across country from his left rear, only 150 yards away. He then saw three or four hundred of them down the valley on the same flank, near the old prisoners-of-war compound, advancing westwards. The machine-gun officer ordered out the guns, and Lane and others ran to get them

into action. But, before this could be done, shots were fired from the rear bank of the quarry, and, looking round, they saw it lined by Germans, lying down with rifles aimed, and an officer standing directing them. Some fifty more appeared at the entrance of the quarry, which opened south-west. The machine-gunners,



entirely at their mercy, were captured without firing a shot The other machine-gun battery, several hundred yards to the left, had already been captured by the same method, being completely surprised by the enemy appearing unexpectedly behind it. The Germans did not even trouble to escort the prisoners, but told them to get back to Dernancourt; German troops were swarming past, and there was nothing to do but to obey or be shot.⁶⁷ An officer of the German battalion—the II/230th R.I.R.—which was then passing has written:

In the sunken road which leads from the railway embankment to the heights a group of Englishmen, probably shirkers, was collecting, which now came out to meet us with hands raised high. Our artillery

of The story of Lane and Ruschpler was interesting. After capture, while they were going down the hill towards Dernancourt, Lane found a wounded Australian German troops were then beginning to march up the road towards the hilltop, and Lane called to a red cross man among them to attend to the Australian. The German came across and bound up the Australian's wounds. The wounded man said he could walk, and so Lane helped him on down into the village to the German aid-post, which was in one of the houses

Ruschpler had been told off by the Germans to help a wounded German officer He found the officer sitting with his orderly in a field before the village, which

must have shot very effectively against the hill in front of us, at least so far as moral effect goes, for the machine-gun nests on the slope, which would have been able to impede us materially, had left their guns in the lurch and vanished. Without a shot the heights in this sector of the battalion's attack were taken and occupied: with this the battalion at 10 30 had achieved its objective.

The writer was obviously not aware that the prisoners whom he saw were the crews of the machine-guns, and had been surrounded before capture; but, at least in his judgment as to the influence which the machine-gun batteries might have had upon the attack, no student of the battle will disagree The machine-gun posts on this slope were, it is with him.

was then being heavily shelled. This barrage was at the moment so ugly that the Germans could not get into the place. Some shells burst short, and presently the orderly, and one of several Australians who collected there with them, were wounded. When at length the fire slackened somewhat, Ruschpler and another Australian volunteered to fetch stretchers from the village, and, having secured one, carried the officer in. At the aid-post Ruschpler again met Lane, who was making himself useful there with the notion that he might obtain a chance to

escape after dark.

The German doctor at the aid-post said that the place was becoming rather dangerous, and told them to take the wounded officer to a cellar a few doors away. They did so, and, on returning, also carried thither an Australian whose wounds had been dressed. They had barely got him out of the door when a shell from one of the British 18-pounders burst in the room, taking off the German doctor's head and doing great damage in the aid-post. The Germans, who till then had treated the two men very well, became very bitter. About 4 p.m. they were told to carry the doctor's body back to his billet at Méaulte. It was tied in a waterproof sheet, and slung on a pole, and they set out, escorted by two unarmed Germans. The road to Méaulte was very muddy, and by the time they were half-way there they were exhausted. The Germans releved them, and carried the body to the outskirts of Méaulte, where, as the village was being shelled, they sat down beside the scaffold of a water-tank. The two Germans were sitting apart when a big British shell—a blind—just missed their heads. They called the Australians to leave the body and make a run with them into the village. They reached the doctor's billet, and ate his dinner, the two Germans refusing to eat until the Australians had eaten first. They all slept there, and next day the Australians joined a body of some 200 prisoners who were being marched back to Peronne.

eaten first. They all slept there, and next day the Australians joined a body of some 200 prisoners who were being marched back to Péronne.

After several days' work at Péronne, burying German dead and working in stores, they were sent forward to an old British prison camp at Bray in order to prepare an aerodrome at Cappy. Here they were within reach of British shell-fire, and one shell, meant for Bray, made a hole in the barbed-wire entanglement, through which, early on the night of April 12, they and two mates escaped. They hurried back across country to Méaulte, where several Germans on the roads hailed them, but they simply hastened on, crept up to the German front line on the Lavieville heights; and, when they saw that it had no wire, rushed through it between two sentries. Lane and Ruschpler reached their own line, lucky not to be shot by the sentries there. The Germans, who recaptured the others, thought they

had killed these two.

The records relating to the Australian prisoners taken in the Battle of Dernancourt are especially interesting as indicating the impossibility of arriving at any sweeping judgment upon the attitude of the German (or probably any other) army towards prisoners. The records describe a number of actions of marked kindness and chivalry on the part of members of the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division towards their Australian prisoners, but also include evidence of quite uncommon brutality; so much so as to arouse the suspicion that this division here some grader against Australian thous, or else that the demeanour of the

unical uncommon brugality; so much so as to arouse the suspicion that this division bore some grudge against Australian thoops, or else that the demeanour of the Australians, and possibly their answers, were resented.

Private J. A. O'Rourke (Cobram, Vic.; died 17 Aug., 1923) of Captain Symons' company of the 47th stated that, when the seven survivors in his part of the support trench were surrounded after a very hard fight, and surrendered, on

true, dangerously exposed; and, as the enemy had apparently detected them beforehand, and was able to deluge them with fire over the heads of his approaching infantry, the mounting of the guns and keeping of proper look-out were difficult. But the eight guns, boldly handled, should at least have been able to do much damage before they were overwhelmed. The court of inquiry found that neither post kept a sufficient look-out, and that the guns in the quarry should have been maintained ready on their tripods. The feeling in the A.I.F. was that the handling of the divisional machine-gun company, a comparatively new one, had on this occasion fallen far short of the standard expected of their corps. Two machine-guns of the 13th Company on the forward slope near the C.C.S. were also eventually captured by encirclement; but these guns had been mounted, although the gunners at first saw little to shoot at. One was disabled by a German sniper who worked round its left, and the gunner,68 endeavouring to repair it, was seriously wounded. Two other guns of the 13th Company at the C.C.S. were half-encircled, but their commander, Lieutenant Tuckett, 69 by making a détour to the south, succeeded in bringing out one and getting it into action

climbing out of the trench they were asked by a German officer who they were. On Private F. Curtis (Tambourine, Q'land) saying "Australians," the officer drew his pistol and shot Curtis through the stomach. Curtis dropped, and the officer told two others of the group to carry him to the rear, where he died.

officer told two others of the group to carry him to the rear, where he died.

On the other hand, when another party of Australians including several officers was captured, one of the Australian officers, after taking off his equipment, found his revolver at his hip, and, not knowing what he was doing (for he had no recollection of the incident afterwards) wildly fired six shots at the German officer who had captured his party—fortunately missing him. The German officer, white with anger, wrenched the revolver from him and said: "Do you know I could shoot you for this?" Nevertheless, displaying a chivalrous restraint that would be rare in any army, he sent the party back unharmed. The captured Australians asked that they might be allowed to carry back their own wounded. This was not allowed—the Germans naturally had to be cleared first; but one of the doctors in Dernancourt treated the wounded alternately—one Australian for each German.

Private V. Savage (Toowong, Q'land) of the 47th's right company, wounded through the elbows and captured, on his way from Dernancourt to the rear asked some Germans for a drink. They asked, in turn, who he was, and, when he said "Australian," they hit him in the mouth and told him not to make a noise on pain of being bayoneted

Captain Fraser of the 52nd, after capture, was on the road from Bécordel to Mametz, when a German artillery officer spoke to him in French, and said that the war was over. On Fraser's "replying," the German struck him across the face with his riding whip and rode on.

on Pte. A. V. Postle (No. 516; 13th M.G Coy.). Clerk; of Toowoomba. Q'land; b. Pittsworth, Q'land, 15 Aug., 1897

60 Lieut. R J. Tuckett, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Pearler; of Melbourne; b Royal Park, Vic., 1890.

again, although eight men of his detachment of eleven were either killed or wounded.

The most anxious position at this time was that of Captain Kennedy, whose company with three widely distributed posts formed the flank of the 52nd on the hillside The Crisis in front of the C.C.S. The Germans were pushing up the gullies beyond his front, and, if they appeared on the hilltop behind and above him, his position would be desperate. Colonel Whitham of the 52nd ordered the attached company of the 51st, under Captain Kelly, to move up on to Kennedy's left, but, through some misunderstanding, although Kelly reported this done, it was not done, the position taken up by the company being on the reverse side of the slope, out of sight of Kennedy's line. As Kennedy continued to appeal for support on his left, Whitham sent up all the men he could collect at his headquarters under Lieutenant Wicks,70 with three Lewis guns. Wicks duly went forward, and at 2 o'clock reported that some party of the 12th Brigade was on his left.

Actually this party was the remnant of Stuart Perry's company of the 45th at the sheep pens. 71 Perry was a junior officer.⁷² and it happened that during the fight the arrival of another company commander, back from leave, displaced Captain Adams (a young railway foreman before the war), who during the previous week in front of Dernancourt had done the work of a superman. Adams was at once sent to the forward company. He found it reduced to Perry (who was soon afterwards wounded) and fourteen men. Perry said that he had then sent forward three platoons and wanted to know whether the remainder should attempt to move up. The racket of machine-guns was incessant, and some movement of troops, difficult to interpret, was occurring over the brow of the plateau 300 yards ahead. Adams, searching with his field-glasses from behind one of the hurdles, saw a number of Australians with their hands above their heads among

⁷⁰ Lieut. E. Wicks, M.C., M.M.; 52nd and 51st Bns. Civil servant; of West Guildford, W. Aust., b Collingwood, Vic., 20 March, 1893.

¹¹ See p. 391

²² Captain O. B. Dibbs (North Sydney), previously commanding the company, had

been killed on April 1

their German captors.⁷³ Any advance by his party was obviously out of the question, and he told Perry that their duty was to hold on and stop any further advance by the enemy.

After a short interval, during which the movements ahead ceased, an extended line of men was seen there, coming over the edge of the slope. They appeared to be wearing British helmets, and it seemed possible that some other party of Australians might be withdrawing. Adams, however, after careful scrutiny, made sure that, though some of the helmets were British, the men were German. Fire was at once opened; to get at them better, a Lewis gunner with the party, Lance-Corporal Bannister,74 stood up and fired his gun from the shoulder of Lance-Corporal Squires.75 The enemy's attempt to make ground on the plateau was thus stopped, and Bannister and Squires, continuing to shoot at intervals in the same manner, though themselves standing fully exposed, kept their opponents down. Eventually, however, Adam's party found itself fired on by a German machine-gun thrust forward along the Laviéville road directly on its right flank. The enemy was evidently pursuing the tactics by which he had isolated and captured the other parties. No other Australians were visible on the plateau, and Adams accordingly sent his men back one by one to join the rest of the battalion in Pioneer Trench, he himself and the Lewis gunner remaining to cover them. By 2 o'clock the withdrawal was complete, and the Australian front line on the plateau lay along Pioneer Trench.

At about this time the 52nd, from which these events on the summit were hidden, saw strong bodies of the enemy moving up from the railway, obviously for a renewal of the attack. Captain Williams, whose company now held the flank on the railway, reported that 200 had come up to old trenches east of the C.C.S. Another force, estimated at two battalions, could be seen advancing northwards up the centre of the down as if to attack the 48th. The fire upon Williams's and Kennedy's companies increased. At 3.37 Williams reported

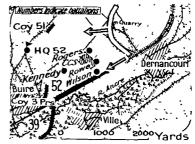
¹³ The prisoners of the 47th were sent to the rear down the road by the quarry and under the railway arch.

¹⁴ Cpl W. J. Bannister, D C M. (No 1912; 45th Bn.). Labourer; of Darlington, N.S W.; b. Sydney, 9 July, 1895. Died 20 July, 1929.

¹⁵ Sgt A. C. Squires, M M. (No 1409; 45th Bn.). Woodworker; of Alexandria, N.S.W.; b. Alexandria, 11 March, 1898

that he was losing men very rapidly and would be hard put to it to hold the railway. Men in the observation post of

the 52nd could see both infantry and what they took to be cavalry assembling in the trees south of the Ancre. The "cavalry" again proved to be guns. At 4 o'clock the Germans began to thrust south-westwards along the railway, enfilading it with machine-guns. Wilson's platoon of Kennedy's company

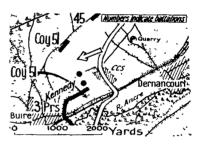


-its commander having been badly wounded shortly after noon-was dislodged and driven back along the embankment, together with the left of Williams's company. machine-guns of the 13th Company, on which the previous retirement had pivoted, had to withdraw 150 yards beside the railway. The centre platoon of Kennedy's company under Lieutenant Rowe, hitherto the main defence at the C.C.S., was now shot out of its trench by enfilade fire from the south, and Lieutenant Rogers and the mixed troops on the flank up the hill were driven to Kennedy's headquarters. Here the Lewis gunners managed to pin down the Germans in front of them, but numbers continued to advance along the sunken road higher up the hill. The hail of fire made it worse than useless to attempt swinging out a flank across the open; all that Kennedy could do was to switch the fire of his northern post upon the Germans up near the hillcrest, and keep the rest of his men shooting to the front. In spite of this fire, the Germans continued to creep round the hilltop. Some of them could be seen carrying a heavy object on a framepossibly a trench-mortar. In front the Germans brought up a field-gun and opened fire with it. Down on the railway the two companies of the 52nd, still in position there, now found themselves under machine-gun fire from the rear, and, in parts, some panic occurred. The troops made back from the railway to the support trenches, and their officers had some difficulty in stopping them. Their position at the railway was abandoned, and part of it was occupied by the Germans

"As the men came streaming back to the support line," says the history of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion, "the enemy opened upon them savagely, at practically point blank range, from light guns in Dernancourt." The retiring men took cover in the support posts and in a trench connecting these with Buire, already garrisoned by a company of the 3rd Pioneers who were firing at Germans attempting to cross the railway line to the C.C.S.

The situation on the right flank was an ugly one, with Kennedy fighting the Germans to the north, on the hill above

him, and to the east, and the other companies, almost back to back with him, facing the enemy south of them at the railway. Fortunately the attack from the south was feeble. In the morning an advance attempted by 300 Germans through the open timber on the river flats,



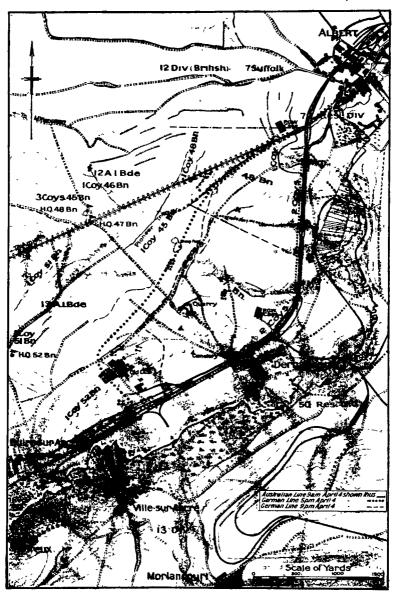
from Ville towards Treux, was quickly smashed by the fire of the 39th Battalion (3rd Division). This effort was now repeated, but less than a fourth of the previous number of the enemy appeared, and they were immediately stopped. The pressure on Kennedy's left flank on the hill, however, threatened to become unendurable, and he sent again to his colonel for help.

Colonel Whitham despatched to him at once a second company of the 51st under Captain Owen. The company was given a direction which would take it straight to Kennedy's left, and at 5.15 it passed Whitham's headquarters. But, as it rounded the hill, it came upon the right company of the 52nd (Captain Stubbings) just launching an advance to reoccupy its abandoned position on the railway. Owen's company joined the left of this advance and swept southwards to the railway, leaving Kennedy still unreinforced. At the railway reinforcement was so little needed that some of the troops there now turned their backs to the line and fired at the Germans high up the slope behind them, who were attacking Kennedy.

At 5.30 Kennedy saw what he had long feared to see, the heads of a line of men appearing over the hilltop directly above him.

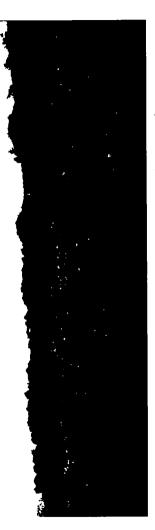
At the other end of the 4th Division's line the left flank post of the 48th, with Lieutenant Shepherdson still in command, had at last, at 3.30, withdrawn from The the original front line, retiring northwards Counter-Attack to the first post of the 7th Suffolk (12th Division), a considerable distance from its left, and thence rejoining its battalion in Pioneer Trench. Orders had meanwhile come through to the 45th, 47th, and 48th Battalions reorganised in Pioneer Trench on this flank, and to the 52nd at the C.C.S. on the other, that a counter-attack by a battalion of the 13th Brigade was being arranged; this battalion would drive the Germans down the hill: the flanks were to support it with fire and to conform to its movement; the artillery would lay a barrage ahead.

This counter-attack had to be quickly staged, news of the situation that rendered it necessary having come through only about noon. The 40th had been sent forward from Laviéville towards its jumping-off line at 1.12, and, while it was on its way, the divisional commander (General MacLagan) and brigadiers settled the plan of attack. On two points they differed. MacLagan thought that use should be made of the tanks, but experience of the fatal unpunctuality and unreliability of these instruments at Bullecourt, caused his subordinates to reject any plan that might make the counterattack dependent on them. They agreed, however, that, when the advance had been made, the tanks should come forward to circle the position and protect the troops digging in. The second difference was that, whereas MacLagan laid down that the object of the 49th must be to reach the railway, Gellibrand -backed up in this by Colonel Leane, on whose opinion he placed much weight-held that, in the 12th Brigade's sector, an advance so far down the slope was out of the question, and that the utmost that could be done was to retake the support line. MacLagan, possibly in accordance with direction from above, insisted on his point, and the order sent to the



SECOND DERNANCOURT, 5TH APRIL, 1918

The dispositions are those existing at 9 am, when the German infantry delivered the main attack.



View from the Australian front line on the slope above Demancourt. An abandoned German machine-gun can be seen on the right—its position was too exposed to be afterwards reached by either side. (Captain Wilkins had to risk his life to add this photograph and plate 30 to the Australian records.) WHERE THE COUNTIR-ATTACK ENDED, 5TH APRIL, 1918

4ust II av Memorial Official Photo N. E2109 Taken on 24th Abril 1918

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THE SOUTHERNMOST HUTS OF THE OLD CASUALTY CLEARING STATION, SHOWING THE AUSTRALIAN FRONT-LINE TRENCH DUG AFFER THF BATTLE

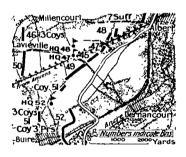
The view is from the railway in front of Burre

4ust II ar Memorial Official Photo No E2499 Fakin on 14th lunc 1918 49th was that it should retake the railway. But Leane, who was in charge of the forward troops of the 12th Brigade, showing, as usual, an independence that would have been highly dangerous in a less capable soldier, directed their effort to ousting the enemy from the sunken road below the crest and reoccupying the support posts.

While these plans had been forming, the 49th had moved across the down to the valley north-east of Colonel Whitham's headquarters. Some time was lost through its taking a direction towards Buire, but this was corrected through a messenger from the 47th, and by 4 o'clock the battalion was lined out along a cross-road on the reverse slope of the mushroom prominence, and Colonel Denton, with his headquarters for the moment at a clump of seven tall trees there, had received Brigadier-General Glasgow's order for the operation. On his left were two companies of the 45th⁷⁶ under Captains Davies⁷⁷ and Holman,⁷⁸ with a third in support—Adams's company now mustered only eight men. Next was a remnant of the 47th, and, farthest left, the reorganised 48th in Pioneer Trench. That part of Pioneer Trench being in

alignment with the support position farther south, the 48th was ordered by Leane merely to support the attack with its fire.

The fixing of the time for the assault was left to Colonel Denton, and by 4.45 he saw that the assembly was sufficiently advanced for an attack at 5.15. It was already past 5 when this decision was passed



through Leane to the staffs in rear. Little time was thus left to get the information to the batteries, which, indeed, had found some difficulty in securing early information of the arrangements. Nevertheless at 5.15 they laid down on the

 $^{^{76}\,\}mathrm{At}$ this stage Colonel Leane gave to the 45th the company of the 46th which he had till then held in reserve.

T Capt. E. Davies, M.C.; 45th Bn. Labourer; of Sydney; b. Kirkdale, Lanca, Eng., 1800

⁷⁸ Capt. J H. Holman, M.C. 45th Bn. Engineering apprentice, of Auburn, N.S.W., b. Sunny Corner, N.S.W., 12 Oct., 1896.

old support line a bombardment which, though at some points slight, was at others fairly heavy. It was to last for six minutes and then move 500 yards farther down the hill. The quarry was specially shelled with 4.5-inch howitzers.

Of this counter-attack, one of the finest ever carried out by Australian troops, strangely little has been recorded. The infantry making it knew that their division was fighting with its back to the wall, and the artillery felt that every shot would help the infantry, part of which the gunners near Millencourt could actually see advancing. The troops went forward, "nominally in waves," as Colonel Leane said afterwards, "but actually in one line or throng." From the start, though partly covered by the swell of the summit, they were under dangerous fire; Lieutenants Mitchell79 and Theo Perry80 of the 45th and many others were killed immediately after leaving Pioneer Trench. But, as the line of determined men came over the crest of the hill into sight of the Germans only a few hundred vards ahead, there broke out what Colonel Imlay described as "a devilish fire, a tremendous tattoo of machineguns."81 Groups of the enemy were ahead of the old support trenches, which were very strongly held, and they were firing unhindered, the British barrage falling behind them. Even back at Pioneer Trench, two of the eight men remaining in Adams's company, which was then climbing out to follow the advance, were killed by this whirlwind of small-arms fire. The forward line charged over the crest and was lost to the sight of those watching from the rear, but the fire of machineguns continued.

It was at this moment that the advancing line of the 49th came into the view of the posts of the 52nd anxiously holding on near the casualty clearing station. Captain Kennedy, who felt a momentary fear that this might be a German attack from behind his flank, and eagerly scanned the figures to ascertain whether they were friend or enemy, noted an immediate easing of the fierce fire that had been lashing his position. Very soon it ceased altogether, most of the German rifles and

^{**}Lieut. H. F. Mitchell, 45th Bn. Barrister; of Kangaroo Island, and Renmark, S. Aust.; b. Kensington, S. Aust., 11 Aug., 1885. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

**Description of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Auburn, 9 May, 1895. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

⁸¹ Captain Davies of the 45th said afterwards that the machine-gun fire was the heaviest he had ever known, other accounts agree as to its intensity

machine-guns being turned on the advancing line. In face of the storm of bullets, the attack came only slowly towards his flank, but it did come. By 6.30 the Germans were in full flight all over the ground in front, abandoning the C.C.S., and shot at, as they retired, by every weapon in the 52nd's partly-recaptured line on the railway. Dusk came on and from the 13th Brigade a report went back that the 40th had "just failed" to reach the railway.

It was, however, not until 9 o'clock that Colonel Denton of the 49th had any real news of his battalion's progress. The extreme right, he knew, had retaken the C.C.S. but had been stopped there. At 8 word reached him from the commander of his left company, Captain Gledhill,82 that the company was high up the slope, a little short of the old support line; it was indeed precisely in the position to which Leane had wished to send the 45th at noon, when his order clashed with Gellibrand's.88 Gledhill said that he could see troops digging on his right, and the 45th Battalion was on his left. Two hours later there came through a message from the commander of the right company, Lieutenant Graham.84 indicating that the 40th held a line from his position to Gledhill's but with a gap in it high up the hill. The com-Millencourt manders of the two centre com-

panies, Captains Willenbrock85 and Atkinson,86 had been killed, half had their junior officers.87 A company of the 51st was placed in the gap. right had crossed sunken road, the enemy fleeing from that part of it and from



^{**}Scapt. A J Gledhill, 49th Bn. Bank official; of Oakey, Q'land, and Melbourne; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 16 June, 1886.

**Scep. 371

**Lieut. J. L. Graham, M.C.; 49th Bn. School teacher; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Gympie, 28 Sept., 1894

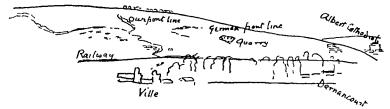
**Capt. J. H. Willenbrock, 49th Bn. Clerk; of Bundaberg, Q'land, and Sydney; b. London, 1888. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918

**Capt. J. V. Atkinson, 40th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Coorparoo, Q'land; b. Coorparoo, 3 Dec., 1894 Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

**Lieut. R. G. T. Turner, W. Henderson, and T. C. Naylor were killed. In Graham's company Lieut. R. H. Verry was killed, and Lieut. W. M. Devine mortally wounded. (Turner belonged to Brisbane and Mackay, Q'land; Henderson to Perth, W. Aust; Navlor to Bundaberg, Q'land; Verry to Coorparoo, Q'land; Devine to Toowoomba, Q'land.)

the C.C.S. The centre had quickly run into overwhelming fire and after a short, wild fight, by which the foremost enemy was cleared, was forced to ground, the Germans in front of it bolting away whenever opportunity occurred. Many of the Australian wounded were hit again on their way to the rear, and killed. On the left the 45th had been met by the same whirlwind of machine-gun fire but, as before, reached the sheep pens. The line was forced to ground 200 yards short of the 47th's old support position on the right and 400 yards short of it on the left. Near the C.C.S. the 49th captured half-a-dozen prisoners and four machine-guns; and the 12th Brigade took about the same number of each.

No more than the topmost edge of the slope had thus been regained; but this was not far short of the position that had first been designated by General Congreve for the main line of resistance, and was, in fact, the only position that had ever really been defensible. General MacLagan decided that his reserves were insufficient to justify any further attempt to recapture the line of the railway. The tanks, which were to protect the infantry while it dug in, did not arrive at Colonel Leane's headquarters until 8.10. It was then night; the



The line after the Battle of Dernancourt, as seen from the front of the 3rd Aust. Divn. (From a sketch made in May, 1918. Note.—
The tower of Albert Cathedral was destroyed on April 16 by a shell from the British heavy artillery.)

officer-in-charge explained that he was not allowed to use his tanks in the dark, and they were accordingly returned to Laviéville. MacLagan was nervous lest the enemy should continue the attack next day with new troops. "The fighting has been harder than we realise," he said to the corps commander on the telephone. "I don't think, if we are hammered by artillery, we shall be able to hold the line." General

Congreve asked where the Germans were going to get the fresh divisions from; the information from the few captured prisoners showed that they had used up the only three that had been available.

General Congreve realised that the attack upon the Laviéville height was only part—though a most important part of an effort made that day by the Second and Seventeenth German Armies on a front extending from Villers-Bretonneux to Bucquoy. The Seventeenth Army had indeed resumed the offensive, so long postponed, against Hébuterne and Colincamps, as well as against the V British Corps at Aveluy Wood and Albert. The Germans had gained some ground at Bucquoy village and Aveluy Wood, and had retaken La Signy Farm⁸⁸ from the New Zealanders, but these trivial results from so great an effort did not justify anxiety. Congreve passed on to Third Army MacLagan's warning. The 6th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division, which was arriving from Flanders, was placed under orders to relieve the 12th, whose outpost-line was taken over during the night by the 46th Battalion from Laviéville. The forward garrison of the 7th Suffolk, which was left exposed by the 12th Brigade's withdrawal,89 was brought back during the night behind a new line manned by the 7th Norfolk.

But in the morning no attack came. Late in the afternoon an otherwise quiet day was broken by an intense bombardment, started through the British artillery mistaking a German "double-green" flare for the British S.O.S. signal, two greens. The deluge of shells from both sides lasted for two and a half hours. On the afternoon of the 7th the 12th Brigade was relieved by the 6th. Colonel Leane, who had a hot meal waiting for his men in the empty aeroplane hangars at La Houssoye, noted, as after First Bullecourt: "It rained during the march... The men marched well and sang most of the journey."

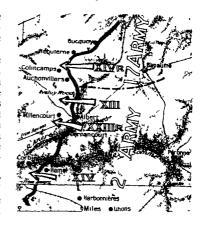
⁸⁸ See b. 141.

⁸⁰ This battalion had held its main position throughout the 5th, being driven back only from some of its outposts. It was at first suggested that the Australian flank should go forward again and protect the British flank, but this plan was wisely abandoned. Part of the 7th Suffolk, which was to form a flank, found the Australians already forming it.

German histories show that the attack at Dernancourt (known to its organisers as "Sonnenschein") had originally been ordered for March 31, but postponed from day to day until the shell-supply was satisfactory. It was to be delivered in concert with other attacks farther north, in which the Seventeenth Army would drive through on either side of Hébuterne to Colincamps, and the Second Army would seize the

Auchonvillers-Millencourt ridge, getting round Millencourt on the north. "Sonnenschein" ("Sunshine") was to reach the line Hénencourt-Laviéville-Buire.

Before the delivery of these attacks, it had been hoped that, south of the Somme, the British front would be crumbling before the blow struck on the previous day by the Eighteenth Army and the left of the Second. At certain points that thrust had penetrated two miles, and on the night of the 4th the chances had seemed sufficiently good to warrant the continuance of blows south of the Somme also, although the exhaustion of the troops eventually caused the effort there to be restricted to a renewal of the assault near Hamel



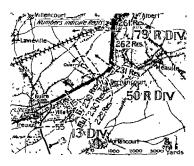
The German thrust at Aveluy and north-east of Albert—the sector held by the 12th, 47th, and 63rd British Divisions, 90 all tired and weak in numbers—was made by the XIII German Army Corps with three divisions, the 107th, 27th, and 3rd Naval, together with parts of the 79th Reserve and 21st Reserve. According to a narrative in the Reichsarchiv, the bombardment there began at 8 with half-an-hour's gas-shelling of the British batteries, followed by half-an-hour's bombardment of the infantry. The reply of the British artillery was weak, but the assault at 9 o'clock, although driving back the British outposts in and south of the wood, came up everywhere against fire from machine-guns posted over the ground in rear and not previously detected, and was stopped far short of its objectives

The attack on the 4th Australian Division at Dernancourt was delivered by the XXIII Reserve Corps with three divisions: south-east of Albert, by the 79th Reserve Division (which also came against the southern flank of the 12th British); on either side of Dernancourt, by the 50th Reserve Division; and, between Dernancourt and Buire by part of the 13th Division, another portion of which made an attempt upon the neighbouring part of the 3rd Division's front south of the Ancre, between Buire and Marrett Wood. The weight of the attack was directed against the railway bank held by the 47th and 48th Battalions, against each of which the Germans threw nearly the equivalent of a division, some additional storm troops also being employed. On this front the German plan was similar to that for

^{*} The artillery of the 17th Division also was engaged.

"First Dernancourt" (March 28), but the artillery preparation was to last for two hours, instead of three-quarters of an hour, and was incomparably more severe, and the 50th Reserve Division, which had

been rested for a week, employed all three regiments instead of two, and attacked on a narrower front. The crucial task was given to the 230th R.I.R, whose II Battalion, after assembling in cellars in Dernancourt, was to seize the embankment there, advance up the hill, and capture the 47th's support trenches and portion of Pioneer Trench south of the Amiens road. The III and I Battalions of the 230th, and the whole of the 229th R.I.R., were to assemble behind Dernancourt and follow the



II/230th in that order. Upon its reaching its objective, they would turn south-westwards. On their right would be the 79th Reserve Division, which in the meantime would have come up north of the Albert-Amiens road. They would then advance together towards Amiens. It was probably expected that the troops defending the railway between the north-east of Dernancourt and Albert would be overcome with little difficulty, being attacked in front by the 231st R I R. (50th Reserve Division) and 262nd and 261st R I.R's (79th Reserve Division), as well as taken in rear by the thrust of the 53th Reserve Division. The 79th Reserve Division therefore attacked with two regiments, the 263rd R.I.R. being held in reserve. By a general order of Ludendorff dated March 30, single field-guns, following the unfantry, were to attack machine-gun nests which held out and furnished the principal obstacle, and machine-guns were to be used to keep down the heads of men in the objective during the attack.

All depended upon the success of the II Battalion of the 230th RIR. The morale of the 50th Reserve Division was high. It was a Prussian Division and, according to the historian of the 230th, ⁹¹ in spite of the losses suffered since March 21, "its keen offensive spirit was still alive. Moreover this time it had been possible sufficiently to prepare the attack, and there was no obvious ground for doubting the result, despite the somewhat difficult change of front" which was to be made when the 230th arrived near the Amiens-Albert road.

The artillery supporting the division had been given 16,000 gas shells for the preparatory gassing of the opposing batteries. The bombardment was to be most intense from 8.30 to 9. No. 3 company of the 3rd Jager Battalion with four machine-guns, two trench-mortars and two field-guns, was attached to the 50th Division, and an assault detachment of the same battalion was allotted to the 230th for "certain enterprises" on the railway line. Possibly the attack on the 52nd's post at the railway shortly after the preliminary bombardment began was one of these. If not, the troops then engaged must have been covering parties of the 5th and 7th companies of the II/230th trying

to protect the assembly of their battalion by driving away the Lewis gunners who commanded its jumping-off position. Most of the machine-guns of the 2nd company took station in houses in Dernancourt and covered the attack with their fire. The barrage of the British artillery was felt more severely on the Dernancourt-Albert front than elsewhere, but it was noted that the gas-shelling behind the lines there soon ceased.

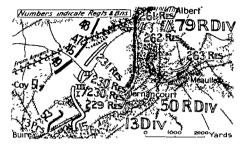
Of the principal attack at 9 o'clock upon the 47th Battalion opposite the village, the available German records say only that it was met by strong machine-gun fire partly coming from the flanks. "Nevertheless," writes Lieutenant Heilemann, "the 7th company succeeded in reaching the railway embankment and rolling its defenders up towards the left. By 9.50 it was in our hand. Its existing muddyyellow garrison gathered together in little squads, and, with hands above their heads, like fleeing flocks of geese with raised wings, trotted through Dernancourt to the rear. Further advance, however, still involved difficulties on account of the machine-gun fire from the railway signal-cabin, which now would have taken us in rear. Captain Krug (the battalion commander) ordered a light minenwerfer, that had just come up, to be placed immediately on the embankment and take the machine-gun under its fire. A thousand hands tackled the job at once, and lifted the swaying mortar to the required position. A few wellaimed shots reduced the machine-gun to silence. Meanwhile the companies had deployed into lines of skirmishers and advanced farther. As they went up the hill they met the Australian machine-gunners, already captured—presumably by the 5th company—and passed the silent machine-guns. The crest was reached "without a shot," and at 10.30 the II/230th had finished its work.

Whether it was part of the 230th, or of the 231st—its sister battalion on the right—that captured the 47th Battalion's support trenches, is not indicated. Shortly after 10 o'clock the commander of the 230th advanced his headquarters to the railway embankment, and, when the severe bombardment of Dernancourt eased, the III Battalion, which had meanwhile come up into the cellars there, moved on across the railway and, marching up behind the II, carried through without difficulty its change of front. The I Battalion followed it and wheeled to the left at the quarry. The head of the 220th R.I.R. led by its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Thadden himself, reached the embankment at 945 before the railway was fully captured. It reorganised there, and at II its leading battalion, the III, with the attached machinegun company, crossed the embankment to take position on the left At this stage British aeroplanes came overhead, and a of the 230th. few minutes later the troops of the I and II/229th, crowded behind the embankment, began to be deluged by shell including some of large calibre. (Actually, the request for this bombardment seems to have come at 11.30 from infantry or artillery-observers on the heights, who calibre. shortly before this had detected Germans "in masses" in Dernancourt, and asked for the village to be shelled by all artillery.) "To stay in this hell," says the historian of the 229th, "appears to be out of the question." Thadden ordered his regiment on to the cemetery, and himself led it over the embankment. As he reached the cemetery road he was mortally wounded by shrapnel. His first words on regaining consciousness were "Have we the cemetery?"

Meanwhile the III/229th reached its allotted position and tried to clear the C.C.S. Somewhat later the II Battalion came in on its left, and, with its own left on the railway, began to push towards Buire.

The whole 50th Reserve Division was now in position for its advance towards Amiens; but, instead of its being behind the line of resistance of its opponents there was a line of resistance west of it, and no 79th Reserve Division on its right. That division had attacked, but its southern regiment, the 262nd Reserve, coming against the right of

the 48th Battalion, had been driven back to its jumping-off trench, and 261st astride Amiens road had almost as little success. Its history says: "Here lay for the last six days Australians who, through their struggles in the bush and forest of their native land, had been made specially efficient in this machine-gun-nest fighting



and understood how to defend themselves with extreme skill." Most of the division's artillery was brought up to near Albert—and at least two guns were pushed through the town. One of these, out with the infantry, cleared a copse held by the 12th Division. Next day the 261st occupied

the old prisoners' camp north of the Amiens road.

On the southern flank of the battle the 13th German Division achieved nothing at all. It was its right regiment, the 15th, that was caught by machine-guns of the 13th Australian Machine Gun Company when trying to advance, together with some Jagers, from the trees of Ville towards Buire. The 55th I.R. could make no headway against the fire from Marrett Wood, although this was deluged for more than two hours with shell; and on the left the 13th I.R, which was to

conform with it, accordingly stayed in its trenches

Thus, for the second part of its task, the 50th Reserve Division had no support on either flank. A message was sent to divisional headquarters, asking for directions Meanwhile, the staff of the 230th R.I.R had established itself in the quarry, and, "precisely at the right time" (says the regimental historian), a brigade⁹² of the divisional artillery came up. "At 5 p.m, after a weak bombardment, the enemy passed to a counter-attack which was easily thrown back. But the great deficiency of leaders now became noticeable. At the cry of the retiring patrols, 'Tommy is coming,' the reserves of all three regiments, closely packed into the gravel pit, began to crumble away to the rear, and had to be vigorously brought forward again. The regimental staff . . . now drew back its headquarters to the railway embankment." A captured sergeant of the 229th described the Australian counter-attack as schr schneidig (very dashing).

The German command did not dream of renewing the attempt to seize the crest. "The enemy's defence was so strong," says a historian of the participating units, 93 "that a farther advance was not to be thought of" The German infantry was at once redistributed in depth The 263rd R.I R. (70th Reserve Division) was brought up to fill a gap between that division and the 50th Reserve, and the Germans

⁹³ The I Abteilung, 50th Reserve Field Artillery Regiment.

⁵⁸ The 63rd Reserve F.A. Regt. (with the 79th Res. Divn.).

passed for the time being to the defensive. The 230th had lost 230 officers and men,94 the 229th 212, the 261st 133; the total loss of the three divisions attacking the 4th Australian may therefore be estimated at between 1,300 and 1,600,95 not a heavy toll for fighting of such intensity.

The casualties on the Australian side were 580 in the 12th Brigade, and about 500 in the 13th, besides 153 in the field artillery supporting the 4th Division. That artillery fired during the engagement 27,588 rounds.

It remains to mention the part played in the battle farther north, at Hébuterne, by the other brigade-4th-of the same division. Between Hébuterne and Bucquoy Hébuternethe 62nd British Division, under whose April 5 orders the 4th Brigade was serving, had, between March 31st and April 2nd been relieved by the 37th. and this division had decided to attempt, early on April 5th, the recapture of Rossignol Wood. The 63rd Brigade, which was to make the attack, was to be assisted by eleven tanks. The 15th Australian Battalion, which, with a company of the 14th attached, lay next to that brigade in the line, was to connect with its flank near the Poplars. Farther south the 13th Battalion would try to divert the enemy's attention by raiding.

At 5.30 on the 5th the 63rd Brigade launched its attack in the muddy conditions of that day, but most of the tanks became stuck at the outset, five of them being ditched in the wide, grass covered trenches of the old battlefield. One, on the right, at the head of the British infantry, reached the

The details of losses in the infantry were as follows

ıgade.		13th Br	igade.	
Officers.	O.R.	C	fficers.	O.R.
13	105	49 Bn.	14	207
3	70			6 r
8	261		3	58
4	77		8	146
2	36	13 M.G. Coy.	I	26
y	I	13 L.T.M. Bty.	I	I
_	_		_	
30	550		27	499
			_	
	Officers. 13 3 8 4 4 2 y. —	Officers. O.R. 13 105 3 70 8 261 4 77 2 36 y. — 1	Officers. O.R. 13 105 49 Bn. 3 70 50 Bn. 8 261 51 Bn. 4 77 52 Bn. 2 36 13 M.G. Coy	Officers. O.R. 13 105 49 Bn. 14 3 70 50 Bn. — 8 261 51 Bn. 3 4 77 52 Bn. 8 2 36 13 M.G. Coy. 1 y. — 13 L.T.M. Bty. 1

Note -Figures for 13th Bde, include also casualties for March 31-April 4.

H Including its commander and medical officer.

⁹⁵ In the 13th Division it would be comparatively slight. The 2nd Naval Regiment, attacking north of the Albert road, lost 16o.

Crucifix97 and went on to the ebjective from which, after subduing several machine-guns. it returned with a couple of prisoners. In all 141 prisoners were captured, but the wood, though entered, was not retaken: during the dav the troops gradually returned the to iumping-off trenches.



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The platoon of the 15th Australian Battalion which was to advance to the Poplars moved off down the old trenches at 5 o'clock, in order to oust a couple of German posts and get close to the barrage when it fell at 5.30. It was observed that when the platoon was just starting the German artillery laid a severe bombardment on the back area, from Hébuterne southwards. The platoon commander, Lieutenant Fewster,98 found Germans assembling in the trenches immediately south of him, and his platoon was stopped by fire from a post high on the spur on his left, in front of the 8th Lincolnshire, who themselves were held up by a similar obstacle. The assembled Germans subsequently attacked the Queenslanders, but were driven off by bombing and rifle-fire. The attempt of the 15th to reach the Poplars thus failed; Captain Toft reported that he thought his men had run into preparations for a German attack.

The raid by the 13th Battalion went well. Under cover of Stokes mortars, which fired thirty bombs at the objective, two parties crept out down old saps and joined each other at a predetermined point, capturing a prisoner and a light machine-gun. All this time the German bombardment was thundering overhead, and the shells from the British artillery, replying to protect the front of the New Zealand Division immediately on the right, prevented the 13th from going to a second objective, farther out.

⁹⁷ On the road south-east of "Nameless Farm".

⁹⁸ Lieut. G E. Fewster, 15th Bn. Farmer; of Brunswick, Vic.; b. Brunswick. 30 March, 1894. Killed in action, 4 July, 1918.

The German bombardment was extraordinarily vehement; according to the historian of the New Zealand Division, "it was perhaps the severest bombardment that the division as a whole experienced during the war." It fell with particular intensity between Hébuterne and Auchonvillers, upon the New Zealanders and the right half of the 4th Australian Brigade. Headquarters of the 13th Battalion had to leave Hébuterne village; but fortunately in that area the fire was not as accurate as it was heavy. The right battalion, the 16th (Western Australia), was in the thick of 1t, but the posts were seldom hit.

It did not require the tried and experienced company leaders, in whom this brigade was especially rich, to realize that an attack was coming. Shortly after 9 o'clock the troops saw it emerging over Serre ridge to the south-east and also in the valley between, where a line of the enemy was detected moving behind a smoke screen. At 9.27 Captain Aarons reported:

Cannot estimate number of Fritz attacking. Considerable forces though. Get artillery on whole front. . . Fritz stronger in front of Ahearne [the right company commander] than me.

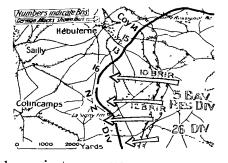
Shortly afterwards came a message from Ahearne:99

Things are very hot. Postpone relief till further notice. It is impossible for them to come up. He is massing in front of Quarry and my right, but we don't want artillery support up to date. They are about 150 yards in front of me, but we can kill them as fast as they come. Keep look out for S.O.S. Don't be alarmed as we can kill em as fast as they come.

As in previous attacks the Germans, trying to pass by Hébuterne on the south, exposed their flank to the fire of the whole 4th Brigade. The centre battalion (13th), and even the 15th on the left, were shooting at them, a Lewis gunner of the 15th taking his gun out into No-Man's Land in order to fire into the German flank. A few of the enemy managed to creep up a sap towards the right-flank bombing post of the 16th, but they were quickly routed out

 $^{^{90}}$ Ahearne is the officer referred to on p 142 and in Vols. III and IV as Ahrens. He changed his name during the war.

from the fire bъ which Stokes mortars burst their shells continually among enemy. Aarons reported that about a battalion of the enemy was involved on this flank, but that only 200-250 of had actually them formed up.



formed up. The attack began in two waves

but they got so knocked about that the balance [i.e., the remainder] of the attack seemed to be on hands down, along saps, go as you please. Sort of Anzac rules.

On the New Zealand front the Germans, after taking La Signy Farm, tried to work along the saps under cover of fire from the trench-mortars, but the New Zealand line stopped every attempt.

German accounts show that the capture of Hébuterne and Colincamps—to which Crown Prince Rupprecht would previously have devoted his reserves had not Ludendorff overruled him—was the main object of the Seventeenth Army's attack, which was made with the further intention of assisting the thrust of the Second Army towards Amiens. The attack at Bucquoy was (according to the history of the 89th Grenadier Regiment, which undertook it) merely devised in order to take advantage of a gas bombardment laid on the British artillery there so as to assist the divisions attacking farther south; its success in penetrating to the western half of the village (from which part, however, the Germans were quickly ousted by the 42nd British Division) was unexpected.

The main attack, on Hébuterne and Colincamps, was known by the code-name "Loki," and was made by two divisions, the 5th Bavarian Reserve and the 26th, with two others attacking Auchonvillers. The preliminary bombardment for "Loki" lasted four hours, 100 beginning as elsewhere with the gas-shelling of the opposing artillery, and ending at 9 o'clock, when the guns passed to a barrage creeping at the rate of 300 yards in ten minutes. According to the history of the 126th IR—which had suffered in previous attempts, but merely garrisoned the existing line in this one—the 5th Bavarian Reserve Division, attacking south of Hébuterne, made "absolutely no headway," and the 26th "very little," the result being "precisely as in previous attacks of the XIV Reserve Corps." The artillery had been regrouped and the batteries advanced at the beginning of the battle.

¹⁰⁰ According to several German accounts; some, however, say three hours.

The troops who came against the flank of the 16th Australian Battalion were those of the 10th Bavarian R.I.R. On their left was the 12th Bavarian R.I.R., with the 7th Bav. R.I.R. behind it to guard against counter-attack from Hébuterne. According to the historian of against counter-attack from Rebuterne. According to the instortan of the 10th, that regiment on entering the line on April 4 had found the machine-gun fire from Hébuterne "most unpleasant." Attacking at 9 o'clock next morning, the first wave met machine-gun fire from the front and both flanks Its right battalion (I) is claimed to have "reached its objective." Its left (III) broke up 150-200 metres from the start Both had to he all day under heavy fire. The divisional commander ordered another attack to be made at 5 pm., but afterwards, on representations from the regimental commander, cancelled the order and withdrew the troops. The regiment lost 190 officers and men. 'The attack had no prospect whatever of success," says its historian, "unless the enfilade fire of enemy machine-guns were eliminated by the preliminary bombardment and by the barrage."

The stroke against Amiens from north of the Somme had thus failed more completely than that south of the river. Of the bitter attacks that formed part of it, that which fell on the two brigades of the 4th Division at Dernancourt was the strongest ever met by Australian troops, and, by reason of the tactical position, one of the most difficult to resist. They were holding a low, protruding line with a bare steep slope immediately behind it and a village in the enemy's possession actually touching it in front. Until just before the battle it had been assumed that the railway embankment around the foot of Laviéville down would be untenable in the face of any strong attack, and the order had been to resist any such attack half-way up the slope. Although this order had been reversed, the conditions had not changed; and the one action that might have overturned the German arrangements—a concentration of artillery-fire on Dernancourt at the outset-was prevented by the fog, which, added to the bombardment, completely prevented the necessary information from getting through during the first hour of the attack. Towards the end of that hour the Germans effected their purpose of breaking through the posts of the 47th. swift seizure of the heights and encirclement of the 47th's support line were directly due to the failure of the machine-gun batteries: but this in its turn was partly due to the exposure involved in attempting to hold a salient by occupying isolated forward positions on a prominent slope. The almost complete absence of news of the rapid developments between 10 and 11 o'clock was largely due to the same cause.

Although the decision to make the railway embankment the line of resistance is obviously open to criticism, it is unlikely that the actual events were much affected by it, inasmuch as the earlier dispositions were not changed. Moreover, the support line was a badly disjointed one. The section dug for the 13th Brigade, far down the hill, was 750 yards ahead of the 47th Battalion's section, near the crest, and the 47th's was insufficiently linked with the 48th's. The pioneers, after digging the well-sited reserve line, had been used to strengthen the front line by tunnelling at the railway.

But, let the tactical judgments be what they may, neither side had the least doubt as to where success lay; this stubborn fight left the Australians overflowing with confidence, the Germans bitterly depressed. Two achievements stand out from it; first, that of the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division in achieving almost perfectly the first part of the task set to it, and, in the face of a stiff defence by first-rate troops, placing itself across the rear of the 12th Brigade's front line, in position to begin the further advance towards Amiens; and, second, that of the 48th Battalion, which, with a fragment of the 47th, for the second time in twelve months, after beating the enemy on its front, found him straight across its rear, and in masterly fashion proceeded to extricate itself. and to come coolly and proudly out of a perilous entanglement Fine as was the performance of the whole 4th Division. which with two brigades in impossible defences received and repelled with but little bending the blow of two and a half German divisions, there was probably no man engaged that would not give the palm for that day's resistance to the 48th. A German war-correspondent wrote after this fight: "the Australians¹⁰¹ and Canadians are much the best troops that the English have." That statement was interpreted by G.H.Q. as merely an attempt to sow jealousy between the mother

¹⁰¹ This, of course, connoted also the New Zealanders and possibly all dominion troops.

country and the dominions, and possibly such a motive was not absent. The men of the 48th would probably be prouder of the tribute which seven months later some of their comrades found scratched in indelible pencil on two rough wooden crosses, erected by the German front-line troops (together with three or four crosses to their own dead) beside the 48th's eld post on the southern edge of the ravine and preserved in the Australian War Memorial to-day.

"Here lies a brave English warrior."102

^{102 &}quot;Hier liegt ein tapferer Englischer Krieger." Before these two crosses were taken for the War Museum others were erected in their place.