

CHAPTER VII

THE THIRD STROKE AT MORLANCOURT

THE German offensive against the French on the Aisne had immediate results on the British front also. It was understood that the Germans had broken through by shattering, largely with trench-mortar bombardment, the trenches and garrisons within some 1,500 yards of the front line. South and east of the Oise this danger was met by a stricter application of Pétain's tactics of making his real defence farther back, and allowing the enemy to take the forward zone if he could overcome the slight forces there. But on the front north of the Oise the orders of Foch were that all ground must be held; "not an inch more is to be lost!" If the enemy did penetrate, the front line must be retaken by counter-attack made either at once with the local reserves or after careful preparation with the reserves of the higher commanders.

But, in case of a great attack, of what use would be any troops within the zone of trench-mortar bombardment? It would descend on them in a crash, without the weeks of preliminary shelling that had precluded the battles of 1917. British commanders expected the blow to fall upon them as soon as their reserves had been attracted to the French front, and to the more thoughtful, therefore, the problem set by Foch's order caused anxiety. On the Australian front it was one of the first that General Monash and the new chief of his staff grappled with.

On June 4th, when it was already foreseen that the next German thrust would be made near Montdidier, Brig.-Genl. Blamey issued a memorandum laying down measures by which troops for defence of the forward area might be kept alive during the expected bombardment "so that when the infantry attack commences the hostile infantry may be met on equal terms." Commanding officers, it was laid down, must keep their reserves safe. Troops not actually required in the firing

line must be either outside the possible zone of annihilating fire or in deep dugouts. All machine-guns within 1,500 yards of the line must be sheltered in dugouts¹ far enough back to enable them to be set up and manned before the enemy was on them. As for the artillery, which the enemy would try to smother in its known positions with gas shell even at 12,000 yards' range, each battery must select beforehand an alternative position—not necessarily one suitable for permanent occupation, but one in which it could fight the battle; and the guns must be ready to move thither at any moment. In addition there must always be a mobile artillery reserve. Gas drill must be perfected. In the forward zone, the infantry garrison must be distributed not in small posts of four or six men but in groups such as platoons with considerable powers of resistance.

These measures were discussed on June 6th at the first conference held by General Monash with his divisional commanders and the chiefs of their staffs—a meeting at which General Hobbs pointed out that, for the first time, all those present, generals and staff officers, were members of the A.I.F.

On the day of that conference—and three days before the Germans struck between Montdidier and Noyon—Sir Douglas Haig issued a memorandum on the same subject.² The garrison of the outpost trench-system, he said, was to be only strong enough to make the enemy believe that the battle would be fought there; the main battle system should be a mile behind it. If the line was penetrated commanders might withdraw any outposts that were still holding or else use small adjacent reserves to counter-attack and retake the position; such immediate attacks were favoured by Haig, but he insisted that, if larger reserves were thrown in, this must be done only after careful and thorough preparation.

These instructions did not conflict with those of Foch; they merely empowered commanders to give up temporarily the foremost parts of the outpost-system, or even, if hard pressed, to retire to the battle zone, but only with a view to retaking the outpost-line as soon as the reserves could be effectively used.

¹ Fourth Army H.Q. also had been urging the construction of many more dugouts

² An amplification of his memorandum of 14 Dec. 1917, on defence.

But, for the troops themselves, whether in the front line or in rear, there was to be "only one degree of resistance, and that is to the last round and to the last man." In a second memorandum, issued five days later, Haig added that British troops when counter-attacking or in minor offensives must not expect to be covered by concentrations of artillery as dense as those of the 1917 battles; in present circumstances it was impossible to withdraw so much artillery from quieter sectors. In a most significant sentence, betraying a lesson finally imbibed (but at what cost?) he added, "a concentration of artillery tends to make surprise difficult and may thus wreck the enterprise." Infantry must learn to manoeuvre under cover of artillery fire, and to rely more than hitherto upon their own weapons for their protection. In order to accustom the British staffs to controlling such battles, he ordered that tactical exercises without troops must also be undertaken.

By this time the Germans had attacked at Noyon; and, as this was rightly assumed to be another formidable diversion, the early launching of Rupprecht's thirty-odd divisions to resume the principal struggle with the British appeared more likely than ever. Early in June a G.H.Q. order pointed out that along most of the British front the enemy's preparations were now so complete that it was difficult to tell where attacks would be delivered; the best way was to ensure the constant identification of the German troops on each sector. On June 8th G.H.Q. further warned all British armies that raids and minor offensives must probably be undertaken to assist the French by holding the enemy on the British front; and after the Noyon attack constant identification became even more urgent.

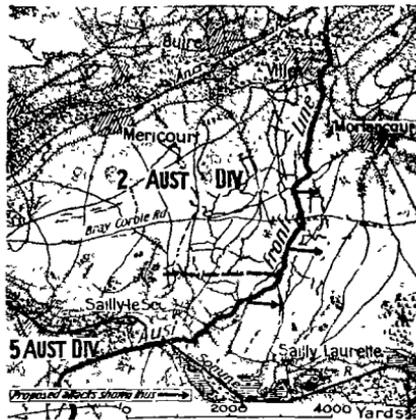
From the Australian fronts, both at Amiens and Hazebrouck, the stream of German prisoners was, it is true, almost continuous. Hardly a day passed without one or more of the posts or patrols making some capture. In the launching of minor offensives, also, the Australian Corps was easily the most active, and had already planned the next stroke in its series. A month earlier, when Rosenthal had made his first advance near Morlancourt, General White saw that the process could

**The next
minor
offensive**

not finish until the cross-spur above Saily-Laurette was wholly captured.³ And when, on May 22nd, Rosenthal became commander of the 2nd Australian Division, now in that sector, the rounding off of the earlier operation by an advance of its right brigade was an early matter for consideration. The attack was authorised before General Birdwood left.

By the capture of this crest the corps would gain good observation on both sides of the peninsula and the Germans would lose it; the depth of the defensive system would be increased; the Fourth Army would secure a position more favourable for any future advance beyond Morlancourt; another small blow would be dealt to the enemy, and a useful haul of prisoners would probably be made. The operation should not be costly—a vital consideration when reinforcements were so scarce. It would bring only one disadvantage—advancing the flank on the peninsula north of the Somme so far would expose it uncomfortably to the Germans at Hamel, south of the river.

Rosenthal, as was his habit, first assured himself of the precise situation by personally going round his front.⁴ The proposed objective, a line—partly of trench and partly of pot-holes—which he termed the German front line, lay just beyond the crest



of the cross-spur, 600 yards from the 5th Brigade's outposts. This would be seized on a front of 3,000 yards. The attack would be made by the 7th (Outer States) Brigade, which was accordingly taken out of the line at Ville for a few days' rest. Since its most dreadful experiences in November, 1916, this brigade had been commanded by Brig.-Genl. Wisdom, a level-

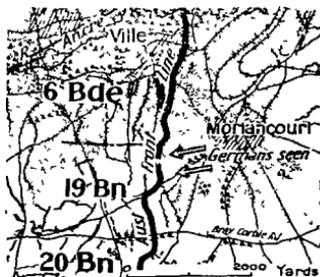
³ Near the Brick Beacon Height (see pp. 75-6)

⁴ On May 24 and 26

headed, cautious, experienced leader, Saxon in appearance and temperament.⁵ He tried to keep the project secret except from his staff⁶ and battalion commanders until he found that it was known "to everyone, including the troops in the front trenches." He then asked divisional headquarters to send him a message saying that the plan had been cancelled, and told his battalion commanders to spread this report.

The need for reasonable secrecy was proved on the night of June 4th, while the 5th Brigade was still holding the front from which the attack was to be made. The sector immediately north of the Bray-Corbie road, including the ground seized by the 18th Battalion during the Ville attack, was then held by the 19th Battalion. The night had been fine, dark, and quiet, when in the early hours a patrol of that battalion under Lieut.

Hunter⁷ came in after examining the German wire-entanglements and reported that many Germans were moving in front,⁸ where the screen of the crops gave them the opportunity of assembling fairly close. Vickers and Lewis guns accordingly opened fire to harass the enemy, but at 2.45 the German artillery suddenly bombarded the front and support lines in the area



captured by the 18th. The bombardment was fierce, with every kind of light and medium shell—5.9-inch, 4.2-inch, 77-mm., trench-mortar bombs, gas, phosphorus (smoke), and high-explosive; the Germans fired gas shells on the southern flank so that the northerly wind blew the fumes away from the area attacked, and smoke shells on the northern flank probably in the hope that the troops would mistake the smoke for gas and

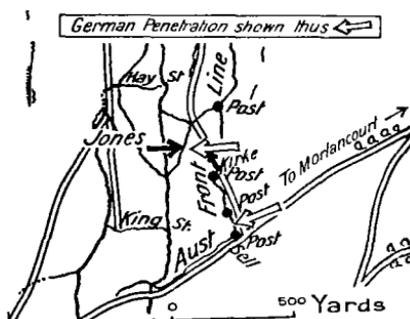
⁵ See Vol. III (pp. 928 et seq) and Vol. IV (p. 189).

⁶ Maj J. E. Lee (Narraport, Vic) and Capt. C. H. Harrison (Dubbo, N.S.W.).

⁷ Lt. R. J. Hunter, 19th Bn. Linesman, P.M.G.'s Dept; of Paddington, N.S.W.; b. Brewarrina, N.S.W., 11 May 1893. Died of wounds, 5 June 1918.

⁸ Hunter had with him 15 men. Some of the other troops when they saw the Germans mistook them for this and other patrols.

put on their masks. At 3 o'clock the curtain of fire shifted farther back and men in the four platoon posts holding this 600 yards of line saw Germans crossing No-Man's Land. The S.O.S. flares, calling for artillery fire, were immediately fired, and the two groups of the 2nd Division's artillery presently laid their barrage along its whole front.⁹ Out in No-Man's Land a private, H. T. Jelbart,¹⁰ who happened to be out patrolling with his Lewis gun team when the German barrage came down and had sheltered in a shell-hole, was now first to open fire on the advancing Germans throwing part of them into confusion. Other groups, however, pushed on and two large parties entered empty lengths of the first Australian trench between the posts. One group, some fifty strong, which got in north of the southernmost platoon, was at once cleared out by it, Lieut. Sell¹¹ with a lance-corporal (E. H. Buckley)¹² leading the bombers while a private (A. G. Weatherall)¹³ boldly climbed on the parapet and hosed the enemy with his gun at the hip. Another and much larger party crossed the trench between the two northern posts and made towards the support line. But in the post south of it Lieut. Kirke,¹⁴ leaving a Lewis gun with five men to guard his front, strung out the remaining fifteen to the flank and fired into the Germans as they pressed on towards the support line. There Lieut. Jones,¹⁵ assisted by Pte. Shannon,¹⁶



⁹ The left group soon ceased, the right group kept up its fire till 3.35

¹⁰ Pte. H. T. Jelbart, M.M. (No. 5673; 19th Bn.). Farmer, of Trewilga, N.S.W., b. Parkes, N.S.W., 19 Sep. 1897.

¹¹ Capt. C. L. Sell, M.C.; 19th Bn. Clerk; of Haberfield, N.S.W., b. Picton, N.S.W., 28 Feb. 1888. Died of wounds, 7 Oct. 1918

¹² L.-Cpl. E. H. Buckley, M.M. (No. 2133; 19th Bn.). Orchardist, of Oberon, N.S.W.; b. Oberon, 18 Feb. 1895.

¹³ Cpl. A. G. Weatherall, D.C.M. (No. 6432; 19th Bn.). Pharmaceutical student; of Bondi, N.S.W., b. Bingara, N.S.W., 22 May 1897

¹⁴ Lt. H. W. Kirke, M.C., 19th Bn. Clerk; of Manly, N.S.W.; b. Armidale, N.S.W., 8 June 1894.

¹⁵ Maj. P. D. Jones, M.C., D.C.M.; 19th Bn. Commercial traveller, of Leichhardt, N.S.W., b. Mortlake, Surrey, Eng., 29 Jan. 1893.

¹⁶ Cpl. H. S. Shannon, M.M. (No. 5628; 19th Bn.). Farmer, of Ardlethan, N.S.W.; b. Charlton, Vic., 2 May 1895. Killed in action, 31 Aug. 1918.

organised a dozen men—batmen, runners, and signallers—from company headquarters and led them straight out against the penetrating enemy. On their approach the Germans began to run. Kirke and his men charged from the flank. The front line was quickly cleared, many Germans being shot down as they ran. Sell had captured four prisoners and two machine-guns, Kirke and Jones four prisoners and another machine-gun, and a dozen other Germans were captured later.¹⁷ Australian stretcher-bearers, working under a white flag, picked up several of them wounded in front of the outposts.

The Germans secured no prisoner.¹⁸

The German raiders were assault troops of the 27th R.I.R., 54th Divn. The history of that regiment says that the attack, the code name for which was "Katzensprung" (Cat's-leap), was devised to give the impression that the Germans still threatened Amiens! The enterprise was controlled by the I Bn.'s staff, but the storm troops of all three battalions took part, advancing in seven parties on a front of 500 yards. The time for preparation had been short. The position of the Australian trenches "was little known." The ranges of the artillery were inaccurate and, on the left, the German barrage fell (as the Australians also noted) on the advancing parties. As a result of this Res.-Lt. Jordan, commanding on this flank, ordered his men to withdraw. He was never seen again. Even where the bombardment was better directed, it was limited by shortage of ammunition. Instead of shattering the Australian infantry it merely warned them of the attack, "so that the penetrating troops actually found the second trench evacuated." (Really they entered an unoccupied length of it.) The leader of No. 3 troop, a fine company sergeant-major, was mortally wounded in the first trench. Part of his troop, however, pushed on towards the second trench. According to this account a troop under Sgt. Bober met an Australian patrol in "vehement hand-to-hand fighting"; two of Bober's men were wounded, but he managed to "drag a struggling Australian" (evidently Corbett) with them. Under a burst of machine-gun fire the prisoner was lost—Bober reported him "killed by 'English' machine-gun fire." Papers were brought back from the trenches identifying the Australians; 20 Germans were missing.¹⁹

This attack convinced the Australians concerned that there

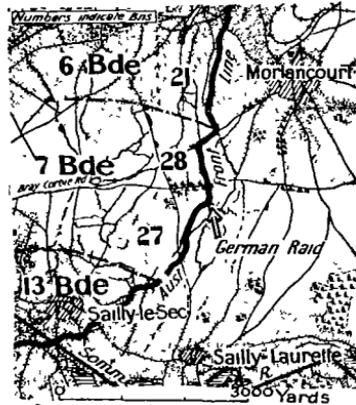
¹⁷ Five were taken by a Maltese Australian, Paolo Debono (Sydney) who, being sent up to the front line with a message, found himself confronted on arrival by half a dozen Germans. He bayoneted one and the others surrendered.

¹⁸ It was, however, only through the stubborn bravery of a New South Welshman that they missed one. At the beginning of the fight a stretcher-bearer, J. A. Corbett (a farmer and grazier of Barrington) was bandaging a wounded man in the front line when five Germans reached the place and seized him. He fought them, but was hit on the head, half-stunned, and taken towards the German lines. After going 100 yards he broke away from his captors, and though they fired after him he managed to reach the Australian lines, where he went on with his task of stretcher-bearing.

¹⁹ In addition the regiment in its four weeks' tour lost 82 killed and 300 wounded.

were important advantages in occupying continuous trenches rather than isolated posts. Not only did the trench render lateral communication possible, but the enemy found it difficult to know what parts of it were held and what were not. Both his bombardment and his infantry attack had largely been wasted upon empty lengths of the front.

On the following night (June 5th-6th), on which the 7th Brigade took over the front, another effort was made by the Germans—this time solely to secure prisoners. Shortly before midnight, when the 28th Battalion had settled down in the trench astride of the Bray-Corbie road, a party of Germans tried to enter this at the point where, in May, the 34th Battalion had blocked the old "pot-hole" trench. Coming from the continuation of the trench this party tried to get through the wire,²⁰ but both bombers and covering party were driven back by the fire of the Australian Lewis gunners, leaving a dead man of the 90th R.I.R. (54th Division).



The 7th Brigade took over precisely the front from which it was to attack.²¹ The two Newton mortar batteries²² of the 2nd Division, under a vigorous officer, Capt. Seymour,²³ were harassing the German front with their powerful bombs, shooting particularly well, maintaining a constant tension

²⁰ They were at first thought to be a patrol of the battalion which the 28th relieved (20th).

²¹ Slight adjustments were made on the flanks by which the 6th Bde. temporarily took over 700 yards on the left, while the 7th Bde took a corresponding length from the 4th Div. north of Sully-Laurette.

²² These were the 3rd Aust. M.T.M. Bty. (Capt. B. H. Cairnes) and 4th (Capt. A. Bickers). (Cairnes, who died on 16 June 1930, belonged to Parramatta, N.S.W.; Bickers belonged to Rupanyup and Queenscliff, Vic.)

²³ Capt. L. Seymour, M.C. Div. Trench Mortar Officer, 2nd Aust. Div., 1918. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Bairnsdale, Vic.; b. Burnley, Vic., 31 July 1885. Died 30 Jan. 1936.

and incidentally cutting the wire-entanglements for the attack.²⁴

The attacking force would be only moderately strong, three battalions (some 1,500 men) advancing in three waves on a front of 3,000 yards. The German garrison, however, was probably thin, and by all accounts its morale was poor. But General Wisdom expected the ground to be strongly guarded by machine-guns, both scattered about the front area and firing from beyond the objective. As the crest was but slightly curved their field of fire would be perfect, and he accordingly asked that seven brigades of field artillery should cover the attack and that the neighbouring divisions also should lay down barrages on their fronts in order to mystify the enemy. The German trenches and posts had but thin wire defence and the Newton mortars and the 4.5-inch howitzers could be trusted to blow gaps in this during their intermittent shoots and in the few minutes' intense bombardment beginning at "zero" hour. Hoping to surprise the enemy Wisdom decided to attack at an hour never chosen by the Australians since the Pozières fighting in 1916—immediately before dark. There would be light enough for the troops to pick their way over the wire and the short, moonless night²⁵ would then screen them in their hazardous task of digging in beyond the crest, in the open fields. Before daylight the new defences and communication

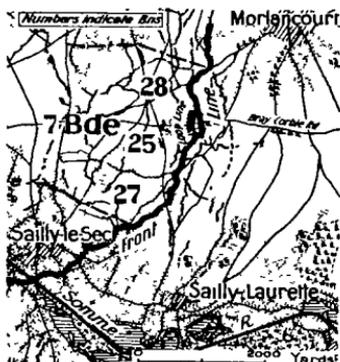
²⁴ On the afternoon of June 8, when one of Cairnes's mortars shelled for two hours the German trench and wire on the immediate right of the 22nd Bn. (who had relieved the 21st), Germans were seen retiring along the trench and others running back across the open. The German line was here a continuation of the 22nd's, and when, at 5 p.m., the shoot ceased, Lt. J. A. Lennon (Landsborough, Vic.) of that battalion, after arranging with the trench-mortar commander to fire another round, scrambled through the Australian wire, screened by the dust of the explosion, and with a sergeant, R. J. Tyler (Sale, Vic.), made his way along the German trench. At first shallow, partly filled with wire, and screened only by the crops, it became deeper, and the two Victorians passed a number of abandoned niches which they judged by the kit left there to be normally occupied by 36 men. Eventually they saw, and were seen by, Germans at a trench junction 450 yards from the Australian line. These Germans opened fire. Several machine-guns both in the line and farther back joined in. Lennon seized a German pack containing papers and with Tyler scrambled back through the wire into their own trench. The Germans were afterwards seen cautiously reoccupying their sap.

That night the same two Victorians led a party of fourteen men in a silent frontal raid through the high crop against the position which they had found to be garrisoned. When they were thirty yards away, however, a bursting flare showed them to the Germans. They rushed the post, and were returning with two prisoners when fire was opened on them from the flank. Tyler, who was bringing one prisoner, was killed and Lennon was mortally wounded. He was carried in by his batman, Pte. F. S. Stacey (Geelong, Vic.). Tyler's body was afterwards found, but not that of Pte. D. F. Bunworth (Byaduk, Vic.), who was killed at the same time.

²⁵ The moon would be new on June 8.

trenches to them must be finished—they would be unapproachable over the open after dawn.²⁶

But an attack at dusk involved one difficulty. The approach to the present front was so exposed to view that the troops would have to assemble in their trenches during the previous night and stay there, as best they could, hidden from the enemy during the whole day preceding the attack. General Wisdom believed that the fate of the attack depended on success in this, and much work was necessary in order to permit the assembly.²⁷ South of the Bray-Corbie road, where McMinn's company had gone through on the night of



May 7th, the Germans and Australians were still in the same trench-line, and the German part could not be safely bombarded unless the Australians next to it were withdrawn. Here, therefore, there had to be dug, 150 yards in rear, a loop line

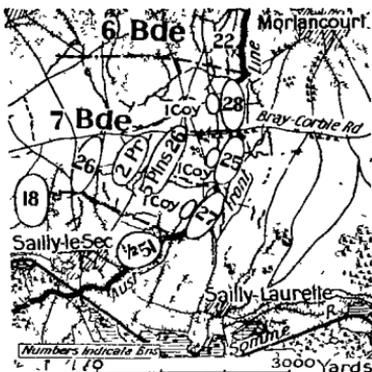
²⁶ Two strong points were to be dug by infantry and wired by engineers and two communication trenches cut by pioneers.

²⁷ The thoroughness of the planning is worthy of note. Three companies of each battalion would start in two lines from the front trench, and one company of each—to act as the second wave, carrying tools and supplies, and support the attack—from the support trench. In order to get quickly clear of the German barrage the second line of the first wave would follow only twenty-five yards behind the first. The pioneers would begin their advance as soon as the objective was known to be taken. Two Vickers machine-guns of the 7th Coy. would advance with the first wave of each battalion to positions chosen beforehand from which they would shoot into the gullies in front and on either flank—34 other guns of the 2nd M.G. Bn. would be massed in rear and fire over the heads of the troops, laying a barrage of bullets on the same gullies. At zero hour the 7th L.T.M. Bty. would shell for one minute at the highest rate of fire the German forward posts, and would then throw its fire, as long as the Stokes mortars could do so, ahead of the advancing infantry. Four of them would go forward to protect the troops digging in; and the rest stand ready to cover the advanced line. To help the companies to know when the objective was immediately ahead of them, one shell in every two of the barrage laid upon it by the field-guns would be a smoke shell.

Prior to the attack communication and assembly trenches had to be extended, deepened, and widened. As parts of the front trenches were now deep, stakes were to be driven into their walls to give the men a foothold in climbing out. Tracks to and from the front were to be thoroughly marked with tapes and sign-posts. Special flare signals were arranged by which the forward commanders of each battalion would indicate that its objective was taken, and others were to be fired when it had consolidated the position. So that the flares might be distinguished from those of the enemy they were to be fired towards the left rear and in particular groups and sequence. The 25th Bn. had to come in between the 27th and 28th on the night of June 7. The 26th Bn. spent each night in burying cables up to the old front line, the engineers and pioneers in tunnelling advanced headquarters and aid-posts.

500 yards long, into which the companies astride of the Bray-Corbie road could retire half an hour before the bombardment and from which they would launch their attack.

The night chosen for the attack was that of June 10th, and the three battalions were already holding their proper sectors on the 8th—27th (S. Aust.) on the right, 25th (Q'land) in centre, and 28th (W. Aust.) on left. Zero would be at 9.45,²⁸ when about a quarter of an hour of fading light would still remain. During the night of June 9th the companies for the attack were moved into their allotted parts of the front and support trenches, five platoons of the reserve battalion (26th, Q'land and Tas.) being brought up into the "old front line" of April; behind them the 2nd Pioneer Battalion settled itself in the old French line.²⁹ The new



alternative trench across the Bray-Corbie road was completed only in the small hours of the 10th by large working parties of the forward battalions. It was only from two to three feet deep and could not be occupied till after dark.

The Diggers were extraordinarily keen. Knowledge of the coming operation had been widespread. A private of the 25th, employed as orderly at the baths in a back area, heard of it, "ran away" to the front, and went into action with his battalion. A corporal, detached at a school of instruction, "deserted" for the same purpose and to his disappointment arrived a day too late. A Queensland officer, in hospital recovering from a shell wound in the head, had news of it and, escaping from the base, "wangled" a flight to the front by aeroplane, only to find that he also was too late.

The troops who crowded the assembly trenches during this long day understood very well the plan of the operations. The

²⁸ "Summer" time—the true time was 8.45.

²⁹ Next came the 26th into close reserve, and the 18th (5th Bde).

company commanders had studied the air-photographs of the position to be captured, and so had many of the patrol leaders who went out nightly with their men to investigate the German wire. Wisdom's order was that during daylight on the 10th the troops must take particular care to remain unseen. But the day was a glorious one and, as the men were bursting with high spirits, it required considerable self-restraint to carry out the order to lie low. As these youngsters coolly and grimly cleaned rifles and sharpened bayonets an onlooker could not help pitying the young Germans ahead of them.³⁰

Machine-guns, trench-mortars, and artillery³¹ also were in position, but in spite of all orders there was movement in the forward area. In mid-afternoon a German aeroplane flew over the Somme flats; at 7 p.m. another swept low over the crowded trenches on the ridge, and at 8.20 five more patrolled the German front. At 8.30 an intense bombardment suddenly descended, but chiefly around the supports and the 4th Medium Trench Mortar Battery.³² The shoot, however, ceased in ten minutes and few men were hit. At 9 o'clock, shortly after sunset, the companies of the 25th and 28th on either side of the Bray-Corbie road filed back into the new assembly trench, and at 9.45 the Australian barrage came down. The troops scrambled out and moved forward.

The sky was clear, the last belt of a beautiful sunset fading

³⁰ See *The Australians: Their Final Campaign, 1918*, by F. M. Cutlack, p. 204

³¹ Before the operation the 2nd Aust Div's artillery comprised *Right Group*—96th (Army) Bde., R.F.A., and 3rd (Army) Bde., A.F.A.; *Left Group*—6th (Army) Bde. and 4th Bde., A.F.A., *Superimposed Group*—5th Bde., A.F.A.; *Mobile Reserve Bde.*—5th (Army) Bde., R.H.A.

For this fight the mobile brigade and the 86th (Army) Bde., R.F.A., came up on June 9, and two army brigades lent by the 5th Aust. Div. (the 298th R.F.A. and 16th R.H.A.) got into position at Vaux and Mercourt early on June 10. The 2nd Div.'s left group—6th (Army) and 4th Bdes., A.F.A.—and the 47th Div.'s artillery made demonstrations north of the attack. The artillery of the 3rd and 5th Divs. made demonstrations south of it. The 298th, 86th 16th, 96th, 5th (R.H.A.), 3rd and 5th (A.F.A.) Bdes. provided the barrages for the 7th Bde., and the 150th and 77th (Army) Bdes., R.F.A. (of the 5th Div.'s artillery, then with the 4th Div.) covered the 51st Bn.'s attack.

³² It was noted that a party of this battery brought up the rations by daylight. Despite the shelling the battery fired 170 rounds during the operation. The 3rd M.T.M. Bty., on the left flank, had bombarded the wire of the second German line north of the Bray-Corbie road during the afternoon with 112 rounds—at zero hour it fired 37 more. In the 4th Bty. Bdr. C. F. Clark and Cpl. G. T. McLennan, and in the 3rd Cpls. S. A. Price and P. C. Barber were conspicuous for their work both in carrying and in action (Clark, who died on 3 Aug. 1937, belonged to Bonegilla, Vic., McLennan to Avenel, Vic.; Price to Collingwood, Vic.; and Barber to Fitzroy, Vic.)

behind the attacking men. Ahead of them the shells burst for the most part very accurately as the three lines, with rifles held high across their chests, hurried through the tall green wheat crop and out on to a belt of grass to halt about seventy yards behind the curtain of shrapnel. In front of his company of the 28th immediately north of the road Capt. Meysey Hammond,³³ with his walking stick hooked on his left arm (which had been paralysed at Flers and was carried in a sling), walked, watch in hand, following the steps of the barrage, whose time-table he had learnt by heart. He knew that in this, the brigade's first big fight since Passchendaele, the eager Diggers incurred the danger of getting forward too quickly in the fading light and being shattered by their own shells. So he himself walked ahead, almost in the barrage, often with his back to the enemy, straightening out the line by an occasional motion of his stick, halting it whenever close enough to the shells by holding the stick above his head—whereupon the men lay down but he walked about until his watch told him it was time to wave them ahead again.

Wisdom's plans worked well; the hostile barrage fell very quickly but the hurrying lines, machine-gunners and all, got clear before the shells arrived. Almost from the start German machine-gun bullets swept the crop-land. Five or six machine-gun crews fought stubbornly, but most of the German infantry

³³ Capt. M. G. Hammond, M.C., M.M.; 28th Bn. Civil servant, of Perth and Broome, W. Aust; b. Handsworth, Staffs., Eng., 3 July 1892. Died of wounds, 14 June 1918. This fine officer when a boy had run away from his cultured home in England and, after working happily as a farm and station hand in some of the roughest parts of Western Australia and serving before the mast in a Western Australian schooner, had found a job in the post office at Broome, the home of the pearling fleet on the north-west coast of Western Australia. When war broke out he enlisted as private in the 28th, and served in Gallipoli as sergeant. Though a cultured speaker and writer he loved the language of the sea and his men had grown accustomed to such orders on the march as "Make fast, A Company!" instead of "Halt!" It was with great difficulty that after the injury to his arm he obtained leave to return to active service. The Third Battle of Ypres was then raging, and all his fellow officers were against his going into it—he could with difficulty have adjusted his gas-mask. But after a stormy interview with his colonel he was allowed to accompany the first attack as intelligence officer—and, as such, went with the foremost troops to every objective. At this time the Aust. War Memorial collection of records and relics was being made, and he flung himself so keenly into the task of building up his battalion's records that his colonel seized the chance of having him transferred to the War Records Section in London. He took up the work with enthusiasm. At this stage H. S. Gullett, who had begun the collection of war records in Egypt and Palestine was appointed official war correspondent there. Hammond was about to be sent in his place when the German drive of 21 Mar. 1918 in France commenced. As letters arrived from his old comrades at the front, he grew increasingly restless and finally begged to be sent back. The request was granted. Lt. H. W. Dinning was sent to Egypt instead.

fled before the swift attack or remained cowering in the trenches. Some even came running towards the 28th with hands held high, to surrender.

On the front of the right battalion (27th, S. Aust.) there was a serious initial difficulty through a couple of the supporting guns catching the troops in the advanced part of their jumping-off trench³⁴—Lieut.-Col. Chalmers³⁵ states that 35 officers and men were hit by their own shrapnel; some batteries had had little time to range their guns. Yet in the main the front-line officers spoke of the barrage with enthusiasm. The infantry's one complaint was that its rate of advance—100 yards in two minutes³⁶—was too slow. Its density—a field-gun shell bursting three times a minute on each twenty-five yards or so of front—could not prevent all the opposing machine-guns from firing through or in it, and the troops waiting at each stage for the guns to lengthen range were under this fire. Yet a swifter advance of the barrage would have been dangerous. Had resistance been stiffer, the infantry would have been taxed to the utmost to fight down opposition quickly enough to keep up with the barrage; and to let the barrage get away from the infantry meant disaster.

In front of the 27th the Germans were holding, first, a few advanced posts in shell-holes, and behind this the now fairly continuous trench in which they had faced the 34th Battalion five weeks before. The 27th was not to end its advance there but to go 300 yards farther to the edge of the reverse slope, where the troops would cross a road and then dig in in the open. Here on the right flank, and here alone, some of the German riflemen fought stoutly—a fact which is illuminated by the history of the German unit concerned.

The advance came against the inner flanks of two German divisions—the 54th (which had relieved the tired 107th astride the Bray-Corbie road after the hammering near Ville) and the 24th (Saxon) Res. Divn., which since early May had been astride the Somme at Sailly-Laurette and Hamel, having relieved the 18th and 1st Divns.

The continual disturbance of the front near Morlancourt had caused special steps to be taken there. "Towards the end of May," says a

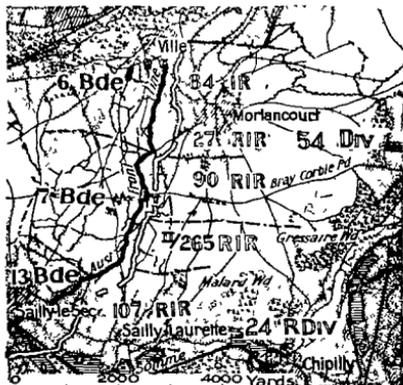
³⁴ Where in May the 5th Div.'s flank had thrust ahead of the 3rd Div.'s

³⁵ Lt.-Col. F. R. Chalmers, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 27th Bn., 1917-19 Civil servant; of Bagdad, Tas; b. Hobart, 4 Jan. 1881.

³⁶ After a wait of four minutes on its starting line.

German history,³⁷ "the fighting activity of the enemy and other intelligence caused an attack to be apprehended, and the 223rd Divn. was stationed ready as counter-attack division behind the 24th Reserve"; in addition, a battalion of another division (the 108th, then near Villers-Bretonneux) was lent to the Saxons to maintain their northern flank on the cross-spur above Saily-Laurette, south of the Bray-Corbie road—the sector attacked by the 25th Aust. Bn. and the left of the 27th.

When brought up on June 2 (says the historian of this battalion, the II/265th R.I.R.) the troops had wondered for what reason they were sent thither. "Either the trenches were not in order or something else." They then found that owing to the recent advance of the Australians there were no proper trenches—"that which bore the proud name



of 'main line of resistance' consisted of single rifle-pits connected by knee-deep bits of trench. . . . There was no wire." The battalion began to put up wire and connected the rifle-pits, though the connecting trench was still only shallow. The front of 1,000 metres was held by two companies, behind each of which, for immediate counter-attack if required, was placed an assault troop with a light machine-gun. The field of fire being short, two pickets, each with a machine-gun, were stationed fifty yards ahead, as well as listening posts. The Australian "patrols and trench-mortars" made it impossible to dig forward on the edge of the valley. The battalion commander, Capt. Rechtern, represented the position as dangerous, and his sector was accordingly narrowed to 800 metres. "Meanwhile the intention of the enemy to attack was increasingly apparent. Our airmen had located his jumping-off trench carried through to the upper edge of the slope, and from June 9, full preparations against attack were ordered." The main line and battalion headquarters in the gully behind it were bombarded with British gas shells "most of which, it is true, did not go off."

At dusk on June 10 the II/265th was about to be relieved by a battalion of the 107th (Saxon) R.I.R. when, at 9 p.m., headquarters warned the companies that German airmen reported the opposing trenches to be filling up with troops, and that the "highest degree of preparation" had therefore been ordered. According to Crown Prince Rupprecht the Australian assembly was "taken under annihilating artillery fire." A little later sudden artillery and trench-mortar fire combed the German position. In the sector of the southern company (7th) Res.-Lt. Graber noticed that after the bombardment had lasted a few minutes the machine-gun fire accompanying it "suddenly ceased with one jerk." A flare went up. He instantly sprang out and saw the

³⁷ *History of 68th (Saxon) F.A.R.*, p. 165.

opposing infantry "leap forward." The artillery barrage was still on his line, but he immediately alarmed his light machine-gun section. The first of its men came creeping because of the shrapnel, but at that moment the British artillery lengthened its range and the light machine-gun was forthwith set up and opened fire. The attacking infantry "threw itself back." The company sergeant-major had now come up, and Gräber, becoming free to attend to the flanks, observed that to the north the line of Australians was advancing quite unhindered. He guessed that the German infantry there were still crouching in their rifle-pits, hiding their heads from the bombardment, and had not detected the attack—a circumstance "which ought not to happen but constantly did." He accordingly told his section to "shoot steadily—nothing could then pass," and ran to find why a heavy machine-gun on his right was not firing. The Australians were advancing towards it in section rushes, but he reached it in time. "True enough there was no one to be seen. 'Get out, Tommy's here!' I yelled. They came at once out of their pot-holes, but mostly with their equipment unbuckled and in their field service caps. This machine-gun also was emplaced in a trice." For the moment the line of Australians had disappeared, but Gräber warned the gunners that it would be up again in a few seconds, and so it was, "at most sixty yards away, in a long line without a gap. The machine-gun opened and the whole line at once threw itself down."

Gräber next looked farther to the right "but had to give up the notion of alarming the other heavy machine-gun there as the enemy, at least as far as I could see to the right, had already advanced to immediately before our trench and I could not get there before him. From now on," concludes his account, "matters began to look ugly."

On the Australian side, by the time the German trench was here reached, one platoon of the 27th Battalion had lost its commander and every N.C.O. But a hard-fighting and hard-living veteran, Pte. Butler,³⁸ led the men bombing and shooting along 100 yards of trench and then organised the platoon in the new position, where for two days he continued to command it. Despite Gräber's bravery the 27th Battalion's objective, beyond the road, was reached practically to time-table. On its right two companies and a platoon of the 51st Battalion, 4th Division, swung forward that division's left immediately above Saily-Laurette. The two platoons in the lead met no resistance, but captured a German officer, 18 men, and a light machine-gun.

This was at the extreme right of the 107th (Saxon) R.I.R., whose historian attributes the penetration to "the failure of several machine-guns."

The 7th Brigade's centre battalion, the 25th (Q'land), advancing on a front of 1,000 yards south of the Bray-Corbie

³⁸ Pte R W Butler, D.C.M. (No 257; 27th Bn.). Labourer, of Glanville, S Aust; b Port Adelaide, 1895.

road, met the opposition of Gräber's company and of another north of it. Here the Germans were occupying part of the old "pot-hole" line and two lines of shell-holes and trenches still unconnected with their two new lines north of the Bray-Corbie road. Several machine-gun crews fired from the start and as one company of Queenslanders climbed out, Capt. Buttner,³⁹ all his subalterns, and several men were hit by a stream of bullets from somewhere in the crops ahead of them. The remaining officer, Lieut. Cromie,⁴⁰ a Victorian farmer, who had come to the infantry from the light horse and was older than most subalterns, was hit in the wrist as he led the company on; the stock of his rifle was splintered, and machine-gun bullets tore a side pocket from his tunic. He went on and, after jumping the barbed-wire entanglement, saw in the dusk by the light of bursting shells ten or twelve German riflemen standing together in a strong-point of the pot-hole line, with their bayonets on guard awaiting the charge. At that moment a shell of the barrage burst above Cromie, a fragment striking his shoulder and bowling him over. He sprang up again to find that the same shell had scattered the Germans, and he and the men with him continued their advance.

At this point he detected ahead, in an open strip between two wheatfields, two machine-guns—evidently those that had fired on the company earlier. He told his N.C.O's to hold the troops until the barrage, then falling about the Germans, lifted. At the moment the German machine-gunners were not active, and Cromie himself, half-hidden in the dust of the shellbursts, went on; threw the five bombs from his entrenching-tool sack at the two posts; and returning brought up his men practically without casualties across the main trench from which all but the dead and wounded had fled, and dug in well beyond it.

The northern company (8th) of the 265th R.I.R. was (says its historian) awaiting relief from the Saxon battalion, whose advanced party had already arrived at the main line, and the company commander there, Res.-Lt. K. Meyer, was going with the Saxon N.C.O. to see to the process, when the barrage fell about them. "Everything left and right was wrapped in black smoke." The S.O.S. signal was fired, but the supporting battery also was being relieved and no answer came.

³⁹ Col. A. R. W. Buttner, O B E.; 25th Bn. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Charters Towers, Q'land, b Ravenswood Junction, Q'land, 4 Dec. 1881.

⁴⁰ Lt G. L. Cromie, D S O. 25th Bn. Farmer; of Rupanyup, Vic; b Rupanyup, 3 Sep. 1881.

A ration party had just arrived, including some men returning from leave; Meyer sent them towards the front line and they walked straight into the arms of advancing Australians.⁴¹ Meyer now used his assault troop to fire on the Australians, who could be seen advancing upon him "extended to about two paces. On our right," he says, "Tommy is already behind our main line of resistance. Of the troops with me—about seven including the Saxons—nearly all are soon wounded, and I too." He was captured. Lt. Weiss was taken prisoner by an Australian "storm troop" which had got beyond his trench and came at him from behind while his men were firing to the front. This opponent (could it be Cromie?) had broken through the right of the right flank company while the barrage was still on its position, and had bombed the trench and dugout and mortally wounded Lt. Meht, a fine young officer in charge of that flank.

One of the two sergeants who closely supported Cromie was mortally wounded; the company now mustered only thirty-six men, and they were well ahead of the troops on either flank. But Cromie stayed on for thirty hours with them until, his wound becoming dangerously septic, he was forced to have it attended to.⁴²

Immediately north of the Bray-Corbie road, Capt. Meysey Hammond of the 28th walked leading his men clear of, but very close to, the barrage. So they came over the grass on the bare hilltop on to a crop of clover, in which was some low trip-wire—the higher wire elsewhere had been well broken by the bombardment. At the last stage, when Hammond signalled, "Come on!" a German machine-gun opened fire and Lieut. Cobbold⁴³ and several men of his platoon were killed, as were many of the left of the 25th under Lieut. Bedsor.⁴⁴ The survivors crawled forward as opportunity arose and Corpl. Seymour⁴⁵ and Pte. Horton⁴⁶ from the flank soon rushed the position. The rest of Hammond's company had meanwhile charged, he being the first to reach the trench. He swung round his revolver in his uninjured hand and a number of Germans sur-

⁴¹ It is just possible that these men strayed and were those who ran forward to the 28th with their hands up.

⁴² Cromie had gone into the Australian barrage deliberately. But just south of the Bray-Corbie road twenty men were caught by it. Some shrapnel was probably falling short; but with men so eager such incidents were in any case inevitable.

⁴³ Lt. W. F. Colbold, 28th Bn. Station manager, of Hughenden, Q'land; b Chascomus, Argentine, 27 Apr. 1887. Killed in action, 10 June 1918.

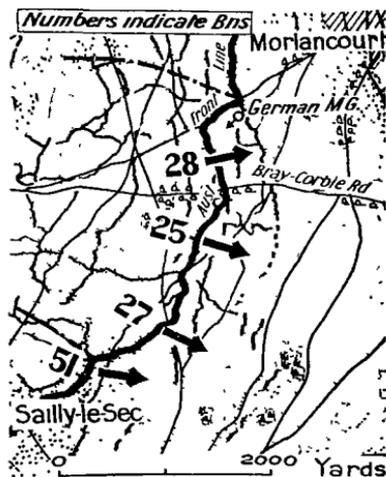
⁴⁴ Lt. G. Bedsor, 26th Bn. Ship's fireman; of Townsville, Q'land, b Tinana, Q'land, 26 Dec 1892.

⁴⁵ Sgt H. L. Seymour, M.M. (No. 155, 28th Bn). Labourer; of Katanning, W. Aust; b. Smuth's Mill, W. Aust, 19 Aug. 1896. Died, 1933.

⁴⁶ Pte. F. N. Horton, M.M. (No. 2510, 28th Bn). Labourer; of Forest, Tas., b. Circular Head, Tas., 17 Mar. 1896. Killed in action, 29 July 1918.

rendered; his men fired at others running off into the dusk. Hammond looked at his watch. "Two minutes late," he said.⁴⁷

On his left the centre company of the 28th under Lieut. Gaby⁴⁸ had less trouble than any other. Its signallers moving steadily behind Gaby, unrolling the reel of insulated wire, set up their telephone in the German front line and within twenty-five minutes of the start Gaby was telling Lieut.-Col. Currie that consolidation had begun.⁴⁹ In front of the left flank company (Capt. Dunkley)⁵⁰ the barrage was lighter and less regular, and German machine-gunners at the head of a communication trench opened fire. But they shot blindly in a fixed direction, with their heads below the parapet, and such tactics could not stop the advance.



The gun was quickly taken; a bombing party led by a lance-corporal, R. C. Lindau,⁵¹ pushed on down this shallow sap but met a stronger party of the enemy and were bombed out again.

The advance of the 28th fell mainly upon the 90th R.I.R. (54th Divn.), but the Germans who here counter-attacked were part of the left flank company of the 1/27th R.I.R., the centre regiment of the 54th Divn. The German company sergeant-major brought up the "assault troop," which was then led in its attack by Under-Officer Drews.

A sergeant, T. H. Woolnough,⁵² at once organised a new

⁴⁷ The barrage lifted from the German line here at 9.58.

⁴⁸ Lt. A. E. Gaby, V.C.; 28th Bn. Farmer, of Scottsdale, Tas, and Katanning, W. Aust.; b. Springfield, Tas., 25 Jan. 1892. Killed in action, 11 Aug. 1918.

⁴⁹ The 28th had taken the precaution of extending the brigade's buried cable up to its advanced headquarters, and was able to speak from the front almost all night. This battalion's ground lines to the 25th and 27th also were most useful.

⁵⁰ Brig. I. E. Dunkley; 28th Bn. Tiler; of North Perth, W. Aust., b. Moorabin, Vic., 6 Sep. 1886.

⁵¹ L.-Cpl. R. C. Lindau, D.C.M. (No. 4167; 28th Bn.). Sleeper hewer; of Greenbushes, W. Aust.; b. Foster, Vic., 28 June 1886.

⁵² Lt T. H. Woolnough, M.M., 28th Bn. House decorator; of Cottesloe, W. Aust., b. West Ham, London, 27 Jan. 1891.

bombing party and, helped by a platoon lying in the open, drove the Germans some way back.⁵³

The brigade had gained its whole objective. From far back the green "success" flares were seen, all within a few minutes of time-table, and soon afterwards the red flares ("consolidation begun, covering parties out"). By 10.20 Meysey Hammond had written his report:

In face of intense machine-gun fire company gained objective in fine style.⁵⁴

The short night was now devoted to intense work of consolidation. The 27th Battalion placed its posts thirty yards beyond the road. Meysey Hammond found the 25th's flank sixty yards ahead of his own and advanced to it. The six forward machine-guns went precisely to their allotted positions,⁵⁵ two in the centre, two on each flank. The Stokes mortars took up their posts and carrying parties of the 26th Battalion brought them ample ammunition. The pioneers marched straight to the sites for digging two communication trenches. In the front line the 51st, 27th, and 25th dug a chain of strong-points and platoon posts, the 28th held and improved the German second line—a good trench, in parts six feet deep.

The crowd are in great spirits (Meysey Hammond had reported at 10.20) and just ready for any number of counter-attacks.

At 11.15 the protective barrage died down, and, after sharp German shelling close behind the front, the night became fairly quiet, as though the German artillery did not know where to fire.⁵⁶ At midnight on the left flank the quiet was broken by a party of Germans attempting to force their way past the barricade built by the Western Australians in one of the forward-leading saps. The Germans were beaten at the barricade,⁵⁷ their leader being

Counter-attacks

⁵³ He could not go so far as Lindau. Drews brought in a dead Australian there.

⁵⁴ His first estimate was that his company had taken 14 prisoners and 2 machine-guns. The number afterwards increased.

⁵⁵ These guns had started with the infantry so as to get clear of the German barrage, and then waited in shell-holes until the objective was taken.

⁵⁶ Apparently it was reported in the 90th R.I.R. that the Australians almost reached Malard Wood—a mile beyond the point actually attained.

⁵⁷ By a party under L.-Cpl. R. A. Davies (Guildford, W. Aust.).

shot, and retired down the sap. Consolidation went steadily forward. At 1.20 Meysey Hammond reported:

Relative quiet now exists on our front. . . . The enemy is evidently in position some 300 yards ahead. . . . Very few flares are being used by the enemy and there is a marked absence of machine-gun fire.

On the extreme right about midnight some Germans, thought to be a patrol, approached the outposts of the 51st and threw some bombs, but retired when fired upon. In front of the 28th in the dawn many parties could be seen moving; near the Bray-Corbie road they were 600 yards away, but to the north much closer. Looking through field-glasses Meysey Hammond judged by their full kit that they were about to attack. The artillery, being called by telephone, shelled the area with moderate intensity. The Australian machine-guns and Lewis guns were firing, and numbers of Germans broke away eastwards. But it was not until a prisoner, captured later, spoke of having taken part at dawn in the assembly for a considerable counter-attack, that the higher staffs realised that a serious effort had been made.⁵⁸

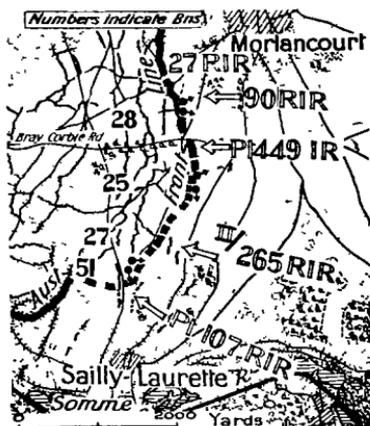
The history of the 265th R.I.R. gives an interesting account of that night's counter-attack, which actually had ended before the Australian infantry detected it. Just before the Australian attack Res.-Capt. Rechtern of the II/265th, at his headquarters in the gully behind the front line, was listening to an officer, back from leave, describing a gay evening at the Drachenfels, a famous resort overlooking the Rhine, when the Australian bombardment opened. Machine-gun fire could presently be heard, but soon the uproar gave way to dead silence. Then a helmetless, tousled machine-gunner reported that the English had broken into his company's trench. Sending a patrol to find the width of the breach, Rechtern himself took forward the two reserve companies that he could reach—one of the 265th and one of the Saxons. They were not to fire till fired on, and were to seize the old line in a surprise rush with bayonets.

Advancing about 11 p.m. into an area "still as death," Rechtern was suddenly met after 150 yards with heavy machine-gun fire from right and right rear. A flare went up from the Australians and showed a line of them just taking cover and others standing on the parapet as far as could be seen to the right. This was the first intimation to Rechtern that the attack extended beyond his own front. His signallers had been unrolling their telephone line behind him as he advanced, and he now

⁵⁸ The prisoner's statement led to an inference that the counter-attack was broken up by the indirect fire of the massed Australian machine-guns, shooting on their barrage lines. The machine-guns laid down barrages at 1.25 and from 2.30 to 3.30 on areas traversed by the German counter-attack troops—during the fight over 190,000 rounds were thus fired.

got through to the Saxon regimental headquarters, told them that the attack had broken through the left of the next division (54th) and asked for two Saxon companies to prolong his line in the counter-attack.

Meanwhile the left regiment of the 54th Divn., the 90th R.I.R., which had lost its whole front line, had sent forward its II Bn. In the centre, part of the 449th I.R. (233rd Divn), reserved for counter-attack, was brought up together with some other advanced troops of its own division and of the 54th. According to the report of the German corps these went forward in the early morning. They were attacked by armen with machine-guns and the attack stopped at 4 a.m. On the southern flank at 2.30 the Saxon batteries, some of which earlier in the night had been firing south of the Somme owing to the false alarm there, intensified their bombardment to cover the counter-attack; but before the troops were ready dawn broke and Australian machine-guns and snipers caught them digging in in the hard clay soil. While they tried to conceal themselves with rye and clover, Rechtern, lying on the slope, was informed through his telephone that a full dress counter-attack was planned for the evening of the 11th and his presence was required at a conference. He crawled to the rear to attend it.



The truth was that no counter-attack without the most careful and intense artillery preparation had the faintest chance of success. Consolidation was supervised personally by each Australian battalion commander himself visiting the front line. The carrying parties worked perfectly⁵⁹—hot coffee and rum were reaching the troops about midnight. Before day-break the forward troops had been thinned out, surplus companies

⁵⁹ That of the 28th, under Lt. E. Edmondson, was specially mentioned. One party of the 7th Field Coy., under Sgt. H. Hadley, which was to wire the 25th Bn's strong-point, arrived at a neighbouring front-line post. As the infantry commander could not be found and time was short, Hadley decided to erect the wire in front of the post reached by his party, and did so. The party under Lt. J. W. Mott, for wiring the 28th Bn.'s strong-point, duly carried out its task. The two engineer officers north and south of the road, Lts. Mott and T. A. Lawrie, after helping to site strong-points, reconnoitred and located the whole line of posts, and Maj. E. N. Webb later carried out a reconnaissance of the new front. (Edmondson, who was killed in action on 2 Sep. 1918, belonged to Perth and Boulder, W. Aust.; Hadley to Sydney, Mott to South Brisbane; Lawrie to Broken Hill, N.S.W.; Webb to Christchurch, N.Z.)

taking position in rear, and most of the wounded had been cleared.⁶⁰

We had a strongly consolidated position (wrote Wisdom afterwards) with two communication trenches, three strong-points, with garrisons disposed in depth, machine-guns and trench-mortars⁶¹ in position, and an effective S.O.S. (barrage) ready. There was nothing above ground to act as a target for snipers or machine-guns, and the troops were standing-to to meet any enemy counter-attack.

At 6 a.m. the contact airman of No 3 Squadron A.F.C. dropped at advanced brigade headquarters a map showing the flares lit by the infantry at his call. They were along the objective whose capture had already been reported by telephone.⁶²

For some hours troops in the front line shot keenly at Germans in the crops ahead; the snipers of the 27th claimed to have shot forty. Machine-guns chased parties of Germans in Morlancourt and down the valley to Sailly-Laurette. The German batteries south of the river for their part quickly realized that they could harry the supports and headquarters behind the now far protruding Australian flank north of the river. German airmen mapped the new line and German field-guns, firing direct, blew out two posts. German machine-guns and snipers became active and Capt. Meysey Hammond, visiting his posts in the afternoon, was mortally wounded. "Keep the old flag flying, sir," he said to Col. Currie as he was carried past battalion headquarters.

⁶⁰ By the 6th Fld. Amb (Lt-Col. H. L. St. Vincent Welch), assisted by bearers of the 5th Fld. Amb. Ambulance cars and Ford vans picked up the wounded on the Bray-Corbie road at "Windy Corner" just behind the old French line. By 11 a.m. on June 11 nearly all wounded (except a few, difficult to find in the crops) had been cleared from the advanced dressing station at "Pearl Bay" near Heilly to the main dressing station (5th Fld. Amb.) near Querrieu and British casualty clearing stations at Vignacourt and Crouy. The stretcher-bearers on the Bray-Corbie crest were almost as exposed as at Bullecourt. Pte. G. L. Davidson has recorded an instance of a wounded man, safely brought to the R.A.P. by the regimental bearers but retained a little longer at the R.A.P., under a bank, because four bearers had just been wounded by a shell. He was presently sent off, but one of the bearers was at once killed by shrapnel. He was sent off again, but about half-way to Windy Corner another shell burst beside the stretcher wounding one bearer. The bearer, however, went on carrying until temporary shelter was reached. From there Davidson and another carried the wounded man for the rest of the journey. (Welch belonged to Double Bay, N S W.; Davidson to Fremantle, W. Aust.)

⁶¹ The four Stokes mortars that had gone forward under Lts. A. H. Stewart and M. J. Foster withdrew slightly, in accordance with orders, after consolidation was complete. They had 117 and 320 rounds at the gun positions respectively. In all, the Stokes mortars of the 7th Coy, under Capt. F. Brand, fired 500 rounds. The work of the guides for the carrying parties was particularly well done. (Stewart belonged to Plympton, S. Aust; Foster to Perth and Fremantle, W. Aust; Brand to Rockhampton, Q'land.)

⁶² British aeroplanes were in complete command for an hour or two at dawn and again at nightfall, but long continuous command of the air was usually impossible this year for either side.

failed after losing 3 killed and 18 wounded. On the southern flank, the demonstration on the front of the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions consisted in artillery fire only, but German records show that the 24th Reserve Division astride the Somme thought that its whole front was being attacked.

The attack of June 10th opened the eyes of some participants on both sides. Success was complete and it was beginning to be said that the attack could have gone much farther. The Diggers felt that, if asked, they could have captured the German artillery. A private diary of June 11th records: "It has been said that if only there were ten or twelve divisions to put in behind them, the Australians could break through to Bapaume." Although, as at Ville, the enemy had been warned of the attack, the opposition failed to such a degree that, apart from the two platoons previously allotted to carry trench-mortar ammunition, the support battalion, the 26th, was not called on to help even with carrying parties. Some 325 Germans had been captured, at a cost of about 400 Australian casualties.⁶⁶ Their divisional commander, General Ernst Kabisch, warned the Second German Army that, if, in a few minutes, "a complete battalion had been wiped out as with a sponge," the same thing might happen disastrously on a large scale.⁶⁷

It was clear that the captured Germans knew of no German offensive impending on the Amiens front. Later other prisoners indicated that four of the six German divisions on the Second Army's front were to be immediately relieved. It was conjectured that the enemy might be putting in fresh divisions in order to assist by a side-stroke the main blow at Arras which prisoners still foreshadowed. But a series of very bold raids undertaken by the 4th, 6th, and 10th Brigades on the nights of June 13th-15th brought proof that no such general relief had been carried out;⁶⁸ so far as the Amiens front was

⁶⁶ See *Der Schwarze Tag*, by Ernst Kabisch, p. 14. The Fourth Army's summary notes that one prisoner of the 90th R.I.R. said that the Australians were the best troops he had ever met, but he criticised their bayonet fighting: one man had tried three times to bayonet him, he said, without success. The captures included 30 machine-guns, light and heavy, and six trench-mortars.

⁶⁷ The losses suffered in the actual fighting were about 350; 25th Bn., 11 officers and 167 others; 27th Bn., 3 and 83; 28th, 6 and 70; 7th L.T.M. Bty., 1 man; 7th M.G. Coy., 2 and 8, and Pioneer Bn., 4 men; 51st Bn., 2 and 29; 23rd Bn., 21.

⁶⁸ *Dernancourt-Ville*: At 11.30 p.m. on June 14 three parties of the 24th Bn. (led by N.C.O's, Sgts. A. G. Prime and J. A. Fisher, and Cpl. C. O. McLear) under command of Lt. J. T. Pocknell raided the German outpost-line on the northern

concerned, there was no sign of any intention of early or serious attack.

bank of the Ancre. Before two of the parties the Germans fled, the raiders chasing them into the barrage. The third found a platoon post from which it brought back 5 prisoners of the 231st R.I.R. (50th Res. Div.) and a machine-gun. Two Victorians who continued their chase into a building found it occupied by a number of Germans and were captured.

Morlancourt: At 12.30 on the same night, covered by a good artillery and trench-mortar barrage, 47 of the 21st Bn (Vic.) under Lts. W. McConnochie and E. B. Mason raided the German post previously raided on June 10 by the 22nd Bn. Most of the German garrison fled, those who remained were killed or wounded, but documents showed them to belong to the 84th I.R. (54th Div.).

Hamel: At 11.30 on June 15 two parties (each of 30) of the 16th Bn. (W. Aust.) under Capt. W. J. D. Lynas raided a prominent pear-shaped trench south-west of Hamel. The German wire-entanglement had first to be destroyed by two Bangalore torpedoes (tubes filled with high-explosive) carried by a party under Lt. J. E. Piercy. This party was seen by the Germans and was bombed while doing its work. The fuses had therefore to be lit at once, and the raiders began their attack half a minute before time. Lt. A. B. C. Dowling, leading one party, and two sergeants were wounded as they entered the trench. Many Germans were found and surrendered, but, as they could not be brought back, were shot, and many others were killed or wounded in the sunken road leading through the position to Vaire Wood. The parties brought back 5 prisoners and 3 machine-guns. The raiders were recalled in nine minutes. They had 16 wounded, partly by a few shells of the barrage which fell short.

Vaire Wood. At the same hour three parties of the 14th Bn. (Vic.) under Lts. Ramsay Wood, H. W. Thompson, and A. R. Bruford raided different parts of the trench on the western edge of Vaire Wood. Although one party was seen and bombed on reaching the German wire all got in, and 11 prisoners and a machine-gun were brought back. Ramsay Wood with Cpl. E. E. Bishop and L.-Cpl. J. Craig returned to find Sgt. E. Harrison, mortally wounded, and carried him in.

In the 4th Bde.'s raids all three regiments of the 77th Res. Div. were identified.

Villers-Bretonneux: At 11.30 p.m. on June 13 Lt. T. T. Hoskins and a small party of the 40th Bn. (Tas.) attempted a surprise raid on a German post previously discovered by a patrol at the third hangar of the old British aerodrome. A party was first sent out to the right to cause a rustling in the wheat crop, distract the Germans' attention, and cause them to fire and disclose their precise position. This ruse succeeded. A volley of rifle-grenades was next fired from the Australian front line, whereupon Hoskins and his party jumped into the post. They found a number of dugouts crowded, which they bombed, and, after a rough and tumble fight in which Hoskins was wounded, they managed to return with difficulty but without a prisoner.

On the following night, at 1 a.m., after a violent and most effective bombardment for ten minutes by Stokes mortars of the 9th L.T.M. Bty., a small party of the 34th Bn. (N.S.W.) under Sgt. P. C. Mudford raided a post a quarter of a mile farther north and took three prisoners of the 137th I.R. (108th Div.). The actual attack was led by L.-Cpl. G. M. Hunt (Cpl. E. Harbour was killed by a stray shot.)

On June 15 a party of the 39th Bn. (Vic.) under Lt. A. E. Guyett attempted to raid the Germans near Monument Wood in conjunction with the French. A salvo of 5.9-inch shell, however, burst among the Australian party before the raid, putting half the men out of action, and the attempt was abandoned. The French party also was reported to have failed.

(Prime belonged to Castlemaine, Vic.; Fisher, whose correct name was Daly, and who died of wounds on June 16, to Carrington, N.S.W.; McLear to Bendigo, Vic.; Pocknell, who died on 1 Mar. 1935, to Kerang, Vic.; McConnochie to Melbourne, Mason to Prahran, Vic.; Lynas to Marble Bar, W. Aust.; Piercy to Belmont Park, W. Aust.; Dowling to Kondoparinga, S. Aust.; Ramsay Wood, killed in action on 4 July 1918, to Melbourne; Thompson, died of wounds 9 Aug. 1918, to Fitzroy, Vic.; Bruford, who died on 7 Oct. 1934, to Warracknabeal, Vic.; Bishop to Brunswick, Vic.; Craig, died of wounds 9 Aug. 1918, to Antrim, Ireland, and Melbourne; Harrison to Maffra, Vic.; Hoskins, who died on 6 July 1932, to Launceston, Tas.; Mudford to Taree, N.S.W.; Hunt to Narrabri, N.S.W.; Harbour to Townsville, Q'land; Guyett to Yackandandah, Vic.)