

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**
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**BRITISH 21ST INFANTRY DIVISION ON THE WESTERN FRONT
1914 - 1918**

A CASE STUDY IN TACTICAL EVOLUTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This MPhil thesis is a case study of the British 21st Infantry Division on the Western Front during the First World War. It examines the progress of the division, analysing the learning curve of tactical evolution that some historians maintain was experienced by the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

21st Division was a New Army division, typical of those raised after the declaration of war, and its performance throughout the war may be regarded as indicative of the progress or otherwise of these units within the BEF.

The conclusions are drawn through an assessment of 21st Division in four battles during the war. The achievements of the division are analysed using a series of performance indicators, taking into account variables such as the weather, the terrain, and the enemy. The relative successes and failures of 21st Division at each of these battles demonstrates the extent of tactical evolution and the smoothness or otherwise of the learning curve both during and by the end of the war.

For my great-grandfather
Corporal F. Clifford,
late Royal Warwickshire Regiment,
who came back,

and my great-uncle,
Corporal R.G. Turrell,
late Royal Field Artillery,
who did not

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Abbreviations and Definitions

ANZAC	Australia and New Zealand Army Corps.
Battery	A group of six guns or howitzers.
Bde.	Brigade.
BEF	British Expeditionary Force.
BGGS	Brigadier-General, General Staff. The most senior staff officer in a corps.
BGRA	Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery. The most senior gunner in a division.
Bn. / Btn.	Battalion.
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
C-in-C	Commander in Chief.
CRA	Commander, Royal Artillery. The most senior gunner officer attached to a formation.
CRE	Commander, Royal Engineers. The most senior engineer officer attached to a formation.
CSM	Company Sergeant Major.
DA & QMG	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster-General; effectively the senior staff position in a battalion, usually a captain.
Enfilade	To fire down a trench or at a row of men lengthways, rather than crosswise. A particularly lethal way of firing, as it is far less likely that bullets or shells will fall short or over their target. In addition, the target itself is denser – a row of 50 men, one deep, is equivalent to a column of 50 when enfiladed.
FOO	Forward Observation Officer for artillery batteries.
GHQ	General Headquarters; the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief.
GOC	General Officer Commanding.

GSO1	General Staff Officer – the number indicates seniority, 1 being the most senior.
Gun	High velocity artillery piece with a flat trajectory; seldom fired at an angle greater than 20°.
HE	High Explosive.
Howitzer	An artillery piece firing a heavier projectile at a lower velocity than a gun of a similar calibre, and at a higher angle. Can be fired with a variable charge.
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KiA	Killed in action.
Lewis Gun	The standard light machine-gun of the British army. It weighed 26lb (unloaded) and could be fired by one man, but several more were required to carry drums of ammunition. It had an unfortunate tendency to jam in wet and dirty conditions, of which there were no shortage on the Western Front.
MGGS	Major-General, General Staff; the senior staff officer in an Army.
MGRA	Major-General, Royal Artillery; the senior gunner in an Army.
MiA	Missing in action.
MiD	Mentioned in Despatches.
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer, such as a corporal or sergeant.
OH	<i>The Official History of the Great War, Military Operations – France and Flanders</i> , compiled by Edmonds.
OP	Observation Post.
ORs	Other Ranks; soldiers who are not officers, including NCOs.
Picquet / piquet	Soldier on outpost sentry duty; also, stake or similar contrivance to support barbed wire.
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew.

RA	Royal Artillery.
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps. Also known as Rob All My Comrades, due to the propensity of orderlies to steal from sleeping or unconscious patients.
RE	Royal Engineers.
RFA	Royal Field Artillery; responsible for batteries and guns within an infantry division.
RFC	Royal Flying Corps; converted into the RAF with effect from 1 April 1918.
RH & RFA	Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery; the ‘umbrella’ formation to which gunners were recruited.
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major.
SAA	small arms ammunition.
Shrapnel	Type of artillery shell filled with small lead balls, which would spray forwards and downwards with lethal effect upon the shell bursting.
Stokes Mortar	Light mortar, consisting of a smooth-bore tube, resting on a baseplate and supported by a bipod.
Verey Light	A type of flare, fired from a brass pistol and used to illuminate No-Man’s Land at night, or for signalling purposes.
Vickers gun	The standard heavy machine-gun of the British army. Unlike the Lewis Gun, the Vickers was water cooled, and given that it also weighed over 88lb, it was far less mobile. Its use of ammunition in belts meant that it could be fired for far longer than the Lewis, and it had a greater range. However, it required a team of ten men to carry the gun, its mounting, water and ammunition.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years the historiography of the British Army on the Western Front has been rewritten. Around the sixtieth anniversary of the Armistice there emerged a new strand of historical analysis, focusing on the development of tactics and technologies – in other words, how and by what methods did the British Army win the Great War?¹ The first work to tackle this subject was *Firepower*, the 1982 collaboration between Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham. They began with the assertion that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had to move from its traditional impression of itself and of its actions, and demonstrated, through the artillery arm, the BEF's rapid and near-continuous adoption of new tactics and weaponry, both on an unprecedented scale. They suggest that it was the absorption of this new type of warfare, along with the experience gleaned by the BEF towards the integration of all arms, that finally achieved victory in 1918. With *Firepower* originates the detailed study of the technological developments of the war and the practical application of this new technology to achieve victory – tactics.

The Canadian Tim Travers was among the first progenitors of this new, operational genre. In *The Killing Ground* (1987) he described the developing dichotomy between differing historians of the war. He cited the 'mud and blood' school of thought on the one side – those who blamed the problems of the Western Front on the internal failings of the British Army itself and its High Command in particular – and on the other he placed historians who laid more import on external factors – primarily the continual emergence of new weaponry

¹ See Ian Beckett, 'Revisiting the Old Front Line – The Historiography of the Great War since 1984', in *Stand To! The Journal of the Western Front Association*, 49 (April 1995), pp. 12-15; J.M. Bourne, 'Goodbye to All That? Recent Writing on the Great War', in *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1) (1990), pp. 87-100; Keith Simpson, 'An Annotated Bibliography of the British Army 1914-1918', in Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms - A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 238-65.

and tactics, plus the actions and abilities of the German Army. Travers sought to establish a middle ground between these opposing camps, arguing that British generalship was marked by a reluctance to abandon traditional pre-war ideas and values, lacking the doctrinal approach of the Germans. The period 1900 to 1918 marked a transitional phase for the British Army as technology replaced ‘the offensive spirit’ as the arbiter of victory. Travers’ second book on the subject, *How the War was Won: Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front 1917-1918* (1992), examines the degree to which the British Army as a whole had withstood the strain of two years of modern, industrial war, and the importance or otherwise of new technologies and their absorption into the existing army structure in achieving victory in 1918.²

There followed a proliferation of works following Travers’ lead. Two American authors, Bruce Gudmundsson, in *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army 1914-18* (1989) and *On Artillery* (1993), and Martin Samuels, in *Doctrine and Dogma: British and German Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (1992), attempted to demonstrate how the British Army rose to the challenges imposed by the war by comparing its progress to that of the Germans. Both authors reached the similar conclusion that the British Army was characterised by its “unsubtle and inflexible approach to battle. Having once adopted this approach, it proved virtually impossible to alter it. The whole system of training produced soldiers and officers unused to independent thought, men unable to develop a more dynamic doctrine or put it into practice.”³ In contrast, the Canadian Bill Rawling’s study, *Surviving*

² Travers’ work has, however, been shown in recent studies to be deeply flawed on a number of issues. See, for example, Peter Simkins, ‘Somme Reprise: Reflections on the Fighting for Albert and Bapaume, August 1918’ in Brian Bond, ed., *Look to Your Front – Studies in the First World War by the British Commission for Military History* (Staplehurst: Spellmount Ltd., 1999), pp. 147-162.

³ Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (Westport: Praeger, 1992), p. 223.

Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps 1914-1918 (1992), which can equally be applied to the ‘citizen army’ that became the BEF, composed largely of men previously devoid in military experience, demonstrates how troops were forced to learn from their difficult and often-horrendous situation how to adapt both their equipment and their tactics to the unexpected and complex face of industrial warfare.

Another notable contributor to the historiography of the Great War is Paddy Griffith. His incisive analysis, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918* (1994), emphasises the significance of Britain's victory over the Germans, and argues that this was achieved through attack and not defence. Griffith stresses that the British Army learnt from the failure of its improvised tactics and technologies during the first half of the war and was able to apply this accrued knowledge and experience in the final two years of the war until, during the Hundred Days campaign of 1918, it was achieving a level of skill and mobility seldom equalled, even in the Second World War. Griffith also points out the misconceptions about the British Army's learning process during the war, emphasising not its perceived amateurism, but the mechanisms established by GHQ for the rapid dissemination and distribution of tactical lessons learnt during the conflict. This line of argument was continued in *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (1996), a collection of essays edited by Griffith, which sought to emphasise the encouragement by GHQ of tactical and technological development and the lengths it went to disseminate tactical lessons learnt from each operation. One of the contributors to this collection was Peter Simkins, whose ‘British Divisions in the Hundred Days’ set out to destroy the myth that the British formations were perceived as inferior to their Dominion counterparts, and were seldom trusted with difficult or strategically important attacks. Simkins' findings are particularly significant to the divisional debate: by analysing the results of nearly one thousand assaults made during the Hundred

Days, he demonstrates not only that success rates by British divisions were on a par with Dominion formations but also that the British troops bore by far the heaviest burden:

Far from being the ‘bluntest of swords’ or a mere supporting cast the British divisions in the ‘Hundred Days’, in spite of the crises they had experienced earlier in the year, actually made a very weighty contribution to the Allied victory.⁴

One of the most important recent additions to the tactical debate is Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson’s study of Sir Henry Rawlinson, *Command on the Western Front* (1992). This was one of the first attempts to bridge the gap between the analysis of high command and the experience of the man on the ground. Prior and Wilson’s original intention was to show how Rawlinson, who began his career on the Western Front as a divisional commander and rose to command an Army, and who had a prominent involvement in many important offensives, particularly the Somme campaign, absorbed the lessons of the war and used them to guide his Fourth Army to striking victory in 1918. However, their research shows Rawlinson as an inconsistent learner, failing to develop a methodical operational procedure, and that his role in 1918 was of considerably less importance than in 1916. Rawlinson adopted more the role of a team co-ordinator, with his subordinates, all experts in their fields, undertaking the task of planning offensives.⁵ This decentralisation of command is indicative of the British Army as a whole, showing how with flexibility and initiative the BEF was able to attack with success in

⁴ Peter Simkins, ‘Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the ‘Hundred Days’, 1918’, in Paddy Griffith (ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (Ilford: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 57. His reference of ‘the bluntest of swords’ is a scathing remark made by the controversial Denis Winter, *Haig’s Command: A Reassessment* (London: Viking, 1991), p. 150.

⁵ However, it is debatable as to whether Rawlinson *was* an “inconsistent learner”, particularly given that Fourth Army had relatively little to do in 1917, and that he hardly put a foot wrong in 1918. His defence of Amiens at Villers Bretonneux in April was very skilful in view of his slender resources, whilst Fourth Army’s attacks at Hamel, Amiens and on the Hindenburg Line were among the outstanding achievements of the war, representing the apogee of the BEF’s tactical and technological improvements. In addition, these last named battles were set-pieces, meaning that Rawlinson inevitably had a role in their planning or co-ordination, displaying arguably a much greater sureness of touch than he had in 1916.

1918, reinforcing success rather than prolonging wasteful attacks on strongly-held positions – the “entirely appropriate use of available resources”.⁶

Running alongside these debates has been a detailed analysis of the extraordinary ‘citizen army’ which became the BEF and the society from which it sprung. The ‘war and society’ approach attempted to place the war and the British Army that fought it in a wider, socio-economic context, hoping to find explanations for the Army’s record within this context. This approach received much attention during the 1980s, the best of which included *A Nation in Arms* (1985) edited by Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* by Keith Grieves, and *Kitchener’s Army* by Peter Simkins (both 1988).

These books are but a handful of the huge volume of important works on the Great War. Many others are listed in the bibliography that concludes this thesis. And, as another historian has pointed out,

one perhaps may be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing left to be said. This is not the case. Volume is not a measure of quality. There have been many recent books about the war which display ability and insight. But there have been many more which seek only to exploit the public’s seemingly endless fascination with military trivia and are content to repeat uncritically... assumptions and prejudices.⁷

The Great War was a monumental event in world history. The achievement of the British Army and its endurance in accomplishing victory was remarkable. The fact that the war and the army that fought it are so little understood almost trivialises the struggle and sacrifice of those who took part. This thesis intends to add to and enhance the current historical research arguing that the British Army on the Western Front did not undertake a

⁶ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front – The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 390.

⁷ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. vii.

series of misjudged and futile offensives, fought by heroic boys and commanded by ignorant, incompetent generals, but was a force that achieved much after its humble beginnings as a citizen army – the defeat of the major military power in the world at that time.

The Place of the Division within the Tactical Debate

The British Expeditionary Force in France during the Great War was co-ordinated from General Headquarters (GHQ) and led by the Commander-in-Chief. Under his control were eventually five Armies, 22 Corps and upwards of 61 Infantry Divisions, including the Dominion forces. The Army and Corps level of command, reporting to and under the guidance of GHQ, were primarily concerned with operational planning and strategy, leaving the question of tactics to the subordinate level of command – the division. In the light of the continuing debate over tactical development and evolution, it is the divisional unit that promises the most from extensive and detailed study. Co-ordinated in turn at Army and Corps level, the division was the largest fighting unit to enter into battle as a homogenous force.⁸ Furthermore, the division was a self-contained unit, comprising by 1918 three infantry brigades of four battalions, although the restructuring during the winter of 1917-1918 due to the losses of the Third Ypres campaign and an increasingly alarming shortage in manpower

⁸ Divisions, unlike Corps and Armies, tried to maintain a continuity of serving units, keeping the same brigades and battalions fighting alongside each other. Although preferable to the constant switch of units, this practise was by no means regulation, as subordinate units were often switched between divisions, as in the case of 110th Brigade (see below, p. 14), and many other divisions also had brigades or battalions switched. Most Territorial units remained largely exclusive in composition, particularly in 1916, but many Regular divisions found their numbers diluted by Kitchener forces and vice versa. In addition, several divisions were partly or even wholly reconstituted after the 1918 Spring Offensive had decimated many units. In fact, the only truly homogenous units in the BEF were the Canadian Corps which, from its establishment in May 1915, maintained the same four Canadian divisions as its serving units; and the Australian Corps, which was only established in the summer of 1918 after the promotion of John Monash to its command.

reduced many brigades to only three battalions.⁹ Other units serving alongside these brigades included a battalion of the Machine Gun Corps, three field companies of Royal Engineers, a signals company, a pioneer battalion, logistical troops, three field ambulance units, veterinary services, and a divisional artillery of four field artillery brigades, each comprising four batteries, and a trench mortar battery. This self-contained unit of the division clearly offers much scope for operational analysis: large enough to study as a miniature version of the BEF, but not so large as to be overwhelming, and generally composed of the same smaller units within the war (unlike the Armies and Corps which rotated their units) thus enabling a comparative analysis of the division against itself in different operations.

Despite the obvious merits of divisional study, however, there are very few in the Great War literature. The SHLM Project, established by leading historians at the Imperial War Museum, was intended to create a comprehensive database of the BEF divisions, rating them individually and against each other according to a series of performance indicators including variables such as weather, terrain, the enemy, and so on, using much the same criteria as this study.¹⁰ This monumental and ambitious undertaking has, however, sadly fallen by the wayside, with its contributors being distracted by other projects.¹¹ There are similar studies to this one currently in progress; postgraduate colleagues here at Birmingham University are

⁹ For general understanding of the various infantry formations of the BEF, there were 14 men to a Section, commanded by a corporal; four Sections, plus an officer, sergeant, runner and batman, to a Platoon; four Platoons to a Company, usually commanded by a captain; four Companies to a Battalion, commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel; four Battalions to an infantry Brigade, commanded by a Brigadier-General; and three infantry Brigades to a Division, commanded by a Major-General. There were upwards of two Divisions within a Corps, although the usual number was three, but there was no established standard of Corps within an Army.

¹⁰ The founders, Peter Simkins, Bryn Hammond, John Lee and Chris McCarthy, gave their initials to the project's title, although the indication that this is solely an IWM project is misleading – John Lee is not connected to the museum. For a fuller picture see John Lee, 'The SHLM Project – Assessing the Battle Performance of British Divisions' in Griffith ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, pp. 175-181.

¹¹ I am informed, however, that the SHLM Project is "only comatose, not dead", and that plans to revive it are currently in progress. Simkins, e-mail to the author, 9 October 2000.

researching 8th, 25th, 38th (Welsh) and 46th (North Midland) Divisions, in line with the Abbots Way project led by John Bourne, and 16th (Irish) and 55th Divisions are being studied elsewhere. Similar work has been undertaken by Gary Sheffield of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, and by Terence Denman and Nicholas Perry in Ireland. It seems clear that divisional studies represent a different tangent from those currently in progress, which are primarily tactical evolution, the study of various arms of the BEF, and the vilification or exoneration of the British High Command. In order to obtain a well-rounded impression of the British Army in the Great War it is axiomatic that all the various branches of historical research should be assessed alongside each other. The importance of divisional study is that, as a miniature version of the BEF, it should demonstrate the varying degrees of tactical evolution and the competence or otherwise of command within the British Army during the Great War.

The choice of division for study was based on certain criteria. Firstly, it seemed appropriate to examine a New Army division, in that the study of a previously non-existent division and charting its progress through the war has more potential than a unit with a historical record, an existing ethos and, above all, experience. Whilst the fate of a New Army division alongside a Regular or a Territorial unit would be an interesting and necessary comparison for future research, this is probably more suited to a Doctoral thesis. This first criterion therefore eliminated the first eight divisions, all Regular troops; the Guards Division, which was formed in France from the Guards of the other Regular divisions; 27th to 29th Divisions, also Regulars; and 42nd to 66th Divisions, excluding 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, which were Territorial units.¹²

¹² For a clearer picture of the organisation of the BEF, see Brigadier E.A. James, *British Regiments 1914-1918* (East Sussex: The Naval and Military Press, Ltd., 1998), Appendix to Part II.

Secondly, the division needed to have spent its entire active service on the Western Front, as it is this theatre of the war that is the prime field of contemporary research. This second factor excluded 11th Division, which served in Gallipoli; 22nd and 26th Divisions, which only served on the Western Front for one month; 23rd Division, which served in Italy for the last year of the war; and 74th (Yeomanry) and 75th Divisions, the former of which only arrived in France in May 1918, having previously served in Palestine.

Thirdly, and on a personal note, it seemed unsuitable to study a division which already had a written history, as this thesis was to be analytical rather than narrative, and an existing account of the division's actions may have hindered the analytical process. This eliminated 19 of the remaining 27 divisions,¹³ leaving 14th (Light), 21st, 24th, 31st (despite earlier service in Egypt, the division fought in France from March 1916), 32nd, 39th, 41st and 63rd (Royal Naval) Divisions.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an interesting series of actions and operations would seem to be a prerequisite for detailed analysis. Of the remaining seven divisions, 14th (Light) Division did not attack on the Somme, but merely held the line, as at Ypres in 1917, although it was extremely successful at Arras earlier in that year, and was so decimated by the Spring Offensive that it was reduced to a cadre in order to supervise construction work; 24th Division suffered a 'baptism of fire' at Loos in 1915, generally failed at Delville Wood on the Somme, on the Canadians' flank at Vimy, and at the Gheluvelt Plateau at (Third) Ypres, and was only involved in the Hundred Days from October 1918; 31st Division failed entirely on the Somme, was barely in action during 1917, and spent 1918 following-up the German

¹³ These were 9th (Scottish), 12th (Eastern), 15th (Scottish), 16th (Irish), 17th (Northern), 18th (Eastern), 19th (Western), 20th (Light), 23rd, 25th, 29th, 30th, 33rd, 34th, 35th (Bantam), 36th (Ulster), 37th, 38th (Welsh) and 40th Divisions.

withdrawals in the autumn; 32nd Division was decimated on 1 July 1916, had a minor but costly action on the Ancre in November 1916, and seldom saw action thereafter until the Spring Offensive, although it spearheaded Fourth Army's assault in the Hundred Days; 39th Division was heavily involved on the Thiepval Ridge during the autumn of 1916 and attacked three times east of Ypres the following autumn, but saw little action after being decimated by the Spring Offensive; 41st Division was not engaged on the Somme until September 1916, attacked successfully at Messines in June 1917 and led Second Army's advance during the Hundred Days; 63rd (Royal Naval) Division were engaged in the Antwerp and Gallipoli operations in the early part of the war, had only a brief involvement on the Somme, were unsuccessful at Arras and only held the line at Passchendaele in 1917, and only played a minor role in the final advance in 1918.¹⁴

21st Division

21st Division's service on the Western Front is possibly unique, in that it fought in every major British offensive from its 'baptism of fire' at Loos in the autumn of 1915. This also made it one of the first New Army Divisions to go into battle. The division entrained in France in early September 1915; within three weeks it had been deployed as one of two reserve divisions at the battle of Loos. Marching every day for a fortnight, the division arrived, exhausted and soaking, at La Buissiere at 6 a.m., to be met at 6.40 a.m. with orders to advance into the battle area at 6.30 a.m.¹⁵ The division suffered enormous casualties at Loos –

¹⁴ I am grateful to Peter Simkins and his 'Assessment of the Divisions on the Western Front 1914-1918' (unpublished) for much of this information. Both he and Paddy Griffith have conducted extensive research into the relative merits of British divisions on the Western Front. See Simkins, 'Co-stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in "The Hundred Days", 1918' in Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, pp. 50-69; and Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front – The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 80-82.

¹⁵ 21st Division War Diary, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) WO 95 / 2128.

4,051, including 33 officers and 219 other ranks killed, and a total of 2,400 wounded.¹⁶ Lieutenant J.H. Alcock, a subaltern in 8th Lincolnshire, 63rd Brigade, writing in a POW camp after his capture at Loos, noted the fates of other officers in his battalion: of the twenty-nine serving at that time, he recorded twenty-two as being “taken out” of the war. “The remaining officers... were left behind as a reserve and, so far as I am aware, did not take part in the action.”¹⁷ Given the astonishingly short passage of time from the division’s entrainment in France to its deployment at Loos, plus the appalling conditions by which the division exhausted itself slogging to the battle arena, its devastation appears understandable, if utterly objectionable. This apparently futile bloodshed and waste of young life epitomises the popular history of the First World War. Yet the division’s next action, on the infamous first day of the Somme, saw peculiar and unexpected success on a day synonymous and forever associated with bloody slaughter and needless sacrifice. Facing Fricourt on the far left of the British sector, 21st Division was part of a five-division front that witnessed success in this most calamitous of offensives. Less than a fortnight later, the division took part in the opening act of the High Wood campaign, a series of piece-meal attacks, which, proportionately, cost the British forty per cent more casualties than on 1 July.¹⁸ However, the initial assault, on Bazentin-le-Petit, involved a highly successful night assembly and dawn attack on 14 July 1916, and will be discussed in Chapter 1. Serving with Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, the division fought well for the rest of the Somme campaign throughout the summer of 1916, including the attack at Flers-Courcelette when tanks were first deployed in battle.

¹⁶ Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915, Volume II* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 392.

¹⁷ Diary of Lieutenant J.H. Alcock, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), 96 / 29 / 1.

¹⁸ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, pp. 203-205. See also Terry Norman, *The Hell They Called High Wood - The Somme 1916* (London: William Kimber, 1984).

21st Division also acquitted itself well in 1917 – the year of Arras, Third Ypres, and Cambrai. In April the division fought under Allenby at Arras, standing-to on the extreme right of the line, accomplishing the extremely difficult but equally vital role of maintaining contact with the French, although two later attacks were unsuccessful. During Third Ypres the Division was twice engaged with Plumer's Second Army - its major success is dissected in Chapter 2. The division was thought recovered enough to take part in the highly successful opening day of the Cambrai offensive, a major tank operation, during which Byng's Third Army advanced over four miles, and to reinforce the front-line following the German counter attacks in December.

Similarly, the division's actions in 1918 offer much for operational analysis. The division was for a time placed on standby for transfer to Italy during the winter of 1917-18, but the order was cancelled, and it remained on the Western Front to face the full brunt of the German Spring Offensive. Unfortunate enough to be on Gough's weak and over-stretched Fifth Army front on 21 March 1918, the division was overwhelmed during the first of the German assaults, and was bludgeoned so badly as to be formed into composite forces. A Lewis-gunner from the Wiltshire Regiment noted how "the Divisions of whom there were five British, the 8th, 21st, 25th, 38th and the 50th, had got so mixed up in the retreat as to be hopelessly separated", and noted his irritation and disappointment to find he was to be sent to one of these composite forces.¹⁹ The commander of 21st Division, Major-General D.G.M. Campbell, described the accomplishments of the division during the first difficult months of 1918 in no uncertain terms:

The 21st Division was probably more heavily engaged than any other Division in the British Army... during March, the Division was in the thick of the Somme fighting... being transferred to the Ypres sector in April it then, once more,

¹⁹ T.G. Mohan, *My War Diary*, Privately Printed, IWM 80 / 28 / 1.

sustained the shock of the German attacks in that section, and was one of the Divisions in the line when the great German attack on April 29 was definitely held up... being transferred to Champagne in May (it) experienced the full brunt of the German attack which was launched on May 27...²⁰

After only a short respite from the fighting, the division was back in the front line by mid-July, preparing for the advance to victory. As the spearhead of Third Army's advance in the Hundred Days, 21st Division fought over the much-contested battlefield of the Somme, in Picardy, and on the Hindenburg Line, fighting at the St Quentin Canal when this 'impregnable' line of German defence was broken, capturing 114 officers and 3,758 other ranks.²¹ The division's actions are surely worthy of further scrutiny, particularly in this year of victory.

Despite fulfilling all the foremost prerequisites, the division initially shows little to recommend itself for further scrutiny. Raised in the north and billeted in the Home Counties in September 1914 in response to Lord Kitchener's nation-wide call-to-arms, the division was unremarkable in most senses. Its 62nd Brigade included 12th and 13th Northumberland Fusiliers, 8th East Yorkshires, and 10th Yorkshires (Green Howards); its 63rd Brigade comprised 14th Northumberland Fusiliers, 8th Somerset Light Infantry, 10th West Yorkshires, and 10th York and Lancasters; and 64th Brigade contained 9th and 10th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, plus 14th and 15th Durham Light Infantry. Yet although most of these battalions were raised in the north, the division as a whole enjoyed little social or regional cohesion. Any that did exist, along with a New Army ethos, camaraderie, and *esprit de corps* was undermined by the constant regeneration of units with new drafts to replace casualties, particularly once they came in via the conscript laws. However, this unpromising and

²⁰ Major-General David M. Campbell, 'Introduction' to H.R. Cumming, *A Brigadier in France 1917-1918* (London: Cape, 1922), pp. 9-10.

²¹ Campbell, 'Introduction' to Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 11.

unremarkable selection of units can be regarded differently, as another historian wrote of a similar division:

It can certainly be viewed as a symbol of the evolution of the BEF from 1915 to 1918 in that it offers a splendid example of what could be achieved, after a chaotic and unpromising start, by an 'ordinary' New Army division, raised in the Home Counties, without the élitist selection of processes of some Territorial units, without the distinct social cohesion of the northern Pals formations, and without the sectarian and political binding of the 36th (Ulster) Division.²²

In terms of its raising and its social composition, the 21st was a similarly typical New Army division. However, in addition to lacking any religious or social cohesion, 21st Division also lacks the regional coherence and romantic subtitling of many other units - 14th (Light), 38th (Welsh), 52nd (Lowland) 74th (Yeomanry) Divisions – to recommend itself through literature borne from local enthusiasm. As has been noted, it is one of the minority of BEF divisions without a divisional history, most of which were written by serving officers who felt the need to document their unit's service.²³

Similarly, the units within 21st Division gave rise to very little literature in the post-war period. In an unusual transfer, both Regular battalions of the Lincolnshire Regiment joined the division in November 1915 after the disastrous 'baptism of fire' at Loos demanded the inclusion and absorption of professional troops, but their involvement within the division is only documented through the Regimental history.²⁴ In a similar vein, the 110th Brigade joined the division in place of the shattered 63rd Brigade after the first day on the Somme. Comprising the four Service Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment, this fairly unusual

²² Peter Simkins, 'The War Experience of a Typical Kitchener Division: The 18th Division, 1914 – 1918', in Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon – The First World War Experienced* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), p. 298.

²³ 38 of the 65 British divisions that served with the BEF have Divisional Histories.

²⁴ See Major-General C.R. Simpson (ed.), *The History of the Lincolnshire Regiment, 1914-1918* (London: Medici Society, 1931).

brigade, which distinguished itself throughout the rest of the war, gave rise to only three works, the last of which was only published last year.²⁵

Neither does the division possess any real historical ‘clout’. It was not renowned within the BEF, nor was it a unit that was feared by its enemies at the time, as were the Dominion troops, particularly the Canadians and, by their own, modest, admission, the Australians. Nor was it a division that has gained historical recognition as an élite unit, such as Lukin’s tactically innovative 9th (Scottish) Division, with its exceptional South African Brigade. It did not achieve a remarkable or famous success for which it is known, such as the breaking of the Hindenburg Line by 46th (North Midland) Division. It was not famously decimated on the first day on the Somme as was de Lisle’s 29th Division, unfortunately facing Beaumont Hamel in its first battle on the Western Front since returning from Gallipoli, only to find its troops trapped on the uncut wire. Nor was the division so decimated by the German Spring Offensive that its survivors were fit only to train Americans and cadres for the rest of the war, as was the fate that befell 39th Division. It is not renowned as a bad or incompetent unit, such as the hapless-sounding Wanless O’Gowan’s 31st Division – known even during the war as the ‘thirty-worst’ – which could demand further inspection as to why it was so bad.²⁶ In fact, 21st Division’s only real claim to fame is its misdeployment at Loos alongside 24th Division, a fact that caused the scape-goating of the Commander-in-Chief at the time, Sir John French.

²⁵ H.R. Cumming, *A Brigadier in France, 1917-1918* (London: Cape, 1922); D.V. Kelly, *39 Months with ‘The Tigers’ - the 110th Infantry Brigade* (London: Benn, 1930); Matthew Richardson, *The Tigers: 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000).

²⁶ Many of these units have written histories. For the 9th (Scottish) Division, see J. Ewing, *The History of the 9th (Scottish) Division, 1914-1919* (London: John Murray, 1921), Lieutenant-Colonel W.D. Croft, *Three Years with the 9th (Scottish) Division* (London: John Murray, 1919); for the South African Brigade, see John Buchan, *The South African Forces in France* (Cape Town: Thomas Nelson, 1920), Peter Digby, *Pyramids and Poppies: The South African Brigade 1915-1919* (South Africa: Ashanti Publishing, 1993); for the 29th see Captain Stair Gillon, *The Story of the 29th Division* (London: T. Nelson, 1925), Lieutenant-Colonel R.M. Johnson, *29th Divisional Artillery, War Record and Honours Book 1915-1918* (Woolwich: Royal Artillery Institution, 1921); for the 46th see R.E. Priestley, *Breaking the Hindenburg Line: The Story of the 46th Division* (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1919).

Command

In terms of command, 21st Division actually has much to recommend it for further study. In total, it had four commanders,²⁷ the last of whom took control in May 1916, thus maintaining continuity of command throughout the major part of the war, from the opening of the Somme to the Armistice. Its commander for this part of the war, Major-General David ‘Soarer’ Campbell, was a successful and popular general;

very quick and alert, with an inexhaustible supply of energy, a great sense of humour, and a fund of common sense, he was the perfection of a Divisional Commander. He was very popular with all ranks, and rightly so, as he never spared himself in looking after their comfort and efficiency in every way. Added to which he was a fine soldier, with sound and original ideas on training, and possessed a strong will of his own without being in any way obstinate.²⁸

Campbell’s military record is distinguished by neither notoriety nor fame; he was notable in non-martial circles as a fine horseman - achieving the unique record of winning the Grand National, the Irish National Hunt Cup, and the Grand Military Steeplechase in 1896.²⁹ His obituary in *The Times* noted that his “personal gallantry was often in evidence (and that he) had reason to be proud of his command... He had, too, an unusual receptiveness to new ideas” and remarked to “have rarely met a soldier who, confronted with a problem, would take so much pains to get to the bottom of it, with the aid of all the information he could procure and with grim determination”.³⁰

²⁷ These were Lieutenant-General Sir E.T.H. Hutton, under whose command the division was raised; Major-General G.T. Forestier-Walker, from 11 April 1915, who commanded the division at Loos; Major-General C.W. Jacob, from 18 November 1915, who was detailed the unenviable task of rebuilding the division after its ‘baptism of fire’; and Major-General D.G.M. Campbell, who took command on 22 May 1916. It should be noted that only two of these commanded the division in action, and it was Campbell who steered it through Britain’s major part of the war, from the opening of the Somme offensive to the Armistice.

²⁸ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 95.

²⁹ Campbell’s nickname, ‘Soarer’, derived from the name of the horse that he rode to victory in the 1896 Grand National.

³⁰ Extracts from *The Times*, 13 March 1936.

Campbell took on a division that had rebuilt itself after devastating losses on its first outing. His predecessor, Claud Jacob, earned promotion to Lieutenant-General and command of a Corps by way of the remarkable turnaround he instigated in 21st Division. After Loos the division had held quiet sectors in Lieutenant-General Charles Fergusson's II Corps, warranting the following praise when it left to join XV Corps in preparation for the Somme campaign of 1916:

The commendation of the Army Commander will be very gratifying to you, and no one knows better than myself how well it is deserved. It has been the greatest pleasure to see how a Division which came to the Corps... shattered by heavy losses has by its spirit and energy raised itself again to a fine fighting unit, and has established its reputation as such.³¹

In a similar vein, the subordinate units of the division all maintained a large degree of command continuity throughout the major part of the war, that is, from the onset of full-scale British involvement beginning on the Somme in July 1916. 62nd Brigade was commanded by Cecil Rawling from mid-June 1916 until his death in action during the Second Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. He was succeeded by George Gater, a 30-year old Oxford graduate with a Dip. Ed., who thus completed an extraordinary rise from civilian to Brigadier, with DSO and bar, in just over three years. He led the brigade for just over a year until the Armistice:

Campbell was an outstanding soldier, but he was very much a *pukka* Regular who never went out of his way to court popularity, especially among New Army officers. Gater nevertheless not only survived under Campbell's command for the rest of the war but also flourished. On two occasions, during the worst of the fighting in the spring of 1918, Gater was chosen to command *ad hoc* units to help stem the German tide. The first, known as Gater's Force, consisted of composite battalions from 62nd, 64th and 110th Brigades, together with 66 Lewis guns of 4th Tank Brigade. This was sent to reinforce 3rd Australian Division on 29-30 March 1918. The second, known as Gater's Independent Brigade, and again composed of composite battalions from 62nd, 64th and 110th Brigades, plus support units, was

³¹ 21st Division Routine Orders – Complimentary Order signed by Lieutenant-General Charles Fergusson, Commanding II Corps, 28 March 1916, PRO, WO 95 / 2129. The Army Commander was General Sir Herbert Plumer.

sent to block any German advance beyond the Marne on 2 June 1918, where it came under the command of the French Fifth Army.³²

64th Brigade was commanded by Hugh Headlam, from the same date as Rawling, until the summer of 1918, when he was transferred to staff duties. His successor, Andrew McCulloch, also an Oxford graduate with DSO and bar, lasted less than a month before being wounded leading the brigade towards Miraumont, the battle examined in Chapter 3. Christopher Edwards, a pre-war regular twice wounded during the war, led the brigade through the difficult advance to victory until the Armistice.

110th Brigade, which was transferred to the division from 37th Division after 63rd Brigade was decimated on 1 July 1916, was under the command of William Hessey, a retired staff officer from the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Lord Loch, another staff officer from the Grenadier Guards, took over the brigade in July 1917, steering it through the difficult Third Ypres campaign, before being relieved of command because of sickness at the beginning of 1918. The brigade then came under the command of Hanway Cumming, described by Campbell as “not only a magnificent leader of men, but also a soldier of the very highest class”³³ who was thus returned to active service after six months in charge of the Machine-Gun Corps Training Centre just a week before the German Spring Offensive. His book, *A Brigadier in France*, which documents his service with the brigade, proved invaluable in the difficult study of the battles of 1918.

This unusual degree of continuity throughout the division is indicative of two things. Firstly, it demonstrates the extent to which Campbell was happy with his choice of Brigadiers

³² J.M. Bourne, *The British General Officer Corps During the Great War*, forthcoming.

³³ Campbell, ‘Introduction’ to Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 13.

– he appointed both Rawling and Headlam – and also how well the three Brigadiers worked alongside each other and subordinate to Campbell. The second point is perhaps more important for the purposes of this study, and concerns the fact that the divisional commander and the Brigadiers within the division maintained their posts, excluding casualties, whilst many others throughout the BEF were sent home and replaced for their failures. This indicates primarily a large degree of competence and good leadership on their part, and that any problems or failures encountered by 21st Division and its composite units were probably due to extraneous factors, such as the enemy, the strength of its defences, the weather and others described below.

The continuity of command throughout 21st Division was a major factor to recommend it for further examination. It ensures that a comparative study of the division against itself will not be marred by the consideration of different commands, which could well complicate the analytical process.

Another factor to recommend 21st Division is its active service within the whole of the BEF. It served in all five Armies, under six different Generals, including Haig, the future Commander-in-Chief, and in seven Corps under nine Lieutenant-Generals. It also served with the French army, during the battle of the Aisne in May 1918. This remarkable record of service implies a division both versatile and quick to adapt, obviously being much in demand within the BEF.

The factors and army service outlined above describe a fairly typical New Army division that achieved what was asked of it. And it is this reason that most recommends 21st Division as the subject of this MPhil thesis: it went about the business of waging war quietly and efficiently, usually succeeding, learning from its mistakes, and using all manner of

methods to avoid the problems previously encountered. In short, it is demonstrative of the vast majority of units and personnel in the war – those that remain in the public consciousness are the very brave and very bloody, the heroic and the disastrous, all the things that perpetuate the old myths: that the war was a bloody, futile, unmitigated disaster of a war, at best a Pyrrhic victory but made intolerable by the tremendous and devastating casualties inflicted by a High Command perceived as military inept, incompetent and butcherous, languishing well behind the lines in luxurious chateaux, apparently oblivious and unconcerned as to the plight and the suffering of their troops. This study intends to join the existing Great War literature dispelling these ignorant preconceptions: the analytical comparison of a unit against itself at different stages in the war, hopefully proving the ‘learning curve’ of tactical evolution that is the common theme amongst current research.

Battles

The decision of which battles to study was as important as the choice of division, given that different combinations of assaults could lead to wholly divergent conclusions. At this point it should be noted that whilst the choice of battles was made very carefully, it should be similarly stressed that the decision was not based on which assaults would yield results closest to the hypothesis. Instead, the choice was made on the following criteria.

Firstly, the decision to study four battles was solely due to word length, limiting each ‘battle study’ to that of the average journal article – about 7,000 words. With a thesis total of 40,000 words, to include a long introductory chapter and the necessary conclusions, the study of four battles was in effect a predetermined factor.

Secondly, it was imperative to compare like with like, to ensure that a comparative study of the division against itself would not be hampered by the consideration of different

methods of action. Put bluntly, this meant that all four battles had to be either offensive or defensive. As this thesis was meant to demonstrate the tactical evolution of the division, it was again almost predetermined that the assaults should be offensive, as it was this type of action that could prove or disprove this theory.

Thirdly, it seemed prudent to study battles over a long period of time, preferably several months, as it would be unreasonable to expect the division to have learnt the lessons of one battle by the time it next saw action. Given that 21st Division saw action in 1915, at Loos, the choice of battles could have been determined by one battle within a major campaign from each year. Yet it is here that other factors play a role. 21st Division was led in action by two different commanders, and in the interests of continuity it seemed appropriate to limit the choice of battles to those under Campbell, who commanded 21st Division for the greatest part of the war, from the opening of the Somme offensive to the Armistice. This, unfortunately, eliminated Loos from the choice of battles, although given the battle itself and the obvious mis-deployment of the reserves (21st and 24th Divisions) its inclusion in the study might not have led to the most authentic conclusion.

It is at this point that an inspection of the actual battles is required.³⁴ In 1916, the major campaign was that on the Somme. 21st Division fought on the opening day, in the initial assault on High Wood a fortnight later, at Flers-Courcelette in mid-September, when tanks were first used in battle, and in three other minor assaults towards the end of the campaign. The battle study from the Somme campaign was therefore to be one of the three listed above, but the decision was not as difficult as it first appeared: initial instincts suggested that the first day on the Somme was already rather over-documented compared to the others, although a

³⁴ The complete actions of 21st Division are listed in A.F. Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions* (British Official History, 6 vols; London: HMSO, 1937-45) vol. 3, pp. 108-9.

better reason for its exclusion soon presented itself. 63rd Brigade, which was the division's assaulting unit on 1 July, was so decimated during the assault that it was exchanged with 110th Brigade of 37th Division, which had not taken part in the initial assault. To examine an attack by a unit that would no longer play any role within the division seemed inadvisable, as there could be no future comparison, and the battle was excluded. The choice between Flers and Bazentin (the initial assault on High Wood) was similarly easy: whilst the discussion of the first attack with tanks would undoubtedly lead to comparisons with assaults later in the war, 21st Division actually played an extremely subsidiary role in the attack, and is barely mentioned in the *Official History*. In contrast, the attack of 21st Division on Bazentin-le-Petit, made by the newly transferred 110th Brigade and marking its 'baptism of fire', was an extremely important assault strategically - the British attack on the German Second Position. In addition, the assault is mildly famous as the first successful night assembly and dawn attack, which would lead to comparisons with attacks at different times of the day.

1917 was the year of two British campaigns: Arras and (Third) Ypres, more commonly known as Passchendaele. 21st Division took part in the initial assault at Arras, but its role was less offensive than simply to 'stand to' at the extreme right of the line, as a pivot for the rest of the British assault. Whilst the division did undertake two assaults in the Arras campaign, at the beginning and the end of May, these were fairly unsuccessful, which was a complete contrast with those during Passchendaele. Initial instincts suggested that (Third) Ypres was the campaign of 1917 to study, if for no other reason than because of its sinister reputation as the vilest and most futile of all Great War campaigns. My intention was to challenge preconception; here was my chance. 21st Division attacked three times during the campaign: at Polygon Wood at the end of September; at Broodseinde a week later; and in the Second Battle of Passchendaele at the end of October. The attack at Polygon Wood, although

successful, was undertaken primarily by Fifth Army and I Anzac Corps of Second Army. Second Passchendaele was in fact a protracted period of battle, as the British troops slogged laboriously through the infamous mud. Broodseinde, on the other hand, had much to recommend it: deemed “the black day of the German Army” by Ludendorff himself,³⁵ it seemed prudent to discover why, plus it was the last battle of the campaign to be fought before the rains came. Most assaults after this were dictated more by the weather and the morass that became the battlefield than the evolution of tactical thought. This finally excluded Second Passchendaele from the list, and established Broodseinde as the 1917 assault for consideration.

This left only 1918 from which to find two battles for study, and it was a year halved neatly between defensive and offensive campaigns. The German Spring Offensive, which began on 21 March and finally petered out at the end of May, was the defining feature of the first half of the year. It was therefore from the Hundred Days campaign that the final two battle studies would have to be chosen, and despite the short period of time the total switch from static to mobile warfare meant that there were many battles from which to choose. However, given the prerequisite factor of time between assaults to learn the lessons and mistakes, it seemed appropriate to choose battles early and late in the campaign. They practically chose themselves.

By the summer of 1918, 21st Division was fighting in Julian Byng’s Third Army, which did not attack in the Hundred Days until the battle of Albert, nearly a fortnight after the opening assault at Amiens. The division distinguished itself well in the initial attack but, on the night of the 23-24 August, undertook a quite breathtaking assault on Miraumont, whose

³⁵ W. Beumelberg, *Flanders, 1917* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1928), p. 122.

capture was imperative to the advance of two different Corps. The *Official History* was so impressed by this feat it devoted over five pages to its narrative, whereas other battles at this time often warranted scarcely a paragraph. Similarly, the attack by 21st Division on 8 October against the Germans' reserve system of defence, the Beaurevoir Line, almost shouted its merits for inclusion. The assault was to be made in three bounds, each in a different direction, pivoting on the second and third jumping-off points that were actually within the territory to be captured during the previous bounds. As one commentator noted, the attack "illustrated the improvement in tactical method since 1916",³⁶ and no other assault could claim to be a better conclusion to a thesis devoted to tactical evolution.

Sources

The most obvious starting point for any analysis of the Great War is the monumental *Official History* (henceforth *OH*). Begun almost as soon as the guns fell silent, the first of fourteen volumes assessing *Military Operations, France and Belgium* was published in 1922, the last in 1948. The *opus-magnum* of compiler Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, who wrote much of the text and jealously guarded his sources, even from other historians and authors, the *OH* has been the cause and subject of much controversy between Great War historians. Its findings and accounts have long since been regarded as inaccurate and biased, its impartiality called into question and Edmonds' personal prejudices - particularly his pro-Haig stance - given increasing prominence. Edmonds personally completed the volumes on 1914 and 1915, and the space devoted to the exploits of the pre-war Regular Army - four volumes on the first seventeen months of the war compared with nine on the last twenty-seven, despite the immense difference in the scale of the fighting - suggests a subtle championing of their qualities over those of the vast 'citizen army' of 1917-18. This implication is reinforced by

³⁶ Kelly, *39 Months*, p. 145.

Edmonds' concentration on the catastrophe suffered by the New Army on the Somme on 1 July, which takes up much of the first volume on 1916. Nevertheless, the *OH* has a great deal of detailed, narrative information, particularly in the operational sphere, and pertaining to practically every unit in the BEF, and should not be ignored in any study of the Great War.³⁷

The use of primary sources in this MPhil thesis is limited by the usual factors relating to the military historian: their availability; their reliability; and their accuracy. Primary sources concerning the First World War are to be found almost exclusively in the WO (War Office) class at the Public Record Office in Kew, the Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart collection at King's College, London, and the National Army Museum. Excluding the official War Diaries, these primary sources are usually letters, diaries, memoirs, personal reminiscences and the like and, by their very nature, must be treated with some caution and scepticism by the historian.

The official War Diaries are the most obvious source of information on the activities of a particular unit or formation. These documents were compiled on a daily basis in line with army-wide military standards, with the primary function of recording a unit's actions and procedures in order that they might prove educative for future soldiers fighting future wars. They are now held in the PRO under the classmark WO 95. The diaries were maintained by one of the unit's senior staff officers, and daily entries record where the unit was situated, the tasks that it undertook, casualties or the arrival of new drafts and any other occurrences deemed worthy of inclusion. This final point is important in understanding the value or otherwise of a specific diary; beyond a bald statement of location, personnel and activity it was very much up to the individual compiler whether any additional information was

³⁷ See David French, 'Sir James Edmonds and the Official History: France and Belgium' in Brian Bond (ed.), *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 69 – 86.

included. This means that the quality of War Diaries can vary enormously, even within the same unit, as different officers assumed responsibility for their maintenance. The daily entries can be just a single line or run to several paragraphs, sometimes including minute detail about the weather, the state of the trenches, the activity or otherwise of friendly and enemy artillery and aircraft, and descriptions of minor incidents. In contrast, some entries can be positively abrupt, particularly when the unit was out of the line, merely noting its location and the number of men allocated to the inevitable working parties.

War Diaries are invariably of excellent use to the military historian for a day-to-day analysis, and much can be gleaned about a unit's morale, strength, training, experience and everyday life from these sources. They are, however, of rather less use during times of battle, which are obviously of the utmost interest to the military historian. Diaries were seldom maintained with rigorous daily entries in times of protracted action, or even a particularly hectic or uncomfortable tour of duty in the front line, being compiled from notes at some later date. This delay in the diary's maintenance raises another problem concerning its reliability and usefulness. In order to write a detailed account of an operation the officer responsible for the diary was usually forced to rely on those who took part for the story of events and, all too often, these were unavailable having themselves become casualties. Some battle reports were written from memory after the conclusion of the battle (or, in many cases, after an 'action' within a larger operation or campaign, such as Passchendaele or the Somme), and the full story of what had actually happened was lost and the account in the diary mere conjecture or, at best, a sketchy outline. The accounts could therefore be tainted by hindsight, retrospect and knowledge of the action's successes, failures, and casualties – luxuries usually reserved for the military historian. Even when the diary was maintained regularly its routine nature

sometimes led to certain incidents, made significant by later events or the advantage of hindsight, either given insufficient prominence or being overlooked altogether.³⁸

For a divisional study it must be noted that it is the diaries of the subordinate units of brigades and battalions, rather than that of the division itself, that will be the most enlightening, as it is these diaries that record the action of the troops 'on the spot'. However, one of the most obvious limitations of the War Diaries as a whole, and of smaller units in particular, is their concentration on officers and the lack of specific references to non-commissioned officers and men. For the historian concerned primarily with tactics, the diaries pose other problems: intended to remain within the military sphere, the diaries were to be read by fellow soldiers and consequently expect the reader to be fully conversant with military terminology and procedures. Accounts of basic actions and tactics are seldom recorded, but much can be gleaned by studying the various appendices, after-battle reports, sketch maps and operational orders that are often attached to the diary. Again, the quantity and quality of the material varies between units, with some diaries containing little but the daily summaries whilst others list start lines and objectives, detail the positions and timings of barrages, the quantity and breakdown of support weapons, equipment and dress of the attacking troops, and a host of other highly relevant information, often including maps. However, it must not be forgotten that the map references and grid numbers that litter many of the diaries pertain to trench maps, rather than actual positions and places on Ordnance Survey maps and those others available to the historian, which can make tracking a unit's position extremely difficult and frustrating.

³⁸ It should be remembered here that after-action reports were not solely for the education of future soldiers, but were of great importance for operational analysis both at divisional and corps level, and the prosecution of campaigns during the war itself were often altered on the basis of these reports.

In short, the War Diaries are the most logical points of reference for narrative and tactical information on various units, personnel and battles, and offer much in the way of useful information. However, their limitations must not be forgotten or their reports viewed as unequivocal truth, and the historian can and should balance one report alongside another to glean a more accurate picture than is possible from the individual diaries alone.

Similarly, private and personal memories are seldom as useful as they at first appear, written either in hindsight, or a tidied-up version of wartime jottings after the event by a gifted and prosaic diarist or biographer. The historian must also consider the author's purpose in writing (and/or publishing) his memoirs, and the audience he anticipates for them. This is particularly pertinent considering the date of production, as the passage of time since the conclusion of the war has witnessed several shifts in popular perceptions of the war. One must also question the intended purpose of these sources: personal exoneration, accusation, or highly-exaggerated, overly bloody, and flamboyant in order to sell – sources such as these seldom have a quest for knowledge and truth at the top of their agenda.

The bibliography that concludes this thesis demonstrates the wealth of secondary sources consulted in its research: books studying particular battles or individuals, those examining tanks, guns and aeroplanes, and the vast majority discussing tactical evolution and the perceived learning curve of the BEF. Some have been outlined above,³⁹ but to discuss their relative merits and shortcomings would be a thesis in itself; yet it is their ideas that have shaped my views on the Great War. They will, obviously, be referred to as needs arise.

There is one other genre of Great War literature, originating in the amateur tradition, which can prove useful for the soldier's view of battle. Historians, some might say compilers,

³⁹ See pp. 1-5.

have portrayed, often through the personal reminiscences of ageing veterans, the day-to-day life in the trenches of the ‘two-a-penny Tommy’.⁴⁰ Again recorded with the luxury of hindsight, these accounts must be approached with caution by the historian in search of ‘facts’, yet the view of the man on the spot can sometimes add the life and colour missing from the brittle and distanced narrative of the War Diaries.

Methods of Assessment

The assessment of battles and the basis for analytical comparison will be a number of different factors, loosely divided into three groups. The first group includes those factors that were beyond the control of British planners; the second encompasses those dictated to the division, and therefore its brigades and battalions, from Corps and Army level; and the final set includes those factors which can be directly attributed to the division or the units within it.

Those factors beyond the control of British planners as a whole include elements such as the weather, and the impact this had on the ground. Although the British had meteorological reports coming in twice daily, the weather then was as changeable and unpredictable as now, and had the ability to ruin an assault or cause a massive turnaround in fortune. The onset of bad weather in Flanders in the autumn of 1917 is a prime example. The six weeks of good weather throughout August and September broke in the first week of October, during the third of Plumer’s four-step, bite and hold attacks, the Battle of Broodseinde, examined in Chapter 2. Although the deteriorating weather may have been to

⁴⁰ See Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the First World War, Book of the Somme, Book of 1918 – The Year of Victory* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson); Sir John Hammerton (ed.), *The Great War... ‘I was there!’ – Undying Memories of 1914-1918*, 3 vols. (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd); Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Allen Lane, 1978); Jonathan Nicholls, *Cheerful Sacrifice: The Battle of Arras 1917* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990); Terry Norman, *The Hell They Called High Wood: The Somme 1916* (London: Kimber, 1984); and the many works of Lyn Macdonald, including *1914: The Days of Hope, 1915: The Death of Innocence, Somme, They Called it Passchendaele, To the Last Man: Spring 1918, 1914-1918: Voices and Images of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books).

the advantage of the British by concealing the troops' arrival from the enemy, the increasing rain turned the Salient into the muddy quagmire that is synonymous with the name of Passchendaele.⁴¹ The state and 'going' of the ground, more often than not caused by the weather, also had a massive impact upon the success or failure of an attack. Continuing with the example of Third Ypres, Prior and Wilson note that

despite the fact that there had been exceptionally dry weather in September, the continuous shelling had destroyed the drainage system of the many small streams which were characteristic of the area. Even without rain these watercourses had become bogs or swamps that provided obstacles for attacking troops. On 4 October units from 5, 21, 3 Australian and NZ Divisions, along with XIV Corps, had reported losing the barrage because of bad going. Without exception, all of these formations suffered heavy casualties as a result.⁴²

Similarly, although early-morning mist was often favoured as it concealed the movement of assaulting infantry, if the sun was not strong enough to burn it off, the mist often hindered the attack later on, particularly in the smoke and fog of war. A frequent occurrence was that the mist caused a loss of either direction or the barrage, and also concealed some enemy outposts, which could then turn and fire on the attacking troops from their rear, causing many casualties.

The enemy, of course, is an enormously significant factor in the success or failure of an assault, and must be given a great deal of consideration in the analytical comparison of battles. However, it must be remembered that, for the most part, this was beyond the control of the divisional planners at least, and more often, that of the higher command as well. The

⁴¹ For a discussion of the increasingly unfavourable weather at Third Ypres, see Philip Griffiths, 'The Effect of Weather Conditions on the Third Battle of Ypres, 1917', BA Dissertation, School of Geography, The University of Birmingham, 1988.

⁴² Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele – The Untold Story* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 137-8.

‘enemy’ is a rather broad term, and encompasses three main points: the enemy personnel, the enemy position and method, and the enemy response.

Enemy personnel describes the defenders of the areas and trenches under attack. The interrogation of prisoners, captured during trench raids, patrols or earlier offensives within the same campaign, could give British Intelligence some idea as to which enemy units were opposing them in the line. However, there could be no guarantee that these units would remain in position; they could be relieved in the normal rotation of troops through the front line or, in instances of protracted battle periods, units could be removed from the battle zone altogether, leap-frogged by fresh troops for the assault. In addition, regardless of whether the expected units remained in the line, it must not be forgotten that this was still beyond the control of the British – knowing the enemy, and thus its reputation, strengths and weaknesses, was a very different matter from being able to choose it.

The manner in which these units actually defended their position is described as the enemy method. As the belligerent most likely to remain on the defensive, the Allies having been committed to their repulsion from French and Belgian soil,⁴³ the German trench systems were constructed and maintained to be a more or less impenetrable line of defence. They took advantage of any high ground in the area, positioning their guns and unit headquarters on the reverse slope, so as to be beyond the reach of the Allied artillery. The strength of these positions, designed to stand firm against whatever the might of two armies could throw at them, was formidable, including accretions such as wire belts, fortified woods and concrete pill-boxes. The German defences on the Somme, for example, were well entrenched on the comparatively high ridges of the undulating countryside, in the valley of the river which gave

⁴³ See John Terraine, *The Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1964), pp. 16-7.

the area its name, puckered with the river's tributaries, streams and peat-soaked land. They were also behind

barbed-wire entanglements, thoroughly staked and employing the type of wire that did not spring apart should the stakes be uprooted by bombardment. The trenches [were dug] in the accommodating soil to a depth of ten feet. And, perhaps of greater importance, beneath their trenches they constructed dug-outs to a depth of thirty feet or more. These dug-outs were not just hidey-holes. Many had electricity, piped water, forced ventilation, and living quarters.⁴⁴

Such dug-outs contrasted sharply with the field fortifications encountered in the Ypres Salient, organised by Fourth Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Friedrich von Lossberg, and which were adapted to suit the difficult nature of the ground. Abandoning the tactics of the Somme, which tried to stop British assaults in the front trenches, German divisions east of Ypres were deployed in depth.⁴⁵ The low-lying ground and the drainage system devastated by constant shelling meant that trenches, as could be described, were little more than a connected line of shell-holes and craters. The main system of defence was the pill-box, a concrete structure designed to house both machine-gunners and riflemen, and sited alongside others to give mutual support. Attacking these fortifications was no longer a matter of breaking through subsequent lines of defence, but developing a method of flanking these structures and capturing the garrison from behind. The pillboxes were "to be tackled by sections of men armed with Lewis guns and grenades, the former to provide covering fire while the bombers worked their way forward and lobbed grenades through the loopholes or rear door – another version of fire-and-movement tactics".⁴⁶ However, it was often the case that troops attacked one pillbox, only to find themselves under fire from flanking positions. In October 1917

⁴⁴ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p. 319.

⁴⁵ The new German doctrine of elastic defence in depth was not only applied in the Ypres Salient, but elsewhere during 1917 – particularly at Arras.

⁴⁶ Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-18* (London: Robinson, 1999), p. 376.

Ludendorff advocated the use of the much-vaunted defence-in-depth system, a strategy which employed two main features. Firstly, it incorporated a greater concentration of machine-guns and a stronger system of defence generally in the forward areas designed to break up an attack before it could overwhelm the defenders and, secondly, it advocated the positioning of counter-attack divisions behind the main battle zone. On other occasions, the Germans sited small units far forward in no man's land as soon as British artillery opened fire in order to place German troops on the Allied side of the barrage, from whence they could inflict heavy casualties on attackers as they were leaving their trenches.⁴⁷

The third enemy factor to consider is perhaps the most important: the actual reaction of the enemy to the assault, which is arguably the decisive factor as to the success or failure of an assault. On 1 July 1916, for example, the enemy response was entirely and unhappily astonishing to the British infantry. Unsurprisingly, the attackers had expected the week-long bombardment, during which 1.5 million shells fell on the German positions, to have virtually annihilated the bulk of the enemy defenders and trench-dwellers. The reality was, of course, murderously different.⁴⁸ The enemy response, particularly in this case, can be measured in terms of the intensity and method of the fire, whether this came only from the troops in the line or the artillery as well, and whether the fire came from the front or flank. The number, ferocity, and speed with which the enemy launched their counter-attacks must also be considered, as should the willingness or otherwise of soldiers to surrender. Evidence of ferocious counter-attacks can be found in the attack to be examined in Chapter 4, during

⁴⁷ Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare – Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914 – 1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 145.

⁴⁸ It should not be forgotten that 1 July 1916 *did* witness some British success, particularly on the southern flank at Montauban, where local commanders had found means to ameliorate the problem of getting attackers across No Man's Land before the enemy had time to emerge from his dug-outs and man his defences. However, this issue has more relevance and is discussed further in Chapter 1, p. 55.

which 64th Brigade of 21st Division took its the first objective, the Château des Angles, with little difficulty. Yet although the château itself was taken, it was lost twice by counter-attack, and retaken only to be abandoned until enemy mines had been made harmless, and finally reoccupied late in the day.⁴⁹

The second group of factors contributing to the success or otherwise of an attack are those elements dictated to the division by the higher command, namely from Corps and Army level. Perhaps the most important of these factors is the state of the division at the time of the attack. This can be measured in terms of battle-weariness – how long the division had been in or out of the line or, in times of protracted battle campaigns, how long it had been fighting. The two 1918 battles examined in Chapters 3 and 4 were both individual assaults within a larger campaign, the battles of Albert and Cambrai respectively, in which the division had recently attacked and would swiftly afterwards attack again. A division exhausted by extended periods either in the front or the firing line would clearly be less rested and refreshed than one which was brought into the line specifically for the battle, as was happily the case for 21st Division at Broodseinde, discussed in Chapter 2.

The strength of the division is inextricably linked to its battle-fatigue. Attacking the enemy obviously caused casualties, as did a simple spell holding the front-line trenches, although fewer, and a division seriously depleted by casualties and exhausted survivors would obviously not perform to the same level as one rested and refreshed. Drafts brought into the division, although boosting numbers, were often inexperienced, seldom knew the sector, and

⁴⁹ Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918, Volume V* (London: HMSO, 1947) p. 202. See also the War Diary of 15th Durham Light Infantry, 64th Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2161.

could not, by their late arrival, share the *esprit de corps* of the existing unit.⁵⁰ It must also not be forgotten that ‘unit strength’ was not the same as ‘fighting strength’.

Other factors imposed from higher command included the frontage of attack and the objective distance. These elements more or less dictated the terrain and enemy of the divisional assault, factors discussed above. It is obvious that the wider the attack frontage, the more troops were needed for each stage of the assault, simply to cover each yard of ground. Similarly, the depth and number of the objectives dictated the number of troops which needed to be held back from the first assault, in order to take objectives further onward in the advance. It is also obvious that a wide attack frontage combined with objectives deep in enemy territory would be far more difficult to achieve than limited and attainable objectives on a narrow frontage, if only due to the overstretched resources of manpower. The success of Plumer’s ‘bite and hold’ tactics against Gough’s more ambitious, thrusting style at Third Ypres is clear testimony to this assertion.⁵¹

The artillery supporting these attacks, whether wide, deep or narrow, was almost always determined by the higher command. Divisional artillery aside, the number of guns, and the ratio of field guns to heavies and howitzers, were allocated amongst the attacking formations by the Corps and Army commanders. The number of guns per yard of attack frontage - a useful barometer for the comparison of battles – was dictated to the division in this way. Similarly, the preliminary bombardment and any barrage put down during the assault were usually part of a Corps-wide scheme to ensure success on the entire frontage.

⁵⁰ Small unit morale and *esprit de corps* were however, constantly and often swiftly regenerated.

⁵¹ For this comparison see Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele – the untold story*, chapters II and III; Peter H. Liddle, *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997); A. Wiest, ‘Haig, Gough and Passchendaele’ in Gary Sheffield, ed., *Leadership and Command in War* (London: Brassey’s, 1997).

These factors relating to artillery support, perhaps more than any other, are particularly good for analytical comparison, in that they offer a range of statistical data: number of guns, ratio of field artillery to heavy artillery, duration of bombardment, timing and method of the barrage, number of belts of fire,⁵² the use of barrages put down by machine-guns or trench-mortars, and the use and quantity of gas or smoke in the bombardment. The use of other elements in the attack, like these last-mentioned and also including aircraft, tanks, mines and so forth, all important factors in the success or failure of an attack, were again dictated to the division by Corps and Army commanders.

The time of the attack is the last factor dictated by the higher command, and obviously has a huge impact on the outcome of an attack. Although not a significant factor in the failure of the 1 July attack, it cannot be disputed that to attack in broad daylight was unwise: zero hour was set for 7.30am and, in the words of one veteran, “it was really a pity to have a war on July 1st, for in all my time in France it was the most beautiful day we had. The sky was cloudless and the sun shone”.⁵³ The attack on Bazentin-le-Petit, examined in Chapter 1, was chosen for analysis primarily for its night assembly and dawn attack, and the contrast with the opening day, just a fortnight earlier, is remarkable. Dawn and dusk attacks grew in frequency throughout the war until they were the norm, and night attacks the daring exception. The

⁵² Plumer, ever the advocate of artillery belts, used them to devastating effect, again at Third Ypres. For the first of his ‘bite and hold’ advances, at the Menin Road Ridge on 20 September 1917, he utilised a creeping barrage of no less than five belts of fire, including three walls of high explosive, a belt of shrapnel and a curtain machine-gun barrage. This moving inferno was fully 1000 yards deep, and played an enormous part in the success of the attack.

⁵³ Unnamed soldier, quoted in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1996) p. 62. There were, however, several commanders who believed in daylight attacks, often around noon, with the intention of lulling the Germans into a false sense of security by not attacking at dawn. This allowed enough light for the assault, and gave troops the opportunity to consolidate the newly-won position during the hours of darkness, when German counter-attacks were less likely to succeed. Ivor Maxse, often considered to be the greatest trainer of troops during the war and who was later promoted to Inspector-General of Training, BEF, was a firm believer in daylight attacks such as these. I am grateful to one of his greatest fans, Peter Simkins, for this point.

attack at Miraumont, discussed in Chapter 3, was such an assault, and the comparison between the two examples should demonstrate the relative benefits of each method and style of attack.

The final set of factors offering data for analytical comparison encompasses those that are directly attributable to the division itself. Though limited, they are extremely important as they offer the most undiluted facts by which to compare and analyse the division *against itself*. The factors, as such, revolve around one main crux: the units within the division and how they were utilised. One major and obvious point is the choice of brigade (and the subordinate units of battalion, company, section, and platoon) for a particular assault. It would be concrete evidence of the ‘learning curve’ if a brigade or battalion that had proved itself proficient in dealing with a particular strongpoint – say, a concrete pill-box or a machine-gun nest – were chosen for the next attack when such a strongpoint was encountered. Similarly, a unit that had found advancing behind a shrapnel barrage a particular stumbling block would, hypothetically, not be deployed in the same manner again until training and practice attacks under these conditions had taken place. Likewise, a unit that had proved itself capable of adapting to unforeseen circumstances – such as losing the barrage or encountering particularly stubborn resistance – might be considered a particularly adept and skilful unit, henceforth given difficult or uncertain tasks, trusting its initiative and clear thinking under fire.

Other issues relating to divisional planners include the actual method of advance: whether to have one or two brigades ‘up’; the number of platoons in the front line; artillery, snake or square formation; whether the troops were able to rehearse the advance prior to the actual assault – all key issues which were capable of tilting the balance between success and failure.

Once all these issues have been considered in turn, the execution of each attack was examined through battalion and brigade reports, and the findings of the *Official History*, as it is the actual outcome of the attack that is the real yardstick for analytical appraisal. The problems experienced by the attacking infantry will be considered alongside those problems foreseen by the planners, the relative success or failure of the attack measured against the objectives set, and the progress made by flanking divisions. The casualties of men and materiel will be compared with the enemy losses, including prisoners taken and guns captured, and the losses of other British units for the attack.

The assessment of 21st Division's performance in these four battles, by the methods described above, indicates the degree or otherwise of tactical evolution – an avoidance of earlier mistakes and the employment of lessons learnt in previous battles. In short, the 'learning curve' that current British historians argue was witnessed during the wartime experience of the British Expeditionary Force as a whole and, given the 'typical' nature of the 21st Division, the conclusion is brought that the success or otherwise of the division to utilise these lessons within its fighting methods, is typical of the British Army on the Western Front.

CHAPTER 1

Bazentin-le-Petit – 14 July 1916

The British assault on 14 July 1916 was a night assembly and dawn attack against the German Second Position on the Somme battlefield. After the disastrous opening day of the offensive, the attack was not only important strategically, but also for the morale and the perception - by the British, their allies, and their enemies - of the British Armies on the Western Front. The assault by 21st Division was delivered by the newly transferred 110th Brigade, marking its 'baptism of fire' in the war. This battle demonstrates the level of tactical skill displayed by inexperienced troops early in the war, through the execution of a complex manoeuvre within the otherwise rigid confines of the set-piece battles so characteristic of the Somme campaign. This battle study will provide a base from which to make comparisons and contrasts with assaults later in the war.

Sources

The source material for the assault on Bazentin-le-Petit is plentiful, as it is for most battles within the Somme campaign. Primary sources are mainly to be found at the Public Record Office in Kew (hereafter PRO) under the classmark WO 95, which holds the War Diaries. WO 95 / 2130 holds documents relating to 21st Division, and includes the Operation Order pertaining to this battle, O.O. No. 59, and its appendices. The diary also contains 'Information Regarding the Enemy', a short, typed account of information gleaned from German POWs, noting the confusion within enemy ranks and the fact that many had been rushed into the area with little idea of why or where they were going. An 'Account of Operations of 21st Division, July 11th – July 18th, 1916' outlines the timing and detail of the assault, taken from messages received at divisional GHQ and after-action reports from the battalions involved. There is also an impressive, three-page document, signed by the BGGs X Corps, outlining lessons learnt

from the “recent fighting”, including the importance of keeping up with the barrage, the need to issue sketch maps, difficulties of attacking over the open, the importance of patrols, co-operation with aeroplanes, and the mopping-up and consolidation process.⁵⁴

Documents from the higher levels of command, XV Corps and Fourth Army, can be found in the classmarks WO 95 / 921 and 431 respectively. There is little in Fourth Army papers that relates directly to 21st Division, but those of XV Corps are particularly useful. Operation Order No. 17, issued on 11 July, outlines the objectives and divisional boundaries for 7th and 21st Divisions, and an appendix gives artillery timetables. This, however, is of little use without the artillery map and tracings which, unfortunately, are missing from the diary. Two documents give an insight into the opposing German forces: ‘Enemy Situation on Corps Front, 11th July 1916’ and ‘Prisoner Reports’ both testify to the confusion of German troops in the line, with the latter also offering evidence as to the “deplorable” condition of the trenches, the state of the wire, and the success or otherwise of the British artillery. Finally, XV Corps diary gives a detailed account of the assault on the entire corps frontage, but contains little pertaining to 21st Division that cannot be found in its own diary and those of the subordinate units.

War Diaries of 110th Brigade and the Leicester battalions, the main units involved, can all be found in WO 95 / 2164. The diary of 6th Leicesters is particularly detailed, including a type-written appendix, ‘Narrative of Action of 6/Leicestershire Regiment 14th - 17th July 1916’, which outlines the timing of the actual assault, the battalion’s position at various times, and gives detailed casualties. Both 7th and 8th Leicesters give detailed narratives, although both are taken from the diaries’ official, hand-written entries, which accounts for some

⁵⁴ See Appendix I, pp. 153-6.

indecipherable gaps in the text. Both give extremely detailed casualty lists. The diary of 9th Leicesters gives a somewhat shorter account, noting various times and positions, and lists officer casualties by name, but offers no other rank casualty figures at all. The diary of 1st East Yorks, which sustained casualties of 460 on 1 July but was nevertheless attached to 110th Brigade for the Bazentin assault, offers little more than a paragraph, stating merely that attacks were carried out under heavy shelling, and notes an unfortunate incident of the British artillery shelling its companies from the rear.

The diaries of 21st Division's other battalions also contain information of note. That of 12th Northumberland Fusiliers, 62nd Brigade (2155), reports on the possible tapping of the wireless by the Germans and notes a bogus order given out to try and convince the enemy that there was not to be a British attack. The diary also cites casualties of over 100, primarily sustained whilst carrying bombs to the ammunition dump for 110th Brigade, indicating the high level of hostile shelling during the day. Its sister battalion, 13th Northumberland Fusiliers, 62nd Brigade, notes a strong German patrol on the morning of the 13 July, possibly to ascertain whether the reports of an assault were correct, and notes the use of lachrymatory gas in the hostile bombardment of the same day, whilst the 15th Durham Light Infantry, 64th Brigade (2161), noted the "evil use of tear shells" during the evening of 14 July. The 9th KOYLI, 64th Brigade (2162), notes the attack of 110th Brigade, and that the battalion was ready to reinforce if necessary. The diary also states that "the attack was preceded by the most intense bombardment and was entirely successful in reaching and capturing the objectives." Finally, the diary of the 1st Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, (2154) shows how keenly the battalion wished its role in the assault to be made known, despite the fact that it did not actually attack: "A message was sent from 110th Brigade to 62nd Brigade which read as follows: - 'Will you please thank in the name of the 110th Brigade the OC 1st Lincolns for his great help in

bringing up SAA for the use of this Brigade.’ The Battalion can therefore claim to have done its ‘bit’ in the great victory which the British scored over the Germans on this date.”

As part of the Somme campaign, the attack on Bazentin-le-Petit is well-documented in the secondary literature. Volume II of the British *Official History* (hereafter *OH*), *Military Operations France and Belgium 1916*, compiled by Captain Wilfred Miles, (London: Macmillan, 1938) describes the planning of the Bazentin offensive after the catastrophe of the first day on the Somme. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson’s *Command on the Western Front – The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) offers an excellent narrative of the assault, giving a particularly useful insight into the operational and planning side of the operation. Matthew Richardson’s *The Tigers – 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), gives an extremely detailed account of the Leicester Brigade’s first assault, using the War Diaries and written reports from the Leicester Records Office as source material. Terry Norman’s *The Hell They Called High Wood: The Somme 1916* (London: Kimber, 1984), focuses primarily on the High Wood campaign itself, but gives a useful narrative of the opening assault on Bazentin. Anthony Farrar-Hockley’s *The Somme* (London: Batsford, 1964) and Tim Travers’ *The Killing Ground* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987) also have some useful information. Eyewitness accounts can be found in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1996), Sir John Hammerton (ed.), *The Great War... ‘I was there!’ – Undying Memories of 1914-1918*, 2 (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd) and Lyn Macdonald, *Somme* (London: Penguin Books).

Context

On 1 July 1916 the British Expeditionary Force in France launched its biggest offensive to date on the Western Front. Its results are infamous: over 57,000 casualties including nearly 20,000 dead, most of whom were probably killed in the first few minutes of the assault, with little ground gained to make the human losses tolerable. For many, it epitomises the grim and bloody futility of the war.⁵⁵ Yet 1 July saw some success: the explosion of *la grand mine* at La Boisselle had afforded a small advance just south of the Albert – Bapaume road, whilst astride the Anglo-French boundary in the south the Germans had been forced from their first position, with the capture of Mametz and Montauban. It became increasingly clear to Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig and General Sir Henry Rawlinson, the Fourth Army commander and principal progenitor of the Somme offensive, that the campaign could not continue without fresh forces and a complete rethink of objectives. “Despite the calamity that had befallen Rawlinson’s forces on 1 July, there was never any doubt that the offensive would continue. The imperatives that had occasioned the battle in the first place required that, however lamentable its opening, it should not be terminated.”⁵⁶ Haig wanted the offensive to be renewed as soon as possible in order to wear down German resistance and to secure a line from which to attack the enemy’s Second Position. There followed a series of piecemeal

⁵⁵ The first day on the Somme is not under discussion here. Volume I of the British Official History (hereafter *OH*), *Military Operations France and Belgium* 1916 (compiled by Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, London: Macmillan, 1932) is devoted almost entirely to the disastrous opening day of the campaign. See also A.H. Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme* (London: Batsford, 1964); John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Penguin Books, 1983) pp. 207-289; Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Allen Lane, 1971); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) pp. 137-185; and T.H.E. Travers, *The Killing Ground* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁵⁶ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 185. The “imperatives” described are discussed in greater detail in the above works, but for the purposes of this work a short summary appears necessary: the Great War was a coalition war, in which British aims were almost entirely subordinated to those of her allies, particularly the French, who had been bled white at Verdun since February. The need to divert German troops away from the ‘mincing machine’ on the Meuse, coupled with the fact that the Germans were entrenched on French and Belgian soil and therefore required repulsion to appease Britain’s allies, demanded her action on the Western Front in the summer of 1916.

attacks by the Fourth Army between 2 and 13 July, trying to take this line. The assault on 14 July, in which the 21st Division lined up in front of Bazentin-le-Petit, was the attack against the Second Position.

Aims⁵⁷

The primary objective of the Fourth Army operation was to capture the German Second Position on the southern sector of the front where Rawlinson's attack had witnessed some success on 1 July. The task allocated to XV Corps was the capture and consolidation of Bazentin le Grand and Bazentin le Petit Woods, and Bazentin le Petit village. XIII Corps was to capture and consolidate Bazentin le Grand village, Delville Wood, and Longueval. The task of 21st Division within XV Corps was to assault the German Second Line on Bazentin Ridge, and capture the enemy front and support trenches between Mametz Wood and Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The second objective was to capture the portion of Bazentin-le-Petit village west of the Bazentin-le-Petit – Martinpuich road, and to capture Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, establishing themselves on a line from the northern edge of the village, thence to Contalmaison Villa and along the north and west edges of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood.⁵⁸ As it happened, the division was also forced to clear Bazentin-le-Petit village, despite the fact that it was not in the divisional sector, owing to their right flank being exposed.

Method

Rawlinson's plan for the capture of the German Second Position did not differ considerably from his method for the 1 July attack. He again placed great emphasis on the role of the artillery, but this time did not demand a week-long bombardment which could only signal to

⁵⁷ See Maps I and II, pp. 145 and 146.

⁵⁸ XV Corps Operation Order No. 17, 11th July, 1916, PRO, WO 95 / 921.

the enemy a forthcoming attack, but instead concentrated on trench destruction and the cutting of enemy wire over a period of three days. The ratio of shells per yard of trench was also significantly more favourable than on 1 July, as Prior and Wilson have calculated:

Rawlinson planned for a three-day bombardment during which almost half a million shells would be fired. The component of the bombardment devoted to trench destruction (that fired by the howitzers) consisted of 62,000 shells weighing about 12 million pounds. This meant that 660lb of shell would fall on every yard of trench attacked, an intensity of fire five times that achieved before the 1 July attack. Clearly then, the assaulting infantry would find the German trenches and their defenders in a far more impaired condition than had been the case of 1 July.⁵⁹

Far more novel than the attack on 1 July, however, was Rawlinson's plan for a night assembly and dawn attack, hoping to catch the Germans unawares and make the capture of objectives therefore easier. This was certainly a difficult manoeuvre, particularly for inexperienced troops, and Haig was initially unconvinced as to the plan's merits against the difficulty that would be encountered in achieving it. Rawlinson, however, was determined that the preservation of secrecy was paramount for the success of the attack and the plan went ahead. It was agreed that white 'jumping-off' tapes should be placed all along the line by the Royal Engineers, in order to make the assembly somewhat easier.

Attacking by night was neither as novel, nor as potentially decisive, as is sometimes suggested. Attempted night attacks between 2 and 13 July had met with no success. And there could be no cause for believing that the proposed night operation on 14 July would prosper should the barbed wire remain intact and enemy machine guns be available against British forces assembling in no-man's land. As ever, all would depend on the ability of the British artillery to suppress the German defences long enough for the attacking infantry first to traverse no-man's land and then to enter the enemy positions.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, pp. 191-2.

⁶⁰ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, pp. 190-1.

Order of Battle⁶¹

XV and XIII Corps of Rawlinson's Fourth Army lined up, left to right, for the assault on the German Second Position. 21st Division was on the extreme left of the attack, in Lieutenant-General Sir H.S. Horne's XV Corps. On its left was Major-General H.E. Watts' 7th Division. This flanked the 3rd and beyond that the 9th and 18th Divisions of Lieutenant-General W.N. Congreve's XIII Corps. Horne's divisions attacked on a one-brigade frontage, Congreve's with two brigades in the front line.

The attack of 21st Division was to be carried out by Brigadier-General W.F. Hessey's 110th Brigade, transferred from 37th Division in place of 63rd Brigade, shattered in the fighting on 1 July. Although this was now the only brigade that could legitimately be called 'rested', both 62nd and 64th Brigades having been involved to some degree of the fighting on 1 July, it must also be remembered that this was a 'green' brigade – one that had yet to see battle. The entrusting of this strategically important assault to an untried brigade is indicative of the confidence that still remained in the New Army formations, to 21st Division staff at least, despite the calamity suffered on 1 July. As noted above,⁶² 110th Brigade was unusual in its composition – comprising four service battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment. In the front line, from left to right, were to be the 6th and 7th battalions, each with a Stokes mortar attached, with one company (D) of the 8th battalion. The remainder of the 8th was in support, with 9th Leicesters and 1st East Yorks (64th Brigade) in reserve. In view of the fact that the division was on the extreme left of the British assault, the left flank of the Leicesters' advance was to be covered by 110th Machine Gun Company.

⁶¹ See Appendices II and III, pp. 157 and 158.

⁶² See Introduction, pp. 14-5.

Resources

The Fourth Army arsenal for the assault on 14 July consisted of 1,000 artillery pieces, of which 311 were heavy howitzers or guns. Despite the fact that this offered 500 fewer pieces than for the attack on 1 July,

the task facing the artillery on the 14th was, proportionately, altogether less formidable. On 14 July the front of the attack was approximately 6,000 yards, as against 22,000 yards on 1 July. Even more significant, the German trench systems behind the front on 14 July amounted to no more than an additional 12,000 yards, compared with the 300,000 yards of supporting trenches on 1 July. In total, then, the artillery on 14 July with two-thirds the number of guns that had been at its disposal on 1 July would have to demolish only one-eighteenth of the length of trench.⁶³

The *OH* figures for the guns on Fourth Army front are more generous than given here. They included twenty 4.7” guns, sixty-eight 60 pounders, fourteen 6” guns, eighty 6” howitzers, thirty-six 8” howitzers, two 9.2” guns, thirty-six 9.2” howitzers, one 12” gun, two 12” howitzers, with sixty-nine miscellaneous guns, anti-aircraft and the like, a total of 328 heavy guns and howitzers. Assuming that the artillery statistics stated above are accurate, that leaves approximately 670 field guns. Divided between the five assaulting units, each division appears to have been supported by sixty-six heavy and 134 field guns. Allowing for the very approximate attack frontage of 600 yards,⁶⁴ this gives an average of one gun per 3 yards. The ammunition available daily to these guns was given ‘as required’ for the 18 pounders and 4.5” howitzers, 250 rounds per gun for the 6” howitzers, 110rpg for the 8” howitzers, 50rpg for the 9.2” howitzers, 70rpg for the 12” howitzers and 25rpg for the 15” howitzers.⁶⁵ Stokes Mortars were to be used on the same principle as the artillery batteries - moving by bounds from one suitable position to another, rather than moving blindly on with the advancing infantry.

⁶³ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 191. Artillery statistics are taken from ‘Battle of the Somme: Artillery Notes and Statistics’, Rawlinson Papers 5201 / 33 / 71, National Army Museum.

⁶⁴ Taken from Captain Wilfred Miles, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1916, Volume II – 2nd July to the end of the Battles of the Somme* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1938), Sketch 10, facing p. 67.

In terms of resources, the artillery was of course the most important and plentiful. Tanks had yet to be used in combat, making their first appearance towards the end of the Somme campaign, at Flers-Courcelette on 15 September. In terms of infantry equipment, 21st Division orders stated that every man was to carry two Mills grenades and 220 rounds of small arms ammunition (SAA), whilst those men detailed specifically for carrying up grenades were ordered to carry only 50 rounds of SAA. Ammunition carriers going forward with the attack were to carry two buckets each containing ten grenades, whilst those following up the attack were to carry two buckets with 18 grenades in each. Battalion raiders and platoon grenade parties were allocated 20 bombs each, whilst a proportion of NCOs were designated to carry a packet of cartridges for rifle grenades in his pocket. Finally, every company was to carry 20 picks and 20 shovels, along with SOS and field flares to signal either aeroplanes or the artillery from the front line.⁶⁶

It is clear that Rawlinson placed as much emphasis on concealment and secrecy as on the artillery preparations. Once his plan for the customary half-hour preliminary bombardment became known, the artillery commanders of 9th and 3rd Divisions (Brigadier-Generals H.H. Tudor and E.W.M. Powell) informed him “that this procedure practically warned the enemy to get ready and put down his protective barrages”⁶⁷ and a hurricane bombardment of five minutes immediately preceding the infantry attack was substituted for the original plan. In a similar vein, it was hoped that the night assembly and dawn attack would maintain the element of surprise - ensuring that the enemy machine-gunners would

⁶⁵ ‘Programme of the Preliminary Bombardment’ issued with Fourth Army Operation Order No. 4 of 8 July, in XV Corps Appendices for 9 July, PRO, WO 95 / 921.

⁶⁶ Appendix to 21st Division Operation Order 59, dated 11-7-16, PRO, WO 95 / 2130.

⁶⁷ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 66.

have as little light as possible to determine the whereabouts of the attackers, whilst allowing enough to ensure the attacking troops could distinguish friend from foe and maintain direction.

Every possible precaution had been taken to ensure secrecy; it was known that the enemy possessed means of overhearing telephone conversations, and there was danger that he might have received some hint. On the morning of the 13th came the discovery that he had been tapping the telephone communications of the 62nd Brigade; accordingly, at 9 p.m. that night, after a verbal warning of its purpose had been given, a bogus order stating 'operations postponed' was telephoned to companies of the brigade in the front line. It is possible that the ruse succeeded, for there was hardly any hostile machine-gun and rifle fire until the British were almost in position, it is certain that the enemy made not the slightest attempt, by patrols or raiding parties, to ascertain if all was normal on his front. When questioned about this want of enterprise, officer prisoners stated that the failure to push our reconnoitring parties was due to there being no reliable NCOs left to lead them: in the German Army this was not officers' work.⁶⁸

Terrain

The terrain over which the Leicester brigade was to cross is fairly well documented. It was to assemble on a line one hundred yards outside the northern edge of Mametz Wood, and about four hundred yards from the enemy position. The *OH* notes that "everywhere, except on the extreme left in front of Mametz Wood, where the ground was flat, the first advance would be uphill".⁶⁹ No Man's Land consisted of a gentle slope and was devoid of cover. The fact that the sector of front allocated to 21st Division *was* in front of Mametz Wood, suggests that the Leicesters' advance could have been the easiest of the British attacks. However, it must be noted that the ground to which the brigade had to advance was very high on the undulating Somme battlefield.⁷⁰ Neither must it be forgotten that Mametz Wood was over three thousand yards behind the German front line of 1 July, and its capture, less than 24 hours before the

⁶⁸ *OH 1916, Volume II*, pp. 68-9.

⁶⁹ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 67.

⁷⁰ Arthur Banks, *A Military Atlas of the First World War* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), p. 156.

main assault on 14 July, had been a long and bitter struggle. Possession of Mametz and Trônes Wood, 3,500 yards to the east, was necessary to secure the flanks for the advance on 14 July. Yet the attacks had been piecemeal; with only a few battalions at a time attacking complex and well-defended trench systems. Casualties were high⁷¹ and the state of the woods testifies to the bitterness of the struggle. David Kelly, a Second-Lieutenant with the 6th Leicesters, viewed the recently-won Mametz Wood before the Bazentin assault:

The wood was everywhere smashed by shell-fire and littered with dead – a German sniper hung over a branch horribly resembling a scarecrow, but half the trees had had their branches shot away, leaving fantastic jagged stumps like a Dulac picture of some goblin forest. It was the type of all woods blasted by really heavy shell-fire, Bazentin, Delville, and even the more uncanny woods one knew East of Ypres in the autumn of 1917... All the old ‘rides’ through the wood were blocked by fallen trees and great shell-holes, and over all hung the overwhelming smell of corpses, turned-up earth, and lachrymatory gas. The sinister aspect of the wood was intensified that night by the incessant whistling and crashing of shells and the rattle of machine guns and illuminated by the German flares, Very lights, and the flash of bursting shrapnel.⁷²

It does not require much imagination to visualise the scene, nor military experience to deduce the state of the ground beyond the wood, that over which the Germans retreated and the British would have to advance – shell-pocked, cauterised with trenches, sighted by machine-guns. A Lieutenant with 9th Leicesters later described the trench systems the Brigade had to combat:

Behind the German first line of this ‘second system of defence’ ran the great wood, Bazentin-le-Petit, which itself was spanned at intervals by three successive lines of trenches, each with its separate wire protection. Between these lines were short lengths of trench, so it was a veritable maze.... It was impossible to march on the intervening ground at the double, so choked with fallen timber, so full of huge shell holes that it was all climbing, jumping, scrambling and sprawling.⁷³

⁷¹ See Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, pp. 187-9.

⁷² D.V. Kelly, *39 Months with ‘The Tigers’ - The 110th Infantry Brigade* (London: Benn, 1930), pp. 28-9.

⁷³ Lieutenant A.C.N.M.-P. De Lisle, unpublished contemporary account, ‘The Story of a Leicestershire Company in the Great Push’.

The fact that it was devoid of cover merely added to the task facing the Leicesters. Another significant topographical feature was a narrow gauge light railway track, which had been laid and used by the Germans for transporting supplies prior to the opening of the offensive. It ran through Mametz Wood, across No Man's Land, and into Bazentin Wood, following roughly the direction the attackers were to take.⁷⁴ What should be noted from this is that, given its significance for the attackers, the railway almost undoubtedly held similar importance for the defenders, who presumably had machine-guns sighted on its passage.

Enemy

The enemy personnel facing 21st Division on 14 July comprised a number of different units. The German *183rd Division* was in the line, but prisoners captured during the assault identified the *Lehr Regiment*, *16th Bavarian Regiment*, *91st Reserve* and *16th Bavarians*. This last regiment, which had all its three battalions in the front line, lost nearly 2,300 officers and men. It is unclear exactly which units faced each other in the line, but there is a significant point, which could not have been anticipated by the British, that is worth noting. During the night of 13-14 July, the Germans had decided to relieve their *183rd Division* with *7th Division* in the Bazentin-le-Petit Wood – Pozières sector. As the British opened their attack, the leading columns of this latter division were just to the north of Flers, some 3-4 miles away, and as news of the British offensive reached the German higher command, troops from this division were sped towards the battle arena. Its three regiments, *26th*, *27th* and *165th*, were hastily thrown into the battle, reinforcing beleaguered troops along the entire front. Other troops out at rest, including units from *185th*, *12th Reserve*, *26th Reserve* and *3rd Guard Divisions*, along with companies of *55th Landwehr Regiment*, were sent up for the same purpose. Therefore, although the equivalent of fourteen German battalions reinforced the front

⁷⁴ Matthew Richardson, *The Tigers – 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), p. 120.

line, they were extremely confused and intermingled, with prisoners owing to the fact that they have been hurried up to the front line with little or no idea of where they were going and what they were to do.⁷⁵ Most sources generally agree that the troops opposite the 21st Division were primarily Bavarians.⁷⁶

Results

The Leicester brigade, only recently arrived in the divisional area,⁷⁷ moved up to assembly positions during the night of 13-14 July. Moving from Fricourt Wood, the battalions made their way along a blasted trench on the west side of Mametz Wood, from which “protruded the arms and legs of carelessly buried men, and as (the) men moved up that night to attack dozens of them shook hands with these ghastly relics”.⁷⁸ As laid out by Rawlinson in his plans for the night assembly, covering parties with Lewis guns were sent out to take up positions on the crest line before midnight. Marking parties from 98th Field Company RE followed to place white tapes along the line on which the main body of troops was to assemble. The assaulting troops began the march to ‘jumping-off’ positions just after midnight. By 3.15 a.m., zero – ten minutes, 110th Brigade was in position to the east of Mametz Wood, between 300 and 500 yards from the enemy front line. The brigade was drawn in four lines, but “owing to uprooted trees and other obstacles, only the fourth line of the 6th Leicestershire could be placed inside the wood, although the last three lines of the 7th were hidden there”.⁷⁹ The 8th Leicesters, on the left of the attacking line, were to skirt around the

⁷⁵ ‘Information Regarding the Enemy, 13-7-16’, taken from 21st Division War Diary, PRO, WO 95 / 2130. See also *OH 1916, Volume II*, pp. 88-9f.

⁷⁶ See Richardson, *The Tigers*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ The Brigade, stationed at Gommecourt on 1 July, arrived at the Quadrangle, about 3,000 yards north-west of 21st Division, in the sector manned by 1st Division on 11 July.

⁷⁸ Kelly, *39 Months*, p. 29.

⁷⁹ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 74.

northern edge of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, whilst the 7th in the centre and the 6th on the right were to enter the wood itself.

All four battalions noted the difficulty with which the assembly took place, carried out under the last few hours of the British bombardment. However, although this did much to conceal the troops' arrival from the enemy, it was not the easiest of circumstances under which to move to assembly positions, particularly as the Germans also gave the area a liberal shelling throughout the night, directed not on the troops but on Mametz Wood itself. The diary of 7th Leicesters notes that one platoon of C Company lost over half its number, and that the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Drysdale, was also wounded during the march to assembly positions. It must be noted that 21st Division was the only assaulting unit to be affected in this way: the *OH* remarks that "except near Mametz Wood, nothing more serious than an occasional field-gun shell had come over".⁸⁰ Thirdly, the night assembly, although not an unprecedented tactic,⁸¹ was certainly an extremely difficult first action for the troops to carry out. Despite his initial doubts about the timing of the attack, Haig later described the success that was achieved.

The whole movement was carried out unobserved and without touch being lost in any case. The decision to attempt a night operation of this magnitude with an Army, the bulk of which has been raised since the beginning of the war, was perhaps the highest tribute that could be paid to the quality of our troops. It would not have been possible but for the most careful preparation and forethought, as well as thorough reconnaissance of the ground which was in many cases made personally by Divisional, Brigade and Battalion Commanders and their staffs before framing their detailed orders for the advance.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Rawlinson had employed night attacks since the second day on the Somme, although the times of actual assemblies are seldom noted. See Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, pp. 190-1.

⁸² *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1979), p. 28. However, given that Haig had raised considerable objections to Rawlinson's plans for the 14 July attack, this generous tribute from the Commander-in-Chief should perhaps be treated with some scepticism.

The *OH* is eloquent in its narrative of the initial events. “When the barrage lifted at 3.25 a.m. the leading companies... all New Army battalions (except one of the 13) rose and advanced through the ground mist at a steady pace. There was just light enough to distinguish friend from foe. Surprised by the shortness of the intensive and most effective bombardment, by the deployment of the stormers so near in the dark, and by the creeping barrage of high explosive, the enemy made but a feeble and spasmodic resistance to the first onslaught. The leading British wave reached the German wire before a shot was fired, and in the hostile trenches the only serious opposition came from men who rushed from dug-outs and shelters after the first waves had passed to engage those which followed.”⁸³ Yet this appraisal, though piling lauds on the attackers, is a general statement of the four assaulting divisions. For the 110th Brigade, though successful, the advance was difficult and troubled.

Having reached the jumping off point, the Leicesters did not have to wait long for their first taste of battle. Once in position, it was barely five minutes before Rawlinson’s hurricane bombardment opened. “At 3.20 a.m. the whole sky behind the waiting infantry of the four attacking divisions seemed to open with a great roar of flame. For five minutes the ground in front was alive with bursting shell, whilst the machine guns, firing on lines laid out just before dark on the previous evening, pumped streams of bullets to clear the way.”⁸⁴ To soldiers yet to be battle-hardened, it was “one continual roar of guns and shells whistling and shrieking through the air... a perfect avalanche of destruction, and how any Bosche could have been alive to withstand the infantry attack was beyond comprehension.”⁸⁵

⁸³ *OH 1916, Volume II*, pp. 78-9.

⁸⁴ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 78.

⁸⁵ D.A. Bacon, unpublished typescript account, Leicester Records Office, p. 60.

Yet withstand it they did, for 7th Battalion War Diary notes that the assaulting troops were in a race to reach the German front line before the trench dwellers could man their machine guns to defend it, and “as a result the advance was rather ragged”.⁸⁶ On the right, A Company worked in conjunction with 6th Battalion, and had little difficulty in reaching the trench, which was very “knocked about”. Between twenty-five and thirty prisoners were taken there.⁸⁷ On the left, D Company was briefly held up by machine gun fire but managed to keep up close to the barrage and rush the line. The two centre Companies, B & C, were held up for about twenty minutes by machine guns, before the pressure was relieved by successful parties from 6th Battalion working down the flanks in a pincer movement. The centre companies were then able to rush the trench. The enemy initially put up some resistance but many were caught in their dug outs, and the rest, seeing that they could not halt the British advance, retreated into the wood. There was little resistance in the second line, known to the British as Forest Trench: according to 6th Battalion War Diary, there were comparatively few Germans in the second line.

On the right of 7th Battalion, the advance of 6th Battalion was similarly dogged by enemy machine-guns, sited in both Bazentin-le-Petit and Bazentin-le-Grand Woods, which caused a good many casualties in the two right companies. The latter wood was on the front

⁸⁶ Narrative of 7th Leicesters, 14-7-16, PRO, WO 95 / 2164. The ‘race to the parapet’ is an interesting analogy, explored in depth for the attack on 1 July by John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1976), pp. 237-8 and 247-58. In no uncertain terms, he states the gravity of such a race: “a race for which the British ran from their own front trench to the other side of no-man’s-land, for the Germans from the bottom to the top of their dug-out steps. Whoever first arrived at the German parapet would live. The side which lost the race would die, either bombed in the recesses of the earth or shot on the surface in front of the trench.” This is not solely restricted to the 1 July; any battle in which the Germans were aware of an impending attack – i.e. before which the British fired a lengthy bombardment – had a similar race. The attack on 14 July was no exception.

⁸⁷ Appendix I (Narrative of Action of 6/Leicestershire Regiment 14th/17th July 1916) PRO, WO 95 / 2164.

of 7th Division to the right, and had yet to be cleared. The third and fourth lines of 6th Leicesters, therefore, rushed the positions, killed the detachments and captured the guns.

Meanwhile, the second and third lines of 7th Battalion were advancing, and carried the remainder of the first line with them on to Forest Trench. By this time, the casualties were mounting, particularly amongst the officers: both B and C Companies had only one officer with them, Second-Lieutenants Evans and Reed respectively, whilst all the officers from D Company were out of action. The Commander of 8th Battalion, 46-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel Mignon, was killed “leading a bombing party like a subaltern”,⁸⁸ and D Company, which had gone over in the first wave, lost its commander, Captain F. Ward, almost instantly. The battalion had to be led by its NCOs, one of whom, Company Sergeant Major Ben Stafford, later wrote a matter-of-fact report of his company’s battle and losses in a letter to the wounded Captain Ward.⁸⁹

By 4 a.m. the second line had been taken along the entire divisional frontage, by all accounts with little resistance. The diary of 8th Battalion states that “very little opposition was encountered as Villa Trench was reached, dug outs were immediately bombed and the Lewis Guns which followed up closely took up a position in Villa Trench and caused a considerable number of casualties amongst the retreating enemy. Although the majority of the raiders had been knocked out, the remainder did excellent work in bombing outwards towards the left

⁸⁸ Kelly, *39 Months*, p. 32.

⁸⁹ CSM Ben Stafford, letter of 20-8-16. This letter can be read in full in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1996), pp. 133-5. Extracts can be found in Richardson, *The Tigers*, pp. 122 and 130. Brown notes that “Stafford’s letter is a remarkable document of the time, for the simple clarity of its description, for the light it casts on officer/other-rank relationships, also perhaps for the powerful impact of its litany of names, but above all for the attitude of stoic determination and willingness to continue on despite adversity which was a widespread characteristic of those fighting on the Somme, certainly at this hopeful stage. Disenchantment undoubtedly existed and would grow, but there were countless officers and men, arguably the large majority, for whom their only thought was that the struggle had to be carried forward and pressed home.” pp. 132-3. See Appendix IV, pp. 159-60.

flank and blocking Villa and Aston trenches”.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, parties from 6th and 7th Battalions were sent back to consolidate the first line, and to ensure that it was clear of the enemy. Contact with 1st Division of III Corps was established on the left.

At 4.25 a.m., leaving a few platoons consolidating the second line, the brigade advanced over the 450 yards of No Man’s Land towards Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The diary of 7th Battalion noted that “no resistance was met with on the right, but on the left considerable trouble was caused by a machine gun and by snipers and close by the observation point in the tree both Captain Clarke and Lieutenant Wakeford were hit. This left the assaulting line without an officer.”⁹¹ Meanwhile, C Company of 8th Battalion moved the along the west side of the wood as far as Forest Trench, eventually advancing as far as its north edge, bombing the enemy dug outs in the wood during the advance. Contact with 7th Division on the right had been lost fairly early in the advance, and the right company of 6th Battalion had to extend a defensive flank facing east to prevent the enemy fleeing from Bazentin-le-Grand Wood to Bazentin-le-Petit Wood.

By 6 a.m. the brigade was in almost full possession of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, except for the north-western corner, in which a pocket of enemy resistance held out all day and caused considerable casualties, particularly to 8th Leicesters and to 1st East Yorks, which had come up in support. Reinforced by platoons from 9th Leicesters, the brigade advanced on Bazentin-le-Petit village, although not in its sector, and joined hands there with 2nd Royal Irish of 7th Division which had finally come up on the right. After handing over the eastern portion of the village to advancing troops of 7th Division, the 6th Battalion retired a short

⁹⁰ Narrative of 8th Leicesters, 14-7-16, PRO, WO 95 / 2164.

⁹¹ Narrative of 7th Leicesters. Clarke won the MC for leading his company in the attack and for rallying his men to assault the third objective – the assault in which he was injured.

distance, occupying and then consolidating the line from the northern end of the village, southwards to the north-eastern point of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, and then along the northern edge of the wood towards the railway. Meanwhile, the other battalions had been occupied in consolidating the wood and, given the presence of the enemy in the north-western corner, an assaulting party of 7th and 9th Leicesters was organised to clear them out. “The bushes and trees were very thick round this part which necessarily made progress slow, the enemy evacuating and manning a trench about 30 yards from the wood, before our men could get through. We suffered several casualties from a machine gun in the aforementioned trench.”⁹² The fight for complete control of the wood continued throughout the day and was not entirely cleared of the enemy until 7 p.m., and even then he clung to a machine gun post fifty yards beyond the edge.⁹³

In terms of set objectives, the assault was now more or less complete. Thrilled with this initial success, Lieutenant-General Horne, commanding XV Corps, began planning an exploitation assault, in which 21st Division was to move northwards and clear the German communication trenches between Bazentin-le-Petit and the light railway to Martinpuich, in order to facilitate the capture of the German Second Position between the corps boundary and Black Watch Alley by III Corps. A combined attack between 21st Division and 1st Division of III Corps was planned for 2.30 p.m., but was postponed for two hours owing to the difficulties experienced by the Leicesters in clearing Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. At 3 p.m. a heavy German counter-attack, supported by artillery, made an assault on the XV Corps position, particularly the village and the northern face of the wood, and the combined operation was cancelled. “The infantry of the 21st Division was now so reduced in numbers – the 62nd Brigade could

⁹² Narrative of 7th Leicesters.

⁹³ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 86.

only muster 1,200 rifles – that all idea of further offensive movement was abandoned, the III Corps deciding that the 1st Division could not act alone.”⁹⁴

The heavy counter-attacks against XV Corps, although anticipated by the British to be made by local reserves, were of a severity and number that could not have been foreseen. The German decision to relieve its *183rd Division*, as described above, allowed reserves to arrive in large numbers throughout the day, in far greater numbers than the British command had reason to expect. The German *7th Division* was just to the north of Flers when news of the British attack came through, and the leading columns rushed to the battle arena. “Elements of these formations (totalling probably 5,000 men) arrived piecemeal in the area of the Bazentins between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. It was these troops that carried out the counter-attacks which occupied XV Corps for most of the day.”⁹⁵

Casualties

Despite the success of the assault, with the capture of objectives and their consolidation, and in the face of severe counter-attacks, this success was bought for a high price. David Kelly remarked that “it had been a gruelling experience for the Brigade, which had lost 2,000 casualties out of 3,300 effectives”.⁹⁶ The breakdown of figures is difficult to ascertain, as three of the assaulting battalions gave their casualty lists for the period 13-17 July, and 9th Battalion War Diary does not give any figures at all. In total, the division sustained losses of 2,894, with each Leicester battalion losing in the region of a hundred men killed with a further two hundred wounded or missing. 1st East Yorks, which was only deployed in the late

⁹⁴ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 85.

⁹⁵ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 200.

⁹⁶ Kelly, *39 Months*, p. 32.

morning and early afternoon to help dispel the German counter-attacks around Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, had six officers wounded and other rank casualties of 348.⁹⁷ The overall divisional losses were the highest on the Fourth Army front.⁹⁸

Conclusions

During the assault on Bazentin-le-Petit 21st Division achieved all its objectives, and even took ground not allocated to its sector. Advancing with only a machine gun company on the left flank, 21st Division made swift progress over the open ground, outstripping 7th Division on its right, therefore leaving 110th Brigade in a somewhat precarious and isolated position. Nevertheless, only one small pocket of enemy resistance held out – on the north eastern corner of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The capture of all objectives was even more remarkable given the overwhelming superiority in enemy forces, as German relief troops were rushed into the battle zone throughout the day. Finally, these would be considered striking achievements by experienced forces, but the fact that this was an assault made by ‘green’ troops makes it all the more notable. However, it is worth mentioning that the response of the enemy was hardly

⁹⁷ Narrative of 1st East Yorkshire Regiment, 64th Brigade, 14-7-16, PRO, WO 95 / 2161.

⁹⁸ 9th Division sustained losses of 1,159, 3rd Division suffered 2,322 casualties, and 7th Division 2,819, compared to 21st Division's 2,894. *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 88 f.

		<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other ranks</i>			Total
		<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	
Battn.	Strength							
1/Lincs	22; 650	-	-	-	-	14	2	16
12 NFs		1	2	-	11*	92		106
E. Yorks	c14; 560	-	6	-	36	186	126	354
9/KOYLI	c11; 520				4*			4
6/Leics		7	20	-	13*	487		527
7/Leics		10*	8		154*	381		553
8/Leics		5	12	-	66	310	39	432
9/Leics	c30; 950	5*			78*			83
Total		28	48		362	1637		2075

* Figures taken from the CD-Rom, *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*. Those figures calculated from these cannot be considered definitive.

ferocious: described as “feeble and spasmodic” by the *OH*,⁹⁹ any initial resistance was swiftly quashed by the attackers trapping them in their dug-outs, whilst the remainder, seeing that they could not halt the British advance, retreated towards Bazentin-le-Petit Wood.

In terms of comparative data, the division captured a quarter of one square mile, with the cost of just under 3,000 casualties – the highest of any assaulting division. This was certainly a meagre gain for the losses incurred, although the limited advance was primarily due to orders from High Command not to advance beyond the Bazentins.¹⁰⁰ Yet the assault is generally viewed as a success. Lieutenant-General Congreve, GOC XIII Corps, noted in his diary that

Haig came to see me and was very complimentary and grateful for our success yesterday, and indeed it was a good operation. I do not think so great a force was ever before got into position within 300 yards of an active enemy for a dawn attack, and our losses before the advance were very small. Our advance was over 1,400 yards of open ground. The arrangements of the Brigade staffs, the discipline of the battalions and the effectiveness of our artillery are the causes of our success. I think it will be a text book operation. I am told it is the most successful of the war and I planned it!¹⁰¹

Rawlinson was similarly satisfied with the operation, and convinced as to the cause of its success, writing to his wife that “there is no doubt that the success of the enterprise must be attributed in a very large measure to the accuracy and volume of the artillery

⁹⁹ *OH 1916, Volume II*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁰ This is one of the most infamous missed opportunities of the war. Brigadier-General H.C. Potter, GOC 9th Brigade, 3rd Division, later wrote to the Official Historian, Sir James Edmonds, “I had been very strictly enjoined not to push the advance beyond the final (infantry) objective laid down, which just included Bazentin-le-Grand. Leaving the consolidation proceeding on that line, I walked out alone to examine the ground in front. It was a lovely day; the ground was very open and sloped gently up to a high ridge in front, so I wandered on until I found myself approaching a large wood which continued over the crest of the ridge. There was no sign whatever of the enemy, so I walked into the edge of the wood but saw no sign of a German, nor any defensive works... The wood reached by me I afterwards knew as High Wood, and it is a great regret to me that the advance was not pressed that day and the hundreds of thousands of casualties afterwards expended in the capture of the position possibly avoided.” PRO, CAB / 45 / 190, 20 March 1930.

¹⁰¹ The diary of Lieutenant-General Sir Walter Congreve VC, 15 July 1916.

bombardment. The enemy's wire, as well as his front and second line trenches, was smashed to pieces. The morale of the defenders had been greatly reduced by the din and concussion of the constant explosions, and it was clear from the number of dead that were found in the trenches that he had likewise suffered heavy casualties from the artillery bombardment".¹⁰² This was certainly borne out by evidence from 21st Division. Battalion reports commented on the poor state of the trenches, and that enemy resistance was spasmodic and easily combated. In this sense, the role of the artillery was clearly definitive. "On 14 July it was the elimination of the trench-defenders by the artillery which allowed the British to assemble in no-man's land unhindered; even the best staff work could not have protected these troops if significant numbers of German machine-gunners had survived the bombardment. And it was the destruction of the barbed wire which enabled the attackers to reach the German positions so swiftly."¹⁰³

Yet for the purposes of this study it is not the artillery that should be considered a defining feature. Although clearly of vital importance in this battle, particularly due to the highly favourable ratio of one gun per three yards of trench, the artillery should really only be considered an assisting tool of the infantry. It is the success or otherwise of the infantry – the actual assaulting force – that provides the real evidence of tactical evolution. Given that this is the first of four battle studies, the assault on Bazentin-le-Petit necessarily provides a template assault - made by inexperienced troops early in the war - from which further comparisons can be drawn.

¹⁰² Rawlinson to Lady Rawlinson, Wigram, Cowans, Archibald Murray, Bagot, and Derby 18-7-16, Rawlinson Papers 5201 / 33 / 18, NAM.

¹⁰³ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p.198.

CHAPTER 2

Broodseinde – 4 October 1917

The assault on Broodseinde is particularly useful for the analytical study of 21st Division as it demonstrates the ability of the troops on the ground to adapt to extremely trying and unforeseen circumstances. Furthermore, it was undertaken by those brigades of the division that did not attack in the first battle studied, at Bazentin in July 1916, thereby offering useful comparisons between brigades and then against themselves in future battles.

Sources

The source material for the assault on Broodseinde is plentiful, principally due to the huge volume of literature covering the Passchendaele campaign. Primary sources are mainly to be found at the Public Record Office in Kew (hereafter PRO) under the classmark WO 95, which holds the War Diaries. WO 95 / 2132 contains documents relating to 21st Division, including the Operation Order concerning this battle, O.O. No. 132, and its appendices, of which there are twelve. The diary also contains several intelligence summaries, which were compiled on a daily basis. The summary for the period ending noon 2 October is useful in that it notes enemy artillery and aeroplane activity, both of which were “persistent and severe” and demonstrates the use at this time and the reliance upon meteorological reports. An ‘Account of Operations of 21st Division’ outlines the timing and detail of the assault, taken from messages received at divisional GHQ and after-action reports from the battalions involved.

Documents from the higher levels of command, X Corps and Second Army, can be found in the classmarks WO 95 / 853 and 275 respectively. As with the records of Bazentin, there is little in Second Army papers that relates directly to 21st Division, apart from ‘Second Army Summary of Operations during period 27th September, 1917, to 4th October, 1917’.

Although far too broad to offer much information relating to 21st Division, this document does list the enemy troops facing Second Army and its subordinate units, and states the disorganisation within the enemy ranks. It is, again, documents from Corps level that offer the most information directly relating to 21st Division. The Operation Order relating to Broodseinde is inexplicably missing from X Corps War Diary, which proves particularly frustrating for detailed analysis. There is, however, a document entitled ‘Second Army Operations (3rd Stage), X Corps Instructions’, which gives instructions as to the assembly of troops, the extension of divisional boundaries, precautions of ‘dulled helmets’ and the restriction of tanks to the rear of the forward zone in order to maintain surprise. Another document, actually dated 4 October and entitled ‘Brief Plan of Operations’, details the timetable intended for the battle, listing plans for all three divisions of X Corps, the artillery action, including the use of gas and smoke, and other arms such as tanks and aeroplanes.¹⁰⁴ Also in X Corps War Diary is a particularly useful document, a ‘Report on Country and the Enemy’s Defences opposite X Corps Front’, which outlines the natural features of the ground over which the corps was to advance, but also the siting of enemy MG posts in hedges, the positioning of sunken roads, and all manner of tiny details which would assist both soldiers and historians in the analysis of the battle. Finally, X Corps diary gives a detailed account of the assault on the entire corps frontage, but contains little pertaining to 21st Division that cannot be found in its own diary and those of the subordinate units.

War Diaries of 62nd and 64th Brigades and their subordinate battalions, the main units involved, are to be found in WO 95 / 2154-6 and 2161-62 respectively. The diary of 10th Yorkshires, 62nd Brigade (2156), notes one of the key features of this battle, the difficulties with which the battalion struggled to the assembly point, and its subsequent replacement in

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix V, pp. 161-3.

the front line by 1st Lincolns. The diary of that battalion (2154) gives an especially detailed account of the battle and the difficulties in reaching the assembly point, and is particularly useful in that it lists battalion strength before, during and after the battle, citing very detailed casualties. An account of the battle in the diary of 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, 62nd Brigade (2155), is long, detailed, and particularly helpful, whilst that of the 3/4th Queens (Surrey) Regiment, 62nd Brigade (2156), is only a short account, but gives very detailed strength and casualty figures. The diaries of sister battalions 9th and 10th KOYLI, 64th Brigade (2162), both offer detailed accounts of the assault, listing names, places, times, objectives gained, and losses incurred. The account of 10th KOYLI was written a week after the assault by its commanding officer, and gives a clear insight into the difficulties posed by the operation. The diary of 15th Durham Light Infantry, 64th Brigade (2161), is surprisingly short, given the tremendous difficulties encountered by the battalion and its subsequent withdrawal from the attack. It states only that casualties were such that the battalion was amalgamated into AB and CD companies, which then extended the brigade flank after the capture of objectives to assist in the consolidation process. The diary of 1st East Yorkshire Regiment, 64th Brigade (2161), the battalion that took its place in the attack, gives a detailed account, again written a week after the assault. This document is particularly pertinent given that the battalion was not due to attack and its preparations for the assault were therefore exceptionally hurried. The account also cites casualty figures, notes the weather and even gives battalion strength, thus proving it very helpful.

The diaries of 110th (Leicester) Brigade (all WO 95 / 2164), which did not take part in the assault, offer an insight into how little battles were regarded by those not involved. The diary of 6th Leicesters notes an officer going on leave, a few casualties owing to hostile

shelling, and the weather as “fair”, whilst that of 7th Leicesters records 4 October as “Z day of the divisional attack”, but contains interesting summaries from 1 October that demonstrate life in the Ypres Salient at this time. The diary notes the relief and dispositions of the battalion, plus a hostile attack made on the evening of 1 October and the hurried consolidation afterwards. The diaries of 8th and 9th Leicesters are practically identical, making no reference to the assault whatsoever, merely noting that “On this day the 8th and 9th Battalions Leicester Regiment were amalgamated on account of the weak state of the two battalions, and came under the command of Major R.R. Yalland, 6th Battalion Leicester Regiment”.

As part of the Passchendaele campaign, the attack at Broodseinde is well-documented in the secondary literature. Volume II of the British Official History (hereafter *OH*), *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917*, compiled by Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, (London: HMSO, 1948) describes the Broodseinde offensive within Plumer’s four-step campaign to take the Passchendaele ridge. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson’s *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), although inferior to their study of Rawlinson, gives a useful narrative of the entire campaign, including the Broodseinde assault within the four-step offensive. A collection of essays covering the Third Ypres campaign edited by P.H. Liddle, *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), offers many diverse insights into attacking in the Salient, focusing particularly on the problems and difficulties this posed. Chris McCarthy’s *Third Ypres, Passchendaele: The Day-by-day Account* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995) is also very useful, simply for its meticulous detail. John Terraine’s *The Road to Passchendaele* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1977) and Philip Warner’s *Passchendaele – The Story Behind the Tragic Victory of 1917* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987) both offer decent narrative accounts, though the latter is slightly florid.

Accounts of the Broodseinde assault through regimental histories can be found in H.C. Wylly's *The Green Howards in the Great War* (privately printed, 1926), gives a detailed account of the assembly of troops, noting the battalion's difficulty in reaching the jumping-off point and its subsequent replacement by the 1st Lincolns. It also includes detailed information about the night itself plus the difficulties and problems posed by attacking within the Ypres Salient. An account of the DLI's abortive attack can be found in *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920), by Captain Wilfred Miles. It is a written narrative, offering much from hindsight that the diaries cannot give, but focusing mainly on the battalion's role in the consolidation process rather than the assault itself. R.C. Bond's *The History of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in the Great War* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries, 1930) offers a similarly narrative account. E. Wyrall's *The East Yorkshire Regiment in the Great War* (London: Harrison, 1918) is based almost entirely on information from the War Diaries and, as such, offers little more than the diary narrative but in better prose. Other eyewitness accounts can be found in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the First World War* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1991); Sir John Hammerton (ed.), *The Great War... 'I was there!' – Undying Memories of 1914-1918*, 2 (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd); Lyn Macdonald, *They Called it Passchendaele* (London: Penguin Books) and Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, *Passchendaele – The Sacrificial Ground* (London: Cassell & Co., 2000).

Context

The Passchendaele campaign of autumn 1917 has long entered the rhetoric as the most evil of all Great War offensives, still attracting bitter criticism and controversy over eighty years after its conclusion. Although the first day on the Somme epitomises for many the futility of

the war, Passchendaele symbolises the ultimate horrors of war and the apparently blithe barbarity of the British high command, which prolonged the battle and sent its troops to be swallowed alive in the stinking, sucking mud particular to this most sinister of battles. It is also the most misunderstood campaign of the war, which is perhaps due to its evil reputation. Third Ypres, as the battle is officially known, began at the end of July 1917 with Gough's assault on the Pilckem Ridge. When all attempts to capture the Gheluvelt Plateau failed, in the face of increasing German bombardment from the Passchendaele Ridge, the battle was called off at the end of August and its execution handed over to Plumer. A meticulous planner and advocate of artillery, Plumer spent five weeks in preparation before reopening the offensive. Haig had been insistent that the campaign should be conducted on the "principle of advancing step by step with limited objectives and overwhelming artillery power".¹⁰⁵ The battle of the Menin Road Ridge, launched on 20 September, was the highly successful opening assault, the first in a four-step series of attacks based on this sensible premise. The battle of Polygon Wood followed in the same vein on 26 September. Another successful attack, towards Broodseinde on 4 October, was the third step, to be followed on 9 October with Poelcappelle, an unfortunate assault compared to its three predecessors. The main reason for this was simple: after six weeks of fine weather, the rains came at the beginning of October, and did not abate throughout the rest of the Passchendaele campaign, which ended with the capture of the ruined village in mid-November.

Yet despite the mud and Gough's mishandling of the opening phase, Plumer's assaults were careful, precise, and overwhelmingly successful. His four-step campaign demonstrated the flip-side of Great War leadership, and deserves further examination. 21st Division lined up

¹⁰⁵ Sir John Davidson, *Haig, Master of the Field* (London: Peter Nevill, 1953), p. 40. Davidson was Haig's Director of Operations 1916-1918, and made frequent but usually unsuccessful objections to the grandiosity of Haig's schemes.

for both the Polygon Wood and Broodseinde assaults, but only in reserve for the former. It is therefore the Battle of Broodseinde, on 4 October 1917, the day the weather broke, that will be examined here.

Aims¹⁰⁶

The primary objectives of the Battle of Broodseinde were the capture of the ridge of the same name, between Noordemhoek and Nieuwemolen astride the Moorslede road, and the capture of the Gravenstafel spur to the north, both of which were on the high ground towards the Passchendaele Ridge. These objectives were entrusted to the four divisions of I and II Anzac Corps, Second Army, with Fifth Army on the left flank advancing towards Poelcappelle, and X Corps, also of Second Army, on the right flank facing the eastern edge of the Gheluvelt Plateau. The capture of Reutel village and the valley overlooking it, on the south-eastern corner of the plateau, were the objectives given to 21st Division, the securing of which Haig stressed as essential for observation of the enemy and for a more effective defence of ground already won.¹⁰⁷

Method

Plumer's plan for the style of attack differed little from the assaults on the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood: limited objectives on a narrow frontage – the 'bite and hold' tactic that had proved itself so well on the previous two attacks. Yet one factor differed enormously: the artillery did not fire a preliminary bombardment, instead crashing down at zero hour with the infantry assault. Plumer hoped to maintain surprise as to the date and hour of the attack, assuming that the Germans were preparing their troops and defences for another British

¹⁰⁶ See Maps III and IV, pp. 147 and 148.

¹⁰⁷ Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917, Volume II – Messines and Third Ypres [Passchendaele]* (London: HMSO, 1948) p. 299.

onslaught. In line with this, the artillery preparation consisted of the usual counter-battery action and the destruction of strongpoints. In an additional deceptive measure, full-scale practice barrages, of the kind fired on the previous outings and including gas shell, were laid at various hours on several days between 27 September and 3 October.¹⁰⁸ Plumer's barrage and the massed arsenal are discussed below.

One particular innovation witnessed at most of the Passchendaele offensives was that the assault was generally delivered by platoons instead of the old-style lines of sections and companies. The platoon was a small, highly efficient unit, with sufficient men and munitions to be capable of independent fire and movement. These autonomous units were, technically, under their own authority, but until 1918 were still fairly dependent on command from above. However, the platoon enjoyed far greater flexibility than the old 'line' formations, and were therefore deployed to take specific strong-points, such as machine-gun nests and pill-boxes. Without the restriction of prearranged lines and sections, the platoons could work their way round these strong-points, flanking and capturing them from behind. The General Staff training manual SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917*, outlined the shift from line and wave tactics to small platoons relying on integral firepower:

a self-contained unit which is divided into a small platoon HQ plus four fighting sections, each with its own speciality. The first section has two expert bomb-throwers and three accomplices, the second has a Lewis gun with thirty ammunition drums and nine servants, the third has nine riflemen including a sniper and a scout, while the fourth section has a battery of four rifle-grenades – called 'the infantry's howitzers' – manned by a further nine men. The platoon is thus a complete and independent 'tactical unit'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *OH 1917, Volume II*, pp. 300-1.

¹⁰⁹ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 77-8.

The reorganisation of platoons was a great innovation within the BEF, as assaulting troops were no longer entirely dependent on command from the highest authority, which was usually stationed at divisional, Corps and Army headquarters way behind the front. Poor lines of communication hampered offensives once begun, as reports from the front often took hours to reach GHQ. Return orders were usually several hours out of date and therefore redundant by the time they reached the troops intended to implement them. The reorganisation of the platoon alleviated this problem, allowing commanding officers within each unit to make swift decisions with the benefit of local judgement and information – in short, to exercise their initiative. This decentralisation of command was not fully realised until the Hundred Days campaign in the autumn of 1918, as will be seen in the next two chapters; the higher command had hitherto proved unwilling to relinquish its authority during an offensive – the literal act of war. Nevertheless, the reorganisation of the platoon was an important first step towards this, and also helped a great deal in the capture of enemy positions.

One final point worth mentioning is the decision to time the assault to begin at 6 a.m. Telegrams found in X Corps War Diary indicate a clear influence by divisional commanders as to the timing of the assault. One from Campbell, dated 1 October, states that “If meteor is able to give any reasonable assurance that weather will be suitable I agree to Zero being at 4 a.m. If there’s any chance of bad light, I am strongly of opinion that Zero should not be before 6.10 a.m.”¹¹⁰ Major-General R.B. Stephens, commanding the flanking 5th Division, concurred on the following day, writing “I do not want to attack during darkness. 4 a.m. is considered a suitable hour for Zero provided ‘Meteor’ can predict a clear sky. If he cannot do this, I would prefer to have the attack timed for 6 a.m.”¹¹¹ The influence of the divisional commanders is

¹¹⁰ Found in X Corps ‘Telegrams’, PRO, WO 95 / 853.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

clear: A.R. Cameron, BGGS X Corps, wrote to Second Army on 3 October outlining their preference for an attack by moonlight, as long as a clear night was predicted. The conclusion of this correspondence was Second Army's Instructions to X Corps, delivered in the early evening of 3 October, stating that "Zero Hour will be 6 a.m." What is particularly interesting is that the time of the assault had been hand-written, whilst the rest of the document was typed, indicating that the time of the assault had been added only once the preferences of Campbell and Stephens had been received. This is clear proof that the advice of divisional commanders had finally influenced decisions made at the very highest level.

Order of Battle¹¹²

XIV and XVIII Corps of Gough's Fifth Army lined up, left to right, alongside II and I Anzac, X and IX Corps of Plumer's Second Army. 21st Division was the middle division of Lieutenant-General Sir T.L.N. Morland's X Corps, the only Corps to utilise three divisions. Major-General T.H. Shoubridge's 7th Division was again on the flank, this time on the left, with I Anzac Corps on its left flank; on the right of 21st Division was Major-General R.B. Stephens' 5th Division, flanking 37th Division of IX Corps. As on 20 September, each division attacked on a two-brigade frontage, with each brigade employing one battalion to take the first objective, and two for the short advance to the final objective. This was to ensure that a strong force of fresh infantry on the entire attack frontage would be available to meet the anticipated enemy counter-attacks. Each battalion deployed three companies for the assault, with one company held as a reserve against counter-attack. Each company had one platoon in advance to follow the barrage, two platoons utilised for mopping-up duties, and one platoon in reserve, all of which moved in small groups of section columns.

¹¹² See Appendices VI and VII, pp. 164 and 165.

21st Division deployed 62nd and 64th Brigades for the assault. 62nd Brigade on the left entrusted the first objective to 3/4th Queen's Regiment, who went in with B Company between A and D Companies with C Company in close support. The second objective was to be taken by 1st Lincolnshire Regiment and 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers. The Lincs went in with D Company on the left front, C Company on the right front, with B and A Companies covering them off respectively; whilst the Fusiliers deployed D Company on the right, C Company on the left, with A and B Companies in support respectively. The companies were composed of three platoons and were formed up each on a one platoon front echeloned in depth.

64th Brigade on the right deployed 9th and 10th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) for the first and second objectives respectively, with 15th Durham Light Infantry (DLI) as brigade reserve. The 9th KOYLI attacked with D Company on the right and C Company on the left, each Company being on a one platoon frontage. B Company was in support behind D Company; A in Reserve behind C Company; each on a single platoon front. From the front to the rear of the battalion the distance was 160 yards, instructions having been issued that the whole unit should keep as close as possible to the barrage without leading to confusion of or within the Companies. Platoons attacked in lines of section in file at equal intervals to cover the front, with about 30 yards between each. The 10th KOYLI went in on a two-company front, with C Company on the right, B Company on the left, with D and A Companies in respective support.

Resources

Available resources were allocated to the division from the higher commands of Corps and Army, commanded at Broodseinde by Morland and Plumer respectively. Plumer was an

advocate of artillery, and the arsenal he amassed for the Third Ypres campaign was hitherto unprecedented. It seems prudent, therefore, to consider the artillery support for this battle before anything else.

Plumer accumulated for his Second Army artillery support of 796 heavy and medium and 1,548 field guns and howitzers. From this arsenal, 152 heavy and medium and 192 field guns and howitzers were allotted to I Anzac Corps, with 227 heavy and medium and 384 field guns allocated to II Anzac Corps.¹¹³ By these numbers, that left 417 heavy and medium and 972 field guns for X and IX Corps. Divided equally between the five divisions, that allows roughly 83 heavy and 195 field guns each, for an attack frontage of around 700 yards.¹¹⁴ These figures demonstrate an average of one gun per 2.5 yards of attack frontage. For comparison, the division had approximately one gun per 3 yards under Rawlinson at Bazentin-le-Petit.

Plumer fired no preliminary bombardment, hoping to achieve total surprise when the barrage was laid with massed strength at zero hour. The form of the barrage, a thousand yards deep, was not altered from those at Menin Road and Polygon Wood, with the first belt laid just 150 yards in front of the jumping-off tapes. After three minutes the barrage was to creep forward by 100-yard lifts every four minutes for the first 200 yards, and then every six minutes to the protective line at the first objective, 200 yards in front of the infantry halt. During the pause the barrage was to wander a thousand yards deeper into the enemy position to break up counter-attacks, and then suddenly return. At zero + 130 minutes it was to creep

¹¹³ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 300.

¹¹⁴ The attack frontage for X Corps' attack was 1,400 yards. Given that both the 7th and 21st Divisions had to negotiate the eastern parts of Polygon Wood, it must be assumed that the attack frontage was divided equally between the two divisions. The average distance of the attack by X Corps was around 1,200 yards, to include the dominating observation areas near Reutel and In de Ster. See *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 299, for more details and Sketch 26.

forward again in front of the infantry by 100-yard lifts every eight minutes to the final objective line. After a pause, it was to creep forward, at intervals of about an hour, up to fifteen hundred yards deeper into the position. The protective barrage by the first two belts (field artillery) was to cease at 11.20 a.m. apart from SOS signals, and the two back belts (heavy and medium artillery) at 1.44 p.m.. The rates of fire were to be two rounds a gun a minute for the 18-pdrs, one-and-a-half for the 4.5" howitzers and one to two for the heavier guns and howitzers.¹¹⁵

H.W. Newcombe, 21st Division's BGRA, added another two points to the arrangements for the barrage, specifically to neutralise particular problems facing the advancing divisional infantry. Firstly, as 64th Brigade was not to assault alongside 62nd Brigade but slightly to the rear of its right flank, the barrage covering the former brigade was to keep 100 yards south of the brigade boundary, so as not to interfere with the advance of 62nd Brigade. Once the first objective had been reached, the two barrages would join up on the same line. Secondly, once the barrage reached this first objective the artillery was to fire a proportion of smoke shells with the artillery belt to indicate the objective to the assaulting troops.¹¹⁶ This, presumably, gave the added bonus of extra protection against enemy counter-attacks during the consolidation process on this first objective.

The ammunition supply required for artillery barrages of such magnitude was of astonishing proportions, as was that provided for the advancing infantry. The emerging reliance on the platoon, with its different sections and arms, lead to a far greater need for small arms ammunition, and in increasingly large quantities. For the assault on Broodseinde,

¹¹⁵ *OH 1917, Volume II*, pp. 300-1.

¹¹⁶ Appendix A to 21st Division Operation Order 132 – Artillery Arrangements, PRO, WO 95 / 2132.

21st Division ordered the massing of 1.2 million rounds of small arms ammunition (SAA) – possibly due to the increasing use of the Lewis Gun, eight thousand Mills bombs, five thousand rifle grenades, and huge quantities of similar supplies, including Very lights, flares, and SOS signals.¹¹⁷

21st Division was also allotted four tanks for the capture of its objectives, which demonstrates that both Second Army and X Corps deemed the terrain over which the division was to advance suitable for tank action. Neither of the flanking divisions, 7th on the left and 5th on the right, were allocated tanks owing to the state of the ground. There is clear evidence to support this decision: one tank allotted to 21st Division lost direction and wandered onto the front of 5th Division, and there assisted the infantry in the capture of Cameron Covert. It eventually ditched in the marshy ground at the junction of two brooks near the objective, confirming the decision that the ground was unsuitable for tanks in this sector.¹¹⁸

In terms of infantry resources, it is clear that the emphasis on surprise was maintained all the way down to the individual soldier. X Corps Operations instructed that

Special precautions must be taken that the assembly of the troops is not betrayed by the moonlight. Tanks will not go within half a mile of the front line down a forward slope. Care will be taken that helmets are dulled or covered and bayonets will not be fixed until Zero.¹¹⁹

Similarly, the diary of 10th KOYLI notes that the morning of the 2 October was devoted to issuing Operation Orders, and going into the exact detail of the attack, so that every man knew his role within the assault. All packs were dumped with the Quartermaster before the

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* See Appendix VIII, p. 166.

¹¹⁸ The fate of the other three tanks allotted to 21st Division is discussed below, pp. 82-3.

¹¹⁹ X Corps Instructions, PRO, WO 95 / 853.

march to assembly positions, so as to maximise the speed and stealth with which the men would attack. The Green Howards noted bombs as “necessary equipment”, with the DLI noting that the troops were issued with “ground flares, bombs etc” and generally prepared for the attack.¹²⁰ Given the emphasis placed upon the platoon, troops were no longer equipped with every tool of war, simply those required by the individual’s role. One minor point worth mentioning, given the stress placed on stealth and secrecy, is the state of the troops once in assembly positions. The fact that the area was heavily shelled by the enemy would clearly have an effect on the troops’ morale, but it must not be forgotten that the assaulting infantry were in assembly positions two hours before zero, lying on the wet ground. It stands to reason that their clothes would have become cold, sodden, and increasingly clingy and heavy, which cannot have helped morale or the ease and speed of the attack.

Terrain

The most significant factor determining the terrain and the state of the ground was the impact of the weather, particularly in Flanders during the Passchendaele campaign. The autumn of 1917 was exceptionally wet,¹²¹ and the British would have struggled wherever they fought on the Western Front that autumn. It was the culmination of a dreadful year in which a long, cold winter, succeeded by a late spring, was followed by a short summer and a sodden autumn.¹²² The high water-table of the Ypres Salient and the destruction of the delicate drainage system, primarily due to Plumer’s meticulous bombardments, turned the ground into the morass for which the campaign is remembered. Yet the swallowing, sucking mud that gave Passchendaele its sinister reputation had yet to reach its zenith by the battle of Broodseinde.

¹²⁰ War diaries can be found at the PRO, WO 95 / 2156, 2164, 2161.

¹²¹ See John Terraine, *Douglas Haig – The Educated Soldier* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 348-9.

¹²² J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the First World War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. 76.

In fact, the spell of fine weather broke momentarily on the eve of the assault, and then began in earnest during the afternoon of 4 October; by dawn on the next day, it was coming down in torrents. "The Germans were waiting anxiously for the autumn rains to come to their aid; the commander in Flanders, Field Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht, called the rain 'our most effective ally', and he was right."¹²³ Broodseinde was the last action during the campaign fought in relatively dry conditions.

The X Corps Report on Country and Defences noted that the natural features of the ground over which the Corps was to attack included a large plateau, the valleys of the Polygonbeek and the Reutelbeek and a spur of the Gheluvelt Ridge pointing north-east. It remarked that

the ground presents no formidable natural obstacles. Going should be extremely good on the high ground, and though the low ground is rather wet in places, and the Reutelbeek and the Polygonbeek are broken up by shell fire, it ought not to be difficult to make headway. On the Plateau there are no trees and the woods at the head of the valley and on the Polderhoek spur are thin. Numerous hedges, however, still exist and it must not be forgotten that these may conceal wire entanglements and be enfiladed in consequence by machine guns.¹²⁴

The sector allotted to 21st Division was in the southern flank of the X Corps operation, between Polygon Wood and the Menin Road. This sector was broken by the Polygonbeek, between Reutel and Cameron Covert, and the Reutelbeek, which drained this south-eastern corner of the Plateau. Normally a few feet wide and a few inches deep, the beds of these brooks, broken by shell-craters, had become belts of oozing mud of uncertain depth; joining near the objective, they formed a muddy valley over half a mile wide between Reutel village

¹²³ Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-18* (London: Robinson, 1999), p. 398.

¹²⁴ Report on Country and the Enemy's Defences opposite X Corps Front, PRO, WO 95 / 853.

and Polderhoek spur to the south.¹²⁵ A 21st Division document, entitled ‘Notes on Area Ahead’, with many points drawn from a captured German map, noted the presence of a steep ravine between the Polygonbeek and Jetty Warren, and that “the land for several yards on each side of the beek is damp but there is nothing to show that this is in any way impassable except in isolated places”, which are then indicated.¹²⁶

Battalion reports of the assault were mixed in their notes of the weather and terrain: 6th Leicesters noted the weather as “fair”, whilst 1st Lincolns experienced “very inclement weather” throughout the operations. 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers noted the ground as “boggy”; 10th KOYLI concurred, noting it as “marshy”, whilst its sister battalion, 9th KOYLI, described “a veritable death trap; we were up to our knees in slush”.¹²⁷ H.C. Wylly, writing the history of the Green Howards, noted that “the conditions in the trenches were very bad, the men standing in upwards of a foot of mud and water, and the task of the stretcher bearers was rendered extremely difficult owing to the ground being badly cut up and in many places quite impossible by reason of the heavy rain which had fallen”.¹²⁸ However, an infantry brigadier opposite Poelcappelle noted that “the going was not too bad on the 4th, infantry had no difficulty and we had no tanks ditched, in fact they (the tanks) were elated. Shells ricocheted too, showing the ground was hard in places”.¹²⁹ What may be deduced from these somewhat conflicting accounts is that the smattering of rain during the night of the 3-4

¹²⁵ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 313.

¹²⁶ Notes on Area Ahead, PRO, WO 95 / 2132. The document is headed by the bold, underlined order, ‘Not to be taken into the Front Line’.

¹²⁷ Battalion reports can be found at the PRO, WO 95 / 2154-6, 2161-4.

¹²⁸ H.C. Wylly, *The Green Howards in the Great War* (Privately printed, 1926), p. 346.

¹²⁹ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 303. The brigadier is unnamed but, judging from Sketch Map 26, it can be deduced that he was GOC of 32nd, 33rd or 34th Brigades, 11th Division, XVIII, Fifth Army.

October was not sufficient to turn the ground uniformly into the swampy quagmire that it was later to become. “Despite the fact that there had been exceptionally dry weather in September, the continuous shelling had destroyed the drainage system of the many small streams which were characteristic of the area. Even without rain these watercourses had become bogs or swamps that provided obstacles for attacking troops... (the small amount of rain that had fallen on the night of 3 October) had made the going in the non-swampy areas heavy and slippery.”¹³⁰

Enemy

A Second Army Summary of Operations noted the enemy order of battle on its front of attack from north to south as *10th Ersatz Division*, *20th Division*, *4th Guard Division*, one Regiment of *45th Reserve Division*, one or more battalions of *16th Division*, *19th Reserve Division*, and *8th Division*.¹³¹ Enemy personnel facing 21st Division at Broodseinde was *19th Reserve Division*, with *17th Division* in close reserve, defending the sector between Polygon Wood and the Menin road.¹³²

However, the British assault was unknowingly timed to coincide with a German attack, with the objective of regaining ground lost during the battle of Polygon Wood. The British assault preceded this counter-attack by ten minutes, but the German preparatory bombardment caused the British many casualties. There were also a great deal more enemy troops in the front line than could possibly have been anticipated, with three battalions of the German *212th Reserve Regiment* assembled on a 2,000 yard frontage between Polygon Wood

¹³⁰ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele – the Untold Story* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 137-8.

¹³¹ *Second Army Summary of Operations during period 27 September to 4 October, 1917, PRO, WO 95 / 275.*

¹³² *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 314 f.

and Zonnebeke, backed by three regiments of the 4th *Guard Division*.¹³³ Having seen Plumer turn the 'new' defensive tactics, with their reliance on organised counter-attacks to restore defensive positions, against them, the Germans' only response had been to thicken the garrisons of their lines and to move the counter-attack formations closer for a quicker response.¹³⁴ The enemy losses, horrifyingly increased by these new tactics, are discussed below.

The nature of the German defences in this area was known to the British through aerial photographs. The X Corps report on the Country and Defences remarked that the trenches appeared more formidable on the map than on the air photos, with most of them very shallow and much dilapidated.¹³⁵ A 21st Division report noted that "a careful examination of photographs reveals no wire anywhere, but this does not necessarily mean none exists, and any hedges are probably wired in some way or other". The document also states that "in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it should be assumed that all buildings are either converted into concrete emplacements or fortified in some way. The village of Reutel is a case in point, but although the houses to the Eastern end have shown no definite fortification, there are four distinct trenches leading to them as evidence of occupation."¹³⁶ The Germans had also constructed a series of strong points from the network of trenches that existed, from Juniper Cottage northwards over the centre of the Plateau to Jay Cottage. This was certainly the enemy's main line of defence.

¹³³ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 304 f.

¹³⁴ John Lee, 'The British Divisions at Third Ypres', in P.H. Liddle, (ed.), *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), p. 220.

¹³⁵ Report on Country and the Enemy's Defences opposite X Corps Front, PRO, WO 95 / 853.

¹³⁶ Notes on Area Ahead, PRO, WO 95 / 2132.

Results

On the left of 21st Division's attack, 3/4th Queens of 62nd Brigade, in action for the first time, were detailed for the first objective. Moving up at 4.30 a.m., the battalion assembled with B Company between A and D Companies, with C Company in close support. The relatively early assembly time meant that the manoeuvre was carried out swiftly and without the added difficulty of hostile shelling which plagued the other battalions. On its right was 9th KOYLI of 64th Brigade; on the left was 1st Staffords of 7th Division.

At zero the battalion advanced across the Polygonbeek. The battalion War Diary states that this was achieved with "a certain amount of difficulty (and) only slight opposition was offered", primarily from a concrete fortress on B Company's front of attack. The *OH*, however, is less ambivalent about the difficulty of this task, stating that the Queens and the flanking KOYLI

crossed the slough of the Polygonbeek in the face of fire from a number of unsuspected pillboxes on the opposite bank. Despite heavy casualties, with the support of one tank which moved by the Hooge – Reutel road, these two battalions most gallantly worked round and captured these strongpoints – an outstanding feat in the circumstances.¹³⁷

Four tanks had been allotted to this operation, to assist the infantry in working around the main German strong-points. The light rain that had fallen during the night had made the going extremely difficult for the two remaining tanks - a "rain-sodden quagmire from edge to edge of the shell-holes. What had once been a road was now, of course, a mass of broken cobbles, muck and debris, human and mechanical". They were therefore led to the objective by Captain Clement Robertson, attached Queens, because

¹³⁷ See 3/4th Queens narrative, 4-10-17, PRO, WO 95 / 2156, and *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 313.

if a tank missed the way it missed the battle too, for there was no recovery once the so-called track was left. Strait was the way and narrow, and Robertson walked alone in front of his tanks, otherwise no-one would have escaped submersion. He was no light-hearted boy doing a stunt. He knew what it meant, but it was up to him to bring his tanks into action at any and every cost. The swampy nature of the ground made it necessary to test every step of the way to prevent the tanks being ditched. Captain Robertson walked in front of his leading tank, prodding the ground with his stick, in spite of machine-gun bullets and heavy shell-fire against the tanks. He must have known that under these conditions his devotion to duty meant, sooner or later, certain death for him. He knew, however, that the success of the attack depended on his making sure of the ground over which his tanks were to go. They had crossed the stream, and were approaching their objective when he was killed by a bullet through the head while still leading. He was awarded a posthumous VC.¹³⁸

Once these obstacles were overcome, the objective was captured to time and quickly consolidated. At zero + 130 minutes the barrage advanced towards the second objective, and 1st Lincolns on the left and 12/13 Northumberland Fusiliers on the right advanced through the Queens and the KOYLI to make the assault on the second objective.

9th KOYLI of 64th Brigade were to advance on the right of the Queen's, next to 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry of 5th Division on their right. During the night of 2-3 October the battalion had moved from Clapham Junction and relieved the Leicesters in the front line in Polygon Wood, suffering about fifty casualties from enemy shelling during their subsequent stint in the line. By 5 a.m. on the morning of 4 October, the battalion was in position in the assembly trenches, again avoiding the heavy shelling about Blackwatch Corner that so affected the follow-through troops. The battalion attacked with D Company on the right of the attack and C Company on the left, with B and A Companies in support and reserve respectively.

¹³⁸ This rather colourful account of a gallant act was written by Captains T. Price and D.E. Hickey, in Philip Warner, *Passchendaele – The Story Behind the Tragic Victory of 1917* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987) pp. 124-5. See also *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 313 f.

Just before 6 o'clock all was more or less quiet, at zero the barrage opened with a fearsome noise and we leapt from our shell holes and went forward in snake formation. It was the darkness that precedes the dawn and one could recognise nobody. We are thankful to say that we were far away from our assembly positions before the full force of the German barrage descended – but were immediately subjected to a withering machine gun fire; shells were falling right and left but who cared? – our one idea was to get forward. Joist Farm proved to be our first stumbling block and was a tough nut to crack. Even when our left had reached the swamp, lights were being fired at us from this point, which was eventually mopped up by two sections of D Company under Captain Sykes and one section of B Company under Sergeant Pyott. This place was found to contain one Officer, twelve men and four machine guns.

The swamp proved a veritable death trap; we were up to our knees in slush and at the same time subjected to enfilade machine gun fire from the right. A small strongpoint, not concrete, and immediately on the west bank of the swamp we took by surprise and the garrison surrendered without firing a shot. On this same bank were a considerable number of German bivouacs constructed of 'elephants' and filled with Germans, most of these had been blown in by our bombardment. The remainder containing Germans were bombed by our men and the Germans shot as they ran out. On the east side the ground rose rapidly and contained a number of concrete strong-points, two of which were in our area. These fired at us until we were within 50 yards. The garrisons then surrendered, the majority of them being bombed and shot. The left strong point turned out to be Battalion HQ and was an elaborate concern. Each contained two machine guns.

Juniper Farm was strongly held but the garrison preferred to retire rather than fight. Second Lieutenant Spicer by a quick manoeuvre cut off the majority of these who gave themselves up to him. On the right the garrison showed a little more pluck and attempted to counter attack us. They were immediately squashed by D Company, after attacking these strong points we received little opposition until our objective was reached. All the troops of the Brigade were mixed up and we had a considerable number of Northumberland Fusiliers and Queens with us. During the one hour and forty minutes bombardment we were considerably troubled by a strong point on the east edge of Reutel which was eventually knocked out by a tank. It was at this time that we realised that our right flank was absolutely in the air... We were (soon) joined by the remnants of one company of the 15th DLI and one company of the East Yorks; these were sent out to the right to form a defensive flank. It did not take the enemy long to realise our position because we were immediately subjected to a heavy bombardment which continued through the day.¹³⁹

The 'follow-through' battalions were detailed to be 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards) on the front of 62nd Brigade, and 15th Durham

¹³⁹ Short summary of the attack made by the 64th Brigade on the morning of the 4th October 1917, 9th KOYLI War Diary, PRO, WO 95 / 2162. Account written by Captains Day and Frank.

Light Infantry on 64th Brigade front. Circumstances were to prove that only the Fusiliers were in a state to be able to carry out their orders.

1st Lincolns, detailed as the reserve battalion of 62nd Brigade, had dug into position in Polygon Wood during the night of 3-4 October, when its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel L.P. Evans DSO, returned from reconnoitring the assembly position and ordered the battalion to move up and take over the role of 10th Green Howards. This battalion had come under an extremely heavy hostile barrage at Blackwatch Corner in Glencorse Wood on the march to the assembly position and, without guides, had lost touch with the other assaulting battalion, 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers. Colonel Evans, reconnoitring the position, had found this gap in the front line, realised the difficulty the Green Howards would have finding the assembly position before zero, and therefore moved his battalion into the gap. The report from 1st Lincolns states that “the whole battalion was delighted when Colonel Evans gave off this information”.¹⁴⁰

The battalion passed 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers and assembled immediately to their north. These two battalions were to be deployed as the ‘follow-through’, detailed for the division’s final objective. D Company was on the left front, C on the right, with B and A Companies covering them off respectively. Each company was in close column of platoons, with six yards between companies. The battalion was actually in this assembly formation by Zero – five minutes, carried out undisturbed by enemy shelling.

At Zero the battalion moved forward en masse. A few casualties occurred very soon afterwards from machine gun fire and ‘shorts’ from the British barrage. By the time the first platoons reached the first strong-point there were gaps in the line. Colonel Evans ordered C

¹⁴⁰ See narrative of 1st Lincolns 4-10-17, PRO, WO 95 / 2154.

and D Companies to push through and catch up the barrage whilst A and B Companies followed by platoons to the first objective, which was captured by C and D Companies at about 6.40 a.m.

Soon after Zero, about the German front line, a few 'friendly' shells fell amongst the two leading Companies. It was discovered later that an 18 pounder was firing short; one shell wounded two officers and six men. 200 yards further a burning pill box was encountered, presumably hit by the barrage, and the leading waves passed without encountering resistance, but one compartment on the north side had escaped observation. A machine gun opened fire from here, inflicting casualties until Colonel Evans silenced it by firing his revolver through the loophole, forcing the garrison to surrender.¹⁴¹ The Germans then came out with their hands up but were not sent back as prisoners. Unlike the Somme battles, no men seemed to want to take them back, and those that did go were invariably escorted by wounded men only. Germans who did not surrender ran mostly without equipment or rifles, so that bayonet work was impossible, but very good use was made of rifles. Men showed a decided preference to use the rifle rather than the bayonet.¹⁴²

Upon reaching the objective, the barrage remained standing for an hour and forty minutes. Under this protective barrage, the Lincolns reorganised in Judge Trench, in touch with the Fusiliers to the south and troops of the 91st Brigade to the north. Before the attack recommenced, Colonel Evans moved A Company up in between C and D Companies as prearranged, with B Company remaining in reserve. By this time there were only six officers besides the CO with the battalion. Other ranks, however, had not suffered very heavily.

¹⁴¹ Lieutenant-Colonel Evans was awarded the VC for this act. See Biographical Index, p.174.

¹⁴² Narrative of 1st Lincolns.

Once the attack resumed, the final objective was taken reasonably smoothly, although fairly heavy casualties were caused by a machine gun and snipers from the vicinity of Judge Copse. One platoon of B Company, in battalion reserve, was sent up to reinforce the right flank of the attack, and the objective was reached. Further casualties occurred during the consolidation, chiefly from snipers. After dark contact was established with 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers to the south and with troops of 91st Brigade to the north, and communication was established between the various posts of the front line. At this time there were, as far as could be ascertained, four officers and 160 other ranks with the battalion, which had gone into action with 22 officers and 570 strong. The final casualty officer list was five killed and 11 wounded. Losses in the other ranks amounted to 24 killed, 167 wounded and 36 missing; a total of 126 officers and 227 other ranks. These figures were thought light in the face of the fact that the German artillery fire in this battle was considered to be the heaviest and most concentrated of the whole war.¹⁴³

12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, the only battalion detailed for the second objective to go over the top, moved to its assembly positions immediately in rear of the Queens at 2 a.m. The battalion was in position by 5.20 a.m., having encountered the enemy barrage between Glencorse and Polygon Woods, but suffered relatively few casualties. D Company was on the right front, C Company on the left, with A and B Companies supporting them respectively.

The final objective detailed to the Fusiliers was a line drawn from the southern end of Judge Copse on the right to Judge Cott on the left. At zero, the battalion moved forward close behind the Queens, encountering opposition for the first time from the shell holes of the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

original German front line, in which remnants of the enemy appeared to have been passed over by the leading battalion. These pockets of enemy resistance caused several casualties.

After crossing Juniper Trench the battalion came under fire from both flanks; on the right by a strong point that had yet to be cleared. Second Lieutenant Edmonds immediately moved A Company up on the right flank of the Battalion, attacked and captured this strong point, taking between 30 and 40 prisoners. A party of the KOYLI who came up shortly afterwards was left in this strong point as a garrison and A Company resumed its position in support of D Company. Meanwhile, on the left flank, C and B Companies had suffered casualties from a strong point near Juniper Trench, near the battalion's junction with the right flank of 1st Lincolns. In conjunction with this latter battalion, the strong point was captured.

Upon continuing the advance, the battalion became somewhat scattered owing to the boggy nature of the ground, primarily on the left flank. Heavy rifle and machine-gun fire was now directed against the battalion from the opposite ridge and a strong point near Judge Trench, causing heavy casualties. Using rifle grenades to good effect, C Company captured the strong point and its garrison.

The battalion was still suffering heavy casualties from machine-gun fire from the front and right flank. Lieutenant-Colonel S.H. Dix MC therefore reorganised the left half of the battalion, and led B Company into the front line to strengthen C Company, but was killed leading the remaining men of these two companies up to the first objective. Captain G.B. Riddell, who was already wounded, took command and gave orders to consolidate the first objective. During the consolidation Captain Riddell was severely wounded, and the command of the Battalion passed to the Lewis Gun Officer, Lieutenant T. McKinnon, as all officers senior to him had become casualties. Only one officer now remained with each company.

Before the barrage moved on D Company found it necessary to attack a strong-point on the right of the battalion front which was causing trouble; a large number of the enemy were killed at this point and their machine-guns captured.

At 7.40 a.m., zero + 100 minutes, the barrage moved on according to plan to allow the capture of the final objective, with the Fusiliers on the right and the Lincolns on the left. The battalions pushed on towards their respective objectives, still under heavy machine-gun and shell fire directed from the ridge opposite. Having reached a point about 250 yards short of the final objective the battalion dug in and consolidated, in line with the Lincolns on the left but considerably in advance of 64th Brigade on the right. Their flank being in the air, a defensive flank was immediately formed on the right by A Company, who eventually obtained touch with 9th KOYLI. Consolidation of the position was satisfactorily completed by dusk and A Company withdrew into close support in Judge Trench.

The total advance effected by the Fusiliers was 1100 yards from the original front line, but at a terrible cost. Casualties suffered amongst the officers were seven killed and 12 wounded; with 44 killed and 320 wounded amongst the other ranks.¹⁴⁴ The *OH* notes that before midday on 4 October, the Fusiliers had lost its commanding officer and all four company commanders.¹⁴⁵

15th DLI, detailed to carry the second objective of 64th Brigade, had relieved the Leicesters in the front line on 2 October, in the vicinity of Glencorse Wood. The shelling that caused the Green Howards so many problems was felt even more keenly by troops already in the line and exposed to the barrage, with no option but simply to endure it. The battalion

¹⁴⁴ Narrative of 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, PRO, WO 95 / 2155.

¹⁴⁵ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 314 *f*.

sustained such casualties - 20 officers and 410 men¹⁴⁶ - as to be deemed unable to attack, and 10th KOYLI was brought forward for the assault. An NCO serving with the DLI later wrote to his fiancée

we didn't go in 'til October the 2nd. Our Battalion was to have gone over the top and taken the final objective. Oh, it was a lovely 'baptism of fire' that night. We had to dig ourselves in, and early in the morning Fritz started strafing... I had twelve men when we went in, I came out with three... That October the fourth 'do' I shall never forget. Our Battalion lost so heavily during the third from shell fire whilst lying in reserve preparatory to going over on the following morning that we could not attempt our job and consequently we remained in support till the attack was over.¹⁴⁷

By around 9 a.m. the objectives allotted to 21st Division had been largely taken, allowing complete observation of the Reutel valley to the south-east, and completing the security of the southern flank of the main Broodseinde battle front. "The value of the position was not altered by the fact that later in the day, owing to constant machine-gun and artillery fire from Polderhoek spur, at a thousand yards' range across the valley, the right brigade, after suffering severe losses, had to withdraw slightly to more sheltered ground. The final objective was not gained, but the casualties show with what stubborn courage this important sector of the battlefield, at the eastern edge of the Gheluvelt plateau, was captured and held."¹⁴⁸

Casualties

Despite the capture of set objectives at Broodseinde, the cost of its success was enormous. Officer casualties of 21st Division amounted to ten killed, 51 wounded and ten missing; those among the other ranks numbered 2,545, of whom 364 were killed, 1,699 wounded and 482

¹⁴⁶ Captain Wilfred Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920), p. 191.

¹⁴⁷ Letter of 5 January 1918, by D.L. Rowlands, 15th DLI, 64th Brigade, IWM 93/20/1. His underlines.

¹⁴⁸ *OH 1917, Volume II*, pp. 313-4.

missing. The overall divisional losses were the highest on Second Army front.¹⁴⁹ Of the 86 officers of 62nd Brigade who went into action, 74 became casualties during the period 3 – 8 October. The three leading battalions each lost over 40 per cent of their effective strength, and no battalion had more than six officers left in action by 8 October. The casualties suffered by 64th Brigade were similarly heavy, totalling 61 officers and 1,293 other ranks in the few days of the battle period. Neither KOYLI battalion lists its casualties, although 10th battalion came out of the line just 150 strong.¹⁵⁰

Conclusions

¹⁴⁹ The *OH* states other divisional casualties for Second Army as: 1st Australian – 2,448; 2nd Australian – 2,174; 3rd Australian – 1,810; NZ Division – 1,643; 7th Division – 2,123; 5th Division – 2,557; 37th Division – 818; compared with 21st Division losses of 2,616. *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 315 f.

¹⁵⁰ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 314 f. Unit reports from the PRO give casualties as follows:

		Officers			Other ranks			Total
		<i>Killed</i>	Wounded	<i>Missing</i>	KILLED	Wounded	Missing	
<i>Battn.</i>	Strength							
1/Lincs	22; 570	5	11	-	24	167	36	243
NFs	-	7	12	-	44	320		383
Queens	41; 904	3	6	-	49	184	19	261
10/Yorks	-	1	10	-	74	249		334*
E. Yorks	615	3	5	1	36	172	73	290
15/DLI	-	4	16	-	38†	372		430**
9/KOYLI	-	1†	unknown		89†	unknown		90
10/KOYLI	-	4†	unknown		75†	unknown		79
Total		28	60	1	429	1,592		2,110
OH figures		10	51	10	364	1,699	482	2,616

† Figures taken from the CD-Rom, *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-19*. Those figures calculated from these cannot be considered definitive.

* Casualty figures for 10th Yorks are taken from Wyllie, *The Green Howards in the Great War*, p. 346.

** Figures taken from Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918*, p. 191.

As always, an offensive can be judged by one fundamental principle: gains versus losses. Gains are measured in terms of ground taken, prisoners of war, materiel and munitions captured, and in terms of the losses inflicted on the enemy. British losses can really only be measured by casualty figures, and whether they are judged to be tolerable given what has been achieved. At Broodseinde, as Prior and Wilson have noted,

X Corps achieved its objectives but only at high cost. In some areas the mud and tangled wire in the woods was so bad that the troops immediately lost the protection of the barrage and were subjected to heavy machine-gun fire from the pillbox defences. In other areas the creeping barrage could hardly be distinguished from the heavy enemy bombardment from unsubdued guns on the right of the attack. Only by repeated frontal assaults was the line advanced the required 800 yards. The total casualty list was 8,000 men.¹⁵¹

Yet the cost to the Germans was undoubtedly as high, if not more so. Ludendorff later deemed 4 October 1917 one of the ‘black days’ of the German Army¹⁵² and the Chief of Staff to Crown Prince Rupprecht, H.J. von K hl, noted Broodseinde in his diary as “quite the heaviest battle to date”.¹⁵³ Certainly, the German losses were appalling. Opposite I Anzac Corps, 45th Reserve Division lost 83 officers and 2,800 other ranks. *Foot Guard Regiment No. 5* described it as the worst day yet experienced in the war.¹⁵⁴ The Australian Official History stated that “early reports which had come in gave clear evidence of the morning’s achievement, but by noon it was obvious that an overwhelming blow had been struck and both sides knew it”.¹⁵⁵ Companies of 212th Reserve Regiment, one of the units brought in for the German assault on Tokio spur, and 4th Guard Division holding the same line opposite X

¹⁵¹ Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele – the Untold Story*, p. 135.

¹⁵² W. Beumelberg, *Flanders, 1917* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1928), p. 122.

¹⁵³ *German Official Account, Volume XIII* (Berlin: Mittler, 1942) p. 79.

¹⁵⁴ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 316f.

¹⁵⁵ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Volume IV – The Australian Imperial Force in France in 1917* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), p. 875.

Corps, lost 95 per cent of their effective fighting strength.¹⁵⁶ A Second Army Summary of Operations concluded that

as a result of recent operations it is estimated that seven Battalions of each of the *4th Guard* and *19th Reserve Divisions*; six Battalions each of the *10th Ersatz* and *20th Divisions*; five Battalions of the *45th Reserve Division*; four Battalions of the *8th Division* and three Battalions of the *16th Division* have all suffered so heavily as to be of little further fighting value. The thickening up of the line by the bringing in of Battalions and Regiments of other Divisions, the confusion of units and the lack of cohesion in the counter attacks proves how completely our former attacks have disorganised the enemy and with what haste he has been compelled to throw in his reinforcements.¹⁵⁷

In terms of prisoners, Second Army captured during the day's fighting 114 officers and 4,044 other ranks; Fifth Army took 12 officers and 589 other ranks. This brought the total for Plumer's 'three steps' to over 10,000. Messages stressed the demoralised state of the survivors.¹⁵⁸ Enemy dead littered No Man's Land, and many British observers said they had never seen so many German corpses on a battlefield.¹⁵⁹

The reasons for these high losses are simple. Firstly, the Germans had sent large numbers of counter-attack troops into the front line for an assault of their own; and secondly, Ludendorff himself had advocated the thickening of garrisons in the front line, positioning his counter-attack divisions to within striking distance of the battle zone, to catch the attacking British infantry as they emerged from the protective barrage. However, this defensive tactic had served merely to increase German casualties, as they were exposed in greater numbers to the increasing weight and deeper thrust of the British artillery. "In this third of Plumer's

¹⁵⁶ *OH 1917, Volume II*, p. 305 f.

¹⁵⁷ *Second Army Summary of Operations during period 27 September to 4 October, 1917, PRO, WO 95 / 275.*

¹⁵⁸ *OH 1917, Volume II*, pp. 315-6 f.

¹⁵⁹ See Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 475-6.

measured blows, it merely created horrendous losses for a German army reeling from a string of tactical defeats.”¹⁶⁰ Prior and Wilson have noted that some of the features of Broodseinde were “the product of ill-judgement and sheer bad luck on the part of the enemy. These were unlikely to be regular features of future operations. For example, it was improbable that the enemy would once again pack additional men into the front zone to be numbered among the dead and prisoners. And Plumer could hardly bank on the Germans again being about to launch an attack of their own when the British bombardment commenced.”¹⁶¹

In terms of advancement, gains and losses, the assault on Broodseinde seems to have yielded the worst results: 2,616 casualties for the meagre gain of 0.2 square miles.¹⁶² Yet the attack on 4 October is generally viewed as a success. Although the ground won was less than in the other assaults, this was primarily due to the setting of limited objectives. This is clear evidence of the problems of the Ypres Salient, as is the huge amount of difficulty experienced by the division during the move to assembly positions. 21st Division was never more severely shelled during the war than at Broodseinde, and in conditions that were arguably the least able to sustain such bombardment. In line with this, the British ratio of 2.5 yards per gun was highly favourable, as was the accumulation of 1.5 million rounds of ammunition for the division, which begs the question: why did both belligerents rely so heavily on artillery in the sector of front which was least able to sustain such shelling? The answer may well imply a military vicious circle: it is possible that both British and German High Command believed that a systematic bombardment of enemy positions combined with a comprehensive multi-belt

¹⁶⁰ Lee, ‘The British Divisions at *Third Ypres*’, pp. 220-1.

¹⁶¹ Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele – the Untold Story*, p. 137.

¹⁶² This calculation is based on the average advance of 800 yards along the 700 yard frontage allocated by X Corps to its two divisions. See above, p. 74.

barrage were the only methods of protecting the infantry from hostile fire whilst they struggled through the sucking mud that was, of course, created by the constant shelling. This was arguably true of Plumer, an advocate of artillery, and who always took what measures he could to protect his attacking infantry. The extraordinary use of tanks in this assault also implies a reliance on technology in this difficult sector to protect the assaulting troops. The fact that the offensive was unknowingly timed to coincide with a German counter-attack accounts for the enormous weight of enemy shelling, and for both British and enemy casualties during the day, simply due to the hugely increased number of troops in the forward area. However, the coincidental timing of the two assaults is a clear indication that the half-light of dawn was the best time to ensure a successful attack in this area.

The achievements of 21st Division at Broodseinde do not demonstrate much in terms of tactical evolution, although this is arguably due to the huge problems encountered by all British forces in Flanders in late 1917. The reorganisation of the platoon into a more autonomous unit does indicate the beginning of the devolution of command process, but the difficulties imposed by the Ypres Salient meant that troops were clearly more dependent on orders from High Command rather than local initiative. There is some evidence of independent thought during the difficult march to assembly positions, particularly at battalion level, but this is arguably before the battle took place and therefore still within the control of higher command. The performance of 21st Division at Broodseinde demonstrates more the ability of the British infantry to adapt to unforeseen circumstances and the determination of all ranks to succeed in the worst of conditions rather than a further step in the learning curve of tactical evolution.

CHAPTER 3

Miraumont – 24 August 1918

The assault on Miraumont is particularly important in the study of the evolution of 21st Division. The capture of Miraumont was imperative to the advance of two separate Corps, and the advance was therefore so strategically important that the Brigadier himself chose to lead the attack, in order to be able to command most efficiently. This is the first indication – in this study, at least - of the decentralisation of command experienced by the BEF,¹⁶³ and the success of this new style of leadership is displayed by the deftness with which the division was able to advance with both flanks in the air, and then consolidate and maintain its isolated position in the face of repeated German counter-attacks. The attack was also undertaken in the darkest midnight hours, and with very little artillery support, making it an ideal comparison with the previous dawn attacks under substantial barrages. Finally, as the attack was over the old Somme battlefield, it offers much in the way of analytical material to compare with the attacks at Bazentin and, in the next chapter, on the Beaurevoir Line.

Sources

One of the huge discrepancies within the literature of the Great War is that so much of it is focused on the early battles of the war, particularly those of 1916 and 1917. The public fixation with the disasters that befell the BEF, particularly the first day on the Somme, muddy, bloody Passchendaele, and the near-collapse in the German Spring Offensive, is due in part to a subconscious need to reinforce the old stereotype that the Great War was ‘a bad thing’. The Hundred Days campaign of autumn 1918, which eradicated entirely the German

¹⁶³ The process of this decentralisation of command was accelerated by the defensive battles of the spring of 1918, during which the formal command systems of 1916-17 swiftly broke down.

gains of the war and caused the virtual collapse of her armies, was a series of spectacular offensives demonstrating the extent of tactical reform and skill within the BEF during the war. Yet the campaign is virtually unknown, particularly within the national consciousness. There are two explanations for this: firstly, that to emphasise the successes of the BEF - and these were arguably the greatest in British military history - would conflict with the public view of the war as pointless, futile, and intolerably costly, both financially and in human terms. The second explanation has more basis in the actual facts of the time: there is very little secondary literature on this part of the war simply because there is scarcely enough primary evidence to use as a foundation. This is easily borne out by the scarcity of literature relating to this battle. Any primary sources available can be found at the Public Record Office in Kew (hereafter PRO) under the classmark WO 95, which holds the war diaries. WO 95 / 2133 contains documents relating to 21st Division, including the Operation Order pertaining to this battle, O.O. No. 210, and its seven appendices. The diary also contains a 'Summary of Operations from August 1st to 31st 1918', which is particularly useful in that it delineates the forces opposite 21st Division, and describes the confusion in the enemy ranks due to the blows dealt on 21 and 23 August. The fact that there is so little information other than this bare minimum is demonstrative of the hurried business of waging war at the time. 21st Division had attacked on these two previous days, and would be engaged again three times before the end of August. To expect the level of battle documentation such as was found earlier in the war would perhaps be asking too much, but this deficit is clear evidence as to the dearth of secondary literature pertaining to this battle.

Documents from the higher levels of command, V Corps and Third Army, can be found in the classmarks WO 95 / 750 and 372 respectively. The only document of note in Third Army Papers is a 'Summary of Operations', a very bare account of the battle but useful

in that it notes the times of orders sent, received, and acted upon, thus recording the timetable of events. Again, it is documents from V Corps that are particularly useful. V Corps Operation Order No. 233 is another very bare account, which simply details the objectives allocated to its three divisions, leaving their Commanding Officers to make their own plans. This is very much in line with Haig's telegram that each division should be allocated a far objective and instructed to reach it regardless of flanks or specific orders from above, and demonstrates the devolution of command at this time. Also to be found in V Corps diary is a 'Narrative of Operations From August 21st to November 11th 1918', a detailed document outlining the necessity of the action, and the difficulties foreseen in its achievement, plus the manner in which the attack was to take place. This document also outlines the 'Problems of the V Corps', a very useful appendix, which describes the obstacles facing the corps, particularly the deliberate flooding of the Ancre by the Germans and the defence methods employed by the enemy on the high ground beyond the river.

War Diaries of 64th Brigade and its subordinate units are to be found in WO 95 / 2161 and 2162. The diary of 1st East Yorks (2161) is particularly detailed under the protracted circumstances of battle, and is very useful in that it lists casualties on a daily basis, so the historian can compare battalion losses against the other battles during this period. The diary of 9th KOYLI (2162) is also fairly detailed for the time, noting the difficulties of the brigade assembly and, unusually amongst these accounts, it actually describes the assault. The diary of 15th Durham Light Infantry (DLI) gives a very sketchy account, presumably due to the difficulties of its maintenance at this time, but is very useful in that it states 7 p.m. on 23 August as receipt of the Operation Order, and listing detailed casualties. However, given that the DLI's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Holroyd-Smyth, took control of the

brigade after Brigadier McCulloch was wounded, one might have expected a slightly more detailed account.

Accounts taken from other battalions of 21st Division are similarly sketchy. The diary of 1st Lincolns, 62nd Brigade (2154), gives a very brief outline of 64th Brigade's attack but little else, while that of its sister battalion, 2nd Lincolns, is little more than useless for the attack, but does summarise the enemy forces facing 21st Division prior to the fighting on 21 August. The final battalion of 62nd Brigade, 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers (2155), usefully details both battalion and fighting strength, but devotes very little narrative to the attack on 24 August as it was involved in attacks on other days. This same reason accounts for even less notice made by the battalions of 110th Brigade. The diary of 6th Leicesters (2164) makes no reference to the attack, and that of its sister battalion, 7th Leicesters, simply notes that the battalion was ordered move forward in the line as part of everyday warfare. This was, in fact, to reinforce the isolated 64th Brigade, but the benefit of hindsight and the importance of this reference clearly escaped the diarist. Finally, the diary of 1st Wiltshires notes the battalion's role in assisting 64th Brigade, but very little else.

As has been noted, the Hundred Days campaign is shamefully neglected in the Great War literature. This assault was, however, recognised by the Official History (hereafter *OH*), as an astonishing feat, and was so impressed it devoted over five pages to its narrative, whereas other brigades assaulting on the same day received only two paragraphs of coverage. See *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918*, Volume IV compiled by Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, (London: Macmillan, 1947). An excellent secondary source recently published is J.P. Harris' *Amiens to the Armistice – The B.E.F. in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey's, 1998). The attack on Albert,

however, is not even mentioned, despite its importance and striking success. Matthew Richardson's *The Tigers – 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), devotes a few pages to the battle's narrative, mainly through eye-witness accounts, and a brief synopsis of 110th Brigade's role in the assault. H.R. Cumming's *A Brigadier in France, 1917-1918* (London: Cape, 1922), which also only recounts the role of 110th Brigade, is very detailed in its narrative of the assault, but David Kelly, whose *39 Months with 'The Tigers' - The 110th Infantry Brigade* (London: Benn, 1930) appeared so useful, was infuriatingly on leave in mid-August, and missed "an action of the brigade for the first and last time" (p. 135). One final eye-witness account can be found in Captain Wilfred Miles' *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920), which offers a good, detailed narrative account, although lacking the trench names and intimate knowledge of the ground to be of great use alongside the other battalion reports. One fact that is particularly interesting is that the account was clearly not taken from the battalion War Diary – there is far more detail than in the diary – and Miles must have taken it from eye-witness accounts later on that were unavailable to both the diarist and myself.

Context

The German Spring Offensive, begun in March 1918 with the 'Michael' assault on the Somme, had been the defining feature of the year to date. It achieved a degree of penetration hitherto unmatched in the history of trench warfare, almost forty miles, and caused the virtual collapse of the British Fifth Army. The Germans, under Erich Ludendorff, followed this remarkable attack with a series of swift, intended knock-out blows on the Lys, the Aisne, and the Marne, but never repeated the success of 'Michael', as their depleted and exhausted troops met with increasingly fortified defences. By July the Germans were spent; struggling with

manpower, rifle and food shortages, as well as physical and moral exhaustion. Yet their leaders, realising that though they could not win the war the Allies still had to defeat them, were unready to sue for peace. An Allied attack seemed imminent, but the British were the only force in a position to deliver a successful offensive – “the only really effective fighting force on the Allied side, for the Americans, though courageous, were still inexperienced and the French were now in an exhausted and war-weary condition”.¹⁶⁴

On 8 August 1918 Rawlinson’s Fourth Army launched an assault east of Amiens, beginning the Hundred Days campaign that would eventually win the war. Supported by a massive concentration of armour - 530 British and 70 French tanks¹⁶⁵ - and undertaken by the exceptional Australian and Canadian infantry, the assault was a huge success, retaking almost the entire Somme battlefield.¹⁶⁶ Ludendorff called 8 August the “black day of the German Army”,¹⁶⁷ but it was only the beginning of a three-month campaign that would eventually defeat the Germans. After the initial gains and two days of heavy fighting, Rawlinson’s forces were exhausted; the advances became increasingly slight and unable to off-set losses in personnel and munitions. With the Germans in retreat, the offensive had to be

¹⁶⁴ Robert Blake (ed.) *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), p. 322.

¹⁶⁵ John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), p. 440.

¹⁶⁶ The British III Corps also played an important, if less spectacular, role in the attack on 8 August, on the north of the Dominion attack. There were sound operational reasons why III Corps was not as successful as the Canadians and the Australians, including the disruption of preparations by a German attack on 6 August and the significant difficulties posed by the proximity of the Chipilly spur. For more information, see J.P. Harris with Niall Barr, *Amiens to the Armistice – The B.E.F. in the Hundred Days’ Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey’s, 1998), pp. 95-98.

¹⁶⁷ Erich Ludendorff, *The Concise Ludendorff Memoirs 1914-1918* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 290. See also Harris, *Amiens to the Armistice*, pp. 103-4.

continued, and Rawlinson felt that the main lines of assault should be shifted to his flanks.¹⁶⁸ In the south, the French began preparing their troops for an assault, whilst Haig gave orders for Horne's First Army to finalise plans for the capture of La Bassée and the Aubers Ridge, in conjunction with an attack of Plumer's Second Army on Kemmel Ridge and a push by Byng's Third Army towards Bapaume.

This assault by Third Army, the battle of Albert, opened on 21 August with remarkable success. Its aim was the capture of the Albert - Arras railway which, in the south, ran very close and parallel to the British line but swung away eastwards to a distance of nearly three miles in the centre. On every part of the front the British took their first objectives, with IV Corps advancing to within striking distance of the furthest section of the railway. Yet it had been a hot day, and Byng's troops were understandably fatigued. 22 August was spent repelling German counter-attacks ordered by General Otto von Below, commander of the Seventeenth Army, who clearly believed that the British were spent. However, unknown to von Below, the attack had merely been paused and was reopened on the following day. Clearly irritated by Byng's caution, Haig had demanded that the offensive be renewed at the earliest moment possible,¹⁶⁹ and the attack was more aggressive than Byng would otherwise have ordered. It was, nevertheless, extremely successful. By nightfall, the Third Army was in almost full occupation of the railway, and the villages of Ervillers, Gommecourt and Achiet-le-Grand had all fallen to British troops. With the Army's distant objective being the capture

¹⁶⁸ The diary of General Sir H.S. Rawlinson Bt., 10 August 1918, National Army Museum. "Hostile resistance is stiffening ... [now] is the time to extend the battle front and put in further attacks by Armies on the flanks, [Foch] strongly advised D.H. to make the III Army attack as I suggested a week ago and I think it will be done."

¹⁶⁹ Haig, *Private Papers*, p. 324. See also Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918 – The Franco-British Offensive, Volume IV*, (London: HMSO, 1947) Appendix XX, 'Commander-in-Chief's Telegram of 22nd August, 1918', pp. 587-8.

of Bapaume, only the capture of the remaining section of railway, unfortunately on the front of V Corps, and the village of Miraumont were required for a relatively unobstructed route to Bapaume.¹⁷⁰ On the night of 23-24 August, 21st Division of V Corps was detailed for the capture of Miraumont.

Aims¹⁷¹

Byng's orders to V Corps were issued at 5.35 p.m. on 23 August, stating that troops were to advance towards Rocquigny and Morval, about eight miles ahead, south of Bapaume, mopping up any remaining pockets of enemy resistance between the southern Army boundary and the Ancre.¹⁷² This zone was familiar to 21st Division, including Mametz Wood and the Bazentins, whose capture a little over two years previously witnessed the first action of 110th Brigade. However, although nearby, the division was not destined for this area, being on the northern flank of V Corps, facing Grandcourt and Le Sars.

Method

The plan of attack outlined by Lieutenant-General C.D. Shute, commanding V Corps, was based on the need to avoid certain areas of the Corps frontage. The Ancre valley, as is outlined below,¹⁷³ was particularly marshy and there existed a flooded area from Aveluy on the southern corps boundary to about seven hundred yards north of Authuille, in the centre of the corps frontage. In order to overcome this, Shute decided to make convergent attacks from north and south of this flooded area, which would join up on the line la Boisselle – Ovillers – Grandcourt, about 1,500 yards to the east of the original start line. In addition, this plan also

¹⁷⁰ See Harris, *Amiens to the Armistice*, pp. 121-43, particularly the map on p. 128. See also *OH 1918, Volume IV*, Sketch 14.

¹⁷¹ See Maps V and VI, pp. 149 and 150.

¹⁷² *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 242. See also Sketch 14.

¹⁷³ See pp. 108-9.

had the advantage of avoiding a direct attack on the strong Thiepval position, which lay just to the north of the sector protected by the flooded area.

The attacks were to be made at 1 a.m. The southern advance, north-eastwards, was to be made by the right of 38th Division, in conjunction with the left of 18th Division of III Corps, Fourth Army. The northern assault was to be directed south-eastwards, by the centre and left of 38th Division, one brigade (50th) of 17th Division and 21st Division. The aims of this attack were to capture Thiepval from the flank, plus the high ground beyond, and Grandcourt; and from there join up with the southern attacks about half a mile north-north-east of Ovillers. From this first objective, success was to be exploited to a line running from Contalmaison via Pozières to the high ground a thousand yards south-east of Miraumont, with Morval as the objective of a farther advance.¹⁷⁴

In the event, 21st Division was not to advance at 1 a.m., as designated by V Corps. During the evening of 23 August it became clear that the enemy was still holding out in Miraumont and had checked the advance of IV Corps to the left. Third Army, therefore, deemed it imperative that the high ground south-east of Miraumont should be seized as early as possible in order to link up with the right of the IV Corps. Rapidity on the part of 21st Division was therefore essential to facilitate the advance of IV Corps and, in conjunction with those forces, to encircle the village of Miraumont and occupy it before the garrison had time to withdraw or destroy the bridge within the village over the Ancre. Under instructions from Third Army, 21st Division was therefore ordered to advance at 11 p.m., with the objective of

¹⁷⁴ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 243, and Sketch 14.

the knoll 1,500 yards south-east of Miraumont, and not wait for the 1 a.m. zero hour fixed for the rest of V Corps' attack to the right.¹⁷⁵

Order of Battle¹⁷⁶

The Australian and III Corps of Rawlinson's Fourth Army lined up, right to left, alongside V, IV and VI Corps of Byng's Third Army. 21st Division was the left of three divisions of Lieutenant-General C.D. Shute's V Corps, with 17th Division immediately to the right and 38th Division beyond that, on the extreme right of Third Army's frontage.¹⁷⁷ Flanking 21st Division on the left was 42nd Division of Lieutenant-General Sir G. M. Harper's IV Corps.

Brigadier-General A.J. McCulloch's 64th Brigade, already in the line, was selected for the assault. The offensive was allocated to 1st East Yorks on the left and 9th KOYLI on the right, both less one Company. Their two detached companies and one available from 15th Durham Light Infantry, which was in the line and could not safely be relieved in time for the assembly, were to form the brigade reserve, assisted by eight machine guns. "Behind a brigade guide in the centre, each battalion had two companies in front line with the third in support, and each company moved in square formation, that is with a platoon at each angle of a square, with 20 yards between the platoons each way. A similar distance separated the companies."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ V Corps Narrative of Operations from August 21st to November 11th 1918, 'The forging of the Ancre and the capture of Thiepval Ridge', PRO, WO 95 / 751.

¹⁷⁶ See Appendices IX and X, pp. 167 and 168.

¹⁷⁷ 38th Division included the now-famous 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers within its 115th Brigade. This battalion has since found literary fame through its celebrated sons, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Frank Richards, as well as an outstanding account of the battalion's wartime experience, compiled by its Medical Officer, J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Abacus, 1998). An account of this offensive can be found on pp. 512-5.

¹⁷⁸ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 245.

Given the difficulty of the assault, and the fact that the brigade was to advance ahead of zero, there were no troops on either flank, but 110th Brigade on the right and 127th (Manchester) Brigade of 42nd Division on the left would follow on at the original zero hour of 1 a.m. and connect with 64th Brigade on the final objective. The fact that the division was to advance with both flanks ‘in the air’ was in line with a general message from the Commander-in-Chief that all ranks should act with the utmost boldness. Divisions were to be given a distant objective which each must reach independently of its neighbour, even if, for the time being, its flanks were exposed. Reinforcements were to be directed to the points where troops were gaining ground and not where they were checked.¹⁷⁹

Resources

The barrage for the convergent attacks was to be fired by 144 field guns and 60 heavy guns; a small number for a front of over 8,000 yards, but sufficient to satisfy the infantry at this stage of the war.¹⁸⁰ This gave rise to a ratio of 39.2 yards of attack frontage per gun. The artillery was under direct orders of the respective divisions, although barrages in depth were arranged Corps-wide to cover the advances, as were protective barrages formed in front of the various

¹⁷⁹ Haig to the Armies, 22 August 1918, OAD 911, PRO, WO 158 / 241. Haig’s telegram can be found in full in *OH 1918, Volume IV*, Appendix XX, pp. 587-8.

¹⁸⁰ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 243. See also V Corps Narrative of Operations. The figures it cites make interesting reading, as follows:

		113 th Bde.	114 th Bde.	50 th Bde.	64 th Bde.	Total
Field Guns	18 pounders	24	18	30	36	108
	4.5” hows.	6	6	12	12	36
Heavy Guns	60 pounders	8	6	8	8	30
	6” hows.	8	6	8	8	30
Total Field Guns		30	24	42	48	144
Total Heavy Guns		16	12	16	16	60
Total		46	36	58	64	204

What is interesting is that 64th Brigade, the assaulting unit of 21st Division, was allotted significantly more guns than the other assaulting brigades, almost double that of 114th, which adds further weight to the theory that this was the most challenging assault on the Corps front. Whether 21st Division was chosen for the assault simply because it was in the line or was moved into position because it was thought equal to the task is debatable.

bounds. In addition to the main artillery the right and left assaults were supported by eight heavy howitzers that engaged selected enemy points of resistance. It must be assumed, given that it was the left assaulting force, that the attack of 21st Division was supported by these extra guns, although the literature does not give any indication either way. The creeping barrage was to be fired by 21st Division artillery, XCIV and XCV Brigades RFA, and 16 guns of XVII Brigade RGA.¹⁸¹ The remainder of the heavy artillery were to keep the area to be nipped off by the converging attacks under heavy fire until 115th Brigade, 38th (Welsh) Division, was in a position to mop it up and begin the consolidation process. One contemporary historian noted that the British barrage had been ineffective, but that the enemy appeared to have little idea of what was happening.¹⁸²

21st Division also utilised its Machine Gun Companies for the assault, allocating 12 guns to assist 64th Brigade in the consolidation process, and 16 guns for that of 110th Brigade. The Operation Order states that once the barrage for the initial assault had been completed, “20 Guns will revert to the 62nd Infantry brigade for the defence of the ground north of the Ancre. 12 Guns will revert to Divisional Reserve.”¹⁸³ However, none of the battalion or brigade diaries report state the use or assistance of these guns, although this may have more to do with the brevity of the reports themselves than the appearance or otherwise of the machine guns.

In terms of other resources, there is very little in the literature or the unit reports to give any real indication. An appendix to 21st Division Operation Order 210 instructs troops to

¹⁸¹ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 244.

¹⁸² Captain Wilfred Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920) p. 322.

¹⁸³ Appendix III to 21st Division Order No. 210 – Machine Gun Arrangements, PRO, WO 95 / 2133.

be “as lightly equipped as possible... The 64th Infantry Brigade will carry two bombs per man; the 110th Infantry Brigade will carry rifle grenades, but not bombs... The exact proportion of tools to be carried is left to Brigadiers, but the proportion will be kept low. It is the Divisional Commander’s intention to improve existing trenches and connect up shell holes, rather than to dig new trenches.”¹⁸⁴ A further appendix instructed the troops to “go into action carrying at least 170 rounds of SAA,” and that 62nd and 110th Infantry Brigades will go into action carrying rations for August 24th and 25th, in addition to the Iron Ration. 64th Infantry Brigade will carry rations for August 24th in addition to the Iron Ration.”¹⁸⁵ In addition, the DLI’s official historian noted that “few tools were to be carried, as existing trenches and shell-holes could be adapted for defence when the objective was won and it was essential that the troops should be lightly equipped for the difficult advance”.¹⁸⁶ It must be assumed from this that the commanders were finally placing greater importance on the capture of objectives, and placing the task of the consolidation process with troops specifically designated for that purpose rather than demanding it of the infantry that had just taken the objective and were understandably fatigued.

Terrain

The area over which the division was to advance was only a few miles to the north-west of the ground assaulted on 14 July 1916, yet the terrain was markedly different. There were two main features; firstly, the River Ancre and the valleys either side; and secondly, the rising slopes towards Martinpuich. The Ancre, generally an inconsiderable stream, had been flooded intentionally by the enemy and was 300 yards wide in a great part of its course. The western

¹⁸⁴ Appendix I to 21st Division Order No. 210 – Assembly and Preliminary Arrangements, PRO, WO 95 / 2133.

¹⁸⁵ Appendix VIII to 21st Division Order No. 210 – Administrative Instructions, PRO, WO 95 / 2133.

¹⁸⁶ Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918*, p. 321.

banks were low and boggy, and all bridges had been destroyed by the considerable bombardment from both belligerents. The main stream, although only fifteen to twenty feet broad, was six to eight feet deep, and was indistinguishable from the rest of the flooded area. This stretch of bog and water was covered throughout by a tangle of fallen trees, branches and coarse reeds, with wire – almost unnecessarily – added to make it a more difficult obstacle.¹⁸⁷

Beyond the river to the east lay the high ground from Tara Hill above Albert to the Thiepval Heights south of Grandcourt, with Martinpuich near its highest point, and there a spur overlooking Miraumont. The difference in height between the river valley and the final objective, about half a mile north-north-east of Ovillers, was around four hundred feet, a particularly high rise, although the incline of the slope is unspecified.¹⁸⁸ The heights were a continuous mass of trenches, dugouts, fallen trees and wire, pitted with shell craters, seamed with old trenches and intersected by deep gullies.¹⁸⁹ The high position afforded the Germans a commanding view of all the British trenches, which meant that any move was witnessed and drew fire. The importance of the position lay in this siting above the British: it was obvious that neither the left of Fourth Army could advance eastward from Albert, nor could IV Corps on the left advance on Miraumont until this formidable position was in British hands.¹⁹⁰

The summer of 1918 had also been fairly hot, and though the Somme valley was bisected with tributary streams and rivers, the land was dry. The weather throughout the Battle of Albert had been exceptionally warm, although 24 August was cooler. The news of

¹⁸⁷ 'Problem of the V Corps' from V Corps Narrative of Operations. PRO, WO 95 / 751. See also *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁸ See Arthur Banks, *A Military Atlas of the First World War* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), p.156.

¹⁸⁹ Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field*, p. 321.

¹⁹⁰ 'Problem of the V Corps' from V Corps Narrative of Operations.

the night attack, as opposed to the burning heat of the day, must have been a huge relief to battle-weary men exhausted by the heat and the sun, particularly given that there was very little shelter in the open.

Enemy

The enemy troops opposite V Corps were universally agreed to be in a state of great confusion. 21st Division War Diary notes that at the opening of the battle, on 21 August, there were eight divisions in the line opposite Third Army, with two known to be in reserve. In addition, divisions that had fought in the battle of Amiens on 8 August were known to be on their way to rest in the Bapaume – Cambrai areas, and train activity from Lille to Cambrai indicated the arrival of fresh divisions from the north. It is generally accepted that these factors boosted the number of divisions to thirteen on Third Army's front. However, it was the success of operations between 21 and 23 August that had caused the state of great confusion, as both fresh and tired divisions were thrown liberally into the fight to stem the advance. Prisoners testified to the confusion that existed behind the enemy lines, and attributed the British success to the fact that the hammering blows of the attack gave them no time to rest and reorganise their troops.¹⁹¹ Prisoners also stated that the enemy was withdrawing to the Hindenburg Line, with the intention of holding up the British advance with rearguard troops for a sufficient length of time to rest and reorganise the main body of troops away from the brunt of the fighting.¹⁹² The confusion behind enemy lines was borne out by the fact that troops from at least twenty German divisions were captured by V Corps

¹⁹¹ Summary of Operations from August 1st to 31st 1918, 21st Division War Diary, PRO, WO 95 / 2133.

¹⁹² Prisoner Interrogation Reports, V Corps War Diary, PRO, WO 95 / 751.

alone, of which eight were identified by 21st Division.¹⁹³ Nominally, *16th Reserve Regiment* and the *3rd Naval Division* of the German Seventeenth Army, both of which had already been identified by 21st Division, were in the line on the night of the 23-24 August. However, the state of the enemy troops, as confessed by their own captured men, would suggest that the pockets of resistance to be encountered by attackers from 21st Division could be from any units opposite Third Army.¹⁹⁴

Results

The task of 21st Division was altered by Army instruction to move as soon as possible towards Miraumont, with the objective of seizing the high ground to the south-east of it in order to cut off the village and prevent the garrison from destroying the bridges over the Ancre and withdrawing. The *OH* is in no doubt as to the difficulty of the task: “to make a night advance to attack a line known to be held and seize an objective over three thousand yards beyond it was an exceptional task”,¹⁹⁵ and devotes much space to describing how it was accomplished.

It was 5.30 p.m. on 23 August before Brigadier-General McCulloch, part of whose 64th Brigade was in the front line, was informed of the change to the operation. Before leaving for divisional headquarters to discuss the alterations he issued a warning order modifying his previous instructions for the 1 a.m. advance, to the effect that the brigade, less 15th Durham Light Infantry (DLI) which could not safely be relieved until dark, was to concentrate in the ruins of St Pierre Divion as soon as possible, with all the machine guns of the company attached to the brigade which could be collected in time. The section of Field Company RE

¹⁹³ Namely the German *3rd Naval Division*, *16th Reserve Division*, *52nd Division*, *49th Reserve Division*, *44th Reserve Division*, *14th Reserve Division*, *163rd Division*, and *87th Division*, from Summary of Operations from August 1st to 31st 1918, 21st Division War Diary, PRO, WO 95 / 2133.

¹⁹⁴ An admittedly ‘inexhaustive’ list of these troops can be found in the *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 262. An appraisal of their ‘class’ can be found on p. 181 f.

¹⁹⁵ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 244.

(probably 98th) attached to the brigade was to continue work at the crossings over the Ancre, and the brigade light trench-mortar company was warned to be prepared to bombard the German positions on the railway that passed north of Grandcourt.

The brigade assembly took place in extremely difficult conditions; in pitch blackness and moving over very rough ground, as well as passing through the line of 62nd Brigade. Shortly after midnight, the brigade entered Battery Valley that runs from Thiepval towards Grandcourt. Some casualties were caused here by the barrage firing short,¹⁹⁶ and it was also here that the brigade encountered the first enemy resistance, from about fifteen yards' range. These outposts were rushed immediately, with several Germans being killed and some thirty taken prisoner, before the advance was continued to the mid-way objective, the Grandcourt – Thiepval Road. This advance was made in good order, with the troops full of confidence, continually rushing small parties of Germans and taking prisoners until the intermediate objective was reached at about 1 a.m., when reorganisation had become necessary. The diary of 9th KOYLI notes that “the men were with some difficulty held back, on account of their eagerness to proceed”.¹⁹⁷ A line of consolidation was established, Grandcourt was mopped-up, and the brigade was reorganised for the second bound of the attack, towards Boom Ravine.

However, owing to the rapidity of the brigade's advance, it was in an extremely isolated position, being unable to maintain touch with 17th Division to the right and also due to the absence of the third battalion, 15th DLI, which did not come up until 2.15 a.m. In view, therefore, of the isolated position of the brigade, and the number of Germans around,

¹⁹⁶ Narrative of 1st East Yorks 64th Brigade, 24 August 1918, PRO, WO 95 / 2161. That of 9th KOYLI notes the same incident, PRO, WO 95 / 2162.

¹⁹⁷ Narrative of 9th KOYLI.

Brigadier-General McCulloch decided to postpone further advance until 3.15 a.m., when he hoped 110th Brigade would have arrived. Meanwhile, the enemy had begun taking advantage of the detached position of 64th Brigade, and was counter-attacking from all sides. In spite of this the brigade succeeded in maintaining its position, beating off all attacks until 2.30 a.m., when 110th Brigade, having fought their way through successive enemy positions between the left of 17th Division and 64th Brigade, finally established itself on the right and connected up with 17th Division a thousand yards north-west of Courcellette.¹⁹⁸

Once the DLI had moved up into position, the advance was resumed in the moonlight, this time on a three-battalion front with the DLI on the right. The brigade moved via Boom Ravine to assault Hill 135, south of Miraumont, an advance of some 2,500 yards. Some opposition was encountered from the ravine, but after a number of Germans had been killed or taken prisoner, the rest fled in all directions, discarding rifles and equipment - two field and several machine-guns were captured, along with one German officer and twenty men.¹⁹⁹ The advance to the final objective was made “with exceptional dash and courage, as heavy machine-gun fire was encountered from both flanks and from the front but the advance continued, with nests of machine-gunners and small posts being cleared en route.”²⁰⁰ The KOYLI reached the final objective at 4.30 a.m.; the DLI arrived 45 minutes later and formed a defensive flank on the right. The East Yorkshires were not able quite to reach the final objective in line with the KOYLI, and therefore extended a guard towards the left flank.

¹⁹⁸ V Corps Narrative of Operations from August 21st to November 11th 1918, ‘The forging of the Ancre and the capture of Thiepval Ridge’, PRO, WO 95 / 751.

¹⁹⁹ Narrative of 1st East Yorks.

²⁰⁰ Narrative of 9th KOYLI.

The brigade was not entirely in position until daylight was breaking, when the troops came under very heavy machine-gun fire. Amidst a certain amount of confusion, the men had to take cover in shell holes. No touch had been gained with the flanks, hostile machine-gun fire and shelling was very heavy, and the enemy artillery was very active. The enemy kept up a vigorous sniping and movement became impossible until midday.²⁰¹ It was at this point that the Brigadier, A.J. McCulloch, was hit and badly wounded, and Lieutenant-Colonel C.E.R. Holroyd-Smith of the DLI took command. The enemy also attempted a few counter-attacks against the brigade, and calls to surrender were made to them by the Germans. The troops took no notice, however; every enemy attack was repulsed and the brigade held its position. Not until midday, influenced no doubt by the general British advance to which the attack of 64th Brigade had been an important preliminary, did the enemy retire and leave the brigade in comparative peace.²⁰²

A report of the arrival of 64th Brigade on the final objective, that the line was weakly held and the enemy working round the flanks, had reached Campbell at 8.45 a.m. An hour earlier he had ordered 110th Brigade, which had in the early morning concentrated in Battery Valley (between Thiepval and Grandcourt), to move by the quickest route to protect the right flank of 64th Brigade.²⁰³ The assembly of 110th Brigade had been carried out with remarkable ease, but as the leading battalion, 6th Leicesters, approached the valley it became clear that its southern end, and the trench line directly to the south, was still held by the Germans in some force. Lieutenant-Colonel Martyn, commanding the battalion, immediately realised the situation, and without hesitation or waste of time attacked at once and drove them out,

²⁰¹ Narrative of 1st East Yorks.

²⁰² *OH 1918, Volume IV*, p. 246.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

capturing three trench mortars and a number of prisoners, thus clearing the valley. The consequence of this was that only 7th Leicesters and 1st Wilts formed the attacking line, and 6th Leicesters, after they had reorganised, followed in support.²⁰⁴ Attacking due east, the brigade made good progress towards the objective, despite the right being subjected to continual machine-gun fire from the unprotected flank. Brigadier-General Cumming, commanding 110th Brigade, wrote that

At about 9 a.m. everything seemed going well and Brigade Headquarters moved from the high ground at Beaucourt, crossed the river, and after a short halt in Battery Valley, where they joined the 6th Leicesters, they pushed on across country in rear of the two leading battalions to where a peculiarly shaped, isolated bush grew on the bank of a sunken road, about 1,000 yards west of Boom Ravine. Here the attack was for a time held up, partially by our own barrage, which they had over-run, and partially from enfilade fire coming from the right flank. The 64th Brigade was being hard pressed, and it was of the greatest importance to get across Boom Ravine and support their right; so the Brigadier, ordered the left battalion (1st Wilts) to push on, having sent back word for the guns to lengthen range; the 7th Leicesters were instructed to follow slightly in echelon on the right and to push out a company to the right to protect that flank.²⁰⁵

Although elements of 110th Brigade reached the isolated 64th Brigade by midday, the full objective was not gained until 3 p.m., when the position of the latter could finally be deemed secure. At no point in the day did any troops of the division gain touch with those of 17th Division,²⁰⁶ and a battalion of 62nd Brigade sent up to protect the left flank did not arrive until after 1 p.m., although it did make contact with troops of 42nd Division on the left, which

²⁰⁴ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 208.

²⁰⁵ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, pp. 209-10.

²⁰⁶ The reason for the non-appearance of the 17th Division was that, after a magnificent start, it had gone astray. See *OH 1918, Volume IV*, pp. 247-8 and A. Hilliard Atteridge, *History of the 17th (Northern) Division*, (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1929).

was by that time in possession of the southern half of Miraumont.²⁰⁷ As co-operation had come so slowly, it seems likely that had 64th Brigade gone straight on to its original final objective, it might well have met with disaster.²⁰⁸ Cumming later called their action a “very brilliant one [which] justified the risk taken, as it materially assisted 42nd Division on the north and forced the early evacuation of Miraumont by the enemy”²⁰⁹ which, it must be remembered, was the whole purpose of the early attack.

Casualties

Accurate casualty figures for 24 August are difficult to ascertain. The *OH* gives none at all, and those taken from the War Diaries are inconclusive.²¹⁰ The only leading battalion of 64th Brigade to cite its figures was 1st East Yorks - its total of ninety seeming incredibly few,

²⁰⁷ This battalion was the 1st Lincs, which had concentrated in the morning north of the river, just west of Bois d'Hollande. An hour later they moved to the Ravine, south-east of Grandcourt and, finding the village evacuated, moved up to the left of the 64th Brigade. See Major-General C.R. Simpson, (ed.), *The History of the Lincolnshire Regiment, 1914-1918* (London: Medici Society, 1931), pp. 346-7.

²⁰⁸ *OH 1918, Volume IV*, pp. 246-7.

²⁰⁹ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 209.

²¹⁰ War Diaries to be found at the PRO, WO 95 / 2154-5, 2161-2, 2164.

		<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other ranks</i>			Total
		<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	
Battn.	Strength							
1/Lincs *		4	5	-	31	166	20	226
2/Lincs **	c 80%	2	1	-	21	71	15	110
NFs ***	15; 593	1	4	-	8†	41		54
15/DLI		7	9	1 POW	56	186	26	285
E. Yorks		5	1		30	42	12	90
9/KOYLI		1†			21†			22
6/Leics		1†			4†			5
7/Leics					2†			2
1/Wilts			2		8	24		34
Total		21	22	1	784			828

* Casualties for the period 21 – 28 August. ** Casualties for the period 20 – 29/30 August.

*** Figures given on 25 August.

† Figures taken from the CD-Rom, *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-19*. Those figures calculated from these cannot be considered definitive.

considering that the DLI, who were only deployed for the final objective, had over two hundred casualties, including thirty-five killed. 9th KOYLI, the other leading battalion and which was deployed for both objectives does not specify its losses, but states that casualties were heavy, owing to the flank being in the air, and the repeated enemy counter-attacks inflicted heavy casualties. However, a remark at the end of this report testifies to the ferocity of the battle, noting that “enemy losses were found to have been very heavy – no less than 130 dead being found before our lines.”²¹¹ Losses for 110th Brigade are sketchy; only the Wiltshire battalion recorded its casualties in the War Diary; losses for the two Leicester battalions are apparently completely unknown.²¹² 62nd Brigade, which was only sent up to reinforce the left flank of 64th Brigade in the early afternoon, is the only brigade to have a full list of casualty figures, but as these are for a period covering up to ten days they cannot be considered conclusive evidence of losses for this particular battle.

Conclusions

Given the inconclusive nature of casualties and captures during the assault, it is difficult to gauge the success or otherwise at Miraumont through comparative data. In terms of the actual advance, 21st Division captured approximately 1.14 square miles for the cost of at least 800 casualties.²¹³ However, as the objective of this assault was the seizure of Miraumont rather than a straightforward advance, it therefore cannot be assumed that the ground captured during the advance was a square area from the start line to the objective line. The fact that

²¹¹ Narrative of 9th KOYLI.

²¹² The latest work on the 110th Brigade devotes only four paragraphs to the action on 24 August, and cites no losses. One can only assume that were they available, the casualty figures would be noted at least in this book. See Matthew Richardson, *The Tigers – 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Yorkshire: Leo Cooper, 2000), pp. 252-3. David Kelly, whose *39 Months with the Tigers* (London: Benn, 1930), documents practically the entire war, was on leave during August, and missed ‘an action of the brigade for the first and last time’, p. 135.

²¹³ This calculation is based on the average advance of 1,000 yards along the frontage of nearly two miles. This figure is taken from the *OH 1918, Volume IV, Sketch 14*, and should be taken as extremely approximate.

Miraumont itself was taken dictates that the assault be deemed a success, but whether or not the attack is indicative of tactical evolution can be determined by the manner in which the assault was delivered.

The attack by 64th Brigade of 21st Division was of such a nature that it is difficult to pigeon-hole it into a set-piece battle. It was hurriedly-planned, with the Brigade commander himself only learning of the change to the original assault just a few hours before zero. The early start time meant that the brigade was to advance with both flanks in the air, and with very little artillery support – just one gun per 55 yards.²¹⁴ The additional support of 12 machine guns was only nominal, as had they been of any real assistance they would have been mentioned in the battalion reports. The march to assembly positions, in addition to being extremely hurried, took place in pitch blackness and over very rough ground, and was also dogged by the fact that the assaulting infantry had to pass through 62nd Brigade, which was already in the line. The advance also took place in the dark midnight hours, and over extremely difficult terrain: the Ancre, flooded intentionally by the enemy, a tangle of fallen trees and wire, and then the rising slopes towards Martinpuich. The brigade met with resistance from small outposts along the way, and was dogged by snipers and flanking machine-gun fire. Once on the final objective, the brigade had to consolidate and maintain its isolated position in the face of repeated German counter-attacks. In short, the task undertaken was extremely difficult, which made its achievement all the more remarkable.

The assault on Miraumont demonstrates neatly the reversal to a fluid battlefield after the long years of static trench warfare – a more mobile method of warfare that was

²¹⁴ The difference in yards per gun ratio is due to the fact that the attack of 64th Brigade was supported by 64 guns. See above, p.106.

necessitated by the demands of the Spring Offensive and fostered during the Hundred Days. This threw the command and control process into the melting pot. Against the backdrop of growing tactical and technological innovation, the increasing impossibility of continual reference to superior officers led to the re-emergence of local command, by which junior officers and NCOs displayed flexibility, initiative and improvisation during an actual assault, forcing the German withdrawal and eventually winning the war. However, it is important to remember that the impossibility of continual reference to superior officers had also been a feature of the fighting during the German Spring Offensive, and had accustomed most units involved to decentralisation of command *before* the Hundred Days. McCulloch, for instance, had distinguished himself commanding *ac hoc* composite forces during that period, which may have influenced the divisional decision to deploy his 64th Brigade for this difficult attack. Nevertheless, the assault on Miraumont demonstrates perfectly this emergence of talent at local levels of the BEF – the decision by McCulloch to lead his brigade personally shows the extent to which he was determined to command his troops ‘on the spot’. The battle also illustrates the ‘hands off’ approach adopted by GHQ during the Hundred Days, which established the logistical infrastructure by which to equip the troops carrying out attacks like this without the set-piece planning from higher commands.

CHAPTER 4

The Beaurevoir Line – 8 October 1918

This final battle is important for the analytical study of 21st Division as it demonstrates the full extent of tactical evolution and reform since the assault at Bazentin, fifteen months earlier. Not only does it illustrate the complex level of operational planning at this late stage in the war, but also the degree of initiative, flexibility and all-round tactical skill displayed by troops on the ground. The assault was made in three bounds, each in a different direction, pivoting on the second and third jumping-off points that were actually within the territory to be captured during the previous bounds. In addition, the troops attacked independently of flanking forces, often advancing completely isolated, with the only-sporadic assistance of a covering barrage, and primarily in the difficult conditions of a pitch-black night. Put simply, 21st Division's assault on the Beaurevoir Line illustrates the evolution of the BEF by the end of the war, thus presenting a range of analytical material with which to compare and contrast the division's performance at varying stages of the war.

Sources

The attack on the Beaurevoir Line is as little documented as the battle of Miraumont, and for much the same reason: fought during a protracted period of offensive action, in which the division had very recently attacked and would again shortly after, diarists were restricted to the barest of summaries. Similarly, the scarcity of secondary literature pertaining to the capture of the Beaurevoir Line stems from the dearth of primary evidence. Primary sources can be found at the Public Record Office in Kew (hereafter PRO) under the classmark WO 95, which holds the War Diaries. WO 95 / 2134 contains documents relating to 21st Division, including the Operation Order pertaining to this battle, O.O. No. 246, including instructions for artillery, tanks, and machine guns. There appear to be no appendices. This lack of further

information is due primarily to the great pressure to issue Operation Orders with sufficient time for them to be adhered to. The diary also contains a 'Summary of Operations for period Sept. 26th to Oct. 10th 1918' (*sic*), which recounts the events of 8 October according to the receipt of messages and information received from the front line.

Documents from the higher levels of command, V Corps and Third Army, can be found in the classmarks WO 95 / 751 and 374 respectively. The only document of note in Third Army Papers is a 'Summary of Operations' relating to V Corps, an extremely bare account of the battle using incomprehensible map references to demonstrate the capture of objectives, and therefore of frustratingly little use. The documents of V Corps are also surprisingly fruitless. The Operation Order issued to its divisions cannot be found in either diary of V Corps or 21st Division, leading to the question as to whether one was issued at all. The only document of any real use is 'V Corps Narrative of Operations From August 21st to November 11th 1918', which summarises in some detail the attack of its three divisions, but is too broad to give any genuine indication of how the battle was actually fought by the man on the ground. It is the battalion War Diaries that usually add this colour to the distanced narrative of Army, Corps and even Divisional reports.

War Diaries of 62nd Brigade and its subordinate units are to be found in WO 95 / 2154 and 2155. The sister battalions of 1st and 2nd Lincolns (2154) both offer particularly detailed narratives, given the hurried circumstances under which they were written, which could indicate a diligence peculiar to the regiment. Both diaries outline the attack using the times at which objectives were reached, plus listing battalion losses and captures of men and materiel. The 1st battalion diary also describes the three-step attack, whilst the 2nd includes a note about the weather. The final battalion of 62nd Brigade, 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers (2155),

recorded the attack in one abrupt sentence, devoting more space to the losses incurred. However, there is one note in the dairy worthy of mention – the listing on 1 October of the battalion strength, by which one can ascertain the scale of losses at this time and in comparison with earlier battles.

The diaries of 64th Brigade's battalions are similarly brief. That of 15th Durham Light Infantry (2161) is quite detailed, though concise, noting the problem of mines and the difficulty in the capture of objectives. The diary of 9th KOYLI (2156) is likewise very brief and also not as detailed, neither does it list any casualty figures. The diary of 1st East Yorks is useful in that it gives battalion strength before, during and after the battle, which gives some indication as to the scale of the fighting, but its narrative of the actual battle is little more than a series of bald statements of action, consolidation or orders forward.

The diaries of 110th Brigade's battalions are likewise extremely concise. The sister battalions of 6th and 7th Leicesters (2164) are spectacularly useless: the former only uses map references to demonstrate the progress of the battalion, whilst that of the latter summarises the attack in just two bald sentences. The account of 1st Wilts (2164) covers barely three lines, but gives a detailed summary of the battalion's captures and losses.

As has been noted in the source material for the attack on Miraumont, the Hundred Days campaign is shamefully neglected in the Great War literature. Despite the tactical difficulties presented by the three-step attack, the Official History (hereafter *OH*), *Military Operations France and Belgium* 1918, Volume V, compiled by Brigadier Sir James Edmonds (London: HMSO, 1947), only allocated three paragraphs to its narration. Similarly, J.P. Harris' recent study of the last months of the war, *Amiens to the Armistice – The B.E.F. in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey's, 1998), devotes

only one paragraph to the assault of V Corps, and does not even mention the divisions involved. Matthew Richardson's *The Tigers – 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (Service) Battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), devotes just over a page to the battle's narration, but the account is more or less lifted straight from David Kelly's *39 Months with 'The Tigers' - The 110th Infantry Brigade* (London: Benn, 1930). Kelly's account is quite detailed, but focuses more on the tactical plan than the assault itself, simply because he was not involved in the attack. H.R. Cumming's *A Brigadier in France, 1917-1918* (London: Cape, 1922), is the only source that offers much in the way of useful information, concentrating primarily on the different assemblies of troops on the three successive jumping-off points. One final eye-witness account can be found in Captain Wilfred Miles' *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920), which offers a short but detailed narrative account, describing the problem of the château and the casualties incurred in its eventual capture.

Context

After the success of the Allied attacks on the Somme and at Arras in the late summer of 1918, the Germans had been forced to withdraw to their main line of defence, the Hindenburg Line. This apparently impregnable 'trench city', a system with five trench lines each protected by notoriously deep belts of wire, was breached at the end of September astride the St Quentin Canal. "Once the Germans had been driven from the Main Hindenburg System it was increasingly clear that they could hold no position on the Western Front for very long. There were still six weeks of very large-scale and very high-intensity fighting ahead – the bloodiest in history up to this point. But in a rational mind, there could be no doubt that Germany had now lost the war. The German Army continued to fight not for victory but only to avoid the

more extreme forms of humiliation which Germany's enemies might impose upon her.”²¹⁵ With this in mind, Haig ordered a Second Army offensive in his favoured stamping-ground, the Ypres Salient, and Fourth Army continued its advance through the Hindenburg Line to the Beaurevoir Line, the last prepared system of defence a few miles to the east.

The attack on 8 October, titled by the Battles Nomenclature Committee²¹⁶ as the battle of Cambrai 1918, was to be a combined attack by the British Third and Fourth Armies and the French First Army to the south. However, due to the advances made by Fourth Army in early October, it was considerably further east than Byng's Third Army, and had already hammered its way through the Beaurevoir Line. This was an obstacle yet to be faced by Byng's forces, primarily V Corps, which was on the extreme left of Third Army, flanking the Fourth. “In order to avoid exposing Fourth Army to flanking fire Rawlinson and Byng considered it important that Third and Fourth Armies should keep abreast of one another... The result was that Shute's V Corps was to mount a preliminary operation at 01.00 to seize the Beaurevoir Line on its front. The rest of Third Army was to attack at 04.30 and Fourth Army and the First French Army would pitch in at 05.10.”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ J.P Harris with Niall Barr, *Amiens to the Armistice – The B.E.F. in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey's, 1998), p. 228.

²¹⁶ The Battles Nomenclature Committee was appointed in August 1919, as the ‘sole authority for what action fought during the Great War has official recognition, under what name it is known and what are its geographical and chronological limits... it was also the basis on which the regiments laid claim to their battle honours.’ Colonel Terry Cave, in foreword to *The Official Names of The Battles and other engagements fought by The Military Forces of the British Empire during The Great War, 1914-1919, and The Third Afghan War, 1919. Report of the Battles Nomenclature Committee as approved by the Army Council* (East Sussex: The Naval and Military Press, 1992).

²¹⁷ Harris, *Amiens to the Armistice*, p. 238. See also Sir James E. Edmonds, *The Official History of the Great War - Military Operations France and Belgium 1918, Volume V – The Advance to Victory* (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 199-200.

Aims²¹⁸

The primary objective allocated to V Corps was to carry the Beaurevoir Line north-west of Villers Outreaux, with the villages of Walincourt and Malincourt cited as distant objectives. The Corps was to advance to a line running from Villers Outreaux in the south via the Château des Angles to Hurtebise Wood on the northern corps boundary. This position was on the eastern edge of a small plateau overlooking the valley of the Sargrenon stream, where the Corps was to obtain touch with the left of the Fourth Army, which was to attack just after 5 a.m. The advance was to be continued at the same hour as the second bound of the Fourth Army, some four hours later, towards the long spur east of the Sargrenon, upon which lay the villages of Malincourt and Walincourt.

Method

The task of 21st Division within V Corps was simply to advance in line with Corps orders, dealing with any resistance or strong-points during the assault. It was to be made in three stages, in the first instance making good Château des Angles and the high ground immediately to the north of it; in the second the line of the high ground from Haut Farm to Hurtebise Farm, and in the third the village of Walincourt and the high ground to the north.²¹⁹ This was a particularly complicated attack which, as one commentator noted, “illustrated the improvement in tactical method since 1916, comprising an easterly attack... to capture a road and trenches east of Montecouvez Farm, and an attack swinging northwards by the two remaining battalions, who were to form up and start from a line indicated in the area which

²¹⁸ See Maps VII and VIII, pp. 151 and 152.

²¹⁹ V Corps Narrative of Operations, from August 21st to November 11th 1918, The attack on the Beaurevoir Line, Villers Outreaux and Malincourt, PRO, WO 95 / 751.

had first to be taken”²²⁰ during the first advance. This line was south of Ardissart Farm, facing north, with the objective of the Beaufort Line and the high ground immediately east of it as far north as Hurtebise Farm, where junction with 37th Division could be established.²²¹ The final bound again involved a pivot on a point to be captured in the second objective, with 62nd Brigade, detailed for the final objective of Walincourt, swinging round to assault eastwards. Not only did the infantry have to cope with an extremely complex plan of assault, they also had to deal with the actual Beaufort system itself and, en route to the second and final objectives, were to encounter Hurtebise, Walincourt and Angles Woods, as well as flanking fire from Château des Angles on the southern divisional boundary.

Order of Battle²²²

The order of battle for the assault on the Beaufort System differed little from that at Miraumont, some six weeks earlier. On 8 October 1918, 21st Division was still under the command of Lieutenant-General C.D. Shute’s V Corps, on the extreme right of Byng’s Third Army. Again, the division was the left of V Corps’ two divisions. 38th Division, under Major-General T.A. Cubitt, was now on the immediate right of 21st Division, with Major-General H.C. Jackson’s 50th Division of XIII Corps, Fourth Army to its right. On the left of 21st Division was Major-General H. Bruce-Williams’ 37th Division of IV Corps. In total, Third Army to the north and Fourth Army to the south deployed six divisions in three corps and four divisions in two corps respectively.²²³

²²⁰ D.V. Kelly, *39 Months with ‘The Tigers’ - The 110th Infantry Brigade* (London: Benn, 1930), p. 145.

²²¹ Hanway R. Cumming, *A Brigadier in France, 1917-1918* (London: Cape, 1922), p.241.

²²² See Appendices XI and XII pp. 169 and 170.

²²³ *OH 1918, Volume V*, Sketches 15 and 16.

For the preliminary and final attacks 21st Division deployed 110th Brigade on the left and 64th Brigade on the right, with the second bound of the assault entrusted to 62nd Brigade. 110th Brigade deployed the 1st Wilts for the first objective, with 6th and 7th Leicesters detailed for the final objective; whilst 64th Brigade utilised both 9th KOYLI and 15th Durham Light Infantry (DLI) for the first objective, with 1st East Yorks detailed for the follow through.²²⁴

Battalions were formed up on a two-company frontage, for the most part in two separate waves of two platoons. Each platoon had two fighting sections in the front line of each wave, with Lewis Gun sections in the second. The inner rear companies were deployed for mopping-up purposes, while the outer ones (on the brigade boundaries) were to protect the flanks. This was particularly pertinent for those battalions on the divisional boundaries.²²⁵

Resources

For the preliminary assault, V Corps supported its two divisions with eight brigades of field artillery and four of garrison artillery.²²⁶ In addition, there were ten batteries of 6” howitzers, two batteries of 8” howitzers, six batteries of 6” guns and two 9.2” railway guns.²²⁷ There is no mention in any of the literature as to how these guns were to be deployed, although for the sake of this study it must be assumed that these guns were divided equally between the two

²²⁴ Battalion reports can be found at the PRO, WO 95 / 2154-6, 2161, 2164. Most unit reports show that the assaulting battalions went in on a two-company frontage, but there is little evidence to either confirm or refute this: the *OH* gives the assault practically no coverage, barely two paragraphs (p. 202).

²²⁵ See narrative of 2nd Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2154. The reference to “fighting sections” is ambiguous, as it is taken directly from the narrative. One can only assume that they were rifle sections.

²²⁶ V Corps Narrative of Operations. The *OH* gives different figures, citing four brigades of field and two of garrison artillery for the 38th Division, and only three field and two garrison for the 21st Division. In the latter case, these were the 17th Division artillery and one brigade from the 21st, under Brigadier-General H.W. Newcombe, and the XVII and XXXIV Brigades RGA (see *OH* 1918, Volume V, pp. 201-2 f). A 21st Division order for the assault states that five field artillery brigades were to be used (PRO, WO 95 / 2134). It must be assumed, therefore, that there was some unforeseen problem with 21st Division’s other brigade of field artillery which prevented its deployment in the fighting.

²²⁷ V Corps Narrative of Operations.

divisions, allowing 42 field guns and 63 heavies and howitzers per division. Allowing for the very approximate attack frontage of 1700 yards,²²⁸ this gives an average of one gun per 16 yards.

Given the mobile state of infantry warfare at the time, it must be assumed that the element of surprise was not as necessary as had been previously, and therefore a preliminary bombardment may have been fired.²²⁹ The need for a barrage was as important as ever, as was counter-battery work, and it is for these purposes that the arsenal must have been used, although in what proportions is unknown. Against a fortified trench system such as the Beaurevoir Line, the task of wire-cutting must also have fallen to the artillery, although the only reference to this is that there was “a great deal of wire, and this had not been adequately gapped by the artillery”.²³⁰ Finally, Brigadier-General Newcombe, BGRA 21st Division, also instructed the divisional artillery that “the village of Walincourt and the high ground will be kept under smoke from 0800 hours till the approach of the 62nd Infantry Brigade necessitates lifting”.²³¹

21st Division also utilised its machine gun companies; using three in the barrage on the second objective, one to support the advance of 62nd Brigade with direct fire from the overlooking ridge, and allotting one company to each infantry brigade for consolidating the

²²⁸ Taken from *OH 1918, Volume V*, Sketch 16.

²²⁹ Narrative of the 2nd Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, notes that the barrage for the 64th Brigade opened at 11 p.m. on the 7th, while the 1st Wilts War Diary simply notes that the battalion attacked after a ‘heavy barrage’. See PRO, WO 95 / 2154 and 2164.

²³⁰ Harris, *Amiens to the Armistice*, p. 238. However, this was in reference to the entire V Corps front. The wire is only mentioned in one battalion report, that of the 1st Wilts, 110th Brigade, which notes that “ ‘A’ Company was held up by the wire... the other Companies found good gaps” (1st Wilts War Diary, Appendix No. 1 – Operation 7 – 8 October 1918, PRO, WO 95 / 2164.) However, Brigadier-General Cumming, commanding 110th Brigade, noted in his book that the wire was “thick and practically undamaged”; from these three conflicting reports one can only assume that the artillery’s success in cutting the wire was scattered.

²³¹ 21st Division Order No. 246, PRO, WO 95 / 2134.

objectives when gained.²³² There is no mention of these companies in the battalion War Diaries, except for that of the ever-useful 2nd Lincolns, which simply notes that one section attached to the battalion was moved up to protect the left flank in the consolidation of the second objective. This battalion also notes the attachment of a battery of light trench mortars and two field guns for sniping purposes, which “were used to great advantage at a critical period”.²³³

In addition to the artillery, both 21st and 38th Divisions were allotted six Mark 5* tanks, all from 11th Tank Battalion. However, none of these was to be used in the initial assault, it having been deemed too dark for the drivers to see adequately from inside. Instead, two were to be used after daylight to clear up the area around Château des Angles, and the others not until the second part of the attack at 5.15 a.m., when the first objective was to be extended northwards to Hurtebise Farm.²³⁴ Once these objectives had been taken the tanks were to advance with 62nd Brigade, clearing up pockets of the enemy during the advance to the third objective.²³⁵

Terrain

The terrain over which 21st Division was to advance was between the enemy’s main defensive line and its support system - the Hindenburg and Beaurevoir Lines. This land, therefore, had clearly not been fought over since 1914, and would not bear the same scars of war seen on the

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Narrative of 2nd Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2154.

²³⁴ *OH 1918, Volume V*, p. 202.

²³⁵ 21st Division Order No. 246. These tanks were intended to give particular assistance to 1st Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, which was advancing without a barrage. The War Diary gives no explanation for this, leading to the assumption that the artillery could not be limbered-up and brought forward to cover the advance. In the event, only one tank was functioning properly, and this broke down later in the assault. See Narrative of 1st Lincolns, PRO, WO 95 / 2154.

original Somme battlefield over which the division had advanced some weeks earlier. David Kelly of 6th Leicesters, 110th Brigade, gave evidence of this when describing the house to which battalion headquarters moved on the evening of 7 October, Gratte Panche Farm: “it was complete with roof and windows, the first tangible proof that we were entering the promised land beyond all the devastated areas.”²³⁶

It must be assumed that the German retreat and the Allied advance, which was accompanied by a severe bombardment campaign, had pocked the ground with shell holes and signs of battle, but the general state of the land was fairly level. The plateau overlooking the Sargrenon stream, by its very name, suggests that it was a level area, and although most of the objectives were on ‘high ground’, it must be noted that the valley produced by the stream was a very shallow incline.²³⁷ Similarly, the British gave specific orders for Whippets to be used in the battle, although not in this sector, which is clear evidence that the ground was suitable for the deployment of these small, swift-moving tanks.²³⁸

Enemy

The trench system along the Beaulieu Line had been adapted from defensive trenches used by the Germans during the Somme campaign of 1916. Given that the Hindenburg Line, between two and three miles to the west, had been the main, and allegedly impenetrable, system of defence, the Beaulieu Line was not as fortified or as meticulously crafted as the main line. In addition, neither position was actually a ‘Line’, in that they consisted of multiple

²³⁶ Kelly, *39 Months with ‘The Tigers’*, p. 146.

²³⁷ There are good photographs of the Beaulieu Line in the recent ‘Battleground Europe’ series, although the land remains little documented. See Jack Horsfall and Nigel Cave, *Battleground Europe: Hindenburg Line. Cambrai – The Right Hook* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999).

²³⁸ Whippets were generally reserved for exploitation echelons, thus adding weight to the idea that a breakthrough was deemed possible for this attack. See Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front – The British Army’s Art of Attack 1916-18* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 162-66.

lines of trenches: the Beaurevoir system had two, with concrete emplacements every two or three hundred yards and with machine-gun nests scattered in depth behind it.²³⁹ The DLI's historian noted that the system was "well wired and strong in concrete machine-gun emplacements and shelters, [and] held in great strength by the Germans who also occupied Montecouvez Farm and other advanced positions".²⁴⁰ However, it must be noted that until a battle for the position seemed imminent - only once the Hindenburg Line had been breached – the system was inadequately fortified and had incomplete wiring.²⁴¹

The enemy personnel defending this position are extremely difficult to ascertain. The *OH* makes no reference to individual units, and the Sketches only state the Allied formations. It must be assumed that the troops and guns that defended the position on 8 October were those in retreat from the assaults on the Hindenburg Line, although if the Germans were in plain retreat one must assume that V Corps was still in pursuit of the remnants of General Otto von Below's Seventeenth Army.²⁴² It is possible that the Germans were in such a state of confusion after the fall of the Hindenburg Line that the units were so mixed up as to be unidentifiable. This is borne out by the one of the two references made to the enemy by the *OH*: "The German regimental histories present a doleful account of the 8th October: the infantry absolutely 'played out' with the battalions down to an average of 150 of all ranks. The Bavarian official account writes: 'The troops were completely used up and burnt to cinders... Cohesion had only been maintained in some formations by severe measures.'"²⁴³

²³⁹ *OH 1918, Volume V*, p. 158.

²⁴⁰ Captain Wilfred Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918, The Service Battalions of the D.L.I.* (London: Cassell, 1920), p. 326.

²⁴¹ *OH 1918, Volume V*, p. 96.

²⁴² See above, Chapter 3, pp. 110-1.

²⁴³ *OH 1918, Volume V*, pp. 210-11.

The other reference to a German unit notes that in an operation undertaken by 110th Brigade, a German battalion was cut off and completely destroyed. This was *II/105th Regiment, 30th Division*.²⁴⁴

Results

The attacking troops began the march to assembly positions at 10 p.m. on 7 October. It was an exceptionally dark night,²⁴⁵ and some heavy rain had fallen during the evening. David Kelly also remarked on the pitch-dark night, and remembered “marvelling at the manner in which the Wiltshires found their way to their starting point and were formed up ready to attack by 1 a.m.”,²⁴⁶ but the assembly of brigades was nevertheless carried out successfully.

The barrage opened at the infantry zero hour of 1 a.m., and 9th KOYLI and 15th DLI of 64th Brigade, with 1st Wilts of 110th Brigade on the right moved forward in artillery formation towards the Beaurevoir Line. The narrative of V Corps states that “the attack of the 21st Division on the left progressed very rapidly in spite of the wire in front of the Beaurevoir Line and the fire of many machine guns in the trench line itself”.²⁴⁷ The KOYLI noted that the enemy put down a heavy counter-barrage throughout the entire British assault, but this passed harmlessly over the attacking troops, causing more anxiety to the battalion headquarters.²⁴⁸ This is indicative of the disorganised state of the German defenders – neither their counter-battery work nor their protective barrages seemed at all effective. The Beaurevoir system itself was taken fairly swiftly, although a strong machine-gun post on the front of the DLI

²⁴⁴ *OH 1918, Volume V*, p. 202.

²⁴⁵ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 241.

²⁴⁶ Kelly, *39 Months with 'The Tigers'*, p. 146.

²⁴⁷ V Corps Narrative of Operations.

²⁴⁸ Narrative of 9th KOYLI, 64th Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2156.

initially held up the advance, but this was eventually rushed and captured. The battalions then pushed on to Château des Angles, which was strongly and tenaciously held by machine-gun posts, and the fighting continued with varying units until midday.²⁴⁹ The diary of the DLI notes that about a hundred prisoners were captured from the château, after a very stiff fight, but its clearance was prevented by pockets of enemy resistance holding out in the wood to the west of the château.²⁵⁰

Others lurked in the woods around the building and there were no British troops on the flanks of this party of Durhams, who now numbered no more than thirty. The officers judged it prudent to withdraw to a convenient sunken road where reinforcements eventually reached them. At 6 a.m., after another struggle, the château was occupied again, but the grounds were mined and repeated explosions compelled a second retirement. Later in the morning came the final capture of the building which was then held as the right of the line occupied by the battalion.²⁵¹

This was the last action of the DLI for this offensive, as 1st East Yorks passed through the battalion and into position for the second objective. On the front of 110th Brigade, 6th and 7th Leicesters moved into position on the right, on the line of a communication trench south of Ardissart Farm. This was no easy operation in the pitch-black night, particularly as the communication trench in question was barely a foot deep and therefore extremely difficult to find.²⁵² Nowhere in the literature is there a description of this second phase of the attack, with all three battalion diaries stating simply that the objective was taken with the capture, all told, of nearly six hundred prisoners, four field guns and many machine-guns. Only David Kelly makes any note of the actual assault and, though his view was from behind the lines, given the absence of any other description his is worthy of note:

²⁴⁹ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 241.

²⁵⁰ Narrative of 15th Durham Light Infantry, 64th Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2161.

²⁵¹ Miles, *The Durham Forces in the Field 1914-1918*, p. 321.

²⁵² Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 242.

About 4.30 a.m. I was ordered to go forward and see the 6th and 7th Leicesters forming up in the area just taken by the Wiltshires and in the slang of the period 'jumping off'. As their zero hour was to be 5 a.m. there was no time to be lost. The German batteries must have been well behind the line, for they were now very active, and as I entered Montecouvez Farm – in reality a small village – falling shells and a shower of bombs from a low-flying aeroplane combined to produce a terrifying uproar. Houses were crashing and bricks flying in every direction, always a specially unpleasant sound in the darkness, and I ran hard through the village and on along a road which brought me to the positions just taken by the Wiltshires. From the spot where the trenches they had captured crossed this road, there was another road running north to the assembly positions of the other two battalions, and following this, visiting the Company commanders on the way, I found the attacking waves of the two battalions already moving forward towards Ardissart Farm. Day dawned, enabling me to watch their progress, and having carried out my instructions I started to return by the same road, which proved difficult as it was being swept by enemy machine-guns which were still holding out in Angle Château and harassing the whole area. I found the Wilts Battalion headquarters sitting under heavy shell-fire in the road just north of Montecouvez Farm, a road which had appeared from the map to be sunken, but turned out to have a low bank on one side only. I was back at headquarters by 7 a.m., with a good appetite and a report that the complicated operation had been crowned with complete success.²⁵³

By 7.30 a.m. the ridge from Haut Farm to Hurtebise Farm had been taken and 62nd Brigade, detailed for the final objective - Walincourt and the high ground to the north – passed through its sister brigades for the attack at 8.45 a.m.. This advance was supposed to be in conjunction with that of 114th Brigade, 38th Division, on the right, but the failure of the leading battalions of this division to take the first objectives had forced Major-General Cubitt to postpone the advance of 114th Brigade until 11.30 a.m.²⁵⁴ Brigadier-General Gater, commanding 62nd Brigade, was unaware of these developments, and his troops moved for the attack with both flanks in the air. The brigade lined up with all three battalions in the front line, with 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers in the centre between 1st and 2nd Lincolns on the

²⁵³ Kelly, *39 Months with 'The Tigers'*, pp. 146-7.

²⁵⁴ For an account of this division's actions see *OH 1918, Volume V*, pp. 201-3; Lieutenant-Colonel J.E. Munby, *A History of the 38th Division* (London: Rees, 1920); Major-General H.D. De Pree, *The 38th (Welsh) Division in the last five weeks of the Great War* (Reprinted from the Royal Artillery Journal, LVIII 1933), pp. 332, 448; Captain J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew, 1914-1919; A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium* (London: Abacus, 1998), pp. 550-6.

left and right respectively. The assault was delivered under a barrage and with the assistance of six tanks, although the diary of 1st Lincolns notes that the battalion was attacking *without* a barrage and with four of these six tanks.²⁵⁵

The assault made little progress during the morning, immediately being raked by enemy guns. 1st Lincolns came under heavy machine-gun fire whilst in the assembly positions from high ground immediately west of the Beaurevoir Line, and the attack was halted until 110th Brigade had completed the consolidation process and cleared the line of the enemy. Similar resistance was encountered from Hurtebise Farm and the copse of the same name, but a forward section of field artillery, plus a light trench mortar and a captured German field gun were turned onto the enemy who eventually surrendered.²⁵⁶ On the right of the assault, 2nd Lincolns had been held up by machine-gun fire coming from the flank, due primarily to 38th Division not attacking at the original zero hour. The two tanks allotted to the battalion pushed on to the quarries and removed the enemy, although not before a large number of casualties had been incurred.²⁵⁷

It seems pertinent here to outline the assault of the Fusiliers in the centre of 62nd Brigade's attack, if for nothing else to demonstrate the scarcity of documentation for this battle. The War Diary simply states: "Weather fine. The battalion attacked Walincourt at 6 a.m. and gained objective at 6 p.m.", along with a list of casualties.²⁵⁸ One can only ponder as to what happened during those 12 hours.

²⁵⁵ Narrative of 1st Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2154.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Narrative of 2nd Lincolns, 62nd Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2154.

²⁵⁸ Narrative of 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, 62nd Brigade, PRO, WO 95 / 2155.

At 2.30 p.m. 62nd Brigade resumed its advance and reached a line of trenches east of Walincourt and Briseux Woods, but was halted here due to machine-gun fire, particularly on 1st Lincolns' front, from Guillemin Farm and the Walincourt – Esne Road. 2nd Lincolns on the right had advanced a little further, having already sent out patrols to reconnoitre the attack frontage and, acting on the findings, the battalion was able to advance to and occupy the sunken road west of Walincourt. During the assault a platoon from B Company, which had extended southwards to protect the right flank, captured two German field guns.²⁵⁹ This completed the capture of the Beurevoir Line on the entire divisional frontage, and although the left of the assault was unable to make any ground east of the Sargrenon River, the troops of V Corps had taken the villages of Villers Outreaux and Malincourt, and Angle, Walincourt and Hurtebise Woods, with an average advance of five thousand yards.²⁶⁰ Brigadier-General Cumming of 110th Brigade remarked that it was:

a most successful day, although an arduous combination of hard fighting with a long advance. On going over the ground next day it was astounding to see the depth and thickness of the wire, practically undamaged, through which the troops had forced a passage. Moreover the intense darkness made the feat all the more marvellous.²⁶¹

David Kelly noted that “the complicated operation had been crowned with complete success, and we eventually learned that four field-guns, sixty-seven machine-guns, six trench-mortars and 624 prisoners had fallen to the Brigade”.²⁶² Third Army War Diary noted 873 prisoners coming through the Corps cages,²⁶³ which would suggest that either there was a numerical

²⁵⁹ Narrative of 2nd Lincolns.

²⁶⁰ V Corps Narrative of Operations.

²⁶¹ Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 243.

²⁶² Kelly, *39 Months with 'The Tigers'*, p. 147. See also Cumming, *A Brigadier in France*, p. 242.

²⁶³ Third Army War Diary, 8 October 1918, PRO, WO 95 / 374. See also V Corps Narrative of Operations.

superiority of enemy troops on the front of 21st Division, or that 38th Division to the left were lax in their taking of prisoners. It must be remembered that its initial advance had not been as successful as that of 21st Division, so the capture of prisoners may not have been considered as important as the capture of objectives, although this in itself virtually guarantees the taking of personnel. However, there are other possibilities; the enemy here may have been quicker to retreat or that there may have been more enemy dead on this divisional frontage than were captured.²⁶⁴

Casualties

The casualties sustained for this remarkable success are as difficult to ascertain as much of the division's actions. 9th KOYLI, true to form, does not list its losses; neither, unusually, does 6th Leicesters,²⁶⁵ whilst 1st East Yorks only cited figures for the capture of the first objective. 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, despite noting more on the weather than the advance, gave casualty figures totalling 138, including twenty-seven killed, which indicates a far more contested assault than the narrative would suggest. Both Lincolnshire battalions and 1st Wilts give figures just under a hundred, with 7th Leicesters a similar figure of 104; suggesting that this was a fairly standard loss for the assault. Only 15th DLI seem to have suffered unduly, although this must be attributed to the long tussle for Château des Angles rather than the

²⁶⁴ One source suggests that this was unlikely, that the Germans were more than eager to give themselves up to the British: 'The [twenty] prisoners were so docile that only one man was sent to HQ with them as escort... On the way down he fell into a shell-hole, accidentally bayoneting his leg, and was half-carried the rest of the way by his charges.' Lieutenant H. Turner, quoted in Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 554.

²⁶⁵ This is surprising, although the entire action for the day is noted thus: "0515 Battn attacked BEAUVOIS (sic) LINE. Captured all objectives including 430 prisoners and 4 Field Guns. All Coys. in front line. Bn. H.Q. in BEAUVOIS front line." PRO, WO 95 / 2164.

initial assault.²⁶⁶ The only comparison to be found in the literature is with 63rd Division, far to the north of Third Army's attack near Cambrai, which sustained 703 casualties.²⁶⁷

Conclusions

The final assault on the Bearevoir Line is unquestionably the most successful in this study, thereby implying an extensive degree of tactical evolution by the end of the war. The assault was by far the most tactically innovative – made in three bounds, with the second and third jumping-off points in territory that had yet to be captured, and facing in different directions. Furthermore, the division attacked independently of flanking forces, often advancing completely isolated, with little assistance from the nominal covering barrage. The infantry met with surprisingly ferocious German resistance for this late stage in the war: enemy outposts held up attacks during each of the three bounds, and the garrison of the château clung tenaciously to its position throughout the day, causing many casualties. Similarly dogged resistance was met on the high ground west of the Bearevoir Line and from outposts in the many woods and copses on the divisional front. Finally, the attack was undertaken primarily

²⁶⁶ Battalion reports can be found at the PRO, WO 95 / 2154-6, 2161, 2164. Casualty figures, as taken from the War Diaries, are as follows:

		<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other ranks</i>			Total
		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
Battn.	Strength							
1/Lincs		2	4	-	11	54	13	84
2/Lincs		-	3	-	14	70	9	96
NFs	26; 805	3	1	-	24	88	22	138
E. Yorks	17; 383	Probably none (no refs.)			at least 3 kia and 28 wia			31
9/KOYLI		none listed*			5*	unknown		5
15/DLI		-	5	-	24	140	49	218
1/Wilts	34; 855	2	3	-	11	78	2	96
6/Leics		unknown			19*	unknown		19
7/Leics		-	1	-	26	76	1	104
Total		7	17	-	137	534	96	791

* Figures taken from the CD-Rom, Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-19. Those figures calculated from these cannot be considered definitive.

²⁶⁷ *OH 1918, Volume V*, p. 210.

in the difficult conditions of a pitch-black night, and the heavy rain of the previous evening onto the baked ground of summer had lead to extremely slippery conditions. The average advance was over 5,000 yards, with the least favourable ratio of 16 yards per gun, and sustaining the fewest casualties whilst capturing significant prizes in terms of German prisoners and materiel. Troops in this assault demonstrated the most initiative, turning a captured field gun on its fleeing teams, and utilising a forward section of field artillery, plus a light trench mortar for the same purpose.

The performance of 21st Division in rushing and capturing the Beaurevoir Line displayed great dexterity and skill. Not only was the assault plan hugely complex, illustrating the improvement and evolution in tactical method since 1916, but its execution was also incredibly skilful, with troops on the ground using initiative and improvisation to ensure success in this difficult assault. This final assault on the Beaurevoir Line demonstrates not only the evolution of tactical thought and planning by the end of the war, but also that of tactical execution – the fact that the British High Command were planning offensives that were hugely evolved from their 1916 counterparts, and that the British infantry were capable of carrying them out with a huge degree of success. In short, this final battle demonstrates the tactical evolution of the BEF by the end of the war.

CONCLUSION

This case study demonstrates the tactical evolution of 21st Division during the war. Not only were the assaults of 1918 more complex and intricate in design than their earlier counterparts, but they were also executed with far more precision, dexterity, and flexibility. The later assaults captured more in terms of ground and objectives, with significantly less artillery support, and suffered considerably fewer casualties.

Yet in terms of comparative data, these four battle studies have yielded few results that were actually comparable. The methods of assessment outlined in the Introduction – the comparison of variables such as the weather, the terrain, the enemy factor, and various artillery statistics²⁶⁸ – actually produced little in the way of statistics with which to compare the battles. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, the lack of primary source material, particularly for the two battles in 1918, meant that some performance indicators could not be completed for all four battles; and secondly, because the battles were so very different it proved almost impossible to compare them. For example, the only battle for which there is any mention of the weather is, unsurprisingly, that at Broodseinde, where the rain was coming down in torrents. It can reasonably be assumed that the night attack on Miraumont was probably cold, damp and misty, but there is nothing to confirm or deny this, and there is little indication beyond ‘fair’ as to the weather during either of the other two battles. Similarly, all four battlefields were so different in terrain that it is fruitless to try and compare them. The infamous mud of the Ypres Salient probably produced the most difficult terrain over which to advance, but it is impossible to judge whether the marshy tangle of fallen trees, reeds and wire

²⁶⁸ See Introduction, pp. 29-37.

over the Ancre at Miraumont was more or less surmountable than the maze of trenches and shell holes at Bazentin or the fortified trench system of the Beaurevoir Line.

It is equally difficult to compare the enemy factor for each battle. In terms of personnel, it is possible to state which troops were facing 21st Division, but without lengthy and exhaustive research into the strength, morale and skill of these forces, it is difficult to state much about these units other than their title.²⁶⁹ Similarly, the defence method employed by these units was more or less dictated by the differing conditions of the land, and though it is possible to compare the German entrenchments on the Somme, the improvised pill boxes and shell-hole-trenches in Flanders, and the multi-trench system of the Beaurevoir Line, it is difficult to state which defence method was the hardest to penetrate. It could be argued that as 21st Division was successful both at Bazentin and on the Beaurevoir Line but not at Broodseinde, that the former emplacements were more easily taken than those at Flanders, but it has already been shown that the division's relative failure at Broodseinde was primarily due to other factors, so again it is very difficult to draw conclusions from this collection of statistics.

The only set of comparative data that yielded particularly useful figures involved the attack frontage and objective distance, which amounted to the ground captured, and the comparison of this together with the artillery data: the number of yards per gun proved the most useful barometer. Other factors concerning the artillery, including any preliminary bombardment, the method of the barrage, the inclusion of smoke or gas within the barrage,

²⁶⁹ This research would also entail resurrecting my rusty GCSE German skills, and it is doubtful whether they would be up to the task. This type of research is probably better suited to a German-speaking historian, although from a British perspective.

and the use or otherwise of machine-gun or trench mortar barrages, were so irregularly recorded that it proved impossible to compare even two battles using the same criteria.

Finally, the choice of brigade and battalion for the assault, which promised so much in providing evidence of the learning curve, offers frustratingly little in terms of comparative statistics. Although 64th Brigade appears to have been utilised most frequently – deployed in the final three assaults - it must not be forgotten that this study only incorporates four battles from 28 for the division listed by the Battles Nomenclature Committee.²⁷⁰ The use of this brigade rather than the other two in just over 10 per cent of battles throughout the war does not prove any preference on the part of divisional headquarters. Similarly, there are no clues in the source material about why any particular unit was utilised for a specific attack, and the notes in the War Diaries of units attending training schools and exercises do not list those sections that took part. Also, it must not be forgotten that personnel attending these exercises may well not have been involved in the next attacks, either through their becoming a casualty, their not being in the line during an assault, or simply the deployment of another unit.

One further problem that contributed to the inconclusive data is the lack of divisional reports in the primary sources. Despite thorough and exhaustive investigation of 21st Division War Diaries, they contain very few documents either relating specifically to the division itself, or reports that cannot be found in the superior or subordinate unit diaries. Reports from Army and Corps level give clear evidence about how the assaults were planned and how they were to be supported; brigade and battalion level reports indicate how the assault actually unfolded. However, there is very little indication why certain decisions were made at divisional level,

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 4, p. 124. See also A.F. Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions* (British Official History, 6 vols; London: HMSO, 1937-45) vol. 3, pp. 108-9.

particularly why certain units were chosen for an assault, and without knowledge like this the conclusions of a divisional study cannot be stated with conviction.

The data, therefore, is of little use in determining the extent of the tactical evolution of 21st Division throughout the war. Nevertheless, the enormous improvement in the division's performance by October 1918 seems indisputable evidence of the learning curve that historians argue took place within the BEF by the end of the war. However, it does not indicate a smooth learning curve. From a firm footing at Bazentin in 1916, the performance of 21st Division dipped dramatically at Broodseinde in 1917, and rose to equally striking success in the final battles in 1918. However, there are explanations for this erratic learning curve: the division's relatively dismal performance at Broodseinde was arguably due to the immense difficulties experienced in reaching the assembly point and the problems peculiar to the Ypres Salient. Similarly, the huge advances made in the autumn of 1918 can be attributed to the shift from static trench warfare to a more fluid battlefield, which allowed the troops more mobility. The question whether this was the sole reason for these enormous gains, or whether they can be attributed in the main to hugely evolved tactics, technologies and fighting methods, is perhaps an avenue for future research.

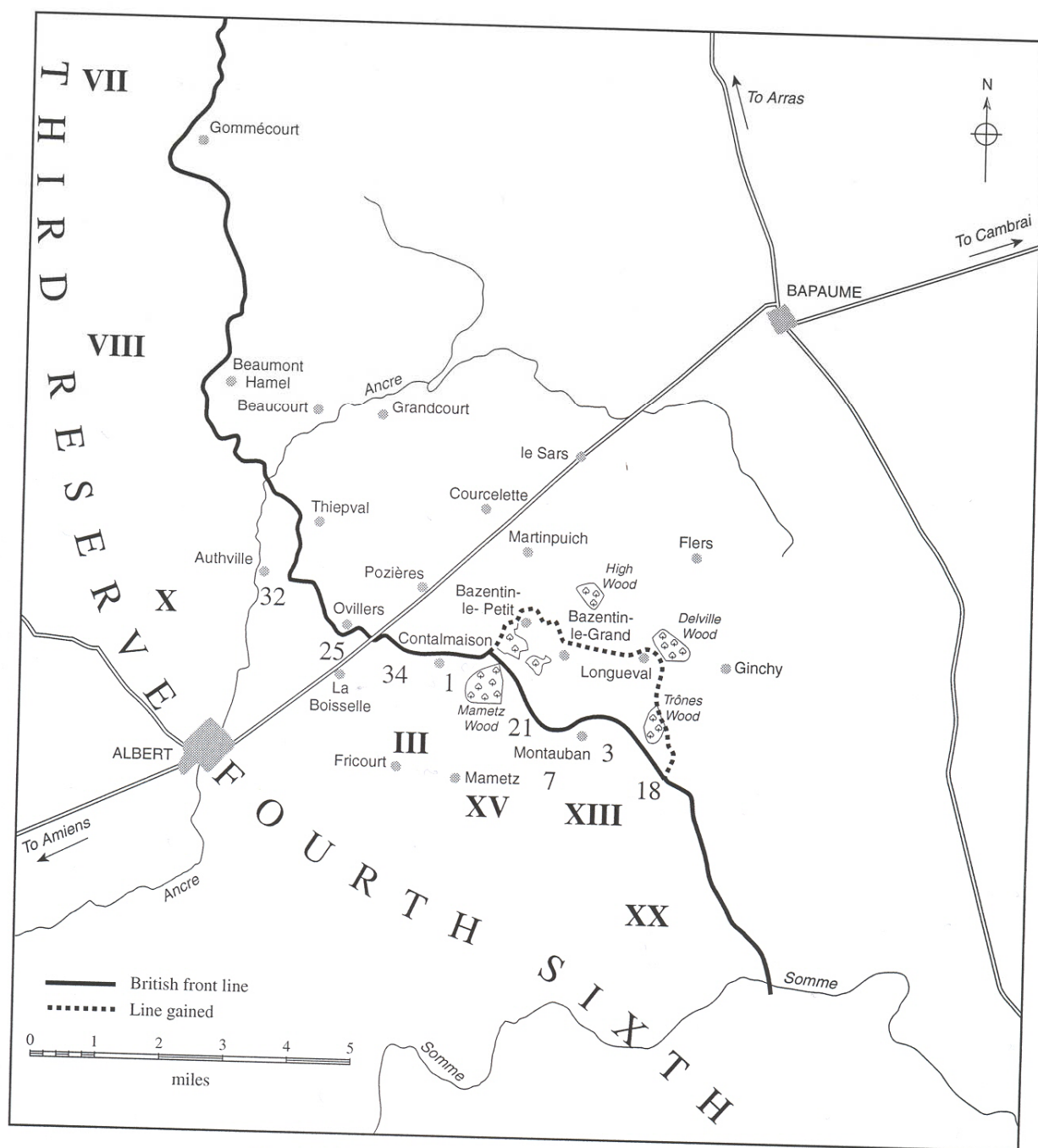
Another necessary field of research is that concerning the Third Ypres campaign and its impact on the learning curve. The set-piece battles of Plumer's Passchendaele campaign could indicate one of two things: either a mere blip in the learning curve; or a return to the old-style battles, in order to deal with German defensive tactics in this difficult sector, rather than continuing the burgeoning initiatives of the time. If Passchendaele was merely a 'blip', then it was a lengthy one: the Third Ypres campaign officially lasted from 31 July to 12 November 1917, a total of 114 days, although Plumer's handling of the offensive lasted

53 days from 20 September. Far more research needs to be undertaken into the other campaigns of 1917 – Arras, Cambrai, and the actions on the Hindenburg Line – in order to determine whether these battles were more tactically innovative than those of 1916, thus indicating the learning curve.

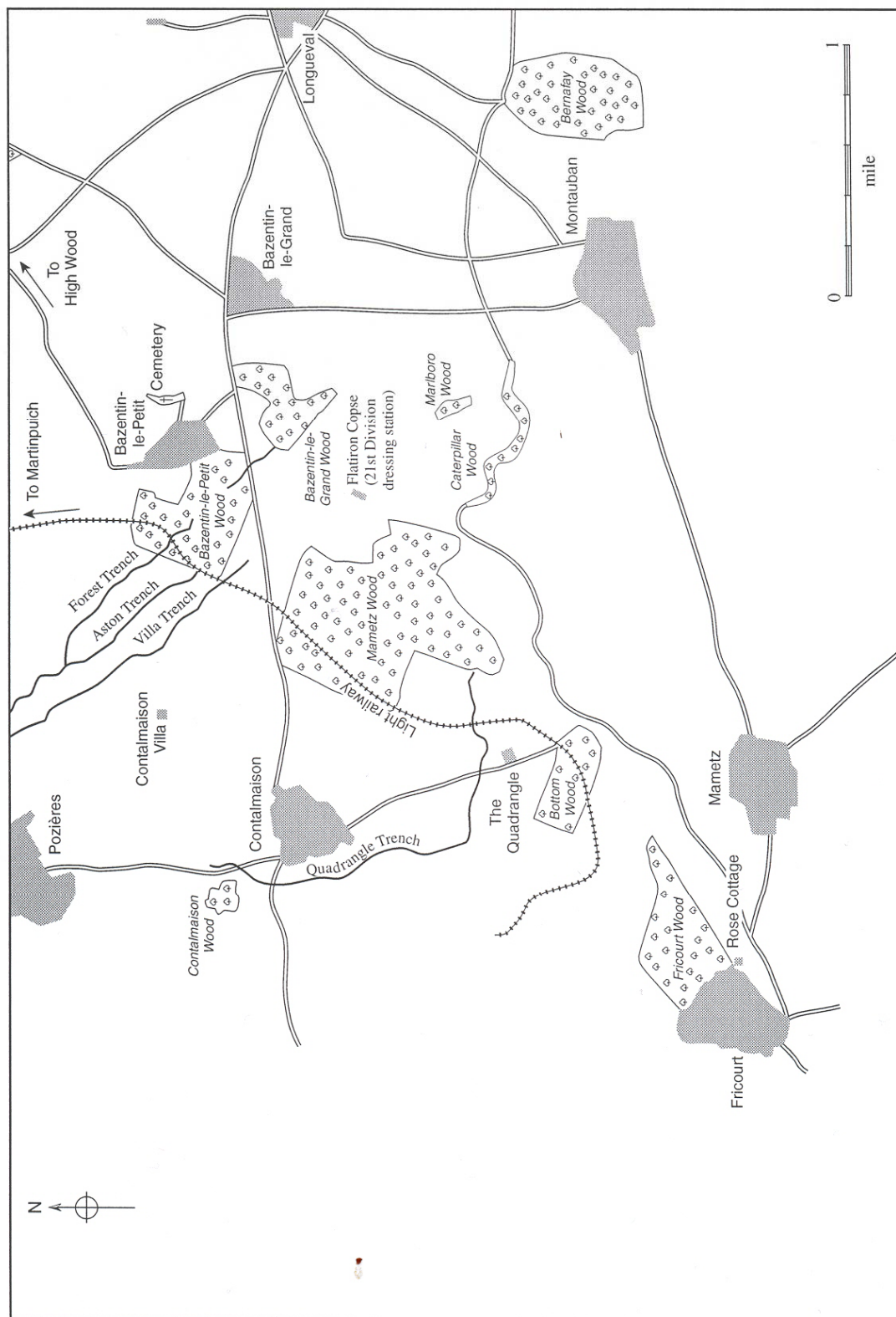
Similarly, it must not be assumed that this study of 21st Division is unequivocal evidence of a learning curve experienced throughout the entire BEF. It should be seen as merely indicative of tactical evolution throughout this division during the war. Whilst 21st Division can be described as fairly standard and typical of the British Army, far more research needs to be undertaken before the assertion of widespread tactical evolution throughout the BEF can be proved. The divisional studies currently underway²⁷¹ will constitute a further step towards proving the existence of the learning curve, but it is the SHLM project, or another like it, that will provide the most evidence through which to determine the overall performance of the BEF throughout the war. Comparisons need to be drawn between Regular, Kitchener and Territorial divisions, and their relative performances should be assessed, possibly in much the same way as in this study. This approach is probably best suited to a Doctoral thesis,²⁷² but any future comparison between the three types of forces will be a necessary and valuable contribution to our emerging understanding of the British Army's learning curve in the Great War.

²⁷¹ See Introduction, pp. 7-8.

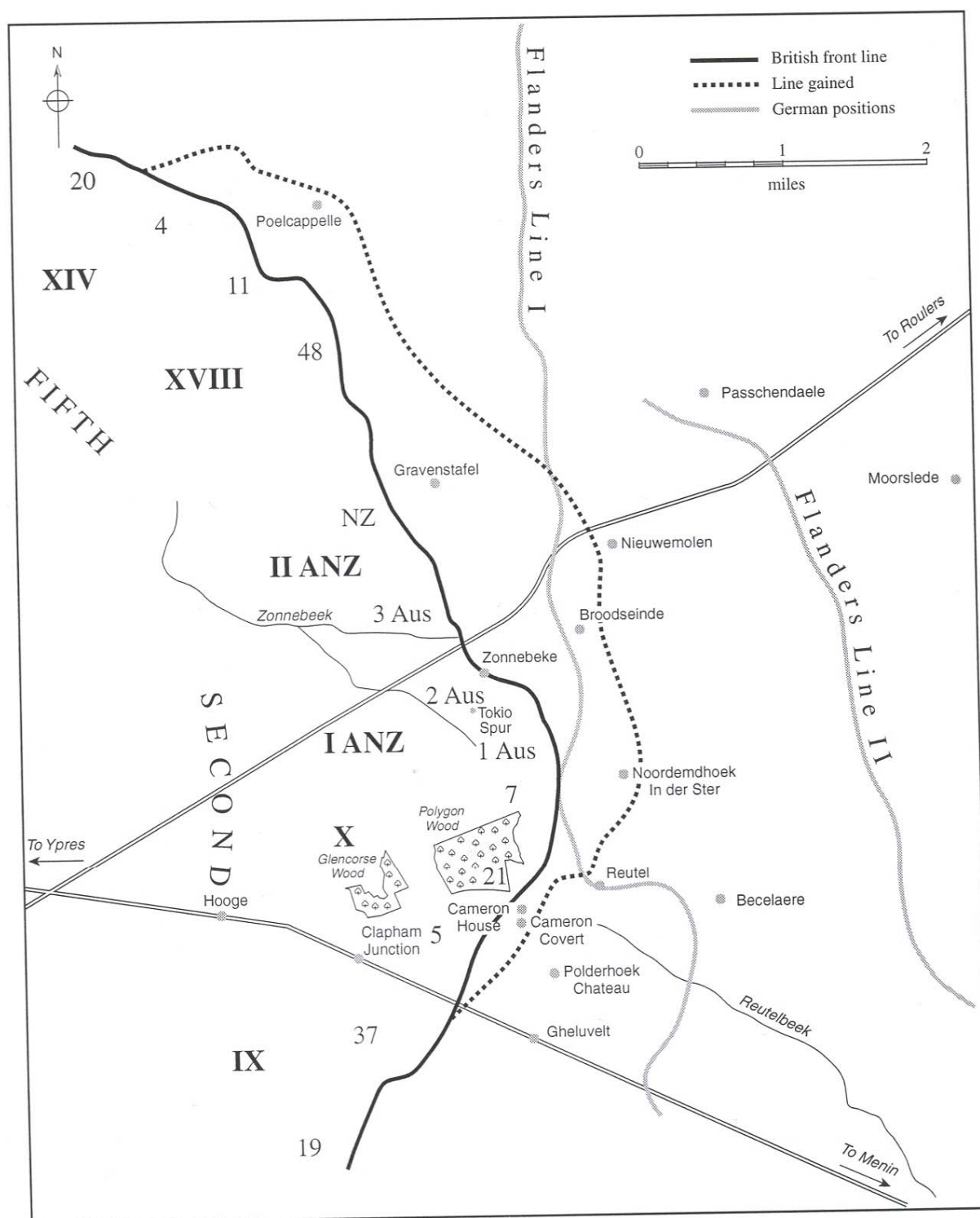
²⁷² Unfortunately, the furtherance of this study into a PhD thesis was prevented by a lack of funds.



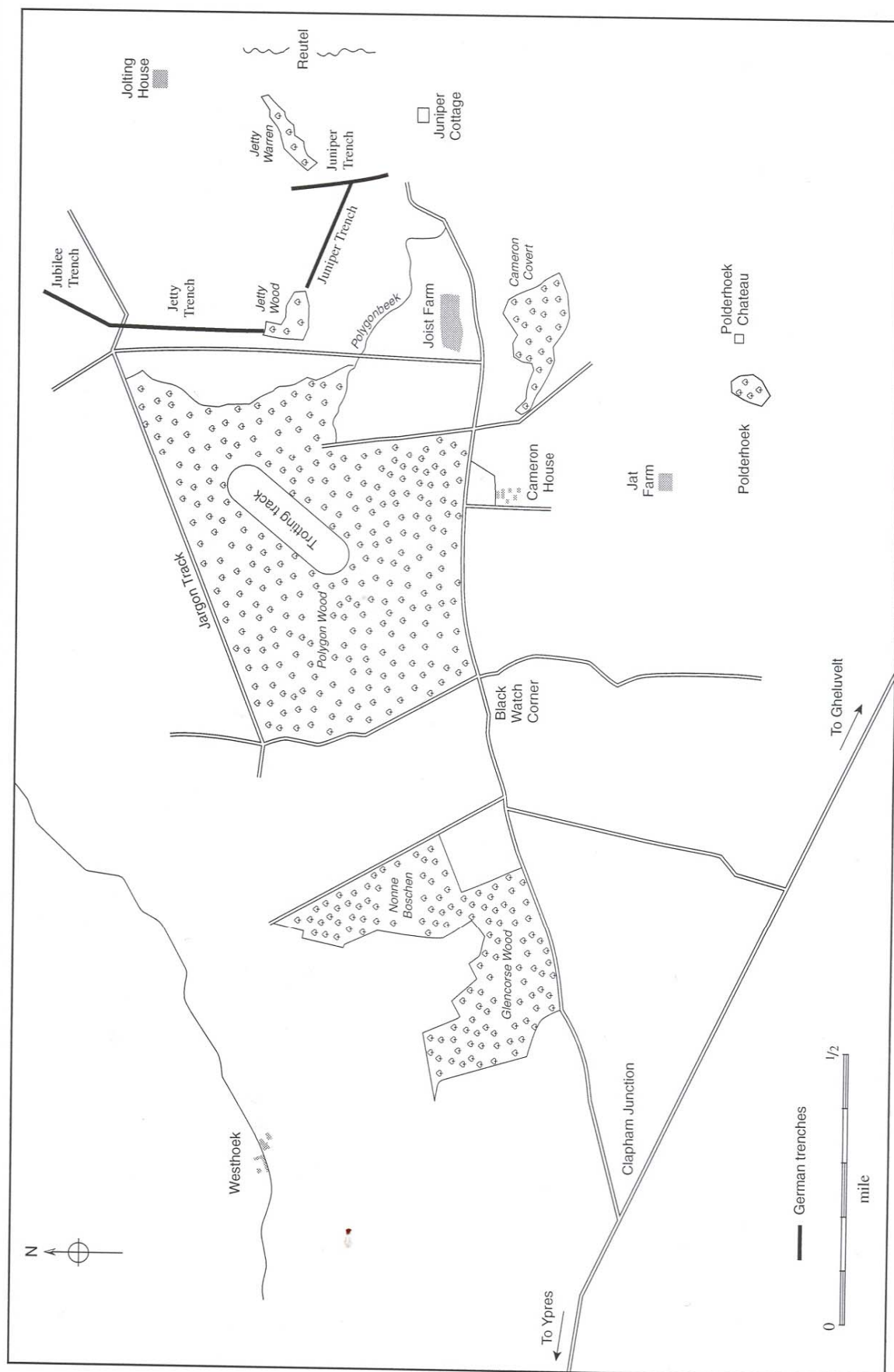
Map I. Bazentin-le-Petit - General British Attack.



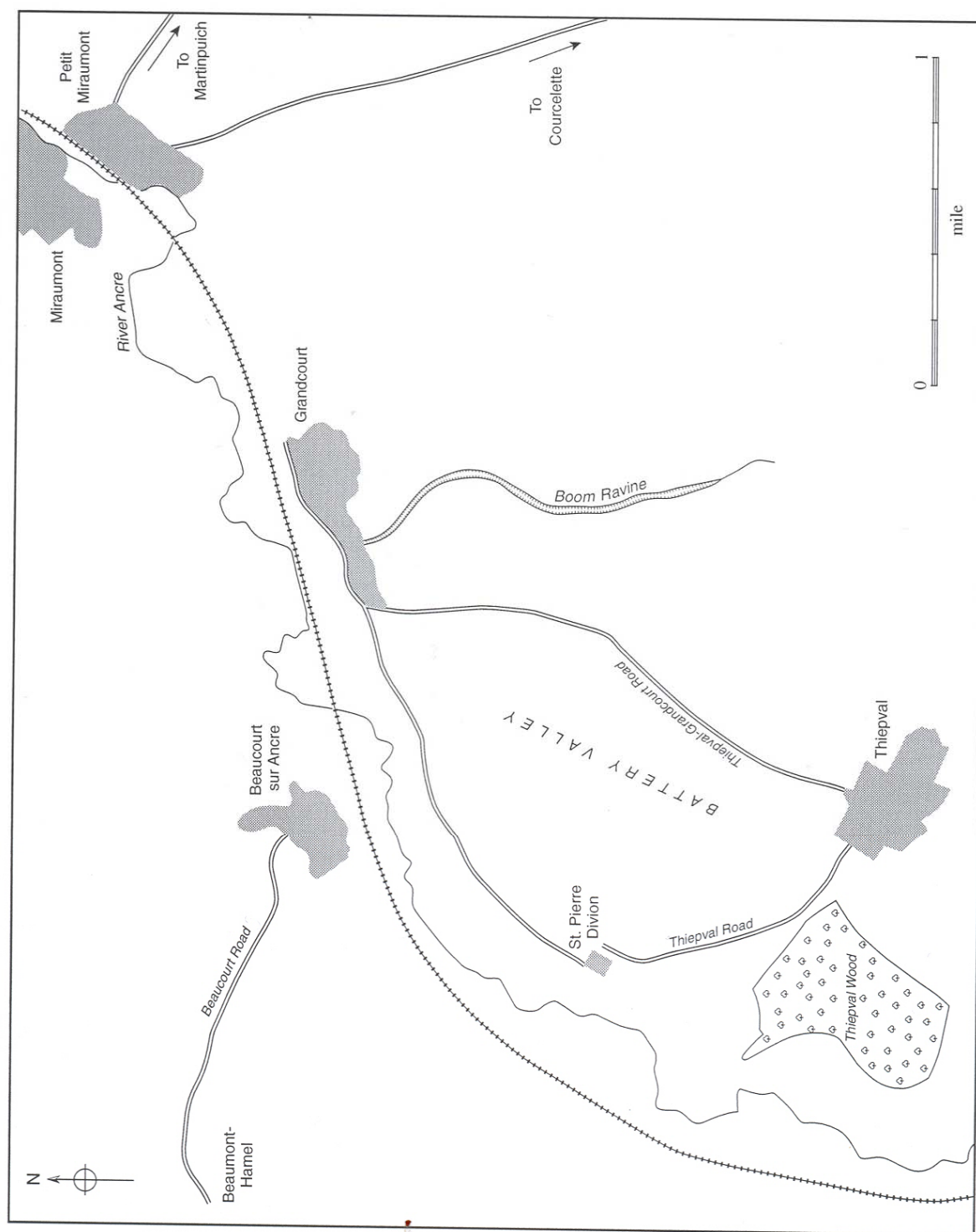
Map II. Bazentin-le-Petit - Divisional Area of Attack.



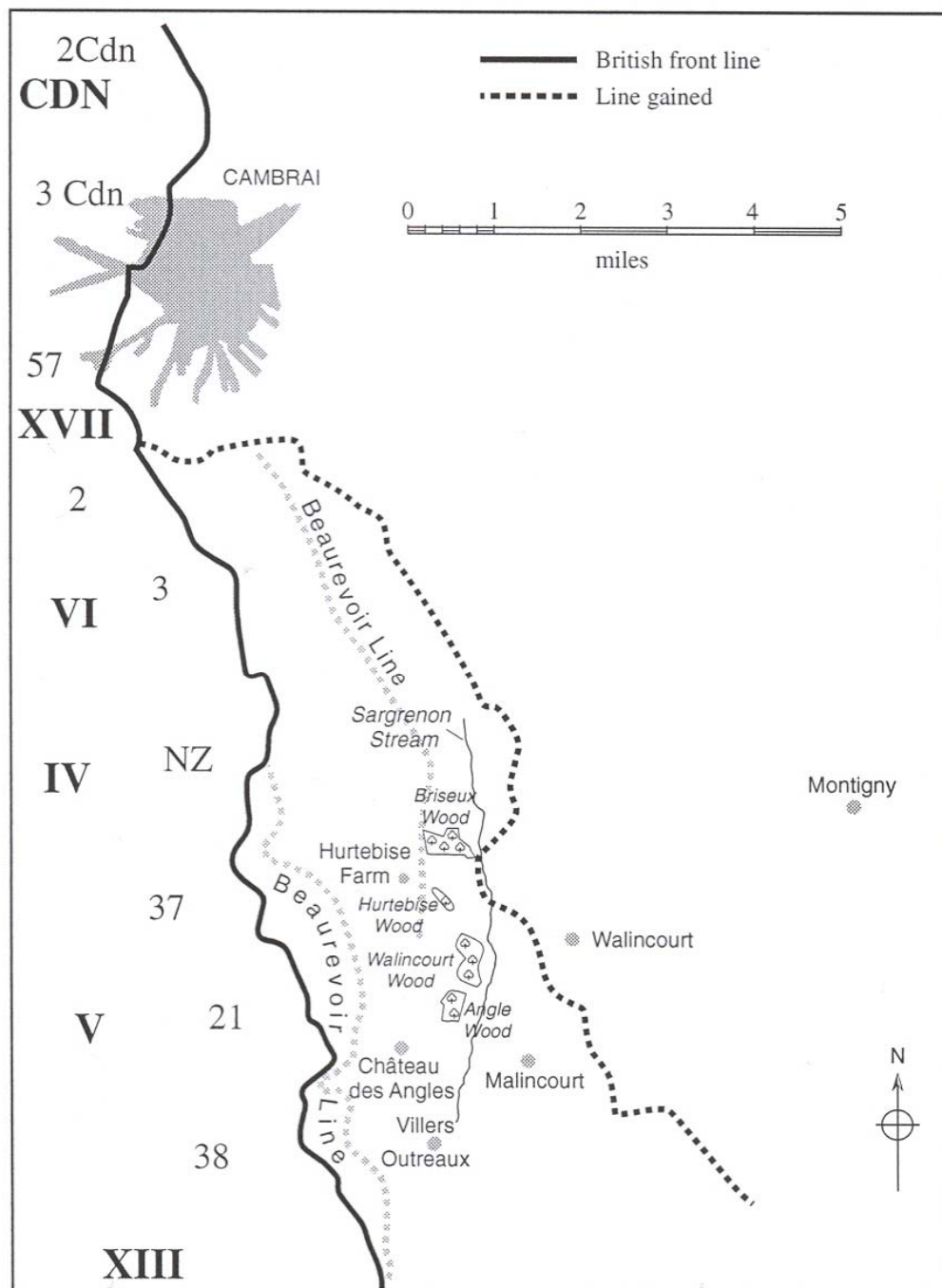
Map III. Broodseinde - General British Attack.



Map IV. Broodseinde - Divisional Area of Attack.



Map VI. Miraumont - Divisional Area of Attack.



Map VII. The Beaurevoir Line - General British Attack.



Map VIII. The Beaurevoir Line - Divisional Area of Attack.

APPENDIX I

PLANS FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

Before entering on the second stage of the operations, the Corps Commander desires to draw attention to certain lessons of the recent fighting. Most of these lessons were learnt during the offensive operations last year by those who took part in them. They have, however, been much emphasised during the last ten days.

1. The artillery must clear the way for the infantry by a smashing bombardment. Provided the bombardment is long enough (the time varying according to the objective to be attacked) and intense enough, the hostile defences will be practically destroyed, and the defenders who still remain will be so dazed and stupefied by the violence of the bombardment as to be incapable of offering a really vigorous resistance. But this state only lasts a short time. Unless the infantry at once take advantage of the situation prepared by the artillery, the opportunity is gone. Then a re-bombardment becomes necessary, and a fresh attack has to be organised. Every time that the bombardment has to be repeated much ammunition is expended which, in other circumstances, would have been available for preparing a fresh advance, and a large proportion of the available 'energy' of the troops in the front line is expended in vain. The movements of the infantry must therefore be regulated according to the artillery fire, and not vice versa.

For this reason the attack must be regulated by a time table. The duration of the bombardments, the hours at which they will lift, and the successive lines on which the front of each successive barrage or bombardment will be placed, must all be laid down beforehand.

The infantry must conform absolutely to the time table of the various lifts. They must be prepared to seize each successive line of area immediately on the barrage lifting, and before the enemy therein has been able to recover.

To do this the infantry must advance as close to the barrage as possible before it lifts. It is better to risk a few casualties from an occasional short round from our own artillery than to suffer the many casualties which occur when the bombardment is not at once followed up.

The time table of barrages is drawn up in consultation with the Divisions concerned, and after close attention has been given to the following considerations:-

- (a) All enemy defences and points likely to be held must be thoroughly bombarded, i.e. made 'ripe' for the assault before the artillery fire lifts and infantry assault.

- (b) As each line or area is captured the infantry must have sufficient time to 'mop up', reorganise, if necessary pass fresh troops through, and advance close up to the next barrage ready to assault before that barrage lifts.
- (c) The various bombardments must not be protracted to such an extent as to delay progress when the infantry are ready to go forward, and also in order to prevent unnecessary expenditure of ammunition.

To follow the bombardment and barrages closely:-

- (a) All ranks must understand the method on which the advance is to be carried out.
- (b) Every single officer and man must have his particular objective and duty allotted to him.
- (c) All ranks must know the lines of the various barrages and the clock hours at which each barrage will lift.

Where possible, (usually in the case of a big attack like that on the German second line of which fairly long notice can be given), sketch maps will be issued to the extent required by divisions. Corps will also endeavour to send to divisions sufficient copies of sketch maps with the lines of barrages and their time of lift marked on them for issue on a scale of at least one copy to each Battalion. Battalions must arrange to let regimental officers copy this.

As long as the previously arranged time table is adhered to, the enemy can be pounded thoroughly well. Our difficulties always start when the time table has to be departed from.

The alteration may occur from two reasons:-

- (a) The infantry having progressed quicker in some portion of the line than was anticipated, and being anxious to continue the advance before the hour at which the barrage has been timed to lift.
- (b) Any part of the line being held up.

With regard to (a), no deviation from the time table laid down should be made for this reason – once the line of the barrage is lifted to allow a portion of the infantry to go through, it is impossible to warn the troops of the change of plan and of what is happening. The barrage cannot again be established because it is not known how far the leading troops may have advanced. Consequently the infantry is deprived of close artillery support.

The infantry must wait for the barrage to lift.

With regard to (b), this unfortunately cannot be avoided. If possible a fresh time table should be issued. If time does not permit of this, the only thing that can be done is to warn the infantry that if they are held up they must wait for the re-bombardment and be prepared to follow it up the moment the fire lifts, on each of the successive stages.

2. Bombing and attack over the open. It must be realised by all ranks that the rifle and the bayonet is the main infantry weapon. Now that the first network of trenches has been crossed, the use of the bomb becomes of a minor degree of importance. Bombs are useful for close fighting when a trench has been rushed or to clear up small lengths of trench. No great progress, however, will ever be made by bombing. The moment an attack comes down to the bombing stage it may be taken for granted that the operation has become sedentary and that no further real progress can be expected.

It must be impressed on subordinate commanders that attacks, if they are to progress at all must be made over the open. Similarly it is impossible to provide a series of trenches for forming up preparatory to an attack. But provided the attack is organised with a heavy preliminary bombardment and barrages on the systems explained in para. 1, the troops can form up under such cover as the ground affords and can advance across the open. Until the enemy in front of us is found to be inconsiderably greater strength than he is at present, attacks under cover of the heavy artillery fire we can develop will always succeed if pushed with vigour and determination.

3. Counter-battery work. To enable the infantry to form up and advance over the open, it is necessary that they do not come under a really heavy hostile artillery barrage. To prevent this barrage we must maintain the artillery supremacy we now possess. This has been done by the activity of our counter batteries, and the lesson to be drawn is the great importance of this very active counter-battery work.
4. Patrols. Constant trench fighting appears in some cases to have induced officers to think that patrols can only be sent out at night.

Directly the fighting becomes more open as has been the case from July 3rd onward, great use should be made of patrols by day and night.

When circumstances permit, the hour at which patrols are being sent out and the points to which they are being directed, should be notified beforehand to Divisional Headquarters so that the artillery fire may be regulated accordingly.

Patrolling must not, however, be neglected because the artillery have not been so warned.

5. Co-operation with aeroplanes. The use of flares for showing the position of our troops and use of ground sheets for showing Brigade and Battalion Headquarters has proved very useful. Both these points should be developed to the full. Some battalions and brigades are still backward about putting out their ground sheets. It will nearly always be possible to put the sheets out where they will not be visible to the enemy.

The Corps Commander considers that if Battalion Commanders realised what an easy means for communicating their position the ground sheet is, and what facilities the signalling patrol affords for sending back messages via the contact aeroplane, they would make more use of these methods.

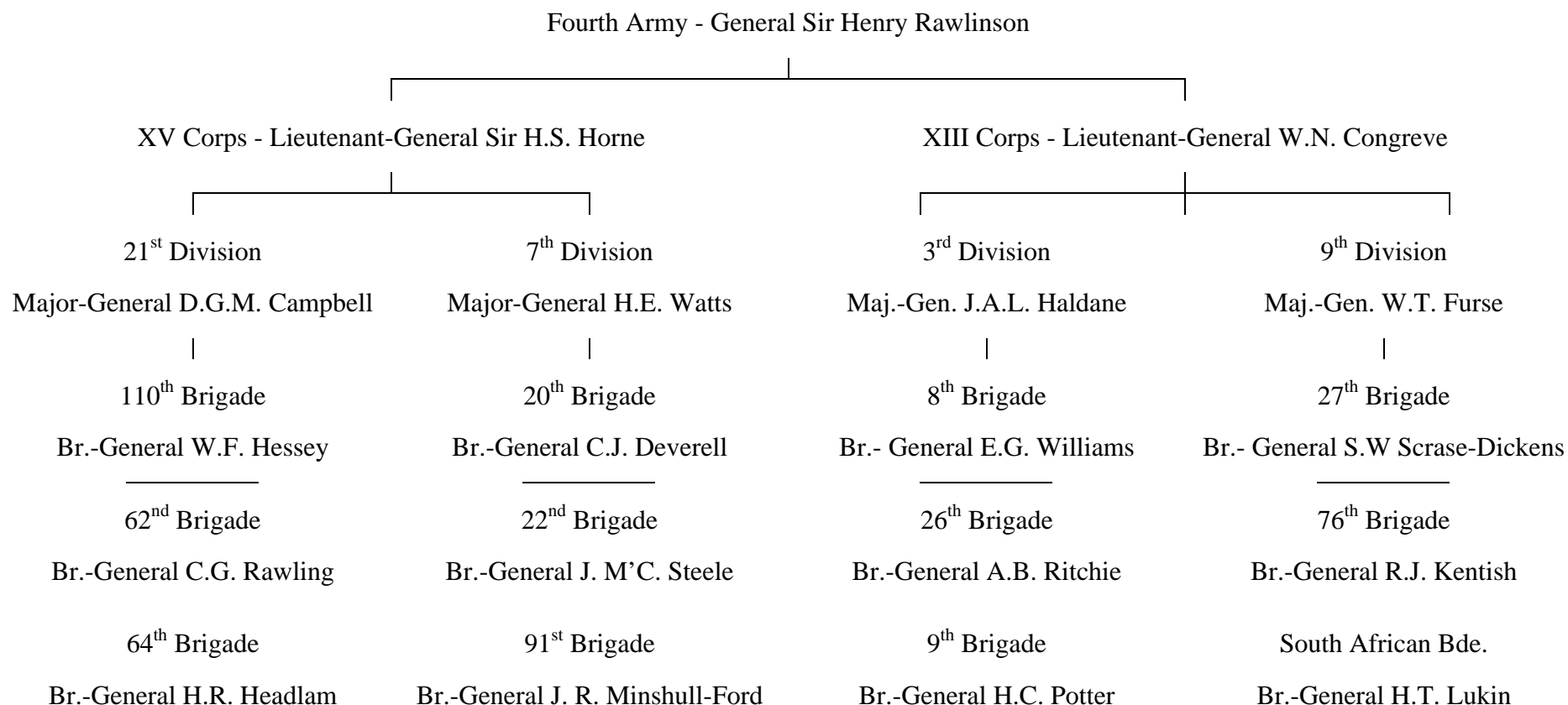
6. 'Mopping up'. When attacking trenches the importance of clearing all enemy forces from trenches captured must not be overlooked. Cases have occurred where the attacking troops have passed over the German trenches only to discover later that points in their rear were still held by groups of the enemy who probably emerged from dugouts which had not been dealt with. With each attacking party, an adequate number of men must be detailed for 'mopping up' and for the safety of these in front must be made responsible that the work is done thoroughly.

Brigadier-General,
General Staff.

H.Q. XV Corps,
11-7-1916.

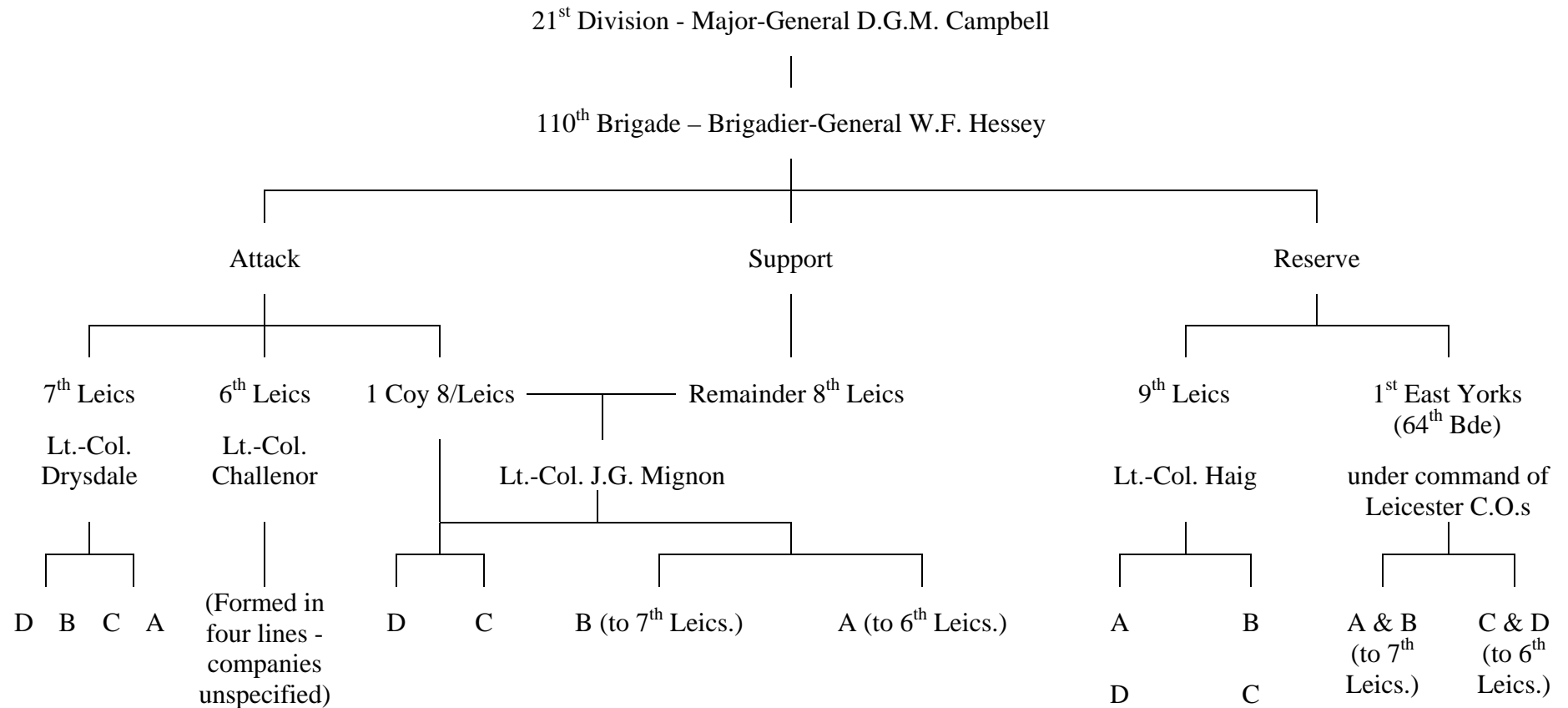
APPENDIX II

ORDER OF BATTLE – BAZENTIN-LE-PETIT: GENERAL BRITISH ATTACK



APPENDIX III

ORDER OF BATTLE – BAZENTIN-LE-PETIT: DIVISIONAL ATTACK



APPENDIX IV

CSM STAFFORD'S LETTER TO THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN WARD

'D' Company 8th Leicestershire Regiment
Captain F. Ward.

21.8.16

Sir,

Mr Goodliffe has today shown me parts of a letter you have written to him. He suggested that I should write to you and give you as many details of the Battle as I possibly can. First of all, Sir, I remember you lying there wounded with a man holding you up. You were shouting to the Company to go on, and I took up the cry also. They who were not hit 'carried on', but how anyone reached the German trench I don not know. I am pleased to say, sir, what remained of the Company got into the right Trench. One party about a dozen lost their direction a little and were making for the Bazentin Wood, they, however, were redirected and recovered the proper direction.

We did not catch it from our front but from the left flank. The enemy seemed to have collected on the left of that communication trench and treated us severely with liquid fire, bombs and their devilish machine-guns. When we eventually reached their lines most of 'em retired to the left (our left, their right). I sent as many men as I could spare to clear that trench which they did remarkably well. We had no trouble from that quarter the whole of the 4 days we were in. Their dugouts were packed and no man escaped from them whilst we were in. They were all well bombed and the only retaliation they made in the trench from a dugout was one bomb which did not reach the top of the Steps, but made myself and L/Sgt Hills A.E. jump. We had no more trouble from that Quarter.

'D' Company took one prisoner which we had to as he had both legs broken and was absolutely helpless. We blocked the junction of their fire trench and the communication trench in no time and every man set to work and we soon had some fire steps made and the trench deepened. On the right of the Company the enemy attempted to force their way into the trench luckily after we had had a breather and it was there that the Colonel was killed. We had a job to keep up with them in bombs, but we had all the bombs collected from the casualties in front and the German bombs came in handy too. L/Cpl Mason fought well in this defensive action but was unfortunately killed. We were shelled fairly heavily too, on occasions and suffered a few more casualties. We were in the trenches 4 days and every man breathed a sigh of relief when we marched through Mametz Wood for the last time.

The Company suffered heavily, Sir, 4 Officers (2 killed, Messrs Greenaway and Bowells) 2 wounded, you and Lt. Ewen, and 310 other ranks. There were no Sergts killed, Sgt. Kirk was very badly wounded but is in England now. Sgts. Buxton, Croker, Hills were wounded badly before we reached our objective. Sgt. Reed of the Lewis Gunners was killed on the last day in the trench. L/Sgt. Hills was wounded by shrapnel a day or two after the attack. Cpl Rayson, L/Cpls Rogers, Wheeler, Morley G., Holyoak, Mason, E., Dunn, West, Chesham and Clarke were all killed, Sir.

Unfortunately, Sir, the boys had no opportunity of showing the ability with the Bayonet. The Bayonet work was done in Bazentin Wood which we missed. L/Cpl Clarke, A.A., showed great pluck, Sir, I believe he was the first man over, but was killed by a rifle bullet. Our Lewis Gunners suffered heavily, Sir, only about 3 or 4 getting through. In one sense, Sir, the Company was lucky to have had one left.

Personally, Sir, I was extremely lucky, bullets pierced my clothing and equipment in six places and a bomb dropped at my feet but I jumped out of the way and caught a tiny bit in the cheek, the force knocked me over though.

I think, Sir, you have every reason to be a proud man (I hope you will pardon me saying so). Only well trained and well disciplined troops could have faced the Hell we faced. It was *your* training, Sir, and I'm a proud man to have served under such an Officer. The 'Boys' did wonderfully well, Sir, and I'm proud to be Com Sgt Major over the 'Remnants'. We have *always* prided ourselves on being the BEST Company in the Battalion and I think Bazentin-le-Petit proved it.

My ambition is, Sir, to bring the Company up to its old efficiency. It is our Duty in remembrance of our late C.O. and you, Sir, who made the Company what it was.

I hope, Sir, you will soon be in good fettle again, I hope your wounds will heal quickly and with as little pain as possible. I'm not going to wish you a Speedy Return to the Front, Sir, as I should be wishing you no good. With every wish for a speedy recovery from *everyone* in 'D' Company. I know the boys would want me to include their good wishes.

I remain, Sir,

Your sincere Sergeant,

Ben. W. Stafford

Coy. Sgt. Major

'D' Company.

APPENDIX V

BRIEF PLAN OF OPERATIONS

4th October, 1917

1. At 6 a.m. on October 4th, 1917, the X Corps is to attack in conjunction with the IX Corps on the right and the I Anzac Corps on the left.
2. The attack is to be preceded by intense Counter Battery work, bombardment and isolating fire. Practice barrages are to be put down on X Corps front at 9.30 a.m. and 8.15 p.m. on 1st October, 5.45 a.m. and 2.30 p.m. on 2nd October and 6 a.m. and 3 p.m. on 3rd October.
3. The X Corps is to attack with three Divisions :-
5th Division on the right; H.Q. BURGOMASTERS FARM, DICKEBUSCH.
21st Division in the centre; H.Q. SCOTTISH WOOD.
7th Division on the left; H.Q. SECARD CHATEAU.
The 23rd and 33rd Divisions in Reserve in the BERTHEN and BLARINGHEM areas respectively.
4. The position of assembly of the attacking troops, objectives, boundaries between Divisions and Brigades are shown on the attached map.
5. The 5th Division is to attack with the 13th Infantry Brigade on the right, 95th Infantry Brigade on the left and 15th Infantry Brigade in reserve.
The 21st Division is to attack with the 64th Infantry Brigade on the right, the 62nd Infantry Brigade on the left and the 110th Infantry Brigade in reserve.
The 7th Division is to attack with the 91st Infantry Brigade on the right, the 20th Infantry Brigade on the left and the 22nd Infantry Brigade in reserve.
The Infantry advance is to be preceded by a creeping barrage. This barrage is to consist of all natures and is to be 1,000 yards in depth. The 18pdrs are to fire on a line nearest to the assaulting Infantry, then 4.5" Howitzers, then machine guns, then 6" Howitzers and lastly 8" and 9.2" Howitzers.
6. The attack is to be made in stages as under :-

<u>1st Stage</u>	7 th and 21 st Divisions advance from original front line to RED line.
<u>2nd Stage</u>	7 th and 21 st Division advance from RED line to BLUE line.
<u>1st and final Stage</u>	5 th Division advances from original front line to BLUE line.
7. At Zero Hour the barrage is to open and will fall 150 yards beyond the Infantry Jumping-off line.
At Zero pus 3' the barrage is to move forward for 200 yards and 100^x in 4 minutes.

The barrage is then to slow down to 100 yards in 6' and to halt as a protective barrage 200 yards in front of the 1st Objective.

A pause of about 1 hour, 40 minutes is to be made on the first objective (RED line). From the RED line to the final objective the barrage is move at the rate of 100 yards in 8 minutes until it reaches the line of the protective barrage, where it will halt.

In order to simulate an advance on GHELUVELT the barrage of the 5th Division is to creep forward at the same time as the barrage of the 7th and 21st Divisions are to move from the RED line to the BLUE line.

8. The assaulting Infantry are to advance preceded by the barrage mentioned in para. 7 and will pause on the RED line for 1 hour and 40 minutes.

The lines when taken are to be consolidated.

Whilst consolidation is proceeding on the BLUE line the barrage is to roll forwards for a distance of about 1,000 yards at intervals.

The attack is to be carried out in depth on the leap-frog principle, battalions being detailed for definite objectives, and passing through one another to their objectives.

9. ARTILLERY ACTION

A stated in paras. 5,7 and 8 above, in addition known strong points and M.G. emplacements are to receive special attention. During the attack intense neutralising fire is to be directed on hostile batteries. See also paras. 10 and 11 below. The rate of fire of the 18-pdr guns is to be increased to 4 rounds per gun per minute for the 4 minutes immediately preceding the lift off the RED protective barrage line.

10. GAS

It is intended to use gas shell for the purpose of neutralising hostile batteries. 4.5" Howitzers and 60-pdrs are to use chemical shell for ordinary neutralisation from 2nd October onwards. The 60-pdr Counter-batteries are to neutralise hostile batteries with gas from Zero hour onwards.

11. SMOKE

During the barrage in support of the attack as a signal to the Infantry that the barrage has reached its halting place each 18-pdr of barrage 'A' (i.e. barrage nearest the assaulting Infantry) on arriving on the RED line protective barrage and again on the BLUE line protective barrage will fire 4 rounds of smoke shell.

If the wind is from S.W. to N.W. the 5th Division is to place a smoke screen on GHELUVELT, and the 7th and 21st Divisions on BECELAERE with 4.5" Howitzers.

12. TANKS

12 Tanks will be available and are allotted to Divisions :-

21st Division are to use four tanks to work round the South of POLYGONE (*sic*) WOOD and move forward with the Infantry from the RED line to the BLUE line.

The 7th Division are to have four tanks. They intend to keep them in reserve near STIRLING CASTLE and to use them after the attack, should they be required for clearing up and enemy strong point that may be holding out.

The 5th Division do not intend to use Tanks as the ground over which they are to attack is not suitable for their employment.

13. R.F.C.

Contact Patrol Aeroplanes are to be in the air from Zero till Zero plus 4 hours. They are fitted with wireless but will only use it for the purpose of reporting a Counter attack or transmitting an Infantry Signal message calling for a barrage.

They are to call for flares by firing a white light or sounding a Klaxon Horn. The leading Infantry are to light flares approximately at the following times :-

On the RED line at Zero plus 1 hour 5'.

On the BLUE line at Zero plus 3 hours 30'.

In addition to the Contact Patrol Aeroplanes a Counter attack machine fitted with wireless is to be up throughout the day.

In the event of a counter attack developing these machines will call on the artillery by Zone Call.

The message dropping ground is to be in the neighbourhood of RENINGHELST.

Four messages are to be dropped at a time in each message bag, one for the Corps and one for each Division.

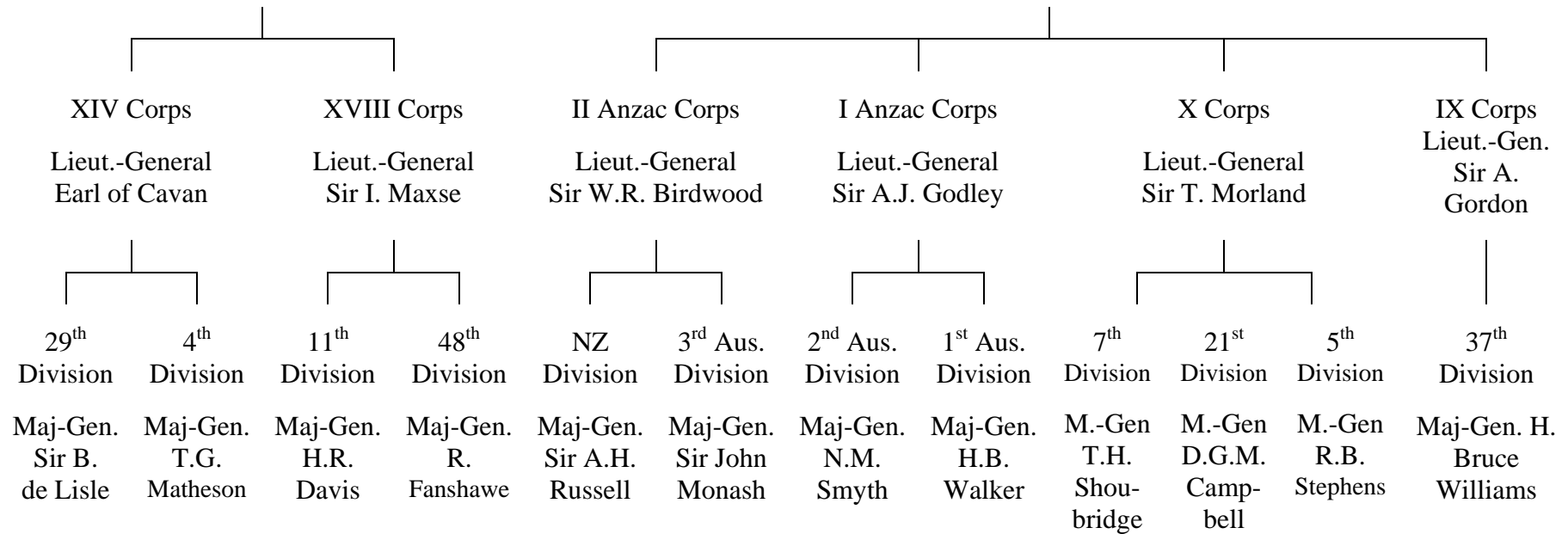
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APPENDIX VI

ORDER OF BATTLE – BROODSEINDE: GENERAL BRITISH ATTACK

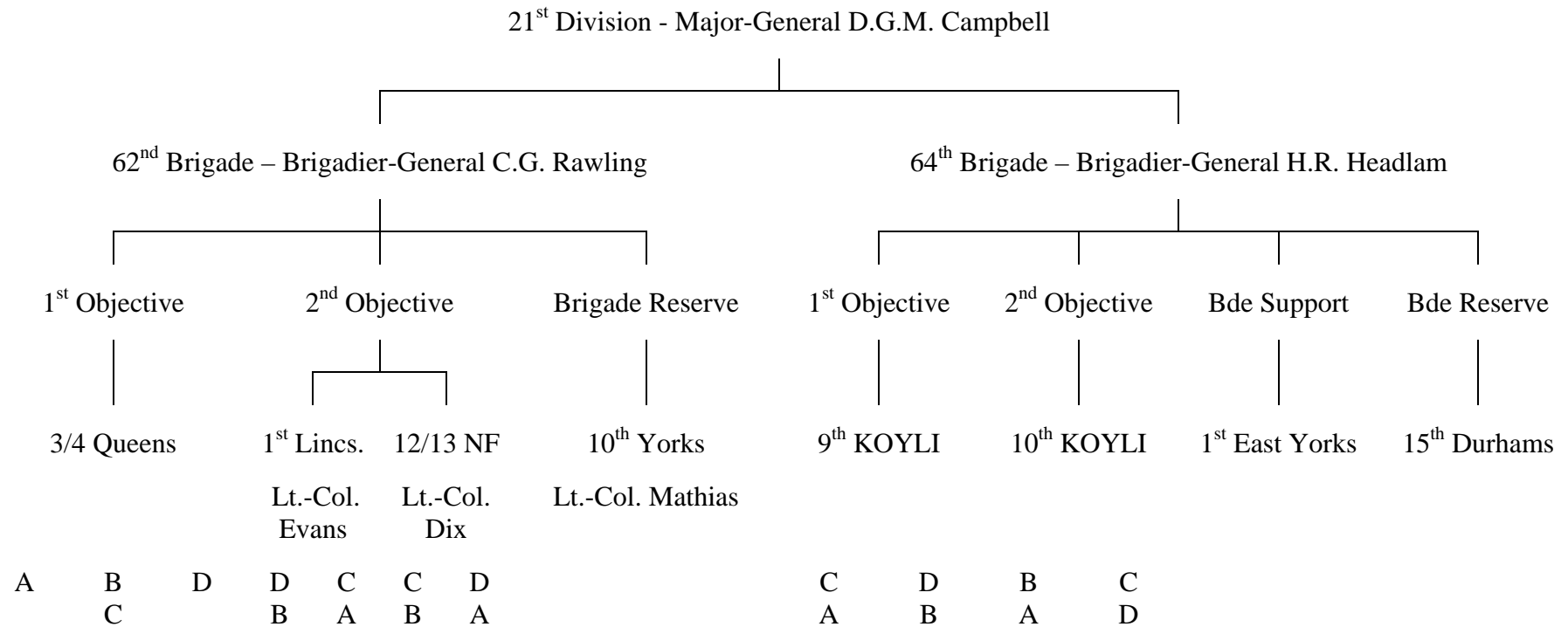
Fifth Army – General Sir Hubert Gough

Second Army – Sir Herbert Plumer



APPENDIX VII

ORDER OF BATTLE – BROODSEINDE: DIVISIONAL ATTACK



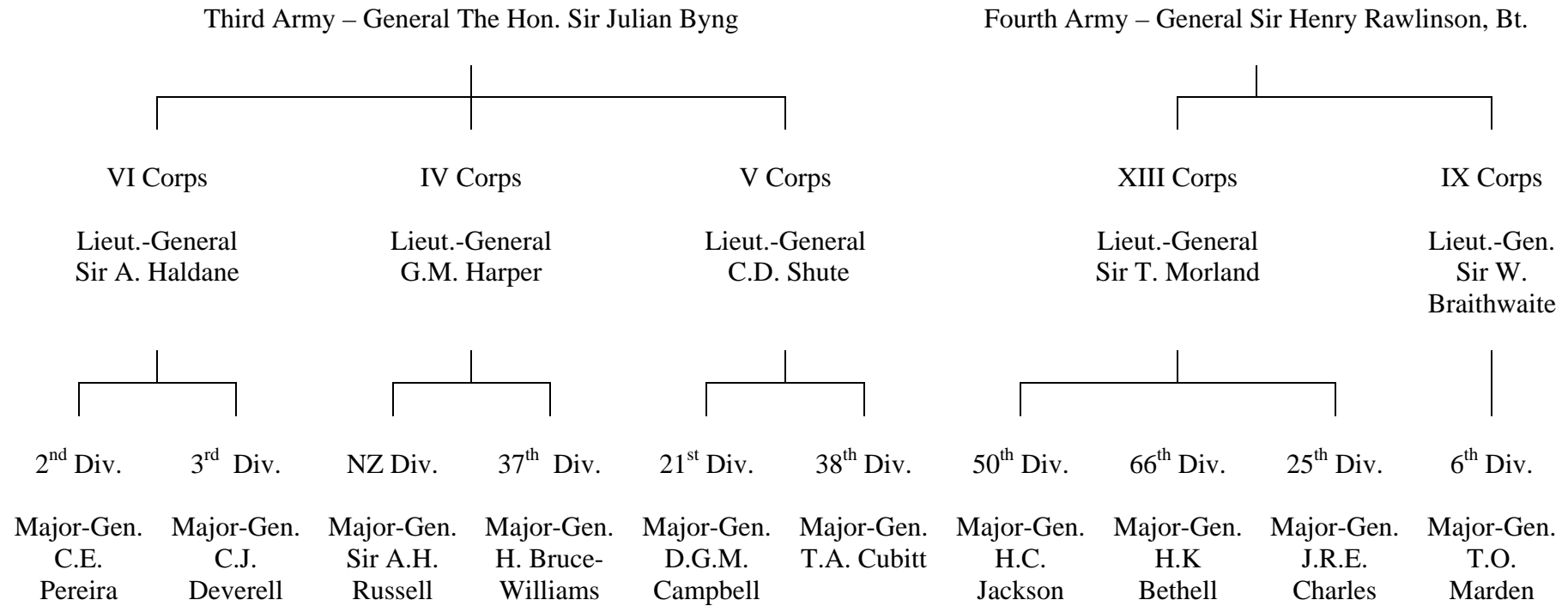
APPENDIX VIII

DUMPS

	Main Div. Dump	Advanced Div. Dump – CLAPHAM JUNCTION	Right Brigade Dump	Left Brigade Dump
S.A.A.	400,000	500,000	150,000	150,000
Mills Grenades No. 5	2,000	3,000	1,500	1,500
Mills Rifle Grenades No. 23	500	1,000	750	750
Rifle Grenades No. 24	500	500	750	750
Rifle Grenades No. 22	500	500	750	750
Stokes Ammunition	1,000	2,000	1,500	1,500
** Grenades	300	300	200	200
30.27 Smoke	150	150	100	100
No. 28. K.J.	75	50	50	50
Smoke Candles (Single type S)	1,500	1,500	1,000	1,000
S.O.S. Rifle Grenades	100	75	50	50
Flares Red	3,000	2,000	1,000	1,000
Daylight Mortar Signals (sets)	-	15	10	10
Very Lights 1" White	2,000	2,000	1,000	1,000
Very Lights 1½" White	1,000	1,000	500	500
Pistol Ammunition	2,000	2,000	1,000	1,000
Petrol Tins	1,100	500	200	200

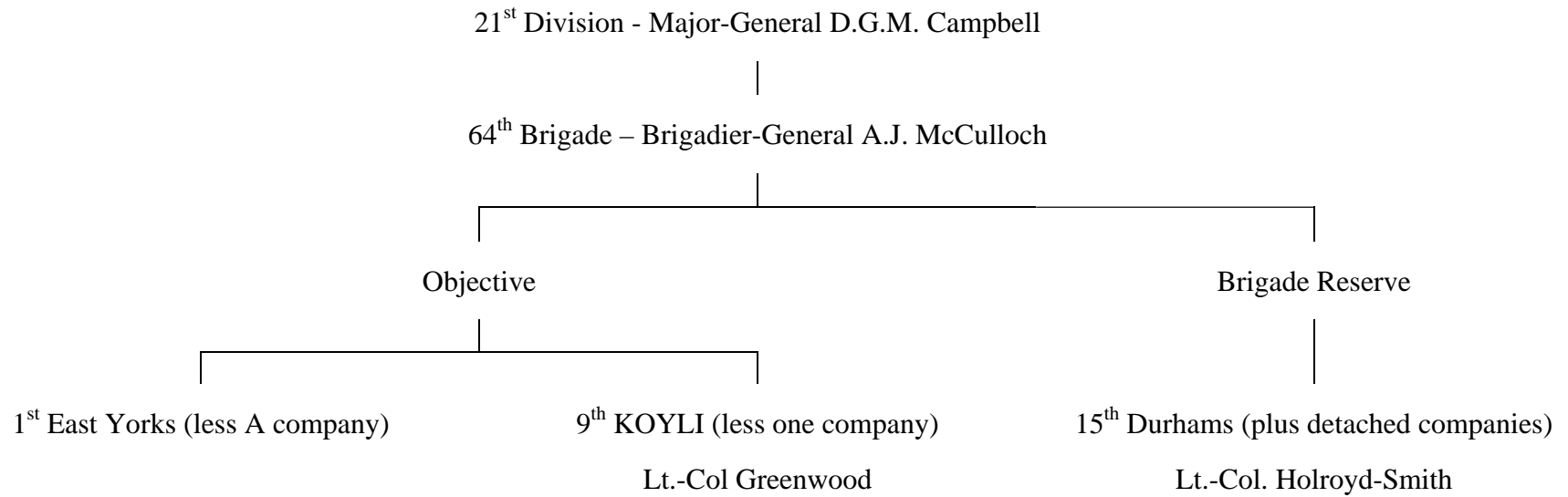
APPENDIX XI

ORDER OF BATTLE – BEAUREVOIR LINE: GENERAL BRITISH ATTACK



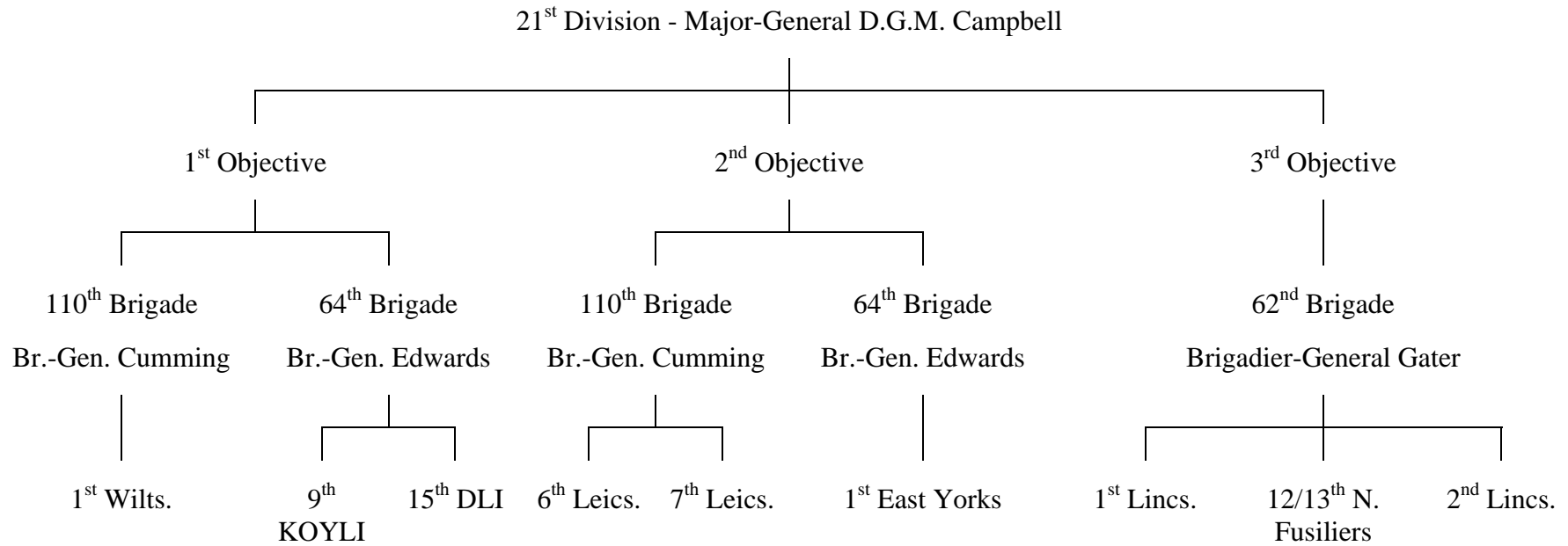
APPENDIX X

ORDER OF BATTLE – MIRAUMONT: DIVISIONAL ATTACK



APPENDIX XII

ORDER OF BATTLE – BEAUREVOIR LINE: DIVISIONAL ATTACK



BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX

Only Great War service is listed, and where subjects achieved high rank, their final Great War rank is listed.

Acland-Troyte, Gilbert John (1876-19??)

Lieutenant-Colonel. King's Royal Rifle Corps. DAA & QMG VII Corps, 4 August 1914 – 27 November 1915; AA and QMG, 21st Division, 28 November 1915 – Armistice. DSO; MiD seven times. Son of Colonel C.A.W. Troyte.

Addison, G.H. (18??-19??)

CRE, 21st Division, 16 January 1917- 19 July 1918. MiD four times.

Alcock, J.H. (18??-19??)

Lieutenant. Lincolnshire Regiment. 8th Battalion. Captured at Loos. Wrote a matter-of-fact account of the battle from a PoW camp in Germany – his list of casualties makes difficult reading. Released to the Netherlands as part of a prisoner exchange in April 1918. A Cambridge graduate, after the war he became a solicitor in Mansfield. In the Second World War he served as a Squadron Leader in the Legal Branch of the RAF. See Bibliography.

Allenby, Edward Henry Hynman (1861-1936)

Field Marshall. Dragoons. GOC Cavalry Division in the original BEF, 5 August 1914 – 12 October 1914; GOC Third Army, 10 October 1914 – 7 May 1915; GOC V Corps, 8 May 1915 – 23 October 1915; GOC Third Army, 23 October 1915 – 9 June 1917; C-in-C Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 10 June 1917 – Armistice. High Commissioner to Egypt, 1919 – 1935. 1st Viscount of Megiddo and Felixstowe. Rector of Edinburgh University. Twice failed the entrance exam for the Indian Civil Service before entering Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Nicknamed 'The Bull', due to his irascible nature, although he later proved himself to be a talented diplomat.

Below, Otto Ernst Vinzent Leo von (1857-1944)

German military commander. Served on the Eastern Front, in the Balkans, Italy and on the Western Front. Commanded the Austro-German Fourteenth Army that crushed the Italians at Caporetto in late autumn 1917. Later commanded the German Seventeenth Army on the Western Front, which was pursued by the British Third Army under Julian **Byng** during the Hundred Days campaign. After the war he was appointed head of XVII Army Corps at Danzig by the new Republican government, but he soon resigned in opposition to the government's conciliatory policy to the new Polish state. Son of a Prussian General.

Bent, Philip Eric (1893-1917)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Leicestershire Regiment. GOC 9th Battalion. Killed in action leading his battalion at Polygon Wood, 1 October 1917. Awarded the VC for bravery and inspiring leadership when he saw the right of his battalion, and the battalion on its right, being forced back east of Polygon Wood. He personally led forward all available reserves at hand, made a successful counter-attack and regained the position, which was of essential importance for subsequent operations. He was killed at the objective, after giving his orders for reconsolidation. Also DSO; MiD twice. A pre-war civilian, he returned from Canada in 1914 to enlist.

Bruce-Williams, Hugh Bruce (1865-1942)

Major-General. Royal Engineers. MGGS Second Army, 15 July 1915 – 5 June 1916; GOC 137th Brigade, 5 June 1916 – 9 November 1916; GOC 37th Division, 9 November 1916 – Armistice. DSO. The 'Bruce' of his mother's maiden name was added in 1920.

Byng, Hon. Julian Hedworth George (1862-1935)

General. Hussars. GOC Forces in Egypt at the outbreak of war. GOC 3rd Cavalry Division, 29 September 1914 – 7 May 1915; GOC Cavalry Corps, 7 May 1915 – 16 August 1915; GOC IX Corps, 16 August 1915 – 8 February 1916; GOC XVII Corps, 27 February 1916 – 25 May 1916; GOC Canadian Corps, 29 May 1916 – 8 June 1917; GOC Third Army, 9 June 1917 – Armistice. Governor-General of Canada, August 1921 – August 1926. In 1928 he became Chief Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police and set about reforming Scotland Yard. Famous for his success at Cambrai and Vimy Ridge, which lead to his long association with the area and with the Canadians, whose forces largely undertook the battle. Son of the 2nd Earl of Stafford. 1st Viscount of Vimy. Nicknamed 'Bungo'.

Cameron, Archibald Rice (1870-1944)

Brigadier-General. Black Watch. GSO2 Staff College, May – August 1914; GSO1 5th Division, March – October 1915; BGGs X Corps, 21 October 1915 – 2 July 1918; BGGs (Additional) Fourth Army, July 1918 – Armistice. Before the war he was an Instructor at Sandhurst; he later became Governor of Edinburgh Castle, 1936-7.

Campbell, David Graham Muschet (1869-1936)

Major-General. Lancers. GOC 6th Cavalry Brigade, 9 November 1914 – 23 May 1916; GOC 21st Division, 22 May 1916 – Armistice. MiD seven times. One of the longest-serving divisional generals, his command lasted for 903 days. Governor and Commander in Chief, Malta from 1931. Son of Major H. Wootton Campbell. Nicknamed 'Soarer'. See Introduction, pp. 15-16.

Clarke, Arthur Aubrey (18??-1917)

Captain. Leicestershire Regiment. Wounded at Bazentin, 14 July 1916, where he was awarded the MC for gallant leadership. He was killed in action near Polygon Wood, 1 October 1917.

Coffin, Clifford (1870-1959)

Major-General. Royal Engineers. CRE, 21st Division, 1 June 1915 – 9 January 1917; GOC 25th Brigade, 11 January 1917 – 4 May 1918; GOC 36th Division, 6 May 1918 – Armistice. Won the VC at Westhoek, 31 July 1917; also DSO and bar; MiD four times. Son of Lieutenant-General Sir I.C. Coffin.

Congreve, Walter Norris (1862-1927)

Lieutenant-General. Rifle Brigade. GOC 18th Brigade, 5 August 1914 – 29 May 1915; GOC 6th Division, 27 May 1915 – 14 November 1915; GOC XIII Corps, 15 November 1915 – 17 June 1917; GOC VII Corps, 3 January 1918 – 13 April 1918. Wounded once; MiD five times. He was awarded the VC during 'Operations in the Transvaal', 1902. Son of Captain William Congreve, DL. Nicknamed 'Squib'.

Cubitt, Thomas Astley (1871-1939)

Major-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. Commander of troops in Somaliland, July 1914 – January 1916; GOC 57th Brigade, 6 April 1917 – 24 May 1918; GOC 38th (Welsh) Division, 23 May 1918 - Armistice. Governor and Commander in Chief, Bermuda, 1931-36. DSO; MiD four times. Son of Major F. Astley Cubitt.

Cumming, Hanway Robert Warren (1867-1921)

Brigadier-General. Durham Light Infantry. GSO2 India, to May 1915; GSO1 31st Division, 24 August 1915 – 2 April 1916; GSO1 48th Division, 2 April 1916 – 27 August 1916; GOC MGC Training Centre, August 1916 – February 1918; GOC 110th Brigade, 16 March 1918 – Armistice. DSO; MiD twice. Murdered by Sinn Fein in an ambush near Cloonbannin while he was Military Governor of Kerry, 5 March 1921. Author of *A Brigadier in France*. See Bibliography.

Daniell, Francis Edward Lloyd (18??-1916)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Seaforth Highlanders. GSO1 21st Division, 16 August 1915 – 4 March 1916 – killed when a shell hit divisional HQ, also wounding Claud **Jacob**. DSO; MiD twice.

Dix, Stephen Hamilton (1878-1917)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Prince of Wales Leinster (Royal Canadian) Regiment, attached Northumberland Fusiliers. GOC 12/13th Battalion. Killed in action at Broodseinde, 4 October 1917, along with all four company commanders. MC; MiD three times.

Drysdale, William (1876-1916)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Lothian (Royal Scots) Regiment. GOC 7th Leicestershire Regiment. Wounded in the march to assembly positions at Bazentin, 14 July 1916, he was killed by a sniper during a preliminary tour of the new trench system, 29 September 1916, soon after his return to the battalion. At the outbreak of war he was a Brigade-Major, and rose to GSO2 in 1915. DSO.

Dunn, James Churchill (1871-1955)

Medical Officer with 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Responsible for compiling the hugely-influential *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919*. See Bibliography. DSO; MC; MiD three times.

Edmonds, James Edward (1861-1956)

British Official Historian. Also served with the Royal Engineers. GSO1 4th Division, 5 August 1914 – 4 September 1914; Deputy Chief Engineer, GHQ. Author of the British *Official History*. Accused of having deliberately falsified the account so as to protect the reputations of senior commanders, but without his dedication the 16-volume series would never have been finished. Nicknamed 'Archimedes'. See Bibliography.

Edwards, Christopher Vaughan (1875-1955)

Brigadier-General. Green Howards. GOC 2nd Green Howards; GOC 64th Brigade, 28 August 1918 – Armistice. Wounded twice; DSO; MiD three times.

Evans, Lewis Pugh (1881-1962)

Brigadier-General. Black Watch. GOC 14th Brigade, 10 June 1918 – Armistice. Commanded 1st Lincolnshire Regiment (62nd Brigade) on 4 October 1917. Awarded the VC for gallant leadership through the enemy barrage and in the subsequent assault. Seeing casualties being caused by an enemy machine gun, he went forward himself and, firing his revolver through the loophole of the emplacement, forced the detachment to surrender. Though severely wounded, he continued to lead his battalion to the objective until, after its consolidation, he collapsed through loss of blood. Previously awarded DSO; MiD four times. Nephew of Lieutenant W.G. Cubitt, VC.

Falkenhayn, Erich Georg Anton Sebastian von (1861-1922)

German Chief of the General Staff, September 1914 – August 1916. Conqueror of Romania. Responsible for the 'Race to the Sea' in the first months of the war and the battle of attrition at Verdun in February 1916, in which he sought to 'bleed the French Army white'. He was dismissed in late August after failing to break the French, and later served in the East and in Palestine, ending the war as an Army commander in Lithuania. The son of a moneyless Junker estate owner, though the family was of ancient nobility, Falkenhayn seemed the epitome of a Prussian Staff officer: tall, slender and aloof, conjuring up visions of precision, exactness and action.

Fergusson, Sir Charles Bt. (1865-1951)

Lieutenant-General. Grenadier Guards. GOC 5th Division, 5 August 1914 – 18 October 1914; GOC 9th Division, 26 October 1914 – 31 December 1914; GOC II Corps, 1 January 1915 – 28 May 1916; GOC XVII Corps, 25 May 1916 - Armistice. Military Governor of Cologne, December 1918 – August 1919. Later Governor-General New Zealand, 1924 – 1930 and Grandmaster of New Zealand Freemasons. Also Lord-Lieutenant Ayrshire, 1937 – 1950. Fergusson was the longest-serving Corps commander of the war, serving 1414 days as a Lieutenant-General.

Forestier-Walker, George Townshend (1866-1939)

Major-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. BGGS II Corps, 5 August 1914 – 1 January 1915; MGGS Second Army, 26 December 1914 – 23 February 1915; GOC 21st Division, 11 April 1915 – 18 November 1915. Scapegoated and sent home after 21st Division's difficulties at Loos were attributed to him. Later commanded 63rd (Naval) Division. MiD six times. Nicknamed 'Hooky'.

Franklyn, Harold Edmund (1885-19??)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Green Howards. GSO1 21st Division, 17 October 1917 – Armistice. Wounded once; DSO; MC; MiD five times. Son of Lieutenant-General Sir William Edmund Franklyn.

French, Sir John Denton Pinkstone (1852-1925)

Field Marshall. Hussars. Commander in Chief in the original BEF in France, 5 August 1914 – 19 December 1915. Resigned after his misdeployment of the reserves at Loos, although history remembers him as a scapegoat. Later 1st Earl of Ypres. A hot-tempered and argumentative man, French tended to bear grudges and had an extremely volatile character. A keen military historian, he was a great admirer of Napoleon.

Gater, George Henry (1886-1963)

Brigadier-General. Sherwood Foresters. GOC 9th Sherwood Foresters, 18 October 1915 - February 1916; GOC 6th Lincolnshire, 15 August 1916 - ??; GOC 6th Lincolnshire; GOC 62nd Brigade, 1 November 1917 - Armistice. Served in Gallipoli with 9th Sherwoods. DSO and bar; MiD four times. In civilian life he was a distinguished civil servant and educational administrator, as Assistant Director of Education for Nottinghamshire.

Gough, Sir Hubert de la Poer (1870-1963)

General. Lancers. GOC 3rd Cavalry Brigade, 5 August 1914 - 16 September 1914; GOC 2nd Cavalry Division, 16 September 1914 - 19 April 1915; GOC 7th Division, 19 April 1915 - 14 July 1915; GOC I Corps, 13 July 1915 - 1 April 1916; GOC Reserve Corps, 4 April 1916 - 22 May 1916; GOC Fifth Army, 22 May 1916 - 28 March 1918. Dismissed as a scapegoat during the Spring Offensive although his command in this period was far better than during the (Third) Ypres campaign of 1917. His character was marked by impetuosity, arrogance and conceit, remarking in his memoirs that he was the youngest cadet at Sandhurst, and thenceforth at each subsequent appointment. Both he and his Army were widely unpopular amongst the troops. Son of General Sir C.J.S. Gough, VC. Nicknamed 'Goughie'.

Haig, Sir Douglas (1861-1928)

Field-Marshal. Lancers. GOC I Corps, 5 August 1914 - 26 December 1914; GOC First Army, 26 December 1914 - 22 December 1915; Commander in Chief BEF in France, 22 December 1915 - Armistice. Commander in Chief of the Forces in Great Britain, 1919-20. Later became Rector and Chancellor of St Andrew's University. 1st Earl Haig of Bemersyde. Through the Earl Haig Fund he devoted the last years of his life to the cause of those who had fought in the Great War. Although a highly-efficient soldier, careful and resolute, Haig was noticeably taciturn and not above intrigue and back-stabbing. His Great War diaries clearly demonstrate the extent to which he felt the burden of the war, yet he remains one of the most reviled and controversial figures in British military history.

Harper, George Montague (1865-1922)

Major-General. Royal Engineers. BGS GHQ, 7 November 1914 - 20 February 1915; GOC 17th Brigade, 11 February 1915 - 24 September 1915; GOC 51st (Highland) Division, 24 September 1915 - 11 March 1918; GOC IV Corps, 11 March 1918 - Armistice. DSO; MiD six times. Nicknamed 'Uncle Harper'. Close friend and protégé of Sir Henry Wilson (CIGS, 1918), but made two unwise enemies, the historians J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell-Hart, who have ever since blighted his reputation. Despite this, recent research has proved him to have been an outstanding commander, particularly towards the end of the war.

Headlam, Hugh Roger (1877-1955)

Brigadier-General. York and Lancasters. Brigade Major, 16th Brigade; GOC 64th Brigade, 13 June 1916 - 28 July 1918. Inspector of Infantry in late 1918. DSO; MiD seven times. Pre-war service in South Africa, India and Ireland; post-war he served in India and the Middle East.

Hessey, William Francis (1868-1939)

Brigadier-General. Royal Iniskilling Fusiliers. GOC 11th Battalion; GOC 110th Brigade, 9 June 1916 – 20 June 1917; GOC 109th Brigade, 23 June 1917 – Armistice. DSO and bar; MiD five times. Retired Staff Officer at outbreak of war.

Hindenburg, Paul Ludwig Hans von Beneckendorf und von (1847-1934)

German military commander and hero of the Eastern Front, having been dug out of retirement in August 1914 at the age of sixty-seven. Sent to the Western Front to succeed **Falkenhayn** in German Supreme Command in August 1916, where he formed a formidable partnership with **Ludendorff**. Phlegmatic and composed, surrounded by an aura of imperturbable calm, Hindenburg provided an anchor to his more volatile colleague. Instrumental in launching the Spring Offensive, which eventually brought Germany to ruin. However, this did not critically damage his reputation at home, and he became German President, 1925 – 1934. His death allowed Hitler's assumption of power.

Holroyd-Smyth, Charles Edward Ridley (18??-1918)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Dragoon Guards, also attached to Durham Light Infantry. Acting GOC 64th Brigade after **McCulloch** was wounded, 24–28 August 1918. Died of wounds received near Ep  hy, 23 September 1918. DSO; MC; MiD four times.

Horne, Henry Sinclair (1861-1929)

Lieutenant-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. CRA I Corps, 5 August 1914 – 1 January 1915; GOC 2nd Division, 1 January 1915 – 5 November 1915; GOC XV Corps, 12 January 1916 – 29 September 1916; GOC First Army, 30 September 1916 – Armistice. MiD eight times. The 'unknown' general, Horne kept no diary, has no biographer, and only a few letters to his wife remain, but he was a dedicated, skilful and respected soldier. Son of Major James Horne.

Hutton, Edward Thomas Henry (1848-1923)

Lieutenant-General. King's Royal Rifle Corps. GOC 21st Division, 16 September 1914 – 11 April 1915. An elderly Regular, he was a retired Lieutenant-General at the outbreak of war, and was forced back into retirement in 1915 due to ill-health. Nicknamed 'Curly'.

Jackson, Henry Chomondeley (1879-1972)

Major-General. Bedfordshire Regiment. GSO3 War Office; GOC 175th Brigade; GOC 50th (Northumbrian) Division, 23 March 1918 – Armistice. Wounded once; DSO; MiD eight times. Son of a Professor, and son-in-law to General Lord William Seymour. Nicknamed 'Jacko'.

Jacob, Sir Claud William (1863-1948)

Lieutenant-General. Worcestershire Regiment. GOC 19th Derha Dhu Brigade, 5 January 1915 – 7 September 1915; GOC 7th Merrut Division, 7 September 1915 – 17 November 1915; GOC 21st Division, 18 November 1915 – 22 May 1916; GOC II Corps, 28 May 1916 – Armistice. Transferred from pre-war service with the Indian Army to serve on the Western Front. MiD nine times.

Kelly, David V. (18??-19??)

Lieutenant. Leicestershire Regiment. Later became Intelligence Officer, 110th Brigade. MC. After the war he became a distinguished diplomat, culminating with the rank of Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1940s. Author of *39 Months with 'The Tigers' – the 110th Infantry Brigade*. See Bibliography.

Kitchener, Lord Herbert Horatio (1850-1916)

Field Marshall. Secretary of State for War, 1914-16. Responsible for the raising of the New Armies and immortalised in his recruitment poster. Possessed of a driving ambition, which proved advantageous to his army career, Kitchener was also, rather peculiarly, devoted to a small poodle. Drowned when *HMS Hampshire* struck a mine off the Orkneys on a diplomatic mission to Russia, 6 June 1916. 1st Earl of Khartoum and Broome.

Kühl, Hermann Joseph von (1856-1958)

German Staff Officer and military historian. Chief of Staff of Crown Prince **Rupprecht's** Army Group and played a leading role in the operational planning of the Spring Offensive. His post-war writings include a two-volume history of the war, *Der Weltkrieg* (1930), plus works on the 'Miracle of the Marne' and on the planning of the 1918 campaign.

Liddell Hart, Basil Henry (1895-1970)

British military historian. Served briefly with 10th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, but was gassed and invalided from the Somme. After the war he became one of its foremost military historians, and although an initial supporter of the British prosecution of the war, became increasingly critical of British generalship. From 1937 he advised the UK War Office on army reorganisation.

Lisle, Alexander Charles Nicholas March-Phillipps de (18??-19??)

Lieutenant. Leicestershire Regiment. Second-Lieutenant with 9th Battalion during the attack on Bazentin, 14 July 1916, and wrote a vivid account of his battalion's actions. Son of an MP. See Bibliography.

Lisle, Henry de Beauvoir de (1864-1955)

Lieutenant-General. Durham Light Infantry. GOC 2nd Cavalry Brigade, 5 August 1914 – 12 October 1914; GOC 1st Cavalry Division, 12 October 1914 – 27 May 1915; GOC 29th Division, 4 June 1915 – 12 March 1918; GOC XIII Corps, 13 March 1918 – 12 April 1918; GOC XV Corps, 12 April 1918 – Armistice. DSO; MiD eight times.

Lloyd-George, David (1863-1945)

British politician, and the only minister to serve in government throughout the war. Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1908-15; Minister of Munitions, 1915-1916; Secretary of State for War, 1916; Prime Minister, 1916-22. The 'Welsh Wizard' was a brilliant speaker and an extremely shrewd politician, although his campaign against the generals, particularly **Haig**, revealed him to be hypocritical, self-serving and vindictive. 1st Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor.

Loch, Lord Edward Douglas (1873-1942)

Brigadier-General. Grenadier Guards. BGGS, VI Corps; GOC 110th Brigade, 22 August 1917 – 4 January 1918. DSO; MiD five times. Chairman of the Greyhound Racing Trust.

Lossberg, Friedrich Karl von (1868-1934)

German Staff Officer, responsible for the defence theory of 'elastic defence in depth', which became the official doctrine of the German army by the end of 1916. It was used against the British during the (Third) Ypres campaign at an increasing cost to the British Second Army. Lossberg was also responsible for the 'retreat to the Hindenburg Line', one of the most remarkable operational achievements of the war that shortened the German line on the Western Front and allowed them to maintain a two-front war throughout 1917. His reputation as a defensive tactician earned him the nickname of 'the fireman of the Western Front'.

Ludendorff, Erich von (1865-1937)

German military commander and military technocrat. Chief of Staff on both Eastern and Western Fronts. A brilliant military technician - his swift rise through the Prussian ranks was due to his clear ability in a number of staff appointments - but he lacked political judgement. He was also extremely temperamental and had a tendency to panic in times of crisis. His Spring Offensive of 1918 brought Germany to ruin. Later propagated the 'stab in the back' myth, according to which the German military was about to win the war in 1918 when the politicians betrayed the generals and surrendered to the Allies.

Lukin, Henry Timson (1860-1925)

Major-General. Cape Mounted Infantry (SA). GOC South African Brigade, 11 August 1915 – 2 December 1916; GOC 9th (Scottish) Division, 2 December 1916 – 4 March 1918. Under his command 9th Division is generally regarded as having been the best division in the BEF; it was unquestionably the most tactically innovative. Nicknamed 'Tim'.

Martyn, M.C. (18??-19??)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment, also attached to Leicestershire Regiment. GOC 6th Battalion. Taken PoW, 25 August 1918, near the Butte de Warlencourt. DSO; MiD twice.

Master, George (1882-19??)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Royal Engineers. CRE 21st Division, 19 July 1918 – Armistice. DSO; MiD three times.

Maxse, (Frederick) Ivor (1862-1958)

Lieutenant-General. Royal Fusiliers. GOC 1st Guards Brigade, 5 August 1914 – 26 September 1914; GOC 18th Division, 2 October 1914 – 15 January 1917; GOC XVIII Corps, 15 January 1917 – 22 June 1918; Inspector-General of Training, BEF, 3 July 1918 – Armistice. DSO; MiD five times. Talkative and bursting with energy, Maxse was reputed to have been the best trainer of troops during the war, although he always regarded his last post as a demotion. Son of an admiral.

McCulloch, Andrew Jameson (1876-19??)

Brigadier-General. Highland Light Infantry. GOC 64th Brigade, 28 July 1918 – 24 August 1918. Wounded whilst leading his brigade towards Miraumont. Previously commanded 9th KOYLI. DSO and bar; MiD three times. Son of a judge and was himself a barrister-at-law after studying at St Andrews University and New College, Oxford.

McKinnon, T. (18??-19??)

Lewis Gun Officer. Northumberland Fusiliers. Forced to command 12/13th Battalion on 4 October 1917 when all other officers senior to him had become casualties.

Mignon, Jephson George (1869-1916)

Lieutenant-Colonel. Leicestershire Regiment. GOC 8th Battalion. Captain in the Reserve of Officers at the outbreak of war, having previously served as a staff officer in the Boer War. Killed in action at Bazentin, 14 July 1916.

Morland, Thomas Napier Lethbridge (1865-1925)

Lieutenant-General. King's Royal Rifle Corps. GOC 5th Division, 18 October 1914 – 15 July 1915; GOC X Corps, 15 July 1915 – 15 April 1918; GOC XIII Corps, 12 April 1918 – Armistice. Commander-in-Chief of the Rhine Army until March 1922. DSO; MiD seven times.

Newcombe, Henry William (1875-1963)

Major-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. BGRA 21st Division, 13 May 1917 – 30 October 1918. Wounded twice; DSO; MiD seven times. Also served at School of Artillery, Larkhill during the war and later in India.

Paley, A.T. (18??-19??)

Lieutenant-Colonel. GSO1 21st Division, 7 March 1916 – 17 October 1917. DSO; MiD six times.

Plumer, Sir Herbert Charles Onslow (1857-1932)

General. York and Lancaster. GOC V Corps, 8 January 1915 – 8 May 1915; GOC Second Army, 8 May 1915 – 9 November 1917 & 13 March 1918 – Armistice. Commander-in-Chief in Italy in the interim. Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Malta, 1919-24; High Commissioner to Palestine, 1925-28. 1st Viscount of Messines. Plumer's rather bemused expression and impressive walrus moustache masked a steely core – he was a strict disciplinarian, although he was loved and respected by all that served with or under him. Everyone's favourite Great War general. Nicknamed 'Plum'.

Powell, Edward Weyland Martin (1869-1954)

Brigadier-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. BGRA 3rd Division, 8 February 1916 – 24 July 1916; BGRA II Anzac Corps, 24 July 1916 – 31 December 1917; BGRA XXII Corps, 31 December 1917 – Armistice. DSO; MiD four times. Son of Colonel W. Martin Powell. Retired 2 July 1910 to Reserve of Officers but reinstated to active service at the outbreak of war.

Rawling, Cecil Godfrey (1870-1917)

Brigadier-General. Somerset Light Infantry. GOC 62nd Brigade, 13 June 1916 – 28 October 1917. Killed in action at the Second Battle of Passchendaele, 28 October 1917. DSO; MiD twice. A New Army Brigadier, in pre-war life he had surveyed Western Tibet and written many geographical works.

Rawlinson, Sir Henry Seymour, Bt. (1864-1925)

General. King's Royal Rifle Corps. GOC 4th Division, 23 September 1914 – 4 October 1914; GOC IV Corps, 5 October 1914 – 22 December 1915; GOC First Army, 22 December 1915 – 4 February 1916; GOC Fourth Army, 5 February 1916 - Armistice. Commanded Second Army for ten days in November 1917. Rawlinson possessed a strong streak of independence and was a man of definitive views, although he lacked the ability to stand up to **Haig**. This was an increasing problem during the 1916 Somme campaign, of which Rawlinson was the principal progenitor. 1st Baron of Trent. Son of Major-General Sir H.C. Rawlinson. Nicknamed Rawly, although he was also widely known as 'The Cad' or 'The Fox', both of which referred to the considerable mistrust which he evoked. Died in Delhi, March 1925, after a hard game of polo and making 21 runs at cricket.

Riddell, Gilbert B. (18??-19??)

Captain. Northumberland Fusiliers. Wounded at Broodseinde, 4 October 1917. MC. Later became a maths teacher and an extremely active advocate of the Officer Training Corps.

Robertson, Clement (18??-1917)

Captain. Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment, also attached at Tank Corps. Awarded the VC for outstanding valour for leading his tanks in attack under heavy fire. He guided them on foot across most difficult ground to their objective, and thereby ensured their successful action. He was killed shortly after the objective had been reached, 4 October 1917.

Rowlands, D.L. (18??-19??)

Durham Light Infantry. NCO with 15th Battalion. His letter of January 1918 describes the battalion's experience at Broodseinde. MM. Later served in the Second World War with the Royal Ulster Rifles. See Bibliography.

Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria (1869-1955)

German military commander. An able and intelligent soldier, he was also sensitive to the suffering and exhaustion of his troops, as well as the plight of those at home.

Shoubridge, (Thomas) Herbert (1871-1933)

Major-General. Dorset Regiment. GSO1 18th Division; GOC 54th Brigade, 23 January 1916 – 6 April 1917; GOC 7th Division, 1 April 1917 – Armistice. DSO; MiD five times.

Shute, Cameron Deane (1866-1936)

Lieutenant-General. Welsh Regiment. GOC 59th Brigade; GOC 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, 17 October 1916 – 19 February 1917; GOC 32nd Division, 19 February 1917 – 27 April 1918; GOC V Corps, 27 April 1918 – Armistice. MiD seven times. Lieutenant of the Tower of London, 1926-27. Nicknamed 'Tiger'.

Spicer, Lancelot Dykes (1893-1979)

Captain. Yorkshire Light Infantry. Second-Lieutenant with 9th Battalion. Adjutant, 10th KOYLI, 10 July 1917 – 17 February 1918; Brigade Major, 64th Brigade, 18 February 1918 - Armistice. DSO, MC and bar; MiD twice. Son of the Hon. Sir A. Spicer Bt. Author of *Letters from France, 1915-1918* (Robert York, London, 1979).

Stafford, Ben W. (18??-19??)

Leicestershire Regiment. CSM, 8th Battalion. His letter to the wounded Captain **Ward** makes for uncomfortable reading. See Appendix IV, pp. 159-60.

Stephens, Reginald Byng (1869-1955)

Lieutenant-General. Rifle Brigade. GOC 25th Brigade; GOC 5th Division, 1 April 1916 – 4 July 1918; GOC X Corps, 3 July 1918 – Armistice. MiD seven times. Commanded at every level from battalion to corps. Nicknamed ‘Stiff’un’.

Tudor, (Henry) Hugh (1871-1966)

Major-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. BGRA 9th Division, 1 February 1916 – 6 September 1917; BGRA Cavalry Corps, 6 September 1917 – 28 March 1918; GOC 9th Division, 28 March 1918 – Armistice. MiD seven times.

Wakeford, Edward Kingsley (18??-1917)

Leicestershire Regiment. Second-Lieutenant with 7th Battalion during assault on Bazentin-le-Petit on 14 July 1916. He was killed in action exactly a year later.

Wanless O’Gowan, Robert (1864-1947)

Major-General. Cameronians. GOC 13th Brigade; GOC 31st Division, 24 August 1915 – 21 March 1918. MiD six times.

Ward, F. (18??-19??)

Captain. Leicestershire Regiment. GOC D Company, 8th Battalion. Wounded at Bazentin, 14 July 1916.

Watts, Herbert Edward (1858-1934)

Lieutenant-General. Lancashire Fusiliers. GOC 21st Brigade, 31 August 1914 – 27 September 1915; GOC 7th Division, 26 September 1915 – 7 January 1917; GOC XIX Corps, 4 February 1917 – Armistice. MiD seven times. Nicknamed ‘Teeny’, for reasons unspecified. Son of the Reverend R.L.R. Watts, late vicar of Wisbech.

Wellesley, Richard Ashmore Colley (1868-1939)

Brigadier-General. Royal Horse and Field Artillery. BGRA 21st Division, 6 October 1915 – 12 May 1917; BGRA XIII Corps, 13 May 1917 – Armistice. MiD six times. Assistant District Commissioner for the Boy Scouts; one of the Governors of the Star and Garter Home for wounded ex-soldiers.

Yeo, Harold E. (18??-19??)

Major. Yorkshire Light Infantry. Staff Captain, 64th Brigade. His extensive collection of letters, nearly 300 written to his parents, offers a detailed and descriptive insight into his duties with the battalion and of battle experience. MC; MiD twice. Also awarded the MBE. During the Second World War he was an Embarkation Commandant in Glasgow. See Bibliography.

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WO 95 / 2158	63 rd Brigade
WO 95 / 2161 – 2162	64 th Brigade
WO 95 / 2164 – 2165	110 th Brigade
WO 157	Summaries of information and intelligence files
WO 158	Western Front Operations
WO 256	The diary of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig
WO 374 / 17191	Brigadier-General H.R. Cumming
WO 339 / 11355	Brigadier-General G.H. Gater

I.ii – The Imperial War Museum

96 / 29 / 1	Lieutenant J.H. Alcock
96 / 17 / 1	F.J.G. Gambling
80 / 28 / 1	T.G. Mohan
76 / 38 / 1	H.G. Perry
85 / 51 / 1	Lieutenant-Colonel B.S. Phillpotts, DSO
93 / 20 / 1	D.L. Rowlands
76 / 226 / 1	D.J. Sweeney
5 / 6 / 1	Colonel H.E. Yeo, MBE MC

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General Sir Henry Rawlinson papers

I.iv – Leicester Records Office

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| Cave, A.C., QMS | Unpublished typescript diary. |
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