

**UNIVERSITY OF  
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**School of History and Cultures**

**A Planned Massacre? British Intelligence Analysis and the  
German Army at the Battle of Broodseinde,  
4 October 1917**

**By**

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## Introduction

In the early hours of 4 October, 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Infantry Division had completed all the necessary preparations for an attack to recapture the parts of the position near Zonnebeke which had been previously lost. They were already gathered in great masses and backed by reserves. Their batteries...opened up heavy fire, only to be hit by a deluge of counter-fire...Simultaneously the enemy brought down drum fire on a fifteen kilometre front...The 4<sup>th</sup> Guards was smashed before it ever got started.<sup>1</sup>

The German 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Division suffered horrific losses on this day.<sup>2</sup> Further up the line other German divisions had also been waiting to go over the top at the Broodseinde Ridge. The 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division had been lying in their positions in the trenches when the British bombardment of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division broke them up just as comprehensively.<sup>3</sup> The entire 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division was also caught in the open along with regiments from the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division. The casualty figures for this one day were appalling. The 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division lost 83 officers and 2800 other ranks, whilst the 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Division suffered 86 officers and 2700 other ranks killed.<sup>4</sup> This German attack, codenamed Operation *Hohensturm*, had been planned to start at 6am. The reason for this slaughter was that at the same time, twelve British divisions were in their lines ready to commence their attack also. The British artillery opened fire at 5.25am across the front, with four divisions immediately following the creeping barrage. The rest would come half an hour later.<sup>5</sup> The two opposing attacks were separated by just half an hour. One German officer wrote, ‘what actually happened in that swampy area in the dark and the fog, no pen of a living author can ever write’.<sup>6</sup> The Battle of Broodseinde, fought during the campaign of the Third Battle of Ypres, was nothing less than a massacre.

The aim of this study is to examine what the British Expeditionary Force [BEF] knew in advance about this failed German attack. The Battle of Broodseinde has been well chronicled because of these exceptional events. It was an important operation during the Third Battle of

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<sup>1</sup> Major Freiherr von Sobee, 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, in Jack Sheldon, *The German Army at Passchendaele* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Their casualty rate for this day was extremely heavy. One regiment, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment, suffered the loss of 14 officers and 328 soldiers. Some companies were almost entirely obliterated; *Ibid*, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Chris McCarthy, *The Third Ypres Passchendaele: The Day By Day Account* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Cave, *Polygon Wood Ypres* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> McCarthy, *Day by Day*, pp. 97-102.

<sup>6</sup> Major Lincke, Commander 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 212 Reserve Infantry Regiment, in Sheldon *German Army*, pp. 195-196.

Ypres (31 July- 10 November 1917). Administered by Second Army of the BEF under General Sir Herbert Plumer, it was his third operation and the fifth battle of the campaign. Its objective was to recapture key ground in the form of the Broodseinde Ridge from which the battle took its name. This would deny the German Army a commanding view of the battlefield and also neutralise a key artillery position.

The Battle of Broodseinde was partly chosen because of the events that occurred. Another factor was that 1917, and particularly the Third Battle of Ypres, saw the BEF move from being a junior partner of the Entente to assuming the lead role on the western front. It was also chosen because the date of the attack was brought forward by the commanders of the BEF from 6 October 1917 to 4 October.<sup>7</sup> The reasoning for this was to continue the operational tempo to ensure success. This thesis will examine whether this might have been influenced by military intelligence. This was the information received and analysed by the formations prosecuting the attack. If intelligence did play a part in this decision, then that could imply that the BEF either planned to massacre the German soldiers or had adopted an extremely aggressive and opportunistic policy. By focussing on the level where operations were being directed, this thesis has to target intelligence that was of purely military value.

In order to accurately examine intelligence analysis in the build up to the Battle of Broodseinde, this study first needs to set the context into which it fell. This shall be done by splitting the study into two halves. The first half, Chapter I, will explain this background so that a solid basis can be made from which to assess intelligence analysis. There will be two objectives to this first chapter. The first will be to provide an explanation of the battle and its place in the First World War. This will include examining the strategy, operational planning, the conduct of the war up to that point and relevant historical debates. The second is to provide an examination of how military intelligence was operating before the battle. To ensure clarity, this chapter will be structured based on the levels of command of the BEF during this period. The second half of the thesis, or Chapter II, shall assess the intelligence picture in the immediate build up to Broodseinde. As the formations of the BEF wrote daily intelligence reports, this half of the thesis shall bring together these reports to build up a day by day picture of what these organisations knew about their enemy. In adopting this structure,

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<sup>7</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The A.I.F in France The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 Vol. 4* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), p. 835. Haig confirmed this on 28 September 1917 at a meeting with his Army commanders, John Terraine, *The Road to Passchendaele The Flanders Offensive of 1917: A Study Of Inevitability* (London: Leo Cooper, 1977), p. 274.

this study shows influences from certain components of the First World War's historiography.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this is that by adopting a two part structure it can first establish a context then describe the intelligence picture before the battle. By adhering to this format this study can clearly detail what was known to whom and when. Although detailing seven days may be seen as limiting, it is necessary for reasons of space. However, it does help to confirm the theory that the BEF's intelligence system relied on the accumulation of information over time.<sup>9</sup> The first part of the thesis combats this shortcoming by examining the intelligence that each level of command was analysing two months before the battle. Further rationales for both the time period chosen and the problems that some of the archival sources have produced will be given where appropriate.

To set the battle in context would not be possible without recourse to the wide historiography of the First World War.<sup>10</sup> The past twenty years has seen a renaissance in scholarly debate in this area. It has given us a greater understanding of British strategy,<sup>11</sup> how the military operations were conducted and directed,<sup>12</sup> and the tactics employed in them.<sup>13</sup> The Third Battle of Ypres is also well debated as it was a major campaign of the conflict.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the historiography of military intelligence during this period is far younger. One of the first scholars to incorporate the influence of intelligence to the wider conflict was John Terraine, but his study was compromised by a lack of official records being made public.<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>8</sup> Jim Beach, 'British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918', University College London; Chris McCarthy, *The Third Ypres Passchendaele: The Day By Day Account* (London: Cassell, 1995)

<sup>9</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Bond et al (eds), *Look To Your Front Studies In The First World War* (London: Spellmount, 1999); John Bourne, 'Goodbye to All That? Recent Writing on the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 1, 1990, pp. 87- 100.

<sup>11</sup> David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, The Western Front and the Emergence of Modern War 1900-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2003); Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Hodder Headline, 2002); Gordan Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Pimlico, 2004); Charles Messenger, *Call To Arms: The British Army 1914-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); Gary Sheffield & Dan Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004); Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (London: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Peter H. Liddle, (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997); Robin Pryor & Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (London: Yale University Press, 1996); Nigel Steel & Peter Hart, *Passchendaele* (London: Cassell, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Terraine, *Road to Passchendaele*.

continued to be an issue for other historians<sup>16</sup> with the result of an unhealthy reliance on private papers and diaries.<sup>17</sup> Only in the last twenty years has the requisite material been made public. As a result a breadth of new studies has been written. Some have been limited in their focus,<sup>18</sup> whereas others have cherry picked information leaving no context.<sup>19</sup> Others examine the development of intelligence over a wider period and as such do not dwell exclusively on the First World War.<sup>20</sup> Although they are exciting developments in the historiography, the official histories of MI5 and MI6, or the Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service respectively, are further examples of studies with a wider remit.<sup>21</sup> Michael Occleshaw's *Armour Against Fate* is the only published work that attempts to correct this. Although it provides balanced analysis in certain areas of historical debate, it suffers from a meandering narrative and a reliance on uncorroborated material, thus underlining a poor methodology.<sup>22</sup> However, one unpublished thesis does succeed in providing a clear examination of military intelligence during the First World War. Jim Beach's unpublished thesis, 'British Intelligence and the German Army 1914-1918' can be seen to be a definitive study in military intelligence during the First World War, although again its remit covers the entire period of 1914-1918.<sup>23</sup> The intelligence historiography may be young and only now has begun to mature, but nevertheless it has provided a solid basis for this study.

This historiography has only been able to build up due to the recent availability of archival sources. The National Archives, formerly the Public Records Office, [TNA: PRO] in Kew

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<sup>16</sup> See: Nicholas P. Hiley, 'The Failure of British Espionage against Germany, 1907-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 26 (4), (1983), pp. 867-89; Wesley K. Wark, 'In Never-Never Land? The British Archives on Intelligence', *Historical Journal*, 35 (1), (1992), pp. 195-203.

<sup>17</sup> N.E. Everitt, *British Secret Service During the Great War* (London: Hutchinson 1920); Nigel West, *M.I. 5* (Reading: Triad/Granada, 1983); Nigel West, *M.I. 6 British Secret Intelligence Service Operations 1909-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); Patrick Beesly, *Room 40 British Naval Intelligence 1914-18* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); John Ferris (ed), *The British Army and Signals Intelligence during the First World War* (Bath: Army Records Society, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground*, pp. 115-6.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985); Anthony Clayton, *Forearmed: A History of the Intelligence Corps* (London: Brassey's, 1996) is a unit history covering most of the twentieth century.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin 2009); *MI6 The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate British Military Intelligence in the First World War* (London: Columbus Books, 1989). Chapter 8 'A Riddle No More' argues for the plausibility of a conspiracy theory regarding the secret rescue of the Grand Duchess Tatiana Romanov from the Bolshevik revolutionaries. This is based on unsubstantiated memoirs, pp. 251-257.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Beach, 'British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918', University College London.

holds all that has survived of the documentation that the BEF produced during the First World War.<sup>24</sup> Likewise the Australian War Memorial [AWM] holds a similar collection for the Australian Imperial Force [AIF], which was utilised at Broodseinde.<sup>25</sup> These collections include the daily, weekly and fortnightly intelligence summaries of the BEF's formations.<sup>26</sup> These sources present some problems due to being incomplete or copied across collections. Specific gaps will be notified when relevant. Other archival sources come in the form of private collections of papers and diaries.<sup>27</sup> These provide added context to the often dry reporting of the intelligence summaries. However, they cannot always provide much relevant detail in regards to illuminating the daily build up of field intelligence. As they also mainly come from officers in high positions, they are broader in their focus. As such this thesis has utilised the intelligence summaries to build up the intelligence picture as their focus is purely military. It has used the other archival sources to provide context and background to the battle and intelligence system.

This thesis does not set out to gauge the accuracy of British military intelligence at Broodseinde, but to assess what was known of the German counter-attack and when. As Beach states 'regardless of whether, in hindsight, British intelligence officers were correct about the German Army, it is their perception and its degree of influence that is important to a full understanding of British military conduct during the First World War'.<sup>28</sup> What is being measured in this thesis is not the accuracy of the intelligence but rather, how accurately it was being analysed. Intelligence analysis was a distinct discipline, one that required its own methodology. It was seen as 'academic' by British officers in a pejorative sense.<sup>29</sup> However, as this study shall show, intelligence analysis was, by 1917, a fully developed and important aspect to the BEF's continued prosecution of the war.

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<sup>24</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett, *The First World War: The Essential Guide to Sources in the U.K. National Archives* (Kew: PRO, 2002)

<sup>25</sup> The online Australian War Memorial archive can be found at [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au).

<sup>26</sup> TNA: PRO WO/95 contains all the war diaries for each British formation during the war; WO 106 contains documentation from the Imperial General Staff and WO 157 contains the intelligence reports for all the British formations involved in the global war.

<sup>27</sup> The collections of the Imperial War Museum [IWM], Intelligence Corps Museum [ICM] and Liddle Hart Centre for Military Archives [LHCMA] have been utilised for this study.

<sup>28</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> IWM: Papers of Major-General Phillip Whitefoord, Lecture, 1926. Whitefoord was an intelligence staff officer at GHQ in 1917.

Chapter I:  
The Build-Up to the Battle of Broodseinde,  
4 October 1917.

## Introduction

This first chapter of the thesis shall provide the context for both the Battle of Broodseinde and military intelligence during the years and months leading up to it. It will consider the relationship of military intelligence at each step of its command structure down to division level, as this was the lowest level where analysis occurred.<sup>1</sup> No intelligence summaries were written from Brigade level down.<sup>2</sup> As such this part of the thesis will look at the different organisations that were concerned with intelligence analysis. Starting at the top of the chain of command, these levels were: the War Office in London [WO]; General Headquarters in France [GHQ]; the Armies; the Corps and the Divisions. For all of these organisations it will assess their structure and strengths and weaknesses of its intelligence analysis in the build up to the Battle of Broodseinde. It will then conclude its findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', pp. 98-100.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157 contains no intelligence reports from a formation lower than division.

## The War Office

The WO was responsible for the direction of the British war effort. Based in London, it directed the strategy of British forces in all theatres of the war, as well as its operations, administration and intelligence gathering. Through the course of the war it had already undergone many changes and expansions to ensure the army's superiority and effectiveness as the effects of total war were felt. The mass expansion of the British Army was felt by the WO. At its peak in 1917, the British Army employed 3.9 million men, 1.7 million of these on the western front. This number was not matched exponentially by the number of staff officers, which consistently hovered at around 12,000.<sup>1</sup> This resulted in poor management of the British Army for much of the war. This was compounded by its traditional class based hierarchy. Structural and organisational changes in late 1916, although achieving much good for the intelligence services in particular, led to an increasing bureaucracy in the WO. Although steps were taken to combat this, particularly by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and GHQ, mostly the system of command of the army remained one of 'top-down line management'.<sup>2</sup> The WO was not, however, ineffective. Its re-organisation and restructuring allowed a successful prosecution of military intelligence in the later years of the war.

In 1914 the intelligence branch of the WO came under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Military Operations [DMO]. Lieutenant-General Sir George Macdonogh headed this department.<sup>3</sup> Working conditions at this time were difficult. Field-Marshal Sir John French, commanding the BEF, believed that the WO departments were suitable only for intelligence regarding the German Army on the western front.<sup>4</sup> As a result of poor sources and internal pressure from his intelligence commanders to fulfil wider remits than just the German Army, and with GHQ gaining greater independence in this respect, competition between these

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics from Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Great War* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Pearson Ed., 2007) pp. 218-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> David R. Woodward, *Field Marshal Sir William Robertson Chief of the Imperial General Staff in The Great War* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1998), p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Field-Marshal Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the BEF from 1914 to 1915, was noted for his lack of enthusiasm regarding field intelligence. See David Stevenson, *1914 1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin 2005) pp. 52-165. However, he believed that the intelligence services of the WO would be able to provide enough focussed intelligence on the German Army that a field intelligence service would not be necessary, Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 39-40; David French, 'Sir John French's Secret Service on the Western Front, 1914-15', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.7, 1984.

organisations grew.<sup>5</sup> After the defeats of 1914-15 Sir John French was replaced as Commander of the BEF by Sir Douglas Haig. The head of the British Army, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff [CIGS], Sir Archibald Murray, was replaced by Sir William Robertson on 23 December 1915.<sup>6</sup> Both Robertson and Haig, now Generals, wanted to move away from a civilian dictated strategy by the War Cabinet and put into motion an extensive reform of the General Staff.<sup>7</sup> At this point jurisdiction of secret intelligence fell to Military Operations [MO]. The reforms created two directorates of equal importance: Military Operations [MO] and Military Intelligence [MI] to combat the extensive growth of the intelligence staff.<sup>8</sup> Macdonogh was given the newly created role of Director of Military Intelligence [DMI], now free of MO oversight and answerable only to the CIGS himself.<sup>9</sup> From here each office was further re-organised. These structural reforms substantially helped military intelligence to grow in importance although failed to create a singular chain of command between the WO and GHQ.

MI was structured into nine sub-sections by 1917.<sup>10</sup> Two offices administered foreign espionage: MI3 under Brevet-Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Cox, who oversaw analysis for all of Europe, including all German military information; and MI1 under Brevet-Lieutenant Colonel C.N. French, who were responsible for the accumulation of intelligence directly relating to the German armies globally. MI1 itself was further sub-divided into departments, as were all MI offices. The most discussed sub-section of MI1 by historians is MI1(c), which oversaw ‘Special Duties – Secret Intelligence’. It was headed by Captain Mansfield Smith Cumming RN or ‘C’. This was the precursor to both the modern MI6 or ‘Secret Intelligence Service’ and MI5 or ‘Security Service’.<sup>11</sup> The title, however, was merely a formality and Cumming operated his office with a certain degree of autonomy. Such was this independence that, in November 1915, before the staff reforms, Cumming argued that his bureau was being

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<sup>5</sup> Stevenson, *1914 1918*, p. 30; Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, pp. 27-30; Jeffrey *MI6*, p. 39-49; Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, pp. 137-148.

<sup>6</sup> One argument is that this was caused by Haig and Robertson intriguing together. Woodward, *Robertson*, pp. 20-25.

<sup>7</sup> Haig was not made a Field Marshal until 27 December 1916; John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Cassell, 2005), pp. 244-5.

<sup>8</sup> Woodward, *Robertson*, pp. 29-34; Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>9</sup> There was a constant political feud between C and the DMI concerning the boundaries of MI1(c)’s reach. Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 49-55.

<sup>10</sup> See Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, pp. 390-393, ‘Directorate of Military Intelligence 1917’ tree.

<sup>11</sup> For background, see Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 195-259; Alan Judd, *The Quest for C: Mansfield Cumming and the Founding of the Secret Service* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), pp. 30-46; Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp.39-98; Andrew, *MI*, pp.3-29.

side-tracked amongst the many offices of the WO.<sup>12</sup> He was told in no uncertain terms by Macdonogh, who was technically his superior, that he retained full control over his office.<sup>13</sup> This belligerence in such situations did not deter Cumming from his ambition that his office would provide political and economic as well as military intelligence. Overall the independence of MI and MO ensured that by mid-1917, the WO had a good analytical capacity for measuring the German Army.<sup>14</sup> Combinations of systems were implemented to promote unity and co-operation across these sections. The first was that the personnel of both MO and MI were fully interchangeable and repositioned regularly between both bodies.<sup>15</sup> The second was the creation of a sub-section, MO3, as a liaison department between MO and MI.<sup>16</sup> It held weekly lectures by and for all heads of departments to ensure awareness and understanding throughout the staffs.<sup>17</sup> This organisation of the General Staff was a positive factor in the growth of the BEF's intelligence analysis capability during the war, although the ambitions of both Cumming and Charteris ensured regular conflict.<sup>18</sup>

In the months preceding Broodseinde, the WO built up an accurate picture of the make-up of the German Army. Both MI3 and MI1(c) had various means to analyse the enemy forces. MI3, amongst its many duties, had the important job of piecing together the enemy's order-of-battle from the intelligence it received through the other offices.<sup>19</sup> The order-of-battle was an approximation of the health, strength and location of Germany's divisions opposite the British lines. Cox did not simply use espionage to achieve this:

A great deal of information, and that not the least valuable was collected by perfectly legitimate means. The newspapers published at Kiel, Wilhelmshaven, and Danzig, to say nothing of the Berlin Journals, often contained, in spite of careful censorship, Service news which contained useful facts to the trained reader.<sup>20</sup>

These sources could be acquired freely and easily enough through neutral states. Cox was an acknowledged expert on the enemy, with 'an encyclopaedic knowledge of the German

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', pp. 138-140.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 232; Jeffrey, *MI6*, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> 'A Former Member of the Service', *Work of the Secret Service*, Part 1, cited in Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 127.

Army<sup>21</sup> having previously headed the German department at MI3. Cox himself, got much of his intelligence from MI1(c). Cumming was running a train-watching network in occupied Belgium. His 'T Service' employed hundreds of agents whose job it was to report on troop movements. The German Army had a vast rail network in their occupational territories. By monitoring it carefully, these agents could record the changing locations of divisions, with accurate numbers of men, horses and guns in transit. Cumming's network was overseen by Captain Richard Tinsley stationed in the Netherlands, hence the name 'T Service'.<sup>22</sup> It operated in competition with two other similar organisations run by GHQ; Major Cecil Cameron's and Major Ernest Wallinger's. Before 1917, it had suffered from the unhealthy competition between the organisations, which had led to serious mistakes.<sup>23</sup> In 1916 the network was compromised and Tinsley was ousted as a spy. However, this proved to be a good change of fortune. Captain Henry Landau, who had been in charge of all military information from Tinsley's organisation, took over. By implementing many structural changes, such as the process for editing reports, Landau did much to turn the network around, so much that Cox commented on the quality of its work in February 1917.<sup>24</sup> Importantly for Third Ypres, Landau was able to extend his network. In the summer months, he took control of La Dame Blanche, a highly effective network of citizens and families in occupied Belgium that had been operating in a smaller capacity under Cameron. They were distrustful of his organisation, fearing leaks. They requested, and were made into citizen soldiers. Because of this they grew into the largest and most successful spy ring of the war, although they detested the term.<sup>25</sup> This meant that in the months leading to Broodseinde, Cox was able to confirm GHQ's train reports through the intelligence he received from Cumming.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, by 27 September 1917, with a new post in the network fully established, Landau doubted that, 'a single troop train was missed'.<sup>27</sup>

Analysis of this information resided with MI3, but because no boundaries had been defined in terms of intelligence collection or analysis, it would also fall into GHQ's remit of information

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<sup>21</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 68-78.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/45, 'The History of GHQ Intelligence (b) January 1917 to April 1918: Part 1 The Secret Service', Lieutenant Colonel R.J. Drake, 11 February 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey, *MI6*, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> The network *La Dame Blanche* eventually covered most of Belgium. Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 78-81; It was organised into battalions. Battalion III was subject to an informative study, Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage during the First World War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

concerning the enemy and the effects of attritional warfare on both the German Army and country. This led to the clashing of personalities, especially between Macdonogh and Charteris. Quickly, these analytical systems were called into question. The WO used questionable sources to assess German manpower. As mentioned the German press was utilised as a source of intelligence. German casualty lists, regularly published here, could give valuable clues to the manpower available to the German Army.<sup>28</sup> They gave every man's unit, age and rank. However, both Cox and Macdonogh formed misgivings about the accuracy of these lists as they felt they were being doctored to keep the German public unaware of the scale of these casualties. By June 1917 they had stopped using them, turning to information provided by French intelligence and comparing their own casualty statistics.<sup>29</sup> These sources were good enough to ensure that, at a War Cabinet meeting, Macdonogh produced a paper that quashed Charteris' assertions that Germany was only months from capitulation.<sup>30</sup> Good analysis also gave the WO a clear indication that, if Russia fell to another seemingly inevitable revolution, then it would free up almost three full armies for Germany to transfer to the Western Front.<sup>31</sup> Both Haig and Macdonogh were extremely concerned about this. Letters in the weeks after the battle, made it clear that this was subject that had been receiving attention for some time.<sup>32</sup> However Germany only began a mass movement of its troops between 7 November 1917 and 30 April 1918.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of Germany's order-of-battle, Cox was instrumental in providing good quality analysis and distributing it accordingly. Cox had collected so much information on the German Army that 'he carried most of it in his head'.<sup>34</sup> He produced an index distributing this knowledge across the BEF, entitled *German Forces in the Field*.<sup>35</sup> Ensuring this book

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<sup>28</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> French, *Strategy*, p. 154. Macdonogh's paper is referenced as; TNA: PRO CAB/27/8/WP18, Macdonogh, 'The manpower and internal conditions of the Central Powers-Germany', 1 October 1917.

<sup>31</sup> Giordan Fong, 'The Movement of German Divisions to the Western Front, Winter 1917-1918', *War In History*, Vol. 7, 2000, p. 234.

<sup>32</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Letter from Haig to Gen. Staff, 8 October 1917; 'I must assume that Russia may fail us, even to the extent of a separate peace'. He estimates that they could move 32 Divisions across, bringing the total on the Western Front to 179. Macdonogh announced in a letter on October 14 1917 that Germany was in the midst of a political crisis with signs of a 'coup d'état' and that Britain had to keep applying her 'full military pressure on the Western Front'.

<sup>33</sup> Fong, 'German Divisions', p.235. Between these months Germany actually managed to move 59 infantry and 3 cavalry divisions. This was actually more than Haig's estimates, in his letter, of 32 infantry divisions although he was not basing his numbers on a 6 month time frame; TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Letter from Haig to Gen. Staff, 8 October 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 219.

<sup>35</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 145.

stayed up to date proved a major operation. Six small books were published between March 1915 and April 1918, by MI2(c).<sup>36</sup> Additionally other publications by senior staff were also disseminated amongst the troops. In June 1917, Beach argues that, ‘the most significant volume...the *Index of Infantry Regiments and Field Post Offices*’ was published.<sup>37</sup> They were distributed to all ranks, in all fields of battle. They were the ‘Brown Books’, the culmination of the WO’s intelligence analysis.<sup>38</sup> These were the peak of the WO’s intelligence analysis before Broodseinde. They were a yardstick from which to measure and analyse future evolutions. ‘In many ways this handbook stands as a testimony to the development of the intelligence system over the previous four years.’<sup>39</sup> The WO was practicing a fundamental of intelligence analysis: to constantly observe, report and build upon that which was known.

The WO’s capacity for military intelligence in the months leading up to Broodseinde was good. They had a good organisation with delegations in every office. The restructuring of the General Staff meant that the role of intelligence within the British military began to change. MI became a professional and respected organisation and served the WO extremely well throughout the war. The staffs were well organised, and the hierarchical system was beginning to be cast aside to allow for quicker recruitment.<sup>40</sup> Problematic to the unity of British military intelligence were the independence of its organisations. This repeatedly led to personality clashes, as evidenced by the arguments between Macdonogh, Cumming and Charteris. Ultimately the WO was able to monitor the German Army very accurately. This position allowed them to keep GHQ in check. Although this bred an unhealthy competition between the organisations, the information they were collecting and their analysis of it before Broodseinde was sound.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 32. The book itself was compiled by Major Marshal-Cornwall, a career Intelligence Officer during the First World War. In 1916, he had been posted to GHQ’s intelligence staff from II Corps. He was later made head of MI3 in 1918. By this time his rank was Brevet Lieutenant Colonel. He wrote a book of his experiences working with Haig; James Marshal-Cornwall, *Haig as a Military Commander* (London: Batsford, 1973)

<sup>37</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> Two published examples are; Jim Beach (ed), *The German Army Handbook of 1918* (London: Pen & Sword, 2008); Imperial General Staff, *Handbook of the German Army, January 1917* (Wakefield: EP Publishing, [Reprint, 1917] 1973)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. ix.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp. 58-61; MO5(g) took on 227 new recruits in 1915 alone after an intensive recruitment campaign. Many of these new recruits, and those of MI1(c), were women. Andrew, *MI5*, pp. 55-63.

## GHQ

GHQ in France was the administrative centre for the BEF in France and Flanders. Its main intelligence duties lay in assessing the makeup and health of the German Army on the western front. To this end they were also concerned with building up Germany's order-of-battle:

As everyone knows the basis is the building up of the enemy's order-of-battle, for when this has been done the identification of one unit is prima facie evidence of the presence of the division to which it belongs, and possibly of the corps or even army.<sup>1</sup>

This would provide 'a vital gauge to measure German military stamina, and the exhaustion and corruption of those reserves would indicate that Germany's war effort was spent at last'.<sup>2</sup>

With Haig's arrival at GHQ in the winter of 1915 a greater emphasis was put on frontline intelligence. Brigadier-General John Charteris, who had been Haig's chief intelligence officer in both First Corps and First Army from 1914-15, benefitted from his patronage and became GSO1 Intelligence at GHQ. He was a contentious choice due to his personality but was well qualified for the job. Indeed his character saw him labelled by the Prince of Wales as 'a shit'.<sup>3</sup> Throughout his tenure, however, GHQ Intelligence took on a greater importance.

In August 1914 Colonel Macdonogh was the assigned GSO 1 Intelligence for GHQ. His small command gave him four sub-sections, the most important of which, I(a), had a total staff of two officers;<sup>4</sup> a paltry number for an office that later become the most important in GHQ's analytical effort. By 1917, GHQ Intelligence had greatly expanded its responsibilities. These were separated into offices. I(a) Operational Intelligence was the largest, directed by Lieutenant-Colonel B.W. Bowdler.<sup>5</sup> The other offices were: I(b) Secret Service; I(c) Topographical and Maps; I(d) Press; I(e) Wireless and Ciphers; I(f) Visitors; I(g) War Trade;

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<sup>1</sup> IWM: Papers of General Sir Walter Kirke, 'Memoirs of Sir George M.W. Macdonogh GBE KCB KCM', p. 388. He also mentions the workings of German Counter-Intelligence, citing one reason for confusion from the WO lay in the fact that German disinformation was often spread through neutral embassies. He cites that one big disaster was averted by recognising this early on, p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp.91-2; Staff officer numbers taken from Figure 17, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, pp. 388-9.

I(h) Censorship; and I(x) the administration of the Intelligence Corps.<sup>6</sup> This amount of responsibilities created an ‘unwieldy’ and inefficient organisation.<sup>7</sup> This expansion was, along with the mass expansion of the BEF as a whole, neither rapid nor comprehensive. The two staff officers assigned to GHQ I(a) in 1914 had only become seven by 1917, though they benefitted from an additional attachment of three Intelligence Corps officers. This was progress, but GHQ never saw its intelligence section flourish quite like the WO. As an intelligence organisation it carried too many tertiary responsibilities like censorship and press handling, whilst maintaining only a minimum of staff to handle the analytical workload. Although the staffs were well trained and supported by intelligence officers, analytical discipline was poor.

British high command suffered throughout the war from a lack of defined intelligence areas. As has already been discussed the remits of the WO and GHQ intelligence services overlapped. GHQ Intelligence summaries from the period regularly analysed both the German Army and German home front when it should have concentrated exclusively on the army. As a result of this assertions were often made based on unconfirmed sources. One example of this is a GHQ Intelligence Summary dated 24 September 1917.<sup>8</sup> This stated that diseases were ravaging Germany, particularly dysentery and typhus. The sources are given as, ‘the German Press of various dates’.<sup>9</sup> The summary then goes on to report on the morale of captured German officers. It stated that:

A noticeable feature is the change of attitude of the German officers, who have lost confidence in the future, and have given up all idea of a military success on the part of Germany in the Western Theatre. The one topic which appears to interest officer prisoners now is the prospect of peace.<sup>10</sup>

The reliability of information from prisoners could be dubious unless confirmed. Yet here, it is reported upon and unquestioned. The summary is at odds with itself further on:

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<sup>6</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, Figure 19, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup> IWM: Whitefoord Papers, Intelligence Lecture, 1926.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/347, GHQ Intelligence Summary, 24 September 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Hostile counter-attacks continued on the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> on the Ypres front.

Considerable German forces were engaged without any result being gained, except a heavy increase in the enemy's losses.<sup>11</sup>

The summary continues describing the 'heavy fighting' and how the enemy 'attacked with great determination'.<sup>12</sup> Its descriptive language in this section does not tally with the previous statement that morale was very low. GHQ's analysis here suffered from poor deployment of sources. In the build up to Broodseinde, similar poor analytical discipline would fuel the most contentious issue of intelligence during Third Ypres; that of the question of German manpower and morale.

GHQ I(a) had been directed to carefully monitor the state of the German Army, particularly its reserves.<sup>13</sup> This would indicate how many soldiers, and of what quality, German High Command could call upon. The greater the numbers killed, the more reserve units would be called up to fight. This cycle, it was hoped, would continue until Germany could no longer wage war. The information required to monitor this was relatively simple, as the German press had to issue notice of the call up of reserves. This combined with frontline observation and captured documents ensured that GHQ had a clear picture of this process.<sup>14</sup> To monitor the German Army GHQ used captured pay books, collating their information to disseminate numbers.<sup>15</sup> However, this source had its shortcomings; they only recorded wastage of conscription classes; they were not specific or detailed enough to provide wastage numbers for individual engagements and missing men were not accounted for, even if they had simply changed regiment or had gone to hospital.<sup>16</sup> In spite of these facts, Charteris estimated German casualties for the battles of Arras, Champagne and the Aisne alone at 400,000.<sup>17</sup> The WO, later and using different methods, tabulated it as 132,000.<sup>18</sup> This difference prompted huge debate and by August GHQ had changed its system to that of the WO's. The method adopted involved cross referencing the known numbers of the reserve classes with the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Brig-General John Charteris, *At GHQ* (London: Cassell, 1931), 1 January 1916, p. 129.

<sup>14</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> This was a much relied upon source during Charteris' tenure at GHQ, but not thereafter. Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, pp. 89-95; Beach, 'British Intelligence', pp. 143-4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 359; John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Cassell, 2005), p. 354.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO T173/829, 'Note on the Strategic Situation with Special Reference to the Present Condition of German resources and Probable German Operations', 11 June 1917. This file is currently missing from TNA: PRO. Cited in Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, p. 359.

<sup>18</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, 'Table showing comparative British and enemy casualties on the battle fronts of Arras, Messines and the Third Battle of Ypres (to 5 October 1917), 17 October 1917.

amount of prisoners taken, thus extrapolating the health of a division.<sup>19</sup> This did combat the problem to some extent, but GHQ's estimates remained higher than the WO's throughout 1917.<sup>20</sup> Both offices used a system with an 'arbitrary methodology',<sup>21</sup> yet GHQ still seemed to be over-estimating during the build up to the battle.

The other aspect of the German Army that GHQ I(a) was analysing was the morale of its troops. This was an extremely complex thing to measure. The raw information came from prisoner interrogations and captured documents. These sources themselves presented great trouble when used to monitor morale, and Charteris himself was critical about using such sources in this regard.<sup>22</sup> By 1917, GHQ had moved to using captured documents as the primary means to assess German morale. However, the time it took to translate and process the information, combined with the paucity of such evidence unless advancing into German held territory, meant that this information was scattershot and nearly always outdated.<sup>23</sup> A GHQ intelligence summary reported that '...there appears no doubt that the deterioration previously noted in the fighting qualities of the German troops has continued'.<sup>24</sup> It cited various captured documentation to support this. A later summary reported on the use of German propaganda officers, both at home and in the army. These 'Welfare Officers', were to 'make every man clearly understand the necessity for continuing the war'.<sup>25</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> a report contained an extract of a letter saying, '...the moral[e] of the troops is nil. It is probably not the case with us only...everything that is done is done under extreme compulsion'.<sup>26</sup> This report was sent to the WO as GHQ's evidence of a continuing decline in German morale. This was poor analytical discipline on the part of GHQ I(a). Letters and statements like these did provide a good indication of an individual's morale but were snapshots of a certain feeling at a certain time. This intelligence had been placed out of context by GHQ and used to extrapolate on the health of units, formations, and the German Army as a whole.

GHQ made some well debated analytical mistakes during the build up to the Battle of Broodseinde; however these over-estimations did not conceal the fact that the British war

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<sup>19</sup> Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, p. 361.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 151.

<sup>22</sup> Charteris, *At GHQ*, p. 221. He describes prisoners as poor gauges of morale, preferring instead written evidence.

<sup>23</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/24, GHQ Intelligence Summary, 21 September 1917.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/347, GHQ Intelligence Summary, 27 September 1917.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/24, GHQ Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

effort was pushing Germany deeper into war weariness. GHQ intelligence did not over-emphasise this but rather were too quick to assume that single sources of intelligence betrayed deeper problems. They suffered from a lack of analytical discipline. Two weeks after Broodseinde, Haig believed that the BEF's efforts were causing a 'revolutionary' feeling within Germany.<sup>27</sup> This was an optimistic analysis of the situation. Macdonogh carefully pointed out that not all factors were in place for a revolution,<sup>28</sup> but that:

The best weapon to take advantage of this weakness is military pressure for it will more than anything else accentuate the internal dissensions and contribute more rapidly than any other measure to the undermining and final breaking of the German war-spirit which is our foremost war aim.<sup>29</sup>

Haig's direction of Third Ypres was agreed upon as necessary, but poor analysis by GHQ gave him the impression that Germany was in far more severe circumstances than it was. Macdonogh did not believe that these differing statistics changed the situation, as he defended Haig:

As regards the reserve [forces] available on October 1<sup>st</sup>, there is a difference between the calculations of Sir Douglas Haig and the Director of Military Intelligence respectively of 720,000 less 500,000 – 220,000. It is not altogether surprising that two different officers should arrive at two different conclusions, and the difference is not great seeing that Germany has a population of 68,000,000.<sup>30</sup>

This was written in the weeks after the Battle of Broodseinde, and was quoted verbatim by Robertson for the attention of the War Cabinet.<sup>31</sup> The statement itself, therefore, was politically motivated and designed to show a unified front of the WO and GHQ to their political masters.

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<sup>27</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Haig, 'German Man-power and Moral', 16 October 1917.

<sup>28</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Macdonogh, 'Effect of Military Operations on the Political situation in Germany', 13 March 1917.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Macdonogh, 'Political Situation'. This analysis is corroborated in Mary Fulbrook, *German History since 1800* (London: Hodder Headline, 1997), pp. 147-226.

<sup>30</sup> TNA: PRO WO/106/313, Appreciation of General Staff, Sir William Robertson (CIGS), quoting General Macdonogh, Director of Military Intelligence, 26 October 1917.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Ill-defined intelligence borders meant that the WO and GHQ overlapped their services unnecessarily. GHQ I(a) staff could not cope with the workload that evaluating Germany, the German Army globally, and the German Army on the western front brought. Because of these mistakes, Haig believed they were in a more positive situation before the Battle of Broodseinde than the WO did. Although shows of unity had been made after the disagreements over Germany's manpower and morale, the relationship between the two bodies had badly deteriorated. The real cause of these debates was the competing systems of both organisations and their over-lapping responsibilities. GHQ's system, in particular, was too susceptible to Haig's self-belief. In the summer of 1917, I(a) and Charteris found themselves applying intelligence analysis to further Haig's strategy. As such, the evidence they used was questionable as it had been hand-picked to back-up pre-existing notions. The WO had no such problems. They were able to offer better, more detached analysis, although both intelligence systems collected very accurate information and painted a reasonably accurate picture of the German Army during these months.

## The Armies

The BEF operated a structure that, although seemed very ‘top down’, actually gave great freedom to the front line commanders when it came to the planning and execution of operations. This was thanks to the ethos of the BEF that allowed those in command nearer the front lines to assess the situation and develop battle plans accordingly. This was made official by the document ‘Field Services Regulations Part 1’ [FSR 1].<sup>1</sup> The BEF, in 1917, utilised five Armies to direct operations against the German Army. The two that oversaw Broodseinde was Second Army under General Sir Herbert Plumer, and Fifth Army commanded by General Sir Hubert Gough. The structures and ethos of the BEF, however, led to varying qualities of intelligence analysis at this level.

On 31 July 1917, the Third Battle of Ypres was launched after a problematic few months for Haig. The gestation phase had been fraught with political problems due to the pressures of coalition warfare. This had led to compromises, particularly concerning the balance the plans presented between breakthrough and limited advances.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the state of the French Army and French society meant that the War Cabinet was left with no other option but to support Haig’s wishes.<sup>3</sup> Haig originally gave command of the campaign to General Sir Hubert Gough and his Fifth Army, in the hope of securing a breakthrough. As the weather drastically deteriorated in the summer months, Gough had to delay the original date of the attack by three weeks. When they were launched, the preliminary battles of Pilckem Ridge, Westhoek and Langemarck failed due to the morass created by the weather and the ambitious targets that were set.<sup>4</sup> The divisions could not progress to their ultimate objective, the ‘red line’, 1000 yards away. By September Haig switched command of the campaign to Plumer, who was known for his methodical planning. Plumer utilised the ‘bite and hold’ operational

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<sup>1</sup> In 1909 the General Staff had issued ‘Field Service Regulations Part 1’ which continued to have a major impact. It was an ethos as opposed to a doctrine; a statement of the operating procedures of the BEF. In 1911 Haig helped to draft this missive that stated that British officers should be trusted to implement plans how they see fit due to their frontline experiences. See; Simpson, *Directing Operations*, pp. xvi-xvii; Albert Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front. The British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War I*, (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 8-27.

<sup>2</sup> French, *Strategy*, pp. 94-127; Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, pp. 138-162; Haig himself stated that the strategy was attrition then breakthrough. ‘The Enemy must first be worn down before a decisive attack is launched and a pursuit begun’. Thursday 3 May, Gary Sheffield & John Bourne (eds), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, (London: Phoenix, 2006), p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), pp. 242-6; French, *Strategy*, pp. 112-123.

<sup>4</sup> The dates of these battles are 31 July, 10 August and 16-18 August 1917 respectively.

method which saw immediate results and small advances made. He did not aim for a breakthrough as Gough had done but used his battles to achieve limited advances, pushing slowly but surely to the high ground behind Ypres.<sup>5</sup> Broodseinde was directed based on these principles.<sup>6</sup>

The German Army had been utilising two defensive tactics up to this point. One was holding their frontline line regiments in staggered lines behind the front. This 'defence-in-depth' policy would repel an advance by utilising many defensive lines to wear it down.<sup>7</sup> The second tactic was to use *Eingrief* or 'interlocking' divisions to enter the front quickly from the reserve lines and counter-attack after the British divisions were clear of their own artillery cover. They would then press this advantage under the cover of their own guns and rout the attackers.<sup>8</sup> The combination of these defensive tactics and the weather had halted Gough's advance. The operational method used by Plumer had nullified this threat. They ensured that the attacking divisions went only so far into the thinly held German front line and then consolidated their position. Although this approach was the only answer to German defensive tactics it did mean that the divisions could not take immediate advantage of this success, having to wait for the line to consolidate before moving on. To stay aware of these changes in tactics and any further adaptations, both Second and Fifth Army required an expansive frontline intelligence system.

1917 saw a great increase and emphasis on the BEF's analytical infrastructure, particularly as a result of the Intelligence Corps. This analysis was mainly recorded in periodic intelligence summaries. These summaries have already been looked at to some extent in this study. The War Office and GHQ produced statements on an 'ad-hoc basis'.<sup>9</sup> The production of such statements within the lower organisations of the BEF was considerably more structured. Armies offered their appreciation every fortnight, combining the GHQ summaries with the reports from their Corps'. Army, Corps and Divisional staffs also produced daily intelligence

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<sup>5</sup> For introductions to the debates concerning Second and Fifth Armies see, Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General* (London: Pen & Sword Ltd., 2004), pp. 194-210; Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele*, pp. 107-112; Stevenson, *1914 1918*, pp. 407-410. For a revisionist perspective see Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 200-205.

<sup>6</sup> The tactics have been attributed to Plumer but the doctrine had been in discussion since before the war. Paul Harris & Marble Sanders, 'The "Step by Step" Approach: British Military Thought and Operational Method on the Western Front, 1915-1917', *War In History*, Vol. 1, 2008, pp. 38-42.

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to these defensive measures see Nigel Cave, *Polygon Wood Ypres* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), pp. 95-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid; Jack Sheldon, *The German Army at Passchendaele* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>9</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 151.

summaries. All of these reports were collated at Army level, which served as the crux of operational intelligence analysis.

The intelligence staffs of the two British Armies at Broodseinde differed greatly in the quality of their analytical output. Fifth Army's intelligence reports had strong foundations but suffered from poor analysis. Its GSO 1 Intelligence was Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Goldsmith.<sup>10</sup> In August Goldsmith reported that 'the situation is considered to be settling down after active operations and there is an opportunity of improving the existing defences'.<sup>11</sup> This was good analysis and correct. However, Goldsmith later stated 'the enemy's dispositions show continued anxiety for the safety of his line opposite the southern portion of our front'.<sup>12</sup> This would suggest that measured improvement had devolved into some form of panic. This reported 'anxiety' was not confirmed and was thus an assumption.<sup>13</sup> Another report stated that 'the ZONNEBEKE group has been rather less active than usual probably owing to the action of our counter-batteries which have shelled the battery positions in this area, apparently with good effect'.<sup>14</sup> No evidence was provided to prove this statement, nor was confirmation sought of the success of British counter-battery fire.<sup>15</sup> This was another assumption. This report also seemed to ignore conclusions made the previous day:

The enemy at times moves sections [of his artillery] into provisional emplacements with a view to attracting the enemy's attention so that another battery whose position has probably not been discovered can carry out effective fire...Prisoners have stated on several occasions that the enemy brings batteries forward at night to fire on our front lines and withdraws them to rearward positions as soon as they have finished shooting.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that analytical mistakes were being made. It is unfair to pin the blame solely on Goldsmith as the contradictions were also the responsibility of his staff. However, mistakes like this in the realm of intelligence could only obscure any analysis of enemy intentions.

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<sup>10</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213-5. Fifth Army Intelligence Files, September-October 1917; Signatures on summaries correspond with Imperial General Staff, *Army List-October* 1917 (London; IWM, unknown).

<sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Fifth Army Intelligence Summary, 7 August 1917.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Annex to Fifth Army Intelligence Summary, 11 August 1917, 'Enemy Attitude'.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Fifth Daily Intelligence Summary, 15 August 1917.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Fifth Army Intelligence Summaries, 15-18 August 1917.

<sup>16</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Fifth Army Intelligence Summary, 14 August 1917.

Fifth Army's intelligence analysis was not very magnanimous in its assessment of the German divisions opposite them:

There is, however, talk among the [captured] men that at least two guns of the 23<sup>rd</sup> R.F.A.R. [Reserve Field Artillery Regiment] placed in front of the "WILHELM STELLUNG" (3rd German Line) were hastily blown up for fear of their falling into our hands. While this statement must be accepted with reserve, it is certain that the 8<sup>th</sup> battery of this regiment suffered heavy casualties, some of which were due to gas.<sup>17</sup>

The implication of this statement is that counter-battery fire was more likely to be the cause of these destroyed guns and that evidence to the contrary should only be questioned first. A change in the enemy's situation was taken as a direct result of positive British action. No allowance was made for any British failings and due consideration was not given to the enemy's situation. Added to this, no confirmation was sought of these assertions. In this instance, Fifth Army's analysis suffered from prejudice. Their reports attributed enemy losses to British success and contradicted themselves when analysing intelligence, in both cases lacking sufficient proof. However, these reports do show that Fifth Army's tactical knowledge of the enemy was sound. In September, Goldsmith and his staff had correctly identified new German defensive tactics of using concrete blockhouses in the defence of their lines.<sup>18</sup> Their front line observations showed that, 'the enemy is evidently much disorganised on the whole front...and is attempting to re-arrange his order-of-battle; it is, therefore, difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion'.<sup>19</sup> Fifth Army's intelligence staff made severe analytical mistakes during this period, but thanks to the frontline intelligence system they were provided with an accurate picture of German defensive tactics and the deterioration of the divisions opposite their front.

Second Army's GSO1 Intelligence was Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mitchell.<sup>20</sup> Mitchell's reports for Second Army were more disciplined in their analysis than Goldsmith's. The language used in the reports is far less prone to ambiguity or bullish remarks. Second Army's reports were also less likely to jump to conclusions. An intelligence summary in August gave

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<sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/213. Annex to Fifth Army Intelligence Summary, 3 August 17 1917.

<sup>18</sup> Sheldon, *The German Army*, p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/214. Fifth Army Intelligence Summary, 22 September 1917.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell had been GSO1 of the Canadian Corps where he oversaw much innovation in regards to intelligence work during his time there. In particular, he did much for the drawing of intelligence maps and the presentation of intelligence analysis as a whole. Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 149.

a less optimistic picture of the enemy forces than Goldsmith's conclusions had. It stated that, 'the infantry has shown considerable power of resistance'.<sup>21</sup> A further report in September also stated, 'the necessity for keeping his front strongly held, however, probably forced the three regiments in line plan. To counteract this method, he has made unprecedented use of his counter-attack divisions'.<sup>22</sup> These reports made clear that Second Army, like Fifth, were aware of the constantly evolving German defensive tactics but were less prejudiced in their conclusions. Between August and September, Beach notes that Second Army observed a downwards trend in enemy morale. Divisions with 'good' reputations were noted to have deteriorated,<sup>23</sup> and Mitchell's report concurs with this; 'the moral of prisoners varies considerably'.<sup>24</sup> Enemy artillery was also being effectively observed and updates were continuously charted into intelligence maps; ably supported by an organised cartographic section and well trained field survey teams.<sup>25</sup> Second Army showed a deep awareness of the position of the German Army:

By the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, the enemy had largely recovered from the confusion and disorganisation caused by our operations on the 26<sup>th</sup> September. His immediate counter-attack division (236<sup>th</sup> Division)...had failed and had been withdrawn again in accordance with his with his known plan of operations.<sup>26</sup>

In their analysis of October, Mitchell qualified their success:

The thickening up of the line by the bringing in of Battalions and Regiments of 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.<sup>27</sup>

Both Fifth and Second Armies had excellent knowledge of the enemy opposite their lines, but differed in their analytical discipline. To their credit Fifth Army emphasised the use of aerial

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<sup>21</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/117. Second Army Fortnightly Summary, 1-15 August 1917.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118. Second Army Fortnightly Summary, 16-30 September 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118. Second Army Fortnightly Summary, 16-30 September 1917.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119. Second Army Intelligence Summary, 20 September 1917. A map at a scale of 1:100 000 shows very clearly marked enemy artillery positions in the forward and rear. Mitchell produced many such maps throughout his tenure at Second Army; Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 149. For more on cartography and its applications in the First World War see; Peter Chasseaud, *Artillery's Astrologers A History of British Survey and Artillery Mapping on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Lewes: Mapbooks, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118. Second Army Weekly Summary, 27 September to 4 October 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

photography to further their own intelligence picture. Their Field Survey Companies created topographically accurate models of the enemy trenches,<sup>28</sup> pieced together from aerial photography.<sup>29</sup> These were then studied by officers before commencing attacks. However, they were not always made available to all soldiers and sometimes kept behind closed doors.<sup>30</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonels Goldsmith and Mitchell, respectively, were able to draw from excellent information but contrasted in their analyses. In the build up to Broodseinde the Armies of the BEF had great knowledge of the enemy's tactics and defences as well as his increased rotation of divisions. However they disagreed over whether this was due more to British success than to German failure. Thus their reports presented mixed messages when copied to their superiors. Haig was in constant contact with his Army, Corps and Division commanders so he might have been aware of such discrepancies.<sup>31</sup> However, intelligence at this level did inform the Armies of the BEF in regard to the success or failure of their strategy. Fifth Army used photographic intelligence analysis to aid knowledge of the defences at Broodseinde but were let down by the performance of their staff. Second Army practiced better analytical discipline to ensure a clear picture was kept of the German Army opposite them by October 1917.

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<sup>28</sup> Griffith, *Battle Tactics*, p. 61; Peter Barton, *Passchendaele: Unseen Panoramas of the Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2007), p. 88, shows a photo of the I and II Anzac Corps examining a model of the terrain before the attack on Messines Ridge, 7 June 1917; Picture showing model of enemy trenches depicting the Passchendaele – Broodseinde Ridge, built by 33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Machine Gun Corps. Sir John Hammerton (ed), *The Great War I Was There* Vol. 3 (London: Amalgamated Press, [n.d.]), p. 1387.

<sup>29</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> General Sir Hubert Gough, *The Fifth Army* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931), pp. 209-210; Brig-Gen A.W. Pagan, *Infantry An Account of 1<sup>st</sup> Gloucestershire Regiment during the War 1914-1918* (Aldershot; Gale & Poden, 1951), pp. 169-170.

<sup>31</sup> In September Haig attended meetings with both Corps and Army staffs on an almost daily routine; Sheffield & Bourne, *Haig: War Diaries*, pp. 321-330.

## The Corps

The next level of command that utilised intelligence analysis was the Corps. Operating below the Army level, they were responsible for planning and executing operations in their sector in accordance with Army directives. Second Army would utilise IX, X, I Anzac and II Anzac Corps to execute the Battle of Broodseinde, whilst Fifth Army used XIV and XVIII Corps. This section shall also look at two more Corps, II and VIII because of the quality of their intelligence analysis. The role of the Corps was not simply ‘middle management’.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to FSR I, Corps staffs became semi-autonomous organisations with full responsibility for the planning and executing of operations passed down from Army staffs.<sup>2</sup> 1917 proved to be a watershed year for the BEF as a number of past innovations began to reach their potential, not least of which was the expanding role of the Corps in the dual roles of intelligence analysis and executing operations.

Before the Battle of the Somme the phrase, ‘Corps Command’ was a misnomer.<sup>3</sup> Up to 1915 there existed only two Corps in the BEF, Haig’s I Corps and Smith-Dorrien’s II Corps. They served more as ‘promotional posts’<sup>4</sup> for their commanders and staffs. During the battle of the Somme; with the expansion of the BEF and its administration, it was acknowledged that the Corps was far better suited to plan battles because of their local knowledge, and in compliance with FSR 1. Devolution of responsibility began to take place. However these changes could not completely eradicate the problems that Corps officers faced. It was ‘apparent that Corps was still acting only as a medium of communication between GHQ, Army and Divisions, rather than taking a more active role in operations’.<sup>5</sup> Divisions would regularly pass through them, sometimes for as long as months and other times for as short as

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Sheffield, Foreword in Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of the growth of Corps Command see: Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 134-172; Simpson, *Directing Operations*, pp. 1-60; Andy Simpson, ‘British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18’, in Gary Sheffield & Dan Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Messenger, *Call To Arms*, pp. 335-66.

<sup>4</sup> Griffith, *Battle Tactics*, p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103

a week.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, little continuity or loyalty was imbued within the troops to their Corps.<sup>7</sup> One description typifies their existence:

A Corps Staff which had been well dug in for a year on a quiet front, resembled nothing so much as the menial hierarchy of a ducal palace – with the duke away. Never having had a division on their hands for more than a month or so they came to regard them as persons to be employed not encouraged. Their interest lay in the smooth airs which caressed Army and GHQ.<sup>8</sup>

However, there were important areas that Corps Command did influence in the months preceding the battle. The staffs had taken on a more dominant role concerning artillery and infantry co-operation through the creation of the Counter Battery Staff Office [CBSO].<sup>9</sup> Corps Commanders were more able to follow a battle from zero hour onwards because of their liaisons with the Royal Flying Corps [RFC] unlike their superiors in the Army staffs, who had to rely on runners and inconsistent wireless and telephones.<sup>10</sup> By early 1917 they were equally responsible with Army HQ for planning major offensive operations.<sup>11</sup> Corps staffs also became responsible for the analysis of these operations, holding regular conferences on their successes and failures.<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, increased the perception of intelligence analysis as a contributing factor to the outcome of Corps operations.

The Corps of the BEF, by 1917, were extremely thorough in their intelligence analysis of the German Army in the build-up to Broodseinde. Thanks to the placement of two permanent Intelligence Corps officers at this level the quality of the intelligence could be quickly determined. Another change came in early 1917, when Charteris' lobbying upgraded the Corps staff officers (Intelligence) from General Staff Officer [GSO] 3 grade to GSO 2. This change, 'greatly increased the status of intelligence work at this increasingly important level

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<sup>6</sup> McCarthy, *Day By Day*, pp. 34-39. See also, Major A.F. Becke, *Order-of-battle of Divisions, Part 1 – The Regular British Divisions* (London: HMSO, 1934).

<sup>7</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms*, pp. 346-8.

<sup>8</sup> Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality: Fragments of Autobiography* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1985), p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> For reading on the CBSO and artillery tactics, see Griffith, *Battle Tactics*, pp. 135-158; Travers, *The Killing Ground*, pp. 62-84; Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, pp. 116-125; Steele & Hart, *Passchendaele*, pp. 182-209; Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele*, pp. 61-72, 117-139.

<sup>10</sup> Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 78. This allowed for greater communications, the RFC acting as their eyes on the battlefield and able to report back via wireless.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 87-109. In particular, p. 105 expands on this gradual passing of responsibility.

<sup>12</sup> Simpson, 'Corps Command', pp. 103-4; Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 92. These conferences were a way to constantly evaluate performance. Pamphlets, which noted the lessons learned, were often issued to the troops.

of operational command'.<sup>13</sup> The reports of II Corps are good examples of the quality of work this brought. In March 1917, II Corps reported on steps taken by German divisions to hinder intelligence gathering on the frontline:

A man belonging to a working party saw what he thought to be a button off of a German soldiers cap, and on picking it up found it was attached to a piece of string or wire. No sooner had he raised the button when he saw smoke issue from a tube... on the side of the trench. Directly after an explosion occurred, immediately followed by another, by which our man was seriously injured about the face, hands and leg.<sup>14</sup>

On 20 March 1917, II Corps reported that, 'No information of any value was obtainable from him [the prisoner]. He was stupid and has only rejoined his regiment a fortnight before so that his statement that the Germans would withdraw their line to behind CAMBRAI must be treated with reserve'.<sup>15</sup> II Corps intelligence staff was thus employing good discipline and control when assessing sources, as in this case they had stated that they would await further confirmation of the intelligence received but were showing good awareness of German counter-intelligence tactics.

German divisions opposite other Corps were also being assessed. X Corps reported that 'the 9<sup>th</sup> Abteilung [Division] had to go into the line again unexpectedly after 3 days rest on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> September on account of our attack. They remained in the line until captured'.<sup>16</sup> X Corps were able to assess from prisoner reports that this relief had been surprising for the men of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division and corroborated it from intelligence received on the same day concerning the location of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division's rest billets.<sup>17</sup> XVIII Corps reported that, in the same month, divisions were being rotated through the front line at least twice.<sup>18</sup> VIII Corps, further south, corroborated these reports that the German Army had to relieve its divisions more quickly than usual:

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<sup>13</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/286, II Corps Intelligence Summary, 16 March 1917.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/286, II Corps Intelligence Summary-20 March 1917. The Intelligence reports for this Corp are missing between the months of March to November 1917.

<sup>16</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/449, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/534, XVIII Corps Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

The 133 I.R. (24<sup>th</sup> Division) was identified by contact just S.E. of Greenwood...last night. As this is a sector previously occupied by the 139<sup>th</sup> I.R. the following conclusions may be drawn:-

- (1) The 133<sup>rd</sup> I.R. may have exchanged places with the 139<sup>th</sup> I.R.
- (2) The party may have formed an advanced patrol of a 'Storm Trupp' which carried out the raid mentioned below.
- (3) The whole of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division may have side-slipped northwards. This is quite likely, as the 207<sup>th</sup> Division, which has been in the sector N. Of it since August 2<sup>nd</sup> suffered heavily in the fighting of 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. And may either be on the point of being relieved or may have contracted its front.<sup>19</sup>

Across the front line at Third Ypres, analysis from separate Corps agreed that the German Army was struggling with the manpower available to it, because of the quicker rotation of divisions. They were also struggling with logistics. I Anzac Corps reported that the food given to the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was 'good, but only just sufficient'.<sup>20</sup> These conclusions pointed to an enemy that would have to employ reliefs out of desperation rather than by allotted timetables. Second Army concluded:

The operations undertaken in the past fortnight have caused the employment and withdrawal of a considerable number of the enemy's divisions...owing to the confusion of the enemy's lines since 20<sup>th</sup> September; it is not possible to indicate exactly when a relief took place. Isolated parties of men of the out-going division have remained and occasionally been captured when the division proper had already been withdrawn.<sup>21</sup>

These Corps reports painted a picture of a deterioration of the enemy's movements and logistics, as well as a deepening manpower problem. Across the line, analysis at this level had been disciplined. The accumulation and clarity of such analyses from multiple sources allowed for educated conclusions to be drawn higher up. In the days before Broodseinde Second Army was able to accurately, and without prejudice, assess the German Army:

By the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, the enemy had largely recovered from the confusion and disorganisation caused by our operations on the 26<sup>th</sup> September. His immediate counter-

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<sup>19</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/422, VIII Corps Intelligence Summary, 1 October 1917.

<sup>20</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 24 September 1917.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 16-30 September 1917.

attack division (236<sup>th</sup> Division)...had failed and had been withdrawn again in accordance with his with his known plan of operations.<sup>22</sup>

General Plumer's operations seemed to be succeeding in pushing the German Army into a state of confusion and disarray. Thanks to a disciplined and well practiced system of intelligence analysis, brought about by the increased status of their intelligence staffs, the Corps of the BEF provided a clear picture of the extent of this decline.

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<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Weekly Summary, 27 September to 4 October 1917.

## The Divisions

The divisions that took part in the Battle of Broodseinde were the British 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> under Lt. Gen Sir Thomas Morland's X Corps; the 37<sup>th</sup> under IX Corps; the 4<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Divisions of XIV Corps and the 11<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> under XVIII Corps.<sup>1</sup> Broodseinde also marked the first time that all of the infantry divisions from Australia and New Zealand attacked together. Lt. Gen. Sir W.R. Birdwood's I Anzac Corps had the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian divisions whilst the 3<sup>rd</sup> and New Zealand Divisions were attached to II Anzac Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Sir A.J. Godley.<sup>2</sup> Of these the only British division that bore the brunt of Operation *Hohensturm* was the 48<sup>th</sup> Division. The German 19<sup>th</sup> Division, 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division and 4<sup>th</sup> Guards were lined opposite the Anzac divisions. Therefore this section of the study shall look specifically at the history of these divisions and how intelligence operated within them.

The divisions of the AIF went into Third Ypres as shock troops. GHQ had been very impressed with their success rate in the previous months. Haig had been very complimentary of the New Zealand Division's work during the Somme:

The New Zealand Division has fought with the greatest gallantry in the Somme battle for 23 consecutive days, carrying out with complete success every task set and always doing more than was asked of it. The division has won universal confidence and admiration. No praise can be too high for such troops.<sup>3</sup>

Haig sent this letter directly to the New Zealand government, marking the division's trial by fire.<sup>4</sup> Such praise increased the reputation of the Anzac soldier, and thus their work-load. There was a general feeling by August 1917 amongst the Australian divisions that they were being asked to do more than their British counter-parts.<sup>5</sup> Although the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisions had had four months rest before being brought into the line in late September, 'the troops had seen too much hard fighting to welcome the prospect of more'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Imperial General Staff, *Army List-October 1917* (London; IWM, 1917), pp. 32-34; McCarthy, *Day By Day*, pp. 96-103.

<sup>2</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The A.I.F in France The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 Vol. 4* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), pp. 834-7.

<sup>3</sup> Col. H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916-1919* (Eastbury: Naval & Military Press, Undated), p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield & Bourne, *Haig: War Diaries*, Thursday 5 October 1917, p. 238.

<sup>5</sup> Ashley Ekins, 'The Australians at Passchendaele' in Peter H. Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), pp. 231-7.

<sup>6</sup> Bean, *Official History*, pp. 733-4.

This was acutely felt in 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division which had only received three weeks rest after Messines. Instead of going out the line as scheduled they were transferred to I Anzac to continue the offensive. As the official historian dryly commented, 'it cannot be said that the news of the coming transference...was received with pleasure by the 4<sup>th</sup> Division'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, when the news was heard by the men, 'audible protests [were heard] at the parade of at least one battalion'.<sup>8</sup> Major-General John Monash's fresher 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Division fared little better during this time. They had lost 4,550 during its time in Messines.<sup>9</sup> However, by Broodseinde, the Anzac divisions had been boosted by the previous successes of Third Ypres; 'in the air was the unmistakable feeling...that the British leaders now had the game in hand'.<sup>10</sup> It helped that no Anzac divisions had been called upon in a major offensive role until Plumer took control of the battle.<sup>11</sup> This rest period had been a welcome relief.<sup>12</sup> By the time the Anzac divisions moved into the line in September only the afore-mentioned 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division was in a poor state. This enforced commitment to the battle soured the morale of the men. The worst affected by this was the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, where the relationship between the company commanders and their commanding officer had, 'almost totally broken down'.<sup>13</sup> It was only thanks to the leadership of these company commanders that the battalion succeeded at capturing their objectives at Polygon Wood.<sup>14</sup> This success meant that by the time of Broodseinde the morale of the Anzac divisions, including 4<sup>th</sup> Division, was much improved.<sup>15</sup> The battle, for them, promised to continue the positive tempo that Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood had started.

The predominance of the Corps in intelligence analysis combined with the intensity of the Anzac experience meant that divisional level analysis suffered with regards to Broodseinde. As the divisional staffs were so busy during operations, it was felt impossible to dedicate a GSO solely to intelligence duties.<sup>16</sup> The responsibility for this fell upon the GSO3, the most junior rank. It was clear, however, that these officers were too busy 'doing all the bottle-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 733.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, footnote no. 148, p. 734.

<sup>9</sup> Ekins, 'The Australians' in Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele*, p. 231.

<sup>10</sup> Bean, *Official History*, p. 833.

<sup>11</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division did produce a brief feint attack on July 31 1917. Although it was only a local operation it did produce heavy losses. Bean, *Official History*, p. 721.

<sup>12</sup> Bean, *Official History*, pp. 683-4, 733-4; Ekins, 'The Australians' in Liddle (ed) *Passchendaele*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> Ekins, 'The Australians' in Liddle (ed) *Passchendaele*, p. 235.

<sup>15</sup> Bean, *Official History*, p. 833.

<sup>16</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 98.

washing of operations'.<sup>17</sup> Officially the GSO3 was still in charge though, in practice, the trained Intelligence Corps officer became, 'the de facto focus', within the staffs.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this subordination led to inconsistencies and reports were not always written or at least archived. No complete intelligence files for the period during Third Ypres remain from the Australian divisions.<sup>19</sup> Those singular reports that do survive are buried in the paperwork of the Divisional General Staffs.<sup>20</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division's instructions to its intelligence officers for dealing with prisoners of war make it very clear that analysis at this level was not a priority. The instructions dictate that, 'prisoners will not be delayed at the Advanced Corps Cage [set up as there was no divisional cage] longer than is absolutely necessary'.<sup>21</sup> A further instruction also insisted that intelligence was quickly passed up the line: 'Divisional Intelligence Officers, after extracting all information of tactical importance, will forward the documents as soon as possible to the Corps Intelligence'.<sup>22</sup>

An explanation for this emphasis on Corps level analysis may lie within the New Zealand Division's intelligence summaries from October. The New Zealand Division was 'atypical' when it came to Intelligence. Major General Sir Andrew Russell was renowned for his attentive command style. He believed greatly in meticulous preparation for operations.<sup>23</sup> It is unclear whether this attentive focus was also practised by the Division's intelligence staff but, the summaries issued contain careful reporting and clear analysis. One example of their meticulousness was from a summary which stated that 'noises [were] heard' from 'Dear House' that indicated enemy occupancy.<sup>24</sup> This was confirmed the next day. Aerial photography showed that two enemy posts were clearly visible and two men were observed 'carrying a long dark object, perhaps an M.G. [Machine Gun]' into the house.<sup>25</sup> It is unclear what further observations or analyses were made here, as the report for 4 October 1917 is missing. In its place is a piece of paper saying, 'Owing to operations of October 4<sup>th</sup> no

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<sup>17</sup> IWM: Whiteford Papers, Lecture, 1926.

<sup>18</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> This is true of the online Australian War Memorial archive at [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au).

<sup>20</sup> AWM 4/1/42-44, War Diaries of the General Staffs, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division.

<sup>21</sup> AWM 4/1/44/26 Part 1, General Staff, 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division, 11 September 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Glyn Harper & Joel Hayward (eds), *Born to Lead? Portraits of New Zealand Commanders* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp. 54-68; John Crawford, "'New Zealand is being bled to death": The Formation, Operations and Disbandment of the Fourth Brigade', in John Crawford & Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand's Great War* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing Ltd, 2007), cites the 'high standard of staff work' in the days before Broodseinde, p. 260.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621, New Zealand Division Intelligence Summary, 1 October 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 2 October 1917.

Divisional Summary was issued from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> October'.<sup>26</sup> This, actually, gives a more accurate indication of the problems of intelligence analysis at this level. The GSO3 had been too busy engaged in 'bottle washing' during this period of activity to devote any time to intelligence work. Analytical work was considered to be subservient to operations preparation at this command level. Based on this evidence and the intelligence instructions as previously mentioned, it is clear that Intelligence Corps officers who were posted to divisional staffs were mainly responsible for the collation of intelligence from the lower formations. Occasionally they were able to methodically analyse these findings but most often had to forward them up the line 'with the utmost despatch'.<sup>27</sup>

1917 saw the importance of intelligence analysis at the divisional level of the BEF grow, but only partially. The attachment of Intelligence Corps officers to divisional staffs was a measure, in part, to relieve the Divisional GSO 3 of the extra work that came with intelligence analysis. It meant that this function now had a dedicated supervisor within each division of the BEF. Intelligence work, however, was not well regarded in these staffs. Divisional GSO 3's were instructed, 'to make himself and his lower officers familiar and ingratiating' within these staffs.<sup>28</sup> Division HQ's seemed to be used as holding houses for this intelligence as it was collated, as instructions made it clear that all material should be brought to Divisional HQ as quickly as possible.<sup>29</sup> This material was then passed to Corps for analysis. This would go some way to explain why intelligence reports of the British divisions that were employed in Broodseinde do not seem to exist.<sup>30</sup> Some summaries of the divisions of the AIF do survive, although only partially. Analysis at this level could not receive the full attention of the officer assigned to it because of their myriad duties. One exception is evident in the New Zealand Division as the quality of their reports indicates a good intelligence infrastructure, possibly as a result of the attachment of Intelligence Corps officers. However, they were still subject to the main problem that intelligence analysis faced at this level. When under active operations, intelligence analysis was not a priority for divisions. Although efforts were made, frontline analysis necessarily gravitated upwards to the Corps in 1917.

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<sup>26</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621.

<sup>27</sup> ICM: Papers of General Sir Walter Kirke, Lecture on the role of forward troops in the collection of intelligence in the field, Major-General Sir William Thwaite.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: PRO WO/95/2746, Appendix V-Intelligence Arrangements, 48 Division War Diary, October 1917.

<sup>30</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157 only contains the divisional intelligence summaries of the ANZAC Divisions, some of which are replicated in the AWM archives, and of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. No British Divisions files are listed in it.

## The Intelligence Corps

In 1914 the BEF began the war with a force designed for colonial warfare. It was made up of one army with two corps, each of which had two infantry and one cavalry division.<sup>1</sup> Along with this, a small military cadre called the Intelligence Corps embarked for Belgium also. Field-Marshal Sir John French felt there was little need for a permanent field intelligence section.<sup>2</sup> In 1904 provisions had been made to form an Intelligence Corps that would be linked more directly with the BEF's newly formed General Staff.<sup>3</sup> However it was not until 1913 that a formation devoted solely to the gathering of intelligence was established. Its remit was:

- (a) To provide experienced officers with linguistic qualifications mounted on horses or on motor cycles or in cars.
- (b) To supplement Intelligence staffs of various headquarters which were obviously inadequate both in numbers and in the two essential foreign languages...French...and German.
- (c) To provide officers for the anticipated expansion of the Secret Service.
- (d) To provide the nucleus of a 'Contre-espionage' organisation with the Army in France.<sup>4</sup>

From this early stage, it was clear that the primary role of the Intelligence Corps was envisaged as espionage work.<sup>5</sup> Although intelligence work was considered necessary the Intelligence Corps, like the BEF as a whole, had to adapt and take on new roles in this first total war.<sup>6</sup>

In 1914, the Intelligence Corps was hastily assembled by Kirke and Macdonogh. Kirke, at this point a Major listed how many, and the types of recruits they were after:

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<sup>1</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Field-Marshal Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the BEF from 1914 to 1915, was noted for his lack of enthusiasm for military intelligence. See; Stevenson, *1914 1918*, pp. 52-165; Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Great War* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Pearson Ed., 2007), pp. 218-226; Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 164-180.

<sup>3</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> A total war is one in which all elements of a country's economy and society is utilised in order to ensure success. Through large scale recruitment, manufacture, employment and other factors, the belligerent nations of the First World War found that only massive mobilisation of their economies could ensure the logistical maintenance of the expansion of their armies. See Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 50-74.

The proposal of an 'Intelligence Corps' and approximate numbers of officers are as follows:

- Detectives (Scotland Yard) – 25
- Officer Scouts (Motorcycles) – 25
- Chauffeurs – 6
- Cooks – 4
- Commandant, Adjutant, Section Commander and Section Officers – 20.<sup>7</sup>

The training, like the recruitment, was also hurried through and by the end of the month the fledgling Intelligence Corps had embarked for France.<sup>8</sup> Because of these factors the officers of the Intelligence Corps were looked on by their contemporaries with contempt. In the early years of the war they were given menial tasks such as disembarking troops and running messages between HQs.<sup>9</sup> They also suffered casualties, one example being Lieutenant A H Smith-Cumming, who died whilst chauffeuring his father, Mansfield ('C' of MI1(b)), in October 1914.<sup>10</sup> The misuse of intelligence officers like this left a wider problem:

It was a fact that the analysis of intelligence often left much to be desired and that there was little, if any, mechanism for efficient analysis. Junior officers were simply not trained to do it and raw intelligence was often circulated to consumers...of more concern, it left individual consumers to analyse intelligence themselves.<sup>11</sup>

In these early days the BEF had no real infrastructure for intelligence analysis at the tactical level. In 1916 intelligence analysis in the field was the focus of Army level staffs.<sup>12</sup> This was so that Corps and Division staffs could focus solely on operations. Charteris himself described his intelligence department in I Corps during 1914 as a small tin box to put papers

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<sup>7</sup> ICM: Kirke Papers Vol 7, p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> There was no perceived need for an Intelligence Service. History already showed that in previous minor or major conflicts the BEF had quickly created a service only for it to achieve little and thus be disbanded after the conclusion of said campaign. Lacking time to mature or even systemise their work, early Intelligence Services could do very little and, as in the first years of the First World War were treated with contempt. As Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate*, p.31 states its creation was, 'casual; so casual in fact that nobody even thought of designating an officer to command it'; Also see Ibid, pp.30-32; Messenger, *Call to Arms*, pp. 49-56; Clayton, *Forearmed*, pp. 1-23

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey, *MI6*, pp.42-45.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Judge, 'The Intelligence Corps 1914-1929', Intelligence Corps Museum, p. 15

<sup>12</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 98.

in.<sup>13</sup> From 1915 to 1917 this focus shifted due to the complexity of waging a large scale war.<sup>14</sup> The Intelligence Corps had begun as a small sub-department of Military Operations [MO] 5, overseen by both Macdonogh in the WO, and Kirke at GHQ.<sup>15</sup> As soon as the western front stabilised, the Intelligence Corps could no longer fulfil its remit as a forward scouting and collation unit. Instead it began to move into other areas. These were mainly in specialist posts in conjunction with the artillery, Royal Flying Corps [RFC] and photographic interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly, the increase in these roles meant a proportional increase in staff.

1916 had seen the BEF adapt to meet new demands of war; key of which was changes to its personnel. The Intelligence Corps had to grow both in size and in reputation to meet these demands.<sup>17</sup> The methods of recruitment and training intensified. Intelligence Corps officers had previously been selected simply for their linguistic skills, and then given a month or so of frontline experience. This soon became a point of contention as they had ‘very little military knowledge’.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this, most Intelligence Corps officers were used by their GSO 1’s as subordinates and lackeys.<sup>19</sup> After the Somme, efforts were made to improve this situation as new training schemes and schools were established.<sup>20</sup> However, throughout the war, the personnel of the Intelligence Corps were limited by ‘the conservative military system’.<sup>21</sup> As has been discussed, Corps staffs did not enjoy stability of the divisions placed underneath them. It became the duty of the Intelligence Corps officers to provide this continuity during reliefs:

One Intelligence officer from XVIII Corps Headquarters will remain with II Corps Headquarters until his services are no longer required.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, pp. 26-37.

<sup>15</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-127. These areas included counter-battery techniques, wireless intercepts and photographic analysis. See; Ferris (ed), *Signals Intelligence*, p. 22; Michael Hefferman, ‘Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 3, 1996, pp. 504-33.

<sup>17</sup> Messenger, *Call To Arms*, pp. 340-60.

<sup>18</sup> IWM: Whiteford Papers, Intelligence Lecture, 1926.

<sup>19</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; Messenger, *Call to Arms*, p. 288-335.

<sup>21</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, p. 133.

XVIII Corps Intelligence will hand over to II Corps Intelligence Officer any relief maps, mosaics and stereoscopes in their possession.

XVIII Corps Branch Intelligence Officer will remain with No. 7 squadron.

Intelligence Officer XVIII Corps H.A. will remain with II Corps until Intelligence Officer II Corps H.A. is sufficiently acquainted with the situation.<sup>22</sup>

Routine orders such as these charted the reliefs of the divisions of the BEF. Here II Corps relieved XVIII Corps on 26 October 1917 two weeks after they had helped to secure the Broodseinde ridge.<sup>23</sup>

Having Intelligence Corps officers permanently attached to the staffs of the BEF was an important step in the evolution of their analytical discipline. In 1915 they were posted to the staffs of GHQ and Army level, but by January 1917 two Intelligence Officers were seconded to every Corps staff and one to every Divisional staff as well.<sup>24</sup> These officers were, 'at first regarded with the utmost suspicion but came to be realized as a most reliable source of information.'<sup>25</sup> It was chiefly the responsibility of these officers to collate and compile information to deduce orders of battle and enemy intentions. One such example comes from Second Army, who interviewed a, 'German officer, captured by the French, states that the '08/15 pattern light machine guns have proved unsatisfactory owing to the constructional defects'.<sup>26</sup> This was then confirmed:

The following extract from a battalion order tends to confirm the above statement...:-

'Machine guns '08/15 must be treated with more care. Attention is again drawn to the fact that company commanders are responsible for these guns. Men who begin to lose parts of [these] guns on the way to the trenches should be punished.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/95/643, II Corps War Diary, 26 October 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Both II and X Corps' war diaries have similar types of instructions; TNA: PRO WO/95/643 and TNA: PRO WO/95/870 respectively.

<sup>24</sup> Fig. 20, BEF Intelligence Establishments, Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> ICM: Kirke Papers, Major-General Sir William Thwaite, Lecture on the role of forward troops in the collection of intelligence in the field, 1926.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Intelligence Summary 28 September 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Evidence from the frontline was catalogued by the Intelligence Corps officers. In this instance it had helped to confirm intelligence regarding the quality of a weapon of the enemy. This information helped to give an idea of the current capabilities of the enemy to repulse an attack, not by itself but as part of a larger picture. Another captured document revealed a clue as to the enemy's signals procedure, 'Enemy code words from noon 28<sup>th</sup> instant:- Wytschaete=Petersburg; Ypres=Potsdam'.<sup>28</sup> This signals intelligence would have helped X Corps to assess the possible direction of an attack, whenever these code words were used. As a final example, the New Zealand Division's use of collated information to confirm an intelligence source identified a division opposite their line:

#### IDENTIFICATION

- (a) The three prisoners belong to the 10<sup>th</sup> company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 20<sup>th</sup> (Prussian) Division. They were captured in DOCHY FARM D.15.c
- (b) A man of the same company of the same regiment was shot by us last night about D.14.b and identified by papers. He had a full pack up and came from a northerly direction.<sup>29</sup>

This system of collation and confirmation was put into place thanks to a well-organised and expanded Intelligence Corps. The experience of these officers in identification of battlefield detritus, interrogation of prisoners and assessment of documents meant that frontline intelligence became, 'the bedrock of the British Intelligence system'.<sup>30</sup> The reality of being an Intelligence Corps officer differed depending on the level at which they were used. Most often within division staffs they were strictly dissuaded from providing official staff opinions on intelligence and were often delegated with all of the staff officer's mundane work.<sup>31</sup> This was because analysis was not required at this level, so their job, in reality, was to collect the intelligence and decide what needed to be escalated. At the Corps and Army level they were utilised more proactively, as this was where the main analysis of frontline intelligence took place. The expertise of these officers correlated to the better use of these frontline sources. One strengthened the other. By 1917 frontline intelligence was the main tool to keep the German order-of-battle up to date. The train-watching networks would simply confirm what was already known;

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<sup>28</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/449, X Corps Intelligence Summary 27 September 1917.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621, New Zealand Division Intelligence Summary 2 October 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Beach, 'British Intelligence', p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

Indicators could be new activities revealed by an air photograph; identifications found upon prisoners showing the arrival of new divisions; the discovery of a new issue gas mask in February 1918, which helped the Intelligence Branch at GHQ to predict the exact date and hour of a German attack upon the Fifth Army.<sup>32</sup>

The specialist training and expertise of the Intelligence Corps officers combined with good analytical discipline helped piece together the jigsaw of the German Army. It was thanks to the rise of the Intelligence Corps as a professional body that allowed this organisation to play an important role in the build up to Broodseinde.

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<sup>32</sup> Clayton, *Forearmed*, p. 29.

## Conclusion

Broodseinde was an important step for the BEF to ensure they kept a positive operational tempo. The campaign had been controversial at its inception and throughout the planning phases. It had become even more so by the time General Plumer took command due to the heavy casualties taken by Fifth Army. Although the later battles of Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood were successes, they were limited advances. This approach had been made necessary because of an ambitious strategy that had been compromised, both by politics and Fifth Army's failure to achieve a breakthrough.

By October 1917, the BEF had a good intelligence system in place from which to measure its adversary. Although the system had its problems it functioned effectively during the build up to Broodseinde. GHQ made serious mistakes in its intelligence analysis in the period before the battle. These were highlighted due to the conflicting personalities between them and the WO. Macdonogh and Cox were united in their dislike of Charteris who was ultimately made a scapegoat. However, thanks to reforms by Charteris of the intelligence infrastructure within the BEF and the restructuring of the General Staff, intelligence analysis operated well throughout the formations below GHQ.

At the levels of Army and Corps, intelligence analysis functioned well. Whilst Second Army's intelligence staff produced reports that were models of discipline, Fifth Army's reports were weighted somewhat with assumptions about the cause of the German Army's problems. This may have been the result of issues within the Fifth Army senior staff that produced a climate of fear.<sup>1</sup> However, it is apparent from both these formations that they shared an excellent understanding of the German order-of-battle and the fighting quality of German divisions. This allowed Second Army, on whose front Operation *Hohensturm* took place, to assess the manpower of the German Army with some accuracy. Accurate reporting by the Corps and Divisions during this build up showed that the BEF had the tactical advantage and began to illustrate the failure of German defence-in-depth tactics to repel these

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<sup>1</sup> There is a debate as to how negative an influence was Neill Malcolm, Gough's Chief of Staff, on the staffs of lower formations. This may have contributed to the lesser quality of Fifth Army's intelligence analysis. See: Ian Beckett, 'Operational Command: The Plans and the Conduct of Battle' in Peter H. Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997, pp. 109-111; Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 41, 58.

limited attacks. This failure was badly affecting German morale, as the Corps' monitoring of the quickening rotation of German divisions through the front line illustrated. This knowledge was instrumental in allowing both Fifth and Second Army to measure the effects of this step by step approach. Intelligence analysis at these levels was largely successful at showing the pressure and severity of the German Army's position in the build up to Broodseinde. Indeed, the BEF's ability to keep an up-to-date order-of-battle at all times was one of their greatest strengths in intelligence analysis throughout the war.

Intelligence analysis within lower formations received mixed priorities and was only cursory below division level. During quiet periods on the front time and resources could be given by divisions to patrolling and other intelligence activities. When on active operations, however, their staffs had too much administrative work to do to purely concentrate on monitoring the German Army. Because of the myriad duties of the GSO 3 analysis received varying amounts of attention from division to division. The most important development of intelligence analysis with the BEF however was the growth of the Intelligence Corps. This body underpinned the quality of both the intelligence and its analysis at the levels of Army and Corps. As such, in order to accurately assess the intelligence analysis at Broodseinde it is these levels that become the most important. Some quick analysis did take place in the field, but only if the 'information [was] of tactical importance'.<sup>2</sup> From here, the analysis was then usually distributed upwards rather than the reverse, although there are indications that it was passed down the line as well.<sup>3</sup> By ensuring intelligence analysis remained most important at Corps and Army levels, the BEF had created a system that allowed for a good cross-referencing of information from a wide range of sources before judgements were made.

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<sup>2</sup> AWM 4/1/44/26 Part 1, General Staff, 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division, 11 September 1917.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that Corps level summaries were not copied for the formations below. The stated recipient only is the Brigadier-General. XVIII Corps' Summaries were not annotated for wide distribution but notations on each command the reader, 'not to be taken further forward than battalion headquarters'. This does indicate that this information was disseminated to the tactical level but only by messenger, not by distribution. II ANZAC's reports similarly state, 'not to be taken into the front trenches'. TNA: PRO WO/157/535, XVIII Corps Intelligence Summaries, October 1917; AWM 4-1-33-17, Intelligence Summaries from September 1917.

## Chapter II:

Broodseinde: The Day by Day Intelligence Picture.

## Introduction

This second chapter of this study will now look into the intelligence picture in the immediate run up to the Battle of Broodseinde on 4 October 1917. By doing this it will be able to paint a fuller picture of how the BEF utilised intelligence before a major operation. The first part of this thesis has established how the BEF's intelligence system operated and how the battle itself fit into the wider context of the conflict. It has also demonstrated how the system in particular was functioning in the months preceding the battle. This part of the thesis will utilize the primary sources from GHQ, Army, Corps and Divisional levels during the period from 28 September to 3 October, the night before Broodseinde. This is for two reasons. The first is that some of the most useful intelligence was received from newly captured prisoners, as has been discussed earlier. Obviously there was a higher likelihood of catching prisoners during major operations. Although prisoners were caught locally during this period, the majority would have been caught due to the British line extending as a whole. The last such major operation that accomplished this was the Battle of Polygon Wood on 26 September 1917. However, for reasons of space the immediate aftermath of Polygon Wood will not be covered. Instead this part of the study shall detail one week leading up to the battle; the period of 28 September to 3 October 1917. Any relevant material from the days before this period may be incorporated to provide context for that specific day's analysis. The second reason for selecting this time period is that the daily intelligence reports were always written in the evening, usually between 6 and 8pm, covering the last twenty four hours. Therefore the reports from 3 October represent the latest information available before the troops went over the line at 6am. The reports dated 4 October were written after the battle had taken place and therefore contain only retrospective analysis. The aim of this part of the thesis is to ascertain exactly what was known or perceived about the German divisions and their intentions before this failed attack. Therefore it shall focus particularly on the reports of the formations directly involved, namely Second Army, X Corps, I Anzac Corps, II Anzac Corps, 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division and New Zealand Division. Information from the 4 October will be utilised when concluding the study's findings.

## 28 September 1917

Two days after the Battle of Polygon Wood the German Army was reported to be in ‘confusion’.<sup>1</sup> It was clear that the German divisions had retreated to the main defensive line in the area, the Broodseinde Ridge, which held much of their artillery positions. This was strengthened by various secondary defensive lines and positions. The quality of these positions and the numbers of soldiers holding them was studied in detail. II Anzac Corps reported that, opposite their front:

The enemy’s MAIN LINE DEFENCE [sic] is the ZONNEBEKE-STADEN line which...runs practically due north and south about 500 yds. east of ZONNEBEKE Church. This line consists of a single line of trenches which have not been properly completed. A good deal of concrete work has been done and the line completely wired though this wire at present would not appear to be a formidable obstacle. There are no communication trenches leading to the rear. West of this line the enemy holds shell hole positions supported by a number of scattered concrete dugouts.<sup>2</sup>

II Anzac had identified that the main line of defence for the divisions opposing them was incomplete and fairly isolated. They identified that the two divisions using it, the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division and the 44<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division would be using the defensive tactic of fortifying shell holes in this region.<sup>3</sup> The report then described how these defences were bolstered by:

The PASSCHENDAELE-TERHARD line. A great deal of work has recently been done on this system, which forms a switch line in the event of our capture of the BECELAERE-BROODSEINDE Ridge. An official German map dated 21 September shows the line heavily wired but the trenches very incomplete.<sup>4</sup>

Although these defences were as yet incomplete, it seemed likely that this work was the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division consolidating its position. Concrete positions, such as had been identified, had already played a large part in the Battle of Polygon Wood<sup>5</sup>. Their use was a known German counter-measure thanks to the BEF’s experience in this battle and this information

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 16 to 30 September 1917.

<sup>2</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sheldon, *German Army*, pp. 167-8.

made clear that it would be deployed again. The lack of a complete trench network also indicated that the German divisions were reliant on fortified shell holes as defensive infantry positions. This had already been confirmed by I Anzac Corps, who published their translation of a set of captured German orders dated 10 September 1917:

When, as in the case of Company A, no small pieces of trench are already dug, the foremost shell craters are to be joined together in such a manner as to provide positions for groups (i.e. 1 NCO and 6 men). The crater-field in between the 'group' positions is to be filled in with barbed wire, to hinder the enemy establishing posts.<sup>6</sup>

This information was widely confirmed across Second Army's front, 'the enemy is occupying shell-hole nests, concrete dug outs, remains of battery positions etc, and he has no connected defensive system in the forward area'.<sup>7</sup> It was clear to the Second Army that this German defence system was flawed and that, in the cases of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarians and 44<sup>th</sup> Reserve, it was still being used.

The importance of knowledge of the enemy's order-of-battle was also demonstrated from the reports from this day. I Anzac identified at least four enemy reserve divisions opposite their lines; the 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve, the 236<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Divisions.<sup>8</sup> They were able to discover that the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division was relieving the 17<sup>th</sup> Division through a set of circumstances that further elaborated the difficulty of the German Army's position. The report first stated that, 'the enemy made a raid on the 5<sup>th</sup> Divisional front early this morning, but was repulsed; with the exception of 9 prisoners, the entire party was killed'.<sup>9</sup> During interrogations these men were members of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 92 Reserve Infantry Regiments, of the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. They were in the process of relieving the 17<sup>th</sup> Division, which had itself relieved the 50<sup>th</sup> Division only two days before. They had not been making an attack but had, 'been caught by our nightly harassing fire, and then lost their way'.<sup>10</sup> They had obviously sheltered in shell holes for the night because, 'when dawn broke they found themselves quite close to our troops who opened fire on them. A large number of their

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<sup>6</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 16 to 30 September 1917.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 27 September-4 October 1917.

company was killed'.<sup>11</sup> This event highlighted, 'the confusion and disorganisation caused by our operations'.<sup>12</sup> It was clear that the German High Command was rotating its divisions much more quickly than expected, in order to maintain morale and fighting fitness, and that the German Army was having trouble adapting to Second Army's 'bite and hold' methods.

II Anzac Corps had also identified two divisions on its front; one in particular gave it cause for concern. I Anzac Corps faced the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division, who had very little frontline experience.<sup>13</sup> The same could not be said of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division opposite II Anzac Corps. They held practically the entire line opposite them; a 'divisional frontage of 2800 yards'.<sup>14</sup> Each German division was comprised of three regiments. Then, 'each regiment has one battalion in the front area, the second in support about the ZONNEBEKE-STADEN line, the third in reserve in hutments...i.e. 4000-6000 yards from the front'.<sup>15</sup> This placement was consistent with the German defence-in-depth policy, with large distances between lines of defence ready for an enemy that would try to break through the lines. Second Army were well aware of this tactic and noted it was being adapted:

The enemy had reverted to the normal method of holding a divisional sector by putting all three regiments in line, distributed with one battalion in line and the support and reserve battalions well up in close reserve...

The necessity for keeping his front strongly held, however, probably forced the enemy to adopt the three regiments in line plan. To counteract the weakness of this method, he has made an unprecedented use of his counter-attack divisions.<sup>16</sup>

II Anzac confirmed this by noting that the front battalions were spaced out as per this policy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 27 September-4 October 1917.

<sup>13</sup> According to their prisoners captured that day, the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division had been in training for six months behind the lines in the eastern front, and had spent only seven days on the front line. They had only light casualties from this period owing to 'easy operations'. TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917; Bean, *Official History*, p. 833.

<sup>14</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Report, 28 September 1917.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 16 to 30 September 1917.

<sup>17</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian was one such counter-attack division that Second Army had referenced. II Anzac Corps had already amassed a good amount of information on this division. Its commander was Major-General Prince Franz of Bavaria and it had ‘arrived in the area on the 26<sup>th</sup> inst., when it relieved the 23<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division’.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that the arrival of this division concerned II Anzac Corps as the daily report devotes a lot of space to it. It stated that ‘[the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division] had previously been in the ARMENTIERES sector since the beginning of July, but does not appear to have had many casualties on that front’.<sup>19</sup> However the division and its reserves had suffered during the relief from this area:

During the relief...incoming units suffered very heavily under our intense artillery fire, in particular the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. The company trench strength may now be said to average out about 80. The moral of the division appears to be indifferent and had probably suffered through a prolonged stay on a quiet front.<sup>20</sup>

A new, freshly rested division was now in the line, specifically one with a history as an adversary of the Australian divisions.<sup>21</sup>

The day had passed with both Anzac Corps being confident of their position. The German Army was confused and having to adapt to the BEF’s dictation of the battle. As a result of the campaign German reliefs were increasing, with some divisions now being passed through the front line twice.<sup>22</sup> The defensive measures taken were piecemeal and temporary. It was, perhaps, unsurprising that Charteris wrote to his wife that day, ‘Things are going very well in the battle and the Germans are far nearer to giving in than ever before’.<sup>23</sup> Although the German Army was obviously experiencing great losses during these days, it was optimistic of Charteris to suggest they were close to giving in. GHQ was aware that the German retreat was sudden and disorganised, although they were equally aware that they were falling back to an established position. The BEF controlled the tempo of the campaign. The intelligence collected during this day painted an encouraging picture.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> They had fought the Australian Divisions at Mouquet Farm, Flers and Baupaume. Bean, *Official History*, p. 846.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 28 September 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Charteris Papers, LHCMA, 28 September 1917.

## 29 September 1917

This day passed relatively quietly as it was stated, ‘the situation this morning is unchanged. There is nothing of importance to report’.<sup>1</sup> However a number of observations were made by both Anzac Corps on high enemy activity during this day.

I Anzac Corps noted that their artillery was maintaining ‘harassing fire’ throughout the day.<sup>2</sup> By ensuring the German Army was kept busy in this way they could observe much of their defences and activity. Hostile artillery, in particular, was, ‘above normal’.<sup>3</sup> However, thanks to new technologies the direction of the shells could be assessed with some accuracy:

The following places were shelled:

WESTHOEK from the direction of OESTHOEK and BROODSEINDE

HELLFIRE CORNER from the direction of OESTHOEK

YPRES from the direction of BECELEARE and KEIBERG

HOOGE with gas shells from HOLLEBOSCH and KEIBERG.<sup>4</sup>

This was analysed by Second Army as harassing fire, and these positions were confirmed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Survey Company as seven groups of batteries with the RFC spotting, ‘84 flashes’.<sup>5</sup> These actions indicated that the German batteries were trying to cover the activity of their infantry in reorganising their defences. The counter-battery work that they undertook was also for this purpose as aerial photographic intelligence made clear. The RFC had last conducted an aerial reconnaissance of the enemy positions on the 27 September. The specialist photographic analysis section had noted several positions of interest. North of Zonnebeke Church four posts had been made with two adjoining trenches which were, ‘full of troops’.<sup>6</sup> Dochy Farm was reported as ‘nil’.<sup>7</sup> By the 29 September British advanced posts were recorded at Zonnebeke Church to monitor this activity and at Dochy Farm.<sup>8</sup> Intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Intelligence Report, 29 September 1917.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

<sup>6</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Corps, Notes on Examination of Aeroplane Photographs of Corps Front, 27 September 1917.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Corps, Notes on Examination of Aeroplane Photographs of Corps Front, 28 September 1917, reported in Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

had influenced local operations as, only two days after they were first reported, observation posts had been established to further monitor these enemy positions. It was also clear that new areas were being adapted for defensive purposes. At Israel House, a position not reported on the 27 September, new trenches were observed leading to what was, ‘probably an advanced post’.<sup>9</sup>

I Anzac Corps was also monitoring the state of the divisions manning these posts. The 15<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division and 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Divisions were adapting the defences available to them. These adaptations were not major works but would slow local operations, being as they were using old trenches and fortifications which had been damaged already in the campaign. This was confirmed by prisoner interrogations from this day, as were the identifications. An NCO of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division had indicated that, ‘in this sector, the light trench mortars were in shell holes and medium ones were in old emplacements’.<sup>10</sup> The prisoner also stated that, ‘moral[e] is fairly good, mainly owing to the rations which are good and plentiful, and also to the fact that the company has been very little in the line recently’.<sup>11</sup> This was compared to a prisoner from the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 17<sup>th</sup> Division, who should have been out of the line as they had already been relieved. He stated that, in his detachment at least, ‘the moral was poor...as the men did not think they should be sent forward again without any rest’.<sup>12</sup> Along the line of I Anzac Corps, enemy morale differed according to individual experiences.

I Anzac also made a notable intelligence assessment that further pointed to the declination of the German Army’s position. At the Zonnebeke-Staden line, ‘the enemy does not appear to have been working on his defences’.<sup>13</sup> The line was noted to be, ‘very battered and in places non-existent’.<sup>14</sup> Further analysis revealed why this was so:

The enemy’s tenacious resistance and repeated counter-attacks in the recent fighting, show how thoroughly awake he is to the threat of that part North of the BROODSEINDE-BECELAERE Ridge, where our line is now within a short distance of the Eastern edge.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, Appendix to I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, Appendix to I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 29 September 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

At present he still retains the advantage of being able to concentrate troops under cover of this ridge, and in his efforts to retain it, further severe fighting and strong resistance can certainly be expected.

That the enemy fully appreciates the situation was clearly indicated by the disposal of his counter-attack regiments, and the promptness with which they came into action in the fighting of 26 September.<sup>15</sup>

Heavy resistance in this area had been expected from as early as the 26 September. Second Army had been well aware of the importance of this position to the enemy, hence why this ridge was the main target of the Battle of Broodseinde. 'It is apparent that he [the enemy] recognised this attack [Polygon Wood]...as the most critical one in our general advance toward the remaining positions on the Gheluvelt-Zonnebeke ridge which he has so desperately defended'.<sup>16</sup> It seemed that the German divisions were consolidating this ridge at the expense of the Zonnebeke-Staden line. One critical piece of analysis in the report furthered this, 'it seems clear from prisoners' statements that he did not expect us to attack on such a wide front; our attack was not expected by his front line troops North of Polygon Wood'.<sup>17</sup> Although this was in the context of the Battle of Polygon Wood, it was a lesson that was to be repeated upon the German Army at Broodseinde. This would explain why they were, during this period, only lightly reinforcing the Zonnebeke-Staden line but tenaciously the Broodseinde-Becelaere ridge. Second Army believed they were either expecting a smaller attack to take the ridge only or were not aware at this time of the length of front line to be attacked. Either way, they were consolidating their strongest position as much as possible at the expense of the rest of their line. Lieutenant-Colonel W. Robertson, the GSO 1 Operations in Second Army wrote 'by the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, the enemy had largely recovered from the confusion and disorganisation caused by our operations on the 26<sup>th</sup>'.<sup>18</sup> Although these other defences would be hard fought come the battle, the German Army had clearly marked its priority as the Broodseinde Ridge and had begun to successfully consolidate its position there. That Second Army was able to identify this was a key factor in furthering their success on the 4 October.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army, Operations on 25 and 26 September 1917.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army, Operations on 25 and 26 September 1917.

<sup>18</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Summary of Operations 27<sup>th</sup> September to 4<sup>th</sup> October 1917.

## 30 September 1917

The major reliefs that occurred on this day and completed by 1 October were not German but British divisions. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian and New Zealand Divisions under both Anzac Corps relieved the outgoing V Corps and adjusted their lines accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Both I and II Anzac Corps had been in the front line since 27 September 1917.<sup>2</sup> X Corps replaced V Corps during this period, and took some of the line from I Anzac Corps so that they were opposite the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian and 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions. The study will look at its intelligence reports from this point on, as well as new material from the divisions already mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

X Corps had been in the line not twenty four hours before they had to fend off a counter-attack by the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division, the formation that I Anzac Corps had identified arriving opposite its line two days ago:

At 1.30 am it was reported that the Germans were massing at J.16b. Patrols were sent out and this was found to be correct. A barrage was therefore arranged at 4.45am and was put down to good effect. About 5.15 am the enemy were seen to be advancing to the attack with their left on the YPRES-MENIN Road.<sup>4</sup>

The report continued:

Visibility was poor despite the moon by reason of a ground mist; while it was further impaired by the Germans' use of smoke bombs and flammenwerfer. Despite these advantages the front line garrison overwhelmed the attack...before it could reach our trenches. About 6 am the attack was renewed...but again the enemy was driven off leaving two prisoners and one M.G in our hands, while the ground in front of our lines was strewn with his dead.<sup>5</sup>

The counter-attack was pressed until 8 am when it was finally dispersed by 'the very heavy artillery fire that was turned onto him'.<sup>6</sup> In total three prisoners were captured. From these

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<sup>1</sup> Bean, *Official History*, p. 836.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 833-66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid; McCarthy, *Day by Day*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/449, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

men immediate observations were made. The attack had been made by the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiments of the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions.<sup>7</sup> This information was shared across the line confirming to I Anzac Corps the identifications they had already made.<sup>8</sup> Only preliminary identification and information could be taken from them at this moment, as they were processed into the Corps cage for further interrogation. This counter-attack however, was a clear signal that the German Army was no longer ‘confused’ as Second Army had reported two days ago.

I Anzac Corps also saw increased enemy action after the previous two days, although not to the degree experienced by X Corps. They reported that German artillery had ‘shown normal activity’ and had come from the directions of ‘KEIBERG, BROODSEINDE and DROOGENBROODHOEK’.<sup>9</sup> They also confirmed that ‘two attempted attacks on the right Division front’ were dispersed with their heavy artillery and that they took one prisoner from the 92<sup>nd</sup> R.I.R., 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division.<sup>10</sup> I Anzac Corps made a good deal of observations regarding enemy mortar positions and sniper posts on this day.<sup>11</sup> However, it was the interrogation from prisoners of the 92<sup>nd</sup> R.I.R., 19<sup>th</sup> Division that provided the most information about the health of the Division. It also confirmed the reasons for the quick relief of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division on the 28<sup>th</sup> ‘after only one day in the line was made necessary by the heavy losses of the former’.<sup>12</sup> The attack made that morning against X Corps had been intended ‘to cut out the “zig-zag” in the German position and to secure a regular line’.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the information these prisoners gave validated previous intelligence that the German divisions had re-organised themselves and were pressing a sustained defence according to their known defensive doctrine.

It was quieter on the front for II Anzac Corps although they made an important assessment that day. They confirmed that the Zonnebeke-Staden line was being neglected, as I Anzac Corps had observed the day before, thanks to captured documents. In some very clear analysis they reported:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The Corps on our right took prisoners of the 78<sup>th</sup> R.I.R., 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. relieved a Bn. of the 231<sup>st</sup> R.I.R. on the night of the 26/27<sup>th</sup>’, TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>9</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567, Annex to I Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The study of aeroplane photographs taken during the last few days reveals no trace whatever of any trench work being done by the enemy West of the ZONNEBEKE-STADEN line. This line itself has been very badly damaged and appears in poor condition. Those pieces of trench which exist appear shallow.<sup>14</sup>

The only area where they observed any maintenance of these defences was an intersection between the main line and the Bellevue Spur.<sup>15</sup> By correlating this information with their existing intelligence, II Anzac Corps found this lack of maintenance surprising:

In view of the fact that captured German maps show that a considerable amount of new defence work had been projected in this area-including a great deal of wiring- this lack of work on the part of the enemy is somewhat remarkable.<sup>16</sup>

This was an indication of the disarray the German Army was now in, but more importantly of the further consolidation of their defensive position. The German Army had planned for a great deal of defensive build up in this area but had abandoned their plans. II Anzac Corps assessed these developments carefully:

It seems probable that the enemy is at present determined to hold the whole area west of the ZONNEBEKE-STADEN line merely as a crater position in spite of the fact that he must have at least three battalions west of this line.

On the other hand he may be tempted by the present lull in operations to construct a line along the GRAVENSTAFEL ridge. The erection of new wire should in particular be looked for.<sup>17</sup>

It was obvious to Second Army why this ridge had been neglected, as their staff observed the wider picture of this consolidation of German forces. The German Army was pulling back towards the Broodseinde and Passchendaele ridges. They had noticed new trenches and dug-outs on the Passchendaele-Terhard line in particular,<sup>18</sup> and the re-arrangement of their heavy

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<sup>14</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> AWM4-1-33-17, II Anzac Intelligence Summary, 30 September 1917.

<sup>18</sup> TNA: PRO WO 157/118, Second Army Intelligence Summary 30 September 1917.

artillery into four large groups.<sup>19</sup> Mitchell noted that ‘very little new [defensive] work has appeared in forward areas during the last fortnight’.<sup>20</sup> This was due to ‘the belief that our offensive is toward obvious objectives’.<sup>21</sup> As such it was clear that the German defensive position was to re-enforce only the most tactically important or defensible areas, like the Broodseinde Ridge leaving those positions less important to decay, as the Zonnebeke-Staden line was doing. From their analysis the previous day, Second Army had a validated and clear understanding of German defensive policy and important areas three days before the Battle of Broodseinde.

Second Army had also accurately predicted the strength of the German counter-attack on X Corps’ front. They had been aware that counter-attacks were likely and that the German Army had largely recovered from their confusion on the 29 September. Presciently, Mitchell wrote ‘the enemy doubtless appreciates that his policy of counter-attack has failed, and that, as our offensive will continue, he must organise his counter attacks and defences on a much more comprehensive scale’.<sup>22</sup> This was a very important statement. It accurately recognised that the German Army was changing its defensive tactics and moving towards much more large scale counter-attacks.<sup>23</sup> Mitchell continued:

Local counter-attacks will of course continue...but should these fail it is unlikely that he will use up all his intact counter-attack units and reserves by flinging them too hastily into battle. It seems more probable that he will rely more on his artillery to keep our attack within bounds...In fact his future defensive policy may probably be in the nature of a carefully prepared counter-offensive which would take place one or several days after our attack and when the position in the forward areas had resumed a more or less normal aspect.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> These were named Tenbrielin Kruiseecke, Becelaere and Keiberg Groups. They were directed towards the areas of Menin Road Ridge, Tower Hamlets Ridge, Polygon Wood and Broodseinde Ridge, TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Summary of Intelligence, 16 to 30 September 1917.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118. Second Army Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, 16 to 30 September 1917.

<sup>23</sup> German High Command had decided, on 29 September 1917, to change their defensive tactics to hold the front line in force instead of in depth; Heinz Hagenlucke, ‘The German High Command’, in Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele*, p. 53; The German Fourth Army received its order’s on 30 September 1917 to action this with the specific order to increase field artillery operations against the British Infantry, another tactic Second Army had predicted; Sheldon, *The German Army*, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/118, Second Army Summary of Intelligence, 16 to 30 September 1917.

This was excellent analysis by Second Army's intelligence staff. The events of the next day would prove its accuracy. By assessing the reliefs, artillery arrangement and aerial activity,<sup>25</sup> Second Army concluded that 'he [the enemy] will doubtless make another similar attempt in the same place or somewhere on the battle line within the next two days'.<sup>26</sup> The attack opposite X Corps was one such carefully prepared counter offensive. They had accurately gauged the intentions of the enemy and the changing of his counter-attack policy. Although Second Army had failed to predict where that attack would come, it had passed this information to all corps and divisions along its front, as this document was within II Anzac Corps archive. In the days before Broodseinde, the BEF was accurately charting the intentions and tactics of the German Army opposite their front.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## 1 October 1917

The only available divisional intelligence summaries from this period are those of the New Zealand Division. They cover the days of 1 and 2 October 1917. As stated before, they are the only division during this period whose intelligence papers have survived, unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Divisions. Much more problematic to this study is the state of the intelligence archives in respect of I Anzac Corps. This Corps and the divisions under it inflicted much of the devastation to the German 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Division on 4 October 1917. The formation's intelligence documents of the month of October do not seem to have survived. In the National Archives the files simply skip this month, going from September 1917 to November 1917,<sup>1</sup> whereas the Australian War Memorial electronic archive only contains the intelligence summaries for this formation up to May 1917.<sup>2</sup> However, within the paperwork of the General Staff of I Anzac Corps there are new daily and fortnightly intelligence reports from Second Army<sup>3</sup> that are not included within their own files.<sup>4</sup> These contain further analyses shared with I Anzac Corps thus enlightening our perspective on what I Anzac Corps knew and when. As such, although important files are missing, there survive indications of the information I Anzac Corps was receiving in these remaining days before the battle. It should also be noted that the reports from X Corps during the period 1 to 3 October 1917 are partial. Most intelligence summaries during this period were written in two parts. Part 1 contained a general overview of the intelligence that day. Part 2 would expand on certain aspects such as full reports of interrogations, information from other units, and details of captured documentation. Unfortunately X Corps' reports during these three days are missing the second parts. As the first parts still remain, however, it is still possible to obtain an accurate reflection of this unit's intelligence of the enemy during this period.

Right at the front line, the New Zealand Division reported that the German Army was continuing to improvise its defensive positions. At 10 a.m. a 'party appeared to be at work...about BOEYLKER...apparently digging a trench'.<sup>5</sup> Further down the line 'a party of the enemy almost 30 strong were working on shell holes at D.8.d.5.6. At least five of this

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/567-568 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> AWM4-1-30-(1-16) are the complete intelligence archive of this formation. It covers the period February 1916 to May 1917.

<sup>3</sup> AWM4-1-29-21 Part 5-General Staff I Anzac Corps, October 1917.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence File, October 1917.

<sup>5</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621, New Zealand Division Intelligence Summary, 1 October 1917.

party were hit by our snipers'. Here, observation of the enemy, indicated as being carried out by snipers, confirmed that the enemy was adapting shell holes into fortifications.<sup>6</sup> This adaptation extended into the ruined buildings on the battlefield. As mentioned earlier, one of the features of the front along the New Zealand Division's line was Dear House. There had already been some indications of its occupancy from the enemy from 'noises heard'.<sup>7</sup> Further observations indicated its use as an infantry strong point as 'at 8 30 a.m. 20 of the enemy moved past Dear House'. That it was already occupied and up to twenty enemy soldiers could move past it in safety confirmed the earlier intelligence. Although no evidence yet pointed to an attack it was clear that the German Army had re-organised. Posts were being established and maintained whilst in one area 'at 11:10 pm a party of at least 100 men were noticed to be working about D.8.central'. Enemy activity had increased.

X Corps' intelligence report for that day validated Robertson's analysis that counter attacks were to be expected. They also confirmed the New Zealand Division's reports that enemy activity had increased:

Hostile artillery was active all last night and today, our forward areas and battery positions being heavily shelled.

Repeated counter-attacks have been made by the enemy during the day and as a result he appears to have occupied JOUST FARM. Our line on one company front has been pushed back from CAMERON COVERT and we now hold a line in front of CAMERON HOUSE...

Our barrage, harassing fire and bombardment are proceeding and four successful counter battery shoots have been carried out so far. Others are in progress.<sup>8</sup>

X Corps were being kept very busy by the operations of the day. This may help to explain why their intelligence report for this day was only partial. They did, however, confirm from prisoners that the 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division had been in the line at Verdun until the end of August 1917 and then rested. Their appearance opposite X Corps was reported on the 23 September

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<sup>6</sup> The Sniper was another prolific source of tactical intelligence during the war; 'Thanks to greater methods of manufacture in glass for scopes, and better methods of camouflage, thanks to 'ghillie-suits', the military sniper became 'the scout/sniper'. Martin Pegler, *The Military Sniper since 1914* (Oxford: Osprey, 2001), pp. 18-19; See also Griffith, *Battle Tactics*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621, New Zealand Division Intelligence Summary, 1 October 1917.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/450, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 1 October 1917.

1917 by a prisoner from the 92<sup>nd</sup> R.I.R..<sup>9</sup> This was an indication that this division had just over one month's rest between fronts. However Second Army did not mention this formation when listing the enemy divisions opposite them on 1 October, in a fortnightly summary.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it can be deduced that the 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division was taken out of the line at some point between the 23 September and 1 October 1917. This meant that the German Army had pulled a unit from one active front, transferred it to a front where they were more heavily engaged in, and had to pull it out again within one month. This was another sign that the Battle of Third Ypres was draining the German Army's resources.

I Anzac Corps also had some interesting information on this day, thanks to Second Army. In a document issued to their General Staff, Robertson assessed the probability of a German counter-attack.<sup>11</sup> Correctly, and as stated in this study's analysis of the previous day, Second Army reported that:

The enemy's appreciation of the present situation doubtless turns largely on his experiences and the result of his tactics during the September fighting; two main considerations are probably prominent in it:-

1. His tactics for counter-attack have failed.
2. He confidently expects our offensive will continue at (a) Menin Road, and (b) Broodseinde Ridge.

The former needs no comment except that he doubtless now sees the necessity for a change in his defensive tactics.

The latter will enable him to make plans for counter measures well in advance of our resumption of the advance.<sup>12</sup>

This analysis had been drawn from the observations of where the defensive build up was occurring over the last few days. Mitchell seems to have directly copied certain aspects of this report from the previous fortnightly summary, parts of which have already been used in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Divisions listed are: 10th Ersatz Division, 20<sup>th</sup> Division, 4<sup>th</sup> Guard Division, 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division, 25<sup>th</sup> Division, 207<sup>th</sup> Division, 24<sup>th</sup> Division, 32<sup>nd</sup> Division and 5<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division; Table titled 'Employment of the Enemy's Forces', TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October 1917.

<sup>11</sup> AWM4-1-29-21 Part 5, 'Enemy's Probable Intentions for Counter-Attack East of Ypres (Third Phase)', General Staff, I Anzac Corps, 1 October 1917.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

this study. However, it is expanded here and within the context of this report and the date of its issue, carries greater significance. On 1 October 1917 Mitchell wrote:

That the enemy is changing his tactics is now evident. He has already engaged in a counter offensive independent of our last advance after we have become established on our new line. This has taken the form of deliberate well organized attacks on our new line about Menin Road Ridge...and Polygon Wood. These have followed our last advance after an interval of three days in which he has perfected his preparations after the confusion of his former failures. He will doubtless make another similar attempt in the same place or somewhere on the battle line within the next two days.<sup>13</sup>

This analysis clearly predicted the German counter attack at Broodseinde. The information collected over the last few days enabled even further prediction of the German Army's intentions:

The likelihood is therefore that he will wait until our advance with limited objectives...has become established and consolidated and that he will...launch a large well organized attack or series of attacks at a time long enough after zero to ascertain our new positions.

To do this would require at least 10-12 hours...It is more likely that he would defer the attack until daybreak employing the night in getting up and assembling his assault troops and putting on the heavy preparatory bombardment of our line...<sup>14</sup>

This analysis accurately reflected the positions and deployments of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian, 4<sup>th</sup> Guards and the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions in the early hours of 4 October. This was a clear success of the BEF's intelligence system, in that it predicted the size and time of a major counter attack by the enemy forces with a high degree of accuracy. This had been measured by an excellent frontline intelligence system, coupled with expert knowledge, experience and careful analysis. The original date for the German counter attack had been 3 October, so not only did Second Army's intelligence staff correctly assess the enemy's intentions but its timetable also. However, this intelligence failed to signpost one important factor; due to the failed attacks on this day, German Command postponed Operation *Hohensturm* twenty four hours to the 4 October.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Bean, *Official History*, p. 847; Sheldon, *German Army*, pp. 191-193.

## 2 October 1917

Across Second Army's front the German Army was relatively quiet on this day. This was expected after the counter-attacks of the last two days. However further observations were recorded about the continuing organisation of their forces and their order-of-battle.

The New Zealand Division observed 'a considerable amount of work is being carried out in trench about D.8.central in front of BOETLEER'.<sup>1</sup> They had already noted that this trench 'had been deepened during night of 30/1 and now seems nearly complete'.<sup>2</sup> Although this trench was part of the network of fortified shell holes, it was further proof of the pace of German re-organisation. More defensive modifications had already been made opposite the New Zealand Division's line. The two houses, Dear and Deuce that had been observed on the 28/29 September, were still under scrutiny. 'Two enemy posts are visible near DEAR HOUSE' whilst 'three men were observed to enter the ruins of DEUCE HOUSE D.14.b. Two of them were carrying a long dark object perhaps an M.G.'.<sup>3</sup> By this information it was clear that both houses would present problems for the division's advance, as the activity indicated that they were being held as fortified positions with the German defensive belt.

The New Zealand Division also made some identifications of the enemy division opposite their line. Prisoners captured that morning near Dochy Farm were confirmed to be from the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 20<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>4</sup> The divisional intelligence staff learned from the interrogation of these men that the 20<sup>th</sup> Division had been established in this area for at least two weeks as the '77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment came into the line on 28<sup>th</sup> September after arrival from Russia'.<sup>5</sup> However not all of the information provided could be confirmed or was useful:

Prisoners saw men of the 79<sup>th</sup> I.R. and probably 92<sup>nd</sup> I.R. (also belonging to the 20<sup>th</sup> Division) in ROULERS and they think 79<sup>th</sup> is in the line to south of 77<sup>th</sup>. Order-of-battle to the north is not known nor do they know what unit their battalion relieved or the extent of

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/621, New Zealand Division Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

their front. Only one battalion (3<sup>rd</sup>) is said to be in line and the other two (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) of their regiment said to be in billets east of MOORSLEDE.<sup>6</sup>

Only one piece of information could be yielded from this interrogation, though it was valuable. The fact that only one regimental battalion was in the line and the other two were in their billets pointed to a change of defensive tactics. On the 29 September, II Anzac Corps had reported that German battalions were holding their combat zones in depth to prevent a major advance. Now, however, these other battalions were being rested and only the front was being held in force.

II Anzac Corps, the formation to which the New Zealand Division was attached to, were very cautious about this information. Their report after further interrogation of these men stated that ‘the order-of-battle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division is subject to confirmation, also the location of the supporting battalions’.<sup>7</sup> By looking for further confirmation, II Anzac Corps acknowledged the unreliability of this source. They did not report the details from the New Zealand Division’s report at all, thus ensuring speculation was kept to a minimum. This was good analytical practice by both division and corps. The divisional report had made clear the problems with the source and the gaps in information, yet had pointed to a possible shift in defensive strategy, whilst the Corps had taken this on board but had not passed the information higher as it was unconfirmed. This system of confirming intelligence through multiple sources was good practice and the sign of a mature intelligence system.

The whereabouts of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division was unclear. They had previously been assumed to have relieved the 23<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division and stayed in the line, as II Anzac Corps had previously reported. The Corps’ summary showed that information from the prisoners had pinpointed their use as a counter-attack division only, not as a full relief.<sup>8</sup> This meant that ‘the corps is therefore now opposed by the 20<sup>th</sup> Division and the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve division holding the line from the YPRES-ROULERS Railway southwards’.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, one counter-attack division was unaccounted for:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/592, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/592, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

In addition, the presence of one counter-attack division must be taken into consideration. The identity of this division is unknown but according to a captured map it is supposed to concentrate on alarm in an area about 1 mile NE of PASSCHENDAELE and counter-attack in an SE direction if required.<sup>10</sup>

X Corps also reconfirmed the enemy formations opposite their line were the 19<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions.<sup>11</sup> They had also been consolidating their front line defences.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the attacks of the previous two days Second Army had so much information to process they produced two intelligence reports on this day; one for the day and the other for the evening. The first covered the backlog of intelligence reported from the lower formations from 1 October. It reported the loss of the front line between Cameron Covert and Joist Farm.<sup>13</sup> The German Army had counter-attacked three times across Second Army's line and still held these positions come the evening of 2 October as the evening report stated 'situation unchanged'.<sup>14</sup> In the morning summary, there was still evidence of defensive gaps. North of the Zandvoorde railway 'the enemy appears to be in considerably less strength'.<sup>15</sup> However, these gaps were still defended, as one pillbox in this area 'still intact, appears to form a centre of resistance, having a trench on each side of it ... and apparently dug in fairly deeply'.<sup>16</sup> The intelligence picture pointed to a reorganised and refocused enemy.

The lull in artillery activity on this day prompted observations by both II Anzac Corps and Second Army. Earlier in the day Second Army had observed the consolidation of the Tenbrielen artillery group.<sup>17</sup> The batteries north of this group had been pulled back 100 yards and other guns brought in to strengthen its flanks.<sup>18</sup> It was clearly an important battery as 'the enemy is using smoke screens to protect [them] from observation'.<sup>19</sup> Further consolidation was in evidence as, for one particular battery, 'south of ZONNEBEKE there has been a distinct decrease in shelling by light calibres and H.V. [High Velocity] guns were more

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/450, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; 'Signs of a new trench being started by the enemy about 200 yards in front of our line' and 'a photograph of 30<sup>th</sup> September shows a few short shallow trenches near this point'.

<sup>13</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>14</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Evening Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

extensively used'.<sup>20</sup> Second Army had maps from 1 October showing the new 'rearward tendency of enemy batteries'.<sup>21</sup> Although Second Army could not state why these guns were not firing, the report from II Anzac Corps sheds some light on what may have occurred to these guns.

The prisoners from the 77<sup>th</sup> Division had, so far, not been able to reveal much useful intelligence to II Anzac Corp. Their intelligence was unconfirmed. With regards to their artillery, however, the prisoners did reveal useful information. II Anzac Corps had observed that 'hostile artillery aircraft have been unusually active throughout the day operating on our front.'<sup>22</sup> Second Army confirmed this across their wider front; 'the enemy has carried out less shoots on batteries today and has endeavoured to do more observed counter-battery work'.<sup>23</sup> This counter battery work meant an increased use of aircraft to spot British gun positions. II Anzac Corps continued saying 'this may possibly be explained by the fact that prisoners captured today say that they understood that their Divisional Artillery had been brought up with them'.<sup>24</sup> This intelligence might have informed why there was a lack of light artillery shelling at certain parts of Second Army's front. It was at least further confirmation that the German Army was undertaking a major relocation of its artillery to further its defensive capabilities. In addition to this II Anzac Corps noticed that these shoots were not random as they had been directly after Polygon Wood:

Further particulars of enemy barrage on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> reveal the following:-

1. Particular attention was paid to the dugouts from D.13.d5.0 to D.13 central.
2. He also gave attention to the dugouts about 300 yards south of DOWNING trench in D.14.c.
3. There was also apparently a barrage line along the road from KANSAS CROSS (D.14a.3.1) to D.14.d.0.5.
4. Our new front line was not shelled.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Evening Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/592, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Evening Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/592, II Anzac Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 October 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

These shoots were specifically targeted towards clear points on their line. This was another sign of their reorganisation and intent to press a counter-attack. The German artillery had, however, missed II Anzac Corps' new front line. The reasons for this were unclear.

Second Army had correctly anticipated when the German Army was most likely to counter-attack at Broodseinde, giving the possible dates as 3-4 October. It had also predicted changes in defensive tactics. The intelligence received on this day, whilst not yet confirming these theories, did point towards their accuracy. The changes in artillery disposition, targeted shoots and aircraft activity suggested a rapid reorganisation. Second Army had stated that the German Army's defensive tactics had failed and 2 October began to show that German High Command recognised this fact. The regiments behind the line were now being rested and more emphasis was being put on frontline defences. The front line was now being held more strongly as was evidenced by observation of its upkeep. Similarly the changes in the order-of battle at the regimental level showed that only one regiment seemed to be holding the front line, and would likely be relieved by one of the two rested regiments, as opposed to all three being in lines in depth. However, it was clear that the Broodseinde ridge was still the priority for the enemy as other defensive lines such as the Zonnebeke-Staden line were being neglected. One major intelligence problem though remained the presence of an unknown counter-attack division.

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Second Army saw a marked increase in enemy activity this day.<sup>1</sup> However this was not across the entire front. II Anzac Corps affirmed they had suffered from increased artillery fire but decreased aircraft activity.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile X Corps' front was much quieter.<sup>3</sup> Further intelligence informed all three of these formations which further informed the state of the German Army, now only one day before the British assault.

The intelligence from the prisoners from the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment fell into further disrepute. A further prisoner from this unit was caught by II Anzac Corps:

He confirms the Order-of-battle given in yesterday's summary but states that two battalions are in the front line system, each with three companies in front line and one in support line of shell craters. Each company in front line has two platoons in front and one in support.<sup>4</sup>

The German front line was being held more strongly than had been thought. The previous day's intelligence had stipulated that the front line was being held by one battalion only. II Anzac Corps had been wise to state that this needed confirmation, as now they were presented with conflicting reports. Further doubt was cast on the previous intelligence when the new prisoner reported that 'Company trench strength is said to be about 90. (This does not agree with the statement of the prisoner taken yesterday morning)'.<sup>5</sup> II Anzac Corps now had conflicting reports on the strength of the enemy's front line. This meant a confusing situation had arisen as this new information was yet to be confirmed, however as an indication of German defensive tactics, it correlated with the information given to them by Second Army the day before. Captured documents also gave a strong indication of the areas targeted by the German Army. They noted the Langemarck-Gheluvelt and Hanneback lines as possible places to attack.<sup>6</sup> However this document was dated 25 September, and considering the number of counter-attacks already made, this information was out of date.

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>2</sup> AWM4-1-33-18, II Anzac Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/450, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>4</sup> AWM4-1-33-18, II Anzac Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>5</sup> AWM4-1-33-18, II Anzac Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

X Corps also reported little intelligence on this day, but did make one acute observations. They had received shelling across their entire line and particularly their battery areas.<sup>7</sup> One statement within the intelligence summary, although unsubstantiated, gave a premonition of the events of the 4 October; 'At 2.45pm the enemy was reported to be massing in JETTY WARREN and was probably caught by our barrage as no infantry action followed'.<sup>8</sup> This uncorroborated statement combined with II Anzac Corps' intelligence did seem point to the accuracy of Second Army's assertion that the enemy's defensive tactics had changed. Holding the front line with two battalions was a clear sign of this change, as well as massing their infantry in front line trenches.

Once again Second Army produced two reports covering the day's intelligence. The first report stipulated the mixed ground conditions across no man's land, ranging from 'passable' to 'very much waterlogged'.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this, further trench works were being undertaken by the enemy.<sup>10</sup> Second Army also confirmed that hostile artillery had been quieter yesterday. This had allowed aerial reconnaissance to be undertaken. Robertson stated that 'a sketch map showing locations by the R.F.C. and Field Survey Company on October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> ...indicates the rearward tendency of enemy batteries between the YPRES-ROULERS Railway and the MENIN Road.'<sup>11</sup> This confirmed the reports from both X Corps and II Anzac Corps from the previous days that the German guns were being further consolidated rearwards. The BEF had a mature intelligence system in place by seeking, and confirming, the accuracy of these reports.

Second Army's intelligence staff also summarized the German order-of-battle for that day. Both the 25<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions had been confirmed to be in the line from captured prisoners.<sup>12</sup> Mitchell reported that 'it appears established that the 20<sup>th</sup> Division has relieved the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division in the PASSCHENDAELE sector, on 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> September'.<sup>13</sup> He continued:

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<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/450, X Corps Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>10</sup> 'There are signs of a new trench being started by the enemy...east of Polygon Wood'; 'a considerable amount of work is reported being carried out in the trench...west of BOETLEER'. TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In this event the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division is a Counter-Attack Division and the enemy has followed his now usual policy of withdrawing the division immediately after it has made its counter-attack. It will, therefore, probably be used again against this sector.<sup>14</sup>

This was confirmation of the information of X Corps from the previous day. The intelligence that the prisoners from the 77<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 20<sup>th</sup> Division had given the previous day had enabled the tracking of movements of a German counter-attack division. The use of these was very interesting from the British perspective. This division had been brought into the line only for one day, used to attack, and then sent back again. This was also good analysis as elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division were used in the counter-attack the next day. It was a tactic that seemed to indicate the German Army were struggling with their manpower, as they were more quickly rotating divisions and bringing some in just for one day. These tactics were being used across Second Army's front, creating confusion:

It is not yet clear whether the whole of the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division has actually taken over the sector south of the YPRES-ROULERS Railway. The 236<sup>th</sup> Division was almost certainly withdrawn about the 27<sup>th</sup> September, and there are indications that elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Guard Division may have relieved it. The 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division may only have been used as a Counter-Attack Division in this sector; prisoners state that only the 210<sup>th</sup> R.I.R. actually came up to counter-attack, not the 211<sup>th</sup> R.I.R. or 212<sup>th</sup> R.I.R.<sup>15</sup>

The evening report further confirmed this use of counter-attack divisions. More importantly, it also pointed to a division being brought into the line opposite X Corps. It stated 'Abnormal train movement northwards from LILLE observed by ground observers this evening between 6 and 7 probably troops coming up from south and may possibly indicate arrival of relieving or supporting division between ZONNEBEKE and GHELUVELT perhaps in sector of 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division'.<sup>16</sup> This movement was possibly elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division being moved towards the front, although they attacked with the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division not the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. It might also have been the rest of the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division being brought up for the upcoming assault, as Mitchell commented 'the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division, one regiment of which has appeared in this sector, is probably being held as the Counter-Attack Division'.<sup>17</sup> The troops being moved could not be pinpointed in time for an accurate

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119, Second Army Evening Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

assessment to be made. All that was known was that a major reinforcement had been made for an unknown purpose.

By the end of 3 October, the BEF had monitored a rise in troop, aerial and artillery activity throughout the day. Small counter-attacks had been fought off but some, particularly at Cameron Covert and Joist Farm, had been successful. The BEF's frontline intelligence system had made them aware of major changes to the enemy's defensive fortifications, tactics and even strategy. They had accurately predicted the 3 and 4 October as possible dates for a major counter attack and witnessed movements that suggested a divisional relief or reinforcement that day. However, the one factor that stopped the accurate prediction of the time of the counter-attack was the very thing that had allowed such accurate analysis to occur in the days leading up to the battle. These reports could not be confirmed at this late hour. The German attack began at 6am. As has been seen, some of this intelligence could only be confirmed one or two days after it had first been reported. This was not a fault of the BEF or even Military Intelligence during this period. The use of counter-attack divisions in this way was unpredictable, but good intelligence had at least given enough useful information for Second Army to fully appreciate the tactics that the German Army was using the night before its attack. Ultimately, it is doubtful that confirmation of this intelligence would have changed Second Army's attack plans, as the British troops were already getting into the positions ready for the advance.

## Conclusion

The massacre of the German Divisions at Broodseinde was not a premeditated event. The original date of Broodseinde had been brought forward to 4 October from 6 October thanks to the speed with which II Anzac Corps could relieve V Corps. This decision was made by the 26 September, immediately after Polygon Wood. By this time it is clear not enough information had been collected that pointed to a large scale enemy assault.<sup>1</sup> Only by 1 October had Second Army predicted that a major attack was due, advising the date was either 3 or 4 October.

The intelligence summaries after the battle make it clear that the German attack would have achieved some surprise, if it had not coincided with the British attack; 'It appears from prisoners statements that three hostile divisions had assembled in his locality for an attack to be delivered at 6.0 this morning, but were completely broken up by our attacking Australian infantry and artillery fire'.<sup>2</sup> On the 4 October, only observations and unsubstantiated reports could be made, but by the evening and the next day the picture had become clear. Mitchell wrote, in his evening analysis, that 'elements of three enemy divisions were found reinforcing his normal garrison in the ZONNEBEKE sector'.<sup>3</sup> Two of these divisions, the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve and 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Divisions were known to be in the line or in support during the intelligence build-up. The last minute reinforcement recorded on the 3 October was later learned to be the 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Division.<sup>4</sup> They had been diverted from Lille, and had been originally headed further north.<sup>5</sup>

The ability of the BEF's intelligence system to keep such a close track on the German Army on a day to day basis was thanks to its field intelligence. The front line collation activities carried out by the officers of the Intelligence Corps established an excellent system of intelligence analysis. These six days before the Battle of Broodseinde show a mature analytical system that checked sources and confirmed information. In these six days, the BEF relied mainly on prisoner interrogations, battlefield detritus and ground observation to report

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<sup>1</sup> Bean, *Official History*, p. 835. Another factor was the increased risk of bad weather. Charteris was not present at this conference so intelligence did not dictate this change. Sheffield & Bourne, *Haig: War Diaries*, 26 September 1917, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119. Second Army Intelligence Summary, 4 October 1917.

<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119. Second Army Evening Intelligence Summary, 4 October 1917.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: PRO WO/157/119. Second Army Intelligence Summary, 5 October 1917.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

on the state of the German Army. Other technologies such as flash-spotting and sound-ranging were used in conjunction with aerial observation. The consolidation of the German artillery groups was reported on the 29 September by I Anzac Corps thanks to flash spotting. These reports were not taken as definitive, however, until the RFC made visual confirmation. Only by the 1 and 2 October were they able to do so, as the Germans had kept them shrouded by smoke screens. It is likely that this confirmation was not sought due to any unreliability of the observation technologies but from knowledge that technological advancements could not always compensate for simple human observation. From the reports of this week, it is clear that aerial observation played a large and important role in confirming artillery related intelligence.

British military intelligence did predict the major-German counter attack on 4 October but could not confirm it. It had accurately monitored the state and intentions of the German Army on the front during the build up to the battle. It gave British high command a clear picture of German defensive doctrine and tactics. However, as stated in the introduction this thesis does not intend to fully measure the accuracy of intelligence, although no conclusions can be made without reference to this factor. The aim of this thesis was to ascertain how successful British military intelligence was at assessing the intentions of the German Army. Judged in this regard the BEF performed well. Second Army was able to predict the attack at Broodseinde thanks to an intelligence system that could provide multiple reinforcing sources. The accuracy of analysis achieved during these six days was due to Second Army's disciplined intelligence staff. By acknowledging gaps in its information and awaiting confirmation of new intelligence, they showed that important elements of the BEF practiced a good analytical methodology. The failure to confirm the date of the attack should not be viewed as a failure of Second Army or the BEF's intelligence system. It is almost perverse to conclude that Second Army could not accurately predict Operation *Hohensturm* because of the mature and established intelligence system. When the reports reached them on 3 October of vast train movements, they did not jump to conclusions but awaited more information. The quality of further analysis at Corps and Division level, and the evolution of the Intelligence Corps continued this good methodology, yet it must be tempered that at this time, GHQ and Fifth Army did not practice this discipline so well. Overall intelligence analysis within the BEF before Broodseinde was mixed. More formations showed better practices than others. However, the intelligence analysis that was undertaken by the British and Anzac formations before Broodseinde, was excellent. An intelligence officer once commented that 'perfect

intelligence in a war must of necessity be out-of-date and therefore cease to be perfect.’<sup>6</sup> This rang true for Second Army’s intelligence staff in the build up to Broodseinde.

In the wider context of the First World War it is clear that Broodseinde represented a time when the BEF was advancing. As Beach makes clear lulls in forward movement could inhibit the amount of intelligence taken, especially from prisoners and thus analysis could be compromised.<sup>7</sup> Any further study of the BEF’s field intelligence has to take this factor into account. 1917 had seen a great evolution of the BEF’s military intelligence system up to this point. It is outside the remit of this study but the system would further evolve into 1918, culminating in the accurate prediction of the German advance in the spring of that year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E.T. Williams, Head of Intelligence 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, 1945, cited in Ferris, *Signals Intelligence*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, p. 286.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 239-249.

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## **V. Online Resources**

The Australian War Memorial – [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)

JSTOR – [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography – [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)

Centre for First World War Studies, University of Birmingham – [www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk](http://www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk)