

DELV L E V D O D T E S UTH AFRICANS IN FRANCE APRIL - JULY 1916

The Genesis of the Western Front

On 28 June 1914 Bosnian nationalists had assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and thus unwittingly precipitated the sequence of diplomatic and military preparations which propelled Europe to war. By the end of July the major continental powers had mobilised and by early August Germany was at war with both Russia and France. Her ally, Austria, would be incapable of containing the massive Russian armies once these had been organised, and Germany faced the daunting prospect of a war on two fronts. The German High Command had long possessed a scheme for obviating this disadvantage, and by launching a swift and decisive stroke against France hoped to secure a victory in the West before moving the bulk of her armies eastwards against Russia. Yet the plan for this initial offensive, the so-called Schlieffen Plan, required the German armies to move through Belgium in order to outflank the French defences and on 4 August 1914 this action provided Britain with the necessary justification to enter the war at the side of France and Belgium. In the first few weeks of war the invading German armies scored a series of rapid and inspiring successes, but by the beginning of September the French, aided by a small British Expeditionary Force, halted the enemy advance and compelled a tactical withdrawal.¹ The front-line troops of both sides now dug themselves crude entrenchments and awaited reinforcements and fresh supplies. Attempts to restore the battle of manoeuvre by outflanking the northern end of the opposing line merely resulted in the establishment of a line of trenches extending from Switzerland to the Belgian coast.

The frustration of the Schlieffen Plan placed the German High Command in a difficult situation, for although they had managed a rather lucky victory over the inefficient Russians at Tannenberg at the end of August, their Austrian allies were badly defeated in Galicia shortly afterwards and German troops from the Western Front were now needed to prevent a Russian breakthrough. To compensate for this transfer of forces the Germans began to make their defence systems on the Western Front more elaborate, even yielding some ground where

advantages of terrain were to be gained. By the end of 1914 they had consolidated their hold over almost all of Belgium and much of industrial France. The early actions of the war had all emphasised the military lesson of the last century: that entrenched riflemen could impose prohibitive casualties on attacking infantry. Now that the rifleman was sheltered behind barbed-wire entanglements and supported by accurate machine-gun and artillery fire it was difficult to see how the war of movement was to be restored in France; Falkenhayn, the German commander-in-chief, reluctantly admitted that only the wide spaces of the Russian front offered scope for even a limited success. On the British side too there were those who now shrunk from the hopeless and wasteful task of battering at the enemy's fieldworks and advocated instead the opening of a back door to their opponents' stronghold, through the Balkans or Turkey. The British generals employed on the Western Front decried such ideas as a dangerous heresy which would merely prolong the war by diverting resources from the decisive theatre. In this they were loudly supported by the French, who were naturally eager to evict the enemy from the occupied territories.

Yet on the Western Front in 1915 no way was found to break with static siege warfare. An answer was sought in the employment of ever-increasing amounts of heavy artillery, intended to smash the enemy defences before the infantry attacked. Yet even when initial success was bought at great ex-

1. B.H. Liddell Hart: *History of the First World War* (London, 1972) pp 1–96, and Cyril Falls: *The Great War 1914–18* (New York, 1961), pp 21–73 both provide excellent general accounts of the outbreak of war and the opening stages of the campaign on the Western Front. Corelli Barnett's *The Swordbearers: Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War*, (London, 1963), contains a detailed analysis of the development of the Schlieffen Plan and its eventual failure. Paul Guinn's *British Strategy and Politics 1914–18* (Oxford, 1965) pp 1–47, and Michael Howard's *The Continental Commitment* (Harmondsworth, 1974) pp 9–52 provide the background to Britain's involvement in the European war. South Africa's commitment to the Imperial war effort is discussed in S.B. Spies: 'The Outbreak of the First World War and the Botha Government,' in *The South African Historical Journal*, No 1, November 1969, pp 47–57.

pense, the methods of command, signalling and transport proved inadequate to react quickly enough to exploit the gaps briefly created in the enemy line. On the German side the story was similar, and the net result of the various isolated offensives of late 1914 and 1915 was an ever-increasing casualty list.²

It soon became apparent that those who had prophesied a short war were to be confuted, and Britain in particular was ill-equipped for a long conflict, for there had been no conscription to form massive armies and reserves of the continental pattern. Britain was dependent upon her small, though excellent, Regular Army and its reserves in the Territorial battalions, and these were being rapidly used up on the Western Front. Lord Kitchener, the Minister of War, had appealed for volunteers to form the 'New Army', but these men, though they came forward in hundreds of thousands, would take time to equip and train.³

Formation of the 1st South African Infantry Brigade

The Dominions and India had already provided considerable assistance to the Imperial war effort, mainly by sending troops to minor theatres of war in Africa and Asia.⁴ The South Africans themselves had provided a large expeditionary force to conquer the neighbouring German colony of South West Africa⁵, and Australia and New Zealand had sent large numbers of troops to fight in the Middle East. By early 1915 Canada and India both had contingents on the Western Front⁶, but additional troops were in constant demand, and by the April of that year the Union government began to discuss with the Imperial authorities the possibility of sending a well-equipped and experienced South African force to serve in France. The rebellion notwithstanding, a great deal of the South African public enthusiastically backed Britain's war effort, and many had already volunteered to serve in British units. Botha's ministry too was firmly committed to the Imperial cause, but another factor which weighed in the government's calculations was an awareness that the demobilisation of the vast volunteer army sent to South West Africa could have dangerous economic and political consequences; unemployment was already a problem and labour difficulties had been the bane of the Union since its inception in 1910. It was wise, therefore, to think of offering the returned soldiers a chance to serve elsewhere, and it was fortunate that many of them were eager to do so.⁷ In June 1915 the South African government agreed to send five batteries of heavy artillery to Europe⁸, and later in the same month General Smuts, the Minister of Defence and Acting Prime Minister, offered to raise

a full infantry brigade from the troops already returning from South West Africa; additional brigades might be formed if sufficient numbers came forward. Personnel for these formations would be volunteers and would be paid at Union rates by the Imperial government. On 5 July 1915, while Botha was negotiating the surrender of the German colony, the Union's offer was accepted, and recruiting began immediately.⁹

The 1st South African Infantry Brigade was to be established on similar lines to the British brigades in the 'New Army', and would comprise four battalions of infantry each of 1 100 all ranks.¹⁰ In order to make these battalions as representative as possible they were designated as follows:

1st South African Infantry (Cape of Good Hope Regiment).

2nd South African Infantry (Natal and Orange Free State Regiment).

3rd South African Infantry (Transvaal and Rhodesia Regiment).

4th South African Infantry (South African Scottish Regiment).¹¹

There were hopes initially that it would be possible to send more than one brigade to Europe, but even

2. Liddell Hart: *op cit.* pp 118–131, 183–203, Falls: *op cit.* pp 74–83, 103–116. A.H. Farrar-Hockley: *Ypres 1914: Death of an Army*, (London, 1970), is a detailed account of the wearing down of the British Expeditionary Force.
3. Martin Middlebrook: *The First Day on the Somme, 1 July 1916*, (London, 1971), pp 4–28, gives an account of the raising of the 'New Army' battalions, and also throws unusual light on the diversity of motives which caused men to volunteer.
4. War Office: *Statistical Abstract of Information Regarding the Armies at Home and Abroad 1914–1920* (London, 1920), tables opposite p 28.
5. J.J. Collyer: *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915* (Pretoria, 1937).
6. War Office: *op cit.*
7. SADF Archives: Secretary of Defence Group (DC), Box 298, File G 31106, Enclosure 12, Memorandum Relating to the Raising of the SA Expeditionary Force.
8. SADF Archives: Secretary of Defence Group (DC), Box 657, File D.383/9199, enclosure 17, Correspondence Relating to the Provision of Imperial Service Contingents by the Union of South Africa: p.3, Telegram, Lord Buxton (Governor-General) to General Smuts dd 30 May 1915; Minute, J.C. Smuts (Acting Prime Minister) to Lord Buxton dd 4 June 1915.
9. *Ibid*: p 3. Minute, J.C. Smuts to Lord Buxton dd 27 June 1915. Memorandum Relating to the Raising of the SA Expeditionary Force, *op cit.*
10. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 520, File 374/4. Letter, Lieutenant-Colonel C.R. Burgess (Staff Officer, Central Bureau SA Oversea Expeditionary Force) to Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin dd Pretoria 10 August 1915.
11. Memorandum Relating to the Raising of the SA Expeditionary Force, *op cit.* Union Defence Forces, General Order 724, dd 31 August 1915.

as the 1st Brigade was forming news came that the establishment was to be increased by an additional 30% to serve as immediate reinforcements, and that each month another 15% of the Brigade's establishment would be required as replacements.¹² Nevertheless, in addition to the heavy artillery and the infantry already mentioned, a number of other specialist units were formed to take their place alongside the British forces in France.¹³ In October 1915 the Imperial authorities asked the Union to provide an expeditionary force for the campaign in East Africa, and South Africa's subsequent commitments in this theatre, together with the large numbers of casualties suffered by the overseas contingent, effectively prevented the raising of more than one brigade for European service.¹⁴

After enlistment the recruits for the 1st Brigade were sent to the training camp at Potchefstroom, where they were kitted up, drilled and inspected. At the beginning of September the first infantry detachments embarked for England and by 17 October the last of the 160 officers and 5 648 men of the Brigade were en route for England, under the command of Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin.¹⁵

Early in October the South African Brigade began to reassemble at Bordon camp in Hampshire, where the troops were to spend the next two and a half months drilling and training in cold, rain and wind. Towards the end of November news was received that the Brigade was to leave for France to join 16th (Irish) Division, but a few days later these orders were cancelled and preparations were begun for the South Africans to leave for Egypt, where a Moslem invasion from Cyrenaica threatened the Suez Canal. On 27 December the Brigade drew its new kit and two days later the first three battalions sailed for Alexandria. In the next three months the regiments of the Brigade gained valuable experience as fighting units, in a campaign where casualties were light and organisational ability and physical stamina were at a premium.¹⁶

Planning an Offensive

While the South Africans were engaged in Egypt the Allied leaders were planning their strategy for 1916. On 6 December 1915 a meeting of the military representatives of the Allied powers was held at French General Headquarters at Chantilly. The situation facing these men was disappointing, for while the Allies had failed to make any impression in the West the Central Powers had scored victories against the Russians as well as in the Balkans and seemed set to spread their dominion over Eastern Europe. Italy's entry to the Allied camp had as yet made little impact and the Anglo-French attempt to eliminate Turkey from the war had resulted in an

expensive and ignominious failure at Gallipoli. The setbacks of the previous year had made evident the need for a more scientific approach to war if victory were to be secured, and the French now argued that their forces and those of Britain must concentrate on the Western Front, co-ordinating an offensive in the near future with others to be launched by Russian and Italy; only in this way could the Germans, manpower reserves be worn down sufficiently to gain victory.¹⁷

Britain's political and military leaders accepted the French proposals in principle, for those advocates of an indirect attack on the Central Powers had been badly discredited by the outcome of Gallipoli adventure.¹⁸ On 19 December 1915 General Haig replaced the mercurial and excitable General French as Commander of the British Expeditionary Force, and General Robertson became Chief of the Imperial General Staff just four days later. These two appointments ensured that Britain would concentrate her main military efforts in France and Bel-

12. Union Defence Forces, General Order 672, dd 27 July 1915. Letter Lieutenant-Colonel C.R. Burgess to Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin dd Pretoria 10 August 1915. *op cit.*
13. Although this article only deals with the role of the 1st South African Infantry Brigade, one other South African unit in particular was closely involved in this information's operations: 1st South African Field Ambulance. This was formed under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel G.H. Usmar, and had an authorised establishment, including attached Army Service Corps personnel, of 10 officers and 256 men, divided into 3 sections. A field ambulance of this size was supposed to have a capacity of 150 patients and was equipped with 7 motor ambulances and 3 mule-drawn ambulance wagons — see Union Defence Forces General Order 840 dd 7 Dec 1915, and *New Establishments Part VII Field Ambulances* dd 7 December 1915. Further details of the activities of the South African Heavy Artillery, Medical Corps, Railway Companies, Trades Company and Signals Company can be found in *The Union of South Africa and the Great War*, cited above, and in John Buchan: *The History of the South African Forces in France* (London, 1920)
14. Correspondence Relating to the Provision of Imperial Service Contingents by the Union of South Africa. *op cit.* J.J. Collyer: *The South Africans with General Smuts in German East Africa 1916* (Pretoria, 1939).
15. Memorandum Relating to the Raising of the SA Overseas Expeditionary Force *op cit.* Ernest Solomon: *Potchefstroom to Delville Wood, together with some Experiences as a Prisoner of War in Germany* (Johannesburg, no date), pp 9–11.
16. Solomon: *op cit.*, pp 13–21. A detailed account of the activities of the South Africans in Egypt is to be found in Richard Cornwell: 'The Sanusi Campaign' in *Militaria* 5/1.
17. A.H. Farrar-Hockley: *The Somme* (London, 1964) p 26. Guinn: *op cit.*, p 121. Sir James E. Edmonds: *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1916*, Volume I (London, 1932), pp 1–9, and *Appendices* Volume I (London, 1932) pp 1–5 provide details of the plan of action proposed by France at the Chantilly conference.
18. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme*, *op cit.*, p 26. Edmonds: *Military Operations, Vol I*, *op cit.*, pp 9–11. Guinn: *op cit.*, pp 126, 129.



Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, France 1915–18. This signed photograph was presented to General Lukin by Haig during his visit to South Africa in 1921. This is the first time it has been published.

gium, for both Haig and Robertson were certain that this was where the war must be won. For them, however, as for the French military commanders, the war aims of the Allies no longer amounted simply to the eviction of the invader from the soil of France and Belgium, but encompassed the complete destruction of the military power of Germany. What alarmed them was that their political masters might cavil at the rising expenditure in lives¹⁹ and money that total victory would require, and they feared that if 1916 presented no prospect of victory a compromise peace might be negotiated with a Germany still in the ascendant. This, to their way of thinking, would simply result in another clash of arms in another few years, when the Allies would be in a far worse state. Haig was therefore determined on a decisive success on the Western Front in 1916, to refute those who regarded compromise as the only answer to the current military impasse. Such a success was just as vital to France, for she could scarcely continue to sustain the losses of the first year and a half. Indeed, Haig was convinced that France could barely survive another winter of war; in his eyes the responsibility for victory rested, as never before, on the British Empire, now organising her wealth and manpower for conflict on an unprecedented scale.²⁰

At the end of 1915 the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium numbered just under 1 000 000 men; these were organised into three Armies, which were subdivided further into corps

and divisions. The left of the British line was just north of Ypres, held by the Second Army, to its south lay the First Army at Loos, then came the French Tenth Army and then the British Third Army with its right flank resting on the Rivier Somme.²¹

Late in December 1915 Haig was invited to Chantilly again, where Joffre asked if the British would relieve the French Tenth Army, thus creating a continuous British front of eighty miles. Haig replied that as soon as sufficient reinforcements arrived from Britain and the Middle East he would oblige. Joffre also announced that he had ordered his staff to draft plans for an offensive south of the Somme, to start about 1 July 1916, in order to co-ordinate with the projected Russian and Italian operations; he was eager that Haig's armies should attack north of the Somme at the same time. Haig had already anticipated this request and had asked General Allenby, commanding the Third Army, to prepare schemes for an offensive flanking the Somme, at the same time he directed General Plumer, of the Second Army, to consider three alternative operations in Flanders, where the Expeditionary Force had done most of its fighting so far.²²

A week later Joffre approached Haig with a modified scheme, but the latter had to refuse the French request to undertake battles in April and May to exhaust the German reserves. By 14

19. By the end of 1915 the forces of the British Empire had suffered casualties (killed, wounded and missing) of 21 747 officers and 490 673 men, see Edmonds: *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit, p 27 f.n.* Of this total over 15 500 officers and 337 000 men had become casualties on the Western Front, and about 4 900 officers and 113 000 men in the Dardenelles campaign. Another 5 800 officers and 124 000 men became casualties on the Western Front before the Somme offensive was launched. See War Office: *op cit, pp 253–258, 284–286.*
20. Edmonds: *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit, pp 16–18.* Guinn: *op cit, pp 122–131.* See also Robertson's letter to Haig dd 13 January 1916 in which he expressed fears about political opposition to an offensive on the Western Front, and Haig's diary entry for 14 January, both in Robert Blake: *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914–1919*, (London, 1952), pp 124–125. Britain's leaders did, in fact, finally accept the principle of conscription in January 1916 when the Military Service Act became law, but none of these conscripts would be in France in time for the summer offensive, see Edmonds: *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit, pp 150–152*, and Middlebrook: *op cit, p 25.*
21. Each army was composed of an average of four infantry corps which themselves contained an average of three divisions each. The division was a fairly permanent organisation, and generally contained the same brigades and battalions permanently. The divisions themselves, however, were often transferred from corps to corps, or army to army, as the campaign dictated — see Middlebrook: *op cit, pp 40–41.* At the beginning of 1916 Haig's command consisted of 5 cavalry and 38 infantry divisions, organised into 12 corps — see Edmonds: *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit, p 19.*
22. *Ibid, p 27.* Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit, pp 27–28.*

February, however, the two commanders had agreed that they would launch a co-ordinated offensive on the Somme on about 1 July 1916, and that the British would undertake a preliminary attack in the Ypres-Basée area roughly two weeks before that date, to draw off the German reserves.²³

The German commander, Falkenhayn, was also convinced that the Western Front held the key to victory, and he was only too conscious of the vast industrial and material potential which the Allies would eventually bring to bear. To him it seemed that Germany's best hope lay in bringing about the collapse of France before this potential was used, for he too recognised that the French had suffered heavy losses. On 21 February, therefore, the Germans launched an onslaught against the French position at Verdun, using massive artillery fire to smash the defences before sending in the infantry. Falkenhayn hoped that the French would defend Verdun regardless of cost, but once again the attacker under-estimated the losses that he would suffer himself. Nevertheless, for the moment, the German attack had thrown into jeopardy the Allies plans for the summer.²⁴

Haig quickly came to the aid of his ally and fulfilled his promise to relieve the French Tenth Army, edging his Third Army steadily northwards to link with the First Army, while a new Fourth Army under General Rawlinson gradually took over the Third Army's old positions bordering the Somme. Planning for the summer offensive went on despite the new turn of events, and on 4 March Haig instructed Rawlinson, who had taken over the Somme sector, to draft a broad operational plan for an offensive there, although Plumer was told to continue with his preparations in Flanders in case the French losses at Verdun reduced the summer operations to an all-British affair.²⁵

The South Africans in France

The relief of the French Tenth Army and the mounting of a large-scale offensive required that the Expeditionary Force receive considerable reinforcement, and between January and July the equivalent of 19 divisions arrived in France. It was late March before Lukin and his staff reached Cairo to make arrangements for the South African Brigade's belated move to the Western Front, where they were to join the 9th (Scottish) Division.²⁶ On 12 and 13 April 1916 the troops of 1st South African Infantry Brigade embarked at Alexandria.²⁷ The sea-voyage appears to have provided a welcome change after even the brief experience of the desert, the more so for those troops fortunate enough to sail aboard *HMT Megantic*, a large White Star liner, which had retained all its peace-

time fittings and conveniences; only the cuisine appears to have approximated to military standards. The respite was short however, for the convoy sailed the length of the Mediterranean and reached its destination, Marseilles, on the night of 19/20 April. While the bulk of the Brigade disembarked and unloaded its equipment Lukin and his staff hurried on to 9th Division Headquarters at Hazebrouck in north-eastern France, about 10 miles from the Belgian border. They were followed later in the day by the 2nd and 3rd Regiments and half of the 1st Regiment, whose march to the railway-station was preceded by bugle-bands and watched by large crowds. The troops who had sailed on *HMT Oriana*, however, were placed in quarantine because of an outbreak of meningitis, and the 4th Regiment, together with 20 officers and 594 men of the 1st Regiment, were moved directly to a camp at La Valentine, a farm outside Marseilles.²⁸

23. Edmonds: *Military Operations Volume I, op cit*, pp 29–30; Blake *op cit*, p 129.

24. Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters, 1914–1916, and its Critical Decisions*, (London, 1919), pp 223–242. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 29–36. The French give their losses up to the end of 1915 as 1 961 687, of whom just over 1 000 000 were killed or missing, see Edmonds, *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit*, p 27 f.n.

25. Edmonds: *Military Operations, Volume 1, op cit*, pp 38–39. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 48–49.

26. SADF Archive, World War I Group (WW1), Box 156 War Diary, 1st South African Brigade. The re-organisation of the 9th Division was caused by lack of recruits for the numerous regiments raised by the Scots since the outbreak of war, for some amalgamation of units was now necessary. In the re-organisation some battalions were re-allocated within the Division and 28th Brigade was transferred to the 15th Division. The South Africans replaced this brigade alongside 26th and 27th Brigades. See John Ewing: *The History of the 9th (Scottish) Division 1914–1919* (London, 1921) pp 81–83.

27. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade *op cit*. The embarkation state of the Brigade at Alexandria was as follows:
 Brigade Headquarters – 6 officers – 52 other ranks
 1st Regiment – 36 officers – 1 000 other ranks
 2nd Regiment – 35 officers – 1 001 other ranks
 3rd Regiment – 31 officers – 958 other ranks
 4th Regiment – 36 officers – 1 062 other ranks
 1st Field Ambulance, SAMC – 10 officers – 250 other ranks
 224th Company, Army Service Corps – 2 officers – 14 other ranks

See SADF Archives World War I Group (WW1), Box 504, 1st South African Brigade Orders dd 12 April 1916. It will be noted that the total establishment of the Brigade in Egypt, as in France, was considerably below that of 160 officers and 5 648 men which arrived in England, but, as related above, some 30% of this initial strength was left at Bordon to act as a reserve.

28. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WW1), Box 147. War Diary, 2nd Regiment. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. Solomon: *op cit* p 42. George W. Warwick: *We Band of Brothers* (Cape Town, 1962) pp 49–50.

Brigade Headquarters arrived at Hazebrouck at about midday on the 22nd, reported to 9th Division and took over billets in the neighbouring village of Bailleul, some 7 miles behind the front line. The 2nd and 3rd Regiments arrived at Steenwerck, near Bailleul, early next morning, after a long and uncomfortable train journey across the length of France. The infantry then marched the two miles to their billets, along roads completely under water. Some distraction was offered by the sound of artillery fire and an aerial battle taking place overhead, and by early afternoon the infantry were settling in to their new quarters. That same day Brigadier-General Lukin and his Brigade-Major, Mitchell-Baker, went into the trenches which 28th Brigade was now holding but which the South Africans were to take over.²⁹

Introduction to the Trenches

The incredible concentrations of violent action which marked the battles of the Western Front tended to be restricted in both time and space, and some sectors of the front were quiet for most of the war. It was to such a sector that the South Africans had been sent, for 9th Division was stationed at the southern boundary of the area held by General Plumer's Second Army. Here the front trenches lay just east of Ploegsteert Wood, they were in quite good condition and reliefs could even be carried out by day. The billets in the villages to the rear were excellent, and as this was one of the few parts of the line where the British held the favourable ground, training could be carried out with relative safety.³⁰ Beginning on 25 April parties of 12 officers and 120 men were sent up by the South African battalions to spend 48-hour periods in the trenches with the experienced men of the 9th Division in order to learn something of trench conditions and methods of fighting.³¹

Most trench systems consisted of three lines of trenches, a front line, support and reserve; all were built in a right-angled zig-zag pattern, to reduce the effect of shell bursts, and each straight section was known as a bay. A fire-step was built on the side facing the enemy, so that the riflemen could resist enemy attacks. The three lines of trenches were linked to each other by communication trenches and the system was entered from the rear by an access trench invisible to the enemy; all trenches were given names, for easy identification. The trenches themselves provided the simplest living accommodation, with dug-outs usually available only for officers and senior non-commissioned officers. The men generally had to find shelter where they could, in small holes scraped in the side of the trench or on the fire-step itself.³² This was the curious world which the South African infantry

entered late in April 1916. One party from the 3rd Regiment was sent up to share the trenches of the Black Watch, and after a march of seven miles from their billets came to Ploegsteert Wood, described by the 9th Division's historian as 'a charming spot'; but as the South Africans moved along its duck-boarded paths they could not help noticing the numerous graves of men who had died there early in the war.³³

Life in the trenches certainly needed getting used to. Before dawn the entire trench garrison had to turn out and stand to arms, on the fire-step, a precaution against an enemy attack at first light. After about an hour the men would be dismissed and sentries posted, while breakfast was cooked over small fires. There was little to do on quiet days except to try to sleep, although equipment had to be worn at all times and rest was disturbed by the movement of men along the lines. All day the enemy line, just a hundred yards away in this particular sector, would be kept under observation through periscopes, for to expose one's head above the trench parapet was to invite a sniper's bullet. Occasionally there would be exchanges of rifle grenades and sniper fire, or the artillery would attempt to damage the opposing line, but in many sectors a policy of 'live-and-let-live' was followed. This was just as well for the British, for along almost the whole of the Western Front the Germans enjoyed the advantage of geographical positions and stronger defences, and were experienced in, and well-equipped for, trench warfare. Nevertheless there were many British commanders who disapproved of this inactivity, which aggravated the monotony of trench life and meant the loss of the 'aggressive spirit'. Sniping and raids were therefore encouraged, often at considerable cost when the enemy retaliated. At dusk 'stand to' was repeated and as darkness fell the real work of the day began, carrying parties moved up from the rear with rations, water, ammunition, sandbags, duckboards and wire, working parties began draining and digging in the trenches, while others were sent into 'No Mans Land', to repair the British wire, or patrol

29. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. That part of the 1st Regiment which had sailed aboard *HMT Scotian*, and which was therefore allowed to leave Marseilles, arrived at Steenwerck on 24 April.

30. Ewing: *op cit*, p 75.

31. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. Solomon: *op cit*, pp 45–48. 9th Division had been on the Western Front since May 1915 and had played a significant part in the battle of Loos in September 1915. Ewing: *op cit*, pp 12–61.

32. Middlebrook: *op cit*, p 31.

33. Ewing: *op cit*, p 76. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade: *op cit*. Solomon: *op cit*, pp 45–48.

and inspect the enemy's defences.³⁴ Despite the fact that this was reckoned to be a quiet sector the Germans enlivened the South Africans' stay with a gas attack on the first night and a heavy bombardment of the line on the 26th when two men of the 2nd Regiment were wounded. The trench to the right of the 2nd Regiment was actually raided after the bombardment, but the Germans were quickly evicted.³⁵

Into the Line

On 2 May the Brigade was considered to have served its brief apprenticeship and to be ready to occupy the line by itself, and on 6 May the 2nd and 3rd Regiments marched to new billets 7 miles away at Le Bizet, a small village on the Franco-Belgian border. The billets here were a series of unoccupied and unfurnished dwellings, for most of the population had left by May 1916 to avoid the frequent German shelling. A few hardier souls had remained, however, aware of the good money to be made by selling wine and fresh provisions to soldiers who lived on a monotonous diet of canned food; the *estaminets* also did a brisk trade. Just a mile away was the larger town of Armentières, whose simple but celebrated pleasures would be available to the South Africans for the next few weeks.³⁶

On 8 May the 2nd and 3rd Regiments relieved the two battalions of Highland Light Infantry in the front line, just 1 000 yards forward of Le Bizet. Even now training continued, and signallers from 123rd Brigade were attached to the South African units to give instruction while in the line. The South Africans' first real spell of trench duty began quietly, for both sides tended to concentrate their spasmodic shelling on the enemy's rear areas. Rifle grenades and trench mortar shells were occasionally exchanged, but these caused only minor casualties and damage to the trench parapet. The newcomers seem to have taken with some enthusiasm to the mundane business of garrisoning trenches, for they frequently interrupted German wiring parties with Lewis gun and rifle fire and their snipers claimed good results.³⁷

On 11 May the Brigade's infantry complement was finally completed when the 4th Regiment and the half battalion of 1st Regiment arrived at Le Bizet after their enforced stay in Marseilles. The men had enjoyed the delay, for quarantine regulations do not seem to have been rigidly applied and despite the gallant attempts of regimental officers to keep their men occupied with drill and competitions many of the wilder spirits had found it possible to enjoy the various delights of Marseilles, a town not particularly noted for either the morality or sobriety of its entertainments.

The South Africans' farewell to the seaport had been a gala occasion, for they paraded through the main streets of the town en route for the station in the wake of Indians and Australians. The kilted 4th Regiment in particular, with their pipeband and Springbok mascot 'Nancy', appear to have been popular with the crowds and sweets, flowers and cigarettes were pressed upon the troops, while the latter were actually forced by the crush to break column and march in single file. Finally, on arrival at the station, the men passed long tables on which champagne was provided, to sustain them in their long journey.³⁸ Three days later they arrived at their billets in Le Bizet and that same evening 200 men from each regiment were sent into the trenches to begin the relief of the 2nd and 3rd Regiments. Over the next few days these reliefs continued, but on the evening of 13 May before the move was completed the trenches to the immediate left of the 3rd Regiment were subjected to heavy bombardment, which killed 16 men of the 11th Royal Scots and wounded another 61. This shelling was merely a preliminary to an enemy raid, which was thwarted only after a fierce struggle; even 'quiet' sectors could become suddenly dangerous.³⁹

Over the next 6 days of their trench duty the men of 1st and 4th Regiments were expected to acquire some knowledge of the methods of warfare practiced on the Western Front. Though out of the line and in the relative comfort of their austere billets in Le Bizet the men of the 2nd and 3rd Regiments were given little opportunity for rest. By day instruction was given in bayonet fighting, bombing and the use of the Lewis gun, by night large parties of men were required to help the engineers repair the front-line defences. Le Bizet itself proved to be less safe than the trenches in fact, and German shelling of the South Africans' billets became a daily occurrence which caused

34. Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 32–35. Solomon: *op cit*, pp 45–48.

35. War Diary, 2nd Regiment, *op cit*.

36. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 489, War Diary 3rd Regiment. War Diary 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*, Solomon: *op cit*, pp 47–48.

37. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. War Diary 2nd Regiment, *op cit*. War Diary 3rd Regiment, *op cit*, see also appendices attached to this War Diary: Intelligence Notes for the period 6 a.m. 9 May 1916 to 6 a.m. 10 May 1916, which give a detailed account of incidents and observations.

38. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. Warwick: *op cit*, p 49. Sir Hugh Boustead: *The Wind of Morning*, (London, 1972), p 29.

39. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*. War Diary, 2nd Regiment, *op cit*. Ewing: *op cit*, pp 76–77.

serious casualties.⁴⁰ On 20 May the 2nd and 3rd Regiments returned to the front line for another 6-day spell, and were in turn relieved by 1st and 4th Regiments on 26 May.⁴¹ The latter battalions were to have a shorter stay than previously however, for that same day Brigadier-General Lukin issued orders for the whole Brigade to move some 30 miles to the rear at the end of the month. The South Africans were to undergo further training with the rest of 9th Division in the area of Erny St Julien, where the First Army had a special manoeuvre area.⁴²

On 28 May 2nd and 3rd Regiments marched west from Le Bizet, after handing over their billets to troops of 123rd Brigade. Over the next two days 1st and 4th Regiments were also relieved by troops of this brigade and followed the other two battalions towards a rendezvous at Strazeele, about 5 miles to the rear. There the South African Field Ambulance joined the Brigade once more, having been training with 28th and 29th Field Ambulances at the nearby village of La Crèche since the middle of May. As the troops marched westwards they found the scenery delightful despite the oppressively hot weather. The soldiers slept in barns at night with straw for beds, and by a series of easy marches had reached Erny St Julien on 4 June.⁴³

The Brigade headquarters staff, at least, must have guessed the reason for 9th Division's sudden removal from the front-line, for the Division's orders emphasised that the forthcoming training programme would concentrate totally on offensive operations. The 9th Division was preparing for the summer.⁴⁴

Tactics and Training

Before turning to the South African part in the fighting of July 1916 it is essential to get some idea of the size and operational capabilities of the formations we are dealing with, and of the tactical doctrine with which their commanders were imbued.

The British infantry division of 1916 was a composite formation, of infantry, field artillery, engineers, medical staff, signallers and drivers; it had an establishment of over 19 000 men, 5 000 horses and about 60 motor vehicles. About 2/3 of the men in a division served in the 13 infantry battalions, 12 of which composed the three infantry brigades; the remaining one was the pioneer battalion which had been found essential in the static siege warfare of the Western Front.⁴⁵ The infantry battalions which made up 9th Division were brigaded as follows:

26th Brigade (Brigadier-General A.B. Ritchie)
8th Black Watch (Lieutenant-Colonel G.W.E. Gordon)
7th Seaforth Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel J. Kennedy)
5th Cameron Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel G.B. Duff)
10th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel W.J.B. Tweedie)

27th Brigade (Brigadier-General S.W. Scrase-Dickens)
11th Royal Scots (Lieutenant-Colonel W.D. Croft)
12th Royal Scots (Lieutenant-Colonel H.L. Budge)
6th Kings Own Scottish Borderers (Lieutenant-Colonel J.C.W. Connell)
9th Scottish Rifles (Lieutenant-Colonel H.A. Fulton)

1st South African Brigade (Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin)
1st Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel F.S. Dawson)
2nd Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel W.E.C. Tanner)
3rd Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel E.F. Thackeray)
4th Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel F.A. Jones)

Pioneer Battalion: 9th Seaforth Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel T. Featherstonhaugh)⁴⁶

The infantry battalion of 1916 consisted nominally of some 36 officers and 1 000 men who, apart from a small headquarters staff, were organised into four rifle companies each of approximately 240

40. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit.* War Diary, 2nd Regiment, *op cit.* Ewing: *op cit.*, pp 76–77.

40. War Diary, 1st South African Brigade, *op cit.* War Diary, 2nd Regiment, *op cit.* War Diary 3rd Regiment, *op cit.*

41. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 504. 1st South African Brigade Operations Orders Nos 28 and 39 dd 18 and 24 May 1916.

42. *Ibid.*: 1st South African Brigade, Operations Order No 31, dd 26 May 1916.

43. *Ibid.* War Diaries: 1st South African Brigade; 2nd Regiment; 3rd Regiment *op cit.* Solomon: *op cit.*, pp 53–54. The South African Field Ambulance had finally reached Steenwerck on 18 May, after a brief stay in Abbeville, and its personnel were immediately sent to Le Crèche for instruction in the organisation of an Advanced Dressing Station — see SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 485. War Diary: 1st South African Field Ambulance.

44. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 200. X 4/1398 dd 25 May 1916, Major General W.T. Furse, OC 9th Division to 1st South African Infantry Brigade.

45. Middlebrook: *op cit.*, pp 36, 40.

46. Ewing: *op cit.*, pp 402–408.

men. In fact, however, the fighting strength of a rifle company would be about 200, and of a battalion about 800, for various personnel had to be detached as signallers, cooks, stretcher-bearers, sanitary and transport men and clerks. The rifle-strength of the battalion in the attack would be further reduced by the designation of one platoon per company as the 'carrying platoon'.⁴⁷ Virtually all of the movement of supplies in the forward areas was done by infantrymen, and large quantities of ammunition, bombs, sandbags and wire, not to mention water and food, would be required by an attacking force immediately after the assault. Of the three remaining platoons per company, each would have about 40 of their complement organised into four rifle sections. Even 'rifle section' is something of a misnomer for three of its ten men would be grenadiers, and in the attack would carry 15 to 20 Mills bombs, and perhaps a knobkerrie for close-quarters fighting. The remainder of the men in the section would be armed with the .303-inch Lee Enfield rifle and sword bayonet. These fighting men went into battle heavily loaded, for each rifleman carried 170 rounds of ammunition in addition to other equipment, and his total burden, including his uniform, was calculated to weigh 58 lbs 3 ozs.⁴⁸

A very useful accession to the rifle sections were the Lewis gun teams, which by 1916 formed a part of the company organisation. The Lewis gun might well be regarded as an unwieldy forbear of the sub-machine gun which revolutionised infantry close-combat in the Second World War. It was in fact an automatic rifle, firing a .303 cartridge, light and easily carried by comparison with the Vickers or Maxim machine-guns and capable of short bursts of very rapid fire. It needed no tripod or platform from which to operate and could therefore be used by advancing troops. Although in its time a most useful weapon it had two defects which are now apparent: it had no artificial cooling apparatus and therefore tended to overheat and jam if overused; although it required only one man to carry and fire the gun itself, another man was required to carry spare barrels and four more to bring the drums of ammunition. By July 1916 each infantry battalion would have 16 of these weapons.⁴⁹

While rifle, bayonet, bomb and Lewis gun were all deployed at battalion level, two other infantry support weapons were at the disposal of brigade headquarters. The first of these was the Vickers medium machine-gun, twice the weight of the Lewis gun, water-cooled and capable of sustained fire, but requiring a fixed position or tripod in action. In 1915 a special Corps had been raised to use this weapon, the Machine-Gun Corps, and

this was divided into brigade machine-gun companies. Each brigade had such a company at its disposal, the South Africans having taken over the 28th Company from their predecessors in the division. A company consisted of four sections, each with four guns, and had an establishment of 9 officers and 141 other ranks.⁵⁰

Another close-support weapon had been added to the British Army's arsenal since the beginning of the war: the mortar. This came in various sizes, from the gaint 240-mm, operated by the Royal Artillery, to the Stokes 3-inch trench mortar which formed an integral part of the infantry brigade. Each brigade had its own light trench mortar battery, comprising eight Stokes mortars operated by 2 officers and 24 other ranks. In addition, under artillery command but for tactical purposes at the disposal of the brigade commander, was a battery of four 2-inch medium mortars. The Stokes mortar was valuable to the infantrymen because of its mobility and rapid rate of fire, for it weighed only 84 lbs and could discharge 20 rounds of 10 lbs ammunition a minute, to a range of up to 430 yards. The 2-inch medium mortar was far too heavy to shift about, weighing 320 lbs, and could fire only one round every two minutes; nevertheless its bomb weighed 51 lbs and could be hurled to distances of 500 yards. The violently destructive power of a mortar bomb was fairly local in effect, and this, together with the very high trajectory and steep angle of descent of the bomb, made it a very useful weapon for supplying the infantry with a close barrage.⁵¹ In addition to these units, each brigade had at its disposal a field ambulance, a field engineering company and an Army Service

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47. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 552. 'Instructions for the organization and training of formations and units of the 9th (Scottish) Division for the attack' issued by Lieutenant-Colonel P. Stewart, General Staff 9th (Scottish) Division, on 7 March 1916, and *ibid* Box 548 Amendments to above X 3/1037/3 dd 24 March 1916; X 4/1400/34 dd 20 June 1916; X 3/1037/5 dd 3 June 1916. In some cases an attacking battalion would employ three companies composed entirely of fighting platoons while the fourth company acted as carriers in the wake of the assaulting waves. Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 36, 95.
48. 'Instructions for the organization and training of formations and units of the 9th (Scottish) Division for the attack' *op cit*. Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 37–38.
49. Middlebrook: *op cit*, p 37. See also Fourth Army, Tactical Notes dd May 1916 in Edmonds: *Volume I, Appendices, op cit*, pp 141–2.
50. *Ibid*. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, p 64. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 182 File 47/6, 'Machine Guns and Machine Gunners', enclosure 11: Army Orders No 414, November 1915 – War Establishment Machine-Gun Company.
51. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, p 61, Edmonds: *Volume I Appendices op cit*, pp 143–44 Fourth Army Tactical Notes. SADF Archives. World War I Group (WWI) Box 183. Range Tables dd 14 November 1916.



The Western Front, 30 June 1916.

Corps company for transport of its baggage and supplies.

Under divisional control were other supporting arms, one of the principal of which was the field artillery. By July 1916 the divisional artillery consisted of four artillery brigades, each of which had three batteries of four 18-pounders and one battery of four 4.5-inch howitzers. The 18-pounder had become the standard field-gun of the British Army and could fire up to 10 rounds per minute, with a range of 3 400 yards for high-explosive and 6 500 yards for shrapnel. The 4.5-inch howitzer could fire up to 7 rounds per minute over 7 000 yards for high explosive and 7 200 yards for shrapnel. The medium and heavy artillery was held under corps command.⁵²

The division also ran a signals company, staffed by the Royal Engineers; this unit was responsible for signals between division and corps and division and brigade; within the brigade signalling was the business of the infantry. The Expeditionary Force had originally been trained to rely on the telegraph for its signals, supplementing this system with visual methods, liaison officers, despatch riders and orderlies. As the war became more static and the front-lines assumed some sort of permanence visual methods became less used and the telephone came into operation. In 1915 the vulnerability of cables and air-lines to shellfire led to the burying of cables as a protective measure, and these methods proved quite successful as cables buried 6 feet underground were rarely destroyed, but such a system obviously consumed a great deal of labour and could not extend as far as the front lines. The very permanence of the communication system with its complex links and connections also tended to dictate where headquarters could be situated. Forward of the buried cable, light cables running along the side of communication trenches had to be used. This system had failed in 1915, despite the massive duplication of routes and miles of wire used, but there was no alternative and so the method continued into 1916. Wireless at this time was still too cumbersome for use in the front-lines, the masts and antennae were easily damaged by shellfire and the cumbersome apparatus with its batteries would have been impossible to carry into the attack. From brigade to battalion level then reliance would ultimately be put in visual methods: discs, shutters, fans and electric signalling lamps, and in runners. Contact patrols flown by the Royal Flying Corps would also help to inform headquarters of the whereabouts of their forward infantry formations.⁵³

Other divisional troops included a sanitary section, a veterinary section and the pioneer battalion.⁵⁴

An Army commander would face no mean task in trying to use this composite force to carry out his plans for an offensive. It is a commonplace to say that no plan survives the moment of contact with the enemy; the commander's job then is to react as well as he can to the shifting fortunes of battle. This in turn requires the timely transfer of accurate information about the course of events and the rapid transmission of orders to the units engaged and, has been hinted, the communications organisation of the British Expeditionary Force, although adequate at Corps and Army level, simply could not be expected to cope at battalion or brigade level once battle was joined. In this situation it was realised that even the corps commander's influence on an engagement would be largely restricted to ensuring the forward movement of supplies and reinforcements. The tactical decisions of the moment would have to be left to the officers of the infantry battalions.⁵⁵

This situation was the cause for some uneasiness at Fourth Army Headquarters, for the virtual elimination of the old British Regular Army in the first year of the war had robbed the Expeditionary Force of most of its experienced officers and men, which had a detrimental effect both on the state of units in the line and of those who were being trained for combat.

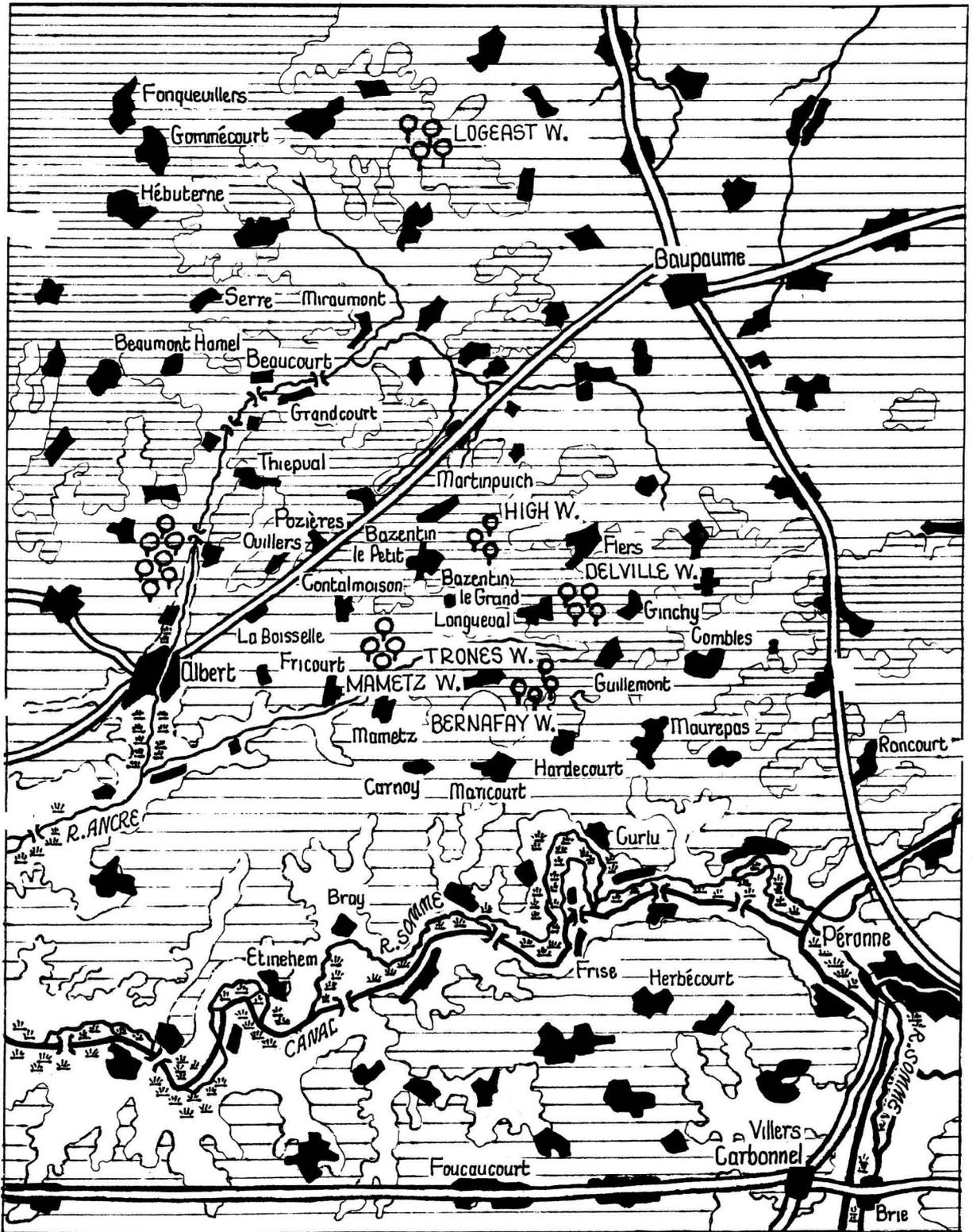
The men of the New Army, for all their enthusiasm could simply not compare with the 'Old Continentals' of 1914 in the business of combining fire and movement. The old standards of musketry, established after the South African war, could no longer be maintained in the rush towards a mass army, and increasing reliance was placed on bomb and bayonet. Nor could the British soldier now acquire that military knowledge born of long, expert training, and no longer could he be expected to react instinctively when faced with the unexpected. In the training period which was to precede the Somme offensive the commanders of the Fourth Army urged that everything possible be done to inculcate the idea of officers and section leaders taking the initiative in such situations, but reliance was placed mostly on plans of attack which would keep battalions, companies, platoons and sections in their original form for as long as

52. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, pp 59–61. Range Tables *op cit*.

53. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, pp 67–73. A very detailed discussion of Signals organisation of the Western Front is available in R.E. Priestley: *The Signal Service in the European War of 1914 to 1918 (France)*, (Chatham, 1921).

54. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, p 59.

55. W. Miles: *Military Operations France and Belgium 1916, Volume II*, (London, 1938) p 569.



The Somme, 1916.

possible. This was essential if inexperienced officers were to retain adequate control over their inexperienced troops through the vital phase of the offensive, and this was why the infantry formations used in the assault were drawn up as if on some eighteenth century battlefield.⁵⁶

In the tactical guidelines issued by Fourth Army to its subordinate formations a couple of other points are of interest, although these anticipate the later experiences of the South Africans and there is no indication that any special attention was paid to these particular items in 9th Division. The first matter was the emphasis on having reserves ready to take over from the attacking troops once the latter had gained their objective. Sensibly Fourth Army headquarters had learned the lessons of experience and now drew commanders' attention to the human factor in war. All troops, no matter how good, have a breaking point and once this has been reached it is almost impossible to reverse the process; reserves must therefore arrive before any such breakdown in morale occurs.

The other section of these notes which is of particular interest is that which deals with the capture of defended woods and villages. The authors of the 'Tactical Notes' admitted that these positions were peculiarly difficult to take, requiring careful preparation and a high state of discipline, leadership and training. Two obvious methods of capture could be tried: direct assault; and outflanking and surrounding. Fourth Army refused to lay down hard and fast rules on the preferred method, but the weight of evidence presented would seem to support the outflanking of such positions, preferably while the defence was pinned in front and bombarded with high explosive and gas shells. It was pointed out that unless the enemy panicked the progress of a direct assault could be expected to be slow and experience had shown that the attackers invariably became confused and needed reorganisation. More definite was the advice on the consolidation of woods once secured. The defence line to be established should be just so far within the wood as to be under cover but to afford a good view of the approaches. The first priority of the attacking commander would be to establish centres of resistance for all round defence at the corners and salients of the wood, those parts being most exposed to counter-attack. A central reserve should be established and lines of communication cleared. The defence must be actively maintained and should prevent any enemy lodgment in the wood.⁵⁷

As has been said there is no evidence that the commander of 9th Division paid any special atten-

tion to these latter points, indeed had he done so he must have been clairvoyant, and in common with other formations in training, General Furse's division prepared primarily for an assault on the enemy trenches from the British front line.⁵⁸ The projected training scheme had to be packed into a very short period, and limited facilities made it impossible to put whole battalions through any one form of training at the same time. Only on its fourth day of training did an entire regiment go through its paces in the attack; previously to this from 6 June onwards platoons and companies had been lectured and drilled from 6 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. although the schedule was frequently interrupted by rain.

Finally on 11 June the whole brigade combined in an exercise which practiced reinforcing a front line under heavy artillery fire and an attack on enemy trenches at 200 yards distance.⁵⁹ Before the division could practice together, however, orders came for the whole formation to move southwards to the Somme, where it would join XIII Corps under the command of Rawlinson's Fourth Army.⁶⁰

Prospect of a Battle

The region chosen for the summer offensive forms part of the great plain of northern France and the river Somme itself cuts a winding valley some 200 feet below the general level of this plain. Between Pèronne and Amiens the Somme provides a serious obstacle to military operations, for the valley bottom is broad and marshy and the north bank rises sharply to the plain. The slopes of the northern bank are broken by many small valleys, and the spurs between these appear as buttresses to the plain. There is one major tributary to the Somme in this part of its course, the Ancre, which passes through the town of Albert and has a valley as deep and marshy as that of the main river; it has its own minor tributaries one of which will be of particular interest to us: the Willow

56. *Ibid* pp 565, 571. Edmonds: *Volume I Appendices, op cit*, Fourth Army Tactical Notes, pp 131–136.

57. Edmonds: *Volume I, Appendices, op cit*, Fourth Army Tactical Notes, pp 136–138.

58. 'Instructions for the Organization and training of formations and units of the 9th (Scottish) Division for the attack' *op cit*.

59. War Diary: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, *op cit*. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 504. Annexures to Brigade War Diary. Programmes of Battalion Training, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Regiments. *Ibid*, Box 475, Appendices to 3rd Regiment War Diary, Memorandum on Brigade Training Scheme 11 June 1916, dd 10 June 1916. Solomon *op cit*, p 54. Warwick *op cit*, p 65.

60. War Diary: 1st South African Brigade *op cit*. Appendices to 3rd Regiment War Diary *op cit*. Brigade Operation Order No 36 dd June 1916.

Stream which cuts its own valley into the plain, Caterpillar Valley. South of the Somme the great plain is flat but to the north it rises to a dominating ridge roughly 400–500 feet above sea level, running from Guillemont through Longueval, Bazentin le Petit and Pozières to Thiepval. At Thiepval the ridge is broken by the course of the Ancre, but rises again on the eastern bank to form another ridge near Beaucourt, Hébuterne, Gommecourt and Fonquevillers.

The subsoil of the area is chalk, and in 1916 the plain was well cultivated and dotted with a number of large villages, among them Montauban and Longueval. Many of these villages had their own cider-apple orchards and there were a few large woods, virtually impenetrable except for the rides which had been cut through them. An old Roman road ran north from Albert to Bapaume, bisecting the front line of 1916, and a railway ran along the Ancre valley from Albert to Arras with a light branch from Albert towards Combles, cutting south of Montauban, and through Bernafay Wood and Trônes Wood.

In 1916 the elaborate German front line ran generally along a north-south axis, crossing the Somme west of Curlu then curving westwards around Maricourt to Mametz and Fricourt, across the spurs of the Ancre valley to Thiepval, thence west of Beaumont Hamel and north to Gommecourt. Between 2 000 and 5 000 yards behind this first position the Germans had sited their second line, generally along the dominating Guille-mong-Pozières ridge, and between these two lines a number of villages and woods had been made into defence positions. Further to the rear a third defence line was under construction. The front two lines were well wired, and the chalk soil made it possible to construct dug-outs of considerable depth. The many small valleys provided both Germans and British with admirable sites for artillery.⁶¹

This was the ground confronting Rawlinson in March 1916 when Haig instructed him to submit plans for an offensive of about 25 British divisions over a 14 mile frontage north of the Somme, to coincide with an assault south of the river by some 40 French divisions. Over the next few months plans and opinions were exchanged between Fourth Army and General Headquarters, and these revealed some interesting differences of view among the British commanders.

Rawlinson, for instance, seems to have been genuinely mystified at the choice of the Somme for an offensive. There appeared to be no vital strategic prize to be won here even if the British were successful in breaking through the German defences. Indeed, it seems that the Somme had been

chosen initially by the French simply because here their armies linked with those of the British, and that here it should be possible to commit their ally to the battle of attrition which was necessary to wear down Germany's reserves. As the year progressed, however, the French army's losses at Verdun caused its proposed role on the Somme to evaporate, until this eventually stood at a 5 division attack to the right of the British line. The British were by then committed to a battle at a time and place originally chosen by Joffre, for the building up of store-dumps, the construction of artillery emplacements, of light railways, roads, and camp sites, of communications and water supplies could not now be wasted, besides, as we shall see, Haig himself was optimistic of an impressive victory. The Fourth Army commander sensibly realised that wherever any attack in this sector led, the prime target must be the ridge from Thiepval to Guillemont. Seizure of this feature would in any case virtually break the German lines and might then be exploited, although Rawlinson himself seems initially to have favoured the idea of holding on to these tactically dominating heights in order to induce the Germans to make expensive counter-attacks. This reasoning fell far short of what General Headquarters required by way of a victory.

Haig himself was optimistic about the prospects of a battle on the Somme, even if Flanders did remain his personal preference, and the long-term objectives for the offensive expressed his larger hopes for a significant victory. In general outline the British were initially to break the German front along a line from Maricourt to Serre, then secure the high ground between Bapaume and Ginchy while the French secured the plateau between Sully and Rancourt. Combined infantry and cavalry would then wheel left and roll up the German flank as far as Arras, thus enlarging the initial breach from a line between Bapaume and Miramont. After this the way would be open for a general advance towards Cambrai and Douai.

Rawlinson's plans for his Army's execution of the first stage of the offensive reveal a more prosaic mind. He was concerned at the general lack of training and experience of the men under his command and this together with the supposed lessons of Verdun led him to emphasise the role of the artillery in the forthcoming battle. He was confident that the surest way to success was for the guns to pulverise the German line and defences until all that was required was for the British infantry to cross 'No Man's Land' and

61. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, pp 246–248. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 45–46. Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 60–66.

occupy the enemy line. The advance on the second line would also be preceded by a substantial artillery preparation. Thus the initial parts of Fourth Army's attack were clearly defined in phases. The first objective would be the capture of the German defence line from Montauban through Pozières to Serre, where a defensive flank would be formed on the Grandcourt – Serre ridge. These gains having been consolidated the defensive flank would be extended from Grandcourt to Martinpuich and at the same time the line would be advanced eastwards to Montauban – Martinpuich. Finally the Fourth Army would attack eastwards from this line to secure the Bazentin le Grand – Ginchy plateau. In his operational orders issued on 14 June Rawlinson stressed the deliberate and inflexible nature of his plan.

'The Army commander wishes to impress upon all commanders that the success of the operation as a whole largely depends on the consolidation of the definite objectives which have been allotted to each corps. Beyond these objectives no serious advance is to be made until preparations have been completed for entering on the next stage.'

Nor was there much flexibility about Rawlinson's allocation of his resources over the 25 000 yard frontage, for the 11 attacking divisions and 1 537 guns were to be distributed more or less evenly along the Fourth Army line. The five day bombardment of the German defences was scheduled to begin on 24 June, and the infantry would attack on the 29th.⁶²

On 15 June 1st South African Brigade arrived in Fourth Army's area, and three days later moved up to billets nearer the front line at Bray, Etinehem and Ailly sur Somme, where Brigade Headquarters was temporarily established. The change of scenery was very welcome to the South Africans after their brief but strenuous training programme, for the countryside of Picardy had been barely touched by war as yet and the neighbouring Somme river provided good swimming. Even during this idyllic lull before the storm there was work to be done, however; parties of officers and non-commissioned officers were sent up to the front lines to reconnoitre the routes forward; large parties of infantry were sent off to help the engineers with cable-burying and last minute training schemes were called for.⁶³

On 24 June the British bombardment began, concentrating on the wire and on registration of targets for the first two days, then switching to the destruction of the German defences, communications, villages and batteries. All day and night the shelling continued with concentrated barrages at certain times. On 25 June Major-General Furse

called a conference of brigade commanders at Etinehem to discuss the forthcoming operations. 9th Division was to remain in reserve in XIII Corps area while 18th and 30th Divisions went in to the attack on that front. Three days later the South Africans prepared to move forward to Grovetown Camp, but the weather was unsettled and had interfered with air observation for the artillery. The attack was postponed to 1 July. On 30 June the South Africans made their move to Grovetown, with Headquarters at Bois les Celestines.⁶⁴

The First Day on the Somme

Lieutenant-General W.N. Congreve's XIII Corps held the extreme right of the British front line, adjoining the positions occupied by the French XX Corps just north of the Somme river.⁶⁵ Here the British line lay near the bottom of the valley between Maricourt and Montauban, near the village of Carnoy, dominated by the German positions higher up the slope. On the morning of 1 July therefore, 18th and 30th Divisions had to attack across a long, gentle slope, almost flat on the right. The positions facing them were held

62. Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 70–77; Liddell Hart, *op cit*, pp 231–240; Falls: *op cit*, pp 195–199; Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 44–77. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, pp 38–51; 248–268; 299–315. Blake: *op cit*, pp 132–151 shows Haig's growing optimism about forthcoming offensive and Edmonds: *Volume 1, Appendices*, pp 64–88 provides copies of important drafts of the operational plan as it evolved.

63. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 148 War Diary: 1st Regiment; War Diaries 1st South African Brigade and 3rd Regiment, *op cit*. Solomon, *op cit*, pp 54–55; Bousted: *op cit*, pp 30–31.

64. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, pp 304–305. War Diary: 1st South African Brigade, *op cit*.

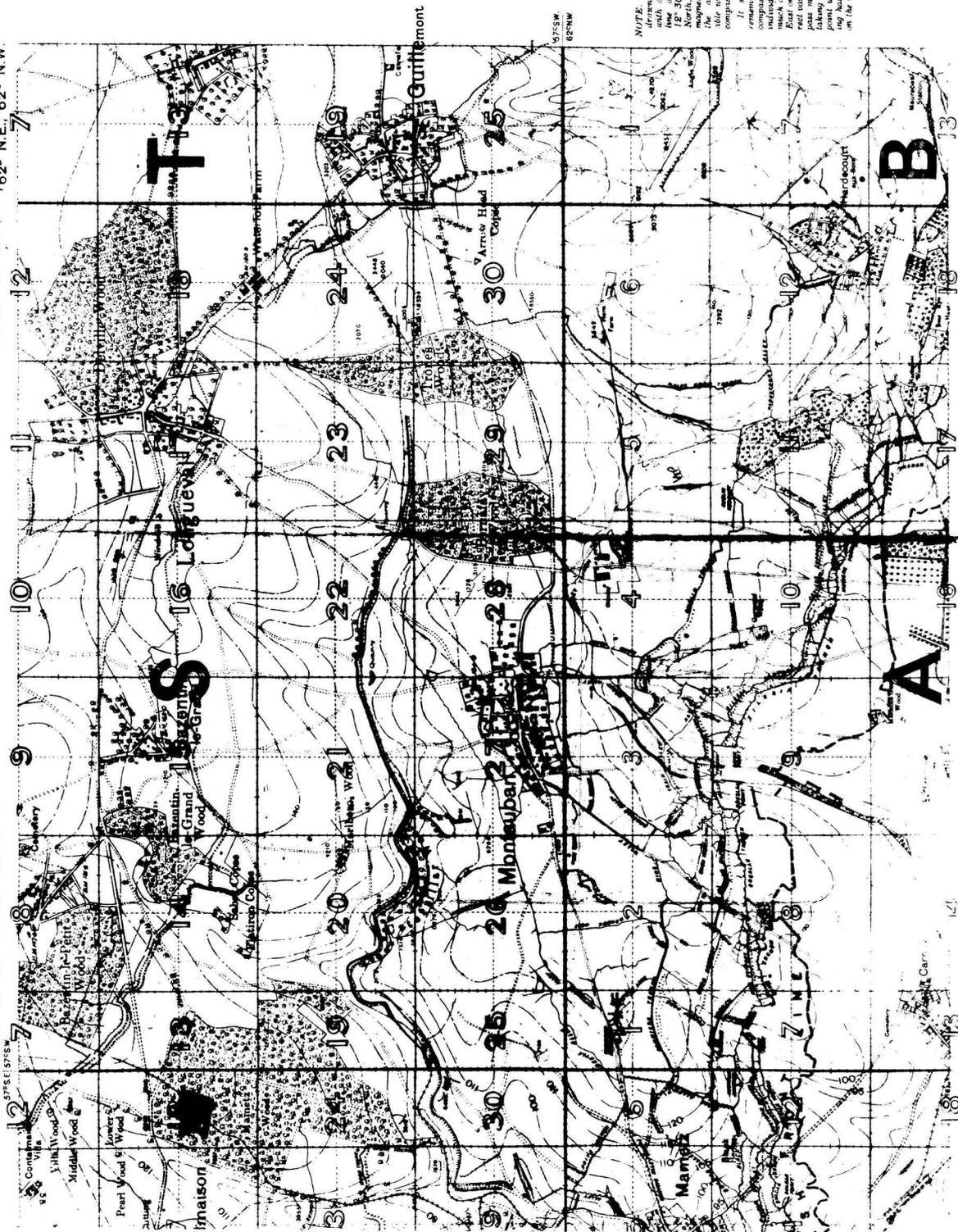
65. XIII Corps was organised as follows:
30th Division (Major-General J.S.M. Shea)
21st Brigade
89th Brigade
90th Brigade
18th Division (Major-General F.I. Maxse)
53rd Brigade
54th Brigade
55th Brigade
9th Division (Major-General W.T. Furse)
26th Brigade
27th Brigade
1st South African Brigade

see Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, p 320.

General Foch, commander of the French forces in the Somme area had insisted that his troops should also hold a small part of the line north of the Somme, even though the river valley created a broad area in which no military operations were possible. The dividing line between the British and French armies was therefore drawn through Maricourt and Bray, and this most inconvenient arrangement threatened to overcrowd the already limited lines of communication in this sector of the front. The division of responsibility on this flank of the attack proved increasingly dangerous as the battle progressed. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit*, p 264.

MONTAUBAN.

PARTS OF SHEETS, 57° S.E., 57° S.W.,
62° N.E., 62° N.W.



NOTE. If it has been drawn making use of a compass may have an error on this map of North or West. The correct orientation of the map may be found by taking a true bearing on the map.

by about nine battalions of German infantry⁶⁶, occupying a front position comprising several trenches and a reserve line about 700 to 1 000 yards to the rear. A communication trench, called Montauban Alley, ran from that village to Mametz along the reverse slope of Caterpillar Valley, and the German second position, about 3 000 yards behind the first line, ran through Maurepas, Guillemont, Longueval, Bazentin le Petit and Bazentin le Grand. The enemy positions were further strengthened by a number of strongpoints, reinforced by all-round wire and trench-blocks, and the village of Montauban had been put into a state of defence.⁶⁷

XIII Corps plan of attack divided the initial operation into three phases. On the first day Montauban was to be captured together with the trenches south and east of the villages, Nord Alley and Dublin Trench, which would keep the British in touch with the French; this was the work of 30th Division. On the centre and left of the Corps, 18th Division was to secure Montauban Alley at the top of the Montauban-Mametz ridge. The next two stages depended naturally on the success of the first, and on the operations north of Fricourt, but assuming that these went as planned, XIII Corps was to wheel right and advance eastwards through Bernafay Wood and Trônes Wood to the German second position at Falfemont Farm and Guillemont, while the French were to take Hardecourt and Maurepas. A heavy artillery barrage would cover the initial advance of the infantry and would lift forward on to new targets as the British troops moved on. These 'lifts' would work according to a pre-arranged timetable which would give the infantry plenty of time to keep up with the barrage and thus make the best use of its protection. 9th Division would be held in Corps reserve about 2 miles behind the front line around Billon Wood.⁶⁸

At 6.25 a.m. on the morning of 1 July all of the artillery along the British line joined in the rapid bombardment of the German defences, and at 7.30 a.m. the attacking waves of infantry left their trenches as the barrage lifted. On the 30th Division's front the shellfire had done its work in smashing the defences and in addition much of the German artillery just beyond Montauban had been put out of action. As a result it took the attacking troops just over an hour to capture the German front line on this sector, although 21st Brigade suffered severe casualties from a single machine-gun which caught the advancing waves in enfilade. To their left on 18th Division's front, the barrage had been slightly less effective and the garrison of the German support line and its

redoubts resisted fiercely throughout the morning; the gallantry of the German machine-gunners who fought their isolated weapons to the last against overwhelming numbers caused severe losses to the British. Despite this delay on the left the 30th Division received permission to continue towards Montauban, which had been severely battered by heavy shellfire. They found the village deserted, and by 11 o'clock Montauban Alley had been secured just to the north of the ruins. From here the victorious infantry could see the enemy streaming northwards, in great confusion, towards Bazentin le Grand. As the German artillery began its counter-bombardment of Montauban the British managed to seize the vital position at the nearby Briqueterie. The right flank was now firmly established on Montauban ridge, and further east the French XX Corps had also made excellent progress and was eager to continue. Further to the south of the Somme the French advance was even exceeding its targets.

With eight hours of daylight remaining the commander of the French XX Corps was eager to press on while the confusion of the defenders was at its height. Major-General Shea of 30th Division, too, was keen to continue; his troops were not yet tired, their losses had been relatively light and despite the fact that 18th Division was still being held up on his left 9th Division was untouched in reserve. Congreve himself went into the front line to observe the situation, and saw the open ground to the east, Bernafay and Trônes Woods being apparently empty of troops. He rushed back to his headquarters to request permission to resume the advance, but Rawlinson refused, stressing the importance of consolidating Montauban before the inevitable German counter-attack. 30th Division should also help 18th Division now struggling up on its left. Despite the French commander's protests, therefore; Congreve was unable to move, although a few patrols were sent into Bernafay Wood where they took a handful of prisoners and confirmed the defencelessness of that feature. Certainly the consolidation of the captured ground was no easy task, for the British bombardment had cut up the ground badly; communication trenches also had to be built across 'No Man's Land' and strongpoints constructed. Nevertheless the exploitation of 30th Division's

66. A German battalion had a fighting strength of between 750 and 800 men, there were three battalions to a regiment and three regiments to a division. Despite the smaller size of a German division its machine-gun firepower made it a very formidable formation. See Middlebrook: *op cit.* p 57.

67. Edmonds: *Volume 1, op cit.* pp 320–321.

68. *Ibid.*, pp 321–323. XIII Corps Operation Order No 14 dd 23 June 1916 is reprinted in Edmonds: *Volume 1, Appendices, op cit.* pp 182–183.

outstanding success on the first morning of the battle could well have secured further vital objectives whose capture proved extremely expensive at a later stage. We now know that both Trônes and Bernafay Woods were empty of troops and that the Germans could have offered little resistance in their second line as the only organised unit over the whole sector was 16th Bavarian Regiment, in reserve between Longueval and Flers. Had the XIII Corps moved towards Longueval and Guillemont during the afternoon these positions would probably have fallen, but by evening it was already too late, for 12th Reserve Division had arrived from Bapaume.

It was 6 p.m. by the time 18th Division secured its objectives on 1 July, after continued severe fighting and difficult mopping-up operations in the complex German trench positions. Elsewhere on XIII Corps front the late afternoon was quiet, and at 9.30 p.m. a small German counter-attack towards Montauban was easily driven off. Despite Congreve's success, however, the Corps had suffered some 6 000 casualties, mainly from those machine-guns which had remained untouched by the bombardment.⁶⁹

The South Africans spent the morning of the battle encamped at Grovetown, ready to move at ten minutes notice; it was not expected, however, that 9th Division would be called upon that day.⁷⁰ The news arriving at Lukin's headquarters indicated that the XIII Corps had reached its objectives by about 10.30 a.m. and that the British infantry had been successful right along the line.⁷¹ This intelligence was sadly misleading; as we have seen, XIII Corps did reach its objectives by the end of the first day, but it had been the only corps on the whole British front to do so. Immediately to the west, XV Corps had captured the village of Mametz and made some gains north of Fricourt, although the attack on the village itself had failed. Even this limited success had cost some 8 000 casualties, mainly from the German machine-guns which were brought intact from the dug-outs to traverse the advancing rows of infantry. In the centre of the British line, facing the summit of the ridge beyond Pozières, X and III Corps had made a very small impression on the German line north of Thiepval. Here the tragedy was compounded by the success of the gallant Ulster Division, who fought their way into the German position only to be wiped out by the British artillery. Together these two corps lost some 20 000 men on the first day. It was scarcely to be expected that VIII Corps, opposite Serre and Beaumont Hamel, would fare any better, for they faced some of the most formidable positions in the German line with the ground all in the enemy's favour. Here again a few

brave men penetrated the defences only to be killed or captured; VIII Corps lost 14 000 men. Just to their north, VII Corps of Allenby's Third Army made a diversionary attack on Gommecourt and here again temporary success was wiped out with heavy loss, and 7 000 men were killed, wounded or missing.⁷²

The scale of the British failure on 1 July naturally had a great influence in the future course of the battle, and was one of the factors which brought the South Africans to Delville Wood two weeks later. At the end of the day, however, the commander of the Fourth Army had only a fragmentary picture of what had happened. As reports came in it became clear that Congreve's men had been successful on the right, yet there was an understandable reluctance to believe the tales of disaster from other sections of the front. That evening Rawlinson still estimated his casualties as 16 000: in fact they were nearer to 60 000. In the afternoon Haig visited Fourth Army Headquarters at Querrieu and expressed the wish that the attack be resumed the next day in order to maintain the pressure on the enemy. He was particularly keen that Fricourt should be captured. Accordingly at 10 p.m. Rawlinson issued orders for a continuation of the attack all along the line. Nowhere was there any suggestion that Congreve's success might be used to improve the situation; indeed, Congreve was ordered merely to consolidate his position the next day, and the Germans were thus given the opportunity to re-organise their defences in this sector.⁷³

Ignorant as yet of the size of their defeat that day, no attempt was made by the British commanders to analyse the reasons for this expensive failure. Over the next few days little attempt would be made to alter the method of approach. The

69. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, pp 323–345; Farrar-Hockley: *The Somme, op cit*, pp 127–132; Middlebrook: *op cit*, pp 179–182, 211–212. "The Other Side of the Hill" No VI 'The German Defence of Bernafay and Trônes Woods: 2nd–14th day of July 1916' Part I, in *Army Quarterly* Vol XIII, No 1, October 1926, pp 20–22.

70. On the evening of 1 July two battalions from 27th Brigade were sent forward to help 18th Division in the work of consolidation. See Ewing, *op cit*, pp 96–97.

71. War Diary: 1st South African Brigade, and annexure 17, Brigade Operation Order No 40 dd 1 July 1916 dictated to officers at 9 a.m.

72. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, pp 346–476; Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 87–127. Middlebrook: *op cit*, provides a very interesting treatment of the disasters for this first day of the battle, basing his account not merely upon the official and published sources but on oral evidence gathered from hundreds of survivors of the Somme. He thus creates a vivid impression of one of the blackest days in British military history.

73. Edmonds: *Volume I, op cit*, p 477–483.

planners had completely underestimated the strength and depth of the German defences in this area while, conversely, they had overestimated the effect of a prolonged bombardment by the artillery. The massive preparations for an offensive had convinced General von Below, the German commander on this sector, of the imminence of an attack between Gommecourt and Maricourt and despite his failure to persuade Falkenhayn of the danger he had strengthened his positions along this sector of the front before 1 July. Only on the line east of Fricourt had any surprise been achieved, where XIII Corps had been able to capitalise on the relative unpreparedness of the enemy, as had the French to the south.⁷⁴

On the Fringes of the Battle 2–7 July

Despite their generally successful defence of 1 July von Below's heavily outnumbered troops were in no state to harrass the British on the first night. Reinforcements were on their way to the German Second Army, however, and it was hoped that these would hold the endangered second line around Longueval and Guillemont. The arrival of these new formations was piecemeal, and the British were given time to move forward supplies, reserves and artillery unhindered. Working parties, including a small group of South Africans, were also sent up to help with the work of carrying and consolidating. By early morning, however, the German 12th Reserve Division had arrived behind the threatened sector and despite its long march, was deployed for a counter-attack facing west against the new Montauban salient. From here the Germans hoped to drive the British off the Montauban ridge and at 3 a.m. they moved past Bernafay Wood towards the British lines. A foothold was gained in Montauban Alley but the British artillery quickly dislodged the enemy. Elsewhere along the line the British defenders easily drove off the exhausted Germans with rifle and machine-gun fire. A simultaneous attempt against the French near Favières Wood also failed with many casualties, and the 12th Reserve Division now fell back on an intermediate position, the Maltz Horn Trench, between Trônes Wood and Hardecourt, about 1 000 yards in advance of the main second line position, Guillemont — Maupas.⁷⁵

At 10.30 that morning Haig arrived at Rawlinson's headquarters to discuss future operations, for it was becoming clear that some re-organisation would be required before the corps to the west of the line could recommence the offensive. The heavy expenditure of artillery ammunition, exacerbated by the two-day delay in launching the battle,

meant that great economy would now have to be exercised and the large numbers of defective shells also gave cause for alarm. Haig, at least, seems to have been aware of the chance offered on the right and urged Rawlinson to exploit this by securing Mametz Wood and the Contalmaison area in order to prepare for an attack on the German second line on the Longueval — Bazentin le Petit ridge, for he realised that an advance from the line Montauban — Fricourt would take in the rear those German defences facing west. He suggested that only a diversionary attack be made on Thiepval and that to the north of the Ancre the enemy were merely to be kept in anticipation of a renewed assault.⁷⁶

The earlier decision to share the north bank of the Somme with the French now began to cause problems, however, for the congestion in the Maricourt sector made it difficult to exploit Congreve's success as fully as Haig hoped. Rawlinson undertook to discuss the matter with General Foch but wanted to make an attempt to improve the position in the centre by taking Thiepval the next day. Haig seems to have approved but continued to press for a more active policy in the Montauban sector, and Congreve was authorised to send out patrols towards Bernafay Wood.⁷⁷

Over much of the front 2 July was quiet, for VIII and X Corps were in drastic need of re-organisation. III Corps managed to take about half of La Boisselle and XV Corps entered the village and wood of Fricourt unopposed. After Bernafay Wood had been shelled, patrols of 30th Division eventually entered, found the feature virtually unoccupied and returned with twenty prisoners, survivors of the early morning attack, but no further efforts were made in this direction that day. Some British reinforcements were now being sent forward into the Montauban salient, however, and 27th Brigade was ordered up to relieve 90th Brigade of 30th Division. The South African Brigade in turn was ordered to move into the positions vacated by 27th Brigade in Trigger Wood, Billon Wood and Copse Valley, and by early morning on the 3rd these moves were completed.⁷⁸

74. *Ibid*, pp 484–493.

75. War Diary: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, *op cit*. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 1–6. "The Other Side of the Hill" No VI, Part I, *op cit*, pp 21–22.

76. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 9.

77. *Ibid*, pp 9–10.

78. *Ibid*, pp 5–9. "The Other Side of the Hill" No VI Part I, *op cit*, pp 22–23. Ewing: *op cit*, p 97. War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1st, 3rd and 4th Regiments, *op cit*. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI), Box 147, War Diary: 2nd Regiment. *Ibid* Box 200. Lukin's Despatch. *Ibid*; Box 504 1st South African Infantry Brigade Operations Order No 41 dd 2 July 1916.

Late that night Haig sent his Chief of Staff to Rawlinson to repeat his opinion that the right wing ought to be exploited, and that no anxieties about artillery ammunition should stand in the way of this move; Haig even authorised the use of the reserve divisions if the enemy's second positions on Longueval ridge could be secured. Rawlinson replied that he had arranged to meet Foch the next day to discuss further moves along the boundaries of the two armies.⁷⁹ Meanwhile Rawlinson's plans for the centre of his line were put into operation, but an attack towards Thiepval and Ovillers on the morning of the 3rd merely resulted in another waste of British lives. XV Corps were a little more successful and edged forward south of Contalmaison, but here again opportunities were allowed to slip and Mametz Wood was left in the hands of a small and disorganised German garrison.⁸⁰ In XIII Corps sector the work of consolidation continued, with men of 27th Brigade driving the enemy out of Montauban Alley as far as Triangle Post, which they garrisoned. Lukin visited Montauban on a reconnaissance and noted en route that the old German front line had been blown to pieces on this part of the front. Large numbers of British dead still littered the battlefield. Patrols that afternoon showed Bernafay Wood still unoccupied and Congreve felt that this opportunity could no longer be ignored. At 3.15 p.m., with Fourth Army's approval, he ordered 30th Division to occupy the wood. In the event it was two battalions of 27th Brigade which set off towards Bernafay at 9 p.m. that evening. The British artillery had bombarded the western face of the wood and little opposition was encountered; Montauban Alley was also cleared as far as the wood, and the Scots accomplished that task for the loss of just six men, killing twelve of the enemy, taking another seven prisoner, along with four field-guns and two machine-guns. There was some confusion during the actual occupation of the wood in total darkness but by early morning on the 4th this had been accomplished.⁸¹

Earlier that day Rawlinson had met Foch to talk over the situation north of the Somme, and as a result of their discussions Joffre went to see Haig that afternoon. It was apparent that the French commanders now objected to Haig's proposal to shift the weight of the British attack to the Longueval – Contalmaison front; they wanted the main effort further north, perhaps feeling that in this way the Germans could be compelled to use more reserves. Joffre even went so far as to try to order Haig to commit his forces against the Pozières – Thiepval front. The British commander refused, however, saying that artillery ammunition was in too short supply to allow of attacks all along the

line and pointing out the promise of the Longueval sector. No definite arrangements were made though and the situation around Maricourt remained as confused as ever. Nevertheless at 9.45 that evening Rawlinson summoned his corps commanders and told them that preparations must be made for an attack on the German second position between Longueval and Bazentin le Petit. As a first step the front line must be advanced to within assaulting distance and the artillery must deploy to destroy the defences. This meant that XIII Corps would hold Bernafay and Caterpillar Woods, XV Corps Mametz Wood and III Corps would have to secure Contalmaison and establish a line to the north of La Boiselle.⁸²

XIII Corps had already made a start with its preparations, and early in the morning of the 4th, the 18th Division secured Caterpillar Wood. Patrols sent eastwards from Bernafay Wood found Trônes Wood held by German machine-gun detachments, but Congreve did not feel justified in trying to secure it yet for a dangerous re-entrant was already forming at the junction of the British and French lines; this had been created by the capture of Bernafay. Here the Scots were finding that holding a wood was often more costly than taking it. The German bombardment began at 6 a.m. on the 4th and continued until noon, interrupting the work of consolidation and causing severe casualties, the 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers alone losing over 150 men. Despite the German counter-bombardment the general feeling in XIII and XV Corps seems to have been that the enemy were on the run, but Rawlinson was understandably reluctant to commit his forces too deeply before some definite arrangement was made with the French on his flank. At midday however, Haig called again at Fourth Army Headquarters and impressed on Rawlinson the importance of securing Trônes Wood, Mametz and Coutalmaison to cover the flanks of the proposed assault on the German second line; he also toured the various corps headquarters urging an energetic and enterprising policy. That same day Foch announced that XX Corps would shortly be ready to attack north of Hardecourt, and requested that the British attack Trônes Wood and Maltz Horn Farm simultaneously.⁸³

79. Miles, *Volume 2: op cit*, p 10.

80. *Ibid*, pp 11–17.

81. *Ibid*, pp 17–18. Ewing, *op cit*, pp 97–98, War Diary 1st South African Infantry Brigade *op cit*; "The Other Side of the Hill" No VI, *op cit*, p 22.

82. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 18–19. Blake: *op cit*, pp 154–155.

83. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 18–23. Ewing, *op cit*, pp 98–99.

On the evening of the 4th Lukin's Brigade was ordered to relieve 21st and 89th Brigades. That evening 1st and 4th Regiments moved into the line; the former to occupy Nord Alley, Train Alley and part of Glatz Redoubt, Chimney Trench and Briqueterie Trench; the latter Dublin Trench, part of Glatz Redoubt, Glatz Alley and Casement Trench. The 64th Field Company, 28th Brigade Machine-Gun Company, Brigade Light Trench Mortar Battery and 'B' Company, 9th Seaforths joined the infantry in the line. 2nd Regiment meanwhile moved into the trenches at Talus Boise as Divisional Reserve and 3rd Regiment moved into the old British and German front line trenches north-west of Maricourt, in support. 9th Division had now completed the relief of 30th Division.⁸⁴

On the 5th Haig again visited Rawlinson, this time to arrange that on the 7th XIII Corps would extend its right flank to Trônes Wood and Maltz Horn Farm while the British centre attacked Contalmaison and Mametz Wood and the forces to the north took Ovillers. On XIII Corps front the day was generally quiet apart from enemy shelling, which wounded seven of the South Africans. Lukin once again went forward to the trenches, where he spent some 15 hours that day, going over the area with Major-General Furse in the afternoon. The South African chaplains and volunteers from the Field Ambulance spent the day burying the dead who were still untended in the South African sector.⁸⁵ On the 6th the shelling became more severe and about twenty casualties were suffered by the South Africans, including two officers and two other ranks killed; nevertheless work on the construction of new fire trenches continued.⁸⁶

That same day Rawlinson made arrangements with the French for attacks on Trônes Wood and Hardecourt, although a postponement of these operations until the 8th was made necessary by a German counter-attack in the French sector. The French were still reluctant to undertake larger operations to include the capture of Maurepas until the British seizure of Longueval — Bazentin le Petit should have opened up the salient and eased the flow of reinforcements and supplies through Maricourt. Despite the necessary delay on the extreme right it was decided that the British operations planned for the 7th should continue.⁸⁷

On 7 July the wet weather which had begun on the 4th continued and the battlefield, already cut up by the artillery bombardment, now turned to mud. This badly interrupted communications and contributed in some degree to the British failure to take any of their objectives that day. Nevertheless heavy casualties were imposed on the Germans too, for

the second position was not so well equipped with deep dug-outs as the first line had been.⁸⁸

The shelling had continued on XIII Corps front during the day and further casualties were suffered by the South Africans; the 1st Regiment was not relieved in the line by a battalion of 21st Brigade, but it was evident that this was only by way of preparation for more violent activity, for Lukin attended a conference that day at Divisional Headquarters where orders were issued for the capture of the enemy second line.⁸⁹ Before this larger attack could be launched, however, it was necessary to succeed with preliminary operations to secure the British flanks.

Bernafay Wood and Trônes Wood 8—13 July

The plan for the 8th was for the British XIII Corps to occupy the Trônes Wood and the adjoining Maltz Horn Trench as far as Maltz Horn Farm while the French took the remainder of that trench and a general line from the farm to Hardecourt village. Trônes Wood was a triangular feature some 400 yards wide in the south at its base and 1 400 yards from there to its tapered apex on the slopes facing Longueval. It was a most awkward position for infantry to capture, for its undergrowth had not been cut for two years and made penetration difficult and keeping direction almost impossible. In addition the Wood was commanded by the German second position to the north at Longueval and to the east at Guilleumont.⁹⁰

In the early hours of the 8th the British objectives were subjected to heavy bombardment and at 8 a.m. the 2nd Green Howards from 21st Brigade began their advance across the ground between Bernafay and Trônes Woods. They were soon checked with heavy loss and fell back into Bernafay; a renewed effort was immediately ordered for 1 p.m. The French meanwhile had

84. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade and Operation Order No 42 dd 4 July 1916, *op cit.* War Diaries 1st and 3rd Regiments *op cit.*

85. Miles: *op cit.*, p 23. War Diary: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1st and 3rd Regiments.

86. War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade; 1st and 3rd Regiments. Buchan, *op cit.*, p 53.

87. Miles, *Volume 2*, *op cit.*, pp 23—24 and footnote.

88. *Ibid.*, pp 28—36, 59.

89. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 200, 9th Division Operations Orders No X.4/1488/1 dd 7 July 1916. War Diaries 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1st, 3rd and 4th Regiments, *op cit.*

90. Miles, *Volume 2*, *op cit.*, p 37. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI Part I, *op cit.*, pp 23—24.

secured Hardecourt knoll and the Maltz Horn Trench at that point, but their flank was exposed to fire from the farm. At 1 p.m. the 21st Brigade's 2nd Wiltshires resumed the attack and succeeded in entering Maltz Horn Trench and driving the enemy away from the farm; a foothold had also been established in the south-eastern edge of Trônes Wood despite heavy losses during the advance. A trench was dug across the southern edge of the wood, facing north, and the British garrison was reinforced by two companies of 18th King's and one of 19th Manchesters, both of 21st Brigade, while 18th Manchesters of 90th Brigade managed to come up during the night.⁹¹

While the fight for Maltz Horn Trench and Trônes Wood had been in progress Headquarters and 'A' and 'C' Companies of 2nd South African Infantry Regiment had been sent into Bernafay Wood to relieve detachments of 27th Brigade on the eastern edge of the wood. This relief was not easily carried out and the South Africans lost one officer and nine men wounded during its progress. A working party from the 3rd Regiment, sent into Bernafay suffered even more severely, losing three men killed and eleven wounded. Even the 1st Regiment, back at Maricourt in the old British front line, suffered nine casualties from the enemy shells.⁹²

At Fourth Army Headquarters plans were still being drafted for the attack on the Longueval – Bazentin line. Haig was naturally disappointed in the progress so far in Trônes Wood, which had to be taken to protect the flank of the projected assault; Mametz Wood and Contalmaison also had to be captured. Early next morning after a preliminary bombardment the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers managed to secure the remainder of Maltz Horn Trench and Farm: 2nd Wiltshire were now relieved. This operation had been planned to coincide with an attack on the northern and central parts of Trônes Wood by 17th Manchesters, also of 90th Brigade, but gas shelling delayed their advance and the Manchesters only reached the wood after 6 a.m. The western edge was undefended and the infantry soon rushed the main German position in the centre of the wood. By about 8 a.m. Trônes Wood was in British hands, except for a few isolated parties of enemy troops.⁹³

In Bernafay Wood 'D' Company of the South African 2nd Regiment completed the relief of 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers in the south-eastern sector; the latter regiment had lost some 16 officers and 300 men during its five-day tenancy of Bernafay. In order to limit casualties from enemy shellfire Lukin ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner, commanding the 2nd Regiment, to reduce

his garrison to the lowest limit which would ensure the wood's protection. Apart from the garrison of the wood itself a bombing party was stationed in Longueval Alley, a trench linking Bernafay with the northern edge of Trônes Wood, so that the 2nd Regiment had taken over three full company frontages and it was impossible to send back any men. Casualties from shellfire therefore continued to be heavy and on 9 July alone the South African Brigade reported 2 officers mortally wounded, 22 men killed, another 82 wounded and 2 missing.⁹⁴

The South Africans' activities on this day were not limited to holding Bernafay Wood, however, for in Trônes the British were learning a lesson which was to be repeated frequently over the next month's fighting, that capturing a wooded area was generally less costly than retaining it, and in the early afternoon the Germans began their counter-attack on Trônes Wood. Fresh German reinforcements had arrived in the shape of 123rd Division, and these were quickly rushed into the line to bolster the battered 12th Reserve Division and the survivors of the original garrison of this sector, 12th Division. At about 12.30 p.m. the German artillery concentrated a barrage on Trônes Wood, firing from battery positions which were disposed in a large arc from Maurepas to Bazentin le Grand, only the southern edge of the wood, partly sheltered by a fold in the ground, escaped. 17th Manchester, holding the eastern edge of the wood suffered severe casualties from the shelling and were authorised to fall back to Bernafay and this left 18th Manchesters, holding the southern end of the wood, in an exposed position; the latter battalion was therefore allowed to withdraw to La Briqueterie. The British garrison of Maltz Horn Trench managed, however, to retain their position just clear of the wood. At 3.30 p.m. the German infantry re-entered and took Trônes Wood virtually unopposed, but another attack towards Maltz Horn Trench was driven

91. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 38–39. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI Part I, *op cit*, pp 24–25.

92. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1st, 2nd, 3rd Regiments.

93. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 38, 43–44. 'The other Side of the Hill' No VI, Part 1, *op cit*, p 25.

94. SADF Archives. World War I Group (WWI) Box 508, 'Operational Papers on the Battle of Delville Wood', Signals Venice (South African Brigade Headquarters) to Edward (2nd Regiment)... dd 9 July 1916: BM 113–11.45 a.m.; BM 114 – 11.50 a.m.; BM 122 – 1.45 p.m.; BM 134 – 10.20 p.m. and Edward to Venice dd 9 July 1916: B 40 – 1.15 p.m.; B 46 – 6.40 p.m.; B 47 – not timed. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*, and War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade and 2nd Regiment *op cit*. Ewing *op cit*, pp 100–101.

off with heavy loss by the British and French artillery.⁹⁵

At 6.40 p.m. 16th Manchesters, also of 90th Brigade, counter-attacked northwards from the sunken road east of La Briqueterie and managed to regain the southern part of the wood fairly easily, but German snipers and bombers made it wise to take up a line outside the trees from the night and the regiment dug in about 60 yards from the south-western edge. It was at this stage that the South Africans began to take a hand in the battle for Trônes Wood, for that night 'A' Company of the 4th Regiment was sent forward to reinforce 16th Manchesters, while a platoon from 'C' Company of 4th Regiment moved into the sunken road. The remainder of the 4th Regiment would be held in readiness to reinforce any British attack in this area. 3rd Regiment was ordered up to take over the old positions vacated by the South African Scottish around La Briqueterie, Dublin Trench and Glatz Alley.⁹⁶

The next morning there was still some confusion about the situation in Trônes Wood, and it was arranged that the British artillery should re-bombard the area before lines of skirmishers were sent forward by 16th Manchesters and 4th South African Infantry Regiment to investigate the situation. At the same time the 2nd Regiment in Bernafay Wood was to push along Longueval Alley under cover of the shelling and establish a small post with Lewis guns at the northern apex of Trônes Wood, covering the ground south of the valley between the wood and Guillemont.⁹⁷ As the British bombardment of the wood began the German infantry holding the western edge rapidly withdrew, and at about 4 a.m. numbers of German troops left the southern part of the wood for Guillemont. Eventually the enemy commanders ordered a general retreat from the wood so that when 16th Manchesters and 'A' Company of 4th Regiment advanced through the wood from south to north many of their parties met no opposition whatsoever. These returned to pronounce the wood in British hands, but a group of Germans holding the central trench had not received the order to retire and inflicted heavy casualties on the isolated British patrols. Gradually more enemy infantry re-entered the wood from the east to add to the confusion and by 8 a.m. it was clear once more that the British held only the southern end of the wood. Their part in the day's action had cost the 4th Regiment about 40 men.⁹⁸

For the remainder of the day Trônes Wood was fairly quiet, but 2nd Regiment's bombing party operating along Longueval Alley had an officer

and four men wounded by snipers before reaching their objective. By about midday this detachment, under Lieutenant Green, had reached a good position near the north end of Trônes Wood, and at 3 p.m. they were ordered to establish a block in the trench about forty yards north of the wood's apex and intermediate positions back to Bernafay Wood.⁹⁹ Meanwhile Bernafay Wood was continually subjected to heavy shelling and rifle-fire, no doubt with the intention of preventing any further attacks from this area towards Trônes Wood. 9th Division was becoming worried about the mounting casualties among the troops in Bernafay, although the garrison had to be maintained at strength lest the Germans attempt their own attack from Trônes Wood. Certainly the 2nd Regiment was suffering badly, while being in no position to really make any impression on the enemy. Although German rifle fire was troublesome, Captain Hopkins of 'D' Company in the south-eastern corner of the wood complained mostly of the heavy shelling, for the great majority of his men had very little protection although they had dug in as well as possible. Hopkins reported to regimental headquarters at 12.15 p.m.:

'Many men are bordering on "shell shock" and the loss of many NCO's makes the position very difficult. No one has had any sleep and everyone is strained to uttermost... Practically all cover in front cut away by artillery fire so that if anyone moves he can be at once seen.'

Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner also reported the damage done by enemy shells, not only to the meagre trenches which had been dug, but to

95. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 44–45; 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI, Part I, *op cit*, pp 25–28.

96. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 45; 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI Part I, *op cit*, p 28. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 510 'Messages and Signals – Dellville Wood'. Signals: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G.332 dd 10.30 p.m. 9 July 1916; Venice to John (4th Regiment) BM 135 dd 10.30 p.m. 9 July 1916; Venice to Walter (3rd Regiment) BM 136 dd 11.00 p.m. 9 July 1916. War Diary: 4th Regiment, *op cit*.

97. 'Operational Papers', *op cit*, Signals: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 10 July 1916 G 336 – 0.55 a.m.; G 337 – 4.15 a.m.; and Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) BM 136 dd 5.20 a.m. 10 July 1916.

98. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 45–46; 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI, Part I, *op cit*, pp 28–31. 'Operational Papers', *op cit*, Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 339 dd 7.53 a.m. 10 July 1916. War Diary: 4th Regiment, *op cit*.

99. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, p 46. Operational Papers, *op cit* Signals: Edward (2nd Regiment) to Venice (South African Brigade) B 58 dd 10.35 a.m. 10 July 1916; Venice to Edward BM 141 dd 3 p.m. 10 July 1916, Message: 2nd Lieutenant Bryant to Officer Commanding, 2nd Regiment dd 12.45 p.m. 10 July 1916.

telegraph and telephone lines. Under these conditions it was impossible to keep adequate control over the three companies at his disposal.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps as a result of these messages it was decided to relieve the 2nd Regiment that night, and 'B' and 'D' Companies of 4th Regiment moved into Bernafay in their place. At the same time 'A' Company of 4th Regiment was relieved south of Trônes Wood and returned to join 'C' Company at Glatz Redoubt.¹⁰¹ The remainder of 90th Brigade were also withdrawn from the vicinity of Trônes Wood that night, being replaced by 89th Brigade, and at 2.40 a.m. the British artillery opened an intensive bombardment on the wood.¹⁰² This was merely the prelude to a day of intensive fighting in Trônes Wood, as 89th Brigade attempted again to wrest possession from the stubborn but exhausted enemy. Eventually the perseverance of the British troops paid off, aided by the fortuitous capture of some German orders which enabled the artillery to break up a German counter-attack, and a defensive line was established across the southern part of the wood. In the morning the South Africans' 4th Regiment bombed along Longueval Alley to the north in support of 89th Brigade's attack, but the steady shelling of Bernafay Wood continued to dominate the action as far as they were concerned, and on this day Lieutenant-Colonel Jones, Officer Commanding the 4th Regiment, was killed by a shell fragment. Major Macleod now took command of the battalion.¹⁰³

The Fourth Army's offensive against the German second position had now been fixed for the early morning of 14 July and it was necessary to re-organise the assaulting divisions. Accordingly on the evening of the 12th most of the South Africans' 4th Regiment was relieved in Bernafay Wood, leaving only a small garrison holding the vital trench, Longueval Alley. That night, before the men were pulled out, the 3rd Regiment had to send a working party to the wood to help with the construction of more effective trenches for the relieving garrison.¹⁰⁴ In Trônes Wood too the 12th had been a day largely of consolidation as the 30th Division strengthened its hold on the southern end of the wood. With the offensive of the Fourth Army fixed for the early morning of the 14th, however, the complete seizure of Trônes Wood became of paramount importance, for XIII Corps's assault was planned to pass along the wood's western edge. General Rawlinson therefore ordered Congreve, the XIII Corps's commander, to complete the capture of the wood 'at all costs' before midnight of the 13th/14th. This effort would require fresh troops, for 30th Division had lost over 2 300 men in the previous five days fighting: on the evening of the

12th, therefore, General Congreve ordered Maxse's 18th Division forward to attack the Wood with its 55th Brigade. It was planned that 30th Division's artillery would bombard Trônes Wood for two hours from 5 p.m. and that the infantry would attack at 7 p.m.

The renewed struggle for Trônes Wood once again highlighted the problems of fighting for this type of feature. As the artillery barrage ceased 7th (Queen's) Royal West Surrey Regiment, only 280 strong after the attack of 1 July, with a company of 7th (Buffs) East Kent Regiment, advanced from Bernafay Wood along Longueval Alley before advancing across open ground to occupy the northern end of Trônes Wood. This force suffered heavily from rifle and machine-gun fire and from the German artillery which dominated the position from Longueval ridge, and the British troops could not get within 100 yards of the wood. Meanwhile the remainder of the 7th Buffs had advanced up Maltz Horn Grench from the south, only to be held up by a strongpoint at the south-eastern corner of the wood. 7th Royal West Kents moving from Trônes Alley attacked northwards and soon lost direction in the tangle of undergrowth and fallen trees, but 150 men, without officers, managed to reach the eastern edge of the wood south of the Guillemont track and mistakenly imagined that they had reached the northern apex of the wood and that their task was now accomplished. As far as 55th Brigade Headquarters was concerned, however, this regiment had simply disappeared, for no messages came back. At 8.40 p.m. the British resumed the bombardment of the north of the wood, hoping that this would clear

100. 'Operational Papers', *op cit*, Signals: Edward (2nd Regiment) to Venice (South African Brigade) 10 July 1916: B 61 — 12.15 p.m.; B 65 — n.t.; Venice to Edward BM 139 dd 11.15 a.m. 10 July 1916. Letter Captain Hopkins 'D' Company to Edward dd 12.15 a.m. 10 July 1916.

101. 'Messages and Signals Delville Wood', *op cit*, Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to Edward (2nd Regiment) and John (4th Regiment) BM 142 dd 3.25 p.m.; BM 143 dd 3.30 p.m. 10 July 1916. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. War Diary 4th Regiment, *op cit*.

102. Miles, *Volume 2*, *op cit*, p 46.

103. *Ibid*, pp 46–47; 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI, Part I, *op cit*, pp 31–32; Part II in Army Quarterly Vol XIII No 2 January 1927, pp 252–256. War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade and 4th Regiment, *op cit*. Operational Papers, *op cit*, 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 336 dd 7.40 a.m. 11 July 1916, Venice to John (4th Regiment) BM 161 dd 7.35 a.m. 11 July 1916.

104. War Diaries: 3rd and 4th Regiments, *op cit*. 'Messages and Signals Delville Wood' Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to Walter (3rd Regiment) BM 171 dd 6.25 p.m. 12 July 1916; Venice to John (4th Regiment) dd 12 July 1916: BM 172 — 6.55 p.m.; BM 175 — 11.20 p.m.; Centre (9th Division) to Venice G.403 dd 8.03 p.m. 12 July 1916; John to Venice G 116 dd 3 a.m. 13 July 1916.

the way for 7th Queens. Of this assault however only one small party managed to reach the apex of the wood, by bombing along Longueval Alley; the remainder of the 7th Queens, now reduced to 80 men, and their attached company of Buffs, now at platoon strength, withdrew towards Bernafay with their wounded. By midnight it was evident that 55th Brigade's attack had failed, and Congreve now wanted to know what Maxse intended to do as the main assault on Longueval was due in just over three hours. Maxse said he would send in Shoubridge's 54th Brigade, and hoped that Trônes Wood could be captured by the time the main attack began. On being informed of the new plan, Shoubridge asked for permission to delay his attempt on Trônes until daylight as none of his men had seen the wood they were to take. Maxse had to refuse in view of the urgency of the task, but even so it would be dawn before Shoubridge could assemble his units for the attack. 54th Brigade's regiments still forming up east of the Montauban Briqueterie when the final barrage was fired prior to the attack on Longueval.¹⁰⁵

There was not no time for the luxury of reconnaissance and Shoubridge therefore decided on a simple plan of attack; his forces were to sweep straight through the wood from south to north establishing a defensive flank on the eastern edge as the attack progressed. The British infantry entered Trônes Wood at its south-western corner at 4.30 a.m. after a shell-swept advance. By 6 a.m. the enemy's central trench had been rushed and taken, yet once again navigational errors led to a premature anticipation of success. Only when the wood was systematically swept from end to end, with troops firing onto the undergrowth ahead as they advanced, was the northern apex of the wood secured.¹⁰⁶ By now it was 9.30 a.m., some six hours after the main attack towards Longueval had started, but fortunately the German garrison of Trônes Wood had been too occupied with their own battle over this time to be able to interfere with the operation immediately to the west. Once the position had been taken preparations were made to consolidate a defensive front facing Guillemont outside the eastern edge of the wood, during the afternoon there were signs of preparations from a German counter-attack, but no advance materialised. This last day of operations in Trônes Wood had cost the British another 450 casualties.¹⁰⁷

The Second Position

On 8 July, while the battles for the preliminary objectives of Trônes Wood, Mametz Wood and Contalmaison were beginning, Rawlinson issued the orders outlining the attack on the German

second position between Longueval and Bazentin le Petit. The prospective date set down for the attack was 8 a.m. on the 10th, and preparations began immediately behind the British front. The experiences of 1 July had convinced the infantry officers that their men must reach the enemy line before there was sufficient light for the German machine-guns to see clearly. Rawlinson deferred to this opinion and it was decided that the attacking battalions should form up in No Man's Land, under cover of darkness, at a distance of about 500 yards from the enemy line. The line from Longueval to Bazentin le Grand was indicated as XIII Corps, objective; XV Corps would attack Bazentin le Grand Wood and Bazentin le Petit village, while III Corps would be responsible for the protection of the left flank of the attack.¹⁰⁸

Haig was uncertain of the prospects of this plan, for he doubted whether his novice troops possessed either the skill or the discipline to form up in assault lines in darkness without bringing disaster upon the whole operation. Nor was he convinced about the role allocated to XV Corps. In any event the delays in securing the preliminary objectives had led to the inevitable postponement of the operations and the plans were further debated over the next few days. On the 11th the bombardment of the second position and the villages and batteries in its rear commenced and, despite Haig's objections, XIII and XV Corps began to prepare for an attack on the lines of Rawlinson's original plan, trusting that General Headquarters would eventually agree. On 12 July Haig's approval was finally secured, on the condition that both flanks were well secured. At 5 p.m. on 12 July the final order was issued: the infantry were to attack at 3.25 a.m. on 14 July. Surprise, a factor so lamentably lacking in the planning of the initial stages of the Somme battles was an important consideration, and it was decided to precede the attack with only five minutes intense bombardment, instead of the customary thirty. Another novelty in the artillery preparation was to be the extensive use of high-explosive shells in the creeping barrage which preceded the infantry advance; delay fuses were to be used to avoid short bursts, which were particularly dangerous in areas with trees or buildings.¹⁰⁹

105. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, p 47.

106. *Ibid*, pp 47–49; Farrar-Hockley; *Somme, op cit*, pp 152–153, 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI Part 2, *op cit*, pp 257–258.

107. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 75–78. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No VI Part 2, pp 257–260.

108. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 62–65, and *Appendices* pp 1–2.

109. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 54–66.

In the final plan the first objective was the enemy's front and second trenches from the south-west corner of Delville Wood through the centre of Longueval and on through the Bazentins. The second objective was a line including all of Delville Wood, the remainder of Longueval and the Bazentin woods and villages. Exploitation of any breakthrough would be the task of three cavalry divisions held in the rear; in particular Rawlinson was keen to secure High Wood, situated on the west of the ridge about 2 000 yards north-west of Longueval, and 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, operating under VIII Corps' orders, was given this as its first objective in the event of a breakthrough occurring. It had originally been expected that the French would co-operate with the British advance, by attacking south of Guillemont, but the British failures of 7/8 July convinced General Foch that the French Army should remain on the defensive until the British had secured the enemy line from Longueval to Pozières. The French decision was a great disappointment to Rawlinson, for it exacerbated the problems created by the delay in taking Trônes Wood.¹¹⁰

On the German side of the lines other developments were being set in train which would also exercise a significant influence on the course of the coming battle. On 11 July Falkenhayn, the German commander-in-chief, had finally called a halt to the offensive against Verdun, which had cost his armies some 200 000 casualties since February. The next day he visited General von Below on the Somme to discuss the policy for the continued defence of the German line. Certain command changes were now made, and Second Army's front would now be confined to the line south of the Somme, while to the north the newly created First Army would form General von Below's command. Both Armies would be under the overall command of General von Gallwitz, previously junior to von Below, and this appointment seems to have been motivated by Falkenhayn's disapproval of 'premature withdrawals' by the defenders of the Somme. To Falkenhayn it seemed possible for the Germans not merely to hold their ground, but to threaten the whole Allied flank along the line Hardecourt—Longueval. Von Below, however, doubted the possibility of such a counter-stroke unless large numbers of reinforcements were sent to his front. Before learning of his replacement von Below had re-organised the command system north of the Somme. The great confusion caused by the piecemeal arrival and commitment of reserves in the early stages of the battle had been wasteful and inefficient. In future the battle area would be divided into permanent corps sectors, the corps providing the administra-

tive and command structures into which the fighting formations would be fitted when they entered the front line; in this way continuity of tactical and administrative policy was preserved. Under this new dispensation the sector from Longueval to the Ancre would fall under a corps to be formed by General Sixt von Arnim. The initial troops in this group were Buckhardt Division, 183rd Division and 3rd Guards Division, but some of these troops were to be relieved on the 14th, that same day that von Arnim was to take over his new command.¹¹¹

Fourth Army's final orders for the attack on the second line were issued on 13 July. As we have seen, it was intended that 18th Division should complete the capture of Trônes Wood that day and form a defensive flank facing Guillemont and connecting up between the 9th Division's right flank and the French at Hardecourt. On the 14th it was expected that the brunt of the fighting in XIII Corps area would fall on the 9th and 3rd Divisions. The latter would be responsible for the assault on Bazentin le Grand, while Furse's 9th Division would take Waterlot Farm, Longueval village and Delville Wood.¹¹² The initial assault by 9th Division would be undertaken by 26th and 27th Brigades with the South Africans in reserve, but it will be as well to look in some detail at the plans for the operations of the 14th, as they naturally continued to influence the local battle once Lukin's men came into action.

The 240, or so, houses which formed the village of Longueval were situated around the junction of four roads on the crest of the ridge north of Bernafay Wood. At the centre of the village was a crossroads, and from here the cottages straggled along three of the roads for a few hundred yards, towards Flers in the north, Ginchy to the east and down the slope southwards to Montauban. The southern part of the village was broad and fairly open to view from the valley below, but the northern half, along the Flers road, was hidden by the orchards which grew all around the village, fringing its dwellings. Immediately

110. *Ibid*, pp 59, 66–67.

111. *Ibid*, pp 59–60. Farrar-Hockley; *Somme, op cit*, pp 165–166.

112. Miles: *Volume 2, Appendices, op cit*, pp 8–11, XIII Corps Operation Order No 25 dd 13 July 1916; see also SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI), Box 200. '9th Division Operation Orders' No 68 dd 13 July 1916. 3rd Division had not been one of the original divisions composing XIII Corps but had been transferred from Second Army on 5 July. Its commander was Major-General J.A.L. Haldane and the division consisted of the 8th 9th, 76th Brigades, see Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 25 and *Appendices*, p 107.



The ruins of Longueval.

north-east of the village, beyond the orchards was Delville Wood, a dense tangle of oak and birch, intersected, like most French woods, with grassy rides, although these were partly covered now by the thick undergrowth.¹¹³ By 14 July the British bombardment had already begun to clutter the wood further with the debris of broken trees. The German second line ran along the southern edge of Longueval then turned south-east past Waterlot Farm and its ruined sugar factory, to the western outskirts of Guillemont. Behind the first line of trenches Longueval had been placed in a state of defence and trenches had been dug in and around Dellville Wood, which commanded the northern end of the village. 9th Division's objective for the 14th was a difficult one, for its capture would involve the creation of a miniature salient under fire from three sides.¹¹⁴

Furse intended to use his brigades for his initial assault on the enemy position, with 27th Brigade on the left and 26th Brigade on the right, both operating on a frontage of about 500 yards. The brigades' tasks were divided into three stages. The first objective would be the German front line and support trenches at the southern end of Longueval. In common with the rest of the British assault force along the line, the two Scottish brigades would form up in No Man's Land on

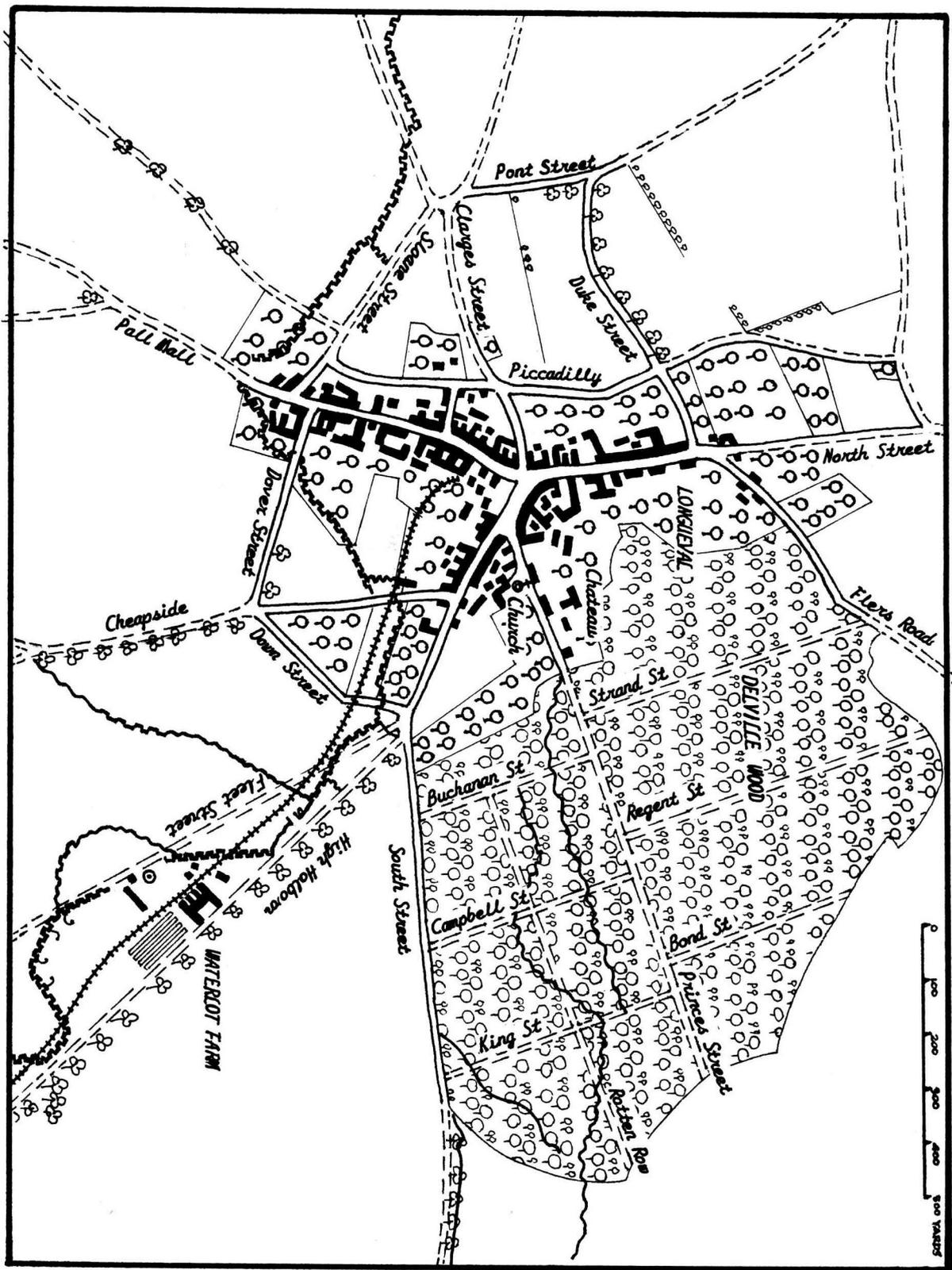
the night of 13/14 July to avoid a suicidal uphill advance over 1 200 yards. Scouting parties had already been pushed out for the past few nights to examine the enemy line, and it was intended that on the night of 13/14 July four platoons of scouts with Lewis guns would be pushed forward on 26th Brigade's front to form a screen some 200–300 yards from the German line. They would shelter in shell-holes specially provided by the British heavy artillery. These covering detachments would be followed by staff officers who would lay out markers of white tape to enable the infantry to form up in their waves of attack on the south-west slope of the plateau on which the Germans were entrenched. The assembly of the infantry would be so timed as to have them formed up no earlier than half an hour before the attack.¹¹⁵

As has been said, covering artillery fire had been arranged on a more scientific and less lavish

113. 9th Division Operation Order No 68 dd 13 July 1916, *op cit*.

114. Buchan: *op cit*, pp 56–57; Ewing: *op cit*, pp 102–103; 'The Other Side of the Hill' No V p 59 in *Army Quarterly* Vol XI No 1. October 1925.

115. 9th Division Operation Order No 68 dd 13 July 1916, *op cit*. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 69.



Longueval and Delville Wood, 14 July 1916.

scale than previously seen on the Somme. Lines delineating the artillery's target area had also been drawn, so that the barrage would lift on to a new area at pre-set times as the infantry advanced. After the completion of the arranged programme of lifts, the field artillery would come under the orders of the respective Brigade commanders. The right flank of the 9th Division's attack would be covered by the repeated attacks of 18th Division on Trônes Wood, by a heavy smoke barrage from Waterlot Farm southwards if the wind was favourable, and by machine guns posted by 26th Brigade in shell holes facing Trônes Wood. The artillery fire plan shows that this first stage of the operation was expected to take two hours.¹¹⁶ The second objective for 26th and 27th Brigades would be most of the remainder of Longueval village together with the south-western edge of Delville Wood. The Brigade commanders were instructed to detail troops to consolidate the village as it was captured; places for the construction of strongpoints were already identified, and the engineering field companies and pioneers attached to the brigades would assist in this work. The third objective for 27th Brigade would be the north-western corner of Delville Wood, while 26th Brigade would attack Waterlot Farm from the north-west.¹¹⁷

Although Delville Wood was included in the objectives to be taken on the 14th 9th Division orders made no detailed provision for this its capture. Sensibly, the allocation of troops for this part of the operation and the time at which it would be attempted were to remain dependent upon the progress of the battle as reported to 9th Division Headquarters, situated some 8½ miles south-south-west of Longueval near Bray. Nevertheless divisional orders did stipulate that, once Longueval and the western edge of Delville Wood were captured, scouts should be sent into the wood as soon as the artillery barrage permitted. 27th Brigade was also instructed to send out scouts to the north and to post machine-guns to command the valley which led to Flers and ran westwards beyond Longueval to Bazentin.¹¹⁸

As has been said, the South African Brigade was to be held in reserve, and together with 64th Field Company, RE and two companies of pioneers from 9th Seaforths, they received orders at 1.30 p.m. on the 13th to assemble in the area of Talus Boise south of the old British line by zero hour on the 14th.¹¹⁹ Arrangements were now made for the relief of those detachments of the 4th Regiment still holding Longueval Alley and the northern part of Bernafay Wood. These detachments would rejoin that portion of the regiment presently under Major Hunt's command at Glatz

Redoubt, Train Alley and Nord Alley. On the afternoon of the 13th the 3rd Regiment would also move west of Talus Boise. At 8 p.m. the Brigade Headquarters would move to a position just north of Cambridge Copse near Talus Boise¹²⁰

Longueval 14 July

On the night of 13/14 July the assaulting brigades began to move off into No Man's Land. 26th Brigade was to form up on the northern slopes of Caterpillar Valley with its left flank at the path from Montauban to Longueval. The 8th Black Watch and 10th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders were to lead this Brigade's advance. After the covering platoons had been posted with their Lewis guns on the west of the ridge the Brigade-Major and two regimental adjutants set off with their party of 48 markers. The Black Watch party headed for the road from Bernafay Wood to Longueval, and the Argylls to the road from Montauban to Longueval; these roads, almost parallel, marked the left flanks of the respective battalions. Tapes were laid to mark the fronts on which the platoons would form up, so as to create an assault of eight waves. German artillery shelled the assembly area while the markers were being posted, but by the time the battalions began to arrive at 12.45 a.m. even this danger had ceased.

The assault battalions moved along the roads by companies, in single file, turned right as they reached their marker on the road, and moved along the tapes. By 3 a.m. the two assault battalions of 26th Brigade were in position, each with a section of 26th Mortar Battery in support. Behind them in Montauban Alley were 7th Seaforth Highlanders and two sections of 26th Machine Gun Company, while the fourth battalion of the brigade, 5th Cameron Highlanders, was in reserve south

116. *Ibid.*, Miles: *Volume 2, Appendices, op cit.*, pp 8–11, XIII Corps Operation Order No 25 dd 13 July 1916.

117. 9th Division Operation Order No 68 dd 13 July 1916, *op cit.*

118. *Ibid.*, Miles: *Volume 2, Appendices, op cit.*, pp 8–11, XIII Corps Operation Order No 25 dd 13 July 1916.

119. 9th Division Operation Orders No 68 dd 13 July 1916, *op cit.*, 'Signals and Messages, Delville Wood', *op cit.*, Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 184 dd 1.30 p.m. 13 July 1916.

120. 'Signals and Messages, Delville Wood', *op cit.*, Signals dd 13 July 1916: Venice (South African Brigade) to Arthur (2nd Regiment), Walter (3rd Regiment) John (4th Regiment) and Major Hunt, BM 182–12.00: Venice to Arthur, Edward (1st Regiment) and Rome (26th Brigade) BM 187–3.05 p.m.; Venice to Major Hunt, BM 188–3.25 p.m.; Venice to John, BM 189–3.35 p.m.; Venice to John and Major Hunt, BM 190–4.05 p.m.; Venice to Major Hunt, BM 192–4.50 p.m. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 504. 1st South African Infantry Brigade. Operation Order No 47 dd 13 July 1916.

of Montauban with the remainder of the machine-guns and mortars. The intricate and risky business of assembly cost the 26th Brigade just one officer mortally wounded, and another six men wounded.

27th Brigade, to the left of 26th, had no roads to aid it in its assembly, and therefore used a different method. At 11 p.m. on the 13th a covering platoon was sent forward and over the next hour and a half the Brigade-Major, aided by personnel of 90th Field Company, RE laid the assembly tapes, bearings were checked and markers placed and at 12.30 a.m. the battalions arrived. 11th Royal Scots and 9th Scottish Rifles formed up in front with all four companies in line, in column of platoons in single rank; the 12th Royal Scots were immediately behind, with 90th Field Company, RE on their right and a company of pioneers from 9th Seaforths on the left. Despite intermittent shelling there were only five casualties; one of these, however, was a severe loss, for Lieutenant-Colonel H.L. Budge of the 12th Royal Scots was killed by a shell fragment.¹²¹

Across the entire front of XIII and XV Corps these methods of assembly were repeated with minor variations by the other four assaulting brigades. By 3.20 a.m. some 22 000 men were drawn up in the open in attacking formation within 500 yards of the enemy line, and scarcely a man had been lost. The noise of the British barrage had helped cloak the movements of the troops, the various brigade staffs had performed their rôles with great skill and the men had proved their discipline in what was, after all, a most dangerous operation. The Germans had helped, however, by keeping an inequitable watch over No Man's Land; of four patrols sent out that night from Longueval, three spotted nothing and one made contact only to be eliminated by the troops forming up near Bernafay. Deception may also have helped, for a false message announcing the postponement of operations was telephoned late on the 13th over a line known to be 'tapped' by an enemy listening post on 62nd Brigade's front. Over the remainder of the front there was no enemy patrolling, possibly because the Germans believed that the British could not attack before dawn or because of the confusion caused by the intended relief of German frontline units on the 14th.¹²²

At 3.20 a.m. the British barrage reached a new level of intensity as large amounts of high-explosive were fired at the German frontline trenches. By this time some troops of the 3rd Division had crept forward to within 50 yards of the enemy wire, as the pugnacity of the assault force was compounded by the men's eagerness to be out of the relative vulnerability of No Man's Land. On

other divisional fronts the intensification of bombardment was taken as a signal for the infantry to crawl forward as far as possible, even at the risk of suffering casualties from their own shells. Some lessons of 1 July had been learned, for the troops were determined not to get caught on the enemy's wire and used the cover of the barrage to dispose by hand of many obstacles which the shellfire had left uncut. At 3.25 a.m. as the artillery lifted its fire to the next line the leading companies of infantry entered the German trenches. In many places surprise was complete for the enemy had been misled by the brevity of the intensive bombardment and by the closeness of the leading British troops. Elsewhere companies which had successfully entered the first trench unopposed bombed dugouts and moved along the enemy line to outflank neighbouring positions and direct the defenders' attention away from the supporting troops still streaming across No Man's Land.¹²³

In 9th Division's sector the initial assault was almost everywhere successful. On 26th Brigade's front most trouble was experienced by the 8th Black Watch. This battalion had initially been forced to deploy further to the left than planned on account of shelling and sniping from Trônes Wood. Perhaps for this reason the right-hand company of the Black Watch were held up by a machine-gun nest at the south-east corner of Longueval. This post was covered by two field-guns in the south-west corner of Delville Wood, yet even after these latter were withdrawn, the Black Watch found that they had too little room to manoeuvre around the enemy machine-guns, and it was evening before this obstacle was dealt with.

The Black Watch were to find their right flank, resting on Delville Wood, increasingly difficult and although the battalion claimed to have taken its first two objectives by 10 a.m., troops who had managed to reach Buchanan Street, in the wood itself, were soon forced back again as their left flank, on Princes Street, was totally exposed. By mid-day the Black Watch position ran from the main square in the village, north of the church and then south-east to a point 100 yards from the west corner of South Street. To their left the 10th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders were completely successful, and continued into Longueval close behind the artillery barrage. Clarges Street was

121. Ewing: *op cit*, pp 109–111; Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, p 150; Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 69–71.

122. Ewing: *op cit*, p 109; Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 156–157, 166; Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 68, 71–74.

123. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 74, 78–79. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit*, pp 157–158.



Memorial to two French soldiers killed at Delville Wood during the German offensive 1914. This is the only known photograph of Delville Wood prior to the devastating battles of 1916, and gives a good impression of the tangled state of the wood when the South Africans first saw it.

quickly reached and the houses on the west side of the main street cleared.¹²⁴

On 27th Brigade's front the right battalion, the 11th Royal Scots, took their fourth objective after a stiff fight in which bombs and Lewis guns proved most useful. The 9th Scottish Rifles, to the left, had an easier time and were even able to assist the advance of their neighbours in the 3rd Division. By 4.15 a.m. 27th Brigade was in possession of its first objective, and now began the attempt on the more difficult second stage. This involved a complex move as 12th Royal Scots passed through 11th Royal Scots, wheeled eastwards and advanced towards Longueval, with the intention of securing the village from the intersection of Duke Street and Piccadilly to where Princes Street emerged from Delville Wood. 11th Royal Scots would move up on the 12th Battalion's left to hold Duke Street. The 11th Battalion managed its part of the move successfully and dug in south of Duke Street, but snipers and machine-guns in the orchards and from Piccadilly held up 12th Royal Scots and forced them to dig in facing eastwards, with their left flank in touch with the 11th Battalion on Duke Street and their right linking with the Argylls on Clarges Street. The 27th Brigade had failed to reach its second objective.¹²⁵

It was some time, however, before the real position was appreciated at 9th Division Headquarters. At 5.05 a.m. a message from 26th Brigade indicated that the situation in Longueval was satisfactory, that the first objectives had been seized and that the 7th Seaforths were moving up to attack Waterlot Farm.¹²⁶ Furse now began to move his reserves and ordered Lukin to march his leading battalion into Montauban Alley as soon as this had been vacated by the other brigades. Accordingly at 6.15 a.m. Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson, of the 1st Regiment, received an order from Brigade Headquarters to move forward and post 300 men in Montauban Alley with the remainder of the battalion in trenches south of Montauban as close up as possible. Four Vickers machine-guns were sent forward to come under Dawson's orders.¹²⁷

124. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 79. Ewing: *op cit*, pp 110–113.

125. Ewing: *op cit*, pp 112–115.

126. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood', *op cit*. Signal Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 445 dd 5.10 a.m. 14 July 1916.

127. *Ibid*, Signal: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 446 dd 5.15 a.m. 'Operational Papers, Delville Wood' *op cit*, South African Brigade-Major's Notebook 14/18 July 1916: Message: Mitchell-Baker to Officer Commanding 1st Regiment BM 30 dd 6.15 a.m. 14 July 1916. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 79.

Further progress was reported from Longueval shortly after 6 a.m. when 27th Brigade announced the seizure of its second objective. The impression was that 9th Division's troops were merely waiting for the barrage to lift before occupying the remainder of the village, and reports from other sectors told of British infantry walking about freely south-west of Longueval. In the light of these optimistic messages Furse can scarcely have been surprised to learn half an hour later that the whole of Longueval had been captured.¹²⁸

From Fourth Army Headquarters, the initial stages of the battle appeared to have been totally successful: Contalmaison Villa, the villages and woods of Bazentin le Grand and Bazentin le Petit, Trônes Wood and, it was erroneously believed, all of Longueval, were in British hands. Counter-attacks had been repulsed, large numbers of casualties had been inflicted and the German second line taken over a frontage of 6 000 yards. By 7 a.m. Rawlinson believed that the exploitation of his success could begin. Congreve of XIII Corps ordered the cavalry to move on High Wood, and III Corps began to advance its infantry reserves to a point where they could turn the whole German line.¹²⁹

By about 7.30 a.m., however, the mistaken reports which had reached 9th Division Headquarters from Longueval were being amended and Furse had to decide what to do in order to complete the capture of the village. If his division were after all to fail the whole of Fourth Army's operations towards High Wood would be jeopardised. Indeed it would not be enough merely to take Longueval; Delville Wood must also be held and the capture of Waterlot Farm was an essential prerequisite to the projected attack on Guillemont.¹³⁰

General Furse now prepared to commit the first of his reserves and offered 27th Brigade the services of the South African 1st Regiment if necessary. Yet the very terms in which the offer was couched showed that 9th Division was still unaware of the full gravity of the situation, for Furse wrote merely of 'clearing up the situation regarding the north half of Delville Wood'. A quarter of an hour later Furse had made arrangements with the heavy artillery that the northern end of Longueval should be bombarded, the barrage ceasing at 9 a.m.¹³¹

Yet even as these arrangements were being made, the troops in Longueval were continuing to struggle forward despite the heavy losses already suffered. At 7 a.m. two companies of 12th Royal Scots had advanced, but only as far as Piccadilly, at 8.30 a.m. the same battalion made another

attempt from Clarges Street, when three sections with a Lewis gun attempted a house-to-house rush up North Street. Once again the attackers were halted by machine-gun fire, and forced to retire to a barricade at the junction of North Street and Clarges Street. This was the situation when Brigadier Scrase-Dickens, commanding the 27th Brigade, received General Furse's orders at 8.48 a.m. Unfortunately, communications forward from Brigade Headquarters near Montauban to the troops in Longueval were now so poor that no further attack could be mounted in time to exploit the British bombardment. At 9.30 a.m. Furse tried again, and arranged the shelling of the northern end of Longueval until 10.30 a.m. when the barrage would lift to the line Buchanan Street — Strand. 9th Division's orders seem somewhat optimistic in the light of later experience, for 27th Brigade was told to capture and consolidate the northern half of the village, push patrols into Delville Wood as far as the barrage allowed, and place machine guns to cover the Flers Road. Once again it appears that the message was delayed, for no attack materialised until 11 a.m.¹³²

Already Furse was making plans for a continuation of the assault after Longueval's capture was completed. A combined attack would be launched on Waterlot Farm and Delville Wood; 26th Brigade, with a South African battalion as reinforcement would attack Waterlot Farm and Delville Wood south of Princes Street, while the rest of the wood formed 27th Brigade's objective. Modifications were introduced to the artillery programme, and these give an idea of the *expected* progress of the attack. The barrage would lift from the line Buchanan Street — Strand at 12.30 p.m. and would move to Campbell Street — Regent Street, shifting after half an hour to King Street — Bond Street and after another half hour to a line beyond the edge of the wood. Lukin was told to send an officer to 26th Brigade Headquarters to make arrangements for the South Africans' part in the operation. Accordingly at 11.37 a.m. the 3rd Regiment, with

128. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood' *op cit.* Centre (9th Division) to Nerve (XIII Corps) repeated Venice (South African Brigade) dd 14 July 1916 G 453 — 6.16 a.m.; G 455 — 6.35 a.m. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, p 79.

129. Farrar-Hockley: *Somme, op cit.*, pp 158—159. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 79—83.

130. Ewing: *op cit.*, pp 112—115.

131. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: 9th Division to Naples (27th Brigade) repeated Venice (South African Brigade) dd 14 July 1916: G 460 — 8.05 a.m.; G 461 — 8.20 a.m.

132. *Ibid.* Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Naples (27th Brigade) repeated Venice (South African Brigade) G 467 dd 9.30 a.m. 14 July 1916. Ewing: *op cit.*, pp 115—116.

two machine-guns attached was moved up south of Montauban, and an officer sent forward to report to Brigadier-General Ritchie. Meanwhile 2nd Regiment moved up to Talus Boise in case further reinforcements were necessary. An hour and a half later, however, 3rd Regiment's move was halted and Thackeray was told to await Lukin's orders.¹³³

As related above 27th Brigade Headquarters had had the 1st South African Infantry Regiment at its disposal since early morning, but the battalion was not ordered forward by Lukin until 11.20 a.m. Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson was then told to report to Brigadier-General Scrase-Dickens' headquarters at the eastern end of Montauban.¹³⁴ Here he was informed that 26th and 27th Brigades were still being confined by enemy machine-guns and snipers to the southern end of Longueval, and he was instructed to deploy his regiment along the line held by the two Scottish brigades, in order to be in a position to attack the remainder of the village at 2 p.m. He was told that there would be a preliminary bombardment of 15 minutes, culminating in 5 minutes intense fire. Dawson left immediately for Longueval himself to ascertain the situation and gave orders for Major Burges to bring up the battalion in 8 lines of sections in file.¹³⁵

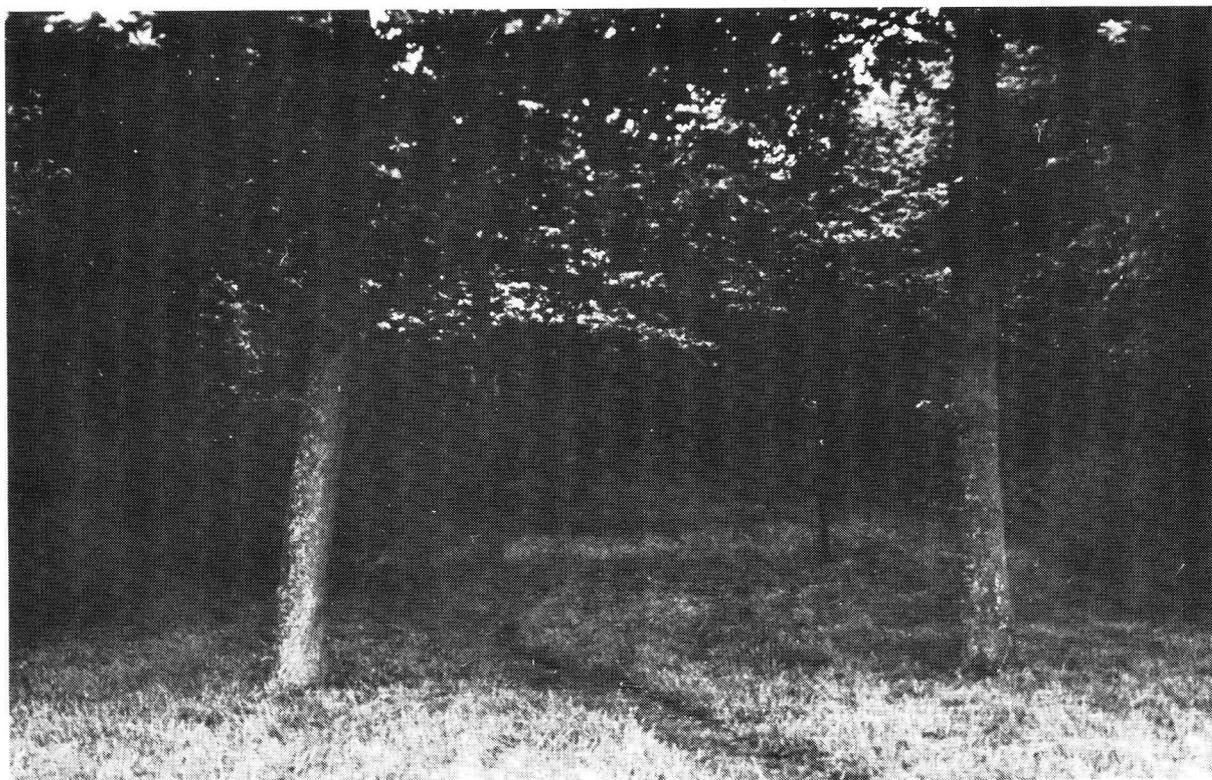
Even as the South Africans were preparing to enter the battle for Longueval Fourth Army Head-

quarters was taking stock of the situation. Almost everywhere along the line enemy resistance had ceased, the surviving defenders having fled northwards in confusion. If a British force could now occupy High Wood it could dominate the main Thiepval—Pozières—Ginchy ridge and threaten movement around Bapaume, Martinpuich and Flers. Yet requests by divisional commanders for permission to move their infantry forward to take this vital position were denied; the cavalry had already been ordered forward. The latter, however, had been encamped some 12 miles to the rear of the front line and were now delayed by the badly cut-up battlefield. Four hours after the cavalry had been ordered up by XIII Corps, they had still not arrived. By 12.15 p.m. however, Rawlinson, aware that Congreve's right was still threatened by the Germans' successful resistance in Longueval, asked Horne of XV Corps to send

133. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood', *op cit.* Signals: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 473 dd 10.30 a.m. 14 July 1916; Venice to Rome (26th Brigade) BM 114 dd 11.50 a.m. 14 July 1916. 'Operational Papers Delville Wood', *op cit.* Brigade-Major's notebook 14/18 July 1916. Messages: Mitchell-Baker to Officer Commanding 3rd Regiment dd 11.37 a.m. 14 July 1916; Thackeray to Brigade-Major South African Brigade dd 1.17 p.m. 14 July 1916. War Diaries: 1st South African Infantry Brigade and 3rd Regiment.

134. *Ibid*, Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Arthur (1st Regiment) BM 213 dd 11.20 a.m. 14 July 1916.

135. War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit.*



Delville Wood in 1966, showing one of the rides, probably not much different from the view it presented at the beginning of July 1916.

forward the fresh troops of his command. Horne decided instead that until Longueval was taken such a move was unsafe, overlooking the obvious fact that a British force at High Wood would bring the German positions in Longueval and Delville Wood under observed shellfire and enfilade by machine-guns and mortars. Indeed, such a move might well render the German position on the right completely untenable, and so obviate the need for continued frontal assault. Nevertheless Congreve deferred to Horne's opinion, and when the cavalry finally arrived at Montauban at 12.40 a.m. he ordered them to halt until Longueval was taken. While the generals delayed, von Arnim, who had taken command of the German defence at 9.00 a.m., managed to get a grip on the situation and began to send forward reinforcements, with an impunity made possible by the British failure to exploit their success, and by 3 p.m. he was able to launch a counter-attack towards Bazentin le Petit, to threaten the salient being formed by the British advance.¹³⁶

In default of more enterprising tactics further along the line the assault on Longueval continued, and at 12.30 p.m. General Furse issued the first orders which committed Lukin's brigade to the battle for Delville Wood. These orders substantially amended those issued two hours previously: after the 1st Battalion had helped 27th Brigade capture and consolidate the northern half of Longueval, and had pushed patrols into Delville Wood west of Strand and north of Princes Street, the remainder of the South African Brigade was to capture and consolidate the outer edge of the whole of Delville Wood. Once again an artillery barrage was planned which involved lifts every half hour.¹³⁷

While these orders were being issued the 1st Regiment was complying with those issued an hour earlier, and despite a considerable amount of hostile artillery fire Major Burges managed to bring the battalion into the line without any casualties. The northern part of Longueval was already being shelled, but because of the fear that isolated groups from 12th Royal Scots might be further forward the artillery directed almost all its fire on the woods immediately to the east. At 2.10 p.m. Dawson's men advanced, with 'A' Company supported by 'C' Company on the right and 'B' on the left supported by 'D'. The aim was to secure the trench which ran along the boundary of Delville Wood from the Flers Road to Princes Street, but despite the fact that the objective had been clearly marked on the map, the village itself had by now been so battered by shellfire that it was difficult to relate the plan to the reality. There had been no opportunity to make any decent reconnaissance of the ground and many of the

officers had but an elementary training in the subject of map-reading. It was scarcely surprising that the advancing infantry soon lost direction and became split into a number of isolated groups.

At about 4 p.m. Dawson received reports from his forward companies, the officer commanding 'B' Company stating that he thought he had reached his objective, and the commander of 'A' Company merely saying that he had occupied a certain trench. Vague as these reports were, both were definite that no further advance was possible owing to heavy machine-gun fire from north, north-east and west. Dawson managed to correlate these messages and ascertained that 'B' Company was in fact in a trench linking Princes Street with North Street, some distance away from its objective and behind 'A' Company, which had in fact reached the edge of the wood. 'D' Company was found to be near the centre of the village while 'C' was on 'A' 's right flank, on Princes Street itself. At about 6 p.m. Dawson saw Captain Jenkins, the officer commanding 'C' Company, and ordered him to try to capture a machine-gun firing from a position called the Chateau a little way along Princes Street. The attempt was unsuccessful and Jenkins was wounded in the assault. So far the Regiment's efforts had cost it 4 officers and about 50 men as casualties and for the time being Dawson decided to push no further. 'D' Company was withdrawn to trenches west of Sloan Street.¹³⁸

While Dawson's men had been fighting through the orchards to the east of the village, 26th Brigade had continued the battle in the south-east of Longueval, where the solitary machine-gun post had impeded them since morning. At 2 p.m. Furse had sent the 5th Cameron Highlanders forward from Montauban to help reduce this strongpoint. It was hoped that by moving a company into the corner of Dover and Down streets success might be achieved. By about 5 p.m. a converging attack by Camerons, Black Watch and Seaforths finally succeeded, the enemy garrison was overwhelmed and three machine-guns were captured. Another company of Camerons was used to clear houses just north of Clarges Street, and a building just on the flank of Dawson's positions on Princes

136. Farrar-Hockley, *Somme, op cit*, pp 160–161, 166–167; Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 83–85.

137. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood' *op cit*; Signal: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 447 dd 12.30 p.m. 14 July 1916.

138. War Diary, 1st Regiment, *op cit*, 'Operational Papers, Delville Wood', *op cit*. Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray's report to Brigadier-General Lukin for the period 14–20 July 1916 dd 27 July 1916. Ewing: *op cit*, p 117 has a somewhat confused account of this action which is contradicted by Thackeray's very detailed report.

Street. The remaining two companies of this battalion were detailed to take four machine-guns into Delville Wood south of Princes Street. The intention was to penetrate as far westwards as possible before turning to attack Waterlot Farm from the north. Aided by a company of Seaforths the Camerons made good progress in the face of heavy machine-guns and rifle fire. The main attacking body managed to secure a position just west of the farm, while a small group of Seaforths worked back to Longueval Alley and made contact with the troops of the 18th Division who had cleared Trônes Wood earlier in the day. Despite the failure to take Waterlot Farm, 9th Division's right flank was beginning to look a little more secure.¹³⁹

It was 1 p.m. when Lukin received General Furse's order for the three battalions under his command to attack Delville Wood. An hour later a further instruction ordered him to move his staff to 26th Brigade's Headquarters, where he would be able to make use of Ritchie's forward communications with Longueval.¹⁴⁰ Before carrying out this instruction, however, Lukin's staff set to work to prepare the necessary orders for the forthcoming operation. These orders assumed that British troops would be in possession of Longueval and the German second line as far as Bazentin-le-Grand; the South Africans would therefore be able to attack the wood from the west, with the start

line running from the intersection of North Street and the Flers road to the junction of South Street and Dover Street. The 3rd Regiment would attack the northern sector of the wood and the 2nd Regiment the southern, with Prince's Street forming the battalion boundaries; the South Africans would advance in columns of half companies. The 4th Regiment would remain in reserve in the old German trenches south of Montauban. The attack would begin at 7.00 p.m. after an artillery barrage, which would lift in two stages to clear the wood by 8.00 p.m.¹⁴¹ Major Hearn, the officer commanding 64th Field Company, RE had already been consulted by Lukin about the correct placement of strongpoints as the regiments advanced through the wood. He suggested that in order to hold Delville Wood against enemy counter-attack it would be necessary to dominate the valley which ran north-east from the wood and south of the Flers Road. He therefore advised

139. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Naples (27th Brigade) and Venice (South African Brigade) G 486 dd 2.16 p.m. 14 July 1916. Ewing: *op cit*, p 119.

140. Lukin's Despatch *op cit*. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood', *op cit*. 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 485 dd 1.45 p.m. 14 July 1916.

141. SADF Archives, World War 1 Group (WWI) Box Div 30. 1st South African Infantry Brigade, Operation Order No 48 dd 14 July 1916.



The Deccan Horse in action near High Wood 14 July 1916.

that machine-gun posts, each protected by two infantry sections, be placed along the northern perimeter of the wood. Other works should be placed around the remainder of the boundary, with supporting and bombing points inside the wood, to be constructed by engineers from his company. Hearn said that the infantrymen should begin each post as a series of deep, narrow pits which could later be joined by traverses to form a position; branches could be heaped in front of the trenches as obstacles, or wire could be used. In any case he advised that the posts on the perimeter be constructed as far inside the wood as possible allowing for a good view and good field of fire for the machine-guns. In almost all respects Lukin's orders followed Hearn's advice, adding that a section of engineers would be attached to the two attacking battalions.¹⁴²

Shortly before 3 p.m., however, it appears that another message came in to 9th Division's headquarters from Longueval, reporting the capture of the village. At any event at 2.45 p.m. 9th Division signalled to Lukin that the attack on Delville must be brought forward to 5 p.m., at which time the artillery barrage would make its first lift. The premature news of Longueval's capture was once more passed to XIII Corps headquarters, and at 3.10 p.m. Congreve informed Horne of XV Corps. The latter replied that he would send 7th Division forward to High Wood in two hours time, and asked that cavalry be provided to cover his right flank. By 3.40 p.m. the Corps commanders had agreed on their plans, but the troops involved received no orders for nearly two hours, and by this time Lukin and Furse both knew of the true state of affairs. If this knowledge was passed on to XIII Corps and Army headquarters little use appears to have been made of it, for Horne's preparations continued, albeit at a slow pace.¹⁴³

At 3 p.m., shortly before receiving Furse's order to bring forward the time of attack to 5 p.m., Lukin met the officers commanding 2nd and 3rd Regiments South African Infantry just south of Montauban. He handed them copies of the orders for the attack on Delville Wood and explained the operation to them. Having done this Lukin moved with his staff to 26th Brigade's headquarters, which were established in an old German dug-out at the north-west corner of Montauban. Here he learned that Longueval had still not been taken and immediately ordered the officers commanding his 2nd and 3rd battalions to await further instructions, while he telephoned General Furse to inform him of the situation, with the result that the plans for the attack on the wood were promptly suspended. Eventually at 5 p.m. Lukin sent Lieutenant Roseby, his intelligence officer, into Longueval to secure

a first-hand account of the situation there, and to reconnoitre the proposed start-line for the South African attack.¹⁴⁴

It was just before 6 p.m. when Furse learned of Horne's orders for 91st Brigade's attack from Bazentin le Petit towards High Wood, which had originally been timed for 5.45 p.m. More disturbing in the light of recent developments was the fact that two cavalry regiments were to operate on the infantry's right flank, in order to protect the latter and attack Delville Wood from north and north-west. Furse now signalled Lukin and Ritchie that it was imperative that their troops enter Delville Wood as soon as possible.¹⁴⁵ About an hour later Furse signalled that he intended to come personally to 26th Brigade's headquarters to discuss plans for the South Africans to complete the capture of Longueval and Delville Wood that same night. Lukin was told to consider the problem before General Furse's arrival.¹⁴⁶

While Furse was trying to resume operations to secure the Fourth Army's vulnerable right flank, Horne's XV Corps were already moving into action to the north-west. Because of inefficient staff work the bombardment of High Wood ended half an hour before the attacking infantry ever reached Bazentin le Petit at 6.45 p.m. Of the supporting infantry there was still no sign, but the two cavalry regiments on the right flank, 7th Dragoon Guards and 20th Deccan Horse, were in position. The commander of 91st Brigade decided to accept the risk and began the 1 000 yard advance towards High Wood at 7 p.m. After nine hours of delay and prevarication the advance got under way, only to run into an attempted ambush, which was frustrated with the timely assistance of the Royal Flying Corps and by a demoralising counter-attack by the cavalry. Eventually the two British infantry battalions reached High Wood, but half-way through they met enemy resistance from the wooded crest and the switch trench beyond. By about 9 p.m. it was practically dark and both sides could do nothing but regroup and prepare

142. *Ibid.*, 'Operational Papers, Delville Wood', *op cit*; Memorandum by Major G.R. Hearn dd 14 July 1916.

143. Miles: *Volume 2*, *op cit*, p 86; Farrar-Hockley, *Somme*, *op cit*, pp 161 – 162.

144. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; War Diary: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, *op cit*.

145. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood', *op cit*. Signals: Centre (9th Division) to Rome (26th Brigade) and Venice (South African Brigade) G 449 dd 6.00 p.m. 14 July 1916; Centre to Venice G 503 dd 8.00 p.m. Communications and staff work between corps seem to have been very inefficient if the operations of the afternoon of 14 July are anything to go by.

146. 'Messages and Signals, Delville Wood' Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 500 dd 7.20 p.m. 14 July 1916.

or improve positions. The cavalry took up position for the night from the corner of High Wood to near Longueval. High Wood and the vital switch trench remained uncaptured for another two months of bloody fighting.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile Lukin, awaiting Furse's arrival in Montauban, had received Roseby's report from Longueval. Roseby signalled that if the Brigade formed up west of Longueval, the left battalion would be exposed to heavy fire from enemy machine-guns in a house at the northern end of North Street. While northern Longueval was still held by the Germans and advance through that portion would entail heavy fighting before the wood was reached. Roseby also reported the enemy still holding Waterlot Farm and the machine-gun nest at the south-east of the village.¹⁴⁸ At about the same time as he received this disquieting account, Lukin sent forward small parties from the 2nd and 3rd Regiments to reconnoitre routes leading to Longueval and the ground in the vicinity.¹⁴⁹ At 8.30 p.m. General Furse arrived, to discuss the solution with his three brigade commanders. It was decided that the South Africans must take Delville Wood at all costs, and that the attack should begin at 5 a.m. next morning. Lukin asked what was to happen if the Scottish Brigades had failed to complete Longueval's capture by then, and was told that operations against Delville would continue regardless, but the South Africans would

then have to clear up Longueval as well. At 9 p.m. Lukin passed on these orders to his three battalion commanders, who then left to rejoin their units.¹⁵⁰

Longueval — 15 July

Rawlinson's general instructions for the 15th issued on the previous evening showed that the seriousness of the missed opportunities of the day had not yet been realised. The divisional commanders were merely enjoined to exploit the success of the 14th to make the most of the supposed confusion and demoralisation of the Ger-

147. Farrar-Hockley, *op cit*, pp 162–163; Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 86–87.

148. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; Operational papers Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signal: Lieutenant Roseby to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 7.55 p.m. 14 July 1916.

149. War Diary: 1st South African Infantry Brigade, *op cit*.

150. *Ibid*. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Thackerey's report, *op cit*. As these instructions were given verbally no written orders can be found which would have committed the South Africans to the work of clearing Longueval before attacking the wood. But the Brigade War Diary states clearly that the 'SA Brigade must attack and clear up situation in Longueval and capture Delville Wood', and this account appears to have been written almost contemporaneously with the events it describes, unlike the regimental diaries and reports, unlike Lukin's despatch. It is likely that the latter source is guilty of some telescoping of events in this case, particularly since Thackerey's report, written on 27 July 1916, also makes mention of the orders received that evening 'for the 3rd SAI to attack Longueval and Delville Wood from the West.'



Five soldiers of the Black Watch marching back along the sunken road south of Longueval.

mans; once again the cavalry would be held ready for action.¹⁵¹

The surprise attack in the early morning of the 14th had certainly caught the enemy off balance, and in the middle of a change-over in command, yet von Arnim had quickly rushed reinforcements forward and despite the confusion of units in the front line it seemed that sufficient time had been gained to organise some sort of defence in depth. Longueval was particularly vital to the defenders, and fortunately for them proved a difficult objective for 9th Division. It had long been in German hands and maximum use had been made of the many cellars beneath the houses; these were now linked to provide an extra menace among the normal dangers of house-to-house fighting. Even though the British artillery had destroyed many of the buildings in the village the ruins provided useful defence positions, while to the east Delville Wood provided defences sited in depth, as well as covered approaches for reinforcements to Longueval. Even these obstacles to 9th Division's progress might have been overcome, however, but for the stubborn gallantry of the village's defenders, II/16th Bavarian Regiment, who were reinforced in the course of the 14th by two more battalions. By the evening of the first day of his command von Arnim was fairly satisfied that the British advance had not penetrated his defences as far as originally feared, and he was even ready to launch a counter-stroke on the 15th.¹⁵²

On the night of 14/15 July 9th Division was still attempting to clear the enemy out of Longueval, a task which had become even more urgent since Furse had issued his orders for the South Africans to seize Delville Wood. Thus at 11 p.m. 1st Regiment South African Infantry received very urgent orders from 27th Brigade that the machine-guns holding up the advance must be captured that night. The work had to be undertaken by small parties and at about midnight Dawson sent out three groups, under Lieutenants Henry, Bate and Burgess. Burgess's party soon returned and reported that the machine-gun in the Chateau on Princes Street, which had previously defied 'C' Company's efforts, had been withdrawn and that this position was clear. The other two parties returned at about dawn, having searched the houses along North Street until they came under heavy fire from a machine-gun in a house at the northern end of the street, the same reported by Lieutenant Roseby the previous evening. Enemy grenades and the use of flares to light the approaches to the position made the South Africans' task a hopeless one, and Henry and Bate therefore decided to abandon the mission and returned to their regiment at daybreak.¹⁵³ Shortly after 1st Regiment had sent out the three parties on their abortive assign-



Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin, Officer Commanding 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1915–1916.

ment General Furse had issued urgent orders for 27th Brigade to make a concerted effort to seize the whole of Longueval that same night, to enable Lukin's Brigade to form up properly before attacking Delville Wood. Further instructions issued shortly afterwards ordered 27th Brigade to establish a strongpoint north-west of Longueval to make contact with the 7th Division which was reported, incorrectly, to have completed the capture of High Wood.¹⁵⁴ As we have seen, there was little need for 27th Brigade to react to these orders until about 4.30 a.m. that morning when 1st Regiment's failure to clear up the German strongpoints became evident. At 7.15 a.m. Furse ordered 27th Brigade to rush the remaining strongpoints in the village, and at about 8 a.m. after a short bombardment by Stokes mortars, the 12th Royal Scots tried to force their way northwards

151. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 90, 117.

152. *Ibid*, pp 60, 88–89, 117–118. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No V, *op cit*, pp 60–61.

153. War Diary, 1st Regiment *op cit*. Messages and Signals. Delville Wood, *op cit*, Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 541 dd 4.35 a.m. 15 July 1916; Naples (27th Brigade) to Venice dd 4.25 a.m. 15 July 1916.

154. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signals: 9th Division to Naples (27th Brigade) repeated Venice (South African Brigade) dd 12.10 a.m. 15 July 1916; 9th Division to Naples repeated Venice dd 12.45 a.m. 15 July 1916.

along North Street and through the orchards to the west. At 1.15 p.m. Scrase-Dickens reported that his bombing parties had successfully cleared the village, but once again this was false intelligence for the attempt along North Street had got no further than half way to Duke Street while the party working through the orchards could only reach Piccadilly. The 12th Royal Scots were eventually forced out of even these meagre gains by heavy German shellfire, and enemy infantry re-occupied their former positions. At 7.30 p.m. another attempt was made by three sections from 12th Royal Scots, advancing from Clarges Street, but these progressed only 50 yards before being forced back. Two more sections pushing along North Street also failed to dislodge the reinforced defenders.¹⁵⁵

Delville Wood — 15 July

Just before 1 a.m. on the morning of the 15th the South African Brigade received orders from 9th Division confirming that their infantry must attack Delville Wood at daybreak. Lukin sent immediately for the commanders of his 2nd, 3rd and 4th Regiments and told them to move off at once with their units in order to be in a position to attack at daybreak. An hour later another telegram arrived from Furse reminding Lukin to obtain reliable information about the situation in Longueval before forming up his infantry for the attack. If it proved

impossible to assemble the troops to the west of the village but the Scots still held the south-eastern portion it would probably be advisable to enter Delville Wood from that corner. Lukin conveyed his information to Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner, of 2nd Regiment, who was to command the assault on Delville Wood that morning, and instructed him to make his attack at 5 a.m. on a single battalion front with 3rd Regiment leading. If Longueval had been captured the original plan of attack would be adhered to. Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray was also informed of the alteration in plan and Major Macleod, temporarily in command of 4th Regiment, was ordered to move up in support. All three battalions were clear of Montauban by 2.30 a.m.¹⁵⁶

The attacking force and its supports were not as strong as their establishments suggest, for 2nd Re-

155. *Ibid.* Signals: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 541 dd 4.35 a.m. 15 July 1916; Centre to Naples (27th Brigade) repeated Venice, 15 July 1916 G 543 — 5 a.m., G 545 — 7.15 a.m. Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) and Walter (3rd Regiment) BM 140 dd 7.40 a.m. 15 July 1916; Centre to Venice dd 15 July 1916, G 565 — 1.15 p.m.; G 569 — 4.10 p.m. Naples to Venice BM 54 dd 4.25 p.m. 15 July 1916. Miles *Volume 2, op cit*, p 91; Ewing, *op cit*, pp 123–124.

156. *Ibid.* 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 527 dd 1.15 a.m. 15 July 1916; Venice to Centre (9th Division) BM 128 dd 4.15 a.m. 15 July 1916. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; Thackeray's Report, *op cit*.



Survivors of the Black Watch after the operations in Longueval.

giment now numbered only 26 officers and 669 men and 4th Regiment had suffered nearly 200 casualties in Bernafay Wood. At 2.40 a.m. a further order was received from Divisional Headquarters to place two companies at the disposal of 26th Brigade for operations against Waterlot Farm, and Lukin therefore had to remove half of 4th Regiment from possible operations in Delville Wood.¹⁵⁷ By now 2nd and 3rd Regiments were moving up towards Longueval and on arrival took shelter in the old German trenches at the south-west corner of the village while Tanner and Thackeray went forward to ascertain the local situation.

As has been mentioned, Delville Wood was similar to most of the woods of this area, the undergrowth being cut by a number of grassy rides. The chief of these, running roughly from east to west, divided the wood into two, and was known to 9th Division as 'Princes Street'. At right angles to this ride ran secondary rides, also named by headquarters: to the north, 'Strand Street', 'Regent Street' and 'Bond Street', and to the south: 'Buchanan Street', 'Campbell Street' and 'King Street'. About 200 yards north of Princes Street, and parallel to it, ran 'Rotten Row'. Tanner and Thackeray now learned from the commanders of the Argylls and the Camerons that the previous night's attack on the north of Longueval had failed but that the south-western corner of Delville Wood itself was still held by the 1st Regiment and the 5th Camerons, their positions bordering Princes Street and Buchanan Street.

The position in the remainder of the wood was still obscure but Tanner and Thackeray decided to enter the wood through its south-western corner, first using 3rd Regiment to clear that part south of the ride called Princes Street, and then launching 2nd Regiment northwards from Princes Street to complete the capture of the wood. A guide provided by 5th Camerons brought 3rd Regiment up through the morning mist to his unit's small shelter trench along Buchanan Street by 5.30 a.m. and the battalion prepared to advance. Tanner was in touch with South African Brigade Headquarters by telephone and had been told that if necessary he could call upon artillery support at any time.¹⁵⁸

At about 6 a.m. the 3rd Regiment pushed into Delville Wood with one company of 2nd Regiment protecting its southern flank. Although it had been shelled over the past few days, Delville was as yet by no means as battered as Bernafay and Trônes Woods had been. Despite the fallen trees a thick canopy of leaves still remained, making it impossible for the infantry to see far ahead. Most of the German garrison of the wood seemed to

have withdrawn in the face of the British artillery fire, however, although trees fitted with sniping positions were found and a few men were wounded by small-arms fire amidst the thick undergrowth. An hour after entering Delville Wood the 3rd Regiment was firmly in possession of the southern half, with 'D' Company on Princes Street, 'C' holding South Street and 'A' and 'B' Companies extended along the southern part of the eastern perimeter. Consolidation began immediately, for already German shells had begun to land, causing more casualties than the actual taking of the position. Further problems were anticipated from the German trenches on the outskirts of the wood. One of these ran from the south-east corner of the wood towards Ginchy and was seen to be occupied. 3rd Regiment placed a machine-gun to cover the head of this trench and for the time being there was no exchange of fire with the Germans there.¹⁵⁹

The three remaining companies of the 2nd Regiment had moved in to the wood close on the heels of 3rd Regiment, but the British artillery was now bombarding the northern part of Longueval in preparation for 12th Royal Scots' attack and Tanner wanted to wait for the shelling to stop before moving his men northward. Furse was delighted with the relatively quick progress of the South Africans, and at 9.40 a.m. he urged Lukin to send Tanner into the northern half of the wood without delay. Only trench mortars would be used against strongpoints in the village, to allow the South Africans to advance in safety.

157. Operational papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*, Carneltes. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. The 2nd Regiment recorded a total strength of 38 officers and 1 093 other ranks on 5 July 1916. In the actions in Bernafay Wood the battalion lost 7 officers and 198 men, of whom 3 officers and 23 other ranks were slightly wounded and returned to duty. Of the remaining strength more than 200 were either on detached duties or with the transport lines at Grovetown camp. The 4th Regiment had also suffered heavily in Bernafay and Trônes Woods having lost 4 officers and 42 men killed and 1 officer and 141 men wounded, this unit therefore entered the fighting line on 14 July with 24 officers and 672 men. The 1st and 3rd Regiments had seen less action before 14 July and went into battle with 31 officers and 748 men and 29 officers and 847 men respectively.

158. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. War Diary, 3rd Regiment, *op cit*. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No V, *op cit*, pp 61–62. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signals: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 15 July 1916; G 538 – 3.45 a.m.; G 539 – 4.05 a.m.; G 554 – 6 a.m. Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) and Walter (3rd Regiment) BM 129 dd 4.35 a.m. 15 July 1916. Venice to Centre (9th Division) BM 130 dd 6 a.m. 15 July 1916.

159. Solomon, *op cit*, pp 61–62. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. War Diary: 3rd Regiment. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood: Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 141 dd 8 a.m. 15 July 1916.



British troops digging a communication trench in Delville Wood, September 1916.

As additional reinforcements the 1st Regiment now reverted to Lukin's command, so that the Brigade was reunited except for the two companies of 4th Regiment at Waterlot Farm. As it happened Furse's injunction was unnecessary for Tanner had already pushed a company along the north-eastern edge of the wood on the line of Strand Street. The decision to do this had not been easy to take, for Tanner knew that the Germans were firmly established in the north-western part of the wood adjoining Longueval, and they had excellent communications to the rear along the Flers road. It was obvious that the enemy would resist fiercely in this quarter. Scouting was also out of the question, on account of the thick undergrowth and the importance of achieving surprise. By 9 a.m. Strand Street had been occupied, however, and Tanner was sending the remainder of his force to occupy the northern perimeter of the wood.¹⁶⁰

Despite the weakness of the German opposition in the major part of the wood the task now facing 2nd Regiment was a difficult one. Along Strand Street itself great difficulty was found in providing cover, for Tanner could afford only 100 men to guard this very vulnerable flank, within very close range of the enemy. The remainder of the three companies had to be spread around a long perimeter, so that roughly 400 men were required to hold about 1 300 yards of front. Fortunately all the companies were well supplied with shovels

and within a short space of time the men had provided themselves with individual cover, these holes later being connected to form a rough trench along the face of the wood. Casualties mounted steadily, however, for many Germans were entrenched a little way to the north of the wood and brought small arms fire to bear on the South Africans as they dug in.¹⁶¹

In the southern half of the wood the 3rd Regiment was in somewhat better shape. There too the vital work of entrenching and establishing strongpoints was quickly undertaken, and an aggressive policy was adopted towards the enemy entrenched just beyond the wood. As the 3rd Regiment consolidated along the eastern perimeter of the wood they came under heavy fire from an unmapped German trench about 150 yards away. Captain L.W. Tomlinson, the commander of 'D' Company,

160. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals: Venice (South african Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) dd 15 July 1916; BM 141 – 8 a.m.; BM 144 – 9.35 a.m.; 9th Division to Venice G 551 dd 9.40 a.m. 15 July 1916. SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 158 Honours & Awards Lieutenant Colonel Tanner's Report to Brigadier General Lukin dd 4th General Hospital Denmark Hill 23 August 1916. Tanner's report times the 3rd Regiment's initial entry to Delville Wood at 7 a.m. and says that this first phase of the operation was completed at about 8 a.m. There is no indication in the signals to decide on this minor discrepancy in times with the other reports and diaries.

161. Tanner's Report, *op cit.*

decided to deal with this nuisance and led a raiding party in a rush against the enemy position. Some 32 Germans were killed, two officers and 70 men were taken prisoner, and a machine-gun was captured. It appears, however, that the raiders were brought under heavy fire on their return and of the prisoners only two officers and 35 men were brought in safely. At about the same time Captain Medlicott the commander of 'B' Company took a raiding party into the German trench to the south-east of the wood and captured one officer and 100 men.¹⁶²

Although the South Africans had not been able to seize the north-west corner of the wood, Furse was beginning to hope that their success in Delville Wood could be exploited to save lives among the Scots in Longueval. If Tanner could somehow seal off the village at its northern end Furse was convinced there was a good chance that the German garrison of Longueval would surrender.¹⁶³ Lukin's main worry, however, was that casualties among the garrison of the wood were rising as the German shelling increased. He had intended to thin out the garrison of the wood itself once the position had been taken, trusting mainly to the fire-power of machine-gun positions, supported by small detachments of infantry, around the perimeter to hold the ground won. Eight machine-guns were to be positioned along the northern boundary between the Flers road and Princes Street to oppose the anticipated attack from Flers another two machine-guns between Princes Street and the Ginchy road would command a distance of about 1 000 yards to their front as far as Ginchy and Guillemont. The proper siting of these emplacements required time, but the German were now beginning to react to the South African occupation of the wood.¹⁶⁴

In the afternoon the II/107th Reserve Battalion of 24th Reserve Division was ordered to attack from the south-east, but only managed to get to within 80 yards of the wood before the South African fire and British artillery forced the assaulting troops to dig in. A little later the III/107th Reserve Battalion attempted a rush from the Flers – Ginchy road, an effort which suffered a similar fate. If these two attacks were any indication it would prove expensive to dislodge the new garrison of Delville Wood, for these two German battalions had just lost 28 officers and about 500 men.¹⁶⁵ More serious in view of the irregularity of the perimeter there, and the distribution of the South African troops, was the threat to the northern perimeter, and at 2.40 p.m. Tanner reported that he was under attack on this side. Once again the German attack, by I/72nd Regiment of 8th Division, was halted before it could gain the South

African lines, and once again the casualties were heavy, particularly among the German officers. Despite this successful defence of the northern perimeter Tanner had good reason for concern, however, for the enemy was beginning to work around his vulnerable left flank from the strong-point in northern Longueval. Communications between his headquarters, at the junction of Buchanan Street and Princes Street, and Brigade Headquarters had broken down at about mid-day: any telegraphic or telephonic exchanges with Lukin therefore had to pass through 27th Brigade Headquarters first, otherwise runners would be used, with all the attendant risks and delays. The already meagre garrison had suffered heavily from shell-fire, and in addition was running short of ammunition.¹⁶⁶ 27th Brigade immediately provided what help it could in the way of ammunition and Lukin made arrangements to send up more that night. To reinforce the north-eastern flank Tanner withdrew a platoon from 'C' Company of the 2nd Regiment, on the south side of the wood, and Lukin despatched a company of the 1st Regiment to help along Strand Street. For the time being it seemed as if Dawson's battalion, having suffered heavily in the fighting for Longueval, would be used as a reserve for the garrison in Delville Wood. In fact 1st Regiment was scattered right across the village, where the confused fighting had led to a great deal of mixing of regiments and brigades. This became even more involved later in the day when two battalions from 35th Division were put at 27th

162. War Diary: 3rd Regiment, *op cit.* Thackeray's Report, *op cit.* SADF Archives: World War I Group (WWI) Box 158, Honours & Awards. Recommendation of Captain L.W. Tomlinson for the award of the Distinguished Service Order. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.*: Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) dd 15 July 1916; BM 148 – 11.20 a.m.; BM 149 – 11.25 a.m. Operational Papers, Delville Wood. Signals: Walter (3rd Regiment) to Venice dd 15 July 1916 timed 11.30 a.m., 12 noon.

163. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 15 July 1916 G 566 – 10.50 a.m.; G 566 – 1.15 p.m.

164. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Miles, *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 62–64.

165. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit.*, p 92.

166. *Ibid.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 15 July 1916: G 568 – 3.43 p.m.; G 569 – 4.10 p.m.; Venice to Centre dd 15 July 1916: BM 151 – 12.20 p.m.; BM 161 – 4.25 p.m.; Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) BM 159 dd 3.35 p.m. 15 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals: 9th Division to 1st South African Brigade G 572 dd 6.45 p.m. 15 July 1916; Edward to Rome (27th Brigade) dd 2.40 p.m. 15 July 1916; Message: Edward to Venice dd 2.45 p.m. 15 July 1916.

Brigade's disposal to replace Dawson's regiment in Longueval.¹⁶⁷

The constant shelling by the German artillery and the sniping from the enemy trenches just outside the wood had caused casualties to mount steadily. The 3rd Regiment estimated its losses for the day at 140, including one company commander killed and one wounded. Tanner was unable to give any estimate of his casualties because of the size of the area over which his command was scattered, but his losses too were known to be high. Lukin spoke again with Tanner by telephone that evening and ordered the 1st Regiment to send in an additional company to reinforce 2nd Regiment in the north, while 4th Regiment sent a company to Thackeray's aid. Arrangements were also made to send up tools that night to improve the South African defences, and 9th Seaforths provided a party to erect wire along the northern face of the wood.¹⁶⁸

That night Furse issued fresh directions to the South Africans: that scouts and patrols should be energetically employed to worry enemy working parties in the neighbouring positions and that those Germans still in the north-west of the wood should be prevented from escaping during the night. Under perfect conditions these would, no doubt, have been wise precautions, but these

orders show what little awareness 9th Division headquarters had of the South Africans' situation. Under the circumstances it is likely that Tanner and Thakeray would have been only too glad to see the German garrison in the north-west quarter of the wood disappear during the night. As it was, by the time the South Africans received these orders, von Arnim's troops were preparing for another attack at about midnight, and the German artillery had intensified its barrage once more.¹⁶⁹

167. Tanner's Report, *op cit.* Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 160 dd 4.15 p.m. 15 July 1916. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, p 92.

168. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 62–64; Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.*; Thackeray's Report, *op cit.*; Tanner's Report, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.*; Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to all units BM 163 dd 5.40 p.m. 15 July 1916; Venice to Walter (3rd Regiment) and Edward (2nd Regiment) BM 172 dd 9.26 p.m. 15 July 1916; Venice to Walter BM 174 dd 9.50 p.m. 15 July 1916; Rome (26th Brigade) to Venice 26/1422 dd 7.20 p.m. 15 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Brigade Major's Notebook 14/18 July 1916 Message: Mitchell-Baker to Officer Commanding 1st Regiment BM 50 dd 8.20 p.m. 15 July 1916; Mitchell-Baker to Officers Commanding battalions BM 47 dd 8.10 p.m. 15 July 1916.

169. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 93–4. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.*; Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 15 July 1916. G 587 – 10.20 p.m.; G 589 dd 11.35 p.m.



British transport passing through Delville Wood, 1916.

Waterlot Farm — 15—16 July

While the 27th and South African Brigades had been preparing their attempts against Longueval and Delville Wood 26th Brigade had received orders to complete the capture of Waterlot Farm before dawn on the 15th in order to establish contact with the troops of 18th Division then stationed in the north of Trônes Wood.¹⁷⁰ As we have seen, 'B' and 'C' Companies of the South African 4th Regiment were placed at 26th Brigade's disposal for this task, and Major Hunt, commanding this detachment, reported immediately to the commander of 5th Camerons at Longueval and received orders for the South Africans to occupy the orchards north-west of Waterlot Farm and to remain there as a reserve garrison. This move cost the 4th Regiment some 25 casualties from enemy shell fire. At about 10 a.m. the Camerons' commander ordered Hunt to bring his men up to the communication trench leading towards the farm and explained that he intended to attack the enemy position at about 11 a.m. The South Africans were to provide a party to follow up and consolidate once the farm had been taken. Major Hunt detached one platoon from each of his two companies and placed them under the command of Captain Ross to carry out this instruction. Another platoon from each company was placed under Captain Marshall and sent forward to occupy the trench leading up to the farm.

Before mid-day the Camerons had successfully driven off the farm's remaining defenders and Ross and Marshall began to move their supporting troops forward, under heavy enemy shell fire and persistent sniping from concealed posts south of the farm and trenches to the east. Ross's attempts to establish strongpoints to the east of the farm were foiled by fire from the enemy entrenchments, so that he was forced merely to post his men to prevent any counter-attack from the direction of Ginchy or Guillemont. All this time the South Africans were under fire, the machine-gunners suffering particularly severely. In the course of the afternoon Marshall's party was sent forward to reinforce Ross, and another South African platoon moved into the trenches west of the farm. In addition to the German shelling a British bombardment fell short on to the South African and Scots' positions and in the early afternoon some 20 or 30 casualties were sustained.

At about 6 p.m. an enemy battalion was seen approaching from Guillemont and the South Africans prepared for action, but British artillery dispersed the attack before it could be launched. Roughly an hour later the officer commanding the Camerons was ordered to pull back his covering

parties to the trenches west of the farm, and early next morning the two South African companies were relieved and returned to the sunken road south of Longueval, where they reverted to the command of the South African Brigade.¹⁷¹

Throughout the next day the troops of 26th Brigade had to be satisfied with consolidating the positions they had taken up just west of Waterlot Farm. German snipers had re-entered the ruins of the sugar refinery and remained there despite the shelling of their own guns. Attempts by the Camerons to drive the enemy out with bombers and snipers met with no success.¹⁷²

Delville Wood — 16—20 July

By the night of 15/16 July most of the South African Brigade was spread around the perimeter of Delville wood. South Street to the west of Campbell Street was held by three platoons of 2nd Regiment, and in the adjoining position up to the south-east corner of the wood was 'C' Company of 3rd Regiment with another company, from 4th Regiment, in support. The corner of the wood opposite Haymarket was held by 'A' and 'B' Companies from the 3rd Regiment, and the perimeter from Rotten Row to Bond Street by 'D' Company, supported by another company from 4th Regiment. From Bond Street to Strand the line was held by one and a half companies of 2nd Regiment, backed up by a company of the 1st which had been sent up during the night. Strand Street itself was occupied by a company of 2nd Regiment and a half company took the line from the south end of Strand Street westwards along Princes Street towards Longueval. Around the perimeter to support the thin line of rifle pits were some ten Vickers machine-guns, mostly on the vulnerable northern and eastern faces of the wood. Another three machine-guns were held in reserve inside the wood itself and a strongpoint had been constructed by Hearn's engineers about 150 yards north-east of the junction of Buchanan Street and Princes Street. Tanner's headquarters were situated at the latter junction and his staff had dug a rough entrenchment from there along Princes Street to the west. Tanner was well aware of the importance of this position and on the 16th he asked the engineers to construct a proper trench

170. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Rome (26th Brigade) repeated Venice (South African Brigade) G 552 dd 12.15 a.m. 15 July 1916.

171. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Centre (9th Division) to Rome (26th Brigade) and Venice (South African Brigade) G 574 dd 7.10 p.m. 15 July 1916. Miles, *Volume 2*, *op cit*, p 91; Ewing, *op cit*, p 124.

172. Ewing, *op cit*, p 127.

along that line in order to enable his men to protect their flank and rear from the Germans still holding on in the wood. This trench, completed the Buchanan Street support line and opened up a covered communication to Longueval. This organisation of a defensible area around the South Africans' headquarters in the wood itself was to prove invaluable later in the battle.

In reserve just outside the wood were two more companies of Dawson's 1st Regiment, in trenches just east of the market place. Further to the rear, in Sloane Street, was this Regiment's remaining company and to their south along the sunken road which led back to Montauban, the two companies of 4th Regiment which had returned from Waterlot Farm.¹⁷³

It will be remembered that the German artillery had begun an intensified barrage of Delville wood at about 9 p.m. on the 15th, in preparation for renewed counter-attacks on the South African positions. That the German command was not guiltless of errors of tactical judgement is evident from the planning of these attacks, for it was 6 p.m. when von Arnim ordered his 8th and 12th Reserve Divisions to retake the wood 'at all costs' that same night. This allowed insufficient time for the issuing of orders and the proper arrangement of artillery support, but postponement of the operation was refused. After a three hour bombardment I/153rd,

II/153rd and III/107th Reserve Regiments mounted a concentric attack on the northern and eastern faces of Delville Wood, beginning about midnight.

The effects of such hasty planning of an attack were soon apparent and most of the German infantry were halted by the defenders' fire before they got to within 50 yards of the trees. So ineffectual was most of the enemy effort that Tanner thought it was probably just an attempt to gauge the strength of the defences. Nevertheless, one party of Germans did reach the wood, and broke through the South African line along the vulnerable flank at Strand Street, causing severe loss to the garrison there. A short while later the survivors of this garrison managed to drive their attackers into the western side of the wood, and the arrival of Major Burges and his company from 1st Regiment allowed the South Africans to re-occupy Strand Street.¹⁷⁴

The fortunes of the Fourth Army on the 15th had indeed been very mixed. While XIII Corps had managed to hold on to its gains in Longueval

173. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; Tanner's Report, *op cit*. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) dd 16 July 1916, BM 185 — 10 a.m.; BM 186 — 10.30 a.m.

174. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 93. Tanner's Report, *op cit*.



Delville Wood, September 1916.

and Delville Wood it had continued to suffer heavy casualties and there was little indication of a solution to the problem of completing the capture of the whole position. To the left of XIII Corps Horne's XV Corps had had an unsuccessful day at High Wood with a series of ill-co-ordinated operations. Further to the left the news was a little better, however, for III Corps made gains near Pozières, albeit at some cost, and X Corps was in the process of completing the capture of Ovillers at last. Despite the disappointments of the day, of course, plans continued to be made at Fourth Army Headquarters and just before midnight on the 15/16 July Rawlinson issued his instructions for the next phase of the battle. Horne's XV Corps was ordered to complete the capture of High Wood on the 16th and a simultaneous attack by all three corps was projected for the 17th. On that day XV Corps would attack the vital switch line between Martinpuich and High Wood, III Corps would deal with the enemy defences to the west around Pozières and XIII Corps presumably having cleared up the German resistance in Longueval and Delville Wood, would turn its attention to Guillemont and Ginchy. On the flanks of the attack Gough's Reserve Army and the French 6th Army would mount covering operations; again the cavalry would stand by to exploit the breakthrough.¹⁷⁵

A conference was held at Querrieu at 9.30 a.m. on the 16th at which Rawlinson discussed further with the commanders of III and XV Corps the plans for the continuation of the offensive. These plans were now modified, to the extent that High Wood was included among the objectives of the main operation, and that this was now postponed for 24 hours to 18 July. That same morning a memorandum arrived at Fourth Army Headquarters from General Haig, outlining the proposed course of the battle in general terms. It was intended that Fourth Army should first secure the line Ginchy — Flers — le Sars, then the Reserve Army would attack northwards from the Ancre valley to take the Germans, facing Allenby's Third Army, in the flank. Haig was still hoping for his breakthrough, even if on a more limited scale than he had thought possible before the losses of 1 July.¹⁷⁶

On the night of 15/16 July Major-General Furse issued orders for a renewed effort to complete the capture of 9th Division's objectives of the 14th. Although Furse was still convinced that the proper solution to the impasse lay with the blocking of the northern end of the village the plans, which Lukin received at 2.35 a.m. on the 16th hinged chiefly on another northward drive by the infantry on Clarges and Princes Streets. Lukin and Scrase-Dickens of 27th Brigade were told to co-operate

to put the general plan into effect; the attack, timed for 10 a.m. would be preceded by a mortar bombardment only, as the British and German positions were too close. The vanguard of the attacking troops immediately came under very heavy fire from at least three enemy machine-guns in the houses and orchards ahead and suffered such heavy casualties that no further progress was possible. To the west of North Street 11th Royal Scots were also held up, by a strongly-wired stone redoubt.¹⁷⁷

It was during this abortive attack that Private W.F. Faulds performed the first of two acts which won him the first South African Victoria Cross of the war. Lieutenant A.W. Craig, leading the bombing party, fell severely wounded half way between the South African and German trenches. Although German small-arms and machine-gun fire were sweeping the ground where Craig lay Private Faulds and two companions, Privates G.F. Baker and A. Estment, crossed the parapet, picked up their wounded officer and brought him back to their trench, Private Baker receiving two severe wounds in the process.¹⁷⁸

In Delville Wood the thinning ranks of the defenders continued the work of consolidation as best they could. Numerous casualties were now being caused by German snipers who had remained concealed in the rear of the South African positions since the previous morning, and ration and ammunition parties found their work increasingly dangerous. The platoons holding the wood's perimeter were by now perilously below strength: 'A' Company of 3rd Regiment reported that afternoon that its four platoons together totalled only about 100 men, other companies were in a similar state, and casualties had been particularly high among the officers. It was now becoming difficult to pass orders along the line because of the gaps in the ranks of the defenders.¹⁷⁹

175. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 94–101.

176. *Ibid*, pp 99–100, *Volume 2 Appendices*, pp 30–31.

177. Buchan: *op cit*, pp 65–67, Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 93, Ewing; *op cit*, pp 127–128. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. War Diary 1st Regiment, *op cit*.

178. War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit*. Honours and Awards, *op cit*. Recommendations for Privates W.F. Faulds, G.F. Baker and A. Estment.

179. Tanner's Report, *op cit*. Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Messages: Lieutenant Elliot to Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray dd 1 p.m. and 3.05 p.m. 16 July 1916; Lieutenant Thomas, 'A' Company to Thackeray dd 2 p.m. 16 July 1916. War Diaries 2nd and 3rd Regiments, *op cit*. Lawson: *op cit*, pp 5–7; Solomon, *op cit*, pp 63–66.

The mental and physical exhaustion of the troops in Delville Wood had now reached an advanced stage. Survivors were to write later of the harrowing business of trying to evacuate the many wounded, or of keeping them under whatever cover was available; of the infantry in their meagre trenches trying to remain alert in case the enemy attacked, waiting under the constant battering of German shells. Morale was further threatened by the impossibility of sleep, and the fact that even when food and drink could be brought to the men in the front lines, it was not warm. At 1 p.m. on the 16th Lieutenant Elliot, now commander of 3rd Regiment's 'C' Company on South Street, wrote to Thackeray:

'The men under my command are rapidly becoming non-efficient through want of sleep, and can not last out for many hours longer.'

When Lukin visited Dawson in Princes Street that afternoon he received the same information, and was asked if there was any prospect of a relief in the near future. Lukin's reply was a disappointment to the exhausted troops, for Furse had already told him that there was no likelihood of 9th Division being relieved for a day or two yet. Nevertheless Lukin was convinced that Dawson and his other battalion commanders were right in their observations of the dangerously fatigued state of their troops and on his return to Montauban he contacted Furse to draw attention to this state of affairs, even though he knew nothing could yet be done about it.¹⁸⁰

At 4.45 p.m. Rawlinson's staff issued the orders for the resumption of the offensive on the 18th; the artillery was directed to begin immediately with the registration of enemy strongpoints and communications. Despite the postponement of the offensive to the 18th further delay was necessary almost immediately, for the deteriorating weather made observed artillery fire almost impossible, the joint plans needed co-ordinating with the French and, probably most important, the position in Longueval and Delville Wood was worsening.¹⁸¹

In Longueval the British trench mortars kept up their bombardment of the German positions throughout the rest of the day, but still failed to silence the German machine-guns. Desultory fighting continued but when Lukin came up to Dawson's position in the afternoon to view the situation for himself he realised that there was no hope of evicting the enemy until a thorough artillery preparation had been made. He immediately communicated his opinion to the staff of 9th Division and by 6 p.m. Furse had decided to make a fresh approach on the 17th. From 4 a.m. that morning

the heavy artillery would fire an observed programme prior to the infantry assault.¹⁸²

Rawlinson, however, was insistent that Longueval should be taken by dawn on the 17th and his haste made certain drastic re-organisations necessary in Furse's plans. At 10.30 p.m. Lukin received the orders for the renewed attack. The artillery bombardment was to last from 12.30 a.m. to 2 a.m. when the infantry would assault the enemy position. The principal attack would be carried out by 27th Brigade with 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers and two companies of 11th Royal Scots. The survivors of Dawson's two companies along Princes Street would cover the right of the advance, while the South Africans along the Strand would push westwards to narrow the front of the attack. There were few differences between this plan and the one of the previous night except in the nature of the artillery preparation, and Rawlinson's haste meant that this would be less effective than Furse and Lukin intended, for observation would be impossible before the infantry attacked.¹⁸³

By 12.30 a.m. most of the infantry in the forward zone had been pulled back, south of Princes Street and east of Strand Street. Yet parties of 1st Regiment in the trenches just north of Princes Street received no notice of the bombardment and only withdrew once it started, fortunately suffering no casualties. At 2 a.m. the infantry began their attack, and once again this failed to dislodge the enemy. Major Burges and his two companies from 1st Regiment advancing from the Strand encountered particularly strong resistance and were forced to fall back to its trenches after suffering heavy losses.¹⁸⁴

This ended the efforts of 27th Brigade to take Longueval; the repeated attacks had gradually worn down its battalions and Congreve now re-

180. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 195 dd 5.15 p.m. 16 July 1916.

181. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, p 100.

182. War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit.* Ewing, *op cit.*, pp 127–128.

183. War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit.* Ewing, *op cit.*, pp 127–129; Miles, *Volume 2, op cit.*, p 93. Operational papers, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals: Naples (27th Brigade) to Rome (26th Brigade) and Venice (South African Brigade) BM 125 dd 1.50 a.m. 17 July 1916. Venice to Arthur (1st Regiment) BM 203 dd 10.40 p.m. 16 July 1916; BM 206 dd 1.55 a.m. 17 July 1916; BM 207 dd 3.15 a.m. 17 July 1916. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.*

184. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit.* Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 214 dd 8.07 a.m. 17 July 1916.



Delville Wood from the Longueval road.

placed it with troops from the relatively fresh 3rd Division. Dawson's command along Princes Street was also to be replaced; his 'A' Company was now reduced to 17 men and 'B' Company to 46, two detachments of 4th Regiment were still holding on just to the north and these were approximately 70 strong. At 10.30 a.m. Dawson was ordered to return with the survivors to the southern boundary of Longueval.¹⁸⁵

While the British had been battling to get forward in Longueval on the night of 16/17 July the Germans had renewed their attempt to evict the South Africans from Delville Wood. Already the previous evening messages had been sent to Lukin warning of German reinforcements detraining only seven miles away, and the intensification of the enemy barrage later in the evening gave warning of another attempted assault. By 11 p.m., despite broken communications, Lukin was able to reassure 9th Division that 2nd and 3rd Regiments had successfully repulsed the counter-attack, but casualties had once again been high, particularly from the preceding bombardment.¹⁸⁶

On the morning of the 17th Lukin visited Delville Wood to discuss the situation with Thackeray and Tanner. He was satisfied that the garrison had erected such defences as the circumstances had allowed but was once again impressed by the strain and fatigue visible on the faces of the defenders.

Yet Furse was waiting to speak to Lukin by telephone on his return to Montauban and told him that Congreve wished to impress upon the South African commander the grave responsibility of holding Delville Wood at all costs. It seems likely that Lukin's reports of his men's exhausted state had caused some anxiety higher up in the command structure, even though, as stated above, Fourth Army's tactical notes, issued in March, had emphasised the importance of the timely relief of front line troops. In any event Lukin was able to reassure Furse that he quite understood the importance of holding the position, for this had been evident in the orders he had previously received, but once more the South African commander felt constrained to inform headquarters of the condition of the troops.¹⁸⁷

185. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*: Arthur (1st Regiment) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 5.45 a.m. 17 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Signal: Venice to Arthur BM 218 dd 10.30 a.m. 17 July 1916. Ewing, *op cit*, pp 128–129.

186. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signals: Venice (South African Brigade) to Edward (2nd Regiment), Walter (3rd Regiment) John (4th Regiment) and Arthur (1st Regiment) BM 198 dd 7.05 p.m. 16 July 1916. Venice to Centre (9th Division) dd 16 July 1916: BM 199 – 7.20 p.m.; BM 200 – 7.35 p.m.; BM 205 – 11.35 p.m.; BM 211 dd 4 a.m. 17 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, Signal: Venice to Edward and Walter, BM 201 dd 9.05 p.m. 16 July 1916. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 93.

187. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*.

Some alarm was caused during the day when a patrol from the 4th Regiment, sent out by Tanner to try to clear up the position in the north-west corner of the wood, ran into a party of 30 to 40 Germans in a trench which the patrol's commander identified as being east of Strand Street. At 4.30 p.m. Tanner was informed of this disturbing situation and he concluded that the company which had held the line on the Strand must have been forced to retire during the operations earlier in the day, possibly as far as Regent Street. This was promptly reported to Divisional Headquarters, and Lukin immediately ordered Tanner to retake the lost ground. At 6.40 that evening Tanner was able to allay the fears of his commanders, for it appeared that the officer in charge of the patrol had confused the battered rides and had mistaken Strand for Regent Street; the position was therefore just as it had been since the South Africans occupied the wood.¹⁸⁸

Yet despite the fact that this particular threat proved to be non-existent the strength of the South Africans in Delville Wood was being steadily eroded. On the 17th alone 2nd Regiment suffered another 84 casualties, including Tanner wounded; command of the regiment was now given to Major Gee, while Thackeray took overall command of the garrison of the wood.¹⁸⁹ Lukin's advice to Furse about the state of Thackeray's men seems to have had some effect, for just before 3.30 p.m. on the 17th 9th Division issued instructions for 26th Brigade to relieve the South Africans north of Princes Street that night. Strangely enough Lukin's headquarters arranged with Brigadier-General Ritchie that the relief should not be carried out, however, for 76th Brigade was being brought up to attack Longueval on the night of 17/18 July. No doubt a relief at this stage would have been difficult to organise, and might have endangered the night's operations, but it could have come as little surprise to Brigade Headquarters when at about 8 p.m. orders were received for the South Africans to occupy the enemy trench which ran about 200 yards south east of the wood. The position was to be taken by dawn on the 18th. Lukin immediately contacted Thackeray, who told him that this trench was strongly held and had several machine-guns in it. Furthermore his garrison was by now so depleted that no more than 200 men could be spared for such an attack without endangering the wood. Lukin passed this information to Furse, who promptly cancelled the proposed operation, although Thackeray was told to continue to harry the enemy in his positions and to wire his own positions for defence.¹⁹⁰

Further alterations to the ground plan were made

at General Headquarters on the 17th. After talking to Haig and Congreve by telephone Rawlinson went to Foch's headquarters at Dury: here it was arranged that the British would attack Ginchy and Guillemont on the 19th and that the day afterwards the French would join in an attack against the German line from Guillemont southwards to the Somme. Foch was evidently not prepared to advance from Hardecourt across the valley against the German lines until Rawlinson had extended his right flank and taken the high ground around Guillemont. The Fourth Army was therefore committed to further preliminary operations before the combined advance could begin; in the event further changes of plan were necessary. The British artillery was hampered by the bad weather which had set in and made observation and the registration of targets impossible; essential reliefs of front line troops were also being held up. On the 18th therefore Rawlinson spoke to Foch again and rearranged the British assault against the line between Pozières and Guillemont for the 22nd. Congreve's XIII Corps and the French XX Corps would attack from Guillemont to the Somme on the 23rd.¹⁹¹

It was apparent to General Headquarters that the difficulties experienced by Fourth Army's right flank and the intended continuation of the attack on the German line there made necessary some reorganisation of frontages. At 11 a.m. on the 18th therefore, it was decided that Gough's Reserve Army would take sole responsibility for operations opposite Pozières enabling Rawlinson to shorten his front and relieve part of Congreve's battered Corps. This relief was begun immediately, but good roads were scarce behind this sector of the front and considerable difficulties attended any attempt to rearrange routes of evacuation and supply in the restricted rear areas. The situation was worsened at noon that day when the French were allotted a large area behind the front north of the Somme in preparation for the combined

188. *Ibid*: Messages and Signals Delville Wood. Signals: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 17 July 1916: G 661 — 4.48 p.m.; G 663 — 5.05 p.m.; G 664 — 5.20 p.m.; G 668 — 7.50 p.m. Venice to Centre dd 17 July 1916: BM 222 — 4.120 p.m.; BM 226 — 6.40 p.m. Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) and Rome (26th Brigade) BM 224 dd 4.50 p.m. 17 July 1916; Venice to Edward BM 223 dd 4.15 p.m. 17 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signal: Tanner to Venice dd 17 July 1916.

189. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. War Diary: 2nd Regiment, *op cit*.

190. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 7.40 p.m. 17 July 1916; Venice to Centre, BM 228, dd 8.10 p.m. 17 July 1916; Venice to Walter (3rd Regiment) and Edward (2nd Regiment) BM 238 dd 1.20 a.m. 17 July 1916; 9th Division to Venice G 656 dd 3.28 p.m. 17 July 1916; Venice to Centre BM 226 dd 7.20 p.m. 17 July 1916.

191. Miles: *Volume 2*, *op cit*, pp 100—103.



An artist's impression of the South Africans' fight for Delville Wood.

attack of the 23rd. This made it necessary to move several British headquarters and made the process of relief a far slower one than Rawlinson would have liked.¹⁹²

Meanwhile on XIII Corps' front preparations were being made for 3rd Division to complete the capture of Longueval on the night of 17/18 July. The Germans, however were preparing their own counterstroke in this area and from about 2 p.m. on 17 July had maintained a continuous shellfire on the South African positions in Delville Wood, firing largely from batteries to the east of Ginchy. The bombardment was also extended to the British support lines, and just before midnight Montauban and the roads around it were hit by barrages of gas shells which caused large numbers of casualties, particularly among the transport men and draught animals moving supplies forward. That same night a party of Germans managed to infiltrate to the north of Buchanan Street from the north-east corner of Longueval and although the assault was successfully repulsed by Thackeray's men, German snipers had obviously slipped between the South African lines and were doing great damage.¹⁹³

Fortunately the German bombardment had slackened by 3.45 a.m. on the 18th when 76th Brigade made its attack on Longueval. The plan

was for the 1st Gordon Highlanders and the 8th King's Own Scottish Borderers to advance on the village from the west, after leaving their assault trenches near the windmill. Their attack would be preceded by a British bombardment of one hour's duration, ending with five minutes intense fire. The attacking force would push right through the village until it reached the South African positions on the Strand and Thackeray was ordered to co-operate by sending out patrols from the Strand to connect with 76th Brigade's troops in the direction of the orchard to the north-west of the wood. Thackeray accordingly instructed the troops occupying the Strand and the western end of Princes Street to move forward at zero hour to gain the perimeter of the wood at its north western corner.¹⁹⁴

192. *Ibid.*

193. Thackeray's Report, *op cit.* War Diary: 3rd Regiment, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: Venice (South African Brigade) to Centre (9th Division) BM 239 dd 1.40 a.m. 18 July 1916.

194. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.* p 104; Buchan: *op cit.* p 69; Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signals Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 17 July 1916: G 651 - 1.26 p.m.; G 673 - 11.45 p.m.; dd 18 July 1916; G 675 - 12.22 a.m. Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment), Walter (3rd Regiment), John (4th Regiment), Arthur (1st Regiment) BM 220 dd 3.20 p.m. 17 July 1916; Venice to Arthur BM 235 dd 12.55 a.m. 18 July 1916.

At 3.45 a.m., according to plan, 76th Brigade began its advance through the village, successfully occupying it as far north as Duke Street. The orchards north of Longueval remained uncaptured however and the work of clearing the ruins had not been as thorough as it might have been, so that the troops of 26th and 27th Brigade sent in to help with the work of consolidation were held up by machine-gun fire from pockets of resistance amidst the rubble. In Delville Wood, the South Africans advanced into the north-west corner, meeting little or no resistance, gained touch with the Gordon Highlanders just west of the orchard and began to dig in. Shortly after this successful occupation of the perimeter the German artillery began a bombardment of Longueval and Delville Wood which completely eclipsed the past experiences of the troops there. The Gordons and the South Africans at the north-west of the wood sent an urgent message to Thackeray asking for tools to deepen their positions, and for ammunition and supporting troops. The tools and ammunition he was able to provide, along with a small party of pioneers to help improve the defences, but no reinforcements were to be had, although he passed this message as quickly as possible to Brigade Headquarters at Montauban.¹⁹⁵

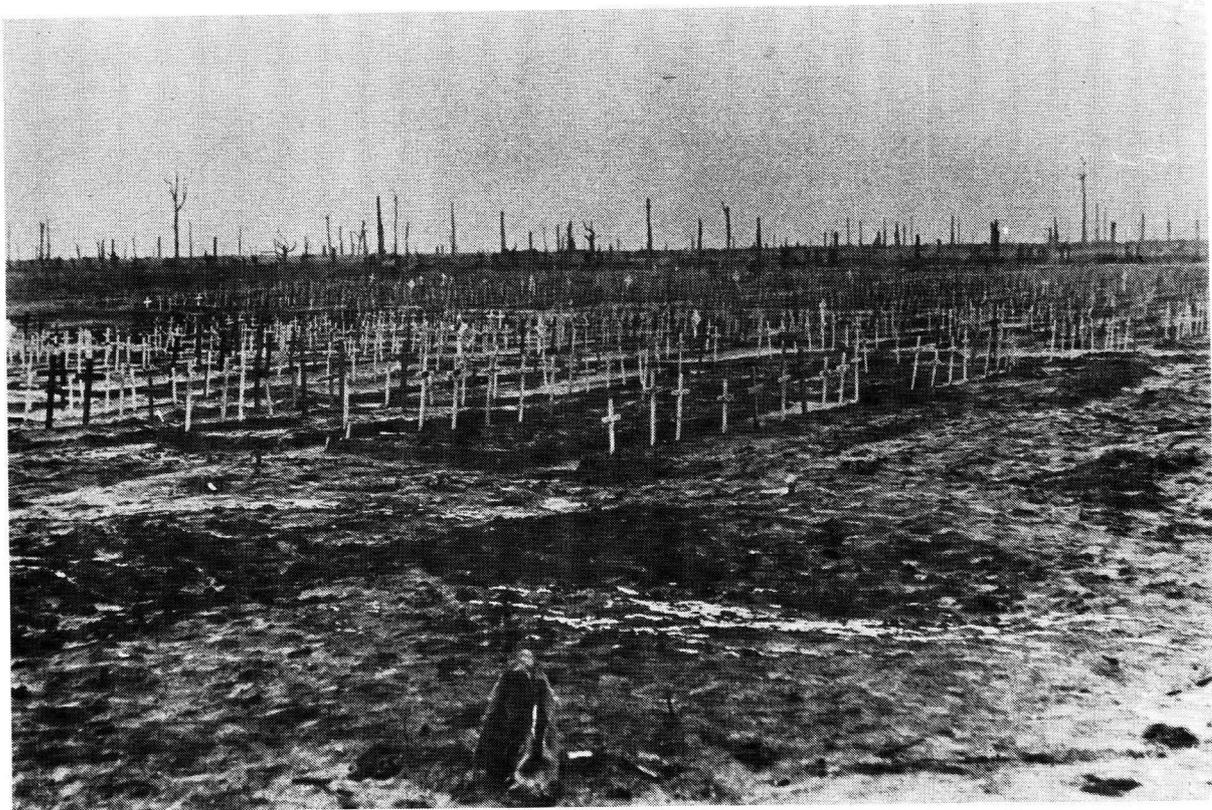
At 7.30 a.m. 76th Brigade reported seeing Germans to the north of Longueval, evidently massing for a counter-attack. Indeed, the enemy had been

making preparations for some days now for a concerted attempt to regain the old second line position south of Longueval and Delville Wood. All around the perimeter of Delville Wood, from just east of Waterlot Farm to the northern apex of the wood itself the Germans had been improving their support line, some 100 to 350 yards distant from the South African positions. Parts of this trench system had been well developed with communications and switch trenches, some of them wired. Despite the interference of the South African snipers and raiding parties the German positions around the wood had become increasingly formidable, and were well covered by numbers of machine-guns. On the 17th Thackeray's men had observed the ominous arrival of about two battalions of enemy infantry as reinforcements.¹⁹⁶

Meanwhile, as we have seen, the South Africans' position had been steadily deteriorating over the

195. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 104; Ewing, *op cit*, p 130. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Signals: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 681 dd 7.20 a.m. 18 July 1916; Venice to Edward (2nd Regiment) 8 a.m. 18 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood. Message Thackeray to Brigade Major R/a?& dd 8 a.m. 18 July 1916.

196. Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) G 683 dd 7.43 a.m. 18 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*: Message, Thackeray to Brigade Major R/284 dd 8 a.m. 18 July 1916.



The South African Cemetery at Delville Wood, 1918.

past few days. The almost constant German artillery and machine-gun fire which traversed the front of the thinly-held South African trenches made repairs difficult and improvements impossible. Communications were frequently cut and this made counter-battery work difficult, nor could trench-mortars be used in the front line without being immediately seen and eliminated. The weakness of the garrison made it essential that food, water and ammunition be brought right into the wood, instead of being dumped in Longueval; Thackeray could no longer spare men for carrying tasks nor would his exhausted troops even have been capable of such work. With his companies holding the front line reduced to a few men each, Thackeray could scarcely view the prospect of a full-scale German attack with any confidence.¹⁹⁷

By about 11 a.m. German artillery and machine-gun fire had reached such a level of intensity that the Gordons were pulled back to their original assault trenches by the mill to avoid annihilation. This withdrawal gravely compromised the South Africans on their left flank, whose ranks were also being thinned by the shells. At about 9 a.m. an officer and 50 men were sent up from the survivors of 1st and 4th Regiments at the southern end of Longueval, to help hold the north-western flank, but three hours later three of this party returned saying they had been ordered to retire, there being only 12 of the 50 left. Other small bands of survivors from the northern edge were coming back to Thackeray's headquarters with stories of a German attack which had forced its way through the line after a fierce struggle. Thackeray reorganised these mixed groups of soldiers in his support trench along Buchanan Street, sending a message to Lukin that he could only hope to organise some sort of resistance there. At about 1.30 p.m. he warned Lukin that if Delville Wood were to be held at all fresh troops would be required, and that if his own resistance were to last he would need ammunition and water.¹⁹⁸

At just after 2.30 p.m. Brigade Headquarters reacted to the situation and ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson to collect whatever troops he could to try to regain the northern edge of the wood. These instructions appear to have been amended in view of Brigade's ignorance of the details of the situation in the wood itself, and Dawson, having eventually collected about 150 men from the 1st and 4th Regiments, took them up to a trench in the south-eastern part of Longueval while he sent a patrol forward to locate Thackeray. By now numbers of stragglers from the wood and village were returning to Montauban, and Lukin made arrangements for battle stops to be set up south of Longueval to reorganise these

leaderless and exhausted men. Lieutenant Phillips was also instructed to take forward all the personnel of the trench mortar battery, equipped as infantrymen, to act as a reserve.¹⁹⁹

By now Thackeray had organised a rough defence of the south west corner of the wood, based along Buchanan Street. On the eastern edge of the wood 3rd Regiment had successfully resisted the rush of the German infantry to their front, but were now effectively cut off by the German penetration from the north. All that Thackeray knew of their plight was what he could deduce from the confused sounds of small arms fire.

In the evening Dawson sent Lieutenant Phillips and 100 men forward to reinforce Thackeray, who had now lost touch with the village along Princes Street because of a withdrawal of the troops to his left. Indeed, Longueval had almost been lost altogether in the confusion of the late afternoon and the 9th Division had only managed to hold on because of the spirited intervention of troops from the 26th and 27th Brigades, who had reached the line of Clarges Street once more.²⁰⁰

Furse continued, naturally, to repeat that Delville Wood must be held at all costs, but added that 26th Brigade would definitely relieve Thackeray that night. Preparations were indeed being made for the attempted recapture of the wood, but the continued bombardment south of Longueval and the approaching darkness made this impossible. By 10.45 p.m. the South African Brigade Headquarters considered it unlikely that any relief would take place that night, although it was found possible to withdraw the small groups from 1st and 4th Regiment in the south-east of Longueval. That same night Thackeray's position was attacked three times, from north, north-east and west. Each time the ever-diminishing numbers of South Afri-

197. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*: Message, Thackeray to Brigade Major R/284 dd 8 a.m. 18 July 1916.

198. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Messages: Thackeray to Brigade Major dd 18 July 1916 — 11.30 a.m.; 12.50 p.m.; 1.20 p.m. Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*.

199. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*; War Diary, 1st Regiment, *op cit*. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, Brigade Major's notebook dd 14/18 July 1916. Brigade-Major to Officer Commanding 1st Regiment dd 2.35 p.m. 18 July 1916; Brigade-Major to 2nd Lieutenant King dd 3.50 p.m. 18 July 1916; Brigade-Major to Officer Commanding, Light Trench Mortar Battery dd 4.50 p.m. 18 July 1916. Brigade-Major to Lieutenant Phillips dd 4.55 p.m. 18 July 1916.

200. Miles, *Volume 2*, *op cit*, p 105. Ewing, *op cit*, p 134. 'The Other Side of the Hill' No V, *op cit*, p 66. Solomon, *op cit*, pp 69–70. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. War Diary: 1st Regiment, *op cit*. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*. Message: Thackeray to Brigade Major dd 9 p.m. 18 July 1916.



Major-General Sir Henry Timson Lukin, presenting medals to members of the 1st South African Brigade at the first Delville Wood memorial service, 17 February 1918.

cans, and the few Scots who had joined them, repulsed the attackers with heavy loss, inspired in their almost hopeless defence by the actions of Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray who led his men by example, fighting with rifle and grenade on the paradocs of the trench.²⁰¹

The casualties inflicted on the Germans on the 19th, followed by Thackeray's successful defence of Buchanan Street that night were achievements which may well have saved the entire flank of the British front. At noon next day when Haig visited Fourth Army Headquarters he was most concerned about the situation in Longueval and Delville Wood, for he realised that a successful German counter-attack here would place in jeopardy the masses of British artillery in Caterpillar Wood. He insisted that efforts now be made to broaden the salient by taking High Wood and Guillemont. At 3.30 p.m. Rawlinson issued the necessary orders for XV Corps to seize High Wood on the 20th and Congreve's XIII Corps to take Longueval and Delville Wood the same day.²⁰²

In fact 53rd Brigade had already been lent to 9th Division to halt the enemy in Longueval and Delville Wood, and troops from this formation were rushed into Longueval just after 7 a.m. on the

morning of the 19th. The 8th Norfolks, who made the attack, had been rushed forward without food and with no time to make any reconnaissance of the ground; despite their hurry they were still too late to take advantage of the British barrage. Once again German snipers, avoiding the first lines of infantry, inflicted heavy casualties on the supporting troops and created great confusion. Nevertheless, Thackeray's garrison was able to punish the retreating Germans heavily and by about midday the Norfolks had gained the line of Princes Street once more. This, however, was too late for the isolated survivors of 3rd Regiment along the eastern and southern faces of the wood, for in the early morning, with their ammunition exhausted, they had been overrun and captured by the German infantry.²⁰³

201. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: 9th Division to Venice (South African Brigade) G 708 dd 5.59 p.m. 18 July 1916. Venice to Centre (9th Division) BM 251 dd 10.45 p.m. 18 July 1916. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Thackeray to Brigade Major dd 10.15 p.m. 18 July 1916. Honours and Wards, *op cit.* Recommendations of Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray.

202. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 103–104.

203. Solomon: *op cit.*, pp 69–70; Miles: *Volume 2, op cit.*, pp 105–106. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit.* Messages and Signals, Delville Wood, *op cit.* Signal: Centre (9th Division) to Venice (South African Brigade) dd 3.45 a.m. 19 July 1916.

Later in the day the other battalions of 53rd Brigade renewed the attack, but the Germans had re-inforced the wood and the British made little progress. The situation remained confused as far as headquarters were concerned, for artillery fire had once again destroyed the signal wires. Thackeray managed to get another message to Lukin by runner, and complained that the British heavy artillery had fired on Buchanan Street causing additional casualties. Snipers continued to cause loss so that the wounded could not be evacuated nor the dead buried:

'the strain of five days continuous work and fighting is becoming beyond endurance and as I have now only Lt Phillips and one or two NCOs I do not feel that we can hope to hold the trench in the face of any determined assault.'

Thackeray had hoped to be relieved by the 19th Durham Light Infantry, but that unit had pressed on eastwards saying they had had no orders to do so.²⁰⁴

In reply to this plea for assistance Thackeray was told that Furse had promised the South Africans relief at the first opportunity, hopefully after dark that night:

'He has expressed the highest admiration for you and your men and describes your stand as a most gallant one.'²⁰⁵

Morning came on the 20th, however, with no relief carried out, despite an understanding that 3rd Division would do so. Another attempt was made that morning to carry the rest of Delville Wood and Longueval, but the attackers lost direction and the operation became disorganised even before it began, resulting in heavy casualties. Thackeray again addressed Lukin about the state of his men, though this time he did not ask directly for relief, just reinforcements, food, water and news of what was going on elsewhere.²⁰⁶

That evening, however, after Major Mitchell-Baker had made strong representations to the high command, 3rd Division relieved Thackeray's troops. They marched out of Delville Wood at 6 p.m. that evening, 3 officers, two of them wounded, and 140 men, and after spending the night at Talus Boise, rejoined the remnants of the Brigade at Happy Valley near Bray on the 21st.²⁰⁷

There the whole Brigade paraded before Lukin, 29 officers and 751 men, out of 132 officers and 3 530 men who had gone into action on 5 July. In fact these figures give a distorted view of the casualties, for some men had been wounded and

had returned to action. Between the 5th and 20 July the South Africans had lost 35 officers and 574 men killed or died of wounds, 62 officers and 1 705 men wounded and 21 officers and 549 men missing, of whom only 6 officers and 215 men were known to be prisoners.²⁰⁸

Though the South Africans had suffered most severely of the brigades in the division, 9th Division had suffered a loss of 314 officers and 7 203 other ranks since 1 July, largely in the fighting for Longueval and the woods of Delville, Trônes and Bernafay.²⁰⁹

For more than a month the fighting continued in Delville Wood and Longueval, until they were completely taken on 27 August. Three days later the Germans regained a foothold, only to be finally evicted on 8 September. On 15 September Haig launched his third attempt at a breakthrough, gaining ground towards Flers with the use of tanks. Despite the failure to break the German line operations dragged on for another two months in ever-worsening conditions. Divisions barely recovered from the earlier battles were now brought back to participate in the hopeless slog of the early winter. Between the 9th and 19 October the South Africans, most of them new drafts from Bordon, were back in action near Le Transloy at the Butte de Warlencourt. This time the casualty list just exceeded 1 100.²¹⁰

The battles for the woods had revealed just one of the problems of static warfare. There was too little room for manoeuvre to surround these natural obstacles in accordance with pre-war doctrine, so that the only recourse was assault and occupation. This in turn led to the slaughter of the infantry by artillery barrages, for wooded

204. Miles, *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 105–106. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Thackeray to Brigade-Major dd 1.15 p.m. 19 July 1916.

205. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Brigade-Major's notebook dd 18/22 July 1916. Message: Mitchell-Baker to Thackeray dd 4.45 p.m. 19 July 1916.

206. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, pp 107–108. Operational Papers, Delville Wood, *op cit*; Message: Thackeray to Brigade-Major dd 8 a.m. 20 July 1916.

207. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*. Thackeray's Report, *op cit*. War Diary: 3rd Regiment. Thackeray's party comprised men from all sections of the Brigade; 9 men from 1st Regiment, Lieutenant Green and 33 men from 2nd Regiment, himself and 14 men of the 3rd Regiment, 25 men of the 4th Regiment and Lieutenant Phillips and 59 men of the Light Trench Mortar Battery.

208. Lukin's Despatch, *op cit*.

209. Miles: *Volume 2, op cit*, p 108.

210. Farrar-Hockley: *The Somme, op cit*, pp 168–212. Buchan: *op cit*, pp 83–101.



The South African Cemetery at Delville Wood, 1966.

terrain prevented the digging of sufficiently deep trenches and dug-outs. Only by capturing the enemy line across a broad front villages, could make them untenable; otherwise, like High Wood, Delville Wood, Longueval and Guillemont they remained as bastions, entire strongpoints for whose capture the assault troops could be made to pay a very heavy price. Of course, had the opportunities of 1st and 14 July been taken on the British right flank, Delville Wood might have meant nothing to the South Africans. Certainly it is possible to speculate that even a limited breakthrough was possible on those two days which would have taken the British to the crest of the fatal ridge. It remains unlikely, however, that any complete breakthrough could have been made and exploited even had the commanders taken their chances. Even if there had been no Delville Wood for Lukin's men, there would have been another place to remember, for Haig's battalions were committed to action until they were used up, rebuilt and then, inexperienced, brought back for more, so that by mid-November the British Empire's casualty list for the Somme campaign stood at over 500 000.

Acknowledgements

I should like here to express my gratitude to Mr P.K.A. Digby of the Transvaal Scottish Regimental Museum, for providing me with copies of documents dealing with the battle at Delville Wood, and to WOI E.S. Taylor for the two photographs taken at Delville Wood in 1966. I should also like to thank Lee, my wife, for her painstaking and expert work on the maps which appear here.