

CHAPTER XV

SPECIAL TRAINING IN THE BEAUQUESNE AREA AND PREPARATION FOR THE BATTLE OF THE HINDENBURG LINE



AT the time the division left Flanders for the Beauquesne area, no one had any information concerning the object of the change, except that we were going as General Headquarters Reserve to an area of the 3d British Army. The new area embraced part of the old area known as the Doullens area, where the division had been located when it served for a short time with General Byng's 3d Army. In the new area, Division Headquarters was located in the Chateau Valvion, a short distance from the village of Beauquesne. The 106th Infantry occupied the town of Doullens, including the citadel. The location of units in this area will be found in Orders No. 80, which appear in the Appendix as Exhibit 34.

On the 6th of September, Harry Lauder, the Scotch comedian and singer, arrived at Beauquesne and lunched with the Division Commander and staff. The same day available troops were assembled, and, accompanied by a small portable piano, Mr. Lauder sang his inimitable Scotch songs. At the conclusion of his program he delivered a very forceful address, in which he told of the death of his son, an officer in the British army, and of his hatred for the enemy and the enemy methods of conducting war.

The Division Commander was notified about the middle of September that tanks would be available so that special training might be given the division in the use of these auxiliaries. It was also intimated that in the near future the division might be called upon to carry out a mission of great importance which would require its use as what was popularly known as a "shock division." As will be seen later this mission became one in which the 27th and 30th Divisions jointly headed the great column of attack designed to break through the Hindenburg Line east of Ronssoy. In anticipation of such use, the division was designated as a part of the General Headquarters Reserve.

One of the first steps taken by the Division Commander was to hold critiques, attended by as many officers as possible. These critiques covered the experiences of the officers who took part in the Vierstraat Ridge battle, so that all might have the benefit of the experiences and suggestions of those who participated. Immediately thereafter the infantry brigades were practised in battle tactics, so that the lessons of the previous experience might be applied.

It having developed that the Stokes mortars and one pounders had not been used to the fullest advantage, according to reports received from many American sources, and our own experience being in accord with such reports, these units of the several infantry regiments were



Main Street, Peronne, France



Cathedral at Peronne, wrecked by Germans

concentrated for purposes of special intensive training. Suitable ranges were found for both Stokes mortars and one pounders. The Division Commander spent as much time as practicable with these units, stimulating their resource and skill in the technical field of their gunnery, but more particularly in the more difficult field of their tactical employment.

On these practise occasions one of the most zealous young officers was 1st Lieutenant Franklin J. Jackson, commanding the Stokes mortar platoon of the 106th Infantry, who was killed in action soon thereafter in the battle of the Hindenburg Line.

These auxiliary detachments profited much by their special training while in this area. Training together as they did, it was found that their association stimulated keenness and rivalry.

In every great attack fiercely contested by the defenders, there usually comes a time in the advance behind the barrage when parts of the line have been stopped while other parts continue to go forward. The result of this is that toward the end of the attack the front line consists of numerous salients which may be regarded as entrants into the enemy line, while on the other hand the reentrants between them may be regarded as enemy salients projecting into the line of the attacking force. The troops who occupy the points of these opposing salients, both friendly and enemy, usually feel that they can go no farther, because the troops on their right or left are held up. This situation develops a very critical phase in a battle. In the case of the attacking side, the men who constitute the points of the salients which have been driven in the enemy line, have the opportunity by maneuvering to the right or left, to encapsulate the enemy troops who constitute the points of the enemy salients. Such action would also serve to relieve the pressure on the groups of attacking troops which have been held up in front of such enemy salients. But in a similar manner, the enemy troops who are holding the points of the enemy salients have a like opportunity by determination and skilful action, to encapsulate the attacking troops thrust into the defenders' line. Much depends upon the relative initiative, skill and determination of the opposing troops. In executing such measures, troops must not only possess determination and courage, but they must maintain direction, taking skilful use of cover and provide for their own local security against surprise.

For the purpose of intensively practising infantry units in this work and of demonstrating more particularly to company and platoon leaders the correct and incorrect methods of accomplishing such missions, the infantry regiments were intensively occupied in the field in the Beauquesne area, from the time they arrived there until shortly before their departure three weeks later for the front.

One battalion of the 107th Infantry was selected for special demonstrations in the attack. This was the 3d Battalion, commanded by Captain Raphael A. Egan. This battalion became very expert, and on the 13th of September a demonstration was given by it, first of incorrect methods often employed in attempting to advance against hostile machine-gun nests, and finally of the correct methods. The demonstration was attended

by Major General Read, commanding the II American Corps; Major General Edward M. Lewis, commanding the 30th Division, and by a large number of the officers of the 27th and 30th Divisions. The observing party occupied what would have been enemy ground, so that they might witness the attack as the enemy would see it. The incorrect methods were pointed out as they occurred. Finally, when the battalion was withdrawn and gave its demonstration of correct methods, the difference was clearly to be observed by all present. Small groups and detachments of the battalion got forward in remarkable manner without being observed by any of the hundreds of spectators. Enemy machine-gun posts were indicated by small red flags and these were reduced by fire action from the front, while the place was enveloped or attacked from the rear, sometimes by fire action and sometimes with grenades.

Other demonstrations were made with tanks after every regiment had had opportunity to practise attacks, using the tanks as auxiliaries. These exercises with tanks took place where practise trenches and wire entanglements existed. The men therefore had opportunity to observe the complete manner in which the tanks leveled the wire under their treads. In most of these exercises smoke bombs were employed to cover the advance of the infantry groups.

At this time there began a series of conferences in preparation for the move of the division to the front and for the part it was to play in the coming attack. At first, instructions to the Division Commander prevented his disclosing to subordinates other than the Chief of Staff, the fact that the division was to play a leading part in a proposed offensive. From the intensive character of the special training, however, the officers and men of the division knew from their experience that the division was shortly to play some important rôle of an offensive nature.

In order that the reader may have a more comprehensive understanding of the battles to be described in the next chapter, a résumé of what preceded the operations of September 27th to October 2d will be given.

It will be remembered that the German thrust toward Amiens was stopped just short of that city, the Germans for a time holding the village of Villers Bretonneux. This was on April 24th. On the same day, however, the place was retaken by the Australians. Following this date there was no other resumption of the offensive by the Germans in this sector. About the middle of July the British planned a counter offensive in this vicinity. This offensive was launched on August 8th. This was the attack referred to so feelingly by General Ludendorf in his memoirs as "the black day" of the Germany army. The offensive was made between Albert and Moreuil. The enemy divisions in the line were overwhelmed. Even some of the German divisional staffs were surprised in their headquarters by British tanks. The battle of August 8th was continued until the 11th. Between the 11th and 15th of August there was a lull for further preparation and the relief of divisions. After the 15th of the month there were numerous minor engagements. From the 22d to the 29th the 4th Army advanced to the general line, Combles-Brie, threatening Peronne. The



Training with tanks, Beauquesne area



Chateau Val Vion, near Beauquesne, used as Division Headquarters. The officer in the foreground is Captain H. F. Jaeckel, Jr., aide to Major General O'Ryan

third phase of their advance covered the period from August 30th to September 15th. At the end of this latter phase the line had been advanced to a point opposite Epehy on the north and Holnon on the south. By the 18th of September the line had been advanced to include Lempire, Ronnsoy, Hargicourt and Villeret, or about where it had been at the time of the German break through on March 21st. This brought the line so that it faced the outworks of the famous Hindenburg defensive system.

A detailed description will be given later of the defenses that constituted the Hindenburg Line. Suffice it to say here that this system consisted really of several systems of trenches, strong points and tunnels, protected by vast networks of wire. There was, for example, the so-called outworks of the Hindenburg Line, composed of a complicated system of trenches extending through The Knoll, Guillemont Farm, Quinnet Copse, Quennemont Farm, Malakoff Farm, Ruby Farm and Villeret. This system was strengthened by highly organized strong points covering the high ground known as The Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm. Behind this system of outworks and connected with it by covered ways and tunnel approaches was the main defensive system extending from Vendhuile on the north along the westerly side of the St. Quentin Canal tunnel to and beyond Bellicourt on the south. Each of these systems consisted of several lines of trenches, each protected by a great mass of wire.

Because the outer defense occupied high ground, the possession of which would afford good observation of the main system, it was most desirable in preparing for any attack on the main system to first gain possession of the outworks and to prepare and launch the final attack from this line.

About September 11th, General Rawlinson recommended that he be allowed to undertake the operation to gain possession of the outer defenses. He desired to make such attempt before the enemy would have time to reorganize his troops or the enemy troops which were to defend the system to become intimately familiar with the defenses. It was believed that every day given the enemy would be of the greatest value to him. It was also believed by the 4th Army commander that so great an undertaking as the breaking of the Hindenburg Line would require much preparation and the resting of the troops in preparation for the final attack, and that with the outworks in the possession of the 4th Army, the necessary time based upon these considerations could be given without disadvantage. General Haig approved General Rawlinson's recommendations. The IX British Corps, which was on the right of the 4th Army sector, had occupied the greater part of Holnon Wood and Villecholles. On the night of September 13th the 6th British Division relieved the 32d British Division on the right of the IX Corps front. On the left of the IX Corps was the Australian Corps. On the left of the Australian Corps was the III Corps. On the night of the 12th of September the 4th Australian Division advanced the corps line so as to include the road between Bihecourt and Jeancourt. On the 17th of September, in order to gain a start line for

the attack on the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line, the 6th British Division, which was on the right of the IX Corps, attacked Holnon village and Badger Copse in cooperation with the 34th French Division of the 1st French Army on its right. The 6th British Division encountered strong opposition on the edge of Holnon Wood and suffered heavy casualties. The French, without very much opposition, secured the right flank of the IX British Corps by the capture of Savey Wood. Meanwhile the IX British Corps, the Australian Corps and the III British Corps in the order named from south to north were perfecting their preparations for the attack on the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line. Numerous airplane photographs were obtained of the enemy's defenses and every precaution was taken to secure secrecy. The date for the attack was fixed for September 18th and the hour 5:20 A. M. It will be remembered that at one time, that is, prior to the German offensive of March 21st, the then British front line ran along in front of the outer Hindenburg Line defenses. The German front line trench on the 18th of September was, in fact, the former British main line of resistance. The proposed attack was to consist of several phases. The first of these was to include the capture of the enemy's first line of defense. The second phase included the taking of the second line of the German outworks, which formerly had been the old British outpost line. This line included the villages of Gricourt, Berthancourt and Pontru, Ascension Farm, Villeret, Cologne Farm, Malakoff Farm, Sart Farm, Tombois Farm and Little Priel Farm. The third phase, dependent upon the extent of the enemy's opposition, consisted of the capture of the last line of the outer defenses. This included the taking of Thorigny, Pontru, Quennemont Farm, Guillemont Farm and The Knoll. The 4th Army did not believe that the three phases could be concluded in one day. The time required was to depend upon the stubbornness of the opposition. The Australian Corps in the center of the 4th Army held a front of 7,000 yards, from the northern boundary of the IX Corps to the Cologne River, near Templeux-le-Guerard. The front of the Australian Corps was covered by the 4th Australian Division on the right and the 1st Australian Division on the left. The III British Corps continued the line in a northerly direction to a point opposite Epehy, where it joined the 3d British Army. The front of the III Corps was held by the 74th, 18th, 12th and 58th Divisions in the order named from south to north. The attack was to be made behind a rolling barrage to be fired by 750 eighteen-pounder guns and 225 4.5-inch howitzers. Tanks were allotted to support the attack.

The attack started as planned. The Australian Corps was successful in its attack. On the right the first objective was secured by the IX Corps, but with considerable difficulty.

On the III Corps front it was originally planned to attack the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line with three divisions, but due to the known strength of this sector of the enemy defenses, decision was made to attack on the III Corps front with all four divisions of the corps in the line. This was the front later to be taken over by the 27th Division. The divisions of the III Corps met with stubborn resistance. While the 18th and 12th

Divisions were engaged in heavy fighting around Basse Boulogne and Epehy, the 74th Division continued its advance, keeping in touch with the Australians on the right. East of Ronssoy, the 18th Division made little progress, so that the 74th Division, which had been able to advance with the Australians on their right, was compelled to form a defensive flank on their left along the Bellicourt road running southeast from Basse Boulogne, in order to maintain contact with the 18th Division. On the right front of its line the 74th Division reached the enemy position known as Benjamin Post.

At the conclusion of this first phase of the attack, therefore, the situation was that the 18th and 12th Divisions after hard fighting had made little progress. As already stated this was the front later assigned to the 27th Division, and this failure and the failure of the later efforts of the III Corps to take the outworks of the Hindenburg Line in this sector of their front made necessary the preliminary attack of the 106th Infantry Regiment of the 27th Division on September 27th, with little opportunity for reconnaissance and at a time when the enemy morale had been stimulated by their success in having shattered all the British attacks made against these positions. It contributed also to the difficulties of the task assigned to the 27th Division on September 29th, which was the attack on the main defenses of the Hindenburg Line.

On the morning of the same day, September 18th, the 74th Division, keeping in close touch with the Australians on their right, went forward for the second objective which they had been unable to gain on their left. The second objective was gained as far north as Benjamin Post. North of Benjamin Post the line of the 74th Division was refused so as to maintain contact with the 18th Division, whose line ran through Basse Boulogne and Quid Copse. At 5:00 P. M., on the afternoon of the same day, the 18th Division made another attack in an attempt to get forward on the second objective. This was a prepared attack behind a moving barrage. The second objective included Zebra Post, Yak Post, Sart Farm and X, Y and Z Copses. The attack failed. On the left the 12th Division succeeded in capturing Malassise Farm, but later was driven out.

On the following morning, September 19th, the Australians, who had taken the entire system of outworks of the Hindenburg Line on their front, continued the work of consolidation. As the IX Corps on the right of the Australians and the III Corps on the left, with the exception of the 74th Division, had failed in their attacks of the preceding day, a renewal of their effort was made. In the morning, therefore, a well-prepared attack was made by the 18th and 12th Divisions. Again the attack failed, except that the 18th Division succeeded in taking Lempire, Yak and Zebra Posts, while the 12th Division took Malassise Farm.

On the following day, September 20th, the enemy withdrew from X, Y and Z Copses, which were outposts in front of Guillemont Farm. Practically no progress was made as a result of the attacks on this day on the front of the 18th and 12th Divisions toward securing the outworks of the Hindenburg Line in their sectors. As a result, therefore, of all of these

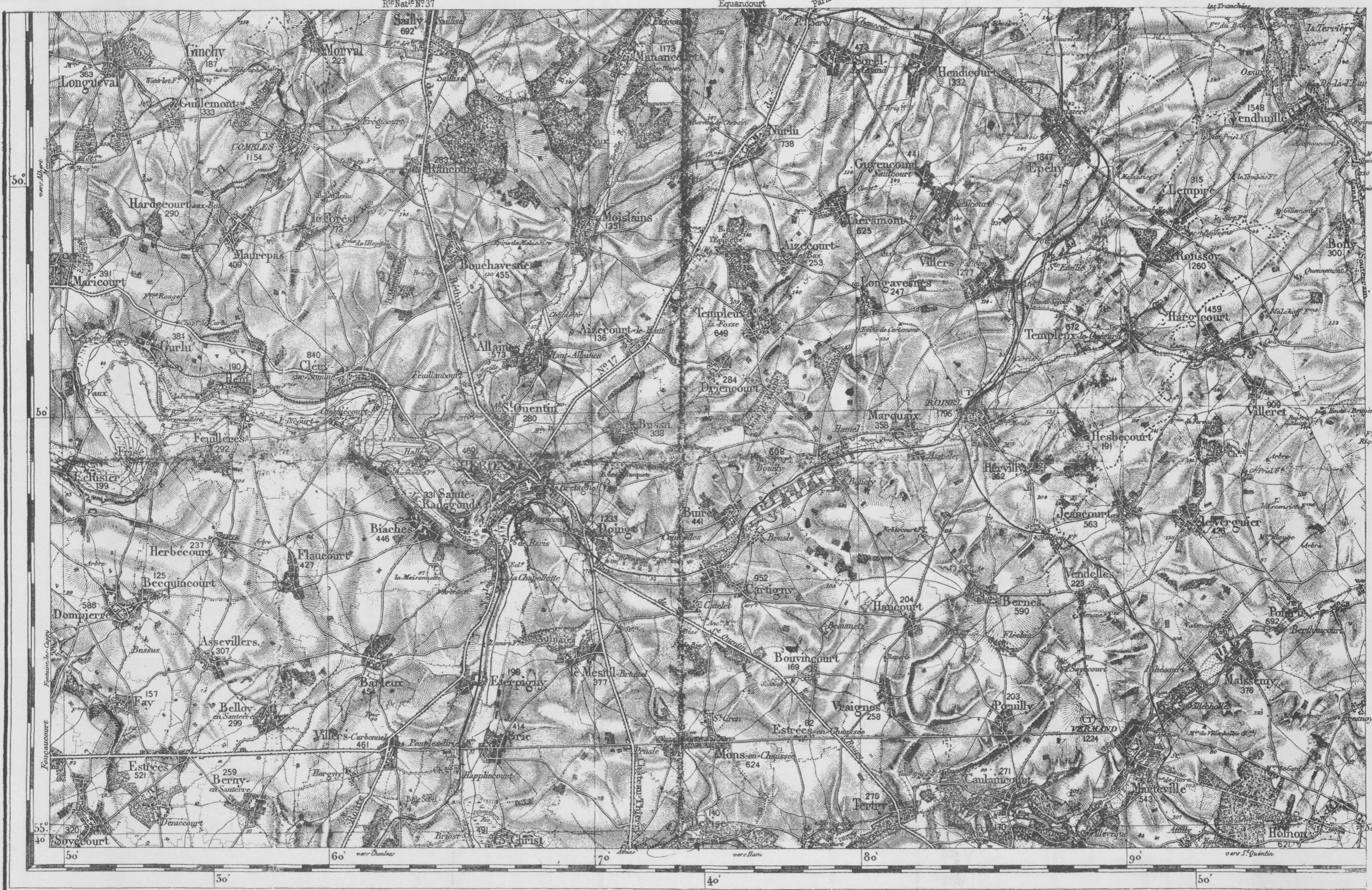
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(Cambrai 13A.)

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(Amiens 12.D.)

(Cambrai 13.D.)

St^{ns} Halte Normalspurige Eisenbahn
 Schmalspurige Eisenbahn

Straße A
 " B

Unterhaltener Fahrweg
 Feldweg
 Fußweg

E^{ts} (Schleuse) Schiffbarer Kanal

Die stehenden Ziffern bedeuten Einwohnerzahlen,
 die legenden: Höhenangaben in Metern.

1:80000

attacks on the front which was ultimately assigned to the 27th Division, the III Corps was still facing the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line. On the right divisional sector of the corps, however, the 74th Division and the Australian Corps on its right had gained and secured the outworks which covered the southern half of the tunnel sector, later taken over by the 30th American Division.

In view of the importance of securing the entire outworks of the Hindenburg Line defenses before any attack should be made on the tunnel sector, the 4th Army commander determined that still another attack should be made in an effort to gain them. The importance of securing Quennemont Farm, Guillemont Farm and The Knoll was recognized and stressed. Preparations were immediately taken to launch this attack without delay.

It will be necessary to digress at this point in order to make clear the relation of subsequent happenings. About this time Marshal Foch had decided that four great offensives would be launched simultaneously by the Allies. One was to be made by the American army in their sector, one by the French, a third by the British through the Hindenburg Line, and the fourth by Belgian and Allied troops in Flanders.

The attack of the British army was directed to be made on September 29th and was to be launched against and through the Hindenburg Line across the tunnel sector of the St. Quentin Canal between Bellicourt on the south and Vendhuile on the north. This tunnel sector of the main defense system lay behind the outworks which were the subject of the attacks above described. The British offensive of September 29th was to be headed by the 27th and 30th American Divisions, followed by the 3d and 5th Australian Divisions, with the 2d Australian Division in reserve. In order that this main attack might be made on the date fixed for it, namely, September 29th, it was essential that the troops to constitute the attacking forces should, if possible, be placed in the line in ample time to take over and reconnoiter their fronts and as well to become familiar with the great problem confronting them. The plans for the British offensive of September 29th were based on the assumption that prior to the attack the outworks would be in the possession of the 4th Army, and would be turned over to the troops which were to lead the offensive so that they might start the attack from a line which included the formidable strong points of The Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm. But as has already been narrated the outworks of the Hindenburg Line, the possession of which was so important a requisite for success in the main attack, had not been secured on the front facing the northern half of the tunnel sector. The orders of Marshal Foch directing that the main attack be made on September 29th, however, were imperative, as the several offensives planned by him were to be synchronized. Therefore, wholly aside from the outcome of the preliminary attacks being made by the III Corps, the troops which were to make the main attack were ordered to the forward area in order to take over the positions assigned them in the plan for the main attack of September 29th. This necessitated the relief of the 74th

and 18th British Divisions by the 27th Division and the 1st Australian Division by the 30th American Division. The front of the III Corps was therefore to be greatly reduced. It was directed that this redistribution of troops was to be complete by September 25th.

Now to return to the account of the activities of the III Corps in their efforts to capture the outworks of the Hindenburg Line. It will be remembered that September 20th saw the continued failure of the III Corps to take the outer defenses fronting the northern half of the tunnel sector and that it had been determined to launch still another attack in the attempt to gain The Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm. This attack was made on the morning of September 21st, supported by an attack along the whole of the III Corps front. The 74th Division, holding the right sector of the III Corps front, was given as its objective Quennemont Farm, Quinnet Copse and Guillemont Farm, while to the 18th Division was entrusted the capture of The Knoll. Tanks were assigned to aid in the attack. The attack was launched behind a rolling barrage at 5:40 in the morning. The fighting was severe throughout the day. The attack of the 18th Division broke down before the annihilating fire of the enemy holding The Knoll and Tombois Farm. Small detachments of the 74th Division are believed to have reached Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm, but in any event were driven out. Troops of the 18th Division which had gained Duncan Post and Doleful Post were driven out by enemy counter-attacking troops. Thus, this well-prepared attack, gallantly carried out, broke down as had all previous attacks before the strength and resistance of the outworks, which covered the northern half of the tunnel sector.

On the night of September 21st-22d there was bright moonlight, and accordingly it was directed that still another effort be made to take these formidable outworks from the enemy, this time by a night attack. At fifteen minutes after midnight, therefore, the attack was resumed, the artillery firing a rolling barrage. The 74th Division retook Cat Post, the 18th Division again gained Duncan Post and Doleful Post. Efforts to take Tombois Farm and Egg Post were unsuccessful and all attacks to capture The Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm broke down with loss.

This last attempt to capture the outworks of the Hindenburg Line, in the northern section of the tunnel, had therefore like all previous attacks resulted in failure. The two divisions were exhausted. Their losses had been considerable. They were necessarily to be relieved. The time had arrived when the troops designated for the main attack of September 29th must take over the front.

Pursuant to the 4th Army Orders already referred to covering the troop dispositions required to be made in preparation for the main attack, scheduled for September 29th, the 27th and 30th American Divisions began to arrive by bus and train in the III Corps area on September 22d and 23d. On the night of September 23d the 30th American Division relieved the 1st Australian Division, its front running from a point immediately south of Buisson Gaulaine Farm, north to Malakoff Farm. The 30th American

Division therefore took possession of the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line on the south half of the tunnel sector, which had been previously captured by the Australian Corps.

On the night of September 24th the 27th Division took over the sector held by the 74th and 18th British Divisions fronting the outworks of the Hindenburg Line and which had not been captured by the III Corps or the divisions composing it. The 27th Division, with the 106th Infantry Regiment in line holding its entire front, therefore faced the formidable outworks of the Hindenburg Line, which had recently given such remarkable and repeated demonstrations of invulnerability against attack.

In order to give the reader an uninterrupted account of the events that were transpiring along the front facing the outer defenses of the Hindenburg Line, between September 18th and September 24th, no digressions were made in the account to describe the conferences being conducted during that period preliminary to the proposed operations of the 27th and 30th American Divisions and which were held for the purpose of explaining the plans for the attack on September 29th. This will now be done.

On the 19th of September, while still in the Beauquesne Area, the 27th and 30th Divisions were engaged throughout the day in conduct of a corps exercise followed by a critique. On this occasion Major General Read, the Corps Commander, notified the Commanding General of the 27th Division that the two divisions composing the corps would in all probability shortly be called upon to participate in a British offensive against the Hindenburg Line in the vicinity of Ronssoy. He did not know the details of the proposed attack, but stated that while the proposed operations were up to that time secret, the Division Commanders, while waiting for details, should study the situation and the probable field of action from maps as they became available.

One copy of a map on large scale was with some difficulty obtained by the 27th Division Headquarters for this purpose, and this with the intelligence reports and all other information obtainable were intensively studied during the next few days before the division left for the front.

On the 21st of September, Field Orders No. 44 were issued from Division Headquarters at Beauquesne. These orders covered the movement of the division from the Beauquesne area by rail, bus and marching to the Haut Allaines area. It was therein prescribed that the troops would detrain at Peronne. Orders No. 92, with "Changes," covered the administrative details of this movement. A copy of these orders will be found in the Appendix as Exhibit 35.

On Monday, September 23d, Division Headquarters moved from Beauquesne to a hutment camp in the Bois de Buire, near Tincourt, with a rear echelon at Templeux le Fosse.

At the time the division was moving to the front, Major General Read called into conference at his headquarters the Commanding Generals of the 27th and 30th Divisions and outlined to them the character of the offensive proposed for September 29th, and that the 27th and 30th Divisions

were to be assigned to the Australian Corps for the purpose of leading the attack. General Read's spirit of cooperation in subordinating for the occasion his own rôle as Commander of the II American Corps, and placing his two divisions at the disposal of the Australian Commander, created a most favorable impression at the time upon all who knew of the arrangement. General Read stated to his two Division Commanders that to him was left the decision as to which of the divisions would take over the northern half of the sector for the attack of September 29th, and explained that in all probability the difficulties to be met there would be much greater than in the southern sector, because the British had up to that time been unable to capture the outworks on the northern sector, and also because of the strength and importance of the German flank position at Vendhuile, which would cover the extreme left of the advance. He asked for the views of the two Division Commanders, as to which of the divisions should be assigned to the northern sector. Both replied that they had no preference to express. General Read then stated that in view of the training and experience of the 27th Division he felt that it would be wiser to impose upon that division the problems of the attack against the northern half of the tunnel sector, which might also involve a preliminary battle for the possession of the outworks. The two Division Commanders agreed that the suggested arrangement was the best for the disposal of the two divisions. It was, however, stated that there would shortly be held a conference at the headquarters of the Australian Corps Commander, where all the details of the plan for the attack would be discussed, and that in view of the short period of time before the divisions would probably be engaged, it would be well to have the divisional conferences immediately follow the Australian Corps conference, so that commanding officers might be made acquainted as soon as possible with the details conveyed to the Divisional Commanders. Following this conference with the Corps Commander there was a meeting called by the Division Commander of the 27th Division and attended by certain members of the divisional staff and the brigade and regimental commanders of the division. These officers were then and there made acquainted with the information which the Division Commander had gained up to that time, which in brief consisted of a reading of intelligence reports concerning the character of the defenses of the Hindenburg Line and its outworks; the fact that the two American divisions were to be part of the Australian Corps for the coming battle and were to lead in the attack, the 27th Division on the northern sector; the uncertain situation along the northern sector in respect to the attacks upon the outworks. The importance of the coming operations were stressed. The fact that we would probably have considerable losses was also mentioned. Finally, all were impressed with the necessity for prompt action in the distribution of maps within the regiments when such maps became available, and the importance of personal supervision by brigade and regimental commanders in order to insure that all to engage in the attack down to the privates in the ranks would understand their mission and the important features governing their employment. In this connec-

tion it was pointed out that in all probability little time would elapse between the receipt of final instructions and the commencement of the attack, and that the lack of time allowed must be made up by the excellence of the organized effort and the energy and foresight behind it to insure a clear understanding by all of what was to be expected of them.

On the 25th of September the first conference was held at the headquarters of Lieutenant General Monash, commanding the Australian Corps, a hutment camp on a hill between Barleux and Assevillers. This conference was attended by Major General Read, commanding the II American Corps; Major General Lewis, commanding the 30th American Division, and Major General O'Ryan, commanding the 27th American Division, and their respective Chiefs of Staff. The other officers present were Australian general officers. The Australian Corps Commander stated that the 4th Army was to launch an attack on its front on September 29th, for the purpose of pushing through the Hindenburg Line defenses across the tunnel sector of the St. Quentin Canal. He explained that for the purpose of making this attack the 27th and 30th American Divisions had been assigned to the Australian Corps and that these two divisions would head the column of attack. They were, in other words, to constitute the spear head of the thrust. All plans for this attack had been based upon the assumption that the outworks of the Hindenburg Line defenses would be in possession of the IV Army prior to the day of the attack. This, however, was not the fact on the northern half of the sector; that is to say, on the half of the front to be taken over by the 27th Division. A discussion of the plans, however, proceeded upon the theory that the outworks would be in our possession before the date of the main attack, and it was explained that for the purpose of accomplishing this, the 27th Division two days before the main attack would capture these outworks. It was, however, prescribed by the Australian Corps Commander that the Commanding General of the 27th Division in the preliminary attack to be made for the purpose of capturing the outworks would limit the force assigned to make the attack to one regiment of his division. The remainder of the division was not to be committed to the preliminary battle for the reason that the division as a whole must be preserved for the effective employment of its full power on the occasion of the main attack on September 29th. For the purpose of supporting the attack of the 106th Infantry, it was stated that the remaining regiment of the 53d Brigade, namely, the 105th Infantry, might be used in support, but with the importance in mind of committing to the preliminary battle no more of that regiment than circumstances might indicate to be essential. It became evident, therefore, that it was to become the mission of this one regiment of the 27th Division to do what two divisions of the III British Corps had been unable to do after repeated efforts and heavy losses.

General Monash asked what regiment of the 27th Division was to make the preliminary attack. He was informed that the 106th Infantry would be assigned for that purpose and would take over the front of the northern sector on the night of September 24th-25th in pursuance of

Australian Corps orders. He then stated that the attack by the 106th Infantry would be made for the capture of the outworks of the Hindenburg Line. He stressed the importance of the three strong points, The Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm, the necessity for careful mopping up, so as to insure continued possession of the ground gained, and the importance of establishing the start line for the main operation on September 29th. He explained that the IV Army had concentrated a great mass of artillery on its front, and that for a period of forty-eight hours immediately preceding a like period of forty-eight hours before the main attack, this British artillery would deluge the German positions with mustard gas. He mentioned that for the first time in the history of the war the British were to use mustard gas fired by shells and that it was believed that the Germans, being unaccustomed to receiving this type of gas, would not be as alert in applying the best gas defense measures as, for example, were the Allies, who were constantly subjected to visitations of mustard gas fired at them by the Germans. As is probably known to the reader, mustard gas is not volatile, and in the absence of strong sunlight clings to the ground, shell holes, trenches, wooded areas, etc., so that it is capable of inflicting casualties many hours after it has been distributed. Because of this quality it was necessary after a bombardment by mustard gas to permit a forty-eight-hour period of time to elapse before assaulting troops were sent over the area which had been covered by the mustard gas bombardment.

Following the mustard gas bombardment, and preliminary to the proposed attack, the guns were to continue their fire with high explosive shells mixed with ordinary gas shells and shrapnel.

The Australian Corps Commander then took up the details of the plan for the main attack. The general plan for the main attack of September 29th has been stated in a general way. To state the plan in detail would be to repeat the requirements of a very comprehensive order. Accordingly, instead of doing this, the order itself is included in the Appendix as Exhibit 36.

In a book written by Lieutenant General Monash describing the Australian victories in 1918, he refers to his conference with the Americans, and states that on the occasion of the conference the plan elicited such a rain of questions that in the end he found himself compelled to embark upon a very detailed exposition of the fundamental principles of his battle practise.

The recollection of the writer is that there were not more than five or six questions asked in all by the American officers present, and these were not asked until a very complete exposition of the plan had been concluded by General Monash, who used diagrams and charts already prepared for the occasion in illustrating his explanation. General Monash's conversation and explanations were so lengthy and detailed that there did not seem to be necessity to ask many questions. Two questions were asked on behalf of the 27th Division. The first was as to whether in the preliminary battle the 106th Infantry, in view of the fact that it was to make the attack single

handed on a front of nearly 4,000 yards, could be supported by other troops of the division to make good its gains in the event that such support became necessary. It was in answer to this question that General Monash indicated the necessity for preserving the remainder of the division uncommitted to the preliminary battle, in order that they might participate with unimpaired strength in the main attack of September 29th, adding that the remaining regiment of the 53d Brigade might, as was planned by the Division Commander, be used in local support with particular reference to the necessities involved in the protection of the left flank. The other question related to the practicability of that part of the plan for the main attack, which prescribed that at the height of the battle the 105th Infantry, having followed the advance of the left regiment of the 54th Brigade, would find it possible, under the conditions as they probably would then obtain, to maneuver in such manner as to change direction to the left and attack, to the north, so as to envelop Vendhuile and relieve pressure against the British on that front. General Monash replied that the plan would be carried out in that manner.

General Monash had prior to this conference organized a group of Australian officers to aid in the coordination of the American and Australian effort. These were constituted as an Australian mission in command of Major General E. G. Sinclair MacLagan. This group of officers rendered very efficient and valued service to the Americans troops during these operations.

In anticipation of full information of the proposed attack being given at this conference, all brigade, regimental and battalion commanders had been notified to attend a conference at Division Headquarters in the Bois de Buire on the afternoon of this same day. At this divisional conference the Division Commander explained to the assembled officers, with the aid of maps and diagrams, similar to those used at the Australian Corps Headquarters in the morning, all features of the plan as they had been unfolded and explained by General Monash.

This divisional conference was of several hours' duration. At this time, it will be remembered, the 106th Infantry was already in the line and the battalion commanders of this regiment were not available for this first conference. The Regimental Commander, Colonel William A. Taylor, however, was present with several of his staff officers, and at the conclusion of the conference left to inform his battalion officers, not only of the general plan concerning the main attack, but of the details available up to that time affecting the preliminary attack to be made by his regiment on the morning of the 27th.

Before continuing with the narrative of the preparations for battle, which were being made within the division, the account of the Australian Corps conference will be concluded. When the conference was finished on September 25th, General Monash stated that on the following day there would be a conference at his headquarters attended not only by the Commanding Generals and staffs of the American corps and of the divisions which were to lead in the attack, but also by the Commanding Generals and

their staffs of the Australian divisions, which were to go through the American divisions in continuation of the attack. This second conference was fixed for 11 A. M. the following day, Thursday, September 26th. The conference lasted for about an hour and a half. In a general way it covered some of the ground discussed the day before, but related more particularly to the coordination of the efforts of the large number of organizations which for the time constituted the Australian Corps. Toward the conclusion of this conference Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces, dropped in and addressed to the assembled officers a few words of confidence in the outcome.

Now to return to the time of the conclusion of the conference of Commanding Officers of the 27th Division held at the Bois de Buire on the afternoon of September 25th.

Following the conference, the Operations Section of the division staff immediately commenced the preparation of Field Orders No. 47, covering the preliminary attack to be made by the 106th Infantry supported by the 105th Infantry.

During the conference at the Bois de Buire the assembled officers made full notes of the features and details of the plan, as they were explained. But to insure an understanding of the more important of them, the Division Commander prepared a memorandum supplementary to the field orders then in course of preparation, and accompanied by the Chief of Staff went, on the afternoon of September 26th, to the post of command of Colonel Taylor, commanding the 106th Infantry, where there was held a conference of the officers of the 53d Brigade. This P. C. was located in a dugout near Ronssoy. The Regimental Commander had been instructed to have present as many of his officers as could be made available from their line duties, and where they could not be made available, that they be represented. These officers attended, as did also Brigadier General Blanding, commanding the 53d Brigade, with officers of his staff, and Colonel Andrews, commanding the 105th Infantry, with one or more of his staff officers.

At the dugout conference all features of the preliminary attack were explained to the assembled officers. Opportunity was given them to ask questions at length, which they did. The Division Commander's memorandum, as well as the attack order, was read to them. Copies of these as well as of the barrage maps were in their possession.

At the earlier general conference of commanding officers, Colonel Taylor had called attention to the shortage of officers in his regiment. This condition, however, existed quite generally in the division. It was not so much the result of casualties as it was due to the custom which obtained at that time in the American army of relieving officers from duty with combat units for attendance at schools and for other purposes, without always recognizing the imperative need for units going into battle possessing an adequate number of commissioned officers.

On this occasion Colonel Taylor called attention to the fact that he had but one Major actually with his regiment. The importance of the



Site of Division Headquarters in the Bois de Buire, France. Picture taken in the summer of 1920 after removal of "Nissen" huts

coming operations made it imperative that at least one additional Major should be given him. Major J. Leslie Kincaid, Division Judge Advocate, learning of this condition, applied personally to the Division Commander to be assigned to command one of the battalions of the 106th Infantry. Major Kincaid having at one time commanded a Squadron of the 1st N. Y. Cavalry and by his demonstrated courage, coolness and marked ability being especially well adapted for the mission suggested, was detailed to



Grave of a German soldier near Villers Faucon, France

the 106th Infantry as a battalion commander. Incidentally it might be remarked that no authority, except the President, has the power to assign to line duty an officer of the Judge Advocate General's Department. The conditions, however, seemed to warrant the assumption of such authority. At any rate Major Kincaid led the 2d Battalion of the 106th Infantry in a most efficient and satisfactory manner.

The battalions were to be led, the right battalion by Major Gillet, the center battalion by Major Kincaid and the left battalion by Captain William E. Blaisdell. At this conference the Division Commander was much impressed with the quick understanding and marked zeal of Captain Blaisdell, who was later killed in the main attack on the Hindenburg Line, September 29th. During the conference the Division Commander stressed the importance of the successive waves of the 106th Infantry lining up close to the tape, which would mark the start line, in order that they might better avoid the enemy counter-barrage when it fell. But it was also pointed out and stressed that when the leading elements went forward behind the barrage, successive waves should not start until proper distances had been gained, in order to insure disposition in depth of the attacking troops. The importance of the leading wave following the barrage closely was pointed out, as well as the necessity for the leading wave to continue in its advance, leaving to successive waves and mopping-up parties the task of taking over prisoners and clearing out trenches, dugouts, machine-gun nests and similar places. Special attention was directed to the vital necessity for thorough mopping up, and that mopping-up parties properly organized should be assigned specific areas for their work. All officers were instructed to notify the men under them that heavy shelling and counter-attacks would not be considered reasons for withdrawal from any position gained. Responsible officers were admonished then and there to secure possession, in readiness for use in each company, of the necessary rifle grenades, rockets and flares. Men were to be warned to keep themselves fit by getting all the sleep possible prior to the attack. In fact company and platoon commanders were directed by adequate supervision to insure that their men slept as much as possible prior to the time of the attack. In this connection attention was called to the fact that men get along better with loss of food than loss of sleep. Provision was made to get hot food to the men of the 106th Infantry shortly before the zero hour. Each unit of the regiment was directed to send a liaison agent to the unit on its left. The importance of having the men avoid the tendency to "herd" during the attack was referred to. Message maps were arranged to be furnished all officers and line sergeants. These were to be used to indicate the line reached by each unit with the time marked thereon, after which they were to be sent back through battalion to regimental headquarters.

At 9:15 P. M., on September 25th, the division attack order, Field Orders No. 47, had been reproduced by mimeograph and was ready for distribution. This order, together with the administrative instructions, Orders No. 93, with Appendices A, B, C and D, are included in the Appendix as Exhibit 37. Orders No. 94, dated September 26th, which appears in



Colonel William A. Taylor, commanding 106th Infantry

the Appendix as Exhibit 38, will give the location by map reference of all units of the division at this time. During the night and the following morning these orders, barrage maps and message maps were distributed to the officers and non-commissioned officers of the 53d Infantry Brigade. There was no problem concerning the distribution of these orders to the remaining troops of the division. The 106th Infantry having received their orders and special instructions immediately immersed themselves in the work of reconnaissance and the arrangement of all the details affecting the attack. This comment applies to the 105th Infantry, which was to be the supporting regiment in the attack, and to the 53d Brigade Headquarters. As soon as the orders for the preliminary attack were out, the detailed work of preparing for the main attack was immediately begun at Division Headquarters.

This work was very considerable and complicated, not only by its diversity, but by the haste attendant upon the short notice given the division for a task of such magnitude. Its difficulties were augmented by the fact that the advance echelon of Division Headquarters at this time

moved forward from the Bois de Buire to some shelters in a quarry between St. Emilie and Ronssoy, where the Battle P. C. was established.

The story of the attack made on the outworks of the Hindenburg Line, referred to as the preliminary attack, will be told in the next chapter. For the purpose of continuing the narrative in its relation to the work preliminary to actual battle, we will now turn to the preparations to be



*Major J. Leslie Kincaid, commanding 2d Battalion,
106th Infantry*

made by the remainder of the division and as well in a measure by the 53d Brigade, for the main attack, which was scheduled to take place two days after the preliminary attack.

On September 26th a warning order was sent out stating that the 53d Brigade would prepare to relieve the 106th Infantry in the front line on the night of September 27th-28th, while the 53d Brigade would prepare to move both its regiments somewhat to the rear and to the left of the 54th Brigade.

Later in the day, Field Orders No. 48 were issued, which directed that in preparation for the main attack the 54th Brigade would relieve the 53d



Tunnel entrance, Hindenburg Line defenses, north end



Quarry at St. Emilie, France, used as Division Headquarters, during the Battle of the Hindenburg Line

Brigade, as stated in the warning order, and that the 108th Infantry would occupy the right regimental sector and the 107th Infantry the left regimental sector. The relief order placing the 54th Brigade in the line preparatory to the main attack order was followed at 1:55 P. M. on September 27th by Field Orders No. 49 and Orders No. 95 with Appendices, covering the main attack. These orders are to be found in the Appendix as Exhibit 39.

Following the general divisional conference in the Bois de Buire, there were numerous conferences between officers of the division staff and officers of divisional units directly concerned with the subject matter of the particular conference. At these meetings numerous difficulties were ironed out. These affected such matters as ammunition supply, transportation, battle stores, signal communication, artillery and machine-gun support, mission and functions of the engineers, evacuation of wounded, burial of the dead, etc.

In the next chapter will be described in greater detail than has already been mentioned the character of the defense constituting the Hindenburg Line and a description of the battle of the 53d Infantry Brigade for possession of the outworks.