

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Lethal Dialectic - The Evolution of Battle Planning in the BEF 1915-1916

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This thesis examines the planning of battles by the British Expeditionary Force (henceforth: BEF) from 1915 to 1916 and finds that with honourable exceptions, they were planned so very badly that by September 1916 only 27% of the attacking battalions had written orders. The causes of this failure stem from an internal conflict of the British Army between the proponents of cavalry and those of mounted infantry, and the belief that battles were won by cavalry charges which could not be planned. This led Major-General Sir Douglas Haig, a cavalryman, to excise essential planning elements from the primary doctrines of the Army. Several other causes are evident: the enormous increase in the size of the BEF from 1914 to 1916 meant a corresponding increase in the span of control which senior officers had to manage; the lack of suitable exercises before the war hid the gross incompetence of many of them; and the lack of staff officer training created gross frictions. The BEF suffered from a doctrinal sclerosis, lacking a feedback mechanism whereby problems could at least be identified even if workable solutions were as rare as unfeasible approaches were common. It also suffered from management conflicts in that Army commanders failed to set out overall plans, corps expected to incorporate divisional plans into their own, failed to coordinate them and induced much re-writing. Planning processes were haphazard and the quality of the plan contents were highly variable. In consequence assaulting troops were betrayed by an unconcern of

corps, divisional and brigade staff to ensure that workable plans were in the troops' hands a day before the assaults.

Occasional improvements were made: a set of common objectives were published, imposing a degree of unity (but not the unit boundaries whose variability continued to plague planners) barrage plans emerged, timetables and conditional orders were included in plans (all contrary to regulations), scenarios were documented, and counter-battery planning established. The dominant ethos of the BEF began to evolve from the agricultural to the technological.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go first to Professor David Stevenson whose encouragement, perceptive comments, and awkward questions provoked much rethinking on my part, and to Professor Matthew Jones who caused me to probe the premisses of the thesis with greater thoroughness. Their support has been invaluable and vastly superior to that received by my wife when she completed her doctorate at Edinburgh. The staff at the various archives from which I have sought help have been of immense assistance: The National Archives; The National Army Museum, The Imperial War Museum, The National Library of Scotland, Ceri Humphries of the Churchill Archives, Siân Mogridge of the Royal Artillery Museum, Diana Manipud, and the staff at King's College London Archives, and Aaron Cripps, then of the JSCSC Library at the Defence College Shrivenham. Regrettably his successors have refused me access on the grounds that I am not a serving member of any Armed Force. I have asked for advice on the thesis from a Brigadier, a retired Colonel, and four Lieutenant-Colonels (one German) but the only input I received was from Tom Peat a retired Royal Marine officer.

I am grateful to my father, Lawrence Farrell, who first aroused my interest in the British Army with his accounts of his experiences in North Africa, whose improbability was only matched by the precision of his recall: he died a year before I could confirm every one of them.¹ Lastly I owe my wife Janna an enormous debt for her time, patience, and very focussed criticisms as well as being one of the people who first excited my interest in the First World War.

¹ See Stroud, Rick, *The Phantom Army of Alamein*, Bloomsbury, (London, 2012).

1. Introduction

'I keep six honest serving men,
they taught me all I knew.
Their names are what, and, how, and when,
and why, and where, and who.'

Rudyard Kipling

1.1 Preface

This thesis exists on several levels. At one level it is a set of plans in graphic form, at another a narrative of planning events, at another an analysis of the process whereby the plans were written. These texts alone are not history: to become history, narratives, and analyses of plans must be supported by analyses of the decisions embodied in them and the process of writing them, so that their quality, hopefully, becomes evident. Therefore, at another level, this thesis is a record of how, while forced to plan in an intellectual void, the BEF succeeded only by the persistence and inventiveness of some senior officers, and their efforts generated the sources of this history. This void derived from an anti-intellectual tradition maintained by Haig and many pre-war senior officers so that a planning doctrine lacuna extended from the retirement of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in 1904 to the Haig's smothering of Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Grigg's SS198 Tactical Instructions for the Offensive of 1918 in 1917, which permanently inhibited its publication.²

Accounts of the British Army in its battles on the Western Front in the First World War mostly focus on their conduct and results. This thesis identifies the evolution both of the British Army's battle planning process and its battle plans, by exploring the relationship between the quality of battle planning by the BEF in the period 1915-1916, the speed with which plans could be written

² Bodleian Library, Gorell papers, box 8, See Cook, James, 'The Transformation Of The British Expeditionary Force On The Western Front 1914-1918', 2021 KCL Ethesis, for a discussion of its contents, in particular p. 211.

and the effects of any improvement in their contents.³ This thesis is therefore the first account of any battle ever written *a priori*.

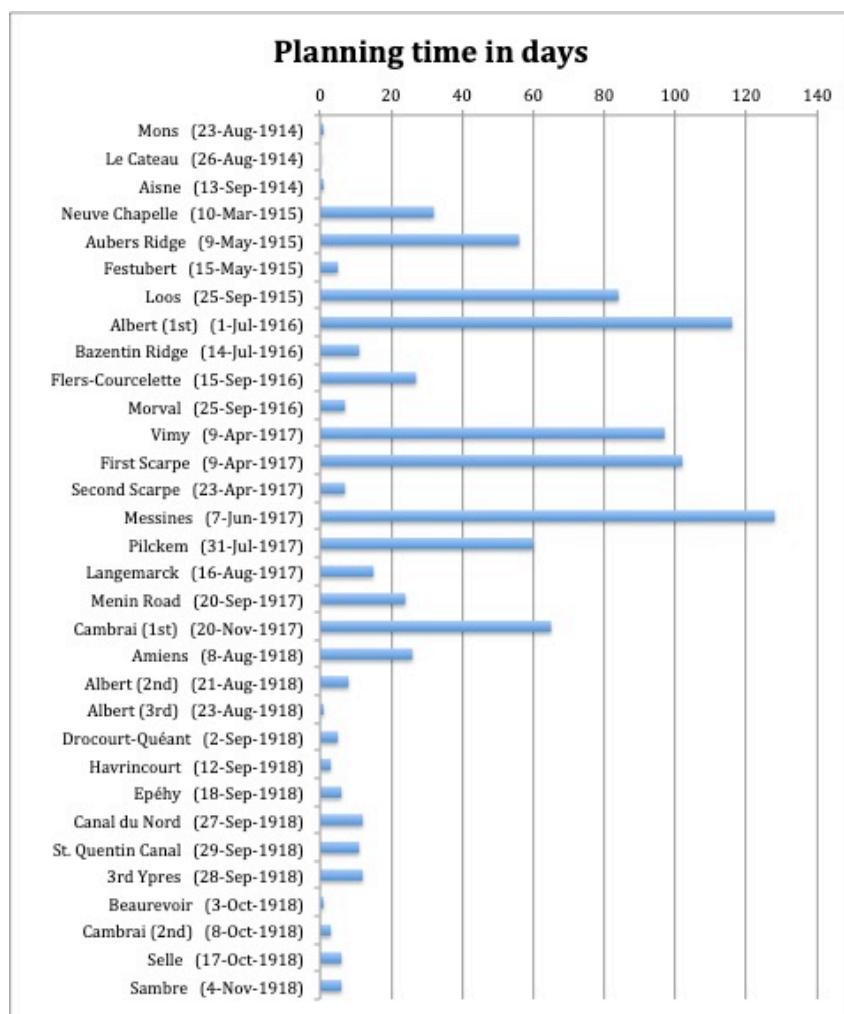


Figure 1 - Planning time⁴

Figure 1 shows the length of time taken by the BEF to plan their principal battles of the Western Front in the period 1914-1918. The planning times for the first three (Mons, Le Cateau and the Aisne) were short since they were defensive, the planning times for Bazentin Ridge, Morval, and Second Scarpe were mostly subsumed in preceding battles. Until the Battle of Amiens most

³ The original intention was to study the evolution of battle planning up to the Armistice but for reasons of space and time this has had to be curtailed. Like the subjects of this thesis, I had badly underestimated the time needed. Thus after 55 months and a pandemic, I had only covered four of the eight battles I had planned to analyse.

⁴ Taken from Simpson, Andrew, 'The Operational Role of British Corps Command on the Western Front, 1914-18', Doctoral Thesis, UCL (London, 2001), p. 222.

battles required extensive planning, but the planning time for of later battles, known colloquially as the '100 days', was noticeably shorter.

Battle plan contents depend on the context in which they are written, the planning process used, and the state of operational knowledge. The thesis investigates the evolution of battle planning up to the end of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. and how the BEF's operational knowledge evolved between 1915 and 1916, whether this evolution was represented in doctrine documents, and how well it was disseminated. No comparable analysis of battle plans from GHQ down to battalion level has ever been made.

1.2

References, abbreviations, footnotes, and documentation colour codes

References to archives may be decoded thus:

- AWM refers to an item held by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra;
- CHUR refers to the Churchill Archives at the University of Cambridge.
- IWM refers to an item held by the Imperial War Museum, London:
 - IWM 2 - Fourth Army war diary, 5 February 1916 to 22 June 1916
 - IWM 3 - Fourth Army war diary, 14 July 1916 to 31 August 1916
 - IWM 4 - Fourth Army war diary, 1 August 1916 to 14 August 1916
 - IWM 5 - Fourth Army Conferences and Somme papers, 3 March 1916 to 22 June 1916
 - IWM 6 - Fourth Army Conferences and Somme papers, 5 February 1916 to 19 November 1916
 - IWM 7 - Fourth Army operation orders and instructions 5 March 1916 to 19 August 1916
- LHCMA refers to an item in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
- NAM refers to an item in the National Army Museum of the United Kingdom

- NLS refers to an item in the National Library of Scotland
- TNA refers to The (British) National Archive, formerly referred to as the Public Record Office.
- WO refers to a War Office file held by the TNA.
- Terms are defined in a Glossary in Appendix A and the data used in tables and graphs can be found in Appendix B. A detailed bibliography is in Appendix C.

Abbreviations are shown without intervening full stops. Footnote references in the text may appear out of numerical order but, to minimise duplication, are simply cross-references to another footnote. Thus footnote ²⁶⁸ appears several times on page 82. The footnotes themselves are all in numerical order.

Chapters 5 to 8 include excerpts from a planning timing chart. These derive from a spreadsheet of the planning documents used for the First Battle of Albert, and Flers Courclette, from army down to battalion levels. These charts denote the documents or events of each day by a coloured oblong which is numbered and ordered by the unit which published them. A key to the numbers is shown below.

	Plans and orders down to division-level		Doctrine documents correspondence and discussion papers		Conference materials		Plans and orders from brigade-level down
---	---	---	---	---	----------------------	---	--

Figure 2 - Third and Fourth Armies | Planning documentation key

This reflects the documents at the level at which they are written rather than where they can be traced. Thus: a document might be written at corps level and sent to a division where the sole copy was found, but it is reflected on the diagram at corps level. Where a document or event is referred to, the related number is enclosed in square brackets, thus: [1], in the footnotes.

1.3

Maps and graphic designs

All maps shown in this thesis derive from those retrieved from either: my personal collection; the contents of the WO 95 series and other TNA files; the Chasseaud collection at the McMaster University Library, Canada; the McGill University Archives; or the IWM. Hard copies have been scanned using Vuescan.⁵ They have been reprocessed to eliminate the original colours and then recoloured to accentuate the contours using 'Graphic Converter 12'.⁶ Some maps display overlays derived from original trench maps whose colours have sometimes been inverted to render them more visible. The illustrations have then been prepared using 'OmniGraffle 7.2.2'.⁷ Charts have been copied directly from Excel and the data and sources on which they are based, can be found in Appendix B - Data on page 629.

References to individuals include their full name and, where applicable, rank at the time they are first mentioned. Further details can be found in Appendix C - Bibliography.

1.4

The beginning

The first assault by troops of the BEF on the Western Front occurred at Messines on 14 December 1914.⁸ It cannot be said to have been planned: Field Marshal Sir John French, the BEF Commander-in-Chief (hereafter: 'C-in-C') merely issued an order from General Head Quarters (hereafter: 'GHQ') on 12 December 1914. The order expected some troops to attack and others merely to 'demonstrate'. No artillery was used. No wire was cut. No ground was taken. Other demonstrations were called off eight days later.⁹ Up until

5 <https://www.hamrick.com>

6 Thorsten Lemke, © 2002-2023 Lemke Software GmbH.

7 Omni Group 2917 NE Blakeley St., Seattle WA 98105-3120.

8 For brevity dates are rendered as dd mmm(yyyy).

9 Edmonds, J. E., and Wynne G. C., *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1915*, Volume I, Imperial War Museum, (London, 1927), p. 18.

then the BEF had fought on grounds and in ways it had not chosen. From the first contact with the German Army on 22 August 1914 near Soignies, through the retreat to the Marne on 5 September 1914 and the 'Race to the Sea', ending in its arrival in Flanders on 8 October 1914, the BEF had (mostly) conformed to French wishes and fought the Germans in whatever way it could.¹⁰ On 10 March 1915, at Neuve Chapelle in France it fought the first battle of the First World War that it had planned.¹¹

Most historical focus on First World War battles is on their outcomes and the reasons for those outcomes. Studies of how these battles were planned and why they were planned thus are rare. The essence of planning is the definition, on paper, of the 'before' and 'after' states of some situation, project, battle, or other endeavour together with definitions of how the 'after' state is to be achieved, who is responsible, with what means, and when. These principles were already well known in the Franco-Prussian war: even when Major-General Adalbert von Bredow planned the charge of the Prussian Dragoons, he first took 30 minutes to understand the situation before issuing his orders.¹² General Carl von Clausewitz had been equally concerned to determine how an opponent would respond,¹³ and both principles are consistent with the idea of the 'Appreciation' as shown in Appendix G - Appreciations, plans and reconnaissance reports which defines the 'before' state. Clausewitz was also concerned to define the 'after' state and the process of achieving it.¹⁴ Assertions that 'no plan survives contact with the enemy'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹² Franklin, Henry Bowles, *The great battles of 1870 and the blockade of Metz*, Trübner, (London, 1887). Cited in Echevarria, Antulio J, 'Combining firepower and versatility, Remaking the 'arm of decision' before the Great War', *The Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* (hereafter: 'RUSI'), 147 (3), (London, 2002), pp. 84, 91.

¹³ Holmes, T. M., 'Planning versus Chaos in Clausewitz's On War', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, (Abingdon: 2007), p. 134.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

ignore Clausewitz's point that keeping armies to a plan is a commander's job and it is only when he loses or changes, that a plan is dead.¹⁵

1.5

Plans

Plans are simply the reification of a number of decisions in narrative and cartographic forms but their structure is more than their tables of contents: each depends on the information flow, the span of control it enables, the level of operational knowledge possessed by the planners, the doctrines in force when it was written, and the process by which it was written. The process in turn directly depends on the planning ability accumulated by planners and is a major determinant of planning speed. The context in which battle plans are written encompasses political, social, technological, and military issues, the state of the war, and of the BEF, and the political, and social pressures exerted. The thesis takes account of the introduction of new weapons and improvements in communications systems, and assesses the quality of plans and processes. It looks for evidence of conflict between the need to devolve responsibility to platoon level and the need to plan comprehensively. It considers how the plans reflected commanders' changing operational knowledge from the '*bombard and storm*' of Neuve Chapelle to the '*creeping barrages*' of 1916.

The operational knowledge of the BEF was contained in the doctrine documents (whose release confirmed the availability of each new military capability, enabling planners to describe that capability merely by reference) and the notes and instructions issued to fill gaps. The thesis shows how the content of doctrines evolved and affected plan contents, planning processes, and outcomes.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

1.6 Method

The method of the thesis is to choose a number of battles, identify the units involved in each, and trace how the plans were prepared, reviewed, and transformed into orders. The battles selected are Neuve Chapelle because it was the first the BEF planned, Loos because it was the first to use a newly-developed weapon, First Albert because it was the largest battle the BEF had ever planned, and involved the 'New Armies', and Flers Courcelette because it was using another hitherto unknown weapon: the tank. The plans concerned cover assault, reinforcements, reserves, support, supply, communications, and field engineering, and are based on the Official History, war diaries, maps, reports, and personal accounts. The thesis examines any consequences of the immediately-preceding battle, the problems posed by the next battle, the degree to which these were recognised and reflected in plans, and the stock of operational knowledge at the time.¹⁶ Since the outcomes of any battle are due to many causes, and often too complex to attribute, the thesis considers them only if they are clearly the consequence of some planning decision.

The quality of a plan can be assessed by answering two questions: do its contents cover all the problems faced by the troops, and is it written in a timely manner? Battle plans must: address the battle problems; express the commander's intention; remain internally coherent - usually with a context-defining narrative;¹⁷ be feasible;¹⁸ be consistent with the plans of neighbouring units; and robust enough to withstand either a change of commander or enemy actions. They must contain enough information for a subordinate officer to write a lower-level plan or orders and be expressed

¹⁶ See also Schwartz, David, *Encyclopedia of Knowledge Management*, IGI Global (New York: 2005), www.army.mil/article/49561/army_operational_knowledge_management.

¹⁷ As in the proposal that separate bodies of troops should advance along a trench towards each other, throwing hand grenades and bayonetting, yet somehow not killing each other 23 December 1915, Conference notes, I Corps War diary, Headquarters Branches and Services, General Staff, WO 95/589/4.

¹⁸ For an example of an unfeasible decision see page 374: a fast-moving barrage is expected to be followed by troops.

such that anyone could decide if such orders have been obeyed or not. They must be autonomous: a plan which depends on a marked-up map is incomplete without it.

The planning of a battle requires that commanders have a definition of the problems they face, often referred to as an 'Appreciation', a modus operandi to resolve them, well-supported commanders and trained troops able, equipped, and willing to follow the plans. The definition of the battle problem is a matter of doctrine, intelligence about the enemy, the terrain, and the weather. The modus operandi is derived from the previously-mentioned doctrine documents and can be seen as the process of battle planning, the battle plan structure and its contents. Only Jonathan Boff has yet attempted to identify a battle planning process,¹⁹ and the only study of a battle plan's structure was made by Farrell-Vinay.²⁰ The contents of battle plans have been studied, most notably by Harris but such studies are rare.²¹

Battle plans represent the best solution to the battle problems that the planners can write. They evolve as the sum of military knowledge and many military historians such as Gary Sheffield, Ian Malcolm Brown, and Aimée Fox have referred to this evolution as a '*learning curve*' but without defining it.²²

The process of writing battle plans is initially the responsibility of the army or corps commander, though it is usually devolved to the chief of staff and in

¹⁹ Boff, Jonathan, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany 1918*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2012).

²⁰ Farrell-Vinay, Peter, 'Thesis-How were attacks planned?' Unpublished MA thesis, University of Birmingham, (Birmingham, 2016).

²¹ Harris, J. P. with Barr, Niall, *Amiens to the Armistice. The BEF in the Hundred Days Campaign 8 August, 11 November 1918*, Brassey's (UK) Ltd., (1999), Chapter Two.

²² Sheffield, G. D. *Forgotten Victory*, Review, (London, 2002),
Brown, Ian Malcolm, 'Not Glamorous, But Effective, The Canadian Corps and the Set-Piece Attack, 1917-1918', *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 1994), pp. 421-444,
Fox-Godden, Aimée, 'Putting Knowledge in Power'-Learning and Innovation in the British army of the First World War', University of Birmingham eThesis, (Birmingham, 2015).

The *learning curve* and *learning organisation* constructs were first used in 1936 in the assessment of the speed of aircraft production. See Wright, T. P. 1936. 'Factors affecting the costs of air planes' in *Journal of the Aeronautical Sciences*, 3: 122-128.

smaller units to a staff officer. This process must be timely: if it is distributed to subordinate units too late for orders to be written and units rehearsed, then while the top-level plan might be good, the planning process is a failure. The process must account for reviews, assumptions, contingencies, risks, and changes and provide the time needed to transmit the orders to battalions, and to rehearse the operation. Its quality can be described as varying from 'immature', through 'improving' to 'mature'. The immature or 'repetitive' process is characterised by a number of failed attempts at writing a plan, a more mature, or iterative process builds on an initial version of a plan, repeatedly adding, or deleting content until it is considered adequate, or time constraints force premature release. The consecutive or mature approach creates few versions in a timely manner, covering all the issues, ready for decomposition into lower-level plans or orders.²³

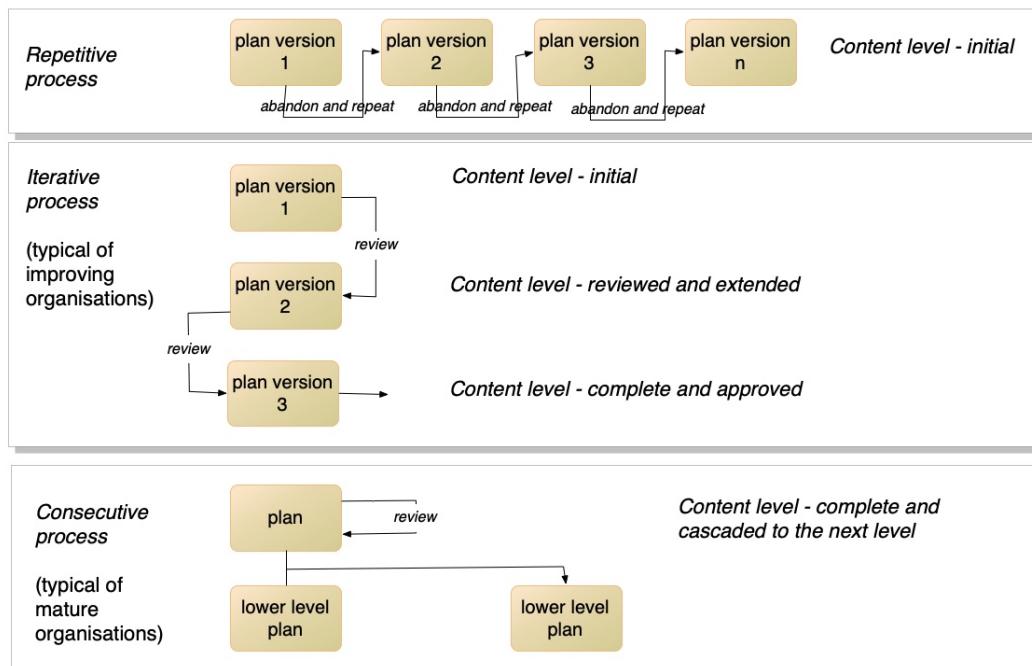


Figure 3 - Planning maturity levels

²³ This discussion is based on Alon, Dudi, *Processes of Military Decision Making, Military and Strategic affairs*, 15 (2) (Tel Aviv: 2013) and Humphrey, W. S. (March 1988). 'Characterizing the software process: a maturity framework'. *IEEE Software*. 5 (2): 73-79.

The mature process is characterised by a number of stages beginning with problem identification. It has several feedback loops to ensure that all the parties involved have their concerns addressed.

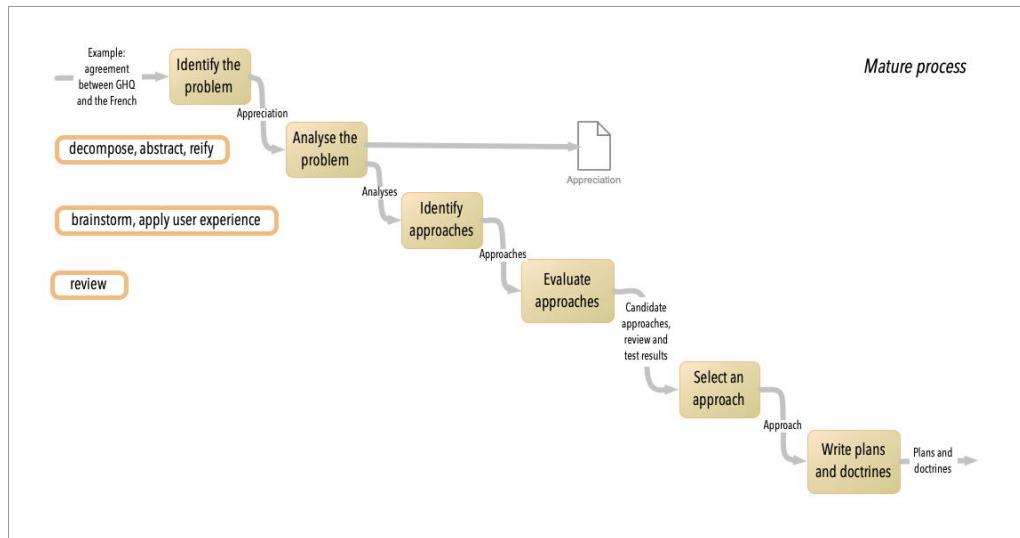


Figure 4 - An idealised example of a mature process

No unit had achieved a mature process by 1916.

1.7 Context

Just tell me somebody, what did he do?

AA Milne, Anxious Pooh Song

Determining the roots of the BEF's battle planning evolution requires that we understand how the doctrinal obsessions of the senior cavalry officers impeded the British Army from developing any planning ability up to 1914 and then how these impediments were overcome.

The historiography of BEF battle planning has always been written as a background to the battle itself and consequently the major inputs of this thesis remain the primary sources. The war diaries which contain many of the plans, strategy papers and orders, are on line in the WO 95 series at the TNA together with the battle files (which remain on paper in the WO 153, 158, 159, 372, and 373 series), and much has been obtained from the Liddell Hart Archives, the Imperial War Museum, and the Defence Academy Library in

Shrivenham. In particular most of the doctrine manuals were available together with the Staff College examination papers.²⁴

Even the humblest archive source has proved valuable if only by being absent (as many important ones were). To lack one source is unfortunate, to lack a set looks like filleting. But those which are evidently 'pour l'histoire' tell us that someone was embarrassed enough to furnish it. Similarly there are passages in diaries which, knowing what the author had been reading or doing that day, could set up unmet expectations which became a basis for further investigation.²⁵ While the history of war planning has been extensively covered,²⁶ no systematic analysis of battle plans and their evolution in the BEF has ever been made. Descriptions have generally focussed on single battles and have not attempted to compare them or analyse the processes involved. G. F. Henderson, once Professor of Military History at the Staff College at Camberley and doctrine writer, mentions plans on some 50 occasions in his book, but not how to write one.²⁷ His pupil, Brigadier-General J. E. Edmonds and other authors of the Official History, use battle orders as devices to declare the start of battles but occasionally give brief accounts of plans and sometimes the entire text.²⁸ Dudi Alon studies modern decision-making,²⁹ others the relationship between modern plans and doctrines,³⁰ or computer systems.³¹ Patrick Watt, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson have subjected parts of the Neuve Chapelle and other plans to close

²⁴ See page 11.

²⁵ See page 299 for an egregious example.

²⁶ Neilson, Keith, 'Great Britain', in Hamilton, R. F. and Herwig, H. H., *War planning 1914*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2010), pp. 175-197, Gooch, 'plans', Gooch, 'prospect', pp. 92-115,

²⁷ Henderson, G. F., *Science of War*, Longmans, (London, 1912).

²⁸ Edmonds, J. E., *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1914-18*, IWM, 1995.

²⁹ Alon, Dudi, 'Processes of Military Decision Making', *Military and Strategic affairs*, 15 (2) (Tel Aviv: 2013).

³⁰ Avant, Deborah D., 'The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (December 1993), pp. 409, 430.

³¹ Bodt, Barry, et al., *An Experimental Testbed for Battle Planning*, Simulation Concepts Branch U. S. Army Research Laboratory, Aberdeen Proving Ground, (Aberdeen: 2008).

textual analysis.³² Paul Kendall gives extensive details of the preparations for the battle, based mainly on personal reminiscences.³³ Gary Sheffield discusses tactics,³⁴ and the 'directive command' approach which he claims that Haig adopted, in which the overall commander expresses an 'intent' which lower-level staff expand into plans and its concomitant flaw that senior officers were loth to interfere even when a junior's plans were faulty.³⁵ He ignores the importance of the Appreciation in the planning of battles and the effect of its excision from FSR I (1912). He claims that Haig rewrote FSR II in 1909 but ignores FSR I 1912. Jonathan Boff has extracted a process model of battle planning showing the steps taken,³⁶ but Paul Harris is only concerned with planners and not what they did.³⁷ J. P. Harris and Nial Barr have analysed the preparations for the battle of Amiens in some detail.³⁸ Sanders Marble discusses artillery planning and many of the difficulties surrounding its evolution, but not the processes involved or how they evolved,³⁹ whereas Jonathan Bailey does.⁴⁰ Andrew Simpson has examined both Neuve Chapelle and the degree to which Haig's use of FSR I 1912 affected battle planning and conduct with respect to corps command. He asks whether commanders relied more on FSR I 1912 or their own judgement and this thesis clearly shows the latter.⁴¹ He describes plans and planning and suggests the faster tempo of the

³² Watt, Patrick, 'Douglas Haig and the planning of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle' in Jones, Spencer, *Courage without glory*, Helion, (Solihull: 2015), Prior, Robin and Wilson, Trevor, *Command and Control on the Western Front*, Blackwell, (Oxford: 2014).

³³ Kendall, Paul, *The Battle of Neuve Chapelle*, Frontline Books, (Barnsley: 2016).

³⁴ Sheffield, Gary, *Forgotten Victory*, Headline, (London, 2001), pp. 161-2.

³⁵ Sheffield, Gary, *The Chief*, Aurum, (Solihull: 2011), p. 26.

³⁶ Boff, *Winning ...* p. 194.

³⁷ Harris, Paul, *The Men who Planned the War*, Ashgate, (Farnham: 2016).

³⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁹ Marble, Sanders, 'The Infantry cannot do with a gun less, The Place of the Artillery in the British Expeditionary Force', 1914-1918, downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/mas01/frames/fmasarc02.html> on 1 November 2014.

⁴⁰ Bailey, Jonathan, *Field Artillery and Firepower*, Routledge, (London, 1989).

⁴¹ Simpson, Andrew, *Op. Cit.*, p. 38.

last months of the war was due to greater availability of matériel, artillery, staff work and surprise, but does not explain how.⁴² His claim

'... that Field Service Regulations, Part 1 (1909), was found by commanders in the BEF to be applicable throughout the war, because it was designed to be as flexible as possible ...'⁴³

flies in the face of the lack of support FSR I provided for the preparation of plans and map references, its prohibitions of conditional orders,⁴⁴ and its discouragement of the use of timetables.⁴⁵ Notably he fails to demonstrate any plan's relationship to FSR I, while conceding that

'Since trench warfare rendered redundant most of FSR's assumptions about an attack ... it is difficult to see how it could be applied at all'.⁴⁶

Nick Lloyd gives an overview of the essential points of the plans for Loos but not why they were planned that way.⁴⁷ Others discuss the relationship between modern plans and doctrine,⁴⁸ or computer systems.⁴⁹ In his study of the Battle of Fromelles, Roger Lee has attempted an analysis, but excludes such essentials as tracing a commander's intentions, the planning process or listing the war diaries consulted. His claim that

'there is little coverage in the literature on the First World War that addresses in any analytical sense how a battle was planned'

⁴² Simpson, Andy, 'British Corps Command on the Western Front' in Sheffield G. and Todman, D., *Command and Control on the Western Front*, (Spellmount: Stroud: 2004).

⁴³ Simpson, Andrew, 'The Operational Role of British Corps Command on the Western Front, 1914, 18', Doctoral Thesis, UCL (London, 2001).

⁴⁴ FSR I, Section 9.

⁴⁵ 'It is seldom necessary or advisable to endeavour to look far ahead in stating intentions.'

⁴⁶ Simpson, Andrew, *Op. Cit*, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Lloyd, Nick, *Loos 1915*, (The History Press, (Stroud: 2008), p 47-61.

⁴⁸ Avant, Deborah D., *Op Cit*.

Evans, Nick, 'From Drill To Doctrine, Forging The British Army's Tactics 1897-1909', eThesis, London, (KCL, undated)
Jones, Spencer, *From Boer War to World War*, University of Oklahoma Press, (Oklahoma: 2012)

⁴⁹ Bodt, Barry, et al. *Op. cit*.

is borne out by the literature search.⁵⁰ The GHQ of the BEF has been probed intermittently but again without useful discussions of planning.⁵¹ Dan Todman mentions planning on half a page.⁵² Strong and Marble discuss artillery innovations but do not relate them to any plan.⁵³ Paddy Griffiths observes

‘Generals were gradually weaned away from the idea that attacks should be improvised heroically and instantly’⁵⁴ but discusses it no further. Travers’ discussions of the Somme battle cover tactics and overall objectives derived from the diaries of General Rawlinson and Haig, and army-level documents, but not the corps or divisional plans. Battle planning has instead been overshadowed by strategic and tactical questions such as the importance of cavalry, machine guns and artillery and the lessons of the Boer and Russo-Japanese wars.⁵⁵ This unconcern to examine plans in detail is matched by authors of works on German and French armies: Gross sees plans only as high-level narratives of exclusively strategic interest,⁵⁶ Sheldon draws his narrative from many after-action reports.⁵⁷ Foley has a chapter entitled ‘Verdun: the Plan’ which discusses the surviving documents and the strategic issues, with a semi-legible map of the battlefield showing four defence lines, and ignoring artillery.⁵⁸ Greenhalgh has

⁵⁰ Lee, Roger, *British Battle Planning in 1916 and the Battle of Fromelles*, Ashgate, (Farnham: 2015).

⁵¹ Brown, Ian Malcolm, ‘The Evolution of the British Army’s Logistical and Administrative Infrastructure. 1914-1918’. eThesis, London, (KCL, 1996), Charteris, John, *At GHQ*, London, (Cassell, 1931), Henniker, A. M., *Official History, Transportation on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, London, (Institution of Royal Engineers, 1937), Nicholson, W. N., *Behind the Lines*, London, (Jonathan Cape Limited, 1939), GSO (Frank Fox), *GHQ: Montreuil-sur-Mer*, London, (Philip Alan & Co., 1920).

⁵² Todman, D., ‘The Grand Lamassery Revisited’ in Sheffield, G. and Todman, D., *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

⁵³ Strong, Paul and Marble, Sanders, *Artillery in the Great War*, Pen and Sword, (Barnsley: 2011), p. 45.

⁵⁴ Griffith, Paddy, *British Fighting Methods During the Great War*, Routledge, (London, 1996), Chapter 1.

⁵⁵ Gooch, John, *The plans of war*, Routledge, (London, 1974), Hamilton, Richard F. and Herwig, Holger H., *War planning 1914*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2010), Lambert, Nicholas, A., *Planning Armageddon*, Harvard, (Cambridge: 2012), Badsey, Stephen, ‘The Boer War (1899, 1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine’ *The Journal of Military History*, Project Muse, 71 (1), (London, 2007), Carlson, Joel, *From Spion Kop to the Somme*, University of Ottawa, (Ottawa: 2008).

⁵⁶ Gross, Gerhard P., *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, Kentucky U. P. (Kentucky: 2016).

⁵⁷ Sheldon, Jack, *The German Army on the Somme*, Pen and Sword, (Barnsley: 2007).

⁵⁸ Foley, Robert T., *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2005), pp. 181-208.

many sections on French Army doctrine but none on plans: her narratives too, are purely strategic.⁵⁹ On Foch she devotes a chapter to the planning of the Somme, mostly discussing doctrine but with a brief narrative of the plan of 10 March, and a map.⁶⁰ Général Foch's analysis of the latest attacks is a revealing view of the battle problems the French had encountered by December 1915 but the plans he mentions concern 1870.⁶¹ See also Appendix C - Bibliography on page 677.

1.8 Doctrinal support

While this thesis examines the battle planning process used, it also examines the doctrinal support available. There is a considerable literature on the doctrinal struggles within the British army between those such as Sir John French and Haig who saw a large continued rôle for mounted troops and those led by Field-Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, who wanted the Army to take into account the effects of entrenching, the indirect fire of long-range artillery and the machine gun (hereafter 'MG').⁶² Haig's 1909 version of the Field Service Regulations (FSR), devoted Regulation 7 to machine guns but saw them as less important than the offensive spirit. In this he was supported by the Japanese Captain F. Takenouchi whose troops took a position well-defended by machine guns at appalling cost.⁶³ FSR I 1912 did not caution against such an attack. The value of trenches was similarly denied: while Henderson had included entrenching in the 1896 Infantry Drill manual and several wars since 1866 had all demonstrated the effectiveness of trench

⁵⁹ Greenhalgh, Elizabeth, *The French Army and the First World War*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2014), p.129.

⁶⁰ Greenhalgh, Elizabeth, *Foch in Command*, CUP, (Cambridge: 2011), p.144.

⁶¹ Foch, F., 'De nos dernières attaques', in *Oeuvres Complètes. Vol II*, Ed. Economica, (Paris: 2008), p. 439.

⁶² Bryson, Richard, *Op. Cit.* pp. 25-62.

Griffith, Paddy, *Op. Cit.* pp. 186-191, Badsey, Stephen, *Op. Cit.*,
Bailey, Jonathan, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Occasional paper no. 22*, (Camberley: 1996),
Carlson, Joel, *From Spion Kop to the Somme*, University of Ottawa, (Ottawa: 2008)

⁶³ Takenouchi, Captain F., "The Tactical Employment of Machine Guns With Infantry in Attack and Defense," *Journal of the RUSI* 51 part 1, January/June, (London, 1907) p. 457.

warfare and modern firepower, the '*propensity to entrench*' of troops in the American Civil War being attributed more to the shortage of professional troops in both armies than to the effectiveness of small-arms and MGs.⁶⁴

Equally it was claimed that in the Russo-Japanese war, cavalry had been 'improperly used' since European battlefields would never resemble those of Mukden or Liaoyang and any misuse was due to either poor leadership or their rôle as mounted infantry.⁶⁵ Timothy Bowman and Edward Connolly cover both these doctrines and the training of the army in detail.⁶⁶

The encounter battles of the BEF in 1914 illustrated the impossibility of relying on orders alone as the basis of attacks and the need for a planning doctrine which would include the planning process and contents, the introduction of new weapons and changes in operational knowledge of commanders and troops. By using four battles as examples and analysing their plans and planning, the thesis shows how long it took the BEF to acknowledge this impossibility.

⁶⁴ Weigley, Russell F. 'American Strategy from its Beginnings Through the First World War,' in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Princeton University Press, (Princeton: 1986), p. 419 Cited in Carlson, Joel, *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁵ Carlson, Joel, *Op. Cit.* p. 105.

⁶⁶ Bowman, *Op. Cit.*

2. The Army - Purpose, Doctrines and Training

2.1 Introduction

‘Happy those whose bones whitened the fields of Surrey; they at least were spared the disgrace we lived to endure’⁶⁷

In 1871 with an army of 1 million, Germany won the Franco-Prussian War against a French army of 0.4m.⁶⁸ The British Army then numbered 0.18m.⁶⁹ The possibility of a war against Germany roused the concerns of the British people and was the basis of a book by George Chesney called ‘The Battle of Dorking’ in which Britain was occupied by Germany. By itself this book created an ‘invasion scare’ genre and aroused enough public concern to support the considerable reforms of the Army made by the Secretary for War, Edward Cardwell in 1871,⁷⁰ including the abolition of the purchase of commissions and a requirement that aspiring officers pass examinations instead. This, combined with the creation of the short-service commission, improved the attractiveness of the army as a career and thus the quality of the recruits.⁷¹

Up to 1871, the structure of the British Army’s officer corps had echoed the land-based social structure of the Britain of the sixteenth century. Officers were aristocrats or of aristocratic origin and soldiers were formerly landless peasants or unemployed workers.⁷² The industrial revolution brought improved communications, better weapons, the need for qualified staff and a

⁶⁷ Chesney, George, *The Battle of Dorking*, Blackwood’s Magazine, May 1871. Blackwood, (Edinburgh: 1971).

⁶⁸ Wawro, Geoffrey, *The Franco-Prussian War*, CUP (Cambridge: 2003), p. 41.

⁶⁹ Rasler, Karen, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490–1990*. Kentucky UP, (Kentucky : 1994). p. 149. (Figure 8.1 ‘Change in the Size of the British Army 1650–1910’).

⁷⁰ Ensor, Robert, *England 1870-1914*, Clarendon, (Oxford: 1986), p. 10

⁷¹ Bond, Brian, ‘The Late-Victorian Army’, *History Today*, XI (1961), p. 624.

⁷² Briggs, Milton and Jordan, Percy, *Economic history of England*, University Tutorial Press, (London, 1958), p. 636.

consequent expansion in technical education.⁷³ The army aspired to join the ranks of the qualified professions, but the education provided by the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich (RMA) (Engineers and Artillery) and Royal Military College, Sandhurst (RMC) (cavalry and infantry) was of limited quality.⁷⁴ The level of education provided by the Staff College at Camberley will be examined on page 40 below.

Much has been written about the British Army as a profession, mostly as distinct from being amateur, unpaid, or unable to publish in reviewed journals.⁷⁵ Professionalism has pre-requisites: it is not only the use of trained expertise and advancement through merit.⁷⁶ Professionals acknowledge a set of ideals outside the employer-employee relationship, usually expressed as a code of practice established by some authorising body.⁷⁷ Thus doctors take the Hippocratic oath never to harm their patients and are licenced (in Britain) by the General Medical Council. Mechanical Engineers are regulated (in Britain) by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Ultimately there are measures of professional failure: patients die, bridges collapse and boilers explode. Before 1914 the British Army had no dominant ideals or code of practice outside King's Regulations, Army Council Instructions, doctrines or military law, save to win battles, pay mess bills and not be cited in divorce proceedings. However, were the measure of its professionalism merely the

⁷³ For example: The Institution of Civil Engineers was founded in 1818, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1847 and the Institution of Electrical Engineers in 1871.

⁷⁴ Spiers, E. M., *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*, Manchester University Press, (Manchester: 1992), pp. 89-117
Duncan, Andrew George, 'The Military Education of Junior Officers in the Edwardian Army', Birmingham eThesis, (Birmingham, 2016).

⁷⁵ Fox, Aimée, 'Goats Mingling With Sheep, Professionalisation Personalities and Partnerships Between British Civil and Military Engineers c 1837 1939', *War and Society*, (London, 2018).
Matin, A. Michael, 'The creativity of war planners-armed forces professionals and the pre-1914 British invasion-scare genre', *English Literary History*, Vol. 78, No. 4, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Winter 2011), pp. 801-831.
McGrath, John J., 'Six Weeks in 1914 Campaign Execution and the Fog of War—Historical Lessons for the Military Professional', *Military Review*, November-December 2015.
Boycott-Brown, Martin, *The Psychology of Generalship in World War One*, Nottingham Trent University, (Nottingham: 2011), Davies, Huw, 'The Evolution of the British Army's Use of its History', eThesis KCL (undated).

⁷⁶ Perkin, Harold, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, Routledge, (Abingdon: 1989). p. 4.

⁷⁷ Kultgen, John, *Ethics and professionalism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, (Philadelphia: 1988).

winning of battles, the British Army could point to the fact that it was winning very small battles every year from 1859 to 1899. But small battles require little planning and the army's troop commitments ensured it fought no big battles in this period (see Figure 5 and Appendix F - Previous wars below). This could be one reason why a critical part of the code of practice, the planning of battles, was missing.

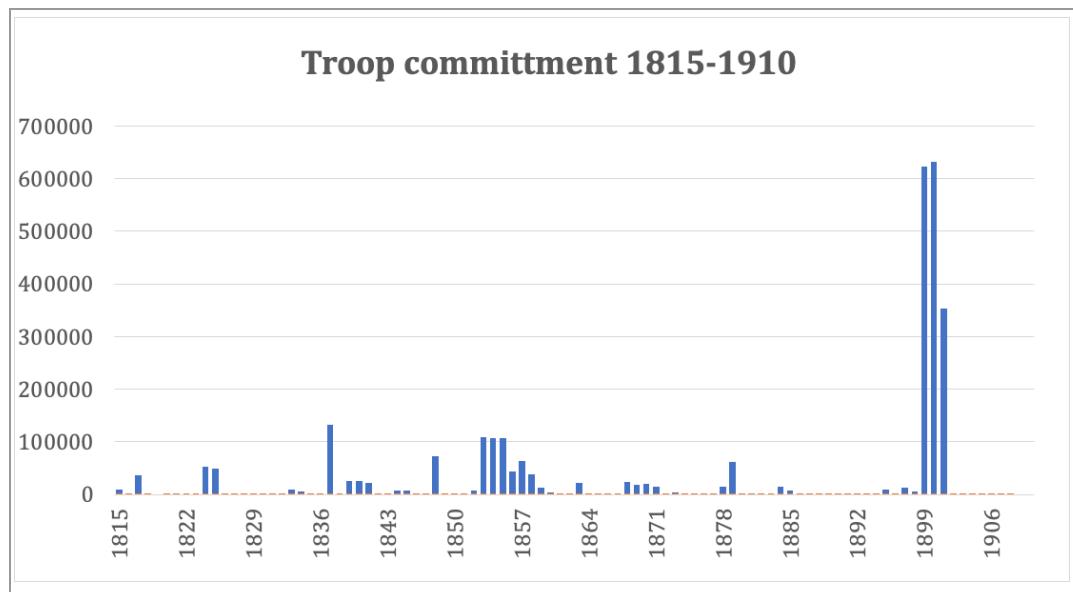


Figure 5 - Annualised number of British and Empire troops on active service in a war between 1815 and 1910.⁷⁸

The leaders of the profession were officers and after 1871 a man could become one by passing the exams of the RMC or RMA. Alternatively, he might join the militia whose entry qualifications were essentially social. Bond's comments that the army:

‘... remained nonetheless a toy, commanded at the top mainly by ‘bow and arrow’ Generals and by an officer class imbued with the notion that the breeding of a gentleman was an adequate—and almost essential—qualification for leadership.’

... and

... constituted a kind of club where a gentleman could enjoy good fellowship, hunting and a life of leisure, with minimum attention to tiresome military routine...⁷⁹

⁷⁸ See Appendix F - Previous wars for details.

⁷⁹ Bond, Brian, *Op. Cit.*

... are repeated too often by other authors to be denied. But under the lash of war inadequate officers were sent home.⁸⁰ During the Second Boer War..

... not only Buller and White but almost all of the divisional commanders failed. Warren, Cléry and Gatacre failed miserably ...⁸¹

The challenges these officers faced were as different from the challenges they had trained for as had been the challenges of the Crimea for their grandfathers. Their profession had been lulled into a belief in its competence by the many campaigns fought against 'savage' enemies.⁸² With the Crimean and Boer wars it received the feedback it needed.⁸³

The quality of an organisation is determined by the quality of its leadership, the level of stress induced by new challenges and its ability to evolve and cope with these challenges. While the British Army met the challenges of the Crimean and Boer wars by indifference, inertia and denial, it was able in the First World War eventually to meet new challenges through the disruptive intrusion of such resources as Lieutenant-Colonels J. F. C. Fuller and Ernest Swinton, Generals Sir John Monash and Sir Arthur Currie, and being under stress it was eventually able to adapt. Leading this adaptation was the staff officer.

2.2

The Staff Officer

Staff officers are Regular Army officers who wield immense power but have no executive responsibility. Their organisational clout derives from the General or senior officer to whom they report and the quality of the advice they give to him and his subordinates. They hold their job because they are

⁸⁰ Jones, Spencer, 'The influence of the Boer War (1899, 1902) on the tactical development of the Regular British Army 1902, 1914', eThesis, Wolverhampton 2009, p. 35.

⁸¹ Sixsmith, E. K. G, *British Generals in the Twentieth Century*, Arms & Armour Press (London, 1970), p. 29.

⁸² See Appendix F - Previous wars on page 687 and compare the wars fought by Britain with those fought by Germany, Russia and France. Four of the eight wars Germany or Prussia fought after Waterloo were of a continental nature. Between Waterloo and the Second Boer War the only continental war Britain had fought was the Crimean War.

⁸³ Dighton, Adam, 'Jomini versus Clausewitz, Hamley's Operations of War and Military Thought in the British Army, 1866-1933', *War in History*, 1(23), Sage, (Abingdon: 2018), p. 4.

Evans, Nick, *From drill to doctrine-forging the British Army's tactics 1897-1909*, eThesis, KCL (London, undated), p. 82.

clever and battles are won partly because the staff officers of one country are better than those of another. From 1799 staff officers had been trained at High Wycombe for quartermaster rôles, but regular officers were appointed to staff officer functions in the Peninsular War (1807–1814). Thereafter their training did not improve until the establishment of the Staff College in 1858 at Camberley⁸⁴. The Camberley output was limited to thirty-two per annum,⁸⁵ and the War Office used them with reluctance: in 1903 only seven out of fifty-two headquarters staff were 'p.s.c.'⁸⁶

Entry to the staff college required a candidate to pass the entrance exam, hold the rank of Captain, have his CO's recommendation, be a good horseman with good eyesight and be under 35. He had also to support himself and pay the College fees, since his 'parent' unit would not. Apart from the fees, the pay on graduation was always meagre and so it was essential that it be supplemented by private income of at least £100 p.a. for the infantry and £400 p.a. for the cavalry.⁸⁷ But staff officers' prospects were about to change: Germany's victory over France in 1870 was widely recognised as a triumph of its General Staff.⁸⁸

... every Continental Government determined that henceforth the brains of its generals and staff officers should be as bright and as vigorous as hard exercise could make them.⁸⁹

There had been several attempts to duplicate such a body in Britain which had mostly been successfully resisted by the Army's most retrograde elements as well as Her Majesty's Treasury.⁹⁰ Despite this, in 1872 Cardwell

⁸⁴ Cripps, *Op. Cit.* p. 18.

⁸⁵ Henderson, p. 397.

⁸⁶ Gooch, *Plans*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Badsey, Stephen, 'The Boer War (1899-1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine', *The Journal of Military History*, Project Muse, 71 (1), (London, 2007). The figures from 1900 would be the equivalent of £ 12,964.19 or £ 51,856.76.

⁸⁸ Wilkinson, Spenser, *The Brain of an Army*, Constable (London, 1891), p. 7.

⁸⁹ Henderson, p. 402.

⁹⁰ Gooch, *Plans*, p. 5, 24.

had established an Intelligence Department with staff officers. Staff were expected to amass information and present it on request, though without any Appreciation.⁹¹

There were many views of a staff officer's role. For Sir Cornelius Francis Cléry in 1875 the Staff officer acted for the commander and managed advances and retreats but no other role was envisaged. He ignored the role assigned to staff by Cardwell, to amass and present information. By 1884 however, a staff officer had become something between a General's understudy and an administrative Boy Scout.

‘... since command is now so complicated’ that no commander can ‘carry on the work single-handed’ ...
... they would be appointed to Commissariat and Transport, Ordnance, Pay, Military (Field Force), Military (Line of Communications) and the Military Secretariat. In addition to reconnaissance, staff would also plan mobilisations, embarkations, movements and encampments, write orders, gather intelligence, censor the Press, guide columns, direct the vanguard and rearguard, police the battlefield, convene courts-martial, supervise manoeuvres, manage vessels, transmit orders and ensure their execution according to the commander's intentions.⁹² They were expected to receive dictated orders, which they would then repeat to each other ‘to see that no error has crept in’.⁹³ They would write multiple copies by hand. The potential for error was acknowledged, but while carbon paper had been invented in 1801,⁹⁴ it was not until 1904 that its use was proposed in the field and the idea was discussed by General Staff Conference only in 1914.⁹⁵ The orders

⁹¹ See page 64 below.

⁹² Clarke, Francis Coningsby Hannam, *Staff duties*, 1884, HMSO, (London,), pp. 4-6, 121, 162, 40, 41, 35, 39.

⁹³ Clarke, p. 45.

⁹⁴ Wedgwood Archive, Keele University-E27 19396-19506

⁹⁵ De Gruyther, p. 254,
Anon., 12 January 1914, *WO-General Staff Conference 1914* 12th to 15th January, p. 63.

were to be transmitted, enciphered and conveyed, to a well-distributed force in a timely manner by two staff officers if necessary. To impede the process further, orders might be rewritten in detail by QMG staff but only issued by the AG staff.⁹⁶

By 1896 the post of Chief of Staff was established: he would command other staff officers, but remain his General's first assistant, constrained by his General's principles, representing him if required, remedying any deficiencies from which he might suffer and attending to the details. These details might extend to the planning of campaigns and battles and so important was a Chief of Staff that the choice was considered a mark of good generalship. Colonel Robert Home claimed that the Staff officer:

.... knows the General's plans and from constant personal intercourse with him, is fully aware of all his intentions and is consequently able to say what he would order under certain circumstances.

... yet for Home the primary concerns of a Staff officer remained:

... the subsistence, the movement and the quartering of troops, [thus relieving] the General of all details and leaving him all his faculties for the combination and execution of his military plans.⁹⁷

By 1903 they were also mentors:

‘an officer [may have] a trained staff officer at his elbow to suggest the right course of action.⁹⁸

In 1904 with the failures of the Second Boer War, came the reforms of Reginald Esher and a body slightly analogous to the German General Staff, able to offer military advice and to execute it, began to emerge in the form of the General Staff.⁹⁹ General Sir Henry Wilson held clear views of its role, which eventually became definitive. It was:

‘to gather the ablest men in the army together and ... form a school of thought which shall be abreast or ahead of that of any other army’¹⁰⁰ ... from

⁹⁶ Clarke, pp. 48, 132.

⁹⁷ Home, pp. 11-13

⁹⁸ Henderson, p. 46.

⁹⁹ Gooch, *Plans*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Callwell, C. E. *Field-Marshall Sir Henry Wilson, his life and diaries*, Vol I, Cassell, (London, 1927), p. 62.

the 'pick of each year's Staff College graduates [who] must be granted accelerated promotion'.¹⁰¹

General Staff officers were divided between the War Office (from 1904), the Army HQ and in the armies (from 1906 in the UK),¹⁰² divisions and independent Brigades. They were expected to:

'Advise on the strategical distribution of the Army; to supervise the education of officers and the training and preparation of the Army for war; to study military schemes ... to collect and collate military intelligence; and ... direct the general policy in Army matters and to secure [its] continuity ...'¹⁰³

In the commands and districts they were to:

'... assist the officers ... in promoting military efficiency [in] the education of officers ... the training of the troops and ... in carrying out the policy [of] ... the Army Council.'¹⁰³

Becoming a Chief of Staff was a stepping stone to becoming a General.

In peacetime staff officers focussed on training and manoeuvres. In a war the army was divided between the field and home armies and staff officers were concerned with marches, reconnaissance, rest and quarters, efficiency, dealings with the enemy and office duties in the field including the preparation of Appreciations, plans and orders.

Thus since the Peninsular War the role of the staff officer had evolved from administrative boy scout to intellectual mentor to candidate senior officer. They were a means whereby the Army exploited their intelligence without threat to the status of the senior officers they advised. Like grit in the oyster they were, at best, benevolent disruptors of the established order, at worst, misunderstood butchers in red tabs. They learned their profession on a two-year staff course.

¹⁰¹ Gooch, *Plans*, p. 80.

¹⁰² Headlam, J. *The history of the Royal Artillery, Vol II*, 1899-1914, Woolwich 1937, p. 129. *Hart's army list* 1910, p. 140.

¹⁰³ Army Order 233, 'Organisation of the General Staff', 12 September 1906, WO 123/48 Cited in Cripps, *Op. Cit.* p. 20.

2.2.1

The Camberley Staff courses

Before 1914 these lasted for two years and were divided into junior and senior divisions. The junior Division was taught at the Brigade and divisional levels whereas the senior Division was taught at army and corps levels.

Copies of the course materials are kept in the form of bound annual volumes referred to as 'Camberley Reds' but the student coursework has been mostly lost.¹⁰⁴ The 1913 Camberley Reds represent the curriculum of the last Staff course before First World War.¹⁰⁵ It has been chosen because it represents the most evolved state of battle plan thinking in Camberley before the outbreak of war. The curricular focus can be seen from the results of a simple word count in Figure 5 below.

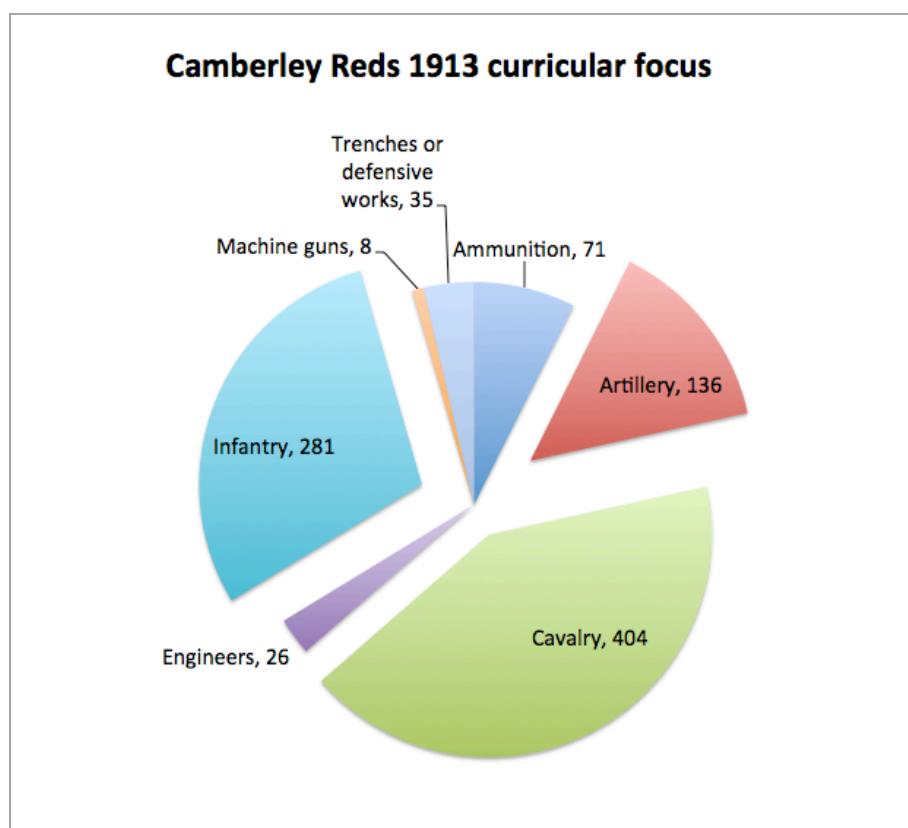


Figure 6 - Camberley Reds 1913 Junior and Senior Division curricular focus as measured by word counts

¹⁰⁴ Cripps, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁵ Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913, Camberley Reds Senior Division 1913, Library of the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, Oxfordshire UK.

The predominance of the cavalry is evident from the 14 exercises in which it played a major part. Artillery–infantry cooperation in 1912 was generally trivial and Camberley did nothing to improve this:¹⁰⁶ the 1913 courses refer to artillery but only the Junior course includes any artillery-dominated exercise or examples.¹⁰⁷ Artillery was the focus of only seven exercises overall of which one concerned supporting infantry and called for a description ‘written either from experience or the literature’ and another for a plan for artillery support which was further constrained in that

‘Ammunition, Supply and Transport and Medical units need not be referred to’

(a shortcoming which the Combined Training doctrine of 1902 would have exposed).¹⁰⁸ The battles studied reflect the focus on cavalry: two exercises derive from 1815, four concern the American Civil War, six concern the 1866 and 1870-71 wars and none concerns the Boer or Spanish-American wars. Of the two papers students were expected to write on the Russo-Japanese war, one was only concerned with war as an instrument of policy and the other required an appreciation of the situation of General Aleksey Kuropatkin before he lost the battles of Liaoyang and Mukden and was thereafter relieved of command.¹⁰⁹ The bias of the instructors is evident from such phrases as

‘minor points to note are ... machine guns’.¹¹⁰

The focus of Camberley’s exercises betrayed a desire to avoid confronting known military problems such as the annihilation of 83% of six cavalry troops at Custoza in 1866 by entrenched infantry, but rather to revisit those problems best understood by the instructors.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ WO 279/47 ‘Report on Army Manoeuvres, 1912’, p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913, Selection of Artillery Positions. Thursday, 22nd May.

¹⁰⁸ Hereafter CT1902, see page 204.

¹⁰⁹ The Official history of the Russo, Japanese War, prepared by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Part IV, War Office, 1920, HMSO, (London,), App D.

¹¹⁰ Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913, Outdoor day No. 8, June 27 1913, Notes for directing staff.

¹¹¹ Haig, Douglas, *Cavalry Studies*, Hugh Rees, (London, 1907), p. 320. He used the example to extol the virtues of Cavalry.

The exercises show the predominance of Order Writing, (24%) over Appreciations (7%), but also that Operational Planning (9%) was a curricular item separate from order writing. FSRs said one thing: Camberley taught another.

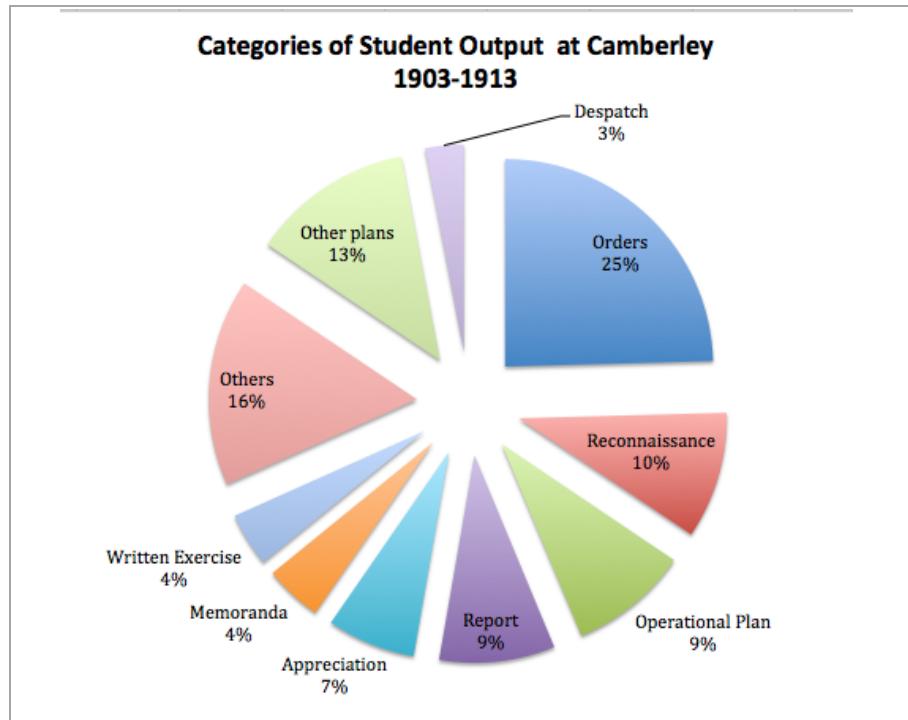


Figure 7 - Camberley Junior and Senior Division student exercises by type (1908 - 1913)¹¹²

Many of the Camberley exercises begin with appreciation-like discussions and conclude with a plan. The appreciations are consistent with the example shown on page 49 but neither weather nor the state of the ground are mentioned. Appreciation-writing had been a major learning tool at Camberley since at least 1895 and Clausewitz had stressed its importance.¹¹³ Henderson, in his 'Science of War', notably does not.¹¹⁴ Course support for Appreciation-

¹¹² Cripps, *Op. Cit.* pp. 35-6.

¹¹³ Caddick-Adams, Peter, II. 'Footprints in the Mud, The British Army's Approach to the Battlefield Tour Experience', *Defence Studies*, 5, 1, (2005), pp. 15-26, Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, Book 1, Princeton, (Princeton, 1989), p. 84.

¹¹⁴ Henderson, *Science*.

writing came from Major J F. Cadell and Major-General Arthur Henry

Marindin whose approaches are summarised on page 742.¹¹⁵

2.2.2 Analysis of a Camberley exercise

Planning had been studied at the Staff College in Camberley since at least 1900 and the process had generated Operational Orders (which followed FSR I 1912) and Appreciations.¹¹⁶

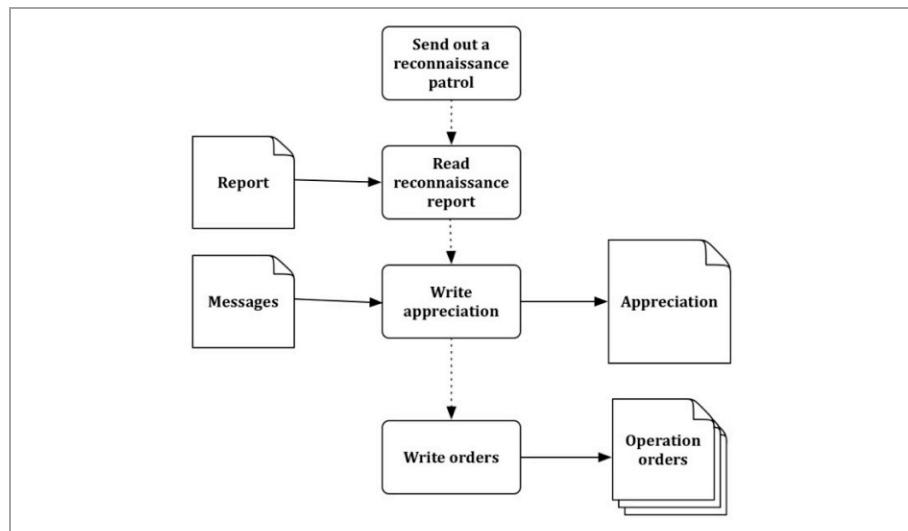


Figure 8 - A simple process of appreciation and operation order writing

The process of creating these texts is illustrated above in Figure 7. Lower-level Operation Orders (referring to subsidiary units such as transport, supply, engineering and ambulance) may need to be cascaded as shown below.

¹¹⁵ Cadell J F., 'On Writing an Appreciation of a Military Situation', *Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institute*, XXXI (1904, 5), Marindin, A. H. *Staff Rides with hints on writing Appreciations and Reconnaissance Reports*, Hugh Rees Ltd., (London, 1908), Cripps, *Op. Cit.* p 91.

¹¹⁶ Such other order types as 'routine orders' and 'standing orders' are not considered in this thesis.

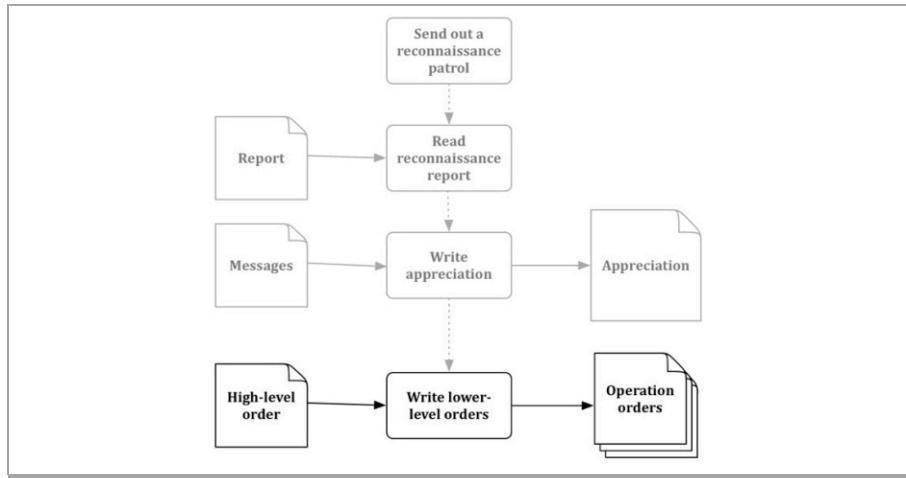


Figure 9 - A more-complex process of lower-level operation order writing

FSR I 1912's definition of Operation Order contents include the name, intentions and location of the author, the map references, the force involved, a definition of the 'general situation' between friendly and enemy troops, the credibility of reports, the instructions to be followed and the place to which reports should be sent.¹¹⁷ The lack of a standard template enabled many errors such as those shown in Figure 9 below to persist. This was acknowledged at the 1910 General Staff Conference (GSC) and was blamed on the need for speed in the issuing of orders.¹¹⁸ The following example of a model Appreciation was distributed to students as the basis of an exercise in Operational Order writing.

¹¹⁷ War Office. *FSR I*, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ War Office, Report, 1910, Brigadier-General Robertson, p. 61.

JUNIOR DIVISION, 1913.

1st EXERCISE IN WRITING ORDERS
28th FEBRUARY.

(Reference sheets 217 MORETON IN MARSH and 218 CHIPPING NORTON 1" = 1 mile).

SITUATION.

(1) A detached force composed as in margin, under the command of Brig-General BROWN is operating in an enemy's country, and is close billeted on the night of 28th February/ 1st March at AYNHO, with outposts 4 companies of the Oxford and Bucks L.I. at KINGS SUTTON, NELLBRIDGE, AYNHO Stn. and SOULDEEN.

(2) At 8 p.m. on 28th February Brig-Gen. BROWN receives an order to proceed next morning to HOOK NORTON, and there to interrupt for some days the traffic on the BANBURY and CHELTENHAM direct section railway line. The message also states that reinforcements for him have left BIDEFORD and may be expected to arrive at LOWER HEYFORD by to-morrow evening.

(3) Brig-Gen. BROWN has information that some hostile cavalry estimated at a squadron or two were seen about CHIPPING NORTON on the afternoon of the 23th; and that, according to trustworthy reports, hostile infantry and artillery were at 4 p.m. occupying billets about NAUNTON, 5 miles WSW of SHOON IN THE WOLD.

(4) Brig-Gen. BROWN says to his Brigade Major:- We will march at 7.30 a.m. by the ADDERBURY - BLOXHAM - MILFORD - HOOK NORTON road, and my present intention is to entrench a couple of battalions on the high ground SATHILL - UPPER BERRYFIELDS FM - SOUTH HILL to cover the R.E. at work on the railway, and hold a couple of battalions in reserve. The bulk of the cavalry should start at 7 a.m. and make for the high ground I have just mentioned and hold it until the arrival of the Advanced Guard, sending patrols in the direction of MORETON IN MARSH, STOW ON THE WOLD and CHIPPING NORTON.
Put 2 troops of cavalry, 1 battalion, a battery and all the R.E. as advanced guard, and two troops of cavalry as left flank guard. We need not bother much about the right flank, I will tell the Advanced Guard Commander to send a patrol or two across the SGR Brook.
I will march with the Advanced Guard.

REQUIRED FROM EACH OFFICER:- the orders which the Brigade Major would issue.
Work to be placed in No 2 Hall by 9 a.m. 1st March.

J. H. D.
Staff College.

Figure 10 - Model example of an Appreciation given to students after an exercise¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913, Section 28. Exercise of Major J. H. Davidson, later Operations Officer to Douglas Haig.

The model answer to the exercise is shown as an Operational Order in the next two pages below.

Office copy. <u>Operation Order No 12.</u>																													
by Brig. Gen. BROWN commanding Detachment.																													
RED LION AYNHO 28th Feb. 1913.																													
INFORMATION.	<p>1. The enemy's Cavalry estimated at a squadron or two were located this afternoon about CHIPPING NORTON. Hostile Infantry and Artillery strength unknown, were reliably reported to be occupying billets at NAUNTON at 4 p.m. to-day.</p>																												
INTENTION.	<p>2. The detachment will march on HOOK NORTON to-morrow.</p>																												
INSTRUCTIONS Cavalry	<p>3. The 11th Hussars (less 1 squadron) will be west of the OXFORD and BIRMINGHAM section G.W.Ry by 7 a.m., and will proceed rapidly to secure the high ground immediately W. of HOOK NORTON, sending patrols in the direction of MORETON IN MARSH STOW ON THE WOLD and CHIPPING NORTON.</p> <p>4. The detachment will march as detailed in the margin. Starting Point, - smithy on the HELLBRIDGE road. Hour - 7.30 a.m. Route - E & W. ADDERBURY - MILCOMBE.</p>																												
<p><u>Adv. Guard.</u> Col. Mr. Col. Smith 4/R.Fus 2 troops 11th Hussars 1 Battery 31st F.A. Bde. 11th Field Co. R.E. less pontoons and trestles. 4/R. Fus. less 4 Cos. 1 Bearer Sub. div. 5th Fd. Amb.</p> <p><u>Main Body in order of march.</u> (b) The main body will pass the starting point at the hours stated.</p> <table><tbody><tr><td>Brig. H.Q. ..</td><td>7.30</td></tr><tr><td>4 Cos. 4/R. Fus. ..</td><td>7.30</td></tr><tr><td>31st F.A. Bde. less 1</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Batty. and A.C. ..</td><td>7.35</td></tr><tr><td>2nd Suffolk Regt. ..</td><td>7.40</td></tr><tr><td>1st Bedford Regt ..</td><td>7.50</td></tr><tr><td>2nd Oxford L.I. less</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>2 Cos. ..</td><td>8</td></tr><tr><td>Ammun. Qd. 31st F.A. Bde. 8.5</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>5th Fd. Amb. less 1</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Bearer sub. div. ..</td><td>8.10</td></tr><tr><td>Pontoon & Trestle wag-</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>ons 11th Fd. Co. R.E. 8.15</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Train ..</td><td>8.15</td></tr></tbody></table>		Brig. H.Q. ..	7.30	4 Cos. 4/R. Fus. ..	7.30	31st F.A. Bde. less 1		Batty. and A.C. ..	7.35	2nd Suffolk Regt. ..	7.40	1st Bedford Regt ..	7.50	2nd Oxford L.I. less		2 Cos. ..	8	Ammun. Qd. 31st F.A. Bde. 8.5		5th Fd. Amb. less 1		Bearer sub. div. ..	8.10	Pontoon & Trestle wag-		ons 11th Fd. Co. R.E. 8.15		Train ..	8.15
Brig. H.Q. ..	7.30																												
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ons 11th Fd. Co. R.E. 8.15																													
Train ..	8.15																												

Figure 11 - Page 1 of an example Operational Order given to students after an exercise

2.	
<u>Left Flank Guard.</u> Cmdr. Major Jones 1 Sqdn. 11th Hussars less 2 troops.	(a) The Left Flank Guard will send a patrol in the direction of ENSTONE.
<u>Rear Guard.</u> Cmdr. Major White. 2 Cos. Oxford L.I.	
	5. Outposts will be withdrawn at 7.30 a.m.
REPORTS.	6. Reports to the head of the main body.
Signed Z, Bdo. Major <u>Dictated at 8.20 p.m. to representatives of all units.</u>	

Figure 12 - Page 2 of an example Operational Order given to students after an exercise

Thereafter students would be given the following Addendum.

CONFIDENTIAL	
<u>Colonel Smith Cmdg. Adv. Guard.</u> Reference Operation Order No 12 of to-day's date.	
(1) No further information concerning the enemy is available. Reinforcements for us have left BICESTER and are expected to reach LOWER HEYFORD to-morrow evening.	
(2) The G.O.C's intention is to interrupt railway communication at HOOK NORTON for some days and to seize and entrench the high ground OATLEY HILL FM - UPPER BERRYFIELDS FM - SOUTH HILL. If encountered before reaching this position the enemy is to be attacked at once and driven back, you will be supported.	
Detachmont H.Q. RED LION. AYNSLEY. 3.20 p.m.	Signed Z Bdo. Major.
<u>Note.</u> Special instructions on somewhat similar lines would be issued to O.O. 11th Hussars & O.O. Left Flank Guard.	

Figure 13 - Example of an addendum to an Operational Order given to students after an exercise

This exercise and its model answer expose several problems in Camberley's approach: the Appreciation itself contains the beginnings of an Order in section 4 (page 50), but should also have discussed the ground and the

situation of any friendly forces since the map alone would be insufficient.

Notably the senior officer's intention is clear only in the addendum (Figure 13 above) where the purpose of the operation is specified. Assuming the imaginary force had already departed by the time it realised the commander's intention was to interrupt the railway, it might have had difficulty in raising the permanent way had it left its tools behind. The Order was not preceded by any Warning Order such that future intentions might be allowed for and there is no discussion of what to do if an enemy force be encountered, where to fall back on should it prevail, what kit is to be brought or how prisoners are to be managed. Additionally, it is unclear to whom the Operational Order is addressed: the 11th Hussars and the Left Flank Guard are included in the order yet separate (but missing) 'Special instructions' will be issued to them. They are expected to have arrived west of the railway by 7 am, some 30 minutes before the rest of the detachment begins to march and will remain at risk for the length of time it takes the main body to arrive. There is no mention of where the 11th Hussars must report (the area of Hook Norton is big, see Figure 14), when they must report (so the Commander can know if they have been annihilated or are merely lost), or how they will intercommunicate to avoid mistaking each other for the enemy (a matter of concern since the 1909 manoeuvres).¹²⁰ This uncomfortably prefigures both the abrupt departure of GHQ to Noyon from St. Quentin on 26 August 1914 without advising II Corps or the General Officer Commanding (hereafter 'GOC'), General Smith-Dorrien, who had to search for them in a car, and the disconnection from I Corps at the time of Le Cateau.¹²¹ There is no definition of when the main body of troops should have arrived so the Commander can exert control, yet calculating such times is covered in the Staff manual.¹²² As

¹²⁰ War Office, Report on Manoeuvres, 1910, p. 5.

¹²¹ Bond, *Op. Cit.* p. 312 and Harris, *Haig*, pp. 78, 79.

¹²² War Office, *Staff Manual 1912*, HMSO, (London,), Appendix I, p. 83.

an example to be followed this was execrable and likely to reinforce students' belief that imprecision and carelessness were acceptable.

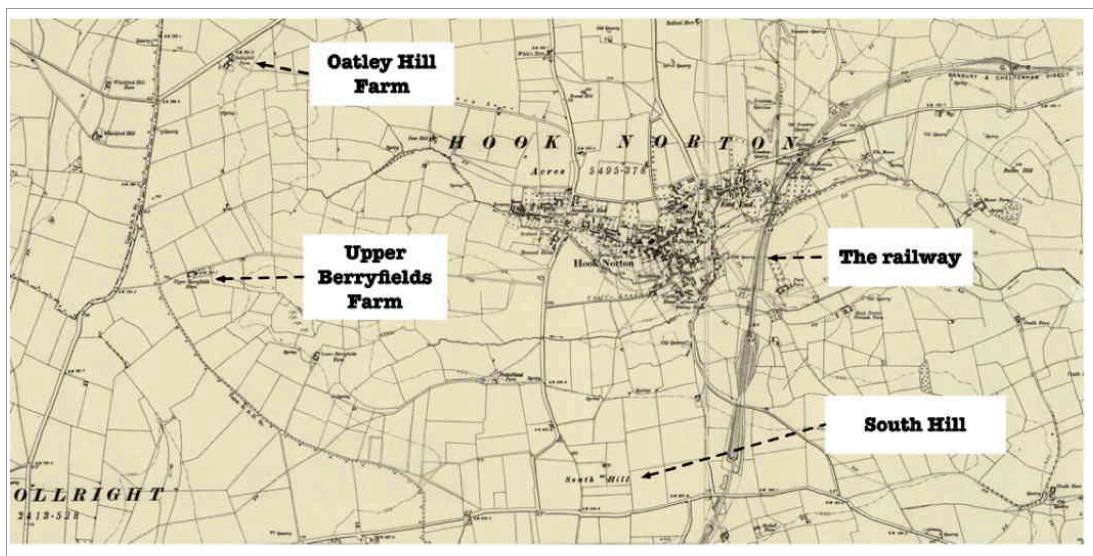


Figure 14 - 1898 Map of Hook Norton

Despite FSR, Chapter II, section 10, p. 30, the model answer makes no reference to other services such as transport, ammunition, medical and supply services. Supply planning was the subject of nine exercises in the Camberley Reds and a supply-planning template was even included in the Camberley Juniors. Captain Edmund Allenby, who attended in 1891 later complained that

‘What seemed to me weak was ... supply and transport’.¹²³

Lastly the Camberley Juniors include three Operational Order No. 12s distinguished only by their dates and likely to lead to student confusion, set a poor example and transgress FSR I 1912.¹²⁴ Lieutenant Archibald Percival Wavell noted in 1909 that

‘too little attention was being paid to the production of clear orders’.¹²⁵

¹²³ Connell, John, *Wavell Scholar and soldier*, Collins, (London, 1964), p. 62.

¹²⁴ Anon., *Field Service Regulations, part I (Operations)*, 1909, War Office, HMSO, (London,), p. 25, Chap 10 (2) ‘Each ... order will be numbered separately ...’.

¹²⁵ Connell, *Op. Cit.* p. 63.

This is not the first class 'quality of the Directing Staff' that Bond mentions.¹²⁶

If the staff were occasionally weak, the quality of the student intake was undermined by the inclusion of a quarter of them being 'nominated' officers (including Haig who had failed the entrance examination) who had been 'preferred' by some senior officer.¹²⁷ In 1913, 15 of the 51 officers admitted were nominated.¹²⁸ The intellectual challenge of the entrance exam can partly be judged from the mathematics required: in 1894 when Haig, Edmonds and many other senior officers of the BEF in 1914 entered Camberley, the most complex algebra examined was a quadratic equation, which is a GCSE 'O' level problem.¹²⁹

Of the textbooks then available Edmonds wrote:

'The British army possesses very little military literature. At the moment there is nothing of the nature of Clery's 'Minor tactics' or Hamley's 'Operations of war'.¹³⁰

His view of the FSR was scathing:

'The first difficulty was our training manuals. Major-General Bridges said ... (in 1913) ... that the British Training manuals were as much use to the Australians as the cuneiform inscriptions on a Babylonian brick ... The (FSM) is a useful reminder of principles to officers who already know them'¹³¹ [and] 'although we have thus adopted the German idea of issuing manuals containing general principles ... we have not ... provided the official and semi-official handbooks ... beginners require'.¹³²

Yet Camberley saw battle planning as a major part of its curriculum and the example shown above indicates that Camberley preferred the thoughtful writing of plans to the speedy writing of messages. It taught poorly because of evidently careless management and because it refused to consider the type of

126 Bond, *Op. Cit.* p. 277.

127 Bond, *Op. Cit.* p. 164.

128 Harris, Paul, *Men ...* p. 53.

129 War Office, *Regulations respecting The Staff College*, 1894, HMSO, (London,), p. 5.

130 King's College London, Liddell Hart Archives, Edmonds, J. E., I/2B, Staff College article in '*The World*' (undated but post 1945).

131 Edmonds, J. E. '*The World*'.

132 War Office, *Report 1913*, p. 15.

battles which Mukden foreshadowed and Jean de Bloch predicted,¹³³ but its graduates were able to adapt speedily when challenged.

2.3 Operational Knowledge

Operational knowledge is

‘a set of claims, definitions and rules resulting from the practice of applying military force’.¹³⁴

This knowledge came in the form of military texts, doctrine documents, plans, notes, examination papers, staff college lectures and ephemera.

2.3.1 Sources of Operational Knowledge before 1914

Institutions partly define themselves through their body of knowledge. This section discusses the operational knowledge of the British Army and how it was defined, encapsulated and transmitted. It deliberately ignores two arms, cavalry and air, since neither affected the way that officers thought about the planning of battles until 1914. The air arm because it then had no teeth and the cavalry because it was

‘... an arm whose chief value lay in quick decisions taken in confused circumstances’.¹³⁵

Trench warfare completely changed cavalry’s tactics and it was ultimately reduced to a reconnaissance role.¹³⁶

Assessing the contents of plans requires assessing the operational knowledge on which they are based and the definition of the problems the plan is expected to address, as well as their structure. For the BEF, understanding a problem meant that they identified the ground conditions, their own arms,

¹³³ Travers, T.H.E. ‘Technology, Tactics and Morale, Jean de Bloch, the Boer War and British Military Theory 1900, 1914’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 1979).

¹³⁴ A claim in this context is the same as that defined by Steven Toulmin in his book *The uses of argumentation*, CUP, (Cambridge: 1958).

¹³⁵ Badsey, Stephen, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918*, Chapter 6, Ashgate, (Farnham: 2008), p. 244.

¹³⁶ Amison, D. P., Warfare on the Western Front 1914-1918, Revolution in Military Affairs?, Joint Staff Support Center, 2001, p. 18.

the defences and the opposing troops. The solution, in the form of a well-structured plan, transmitted the commanders' intentions and objectives, the attack process, the allocation of troops and their needs, artillery tasks, covering fire, assault method, lines of approach, trench garrisons, the positions of reserves, post-assault consolidation, further objectives, command posts and supporting units. Officers would use an overall plan written by a more-senior officer as a framework within which to write more-detailed plans or orders.

During the First World War plans were created under the control of the General Officers Commanding (GOC) of the various British armies and their contents were also the responsibility of the General Staff in the form of the Major-General General Staff (MGGS), of the Engineers in the form of the Major-General Royal Engineers (MGRE) and of the Artillery in the form of the Major-General Royal Artillery (MGRA).

Table 1 below shows only the GOsCs and a group, referred to henceforward as the 'Planners' of the battle plans studied in this thesis. The role of the Planner was not then established in the British Army, though the planning process was frequently referred to. For the purpose of this thesis 'Planners' were those officers who from the war diaries and files can be seen to have been the driving force behind the plans and the planning process. Such officers include Francis Davies (8 Division), John Monash (Australian Corps), Arthur Currie (Canadian Corps) and John Frederick Charles Fuller (Tank Corps), as well as several of the GOCs themselves (ancillary arms such as the Engineers, Signals and Flying Corps are not shown). All of them had been staff officers before becoming Generals and all (except Monash and Currie) had attended the Staff College at Camberley or Quetta and were considered 'p.s.c'.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ 'passed staff college'.

		Planning date	Battle date	28-Dec-14	10-Mar-15	X			
		Battle	Neuve Chapelle	03-Jul-15	25-Sep-15	X	X	X	X
			Loos	07-Mar-16	01-Jul-16	X	X	X	X
			First Albert						
			Flers-Courcelette	19-Aug-16	15-Sep-16				
Planner	W G Gwatkin (Canadian Corps)								
	W H Anderson (XI Corps)						X	X	
	L R Vaughan (XV Corps)						X	X	
	W H Greenly (XIII Corps)						X	X	
	A R Cameron (X Corps)						X	X	
	Hore-Ruthven (VIII Corps)						X	X	
	C F Romer (III Corps)						X	X	
	J T Burnett-Stuart (VII Corps)						X	X	
	P Howell (II Corps)								
	A A Montgomery (IV Corps)						X	X	
GOC	H Hudson (Indian Corps)						X	X	
	H S Jeudwine (I Corps)						X	X	
	B F Burnett Hitchcock (47 Div.)						X	X	
	H S Rawlinson					X	X	X	
	H Gough						X	X	
	T. Capper (7. Div)						X	X	
	A. J. Longridge (1 Div.)						X	X	
	F Davies 8 Div.)					X			
Army	E. H. H. Allenby							X	
	J H G Byng								
	R C B Haking								
	H S Horne								
	H Gough								
	H C O Plumer								
	C C Monro								
	H S Rawlinson								
	D Haig					X			
	Fifth						X	X	
	Fourth						X	X	
	Third						X	X	
	Second						X	X	
	First						X	X	

Table 1 - Battles and Planners

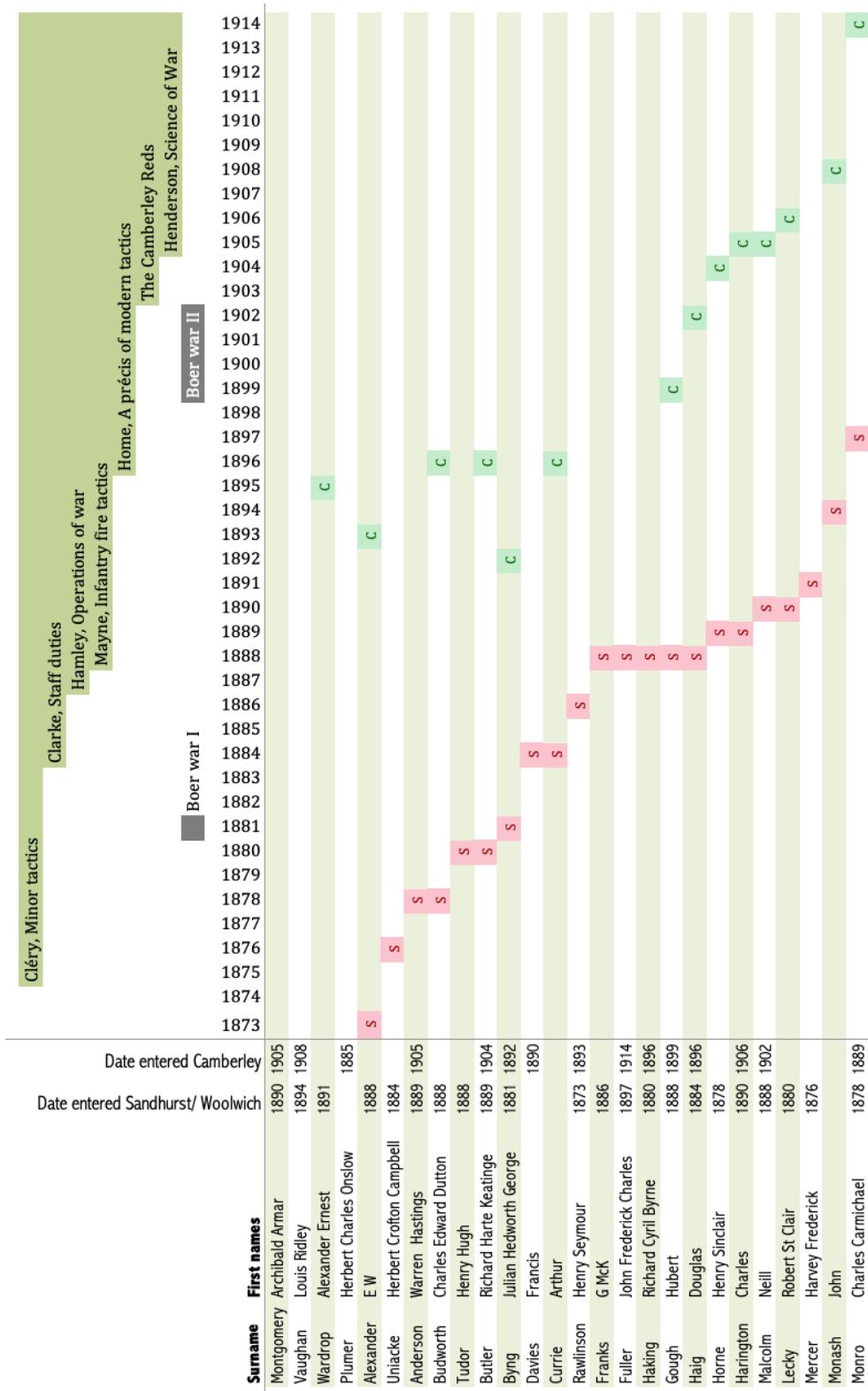


Table 2 - Acquiring operational knowledge - When and where senior officers of the BEF studied: S(andhurst) and C(amberley) and some of the books then available¹³⁸

138 See Appendix C, Bibliography.

These officers entered the war with an operational knowledge deriving from their studies at Sandhurst, Woolwich, the Staff College, their previous experience and private studies. The sources of their operational knowledge are discussed on page 55.

No pre-1914 lecture notes are held by the Staff college, now at Shrivenham, but the examination materials of the period 1903-1913 are held in 'The Camberley Reds', a series of bound volumes in the archives.¹³⁹ Additionally Haig's and Edmonds' papers contain their Staff College exercises.¹⁴⁰ There is also a number of books containing operational knowledge. Hamley's *'Operations of War'* is the best known: until 1894 it was the sole text used in the entrance examination for the Staff College.¹⁴¹ It was widely cited and recommended in the Army Staff conferences as late as 1910 and in 1914 was reissued with amendments by Brigadier-General Lancelot Kiggell.¹⁴² It had influence: because of it, Sir John French decided in August 1914, not to occupy

¹³⁹ Cripps, Aaron, *The Camberley 'Reds'*, Aberystwyth University (Aberystwyth: 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Haig's is in the NLS, Edmonds' in LHCMA.

¹⁴¹ Chisholm, Hugh, ed., 'Hamley, Sir Edward Bruce'. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 12 (11th ed.). CUP. (Cambridge: 1911), p. 896.

¹⁴² Hamley, Edward Bruce (and in 1907, Kiggell, Lancelot Edward), *Operations of war*, Blackwood, (Edinburgh, 1866, 1886, 1907 and 1914).

Anderson, J. H., *Campaign of Jena 1806*, Hugh Rees, (London, 1913).

Anon., *WO-General Staff Conferences GSC 1910 17th to 20th January*, pp 50, 57-8,

Brackenbury, C. B., *Field Works Their Technical Construction and Tactical Application*, Kegan Paul Trench, (London 1888), p. 285.

Cadell, J F., 'On Writing an Appreciation of a Military Situation', *Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institute*, XXXI (1904-5), Evans, Nick, *From drill to doctrine, forging the British Army's tactics 1897-1909*, eThesis, KCL (London; undated), pp. 103, 266, 282,

Henderson, *Science ...* p. 105, 140, 166, 168-9, 172.,

Home, Robert, *Précis of modern tactics*, Clowes, (London, 1882),

Gough Hubert, *Soldiering on*, Arthur Barker Ltd, (London, 1954), p. 127.

Bonham-Carter, Victor, *The strategy of victory*, Holt Rinehart and Winston, (New York: 1962),

Edmonds, J. E., Cites a case of a student who was able to recall entire passages from Hamley for the purpose of repeating them in an exam. (Edmonds, J. E., papers, LHCMA III/2, p. 4).

Sir John French is believed to have studied Hamley (Bond, Brian and Cave, Nigel, *Haig, A reappraisal*, Pen and Sword, (Barnsley: 2009), p. 54.

Liddell Hart, Basil, *The British way in warfare*, Penguin, (London, 1942), p. 71

Luvaaz, Jay, *The education of an army*, Cassell, (London, 1964), p. 124.

Reid, Brian Holden, 'War studies at the Staff College 1890-1930', *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute*, (Aldershot, 1992), p. 10.

Travers, 'Technology ... ' p. 270.

the fortress of Maubeuge but to continue the 1914 retreat.¹⁴³ Other sources include Cléry's '*Minor tactics*',¹⁴⁴ Henderson,¹⁴⁵ and the RMC Sandhurst;¹⁴⁶ Mayne's '*Infantry fire tactics*',¹⁴⁷ Clarke's '*Staff duties*' (the text of his lectures at Camberley),¹⁴⁸ Home's '*A précis of modern tactics*',¹⁴⁹ which Henderson extolled,¹⁵⁰ and DeGruyther's '*Tactics for beginners*' (which was adopted as a course text at Sandhurst after the RMC's limitations were identified by the Akers-Douglas report on officer training).¹⁵¹ Foster's '*Staff work*' and '*How armies are formed for war*',¹⁵² Henderson's '*Science of War*' was culled from the various papers he wrote while Commandant at Camberley. ('*Staff*' refers to the 1912 Staff manual.)¹⁵³

The bias of the authors towards the four primary arms is shown in Figure 14 below, which derives from a simple word count.

¹⁴³ French, John, 1914 (London, 1919), p. 70. Cited in Dighton, Adam, 'Jomini versus Clausewitz, Hamley's Operations of War and Military Thought in the British Army, 1866–1933', *War in History*, Sage, (Abingdon, 2018), p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Cléry, Charles, *Minor tactics*, King, (London:1875).

¹⁴⁵ Henderson, p. 165.

¹⁴⁶ Puncher, Sebastian, 'The Victorian Army and the Cadet Colleges Woolwich and Sandhurst c.1840-1902', Kent eThesis, (Canterbury, 2019), p. 286.

¹⁴⁷ Mayne, C. B., *Infantry Fire Tactics*, Gale and Polden, (Chatham: 1888).

¹⁴⁸ Clarke, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴⁹ Home, Robert, *A précis of modern tactics*, HMSO, (London,), (London, 1896).

¹⁵⁰ Henderson, p. 400.

¹⁵¹ DeGruyther, *Tactics for beginners*, Gale and Polden, (London, 1904).

Anon., Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Education and Training of Officers of the Army and Appendix, HMSO (London, 1902) (Akers-Douglas).

¹⁵² Foster, Hubert, *Staff work*, Hugh Rees, (London, 1912).

Foster, Hubert, *How armies are formed for war*, Hugh Rees, (London, 1913).

¹⁵³ Anon., Staff Manual 1912, 40-WO-1674

Incidence of references

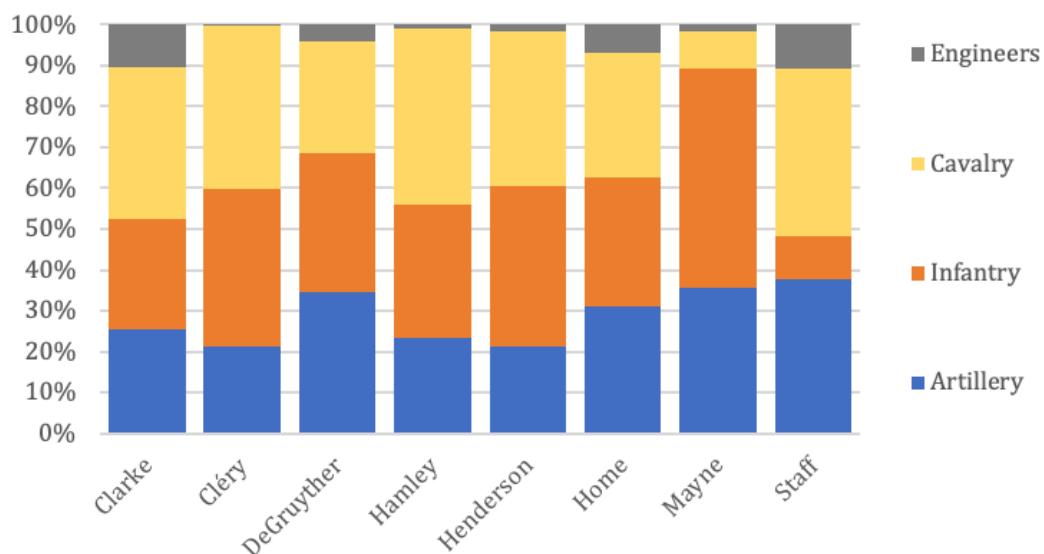


Figure 15 - Incidence of references to four arms of the British army in the primary textbooks of the pre-war period.

Underpinning these books was a number of official doctrines concerning infantry training. Between 1877 and 1914 the British War Office published 11 doctrine documents ostensibly concerning '*Infantry drill*',¹⁵⁴ but in practice covering two elements: that of drill proper (some 65%):

‘(ATTEN—TION.) Spring up to the following position: Heels together and in line. Feet turned out at an angle of about 45 degrees ...’¹⁵⁵
 ... and active operations (some 35%).¹⁵⁶ The frequency of occurrence and overlapping contents of the documents from 1900 are evidence of the Army’s need to integrate the experiences of the Second Boer War and the changing strategic concerns of the War Office in order to transform itself from being a colonial gendarmerie to becoming a ‘continental’ army. The 1896 and 1911

¹⁵⁴ Anon., Field exercise and evolutions of infantry as revised by Her Majesty's command 1861, 1877.

Anon., Infantry drill (provisional) 1892, 1896.

Anon., Combined Training (provisional) 1902

Anon., Combined Training 1905

Anon., Infantry Training 1902, 1905, 1911, 1914

Anon., Training and manoeuvre regulations 1912.

¹⁵⁵ Anon., *Infantry Training 1911*, p. 16, section 6.

¹⁵⁶ 29% (1896) to 18% (1911) to 39% (1914).

manuals have been studied as bases for understanding the doctrinal evolution. Two manuals have been excluded from consideration: that of 1902, because it did not reflect the conclusions of the Elgin report into the Second Boer War and was superseded in 1905 and the 1914 manual, because it was issued too late to have affected the tactical education of the planners concerned.¹⁵⁷ These texts were the primary source of operational knowledge for the planning officers listed in Table 1.

2.3.2

Maintaining Operational Knowledge

Operational knowledge is kept relevant by wars and extended by exercises involving the military problems of tactics, terrain, technologies, the spans of control imposed by force sizes, the ability of staff officers and the capabilities of Britain's potential opponents. Between 1815 and 1914 Britain was involved in 53 wars, of which four were in Europe and two in South America (see Appendix F - Previous wars on page 733). Of these, only three were wars of 'continental' dimensions: at Waterloo, the last battle of the Napoleonic wars (1803-15), British forces numbered 107,000,¹⁵⁸ in 1853-6 in the Crimea they were 108,000 and in 1899 in South Africa they eventually numbered 448,435 plus 100,000 native levies.¹⁵⁹ But most of the small wars involved only one or two regular battalions (500-1000 men each) operating as colonial gendarmes, supplemented by locally-raised units.¹⁶⁰ From these figures can be seen the great disparity between the spans of control which senior officers experienced. The frequency of the policing operations in the same territories

¹⁵⁷ Anon., Report [and Minutes of Evidence and Appendices] of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire into the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa, Cd. 1789-90-91-92, 1903-8, HMSO, (London,), [hereafter the Elgin Commission Report]

¹⁵⁸ Hamilton-Williams, David, *Waterloo, New Perspectives, The Great Battle Reappraised*, Wiley, (New York: 1994). p. 256.

¹⁵⁹ Grant, Maurice Harold, *History of the war in South Africa, Vol IV*, Hurst and Blackett, (London, 1910), p. 674, *Role of Black people in the South African War*, South African History on-line, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/role-black-people-south-african-war>, retrieved on 27 February 2020. Also see page 29.

¹⁶⁰ French, D. and Reid, B. H. *The British General Staff*, Cass, (London, 2002), p. 91.

implies that they often failed,¹⁶¹ and the poor performance of the British Army between 1854 and 1914 gave rise to investigations by 567 committees and Royal Commissions.¹⁶²

While Britain's primary opponents of the period were considered to be tribespeople or in the case of the Boers, 'mounted irregulars',¹⁶³ Britain's only alternative source of experience lay in observing others' wars and reading their officers' books describing 'Continental' wars of the Napoleonic period, the American Civil War and the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars. This dependence on others' battles had reduced much of British military texts to vicarious reworkings of these narratives and thus limited the ability of British officers to interpret and analyse operational knowledge from personal experience or after-action reports. The consequence was the problematic collection of texts mentioned on page 61.

The extreme disparity between colonial policing and 'continental' warfare induced comparable disparities in outlook between the arms of the British Army: while mobilisation and artillery training implied a European commitment, infantry and supply training remained essentially colonial and cavalry training was dominated by the American Civil War.¹⁶⁴ The many disasters of The Second Boer War provoked the publication of a large number of books narrating the newly-acquired experience of fighting irregular

¹⁶¹ Nine Xhosa wars, three Anglo-Burmese wars, three Maori wars, three Ashanti wars, two Afghan wars and two Opium wars.

¹⁶² Gooch, John, 'A particularly Anglo-Saxon institution': The British General Staff in the era of two world wars' in French, D. and Reid, B. H. *The British General Staff*, Cass, (London, 2002), p. 193 also Beckett, Ian F. W., 'Edward Stanhope at the War Office 1887-92', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 5-2, (London, 1982), p 281.

¹⁶³ Chapter X of *Field Service Regulations 1909* Part I-Operations, Reprinted 1912, pp. 102-113 is devoted to 'Warfare against an uncivilized enemy'. Callwell, C. E., *Small Wars: A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers*, 1896. HMSO, (London,), 1906 ed. repr, Greenhill and Novato, Presidio, (California: 1990), 412-13 Cited in Badsey, Stephen, 'The Boer War (1899-1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine', *The Journal of Military History*, Project Muse, 71 (1), (London, 2007), p. 77.

¹⁶⁴ Gooch, *Plans* ... p. 200.

mounted infantry, typified by Henderson's '*Science of war*', yet lacked a coherent approach to the use of cavalry.¹⁶⁵

The British Army had been greatly shocked by The Second Boer War to the extent that it had attempted to institute reforms, but its internal disputes had hobbled many of these efforts and not even the lessons of the Balkan and Russo-Japanese Wars were sufficient to evolve an operational knowledge base capable of supporting the shock of the First World War. Several accounts were published of the Balkan Wars,¹⁶⁶ but they did not become a part of the Staff College curriculum although a Major Philip Howell gave a lecture there based on his book.¹⁶⁷

The most relevant war, however, was between Russia and Japan in 1904-05. This was partly described in two volumes of a British Official History (the third was only published in 1920),¹⁶⁸ three volumes of '*Reports from British Officers*', Bird's, '*Lectures on the strategy of the Russo-Japanese War*' and '*A staff officer's scrap-book*' written by Sir Ian Hamilton,¹⁶⁹ one of the officers sent to report on the war. The reports displayed bias concerning planning, orders and mounted infantry.

That the Japanese planned was clear:

Apparently two alternative plans of campaign had been prepared, the choice between them being dependent upon the degree of success which the fleet might achieve during the first few hours of the war.¹⁷⁰

But the British observers did not report their contents:

We have not been told what the plan of attack ... was, but it worked out as

¹⁶⁵ See the advertisements at the start and end of the major British Army doctrine books, from 1902 onwards.

¹⁶⁶ See Leonard, Robert Glenn, 'No Lessons Required, The Balkan Wars and Organizational Learning in the British Army before the First World War', Thesis, The University of New Brunswick, (Frederickton: 2011).

¹⁶⁷ Howell, Major P., The Campaign in Thrace 1912. Hugh Rees, (London, 1913). See also page 385.

¹⁶⁸ Anon., Official History of the Russo-Japanese war. Vol. I-II. 1904-8, HMSO, (London,).

¹⁶⁹ Anon., The Russo-Japanese war, reports from British Officers attached to the Japanese and Russian forces in the field, Vols I-III. 1908, HMSO, (London,), Bird, W. D., Lectures on the strategy of the Russo-Japanese war, Hugh Rees, (London, 1909), Hamilton, Ian, A staff officer's scrap-book during the Russo-Japanese war, Vols. I & II, Edward Arnold, (London, 1907).

¹⁷⁰ Anon., *Official History of the Russo-Japanese war*. Vol. I. 1904, HMSO, (London,), p. 70.

follows ...¹⁷¹

The orders might have been quite detailed, but Hamilton was unconcerned:

I have not got the actual battle orders issued to the several divisions and I do not think they would be very illuminating even if I had got them. I suspect they were something very much to the effect of 'Go ahead!' or something of that sort.¹⁷²

Yet Japanese orders *were* reported, some in detail, from army, division and battalion levels and were very similar to those specified in FSR I 1905 but included sensible map references. The superior quality of the Japanese doctrines then used might support Hamilton's assertion that all

... eventualities are considered, prepared for and worked out to the last detail in this army...¹⁷³

Parts of Japanese and British Field Service Regulations are compared in Appendix E - Japanese and British Field Service regulations, concerning After-Action reports, War Diaries and Night operations. Hamilton had

'been immensely struck with the forethought, completeness, wisdom, economy of [the Japanese] administration ...'¹⁷⁴

He mentions plans twenty-two times in his book but never gives the contents of one.

The war involved frontal Japanese attacks on positions ably defended by Russian machine guns, but its lessons did not permeate the British Army. It provoked no doctrinal change and was treated merely as a source of evidence to satisfy many opposing viewpoints.¹⁷⁴ The Japanese had used machine guns extensively but the General Staff were not interested: the General Staff Conference of 1910 noted that:

At present some of the instructions with reference to machine guns are contained in Musketry Regulations and some in Amendments to Infantry

¹⁷¹ Lieut-Colonel C. V. Hume DSO MC in Anon., *The Russo-Japanese war reports*, Vol. I., p. 193.

¹⁷² Comments by Hamilton on 'First Japanese Army.—The Action of the 31st July 1904 (Yu-shu-lin-tzu—Yang-tzu Ling)' in *The Russo-Japanese War, reports* Vol. I., p. 180.

¹⁷³ Hamilton, Ian to Henry Spenser Wilkinson, HP 3/2/4, photocopy of letter from Hamilton to Wilkinson, 30-Mar-1904 in 'General Sir Ian Hamilton (1853-1947) and The Russo-Japanese War', p 166. Cited in Cortazzi, Sir Hugh (Ed.) *Britain and Japan, Biographical Portraits*, Vol. VII, The Japan Society and Global Oriental Publishing (London, 2010)

¹⁷⁴ Neilson, Keith, 'That Dangerous and Difficult Enterprise-British Military Thinking and the Russo Japanese War', *War and Society*, (1991), p. 17, Anon., *General Staff Conferences GSC 1910 17th to 20th January*, p. 37.

Training.¹⁷⁵

The discussion thereafter centred entirely on the weapon rather than its use, the then Brigadier-General Sir William Robertson noting that:

‘... opportunities for using machine guns are fleeting and frequently local ...’¹⁷⁵

Yet the Maxim gun had seen extensive and effective use in Africa.¹⁷⁶ The Russo-Japanese war was the subject of divisional lectures in support of examinations at Aldershot in 1909 and a report on the Japanese approach to military education reached Haig, though there is no evidence he did anything with it.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps coincidentally the ‘*Infantry Training 1905*’ doctrine acknowledged the need for the infantry to cross a fireswept zone but did not say how.¹⁷⁸ The war was occasionally echoed in the Staff College examination papers¹⁷⁹. In 1906, one question on the development of artillery tactics was to be answered ‘with reference to Manchuria’, in 1913, one question was concerned with war as an instrument of policy and another required an appreciation of the situation of General Aleksey Kuropatkin before he lost the battles of Liaoyang and Mukden and was thereafter relieved of his command.¹⁸⁰ The bias of the instructors is evident from such phrases as

‘minor points to note are ... machine guns’¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ GSC 1910. p. 29.

¹⁷⁶ Anon., *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 21. p. 185. (Aldershot, 1921), Ellis, John, *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, 1981, (New York: Arno Press).

¹⁷⁷ Anon., GSC 1910, p. 37.
Brunker, H. M. E., Military history for examinations: questions on the Russo-Japanese War, from outbreak of hostilities to 24th August, with a diary of the war, Forster Groom, (London, 1909).
General report on the Japanese system of military education and training 1906, WO 33/407, Cited in Gooch, Plans, p. 108

¹⁷⁸ Anon., 1 February 1905, WO-IT *Infantry Training 1905*, p. 87 (v), ‘Exposed ground will, if the enemy's fire is heavy and accurate, be crossed by rushes at the quickest possible pace’.

¹⁷⁹ Section 31, 29-Mar-13, Lt. Col. Malcolm, Strategical paper, Russo-Japanese war in Camberley Reds Senior Division 1913.

¹⁸⁰ Anon., War Office, *The Official history of the Russo-Japanese War*, prepared by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Part IV, HMSO, (London,), (London, 1920), Cited in Sisemore, James D., *Russo-Japanese War, lessons not learned*, eThesis, Fort Leavenworth, (Kansas: 2003), p. 117.

¹⁸¹ *Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913*, Outdoor day No. 8, June 27 1913, Notes for directing staff.

Even entrenchments were dismissed as a problem despite the 'abnormal extension of fronts' they permitted, since

‘a recurrence of such conditions ... in Europe, seems most unlikely’.¹⁸² The other means of maintaining operational knowledge were the summer manoeuvres which each European army held. The British Army exercised at Aldershot, where the maximum size of a force which could be accommodated was two Corps each averaging 50,000 soldiers. Consequently commanders could never experience exercising more than a single Corps against another, most exercises were at Brigade level and thus few 'span of control' problems would have been exposed.¹⁸³ As a feedback mechanism the exercises were in any case flawed and their intention subverted: in 1884 a battalion of 400 men in extended order 'defeated' a line of 1200 'enemy' troops in close order, on a front of 600 yards.¹⁸⁴ The exercise was a mere formality and no useful lesson could have been learned: the British Army's body of operational knowledge remained inviolate.

Roberts noted after the Second Boer War:

‘manoeuvres on a large scale were so infrequent that it was impossible to ascertain by this practical test whether ... senior officers ... could handle troops in accordance with the principles of modern tactics.’¹⁸⁵

Henderson had already observed:

Manoeuvres are the best means of making certain that the superior officers of an army do not grow stupid.¹⁸⁶

Col. Henry Wilson, then the Staff College Commandant concurred:

There has been nobody to teach us the lessons of our wars & the result is that our superior Generals think, & act, differently & the training at

¹⁸² Hamley (1907), p. 403.

¹⁸³ Risio, Andrew, J, 'Building the old contemptibles', eThesis, Fort Leavenworth, (Kansas, 2007), p. 53. Regulations issued with Army Circular of the 1st November, 1881 envisaged an army of one or two corps. (Clarke, p. 53).

¹⁸⁴ Luvaaz, *Education ...* p. p. 141, et. seq.

¹⁸⁵ Roberts Cited in Evans, Nick, 'From drill to doctrine-forging the British Army's tactics 1897-1909', eThesis, KCL (London, undated), p. 293.

¹⁸⁶ Henderson, p. 397.

Aldershot is not that at Salisbury nor does Ireland agree with either, ...¹⁸⁷ Except those deriving from the Royal Artillery,¹⁸⁸ most of the superior officers in 1899 had been staff officers.¹⁸⁹

Systems either adapt to meet new challenges or they fail: the bigger the challenge the harder the adaptation. Beyond some limit the challenge is ignored. The major challenges in the many wars Britain faced in this period lay in the logistics and administration of colonial operations rather than in doctrine, which is why doctrines concerned with colonial battle-fighting (convoys, patrols and defiles) cohered more than those for major battle-fighting (artillery, combined arms and defence) for which Britain depended on the experience of others. When however, that experience touched on a challenge outwith some limit (such as how the Japanese planned battles) interest in learning from them abruptly vanished.

When such challenges as annual manoeuvres are conducted with insufficient blank ammunition, inadequate umpires, gross shortage of troops, unduly-brief (five day) timescales, the piecemeal reallocation of senior officers between command and training supervision roles in which they tended to oversee rather than participate.¹⁹⁰ their value was performative rather than conclusive.¹⁹¹

The absence of the stress of major battle experience left the British Army attempting to think about war by using fantasy narratives, ahistoric references, unreasonable constraints and bizarre expectations, such as 30

¹⁸⁷ Imperial War Museum, 'Standards of Efficiency Lecture I, 13 November 1907, p. 14; also 'Standards of Efficiency Lecture II', 25 November 1907, p. 9. Wilson MSS 3/3/5, Cited in French, D. and Reid, B. H. *The British General Staff*, Cass, (London, 2002), p. 196.

¹⁸⁸ See page 75.

¹⁸⁹ Beckett, Ian F. W. and Corvi, Steven J., *Haig's Generals*, Kindle edition. Birdwood was an exception.

¹⁹⁰ Bowman, Timothy and Connelly, Mark, *The Edwardian Army*, OUP (Oxford: 2015), pp. 60-62

¹⁹¹ Aldershot Command staff tour and Manoeuvres, 1907 in WO 279/517, 1908 in WO 279/21, 1912 in WO 279/47.

Division being expected to cross a heavily-fortified village in ten minutes.¹⁹²

This failure to present a consistent operational narrative was reflected in the reports of the Inspector-General of Infantry. No coherent approach to planning could emerge with such impediments.

2.3.3

Staff Work and Doctrine

The fighting of wars depends on a set of shared expectations between the various arms and layers of command in an army. In the British army these expectations are embodied in a series of doctrine documents. Army doctrines have been written since at least the C17th,¹⁹³ primarily for infantry and described the use of firearms or exercises.¹⁹⁴ They were augmented by a few local publications, none of which mentioned plans or the writing of orders.¹⁹⁵ This reticence was primarily due to the influence of cavalry on British military thought.

British military thinking up to 1918 was dominated by two ideas: the decisive battle and the decisive moment in that battle. Decisive battles were discussed at length by the historian Edward Shepherd Creasy,¹⁹⁶ the existence of decisive moments in such battles was an accepted part of doctrine and a cavalry charge was believed to be the essential precursor of such a moment.

192 See page 385.

193 Anon., Commands for the Exercise of Foot, Arm'd with Firelock-Muskets and Pikes; with the Evolutions, etc. MS. Additions, London 1690.

194 *The manual and platoon exercises, &c. &c.* Great Britain. Adjutant-General's Office. Printed for T. Egerton at the Military Library, (London, 1804).
Field exercise and evolutions of infantry: as revised by Her Majesty's command, 1861, 1870, 1877 and 1884
The Attack Drill. (Sixteenth edition.), (London, 1893).
Infantry drill: as revised by Her Majesty's command, HMSO, (London, 1889, 1890, 1893 and 1896).

195 Vincent, Lieut-Col, Sir Howard, C.B. MP. Rules, regulations standing orders and instructions of the Queen's Westminster Volunteers (13th Middlesex), Private Circulation, (London, 1898)
Anon., Field and brigade movements and infantry in attack. Instructions and remarks for use in the camps of instruction, Government Printer, (Ottawa: 1899).
Jones, Boer ... pp. 37-70.
See 1861 Field Exercises and Evolutions of Infantry which devotes its 500 plus pages to definitions of drill.

196 Creasy, Edward Shepherd, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, Bentley, (London, 25th edn., 1874).

¹⁹⁷ Battle-planning in any form was seen by the cavalry as a constraint on their freedom: its roles in charging and pursuing beaten foes were event-determined rather than commander-determined, and thus unamenable to any but the briefest of battle planning:

Definite plans of action can seldom, if ever, be laid down beforehand ... a general outline of the methods on which the cavalry is to work should be formed in the mind of the commander ...¹⁹⁸

'As the crisis of the battle approaches ... the chances of successful cavalry action increase ... the concentration of as large a part of the cavalry as possible is required; the rest depends chiefly upon the cavalry commander'.¹⁹⁹

However, as Mallinson puts it, while ...

'The well-timed charge with sword and lance, delivered against an enemy off-balance and demoralised, would turn a defeat or minor check into rout, panic and collapse. ... [but in 1815] Wellington's cavalry had waited all day before the moment arose'.²⁰⁰

Since the cavalry was expected to be the basis of the 'decisive attack',²⁰¹ its needs dominated the decision-making (and thus the planning) process and doctrine.

In the Second Boer War cavalry had shown itself invaluable for reconnaissance but it rarely pursued beaten foes with any success and its only shock attack was when French's Cavalry Division galloped down the Klipdrift valley to relieve Kimberley on 15 February 1900.²⁰² The British cavalry's weakness had been exposed by mounted infantry units from Canada, Australia and South Africa which had repeated the successes of the mounted infantry of both sides in the American Civil War (hereafter 'ACW'). For Roberts the implication was clear: the British cavalry must become mounted

¹⁹⁷ Anon., *Infantry Training*, Preface, WO 40-30 Field Service Regulations I Combined Training, (London, 1905), p. 118.

¹⁹⁸ TNA WO 33/3009 'Report on Army Manoeuvres, 1909', p. 52.

¹⁹⁹ See section 106 (para 2.) of *FSR I* 1912, p. 127.

²⁰⁰ Mallinson, Allan 'Charging Ahead', *History Today*, 42, (London, 1992).

²⁰¹ GSC 1910, p. 12 and *FSR I* 1912, p. 137.

²⁰² Cassar, G. H., *The Tragedy of Sir John French*, University of Delaware Press, (London, 1985), p. 79.

infantry whose primary arm was the rifle.²⁰³ To this end he formed a committee in 1902 of Lieutenant-General J. T. Hildyard, Rawlinson, Wilson and Major-General G. Ellison to write several new doctrine documents: the Combined Training manual (CT 1902),²⁰⁴ the Infantry Training manual (IT 1902),²⁰⁵ and the Staff manual 1912.²⁰⁶ Roberts was supervising the rewriting of Haig's draft of Cavalry Training 1903 to give it a mounted infantry bias and wrote to Kitchener:

Haig ... still clings to the old 'Arme Blanche' system and in the chapter ... entrusted to him to write, on Collective Training there is not one word about artillery or dismounted fire. Haig ... insists on cavalry soldiers being taught to consider the sword the chief weapon and the rifle as a kind of auxiliary one.²⁰⁷

But Roberts was retired as C-in-C in 1904 and in 1907 Haig as the new Director of Staff Duties, rewrote 'Cavalry Training' and eliminated any reference to planning.²⁰⁸ He ignored Clausewitz' contention that keeping armies to a plan is a commander's job and it is only when he loses, that a plan is dead,²⁰⁹ and followed Moltke the Elder:

'No plan of operations can with any safety include more than the first collision with the enemy's force'.²¹⁰

He was now free to ensure that no doctrine document constrained the role of cavalry and over the next seven years the British Army's doctrines would be greatly changed with CT 1902 evolving mostly into FSR I (1909) and some parts moved to T&MR I. Planning remained downgraded.

²⁰³ Badsey, Stephen, 'Boer War', p. 82.

Bowman and Connolly, *Edwardian Army*, p. 184.

²⁰⁴ Anon., *Combined Training*, WO-CT 61030-3008 (1902).

²⁰⁵ Anon., *Infantry Training*, WO-IT 1902 in WO 61030-3066

²⁰⁶ Gooch, *Plans*, p. 28., Simpson, Keith, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 51, 56.

²⁰⁷ De Groot, Gerard, J., *Douglas Haig 1961-1928*, Unwin Hyman, (London, 1988), p. 50.

²⁰⁸ De Groot, Gerard J. 'Educated Soldier or Cavalry Officer?', *War & Society*, 4 (2), (London, 1986), p. 61.

²⁰⁹ Holmes, *Planning* ... p. 139..

²¹⁰ Terraine, John, *Douglas Haig: the Educated Soldier*, Hutchinson (London, 1963), p. 49.

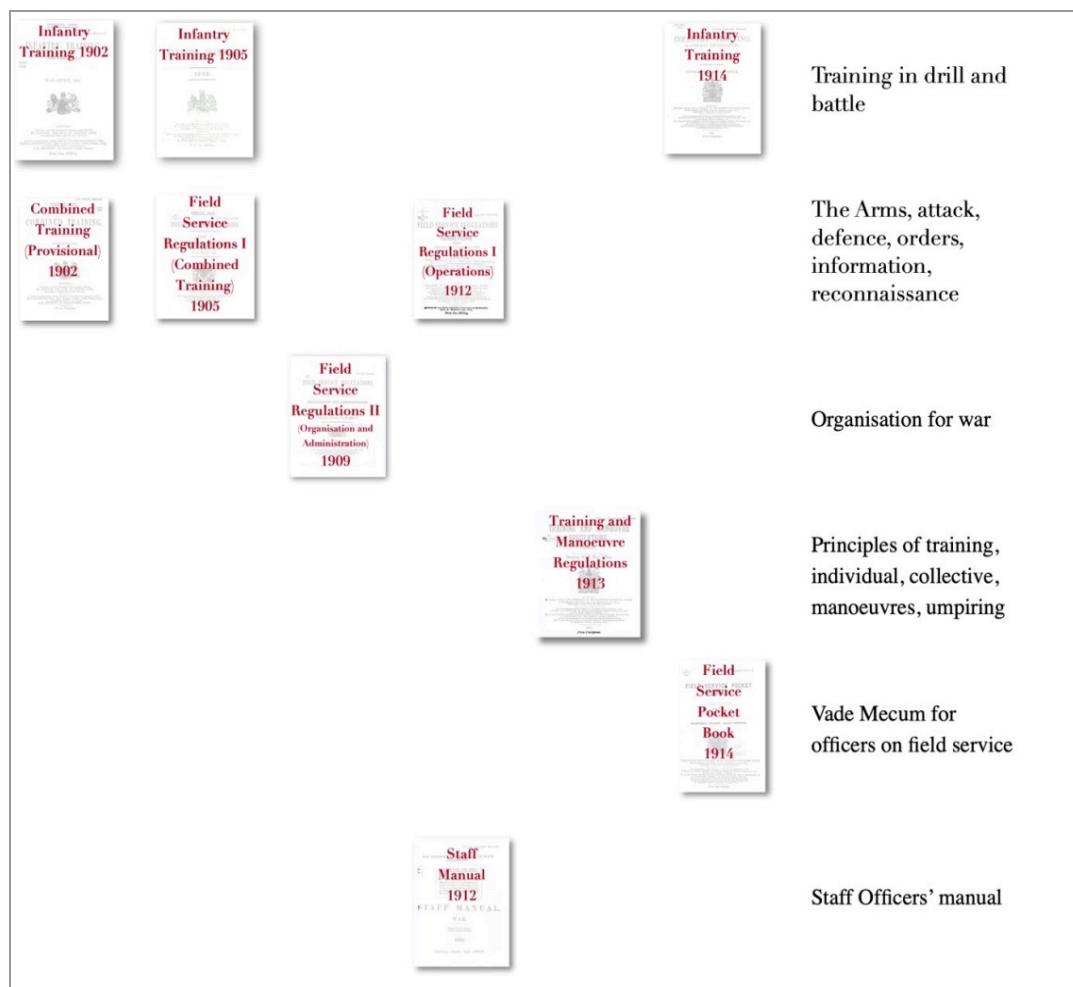


Figure 16 - Doctrine documents, 1902-14

2.3.4 Staff Officers' Manual

By 1912 Staff officers had their own doctrine.²¹¹ Its six chapters covered general and organisational principles, information and correspondence, the Staff's duties in war, cooperation and duties in Brigades.

Some lessons of The Second Boer War had been learned, as Samuels claims,²¹² and the principle of 'umpiring' in which a superior officer would merely observe the failings of junior officers without correcting them save to adjudicate between juniors in the event of a dispute, had been recognised as pernicious and proscribed. That Haig should have persisted in this error

²¹¹ 40-WO-1674 Staff Manual 1912.

²¹² Samuels, Martin, Command or Control, Command, training or tactics in the British and German armies 1888-1918, Frank Cass, (London, 1995), p. 50.

points to Haig's personal failure rather than an institutional one. Haig's view, as de Groot observed, was dominated by what he had learned at Staff College, but he ignored the proscription of Umpiring.²¹³

'De facto' provisions for Intelligence became 'de Jure': both the enemy and their own forces should be assessed, reported, updated and conclusions drawn. Troops should interrogate prisoners, identify the uniforms of the dead and ensure that the provenance of all intelligence was included. Troops in neighbouring countries and their tactics should also be monitored and assessed. A war diary was to be kept. Aircraft could be used for observation and transmitting messages, but cavalry should be employed for verification.²¹⁴ Even by 1914 the credibility of air reconnaissance was limited: news of the arrival of von Kluck's First Army was derided:

‘The information which you have acquired ... appears to be somewhat exaggerated. It is probable that only mounted troops supported by Jägers are in your immediate neighbourhood’.²¹⁵

The principle of inherited responsibility was retained: staff officers had no authority except that vested in them by their commander. Verbal orders were deprecated, but so were method statements. Plans should be revealed solely on a need-to know basis. The priority of orders and any need to risk life, should be clarified. A staff officer might issue an order but must clarify to the recipient that his authority was only delegated. A staff officer's task was to anticipate and resolve problems, to project the will of the commander, to relieve him of 'all detail' and to be coordinated by the Chief of the General Staff (CGS).

The CGS provided the C-in-C with all the planning information needed and maintained the intelligence picture. Once a plan was decided, the General Staff

²¹³ De Groot, *Haig* ... p. 50.

²¹⁴ Anon., *Staff Manual 1912*, WO-40-1674 p.12.

²¹⁵ Order (0(6)47) to the Cavalry Division of August 22 1914 Cited in Spears, E. L., *Liaison 1914*, Heineman, (London, 1930), Footnote on p. 137.

would anticipate and eliminate obstacles, draft orders and assist the troops in its execution. Advice to senior officers should be given by staff officers when it appeared useful and if rejected should remain private.²¹⁶

Important decisions should only be taken in concert with all affected parties.

Orders and instructions other than those regarding billeting, embarkations and unopposed landings were to be prepared and issued by the General Staff.

A staffing organisation should be designed in peacetime. Modifications could be added with experience. Some of the contents were mere common sense: staff officers must retain copies of important documentation at all times for immediate reference. They should at all times record any data of potential military interest. They should advise their colleagues on a 'need-to-know' basis. The information flow should be noted and reported.²¹⁷ However, the manual said nothing of plans or planning and merely touched on the processing of orders rather than their contents.

2.3.5 Doctrines

From 1856 to 1899 the army was essentially a colonial paramilitary police force. All the training and doctrine paid lip-service to the need to field a 'continental' army of the size of Germany's or France's. But up to 1899 the detail of all these documents was concerned either with drill or with the protection of convoys, outposts or warfare against tribespeople. From Figure 17 below it is evident that the only combat operations appropriate to a 'Continental' army are discussed in Parts V and VIII of the Infantry Drill manual (1896) and account for only 15% of its contents.

²¹⁶ Anon., *Staff Manual*, pp. 34, 40 33, 41, 42, 40, 364, 25, 33, 20, 34, 8, 7, 11, 12, 12, 28, 27, 37, 9.

²¹⁷ Anon., *Staff Manual*, p. 13, 15, 16-18.

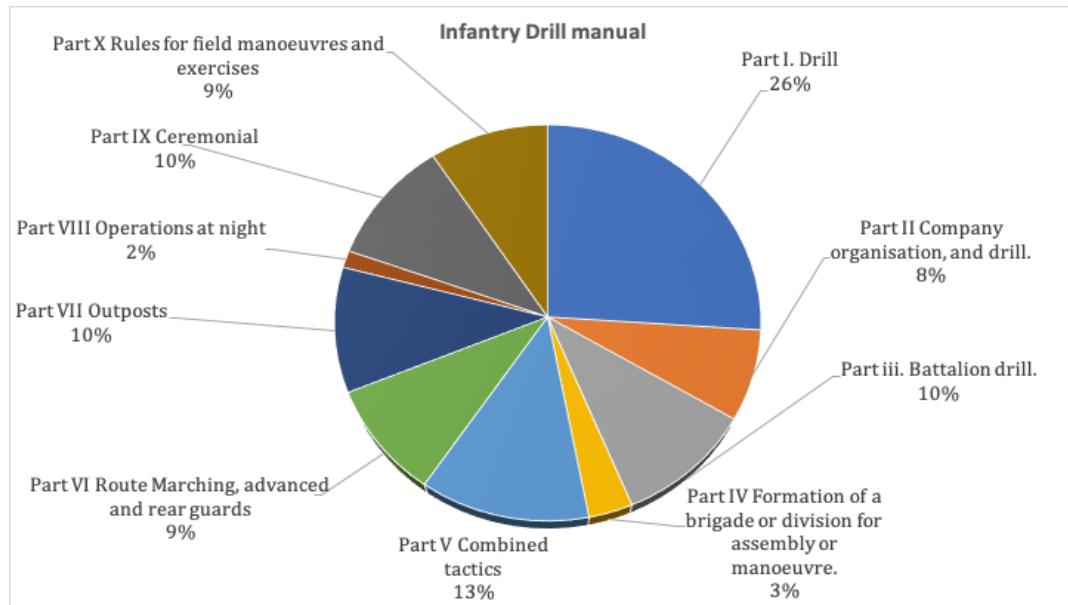


Figure 17 - Infantry Drill Manual 1896 contents.

By contrast CT 1902 had covered attack and defence, as well as orders, reports and messages, information and reconnaissance. It mentioned a plan without identifying its contents, but since plans eventually materialised as orders, it specified four kinds of order:²¹⁸ 'Attack'; 'Occupation of a position'; 'Night operations' and 'March'.²¹⁹ They would be written with numbered paragraphs, follow rules for specifying time and place and be signed. They would say what was known of the enemy, of British forces, the commander's intentions and location, each unit's identity and actions and the objectives. CT 1902 also had a section 10 ('Reconnaissance before and during an attack') and a section 11 ('Plan of attack'). These were important in that they embodied two essential parts of planning: the definition of the 'before' state (by a reconnaissance report, sometimes referred to as an 'Appreciation'²²⁰) and a definition of the 'after' state (by a plan). The battle would be planned in (unidentified) stages. Precision was required but notably, conditional statements and justifications, as well as any contextual description, were

²¹⁸ As footnote 204.

²¹⁹ CT 1902, Sections 13, 30, 42, 60.

²²⁰ See page 66.

prohibited. There was a protocol for issuing the order, but the subordinate could exceptionally use their initiative and ignore them and their independence was thus preserved.²²¹ Any 'special instruction' would simply identify an objective and leave the method to the discretion of the officer in charge. Most of the regulations of CT 1902 were incorporated into FSR 1905 whose chapter 114, 'Attack orders' expanded the 'Plan of attack' to require that each body of troops have an objective or task, to ensure that

■ 'attacks intended to be simultaneous should be so in reality' but leaving 'the manner in which the task assigned to each body of troops is to be performed' to its commander.

In 1908 Haig as Director of Staff Duties (hereafter: 'DSD'),²²² supervised the preparation of a successor to FSR I 1905 in the form of FSR I 1909, later updated to become FSR I 1912. This had several sections dealing with reconnaissance (mostly by cavalry) and a section 96 identifying the essentials of a reconnaissance report.²²³ A reconnaissance report tells a commander what is there, an Appreciation explains why it is a problem and what might happen. See Appendix G - Appreciations, plans and reconnaissance reports on page 742 for examples.

Haig had used Appreciations extensively in his book '*Cavalry Studies*' but purely as learning devices.²²⁴ He moved the definition of an Appreciation to section 14 of T&MR 1913 as shown in Appendix I and thus prevented Appreciations from being considered as an operational practice. Gone also was the FSR I 1905 section 114 'Plan of attack', replaced by references to

²²¹ Section 42.

²²² WO 260.

²²³ Carlson, Joel, *Op. Cit.*, p. 112.

²²⁴ Haig, *Cavalry* ...

unspecified 'plan of operations',²²⁵ 'plan of action',²²⁶ 'strategical plan of operations',²²⁷ 'plan of battle'²²⁸ and 'plan for the assault'.²²⁹ Haig's priorities were evident from the five-sentence outline of the contents of a generic plan in section 104 of FSR I 1912 'Preliminary measures' and the 13 pages of FSR I 1912 devoted to the preparation and distribution of orders. Prejudices persisted: no planning doctrine was issued by the British Army before 1918. Plans were considered to be part of the 'Duties of the General Staff'.²³⁰ Neither the 1905 nor the 1912 Staff Manuals define how plans should be written.²³¹ Plans and their preparation were thus consigned to a bureaucratic, recursive limbo.

The excision had consequences: the level of army disregard for problem and solution definition was evident from French's report on the state of infantry training of 1908, in which he rhetorically asks:

'Are officers trained ... To approach the solution of strategic and tactical problems with sound definite ideas as to their principles of war and do they ... understand the 'appreciation of situations'?'²³²

By 1914 French was still complaining:

'... the many appreciations ... were apparently based on a knowledge lacking those principles which should be second nature.'²³³

2.3.6 Appreciations and Plans

Without some definition of a problem, no plan can hope to succeed. In battle planning this definition is called an 'Appreciation' and its value lies in the

²²⁵ Section 22 The strategical concentration, section 108 Preliminary measures.

²²⁶ Section 75 General principles and rules, section 79 Distribution of the outposts, section 94 Tactical reconnaissance by patrols, section 148 Characteristics of bush tribes.

²²⁷ Section 90 General principles.

²²⁸ Section 102 Deployment for action.

²²⁹ Section 124 The regular siege.

²³⁰ War Office. *Field Service Regulations*, part II (Organisation and administration), HMSO (London, 1909), Section 16.

²³¹ von Schellendorff, Bronsart, *The Duties of the General Staff*, 40-WO-1674, HMSO, (London, 1905), .

²³² WO 27/508 'IGF Report 1908', p. 28, Cited in Evans, Nick, *Op. Cit.*, <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/>.

²³³ Anon., Report of a conference of General Staff officers at the Staff College 1914 12th to 15th January, War Office, (London, 1914), p. 92.

discipline it imposes on officers to separate problem from solution by first defining the situation they find themselves in. Writing Appreciations was a staff duty as Schellendorf had observed:

The chief duty of an officer of the General Staff ... consists in arranging for ... the facts necessary for an appreciation of the situation.²³⁴

Yet of the authors discussed here, only Mayne and DeGruyther mention an Appreciation or any other form of problem definition.

... it is only after a due appreciation of the ... circumstances that it is possible to decide ... the best chance of success.²³⁵

Defining the battle problem is very hard which was possibly why it rarely happened. The failure of many British Army battle plans can be traced both to misconceptions of the battle problem (which an attempt at defining it would have revealed) and to their general inexperience in and lack of support for planning. The lack of support was most evident when the authors, confronted by the task of explaining planning, were reduced to platitudes, contradictions, or impracticality.

Camberley students would have learned that planning information must be ample, early, accurate, updated,²³⁶ and based on a knowledge of the enemy's proceedings.²³⁷ While encounter battles could not be planned,²³⁸ plans reflecting reality were more likely to succeed,²³⁹ and failure to plan for supplies could not be rectified by inspiration or 'excitement'.²⁴⁰ They discovered that plans must be thought out by a commanding officer and reflect his wishes, since only a professional soldier had the requisite

234 Von Schellendorf, *Duties*, p. 316.

235 DeGruyther, p. 329, Mayne, C. B., *Infantry Fire Tactics*, Gale and Polden, (Chatham: 1888), p. 363.

236 Cléry, pp. 3, 38.

237 Clarke, p. 40.

238 Home, pp. 160, 161.

239 Home, p. 164, 165.

240 Home, p. 214.

experience and judgement.²⁴¹ Were students insufficiently-confused by all this, they were also told that few plans were written **before** battles begin and yet, the requisite reconnaissances having been made, there would usually be ample time for planning.²⁴² Soldiers should be aware of the plan preferably before the battle,²⁴³ but the plan might emerge during it.²⁴⁴ Frederick the Great was much quoted, but it ...

... was by his successes in the fields of battle, rather than by his plans of campaign, which were often faulty, that he finally emerged victorious ...²⁴⁵ The perfect exemplar for those who couldn't or wouldn't plan: the test of real efficiency lay in the outcome.²⁴⁶ Reviews were not mentioned but modifications would rarely occur before the start of the battle. A plan should contain all the instructions to all the forces involved and any temptation to précis it to a few sentences should be avoided since this was 'difficult'.²⁴⁷ Students might have suspected that none of the manual authors had ever planned a battle and being told that even indifferent plans should be followed and only abandoned if 'utterly bad'²⁴⁸ might have reinforced their suspicions: to be told that neophyte planners planned badly would not have surprised them.²⁴⁹

Hamley (Kiggell)²⁵⁰ quotes Clausewitz in an attempt to show that Clausewitz had no idea either.

Then strategy must go with the army to the field in order to arrange particulars on the spot and to make the modifications in the general plan

²⁴¹ Henderson. pp. 82, 20. DeGruyther, p. 256.

²⁴² Henderson pp. 120, 122.

²⁴³ Home, p. 11.

²⁴⁴ Home, p. 164.

²⁴⁵ Hamley (1866) p. 304.

²⁴⁶ Home, p. 160.

²⁴⁷ DeGruyther, pp. 254, 257.

²⁴⁸ Cléry, p. 156.

²⁴⁹ Henderson, p. 20.

²⁵⁰ Kiggell made minor alterations to Hamley's text.

which incessantly become necessary in war.

... and was reduced to gnomic utterances:

‘The object of strategy is to lead up to success in decisive battles.’

When faced with the evident success of the Japanese his only response was to carp vacuously:

On the Japanese side we may venture to ask whether their apparently very superior mobility and power of manoeuvre were always turned to the best possible account in their plans of battle?²⁵¹

Thus, students were offered platitudes rather than principles and senior officers of the British army, who knew of the battle plans of two major wars and could have obtained them, could only denigrate them and their authors.²⁵² On so abject a basis, no tradition of battle planning could be established.

2.3.7 Orders

Whatever hierarchy of plans cascaded from the commander’s original intention, they were all, eventually translated into orders. Orders were mentioned in doctrine documents at least from 1861 but not defined,²⁵³ nor were they mentioned in British military texts until 1884.²⁵⁴

Clarke saw written orders as a kind of memorandum in which conciseness was imperative:

‘... every word and every sentence should be weighed ...’²⁵⁵

... yet they should be justified:

‘At the beginning of each order, the motive for it should be briefly stated ...’²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Hamley (1907), pp. 8, 400, 416.

²⁵² See page 54.

²⁵³ The *WO-Field Exercises and Evolutions of Infantry* of 1861 mentions commands 300 times but orders only ten times.

²⁵⁴ See Appendix E - Japanese and British Field Service regulations.

²⁵⁵ Clarke, p. 24.

²⁵⁶ Clarke, p. 24.

The criteria for completeness were subjective:

‘... the Staff Officer... must ... understand ... everything that is done, ... to grasp the sense of any order ... and its purport ...

... yet:

‘Nothing that is necessary for the recipient to know should be omitted; on the other hand, all details should be omitted which cramp the reaction of the subordinate.

Orders could be ignored:

‘... an order ... ceases to be binding as soon as the circumstances in which it was framed have ceased to exist.

Orders could be conditional:

‘If a collision is expected, the order must contain instructions whether the march is to be carried out ... left optional ... or whether fighting is to be avoided ...²⁵⁷

The provisions for orders in CT 1902 are described on page 72. It was substituted by FSR I of 1905 under Haig's control. The changes to the contents differed, rather inconsistently. The need for strong flanks in an attack was dropped,²⁵⁸ the provenance of intelligence was to be given, or its credibility specified,²⁵⁹ but the need for an objective for each attacking body of troops now applied only to the issue of 'special instructions',²⁶⁰ and explanations were deprecated.²⁶¹ Devolution of responsibility was repeatedly emphasised,²⁶² as was the need to reread an order before issuing it.²⁶³ There was a new section on communications.²⁶⁴ Ambiguity was decried,²⁶⁵ yet the identity of the attacking force need not be made explicit but would 'usually be

²⁵⁷ Clarke, pp. 35, 37, 43, 135.

²⁵⁸ CT 1902 11. Plan of Attack.

²⁵⁹ FSR (1905) 3. Operation Orders.

²⁶⁰ CT 1902 13. Attack orders.

²⁶¹ CT 1902 45. Nature of orders, FSR (1905) 3. Operation Orders, FSR (1905) 7. Framing orders and messages.

²⁶² Anon., FSR (1905) 3. Operation Orders.

²⁶³ Anon., FSR (1905) 3. Operation Orders, FSR (1905) 7. Framing orders and messages.

²⁶⁴ Anon., FSR (1912) 8. Responsibility for maintaining communication.

²⁶⁵ Anon., FSR (1912) 9. General rules regarding the preparation and despatch of orders, reports and messages.

clear [in] the body of the order ...'²⁶⁶ Three times it was stated that orders should contain no more than the recipient needed or what he could not arrange by himself.²⁶⁷ Orders should be issued in a timely manner: where this was not possible, they should be preceded by a preliminary order.²⁶⁸ Orders could be modified, rescinded or withdrawn.²⁶⁸ In particular, an order, if mechanically reproduced, could be distributed immediately without fear of errors occurring in dictation. In this Haig erred politically. Mere mechanical reproduction was akin to stereotyping which was anathema.²⁶⁹ Such an approach might lead to senior officers distributing large numbers of orders amounting almost to plans. An addendum was issued on 1 May 1907:

‘... distribution of ... copies of operation orders ... can seldom be justified.²⁶⁸ Operational orders were deliberately not discussed at the 1909 annual Conference of General Staff officers. The minutes declared that they had ‘been authoratively (sic) dealt with by the publication of Chapter II, FSR, Part I’.²⁷⁰ The point was further emphasised by Kiggell (by then the DSD) who echoed the Official View:

‘There is no doubt as to the danger ... of laying down too much detail in official regulations. To lay down rules would tend to cramp judgement ... our manuals aim at giving principles but avoid laying down methods’.²⁷¹ Methods implied the use of proformae or ‘stereotypes’ as they were then known and their use was a taboo whose breaking in 1915 heralded the start of better planning.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ Anon., *FSR (1912)* 12. Operation orders.

²⁶⁷ *FSR (1912)* 12. Operation orders.

²⁶⁸ Anon., *FSR (1912)* 104. Preliminary measures, *FSR (1912)* 13. Issue of orders.

²⁶⁹ Anon., General Staff Conferences GSC 1914 12th to 15th January, pp. 74-77.

²⁷⁰ Anon., Report of a conference of General Staff officers at the Staff College, 18-21 January 1909, War Office, (London, 1909), p. 3.

²⁷¹ War Office, *Report 1914*, p. 17.

²⁷² *Ibid.* 1910, p. 50.

The need for detailed orders was again denied in FSR I 1912, Chapter 12,

'Operation Orders' section 2:

'An operation order should contain just what the recipient requires to know and nothing more'.

This reluctance to guide the construction of orders was made explicit in the next section:

'It is neither necessary nor desirable that definite rules should be laid down as to the form in which operation orders should be drafted'.

Yet section 12 devotes 6 pages to doing just this. Nor was there any support planned in the form of subsidiary manuals as there had been in CT 1902 and it was their absence which provoked the later generation of 'notes' by Rawlinson and others to overcome the doctrinal gaps which trench warfare later exposed.²⁷³

Between 1908 and 1914 the Conference of General Staff officers discussed orders frequently.²⁷⁴ But when in 1914 Davies, the new DSD, declared he would start revising the FSRs in 1914 '... as the book will shortly be out of print ...'²⁷⁵ Robertson, then Director of Military Training, hastened to forestall any radical change:

'... the various points ... need, the Director of Staff Duties tells me, to be carefully considered and the instructions of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff taken'.²⁷⁶

Order-writing continued to be a politically-sensitive issue in the British Army up to the outbreak of war. There were social tensions to be considered: the level of detail in an order increased as the rank of the person writing it decreased.

'Thus the ... orders of the army corps commanders are more detailed [than those of the Army Commander]'.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ See page 174 et seq.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p 60.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 1914, p. 89

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 66.

²⁷⁷ Clarke, p. 44.

Conversely the greater the amount of detail in an order, the more it implied the work of a subordinate. There was thus every social pressure to minimise the amount of detail. Senior officers were in a bind: giving orders was an essential function and demonstrated their status, but their contents, if faulty, remained a threat to their position. Clarity must thus be sacrificed to brevity and the risk borne by the troops.

2.4

Battle Phases

The disconnection of viewpoints between the arms meant that each saw a battle as having different phases. Colonel Charles Mayne proposed four: *reconnaissance, preparation; assault; and the re-forming* (and consolidation) of the tactical units. Confusingly he also mentioned a 'first' phase in which the infantry line would dissuade enemy skirmishers from attacking the artillery and a 'final' phase in which one side would abandon the fight.²⁷⁸ Both DeGruyther and Haig attempted to define phases after the Second Boer War. DeGruyther defined a cavalry versus cavalry battle as having three phases: reconnoitring (preparatory), manoeuvring and attacking (or retreating). He discussed them in a little detail but merely mentioned the possibility of conflict between other arms.²⁷⁹ In his book *Cavalry Studies* Haig frequently referred to phases, beginning with the second (the first remained undefined).²⁸⁰ He later declared there to be four phases of a battle: the *introduction*, when manoeuvring and preparation occur, the *engagement*, when artillery and rifles prevent the enemy from manoeuvring, the *supreme effort* and assault of the enemy's position and *victory* by pursuing the enemy to the uttermost limits, or the covering of a retirement. He illustrated this with a description of a battle written entirely from a cavalry viewpoint. The Field Artillery Training

²⁷⁸ Mayne, *Infantry* ... pp. 451, 3, 277.

²⁷⁹ DeGruyther, *Tactics* ... p. 160-170.

²⁸⁰ Haig, *Cavalry* ... p. 40, 170 et seqq.

manual mentions three phases each for attack and defence.²⁸¹ FSR I (1912) refers to them only for sieges.²⁸² This disparity of phase definitions illustrates the difficulty the British Army had in evolving a satisfactory battle doctrine and confirms the inexperience of its officers in 'continental' warfare.

Even the need to control forces on the battlefield became in itself a problem. While most doctrines paid lip service to the idea of open order formations, the general failure in peacetime to train troops to operate autonomously, or in wartime to believe the New Armies to be able to use their initiative,²⁸³ led to the conviction that the close-order attack was the only approach to be adopted because only thus could officers adequately direct their men in the heat and noise of battle.²⁸⁴

The increasing range of rifles and field guns deepened the battlefield and exposed attackers to greater fire for longer periods. The combination of the deep battlefield and the belief in the 'decisive' bayonet charge led to troops being ordered to reach a point some 250 yards from the enemy line from which their charge might begin. With the developing use of machine guns this was an increasingly suicidal move.²⁸⁵ Solutions were proposed: more use of cover;²⁸⁶ night attacks; fire-and-movement attacks;²⁸⁷ and flank attacks.²⁸⁸ Before 1914 virtually all soldiers assumed that a flank would always be

²⁸¹ Anon., *Field Artillery Training*, 9 April 1914, WO-40-2016, pp. 246-257.

²⁸² Anon., *Field Service Regulations Part I*, 11 July 1912, WO-40-1665, p. 164.

²⁸³ Prior and Wilson *Command* ... p. 143.

²⁸⁴ Bruno, Thomas A., 'Ignoring the obvious, Combined arms and fire & manoeuvre tactics prior to world war I', eThesis, USMC, (Quantico: 2002), p. 7.

²⁸⁵ Bruno, *Op. Cit.* pp. 8-9.

²⁸⁶ Henderson pp. 134, 146-47,153. Cited in Luvaaz, p. 234.

²⁸⁷ Bruno, *Op. Cit.* pp. 12-13.

²⁸⁸ Maurice, John Frederick, The System of Field Manoeuvres Best Adapted for Enabling Our Troops To Meet a Continental Army, (Edinburgh, 1872). pp. 19, 26-31, Cited in Luvaaz, Jay, *The education of an army*, Cassell, (London, 1964), p 177.

exposed somewhere, it was merely a matter of finding it.²⁸⁹ But no solution was found to the

‘... problem of covering the infantry as it advanced across the fire-swept defensive zone ...’²⁹⁰

... other than appeals to moral superiority:

War is essentially the triumph, ... of one will over another weaker will²⁹¹

Since no attack formation could be found, it was simpler to prohibit the search.

It is therefore strictly forbidden either to formulate or to practise a normal form of either attack or defence.²⁹²

Which left infantry-artillery cooperation, also known as ‘combined arms’.²⁹³

Combined arms approaches were problematic for many reasons. The increasing range of artillery had led to the division of the battle into two parts: counter-battery firing and infantry support. Counter-battery firing in turn had led to early attempts at indirect firing and the realisation of the need for battlefield communication. The Staff College had no answers but implored students to:

Describe any instance you have seen in war or peace operations, of artillery support to an infantry assault. If you have not seen one, describe a case you have read of.²⁹⁴

All of this left a large hole where doctrinal support should have been. Field Artillery Training 1914 merely says:

[if the] ... artillery commander ... [must cooperate with] ... infantry ... [communicate] ... with its commander ... to ... [understand] ... the operation that he is to support and ... the proposed method of its execution’
[To direct] the fire of his batteries the ... artillery commander ... [must] ... know ... where the infantry ... [is] ... its immediate objective; and ... what

289 Luvaaz, *Education*, p. 197.

290 Bruno, *Op. Cit.* p. 2.

291 Hamilton, Ian, *Compulsory Service* (London, 1910), pp. 121-2

292 As footnote 205, p. 191.

293 Henderson p. 78.

294 Anon., *Camberley Reds Junior Division 1913*, Artillery Exercise No. 1 of 17 February 1913.

... prevents it from attaining its object.²⁹⁵

... and Field Service Regulations Part I Operations, declares:

‘As the infantry advances to the decisive attack ... converging artillery fire [must be brought] to bear on its immediate objective, ... artillery commanders ... [must] ... keep themselves informed as to the progress of their infantry and to discontinue fire ... when the infantry is setting to close quarters ...’²⁹⁶

The problem of keeping commanders informed would persist well into the First World War.

2.5 Artillery

Artillery planning was considered neither by doctrine documents nor by military texts. Orders were given and taken but their contents were not discussed. Combined operations were mentioned but their implications were ignored. Thus section V of the Infantry Drill manual of 1896 (Combined Tactics) declares that

‘1. The commander having given his ...artillery commanders full information as to his proposed plan of attack, the mass of the artillery will be brought into action.²⁹⁷

The 1914 Field Artillery Training manual merely proposes that combined arms operations be best arranged:

‘... by a personal exchange of views between the commanders concerned before the operation begins.

No mention was made of any artillery plan, its structure or contents. The infantry plan would be

‘... translated into orders [but how] these orders are conveyed to the artillery must depend to a great extent on the nature of the operation.²⁹⁸

The artillery commander should know the attack location..

‘... so that he may be ready to [shell] the enemy.

²⁹⁵ Anon., 9 April 1914, WO-40-2016 Field Artillery Training, pp. 242, 244, 138.

²⁹⁶ Anon., GHQ, 40-WO-1665 FSR I (1909), p. 138.

²⁹⁷ Anon., 7 July 1896, *WO-Infantry drill manual,1896*, p. 116.

²⁹⁸ Anon., WO-40-2016 Field Artillery Training, p. 175, 238, 242.

Similarly ...

The commander ... decides on the moment for entering the manoeuvring phase. The 1st line and the guns must act in complete accord.²⁹⁹

Even by 1904, with all the experience of Boer war II to hand, a tactics expert could offer no better suggestion to his young officer cadets. Even by 1913 the Staff College had no idea either.³⁰⁰

While cavalry and infantry Brigades had Brigade Major staff officers, artillery only had staff captains who were not Staff College officers, had not been through the Staff College, were not p.s.c. and did not wear staff badges.³⁰¹

Additionally no artillery officer who graduated from the Staff College could become a staff officer in the Royal Artillery. A brief assessment of the careers of leading Royal Artillery Commanders partly confirms this: Brigadier-Generals N. Birch, C. E. D. Budworth, J. F. Du Cane, A. E. A. Holland, H. S. Horne, Lieutenant-General G. MacMunn, Brigadier-General H. C. Uniacke and F. D. W. Wing never attended the Staff College as students.³⁰² After Staff College, Milne served in Intelligence and only briefly as a BGRA, Montgomery-Massingberd became Rawlinson's Chief of Staff (hereafter 'CoS') and MacMunn took staff roles. Artillery suffered from the lack of a 'school of thought'³⁰³ and was thus unable to maintain and develop a body of artillery operational knowledge in the Staff College.

Artillery expertise at RMC was also constrained by this lack of a body of artillery operational knowledge. Following the Akers-Douglas report it was

²⁹⁹ DeGruyther, p. 163.

³⁰⁰ See page 74.

³⁰¹ Headlam, J., *The history of the Royal Artillery, Vol II, 1899-1914*, (Woolwich: 1937), p. 135.

³⁰² Headlam, *Royal Artillery*, p. 337-8.

³⁰³ See page 33.

decided that all RMC Company Commanders must be *psc [passed staff college]*³⁰⁴. In 1907 the War Office wrote to the RMC Commandant:

‘... ‘that while Major Norris RFA is no doubt an excellent officer in all respects’ he was not a Staff College graduate and thus [is] ineligible under the regulations to hold the position ...’³⁰⁵

The Army was beginning to impose professionalism.

Between the Crimean and Second Boer wars artillery greatly increased its range and lethality. These increases remained unmatched by doctrinal improvements, possibly because few shells came the other way until 1899. Only with Boer war II and the ferocity of the Boer and their German guns³⁰⁶ did doctrine, practice and hardware improve.

2.6

Conclusions

A consequence of Britain’s ‘splendid isolation’ was her general unconcern for her military strength which was only corrected by a fear of invasion. Her weakness lay not simply in numbers or hardware but also in the quality of her officers. Their profession had been subverted by a lack of external challenge and the prevalence of an elitist anti-intellectual viewpoint deriving from the British class system. Its body of knowledge was full contradictions, had not kept pace with technology and lacked any useful references to plans or planning. The officers who would plan the battles of the First World War were thus very unprepared for the battle planning tasks they would confront from 1914 onwards. The lack of a ‘continental’ challenge skewed the contents of the body of knowledge primarily to address the problems of ‘small’ wars. While ironically these small wars taught some lessons in the deployment of infantry and the use of cover, which was of immediate value in 1899, the

304 Akers-Douglas

305 Duncan, p. 28.

306 Maurice, F., *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, Vol II*, Hurst and Blackett, (London, 1910), p. 603.

British army was very unprepared for Boer war II as the calamities of 'Black Week' showed.

The shock it induced and the lessons deriving from the Russo-Japanese and Balkan Wars still did not provoke sufficient change to prepare the British army for the First World War. Notably neither Henderson nor Kiggell attempted to synthesise the lessons of the Second Boer War: Henderson's reference point remained the ACW and Kiggell could not be bothered with the complete rewriting which Hamley's book would have required to remain relevant. The only other feedback mechanism available, the annual manoeuvres, was too trivial to be useful. Lack of feedback from big wars condemned the Army to try and learn from small ones. Small wars taught inconclusive lessons and thus left room for factionalism.

The use of staff officers, seen to have been a key to German success in 1870, was formalised in the British Army and their position as a stepping-stone to promotion established. They would become the intellectual glue binding the army's actions. They were mostly responsible for battle planning and wrote many of the doctrine documents. The doctrines themselves became a battleground between enthusiasts for mounted infantry and cavalry die-hards: battle planning and the writing of Appreciations became casualties, whereas order writing survived.

The infantry's functions evolved as the technology permitted, their movement to battle and deployment was an arena in which effectiveness vied with choreography. Effectiveness, in the form of skirmishers, eventually won, aided by colonial experience, but a definition of a 'normal' form of the attack eluded the British army. As the battlefield deepened, the frontal attack became increasingly suicidal and recourse was had to 'combined arms' approaches in vain. The defence of a country was mentioned but not analysed, but the defence of positions was discussed in depth with the exploitation of such

obstacles as rivers, mountains, villages and woods to facilitate counter-attacks. Trench warfare remained unconsidered.

Artillery's primary functions were shown, but combined operations and counter-battery duels remained undecided on. Battlefield communications, planning and rangefinding were merely mentioned. Attacks on such targets as villages and woods were discussed in detail but the lack of a body of operational knowledge impeded Artillery's ability to professionalise.

While planning of a high order might be achieved by officers in conjunction with civilians, as the plans for the movement of the BEF to France showed,³⁰⁷ the process of battle planning from reconnaissance to appreciation to planning was impeded by a lack of doctrine, training and political will among commanders.

³⁰⁷ Gooch, *Plans* ... p. 121.

3. Neuve Chapelle

3.1 Introduction

From the moment it arrived in France and detrained at Maubeuge, to the defence of the Mons-Condé canal on 23 August, through the great retreat to the Marne and then the Race to the Sea, every action the BEF fought in 1914 was an encounter battle for which no planning occurred. By Christmas they occupied a line from St. Eloi south as far as Cuinchy.

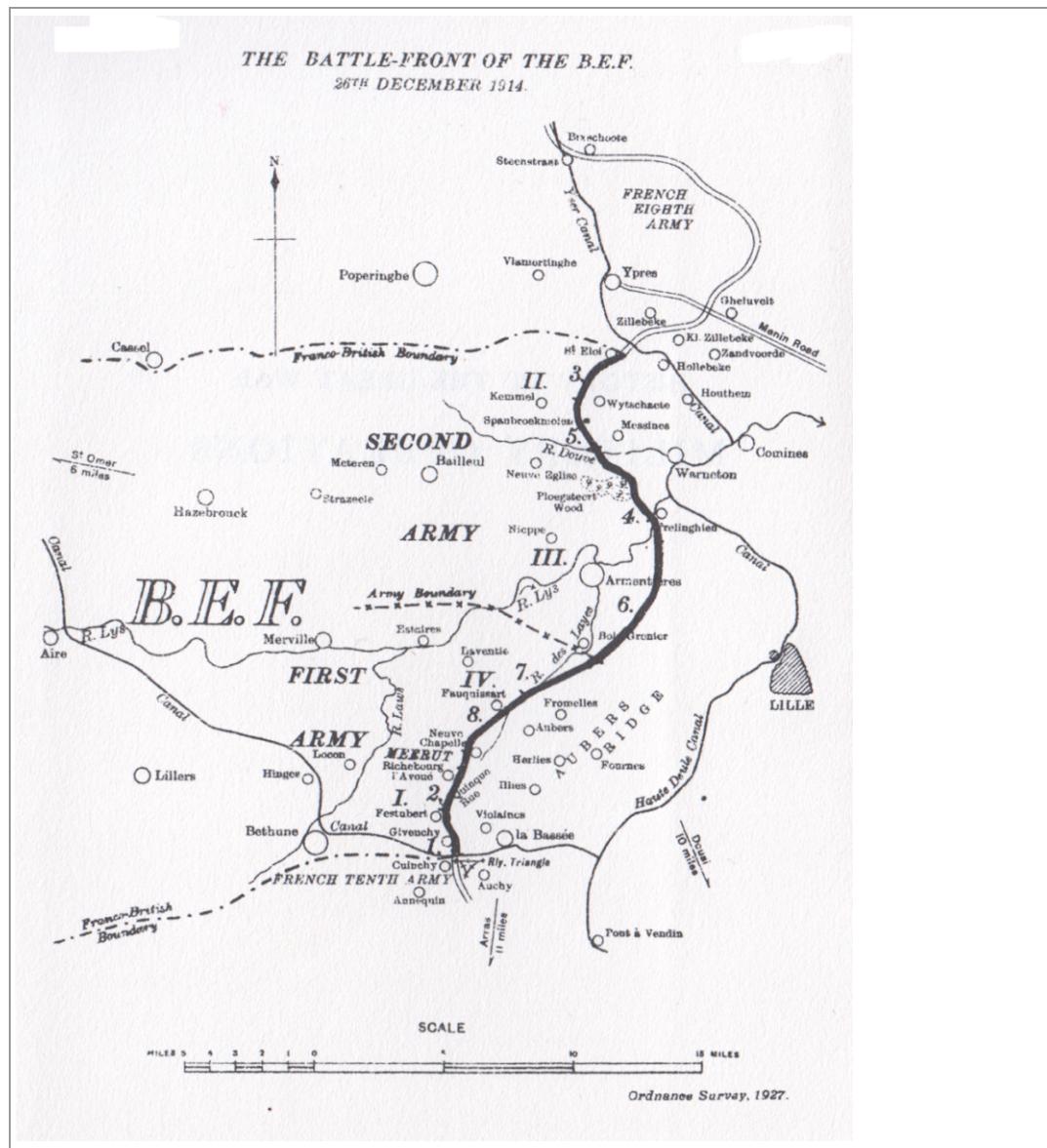


Figure 18 - The Battle Front of the BEF on 26 December 1914³⁰⁸

It had expanded into two armies with the return of troops from the Empire, and Dominions and by January 1915 was commanded as shown below:

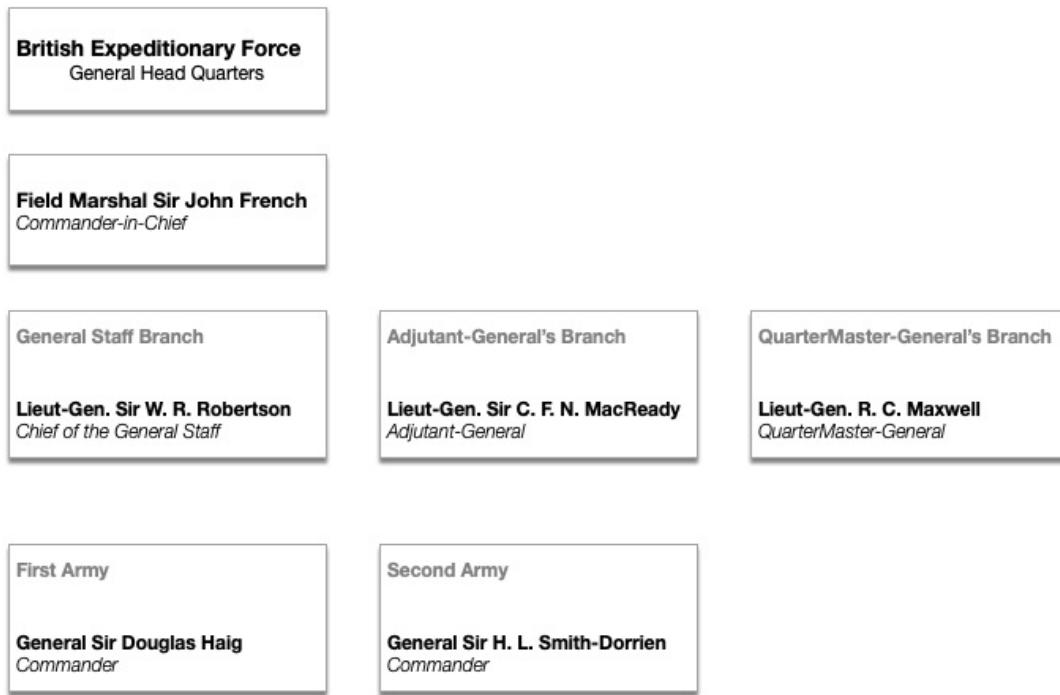


Figure 19 - The higher staff of the BEF 10-Feb-1915³⁰⁹

Field Marshal Kitchener was the Minister for War and held political responsibility for the British armies. Both the armies of the BEF were commanded by Field Marshal Sir John French. He was a cavalryman who had never commanded an infantry unit and knew little of artillery. He had little political *nous*: he managed to enrage the Government in his mishandling of the Curragh affair.³¹⁰ He had limited administrative ability and had delayed as long as possible the introduction of an army level of command preferring to add more divisions to corps than to create a second army.³¹¹ As a commander, his competence in planning an attack can be seen from his 'Army Operation Order No. 40',³¹² of 15 December 1914, issued 11 hours and 20 minutes before the attack was due to be launched, which resulted in II Corps

³⁰⁹ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, ... Vol I, p. 363.

³¹⁰ Cassar, *French* ... p. 38.
Foster, Roy, *Modern Ireland*, Penguin, (London, 1988).

³¹¹ Beckett and Corvi, *Haig's Generals*, ... Kindle location 215 of 5643.

³¹² Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol I, p. 380.

remaining immobile and six piecemeal attacks elsewhere by companies and battalions to no useful effect.³¹³ To Haig he said

‘I can’t go on as things are now’.³¹⁴

Robertson was the Chief of the General Staff (hereafter CGS) of the BEF whose role was essentially that of the mechanic, keeping the vehicle of the BEF in good working order for drivers such as Haig. Robertson wielded immense political and technical power.³¹⁵ It was he who wisely decided to shift the advanced base of the BEF from Amiens, due north of Paris, to Le Mans, far to its south-west and the main bases from Boulogne and Le Havre on the Channel coast to St. Nazaire on the Atlantic long before the Germans occupied Amiens or threatened the Channel ports.³¹⁶

The First Army was commanded by Haig and was composed of three Corps: I, IV and Indian, each of two divisions. IV Corps was led by Rawlinson. The Indian Corps was commanded by Sir James Willcocks and Sir Charles Monro, led I Corps.

³¹³ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol I, pp. 15, 19.

³¹⁴ Haig, Douglas, *Diaries*, Weidenfeld, (London, 2005), p. 86.

³¹⁵ Robertson, Sir William, *From Private to Field Marshal*, Constable, (London, 1921), p. 219.

³¹⁶ <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/wully-field-marshal-sir-william-robertson-bart-gcb-kcvo-part-ii/>

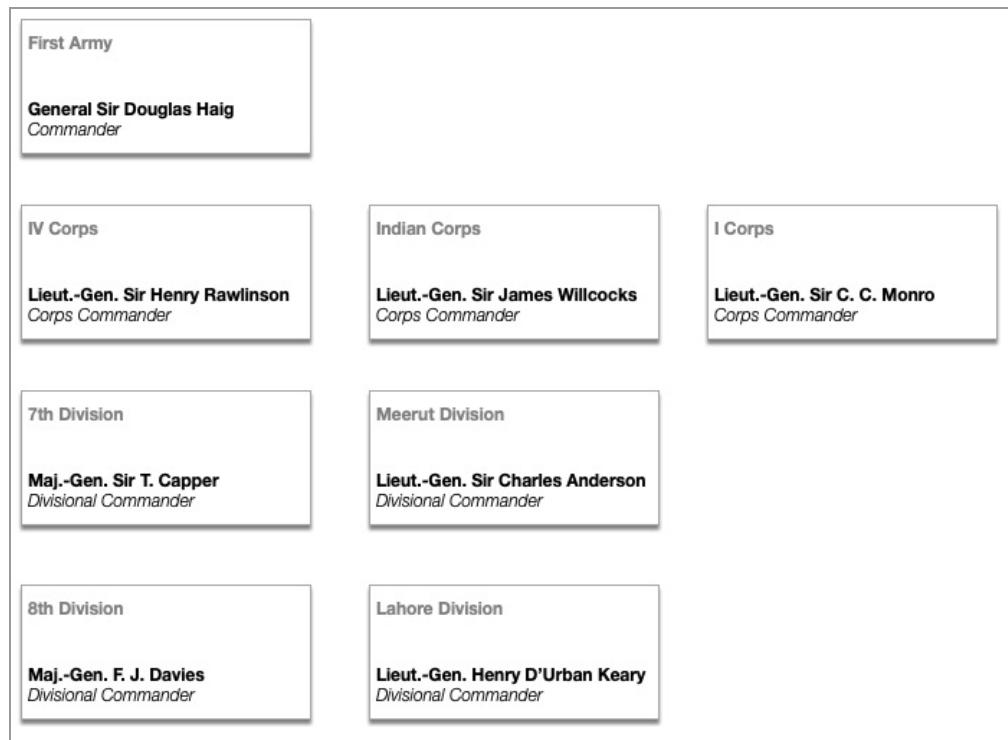


Figure 20 - First Army of the BEF 10-Feb-1915 ³¹⁷

As a general leading an Army, Haig might have been expected, like many army commanders, to review and approve the plans written by his Chief of Staff, in Haig's case Major-General Richard Butler, but there is no evidence that Haig ever asked Butler to write any plans and as Charteris wrote:

‘In many ways D(ouglas) H(aig) is his own Chief of Staff. He knows so much more about fighting than any of the Staff ... that his Chief of Staff has little to do, except to see that things go smoothly.’³¹⁸

But Haig had ensured that the British Army had no battle planning doctrine and it was about to fight a battle.

3.2

Why Neuve Chapelle?

There were several reasons for the BEF's choice of Neuve Chapelle: with the withdrawal in the winter of 1914 of a large part of the German forces on the Western Front to Russia there was a need to demonstrate Allied solidarity with France; to prevent a Russian collapse; and to show that breaking through

³¹⁷ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol I, p. 363.

³¹⁸ Charteris, John, *At GHQ*, Cassell, (London, 1931), p. 74.

the German lines was possible. Neuve Chapelle was sufficiently-close to a French-held part of that line to permit a joint offensive by British and French forces, which by straightening a salient would leave a shorter line to be defended.



Figure 21 - Flanders, Wytschaete and Neuve Chapelle

3.3 Constraints

There were several constraints: on 27 February Robertson cautioned Haig that there were limits of about 400 rounds per gun and 200 per howitzer.³¹⁹ The speed at which German reinforcements could arrive was estimated at 4,000 troops on the evening of 10 March and 16,000 by the next evening.

³¹⁹ First Army Robertson memo on ammunition of 27 February 1915 in WO 158/181.

RB

- I. Following German reinforcements could reach area HERLIES -
- AUBERS:-
- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Within 6 hours of orders to move. | 1 Regt. XIXth Corps
2 Regts. 6th Bav.Res.Div.
11th Landwehr Brigade. | From
LILLE. |
| 2. Within 10 hours of orders to move. | 2 Regts. 43rd Res.Div. | From
MENIN. |
| 3. Within 12 hours of orders to move. | 2 Regts. XVth Corps. | From
COURTRAI
district. |
| 4. Within 12 hours of orders to move 1 battalion from GHENT could reach area LILLE and by train to LILLE and thence by march. Another battalion might be expected each hour until the whole 26 battalions had arrived, making 37 hours in all. | 2 Regts. XXVII Corps
3 Regts. XXVI Corps
2 Regts. 2nd Bav.Corps
2 Regts. XXIII Corps
2 Bns. 4th Ersatz Div. | From
GHENT |
| <u>Total.</u> - | | 47 battalions (about 32,000 rifles). |

II. This assumes the transfer of all available reserves North of LA BASSEE under favourable conditions as regards railway traffic and state of roads. It also assumes that no reserves would be retained by action of 2nd Army.

III. It is very improbable that the whole of the above troops would be ordered to oppose the 1st Army as soon as its offensive is developed. The number ordered up and the rate at which they would arrive must depend largely on the success of our operations and its effect on the opposing commander's mind. It is reasonable to expect that we may have to meet reinforcements of about 4,000 rifles from LILLE on the evening of the 1st day and about 16,000 rifles more from GHENT on the evening of the 2nd day.

Figure 22 - Reinforcement assessment made before the battle of Neuve Chapelle³²⁰

Most seriously, a line of reinforced MG nests 800 yards apart and 1000 yards to the rear of the main German line of defence was completely missed.

The story of the planning for the battle of Neuve Chapelle has already been mostly recounted by Watt, Prior and Wilson and will only be briefly resumed

³²⁰ First Army Intelligence estimates of 6 March 1915 in WO 158/181.

here.³²¹ Haig had first referred to Neuve Chapelle as a location for offensive action at a corps commanders' conference on 30 December 1914. Attending were Rawlinson, Monro and Willcocks. At the conference Haig asked Monro to

try and advance from Richebourg S.E. on to the Violaines ridge'.³²²

He asked nothing of Willcocks, but asked Rawlinson

whether he could not drive enemy out of Neuve Chapelle. He said NO ...
³²³

Haig claims that he chose Neuve Chapelle because it would be essential to either of two later operations: an advance from Givenchy and Neuve Chapelle or an advance east from Neuve Chapelle and La Cordonnerie.³²⁴

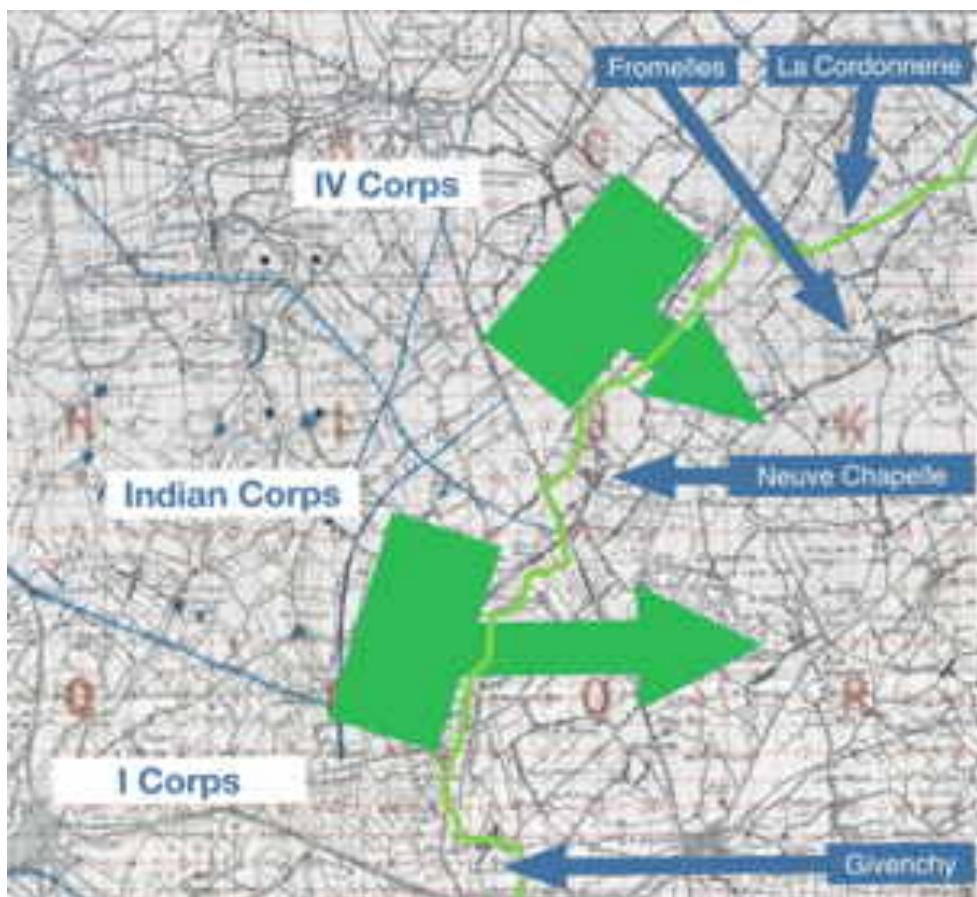


Figure 23 - Haig's alternatives

³²¹ Prior and Wilson, 'Command etc.'

³²² Haig, *Diary*, WO 256/3, p. 9.

³²³ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 10.

³²⁴ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 107.

Haig then asked Rawlinson to focus on Fromelles and four days later Rawlinson sent a 'Special Instruction' to his divisional commanders via his CoS, Brigadier-General Alister Grant Dallas:

'The objective of FROMELLES has been allotted to the 7 Division and NEUVE CHAPELLE to the 8th'.³²⁵

While acknowledging that the ground was impassable it asked that they maintain an

'offensive attitude ... study the problem and work out ... a ... solution'.

Rawlinson's mention of Neuve Chapelle was presumably as the result of conversations with Haig and on 6 January Haig duly asked him to prepare a

'scheme ... for the capture of Neuve Chapelle'.³²⁶

While Haig had hoped to be ready to attack in ten days, it took Rawlinson two weeks to issue a one-page Operation Order entitled 'The attack on Neuve Chapelle'.³²⁷ Prior and Wilson charge that

'Rawlinson ... did not attempt to come up with an outline plan himself', but do not mention this document.³²⁸ The 'operation order' ambiguously declares that 8 Division will

'commence their arrangements for the attack on NEUVE CHAPELLE on January 25th 1915', without clarifying whether the arrangements or the attack were to begin on that date.³²⁹ However 'detailed instructions' should be received by the evening of 25 January and a further narrative thereafter. Without reference to any map, the order declared that the attacking troops would

'walk forward simultaneously from A, B and C sections closely supported by the artillery', which would also 'break down the wire, [and] protect the artillery against counter-attack'.³³⁰

³²⁵ See Dallas, Alister Grant, Memo in IVth Corps General Staff War Diary of 3 January 1915 in WO 95/707/1.

³²⁶ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 83.

³²⁷ See Dallas, Alister Grant, Memo in IVth Corps General Staff War Diary of 20 January 1915 in WO 95/707/1.

³²⁸ Prior and Wilson, 'Command' etc., p. 25.

³²⁹ See Rawlinson, Memo, The attack on Neuve Chapelle of January 20 1915 in WO 95/707/1.

³³⁰ See the map on page 78.

That the order was suicidal was already known to all concerned, since both 'flank attacks' would themselves expose flanks. Rawlinson's lack of concern for urgency can be seen from point 5:

■ 'It will be desirable not to hurry the attack'.
No appreciation was included, no objective was defined, no instructions were given.³³¹ This was staff-work of great ineptitude.

Rawlinson sent the operation order to Lieutenant-General Sir Thompson Capper (7 Division) and Davies (8 Division). Capper proposed either a 'bombard and storm' approach, reminiscent of the Peninsular Wars, or a 'gradual approach by sap'. He qualified his views by observing that no Schwerpunkt could be identified, but alone of the officers concerned, he prepared an Appreciation covering the opposing trenches, the wire and the sodden ground. He identified the need for artillery to destroy the wire, to wait for the water table to subside, the improbability of this happening before March and the potential outcome:

■ 'a bite out of the enemy's entrenched line'.
He believed the 'bite could be enlarged by fresh attacks until a hole was made

■ 'through which a 'sufficiently large ... force ... could be poured'.
It was not a plan but an approach, with no concern for infantry-artillery co-operation and none for the probable German reactions.³³² The fortress image, requiring merely persistent attacks to chip away at its strength, dominated the thoughts of battle planners at least until 1916.

Davies answered on 25 January 1915 with a 9-page, plan which included a 'Memorandum on the attack on Neuve Chapelle'.³³³ It too lacked any Appreciation, but accepted that as Neuve Chapelle had been in enemy hands

³³¹ The section entitled 'Instructions' merely lists a number of assumptions.

³³² See Capper, T., 7 Division General Staff Memoranda (Capper's views) of 8 February 1915 in WO 95/1628/1/2.

³³³ See Davies, F. J., 1st plan, Divisional and Brigade Operational orders, IVth Corps General Staff War Diary of 25 January 1915 in WO 95/707/1.

for four months it should be considered to be fortified and attacked as such, isolating the defended centre from the flanks. Davies did not describe how the assault should be conducted (the plan's central flaw) but proposed sapping up to 50 yards from the enemy trenches despite the water. He also proposed mining, machine-gun fire or artillery to dispose of the wire, a general bombardment and counter-battery firing. Special instructions to the infantry enjoined officers to reconnoitre the enemy-held trenches and wire as well as their 'own', keep the men fit by marching, attend to their feet and be prepared for enemy attacks. The artillery plan required that his Commander Royal Artillery (hereafter 'CRA', or chief gunner) demonstrate the feasibility of artillery-infantry cooperation, destroying wire by shrapnel, maintaining a constant shelling of the enemy's defences along the entire front and artillery switching and lifting. Counter-battery firing against enemy guns was expected but with a lower proportion of guns than that applied to enemy infantry and trenches. His engineering plan required his Commander Royal Engineers (hereafter 'CRE') to show how the necessary saps would be created, by when and the labour required.

Davies questioned the feasibility of the attacks on position B mentioned by Rawlinson and suggested flank attacks near the allegedly-weaker points A and C with support attacks around B. All these attacks would require sapping until parallel trenches were constructed some 40-80 yards from the hostile trenches.

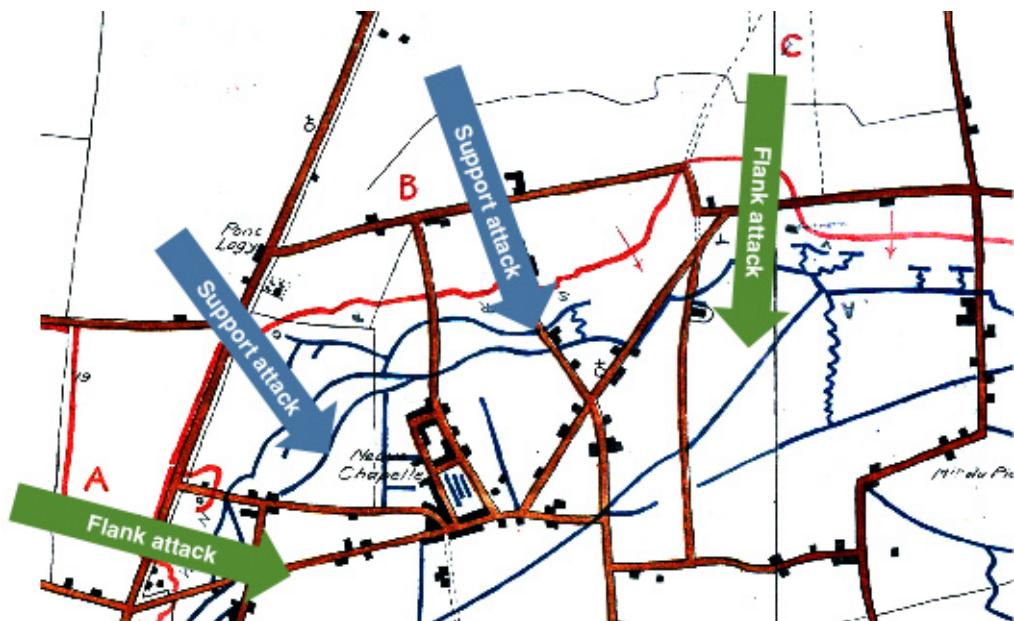


Figure 24 - Davies' proposed assault points

This would enable 8 Division to surround the village, whereafter it would be cleared by sapping and house-to-house fighting. The plan acknowledged that this approach could not yet be decided upon, but allocated troops to attack 'sections', trained troops in grenade throwing, adjusted their billeting and organised the artillery and MGs.

At this point Rawlinson lost control of the planning process and did not reply to Davies until 18 February, by which time Haig had taken control of it:³³⁴ on 5 February Haig had asked his CRA, Brigadier-General H. F. Mercer

'to submit proposals for disposing our artillery for attacking Neuve Chapelle',³³⁵ and the next day he asked Rawlinson for a plan to capture it.³³⁶ Two days thereafter he asked his Chief of Staff, General 'Johnnie' Gough to reconnoitre part of Neuve Chapelle,³³⁷ and the next day he asked Generals Sir Henry

³³⁴ See Rawlinson., Note on the attack on Neuve Chapelle of 18 February 1915, in NAM 5201-33-17.

³³⁵ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 81. This was somewhat premature since Mercer did not take up his appointment until 16 February 1915 (First Army war diary February 1915, WO 95/154/4).
Mercer, Brig. Gen. Harvey Frederick, (1858-1936) MGRA, First Army.

³³⁶ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 83.

³³⁷ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 86.

Horne, Monro, Lord Cavan (GoC 4 Brigade) and Brigadier-General E. A.

Fanshawe (CRA of 1 Division) about

‘the enemy’s guns near Haute Pommereau, 3,000 to 4,000 yds. N. E. of Neuve Chapelle’,³³⁸ and Brigadier-General John Charteris (Haig’s General Staff Officer, hereafter ‘GSO’) about the ‘Rivière des Layes’.³³⁹ In casting around for ideas, Haig had sent two corps commanders off to plan and then potentially duplicated effort by seeking related information from his CoS, CRA and Intelligence chief.

That day, 8 February Major-General Thomson Capper (GOC 7 Division) replied to Rawlinson with a strategy document.³⁴⁰ Capper’s analysis is, as Watt observes, the first recorded mention of a ‘bite (and hold)’ approach.³⁴¹ His discussion of sapping was as problematic as Davies’,³⁴² and his strategy paper elicited no response from Rawlinson, who next day handed Haig a

‘memorandum embodying … (Rawlinson’s) … and General Davies’ views on the best way to attack Neuve Chapelle’.³⁴³

On 9 February Robertson wrote an Appreciation of the BEF’s position accompanied by a ‘Memorandum on the possibility of conducting offensive operations’, recommending an attack on Wytschaete.³⁴⁴ Seeing this (and realising it might advantage his rival Smith-Dorrien), Haig, the newly-appointed First Army commander, issued a counter-Appreciation proposing Neuve Chapelle as a target on 12 February, for which he was already preparing.³⁴⁵ He believed there were two approaches to breaking through the German lines: to bombard and storm, or to sap and tunnel. Sapping or

³³⁸ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 89.

³³⁹ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 97.

³⁴⁰ See Capper, *Op. Cit.*

³⁴¹ Watt, Patrick, *Op. Cit.*, p186.

³⁴² To assess the risks, see the example in Henderson, G. F. R. and F. Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa, 1899, 1902*, Hurst and Blackett, (London, 1908), p. 170.

³⁴³ Haig, *Op. Cit.* p. 90.

³⁴⁴ Robertson, Appreciation of 9 February 1915, in First Army Headquarters Branches and Services, WO 95/154/8.

³⁴⁵ Haig memo of 12 February 1915 in WO 95/154/8/18.

tunnelling were not feasible since the water table was in places half a metre below the soil, but as the days turned into weeks it became evident that neither Haig nor his senior commanders could plan a bombard-and-storm operation.

First Army was in a state of management confusion from mid-December 1914 to mid-February 1915 as it struggled to find a way to attack the Germans and write plans. During this time, it had passed planning responsibility to Davies, a divisional commander who could plan. But Haig still failed to review or coordinate plans sufficiently, other than to ensure that all Corps started the offensive simultaneously: he continued to behave like the corps commander he had recently been.

On 10 February Mercer proposed a four-day bombardment 'by compartments', which Haig rejected not because it would have exhausted the available ammunition or because it would have signalled exactly where the next attack would occur but because it was 'too long' (in the event, the battle almost succeeded due to the surprise of the very short but intense bombardment).³⁴⁶ On 11 February Haig added Aubers Ridge to his list of objectives.³⁴⁷ This is a low hill some miles beyond Neuve Chapelle whose capture, however unlikely at that point, could have severely disrupted the German forces. The next day he replied to Robertson's paper with an appreciation lacking any discussion of the ground (other than that it was muddy) the opposing forces or their defences. His first objective was the

| 'trenches immediately in front of that section of our lines', and he realistically suggested they prepare for a counter-attack, implying he did not believe the advance would progress far. He repeated this in a second

³⁴⁶ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 92.

³⁴⁷ Haig, Douglas, Diary, WO 256/3, p. 94. The earliest mention of Aubers Ridge in a plan is in Rawlinson's plan for the attack on Trivelet, IVth Corps General Staff Memoranda February 1915 WO 95/707/3/1. The earliest mention of Aubers Ridge in a memo is on 28 February 1915 in First Army Neuve Chapelle WO 158/258. See page 734.

memo on 16 February, but this realism was unsustained in any plan for Neuve Chapelle and with characteristic optimism he concluded his first memo by suggesting they 'bombard and storm' with a view to advancing as far as Fromelles.³⁴⁸

The following day French told Mercer that he wanted an attack led by Haig rather than Smith-Dorrien.³⁴⁹ Haig decided to give the lead planner role to Rawlinson, commending the

‘papers which you sent ... (which)... will be helpful ... in working out the details of a practical plan ... so begin ... methodical preparation’.³⁵⁰

On 15 February Haig held another Corps commanders’ conference with Monro, Rawlinson and Willcocks, declaring that his intention was to

‘threaten the communications of the Germans from La Bassée to Lille’,³⁵¹ asking for a ‘statement’ by 20 February with a view to a conference on 22 February and including a set of valid but disordered questions.³⁵² By then Haig was also disposing his artillery without advising Rawlinson.³⁵³ Rawlinson returned his assessment of Davies’ first plan to Davies on 17 February, approving and asking usefully that the positions of MGs be identified and telephone wires be triplicated, but also for more detail. Having deprecated the use of saps in waterlogged ground he confusingly advised that they not be dug closer than 50 yards.³⁵⁴

On 18 February he gave Haig two handwritten papers: ‘Points for consideration in the attack on Neuve Chapelle’ and ‘Notes on the attack on

³⁴⁸ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 95. This was presumably from Robertson as C.I.G.S. See also 19150212, Haig's memo 1, WO 95/154/8 and 19150216, Haig's memo 2, WO 95/154/8.

³⁴⁹ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 97.

³⁵⁰ Haig *Op. Cit.* facing page 99 and Rawlinson diaries, CHUR.

³⁵¹ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 101.

³⁵² Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 109, see also 19150215, Haig's questions.

³⁵³ Haig *Op. Cit.* pp. 101, 106.

³⁵⁴ Rawlinson, Review of the plan of 17 February 1915 in WO 95/707/1.

Neuve Chapelle'.³⁵⁵ These were assault details which could more usefully have been made to Davies: but which contradicted some of Rawlinson's criticisms of Davies and show Rawlinson to be inconsistent (could Neuve Chapelle be considered a fortress or not? Was he really proposing that battery commanders substitute for Artillery Observation Officers (AOOs)? Was the proposed diversionary attack on Trivelet the best use of 2 divisions?³⁵⁶ Not being a plan, these notes excited Haig's ire and again he asked Rawlinson for a plan on 19 February.³⁵⁷

Rawlinson replied on 20 February with a one-page document, 'The attack on Neuve Chapelle'.³⁵⁸ This was still not a plan but a précis of the more-detailed second plan of Davies of 20 February: an 18-page typewritten document supported by a 5-page artillery addendum by Holland.³⁵⁹ Davies' methodical introduction noted the need to capture a line of trenches and negotiate sodden ground and estimated the need for a two- Brigade attack using a road to orient and separate them. He 'cascaded' the planning tasks to his CRA and CRE, asking for more-detailed plans.

Davies attempted a solution to the problem of infantry-artillery coordination which had so exercised the instructors at Camberley. At that point of the war the capabilities of map-making in France were limited and without a useable cross-reference system: thus FSR II stated with great imprecision:

'The position of places will ... be denoted ... by the points of the compass, e.g., 'wood, 600 yards S.E. of TETSWORTH'.

³⁵⁵ Rawlinson, Points for consideration in the attack on Neuve Chapelle of 18 February 1915 in WO 158/258.

³⁵⁶ See page 755 for details.

³⁵⁷ 19 February 1915, Haig to Rawlinson in, WO 252/3 and in Prior and Wilson, p. 27.

³⁵⁸ 5 February 1915, IV Corps General Staff, Neuve Chapelle Plans 1 & 2 1915, WO 95/708/2.

³⁵⁹ 2 February 1915, 8 Division Notes on the attack, WO 95/1671/3/2.

Davies' plan envisaged a number of targets to be identified, numbered and thus shared between infantry and artillery. Fortunately, the development of aerial photography had simplified the drawing of trenches by March 1915.



Figure 25 - Trenches south of Neuve Chapelle (WO 158/374)

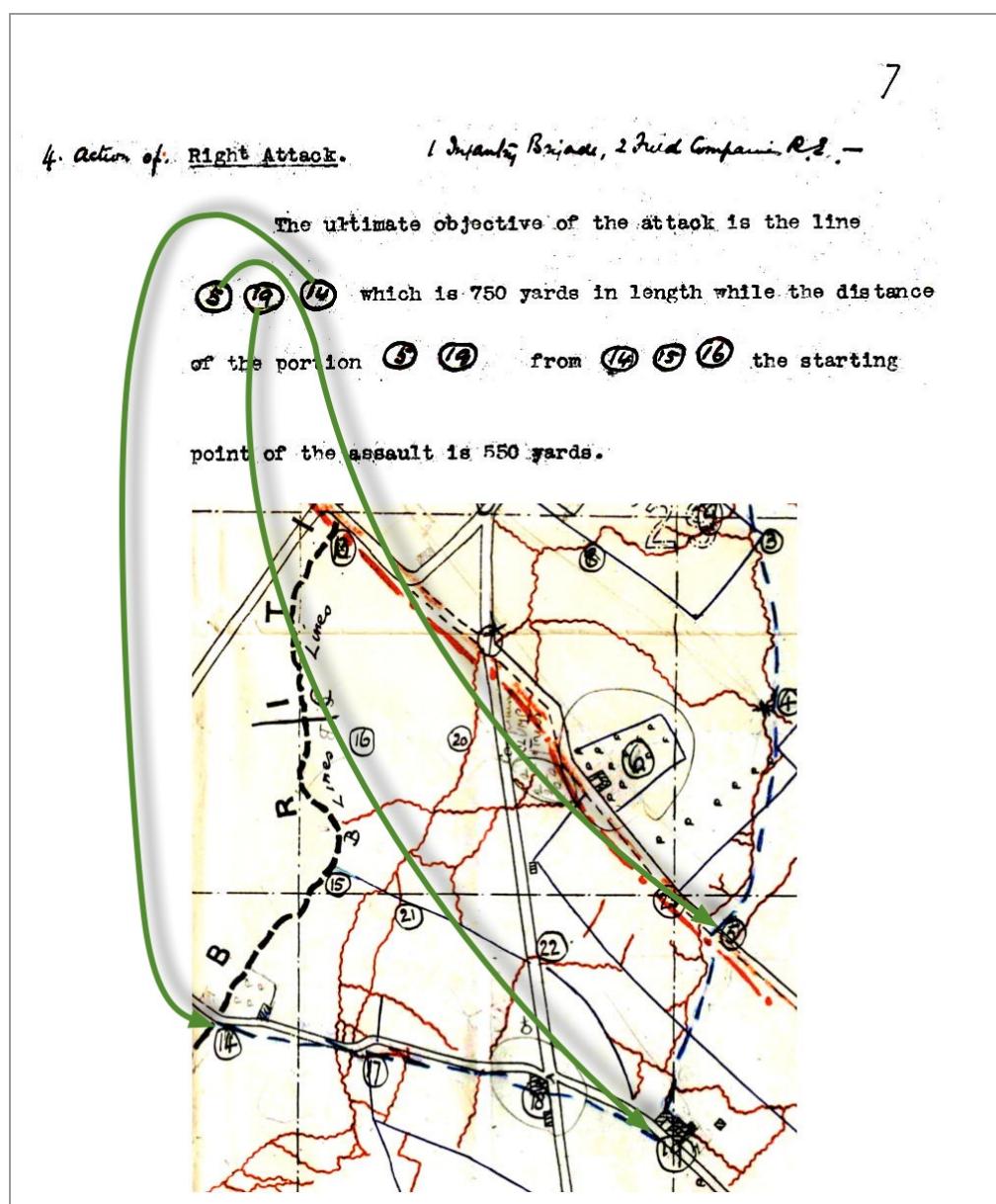


Figure 26 - Extract from WO 95/1671/3/2

But the plan was incomplete: Davies too, ignored the German machine guns and Holland's accompanying artillery memorandum referred to two primary objectives but only discussed the first.³⁶⁰ Rawlinson correctly reminded Davies of the need to locate MGs yet found his precision excessive: it was

‘scarcely necessary at this early stage to enter into details’. This was firstly wrong (without the detail it would be impossible to cascade it to lower-level plans), secondly it showed that Rawlinson could not grasp the operation and its implications as a whole and thirdly, it implies he was unable to plan a Corps-level offensive himself.³⁶¹ Since he offered no other criticism, his comment that it was ‘somewhat complicated’, can be read as an admission that he either had not read it or did not understand it.³⁶² Haig’s only objection had been that the plan assumed two stages and he wanted one.³⁶³

On 21 February Haig was pressured by Robertson, who proposed an attack date of 7 March and when Haig demurred, changed it to 10 March, added his own questions and emphasised

‘the importance of settling down to plan now’.³⁶⁴ (Haig having presumably kept the planning documents from Robertson.) At that point Haig was under pressure from Robertson, from Rawlinson’s failure to deliver him anything more than a strategy paper, from the absence of any plans from Willcocks and from the constraints of the ‘Umpiring’ principle of non-interference in a subordinate’s work.³⁶⁵ Robertson had administered a shove which bumped down the chain of command and was answered.

³⁶⁰ WO 95/1671/3/2, 8 Division, Notes on the attack.

³⁶¹ NAM, Rawlinson Diaries 18 February 1915 ‘Points for consideration in the attack on Neuve Chapelle’.

³⁶² WO 158/374/5.

³⁶³ Haig, Diary, 22 February 1915, WO 256/3.

³⁶⁴ First Army, Miscellaneous papers in connection with Neuve Chapelle, Private letter from Sir W. Robertson to Sir D. Haig, regarding proposed operations, WO 158/258.

³⁶⁵ Samuels, *Command* ... p. 52.

Haig conferred with his Corps commanders and their immediate staff on 22 February at which he announced the date, the increase in available artillery and the importance of 'settling down to plan *now*'.³⁶⁶ Haig visited Rawlinson on 23 February, found him ill and learned from Dallas that the planning task had been devolved to Capper and Davies. Haig harrumphed that

'the time for setting schemes had passed. It was not for the Corps Commander to order a certain divisional General to give in detail his plan of attack ... if such (sic) problem is to be given to two commanders, where are we to stop? Why not give a Brigadier's scheme to two brigadiers and so on. The idea is ridiculous.'³⁶⁷

Up to this point Haig had been unaware of Davies' involvement. But it was Davies who the previous year at the General Staff Conference, in front of Haig, had implicitly criticised the usefulness of the Field Service Regulations as a basis for writing orders.³⁶⁸ On 25 February Haig again met Monro, Rawlinson and Willcocks at Merville and

'explained that the objectives aimed at ... [taking] ... Aubers village'.³⁶⁹ which had not been mentioned before. On 27 February Davies submitted the 13 pages of his third plan to Rawlinson, with a 7-page memorandum on artillery.³⁷⁰ Rawlinson forwarded this to Haig and on the evening of 28 February they discussed it with Holland but notably without Davies.³⁷¹ The plan was preceded by a 6-page discussion of the preparations for the attack covering the preparation of trenches, orientation by officers and NCOs, provision of stores, food and water, First Aid, dress, wire- and hedge-cutting, bombing by hand grenades and the assembly of troops. Wire-cutting would be the responsibility of specially-trained troops and the artillery (3 Brigades of

³⁶⁶ First Army, Neuve Chapelle, WO 158-258.

³⁶⁷ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 118.

³⁶⁸ Anon., General Staff Conferences GSC 1914 12th to 15th January, War Office, p. 66.

³⁶⁹ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 106.

³⁷⁰ Davies 3rd plan, IVth Corps General Staff Memoranda of February 1915 in WO 95/707/3/1

³⁷¹ 21 February 1915, IV Corps General Staff Neuve Chapelle Plan 1 1915, WO 95/708/2 and Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 128.

18 pdrs.). The destruction of enemy trenches was identified but the ability of the artillery to destroy both trenches and wire remained in doubt. Haig wrote

‘It is difficult to estimate the proper number of howitzers to batter in a line of trench. We don't want to run any risk of failure, so I decide to ask for two more batteries of 6-inch howitzers ... None of the artillery commanders seem able to agree as to the amounts of ammunition or time required to destroy a given length of hostile position ...’³⁷²

Davies was unhappy with the plan: artillery control remained undecided and on this depended the control of air reconnaissance, essential both to artillery registration and early warning of enemy movements. This was the first time this problem had surfaced in the history of the British Army³⁷³ and it led to ‘some friction’.³⁷⁴ The cause was the lack of understanding in the British Army of the need for artillery control colliding with the realisation by Davies and his CRA that without battle-wide control of artillery, friendly-fire casualties were very probable.³⁷⁵

The general lines of attack of 8 Division are shown on the next page. It is unclear why the re-entrant between point 4, 11 and the Moated Grange was left.

³⁷² Haig *Op. Cit.* 28 February 1915.

³⁷³ Sanders, Marble, ‘The Infantry cannot do with a gun less’, The Place of the Artillery in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918, <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/mas01/frames/fmasarc02.html> section 2.6.

³⁷⁴ Farndale, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, The Royal Artillery Institution, (London, 1986), p. 86.

³⁷⁵ There are several such examples from 1914 mentioned in Bailey, Jonathan, *Op. cit.*, p 129, footnote 4.

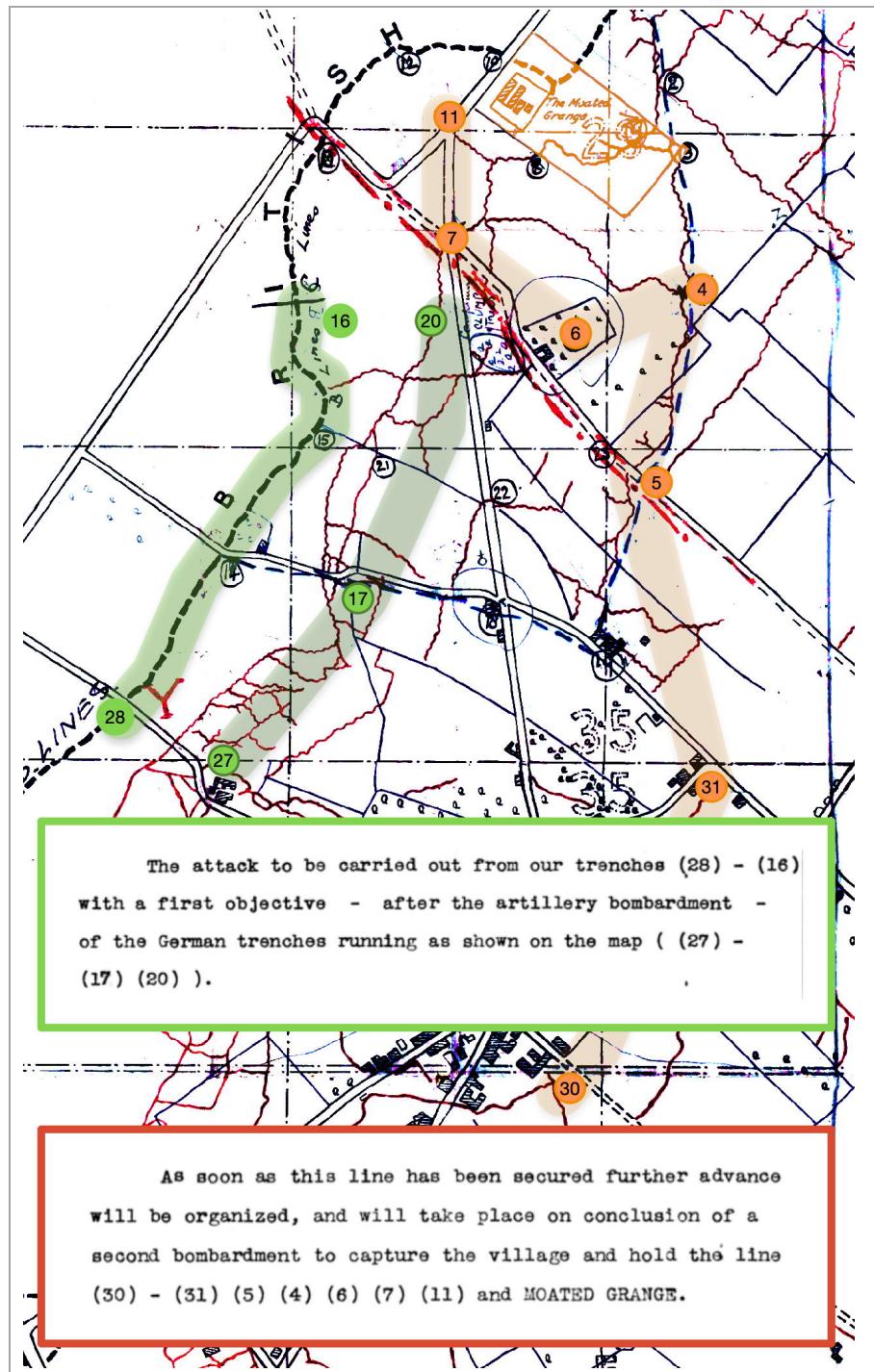


Figure 27 - Davies' 3rd plan - the general lines of attack - WO 95/707/3/1

On 3 March Brigadier-General R. H. Butler issued the First Army operation order No. 8.³⁷⁶ Haig called a final conference on 5 March whose minutes showed only administrivia, exhortations and the 4 objectives, now including

376 First Army Neuve Chapelle, WO 158/258.

Aubers Ridge.³⁷⁷ 3 days from the start of the attack, appreciations were written in the form of a one-page 'Note on the German VII corps',³⁷⁸ and a reconnaissance report.³⁷⁹ The next day a Major R. H. Johnson submitted 8 Division Artillery plan.³⁸⁰

The limited minutes of Haig's meeting of 5 March are explained by Brigadier Edgar Carnegie Anstey:

'The subsequent planning for the Battle of Neuve Chapelle ... and 'the regrettable heat then engendered at artillery conferences between Division artillery commanders and heavy artillery group commanders, ... belied the claims of harmony which had been made and proved a powerful advocate for the appointment of one artillery commander on a battlefield'.³⁸¹

Haig's behaviour in this period illustrated the difficulty he had in adjusting to his role as an army commander. To ask Rawlinson to submit plans yet then ask the First Army CRA to submit artillery plans and discuss them without Rawlinson, suggests Haig still felt himself to be a corps commander, believed in domination by exclusion and could not resist interfering. Haig had devolved planning design to one corps commander while still intending to involve the others (Willcocks and Monro). This would have been a good decision had Haig acted as an overall controller ensuring coherence between the plans of the various commanders, but the minutes of 5 March conference show no evidence of any systematic review. Plans from Willcocks and Monro were written much later than those of Rawlinson and Davies and the battalion-level plans cannot easily be traced to theirs, as those of 8 Division can be traced to

³⁷⁷ Ditto, WO 158/258.

³⁷⁸ 20th Infantry Brigade Note on German VII Corps, WO 95/1650/2/2.

³⁷⁹ 7 March 1915, 20 Infantry Brigade reconnaissance report in WO 95/1650/2/2.

³⁸⁰ WO 95/1671/3/2.

³⁸¹ Anstey, Edgar Carnegie, 'The History of the Royal Artillery,' p. 64, in Brigadier Edgar Carnegie Anstey Papers, RAM. Cited in Robbins, Simon Nicholas, *British Generalship During The Great War*, Ashgate, (Farnham, 2010), p. 59.

Davies', thus showing the difficulties in cascading to lower-level plans without the map-based approach that Davies used.³⁸²

Why did not Haig take control? There are several possible reasons: Haig had even less idea of how to plan than Rawlinson as his optimistic assessment of the planning time required shows:³⁸³ he was also unsure of himself when dealing with gunners.³⁸⁴ But possibly the primary reason was that he persisted in maintaining the umpiring habit despite its proscription as discussed on page 73. Reviewing plans was too close to 'umpiring' to be attempted and in any case was not a practice learned in Staff College. His points (a mixture of questions and assertions) were all valid but unstructured and there is no evidence that he used them to check planning progress or for any other reason than to assert his dominance over Rawlinson as Robertson had used his questions to dominate Haig. This was the behaviour of a manager who did not know which levers to pull because he did not understand the process, could not be bothered to read the documents critically and relied on a conference as a way of imposing his views rather than eliciting feedback. His diary entry for that day simply records his own aspirations for the attack. Rawlinson's diary records that the bombardment time had been increased.³⁸⁵

3.4 Haig's hopes of a breakthrough and his use of I Corps

From 11 January Haig had hopes of a breakthrough. This is evident from his many references to Aubers ridge, which Haig viewed with Charteris on 18

³⁸² Outline on 28 February 1915 and Indian Corps Operation Order No. 56 of 9 March 1915 in 191503, Indian Corps General Staff War Diary, WO 95/1089/2 and 7 March 1915, I Corps Plans, WO 95/590/4.

³⁸³ Watt, *Op. Cit.* p. 184.

³⁸⁴ Letter by J. F. C. Fuller to E. K. G Sixsmith. Sixsmith, p.162.

³⁸⁵ Rawlinson Diaries Extract, Archives, CHUR.

February and mentioned to his team repeatedly through February and March 1915.

'I Corps must gain the Orchard near La Quinque Rue. Indian Corps would take the south end of Neuve Chapelle and then the Bois du Biez. The IV Corps the rest of Neuve Chapelle and then Aubers village'.³⁸⁶

Haig's First Army consisted of three Corps: Indian, I and IV Corps positioned as shown below. To break through the German lines Haig was prepared to use them all.

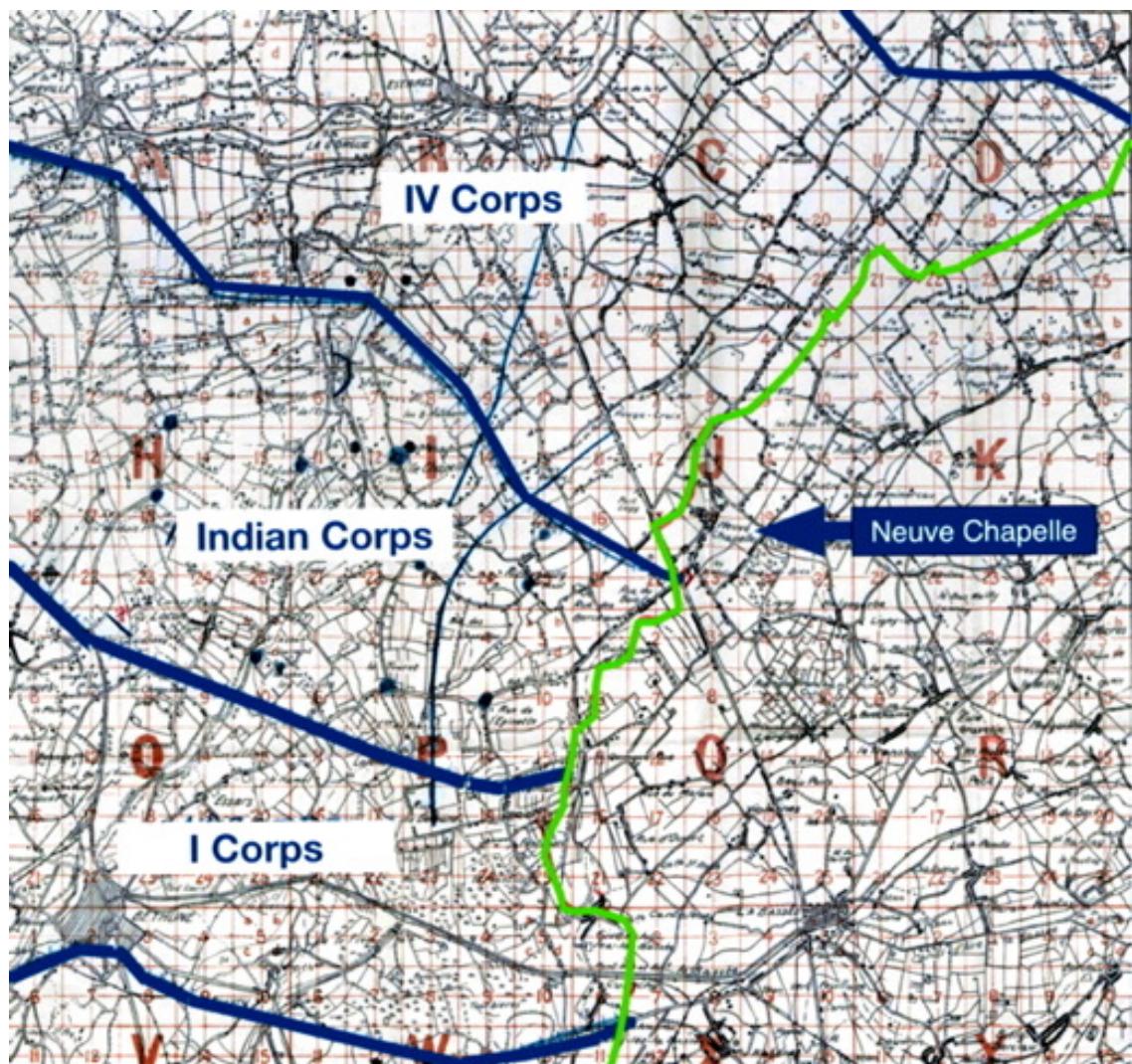


Figure 28 - First Army's dispositions

There is a curious gap in the British Official History of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle: Edmonds shows that the IV Corps and the Indian Corps were the

³⁸⁶ Haig Op. Cit p. 101.

two Corps involved.³⁸⁷ So did the British order of battle.³⁸⁸ Although the lead battle planner was Rawlinson (Willcocks was expected to conform to him), Monro of I Corps was also involved.³⁸⁹ In his memo of 16 February Haig told Robertson that I Corps would advance to Festubert via La Quinque Rue but would otherwise be used only to demonstrate and thus distract the Germans' attention.³⁹⁰ On 20 February Haig told Monro to

‘work for the 10th March for our main attack … and … to take St. Roch and Canteleux … (and) … the Orchard near La Quinque Rue’.³⁹¹

Monro replied the next day with a memo proposing an attack in the Givenchy sector, but this was considered insufficient: Butler prodded Monro with a memo on 22 February and Monro replied the next day that no attack on Quinque Rue or Festubert was then feasible since the troops would stick in the mud.³⁹² Undeterred, the next day Haig told Sir John French that he could ‘arrange to advance from Givenchy against St. Roch and Canteleaux’, which French approved.³⁹³

As mentioned on page 110, on 25 February Haig had met Monro, Rawlinson and Willcocks at Merville and

‘asked Corps Commanders to give me a written statement by Saturday, showing how they proposed to carry out the orders I had given them’.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁷ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol. I, pp. 74-79. Only on p. 80 are there brief mentions of I Corps.

³⁸⁸ Becke, A. F., Order of Battle of Divisions, Parts I, IV, Naval and Military Press (Uckfield: 2007).

³⁸⁹ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 143. Willcocks was not considered of great account by Haig.

³⁹⁰ March 1915, 1st Army, War Diary of General Staff, Headquarters Branches and Services, WO 95/154/8.

³⁹¹ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 111.

³⁹² I Corps War diary March 1915 Headquarters Branches and Services, General Staff, WO 95/590/4 and First Army Neuve Chapelle, WO 158/258.

³⁹³ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 116.

³⁹⁴ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 106.

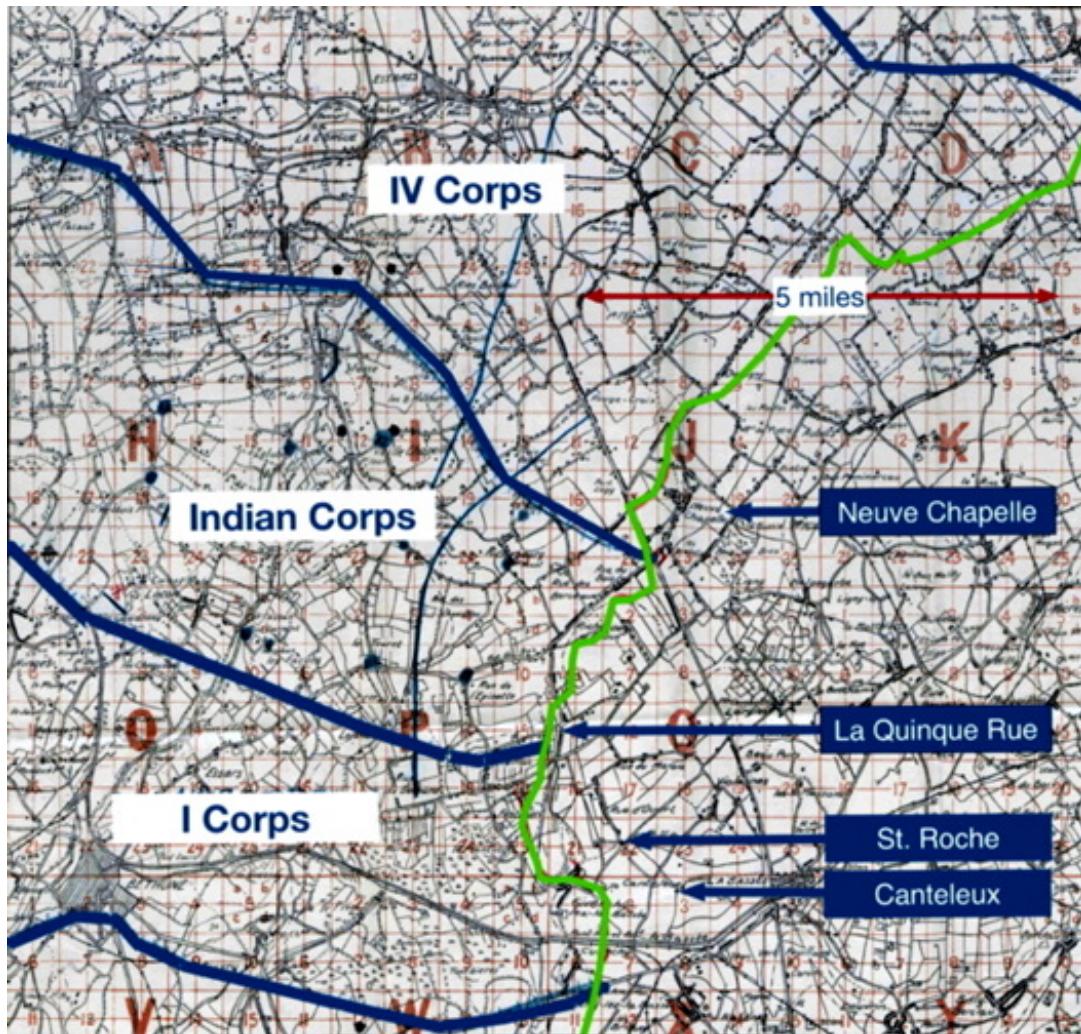


Figure 29 - I Corps' targets

Given Monro's objections Haig then decided to use I Corps partly as a feint.³⁹⁵

This was ordered in a memorandum and incorporated in Division order No.

65.³⁹⁶ Monro is listed in the Béthune conference of 5-Mar-1915 and I Corps is included in 'First Army Operation order No. 9' of 8-Mar-1915:

(c) The 1st Corps will assault the enemy's lines north-east of Givenchy under special instructions ...'.³⁹⁷

Haig's concern to induce a pincer movement remained obvious from the declaration in the conference notes of 5 March:

The 1st Corps and 7 Division must be ready to push in at any period, even

³⁹⁵ Haig *Op. Cit.* p. 145.

³⁹⁶ March 1915, I Corps War diary, Headquarters Branches and Services, General Staff, WO 95/590/4.

³⁹⁷ I Corps War diary entry for 5, March, 1915, WO 95/590/4 and 1st Army war diary March 1915 in WO 95/154/6 and Edmonds, J. E., Watt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

on the first morning of the attack'.³⁹⁸

In the event Monro's divisions were merely planned to create a diversion.

Haig prudently decided not to commit 3 corps to take a small village.

3.5

Neuve Chapelle plans

In the case of Neuve Chapelle Rawlinson wrote

4. So far as the operations of the 1st Army are concerned, the intention is quite clear, i.e., to break through at NEUVE CHAPELLE and then, if possible, advance to the line AUBERS - BOIS DU BIEZ and establish ourselves on that line,

Figure 30 - Rawlinson's intention

This was echoed in both Robertson's 'Operation order No. 8 and Haig's Operation order No. 9 (written essentially 'pour l'histoire'), but the critical document was the 'Army Corps Operation order No. 10' of Rawlinson ordering the attack.

SECRET.
ARMY CORPS OPERATION ORDER NO. 10.
by
LIEUT. GEN. SIR H.S. RAWLINSON, M.A.R.T., K.C.B., C.V.O.
COMMANDING 4TH ARMY CORPS.

Headquarters 4th Corps.
7th March, 1915.

2. The attack on the village of NEUVE CHAPELLE will be carried out in two stages by the 8th Division. Detailed instructions have already been communicated to the G.O.C., 8th Division.

First objective. The enemy's front and support trenches opposite 'B' lines.

Figure 31 - Extract from Rawlinson's operation order No. 10 of 7 March 1915 (WO 95/154/6)

This was expanded thus:

398 WO 158/258.

Reference to maps 1/20,000 and 1/5,000.

Headquarters, IVth Corps.
7th March, 1915.

1. In accordance with instructions received from the General Officer Commanding 1st Army, the IVth Corps and Indian Corps will carry out a vigorous attack on the enemy on a date and at an hour to be notified later. The village of NEUVE CHAPELLE will be attacked and captured by assault after which a further advance will be made to gain the line ^S AUVERS - LA CLIQUETERIE FARM - LIGNY LE GRAND.

Figure 32 - Example of corps-level plan reflecting an Army-level intention

The corps-level plan was then translated to division-level, in this case 8 Division infantry, part of which was the 23 Brigade, which was moved into an assembly position by 8 Division operation order No. 10.

Copy No.

8th Div. Operation Order No. 10.

7-3-'15.

1. Following moves take place this evening :-

(a) 23rd Inf. Bdo.

To march by road S. of LYS River to ESTAIRE and go into close billets in -

LE FRANC Factory (2 Bns.)
ESTAIRE (1 Bn.)
LA GORGUE Street (1 Bn.)

First Line transport and baggage section of train will accompany the Bds.

Supply Section Train joins Div. Train ~~at~~ ^{at} GAUDENBERG after issuing to Bds, under instructions to be issued later.

Section 26th Field Ambco. re joins 26th Field Ambco.

The Bds. will not move off before 3 p.m.

Figure 33 - Example of the span of control of a division-level plan: an extract from the 8 Division operation order No. 10 (WO 95/1671/3)

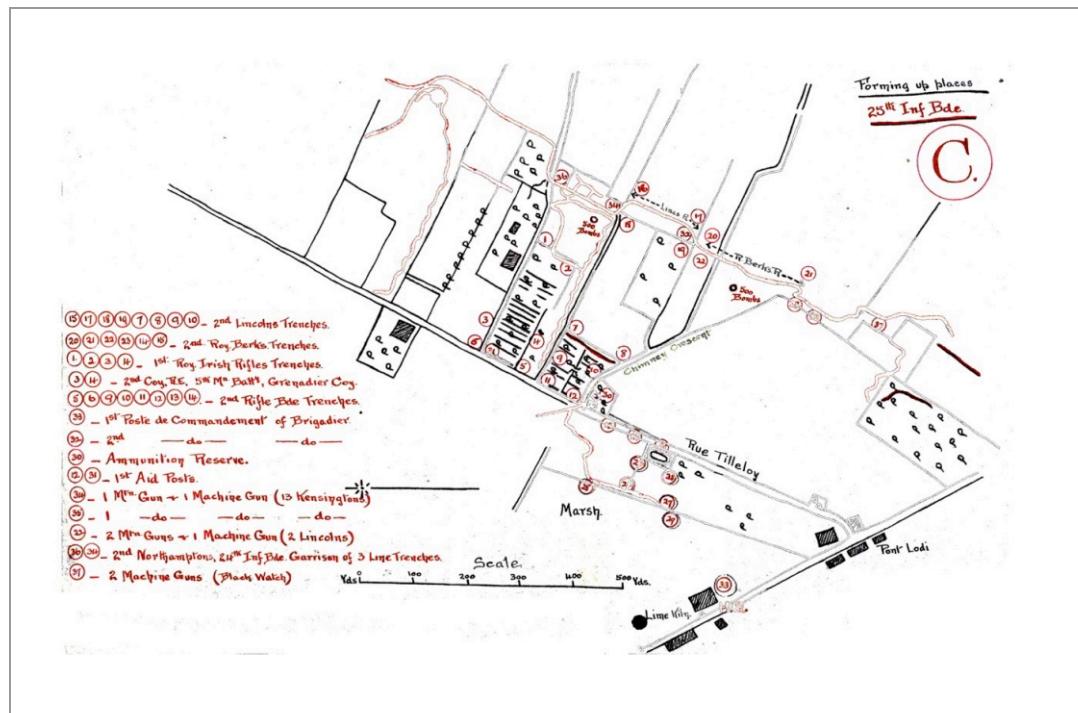


Figure 34 - 25th Inf. Brig. - Forming-up places (WO 95/1707/3/2)

They would attack following the Divisional operation order No. 12 written by Davies.

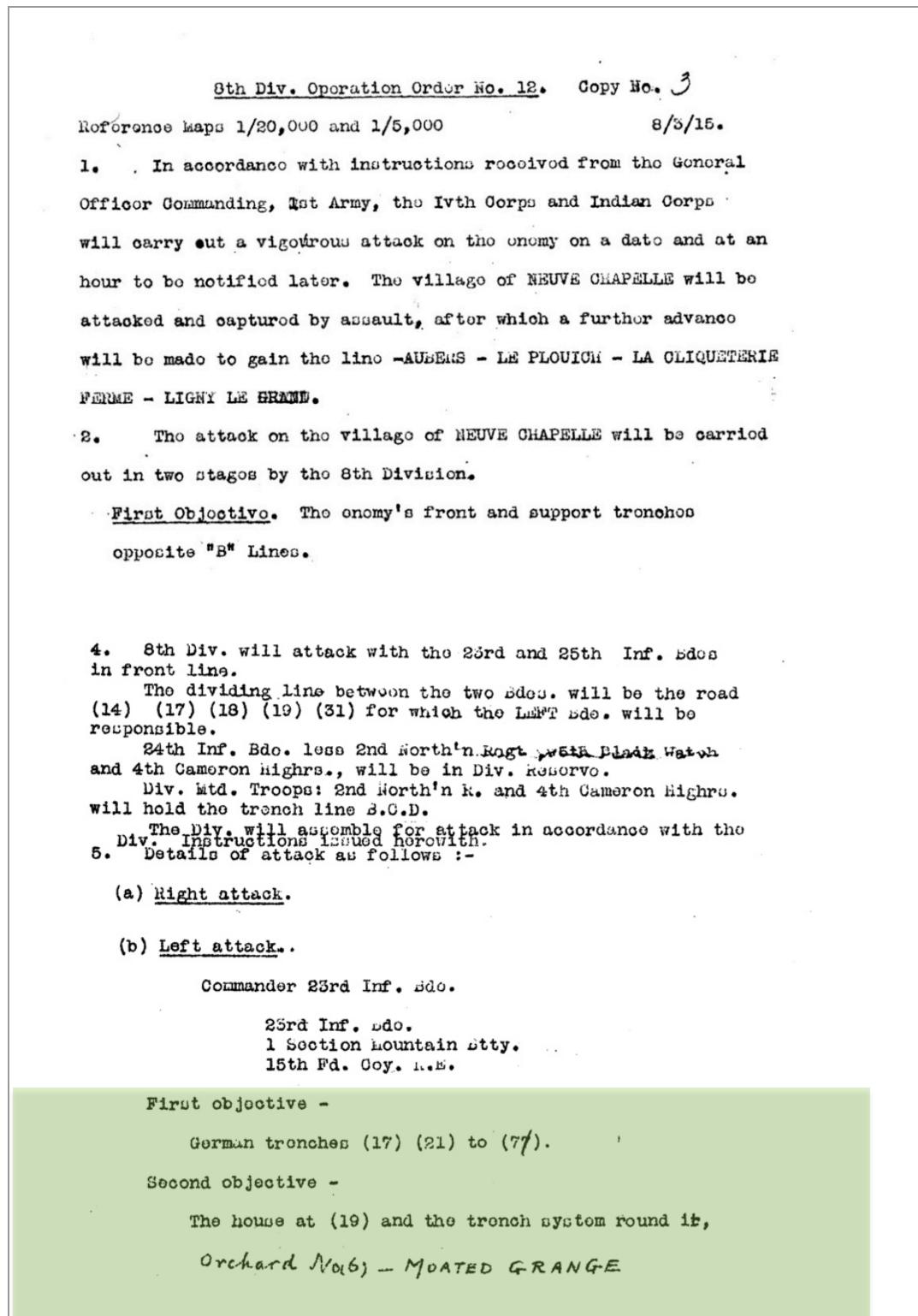


Figure 35 - Extract - 8 Division operation order No. 12 showing general instructions to 23, 24 and 25 infantry Brigades (WO 95/1707/3/2)

The divisional operation order above identifies the first objectives (trenches 17 to 7) and the second objectives (the house at 19 and the orchard at 6) shaded in green which are shown on the map below.

At a brigade level the plan would be expressed as shown below.

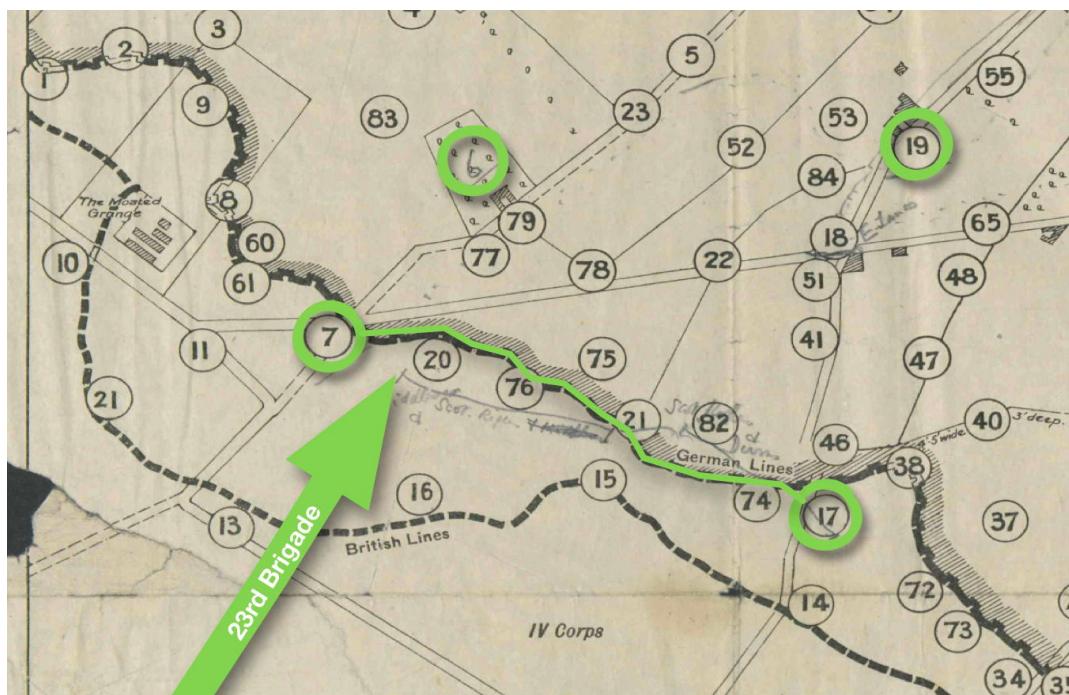


Figure 36 - Detail of the attack of the 23 Brigade - Operation Order No 10 (WO 95/1671/3/2)

The Brigade instructions showed for each battalion the starting point of their advance and their objectives.

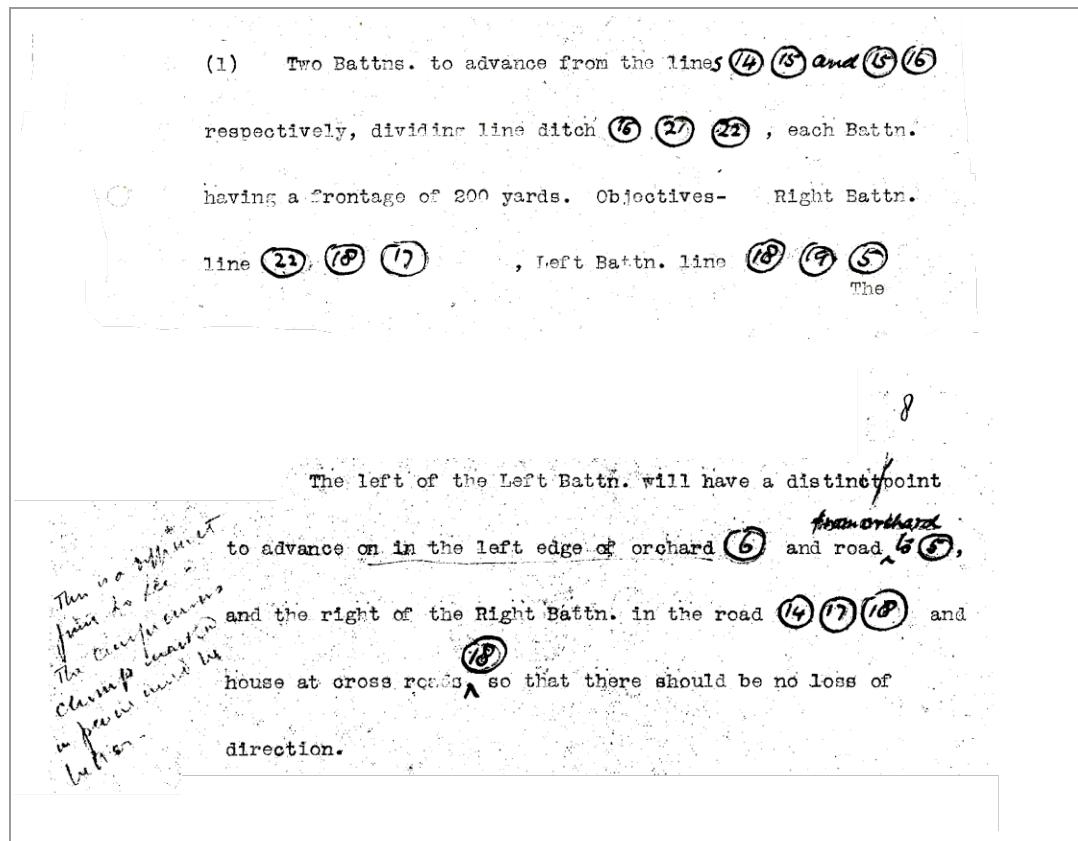


Figure 37 - The battalion instructions (WO 95/1671/3)

For speed, Davies had written the battalion instructions though this was against the provisions of FSR I.

3.6 The artillery plans

The top-level plan was rewritten in greater detail to include the artillery. In his artillery plan Holland had stressed the need for counter-battery firing, for observation by wireless-equipped aircraft and ensuring an FOO be attached to each battalion with a telephone connection and two linesmen to maintain it. He also ordered flanking fire on each side of a portion of captured trench and barrages by maintaining 18 Pdr. battery fire at 5-second intervals over a 200-yard front. Davies asked him to concentrate on wire cutting at the start of the

offensive.³⁹⁹ A number of wire destruction experiments were carried out but with inconclusive results.⁴⁰⁰

To coordinate the artillery and the infantry there was a timetable.

S E C R E T.		
AMENDED TIME TABLE. (TIMING 30 MINUTES EARLIER THAN PREVIOUS TABLE).		
FIRST PHASE.		Time.
Description of Gun.	Objective.	Commence. Cease.
15" Howitzer.	AUBERS and guns round AUBERS	
9.2" Howitzers. Three. One.	and POMEREAU. 7.30 a.m. NEUVE CHAPELLE & outskirts. 7.30 a.m. 8.5 a.m. Railway triangle under orders of 1st. Corps. 7.30 a.m. As required.	

Figure 38 - Extract from 8th Division Artillery timetable of 7 March 1915 (WO 95/154/6)

Each gun was located according to an order of battle.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF No 1 Group GHQ Artillery 11 MARCH 1915				
BRIGADES		BATTERIES		Remarks
No. & Cmdy offr	Hours	No. & Cmdy offr	Position	
1st Bde (47) Lt Col. W. S. C. Black Attached - Lt Col. M. B. Roberts	R 2.8.1 6.45	169 - Hq Btys Major T. S. G. G. G.	R 3.6.2 4.6	
		119 - Hq Btys Major W. Loving	X 4.5 9.2	

Figure 39 - Extract from No. 1 Group GHQ Artillery order of battle 9 March 1915 (WO 95/86/2)

Firing followed a programme.

399 8 Division, Notes on the attack of 2 Feb 1915 in TNA WO 95/1671/3/2.

400 January 1915, I Corps War diary, Headquarters Branches and Services, General Staff, WO 95/590/1 and 6 February 1915, Report on wire cutting experiments, 7 Division General Staff, February 1915, Memoranda, WO 95/1628/1. 1.

PROGRAMME FOR THE COOPERATION BY NO. 1 GROUP GHD ARTILLERY (ATTACHED TO 1ST ARMY) IN THE ATTACK BY THE 1ST ARMY ON NEUVE CHAPELLE			COPY NO. 1
TIME	UNIT	TASK	
7.30 am 5 8.5 am	9.2" Howitzers (10th Siege Bty)	NEUVE CHAPELLE church and the orchard just NW of it.	

Figure 40 - Extract No. 1 Group Heavy Artillery programme of 9 March 1915 (WO 95/86/2)

The targets were located with a map.



Figure 41 - Extract Map 1 showing the bombardment target (WO 95/707/5)

3.7

Conclusions

The reasons for attacking at Neuve Chapelle were sound: the Germans were generally weakened by the need to move troops to Russia, the British troops numbered some 30,000 against the Germans' 2,000, the German artillery was far weaker than the British and the village formed a salient allowing the British to fire on it from three directions. The French would also be assured of British commitment.

The troops would follow the heaviest bombardment yet seen which would destroy the German front line (a five-foot-thick breastwork easily demolished by a direct hit, preceded by two trivial barbed-wire entanglements), cross the

150 yards of no-man's-land, take the village and then fan out beyond it, to right and left, until they reached a line Herlies-Illies. Once clear of the village they would be followed by two divisions of cavalry. The bombardment was unannounced and, being concentrated in such a small area, most effective.⁴⁰¹

But British planning was bedevilled by several failures: of doctrine, strategy, appreciation, preparation and management. Haig's rewriting of the FSR doctrine failed to account for the need to plan for such large-scale hostilities as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 or the need to break through entrenched systems defended by machine guns. The Neuve Chapelle problem greatly exceeded his or the BEF's planning capabilities: only one of his generals, Davies, was capable of writing anything more complex than a position paper. With his doctrinal editing from 1904, Haig had created and maintained an intellectual and managerial planning vacuum which only Davies filled. Had Davies not used his initiative and inventiveness, the doctrinal limitations of the BEF would have been evident even earlier, yet despite this, 32% of the battalions attacking at Neuve Chapelle had no orders. The warning of later chaos was there if Rawlinson and his Commanders had looked.⁴⁰²

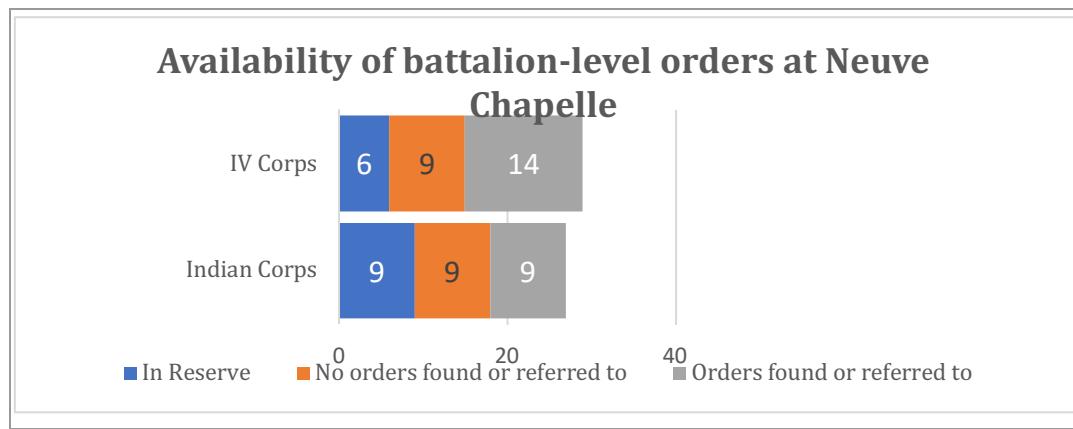


Figure 42 - Availability of battalion-level orders at Neuve Chapelle

⁴⁰¹ Prior and Wilson, *Command ...* p. 45

⁴⁰² See page 492 for a discussion.

Haig was strategically conflicted between the need to break through the German lines, advance and prepare for the inevitable counter-attack. While he had initially insisted on a single-stage plan,⁴⁰³ in the event he adopted a two-stage plan.⁴⁰⁴ In his notes of the conference of 3 March he had said:

‘The idea is ... to carry the operation right through; in a sense surprise the Germans, carry them right off their legs, push forward to the AUBERS e HAUT POMMEREAU ridge with as little delay as possible ...’⁴⁰⁵
yet,

‘As soon as this line has been secured further advance will be organised ...’ and ‘... as soon as the village of NEUVE CHAPELLE has been captured and the order has been given by the Corps Commander for the further advance...’⁴⁰⁶

implies there was not to be a continuous movement but a cautious, halting one. This caution is matched by his exhortation to secure

‘ground already gained ... the following are, broadly speaking, the general lines, any one of which may be required to be held to meet a counter-attack’. Haig was aware that the Germans would counter-attack but did not relate this probability to the intelligence that a further 4000 German troops were expected to arrive after 12 hours and a further 16,000 in 24 hours.⁴⁰⁷

(Charteris exulted:

‘Our Intelligence show was successful in that we found the Germans exactly as we had located them and their reinforcements arrived to the exact hour as we had predicted they would.’⁴⁰⁸

If Haig realised that he had a 12-hour window in which to break through the German line and fan out as planned before a counter-attack could begin, there is no record in the plans. His declarations and plans did not cohere either with each other or the available intelligence picture.

⁴⁰³ Haig, *Diary*, 22 February 1915, WO 256/3.

⁴⁰⁴ See page 96.

⁴⁰⁵ Neuve Chapelle, Report on Operations of 8 March 1915 in WO 158/374.

⁴⁰⁶ Dallas to Davies and Capper, Neuve Chapelle, Report on Operations of 8 March 1915 in WO 158/374.

⁴⁰⁷ First Army, Intelligence estimates of 6 March 1915 in WO 158/181.

⁴⁰⁸ Charteris, *Op. Cit.*, p. 82.

The row over artillery control showed Haig's inability either to foresee managerial conflicts, or to deal with them as they became evident.⁴⁰⁹ Similarly, Haig failed to attend to Rawlinson's dilatory planning (see below). This was an early warning of plan and other management problems that would bedevil the Fourth Army.

Rawlinson's failures began, notably, with his inability to create any more than a position paper in the two weeks from Haig's first request for a plan,⁴¹⁰ compounding this with a repetition a month later,⁴¹¹ and provoking Haig's anger.⁴¹² His management of the battle was influenced by the three lines identified in the plans where the attack might be paused: in the event the attack stopped at the first because of the army's inability to cope with the threat to its flanks and the three machine guns ahead. Rawlinson failed to ensure that once halted, the attack would be speedily resumed.

The preparations for the attack were impressive but critical elements were only aspired to: 'We want to locate his maxims!' Haig had punned, but failed to locate them and no record can be found of any effort to search for them;⁴¹³ Rawlinson had asked if

'signal communication be established between every observer and his battery ... All battery telephone wires should be triplicated and laid not along the sides of roads where they are most liable to be cut by enemy's fire but across open fields where enemy shells are less likely to fall';⁴¹⁴

Holland (CRA 8 Division) wrote that an observer from each battery should accompany attacking infantry.⁴¹⁵ Communications were maintained until the capture of Neuve Chapelle itself whereafter 'most of the telephonic

409 See page 97.

410 See page 85,

411 See page 88.

412 See page 94.

413 Haig, Douglas, *Diary*, WO 256-3, p. 102.

414 Rawlinson's review of the plan, IVth Corps General Staff War Diary of 17 February 1915 in WO 95/707/1, p 125.

415 8 Division Notes on the attack 2 of 20 February 1915 in WO 95/1671/3/2, p. 4.

communications had been cut'.⁴¹⁶ The plans included a concern for secrecy including covered trenches to disguise the troop build-up and orders that artillery registration be unostentatious,⁴¹⁷ but the Germans captured a copy of Haig's orders and thus knew the number of troops involved: Rupprecht consequently sent a further seven battalions.⁴¹⁸

3.8

The attack and Rawlinson's failure

The attack began as planned at 08.05 and Neuve Chapelle was taken by 10.00 hrs.⁴¹⁹ A gap almost one mile wide was made in the German defences.⁴²⁰

'The commanders ..., requested permission to move forward, ahead of schedule. This request was refused ... [because] ... the troops on both flanks had been repulsed'.⁴²¹

Rawlinson delayed the resumption of the advance until 15.30.⁴²² '... from then onwards a paralysis crept over the whole movement... The British battering-ram had... been halted, as much by its own unwieldiness as by German bullets'.⁴²³ The pause was so long that there *was* a counter-attack, but the preparation (organised on the initiative of junior officers alone) was sufficient to repel it.

The First Army had been taught many lessons by the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. At the battle of Loos, it demonstrated what little it had learned.

⁴¹⁶ Neuve Chapelle, Report on Operations, Memorandum on the attack on Neuve Chapelle of 8 March 1915 in WO 158/374, p. 4.

⁴¹⁷ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 1, p. 77.

⁴¹⁸ Boff, Jonathan, '*Haig's Enemy*', OUP, (Oxford: 2018), p. 64.

⁴¹⁹ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 1, p. 98.

⁴²⁰ Anon., 'The Other Side of the Hill, No. I: The German Defence During the Battle of the Somme, July 1916', *Army Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (January 1924), 245-59' 35.

⁴²¹ Samuels, Martin, *Doctrine and dogma, German and British infantry tactics in the First World War*, Greenwood Press, (Oxford: 1992), p. 53.

⁴²² Haig, Douglas, *Diary*, WO 256-3, 25 December 1914, 26 March 1915, p. 162.

⁴²³ Wynne, G. C., *If Germany Attacks*, Tom Donovan Editions, (Brighton: 2008), p.27.

4. LOOS

‘If it isn’t planned it won’t happen’

Project management aphorism

4.1 Introduction

By June 1915 the Allied line was held by six French and three British armies, of which only the First Army was experienced. Despite this, on June 4 Généralissime Joseph Joffre, the French c-in-c sent a memo to the British.⁴²⁴ He wanted a major offensive from Champagne northwards and from the Artois plateau eastwards, to sweep German forces north into Belgium, thus blocking three German armies in the Noyon salient and severely disrupting the German armies on the Western Front.⁴²⁵

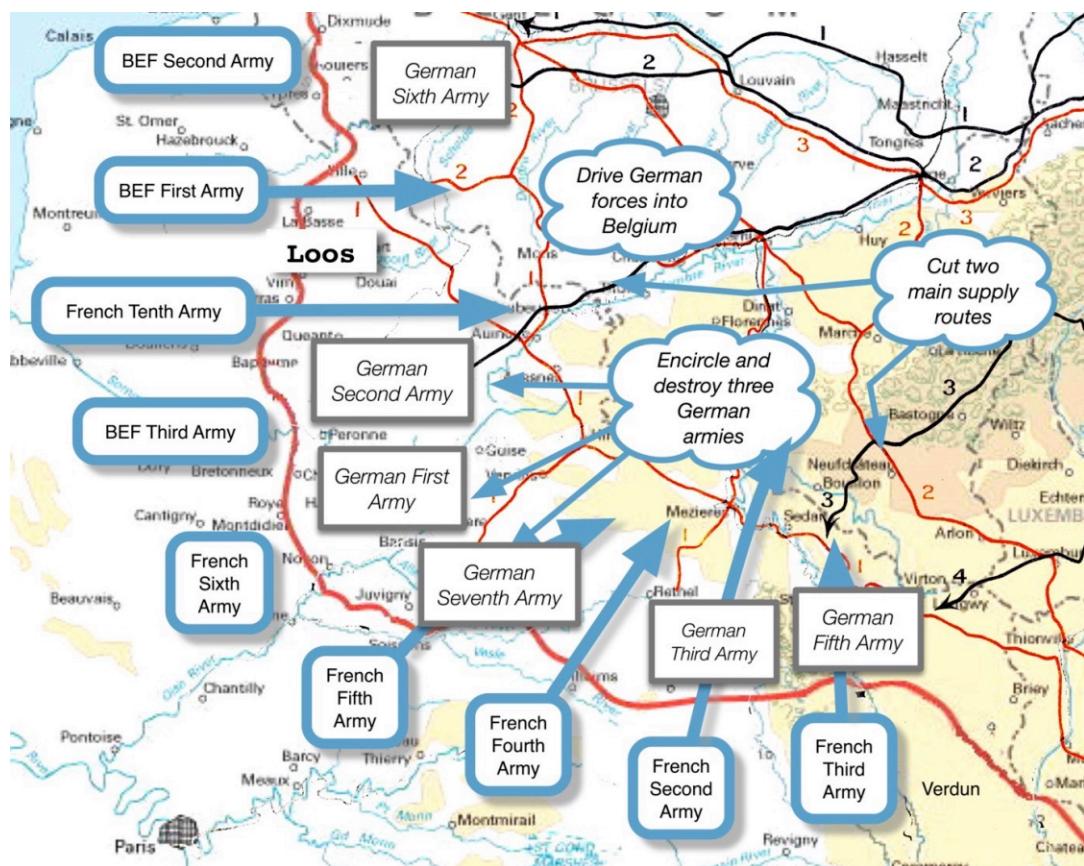


Figure 43 - Joffre's intentions for the last offensive of 1915

424 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 113.

425 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 111.

He sent a draft scheme to GHQ on 4 June with a view to a combined offensive and on 20 June asked Haig to submit a plan. Haig replied three days later.⁴²⁶ Générale Ferdinand Foch and Joffre wanted the British to attack Lens on the immediate left of the French X army on a front from Grenay to the La Bassée canal.⁴²⁷ However French and Haig recommended that the primary attacks should be made further north, 'astride' the canal, 'threatening Violaines and La Bassée' and only subsidiary attacks should be made south of it, yet the only target they mentioned was to the south of the canal: Auchy village.⁴²⁸ This was one of many contradictions which plagued the planning of the Battle of Loos.

4.2

Terrain

For the BEF the offensive operations of the Loos battle occurred in the twenty miles between the La Bassée canal to the north and Lens to the south. The terrain was dominated by two ridges running roughly from the south-east to the north-west. In the valley between them lie the towns of Loos and Hulluch and thereafter Bauvin and the Haute Deule canal. The ground is chalky which exposes trenchwork and was then covered with grass, but devoid of hedges.

The area was dotted with mines, each with a spoil heap called a 'fosse' (pithead), 'puit' (auxiliary shaft) or 'crassier' (spoil dump), and some winding gear towers. These provided many points of observation with one in particular, a massive tower nicknamed 'Tower Bridge' by British troops, affording a clear view over much of the battlefield.

⁴²⁶ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, pp. 111-114.

⁴²⁷ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 113.

⁴²⁸ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 114.

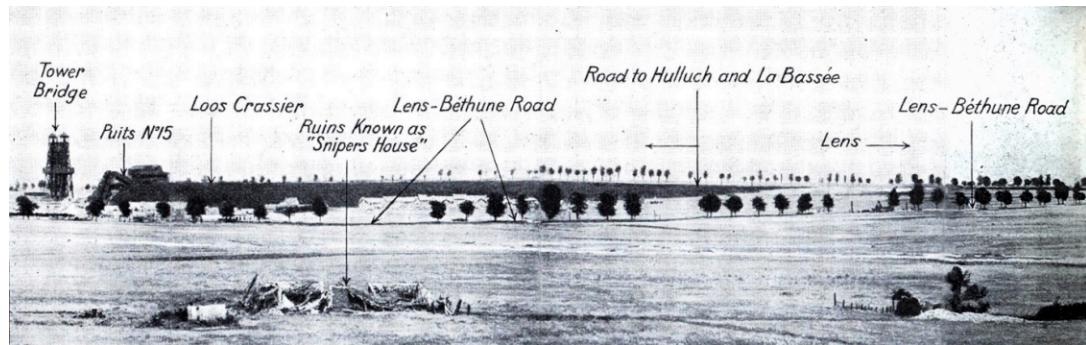


Figure 44 - Left-hand view of Loos from the West⁴²⁹

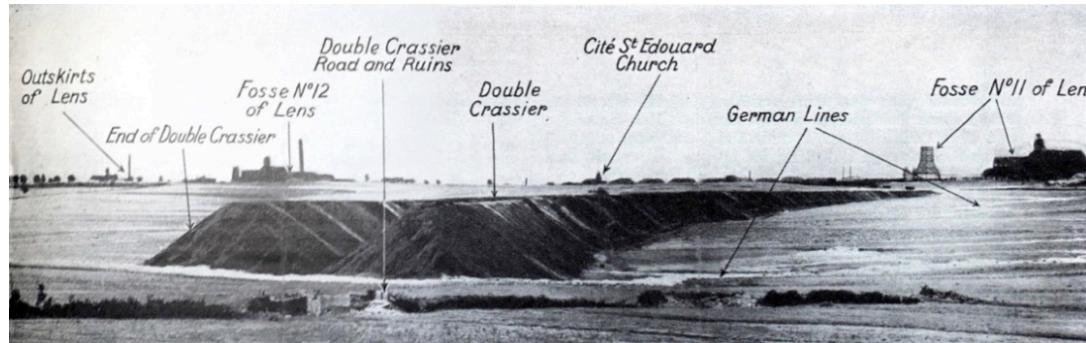


Figure 45 - Right-hand view of Loos from the West



Figure 46 - Camera view

To the north was a slight eminence known as the Hohenzollern redoubt, an extensive series of trenches designed as a strongpoint to be able to enfilade troops. A similar strongpoint had been established on the Loos road.

⁴²⁹ Hammerton, John, *The Great War, I was there*, Vol. I, Amalgamated Press, (London, 1937), p. 468.



Figure 47 - View of Hohenzollern redoubt in 2020

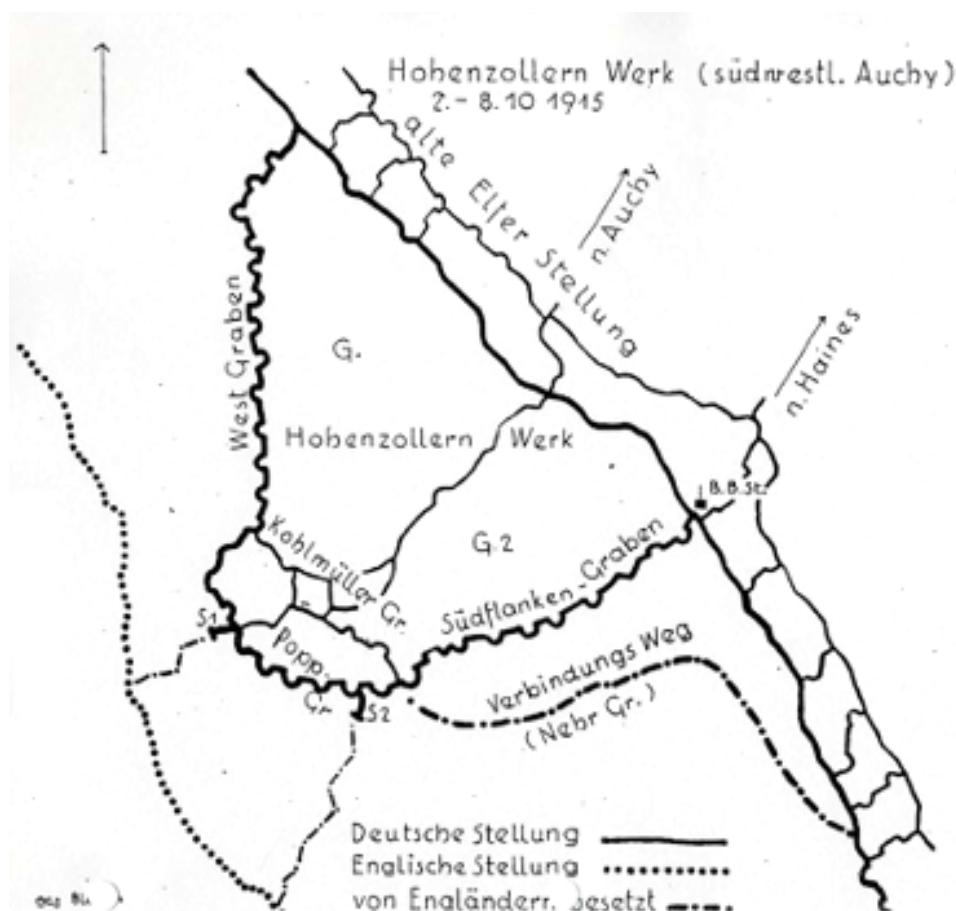


Figure 48 - Hohenzollern redoubt, German illustration⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Taken from Kenyon, David, 'No Man's Land', The European Group for Great War Archaeology, August 2006, downloaded from <http://www.redtwo.plus.com/nml/docs/Hamel%20report%20final.pdf> on 1 December 2023.

These photographs and maps show the considerable difference between the view of a contoured map and the general featurelessness of the battlefield save for the occasional 'fosse', 'puit' or 'crassier'. Each provided a good observation point: each fosse or puit had a tall winding tower of 25-30 metres in height, each crassier was a small hill which could be entrenched.

Additionally, Hill 70 dominated both Loos and Lens and the 'Double Crassier' running north-west out of Cité St. Pierre as far as the German front line provided further observation points. These vantage points were critical to the planning and conduct of the battle and their advantage lay mostly with the Germans. It was impossible to move anywhere in the British area in daylight closer than a kilometre from the German line without being observed and 'Tower Bridge' was visible from a distance of two kilometres.

The British had inferior observation points: Fosse 8 de Béthune was 1.5 km from the Front line and some 9 km from Loos but Fosse 5 de Béthune was just behind Grenay and 2 km from Loos.

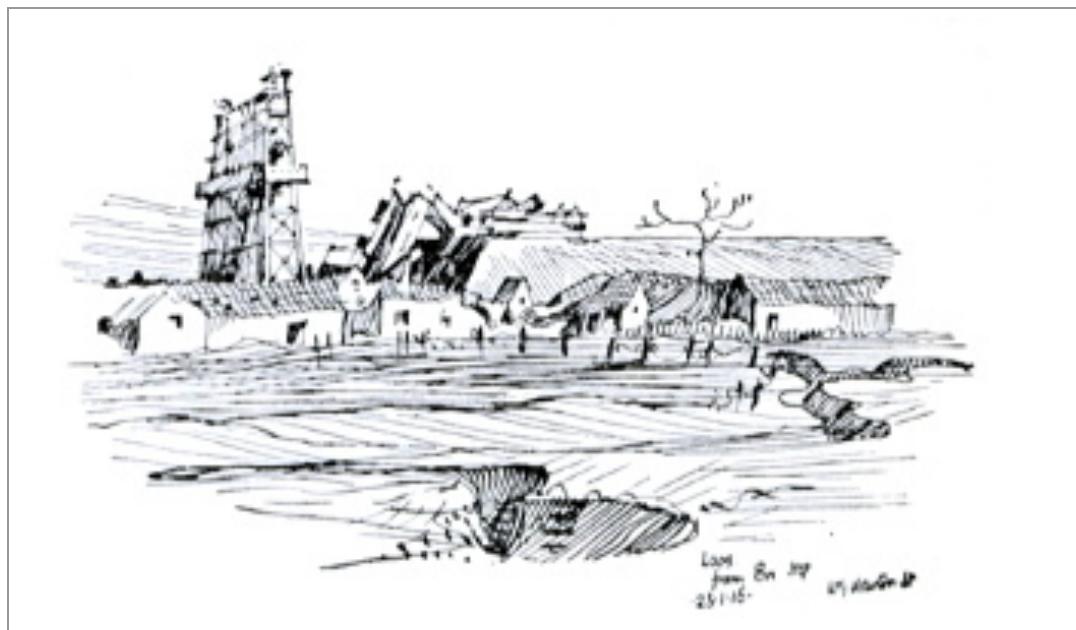


Figure 49 - Loos showing the 'Tower Bridge' winding gear tower⁴³¹

⁴³¹ Taken from Maude, Alan H., *The history of the 47th (London) Division*, Amalgamated Press, (London, 1922).

There was also a second German line roughly following the Route Nationale from Lens north to La Bassée with a number of fortified houses and villages along it. The many fortified mining houses made the positions along the line highly defensible.

On 23 June Haig reconnoitred the area between the left of the French line and the La Bassée Canal and reported.

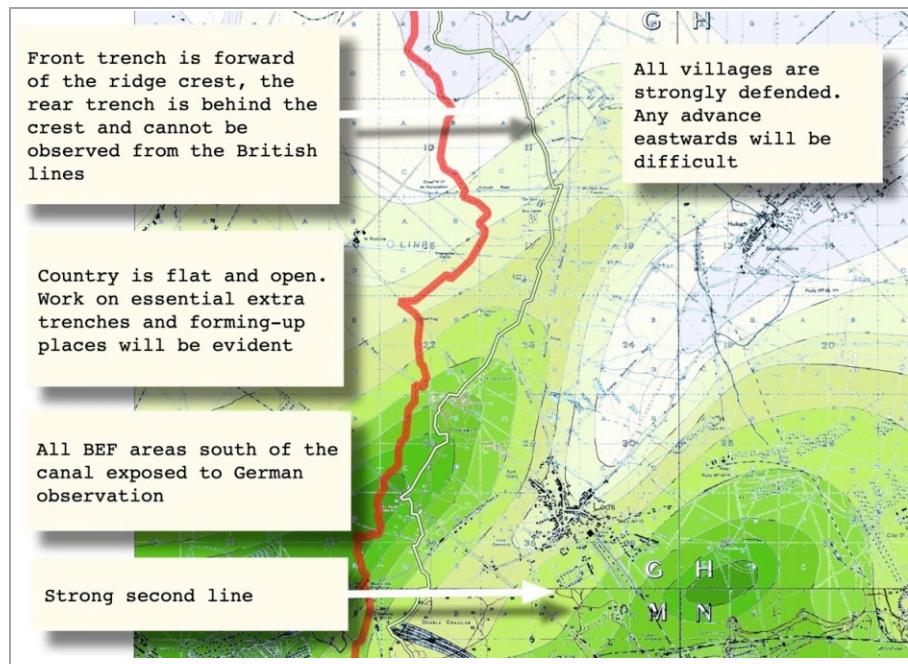


Figure 50 - Haig's reconnaissance

He divided the area into four, assessed each in detail and decided that few were feasible.

‘If ... it is necessary to deliver an attack ... the plan ... should be:⁴³²

432 Haig's reconnaissance report of 23 June 1915 in First Army, Operations in WO 95/156/3.

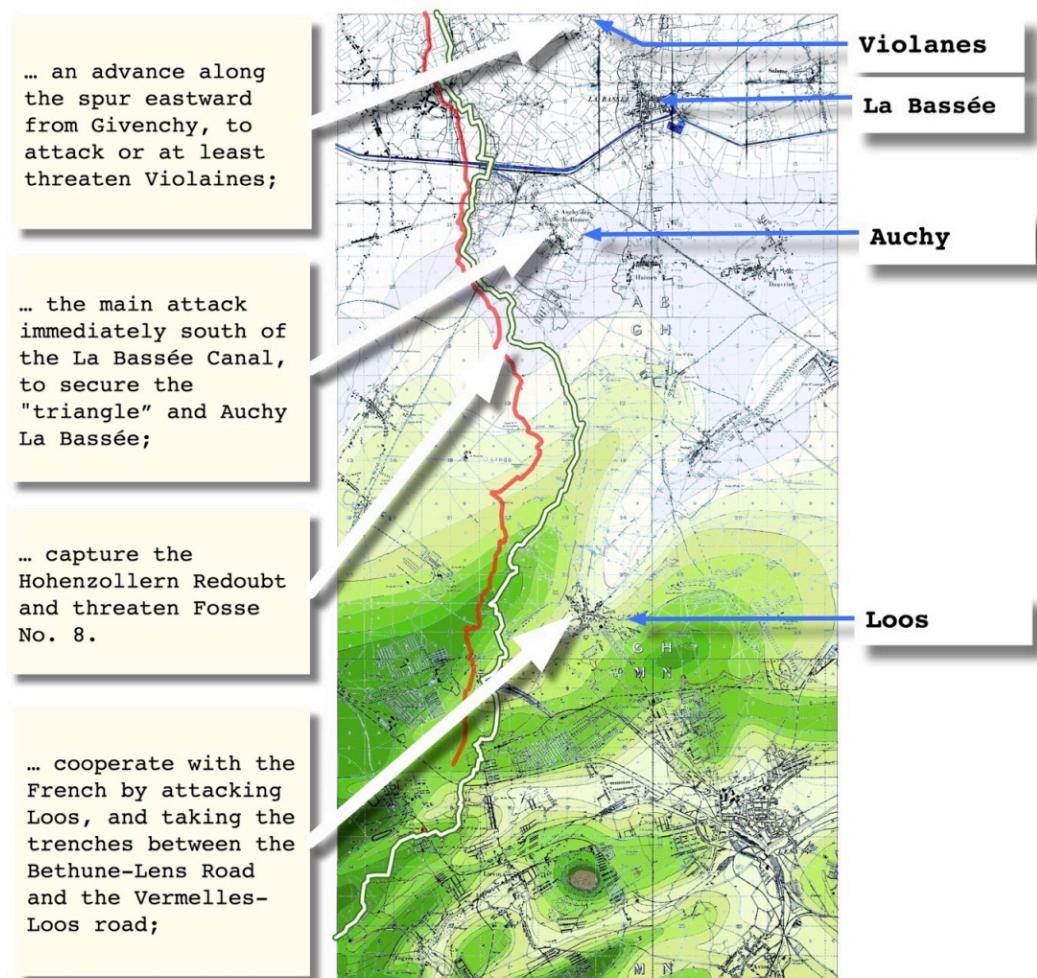


Figure 51 - Haig's plan of 23 June 1915

Haig's first plan would have spread attacks all along the front as far north as Violaines.⁴³³ His claim that he was following the 'principles which were taught by the late Colonel Henderson at Camberley'⁴³⁴ was compromised by his belief in the need to attack on as wide a front as possible in order to deceive the Germans about the true points of attack and not expose a flank. His proposal would have taken the First Army away from the French: helping Joffre was of small concern.

⁴³³ As footnote 432.

⁴³⁴ WO 95/158/5, First Army General Staff, Operation files 20, 7 September 1915, Anon., Appendix D, *Précis of conference of 6 September 1915*, p. 2.

4.3

Discussions with Foch and Joffre

Joffre remained wedded to combining Anglo-French attacks around Lens-Lievin. On 5 August he proposed that the BEF attack Loos and Hulluch and thus outflank Lens and Lievin from the north while the French outflanked from the south.⁴³⁵

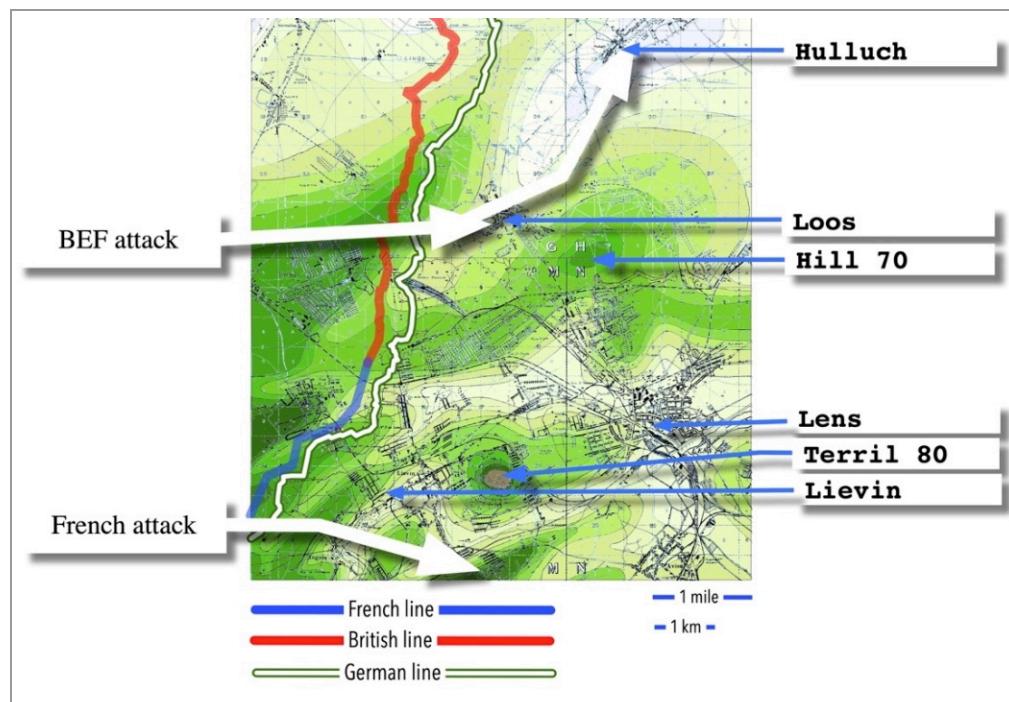


Figure 52 - Joffre's proposal of 5 August 1915

He extolled the virtues of wide fronts to avoid flanking attacks but ignored the fact that the defenders of Lens and Lievin would be presented with ample flanks to be attacked, while the Germans could observe and dominate from Hill 70 and 'Terril 80'.⁴³⁶ He believed that the district about Lens would be effectively encircled by the British and French.⁴³⁷ But by proposing the capture of Hulluch he would send the British north-east away from the French and expose a flank by Lens. These were instances of failures to concentrate forces and protect flanks which characterised much of the planning of Loos.

⁴³⁵ Joffre to French, First Army General Staff operations of 5 August 1915 in WO 95/157/3.

⁴³⁶ A 'Terril' is a conical pile of waste material removed during mining.

⁴³⁷ Haig, Diary, 13 August 1915.

Haig and Robertson then pursued an exchange of memoranda in an effort to have the attack moved north of the canal.⁴³⁸ Joffre eventually tired of this and on 5 August asked that the BEF attack Loos,⁴³⁹ but it took until 24 August for Butler to issue a conference call. This included a request for plans to I Corps and IV Corps to show a bombardment preceding a release of gas along the entire front from Givenchy to Lens following Butler's outline plan and assault objectives.⁴⁴⁰

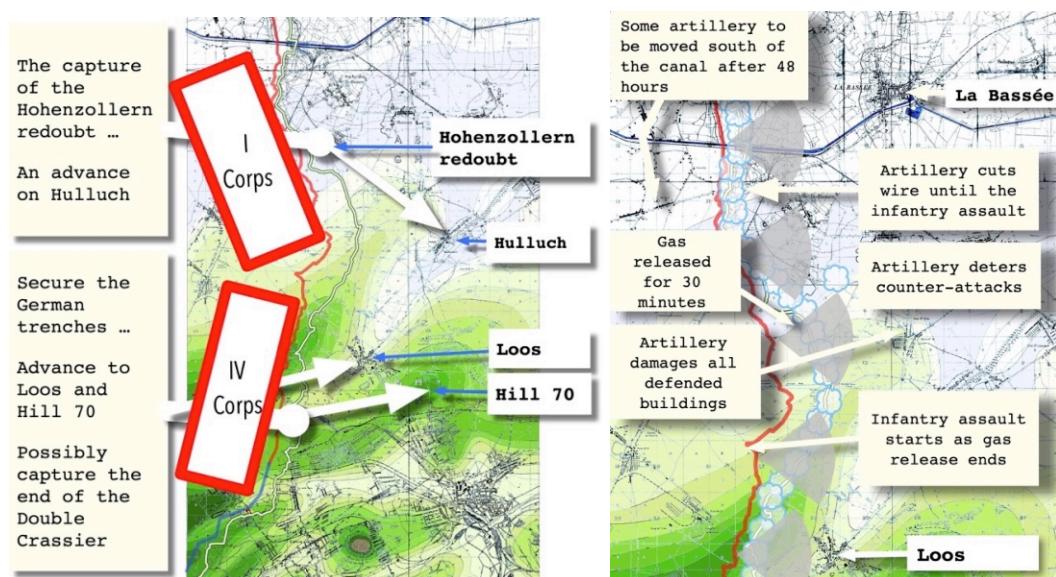


Figure 53 - Butler's outline objectives and bombardment plan of 24 August 1915

Butler proposed assault objectives. The Indian Corps north of the canal would contribute by diversionary attacks.

While Joffre disposed of a large and well-supplied army, French and Haig felt constrained by many factors: their communications, artillery and ammunition. They needed to protect their communications with Calais in the event of a retreat. Their artillery was weak: the British 18 pounder could not destroy entrenchments. Consequently, a small force, well entrenched and supported by machine guns, could always resist attacks by larger forces with

⁴³⁸ Haig to Robertson, Robertson to Haig, First Army, Weekly report on operations of 21 July 1915 in WO 95/156/8.

⁴³⁹ Joffre to French, First Army General Staff operations of 5 August 1915 in WO 95/157/3.

⁴⁴⁰ Butler, G.S. 135(a) in First Army General Staff, Operations of 24 August 1915 in WO 95/157/3. See also page 127

poor artillery. Heavier guns were required: the Germans were estimated to have a ratio of heavy guns and howitzers to field guns of 1:2. The French proportion was 1:4 and the British 1:20. It was believed this could not be raised to 1:4 until 1916.⁴⁴¹ The BEF had only 71 guns greater than 6 in. against the Germans' 1,406.⁴⁴² Even were artillery not a problem, the shortage of ammunition prevented any comprehensive destruction of trenches and dominated the BEF's thoughts.⁴⁴³ The French believed that for 'offensive' sectors, there should be at least 1000 rounds for each heavy gun and 2000 rounds for each field gun or light howitzer. 'Defensive' sectors should not have less than 200 rounds per heavy gun and 500 rounds per field gun.⁴⁴⁴ But there remained the problem of supply: the Germans were believed to produce 250,000 rounds of ammunition per day, the French 100,000, but the British only 22,000.⁴⁴⁵ Britain was embarrassed: it could not hope to achieve the French criteria until 1916.⁴⁴⁶

German military preponderance had caused the failure of the BEF at Aubers Ridge on 9 May when a British attack by three Brigades was defeated by 15 German companies and 22 machine-guns.⁴⁴⁷ It was held that the failure at Aubers Ridge and all preceding attacks by the BEF were caused by fire on the flanks of each attack.⁴⁴⁸ All the military texts which the senior officers had studied at Sandhurst and Camberley stressed the danger of flanking fire. The BEF commanders remained highly-sensitive to it and it influenced the tactics

⁴⁴¹ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 115.

⁴⁴² Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 116.

⁴⁴³ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 136, 114.

⁴⁴⁴ As footnote 442.

⁴⁴⁵ As footnote 442.

⁴⁴⁶ As footnote 442.

⁴⁴⁷ Farndale, History, p. 116.

⁴⁴⁸ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 117.

they adopted at Loos and thereafter,⁴⁴⁹ but was occasionally ignored for political reasons.⁴⁵⁰ At Loos, six British divisions faced twelve German companies in the front line.⁴⁵¹

All concerns were however trumped by the state of Russia. Were Russia to collapse, Germany might agree peace terms, withdraw her forces, be supplied by Russia and thus oppose the Allies with an even greater force. Attacking now could forestall this.⁴⁵² Novo-Georgievsk, the last Russian fortress in Poland, fell on August 20 and the next day Kitchener, with Cabinet backing, told French to undertake offensive operations south of the La Bassée canal.⁴⁵³

4.4

Planning constraints at Loos

Before Loos the BEF had planned several battles: Neuve Chapelle on 10 March, Aubers Ridge on 9 May and Festubert on 15 May. It had also fought several defensive engagements such as the Second Battle of Ypres in April and May. Of all these, the Battle of Loos was the largest: the Battle of Neuve Chapelle occupied 23 Division-days, the Battle of Loos occupied 155.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁹ First Army, May 1915 in WO 95/155/4.

⁴⁵⁰ The texts referred to in chapter 2 (The Army, purpose, doctrines and training) mention 'flank' 3770 times and 'enfilade' or 'enfilading' 143 times. A simple example suffices: Cléry p. 129 'The 4th and 5th squadrons of the Russian Chevaliers-Gardes were completely overthrown by the attack on their flank, the 4th squadron being almost annihilated.' The BEF commanders remained obsessed with avoiding flanking attacks until 1918.

⁴⁵¹ Wynn, 'If Germany ... ', p. 42. Haig put the figure at 13,000 men which is approximately the same, in his First Army conference speech of 9 September 1915, WO 95/711/2.

⁴⁵² Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 123.

⁴⁵³ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 129.

⁴⁵⁴ Division day: a means of estimating the size of a battle. A 'Division day' is measured as the commitment of a Division to battle for one day.

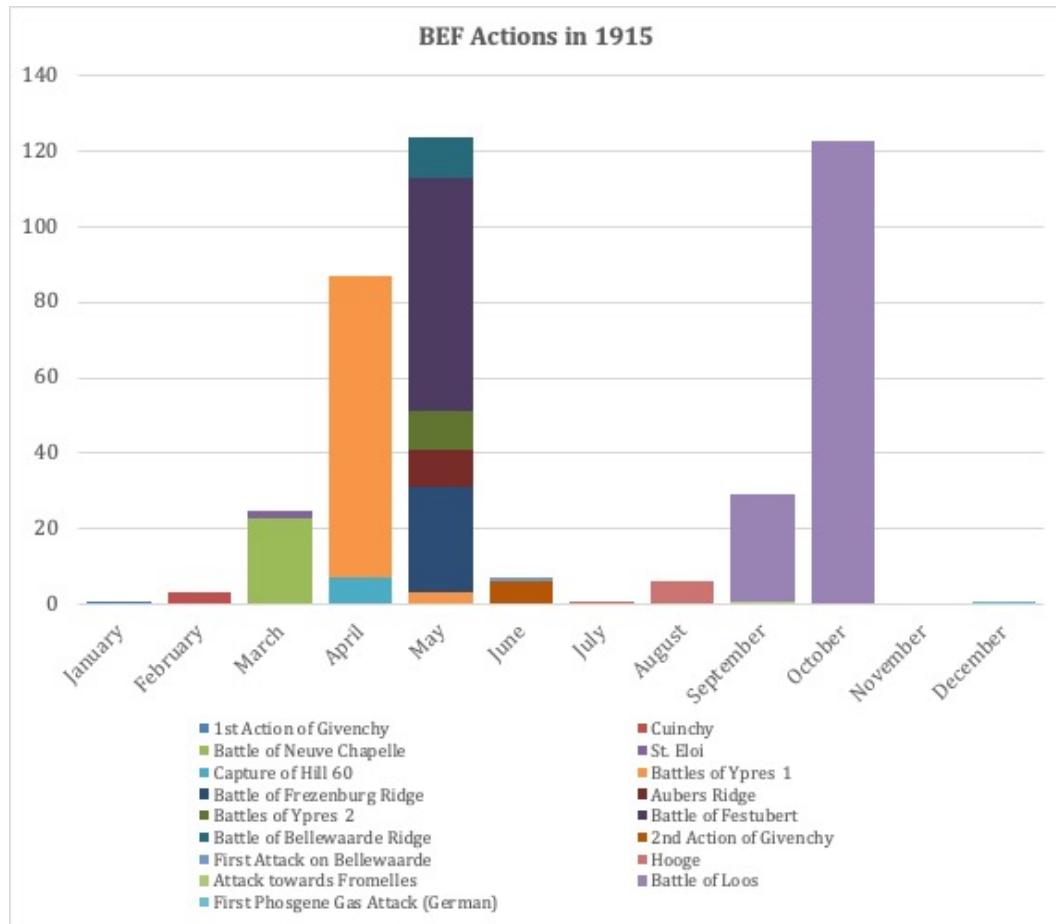


Figure 54 - BEF actions of 1915 measured by the number of divisions involved.⁴⁵⁵

Through the summer the BEF was both recuperating from these battles and reorganising itself to absorb the New Armies being formed as a result of Kitchener's call to arms of 1914. By September it numbered 875,000.⁴⁵⁶ This began to expose major problems of span-of-control and planning consistency: whereas Neuve Chapelle had been planned by a single divisional commander (Davies), Loos involved 2 Corps and ultimately nine divisions in the offensive.

These stresses showed in the degree to which the Loos battle plans reflected the problems the various groups faced. Few of these plans derived from, or acknowledged the existence of an appreciation such that a reader could be confident that the planner understood the problems the battle posed. Those

⁴⁵⁵ Becke A. F, *Order of Battle of Divisions*, parts 1-4, Naval and Military Press, (Uckfield, 2008).

⁴⁵⁶ Brown, *Op. Cit.*

which did, such as the plans of 47th and 9 Divisions, exhibited a greater degree of preparedness for the battle than the others.

By the time of Loos, the increase in the size of the armies and the value of seeking the views of junior officers (hitherto ignored) was understood and resulted in Haig outlining an overall approach and then calling for proposals for plans from his corps commanders, claiming that an ample supply of asphyxiating gas would be available.⁴⁵⁷

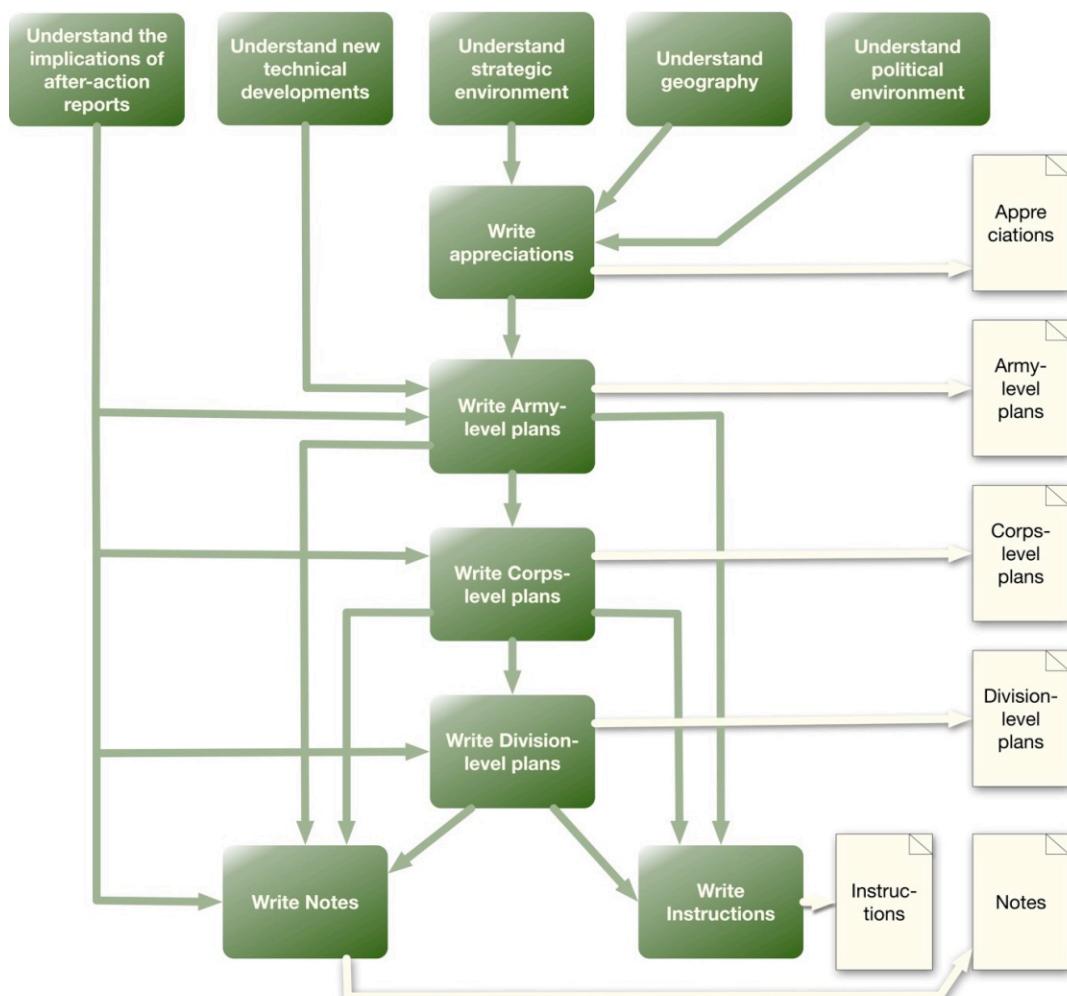


Figure 55 - A planning process

Figure 55 illustrates the planning process so far as it can be deduced from the documents available up to the time of the battle. Tracing the inheritance of ideas from army to corps and division remains difficult which may have been

⁴⁵⁷ Butler, Request for I Corps attack proposal of 13 August 1915 in WO 95/711/2.

due to the lack of reviews: the only review which can be found is that of Willcocks' plan which Haig annotated furiously and which was followed by Willcocks' departure - a rare example of the abandonment by Haig of the 'Umpiring' principle.⁴⁵⁸ There was also a great disparity in the quality of notes. Some were simply extensions of the plan and were called 'instructions', others attempted to formalise the views of senior officers and a very few to advance the BEF's corporate understanding of a problem.

4.5

The Decision to Use Gas

The first use by the Germans of chlorine gas at Ypres and Osowiec in April removed the moral repugnance many in the BEF felt against its use by Britain.⁴⁵⁹ Robertson advised Haig of the possibility of using chlorine gas as a weapon in a memo of 12 July.⁴⁶⁰ Given the shortage of both ammunition and artillery, Haig hoped that this gas, released from cylinders spread along the entire front of First Army, could provide a critical reinforcement. There were many problems with this decision: since the weapon was entirely new, the BEF had no experience to inform it and thus no proven doctrine; while promised in great quantities, the supply was in practice limited, so there was insufficient gas to asphyxiate the occupants of the enemy trenches: its effectiveness depended on the wind and Haig, despite Robertson's advice, was mis-informed by his gas advisor, a Royal Engineer named Foulkes, about German anti-gas defences.

The gas-cylinder-delivered weapon had been evaluated at the Kastner-Kellner⁴⁶¹ works at Runcorn on 4 June for the benefit of Army officers.

⁴⁵⁸ Willcocks to Haig (annotated) 29 August 1915 and Butler to Willcocks 30 August 1915 in First Army General Staff, Operations in WO 95/157/4).

⁴⁵⁹ Kauffman, J.E.; Kauffman, H.W. *Verdun 1916: The Renaissance of the Fortress*. (2016, Barnsley), Pen and Sword, pp 112-113, Edmunds V1915 Vol I, pp 370-374.

⁴⁶⁰ 12 July 1915, Robertson to Haig, First Army, Weekly report on operations in WO 95/156/8.

⁴⁶¹ The name was later changed to Castner-Kellner and the company bought by Imperial Chemical Industries.

Employees in a line were exposed, downwind, to discharges from several cylinders and each was instructed to advise when the gas was detected. Each possessed a respirator but only donned it when the gas became too oppressive. Paper disks were prepared that reacted visibly on exposure to chlorine and arranged on poles representing troops at various heights set in trenches. The behaviour of the gas could thus be monitored. It followed the contours of the ground and (propelled by a 20 m.p.h. wind) could ascend a 10m-high bank.⁴⁶²

Foulkes wrote a gas policy for the BEF from which its doctrines derived: the gas was contained in liquid form and issued as a yellow cloud, which quickly became transparent; two cylinders should be opened at first to obtain a high-enough concentration and would empty in two minutes. The smoke from adjacent smoke tubes could be used to monitor its progress as well as disconcert the aim of hostile troops.⁴⁶³

'Notes in connection with the employment of gas in the attack' was issued three days before the attack by Butler and claimed that:

‘... the Germans have not got an effective smoke helmet ...’⁴⁶⁴
This directly contradicted Robertson's 12th July memo to Haig:

‘It is known that the enemy has provided himself with respirators ...’⁴⁶⁵
Haig did not correct Butler and the only evidence of any attempt to assess the available German gas-survival equipment is a memo issued on the eve of the Battle of the Somme.⁴⁶⁶ Such an investigation would have found that by 1911 both the British Siebe Gorman 'Proto' apparatus and the equivalent German

⁴⁶² Foulkes, C. H., *Gas*, Naval and Military Press, (Uckfield, 2003), p. 42-3.

⁴⁶³ 'Notes of experiments with chlorine gas and smoke balls near St. Omer, 22nd August, 1915' in Foulkes, *Gas*, p. 39

⁴⁶⁴ WO 95/158/2, 191509, First Army General Staff, Gas papers. First Army G.S. 177/5 (a). WO 95/158/2, 191509, First Army General Staff, Gas papers. 19150822, Chief Engineer IV Corps, Notes of experiments with Chlorine gas ands smoke balls near St. Omer.

⁴⁶⁵ As footnote 460.

⁴⁶⁶ W. W. Torr (III Corps) to 8 Division, G253/100, 13 June 1916 in WO 95/2185/3.

Dräger 'Tauchretter' apparatus - widely used in German mine rescue units - had a use duration of 60-120 minutes.⁴⁶⁷ The 'Tauchretter' were known to have been issued to the German machine-gunners.⁴⁶⁸ The cylinders would need to be exchanged since few mine rescues are achieved in less than 120 minutes.⁴⁶⁹ Foulkes was a Royal Engineer. This unit has an extensive history of work with breathing apparatus stretching back to 1838 on which Foulkes could easily have drawn.⁴⁷⁰ At best Foulkes was mistaken. At worst he was lying. Had he admitted to Haig that the gas weapon might be ineffectual, it is possible Haig would have abandoned its use.

467 Dräger, H. & B. *Oxygen the life saver*, Catalogue, Drägerwerke (Lübeck, 1909), p. 21, Singleton, John, 'Baking a New Technology, Breathing Apparatus for Mine Rescue in Britain, 1890-1930', *Economic History Society Conference*, University of Keele, April 2018

468 Foulkes, *Gas*, p.44.

469 Annual reports of inspectors of mines 1910-14, TNA POWE 7/46-50.

470 Porter, Whitworth, *History of the Royal Engineers*. Vol IV., Longmans, London.

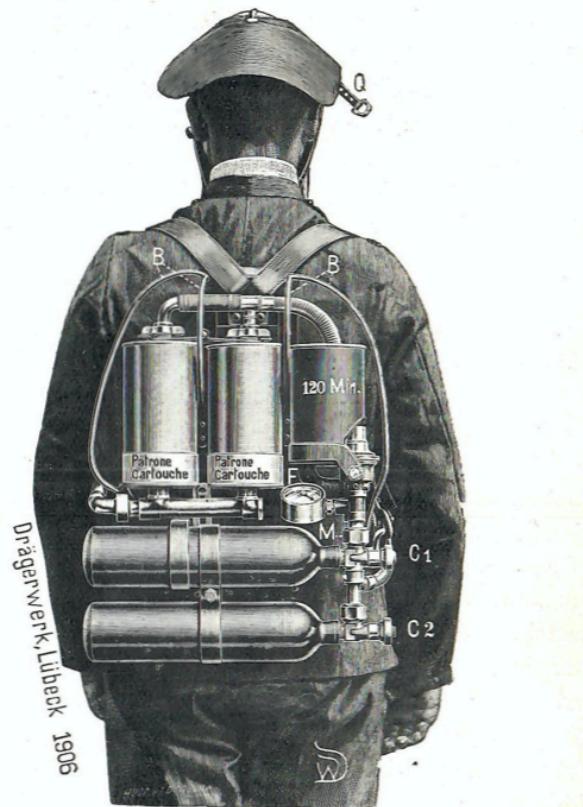


Fig. 6.

“Draeger’s” Rescue Apparatus complete, with Smoke Helmet and Twin Cylinders, for use in Mines, etc.

Figure 56 - Dräger twin-cylinder mine rescue apparatus

Apart from the breathing apparatus issued to machine-gunners, the German troops were equipped with gas masks: on 28 May the British had seen them and told GHQ.⁴⁷¹

‘7.40 a.m. ... Yesterday evening an infantry observer saw about twenty men in a trench at La Boiselle carrying cylinders and wearing what looked like gas masks.’

On 7 July a sniper saw Germans using an ‘experimental’ gas mask.⁴⁷² Foulkes claims he requested that all captured German respirators be sent to him for evaluation. From his descriptions none of them matched the kind shown in Figure 56 below⁴⁷³ On 28 August Haig noted in his diary that a ...

⁴⁷¹ General Staff of 28 May 1915 in WO 95/4/1.

⁴⁷² First Army -June 1915 in WO 95/156/1.

⁴⁷³ Foulkes, *Gas*, p. 45.

‘Prisoner of 13th Regiment ... possessed a rather good gas mask.’
One such mask is held in the Exeter museum and is dated 15 September
1915.⁴⁷⁴



Figure 57 - The German gas mask held in the Exeter museum

By 4 September Haig was concerned that the Germans might issue effective gas helmets were they to become aware of First Army intentions.⁴⁷⁵ A deserter had been captured on 18 September, but no mention was made of gas masks in the report of his interrogation.⁴⁷⁶

The release of the gas was constrained by its limited availability and the extension of the front by a further two divisions.⁴⁷⁷ To offset this, on 31 August Butler proposed alternating gas and smoke discharges for each 25 yards of line as shown in Figure 57 below. On 20 September this was changed,

⁴⁷⁴ Thompson, Peter, The chemical subject, phenomenology and German encounters with the gas mask in the World War I, *History and Technology*, Routledge, (London, 2017).

⁴⁷⁵ Haig, Diary and letters.

⁴⁷⁶ 1 Division General Staff of 20 August 1915 in WO 95/1229/3.2.

⁴⁷⁷ Foulkes, *Gas*, p. 60.

ostensibly owing to a shortage of gas cylinders but possibly because it was realised that ordering troops to charge into a cloud of lethal gas was unwise.⁴⁷⁸

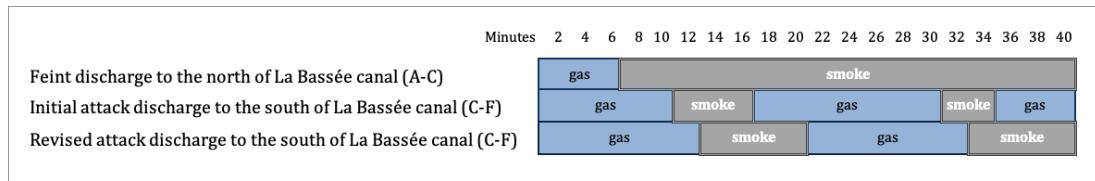


Figure 58 - Initial and revised discharge patterns⁴⁷⁹

The cylinders were to be allocated as shown below.

478 Foulkes, *Gas*, p. 61.

479 First Army, Instructions as to scope of gas attack of 31 August 1915 in WO 95/157/4.

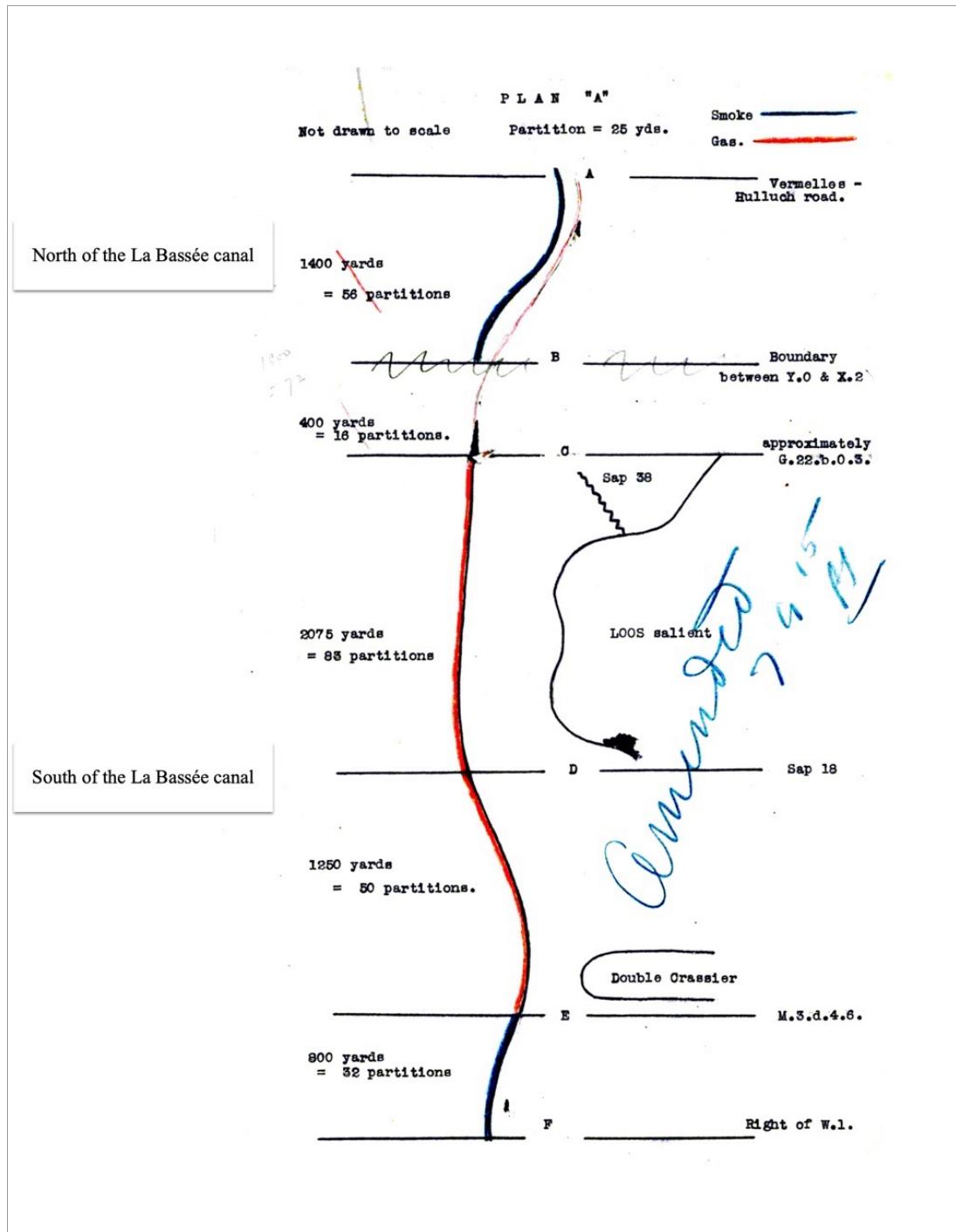


Figure 59 - Gas cylinder allocation north and south of the La Bassée canal⁴⁸⁰

The proportions of the gas cylinders over the sectors (measured in yards per cylinder) is shown below.

480 As footnote 479.

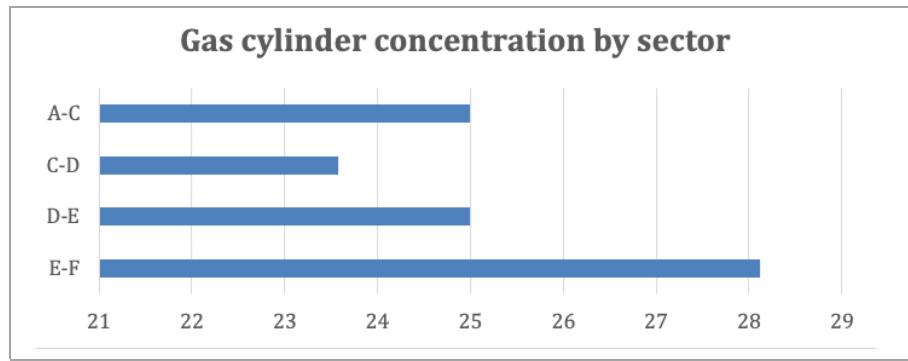


Figure 60 - Gas cylinder concentration by sector measured in yards per cylinder

Thus the greatest concentration (E-F) was opposite Loos.

4.6 Appreciations

Few of the division-level plans for the battle contained an appreciation.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Francis Gathorne-Hardy's was the exception, but at army-level there had been several. Few of them accounted for the existing conditions and merely proposed attack approaches.⁴⁸¹ On May 27 Haig reported on the inadvisability of an attack on Loos. He noted the openness of the country and that both artillery and infantry would be visible both from the ground and from enemy balloons. He noted the need to create forming-up places and the distance to the enemy lines over which troops would have to pass in order to attack. He ignored the kind of soil (rocky chalk which exposed any new trench work) and the lack of east-west roads, with the logistical problems this would cause, but advised against such an attack anyway.⁴⁸² Robertson conveyed French's concerns and on June 6 Haig declared his preference for an attack on the Rue D'Ouvert and Chapelle St. Roch, independent of any attack south of the La Bassée canal.⁴⁸³ He believed that no attack on Loos would be practicable until Lens and its area were first

⁴⁸¹ Horne, 3 June 1915 First Army Headquarters Operations, Loos area, in WO 95/155/6), Anon., (Robertson?) 16 August 1915, appreciation in First Army, Operations in WO 95/155/6) Rawlinson to Haig 16 August 1915, First Army Headquarters Operations in WO 95/156/3).

⁴⁸² Haig (Draft) Appreciation of Loos attack, 27 May 1915, First Army Headquarters, General Staff Branches and Services. in WO 95/155/6.

⁴⁸³ Haig, Diary, 30 May, p. 127.

captured. His brief appreciation was followed by a long narrative of his proposed attack. Interestingly Haig proposed using

‘gas bombs dropped from aeroplanes....’,⁴⁸⁴ which betrayed unjustified faith in the RFC’s bombing ability. Kitchener, not perhaps entirely *au fait* with the current political position, proposed that the BEF make an offensive of a ‘local and demonstrative nature’ with attacks on the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge or on the Aubers Ridge, despite the last two attempts having failed.⁴⁸⁵ Horne had already assessed the possibilities of an attack on 3 Jun and concluded that it was likely to fail, though a small night-time assault might succeed. The difficulty was not ‘getting in but staying there’. With the available force, a large-scale attack was out of the question.⁴⁸⁶ Lieutenant-General Sir Hubert Gough assessed the problem as discussed on page 160.

None of the assessments mentioned the probable enemy reaction. An intelligence report (undated but after March) claims:

There is ... no reason to believe that [the enemy] has been reinforced ... [and thus] there can be no reserves between the front line of trenches and Lille ... [but] the railway system will always admit ... moving ... reinforcements which will arrive in from 36 to 48 hours. This ... can be prevented by interfering with the main line ... from Lille through Don to La Bassée.⁴⁸⁷

On June 26th Butler noted:

... we must expect that the enemy in our front will receive reinforcements⁴⁸⁸ The possibility of German reinforcements was mentioned by Joffre at a conference in July attended by French:

If German troops are transferred from Russia before we commence operations, we shall still be in a more advantageous position than they as our

⁴⁸⁴ Haig, Appreciation (Rue d’Ouvert), First Army Operations of 6 June 1915 in WO 95/156/2

⁴⁸⁵ Anon., Notes on operations 1915 in WO 158/17. Britain lost the Battles of Wytschaete on 14 December 1914 and Aubers Ridge on 9 May 1915. Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol I, p. 75 and Vol II p. 37.

⁴⁸⁶ Horne, Appreciation of Loos area of 3 June 1915 in WO 95/155/6).

⁴⁸⁷ Anon., Intelligence report on countryside of 24 April 1915 in WO 158/260.

⁴⁸⁸ Anon., First Army, Appendices of 1-7 July 1915 in WO 95/156/7.

troops will have been rested, reorganised and reinforced.⁴⁸⁹ Haig however provided an outline assessment of the risks of a counter-attack at the conference of 6 September.⁴⁹⁰

4.7

Conferring and planning

The planning process was punctuated by conferences. Several were held by Haig, less for discussion than dissemination. None was minuted (the War Cabinet itself only introduced minuting from 9 December 1916),⁴⁹¹ but notes were circulated thereafter.⁴⁹² Most of the discussions were reiterations of major decisions already taken privately concerning the use of gas, the bombardment, the infantry assault and miscellanea, each group declaring their intended actions and discussing the date, form and length of the bombardment. This was an improvement on the Neuve Chapelle conference, which had merely allowed Haig an opportunity to vent his views. The First Army conference of 24 August was attended by Gough (I Corps), Rawlinson (IV Corps), Franks (Heavy Artillery), the GSO1s, the artillerymen, engineers and the RFC. They agreed on a continuous bombardment of four days of wire-cutting which would also deter the Germans from mending it and leave them unsure of the attack's focus. While III Corps and the Indian Corps would feign activities such as creating dummy starting-off places to be occupied by dummy soldiers, the main attack would occur south of the canal and focus on taking Loos and Hulluch. It was believed that the Germans could be dislodged from their deep, well-constructed dug-outs by the use of gas. They would then either be exposed to shellfire, die or retreat. After 2 days some heavy guns would be moved south. All counter-battery firing south of the canal would be managed by Franks' No. 1 group. Infantry would attack in line rather than

⁴⁸⁹ Minutes of a meeting with Joffre, Yarde-Buller to Kitchener letters of 4 July 1915 in WO 159/11

⁴⁹⁰ See page 114.

⁴⁹¹ The War Cabinet, Report for the Year 1917 (H.M.S.O., London, 1918), Cd 9005, p.3.

⁴⁹² First Army General Staff Operations, August 1915, WO 95/157/4, General staff war diary, September 1915, WO 95/711/2.

column, as had been the case at Neuve Chapelle and would follow the gas as closely as they could (but Haig's preference for line rather than column had reversed by the time he published his overall plan).⁴⁹³ Gas cylinder installation and management were discussed. The problem of the asphyxiation of attacking troops was mentioned in this and most other conferences but without a solution being proposed, much less experimented with. The conflict between this and the frequent exhortations to 'press on' was never resolved but an instruction was promised shortly.⁴⁹⁴ There was no discussion of battlefield communications, other than a reference to bombers' flags, nor of the context of the battle. Any mention of coöperation with the French was merely exhortative.⁴⁹⁵

As French's CoS, Robertson made the first move to begin planning on 21 June with a request for a plan of attack between the First Army's right and the La Bassée canal to take place on 1 August.⁴⁹⁶ Following the conference of 24 August, Haig produced his second plan.⁴⁹⁷ He predicated its execution on the arrival of sufficient gas.⁴⁹⁸ As at Neuve Chapelle, he ignored the need to delegate but planned to divisional level. Additionally, he erred in his disposition management.

⁴⁹³ Anon., Appendix I, Notes for conference, First Army, 7 September 1915 in WO 95/159/2) shows it as 'line', First Army General Staff, Operations, Loos, Haig, Plan of operations 28 August 1915 in WO 95/158/3) shows it as 'column'.

⁴⁹⁴ Mentioned repeatedly in WO 95/711/2, WO 95/158/4, WO 95/158/1, WO 95/158/5, WO 95/159/1, WO 95/159/3, WO 95/710/1.

⁴⁹⁵ Conference notes 24 August 1915 in WO 95/157/4.

⁴⁹⁶ Robertson to Haig of 21 June 1915 in WO 95/156/3.

⁴⁹⁷ Haig, Plan of operations in First Army General Staff, Operations, Loos of 28 August 1915 in WO 95/158/3.

⁴⁹⁸ 5280 cylinders.

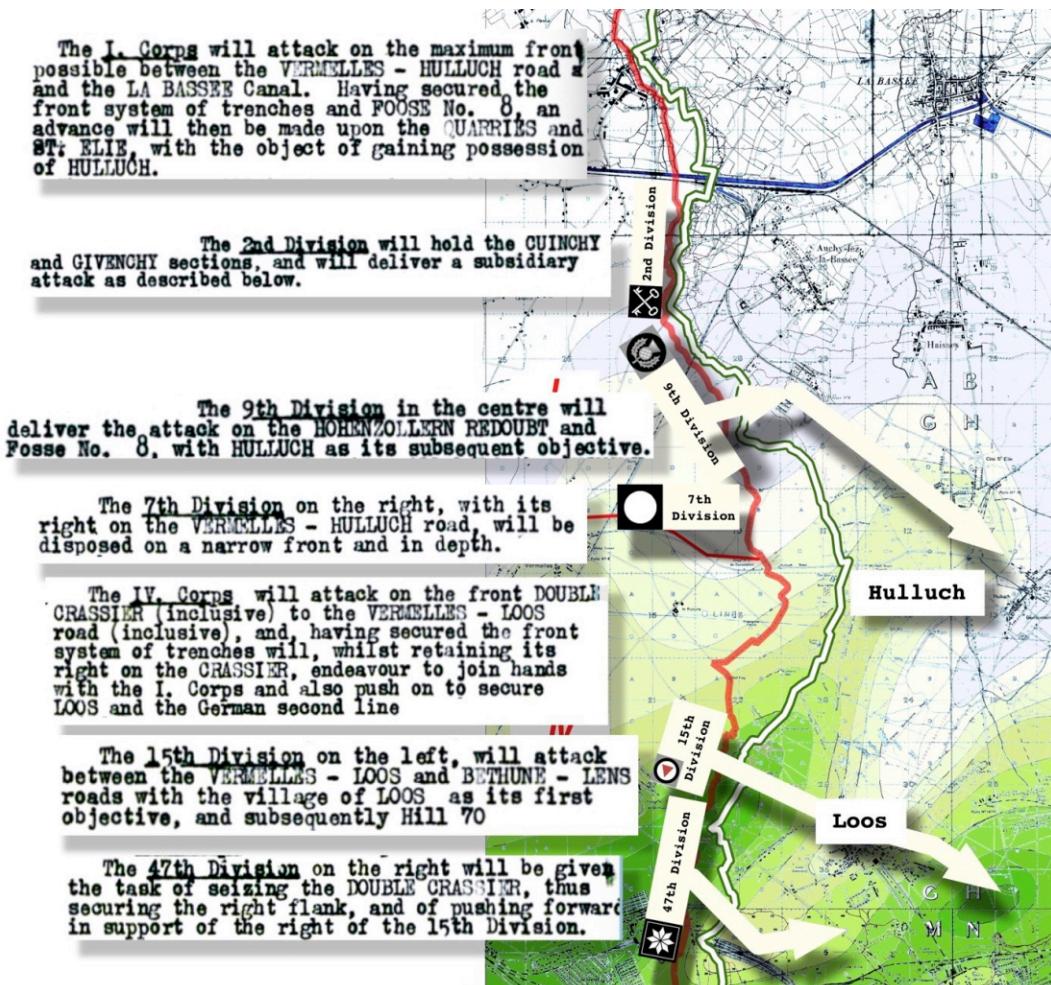


Figure 61 - Loos - The main attacks

His second plan showed the main attacks with a curious gap, opposite Hulluch, between the 15th and 7 Divisions, placing the 1 Division near Houchin and Hallicourt, some 11 miles from the front. Thus Haig committed six errors: failing to keep track of his forces; leaving a portion of his line undefended; failing to concentrate his forces at the vital point; exposing two flanks; keeping a vital reinforcement three hours march from the front and failing to review his plans.⁴⁹⁹ 1 Division had been ordered to move to Corps reserve on 28 August.⁵⁰⁰ This gap was noted by Prior and Wilson who claim

499 As footnote 497.

500 1 Division operation order No. 108, General Staff war diary in WO 95/1229/2.

that both Gough and Haig agreed to close it,⁵⁰¹ yet by 4 September it was still in the line and the war diary noted:

‘The Corps Commander came in the afternoon and held a conference at 1st Division HQ at which the plan of operation was considerably modified.’⁵⁰² The 1 Division stayed between 7th and 15 Divisions. This left Haig with no reserves. There had been a general understanding that the XI Corps and 28 Division (later assigned to I Corps)⁵⁰³ would form the reserves but by 23 September H. M. Montgomery the XI Corps BGGS noted that:

‘No written orders have yet been received regarding the next move of the XIth Corps ...’ but he issued draft orders in case XI Corps was ordered to support the attack on the 24th.⁵⁰⁴ XI Corps had until then been under the direct control of French and his failure to release them in time to support the attack, despite Haig’s entreaties, ultimately led to French’s dismissal.⁵⁰⁵ In the event, as Lloyd describes, Haig attempted to resolve the question of the Reserves with French on 18 September and failed, French fearing that Haig’s determination to commit all the available forces would result in their destruction and apparently wishing to limit the strength of Haig’s attack. The Reserves (21 and 24 Divisions) had to march from 6 pm on 24 September to 6 am on the morning of the battle, when, without rest and few maps, they were flung straight into the battle from which they retreated on 26 September.⁵⁰⁶

The plan had several other limitations: it had no timetable save that of the bombardment and gas release. It did not explain how Corps would cooperate with each other or the artillery; how the artillery would see through the

501 Prior and Wilson, cite no references for p. 106.

502 1 Division General Staff war diary in WO 95/1229/3.1.

503 28 Division was warned of an impending move on 23 September 1915 in the form of XXI Corps Operational Order No 60. First Army ordered them to Merville the next day, while they were still part of the GHQ reserve. War diary, 28 Division General Staff, WO 95/2268/4.1.

504 24 Division Operation reports, Loos in WO 158/261.

505 Lloyd, *Loos*, p. 172.

506 Lloyd, *Loos*, pp. 89-93, 163.

smoke so as to be able to fire 'on hostile troops'; or how the skirmishers and MG crews could be

pushed forward to mislead the enemy and to find out at once if he shows any signs of weakening'
protected from asphyxiation, see through the smoke, or communicate with their commanders. The plan also ignores training, resupply or field engineering. The potential for confusion was evident.⁵⁰⁷

The second conference at Army level occurred on 6 September. Haig gave a succinct overview of the international military situation, relations with the French, the overall plan and the availability and likely times of arrival of enemy troops. But he gave no troop figures for the critical first 24 hours (wherein a counter-attack would be mounted) and those for the first 48 hours varied between 78,000 and 104,000. But while Haig proposed no timetable of the advance of his troops, he nevertheless advised, Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Anderson K.C.B., K.C.I.E., the new Indian Corps Commander, that any advance by the Indian Corps

'would arrive at a point where they would be held up'.⁵⁰⁸
Evidently Haig had some private estimate of the speed of the First Army advance, the resistance it would likely meet and he predicted four points where this might occur: the first assumed only small inroads in the main German line, to be met by battalion-level attacks by troops from the rest billets and the second line within 3 hours. If the BEF supervened there would be brigade-level attacks on a line from Haisnes to Hulluch within an unspecified period. Haig thus implied that he believed that the BEF must advance more than 2 miles in 3 hours to avoid such attacks, but did not make this explicit to his Corps commanders or expect their plans to reflect this constraint.

507 Haig, Plan of operations in First Army General Staff, Operations, Loos, 28 August 1915 in WO 95/158/3.

508 First Army General Staff, Weekly reports August 1915 in WO 95/158/4.

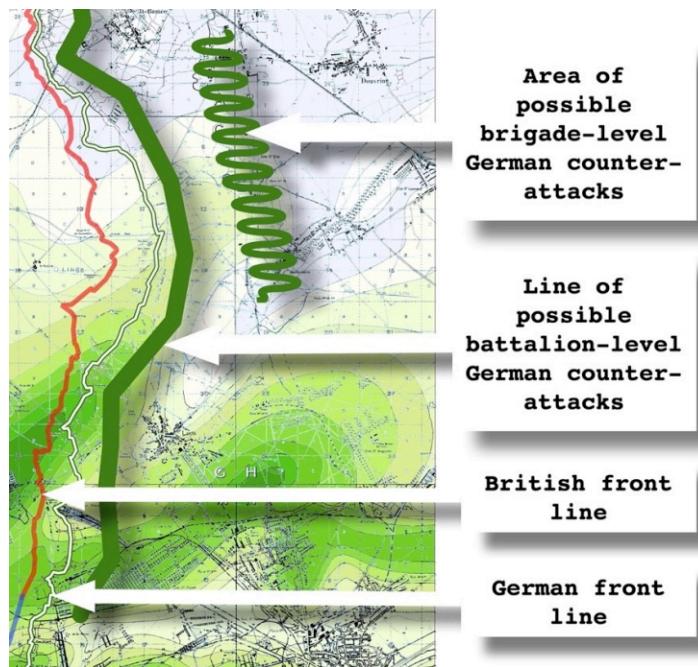
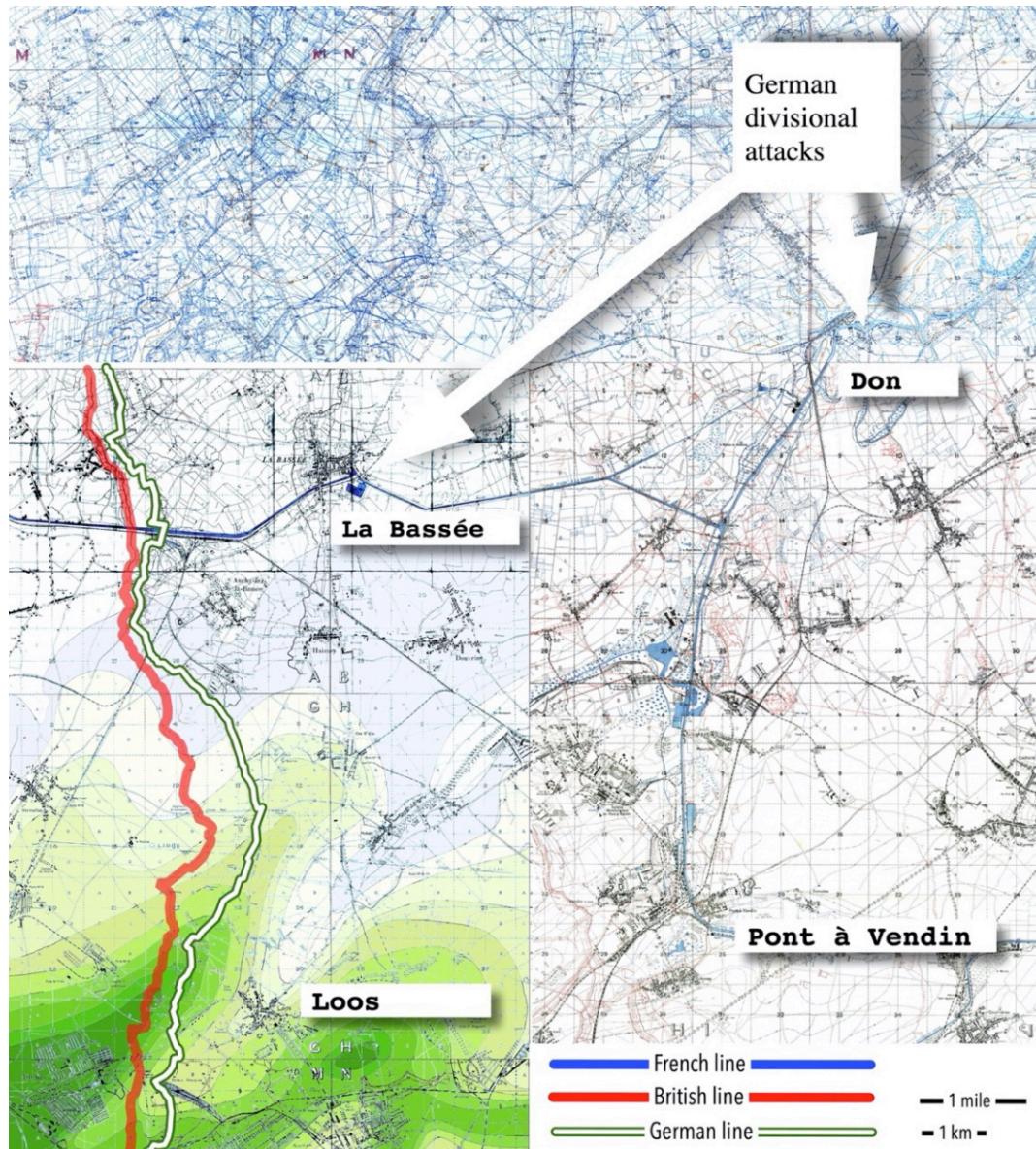


Figure 62 - Haig's predicted battalion- and brigade-level counter-attacks

Were these attacks also unsuccessful, he predicted that the Germans, influenced by the availability of the railway line, would launch a divisional counter-attack from troops entrained from Lille on La Bassée and Don. But such counter-attacks in the flank would not necessarily prevent the First Army from moving on Pont à Vendin which was Haig's objective and which would keep the BEF close to the French 10th Army. Haig imposed no requirement on his generals to cope with such attacks.



other of the Loos papers.⁵¹¹ Nor is one mentioned in the papers assembled for the later inquiry into the handling of the Reserves.⁵¹²

Despite Haig's advice to Anderson and his concern for counter-attacks, he made no attempt to plan for them. His focus lay entirely on breaking through the German lines, not on what to do next. Haig was aware that

‘forethought is necessary in order to have the requisite stores ... when required. ... difficulties will arise unless all matters connected with the advance are carefully thought out ... [and] control of traffic ... considered.’

But either to plan for such events or order someone else to do so (as he had with gas) was beyond him. No lower-level plan mentioned counter-attacks and Haig did not insist that it should.⁵¹³ Aspiration was all: Haig's unconcern for planning coherence can be seen from this and from his inability to manage his reserves.

While not mentioned in the war diary, a further conference was held by Haig about 18 September to agree operation order No 95 of the 19th which confirmed Butler's planning objectives but added a reference to Second Army's diversionary attack on Hooge.⁵¹⁴ This conference also discussed the shell-proofing of HQs, the use of flags for location marking by troops, mortars, smoke bombs, MGs, the distribution of gas cylinders and smoke candles. The need to maintain a constant advance was emphasised but counter-attacks were again not discussed.⁵¹⁵

511 As footnote 509.

512 WO 95/158/3.

513 Précis of conference of 6 September 1915, First Army General Staff Operation files 7 September 1915, Anon., Appendix D in WO 95/158/5.

514 Butler, G. S., First Army operation order No. 95, 19 September 1915, WO 95/158/6.1.

515 First Army weekly report on operations, 1st to 14th September 1915 in WO 95/158/4.

Gough and Rawlinson replied to Haig's plan with their own, Corps-level plans.

Gough's included an appreciation in which he identified a number of constraints.⁵¹⁶

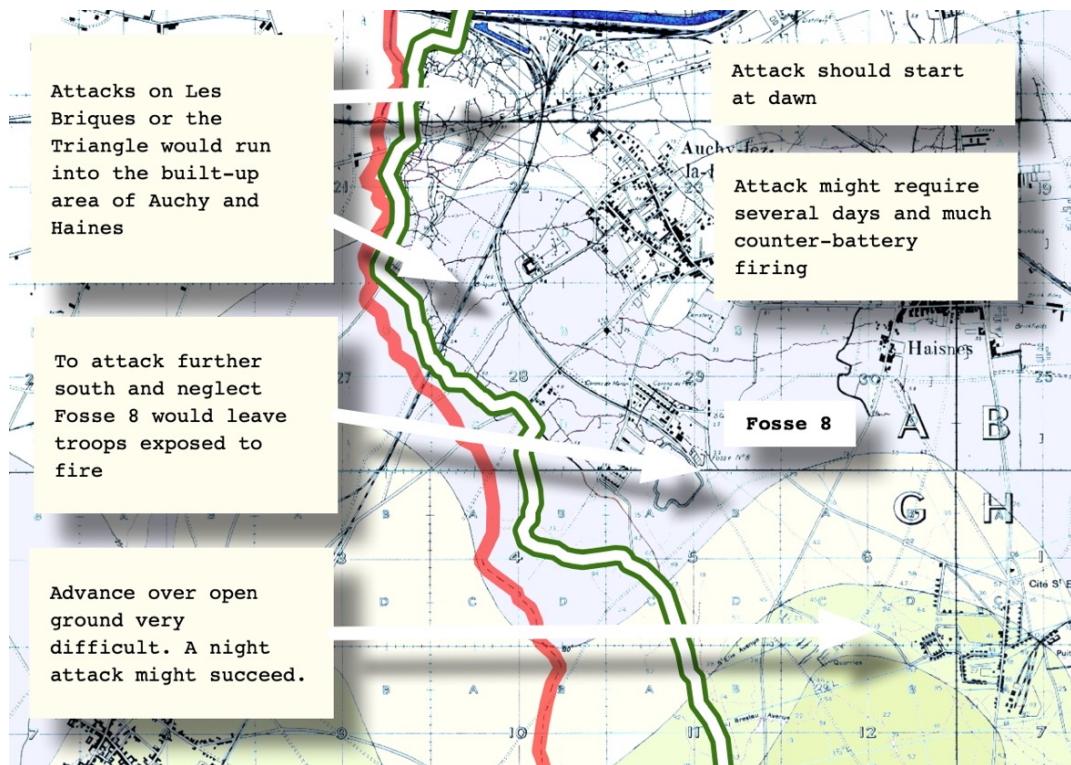


Figure 64 - Gough's appreciation

His plan was for the attack to be spearheaded by 9 Division on the Hohenzollern redoubt.

⁵¹⁶ 22 August 1915, Gough to Haig, First Army General Staff operations in WO 95/157/3.

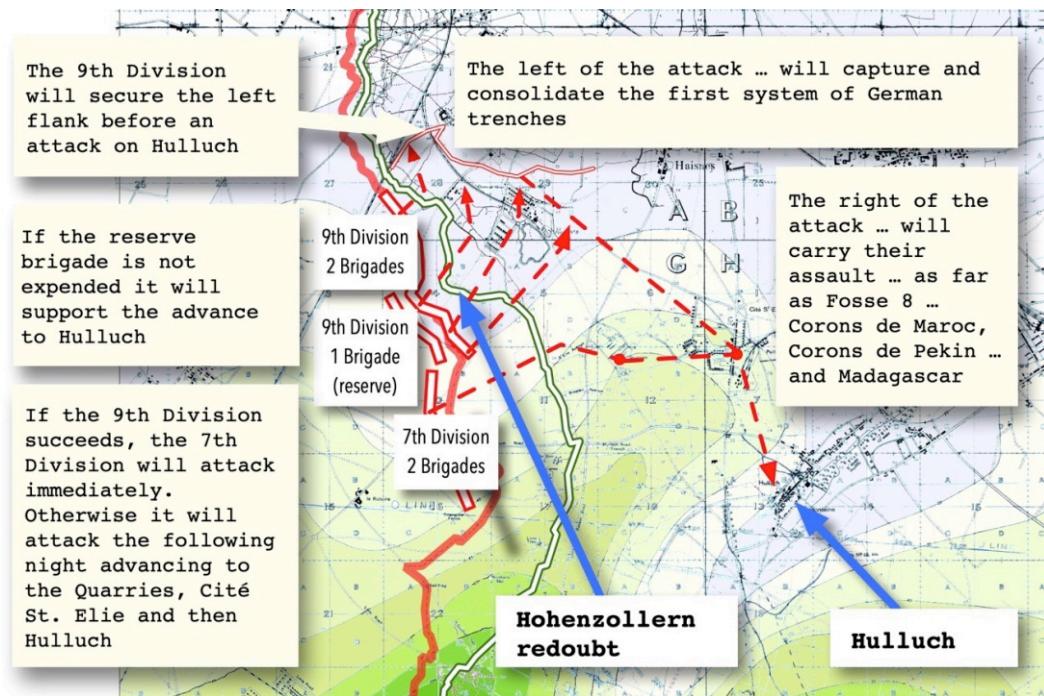


Figure 65 - Gough's plan

Gough's plan was a confusing mix of appreciation, caveat and proposal. It also exhibited a number of problems: the left-most Brigade of 9 Division would have to take the Hohenzollern redoubt and the right-hand one Fosse 8. If both Brigades succeeded and they created a defended left flank quickly enough, the right-hand Brigade would then have to turn sharply south-east to advance on Hulluch, which in the confusion of a battle could disorient them, disrupt the artillery support and expose a left flank as far as Hulluch, whose defence would progressively deplete the force. What was to happen if the left Brigade were slow to take the redoubt was not mentioned. Gough also proposed attacks from Givenchy and even Aubers Ridge, which would have diluted the limited artillery support available. He saw no particular role for the artillery other than bombarding trenches, cutting wire, counter-battery work and general offensiveness and placed little reliance on the use of gas, though he was concerned that troops did not attack through it asking ...

‘whether our men should advance with ... respirators on ... rather than waiting till the air is altogether clear again’

Insofar as Gough made conditional statements, his plan recognised the uncertainty of the situation and his inexperience:

‘it is impossible to put forward very definite proposals for attack, as so much would depend on how far the consequences of our capture of Fosse No. 8 might spread.’

Rawlinson’s plan was more explicit but equally unfocussed. His plan acknowledged the three lines of defence the Germans had constructed together with the extra defences around Loos itself.⁵¹⁷

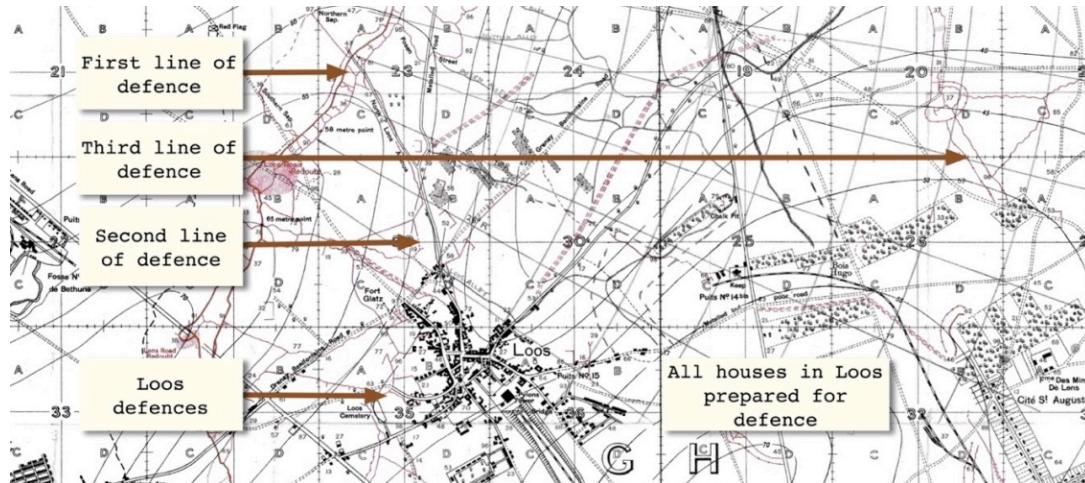


Figure 66 - Loos defences

He appreciated that the Loos’ position impeded artillery observation since the field of view was narrow.

517 22 August 1915, Rawlinson to Haig, IV Corps General staff war diary in WO 95/711/21/2.

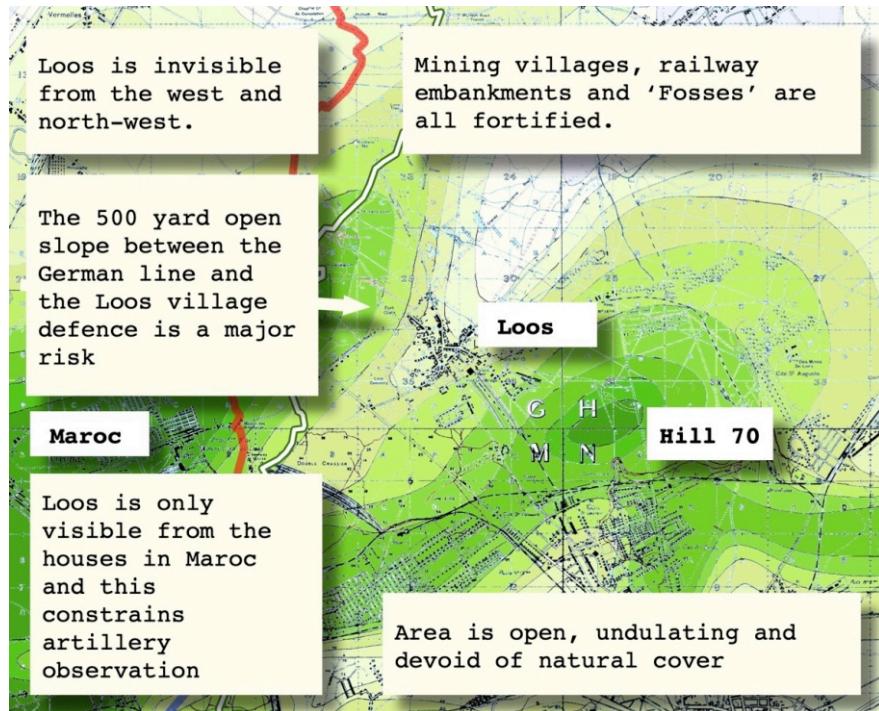


Figure 67 - Rawlinson's appreciation

The trenches shown on the map descending the eastern slope of the Loos-Hulluch ridge were invisible from the British positions and so would have been a problem for any Corps artillery attempting to use indirect fire. He divided the attack into three parts.

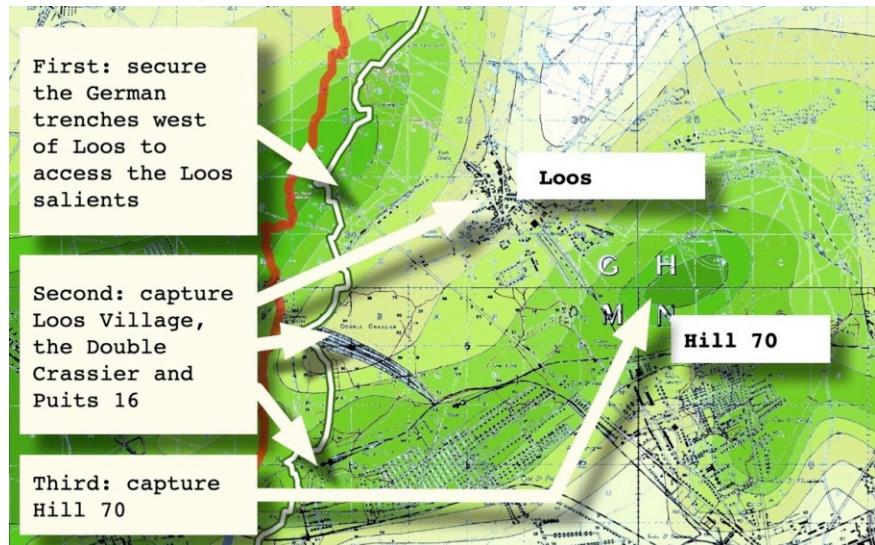


Figure 68 - Rawlinson's outline plan

The trench lines were 150-200 yards apart. Securing them required that the wire be cut by artillery and that hidden saps be dug secretly to minimise the

time in which the troops were exposed before entering the enemy trenches.

Feint attacks would be made against the Double Crassier and Puits 16.

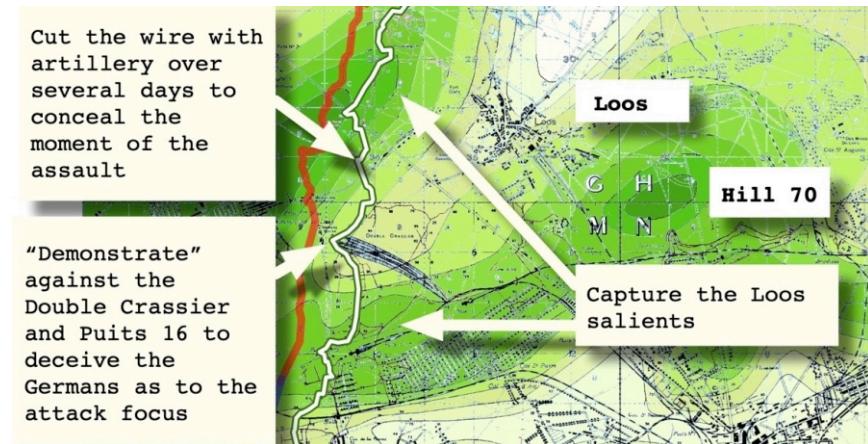


Figure 69 - Stage 1 - Capture the Loos salients

Once the salients were captured Rawlinson proposed simultaneous attacks on both the village and the Double Crassier. He would move troops: the 14 Division would take over from 15 Division and the 1 Division would move 'west of the Lawe river'.

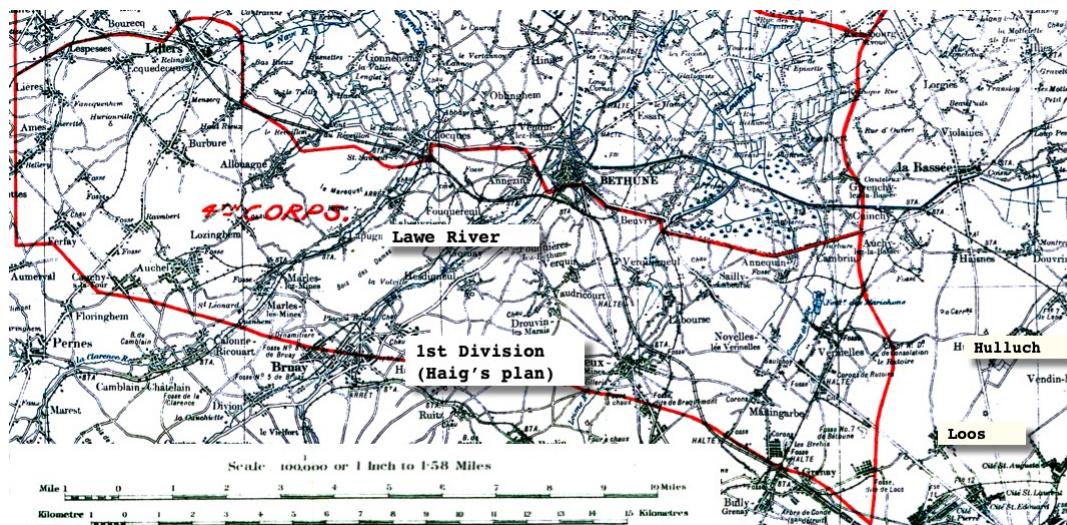


Figure 70 - The relocations of the 1st Division

This shows that Rawlinson like Haig, expected to use the 1 Division as a reserve. Rawlinson never specified its location, but the idea persisted: at the conference of 27 August he noted

I Div[ision] in Corps reserve and 4 Division again behind I Army in

reserve'.⁵¹⁸

This exposed the problem discussed on page 154. From the map of the forming-up areas it is evident that Rawlinson initially planned an attack by two divisions with one in reserve.⁵¹⁹ He named the two attacking divisions as the 15th and 47th and the supporting Division was presumably the 1st but he chose not to reflect this on the map.

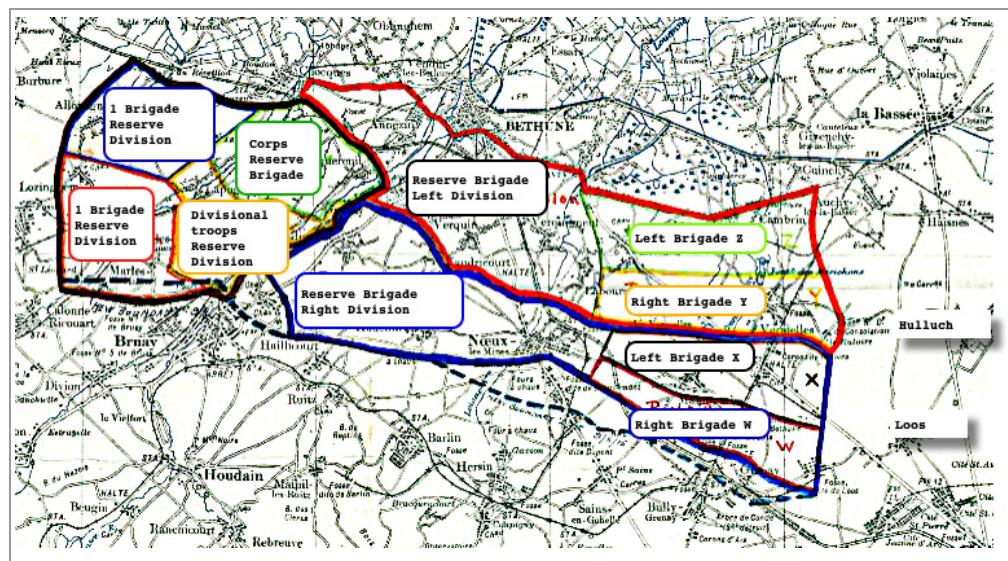


Figure 71 - IV Corps forming-up areas

The attack would be prepared: by the artillery cutting the wire at intervals in the first and second German lines some ten days before the assault; by the digging of new trenches and sapping forward where the front line was only 250 yards distant. Guns would be hidden in fosses and buildings to destroy MG nests at short range from the moment of the assault. Troops would be covered by the buildings at Fosse 7 de Béthune and four new communication trenches.

518 WO 95/711/2, IV Corps General Staff War diary, Rawlinson's notes of the Conference of the 21st September.

519 See page 147.

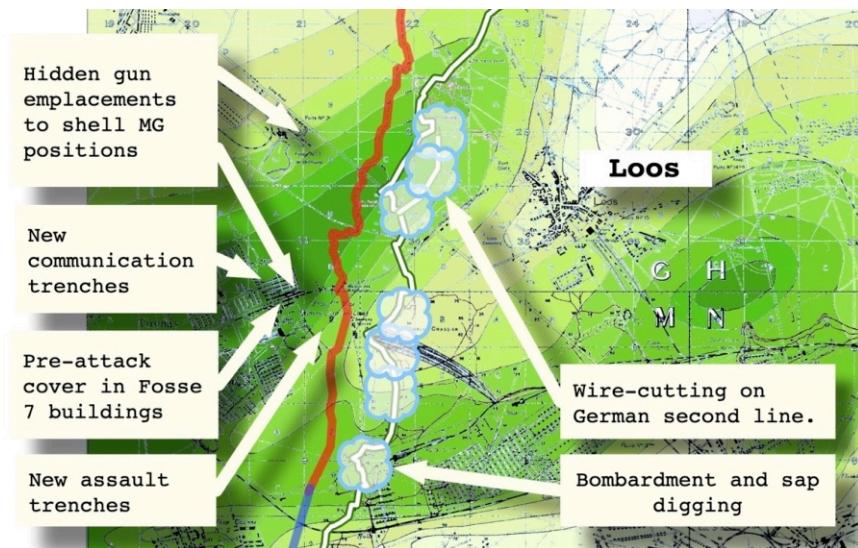


Figure 72 - IV Corps preparation

The attack would be made by two columns, each of Brigade strength, advancing on a two-company front, supported by the other companies of the same battalion and followed by a further battalion. The role of 47 Division in the attack would be clarified by its GoC (Major-General C. St. L. Barter) in another plan. But at this point Rawlinson the planner was overtaken by Rawlinson the Camberley Instructor. Rather than a single plan whose merits could be assessed and used as a basis by others, he proposed three mutually-exclusive alternatives:

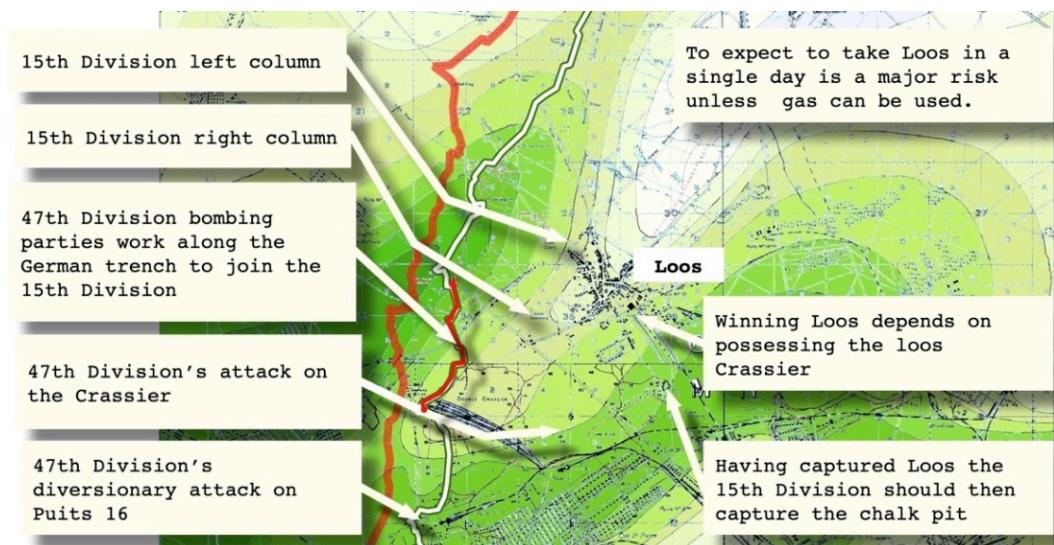


Figure 73 - Attack - Rawlinson's first approach - rush the village

Alternatively, having captured the German lines, 15 Division could spend up to 10 days sapping forward the last 500 yards until it could rush the village, losing all momentum and risking a German counter-attack in the meantime.

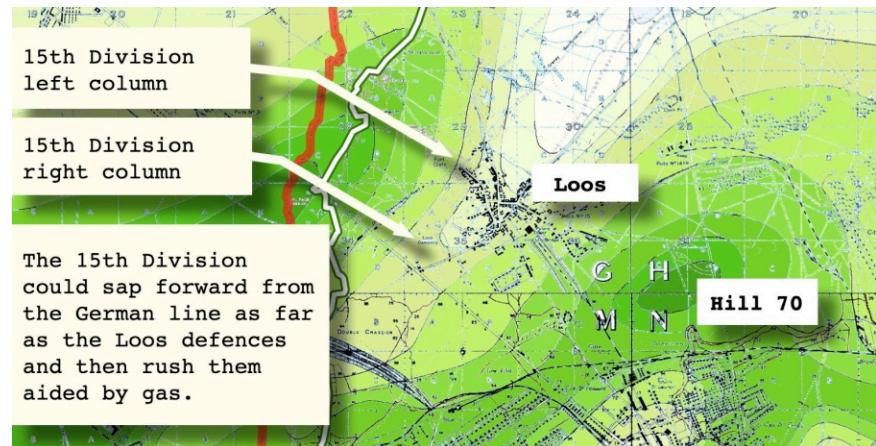


Figure 74 - Attack - Rawlinson's second approach - sap forward

Lastly, given the relatively light defences to the north and north-east of Loos, he proposed to attack at these points. But there were risks of exposing flanks unless the opposing artillery could be neutralised.

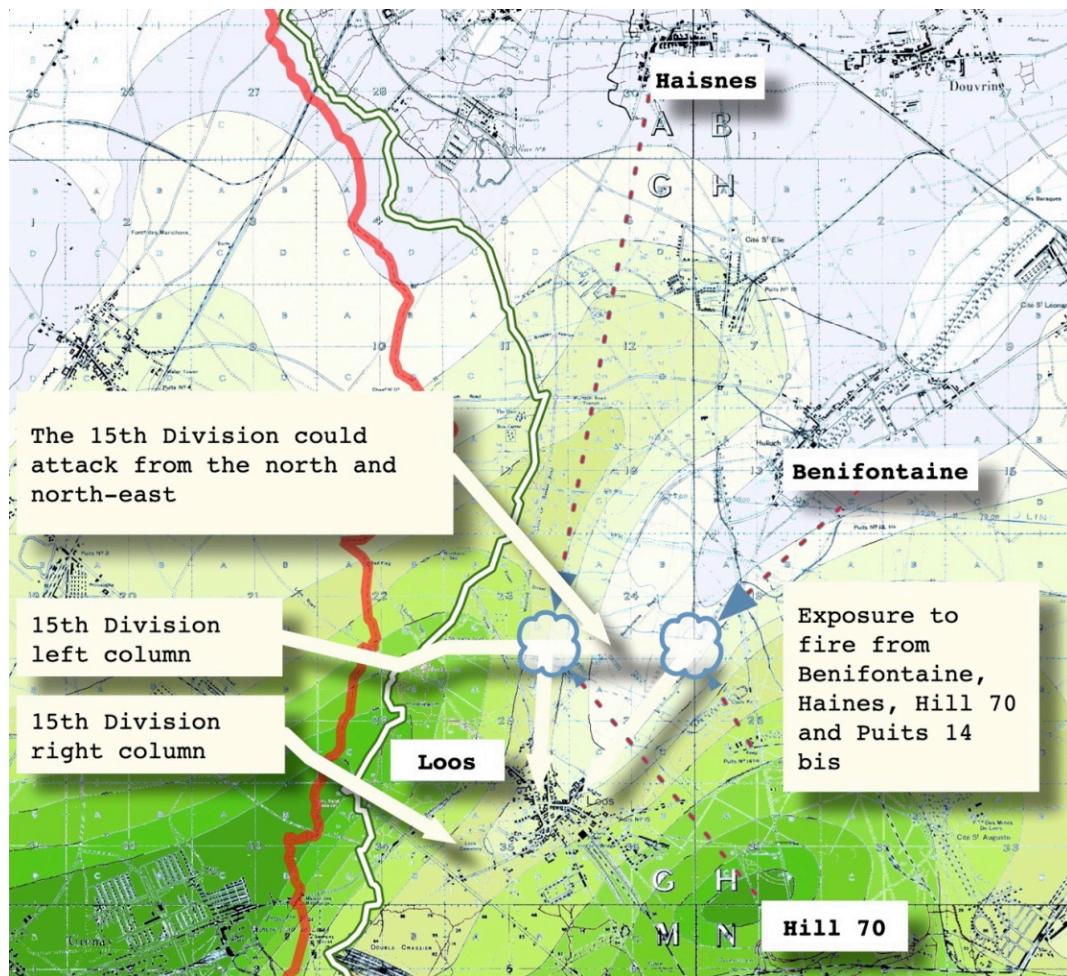


Figure 75 - Attack - Rawlinson's third approach, from the north and north-east

The attack could start in the late afternoon, but Rawlinson preferred the earlier in the day so that troops could consolidate and be prepared for a night-time counter-attack. A draft artillery plan would be submitted.⁵²⁰

Weapons continued to be a problem: hand-grenades were known to be in short supply and 15 Division needed to be trained in their use.⁵²¹ The available grenades were either the 'Battye' type or home-made.⁵²² Rawlinson

‘trusted therefore that an ample supply of home-made bombs will be available’,

⁵²⁰ See page 168.

⁵²¹ The Mills grenade was not then available.

⁵²² *The History of the Corps of Royal Engineers*, Volume V, p. 456.

which shows how little faith he had in his munitions supply or his ability to command it. He doubted the value of using gas in the first attack since it would require great effort to prepare and might be better used later for the assault on Loos village.

Rawlinson held several IV Corps conferences concerning Loos. The first was on 26 August which noted the problems of advancing behind gas and smoke (without proposing a solution), the divisional objectives, the need for persistent advance, wire destruction and bombardment of strong points.⁵²³ His later conferences only exposed a failure to plan. That of 21 September attempted to manage how cavalry and infantry would share roads (they wouldn't - the infantry would stay clear) and that it would be 'desirable' for ammunition to have been moved 48 hours before the attack. The notes ended with exhortations concerning the flagging of roads to aid the orientation of troops, the bridging of trenches and the indicating of gaps in the wire. Who was to do this, when and with what, was left undefined.⁵²⁴ Rawlinson's notes for the conference mentioned that ...

‘Experience shows that the first rush is everything and not much progress made afterwards’

... and having noted that ...

‘Careful preparation is necessary in order to hold onto what we have got’
... failed to ensure that this happened.

4.8 Overall Approach

The overall approach as expressed through the various conferences was that the attack would be preceded by a 4-day bombardment along a frontage of six miles.⁵²⁵ Wire would be cut by field guns and the heavier pieces would

523 WO 95/711/2.

524 As footnote 523.

525 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 136, and see also page 134.

destroy the enemy trenches, artillery, MG positions, fortified houses and redoubts.⁵²⁶

The British attack would be in two parts: real and diversionary. The diversionary attacks would be made near the canal by Plumer's Second Army to prevent the Germans realising where the real attack would be made until the last moment. The real attack would be made by six divisions of Haig's First Army supported by 114 heavy guns and 670 field guns.⁵²⁷ Once the infantry had broken through the German lines, the cavalry would be free to press through.⁵²⁸ Two Cavalry Corps were to be ready to exploit this.⁵²⁹ The RFC would bomb the enemy railway junctions feeding the battle area, although the limited value of such attacks was noted given the ease with which repairs could be effected.⁵³⁰ It would also attempt to cooperate with battalion HQs, using a series of ground strips in arrow form showing the direction of a target.⁵³¹ The possibility of bombing the 'Tower Bridge' observation post in Loos was not mentioned.

4.9 Division-level planning

Responsibilities for planning at divisional level meandered between the divisional commander, his CoS and the CRA. While commanders might dominate planning at some moments as Capper did, most commanders ceded what would today be termed 'design control' to their CoS early in the process and brought them to corps conferences. Some like Barter appear to have had sufficient self-confidence and ability to remain closely-involved in the planning process throughout. Artillery support remained a matter of

526 As footnote 525.

527 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 135.

528 As footnote 527.

529 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 137.

530 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, pp. 141-142.

531 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol 2, p. 142.

negotiation since the divisional CRA had only limited artillery control and much depended on the corps CRA.

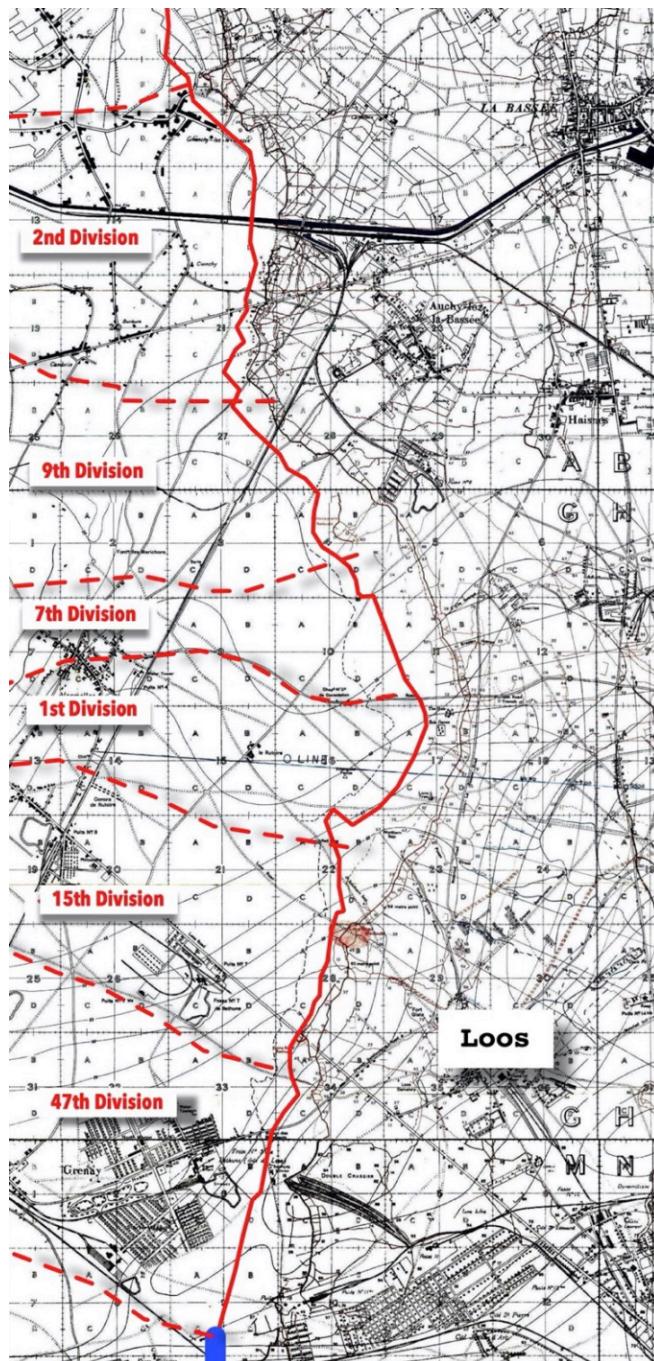


Figure 76 - Loos - First Army divisions

Battle planning was discussed at conferences by five of the six divisions to be engaged on the first day.

1 Division conferred on 26 August to be told they were in Corps reserve west of Noeux les Mines.⁵³² Following their re-establishment in the front line,⁵³³ they prepared for the forthcoming battle: a staff officer would advise each Brigade on preparations; that when the troops ahead had advanced, a new traffic management régime would obtain; how Small Arms Ammunition and bombs would be dumped and distributed; the location of Brigade HQs, provision of water and wire-cutting tools. They discussed position identification codes: unit ID, the position of ammunition, telegraph wiring and leaving the trench. But otherwise, 1 Division's experience showed: they came prepared with questions and points. They issued crisp conference notes:⁵³⁴

2. Decided that G.O.C. 1st and 2nd Brigades should each send a Staff Officer daily into his area, who will be responsible for its preparation as a Battle Front, but in all cases working through G.O.C. troops in the area.

Brigadier of 1st and 2nd Brigade to report progress of preparation of their front daily.

The ability of the staff to specify conditional orders varied. On 18 September Haig (concerned that the wind might be unfavourable) proposed to French that:

- If the wind favoured the discharge the attack would go ahead as planned
- If the wind would inhibit the gas discharge but the weather was otherwise fair and the attack could no longer be delayed, the use of the gas should be delayed until the 26th but on the 25th one Division each from the IV and I Corps would attack the Loos salient and the Hohenzollern redoubt.
- If the weather on the 26th was not fair, then the main advance will be postponed to the 27th.⁵³⁵

Robertson replied the same day.

'The infantry attack will take place on the 25 September'⁵³⁶

⁵³² Draft of operation orders for discussion at conference at 5 p.m. A. A. Montgomery, 1 Division General Staff war diary of 26 August 1915 in WO 95/1229/3.2.

⁵³³ See page 137.

⁵³⁴ Longridge, Conference notes of 5 September 1915 in WO 95/1229/3.2

⁵³⁵ Haig to French in Operation files, First Army of 18 September 1915 in WO 95/158/5.

⁵³⁶ Robertson to Haig in Operation files, First Army of 18 September 1915 in WO 95/158/5.

Haig did not circulate this critical constraint, which essentially reduced his decision to whether to use gas or not.

IV Corps, unknowingly sent a conditional order on 21 September: in the event that the wind inhibited the use of gas, the imperative to rush the enemy would be ignored and a staged, bite-and-hold' attack would be made by 15 Division with demonstrations by 1 and 47 Divisions. Their attack would be at a time

‘which will depend on the ... progress [of] the French ...’

- Should the attack of the French succeed 1 and 7 Divisions would attack and 47 Division would demonstrate.
- Should the attack of the French fail, 1 and 47 Divisions would attack after dark.
- Should the wind improve during the 25th, the three divisions would attack on the 26th.⁵³⁷

Quite how the divisions could know the wind would improve during the 25th such as to delay the attack of the 16 Division was not clarified and Lieut-Col. A. J. Longridge of 1 Division further confused matters with the notes he took at a conference on 24 September:

- If on the 25th the French want the BEF to attack, then the 9 Division will attack at dawn, 15 Division will attack at 10 am and 1 and 47 Divisions will demonstrate.
- If on the 26th the wind is favourable, the attack will progress as planned otherwise 1 Division will attack after a bombardment and 47 and 15 Divisions will demonstrate.

Fortunately, officers' imperfect grasp of temporal logic was never exposed.

Conditional order writing was never taught at Camberley, nor was the writing of logical expressions.⁵³⁸ There is no evidence that Montgomery discussed his memo with anyone outside IV Corps of which he was BGGS. Coordination between Corps, with the GoC First Army and the French were all put at risk by Haig's failure to provide a lead and such unthinking order-writing.

Longridge eventually issued the 1 Division plan on 18 September without conditional clauses.⁵³⁹ Two Brigades would attack and a special "Green's

⁵³⁷ Montgomery, A. A., memo of 21 September 1915, 1st Division General staff war diary, WO 95/1229/3.2.

⁵³⁸ FSR I (1914), Section 124 states 'Anything of [a] conditional nature is to be avoided'.

⁵³⁹ Longridge, 1st Division operation order 110, 18 September 1915, WO 95/1229/3.1.

Force" would act as a reserve, prepare for a counter-attack and, if one occurred, would be supported by a barrage. Each Brigade was allotted a number of primary objectives.

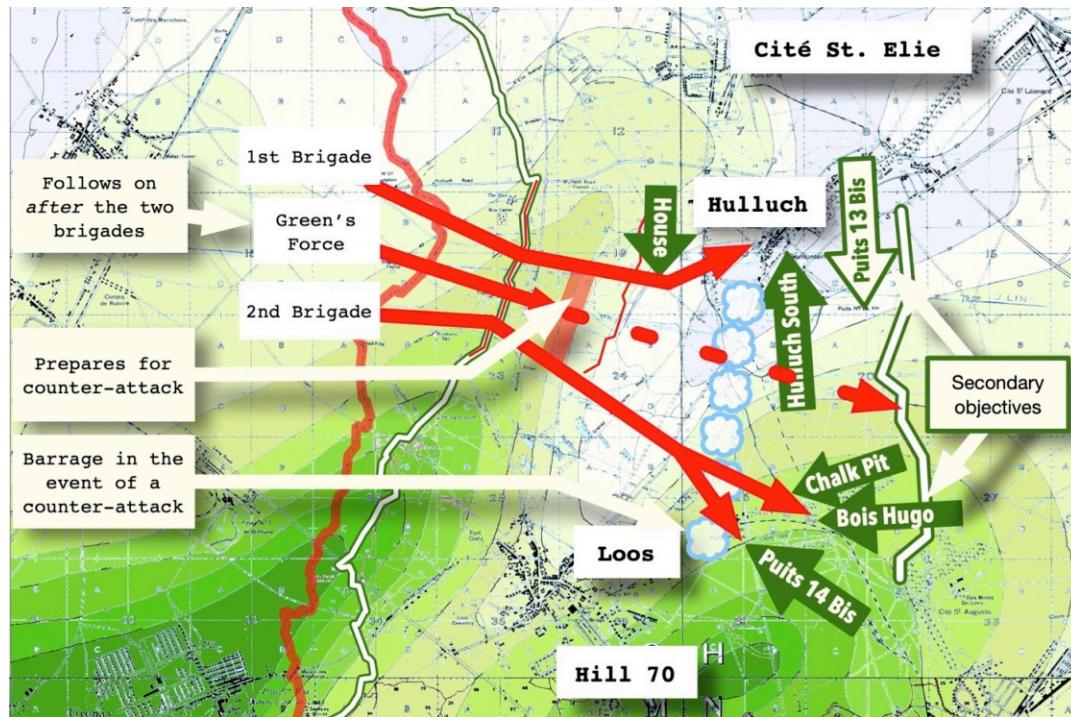


Figure 77 - 1st Division operation order 110

Should no counter-attack occur, the three forces would take the secondary objectives. Of the six BEF divisions in the battle 1 Division was the only one to prepare for a counter-attack. The only other division to consider the possibility of a counter-attack, 2 Division, dismissed it:

‘... the enemy is to be engaged vigorously in order to prevent him withdrawing troops for a counter-attack.’

On 26 August, 7 Division was asked by Brigadier-General Alexander Stanhope Cobbe (BGS I Corps) to reconnoitre the ground and submit proposals for a plan of attack. He described the object of the main attack by 9 Division (Hohenzollern redoubt) and the objectives of 7 Division (the trenches ahead and then the Quarries and St. Elie). Cobbe's request was well-structured and it was easy to see if it had been satisfied. It was not.⁵⁴⁰

⁵⁴⁰ WO 95/591/4.

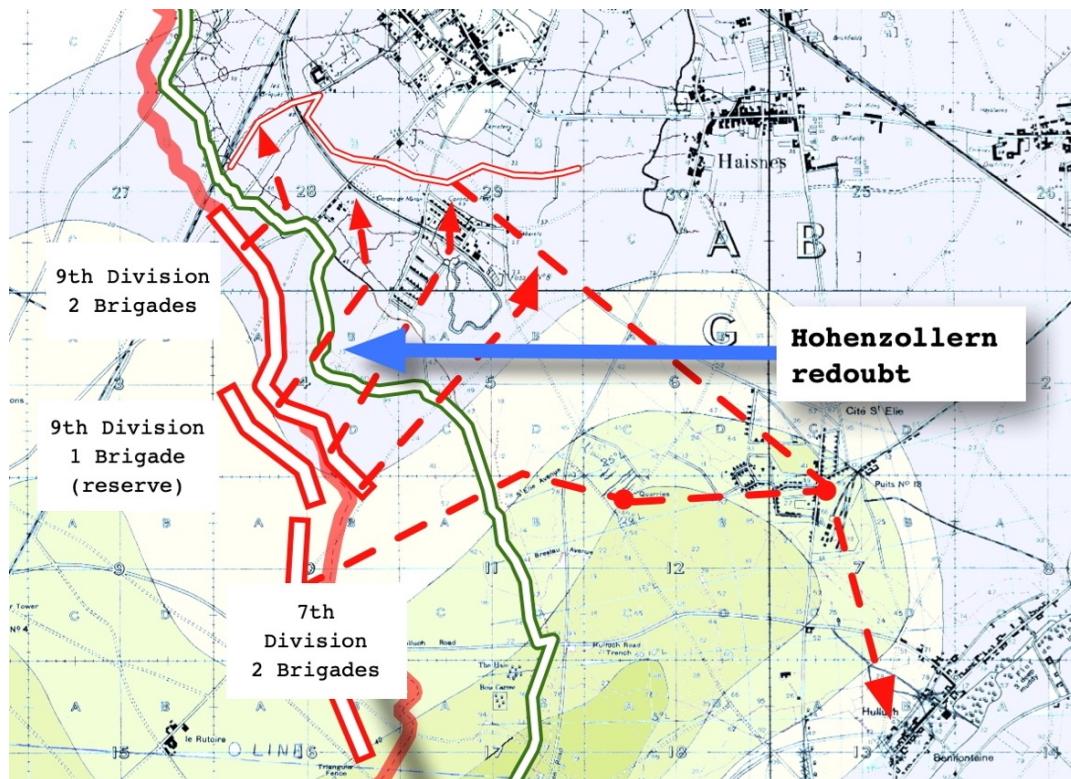


Figure 78 - I Corps request for proposal

On 28 August Gathorne-Hardy (Capper's CoS) sent Brigadier-General J. G. Rotton (Capper's BGRA) some notes by Capper asking for ideas to support artillery-infantry cooperation. Capper envisaged 3 kinds of attack: a general rout of the Germans; the capture of the Hohenzollern redoubt or a night attack.⁵⁴¹ Sending notes in this manner could have been a major step forward. Rather than have artillery chiefs bicker over control, as had happened just before the start of Neuve Chapelle, Capper was apparently exploiting his BGRA by posing a set of cases and then assessing the answers. In practice however Capper's three cases serve mainly to illustrate his incomprehension of the battle's context and his failure to follow a clear order which asked for a 'Plan of attack'. Cobbe expected Capper to decide but Capper failed to do this. Rotton had no basis against which to offer an answer.

⁵⁴¹ Gathorne Hardy, Notes for the BGRA from the conference of 28 August 1915 in WO 95/1638/4.2.

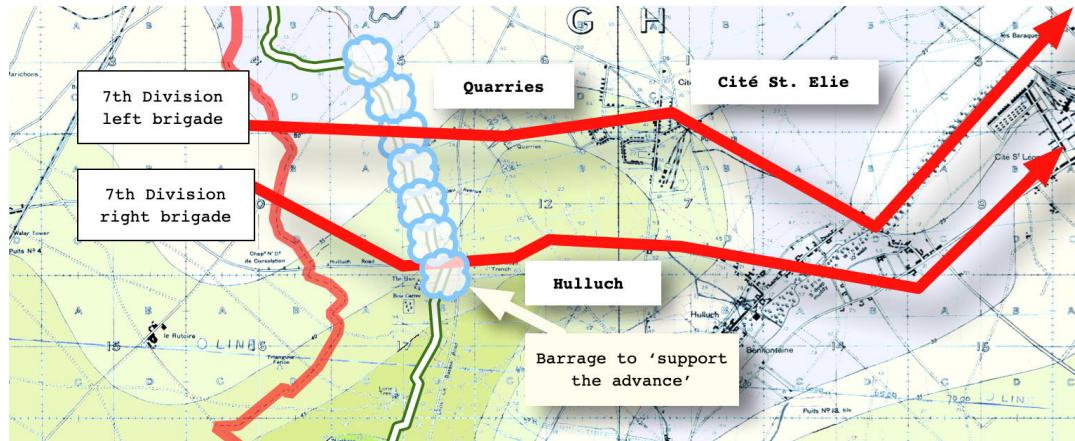


Figure 79 - Capper's first case - the general rout

In Capper's first case his objective was 'the enemy's line of guns', but he did not show their positions and the probability that the Germans would have obligingly created so Napoleonic a target was slim.

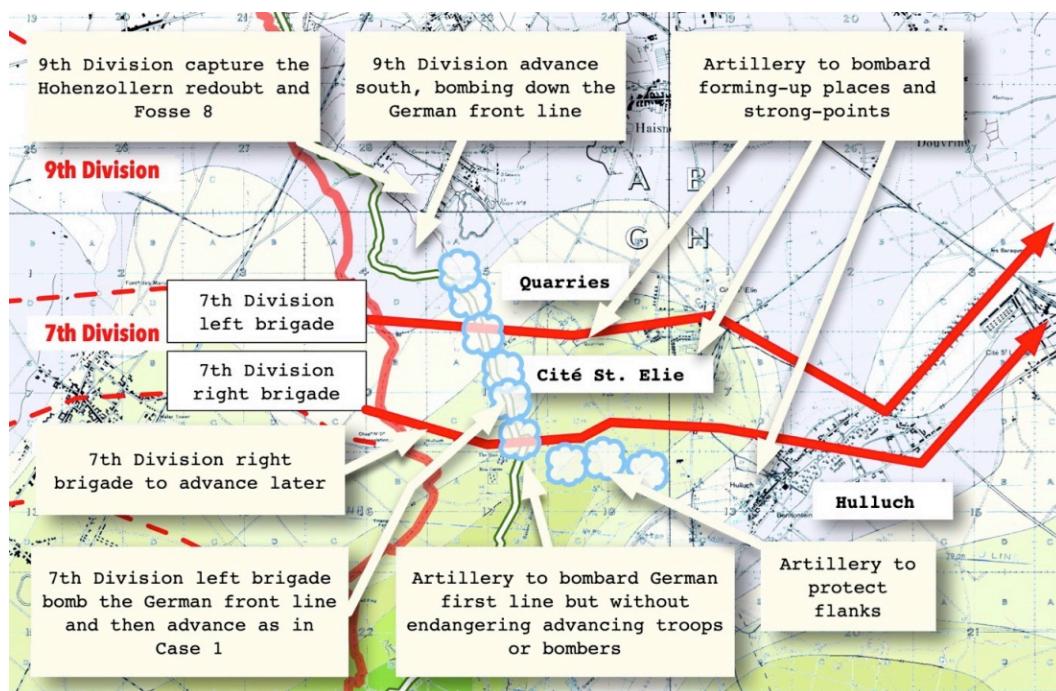


Figure 80 - Capper's second case - support the 9 Division

In Capper's second case he assumed that 9 Division would take the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse 8. Implicitly his intention was to coordinate with them, but he explained neither how this would occur, nor how his divisional artillery's flanking fire would be coordinated with the 1 Division on his right. Once the left Brigade had cleared the front, the advance would continue as in the first case. Counter-attacks were not mentioned.

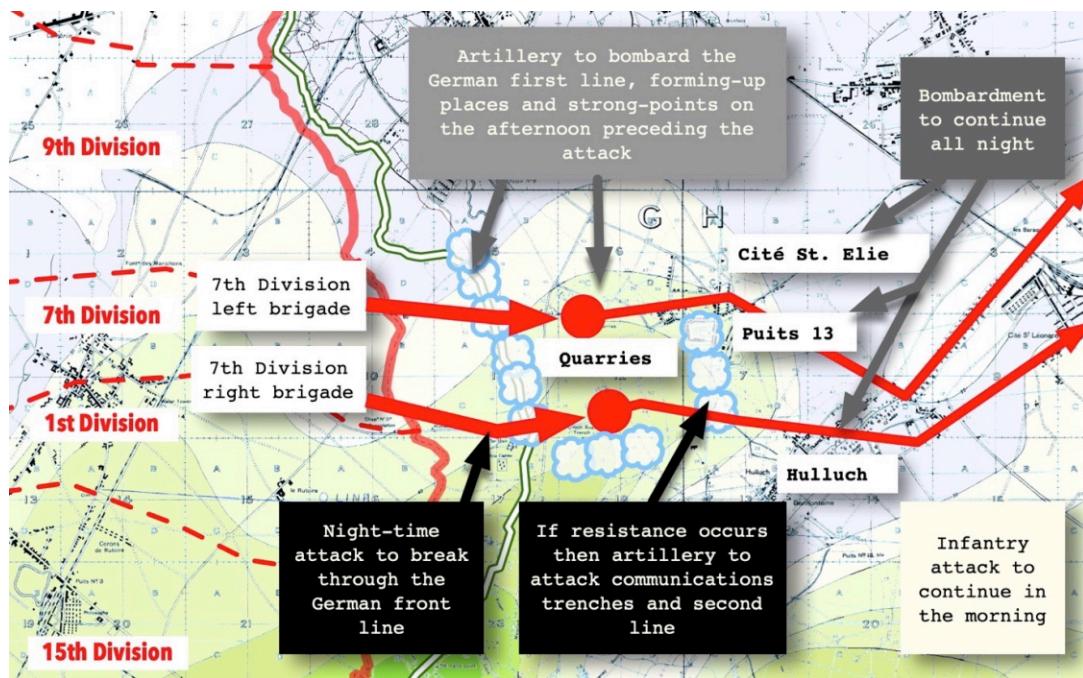


Figure 81 - Capper's third case - a night attack

By 1915 the BEF had devised a means of calling for artillery help in the event of an attack and it was reasonable to assume the Germans had too.

Notwithstanding this, Capper's third case assumed a heavy bombardment all afternoon followed by a night-time attack on the front line taking place in near silence:

By night Artillery will not fire until enemy offers serious fire, as it is intended to work as quietly as possible.

Should the Germans resist however, the artillery would lay down a barrage 'lifting to correspond with the infantry advance'. Infantry would signal their position with rockets, if these could be obtained. No alternative was proposed were rockets not available.

Capper revised his ideas and wrote a further proposal. This too involved three choices: a rout of the Germans, a general advance and a night attack.⁵⁴² The general advance would

'of necessity probably be made in echelon from the left, each battalion advancing when its front is cleared'.

⁵⁴² Capper, T., Attack proposal of 31 August 1915 in WO 95/1733/2/2

Quite how they were to know that the front was 'cleared' and how this would not merely provide German machine gunners with better targets is not clear, but the survival of the idea of the echelon despite the experience of three battles is a testament to Capper's faith in Cléry:

'Thus the advance was made in echelons from the flank nearest the enemy'.⁵⁴³

Rotton replied on 18 September with a 72-hour programme of wire-cutting and bombardment of trenches to which a further 24-hour programme would be added later. His reply owed much to Birch's I Corps Artillery Order No. 1 of 17 September. He said nothing of Capper's three cases, any artillery-infantry cooperation or of field guns in the front line. Rotton would do what he knew he could do and no more.⁵⁴⁴

Some serious discussions presumably followed because on 21 September Capper returned an extensive and well-structured operation order No. 43 with appreciation, plan and appendices under Gathorne-Hardy's signature.⁵⁴⁵ It described the front, the enemy unit to be attacked, the neighbouring divisions and the attacking force. The overall objectives had extended from the Quarries and St. Elie to a line from Meurchin to Pont-à-Vendin.

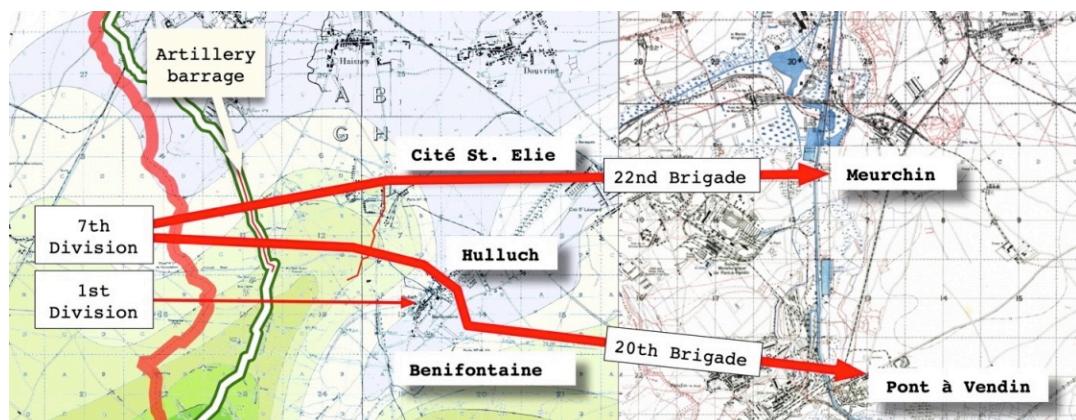


Figure 82 - 7 Division overall plan

543 Cléry, p. 70.

544 Wynter, 7 Division artillery operation order No 1 of 18 September 1915 in WO 95/1638/4.2.

545 Gathorne Hardy, Operation order 43, 7 Division General staff war diary in WO 95/1629/3.2.

The assault would be made by the 20 and 22 Brigades with the 21 Brigade in reserve. Each would have a mortar battery, an engineer company and an artillery Brigade. Cavalry and cyclists would stay with the reserve but were expected to be able to overtake the infantry and occupy the crossings before Meurchin and Pont à Vendin. How they would know this and how they would achieve this were not stated.

Artillery was planned using a timetable. Firstly the barrages,



Figure 83 - 7 Division timetable to 00:30 and 00:38 hours

... then the assault.

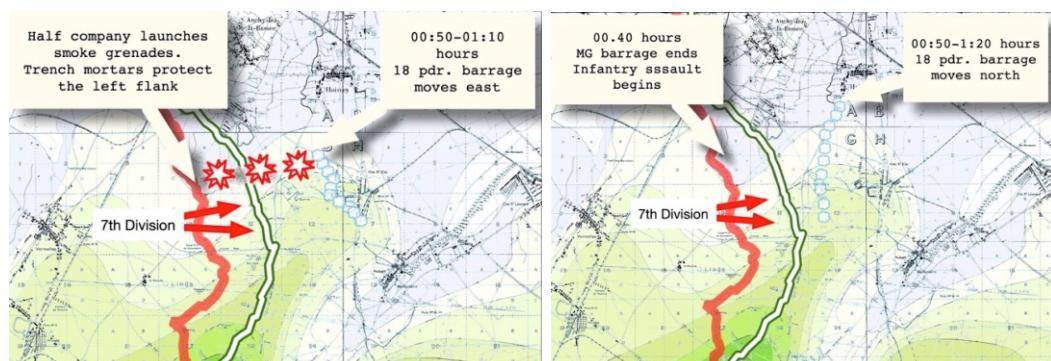


Figure 84 - 7 Division timetable to 01:20 hours

Should further 'obstructions' be detected they would be bombarded generally for 25 minutes and intensely for the following five minutes whereupon the troops would assault. The increased intensity of these last five minutes were expected to enable troops to gauge the assault moment. Minor obstructions were expected to be bombarded at the request of an FOO who would accompany the troops.

The HQs and observation stations were shown.

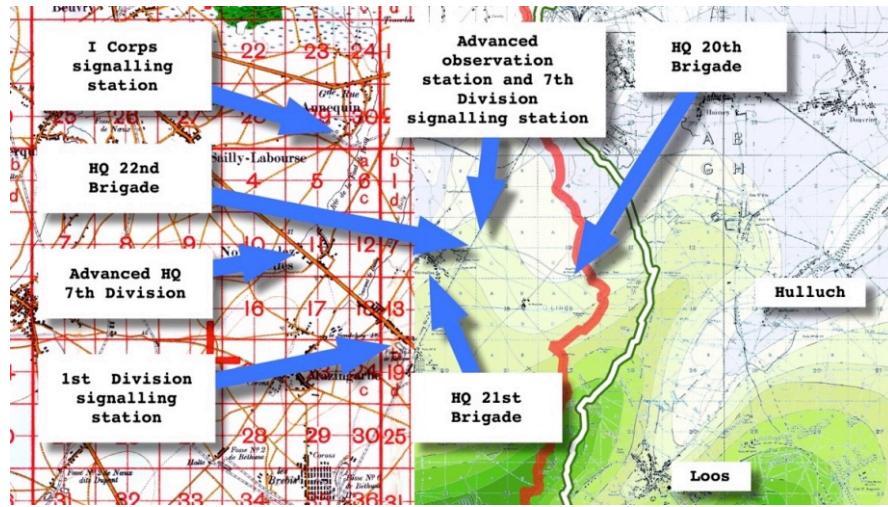


Figure 85 - HQs and observation stations

Even First Aid, ambulance and prisoner collection facilities were identified.

Prisoner interrogation was ignored.

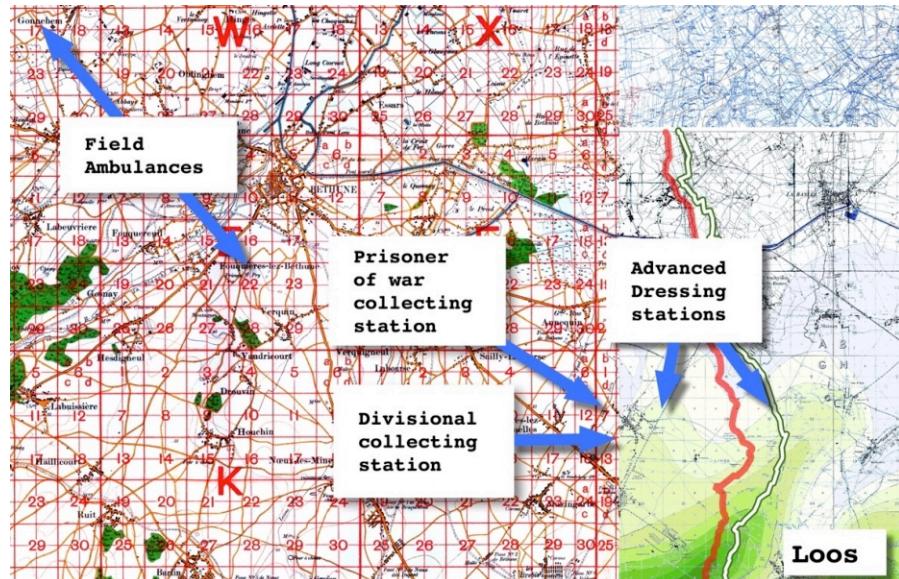


Figure 86 - 7 Division Medical and PoW facilities

The plan contents covered information on the enemy, the troops, the intention broken down by tasks, the attacking troops' positions and tasks, the artillery bombardment and details such as dress, trench management and HQ locations but not infantry-artillery or brigade-brigade cooperation. Reporting or communications, other than use of smoke candles as unit position indicators, were similarly ignored.

Capper officially announced Loos to 7 Division in what appears to be a conference paper of 18 September. It was exhortative

‘we are determined ... to exploit the chances offered to us’, offered no solution to any problem and followed Haig’s speech at the conference of 7 September.⁵⁴⁶

The 9 Division took notes at an I Corps Conference (presumably after 24 August and implying that Gough held at least one). It discussed the use of cylinder-borne gas in the main attack on the Railway and a subsidiary attack on ‘Duck’s Bill’.

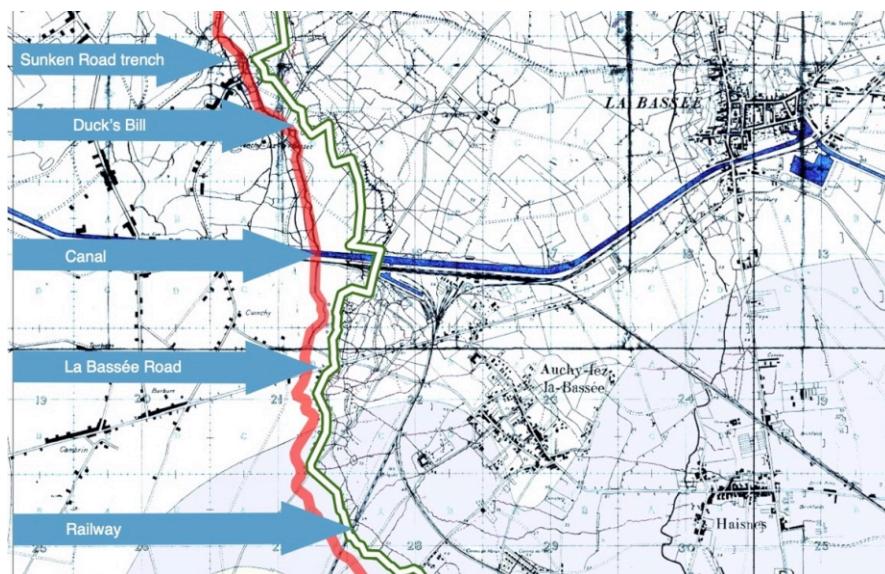


Figure 87 - I Corps attacks

The belief persisted that scouts could ‘go out to report any panic’ or ‘dig in machine guns’, despite the presence of gas and smoke. Practical issues concerning logistics, stores, ladders and ammunition were interspersed with echoes of 19th Century tactics:

horse artillery must be placed where they can go forward with the cavalry. Attendees were asked to study and report dispositions with reference to the plan of attack (whose plan was not stated), the front allotted, the battalion structure, command posts, use of trench mortars and MGs. Communications were ignored. The final question

Had any Division experience of burning grass with incendiary bombs?’

⁵⁴⁶ Montgomery, A. A., Draft of operation orders for discussion of 26 August 1915 in WO 95/1629/3/4 and 7 Division General staff war diary, WO 95/1629/3/1.

implied a degree of helplessness: there was time to experiment.⁵⁴⁷

The 47 Division was warned of the attack on 26 August in a memo from the IV Corps BGGS.⁵⁴⁸ This identified the objectives: Loos and Hill 70, the 4-day bombardment and the use of gas and use of smoke for flank defence. Artillery and the release of gas would be planned separately.

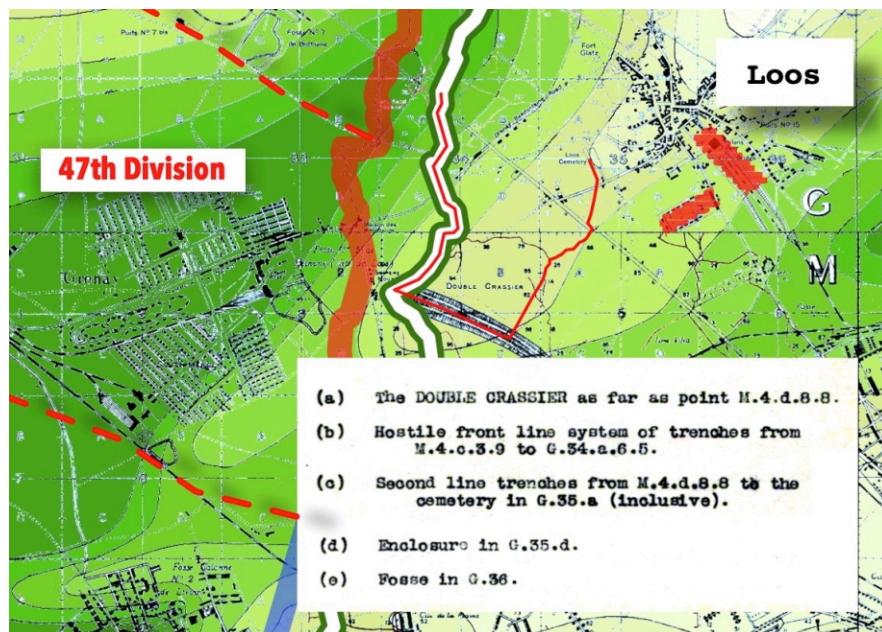


Figure 88 - 47 Division objectives

Its plan was expanded on 27 September by 'Instructions'.⁵⁴⁹ From 47 Division trenches (W2, W3) troops would advance east to the Double Crassier and Loos.

547 Notes for conference with *Appendices* of 13 August 1915 in WO 95/1733/2/3.

548 Anon., HRS 525, 47 Division General staff war diary in WO 95/2698/2.

549 Burnett-Hitchcock, 47 Division instructions of 5 September 1915 in WO 95/2698/3.

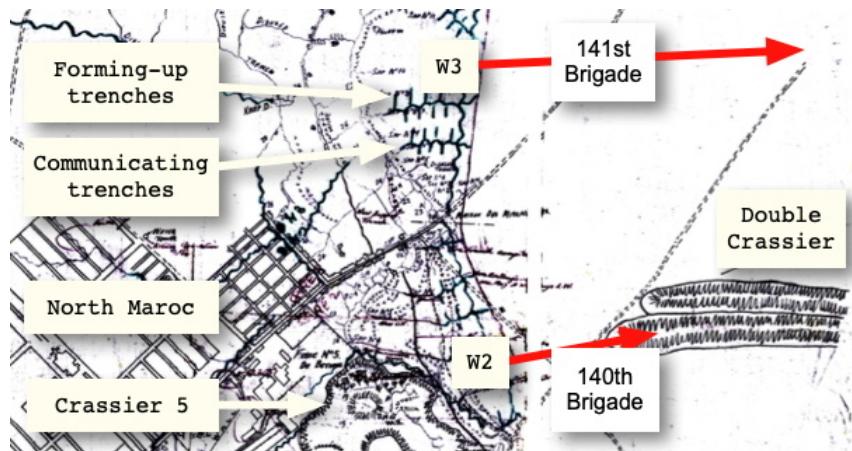


Figure 89 - 47 Division starting points

The Division conferred on 10 September, Rawlinson asked for plans to cover strongholds and a general advance over several days.⁵⁵⁰

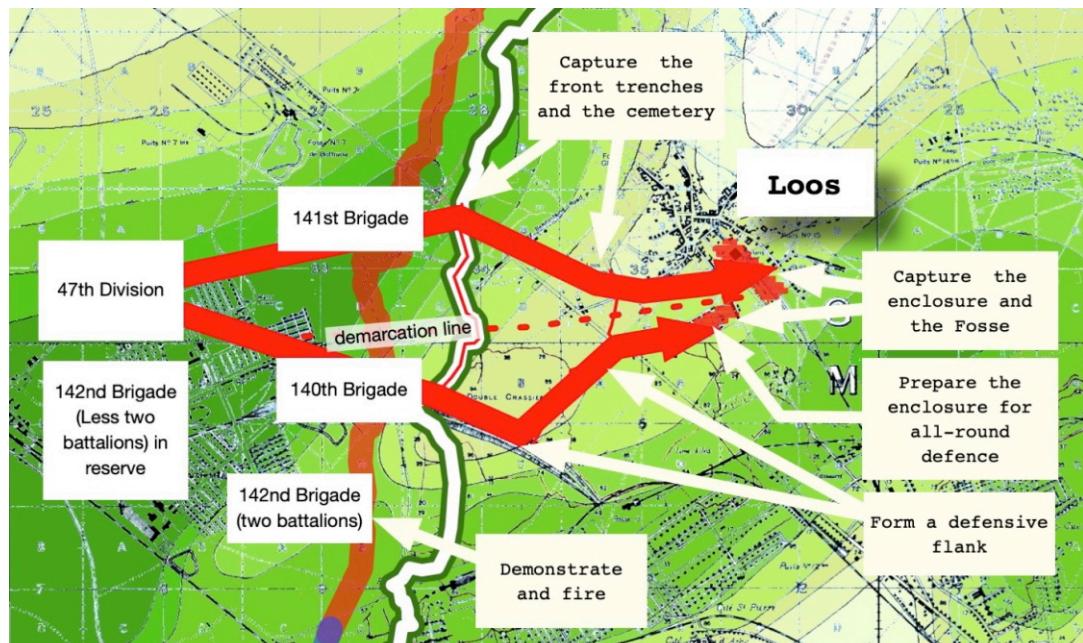


Figure 90 - 47 Division plan

Barter responded on 20 September with Operation order No. 19 identifying the context of the battle and the roles of the units, as well as such constraints as staying in touch with other divisions, consolidating positions taken, using special troops to overcome points of resistance, MG batteries, communications, mopping-up and reserves.⁵⁵¹ It listed the composition,

550 War diary, WO 95/2698/3.1

551 47 Division operation order No. 19 of 20 September 1915 in WO 95/2698/3.3.

starting points, objectives and timetable for the first 50 minutes of each Brigade. Positions captured were to be 'consolidated for defence' and communications trenches dug by the accompanying engineer units. Artillery orders would be in a separate plan to cover the four-day bombardment, removal of obstacles, cutting of wire, destruction of artillery observation stations, buildings, defences and connections. The plan required that all units be 'mobile' and 'instructions ... have been issued.' Several instructions were issued to augment the plan, three covering the battle and one for the Division, detailing the battle objectives, gas, assault, possible postponement, tactics, engineers, road controls, prisoners (but ignoring their interrogation) and veterinary management. None mentioned the need for transport of ammunition up the trenches or any preparations for the artillery to advance. Each set of instructions repeated much of the preceding one, but extended and sometimes corrected it. They included a single mention of the attack formation: in extended order of successive lines at intervals of 50 to 200 yards. Trenches captured were to be placed in a defensive state with MGs and mortars, and manned by a minimum of support troops. Existing screens were to be retained lest their removal indicate the position's capture and invite retaliation. Acts of 'treachery' including faked surrender and the possession of expanding bullets were to be dealt with according to a secret GHQ memorandum.⁵⁵² Troops were to carry two smoke helmets and three sandbags. Wire-cutters would be distributed: 1 per platoon plus 100 extra for the Division as a whole (other divisions supplied bill-hooks). Specially-issued maps of German trenches were the only ones allowed to be carried by attacking troops. Artillery liaison officers would be attached to each Brigade along with observers. Telephone wires and runners were planned. The contents of each RE depot was listed. The possibility of troops advancing fast

⁵⁵² GHQ memorandum Q.108 of 27th March 1915, referenced in WO 95/2708/6.

into a gas cloud was recognised and allowed for by using 'a thicker cloud of smoke' immediately before the assault.⁵⁵³

Preparation for the attack included the exposure of some 650 officers and men to the gas by walking through a trench and the construction of a new front line better able to accommodate gas cylinders.⁵⁵⁴ Dummy soldiers were built which could be raised by a rope so as to appear about to attack. They were placed in shallow trenches either side of the wire next to the French line where no troops would assault.⁵⁵⁵

The 47 Division also planned for an attack without gas. Unlike 1 Division,⁵⁵⁶ their logic was well-formed, if incomplete in that they did not cover all the possible outcomes:

- If on the 25th the weather conditions prevent the use of gas and no postponement is possible, then the attack will be made in stages beginning with an assault by 15 Division at 0500 using smoke shells and 1 and 47 Divisions will demonstrate simultaneously.
- If 15 Division, have launched their attack and the weather is persistently unfavourable, but the French make good progress, then 1 Division will attack and the 47 Division will demonstrate.
- If 15 Division have launched their attack and the weather is persistently unfavourable, but the French do not make good progress, then 1 Division and the 47 Division will both attack on the night of the 25th/26th.
- If 15 Division have launched their attack and the weather improves during the 25th then as many gas cylinders will be advanced to 15 Division's position as possible and all divisions will attack using gas as originally planned, but on the morning of the 26th.

1 and 47 Divisions made no attempt to reconcile their differences. Barter did not want the instructions to be circulated outside the Division.⁵⁵⁷

The field artillery plan showed the artillery divided into groups and assigned targets for each day.

⁵⁵³ Burnett-Hitchcock, 47 Division Instructions II, (G/280/29) Section 26 of 16 September 1916 in WO 95/2698/3.3.

⁵⁵⁴ War diary 31 August 1915 and 1st September 1915 in WO 95/2698/2-3

⁵⁵⁵ Burnett-Hitchcock, G 280/11 of 28 August 1915 in WO 95/2698/2-3

⁵⁵⁶ See page 154.

⁵⁵⁷ Burnett-Hitchcock, 47 Division instructions, 22 September 1915 in WO 95/2698/2-3



Figure 91 - 47 Division Field Artillery programme (extract)

A set of coloured maps showed the degree of bombardment coverage achieved. It is evident from these at least that Farndale's claim that

no orders were given as to how the wire of the second line was to be cut was unjustified.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁸ Farndale, *History*, p. 117.

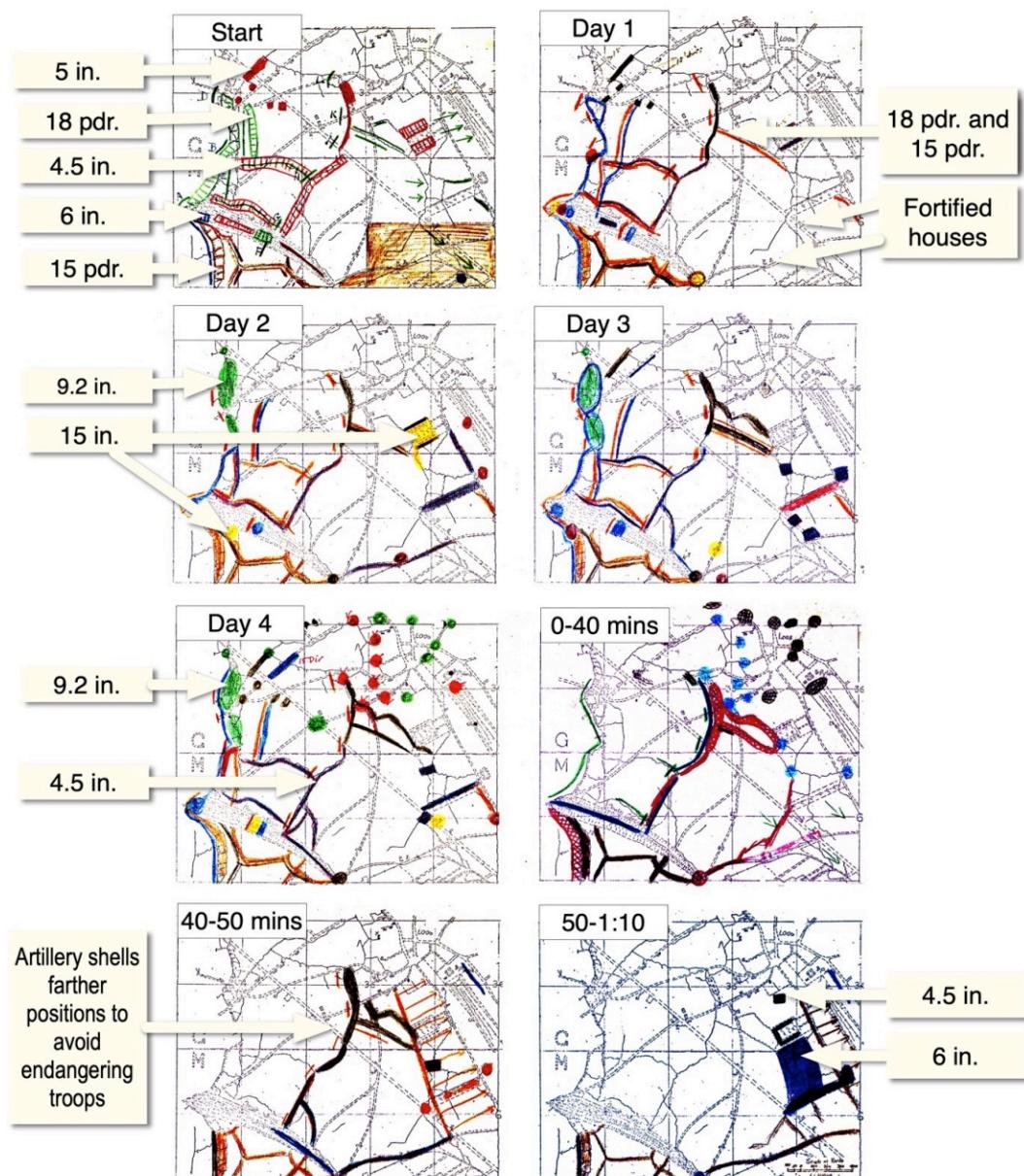


Figure 92 - 47 Division bombardment display covering the 5 days⁵⁵⁹

Cooperation between infantry and artillery was supported by a summary ordered by phases and Brigades.

⁵⁵⁹ 47 Division in WO 95/2698/3.4

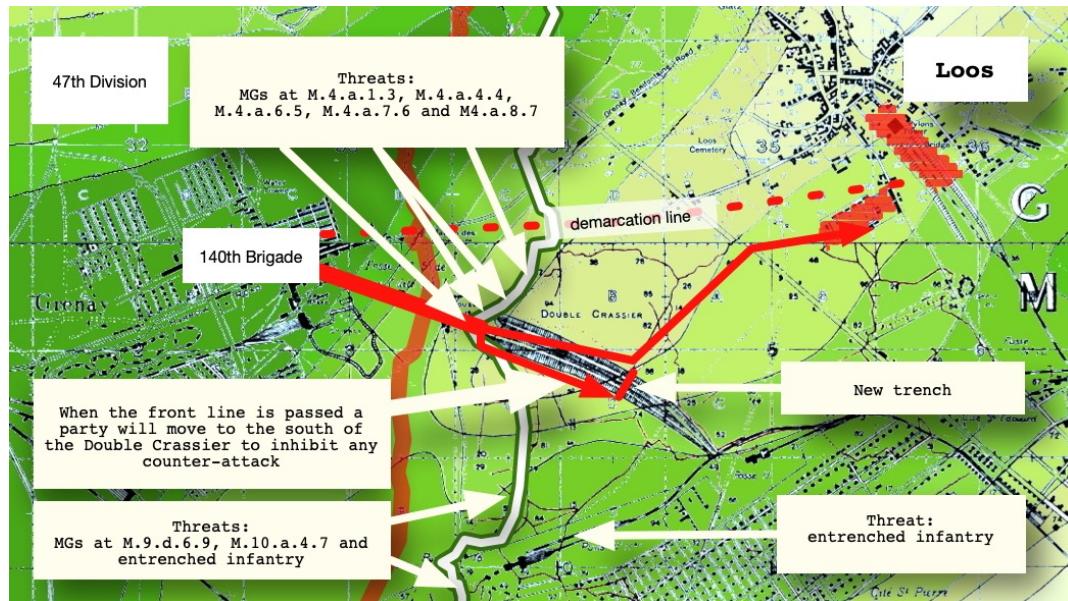


Figure 93 - The artillery cooperation with the 140 Brigade

The artillery supporting 140 Brigade would neutralise the threats from suspected MG nests and infantry entrenched along the railway embankment from which a counter-attack was expected.⁵⁶⁰

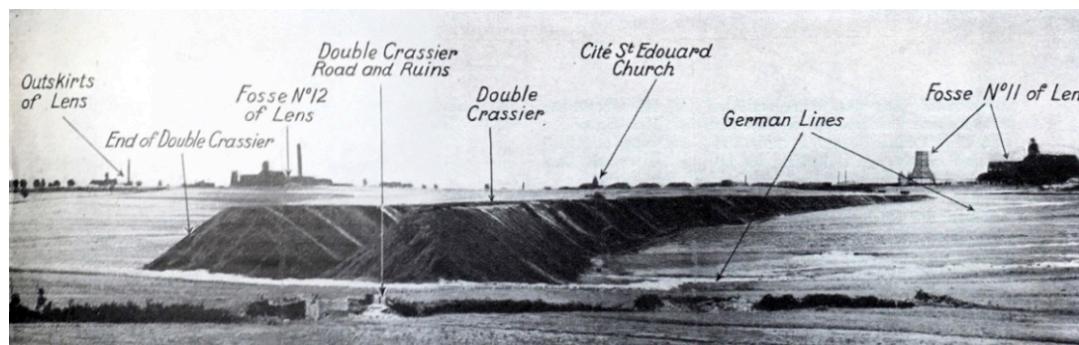


Figure 94 - The view of the 140 Brigade

In the event of an advance, the artillery groups would be assigned to the command of the Brigades. FOOs were assigned and each would communicate with a Brigade Artillery Officer, who in turn would call group commanders who would call the batteries using the 'visual signal stations'.

⁵⁶⁰ See page 165 for an overview of the plan.

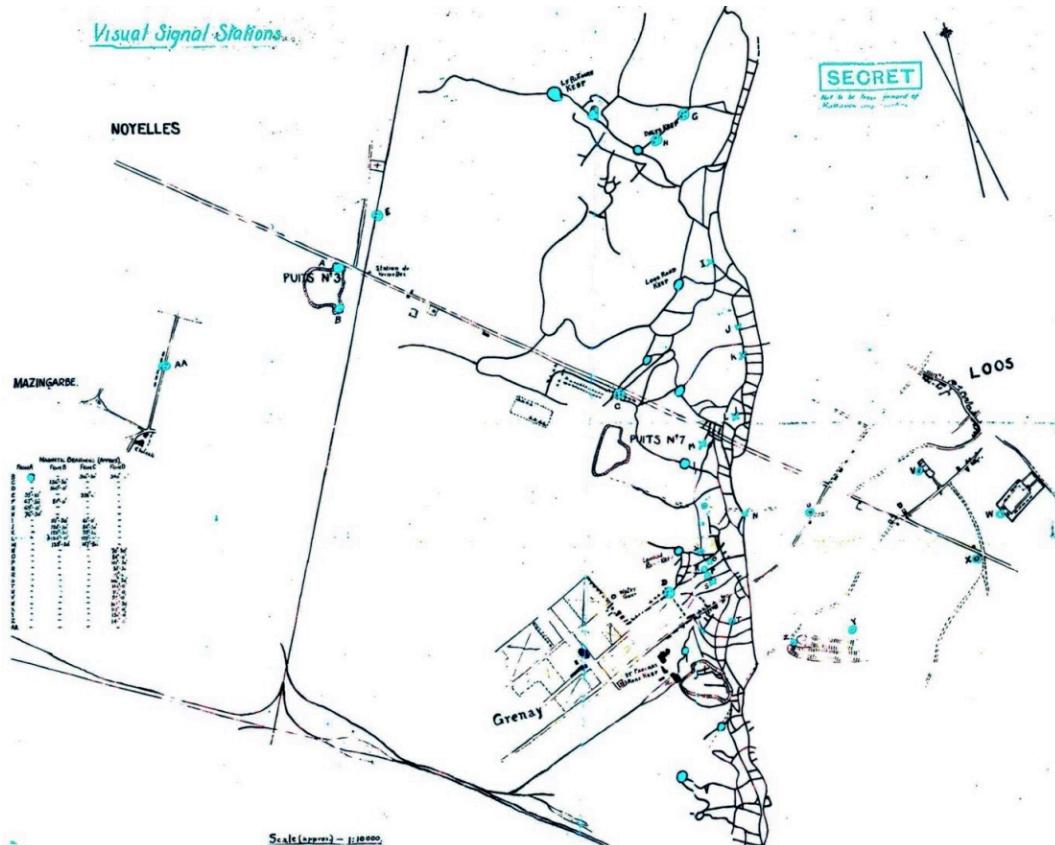


Figure 95 - Visual signalling stations⁵⁶¹

Once a position was captured, delays would be minimised by putting the unit commander in direct contact with allotted batteries.⁵⁶² In I Corps, artillery batteries were allocated to squares on the map and called up by an FOO by telephone.⁵⁶³ The two wireless sets available were assigned to 1 and 15 Divisions and were expected to move with the Brigade HQ.⁵⁶⁴

561 Montgomery, A. A., Map of Visual Signalling stations of 13 September 1915, First Army Schemes for operations, WO 93/158/1

562 Burnett-Hitchcock, Memo for artillery cooperation II of 14 September 1915, 47 Division General staff war diary, WO 95/2698/3.4

563 Montgomery, A. A., Target identification, table of batteries of 25 August 1915, WO 95/27085.

564 Montgomery, A. A. Wireless sets of 18 September 1915. WO 95/2708/5.

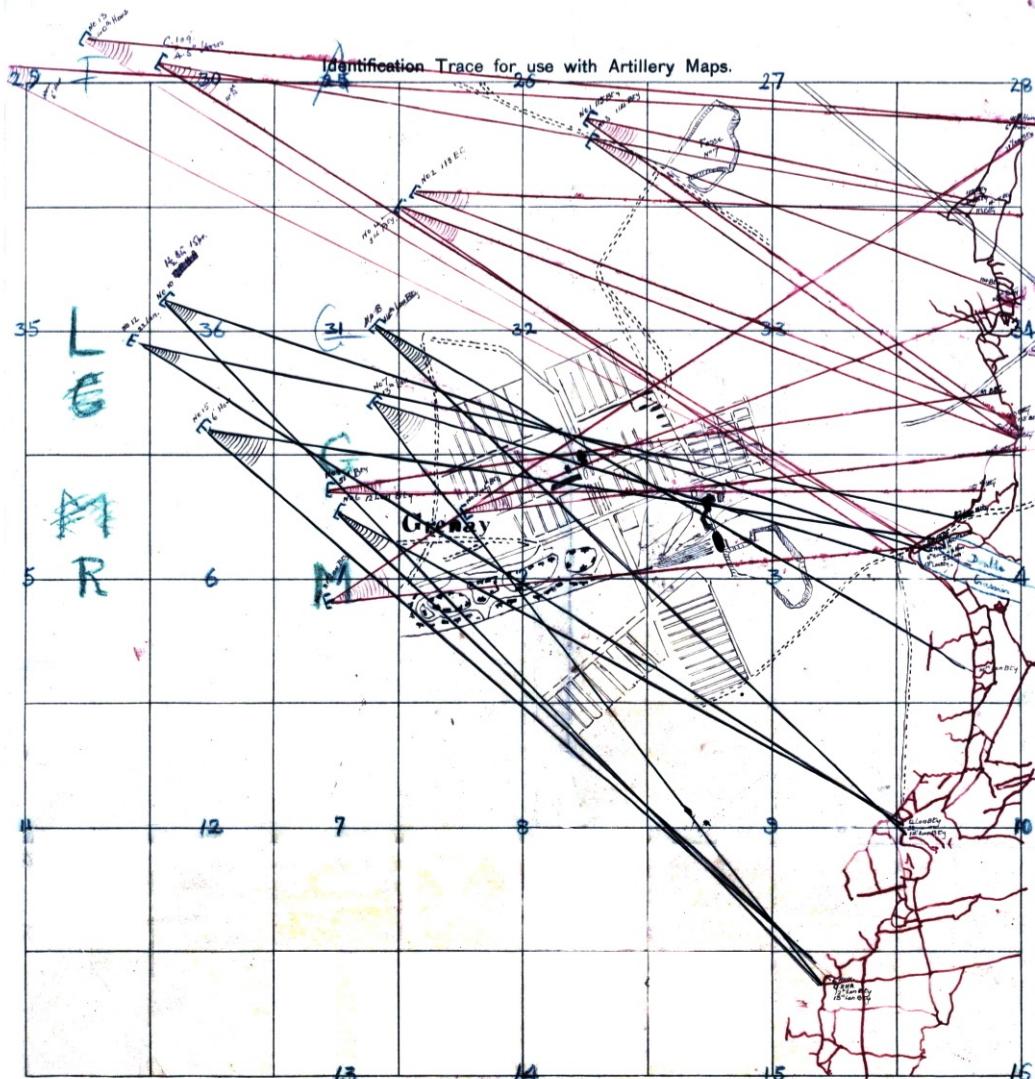


Figure 96 - Battery assignment

Should a unit find its path impeded by BEF artillery it should burn a smoke candle.⁵⁶⁵ How any FOO was to see the smoke given the artillery plans' adoption of smoke was not mentioned.⁵⁶⁶ The improvements in photo-reconnaissance and mapping rendered order-writing and targeting far easier than at Neuve Chapelle. Hitting those targets was another matter.

565 Vaughan, Instructions 78 (g), use of smoke candles of 20 September 1915, 2nd Division in WO 95/1287/1.1.

566 See page 131.

4.10 Notes and Doctrine

4.10.1 Principles of the Attack

In his diary Haig identified three principles he wanted to adopt, none of which he adhered to. The first was to engage the enemy on the widest possible front: 160 kilometres or more, to ensure the enemy engaged all his reserves, then after 5 to 6 days bring up a strong reserve of all arms to breakthrough at the weakest point with much ammunition.⁵⁶⁷ The second was that

troops can stand no more than four days hard fighting before being relieved.⁵⁶⁸

The offensive front at Loos was no more than 14 km. His own reserves, such as they were, were brought up as soon as the assault was launched with far too little ammunition. Haig was aware of the possibility of counter-attacks,⁵⁶⁹ though he made no provision for them. Only through defeating counter-attacks could Haig hope to engage all the German reserves. The second principle betrays great optimism and in any case contradicts the first. The third principle was always to ensure that troops had an objective.⁵⁷⁰ Yet he contradicted this when he ordered III Corps and the Indian Corps to attack in order to hold as many of the enemy as possible at the front and prevent them from detaching troops to counter-attack I Corps. He gave neither Corps any objectives, not even to take the enemy's front line.

Haig issued his 'General principles of the attack' about 30 August.⁵⁷¹ It contained a number of rules couched in exhortative language. Counter-attacks were implicitly ignored.

'The enemy ... must not be allowed time to reform ... We must not wait to be counter attacked ... Operations would be continued for a considerable period'.

⁵⁶⁷ Haig, 'Diary and letters', 30 July 1915.

⁵⁶⁸ As footnote 567.

⁵⁶⁹ See page 140.

⁵⁷⁰ Haig, 'Diary and letters', 6 September 1915.

⁵⁷¹ First Army GS 164 (a) in First Army Schemes for operations, WO 95/158/1 and WO 95/2698/2.

Commanders were expected to feed reserve troops through those who had made the initial assault and who should not be expected to continue the following day, though none of this was echoed in plans. This was to be done by one unit 'passing through' another but this was not clarified until SS 109 was issued and Haig strongly objected to the method when he saw it rehearsed in May 1916.⁵⁷²

Reserves should be organised in depth, kept under cover and able closely to follow the initial assaulting troops with guidance from indication boards (IV Corps divisional plans merely mentioned their composition and locations). Rehearsals were limited to forming-up. Bodies of troops should be assigned positions to be taken and special parties devoted to grenade-throwing, bayonetting, sand-bagging and entrenching should be appointed. Flanks should be exposed without concern.⁵⁷³ A failed attack on some position should be repeated, yet successful attacks should be reinforced with troops, MGs, mortars and field guns. The normal formation for the attack was not mentioned, possibly because Haig could not decide whether he preferred column or line and could not imagine any alternative.

Before the assault the artillery would cut wire, destroy enemy observation posts, strong points, communications, obstacles and batteries, thereafter they would support the infantry and continue CB fire. Field guns should advance to keep in range: special parties would clear obstacles, repair roads and lay telephone cable. Communications should be planned, rehearsed and made resilient through the provision of multiple channels (telephones, flags, lamps and runners - but pigeons were ignored).

572 See page 329.

573 Haig, *Diary and letters*, p. 121, Thursday 6 May 1915 repeats this.

Brigadier-General H. M. de F. Montgomery (BGGS XI Corps) circulated a platitude-rich 'Notes for lectures on attack'.⁵⁷⁴ He made a number of assumptions: that infantry would be in one of three states: holding a trench, breaking into the enemy's trenches or breaking through them. He claimed his note was only concerned with the breaking through, though it mentioned the need to attack prepared positions to the rear. He assumed the enemy was half-defeated, had fallen back on previously-prepared positions, with few reserves, greatly-disrupted artillery and that other Allies, notably the French, were already stressing them. The enemy had left gaps between strongpoints. The attack would be accompanied by 'observing officers'. How these were to communicate with the artillery was not mentioned. His approach contained many inconsistencies: he intended to

- 'smother the strong (enemy-occupied) localities with artillery fire without explaining how this is to be coordinated,
- press on everywhere else and yet simultaneously to
- surround the localities still held by the enemy.
He acknowledges that
- This may appear a somewhat difficult task.
Troops leading an attack must
- form an advance guard [yet] it is useless to expect troops which have been heavily engaged, to form ... an advanced guard ...
British success would be assured by the number of officers and NCOs who have not been
- 'habituated by years of training to know exactly what to do... [yet all officers and men will] ... know exactly what to do ...'

⁵⁷⁴ Battle of Loos - Original reports etc. - Montgomery - Notes for lectures on attack of 16 September 1915 in WO 158/261

Later it becomes clearer that he expects officers and men to use their initiative rather than wait for orders. The best way to urge on an attack is to send up reinforcements yet

‘it is useless to send up reinforcements’ when ‘there are already more men in the front line than can use their rifles and bayonets with effect’.

This memo contains no reference to any manual such as Infantry Training 1914 and no sense that Montgomery is aware of such tactics as fire and movement.⁵⁷⁵ Given the variability in quality of such 'notes' it is understandable that few officers adhered to them.

4.10.2 Preliminary instructions

Longridge of 1 Division issued preliminary instructions for battle. They covered ammunition, Very pistol cartridges, grenade fusing and resupply. These stores would be taken to the infantry and grenadiers by a dedicated team and replenished from the rear. Any casualty in the dedicated team would be replaced by the nearest battalion commander. Tools would be laid ready in the front trenches and placarded. Trench bridges suitable for vehicles and guns, and foot bridges were being constructed to extend a road to the front from Le Rutoire Farm together with three tracks suitable for stretcher bearers. Three wagons of bridging materials were kept ready. Up to 100 wire cutters and associated hedger's gloves or sandbags per battalion would be supplied. The wire cutters would be attached to selected troops with rope. Water would be stored to augment the supply from water carts and drawn from local wells. Food enough for a day would be carried by each man. Flags to identify units would be carried. Each infantryman would take 220 rounds of SAA, grenadiers would take 120 rounds and 5 grenades. All soldiers would carry two smoke helmets, two sandbags and a haversack. Their packs and greatcoats would be left behind.

⁵⁷⁵ WO 2062 *Infantry Training* p. 108.

Troops would leave the trenches by pulling themselves up by a stake.⁵⁷⁶ Gaps would already have been made in the wire. Each battalion would take telephone wires forward and tell off four men per company, six per battalion and six per Brigade, to run messages. Troops should be discouraged from damaging the telephone wires. An unspecified means of visual communication should be carried by each battalion. No man should assist the wounded. The failure to rehearse these procedures ensured such deficiencies would remain hidden until it was too late.

Soldiers not taking part in the assault such as farriers, shoemakers and bandsmen, would be placed at the disposal of the Assistant Provost Marshal to maintain battlefield security behind the front line, collect stragglers and guard prisoners. Security on the battlefield should be preserved by destroying all papers save the Auchy-Lens map or leaving it with the baggage. Soldiers should be told that if they are taken prisoner they were to mention only their name and rank to an interrogator and that any further information would prejudice their country and earn their captors' contempt. Prisoners should be searched in the presence of an officer but should be left their personal effects, a little money and identity disks while relieved of any weapons. Any maps or papers they held should be retained and forwarded with each group of prisoners being sent rearwards. Wounded prisoners should have all documents retrieved from them and escorted to an ambulance. Groups of 100 prisoners should be collected and should include an NCO for order transmission. Prisoners might not talk unless authorised. They should be guarded by 15 or 20 soldiers under the command of an officer. Interrogated prisoners must be kept separate from the others.⁵⁷⁷ The doctrine was very

⁵⁷⁶ This would have both warned the Germans of an impending attack by the noise of stakes being hammered in, and created delays in the trench as heavily-laden infantry pulled themselves up. The use of ladders was not mentioned.

⁵⁷⁷ Longridge, J. A., Preliminary instructions on battlefield. 10 September 1915, 1st Division General Staff war diary WO 95/1229/3.1.

thorough and conclusive, if rarely practicable and was not echoed in lower-level plans.

4.11 Conclusions

Haig faced many problems in planning Loos: the pressure to support the French, by drawing off German artillery fire, the need to attack an unsuitable point of the German front line, the lack of ammunition, the lack of artillery, given the size of the front and the difficulties in trying to compensate for the lack of artillery by using gas.

Other problems were either imposed on him or self-inflicted. He frequently claimed to adhere to principles yet rarely did so. Thus Sir John French expected him to attack on as wide a front as possible,⁵⁷⁸ and Haig (wisely) ignored the expectation, ordering his forces north of the La Bassée Canal to do no more than demonstrate.⁵⁷⁹ Given the limited availability of gas he could have concentrated all of it on the assault and concentrated his forces on the critical position, as every textbook urged, yet he released a large gas concentration north of the Canal (see Figure 58 on page 149) which might have been more useful if released to the south. At worst the Germans would have had 40 minutes warning of the First Army's key objectives. At best he would have faced an enemy as asphyxiated as possible at those key points, but this was not attacking with the 'full force of his power' as French had requested and as Haig had promised Asquith.⁵⁸⁰ French's request was due to the common fear of enfilade fire yet Haig, French and Joffre were content effectively to create a massive flank by leaving Lens to be surrounded by the

⁵⁷⁸ Haig, Diary, Tuesday 17 August.

⁵⁷⁹ Haig to French, 15 August 1915, GS 135/5 (a) in Reports, correspondence and maps concerning the Battle of Loos, NLS Acc 3155 No 174.

⁵⁸⁰ Haig, Diary, p. 136, 14 August 1915, Haig to Asquith, 25 June 1915, Asquith papers 13-14, Bodleian Library Oxford Cited in Lloyd, Loos.

BEF and the French. Maintaining a wide front inhibited Haig from seeking a critical point for the attack. The weak point would, he believed, emerge.⁵⁸¹

Haig wanted to transform an attack into a major rout of the enemy and advance to the plain of Douai yet none of his army's plans made any provision for the operational requirements for such an achievement. This was fantasy planning. In his more measured moments Haig knew this as he showed when, at the conference of 6 September, Anderson, mentioned a putative advance by the Indian Corps and Haig advised him of its inevitable halt.⁵⁸² At best Haig acknowledged that counter-attacks might occur, but imposed no requirement that they be planned for. His failure to provide the requisite intelligence about German reinforcements, yet insist that plans take account of them, was paralleled by his failure to assess and take into account the German gas defences. He allowed a narrative of German vulnerability to permeate planning. The use of gas produced one benefit: First Army began to use timetabling in their planning. In the case of 47 Division this involved estimating the position of their leading troops. The iterative and repetitious nature of 47 Division's instructions is evidence partly of its learning and partly of the attention to detail of its staff. It contrasts favourably with the insufficiency of the instructions issued by other divisions. Rawlinson's principles of attack were imaginative but not followed: there is no evidence that Rawlinson or Gough ensured that their subordinates adhered to the notes they published, but much evidence that these were ignored.

It was in planning that First Army displayed the greatest number of failures. By failing to lay down policy and review divisional plans, First Army effectively abandoned planning control. Neuve Chapelle showed how the planning process was unsupported by the available doctrines. But plans were

581 Haig, Diary, 30 July 1915,

582 Haig, First Army conference report of 6 September 1915 in NLS Acc 3155 No 174.

reviewed at Neuve Chapelle and the process eventually generated some well-structured documents from which outline templates could have been extracted, circulated as notes and thus have enabled later planners to engage in some more-comprehensive thinking. Planning for Loos was conducted in isolation despite the increased and improved use of conferences. The separate artillery and infantry plans showed the inability of each arm to cooperate with the other. The plans of the divisions took little account of their neighbours and assumed they would all move forward together. Experience should have taught them that some would advance faster but the only answers to the problem of variable speed they employed were to reinforce successful advances, repeat failed attacks and refuse to plan for counter-attacks. Good and bad plans were distinguished by the (lack of) imagination in the minds of the planners of how the plan would be executed. Thus Rawlinson observed the problem of men failing to leave a trench simultaneously in June but blamed it on the officers rather than the lack of ladders.⁵⁸³ Rawlinson might also have mentioned the difficulty in bringing up reinforcements due to congestion in the trenches.⁵⁸⁴ This echoed the same problems of 9 May at Aubers Ridge which prompted Haig to break off that attack.⁵⁸⁵ Problems like this were identified but no solution was ever experimented with. 47 Division's plans were not understood by IV Corps which believed they were maintaining 'their present position' even as the Division began their attack.⁵⁸⁶ Similarly Haig and Rawlinson failed to account for the missing 1 Division until it was almost too late. There is no evidence of the review of any plan other than

583 Rawlinson to Haig, HRS 214 J in First Army Operations, 21 June 1915, WO 95/156/3.

584 <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/actions-in-the-spring-of-1915-western-front/>

585 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1915, Vol II, p. 37.

586 Montgomery, A. A., IV Corps memo HRS 530 of 25 September 1915.

Haig's scrawls on an already-circulated proposal by Rawlinson and on two documents by Willcocks.⁵⁸⁷

Neuve Chapelle was a far smaller and simpler battle than Loos and its chief planner (Davies) had mostly ensured a consistency of approach. The greater number of divisions at Loos and the complexity of the attacks effectively exposed the limited ability of some of the divisions and corps commanders' to plan and ensure coherence. The malign influence of Cléry can be detected in Holland's view of planning:⁵⁸⁸

an inferior plan energetically carried out is far more likely to succeed, than a superior one which is slowly conceived and feebly pressed.⁵⁸⁹
 However, no plan will succeed if those executing it cannot read it and British planning at Loos as at Neuve Chapelle, persisted in failing to ensure every battalion received its orders in a timely manner.

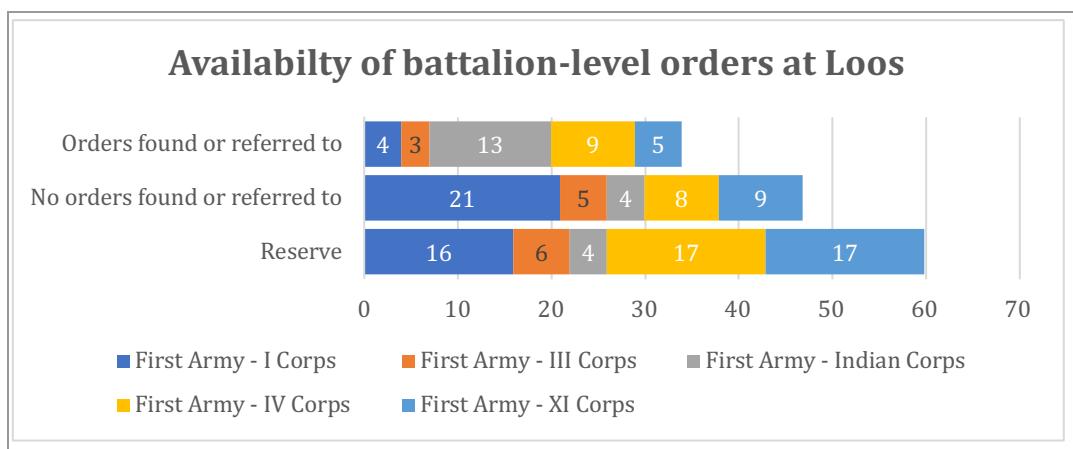


Figure 97 - Availability of battalion-level orders at Loos

⁵⁸⁷ First Army, Operations of 4-14 June 1915 in WO 95/156/2.

⁵⁸⁸ Cléry, p. 156.

⁵⁸⁹ 1 Division of Sept 1915 in WO 95/1229/3.

5. First Albert - Context

5.1 January 1916



Figure 98 - The Fronts in January 1916

Despite the defeats of 1915 The Allies recuperated well: the Italians, while bogged-down on the Isonzo river in the south, had increased their weapons and numbers, the Russians also rebounded from their defeats in 1915 with more equipment and troops than before, though they were unlikely to be ready to take the offensive soon, Britain's 'New Armies' were in training and would be fed into the Western Front throughout 1916 together with Empire troops.⁵⁹⁰ The Allied retreat from Gallipoli was complete by January 8.

After the 6 December 1915 conference at Chantilly, Joffre the new French C-in-C, sent a memo to Haig, the new British C-In-C, mentioning the Somme as the site of a potential battle.⁵⁹¹ Joffre wanted a 'wearing-out' fight, to be

590 Stevenson, David, *1914-1918*, Penguin, (London, 2005), p. 100.

591 Joffre's letter of 23 January 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8) February 1916 (OAD 344.).

initiated by the British at the end of April to exhaust the German reserves before a similar attack on another front by the British Army. Thereafter there would be a 'decisive' simultaneous general offensive by British, French, Russians and Italians after June 1916.

On 16 January the proposed British approach to mount a programme of minor, preparatory and main attacks was acknowledged to be impossible, yet such attacks were suggested two days later. The Somme was again proposed as the location of the main attack, the La Bassée-Lys area for the preparatory attacks with possible operations towards Roulers and the Messines ridge as a third choice. No justification was given other than that they would 'draw in and use up German reserves'.⁵⁹²

5.2

Background notes

Within GHQ and the War Office, several 'notes' were circulated every year by the CGS and senior officers, to illustrate their concerns, to act as a briefing papers and thus direct the attention of senior staff. From these it is possible to determine their dominant concerns over the course of the war.

In early 1916 GHQ believed that the advantage of interior lines enjoyed by the Central Powers could only be countered by simultaneous offensives on all fronts.⁵⁹³ These offensives being then impossible, for some time the only alternative was to increase the Allies' strength by raising, training and equipping new armies and by reducing the Central Powers' strength by well-prepared attacks.

Well-prepared and supported attacks were expected to cause greater loss to the defenders than to the attackers, but this advantage would be quickly lost when the infantry outran the artillery's cover, and the enemy's reserves

592 'Outline plan of campaign' 1916 in WO 158/19

593 X Corps, WO 95/850/5. The contents of Fourth Army war diary are blank for the period 23 March -30 April 1916 in WO 95/431/1.

arrived, so any early successes were likely to be outweighed by later reversals. Conclusion: attacks should be stopped when artillery support was lost and 'disorganisation sets in.'

Short 'wearing-down' operations were preferable but still needed three months to prepare and required an unavailable quantity of munitions. By February 1916 this contradiction had been forgotten and continuous attacks, each launched before its predecessor faded, were proposed.⁵⁹⁴

GHQ thus confronted a conundrum: a 'decisive effort' could only occur after 'wearing-down' operations whose but the time taken to prepare each 'wearing down' operation was so slow as to both permit the Germans to repair their defences and consume so many munitions that too few would be available for the 'decisive effort'. GHQ did not attempt to confront this conundrum until 1918. By not mentioning the speed of planning itself in its discussion documents, it also avoided the question of process and consider the need to manage planning, if indeed it were aware of the problem. Consequently, when munitions ceased to be a constraint in 1917, the problem of delays in planning remained to be addressed.

There was also the threat of a pre-emptive strike by the Germans to forestall any offensive, either by forcing a decision or attrition. Robertson considered

‘the enemy [may] attack us in anticipation of our offensive ...’ but did not propose any defence. Simultaneous offensives implied the involvement of Russia which was unlikely to take the offensive for some time, the so the only alternative was for the other remaining Allies to launch their own offensives. Victory required that the Central Powers' reserves be exhausted before the 'decisive effort' be made. How this was to be achieved

⁵⁹⁴ Hore-Ruthven to Montgomery, A. A., Discussion of Hore-Ruthven's objection to smoke, of 10 April in IWM 6.

was not discussed, but the problem of exhausting German reserves through wearing-out operations was, though no conclusion was reached.⁵⁹⁵

Exhausting the German reserves became a pre-requisite for the battle and the basis of much circular thinking: Colonel des Vallières, an aide to Joffre, told Haig that the Germans had 25 divisions in reserve and that no decisive attack could succeed until these were used up. The French had insufficient troops both to wear out the enemy and still have enough to deliver a decisive attack.

He declared that

‘at the peace it would never do for France to have no Army at all left’.⁵⁹⁶ Joffre however felt that any early attempt to engage the Germans would fail ('since the Germans would have too many reserves')⁵⁹⁷ but equally waiting until the Summer would benefit the Germans more than the Allies. Haig prevaricated and waited for the Germans to weaken their front. That the Germans might attack first was considered by neither he nor Joffre.⁵⁹⁸ Joffre doubted that Haig's preparatory attacks would induce the Germans into committing sufficient reserves to later cripple their reactions to the 'decisive' Allied attack, and Haig ignored this.

These papers exhibit repeated attempts to propose solutions mixed with acknowledgements of the solutions' deficiencies and followed by further proposals of equal infeasibility which fail to acknowledge, much less deal with the identified problems. This was another result of the failure to write

⁵⁹⁵ Anon., General factors to be weighed in considering the allied plan of campaign during the next few months c. 15 January 1916 in WO 158/19.

⁵⁹⁶ 2 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁵⁹⁷ ‘Si ennemi n'est appelé à subir de votre part, aucune attaque de quelque envergure d'ici l'été prochain, le problème de l'offensive générale ne se pose plus tout à fait de même façon, car il faut admettre que l'ennemi disposera à ce moment de nombreuses disponibilités sur notre front et que l'entrée en ligne de celles-ci est de nature à entraver sérieusement le développement de nos attaques.’

‘If the enemy is not called upon to undergo from you, an attack of any scale by next summer, the problem of the general offensive does not arise any more in quite the same way, because it is necessary to admit that the enemy would have at that time many possibilities on our front and that the entry in line of these is likely to seriously hamper the development of our attacks.’ Entry of 6 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁵⁹⁸ Joffre to Haig, 6 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

Appreciations. The exchange of letters exposed a set of attitudes and conundra which dominated battle planning until at least 1917. For any claim, such as Haig's, that feint attacks would draw in German reserves and Joffre's that they wouldn't, were based (in Haig's case) on no evidence and (in Joffre's case) on the presumption that the efforts of the British Army had yet to provoke any change to the German order of battle.⁵⁹⁹ The weight of the arguments mostly depended on the political and military positions of the claimants. To seal his point Joffre called for Robertson to join them soon, so as to be sure to meet the approval of the British Government. The suitability of the Somme as a locus of the attack was never discussed.

5.3 Changes to the BEF

By January 1916 major changes to the BEF had occurred. The C-in-C Sir John French had been replaced by Haig, The First Army was commanded by Sir Charles Monro and Britain planned a further three armies for the Western Front, plus a Reserve Army. Two of these armies: the Fourth and, to a limited extent the Third, would be central to the Battles of the Somme in general and the 1st Battle of Albert in particular.

⁵⁹⁹ 'J'estime de même que l'usure causée, a l'ennemi par les hardis coups de main, exécutés si brillamment par vos troupes, ne peut entrer en ligne de compte quand il s'agit d'obliger l'adversaire à dépenser un grand nombre de divisions réservées. Il ne semble pas qu'ils aient jusqu'ici amené les Allemands à changer quoi que ce soit à l'ordre de bataille des forces vous opposant, et il y a tout lieu de craindre'

'I consider that wearing down caused to the enemy by the bold attacks so brilliantly executed by your troops cannot be considered when it is a question of forcing the adversary to commit a large number of reserve Divisions. It does not appear that they have so far caused the Germans to change anything in their order of battle and there is every reason to fear.' Entry of 6 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

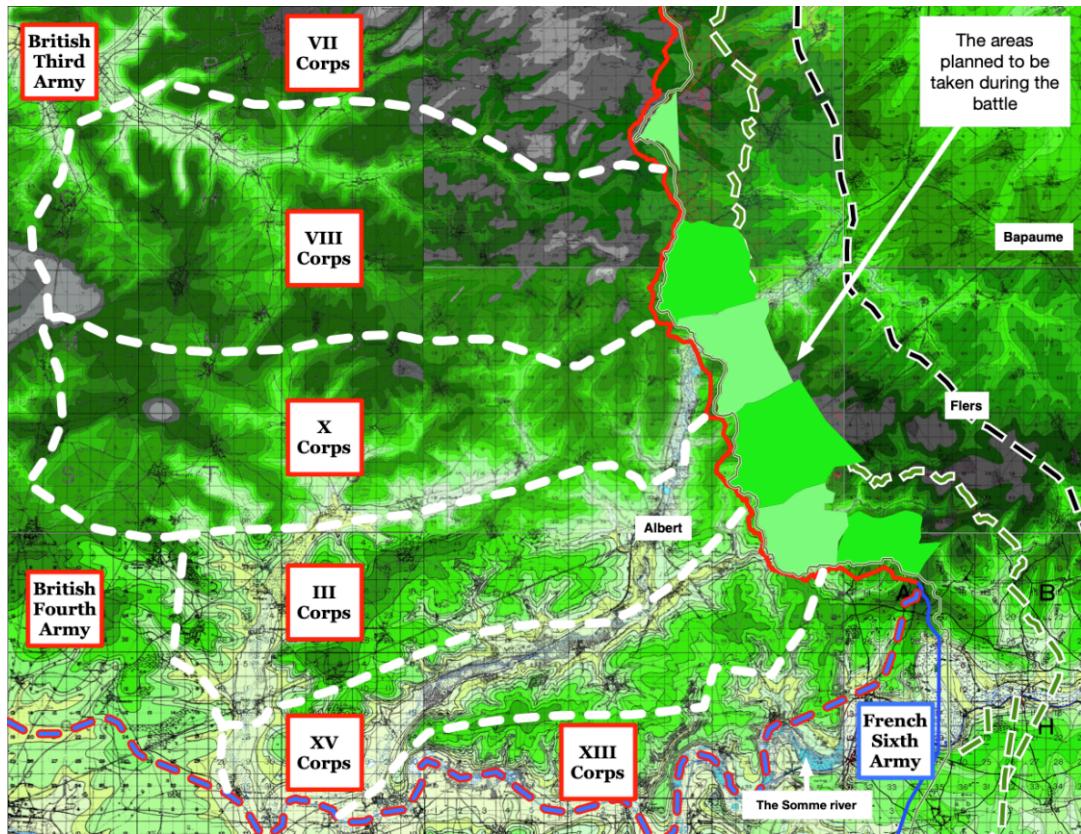


Figure 99 - The BEF corps as they were eventually ranged along the Front for the 1st Battle of Albert

Following the closure of the battle of Loos, the BEF had fought the defensive Battle of Mount Sorrel, a 3-Division, 11-day battle,⁶⁰⁰ and a number of minor operations.

⁶⁰⁰ The Battle of Mount Sorrel.

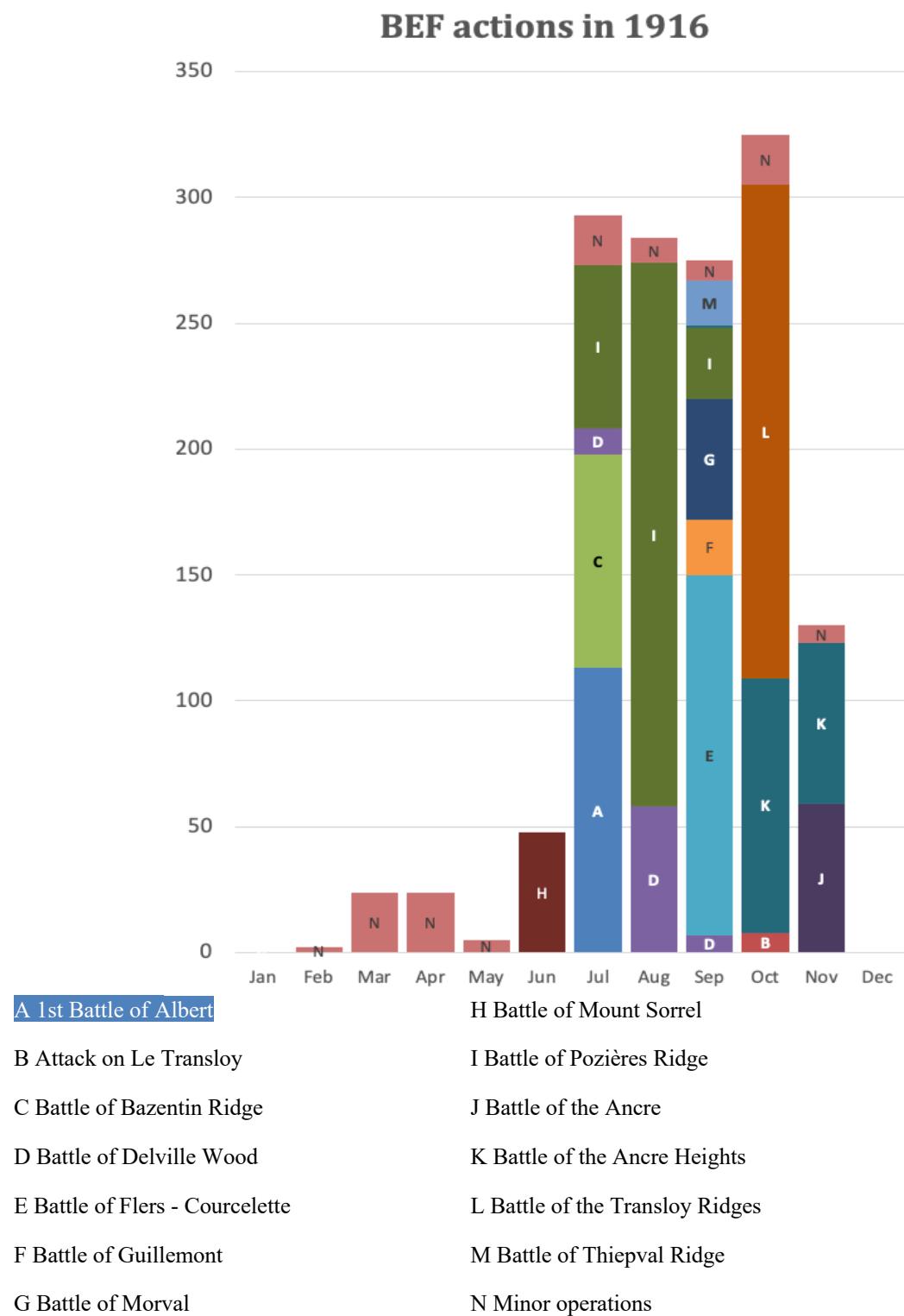


Figure 100 - BEF actions of 1916 measured by the number of divisions involved per day⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰¹ Becke. *Op. Cit.*

The 1st Battle of Albert would be the biggest the BEF had yet fought, with 19 divisions and, effectively, six Corps.

For the purposes of battle planning Sir Henry Rawlinson, the Fourth Army Commander had five corps commanders. There was also an indirect connection, through the Third Army Commander, Allenby, to the VI Corps for a distraction attack on Gommecourt. This large number of responsibilities was probably a contributory factor to many of the planning problems that ensued.

5.4 GHQ and Army Planning Timeline January-February 1916

This chart and the others on later pages is a representation of the moments in which plans or plan-related documents were released.

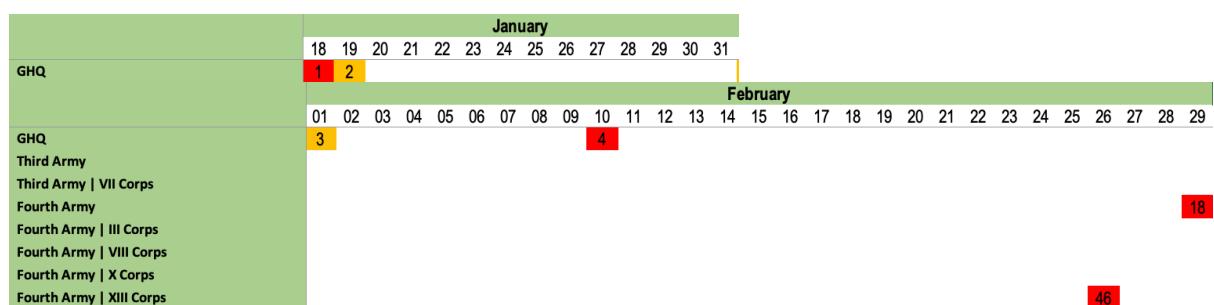


Figure 101 - GHQ and Army Planning Timeline January-February 1916
(see page 22 for the key)

On 18 January GHQ had published an outline plan of campaign, identifying the Somme as the locus of the battle,⁶⁰² and added 'Plans for future operations' 23 days later.⁶⁰³ No justification was proposed, but Haig had earlier suggested to Allenby that locating an attack on the Somme

‘would mean that the British Right flank would be protected by a French advance.’⁶⁰⁴

602 [1] Anon., Outline plan of campaign in WO 158/19. The numbers in the brackets refer to the numbers in Figure 98 *et seq.*

603 [4] Anon., Plans for future operations in WO 158/19.

604 'Meeting at Beauquesne between the C-in-C. and G.O.C., Third Army, 2 p.m.', 28 December 1915, AWM 252/A100, Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Cited by Greenhalgh, Elizabeth, 'Why the British Were on the Somme in 1916'. *War in History*. (1999).

This outline plan agreed that the BEF should draw German reserves away from the Somme by preliminary attacks elsewhere. The BEF wanted them to occur immediately prior to the main attack to be made by the Fourth Army.⁶⁰⁵

At the conference of 19 February, Haig had ordered that:

‘... each Army Commander must therefore be ready ... To assume the offensive ...’

... but this call did not result in any action by Rawlinson and Haig made no further reference to it.⁶⁰⁶ In March Rawlinson claimed that ‘the general role is a defensive one’ but then demanded that the:

‘various schemes for offensive on our part must be worked out every detail.’⁶⁰⁷

The more-enterprising senior officers such as Brigadier-General A. R. Cameron of (BGGS, X Corps) and Lieutenant-General W. N. Congreve (GOC, XIII Corps) started to plan, but their proposals yielded nothing. Fortunately for Haig and Rawlinson the French never insisted on an impromptu offensive: the lack of timely plans had no consequences and the failure remained invisible.⁶⁰⁸

5.5

Haig's First Plan

Haig's first attempt at a plan (in a letter to Robertson) was purely an outline of principles to identify and resolve the Anglo-French differences which surfaced at the meeting with Joffre and Robertson at Chantilly. He agreed that there should be a major simultaneous offensive to exhaust German reserves.

To be decided were the where, when and how.⁶⁰⁹ To Joffre he proposed attacks along a 24,000-yard front by at least 18 divisions. The French would

⁶⁰⁵ WO 158/19.

⁶⁰⁶ Conference notes of 19 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁶⁰⁷ Montgomery, A. A., of 4 March 1916 in IWM 5.

⁶⁰⁸ [37] Cameron, Encloses map of future offensive in WO 95/863/11.

[46] Congreve, Notes on XIII Corps Scheme in IWM 6

⁶⁰⁹ Haig to Robertson, 7 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

also assist with the loan of field and heavy guns. Attacks should be coordinated with the Russians and Italians and occur not later than June 1916. Should the Germans launch a spring attack on Russia, the Allies should be able to counter with a coordinated attack of their own. Preparatory attacks should attempt to engage as many German reserves on as wide a front as possible, but would be followed by the main attack before the Germans had had time to organise replacements.

For this reason he rejected Joffre's proposed 'wearing out' battle which would become so protracted as to allow the Germans to reorganise and would depress morale on both the Western and the Home fronts. Instead he proposed raids and bombardments to minimise Allied losses.⁶¹⁰ Since the British would be stronger in July, the preparatory attacks would be correspondingly more powerful, particularly if both French and British forces were engaged. In any case, he was prepared to shoulder the major burden of such attacks providing they occurred no more than 14 days from the main attack.⁶¹¹

Haig's approach was to wear down German strength gradually by preparatory attacks over a large front to draw in enemy reserves prematurely at some distance from the locus of the main blows and so soon before the main attack as to prevent the speedy transfer of reserves by the Germans. His plan also hinged on a number of events: if the Germans weakened their Western Front forces by moving divisions east, the preparatory attacks would be made by the British First and Second Armies and the main attack would be made by 25 divisions of the Third Army before June; otherwise if the Germans retained their Western Front forces, then, after May, either the preparatory attacks

⁶¹⁰ Haig to Joffre, 10 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁶¹¹ [1] Haig, Plans for future operations, 10 February 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

would be made by the First and Second Armies and the main attack by the Third Army on 14 March.⁶¹²

He ignored several premisses: that the Germans would need more reinforcements for the east and could not attack in the west; that preparatory attacks would draw in the existing German reserves rather than merely be repulsed; that the Germans could not reinforce fast (though were he ignorant of the German movement by rail of I Corps north before Tannenberg,⁶¹³ the BEF's speedy deployment in France might at least have given him pause for thought).⁶¹⁴ Otherwise, preparatory attacks would be made on the First, Second and Third Army Fronts with the main attack 'further north'.⁶¹⁵ This last case was Haig's preferred choice: he was then about to form a Fourth Army and was considering a seaborne attack near Ostend but chose not to mention these elements. The spirit of Plan XVII died hard. Joffre could see no farther than 'wearing-out' and had learned nothing from the Battle of the Frontiers while Haig rarely mentioned the effects of machine guns except in defence. Neither was prepared to cede control over the timing of operations to the Russians or Germans. They decided to have another conference at Chantilly.⁶¹⁶

Haig proposed that the offensive occur by the first week in July but his first choice, Boesinghe, was dropped as a location and replaced by the Somme.⁶¹⁷ The BEF was at that time spread along a line from Ypres in the north to Cury on the Somme with a section in the middle occupied by the French Tenth

⁶¹² Haig to Joffre, 'Memoranda on Note dated GQG 10 February 1916'. Haig, Diary, 12 February 1916, WO 256/8.

⁶¹³ Zuber estimates that a German Army Corps required c. 140 trains. Zuber, Terence, *The Battle of the Frontiers: Ardennes 1914*, History Press (New York, 2009).

⁶¹⁴ 'I Corps was moving over more than 150 km of rail, day and night, one train every 30 minutes, with 25 minutes to unload instead of the customary hour or two', Lincoln, W. B, *Passage through Armageddon. The Russians in war & revolution 1914-1918*. Simon & Schuster, (New York, 1986) pp. 72-73.

⁶¹⁵ Boesinghe, north of Ypres. Haig, Diary, 13 February 1916, WO 256/8.

⁶¹⁶ Haig, 'Points suggested for discussion at Chantilly; in Haig, Diary, 14 February 1916, WO 256/8.

⁶¹⁷ Entry of 14 February 1916 Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

Army. Joffre asked that this be replaced by British troops.⁶¹⁸ This required some reorganisation and movement of Corps along the BEF's front which in turn delayed the planning.⁶¹⁹ The British Third Army eventually occupied the area on 14 March.⁶²⁰

5.6

Joffre's Proposals

Joffre suggested an Allied offensive for 1 July. This depended on two events: the Germans attacking the Russians or (absent such attacks) the Russians being ready to attack the Germans. In either case the Anglo-French forces would attack north and south of the Somme and it was essential that the German reserves be already diminished by attacks. Joffre ignored Haig's stipulation that the preliminary attacks occur no more than 14 days prior to the main attack. Joffre's approach thus required that the Allies knew the dates of Russo-German attacks.⁶²¹ Haig chivvied Rawlinson to complete the preparations of the Fourth Army Front by 11 May.⁶²² On the day Haig published his 'Plans for future operations' he learned from his Intelligence Officer Charteris of the first hint of a German offensive at Verdun.⁶²³ By 21 February it focussed everyone's attention on ways to relieve the pressure on France.

Joffre wanted attacks to take place from April to June to relieve the German pressure. The BEF however wanted them to occur immediately prior the main attack.⁶²⁴ This would be made by a Fourth Army established on 1 March, with

⁶¹⁸ Joffre to Haig, 'Note on the conduct of 1916 operations' of 10 February 1916 Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁶¹⁹ d'Urbal, Request to hand over that part of the front occupied by the French Tenth Army 11 March 1916: Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶²⁰ Haig, Diary, 14 March 1916, WO 256/9.

⁶²¹ Joffre to Haig, 'Note on the Conduct of Operations in 1914 on the Western Front'. Haig, Diary, 20 February 1916, WO 256/8.

⁶²² Entry of 15 March 1916: Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶²³ Haig, Diary, 10 February 1916, WO 256/8.

⁶²⁴ WO 158/19.

an 'Operation order No. 1'.⁶²⁵ On 27 March Joffre proposed a joint attack eastwards on a front from Hébuterne to Lassigny with a common boundary from Maricourt to Bouchavesnes. The offensive would occur on both banks of the Somme after the Italian and Russian offensives had caused the Austro-German armies to reinforce their fronts. Preliminary attacks would no longer be possible since the relief of the French Tenth Army would have absorbed whatever reserves the British Armies had available. The offensive must operate to a common plan and common direction of the Army groups engaged. This required that the British Army behave as if it were a French Army Group obeying directives agreed by both British and French commanders.⁶²⁶ Haig agreed in principle.

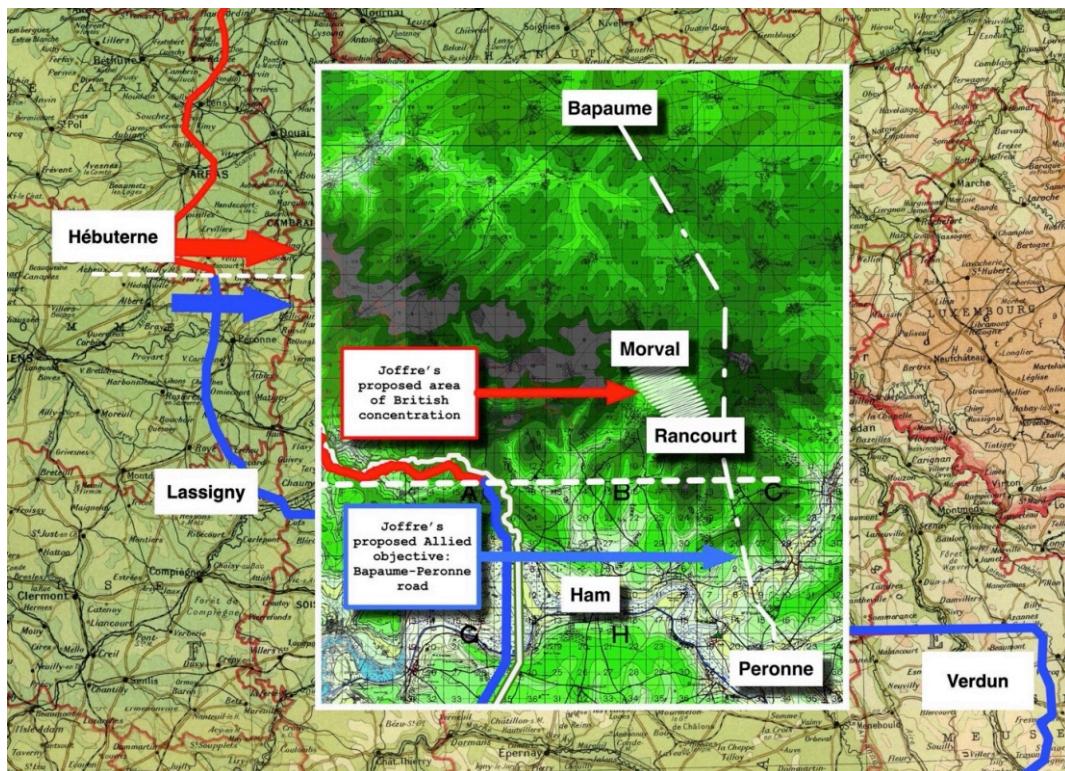


Figure 102 - Joffre's Proposal of 27 March

The objectives were to break the German front and then push east as far as possible. The Anglo-French armies would be divided along the line Maricourt-

625 [18] Montgomery, A. A., Operational order No. 1 of February 29 in WO 95/431/1.

626 Joffre to Haig, of 27 March 1916 in Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. pp. 40-41.

Hardecourt-Maurepas-Bouchavesnes. Any divergence of directions of attack of the two armies would require much liaison along that line. However, this proposal required that the British attack first with 25 divisions, keeping a further 23 to hold the remaining 125 km of front. Joffre asked that Haig call for all the forces available in England and Egypt.⁶²⁷

On 3 April Haig discussed Joffre's plan with Kiggell and Butler and wrote to Robertson to ask if he could cooperate with Joffre as Joffre asked.⁶²⁸ On the same day Rawlinson submitted a first draft of his plan. Possibly prompted by such diligence, Haig asked for plans at a conference of Army Commanders that day, though only on 12 April did he put this request in writing.⁶²⁹ He made no mention of minimum contents or a date by which draft plans should be returned and did not circulate Rawlinson's plan to them.⁶³⁰

5.7

Rawlinson's First Plan

Rawlinson's first draft began with an assessment of the ground and the German defences.⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ Joffre to Haig. Entry of 27 March 1916: Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶²⁸ [24] Rawlinson, (To Haig) GX 3/1 Plan for offensive by the Fourth Army of 3 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

⁶²⁹ Entry of 1 April 1916: Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶³⁰ Haig to Rawlinson (OAD/710) 12 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

⁶³¹ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Appendices, p. 64.

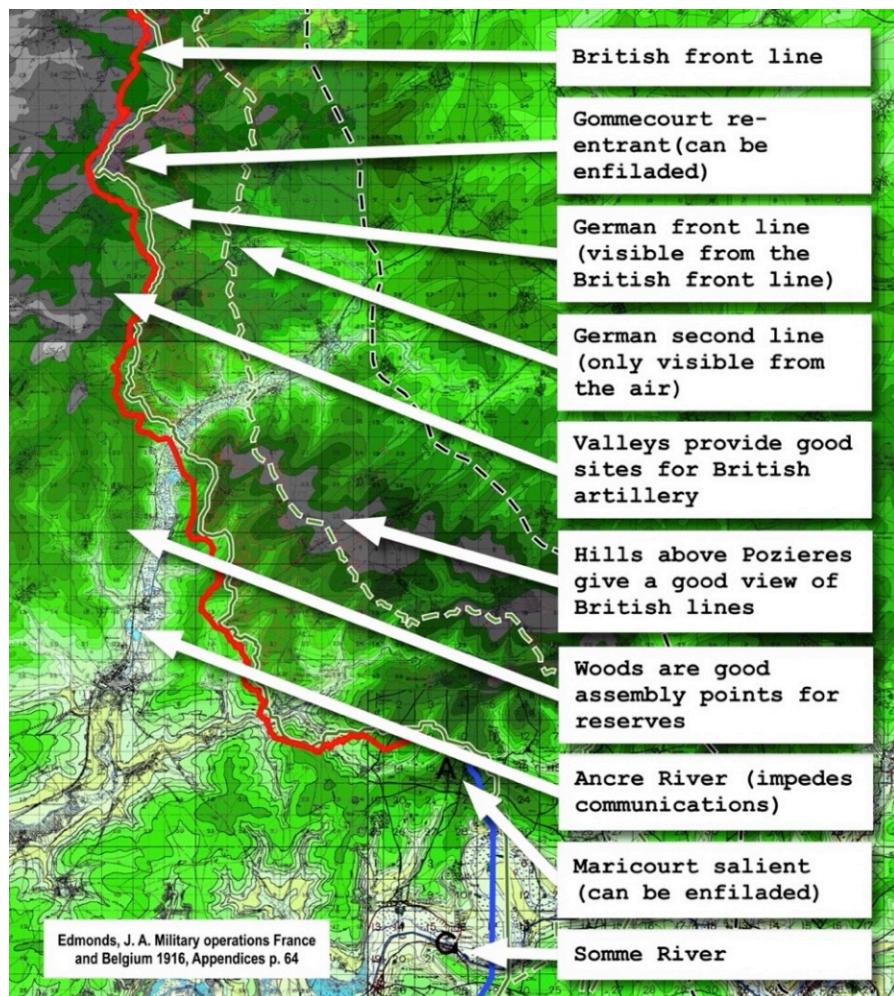


Figure 103 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's Assessment of Terrain

He noted the many defended villages included in the German first and second lines: all were within howitzer and heavy trench mortar range. Dug-outs 'of any depth can be constructed'. He believed that 'most of the wire could be dealt with by field guns' and the defences could mostly be destroyed by howitzers and heavy trench mortars, but part of the second line was out of range of the artillery.

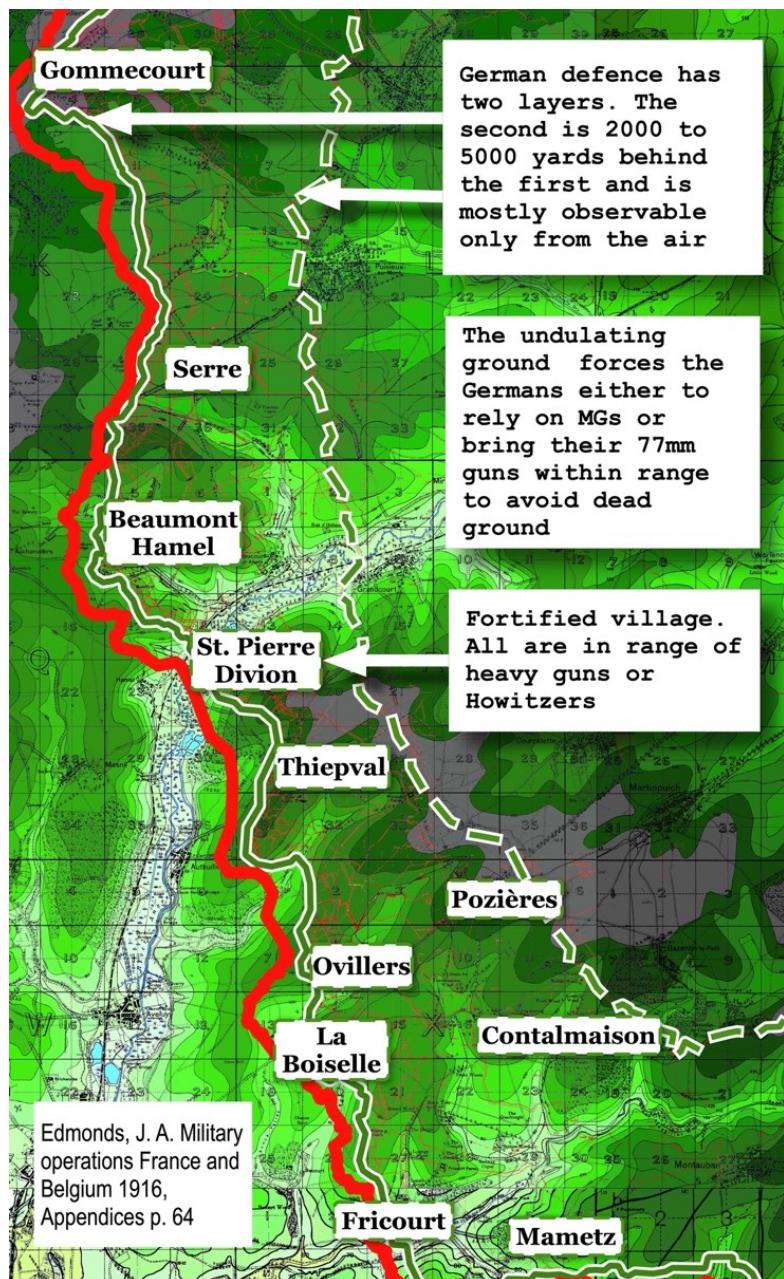


Figure 104 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's Assessment of Hostile Defences

He noted several points of 'great tactical importance as observation posts' but did not explain what was to be done about them.

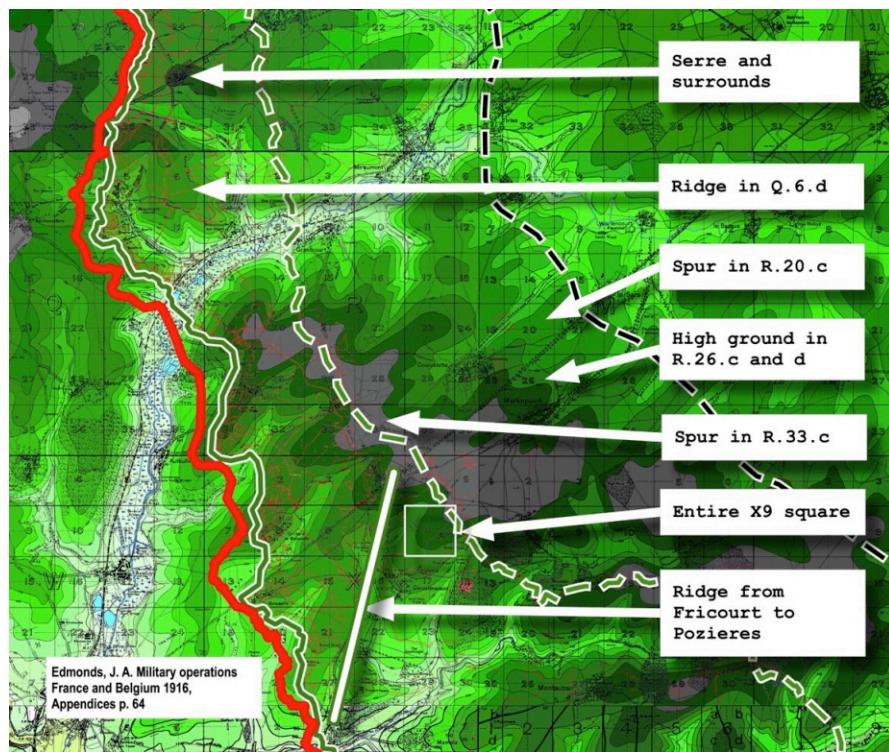


Figure 105 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's critical targets

His assessment of the length of the front varied: it was initially defined as being from the River Somme to Fonquevillers.⁶³² Section 13 referred to a 'suitable front of about 20,000 yards'. Section 17 referred to a front between Serre and Maricourt. They differed.

⁶³² Rawlinson, Operation order No. 1 of 29 February 1916 in IWM 7.

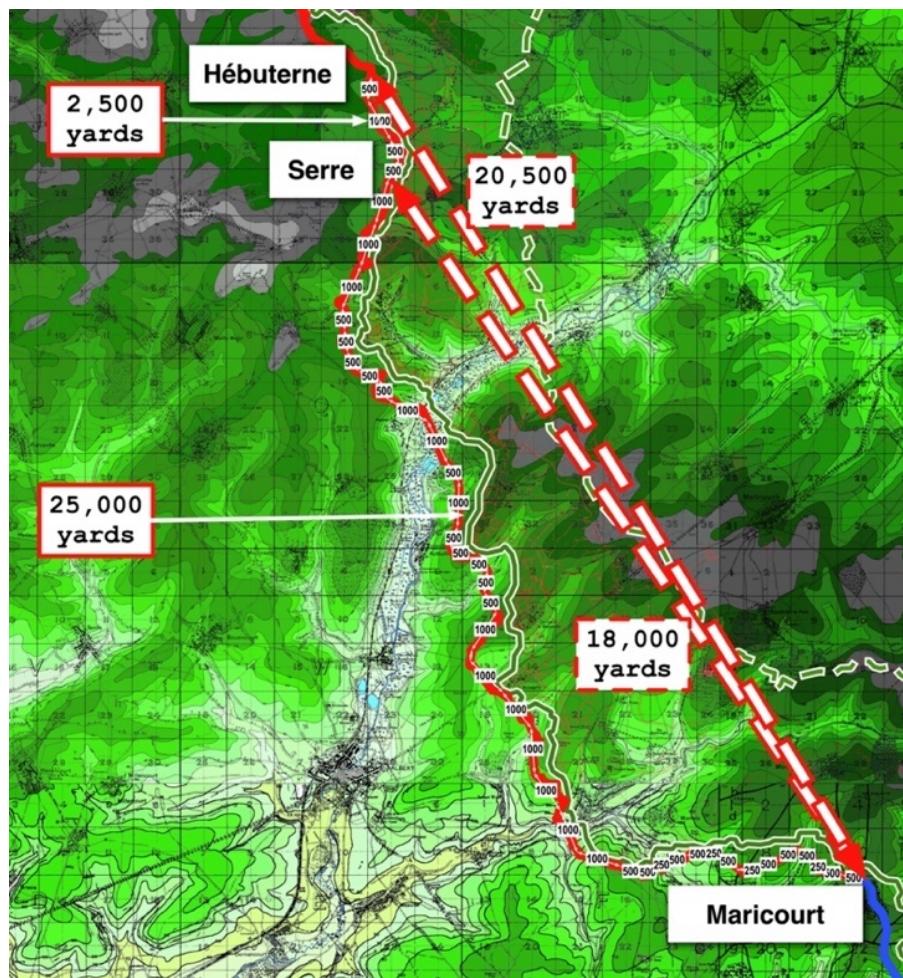


Figure 106 - Fourth Army | The lengths of the front

The as-the-crow-flies measure of the distance from Serre to Maricourt is 18,000 yards whereas the length of the British trenches was over 25,000 yards and the distance between these points is thus 25% larger than Rawlinson's estimates. He could have avoided this error by using an Opisometer or a piece of paper with a scale written on it.⁶³³ Curiously, estimates of the front's length had already been prepared.⁶³⁴

Haig was presumably ignorant of Rawlinson's inaccuracy and perpetuated it: writing to Joffre on 10 April, he claimed that the British front would extend from Maricourt to 'just South of Hébuterne'. This extended the as-the-crow-

⁶³³ A devices for measuring distances on maps which had been in existence since 1874.

⁶³⁴ Winterbotham, H. S. L., *Survey on the Western Front, 1918*. Royal Geographic Society, p. 3, and see page 527 for a discussion.

flies measure of the front to 20,500 yards and the length of trenches to over 27,500 yards.⁶³⁵ The Hébuterne-Maricourt front was eventually used in Corps and divisional planning.⁶³⁶ On April 16 Rawlinson declared the Anglo-French attack would be on an (50-56-mile) 80-90 kilometre-wide front. No questions were raised about the length.⁶³⁷

The attack was expected to last more than two weeks and reach a depth of 2000 to 5000 yards. Rawlinson claimed this would require 8-9 men per yard which implied a force of 233,750 or 19.5 divisions. The number of divisions he planned for the assault was inconsistent: in section 15 he lists 15 divisions with a further two infantry divisions and a cavalry division in reserve, but in section 36 he concludes:

‘the attack would be made by ... ten divisions [with a further two remaining] on the defensive’.⁶³⁸

These would

‘enable me to maintain a sustained offensive’.

Rawlinson was in a bind: if 8-9 men per yard were ‘none too much’, 120,000 troops left him with only 4.4 men per yard - a 49% reduction. He also noted that the 200 heavy howitzers available would not suffice for a larger front.⁶³⁹ He believed his attack to be grossly underpowered. Fortunately, he had both underestimated the artillery,⁶⁴⁰ and the number of troops that would become available.⁶⁴¹

635 Haig to Joffre, 10 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

636 Hore-Ruthven, VIII Corps operation order No. 3 of 15 June 1916 in WO 95/820/2.2.

637 Pitt-Taylor, Fourth Army conference notes of 16 April 1916 in IWM 5. 90 km is 98,425.2 yards.

638 Each Division is calculated as having 12,000 infantry, Prior and Wilson, *Op. Cit.* p. 20 and Tucker, Spencer; Roberts, Priscilla Mary, *World War I Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. ISBN 1-85109-420-2, p. 792.

639 Section 15 of GX 3/1 of 3 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

640 See page 530.

641 See page 217.

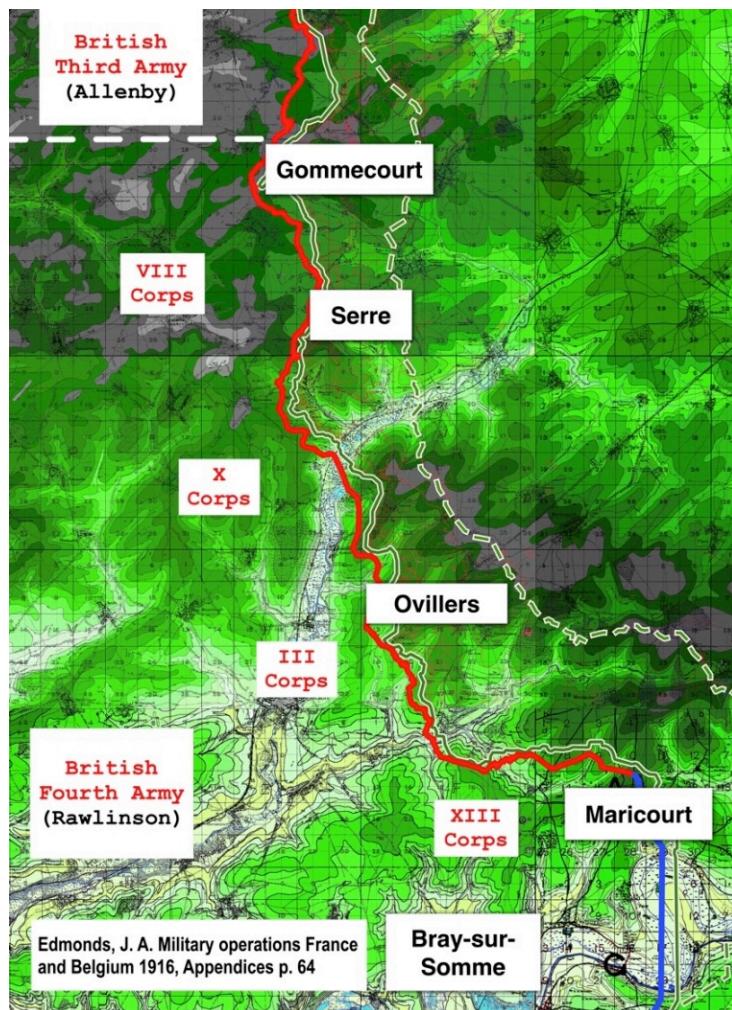


Figure 107 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's Corps Dispositions

Rawlinson's plan showed, from right to left, the XIII, III, X and VIII Corps.⁶⁴² He claimed that X Corps was 'opposite the Gommecourt re-entrant', which shows that disposition management was a problem for Rawlinson as for Haig. Perhaps he meant 'Grandcourt'.

The plan identified two sets of defensive flanks: Southern and Northern.

⁶⁴² XV Corps would not be established until 24 April 1916.

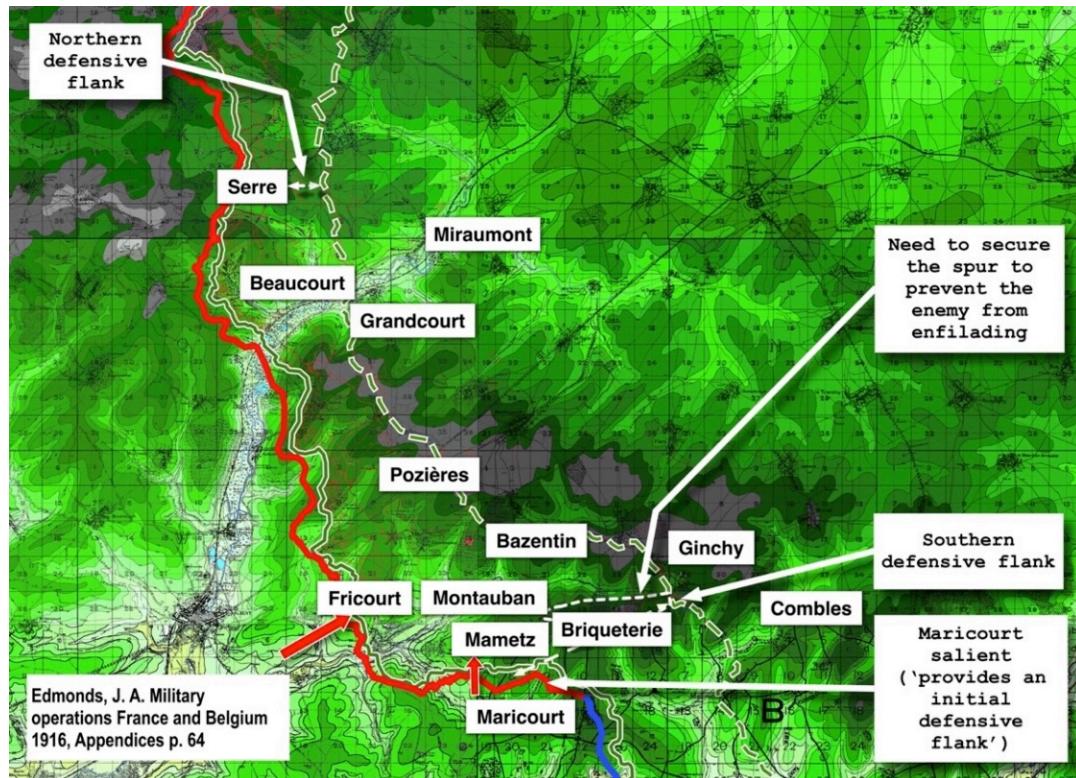


Figure 108 - Fourth Army | Defensive flanks and attacks

This choice of flanks is curious. Although it would be partly protected by the French, the southern flank was far more extensive and stronger than the northern. The northern flank, from Serre to a point 1000 yards east of Serre, seems trivial⁶⁴³. He expected the Third Army to assist in holding 'the attention of the enemy's artillery and reserves' opposite Gommecourt. Only later did the northern flank become the first step in a move against Bapaume, which made the defensive choice for the north even more curious.

Haig's attack plans were confused. Rather than begin by identifying the objectives of the attacks, justifying and then explaining them, he discussed the availability of artillery, the allotment of divisions to Corps: the possible objectives were introduced only *en passant* as if already decided. In section 17 the only attacks identified were against Fricourt and Mametz and the spur from Montauban. Implicitly other attacks would occur between Serre and Maricourt but he only showed blue and green lines to identify the limits

⁶⁴³ Refers to the square L.25 on the 57dNE map.

expected to be reached, on an attached map. These lines were the two stages of the attack. The first stage would take the front line, Serre and the fortified villages of Mametz, Fricourt, La Boisselle, Ovillers, Thiepval, St. Pierre Divion, Beaumont Hamel and Gommecourt. The second would take the German 2nd line, Pozières and Contalmaison. Between the stages would be an interval. The two stages were marked on a Map A which he distributed.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁴ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol. I p. 250.

Montgomery in G.X.3/1, III Corps war diaries of May 1916 referred to in WO 95/672/4.

See also page 224 for a discussion of this map.

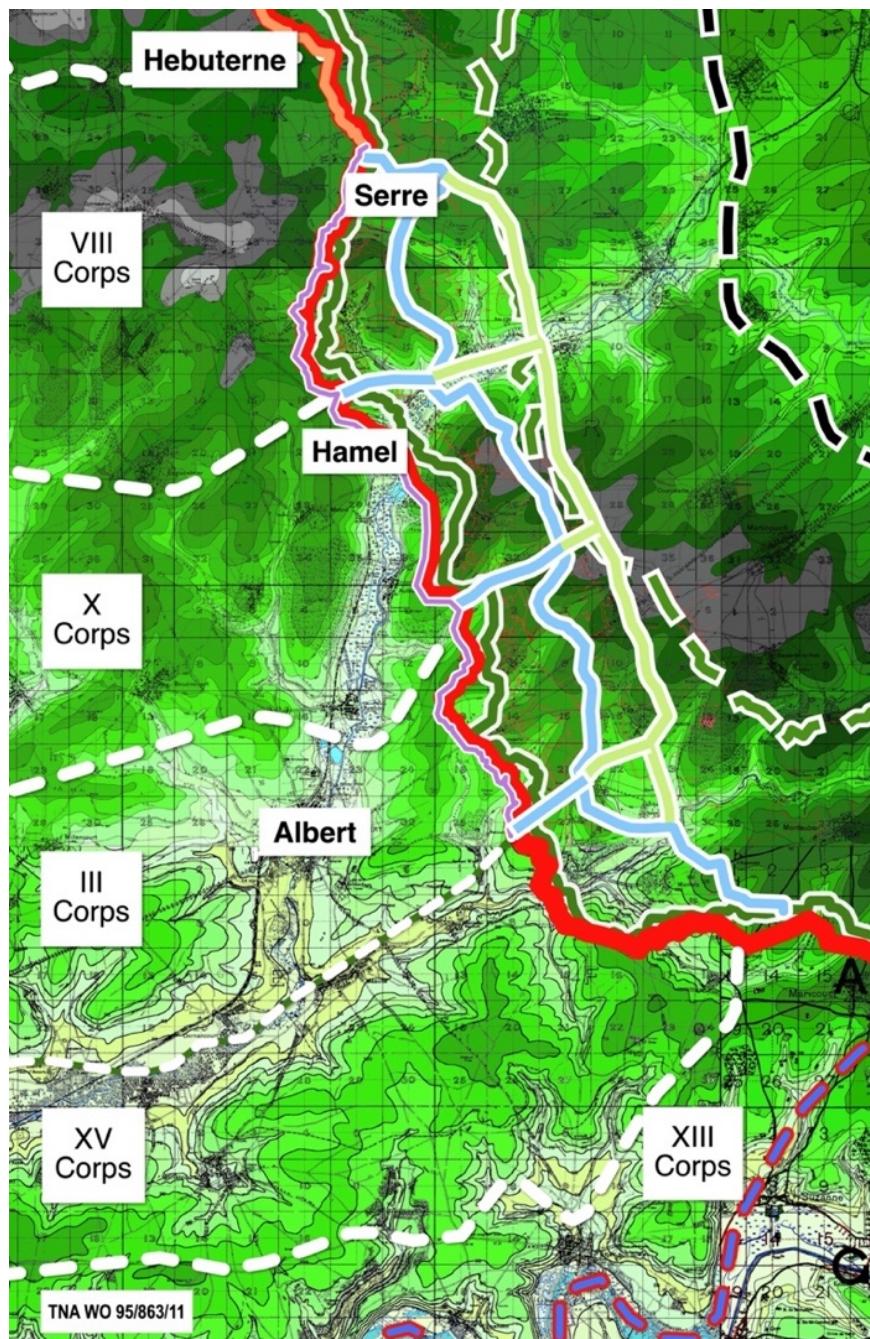


Figure 109 - Fourth Army | Map 'A' (Fourth Army Objectives)

The tactically-important points to be taken and the general direction of the attack were not otherwise mentioned: nor was Bapaume, although in later versions of the plan it became a major objective.

Having dismissed the possibility of a single attack overcoming the German second line as too risky, since the troops would be unlikely to reach the German second line before it was reinforced, Haig proposed seizing tactically-important points within artillery range, not necessarily essential to a further

advance, but whose attempted re-seizure by a German counter-attack would be easy to resist.

Hence the solid green line in Figure 109. This could only be attacked when the southern part of the German second line, mostly on a reverse slope, became visible and British artillery repositioning had been completed. It did not appear to him

‘that the gain of 2 or 3 more kilometres of ground’ justified the heavy losses inevitably incurred, but his approach would fulfil the principle of killing as many Germans as possible with the least loss. However, none of the corps plans showed how the green line would be captured.

Rawlinson also published a heavy artillery plan on 3 April.

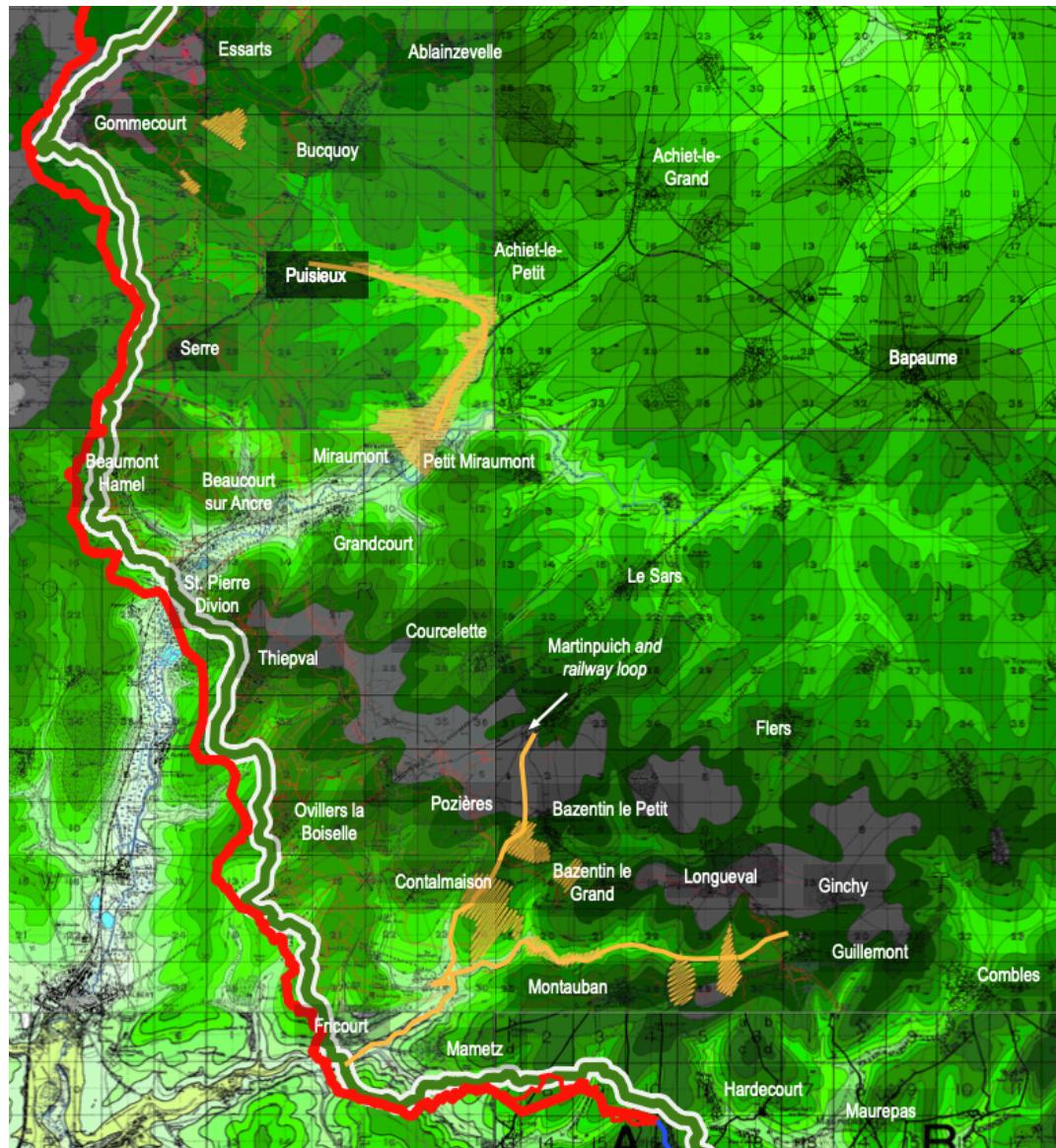


Figure 110 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's heavy artillery plan showing the targeted locations, railway lines, woods and valleys⁶⁴⁵

The heavy artillery was intended to destroy wire and targets rather than provide cover for advancing troops. Although the notion of 'curtain fire' was then current, such barrages were expected to be laid down by 18 pdr. guns and planned at Corps and divisional levels.⁶⁴⁶ Being then relatively short of guns, a 5-6 hour 'hurricane' bombardment, such as he oversaw at Neuve Chapelle, was simply unfeasible and in section 24 he proposed a 48-72 hour

⁶⁴⁵ Montgomery A. A., Allotment and tasks of heavy artillery 3 April 1916 in IWM 7.

⁶⁴⁶ 1-7 May 1916, in WO 95/431/1.

bombardment (reduced to 50-60 hours in section 34) and preceded by wire-cutting along the entire front. In this manner the assault points would be concealed as long as possible even though the enemy would be well forewarned. Whereas at Neuve Chapelle it was planned that every 10 yards of trench would be hit by 0.8 rounds of 6' shell and 3.1 rounds of 4.5' shell over 30 minutes, the artillery plan for the Somme assumed 18.3 and 74.9 rounds respectively over the 5 days bombardment, an average increase of 239%.⁶⁴⁷

With an 'intense bombardment' [there would] 'be no time for the enemy to bring up guns and reserves' [and] 'an effective back barrage' would prevent food and ammunition being supplied to the front line.

However, assaulting troops would have to occupy their assembly trenches throughout the bombardment and would therefore 'suffer casualties and lose morale'. Birch modified Rawlinson's plan, changing the allocation of guns between Corps but not the targets.⁶⁴⁸ Gas would be used, mixed with smoke, such that British troops could attack without masks, but the Germans could be expected to wear them. Smoke would be used extensively. Dummy and assembly trenches would be dug for deception purposes on other fronts.

On 4 April Haig studied Foch's proposed plan, noting that Foch expected the British to attack first.⁶⁴⁹ No review of the status of corps commanders' plans featured in the conference agenda issued by Kiggell that day.⁶⁵⁰ Very few were ready to be reviewed.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁷ Figures based on Mercer's calculations in IV Corps General Staff Neuve Chapelle Plans 1 & 2 of 3 March 1915 in WO 95/708/2

⁶⁴⁸ Birch, N. Allotment and tasks of heavy artillery 25 April 1916 in IWM 7. There was an extensive set of narrow-gauge lines from Miraumont to Puisieux and Irles.

⁶⁴⁹ Entry of 4 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶⁵⁰ Kiggell, Conference agenda. Entry of 4 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶⁵¹ See page 502 for an explanation.

5.8

Haig's Review of Rawlinson's Plan

Haig reviewed Rawlinson's plan with Rawlinson and Montgomery, disparaged Rawlinson's proposal to take only two sets of trench lines and 'kill Germans' and declared that Rawlinson should aim to get

‘as large a combined force of French and British across the Somme and fighting the enemy in the open!’

as if Rawlinson also commanded French forces.⁶⁵²

The version of the plan in Haig's diary entry of 5 April differed slightly from the one he would later submit to Rawlinson as instructions on the 12th: Haig proposed using tanks (he later pressed Swinton to have 50 ready by 1 June but they would not be operational until September),⁶⁵³ and his phrase

‘make (a) great effort on the triangle Thiepval - Boiselle - Pozieres’
implied a concern for appearances rather than effect. He offered Rawlinson no extra troops.

652 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol. I, p. 251.

653 Entry of 14 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

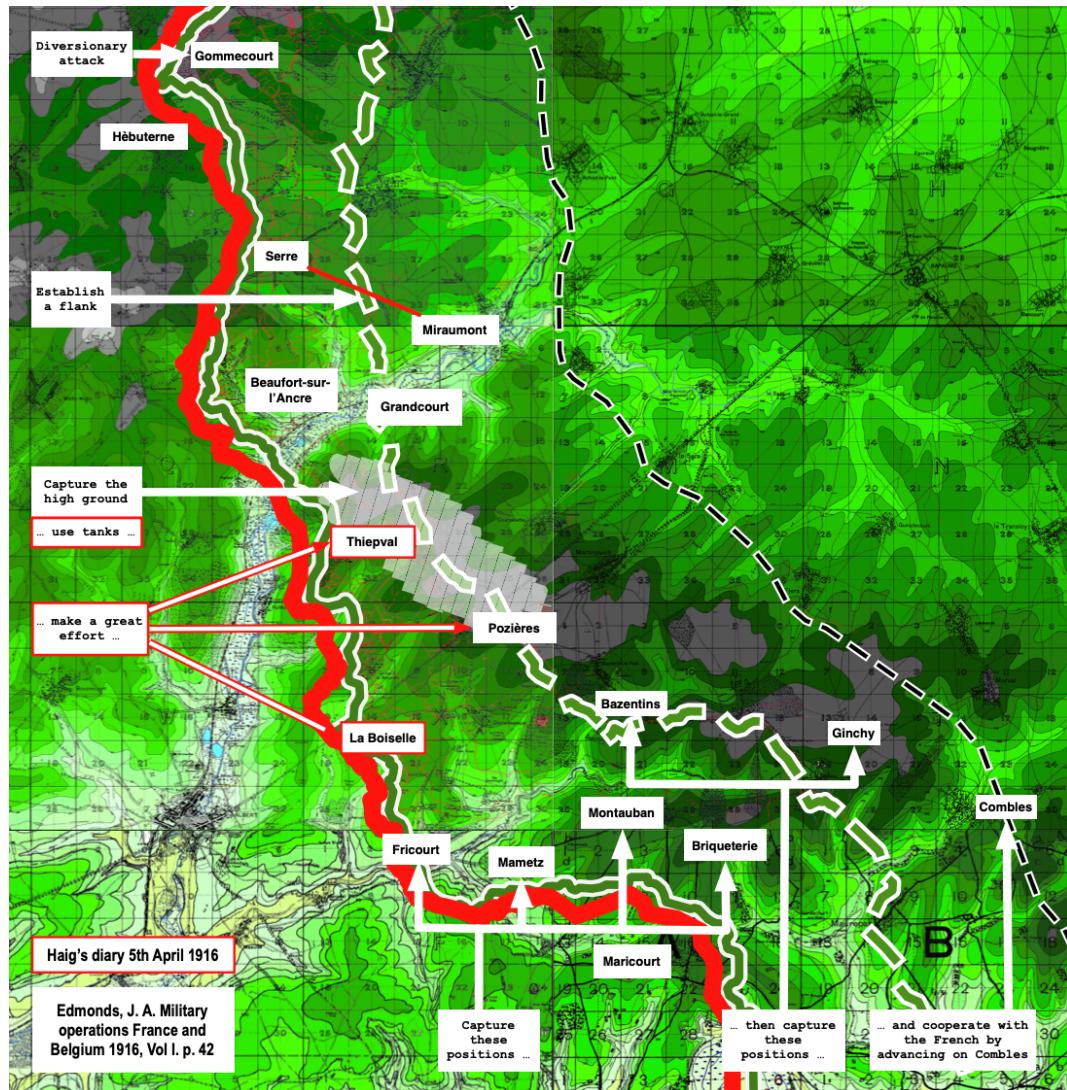


Figure 111 - GHQ | Haig's outline in his diary entry of 5 April and his letter of 12 April

His approach at this point remained that the Fourth Army would tend to advance east towards Combles rather than north towards Bapaume.⁶⁵⁴ He claimed that the BEF

‘can do better (than take the enemy’s first and second system of trenches).⁶⁵⁵ This implies that Haig was then unaware of the need to break the German Third line of defence which would be extensive by the time of the battle.

⁶⁵⁴ Entry for 5 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶⁵⁵ Haig, Diary edited by Sheffield, *Op. Cit.* p. 184.

Haig met Joffre on 7 April, discussed their plans and disagreed with him about the need to take the hill to the north-east of Maricourt prior to taking Montauban. Haig concluded that Joffre 'was talking about a tactical operation which he did not understand' and was 'really past his work'.

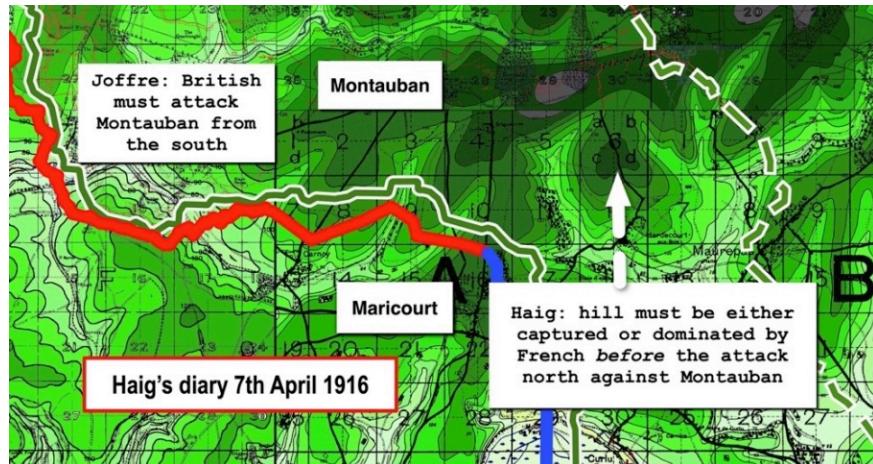


Figure 112 - GHQ | Haig's disagreement with Joffre

Later that day Haig talked to Lieut-General Aylmer G. Hunter-Weston about the possible use of tanks on the attack on Serre.⁶⁵⁶ His enthusiasm for tanks was running away with him.

Haig wrote to Foch (with a copy to Rawlinson) seeking Joffre's agreement on the attack and asking that Rawlinson agree with Foch on the dividing line between the two forces.⁶⁵⁷ He declared six principles: simultaneous Allied attacks; no preparatory attacks if Germans have used up their reserves; agreed objectives; boundaries; timing; and a common plan (which never materialised).

He repeated the constraint on attacking Montauban mentioned above and expected the British to field 23 divisions in the attack, despite having taken over the Front occupied by the French Tenth Army and having reviewed

⁶⁵⁶ Haig, Diary, 7 April 1916 in WO 256/9.

⁶⁵⁷ OAD 688 (extracts) of 10 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

Rawlinson's plan which cited 17. He lamented the lack of reserves which he expected the French to supply, 'to take ... advantage of success'.

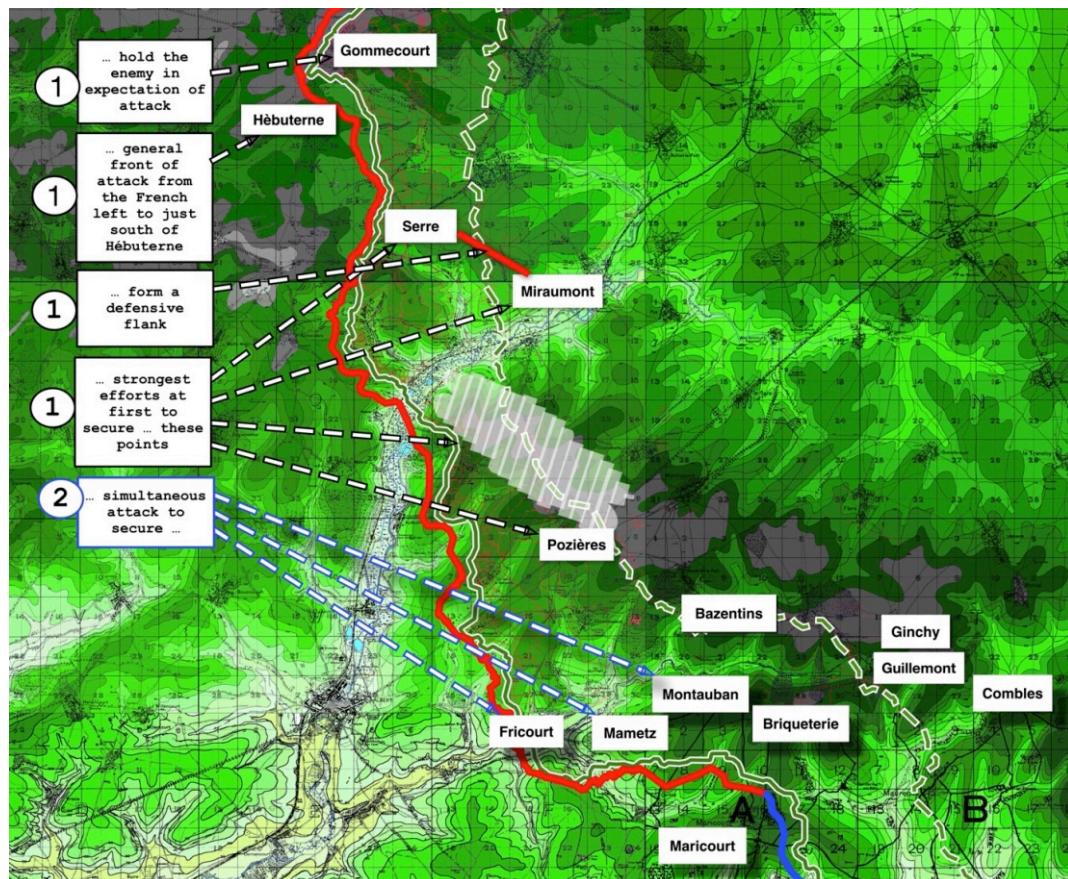


Figure 113 - GHQ | Haig's general outline plan of 10 April (OAD 688)

Haig's description of his timing was confusing: the '... strongest efforts *at first* ...', would occur with an attack on Fricourt, Mametz and Montauban which would be '*simultaneous*'.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ Haig to Foch (and Rawlinson) of 10 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

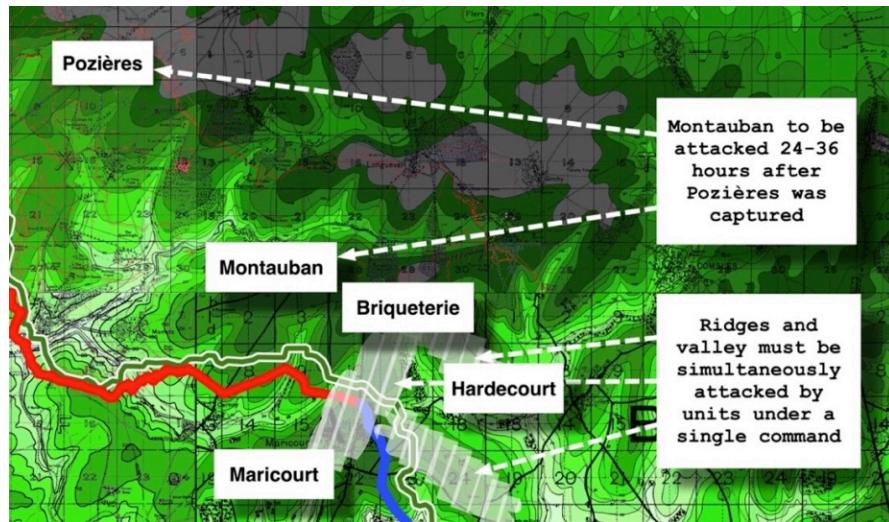


Figure 114 - GHQ | Timing detail of Haig's general outline plan of 10 April

While the start of the British and French attacks were to be simultaneous, a 24-36 hour delay was expected between the capture of Pozières and the attack on Montauban, despite Haig's request to Rawlinson for speed.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁹ Haig, Diary, 10 April 1916, WO 256/9.

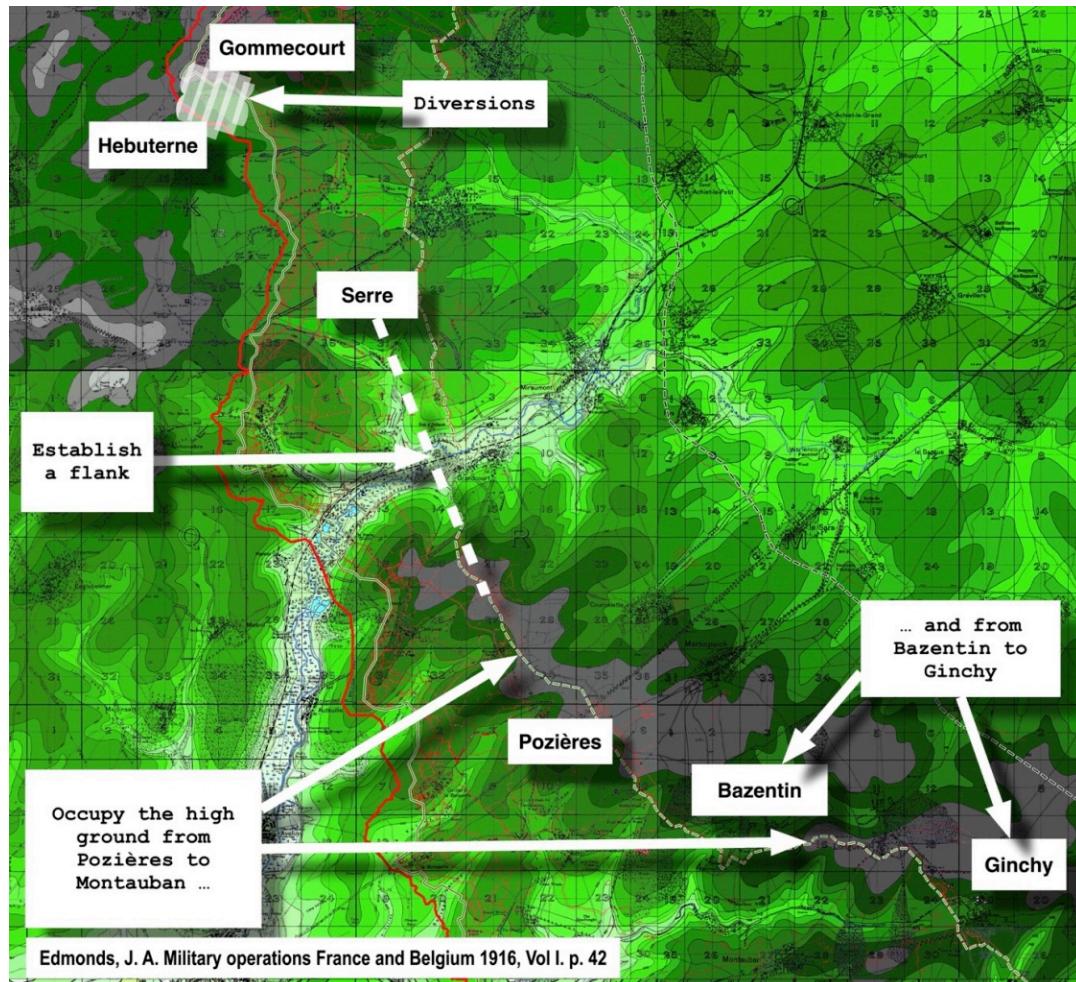


Figure 115 - GHQ | Haig's outline in his letter of 12 April

5.9

Rawlinson's Second Plan

Rawlinson proposed another outline plan on 12 April.⁶⁶⁰ Its provisions were mostly consistent with his various memoranda but differed from the one shown on page 228 above. It proposed a front from Hébuterne, south to the junction with the French at Maricourt with diversionary attacks from Hébuterne north to Gommecourt to distract the Germans until the main attack, which would establish a flank from Serre and occupy the high ground from Pozières to Montauban. With these secured he would take the high ground from Bazentin to Ginchy.⁶⁶¹ Edmonds claims that Joffre's plan included a breakthrough with which Haig was expected to comply. Haig was

660 WO 158/19, Fourth Army, Notes on operations, 28 December 1915, 5 December 1916, WO 158/321.

661 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 253.

alleged to have wanted to capture the German artillery. There was no mention of these in Joffre's plan of 10th April or in Haig's letter of 12th April.⁶⁶²

Supporting his various letters, Haig issued some general instructions to Rawlinson, which added further constraints to Rawlinson's initial plan.⁶⁶³ He emphasised the need to cooperate with the French whose front would extend south from Maricourt.

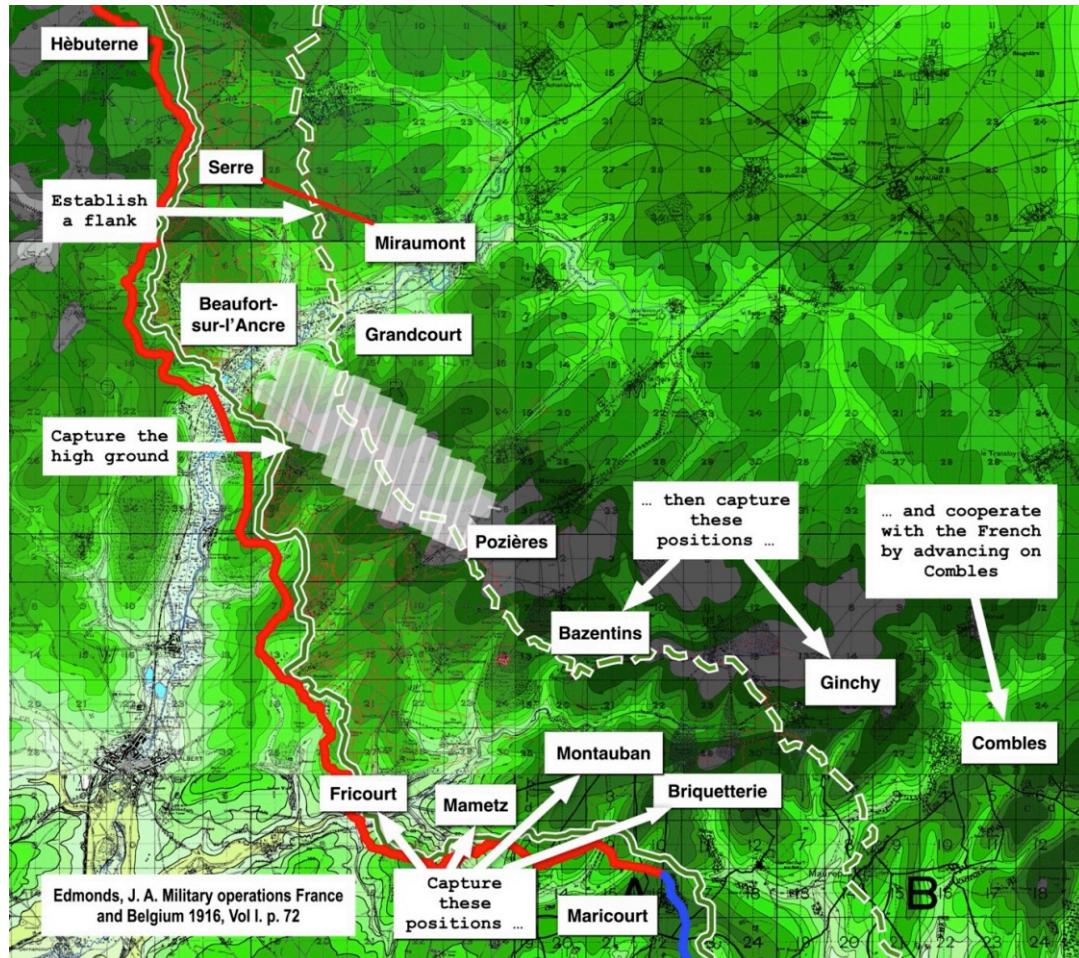


Figure 116 - GHQ | Haig's requirement of 12th April

Attacks would establish a Serre-Miraumont flank, gain the high ground

around Pozières and capture critical positions at Fricourt, Mametz,

662 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 255.

663 710/1 of 13 April 1916 in WO 158/321 and see page 194.

Montauban and the Briqueterie.⁶⁶⁴ Thereafter the task was to support the French by capturing the remaining high ground and advancing on Combles. Further cooperation with the French would be detailed later. The need to prioritise attacks around Montauban which Haig had pressed on Joffre was ignored.⁶⁶⁵ Haig told Robertson to expect 50% casualties over two months which shows that he expected a long battle, though the two months would become five and the British casualties would mount to 0.6m.⁶⁶⁶ His prediction is consistent with his view that battle losses were of little consequence when actions

produce important tactical results.⁶⁶⁷ He wanted the advance to be extended farther than Rawlinson planned and indeed as far as possible, particularly to Miraumont and Montauban, but failed to say how far. There should be as little delay to regroup as possible, yet he emphasised the need to consolidate captured ground. Despite the believed shortage of guns, he wanted the bombardment curtailed but did not specify any limits (had Rawlinson reduced the length of the bombardment to the 30 minutes of Neuve Chapelle, its intensity would have been reduced by 80%). Rawlinson ignored the suggestion. Haig again emphasised the need to exploit cavalry and Rawlinson ignored this too.⁶⁶⁸ Haig mentioned that the French artillery might be prepared to help with the attack on Montauban and the Briqueterie. His instructions were mostly exhortations and were increasingly being countered by Rawlinson's assurances, which were never fulfilled. Prior

⁶⁶⁴ These may be the *Schwehrpunkten* referred to by Graham (Graham, Dominic, *Sans Doctrine: British Army tactics in the First World War* in Travers, Tim and Archer, Christon, (Eds.), *Men at War Precedent*, Chicago, 1982, p. 81), but Gough was ill-positioned to support them.

⁶⁶⁵ GHQ War Diary of 2 April 1916 in WO 95/3/11 and see page 207.

⁶⁶⁶ Mentioned by Elles to Robertson on 14 May 1916 in WO 95/3/13. Casualties on the Somme remain debated. This figure is from Farrar-Hockley, *Somme* ... p. 253

⁶⁶⁷ Haig, Douglas, *Cavalry Studies*, Hugh Rees, (London, 1907), pp. 17, 320. Haig was referring to cavalry charges at Vionville, Eylau, Aspern and Custoza. At Custoza the Austrians (who won) suffered 319 killed, 1,282 wounded against the Piedmontese 288 killed and 883 wounded. Three Austrian Cavalry troops were reduced to 17 men,

⁶⁶⁸ Entry for 13 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9) (OAD 710/1), Edmonds, J. E., ... *1916 Vol I Appendices*, p. 72 and 2 April 1916 in GHQ War Diary in WO 95/3/11.

and Wilson ask why Rawlinson so readily capitulated to Haig and the reason might have been that Rawlinson had found a way to manage Haig: Rawlinson possibly believed that Haig never read plans below Army level. He could thus, after showing reasoned opposition, defer ostensibly to his superior's wishes while actually ignoring them. Unfortunately this involved creative ambiguity and his failure to reissue his plan of 3 April in a way that could be used as a basis for his Corps to write their plans, hobbled their planning, though it prevented criticism by Haig.

5.10 Joffre's Next Proposal

On 14 April Joffre proposed a revised version of his suggestion. His objectives were that the Allies should occupy the Ham-Péronne-Bapaume road and that the British should concentrate between Morval and Rancourt. He suggested that this should be achieved in two stages: firstly by the British occupying Serre, Pozières, Mametz Wood, Montauban and the Briqueterie and the French taking Crouy and the Bois Favière. In the second phase the British would occupy Warlencourt, Longueval, Combles and Rancourt while the French north of the Somme took Bouchavesnes and advanced on Péronne.⁶⁶⁹ The beginnings of a move on Bapaume emerged.

⁶⁶⁹ Joffre to Haig, GQG 8970 in entry of 14 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

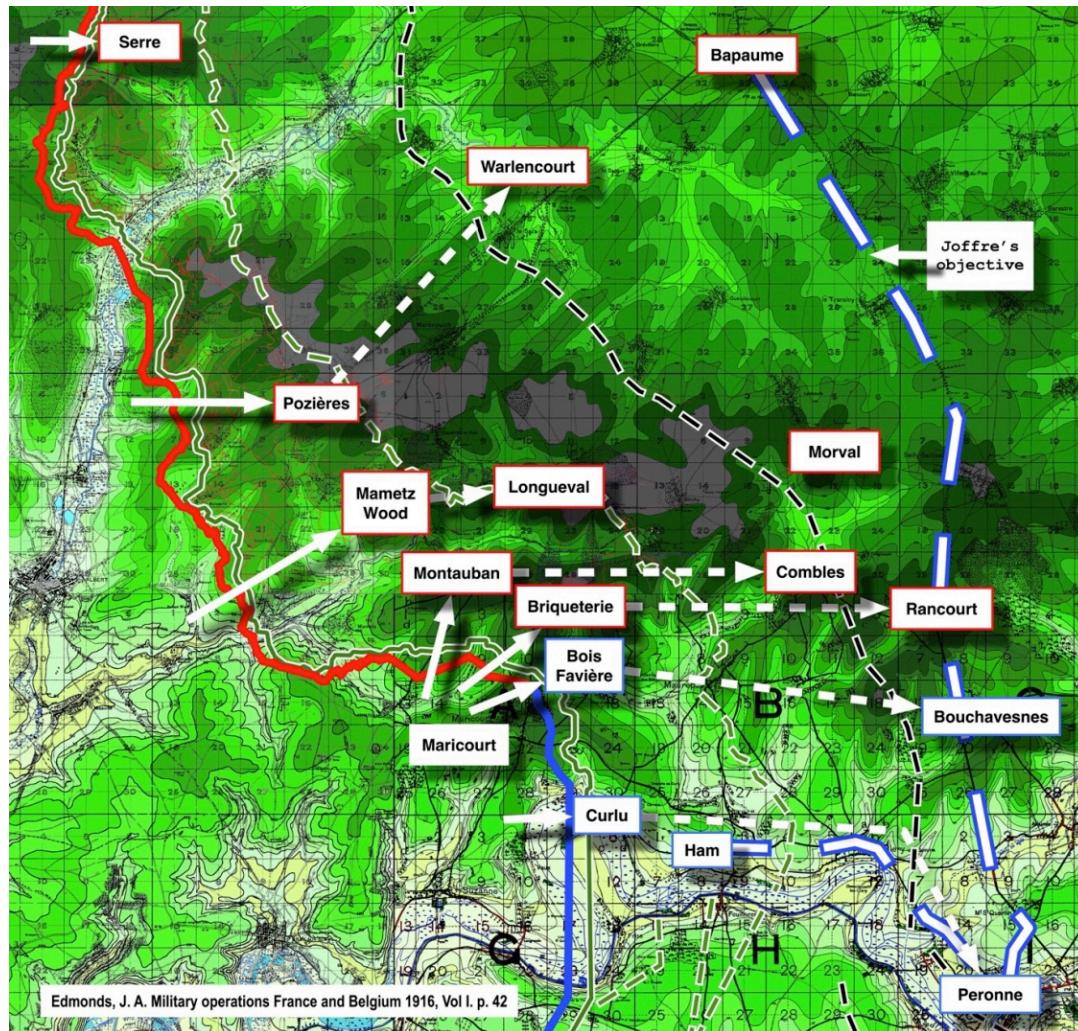


Figure 117 - Joffre's two-stage approach of 14 April

Haig agreed with most of Joffre's letter of 14 April. He feared a pre-emptive attack by the Germans and would counter it by keeping reserves ready to reinforce assaulting troops and by minimising the period of concentration. Once decided, the date of the attack must only be changed in exceptional circumstances. He could not field more than 15 divisions in May but after 15 June hoped to have 20 available.⁶⁷⁰

Joffre could not commit to a date but believed the preparatory work should be completed by 1 June.⁶⁷¹ Thereafter, 3 weeks warning would be given of the

670 Haig to Joffre in entry of 25 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

671 Joffre claimed Haig had 25 Divisions and Haig did not disagree.

attack date.⁶⁷² The point of juncture between the two armies would lie along a line joining La Briqueterie and Bois Favière. It was essential that the French left dominate the valley between the Bois de Favière and Hardecourt to inhibit any attempt at a flanking attack on British forces.⁶⁷³ Fricourt, Mametz, the Bazentins, the Briqueterie, Ginchy and Combles were left off Joffre's list. Most importantly, contrary to Edmonds' claim, no mention was made of any attack on the second line.⁶⁷⁴

That the bombardment would be prolonged was confirmed on 16 May.⁶⁷⁵ Edmonds claims that while Haig had said that the assault should be delayed until the defences were sufficiently destroyed, he later clarified that this should only be until the armies were as strong as possible, the troops sufficiently trained and the ammunition supply adequate. Rawlinson would be in complete charge until the attack 'became fluid' when Gough would take charge of the cavalry (confirmed on May 14).⁶⁷⁶

5.11

Haig Asks for Deception Attacks

Haig asked the First, Second and Third Armies to plan for deception attacks to occur towards the end of June.⁶⁷⁷ Kiggell followed up with a memo identifying two sets of attacks: by the Second Army or by the Fourth Army and some of the Third Army. The latter were presumed to occur first. The deception attacks would include the advancing of real trenches, dummy trenches and emplacements; wire-cutting; gas; smoke; barrages directed at communications and logistical centres; bombardments of rest billets and raids. No copies of such plans can be found in any Fourth Army files.

⁶⁷² Joffre to Haig in entry of 27 April 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/10

⁶⁷³ Joffre to Haig in entry of 2 May 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

⁶⁷⁴ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 259.

⁶⁷⁵ See page 238.

⁶⁷⁶ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 258 and OAD 291/14 in WO 95/4/1.

⁶⁷⁷ Entry of 27 May 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

Davidson calculated that 56 divisions would be available from July to September of which either 20 would be available for the battle alone or 31 for the battle plus exploitation. 21 more would be available for operations north of the Warnave river if only 20 and not 31 were committed to the battle.⁶⁷⁸

5.12

The Allies Agree a Start Date

The leaders finally agreed on a start date. Haig met Joffre, Robertson and Générale Noël Edouard de Castelnau to discuss it: this depended on a balance between the exhaustion of the French Army at Verdun and the increase in the BEF.⁶⁷⁹ On 27 May it was agreed to be 1 July,⁶⁸⁰ and this was confirmed in writing on 3 June.⁶⁸¹ Given the casualties at Verdun the French would be unable to 'force the passage of the Somme at or above Péronne'. The British objective of the Rancourt-Morval-Warlencourt line might be abandoned as a result.

Having reached agreement on so much, on 27 May Haig began to review the state of the Army-level preparations but with no mention of the state of planning. He identified three overall objectives which he mentioned to Rawlinson and Robertson: train, build up reserves of ammunition and (curiously, given his enthusiasm for the maximum concentration of force)

'wear out the enemy; support the French and exploit any success; but when attacking bear in mind the eventual offensives of 1917 - Ypres and avoiding being stuck in the mud beyond the Pozières ridge'.

He claimed he could not assess the BEF's tasks without the details of French plans,⁶⁸² and on 6 June Joffre declared that the first objective would be the

⁶⁷⁸ Davidson, 'Note on number of Divisions required and available for offensive operations in July, August and September' of 6 June 1916 in WO 158/19

⁶⁷⁹ Joffre to Haig in entry of 14 May 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

⁶⁸⁰ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 44. Entry of 26 May 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

⁶⁸¹ Vallières to Kiggell. Entry of 3 June 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

⁶⁸² Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 46.

enemy's first line and that the eastern objectives of the Ham-Péronne-Bouchavesnes line would be unattainable.⁶⁸³

5.13 Joffre's Amendments - The Breakthrough to Bapaume

These objectives were one of many last-minute thoughts which Haig and Joffre both threw into the planning pot too late to provoke anything but confusion.⁶⁸⁴

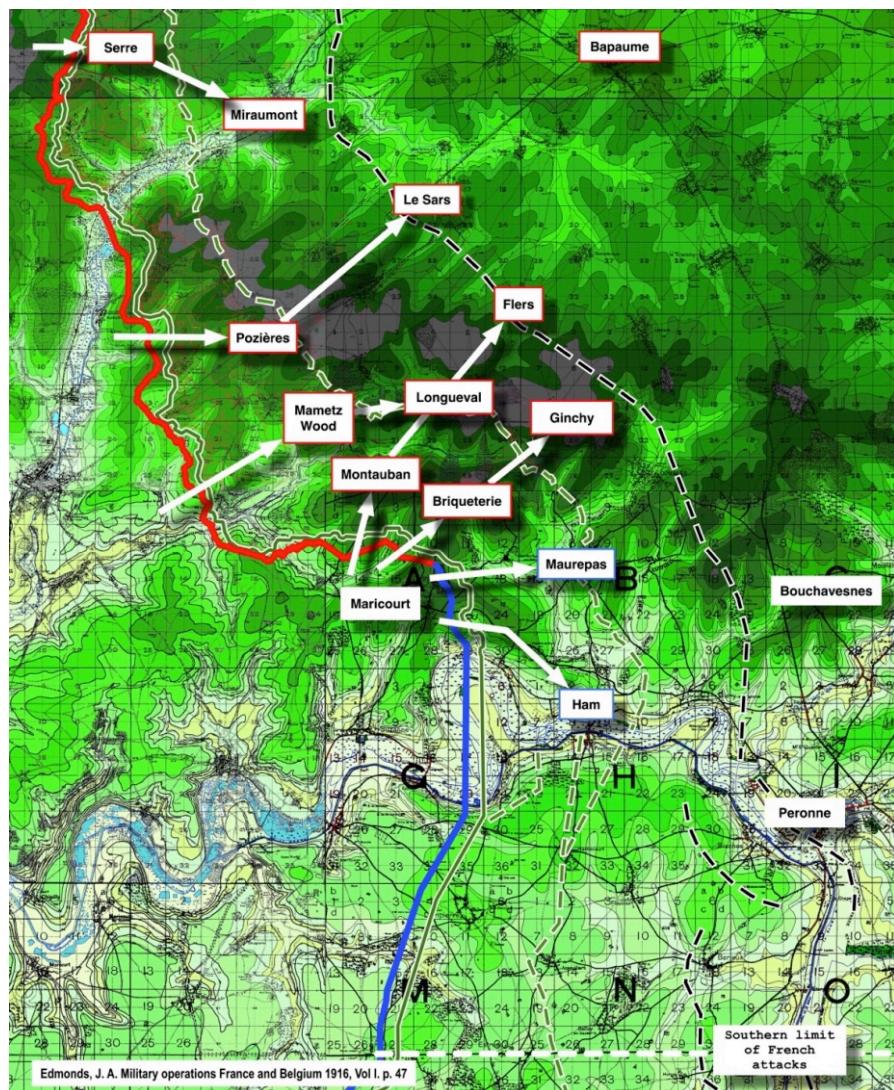


Figure 118 - Joffre's amendments of 6th of June

683 Edmonds, J. E. ... 1916, Vol 1. p 47

684 Entry of 29 May 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/10.

There was room for another massive distraction: the Breakthrough. This had often been at the back of Haig's mind and it erupted intermittently in the form of papers and notes. The first was from Kiggell as early as March who expected mounted forces to make a breach, keep it open as a bridgehead to be held by infantry and allow other mounted units to interfere with the arrival of hostile reinforcements. At no point did he explain how the breakout was to be achieved or where.⁶⁸⁵ The matter lay dormant for several months until a prod from Joffre revived it.

On 17 June he asked that the British, having taken Pozières, should advance to Bapaume. Haig said he intended to take both Bapaume and the Transloy ridge if possible. By this time, it would have been evident to anyone reviewing the plans that no breakthrough could be contemplated since the Fourth Army was using the German Third line as a limit and Bapaume lay well beyond that.⁶⁸⁶ Haig's letter suggests an extraordinary unconcern to simply look at the map and the aerial photographs. By that date the German third line was well-developed and visible, yet he proposed that, without breaking through that line, his army should move parallel to it. He could have known from Neuve Chapelle and Loos that this would have wiped it out.

Haig outlined his objectives in OAD 12 'Letter to Army Commanders'.⁶⁸⁷ They were reflected as a 'Précis of schemes submitted by Armies'. Haig confirmed them in OAD 17 of 21 June declaring he would take Bapaume and head for Morval.⁶⁸⁸ Joffre's concentration on the south ignored both the big spaces between Serre and Bapaume and the danger of splitting the Allied attack. It

⁶⁸⁵ Entry of 24 March 1916, Haig, Diary, WO 256/9.

⁶⁸⁶ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 49.

⁶⁸⁷ O.A.D. 12 of 17 June 1916 in WO 158/321. Travers claims that Haig's desire for a breakthrough was 'not quite so clear' but the ubiquity of Montgomery, A. A.'s paper on the subject in most Divisional and Corps war diaries shows that in the last fortnight of June 1916 a breakthrough was a persistent obsession at GHQ. (Travers, Tim, *'The Killing Ground'*, Unwin, London, 1987, p. 130)

⁶⁸⁸ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. *Appendices* p. 89.

took until 28 June for Joffre to realise this and ask Haig to make further changes: Haig refused.⁶⁸⁹

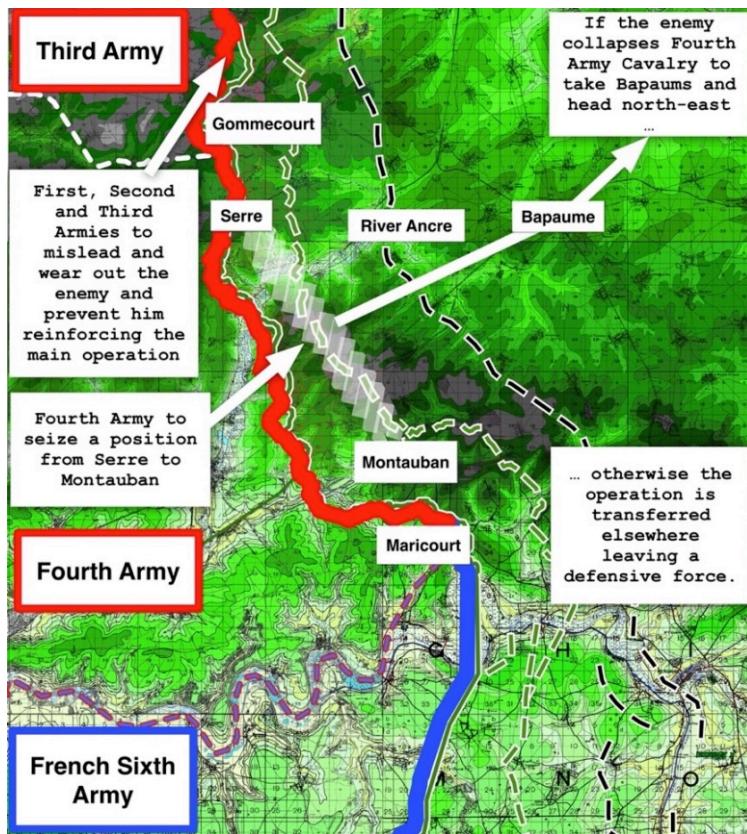


Figure 119 - GHQ | Haig's objectives

To give form to Haig's aspiration, Montgomery issued 'Orders conditional on a Breakthrough'. The first task was to assemble the troops over a four-day period between Buire and Bresle.⁶⁹⁰

689 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 50.

690 Montgomery, A. A., (2/3 (G) of 22 June in Fourth Army operation orders and instructions, 5 March, 30 June 1916 in IWM 7.

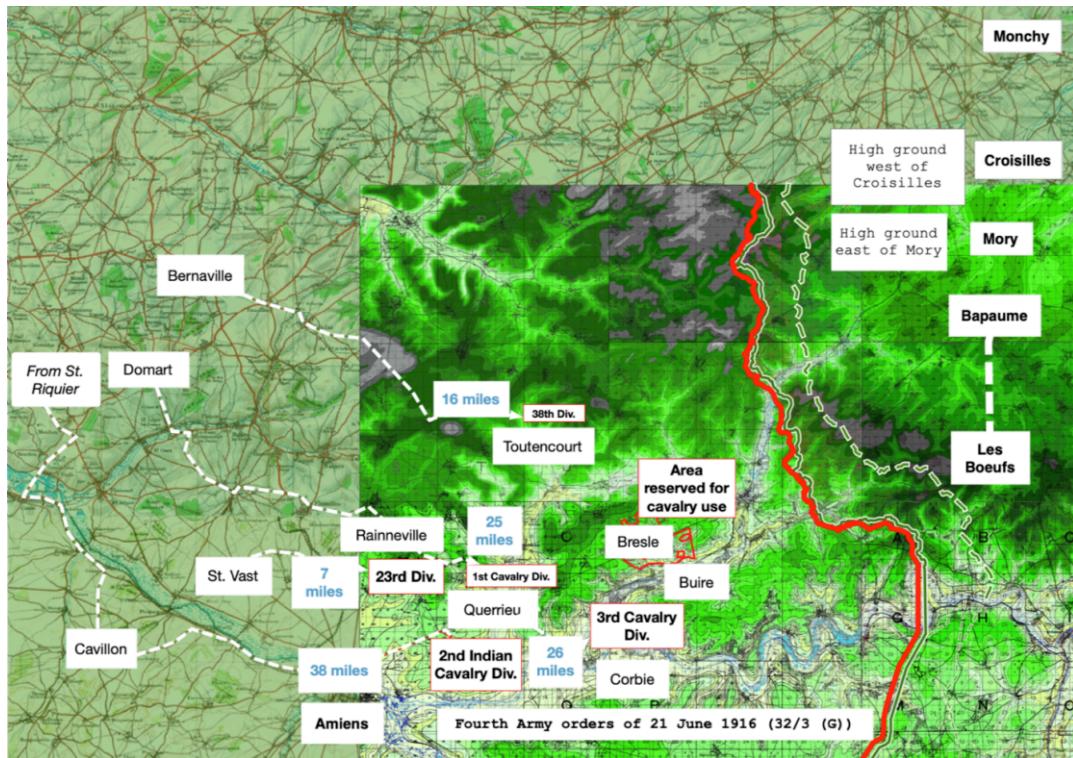


Figure 120 - Fourth Army | Orders conditional on a breakthrough of 21 June - Assembly of troops by 28/29 June and general objectives

He identified the general objectives of interest: Monchy, Croisilles, Mory, Bapaume and Les Boeufs. There followed four memoranda whose contents overlapped.⁶⁹¹ Gough as GoC Reserve army was asked to plan a movement of the cavalry (the infantry were ignored).

⁶⁹¹ Montgomery, A. A., Cavalry orders of 22 June 1916 and Orders conditional on a breakthrough of 22, 28 and 30 June 1916, in Fourth Army operation orders and instructions, 5 March- 30 June 1916, IWM 7.

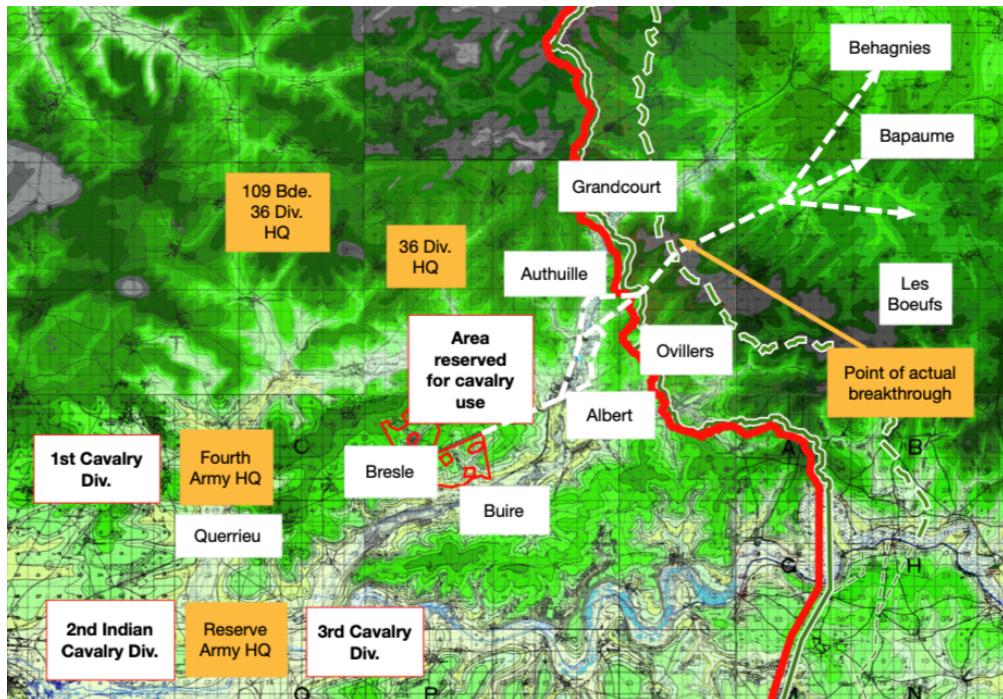


Figure 121 - Fourth Army | The plan for the breakthrough

The cavalry were expected to cross the river between Authuille and Albert, then the old German front line between Grandcourt and Ovillers, and head for Bapaume. It was a terrible irony that a breakthrough occurred at almost exactly that point.

It was never exploited since Montgomery's plans made no mention of how a breakthrough was to be confirmed and the news transmitted to begin the cavalry's advance.⁶⁹² Travers observes that Haig had 'not properly considered what to do if' no breakthrough occurred: but despite having attended a demonstration of

'fireworks ... [to show] the position of our infantry during an advance',⁶⁹³ Haig ignored them.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹² See for example the set of call signals where such a message might have been used in Horne H. S., Report on infantry-RFC cooperation of 19 May in WO 95/921/1.2. Proposed messages are: 'I am here', 'Barrage wanted', 'Lengthen range', 'Short of ammunition', 'Short of Grenades', 'Held up by wire', 'Held up by machine guns'. See also the set of messages of the 19 Division (a reserve Division of XV Corps) which (to the potential confusion of the RFC) also had a 'Headquarters are here' message in Johnson, R.M. 19 Division operation order 51 of 22 June in WO 95/2053/3.

⁶⁹³ Haig, Diary, 15 March 1916.

⁶⁹⁴ Travers, T.H.E. *The Killing Ground*, Unwin Hyman, (London, 1990), p. 131.

On the 1st of July the men of the 36 (Ulster) Division lay out in the sun all day waiting for the cavalry which never came.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁵ Middlebrook, Martin, *The first day on the Somme*, Penguin, (London, 1971), p. 176.

6. First Albert - GHQ and Army Planning

6.1 Fourth Army

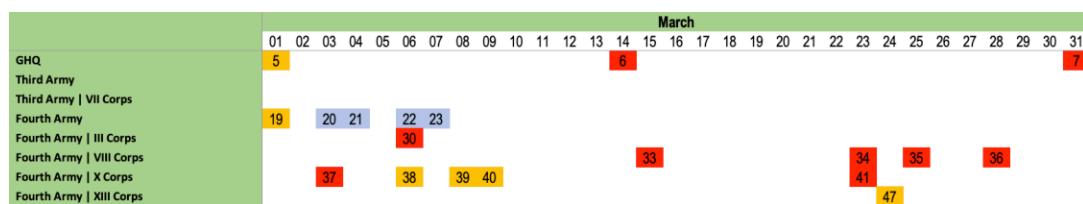


Figure 122 – GHQ and Army planning timeline - March 1916 (see page 22 for the key)

The Fourth Army was formed on 6 February 1916 and consisted of the XIII, X and VIII Corps.⁶⁹⁶ On 27 February it took over that part of the Western Front previously held by the French Tenth army and to the south formed a junction with the French Sixth Army.⁶⁹⁷ Its HQ opened for communications on 24 February at Querrieu and it assumed control of its front on 1 March.⁶⁹⁸

On 1 March the BEF occupied 151,000 yards of front of which the Fourth Army was responsible for 35,000, with the following ratios:

	Fourth Army	Opposing German	Total British	Total German
Rifles per yard	2.2	1.1	3.98m	2.25m
Total field guns	350	202	1934	1382
Total heavy guns	109*	200*	925	602

Figure 123 - BEF and German force comparisons⁶⁹⁹

*Estimate

Once established, Fourth Army Corps commanders conferred three or four times a month except in May. The conference notes frequently illustrate the extreme caution of Rawlinson and Montgomery when addressing planning. Rather than stating the current situation and the objectives clearly, they both spent much time discussing doctrine and logistics with only occasional references to units and their tasks. Thus, not until the conference of 16 April,

⁶⁹⁶ Elles, H. J., War Diary GHQ General Staff 1 March 1916 in WO 95/3/7.

⁶⁹⁷ War Diary GHQ General Staff OA 493 of 27 February 1916 in WO 95/3/7.

⁶⁹⁸ War Diary GHQ General Staff of 24 February 1916 in WO 95/3/8.

⁶⁹⁹ Charteris 'Comparison of strengths' of 1 March 1916 in WO 158/19.

after discussions of hostile raids, was a battle objective, related to a unit, mentioned.

‘The objective of the III, X and VIII Corps [are] the Pozières - Grandcourt - Serre ridge ... The tasks of the VIII and XV Corps ... [are] not yet definitely settled.’

Clearly informal discussions had occurred, since on the next page:

‘The G.Os.C of the III, VIII and X Corps briefly explained their schemes for attack.’

At this point Haig was

‘anxious to assist the French by directing the main offensive towards Combles’

(the topic of the breakthrough had yet to be broached).⁷⁰⁰ The rest of this conference was devoted to discussions of infantry, artillery and the RFC.⁷⁰¹

On taking over its part of the front the Fourth Army Corps commanders conferred on 3 March.⁷⁰² Rawlinson said that while the Army’s current role was defensive it was expected to change to an offensive one and to this end all the units must plan: he asked that the

‘schemes for offensive ... be worked out ...’
... but identified no objectives.⁷⁰³ He also ordered that the artillery preparations and the writing of estimates begin.⁷⁰⁴ Montgomery promised to forward ...

‘orders as regards objectives ... shortly’.⁷⁰⁵

700 See page 218.

701 Pitt-Taylor, 16 April 1916, Fourth Army conference notes in IWM 5.

702 [19] Fourth Army takes over front in WO 95/431/1.

[20] Pitt-Taylor, Fourth Army conference call and agendae in IWM 5

[21] Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes in IWM 5

[22] Fourth Army Corps Commanders conference preliminary notes in IWM 5

Montgomery, A. A., Conference report announcing the battle in WO 95/850/5

Anon., Corps commanders’ conference in WO 158/321

[23] Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference report in IWM 5.

703 Montgomery, A. A., ‘Fourth Army conference notes’ and ‘Fourth Army conference report in IWM 5.

704 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. pp. 247-8.

705 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 4 March 1916 in IWM 5.

... which he did. While much of the rest of the discussion concerned administration, doctrine and training, it still concentrated on preparations for attack (gun positions, OPs, ammunition dumps, water and railheads) rather than any strategic intent, or tactics. The first phase of the attack would be to take the German first line. No date was given but June or July was mooted.⁷⁰⁶

Two days later Rawlinson had an outline from Montgomery in the form of Map A.



Figure 124 - Fourth Army | Map A (III Corps copy of the 6 April)

This map formed the basis of planning until 5 June when the objectives were extended. The provenance of the map is problematic since few copies survive, but three days later a copy was distributed to divisional commanders by Cameron the X Corps Commander (see the discussion of Map A on page 264).⁷⁰⁷

706 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference report of 5 March 1916 in IWM 5.

707 Cameron, Encloses map of future offensive in X Corps CRA, Artillery programme WO 95/863/11.

Rawlinson announced the battle at the conference on 6 March using Map 'A',

'showing roughly the fronts' allocated to each corps and the objectives to the corps commanders. The map showed the objectives as blue and green lines. It was issued as a guide only, against which the corps commanders could submit their own plans with a view to an offensive in June or July, but (if the French were failing at Verdun) just possibly in April when a limited offensive might be all that could be attempted.⁷⁰⁸ Montgomery also circulated a memo identifying the three Corps with a further one (III) anticipated.⁷⁰⁹ 14 divisions would be shared between them. Artillery would consist of one heavy howitzer per 100 yards of front, possibly with some heavier calibres.⁷¹⁰

708 The Corps were re-allocated later and the final allocation is shown to minimise confusion.

709 Montgomery, A. A., to X, XIII, VIII Corps Commanders 6 March 1916 in WO 95/850/5. The memo was missing from the VIII Corps files.

710 'Heavy' implying here 6 in, 8 in and 9.2 in guns.

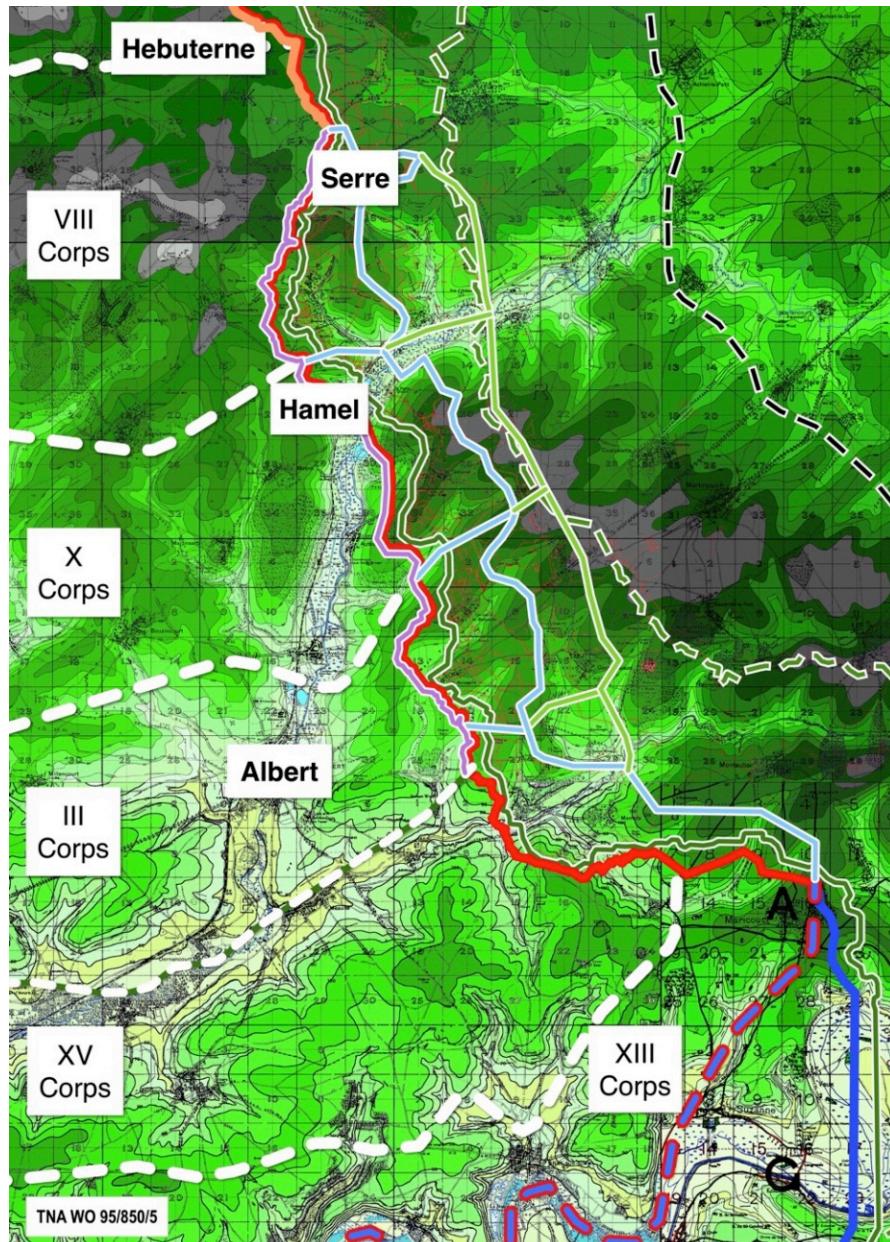


Figure 125 - Fourth Army | Overview (Map A)

Montgomery (a gunner) pressed commanders to prepare for the artillery with OPs, telephone lines and battery site selection. In this way Montgomery's approach dominated the planning. Whatever arguments might ensue between Rawlinson and Haig about breakthroughs, or other approaches, Montgomery had plumped for a simple 'bite-and-hold' strategy. He set the limits: the corps commanders followed.

Other Generals contributed: Davidson (who reported to Haig) published a 'Memo re offensive operations';⁷¹¹ Cameron published a paper on the proposed attack and speculated on possible enemy reactions (the only commander to do so).⁷¹² Hunter-Weston (VIII Corps) and Brigadier-General Hon. W. P. Hore-Ruthven (his BGGS) had published their plans in late March two months before Rawlinson sent his first outline plan to Haig.⁷¹³ Rawlinson again failed to provide a lead, though in doing so limited the risk that Haig might have decided on some major new initiative which would have rendered useless any existing plans. Clausewitzian 'friction' persisted, but Haig's influence on the plans diminished.

While corps commanders had a map, an outline and various conference reports against which to plan, the first planning document was sent by Fourth Army to corps commanders as late as 5 June. It was not an operation order but a three-page memo with another copy of Map A attached.⁷¹⁴ Corps' plans were to conform to the map, drawing 'up their scheme in detail'. It had taken Montgomery 46 days, from the moment Rawlinson sent his revised plan to Haig, to write this. The operation order followed nine days later.⁷¹⁵

Until 6 March the corps commanders' conferences had been mostly concerned with defence, thereafter they began to identify elements and constraints of offensive plans together with the limits of the battle and the

711 [6] Davidson, Outline of offensive operations in WO 158/19.

[7] Davidson, Memo re. offensive operation in WO 158/321 in WO 158/19.

712 [41] 23 March 1916, Cameron, X Corps conference notes on future operations

Cameron, Future operations

Cameron, Outline discussion of probable enemy reactions to an attack with ms. notes Rycroft, Reconnaissance in WO 95/863/11.

713 [34] 23 March 1916, Hunter Weston, Outline of XIII Corps scheme in IWM 6.

[35] 25 March 1916, Hore-Ruthven, VIII Corps Attack plan in WO 95/820/1.

[36] 28 March 1916- Hunter-Weston, Notes on VIII Corps Scheme in IWM 6.

714 Fourth Army operation orders and instructions of 5 June 1916 in IWM 7.

715 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army operation order No. 2 of 14 June 1916 in IWM 7.

corps boundaries. They were exhorted by Rawlinson (who had yet to produce any plan) to:

‘get on with all the preliminary preparations and have all plans cut and dried’⁷¹⁶

Issues such as signals, gas and smoke were also raised⁷¹⁷ On 15 March

Rawlinson went on sick leave for two weeks.⁷¹⁸

Four conferences were held on between 18 March and 8 April, but plans were not mentioned in any of them.⁷¹⁹

6.2 April 1916

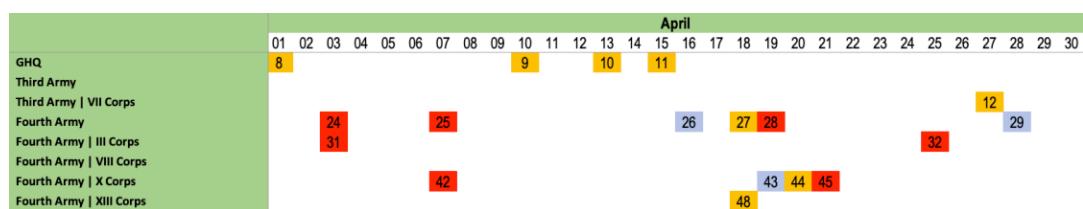


Figure 126 – GHQ and Army planning timeline - April 1916 (see page 22 for the key)

Rawlinson forwarded Haig a copy of the outline plan on 3 April.⁷²⁰ Prior to the conference of 16 April Haig asked Rawlinson for changes: Rawlinson wrote in his diary

‘It is clear that D(ouglas) H(aig) would like us to do the thing in one rush ... but it certainly does involve considerable risks, He also wants the XIII Corps to capture Montauban in the first instance.’⁷²¹

⁷¹⁶ IWM 5. See 4 Division General Staff war diary of June 1916 in WO 95/1444/4 for a Map B.

⁷¹⁷ Anon., Fourth Army Corps Commanders conference preliminary notes of 6 March 1916 in IWM 5.

⁷¹⁸ Entry of 15 March 1916 in Rawlinson, Diary, CHUR.

⁷¹⁹ OAD 271/10 of 26 March 1916 in WO 95/3/10 and 1 April 1916 in WO 95/3/13, also Rawlinson, H., OAD 271/10 in War journal with documents 5 February-26 September 1916, CHUR GBR/0014/RWLN 1/5-1/6.

⁷²⁰ [24] As footnote 723

Rawlinson forwards first plan to GHQ, WO 256/9

Rawlinson sends plans (Montgomery in G.X.3/1 referred to in WO 95/672/4

Montgomery, A. A., Heavy artillery tasks, tables in IWM 7

⁷²¹ Entry of 14 April 1916 in Rawlinson, H., ‘War journal’, CHUR.

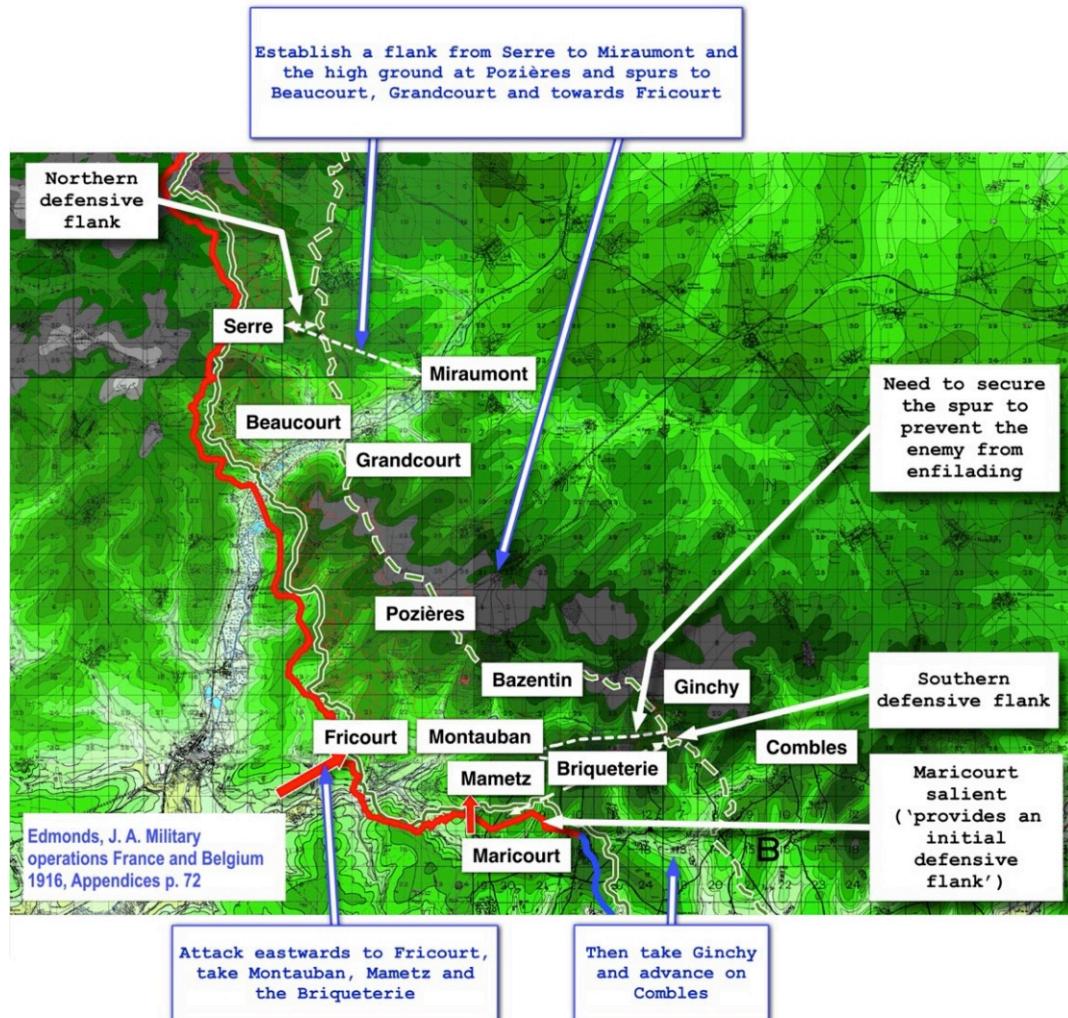


Figure 127 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's plan and Haig's requested changes

Apart from the timing, Haig's requests merely amplified Rawlinson's outline plan. Haig discussed the changes needed with Rawlinson and Montgomery on 5 April,⁷²² but took five days thereafter to send 'advice' to Rawlinson and three more to put requested changes on paper.⁷²³ Rawlinson replied with a revised version six days later.⁷²⁴

⁷²² Entry of 5 April 1916 in Haig, Diary in WO 95/256/9.

⁷²³ [9] Haig, (To Rawlinson) Extracts from secret letter 10 April 1916 in WO 158/321.
 [10] Haig, Advice, OAD 710 of 13 April 1916 in WO 158/321.

⁷²⁴ [28] Rawlinson forwards second plan to GHQ, 19 April 1916 in Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916 Vol I Appendices, p. 76 and WO 158/321.

By 6 April the only Corps to have published a plan was VIII Corps.

Consequently Rawlinson had his corps commanders describe their plans verbally at the conference that day. He was dissatisfied with Congreve and Brigadier-General W. H. Greenly (BGGS, XIII Corps), not because they had not submitted a plan (which they would not do until 23 June), but because they anticipated too many difficulties.⁷²⁵

At the conference of 16 April Rawlinson discussed 'various amplifications' of the plan which had been considered since the last conference: the Anglo-French attack would be on an 80-90 kilometre-wide front; the Pozières-Grandcourt-Serre ridge should be taken on the first day so as to form a defensive flank: he was aware this might not happen but proposed no alternative. Thereafter he wanted thrusts towards Bazentin-le-Grand, Guillemont, Hardecourt and Combles. Following their capture of a position, troops should exploit any panic by consolidating it, going

‘... for ... important points’ and be ‘covered by artillery in each ... stage of the advance’.

What ‘covered’ meant remained unclear, but later he proposed that..

‘lifts of the artillery ... must conform to the advances of the infantry’
For Rawlinson, aspirations were substitutes for cogent planning. Occasionally his incoherence revealed his carelessness:

... the enemy would increase the number of his guns but not to the extent that we shall increase his targets’.

This was battle as a slugfest, not a well-choreographed fight. Rawlinson loved truisms:

If each unit ‘knows ... what ... to do and (has a) plan to do it ... it would have an immense advantage’.

Yet at no point did he insist on rehearsals and little of his rambling narrative supported the development of a plan or strategy.⁷²⁶ III, X and VIII Corps were

725 Rawlinson, Diary 6 April 1916, CHUR.

726 Pitt-Taylor, Fourth Army conference notes of 16 April 1916 in IWM 5.

to take Serre, Grandcourt and Pozières as shown by the green line.⁷²⁷ The offensive should be aimed at Combles, to help the French, however by 29 April, XIII and XV Corps objectives remained undecided.⁷²⁸

On 17 April Major-General O. S. W. Nugent (GOC, 36 Division) gave Rawlinson the detail of his plan 'which he is working at well'.⁷²⁹ On 18 April Rawlinson reviewed Congreve's plan 'for the attack on Montauban' and began to side with him:

I am not at all sure that we can undertake this objective (Montauban) with the guns we have got'.⁷³⁰

On 19 April Rawlinson answered Haig's objections concerning Montauban by publishing a memo of several pages of caveats and objections,⁷³¹ concluding with two possible approaches. It was not a plan and it was quite unusable by the Corps which might have expected to be able to decompose it as a basis for their own plans.⁷³² It represented another abdication of leadership by Rawlinson which may also have been a cause of the gross planning delays from which Fourth Army then suffered, but it delayed any objections from Haig until 16 May.

Three days later he was dissatisfied with the plan to attack Serre in that Major-General R. Wanless O'Gowan (GOC, 31 Division) ...

'is not good at explaining and ... did not seem ... To have thoroughly worked out his scheme'

... which would begin to be published, in parts on May 4.⁷³³ For Rawlinson a review of a plan was a form of *viva voce* untrammelled by documentation, in

727 Presumably a reissue. It accompanied GX 3/1 of 3 April 1916.

728 Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol 1. p. 256.

729 Rawlinson, Diary 17 April 1916, CHUR.

730 Rawlinson, Diary 18 April 1916, CHUR.

731 See page 232.

732 Amended plan submitted by the Fourth Army to GHQ, 19th April 1916 in Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Vol I Appendices, p. 76 and in WO 158/321.

733 Rawlinson, Diary 4 May 1916, CHUR and WO 95/2341/1.

which the loquacity of corps commanders substituted for plan quality, as his comment on Nugent's plan implied.⁷³⁴ Montauban was still a major issue on April 24 and planning was evidently delayed because

‘there was no news from GHQ yet [on the attack on] Montauban.’
Montgomery and Birch exchanged artillery plans.⁷³⁵ Cameron (X Corps) requested plans from the divisional commanders and published its plans, the first corps to do so.⁷³⁶

At the 29 April conference, the plans for operations of the XIII and XV Corps were discussed *in vacuo*: the XIII Corps would not begin to publish their plan until 15 June (the last part being published on 7 July) and XV Corps did not publish until 31 May.⁷³⁷ Rawlinson asked for ‘preliminary artillery schemes’ by the ‘end of next week.’ The possibility of counter-attacks against Montauban was raised: artillery must cover its northern and eastern approaches but no conclusions were drawn. Later operations were discussed but not noted.⁷³⁸

Elsewhere, an enormous confusion developed. Travers refers to Colonel S. J. Scobell of X Corps and claims that Corps called for plans from their divisions and then attempted to coordinate them.⁷³⁹ Scobell's words were more damning:

My own impression of the preparation of the battle ... was that at very great deal of extra work was thrown ... staffs by the practice ... of asking for plans and then trying to coordinate them at Corps HQ and Army HQ with the result that many [were] sent back to be done again. I think the 36 Division plan was [returned] three times. One felt that [had] much more ... gone as

734 See page 236.

735 [42] Montgomery, A. A., Allotment and tasks of heavy artillery of 7 April 1916 in WO 95/863/11..

[31] Montgomery, A. A., Heavy artillery tasks 1 of 3 April 1916 in IWM 7

[32] Birch, Heavy artillery tasks, 2 of 25 April 1916 in WO 05/690/1 and IWM 7.

736 [44] Cameron, Requests battle plans of 20 April 1916 in WO 95/863/11.

[45] Anon., X Corps plans, tables, map of 21 April 1916 in WO 95/850/5.

737 WO 95/895/2 and WO 95/921/1.

738 Montgomery, A. A., 28 April 1916 in IWM 5. The conference was held on 29 April 1916 according to Elles to CIGS 14 May 1916 in WO 95/3/13, GHQ (O.A.D.291/13) of 1 April 1916 in WO 95/3/12.

739 Travers, *Killing Ground*, p. 143.

an order in the first place, ... divisions would have known what their plans had to fit in with ... The result was a production of vagueness and waste of work.⁷⁴⁰

By the end of April, of the 17 divisions, only four commanders: Major-General H. E. Watts⁷⁴¹ (7 Division), Lieutenant-Colonel H. R. Cumming (48 Division), Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. Paley (21 Division) and Lieutenant-Colonel C. O. Place (36 Division) had written draft plans.⁷⁴² Lieutenant-Colonel Walter W. Pitt-Taylor at GHQ was so concerned by the delays that on 21 April he asked all Corps that the plans

‘... reach this office by the evening of 30 April.’ These should include both the divisional and corps plans.⁷⁴³

6.3 May 1916

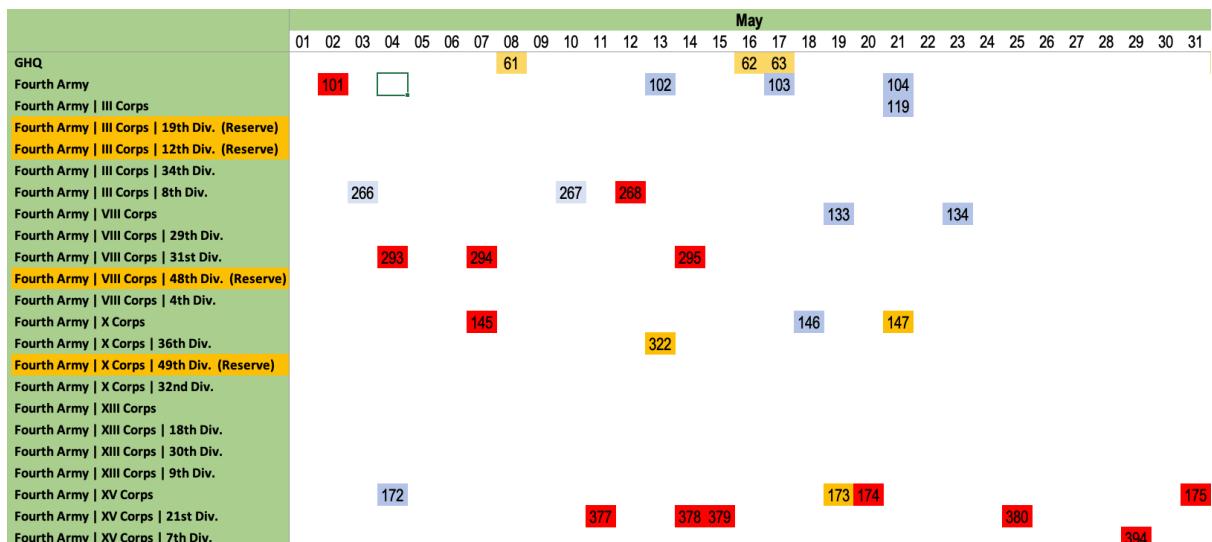


Figure 128 – GHQ and Army planning timeline - May (see page 22 for the key)

Pitt-Taylor’s plea was mostly ignored: during May only two Corps responded: Cameron of X Corps and Brigadier-General L. R. Vaughan of XV Corps

740 Scobell to Edmonds in CAB 45/133.

741

742 [51] Cumming, 48 Division OO 58, Plan of attack on Gommecourt of 8 April 1916 in WO 95/2745/3.

[52] Place, C. O., Plan of attack No. 1 of 27 April 1916 in WO 95/2491/2.1.

[54] Paley, Outline plan of 19 April 1916 in WO 95/2129/4.

[55] Watts, Scheme for proposed operations of 21 April 1916 in WO 95/1630/3.

743 Pitt-Taylor, Memo of 21 April 1916 in WO 95/850/5. The contents of WO 95/431/1, Fourth Army War Diary, February, July 1916 are blank for the period 23 March -30 April 1916.

proposed some changes.⁷⁴⁴ Horne of XV Corps proposed a 'Scheme of operations'.⁷⁴⁵ Three divisions responded: 8,⁷⁴⁶ 31,⁷⁴⁷ and 21.⁷⁴⁸ Uniquely, 21 Division, also perhaps concerned for timeliness, drafted operation orders for their Brigades and battalions.⁷⁴⁹ Conferences were held by Fourth Army and its Corps, the most substantial by Rawlinson on 21 May.⁷⁵⁰

There remained one fundamental, unresolved problem: the lack of an overarching Fourth Army plan to which the Corps and divisional plans could relate. Without this it was impossible to agree on an explicit set of objectives, coordinate the artillery and the infantry actions, or protect the boundaries between units. This problem would not be resolved until June, by which time it was too late. On May 1 Rawlinson read Foch's plan of attack. For him it was a 'heavy day':

-
- 744 [145] Cameron, Proposed plan changes, of 7 May 1916 in WO 95/850/5.
Anon., Proposed plan changes (fragment) of 7 May 1916 in WO 95/850/5.
- 745 [174] Vaughan, L., Proposed alterations to plan of attack of 20 May 1916 in WO 95/921/1.2 (Note that no plan prior to this date can be found in the file and none is referenced).
- 746 [175] Horne, Scheme of operations, Part I of 31 May 1916 in WO 95/921/1.2.
- 747 [268] Hill, OO 107 Assault of 12 May in WO 95/1674/4.3.
- 748 [297-299] Baumgartener, 31st Division battle instructions 1-31 of 10-16 June 1916 in WO 95/2341/1.
[295] Stenhouse 31 Division OO 16, boundaries of 14 May 1916 in WO 95/2341/1.
- 749 [377] Forster, OO n, assault.
Profeit, Medical arrangements of 11 May 1916 in WO 05/2130/1.1.
- 750 [378] Bosanquet, Provisional OO 1, assault.
Bosanquet, 63rd Brigade OO 47, assault.
Bosanquet, 64th Brigade OO X, assault of 11 May 1916 in WO 95/2130/1.1.
- [379] Indecipherable, 13th Northumberland Fusiliers OO 1, assault.
Fitzgerald, 15th DLI OO 1, assault.
Saunders, 1st East York Rifles OO 8, assault.
Stephenson, 9th KOYLI Provisional OO, assault.
King, 10th KOYLI Provisional OO, assault.
Scott, 8th Somerset LI OO 1, assault.
Boden, 4th Middlesex OO 1, assault.
Johnston, 8th Lincolnshire OO ?, assault.
Taylor, 10th York and Lancaster OO ?, assault, barrage map overlays.
Wellesley, 21 Division Artillery OO 22, assault of 15 May 1916 in WO 95/2130/1.1
- 750 [102] Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 13 May 1916 in IWM 5.
[104] Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 21 May 1916 in IWM 5.
[103] Anon., Conference notes of 17 May 1916 in WO 158/321.
[68] Kiggell, Provisional timetable set by GHQ in OAD 9 of 12 June 1916 in WO 158/321.
[105] Montgomery, A. A., Write your own plans.
Montgomery, A. A., Artillery table.
Montgomery, Programme of preliminary bombardment of 5 June 1916 in IWM 7.

‘I must issue one to the Fourth Army’ he decided.⁷⁵¹ He never did. Montgomery’s order of 14 June was given to five corps as the basis of the battle. It was two pages long. The corps commanders were thus left directionless and effectively ceded planning direction to divisions while attempting to coordinate the divisional plans.⁷⁵²

On May 2 Rawlinson discussed the VIII Corps plan with Hunter-Weston approvingly. This document has not survived. The ‘Note on VIII Corps Scheme’ of 28 March: the four-page order to attack the Grandcourt-Serre ridge and the 83-page ‘Scheme of operations’ were not published until mid-June.⁷⁵³ On May 5 he reviewed the III Corps plan of Lieutenant-General W. P. Pulteney which by 20 June was still a two-page order:

[Pulteney] ‘has much to do in getting his scheme in order’.⁷⁵⁴
On May 11 Nugent (GOC, 36 Division)

‘gave a good account of his method of attack but ... [his 16-page] plan is too complicated’.⁷⁵⁵
Nugent explained his approach two days later in a three-page document.⁷⁵⁶

Rawlinson lamented that both the XV and XIII Corps were ‘behindhand as I cannot get a decision about Montauban’. He would review them the next week. Haig decided on the 13th in favour of a long bombardment and taking Montauban.

Rawlinson complained

‘The Corps reviews require to be coordinated with one another - they do not at present fit in’.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵¹ Rawlinson, Diary, 1 May 1916, CHUR.

⁷⁵² [107] AAMontgomery - Fourth Army operation order No. 2 (Somme) (IWM 7) (WO 158/321).

⁷⁵³ VIII Corps Operation Order No. 3 of 15 June 1916 and VIII Corps Scheme of operations of 16 June 1916 in WO 95/820/2. No others are on file.

⁷⁵⁴ Entries of 5 and 11 May 1916 in Rawlinson, Diary 1916, CHUR and [125] Romer, III Corps operation order No. 70 of 20 June in WO 95/672/5.

⁷⁵⁵ Rawlinson, Diary 11 May 1916, CHUR.

⁷⁵⁶ Nugent, 36 Division G.S./4/415 of May 13 in WO 95/2491/2

⁷⁵⁷ Entry for 11 May in Rawlinson, Diary 1916, CHUR.

The conference of 17 May would

‘decide the framework of the scheme on which the Corps Commanders would have to frame the detail of their attacks.’⁷⁵⁸

The dominant reason why these plans did not ‘fit in’ was of course

Rawlinson’s failure to write an overarching plan.

The preceding day, having received no plan from Rawlinson, Haig sent a memo asking that the first day’s objectives of the Fourth Army include the Serre-Miraumont spur, Pozières, Contalmaison and Montauban.

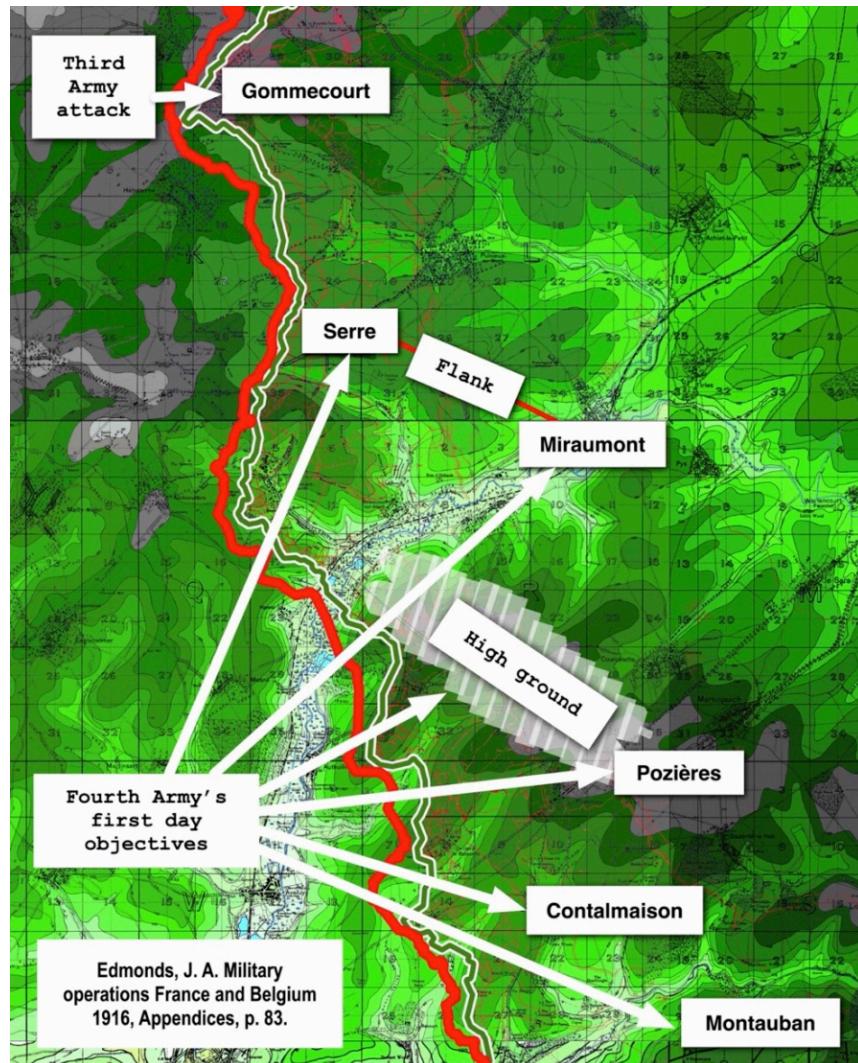


Figure 129 - GHQ | Haig's letter of 16th May

758 Entry for 15 May in Rawlinson, Diary 1916, CHUR.

Thereafter the general direction of the attack would be south-west, towards Combles. The Third Army would attack the Gommecourt Salient.⁷⁵⁹ Artillery would continue to bombard until officers were satisfied that obstacles were destroyed. Coverage of troops had failed in the past because 'lifts' had occurred too soon, but it remained a matter of timetables: the green line might be reached in three hours. Once it was taken (hopefully on day one) the artillery would protect it with a barrage while the infantry sent observers forward (presumably *not* into the barrage) to monitor any counter-attacks. On having established flanks towards the northwest and west, the Army would head southwest towards Combles. Haig was thus proposing to have his army move south-west, exposing its flank to the German third line.

In preparation for the conference of 17 May, Rawlinson issued revised objectives to accommodate Haig.⁷⁶⁰ The question of monitoring the state of the advance was raised in a discussion of flares. The RFC had flares to spare and proposed that these or mirrors be used to communicate with aircraft. What the letting-off of a flare was intended to signify was undecided: some position was occupied, or some point had been reached. Generally, it was held, flares should be lit only when a contact aircraft had just fired a white light to indicate they were watching. Lamps might alternatively be used and Corps commanders were asked to decide if they should be held by brigade, divisional or battalion HQs as well as the codes to be used. The use of rockets other than to deceive the enemy was deprecated. Rawlinson appealed for answers to the questions raised to be forwarded soon.⁷⁶¹ None can be found

759 GHQ letter OAD 876 to Sir H. Rawlinson, 16 May in Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916 Vol I Appendices, p. 83.

760 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 13 May 1916 in IWM 5.

761 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 21 May 1916 in IWM 5.

in the papers.⁷⁶² Thus an opportunity for timely advice of any breakthrough was lost.⁷⁶³

Further advances would depend on the speed with which artillery could move and this problem should be considered before the next conference, a plan written and explained to Corps at a future conference. The value of training was emphasised: the date of the operation depended largely on its conclusion (it didn't).⁷⁶⁴ The French would attack on a greater front than the British and would take the Bois de Favière and the south bank of the river which commands the north bank. Corps could assist by enfilading the enemy to the benefit of adjacent Corps.⁷⁶⁵

On 27 May at a conference at St. Pol, Haig issued instructions for the preparation for the battle. 33 days prior to the attack he was still unsure whether the Second or the Fourth Armies should attack first. He asked that deception operations be planned to include creating false trenches and gun emplacements, as well as wire cutting, gas and smoke discharges along the entire front, bombardment of communications, and rest billets, and night raids.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶² Pitt-Taylor mentioned the possibility of passing a coded message to the Cavalry on 30 June 1916 in WO 95/672/5 but made no mention of conventions or meaning.

⁷⁶³ See page 218.

⁷⁶⁴ See page 555.

⁷⁶⁵ Montgomery, A. A., 21 May 1916 Fourth Army conference notes in IWM 5.

⁷⁶⁶ GHQ letter OAD 912 to Sir H. Rawlinson of 27 May 1916 in Edmonds, J. E., Appendices, p. 84 and O.A.D.924, O.A.D.912 and O.A.D.91 of 1 June 1916 in WO 95/4/1.

6.4

June 1916

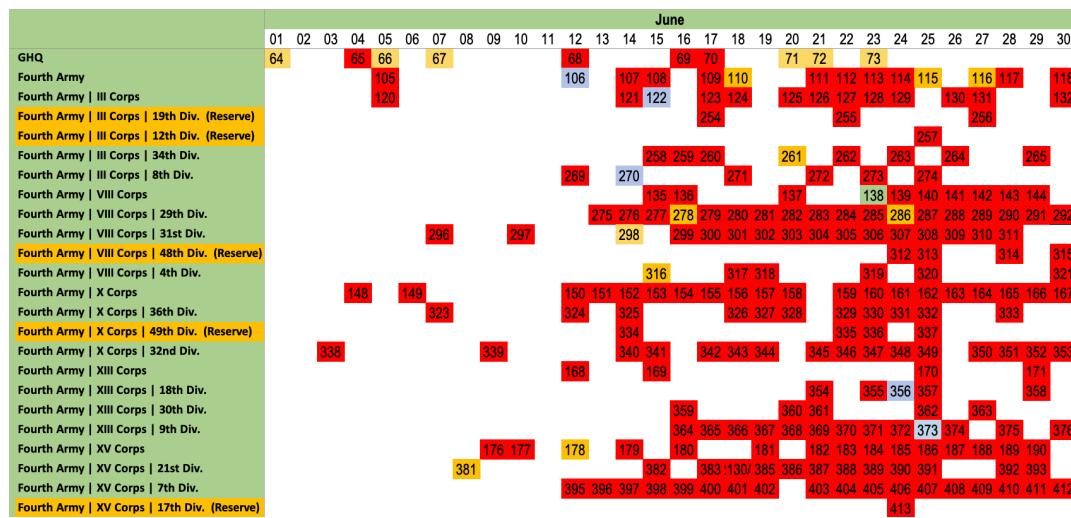


Figure 130 – GHQ and Army planning - June (see page 22 for the key)

By June planning was under way in all Corps and divisions. VIII, X and XV Corps, 7th, 21, 32 and 36 Divisions had already submitted drafts. Every corps had held at least one battle-planning conference.

On 1 June Rawlinson settled the matter of the synchronisation of the artillery lifts of the Corps with Montgomery and Budworth.⁷⁶⁷ On 4 June Allenby published an outline of an attack by Third Army on the Gommecourt Salient.⁷⁶⁸ At the Fourth Army conference the same day Rawlinson gave a situation report: the state of the Eastern front had greatly improved,⁷⁶⁹ but the Germans still pressed at Verdun. The French wanted an early date for the new offensive and Haig had proposed 20 June.⁷⁷⁰

On 5 June Montgomery reissued Map A marked with the times each Corps should have gained the green, brown and purple lines and attaching the preliminary bombardment programme.

‘The Army Commander wishes Corps to draw up their schema of operation

⁷⁶⁷ Entry of 1 June in Rawlinson, Diary 1916, CHUR.

⁷⁶⁸ [65] Allenby, Proposes attack on Gommecourt salient of 4 June 1916 in IWM 6.

⁷⁶⁹ Due to the Brusilov Offensive.

⁷⁷⁰ Anon., OAD 9 of 12 June 1916 in War Diary GHQ General Staff in WO 95/4/3.1.

in detail ...’⁷⁷¹

Far too late to be useful, Rawlinson also requested that corps plan their programmes according to a memo and a map showing the positions all units should have reached and the times they should have reached them by (though no times were shown).⁷⁷² The map, he claimed, echoed his intentions. A copy of it survived in III Corps files.⁷⁷³

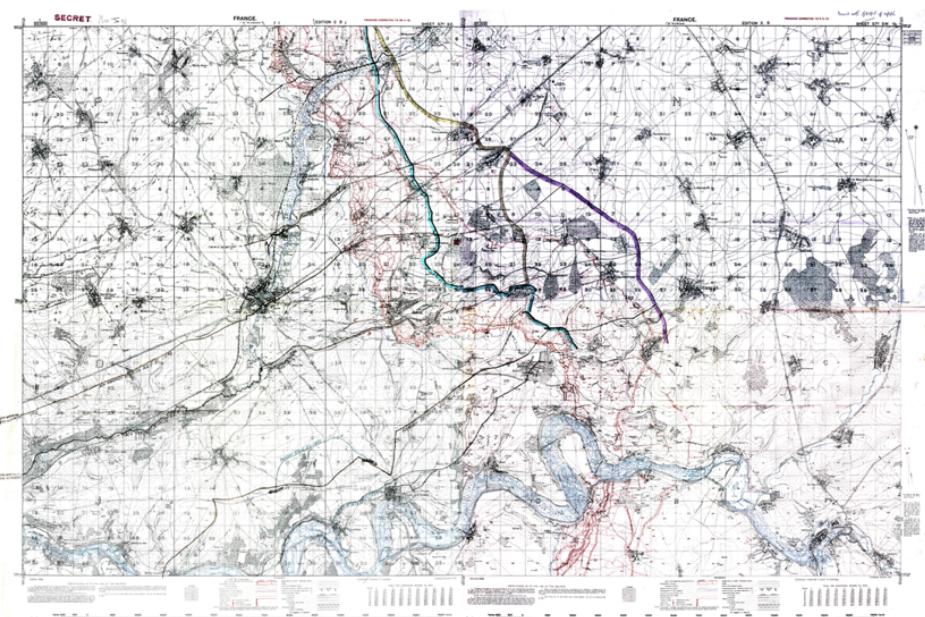


Figure 131 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's map of 5 June(WO 95/673/1)

⁷⁷¹ [68] Kiggell, Provisional timetable set by GHQ in OAD 9 of 12 June 1916 in WO 158/234.

[105] As footnote 750.

Montgomery, A. A., Artillery table.

Montgomery, A. A., Programme of preliminary bombardment of 5 June 1916 in IWM 7.

⁷⁷² Montgomery, A. A., To Corps Commanders (GX 31/P) of 5 June 1916 in IWM 7 and instructions 5 March, 19 August 1916.

⁷⁷³ See Fourth Army Operation order No 2 which refers to map issued with G.X.2/1P dated 5th June 1916 in IWM 7. The map in WO 95/673/1 has the same reference number on the top right-hand corner.

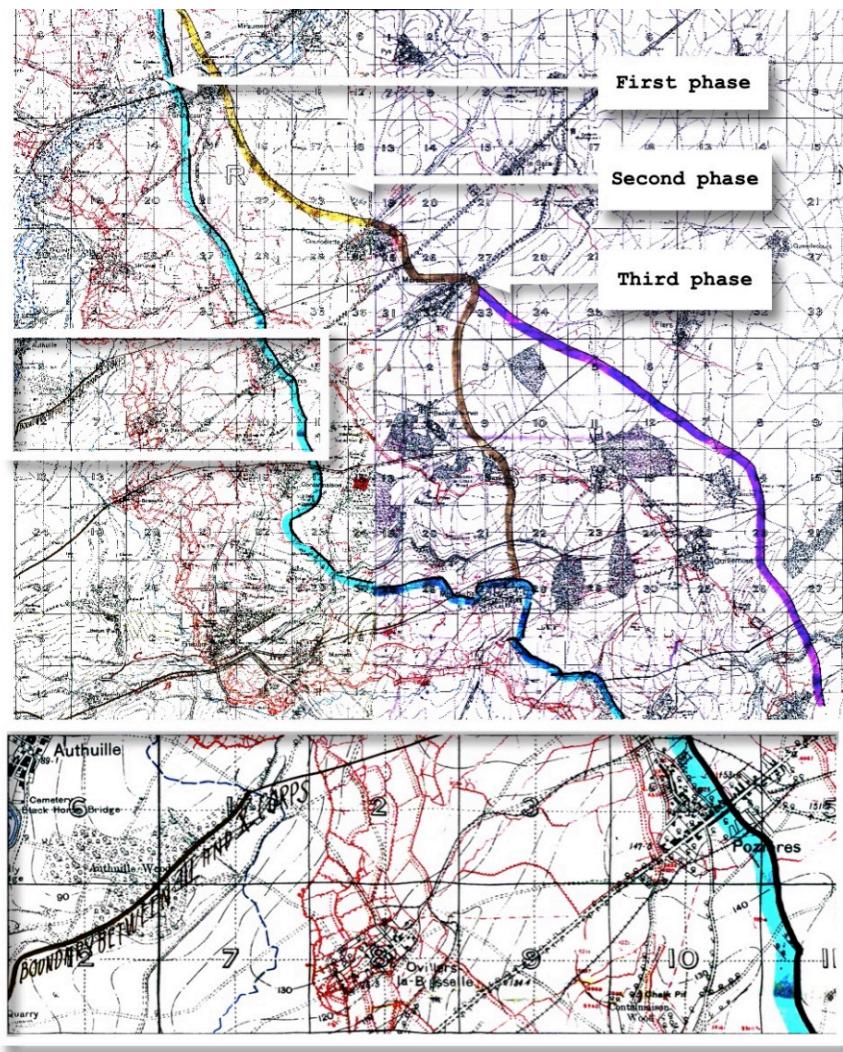


Figure 132 - Fourth Army | Rawlinson's map (WO 95/673/1) and detail

It was again 'Map A'. (See also the discussion on page 545.) By this time all Corps had issued plans, but none showed the third phase being achieved and Rawlinson's request was collectively ignored. No previously-issued plan was revised to comply entirely with his approach.

His initiative was an attempt to coordinate planning between Corps more formally, but was too late to be useful: the coordination of Corps and divisions was by then catastrophically-late and was only maintained by their adherence to Montgomery's Map A.

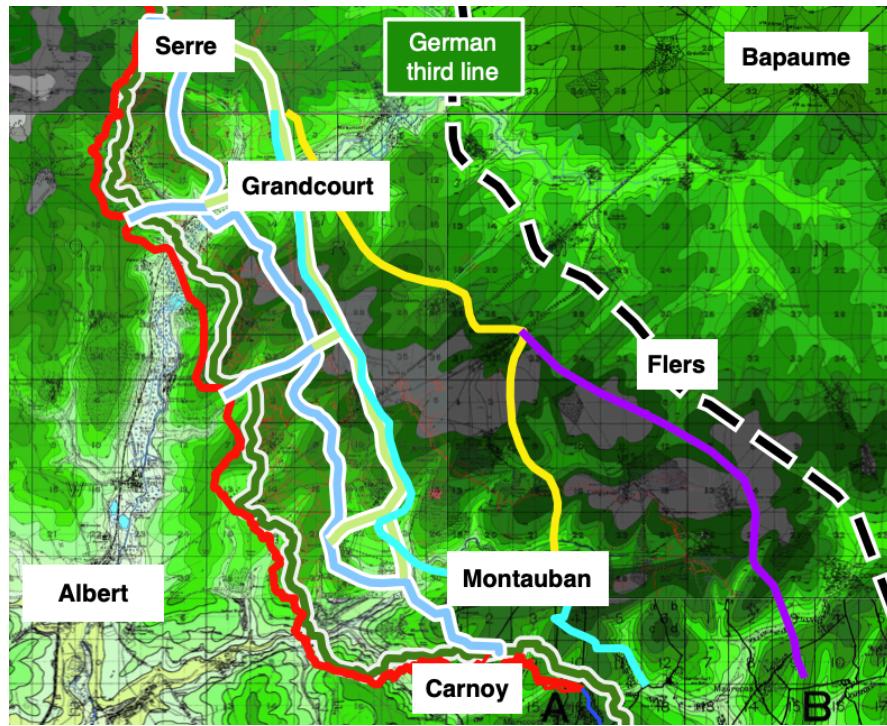


Figure 133 - Fourth Army | The maps combined - Map A and the map in GX 3/1 P

The revised map showed the starting line lying mostly along the former green line and it was extended east by the brown and purple lines. The flanks this left exposed to the south were presumably to be covered by the French, but no French plan or map can be found on the files to support this.

Artillery planning was initiated by Montgomery who produced a table whose row headings listed the kind of action the artillery was expected to take such as

‘Bombardment of trench systems, fortified localities ... shelling of communications approaches, railways ... [and] counter-battery work’.

The column headings identified the day ('U'-‘Z') and ‘general instructions’. The intersections added such detail as

‘all day by all natures of howitzers’.

It was to be used by all artillery units as a guide.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁴ [105] Montgomery A. A., ‘Programme of preliminary bombardment’ of 5 June 1916 in IWM 7.

The provisional timetable for the attack was published on 12 June,⁷⁷⁵ two days before the operation order.⁷⁷⁶ The guns and ammunition would arrive with several days to spare and 9, 12, 17, and 25 Divisions were to arrive by 19 June. None of these was a reserve division, and all had received training.⁷⁷⁷ The offensive would proceed as planned. Were heavy resistance encountered then they might not proceed beyond the Green line, but otherwise they were expected to go further, feeding in reserve divisions to reach a line Bazentin-le-Petit - Martinpuich - Courclette.

⁷⁷⁵ [106] Kiggell, Provisional timetable Fourth Army Conference notes of 12 June 1916 in IWM 7.

Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 12 June 1916 in IWM 5.

Anon., Conference notes of 12 June 1916 in WO 158/321.

Montgomery, A. A., Changes to programme of preliminary bombardment of 12 June 1916 in IWM 7.

⁷⁷⁶ [107] Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army operation order No. 2 (Somme) of 14 June 1916 in IWM 7 and WO 158/321.

Montgomery, A. A., Objectives, if successful of 14 June 1916 in IWM7.

Montgomery, A. A., Cavalry to raid Bapaume of 14 June 1916 in WO 158/234.

Montgomery, A. A., Changes to programme of preliminary bombardment of 14 June 1916 in IWM 7.

Montgomery, A. A., Timing changes to programme of preliminary bombardment14 June 1916 in IWM 7.

⁷⁷⁷ Portions of the 9 Division underwent 'Trench training' to prepare them to take over the line from 12-16 May 1916 in WO 95/1734/3.

12 Division trained in the First Army training area from May 8th 1916 until they left the Corps Reserve on 25 June 1916. They spent four days rehearsing on a copy of the trenches they were to be attack in 12 Division General Staff war diary of May-June 1916.WO 95/1823/2.2.

17 Division trained from 17th May 11th June at Tilques. in 17 Division General staff war diary May-June 1916 WO 95/1980/4.2.

25 Division trained on a specially-created mock up of the trenches they were to attack from 1 to 15 June 1916 in WO 95/2222.02

Montgomery, A. A., 12 June 1916, Fourth Army conference notes in IWM5.



Figure 134 - Fourth Army | Conference of 12 June - Rawlinson's key objectives

The advance beyond the green line depended on the ability to move the artillery and new positions must have been previously identified. At the conclusion of the first phase, it was essential that artillery and infantry could communicate and therefore the HQ of heavy artillery groups be sufficiently close to that of divisional commanders.

There was to be a timetable to cover the first phase of the operation, but Rawlinson did not write one and made no attempt to ensure consistency by setting up any timetable doctrine. It was at one with his habit of assuming

that an aspiration expressed was an order obeyed. The only plans to show timetables were those of the XIII Corps.⁷⁷⁸

Locating the progress of the advancing infantry remained a problem. Rawlinson hoped to ascertain this using flares, mirrors and panels in conjunction with aeroplanes and balloons: there had been time for the process to be rehearsed but no but no evidence that any had occurred nor any doctrine supporting it can be found.

The re-bombardment of an untaken position was however a problem both understood and addressed. Re-bombardment was set to a 30-minute limit, at the end of which the bombardment would become increasingly heavy, thus infantry merely needed to know when the bombardment would start and from this could calculate when they should assault.⁷⁷⁹

Two days later the Fourth Army operation order 2 was issued. 15 days before the assault, Haig conferred with his Generals at St. Pol, listed the objectives and disposition of the armies, and discussed tactics.⁷⁸⁰

778 See pages 378 and 345 respectively.

779 Montgomery, A. A., 12 June 1916, Fourth Army conference notes in IMW 5.

780 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army operation order No. 2 in IMW 7.

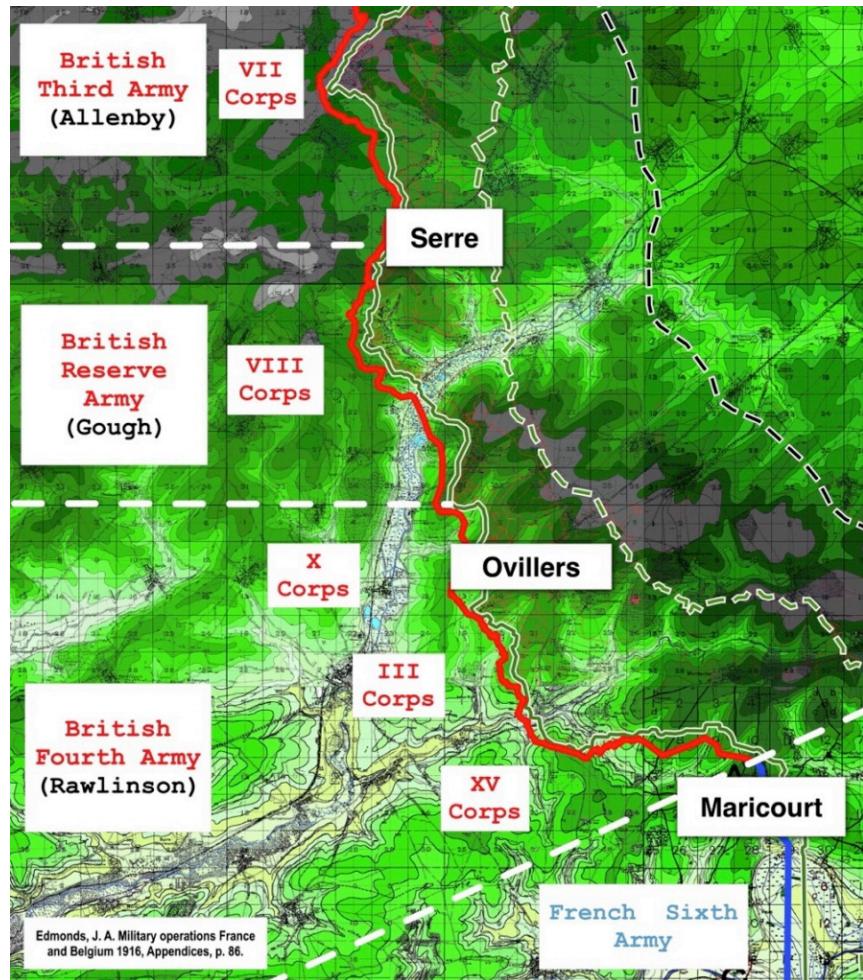


Figure 135 - GHQ | Haig's letter of 16th June - disposition of forces

His intention was to gain the Pozières heights (11 km) and then, if possible, occupy the German third line from Flers to Miraumont (9 km), push cavalry out to Bapaume (7 km) and wheel north to capture German forces 'in the re-entrant south of Arras'.⁷⁸¹ He confirmed these points two days later in a letter to Rawlinson restating the disposition of the armies and a list of objectives.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸¹ Haig, Diary, *Op. Cit.* p.190 See also OAD 291/18.

⁷⁸² GHQ letter OAD 12 to Sir H. Rawlinson, 16 June 1916 in Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, *Appendices*, p. 86. According to WO 95/4/3.1, War Diary GHQ General Staff it was sent on 17 June 1916.

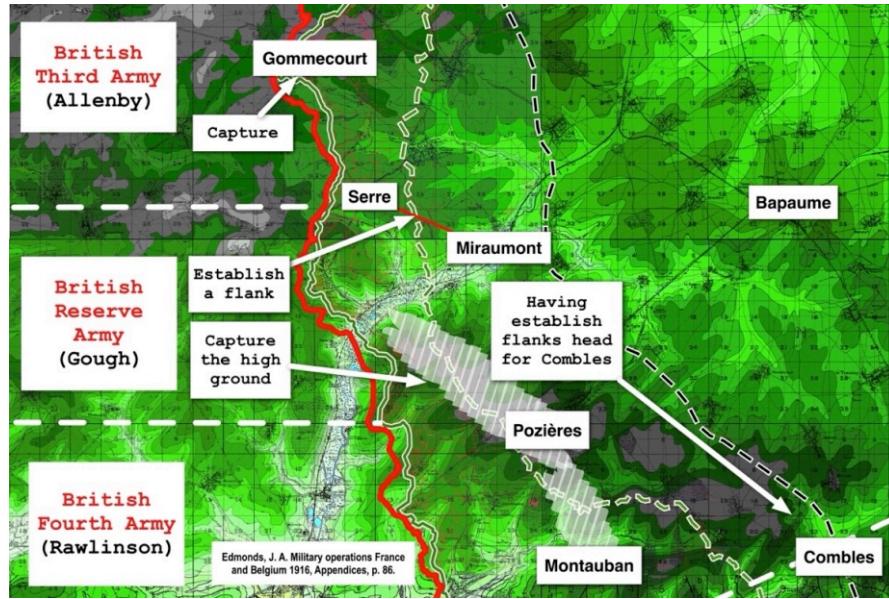


Figure 136 - GHQ | Haig's letter of 16th June - objectives 1

The Armies' objectives would be to establish a flank and then take the Pozières to Montauban high ground and execute flank attacks with cavalry. Then, were the enemy to collapse, to advance and take the Mory-Bapaume high ground (he had previously favoured the 're-entrant South of Arras' which would have drawn his forces north). Should no collapse occur, the BEF would merely hold the new front with minor attacks and transfer its forces elsewhere.

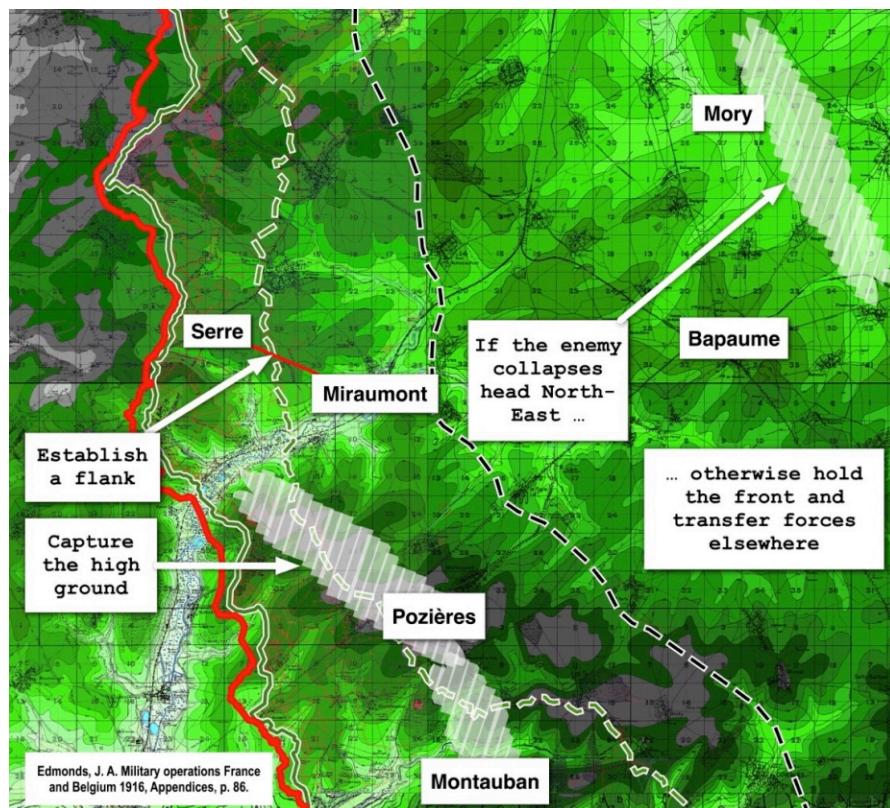


Figure 137 - GHQ | Haig's letter of 16th June - objectives 2

All concerns for cooperation with the French were ignored. By driving north-east in this manner Haig was opening a gap between the British and the French which the Germans could then exploit. Haig contributed a list of objectives on 17 June:⁷⁸³ he wanted an artillery plan immediately, although Field Artillery was planned at divisional level and Birch and Montgomery had already issued the task list for the heavy artillery tasks, supplementing them with an Artillery table.⁷⁸⁴ Rawlinson sent him details the same day.⁷⁸⁵

Ten days before the assault, Haig, encouraged by Joffre, ordered that an attack on Bapaume be planned in.⁷⁸⁶ Montgomery issued several 'Changes to orders

⁷⁸³ [70] Haig sends OAD 12 to Rawlinson outlining the operation's objectives (Edmonds, J. E., 1916, Appendices, p. 86 and WO 158/321).

⁷⁸⁴ [102] As footnote 750

[119] Montgomery, A. A., Conference notes outlining Somme plan in WO 95/672/4.

⁷⁸⁵ [109] Rawlinson, Date change in WO 158/321

Montgomery, A. A., Changes to programme of preliminary bombardment in IWM 7.

⁷⁸⁶ [71] OAD 15, Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Appendices p. 88 and WO 158/321.

OAD 17, Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, Appendices p. 89.

conditional on a breakthrough,⁷⁸⁷ but this was effectively ignored by all commanders: no changes were made to any plans. The 'Plan A' map dominated their plans and they left Rawlinson to argue with Haig. But as a result of Foch's requests Haig agreed to delay the attack by 48 hours. The attack days would be relabelled: 'Y.1' day would be 29 June, 'Y.2' day 30 and 'Z' day would be 1 July.⁷⁸⁸

On 22 June Rawlinson held the final conference before the assault. He began by claiming that many German units had been moved east and replaced with ersatz troops. Haig had advised him that the Germans only disposed of 32 battalions with a further 65 which could be deployed within the first six days.⁷⁸⁹

The persistence of the German attack on Verdun caused the French to limit their attack front from 50 to 15 kilometres. The British attack would thus predominate and the object of the operation was now to assist the French in forcing the passage of the Somme at Péronne and seizing the heights east of Combles. The right of the Fourth Army would therefore capture the green line and then move to the high ground at Ginchy and Guillemont. From this premiss many scenarios could ensue: that it would be enough to send out reconnaissance patrols; to take Courcelette and Martinpuich; that the cavalry of Sir Hubert Gough could take Bapaume, veer left and right to take German forces in the rear, and the Fourth Army should also seize the high ground about Ginchy, Morval and Achiet-le-Grand.

787 [117] Montgomery, A. A., Orders conditional on a breakthrough in IWM 7

Montgomery, A. A., Attack postponed by 48 hours in IWM 7

Montgomery, A. A., Draft Conditional advance warning in WO 95/431/1.

788 Thus Travers' exposition of the 'bite-and-hold' discussions of Haig and Rawlinson is rendered nugatory. Travers, *Killing Ground*, pp. 137 et seq.

789 Montgomery, Fourth Army conference notes of 22 June 1916 in IWM 5.

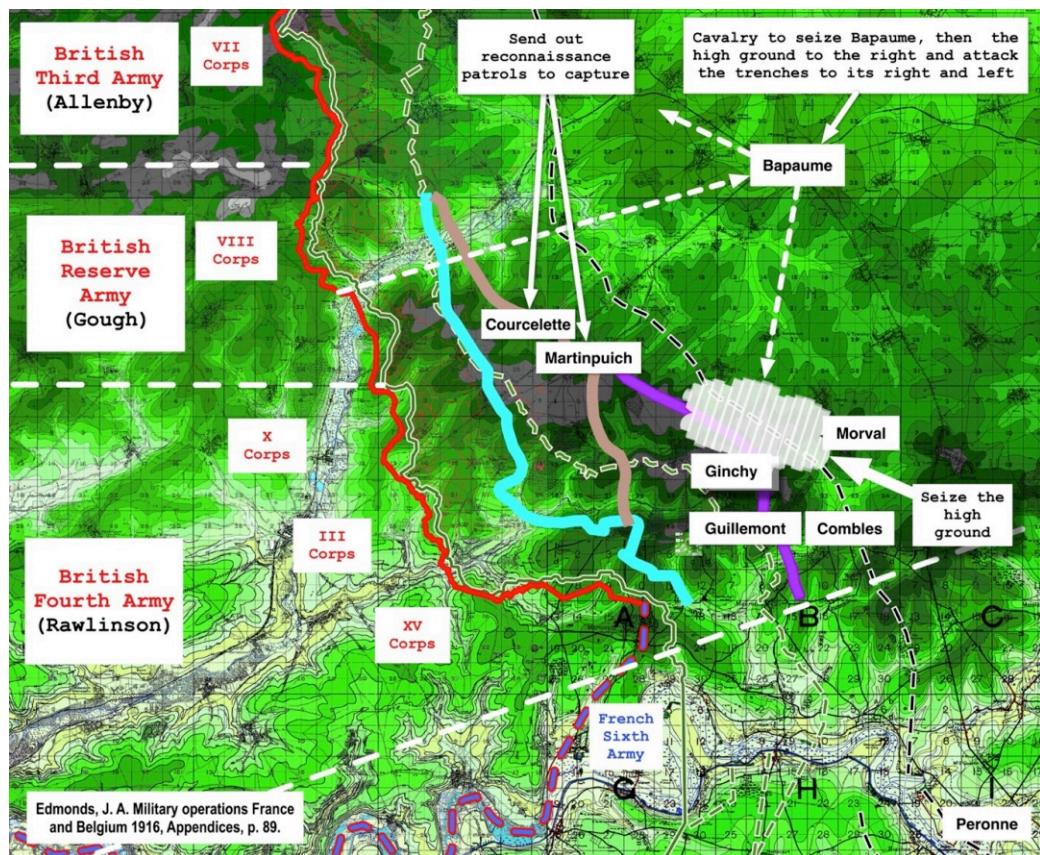


Figure 138 - GHQ | Haig's instructions of 21 June as recounted by Rawlinson

The attack would thus be split into two (one part north-east towards Bapaume and the other south-east towards Combles). Preceding plans and instructions were ignored, a possible counter-attack by the Germans was mentioned though its location was not: perhaps admitting to splitting the attack was too embarrassing. In the event of a German counter-attack, Rawlinson's only response was that the Fourth Army would attack the second objective.

A speedy advance would require the early movement of guns and provoke problems of supply which could be relieved by opening dépôts at Albert, Aveluy and eventually Miraumont. Units must reorganise when a position had been taken. Railways and trench tramways should be connected. Flares and signal panels were available and should be distributed to Company level. The RFC would fly contact patrols and balloons would be aloft, manned by staff officers to monitor battle progress. A decision would be taken on the use of

Phosgene gas distributed by the French guns on loan to the Fourth Army.⁷⁹⁰

Gough was asked to plan to raid Bapaume, secure the ground to its north and south and prevent the arrival of reinforcements.⁷⁹¹

6.5

Conclusions

The lack of urgency exhibited by GHQ and the Fourth Army overall meant that by the end of April 1916 only 15% of the planning documents down to division-level had been created, 9% more were created in May and the rest in June. The 81 divisional documents published in the last week before the battle might possibly have been translated into brigade, battalion and company orders, but being late could never have formed the basis of any rehearsal. It would take at least thirty-six hours for divisional orders to reach a platoon commander.⁷⁹² This would exclude the time needed to translate them to platoon level. Only 40% of the war diaries of the Brigades and battalions which fought on 1 July contained plans or orders.

The illustrations on pages 244, 250, 255, 261, and 276 show how the BEF's planning deteriorated into a race against time. The Fourth Army overview was published a mere four days before the attack and was evidently intended 'pour l'histoire'.⁷⁹³ That Brigadier-General T. A. Tancred (VIII Corps) should be issuing changes to the artillery plans up to the last day is evidence of flexibility: artillery could adapt more quickly than infantry,⁷⁹⁴ but Greenly and

790 Montgomery, A. A., Fourth Army conference notes of 22 June 1916 in IMW 5.

791 Montgomery, A. A., 32/3/1(G) of 22 June 1916 in WO 95/431/1 and see page 218.

792 LHCMA, Montgomery-Massingberd 7/3, 'Notes on Somme Fighting', (1916). 'Notes on Experience Gained During Recent Operations'. Cited in Vines, Anthony John, 'The heroic manager', KCL eThesis, (London, 2015).

793 Anon., *Précis of Fourth Army approaches of 26 June 1916* in WO 158/19. The phrase 'pour l'histoire' is attributed to a French General, as a means of leaving false evidence of serious and timely intent. Montgomery, B. L., 'The memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery', Collins (London. 1958), p. 543.

794 [139] Anon., Conference notes.

Tancred, Artillery programme (plan).

Tancred, Artillery programme for X-Y night (plan) of 24 June in WO 95/820/2.

[140] Tancred, Artillery programme (plan) of 25 June 1916 in WO 95/820/2.2.

Vaughan were still issuing infantry operation orders up to 29 June.⁷⁹⁵ This is evidence of gross disorganisation: it would have been impossible to translate such orders to divisional and battalion level in the time available and the senior NCOs and young officers leading the attack would have had no time to orient themselves nor any to rehearse their changed objectives on the training grounds.

This was a catastrophic failure by the BEF for which Haig, by his failure to monitor the planning status, must take the major responsibility. It was generated by the absences of a planning doctrine, or a planning process, and an increase in the span of control from two corps at Loos to five, for which commanders were intellectually and organisationally unprepared.

The lament that

‘it was all important in major operations that orders to units ... must reach them in plenty of time and that there must not be a second’s delay in passing orders from Corps to Division & Division to Brigade etc.’
was borne of the realisation of the BEF’s evident failure to plan efficiently as Figure 130 shows.⁷⁹⁶

[141] Tancred, Artillery programme for X-day (plan) of 26 June 1916 in WO 95/820/2.2.
[142] Tancred, Artillery programme for X-Y night (plan).

Tancred, Artillery programme for Y-day (plan) of 27 June 1916 in WO 95/820/2.

⁷⁹⁵ [171] Greenly, Plan of operations, parts II-V of 29 June 1916 in WO 95/895/2.
[191] Buckle, Plan of attack of VIII Corps heavy artillery of 13 June 1916 in WO 95/811/2.

⁷⁹⁶ Major P. R. Currie to Edmonds of 23 April 1930 in CAB 45/132. Cited in Robbins, Simon, ‘Henry Horne as Corps Commander’ in Jones, Spencer, *‘At all costs’*, Helion, Warwick, 2018, p. 254.

7. First Albert - Corps and Division Planning

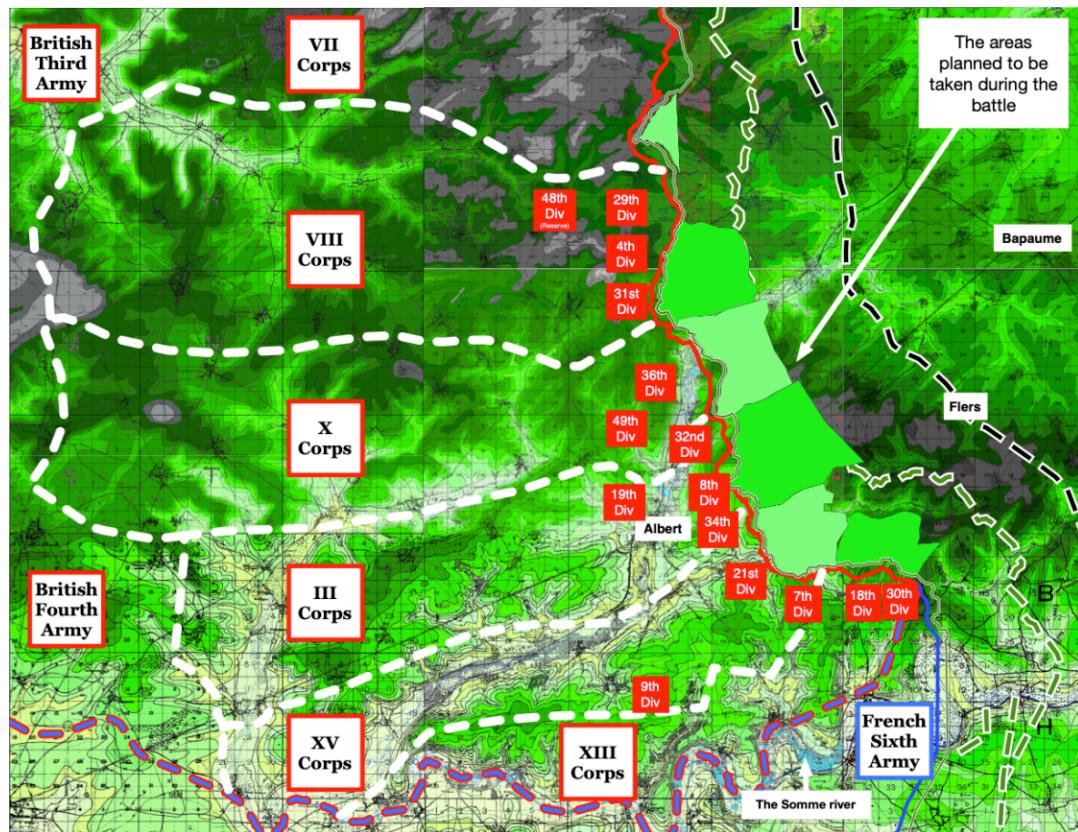


Figure 139 - Armies, Corps and Divisions | Dispositions and Objectives

7.1

VII Corps (Third Army) Planning

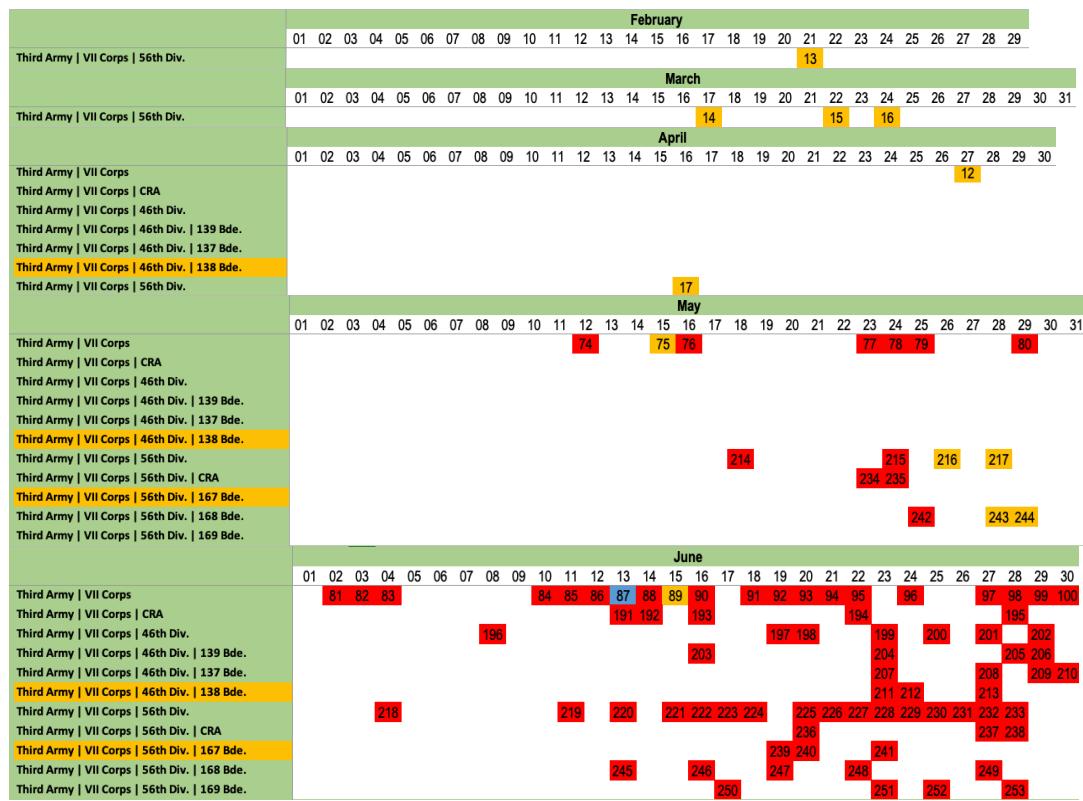


Figure 140 - Third Army | VII Corps Planning Timeline (see page 22 for the key)

The Third Army was formed on 13 July 1915, commanded by Lieutenant-General Edmund Allenby and composed of X, VII and the Indian Cavalry Corps.⁷⁹⁷ In March 1916 it relieved the French X Army. No plans can be found in the Third Army files before 1 August,⁷⁹⁸ but many are visible in the VII Corps HQ files and in those of its constituent divisions: 46 and 56. Its role in the battle was primarily to manage the VII Corps which was used as a diversion.

The attack on Gommecourt was first mentioned by Haig on 3 April but ruled out due to the shortage of troops.⁷⁹⁹ A week later it returned as a possible

797 Becke, Part 4, p. 89.

798 WO 95/360 Third Army HQ 1916

799 Edmonds 1916 Appendices p. 66

objective to hold 'the attention of the enemy's artillery and reserves'.⁸⁰⁰

Rawlinson preferred any such attack to be a demonstration.⁸⁰¹

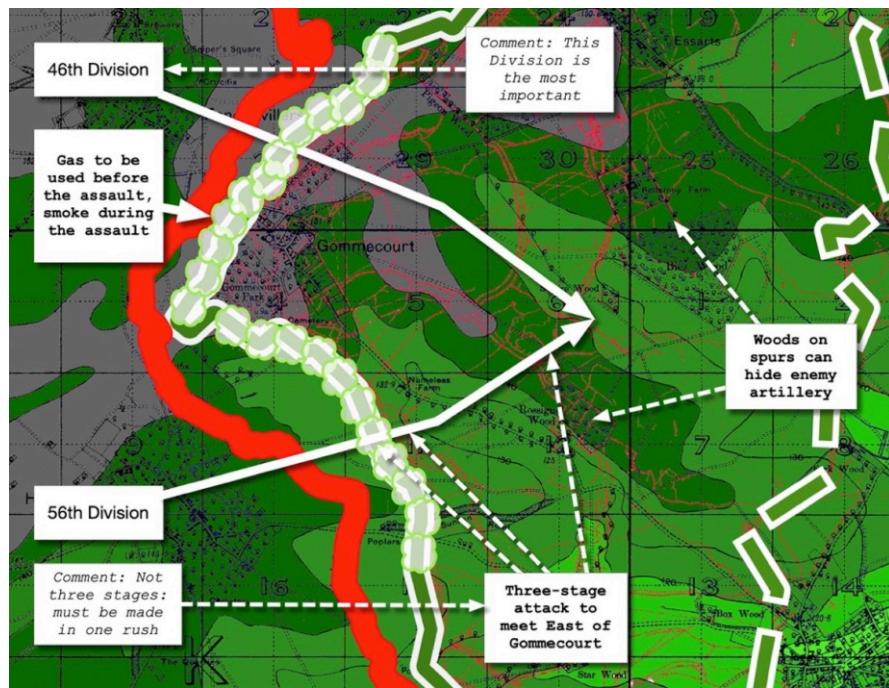


Figure 141 - Third Army | Proposed attack on Gommecourt

The objectives remained as they were on 6 March,⁸⁰² but while XIII and XV Corps could 'count on the addition of a division each' a comment stated that (with reference to VII Corps)

'no extra divisions have been allocated for this purpose'.
The intentions remained to fix as many German troops as possible away from the main focus of the Somme attacks and minimise any artillery threat from the west.⁸⁰³

Until 12 May records exist only of discussions of training and of ammunition supply, but then Brigadier-General F. Lyon (BGGS, VII Corps) requested plans for attack on Gommecourt and repeated the request on 16 and 23 May,

⁸⁰⁰ Edmonds ... 1916, Appendices p. 74.

⁸⁰¹ Edmonds ... 1916, Appendices p. 79.

⁸⁰² See page 226.

⁸⁰³ Snow, T. d'O memo 237/35 to Allenby of 6 June 1916 in WO 95/804/3.

inviting divisional commanders to discuss them the next day.⁸⁰⁴ Lieutenant-General Sir T. D'O Snow, GOC VII Corps, provided an outline. Major-General C. P. A. Hull of 56 Division responded with an 'Appreciation' and the 'Outline plans of 56 Division' and Major-General Hon. E. J. Montague-Stuart-Wortley provided the 'Outline plans of 46 Division'.⁸⁰⁵ There followed discussions of the use of gas, deception operations and the outline artillery plan before Snow announced (prematurely as it turned out) that the divisional plans were approved and issued the VII Corps plan.⁸⁰⁶ Only on 21 June did Major-General L. J. Bols, MGGS of Third Army issue a one-page 'Third Army OO 11, Assault' to authorise the attack.⁸⁰⁷ The planning of Gommecourt was dominated by the divisions.

VII Corps planning was topsy-turvy, discussing the means before the ends. They began in April 1916 with the provision of an estimate of ammunition required.⁸⁰⁸ The basis had been 'approved by the MGRA Third Army ...'⁸⁰⁹ and assumed a preparatory bombardment of four days. The length of the front to be bombarded was not mentioned, nor was any plan referenced.⁸¹⁰ Shortage of ammunition had been an issue during the Loos battle and it is possible that this estimate was an early test of the Army's flexibility on its use. That ammunition estimates were discussed seven times up to 17 June supports

804 [74] Lyon, Request for plans of attack in WO 95/804/2.

805 [75] Snow, Gas and smoke (GCR 237/7) of 15 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

[76] Lyon, Request for plans of attack in WO 95/804/2.

[77] Bols, ms. Request for details of preparations and deceptions of 23 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

 Lyon, Please come and explain your plans tomorrow in WO 95/804/2.

[78] Snow, Outline plans.

 Hull, Outline plans of 56 Division in WO 95/804/2.

[79] Montague-Stuart-Wortley, Outline plans of 46 Division 1 in WO 95/804/2.

[80] Montague-Stuart-Wortley, Outline plans of 46 Division 2 in WO 95/804/2.

806 [85] Lyon, Plan approved, table

 Snow, Deception operations WO 95/804/3

[90] Lyon, 37 Division OO 16, attack on Gommecourt in WO 95/804/3.

807 [94] Bols, Third army OO 11, assault in WO 95/804/4

808 [12] Anon., Ammunition requirements in WO 95/804/2

809 A. E. Holland.

810 Anon., GCR 231 of 27 April 1916 in WO 95/804/2

this.⁸¹¹ Additionally, before a plan had been submitted, Snow (GOC, VII Corps) discussed the use of gas and smoke.⁸¹²

On 12 May divisional commanders were asked to 'give an outline of their plan of attack' at a conference on the 14th. The presence of the CRA VIII Corps, the GOC Heavy Artillery and an RFC representative to answer 'any technical points', implied that considerable discussions had already occurred.⁸¹³ They were then asked to provide plans by the 25th and Snow, GoC VII Corps, made it clear that the intention was simply to take a position cleared by the artillery, no reinforcements were to be involved and ...

... there is no intention of piercing the enemy's front ...⁸¹⁴ Bols reinforced the request for plans, asking additionally for deception details.⁸¹⁵

Snow's outline plan of 24 May envisaged a two-prong attack and included the attack preparations, the organisation of trenches, communications, artillery, engineers, traffic, roads, supplies, water, medical railheads, stores and deception.

⁸¹¹ See WO 95/804/2 and WO 95/804/3

⁸¹² [75] As footnote 805

⁸¹³ Lyon, GCR 237/5 of 12 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

⁸¹⁴ Lyon, GCR 237/8 of 16 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

⁸¹⁵ [77] As footnote 805.

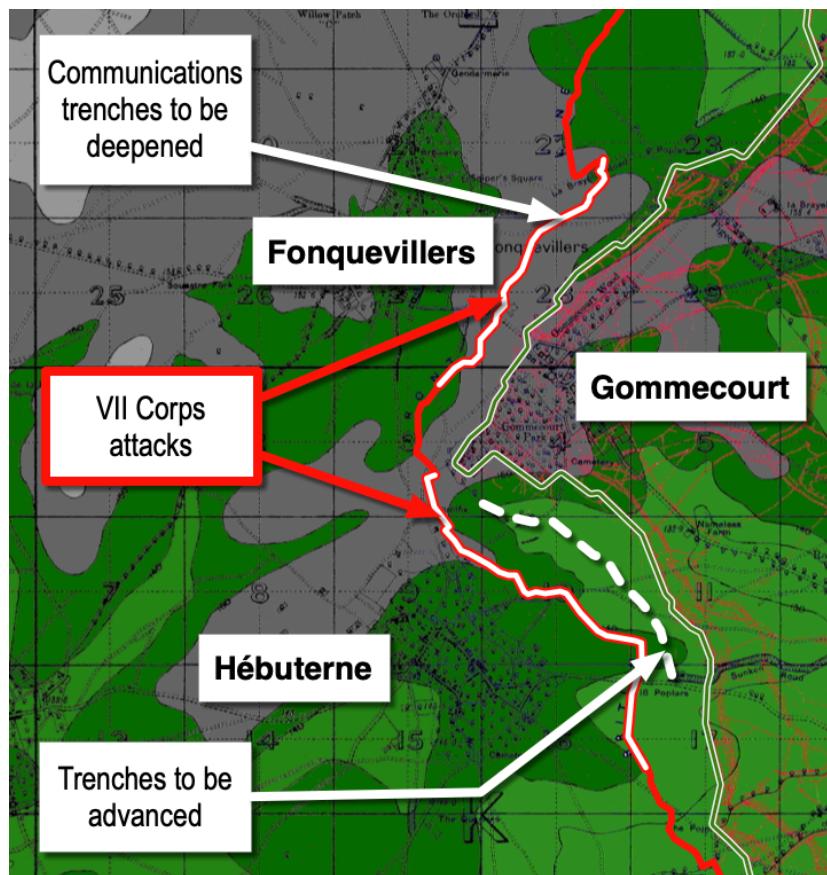


Figure 142 - VII Corps | Snow's outline of 24 May

The excavation of the new trenches would be covered by artillery. 56 Division Heavy Artillery Group had two guns already trained on hostile batteries and a strongpoint by 23 May to protect a trench-digging party on the night of 26/27 May in no-man's-land.⁸¹⁶ 46 Divisional artillery had a similar order.⁸¹⁷

The reference to deception in Snow's outline plan undermines Travers' allegation (based on a letter from a 'senior officer of 46 Division') that Snow was insufficiently concerned for deception:⁸¹⁸ By 9 May he had asked that the number of gun emplacements be doubled but ...

| This work should not be done too obviously.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁶ Indecipherable, K/540 in WO 95/2937/1.

⁸¹⁷ Indecipherable, ID 43 and 44 of 25 May 1916 in WO 95/2937/1.

⁸¹⁸ Travers, *Killing Ground*, p. 154.

⁸¹⁹ Lyon, F. Memo (GCR 237/4) to 37 Division of 9 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

He also asked that the RFC provide aircraft to intercept enemy photo-reconnaissance on 23 May, discussed deception operations in his outline plan, repeated his request for aircraft on 24 May and camouflage work on 25 May.⁸²⁰ By 6 June he was amplifying his requests to include fake grass and steel boxes for camouflaged OPs,⁸²¹ and on 11 June he published a 'Deception Operations' plan.⁸²² Edmonds claims that when Snow was asked by Haig about progress, he replied that

‘They know we are coming all right’. Snow’s concern was presumably to attract attention subtly and to hinder the German artillery’s ranging ability, rather than deceive them completely about an assault. The Germans diverted a division and its artillery away from the main attack in consequence.⁸²³

7.1.1 56 Division Plans

The objective of Hull (GoC of 56 Division) was to cut off Gommecourt along a north-south line.⁸²⁴

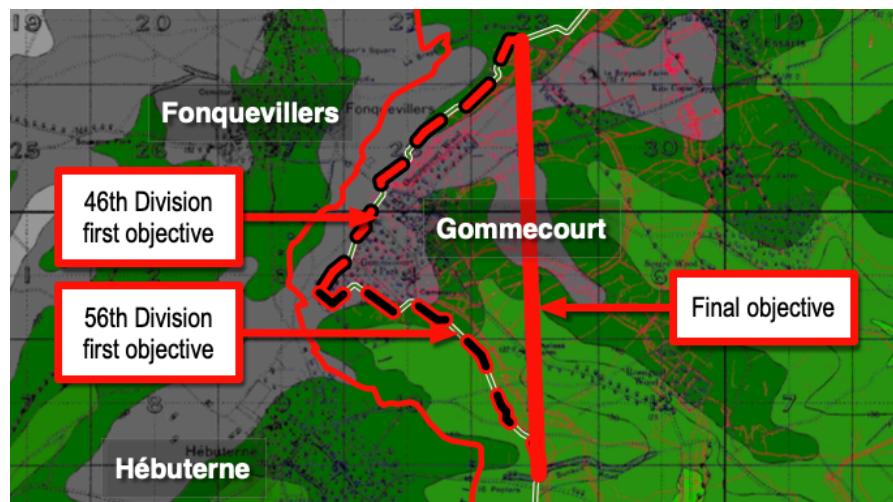


Figure 143 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Hull's objectives of 24 May

⁸²⁰ Snow to Third Army (GCR 237/10, GCR 237/16, GCR/237/19 and GCR/237/20) in WO 95/804/2.

⁸²¹ Lyon to Third Army (GCR 237/38) in WO 95/804/2.

⁸²² Snow to Third Army (GCR 237/46) in WO 95/804/2.

⁸²³ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, p. 460.

⁸²⁴ Hull, C., 'a line on or beyond the Eastern edge of Gommecourt' of 24 May 1916 in in WO 95/804/2.

Both Hull and Montague-Stuart-Wortley (GoC 45 Division) included appreciations of the battle problem in their plans.⁸²⁵ Hull's appreciation included both the terrain and the enemy forces.

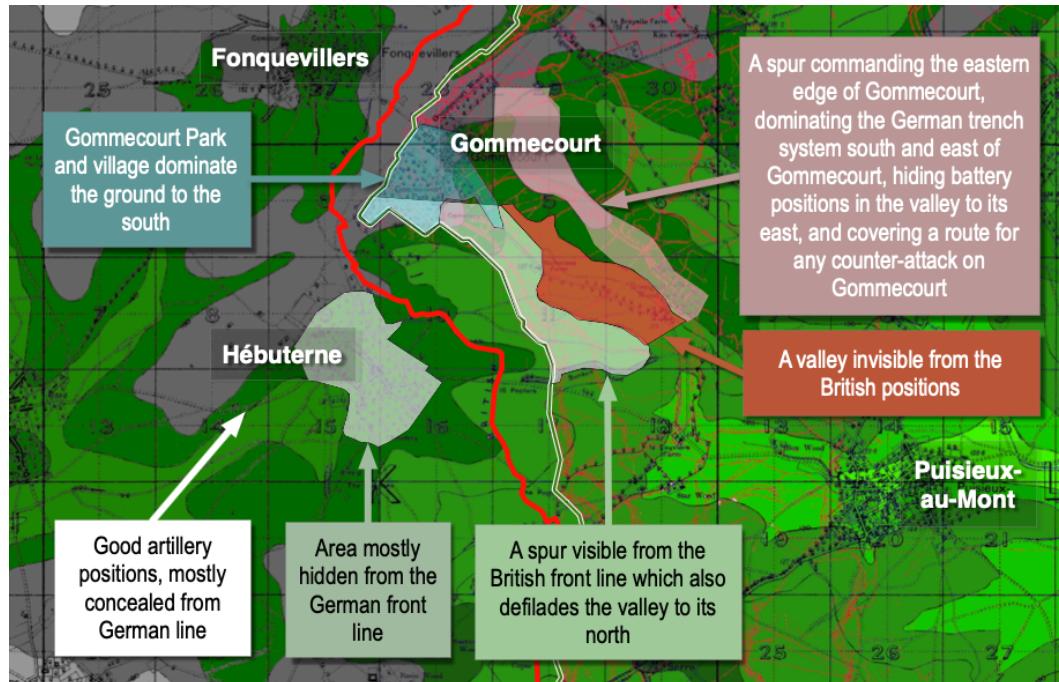


Figure 144 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Hull's terrain appreciation of 24 May

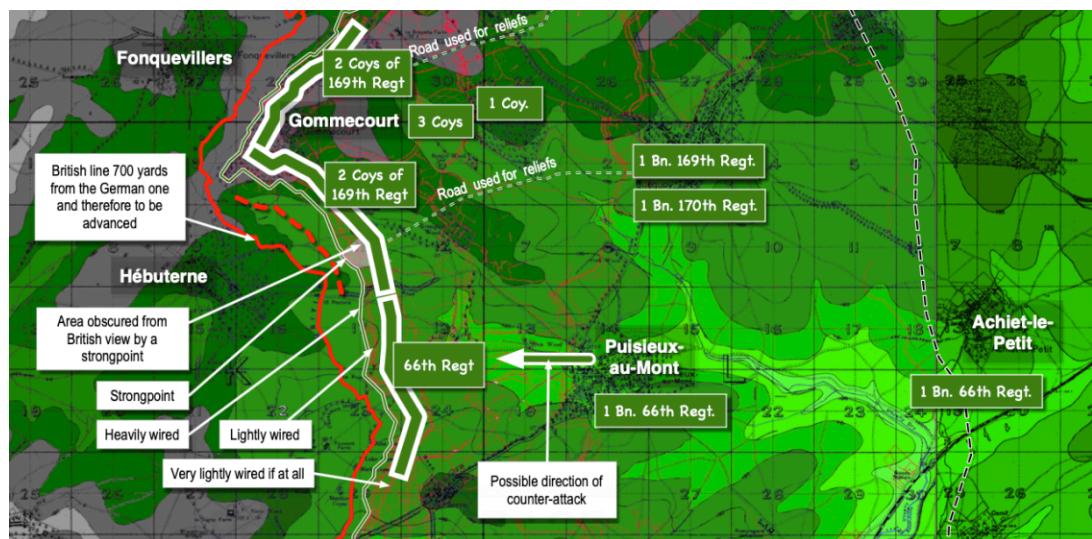


Figure 145 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Hull's forces appreciation of 24 May

His overall objectives were to capture the southern part of Gommecourt, leaving the northern part to 46 Division.

⁸²⁵ WO 95/804/2.

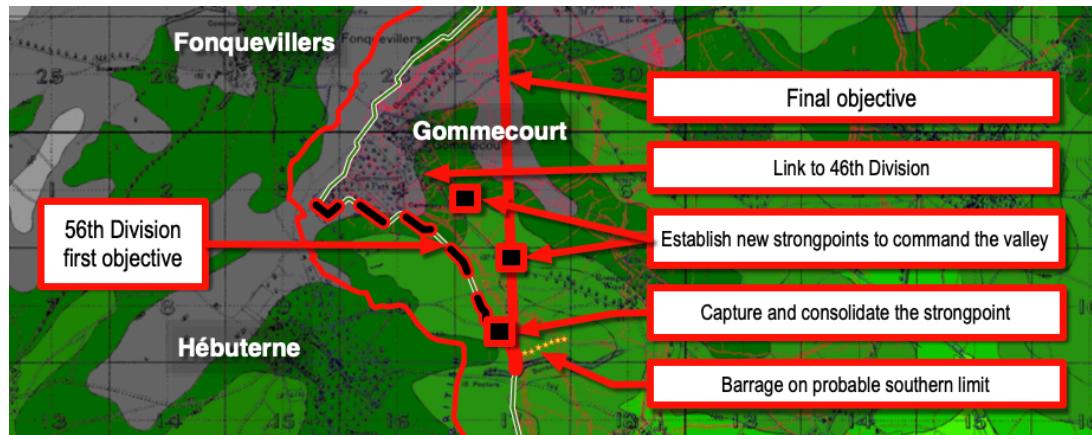


Figure 146 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Hull's overall objectives of 24 May

His approach was in two parts: to capture the ridge dominating the village ...

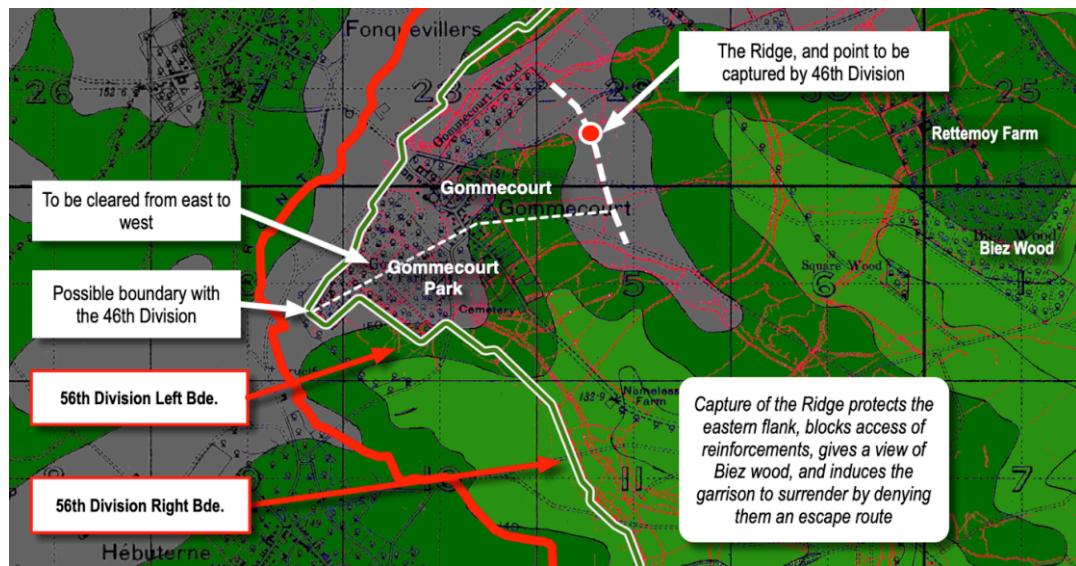


Figure 147 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Taking Gommecourt village and the Ridge

... and the village itself.

Hull preferred to take the ridge in a single assault rather than have two, since at Loos the first assault had been the only decisive one; attempting an assault from newly-captured trenches would be unfeasible; the losses from a single assault would be less than those from clearing the village; any delay would permit an enemy barrage, and should either division fail to take their first objective in a two-objective assault, the other would be isolated. In that case

Hull would use his reserves to support 46 Division.⁸²⁶ A compromise was imposed: there would be three phases.⁸²⁷

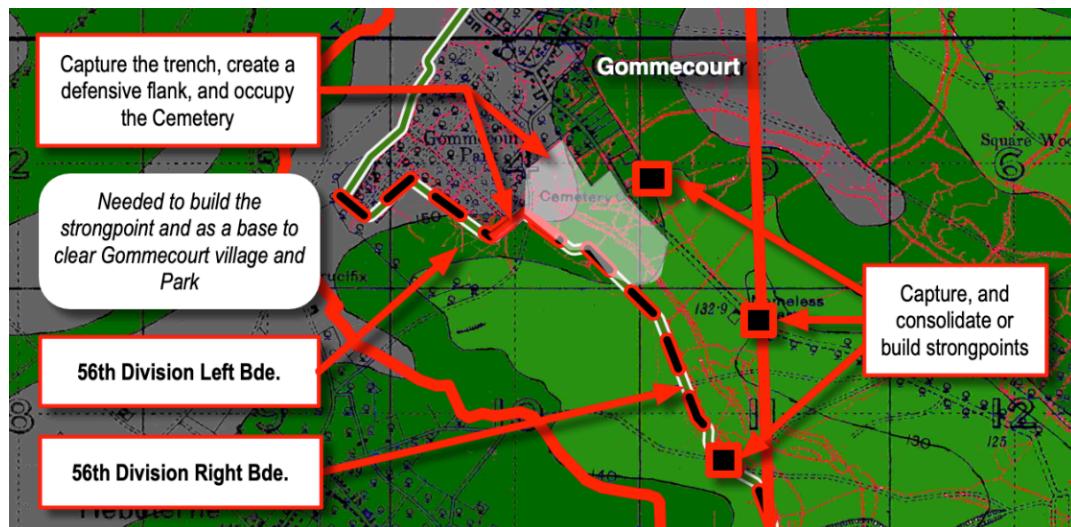


Figure 148 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Taking Gommecourt village

The role of the artillery was deliberately ignored until the plan was agreed.

The purpose of the pincer movement was implicitly to bottle-up the Germans in Gommecourt Park, clearing it from east to west. None of the capture of the Ridge was the responsibility of 56 Division.

7.1.2

46 Division Plans

Montague-Stuart-Wortley's appreciation was more perfunctory. It simply divided the terrain into three parts: Gommecourt Village and Park, the ridge between Gommecourt and Pigeon Woods and the ridge South-East to Rossignol Wood, with no concern for contours, or any for the defences to be overcome. The fortified salient 'The Z', was noted ('Little Z' was not) and was expected to be excluded from the attack and dealt with by artillery. Both were able to subject the assault to flanking fire so that in the event practically none of the rear lines got across No-man's land.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁶ Hull, C. To Allenby (S.J 6/5) of 4 June 1916 in WO 95/804/3.

⁸²⁷ Lyon F. To Hull (237/47) of 11 June 1916 in WO 95/804/3.

⁸²⁸ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916 Vol. I, p. 467.

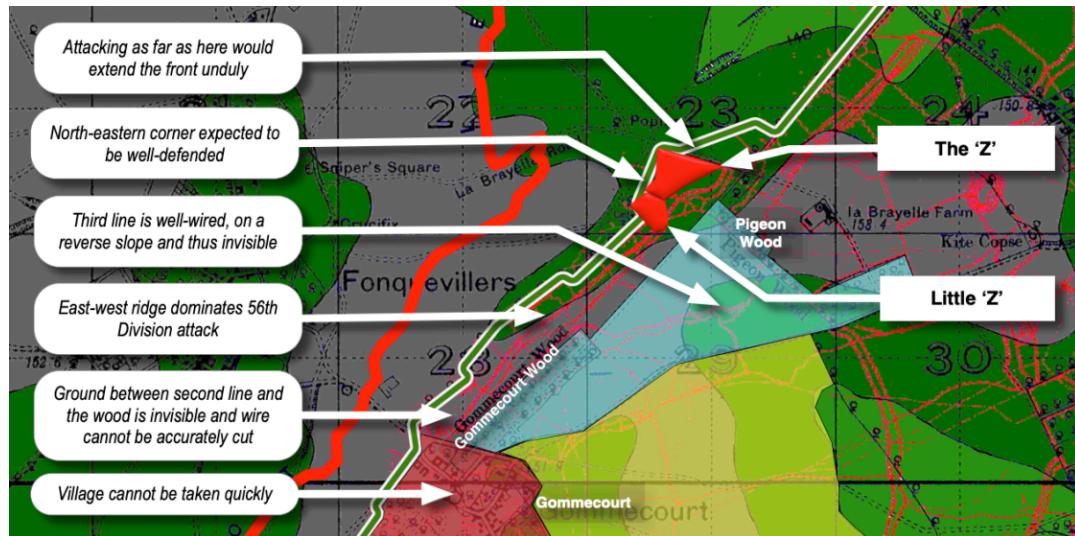


Figure 149 - VII Corps | 46 Division | Montague-Stuart-Wortley's appreciation of 25 May

His plan was also problematic. The attack was to be made with two Brigades, right and left whose operation orders were transmitted - presumably verbally since none of their diaries contains any orders - to their constituent battalions.⁸²⁹ The 1/7 Sherwood Foresters' diary said:

In accordance with the Brigade orders the ... Robin Hoods attacked the German line ...⁸³⁰

The war diary of 5th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment contained a map illustrating the poverty of information they were given.⁸³¹

⁸²⁹ WO 95/2692/4 lacks the essential 'Brigade Instructions', identifying objectives, assaulting troops etc.

⁸³⁰ Spalding, E. H. 'Report of the attack July 1st 1916' in WO 95/2694/2.

⁸³¹ Third Army, VII Corps, 138 Bde, 1/4 and 1/5 Leicestershire in WO 95/2690.

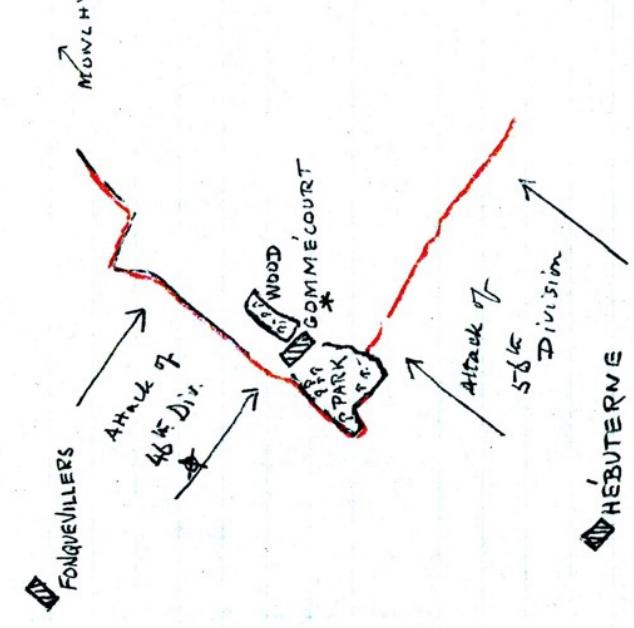
WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.				Army Form C. 2118. 16 JUN 1918.	Remarks and References to Appendices
Place	Date	Hour	SKETCH.	Summary of Events and Information	
FOLQUEVILLERS	17/6		 <p>Huns' FRONT LINE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The point at which the 2 attack wings meet. ♦ SURGERIE ruined. <p>Infantry Advances at 7.30 a.m. When the 2 attacks have met + concentrated the position an attack was to be made into village + Park from NE + from SE. This was timed to start at 10.30 - 10.30 a.m.</p>		

Figure 150 - VII Corps | 46 Division | 5th Leicester War Diary excerpt

The bombardment of Gommecourt village and Pigeon Wood would be continuous, with no mention of its limits or when it would stop. The attack and cooperation with 56 Division, even a proposed boundary line, were not mentioned other than as 'bombing attacks' along the 'eastern edge of Gommecourt village'. There was reference to ...

'a line most advantageous for the pinching of Gommecourt', but its purpose and location were unspecified. A boundary line between the two divisions was only decided on 24 June.⁸³² It was close to the one proposed by Hull.⁸³³

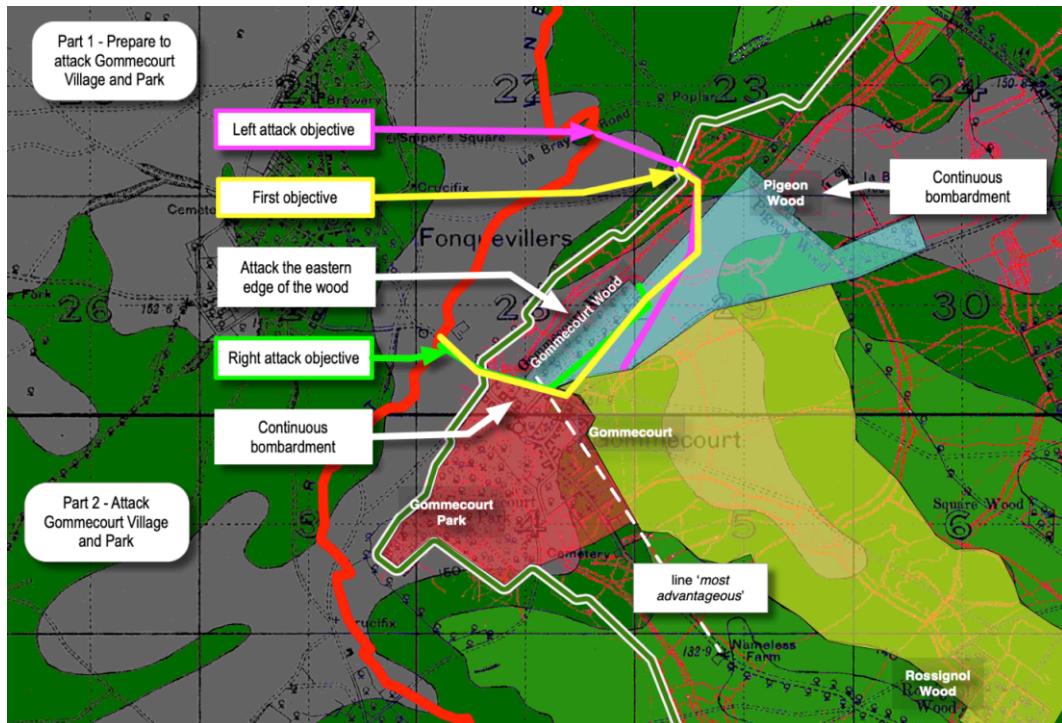


Figure 151 - VII Corps | 46 Division | Montague-Stuart-Wortley's attack proposal of 24 May

Montague-Stuart-Wortley ignored Hull's objectives and the plans of 56 Division. Snow did not correct him, but was concerned to coordinate with the Fourth Army. He wrote to Allenby asking for information concerning Fourth

⁸³² See page 274.

⁸³³ See page 262.

Army artillery plans, that VII Corps might conform to them and how long the VII Corps attack should continue, given that

‘There are no reserves behind the divisions that are carrying out the attack.’⁸³⁴

No reply can be found and no war diaries for the Fourth Army CRA for the period have survived.⁸³⁵

7.1.3 Artillery Plans

The artillery plans remaining are those of the VII Corps, 56 and 46 Divisions.

The VII Corps had two plans: one for Heavy artillery bombardment,⁸³⁶ and one for a mixed Heavy and Divisional artillery barrage.⁸³⁷ Some of the Heavy artillery would also engage in counter-battery firing. The Divisional artillery would be augmented by the guns of 37 Division. The CHA of VII Corps was Brigadier-General C. Reginald Buckle.

⁸³⁴ Snow to Allenby, GCR 237/28 of 29 May 1916 in WO 95/804/2.

⁸³⁵ Farndale mentions an ‘Army Artillery Operation Order’ of 5 June 1916, written by Birch (MGRA Fourth Army) but provides no reference. See Farndale, M., *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, Western Front 1914-18*, Royal Artillery Institution, (Woolwich 1986). P. 142.

⁸³⁶ Buckle, C. R., ‘Plan of attack of Corps heavy artillery’ of 14 June 1916 in WO 95/811/2.

⁸³⁷ Fox, R. F., ‘Artillery orders for bombardment No. 1’, of 14 June 1916 in WO 95/811/2.

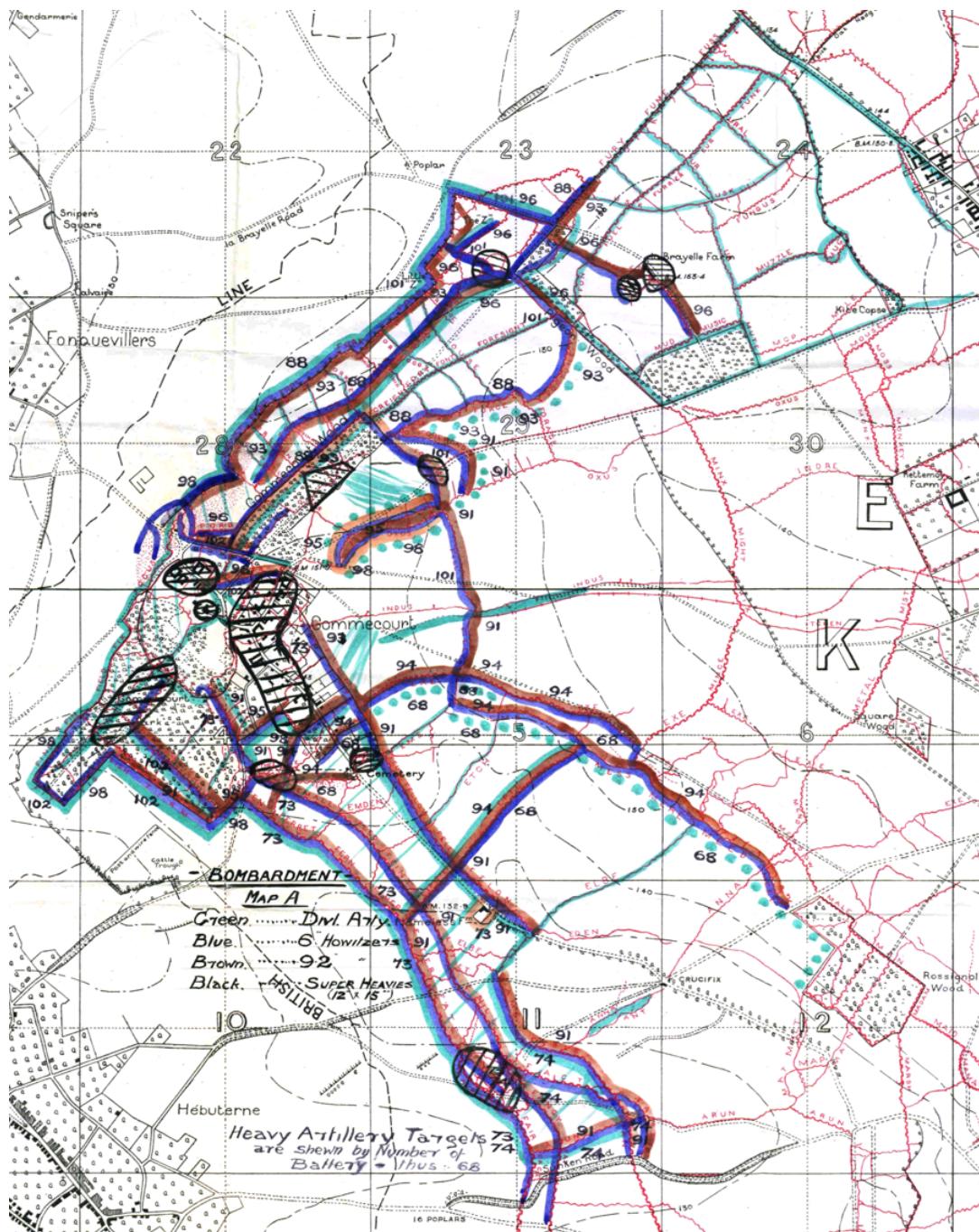


Figure 152 - VII Corps | Buckle's Heavy Bombardment proposal of 14 June

The bombardment was allocated to the Corps Heavy Artillery and was intended to destroy wire, trenches and dugouts as well as engage enemy batteries.⁸³⁸

838 Buckle, Op. Cit. in WO 95/811/2.

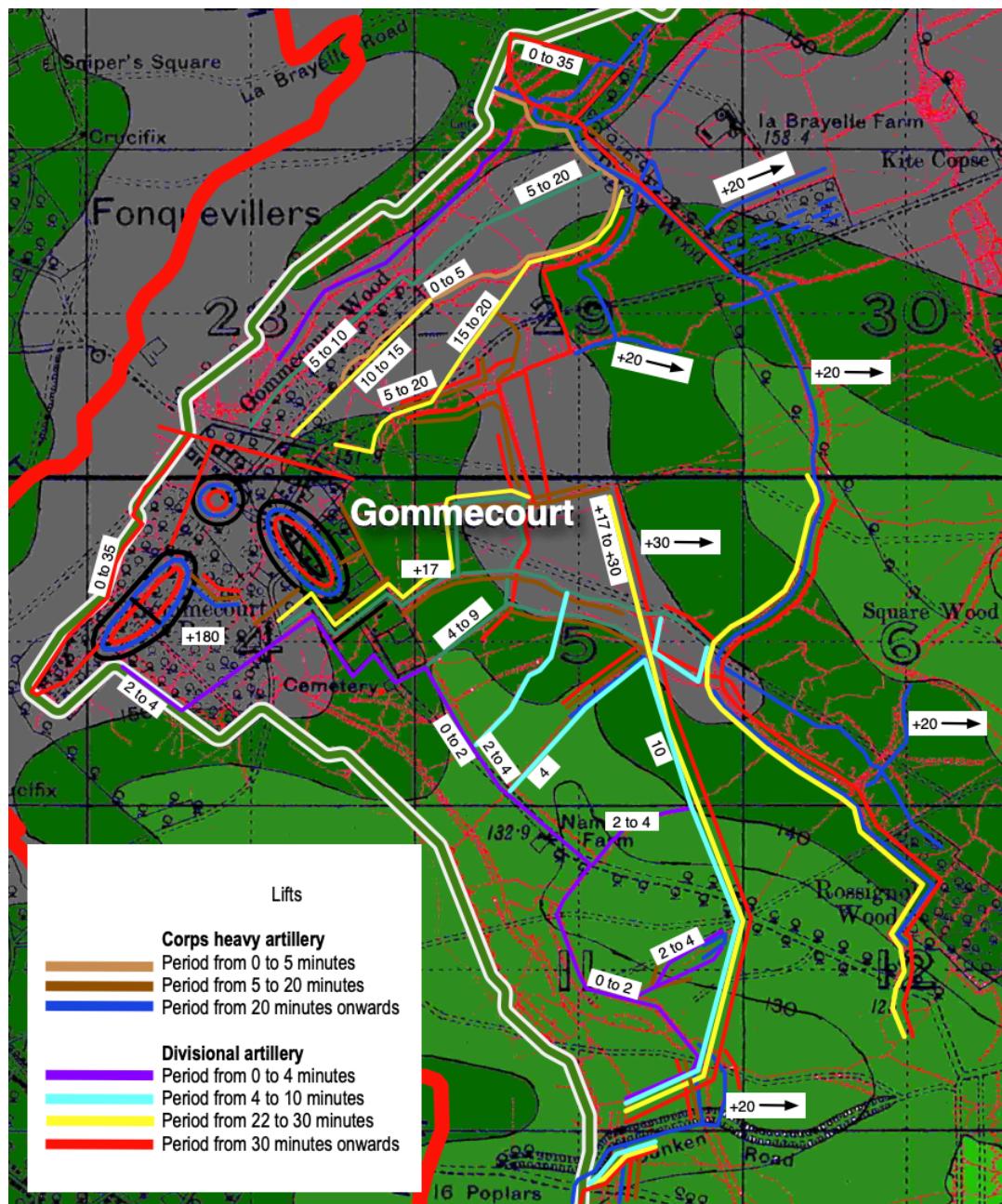


Figure 153 - VII Corps | Buckle's Artillery attack proposal of 14 June

All batteries were assigned targets, firing times and ammunition limits: the Divisional artillery were also assigned a list of map references of enemy OPs to be hit.⁸³⁹ The bombardments and counter-battery firing would be observed by balloons, despite the smoke,⁸⁴⁰ and would follow a timetable (and the map

839 WO 95/2937/1.

840 Cleaver, H. A., 'Co-operation of VIIth Corps Balloon with Artillery and Intelligence' of 16 June 1916 in WO 95/811/2.

on page 289).⁸⁴¹ Batteries would revert from corps to divisional control when the assault began.

No attempt was made to relate the artillery 'lifts' to the infantry progress: the policy remained as it had been at Neuve Chapelle: 'bombard and storm'. Thus while the bombardment plan covered several areas also covered by 56 Division artillery, 56 Division artillery plan did not relate to 56 Division's infantry plan

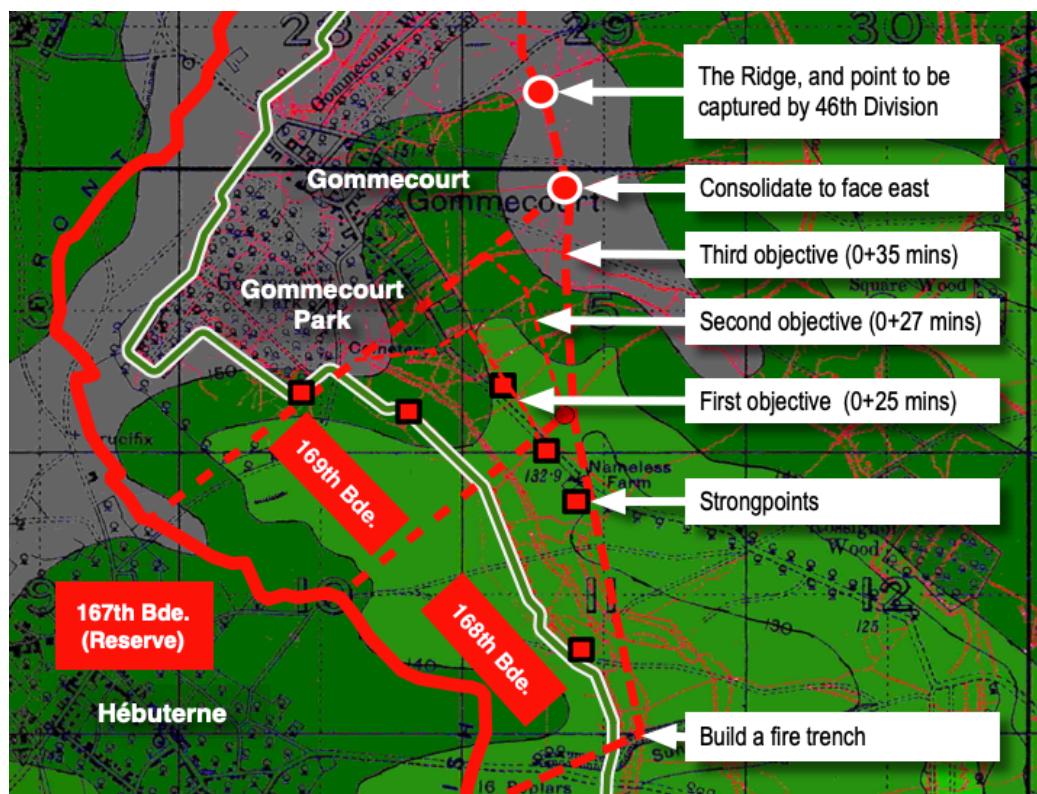


Figure 154 - VII Corps | 56 Division | Elkington's objectives of June 20 (WO 95/2937/1)⁸⁴²

Similarly Montague-Stuart-Wortley's eventual plan for 46 Division bears little relation to the proposal of 14 May.⁸⁴³ It assumed that the artillery would dominate and that the 139 Brigade troops should advance 'as far as the

⁸⁴¹ Bowles, J. de V.. 'Bombardment' of 28 June 1916 in WO 95/811/2.

⁸⁴² The plan was ostensibly an artillery plan and was found in the CRA files. It was prepared for Elkinton, the CRA, though it was ultimately Hull's responsibility.

⁸⁴³ See page 262.

artillery will allow'. The interface with 56 Division consisted of a point, not a line and the second objective was thus without a southern boundary.⁸⁴⁴

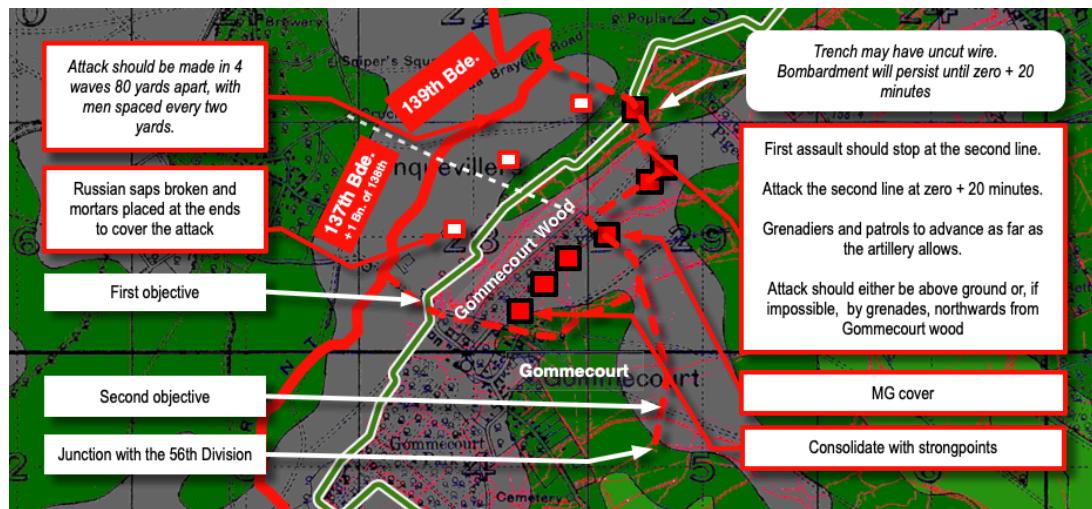


Figure 155 - VII Corps | 46 Division | Divisional instructions of June 8 - attack (WO 95/2663/2)

The third objective was Gommecourt village which the 137 Brigade would attack with grenades at zero+3 hours. Montague-Stuart-Wortley also considered the follow-up to the attack.

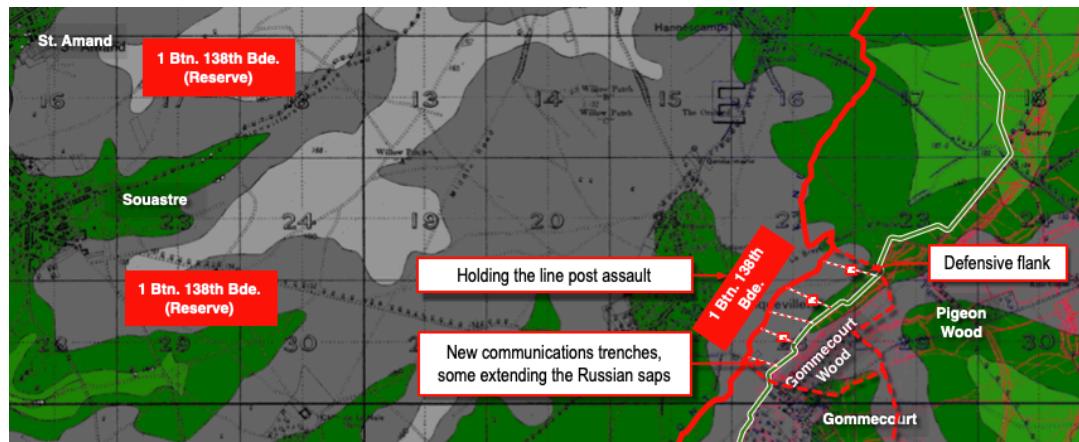


Figure 156 - VII Corps | 46 Division | Divisional instructions of June 8 (WO 95/2663/2)

The communications trenches allowed one up and one down trenches. The rest of 46 Division's plan is unexceptional and covered stores, stragglers

⁸⁴⁴ Anon., divisional instructions of 8 June 1916 in WO 95/2663/2.

prisoners, intelligence, medical and veterinary matters, and battlefield clearance.

Smoke was to be generally used and the plan of 138 Brigade for the third objective, the taking of Gommecourt, is as vague as that of the divisional plan:

Third objective.

When the above position has been consolidated and a junction made with the 56th Division, the clearing of GOMMECOURT VILLAGE with the 46th Division from NORTH and 56th Division from South will commence. This is timed to begin three hours after the assault, and at that time the Heavy Artillery will lift off GOMMECOURT VILLAGE, keeping on, however, on the PARK. The 137th Inf. Bde will push forward parties into the Village, with this object, three hours after the assault commences

Figure 157 - VII Corps | 46 Division | Excerpt from the 138 Brigade plan⁸⁴⁵

The failure to relate in any way to the attack of 56 Division suggests animosity between Hull and Montague-Stuart-Wortley and certainly a failure of Snow to command overall. The lack of any approach to the taking of Gommecourt compares badly with that taken by the XV Corps' 21 Division for their attack on Fricourt.⁸⁴⁶ The XV Corps plan was reviewed and improved,⁸⁴⁷ but 138 Brigade, being a Reserve, had a simple one-page plan and 'Attack instructions' copied from some of those of 46 Division.⁸⁴⁸

7.1.4 Battalion-Level Planning

The only battalion-level plans which can be found are those of 5 London Rifles, 9 London and 16 London.⁸⁴⁹ Brigadier-General F. H. Nugent, the 167 Brigade CO, had held a conference on 20 June in which he ...

⁸⁴⁵ Kemp, G. C. 138 Brigade OO 36 of 17 June 1916 in WO 95/2688/3, Third Army, VII Corps, 138 Bde.

⁸⁴⁶ See page 359.

⁸⁴⁷ Vaughan, L., 1/16 GX of 16 June 1916 in WO 95/921/2, XV Corps.

⁸⁴⁸ Godsall, W. L., OO 38 of 24 June in WO 95/2688/3 and Anon., Divisional Instructions of 18 June in WO 95/2663/2.

⁸⁴⁹ Bates A. S., OO 2 (m.s.) of 28 June 1916 in WO 95/2961/1, Chudman, J., QVR Attack order (m.s.) of 27 June 1916 in WO 95/2963/1, Shoolbred, R., Battalion Orders of 27 June 1916 in WO 95/2963/2. The other battalions are:

‘explained to all officers all the details of the forthcoming operation’.⁸⁵⁰ The plan of 137 Brigade was largely a copy of the 46 Divisional plan, but omitted to mention the names of the battalions involved. The attack would be generally covered with smoke, beginning 5 minutes before the assault and decreasing in intensity after 15 minutes. Troops were expected to maintain their direction under such conditions by using white tapes, spun yarn and compass bearings. The four snipers were expected to accompany the battalion’s HQ and cover the ‘consolidation of the most important points’ rather than accompany the attacking troops.

The injunction to press on irrespective of any threat to the flanks was expressly contradicted:

‘Whenever a commander of a bombing party sees that troops on his right or left are held up, he will attack that portion of the enemy in flank, which is checking the advance.’⁸⁵¹

Troops would attack in four waves, 80 yards apart. Should smoke be used, the waves would be connected by files. As soon as the ‘Oxus’ trench was reached, a grenade-throwing party would attack along ‘Fill’ trench.⁸⁵²

46th Div, 137 Bde, WO 95/2685
5 & 6 North Staffordshire in WO 95/2686
5 South Staffordshire WO 95/2687
6 South Staffordshire, 138 Bde, WO 95/2690
4 and 5 Leicestershire, WO 95/2691
4 and 5 Lincolnshire, 139 Bde, WO 95/2694
6 Sherwood Foresters, WO 95/3025
5 Sherwood Foresters, WO 95/2694
7 Sherwood Foresters, WO 95/2695
8 Sherwood Foresters, WO 95/2695
5 Notts. and Derby, 56th Div, 167 Bde, WO 95/2949
1 & 3 London, WO 95/2950
7 & 8 Middlesex, 168 Bde, WO 95/2954
4 and 12 London, WO 95/3030
13 & 14 London, 169 Bde, WO 95/2960
2 London, WO 95/2961
5 London, 9 and 16 London, WO 95/2963.

⁸⁵⁰ Anon., Entry in the War diary of 7 Middlesex, 191602-191901 in WO 95/2950/1.

⁸⁵¹ Section ‘Mutual aid’ in Anon., ‘137th Infantry Brigade instructions’ of 24 June 1916 in WO 95/2683/2, for example see page 345.

⁸⁵² see Figure 159.

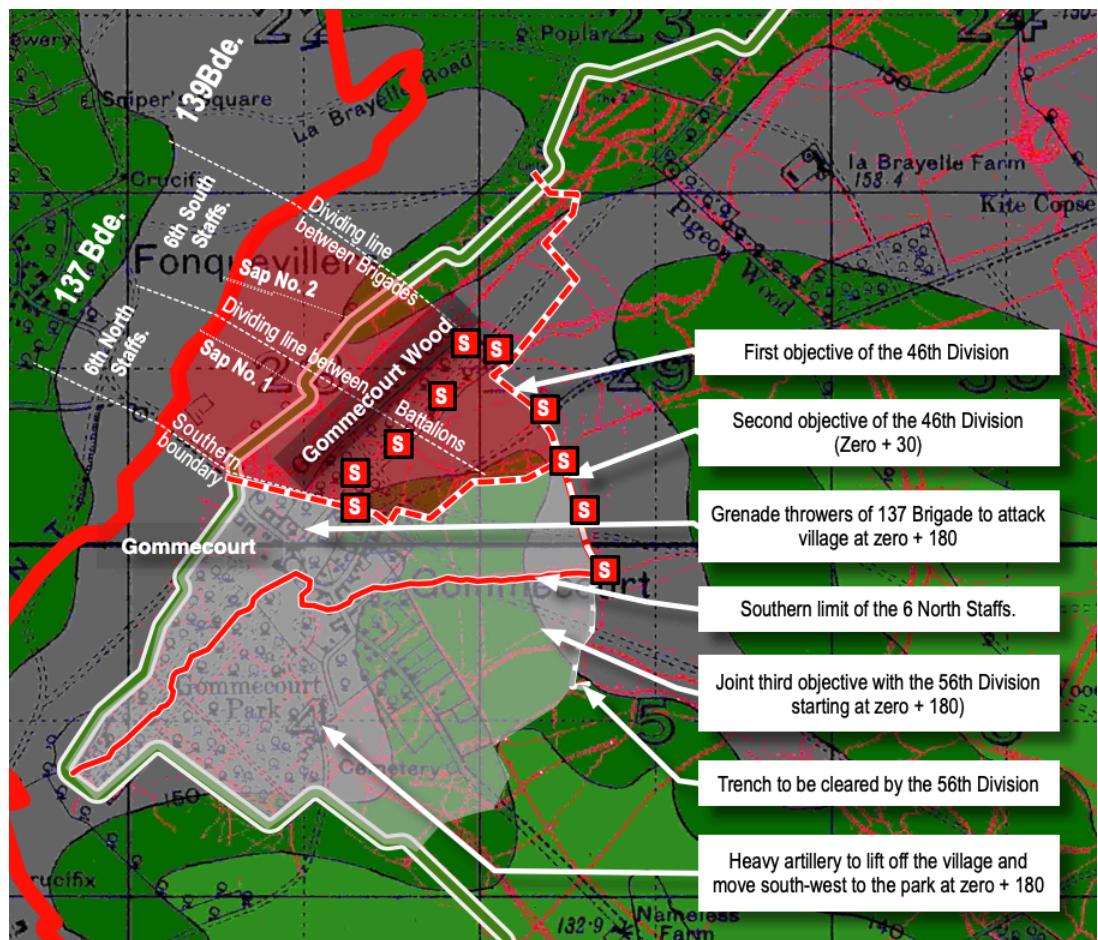


Figure 158 - VII Corps | 46 Division | 137 Brigade attack plan

The attack plan of the grenade-throwing parties on the village is shown below.

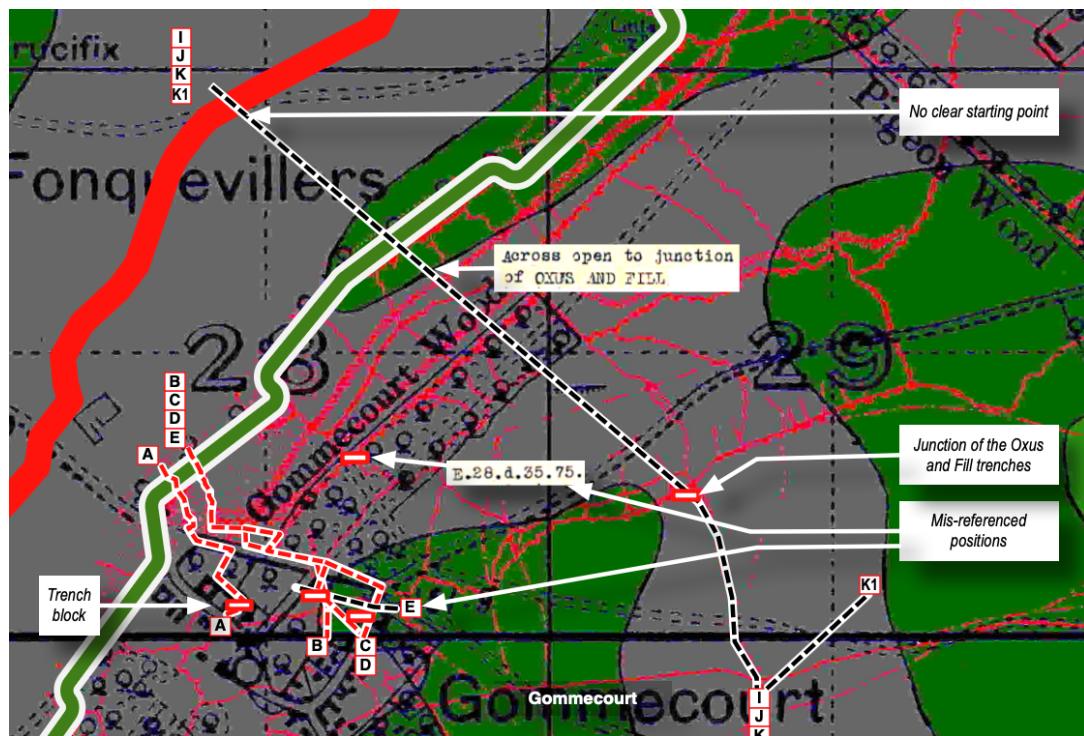


Figure 159 - VII Corps | 46 Division | 137 Brigade attack plan of the grenade-throwing parties

The plan for the attack on the village involved 14 grenade-throwing parties, each composed of an NCO, 8 ORs, 3 rifle grenadiers and 2 RE.

Reference F & G Bombing Parties, attention is directed to photo 8.L.122 taken 16-5-16, which shows German main front line plainly.
This differs from map of GOMMECOURT 2nd Edition 1/5,000

Figure 160 - VII Corps | 46 Division | 137 Brigade attack plan of the grenade-throwing parties - detail

Two parties, F and G, were to follow a route according to a photograph, 8 L 122 which differed from the map.⁸⁵³ Three of the parties would follow others' routes and the routes of the remaining parties are shown above. Of these, only A was well-formed, having a clear beginning and end and separate from duplications of B-D. The duplications limited the front to be attacked, simplified blocking and put nearby parties at risk. Routes I-K1 lacked a starting point and several, such as K1, an end point, the party being directed north-east. Many of the positions, such as E are unfeasible since they do not

⁸⁵³ H. B. Williams 137 Infantry Brigade instructions of 24 June 1916 in WO 95/2683/2.

refer to a trench. The plan is evidence of incompetent staff-work, a failure by commanders to check, and an assault on an extremely narrow front.

The attack was to be supported by first-aid posts and ammunition dumps.

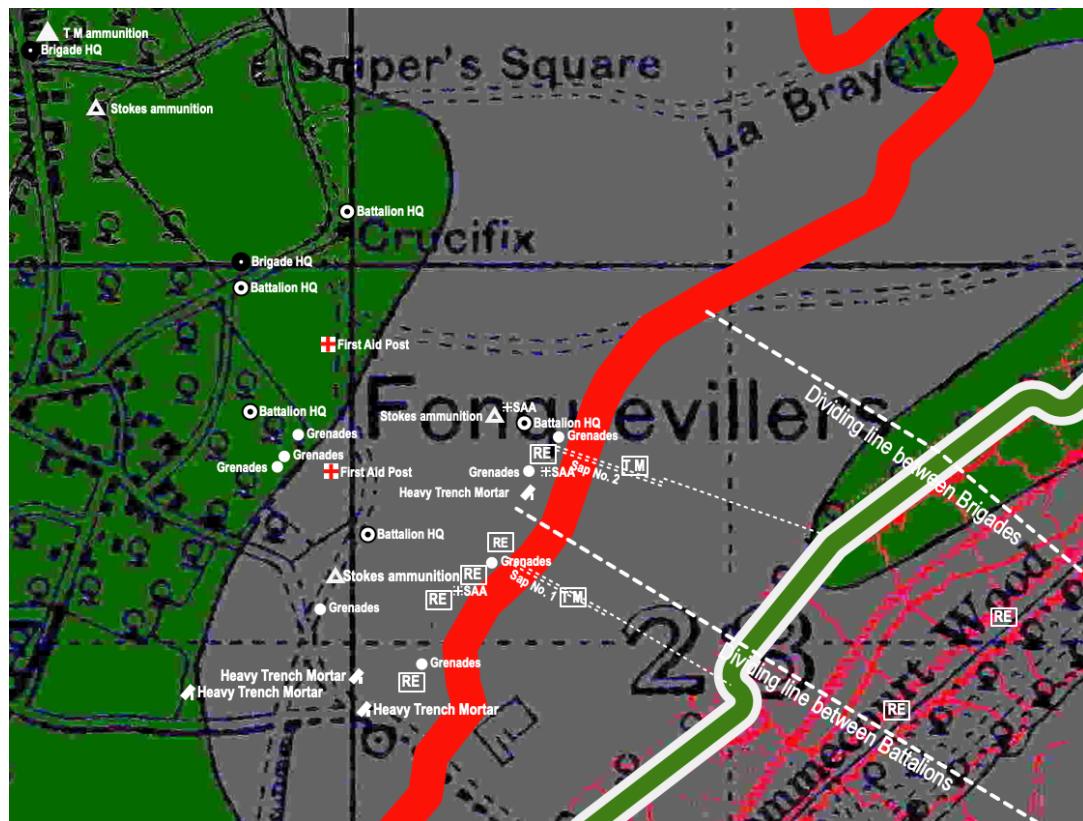


Figure 161 - Third Army | VII Corps | 46th Division | 137 Brigade | Attack plan, support (WO 95/2683/2)

While rations and water were mentioned in the map key, none could be found on the map.

The war diary of 138 Brigade shows that no training occurred, troops being entirely occupied in digging.⁸⁵⁴ 139 Brigade practiced attacks from 8-16 June.⁸⁵⁵ 137 Brigade had a practice attack over rehearsal trenches on 20 June.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁴ Anon., 138 Brigade War diary in WO 95/2688/3.

⁸⁵⁵ Anon., 139 Brigade War diary in WO 95/2692/4.

⁸⁵⁶ Anon., 137th Brigade War diary in WO 95/2683/2.

7.1.5 Conclusion

The failure of the attacks by both the Divisions has been ascribed to a lack of aggressiveness by 46 Division whose

'failure to do more than make a small entry into the German line had disastrous consequences for the 56th'⁸⁵⁷

... and resulted in the sacking by Haig of Montague-Stuart-Wortley on 5

July.⁸⁵⁸ Given the inadequacy of the plans and that only one of the battalion files held an attack order, these were presumably contributory factors.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁷ Edmonds, J. E., ... 1916, *Vol I*, p. 471.

⁸⁵⁸ Peaple, Simon Patrick, 'The 46th (North Midland) Division (TF) on the Western Front 1915-18', eThesis, (Birmingham, 2003), p 128.

⁸⁵⁹ WO 95/2679/1, WO 95/2683/2, WO 95/2686/1, WO 95/2687/2, WO 95/2690/1, WO 95/2690/2, WO 95/2690/2, WO 95/2690/2, WO 95/2691/1, WO 95/2691/2, WO 95/2694/1, WO 95/2694/2, WO 95/2695, WO 95/3025.

7.2 VIII Corps planning

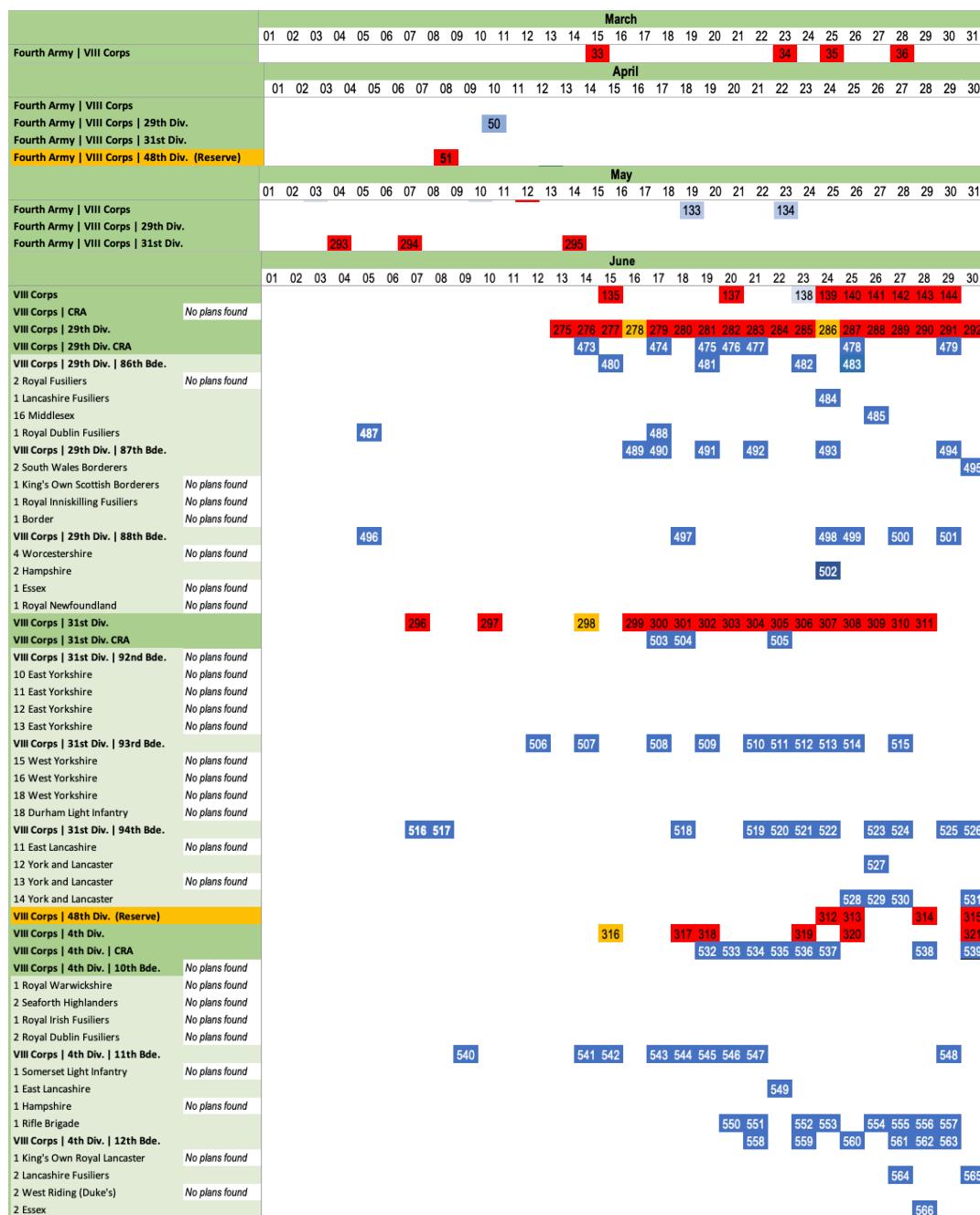


Figure 162 - VIII Corps | Planning timeline (see page 22 for the key)

The intensity of the battle of Verdun and the consequent pressure exerted by the French on Haig was evident from the first attempt at a plan made by Horruthven of the VIII Corps on 25 March [35]. The Corps had been formed from a mere three divisions with a promise of a fourth, which would not arrive until ten days before the proposed attack.

It intended to take an area of 2.34 sq. miles which would have required that each soldier capture a reasonable 100 sq. ft. A mooted fifth Division and a second objective would have increased this to a barely-feasible 140 sq. yards. (The attacks at Neuve Chapelle and Loos averaged 132 sq. yards.)

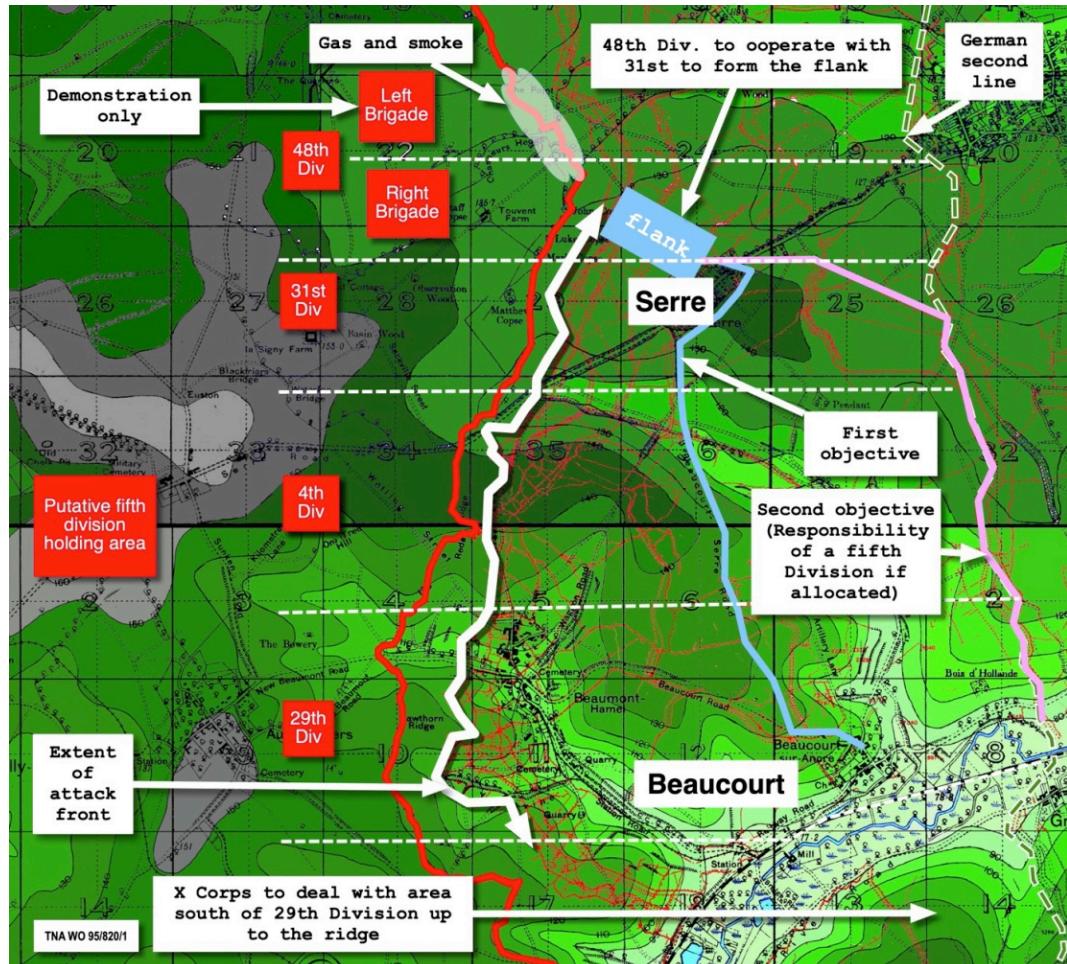


Figure 163 - VIII Corps | Attack plan of 25 March

The attack was expected to be made by 30 April. The three allocated divisions would have to prepare for the attack by themselves, since the fourth would arrive too late to help. New trenches should be dug to ensure the assault could start some 200 yards from the German front line and each battalion should have 'up' and 'down' communication trenches. Assembly trenches were to be camouflaged. All divisions were expected to write 'Schemes of attack' without delay. Deception operations would include digging trenches to the north-west

of the left Brigade of 49 Division. The urgency of Verdun subsided, the attack was never made, but planning experience was gained.⁸⁶⁰

For almost two months no planning activity was recorded, then VIII Corps commanders were invited to a conference on 23 May to discuss an outline of the forthcoming battle with Hunter-Weston. He began by identifying the need for defensive measures, the attack objectives of the left of the Fourth Army being the Serre-Grandcourt spur and Pozières (the Gommecourt Salient, further north, would be attacked by the Third Army).⁸⁶¹ As before, a defensive flank was called for, but its position was unspecified. Its rôle was to

| 'keep the enemy fully employed towards the North and North-East'. The final position, astride the German second line, would typically be taken in 3 hours. At its farthest from the British trenches, it was 4,000 yards away. At the end of the first day's attack at Loos the British had reached Hulluch, just 3500 yards from the British front line, the equivalent distance at Neuve Chapelle was 1200 yards.⁸⁶² Haig had insisted that VIII Corps take Serre and establish a flank in a single action.⁸⁶³ The contrast with Snow's insistence on a three-phase attack,⁸⁶⁴ shows the corporate inexperience of the BEF at that time.

⁸⁶⁰ Hore-Ruthven, W., G.131 of 25 March 1916 in WO 95/820/1.

⁸⁶¹ See page 255.

⁸⁶² Kendall, Paul, *The Battle of Neuve Chapelle*, Frontline Books, Barnsley, 2016, p. 140.

⁸⁶³ Entry of 8 April 1916 in Haig, Diary, WO 256/8.

⁸⁶⁴ See page 263.

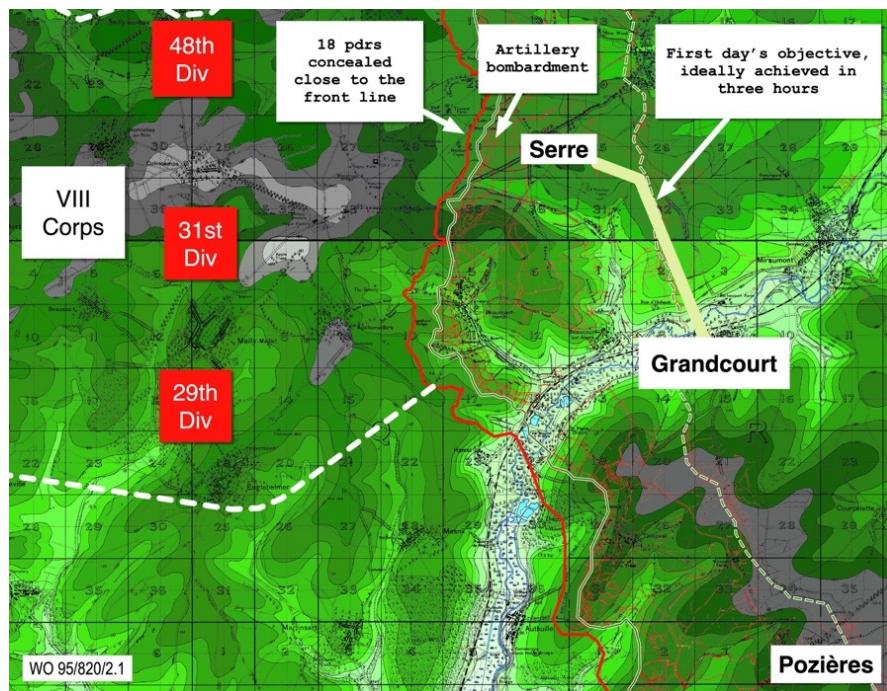


Figure 164 - VIII Corps | Conference notes of 23 May

The artillery would cooperate with the neighbouring X Corps by each advancing on and enfilading enemy trenches. Training would include simulated trenches and the passing of one unit through another. Mortars and MGs were expected to move with the troops. Hunter-Weston speculated whether troops should attack in columns, but decided that the first objectives should be taken by troops in 'waves', forming up on tapes laid the preceding night. Assaulting troops must start on a line parallel to the front to be assaulted. On taking the first objectives, troops should attack in columns until the 'intensity of the enemy's fire' required they 'extend into line'. Artillery movement was not mentioned, but bridges, capable of taking motor transport, should be constructed to carry roads over trenches.⁸⁶⁵

The plan was expressed in two parts: a simple four-page operational order No. 3 and a detailed, 28-section 'scheme' of 15 and 16 June respectively, complete with nine maps.⁸⁶⁶ The attack would be preceded by blowing a

⁸⁶⁵ Hore-Ruthven, Conference notes, VIII Corps war diaries, 23 May 1916 in WO 95/820/2.

⁸⁶⁶ Hore-Ruthven, VIII Corps operations order No 3 and Anon., 'Scheme for offensive' in WO 95/820/2.

mine, a mortar barrage and a 5-day artillery barrage with field guns which thereafter would be moved into no-man's land. It would take Serre, Beaumont Hamel and end on the German second line, where strongpoints would be established. Progress would be monitored from three observation posts which could call down a barrage by firing rockets, if any unit signalled a problem.

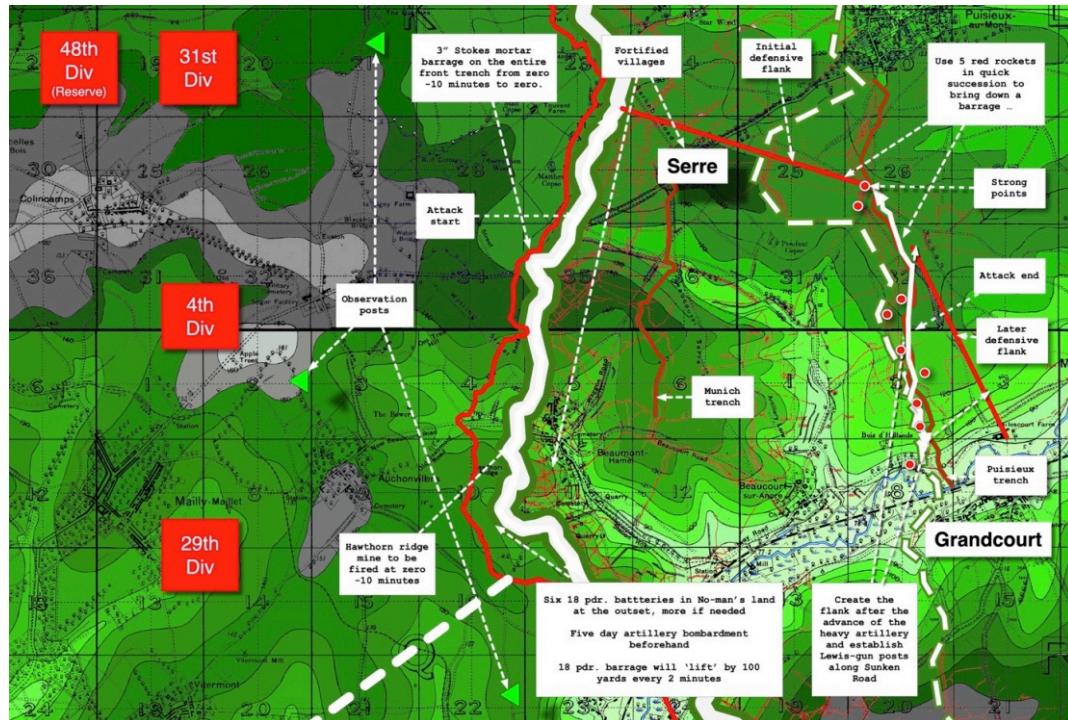


Figure 165 - VIII Corps | Operation order No 3

The 'scheme' covered the actions of the troops, the artillery, aircraft, weapons, supply, command, communications and battlefield policing. It contained a summary and detailed instructions ordered by Brigade, battalion and objective. An example concerning 31 Division is shown below.

- 9 -

31st DIVISION.

The front of attack allotted to this Division is from K.35.a,98 - K.23.d,81. The positions of Battalions in this Division immediately prior to the assault are shown on the attached map.

G.O.C., 31st Division intends to carry out the attack as follows :-

1st OBJECTIVE. The German trench extending from K.36.a,19 to K.30.a,37.

Right Brigade - 93rd Brigade. The 15th West Yorks will assault the enemy's first three lines of trenches and establish itself in the fourth line from K.36.a,19 - K.30.c,26.

The advance will be made on a front of two Companies each Company on a front of two Platoons. The first two waves will be in line extended to three paces interval. The remaining two waves having each platoon in column of sections moving to a flank in file, sections being at deploying interval.

Left Brigade - 94th Brigade. The assault will be made by two Companies 11th East Lancs. on the right and two Companies 12th York and Lancs. on left. They will move over the enemy's first three lines of trenches and establish themselves in the fourth line on the following frontage :-

11th East Lancs. - K.30.c,26 - K.30.a,22.

11 Jap-

12th York & Lancs. - K.30.a,22 - K.30.a,37.

The advance will be made on a frontage of one Company, the formation being the same as for the Right Brigade.

It is hoped that the first objective will be reached by 0.20.

Figure 166 - VIII Corps | 31st Division | Page 9 of the assault plan

One Brigadier-General noted that 'the first principles of war were overwhelmed by a mass of detail which dispensed with individual initiative & any elasticity' and giving as an example the orders issued by VIII Corps prior to 1 July 1916 a 'terrible document' of 76 pages which 'had been endeavouring to legislate for everything' and issued with 365 Supplementary

Instructions and it took three days 'to reduce this enormous mass of instructions to some 8 pages & 5 maps of Brigade orders'⁸⁶⁷

The plan covers 93 pages. No 'Supplementary Instructions' can be found on file. Being detailed down to battalion level, it is hard to see how a reasonably-competent officer would have had difficulty in writing battalion-level orders from it. Nevertheless the criticism was levelled by Brigadier-General Rees (then commanding the 11 Brigade in the 4 Division) whose involvement would have been minimised by the plan's thoroughness.⁸⁶⁸

However, some planning confusion was evident. The order stated:

'Where, as in the case of Munich and Puisieux Trenches, a second line of German trenches has recently been dug, the infantry would make this second line their objective and not the original line.'

The Puisieux trench was some 2000 yards to the rear of the Munich trench and it was unclear how infantry were to decide which trench should substitute their original trench.

Some map references were evidently faulty:

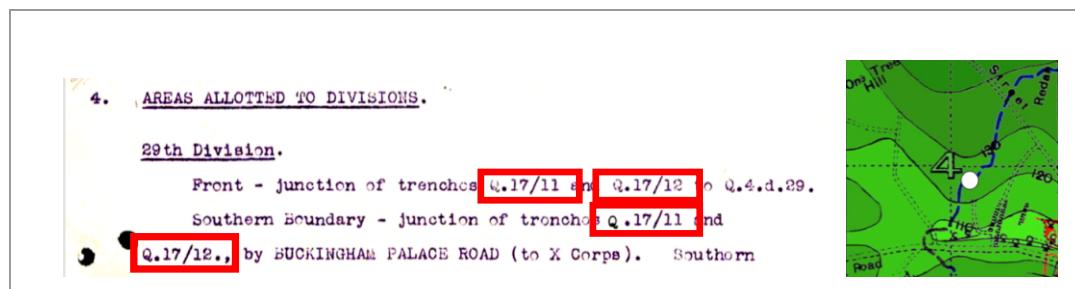


Figure 167 - VIII Corps | Assault plan, faulty map references in WO 95/820/2.2 and point Q.4.d.29

Q.17/11 and Q.17/12 are not map references since the quarter square (a, b, c, or d) is not specified: but Q.4.d.29 is.

⁸⁶⁷ Brigadier-General H.C. Rees to Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, J. E., 14 November 1929, CAB 45 137, TNA in Robbins, Simon Nicholas, 'British generalship on the Western Front in the First World War, 1914-1918', eThesis, KCL, (London, 2015), p. 135. See page 294 for a discussion of the 4 Division plan in general and the 11 Brigade's role in particular.

⁸⁶⁸ Rees H.C., 'Report of a deception operation' in WO 95/820/5

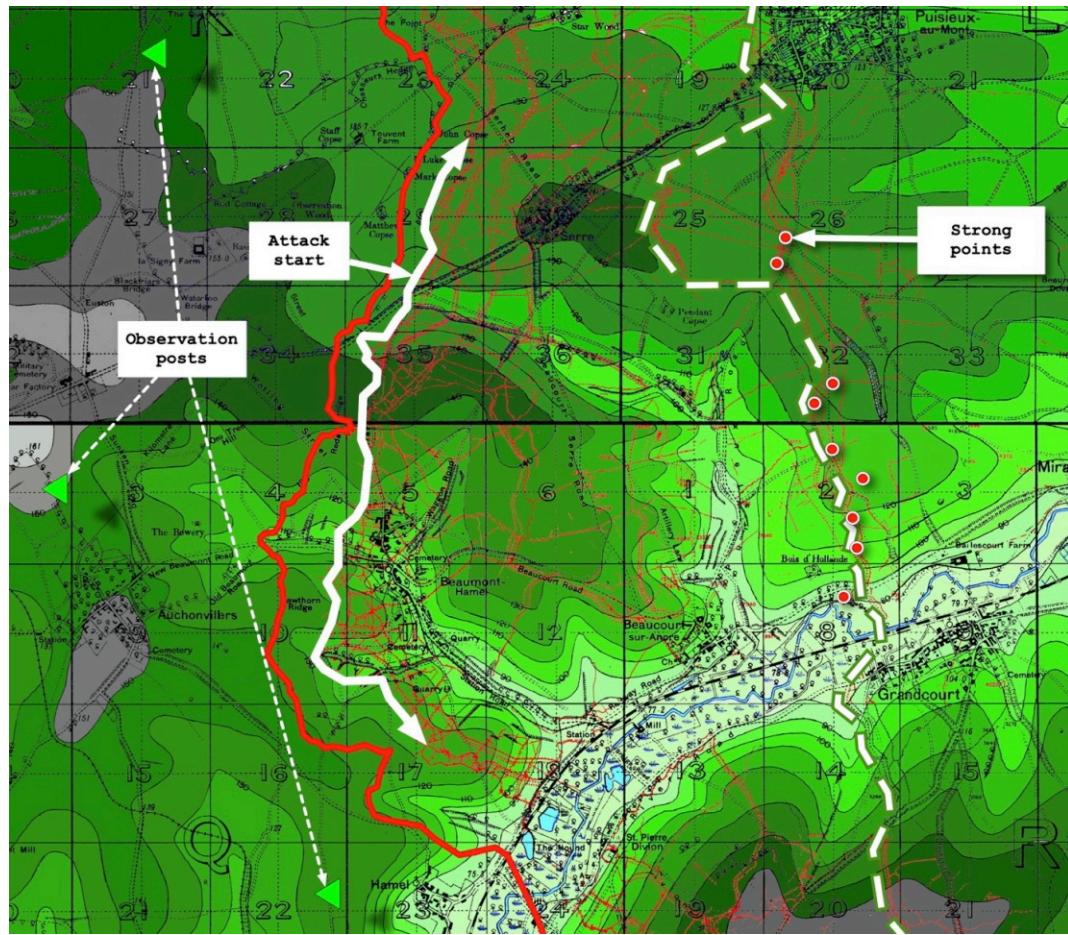


Figure 168 - VIII Corps | Observation Posts and Strongpoints

As shown on page 307, there were to be four sets of objectives each with a time whereby it was expected to be taken. The whole attack was expected to be achieved in three hours, after which each soldier would have taken 156 sq. yards. Given that Neuve Chapelle and Loos had averaged 132 sq. yds. per soldier per day, this was optimistic. Having gained the fourth objective, a series of strongpoints would be established with a further series of small posts based on Lewis gun teams at the easternmost perimeter.

The proposed timing of the barrages was problematic.

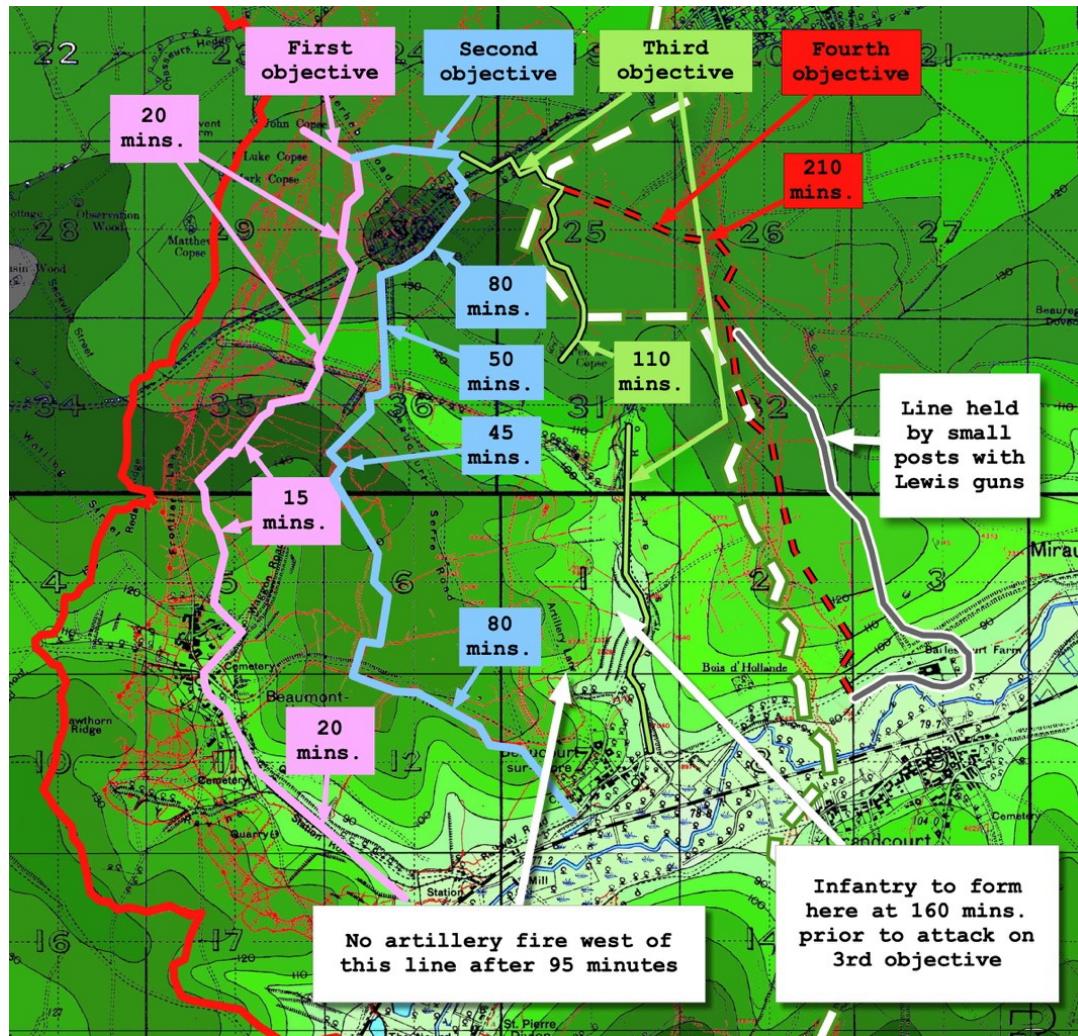


Figure 169 - VIII Corps | Objectives⁸⁶⁹

It is not clear why the infantry should form for an attack on the southern half of the third objective (in green) at 160 mins after the Z-hour with no time constraint, when the northern half was expected to have been taken by 110 minutes.

7.2.1 31 Division's Plans

31 Division's plan derived from the instructions in the VIII Corps plan shown on page 304. Its preparations included having the RE create saps from which the troops could emerge using ladders. Trenches in front of the rear assembly

⁸⁶⁹ Based on an undated map in WO 95/820/1. Note the dates on which VIII Corps published their orders (25 March 1916) and the dates on which the constituent Divisions published theirs (31 Division First instruction on 4 May, OO 32 on 28 June and 4 Division OO 38 on 18 June, 'Attack formations 30 June'). It was not always the case that Divisions led the Corps in planning.

trenches would be bridged immediately before the assault. A 'Russian' sap at the northernmost extreme would later become part of the flank defence.

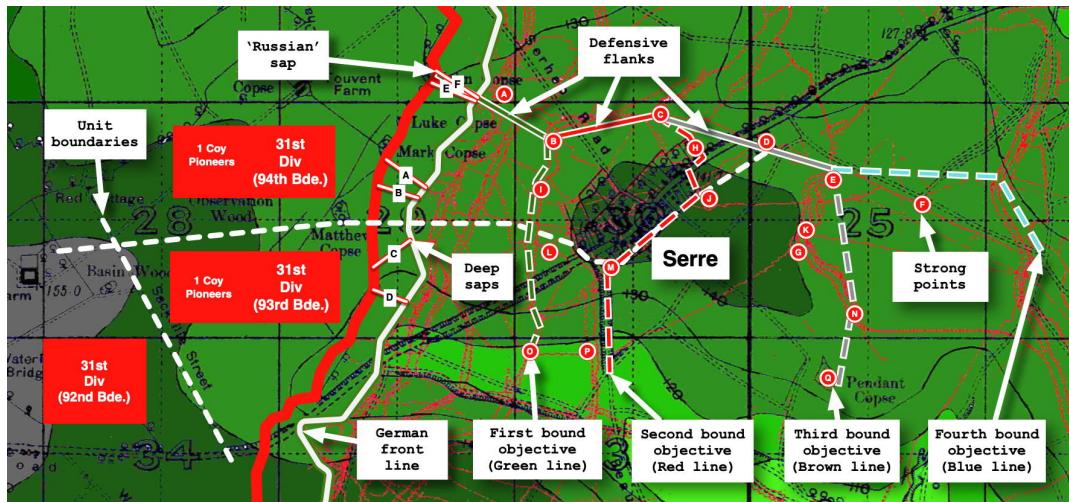
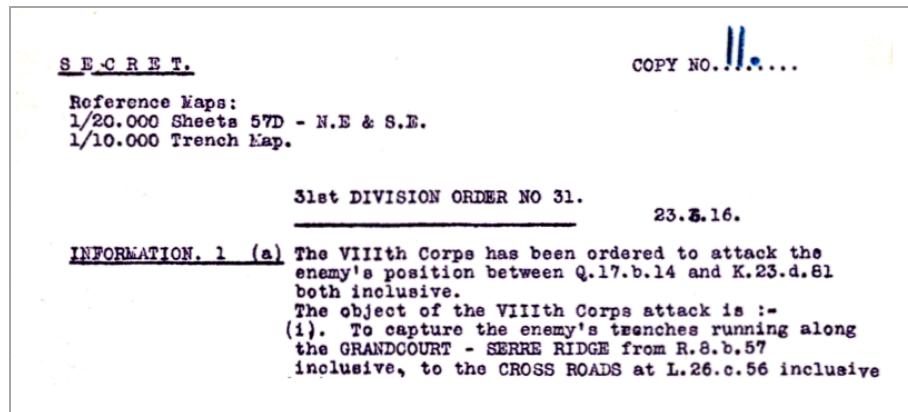


Figure 170 - VIII Corps | 31st Division | Plan

The assault would be made in 'bounds': three for 93 Brigade on the right and four for 94 Brigade on the left. As positions were captured, strongpoints would be established by the RE, garrisoned with infantry and provided with a machine gun. New communication trenches would be dug, existing trenches would be exploited, and rations and ammunition dumps established. (The 'bounds' correspond approximately to those shown in Figure 169 on page 307.)

31 Division's plan was written both as an order ...



... such that the commander's intention was clear ...

<u>TASK OF THE DIVISION.</u>	3.	The task of the Division is to form a defensive flank to the VIIth Corps extending from cross roads L.26.c.56 exclusive on the right to our own trenches at K.23.d.3.2 on the left.
<u>OBJECTIVES.</u>	4.	In order to carry out the task allotted the following objectives will be captured and consolidated.
	(a)	<u>Objective of the First Bound.</u> The German trench extending from K.30.a.3.7 to K.36.a.1.9. This line will be consolidated and garrisoned and a defensive flank formed facing North from our own trenches at K.23.d.3.2. to K.23.d.8.1 thence along communication trench to K.30.a.3.7.

... and as a series of 'Instructions' which interleaved doctrine and commands sometimes coherently ('Appendix I - Stragglers'), but otherwise promiscuously, incoherently and randomly. Thus

113.	All watches will be synchronised at 6 p.m. on Y day. The O.C. Signal Coy will arrange for time to be given at that hour.
114.	On arrival at the Cross Roads K.36.a.8.7. the G.O.C. 93rd Brigade will detail special troops to bomb Southwards to join the left of the 11th Brigade, which will be just North of K.36.a.65.20.

Dates and times were mostly grouped in a single appendix ...

<u>S E C R E T.</u>	<u>COPY NO.....</u>
	<u>31st DIVISIONAL INSTRUCTIONS.</u>
<u>APPENDIX S</u>	

At 0.0 the artillery will lift off the front line and will creep forward, i.e. increase the range 100 yards every 2 minutes until they arrive at the 1st Objective. They continue firing on this till 0.20.
From 0.20 to 0.30 they fire occasional bursts East of the Objective at selected targets.

..., but would also be defined locally:

100.	Gas will be discharged on V night if wind is favourable. If not, on W or X nights. Hour of discharge will be known as Zero. Duration of discharge 1 hour and 28 minutes.
101	The 92nd Brigade will arrange for rapid rifle and Machine gun fire to cover the noise made by the escaping gas during the concentrated discharges from Zero to 0.4 and from 1.24 to 1.28.

The failure to group the instructions coherently, without index or table of contents, meant that officers and NCOs were forced to remember a large amount of unstructured information which they would be prohibited from taking with them in the assault and which would in turn impede training,

rehearsal and the assault itself. For example Hore-Ruthven and Lieutenant-Colonel J. Baumgartner (31 Division) repeated both their own contents and that of earlier instructions as if they had hastily assembled them from notes.⁸⁷⁰ As the date of the assault approached the confusion increased with references to paragraphs in other, unnamed documents and contradictory injunctions such as 'running fast' ('doubling') prohibited in Instruction 128 yet required in Instruction 124 and elsewhere.⁸⁷¹ Yet although the plan exhibited problems, Rees's complaints were wide of the mark.⁸⁷²

7.2.2 29 Division's Plans

29 Division was bounded by 4 Division to the north and 36 Division to the south. It was expected to take three well-defended German lines to the north of the valley of the Ancre. It conferred on the best methods of taking Beaumont Hamel, but no records survive.⁸⁷³ divisional Officers attended the corps conference of 23 May. On 14 June 'Preliminary instructions' were issued.

870 31st Division Instructions (61-72) and *Appendices G, J* in WO 95/2341/1

871 Instruction 15 of 16 June 1916 in WO 95/2359/1.

872 Hore-Ruthven, Instructions (1-17) of 7 July 1916 and Baumgartner, 31st Division Instructions (61-72), *Appendices G, J* in WO 95/2341/1) are examples. They repeat both their current contents and those of earlier instructions as if they had hastily assembled them from notes.

873 10 April 1916 War diary entry. WO 95/2280/2.1.

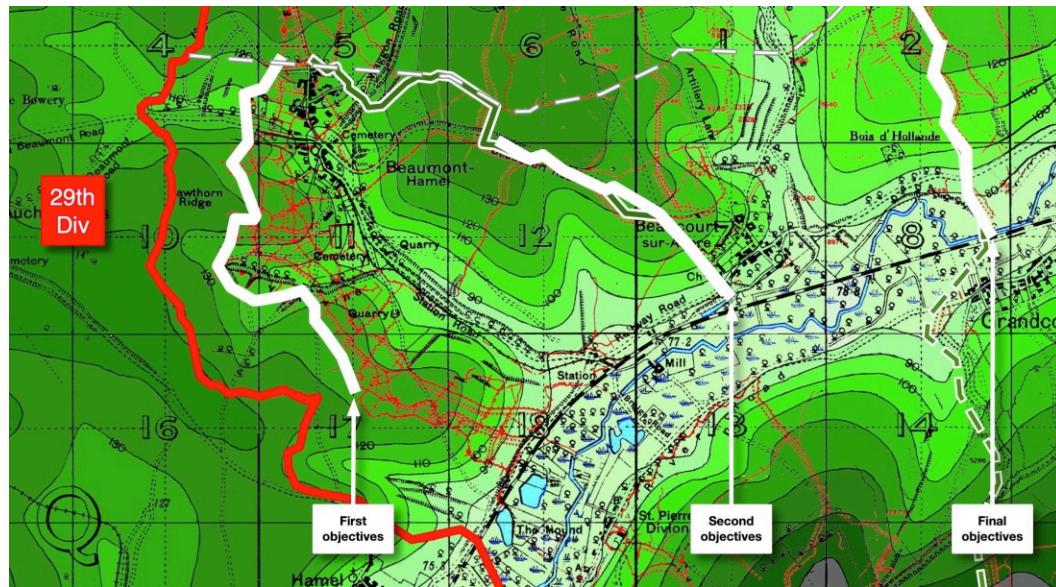


Figure 171 - VIII Corps | 29 Division | Problem

The objectives were bordered to the north by the artillery limits (shown as a dotted white line) The second objective's northern limit ended, however, some 400 yards south of the artillery limit with no plan to bombard it during the assault (it would have been bombarded earlier). The solutions proposed were to bombard the objectives for five days and then assault them.

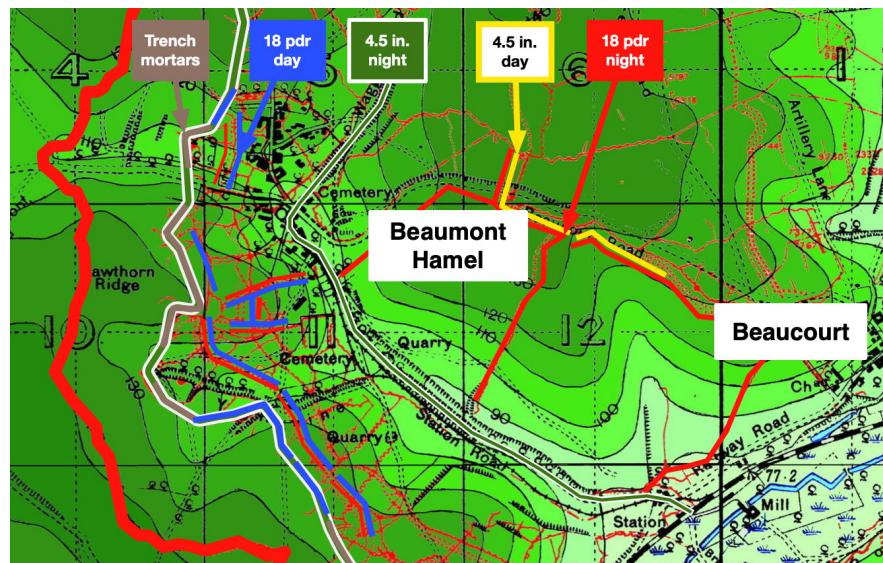


Figure 172 - VIII Corps | 29 Division | Plan, bombardment phases 1 & 2

Three other bombardment phases would also cover the same targets, but with greater intensity. The assault would be timed by the artillery lifts.

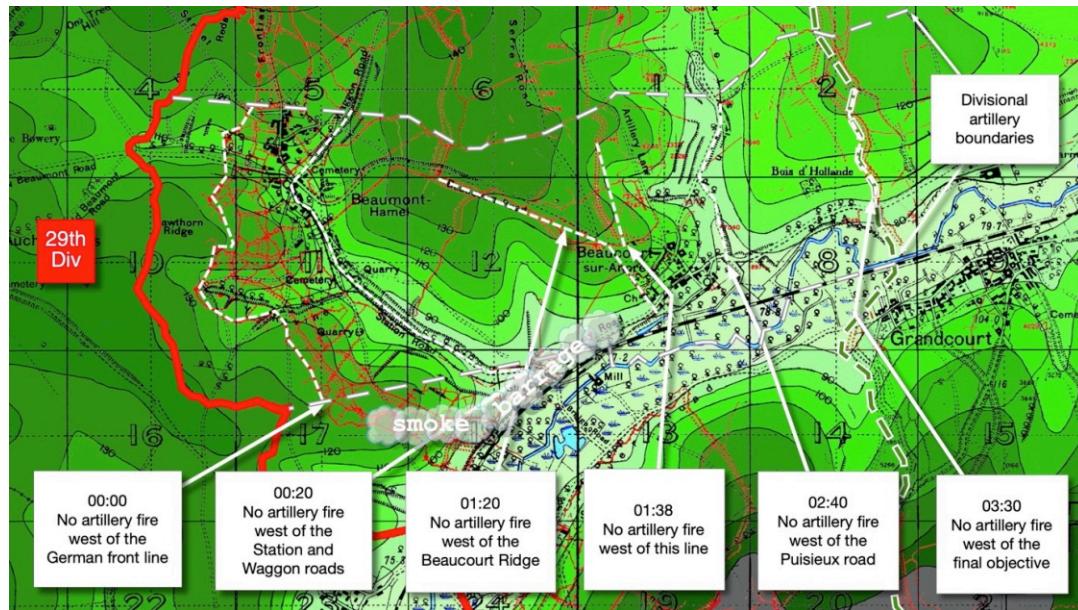


Figure 173 - VIII Corps | 29 Division | Plan, artillery lifts

Disconcertingly, these too left coverage gaps along to the north of several of the lifts. The smoke barrage to the south was provided by mortars, but was not replicated to the north.⁸⁷⁴ No record of attempts to coordinate with neighbouring divisions can be found, but the 4 Division's view of 29 Division's plan echoed the artillery gap to the north.

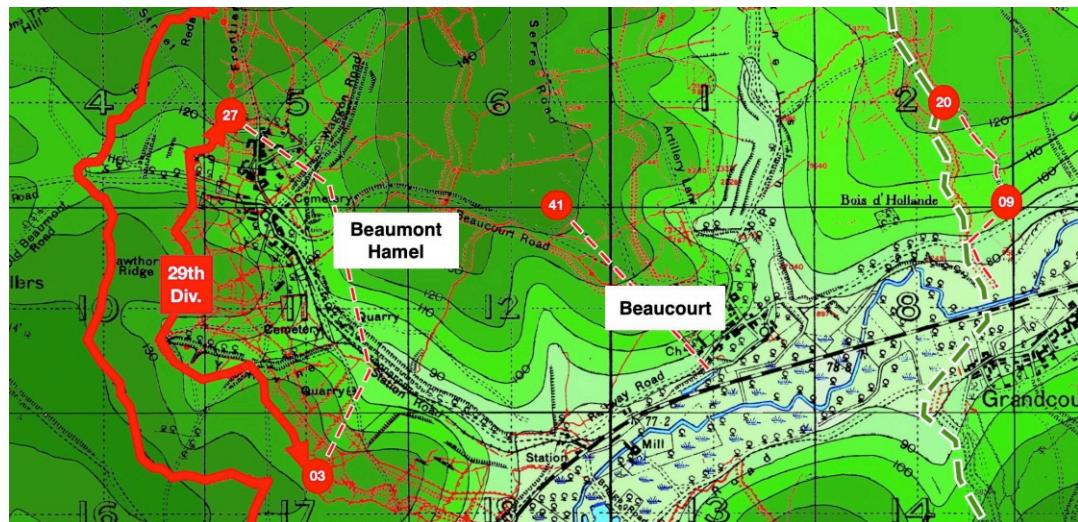


Figure 174 - VIII Corps | 29 Division | Plan, artillery lifts (as seen by 4 Division)

Of the 36 battalions involved, only 11 had plans in their war diaries. One of these was the 1 Essex, who were allegedly sent a copy of 29 Division's OO 36

⁸⁷⁴ Peake, Operation order No. 1 of 25 June 1916 in WO 95/2287/1.

on 15 June by 88 Brigade with two trench diagrams the next day.⁸⁷⁵ No copy of OO 36 can be found on the 11 Essex file, but a copy is in 88 Brigade file for July. 88 Brigade's Operational order for the assault is OO 8. 2 Hampshire, also a part of 88 Brigade, assigned to follow 1 Essex, published an 8-page, manuscript OO 1 on 24 June. No orders can be found for the 4 Worcestershires: a movement order is mentioned in the diary, but no operational orders. Instead, on 24 June, Cayley, the

‘GOC 88 Brigade ... gave his views on the forthcoming attack ... To all Battalion and Company Commanders’.⁸⁷⁶

Yet this meeting is not recorded in the diaries of any of the other battalions involved or indeed of 88 Brigade and is presumably another entry ‘pour l'histoire’ to deflect attention from the lack of written orders. The 88 Brigade actually held a concert that day, attended by General De Lisle.⁸⁷⁷

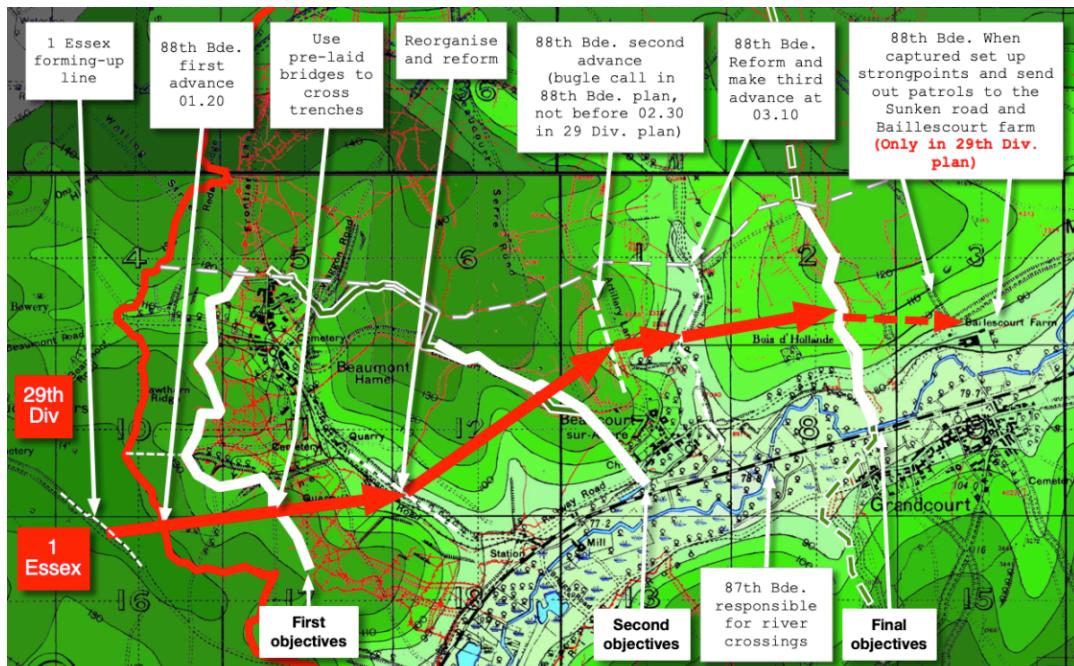


Figure 175 - VIII Corps | 29 Division | 1st Battalion the Essex Regiment | Assault plan

⁸⁷⁵ 29th Div, 88th Bde, 1 Essex, March 191603 July 1918 in WO 95/2309

⁸⁷⁶ 29th Div, 88th Bde, 4 Worcestershire in WO 95/2309/2.1

⁸⁷⁷ 88 Bde, HQ war diary in WO 95/2306/1.

The Commander's intentions can be mostly traced, but only by reference to 29 Division's plan: that of 88 Brigade missed the reconnaissance of the Baillescourt farm and the VIII Corps plan had some map referencing problems.⁸⁷⁸

Unusually, the 29th's plans were reviewed at a conference on 20 June. The review asked how units were to be identified; required that each MG company have a plan to maximise their coverage of enemy trenches; identified those Brigades which had yet to list their reserves and asked that the leading troops be in a position to assault at zero hour.⁸⁷⁹ Hunter-Weston later reviewed an exercise plan.⁸⁸⁰ No-one reviewed the 3-page plan of the 2 South Wales Borderers because it was only written on 30 June.⁸⁸¹

7.2.3 4 Division's Plans

The 4 Division issued operational order No. 38 on 18 June.⁸⁸²

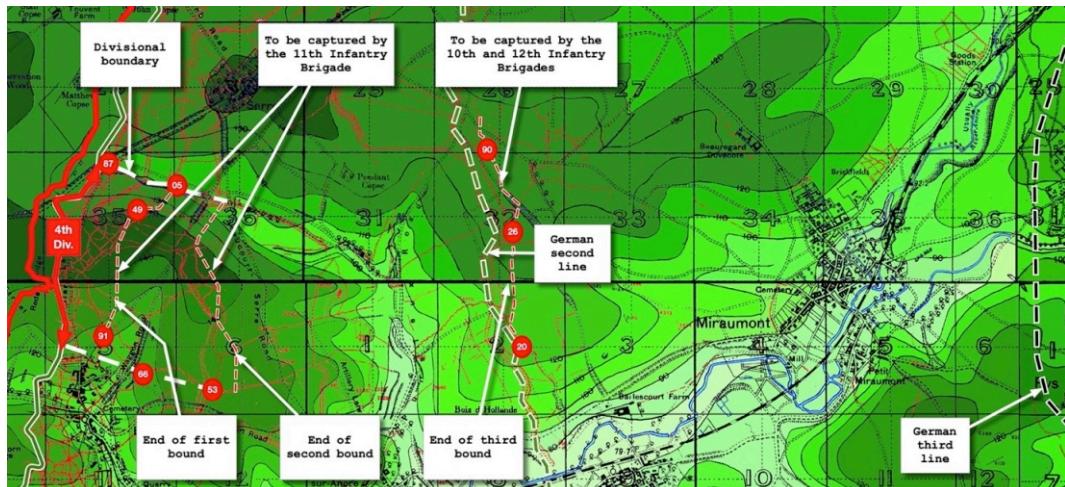


Figure 176 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Outline plan (the numbers in circles are those in the original)

⁸⁷⁸ See page 284.

⁸⁷⁹ Anon., Conference notes of 20 June 1916 in WO 95/2280/3.

⁸⁸⁰ Hunter-Weston, A, Conference notes of 21 June 1916 in WO 95/2280/3.

⁸⁸¹ See page 383.

⁸⁸² Bartholomew, W. H., 4 Division Operation Order No 38 of 18 June 1916 in WO 95/1444/4.

The tempo of the infantry attack was beaten, as elsewhere, by the artillery.

Over six days, labelled U-Z, the artillery planned to bombard the German defences by day and by night. Two groups provided the artillery support for the attack: Heavy Artillery Groups (HAG), each averaging 10 batteries and four divisional Field Artillery Groups. These were disposed as shown below with field batteries shown in circles and heavy batteries in squares.

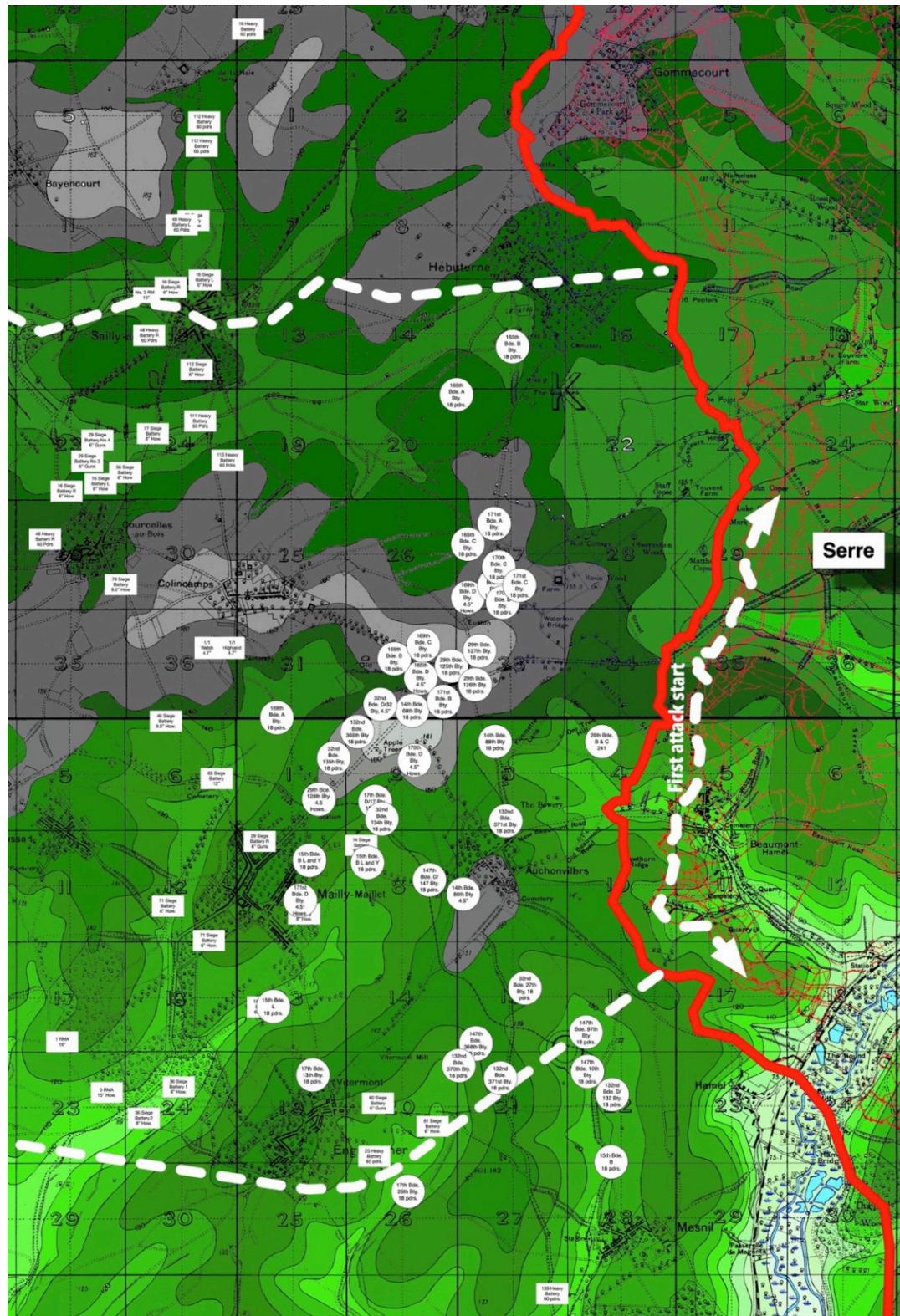


Figure 177 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Heavy artillery dispositions

Artillery orders were issued with tables showing the objectives and timing of each battery's shoot.

"U" DAY.		TABLE "A"		
WIRE CUTTING.		ZERO 6.a.m. X		
HOUR		Battery	OBJECTIVE	Remarks.
From	To			
0.00	1.00	16 Heavy Battery	L.25.c.75240 - L.25.c.97 08	
0.00	1.00	113 Heavy Battery	L.25.c.45 70 - L.25.c.45 08	
1.00	2.00	(112 Heavy Battery	L.25.c.57 40 - L.25.c.44 70	
		(111 Heavy Battery	L.25.c.45 08 - L.25.c.70 40	
0.00	1.00	(159 Heavy Battery	Q.6.c.30 00 - Q.6.c.45 50	
		(1/1 Highland H.B	Q.12.b.40 56 - Q.12.b.80 25	
1.00	2.00	(19 Heavy Battery	Q.6.c.58 45 - K.35.c.10 15	
		(1/1 Welsh H.Btty	Q.12.b.80 25 - R.7.a.30 15	Registration with AEROPLANE.
2.00	4.00	16 H.B. & 113 H.B.		
		112 H.B. & 111 H.B.		
			TASKS AS ABOVE	

Figure 178 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Heavy artillery order example

... and the consequence was:

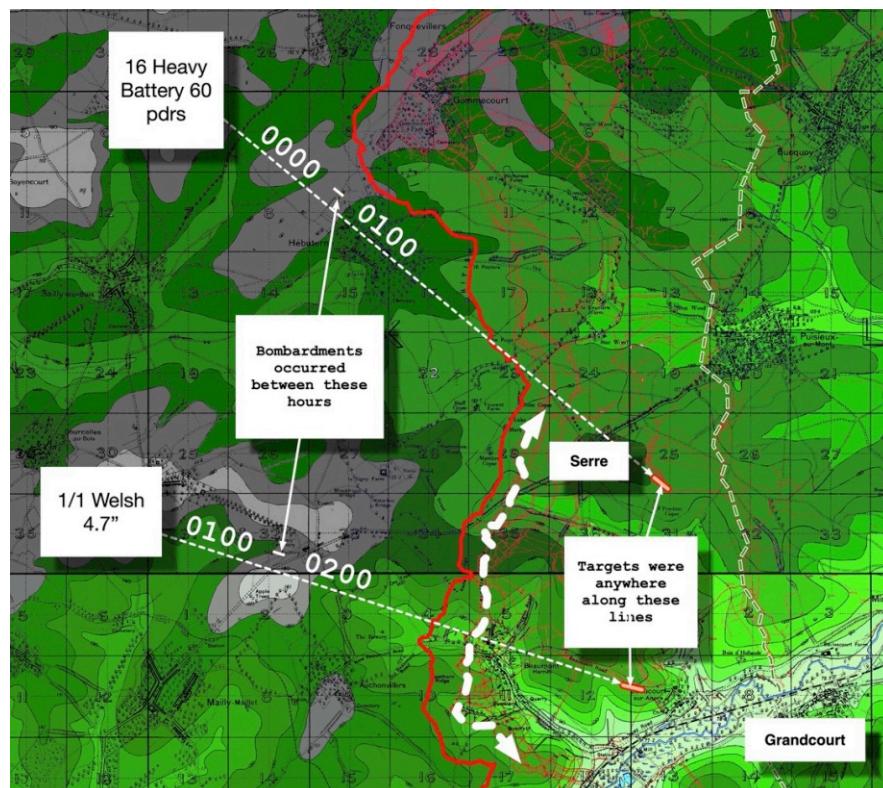


Figure 179 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Heavy artillery bombardment

The 4 Division CRA files contain far more intelligence detail than do their General Staff files. There was a daily résumé of the intelligence position,

including prisoner interviews,⁸⁸³ but no appreciation of the problem comparable to Budworth's can be found.⁸⁸⁴

The 4 Division infantry consisted of three Brigades: 10th, 11th and 12th which would advance in three bounds. The first and second bounds would be made by two halves of 11 Brigade and the last by 10 and 12. Each wrote an operation order. 11 Brigade wrote a series beginning with an eight-page OO No. 13 defining the attack, on 15 June, extended by a six-page OO No 16 on the 20th and amended on the 29th.⁸⁸⁵

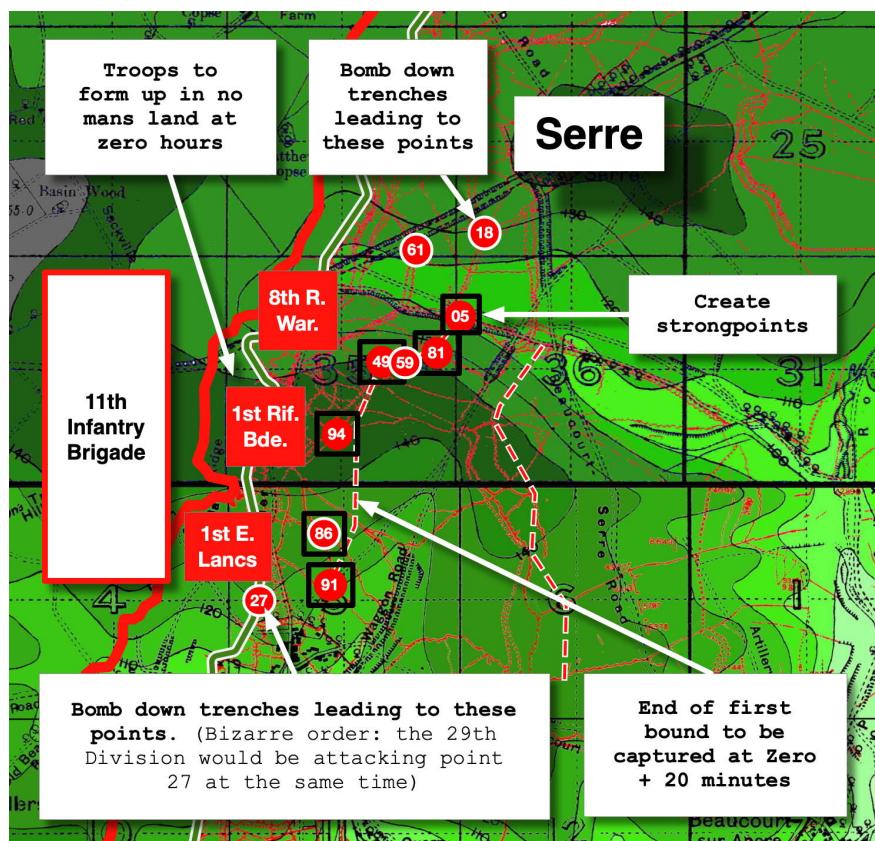


Figure 180 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 11 Brigade | First bound (the numbers in circles are those in the original plan)

⁸⁸³ 4 Division CRA, 1916 in WO 95/1457/5.2.

⁸⁸⁴ See page 507.

⁸⁸⁵ Prideaux, 11 Brigade Preliminary OO 13, assault, Somerville, 11 Brigade OO 16, assault and Somerville, 11 Brigade OO 13, amendments in WO 95/1490/3

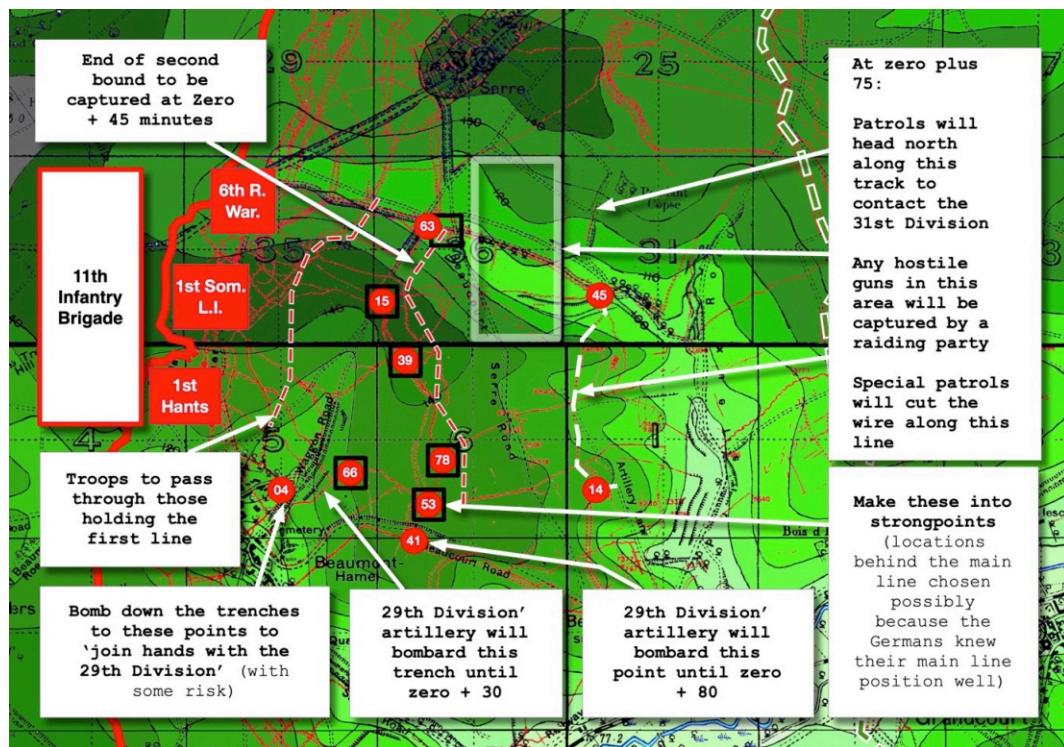


Figure 181 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 11 Brigade | Second bound (the numbers in circles are those in the original plan)

Any 11 Brigade troops not required for consolidation would form a divisional reserve.

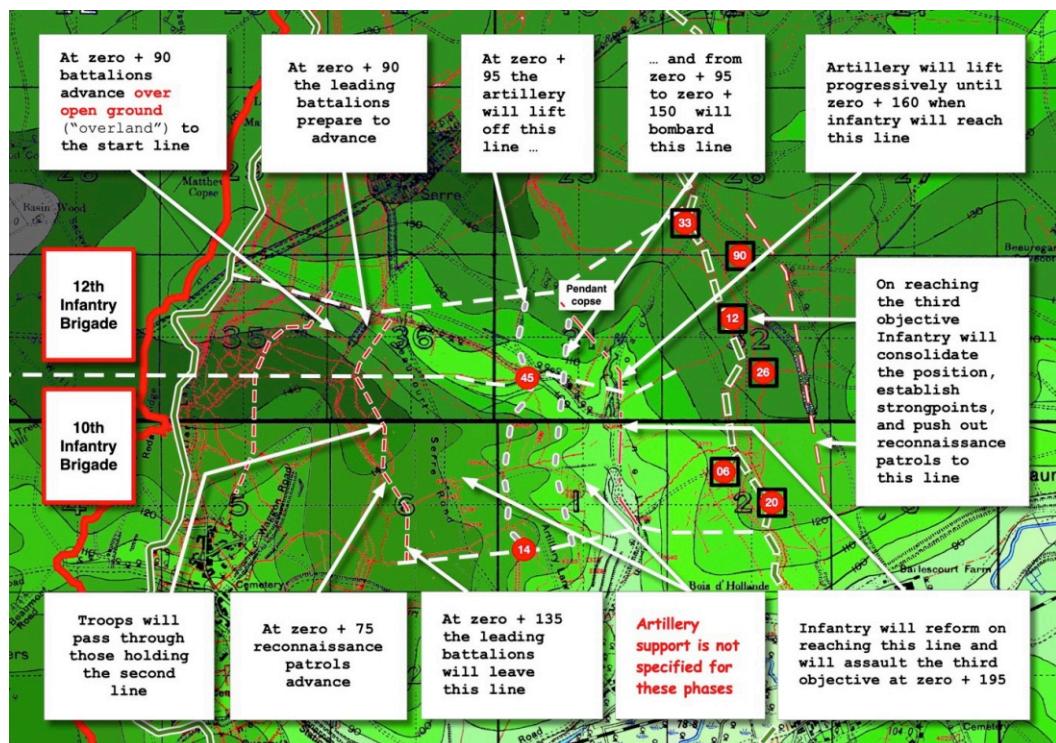


Figure 182 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 11 Brigade | Third bound

The plan for the 11 Brigade's third bound exhibits a number of problems: troops were expected to advance to the start line over open ground; the assault was frontal; the artillery support was sparse and ill-coordinated: thus while troops were to advance from the second line at zero+135, the artillery would be bombarding a position 1000 yards ahead. Similarly the two phases lacked artillery support and contravened the principle of the Tactical Notes issued before the battle: The provision of reconnaissance patrols contradicted the principle of maximising force at the vital point.

The programme of lifts was recorded on a master map 'A' held by the Division.

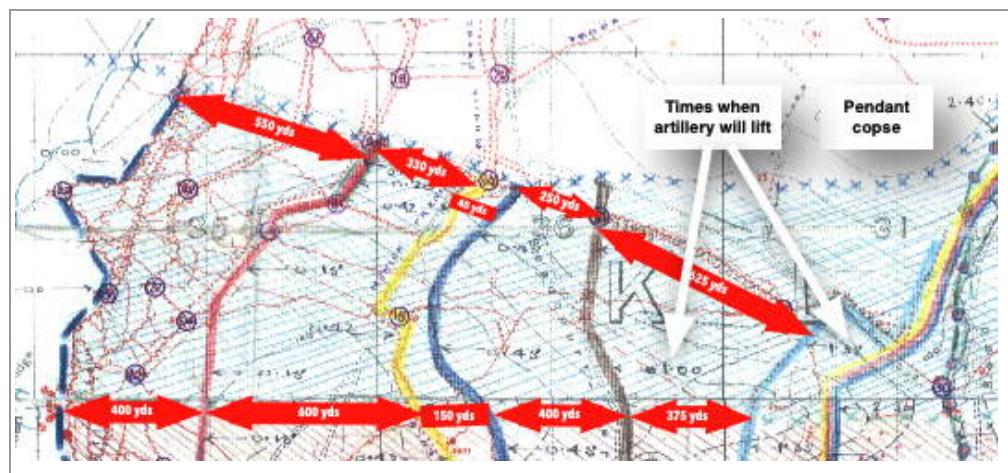


Figure 183 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Portion of master map 'A'

The artillery's determination to hit trenches outweighed any consideration for the distance troops needed to advance between them and it is unsurprising that many units 'lost' the barrage there as elsewhere.

At Brigade level these times were transcribed into a timetable.

TIME TABLE OF MOVES OF 12TH INFANTRY BRIGADE - ASSAULTING BATTALIONS. Appendix A.							
The times are taken from ZERO Hour, i.e. being the hour the Artillery lift from intensive Bombardment of Enemy's Front Line.							
Battn.	Assembly Trenches	Departure from Front Line A (our Arrive Line B) (Pass Line C)	Arrive Line B (our Arrive Line B) (Pass Line C)	Arrive Line C (our Arrive Line B) (Pass Line C)	Arrive Line D (11th Bde Fin- (11th Bde Fin- (PUISIEUX RD) (Final Objective) (Final Objective)	Arrive Line E (our Arrive Line B) (Pass Line C)	Arrive Line F (our Arrive Line B) (Pass Line C)
12th Bde Own	LYCUM	Patrols: 1.11 Bn. 1.16	1.26 1.30	1.36 2.00	2.00 2.15	Keep behind our Barrage. 2.40 3.15	3.30
12th Bde Rec't.	ELING SQ.	Patrols 1.6 Bn. 1.6	1.26 1.30	1.56 2.00	2.00 2.15	Keep behind our Barrage. 2.40 3.15	3.30

Figure 184 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 12 Brigade | Artillery timetable

The timetable also corresponded to a map showing the assembly points.

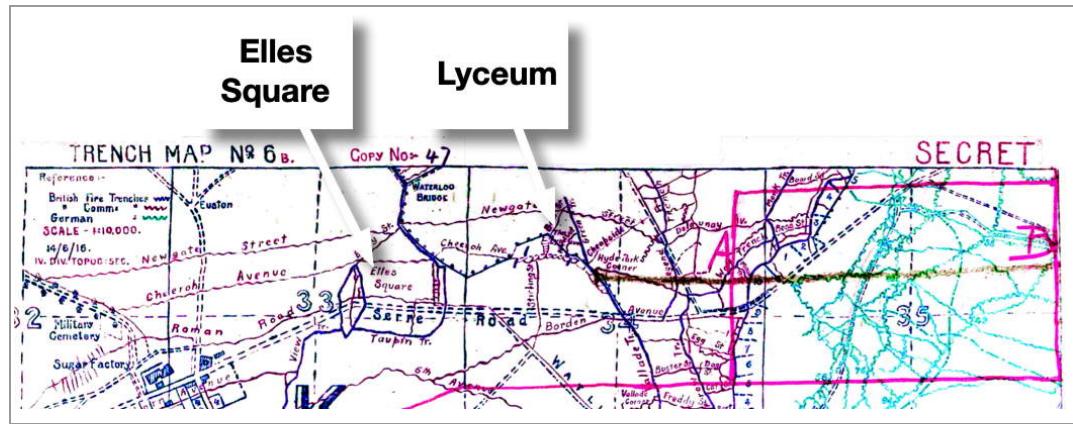


Figure 185 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 12 Brigade | Assembly points

The position of each battalion in the Brigade's attack formation was identified together with the position of Vickers MGs.

The injunctions to keep MGs to the front were ignored.⁸⁸⁶

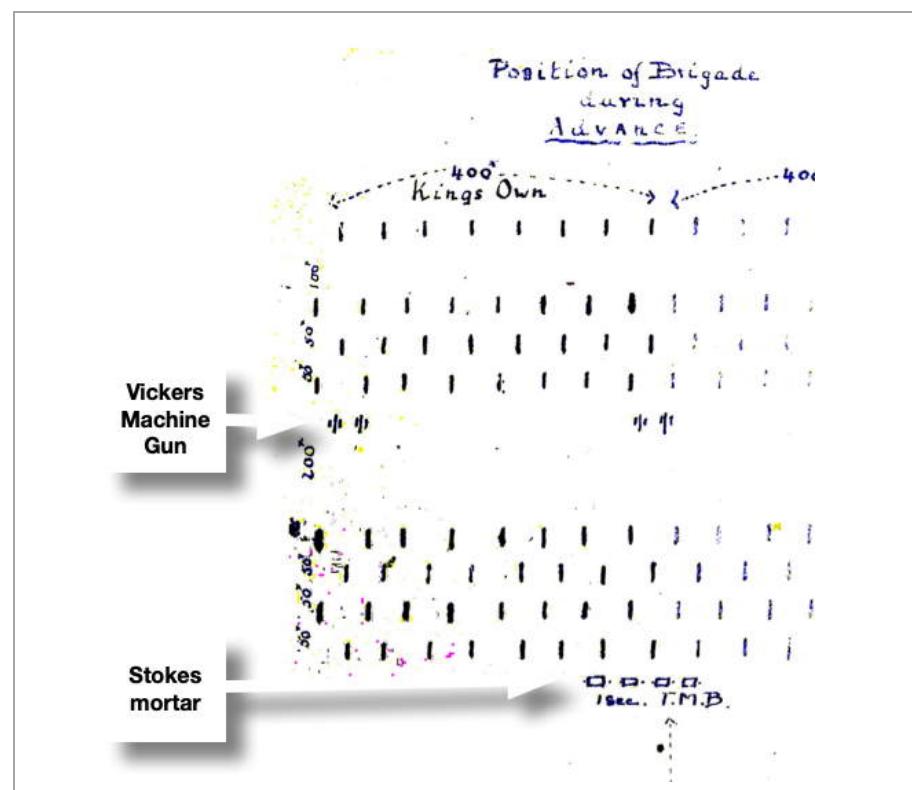


Figure 186 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | 12 Brigade | Portion of the attack formation⁸⁸⁷

886 Anon., 1 March 1916 BEF, SS 106 Notes on the tactical employment of machine guns and Lewis guns. (<https://ia801908.us.archive.org/16/items/1916-uk-ss-106/1916-UK-SS106.pdf>).

887 WO 95/1444/4

Strongpoints were to be constructed to the following design.

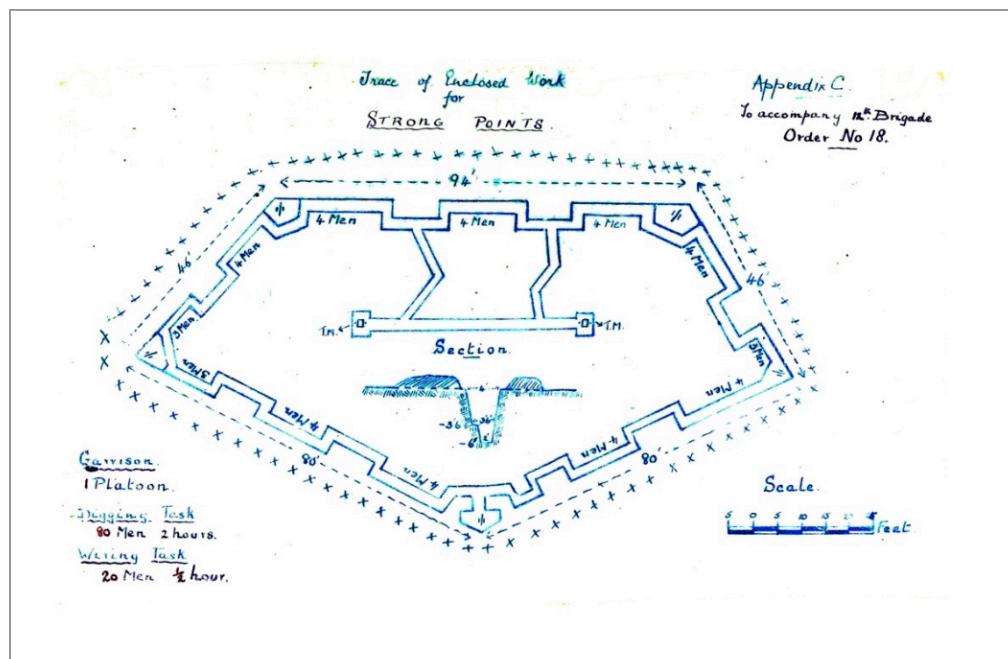


Figure 187 - VIII Corps | 4 Division } 12 Brigade | Strongpoint template

Instructions were issued for the provision of water,⁸⁸⁸ rations and their dumping and management.⁸⁸⁹

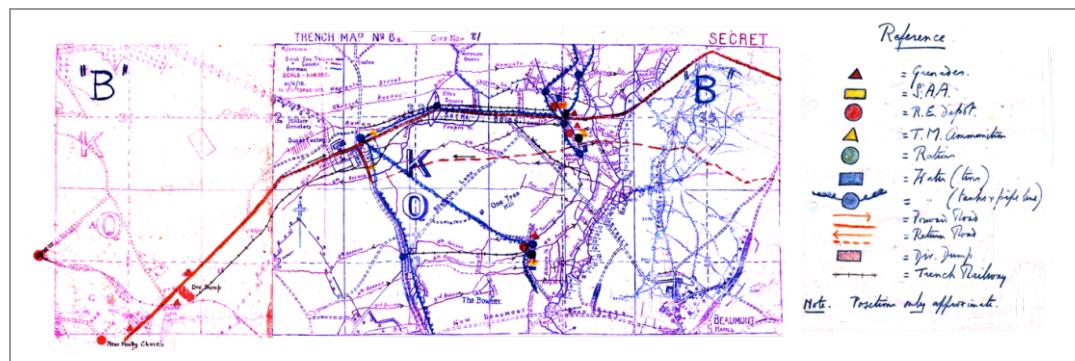


Figure 188 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Supply dumping map in WO 95/1444/4

Medical and ambulance planning was initially limited to stretcher and bed provision.⁸⁹⁰ A conference of staff captains identified requirements for

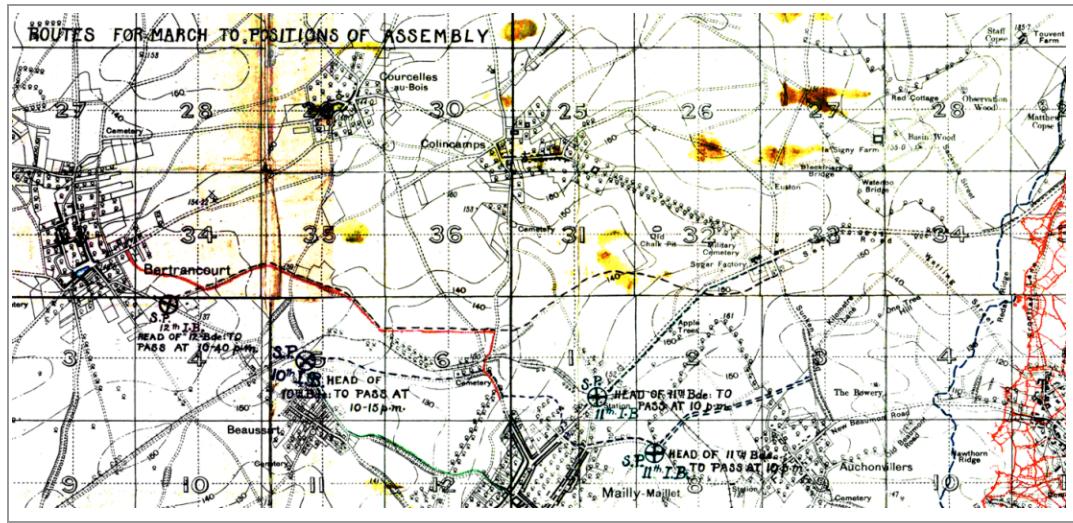
⁸⁸⁸ C.E. No W.T.2774 of 7th June 1916 in WO 95/1444/4.

⁸⁸⁹ Instructions as to the provision of rations, water, grenades, SAA, gun and ammunition, R.E. stores 9th June 1916 in 7th June 1916 in WO 95/1444/4..

⁸⁹⁰ Brogden to VIII Corps HQ on 11 June 1916 in WO 95/1444/4

feeding, billeting and the movement of troops to the front before the attack.⁸⁹¹

The routes to be taken to positions of assembly were mapped and the timing of the positions of the heads of the columns calculated.⁸⁹²



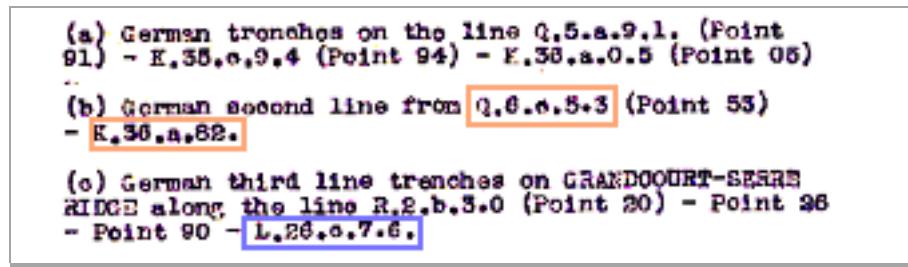


Figure 191 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | View of its objectives⁸⁹⁴

The consequences are visible on the map.

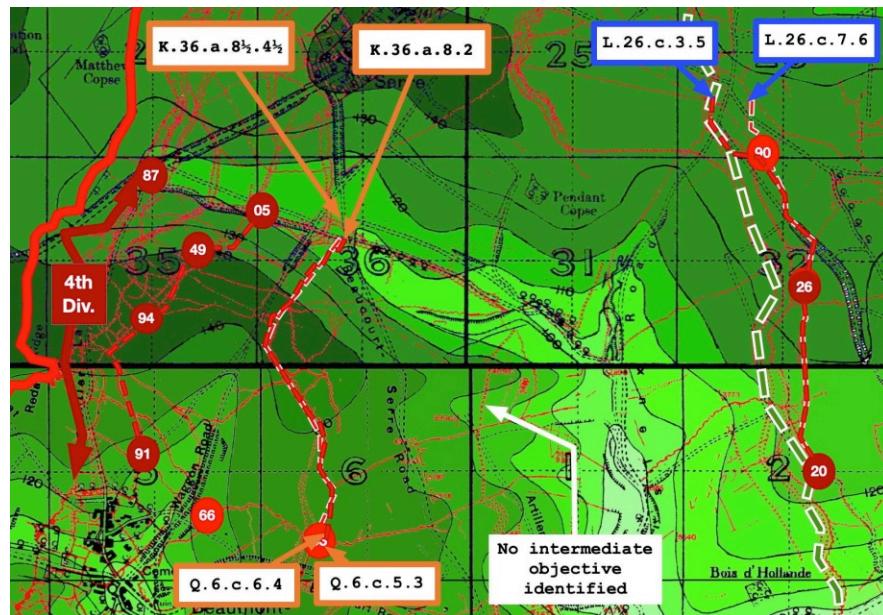


Figure 192 - VIII Corps | 4 Division | Plan mismatches

Additionally, the German line running south from Pendant Copse had been ignored as an intermediate objective, thus denying the troops any artillery support at this point. Compare this with 31 Division plan on page 308, where intermediate objectives are specified.

894 As footnote 882.

7.2.4 48 Division's Plans

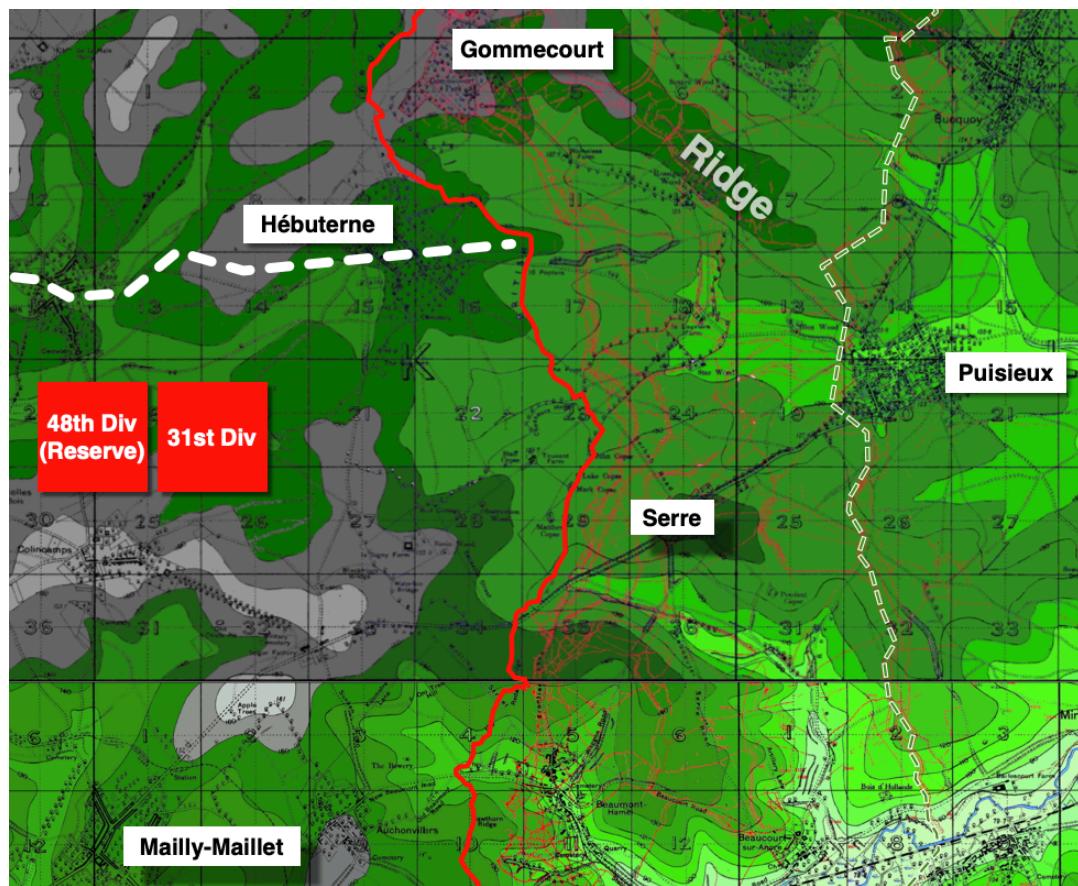


Figure 193 - VIII Corps | 48 Division | Plan

Being the VIII Corps reserve, 48 Division's plan was based on that of the VIII Corps. The reference to helping 31 Division to create the flank vanished and the divisional artillery was largely loaned to other units. It was expected to relieve 10 and 12 Brigades on the ridge connecting Gommecourt and Puisieux on the second night of the battle and paths to the main road east were to be identified with white sticks. The only warning, of a possible move east to Mailly-Maillet, was made on 30 June. 48 Division planned to occupy billets and little else. By contrast VIII Corps claimed that it was expecting its reserve Division to move at 9 hours notice and to have an entraining plan detailing its entrainment stations and timetables as well as the billeting provisions near the entrainment stations.⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁹⁵ Logan to 4 Division, 17 March 1916 in WO 95/1444/2.

Great emphasis was laid on the need to keep pace with the artillery barrage, expected to advance at 50 feet per minute (an average walking pace for an unburdened man being 88 feet per minute, so the pace was inconsiderate) and to consolidate a position once captured. Strongpoints were identified on the 48 Division Special map.⁸⁹⁶ Training was ignored and the value of having reserves to hand, so bitterly learned at Loos, seemed forgotten. VIII Corps planning was extensive, but ill-considered, particularly in its failure to relate the artillery to infantry movements.

7.3 X Corps planning

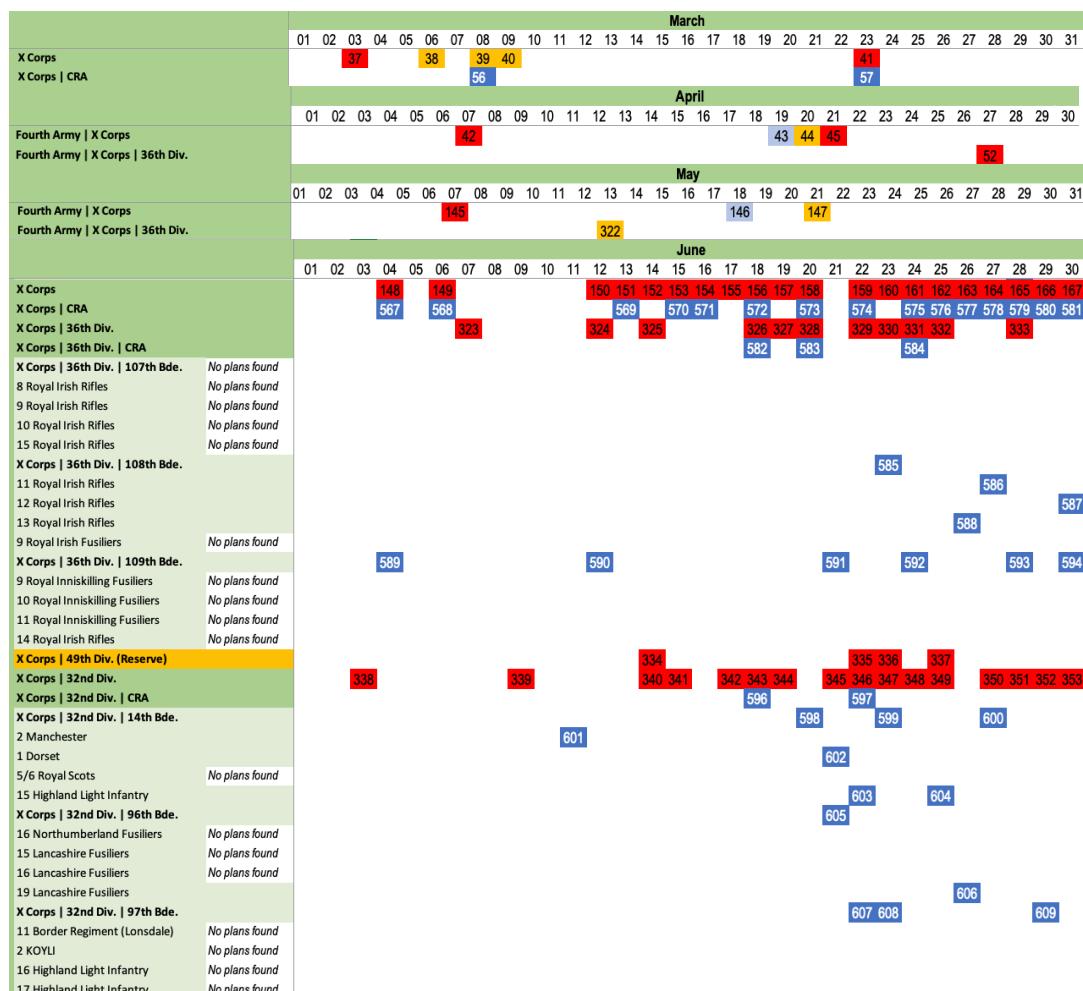


Figure 194 - X Corps | Planning Timeline (see page 22 for the key)

896 48 Division order no 78, 24 June 1916 in WO 95/2745/4.1.

Replying to a Fourth Army letter of 3 April, Major-General A. R Cameron sent an outline plan conforming to the 'Map A' which accompanied it on 17 April.⁸⁹⁷ His assessment of the battle problem is shown below.

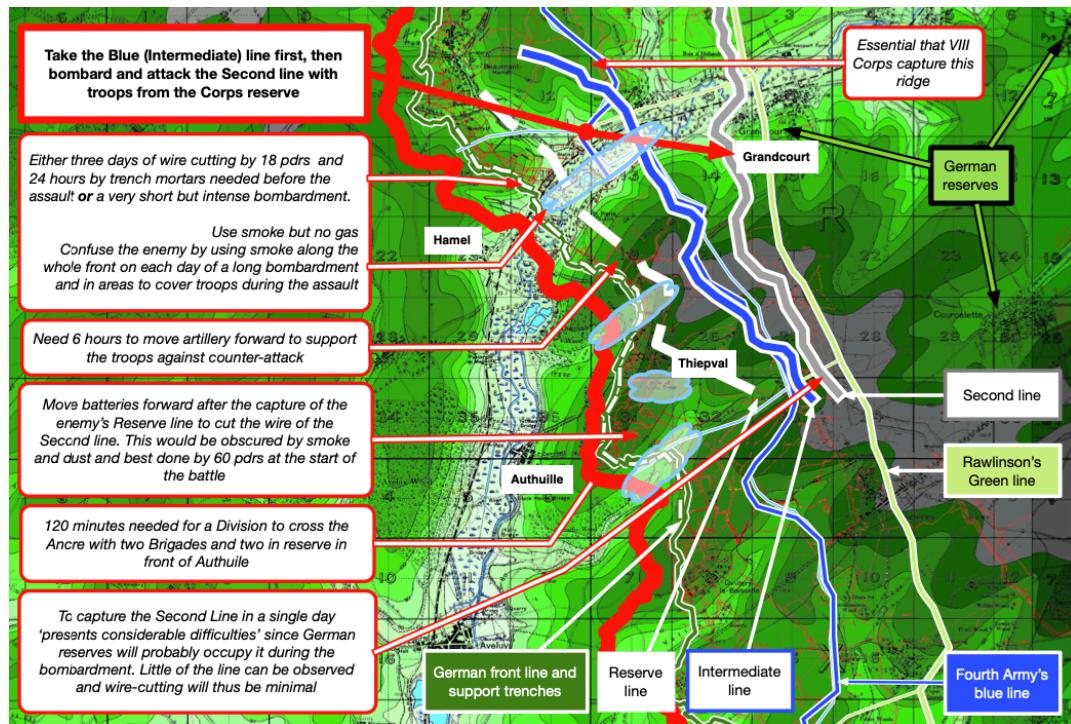


Figure 195 - X Corps | Cameron's appreciation and first plan of 17 April

He assumed the green line (see also Figure 125 on page 248) to be the final objective and forwarded a map showing the infantry positions during the bombardment, HQ, magazines, assembly and communication trenches, dressing stations and river crossings. The hill and wood of Thiepval were constraints: the hill dominated the nearby territory and could only be taken by a frontal attack after an extensive bombardment by heavy howitzers. The preparations would involve a great concentration of troops and artillery with the consequent risk of a pre-emptive bombardment by the Germans.

The choice of objectives for the first day lay between taking the initial and second lines in one operation or only the initial and 'intermediate' lines. The advantage of the first choice was that the impetus of the attack might provoke

⁸⁹⁷ [39] Cameron, Encloses map of future offensive, map in WO 95/863/11). See page 24 for details.

such demoralisation of the German troops that the attack would succeed as far as the second line which was also within range of the heavy artillery. The disadvantages lay in the dissipation of firepower between the various lines and the inability of field guns to support troops against a counter-attack once the second line was taken. The advantage of the second choice was that once captured, the intermediate line could be supported by field guns, but wire-cutting of the second line was almost impossible without a delay of some 6 hours while the field guns were advanced (and the enemy brought up reserves): any delay would eliminate surprise. A 'hurricane' bombardment required more guns than were available. One compromise might have been to have concealed the point of attack by wire-cutting along the entire British front.

In his plan of 21 April, Cameron chose a four-day bombardment with the first day devoted to wire-cutting.

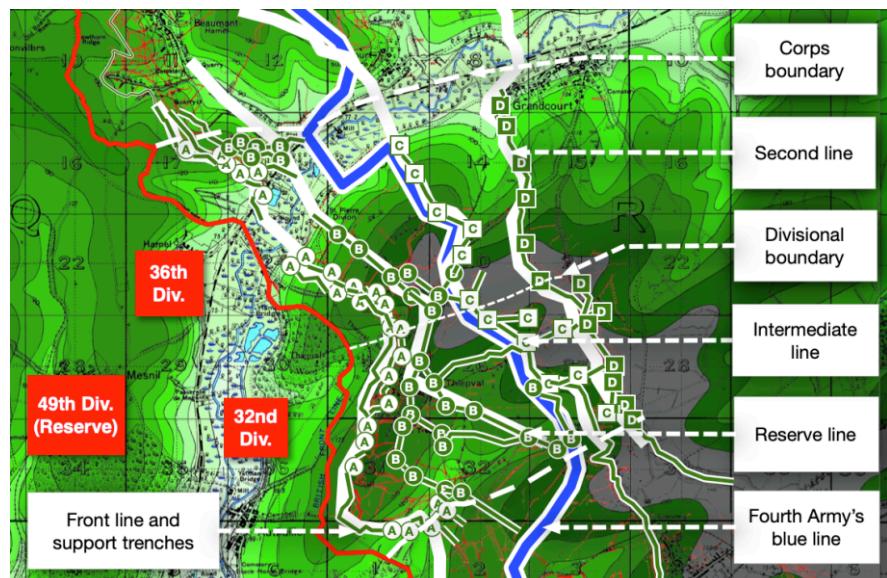


Figure 196 - X Corps | Disposition and objectives

The attack would be made by single Brigades from each of 32 and 36 Divisions, with the remaining Brigades and 49 Division forming the reserve. Of the four lines of defence (A-A, B-B, C-C, D-D), D-D - the German second line - was unlikely to be taken on the first day. The plan was followed by another on 6 June. Some measure of the degree of change of approach between the

publication of the two plans lies in the proposed capture of the 'Blue' line. In the earlier plan it would be preceded by a 30-minute bombardment before an assessment by patrols. Should they be opposed..

‘an intense bombardment of some considerable length would be applied’ (the unwisdom of sending out patrols unprotected by artillery was not then acknowledged).⁸⁹⁸ The later plan contained no such provisions: on reaching the intermediate line, both the divisions would establish strongpoints and link up with flanking corps. The next objectives were not mentioned in either plan,⁸⁹⁹ and the accompanying maps are missing. Their timetable and Figure 196 above have been generated from the text.⁹⁰⁰ Addenda to the plan covered prisoner management, cooperation with the RFC, administration, and signal communications (telephone cables, semaphore, wireless, pigeons, flares, rockets, balloons, the codes to be used and distinguishing marks).⁹⁰¹ Unusually among Corps, Cameron’s plan also identified the tracks, tramways and bridges needed to support the artillery advance.

898 WO 95/850/5

899 Cameron, OO 27 of 6 June 1916. The draft is in WO 95/850/4 but appears to have been misfiled from WO 95/850/5

900 See page 325 for an illustration of part of 32 Division’s timetable.

901 *Appendices A-H*, some of which are in WO 95/850/5.

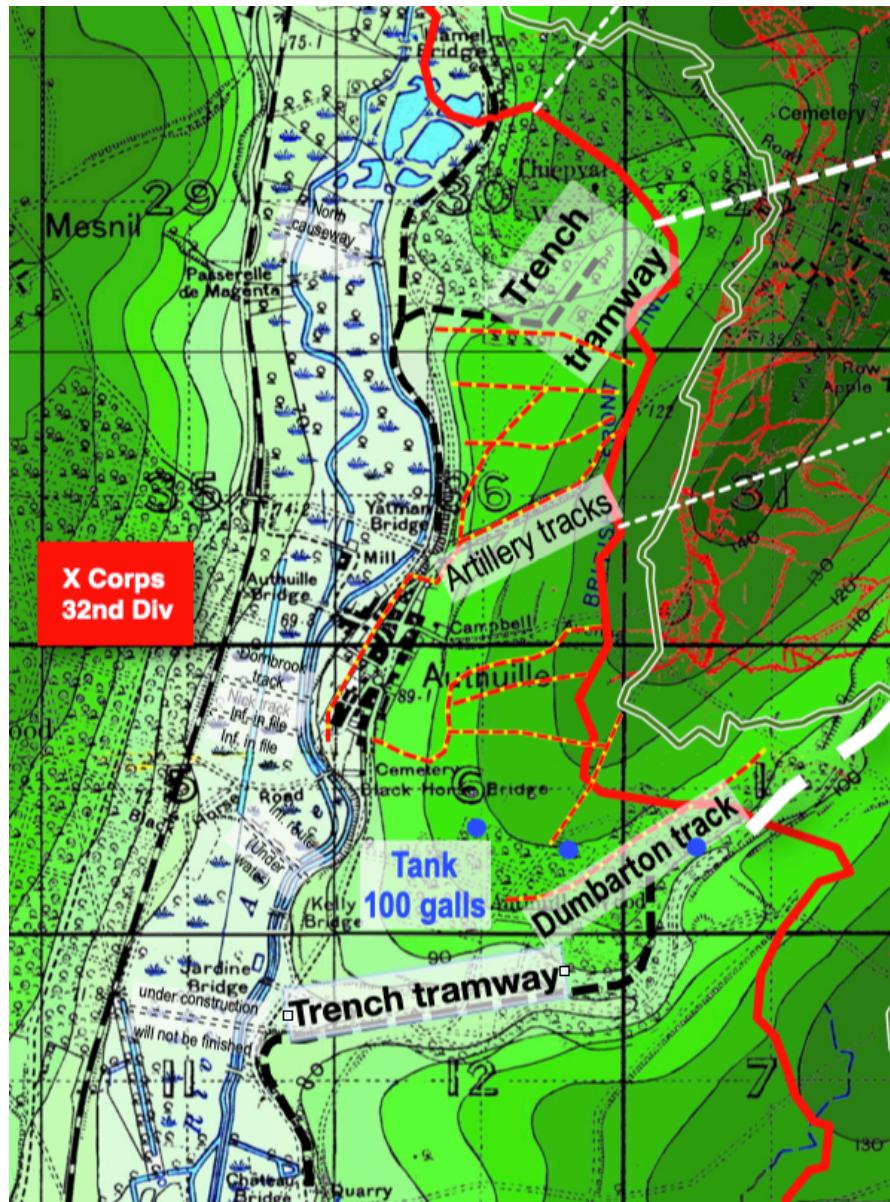


Figure 197 - X Corps | Infrastructure needs⁹⁰²

In the event of a German collapse 49 Division would come under the control of the Reserve Army and head for Pys and Irles.⁹⁰³ The use of gas was planned, but the decision to use it rested at Army level.⁹⁰⁴

902 X Corps, March-May 1916 in WO 95/850/5

903 See page 223 for a discussion of what happened, as well as Budworth's Appreciation of X Corps position on page 507.

904 Montgomery, A. A., GX 3/1.P of 23 June 1916 in WO 95/850/6

7.3.1 Artillery Plans

Both field and heavy artillery would be kept under Corps control until the 'completion of the time programme' (sic). Heavy mortars would not be used until the day before the assault to keep their positions hidden.⁹⁰⁵ Heavy artillery tasks are shown on page 224. The heavy artillery were divided into groups: North and South, Counter-battery and 'Heavy'. Each artillery battery was allocated a site.

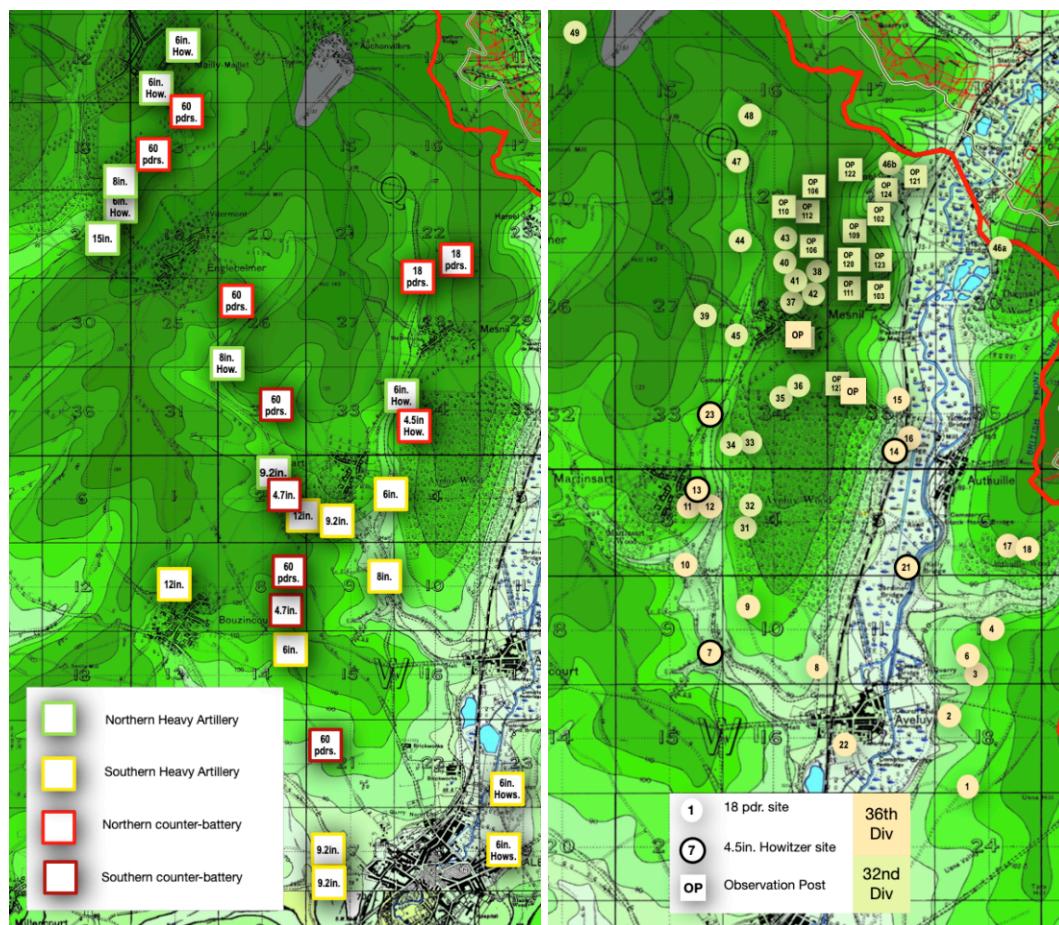


Figure 198 - X Corps | Heavy and Field artillery site maps

Note that 36 Division had only two observation posts whereas 32 Division had one per battery. The divisions' counter-battery tasks were initially ordered by Montgomery. Firstly, the nearer villages..

⁹⁰⁵ X Corps, March-May 1916 in WO 95/850/5.

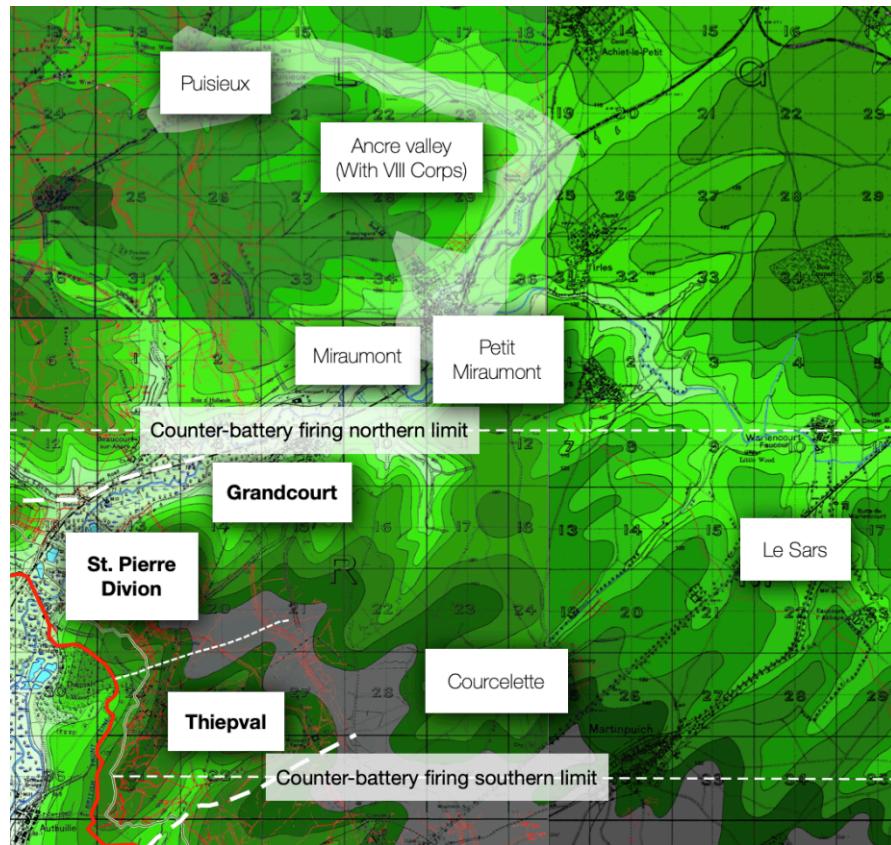


Figure 199 - X Corps | Montgomery's counter-battery tasks

... then the farther batteries. That their positions were noted was rare for the BEF in 1916.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁶ Wace, E. G., 32nd Division OO 24, Assault of 17 June 1916, Hostile artillery opposite 32nd Division front in WO 95/2367/4.

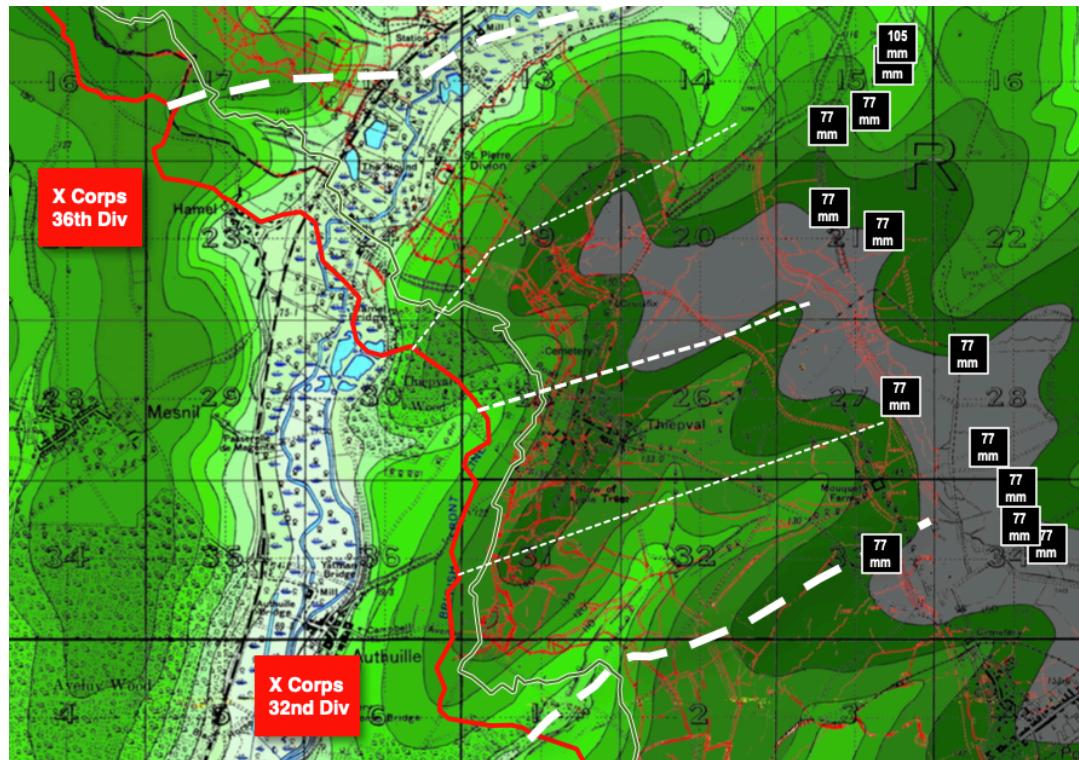


Figure 200 - X Corps | Counter-battery objectives

In addition, six 18-pdr batteries from 49th (Reserve) Division were shared between 32 and 36 Divisions.⁹⁰⁷ Wire-cutting of the intermediate line would be left to the 60 pdrs since it would take too long to move 18 pdrs to do this.⁹⁰⁸

Alone of the Corps BGGSSs, Cameron also sought a minimal set of contents in divisional plans. Assaulting divisions should show the dispositions of infantry before the assault, their frontage, the objectives of each wave and the troops to consolidate captured points; the forward and backward routes, the new communication trenches and bridges needed; and the position of headquarters, magazines and dressing stations. The Reserve (49) Division should show: preliminary dispositions; routes and time required to replace the assaulting Brigades; their dispositions; route and time required to support the assaulting divisions. The Corps and divisional artillery should show their

⁹⁰⁷ Skipwith (GM5/2) on 6 June 1916 in WO 95/863/12.

⁹⁰⁸ X Corps, March-May 1916 in WO 95/850/5.

grouping, objectives, lifts, the batteries to move in the event of an advance, when this might be and their routes.⁹⁰⁹ Cameron shared Pitt-Taylor's concern at the delays in planning and ordered that plans be submitted by 22 May.⁹¹⁰ He distinguished himself as one of the better planners.

The 32 and 36 Division plans differed from the corps plan in depth and timing, but Cameron submitted them anyway, awaiting agreement from Rawlinson before attempting to coordinate them.⁹¹¹

7.3.2 36 Division's Plans

The 36 Division, which submitted a plan two weeks later, ignored the need to consolidate or identify any post-assault routes or bridges. There was no reaction from Cameron for whom the 'umpire' principle held firm and confusion reigned.⁹¹²

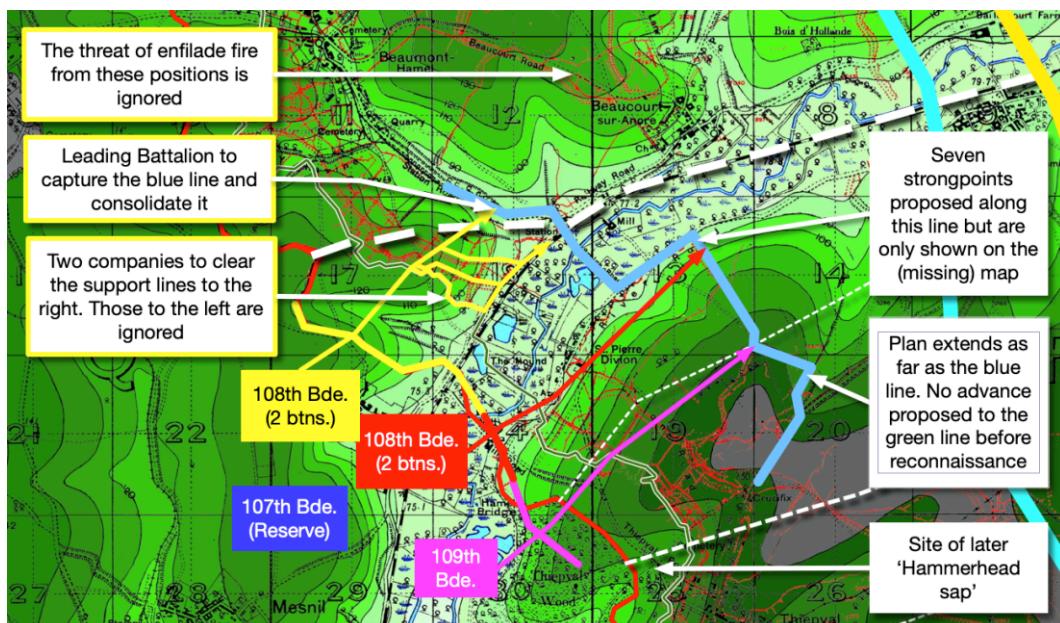


Figure 201 - X Corps | 36 Division | Place's plan of 27 April

⁹⁰⁹ Cameron, Requests battle plans on 12 April 1916 in WO 95/863/11.

⁹¹⁰ Cameron, GS/187 of 23 April 1916 in WO 95/863/11.

⁹¹¹ X Corps, March-May 1916 in WO 95/850/5.

⁹¹² Wace, E. G., plan of attack of 27 April 1916 in WO 95/2491/2. See also page 234

Place was quick to write a plan for Nugent of 36 Division, but the speed of his planning came at the price of incoherence.⁹¹³ His plan suffered from a dependence on an annotated map, a failure to use map references correctly and a reference to a non-existent location: 'Hammerhead'. This may have been a colloquialism because Nugent, also referred to it later.⁹¹⁴ No place called 'Hammerhead' exists in France: Place may have confused it with Hamel Bridge, but a 'Hammerhead sap' was later cut in Thiepval wood (R25.a.4.3).



Figure 202 - X Corps | 36 Division | The 'Hammerhead sap'

Haig decided that

'the plan of General Nugent of 36th (Ulster) Division was ... too complex'.⁹¹⁵

Place rewrote the plan. Haig's comment is revealing: plans are often complex, but to have explained why this one was bad was evidently too much for him.

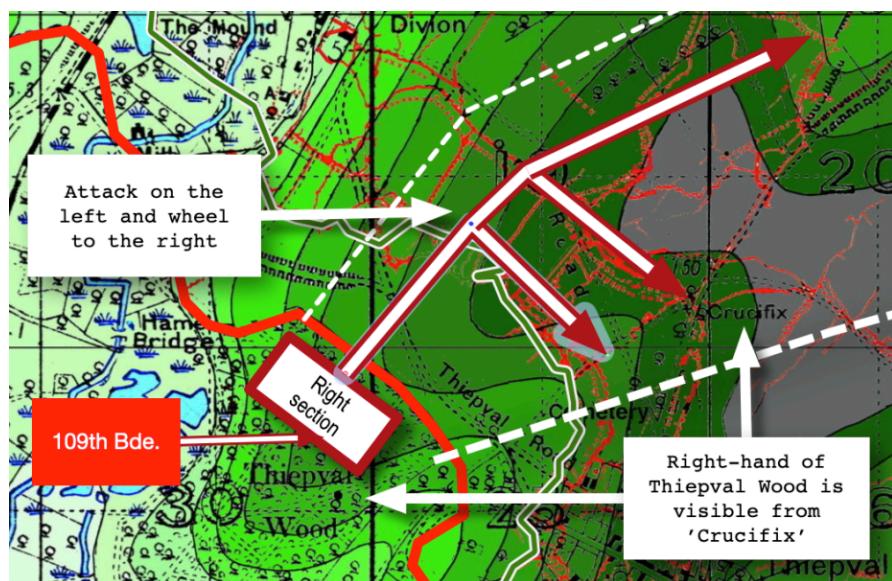


Figure 203 - X Corps | 36 Division | Nugent's justifications

⁹¹³ Place, C. O., Plan of attack No. 1 GX 3/10 (4c) of 30 April 1916 in WO 95/2491/2.

⁹¹⁴ Nugent, O. S. W., 36 Division G.S./4/415 in WO 95/2491/2.

⁹¹⁵ Haig, Diary, 11 May 1916 in WO 256/10.

Nugent attempted to justify the approach, but only complicated matters further with references to an unidentifiable 'Parallelogram',⁹¹⁶ the Division's inability to dig assembly trenches on the right of Thiepval wood owing to exposure to German machine-gunners and the consequent need to attack on the left and then wheel twice to the right⁹¹⁷ That this would greatly reduce the attack front (as well as expose the troops to enfilade fire from their left) was not mentioned, but while the 'disadvantages were obvious' no countervailing advantage was proposed: forming up would be difficult and the troops might be enfiladed anyway.⁹¹⁸ The attack itself was complex: Haig had a point.

Place released the rewritten plan on 14 May.⁹¹⁹ This too had no map and did not refer to one. Its plan of attack mentioned the "Assault of the 'A', 'B' and 'C' lines", but did not define them. Another map in the file gives a clue in the lettered lines.

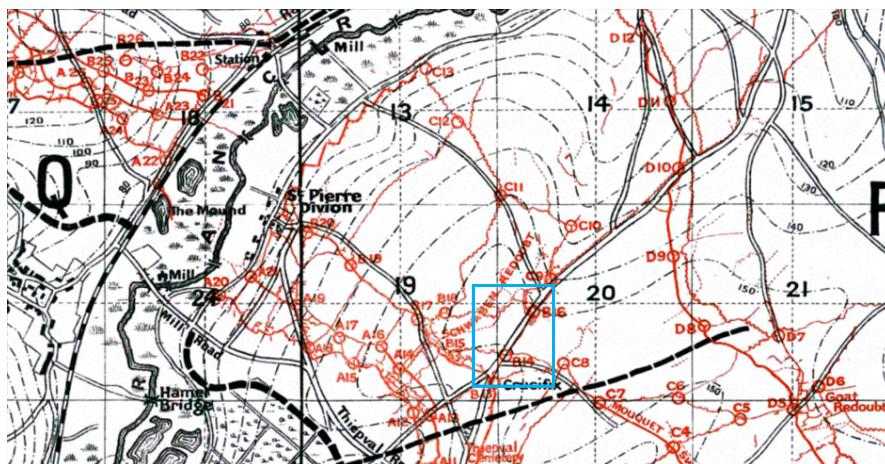


Figure 204 - X Corps | 36 Division | Map, 17 May(extract)

The map in the file was drawn to satisfy X Corps (compare it with Figure 196 on page 328) and merely identified a series of points on the various German

916 Geometric references were popular among military writers up to 1914. See Anon., Report on the examinations for admission and qualification at the Staff College 1876, 1883.

917 Nugent, O. S. W., 36 Division G.S./4/415 of 14 May 1916 in WO 95/2491/2.

918 *Ibid.*

919 Place, C. O., 36 Division 00 34, in WO 95/2491/2.