

PEACEFUL PENETRATION - Straightening the Line

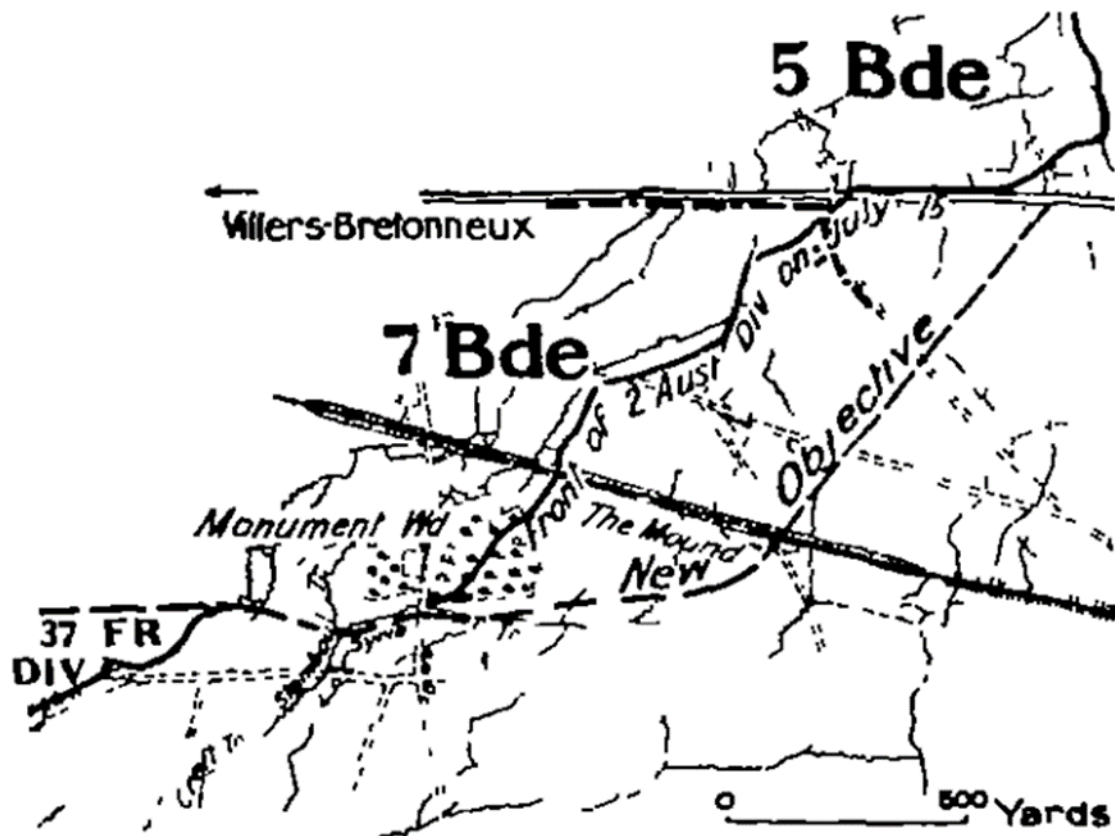
15, 16, 17 July 1918

Monument Wood and The Mound

Villers-Bretonneux

In July 1918, after the Hamel advance on 4 July 1918, it became obvious that the enemy was in a disorganised state and the opportunity for more extensive Peaceful Penetration arose.

On the plateau east of Villers-Bretonneux, south of the bulge created by the success at Hamel the Australians 'nibbled away' at the German front with a view to straightening the front line. After some success it became obvious that the enemy was reorganising and defending their posts with vigour. A low hummock just south of the railway line known as The Mound near Monument Wood was dominating the Australian positions. An attack was planned to take the balance of Monument Wood and The Mound, in support of straightening of the line, on 17 July 1918.



The 25th Battalion history, 'Black over Blue' notes that in preparation for this attack that "On the night of 15 July 1918, two platoons of the 25th Battalion were pushed out to secure two German advanced posts along Marcelcave track, some 600 yards north of The Mound. Moving through the crops, the Australians were able to rush the posts and capture them. They were able to retain the post closest to the Australian lines, but the other, in an old British semi-circular trench was counter attacked

by about 40 Germans, coming in from the south. After more than half the platoon under Second Lieutenant Phillip Herbert Rerden had been killed or wounded, the post was abandoned."

4655 Private George Allan and three other members of the raiding party, 3363A Private Alexander Boyne, 4739 Private Joseph McIntyre and 6647 Private Arthur Trapp were killed, whilst Second Lieutenant Rerden suffered serious wounds to his left thigh and a compound fracture of his left arm. The other post was occupied until the morning of the 17th when it was also abandoned in preparation for the attack.

The attack was a success with almost complete ascendancy gained over the battlefield - the culmination of Peaceful Penetration in the area but coming at a significant cost to the 25th Battalion with 54 killed and 158 wounded.



No man's land and The Mound near the railway at Monument Wood. The mound was the only prominent feature of the landscape and was used by the enemy as an observation post. It was taken by the enemy in its attack on Villers-Bretonneux on 4 April 1918 and it was not until 17 July that it was retaken by the Australians in the capture of Monument Wood by the 7th Infantry Brigade. On that occasion two companies of the 25th and 26th Battalions seized the Mound after a fierce fight, in which the German garrison were all killed.

References:

Black over Blue: The 25th Battalion AIF at War 1915-1918.

The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918 – Volume VI

Australian War Memorial - <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C55007>