

## THE AUSTRALIAN ATTACK IN THE BATTLE OF POZIÈRES 21-31 JULY 1916: A TRANSLATION OF THE OFFICIAL GERMAN VERSION – PART 2

Paul Thost and David Pearson

[page 138] In the night of the 25. July R.I.R. 86<sup>1</sup> was also to take over the positions in the sectors of the I.R. 157<sup>2</sup> and 27 to the north and northeast of Pozières and from there participate in the attack on the village [see Fig.1.2 in Part 1]. The assault, which was to be preceded by a four-hour long fire for effect by heavy batteries, was assumed to commence about 5.30 p.m.<sup>3</sup> The commander of I.R. 157 had, other than the units of his regiment which had to be detached, 1. and 2./R. 86 as well as half 1./R. Pi. 9;<sup>4</sup> the commander of R.I.R. 86 had his regiment (without 1.) and half 1./R. Pi. 9 available. For the fight in the village the assault companies were to be supported by Fl.W.<sup>5</sup> of the 3./G.R.Pi.R.<sup>6</sup>, Lt. d. R. [Reserve Second-Lieutenant] Bruckmann.

The order to attack only arrived at 2.30 a.m. with Major Hengstenberg<sup>7</sup> in Courcelette. He decided to carry out the attack with 1. and 2./R. 86 and the 5. and 9./157 which were being made available, in consideration of the general situation. Shortly after 3 a.m. south of the National Str. red flares were seen rising; that signified enemy attack. After drumfire, that had started at 2 a.m., strong enemy forces entered the position of the by now very weak 9. and 10./62 east of Pozières. At the same time, a strong Australian thrust from the village along the National Str. against the Komp. Messerschmidt (II./27) and by the English on the adjoining 2./R. 84. Lt. d. R. Klüver, that butted onto the 62<sup>nd</sup> were repulsed by rifle and machine gun fire. But Australians of the 2. Australian Br.,<sup>8</sup> which had arrived in Pozières just the previous evening, broke into the rear of Komp. Messerschmidt, through the wide gap that had been torn into the 62<sup>nd</sup>. By the light of flares the men of the 27<sup>th</sup> and the machine guns of Lt. [Second-Lieutenant] Freytag and V.F. [Vice Sergeant] Jordan, which happened to be there, took the Australian under devastating fire. Lt. Engelhart was wounded. Lt. d. R. Binder of I.R. 62 was killed; Lt. Pott, Lts. d. R. Voigt and Heiderich were wounded, Lt. d. R. Lengwening remained missing.

While all this was going on II./R. 86, Hptm. [Captain] Sieveking<sup>9</sup> advanced under the English curtainfire as relief from Le Sars with the 6. and 5. Companies in the first line and 8. and 7. Komp. in the second line.<sup>10</sup> When Hptm. Schweers<sup>11</sup> of 5./R. 86 approached the position that he had to occupy on the furthest left at about 4 a.m. they noticed that the enemy was still in that position. Immediately hand grenades flew at the Australians, so that they lost the inclination to dig in there. In the lead of the 5./R. 86 the Lts. d. R. Wirckau (gef.<sup>12</sup> 8.10.16) and Schmidt<sup>13</sup> pushed the enemy back meter by meter. The last mentioned [page 139] was wounded in the

<sup>1</sup> R.I.R. = Reserve Infanterie-Regiment (Reserve Infantry Regiment). R. = Reserve (War Office, 1918: 202).

<sup>2</sup> I.R. = Infanterie-Regiment (Infantry Regiment) (War Office, 1918: 189).

<sup>3</sup> See Bean (1936: 557) and Miles (1938: 149 n.2).

<sup>4</sup> Pi = Pionier (Pioneer) (War Office, 1918: 201).

<sup>5</sup> Fl.W = Flammenwerfer (Flame thrower) (War Office, 1918: 182).

<sup>6</sup> Unknown Pioneer unit.

<sup>7</sup> Major Hengstenberg the commander of I.R. 157 is mention in Bean (1936: 521 n.54, 524, 577).

<sup>8</sup> Br. = Brigade (Brigade) (War Office, 1918: 175).

<sup>9</sup> Hptm. Sieveking (II./R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 576, 584).

<sup>10</sup> This could be the action described in Miles (1938: 150 n.2) in relation to the Australian 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

<sup>11</sup> Hptm. Schweers (5./R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 568).

<sup>12</sup> gef. could be gefallen (K.I.A.) or gefangen (Prisoner)?

<sup>13</sup> Lt. d. R. Schmidt (5./R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 568).

process. The Lts. d. R. Zentner<sup>14</sup> and Martin joined in and with hand grenades, rifle and machine gun fire they threw back the Australians, who were fighting doggedly. The enemy was trying to advance reinforcements under cover of fire of M.W.<sup>15</sup> but it was in vain. The fellows from Schleswig-Holstein made it hard for them and finally reoccupied the entire position again. Again and again the brave officers encouraged their people to attack and hold fast. But new Australian reinforcements came close, new M.W. appeared. And heavy batteries fired their shells into the newly regained trenches. Lt. d. R. Zentner and many brave men of the 5./R. 86 were killed. In the end the lack of hand grenades made it impossible to continue to hold on to the line they had reached. About 100m left of the edge of the regimental sector the position was blocked and the advancing enemy held back with rifle fire. Sitting on the parapet, Hptm. Schweers kept firing during the enemy attack on the blocked sector at every target that offered itself, especially at the crews of the enemy M.W., until he was fatally wounded.<sup>16</sup> In the totally uncertain condition at the front, all attempts to make contact with I./R. 84 on the left were unsuccessful. The gap could at this time only be closed by observation and machine gun fire.

When 2./R. 84 reported a serious threat to their right wing by the enemy, two platoons of 3./R. 84 under command of Lt. d. R. Wagner came to help [*see Fig.2.1*]. The combined efforts of 2., 3. and 4./R. 84 made it possible to hold the position of I./R. 84 in spite of heavy losses.<sup>17</sup> Offz.St. [Deputy Officer] Delfs was killed in action there.

The penetration by the enemy at the 62. was made known to Major Hengstenberg soon after 4 a.m. by Lt. d. R. Holler, 9./62. As Courcelette was endangered by this breach, I./R. 86 was ordered to advance immediately to the southwest perimeter of this village. For a further reconnaissance the Lts. d. R. Holler and Dietrich, last mentioned from the I.R. 157, were sent forward. Lt. d. R. Holler reported about 5.30 a.m. that the firing of white flares north of the National Str. were evidence that the enemy had not attacked there. As reported by personnel of the 62<sup>nd</sup> who had come to the rear, parts of II./R. 86 had repulsed the enemy that had invaded there, south of the street. However, one could still hear battle noises from there.

[*page 140*] Oberstlt. [Lieutenant Colonel] Burmester<sup>18</sup> also had received the order to attack as late as 3 a.m. in Martinpuich. The village was under heaviest English shell and gas shell fire. Officers, runners, telephone operators and wounded were closely together in the Gef.St./R. 86<sup>19</sup> [Reserve Battle Headquarters 86]. The Commander therefore went to Warlencourt and called Major Hengstenberg at 6 a.m. on the telephone. At 4 a.m. he had already reported to the 18. R.D.<sup>20</sup> that the relief of the 157<sup>th</sup> north of the National Str. had not yet been carried out and therefore the preparation for the attack had not been achieved as timely and carefully that a success could be assured. Major Hengstenberg reported to the 18. R.D. again at 6.30 a.m. that the continuous fighting had made the relief as yet impossible and that preparations for the attack could therefore not have been made.<sup>21</sup> In the early morning hours the unfavourable reports mounted in a short time in the operations centre of I.R. 157. II./157 reported the advance of enemy columns to the northern corner of Pozières. III./157 reported, that as a result of the

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<sup>14</sup> Lt. d. R. Zentner (5./R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 568).

<sup>15</sup> M.W. = Minenwerfer (trench mortar) (War Office, 1918: 103).

<sup>16</sup> See Bean (1936: 568).

<sup>17</sup> See Bean (1936: 568).

<sup>18</sup> Oberstlt. Burmester (R.I.R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 557 n.70, 612).

<sup>19</sup> Gef.St. could be Gef.Std. = Gefechts-Stand (Battle Headquarters) (War Office, 1918: 185).

<sup>20</sup> R.D. = Reserve Division.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the same event is described in Miles (1938: 152 n.1).

enemy attack at the National Str. the relief had not yet been made. Then it was said, that the enemy had penetrated north of this approach into the position. Shortly after 8 a.m. there were reports by both battalions, that an enemy attack had happened on the northern corner of Pozières and that south of the National Str. the first front line had been evacuated. At this approach the enemy was reported to be already behind the front line. These reports about the condition of National Str. were exaggerated, but the enemy penetration at the Khf.<sup>22</sup> Pozières at the north-western corner of the village was confirmed by Fähnr. [Ensign] Hübner, who had been sent by Lt. d. R. Vetter from *Schwarzwaldgrabenstellung* [the Black Forest position].

In the meantime 18. R.D. had allocated 3. and 4./R. 86 to I.R. 157 for the attack as well. They were assigned to II./R. 86 for the recapture of the positions the enemy had captured at the National Str., whilst I./R. 86 was to stand to with 1. and 2. Komp. and M.G.Zug<sup>23</sup>/157 southwest of Courcelette for a counterattack. A scratch force, foodcarriers etc, who had been formed into Komp. *Glaser* at the I.R. 157, was to occupy the *Bayer* blocking position south of Courcelette.

1./R. 86 had already advanced at 7 a.m. in heavy English artillery fire to the sunken road southwest of Courcelette but had been chased by English shells and shrapnel from crater to crater, from depression to depression, and now had to evade into a shallow trench at the southern perimeter of the village. But here as well the position was terrible. Heaviest English shells rained incessantly in and about Courcelette and threw stones, beams, smoke and fumes to heaven.

[page 141] Hptm. Sieveking, II./R. 86, responded to the report of the enemy attack against the sectors of his 5. and 6. Komp. at the National Str. immediately by marching 7. and 8./R. 86 as reinforcements forward.<sup>24</sup> The Batls.Stab.<sup>25</sup>, which advanced with the first wave of 7. Komp., Hptm. d. L. [Landwehr Captain] Paulsen (gef. 8.8.16) were the first to arrive in the very front line. The 7. Komp. stormed platoon by platoon, forward over an open field with many losses. The following 8. Komp. lost in a short time all its officers in the enemy shell and machine gun fire. The Komp. leader, Hptm. d. R. [Reserve Captain] Rissom, was killed. Only weak sections of both Companies arrived in the first line after leaping from crater to crater. As the attack faltered, from 2./R. 86 which had at first advanced onto the southwest exit of Courcelette, two platoons went west and one platoon east of the National Str. They came immediately under continuous English shell and shrapnel fire; here also dead and wounded soon covered the field. The leader of the Komp., Hptm. d. R. Köhler, was wounded, then Lt. d. R. Gerwig was killed, while his platoon advanced against the windmill height. Everywhere the braves [soldiers] were forced to lie low by the shellfire. Under command of Lt. d. R. Margraf 2./R. 86 finally held their position in the chain of craters of the old third frontline. From the Khf. of Pozières, the 1./R. 86 Lt. d. R. Thalemann<sup>26</sup> (gef. 23.11.17) was also not able to advance over the empty, coverless open ground in the sharp English fire;<sup>27</sup> and the 3./R. 86 advancing on the left of 2./R. 86 and making reasonable headway in the English shell and machine gun fire, had great losses as well. When their leader Oblt. d. R. [Reserve Lieutenant] Schwebel was wounded, Lt. d. R. Nielsen took over the leadership and was able to hold the position they had reached. And the 4./R. 86 that followed on the road Courcelette-Pozières, also had to suffer badly in the English

<sup>22</sup> Khf. = Kirchhof (Churchyard) (War Office, 1918: 192).

<sup>23</sup> M.G.Zug = M.G. Platoon.

<sup>24</sup> See Bean (1936: 576).

<sup>25</sup> Batls.Stab. or Btl. St. = Bataillons-Stab (Battalion staff) (War Office, 1918: 176).

<sup>26</sup> Lt. d. R. Thalemann (1./R. 86) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 739, 740).

<sup>27</sup> See Bean (1936: 576-77).

fire. When a report came about 10 a.m., that II./R. 86 was in a tough hand-to-hand fight with the enemy and that ammunition and hand grenades were getting short, Lt. d. R. Seiffe and his platoon of the 1./R. 86 were able in spite of the heavy English fire to bring help and ammunition to the comrades.

On the report of the penetration by the enemy Major von Gravert (gef. 18.10.18)\* of III./R. 86 at Le Sars had been alerted immediately to hold any enemies that may advance that far. 10./R. 86 with Lt. d. R. von Ahn<sup>28</sup> (gef. 8.10.16) was sent to the windmill height, the other three companies advanced in loose fanned-out formations south of the National Str. They had to seek shelter from the heavy English artillery fire [page 142] in the huge craters in the sunken road Courcelette-Martinpuich. Discovered there by English planes, who immediately directed shellfire on the sunken road, they had to flee from there after suffering heavy losses.<sup>29</sup> Finally the Companies could be reformed in a gully that was not under heavy fire north of the National Str.

\* After being wounded 17.10.18 as Oberstlt. and Komdr. of the R.I.R. 76.

As it wasn't known at I./R. 84 if the gap between II./R. 86 and 2./R. 84 at the front had been closed in the meantime, V.F. Bodinus, 3./R. 84 with two men was sent out for a reconnaissance. He reported about 9 a.m., that he had observed 86<sup>th</sup>'s men advancing and that the position of 2./R. 84 was being held. But the position to the right of 2./R. 84 was filled with dead or wounded fellows of 62<sup>nd</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and even 84<sup>th</sup> Reserve.

For the defence against the enemy that had advanced at the Khf. of Pozières, the Komp. Winter (I.R. 26), which had been at the southern exit of Courcelette, had been attached to II./157 in the morning. This extended the Komp. Deckert (I.R. 26), which was in the blocking position towards Pozières, to the left. Of the Komp. Glaser (I.R. 157) the platoon of Lt. d. R. Wiggert supplied the frontline of II./157 with ammunition, hand grenades and flares with great difficulties.

At about 11.30 a.m. Offz.St. Adler, who had been sent to reconnoitre the status of the *Schwarzwaldgraben* position, returned to Courcelette. He reported on the hopeless situation of the remainders of the I. as well as the 6. and 8./157. They were almost encircled by the enemy and were suffering from lack of ammunition, rations and drinking water. Fähnr. Hübner had in the meantime also reported about conditions in the *Schwarzwaldgraben* trench to Hptm. d. R. Theuer, I./R. 11 and asked for urgent relief. As I./R. 11 had observed the arrival of significant enemy reinforcements through the old *Kabel* trench to the *Schwarzwaldgraben* trench, Hptm. d. R. Theuer sent Lt. d. R. Vetter the order, to retreat via the position of R.I.R. 11, to prevent the rest of the 157<sup>th</sup> being cut off. After a hard fight, this officer was able to reach the *Gierich* path with a few others of 1., 2., 6. and 8./157, as weak sections of 3. and 4./157 remained in their position. 6./R. 11, Lt. d. R. Zoch, had early in the morning in yet another attack onto the section of the *Schwarzwaldgraben* trench which had been occupied by the enemy in the sector of the R.I.R. 11 reconquered about 60m of this trench. This position was then blocked off towards the enemy but was later on under continuous machine gun fire [page 143] from the flank.

<sup>28</sup> Lt. d. R. Ahn (10./R. 86) is mentioned Bean (1936: 612-13).

<sup>29</sup> See Bean (1936: 577-78).

In Warlencourt in the morning, Gen.Maj. [Major General] Wellmann<sup>30</sup> had given command of I.R. 157 and R.I.R. 86 to Oberst [Colonel] von Beczwarzowsky, Komdr. of 81. I.Br. As well, III./R. 84 at Ligny-Thilloy was assigned to him. Finally, I.R. 162 (without III.) from Gueudecourt was sent to Warlencourt. Major Hengstenberg reported at about 1 p.m. that his Regiment 157 and other troops assigned to him were involved in heavy fighting and that therefore the attack on Pozières, ordered for that afternoon, could not yet be prepared. The situation was getting more and more critical. There was a conference at Warlencourt in the afternoon and Major Hengstenberg made it clear that the exhausted condition of the troops and the great casualties made a successful attack unlikely, and that the commencement of the attack as planned was impossible, for the most part as the continuing engagements had made it impossible to prepare for the attack as yet. Upon the advice that the main phase of the attack was to be in the sector of R.I.R. 86 with fresh forces, Major Hengstenberg requested a company or two as well as a postponement of the attack by an hour with corresponding extension of the artillery preparation. But the Brig.Komdr. [Brigade Commander] would not consider it. When Major Hengstenberg returned to Courcellette about 5pm the situation had deteriorated further yet. In the nearly flattened blocking position that led from the northwest corner of Pozières to the old II. Position the crews were to a large part dead, wounded or entombed. The blocking position was only inadequately occupied in the northern part. The Lts. d. R. Nagel, 7./157 and Deckert, I.R. 26 had personally reported at the Gef.St. of II./157 at about 4.30 p.m. of the serious fighting situation and had finally received the order to return to the old II. Position with their reduced forces and sections of Komp. Winter (I.R. 26), which were with them there under Lt. d. R. Franke. In spite of these unfavourable conditions the Gef.St. of I.R. 157 was now trying to relay the order to attack to II./157 by telephone, but this was accomplished only by 5.20 p.m. 9./157 was ordered to attack the northwest corner of Pozières and I./R. 86 was to advance at their left. Hptm. d. R. Mende, II./157 was also indicating that as a result of the heavy losses from the English artillery fire incurred so far and the unsatisfactory own artillery effort, no success could be expected. In spite of this Major Hengstenberg had to insist on the [page 144] early execution of the attack, as demanded by superior orders.

Oberstlt. Burmester in Warlencourt had received only unsatisfactory reports about the difficult position of his I. and II./R. 86. Conforming to higher orders, he had ordered the attack on Pozières by II./R. 86 with machine gun, Pioneers and Fl.W. for 5.30 p.m.<sup>31</sup> The Fl.W. platoon of 3./G.R.Pi.R. under Offz.St. Hotzel had already suffered badly during its night march on the National Str. from Martinpuich to its forward position. III./R. 86 was to stand by as reserve in the sunken road at the eastern perimeter of Courcellette with seven machine guns, entrenching tools, building equipment, hand grenades and water. For the attack Oberstlt. Burmester and his staff went through the English curtainfire to Courcellette. There, in the dug-out that had been converted to an emergency Gef.St., the lights were flashing on and off, caused by the air pressure of the numerous shells that burst continuously. Strong anxiety filled the commander, who had to issue all orders to his battalions in a great hurry and in complete ignorance of the existing conditions.

II./R. 86 had in the meantime suffered very much again, as the English drumfire had increased yet more in reply to the fire for effect onto Pozières, which had started at 1.30 p.m. The trenches and dug-outs that had remained were crushed or flattened, but crews had continued to keep their crater positions ready for defence and to rescue wounded comrades after digging them free. In this insane fire they were working heroically. Also, many of the brave runners were

<sup>30</sup> Gen.Maj. Wellmann is mentioned in Bean (1936: 557, 567, 576, 583-84, 721, 722) and Miles (1938: 149 n.2, 152 n.1, 153 n.1, 155 n.1 and n.3).

<sup>31</sup> See Bean (1936: 583).

lost, but in spite of exhaustion they carried reports and orders through the curtainfire in an unshakeable and responsible manner. Only Hptm. Sieveking, Hptm. d. L. Paulsen, Oblt. d. R. Holm, the Lts. d. R. Hübner, Stolke, Hoppe remained unwounded and with some 90 men they defended about 900m of craterline.<sup>32</sup> In this condition Hptm. Sieveking had received the order to attack at about 4pm.

III./R. 86 (without 10.) had advanced from the depression near the sunken road Martinpuich-Courcelette in waves towards the southwest, to get into the battle-zone of II./R. 86. 10./R. 86 had advanced to the windmill height already.

At about 6 p.m. Oberstlt. Burmester received the message, in part from I.R. 157 and also from the wounded, that the attack had not been carried out. II./R. 86 reported then as well that the serious situation there had made the attack impossible. There were no more machine guns and hand grenades, everything was [*page 145*] lacking. Only with utter effort could the position be held.<sup>33</sup> Even so, Oberstlt. Burmester wanted to carry out his assignment and issued at 7.15 p.m. a new order to attack. After a repeated one-hour artillery effort the assigned III./R. 84, Major Lang, was to carry out the attack with the participation of all available forces of R.I.R. 86 at 9.30 p.m.

At the I.R. 157, 9./157 and 1./R. 86 were ready to attack about 6.30 p.m. At that time R.I.R. 86 informed them that the attack had been postponed to 9.30 p.m. Therefore I.R. 157 also held back with the attack.

In view of the poor condition of the troops and the large quantity of ammunition required for a repeated artillery preparation the attack was cancelled by order of Gen. d. Inf. [General of Infantry] von Boehn.<sup>34</sup> The parts of I.R. 157 and II./R. 86 remained in their positions at the front; III./R. 86 assembled in sunken roads at Corcelette. The III./R. 84 which had arrived in the sunken roads Courcelette-Martinpuich prepared to relieve II./R. 86. II./162 was put forward to Le Sars.

The rest of II./27, of III./62 as well as the Companies Molsen and Hedicke (I.R. 26) had been retired in the morning after suffering further heavy losses. Oberst Balthasar,<sup>35</sup> Komdr. of R.I.R. 84 (gef. 2.9.16) had taken over command from Oberstlt. Hundrich at Le Sars over the former sector of I.R. 27. I.R. 62 had lost during its combat from 15. to 25. July in the sector of the Army Group Armin 188 dead (4 Offz.), 721 wounded (17 Offz.) and 194 missing (7 Offz.).

A new attack was conducted on the *Schwarzwaldgraben* trench position by the Queensland and South Australian Batl. in the night to the 26. July against the left flank and the rear of the exhausted remnants of 3. and 4./157 which had suffered badly from shell and mine fire. Utterly exhausted, they defended themselves in hand-to-hand fighting, until they finally collapsed from the enemy superiority. Lt. d. R. Roske,<sup>36</sup> leader of the 3./157, was killed in close combat along with many of his brave Silesians. So this position which had been so bravely defended so far, had also fallen to the Australians. Now the much more endangered position of R.I.R. 11 on the left flank had been secured by reinforcements of the *Gierich* path crew and the *Stockacher*

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<sup>32</sup> See Bean (1936: 584).

<sup>33</sup> See Bean (1936: 584).

<sup>34</sup> Gen. d. Inf. von Boehn is mentioned in Bean (1936: 557, 584, 721, 732, 742) and Miles (1938: 152 n.1, 153 n.1).

<sup>35</sup> Oberst Balthasar (R.I.R. 84) is mention in Bean (1936: 721).

<sup>36</sup> Lt. d. R. Roske (3./157) is mention in Bean (1936: 547, 578).

trench. In a hand grenade fight with a strong Australian reconnaissance unit that advanced early in the morning from the northern tip of Pozières against the *Gierich* path, Oblt. d. L. [Landwehr Lieutenant] Högermann, leader of 9./R. 22, was killed. The I./162, Hptm. Dziobek, put in a state of alert at night at Warlencourt, was sent to Courcelette to be at the disposal of the 117. I.D.<sup>37</sup> [page 146] and were there assigned 1. and 3. Komp. to R.I.R. 11, 2. and 4. Komp. to R.I.R. 22. They formed the rearforce for the line of the 117. I.D. on the front *Feste Zollern-Mouquet Ferme*.

In the sector of I.R. 157 the Companies Winter and Deckert (I.R. 26), which had been retired to the sunken road Courcelette-Pys in the evening of 25. July, moved early on 26. July to Warlencourt after having suffered badly yet again.

Pozières was now under continuous fire from the batteries of the 117. I.D. and 18. R.D. III./R. 84 relieved the much reduced II./R. 86 on both sides of the National Str. under much difficulty and losses in the heaviest English artillery fire. While moving into the position Hptm. von Pavel, 12./R. 84 came across many Australians of the Victorian Batls. who had penetrated on the left wing but who were soon thrown back in a hand grenade fight. A machine gun that had caused many casualties was captured during the fight. Many dead and wounded Australians were left lying there. The position was occupied, after expelling the enemy and blocking it off against them. The continuation of the free left wing led to the enemy position that was barely 50m away. So there was no contact with II./R. 84. The position found by 10., 11. and 12./R. 84 was generally flattened, the few dug-outs were full of badly wounded and in the craters many dead were lying. 9./R. 84 occupied the blocking position east of the Sugar factory of Courcelette. In the supporting line were the rest of 2. and 3./R. 86, 1. and 4./R. 86 were in reserve in sunken roads at Courcelette. I./R. 86 had lost almost all its officers. The commander, Hptm. d. R. Deichmann, was wounded; Lt. d. R. Thalemann was leading the battalion. 9. and 11./R. 86 were positioned in the third line. II./R. 86 had retired to Le Sars.

After heavy English artillery fire from 2 p.m. on the positions at Pozières-Pocket the red flares were shooting up again. The English of the 48. Div. attacked the positions of R.I.R. 11 at the *Ganter* path and the Australians the positions northeast and southeast of Pozières. At the R.I.R. 11 the English were soon repulsed. However, heavier fighting developed at R.I.R. 84. As soon as the red flares had been observed from Courcelette, Oberstlt. Burmester had put forth 10./R. 86 with three machine guns over Martinpuich against the gap between III. and I./R. 84 which was occupied by the enemy.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime the artillery curtainfire had commenced but shells that were falling short were causing significant losses at 12./R. 84. [page 147] Lt. d. L. [Landwehr Second-Lieutenant] Rohlf's was badly wounded, V.F. Horstmann was killed. From an entombment seven men could not be recovered alive.

In the late afternoon of 26. July the 2. Komp. that was at the right wing of I./R. 84 and which had still three groups of 3./R. 86 under Lt. d. R. Hagenah along, was attacked heavily several times by parts of the 2. Welsh Batls. (3. Br., 1. Div.). By counterattacks of the platoons of Lts. d. R. Bummerstedt and Kober the tenaciously attacking English were always repulsed with many casualties. Parts of 4./R. 84 were also thrown into this battle and participated heroically in the defence. As well, Lt. d. R. von Ahn with his 10./R. 86 arrived at the entrance of the sunken road Martinpuich-Pozières in time to successfully participate. At the start of dusk V.F. Maxfeldt, 1./R. 84 (gef. 31.7) with his platoon came and two platoons of 1. and 11./R. 84

<sup>37</sup> I.D. = Infanterie-Division (Infantry Division) (War Office, 1918: 188).

<sup>38</sup> See Bean (1936: 612).

advanced from the right. By this combined attack the English on the right wing of I./R. 84 were thrown out and a machine gun and several prisoners were captured. As there had been heavy losses during this successful action Lt. d. R. Lembke with 5./R. 84 also participated in the action at about 10 p.m.. About midnight the English advanced yet again but were not only repulsed but a part of their position was taken. During this action Lt. d. R. Hagenah was killed. The fights in the gap lasted until early on 27. July, at the conclusion the English retained about 150m of the section. Now started the withdrawal from the front line of 10., of three groups of 3./R. 86 and the sections of R.I.R. 86 that were still south of the path Courcelette-Pozières. For the I./R. 84 the II./R. 84, Hptm. Becker with the 8., 5. and 6. Komp. was inserted in the very first and 7. Komp. in the second line. III./R. 84 remained in contact right in the frontline; they, too, had suffered significantly. As well as people already mentioned, Lts. d. R. Hardow, leader of the 10. Komp., Bruhn (Rudolf) and Wrede had been wounded. III./R. 86 remained at the northeast edge of Courcelette, I./R. 86 occupied the Le Sars position. R.St.<sup>39</sup> and M.G.K./R. 86<sup>40</sup> returned to Warlencourt. I./R. 84 occupied the *Gallwitz* blocking positions on both sides of the National Str. They had so far in their combat had 55 dead (1 Offz.), 227 wounded, including Lt. d. R. Wagner and Ass.Arzt [Assistant Doctor] Dr. Löwenstein, as well as 33 missing and during their retirement lost the Batsl. Adj., Lt. d. R. Reimpell (gef.).

[page 148] In the night to the 27. July, II./162 Hptm. Götze relieved the rest of I.R. 157 with 5., 8., 6. Komp. and six machine guns to the north of Pozières, very much hindered by heavy English artillery fire. 7./162 remained in the sunken road at Courcelette with two machine guns on stand-by. I.R. 157 retired to Thillooy, Ligny-Thillooy and Warlencourt. Their total losses since 21. July were 140 killed (4 Offz.), 526 wounded (7 Offz.) and 286 missing (5 Offz.). III./162, Major de Rainville\* was Army group reserve at Warlencourt. Oberstlt. von Rettberg<sup>41</sup>, Komdr. of I.R. 162, took over the hitherto sector of I.R. 157 and transferred the R.Gef.St.<sup>42</sup> to Pys.

\* Later as Komdr. Gr.R. 89 [Grenadier Regiment 89], awarded the *Pour le Merite* [Blue Max].

In the sector of R.I.R 11, large components of 3./162, Oblt. d. R. Klüver, dug in in the western part of the *Ganter* path in the night to the 27. July in spite of heavy difficulties. 1./162, Lt. d. R. Eilers, occupied the eastern part of the *Ganter* path, 2. and 4./162 were located in the *Bayern Riegel* [Bavarian blocking position]. Our own artillery covered Pozières, the enemy trenches and the approach lines to the village under fire but the English artillery as well remained very active.

Soon after 8 a.m. the English attacked anew the right wing of II./R. 84, to reconquer the section in the gap of the old position they had lost during the night. 8./R. 84 repulsed this and several other thrusts on the whole. The small remainder of a nest of the English was closely encircled. Even a hand grenade fight of some three hours and subsequently heaviest English shell and mine fire were unable to shake II./R. 84, in spite of having suffered 65 dead, including Lt. d. R. Fahrnow, and 127 wounded, among them Lts. d. R. Tovsby and Petersen.

On 28. July at about 2 a.m. the English again advanced against the gap between III./R. 84 and II./R. 84. They were easily repulsed. Enemy curtain fire then prevented an operation for the complete elimination of the English nest. Another English attack at about 10.30 a.m. after heavy mine and rifle grenade fire against the right flank of 8./R. 84 was repulsed as well by

<sup>39</sup> R.St. = Regiments-Stab (Regimental Staff) (War Office, 1918: 203).

<sup>40</sup> M.G.K. = Maschinen-Gewehr-Kompanie (Machine Gun Company) (War Office, 1918: 197).

<sup>41</sup> Oberstlt. von Rettberg (I.R. 162) is mentioned in Bean (1936: 700).

<sup>42</sup> R.Gef.St. or R.G.St. = Regiments-Gefechts-Stand (Regimental Battle Headquarters) (War Office, 1918: 202).



11.30 a.m.. Subsequently during the day very heavy enemy artillery fire covered the entire sector of the 84. Res. and increased losses exceptionally. Lt. d. R. Preuss from III./R. 84 was killed; Lts. d. R. Gregersen, leader of 11./R. 84, Renz and Rott [page 149] were wounded. Yet another English attack on the positions of 8. and 5./R. 84, who were supported by two platoons from 1. and 7./R. 84, was again repulsed with great losses for the enemy.

Northwest and to the north of Pozières numerous planes and closely bunched together tethered balloons directed heaviest English shell and shrapnel fire onto the sector of I.R. 162 the whole day.<sup>43</sup> In the evening heavy enemy concentrations were reported in Pozières. The 2. Australian Div. had been moved in from the direction of Albert and in the night to the 28. July relieved with battalions of the 6. and 5. Br. the battalions of the 1. Australian Div. which had been in combat in the Pozières pocket hitherto. The 7. Australian Br. was in reserve in the vicinity of Pozières. Therefore new large attacks were in preparation against the Pozières pocket. From 9.30 p.m. the English artillery increased their destructive fire to drumfire of every calibre that lasted until 1 a.m., 29. July.<sup>44</sup> There was especially heavy fire onto the positions of I./162 at the *Ganter* and *Gierich* paths. Almost all constructions of fieldworks were levelled again and renewed heavy losses created. At the II./162 a 21cm shell killed Lt. Döhrmann as well as the artillery observation officer, Lt. d. R. Rettberg of the R.F.A.R. 18 and wounded Lt. d. R. Uther, leader of 8./162. The relief for the I./162 by the III./R. 86, Major von Grawert, was in progress as the expected major attack by the Australians commenced with full might. Red flares shot up at 1.20 a.m. in front of 18. R.D. and well directed curtainfire from the artillery of 52. I.D., 26. R.D., 117. I.D. and 18. R.D. was started.<sup>45</sup> As the English curtain fire moved to the rear, dense Australian masses, in many waves, attacked the Lübeck Regiment in the Pozières pocket.<sup>46</sup> At the I./162 they hit exactly in the weakest spot on the right wing of the 1. Komp., which had been reinforced by a platoon from the 2. Komp. [see Fig.2.2]. Here, at the road to Thiepval, a gap had been created by many losses, and as the Australians, stimulated by alcohol,<sup>47</sup> did not find any obstructions and disregarded the defensive fire entirely, the right wing of the 1. Komp. was surrounded in a moment. At this position a bitter handgrenade fight occurred and Lt. d. R. Lüders and 10 men were killed. Machine guns became unserviceable; the Komp. leader, Lt. d. R. Eilers recognised the danger in time and ordered a retreat to the *Gierich* path; it was successful although the company had [page 150] to battle their way through enemy lines. Ufffz. [Corporal] Heitmann was especially gallant in this action and held off the following enemy and so contributed greatly to prevent the enemy from further penetration. In cooperation with the 2. Komp., Lt. d. R. Sodemann, which held the *Gierich* path, several repeated attacks were then repulsed with heaviest losses for the enemy. At 3.30 a.m. arriving sections of the 12./R. 86, Lt. d. R. Hübner, participated powerfully in the defence. When a scouting party, led by Ufffz. Heitmann, ascertained that the *Ganter* path position was strongly occupied by the enemy, it was then subjected to heavy fire from 1. and 2./162 as well as 12./R. 86. After one hour the patrol of V.F. Busch, 1./162, reported that the Australians had vacated the position, so 12./R. 86 could reoccupy it without a fight. The 3./162 Oblt. d. R. Klüver, in the western part of the *Ganter* path, had not been attacked and held their advanced positions; 4./162, Lt. d. R. Schaaf, had also not been involved in the battle. Both companies had supported their endangered comrades splendidly by bringing up ammunition, hand grenades and flares. Lt. d. R. Schaaf continued to lead his company until relieved in the morning although he had been wounded on the head even before the attack.

<sup>43</sup> See Miles (1938: 154 n.2).

<sup>44</sup> See Miles (1938: 154 n.2).

<sup>45</sup> This seems to be the same event described in Bean (1936: 634) involving the Australian 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

<sup>46</sup> See Bean (1936: 639). This seems to be a part of the Australian 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack.

<sup>47</sup> See Bean (1936: 639-40 n.100) on this point.

The Australians attacked the positions of the II./162 as well, in dense swarms, man by man, about ten rows deep. In the raging defensive fire of the battle ready crews and their machine guns these masses collapsed dead or wounded, others fled back in the German curtainfire. But twice more parts of the enemy advanced in renewed attacks, only to be met almost everywhere by devastating fire and to be fought down. Australians who had burst into the position were finished in man-to-man fighting; others who were firing from cover in front of the position were rendered harmless by courageous, forward dashing fellows or taken prisoner.<sup>48</sup> Those had been of the 25., 26., 28. and 29. Batl. (7. Australian Br.).<sup>49</sup> Two English machine guns, many dead, especially officers and wounded remained in the German position. When checking over the forefield, Ufffz. Awe, 8./162, brought back another two machine guns and an electric signal lamp. In the course of the battle Lt. d. R. Döscher was wounded. 11./R. 86 now occupied the advanced position east of the path Pozières-Mouquet Ferme for the I./162, which had retired to Warlencourt; 12./R. 86 went to the *Gierich* path and 10./R. 86 to the Bavarian blocking position.<sup>50</sup> [page 151] Of the mobilised I./R. 86, 4./R. 86 were in *Feste Zollern*, the other companies in the Pys position. II./R. 86 returned to Ligny-Thilloy.

R.I.R. 84 had been able to dig a communication trench to surround the remaining English nest between the III. and II./R. 84 with sections of 9., 7. and 3./R. 84 in spite of heavy English fire. III./R. 84 then received the order to remove this nest with 1., 3., 7., 9./R. 84, four machine guns, two pioneer troops and six Fl.W. From the left wing of 12./R. 84 two platoons of the 9. and some groups of 7./R. 84 with Hptm. von Pavel in command, from the right wing of 8./R. 84 two platoons of 3./R. 84 under command of Oblt. [Lieutenant] Engel (gef. 5.8.) went forward. Contact had only just been made about 1 a.m. between the two battalions, when strong forces of 10. West Riding<sup>51</sup> (69. Br., 23. Div.) in several waves attacked III./R. 84, the new connecting position and the right wing of II./R. 84. In a fight that lasted about one and a half hours the attack was totally repulsed with heavy losses for the enemy. There were especially heavy fights by 8./R. 84 with the enemy who had broken into the position in some sections. But the company threw the English out again without having to rely on help from 1./R. 84, which had been sent forward. As it was getting lighter, the connection between III. and II./R. 84 had been established by a 1.1m deep trench, now occupied by 12./R. 84 and 9., 7. and 3./R. 84. In these bitter fights the Lts. d. R. Röhl and Segelken were killed. Among the many wounded were Lt. d. L. Vogler, leader of 7./R. 84, the Lts. d. R. Ehlert, Arens, leader of 12. and 11./R. 84 and Rumohr. Several prisoners and a machine gun were taken. Several minor English hand grenade attacks occurred in the late evening hours against II./R. 84 after undiminished artillery fire that lasted the whole day. During relief of the exhausted 8./R. 84 by 7./R. 84 the English even managed to break into the position but they were ejected again by Hptm. d. R. Schlettwein, leader of 8./R. 84 and Lt. d. R. Braun with a few randomly collected people. The Komp. Commander, who stormed ahead of his soldiers, was killed. Lt. d. R. Kloevekorn, who had only taken over 7./R. 84 in the morning, was killed on the way to the position.

On the 30. July Australians tried three attacks in the sector of II./162 after drumfire from 4 a.m., but were held each time in the artillery curtainfire.<sup>52</sup> But German losses also increased that day (Lt. d. R. Rettberg among many others, was wounded).

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<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this action is referenced to in Miles (1938: 155 n.1) in relation to the Australian 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

<sup>49</sup> Sic. It should read 27. Batl. rather than 29.

<sup>50</sup> See Bean (1936: 640) and Miles (1938: 155 n.3).

<sup>51</sup> The original text has 'Reading'.

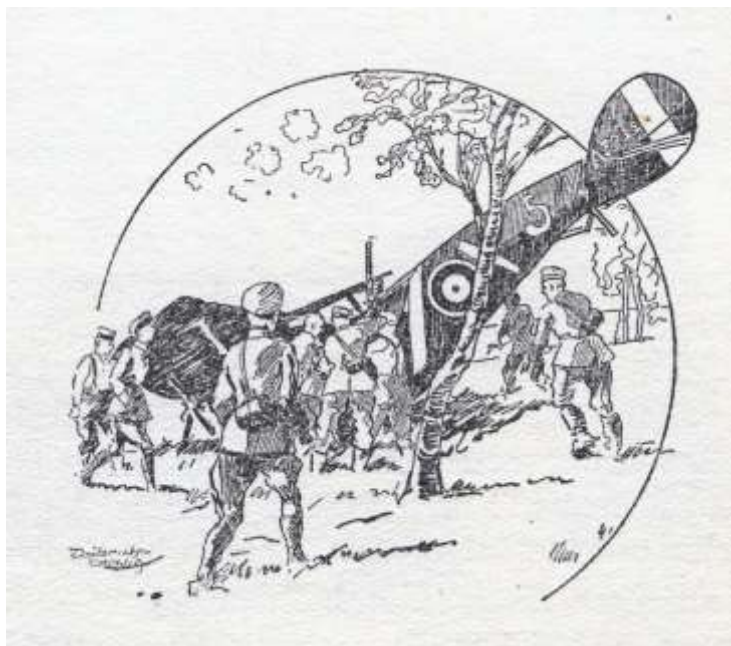
<sup>52</sup> See Bean (1936: 657).

[page 152] At the III./R. 86 the heavy English fire was directed predominately against the *Gander* path position. Only a few shellholes could remain occupied by small groups. Therefore the *Gierich* path was now to be considered as the real front line. The enemy front line did slowly establish itself through the *Schwarzwaldgraben* trench to the northern tip of Pozières and then around the northern part of the village. Several small trenches were put forward to the north on both sides of the road to Thiepval.

III./R. 84 was being relieved by I./R. 84 with the 1., 3., and 4. Komp. northeast of Pozières. The battalion had suffered badly (among others Lt. d. R. Berner, killed on 30.7) and was now occupying rear positions. At the II./R. 84 Lt. d. R. Thieling was killed fighting against English machine gun posts.

The weary enemy was content to direct heavy artillery fire against the troops on 31. July in the Pozières pocket; they would have to face yet more defensive battles in the coming days.

The 29. July was the most glorious day of the 18. R.D. during their first combat in the Somme battle. Even the official daily Army Communiqué mentioned the valiant actions of the brave soldiers from Schleswig-Holstein on 31. July.



END

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THE AUSTRALIAN ATTACK IN THE BATTLE OF POZIÈRES 21-31 JULY 1916:  
A TRANSLATION OF THE OFFICIAL GERMAN VERSION – PART 2 (MAPS)

Paul Thost and David Pearson

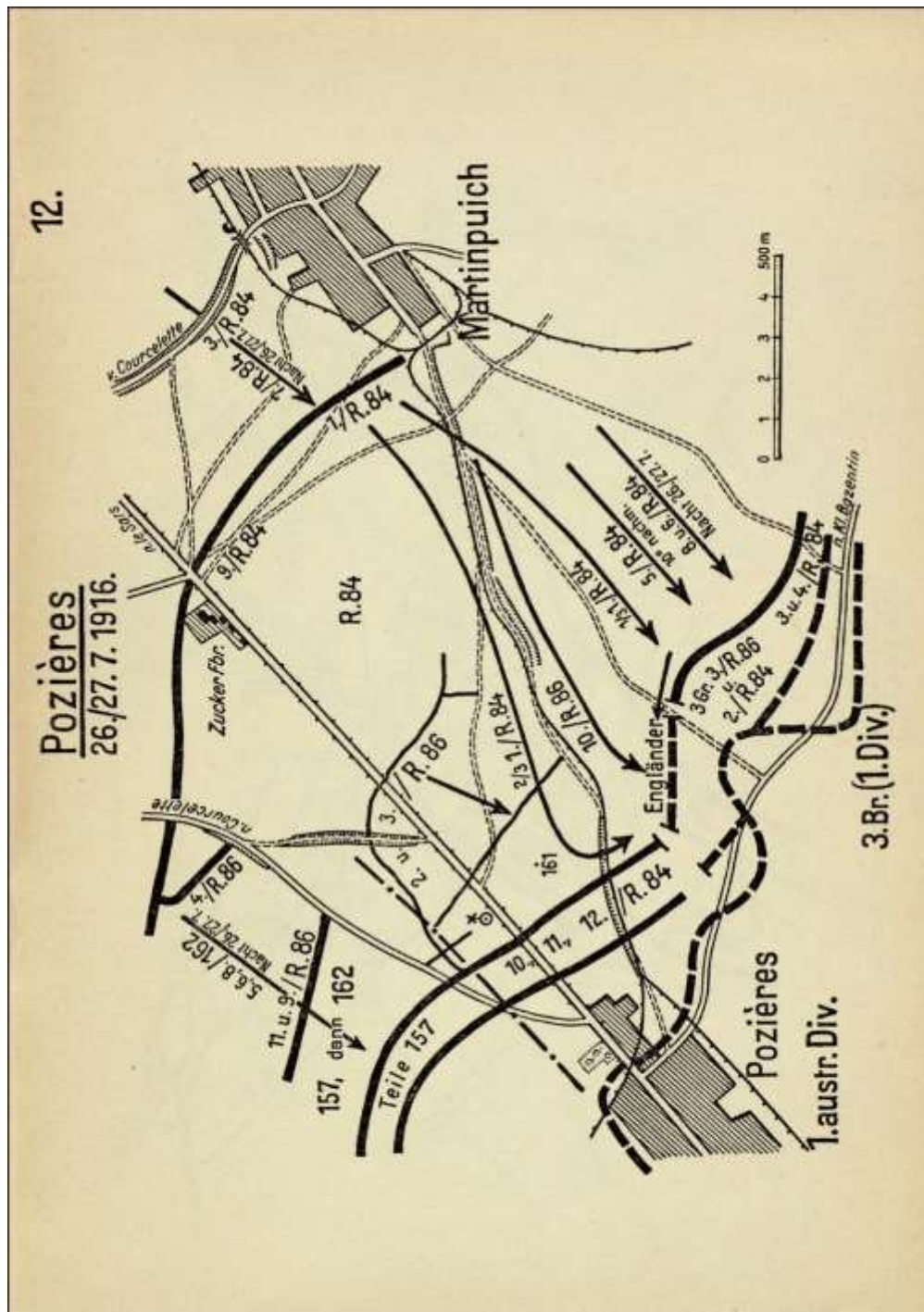


Fig.2.1: Map 12 titled 'Pozières 26./27.7.1916.' The map shows the German counterattacks from the north-east of National Str. on the night (nacht) 26-27 July by the 5., 6., 8./162 (II./162). It also shows the German counterattacks from the north-east and south-east of National Str. by: 2. and 3./R. 86 (I./R. 86);  $\frac{2}{3}$  1./R. 84 (I./R. 84); 10./R. 86 (III./R. 86);  $\frac{1}{3}$  1./R. 84 (I./R. 84); and at 10.00 p.m. (nachm. = Nachmittag = afternoon) 26-27 July by the 5./R. 84 (II./R. 84); and the 8. and 6./R. 84 on the night (nacht) of the 26-27 July. The German companies from left to right on the front line are: 157; 10., 11., 12./R. 84 (III./R. 84); 3 Gr., 3./R. 86 (I./R. 86) and 2., 3. and 4./R. 84 (I./R. 84). Scale 500m.

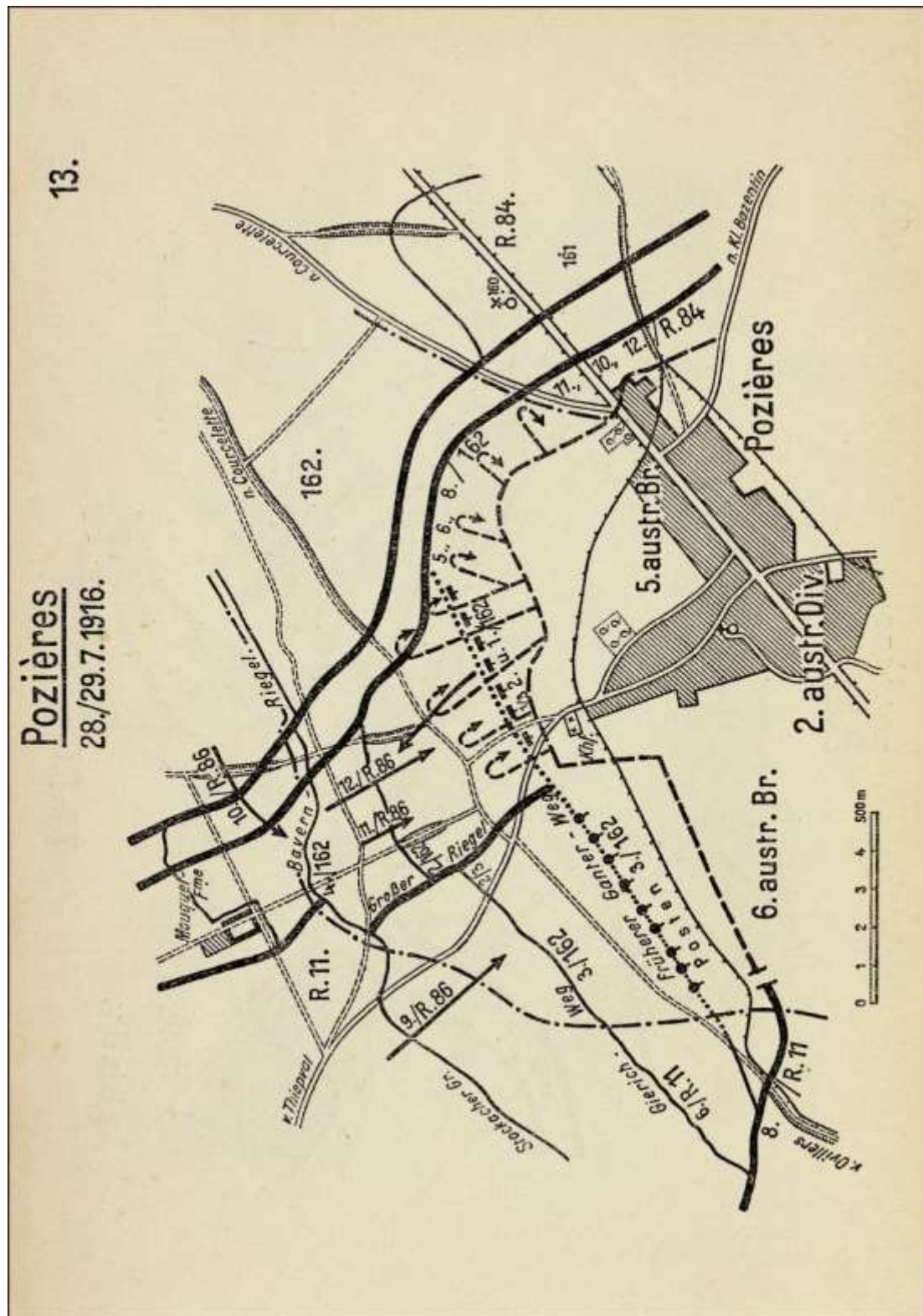


Fig.2.2: Map 13 titled 'Pozières 28./29.7.1916.'. The map shows the German counterattacks north of National Str. by 9., 10., 11. and 12./R. 86 (III./R. 86). The German companies from left to right on the front line are: 6./R. 11 (II./R. 11); 3., 1/2 2. and 1./162 (I./162); 5., 6. and 8./162 (II./162); and 11., 10. and 12./R. 84 (III./R. 84). Scale 500m.