

LT Samuel Thurnhill

Direct Fire Amid the Wreckage of Pozieres

22-23 July 1916

Major Darryl Kelly OAM

Outline.....

- **Background**
- **Command Selection**
- **Mission**
- **Execution**
- **Filling in the Gaps**
- **Analysis / Lessons**

Background.....

- **19/20 July 1916 - Fromelles had been fought and lost**
- **Interest now switched to breaking the deadlock on the Somme**
- **Theipval, Pozieres and Butte de Warlencourt #**
 - **are still in enemy hands**
 - **wouldn't fall to allies until the 31st of December #**
- **Pozieres attack cancelled twice previous ***
- **Australian 1st Division is brought up to try and break the deadlock**
- **Eve of the Australian assault on heights of Pozieres**
- **One commander seized this delay as an opportunity**





LTCOL Alfred Bessell – Browne
Commander 2nd Field Artillery Brigade



LTCOL Alfred Bessell – Browne

- **Perth Artillery Volunteers - 1896**
- **Decorated Boer War veteran (1st & 5th WA Mounted Infantry)**
- **Battery Commander 37 Battery (Militia)**
- **Graduate of a Military Science Degree***
- **Commanded 8 Battery throughout Gallipoli and Cape Helles Campaigns**
- **Forward thinker but stifled at Gallipoli**
 - **Ammunition shortages, Ammunition types, Out of date tactics, Command friction**
- **Now he had the flexibility somewhat, to seize the initiative and command**

Outline of the Mission.....

- **Single gun with sufficient ammunition**
- **Direct fire task**
- **Enfilade enemy defences and destroy the enemy's barricade**
- **Personal reconnaissance forward**
- **Cease fire in complete darkness and move to selected area**
- **Deploy in complete darkness and under cover of main barrage**
- **Watches synchronised every hour from 1800hrs 22 Jul**
- **Withdraw**
- **Simple in theory..... BUT**

Command Selection.....

- 6 Battery allocated the task
- Wanted an officer in command
- Didn't allocate the task until the evening (XXXX h) of the 22nd July
- Twilight / Sunset – 2047 hours
- Moon Rise – 2322 hours
- 45% illumination with intermittent cloud
- Zero Hour – 0030 hours – 23 July

LT Samuel Thurnhill

- **British born**
- **Came to Australia in 1912,**
- **Enlisted in 1914 with onset of war**
- **Served at Gallipoli in 8 Battery**
- **Wounded August 1915, shrapnel wound to left ear**
- **Evacuated to Malta**
- **Returned to battery, March 1916**
- **Posted to 6 Battery as gun number**
- **Commissioned to 2nd Lieutenant - 12 March 1916**
- **Promoted to Lieutenant – 10 July 1916 – no formal officer training**

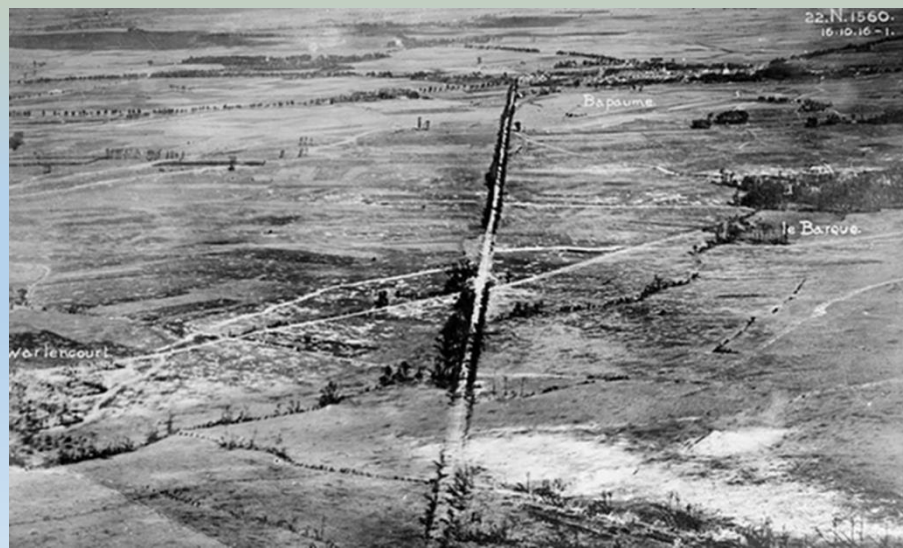
Preparations.....

- **Review of available intelligence**
- **Fixation / Orientation**
- **Detailed reconnaissance by Thurnhill**
 - **Route selection**
 - **Vulnerabilities**
 - **Ammunition type and quantities**
 - **Location friendly troops**
 - **Withdrawal / Escape / Destruction Plan**
- **Reconnaissance conducted under extremely heavy fire**

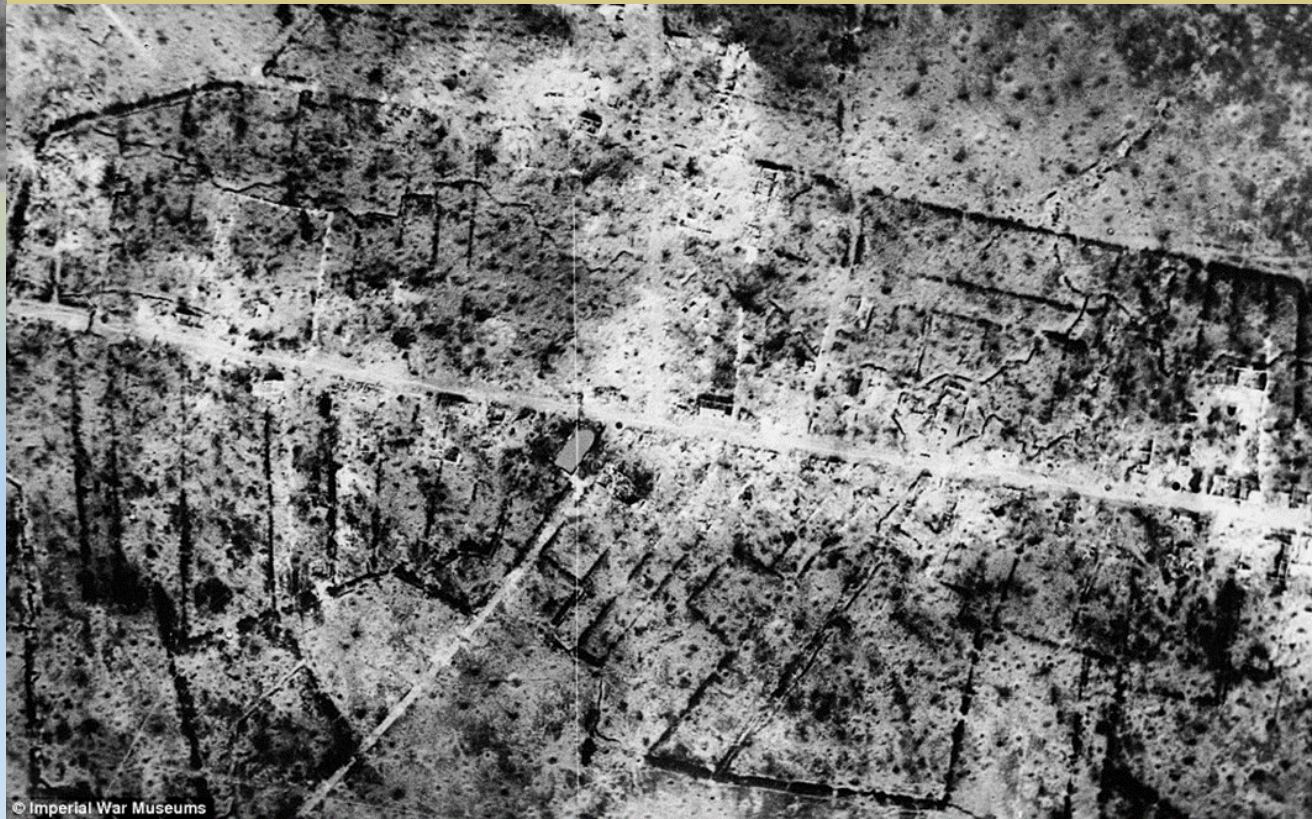


© Imperial War Museums

June 16



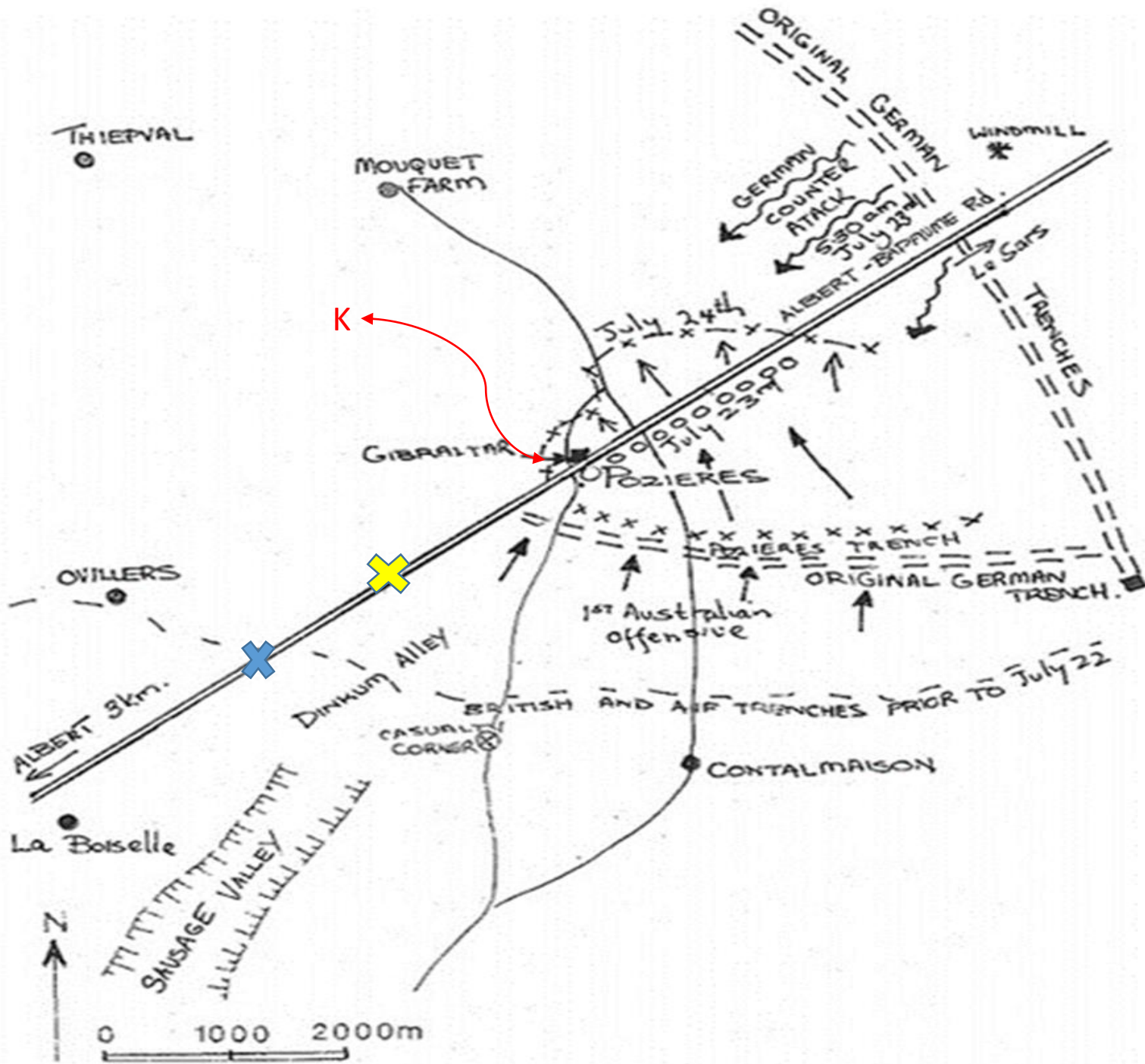
End Jul 16

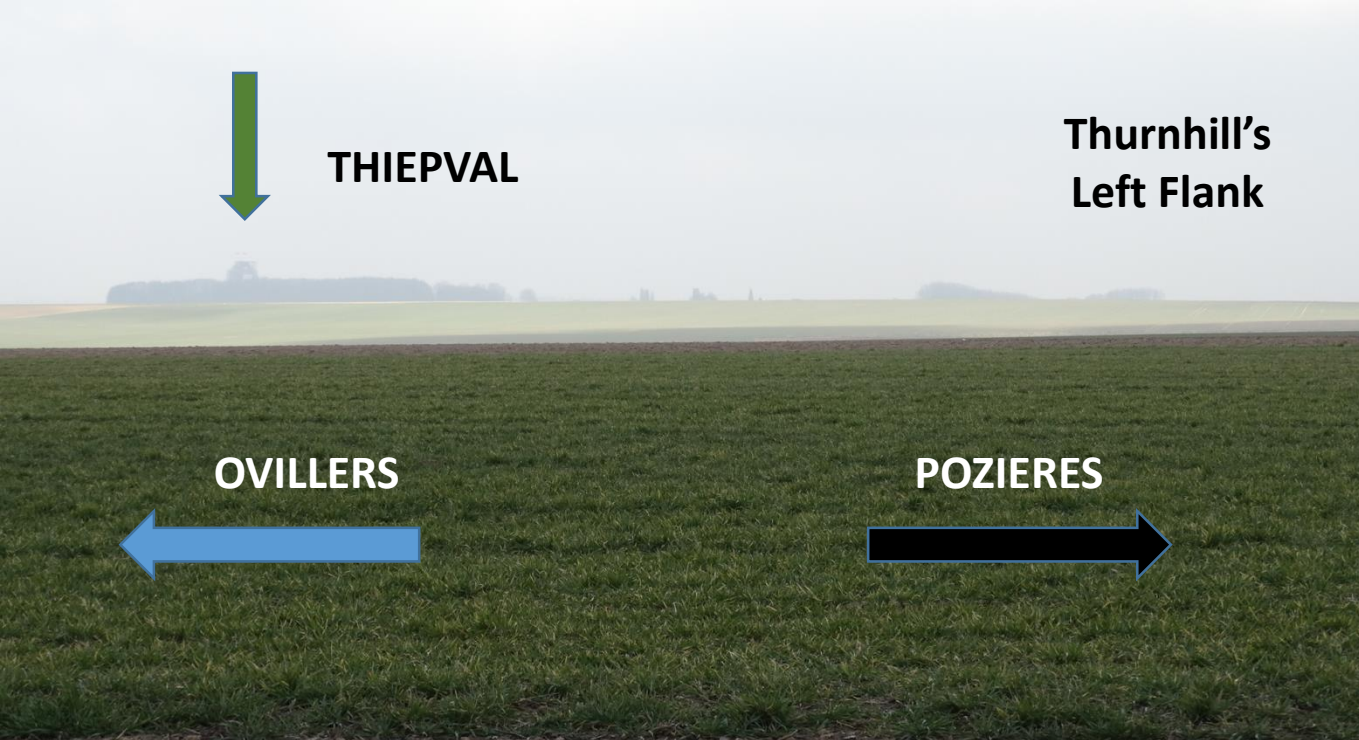


© Imperial War Museums



NOTE:
A line drawn making an angle of 1° 04' North by East with any vertical grid line will give True North.





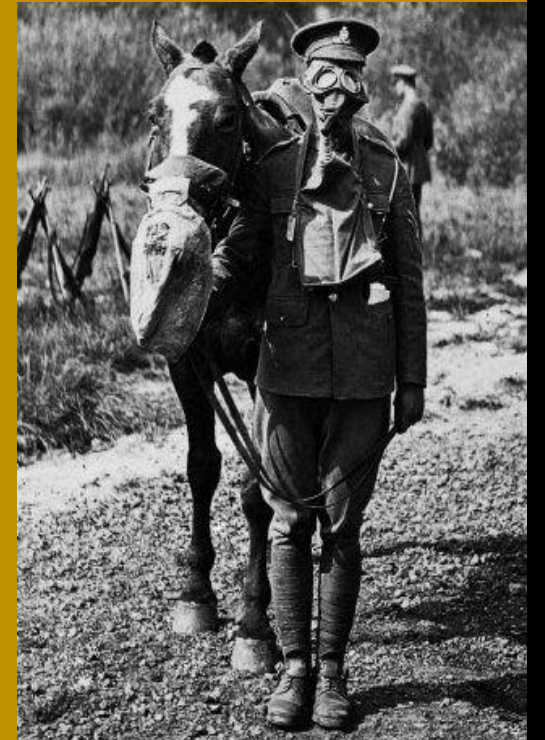




Preparation of the gun and horse teams

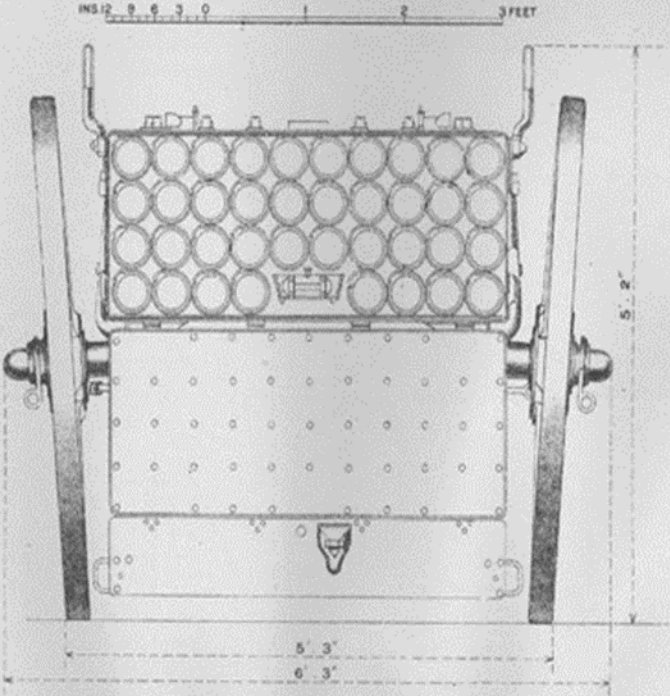
- Extra grease on pivot points, axles and wheel hubs
- Sandbags wired to wheel rims
- Truck types were cut down and wired to wheel rims
- Chains were wrapped in sandbags
- Sandbags wrapped and tied around horses hooves
- May have considered using gas masks on the horses
- May have considered two rounds kept to blow gun

All this was done within hours



WAGON AMMUNITION, Q.F. 18 PR. MARKS I AND II.

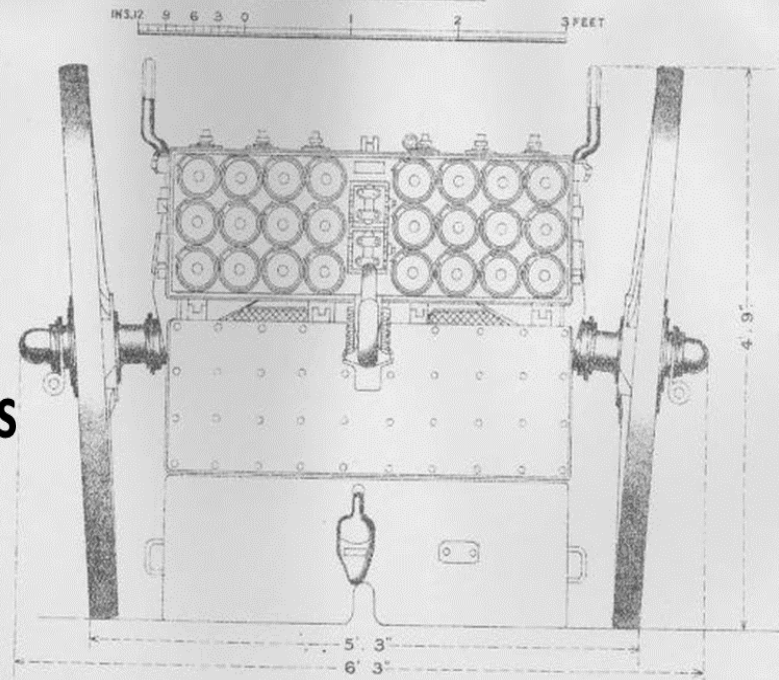
REAR ELEVATION



38 Rounds

LIMBER, Q.F. 18 PR. CARRIAGE, MARKS I AND II.

REAR ELEVATION.

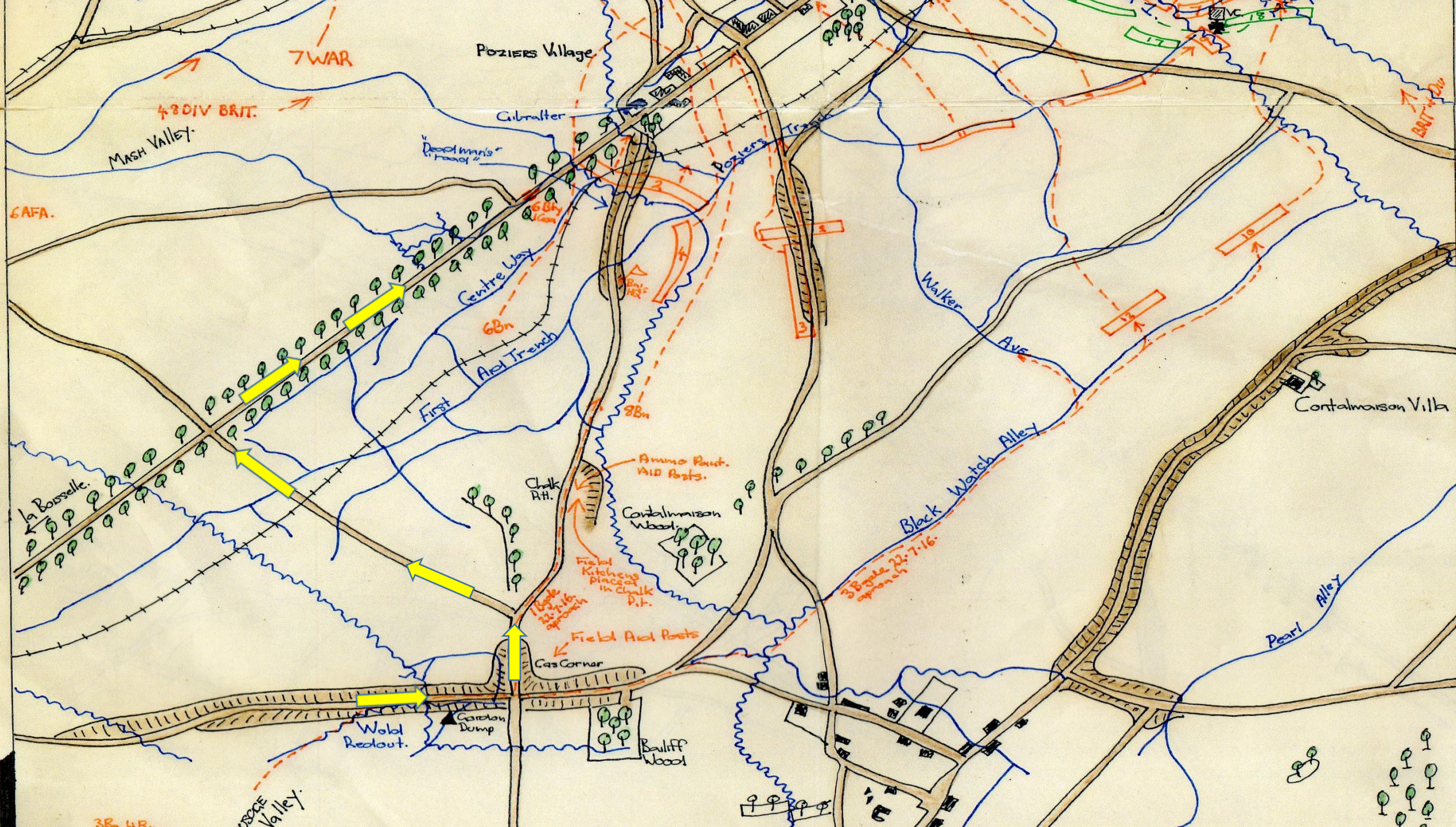


24 Rounds



115 Rounds
 Sandbags
 CES
 Staves and
 water
 Lewis guns





7WAR

48 DIV BRIT.

Poziers Village

MASH VALLEY

Gibraltar

Dead Man's Road

Doggers Trench

GAFA.

Centre Way

First Aid Trench

Walker Ave

68th

88th

La Boisselle

Chalk P.H.

Ammo Post. Aid Posts.

Contalmanson Wood

Black Watch Alley

Field Kitchens placed in Chalk P.H.

38th gate 22.7.16. approximately

Field Aid Posts

Gas Corner

Contalmanson Villa

Pearl Alley

Wald Redout.

Gas Corner Dump

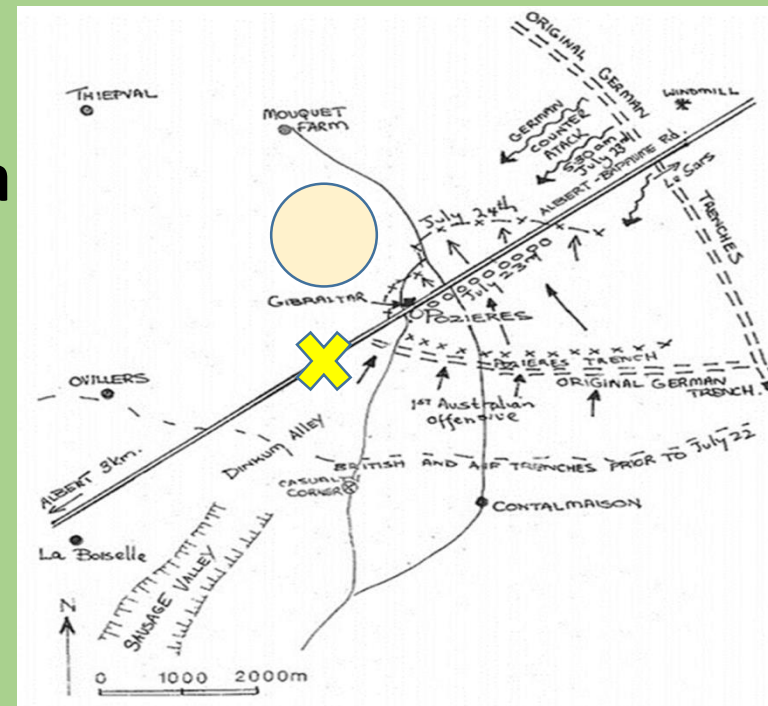
Bailiff Wood

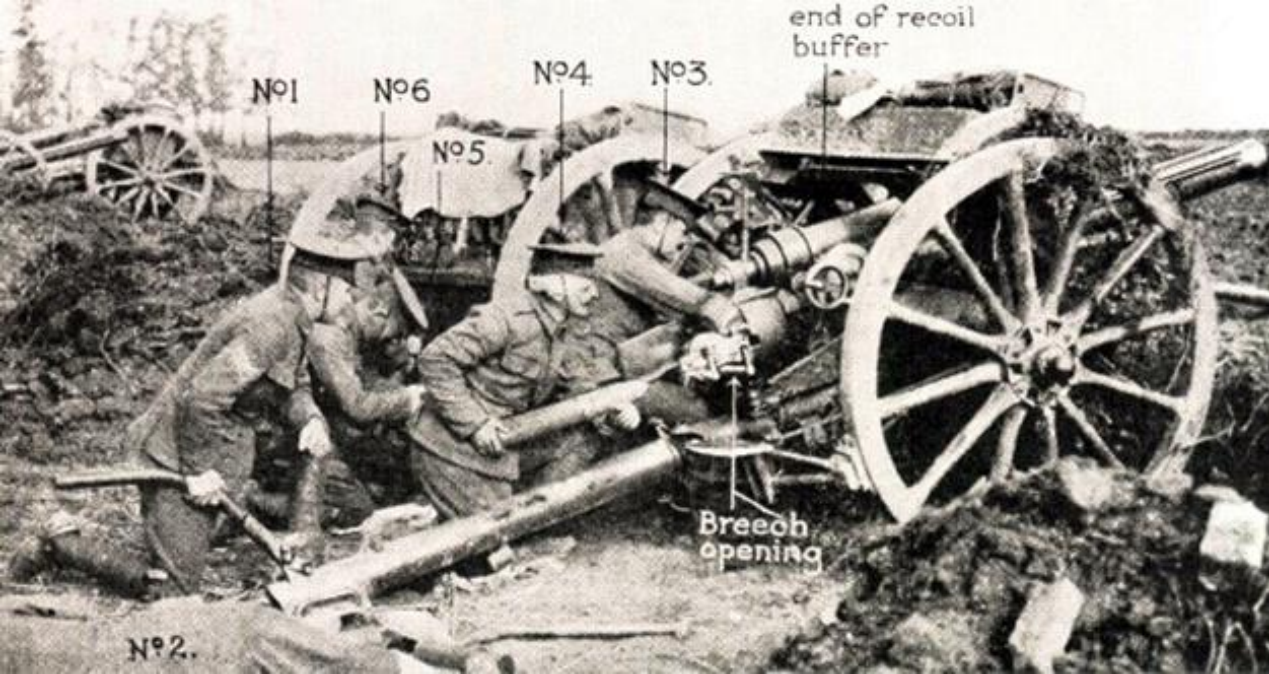
38th BR.

Wald Valley

Zero hour.....

- **0000h** - 23 July 16 – steady stream of fire falling on enemy trenches
- Thurnhill and detachments manhandle gun and wagon forward
- **0028h** - 23 July 16 – All guns of the 1st Division open up
- Free fire for two minutes
- **0030h** - Guns lift fire to orchard area







Zero hour.....

- **0030h** - Thurnhill opens fire
- **0030h** – Infantry goes over the top
- After expending all ammunition (115 Rds), Thurnhill ceases fire and withdraws gun
- Detachment withdraws
- The gun is pushed into a shell crater
 - recovery can occur later
 - breech and firing mechanism removed and carried separately *

Analysis / Lessons.....

- This was a 'Maverick Undertaking' by Bessell-Browne
 - No mention
 - 1 DIV Operational Orders
 - 1 Div Arty Operational Orders
 - 1 Div Arty Operation Summary (0200h entry) seemed vague, aloof and past tense
 - 2nd or 4th Battalion Unit War Diaries
- He was a forward thinker
- Visited the captured German pillboxes at la-Boisselle and Ovillers
- Knock down houses but retain and improve cellars and lower floors
- Identified the strength of German defences and their use of reinforced concrete

Analysis / Lessons.....

- Direct fire was still an valuable tactic – as he used at Gallipoli
- Carried the fight to the enemy by use of artillery

Thurnhill

- Given a task and got on with it
- Lateral Thinking and Common Sense to get the job done
- Good use of the ‘What If?’
- Actions on compromise or possible capture
- May have actually fired on Gibraltar as well



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

C00452

On Call Targets

Covered in question time

LT Samuel Raymond Thurnhill MC

Killed in Action

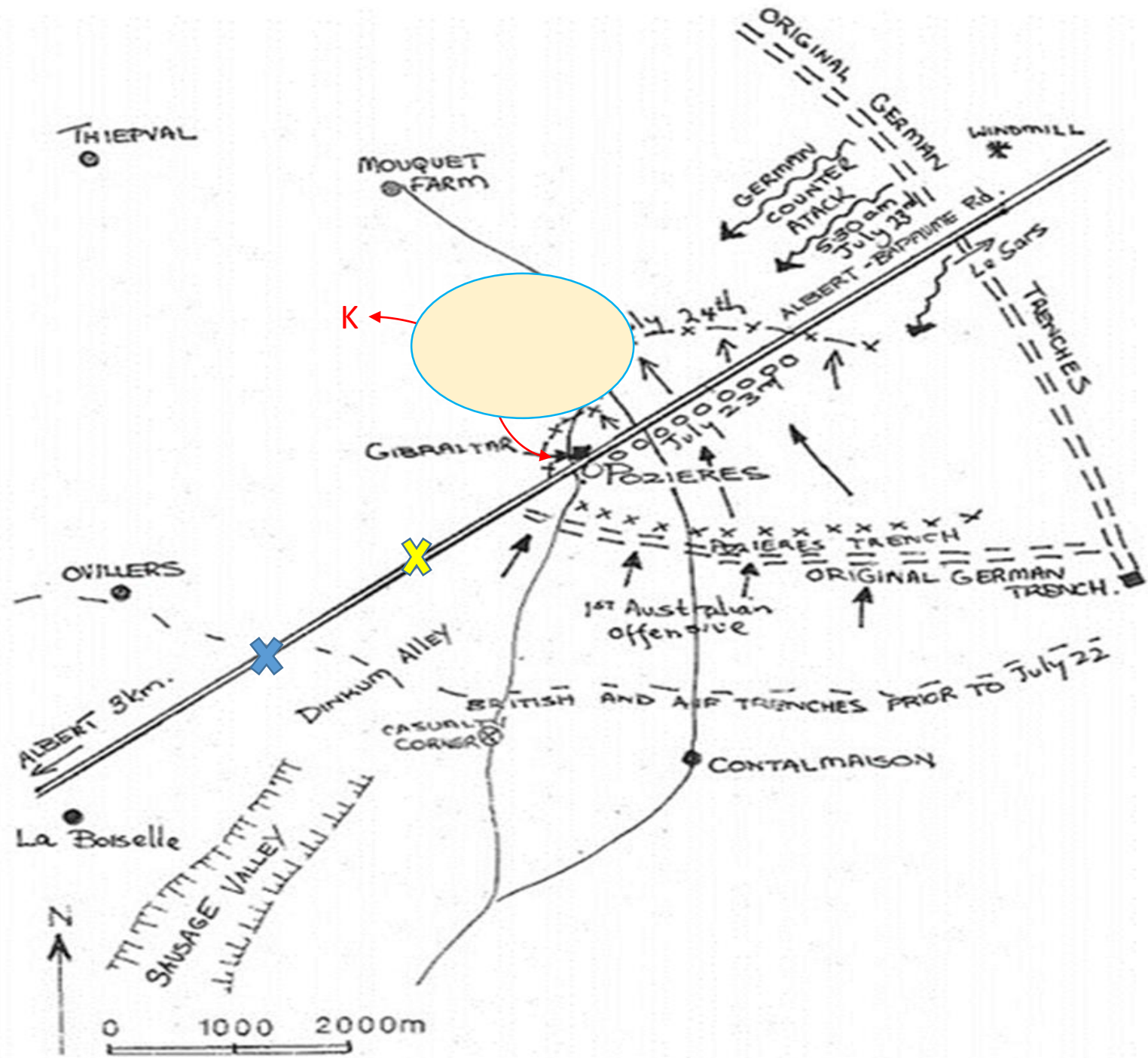
5 November 1916

at rest

Caterpillar Valley Cemetery

Longueval, France

Lest We Forget





Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

OR
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Brass heading not required.)

Volume 100 Sheet No 23 288

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
France	July 22/23		<p>in the field and have since been sent to A.O.M. workshops. Despite this fact fire was satisfactory - but to maintain efficiency necessary it is absolutely necessary that all guns now in possession of Bde be fitted with new buffer springs. In addition to the tanks already referred to one gun of the 6th Bty under the command of Lieut J.R. Churchill was taken into action after dark to a position 200 yards behind our front line on the main ALBERT B.A.P.U.M.E. road. After the loss of 1st Barrage he fired fire and expended 115 rounds which exploded the enemy's position as this line passed through the centre of POZIERES village - This stands out as a main feature of the action of the Bde during this operation - all vehicles and harness were muffled and taken out position on the top of the crest - From here gun and waffer were seen forward by hand - the waffer being replaced as to from a screen from machine gun and rifle fire from left flank R - Under separate report I am bringing under notice the gallant action of Lieut J.R. Churchill and his detachment. The enterprise was effectively accomplished without casualties to personnel or material. During morning and remainder of the day enemy trenches under construction were subjected to a retaliatory fire by 158th Bty of Bde. On the morning of the 23rd the 102nd Bty leading the Bde was ordered to surge Bde at a time at the head of Sausage Valley.</p>	

22. 7. 16

Issued Divisional Artillery Order for action of Artillery in attack on POZIERES.

23. 7. 16

12 28am
to 12 30am

Bombardment by all batteries of trench X 5 b 4.1 to X 4 d 1.1

12 30am
to 1 am

First lift - All batteries on line X 5 b 2½.3½ to X 4 c 7.4

1 0 am
to 1 30am

Second lift - All batteries on line X 5 b 2.5½ to X 4 c 7.4½

1 30am
to 2 am

Third lift - All batteries on line X 5 a 2½.8½ to X 4 c 5½.5½.

2 0 am

All batteries except howitzers firing on third lift. Rate slackened to 100 rds per brigade per hour.

2 0am

Received report from O.C., 2nd F.A. Brigade that ~~the~~ one gun under Lieut. S.R. Thurnhill had gone forward to a position 200 yards behind our front line on the main ALBERT - BAPAUME road. At 12 30am this gun fired 115 rounds enfilading enemy's position. It was then withdrawn into a crater and the detachment returned without casualties.

2 10am

Short report from 2nd F.A. Brigade stating that half an hour before commencement of operations O.C., 2nd Battalion asked their fire to be lifted as our infantry had gone out. This was done on instructions from CRA.

Divnl. Artillery Brigade. 1st. Australian Division. 1st A & N.Z. Arty Corps. July 30th. 1916. Date of Recommendation.

Schedule No. <small>(To be left blank)</small>	Unit	Regt. No.	Rank and Name	Action for which commended	Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be left blank)
	6th. Battery 2nd. F.A. Bde		2/Lieutenant Samuel Raymond THURNHILL.	<p>During the operation on evening 22nd. July near POZIERES, acting under instructions issued by O.C. 6th. Battery, Lieut. THURNHILL was detailed to make a reconnaissance with a view to taking forward a gun on Main ALBERT - BAPAUME road for the purpose of demolishing enemy's barricade and enfilading road through village of POZIERES which was to be attacked that night. Lieut. THURNHILL made the reconnaissance and eventually carried out this task, particulars of which are hereunder.</p> <p>To carry out this task he first muffled his gun and wagon by wiring sandbags round the tyres of his wagon and for the gun he used old tyres from mechanical transport vans which he wired to the wheels. The gun was moved forward as far as possible with teams and then run out by hand to close behind our own front line, he took up a position on the road which enabled him to carry out his task. I will point out here that his left flank was fully exposed and resting on our front line which ran parallel to the ALBERT - BAPAUME road. Having successfully got into position he waited until the first barrage of 3 minutes had finished then he opened fire and expended 115 rounds on his task - all the ammunition he had, and successfully withdrew his gun and detachment without casualty. This task entailed careful reconnaissance under heavy fire and to have brought it to a successful issue meant it to be carried out methodically and entailed courageous determination of those concerned.</p>	C.R.A. 1st. Aust. Division.	Military Cross.	



Major General
Commanding 1st. Aust. Div.

During the first assault, Lieutenant Thurnhill, of the 6th Battery AFA, had one of his 18 pounder guns manhandled to within metres of the German positions, from where it engaged the defences with over **115 rounds of direct fire**. In this way, many obstacles and enemy positions were destroyed which would otherwise have been left intact, with potentially dire consequences. **The only other way in which such results could be duplicated would be through well aimed, observed indirect fire.** It will be remembered that such tactics were also used to great effect by the British, at Neuve Chapelle in 1915, but as with many of the lessons from this earlier battle, it was not adopted as an accepted practice.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE GOD OF WAR:

The Changing Face of Australian Field Artillery in World War One

LTCOL Nicholas Floyd

Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery

Promoted colonel and temporary brigadier general in January 1917, he was in charge of the 5th Divisional Artillery until the end of the war and in this period emerged as an outstanding commander, constantly showing his capacity for solving difficult problems of technique and command.

At Polygon Wood he sent three batteries to cover the Australians' exposed right flank: this was probably the first time that defence of a flank by artillery had been attempted in a trench-warfare attack.

With the transition to mobile warfare after Villers-Bretonneux in 1918, he quickly adapted tactics to give close support to the advancing infantry during the attacks on the support systems of the Hindenburg Line and the final penetration at Bellicourt. Here, in its finest performance during the war, the 5th's artillery put down a creeping barrage at an angle of ninety degrees from the line of sight to cover an attack at Le Catelet.

