



New Zealand's Great Forgotten Victory: The Battle of Messines 1917

Jeff McNeill



Tītipounamu
Rifleman Press



MASSEY
UNIVERSITY
TE KUNenga KI PŪREHUROA

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND







THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

WORK OF COLONIAL TROOPS

MINES CREATED THE HIGHEST
SPIRITS

PHENOMENALLY LIGHT
CASUALTIES.

(AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND CABLE ASSOCIATION.)

LONDON, 11th June.
Witnesses of the fight at Messines point out the complexity of the plans leading up to the battle allows only an estimate to be made of the part played by the Australians and New Zealanders, but it discloses the brilliance of their achievement. Although Messines will be historic as a most gigantic artillery and engineering victory, the mighty concussions would have accomplished little unless the troops had followed them up by taking possession of the desolated land. The New Zealanders were given most prominent mention because they were the first to enter Messines. The Australians do not grudge them the likewise had a definite

ATTACK

R'S WORK

ES RIDGE

THE WAR

PLENDID

THE NEW

WORK DONE C

(PUBLISHED

The Times correspondent at B
Zealanders took Messines.

Writing later, the correspondent
Zealanders did their work, as alwa
light casualties. They have already
thoroughness and precision worthy o

OFFICIAL

OVER 5000 P

The New Zealand High Com

A British official report states
tinned methodically throughout the
Messines-Wytschaete ridge, which
our position at the Ypres salient, w
captured the villages of Messines
systems, including many strongly-o
a front of over nine miles from sou
Sorrel.

Later we again advanced in a
carried the village of Oostaverne
east of the village on a front exten
attack on the southern portion of
by our artillery.

The enemy's casualties to-day
5.30 p.m. this afternoon, over 5000
stations, and others are still com
many trench mortars and machine

There were many air fights.
sisted of over thirty machines, w
casualties. Nine German aeropl

German aeroplanes and drove down four
others which were not under control. Six
of ours are missing.

EXTRAORDINARILY LIGHT LOSSES

GREAT DAY FOR NEW ZEALAND AND IRELAND.

(AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND CABLE ASSOCIATION.)

LONDON, 9th June.

Mr. Philip Gibbs writes:—The cap-
ture of Messines Ridge has given the
men a remarkable sense of great achieve-
ment. They know that a formidable
task has been carried out with extra-
ordinarily light losses. The proportion
of lightly wounded is high, and at least
one Irish company took its objective
without a single casualty. The victory
was unclouded by the heavy sacrifices
of the Battle of the Somme. The New
Zealanders say that it was a great day
for New Zealand.

Mr. Gibbs describes a visit to Wyt-
schaete, where the Irish Nationalists
and Ulstermen vied with the exploit of
the New Zealanders in the carrying of
Messines Ridge. The Irishmen state
that the bombardment wiped out Wyt-
schaete Wood, which was eight hundred

A poke in the eye
with a sharp stick,
Officers Club wall.

2nd Lieutenant Pat
Hanna, 1 July 1917

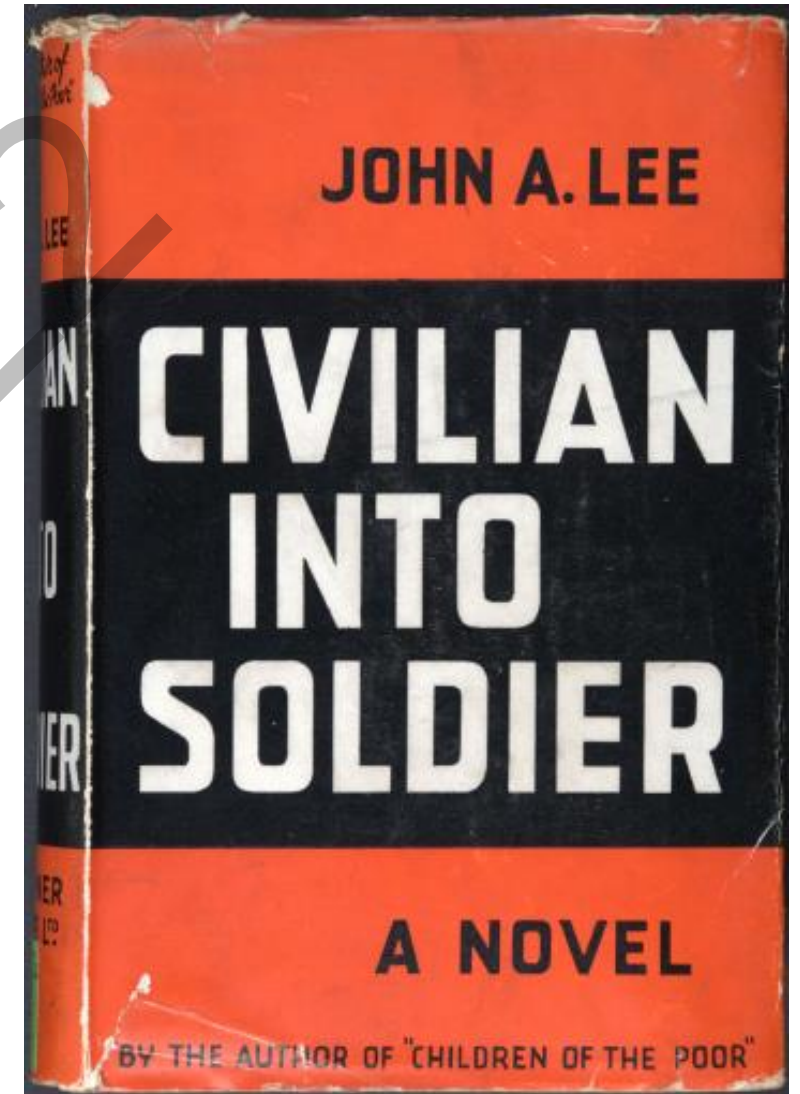






John A. Lee – renegade Labour MP

‘During the First World War he served with the 1st NZEF, won the D.C.M. at Messines, he was wounded, and lost his left arm’ (1966 *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*)



Sid Holland: NZ Prime Minister, 1949-1957

‘Lt FA 1 NZEF (invalided after Messines)’ –
Who’s Who, 1956

‘During the Battle of Messines in June 1917
he became seriously ill and was invalided
home to be discharged in the following
November’ (*An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, 1966)

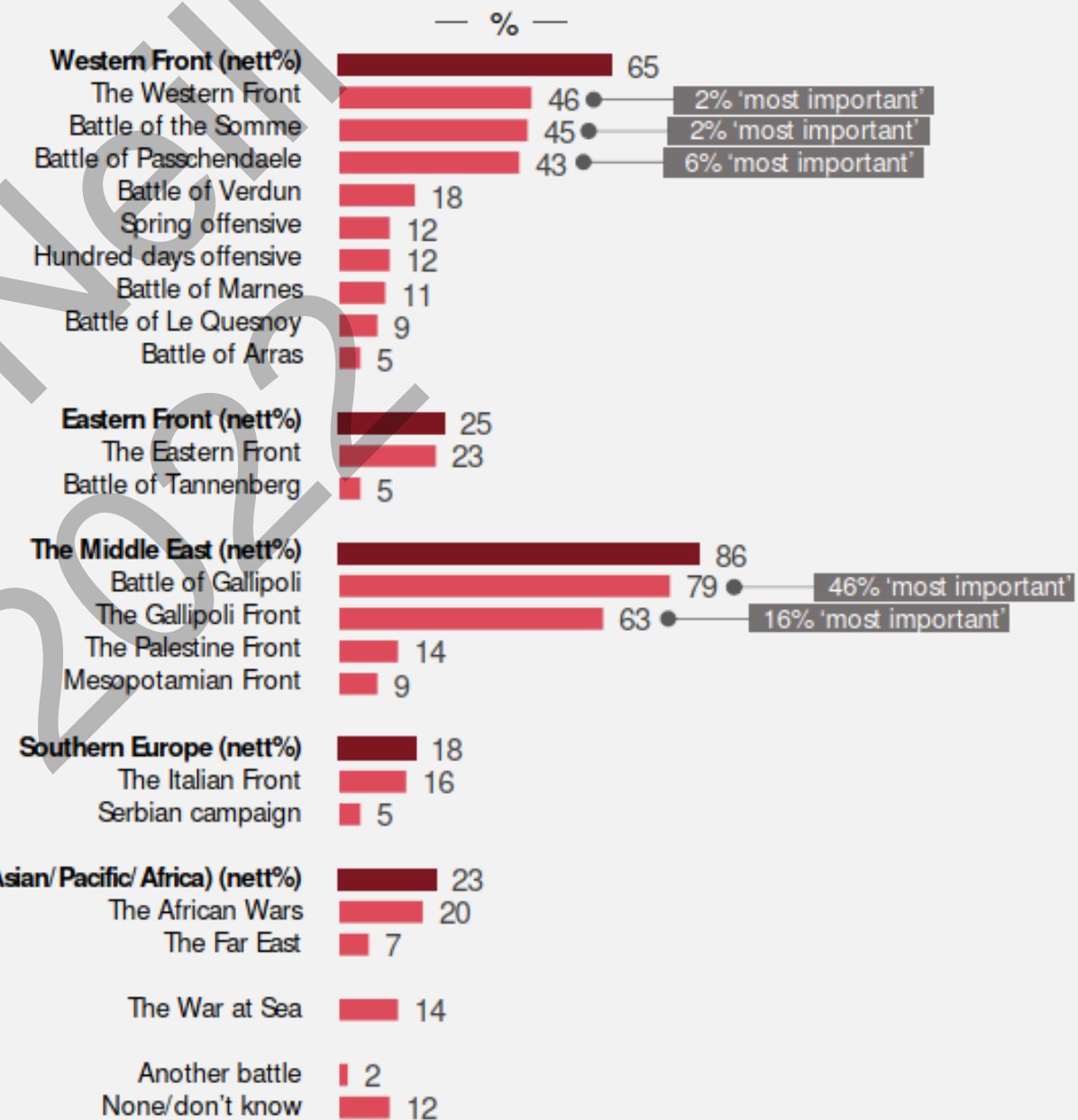


| | | | | |
|----------|--------|----------|--------|---|
| | | 05.10.17 | | |
| Sick ... | 3388 | 1-6-17 | London | adm. Hosp. France May 25. Suspect "Phthisis" slight |
| | 3432 | 8-6-17 | London | adm. 2 nd Lon. G. Hosp. 8-6-17. "Pleurisy" |
| | 3611 | 30-6-17 | " | Trans. Wom. S. Hosp. 25-6-17 Pleurisy. |
| | A.J.B. | 7-7-17 | London | advises Improving. |
| | 3685 | 19-7-17 | London | period 11.00. S. Hosp. 19-7-17 |





AWARENESS OF FIRST WORLD WAR FRONTS AND BATTLES



Base: All respondents (4,017)

German perspective

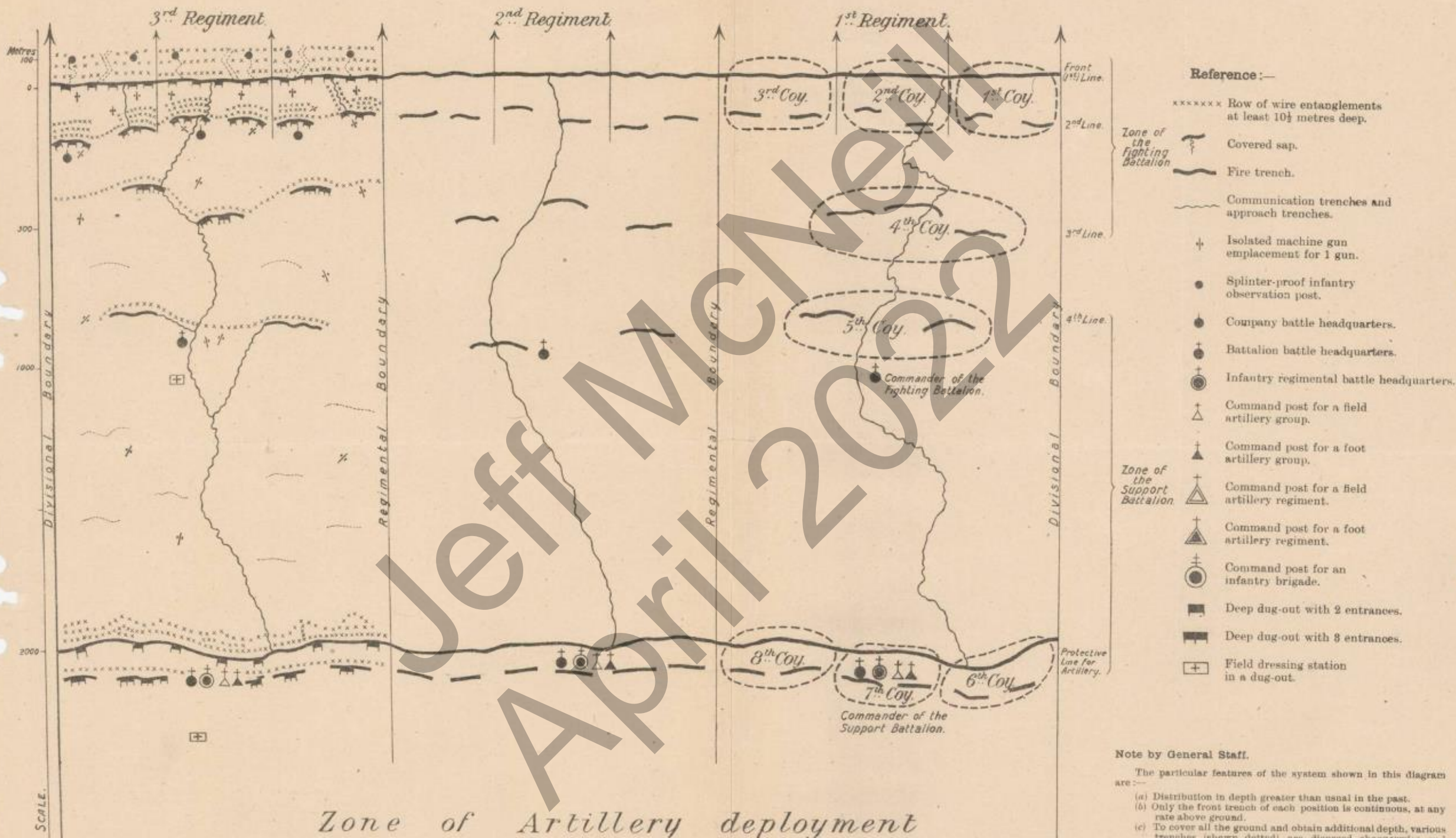
Some impressions will gradually fade for us. Yet, we can never forget that dramatic day. All of us who shuddered at the damage inflicted by this experience, this catastrophe at Messines. All of us, there where dying and bleeding had become as familiar to us as for children their daily evening prayers

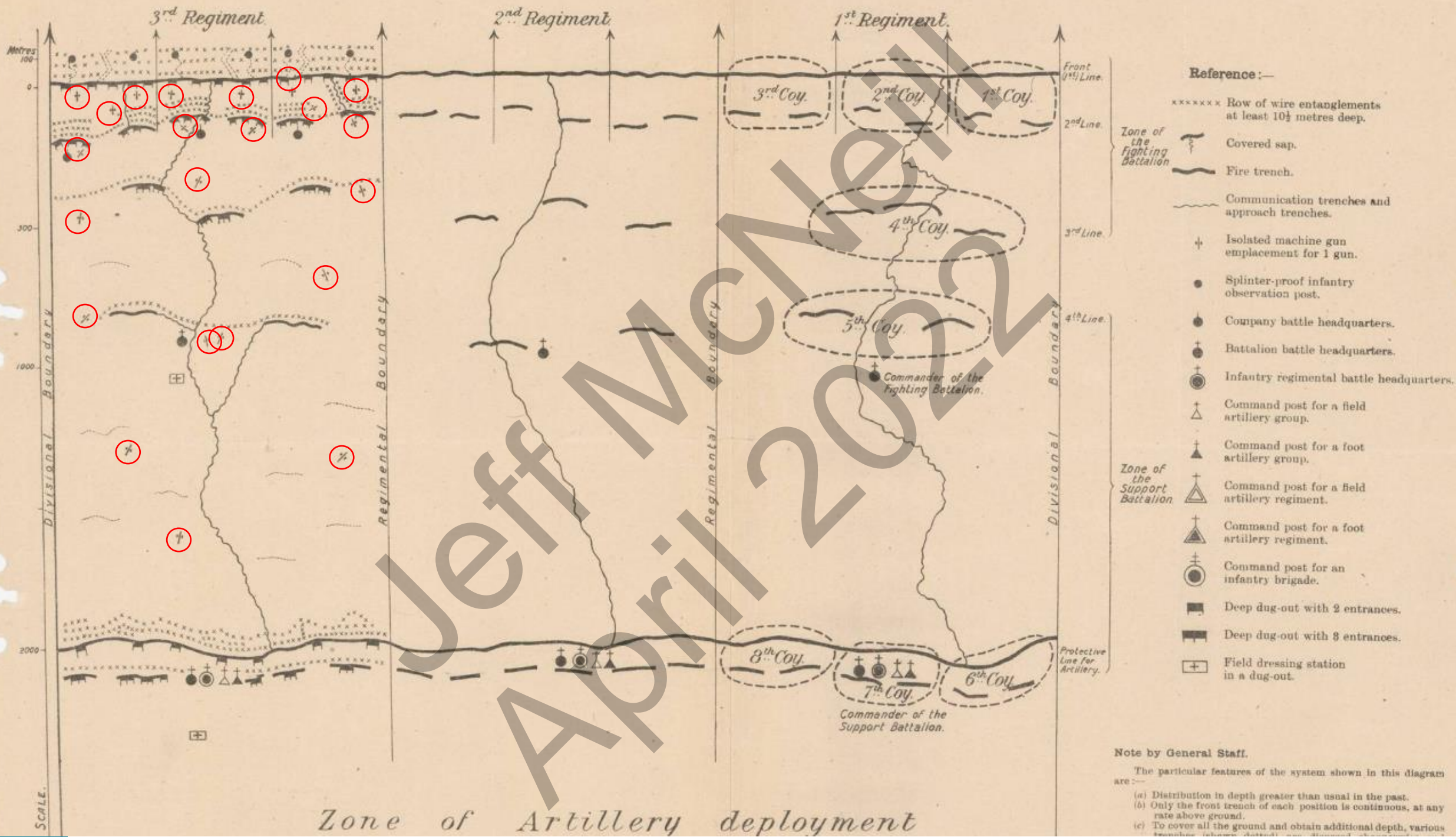
- Hermann Kohl, *Mit Hurra in den Tod!* 1932

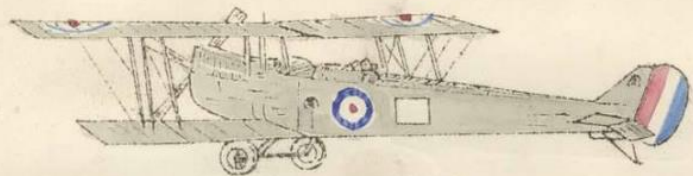




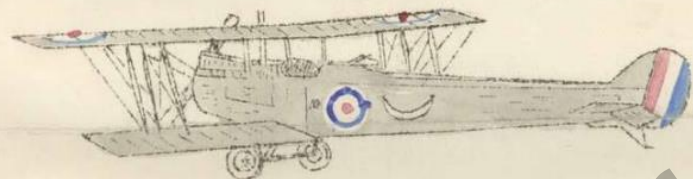








AEROPLANE OF 42ND. SQUADRON R.F.C.
II ANZAC



AEROPLANE OF 53RD. SQUADRON
IX CORPS



| Section | Composition | No. ORs |
|-------------------------|--|---------|
| Headquarters | 1 Officer, 4 OR | 4 |
| 1 Section Bombers | 1 NCO, 8 OR (including 2 bayonet men and 2 throwers) | 9 |
| 1 Section Lewis Gunners | 1 NCO, 8OR (includes Nos. 1 and 2) | 9 |
| 1 Section Riflemen | 1 NCO and 8 OR (picked shots, scouts, picked bayonet fighters) | 9 |
| 1 Section Rifle Bombers | 1 NCO, 8 OR (includes 4 bomb firers) | 9 |
| Total | 1 Officer | 4+36 OR |

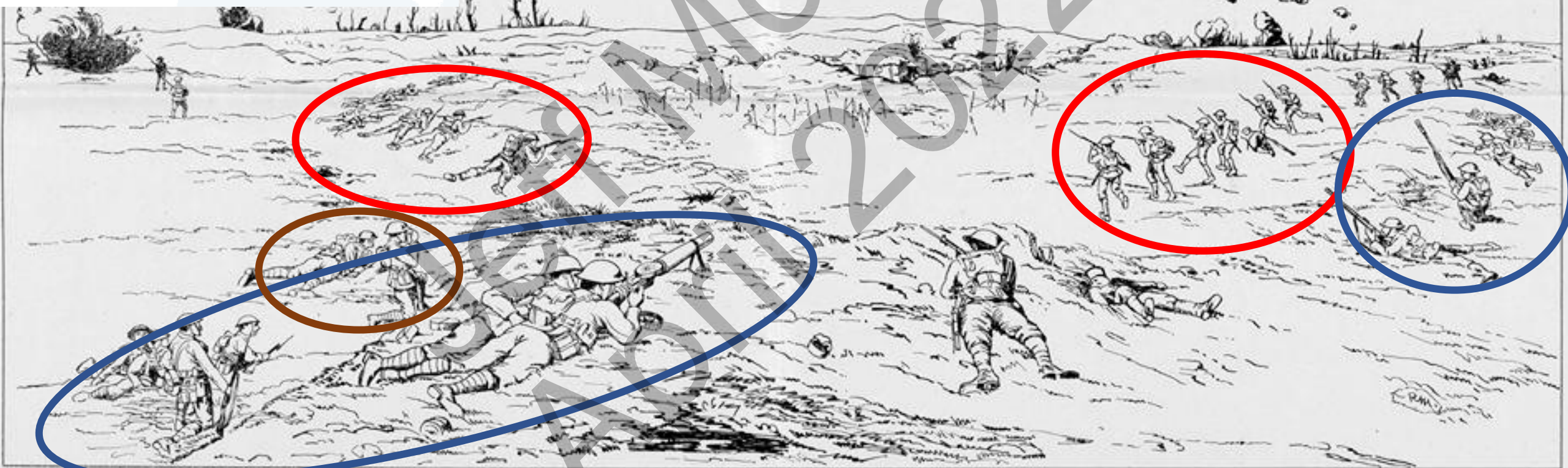
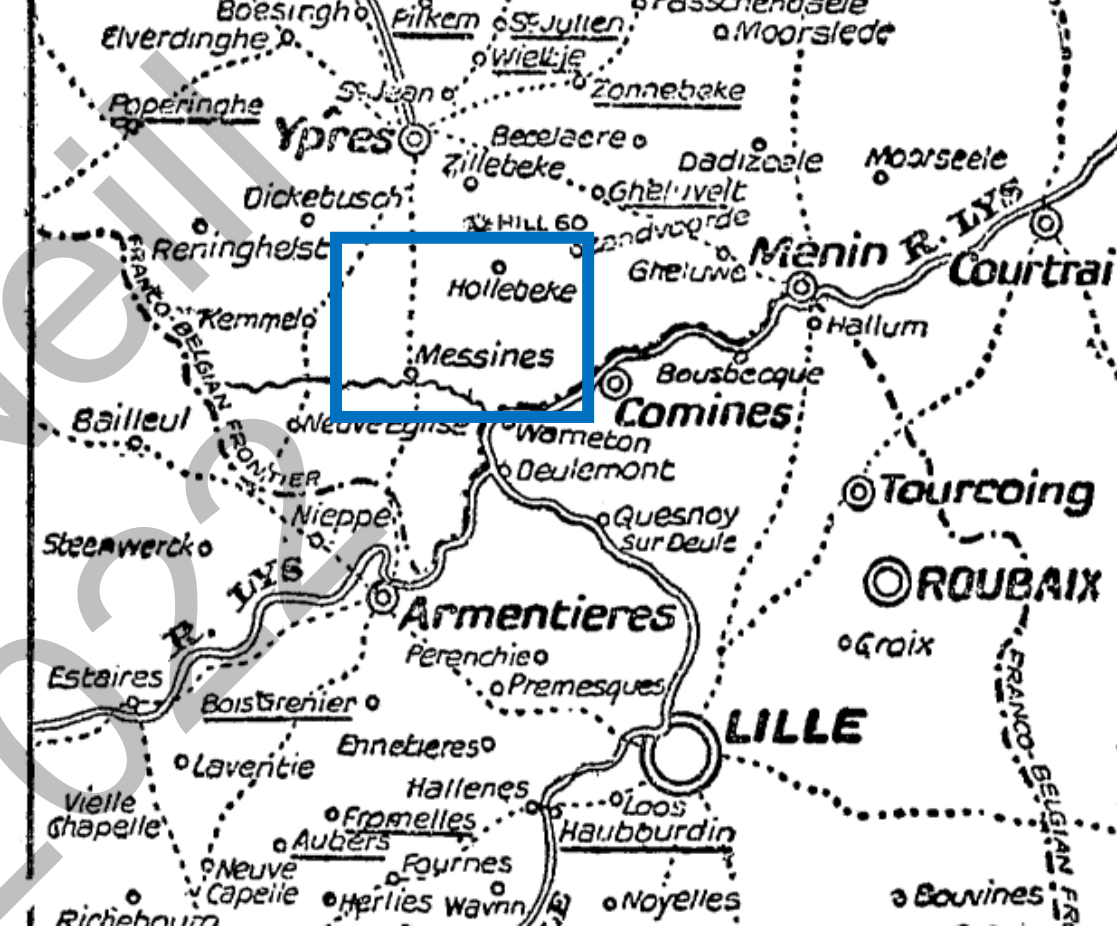


Plate II.—A PLATOON ATTACKING A STRONG POINT.
Note the covering fire supplied by the
Lewis gun section and by rifle bombers.







Wytschaete is a small village four miles south of Ypres, and two miles north-west of Messines, which is shown in the map published in this issue. Both villages stand on the crest of a range of low hills which runs to the north-east beyond Ypres. The original line lay about a mile west of both Wytschaete and Messines, forming almost a semi-circular salient, and a considerable flattening of this bulge has resulted from the attack

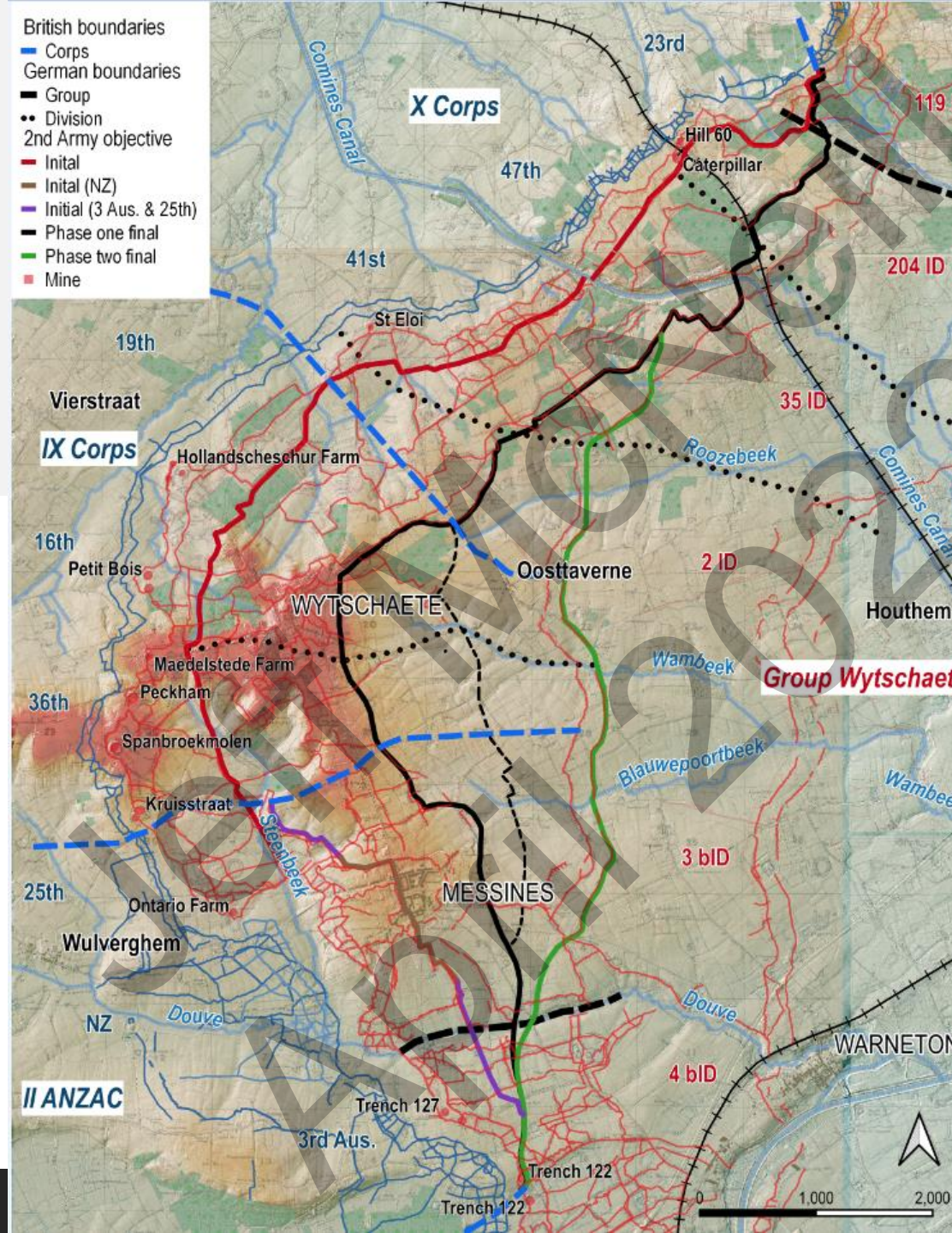


Front Line

April 1915 - June 1917

December 1917





British 2nd Army General Herbert Plumer

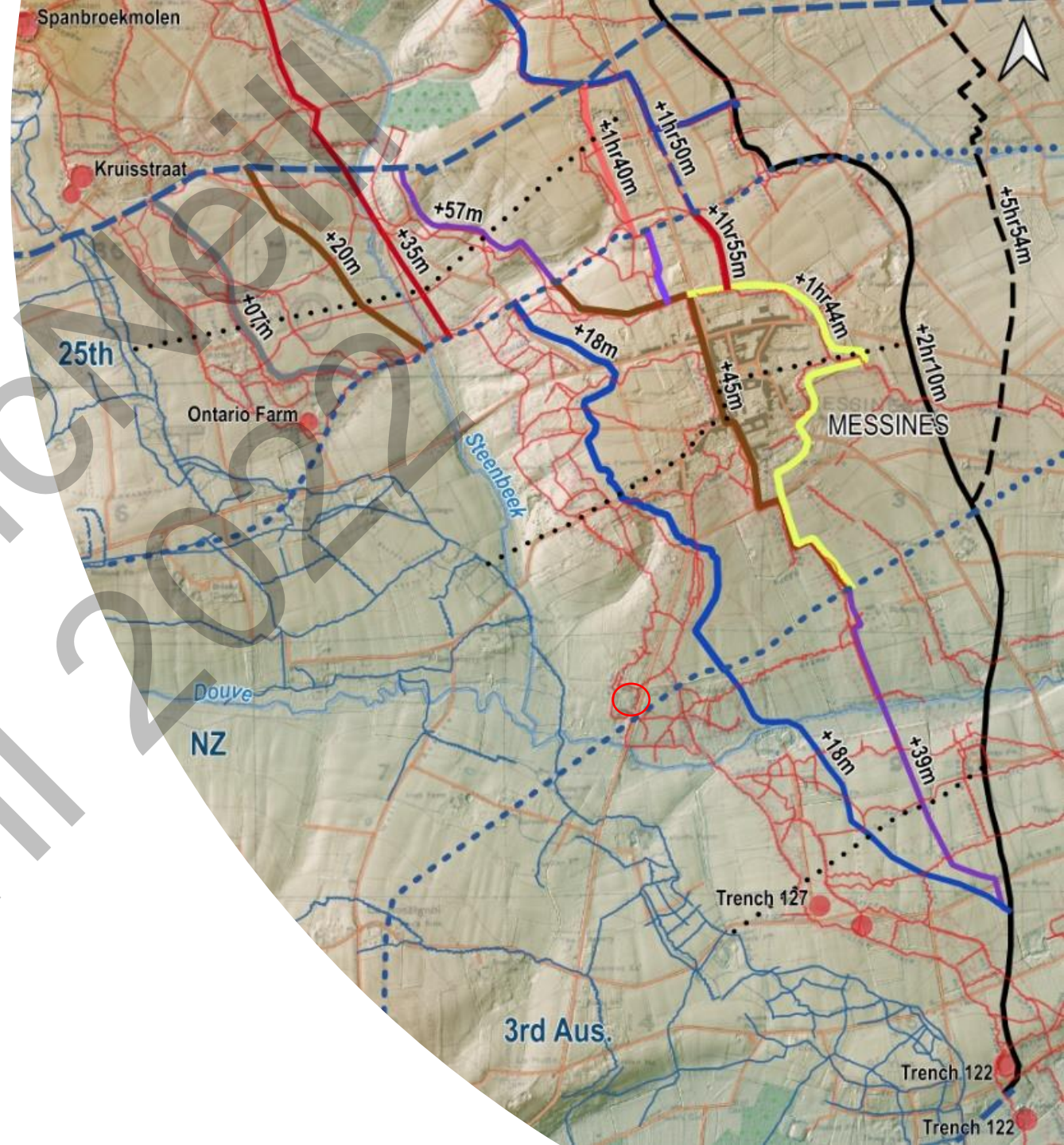
- X Corps
- IX Corps
- II ANZAC

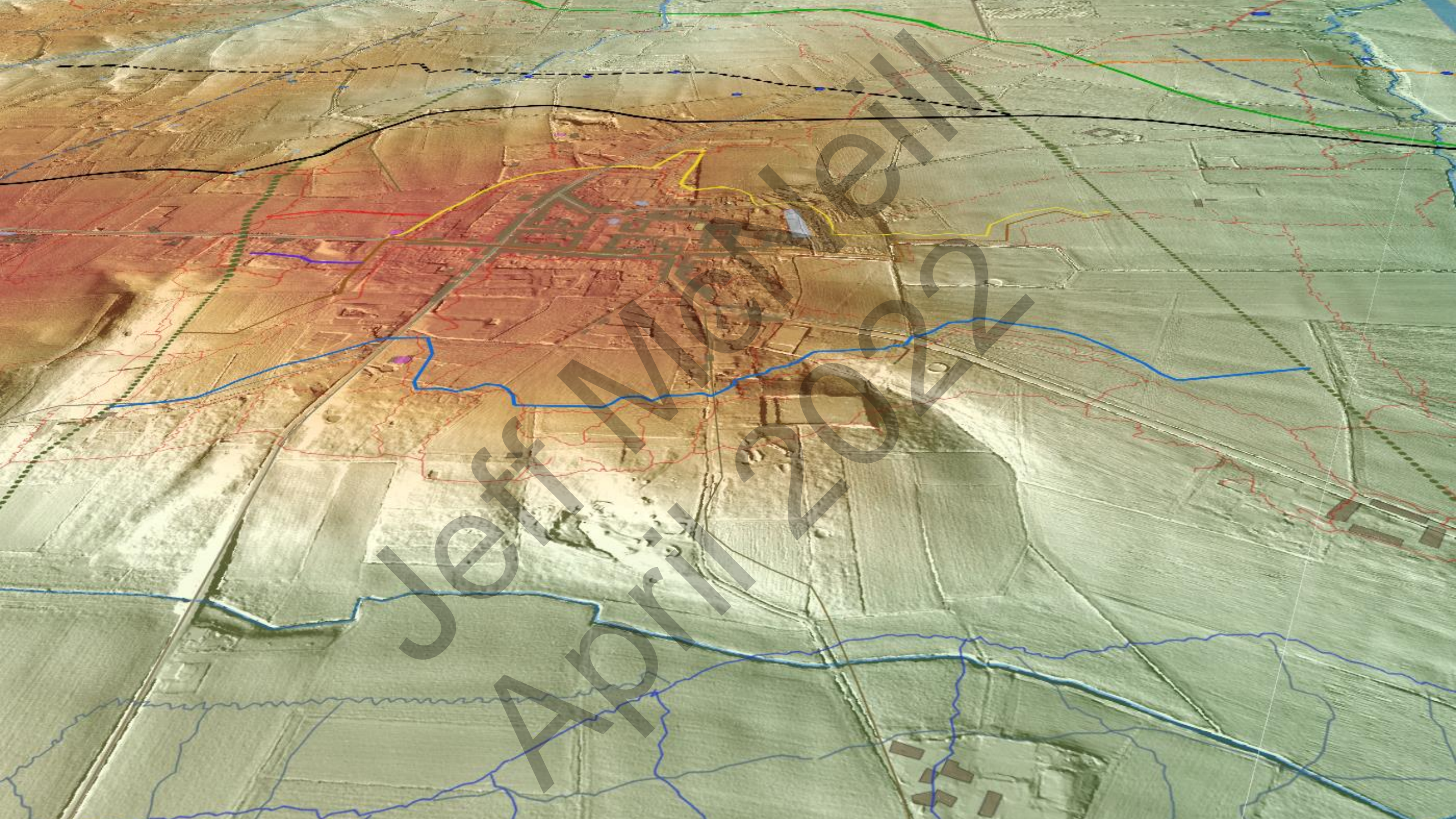


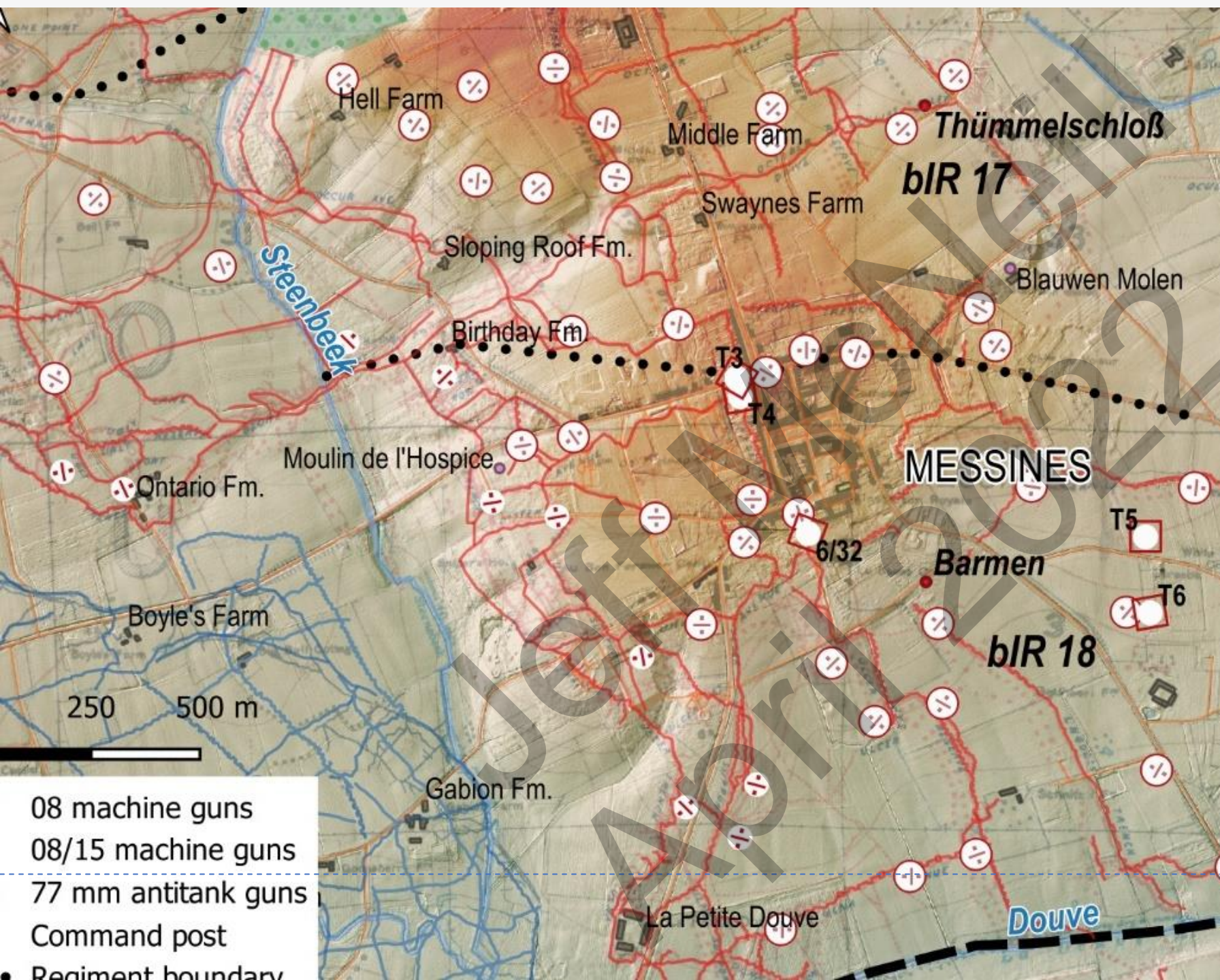
II ANZAC

General Alexander Godley

- 25th Division
- NZ Division
- 3rd Australian Division
- (4th Australian Division)
- Corps units
 - II ANZAC Mounted Regiment
 - 2nd NZ (Army) Field Artillery Brigade
 - 4th NZ Infantry Brigade







- (40th Saxon Division)
- 3rd Bavarian Division
 - bIR 23
 - bIR 17
 - bIR 18

08 machine guns
08/15 machine guns
77 mm antitank guns
Command post
• Regiment boundary

SECRET.

MAP A

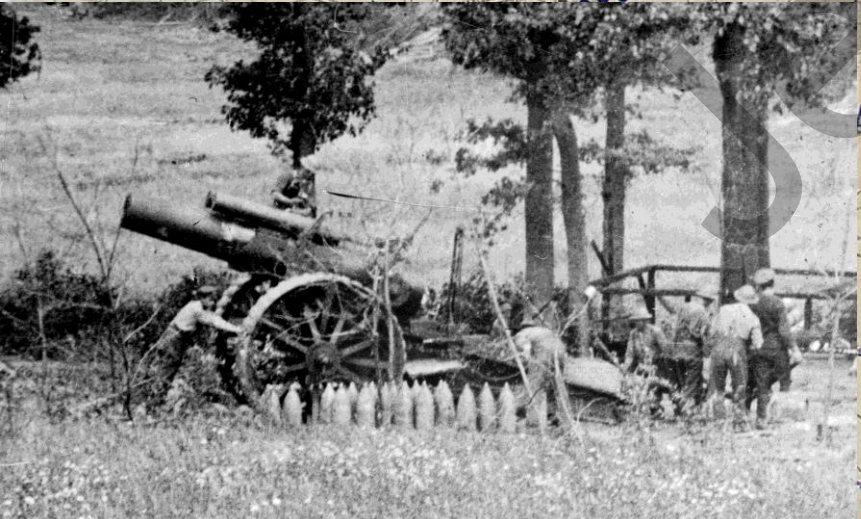
36th DIV.

25th DIV.

Wulverghem

MESSINES

N.Z. DIV.



- 40 mins.
- 44
- 48
- 49
- 50
- 52
- 54
- 56
- 0 mins.
- 4
- 5



Generalleutnant Erz. Ritter von Wenninger.
Kommandeur der 3. Bayer. Inf.-Div.,
gefallen am 8. Sept. 1917, zuletzt Kommandierender

German mistakes

- 4th Army
 - Failure to relinquish ridge voluntarily (30 April conference)
- Group Wytschaete
 - Relieved 40th Saxon with 3rd Bavarian Division just before the attack
 - Committed 1st Guards Reserve Division to pointless afternoon counter-attack
 - Failed to grasp limited nature of offensive

New Zealand Division

2nd Infantry Brigade

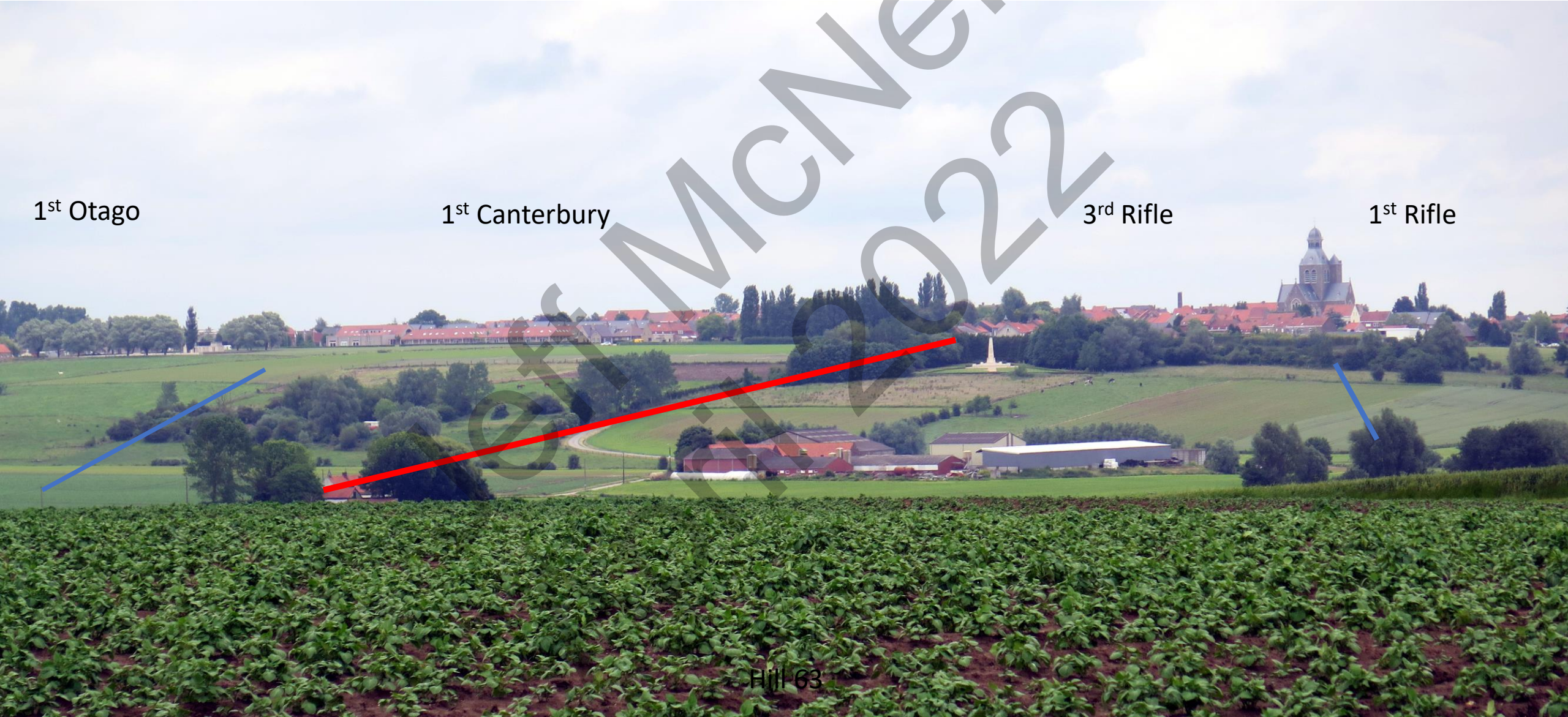
3rd (Rifle) Brigade

1st Otago

1st Canterbury

3rd Rifle

1st Rifle







On the left a great mine went up in vast masses of earth and smoke and lurid red flame, like a night eruption from the throat of some great volcano. It was the great momentary flash of the red flame, like the red of a blood orange, brilliant against the black smoke, that impressed the vision. In quick succession other ruins, five or six in number, heaved themselves skyward with awesome effect, making the ground rock and quiver as if stricken with a great earthquake

– **Malcolm Ross**, New Zealand Correspondent

The earth started to quake, our pit seemed to stand on end and rock up and down – an awful sensation – and all the time dull reports went off... our mine went up on the left of Messines and I don't think as long as I live will I ever see such a sight again... It was like pictures of Hell – great billows of Blood Red flames curling up hundreds of feet high and the ground shook like a leaf

– **Bombardier Malcolm Beaven**, 7th Battery, 1st Brigade, NZFA

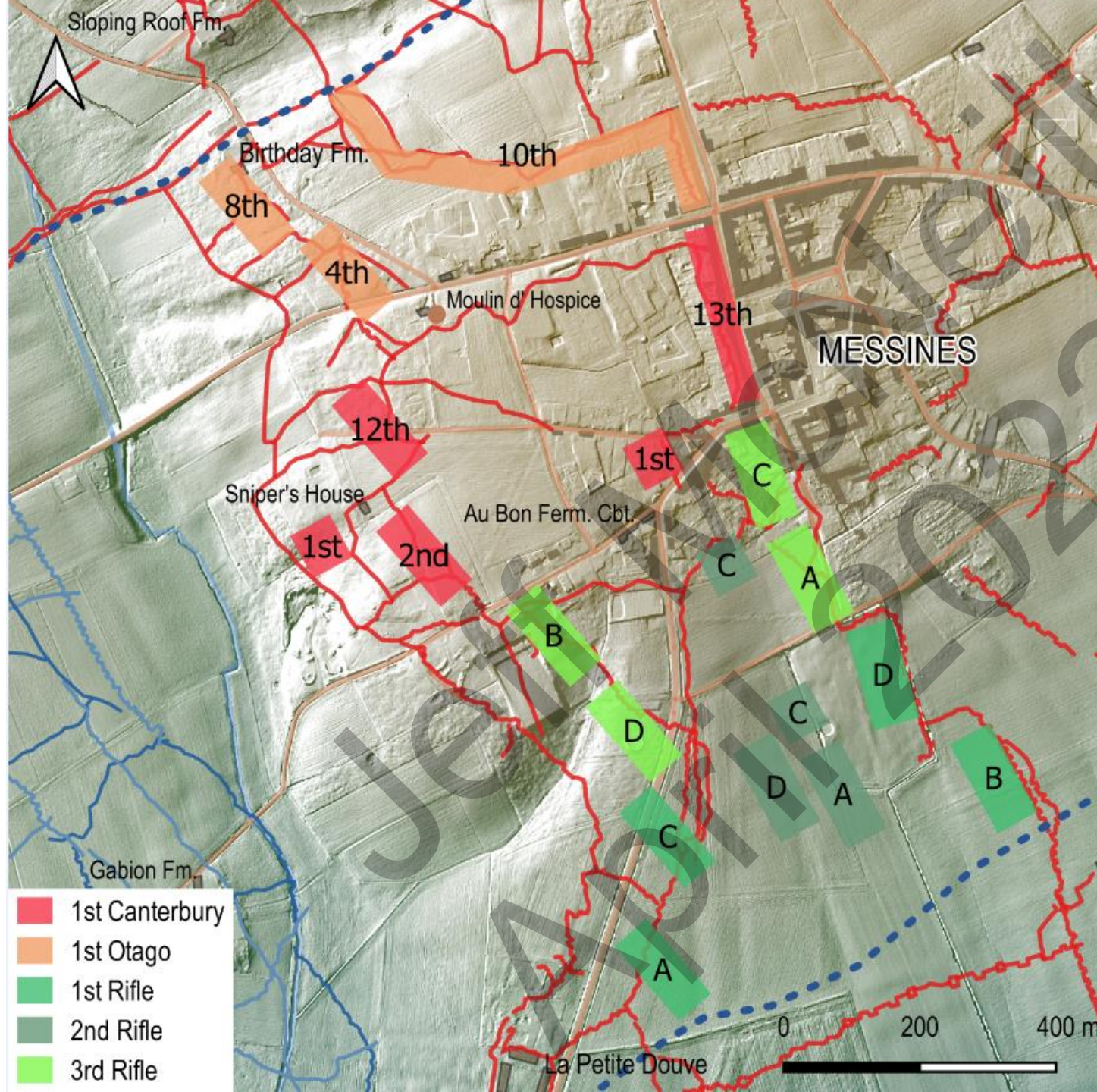




1st Otago
1st Canterbury
3rd Rifle
1st Rifle
(2nd Rifle)

Blue Line
3:27 am
(+7 minutes)

Brown Line
3:37 – 3:55 am
(+45 minutes)





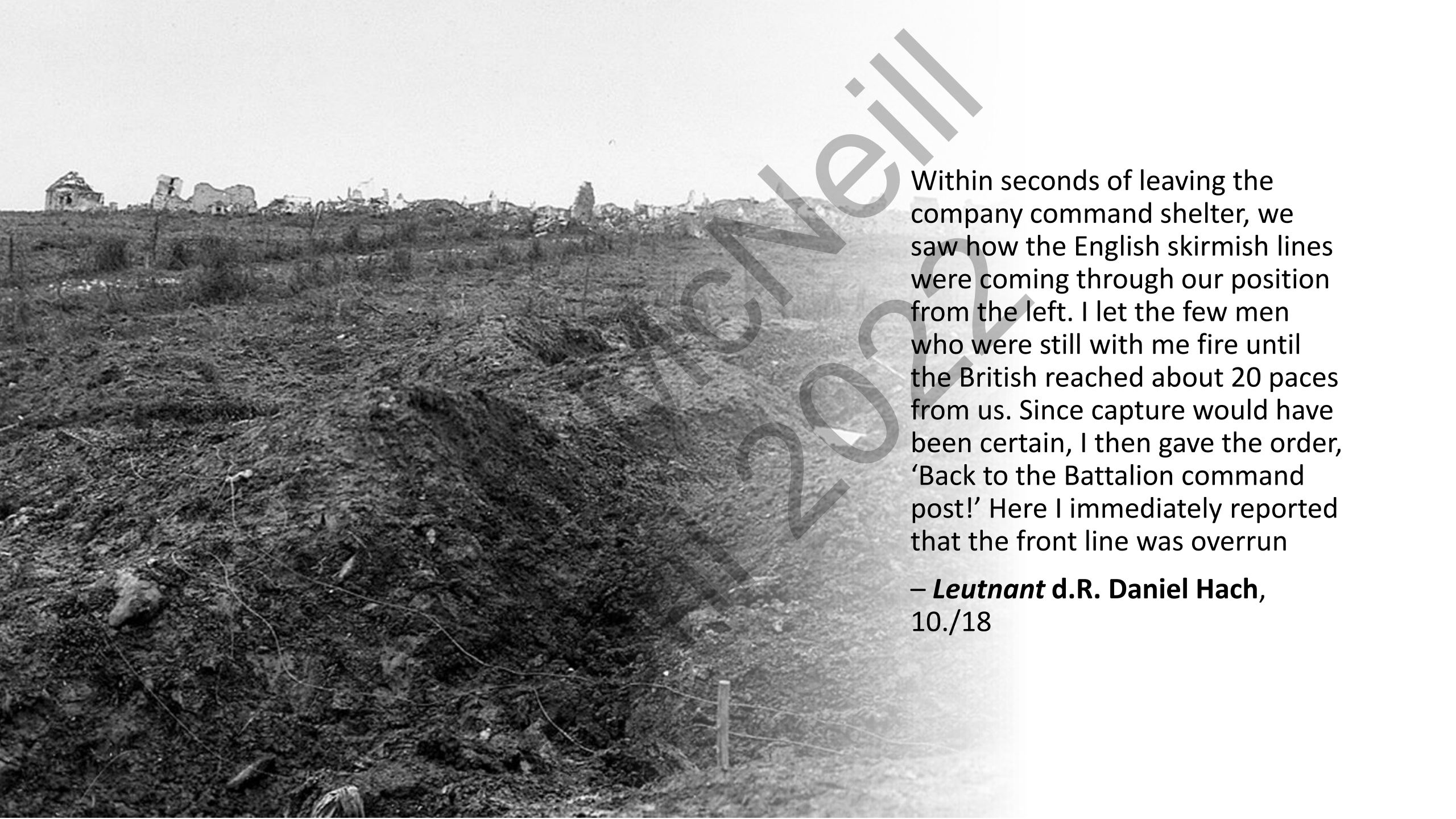
After searching around...we came across one or two underground dugouts which were all that remained of his front line... I spotted a Fritz scarpering out the back door. As soon as he saw me, up went his hands and he started "mercy Kamerading" for all he was worth. That didn't have any effect on me though and I let him have it and he tumbled back into 20 feet of space.

– **Private Bill Bailey, B**
Company, 3rd Rifle

I was digging-in and had sat down in my hole to light a "fag", when over toppled a chap on either side of me, both dead, shot through the head. At last we were down 6 feet and fairly safe

– **Lance Corporal Victor J**
Watson, 1st Otago

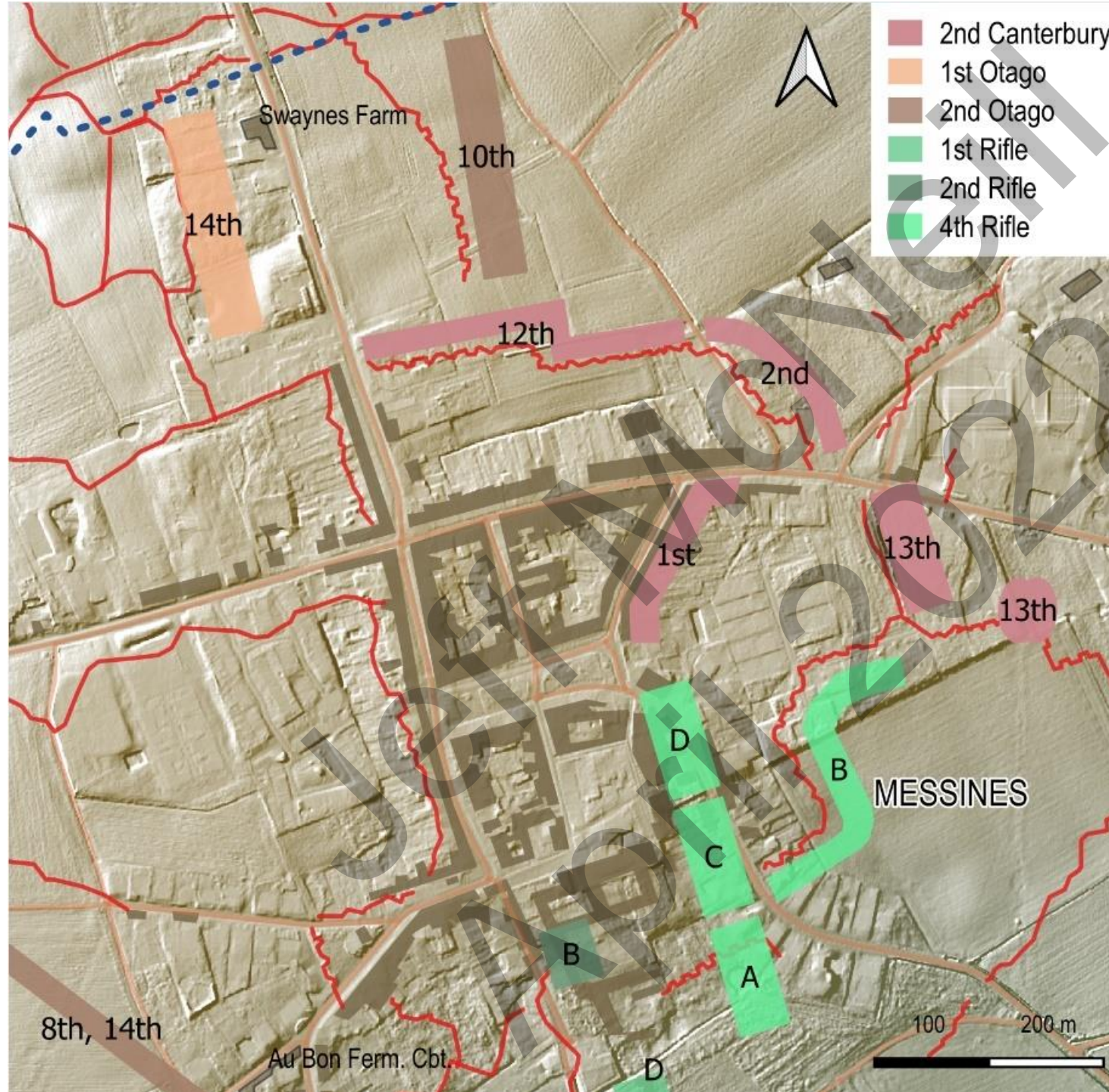




Within seconds of leaving the company command shelter, we saw how the English skirmish lines were coming through our position from the left. I let the few men who were still with me fire until the British reached about 20 paces from us. Since capture would have been certain, I then gave the order, 'Back to the Battalion command post!' Here I immediately reported that the front line was overrun

– ***Leutnant* d.R. Daniel Hach,**
10./18





2nd Canterbury
4th Rifle

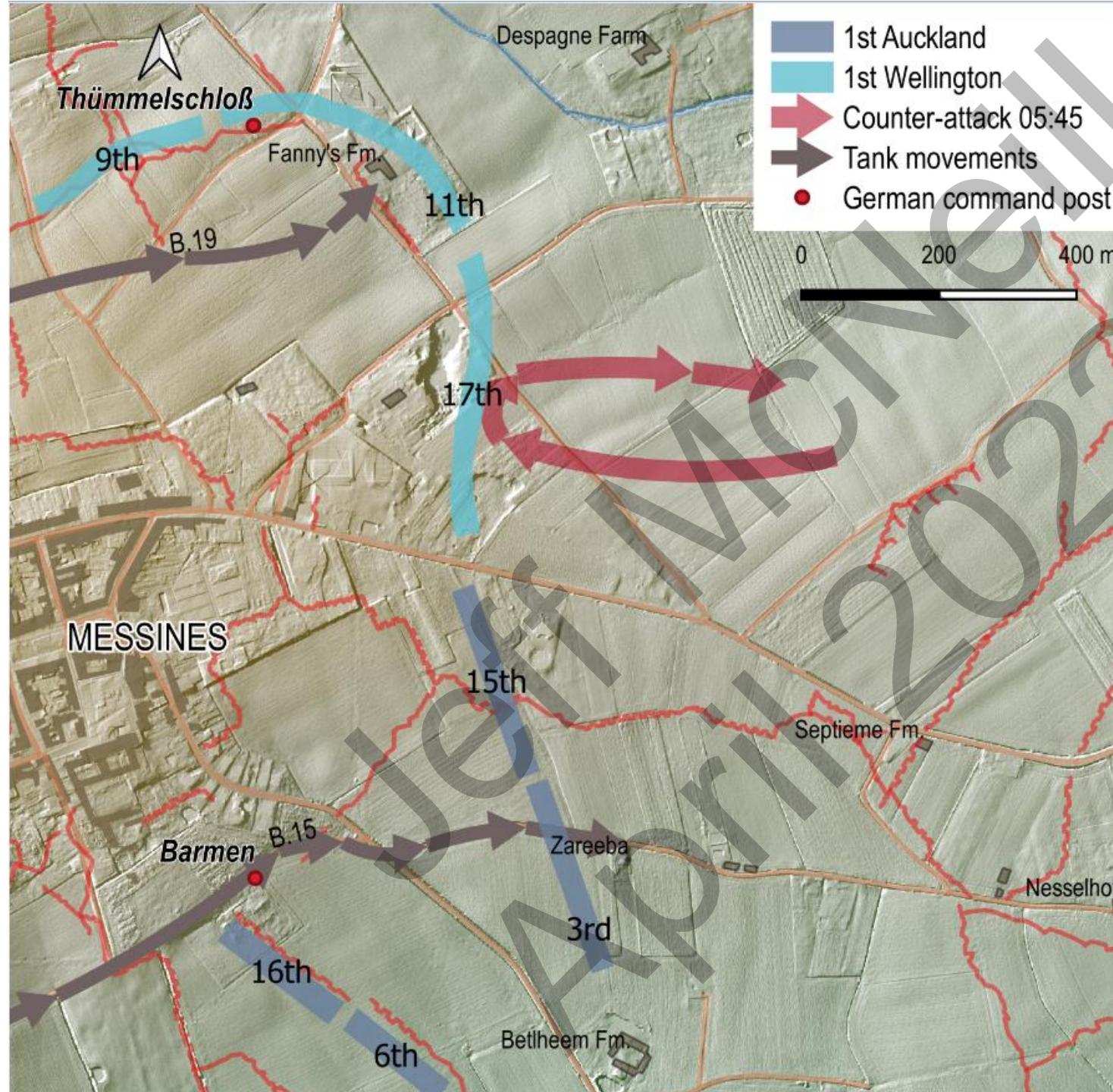
Yellow Line

4:06 – 5:00 am
(+1 hour 50 min.)





H67



1st Brigade

1st Wellington

1st Auckland

Black Line

5:12 – 5:20 am
(+ 2hrs 10 min.)



Ahead on the left there was a strong point and Hunnish machine guns were mowing down men like a swinging scythe mows tall grass. Fanwise, New Zealanders were lying dead, spread-eagled around the circle of traversing machine-gun barrels...As he looked three men stood erect at the end of the sag and ran forward.

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!

One at a time they were cut down, crumpled forward, somersaulted, stilled.

‘The bloody hell. I’ll fix those bastards.’

He started to run at the strong point.

– **John A. Lee**, *Civilian into Soldier*. 1937.

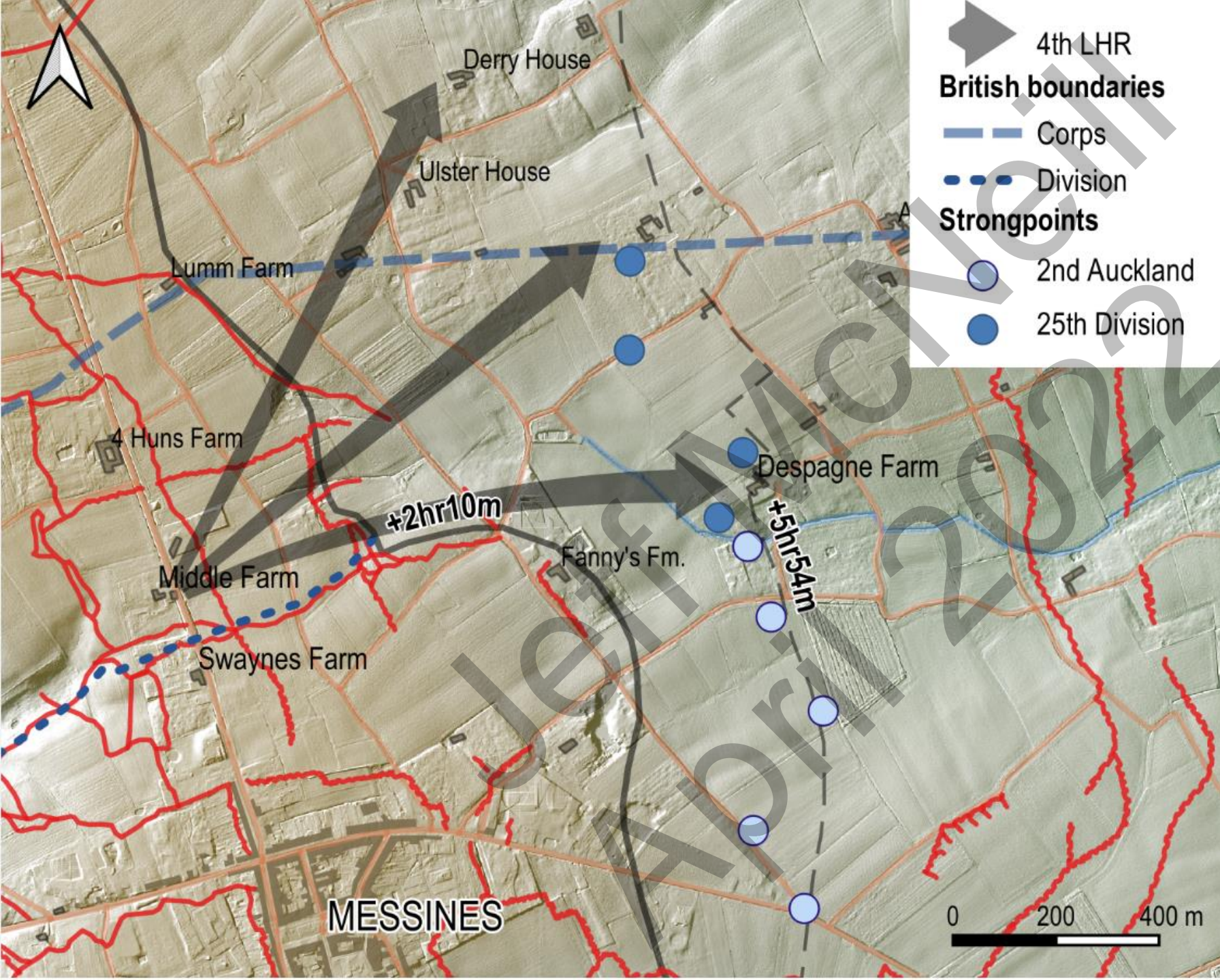




Thümmelschloß bIR 17 Battalion Headquarters

I didn't go to war to surrender the position I was entrusted to defend. Either I die here, or my troops and I shall be assisted by our support troops. For me there is no question of relying on the support troops to come to our assistance

— **Major Hans von Kohlmüller**, 17. bIR



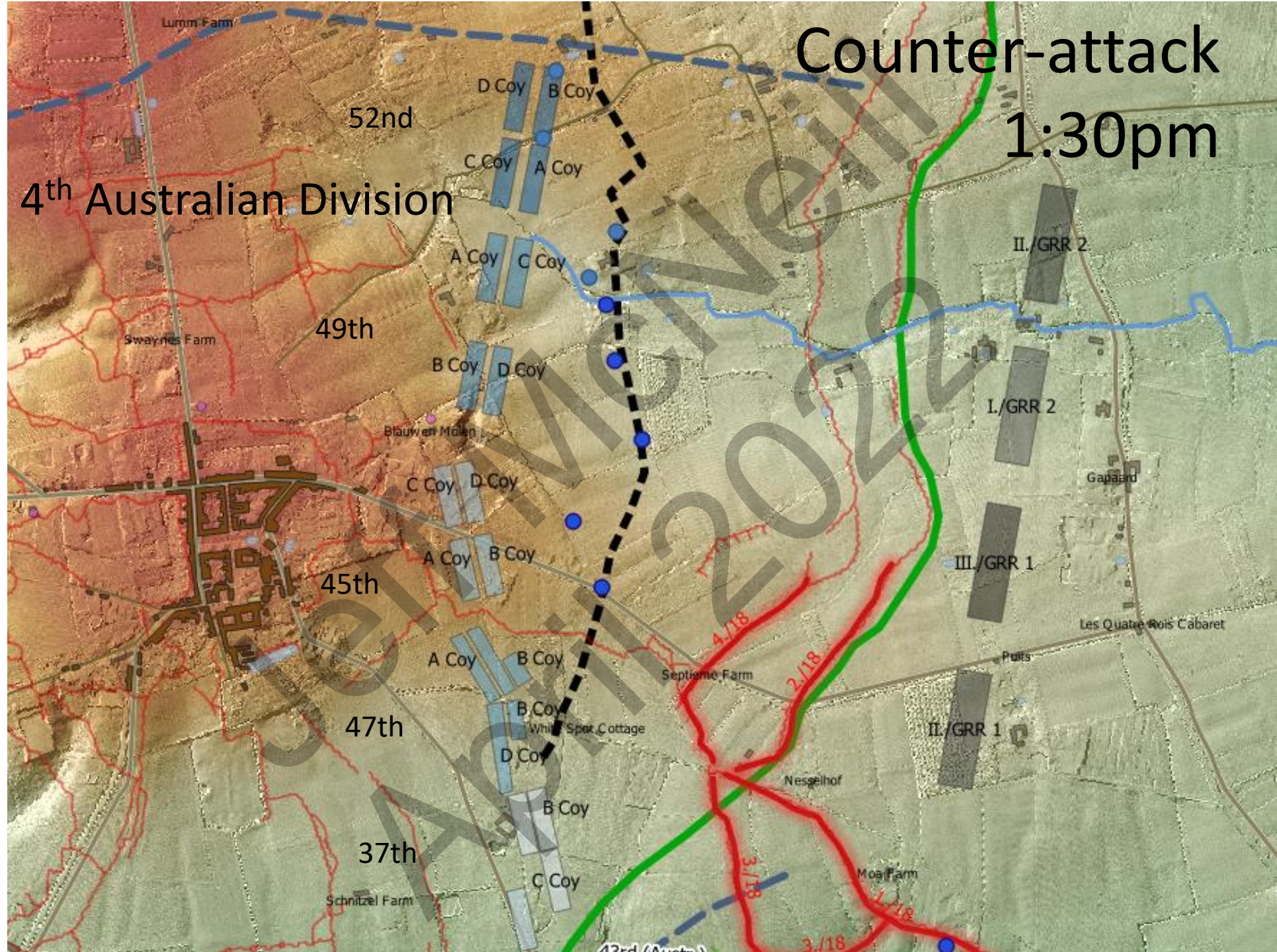
Australian 4th Light Horse Regiment

2nd Auckland

Black Dotted Line
8:55 – 9:04 am
(+6 hours)

Counter-attack 1:30pm

4th Australian Division

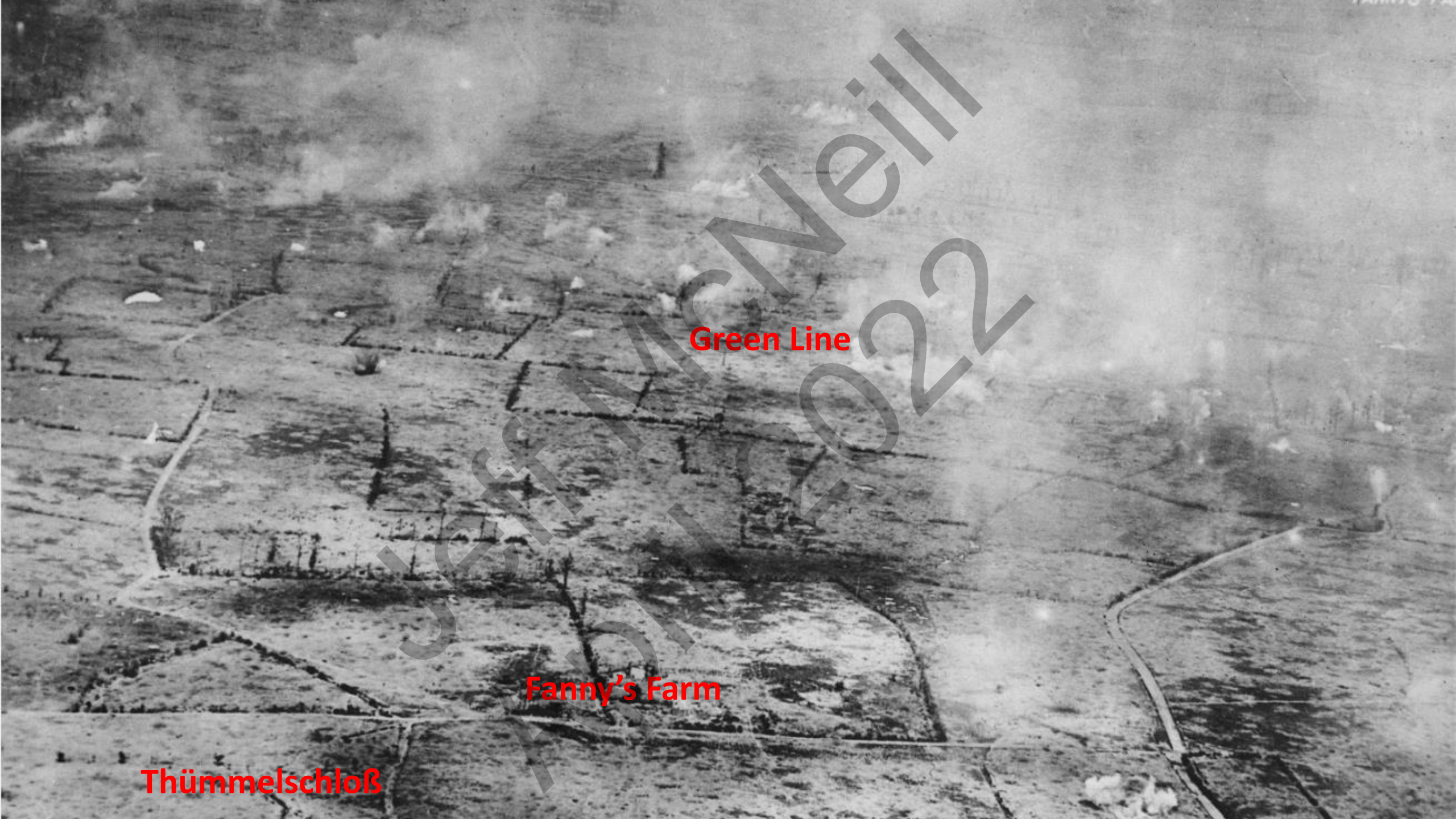


The whole II. *Battalion*...advanced line abreast, the men three steps apart. A grand sight, with shell and shrapnel on the surging attack-line...More and more [shell bursts] occurred and men fell out here and there more quickly than before...

We also came under sustained English machine-gun fire. Fortunately, it was still too high, so the 'blue beans' [bullets] sizzled over our heads. I remember that I raised an ammunition-box to protect my head, but I didn't think to protect my chest and body as well

– **Schütze Hans-Joachim Röhr**, MG
Company 2, GRR 1



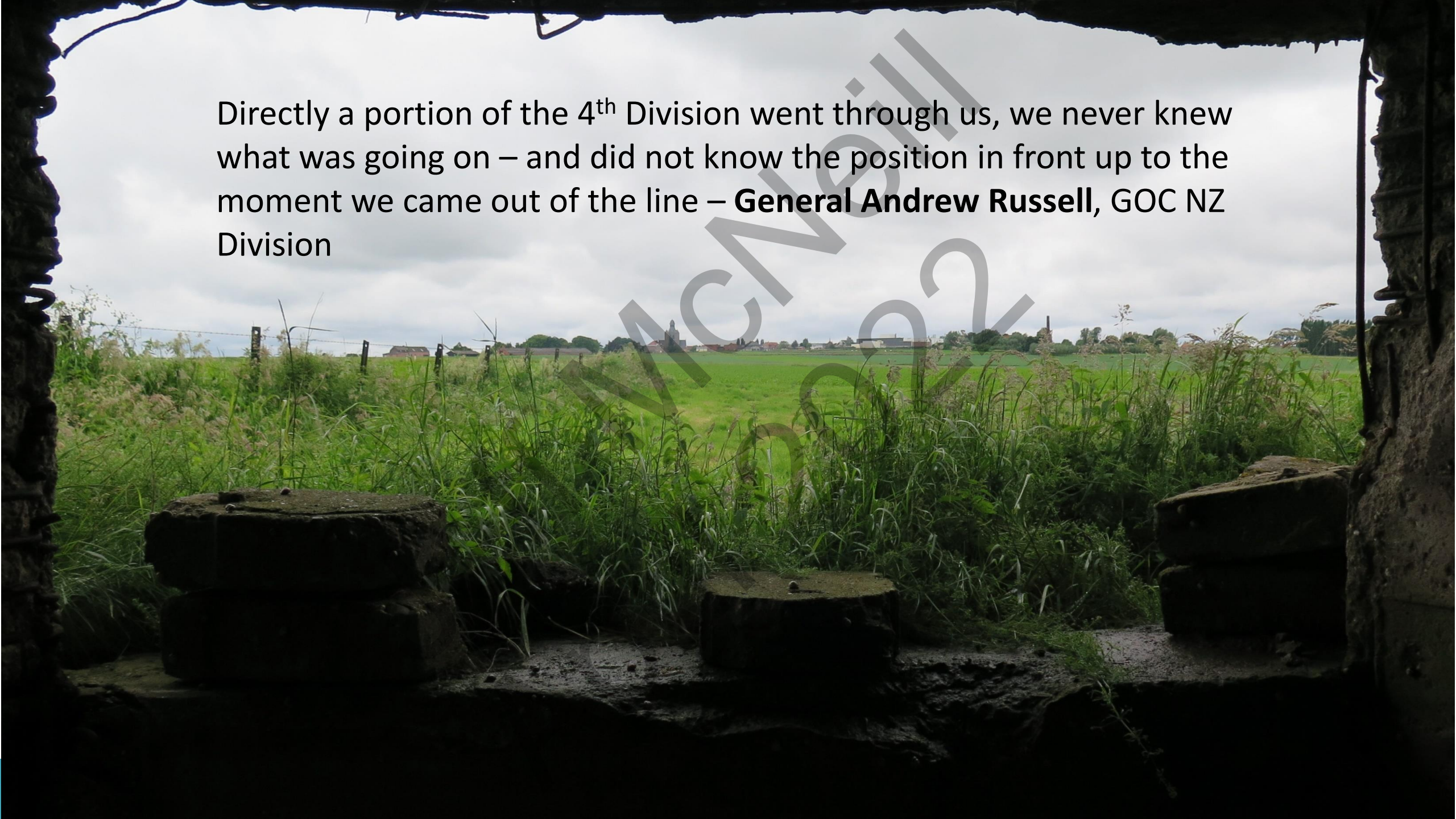


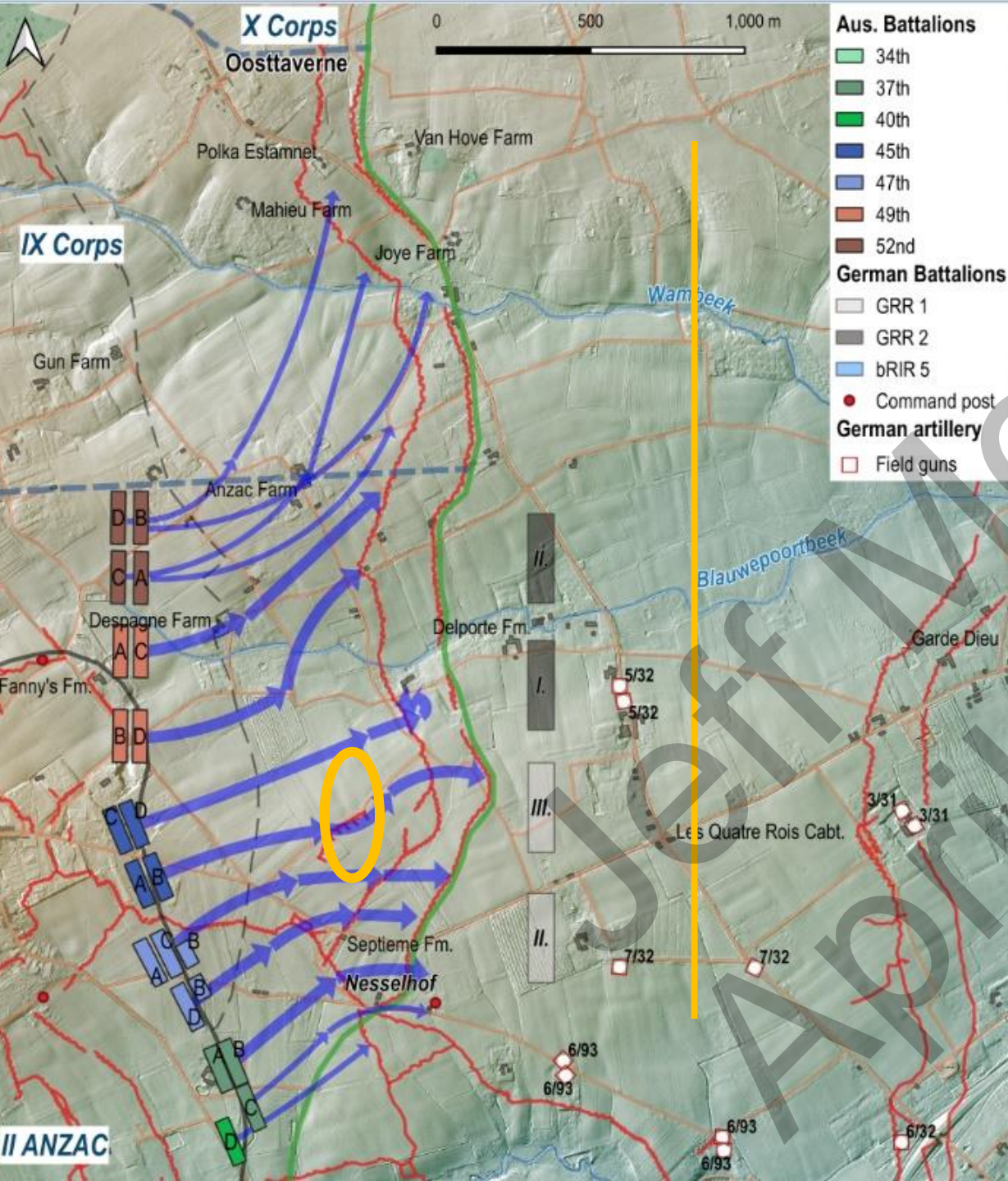
Green Line

Fanny's Farm

Thümmelschloß

Directly a portion of the 4th Division went through us, we never knew what was going on – and did not know the position in front up to the moment we came out of the line – **General Andrew Russell**, GOC NZ Division



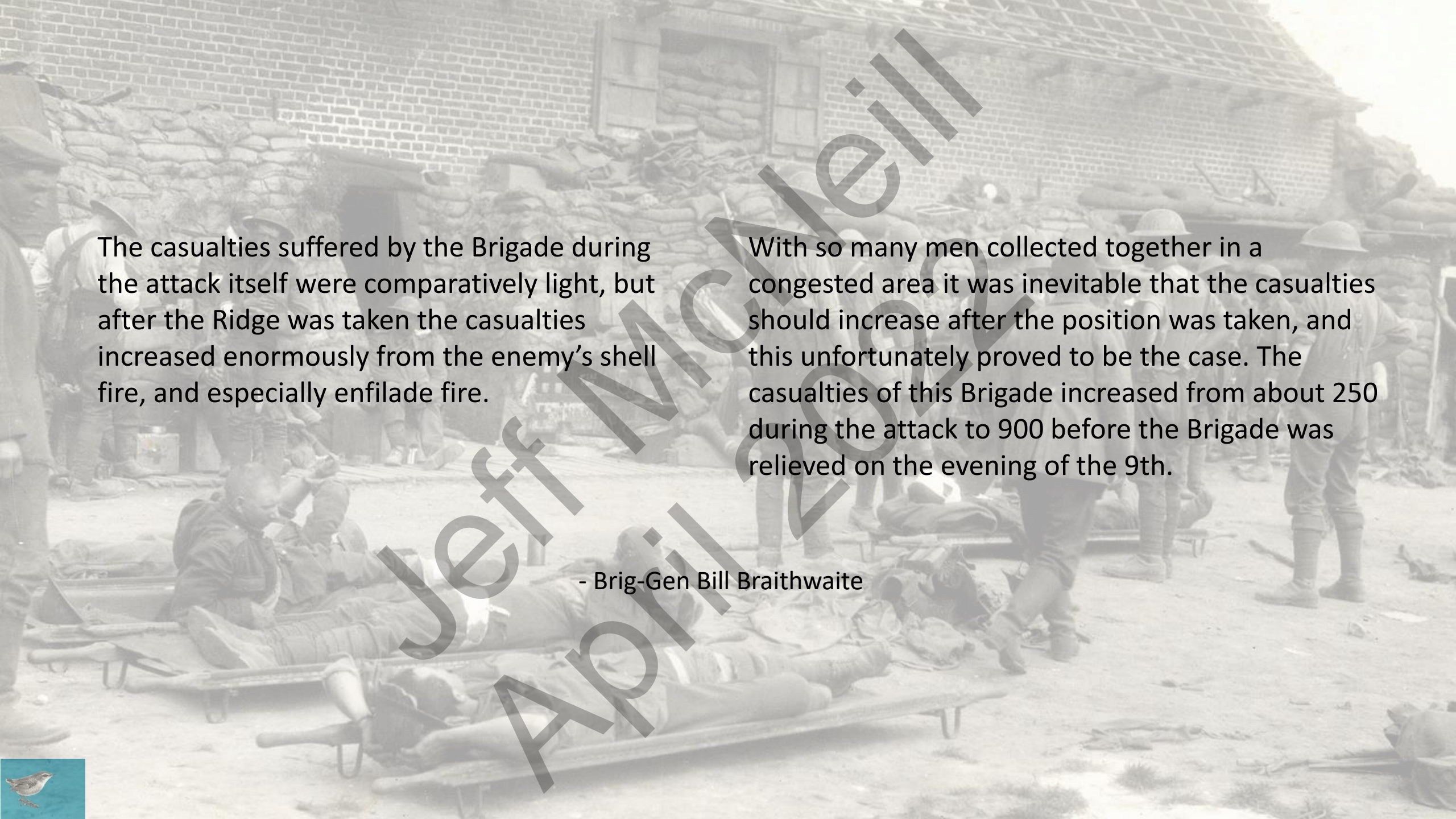


3:10pm
Afternoon attack:
4th Australian Division

6:30pm
Otago Mounted Rifles

Evening
Confusion and retreat





The casualties suffered by the Brigade during the attack itself were comparatively light, but after the Ridge was taken the casualties increased enormously from the enemy's shell fire, and especially enfilade fire.

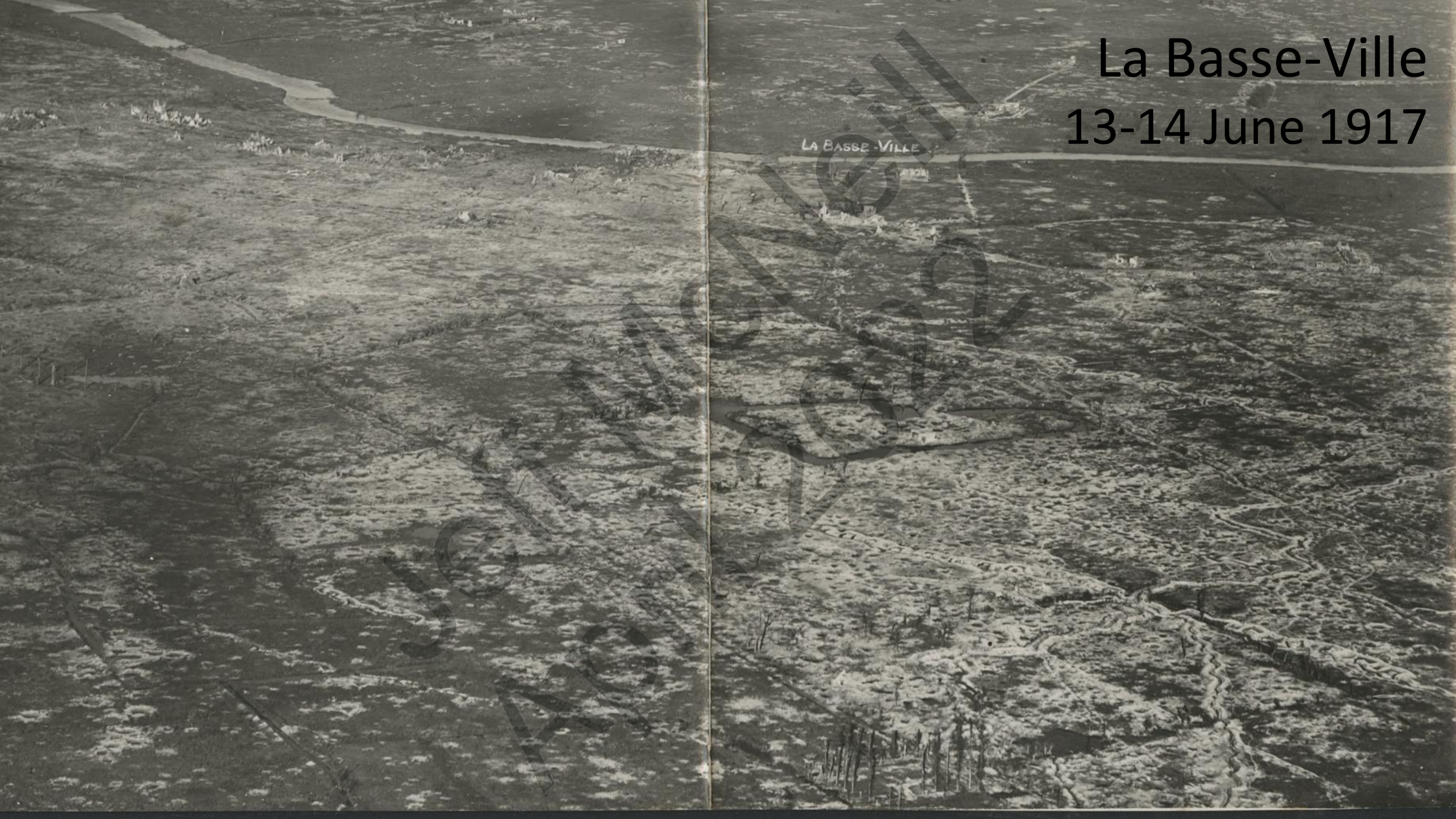
With so many men collected together in a congested area it was inevitable that the casualties should increase after the position was taken, and this unfortunately proved to be the case. The casualties of this Brigade increased from about 250 during the attack to 900 before the Brigade was relieved on the evening of the 9th.

- Brig-Gen Bill Braithwaite



La Basse-Ville

13-14 June 1917



ROLL OF HONOUR

CASUALTIES AMONG NEW ZEALANDERS

LAST NIGHT'S BIG LIST

A TOTAL OF 1201 NAMES

INCLUDING 1149 WOUNDED.

A further heavy casualty list was issued last night, containing 1201 names. The casualties reported were as under:—

| | Officers. | Men. |
|------------------------|-----------|------|
| Killed in action | — | 44 |
| Died of wounds | — | 8 |
| Wounded | 9 | 1140 |
| Total | 9 | 1192 |

The list is as follows, all being privates unless otherwise mentioned. The names of next-of-kin are given within parentheses, the relationship being denoted by m. for mother, f. for father, w. for wife, b. for brother, s. for sister, etc.:—

KILLED IN ACTION.

ARTILLERY

Cruickshank, W. R., 9/1815 (J. Cruick-

Chester, G. A., 22461 (Mrs. P. Bowden, Devonport)
Shelton, W. W., 12/3153 (Mrs. R. Howard, Auckland, s.)
Brogan, W. A., 4/1025 (E. P. Brogan, Hamilton East); 4th June
5th June.

Barnes, J., 12/3550 (Mrs. S. MacMahon, Auckland)
Christie, A., 12/3586 (A. Christie, London)
Wright, P., 24/2568 (Mrs. L. Wright, Devonport)
7th June.

Atkins, W. H., 12/2204, Cpl. (W. G. Atkins, London)
Barrett, R. J., 18747 (W. H. Barrett, Mataura, f.)
Beehan, K. St. J., 13404 (W. Beehan, Auckland, f.)
Catterall, H., 15107 (Mrs. M. Catterall, Mt. Albert)
Clos, P. W., 23976 (Mrs. A. Clos, London, m.)
M'Kechnie, J., 12/4431, Sergt. (Mrs. A. E. M'Kechnie, Rangiora)
Maughan, J. K., 21292, T.-Cpl. (Mrs. E. Maughan, Mt. Eden)
Ross, F. R., 8/2719, L.-Cpl. (Mrs. Ida F. Ross, Grey Lynn)
Self, O. W., 32086 (Alice Self, Norfolk)
Shore, A. M., 12/2840, Cpl. (R. A. Shore, Cheshire)
Williams, E. J., 13/752 (Mrs. I. Williams, Devonport)

WELLINGTON INFANTRY REGT.

Murrell, S. A., 1/557, 2nd Lieut. (J. M. Murrell, 65, Ellice-street, Wellington, f.); 8th June
Doughty, R. M., 23/971, 2nd Lieut. (W.

Ingles, M. A. B., 7/537 (Miss M. Ingles, St. Albans, s.)
Ivory, J. W., 15548 (W. Ivory, Oxford, f.)
Jacobsen, J., 21690 (Mrs. M. Jacobsen, Nelson, m.)
Japp, J. A., 25256 (Mrs. W. Japp, S. Dunedin)
Johnston, J. A., 26272 (J. M'K. Johnston, Rolleston, f.)
Joyce, P. G., 14994 (P. Joyce, Kaiapoi, f.)
Kay, A., 6/2379 (Mrs. A. Higgins, Caversham, m.)
Keith, G., 14998 (W. Keith, Papanui, f.)
Kennedy, A., 14906 (Mrs. M. Kennedy, Timaru, m.)
Kiddey, J. H. L., 6/4285 (Miss C. Kiddey, Chch., s.)
King, C. A., 13935 (Mrs. W. King, 3, Revans-street, Newtown, m.)
Kinzett, P., 15558 (J. W. Kinzett, Nelson, f.)
Lewis, J. J., 6/3773 (E. B. A. Lewis, Westport, m.)
M'Auliffe, D., 6/3793, L.-Sergt. (Mrs. E. M'Auliffe, Chch., w.)
M'Carthy, H., 6/4634 (Mrs. M. M'Carthy, Ireland, m.)
M'Dougall, J., 6/2338, Sergt. (Mrs. M. M'Carthy, Glasgow, m.)
M'Donnell, H. R., 27029 (W. M'Donnell, Linwood, f.)
M'Gillivray, A., 24825 (Mrs. C. M'Gillivray, Melbourne, m.)
M'Kenna, C. J., 27326 (J. M'Kenna, Seadown, f.)
M'Lauchlan, L. D., 6/3806 (L.-Cpl. (Mrs. M. M'Lauchlan, Owaka, m.)
M'Laughlin, G., 13077 (Mrs. M. M'Laughlin, Cheviot, m.)
M'Nabb, W. C., 11708, Cpl. (Mrs. F.

Harris, A. J., 15541 (G. Harris, Lower Riccarton, f.)
Hinton, A., 13/1044, L.-Sergt. (H. Hinton, Frankton Junction, f.)
Hollings, H., 21683 (Elizabeth Hollings, England, m.)
Hume, J., 6/2831, Sergt. (Mrs. L. Hume, Takaka, m.)
Johnston, H. M., 14995 (Mrs. I. Johnston, Aberdeenshire, m.)
Johnston, C., 27300 (R. Johnston, Christchurch, f.)
Johnstone, F., 7/1367 (A. Johnstone, Sydenham, f.)
Jordan, G., 31511 (A. Jordan, Nelson, f.)
Jury, W., 21696 (W. Jury, Kaiapoi, f.)
Kane, L. P., 28890, Cpl. (P. Kane, Timaru, f.)
Kilgour, R. P., 27303 (Mrs. M. Kilgour, Timaru, m.)
King, J., 27304 (Mrs. A. King, Temuka)
Kruse, S., 6/3769 (Mrs. H. Kruse, Papanui)
Lobley, W., 32196 (Mrs. W. Lobley, Gisborne, w.)
Loffhagen, C. W. S., 29334 (J. Loffhagen, Southbrook, f.)
M'Colgan, W., 15012 (Mrs. C. M'Colgan, Scotland)
M'Cracken, S., 9/1195 (S. M'Cracken, Caversham, f.)
M'Dowell, D., 16224 (Miss A. J. Jones, Karamea, friend)
M'Hugh, F. H. J., 21706 (J. M'Hugh, Blenheim, f.)
M'Iraith, F. H., 21707 (Mrs. K. S. M'Iraith, 49, Coromandel-st., Wgtn.)
M'Kinley, R., 15453, Cpl. (Mrs. D. M'Kinley, Cashmere Hills, w.)
Maitland, W. J., 6/2197 (J. Maitland, Clinton, f.)
Thomson, H. J., 15043 (Mrs. E. Thom-





Jeffrey McNeill

TAKING the RIDGE

Anzacs & Germans at the
Battle of Messines 1917

