

Appendix B

Artillery at the Aubers Ridge (9th May 1915) and Fromelles (19th July 1916) attacks.

On the 9th May 1915 two brigades had attacked the Aubers Ridge, each on a frontage of 700 yards, supported by 190 guns, which equates to 95 guns per attacking brigade, or one gun for every 7.3 yard of front¹. In July 1916 the Fromelles attack was made by six brigades, with an average frontage of 750 yards (2200 yards for the 5th (Australian) Division and 2300 yards² for the 61st Division).

The 61st Division was supported by 374³ guns, just over 125 guns per brigade or one gun for every 6.1 yards of front⁴, a marginal improvement over 1915. Moreover, the attacks of 1915 had been made by experienced troops. While the guns were worn and ammunition of poor quality, the gunners were experienced. In 1916 the infantry were inexperienced⁵ and, while the guns were generally better, the field gunners were totally untried.

219,350 rounds of artillery ammunition were provided for the Fromelles attack⁶. Availability of ammunition, however, is not the same as ammunition being delivered on a target. During the period from the 15th-19th of July only 51,628 rounds were fired in support of 61st Division. Assuming an equal supply of ammunition was allocated to both the 61st and 5th (Australian) Divisions then less than 50% of the ammunition available to the gunners was actually fired during the battle.

¹ Measured on the British side.

² These distances have been arrived at using Google Earth satellite imagery and measuring tools, combined with careful reference to the operational trench maps for the attack. These maps can be found in NA WO 95/881.

³ Haking gave the figure of 350.

⁴ The eventual gun requirements for delivering a creeping barrage would be 64 guns for every 300 yard width of barrage, a gun for every 4.7 yards of front. See: Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power. The British Army weapons and theory of War, 1904-1945*, Pen & Sword military classics, 2004, p.83.

⁵ The Australians 5th Division had a leavening of Gallipoli men, but, for many of the Australian troops, Fromelles was their first attack.

⁶ OH *Operations in France and Belgium, 1916 Vol 2*, p.123.

On the 19th of July 1916 the artillery of the 61st Division fired a total of 39,837 rounds of all natures. Additionally, during the 18th and 19th, 2,733 light and 109 heavy trench mortar rounds were fired⁷.

Compare this with 31,356⁸ rounds fired by the divisional artillery alone⁹ in 1915 and it is clear that the 17.32 shells per yard of the three brigade attack front of the 61st Division in 1916 compares unfavourably with the 22.4 shells per yard fired on the 9th of May 1915. Even if the Trench Mortar battery fire of the 18th and 19th of July is added to the 1916 figures the total of 18.5 rounds per yard is still less than that of 1915.

Haking may have had sufficient ammunition. He might possibly have had enough guns to deliver that ammunition given ideal weather and trained gunners. Given the poor weather and the poorly trained gunners it is difficult to see his insistence that the attack proceed as other than a command failure. As it was the 61st Division attack was delivered against a strengthened enemy position with less weight of shell per yard of front than was delivered in the 1915 battle, with predictable results. Haking had been involved in the 1915 battle as a divisional commander under Haig and should have been aware both of Haig's thoughts on the need to suppress machine guns before the infantry advance, and of the consequent shortcomings of his plans for the Fromelles battle of 1916¹⁰.

⁷ War Diary, HQ RA 61st Division July 1916. NA WO 95/ 3037.

⁸ OH of *Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos*, pp.32/33.

⁹ Additional fire was provided by No. 2 HAR heavy guns and howitzers. Figures for ammunition used are not available, but it is unlikely to be more than 1000 additional, large calibre, shells.

¹⁰ See Haig's diary entry of Tuesday 11th May 1915:

The defences on our front are so carefully (and so strongly made), and mutual support with machine guns so complete, that (in order to demolish them) a long methodical bombardment will be necessary (by heavy artillery [guns and howitzers] before infantry are sent forward to attack).

Appendix C

61st Division casualty figures – Fromelles 1916

The 61st Division had been in the line since mid July 1916 and, following the XI corps policy of sustained offensive action, had been involved in frequent fighting patrols against the Germans, in order to “dominate no man’s land”. This had led to a steady flow of casualties which had reduced the strength of individual battalions considerably by mid July. The fighting strength of most battalions was reduced to between 500 and 600 men.

Mackenzie’s later report shows the casualties of those battalions engaged in the Fromelles assault on the 19th of July as¹¹:

	<i>Approximate fighting strength on the 18th</i>		<i>Casualties</i>					
			<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other Ranks</i>		
	<i>Officers</i>	<i>O.R.</i>	<i>Killed & Missing</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Total.</i>	<i>Killed & Missing</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Total.</i>
<i>2/6th Warwicks</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>238</i>
<i>2/7th Warwicks</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>182</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>315</i>
<i>2/4th Glosters</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>550</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>152</i>
<i>2/6th Glosters</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>600</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>2/4 R. Berks</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>2/1st Bucks</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>550</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>228</i>
	<i>140¹²</i>	<i>3270</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>751</i>	<i>1251</i>

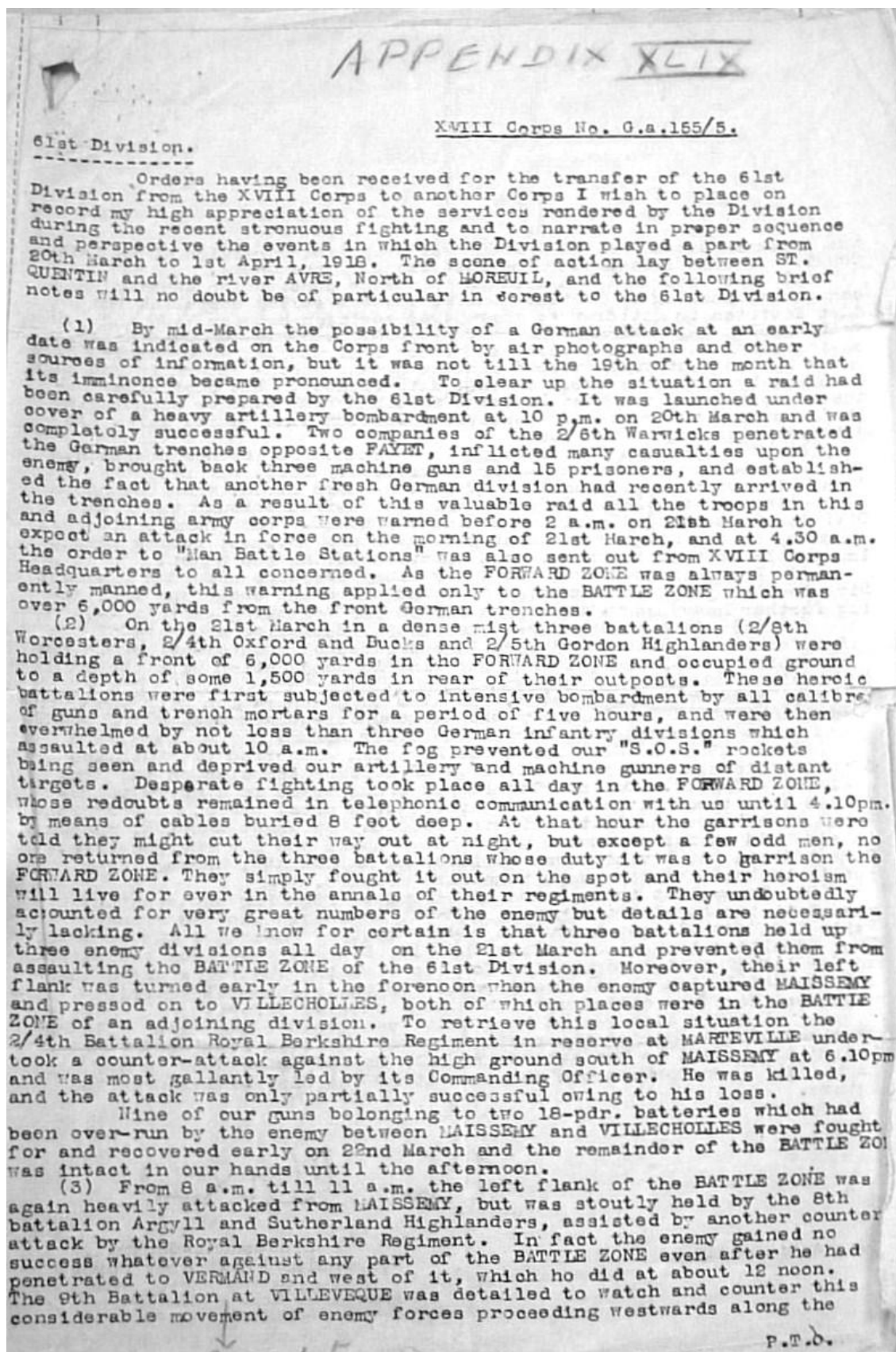
This equates to an average of 38% casualties among the attacking battalions.

¹¹ NA WO 95/3033.

¹² Arithmetical error, this should be 120.

Appendix D

Sir Ivor Maxse's valedictory farewell to the 61st Division - 10th April 1918



the northern slopes of the OHIGNON Valley in the direction of CAULAIN-COURT. It thus safeguarded the left flank of the Corps.

(4) But late in the afternoon this deep penetration and the consequent massing of hostile guns across the valley compelled the 61st Division to withdraw to a prepared position between VAUX and VILLEVEQUE. This was done in good order by 5.40 p.m. on 22nd March, on instructions from the Corps and these instructions were partly influenced by the fact that ESSIGNY and the ground south-west of it had been captured by the enemy early on this date (22nd.). The choice lay between sacrificing the 61st Division in its BATTLE ZONE or withdrawing it to conform to the deeply penetrated British line on its left. It withdrew fighting to the last.

(5) The Division was subsequently attacked in its new position, was subjected to severe and accurate artillery fire, but held its front line with success until 2.30 a.m. on 23rd March, when the 2/5th Gloucesters of the 184th Infantry Brigade retired through the 20th Division to take up a position behind the SOMME. The enemy's fire was so heavy in the neighbourhood of BEAUVOIS that movement became almost impossible at that important road junction during the night.

(6) The subsequent retreat under enemy pressure afforded the 61st Division two good opportunities of rounding on the enemy and inflicting further heavy casualties upon him in the following actions :-

(a) On the 24th March the Pioneer Battalion and part of the Reinforcement Battalion joined in a successful counter-attack in the direction of HAM and restored our line in conjunction with the 20th Division.

(b) On the same date, and also in co-operation with the 20th Division, the 183rd Infantry Brigade counter-attacked at BETHENCOURT and drove the enemy back across the river SOMME.

(7) On 25th and 26th March the Division supported the 20th and 30th Divisions on the line HANGEST - LE QUESNOY and also on the line MEZIERES - DEUIN. On the 27th it was transferred in a hurry to retrieve a critical situation in another Corps area. Here, on the 28th March, the 183rd and 184th Infantry Brigades attacked LANOTTE, captured it and held it for six hours under heavy shell and machine gun fire. On 1st April the Division was relieved at MARCELCAVE, where it was put in to hold the line as a temporary measure.

(8) Throughout this period of sleepless fighting and constant movement, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Battalion were all put through a severe test of endurance and courage. They acquitted themselves well. The 61st Division has thus established for itself a high reputation for its fighting qualities and gallant spirit, and I wish to thank all ranks for their cheerful alacrity whenever they were called upon to make a special effort.

I would also remind them that even greater exertions will be required of them during the coming months, and I am convinced that they will respond to the call as readily as they have done in the past. May good fortune and success attend the 61st Division in the future.

Ivor Maxse

Lieutenant-General,
Commanding XVIII Army Corps.

10th April, 1918.