A Few Daring Men: Stealth Raiders of the
Australian Infantry, 1918

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University.

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August 2016

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Lucas Jordan
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I would also like to sincerely thank Dr Peter Stanley, and Dr Paul Pickering. As associate supervisors they have always been generous with their time and have provided me with helpful criticism and inspiration. Sometimes I was sensitive to their criticisms. Their input and their teaching always improved my work.

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offered advice on Canadian records.

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My final thanks is to the men of 1918 who recorded their thoughts and feelings and described
the actions which I hope I bring to life in this thesis. To them and to the lineage of historians
who recognised the distinctive qualities of stealth raiders, chiefly, Bean, Bazley and Gammage I
owe my utmost thanks and appreciation.
ABSTRACT

In 1918 a few daring low ranking Australian infantrymen, alone among all the armies on the Western Front, initiated stealth raids without orders. This thesis examines this distinct but neglected group. Stealth raiders killed Germans, captured prisoners and advanced the line. They were held in high regard by other men of the lower ranks and feared by the Germans facing them. Since the official historian CEW Bean laid down his pen in 1942, historians have not considered the distinctive character and motivation of these men. The premise of this thesis is that such men should not be forgotten. Bean called stealth raids, “peaceful penetration” but this thesis argues that the name is inappropriate because “peaceful penetration” was a term that higher command used, sometimes for actions other than stealth raids. The term did not emanate from the original stealth raiders.

The thesis is the most comprehensive account yet written on stealth raids. Using first-hand accounts in official archives and private records in Australia and overseas, the thesis asks who were stealth raiders? Why did they do it? How significant were their actions? The thesis answers these questions using a historical narrative and analysis that describes all the stealth raids uncovered during the research.

The account considers the stealth raiders’ war experience and training, the unprecedented topographic and environmental conditions at the front, and the quality and morale of the German Army in 1918. It also goes beyond these to consider the influence of Australian civil society and in particular the “bush ethos”. The thesis is original not only for its primary narrative, but also because it undermines the contemporary fashion of dismissing the importance of bush skills and the bush ethos in the AIF. It demonstrates that bush skills gave some stealth raiders an edge and that the bush ethos, with its high premium on resourcefulness and initiative contributed to making stealth raids a distinctively Australian phenomenon.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AANS</td>
<td>Australian Army Nursing Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFT</td>
<td>Australian Federal Territory (now ACT)</td>
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<td>AIF</td>
<td>Australian Imperial Force</td>
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<td>App</td>
<td>Appendix</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAMC</td>
<td>Australian Army Medical Corps</td>
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<td>AWM</td>
<td>Australian War Memorial</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEF</td>
<td>British Expeditionary Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bde</td>
<td>Brigade</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHQ</td>
<td>Battalion Headquarters (sometimes Brigade Headquarters)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bn</td>
<td>Battalion</td>
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<td>Brig Gen</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
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<td>Captain</td>
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<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Companion of the Order of the Bath</td>
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<tr>
<td>CdG (Bel)</td>
<td>Belgian Croix de Guerre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CdG (Fr)</td>
<td>French Croix de Guerre</td>
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<td>Ch</td>
<td>Chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHQ</td>
<td>Company Headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
<td>Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Commanding Officer (the senior officer of a military unit)</td>
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<td>Colonel</td>
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<td>Company</td>
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<td>Company Sergeant Major</td>
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<td>Diary</td>
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<td>Division Ammunition Column</td>
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<td>Distinguished Conduct Medal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disch</td>
<td>Discharged (date at end of service)</td>
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<td>Div</td>
<td>Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Div Sig Co</td>
<td>Division Signal Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOI</td>
<td>Died of Illness or injury</td>
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<td>DOW</td>
<td>Died of Wounds</td>
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<td>DSO</td>
<td>Distinguished Service Order</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Enlisted (date at beginning of wartime service)</td>
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<td>FCT</td>
<td>Federal Capital Territory</td>
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<td>FGCM</td>
<td>Field General Court Martial</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>General Officer Commanding</td>
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<td>GSO</td>
<td>General Staff Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>Howitzer (artillery piece)</td>
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<td>HQ</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
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<td>Inf</td>
<td>Infantry</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>Infantry Regiment (German)</td>
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<td>KIA</td>
<td>Killed in Action</td>
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<td>KOSB</td>
<td>Kings Own Scottish Borderers</td>
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<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lewis Gun</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHR</td>
<td>Light Horse Regiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>LH</td>
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<td>LTMB</td>
<td>Light Trench Mortar Battery</td>
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<td>Memoir</td>
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<td>Military Cross</td>
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<td>MD 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Class</td>
<td>Montenegrin Order of Danilo, Third Class</td>
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<td>Machine Gun</td>
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<td>NAA</td>
<td>National Archives of Australia</td>
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<td>NAWO</td>
<td>National Archives War Office (United Kingdom)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-Commissioned Officer</td>
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<td>NML</td>
<td>No Man’s Land</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>OC</td>
<td>Officer Commanding (usually refers to a company commander)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>Oral History</td>
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<td>OR</td>
<td>Other Rank</td>
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<td>Quarter Master</td>
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<td>Reserve Infantry Regiment (German)</td>
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<td>RRC 3rd Class</td>
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<td>RTA</td>
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<td>SA</td>
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<td>Sgt</td>
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<td>Signal/Signaller</td>
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<td>SIW</td>
<td>Self-Inflicted Wound</td>
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<td>State Library of Victoria Manuscript</td>
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<td>SO</td>
<td>Sound Recording (oral history)</td>
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<td>Tas</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
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<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Trench Mortar</td>
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<td>T/Sgt</td>
<td>Temporary Sergeant</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States Army</td>
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<td>USDSM</td>
<td>United States Distinguished Service Medal</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Victoria Cross</td>
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<td>VD</td>
<td>Venereal Disease</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>VD</td>
<td>Volunteer Officers Decoration (award)</td>
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<td>Vic</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
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<td>Vol</td>
<td>Volume</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIA</td>
<td>Wounded in Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO2</td>
<td>Warrant Officer, Second Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>yd/yds</td>
<td>yard/yards</td>
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Map1 France and Belgium (Courtesy of Bill Gammage)
Map 2 Australian Corps sector near Amiens, 1918.

Map 3 1st Australian Division sector near Hazebrouck, 13 April to 1 August, 1918.
INTRODUCTION

‘A stealth raid is made up on the spot by a group of determined men’

*A Few Daring Men: Stealth Raiders of the Australian Infantry, 1918* differs from all previous accounts of Australian soldiers in 1918. It is not a story of the Australian soldier in general, nor of higher commanders and their staffs. Great battles appear only in passing, and the timeframe is limited to a few months in the war’s final year. The thesis is what its title states: it is the story of a few daring men of the lowest ranks of the Australian infantry. It is about the tactic they initiated and used with deadly effect, and how it evolved and spread, during the longest continuous period of front line service that the Australian infantry undertook on the Western Front. Their stories are so vivid and detailed that I have been able to rely almost entirely on first-hand accounts and a study of the ground they fought on. Telling their story is long overdue, and it corrects many now popular judgements about the quality of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and the influence of the society and the land from which they enlisted.

The enduring image of the First World War is of trenches, barbed wire, machine guns, shell fire and mud intimately connected with the battles of the Somme in 1916 and Flanders in 1917. But the German offensives of March and April 1918 swept through the old Somme and Flanders battlefields into farmland untouched by the war.¹ By 13 April all five AIF divisions were committed against the offensives. Where the German advances stopped, Australian and German infantry dug outposts in the fields. The battlefields were like no other the AIF had experienced. The new outpost system was in a landscape of ‘marvellous beauty’, among fields of freshly sown crops and pleasantly undulating terrain, and in French Flanders, hedges and farm buildings.² So open was the front that neither side knew where enemy posts were. There were no continuous lines of trenches. This was not the war that men had become used to. The strategic situation also was unprecedented. In 1916 and 1917 the Australian infantry were used as shock troops in offensive battles, but from April to July 1918 the British Army, including the AIF, expected the Germans would attack.³

³ The Australian Corps fought as part of the British Fourth Army defending Amiens. The corps front reached from half a mile south of Villers-Bretonneux to 10 miles north of the Somme River. From May four Australian divisions fought together under an Australian command, with three divisions in the line,
In this setting, in April 1918, without orders, a few Australian soldiers of the lowest ranks began to kill, capture and sometimes advance the line, usually by creeping up on German posts and surprising them. This was not what any infantry had done in 1916-1917, and it was unique in the British Army then and for months ahead. Precept had it that higher command ordered set-piece battles, while brigade or divisional headquarters ordered trench raids, and battalion commanders organised fighting patrols. Yet from April 1918 to the end of the war, a few daring Australians attacked enemy posts without orders, often in daylight and with only the weapons in their posts, and from July 1918 onwards schooled others in the British Army in their methods.

In this thesis this activity is called stealth raiding, but it is commonly known as “peaceful penetration.” The phrase “peaceful penetration” had pre-war associations: Charles Bean adopted it in his official history, and it has been used ever since. This thesis uses stealth raids because the activity was often not “penetrating” and never “peaceful,” and because “peaceful penetration” was a term that higher command used, it did not emanate from the original stealth raiders. From April 1918 the men used a variety of expressions to describe what they were doing. Some quoted in this narrative are ‘kidnapping’, ‘stonkering’, ‘stoush’, ‘one-man raid’, ‘sport’, ‘the cuckoo game’, ‘minor enterprise’, ‘daylight raid’, ‘epic’, and ‘stealth raid’. This thesis uses stealth raid because some men used it, and it is the only term which fits this activity and nothing else.

An Australian infantryman wrote a definition of a stealth raid:

one north of the Somme River, two south, and the fourth in support. The 1st Australian Division was detached to the British Second Army defending Hazebrouck in French Flanders.

4 For command and control in the British Army see G Sheffield & D Todman (eds), Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army’s Experience 1914-18, Staplehurst, 2007.


6 ‘Kidnapping’ and ‘stonkering’ ch 1; ‘stoush’ and ‘one-man raid’ ch 2; ‘sport’ ch 4; ‘cuckoo game’ and ‘minor enterprise’ ch 5; ‘daylight raid’ ch 6; ‘epic’ ch 7 and ‘stealth raid’ Introduction.
A stealth raid is made up on the spot by a group of determined men... Patolls might report a post in front and you decide with the arms you have in the front line to take it.\textsuperscript{7}

On a hot morning on 18 May 1918, Lieutenant Colonel George Murphy,\textsuperscript{8} commanding the 18\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, visited his outposts. His battalion had just received orders to go over the top that night to capture Ville-Sur-Ancre. While inspecting the front, Murphy was furious to find some of his men asleep. A scout sergeant told him, ‘‘The Hun will be asleep too’’.\textsuperscript{9} Nearby sentries nodded in agreement. They added that the German garrison in an advanced machine gun post in crop 70 yards away appeared to be asleep, because there had been no signs of activity in over two hours. Sensing a ‘golden opportunity’, one of Murphy’s officers, Lieutenant Alex Irvine,\textsuperscript{10} proposed to capture the post immediately, by creeping up on it through dead ground and surprising the garrison, and using the bayonet rather than bombs to avoid arousing the German front.\textsuperscript{11} Murphy agreed and decided not to inform brigade headquarters for fear of stalling the plan. The stealth raiders captured 22 men and a machine gun. The stealth raid took ten minutes to plan and seven minutes to execute.\textsuperscript{12} Irvine and seventeen volunteers were lauded for saving the battalion casualties when they attacked Ville-Sur-Ancre that night.\textsuperscript{13} This example will be explored in detail in chapter three.

One thing that made stealth raids like this so attractive to front line soldiers was that they defeated the enemy at no great cost. After three years of heavy casualties and frequent failures when operations were left in the hands of staff officers and higher commanders, the survivors of 1918 saw stealth raiding as a virtue. Nevertheless, throughout 1918 most Australian soldiers were not stealth raiders. This made stealth raiders all the more remarkable. Lance Corporal David Wilson, 24\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, heard of a stealth raider who ‘got into trouble for his silly action... He acted without orders & this sort of thing is not allowed’.\textsuperscript{14} From 26 March to 5 October 1918 the Australian infantry were in action so often that there was little time or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} 6810 L/Sgt J Rafferty, 11 Bn, Iron turner, of Victoria Park, WA. E 7/8/16, aged 26, RTA 23/7/19. D 6/9/18, WA Army Museum, File no. UH11/2.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Lt Col GF Murphy CMG, DSO and Bar, MID, 18 Bn, School teacher, of Bathurst, NSW. E 5/5/15, aged 31, RTA 10/4/19.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 105.
\item \textsuperscript{10} (2511) Lt A Irvine MC and Bar, 18 Bn, Station overseer, of Wanaaring, NSW. E 21/7/15, aged 21, RTA 24/4/19.
\item \textsuperscript{11} 18 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 25X18, AWM4/23/35/34.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Bean D, Morlancourt May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, 93-104.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Irvine, Citation Bar to MC, AWM28/1/109/0018.
\item \textsuperscript{14} 4796 L/Cpl DTP Wilson, 24 Bn, Fireman, of Geelong, Vic. E 9/2/16, aged 26, RTA 9/12/18. D 10/6/18, AWMPR86/341.
\end{itemize}
incentive for “buying into a fight”.\textsuperscript{15} As one Australian infantryman put it, ‘The people in charge... just drove as hard as they could’.\textsuperscript{16} Front line soldiers repeatedly “hopped the bags” in active operations: battles, patrols and raids, hereafter described as formal, to indicate that they were ordered; and also endured routine and exhausting labour. A platoon commander described the workload in the outpost system in July 1918:

> working hours... are only from 10.30[pm] to 3.15[am]... 2 men put on a listening post... changed every hour, complete digging the trench for the platoon post; send out a patrol of 4; send 2 fatigue parties up to C.H.Q. [Company Headquarters] for food; and send 3 parties up for wiring and working materials, wire the platoon front, start digging sleeping possies and keep sentries in the trench all the while, with men to relieve them.\textsuperscript{17}

Platoons that were at minimum strength, at most 28 men and often as few as a dozen, in the posts closest to the enemy had to do this work.\textsuperscript{18} According to Lance Corporal Harrie Cave,\textsuperscript{19} 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion:

> While you are right up in front of “Fritz” it seems, when you look back towards our rear, that an un-bridgeable... gully separates you from it... Movement of any kind on terra firma is not safe within a certain distance of “No Man’s Land”... we who man the trenches for the four or more days @ a stretch have to emulate the despised old “Bunny” – come out of our “dugouts” @ dusk & sneak in again by dawn...We down... in the bottom of the narrow trench, “camouflage” ourselves with blankets... & try to enjoy the unnatural & well-earned rest, called sleep – daylight sleep. Watch has to be kept on No Man’s Land just the same because there’s no saying what’s on the “cards”.\textsuperscript{20}

When not in the front line the infantry was used as a labour force building further defences in anticipation of a German attack. Throughout the period covered in this narrative, April to

\textsuperscript{15} In CEW Bean, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: The Australian Imperial Force in France During the Allied Offensive, hereafter Official History, 1918, Vol VI, Canberra, 1942, p. 429.
\textsuperscript{16} 2716 Cpl L Jones, 3 Bn, Clerk, of Lakemba, NSW. E 21/5/15, aged 22, RTA 10/12/18. P July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.
\textsuperscript{17} (753) Lt SR Traill CdG (Bel), 1Bn, Clerk, of Sydney, NSW. E 28/8/14, aged 19, RTA 10/5/19. D 7/7/18, AWM2DRL/711.
\textsuperscript{18} C McCarthy, in Sheffiel & Todman (eds), Command and Control, pp. 181-182: ‘The platoon was the smallest unit in the British Army that was made up of all the infantry weapons. Its minimum strength was twenty-eight Other Ranks (OR); the maximum, forty-four OR. If its strength fell below the minimum, the platoon ceased to be workable and had to be reinforced.’ But at the time Traill wrote referring to 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion platoon posts, average platoon strength in the outpost system was 1 officer, 27 other ranks and 2 Lewis guns. 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 1, AWM4/23/18/33. Throughout the period covered in this thesis Australian platoons were always under minimum strength.
\textsuperscript{19} 3900 L/Cpl HJ Cave, 1 Bn, Customs clerk, of Balmain, NSW. E 25/7/15, aged 23, RTA 28/3/19.
\textsuperscript{20} Cave, L 20/7/18, MLMSS1224.
September 1918, the Australian infantry were always within the range of the German heavy guns and aerial bombers, and seldom relieved from the outpost, support or reserve line. Faced with this workload and the accompanying strain on the nerves, and conditioned by years of trench warfare, most men took few risks beyond what they were ordered to. Private Bert Bishop MM,\(^{21}\) 55\(^{th}\) Battalion, held that the attitude was: “If you want me to go, you’ll have to detail me”.\(^{22}\) Simon Robbins noted in writing of British troops after the first withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line by the German Army in March 1917, ‘Three years of trench warfare had left its mark’ and it was ‘a matter of comment at the time’ that ‘the stickiness of many operations was not due to the mud but what was called trenchitus of the brain’.\(^{23}\) Sickness rates were also high. For instance in May and June 1918, the 5\(^{th}\) Battalion lost more casualties through sickness than enemy action.\(^{24}\) Stealth raiders overcame all this to launch aggressive attacks on the enemy. Their distinctiveness suggests the questions – who were they? Why did they do it? And how significant were their actions?

To answer these questions, the thesis is a chronological account of numerous stealth raids recorded in first-hand accounts.\(^{25}\) These narrative descriptions are combined with biographies to offer a window into the skills and ethos of these men. This focus on narrative description and individuals explains how stealth raiding evolved and spread. The chapters alternate between stealth raiders in the Australian Corps defending Amiens and stealth raiders in the 1\(^{st}\) Australian Division attached to British XV Corps defending the vital rail hub at Hazebrouck, which connected the British Army to the channel ports and Great Britain.

Chapters one to four describe how stealth raiders came to the fore when opportunists took advantage of the unsettled nature of the outpost system. Some men explicitly sought ways to avoid costly trench raids. The first-hand accounts in this thesis support Bean’s argument that by 1918 the men ‘hated’ formal raids and minor operations because they ‘brought always intense local shelling and often painful losses’. Bean held that in April 1918 ‘each front-line

\(^{21}\) 3762 Pte WH Bishop MM, 55 Bn, Printer, of Milton, NSW. E 28/9/15, aged 18, RTA 8/5/19.
\(^{24}\) 5 Bn Casualties in May: 132 sick, 5 KIA, 2 DOW, 38 WIA, gassed, 8 wounded remained on duty & 1 SIW. 5 Bn June casualties: 10 officers & 174 OR, of which sickness made up 8 officers & 134 OR. See FW Speed (ed), Esprit De Corps: The History of the Victorian Scottish Regiment and the 5\(^{th}\) Infantry Battalion, North Sydney, 1988, pp. 107, 111.
\(^{25}\) The author researched and recorded all stealth raids found in secondary sources and primary sources including: Australian battalion war diaries 1916-1918; private records held by the Australian War Memorial, WA Army Museum, Mitchell Library (NSW), State Libraries of Qld, SA, WA, Vic and the personal records held by families related to stealth raiders.
battalion knew that, if its nightly patrols in No Man’s Land could seize... small posts or patrols, or even single men from any of them, the need for a full-dress [formal] raid generally disappeared. The stealth raider Lieutenant George Mitchell called this ‘modification’ of orders.

As spring turned to summer, changing seasonal conditions spurred a few men to go beyond modification to innovation. The growth of crops in the outpost system, and the German tendency to withdraw as soon as they heard a patrol or were warned of a trench raid by a bombardment, made the tactics used in 1917, and Bean’s argument in favour of nightly patrols, difficult to continue. This thesis goes beyond Bean’s reckoning to argue that Australian battalions increasingly found that even the most experienced and trained patrollers and trench raiders could fall foul of the ground and the darkness. Several respected junior officers and men were lost to ambush or indirect machine gun and friendly fire. The men found these losses the more regrettable because with reinforcements next to none, experienced men were practically irreplaceable. Nevertheless, higher command, (a term used throughout to describe brigade headquarters and above), continued to order nightly fighting patrols and raids.

In May and June typical battalion orders were to submit a plan for one minor operation ‘against suitable objectives’ each tour. There was also a series of what General John Monash called “miniature battles” to improve the line and increase the depth of the defensive zone between the front and Amiens or Hazebrouck. These were nasty little affairs, and regardless of their ultimate success or failure, the men involved became increasingly war weary. In May 1918 a survivor of Gallipoli, the Somme and Flanders learned of orders for a minor operation to capture the Mont de Merris and wrote, ‘These little stunts are no good to

29 See for instance L Newton, The Story of the Twelfth: A Record of the 12th Battalion AIF During the Great War 1914-18, Hobart, 1925, p. 449; 7610 Pte R Randall, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
31 Lt Gen (Sir) J Monash CMG, CB, VC, MID, CdG (Fr), US DSM, GC (Bel), GOC 1 Australian Corps, Civil engineer, of Toorak, Vic. E 19/9/14, aged 49, RTA 26/12/19.
any one’. But among the Australian platoons were lateral thinkers and experienced men who had learned from the mistakes of the past. These imaginative soldiers, not their commanders, or training schools began innovative tactics to capture prisoners for intelligence, or advance posts to better positions. A few daring men started to patrol and raid in daylight, without orders, using stealth and crop cover rather than artillery. This thesis demonstrates that the beginning of daylight stealth raids was an important evolutionary step in the tactic of stealth raiding and an unprecedented step in the history of infantry in the war.

Mid-May marked the height of early summer: red poppies and brilliant blue cornflowers were in bloom, hares and rabbits were seen frequently, the great game bird of the French farmers, the pheasant, was laying its eggs in the fields, and the grating call of the corncrake was constant at night. The old Flemish and French farmers carrying shotguns over one arm accompanied by grandsons thumbing cartridges were gone. Many Australian country boys commented on the great shame it was that these old men and their womenfolk would not be around to harvest what looked like a bumper crop. Corporal Thomas Quinn34 wrote,

My Dear People... The weather is still very nice & there are some nice crops about the country we are fighting in. I have seen some crops in no-mans land that I would like to try a binder in, but it would be rather unhealthy there just at present. 35

The sun was warmer every day and the hours of daylight longer, increasing the growth of the crop and making the outpost line humid and sleepy, interrupted occasionally by gusting winds and rain. Men of skill could creep on their enemy, keeping him in their line of sight and without leaving cover. Here the personal characteristics of intelligence, ingenuity and daring were combined with professional competence – the ability to employ the full range of weapons at the disposal of the platoon, and in many instances a bushman’s skill. Chapters three and four cover the evolution of the tactic once a few battalion commanders began to see what could be done with stealth raids. It was at this point that some battalion commanders,

33 Traill, D 21/5/18, AWM2DRL/711.
34 Cpl T Quinn MM, 32 Bn, Farmer, of Mt Bryan, SA. E 12/7/16 aged 23, RTA 10/4/19.
A view of the crop from the Australian outpost line near Merris, May 1918. At the time this photo was taken the Germans were known to be in posts near the treeline. (AWM E02490)

Near Merris, 2012. The author is positioned in this crop only two feet from the edge, demonstrating how useful it was as cover for stealth raiders. (Lucas Jordan 2012)
most notably the maverick Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Wilder-Neligan,\textsuperscript{36} 10\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, utilised stealth raiders to penetrate and hold ground and not just capture, kill, and demoralise the enemy in isolated posts.

Jeffrey Grey, one of Australia’s most prominent military historians, called the resulting “peaceful penetration,” ‘small-unit tactics at its very best.’ But Grey went on to relegate the importance of stealth raids by claiming that such tactics ‘do not win wars, or battles’.\textsuperscript{37} Chapters five to seven challenge Grey’s view in regard to battles. On 8 July 1918, Second Lieutenant Russell Colman,\textsuperscript{38} the youngest officer in the 27\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, initiated a series of stealth raids that captured all of the objectives that Monash intended to capture in a second battle of Hamel. Stealth raiders thus made a formal battle unnecessary, saving casualties the AIF could ill-afford. Chapter six covers the same period in French Flanders, where on 11 July a few men of the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalions captured half the opposing German division’s front line before either their own headquarters or the German commanders were aware of it, for the loss of three men killed. Bean interviewed several of the stealth raiders and thought:

\begin{quote}
On that day there must have been 20 performances at the very least every one of which would have gained a V.C. if it had been a separate action or an enterprise carried out by some less enterprising troops.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

On 30 July 1918 the 1\textsuperscript{st} Division captured the fortified village of Merris in a unique formal battle, which combined an all-arms barrage with stealth raiding tactics. A few Australian stealth raiders of the 10\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, led by Maurice Wilder-Neligan captured more Germans than there were Australian infantrymen in the attack. The importance of stealth raiders in this victory has not been previously recognised or acknowledged.

Chapter seven focuses on the period from the allied 8 August counter-offensive to the breach of the Hindenburg Outpost Line on 18 September 1918. The chapter describes the influence of stealth raiding on higher command, in particular the indoctrination of the tactic in schools. At this time the Australian Corps headquarters, commanded by Monash, initiated a patrolling policy it called “peaceful penetration”. Chapter seven argues that stealth raiding and “peaceful penetration” were fundamentally different. However, the distinction has been lost over time

\begin{footnotes}
36 (974) Lt Col M Wilder-Neligan CMG, DSO & Bar, DCM, MID, CdG (Fr), 10 Bn, Clerk, of Brandon, Qld. E 20/8/14, aged 28, RTA 18/7/19.
38 (2552) Lt WRG Colman MC, 27 Bn, Mining-engineer student, of Adelaide, SA. E 2/8/15, aged 18, RTA 28/2/19. Colman stealth raid see ch 5.
39 Bean, D 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/44-45.
\end{footnotes}
due to neglect of the subject by historians. The chapter describes several stealth raids, which demonstrate just how irresistible stealth raids were at this time in the hands of a few daring men, operating without orders. Bean wrote:

All of us knew of instances – I personally found them to occur more often than not – in which the commander’s report on an action contained important inaccuracies. Commanding officers, for example, constantly – and naturally – believed and reported that some movement made by their troops was the result of an order issued by them, when it had actually been initiated and carried out by a company commander or one of his men on the spot before the order from above arrived – if ever it did.40

Such a case was the capture of Chipilly Spur, tactically important high ground overlooking the Somme River. Monash claimed that Chipilly Spur was captured on his orders by an Australian brigade and the American 131st Regiment, after a British division had failed to take it.41 This thesis argues that the spur was actually captured by six Australians: two NCOs and four privates, using stealth raid tactics. On 9 August the six crossed the Somme River during a thirty-hour battle in which British troops using conventional frontal assault tactics, including tanks and artillery, had failed. The six volunteered to go ahead and scout for the British. They captured the right flank objective of a British division during the most decisive battle of the war. This event was the supreme stealth raid. This story and the biography of its leader, Company Quarter Master Sergeant Jack Hayes42 is told in detail in chapter seven. The capture of Chipilly Spur goes straight to the central argument of the thesis. This is that a few Australians, men like the veteran Jack Hayes, were distinctive in stealth raiding.

The thesis conclusion is an analysis of what distinguished the Australian at stealth raiding. The argument is based on the weight of evidence accumulated in the thesis narrative. While it allows for differences and contradictions, the thesis argues that stealth raiders tended to be experienced front line soldiers with notable bush skills, arguably due to rural experience before the war as opposed to trained fieldcraft. Typically, the stealth raider had a disdain for orders or protocol if they thought they knew a better, less costly way of getting the job done, of killing the enemy and defeating him in the field. These unique features are argued explicitly and implicitly throughout the narrative: The thesis conclusion acknowledges that there were some stealth raiders in the rest of the British Army. However, no other group of men did

41 Monash, Australian Victories in France, p. 115.
42 948 CQMS JC Hayes DCM, 1 Bn, Railway engine cleaner, of Bathurst, NSW. E 19/8/14, aged 19, RTA 24/12/18.
stealth raids as enthusiastically and as often as the Australian. In the AIF the tactic became distinguishing and characteristic of a particular type of individual.

Most stealth raiders were experienced front line soldiers. Experienced men could be found in all armies, but the Australians dominated as stealth raiders. Experience alone cannot explain Australian distinctiveness. Similarly, training cannot account for stealth raids: in the AIF there was no training for it. In 1917 the BEF promulgated new doctrine that guided the British Army and the Australian Corps staff for the rest of the war. The foundational documents were Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action (SS135) and Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917 (SS143). Neither mentioned stealth raids.

Robert Stevenson argues that the improved tactical performance of the 1st Australian Division in 1918 was directly attributable to changes in its training regime in 1917. This seems broadly true of all the Australian divisions. The training in 1917 gave the infantry a new emphasis on platoon and platoon weapons and the way to conduct them against strongpoints. But this thesis argues that in 1918 the conditions were so unprecedented that a few daring men made use of these weapons in entirely new ways. Stevenson is closer to the mark when he acknowledges that “peaceful penetration” or stealth raids contributed to fine-tuning the tactical skills of an Australian infantry platoon, and that this occurred in the context of front line experience. Beyond frontline experience, there was no training in stealth raiding. The unprecedented conditions which opened up after the German offensive created unforeseen circumstances for which there was no prior experience or training, even for the most experienced soldiers.

Peter Pederson argued that “peaceful penetration”, was made possible because the Australians faced ‘inferior trench divisions’. This judgement highlights how military historians have not given serious attention to stealth raiders, for it is revised by the findings of this thesis.

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43 There is no evidence of formal training in the tactic until after 12/7/18. By September 1918 stealth raiding was being taught at the Australian Corps School and elsewhere. See chapters 5-7.
45 Stevenson, To Win the Battle, pp. 103, 107. Stevenson refers to “peaceful penetration” and mentions 1st Bn ‘patrol actions… that highlighted implications for training’. His work should be corrected to read July, not May 1918; see ch 6. For the other Australian divisions see Bean, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1917, Canberra, 1941, Vol IV, pp. 234, 426, 578, 580, 730-732.
46 PA Pedersen, Monash as Military Commander, Carlton, 1985, p. 214.
The thesis demonstrates that stealth raiders vanquished the worst and the best of the German Army, including first class divisions that spearheaded the Michael offensive, and the elite 4th Division and 27th Wurttemberg Division, among the best in the German Army.

If battle experience and the quality of the enemy contributed to Australian stealth raids, they cannot explain why Australians stood out, as both were universal in the British Army in 1918. This thesis looks beyond these factors. Did the ground on which the Australians fought make stealth raids possible? Were other troops held back by unfavourable ground and conditions like trench warfare in sectors in Flanders and Arras as opposed to the Somme? The accounts in this thesis indicate that ground was important, but initiative more so. An Australian wrote proudly of stealth raiders in action near Strazeele on 11 July 1918, ‘[t]he Tommies next door just sat and watched. They had no orders to go out – our boys had no orders not to go out, just the difference’. Stealth raiders were independent and enterprising.

What made them this way? Many of the first-hand accounts in this thesis point to the civil society that produced men with these traits. Stealth raids were a way to avert formal raids, rescue mates, avenge mates, collect souvenirs and war trophies, or show skill and initiative and speed up the end of the war. Stealth raiders considered all these to be virtues linked to civilian qualities: freedom, initiative, independence and solidarity in the lower ranks. Stealth raiders and their admirers frequently compared their initiative with the supposed “stickiness”, or lack of initiative of others, including mates, sections, platoons, companies, battalions and, particularly, English troops. Australian disparagement of the formal discipline of the British Army recurs throughout this thesis. The Australian perceived British Army discipline to be a chain around the neck of the “Tommy”. This led to pity and contempt for English troops. The stealth raider acted on a distinctly Australian ethos.

This thesis argues implicitly that the ethos of the AIF was partly built on perceived freedoms that resonated in Australian cultural and political life at the turn of the 20th century. In the years before the war (and during it) Australian working class political culture championed the rights of the white male worker. Rural and urban workers were the men most likely to be stealth raiders because they tended to hold the lowest ranks. They grew up and worked in an Australia considered a workingman’s paradise, hard earned. Their new federation was the first nation state to legislate universal suffrage for adult white males and an eight-hour working

47 P Yule (ed), Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France, Carlton, 1987 p. 171.
day. In some this fostered an essential quality needed to be a stealth raider: ‘the habit of thinking for themselves and acting on their decision’. 48 This trait was radical and rare in the British Army, which included the AIF. But it created stealth raiders among the Australians who inspired their mates from posts closest to the enemy not from remote command posts. This led to tension between those in command who sought control and those in the ranks who disdained orders they judged wasteful, and acted on their feelings by initiating stealth raids. As this thesis narrative and the biographies of men who lived by this ethos demonstrate, the spur from below activated stealth raids time and time again. Each chapter is littered with examples of it. But only a few commanders appreciated it at the time.

The lower ranks championed personal freedoms over entitlement, and linked a heightened sense of independence and initiative with the distinctly Australian “bush ethos”. In the fighting ranks, the mythical values and virtues of the Australian bush: laconic humour, comradeship, suspicion of authority and a high premium on initiative and resourcefulness were contemporary and popular through the works of Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy, Banjo Patterson and contributors to the Bulletin. 49 This was a general trait of the Australian and how they thought about themselves. How this actually influenced particular individuals is a different matter. Whilst most were happy to adopt the “bush ethos” because it was a point of difference from rigid British Army discipline, and their own Australian commanders, only a few daring men acted on the “bush ethos” by initiating stealth raids. This thesis shows that some men explicitly acknowledged the bush influence and how it contributed to their readiness to act. That the majority of men who participated in stealth raids were from bush or country backgrounds is argued implicitly in the footnotes which give biographical sketches of these until now unknown and unacknowledged men. An integral part of the argument for the importance of the bush is in the detail in these footnotes.

49 The impact of the Australian landscape on aptitude and psyche is a subject more often found in social and cultural history and in the genre of landscape memoir than in military history but it seems pertinent here. There is a tradition of classic articles and histories which consider the influence of the Australian bush on the Australian soldier in the Boer War and in particular the First AIF. For the Boer War see EGH Bingham, ‘The Australian Soldier’, The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, Vol XLV, October 1901, No. 284, pp. 1163-1182. For the First World War, following Bean’s Official History, the best of these are: R Ward, The Australian Legend, Melbourne, 1966; Gammage, Broken Years; Holbrook, Anzac the Unauthorised Biography, Sydney 2014. In the opposing camp are historians such as G Wilson, Bully Beef & Balderdash: Some Myths of the AIF Examined and Debunked, Newport, 2012, pp. 61-119 and J Bou, Light Horse: A History of Australia’s Mounted Arm, Port Melbourne, 2010, pp. 1-4, 55-58, 107, 132-138. Additional histories and landscape memoirs which consider the influence of the Australian bush in forming a distinct Australian character include F Adams, The Australians: a social sketch, London, 1893; V Palmer, The Legend of the Nineties, (1954), Kingsgrove, 1966; D Watson, The Bush: Travels in the Heart of Australia, Melbourne, 2015; T Winton, Island Home: a Landscape Memoir, Melbourne, 2015.
204 stealth raiders are named in this thesis. Each man is mentioned in footnotes which include in order: service number (in brackets if later commissioned), rank at the end of the war, initials and surname, awards, battalion or unit, calling or profession, home town, enlistment date, and fate. Of the stealth raiders thus named 63 per cent came from rural or “bush” backgrounds, meaning at the time they enlisted they were living outside urban centres and were working in country callings, extending to mining, clerical occupations, country school teaching and the railways.\(^{50}\) It is important to note that this high percentage is well above the representation of countrymen in the AIF as a whole, which Bean estimated ‘was probably not much more than a quarter’, and Gammage found to be 17.36 per cent and a further 13.5 per cent being rural labourers.\(^{51}\) Despite what has become a fashion to criticize the likes of Bean on the influence of the bush on the AIF, this study of stealth raiders indicates that the urban component of the AIF statistics is exaggerated. For instance among stealth raiders, some countrymen enlisted in cities, and named that city as their residence – for example Neil Maddox chapter two, three and seven, Jack Southey chapter six and Jack Hayes chapter seven.\(^{52}\)

For 30 years, since the social composition of the AIF became the subject of analysis, historians have largely decried Bean’s emphasis on the importance of countrymen in the AIFs make-up and ethos. This thesis challenges that criticism. While it accepts that the AIF was overwhelmingly an urban force, it nevertheless points to the demonstrable presence of bush workers and a distinctly Australian bush ethos as a factor in the AIFs unique and hitherto unexplained stealth raiders. The argument is sustained throughout the thesis implicitly, through biographical footnotes and references to the background of the men and explicitly in the words the men used to describe themselves, or others used to describe them.

This thesis is important because it examines a distinct but neglected group of Australian soldiers and because it undermines the contemporary fashion of dismissing the importance of bush skills and the bush ethos in the AIF. Given the high proportion of countrymen involved in stealth raids, in a predominantly urban force, might bush skills and values help illuminate why

\(^{50}\) Of the 204 stealth raiders, 129 were living or working in country occupations, and 69 in a city. This includes Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Bathurst, Launceston and Canberra as country, Hobart as city. The country or urban background of a further six stealth raiders could not be established.

\(^{51}\) Bean noted, ‘The number following “country occupations” is given as 57 000 out of 330 000, but a proportion of “labourers” (99 000) were probably also country men.’ Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 1079, n11; Gammage, Broken Years, App 1, p. 287.

\(^{52}\) This finding runs counter to prevailing opinion in some quarters such as Wilson, Bully Beef & Balderdash, pp. 61-119. See conclusion for more detail on this argument.
stealth raiders were not intimidated by the open battlefield of crops, hedges, gullies, rivers and streams they encountered after three years of trench warfare? The thesis argues that the preponderance of countrymen reaffirms the belief held by many men involved in stealth raids (and their admirers) that bushcraft was a competence that could not be accounted for by training or trench warfare. If bush skills gave stealth raiders an edge, the bush ethos, however supposedly mythical, contributed to the motivation behind stealth raids.
FOREWORD: The ground and the men

The ground

I visited the sites named in this thesis with my father Ken and my fiancée Anna in the European spring and summer of 2012. Armed with trench maps, diaries, notepad and camera, I found that the rural landscapes where most stealth raids occurred remain recognisable, or at least easy to conceptualise as they were at the time. Many of the farmhouses and roads marked on trench maps used in 1918 are extant. Crops still grow in the same fields enclosed by the same hedges. Even on the outskirts of Villers-Bretonneux where the light industrial area has crept down the old Roman road to Warfusee, the remnants of an orchard where stealth raiders slipped into the German 108th Division’s main line of defences still stands amid the car yards. Anyone with an eye for ground and a trench map can appreciate how vital dead ground, ridgelines and natural cover were in this war of isolated posts and vast spaces of country – latent with the potential to be explored and conquered between April and September 1918.

Photo 3 The stealth raid organised by Alex Irvine mentioned in the introduction (and Chapter 3) took place in the dip, centre right (X), where the change in the line of the crop indicates the dead ground which hid a German machine gun post. (Lucas Jordan 2012)
The men

At the beginning of 1918 the outstanding problem facing the AIF was maintaining sufficient strength in the field. In 1916 the AIF lost 42,270 men in battle casualties and 45,657 non-battle casualties, including sickness and injury. The situation worsened in 1917. A serious defeat for the AIF at Bullecourt was followed by campaigns at Messines and Third Ypres: battle casualties in 1917 climbed to 76,836, eclipsed by non-battle losses of 89,084. The appalling scale of casualties had a knock–on effect. By the beginning of 1918 recruiting in Australia had fallen to less than 2,000 a month and two referendums to introduce conscription had failed. It fell to the Australian depots in Britain, convalescent camps treating the wounded, and non-combatant arms to keep pace with the demand for reinforcements.\(^{53}\) They failed: the AIF in 1918 was growing weaker by the month.

Yet at the beginning of 1918 morale and confidence in the AIF were high. When news of the opening of the German offensive reached the Australians, the Gallipoli veteran Sergeant Archie Barwick\(^{54}\) wrote,

> So the Great Hun offensive has been launched at last... I'll bet they will get cut to pieces... there is never any trouble... to make the first advance for they have all their guns registered on the trenches & the front line is always lightly held, wait till they get up against the line of resistance & have to haul their guns over shell torn ground & get them into position for the next push then the fun starts, we know all about that from personal experience & as for [sic] man to man goes every Australian knows who is the superior fighter, that has been tested too often & the Fritzies know it in their own hearts too... good luck to him & his storm troops this should be the beginning of the end & France will be a good place to be out of during the next 6 or 8 months for there will be plenty of stouch [sic].\(^{55}\)

The Australian divisions entered the line just as the German offensive was losing its momentum. It was much as Archie Barwick had predicted, although the result was too close a call for comfort. On 11 April the British Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Douglas Haig issued his now celebrated appeal:

> To all ranks of the British Force in France... There is no other course open to us but to fight it out! Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the

\(^{53}\) AG Butler, *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914–1918*, Vol II, Sydney, 1940, pp. 647-650. 11 AIF battalions were disbanded between April and September 1918 for want of reinforcements.

\(^{54}\) 914 Sgt AA Barwick CdG (Bel), 1 Bn, Farmer, of Surveyor’s Creek, NSW. E 24/8/14, aged 24, RTA 3/12/18.

\(^{55}\) Barwick, D 24/3/18, MLMSS1493.
justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our Homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.\textsuperscript{56}

Such was the mood when the Australians took the line. As they marched towards the sound of the guns, they witnessed droves of French and Flemish peasants evacuating once peaceful villages. They looked with pity and sometimes disdain on tired and disorganised elements of the British Army. Sergeant Albert “Eddie” Edwards,\textsuperscript{57} marching to the front near Hazebrouck, saw

the skyline... illuminated with the flames of the still burning farmhouses and the occasional flash of guns. It was a weird feeling to be out in the blue with very little knowledge of the positions of our own or enemy troops... Our footsteps echoed hollowly as we tramped through the deserted streets... Everything spoke of hurried departures as some new rumour of the enemy's approach spread panic into a wild stampede for personal safety.\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.jpg}
\caption{Photo 4 Men of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion digging trenches near the village of Borre at the height of the German offensive. “Eddie” Edwards is standing at centre with tilted helmet and hands in pockets. (AWM E04745)}
\end{figure}

The German offensives captured all the battlefields where Australian soldiers had fought in 1916-1917. To many Australian survivors of these battles, the ground was sacrosanct, and for new men, a storied testing ground. Lieutenant Colonel George Murphy, 18\textsuperscript{th} Battalion,

\textsuperscript{56} In Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol V, p. 437.
\textsuperscript{57} (5684) Lt AW Edwards MM, Civil servant, of Canberra, FCT. E 2/12/15, aged 25, RTA 9/7/19.
\textsuperscript{58} Edwards, MS 11/4/18, AWMPR89/050.
exhorted his men, ‘The foot of the Hun is on the graves of our fallen comrades and I know my men too well to fear that they will rest contented’. The defensive battles at Villers-Bretonneux, Monument Wood, Dernacourt, Sailly-le-Sec and Hazebrouck which followed are not the subject of this thesis, but suffice to say that the Australian infantry engaged in cathartic killing. In the wedge of high ground between the Ancre and Somme Rivers, Private Horace Lock, 43rd Battalion, described how the German infantry came on in massed waves in broad daylight, and ‘made fine targets for our machine gunners’ and they ‘simply poured hundreds of bullets at the enemy’. At Strazeele, near Hazebrouck, Corporal Percival ‘Topsy’ Turvey, 3rd Battalion, watched German infantry advance in human waves, six deep. ‘It was like firing into a haystack – one could not miss’. At Villers-Bretonneux, Private Allen Clements, 54th Battalion, noted,

Fritz lively. Had a great day yesterday killing Huns. They came over in thick waves. The first was shot to pieces and not a man got away. The second got to our wire and then broke, the third got halfway over and then bolted back. Threw down my rifle was sick of killing men could not miss.

Where the German advances stopped, Australian and German infantrymen dug outposts in the fields. Each AIF battalion entered the line with instructions to identify the German units opposite and if possible capture a ‘live Bosche’, who might offer information on the likely direction of the next German offensive. A typical AIF divisional frontage consisted of a reserve fire trench well within range of German artillery, a support line with wire in front, and an outpost system patrolled by liaison, reconnaissance and fighting patrols. An infantryman wrote,

It doesn’t do to think too much of what may happen if ever Fritz came against us – but of course he does not know the line is practically held on reputation. Two men in a post then a gap of 50yds, there another post a few men holding it, then another gap of 50-100 yards, another post of a few men and so on; and that’s the front line holding Amiens. The supports are just as weak – we are at present holding a battalion front with 300 men instead of the 1200 we should have. But the line holds – it even advances.

59 18 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 3, AWM 4, 23/35/33.
60 2209 Pte HF Lock, 43 Bn, Storekeeper’s assistant, of Grange, SA. E 8/5/16, aged 22, RTA 16/6/19.
61 Lock, D 30/3/18, AWMPR00327.
63 ‘Gutzer Farm, Meteren,’ Reveille, 1 November 1934, p 32.
64 3480 Spr A Clements, 54 Bn, Telegraph linesman, of Goulburn, NSW. E 14/9/15, aged 27, RTA 22/8/19.
65 Clements, D 26/4/18, AWM3DRL/0961.
66 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
67 Miller, D 11/6/18, AWMPR00792
The change in battlefield conditions from trench warfare to semi-open and open warfare served to heighten Australian morale and aggressiveness. It promised an end. The men stuck to their job in the knowledge that the war had reached a critical stage. Their commander-in-chief had warned them their Empire’s back was to the wall. The Australians told each other, if they could hang on a few months the tide might turn. In April 1918, Second-Lieutenant John Bourke, 68th Battalion, captured the spirit.

Dear Dad

The long winter is over and with it – gone for ever [sic] I hope the very trying strain of the trenches. How we did hate with a most detestable hate that long infernal gutter system that marked our far flung battle line. Such names too – Sydney Rd, Burke St, Piccadilly Circus, Rotten Row all provocative of sarcasm and mirth & always greasy & muddy & uncomfortable enough to exhaust Australia’s vocabulary. Rats, men & mice all lived together here – the mice feeding on men’s rations, & the rats going deep after our buried comrades... their plump bodies could be heard splashing through the shell holes in search of their prey.

That such a nightmare of horrors & pain may not be ours for another year is the earnest wish of all & present appearances seem to point to a finish... we have every reason to think that trench warfare is ended. Open, or semi-open warfare has begun & although the enemy has had initial success, we hope to turn the tables before the year ends. The Australians are “all in” & before long I’ll send an account of the part we played & are still playing. 69

Yet only a few were stealth raiders. Stealth raiders never ranked higher than battalion commanders, and were usually junior officers, NCOs, privates, horse drivers, stretcher-bearers, runners, scouts, Lewis gunners, cooks and batmen. They set about doing the job they had come for, defeating the enemy in the field and finishing the war. This thesis demonstrates that the skills they used were not just the product of military training and discipline, because they suddenly found themselves fighting among crop, gullies, rivers and streams quite unlike anything they had experienced or trained for. They garrisoned isolated posts in a battlefield defined by space and the vagaries of the weather and topography, often going days without being supervised by a commanding officer. Stealth raiders were acutely aware that their actions made them exceptional. While others waited in their posts for orders, ‘like them old Roman soldiers, that you read about, that stood to their posts when the lava went over their head’, the stealth raiders stayed daring, resourceful and deadly effective. 70 This thesis is the

69 Bourke, L 23/4/18, AWM1DRL/0139.

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most comprehensive account written on Australian stealth raiders. It challenges the historical neglect they have received since Bean laid down his pen in 1942.
CHAPTER ONE

‘A sort of Company Competition’

Formal fighting patrols versus stealth raiding on the Somme, 26 March to 17 May 1918

One of the first steps in the advancement of stealth raids was the modification of formal raiding and night fighting patrol tactics of 1917. This began as soon as the four Australian divisions defending Amiens met the German offensives of March and April. Led by experienced men, a few frontline soldiers ordered to undertake formal raids and fighting patrols at this time adapted their tactics to suit the unprecedented conditions. In the process these men learned the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents and how to make the most of the ground and conditions. As a result, they knew the enemy and the front better than the commanders who ordered and controlled minor operations and raids.

Some vital elements of stealth raids were evident at this time: initiative, self-reliance, distrust of a traditional artillery barrage to support raids, and often bush skills that proved useful in the rural environment. Sometimes these facets arose from the skill of individuals and small groups, above the run of ordinary men, but also because men learned tough lessons particularly after they carried out orders that were out of step with the conditions.

The first stealth raids occurred north of the Somme River, where the 3rd Division, and the 4th Brigade, attached to the British 62nd Division, met the Michael offensive. Stealth raids also evolved in the 5th Division, engaged in the sector south of the Somme River.

The German Michael offensive forced a gap of ten miles between the Ancre and the Somme Rivers on the right flank of the British Third Army. BEF high command urged divisional commanders to instruct the line battalions to identify the enemy units opposite them every 24 hours, and capture a prisoner who might give useful information on the next attack. At 5pm on 28 March General Monash, commanding the 3rd Division, ordered his two available brigades to advance by platoons in fighting patrols and make contact with the enemy. The fighting patrol leaders had only a vague knowledge of their objectives and none of enemy strength or

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1 Several Australian brigades were attached to British Divisions: 4 Bde (4 Div) to 62 Div at Hebuterne; 5 Bde (2 Div) to 18 Div; and Monash’s 9 Bde to defend the British Fourth Army flank at Villers-Bretonneux.  
2 Hereafter the term fighting patrol refers to ordered operations as opposed to stealth raids.  
dispositions. ‘We were to make contact and drive in his outposts,’ wrote Lieutenant Les Boyce of the 41st Battalion, ‘I remember gathering at Company headquarters. A misty drizzle had set in and it was dark...We received our orders... drank [looted] champagne out of tin mugs and set off’. Boyce wrote, ‘in the dark and wet with no real knowledge where the enemy was it was a bit confusing’. As he moved forward with his fighting patrol, he was not in contact with the brigade to his left. ‘I was... making my way cautiously up the road when someone called out “who’s there?” which, just as I answered, sank into my consciousness as “Vass is dar?” Accompanied by a burst of machine gun fire... contact was made’. Boyce and his men took cover and prepared to advance according to the drill they had learned – Lewis gunners on the right flank maintained fire; rifle grenadiers pitched grenades while two squads of infantrymen took turns to move forward.

I heard the thud of bullets in bodies. A bullet got me in the left thigh. It hit like a complete black out, I thought I had been killed but no, I stretched out but could not stand. Some of my chaps came and put on a field dressing and started to carry me out when another bullet got me from behind, right thigh this time... and that was the end of my war. Boyce was one of 300 casualties inflicted on the 11th Brigade that night. All of the brigade’s fighting patrols were forced back to the starting line. The advance was a disaster, the result of an ill-conceived plan on Monash’s part, made worse by its haste. The orders caused confusion between the two line brigade’s commands, which failed to agree on the method or timing of their respective advances, or their objective: Were the fighting patrols to bite and hold ground? Or capture prisoners to ascertain the strength and intent of the enemy? Those tasked with the work were uncertain from the outset. To make matters worse they had no knowledge of the battlefield or the German’s strength. Monash’s orders typified the type of formal operation the Australian infantry had grown to detest, because it wasted lives in vain hopes that lacked clear objectives, and which did not provide adequate firepower to protect the infantry (particularly its flanks) once the enemy signalled its intentions with strong counter-attacks. This chapter shows how some men in the frontline learned from these types of harsh lessons more quickly than their commanders, and initiated stealth raiding.

In the ensuing month a few men began to modify the orders they received, particularly ‘if commanders did not hang around to see them carried out’. A small minority adapted

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4 (819) Lt LA Boyce MC, 41 Bn, Clerk, of Toowoomba, Qld. E 6/1/16, aged 18, RTA 31/7/18.
5 Boyce, M 27-29/3/18, AWM2DRL/1180.
7 Mitchell, Backs to the Wall, p. 289.
radically. They were the first stealth raiders and sometimes they captured the prisoners or secured the identifications from the German outpost system that their divisional headquarters wanted.

The setback on 28 March marked the 3rd Divisions first experience on the Somme. It had little time to recover. The German Army attacked repeatedly between 29 March and 4 April, the objective Amiens. On 9 April the focus of the attacks shifted to French Flanders. With practically the entire British Army front under pressure Field Marshal Haig ordered his army to strengthen its defences. This included aggressive defence aimed at gathering intelligence. ‘Vigorous patrolling’ was ordered across the BEF front.

The job of patrolling fell to the companies manning the outpost and support lines. In general, the Australian battalions followed orders and used organised, or formal, patrols. Liaison patrols maintained lateral communication with friendly forces, reconnaissance patrols established enemy dispositions and strength, and fighting patrols killed or captured the enemy. The tactics used were based on lessons learned during the winter in Flanders, where Bean wrote that No Man’s Land at night had ‘swarmed’ with small Australian patrols.

Battalions typically received orders channelled through brigade headquarters to conduct formal raids and fighting patrols, all at night. For example on 15 April, the 16th Battalion was ‘ordered by brigade through division to secure an enemy for identification’. The chain of command worked in much the same way as it had done in 1917 but the method of acquiring the prisoners was innovative. On 16 April, Sergeant Chris Sandilands wrote:

Some fun on this morning. CSM England, Cpl Smith, Sgt Mackie went exploring along an old trench and came across a Fritz machine gun which...
they promptly lifted and brought back to our lines, then they took three others including an officer and went back and captured the crew who were asleep in their dugouts. One Fritz being killed and three wounded, none of our fellows being touched.\textsuperscript{18}

This action occurred near the pulverised villages of Gommecourt and Hebuterne, where No Man’s Land was criss-crossed by derelict trenches from the battles of the Somme in 1916. The old trenches and long grass gave excellent cover to the three experienced NCOs as they searched for an isolated post. When they found the post they decided to take it with the weapons they had in the frontline. England, Mackie and Smith showed initiative and self-reliance because it occurred before a formal raid could be organised. It was one of the first stealth raids undertaken by Australians in 1918.

A similar action with the same consequence of making a formal operation unnecessary occurred where the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Division held the outpost line, close to where Les Boyce had been wounded. In a gully running from the high ground of Morlancourt Ridge to the north bank of the Somme River, Private Stanley Smith,\textsuperscript{19} 43\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, located an enemy post and went out supported by the rifle fire of two other soldiers. He met an enemy patrol. Smith immediately rushed towards the patrol and fired his rifle, wounding one man and taking him prisoner.\textsuperscript{20} Smith was a sniper who had volunteered to stay behind when the 41\textsuperscript{st} Battalion took over from his battalion. He had been living alone in the fields on emergency rations for days, and visiting the 41\textsuperscript{st} Battalion outposts infrequently. His stealth raid prevented the need for a formal fighting patrol or raid being organised.

Smith’s unusual stealth raid was followed by a spate of formal fighting patrols, which used 1917 tactics. On the night of 13 April Lieutenant Walter Green,\textsuperscript{21} 43\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, led a typical formal fighting patrol of twenty men including a Lewis gun. Green picked out a German listening post, crept 600 yards through a “friendly” bombardment and seized a solitary German. Green’s patrol suffered four casualties – all wounded by their own bombardment. The prisoner was from the 18\textsuperscript{th} Division, a first class division that had taken part in the opening of the Michael offensive. He was tired and emaciated, having been in the line since 21 March.

\textsuperscript{16} 2073 Cpl GE Smith MM, 16 Bn, Platelayer, of Albany, WA. E 4/3/15, aged 19, RTA 30/12/18.
\textsuperscript{17} 209 Sgt A Mackie MM, 16 Bn, Labourer, of Fremantle, WA. E 9/9/14, aged 21, RTA 8/10/18.
\textsuperscript{18} Sandilands, D 16/4/18, AWM\textsuperscript{PR}01350. The battalion war diary states the action occurred on 15/4/18, AWM4/23/33/29Part1.
\textsuperscript{19} 3314 Pte SG Smith DCM, 43 Bn, Labourer, of Renmark, SA. E 26/4/16, aged 18, RTA 12/6/19.
\textsuperscript{20} Smith, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/156.
\textsuperscript{21} (2018) Lt WH Green MC, 43 Bn, Ironmoulder, of Mannum, SA. E 12/1/16, aged 20, RTA 15/5/19.
He was interviewed in the outpost line and told his captors that he was one of a series of listeners, or “flare kings”, who occupied posts in advance of strong points. It was his job to fire flares to warn of the approach of “British” patrols. The following night, Second Lieutenant Francis Burtenshaw, 23 41st Battalion, led a similar formal raid with box barrage against a German machine gun post. The post was silhouetted against the skyline by a tree and several weathered crosses in a small British cemetery, a remnant of the first battle of the Somme in 1916. As scouts led the raiders towards the target one of the German machine gunners saw them and thinking they were a friendly relief, walked out to meet them. Private Ernest Dixon, a headquarters scout, shot this man. Corporal Charles Ralph rushed the post and killed a second man. Burtenshaw captured a sergeant and two other ranks. The prisoners also belonged to the 18th Division.

The following night, 15/16 April, Lieutenant Robert Tredenick and a party of volunteers of “A” Company, 41st Battalion, rushed a post north east of the cemetery after their fighting patrol was fired on. They killed two Germans and suffered four slight wounds. The next night another 41st Battalion formal fighting patrol went into action. This time the leader, Lieutenant Colin Butler, radically modified the tactics the battalion had been using, hoping to catch the German outposts system off guard after three consecutive nights of fighting patrols penetrating their outposts. The resulting action was typical of the initiative, self-reliance and bush skills that would come to exemplify stealth raids.

Butler found a line of German wire running across the Bray-Corbie road, while on one of his frequent solo reconnaissance patrols, by night. The following day he organised a shoot by a 4.5-inch howitzer battery, six guns, each firing one round per minute, designed to keep the

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22 43 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 2, AWM4/23/60/20.
23 (127) Lt FJ Burtenshaw MC, 41 Bn, Farmer, of Brisbane, Qld. E 15/11/15, aged 23, KIA 15/5/18.
24 Dive Copse Cemetery. In June 1916, before the Somme offensive, the ground north of the cemetery was chosen for a concentration of field ambulances, which became XIV Corps Main Dressing Station. Dive Copse was a small wood nearby, south of the Bray-Corbie Road, named after the officer commanding the station. British dead were buried here between July and September 1916. http://www.cwgc.org
25 1811 L/Cpl E Dixon DCM, MM, 41 Bn, Farmer, of Elimbah, Qld. E 21/1/16, aged 24, RTA 22/9/19. Citation MM, AWM28/1/158/0042.
27 (347) Lt R Tredenick, 41 Bn, Clerk, of Brisbane, Qld. E 8/10/15, aged 22, RTA 20/5/19.
28 See 147 L/Cpl E Croft MM & Bar, 41Bn, Labourer, of Toowoomba, Qld. E 24/1/16, aged 21, DOW 15/10/18. Citation Bar to MM, AWM28/1/130/0010.
29 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 17, AWM4/23/58/19Part 1.
30 (2030) Lt CH Butler MC & Bar, 41 Bn, Station overseer, of Kilcoy, Qld. E 2/12/15, aged 24, RTA 4/6/19.
enemy’s heads down whilst not arousing suspicion of a raid.\textsuperscript{31} That night he and 22 men including a Lewis gunner crept along the Bray-Corbie road to the German wire. At 2.15am Butler and a scout, Private Noel Murray,\textsuperscript{32} began to cut the wire as the howitzer battery opened up. Butler cut while Murray held the wires tightly, taking up the tension so that the recoil of the metal would not give them away. They waited twenty minutes then returned to the patrol and led them through the gap. Private James Whannel,\textsuperscript{33} the Lewis gunner, moved to cover the patrol’s right flank. Butler, Murray and the scout Dixon crawled towards the German outpost system north of the road, unaware of the precise location of hostile posts. At the third attempt, the sounds of coughing and the smell of tobacco led Butler and the two scouts to a garrisoned post.

They were challenged when fifteen yards from the post. Butler yelled “‘At them!'” He leapt into the post with Murray and Dixon. Nine Germans were killed ‘hand-to-hand’. Murray was credited with two, Dixon claimed to have killed or wounded three, but Butler reckoned it was more like six. Two prisoners were pulled out ‘by the scruff of their necks’ as rifle and machine gun fire cracked about them. Germans in other posts counter-attacked.\textsuperscript{34} Whannel opened fire with his Lewis gun, ‘and prevented the enemy from cutting off the patrol’.\textsuperscript{35} The prisoners were from the 50\textsuperscript{th} Reserve Division. This was a different division to those identified in the three formal fighting patrols of the previous nights. It indicated that a relief might have occurred.

A report on Butler’s innovative fighting patrol was circulated to the other Australian divisions.\textsuperscript{36} It was an excellent example of the communications and control a junior officer had at his disposal in a well-organised brigade, to bring artillery and platoon weapons to bear on a target of opportunity – quickly and efficiently. It also required men of skill who could operate in unknown rural conditions beyond the German wire at night.

Colin Butler was born in 1892 at Kilcoy Station, a two days’ horse ride northwest of Brisbane. In his own opinion he ‘came into the world inauspiciously, in fact I was a damn nuisance, one of those little “Straws” that occur to elderly parents who have already raised nine children’. As

\textsuperscript{31} 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 18, AWM4/23/58/18Part1.
\textsuperscript{32} 7603 Cpl NS Murray MM, 41 Bn, School teacher, of Bundaberg, Qld. E 20/2/17, aged 19, RTA 4/1/19.
\textsuperscript{33} 1921 Pte J Whannel MM, 41 Bn, Labourer, of Mackay, Qld. E 1/4/16, aged 33, RTA 20/5/19.
\textsuperscript{34} 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 18, AWM4/23/58/18Part1.
\textsuperscript{35} Whannel, Citation MM, AWM28/1/158/0044.
\textsuperscript{36} A circular detailing the raid was provided to the author courtesy of Ian Butler.
a boy his happiest days were spent on “Kilcoy Creek,” building dams, canals, shrimping and the hundred and one things one “could do.” He learned how to handle a rifle and hunted possums, bandicoots and ducks with his older brothers, sometimes his sister, and always a dog to keep me company. Butler remembered his youth as ‘a life of sheer joy... for to adapt Banjo Paterson’s “Clancy” – “The bush boys life has pleasures that town boys never know” – and so on to the end.  

When the war broke out, Butler was ‘among the sheep’, working as an overseer at Saltern Creek Station in central western Queensland. Already married to Alice, his ambition was to become a sheep station owner.

I had no wish to go to war, but gradually I began to realise that, if I was to accomplish my ambition I had to join those who were fighting for their freedom to remain as part of the Empire and not bow down to the German jackboot.

At the 1st AIF’s Officer’s School at Duntroon he was failed: “not sufficient leadership”. He joined the 41st Battalion in France on 29 November 1916 as a sergeant. Initiation into front line work came in the Armentieres sector. He was commissioned in the field in January 1917, wounded twice at Messines – 2 June and 2 July – and again at Broodseinde Ridge on 4 October while leading a bayonet charge to recapture a position. He re-joined the battalion in February 1918, in his words to ‘Fight Another Day’. He was recommended for the Military Cross for ‘excellent leadership’ during the German offensive on 30 March when he ‘controlled the fire of his platoon’ against repeated massed wave infantry attacks. His commanding officer, Alex Heron, after a ‘long and constant association’, wrote that had it not been for his wounds at Broodseinde Ridge, Butler ‘would have had an MC long ago’. He was in the eyes of the ordinary digger a front line soldier. He had been involved with distinction in nearly every major and minor engagement the 41st Battalion had taken part in. The battalion’s newers

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37 Two older brothers served in the war: 761 Sgt DO Butler, 2 LHR, Clerk, of Kilcoy, Qld. E 10/12/14, aged 27, RTA 14/1/17; Lt Col AG Butler DSO, MID, Aus Army Med Corps, Medical practitioner, of Brisbane, Qld. E 20/8/14, aged 42, RTA 3/10/18.

38 Dodie served in the war as a nurse: Sr Sister EB Butler RRC 2nd Class, AANS, Nurse, of Kilcoy, Qld. E 11/11/14, aged 33, RTA 2/12/19.

39 Private Collection of Ian Butler.

40 In LL Robson and JNI Dawes, Citizen to Soldier: Australia before the Great War Recollections of Members of the First A.I.F., Melbourne, 1977, pp. 142-143.

41 In Robson and Dawes, Citizen to Soldier, p. 143.

42 Butler, Citation MC, AWM28/1/156/0091.

43 Lt Col AR Heron CMG, DSO, MID, 41 Bn, Chemist, of Bowen, Qld. E 6/2/16, aged 27, RTA October 1919 (precise date unknown).

44 Private collection of Ian Butler, letter Heron to Mrs Butler, 15/5/18.
in the first months of 1918 held such men in wonder. The young man who had been deemed to have “not sufficient leadership” was in the eyes of his commanding officer, one of the ‘very best platoon commanders: keen, conscientious and a brave and fearless leader at all times’  

Heron wrote that Butler’s innovative and determined raid spurred ‘a sort of Company Competition’. Lieutenant Ewen Price, commanding “D” Company, described what happened next as a ‘stonkering’ followed by a ‘kidnapping’. In the subsequent actions the instincts and ethos of stealth raiders came to the fore.

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45 Private collection of Ian Butler, letter Heron to Mrs Butler, 15/5/18.
46 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
48 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
On the night of 18/19 April a formal fighting patrol under Lieutenant Harry Wiles,⁴⁹ including Dixon and Murray, crept through the gully south of the Bray-Corbie road to a field near the cemetery. Wiles had orders to attack a post but after three hours he decided to attack a patrol instead, despite being outnumbered ‘four to one’.⁵⁰ He opened fire on a patrol coming from the direction of Sailly Laurette. One of his men was heard to yell, ‘“We’ve got one”’. Wiles ordered a withdrawal. He thought a prisoner had been captured. But the yell referred to a German shot dead. By the time Wiles realised there was no prisoner the German machine gun fire was fierce and his men were determined to withdraw to a friendly post. Then, what had started as a formal fighting patrol became a stealth raid. Wiles decided to go back and try to retrieve information from the Germans killed in the ambush. The irrepresible scout Dixon volunteered to go with him. In a ‘masterly’ show of skill the two crawled through low crop and dead ground, under intense fire and ‘brought back a complete identification’: shoulder straps, maps and papers from the dead.⁵¹ Here again was the self-reliance that would come to be the distinctive mark of a few Australian stealth raiders in 1918.

The identification ‘caused a slight commotion’ at divisional headquarters, because the 41ˢᵗ Battalion had captured men of two different divisions in four consecutive nights. 3ʳᵈ Division headquarters were concerned it might signal the German high command was strengthening the front in preparation for an offensive. The next day, 20 April, Colonel Heron received a message from division stating that a ‘live Bosche was urgently required’. There was no time for a fully planned formal raid with artillery support, which typically would have been used in 1916 and 1917. The method of capturing a “live” German had to be devised on the spot, by a group of determined men, using platoon weapons, because there was simply no time to arrange supporting firepower with headquarters in the form of artillery, mortars, gas or Vickers guns. It was under this sort of pressure that stealth raids evolved. Wiles volunteered and asked for his friend Francis Burtenshaw to go with him. Heron agreed and ‘as far as possible a scheme was devised’.⁵²

The night was ‘unusually bright’. For two hours Wiles, Burtenshaw, and a small group of men chosen because they were confident and competent, crawled about the farmland, woods and gullies looking for an isolated post to raid. The moonlight made them fearful of being seen. Tired, they returned to a post for a ‘spell’. By 2.30am visibility had deteriorated enough to

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⁴⁹ (793) Lt HJ Wiles DSO, MID, 41 Bn, Upholsterer, of Mackay, Qld. E 30/12/15, aged 21, RTA 9/12/18.
⁵⁰ Wiles, Citation DSO, AWM28/1/158/0038.
⁵¹ Dixon, Citation DCM, AWM28/2/75/0024.
⁵² 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
warrant another attempt. They started up a sunken road running into the German outpost system. A command rang out in German from a bush above the road. One of Wiles’ scouts who could speak German replied, “Deutchen”, but the clumsy trick did not work. A German standing patrol answered with bombs and rifle fire. Wiles and his party attacked, killing two. Some of the Germans fled. Wiles whose revolver was now empty chased an armed German for 30 yards up the sunken road and into a field. Wiles tackled the man within a stone’s throw of a German post. It was practically a kidnapping. The prisoner told his captors that he belonged to 18th Division – only its two northern regiments had been relieved. He had heard nothing of a renewed offensive. In fact, he said that his battalion was exhausted. The next day the 41st Battalion was relieved. In five fighting patrols in six nights, (each one more innovative and unprecedented than the last), the 41st Battalion captured six prisoners and killed 21 Germans for the loss of two men badly wounded, and four minor wounds. The minimal casualties justified the innovation of the men involved and increased their confidence.

On 25 April the battalion returned to the outpost line, and noticed a change of attitude in the enemy. The Germans treated any artillery falling near their outposts as advertisement of a raid. They responded with machine gun barrages from deep positions across a broad front and withdrew their outpost garrisons. The adjustment in tactics indicated that the Germans despite being tired were well led and organised. On 26 April the 41st Battalion suffered its only fatal casualties in this form of warfare when a “B” Company man was killed and another died of his wounds. This caused the battalion to adapt again. On the night of 27 April, Lieutenant Samuel Robinson, “A” Company, killed one man and took one prisoner in a formal raid on a machine gun post on a ridge north of the road. Robinson had taken his patrol deep into the German outpost system in the hope of cutting off retreating garrisons.

Heron remarked, ‘The morale of all ranks is in a very good state, everyone has had a trying time but on all sides the desire to get an opportunity of meeting the Bosch and inflicting

53 41 Bn War Diary April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
54 For names of D Coy men who took part in this action, see 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 18, AWM4/23/58/18Part1.
55 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
56 The fighting patrol was led by Lt WH Parker, 41 Bn, Clerk, of Rockhampton, Qld. E 20/11/16, aged 22, RTA 23/7/19; the casualty was 2558 Pte JE Carrie, 41 Bn, Farmer, of Kooroongarra, NSW. E 6/5/16, aged 27, DOW 26/4/18, Red Cross File 1DRL/0428/2/69/11-12. 41Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 25, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
57 (268) Lt SL Robinson MC, 41 Bn, Student, of Brisbane, Qld. E 6/12/15, aged 18, RTA 28/2/19.
58 Robinson, Citation MC, AWM28/1/160/0042.
59 The raiders suffered three casualties. The Forty First, p. 94; 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.
casualties on him is great. Our recent successes in encounters with him have had a very stimulating effect and we are sure that when it comes to hand-to-hand fighting, we are immensely superior’. On 1 May he wrote to his wounded officer Les Boyce, and informed him that the German machine gun post that had wounded him had been captured. Heron also mentioned that the battalion had ‘made quite a name for itself’, while the other three battalions in the brigade had only managed to capture one prisoner between them.

At the time the 41st Battalion’s dynamic mix of formal fighting patrols and stealth raids were thought to be unprecedented in the British Army, in frequency in one tour, in material and men captured, and the few casualties incurred. Yet when it came to formal raids and fighting patrols, the battalion did not have a glorious record to fall back on. Indeed, the formal trench raiding and fighting patrol experiences of 1917 taught the 41st Battalion what not to do. At least seven officers and 173 other ranks had been trained in raiding by March 1917. Before April 1918 they had attempted five formal raids. All failed. Private and official records give only a partial picture of the men who participated in these events, but Wiles, Butler, Croft and Dixon and several other headquarters scouts and intelligence staff were involved at one time or another.

Dixon was one of eight men wounded (with two killed) on the 11 February 1917 in a raid at Armentieres when three officers and 43 other ranks went over the top and found the German wire had not been cut by the preliminary bombardment. Wiles commanded an assault group in a large formal raid in the Mushroom Salient two weeks later. Eight men were wounded and two killed. The raiders went over after the artillery had bombarded the German line for four consecutive nights only to find the wire uncut. They made a hasty withdrawal. The Germans responded with a counter-bombardment that killed three men in the front line trenches and wounded eight. This is exactly the type of scenario that Bean claimed the men of 1918 feared and hated about formal raids.

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60 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/S8/18Part2.
61 In Boyce, L (Heron to Boyce) 1/5/18, AWM2DRL/1180.
62 The Forty-First, p. 91.
63 This figure is the sum of men trained for formal raids at Armentieres between January and March 1917. See 41 Bn War Diaries, January to April 1917: AWM4/23/S8/3; AWM4/23/S8/4; AWM4/23/S8/5 & AWM4/23/S8/6.
64 See for instance Croft, Citation MM, AWM28/1/130/0010.
65 The Forty-First, p. 34; 41 Bn War Diary, App 9, AWM4/23/S8/4.
On the battalion’s first formal fighting patrol in January 1917 the men ‘greatly under-estimated the enemy’s vigilance’, and ‘simply walked across [No Man’s Land] in a stooping posture, so that Fritz, immediately he detected their movements, waited and allowed them to come quite close up before opening fire’. At Ploegsteert on 16 April 1917 an officer was killed and two other ranks wounded, again before their fighting patrol had crossed No Man’s Land. In the same sector, Butler led a fighting patrol in cooperation with a gas projector attack. He cut the German wire by hand, perhaps because he had learnt not to trust an artillery barrage to do it. But the patrol was heard, and had flares and grenades thrown at them. Before April 1918, no raid or fighting patrol by the 41st Battalion had reached an enemy trench or killed or captured a German. Hence the men recognised the need to adapt.

As distinct from these formal operations the battalion prided itself on its scouting and reconnaissance of No Man’s Land. Central to this was dominating No Man’s Land right up to the enemy wire. Heron took command in July 1917 and continued a policy of being ‘master of “No Man’s Land”‘. At Le Bizet in February 1918 he wrote, ‘the quietness of the front offered excellent opportunities… for getting all new hands into No Man’s Land to accustom them to moving about in the dark’. This experience prepared the battalion for the formal fighting patrols in April, and gave scope for innovation that anticipated future stealth raids. By April 1918 the patrollers of the battalion were experienced in No Man’s Land. Faced with intense demands for identification and prisoners, they showed a readiness and confidence to crawl for distances of 1,000 yards and to wait for hours at a time to get in position to rush German posts or patrols from the flanks. They used disciplined formations, mostly the diamond, with a central assault party, covered by flanking parties and reserves, known as “tailers”. However usually only a handful of men actually raided a post, probably because the experienced men insisted that fewer men made less noise and created less of a target. The majority of a fighting patrol’s strength waited in No Man’s Land as supports and reserves as required.

In the raids of 1917, artillery had been used in the form of preparatory and destructive barrages to cut the German wire, smash the trenches, and demoralise or kill the garrisons. Brigade orders dictated how and when the artillery would fire. In the 41st Battalion’s

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68 The Forty-First, p. 33.
69 41 Bn War Diary, 16 April 1917, AWM4/23/58/6.
70 41 Bn War Diary, 24 April 1917, AWM4/23/58/6.
71 The Forty-First, p. 32.
72 41 Bn War Diary, February 1918, App 3, AWM4, 23/58/16.
experience these barrages had failed and served only to invite retaliation. In April 1918 the men preferred to cut through the wire themselves and use artillery to bluff and outmanoeuvre their enemy and assist a patrol’s movement. Artillery was less about firepower and more about ruse.

Photo 6 Battalion artist’s impression of a stealth raid by the 41st Battalion in April 1918 on a German post near a cemetery, where British dead had been buried during the first battle of the Somme in 1916. (AWM RCDIG0001603)

The innovative fighting patrols of the 41st Battalion may well have influenced the small-unit fighting skill of the division. Certainly Colin Butler’s raid was disseminated as an example to other units. On 3 May the 37th Battalion, in posts on the river flats near Ville-sur-Ancre, received a memo from divisional headquarters requesting urgent identification of the German unit facing them. The battalion was left to devise the plan. A fighting patrol was organised that owed much to the tactics outlined in the circular detailing of Butler’s action on 18 April. A barrage was arranged to resemble the harassing fire of the previous four nights in the hope that the enemy would be ‘unsuspicious of any change’. It lasted five minutes before the Germans caught on that something was up. By then the fighting patrol had crossed the dead

73 10 Bde War Diary, App 2, AWM4/23/10/19.
ground. The Germans opened machine gun fire as the patrol rushed the post in two parties. The presence of a Lewis gunner was critical, as it had been for Butler:

One of the enemy on the left of the post fired steadily at close range but the Lewis gun... beat him down. The remainder of the post threw bombs and fired their rifles at the attacking party – two of whom were wounded. The post was rushed and the two occupants were captured although they offered stubborn resistance. One was wounded... but the other had to be urged to go with the patrol by being prodded with the bayonet. 74

However, this thesis argues that there were a few men in some Australian battalions who needed no coaching or circulars to instigate stealth raids. On the night of the 18th April Lieutenant Stan Stebbins 75 and eight men of the 40th Battalion patrolled 1,000 yards in front of the 10th Brigade lines south of the Ancre River with orders to locate an enemy post with a view to raiding it the following night. Stebbins found a post on the outskirts of Ville-sur-Ancre. ‘Realising that they would have to go out and do the work the next night, he decided to obtain the identification then and there.’ 76 As he and two men moved to outflank the post, a nine man German patrol intercepted them and called on Stebbins to surrender. The three Australians attacked. Stebbins and Sergeant Alfred Richards 77 shot two Germans. Private John Brilliant 78 killed one with the bayonet and chased the others who ran ‘squealing’. The three stealth raiders carried one of the dead back to their lines to establish identification. The formal raid set for the next night was thereby avoided. 79 This was another example of the virtue of stealth raiders. A few daring men could do a job willingly that might have been set aside for a whole platoon or company.

The actions recorded thus far closely resemble what would become stealth raids. At the time they were significant because they contributed to the demand for prisoners and the domination of No Man’s Land that the Australian Corps had come to expect. The men were pleased because the casualties sustained in these types of enterprises were much fewer than they had come to expect in conventional operations. On the night of 4 May, patrols of the 9th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Charles Rosenthal, 80 advanced between 400 to 1,000 yards

74 10 Bde War Diary, App 2, AWM4/23/10/19.
75 (701) Lt SG Stebbins MC, 40 Bn, Grocer, of Zeehan, Tas. E 8/2/16, aged 20, RTA 1/8/19.
76 FC Green, The Fortieth: A Record of the 40th Battalion, A.I.F., (1922), Uckfield, 2007, p. 129.
77 1964 Sgt AH Richards MM, 40 Bn, Farmer, of Sheffield, Tas. E 11/4/16, aged 21, DOW 18/7/18.
78 7438 Sgt JD Brilliant MM, 40 Bn, Mechanical engineer, of Canberra, FCT. E 13/10/16, aged 22, RTA 10/4/19.
across a front of 1,500 yards and dug new posts. His decision to advance meant the support line took up better positions. It increased the depth of the defence and gave the outposts respite because the German artillery was unsure of where they were. The advance was bloodless because innovative fighting patrols and the original stealth raiders, mostly from the 41st Battalion, had cleared all the hostile German posts in the area over the previous few weeks. It led to General William Birdwood, commanding the Australian Corps, to initiate a scheme to capture the Morlancourt Ridge in a series of formal operations. The subsequent success of this was brought to the attention Field Marshal Haig. On 8-9 May Haig commented in his diary:

> During the last three days [they – the 3rd Division] advanced their front about a mile... The ground gained was twice as much as they had taken at Messines last June, and they had done it with very small losses.

Rosenthal’s advance and the subsequent formal operations on Morlancourt Ridge were anticipated by the work of the first stealth raiders. It was a better use of the infantry of the 3rd Division than Monash’s ambitious yet blind foray into unknown territory against a vast enemy force, which cost 300 men, on 28 March. Monash was apt to make poor decisions about the conditions at the front because he did not visit it. On the other hand stealth raiders were self-reliant and confident in the vast rural battlefield they were exploring, with its gullies, copses and sunken roads. Such men increasingly became disillusioned by orders that were out of step with the conditions or which denied them some measure of independent judgement. Monash’s orders on 28 March were an example of the type of command the men had come to resent. Monash’s finest achievements were based on thorough and detailed planning. As this thesis will show, his ambitions were such that he sometimes claimed stealth raider’s successes as his own.

Meanwhile, south of the Somme River, small actions occurred that had elements of what would become stealth raids: initiative, self-reliance and bush skills. On 5 April, during the First Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, Corporal Doug Sayers and four men, 58th Battalion, rushed a...
German patrol in the flats between the villages of Hamel and Bouzencourt in daylight. Sayers had been instructed to protect an advanced machine gun post and his actions were in part based on those orders. They killed an officer and five men, captured two wounded prisoners, and collected maps and a diary from the dead officer. Elsewhere fighting patrols and small raids which battalion or brigade headquarters intended to involve a whole platoon plus Lewis Guns supported by a box barrage were sometimes pulled off swiftly and stealthily by experienced patrols with ‘as few men as possible’. Lieutenant George Mitchell, 48th Battalion, learned not to rely on a barrage or weight of numbers. ‘A lot of men mean a lot of noise, and are a lot of target. Only take trusted men, with good night eyes, who can move quietly.’

On the night of 13 April Lieutenant John Stinson, ‘a tall leather-faced bushman,’ while leading a formal fighting patrol of twenty men and a Lewis Gun, with orders to a raid a post, broke away from his men and seized a lone German moving between posts in No Man’s Land. The prisoner was dragged back to the Australian line without ‘attracting attention’, as might have happened had Stinson raided a post. Lieutenant Albert Hill MC, a former itinerant shearer and champion boxer of the 5th Division, shot a German in the face in a field near Bouzencourt, after several nights of stalking the German outpost system. The wounded German ran. Hill chased, and tackled him. The prisoner surrendered with the stricken plea “Very good, Sir”. The incident was similar to the “kidnapping” by Harry Wiles of the 41st Battalion. Hill’s initiative and self-reliance was indicative of the virtue of stealth raids. He had captured a prisoner without drawing fire.

Hill was resourceful and preferred to work alone or in a small team of trusted men. He was the type of man likely to distinguish himself in a No Man’s Land, if he survived. On 21 March 1918, on a reconnaissance patrol in No Man’s Land, Hill and two other men armed with revolvers and bombs, attacked a German raiding party and scattered it, undoubtedly saving

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86 58 Bn War Diary, April 1918 including entry 5/4/18 & App 3, AWM4/23/75/27.
87 Mitchell, Backs to the Wall, pp. 289-290.
88 (2251) Lt J Stinson MC, 53 Bn, School teacher, of Blayney, NSW. E 3/2/16, aged 25, RTA 8/1/19.
89 Williams, An Anzac on the Western Front, p. 101.
90 In Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 43.
91 (1428) Lt AH Hill MC & Bar, 31 Bn, Shearer, of Hornsby, NSW. E 30/6/15, aged 27, RTA 16/3/19.
92 31 Bn War Diary, 2/5/18, AWM4/23/48/34.
93 Bean sometimes used this kind of turn of phrase. For instance he described Walter Brown (ch 5) as ‘the type of man certain to distinguish himself in this way if he survived’ and Maurice Wilder-Neligan (chs 4 & 6) as ‘an adventurous young [man who]... like many others found his natural vocation in war’. In Official History, Vol VI p. 341 n8 and p. 404 respectively.
their mates in the trenches. This was reported in the Empire press under the headline – ‘Sixty routed by three: Australians fight with bombs and revolvers’.  

Men like the bushmen Stinson and Hill in the 5th Division and Butler, Dixon and Stebbins in the 3rd reflected the old hands’ belief that ‘as for man to man goes every Australian knows who is the superior fighter, that has been tested too often & the Fritzies know it in their own hearts too’. Their stealth raids were reported and circulated in divisional intelligence reports which officers were encouraged to read to the men. They added to Australian confidence and spirit. The men knew they were powerless against gas, shells and machine gun fire but they revelled in the superiority a few daring men demonstrated in stealthy hand to hand fighting in No Man’s Land. Also, the condition of the prisoners gave them reason to be confident. From the frontline the Australian infantry observed that German morale seemed to have taken a knock because of the innovative Australian patrol tactics and stealth raids. Lieutenant Tom Britton thought that the captured officers he saw were ‘mostly game fellows but the men always beg most abjectly for mercy’. The commanding officer of the 15th Brigade, Brigadier Harold “Pompey” Elliott, 15th Brigade wrote, 

The intelligence reports of these patrol encounters are joyful reading. I feel like going out myself for a rough and tumble, for the sport seems as harmless for us as chasing and rounding up barn door fowls.

At Villers-Bretonneux on the night of 19/20 April, Private Sydney Lewis, 56th Battalion, a signaller drunk and absent without leave from his battalion, captured a German from a post deep in the outpost system. Driver John Turnbull, 5th Division Ammunition Column, met Lewis and his prisoner the next day, outside Amiens and still absent without leave:

This chap [Lewis] had too much rum and lost his B[attalion]n. He wandered across No man’s land, half stupid and found himself in a Hun trench, which sobered him up. He came across a dugout full of Huns. He did, as he said, a bit of bayonet exercise in front of the dugout, calling on Fritz to come out. 27 Huns came out & faced [him]… He picked one man out & ordered the
rest into the dugout... He made his way rapidly back through our outposts passing the Tommy reliefs. He said he would have brought the lot over only he was scared of the Tommies who would open up on that number of Hun’s coming over at night & might skittle [him]... He passed here with the Hun carrying his equipment & rifle for him. Last night he camped in Amiens getting his prisoner very drunk on wine. He reckons he must get his prisoner up before his Colonel. He has to account for his absence somehow.¹⁰¹

“Pompey” Elliott’s response and Lewis’ freakish drunken stealth raid both point to the exhaustion and malaise infecting German units which had been in the line since 21 March and were beginning to be reinforced by teenagers with no battle experience. But they also belie the difficulties of closing with a nervous enemy, in a fluid frontline that changed with successive waves of German attacks. As Bean pointed out, in parts of the Australian Corps front any form of activity above ground ‘was impossible’ because the space between the opposing lines was ‘too narrow and bare to allow manoeuvring even by night’.¹⁰² The outposts were swept by machine gun fire. Low-lying areas were toxic with gas, No Man’s Land interminably lit up by flares. Shellfire was a persistent fear, much of it “friendly fire”. The German attacks had been so sudden and penetrating that neither the British nor the relieving Australian troops had time to dig posts capable of withstanding shell fire. A tired Allen Clements described moving up to the front near Villers-Bretonneux.

came into the front line last night after our short spell. Was hardly able to walk, but managed to get along cold and wet... Big barrage opened up as we were coming in and there was iron floating everywhere. One shell from our own guns fell within a few yards of me must have been defective. Trenches in this sector in rotten condition and not deep enough.¹⁰³

On 8 May Private John Smith ‘felt like having a yarn’ with his dad and wrote home:

¹⁰¹ Turnbull D 20/4/18, AWMPR91/015. Eventually Lewis handed his prisoner over to some higher authority and the brigade war diarist recorded the ‘identification was normal though the means of obtaining it rather extraordinary.’

¹⁰² Bean wrote: ‘After Second Villers-Bretonneux the corps held, for a time, the whole of the Fourth Army’s front. The northern flank of this, opposite Albert and Dernacourt, lay, where the Battle of Dernancourt had left it, on the bare promontory of the Lavieville heights, looking down upon the Germans at some 250 yards’ distance. Here the German sentries had the Australian front-line posts on the skyline, and any except the most cautious movement in No Man’s Land attracted the instant fire of machine-guns against which there was little or no cover... at the southern end of the corps front, in the sector of the 4th Division on the Villers-Bretonneux plateau the bareness and flatness of the summit made [patrolling]... difficult’. Official History, Vol VI, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰³ Clements, D 28/4/18, AWM3DRL/0961.
we have held this front line for over a month now without relief - & this is, I believe a record for the British Army. The Fritz artillery is not very severe but still there is a strain all the time. We have to keep out of sight all day & work all night. The work consists of patrols etc & we have gained the upper hand of No man’s land. The night is only 6 hours now compared with 15 hours in winter.\textsuperscript{104}

The signs of fatigue were apparent. The work went on. It was the norm for the “work” of formal fighting patrols and raids to be conducted at night. This added to the nervous and physical exhaustion, and the risk of casualties, because the outpost system at night was at its most active. Formal fighting patrols and raids that returned empty handed would also have the emotional drain, knowing another would be ordered. Allen Clements took part in several formal fighting patrols in the understrength 54\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. He experienced the full horrors and frustrations of No Man’s Land. In one a German garrison saw them coming. It sent up flares and turned six machine guns onto Clements’ party: ‘bullet hit rifle... got fastened up in our wire... fell into shell holes clothes torn to pieces and nothing to show for it’.\textsuperscript{105}

Four nights later, as Clements prepared to go over the top in a formal raid supported by a “friendly” trench mortar barrage, he could hear German wounded screaming in their posts. ‘It was heartrending’ he wrote, ‘Hope I will never get like that’. When Clements’ raiding party attacked they found the bombardment had acted as signal to the German garrison. ‘Fritz scooted as hard as he could go’.\textsuperscript{106} The trench mortar barrage was such an effective warning of an impending raid that the Germans had time to evacuate their wounded. The raiders got no prisoners but their own nerves were rattled. The Germans responded with artillery, machine guns and gas. These types of incidents occurred almost every night somewhere or other along the Australian Corps front. And with it exhaustion was inevitable.

The Germans tended to stand and fight in their posts when they had the tactical advantage of high ground or cover. One particularly dangerous area was the southwest corner of Vaire Wood, north east of Villers-Bretonneux. The Australian line ‘ran in a series of strong posts roughly following the crest of a rise’. It faced a shallow valley ‘beyond which rose steeply a bank about fifteen feet high, and then a series of terraces’ where a small plantation hid Germans in advanced posts. Until 17 May German machine gunners and snipers dominated the terrace and plantation, protected by patrols that used a tactic of lying and waiting in the

\textsuperscript{104} 4815A Pte JRN Smith, 31 Bn, Farmer, of Grandchester, Qld. E 27/10/16, aged 22, DOI 24/10/18. L 8/5/18, AWM2DRL/027.
\textsuperscript{105} Clements, D 12/5/18, AWM3DRL/0961.
\textsuperscript{106} Clements, D 16/5/18, AWM3DRL/0961.
low crop, spread out in the shape of what one Australian called, ‘Zulu horns’, with the intent of trapping or outflanking Australian patrols.\textsuperscript{107}

On the night of 5 May 1918 Second Lieutenant Dalton Neville,\textsuperscript{108} 55\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, and fifteen men, used the din of a heavy rainstorm to cover their movement onto the terraces where they searched on their bellies for signs of a German machine gun post. This was not a time-bound formal fighting patrol or raid reliant on coordination with artillery or trench mortars, but an impromptu stealth raid by self-reliant men designed to make the most of the cover the noise of the rain afforded.

Dalton Neville was from the small town of Singleton on the Hunter River in New South Wales. As a boy he had helped drovers pilot their stock across the river and rode his bicycle enthusiastically between isolated rural townships. He worked briefly as a clerk in the local Commonwealth Bank, being one of the first young men to take up the employment opportunity afforded by the nationalisation agenda of the Fisher Labor government. He enlisted underage in July 1915. His first night on active service was at Fromelles in July 1916, where he recalled ‘at the age of 20 as a Corporal I was shoved out on No Mans Land with one other man to act as a listening post... From that night on... until I was seriously wounded in July 1918 I was out in No Mans Land nearly every night. I had the flair, or it was cultivated in me, or because I was with the battalion and knew the ropes.’\textsuperscript{109} In 1917 he was decorated with the DCM and MID for gallantry and initiative as a leader of formal patrols and raids.\textsuperscript{110} He was commissioned after good work during the Third Battle of Ypres. Years later he told his son Dalton (Junior), that on hearing of his younger brother Tom’s death at Menin Road he became mightily enraged and set about stealth raiding as a way to extract a personal toll.\textsuperscript{111} If this were the case it did not affect his skill in how to use ground, or the judgement required to decide when a silent raid under a rainstorm was a better option than a noisy vengeful bloodbath.

Neville led the stealth raiders across No Man’s Land while rain pelted the crop. They found a German machine gun post on the terrace. Four wet German machine gunners crouched by

\textsuperscript{107} Williams, An Anzac on the Western Front, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{108} (2742) Lt DTW Neville MC, DCM, MID, 55 Bn, Bank clerk, of Singleton, NSW. E 16/7/15, aged 19, RTA 5/1/19.
\textsuperscript{109} Private collection courtesy of Dalton F Neville.
\textsuperscript{110} Neville’s pay book indicates that he also held the CdG (Fr). Private collection courtesy of Dalton F Neville.
\textsuperscript{111} Private collection courtesy of Dalton F Neville.

He was a huge, powerful man… I had to shoot him. The outpost was only about 35 yards from the main German trenches, and the man made a rush to get back to his own lines. I shot him again, this time through the back, and he dropped on his hands and knees and started crawling forward, and I had to shoot him twice again in the back before he stopped.

Neville and another man searched the dead corporal for information. They were so intent on this work that they did not see the German reinforcements approaching through the crop until they were practically on top of them.

We looked up to see a German officer and a private within five yards of us. They saw us at the same instant, but we had our revolvers up quicker, and... shot them both dead. Before we could get away the effect of the shooting had its result. We were surrounded and had to fight our way back... but all of us managed to get back without a scratch.112

Experience in No Man’s Land had made Neville fit and tough but there was also bushcraft in this stealth raid. Whereas an artillery or trench mortar bombardment was the norm in a formal raid, experience taught front line soldiers that it also served to advertise that an attack was likely. Neville’s skill was that he used the noise of the rain to achieve the covering effect of a bombardment: The German garrison could not hear his approach and the sentries were crouching down avoiding the rain rather than keeping watch. This was an example of how stealth raiders thought and reacted to the environment. They were lateral thinkers, not bound by doctrine. But this stealth raid had been a close run thing.

It did not take the Germans long to re-occupy the post and to send patrols into the plantation. Sniping and machine gun fire from the terraces continued to harass the Australian outpost line, suggesting well-organised fresh troops with competent NCOs and junior officers. The prisoners Neville captured were from the 77th Reserve Division. Their identification confirmed that the Australian Corps was facing fresh enemy divisions north and south of the Somme River. The first class, albeit exhausted, divisions had been replaced by less experienced

112 ‘World’s Super-Raider, Diggers Adopt Indian Warfare, Sydney man’s extraordinary exploits’, *Sunday Times*, Perth, 26/02/22, p. 16.
Photo 7 Studio Portrait Lieutenant Dalton Neville MC, DCM, MID. The chevrons on his right sleeve mark three years of service. (Courtesy of his son Dalton F Neville)
and less known divisions including the 77th Reserve and 108th, which had recently transferred to the Amiens sector from the Eastern Front. This coincided with a weather change – the cold and unsettled days of April gave way to a ‘humid, enervating heat’.\textsuperscript{113} No Man’s Land and the surrounding countryside fast became ‘one mass of beautiful scarlet poppies growing ever abundantly amid the neglected fields of wheat’. Men complained that the ‘high crop in No man’s land, made patrolling awkward... as they couldn’t help making a noise... in it’.\textsuperscript{114} It was, ‘a very hard job finding your way about in this country which is covered in wheat crops or high grass.’\textsuperscript{115} No training or battlefield experience in 1916 and 1917 helped the men to cope with this. The conditions were unfamiliar to all except men from rural (and bush) backgrounds.

On 17 May Private Edmund Street, a 20-year old station-hand who described himself as a “freelancer” in the front line – he was usually a runner delivering messages for his company commander – joined Dalton Neville and thirteen men while they organised another stealth raid. Street wrote that from an outpost they watched an enemy ‘machine gun spitting fire as it traversed our line’. They made a plan. At 1am the stealth raiders crept out intent on wiping out the German garrison on the terrace. The stealth raiders faced the familiar perils of No Man’s Land: flares, indirect and direct machine gun fire and the fresh challenge of high, dense crop in a semi-open battlefield.

They had gone several hundred yards ‘when a sudden crack was heard’. It was a flare fired from the German outposts system. It soared above the crop in ‘a brilliant white flame’. Street described how the stealth raiders depended on skills learnt in the Australian bush:

\begin{quote}
We kept a tight hold of ourselves and flattened into the wheat. The flare fell among us sizzling and roaring. Fortunately, it touched none of us and was soon burnt out. We crept forward until we were within striking distance of the flare king. One of the chaps, who was a roo hunter in pre-war days, crept forward alone and pounced onto the unsuspecting flare king. Our man hit hard with his fist and, as there was a Mills bomb in it, the impact sent the firer of flares to sleep. On we crept, the machine gun spitting bullets over our heads into our outposts.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} Lt EG Hodge, 50 Bn, Clerk, of Alberton, SA. E 17/5/15, aged 22, RTA 15/6/19, D 26/5/18, AWMPR00792.
\textsuperscript{114} Geddes, D 12/6/18, MLMSS 2763/Item 1.
\textsuperscript{115} Hodge, D 5/6/18, AWMPR00792.
Street could hear the German garrison talking. ‘At last the gunner left his post and walked along the trench’. The German was unaware of the menace that watched him from the edge of the crop. Neville gave a ‘low spoken order’. The stealth raiders ‘made a silent rush at the post’. Street, firing a revolver, was among the first into the trench. As far as he was concerned the ‘stunt was over in a few seconds’. But citations for gallantry suggest a short, bitter fight ensued. Private Peter McClusky, a former light horseman and Gallipoli veteran, frequently disciplined for drunkenness, absenteeism, insubordination and fist fighting, beat down a German bayonet with the butt end of his rifle just as the German ‘was about to strike’, then clubbed him to death. McClusky was also freelancing – he was usually a horse driver in the battalion’s transport section.

The “roo hunter” was Private Peter Monck, a farmer from Pambula on the New South Wales south coast. Monck killed the machine gunner then captured the stunned flare king he had knocked out in the crop. Two others were also captured. Finally, Neville, ‘in an exercise of great skill and leadership, piloted’ his men and the prisoners back to the 55th Battalion’s outposts. When trench maps were issued in this sector after 17 May the terraced ground was marked “Neville’s”. Getting your name on a trench map was indicative of one of the ways in which stealth raider’s and stealth raiding’s reputation grew and spread.

It had taken weeks of reconnoitring and ultimately the bush skills of a bunch of freelancers, most of them ‘Fine big country men’, according to Street, to wipe out the German posts on the terrace. One of the virtues of stealth raids like this was that they were silent. A few revolver shots did not attract attention when fired in the crop, nor did some brutal work with rifle butts and bayonets. No noise meant retaliation was less likely because the local German commanders did not know a post had been captured. The Australian infantry garrisoning the outposts, support and reserve line, within range of the German trench mortars.

116 Street, MS AWMPR85/179. See also TJ Cook, Snowy to the Somme a Muddy and Bloody Campaign, 1916-1918, Newport, 2014, pp. 212-213.
117 Revolvers and automatic pistols were not standard issue for a runner or a private, but many Australians had them in 1918.
118 Street, MS AWMPR85/179.
120 McClusky, Citation MM, AWM28/1/298. On discipline see 651 McCluskey [sic], recordsearch.naa.gov.au.
121 2184 Pte PE Monck CdeG (Bel), 55 Bn, Farmer, of Pambula, NSW. E 9/1/16, aged 21, RTA 2/6/19.
122 Monck, Citation CdeG (Bel), AWM28/1/298.
123 Neville, Citation MC, AWM28/1/298.
124 See for instance map in FA Stichnoth, AWMPR88/088.
125 Street, MS AWMPR85/179.
and artillery appreciated this. Often the stealth raiders own battalion and brigade commanders did not know a stealth raid had taken place until the stealth raiders arrived at headquarters with their prisoners.

The origins of stealth raids lay in these types of actions. The first stealth raids can be distinguished from formal raids and fighting patrols which were organised at battalion headquarters. Stealth raids had several advantages over the conventional formal raiding and fighting patrol tactics. The objective of capturing prisoners, which traditionally meant big, highly organised and time bound formal operations with attendant risks, could be achieved by small numbers of men without heavy casualties. The tactic gave higher commanders, with an intelligent and critical eye, like Rosenthal, 9th Brigade, and Birdwood, commanding the Australian Corps, unforeseen opportunities to improve the Australian Corps line by increasing the depth of the defence between the front and Amiens, to shift posts to higher ground, to improve fields of fire and tactical continuity in the outpost system. All of this was a benefit to the men. As the 41st Battalion intelligence staff noted, ‘Better work of this nature, with fewer
casualties attendant, has certainly never been done’. Stealth raiders also demoralised the enemy, and the war weariness of the prisoners they captured reinforced Australian confidence.

During the same period, 60 miles to the north at Hazebrouck in French Flanders, Australian stealth raiders also began to influence the small unit tactics used by the lower ranks of the 1st Division. Men and commanders heard rumours of a new tactic among the men, and new terms like “daylight raid” and “one-man raid”. Stealth raiders acting with no orders captured and killed the enemy quietly when he least expected it, losing few themselves. They would steer the AIF on an uncharted path, beyond traditional doctrine and modification of orders to something unique and distinctive.

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126 In The Forty-First, p. 91.
CHAPTER TWO

‘We gave them a bit of stoush’

The origin of stealth raids at Hazebrouck, 22 April to 28 May 1918

The most prolific source on stealth raids is the men. Like the Australian Corps on the Somme, the origins of stealth raids by men of the 1st Division at Hazebrouck can be linked to a small number of determined men and their attempts to avoid the expected butcher’s bill of formal operations. First-hand accounts are reliable on this matter because the men didn’t hesitate to express their feelings. Some battalions suffered heavy losses in the April fighting and blamed them on their commanders. Bean argued that this led to the nightly Australian patrols trying to seize small posts or patrols in order to dodge unpopular formal operations.¹ Some men initiated stealth raids in this hope.

A few adventurous men in the 1st Division began to stealth raid German outposts in daylight. This was against a commonly accepted rule of trench warfare: not to appear above ground by day. ‘We hide by day and crawl out of our holes like rats at night,’ wrote Lieutenant Bob Traill, ‘feed by night and work by night’.² Traill was an experienced soldier. His comment typifies the common soldier’s habits and experience. It was the same on the German side. Corps, division and brigade ordered formal raids and gas projector attacks and battalion commanders ordered fighting patrols, all at night. Challenging this doctrine was radical. Yet, unofficially, a few men began stealth raiding by day, finding the conditions more conducive. More than once, small bands of Australians, even men operating solo, captured Germans without a shot being fired.

The evolution and spread of daylight stealth raids has not been widely acknowledged in general histories of 1918, or in Bean’s three chapters on “peaceful penetration” in the Official History. Yet it is one of the truly outstanding innovations in small unit tactics of the war. This neglect is probably due to the fact that higher commanders, BEF and Australian alike, took months to appreciate what some Australians were doing. Consequently, historians studying official documents, memoirs and biographies of commanding officers, or set-piece battles, have also overlooked the origins of daylight stealth raids and their significance.

¹ Bean, Official History, Vol VI, pp. 32-33.
² Traill, D 9/6/18, AWM2DRL/711.
This chapter demonstrates that command and control of formal raids was hidebound. Some of the stealth raiders mentioned in this chapter must have been bitterly disappointed when commanding officers ordered them over the top in formal operations anyway – despite the fact that they had captured prisoners or secured identification using their own initiative.

The innovative shift to stealth raids came out of bitter and costly experiences. At Hazebrouck in April and May mistakes were made and lessons learned and it was the infantry in the outposts, not their commanding officers, that proved the most adaptable. It began on 22 April when the 1st Division was ordered to capture Meteren in two phases over consecutive nights. First, advancing the line on the flanks of the town, then on the second night, encircling, attacking and “mopping-up” the village. Old soldiers of the 3rd Brigade, who were given the job, were sceptical from the outset.

The method of the attack did not appeal to us at all, although in theory it was very excellent... provided the enemy acted “according to plan” ... It reminded us too forcibly of the attack on Boursies [6-10 April 1917], which was carried to a successful issue during the second phase, only after suffering heavy casualties and nerve strain... However orders issued are not to be queried, but obeyed.3

The first stroke succeeded, due mostly to ‘surprise and dash’. But as the old soldiers had feared, when the second phase began, the German defenders were expecting it and fought bitterly and well. The outskirts of the town were ‘bristling with machine guns’, and the encircling battalions and “moppers up” were dragged into a bloody two-hour street battle with no artillery support, as the village burned fiercely.4 The historian of the 12th Battalion recorded that

It was a forlorn hope from the very onset, and although officers, N.C.O.’s and men alike acted in an irreproachable manner, they could not attain the impossible. As soon as a move was made, concentrated machine gun fire swept the whole front... and made movement extremely difficult... It was a fight between bombs and machine-guns, and although many Huns were accounted for before we admitted defeat, the machine-guns... proved their superiority and demanded our withdrawal.5

The failure was not the fault of the infantry but of their commanders who had underestimated the Germans. The operation cost the 1st Division 200 casualties. The men felt angry and betrayed. One digger described it as ‘a needless waste of valuable lives in a stupidly arranged

3 Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 438. For the attack at Boursies see pp. 282-327.
4 Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 441.
5 Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 442.
affair’.\(^6\) The battalion war diaries, histories and the \textit{Official History} were equally scathing.\(^7\) The defeat added fuel to the almost universal mistrust of orders for minor operations and formal raids. The beginning of stealth raiding at Hazebrouck grew out of this loathing and a preference for self-reliance, employing bush skills, which one digger claimed was ‘much more to our liking’.\(^8\)

After Meteren, patrolling and formal raiding to identify the German units opposite and improve the local tactical situation became routine. At first light on 1 May three patrols returned with prisoners. One was a stealth raid. Lance Corporal George Godfrey’s mates went exploring the fields on the slopes of a prominent rise, the Mont de Merris, and came upon a tarpaulin draped over a shell hole. They heard snoring – so gave it a tug:

Imagine the consternation of five Fritz who were supposed to be on listening post. The boys took... them prisoner... To hear the boys coming back across No Mans Land one would have thought they were a picnic party the laughing and banter that was going on. I was greatly surprised that Fritz did not put a few bursts of machine gun fire at them.\(^9\)

Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Wilder-Neligan, 10\(^{th}\) Battalion, was said to have delighted in the story of a stealth raid by his Regimental Sergeant Major Ernest “Raggy” Holland.\(^{10}\) Holland returned from a “reconnaissance” of a farm building in No Man’s Land with ‘a scared and much bruised German’ and ‘a sack of more scared hens’.\(^{11}\) This type of initiative and daring was good for morale. So was the countryside. There was “buckshee” tucker in the form of fields of potatoes, onions, cabbages, as well as goats, pigs, poultry and dairy herds. The area was familiar to “Raggy” Holland and other old soldiers because the 1st Division had been billeted there in 1916 and 1917. The estaminets in Caestre, Fletre, Strazeele, Moolenaacker and Rouge Croix where they had once ‘drunk the “plink plonk” (vin blanc) and... “vin rouge”’,\(^{12}\) were being ransacked by “salvagers” so that grog was plentiful, in and out of the line despite

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\(^8\) In Gammage, \textit{Broken Years}, p. 200.


\(^{10}\) 503 WO2 EA Holland DCM, MID, MM (Fr), 10 Bn, Labourer, of Broken Hill, NSW. E 24/8/14, aged 25, RTA 24/9/18.

\(^{11}\) In “Raggy” Holland Passes: 10\(^{th}\) Bn. Stalwart’, \textit{Reveille}, 1/1/41, p. 8.

\(^{12}\) Belford, \textit{Legs Eleven}, pp. 559-560.
orders to destroy it. The absence of artillery fire also contributed to Australian cheeriness. Harold Mercer\(^\text{13}\) reckoned the uncertainty of the location of the outposts meant ‘[w]e don’t know where [they] are; and apparently they don’t know where we are, so it is no good [either side] wasting shells’.\(^\text{14}\)

German shelling was heavier and more accurate behind the lines in the towns and near cross roads, where large bodies of troops gathered. The 12\(^{th}\) Battalion was particularly unlucky. On 17 April German artillery observers on Mont de Merris caught them in their reserve camp at Borre. The battalion suffered thirty casualties in two hours, then ten more deaths and fourteen wounded, when a shell struck a tent while the battalion was licking its wounds after the setback at Meteren.\(^\text{15}\) When rumours began of orders for formal raids, one experienced soldier in the 12\(^{th}\) Battalion went to great lengths to avoid more casualties.\(^\text{16}\) Captain Don McLeod asked permission to reconnoitre the front; he hoped to avoid the formal raid by capturing a prisoner, but he kept this a secret.\(^\text{17}\) McLeod was one of the best and certainly most experienced patrollers in the 1\(^{st}\) Division. A Scot by birth, he had been ‘chasing the gold in Marble Bar’ in the Pilbara region of Western Australia before the war.\(^\text{18}\)

The rough and mobile life of an infantryman did not bother him. A fellow West Australian digger remembered McLeod in Pilbara days:

What a fine specimen of a man he was! In those days he worked hard, but never neglected to jog a few miles, have a bath and a rub down, besides, dumbbell exercises, etc… his long suit was wrestling, at which he was a snag [a match] for anything in the Commonwealth.

The digger remembered McLeod in a bar fight in the billiard room of the ‘only hotel’ in Marble Bar. A stranger kept annoying McLeod, ‘until at last Donald gathered him up’ and in a wrestlers hold carried the would-be challenger into the street, ‘stood him on his head and let him drop, at the same time warning him that, if he came back in the billiard room, he would hurt him’.\(^\text{19}\) McLeod landed on Gallipoli a corporal and was quickly promoted to sergeant. His energy and strength were legendary, ‘he could always be seen doing the work of two men, keeping his

\(^{13}\) 7531 Cpl HSA Mercer, 1 Bn, Journalist, of Sydney, NSW. E 17/4/17, aged 35, RTA 28/3/19.

\(^{14}\) Mercer, D 24/4/18, MLMSS1143.


\(^{16}\) ‘Identification of Prisoners,’ Pamphlet issued by XV Corps to its Divisions, in CM Wrench, *Campaigning with the Fighting 9\(^{th}\)*: In and Out of the Line with the Ninth Battalion A.I.F., Brisbane, 1985, pp. 552-553.

\(^{17}\) (849) Capt D McLeod MC, 12 Bn, Miner, of Marble Bar, WA. E 10/9/14, aged 26, RTA 23/9/18.

\(^{18}\) ‘Donald McLeod’, *Western Mail*, 10/11/38, p. 67.

\(^{19}\) *Western Mail*, 10/11/38, p. 67.
men well under control, giving orders with his broad Scotch accent, and on all occasions personally leading his men with the full conviction that they were following him to a man’. At Gallipoli he led several patrols deep into Turkish territory, once bringing back three prisoners. Much of the information about the enemy works known as Pine Ridge South and Twin Trench Knoll – a dominant position over 500 yards south of the Anzac flank – was gathered by his patrols. He was promoted second lieutenant in August 1915.

McLeod’s war should have finished at Gallipoli. At Lone Pine his right hand was blown off in a bombing fight. Witnesses said he held the bloody stump of his forearm in his good hand, ‘with the thumb pressed firmly on the artery [and] quietly requested another soldier to apply first aid’. The fighting was so fierce he had to wait several hours for an opportunity to go to the rear, yet ‘never murmured or appeared downcast’. He was sent to Britain, recuperated and by early 1917 was badgering authorities to send him back to the fighting line. In April 1917 he returned to the 12th Battalion in France.

On 10 May 1918, with the recent losses in the battalion on his mind, he took just three volunteers to try and get a prisoner by stealth raid. Two were mates: Company Sergeant Major Bill Sheedy, a battalion original, and Private “Snowy” Carrick, whom the men called sergeant, even though he had been reduced to the ranks for over-staying his Paris leave. The third was Private James Bush, a 33-year old reinforcement who farmed on the York Plains in Tasmania. He was probably brought along for experience. The night they chose for the stealth raid was pitch black. They penetrated 1200 yards into the German outpost system by following a nine-foot high railway line embankment that crossed No Man’s Land at the southern base of the Mont de Merris. They searched the crop and found a hostile post in a shell hole. But as they prepared to rush it they were fired on from several directions including a farm building. All were seriously wounded and became separated. Bush and Carrick bled to death in the crop. McLeod despite wounds to his head and leg carried the mortally wounded Sheedy back to the Australian lines.

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21 Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 121.
McLeod limped to a British 4.5inch howitzer battery stationed in the reserve lines. He marked the location of the German posts on a map and proposed a scheme to the battery’s commanding officer, Major Robert Wilson, before going to a field ambulance. The next day, Wilson ‘carefully registered two guns each’ on the two targets marked by McLeod, and told the 11th Battalion to prepare to send out a patrol. That night the howitzer battery opened rapid fire on the targets for half an hour. The 11th Battalion patrol captured three dazed men who had been blown from their posts.

McLeod’s intention had been to avoid the casualties that he feared might be inflicted on his depleted battalion in a formal operation. But the fate of his stealth raid points to how difficult it was to adapt to the semi-open battlefield at night. It demonstrated that the best men could fall foul of the ground and the darkness. Incidents like this made clear to the Australians that the Germans, although inoffensive by day, were active at night. The Germans response to Australian formal operations by night included: wired crops and hedges designed to entangle

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23 Maj RA Wilson DSO, RGA, British Army.
24 RA Wilson, A Two Years Interlude: France 1916-1918, Palmerston North, First edition (publication date na), pp. 87-88. The prisoners said the shelling caused 10 casualties. 11 Bn War Diary, 11/5/18, AWM/23/28/39.
patrols and warn sentries; German machine gunners and snipers, who always commanded respect, hid in the crop, fired from the attics of farm buildings and behind hedges and dominated the high ground on Mont de Merris. Indirect fire over vast stretches of flat ground north and south of the Mont also caused many casualties.25 All this had to be dealt with at night when it was difficult enough for a patrol to stay together while moving through crop or skirting hedgerows and sunken roads. Several irreplaceable losses of respected experienced junior officers, NCOs and privates were caused by ambush and friendly fire because nervous men tended to fire at what they heard and identify their victims later.26 These problems drove imaginative soldiers, not their commanders, to think of innovative stealth raids as a way to get the prisoners, as Bob Traill put it: ‘Corps is mad on identification these days’.27

The objective of capturing prisoners for intelligence remained constant but the methods of getting them were contrived by a few daring men. Some junior officers relied on remarkable individuals. Lieutenant Donavon Joynt VC,28 8th Battalion, received an order from brigade to ‘catch a “live” Hun’. He was frustrated because it was ‘not so easy to carry out’.

The normal method would be a raiding party under an officer but in my position I had no spare officer or enough men to carry out such a job.
I put the matter to a stretcher-bearer, [Private David] Morgan,29 a man who was always ready for an adventurous job quite outside his normal work of picking up wounded men and carrying them in on a stretcher... This stretcher job alone was dangerous enough to satisfy an ordinary man, but Morgan was no ordinary man. He was a character known throughout the whole battalion – not only his Company – and like some diggers, was no good on parade or behind the Line. When an inspection by a Senior Officer was about to take place his Company Commander would see that Morgan did not appear, he was hidden away somewhere out of sight because he was always dirtily turned out, boots unpolished, tunic torn, hat turned up at the wrong angle and altogether most unsoldierly in appearance but when in the Line, was truly wonderful and worth half a dozen ordinary men for his initiative and bravery.

At around 3am Morgan (Photo 43) returned covered in mud, carrying maps and papers and a German automatic pistol. Joynt sent the documents to battalion headquarters and ‘shortly

25 Traill, D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0711.
27 Traill, D 8/7/18, AWM2DRL/0711.
29 958 Pte DO Morgan DCM, 8 Bn, Carpenter, of Richmond, Vic. E 9/2/16, aged 19, RTA 12/6/19.
afterwards the Adjutant rang and said “All correct, splendid.” A formal raid had been avoided because of one man’s skill.

Most battalions had a few men like Morgan and McLeod, respected for their initiative, daring and self-reliance. Men of all ranks turned to these men repeatedly as platoon strengths diminished in the final year of the war. In the 4th Battalion Corporal John Lean was one of these men. He became a pioneer of a wave of daylight stealth raids. On 5 May Lean saw a lone German in a post by a hedge. Keeping his enemy in view and using the crops as cover he crept out and surprised him, taking him prisoner without firing a shot. On their way back, Lean noticed another post. Two men volunteered to come with him. They crept out and rushed it. The enemy yelled. Lean used his bayonet. A shot would have given them away. He killed one and wounded another. Two others surrendered quietly. The German prisoners said they were defending their front in depth with rifle pits and small trenches made in shell holes with interlocking fields of fire protecting machine guns further back. They called it “field watching”. The positions were held in strength at night and at daybreak most men withdrew to the main line, leaving fewer men in more isolated posts.

Lean’s daylight stealth raid ‘created a great keenness and... a splendid example.’ It was a model in how to use natural cover by day. And it also proved a nimble inexpensive way of gathering important tactical intelligence. This had a dual benefit: higher command wanted prisoners who might give information on the next German attack; while the men were interested in the location of the nearest German posts, and their habits because they were directly threatened by them. Captain Walter Belford, 11th Battalion, described how Captain Arthur Keighley, the battalion intelligence officer, began to promote daylight stealth raids, arguing they would be ‘utterly unsuspected [and that] there would be no possibility of confusion as was the case when [formal] raids were made in the darkness’. Cyril Lillie, the

34 4 Bn War Diary 5/5/18 & App 7, AWM4/23/21/39Part1; Austin, The Fighting Fourth, p. 173; Lean, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/57/0006.
37 Belford, Legs Eleven, pp. 569-570.
38 Capt CM Lillie DSO, MID, 5 Bn, Clerk, of Armadale, Vic. E 24/8/14, aged 19, Disch 22/9/19.
officer commanding “C” Company, 5th Battalion, also wrote that one of his officers had the idea of daylight stealth raids in preference to formal raids under box barrages, which usually resulted in losses:

[Lieutenant] Neil Maddox

[39] came to me with a plan whereby the objective could be achieved in daylight without casualties. His plan was to work your way through the wheat crops (5 feet high) between the posts and attack from the rear.

Keighley’s opportunity came on 8 May near a stream in the shallow valley between Meteren and Merris known as the Meteren Becque. He and his scout corporal, “Long” Dick Wearmouth,[41] had been ‘enjoying the contents of some bottles of wine that had been “salvaged”’ by the headquarters scouts. ‘The wine was good [so they] had a few’. Conversation swung round to a debate on daylight stealth raids and Keighley, with Wearmouth in tow, set off into No Man’s Land to prove his point. Walter Belford recalled:

It was a lovely May afternoon and the drowsiness of the early summer lay over everything. As the two warriors approached the German lines, Captain Keighley, who was leading, suddenly recollected that he had no arms with him, so he asked Wearmouth for his Webley (the scouts were privileged to carry revolvers). The “squirter” was handed over and the pair moved on, but Wearmouth was now unarmed save for a bayonet.

The intoxicated pair investigated several empty posts, then, walking upright in bright sunshine, moved into the grounds of the Meteren baths, which were familiar because the Australians had used them in 1916 and 1917. To their surprise, they came across a solitary, ‘somnolent German,’ who was so ‘utterly astounded that he offered not the faintest resistance’.

It was a strange little party that came triumphantly back in broad daylight. The short, dapper Captain in front, then the German prisoner and lastly the tall, lanky Wearmouth trying to make his great height as inconspicuous as possible bringing up the rear. Many eyes popped as the trio passed between the posts... The good Captain was mightily pleased that he had proved his point about daylight [stealth] raids.

39 (2038) Lt NS Maddox MC & Bar, 5 Bn, Bushman, of Melbourne, Vic. E 21/9/15, aged 23, RTA 16/3/19.
42 Belford, Legs Eleven, pp. 569-570; Keighley, Citation MC, AWM28/2/62/0048; Wearmouth, Citation MM, AWM28/1/58/0013.
The Lean and Keighley daylight stealth raids became the talk of the division.\textsuperscript{43} They underlined the stark difference between operating with full view of the ground as opposed to the darkness of night. That night the focus on daylight stealth raids was heightened when an 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion fighting patrol blundered into an ambush near the Meteran baths which resulted in one man being killed and several wounded.\textsuperscript{44}

The Germans were well dug in near the baths at night and garrisoned it with machine guns. 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade headquarters thought it a worthy objective for a formal raid. The date set was the night of 11/12 May. A party of raiders from “A” Company, 9\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, trained specifically, went over the top supported by a five-minute trench mortar barrage. They captured four men and a machine gun, and dug new posts near the baths.\textsuperscript{45} The next day, a section led by Corporal Carl Holm\textsuperscript{46} and William Allan,\textsuperscript{47} an experienced private, sniped at the remnants of the German garrison. Then rushed them in an impromptu stealth raid. According to Allan they captured ten prisoners, for the ‘new chaps to rat’.\textsuperscript{48} Later Holm and Allan burned down the baths and Lieutenant Herbert Knowles\textsuperscript{49} scouting in the smoking wreckage found a lost German and made him a prisoner. The stealth raiders had captured the post the hapless soldier was looking for. The prisoners were from the 12\textsuperscript{th} Division, which BEF intelligence considered good troops. But it had suffered many casualties in the March and April offensives, and had been reinforced by recruits that the 9\textsuperscript{th} Battalion described as being of ‘a poor type’. The prisoners were nearly all boys of eighteen or nineteen who had never been in the outposts before.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{43} See for instance 5372 Pte C Hamley, 10 Bn, Cabinet maker, of Port Pirie, SA. E 30/12/15 aged 25, RTA 12/5/19. D 8/5/18, AWMPR89/144; (448) Lt ES Inman MC, 11 Bn, Grocer, of Fremantle, WA. E 8/9/14, aged 20, RTA 18/1/19. D 8/5/18, WA Army Museum, Personal document 1325, Catalogue No 33367; Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol. VI, pp. 50-51; Bean notes, ‘11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion Patrols at Meteren,’ AWM38/3DRL/606/199/7-8.
\textsuperscript{44} 11 Bn War Diary states one other rank was killed; Bean claims two. 11 Bn War Diary, 8/5/18, AWM4/23/28/39; Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol. VI, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{45} 9 Bn War Diary, 11/5/18, AWM4/23/26/41.
\textsuperscript{46} 2162 Cpl C Holm DCM, MM, 9 Bn, Miner, of Gympie Qld. E 15/3/15, aged 29, RTA 16/1/19.
\textsuperscript{47} 4129 L/Cpl WF Allan MM, 9 Bn, Clerk, of Wallangarra, Qld. E 13/8/15, aged 24, RTA 18/1/19.
\textsuperscript{48} In NK Harvey, \textit{From Anzac to the Hindenburg Line: The History of the 9\textsuperscript{th} Battalion A.I.F.}, (1941), Uckfield, 2010, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{49} Lt HN Knowles MC & Bar, 9 Bn, General merchant, of Clayfield, Qld. E 31/1/16, aged 23, RTA 12/6/19. See Knowles, Citation MC, AWM28/2/57/0004.
\textsuperscript{50} Wrench, \textit{Campaigning with the Fighting 9\textsuperscript{th}}, p. 233; USA General Staff, \textit{Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-one Divisions of the German Army which participated in the War (1914-1918)}, Chaumont, 1919, pp. 213-214.
The Victorian 5th Battalion took over the captured posts from the 9th and continued stealth raiding. Captain Tom Maltby, the acting company commander of “C” Company, immediately sent out Lieutenants Neil Maddox and Harry Garlick with ten men, to clear posts that the 9th Battalion stealth raids had left dangerously close. Maddox and Garlick made contact with the enemy and drove them off. Maddox was wounded but remained on duty. He brought in identification confirming the 12th Division was still in the line. The success of the stealth raid meant that the 9th and 5th Battalions advanced 300 yards by a combination of the formal raid and impromptu stealth raids. However, it was also evident that sometimes several stealth raids had to take place in quick succession in order to improve the positioning of captured posts.

Within hours of capturing the posts, Maddox and Garlick were given orders to raid a German trench under a box barrage on the night of 17/18 May. But the idea of a formal raid with a barrage was not as appealing to them. They were experienced front line soldiers and they knew the risks associated with advertising a raid with a bombardment.

Maddox and Garlick had been NCOs at the time of the battalions’ only previous formal raid, against Bayonet Trench in the Somme sector, on 10 February 1917. It had been a disaster. After weeks of training, four officers and 103 men went over the top and ran into three belts of unbroken wire: they scaled the first with ladders, crawled under the second, but were met by a hail of bombs at the third. Only an officer and fifteen men made it into the German trench. They were counter-attacked by a company of the elite 5th Guards Regiment. According to the Guards history the Australians fled, leaving thirteen rifles and 250 bombs in the trench. As they withdrew the 5th Battalion raiders were caught by an intense retaliatory bombardment in No Man’s Land. Their casualties: eight killed, 43 wounded and three missing. The raid did little damage to the Germans. The formal raid proposed on 17 May was a much smaller affair in a different battlefield, but the experience must have left some reservations about the efficacy of raiding under a barrage. Certainly Neil Maddox expressed a

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51 The British 31st Division took over the front on the Meteren side of the becque, allowing the 1st Division to rest two of its brigades while holding the line in front of Merris with one.
52 Capt TK Maltby MC, MID, 5 Bn, Clerk, of Yarraville, Vic. E 17/5/15, aged 25, RTA 28/2/19.
54 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 7, AWM4/23/22/39.
55 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/22/39.
56 In Speed (ed), Esprit De Corps, p. 81.
57 Speed (ed), Esprit De Corps, p. 81.
determination to do things differently. He came up with an unofficial plan – a daylight stealth raid that would pre-empt the formal raid, and result, he was confident, in few or no casualties.

Maddox came from a wealthy Launceston family and had been educated at Brackley Grammar School in Melbourne. He joined the staff of Gibbs Bright & Co in Melbourne, but the work of a clerk did not fit his adventurous spirit. He travelled to outback Queensland, where he took a job as a Jackaroo on a cattle station. Maddox ‘was very green [at first] but in a little over 12 months he was considered one of the best buck-jump riders on the station.’\(^5\) The life of a stockman appealed to him. It took determination and skill to learn how to track cattle in the bush, to know where the cattle would go to feed and to find water in vast country unbounded by fences.\(^5\)

Maddox left the outback at the end of the dry season of 1915 and joined the Light Horse, calling himself a “bushman.” The term is important. He shied away from “Jackaroo” in favour of the more egalitarian title. Many bush workers saw the jackaroo as a bush aristocrat, typically the son of a wealthy businessman or landed farmer from the settled districts, sent to the bush as a form of rite of passage. The stereotype matched Maddox’s upbringing. By contrast his usage of bushman eschewed the privileges of the station homestead for the rugged camp of the bush workers. Viewed from a pastoral homestead, the bushman was a step down the social ladder from the jackaroo, though one camp closer to the homestead than the Aboriginal stockmen and their families. The bushman, according to legend, treated all he came upon as his equal. Maddox’s disposition and charismatic leadership would prove important in a company which consisted of many men from the working class inner Melbourne suburbs like South Melbourne, St Kilda, Collingwood and Richmond, where the effects of the depression of the 1890s had left their mark on ‘the faces in the street’.\(^6\) People lived in homes with dirt floors. Maddox’s one time platoon sergeant John Edey\(^6\) reckoned that many of the enlisted men in the company were ‘familiar[s] of Jack Wren’. He was ‘quite certain…[they] would have been far happier… issued… with broken beer bottles and let… loose on Fritz’.\(^6\)

A fortuitous meeting with an old school friend led to Maddox joining the 5th Battalion. He served in the ranks, was promoted to second lieutenant, court martialed and cleared with a

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\(^5\) NS Maddox, Biographical file AWM43 B12.
\(^6\) Reveille, 1/9/41, p. 18.
\(^6\) 1741 Sgt JF Edey, 5 Bn, Steward, of South Yarra, Vic. E 16/12/14, aged 19, RTA 13/3/18.
\(^6\) Edey, ‘Comments on the 1914/18 War’, SLVMSB223 MS10511.
caution for a reckless act while skylarking behind the front line. His grandson Ian Sharman heard that he once entered an estaminet in France with a defused grenade which he placed on the bar. The terrified publican and his customers fled. Maddox and a mate helped themselves to a few bottles. This might have been the incident that led to his court martial. He was wounded during the battle of Menin Road in September 1917. Edey saw him leading men against German pillboxes during that battle:

> [W]ith his right arm bandaged, waving his revolver in his left hand in the good old charge manner and leading a good proportion of the company. He was heading for Black Watch Corner and we were between him and his objective, so with discretion we kept our heads down.

Maddox returned to the battalion soon afterwards and was promoted to lieutenant. As a platoon officer he was at his best when scouting and roving as he had done in the Australian bush. The rural setting of the outpost line near Hazebrouck was perfectly matched to his skills. It did not take him long to distinguish himself. During the attacks on Meteren in April, he acted as liaison officer to the 12th Battalion. He crossed the Meteren Becque several times under heavy machine gun fire, dodging through a maze of narrow tracks in the crops, leading Lewis gunners and rifle grenadiers to attack posts he had located. He knew this front like few others and it paid off in the form of the first organised daylight stealth raid on the Hazebrouck front.

At 5.30am on 17 May, with the formal raid hanging over them, Maddox took out a patrol of four men, bent on finding a post to stealth raid. They slid out from their platoon post and crawled through the crop. From a hideout they watched a German post 200 yards away. They counted fifteen men with a machine gun. The post backed onto a hedge with a small gap in it. They agreed they could capture it 'without very much trouble'. Back at the post they proposed a plan. Six men joined them: a barrage of rifle grenades and Lewis gunfire would distract the Germans while Maddox and the stealth raiders crawled out. Maddox would

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63 Ian Sharman, pers com, 8/8/12.
64 Edey, D 20/9/17, SLVMSB223 MS10511.
65 1168 Sgt SL Williams DCM, MM, 5 Bn, Seaman, of Christchurch, NZ. E 1/10/14, aged 24, RTA 8/10/18; 1762 L/Cpl T Haydon MM, 5 Bn, Fireman/Stoker, of Port Melbourne, Vic. E 8/1/15, aged 24, RTA 28/3/19; 5027A L/Cpl RH Abernethy, 5 Bn, Labourer, of Horsham, Vic. E 15/2/16, aged 18, RTA 20/6/19; the other Williams is unknown.
66 Reveille, 1/5/38, p. 16.
67 For names see Reveille, 1/5/38, p. 16.
Photo 10 Studio portrait of Lieutenant Neil Maddox MC and Bar. Maddox achieved distinction in XV Corps as a leader in daylight stealth raids. c1917 (AWM H15253)
carry a flare pistol and when they were ready to rush the post he would fire it. This would be the signal for the barrage to cease. The stealth raiders would surround the post except the gap in the hedge: a Lewis gunner would switch his fire onto the gap where the Germans were expected to flee. The Lewis Gun’s fire can be likened to the crack of a stock whip. Those not killed would, like spooked cattle, wheel back into the post where the stealth raiders would bail them up. Any resisters would be shot.

The stealth raiders got underway without hesitation. Two platoon posts bombarded the Germans with rifle grenades and Lewis gunfire while Maddox got his men to within 30 yards of the German garrison and fired the flare. They rushed in. The Germans fled and the Lewis gunner switched to the gap. The gun jammed. A few escaped. Five wheeled back into the post and were ‘fixed up,’ in Maddox’s words, ‘in good old style’:

One grappled with [Corporal Sydney] Williams and I shot him in the stomach, but unfortunately a stray bomb blew him to pieces and all we could get from him was a shoulder strap marked 62. We secured several other identifications, but before we could finish our hunt we were attacked by about 30 to 40 men from [a] post on our right and we gave them a bit of stoush... seeing that things were getting too hot, I returned with party to post and found that [Lance Corporal Tom] Haydon was missing. So we hopped out again to get him and were met with severe M.G. and rifle fire, but succeeded in bringing him in safely, without casualties. He was severely wounded and we got him straight away to [a] dressing station, his own comrades who had been on the [stealth] raid insisted on carrying him down.68

The stealth raiders got identification and killed five Germans. Maddox had organised an impromptu stealth raid from an isolated platoon post that was innovative and radical: He organised his platoon so that it willingly tried to pre-empt orders set-down for a formal raid under a box barrage, that night. He did it without informing his battalion commander. But when the stealth raiders presented the identification to battalion headquarters they were informed that only a talkative prisoner could say whether the Germans were planning a major offensive. Maddox and his friend Harry Garlick’s platoons were ordered to go over the top in the planned formal raid anyway. Perhaps a stronger battalion CO would have queried the orders in the light of the identification produced by the stealth raid? But the tactic was so unprecedented as to be met by a mixture of ignorance or ambivalence. That night the formal

68 Reveille, 1/5/38, p. 16. See also 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 9, AWM4/23/22/39. Maddox, Citation MC, AWM28/2/297Part3/0009; Haydon, Citation MM, AWM28/2/297Part2/0049: Williams, Citation MM, AWM28/1/59/0005. Haydon lost an eye.
raid found the German trench empty, and suffered five casualties. As far as the men involved were concerned, the result was hardly worth the strain. It reinforced their view that the Germans would withdraw from their post when the attackers announced their intentions with a box barrage. The friendly barrage also exposed the raiders to retaliatory machine gun and artillery fire while they were out of their posts. It was a sharp contrast to Maddox’s daylight stealth raid.

The next day (18 May) Private Arthur Hall, a battalion original, who had been on Maddox and Garlick’s first stealth raid of the tour, saw three Germans get out of a trench, take off their coats, and lie down to sleep behind a hedge. Hall crept out, shot one and after a brief chase captured a young soldier of the 12th Division. Hall had previously been a sergeant but he had been court martialed and reduced to the ranks for going absent without leave from 28 October 1917 to 11 December 1917. The style of warfare at Hazebrouck brought the best out of him as a soldier. In the space of a month he was awarded the Military Medal and two bars, two of the awards being for the stealth raids mentioned above.

The advantage of daylight stealth raids to the men in the posts closest to the enemy was highlighted again that night when a formal fighting patrol was outflanked by 70 Germans and forced to pull back. Confused in the darkness they became separated in the crop and popular soldier and battalion barber, Private “Pug” Randall, was killed when his mates mistook him for a German. Randall’s shooting was not recorded in the battalion or brigade war diaries. Only witness statements in Randall’s Red Cross file reveal what happened and testify that the event left a bad taste in the mouth of the battalion and a sense of unnecessary and avoidable loss.

The next afternoon (19 May), a sentry in a post near the Meteren Becque saw some Germans. When they were close enough, Private Francis Maher rushed them, shooting one and bayoneting the other before tearing the shoulder straps from both. Then he returned along the Meteren Becque, covered by his section and Lewis gunner. This ended an extraordinarily successful four days tour in the outposts. It was the first by any battalion in the war in which

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69 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 8a, AWM4/23/22/39.
70 762 L/Cpl A Hall, MM and 2 Bars, 5 Bn, Cellarman, of St Kilda, Vic. E 15/8/14, aged 19, RTA 28/8/19.
71 AP Hastings in Speed (ed), Esprit De Corps, p.106.
72 762 Hall, recordsearch.naa.gov.au.
73 Hall, Citation MM, AWM28/2/53, Citation Bar and second Bar to MM, AWM28/2/297Part2.
74 7610 Pte R Randall, 5 Bn, Hairdresser, of South Melbourne, Vic. E 17/6/15, aged 23, KIA 19/5/18.
75 7610 Randall, Red Cross File AWM1DRL/0428/2/224/2/1.
76 336 Pte FD Maher MM & Bar, 5 Bn, Labourer, of Richmond, Vic. E 5/2/16, aged 22, RTA 16/6/19.
77 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 13, AWM4/23/22/39.
successive daylight stealth raids without orders had gained so many identifications with so few casualties. General Harold Walker, the general officer commanding the 1st Division, met the tactic with surprise and vacillation. He sent his congratulations to the battalion commander (who had no influence on the stealth raids) and mentioned the daylight stealth raids in his divisional circular.  

But his subsequent orders were dogmatic. When the 1st Brigade took over the line, Walker ordered the 1st Brigade to ‘maintain the excellent standards’ of the other brigades: ‘give the Hun no peace’. Each battalion was ordered to ‘formulate plans for one minor operation against suitable objectives’ and submit them for approval. There was nothing innovative in this directive. Battalion commanders were expected to get prisoners by night, using the familiar tactical doctrine. For front line soldiers this meant reconnaissance patrols followed by formal raids and fighting patrols, at night.

But instead there was a sharp decline in the patrolling that had been so dominant. Worn out and facing an apparently indifferent enemy, some battalions had fallen into the “habit of leaving a thing when it is “near enough”’. The 1st Brigade had marched to the front from the support and reserve lines in villages where civilian comforts and alcohol were plentiful. When they relieved the 2nd Brigade the signs of exhaustion in the form of binge drinking, sloppiness and indiscipline spilled into the outposts. One Australian described seeing a drunken digger in top hat, frock coat, canary yellow waistcoat, a pair of corsets, with an umbrella up, pushing a wheelbarrow full of beer bottles into the front line. Other men sniped (poorly by one account) a pig in front of their position and crawled out at night to bring it in.

In the first two nights that the 1st Brigade garrisoned the outpost line, only three reconnaissance patrols were active across the entire brigade sector and no Australian patrols were in No Man’s Land after 2.30am. No formal raids or fighting patrols took place. Brigadier William Lesslie, the brigade commander, was furious when he found out that formal patrol activity had dropped off to this extent. He accused the line battalions of not giving their orders

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78 Lt Gen HB Walker DSO, CB, CB, CMG, MID, CdG (Fr), British Army.  
82 Jones, 3 Bn, P 19-20/5/18, AWM2DRL/0521.  
83 Jones, 3 Bn, P 19-20/5/18, AWM2DRL/0521.  
84 Brig Gen WB Lesslie CB, CMG, Indian Army.
the ‘proper attention’ and issued specific orders for fighting patrols and raids to be carried out. This doubled the number of minor operations ordered by General Walker: at two formal operations per tour. The rebuff was clear: ‘Domination of No Man’s Land, the ascertaining of necessary information, and harassing the enemy will not be effected unless Battalions in the line act on the lines above directed.’

The orders led to a number of casualties for no identification or ground gained. On 21 May an experienced officer was killed while reconnoitring for a formal raid. The next night a formal raid under a box barrage found the German trenches empty – the garrison having retired at the first sign of a barrage. On 22 May three reconnaissance patrols of one officer and ten other ranks were sent out after midnight. One of these was attacked and forced to withdraw with two men wounded. However, the number of daylight stealth raids actually increased. A few daring men trusted their judgement and skill in No Man’s Land in preference to the formal operations they were being ordered to undertake at night. It was a pattern of behaviour and an ethos which increasingly differentiated the Australian from other troops.

On 21 May the 3rd Battalion received orders to conduct a formal raid during a gas projector attack. The raiders were ordered not to wear gas masks because they hindered vision. Instead they were instructed to avoid low-lying ground such as shell holes. The choice between crouching in No Man’s Land strafed by German machine gun bullets, or choking on gas in a shell hole was not appealing. Before the formal raid went ahead Sergeant Jack Bruggy, one of the battalion’s originals, crept from his post at 6am (22 May). He crawled 500 yards through a corn crop and opened fire on a German post with his revolver. He shot the garrison and brought back a handful of identity discs.

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86 (652) Lt SG Viccars, 1Bn, Station overseer, of Sydney, NSW. E 16/8/14, aged, 28, KIA 21/5/18. The battalion war diary states that Viccars was killed 20/5/18, but the brigade war diary and private records of Cpl. H Mercer corroborate that he was killed on patrol on the night of 21 May.
88 “C” Coy were given the job, and a fighting patrol of one officer and ten men was organised.
89 Bruggy belonged to “C” Coy. (308 & 6149) 2/Lt JJ Bruggy MM, 3 Bn, Bricklayer, of Harden, NSW. E 21/8/14, aged 29, RTA 6/11/18. 3 Bn War Diary, 22/5/18, AWM4/23/20/39. Bruggy had recovered from a gunshot wound to his left knee at Gallipoli that was serious enough to see him discharged. He re-enlisted and served on the Western Front, assuming his original regimental number.
An account by Company Sergeant Major Pat Kinchington implies that Bruggy might have known his company were due to do the gas projector raid that night, but decided to take action himself. Kinchington told Bean:

Bruggy [was] a big country man, 6’2” or so & square, fairly well informed & a favourite of [Captain] McDermid. This morning Bruggy had had his rum – [and probably] other men’s rum as well... he came into... [McDermid’s] HQ at the Paradise Estaminet & threw down five [identity] discs on the table. His revolver was caked up with mud. He said practically nothing.

McDermid asked Kinchington if he thought the discs were genuine. Kinchington noticed they were from different regiments and were weathered, implying that they had been “souvenired” earlier. He challenged Bruggy to prove his stealth raid by taking him to the German post, if he were ‘game enough’. Within a few minutes the two were crawling through the crop. Bruggy led Kinchington to the post. Kinchington saw four bodies lying prostate, and blood trails. He started to cut the identifying shoulder straps from one. The apparently lifeless corpse came to life striking him hard on the arm. He shot the man and with Bruggy crawled back to company headquarters. Kinchington acknowledged that Bruggy’s stealth raid was legitimate.

When General Walker heard about it, he was so astonished at Bruggy’s initiative that he ordered a reconnaissance plane to photograph the tracks the big countryman had made in the corn. The image and reports of the stealth raid were sent throughout the division. It served as both an encouragement and a warning of what could be done in the crop by men with initiative and skill. The phrase “one-man raid” was invented.

In contrast to Bruggy’s stealth raid a formal raid by the 1st Battalion on 27 May was ‘doomed to failure’. In the dark and in high crops a number of raiders ‘strayed from the leaders’. Scout Sergeant “Eddie” Edwards (Photo 4) reckoned the noise the men made in the crops ‘was loud...
enough to arouse the whole of the western front’. The enemy commenced throwing bombs and turned a machine gun on the raiders. Edwards gave the order to charge:

The German outpost fired one farewell volley... and then made off in all directions, over the back of the trench, along either side, in fact everywhere except forward. I chased one fat chap until I had emptied every chamber of my revolver at him. Finally giving up the chase... [another] member of the party to reach the objective was calling out something about the “cowardly buggars”.  

For no result, two Australians were killed and five wounded. The result was typical of what the men had come to expect of formal raids. Edwards found his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bertie Stacy, waiting in the outpost line. ‘He seemed to be rather disappointed with our failure, although he realized that the party had done everything possible in the circumstances’.

A few days later, Edwards was ordered back into No Man’s Land, to reconnoitre for another formal night raid. This time however, he embarked on his own version of a one-man daylight stealth raid and went way beyond the expectations of his commanding officer. In ‘a field of growing wheat about four feet high, with numerous tracks running hither and thither’ he found a German strongpoint. Edwards saw a ‘tall fair headed chap... busily cleaning a rifle’ while talking. Edwards pulled the pin on the only Mills bomb he carried, threw it at the German garrison, ‘and without waiting to see the result’ doubled back on his tracks, ‘followed by a hail of machine gun bullets’. A few hours later he saw two more German posts on the opposite side of a field, about 200 yards away. He watched these posts for several hours from a hiding place in the edge of a crop. A German crept from a farmhouse and visited a series of posts. Edwards decided he had ‘seen enough.’

I took careful aim at him, but in the failing light I am afraid I missed him, for with a startled glance around he jumped for the nearest cover. After some minutes he emerged 50 or 60 yards further along, and I think I made a better shot this time. As I came back through our trenches the outposts wanted to know what war had been going on in No Man’s Land.

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98 Edwards, MS 27/5/18, AWMPR89/050. For biographical details see Introduction n57.  
99 Edwards, MS 27/5/18, AWMPR89/050.  
100 See Edwards, MS 27/5/18, AWMPR89/050; Chedgey L, 10/6/18, AWM2DRL/0178.  
101 Lt Col BV Stacy CMG, DSO & Bar, MID, 1 Bn, Solicitor, of Crossington, NSW. E 19/9/14, aged 27, RTA 6/7/19.  
102 Edwards, MS 27/5/18, AWMPR89/050.  
103 Edwards, MS April-July 1918, AWMPR89/050.
Edwards was in his own words ‘independent’ as a soldier.\textsuperscript{104} He was highly regarded in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion for his ‘very keen sense of direction’, which he attributed to summer holidays spent roaming the coast and hinterland of southern New South Wales as a boy. The army (his battalion commander probably on the advice of junior officers) noted his talent and built on it. Just a few weeks before the Hazebrouck campaign, Edwards went from a corporal in charge of a section, awarded a Military Medal for ‘conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty’ at Third Ypres, to battalion scout sergeant.\textsuperscript{105} He described his ‘rambles’ in the outpost system as ‘great fun’.\textsuperscript{106} He was confident and competent. Beholden to none but himself, he would spend hours alone and seemingly content as he hunted German posts and strong points in No Man’s Land. Dalton Neville in chapter one, the bushmen Neil Maddox, Jack Bruggy, John Lean, Arthur Hall and other stealth raiders mentioned in this chapter seem to have had similar careers in that they were recognised as good soldiers before 1918 but proved exceptionally adaptable in the unprecedented battlefields that opened up following the German offensives.

The outpost war at Hazebrouck was a stark contrast to the drudgery of military life and trench warfare that had become the infantryman’s lot, where according to the bushman Private Bill Harney, ‘all initiative was gone.’ In the trenches of 1916-1917:

The old days of the cattle stations where a man rounded up the cattle and used his own initiative – that’s all gone. You’re just a big cog in the machine and your just moving ahead, the whole heap of us, you’re part of a big mob.\textsuperscript{107}

But at Hazebrouck the Australians were unfettered from the routine of trench warfare and the close supervision that had moulded them into a mob. Lieutenant Harry Chedgey\textsuperscript{108} wrote that the ‘style of warfare suits us better and the men are keen and in excellent health... We fight in open fields, among hedges and farm houses and dig trenches all over the country and have got right away from fixed trench warfare’.\textsuperscript{109} The stealth raiders mentioned in this chapter were experienced front line soldiers. Some were “hard doers,” city larrikins, like Snowy Carrick, Arthur Hall, and David Morgan who had been reprimanded by the army for a variety of “offences” and in some cases court-martialled. However, the majority of the first stealth

\textsuperscript{104} Edwards solo daylight stealth raid was only one of its kind in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion until 8 July, when a junior officer took out the battalion’s first organised daylight patrol consisting of four other ranks. See ch 6.

\textsuperscript{105} Edwards, Citation MM, AWM28/1/34Part1.

\textsuperscript{106} Edwards, MS April-July 1918, AWMPR89/050.

\textsuperscript{107} Harney, Bill Harney’s War, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{108} (28) Lt HV Chedgey, 1 Bn, Solicitor, of Arncliffe, NSW. E 31/3/16, aged 23, RTA 1/8/19.

\textsuperscript{109} Chedgey, L 23/4/18, AWM2DRL/0178.
raiders were country born or former pastoral and outback workers. After three years of trench warfare might these men have found themselves marginally freer of the drudgery and the shackles that had imprisoned them in the trenches? They were in their element.

The frontline soldiers were sick of dying or being mutilated by plans drafted by corps, division or brigade staff and not questioned by their own battalion commanders. The stealth raiders actions spoke to this feeling. They were some of the best men when it came to initiative and self-reliance. They were efficient killers. They wanted to be in at the kill, and they were confident to choose when. They did not want to be whittled away by relatively pointless minor operations.

Battalion commanders, brigadiers and the divisional commander, General Walker, were largely ambivalent towards the tactical innovation of these few men. Consequently there was no doctrinal change. In fact, the orders for formal operations by night increased. The worst types of formal operations happened repeatedly in April and May: such as the disaster at Meteren on 22 April, or the failed formal raids detailed in this chapter. However, set-piece battles were sometimes necessary. At the end of May, the men of the 1st Division were informed that they would be attacking the Mont de Merris. Almost as soon as word got out, stealth raiders were in the fields and among the hedgerows seeking hostile machine gun posts and snipers in anticipation of the formal attack. To the south, on the Somme River, a few men in the Australian Corps also started stealth raiding in daylight, when conditions suited them and often with the hope that their action would pre-empt formal operations.

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110 Walker circulated throughout the division details of the Maddox, Hall (5 Bn) and Bruggy (3 Bn) stealth raids. In 4 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 21, AWM4/23/21/39Part3; 1 Bn AIF War Diary, May 1918, App 13, AWM4/23/18/31. See also Joynt, Saving the Channel Ports, p. 123.
CHAPTER THREE

‘A Golden Opportunity’

The evolution of stealth raiding on the Somme, 18 May to 4 July 1918

The previous chapter described how on 17 May 1918 Lieutenant Neil Maddox, a bushman from outback Queensland, led the first organised daylight stealth raid on the Hazebrouck front. On 18 May at Morlancourt Ridge near Amiens, a few men of the 18th Battalion conceived and carried out a daylight stealth raid in anticipation of a set-piece battle. On their respective fronts the two actions marked the origins of organised stealth raiding by day. Both were emblematic of a distinctively Australian aptitude wherever the ground afforded cover to daring men.

In the period covered in this chapter the Australian Corps carried out numerous minor operations while defending Amiens. Corps headquarters ordered a series of minor battles to advance along Morlancourt Ridge. The British Fourth Army awoke from prostration and ordered formal raids along the length of its front, which included the Australian Corps. Meanwhile the Australian battalions continued routine formal fighting patrols by night. The 18th Battalion daylight stealth raid, which will be described in this chapter, was so unprecedented that it captured the attention of Australian Corps headquarters and the British press. It led to a series of mimic ‘silent’ raids – or quasi stealth raids. This was when Australian brigade commanders pressured the line battalions to imitate the tactic. This occurred mostly in the 2nd Division where competition with the 18th Battalion was fiercest. When the Fourth Army ordered formal raids in mid-June, stealth raiders went into the outpost system day and night in search of machine guns or a prisoner that might make the formal operation unnecessary.

On 11 May the 2nd Division took over from the 3rd the sector between the Ancre and the Somme Rivers, with orders to capture Ville-sur-Ancre to shorten the line and weaken the German hold on Morlancourt Ridge. The date set for the attack was 19 May. The 6th Brigade was to capture the village, while the 18th Battalion advanced to its right to drive the Germans out of a sunken road known as the Big Caterpillar that the Germans were rapidly making into a trench line.

The morning before the attack was unusually hot when Lieutenant Colonel George Murphy, the commanding officer of the 18th Battalion, left his headquarters with his intelligence officer Alex Irvine. Orders for the attack had been received at 9.30am and Murphy was keen to see for himself the task ahead of his infantrymen. They made their way to a narrow post crammed with small arms ammunition, bombs and tools organised in dumps before the impending attack. Men not on duty were asleep in dugouts cut into the white chalk walls of the trench, attempting to escape the heat of the sun. The meticulous colonel was none too pleased with the apparent dopiness and let the garrison know about it. The little Irish scout Sergeant Paddy Boyce replied, “The Hun will be asleep too.”

Boyce’s remark got Murphy thinking. The trench overlooked a small depression, the opposite side of which, 90 yards away, was a German machine gun post. Behind it the German trench line ran along the sunken road (Big Caterpillar) from Ville-sur-Ancre to the Bray-Corbie road (Photo 3). The damage the machine gun could do to the battalion when they hopped over that night was apparent to all. Twice Murphy had asked permission from brigade to raid the post under a box barrage and remove the obstacle. Twice his request was denied, so he improvised. Over the previous two days snipers and rifle grenadiers had pinned down the German garrison, making it impossible for them to leave the post in daylight and forcing them to relieve themselves in tins. Every so often one would be seen as it was hurled into the cornfields. The sentries told Murphy, “No tins had been thrown out for some hours.” Was Boyce right? Could the Germans be asleep?

According to Murphy the opportunity to capture the garrison, silence the machine gun and cut out the deadly threat it posed to his men was a ‘golden opportunity’. He ‘looked over the top which was usually very dangerous, & sat there chest high looking through his field glasses... seeing no movement... he said to Alex Irvine: “Well Irvine what about it. Do you think you could do it by day – now?”’ He added that he could not possibly put it up to brigade for fear of stalling it. Irvine and his seventeen scouts at once decided to rush the post. Other men had to

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2 For biographical details see Introduction n8.
3 For biographical details see Introduction n10.
4 4071 Pte PJ Boyce DCM, MM, 18 Bn, Marine engineer, of no fixed address (deserted RAN to join AIF). E 5/11/15, aged 27, RTA 18/12/19.
5 Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 105.
6 18 Bn War Diary, May 1918, Apps 9X18 & 16X18, AWM4/23/35/34.
7 Bean notes, Morlancourt May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, 93-104.
be turned down. The plan was perfect in its simplicity: ‘Go for the post in one line. Rush him without any shouting, don’t fire, use the bayonet, hang on till night if it’s too hot’. Since identifications were always needed, instructions were given to bring back prisoners. A Lewis gunner on a flank was told, ‘We are going to “lift” the Hun. Look out for your targets.’ No ‘special arrangements’ with the trench mortars or artillery were thought necessary. Murphy went back to his headquarters where he could be of most use if things went wrong. Irvine gave the “Go” and the stealth raiders hopped out and advanced in one line two paces between them. The formation was adopted so that, as in football, each probable opponent was marked down. They walked at a crouch across the dead ground and built to a jog as they neared the rim of the post. A German sentry saw them at twenty yards. Eighteen men bore down on him silently with cold steel. A cigarette fell from his mouth. His hands went up in surrender. He had missed his chance to warn the garrison. A second sentry stammered “good morning”.

Twenty-six men were in the post, all asleep. A bomb thrown into a dugout killed four. The explosion was the only sound of the stealth raid. The rest surrendered. Irvine took the party back over the open ground the way they had come. “D” Company men in the outposts witnessed the stealth raiders herding 22 bootless, bare chested and unarmed prisoners back across the cornfield, Private George Peacock proudly carrying the captured machinegun. A German in the sunken road fired at them. The Lewis gunner shot him. A sniper in the cornfields stood up in disbelief: he too was shot. The stealth raiders got back ‘without a scratch’. The stealth raid had taken ten minutes to plan and seven minutes to execute. The prisoners were sent to brigade headquarters. Their hapless appearance prompted jokes at the expense of the British Army who had not been forgiven for the retreat in March. ‘Hi choom, where’s your prisoner’s boots?’ a Tommy was said to have asked. “They wore them out chasing you blokes”, came the reply from the Australian escort.

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8 This can be gleaned from Bean’s conversation with Murphy in notes, Morlancourt May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, 93-104.
9 18 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 25X18, AWM4/23/35/34.
11 2454 Pte GR Peacock MM, 18 Bn, Plumber, of Narromine, NSW. E 3/2/15, aged 21, RTA 20/10/18.
12 Bean notes, Morlancourt May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, 93-104; Awards for gallantry: Irvine, Citation Bar to MC, AWM28/1/109/0018; Boyce, Citation DCM, AWM28/2/313; Peacock, Citation MM, AWM28/1/109/0032; 5873 Pte RC Scotland MM, 18 Bn, Barman, of Mainly, NSW. E 19/6/16, aged 21, KIA 9/8/18. Citation MM, AWM28/1/109/0028; 6537 Pte E Dunkinson MM, 18 Bn, Labourer, of Hay, NSW. E 10/1/17, aged 22, RTA 22/9/19. Citation MM, AWM28/2/313/0055.
13 Bean notes, Morlancourt May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, 93-104.
Forty minutes after the raid, the brigade major was at Murphy’s headquarters discussing the operation to capture Ville-sur-Ancre that night. In the afternoon the heat wave broke and rain pelted the ridge. The warm earth gave off the ‘pleasantest of perfumes’ as the battalion and the 6th Brigade on their left hopped the bags and trod through fields of corn and turnip patches covered in yellow flowers to go about their deadly business at zero hour. The Germans who held the village defended it valiantly. It took two hours of tough street fighting to clear the village and its cellars and to overcome with bombs the most obstinate. The Australians captured 45 machine guns and 330 men, and reckoned they left at least as many dead.

The stealth raid on the German machine gun post had saved many lives. Alex Irvine’s citation for a bar to his MC spoke volumes: the post was described as ‘a troublesome corner which might have given a great deal of trouble in the attack’. The historian of the German unit involved wrote that the officers responsible for the post did not realize their men had been captured until dusk. By then it was too late. The 18th Battalion had swept past the empty post and captured its objectives.

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17 Irvine, Citation Bar to MC, AWM28/1/109/0018.
More than any that preceded it, the Irvine stealth raid opened higher command eyes to the initiative and self-reliance in some Australian troops. A circular was sent throughout the Fourth Army, detailing the tactic used. The British press reported the stealth raid and credited it to Australian, not British troops, as so often happened to the chagrin of the Australians in 1918. Hubris and publicity fuelled the competition and aggression for which the Australian divisions were notable. In June some Australian brigades directed battalion commanders to mimic the Irvine stealth raid in a policy called “silent raids”.

The competition was fiercest in the 2nd Division, probably because it was the 18th Battalion’s home. On 8 June in a newly captured post at Ville-sur-Ancre, Lieutenant John Lennon, 22nd Battalion, spotted Germans abandoning their forward trenches under a ‘spirited’ trench mortar and rifle grenade bombardment. On his own initiative Lennon called up brigade headquarters and asked for one more mortar round. Then, with Sergeant Roy Tyler, he rushed into the German trench before the dust had settled. Seven or eight Germans armed with rifles and bombs met the two stealth raiders. Lennon and Tyler also came under heavy fire from at least three machine guns firing from the German’s left flank and rear. Lennon wrote ‘I grabbed a full [German] pack and we ran back to our line’.

Lennon sent the contents of the pack to battalion headquarters. His commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Aubrey Wiltshire, was not satisfied it gave any useful information. Wiltshire asked Lennon to go back and ‘try and get a Hun.’ The pressure on battalion commanders to mimic the 18th Battalion stealth raid might have influenced him. A “silent raid” was organised. Lennon, Tyler and fourteen men promptly went over the top. Wiltshire recorded the events as they unfolded:

Lennon got into the Bosche post and killed or wounded about 6 or 8 of the occupants. One prisoner a boy of 20... was sent back. Another was taken

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23 22 Bn War Diary, June 1918, App B, AWM4/23/39/34.
24 6904 Sgt R Tyler, 22 Bn, Farmer, of Kilmany South, Vic. E 22/6/16, aged 31, KIA 9/6/18.
26 For biographical details see n15.
27 Wiltshire, D 8/6/18, MLMSS3058/Box 2/Items 19 & 20.
but got away in No Mans Land... and was shot dead. Machine guns opened up and got on to our party as it was returning. Sgt. Tyler was killed and fell near the Boche post. Pte Bunworth also was killed and left in No Mans Land. Just as he was crossing our parapet a machine gun sent a spray of bullets through Lennon’s back and the bullets passed right through him and out of his box respirator. He died soon after. Six of the men were wounded & came along to Bn. H.Q. later with bullets through their limbs and bloodstained clothes.

The Germans also retaliated with a high explosive and gas bombardment that killed a driver in the transport section and destroyed Wiltshire’s command post. This was the type of disaster that many old soldiers associated with formal raids. It was well known that the Germans were in the trench and that it was covered by machine gunners. It was a mistake to think they would not be alert after Lennon’s initial stealth raid. The battalion lost one of its brightest young officers, one of its most experienced NCOs, one other rank killed and six wounded. An inquiry was held but nothing came of it.

Similar “silent raids” were proposed to the 20th Battalion. It was ‘asked’ by brigade headquarters ‘to consider walking over’ the top in a silent daylight raid to seize a troublesome German post south of the Bray–Corbie road. The suggestion removed any sense of initiative on the part of the men. An officer and a sergeant reluctantly went out at night to reconnoitre the feasibility of brigade’s idea. They were chased back by German hand grenades and any notion of a mimic “silent raid” was called off. Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Bennett, the battalion commander, pointed out that, while such a surprise might be possible against an unsuspicious post in an isolated position, it was quite different to attempt a so-called “silent” raid against a post well covered by machine-guns and in sight of the main enemy line. He thought the attempt would be costly and did not order a raid. Instead he ‘maintained a policy of returning 2 Rifle grenades & 2 Stokes Mortars for everyone of similar kind sent over.’ Within days of coming into the line south of the Bray-Corbie road the battalion reported, ‘movement about our frontline trenches in daylight could now be carried out in comparative safety owing to [our] superiority of fire.’ The ill-fated experience of the 22nd Battalion validated his decision. Nevertheless, the idea of “silent raids” did not go away.
Private Dudley Jackson,²⁶ 20th Battalion, was asked by his company commander to attempt an “ unofficial” silent raid, at night. Jackson and three friends crawled through crop to a belt of German wire eight feet from a machine gun post. But when the machine gun opened up Jackson decided ‘it was the end of the raid’

The captain was disappointed with the result but I was not sorry as my mates were too good to be killed for his or anyone else’s benefit.³⁷

Brigade commanders and some battalion and company commanders simply did not understand that a “silent raid” – a mimic stealth raid – could not be forced. The initiative had to lie with a few determined men in the posts nearest the enemy, or they were not much different from a formal raid.

Dudley Jackson was a cunning soldier who frequently ventured into No Man’s Land without orders. Leaving his Lewis gun with his team in the trench he would explore the outpost system with a few reliable mates, armed as the Lewis gunners were with revolvers and a handful of bombs:

When night comes Casey,³⁸ Ike,³⁹ Barney Egan,⁴⁰ and myself go out into No Man’s Land about fifty or sixty yards to examine a couple of sniper posts which we can see from our line. We thought they might have been occupied, as someone threw an inkwell bomb into our post last night... We found two German rifles but no sign of recent occupation... A seventh brigade officer who was visiting our line, heard me reporting our trip to our officer and wanted to know hadn’t we enough fight without wandering around No Man’s Land [without orders].⁴¹

Jackson and his mates were hunting for an opportunity to stealth raid. They soldiered under the philosophy it was better to be the hammer than the nail: if there was a threat out there find it and deal with it. Better to tell the company commander about it later than miss the chance of beating the enemy to the initiative. Jackson’s Lewis gun team watched their front closely, harassing the Germans with bursts of fire and frequent exploratory stealth raids. Jackson’s diary gives an insight into the thinking of a stealth raider at this time.

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²⁷ Jackson, D 4/6/18, AWM3DRL/3846.
²⁹ 6568 Pte IJ Taylor, 20 Bn, Labourer, of Lismore, NSW. E 19/10/16, aged 26, RTA 31/3/19.
³⁰ 6315 BLM Egan, 20 Bn, Drover and Carter, of Eden, NSW. E 12/9/16, aged 21, RTA 10/4/19.
³¹ Jackson, D 29/5 to 5/6/18, AWM3DRL/3846.
I observe an opening through the field glasses in the crop. Just on our right. So as soon as it gets dark Barney, Ike, and myself go out and investigate. We find it is a trench leading towards the German lines. Just where it starts we find 14 German hand grenades. Proceeding along it for about 10yds we suddenly hear another party on our left. Peering over the crop I see four men crouched down making towards our lines. In the dark I could not make out if they were our men or Huns and so as we were out there without permission it would have been too bad for us if [we] had killed our own men. We went back in as quickly and as silently as possible and find that our company has not any patrol out. I then spray No man’s land with two magazines of bullets but am afraid we lost our little chance of a small scrap with the Hun.42

Dudley Jackson was one of three brothers and their father who enlisted in the AIF.43 He was dairy farming on the Richmond River in northern New South Wales before the war. He left Sydney in 1911 aged fifteen, to avoid compulsory military service, an idea he hated. When the war began his eldest brother Harry enlisted in the 13th Battalion. Dudley followed, but it required persistence:

About six months after war was declared... I tried to enlist at Lismore. The physical examination was A1 until they tried my eyes which they declared to be hopeless, as I could read only the biggest letters on the card. They said I would never see a German... I tried again... with the same result. Then in 1915, I heard confidentially that by tipping a recruiting sergeant in Sydney I could get in. Much to my joy he “bit” straight away: £1 to him and £1 (he said) to the doctor whom I never saw... and I was in the army.44

Despite his eyesight, he saw plenty of Germans. After labouring on dairies he found the recruitment camp a ‘picnic’, and quickly bluffed his way overseas, having never ‘handled anything bigger than a pea-shooter’.45 For the next two and a half years he was a front line soldier. He saw action in the Fleurbaix sector, the attacks on Pozieres, the dreadful winter of 1916, and at Bullecourt and Passchendaele in 1917. He was promoted to corporal but asked to revert to the ranks. He wore spectacles yet was a No 1 Lewis gunner and a frequent volunteer for patrols in No Man’s Land, and in 1918 led many stealth raids.

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42 Jackson, D 29/5 to 5/6/18, AWM3DRL/3846.
43 Father: 3832 Pte J Jackson, 55 Bn, Blacksmith, of Neutral Bay, NSW. E 13/9/15, aged 53 (claimed to be 44), RTA 13/2/17. Brothers: 1766 Sgt HM Jackson 13 Bn, Builder’s clerk, of Sydney. E 28/1/15, aged 21, DOW 15/8/15 & Lenard Jackson E 6/8/15, aged 13. Lenard served as 2723 Pte RW Mayhew, 55 Bn, Draper, of Neutral Bay, NSW, claimed to be 19, RTA 13/12/17. A fourth brother served in the 2nd AIF.
45 Stand To, November-December, 1964, p. 1.
Dudley saw very little of his father and brothers in the AIF. Len, ‘big for his age’, signed up aged only thirteen years and eleven months. He was drafted to the 55th Battalion. A sense of fatherly duty led their father, Joseph, a veteran of the Sudan contingent of 1885, to put back his age and sign up. Joseph Jackson followed his youngest son into the 55th Battalion. He fought with Len at the bloody battle of Fromelles. They were in hospital in Norfolk when they learnt that Harry had died of wounds while a prisoner. It led to some serious soul searching. According to Dudley:

[Father] knew I was in the war till it ended, or I was killed or wounded, so he thought out of fairness to my mother he would pull out… he stated his right age, and when the details were fixed up, claimed my brother Len as having joined up without consent… and being far too young.

Father and youngest son went home to their grieving wife and mother Annie. Dudley fought on, and made a family of his section and by surviving became part of the hard core of the battalion. He kept a diary and a Vest Pocket camera known as the “Soldier’s Kodak”. Personal cameras were banned. Using the camera in the frontlines was an act of dissidence. But Jackson tended to ignore rules that he thought were stupid. Difficult to control out of the line but not disruptive, men gravitated to him while in it. One of his favourite companions on stealth raids was a new man in whom Jackson saw an attitude he respected: Raymond Casement asked Jackson to get him into his team, ‘he says the section he is in are a very windy lot’.

Last year his wife died so he sold his farm, as he did not want to live any more so he came over here to die. He has now changed his mind and decided to live, if possible.

Jackson was too independent a character to accept authority for the sake of it. Many diggers believed the strength of their sections and platoons lay in the fact that there were ‘men from the ranks ready to lead’. Dudley Jackson epitomised that wisdom. By 1918 he was experienced enough, and respected enough, to initiate or debate tactical matters with his officers and NCOs, particularly if he thought he knew a better, less costly, way. This was a

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46 *Stand To*, November-December, 1964, p. 3.
48 Jackson, D 19/4/18, AWMDRL/3846.
49 See for instance 7981 Pte JA Flannery, 12 Bn, Farm labourer, of Don, Tas. E 20/10/17, aged 18, RTA 13/7/19. OH, AWMSO1312.
characteristic that differentiated stealth raiders from the majority. The officers and NCOs accepted Jackson’s individuality and he was dependable because of it. In the line he was steady and when the situation merited, a risk taker.
While stealth raiders like Jackson and his mates were exploring the outpost system by day and night, the rest of the British Fourth Army Front had seemed enervated. Then on 9 June Fourth Army headquarters ordered a series of formal raids along its front to ascertain the likelihood of a German attack on Amiens. The Australian Corps were ordered to launch seven formal raids in three nights. Orders arrived at battalion headquarters’ daily between 9 and 15 June. Lieutenant Edgar Rule, 14th Battalion worried the formal raids would be ‘either a great success or else a murdering match’. It was a concern based on bitter experience in 1916 and 1917.

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50 4441 Pte LJ Hobbs, 20 Bn, Belt maker, of Kiribilli, NSW. E28/10/15, aged 37, RTA 8/10/19.
51 Rule, Jacka’s Mob, p. 128.
The 22nd Battalion had barely dusted itself off from its failed “silent” raid when in the cruel irony of war, it received orders to carry out a formal raid on the night of 10 June. The situation gave rise to a type of stealth raid that was fast becoming typical. A headquarters scout, Sergeant Bertie Bridges\(^\text{52}\) killed two Germans, wounded four and captured a machine gun when ordered to reconnoitre for the formal raid. Bridges probably hoped that by securing a prisoner – the objective of the formal raid – he would save his shaken battalion the strain of having to go over the top again. Despite Bridges’ efforts the formal raid went ahead. This is indicative of the inflexibility of the command and control hierarchy at this time. The orders had originated at Fourth Army headquarters and no Australian authority interceded on behalf of the battalion despite the fact that Bridges had achieved the objective of the raid. Nevertheless his battalion appreciated the ethos that inspired his stealth raid: his citation for the Military Medal describes how he captured a post that would have undoubtedly caused casualties to the formal raiders.\(^\text{53}\)

In the 24\(^\text{th}\) Battalion a scout, named Private Norman Munro,\(^\text{54}\) also tried to make a formal raid unnecessary. A few hours after orders were issued regarding a formal raid near Buire on 14 June, Munro decided on ‘his own initiative’ to stealth raid an enemy post. He singled out a post that was known to be dangerous. Its garrison had killed one of the battalion’s best scouts, possibly a friend of Munro’s.\(^\text{55}\) Munro may have gone alone into the wheat with vengeance on his mind.

At 6.30pm on 11 June he crawled for 150 yards through dense crop. His pockets and respirator bag were stuffed with Mills bombs. Munro watched the German post from the edge of the crop. He pulled the pin from a grenade and lobbed it into the post. It exploded. Munro threw bomb after bomb. The German garrison bombed back. Shrapnel tore through the wheat, through Munro’s webbing and into his stomach. He crawled back to an outpost and died.\(^\text{56}\) He had been unable to get identification or a talkative prisoner. The formal raid went ahead. A soldier in a nearby post commented dryly, that Munro ‘acted without orders and this type of thing is not allowed.’\(^\text{57}\)

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\(^{52}\) 334 Sgt BV Bridges MM, 22 Bn, Staffman, of Ballarat, Vic. E 21/1/15, aged 22, RTA 10/4/19.

\(^{53}\) Bridges, Citation MM, AWM28/1/111/0016.


\(^{55}\) This was 1550 Sgt PJ Molloy MM, 24 Bn, Farm labourer, of Gunbower, Vic. E 3/4/15, aged 20, KIA 8/6/18. See 24 Bn War Diary, 8/6/18, AWM4/23/41/33.

\(^{56}\) 24 Bn War Diary, 11/6/18, AWM4/23/41/33; Munro, Citation MM, AWM28/1/111/0029.

\(^{57}\) Wilson, D 11/6/18, AWM PR86/341.
Many experienced men thought the success or failure of a formal raid was something of a lottery. Consequently, some battalion commanders thought it only fair that it should be chance that decided whom would lead them. When the 40th Battalion was ordered to conduct a formal raid on 13 June, a poker hand was dealt and the loser, Lieutenant Thomas Hoskins was said to have ‘set off to make his dispositions and his will’. Hoskins returned wounded and without a prisoner. The cards also decided who led the formal raid in the 14th Battalion.

Edgar Rule worried who was to get the job? No volunteers – we were all too much of the “old soldier,” and had seen too much to go pushing our heads into trouble... whoever picked the two of hearts out of four cards would do the job... We all wondered if it meant death for one of us... Cleary picked the three of hearts, and next came Wood’s turn, and before my turn came I heard him say: “Well, I’m damned,” and I knew I’d missed.

The 14th Battalion formal raiders took eleven prisoners, but a favourite sergeant was mortally wounded. ‘He was one of our best N.C.O.’s’, wrote Rule, ‘and one we could ill afford to lose.’ The anxiety and depression among the junior officers and men that accompanied orders for formal raids highlights the difference in ethos from stealth raids. Enthusiastic men initiated stealth raids whereas formal raids were met with universal distrust and fatalism. Nevertheless most men soldiered on under the philosophy that “It’s an order, and I’ll carry it out.”

However, one of the characteristics of stealth raiders was their casual attitude towards authority and orders. The men who carried out the next stealth raid on the Amiens front represented a battalion that no longer existed, in the eyes of higher command.

On 20 June, five friends – former NCOs of the 36th Battalion which had been disbanded on 30 April after being decimated during the German offensive battles near Villers-Bretonneux – initiated an audacious stealth raid only days after joining the 33rd Battalion. Lieutenant Albert

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58 (417) Lt TT Hoskins, 40 Bn, Medical student, of Launceston, Tas. E 1/12/15, aged 25, RTA 27/5/19.
59 Green, The Fortieth, p. 140.
62 Rule, Jacka’s Mob, p. 128.
63 Rule, Jacka’s Mob, p. 128.
64 Rule, Jacka’s Mob, p. 116. The prisoners and information taken in the formal raids indicated no widespread relief had occurred on the German front at Amiens, and there was no indication of a coming offensive against the Fourth Army. Bean, Official History, Vol VI, n68, pp. 240-241.
65 For the disbandment of some AIF battalions in 1918 see Bean, Official History, Vol V, pp. 657-660.
Widdy,\textsuperscript{66} and Corporal Allan Brecht,\textsuperscript{67} bush workers from outback New South Wales, slithered into a crop east of Villers-Bretonneux, in daylight, while the Flying Corps strafed the nearest German trenches with machine gun fire. Widdy and Brecht crept to the edge of a German trench and looked along it for 400 yards. They returned to their lines, telling their mates from the old 36\textsuperscript{th} that the enemy was not keeping a very good watch. They made a plan.

The following afternoon (21 June) Allied artillery commenced a routine bombardment of the German front. Widdy and Brecht’s allotted company was ordered to withdraw to the support line. The order was intended to avoid casualties from “friendly fire”, but Widdy and Brecht ignored it. At 3.45pm the bombardment commenced. Widdy and Brecht advanced, joined by Sergeant James Harris\textsuperscript{68} and Corporals Roy Swadling\textsuperscript{69} and Keith Horne,\textsuperscript{70} mates from the old 36\textsuperscript{th}. They carefully worked through the crop to the edge of the German trench. They saw a machine gun post manned by two men taking cover from the bombardment. Widdy armed with a revolver and Brecht with rifle and fixed bayonet leapt into the trench. They shot the machine gunners dead. Three Germans ran from a dugout. A German shot off part of Widdy’s left hand including a finger. Widdy killed the man. Brecht bayonetted another. The third German ran yelling. Harris and Swadling ‘were unable to take part in the melee owing to [the] narrowness’ of the trench.\textsuperscript{71} Horne, who had stayed above ground to keep watch, saw Germans with a machine gun organising a counter attack behind a traverse. He yelled a warning. The four friends climbed out of the trench and dived into the crop, taking a German field cap with identifying marks with them. The German machine gunners fired after them, vainly. The five friends crawled back to their lines – one by one – so as not to make too much noise or too big a target, practically untraceable except for the subtle waving of the wheat. All five were “home” by 5.15pm.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} 1620 Sgt AW Brecht DCM, MM, MID, 33 Bn, Labourer, of Gunnedah, NSW. E 28/3/16 aged 25, RTA 19/6/19.
\textsuperscript{68} 775 Sgt JA Harris MID, 33 Bn, Farmer, of Peak Hill, NSW. E 31/1/16, aged 18, Disch 17/1/20.
\textsuperscript{69} 1235 Cpl RL Swadling MM, MID, 33 Bn, Labourer, of Coffs Harbour, NSW. E 23/1/16, aged 21, RTA 1/8/19.
\textsuperscript{70} 1661 Cpl K Horne MID, 33 Bn, Clerk, of Mosman, NSW. E 8/4/16 aged 18, RTA 3/7/19.
\textsuperscript{71} 33 Bn War Diary, June 1918, App 27, AWM4/23/50/20.
\textsuperscript{72} 33 Bn War Diary, June 1918, App 27, AWM4/23/50/20.
Within hours, signallers at brigade headquarters were talking about the stealth raid. Private Sydney Young, a stretcher-bearer in the 34th Battalion, wrote of it, and recalled that Widdy was ‘our [brigades] 1st M.M.’ for initiative on patrol at Armentieres in 1916. Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Morshead, commanding the 33rd Battalion, recommended Widdy for the Victoria Cross and Brecht for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He wrote that the ‘daring exploit had a most exhilarating and inspiring influence on the whole of the Battalion, and probably a most wholesome effect on the enemy.’ The recommendations were subsequently downgraded. Nevertheless Monash mentioned the four stealth raiders in Corps orders on the eve of the battle of Hamel. Widdy would not get the VC but another stealth raider soon would, after the battle of Hamel.

By the end of June, it was clear to the Australian Corps that the Germans opposite them feared stealth raiders. German prisoners were convinced there was at least four times as many Australians on their front as there actually were. Stealth raiders in the Australian Corps were killing and “kidnapping” by day and night, enthusiastically. It was a very local, very personal tactic. However, there was room for further evolution of stealth raids. After the unprecedented daylight stealth raid of the 18th Battalion, higher command, in particular 2nd Division, showed an interest in the tactic. The resulting “silent” raids could be misguided because division, brigade, battalion and company commanders set the agenda, not the men. So-called “silent” raids could be just as much a lottery as the hated formal raids if hubris or ignorance of the situation at the front overrode the cautious self-reliance characteristic of stealth raiders. Nevertheless, the actions recorded in this chapter indicate that after 18 May until the eve of the battle of Hamel some in higher command were trying to copy or modify the tactics initiated by the men. The climax of stealth raiding on the Somme was still ahead.

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73 3021 Pte CJ Britton, 9 Bde HQ (33Bn), Assistant tester, PW Dept, of North Sydney, NSW. E 8/9/16, aged 37, RTA 12/6/19. D 21/6/18, MLMSS 1396.
74 1433 Pte SB Young, 34 Bn, Bricklayer, of Sydney. E 31/8/15, aged 21, RTA 12/12/18. D 25/6/18, MLMSS985.
75 Lt Col LJ Morshead CMG, DSO, MID, LH 5th Class (Fr), 33 Bn, School master, of Ballarat, Vic. E 9/9/14, aged 26, RTA 20/11/19.
77 MC Widdy & MM Brecht.
78 Mention in Corps Orders, AWM28/1/165/007.
79 See for instance, The Forty-First, p. 94.
CHAPTER FOUR
‘This is an opportunity for a few daring men’

The evolution of stealth raiding near Hazebrouck, 28 May to 28 June 1918

On 22 May the 1st Division learned that they would be attacking Mont de Merris. When division headquarters ordered reconnaissance patrols to investigate the strength of the German defences on the Mont, stealth raiders took the opportunity to destroy posts that might be dangerous in an attack. While on a reconnaissance patrol on the night of 30 May, Sergeant George Turner,¹ with Privates Lindon Saltmarsh² and Francis Reynolds³ found a German post south of the railway embankment that ran into the German system. After a quick discussion they decided to rush it. They killed three men and captured a machine gun.⁴ On 31 May Private David Mack⁵ saw a party of six unknown stealth raiders from the 10th Battalion try
to take a German machine gun group which had moved out into “no mans land.” The Germans hastily retreated our chaps hurried them on with a few grenades & made it safely back.⁶

On the same day in the valley of the Meteren Becque north east of Mont de Merris, a platoon officer of the 9th Battalion instructed Private Reg Knight,⁷ aged 18, to see if a trench known to be used by German machine gunners at night was occupied by day. Knight crawled into No Man’s Land armed with a borrowed revolver. He found the trench and decided to explore it.⁸ His eyes fell on a hessian sack. He lifted it and came face-to-face with a German officer lying in a dugout. Knight fired his revolver but did not wait to see the result because about 25 Germans charged at him from behind a traverse. He shot the nearest man and ran. When he reached the end of the trench, he pulled himself out and dived into the crop. He took a well-

¹ (2732) 2/Lt GW Turner DCM, MM, 12 Bn, Brass-turner, of Launceston, Tas. E 15/7/15, aged 23, RTA 18/7/19. Turner was a renowned 12th Battalion scout.
² 4034 Pte LR Saltmarsh MM, 12 Bn, Laboureur, of Cressy, Tas. E 30/7/15, aged 24, RTA 3/7/19.
³ 7328 Pte FT Reynolds MM, 12 Bn, Yardman, of Hobart, Tas. E 10/10/16, aged 19, RTA 18/7/19.
⁴ See Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 454; Turner, Citation DCM, AWM28/2/62/0047; Saltmarsh, Citation MM, AWM28/1/61/0040; Reynolds, Citation MM, AWM28/1/61/0040.
⁵ 7516 Pte DL Mack, 10 Bn, Clerk, of Adelaide, SA. E 5/9/17, aged 20, RTA 19/4/19.
⁶ Mack, D 30-31/5/18, AWMPRO1061.
⁷ 714A Pte RP Knight MM, 9 Bn, Laboureur, of Bellingen, NSW. E 19/2/17, aged 17, RTA 2/1/19. This was the same trench that the 1st Battalion had raided on 27/5/18, suffering seven casualties. See Edwards recount in ch 2.
⁸ 9 Bn War Diary, 1/6/18, AWM4/23/26/42.
aimed shot at a man about to throw a stick bomb, and then bolted for the 9th Battalion’s outpost line, cheered home by his platoon.9

On the night of 3 June the 11th Battalion went over the top in a formal battle to capture Mont de Merris. The Western Australians advanced in two waves of two companies, shooting down ‘terror stricken Fritzes clinging to their “posies” and capturing hundreds more.10 The German garrison on the Mont were caught in the middle of a relief which caused an unexpectedly large haul of prisoners and weapons.11 The Allied barrage was widely praised, and the Australian casualties comparatively light, unlike the set-piece battle at Meteren in April. The men acknowledged that the work of patrols and stealth raiders in the lead up to the attack had reduced several strongpoints that might have caused casualties.12 The capture of the Mont advanced the line about 500 yards on a front of 800. Though only 144 feet above sea level, the Mont was a commanding position, on a ridge of land running west of the village of Merris. After its capture Sergeant Peter Snodgrass,13 11th Battalion, exclaimed, ‘we could see for miles’.14

At Pozieres in 1916, Passchendaele 1917, and at Meteren in April 1918, Sergeant Bill Vickers,15 12th Battalion, had seen isolated pockets of motivated German infantry shoot into the rear of advancing Australians.16 When day broke after the battle of Mont de Merris he went into the crop alone, and tackled several posts that were dangerously close to the new frontline, using his rifle, bayonet and ‘fiery language’. Witnesses said his ‘strength and bravery were miraculous’.17 He captured fifteen prisoners.18 Vickers’ single-handedly prevented numerous threats to his battalion that many battle weary and inexperienced men might have overlooked.

9 Knight, Citation MM, AWM28/1/61/0004; see also Harvey, From Anzac to the Hindenburg Line, p. 217.
11 Five German officers and 253 other ranks were captured along with 26 light machine guns, one heavy gun, 13 light trench mortars, five grenade-throwers and one 77mm quick firing field gun. Belford, Legs Eleven, p. 580.
12 3 Bde had about 100 casualties. A full description of the battle is in Bean, Official History, Vol. VI, p. 388. See also Hamley, D 3/6/18, AWMPR89/144; Gemmell, D 3/6/18, AWM2DRL/0181; Belford, Legs Eleven, pp. 576-583.
13 (1418) Lt PWC Snodgrass, 11Bn, Shearer, of Camberwell, Vic. E 16/11/14, aged 29, RTA 6/9/19.
14 In Belford, Legs Eleven, p. 582.
16 Vickers, Citation MM, AWM28/1/37/0057; Citation DCM, AWM28/2/62/0010.
17 Newton, The Story of the Twelfth, p. 453.
18 Vickers, Citation Bar to DCM, AWM28/1/61/0037.
After the capture of Mont de Merris, stealth raids occurred almost daily on the flats south of the Mont and the shallow valley of the Meteren Becque to the north. Adventurous men penetrated the German system in search of what one stealth raider called “sport”,¹⁹ perhaps encouraged because men were no longer harassed by machine guns or susceptible to barrages directed by observers on the Mont. The German high command realised the significance of losing Mont de Merris and counter-attacked several times. Each time they were beaten back. After these German attacks, stealth raiders ventured into the semi-open battlefield to improve fields of fire, cut out dangerous posts, or look for missing mates, souvenirs and war trophies.

On 5 June, following a week’s rest at Sercus (where cricket and football had been the focus) the 5th Battalion returned to the outpost line between Meteren and the Mont. Emboldened by the fact that their flank was no longer exposed to raking fire from Mont de Merris, several “D” Company experienced soldiers maintained the momentum of stealth raiding begun by Lieutenant Neil Maddox and “C” Company on the previous tour (see chapter two). It took two days and nights of careful reconnaissance before three stealth raids were carried off in one

¹⁹ In Reveille, 1/4/38, pp. 62-63.
morning. At dawn on 7 June Private Thomas Gardner,\(^\text{20}\) who had been Regimental Sergeant Major before being reduced to the ranks for insubordination and absence without leave, and Corporals John Reilly\(^\text{21}\) and Ernest Schwab\(^\text{22}\) captured two Germans sleeping in a post near the Meteren Becque by sneaking up on them through the crop. Next, Sergeant Arthur “Morrie” Morrison,\(^\text{23}\) one of the original members and ‘hard-doers’ of “D” Company, and three men, covered by a Lewis gunner, simply walked through the high crop in No Man’s Land and surprised six Germans in the same trench Reg Knight had stealth raided previously.\(^\text{24}\) Morrison brought the prisoners back, throwing clods of dirt at their feet to herd them. Meanwhile his accomplices captured three more. Then Morrison collected a machine gun and papers, drawing fire only belatedly. He described the stealth raid as “a bit of sport”.\(^\text{25}\) This inspired Gardner, Reilly and Schwab to go out again. Their platoon officer, Tom Parker\(^\text{26}\) agreed to cooperate. Armed with revolvers Parker lent them, Gardner and Reilly crawled through the crop to a post. Parker and Schwab watched on in support.\(^\text{27}\) A German sentry saw them and opened fire. Gardner and Reilly charged the man, shot him, and jumped into a short trench. They landed in a mob of Germans who fought tenaciously. One grabbed Reilly and wrestled him to the ground. Reilly shot the man in the face. He and Gardner were fighting with their fists when Parker and Schwab opened fire on a group of Germans coming to counter-attack. Gardner and Reilly escaped into the crop. Later, they estimated that they had killed eight men. A planned formal raid by “C” Company was cancelled because the “D” Company stealth raiders had made eleven identifications between dawn and 10.30am, without a casualty.\(^\text{28}\)

Colonel Cecil Sasse,\(^\text{29}\) the commander of the 4th Battalion, was influenced by the 5th Battalion’s success and grew increasingly interested in stealth raids.\(^\text{30}\) He later admitted to Bean that at first his men were ‘a trifle nervous’ of infiltrating through the crop by day but ‘when they

\(^{20}\) S84 Cpl THC Gardner MM, 5 Bn, School teacher, of Kew, Vic. E 17/8/14, aged 20, RTA 18/12/19.


\(^{22}\) 1612 Cpl EJ Schwab MM, 5 Bn, Labourer, of Camberwell, Vic. E 18/11/14, aged 22, RTA 30/12/18.

\(^{23}\) 907 Sgt AT Morrison DCM, 5 Bn, Mechanic, of Elsternwick, Vic. E 17/8/14, aged 25, RTA 24/9/18.


\(^{25}\) In Reveille, 1/4/38, pp. 62-63. The other soldiers involved were: (6643) Lt WAM Simms MM, 5 Bn, Clerk, of Richmond, Vic. E 12/4/16, aged 19, RTA 26/7/19; 5707 Pte SP Hastings MM, 5 Bn, Labourer, of Geelong, Vic. E 15/3/16, aged 31, RTA 19/4/19; 966 Sgt EJH Barker, 5 Bn, Farmer, of Springvale, Vic. E 17/8/14, aged 25, RTA 23/10/18.

\(^{26}\) (704) Lt TS Parker, 5 Bn, Patternmaker, of Middle Park, Vic. E 18/8/14, aged 21, RTA 20/6/19.

\(^{27}\) Keown, Forward with the Fifth, p. 274 claims 7471 Pte AG Duclos, Motor driver, of Carlton, Vic. E 13/6/17, aged 21, RTA 20/12/19 went with Parker, and does not mention Schwab. However, Schwab’s citation for the MM mentions his role in both stealth raids. Schwab, Citation MM, AWM28/2/297/0028.

\(^{28}\) In Speed (ed), Esprit de Corps, p. 109.

\(^{29}\) Lt Col CD Sasse DSO & Bar, MID, 4 Bn, Woolbroker, of Sydney, NSW. E 27/8/14, aged 23, Disch 29/4/19.

\(^{30}\) Bean folders, ‘Merris Patrols Historical Notes’, AWM38/3DRL/606/252/1/1918-1935.
found out what could be done... it was the other way’. On Sasse’s headquarters staff was a 24-year-old intelligence officer, Lieutenant Robert Taylor. According to Sasse, Taylor was ‘a wild youngster’ and he turned to him to inspire the fighting spirit he felt was lacking in his battalion. Taylor had been on a reconnaissance patrol where he claimed to have seen about twenty Germans in a communication trench running across the ridge from the Mont towards Merris. Sasse challenged him to take it on, in daylight, before a formal raid could be organised. Taylor agreed and six men he patrolled with regularly joined him.

Few AIF men had been on the Western Front as long as Taylor. Born in Madras, India and educated at a public school in London, he arrived in Australia as a teenager. In August 1914 he enlisted as a private in the first contingent of the AIF, but his goal was to serve in a British regiment with his schoolmates. He was well connected and succeeded in getting a transfer to the 3/7th London Regiment as a subaltern. He served with the battalion on the Western Front from October 1915, while the Australians were on Gallipoli. During the Somme battles he was wounded in the forming up trenches but ‘insisted’ on ‘going into action’. In the attack that followed, he beat ‘a fully armed enemy with his fists,’ knocking him to the ground, and was wounded three more times before he finally left the field. He was awarded the Military Cross.

In the winter of 1916 Taylor returned to the Somme and was wounded again. Unfit for active service he sailed to Sydney, married, then re-enlisted, stating he was a horse breaker although he was still officially an officer in the British Army. On the return voyage to Britain to join the 4th Battalion, a U-Boat torpedoed and sunk the ship he was on, 250 miles from Lands End. He and ‘some of the crew’ drifted for two and a half days in a lifeboat before being picked up by a Royal Navy minesweeper. Taylor returned to France with the Australians.

At 9am on 12 June Taylor and his men crawled out through a crop and cut through the German wire without being noticed. Here Lance Corporal Jack Pearce stayed to cover them. They were expecting at least twenty Germans in the trench, but a relief was occurring and when...

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31 Bean folders, AWM38/3DRL/606/252/1/1918-1935.
32 (61) Lt RE Taylor MC & Bar, 4Bn, Clerk and horse breaker, of Sydney, NSW. E 11/9/14, aged 21, RTA 24/1/19.
33 Bean folders, AWM38/3DRL/606/252/1/1918-1935.
35 RE Taylor, L 21/3/39, Biographical file AWM43.
they leapt in they found it full of Germans – Taylor thought 40 – and good troops.\(^{37}\) Some ran but those that stood their ground made a nasty, bitter ‘stand up fight’.\(^{38}\) In the melee Taylor grabbed two prisoners, but the air above the trench was cracking with lead as Germans in nearby posts fired into the audacious breach. One of the prisoners hesitated so Taylor shot him.\(^{39}\) The second came with him but was killed by a burst of fire that also wounded Taylor and Sergeant Don McLennon.\(^{40}\) Seeing them in strife, Pearce came forward in support and fought back with bombs and rifle fire. Shrapnel blasted him in the face, ear and legs but he kept firing as the others retired. Taylor, although wounded, had the presence of mind to cut identifying marks from the uniform of the dead prisoner. He got back with all his men, but they were lucky. They had come up against stiff and well-armed resistance. The 12\(^{th}\) Division, followed by the 13\(^{th}\) Reserve Division and 81\(^{st}\) Reserve Division whom stealth raiders had been intimidating for weeks, had been relieved by good troops of the 4\(^{th}\) Bavarian Division. It was an attempt by the German higher command to stem losses resulting from stealth raids and the capture of Mont de Merris.\(^{41}\) The 4\(^{th}\) Bavarian Division ‘was rated a high quality division; aggressive in attack and tenacious in defence’.\(^{42}\) General Herbert Plumer’s\(^{43}\) intelligence staff at Second Army headquarters noted: ‘A fairly good Bavarian division has replaced an exhausted division in the Merris sector.’\(^{44}\) German resistance almost universally increased across the 1\(^{st}\) Division’s front, and German attacks repeatedly struck the Australian line.\(^{45}\)

For the next two weeks, Taylor’s trench, known as the old communication trench, was the focus of formal raid and counter-raid. One survivor of the 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion remarked that “The b[astards] were so thick, you couldn’t poke a stick between them”.\(^{46}\) Jack Bruggy, whose stealth raid in May had inspired the new term “one-man raid”,\(^{47}\) received 21 wounds to his lower limbs when a German force estimated at 200 strong attacked his post on the night of 22

\(^{37}\) Taylor said 40; his citation gives the same; Bean in conversation with Sasse believed this might have been an exaggeration and states ‘20 or 30’. See Bean, ‘Merris Patrols’, AWM38/3DRL/606/252/1/1918-1935; Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, p. 394.

\(^{38}\) Taylor’s citation for a Bar to his MC credits the stealth raiders with killing ten Germans. AWM28/1/62/0004.


\(^{40}\) 1237 Sgt D McLennon MM, 4 Bn, Labourer, of Sydney, NSW. E 15/8/14, aged 28, RTA 8/10/18.


\(^{43}\) Field Marshal H Plumer, GOC British Second Army.


\(^{47}\) See ch 2.
June. One dead German officer was counted to have 46 separate wounds. Pat Kinchington found in the officer’s pocket papers ‘from his Commander warning him that the Australians were dangerous fellows, and that they even went about in the day time’. On the night of 14-15 June German raiders supported by an intense high explosives barrage wiped out several of the 5th Battalion’s listening posts, on the extreme right of the 1st Division’s flank, taking prisoners and threatening to annihilate a company headquarters. The Victorians held the ground and when dawn broke they looked over a scene of human carnage. One platoon counted nineteen bodies within a stone’s throw of their post. Seven prisoners were brought in. They belonged to the 44th Reserve Division, which was considered first class. They spoke freely about an attack on Hazebrouck ‘to be undertaken in a few days’ time’.

At XV Corps headquarters concern arose that the 26 to 31 German divisions known to be resting in Flanders were about to launch a major offensive. Consequently on 15 June the corps commander, Lieutenant General Beauvoir De Lisle, issued orders to the 1st Division to capture prisoners. The orders reached the battalion headquarters in the front lines at midday. At that time the whole front looked a wilderness. Chaplain Walter Dexter, at 5th Battalion headquarters, which was completely cut off from the outpost line by day, noticed, ‘[t]here does not seem to be a man on the landscape & the only noise we hear is an occasional plane of ours buzzing overhead… & the whizzing of shells both his & ours’.

But men were moving in No Man’s Land. After the vicious fighting of the previous night, “C” Company, 5th Battalion, took pause to work out what happened. One of the battalion’s original soldiers, Corporal Ernest “Erny” Chambers was missing in action. Chambers had been leading a formal patrol in No Man’s Land when the Germans launched their attack and had not been seen since. He had taken only three men with him, and two of those were evacuated wounded, so there was no reliable information. Chambers was well liked and respected. He had survived a serious chest wound early in the war, and chosen to return to the battalion

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48 In Reveille, 1/6/34, p. 13.
49 In Reveille, 1/6/34, p. 13.
50 Histories of Two hundred and Fifty-one Divisions of the German Army, p. 461.
51 These prisoners were 208 Bde, 44 Div on the left flank of the 43rd Bavarian Div. See Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 397.
52 Lt Gen B De Lisle, GOC XV Corps, British Second Army.
54 Dexter, D 15/6/18, AWMPR00248.
55 373 Cpl EM Chambers, 5 Bn, Bookbinder, of Ascot Vale, Vic. E 15/8/14, aged 22, KIA 14/6/18.
The stealth raiders were Maddox, Sergeant Arthur Lucas, Corporal Ernest Jacobe, Lance Corporal John Jackson and Privates Albert Merrin DCM and Claude Shepherd. In a platoon post near the Plate Becque, 100 yards east of the Vieux-Berquin-Strazeele road, they took off their identity discs, shoulder patches and other marks of identification and armed themselves with a revolver and one Mills bomb apiece. Only Shepherd took his rifle and fixed bayonet. Maddox warned his platoon Lewis gunners to look out for targets. The six stealth raiders primed their weapons and headed into No Man’s Land. They crossed a makeshift wooden bridge over the Plate Becque by a solitary tree. The stream was brimming with cold, fast moving water, five foot deep and just as wide. On the other side they climbed through a barbed wire entanglement and made their way into a pea crop about eight inches high. Maddox, Lucas and Merrin explored the field while the others waited in support near the footbridge. Maddox had gone about 60 yards when he was fired on from a post in the pea crop. He rushed his attackers. The supports joined him. The tactic worked, the sight of what appeared to be a strong force was too much for three German sentries. They threw down their rifles and surrendered. Maddox and the other stealth raiders began tearing away the timber and corrugated iron roofs of several dugouts, full of sleeping Germans:

we were in a nest of about 8 posts... The only trouble we encountered was a [sergeant] who persisted in squealing for help and would not come out... but with the aid of Private Merrin’s boot and [the butt-end of] my revolver... we soon started him off home with the rest, who were by this time crossing the becque... one of my escort fired a revolver shot under

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56 In 373 Chambers, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
57 In 373 Chambers, Red Cross File AWM1DRL/0428.
59 3144A L/Sgt EW Jacobe, 5 Bn, Butcher, of South Yarra, Vic. E 13/7/15, aged 25, RTA 20/12/18.
60 2736 Pte JD Jackson MBC (Romania) 3rd Class, 5 Bn, Bricklayer, address unknown. E 14/7/15, aged 25, RTA 21/3/19.
62 6577 Pte CA Shepherd, Labourer, of South Melbourne. E 3/7/16, aged 21, Disch 21/7/20 (desertion illegally absent from 25/10/18).
one’s heels followed by several other shots and this started a marathon run to [company headquarters] – a most amusing scene.\textsuperscript{63}

The prisoners numbered six NCOs and six privates. To Corps headquarters this might have seemed a response to General De Lisle’s orders. Viewed from the front line it was a stealth raid to find a missing mate. Maddox initiated and carried out the stealth raid before De Lisle’s orders arrived at his outpost.\textsuperscript{64} Maddox wrote in a subsequent report, ‘unfortunately [found] no trace of Cpl. Chambers’.\textsuperscript{65} The swiftness of Maddox’s stealth raid, which anticipated higher commands call for prisoners, is in stark contrast to a formal raid of 40 men with a box barrage which the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion sent over that night in compliance with De Lisle’s orders. That raid came back ‘empty handed’.\textsuperscript{66}

![Photo 15 This may be the lone tree by the Plate Becque that Maddox mentioned, it is close to the grid reference in his report. On 15 June 1918 a pea crop grew in the field beyond the tree where Maddox surprised eight German posts and captured twelve men while searching for Corporal “Erny” Chambers. (Lucas Jordan 2012)](image)

\textsuperscript{63} In 5 Bn War Diary, App 15, AWM4/23/22/40.
\textsuperscript{64} Corps orders for identifications were received at midday. Maddox captured the Germans at 6.30pm.
\textsuperscript{65} 373 Chambers, Red Cross File, 1DRL/0428.
\textsuperscript{66} Edwards, MS 15-18 June 1918, PR89/050.
Maddox was awarded a bar to the Military Cross he had won for his stealth raids in May. Both awards indicated a growing appreciation of the tactic by battalion commanders and division headquarters. It confirmed a belief long held by the bushman Maddox that the enemy was vulnerable by day and casualties in stealth raids were light. However, in the outposts some men in the 5th Battalion became over-confident and used the tactic as an excuse to go souvenir hunting in the outpost system, while ostensibly on patrol. The morning after Maddox’s stealth raid, Second Lieutenant Bert Davis,67 Privates Les Bursill,68 Frank Hardie69, Andrew Kilpatrick70 and Francis Maher – one of the battalion’s original stealth raiders in May (see chapter two) – were looting the dead in No Man’s Land hundreds of yards beyond friendly posts when they decided upon a stealth raid. Bursill looked like a bushranger in ‘German boots, German waistcoat’ carrying a ‘Fritz revolver’.71 Davis’ pockets were stuffed with German medals.72 An eyewitness saw one of them draw a waterproof sheet off what looked to be a post, recoil, then fire his revolver. Nearby a German machine gun opened up, followed by grenades thrown from behind a hedge. Davis was seen to be hit and crawl into a shell hole. Bursill was said to have leapt in after him.73 The others ran back to the outpost line under fire.

Once again 5th Battalion lower ranks tried to recover their mates. Arthur Hall described how volunteers made three attempts to rescue Bursill and Davis under cover by rifle grenades and Lewis guns. Each time they were beaten back, and eventually forced to give up.74 As with “Erny” Chambers, Davis and Bursill were killed and their bodies were not recovered.75 The 9th Battalion took over the outposts from the 5th Battalion that night. It lost seven men killed, two officers and seventeen men wounded in 24 hours of repeated attempts to capture the machine guns that had been responsible for the deaths of Davis and Bursill.76 Misfortune continued to follow stealth raids on 23 June when two 9th Battalion men tried to capture a

67 (13941) 2/Lt HS Davis, 5 Bn, Engineer, of Boisdale, Vic. E 6/7/15, aged 22, KIA 16/6/18.
68 S40A Pte LG Bursill, 5 Bn, Labourer, of Maryborough, Vic. E 26/5/16, aged 21, KIA 16/6/18.
70 1846 Pte A Kilpatrick, 5 Bn, Plumber, of Haberfield, NSW. E 26/1/15, aged 21, RTA 5/3/19.
71 S40A Bursill, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428. Bursill was accustomed to moving about in No Man’s Land independently. He was recommended for the MM for initiative on the night of 24-25/4/18, when in the vicinity of Meteren during a heavy bombardment, he volunteered to go out and observe the enemy from an abandoned post. He proceeded through the barrage and remained in No Man’s Land till all was quiet and sent back the following message “All clear in front, sir.” He remained observing until he was relieved. Citation AWM28/2/297Part1. He was not awarded the medal.
72 2/Lt HS Davis, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
73 2/Lt HS Davis, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
74 In Bursill, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
75 Chambers, Bursill and Davis are named on the memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.
group of Germans thought to be sleeping in the same posts that Maddox had surprised in the pea crop. This time the Germans held their ground. Sergeant Harold Goulborn was wounded and Private Donald Mackenzie, a battalion original, mortally wounded. Mackenzie died in full view of his mates in the outposts. The Germans had reoccupied the posts Maddox’s stealth raiders had so systematically cleared and they were alert and aggressive.

Although the casualties in these stealth raids were comparatively light, they were generally the most experienced and daring men. It required a leader who ‘appreciated their initiative’ to hold the ground they penetrated. In the 1st Division that commander was Maurice Wilder-Neligan, 10th Battalion. Wilder-Neligan was a ‘unique and vivid’ personality. By 1918 he was the only battalion commander in the AIF who could boast that he had ‘enlisted as a private, had officiated as a cook, batman, orderly room corporal, orderly room sergeant, intelligence officer, adjutant, and held practically every job which the A.I.F. could offer.’ One of his officers once said to him

it would be interesting to know what you will be doing in five years’ time
Colonel. You may be the Prime Minister of Australia, President of a republic – or you may be in gaol.

More than any other battalion commander Wilder-Neligan would extend the ethos of stealth raids beyond capturing or killing the enemy in isolated posts, to penetrating and holding useful ground.

Described by one of his fellow officers as a ‘soldier of fortune,’ Wilder-Neligan hid his cultured roots and connections with the British clergy and upper class. In his youth he had spent a brief period in the elite Royal Horse Artillery before buying himself out, but the experience endowed him with a strong sense of discipline and a redoubtable drive for excellence in dress and drill. He enlisted as a private in the 9th Battalion in north Queensland in August 1914. He won a DCM at Gallipoli, and a DSO at Fleurbaix where he led a formal raid that Bean described as ‘probably the most brilliantly executed’ of its kind that the Australians undertook. When

77 1547 Sgt HH Goulborn, 9 Bn, Engineer, of Townville, Qld. E 28/12/14, aged 22, Disch 30/6/20.
78 950 Pte D Mackenzie, 9 Bn, Carpenter, of Cairns, Qld. E 21/8/14, aged 21, KIA 23/6/18.
79 See 9 Bn War Diary, 23/6/18, AWM4/23/26/42.
81 For biographical details see Introduction n36.
83 In ‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2.
he first took over the 10\textsuperscript{th} Battalion on a temporary basis in June 1917 he was junior to 40 majors in the AIF and few would have put money on him becoming a commander. Others saw something in his virile leadership, organisational skill and diplomacy in circles away from the line. He officially took command of the 10\textsuperscript{th} Battalion in July 1917 and set the tone immediately. At his first meeting in the officers’ mess he told his new command, “This battalion has never been a battalion, but I am now going to make it one... We will start all over again, and the first Battalion Order issued will be No. 1”.

On the parade ground he was completely master, and his great delight was to see his battalion quick-marching, and double-marching, wheeling, forming, inclining on a large field... while he roared out personal pointed remarks through his megaphone to any hapless subaltern whom he detected in error.

In communicating with his men his organisation and clear expression were exemplary. Throughout the Hazebrouck campaign he built scale dioramas of the ground over which the battalion was fighting, and made a point of talking not just to his officers about operational matters but also to each of his platoons in turn. Officers were banned from attending these ‘chats’, so that his NCOs and privates went away ‘thoroughly equipped’ with his plans, and he with their opinions. He instilled in the men his own ‘selfishness of aims and ruthlessness of methods’, and pushed them hard. His drive was remarkable. Lieutenant John Searcy remembered that ‘every night’ the battalion was in the line at Hazebrouck, Wilder-Neligan would be out ‘from dusk to dawn round the trenches’.

His tenacious interest in their wellbeing and their opinion on tactical matters earned the men’s respect. At Messines in January 1918, when the Australian artillery was firing short and killing his men, he blasted the offending gunnery officer with a message that became legend: ‘You murderer! You hound of hell fire let loose! Man alive, your shells are dropping in my trenches and killing my men. If you don’t increase your range, by the powers of Hades I’ll come over and fix the damn lot of you’. He meant it. ‘The Colonel was a great disciplinarian, but he was a law unto himself in respect to his methods of gaining results’.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{86}{‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2.}
\footnoteref{87}{‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2.}
\footnoteref{88}{‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2; ‘Battn Training. Lecture to all ranks on forthcoming operations by C.O.’ in 10 Bn War Diary, 12/9/17; App 3 AWM4/23/27/23.}
\footnoteref{89}{(237) Lt JW Searcy MC, MID, 10 Bn, Civil engineer, of North Adelaide, SA. E 19/8/14, aged 22, RTA 23/10/18. M June 1918, AWMPR84/075.}
\footnoteref{90}{Searcy, M June 1918, AWMPR84/075.}
\footnoteref{91}{‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2.}
\footnoteref{92}{‘The Colonel’, Lock collection, SLSAPRG272/2.}
\end{footnotes}
Wilder-Neligan admired stealth raiders. He understood their ethos because of his genius in talking with his men about tactical matters, and because he had once been a private and an NCO. One of his favourite stories was the stealth raid by RSM “Raggy” Holland which netted a German and a bagful of chickens from a farmhouse, described in chapter two. But Wilder-Neligan had learned more prescient details about stealth raids since the capture of Mont de Merris. One of the recent lessons of the fighting, exemplified in the experience of the 5th and 9th Battalions, was that if the ground penetrated by stealth raiders were not held the Germans were likely to reoccupy it at night. This gave the German machine gunners and snipers a measure of unpredictability which they exploited at the expense of Australian night patrols and raids. Wilder-Neligan was the first battalion commander to encourage stealth raiders to conquer the ground they were exploring by holding it, like a cuckoo would steal a nest. When Second Army headquarters ordered the 10th Battalion to simulate an attack on Merris, the aim was to divert German forces away from a major attack by the British 31st Division known as “Operation Borderland”. Wilder-Neligan saw an opportunity for stealth raiders that no other commander had recognised.

93 See also Reveille, 1/1/41, p. 8.
“Borderland” was set for 28 June. Wilder-Neligan learned that the barrage would include an innovation in the form of smoke shells that would fall across the 10th Battalion front 200 yards in advance of his outposts. He was given clear orders that there was to be ‘no set infantry action’. His was to be a feint only, using rifle grenades and Lewis guns. His men were not to leave the trenches. But Wilder-Neligan had other ideas. The night before the “Borderland” set-piece battle he issued a secret rallying call: ‘This is an opportunity for a few daring men. The detail and opportunity is left to the Commanders concerned. ACKNOWLEDGE.’

This was a green light to the stealth raiders of his battalion to exploit the barrage supporting the British attack. Although unauthorised, a successful advance on the part of the 10th Battalion would improve the tactical continuity across the 1st Division’s front and put pressure on the fortified village of Merris that was slowly being squeezed by stealth raiders from the north and the south. It was a roguish decision but the tactical thinking behind it was sound.

That evening word was ‘passed round’ that stealth raiders would be going over behind the Allied barrage the next day. Control in the first phase was in the hands of “a few daring men” and would devolve to company commanders who would send in their platoons if opportunity permitted. Then the age-old job of the infantry would begin – dig in and hold the ground. The nerve system of the infantry – signallers, runners, stretcher-bearers, company quartermaster sergeants and others that moved between the front line and headquarters – would keep Wilder-Neligan in touch. Before zero hour Private George Wright and his mates tried to sleep, but they were keyed up. ‘Punctually at 6[am] the guns began [in support of the British attack], and not many minutes afterwards the Bosche answering fire came across... Then events began to speed up and crowd one another in a succession that didn’t leave us much time for thought.’

As soon as the barrage opened Sergeant Tom Leathley, “C” Company, with four men and a Lewis gun, outflanked a German post in the crop. Leathley pointed it out while rifle grenadiers led by “Raggy” Holland hammered it. Leathley and his stealth raiders surrounded the post. The grenadiers ceased fire. The stealth raiders rushed it killing two men and capturing a
prisoner.\textsuperscript{100} Major Clarence Rumball,\textsuperscript{101} commanding “C” Company, pushed out a platoon to occupy the post and dig in on a nearby hedge.\textsuperscript{102} His men captured twenty more Germans in similar fashion.\textsuperscript{103}

At the same time, Lieutenant Howard Scudds,\textsuperscript{104} a battalion original, and one other man,\textsuperscript{105} on their own initiative, captured five men and a machine gun behind a hedge to the south. Rumball sent another platoon forward to occupy this post. At first Wilder-Neligan knew nothing of this. German counter fire had destroyed his signal wires. Rumball sent a runner over ground. He got through and Wilder-Neligan immediately sent two platoons from “A” Company to reinforce and, if possible, continue to advance behind the stealth raiders. David Mack wrote, ‘We could see enemy running around in great confusion in front of us [and] used our rifles freely.’\textsuperscript{106} Meanwhile signallers repaired the line under fire. Wilder-Neligan found that “D” Company on the left had been held up by intense machine gun fire. He gave Rumball command of both forward companies and told him to get them forward. “D” rallied and with the help of the stealth raider RSM “Raggy” Holland, leading an ad hoc section of rifle grenadiers made up of cooks and batmen, got forward alongside “C” and the reinforcements from “A”.\textsuperscript{107}

By midday the forward elements were digging in on the barrage line, 200 yards from the start line. A few stealth raiders continued to go well beyond it. Not all Germans in the vicinity had been mopped up. An officer was killed by a German machine gun fired at point blank range, and some of the Australians started to break and run to the rear when another machine gun behind a hedge fired into them from only a few yards away. Corporal Phillip Davey\textsuperscript{108} attacked the gun with grenades, putting half its crew out of action.

Having used all available grenades, he returned to the original jumping off trench and secured a further supply and again attacked the gun, the crew...
of which had in the meantime been reinforced. He killed the crew, 8 in all, and captured the gun.\textsuperscript{109}

The Germans counter-attacked. Davey fired the captured weapon at them, was wounded and another man took over the gun. The officers debated what to do. Wilder-Neligan may have initiated the advance without permission from higher authority but he needed its help to consolidate it. He spoke with his brigadier, Gordon Bennett,\textsuperscript{110} a former front line soldier, and artillery with more smoke was organised. This was duly delivered and although a few rounds fell short the men pushed forward one behind the other.\textsuperscript{111} Hidden by the smoke they advanced, shooting Germans caught in their shell hole posts as they went.\textsuperscript{112}

By 7pm a new line had been established. The battalion had captured nine machine guns, two light trench mortars, numerous rifles and equipment and about 500 yards of ground. One officer and six other ranks had been killed and two officers and 35 men wounded. They had captured 35 prisoners and counted over 100 German dead.\textsuperscript{113} David Mack wrote with satisfaction that when they dug in at the end of the day the enemy mortar batteries and artillery ‘did not seem to know where we were’. The front line had got under the Germans. As the ‘mist settled in’ and the sun dipped behind the Australians, Mack crawled forward to a captured post manned by a few men firing a captured German machine gun. They poured ‘thousands of rounds’ of “squid” ammo’ into the retreating enemy.\textsuperscript{114} The Germans had been pushed back by a few daring men to the southern outskirts of Merris. Wilder-Neligan, suffering from flu, handed over his command and left, as night patrols were organised and crept out to find new targets.

In the period covered in this chapter a few men were stealth raiding enthusiastically for all sorts of reasons. One of the consequences of this was that news spread throughout the 1\textsuperscript{st} Division that the Germans were susceptible by day, and often asleep at their posts. More men tried their hand at stealth raiding: it continued to evolve and spread. But there was one important qualification to this: those Australians killed or wounded in stealth raids were

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} Davey, Citation VC, AWM28/2/58/0033.
\textsuperscript{110} Brig Gen HG Bennett CB, CMG, DSO, MID, MD 3\textsuperscript{rd} Class, Soldier, of Canterbury, Vic. E 19/8/14, aged 27, RTA 15/5/19.
\textsuperscript{111} Known as artillery formation.
\textsuperscript{112} Lock, \textit{The Fighting 10\textsuperscript{th}}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{113} Lock, \textit{The Fighting 10\textsuperscript{th}}, p. 82; Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 403. The 31\textsuperscript{st} Division’s objectives nearest the Australians were La Becque Farm and Le Corent Perdu Farm between the Estaires road and the Nieppe Forest. The Division captured 254 prisoners. To their south the British 5\textsuperscript{th} Division also “hopped over,” and captured 165 prisoners. See Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 407.
\textsuperscript{114} Mack, D 28/6/18, AWMPR01061.
\end{flushright}
usually the most self-reliant and daring men. The penetrating stealth raids of the 10th Battalion proved popular because it shifted the ethos of stealth raiders beyond self-reliance when it came to procuring prisoners for intelligence, or other limited objectives, to a tactically sound and inexpensive way to advance the line. Stealth raids were increasingly appreciated as a tactic to draw the German infantry reserves into repeated small fights and destroy them in their outposts and degrade German morale. Stealth raiders confidence was high, and despite several setbacks they were sure that they were the masters of the rural battlefield.

The success of Wilder-Neligan’s impromptu and unauthorised advance muted any criticism of it in subsequent histories of the AIF and in his biography published in 2013. However at the time Wilder-Neligan’s encouragement of stealth raids and his disdain for orders raised the ire of the new divisional commander, Major General William Glasgow. There was concern at 1st Division headquarters that Wilder-Neligan had gone rogue. Yet the 10th Battalion’s action on 28 June epitomised the character and spirit of stealth raids. Wilder-Neligan was seen as a maverick in the eyes of some, and ‘magnificent’ in the eyes of others.

Furthermore, Wilder-Neligan and the 10th Battalion demonstrated that stealth raids could precipitate and complement all-arms battles. In July it would be a case of higher command and the other arms trying to keep pace with the advance of stealth raiders. A similar phenomenon occurred on the Somme, after the battle of Hamel.

\[\text{115 P Holmes, A Magnificent Anzac: The Untold Story of Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Wilder Neligan, C.M.G., D.S.O., and Bar, D.C.M., Croix de Guerre, M.I.D. (5), Reedy Creek, 2013.}\]
\[\text{116 Glasgow assumed command of the 1st Division on 30/6/18. Maj Gen TW Glasgow, CB, CMG, DSO, MID, CdG (Fr), LH 4th Class (Fr), Grazier, of “Sanders”, Dingo, Qld. E 19/8/14, aged 38, RTA 6/5/19.}\]
\[\text{117 See for instance Bean, D 29/6/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/40; Belford, Legs Eleven, p. 615.}\]
\[\text{118 Holmes, A Magnificent Anzac, 2013.}\]
CHAPTER FIVE

‘More or less an experiment’

Stealth raids inspire orders for “peaceful penetration” on the Somme,
5 to 17 July 1918

This chapter begins the day after the battle of Hamel for which Monash is famous and concludes just before the 8 August offensive. It covers one of the most neglected yet important periods in which the Australian Corps occupied the line. In this period stealth raids occurred regularly, to improve the location of new posts after the set-piece battle, and to reduce enfilade fire from the salient the advance created.

In these few days men operating by day and night, without artillery support, captured vast and tactically important ground before Monash could organise a major set-piece battle to do it. This chapter argues that at this time the term “peaceful penetration” became a ‘pet term’ used by ‘those clad with authority’ in orders which hoped to emulate stealth raids.1 On the strategic front stealth raids and formal “peaceful penetration” operations that they influenced played an important part in destroying the German morale and gathering the intelligence that convinced the British Fourth Army and Field Marshal Haig to choose Amiens as the site for the 8 August offensive.

As dusk set in on the first day after the battle of Hamel (5 July), the 21st Battalion had captured a dangerous trench by advancing in a formal operation to a rise north of the Roman road between Villers-Bretonneux and Warfusee.2 As they dug in, the Germans replied with gas and high explosives. In the first hours, the men crowded into the trench, straining their eyes through the infuriating fog on the lenses of their gasmasks. The shelling became sporadic and when the gas eased off the men dug, smoked, and dug some more. At dawn they found themselves among the things they had carried and the things abandoned by the enemy: ammunition boxes, coils of wire, bombs and shovels. Gas lingered in the low-lying areas, mixing with the sour taste of explosive, stinging the back of throats. Rifle and machinegun fire, friendly and hostile, was constant. The men of “A” Company, 21st Battalion, were waiting for the relief, their eyes shining, their motions stiff and jolting from stress and exhaustion caused

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by two days and nights of constant fighting. They knew they only had to stick it out until evening (6 July) and fresh troops would come forward to replace them. But enemy sniping was active, and the officers began talking about another “hop-over” to silence a post that had been missed somewhere in front of them – too close for comfort. It was an unwelcome prospect, the type of moment when ‘men die because exhaustion undermined them and they couldn’t fight as they fought when fit’.³

A stranger came forward, one of two 20th Battalion NCOs whose job was to familiarise themselves with the position before their company took over the posts that night. This man volunteered to “‘have a pot... myself’” at the suspected hostile post, despite being ‘under no obligation to participate in any offensive operations’.⁴ From the men of “A” Company, 21st Battalion’s trench he looked out into the “blue”, that part of No Man’s Land where men sometimes go with no distinct objective. He heard a shot, and a suspicious clump of earth 70 yards away caught his eye. He laid down his rifle, preferring two hand grenades, and went out to investigate. Another shot cracked. He knew it was close, and wondered if he was the target. He threw his first grenade at the clump but missed, so he dived into a hole. He caught his breath and looked around. Too far out to hope for any support, he decided to keep going and found a small, ‘kidney-shaped trench’.⁵ In it was a light machine gun with a belt of ammunition, and at the far end, facing him, was the entrance to a dugout. He leapt in just as a German appeared in the doorway. He hit this man in the jaw with his fist holding the grenade, knocking him back into the dugout. He thought he heard the German say “Kamerad”, meaning “I surrender”. He was truly surprised when more men appeared behind him from another dugout he hadn’t seen. He knew that to throw the grenade at one group would put him at the mercy of the other. He had no intention surrendering, so he held his ground by the machine gun, and stood menacingly, indicating in stern language – it would please him if they all surrendered. Thirteen men including an officer filed out from both ends of the trench. He stripped them of their weapons, noticed three automatic pistols thrown back into the dugouts, and herded them back to the 21st Battalion lines. A machine gun from another post opened fire and the movement alerted the German artillery who sent over some shells. The 21st men swore at him for “‘drawing the crabs’”⁶ but he had rendered their job of raiding this post unnecessary.

⁴ Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 339; Brown, Citation VC, AWM28/1/113/0004 & AWM28/1/113/0005.
The 21st Battalion officers found that the stranger was Corporal Walter Ernest Brown DCM, when they inquired in order to recommend him for the Victoria Cross. It took these officers a few hours of investigating to work out that what their war diary described as a ‘minor operation’ had in fact been carried out by a solitary soldier from another battalion nominally not in the firing line. The story ‘spread like fire’. Those who knew Brown described him as ‘a very modest chap’, ‘quiet, friendly’ and ‘loyal beyond measure’. As was typical of the man, he hardly thought anything about his stealth raid – he was too busy. First he made sure he got one of the automatic pistols he had seen thrown back into the dugout. Then shortly afterwards his companion in the advanced party, Corporal William Gallagher, was wounded in the leg by shellfire. Brown carried him from the front line back to Villers-Bretonneux. This was the Brown his company of the 20th Battalion knew, self-confident and a rugged individualist, a man who took on dangerous jobs with equanimity. At Passchendaele on the night of 5-6 October he had done similar work bandaging and carrying wounded under intense shellfire in conditions described as a ‘quagmire’. On 9 October 1917 when Brown’s company was ordered to attack, he led his section to their objective after their sergeant became a casualty. After the battle, he was the only NCO fit to answer the roll call with one officer and four men of the usual company strength of 200.

Brown’s prisoners were men of the 137th Infantry Regiment, part of the tired, bedraggled and utterly outclassed 108th Division. After the battle of Hamel they unexpectedly found themselves as an advanced post, they were cut off, and had not eaten for two days. When

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7 1689 Sgt WE Brown VC, DCM, 20 Bn, Grocer, of Hobart, Tas. E 11/7/15, aged 30, RTA 1/11/19.
11 Brown, L 31/5/27 (to Treloar), AWM93/12/11/4808.
12 2901A Cpl WP Gallagher, 20 Bn, Clerk, of Sydney, NSW. E 15/5/16, aged 19, RTA 25/1/19.
13 Brown, L 31/5/27, AWM93/12/11/4808.
14 20 Bn War Diary, October 1917, App 5, AWM4/23/37/27/Part 1; Brown, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/95/0056.
15 Bean folders, AWM38/3DRL606/274B/1/1918-1941.
Monash heard of Brown’s exploit, he issued a circular throughout the Australian Corps (including the 1st Division at Hazebrouck) describing Brown’s stealth raid and the state of his prisoners. ‘It is difficult to imagine’ he wrote to his troops, ‘men exhibiting greater dejection and a poorer morale’. He encouraged his soldiers as individuals, sections, platoons, companies, battalions and Australians to take further advantage of similarly disorganised, ‘utterly cut-off’ and ‘quite helpless’ isolated groups of the enemy.¹⁶

Some men needed no encouragement. Stealth raiders were active before Monash’s circular was issued. At Vaire Wood on 7 July, Lieutenant Albert Murray,\textsuperscript{17} Lance Corporal Bernard O’Farrell\textsuperscript{18} and an unknown man, 49\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, crawled from their post at 2.30pm to attack a German machine gun that had been harassing the front since Hamel. They wormed their way through No Man’s Land for over 100 yards and entered a German trench. They followed it for a further 150 yards until they found the machine gun. Murray killed the sentry and captured the weapon, then bombed a dugout, killing five men and taking two prisoners. As the stealth raiders returned through No Man’s Land they were attacked by what they estimated to be at least eight Germans. O’Farrell fought these off with bombs while Murray and the other man got the prisoners back to the Australian lines.\textsuperscript{19}

Two nights later, 9/10 July in the same sector, men of the 50\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, ‘dirty, lousy and uncomfortable… with the rain beating down on top of us’ and ‘without a wash or a shave for about 5 days’ watched as Lieutenant Avelyn Dunhill,\textsuperscript{20} had a ‘box on’ with a well-armed German post.\textsuperscript{21} Dunhill, a veteran of the landing at Gallipoli, was leading a five-man patrol when he came across a German listening post. Being ‘some distance ahead of his men’ he decided to attack it alone. He was about to throw a bomb when the German garrison saw him and fired. He crawled back to the Australian lines. He got more ammunition and two men, and returned to the German post and attacked it, killing two men, wounding one and bringing in a prisoner.\textsuperscript{22} Lieutenant Ernest Hodge watched Dunhill’s stealth raid from a post nearby and described its effect on the morale of his weary company:

\begin{quote}
this bold statement [Dunhill’s stealth raid] may not look much, but [I] can tell you it meant something to us where we were… We had no continuous line but just a number of posts dug in to a depth of from 3 to 4 feet holding anything from 3 to 8 men. Old Fritz looked straight down on us from a high hill on our immediate left flank, we had absolutely no cover whatever and as soon as it got daylight we had to lie down in the bottom of the stony narrow limestone trench, and could not move… until 9.30 p.m.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17}Lt A Murray MC, 49 Bn, Mechanic, of Brisbane, Qld. E 2/7/15, aged 23, KIA 16/9/18.
\textsuperscript{18}3365 L/Cpl BL O’Farrell MM, 49 Bn, Labourer, of Gympie, Qld. E 27/10/16, aged 21, KIA 15/9/18.
\textsuperscript{19}Murray Citation MC & O’Farrell Citation MM, AWM28/1/236. The prisoners stated that they had not eaten since before the attack on 4 July. See 49 Bn War Diary, 7 July 1918, AWM4/23/66/26.
\textsuperscript{20}(434) Lt AC Dunhill MC, 50 Bn, Clerk, of Orroroo, SA. E 26/8/14, aged 24, RTA 6/5/19.
\textsuperscript{21}Hodge, D 10/7/18, AWMPR87/208.
\textsuperscript{22}50 Bn War Diary, 9/7/18, AWM4/23/67/25.
\textsuperscript{23}Hodge, D 10/7/18, AWMPR87/208. See also 50 Bn War Diary, 9/7/18, AWM4/23/67/25.
Hodge and Dunhill’s precarious position was the price the infantry paid for the success of the battle of Hamel. The battle had alleviated the problem of enfilade from the north, but had created a similar problem from the south. The Australian Corps front line receded in a southwest direction at an angle of practically 45 degrees.\textsuperscript{24} The German field artillery pumped high velocity shells and gas into positions like those occupied by Hodge and Dunhill. Monash considered launching a ‘second Hamel’ – another set-piece battle on the heels of the first to straighten and shorten the line south west of the bulge the advance at Hamel had made.\textsuperscript{25} At a meeting on 5 July Monash and Henry Rawlinson,\textsuperscript{26} commanding the Fourth Army, sought Haig’s permission for the attack, but Haig was unmoved. He proscribed formal operations in the area, citing the difficulties of inter-allied cooperation with the French to the south, and more importantly, a lack of strategic reserves. He did agree for plans to be drafted for a set-piece attack which might take place there in the future. Monash’s plans were duly drafted and submitted to Haig. Monash proposed 17 July for the battle.

In the meantime, his commander on the spot, Major General Rosenthal, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division, who had followed stealth raiders with an intelligent and sympathetic eye as a brigadier in the 9\textsuperscript{th} Brigade in April and May, sent out an ‘instruction’.\textsuperscript{27} He urged his brigade commanders to advance if they could by means of ‘silent penetration’, meaning without assistance by the artillery. This was the first suggestion of what would become the formal policy called “peaceful penetration”. Effectively a deal was being struck with the men: if you can do it your way, by stealth raids, good luck to you. If you fail, you will be going over the top. On 7 July Rosenthal concluded his personal diary with the following comment: ‘I am instructing my two line Brigadiers to do all they can under the present disorganised and demoralised condition of German defences to extend our front Eastward’.\textsuperscript{28} On 11 July he forwarded to Monash a recommendation that the Victoria Cross be awarded to the stealth raider Walter Brown.\textsuperscript{29}

The front line soldier’s view was more limited. On 7 July, shortly after Rosenthal issued his instructions, the youngest officer in the South Australian 27\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, Lieutenant Russell

\textsuperscript{26} Gen HS Rawlinson CB, GCSI, GCVO, KCMG, British Army.
\textsuperscript{27} Rosenthal, D 7/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.
\textsuperscript{28} Rosenthal, D 7/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.
\textsuperscript{29} Rosenthal, D 11/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.
Colman,\textsuperscript{30} was called before his commanding officer, Colonel Frederick Chalmers,\textsuperscript{31} and a proposal put to him. Colman, unaccustomed to such situations, recalled the event vividly,

[The Colonel] told me that there was an order from Brigade (Gen Wisdom)\textsuperscript{32} that the line had to be shifted further out from Villers Brett. they did not want to make an attack if it could possibly be avoided & were going to try to take it by means of a raid. I had visions of a night raid & box barrage but he went on “and we are going to try it by daylight & I want you to take charge of it.”\textsuperscript{33}

Colman was an intelligent youngster; who three years previously was beginning his first semester in the School of Mines at Adelaide University. In 1934, when a qualified mining engineer, he wrote an account of his war experiences in the third person. He entered it in the war novel competition at the Melbourne Centenary celebrations. It did not win, but the War Memorial was eager to have it and it is held in its manuscript collection. This detailed exposition plus Colman’s candid correspondence with Bean paint the picture of a sportsman, scholar and skilled observer of human nature.\textsuperscript{34} Colman described how Chalmers launched into a pep talk on how he thought it could be done:

The Flying Corps had obtained aerial photographs of the German trench system opposite. Using these as a guide, it was proposed to enter the German trench system in broad daylight, at a certain point, and work along to the left, presumably bombing the occupants as one went. An unusual feature was that the raiding party were supposed to hold the ground they captured. It was more or less an experiment, and... if he met with any determined opposition in entering the trench, he was to get his men out of it as best he could, and the stunt would have to be repeated with a thorough artillery preparation and barrage. If he could bring it off however, it would save the battalion from going over the top again.\textsuperscript{35}

The single thought to ‘save the battalion going over the top again’ inspired Colman. He was handed an aerial photograph of the German system and dismissed. As he walked back to his platoon through the streets of Villers-Bretonneux he decided to think the situation over from a greater height. He climbed to the rooftop of the “Doll’s House,” the last house standing on the

\textsuperscript{30} Biographical details see Introduction n38.
\textsuperscript{31} Lt Col FR Chalmers CMG, DSO, MID, 27 Bn, Government servant, address unknown, Vic. E 16/5/15, aged 34, RTA 16/6/19.
\textsuperscript{32} Col EA Wisdom CB, CMG, DSO, MID, MD 3\textsuperscript{rd} Class, Soldier and Politician, of Cottesloe, WA. E 23/4/15, aged 45, RTA 26/12/19.
\textsuperscript{33} Colman, L 19/10/38, in Bean Folders AWM38/3DRL/606/275/1/1918-1938.
\textsuperscript{34} Colman’s manuscript has recently been published: C Woods & P Skrebels, There and Back with a Dinkum, North Melbourne, 2013.
\textsuperscript{35} Colman, MS p. 309, AWMMMSS1357.
eastern edge of the village, and compared what he could see with the photograph. He decided that the only place in his sector that gave him a ‘sporting chance’ of getting into the German trenches was through a part of No Man’s Land called the orchard, where some fruit trees stood in disorderly blasted rows.

At its furthest point from the Australian line the orchard was 150 yards from the main German trench, while on the Australian side it offered cover, since the approach to it was through a crop two feet high. Colman went into the front lines and ‘dug up’ the officer in charge. He asked him to ‘warn his coves to be careful’: he was about to go into No Man’s Land in daylight. He crawled through the crop for 200 yards towards the orchard, and came to an old trench two or three feet deep. 50 yards ahead he saw a German helmet on the ground. He held his breath and waited. Nothing stirred, but it was obvious that it marked a German trench. He watched this place for two hours and was falling asleep in the warm sun when a familiar “pop” woke him, followed by a gut wrenching, twisting metallic squeal. An Australian heavy trench mortar battery in Villers-Bretonneux was firing its daily shoot. The “Flying Pigs” were falling short, between Colman and the Australian lines. There was a second horrifying squeal, and another shell fell in the same area. Colman estimated the next one would fall on him because the mortar-men would be adjusting their aim. He crawled away, with his chin virtually digging up the earth beneath him, ‘breathing fire and slaughter against all trench mortar batteries’. But he had seen enough: the abandoned trench was an excellent jumping off point for his stealth raid, although the post in the crop with the helmet worried him. On a field telephone he discussed what he had seen with Colonel Chalmers, and told him he would ‘have a go at it’ the next morning at 10am.

Colman was given what he described as a ‘free hand’. He used it to ‘extract a promise’ that the trench mortar battery would be kept quiet while he was out with his stealth raiders. Then he went to his platoon and ‘broke the news quietly’. In the battalion’s history a stealth raid on this scale had not been undertaken in daylight and without artillery. He chose his group carefully. His own No 10 platoon in which he had been a private and NCO would make up the

37 Colman, MS p. 309, AWMMSS1357.
38 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
39 Colman, MS p. 311, AWMMSS1357.
40 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
bulk of the stealth raiders, minus ‘three or four’ that he knew were ‘not cut out’ for it.\textsuperscript{41} He got volunteers from the rest of the company and made the number up to 26. For specific roles he chose reliable men: two veteran NCOs in Sergeant Richard Carter\textsuperscript{42} and Corporal Fred Boughen\textsuperscript{43} as bayonet men, and Private Claude Crocker\textsuperscript{44} as No. 1 on the Lewis gun. The rest would act as a bombing and garrisoning force: supports and reserves.

Before they went to sleep Colman made sure that each man had seen the photos and understood his job and the objective. The party would creep into the crop under the cover of darkness and lie up in the shallow abandoned trench until zero hour. Colman would lead them single file through the orchard. On entering the trench, the Lewis gunner would be posted to cover their rear, while the stealth raiders would head left towards the Roman road (north), then proceed, bombing if they had to, leaving a man every 30 yards to garrison the trench. This preparation gave each man the opportunity to prepare mentally and to visualise the action. No one gave much thought about what to do with prisoners. They were not convinced of success, but Colman’s friend, Lieutenant Vic Lampard,\textsuperscript{45} offered a glimmer of hope when he promised Colman if he had the ‘good luck’ to get along the trench to a position opposite his company he would ‘help... out to the last ounce’.\textsuperscript{46}

In the dim dawn light, 3am, 8 July, the stealth raiders deployed in single file into No Man’s Land and settled into the abandoned trench for a seven hour wait till zero hour. Standing was impossible. Each man lay down. Every now and then indirect machine gun fire cracked close overhead. The cramped men were simmering with eagerness to get moving. Colman reflected:

> there was a shot from a rifle along our trench. With nerves on edge I thought it must have roused the whole German Army. I crawled along on hands & knees to see what careless idiot had let off his rifle & given our possie away & I found that the strain had been too much for one of our men. He had shot himself in the foot.\textsuperscript{47}

It was only minutes before 10am. The wounded soldier was left in the trench. Colman, Carter and Boughen checked their weapons, hopped out and rushed the post. It was unoccupied.

\textsuperscript{41} Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
\textsuperscript{42} 4684 Sgt RJ Carter, 27 Bn, Gardener, of Marion, SA. E 4/2/16, aged 18, RTA 8/5/19.
\textsuperscript{43} 2372 Sgt FR Boughen MM, 27 Bn, Blacksmith, of Koolunga, SA. E 26/1/16, aged 24, RTA 12/6/19.
\textsuperscript{44} 6056 Cpl C Crocker, 27 Bn, Fruit grower, of Ramco, SA. E 12/5/16, aged 25, RTA 4/6/19.
\textsuperscript{45} (4362) Lt VW Lampard MC, 27 Bn, Grocer’s assistant, of Torrens, SA. E 4/1/16, aged 19, KIA 2/9/18.
\textsuperscript{46} Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
\textsuperscript{47} Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
They signalled the others forward. The main German line was still 150 yards away. The three went forward again in single file, trying to move behind the fruit trees. To their surprise, they got into the main trench unnoticed. They motioned the others forward.

Claude Crocker, the Lewis gunner, dropped in by Colman and was posted to cover their right flank where the trench went towards a railway line and a brickfield containing German dugouts. Colman, Carter and Boughen led the rest of the party to the left, along the trench in the direction of the Roman road. There was plenty of evidence of recent occupation: food, ammunition, coils of wire and so on. They occupied 600 yards of trench without encountering opposition. Colman looked over the parapet and saw another trench 50 yards away which cut at an angle of 45 degrees from the trench they were in. It linked his position to a second parallel trench line. Owing to the complete lack of opposition, he decided to go over the top across open ground and cut out the angle. The bayonet men followed and they were almost there when they noticed a German machine gunner through a traverse a straight ahead. They went for him with bombs and found the trench ‘alive with Germans trying to grab rifles & pull on their equipment’. Colman and the two bayonet men killed eight Germans and subdued the rest by standing threateningly above them, any thought of resistance tempered by the other stealth raiders arriving to reinforce them. They now had fourteen prisoners. Colman was a little surprised:

We quickly surveyed our position. Looking back towards our own trenches... I could see our men waving excitedly to us from there. Quickly disarming the prisoners I made signs to them to move in a body back over the flat country to A [Company’s] men. A [Company] seeing them coming sent out men who met them & ratted them. My party did not have time to collect souvenirs.

Colman pulled out his field message book and scribbled a note to his friend Vic Lampard: ‘Established block. Think you could get up overland if you came quickly’. A runner sprinted across the open space with the message. Lampard jumped out of his trench and met him in No Man’s Land. Colman wrote, ‘Within 30 seconds of the time Vic had his hands on that message’ he had his company ‘streaming across’ and within three minutes they were garrisoning 600 yards of new trench 500 yards closer ‘towards Germany’. ‘We had not had a single shot fired

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48 Colman, MS p. 314, p. AWMSS1357.
49 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
50 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
51 Colman, annotated map attached to L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938; Photo 20.
Photo 18 Looking through “the orchard” towards Villers-Bretonneux from a position captured by Russell Colman in a daylight stealth raid on 8 July 1918. This photograph was taken shortly after Colman had captured the position. (AWM E03842)

Photo 19 The same position in 2012. (Lucas Jordan 2012)
at us – it seemed as if the whole German army was asleep’. The Germans seemed unaware of what was happening, ‘it looked a good win’.53

Colman retraced his steps to the orchard where a field telephone had been brought up. He picked it up and spoke to Colonel Chalmers. Colman thought that Brigadier Wisdom was also at battalion headquarters, listening in, but was not sure. He told Chalmers all he knew about the position.

He asked me what I thought about having a go up the trench to the right from the other side of the brickfield. I said I would give it a go.

He was given a second Lewis gun to cover him and by creeping along the trench captured two Germans sleeping in a dugout near the brickyards and two more sleeping further down the trench. Here they met what Colman called their ‘first reverse’. One of the Germans started to ‘jabber’ a warning to his comrades further along. Carter and Boughen put their bayonets to his throat and Colman threatened to ‘stick’ him. Colman thought ‘he was too good a soldier to murder’, so ‘we let him live’. But the ‘damage was done’.54

The German’s shouted warning had worked. Several helmeted heads were seen escaping along the trench further down. Acting on instinct Colman sprang out of the trench and chased them firing his revolver wildly. He gave up the chase where the trench finished abruptly, dropping eighteen feet to the railway line below. Here Colman had his men build a block to protect their flank. This drew a close to his remarkably successful experiment.

In two successive stealth raids in broad daylight in flat country Colman had seized between 800 and 1,000 yards of trench to a depth of 600 yards, captured eighteen prisoners, two machine guns and a light trench mortar, and killed eight Germans without suffering a single casualty besides the self-inflicted wound.55 He wrote he ‘felt as though he were walking on air’. He was greeted at battalion headquarters by the colonel and the brigadier, and all the headquarters lads ‘crowded in to hear what had happened’. The whole battalion ‘were...

52 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
53 Colman, MS p. 315, AWMMSS1357.
54 Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938.
55 Colman, Citation MC, AWM28/2/329/0003.
delighted... because it meant to them that the objective had been gained, and there was no need for another stunt, in this case anyhow.\textsuperscript{56}

Wisdom informed Rosenthal who asked Monash for ‘authority’ to try a similar stealth raid at Monument Wood.\textsuperscript{57} The next day (9 July) Wisdom took news of Colman’s stealth raid direct to Colonel Currie,\textsuperscript{58} commanding the 28\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. The battalion’s scout officer, Lieutenant Phil Coburn,\textsuperscript{59} one of its originals, insisted that the 28\textsuperscript{th} could do the same in their sector. Coburn proposed penetrating a trench which ran south from the railway cutting into a position known as Monument Farm – ruined buildings with an orchard enclosed by a hedge. The farm was in the bounds of a greater park-like area known as Monument Wood, a feature that dominated Villers-Bretonneux from the southeast. The German high command understood the value of the position and for months had defended it with some of its best troops. The Australians always coveted it and had made two attempts to capture it, each assault being unsuccessful.

\textsuperscript{56} Colman, MS p. 317, AWMSS1357.
\textsuperscript{57} Rosenthal, D 8/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.
\textsuperscript{58} Lt Col P Currie CMG, DSO, MID, CdG (Fr), 28 Bn, State school teacher, of Sandgate, Qld. E 28/4/15, aged 31, RTA 22/9/18.
\textsuperscript{59} (38) Lt AP Coburn MC, MID, 28 Bn, Engine driver, of Boulder, WA. E 2/3/15, aged 26, RTA 21/5/19.
and costly.\textsuperscript{60} The bodies of Australians killed in these frontal attacks still lay in No Man’s Land, and the smell of their rotting corpses and the swarms of green flies turned the stomachs of the men in the outposts. But Coburn was an active scout and he knew that since the battle of Hamel the position was no longer so vigilantly or strongly garrisoned. With the help of a Newton Mortar bombardment he reckoned he could get a patrol into the trench. Currie agreed. This was a case of the firepower of brigade headquarters being switched to support a stealth raid. Brigade headquarters were now cooperating with stealth raiders. Since Coburn’s enthusiasm and knowledge of the ground were central, Currie gave him the job of leading the patrol that would head right (south) along the trench that led into the Monument Farm. Lieutenant Arthur Loveday\textsuperscript{61} would capture and hold the length of trench running north from the point of entry to the railway cutting opposite Colman’s block.

That afternoon a staff officer with full knowledge of Monash’s plans for a second battle of Hamel came forward and spoke to Currie. He looked over the formidable system of trenches, the high ground of the wood and the confusing hedges around the orchard and said,

“I suppose you’ll be having a battle there before long?”
“This afternoon,” was the answer. “What do you think we are putting in?”
The visitor shook his head.
“A job for a brigade wouldn’t it be?” suggested Currie.
“Well I dare say it would. What are you tackling it with?”
“An officer and eleven men are going for the right half and an officer and six men are going for the left.”
The visitor whistled. “What have you got on the left flank?”
“An N.C.O. and four men are going to look after that.”
“It’s the damnedest bit of cheek I ever heard of” said the visitor “and I’m not going to swear it won’t come off.”\textsuperscript{62}

Like Colman’s stealth raid, it was more or less an experiment. Only 40 men were to go over and if they failed, the whole brigade had been told they would be going over in a formal battle some time later.\textsuperscript{63} At 2.35pm (9 July) the Newton Mortar Battery opened up. The sky was a steel grey. Moody clouds seemed to be racing overhead, as if in tune with the quickening senses of the West Australians in their forward trenches. Each man knew his job. Like Colman’s stealth raid, the officers commanding the companies looking on had their men ready to push forward and occupy the trench if called on. Coburn led the bayonet men through a sap. They

\textsuperscript{61} (4777) Lt AC Loveday, 28 Bn, Clerk, Fremantle, WA. E 1/3/16, aged 18, DOW 12/8/18.
could see the helmet of a German sentry at a machine gun post. The mortars ceased. Coburn yelled “Come on” and jumped into the post. He captured the machine gun and its crew fled.\(^{64}\) One of the stealth raiders recalled how the sentry and his mate could be seen running fast along the trench into the grounds of the farm.\(^{65}\) The trench was narrow. Coburn and his first bayonet man Private Henry Wehsack\(^{66}\) took the brunt of the work. They threw bombs into dugouts as they headed towards the farm. Germans ran away in front of them, some going through a hole in a wall, probably to some headquarters in the farm buildings. Others ran over ground to a second line of trenches, on the far side of the farm, known as Syria Trench.\(^{67}\) Meanwhile the NCO with four men crept over and secured the trench at the cutting, where they found only one German who ran away. Loveday with his six men garrisoned the space between the cutting and Coburn’s entry point. The stealth raiders captured 300 yards of trench from the cutting to the edge of the orchard within fifteen minutes, with no resistance from the German garrison.

Coburn signalled “A” Company to advance and secure the trench. This was promptly done. Meanwhile scouts reported that the saps and main trench both finished in the orchard where the German machine gunners were seen running. Coburn decided to track them. He followed a hedge enclosing the orchard on its northern side, but his patrol was ambushed. One man was killed\(^{68}\) and another badly wounded. A rifle grenadier, Private Tom Willis,\(^{69}\) ran up from the rear of the party aiming and firing bombs as he went. The Germans fled, leaving their dead.\(^{70}\) They ran so fast Coburn’s men could not catch them. The stealth raiders cleared another several hundred yards of trench and estimated they saw 90 Germans running from the farm to Syria Trench, and deeper into Monument Wood. 7th Brigade trench mortars that had been warned to be ready to fire now chased these men with fifteen well-placed shells.\(^{71}\) These events demonstrate how brigade and divisional headquarters were now cooperating with stealth raiders.

For Coburn and his stealth raiders, the danger of snipers in Syria Trench now became evident. They pushed on a further 50 yards, built a block and signalled to the company watching from

\(^{64}\) Coburn, Citation MC, AWM28/1/113/0046.
\(^{65}\) Bean, Official History, p. 354.
\(^{66}\) 4291 Pte HFL Wehsack MM, 28 Bn, Labourer, of Kalgoorlie, WA. E 11/1/16, aged 19, RTA 6/11/18.
\(^{67}\) See Wehsack, Citation MM, AWM28/1/113/0048; Coburn, Citation MC, AWM28/1/113/0046.
\(^{68}\) 4303 Pte G Brown, 28 Bn, Seaman, of York, WA. E 15/1/16, aged 35, KIA 9/7/18.
\(^{69}\) 4289 Pte TW Willis MM, 28 Bn, Stockman, of Kanowna, WA. E 12/1/16, aged 19, RTA 12/6/19.
\(^{70}\) Willis, Citation MM, AWM28/1/113/0049.
\(^{71}\) Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 356.
their former front line to come over and occupy the new front line. It did this with rifles slung and cigarettes lit. Lieutenant Harry Kahan\textsuperscript{72} wrote that souvenir hunters ‘soon explored’ the farm buildings and found the cellars ‘fully furnished with even a piano’.\textsuperscript{73} The whole stealth raid took 24 minutes and resulted in the capture of 1,200 yards of the German front line from the southern edge of the railway cutting to the near edge of Monument Wood, a depth of about 150 yards. The stealth raiders killed at least ten Germans, captured three machine guns and two trench mortars.\textsuperscript{74} Most of the German garrison had simply run away. When combined with Colman’s stealth raid of the day before, 67 men had captured about 2,200 yards of front line for the loss of one man killed, two wounded and one self-inflicted wound. In doing so, they avoided a fixed battle and its attendant strain and waste. Until now, historians have neglected the significance of what these men did. What they achieved was significant and it undermines the assertion of the eminent historian Jeffrey Grey, that stealth raids or “peaceful penetration” ‘do not win... battles’.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Two Australian soldiers operate a light trench mortar established in a trench in the new front line captured by Russell Colman in a daylight stealth raid on 8 July 1918. This photograph was taken on 10 July 1918. (AWM E02677)}
\end{figure}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{72} 1146 Sgt HK Kahan (aka Kagan), 28 Bn, Clerk, of Perth, WA. E 19/5/15, aged 18, RTA 28/2/19.
\textsuperscript{73} HK Kahan, \textit{The 28th Battalion Australian Imperial Force: A Record of War Service}, (1968), Victoria Park, 2007, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{74} Bean, \textit{Official History}, p. 357.
\textsuperscript{75} Grey, \textit{A Military History of Australia}, p. 108.}
The 7th Brigade resumed the tactic on 10 July. The 28th Battalion found the Germans more aggressive and determined to hold Syria Trench, but the 27th Battalion pushed the Germans out of the last piece of trench between Colman’s left flank and the Roman road. Sergeant Rupert Baldwin, 27th Battalion, wrote there seemed ‘very little fight left in Fritz... we meet nearly all young boys about 19 or 20 and 90% of them with Glass[es] on they never stopped running when they saw the bayonet we could not reach them’.76 But on 12 July German resistance stiffened.77 Rosenthal wrote that his brigades were now ‘hard up against the Boche and further “peaceful” advance seems impossible’.78 This is the first mention of the term “peaceful” in reference to Australian stealth raids in any Australian letter or diary. Rosenthal’s terminology is not the same as “peaceful penetration”, but his reference to “peaceful” is key. He was referring to stealth raids, which resulted in few casualties and important tactical gains.

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76 265 Sgt R Baldwin, 27 Bn, Miner, of Adelaide, SA. E 8/2/15, aged 28, RTA 23/9/18, D 10/7/18, AWMPR00557.
77 The German high command had finally realised what was happening at the front. Monash, Australian Victories, p. 47.
78 Rosenthal, D 12/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item 2.
The 7th Brigade headquarters dubbed the Colman and Coburn stealth raids: “silent penetration”, whereas Russell Colman simply called it a daylight patrol.  

On 15 July Rosenthal attributed an important tactical victory to the stealth raiders: ‘the recent advance has robbed the Boche of splendid observation and we now have the advantage over him’. He asked Monash for approval to continue to advance. Monash agreed. 2nd Division headquarters instructed 5th Brigade to continue to advance by “peaceful penetration”. The term had pre-war connotations, when it had commonly been used in the British press to warn that German trade was spreading so quickly through the British territories that the Germans had no need for a war because they were gaining the British Empire by “peaceful penetration”. By March 1917 the British Army and the British press had taken up the term to describe the formal patrol operations which occupied ground ceded by the Germans during their strategic withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. Its first clear use in the AIF applied to stealth raiders, and seems to have originated with Rosenthal or 2nd Division headquarters. Lieutenant Victor Sullivan’s attitude towards the term when it appeared in orders is enlightening:

In the... summer days of July, 1918, a pet phrase of those clad with authority was “peaceful penetration.” The enemy was to be denied any freedom in No Man’s Land; every opportunity was to be taken to filch a few yards of ground, with an absolute disregard for the feelings of the company detailed for the unpleasant work.

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79 See for instance 27 Bn War Diary, 6/7/18, (wrong date given in official record), AWM4/23/44/35; 5 Bde War Diary, 15/7/18, AWM4/23/5/37Part1; Colman, L 19/10/38, AWM38/3DRL606/275/1/1918-1938; Colman, MS, AWMMS1357.  
80 Rosenthal, D 15/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item 2.  
81 Rosenthal, D 15/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item 2.  
82 Rosenthal, D 15/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item 2; 5 Bde War Diary, 15/7/18, AWM4/23/5/37Part1.  
83 Bean, Official History, Vol VI, n24, p. 42.  
84 For instance, The Bendigonian reported on Thursday, 8/3/17, p.3: “The Times” correspondent... states that Gommecourt was occupied by peaceful penetration’. Further to which the United Services added ‘British patrols at night found Gommecourt strongly held. Stronger British patrols in the morning found it evacuated’. A similar “Times” report on “peaceful penetration” by formal British patrols at Gommecourt can be found in The Maitland Mercury, Saturday, 3/3/17, p. 5. Pte Robert Cude, serving with the Buffs, used the term “peaceful penetration” in his diary in early 1917, to describe formal patrols that gained 2,700 yards of uncontested ground during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. Pte R Cude, D 13/3/17, IWM: PP/MCR/C48 & Con Shelf, p. 66. Reference courtesy of R Stevenson, UNSW.  
86 In Mackenzie, The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion, p. 245.
The men recognised a distinction between formal “peaceful penetrations” and informal stealth raids, (which they called various names). The most striking difference was who initiated the action, and the attitude of the men who took part. Whereas “peaceful penetration” was at least inspired from the top, from mid-July, since April stealth raids had been initiated from below, and continued until well after 8 August. “Peaceful penetration” operations were not the same thing as stealth raids. The consequence of that difference for the men at the front will be described hereafter.

Late in the afternoon of 15 July the headquarters of the 17th and 19th Battalions received verbal orders to continue to advance by “peaceful penetration”58 – to repeat the tactics used by the likes of Colman and Coburn, though at night. The objective was a series of strong posts in shell holes and trenches running north to south across the Roman road for 1,000 yards, to depths ranging between 100 yards on the left, north of the road, and 500 yards on the southern flank of the advance. The battalions concerned were told that they could expect that the Germans would run upon seeing them, but should they meet strong resistance, then brigade headquarters would organise a conventional barrage in support of a set-piece attack.59

At 2am on 16 July six platoons of the 17th Battalion organised in fighting patrols “hopped the bags” to “peacefully penetrate” a series of posts and short trenches indicated on maps provided by brigade. It was not long before the 17th Battalion met resistance. On the far right of the advance, Lieutenant Roy Willard,1 with a platoon of nine men, captured a German machine gun post that threatened the right flank of the “peaceful penetration”. But in an ensuing gunfight Private John “Dusty” Rhoades was killed and Corporal Frank Johnson, a long-time member of Willard’s platoon, was wounded. Nevertheless Willard and his small team prevented the German strong point from firing into the flank of the advancing Australian platoons.

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87 See Introduction, p. 2.
88 5 Bde War Diary, 15/7/18, AWM4/23/5/37Part1.
89 5 Bde War Diary, 15/7/18, AWM4/23/5/37Part1.
90 In Mackenzie, The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion, p. 246.
92 Willard, Citation MC, AWM28/1/114.
93 6650 Pte JWF Rhoades, 17 Bn, Station overseer, of Double Bay, NSW. E 19/1/17, aged 18, KIA 16/7/18.
94 1707 Cpl FL Johnson MM, 17 Bn, Railway porter, of Turramurra, NSW. E 20/5/15, aged 22, RTA 20/11/18.
95 Mackenzie, The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion, p. 245.
By 4am the platoons at the centre of the 17th Battalion “peaceful penetration” had also reached their objectives. This was generally because the Germans had evacuated their trenches, or their machine gun fire was inaccurate. But the 19th Battalion on the left flank had not left their trenches, perhaps because the orders arrived at very short notice, and asked a lot of men used to advancing by conventional tactics that relied on artillery support? At dawn Lieutenant Albert West, 17th Battalion, in a newly captured post on the far left of the 17th Battalion’s advance, could see that the trench where he had been told his platoon would link up with the 19th Battalion was 35 yards to his front and manned by Germans. It was clear to West that the 19th Battalion had not reached its objectives.

West decided to stealth raid the German post, possibly on the suggestion of Corporal Fred Abbott, an original member of the battalion, or Private Patrick Broder MM, a man with a reputation in the company for being ‘absolutely fearless’. The senior NCO present reminded them that such an action ‘would be acting contrary to orders’ – the trench was in the 19th Battalion’s area of responsibility and it was now daylight. West’s platoon was down to ten men. Most were not interested in risking another attack. But stealth raids did not rely on orders or uninterested men. West, Abbott, Broder and one other man could see that by stealth raiding the trench they might achieve their rival battalion’s objective, and more importantly wipe out a post that was dangerously close to their present precarious position.

The four men slipped into the high crop, and crawled on their stomachs to within rushing distance of the German trench. The rest of the platoon opened covering fire with rifles and Lewis guns. One stealth raider was killed in the crossfire as he charged the German trench, but the other three got into the trench and killed a machine gunner, destroyed a heavy machine gun and bombed several dugouts against a wave of resistance put up by the garrison and another post in rear. Their mates could hear the stealth raiders calling for more ammunition. Private Francis Sullivan ‘fell riddled with bullets’ when he attempted to cross the intervening space to resupply them with Mills bombs. West was beaten unconscious by Germans wielding rifle butts like maces (he died of his wounds the following day after being traded for a

96 Mackenzie, The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion, p. 244.
97 (6874) Lt AS West, 17 Bn, Student, of Marrickville, NSW. E 28/5/17, aged 20, DOW 17/7/18.
98 158 L/Sgt F Abbott MM, 17 Bn, Messenger, of Redfern, NSW. E 5/3/14, aged 18, RTA 2/1/19.
100 Mackenzie, The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion, p. 247.
101 3906 Pte FJ Sullivan, 17 Bn, Time collector, of Waterloo, NSW. E 15/10/15, aged 25, KIA 16/7/18.
German prisoner by stretcher bearers). Abbott was also wounded but escaped. Only Broder got out of the trench unhurt. In the crop he found more bombs, perhaps those dropped by Sullivan. He went back to the German trench under heavy machine gun and sniper fire and threw them before crawling back to the remnant of his platoon. Afterwards the Germans were seen taking twenty stretcher cases and several walking wounded from the trench, ‘thus testifying to the splendid work done by this party of three.’ On the following night (16-17 July) the 19th Battalion finally responded to its orders and captured the trench against little opposition, largely because the three stealth raiders had killed, wounded or demoralised most of the garrison.104

West, Abbott and Broder were each in their own way typical of stealth raiders. Albert West was a young officer in the Russell Colman mould: he was considered a ‘fine athlete’, he had been promoted from the ranks of his platoon, and had attributes of what the Australian considered the ideal platoon commander: keen, conscientious and brave.105 Fred Abbott, regimental number 158, was one of the longest serving and most battle hardened NCOs in the battalion. Was his experience vital in the decision to act, did it draw the others to him? A distinctive aspect of many stealth raids is the mystery of who led them – was it the officer in charge, or his old familiar from the battalion? In the front line men like Abbott were often the leaders. Patrick Broder, also known as Michael John Broder, is arguably also typical of a type of man destined to stand out in stealth raids. Undisciplined in a strictly military sense, he was undeniably effective in battle. He had been discharged from the AIF in disgrace in March 1915 after missing his transport ship as it sailed from Brisbane ‘because he was worse for liquor’.106 It followed a string of other minor offences for absence without leave, drunkenness and ‘insulting language’.107

Broder re-enlisted a year later, assuming his father’s first name and finally reached France in July 1917. He quickly ‘gained a fine reputation in his company’ for ‘coolness and initiative’, despite having little formal training or battle experience. At Passchendaele on 9 October 1917 he was ‘instrumental’ in capturing three machine guns and their crews by working around their flanks. On his company reaching its objective he was said to have gone on alone. He met nine Germans, ‘These he killed. He also shot a German officer from whose body he recovered

103 Broder, Citation Bar to MM, AWM28/1/114.
107 5681 Broder, charges against, 31/12/14; 18/2/15, recordsearch.naa.gov.au.
Broder was an individual with distinctive self-reliance and confidence that would characterise the stealth raiders in 1918. The same qualities got him in trouble with military discipline when out of the line.

At the height of the first battle of Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918 Broder went forward alone into the hotly contested village while his battalion were taking a brief spell from the fighting line. At the time Villers-Bretonneux was infamous as a treasure trove in the form of cellars of grog. Broder had his fill. Eight days later he was arrested in Amiens. He was court martialled and charged with desertion. He told his court martial, ‘I had... more drink than I could hold, and suffered the effects for a couple of days’. He protested that he had been looking for his battalion when the military police arrested him. It followed a series of similar absences when his battalion was not in the front line. Nevertheless, at his court martial he had supporters in the battalion, who overlooked his indiscretions. His Company Sergeant Major told the court martial: ‘The accused is a very good soldier... He is a game man’. The charge against him was reduced to absence without leave. He was sentenced to Field Punishment Number Two and fined almost £20 in pay. After the stealth raid Broder wrote that the 17th Battalion adjutant, Captain Frederick Barnett, ‘congratulated me on my bravery and said he would do his best to get the crime replenished [sic], but he got killed shortly after’.

Broder proved ‘absolutely fearless’ in battle and for this he was forgiven many things. By 1918 it was common for the men to think that the best Australian soldier was ‘one who could keep himself out of the clink by the force of imagination, and the spoken word. He can do his drill when he wants to; and when the time comes he can fight hard, and if necessary, die hard’.

By 16 July Monash, Rawlinson and Haig were pushing for a British counter-offensive along the Somme, ‘Partly because the Villers-Bretonneux plateau was very suitable for tanks, but mainly because the ceaseless Peaceful Penetration [and stealth raids] by Australian infantry had greatly strained the German defences there and apparently prevented them from thoroughly

108 Broder, Citation MM, AWM28/1/95Part1.
110 In 5681 Broder, FGCM 9/5/18, recordsearch.naa.gov.au.
111 Capt FG Barnett MID, 17 Bn, Bank manager, of Haberfield, NSW. E 11/5/15, aged 26, KIA 2/8/18. Barnett was killed by shellfire at battalion headquarters.
112 5681 Broder, L 14/5/19, recordsearch.naa.gov.au.
113 H Matthews, Saints and Soldiers, Sydney, 1918, p. 22. 1056 Pte H Matthews, 4 Bn & Pay Corps, Tram conductor, of Sydney, NSW. E 26/8/14, aged 25, RTA 29/12/17.
fortifying their front’.\textsuperscript{114} Stealth raiders and formal “peaceful penetrations” had captured all of the ground that Monash had intended to take in a second battle of Hamel, and the German garrisons were demoralised and fearful of Australian patrols, formal and informal alike. A captured document dated 13 July is telling:

During the last few days the Australians have succeeded in penetrating, or taking prisoner, single posts or pickets. They have gradually – sometimes even in daylight – succeeded in getting possession of the majority of the forward zone of a whole division. Troops must fight. They must not give way at every opportunity and seek to avoid fighting, otherwise they will get the feeling that the enemy are superior to them.\textsuperscript{115}

The document referred to stealth raiders, although Monash took the credit for it in his book \textit{The Australian Victories in France}\.\textsuperscript{116} Stealth raiders and their formal counterparts “peaceful penetrators” were killing Germans and taking out irritating strongpoints at a rate hitherto unknown outside formal battles and raids and without the casualty rates the men associated with such operations. Lieutenant George Mitchell,\textsuperscript{117} 48th Battalion, wrote that he and other experienced mates learned many ways to put a ‘draught up’ the ‘Fritzies’. Mitchell led stealth raids with ‘enthusiasm’.\textsuperscript{118}

we advanced cautiously through a wheat crop, and then we crawled through the long grass. There was a little MG fire. A few flares were coming over. We crawled on and on. At length I found a deep comfortable shell hole... Listening we heard coughs, click of rifle bolts and the sounds of picks and shovels... Sergeant Halliday\textsuperscript{119} and I worked forward through the grass... [then] squirmed back to the rest of the party. I got them ready. We all stood up together and gave rapid fire on to the party in front... silence. No leaf stirred. We crouched down in our shellhole. Still no answer. So I sent them off in the direction of home.\textsuperscript{120}

In the 5th Division sector north of the Somme River, Lieutenant “Jimmy” Sowter,\textsuperscript{121} 56th Battalion, happened upon an advanced German machine gun strongpoint while on a formal reconnaissance patrol. He and his two companions decided to capture it. The tactics they used were typical of stealth raids. Sowter hoped to ‘bluff’ the garrison into surrendering by

\textsuperscript{115} In Monash, \textit{Australian Victories in France}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{116} Monash, \textit{Australian Victories in France}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{117} For biographical details see Introduction, n27.
\textsuperscript{118} Mitchell, \textit{Backs to the Wall}, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{119} 791 Sgt EA Halliday MM, 48 Bn, Labourer, of Tailem Bend, SA. E 29/12/14, aged 21, RTA 31/3/19.
\textsuperscript{120} In Gammage, \textit{Broken Years}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{121} (653 & 2447) Lt JJ Sowter MID, 56 Bn, Warehouseman, of Granville, NSW. E 11/8/14, aged 23, RTA 13/4/19. Originally Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (Tropical Unit), served at Rabaul.
approaching them from the direction of the German lines. He crept to the post alone, while Privates Harry Willis and Thomas Carroll watched from a flank, ready to act as supports.

Sowter could see the garrison ‘swinging their arms and slapping their chests to keep warm’. He called on them to surrender, which they did. But in the darkness he stepped on a waterproof tarpaulin pulled over part of the trench and ‘fell, feet first’ among the Germans. They ‘snatched up their rifles’ and attempted to club him to death. Willis and Carroll sprang to Sowter’s aid. They ‘pumped’ three shots into a huge man who had smashed his rifle butt into Sowter’s helmeted head several times. The fight ended when all of the Germans had been killed except the big German who was badly wounded. The 56th Battalion war diarist described how the stealth raid provoked the ‘Bosche in their usual “windy” manner’ to open machine gun fire ‘from all directions’. Willis was hit as they carried ‘the massive fellow’ back towards their lines. He died of his wounds. The German prisoner died a few hours later at battalion headquarters.

By the end of July stealth raids on the Somme had evolved and spread. A few determined men, without formal orders, were apt to initiate them by day or night, usually to improve the location of new posts, and to reduce fire into an exposed flank. The ethos of these stealth raiders was built on self-reliance. Battlefield experience meant some men preferred small stealthy operations to the prospect of set-piece attacks which were sure to result in intense local shelling that the men feared. Stealth raiders were increasingly aware of the war weariness of their comrades. Stealth raids were initiated to save their mates the strain of formal attacks. Stealth raiders were individuals or small teams who acted according to their free will, whereas “peaceful penetration” was a policy. Although the tactical objectives were often similar, stealth raids were different from “peaceful penetration” in initiation and ethos.

An extract from the history of the British 18th Division serving next to the Australians at this time indicates that this remarkable yet little known activity was distinctively Australian. A British artillery officer recalled a discussion with an Australian artillery colonel on the Somme in July. The British officer said to the Australian:

122 3498 Pte HD Willis, 56 Bn, Steward, of Leichhart, NSW. E 13/12/16, aged 27, KIA 25/7/18.
123 1637 Pte TM Carroll, 56 Bn, Labourer, of Frogmore, NSW. E 9/2/16, aged 22, RTA 1/8/19.
125 56 Bn War Diary, 25/7/18, AWM4/23/73/30.
126 Williams, Comrades, p. 248.
127 56 Bn War Diary, 25/7/18, AWM4/23/73/30.
128 Williams, Comrades, p. 248.
“I’m told your infantry do practically what they like with the Boche on their sector over the river. What was that story a Corps officer told me the other day? Oh, I know! They say your infantry send out patrols each day to find out how the Boche is getting on with his new trenches. When he has dug well down and is making himself comfortable, one of the patrol party reports, ‘I think it’s deep enough now, sir’; and there is a [stealth] raid, and the Australians make themselves at home in the trench the Boche has sweated to make.”
The Australian nodded with pleasure. “Yes, our lot are pretty good at the cuckoo game,” he agreed.129

At Hazebrouck to the north, stealth raiders were doing the very same thing and finding that the enemy there also seemed to have ‘suffered a rot’ when faced by relentless stealth raids.130

Corporal Len Jones, 3rd Battalion, recalled a comment made by an officer of the Australian Corps during a visit to the 1st Division in July:

In a big barn, he got up & said. “I have been sent from Anzac HQ to tell you of the wonderful deeds done by your brothers down South but it seems to me that my job is to hurry back and tell them all about your great bit of work up here.”131

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130 Bean, D 11/7/18, AWM38/116, 25, 25a.
131 Jones, P July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.
CHAPTER SIX
'Today is a great day... one quite unprecedented in the war'

The climax of stealth raiding at Hazebrouck, 29 June to 1 August 1918

By July 1918 the 1st Australian Division’s confidence was at an all-time high. The initiative and variety of their stealth raids was unprecedented, and intelligence indicated that German morale was severely shaken. One digger boasted ‘the Bosche was mortally afraid of us’.¹ Another wrote:

I always thank God that I am not a Hun opposite the diggers. A man would get the horrors because they [the Australians] are absolutely irresponsible and raid him at any old hour, whilst they possess a happy knack of turning every little incident to their own advantage.²

Documents the 10th Battalion captured during their stealth raid on 28 June indicated that the German high commander in Flanders, the Crown Prince of Bavaria, was ‘considerably perturbed at the ease and impunity’ with which German posts were captured near Merris. The Crown Prince had warned his officers that he would make them personally responsible if what he called, ‘this deplorable state of affairs’, continued.³ General Glasgow, who had replaced Walker as commander of the 1st Australian Division, had the Crown Prince’s orders read to the men.⁴ As a result the Australian infantry knew they were facing an enemy in crisis. At the same time, 1st Australian Division Intelligence circulated a report advising that the key findings of interviews with prisoners were: ‘the immense moral effect our minor enterprises have had on the enemy [and] the value of daylight aggressiveness’.⁵ This indicated that stealth raids were being embraced and promoted at divisional headquarters.

Conditions in the outpost system increasingly favoured ‘daylight aggressiveness’. The corn and wheat crops in No Man’s Land were mature and stood up to five feet high, making excellent cover for men leaving their trenches by day. Summer heat and the occasional thunderstorm meant conditions for daylight patrolling and stealth raiding were excellent, since heat tended to make for lethargy in the outposts, and rain drove men to cover when they should have been

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¹ (71) Capt AG Carne MC, 6 Bn, Student, of Malvern, SA. E 18/8/14, aged 26, RTA 10/10/19. M July 1918, AWM2DRL/0013.
² In Yule (ed), Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France, p. 170.
³ Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div War Diary, Intelligence Summary No. 79, 2/7/18, App IV, AWM4/1/42/42Part2.
⁴ See for instance Traill, D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/711; Abson, D 12/7/18, AWM2DRL/0007.
⁵ Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div War Diary, Intelligence summary No. 80, 3/7/18, App IV, AWM4/1/42/42Part2.
keeping watch. These conditions and long-standing factors such as fierce competition between battalions and dislike of top down orders for formal raids saw stealth raiding peak. First, the line was advanced south of the Merris Ridge. Then senior officers, inspired by their men’s initiative, ordered the tactic to capture the remaining German strong points in the Australian sector. The 1st Australian Division advanced, hundreds of prisoners were captured, and casualties were few. Allied Divisional, Corps and Army commanders looked on and were impressed because stealth raids proved to be an economical and masterful way for understrength battalions to dominate their enemy.  

Most 1st Division men who patrolled in the Hazebrouck sector in July 1918 were experienced and knew the enemy outpost system well. Sergeant William Sheppard of the 8th Battalion was one of these. He had been awarded a Military Medal in April for gallantry on patrol. On 29 June, in the afternoon, he crawled through a crop to the edge of an enemy listening post. He saw one man awake and a second asleep. He tried to persuade the first to surrender and when he refused, shot him. This woke the other and Sheppard shot him too. Other patrols reported that the Germans seemed to be withdrawing from the outpost system by day and reoccupying some of their posts by night. Second Lieutenant Jack Southey of the 6th Battalion recalled a daylight patrol to a post in which he found no Germans, but plenty of ammunition and equipment. Southey wrote that he got ‘a mild strafe from headquarters’ for inserting in his report that the sole occupant of the German post was a black cat. His humour ‘was not appreciated’ by his CO.  

Southey, officially 21, actually nineteen, was working in a surveyor’s camp in western Queensland when he decided to enlist. He recalled, ‘I had a fifty miles’ journey to the nearest railway line, where I stopped the train in the usual way by lighting a fire alongside the line’. He travelled to Melbourne and joined the 6th Battalion on 21 September 1915. In France he was frequently on patrol: ‘[i]n my battalion one wasn’t detailed for patrol, but asked if one would care to go out, and one didn’t dare say “No.” I know I was asked too often for my peace of

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8 Sheppard, Citation MM, AWM28/2/56/0023; R Austin, Cobbers in Khaki: The History of the 8th Battalion, 1914-1918, McCrae, 1997, p. 197.
9 See for instance 3 Bde War Diary, July 1918, App 11, AWM4/23/3/33Part1; Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div, ‘Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 2’, 21/7/18, App IV, AWM4/1/42/42Part3.
10 (4606) Lt HJ Southey MC, 6 Bn, Surveyor’s assistant, of Melbourne, Vic. E 21/9/15, aged 17, RTA 1/11/19.
11 In E Swinton (ed), Twenty Years After: The Battlefields of 1914-18 Then and Now, Newnes, 1938, p. 345.
mind.\textsuperscript{12} Southey was promoted to Second Lieutenant and on 7 July 1918 he helped organise the 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalion’s first daylight stealth raid. Southey leading a Lewis gun team,\textsuperscript{13} Lieutenant Edward Archer\textsuperscript{14} an assault party, and a sniper operating solo,\textsuperscript{15} killed nine Germans and captured three after a fight against two machine gun posts near the Dom Becque, a small stream running through No Man’s Land.\textsuperscript{16} During the fight Southey was slightly wounded and Corporal Fred Erfurth\textsuperscript{17} was killed. That afternoon, Southey, despite his wounds, returned with two volunteers to the raided post by creeping along the becque. He killed the sentry in a hand-to-hand struggle and took two more prisoners, then recovered Erfurth’s body.\textsuperscript{18} This followed months of failed formal night fighting patrols and raids and started a battalion competition. The next morning another platoon from Southey’s battalion captured a machine gun but no prisoners.\textsuperscript{19} More stealth raids followed on 10, 12 and 13 July plus two formal raids. In a week the 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalion captured fifteen prisoners and five machine guns using daylight stealth raids.\textsuperscript{20}

On 7 July, Lieutenant Wallace Court\textsuperscript{21} of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion captured two Germans sleeping in a post he had reconnoitred the previous night. The prisoners told the Australians they expected their division would soon be replaced.\textsuperscript{22} 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Division headquarters ordered a formal raid in an effort to catch the Germans in the middle of the relief.\textsuperscript{23} The raiders, from the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalions, met determined opposition, killed over 100 men, captured nineteen and dug in. Among the prisoners were eight who belonged to the 13\textsuperscript{th} Reserve Division, which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} In Swinton (ed), \textit{Twenty Years After}, p. 338.
\item \textsuperscript{13} The No 1 on the Lewis gun was 6717 Pte GE Bowman MM, 6 Bn, Farmer, of Mount Hooghly, Vic. E 29/8/16, KIA 9/8/18.
\item \textsuperscript{14} (409) Lt El Archer MC, 6 Bn, Railway porter, of Annandale, NSW. E 9/2/15, aged 23, Rta 2/1/19.
\item \textsuperscript{15} 2143 Cpl P Maroney (P Garoney) MM & Bar, 6 Bn, Labourer, of Wangaratta, Vic. E 19/9/14, aged 21, Dow 24/8/18.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Other stealth raiders in this action were 4434 Cpl FM Billiet MM, 6 Bn, Warder, of Abbotsford, Vic. E 10/7/15, aged 28, Rta 20/11/18; (3845) Lt FW Maher MM, 6 Bn, Wheelwright, of Yarraville, Vic. E 3/8/15, Rta 31/3/19; 3053A Cpl FJ Jackson MM, 6 Bn, Farmer, of Winchelsea, Vic. E 8/7/15, aged 25, Rta 12/4/19.
\item \textsuperscript{17} 568 Cpl FSG Erfurth, 6 Bn, Labourer, of Bairnsdale, Vic. E 17/8/14, KIA 7/7/18.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Southey, Citation MC, AWM28/1/65/0033.
\item \textsuperscript{19} 6 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App V, AWM4/23/23/32; R Austin, \textit{Rough as Bags: The History of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, 1\textsuperscript{st} AIF, 1914-1919}, Melbourne, 2005 p. 247.
\item \textsuperscript{20} 6 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App XVII, AWM4/23/23/32.
\item \textsuperscript{21} (2487) Lt WJ Court MM, 4 Bn, Monitor in telephone exchange, of Sydney, NSW. E 10/6/15, aged 23, Rta 31/5/19.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, fn 94, p. 409.
\item \textsuperscript{23} 6 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 7, AWM4/23/23/32; 4 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 1, AWM4/23/21/41Part1.
\end{itemize}
confirmed a changeover. Lieutenant Graeme Stobie thought their morale seemed ‘very low indeed’. The 13th Reserve Division had suffered at the hands of the Australians at Mont de Merris in June and the prisoners spoke openly to Stobie of mutiny. Stobie heard, ‘they resented going [back] in on the same sector again against the Australians whom they dread’. News spread through the 1st Division that the enemy had little will to fight.

The next day, 10 July, Corporal Francis Addy in one of the captured posts could not believe his eyes: ‘[o]ur men are going out in daylight to the opposition posts & gathering in Adolfs by two & threes; also their machine guns’. After the advance, the Australian positions were uncomfortably close to uncharted enemy posts hidden in the crops. Some men addressed this problem spontaneously. Sergeant Fred Billiet who had taken part in the Southey daylight

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26 Stobie, D 10-11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0196.
27 Addy, D 10/7/18, MLMSS1607 Items 1 & 2.
28 For biographical details see n16.
stealth raid, ‘crept forward through the barbed wire and crop to locate an enemy machine gun which was hampering... consolidation’. He located the machine gun and after a ‘brief hand-to-hand fight’ captured the gun and its crew of two.29 Lance Corporal Charles Kerry30 and two mates, 4th Battalion, crept out and outflanked a heavily manned post, killing ‘about ten’ of the enemy. Later Kerry went out to the same post and brought in a machine gun.31 Sergeant Joseph Lockhart32 and Lance Corporal “Bluey” Farrell33 were looking for a missing man in No Man’s Land when Farrell almost fell into a short German trench hidden in the crop. Fortunately for him only one man in the post was keeping watch. Farrell beat him to his weapon. Farrell and Lockhart captured eight Germans from the post (Photo 44).34 A few men like these, and those before them in May and June, discovered that most of the Germans were sleeping in their posts during daylight hours, and that sentries were undisciplined. The ‘news spread – Fritz sleeps’.35

A little further south the 1st Battalion heard of these exploits and were keen to emulate daylight stealth raiding tactics. At Hazebrouck the battalion had persisted in the old formal raids and night fighting patrols, with no success.36 The battalion commander Bertie Stacy’s command style was largely responsible. His scout sergeant “Eddie” Edwards called Stacy’s rusted on approach to outmoded doctrine ‘determined’.37 It lacked the tactical innovation of stealth raids. However, the diary of one of his most experienced lieutenants indicates that there were men in the battalion below the level of company commander who were aware of events around them and anxious to adopt new tactics. On 8 July Lieutenant Bob Traill wrote that Second Lieutenant Charles Hudson38 planned to do a daylight patrol today in place of one which did not eventuate last night. Their idea was to capture Huns sleeping in shell holes, as the 4th Battalion did the other day.39

29 Billiet, Citation MM, AW2M2/2/54.
30 1280 L/Cpl CH Kerry MM, 4 Bn, Cab driver, of Lismore, NSW. E 22/10/14, aged 20, RTA 19/2/19.
31 Kerry, Citation MM, AW2M2/1/65/0024.
32 4664 Sgt JA Lockhart DCM, 6 Bn, Timekeeper, of Bendigo, Vic. E 31/7/15, aged 23, KIA 23/8/18.
34 A 4th Battalion patrol returned to the post and brought in a second machine gun.
35 In Yule (ed), Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France, p. 171.
36 1 Bn formal raids and night patrols at Hazebrouck 13/4/18 – 10/7/18 led to 10 casualties for no prisoners captured and no identifications. See for instance Edwards, MS May/June 1918, AWMP2R89/050; Langford, MS May/June 1918, AWMP2R89/0666; Mercer, D 21/5/18, MLMSS1143; 1 Bn Historical Committee, The History of the First Battalion A.I.F. 1914-1919, Sydney, 1931, pp. 98-100; D Blair, Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War, Carlton, 2001, p. 146.
37 Edwards, MS June 1918, AWMP2R89/050
38 (16) Lt C Hudson MC, 1 Bn, Civil engineer, of Nelson, NZ. E 20/8/14, aged 24, RTA 17/1/19.
39 Traill, D 8/7/18 (Actually 9-10/7/18), AWMP2R89/0711.
This was the first daylight patrol in the 1st Battalion, and was organised in a platoon post in direct opposition to Stacy's orders for night patrols. Hudson and four men did not get any prisoners but they did fire on the enemy, prompting Bob Traill to write that it 'went pretty well considering'. On the night of 10 July Traill's “C” Company was relieved. “B” and “D” Company came into the line with orders to carry out formal raids by night, but the men were weary of such orders, and events would prove that they were ready to follow the example of Hudson and men in the other battalions.

Traill handed over to Second Lieutenant George Gaskell of “D” Company. The post was a large shell crater next to the southern bank of the railway line running through No Man’s Land. In front were crops four feet high, with the roof of a farmhouse just visible 90 yards away. Traill departed with a warning that the house might be occupied. Gaskell kept watch. It was dark, drizzling and muddy. There were many dead about and the area ‘ponged no end’. Gaskell saw a man stand up in front of him, ‘so close that he thought he was almost on him’. The figure disappeared and Gaskell crawled to Sergeant David Scott and whispered to him what he had seen. Scott crawled out to investigate but found nothing. Gaskell was certain he had seen a German and sent Corporal August London to work his way along a hedge running along the bank towards the farmhouse and keep watch till dawn. At 3am Gaskell joined London. They fired rifle grenades at the house and waited to see what happened.

Sergeant “Sammy” Langford was in a post less than 100 yards north of Gaskell’s, hidden from line of sight by the embankment. His “D” Company platoon had been ordered to do a formal

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40 Edwards had made several impromptu solo daylight stealth raids while purportedly reconnoitering for Stacy. See ch 2.
41 Traill, D 8/7/18 (Actually 9-10/7/18), AWM2DRL/0711. Hudson’s stealth raid is mentioned in 1 Bn War Diary, 8/7/18, AWM4/23/18/33.
42 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; Langford, MS 10-11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0666; Bean, Official History, Vol VI, pp. 417-418.
43 (671) Lt GE Gaskell MC, 1 Bn, Clerk, of Fitzroy, Vic. E 20/10/14, aged 19, RTA 22/1/20. Gaskell enlisted in 1914 and served in the Army Service Corps (a non-combatant unit) in Gallipoli and France. He was commissioned and transferred to the 1st Bn in June 1918.
44 Traill, D 6/7/18, AWM2DRL/0711.
45 ‘Interview with GE Gaskell’, Bean’s notebook, 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/187/8-21.
46 5086A Sgt DH Scott DCM, MSM, 1 Bn, Shop assistant, of Cobar, NSW. E 6/10/15, aged 27, RTA 6/7/19. Scott was a seasoned veteran with a Meritorious Service Medal for ‘maintaining discipline and efficiency [under] most difficult and trying circumstances’. Citation MSM, AWM28/1/41/0024.
48 3092 Sgt NH Langford MID, 1 Bn, Picture engraver, of Mosman, NSW. E 12/7/15, aged 21, RTA 20/4/19.
raid and his officer, Claude Morley,\textsuperscript{49} sent him out to reconnoitre:

I went out after tea soon as it was dark, taking only two men with me... I was offered a stronger party if I desired, but owing to the high dense wheat I decided to take two and myself as we would make less noise... It was a nasty nervy piece of work, as one did not know what was hidden there... I suddenly touched a body with my right hand. My heart stopped dead and a cold shiver went up my spine, I clouted it with my revolver butt, but I soon found that it was a dead man, one of our Australians.\textsuperscript{50}

The body lay in a field cleared by German machine gunners. Langford returned just before dawn and told Morley what he had seen. It was daylight and the sound of the detonation of rifle grenades was heard. It was Gaskell and London on the other side of the railway bank. Morley and Langford saw several Germans run over the railway line and disappear into the crop in front them. Morley sent out a patrol to investigate; they thought another farmhouse in front of their position was occupied. At 8am Gaskell and Morley decided they wanted to take

\textsuperscript{49} (2417) Lt CR Morley MC, 1 Bn, Analytical chemist, of Lindfield, NSW. E 25/5/15, aged 25, RTA 20/4/19.

\textsuperscript{50} Langford, MS 10-11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0666.
daylight patrols and try to trap the Germans in the houses. Captain “Rollo” Somerset, their company commander, agreed. Gaskell, Sergeant Scott, Corporal London and Private Stanton Ayoub were the first to get away. Each man carried a revolver, rifle, four bombs and ‘two or three’ bandoliers of ammunition slung round his shoulders. This was more weapons and ammunition than Australian infantrymen had carried into the battles of Pozieres, Bullecourt or Third Ypres, indicating that they were prepared to fight as an independent unit against a strong enemy force. When they left their post it was raining, and the patrol hoped the German sentries would be taking cover and not paying attention to No Man’s Land. The four Australians crawled out to the house along the ditch running between the embankment and the crop. Two of them searched the house while the others covered them. They found nothing besides a set of old playing cards. They searched shell holes in the field beyond the house and again found nothing. They decided to search the crop closer to their own post, where Gaskell had seen the figure the previous night. They crawled into the wheat single file and saw a shell hole partly covered with fresh green grass. They approached with caution, Scott and Gaskell signalling the others to cover them as they crept on. They knew it was occupied when they crawled into human excrement. Scott and Gaskell, revolvers in hand, quietly edged to the lip of the crater and surprised two Germans who were chatting quietly beside a machine gun. The Germans looked up and called “Merci Merci”. Gaskell and Scott threatened to shoot them if they made noise. The Germans shut up. Gaskell pressed them for information about other machine gun posts, then hurried them back to London and Ayoub. Two more posts were located in this way and it was decided to take them immediately, Gaskell rushing one and Scott the other, using revolvers not bombs, since a shot in the wheat would be less likely to wake the enemy. Scott captured four men and Gaskell eight and a machine gun from these posts, both men firing only a couple of shots. They rushed the prisoners carrying their machine guns straight to the Australian lines, not bothering to duck or crawl. In one morning, acting on their own initiative, the four had surprised and captured fourteen Germans and three machine guns.

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51 (479) Capt CWHR Somerset MC, MID, 1 Bn, Station-hand, of Toogoolawah, Qld. E 30/10/14, aged 20, RTA 9/12/18.
52 Bean notes, 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/187/8-21.
53 1161 Pte S Ayoub MID, 1 Bn, Horse driver, of Coonamble, NSW. E 5/6/15, aged 19, RTA 20/12/18.
54 Bean notes, 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/187/8-21.
55 Bean notes, 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/187/8-21.
56 Bean notes, 1/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/187/8-21.
guns, all in a field less than 70 yards from their post, with only a couple of revolver shots. It was an astonishing success for the whole battalion, because it followed three months of regular night fighting patrols and formal raids with no prisoners to show for the effort.

It was only the beginning. A similar stealth raid by Morley, Sergeant Jim Coppin and Private Allan Rostron on the other side of the railway embankment netted two prisoners and a light machine gun. Sammy Langford watched them capture several more posts:

Moving swiftly Lt Morley surprised a second post taking them also, when the party was returning they ran across another post, this time the enemy were prepared to resist, but Morley rushed the post and wounded several of the garrison with his revolver and captured 8 men and another M.G. including an officer... in came the party with the prisoners with no casualty to our side.

Rostron was covering Morley and Coppin when he saw two Germans spring out of the wheat. He beat both of them to the trigger, killing one and wounding the other. He then leapt into a concealed post and captured two more. Within an hour, Morley’s stealth raid of four men had captured 25 Germans and four machine guns. Gaskell and Morley’s stealth raids combined captured 39 men and seven machine guns, for no loss. Men from “A” Company were called up from the supports to deal with the unexpected influx of prisoners. Lance Corporal Harrie Cave portrayed the novelty of the stealth raids:

The Huns were brought in like sheep from shell holes in “No Man’s Land” & from their outposts in broad daylight – yes, daylight raids. Jove but it was funny - yes and thrilling too! The boys were in their very element & smiles were worn by all. Poor, dazed, or bewildered Ottos & Hans’, & Fritz’s & Wilhelms, all with the unmistakeable "square-eds", light hair & 'orible Hunnish or Mongolian strain dials were brought back in big batches by one or two of us as meekly as baa-baas.

Apart from a few disgruntled German officers, who made Cave feel 'like putting the boot in,' the Australians mixed freely with the prisoners and gathered important tactical information:

One bloke we caught could speak a "leetle" English so he was asked by one of our lads what his job was. This is something like how it went: "Whats' your position in the Army, digger?"

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59 3157 Pte AE Rostron MM, 1 Bn, Messenger, of Sydney, NSW. E 31/8/15, aged 18, KIA 18/9/18.
60 Langford, MS 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0666.
61 Rostron, Citation MM, AWM28/2/49/0014.
62 Biographical details see Introduction n19.
63 Cave, L 20/7/18, MLMSS1224.
... "me no fight, me up the flares shoot!" Well blimey if you could have heard the laugh. You’d have thought the war was over!

... Someone suggested that this was the Hun who ran all the way along Fritz’s Front Line, from Nieuport to the Swiss border, firing up star shells and flares over "No Mans Land" every night.64

But the Australians learnt that the enemy observers, or “flare kings”, manned shell holes in garrisons of two. They learnt other posts were manned by machine gunners and trench mortar-men sleeping by day, on duty at night. Other posts contained sections of riflemen known as gruppes, usually seven men under an NCO, whose job it was to screen the machine gunners. The prisoners’ morale was low. Many seemed happy to be captured and others spoke of mutiny and a long exhausting march into the front lines.65 The 1st Battalion quickly exploited this intelligence. The battalion war diary states that Captain Somerset instructed his line platoons to capture all the enemy posts on his immediate front. Their tactics came straight from the experience of Gaskell and Morley. Patrols in diamond formation of four men were to creep around the flank of each post, using the crop as cover, then two men would rush it from the rear.66 Yet diaries, letters and memoirs show the front line soldiers were out raiding posts before Somerset’s instructions arrived. Sammy Langford wrote ‘the raids became general straight away’; Bob Traill heard ‘the remainder of D Company looking on got interested and started out to do a bit too’. Cave said ‘the boys revelled in this class of stunt’.67

Gaskell and his men captured another eighteen prisoners, mostly sleeping in shell hole posts that were easy to outflank in the crop.68 Scott went out ‘repeatedly’ and ‘was instrumental in many cases in alone locating enemy posts, and in some cases rushed them single handed [sic].’69 In this way “D” Company’s prisoners increased to 47 and seven machine guns, for the loss of one man wounded and, as Cave put it, ‘very little ammunition’.70 Corporals George Wood71 and Roger Cooney72 from Morley’s platoon captured eleven men in two posts near the

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64 Cave, L 20/7/18, MLMSS1224.
65 Cave, L 20/7/18, MLMSS1224; Traill, D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0711; Langford MS 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0666; 1 Bn War Diary, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div War Diary, “Weekly Intelligence Summary No.2”, 21/7/18, App IV, AWM4/1/42/42Part2.
66 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; see also 11 East Yorks War Diary, July 1918, pp. 113-119 of 200, WO/95/2357-0-519.
67 Cave, L 13/7/18, MLMSS1224.
68 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33.
69 Scott, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/65/0010.
70 Cave, L 13/7/18, MLMSS1224.
71 5256 Sgt GF Wood MM & Bar, 1 Bn, Clerk, of Marrickville, NSW. E 14/9/15, aged 21, RTA 20/6/19.
72 2803 Pte R Cooney MM, 1 Bn, Labourer, of Kensington, Vic. E 9/7/15, aged 22, RTA 20/6/19;
4th Battalion’s lines. ‘In one, the garrison was surprised and captured; but from the other resistance was met’. Wood bombed the post while Cooney rushed it. They captured eleven Germans and brought “D” Company’s score to 58 men and seven machine guns and still only one Australian wounded. Further north men of the 4th Battalion saw what was happening and

73 Wood & Cooney, Citation MM, AWM28/1/65/0012.
joined in. Corporal Ralph Hedley\(^{74}\) sometimes alone and sometimes with two others captured fourteen prisoners and two machine guns against constant sniper fire.\(^{75}\) Private Oliver Poulton,\(^{76}\) ‘brave, fearless, and cool, and a very good shot’, stood up in the crop and sniped at the enemy. He killed two and his mates prepared to rush a post, but when a German sniper shot Poulton through the chest they were forced to retire. Poulton, a farmer from the Macleay River in New South Wales, had been in France less than three months.\(^{77}\) He was the first Australian fatality of the day.

By midday the 1\(^{st}\) and 4\(^{th}\) Battalions had captured 75 men and nine machine guns, for one Australian killed and one wounded. “D” Company, 1\(^{st}\) Battalion, had captured virtually the entire garrison of the front line of the German division opposite.\(^{78}\) Somerset’s posts north of the railway line and the 4\(^{th}\) Battalion on his flank were digging in between 200 and 250 yards ahead of their original line. South of the railway, Somerset instructed Gaskell to hold the house with a few men and called Colonel Bertie Stacy at battalion headquarters to request that “B” Company advance and secure Gaskell’s right flank; he expected to be counter-attacked at any moment. Stacy, who had no influence on the morning’s events, skilfully and quickly complied, at 4pm ordering a “B” Company platoon to advance and capture a farm on Gaskell’s right.\(^{79}\)

Corporal Allan Leighton\(^{80}\) of “B Company had already been out to this farm that morning and captured seven men, thinking the prisoners would negate a formal night raid.\(^{81}\) His initiative meant that part of the job of clearing the farm was done.\(^{82}\) Just after 4pm Leighton’s platoon under Lieutenant Roderick Sampson\(^{83}\) attacked the farm from the rear, approaching it from the house Gaskell captured. Gaskell’s men and the rest of “B” Company covered them with rifle grenade and Lewis gunfire from their posts. The German garrison was effectively fired on from three sides. The patrol advanced southwards in two lines, an assault party to fight, and

\(^{74}\) 2613 Cpl R Hedley MM, 4 Bn, Labourer, of Hawick, Scotland, E (Liverpool, NSW) 16/6/15, aged 26, RTA 25/1/19.

\(^{75}\) Hedley, Citation MM, AWM28/1/65/0023.

\(^{76}\) 7519 Pte OJ Poulton, 4 Bn, Farmer, of Macleay River, NSW. E 25/4/17, aged 21, KIA 11/7/18.

\(^{77}\) 7519 Poulton Red Cross File 1DRL/0428.

\(^{78}\) Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 417.

\(^{79}\) 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33.

\(^{80}\) 6590 Cpl AD Leighton DCM, 1 Bn, School teacher, of Rylstone, NSW. E 26/4/16, aged 24, DOW 11/7/18.

\(^{81}\) “B” and “D” Coy had orders to undertake night raids during this tour. See for instance Bean, Official History, Vol VI, pp. 417-418; 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; Langford, MS 10-11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0666.

\(^{82}\) Leighton captured these prisoners while on a stealth raid with Lt RW Sampson MC & Bar, 1 Bn, Bookkeeper, of Leichhardt, NSW. E 13/9/15, aged 29, RTA 31/5/19.

\(^{83}\) See n82.
supports to whisk away prisoners or replace men who fell out of the assault. The attack captured nine prisoners and two light machine guns and cleared all the buildings and hedges enclosing the farm. However Germans to the south showed fight and started firing on the patrol from several hundred yards away, wounding four Australians. Harry Cave wrote ‘[d]on’t believe that all the birds we got were “duds” - not a bit of it’; meaning that as resistance increased so did the tactical difficulty. Sampson’s patrol dug in while several NCOs and scouts set off in small groups, or reportedly alone, to outflank the German posts (firing from the south). The senior sergeant, George Abraham, exposed himself to a machine gun and threw bombs while his men rushed it, capturing the gun and eight men. Allan Leighton captured another machine gun and its crew. The indefatigable Leighton was shot in the chest while approaching another post. He was a corporal usually in charge of a section of ten men, yet on this day the former bush school teacher from Rylstone was one of the battalion’s leaders. He died of his wounds that night. Independent parties of stealth raiders captured more prisoners during the twilight.

At the end of the day, the left flank of “B” Company, all of “D” Company, and the 4th Battalion’s line had advanced ‘on an average depth of 200 yards’. Junior officers and other ranks had captured over 1,000 yards of the German line, taking 120 prisoners including three officers, and eleven machine-guns. They did it using little ammunition and no artillery support. Two men were killed in action and two died of wounds. Bob Traill wrote: ‘Today is a great day in the history of the [1st Battalion]... one quite unprecedented in the war’. He was well qualified to make this judgement since he had endured nearly every campaign the 1st Battalion was involved in since the landing at Gallipoli. He had never heard of daylight patrols – stealth raids – or of so few men capturing so much ground, prisoners and war material with so few
Recalling the Crown Prince of Bavaria’s orders read to the battalion at the beginning of its tour, he concluded, ‘there will be a couple of Hun C.O.’s writing “Please explains” today.’

The following morning Lieutenant Francis Laracy and five stealth raiders of the 1st Battalion, captured 28 more Germans, four machine guns and 250 yards of ground in a field on the extreme right flank of the 1st Division’s line. They reasoned ‘the rain would have the same

94 Traill, D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0711.
95 (121) Lt FP Laracy MC, 1 Bn, Chemist’s assistant, of Toowoomba, Qld. E 24/8/14, aged 23. Laracy died at sea during his leave when SS Leinster was torpedoed in the Irish Sea, 10/10/18.
effect as a barrage and drive Fritz to cover’.

Their imagination paid off and as well as “scooping” up unwary prisoners and their machine guns their booty included automatic pistols, field glasses, belt buckles and German rum. Laracy directed the rest of his platoon to come forward and occupy the captured posts, then waited for ‘further instructions’.

On hearing of this stealth raid the diggers mocked the British on their flank. One digger wrote, ‘[t]he Tommies next door just sat and watched. They had no orders to go out – our boys had no orders not to go out, just the difference’. The Australians thought the Tommies lacked initiative and aggression. They called the English battalion “sticky”, meaning hesitant to get out of their trenches and attack.

By coincidence, Lieutenant Colonel CH Gurney, commanding officer of the 11th East Yorkshire Battalion (the Tommies who “sat and watched”) visited Colonel Stacy’s headquarters at midday to discuss a formal raid the East Yorks had been ordered to do the next day. The objective was Tern Farm, a German strong point overlooking the field where Laracy’s men were. Stacy told the British colonel that four of his Australians had already advanced and captured 28 Germans near Tern Farm that morning. Stacy urged Gurney ‘to press on immediately and exploit the success’ using stealth raiding tactics, without artillery, and not wait for orders the next day.

Gurney agreed, admitting afterwards that he ‘was somewhat anxious [and] wondered what on earth higher authority would say if this unusual warfare didn’t come off’. Stacy guaranteed that his Australians would cooperate with patrols from north and north east of Tern Farm. Zero hour was arranged for 2.30pm.

The Australians were keen and broke out into the fields fifteen minutes before the agreed zero hour. It took ten minutes before the East Yorks realised what had happened and sent out their patrols, but the Australians had run into considerable resistance. Laracy’s 5 Platoon advanced, less than fifteen men with two Lewis Guns. Seven men also advanced from the platoon to his left. Machine gunners on a track by the Plate Becque fired on them and one man was

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97 In Yule (ed), Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France, p. 170; Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 421.
98 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 7, AWM4/23/18/33.
99 In Yule (ed), Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France, p. 171.
100 Bean, D 12/7/18, AWM38/3DR/606/116/26.
101 1 Bn War Diary, App 7, AWM4/23/18/33.
103 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 7, AWM4/23/18/33.
104 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 1, AWM4/23/18/33.
killed. Laracy’s platoon ran into fire from posts in the fields in front of them. Two men who had excelled in the stealth raids of the previous day were called up to take on the machine gun post. The two outflanked the post and cut the garrison off, and the Germans raised their hands to surrender. When the Australians exposed themselves to take them prisoner, a German officer in another post ordered the would-be prisoners to fight. They opened fire. The two Australians were caught outnumbered in the open. One was killed, the other wounded.

German reinforcements arrived and heavy machine gun fire continued. Laracy knew there was a gap between him and the Tommies on his right. The patrol on his left had been forced back. He sent a message to his company commander, Captain Roderick Macgregor, who acting under Colonel Stacy’s instructions directed a platoon from “A” Company into the gap between Laracy and the East Yorks. This was done by a patrol reportedly led by a Lance Corporal.

With the flank with the British secured, Laracy’s patrol captured seven Germans and a machine gun. Some Australians pushed on a further 200 yards and came up against the German main line of resistance. Here Privates Richard Burke and “Scottie” Neil were killed by sniper fire. Burke and Neil were reportedly drinking captured German rum and Private William Clay thought it had made them ‘less cautious... they went too far’, while another digger reckoned they ‘were a bit muddled [although both] had been doing some good work’. Laracy was wounded and Sergeant Richard Hart took command. Hart stopped the stealth raid and called up the artillery to barrage the German line. Colonel Stacy summarised the moment in his post action report:

[I]t was not considered advisable to continue to press on. A more organised form of attack would have been necessary with the employment of a fair number of men and the objective did not hold out an equivalent for the

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105 6530 Pte GPJ Lawton, 1 Bn, Wicker worker, of Waterloo, NSW. E 11/5/16, aged 22, KIA 12/07/18. Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428.
106 One was 3302 Pte WF Eagles, 1 Bn, Labourer, of Albury, NSW. E 4/8/15, aged 20, KIA 12/7/18. See MID 4/12/7/18 in 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 10, AWM4/23/18/33. The other man is unknown. This incident prompted Stacy to write an analysis on the value of patrolling in crop in teams of four, using the diamond formation: two men to outflank and assault German posts and two to support. 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33.
107 (671) Capt RIC Macgregor MC, 1 Bn, Farmer, of Boree Creek, NSW. E 22/8/14, aged 22, RTA 31/5/19.
108 A second platoon from “A” Coy moved into close supports.
109 Langman Red Cross File 1DRL/0428. 3816 L/Cpl EH Langman, 1 Bn, Teamster, of Smithfield, NSW. E 18/5/15, aged 22, KIA 12/7/18. Langman was killed by shellfire that evening.
110 6708 Pte RJ Burke, 1 Bn, Waiter, of Surry Hills, NSW. E 7/8/16, aged 36, KIA 12/7/18.
111 7016 Pte D Neil, 1 Bn, Labourer, of Old Junee, NSW. E 19/10/16, aged 29, KIA 12/7/18.
112 6724 Pte W Clay, 1 Bn, Window dresser, of Bellevue Hill, NSW. E 20/3/16, aged 27, RTA 18/12/18.
113 In 6708 Burke Red Cross File, 1DRL/0428.
114 For biographical details see n96.
casualties which would have to be suffered. The EAST YORKS battalion had achieved their object on our right and taken TERN FARM.\textsuperscript{115}

The 11\textsuperscript{th} East Yorks also took 60 prisoners and four machine guns.\textsuperscript{116} It was the only known example of an organised British stealth raid at the time. Their commanding officer thought it one of the battalion’s finest achievements of the war.\textsuperscript{117}

The stealth raids of 11/12 July 1918 captured more men and more ground than the set-piece battles on Morlancourt Ridge and at Mont de Marris in May and June, with a fraction of the casualties of these and other battles. Interest in the tactic was expressed at Army, Corps and Divisional headquarters. Higher command requested reports by Colonels Stacy and Gurney. Re-enactments and lectures on the tactic were given at Army and Corps schools.\textsuperscript{118} Stealth raiding became a doctrine. A policy was adopted whereby daylight patrolling initiated by officers and men in front line posts were ‘permitted to extend under certain conditions and with certain precautions’.\textsuperscript{119} What these conditions and precautions were is best interpreted in the reports of Stacy and Gurney whose men initiated the stealth raids. On the question of command, Gurney emphasised the importance of initiative. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
The Company Commander must be given the greatest possible latitude and should be fettered only by the general line... to which it is proposed to advance. Throughout arrangements must be left entirely to him and he must be encouraged to seize opportunities and to exploit success in a manner found best in the course of the operations.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

This devolution of control from commanding officers and staff to front line junior officers was radical. The Australian position was even more so. Stacy focussed on the ‘dash and initiative of patrol leaders and personnel’.\textsuperscript{121} The extent to which Stacy had learnt to appreciate the value of the men’s initiative, dash and judgement on 11 and 12 July was reflected in the recommendations he made for awards. Stacy recommended lieutenants, NCOs and privates.

\begin{footnotes}
\item 115 1 Bn casualties: 4 killed, 2 wounded. 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33.
\item 116 11 East Yorks casualties: 5 killed, 13 wounded. German casualties: over 50 killed. 11 Bn East York Regt, War Diary, July 1918, ‘A Report on Daylight Operation carried out by the 11\textsuperscript{th} Bttn East Yorkshire Regiment on 12\textsuperscript{th} July 1918’, p. 110 of 200, NAWO/95/2357-0-519.
\item 117 In 11 Bn East York Regt, War Diary, July 1918, pp. 113-119 of 200, NAWO/95/2357-0-519; A Short Diary of the 11\textsuperscript{th} Service Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, 1914-1919, Compiled by “Some of Them”, Hull, 1921, pp. 56-57.
\item 118 See for instance, A Short Diary of the 11\textsuperscript{th} Service Battalion, pp. 56-57; Edwards, D 13-20/7/18, AWMPR89/050.
\item 119 Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div War Diary, App XXV, 17/7/18, AWM4/1/42/42Part9.
\item 120 11 Bn East York Regt, War Diary, July 1918, ‘A Report on Daylight Operation carried out by the 11\textsuperscript{th} Bttn East Yorkshire Regiment on 12\textsuperscript{th} July 1918’, pp. 109-112 of 200, NAWO/95/2357-0-519.pdf.
\item 121 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33.
\end{footnotes}
This is in contrast to the 11th East Yorkshire Battalion where Gurney and a company commander were awarded the DSO, second only to the VC. No medals were awarded to other ranks.\textsuperscript{122}

On tactics, Stacy and Gurney emphasised the importance of cover. The patrols were able to get behind the enemy by crawling through crops and along ditches. Stacy also emphasised the ‘use and proper control of supports’. In a patrol of four men, two were left about ten yards in rear to protect the flanks and rear and if necessary reinforce. Gurney suggested patrols of six,

\textsuperscript{122} A Short Diary of the 11th Service Battalion, p. 92.
with two men acting as scouts.\textsuperscript{123} Stacy also reported that his men preferred to turn only one flank of an enemy post rather than surround them, because it enabled them to capture posts using less men and was less likely to panic the enemy and provoke fire and avoidable casualties.\textsuperscript{124}

Both commanders praised the value of the rifle grenade for bombarding posts, and cautioned that Lewis guns were useful for covering or distracting fire but cumbersome and dangerous in close fighting when posts were rushed. The weapon of choice was surprise, enforced by a revolver and bombs in the hands of cool-headed men. In summarising what constraints should be placed on these operations, both men emphasised that daylight stealth raids should only be considered where the cover of a crop was available and should not be permitted to continue when resistance or casualties outweighed the value of the objective.\textsuperscript{125}

This prompted the first formal orders on the Hazebrouck front to advance by daylight patrols.\textsuperscript{126} 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Division headquarters reasoned that if the line to the north could be advanced by such means, then the German strong point at Merris could effectively be outflanked from north and south. However subsequent daylight patrols found the enemy alert and nervous. In the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Brigade one officer and two men were killed and further formal daylight patrols were called off.\textsuperscript{127} Higher command resorted to advancing by formal bite and hold raids at night, and Lieutenant Matt Abson\textsuperscript{128} of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalion received orders to ‘carry out a minor operation against a fairly long trench’ on the Merris ridge. He and his fellow officers did not like the orders because they were given short notice and practically no information regarding the enemy’s defences. In an effort to avoid the formal raid, two junior officers volunteered to see if they could capture the trench by day. Each took three men and used a captured German map and an aerial photograph to navigate their way through the crop. Their attempts provoked aggressive resistance and were turned back.\textsuperscript{129} This meant the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; 11 Bn East York Regt, War Diary, July 1918, ‘A Report on Daylight Operation carried out by the 11\textsuperscript{th} Bttn East Yorkshire Regiment on 12\textsuperscript{th} July 1918’, pp. 109-112 of 200, NAWO/95/2357-0-519.pdf.
\item[124] 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a.
\item[125] 1 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 4a, AWM4/23/18/33; 11 Bn East York Regt, War Diary, July 1918, ‘A Report on Daylight Operation carried out by the 11\textsuperscript{th} Bttn East Yorkshire Regiment on 12\textsuperscript{th} July 1918’, pp. 109-112 of 200, NAWO/95/2357-0-519.pdf.
\item[126] Despite there being no link between the events this coincided with Rosenthal and Monash’s orders for “peaceful” or “silent penetration” east of Villers-Bretonneux; see ch 5.
\item[127] 5 Bn War Diary, 12/7/18, AWM4/23/22/41; 6 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 11, AWM4/23/23/32.
\item[128] Temp Capt M Abson, 6 Bn, Bank teller, of Geelong, Vic. E 10/7/15, aged 24, RTA 12/5/19. D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0007.
\item[129] Abson, D 11/7/18, AWM2DRL/0007.
\end{footnotes}
formal raid had to go ahead. The men feared “friendly fire” from allied artillery support, and a possible retaliatory barrage from the Germans. Two platoons went over the top at night behind a “hurricane” bombardment. ‘Much to everyone’s relief’, wrote Abson, the battalion captured the trench, one prisoner and two machine guns, but three men were wounded.\(^{130}\)

The next day Second Lieutenant John “Pedlar” Palmer,\(^{131}\) a Gallipoli veteran who was one of the officers who tried to capture the trench “off their own bat”, surprised a German post by creeping upon it through the crop while another officer covered him, possibly an American named Young who was attached to the 6\(^{th}\) Battalion for training.\(^{132}\) Palmer captured one man and a machine gun from a post similar to the one the battalion had raided. Because no artillery was involved, his enterprise did not attract a retaliatory barrage. Captain Alf Carne wrote that Palmer’s initiative represented ‘the spirit of the Battalion at this time’. The men preferred this type of fighting which, Carne wrote, ‘gave ample scope to the display of the greatest ingenuity, resourcefulness, and personal initiative’.\(^{133}\) Lance Corporal Len Jones concurred: each day the ‘boys showed great initiative, altering their tactics... in [the] ripening crops of wheat and oats’.\(^{134}\)

Australians raided the weakened 13\(^{th}\) Reserve and 207\(^{th}\) Divisions night and day, and came up with all sorts of tricks to ambush the enemy. Thirteen men ambushed 70 Germans by hiding in the wheat and holding their fire until the Germans were only ten paces away. Then each man threw two bombs and a Lewis gunner opened fire. Many Germans were seen to fall, and the Australians reported hearing much ‘squealing and shouting’ as the survivors scattered through the crops.\(^{135}\) It surprised the Australians to see such a large enemy patrol in No Man’s Land. It coincided with several counter-raids along the Australian front. Intelligence reports speculated that increased German patrolling and raiding was an attempt to avoid further losses in territory to Australian stealth raids.\(^{136}\) The Germans also increased machine gun fire from advanced outposts at night. Private Gerald Evans, 9\(^{th}\) Battalion, remembered the strain these machine guns caused: ‘the bullets were so close that I felt the dirt splash up in my face... my

\(^{130}\) Abson, D 12/7/18, AWM2DRL/0007.
\(^{131}\) (2142) Lt JJ Palmer MC, 6 Bn, Carpenter, of Inglewood, Vic. E 10/9/14, aged 24, RTA 18/4/19.
\(^{132}\) Austin, Rough as Bags, p. 250.
\(^{133}\) Carne, M July 1918, AWM2DRL/0013.
\(^{134}\) Jones, P July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.
\(^{135}\) The patrol was led by 1317 Sgt W Delaney Cdg (Fr), 3 Bn, Labourer, of Lithgow, NSW. E 29/8/14, aged 21, RTA 23/10/18. 3 Bn War Diary, 14/7/18, AWM4/23/20/41; Jones, P July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.
\(^{136}\) Gen Staff HQ 1 Aus Div War Diary, Intelligence Summary No. 94, 17/7/18, App IV, AWM4/1/42/42Part3.
[uniform] was so wet I could have wrung the sweat out of it'. Sergeant Harry “Squatter” Preston, of the same battalion, saw machine gun fire kill a friend from northern New South Wales in front of him. This provoked “Squatter” and Lance Corporal Vic Black and Corporal Matt Baillie to avenge their mate. Their company commander agreed to let them go out and kill some Germans, and see if they could capture a German machine gun. At 1pm on 17 July, using a drain as cover, they crawled through a wheat field until they saw a German trench system. Preston decided to go ahead alone, and after crawling around a barbed wire entanglement entered an abandoned German trench.

Inside the trench, “Squatter” saw that the ground was littered with empty bullet cases, indicating that a machine gun was fired from it at night. He also found German stick grenades and captured British Mills bombs hidden under straw. “Squatter” suspected the Germans would return to the trench that night to fire their machine gun, so he took the detonators from the grenades and covered them again. Back in the Australian lines he, Black and Baillie asked their battalion commander, Colonel Leslie Mullen, for permission to ‘go out again that night and try for the [machine] gun’. Mullen agreed to give them between sunset and 10pm to stealth raid the trench before the artillery began its nightly shoot on the area. “Squatter” wrote that Lieutenant “Joey” Russell ‘wanted to be in on the show’ and brought two men. When it got dark the six Australians crept into No Man’s Land and followed the drain to within 50 yards of the trench. Preston wrote that Russell and his two men occupied shell holes where they could fire along the trench, while he, Black and Baillie crept closer to wait in ambush.

Plan: wait till enemy got into trench and before he had time to get his gun in position, rush him, kill what we could, the rest would surrender, the bombs they would use would be useless, (no detonators).

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138 2871 Sgt H Preston, 9 Bn, Farmer, of Ulmarra, NSW. E 10/6/15, aged 19, RTA 12/5/19.
139 2593A Cpl VJ Black, 9 Bn, Clerk, of Dunoon, NSW. E 20/8/15, aged 19, RTA 12/4/19.
140 6959 Sgt M Baillie, 9 Bn, Grocer, of Brisbane, Qld. E 10/7/16, aged 24, RTA 12/7/19.
141 Preston, M ‘Daylight Raid’, 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811. According to Preston, the mate killed by machine gun fire was 759A Pte D Gillies, Farmer, of Grafton, NSW. E 10/11/16, aged 24, KIA 1/6/18. This was the first time the battalion had returned to this part of the line since Gillies’ death.
142 Lt Col LM Mullen DSO, MID CdG (Bel), 9 Bn, Area officer & accountant, of Burnie, Tas. E 28/8/14, aged 32, RTA 4/6/19.
143 Preston, M 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811.
144 (3900) Lt SHE Russell MM, 9 Bn, Herd tester, of Lismore, NSW. E 21/8/15, aged 19, KIA 20/7/18.
145 Preston, M 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811.
146 Preston, M 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811.
By 9.50pm “Squatter” was thinking of withdrawing before the artillery started when ten Germans appeared, coming towards them on a track through the wheat. He tapped Black and Baillie on the shoulder and motioned towards the enemy. Russell, seeing the dark figures moving through the crop whispered, “Is that you Squatter?” Preston did not answer because: ‘[t]he Huns [were] right on top of us’. Russell opened fire. One German landed on top of Black and was killed hand-to-hand, while Preston and Baillie fired into the others at point blank range. Some Germans gained the trench and started throwing the bombs. They fell harmlessly without detonating. Preston and Baillie jumped into the trench and grabbed the machine gun. The German fire was heavy and Preston was wounded in the face and the machine gun, damaged. They left the broken weapon in the wheat and scrambled back to their lines. Russell and the others got back, firing their revolvers and rifles as they withdrew. Any further attack was thought unwise because the Germans could be heard reoccupying the trench and throwing grenades into the crop. The 9th Battalion war diary states that identification was recovered from a dead German found by a patrol scouring the ground the next day.

Diggers like “Squatter” Preston and his mates were fighting the war as they saw it unfolding around them. Their horizon limited by the crops and hedges, their job was to kill, capture and identify the Germans in the fields around them. By the time of “Squatter’s” stealth raid, summer was reaching its height, with less than eight hours of darkness per night. Sentry duty, listening posts, ration parties, wiring and other fatigues, liaison, reconnaissance and sometimes fighting patrols or formal raids all required men and all had to be done under cover of darkness. Corporal Len Jones considered the amount of work the understrength Australian infantry was asked to do was ‘no joke’ and the ‘people in charge... just drove as hard as they could’. Under these conditions officers struggled to keep up with the demand for prisoners and identification, and turned to stealth raiding, and in particular men most skilled at getting results in it. Emboldened and confident, the whole division now actively attempted daylight patrols and ‘whole platoons of men were out all day in search of unwary Bosche.’

Sometimes a commanding officer alerted the men to a major raid or operation. One set of orders came on 18 July. The 9th Battalion was told they would be going “over the top” at dawn the next day, without an artillery barrage, while the British attacked Meteren. Colonel Mullen and his brigadier, Bennett, seem to have been inspired by stealth raiders and decided to

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147 Preston, M 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811.
149 Jones, P July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.
150 Carne, M July 1918, AWM2DRL/0013.
advance using an adaptation of the tactic, while the Germans were distracted by the British attack at Meteren. Bennett’s agreement to the enterprise was another sign that higher command was adopting the tactic as part of its doctrine.

Mullen proposed that three platoon strength patrols infiltrate the German line along the dead ground of the Meteren Becque, then move from north to south behind the German outpost line. By attacking each post in turn from the rear and a flank while the companies manning the Australian outposts fired Lewis guns and rifle grenades, each German post would be attacked from three sides before it was rushed. The 9th Battalion war diary described it as the “pincher” form of attack.151 The tactic was similar to those the 1st Battalion used to capture the farm south of the railway line on 11 July. It relied heavily on the cover of the crop to allow stealth raiders to creep up on the enemy unseen. Men fastened ears of wheat to their helmets and shoulders as camouflage.152

The “pincher” attack was a success. It started at dawn on 19 July and was all over by midday. Nearly every German post was attacked from three sides and those Germans that did not flee were bombed and rushed by camouflaged stealth raiders sweeping out of the crops.153 Australian troops occupied the captured posts, forming a new front line. Their former positions became the support line. The stealth raid captured all the remaining German outposts in the Meteren Becque valley, including the hamlet of Le Waton and the German main line of resistance along a road between Le Waton and Gerbodeon Farm on Merris Ridge. The 9th Battalion stealth raid secured nearly a mile of the German line, 97 prisoners and sixteen machine guns. The battalion suffered 25 casualties. To the north the 9th Scottish Division captured Meteren.154 Two nights later Gerbodeon Farm fell to a formal raid by the 11th Battalion. In the 1st Australian Division’s sector only the village of Merris remained to be captured.

The Australians had outflanked Merris on the northeast and south, and Australian outposts on Merris Ridge looked directly into the western edge of the village. Colonel Maurice Wilder-Neligan, whose fame at Hazebrouck had already been highlighted by his battalion–sized stealth raid on 28 June, came back from a reconnaissance of No Man’s Land with ‘an abrasion on the knee from a bullet and two german [sic] pistols one of which had portions of human

151 9 Bn War Diary, 19/7/18, AWM4/23/26/43.
152 Wrench, Campaigning with the Fighting 9th, p. 242.
153 Wrench, Campaigning with the Fighting 9th, p. 242.
flesh and blood on it’. Wilder-Neligan was ‘reticent as to his movements’, but whatever this skirmish was, it occurred while his battalion was out of the line resting. It had all the hallmarks of a stealth raid, and reflected Wilder-Neligan’s drive to capture Merris using the small unit tactics he and his most daring men preferred.

On 22 July Wilder-Neligan ordered three daylight patrols to probe Merris. They were forced back by sniper fire from the church steeple in the centre of the village. That night he directed three platoon-strength patrols to encircle Merris, two from the northeast and one from the south, with orders to meet east of the village and attack the German garrison from behind. He did not tell General Glasgow of his plans, but 3rd Brigade headquarters and 1st Field Artillery Brigade assisted him, because Wilder-Neligan wanted a light barrage to hide the sound of the patrols as they enveloped the village. The Australian artillery shelling incited a retaliatory barrage along the 1st Australian Division’s front line and this warned General Glasgow that something was happening at Merris. Glasgow was furious when he learnt that Wilder-Neligan had launched an operation without his permission and ordered it cancelled, unless Merris had already been captured.

Merris was far from captured. Wilder-Neligan had lost touch with his patrols because he had no continuous line of communication out to them. The patrols confirmed later that they did not gain touch east of the village and the northeast patrols became embroiled in a fierce fight against a large German working party being reinforced from positions the Australians could not see. Wilder-Neligan sent a runner, who braved the darkness and the confusing ground to make contact with the men with instructions to withdraw. “B” Company’s commander, Captain Roy Hurcombe, went through the fields and hedges to meet his patrols and personally led them back to their lines under heavy fire.

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155 3 Bde War Diary, 16/7/18, AWM4/23/3/33Part1.
156 A stealth raid of 12 men under (3102) Lt WD Sharland MC, 10 Bn, Commercial traveller, of Unley Park, SA. E 16/6/15, aged 24, RTA 1/8/19: ‘after covering about 500 yards, surrounded and seized an enemy post, captured 8 unwounded prisoners and one machine gun’. Lock, The Fighting 10th, p. 83.
158 10 Bn War Diary, App XVI, AWM4/23/27/33.
159 (52) Capt RK Hurcombe MC & Bar, MID, 10 Bn, Storeman, of Mile End, SA. E 19/8/14, aged 25, RTA 22/10/18.
160 German casualties estimated 60–70 killed. 4 prisoners, 1 heavy trench mortar, 2 heavy machine guns, 4 light machine guns. 10 Bn casualties: 2 Killed, 7 wounded. In the official history Bean wrote that ‘a number of prisoners’ were shot. Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 431.
Glasgow’s anger at the unauthorised operation piqued the maverick Wilder-Neligan. In a statement dismissive of his senior officer, Wilder-Neligan wrote afterwards:

In order that the benefits of the advance... should not be entirely lost, both Companies were ordered to fall back to a “Pincer” line round MERRIS... The operation was carried out throughout strictly in conformity with plans, and the ultimate withdrawal in obedience to the order of the Divisional Commander is [sic] no way mitigated its success.¹⁶¹

Nevertheless 10th Battalion had learnt some useful information: Merris was heavily defended and reinforced from the east by Germans from the village of Outersteene. Lieutenant John Searcy remembered, ‘the C.O. was out from dusk till dawn round the trenches’ and talked closely with the men who had been on patrols and stealth raids.¹⁶² What impressed him most was the skill and resourcefulness of some of these soldiers. One of the standouts was Lance Corporal Robert Beatty.¹⁶³ He had gone out with three other ranks in daylight and located a strong enemy post, a fight ensued and Beatty captured one wounded prisoner. During the attempted envelopment of Merris, Beatty went out with another patrol and captured a post after a ‘sharp fight’. He rushed an enemy soldier who was trying to bring a machine gun into action and killed him with his revolver, ‘saving the patrol’ and capturing a further four men and three machine guns.¹⁶⁴ Sergeant Bill Faint,¹⁶⁵ a 10th Battalion original, widely regarded as one of the ‘finest’ soldiers in the battalion, demonstrated what could be done in daylight: he captured a machine gun crew and a section of riflemen by ‘carefully working his way to the rear of the post’.¹⁶⁶ Several days later Lance Corporal Arnold Warner,¹⁶⁷ using the same tactics, captured a German machine gun post.¹⁶⁸ With men like these in the ranks Wilder-Neligan was determined to take Merris by patrols using stealth raids.¹⁶⁹ On 25 July, Glasgow issued him formal authority to capture Merris. What followed was a plan ‘deceptively simple in concept, although highly complex in execution’, a combination of the all-arms battle utilising all the fighting resources of the division, and stealth raids.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Searcy, M July 1918, AWMPR84/075.
¹⁶³ 7103 Sgt RA Beatty DCM, MM, 10 Bn, Civil servant, of Parkside, SA. E 18/9/16, aged 21, RTA 18/7/19.
¹⁶⁴ Beatty, Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0021. Beatty’s best friend in the battalion was RSM Ernest “Raggy” Holland. Hollands part in stealth raids is detailed in chapters 2 & 4.
¹⁶⁵ 355 Sgt W Faint MM & Bar, 10 Bn, Cleaner (Railways), of Hindmarsh, SA. E 19/8/14, aged 19, KIA 11/8/18.
¹⁶⁶ In 355 Faint, Red Cross File, AWM1DRL/0428; Faint, Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0021.
¹⁶⁷ 6606 Pte A Warner MM, 10 Bn, Labourer, of Grunthal, SA. E 21/8/16, aged 19, RTA 31/3/19.
¹⁶⁸ Warner, Citation MM, AWM28/1/66/0028.
¹⁶⁹ ‘[B]y patrols no major operation’ in Searcy, M AWMPR84/075. For 10 Bn patrols 22-30/7/18 see 10 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App XVI, AWM4/23/27/33.
¹⁷⁰ Stevenson, To Win the Battle, p. 189.
Wilder-Neligan developed the plan to capture Merris ‘in consultation’ with Jeremiah Selmes, the acting CO of the 1st Field Artillery Brigade. It combined the power of Vickers guns and trench mortars to barrage known strong points, and the field artillery to fire a creeping barrage around Merris. Behind this barrage, two companies of the 10th Battalion (“A” and “B”) would advance simultaneously from the northeast and south of Merris and meet east of it on the Outtersteene road. Zero hour would be 12.15am, 30 July. As the companies advanced, they would drop a platoon and establish a post at designated points about 100 yards apart. This would make a total of eight platoon posts as the new front line. The original line west of Merris would become the support line; the village would be surrounded. At 1.20am the shellfire on the village would cease for an hour. The headquarters platoon would enter the village from the northeast via the road from Gerbodeon Farm. They would have one hour to mop up the village before thermite shells fired 1,000 yards to the east south east, over Acklon Farm, would mark the recommencement of the barrage. It was hoped the Germans in Outtersteene, on seeing further shells falling on Merris, would be tricked into thinking it was still held by their men. Wilder-Neligan instructed his companies occupying the new posts to scoop up unwitting parties of the enemy as they came down the Outtersteene road into Merris. At 4.25am, just after daylight, the barrage on the village would cease. Here Wilder-Neligan proposed tactics that relied heavily on the skill and initiative of the men. Patrols of no more than six men were to capture isolated Germans in and around Merris using stealth raids. Wilder-Neligan wrote later, ‘[t]he novelty of the plan undoubtedly appealed to the men and served to increase their confidence’.

Before the battle had even commenced desultory German shellfire reduced “B” Company’s fighting strength to just 70 men. Minutes before zero hour the platoon whose job was to establish contact with “A” Company east of Merris, had an NCO killed and an officer and eight men wounded. Captain Roy Hurcombe reorganised the men, leaving the decimated platoon in the first post and urging the others forward when the Australian creeping barrage commenced. Each platoon was 150 yards apart, with two scouts leading and Lewis gunners

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171 Stevenson, To Win the Battle, p. 188. Maj JC Selmes DSO, MID, 1 FAB, Public accountant, of Sydney, NSW. E 18/8/14, aged 35, RTA 9/10/18.
protecting the flanks. They advanced in snakelike lines round Merris from the northeast and south. The leading platoons of “A” and “B” Company met on the Outersteene road at 12.36am, 21 minutes after zero hour.\textsuperscript{175} With Merris surrounded, focus turned to strengthening and wiring the new positions. Hurcombe, Company Sergeant Major Albert Neave\textsuperscript{176} and two runners captured 22 Germans and six machine guns while carrying bombs and wire to the new posts. An NCO and a private captured fifteen men and a machine gun in a similar fashion.\textsuperscript{177} At 1.20am the artillery barrage on Merris temporarily ceased. Acting RSM George Wilson (“Raggy” Holland had been wounded in action in June) led the headquarters platoon down the road from Gérbodeon Farm to the burning ruins of the church in the centre of the village.\textsuperscript{178} Some of Wilson’s men had drunk in cafés and estaminets in Merris in 1916 and 1917. They led the party through the village. They captured 28 Germans and threw phosphorous bombs into dugouts and cellars. One hour after entering the village, a brilliant explosion of thermite shells over Acklon Farm warned Wilson that the barrage was about to resume. With his pipe lit and walking stick in hand, he led his men and their prisoners carrying five machine guns out of the village into the battalion’s line near Gérbodeon Farm.

When the barrage recommenced it became clear that the trick had worked. The German command thought it still held the village and continued to order reinforcements from Outersteene into the trap. Private William Cilento\textsuperscript{179} shot a German officer and captured seven men walking down the Outersteene road.\textsuperscript{180} Similar incidents happened repeatedly. An Australian sent back from one of the northern posts for water was captured. Soon after, he convinced a German officer and around 40 men to surrender to the Australians.\textsuperscript{181} A German runner was intercepted carrying a message out of Merris on which an officer had written that his men still held the village although the ‘situation was very obscure’.\textsuperscript{182} At 2.40am Wilder-Neligan reported to 3rd Brigade headquarters that the battalion suspected ‘there are some Bosche [in the fields] about Merris inside our lines and that his men would ‘clean these up’

\textsuperscript{175} Lock, \textit{The Fighting 10th}, p. 86; Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 434 n. 61.
\textsuperscript{176} 131 Acting CSM AGF Neave MM, 10 Bn, Railway porter, of Exeter, SA. E 19/8/14, aged 24, RTA 23/10/18. Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0025.
\textsuperscript{177} 1469 Sgt EW Mann MM, 10 Bn, Blacksmith, of Alberton, SA. E 26/11/14, aged 20, RTA 12/4/19; 964 Pte D Winter MM, 10 Bn, Clerk, of Port Wakefield, SA. E 10/3/15, aged 18, RTA 31/1/19. Mann & Winter Citation MM AWM28/1/66/23.
\textsuperscript{178} The headquarters platoon consisted of a young officer, batmen, orderlies and cooks led into Merris by 116 CSM EG Wilson DCM, MM, 10 Bn, Cabinet maker, of Hindmarsh, SA. E 19/8/14, aged 22, RTA 8/10/18.
\textsuperscript{179} 7219 Pte WA Cilento MM, 10 Bn, Labourer, of Alberton, SA. E 31/1/17, aged 18, RTA 6/9/19.
\textsuperscript{180} Cilento, Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0044.
\textsuperscript{182} Lock, \textit{The Fighting 10th}, p. 86.
with patrols after the barrage ceased at dawn. At 4.25am the bombardment on Merris stopped and the village was mopped up again. Albert Neave, previously carrying bombs and wire to the front line with the help of two men, captured 46 Germans hiding in cellars. One was a company commander.

The end of the bombardment marked the moment when the 10th Battalion men in the new posts surrounding the village were given a free hand to use daylight stealth raiding tactics to deal with isolated German posts in crops and behind hedges between the old front line and the new.

Eyewitnesses believed Bill Faint was responsible for capturing 22 prisoners and two machine guns during several of these stealth raids. Faint also killed at least twenty Germans by repeatedly sniping, bombing and rushing posts. At one, he sniped a German sentry before bombing it. His officer then rushed it, capturing seven men. Faint brought in a machine gun. Lance Corporal Francis Elvidge, a battalion scout since Gallipoli, cut off a group of five Germans. They refused to surrender when they realised Elvidge was alone. Elvidge responded by killing all except one whom he made a prisoner. Private Horace Beaton was said to ‘always’ volunteer for ‘enterprises of a daring nature’. During the stealth raids around Merris that morning, he saw a German machine gun crew firing from a post facing the new posts. Beaton went out with a mate to take them on. His mate covered him from a hiding place in the crop while Beaton crept on alone. He got within a few feet of the German machine gunners before he was seen and fired on. Beaton charged the post, killed four men, and convinced seven to surrender and hand over their machine gun. Lieutenant Francis Pennington saw several Germans in a farmhouse ahead of the new posts. He crawled through a field while a Lewis gunner covered him by firing into the house. Pennington got round to the back door and threw in some grenades, then walked in armed with a revolver. He captured nine men. One of the last German posts to fall that morning gave the greatest indication of how conclusively

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183 Wilder-Neligan used the term patrols when referring to stealth raids. 3 Bde War Diary, July 1918, App 31, AWM4/23/3/33Part2; Lock, *The Fighting 10th*, p. 85.
184 Neave, Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0025.
185 Faint, Citation Bar to MM, AWM28/2/58/0020.
186 Sharland, Citation MC AWM28/2/58/0016; Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, p. 436.
187 2057 Pte FT Elvidge MM, 10 Bn, Labourer, of Broken Hill, NSW. E 15/3/15, aged 20, RTA 31/3/19.
188 Elvidge, Citation MM AWM28/2/58/0037.
189 3684 Cpl HE Beaton MM & Bar, 10 Bn, Student, of Lucindale, SA. E 11/8/15, aged 19, RTA 16/6/19.
190 Beaton, Citation MM, AWM28/2/58/0035.
191 (73) Lt FE Pennington MC, DCM, 10 Bn, Electrical engineer, of Carlton, Vic. E 21/8/14, aged 21, RTA 21/3/19.
192 Pennington, Citation MC AWM28/2/58/0005.
the Germans had been tricked and how masterful was the Australian skill in stealth raiding. The post was west of Merris, and its garrison was facing west, towards what they thought was the Australian front line: they were captured by an NCO and five men coming from Merris to their east. The six Australians killed fifteen men and captured five machine guns and a further 27 men who admitted they had no idea that Merris had been captured.193

At 10.10am the men in the new front line were enjoying a hot stew. Merris was captured, and the fields around it mopped up by stealth raiders. German counter-attacks had been beaten off.194 The haul of German prisoners was four officers and 175 men, more than there were Australians in the attack. The 10th Battalion estimated they inflicted over 300 casualties for the loss of four Australians killed and 31 wounded.195 They had expected to find the demoralised 13th Reserve Division defending Merris. However, their prisoners were men of the 4th Division, a crack German unit, previously held in reserve awaiting offensive operations.

The victory, which came quickly on the heels of the British capture of Meteren, stopped any German offensive plans to capture Hazebrouck. The British Inspector General of Training described the attack as ‘the best show ever done by a battalion in France’.196 This and subsequent studies of the battle acknowledged the aptitude of the 1st Australian Division and praised the sophistication of the barrage and the timing of the mopping up operation inside the village.197 Less well acknowledged is that stealth raiders were responsible for most of the German casualties and prisoners.

Bean wrote that throughout July, General Plumer, the Commanding officer of the Second Army, ‘repeatedly’ visited the 1st Division headquarters, to ask Glasgow “‘What is it your fellows have been doing’”. Glasgow would recount to Plumer the stealth raiding tactics of the men, so far as he understood them: “‘They get in the flank of a German post & then scoop it up, & then make use of the opening made so as to outflank & scoop up another post & so on’”. Plumer would look at the map, ‘then turn & walk back to his car, & Glasgow could see his shoulders shaking with laughter as he rolled down the path’.198

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193 Lock, The Fighting 10th, p. 89
196 In Stevenson, To Win the Battle, p. 190.
197 Stevenson, To Win the Battle, pp. 189-190; Holmes, A Magnificent Anzac, pp. 111-114; Molkentin, Wartime, Issue 43, p. 23.
198 Bean notes, AWM38/3DRL/606/252/1/1918–1935.
The capture of Merris was the last battle the 1st Division fought as part of Plumer’s Army. Shortly afterwards orders were received that it would be leaving Second Army to re-join its “brothers” on the Somme. On 4 August, Plumer pulled Glasgow and some of his Australian officers aside. He told them.

“You are leaving my army. I am sorry to lose you, but I wish you success. You know gentlemen... it is not my practice to make eulogistic speeches – there will be plenty of time for that after the war. At the same time I would like to tell you that there is no division, certainly in my army, perhaps in the whole British Army, which has done more to destroy the morale of the enemy than the 1st Australian Division.”

Over the previous four months the 1st Division had defended Hazebrouck against concerted attacks, then steadily advanced while the rest of Second Army was prostrate. Stealth raiders demoralised and decimated once strong German divisions, including some of the best that had been sent into the line to stem the ‘rot’ caused by stealth raiders. Some Australians were seconded to British brigades to teach Australian tactics, and the stealth raider Neil Maddox was asked to lecture on the tactic at a corps school for officers. Plumer, inspired by the tactics of the 1st Division, ordered his British divisions to emulate the Australians and pursue

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200 Bean used ‘rot’ in his diary to describe the effect of Australian stealth raiders on the German outpost garrisons near Hazebrouck on 11/7/18. AWM38/3DRL/606/116/25,25a.
201 Maddox lecture see Edwards, MS July 1918, AWMPR89/050.
the withdrawing Germans using daylight patrols and stealth raiding tactics.\(^{202}\) Bob Traill heard of several deaths when Australian stealth raiders tried to inspire British troops: ‘Mason\(^{203}\) a very nice chap, of the 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion... was killed’, he heard, ‘as was my Corporal Schofield\(^{204}\) ... in a [stealth] raid [leading British troops]... neither of them were authorised’ to do.\(^{205}\)

In the 1\(^{st}\) Division stealth raids continued right up until the Australians were withdrawn from Second Army’s front on 2 August. On 1 August Glasgow instructed the 2\(^{nd}\) Brigade to reduce the number of patrols because he did not want to risk men’s lives at the end of the campaign. Despite his instructions stealth raiders boasted they could ‘put their hand’ on more prisoners.\(^{206}\) At least ten more Germans were captured before the 1\(^{st}\) Division withdrew.\(^{207}\)

The men of the 1\(^{st}\) Division did not know it, but they were days away from taking part in the most significant offensive of the war.


\(^{203}\) Lt AC Stuart-Mason, 3 Bn, Bank officer, of Randwick, NSW. E 18/11/15, aged 25, KIA 25/7/18.

\(^{204}\) 2410A Cpl WJ Schofield, 1 Bn, Engine driver, of Sydney, NSW. E 22/5/15, aged 22, KIA 25/7/18

\(^{205}\) Traill, D 22/7/18, AWM2DRL/711.

\(^{206}\) Bean, D 31/7/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/44-45.

\(^{207}\) 7 Bn War Diary, 1/8/18, AWM4/23/24/42; 8 Bn War Diary, 1/8/18, AWM4/23/25/44; Bean, D 31/7/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/44-45.
CHAPTER SEVEN

‘The Tommy Captain nearly fell on their necks and kissed them’

Stealth raids after the 8 August offensive

The capture of Merris was the culmination of three and a half months in which the 1st Division advanced over a mile on a front of 5,000 yards, and captured nearly 1,000 prisoners, most by stealth raiding. The commanding officer of XV Corps, General Beauvoir De Lisle, acknowledged that the Australians did ‘such damage to the troops of the enemy’ that nine divisions were replaced.¹ On the Somme, stealth raiding advanced the Australian line three-quarters of a mile between 29 March and 6 May, and a further two miles by 8 July.² The tactic was so successful and so widespread among Australian troops that higher command could not ignore it. A ‘slowly widening circle of “contacts”’, which included corps, army commanders, and General Haig, recognised that the Australians’ aggressive defence ‘was partly due to marked capacity in their officers and N.C.O.’s and intelligent initiative in their men’ at a time when it was the Germans who were expected to attack.³ GHQ instructed the Australian divisions to send ‘special patrols’⁴ to the British Army to teach Australian stealth raiding tactics. In the Second Army the number of United States Army officers and men sent to train with the Australian 1st Division was more than four times greater than those sent to any other division of XV Corps. On the Somme, General Rawlinson, Fourth Army, ordered officers from British III Corps to go to the Australian divisions to gain experience in patrolling and raiding. III Corps asked for Australian special patrol instructors and got them.⁵

The importance of stealth raiding went beyond its influence on British Army tactics. Australian stealth raids, the battle of Hamel, and several formal operations on Morlancourt Ridge convinced General Rawlinson of the weakness of the German defences facing Amiens, and the morale supremacy the Australians had gained. On 13 July Rawlinson asked Haig for a reinforcement of five divisions to carry out an offensive. On 23 July GHQ approved. The next

¹ In Belford, Legs Eleven, p. 606.
² Gammage, Broken Years, p. 202n. Gammage writes ‘In May and June formal Australian attacks on the Somme gained ground not included in calculations here’.
⁴ The term is used in the diary of DTW Neville to refer to his work as a patrol instructor attached to III Corps, 17-22/7/18. Private papers courtesy of Dalton F Neville, Tura Beach, NSW.
day Haig met Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the supreme commander of the Allied forces in France, and the decision was made to launch the 8 August offensive at Amiens.

As far as the Australian infantryman was concerned, the skills developed in stealth raids would benefit him in two important ways when he went ‘in at the kill’ on 8 August. The men believed they had a uniquely Australian fighting style that brought out ‘the true qualities of the “digger”’: ‘ingeniousness, resourcefulness, and personal initiative.’ Confidence was at all-time high: ‘we... knew we had Fritz beaten’, wrote Jack Southey, ‘We could smell the gum leaves of Australia’.

Several stealth raiders mentioned in this thesis were killed or wounded before and during the 8 August offensive. Francis Burtenshaw was killed on 15 May. Jack Bruggy and “Raggy” Holland were invalided home after wounds sustained in German raids against Mont de Merris in June. Harry Garlick was dead by a sniper’s bullet. Alf Richards died of wounds in July. On 22 July Dalton Neville was severely wounded while leading a stealth raid composed entirely of Australian special patrol instructors attached to the British 58th Division. Australian, British and German posts fired on and practically wiped out Neville’s men when they tried to attack a German post by creeping up on it through a neighbouring Australian battalion’s front. The 31st Battalion whose men did most of the damage to Neville’s stealth raiders reported: ‘It was certainly a very regrettable incident, but this battalion is in no way to blame... It shows that the front line garrison was very much on alert’. The bushman Lieutenant Neil Maddox MC and Bar, one of the greatest of the stealth raiders, was hit early on 9 August in the fighting at

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6 Pedersen, Monash, pp. 234-235.
7 Wrench, Campaigning with the Fighting 9th, p. 242.
8 Carne, M July, AWM2DRL/0013.
9 In Swinton (ed), Twenty Years After, p. 345. Similarly, on 2/8/18, a digger wrote home: ‘As far as this terrible conflict is concerned there is a much brighter outlook at the present time than there has been for some time past and I really think this is the beginning of the end’. 2658 Sgt LF Elliott, 56 Bn, Compositor, of Marrickville, NSW. E 23/5/15, aged 26, DOI 18/2/20, AWM2DRL/0213.
10 31 Bn War Diary, 22/7/18, AWM4/23/48/36. The special patrol instructors who accompanied Neville on the stealth raid were: 3357 Pte J Mathison, 53 Bn, Storeman, of Croydon, NSW. E 8/8/15, aged 24, KIA 22/7/18; 3374 Pte AR Martin, 53 Bn, Packer, of Paddington, NSW. E 26/8/15, aged 18, DOW 22/7/18; 2918 L/Cpl RA Howes, 56 Bn, Engineer, of Riverton, SA. E 8/6/16, RTA 23/6/19; 1629 Sgt PF Cahill, 54 Bn,Labourer, of Wellington, NSW. E 17/1/16, aged 22, RTA 20/11/18; 2404 Pte J Finch, 55 Bn, Farmer, of Yass, NSW. E 6/3/16, aged 22, DOW 22/7/18; 2165 Pte JW Hagger, 55 Bn, Station hand, of Bombala, NSW. E 25/1/16, aged 23, RTA 9/12/18; 5152 Pte AE Leabeater, 56 Bn, Carter, of Parramatta, NSW. E 4/1/16, aged 19, KIA 22/7/18; 5145 Pte MJ Kerr, 56 Bn, Boilermaker, of Paddington, NSW. E 4/1/16, aged 23, RTA 8/1/19; 1992 Pte JP Walsh, 57 Bn, Boot salesman, of North Sydney, NSW. E 24/1/16, aged 21, KIA 22/7/18; 4847 Pte RJ Linford, 59 Bn, Labourer, of Warragul, Vic. E 16/8/15, aged 18, KIA 22/7/18; 2800 Sgt EW Stanford, 59 Bn, Printer, of Thornbury, Vic. E 13/7/18, aged 18, RTA 28/8/19; 2913 Pte AT Higgins, 59 Bn, Railway clerk, of Newtown, NSW. E 18/9/16, aged 21, RTA 3/3/19. These men were identified courtesy of the private collection of Dalton F Neville.
Harbonnières and had a leg amputated. Maddox wrote to a mate in the battalion from his hospital bed, ‘So sorry I had to piss off just as the fun was beginning, but I copped a fairly large shell’. William Shepherd was killed in the same battle. Dozens more stealth raiders mentioned in this narrative would be killed or maimed before the Armistice. From his hospital bed the stoic Maddox asked his mate ‘Write soon old soul,’ and ‘let me know how you all got on… I’m dying to know.’ His mate was dead by the time the letter reached the battalion. But it might not have surprised Maddox that in the last battles of the war other men went forward to make stealth raids.

East of Amiens on 8 August 1918, five Australian divisions advanced seven miles and captured all of their objectives as well as 7,925 prisoners and 173 guns. The Canadian Corps on their right made similar gains. Despite this ‘brilliant success’, the ‘black day’ of the German Army, the Australians, with their left pressed against the south bank of the Somme River three miles east of Hamel, finished the day under duress. In III Corps sector north of the river, the British 58th Division failed to reach its objective, prominent high ground known as Chipilly Spur. This ridge rises over the surrounding country, and runs north to south from Morlancourt plateau to form a peninsula in a bend of the Somme. German machine gunners and artillery on the spur fired into the flank and rear of the Australian advance, inflicting casualties, destroying gun batteries and harassing supply lines. Monash proposed to the British command at III Corps that an Australian brigade cross the river and capture the spur to keep up the momentum of the advance.

Friday 9 August 1918 was a warm clear day. At around 10am Company Quarter Master Sergeant Jack Hayes and his friend Sergeant Harold Andrews of “C” Company, 1st Battalion, left their battalion lines near the village of Cerisy and went exploring the villages along the Somme. Hayes was expecting to be granted “Anzac leave”, a newly instituted form of six-month leave to Australia for men who enlisted in 1914. Andrews recalled that Hayes

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11 Bean, Notes, AWM38/196/40-41.
12 In L (Maddox to GL Makin) 12/8/18, papers of (703) Lt GL Makin, 5 Bn, Clerk, of Middle Park, Vic. E 18/8/14, aged 20, DOW 8/9/18. Makin AWM1DRL/0473.
13 Maddox, L 12/8/18, in Makin AWM1DRL/0473.
14 On 7-14/8/18 the Australian Corps suffered 6,491 casualties, a quarter of its strength on entering the battle. http://www.anzacsinfrance.com/1918/
18 Biographical details see Introduction n42.
19 (3232) Lt HD Andrews DCM, 1 Bn, Farmer, of Wauchope, NSW. E 14/7/15, aged 18, RTA 6/7/19.
‘suggested a stroll’, because he was looking ‘to obtain some worthwhile souvenirs’ to take back to Australia. ‘Hayes and self unarmed, in our stroll discovered a footbridge well to the west of Chipilly, as we were satisfied this village was empty, we crossed at a point that was about ½ mile from the enemy’. No shots were fired, so ‘we decided to have a close look at the village as it was rumoured that our battalion was to make a crossing at night’ to capture the village and Chipilly Spur.20

Hayes and Andrews had kept their hands free to carry souvenirs, but now armed themselves with abandoned German rifles and ammunition and ‘stalked’ a chalk pit north of the village. They heard yelling, turned and saw a group of British soldiers waving at them from the front line, half a mile behind them. Casually the two Australians walked back, to ‘pay their respects’.21 The soldiers were from the 2/10th London Battalion, which had failed to capture Chipilly on the opening day of the offensive and suffered heavy casualties. That morning they had been reinforced by 100 conscripts, eighteen and nineteen year olds with no battle experience.22 The two veteran Australian sergeants yarnd with them for a while then took the footbridge back to their battalion. At company headquarters the atmosphere was tense. The British failure to capture Chipilly Spur was holding up the general advance. Hayes, having just come from the area, volunteered to take a patrol across the river after dinner and occupy the village.23 The battalion’s commanding officer, Colonel Bertie Stacy, was away at a school and Major Alexander Mackenzie24 was commanding. Mackenzie relayed Hayes’ suggestion to the Brigade Commander, Iven Mackay.25 A quartermaster sergeant was suggesting tactics to a brigadier. But Mackay had word from the British 58th Division that they would be attacking Chipilly Spur again at 5.30pm, reinforced by the inexperienced United States 131st Regiment. He rejected Hayes’ suggestion.26

At 4pm the British commenced an artillery barrage as a prelude to their attack, and at 5.30 the Australians watching from south of the river saw American troops ‘sweep along the upper part

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20 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
21 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
23 Andrews, L 29/12/29 AWM1DRL/0043.
24 Lt Col AK Mackenzie DSO, MC, 1 Bn, Clerk, of Bondi, NSW. E 27/8/14, aged 26, RTA 3/5/19.
26 See 1 Bn War Diary, 9/8/18, AWM4/23/18/34; 2/10 Bn War Diary, August 1918, ‘Summary of operations’, p. 11 in WO/95/30009, pp. 121-122 of 199.
of the [Chipilly] ridge... and enter Gressaire Wood’. But nearest the Australians, the British attack aimed at the western terrace of Chipilly Spur and the village did not go well. Chipilly Spur was the key to the German defences on the Somme. The western terrace was thick with German machine guns that overlooked the 58th Division assembly area in the gullies and woods to the west. The German defenders were practically immune to tanks and fired into the British infantry as they attempted to advance across the gully and up the slopes of the spur. The British objective was a mile further east, where the high ground of the spur, 85 feet above sea level, falls sharply to the marshlands of the Somme winding slowly below. However few of the British infantry involved in the attack had any idea that this was the objective. Private Bill Gillman, 2/2nd London Battalion, described the attack on the western terrace of the spur:

Unknown to us there were from ten to twenty heavy German machine guns in emplacements. My God, he really opened up! He let us have it. He just swept us. I looked round as I was advancing and you could see the numbers of our people melting away, just dropping all around you. Those that fell were shot over again... There was nothing you could do. It was getting so bad, as I took my steps I thought, “The next one will be it!” ... I jumped for this big shell hole... I knew there was no hope of getting any orders because there was nobody to give any. The bullets were hitting the back of the shell hole; it was raining bullets.

The watching Australians quickly realised that the British attack was faltering. It took Mackay only twenty minutes to send a written message to Mackenzie authorising Hayes and Andrews to take a ‘strong patrol’ across the river to ‘see what the position was’. Usually a strong patrol meant a platoon or platoons – at the bare minimum eighteen men with a Lewis gun under an officer. But Hayes’ experience and the battalion’s experience in the stealth raids at Hazebrouck had radically altered these out-dated tactics. Jack Hayes took just six men, and had them ready to go within ten minutes of receiving Mackay’s instructions.

At 6pm Hayes led the six-man patrol over the footbridge under scattered fire from Chipilly Spur. The first British troops they found were remnants of two platoons of “D” Company, 2/10th Londons, under a temporary captain, Jack Berrell. Berrell told Hayes that his men were held up by heavy machine gun fire from the high ground along the western terrace of the spur.

29 In Hart, 1918, pp. 341-342.
30 1 Bn War Diary, 9/8/18, AWM4/23/18/34. In 1929 Andrews wrote that the permission came through at 2pm but contemporary accounts put it after the British attack commenced at 4pm.
31 2/Lt (A/Capt) JS Berrell, 2/7 Bn, London Regt, attd. 2/10 Bn.
Berrell had orders to attack these German machine gun posts by clearing the village of Chipilly and outflanking them from the south. His battalion commander had arranged for a barrage of smoke, high explosive and Vickers machine guns at 7.30pm under which Berrell was expected to attack.\(^{32}\) Hayes volunteered the six Australians to act as Berrell’s scouts and reconnoitre Chipilly for them.\(^{33}\) Berrell tried to discourage him because the 2/10\(^{th}\) London Battalion had not been able to get a foothold in Chipilly in over 30 hours of fighting. But the six Australians were keen to look for souvenirs, even if this meant leading Berrell’s men into the village under fire.\(^{34}\) Before Berrell could object, the six ‘tore for the village, through a veritable hail of machine gun and rifle fire’ from the spur above. They spaced their run – each man twelve yards apart – so that a burst of fire could not wipe them all out.\(^{35}\) They reached a chateau winded but unhurt. Berrell and his men ran after them. Hayes sent Private William Kane\(^{36}\) to bring up a British Lewis gun crew. Privates Stevens\(^{37}\) and Turpin,\(^{38}\) usually stretcher-bearers, had volunteered as riflemen for the patrol. They were sent through the village to look for Germans. Andrews and Private “Jerry” Fuller,\(^{39}\) a diminutive youth who was usually the company commander’s batman, went northeast ‘across country’ to reconnoitre the spur. While they went, Hayes watched the German machine gunners on the western terrace as they fired on the British infantry. When he was satisfied with this reconnaissance he took Berrell’s men plus the Lewis gunners north, up the spur, to a position near the quarry he had explored that morning. It was an excellent position to fire into the flank of the German machine guns on the terrace. Jack Hayes was orchestrating an attack that would turn the momentum of an entire Allied division’s flank and win a battle.

It was just before 7.30pm. This is known because at that time, ‘promptly and effectively’, the British barrage in support of Berrell’s orders commenced.\(^{40}\) It landed practically on top of the six Australians and Berrell’s men. The fire was intense. Smoke shells shrouded the spur in a veil and Vickers gun rounds cracked overhead, so close that it was obvious that the British machine

\(^{32}\) Berrell’s company was meant to be in close support, but 2/2 Bn had failed to get forward and D Coy 2/10 Bn became the most advanced British troops on the battlefield, although they still had not entered Chipilly. 2/10 Bn War Diary, August 1918, ‘Summary of Operations’, p. 11 in W0/95/30009, pp. 121-122 of 199; 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/18/34.
\(^{33}\) 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/18/34.
\(^{34}\) Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
\(^{35}\) Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
\(^{36}\) 3845 Pte WH Kane MM, 1 Bn, Sleeper cutter, of Castlemaine, Vic. E 15/7/15, aged 22, RTA 21/12/18.
\(^{37}\) 5094 Pte GA Stevens MM, 1 Bn, Carter, of Young, NSW. E 31/1/16, aged 25, RTA 18/7/19.
\(^{38}\) 7061 L/Cpl JR Turpin MSM, 1 Bn, Labourer, of Broken Hill, NSW. E 25/10/16, aged 27, Disch 20/2/20.
\(^{39}\) 7082 Pte A Fuller MM, 1 Bn, Tailor, of Alexandria, NSW. E 17/5/16, aged 18, RTA 12/12/18. Fuller and Turpin’s regimental numbers are close, suggesting they might have known each other since enlistment.
\(^{40}\) 2/10 Bn War Diary, August 1918, ‘Summary of operations’, p. 13 in W0/95/30009, p. 123 of 199.
gunners had mistaken them for the enemy.\footnote{The 2/10 Bn’s war diary states that the party [actually led by Hayes] ‘had worked through the smoke barrage faster than was anticipated’. 2/10 Bn War Diary, August 1918, ‘Summary of operations’, p. 13 in WO/95/30009, p. 123 of 199; Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.}

The Tommies’ began to withdraw, but the battle discipline of the Australians held. Hayes and Andrews decided to use the smoke as cover to creep around the southern crest of the spur and outflank the German posts on the high ground, effectively isolating the German machine gunners on the western terrace by cutting them off from their flank and rear. The two slipped through the long grass into dead ground. Fuller and Kane followed, leaving Turpin and Stevens near the village. They moved in pairs, one to assault and one to support, just as at Hazebrouck on 11 July. Along the crest of Chipilly Spur, German machine gunners peered into the smoke, waiting for the English to attempt another frontal assault, unaware that the four Australians were creeping around their southern flank.

Hayes and Andrews saw a German post above a sunken road leading to Etinehem. They shouldered their rifles. Both were first class shots.\footnote{Hayes marksmanship: 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 1, ‘Five rounds “application”’ & ‘10 rounds “rapid”’, AWM4/23/18/34; Barwick, D 30/11/17, ‘the day when C Coys crack shots went shooting’, MLMSS1493.} Andrews ‘often thought’ his ‘initiation in... sniping’ came from boyhood on the family farm at Wauchope and that military training turned...
his skill to what he called ‘deadly purpose’! Both men ‘cut loose’ with their rifles, then got into position to rush the post. Reinforced by Fuller and Kane, Andrews fired down the length of the German post, while Hayes crept down the sunken road. Then Hayes attacked, firing and yelling as he charged up the embankment. He practically fell into a small post he had not seen. A German fired at him point blank. The bullet singed Hayes’ tunic but he was not hit. He killed the man and captured two others. He dragged his prisoners back to Andrews, Kane and Fuller, and together they ‘fled for the chalk pit’ a mile to the west on the other side of the spur.

Here they found Captain Berrell and the two platoons of “D” Company 2/10th Londons, talking about what to do. Andrews told them to advance ‘before [the] smoke lifted’. Then he, Hayes, Fuller and Kane took off again on the run across the spur. Allied artillery was pounding the area. Infantry of the Australian 41st Battalion in Cerisy had turned around a battery of German 5.9 inch field guns and were firing them at the German positions on the Spur, adding to the firepower of the British guns. A watching Australian called the outcome ‘a wonderful and appalling sight’. He did not know that four Australians were pressing close to the barrage, outflanking the Germans on the high ground. Andrews recalled that they were blown off their feet several times by the concussion of their own shell bursts. They had experienced the worst of shellfire and become professional in their skill at reading it. Andrews had been wounded at Pozieres in 1916, lying helpless in the forward trenches under a tremendous barrage for 30 hours before English volunteer stretcher-bearers carried him out. Hayes admitted to a case of shellshock at Mouquet Farm in August 1916, which he reckoned he managed to sleep off. Men who survived this sort of shellfire generally learnt from it: ‘an experienced man can tell when a shell is going to fall very close by the sound it makes in the last few seconds of approach’. At Hazebrouck in 1918 Hayes laughed (and cursed) at shellfire and actually went into a barrage, to guide less experienced men to safety.

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43 Andrews, M 1975, MLDQC2754.
44 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
45 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
46 41 Bn were organised by Lt Col Tic Williams DSO, MID, CgD (Fr), 10 FAB, Dentist, of Stanmore, NSW. 20/10/15, aged 35, RTA 4/6/19, attached to 4 Div Arty HQ. See Andrews M 1975, MLDQC2754; 41 Bn War Diary 9/8/18, AWM4/23/58/22.
47 Deitz, D 9/8/18, AWMPRO1937.
48 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
49 Andrews, D 23-24/7/16, MLMSS7504.
51 Jackson, D 31/8/18, AWM3DRL/3846.
52 Barwick, D 15/4/18, MLMSS1493.
Photo 31 View of the Somme River from Chipilly Spur, 17 August 1918. This is where the six stealth raiders advanced on 9 August 1918. (AWM E02989A)

Photo 32 View of the Somme River from Chipilly Spur, 2012. (Lucas Jordan 2012)
On Chipilly Spur they pushed close to their own barrage because it had a force and momentum of its own. The concealing smoke was their greatest ally and they knew the Germans would be dead, cowering or retreating from the force of the explosions. Hayes, Andrews, Fuller and Kane pushed further down the sunken road, collecting German potato masher grenades from posts that had been annihilated by the shellfire. They bombed several ‘German dugouts and posts into silence’ as they passed.53

They saw some Germans running into a heavily armed post about twenty yards from the road. Hayes decided to attack.54 He skilfully divided his patrol. The tactic mirrored the battalion’s daylight stealth raids at Hazebrouck: two men approached the post from a flank and two from the rear, then ‘rushed in for bayonet work’.55 The Germans were utterly surprised. They expected a frontal assault from the British who were still the best part of a mile away. They did not expect to be assailed by four men apparently coming out of the ground. The result was panic. The German garrison fled for a dugout, leaving seven machine guns. Hayes and his men persuaded them to surrender by detonating a Mills bomb at the dugout entrance. A German officer and 31 other ranks came out with their hands up, crying for mercy.56

The prisoners were handed to a 2/10th London party, which had followed the four Australians on Andrews’ instructions.57 The prisoners were ‘marshalled’ into the sunken road ‘just as the smokescreen rolled away’ leaving clear visibility for hundreds of yards.58 Some Germans could be seen retreating towards the village of Etinehem and across the Somme marshes.59 Fuller and Kane pursued them while Andrews brought one of the captured machine guns into action and opened fire:

> Fuller [and Kane] went round behind & collected 9 unwounded prisoners just as gun jammed. Bringing another gun into action I kept firing as the stragglers cleared out leaving 2 guns for Fuller [and Kane] to bring in.60

Andrews’ fire also encouraged the rest of Captain Berrell’s men to advance in the wake of the Australian patrol.61 A 2/10th London sergeant, Herbert Darby, led a party and mopped up some

53 Andrews, M 1975, MLDOC2754.
54 Hayes, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/44Part1.
55 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
56 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/18/34; Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
57 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
58 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
59 The history of the 202nd RIR, claims its I Bn and elements of III/137 IR received orders to withdraw and make a front along the Meaulte-Etinehem Road. See Bean, Official History, Vol VI, pp. 652-653.
60 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
machine gun posts completely cut off on the western terrace by the Australian outflanking manoeuvre. Simultaneously, American troops began to advance out of Gressaire Wood to the north. The Americans ‘tore into’ the Londoners, the Australians and their prisoners with Lewis guns. Australians, Englishmen and prisoners dived for cover. Hayes reported that when the Americans finally caught up they were ‘greatly surprised to see them as they did not know anyone except the enemy was ahead of them’.

This marked the moment when the right flank of the 58th Division’s objectives on 8 August was reached. Hayes’ six-man patrol had completed Berrell’s objective of capturing Chipilly and outflanking the hostile machine gun posts from the south, and the wider British and American objective of capturing Chipilly Spur. Allied and most German accounts alike confirmed that the success had been due to an outflanking movement from the south. The six Australians captured a further 28 prisoners during mopping up and consolidation. Then, according to Andrews they

rested up awhile, smoking Hun cigarettes, kindly offered by a onetime Hun waiter in a London hotel, who wanted to know what was his chance of getting to England. He also informed us that the ridge [Chipilly Spur] was at 2pm that afternoon manned by about 360 men with about 30 guns, most of which were collected afterwards. The enemy at this point had held out for about 30 hours against repeated attempts to dislodge them.

The six-man patrol was in action, ‘or had the enemy in view close up for about 4 hours and did not receive one injury’. At 9.30pm Captain Jack Berrell handed Andrews a note, ‘glowing in terms’, which recommended the six Australians ‘for their conspicuous work and magnificent

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61 Berrell was awarded a DSO for this action. According to his citation he ‘signalled to the assaulting troops [Hayes’ patrol ahead of him], and leading the remainder of his party over the spur, established himself at the final objective’. Berrell, Citation DSO in Supplement to the Edinburgh Gazette, 5/2/19, p. 622.
63 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
64 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/18/34; D Van Every, The A.E.F. in Battle, New York, 1928, p. 226.
65 The history of the 124th IR states that some of the defenders on the ridge to the north were ‘seized with panic’ when they saw tanks assemble (near the Bray-Corbie Road) and then found the view shut out by smoke. Whereas in the area the six-man patrol was operating, the history of the 120th IR states that its men withdrew ‘under pressure of a hostile encircling movement on the south.’ This was the six Australian stealth raiders. The history of the 479th IR supports this. See Bean, Official History, Vol VI, pp. 652-653. The 131st US Regiment also reported on the Australian outflanking movement from the south in Van Every, The A.E.F. in Battle, p. 226.
66 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
bravery with me to-day’. Andrews remembered that Berrell ‘distinctly said’ that the spur was taken by the six Australians before “D” Company 2/10th London Battalion came up. The six then strolled back to their battalion on the other side of the river, taking 28 prisoners with them and leaving the rest for the 2/10th London Battalion and the Americans.

That evening (9/10 August), British III Corps belatedly agreed to Monash’s proposal for the Australian Corps to cross the river. At around midnight Monash’s orders reached the front line. 50th Battalion crossed the Somme at 3am under a heavy mist, to find Chipilly Spur captured. In his book *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, published in 1920, Monash took credit for the capture of the Chipilly Spur by claiming it was captured under his orders by the 131st American Regiment and the Australian 13th Brigade (50th Battalion). The claim upset Captain RJ Martin, an officer formerly of 2/10th London Battalion. Martin wrote a scathing attack on Monash in a letter to the *London Times* published 1919 which stated that the general was ‘particularly unfortunate’ in declaring that the Londoners failed to capture Chipilly Spur and claiming that the ground was not captured until Monash took command of operations. The newspaper controversy was exacerbated by the fact that neither Monash’s book nor 2/10th London Battalion’s war diary or published history mentioned the six-man patrol. But the battalion history does signal it: ‘Then, in a flash, the situation suddenly changed. The 2/10th Londons... succeeded in clearing the village [of Chipilly]. Having gained a footing on the southern end of the spur, they began to clear out the machine gun nests on the terraces that had so long delayed the advance of the Brigade... by 11p.m. the ridge was ours’. It was Hayes’ stealth raiding patrol that captured the southern end of the spur.

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68 Andrews, L 29/12/29, AWM1DRL/0043.
69 26 unwounded and 2 wounded prisoners brought through 1 Bde HQ. 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 8, AWM4/23/18/34.
72 This was reported in the Australian press in ‘Chipilly Spur: The Official Story,’ by FM Cutlack, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 31/12/19, p. 8.
Photo 33 Sketch illustrating the route taken by Hayes, Andrews, Kane, Fuller, Turpin and Stevens. Note the war diarist claims it as an operation of the 1st Battalion and has incorrectly dated the action. (AWM RCDIG1009358-55)

Monash, who seldom went near the front, can be excused for not knowing anything about the role the six played in the capture of Chipilly Spur, but his assertion that the spur was captured under his orders is wrong. Martin was right to criticise Monash on this point, but the 2/10th Battalion’s history is equally flawed for its similar omission. The US 131st Regiment did note the presence of the Australians. Dale Van Every in his history, The A.E.F. in Battle, wrote that American infantry of ‘Company K of the 3rd Battalion’ attacked through Gressaire Wood and ‘joined the 10th London Battalion in renewing the assault... The Australians down on the Somme gladly joined... and climbed the steep slopes from the south to assist in stamping out the machine guns’.  

A few days after the capture of Chipilly Spur, ‘in the blazing heat of the day’, Lieutenant Bob Traill spoke to the six:

It’s good to see them all again and have a crack. My Sergeant Andrews, Q.M. Jack Hayes, Fuller and couple of stretcher bearers distinguished themselves in capturing 47 Huns and 27 M.G.’s on their own. It is quite an epic. The Tommies were to have a second attempt at Chipilly and these 5 [sic] went over, whilst they were talking about it, went round the flanks and did the trick. The way they worked it was very clever and the Tommy

Captain nearly fell on their necks and kissed them. Undoubtedly they took the position for them and the Captain admitted it. But in the papers there was no mention of the Aussies work, but plenty about the dash of the blasted Tommies! The Captain was good enough to take their names... Hayes deserves the V.C. and Andrews the D.C.M. and Jerrie Fuller.

All six were awarded medals, but Hayes did not receive the Victoria Cross Traill thought he was entitled to. Colonel Bertie Stacy, who was not with the battalion at the time, signed a recommendation for the Distinguished Conduct Medal for both Hayes and Andrews. This was the second highest award for gallantry that a soldier from the ranks could receive. There is no evidence of bitterness in any of the Australian records that the Victoria Cross was not recommended. Did Stacy recommend the lesser award because he had a strained relationship with Hayes, and because the stunt originated while Hayes and Andrews were absent without leave and souvenir hunting in the midst of a major offensive? Sergeant Archie Barwick’s response is illuminating. On 4 September 1918 he wrote:

Heard last night that one of my greatest cobbers Jackie Hayes had been... recommended for the D.C.M. for a fine piece of work he did, captured nearly 80 Germans single handed & quite accidentally for Jackie true to the old days went souveinering [sic] in Chipilly the village that held the Tommies up... there will be no one more pleased than I if Jack gets this for he is a splendid chap & he has been badly treated by the Military.

Hayes’ citation commended his ‘great gallantry, initiative and devotion to duty’. The patrol was officially credited with the capture of 71 prisoners and nine machine guns. These figures were quoted in the Official History, but Harold Andrews did not accept them. He believed there was a ‘discrepancy in the official reports’, representing the number of walking wounded prisoners and stretcher-cases that were ‘not taken into account’. The ground gained, which led to securing an objective unobtained by a conventional frontal assault by infantry and tanks for over 30 hours, was more significant than the numbers of prisoners and war material captured. In four hours of fighting the patrol advanced over one mile with no loss to themselves. This was further than Hayes’ entire battalion, brigade or division had advanced in any day of fighting at Pozieres, Mouquet Farm or Flers in 1916, or Bullecourt or Ypres in 1917. These were very different battles, but even the unprecedented stealth raids at Hazebrouck on

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75 Traill, D 16/8/18, AWM2DRL/0711.
76 Awards: Hayes DCM, Andrews DCM, Fuller, Kane & Stevens MM, Turpin MSM.
77 Barwick, D 4/9/18, MLMSS1493.
78 Hayes, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/44Part1.
79 Andrews, M 1975, MLDOC2754.
11 and 12 July, which are comparable in terms of prisoners and low casualty rates, pale in comparison with the ground gained by Jack Hayes’ patrol.\textsuperscript{80}

Jack Hayes, Jackie to his friends, was born in Hay in country New South Wales, and grew up in Bathurst where he worked as an engine cleaner in the railways. Two days after war was declared he left Bathurst, visited his mother, Blanche, in Marrickville, Sydney, then enlisted. He was a good horseman and hoped to join the Light Horse, but was told they had enough men. Perhaps at 5’7” he was considered too short. In August 1914 class and physical dimensions still played a prejudicial part in recruitment. Hayes found himself in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, the “Pride of the Line” as he would call them for the rest of his life. A photograph of Hayes and friends in uniform in August 1914 shows a youth of 19, beer in hand, in an impromptu mess bar under canvas, apparently at Kensington racecourse (Photo 34). Tough physical training and military drill in Egypt followed. He landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and was wounded shortly afterwards, a bullet wound in his right leg, inflicted sometime between 25 and 30 April. He was back in the trenches in May and promoted to Lance Corporal. He fought at Lone Pine, which his friend Sergeant Archie Barwick described as a ‘frightful battle... our boys & Turks lay 3 & 4 deep, & on top of these we had to fight for our lives’.\textsuperscript{81} Hayes remained on Gallipoli until the evacuation and left the peninsula a corporal.

He was promoted to sergeant in July 1916 when the battalion was at Vignacourt, on their way to attack Pozieres. Hayes was 21 and already a veteran. He kept a diary in which he laid bare his attitude on the eve of the battle: ‘Feeling confident but a bit shaky continue this after the push’.\textsuperscript{82} When the battalion went over the top that night Hayes organised five men who had been separated from their units in No Man’s Land. The patrol headed for the second German trench system (OG 2). They ‘encountered 33 square heads... had a little scrap... we stuck one [with a bayonet] who was giving a bit of cheek [and] took the rest [prisoner]’.\textsuperscript{83} He kept up his

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\item For an action similar to Hayes’ on 8 October 1918, during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Sgt Alvin York, 328\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regt, 82\textsuperscript{nd} US Infantry Division, was awarded the Medal of Honour, French Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honour, the French Medaille Militaire, the Montenegrin Silver Medaille pour la Bravoure Militaire and Italian Croce de Guerra, making him the highest decorated American soldier of the war. See DV Mastriano, *Alvin York: A New Biography of the Hero of the Argonne*, Kentucky, 2014, pp. 133-141.
\item Barwick, D 6/8/16, MLMSS1493.
\item Hayes, D 19/7/16.
\item Hayes, D 22/7/16. The battalion went over the top just after midnight on 23/8/16, but Hayes wrote up the event in his diary under the date 22/8/16.
\end{itemize}

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diary throughout 1916 and 1917. By the time of the Chipilly “stunt” in August 1918 he was one of only a few dozen original men left in the battalion, and had either given up writing or his 1918 diary has been lost.84 “Originals” like Hayes were the custodians of the battalion’s fighting spirit and ethos. After Pozieres he wrote: ‘our people… stuck it like the old boys’.85 This

84 At 8/2/18 only 69 originals were left in the battalion. See 1 Bn War Diary, AWM4/23/18/28.
85 Hayes, D 24-25/7/16.
was a reference to the standards set at Gallipoli. In September 1916 Hayes was promoted to Company Quartermaster Sergeant.

Despite his soldierly qualities in the firing line, Hayes was often in trouble with superior officers out of the trenches. His diaries record several direct confrontations with officers, mostly the result of his independent spirit, bound to the cogs of the military machine. The most serious cases brought him before his commanding officer, Colonel Bertie Stacy. The two seldom saw eye to eye. Hayes once went over Stacy’s head and demanded to appear before the brigadier over a perceived injustice regarding leave. Hayes’ close friend and fellow original Sergeant Archie Barwick remembered a parade when Hayes was missing: ‘most of us knew he was down in a little quiet restaurant but no one else let on so the parade had to be dismissed’. Hayes wrote of the incident, ‘Had a good night at Lilly’s’, and followed it with ‘Lilly got her... smacked’. A favourite poem of his was “Luck or Pluck” which ends with the line, ‘tis pluck that attains not luck that gains she gives to the man that dares’. He lived in the moment. He called most of his adventures at the expense of the ‘mindless supervision of the parade ground’, “stunts”. He had many of them. One took him and some friends to Amiens. The trip began with cigarettes and six bottles of champagne and ended with seven weeks in a convalescent camp. Hayes called it mumps, but his official file called it venereal disease. While recovering in a camp of AIF incorrigibles, he furtively read letters from men in his battalion from the front. They told grim tales of the fighting at Demicourt, Boursies and Bullecourt. Hayes told his diary:

21 April 1917: Tucker not too good down here. Often wish I was back with the Battalion.
23 May 1917: Got a letter... asking me to come back [to the battalion] (toute suite).
24 May 1917: Am going to keep quiet and see if I can get out of here. Just beginning to get sick of it.
25 May 1917: Bn still getting a rough time. (Fate sent me here).
26 May 1917: I wish I was out of here. Thinking of the good times we [the battalion] used to have.

On 29 May he was declared fit for active service and left hospital. He was offered a relatively safe job as brigade quartermaster sergeant. He refused it in preference to returning to the

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86 Pers comm John Hayes, 7/7/13; Barwick D, 7/12/17, MLMSS1493.
87 Barwick, D 28/11/16, MLMSS1493.
88 Hayes, D 28-30/11/16.
89 Hayes notebook, Ypres 6/9/16, courtesy of Helen Thomson and Nola Moore.
90 Gammage, Broken Years, p. 236.
battalion, his home. When he got there he found ‘a lot of new faces’ but when he met up with old friends whom he called the ‘remnant’, he ‘made up for lost time’.  

92 Archie Barwick described Jack Hayes as ‘a fine chap and a great cobber’, ‘seething with humour’.  

93 Hayes’ wartime diaries are laced with examples of his wit and irreverence. Of the Prince of Wales, he wrote ‘cannot ride much’. He described shellofire as “No Bon for Soldats”, and wrote that the rats preying on corpses in the mud at Hill 60 ‘appeared to mobilise in our rear, but never launched an attack’.  

94 Perhaps the most penetrating study of Hayes is a photograph taken in a French café behind the lines (Photo 36). In it, four Australian friends including Hayes are raising a toast. Three are in uniform but Jack Hayes is dressed as a civilian and looks like a Frenchman. Impersonating a civilian was a punishable offence in the British Army in a war zone. Had the military police or his commanding officer seen him, Hayes would have been in serious trouble. The cheeky look on his face indicates he was willing to take the risk. Hayes seems very much the Australian volunteer: a soldier in the line and in camp, but doing whatever he pleased when away from his responsibilities. When “C” Company went into the line during the battle of Menin Road in September 1917, Hayes organised the parties carrying water and rations to the front. Despite the barrages the rations got to the men, usually under his supervision. At the end of a tour at Zonnebeke, the battalion pulled out ‘badly shaken by four days of shellfire’.  

95 The men were so exhausted they ‘could not have gone another twenty minutes’ when Jackie Hayes met them with a stew, tea and rum.  

96 The first rule of the company quartermaster sergeant’s responsibilities is "get the job done". If the men in the front line needed equipment, water, food, ammunition, or leadership – there was no time to ask whose job it was.

Hayes got the job done on Chipilly Spur. Two weeks later, he, Kane and Fuller were wounded when the battalion attacked in the Chuignes valley. Hayes was shot in the chest at point blank range while trying to rush a German post. Hayes’ son, the late John Hayes, remembered his father saying that Fuller propped him up against a tree then went on and captured the man who fired the shot. Fuller reportedly dragged the prisoner back to Hayes and said “I’ve got the bastard that shot you and I’m going to shoot him down for you”, but Hayes told him, “No. Sit
him down next to me”. The wounded Australian and the prisoner shared photographs of family and home. 97 Hayes was not expected to live. 98 Harold Andrews led the men who captured the final objective:

[the dead] were buried in one temporary grave… under fire as so many others were. No burial service, with only their handkerchiefs for covering – no time to scrounge a blanket, as relief was pending and the job must go on. 99

Jack Hayes was not destined to die in battle. John Hayes recalled his father saying that he was one of the last of the critically wounded to be carried from the battlefield. 100

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99 Andrews, M 1975, MLD0C2754.
100 Pers comm, John Hayes, 7/7/13.
Photo 37 Studio of portrait Private “Jerry” Fuller MM. Fuller was a 20-year old batman when he took part in the capture of Chipilly Spur. c1918/19. (Courtesy of Helen Thomson and Nola Moore)

Photo 38 Chuignes, 23 August 1918. Men of “C” Company 1st Battalion resting in a railway cutting they had captured that morning before going “over the top” again that afternoon. Sergeant Harold Andrews is seated with arms resting on knees, next to the man lying under a blanket. On this day, Hayes, Fuller, Kane and Stevens were all wounded in action. (AWM E03004)
Photo 39 Photo of Jack Hayes’ home coming in 1919. His son the late John Hayes remembered ‘As a young boy I could put my clenched fist into a hole in his chest. Such a wound would usually kill. He had been shot at close range but he was not destined to die. Jack’s life revolved around his past soldier friends’. (Courtesy of Helen Thomson and Nola Moore)

The capture of Chipilly Spur was the supreme stealth raid. Set-piece battles supported by artillery and sometimes tanks resumed but individuals and small groups of daring men continued to use stealth raiding tactics. At the battles of Chuignes and Mont St Quentin, detailed orders for these set-piece attacks arrived well after the men had used their own initiative and skills to continue stealth raiding.\textsuperscript{101} Battalion commanders reported numerous examples of individual soldiers and small teams using ground and fire to ‘dislodge’ the enemy or take prisoners. Some platoons went well beyond their objectives, usually on ‘the initiative of local commanders’, which included NCOs and privates.\textsuperscript{102} Bean heard of an incident during the battle of Chuignes where men of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions were being sniped at from a

\textsuperscript{101} Bean, \textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 812
\textsuperscript{102} See for instance 1 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 14, AWM4/23/18/34.
wood that should have been cleared. Lieutenant Murray Connor, 103 2nd Battalion, went into the wood with a party of '3 or 4 batmen and cooks' and captured eighteen prisoners, two trench mortars and a machine gun while a company was being organised to do it. 104 This had all the hallmarks of a stealth raid.

In the same battle, just after dawn, a platoon of Australians, under Second Lieutenant Clem Garratt, 105 16th Battalion, was attacked by a stronger party of Germans in a trench where the advancing Australians had expected to link up with men of the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers. Garratt, Sergeant Frederick Robbins, 106 and eight men fought a two-hour bomb fight and pushed the Germans back 200 yards before Garratt went to collect more bombs, leaving Robbins in charge ‘where the fighting was fiercest’. 107 Their company commander, Lieutenant Laurie McCarthy, 108 went to see what was holding up the British. McCarthy’s nickname was “Fats”, in reference to his robust frame. He was a wrecking ball of a man, and that term might better describe him and what he did next.

McCarthy took a few moments to watch the battle going on around him, as Hayes had done at Chipilly. From his trench McCarthy could see that the Germans were bombing Robbins and his men from behind an earthwork – an island with lanes on either side in the middle of a shallow trench. Both lanes were blocked with piles of rusty barbed wire, detritus of the fighting of 1916. The Germans were firing a machine gun from behind the island, ‘almost enfilading the Australian trench’. 109 McCarthy also noticed other Germans firing machine guns 50 or so yards back from the island block.

All this was in the British area of responsibility. McCarthy had no orders to attack it. But he knew his men’s position was untenable so long as the Germans were between them and the British. ‘I could see we were in a hopeless position. I had to do something. I had either to attack... or be killed or taken prisoner’. 110 McCarthy chose to attack. Armed with a revolver and

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103 (2562) Lt JM Connor MC, 2 Bn, Farmer, of Sydney, NSW. E 10/6/15, aged 25, RTA 20/4/19.
104 Bean notes, [23/8/18], AWM38/3DRL/606/193/5; 2 Bn War Diary, August 1918, App 16, AWM4/23/19/40.
107 Robbins, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/242.
108 (422) Lt LD McCarthy VC, MID, CdG (Fr), 16 Bn, Contractor, of Lion Mill, WA. E 23/9/14, aged 22, RTA 30/12/19.
110 McCarthy, SO 7/11/65, AWMSO3037.
as many Mills bombs as he could carry he leapt from cover and dashed over the top and into
the shallow trench in front of the island block.\textsuperscript{111} Sergeant Robbins rushed to join him.
Together they discovered that the bottom of the trench was part of the roof of an old dugout,
and that the German machine gunners were firing from the other side of it. McCarthy decided
to tunnel his way through and attack the Germans:

I forced my way through the roof of this dugout, right through the corroded
iron, and I fell at the foot of the dugout and there was the German machine
gunner standing up. I got my revolver out and I finished him off and about
six Germans came at me.\textsuperscript{112}

McCarthy ‘threw his limited number of Mills Bombs... and inflicted more casualties’.\textsuperscript{113} Robbins
scrambled through the hole behind him, ‘[f]ighting the enemy... hand-to-hand’.\textsuperscript{114} At a junction
in the trench they shot another German. McCarthy raced ahead: ‘I went along, mopping up the
trench’. Robbins stayed at the junction to prevent the Germans slipping in behind McCarthy
and cutting him off. This kind of assault and support by a small team was typical of stealth
raids. Shells started falling nearby: ‘there was an enemy aeroplane overhead watching the
situation’. McCarthy reasoned that the pilot was signalling to an artillery battery, so he picked
up a German flare gun and fired what he knew was the German SOS signal, to trick the
German artillery into stopping.\textsuperscript{115} He came to a junction where the trench split into four
directions. Two German officers appeared. McCarthy had a shoot-out with one: ‘[a] German
regimental commander came at me, we had a duel for about two minutes... and I managed to
get the better of him’. McCarthy also shot and wounded the second officer, ‘then charged
down the trench using his revolver and throwing enemy stick bombs’ which he collected as he
went. He captured three more German machine guns and about 500 yards of trench, then
continued to bomb up the trench, capturing yet another machine gun. The fighting was close
range and intense. The fact that he ran into two officers suggested he was fighting at least a
company of Germans. He did not break contact. According to McCarthy, the Germans broke
first:

The Germans were coming from north, south, east and west... I was
standing in a pile [of German stick bombs] throwing them north, south,

\textsuperscript{111} Two British soldiers attached to headquarters as liaison followed McCarthy over the top. Bean,
\textit{Official History}, Vol VI, p. 742. McCarthy thought both men were wounded and put out of action soon
afterwards. McCarthy, SO AWMSO3037.
\textsuperscript{112} McCarthy, SO 7/11/65, AWMSO3037. See also, Citation VC, AWM28/1/242.
\textsuperscript{113} McCarthy, Citation VC, AWM28/1/242.
\textsuperscript{114} Robbins, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/242.
\textsuperscript{115} McCarthy, SO 7/11/65, AWMSO3037.
east and west when to my amazement a German corporal took the bomb out of my hand, and said, “This is mine”. More German soldiers followed their corporal around the traverse, gesturing to McCarthy that they intended to surrender, patting the Australian on the back, indicating to him that it was within his power to stop the bloodshed. They picked the big man up. McCarthy said: ‘They put me on their shoulders and carried me back [to the Australian lines]’. McCarthy dismounted from his prisoners and covered Robbins who led two Lewis gun teams to occupy the captured trenches. Captain Daniel Aarons of “A” Company ‘quickly moved up & held 700 [yards] of [the] Tommies sector’. These men held the trench until ‘the [Tommies] woke up’ and came forward. McCarthy, Robbins and the rest of Garratt’s platoon consolidated the newly captured trenches and mopped up, as the six had done at Chipilly. It was typical of the teamwork that had come to exemplify stealth raids.

Photo 40 The stealth raid that became known as the “Super VC” took place in these trenches near Madame Wood. The trench in the foreground is where Laurie McCarthy and Fred Robbins initiated their stealth raid on 23 August 1918. This photograph was taken on 26 December 1918. (AWM E04024)

116 McCarthy, SO 7/11/65, AWMSO3037. Bean states that a red handkerchief was waved from the other side of a traverse, indicating that the Germans wished to parley, and then the corporal appeared, making an offer to surrender. Official History, Vol VI, p. 743.
117 McCarthy, SO 7/11/65, AWMSO3037.
118 McCarthy, Citation VC, AWM28/1/242.
120 Aarons, D 23/8/18, AWM3DRL/7047.
Photo 41 Studio portrait of Lieutenant Lawrence McCarthy VC, MID, CdG (Fr). c1918 (AWM H13822)
McCarthy was officially credited with capturing five machine guns and 50 prisoners (37 unwounded and thirteen wounded) and killing over twenty men in a twenty minute burst.\textsuperscript{121} He captured over 500 yards of trench. The engagement lasted about three hours, beginning with the bomb fight led by Garratt and his platoon of ten men, including Robbins. All this ground was handed over to the British. McCarthy was immediately recommended for the Victoria Cross. Aarons wrote: ‘well earned too’.\textsuperscript{122} His official citation credited him with preventing ‘many casualties’, and being ‘mainly, if not entirely, responsible’ for the Lancashire Fusiliers objective being taken.\textsuperscript{123} The British press called McCarthy’s Victoria Cross the “Super VC”, and Australian soldiers like Bob Traill were pleased that finally some of their achievements were being properly recognised in the Empire’s press.\textsuperscript{124}

On 15 August Bean at last heard the term “peaceful penetration,” not from the men but at Australian Corps headquarters:

It had been decided to adopt a policy of conserving men. It was considered that the Australian could do all that was wanted by cutting out expeditions and patrolling – peaceful penetration as they call it here.\textsuperscript{125}

Australian records show that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division started using the term “peaceful penetration” after Russell Colman’s stealth raid of 8 July 1918. On 12 July General Rosenthal used the term “peaceful” advance.\textsuperscript{126} The term “peaceful penetration” is a higher command term, not the men’s. “Peaceful penetration” was not stealth raiding, though it built on it. Formal patrols were ordered to use stealth raiding tactics and work their way around German strong points to take them in flank and rear while platoon fire-power, usually rifle grenades and Lewis guns, covered the assaulting party. If resistance were too great the patrol would hunt the enemy out of the post with “pigs” – the infantry term for trench mortar shells fired by batteries attached to brigade headquarters.\textsuperscript{127} The precedent was the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} Brigade stealth raids led by Colman, Coburn and Willard near Villers-Bretonneux in July and the 1\textsuperscript{st} Division at Hazebrouck.

\textsuperscript{121} McCarthy, Citation VC, AWM28/1/242. McCarthy claimed he killed about 50 Germans, SO AWMSO3037.
\textsuperscript{122} Aarons, D 23/8/18, AWM3DRL/7047.
\textsuperscript{123} McCarthy Citation VC, AWM28/1/242. Bean believed that apart from Lt Jacka at Pozieres, McCarthy’s was perhaps the most effective feat of individual fighting in the history of the AIF. Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p.743.
\textsuperscript{125} Bean, D 15/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/80.
\textsuperscript{126} See ch 5, n80.
In the last days of August, Suzanne, Vaux and Curlu were captured along with hundreds of prisoners by either “peaceful penetration” or stealth raids.\footnote{See for instance Beaumont, \textit{Broken Nation}, p.479.} The official war photographer Wilkins told Bean of nine men of the 9th Battalion who pushed half a mile beyond Cappy although it was ‘not their business to be there’. They went from dugout to dugout ‘and whistled down... as you might to a dog: “come on Fritz – now then Fritzy – there Fritz”.\footnote{Bean, D 25/8/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/1.} Jeff Maynard points out that Wilkins thought there was something exceptional about this experience because the photographs he took of the stealth raiders ‘were among the collection of prints from the war that he kept for the remainder of his life.’\footnote{J Maynard, \textit{The Unseen Anzac: How an Enigmatic Polar Explorer Created Australia’s World War I Photographs}, Melbourne, 2015, p. 165.} The Australian War Memorial in Canberra holds copies of two of the photographs.\footnote{AWME02990; AWME02992.} A battalion original, Sergeant Doug Brown,\footnote{451 Sgt DH Brown MM, 9 Bn, Clerk, of Warwick, Qld. E 26/8/14, aged 19, RTA 8/10/18.} and Corporal Arthur Henley\footnote{5381 Sgt A Henley DCM, MM, 9 Bn, Labourer, of Burpengary, Qld. E 9/10/15, aged 24, RTA 5/9/19.} were awarded the Military Medal for the Cappy stealth raid.\footnote{Brown, Citation MM, AWM28/1/47Part2; Henley, Citation MM, AWM28/1/47Part2.} Henley subsequently won a Distinguished Conduct Medal at Villeret on 18 September, where his commanding officer praised his ‘judgement’ in capturing enemy strongpoints, including seventeen prisoners, by outflanking them using a tactic that resembled stealth raiding.\footnote{Henley, Citation DCM, AWM28/1/49Part2.} Among the men named by Wilkins are the bushman Bill Harney, a veteran 22 times in action, and Private Daniel Mahoney MM,\footnote{2772 Pte D Mahoney MM, 9 Bn, Farmer, of Kyogle, NSW. E 28/6/15, aged 23, RTA 12/4/19. Citation MM, AWM28/1/3.} who had distinguished himself in Wilder-Neligan’s acclaimed formal raid at Fleurbaix in July 1916.\footnote{In Bill Harney’s \textit{War}, p. 4. The Fleurbaix raid is mentioned in ch 4.}

Monash called it a ‘merry and exciting’ few ‘days of pursuit’, and boasted that by 29 August, ‘not a German prisoner [sic] remained west of the Somme between Peronne and Brie’.\footnote{In Beaumont, \textit{Broken Nation}, p. 479.} However some “peaceful penetrations” Monash ordered were far from merry and exciting. Patrols of the 2nd Division advanced over 2,000 yards by “peaceful penetration”, mostly through old trenches, until they struck the village of Herleville. There the Germans ‘vigorously counter-attacked’ and reduced the Australian gains to 500 yards. The Australians lost 117

\footnote{AWME02990; AWME02992.}
officers and men. Lieutenan Percy Smythe’s commanding officer called it ‘simply murder’ and ‘harboured some bitter feelings against the authority that had committed his men to such a futile and murderous task’.

Smythe’s CO was not alone. There was a big difference between stealth raids – initiated by the men – and being ordered to do “peaceful penetration” by a corps commander ‘who had not willingly visited his troops in the front line’, and therefore had little first-hand knowledge of the ground or the condition of his men. According to Bean the order for “peaceful penetration” operations in August ‘caused resentment though everyone obeyed it’. He heard that the last “peaceful penetration” patrol ordered by Australian Corps headquarters resulted in a company of the 4th Battalion being ‘practically annihilated’ east of Jeancourt on 9-10 September. The so-called “peaceful penetrators” lost about 60 men to gas, high explosives and machine gun fire and ‘came back only 29 strong’. A further six were taken prisoner. Most of the survivors were wounded. Battalions were at less than a third of full strength and there were grumblings within the ranks that the men were exhausted. Monash ignored this. He was convinced that as long as a battalion had ‘30 Lewis guns it doesn’t matter what else they have’.

Most of the time enough of the men did not let Monash down: ‘I like General Monash best’, wrote the Lewis gunner and stealth raider Dudley Jackson, ‘when the division was growling about it wanted a long spell from front line fighting, he lined them up and told them “You came over here to fight, when you have beaten the enemy you will get a spell and not before.”’ Jackson and his mates Ike Turner and “Bluey” Boxsell patrolled to the slopes of Mont St Quentin by self-reliant stealth raiding – as distinct from “peaceful penetration.” They captured Germans who had slipped out of their lines to fill their water bottles in the

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139 15 men of 22 Bn were captured. 6 Bde War Diary, August 1918, App 36, AWM4/23/6/36Part1.
140 Smythe, D 20/8/18, AWMPR01463.
143 Bean, Notes, September 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/192/57-8.
144 See for instance Pedersen, Monash, pp. 257-293; Pugsley, The Anzac Experience, pp. 272-278.
146 For biographical details and previous stealth raids see ch 3, n36.
147 For biographical details and previous stealth raids see ch 3, n39.
Somme, then Jackson and Turner rushed dugouts where they ‘smashed in’ the head of a German machine gunner and captured eighteen men:

As Ike and I were on our own we had to send them back to the rest of the company without an escort. Ike wanted to take their field glasses, revolvers, and watches [sic] etc but I thought we were loaded heavily enough already, and time was running out. Was sorry afterwards that we did not do as Ike had wanted. One of our big guns was landing shells on this line, so we decided it was too unhealthy for us, so we started forward again. We had proceeded about 300 yards... just Ike and I on our own when we heard someone calling and looking round saw our fellows advancing. So waited for them to catch up. The officer asked if Ike and I thought we could take the German army on our own. It was... broad daylight.\textsuperscript{149}

Jackson was awarded the MM, Boxsell the DCM. Boxsell’s recommendation contains the language of stealth raid tactics:

During the operations on Mont St Quentin... this N.C.O. on three occasions went out and personally attracted the fire of enemy machine guns from an exposed position while the remainder of his section worked round the flanks, and killed and captured the crew. His own gun was knocked out by M.G. bullets, while engaging enemy above. He immediately got a light enemy M.G. and ammunition and carried on with this throughout the operations, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy.\textsuperscript{150}

Peter Pedersen wrote that Mont St Quentin and Peronne more than any other battle, ‘showed the quality of the instrument at Monash’s disposal and how fortunate he was to command it’.\textsuperscript{151} Peter Stanley came to a similar conclusion in his book \textit{The Men of Mont Saint Quentin}.\textsuperscript{152} Bean claimed that ‘these types of actions occurred over and over again’, usually because orders for set-piece attacks arrived well after the men had used their own initiative and skills to continue stealth raiding.\textsuperscript{153}

At this time Lance Sergeant James Rafferty, 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, wrote in his diary the definition of a ‘stealth raid’ that began this thesis.

\textsuperscript{149} Jackson, D 30-31/8/18, 1918, AWM3DRL/3846.
\textsuperscript{150} Boxsell, Citation DCM, AWM28/2/317Part1.
\textsuperscript{152} P Stanley, \textit{Men of Mont St Quentin Between Victory and Death}, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 73-149. Stanley credits the small unit tactical skill of the Australians to training, whereas this thesis argues that experience in battle, particularly the stealth raids over the spring and summer of 1918, was decisive.
A stealth raid is made up on the spot by a group of determined men. Patrols might report a post in front and you decide with the arms you have in the front line to take it.\textsuperscript{154}

Rafferty wrote the definition while attending an Australian Corps patrol school commanded by Captain William Scurry,\textsuperscript{155} the former lance corporal responsible for inventing the famous “drip rifle” at Gallipoli. The definition encapsulated the unprecedented host of kidnappings, stonkerings, stouishes, one-man raids, daylight raids and cuckoo games, the epic capture of Chipilly Spur, and the Super VC. The actions and dozens like them recorded in this thesis occurred without any formal training. Although somewhat belatedly, it seems some of the most innovative instructors at the Australian Corps School appreciated the difference between the initiative and self-reliance of stealth raids and the formal “peaceful penetration” policy Monash espoused.\textsuperscript{156} Perhaps it is not surprising that Scurry had served in the ranks.

After Mont St Quentin the Australian Corps opposed the Hindenburg Outpost Line. On the night of 17/18 September a formal set-piece attack was launched to smash through this formidable barrier. “Peaceful penetration” operations ordered by Monash officially ceased but stealth raids did not. When cover permitted, the Australians trusted their skill in the tactic to capture German strong points without heavy casualties. The 48th Battalion attacked near Le Verguier, north-west of St Quentin. It took its objective, but British troops on the Australian flank were held up and a company of the 48th was sent in support. A patrol of three Australian privates discovered a German post comprising six machine-guns and over 30 men. In perhaps the last Australian stealth raid of the war, Private James Woods\textsuperscript{157} led the small patrol against the strong point while his company commander was organising more men to attack it. Woods shot one German and captured another, and the rest of the garrison fled.

The Germans then counter-attacked. Despite heavy fire, Woods climbed over the parapet and, while lying there, held off successive attacks by throwing bombs handed to him by his companions. So effective was his defence that, when Australian reinforcements arrived, they were easily able to secure the post. Woods was awarded the Victoria Cross for his part in the action.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{154} Rafferty, D 6/9/18, WA Army Museum, File No. UH11/2.
\textsuperscript{155} (2668) Capt WC Scurry MC, DCM, MID, Aust Corps School, Modeller, of Ascot Vale, Vic. E 19/7/15, aged 19, RTA 16/3/19.
\textsuperscript{157} 3244A Pte JP Woods VC, 48 Bn, Vigneron, of Caversham, WA. E 30/10/16, aged 25, RTA 21/6/19.
Three men captured an objective set for the flank of a British division before the British or Australian orders arrived.\textsuperscript{159} This demonstrates the belief the Australian infantryman had in himself and his mates and their frustration with the British troops on their flanks. According to the 48\textsuperscript{th} Battalion war diary, the British said they were in a certain position but our patrols discovered they were not. Indeed we knew more about their position than their B.H.Q... What a pity this race of athletes can’t go ahead and do their own job. The remarkable thing is that they don’t seem to mind others doing it for them.\textsuperscript{160}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Private_James_Woods_VC_1917-18_AWM_P02939_048}
\caption{Studio portrait of Private James Woods VC. c1917-18 (AWM P02939.048)}
\end{figure}

The reconstituted battalions of the British Army were full of eighteen and nineteen year-old conscripts still learning the lessons of war. The German Army was disintegrating, but its machine gunners and snipers still demanded respect. Stealth raiders killed many of them. The Australian battalions were barely able to scrape together 300 men each and were led by a

\textsuperscript{159} 1\textsuperscript{st} British Division. See Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, pp. 930-931.
\textsuperscript{160} 48 Bn War Diary, 19/9/18, AWM4/23/65/32.
corps commander who gave them practically no rest. But the experienced few that remained ‘knew the soldiers game from A to Z’. Sometimes they anticipated the orders of their commanding officers, or knew better ways to get a job done with few casualties. These attributes, combined with a uniquely Australian ethos that championed initiative, individualism, resourcefulness and bush skills, produced stealth raiders. The fact that the AIF achieved as much as it did from April to October 1918 was in large part due to the tactics these few daring men invented.

161 In Chapman, Iven G. Mackay, p. 107.
CONCLUSION

‘Something unique in the fighting line’

On 21 March 1918 the war took a radical shift when the Germans launched their great offensive. In March and April the Australian infantry entered the fighting line knowing the seriousness of the strategic situation. They expected the Germans to attempt further offensives, and faced the prospect with the collective thought that ‘if we can hang on... the tide may turn’. In the ‘crucial summer’ that followed, the AIF adapted to the vastly different battlefield conditions it encountered. It developed innovative small-unit tactical skills which set the Australians apart from the other divisions in Second and Fourth Armies. A core of experienced junior officers and men still survived, and as battalion numbers fell with no hope of being brought to strength, a few daring men stood out as independent thinkers. They exploited the local geography and the low morale of the enemy to become highly proficient at killing, capturing and advancing their posts while losing few men themselves. By the end of July, commanding officers and the British units that served near these daring men had learnt the character of the Australian soldier.

The higher commanders chose the Australian Corps front to launch the Allied counter offensive. Major General Archibald Montgomery, GSO2, Fourth Army, asserted that the victory on 8 August

could not have been won without the steady and continuous offensive of the Australian Corps throughout the months of April, May, June and July. To its remarkable achievements... may be attributed to a very large extent the increase in moral[e]... necessary to make... August 8th... even a possibility.

The Australian soldier became feared and admired as a confident, competent and aggressive soldier adept at surprise. German documents captured at Mont St Quentin stated,

Forces confronting us consist of Australians who are very warlike, clever and daring. They understand the art of crawling through high crops in order to capture our advanced posts. The enemy is also adept in conceiving and

1 Bourke, D 28/4/18, AWM1DRL/0139.
2 Bean, Anzac to Amiens, p. 444.
putting into execution important patrolling operations. The enemy infantry has daily proved himself to be audacious.  

The Englishman Lieutenant Colonel AM Ross wrote that the Australians showed distinctive and unique abilities:

Without in the least decrying the British soldier, it is fairly generally admitted that the Australian had peculiar gifts for this work. His very mode of life, independence of character, initiative, and upbringing fitted him for this special duty.

General Beauvoir De Lisle wrote that 1st Australian Division stealth raids ‘by day as well as night… excited the admiration and emulation of all’. The history of the British 29th Division, written in 1925, recorded that the ‘individual enterprise’ of the Australians set ‘a splendid example’. The 9th (Scottish) Division acknowledged the Australians’ ‘big reputation… in stalking Germans’. The 18th Division dubbed the Australian a ‘master’ of ‘raiding fights’ and complained that the trenches it took over from Australians near Morlancourt were ‘difficult to hold’ being ‘only knee-deep’. The AIF had ‘not allowed the Boche to do more digging than that’. Australian stealth raiding led to higher commanders adopting a modification of stealth raids that they came to call “peaceful penetration”.

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4 In Gammage, Broken Years, p. 230.

5 Lt Col AM Ross CMG, DSO, MID, Soldier, of Duntroon, AFT. E 15/8/14, aged 35, Disch 30/5/19. Before the war Ross was a regular officer in the British Army. He was appointed Instructor in Tactics at the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1913 and enlisted in the AIF from that position. During the war he served on 3rd Brigade HQ staff and commanded the 51st Battalion before taking up staff appointments at 1 Anzac Corps School and as GSO1 to Gen Glasgow 1st Div. After the war he returned to the British Army and was posted to the staff college at Camberley.

6 AM Ross, ‘Australian Patrol Operations, Strazeele, July, 1918,’ Royal United Services Institution Journal, 67: 468, p. 652. According to Ross the lessons of stealth raids were: the infectious spirit; study of formations; reconnaissance before a strong patrol; method – route – against exposed flank and rear attack from behind; covering fire; prompt appreciation; consolidation. p. 658.

7 In Belford, Legs Eleven, p. 606


9 Including the South African Bde.

10 Ewing, The History of the Ninth (Scottish) Division, p. 322.

11 GHF Nicholls, The 18th Division in the Great War, Edinburgh & London, 1922, p. 339. For Australian stealth raids on Morlancourt Ridge see chs 1, 3 & 5.

12 “Peaceful penetration,” see chs 5 & 7.

13 A Short Diary of the 11th Service Battalion, p. 57. From at least March 1917 the British sporadically used the term “peaceful penetration” but it referred to formal patrol operations, though this instance is clearly a stealth raid in which the regiment was encouraged to participate by Australians. See 1 Bn stealth raids ch 6.
It is worth noting that among the “colonial” forces, the patrolling and raiding activity of the New Zealand Division near Hebuterne ‘closely paralleled’ what occurred on Australian fronts.  

The history of the New Zealand Division states:

Many of these exploits were performed by our patrols, not at night, but in broad daylight, in full view of their delighted comrades and with a wholesome effect on the morale of recently joined reinforcements. Not infrequently a German sentry or two were [sic] kidnapped without a struggle, asleep or writing letters, delousing themselves, or at a peaceful meal, and there was nothing to show their commander the reason of their disappearance. More often some had to be killed, or the raiders had to fight.

Most of the men involved in these ‘freebooting forays’ have not been acknowledged.

In the Canadian Corps, four of its five divisions spent between 7 May and 8 August 1918 out of the line, resting and training. Only the 2nd Canadian Division, attached to British VI Corps, fought near Arras. It conducted 27 formal raids in three months, losing 120 officers and 2,647 other ranks, and a ‘pervasive rumour circulated through the ranks of the division that they were being punished by the corps commander for supposed crimes they had committed’. On 26 May, Armament Corporal David Kelley, 18th Western Ontario Battalion, crawled through grass and under barbed wire to rush a German post where he killed two Germans and grabbed a third, dragging him back to the Canadian lines. This is the only stealth raid recorded in Canadian war diaries. Bean suggested that ‘formal raiding was doubtless more suited to their front’.

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16 Stewart, The New Zealand Division, p. 385.
18 T Cook, Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918, Vol 2, Toronto, 2008, p. 400. According to Cook, the 2nd Canadian Division infantry pioneered ‘deep-raiding techniques... the raiders did not stop at the first or second enemy lines but pushed further, often 1,000 metres into German-held territory’. Similar developments occurred in formal raiding tactics by British troops. See M Connelly, Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region, and the Great War, Oxford, 2006, p. 87. The formal raid Connelly describes as “peaceful penetration” should not be confused with Australian stealth raids.
19 Cpl DA Kelley DCM, Gunsmith, of Windsor, Ont. E 15/1/16, aged 31.
20 4 Can Bde War Diary, 26 May 1918, http://data2.collectionscanada.ca/e/e043/e001050945.jpg.
Why did Australians conduct more stealth raids than the rest of the British Army? One factor was the coincidence of timing and ground. The Australian divisions were not in the line at the beginning of the Michael or Georgette offensives so were spared the heavy casualties inflicted on the British Third and Fourth Armies on the Somme and the Second Army in Flanders. After the offensives the German Army did not have enough men to defend its newly won front in strength. This and the vast supremacy of Allied artillery led the German high command to decide to defend the Somme and Hazebrouck fronts with an outpost system. The outpost system consisted of strong points in depth rather than continuous trenches shielded by belts of barbed wire. This and the rural setting with its undulating terrains and crop made it possible for Australian patrols and stealth raiders to outflank posts and attack them in flank and rear – often without alerting other enemy forces or command posts nearby.

By 9 August 1918 Australian stealth raiders had vanquished the worst and the best of the German Army, while British divisions also facing the same German outpost system were prostrate. The Australian soldier stood out in stealth raids not because he faced inferior “trench divisions” as Peter Pedersen claimed, but because the Australian demonstrated an unrivalled capacity to adapt to changing conditions and a changing enemy. In April the 41st Battalion captured men of the German 18th Division, considered a first class attack division by Allied intelligence. But they had been in the line over a month, since the opening of the Michael offensive, and were suffering from exhaustion and hunger. When ‘Asked when the war would finish, most were of the opinion that it would not last till Christmas, lack of... manpower being the main cause, while other factors were shortages of food, necessities, and equipment’ due to the Allied naval blockade. As Peter Hart points out:

The German troops at the front were... gradually fading away from a simple shortage of food... The rations they were given simply did not have the calories to keep body and soul together.

The first German troops Australian stealth raiders captured at Hazebrouck were from the 12th Division. Allied intelligence considered it a second class division. It lost 48 officers and 1,550 other ranks in massed wave attacks during the Georgette offensive. Teenage conscripts of the

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22 Pedersen, Monash, p. 214.
23 Histories of Two hundred and Fifty-one Divisions of the German Army, p. 288.
24 The Forty-First, p. 94.
1920 class replaced the casualties. An Australian described them as being a ‘poor type,’ and many were in the front line for the first time. The stealth raiders totally outclassed them.

In mid-May the German high command replaced the tired attack divisions with low quality trench garrison divisions, some recently arrived from the Eastern Front. Yet interviews with prisoners captured by stealth raiders throughout this period indicate that the problem of morale and fighting quality in the German Army was not isolated to its inferior trench garrison divisions or those exhausted by failed offensives. Stealth raiding was also responsible for decimating German morale. A letter taken from a German killed near Morlancourt read:

We have Australians in front of us... they are very quick and cunning. They creep... like cats to our trenches so that we don’t notice them. Last night they were in our trenches and killed two men and dragged one away with them.

On 11 July Australian stealth raiders captured over half of the front line of the 12th Reserve Division. The Australians at first considered the 12th Reserve to be good troops. Australian accounts admit that many hardened German NCOs, officers and machine gunners showed fight. But this was their second tour against the Australians, and many prisoners admitted to being terrified and mutinous. They had been promised a rest but instead found they were confronting aggressive Australian patrols by day and night. The German high command replaced the 12th Reserve Division with the elite 4th Division ‘with the hope of... putting an end’ to Australian “minor enterprises”. Consequently, during the fighting for Merris the 10th Battalion reported resistance was ‘tougher than usual’. But a report based on interviews with prisoners speaks to the domination of Australian stealth raiding tactics:

Considering the 4th Division had only just come into the line after a 10 weeks rest, one would have expected to find some “moral” amongst the men, but the sample of over 150 taken this morning proved a very pessimistic lot... thoroughly “fed up” with the war. They were overcome with the dash and initiative of our troops in this mornings [sic] attack, and the majority of them were very glad to be taken prisoners.

26 9 Bn War Diary, 12/5/18, AWM4/23/26/41. See stealth raids ch 2.
27 In Wrench, Campaigning with the Fighting 9th, p. 233.
29 The Crown Prince of Bavaria commanded these troops. The Australians first encountered them at Mont de Merris on 3 June. Following that battle and subsequent stealth raids prisoners were low in morale and fighting spirit. See chs 2, 4 & 6.
30 See ch 6.
31 General staff HQ 1st Aus Div App IV, 30/7/18, AWM4/1/42/42Part3.
33 General staff HQ 1st Aus Div App IV, 30/7/18, AWM4/1/42/42Part3.
In this case it was the “dash and initiative” of Australian stealth raiders that won the day, more than the poor attitude or quality of the German infantry. The prisoners may also have been relieved to be alive because the ethos of stealth raiders, according to “Squatter” Preston, was to ‘kill what we could, the rest would surrender’. Prisoners captured by the six-man patrol at Chipilly Spur included the 27th Wurttemberg Division, ‘always... considered one of the very best of the German divisions’. They proved powerless to stop determined and intelligent men who knew how to use ground. As Bean put it ‘When once surprise is effected by bold and skilful men with a good sense of ground, even tough adversaries may be almost impotent’. The reason why Australian soldiers did more stealth raids than any other army lies in the character and composition of the Australian battalions in 1918, and the innovation of their front line men.

In 1918 the typical Australian battalion retained a core of men who had been with their battalion a long time. Platoon officers were ‘the sergeants of last year’, and among the NCOs and privates were ‘men ready to lead’. Of the officers mentioned in stealth raids in this narrative, 86 per cent had served as privates or NCOs in the one battalion, often in the same platoon. Jack Southey ‘treasured the rum-inspired remark of an old cobber’: “Jack, you were a good digger, but you’re a --- rotten officer”’. The familiarity between men like Southey and the soldiers they led ‘was a chief cause for the effectiveness of Australians in battle’. The bushman Bill Harney considered that the officer – man hierarchy existed behind the lines and caused resentment; but dissolved in the frontline, where, ‘it’s everybody’s level’ and officers and men talked ‘freely’. In the line the ‘rough equality’ between junior officers and men undermined the rigidity of British Army discipline, which might have restricted stealth raids. “Eddie” Edwards reckoned:

34 Preston, M 17/7/18, AWM2DRL/0811.
35 Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-one Divisions of the German Army, p. 373.
36 Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 438. See also Gammage, Broken Years, p. 227 n92.
37 Bean, Official History, Vol VI, p. 15; 7981 Pte JA Flannery, 12 Bn, Farm labourer, of Don, Tas. E 20/10/17, aged 18, RTA 13/7/19. AWMSO1312.
38 Of the 204 men involved in stealth raids and mentioned in footnotes, 47 were junior officers and of these 85 per cent had been promoted from the ranks. A further eight stealth raiders were later commissioned.
39 Southey stealth raids see ch 6. In Swinton (ed), Twenty Years After, p. 345.
40 Gammage, Broken Years, p. 247.
41 Harney, Bill Harney’s War, p. 46. Biographical details in Introduction n65.
We may have had our reprobates, but we had our heroes by the score, and when one learnt their weaknesses he appreciated their deeds the more and condoned their little failings.\textsuperscript{43}

Lieutenant Donovan Joynt VC wrote that the stretcher-bearer and stealth raider David Morgan\textsuperscript{44} was ‘no good on the parade ground or behind the Line... but when in the Line, was truly wonderful and worth half a dozen ordinary men for... initiative and bravery’.\textsuperscript{45} Corporal “Bluey” Farrell\textsuperscript{46} was described by an officer who served with him in the ranks ‘as rough as bags’ on the parade ground, but in the front line, one of the ‘men who helped to mould the [6\textsuperscript{th}] battalion’.\textsuperscript{47} These are just two examples of the many stealth raiders in this narrative who were ‘confident, casual, undisciplined in the parade ground sense, but deadly effective’ in the line.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Photo 43} The 8\textsuperscript{th} Battalion Australian Rules Football team, 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Division premiers 1917, 1918 and 1919. The stealth raider David Morgan is seated in the front row right. c1919. (AWM H00562)
\end{center}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Edwards, MS (no date) AWMP89/050. Edwards stealth raid see ch 2.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Morgan stealth raid see ch 2.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Joynt, Saving the Channel Ports, pp. 98-99.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Farrell stealth raid see ch 6.
\item \textsuperscript{47} ‘Cook to Lewis Gunner’, Reveille, 1/11/38, p. 14; ‘Men who helped to mould the battalion’, Ce Ne Fait Rien, AWM3DRL/7869(A).
\item \textsuperscript{48} Gammage, Broken Years, p. 202
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The men of the AIF respected the type of officer who recognised that pushing parade ground discipline on Australians was futile and more importantly irrelevant to their performance in battle. In 1918 parade ground discipline was largely dropped and training became almost entirely based around competitive sports, weapons drill and new technology.\(^{49}\) Australian officers relied on a distinctly Australian ethos. According to the stealth raider Russell Colman:

> The gist of their teaching was this: “You are Australians, from the land of the free. You are bred under wider, freer surroundings than the rest of the world, and consequently have more initiative. You are different clay to the rest of them and are as rough as bags out of the line, but in the line nothing can beat you”. Now this teaching fell on very fertile ground and flourished exceedingly. It certainly did a great deal towards increasing the fighting power of the AIF but it was not the kind of creed that produced a lovable type of man when the AIF came in contact with other units of the British Army.\(^{50}\)

\(^{49}\) When a veteran NCO returned to his battalion before the 8 August offensive he commented the ‘troops are looking real [sic] well at present. There isn’t so much drill nowadays. That has been cut to a great extent and sports, cricket, football, etc takes its place’. 1003 WO2 JW Hetherington MID, 2 Bn, Engineer toolmaker, of Burwood, NSW. E 17/9/14, aged 32, RTA 24/9/18. L 4/8/18, AWMPR03795.

\(^{50}\) Colman stealth raid see ch 5. Colman, M p.85, AWMMSS1357.
Stealth raiding was the supreme embodiment of this distinctive Australian ethos. Australian battalions frequently contrasted the initiative and aggression of their stealth raiders with the “stickiness” of rival Australian battalions, and more often to what they saw as the abhorrent structure of the British Army, which manifested itself in a lack of initiative in battle. 51 ‘You have no idea how different they are from Colonials’, wrote Sergeant Archie Barwick of British troops,

they never question their leaders even if they are on the wrong track but will blindly follow him, bit different to our chaps. A Tommy once he gets in the Army seems to lose all individuality & initiative, & their so called discipline exists only when the eye of authority is over them, & they have to be told to do every little thing just like a mob of kids, & they live in dread of their officers & N.C.Os of all the incompetent & useless officers as ever I saw in my life these Tommy leaders were just them. I wouldn’t follow them as far as I could throw a ton. 52

In 1918 this attitude was typical throughout the fighting ranks of the AIF. In July 1918 Bean told his diary, ‘It is useless at this stage to attempt to cram into Australian troops that the English divisions beside them are as good as they... because they know they are not’. 53 Russell Colman recalled ‘A small undersized weed with a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth’, who remarked as the Guards marched past, ‘“Guards, eh! They look alright out of the line, but in the line they are not a patch on us”’. Colman thought this comment indicated the uniqueness and strength of the Australian’s ethos, because if a ‘little fellow’ from Australia could think so highly of his section, his platoon, his company, his battalion, the AIF, then he was likely to ‘do his very best and hang on to a bad post till the last gasp’. Or try a daring stealth raid as Colman did, to ‘save the battalion from going over the top again’. 54

This ethos was not built on military tradition or the enforcement of parade ground discipline, but on the freedoms that resonated in Australian cultural and political life at the turn of the 20th century. Australia was considered by many to be working man’s paradise. Organised labour was entrenched in parliament. While Australian parliaments embraced the procedures of the British Westminster system, Australian democrats initiated changes that were a generation or more ahead of their British counterparts. The newly federated nation was the

51 3 Bde War Diary 19/7/18 records the failure of 11 Bn to exploit 9 Bn stealth raids: ‘The 11th Battalion left flank has been a bit sticky and haven’t moved forward with the 9th Bn as readily as they might have. This is probably the fault of Capt. Combs the Left Coy. Commander whose nerves are not all they might be – he is being replaced tonight by Capt. Walker’. AWM4/23/3/33Part1.
52 Barwick, D 11/11/17, MLMSS1493.
53 Bean, D 14/7/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/26.
54 Colman, MS pp. 84-85 & 309, AWMMSS1357.
first of its kind to introduce universal suffrage for adult white males and the first to institute an eight-hour working day. The pursuit of ‘Social equality in civil life had produced men with the habit of thinking for themselves and acting on their decision. In the army they continued the habit’.  

The resulting Australian ethos championed personal freedoms over entitlement, and linked a heightened sense of independence and initiative to the vastness of the Australian continent – the bush. What Colonel Arthur Butler, the official medical historian of the AIF, described in his paper “‘The Digger’: A Study in Democracy’ as ‘a deeply-rooted instinct and tradition’, which celebrated virtues of ‘the “common men,” who blazed the trails’ of the ‘vast and forbidden Continent and opened up the Never-never’. The mythical values and virtues of the Australian bush resonated easily with the Australian male at war. The digger behaved much as Lawson’s shearer did in the bush, where respect was earned, not mindlessly given – both ‘call[ed] no biped lord or sir, and touch[ed] their hat to no man!’ In war this attitude to authority troubled many AIF senior commanders, Australian and British, but it was also a principle cause of stealth raids. As late as 31 July 1918, at Hazebrouck, General Glasgow warned his staff not to tell the men they were nearing a milestone of 1,000 prisoners because ‘he didn’t want the men risking their lives in trying to drag prisoners from impossible places’. Stealth raids came about because of the spur from below, not orders from above.

Of the 204 men involved in stealth raids and named in footnotes, 63 per cent came from rural, or “bush” backgrounds in that they were living in country towns or working in country occupations at the time of their enlistment, regardless of where they were born (this includes men who had migrated to Australia). This is well above the total percentage of men with bush backgrounds in the AIF as a whole, which Bean estimated ‘was probably not much more than a quarter’ and Gammage in sum total found to be 30.86 per cent. The thesis shows the urban component of the AIF statistics is exaggerated. For instance, some stealth raiders were countrymen but enlisted in cities, and named the city as their home on their enlistment papers. Jack Hayes was born in Hay, worked in the railways in Bathurst and enlisted in Sydney.

56 AG Butler, “‘The Digger’: A Study in Democracy’, *Reveille*, 1/10/45, p. 4.
57 *The Poetical Works of Henry Lawson*, p. 103.
58 Bean, D31/7/18, AWM38/3DRL/606/116/44-45.
59 This includes Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Bathurst, Launceston and Canberra as “country” at the time; Hobart included as a “city”.
Neil Maddox and Jack Southey worked in remote far western Queensland and enlisted in Melbourne. Bill Harney was a stockman on the Nicholson River in the Gulf of Carpentaria when he decided to enlist. He enlisted in Townsville and named Townsville as his place of residence. Occupations on enlistment papers can also be misleading because they can be misconstrued as “urban”; Dalton Neville was a bank clerk in the town of Singleton, on the banks of the Hunter River, 120 miles northwest of Sydney. A friend described John Stinson, a schoolteacher from Blayney, New South Wales, as a ‘tall leather faced bushman’. Similarly Allan Leighton was a school teacher at Rylstone in the central tablelands of New South Wales.

This thesis also argues that while not absolutely conclusive, bush skills and the distinctly Australian bush ethos might help illuminate why these independent men were not intimidated by the open battlefield of crop, hedges, gullies, rivers and streams encountered after three years of trench warfare at Gallipoli and on the Western Front.

Bush skills refer to an individual’s ability to use confidently environmental stimuli like crop, rain and dead ground, to move with skill to track, surprise, kill, capture or drive the enemy from his strong points. There is no evidence that the stealth raiders’ bush skills were attributable to military training or three years of trench warfare. But there is significant evidence suggesting the Australian soldier valued bush skills and attributed the success of some stealth raids to them. Stealth raiders valued bush skills so highly, particularly tracking and snap shooting, that some country men were encouraged to go on stealth raids even if they had only just arrived in France. Before the war and during it, the power of the bushman legend captivated city and country alike. Even the city boy and university student Russell Colman likened sniping to an Australian bushman getting a possum ‘‘mooned’, [on the skyline] and shooting it’. This touches Bean’s point that in the AIF ‘even city-bred Australians were bush men at heart’.

The Australian bushman’s ethos also contributed to a unique form of mateship in the AIF. Carolyn Holbrook writes, ‘The legendary traits of the Australian soldier – his laconic humour,
comradeship, suspicion of authority and reluctance to salute – were all inherited from the bushman’.\textsuperscript{69} Bill Gammage was right to claim that ‘the best Australians were loyal to their mates in every circumstance’,\textsuperscript{70} as Lawson claimed of the bushman. According to Lieutenant George Mitchell MC, DCM, ‘Digger mateship may be a low ideal, or it may be a high one, but, whatever it is – it will do me!’\textsuperscript{71} He wrote

\begin{quote}
We diggers were a race apart. Long separation from Australia had seemed to cut us completely away from the land of our birth. The longer a man served, the fewer letters he got, the more he was forgotten. Our only home was our unit, and... Pride in ourselves... was our sustaining force.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Was this the ethos that inspired Jack Hayes\textsuperscript{73} to lead the six man patrol against machine gun posts on Chipilly Spur when his Anzac leave to Australia was due and rumours abounded that a battalion would be ordered to do it? ‘Most of the old hands believed we cannot escape our fate, no matter what we did’, wrote Dudley Jackson.\textsuperscript{74} This attitude led men to extraordinary acts of initiative and courage. Men like Hayes possessed that illusive charismatic leadership that regular armies covet in their fighting ranks, but he was far too independent and mobile to be constrained by parade ground discipline or orders. Men like Hayes lived in the moment and dwelt very little on a future beyond defeating the enemy.

With reinforcements practically nil, the Australian soldier knew his battalion, which was his home, could not fight effectively if it sustained heavy casualties, particularly among its best soldiers. The death of old soldiers was felt throughout a battalion, as ‘their testing had lasted so long that theirs was the heavier cross’.\textsuperscript{75} “Eddie” Edwards wrote in May 1918 that he had ‘been with the battalion so long that most of the killed and wounded were personal friends, and it used to come as a shock to hear that so and so had been “knocked”.’\textsuperscript{76} In May 1918, Ernest Hodge and friends buried a mate, and he thought

\begin{quote}
... “3 years ago tomorrow dear old Sticker and I marched into camp together, full of patriotism and enthusiasm and building wonderful castles in the air,” and a big lump came into my throat as I realised this was the finish of it all. I recalled the many happy years we had spent together and
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{69}{Holbrook, Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography, p. 98.}
\footnotetext{70}{Gammage, Broken Years, p. 249.}
\footnotetext{71}{GD Mitchell, ‘When Discipline Overcame Fear,’ Reveille, 1/2/36, p. 10.}
\footnotetext{72}{In Gammage, Broken Years, p. 210.}
\footnotetext{73}{See Hayes, Chipilly Spur, ch 7.}
\footnotetext{74}{Jackson, ‘Flanders, 1917’, Stand To, Vol II, No 3, July-September, 1967, p. 10. See Jackson stealth raids chs 3 & 7.}
\footnotetext{75}{Mitchell, Backs to the Wall, p. 307.}
\footnotetext{76}{Edwards, MS May 1918, AWMP89/050.}
\end{footnotes}
could have wept as I thought it was all finished now. Ah! It is a cruel thing this war, but its no use… after all what better way can a soldier die than leading his men in the thick of the fray against the “Devastators of Civilization.” But a man mustn’t have feelings in this game and with a sigh and a commonplace remark we strolled back to the Battalion chatting away as though we had not a care in the world, while underneath this great camouflage of levity there was a great hole in our hearts and an ache that would not be stilled… “High-ho” with a cheer and a smile we “carry on.”

Throughout 1918 there was ‘strain all the time’. Carrying on became harder as the fighting intensified, the rest periods shortened and battalion strengths diminished. The year began with brutal battles to stop the German offensive, and then followed a crucial summer that was the longest period the AIF spent in the front line on the Western Front. One man described the period as ‘one of the most interesting and successful, as well as strenuous, periods of fighting in which our battalion has taken part’. Men were killed in action, were wounded or fell out of the line through exhaustion, which manifested itself in drunkenness, insubordination, desertion, self-inflicted wounds and most often sickness and war weariness. On 21 September 1918, the 1st Battalion, outstanding for its stealth raiders in July and August, practically imploded in what Ashley Ekins described as an ‘outbreak of collective indiscipline’, in the frontline. 127 men refused to go into action, claiming that they were exhausted, and had done their bit. After capturing their objective, they expected to be relieved by British troops but instead were ordered to return to action to capture an objective the British had failed to take. In a subsequent court martial the men were found not guilty of mutiny but guilty of desertion and were given sentences ranging from 3 to 10 years imprisonment. The majority of these men had their sentences suspended seven to eight months later, but at least one died in custody. Among those court martialled and sentenced to eight years was Corporal Roger Cooney, who had been awarded the Military Medal for his stealth raid at Strazeele on 11 July. Several other men who had done good work on patrols at Hazebrouck were also sentenced.

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77 Hodge, D 16/5/18, AWMPR87/208.
78 Smith, D 8/5/18, AWM2DRL/027.
79 Carne, M July 1918, AWM2DRL/0013.
80 701 cases of SIW were recorded against the AIF in France, about half of these between March and August 1918. See Gammage, Broken Years, p. 222. A SIW is mentioned in ch 5.
82 7784 Pte R Stafford (aka Charles E Riddett) 1 Bn, Labourer, of Wollongong, NSW. E 13/6/17, aged 22, DOI 19/3/19.
83 AWM51/122Parts1-9.
Typically experienced front line soldiers accepted war weariness as a fact of a soldier’s lot: ‘Before any stunt there are a few men who find it impossible to get a grip on their nerves’, wrote the stealth raider Edmund Street, ‘Not the same men by any means. It might be me one day, it might be the sergeant the next stunt’. 84 Colonel Aubrey Wiltshire, 22nd Battalion, worried about a case of a sergeant major that admitted: “I am not afraid of the Hoch but in spite of myself, my nerves are all of a tremble. It’s a bit of war weariness”.

What is one to do in a case like this [Wiltsahire asked himself]? The case is genuine – a splendid brave soldier – always to the front. Nerves can’t stand it interminably. The Army makes no allowance for a thing like this. 85

Yet at this very time confident and self-reliant stealth raiders carried their battalions on their shoulders in times of stress, and on their own or with a few trusted friends did jobs that their commanders set out for a formal raid by a company, a battalion, or a brigade. More often than not they acted decisively before their commanders knew the situation at the front or had decided what to do. The attitude was, when you see an opportunity, are fit enough, and you know how to use the ground, go! Colonel Arthur Butler, whose brother Colin was one of the initiators of stealth raids, 86 believed,

The Australian soldier… wanted to do the job he had come for – to beat the enemy. To that end he was determined to take any amount of pains, understand his weapons and his tactics better than the enemy did, so that, when it came to killing, the odds would be against the enemy. 87

As well as doing “the job he had come for”, stealth raids were a way to avert formal raids, rescue mates, avenge mates and collect souvenirs and war trophies, or a means to express skill and initiative, and speed up the end of the war. A few daring men considered all of these virtues. 88

Stealth raiders were feted and admired during the war and for a time after it, in battalion and divisional histories and in articles in returned soldiers journals and newsletters. Bean dedicated three chapters to stealth raids under the title of “peaceful penetration” in volume VI of the Official History. There the trail ends. In the post Second World War era historians and the

84 Street, MS AWMPR85/179. See Street stealth raid ch 1.
85 Wiltshire, D 4/5/18, MLMSS3058/Box 2/Items 19 & 20. See 22 Bn stealth raids ch 3.
86 See Butler stealth raid ch 1.
88 An excerpt from 24th Bn war diary 8/6/18 is indicative: ‘Scout Sgt. Molloy while leading a patrol came across an enemy post in the high crop and in the ensuing fight was unfortunately killed. He died like the good soldier he was firing his revolver at the enemy. His loss will be much felt.’ AWM423/41/33. See 1550 Molloy, ch 3 n55.
national memory neglected stealth raids, despite the fact that the diggers believed they were important and went a long way in defining the Australian infantryman’s unique characteristics. This historical neglect is perhaps attributable to what Joan Beaumont describes as the ‘selective’ nature of historical writing and memory: what ‘we remember is shaped as much by the priorities and values of the present as by the realities of the past.’

Gallipoli has always held centre stage in the Australian memory. The First AIF championed this because Anzac set the precedent. But the shadow of Gallipoli has loomed disproportionately large over what occurred on the Western Front. Recently historians have attempted to press the case for a deeper understanding of the campaign on the Western Front by focussing on the battles of Fromelles, Pozieres, Third Ypres, Villers-Bretonneux and Hamel and the staff work and leadership skills of higher command in the AIF. These histories tell little of what the frontline soldier felt or did in 1918. What men’s diaries tell us about these battles is not so much what men did, or the outcome, or whether or not Monash was a genius or a commander who ‘destroyed the instrument that had given him his victories’. The men’s diaries and letters tell of the strain and nervous energy before battle, the mistrust of higher command and enemy artillery (their dominant fear), and the shock after battle: weariness, death and mutilation, resignation to fate and rebuilding to maintain the traditions of those that went before them. This is why the Australian tended to revere stealth raids – they defeated the enemy at no great cost to themselves.

The Australian infantrymen thought their stealth raiders ‘ideal soldiers’. They regarded the achievements of stealth raids as among the finest feats by Australians on the Western Front. Yet to this day the Australian War Memorial has no section on Australian stealth raids or “peaceful penetration”, the similar headquarters initiated policy. Post war and revisionist histories have neglected the subject.

In 1918 stealth raiding tactics were entirely original and developed by Australian soldiers of the lowest ranks in the most dangerous posts closest to the enemy. These men understood the brutal nature of the war and the impersonal fact of mass mechanical slaughter. But they did not see themselves as victims. They fought for their units and their mates as part of a distinctive national force. They fought as all good soldiers do, with full confidence and skill in

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89 Beaumont, Broken Nation, xix.
91 Carne, M July 1918, AWM2DRL 0013.
92 Including the new First World War Centenary Gallery 2015.
their weapons and their friends, but also with a distinctly Australian ethos and its close link with the bush and its legend. They were curious and they were competent on the edge of the known world – the battlefields of 1918 were a frontier. While others waited in their posts for orders, ‘like them old Roman soldiers, that you read about, that stood to their posts when the lava went over their head’, the stealth raiders stayed daring, resourceful and deadly effective.

In July 1918, a great compliment was paid to the AIF when the bushman stealth raider Lieutenant Neil Maddox was asked to give a lecture on the tactics at a XV Corps school. “Eddie” Edwards, a No Man’s Land scout famous in the 1st Battalion, witnessed Maddox’s talk:

as I watched, during Maddocks [sic] lecture, the expression on the faces of those men, officers of three famous English and Scottish divisions, I could not repress a thrill of pride in the story so nonchalantly told by him, proud to belong to the same country that produced men who in parties of threes and fours walked into enemy outposts and secured prisoners four and six times their numbers. It was a brilliant series of sorties that will live in the annals of history for all time. The deeds of the Australian soldier in these [stealth] raids made all with whom they came in contact look up to him as something unique in the fighting line.94

Such men should not be forgotten.

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94 Edwards, MS July 1918, AWMPR89/050.
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