



## **MASTERS OF WAR: THE AIF IN FRANCE 1918**

ONE-DAY CONFERENCE SATURDAY 14 APRIL 2018  
POMPEY ELLIOTT MEMORIAL HALL  
403 CAMBERWELL ROAD, CAMBERWELL

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER – CHRIS CLARK**  
AUTHOR OF *THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF AUSTRALIA'S BATTLES*



MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.



# **MASTERS OF WAR: THE AIF IN FRANCE 1918**



**MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.**

**THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT  
THE POMPEY ELLIOT MEMORIAL HALL,  
CAMBERWELL RSL BY MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE, VICTORIA.**

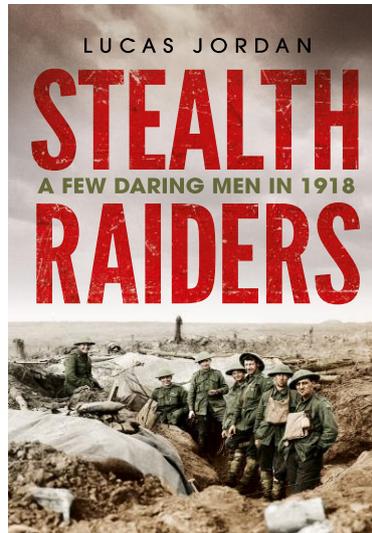
**14 APRIL 2018**

Proudly supported by:



# Stealth Raiding: the crucial summer of 1918

Lucas Jordan



By 13 April 1918 all five Australian divisions were committed against the German spring offensives. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division fought as part of the British XV Corps, Second Army, defending the vital rail hub at Hazebrouck, while the other four Australian divisions, fought on the Somme, in the defence of Amiens, in Fourth Army, commanded by General Henry Rawlinson.



Map 1: France and Belgium

Many historians have written about the battles that followed, at Villers-Bretonneux, Hamel and Amiens, and many Australians have heard of these victories. But it is not well known that the spring and summer of 1918 was the longest period of continuous service in the outpost, support and reserve lines that the infantry of Australian Imperial Force (AIF) endured on the Western Front.

Charles Bean, the Australian official war correspondent and historian, described it as ‘the crucial summer’.<sup>1</sup> The German Army was expected to attack. The AIF was engaged in brutal defensive battles at Hebuterne, Villers-Bretonneux, Monument Wood, Dernancourt, Sailly-Le-Sec, and Hazebrouck. The infantry also repeatedly “hopped the bags” in formal operations, including minor operations, patrols and raids, to capture prisoners for intelligence or improve the tactical position of the Australian line. The infantry was also used as a labour force building further defences in anticipation of a German attack. As one digger put it, there was ‘strain all the time’.<sup>2</sup>

Yet at this time, a few daring low ranking Australian infantrymen began to attack enemy posts without orders, by day and night, killing Germans, capturing prisoners and machine guns and sometimes advancing the line. These men were revered by their mates in the posts closest to the enemy and feared by the Germans.

These men were stealth raiders. Sergeant John Rafferty, an iron turner, of Victoria Park, Western Australia, wrote that ‘a stealth raid is made up on the spot by a group of determined men.’<sup>3</sup>

Men of skill would creep up on their enemy, keeping him in their line of sight 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 to navigate crops, rivers, streams and gullies, to attack and then swiftly return to their posts. Operating in this way without orders was not what the 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 setpiece battles, while brigade or divisional headquarters ordered trench raids. Battalion commanders, headquartered in the front line, oversaw a routine of fighting patrols, by night, typically consisting of an officer and half a platoon with a Lewis gun. These ‘formal’ (ordered) operations might be supported by artillery, trench mortar, heavy machine guns and sometimes gas. Yet during the spring and summer of 1918 and well into the 100 days following the 8<sup>th</sup> August counter-offensive, 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.

At 9 am on 18 May, the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion received orders that it would be attacking the German held village of Ville-sur-Ancre that night. It was a hot, enervating morning. Some of the

---

<sup>1</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, (1946), Ringwood, 1993, p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Diary 8/5/18, AWM2DRL/0013.

<sup>3</sup> Rafferty, Diary 6/9/18, WA Army Museum, File no. UH11/2.

Australians had slept among the equipment they were to carry into battle that night, reckoning, 'The Hun will be asleep too.' Ninety yards away from the Australian line the Germans manned an advanced machine gun post, partially hidden by a crop of corn in No Man's Land. The 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion sentries knew it was occupied because sniping had been active and every so often a German would be seen throwing a 'bully beef' tin of excrement into the field. But no tins had been thrown for some time; the Australians were convinced the Germans were asleep. Lieutenant Alex Irvine, a station overseer from Wanaaring, in outback New South Wales, sensed a 'golden opportunity'.<sup>4</sup> He 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. His commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel George Murphy, agreed and decided not to ask permission from brigade headquarters for fear of stalling the plan.

What happened next was described by Lieutenant Joe Maxwell, VC, MC and Bar, DC, 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion, one of Australia's most decorated soldiers of the First World War, as the 'finest individual act of audacity – if one could call it individual' – that 'I witnessed... during the war'.<sup>5</sup>

Irvine and 17 volunteers jogged across the dead ground in No Man's Land, trampling the ears of corn beneath their boots. They moved in a line, spaced a few yards apart, like a rugby team sweeping into attack, each man visualising his opponent. They leapt into the post and captured 22 sleeping Germans and a machine gun, Irvine herded the prisoners, carrying their gun back to his own post. The stealth raid took ten minutes to plan and seven minutes to execute.<sup>6</sup> It was so swift and silent Germans in a nearby trench had no idea their machine gun had been captured.

One thing that made stealth raids so attractive to frontline soldiers was that they defeated the enemy at no great cost. To the men of the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Irvine's stealth raid saved casualties the machine gun would have inflicted that night during the attack on Ville-sur-Ancre. 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.

The more I learned about stealth raiders the more their experiences challenged my own preconceptions and many orthodox historical interpretations of the AIF in 1918. For example, the small unit tactics I am describing today have commonly been known as 'peaceful penetration'. The official historian Charles Bean adopted the phrase in Volume VI of his official history, and it has been used ever since. But I found that Australian soldiers did not use that term. They had a variety of expressions to describe what they were doing: 'kidnapping', 'stonkering', 'stoush', 'box-on', 'one-man raid', 'sport', 'the cuckoo game', 'minor enterprise', 'daylight raid', 'epic' and 'stealth raid'. My reading of hundreds of firsthand accounts convinced me to replace 'peaceful penetration' with a term that was used by the men. The term 'peaceful penetration' does appear in the primary sources but it was

---

<sup>4</sup> Bean, Diary, Morlancourt, May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, pp. 93-104.

<sup>5</sup> J. Maxwell, 'Audacity: Bootless Prisoners', *Reveille*, 30/5/31.

<sup>6</sup> Bean, Diary, Morlancourt, May 1918, AWM38/3DRL/606/112/12-16, pp. 93-104.

used by higher command. Stealth raids were initiated by men of the lower ranks and began in April 1918, whereas divisional and Australian Corps headquarters adopted a policy of 'peaceful penetration' in July. Stealth raiders inspired it, but it was not the same.

The late Jeffrey Grey, one of Australia's most distinguished military historians, called 'peaceful penetration' 'small-unit tactics at its very best'. But Grey went on to diminish the importance of stealth raids by claiming that such tactics 'do not... win battles'.<sup>7</sup> *Stealth Raiders* shows that Grey's view is simply a misreading of history and a misreading of the role of stealth raids in the Australian Imperial Force in 1918.

For example, on 8 July 1918, Second Lieutenant Russell Colman, the youngest officer in the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion, initiated a series of stealth raids that captured all of the objectives General John Monash intended to capture in a second Battle of Hamel. The stealth raids made a formal battle unnecessary, saving casualties the AIF could ill afford. In the same week in French Flanders, a few men of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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. On 30 July the 1<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>th</sup> battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Wilder-Neligan, captured more Germans than there were Australian infantrymen in the attack. The British Inspector General of Training described the attack as 'the best show ever done by a battalion in France'.<sup>8</sup> The supreme stealth raid of the war altered the course of the Battle of Amiens. On 9 August the British battle to capture Chipilly Spur had been raging for 30 hours, when six Australians decided to cross the Somme River. They captured the village of Chipilly and the Chipilly Spur – the right flank objective of a British Division, some 15,000 men – during the most decisive battle of the war. The story of the stealth raiders tells us a great deal about the sophistication and ingenuity of the diggers and their achievements in the last battles of the war.

The enduring images of the First World War are of trenches, mud, barbed wire and craters but the German Michael and Georgette offensives swept through those desolate battlefields into rolling farmlands untouched by the war. The new battlefronts comprised of outposts rather than fixed lines of trenches. A chorus of Australian soldiers' diaries describe the battlefield as 'a landscape of marvellous beauty', characterised by fields of newly sown crop, drains, streams, rivers and gullies, dense woods, sunken roads, and in French Flanders, hedges and farm buildings.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> J. Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, Port Melbourne, 2008, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> R. Stevenson, *To Win the Battle: The 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division in the Great War, 1914-1918*, Melbourne, 2013, p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> See for example H.R. Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918*, (1933), Barnsley, 2012, p. 135.

### **A typical battlefield from 1917**



**‘A landscape of marvelous beauty’**



Where the German advances stopped, Australian and German infantrymen dug outposts in the fields. 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.

The strategic situation had changed also. After two years in which the Australian infantry had been used as shock troops in offensive battles it was now the Germans who were expected to attack. Lance Corporal William Miller, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 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 50 yds, 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.<sup>10</sup>

It was stealth raiders who initiated many of these advances. The German Army had suffered such significant losses in the spring offensives that it did not have the resources or the time to construct a formidable or cohesive front line. The reinforced concrete pillboxes that the Australians had encountered at Messines and Third Ypres in 1917 were absent, and a lack of manpower also meant that very little effort was put into building trenches or constructing the massed barbed wire that channelled attackers into killing zones for machine gunners. The Germans could not hold their front in strength and amass reserves for another offensive. The result was that the British Army, including the Australians, faced a relatively disorganised system of outposts shielding a haphazard main line behind it, while the German high command siphoned divisions for further offensives against the French to the south.

This would leave the German outpost garrisons vulnerable to exploitation by bold and skilful men who knew how to use dead ground and cover to outflank German posts.

The first stealth raids were modifications of 1917 tactics. With the Germans expected to attack Allied high command put great pressure on the infantry to capture 'a live Bosche' every 24 hours who might offer information on the likely timing and direction of the next offensive.<sup>11</sup>

In trench warfare in 1917 the typical tactics used to capture an enemy or gain intelligence were the formal raid and the fighting patrol, by night. The formal raid generally took the form of a box barrage supported by trench mortar, artillery, or a gas attack. By 1918 the men dreaded formal raids because the supporting arms, be it 4.5-inch howitzers, trench mortars or machine guns tended to advertise the raid. Lieutenant Edgar Rule, 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, wrote that by 1918 the men thought that these raids were 'either a great success or else a murdering match'.<sup>12</sup> Some men initiated unauthorised stealth raids to prevent formal raids, backing themselves to pull off the objective of the raid without their battalions suffering the casualties the men associated with formal operations. Bean held that in April 1918,

---

<sup>10</sup> Miller, Diary 11/6/18, AWMPR00792.

<sup>11</sup> 41 Bn War Diary, April 1918, App 30, AWM4/23/58/18Part2.

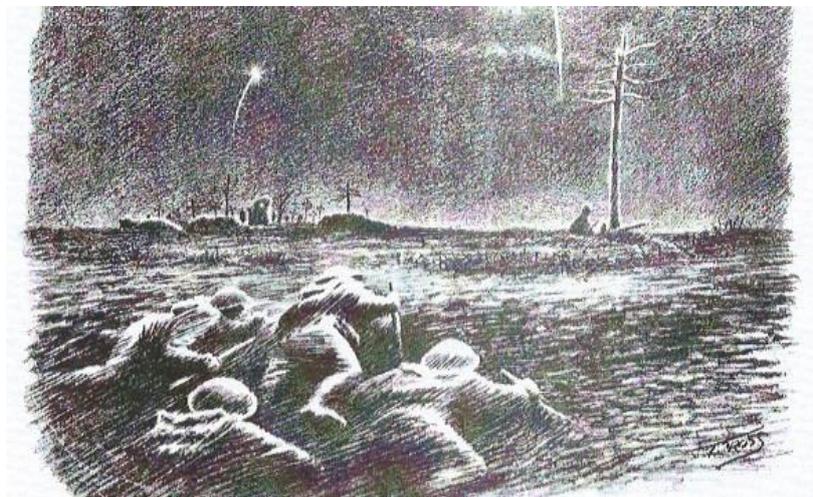
<sup>12</sup> E.J. Rule, *Jacka's Mob: A Narrative of the Great War*, (1933), Prahran, 1999, p. 128.

Each front-line battalion knew that, if its nightly [fighting] 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.<sup>13</sup>

In *Backs to the Wall: Larrikin on the Western Front*, the stealth raider Lieutenant George Mitchell, 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion, called this the 'modification' of orders. Mitchell learnt 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 quickly.'<sup>14</sup>

**Battalion artist Tom Cross's impression of a stealth raid by men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Battalion, April 1918.**

(AWM RCDIG0001603)



As spring turned to summer, changing seasonal conditions spurred a few men to go beyond modification to innovation. The growth of crop 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 arguments in favour of Bean's nightly patrols, difficult to continue. Australian battalions increasingly found that even the most experienced and trained patrollers and trench raiders could fall foul of the ground and the darkness. The men found these losses the more regrettable because, with reinforcements next to none, experienced men were practically irreplaceable. Nevertheless, higher command – brigade headquarters and above – continued to order nightly fighting patrols and raids. The men in the front line soldiered on, under the philosophy that 'It's an order, and I'll carry it out.'<sup>15</sup>

May to July 1918 marked the change of season. Weather conditions were hot, humid and enervating. The crop in No Man's Land grew to over four feet tall. A few men began to stealth raid in daylight, arguing that daylight raids would be 'utterly unexpected' and could

---

<sup>13</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: The Australian Imperial Force in France During the Allied Offensive, 1918*, hereafter *Official History*, Vol VI, Canberra, 1942, pp. 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> G.D. Mitchell, *Backs to the Wall: A Larrikin on the Western Front*, (1937), Crows Nest, 2007, pp. 289-290.

<sup>15</sup> Rule, *Jacka's Mob*, p. 116.

succeed 'without the casualties.'<sup>16</sup> This was an unprecedented tactical innovation initiated by men of the lowest ranks.

**6<sup>th</sup> Battalion artist Charles Henry Gould's impression of a daylight stealth raid.**

**(AWM ART025562.018)**



Lieutenant Bob Traill, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, described the routine of trench warfare as men had come to know it:

We hide by day and crawl out of our holes like rats at night... feed by night and work by night.<sup>17</sup>

The bushman Lieutenant Neil Maddox, of the Victorian 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was one of the few who challenged that. He was widely regarded as one of the initiators of daylight stealth raids.<sup>18</sup> A Jackaroo on a cattle station in Western Queensland before the war, Maddox was the type of junior officer the AIF admired: keen, conscientious and a brave and fearless leader. As a platoon officer he was at his best when scouting, as he had done in the Australian bush. He was also something of a larrikin. He once entered an estaminet in France with a defused grenade, which he placed on the bar. The terrified publican and his customers fled, and Maddox and a mate helped themselves to a few bottles.<sup>19</sup> However the rural setting of the outpost line near Hazebrouck was perfectly matched to his skills and it did not take him long to gain a reputation as an innovative stealth raider.

---

<sup>16</sup> W.C. Belford, *Legs Eleven: Being the Story of the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF in the Great War*, (1940), Uckfield, 2010, pp. 569-570; 'Colonel Lillie's Story', *5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association Bulletin*, No. 28, 24 April 1977, AWM3DRL6557; 'Daylight Raids Lieut. Neil Maddox's Report', *Reveille*, 1/5/38, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Traill, Diary 9/6/18, AWM2DRL/711.

<sup>18</sup> 'Colonel Lillie's Story', *5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association Bulletin*, No. 28, 24 April 1977, AWM3DRL6557; 'Daylight Raids Lieut. Neil Maddox's Report', *Reveille*, 1/5/38, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Sharman, pers com, 8/8/2012.

**Lt Neil Maddox MC & Bar. (AWM H15253)**



On 17 May 1918 he was ordered to lead two platoons in a formal raid supported by a box barrage against a German post with the objective being to identify the German unit. But the idea of a formal raid with a barrage was not appealing to Maddox. He was an experienced frontline soldier and knew the risks of advertising a raid with a bombardment. Instead Maddox and four seasoned NCOs from “C” Company pre-empted the formal raid by surprising a German post hidden in a wheat crop by creeping up on it and outflanking it while the rest of their platoon bombarded it with rifle grenades. When the rifle grneadiers let up, the Germans fled for a gap in a hedge where Maddox and his mates were waiting for them and held them up in good old bushranger style. The stealth raiders killed five Germans and identified their unit. Maddox reported, ‘We gave them a bit of stoush’.<sup>20</sup> But despite the success of the daylight stealth raid Maddox and his platoon were ordered to “go over the top” that night in the formal raid anyway. That night the raiders found the German trench empty. The friendly barrage served as a warning to the Germans and provoked retaliatory fire. The Australians suffered five casualties. The formal raid was a sharp contrast to Maddox’s daylight stealth raid.

As the summer went on, daylight stealth raiding intensified. Corporal Len Jones wrote that each day the ‘boys showed great initiative, altering their tactics... in [the] ripening crops of wheat and oats’.<sup>21</sup> Australian stealth raiders advanced the line, killed and captured dozens of Germans and their machine guns and war material. On 11 July 1918, a few stealth raiders of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions captured half the opposing German divisions front line before either their own headquarters or the German commanders were aware of it, for the loss of three men. Stealth raiders typically worked in small teams. They would work their way around the

---

<sup>20</sup> *Reveille*, 1/5/38, p. 16. See also 5 Bn War Diary, May 1918, App 9, AWM4/23/22/39.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, Papers July 1918, AWM2DRL/0521.

flank of a German post. Some men rushed it while the others remained hidden in the crop in support. A digger wrote:

The 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.<sup>22</sup>

The war diary of the XV Corps artillery stated that artillery fire was suspended because ‘no one knew where the Australian infantry had gone on their marauding expeditions’.<sup>23</sup>

**Painting by the official war artist James F. Scott: two men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion conducting a stealth raid, 11 July 1918.**

(AWM ART03384)



The stealth raiders learnt that enemy observers, or “flare kings”, manned shell holes in garrisons of two; 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 *gruppas*, usually seven men under an NCO, whose job it was to screen the machine gunners. Patrols in a diamond formation of four men would creep around the flank of each post, using the crop as cover, then two men would rush it from the flank or rear. The stealth raiders mixed freely with the prisoners and it was known that German morale was shattered and that their outpost garrisons were increasingly tired and despondent.

Meanwhile 60 kilometres to the south, the Australian Corps was engaged in the defence of Amiens. Here also, men of the lowest ranks, initiated daylight stealth raids. It was a distinctively Australian tactic. On 5 July, Corporal Walter Brown earned a Victoria Cross for his solo raid near Villers-Bretonneux. Commanding officers called it a ‘minor operation,’ before they learnt that Brown had carried out the raid on his own, and before his battalion had entered the frontline.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> In P. Yule (ed), *Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France*, Melbourne, 1987, p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> In Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, pp. 420-421.

<sup>24</sup> 21 Bn War Diary, July 1918, App 15, AWM4/23/38/35Part2.

**Sgt Walter Brown VC, DCM (courtesy of Pamela Gould)**



Walter Brown's VC makes him the most famous of the stealth raiders but other men acting alone or in small teams also initiated stealth raids in the days after the Battle of Hamel. The battle had eliminated the problem of enfilade from the heights north of the Somme River, but had created a similar problem from the south. The Australian Corps front receded in a south-west direction at an angle of practically 45 degrees. The German field artillery pumped high-velocity shells and gas into position occupied by the likes of Wally Brown. Stealth raiders attempted to destroy German strong points that were precariously close to the Australians new forward posts. General 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.<sup>25</sup> At a meeting on 5 July, Monash and General Henry Rawlinson, commanding the Fourth Army, sought Field Marshall Douglas Haig's permission for the attack. Haig agreed for plans to be drafted for a setpiece attack that might take place there in the future. Monash's plans were duly drafted and submitted to Haig. Monash proposed 17 July for the battle.

On 7 July, Major General Charles Rosenthal, GOC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, who had followed stealth raiders with an intelligent and sympathetic eye as a brigadier in the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade in April and

---

<sup>25</sup> Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, pp. 375-376.

May, sent out an 'instruction'. He urged his brigade commanders to advance if they could by means of 'silent penetration', meaning without assistance by artillery. Rosenthal's message was the first suggestion of what would become the formal policy of '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. Later that day, Rosenthal concluded his personal diary with: 'I am instructing my two line Brigadiers to do all they can under the present disorganised and demoralised condition of the German defences to extend our front Eastward.'<sup>26</sup> On 11 July he forwarded to Monash a recommendation that the Victoria Cross be awarded to the stealth raider Walter Brown.<sup>27</sup>

What followed was a series of stealth raids sanctioned by the divisional commander, in which the initiative and planning was left to experienced front line soldiers. Between 8 and 17 July, stealth raiders captured all of the objectives that Monash intended to capture in a second battle of Hamel. A captured German document read:

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.<sup>28</sup>

Stealth raiders so demoralised their opponents that they feared to enter the line against them.



**Trophies captured by stealth raiders. (AWM E02803)**

### **Significance of stealth raiding at Hazebrouck:**

- The capture of Merris was the culmination of four months in which the 1st Division advanced over one mile on a front of 5000 yards, and captured nearly 1000 prisoners. The commanding officer of XV Corps, General De Lisle, acknowledged that the Australians did 'such damage to the... enemy' that nine divisions were replaced.

---

<sup>26</sup> Rosenthal, Diary 7/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, Diary 11/7/18, MLMSS2739/Item2.

<sup>28</sup> In J. Monash, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, (1920), Sydney, p. 47.

### Significance of stealth raiding on the Somme:

- Advanced the Australian line three-quarters of a mile between 29 March and 6 May, and a further two miles by 8 July.
- Made a second battle of Hamel unnecessary, saved casualties the AIF could ill-afford.
- The tactic was so successful that higher command could not ignore it. Monash introduced a policy known as ‘peaceful penetration.’
- Australian special patrol instructors were sent to British Corps.
- Along with the battles of Morlancourt, 10 June, and Hamel, 4 July, the dominance of stealth raiders on the Somme front led to Haig and Rawlinson (GOC Fourth Army) choosing Amiens as the site for the Allied counter-offensive.

When the Allies launched their great counter offensive near Amiens on 8 August 1918, the men believed they had a uniquely Australian fighting style that brought out ‘the true qualities of the digger’:

‘ingenuity, resourcefulness, and personal initiative’.<sup>29</sup>

Confidence was at an all-time high.

On 8 August setpiece battles supported by artillery and sometimes tanks resumed but individuals and small groups of daring men continued to use stealth-raiding tactics.

The fluid semi-open and open battlefields which opened up after the 8 August offensive challenged Monash’s generalship because the situation was so fluid as to be impossible to control by tight planning. At the battles of Chuignes, 23 August, and Mont St Quentin, 31 August, detailed orders for these setpiece attacks arrived well after the men had used their own initiative and skills to continue stealth raiding. Of the fighting in 1918 Bean wrote:

All of us knew of instance – 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 carried out by a company commander or one of his men on the spot before the order from above arrived – if ever it did.

Such a case was the capture of Chipilly Spur, tactically important high ground overlooking the Somme River. Despite the ‘brilliant success’,<sup>30</sup> of the 8 August offensive. The Australian Corps, with its left pressed against the south bank of the Somme River, finished the day under duress. In British III Corps sector north of the river, the British 58<sup>th</sup> Division failed to reach its objective, a ridge of high country which rose to form a peninsula in a bend of the Somme. Chipilly Spur was the key German defensive position on the Somme; the western terrace was thick with German machine guns that overlooked the 58<sup>th</sup> Division assembly area in the gullies and woods to the west. German machine gunners and artillery on the spur fired into the flank and rear of the Australian advance, inflicting casualties, destroying gun batteries

---

<sup>29</sup> Carne, Manuscript July 1918, AWM2DRL/0013.

<sup>30</sup> R. McMullin, *Pompey Elliott*, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 464-465.

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. But before Monash's orders reached the front, the spur was captured by six Australians, led by Company Quartermaster Sergeant Jack Hayes, an original of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, using stealth raiding tactics.

On the morning of 9 August, Hayes and his friend Sergeant Harold Andrews were souvenir hunting in the village of Chipilly despite knowing it was in the middle of No Man's Land. The two experienced sergeants were absent without leave but recognized the tactical importance of the position. Arming themselves with abandoned German rifles they scouted the village, and the location of the German machine gun positions on the western terrace of the spur. Then, they returned to their battalion headquarters. Major Alexander Mackenzie was commanding. The Australians were fed up and frustrated with the repeated failure of the British to capture Chipilly and the high ground. Hayes suggested taking a patrol across the river to capture the village for the beleaguered British. Mackenzie relayed Hayes' suggestion to the brigade commander, Iven Mackay. A quartermaster sergeant was suggesting tactics to a brigadier. But Mackay had word from the British 58<sup>th</sup> Division that they would be attacking Chipilly Spur again at 5.30 pm, reinforced by the inexperienced United States 131<sup>st</sup> Regiment. He rejected Hayes' suggestion.

**Jack Hayes seated at left. (courtesy of Helen Thomson and Nola Moore)**



**The village of Chipilly, as the six stealth raiders led by Jack Hayes would have seen it.**

**(AWM H15934)**



At 4 pm the British commenced an artillery barrage as a prelude to their attack, and at 5.30 pm the Australians watched the Allied assault. Nearest the Australians, the British attack aimed at Chipilly and the spur above it did not go well. The German defenders were practically immune to tanks and fired into the British infantry as they attempted to advance across a gully and up the slopes of the spur. The watching Australians quickly realized the British attack was faltering. Within ten minutes Jack Hayes had five men organized to follow him across the river as riflemen.

The first British troops they found were two platoons of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> London Battalion, under a temporary captain. This man told Hayes that he had orders to clear the village of Chipilly before outflanking the German machine gun positions on the spur from the south. Hayes volunteered the six Australians as scouts but the British captain tried to discourage him because the 2/10<sup>th</sup> 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 the British into the village under fire.

What followed was the supreme stealth raid of the war. The six Australians cleared the village and garrisoned it with British troops. Hayes and Andrews led a Lewis gun team up the spur to a position from which it could fire enfilade into the German machine gun posts which were holding up the British advance. A British barrage of smoke and high explosive commenced. The Tommies withdrew. By 1918 experienced Australian infantrymen used clear and simple instructions to communicate fire and movement tactics in semi-open or open-warfare: 'watch your flanks – hit hard'; 'Those who can, get on; while those who can't, get around.'<sup>31</sup> At Chipilly Spur the British troops could not get on and the German defenders were more than a match for their frontal assaults. Hayes took his men around. The six

---

<sup>31</sup> See for instance Gemmell, *Diary*, 23/5/18, AWM2DRL//0181; H. Kahan, *The 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion Australian Imperial Force: A Record of War Service*, (1969), Victoria Park, 2007, p. 64.

Australians advanced ‘across country’ using the smoke, dead ground, and long grass as cover. Moving swiftly, they attacked post after post, outflanking them from the south. They worked in pairs, one to assault and one to support, just as stealth raiders had done throughout the crucial summer. Along the crest of Chipilly Spur, German machine gunners were taken by surprise as they peered into the smoke, waiting for the English to attempt another frontal assault. The Germans were from the 27<sup>th</sup> Wurttemberg Division, ‘always... considered one of the very best of the German divisions.’<sup>32</sup> but they were powerless against the stealth raiders tactics. As Bean put it:

When once surprise is effected by bold and skillful men with a god sense of ground, even tough adversaries may be almost impotent.<sup>33</sup>

The action of the six stealth raiders at Chipilly Spur marked the moment when the 8 August objectives of the 58<sup>th</sup> Division, III Corps, were reached. Hayes’ six-man patrol had completed the objective of capturing Chipilly and outflanking the hostile machine-gun posts from the south, and the wider British and American objective of capturing the spur. They had advanced over one kilometre.

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. The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion crossed the Somme at 3 am under a heavy mist, to find Chipilly Spur captured. In his 1920 book *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, Monash took credit for the capture of Chipilly Spur. He claimed it was captured under his orders by the 131<sup>st</sup> American Regiment and an Australian brigade. Jack Hayes, Harold Andrews, Richard Turpin, William Kane, “Jerry” Fuller and George Stevens – the Chipilly Six – were not given the credit they deserved for what can only be described as an epic.

### **Chipilly Spur August 1918. (AWM E02989A)**



---

<sup>32</sup> USA General Staff, *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-one Divisions of the German Army which participated in the War (1914-1918)*, Chaumont, 1919, p. 373.

<sup>33</sup> Bean, *Official History*, Vol VI, p. 438.

## Chipilly Spur 2012



In 1918 the German army began disintegrating after the failure of its spring and summer offensives, 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 corps commander who gave them practically no rest. But the experienced few who remained ‘knew the soldiers game from A to Z’.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes they anticipated the orders of their commanding officers or knew better ways to get a job done with few casualties. 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 their weapons and their friends. These attributes, combined with a uniquely Australian ethos that championed egalitarianism, 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.

---

<sup>34</sup> In I. Chapman, *Iven G. Mackay: Citizen and Soldier*, Melbourne, 1975, p. 107.