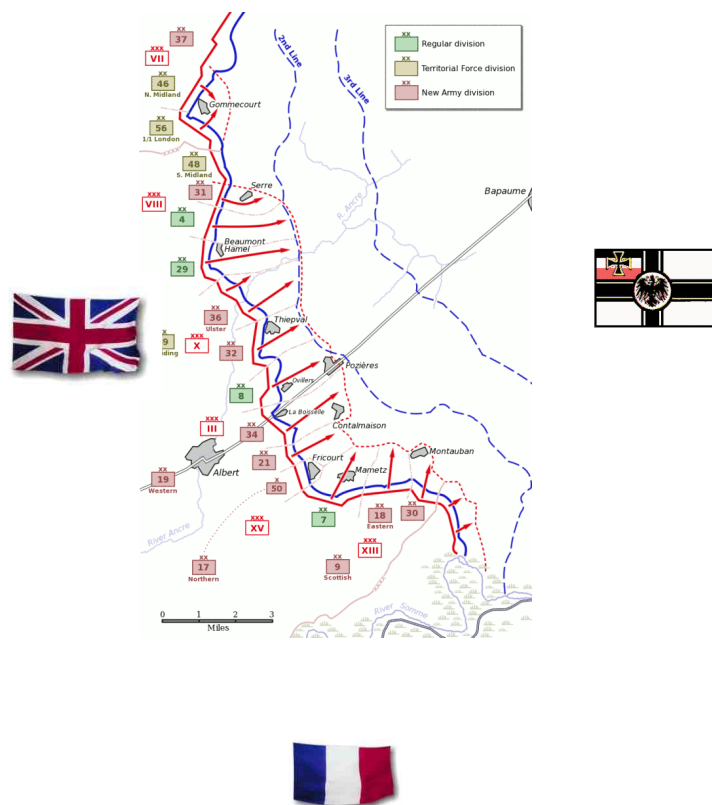


# Muck and Bullets



## A simulation of the battle of the Somme 1916

The nation must be taught to bear losses. No amount of skill on the part of the higher commanders, no training, however good, on the part of the officers and men, no superiority of arms and ammunition, however great, will enable victories to be won without the sacrifice of men's lives. The nation must be prepared to see heavy casualty lists.

Sir Douglas Haig June 1916

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## ***Introduction***

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This is a simulation of the military campaign in 1916 known as the Battle of the Somme. It took place in Picardy, to the north of the Somme river, over a front of 16 miles during the latter part of 1916. We will take an entire day to go through this simulation in order to give you a feeling for the way that the campaign developed. When you visit the area, we would like to think that you will recognise some of the places, because you will have “fought” over them. We hope that you will understand the location of villages such as Thiepval and Beaumont-Hammel. We also hope that you will find the simulation both interesting and fun!

This simulation takes the form of a game that has been specially designed for you. Although we will all be playing a game, it represents a series of events that were deadly serious. Losses during the First World War were dreadful and the Somme was one of the worst battles. The British army lost more men on the first day of the battle than at any time before or since. Each of these losses was a man killed or seriously wounded and was a catastrophe for the people involved. So please enjoy the day, but bear in mind that this was a dreadful and monumental event.

During the day, you will become very involved in the game. Do not let your enthusiasm override your courtesy to others. It can be rather easy to let game disagreements become personal – don’t.

The rules are intended to represent reality, but we will not have taken account of everything. There will be a team of umpires who will be constantly monitoring the game. If there is something that has not been allowed for, the umpires will tell you what happens. The umpire is always right – there are no exceptions to this. Umpires will be very busy, so if you need an umpire, raise your hand and be patient.

You will be taking the part of commanders of the forces involved. Some of you will be playing British forces, some French and some German. Display courtesy to everyone – on the same side or not. You will be left to resolve a lot of the actions between yourselves, so be polite and fair – try to come to the right decision rather than the decision that happens to suit you. If you cannot agree with your opposite number, then consult an umpire (but please note umpires are likely to penalise trivial requests). Finally, we are aware that there might be occasions when you could cheat. You know that this would be wrong, but it will also spoil the simulation for many others, so don’t do it. The umpires are all experienced and will devise suitably horrible punishments, within the context of the game, for cheats.

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## **Background**

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The German army has built very strong fortifications in the Somme area and left a force of about 6 divisions to man them. The fortifications are in three lines of trenches – each line having front line and support trenches with barbed wire. The Germans have thereby released a large number of soldiers to attack the French at Verdun. This attack has been going on for over three months and is going badly for the French. It is the opinion of Marshal Foch, in command of French forces, that help is needed from the British army or the collapse of French forces is inevitable.

Sir Douglas Haig has been in command of British forces since December 1915. He sees his duty clearly – to act as if he is the subordinate of Marshal Foch. Although he has grave misgivings about the timing, he therefore agrees to the request from Marshal Foch that the British, along with some French, should attack the German positions in the area to the north of the Somme river.

The attack has been timed for 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916. It is being preceded by a massive bombardment lasting a week (this bombardment will be going on as you come into the Great Hall). Haig's objectives are:

1. to stop further German divisions from being sent to Verdun
2. to inflict large casualties on the German Army
3. to make territorial gains

Haig's plan falls into three phases:

1. an initial bombardment, to cut the wire and neutralise the German trench defences
2. a rapid assault to take the first trench system, followed quickly by an assault on the trench lines behind
3. a cavalry sweep through the unfortified ground behind the trench system

The bombardment, along with other indicators, has warned the Germans of the coming attack. The German plan is simply to hold the British and French at the first opportunity, using the good quality of the trench systems. German divisions will be rushed to the Somme from the south (around Verdun) as they are needed, but the pressure is on to avoid using too many divisions because the German army is making good headway at Verdun.

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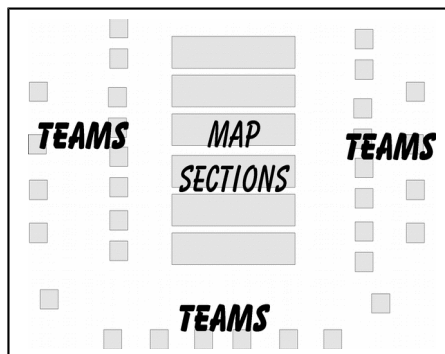
## **Game Structure**

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You will be placed in a team. Most teams will take the role of Divisional HQ (a Division was about 8,000 men). Some of you will be in Corps teams – a Corps is in charge of a number of divisions.

The Great Hall will have a large map of the Somme, in sections. Tables for Division teams will be placed around this map and then Corps tables will be behind them.

At the start of the game, every divisional team has units on the map, but some are more heavily involved than others. As new units come on, Army HQ will allocate them to Corps who will, in turn, allocate them to divisional teams, who will bring them onto the map at a convenient position near their other units.



Within a short while, therefore, there will be plenty of activity for every team. If at first you have less to do, then make the most of it – learn by watching how the assaults are going and plan what you will do.

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## ***Military Units***

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On both sides, the basic unit was the division. A division was able to operate as a tactical unit, with its own artillery and support units. The important parts of a division were three infantry brigades (the same units are known as regiments in the German and French armies) and a number of artillery units that we will be treating as all one “divisional artillery” unit. Each brigade was about 2500 men.

A brigade/regiment was made up from 3 battalions. We will not be considering battalions except for front-line German units (see below, where the counters are described).

Each division was part of a Corps. The Corps could normally have between 2 and 5 divisions. The Corps commander would give orders to the divisions and the Corps had an amount of heavy artillery that it used to help divisional attacks.

Each Corps was part of an Army. An Army would have very different numbers of Corps. Although there were several armies involved in reality, in our game, the Army will be played by sixth form students. Army commanders and staff were based well away from the fighting and directed the Corps at a distance. This will be represented by Army HQ being outside the Great Hall.

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## ***How does this game actually work?***

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The teams will be sitting around the hall. In the centre will be a very large map of the Somme area. Players will have various things to do in each turn of the game – some will involve sitting at their tables and some will involve being at the map (players at the map will probably have to stand).

The game is organised as a series of turns. Each turn should take about 20 minutes and has a series of actions that are carried out in sequence for each part of the battlefield. Players who are operating and moving regiments and brigades on the map will move counters on the large map. Operations will include firing artillery barrages (by putting artillery markers on the map), moving troops to assault trenches (by moving the brigade/regiment counters) and moving troops to another position (again, by moving the counters). Those operations players will then work out what happened as a result of their actions by working through the rules, marking any losses on the counters and carrying through anything else required by the rules.

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## ***Each Turn***

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Each turn represents the actions in a week/10 days. We will need to be very strict about the turns – if you do not finish what you want to do in a particular part of the turn, then it will not be done and you must move on when asked to do so. One of the umpires will announce what to do in each part of each turn. The jobs that players have to do are spelled out on the sheet at the back of this handbook, but the main turn sequence is:

1. “Over the Top” – a whistle will go, the operational players from the divisional teams will move to the map and go through the combat rules. During this stage, Army HQ will allocate new units.
2. “Back to HQ” – every player must return to their team table. The map should now be updated and reports written ready for Divisions to give to Corps
3. “Report up the Line” – Divisions should pass reports to their Corps and new divisions will be passed by Corps to Divisional teams.

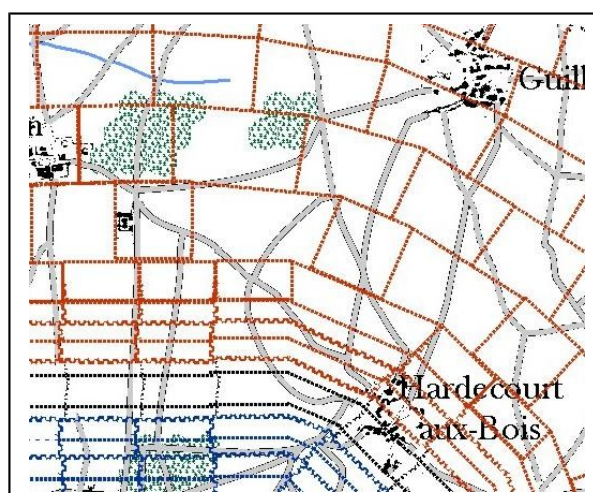
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## ***The Maps***

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Each team will be given a map of the Somme, with a normal grid reference system on it. When communicating with other teams, always use the grid reference. Most of the time, a four figure reference will be best (e.g. a Corps could instruct a division: “you are to attack towards Montauban at grid reference 6638). The trench systems are marked on this map – Allied trenches in blue and German trenches in red.

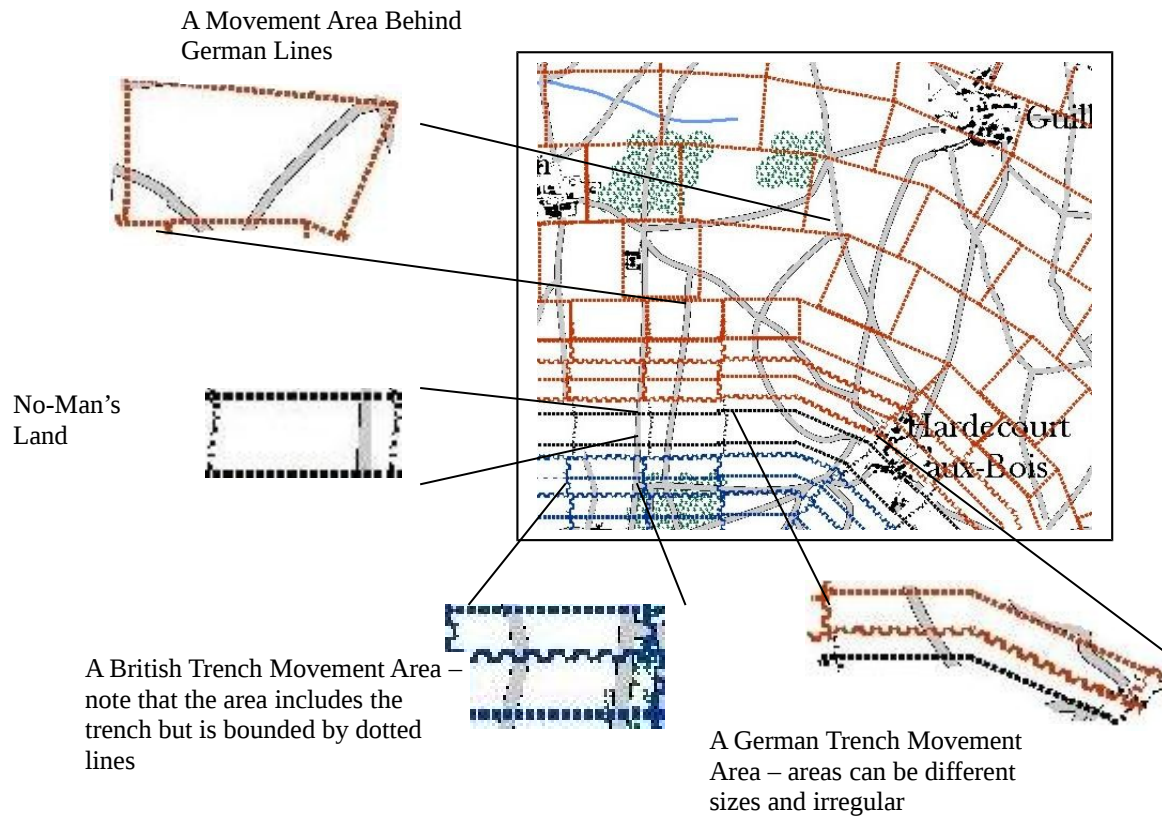
The main map does not have the grid reference on it. Instead, it has a series of movement areas marked by dotted lines (blue for areas in British/French control, red for areas under German control and black for “no-man’s land” in front of each trench system). The size and shape of the areas is different from place to



place. Movement areas can hold two brigades/regiments of troops and are used to regulate movement.

The figure above shows an example of the map in the area of Hardecourt-aux-Bois. The dotted lines define the areas and you will see the trenches (jagged lines), roads, villages and woods.

Just to make the point clear, in the next figure, I have pulled out four of the movement areas:



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## ***The Tactical Zone***

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One of the important ideas in this game is the “Tactical Zone”. If a unit is within 4 game areas of an enemy unit, then it is said to be in the *Tactical Zone*. In other words, when a unit is under immediate threat of enemy action it cannot act as the same old way and it is slower to do things because it needs to adopt a different stance and move more cautiously under enemy observation and fire.

In the game, this means that a unit in the *Tactical Zone* can only move a maximum of 4 areas and it must move straight forwards or back, without turning. This, along with problems of moving ammunition and sighting the guns, means that artillery can only move 1 area if in the *Tactical Zone*.

Outside the Tactical Zone, a unit may move anywhere on the map and end up facing in any direction. If a unit starts inside, but finishes outside the Tactical Zone, then it may travel only 4 movement areas, but may change direction at the end.

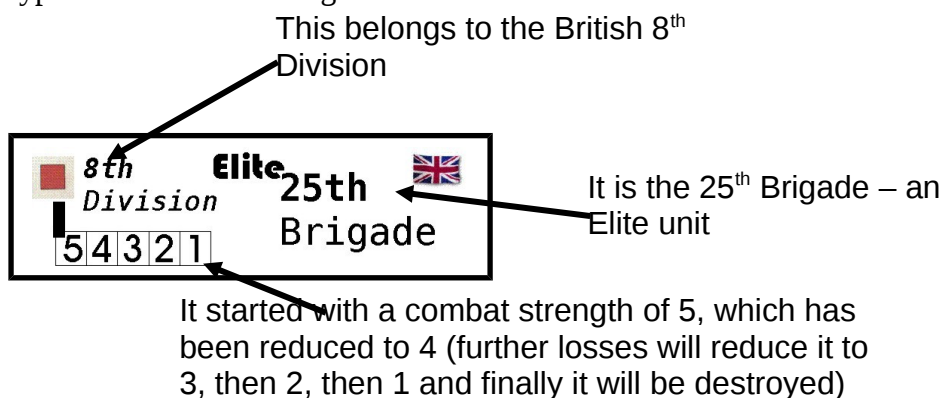
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## Game Counters

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### Brigades and Regiments

This is a typical British counter. It is based on a khaki block and has a label on the face showing the division, the brigade (regiment in the case of France and Germany), the type of unit and its strength



French counters have blue bases, British/Empire counters are khaki and German counters have grey bases.

### German Battalions in the Front Line

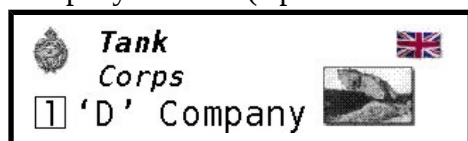
At the start, the German units in the front-line trenches are battalions. The battalion units look very similar to the German regiment units, but on a more slender base:



This unit is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Regiment – part of the German 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. It has a strength of 2.

### Tanks

The Somme was the very first battle to use tanks. This British development was only available in small numbers, but could prove very effective. A tank counter represents a company of tanks (a part of a battalion) and is therefore on a small counter.



This figure shows 'D' Company of the British Tank Corps and has a strength of 1 (but the rules make clear that its effectiveness in attack is greater).



## Artillery

Artillery counters are similar to brigade counters, but they do not have any strength shown on them. Instead, an artillery counter allows artillery fire markers to be placed on the enemy. These artillery fire markers show the national flag and the division name (or Corps name for Corps artillery). An artillery marker for the French 11<sup>th</sup> Division is shown



here:

Artillery counters and markers are also available for each Corps and will be placed on the map by the Corps players.

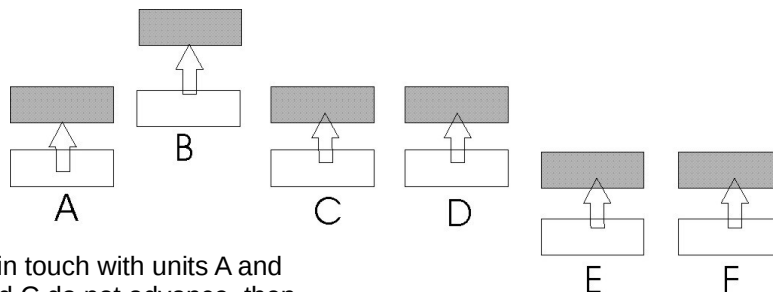
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## Maintaining the Line

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One of the features of warfare in the trenches was the need to “maintain the line”. That is to say that each brigade/regiment must keep in contact with a friendly unit on each side of it. A unit is in contact if it is directly at the side or it is one area diagonally in front/ to the side or behind/to the side.

The effect of this is that a unit may only advance if it maintains the line – i.e. it cannot go more than one ahead of the friendly units at its side. The following diagram illustrates this point:



Unit B is in touch with units A and C. If A and C do not advance, then unit B cannot – because it would not maintain the line

Unit E is in touch with units D and F. It may advance because it can stay in touch with those units and maintain the line. Unit D, however, can only advance when unit E has advanced.

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## German Start Turn

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At the beginning of the game, the German forces are very thinly spread and there are only a few divisions in the line. This is simulated by breaking the regiments into their battalions – each regiment will have 3 battalions with the same width as a regiment and acting just like a regiment for the first turn, but being much weaker.

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## **Rules**

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As well as this handbook, a sheet of rules will be available for each team. The rules have been written specially for this game. They cover every eventuality that you are likely to come across. If, however, there is something that is not clear or where the rules don't quite allow for something, then ask an umpire. The reason for an umpire's decision might not be clear to you, but do not question it! If an umpire has given you a decision, then that decision will not be over-ruled by anybody, so don't ask. Even if it subsequently transpires that an umpire could have made a better decision, the original decision will still stand.

Most of the time, you will not need an umpire. You will be able to resolve combat results with the player opposite you. Once you have resolved combat and moved onto the next turn, there is no going back, even if you suddenly realise that you got it wrong.

There may be rules that are not shown in the handbook or on the rules sheet. Most of the time, war produces nasty surprises and there might be a few in store for you in this game. If you think that someone is trying to pull a fast one, check with the umpire. If, however, you find that something happens that you were not expecting, then take it with good grace and think what to do next.

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## **Attacking**

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A standard attack on defended trenches would go through these general stages:

1. fire artillery: each artillery unit has one or two artillery fire markers – these would be placed on the enemy trench
2. move troops: move one or two brigades into no-man's land in front of the enemy trench – this can be done if the units are close enough (4 movement areas) – only two units can end up in the same area
3. find out if the wire has been cut: each trench has barbed wire obstacles to stop troops advancing – the rules give the required die roll for the wire to be cut if Corps artillery is firing at it (each trench starts with a wire marker on it – cutting the wire removes that marker)
4. find out if the bombardment has caused casualties: the player will roll a die and refer to the rules, then the enemy player will mark off the strength points on the hit unit (each unit has a number of strength points, representing the soldiers in that unit)
5. assault the trench: the player will roll a die – if the roll is good enough, then the assault succeeds and the enemy is driven back (the odds are improved by a number of things – cut wire, having more units than the enemy, the enemy having casualties as a result of the bombardment etc.)

In the next section, I will show a British attack on the German trenches and work through the rules, so that you get an idea of what to do.

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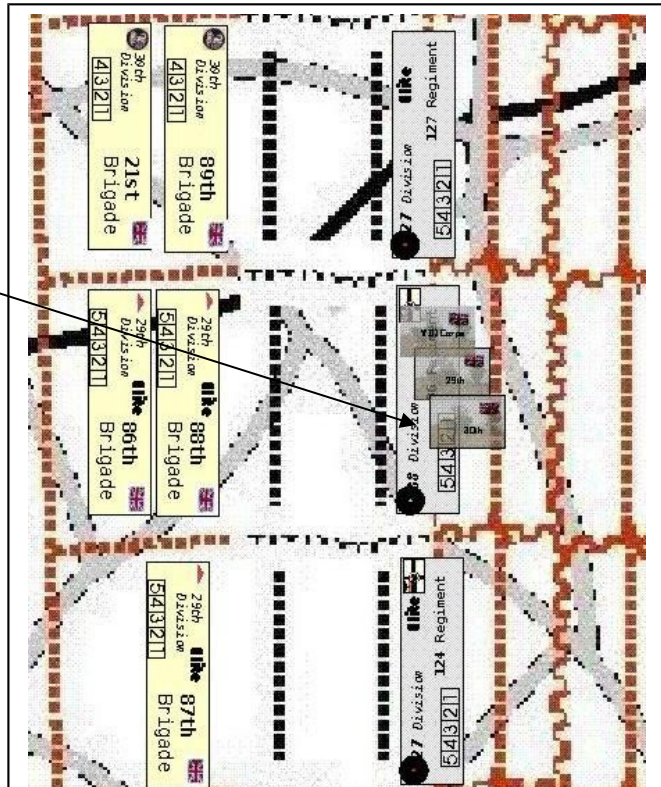
## Example: A British Attack

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In this example, a British division is attacking a trench system held by German divisions. I will follow the rules through, explaining what is going on with the aid of some diagrams:

### 1. British Place Artillery Target Markers

The British (the units on this side) have arranged for Corps artillery to be fired in front of them, and two Divisions are also firing. The British have placed the three artillery markers on the German unit in the trenches in front of them (the Germans are on the far side of the diagram).

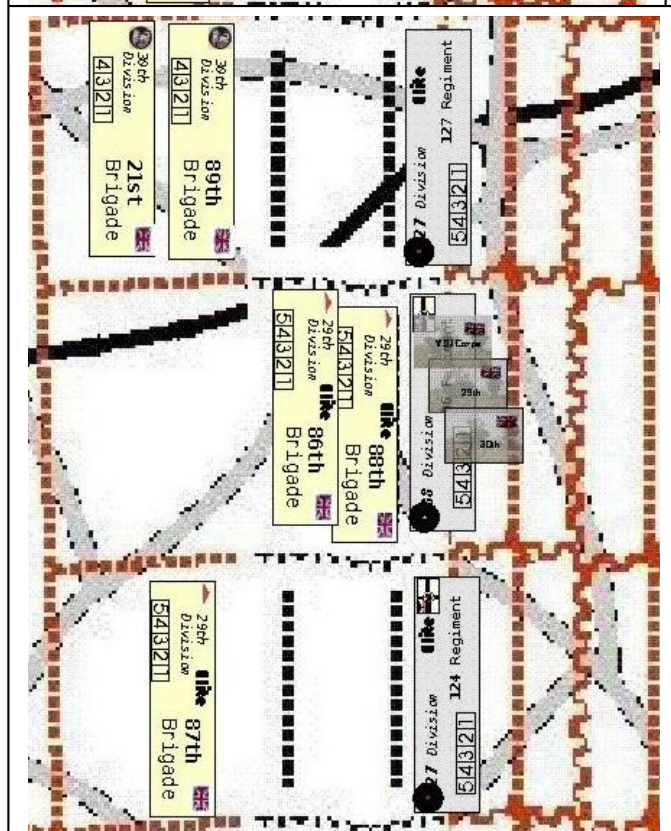


### 2. Germans Place Artillery Markers

The Germans decide to hold back firing until they can see what is going on – they are allowed to do this with Divisional artillery when they are defending

### 3. British Brigades Move Forward

The British have moved 2 Brigades forward and are attacking the German regiment in front of them. Up to 2 Brigades can occupy the same movement area. They move up to 4 areas when in the *Tactical Zone* (i.e. when within 4 areas of the enemy).



### 4. German Regiments Move Forward

The Germans have been ordered to hold this trench line, so do not move. There is a great advantage to being in trenches if defending.

## 5. Defender Places Unused Artillery Markers

Because the Germans held back their artillery, they now fire at the advancing British brigades by placing artillery markers on the Brigade counters

## 6. If you have placed Artillery Markers on Enemy Artillery Units.....

Does not apply in this case. There is always a shortage of artillery and both players have decided to use it to better effect (there is only a small chance of stopping the enemy unit firing). The artillery counters are a little way off in this diagram – artillery generally stays behind and fires at a distance.

## 7. Cutting the Wire

Corps artillery can cut the barbed wire in front of a trench. In this case, the British player has fired Corps artillery at the trench but has rolled a 4 on a six-sided dice, so just fails to make gaps in it. Each trench section will have a marker to show the wire – I have left it off the diagram for clarity.

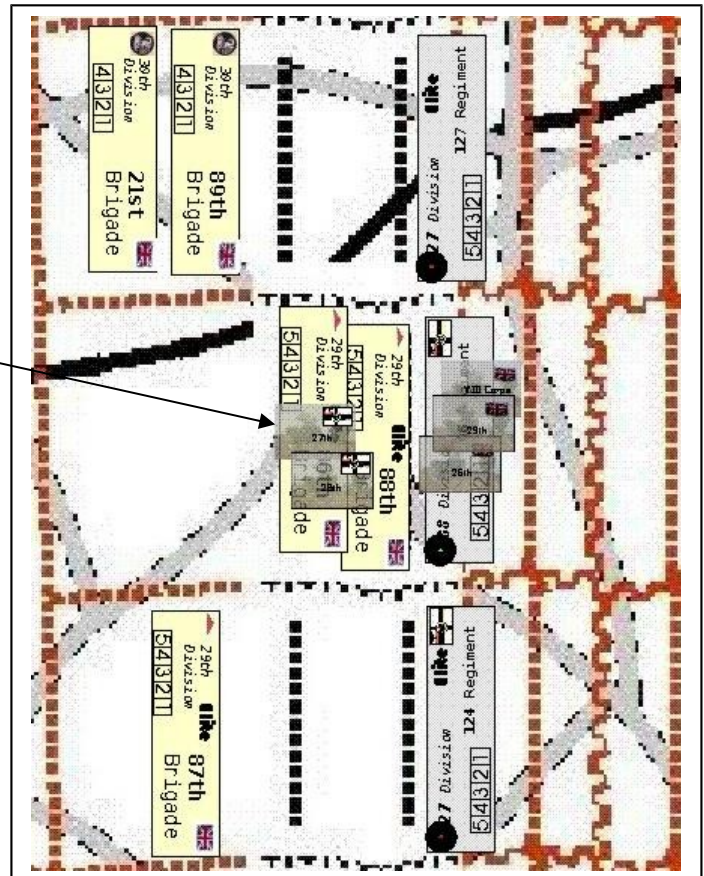
## 8. Killing the Enemy with Artillery

The British are firing on an enemy in trenches, so when they roll 3 dice (one for each time they have fired – and note that the Corps artillery counts here as well) and score a 6 on 2 of them (very lucky indeed!) then that German unit loses two strength points.

The Germans are firing on troops in the open, so when they roll 2 dice and one of them scores a 3, while the other scores a 6, then they inflict 3 strength point losses on each of the attacking units. In the open, troops take losses of 1 when a 3,4 or 5 is rolled and 2 if a 6 is rolled.

## 9. Remove Artillery Markers

An easy and obvious stage! However, don't remove the markers before this stage because there are circumstances where you might need them.





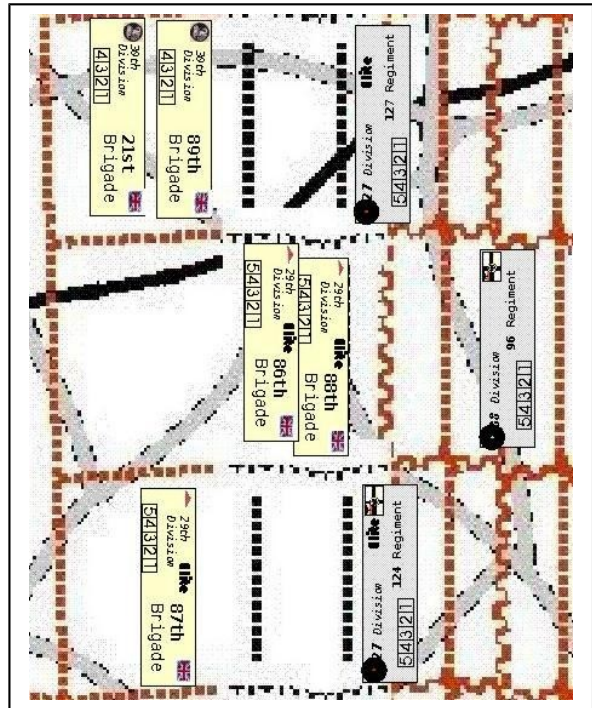
## 10. British Attacking

The British Brigades can now assault the trenches in front of them.

The British roll a 6 and the Germans roll a 1 – a good start. Modifiers are then applied to the dice rolls:

The British 6 is modified by:

- 1 because the wire is intact
- 2 because the units took losses this turn from artillery
- +1 because the units are elite
- +1 because they have more units than the enemy
- 2 because there are two enemy units on the flank which have not been engaged by a British unit (a “flank” is a movement area to the side of a unit – including the diagonals)



The German 1 is modified by +1 because the enemy is not in trenches.

This means that the British have a modified score of 3 and the Germans a modified score of 2 – a difference of +1. The players then look this up to find that the attack was successful and the defenders are pushed back to the next area and take one loss per unit. The attacker also takes one loss per unit (so is now very weak) and could normally occupy the area that the enemy was in. Unfortunately, the British forgot that they needed to maintain the line – so they cannot advance in this case because it would take them out of touch with friendly units on their side.

## 11. Germans Attacking

The Germans are pleased with progress and decide not to attack (the unit that has been pushed back has been involved in combat, so cannot attack).

## 12. Building Trenches.

The British decide that this will be a long business. They occupy two areas with troops that have not been attacked and have not moved this turn. As they are more than one area away from the enemy, they decide to dig in and build trenches.

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## Team Actions

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Players will be in Corps Teams or in Divisional Teams. Corps players will take their instructions from the Army HQ and Divisional teams will take their orders from the Corps teams. To spell it out... this means that most of you will have to do what you are told by another player (i.e. another year 9 student). Some of you will have to do

what you are told by a sixth form player – I am not sure which you will find more unpalatable! There is no choice in this matter – refusal to carry out an order is a very serious thing and may result in a commander being relieved of his command. You should put important orders in writing so that there is no confusion. If Corps teams wish to relieve a Division commander of his post, then one of the umpires should be consulted (he will want to see the written orders).

### Team Roles

Each team will have three players. One player will be the commander, one responsible for artillery and one will be the staff officer.

The Army team will issue instructions to Corps (which will be of the type “VIII Corps should take Beaumont-Hammel”, co-operating with X Corps who will be advancing on their left” and will give divisions to different Corps.

Each Corps team will need to decide where to advance strongly, where to hold the line and maybe even where to retreat. Corps teams will succeed more if they concentrate their efforts in one part of the line at a time. They can do this three ways:

- give orders to their divisions to do just that
- give extra divisions to teams where they want extra effort applied
- give extra support by way of Corps artillery bombardment

Each Division team will have one or more divisions. During the “Over the Top” phase, the team will need to go to the maps in order to move the units and conduct combat. The team might have command of 1,2 or 3 divisions. In each case:

- 1 division: each player moves one brigade, the artillery player fires the artillery – the commander should be listened to co-ordinate the brigades.
- 2 divisions: the artillery player takes on the artillery firing for both divisions and the other two players move a division each
- 3 divisions: each player takes a division each and fires its artillery as well as moving its units.

You will find that it is very important to talk to adjacent teams – for example, to make sure that the line is maintained and to obtain/give artillery support.

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## ***War Diary***

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Each team must write a war diary for each turn. Army teams will collect these for consideration after the day. If it is good enough, the best war diary will form part of the Olavian magazine article about this game. Every player should help with this. The war diary should show:

The team name

A brief explanation of the actions involving units controlled by the team, giving the names of any villages and any particularly successful units.

A casualty figure for each division for the turn. A strength point is 500 men, so if a division loses 3 strength points, then the casualty figure will be 1500 men.

A typical entry could be:

*Divisional Team 6*

*4th Division attacked Achiet-le-Petit. The 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade took heavy casualties but managed to take the village. Total casualties 2000 men.*

## Player Actions in a Turn

### Corps Team

Phase ⏴	<i>Commander</i>	<i>Artillery Player</i>	<i>Staff Player</i>
<b>Over the Top</b>	Go to Army HQ. Get new units and instructions. Take back to Corps team table.	Move to map and place artillery markers	Take command in the absence of the Corps commander. Keep the map up to date with any fresh information.
<b>Back to HQ</b>	Run a Corps meeting. Decide what to do next turn and who to give units to. Give units to staff player	Update the map while talking in the Corps meeting.	Write the war diary, while talking in the Corps meeting, and pass to Army HQ
<b>Report up the Line</b>	Talk to other Corps commanders – find out how they are doing and mark this on the map	Talk to other Corps artillery players and Division artillery players to decide in general where to use artillery next turn	Give units to Division teams. Pass on instructions. Receive war diaries from Division staff players. Talk to them to understand how things are going.

### Division Team

Phase ⏴	<i>Commander</i>	<i>Artillery Player</i>	<i>Staff Player</i>
<b>Over the Top</b>	Move to map and go through combat rules	Move to map and go through combat rules	Move to map and go through combat rules
<b>Back to HQ</b>	Run a division meeting. Decide who will get the next units.	Update the map while talking in the Division meeting	Write the war diary for this turn while talking in the Division meeting.
<b>Report up the Line</b>	Receive new units, decide where they should go. Mark them on the map.	Talk to the Corps artillery player and adjacent Division artillery players to decide in general where to use artillery next turn	Pass war diary to the Corps staff player and make sure they know what your situation is and what you want to achieve.