BRITISH ARTILLERY BATTERY AND PACKHORSE SUPPLY TRAIN

This shows an Eighteen pounder artillery battery doing its best to support the two platoons attacking the Eagle trench system. The battery has been emplaced in the former German defence position which originally defended the Steenbeek river.

The battery headquarters in the captured ‘Au Bon Gite’ blockhouse is trying to maintain contact with the rifle brigade forward platoons by field telephone. This is difficult as the line is being continually cut by shellfire and one officer has resorted to flags communication with the crew of a ditched tank on tile 3.

The partially destroyed defence system is flooded which is making life difficult for the gunners. The battery usually had six guns but this was often reduced as guns got bogged down or were destroyed by German artillery fire. An additional gun is being brought across the Steenbeek by horse train.

On the left of the Steenbeek you can see supplies being brought forward to the front lines by pack horses. The only way to cross the boggy ground was by slippery, exposed duck tracks which were being continually broken up by artillery fire. It was impossible to use horse trains or vehicles and everything had to be brought forward by hand or individual horse.

DUCK BOARD TRACKS LAID TO SUPPLY BRITISH FRONT LINE JUMPING OFF POINTS

DESTROYED VILLAGE OF LANGEMARK

This shows the nature of the boggy ground and the slippery exposed duck tracks that were used to supply the forward platoons, bring forward fresh troops, remove the wounded and relieve the frontline infantry.

The natural drainage system has been destroyed and the artillery fire has ploughed up the ground creating large shell holes that rapidly fill with water. When traversing the duck boards troops had to be careful not to fall into the shell holes as the combination of deep water and mud made it almost impossible to get them out! Many wounded men and horses died in this way.

A ‘Stokes’ mortar section has been set up to support the attack on Tile 3 and you can see the remains of the destroyed village of Langemarck.

You can also see a ditched ‘female’ tank on this tile. “Female’ tanks were armed with machine guns and the ‘male’ tanks were armed with ex naval guns. The ‘female’ and ‘male’ tanks operated in pairs providing mutual support. Small amounts of tanks were used to support the infantry in the northern sector of the salient but it soon became apparent that despite their caterpillar tracks they could make no headway through the boggy terrain and became sitting targets for the German artillery.

1ST PLATOON RIFLE BRIGADE JUMPING OFF TRENCHES IN THE GERMAN CAPTURED OUT POST LINE

TWO DITCHED TANKS

The 1st platoon of the 2nd company the Rifle Brigade has captured the German Eagle trench outpost position and is currently making its assault on the main position on the ridge. The German outpost positions are partially destroyed and flooded which have been uncomfortable for the British to occupy and you can clearly see the difficulty in attacking from flooded trenches that are facing the wrong way round!

Platoon headquarters has occupied a captured German blockhouse and is attempting to make contact with company headquarters by field telephone. This is proving difficult as the line is being continually cut by shellfire and runners are being sent back to brave the duck tracks with vital information for headquarters and artillery support.

Close support is being provided to the infantry by a Vickers machine gun team, a Lewis light machine team, a sniper and the Stokes mortar team on tile 2.

You can also see a ditched and knocked out ‘Female’ and ‘Male’ tank on this tile. “Female’ tanks were armed with machine guns and the ‘Male’ tanks were armed with 6 inch ex naval guns. The ‘Female’ and ‘Male’ tanks operated in pairs providing mutual support. Small amounts of tanks were used to support the infantry in the northern sector of the salient but it soon became apparent that despite their caterpillar tracks they could make no headway through the boggy terrain and became sitting targets for the German artillery.

Two crew members from the ‘Female’ tank are attempting to hand signal using flags for assistance from the rear to free the tank.

GERMAN EAGLE TRENCH SYSTEM

This is dominated by the one side of the formidable German Eagle trench system which features two concrete blockhouses and two defence trenches with a firestep. The Germans constructed blockhouses containing the highly effective Maxim heavy machine guns to form the heart of their defence. The blockhouses were a crude but effective structure impervious to artillery fire and were very difficult for the allied troops to capture surrounded as they were by supporting trenches and barbed wire. Note how one of the blockhouses is positioned at an angle to provide enfilade fire with a similar blockhouse on tile 5.

Note also the zig zag nature of the trenches which was intended to minimise casualties from the blast of artillery fire. Reinforcements can be seen moving forward from the rear trenches and there are medical and headquarters bunkers situated to the rear.

Also note a section of German troops equipped with extra grenades and a flamethrower, emerging from an area of destroyed trench, acting as a ‘storm’ party intending to disrupt the British attack.

EAGLE TRENCH SYSTEM 2

This is dominated by the one side of the formidable German Eagle trench system situated on high ground which dominated the British positions. The trench system features two concrete blockhouses and a firestep trench which has been breached by the British assault. The Germans constructed blockhouses containing the highly effective Maxim heavy machine guns to form the heart of their defence. The blockhouses were a crude but effective structure impervious to artillery fire and were very difficult for the allied troops to capture surrounded as they were by supporting trenches and barbed wire. Note how one of the blockhouses is positioned at an angle to provide enfilade fire with a similar blockhouse on tile 4.

Note also the zig zag nature of the trenches which was intended to minimise casualties from the blast of artillery fire. Reinforcements can be seen moving forward from the rear trenches to challenge the breach made by the British troops and there is a German light 75mm artillery battery providing support to the rear.

2ND PLATOON RIFLE BRIGADE JUMPING OFF TRENCHES IN THE GERMAN CAPTURED OUT POST LINE

The 2nd platoon of the 2nd company the Rifle brigade has captured the German Eagle trench outpost position and is currently making its assault on the main position on the ridge. The German outpost positions are partially destroyed and flooded which have been uncomfortable for the British to occupy and you can clearly see the difficulty in attacking from flooded trenches that are facing the wrong way round! The shelling has had some effect and the British have made a breach in one of the German front line trenches.

Platoon headquarters has occupied a captured German blockhouse and is attempting to make contact with company headquarters by field telephone. This is proving difficult as the line is being continually cut by shellfire and runners are being sent back to brave the duck tracks with vital information for headquarters and artillery support.

Close support is being provided to the infantry by a Vickers machine gun team, a Lewis light machine team, a sniper, a forward artillery observer and a Stokes mortar team.

DUCK BOARD TRACKS LAID TO SUPPLY BRITISH FRONT LINE JUMPING OFF POINTS

DITCHED TANK

This shows the nature of the ‘no man’s land’ type boggy ground and the slippery exposed duck tracks that were used to supply the forward platoons, bring forward fresh troops, remove the wounded and relieve the front line infantry. Note the casualties being taken back and the men bringing up fresh wire for the telephone land lines.

The natural drainage system has been destroyed and the artillery fire has ploughed up the ground creating large shell holes that rapidly fill with water. When traversing the duck boards troops had to be careful not to fall into the shell holes as the combination of deep water and mud made it almost impossible to get them out! Many wounded men and horses died in this way.

You can also see a ditched and knocked out ‘Male’ tank on this tile. ‘Male’ tanks were armed with 6 inch ex naval guns. Small amounts of tanks were used to support the infantry in the northern sector of the salient but it soon became apparent that despite their caterpillar tracks they could make no headway through the boggy terrain and became sitting targets for the German artillery.

COMPANY HEAD-QUARTERS RIFLE BRIGADE, SITUATED IN FORMER GERMAN DEFENCE LINE

STEENBEEK STREAM

This shows 2nd company headquarters of the Rifle brigade, situated in a bunker of the former German defence position, which originally defended the Steenbeek stream swollen by rain and shell fire. Note the Vickers machine gun team which has been set up to protect company headquarters and the German prisoner being led back for questioning before safety in captivity awaits!

On the right you can see supplies being brought forward to the front lines by pack horses. The only way to cross the boggy ground was by slippery, exposed duck tracks which were being continually broken up by artillery fire. It was impossible to use horse trains or vehicles and everything had to be brought forward by hand or individual horse.