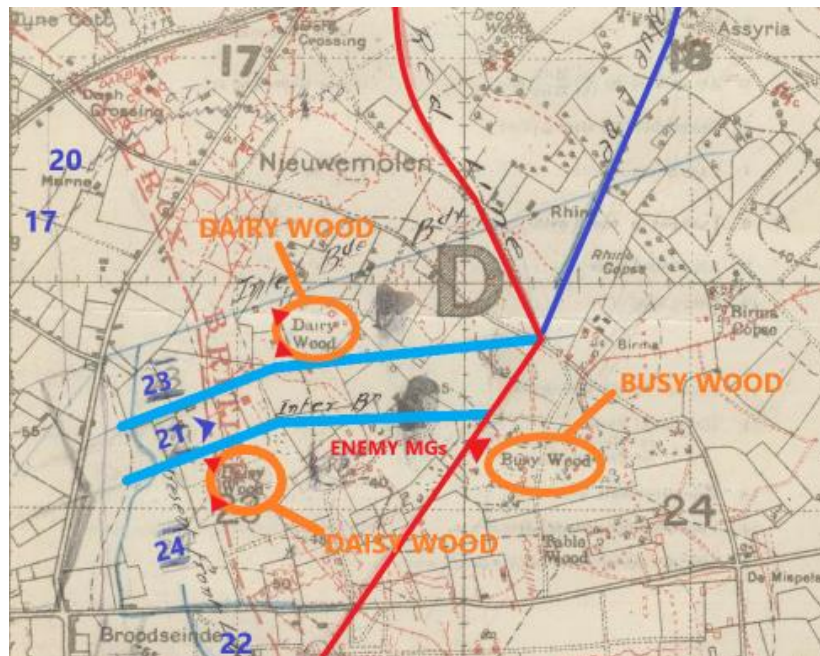




21st Battalion The Battle of Poelcappelle 9 October 1917 Ypres, Belgium

The operation in the Anzac sector entailed the taking of two objectives, the red and blue lines being some 650 and 850 yards forward respectively. The AIF 2nd Division of General Birdwood's I Anzac Corps would provide the 5th and 6th Brigades for the right flank of the attack.

In the early hours, the 5th Brigade formed up on the tapes near Tyne Cot with two battalions (20th supported by the 17th) to the north of the 6th Brigade. The 6th Brigade attacked near Broodseinde, with all four battalions – 23rd, 21st, 24th and 22nd involved (see map below) – on a frontage of 1,200 yards but with an average strength of just 7 officers and 150 other ranks per battalion.



So thin was the barrage that from the start the German machine guns were able to cause havoc for the advancing parties. The 21st Battalion War Diary noting that the barrage which opened at 5.20 am *'had been light and ineffective, enemy snipers and machine gunners remaining in action over the whole area'*. The 21st which should have passed between Daisy Wood and Dairy Wood was mostly held up before reaching them – the war diary stating that *'All officers became casualties early in the operation and formations became considerably disorganised'*.

Communication became extremely difficult and was almost non-existent. The attack was held up on the flanks but continued in the centre, despite little cover, by bounding from hole to hole over the heavy ground. By midday, some elements of the 21st had established themselves adjacent to Dairy Wood but had little support. During the afternoon it was decided to withdraw the remnants of the 21st and establish a consolidation line for handover – the relief was completed by 1.00 am the following morning with the residual members combined with the 49th Battalion as a combined battalion. The 21st which had entered the action with diminished numbers, suffered 127 casualties of which 17 were killed and 26 were missing – Private Edwin Wellington being amongst those missing.

With the assistance of reinforcements, the 21st's first objective, Knoll 38, between Daisy Wood and Dairy Wood was achieved and both woods taken. But these gains were thinly held and over the subsequent few days these gains were lost.