

XIII Corps: The Somme 1916



A Card Wargame of World War I

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Free Sample Pages

Acknowledgements

To Kevin Tucker for his enthusiasm and help in developing this project.
Perhaps you will get some of your own games developed now?

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1. Introduction

This two player card game covers the experience of the British XIII Corps on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1st 1916.

The game follows the course of the pre-battle preparation and the first day of the battle itself. One player is the commander of the XIII Corps, Lt. General Walter Congreve. The other player is his opponent Lt. General Hermann von Stein commander of the German XIV Reserve Corps.

This game is an extension of X Corps, the second game in the Somme Series, and uses exactly the same rules. The rules are not reproduced here and to play this game you will need a copy of the rules from X Corps.

2. Historical Background

On July 1st 1916 XIII Corps, led by Lt. Gen Walter Congreve comprised the 18th Division and the 30th Division; both New Army Divisions. It was one of five from Lt. General Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army that attacked German positions on the Somme in an attack supported by a diversion created by Fifth Army's VII Corps against the village of Gommecourt.

XIII Corps was the most southerly Corps and positioned at the end of the British line with the French forces committed to the Somme offensive on their right flank. Unlike the VIII Corps who attacked directly east, XIII Corps attacked almost directly north along shallow valleys and sheltered woods

XIII Corps had two separate objectives. They were to take the German front line consisting of three separate trench lines. Once these had been taken they were to seize the Pommiers and Glatz Redoubts before capturing Montauban; a fortified village of some 270 houses which stood alone in the defences. The end of day objective was the German support line along Montauban Alley that linked Montauban to Mametz to the north.

The German front line south of the river Ancre was not as well prepared as the northern defensive lines. Despite the lack of other prepared defences the fortified villages created a formidable defensive line with interlocking fields of fire. Montauban itself had been turned into a large and effective machine gun nest by the German Engineers.

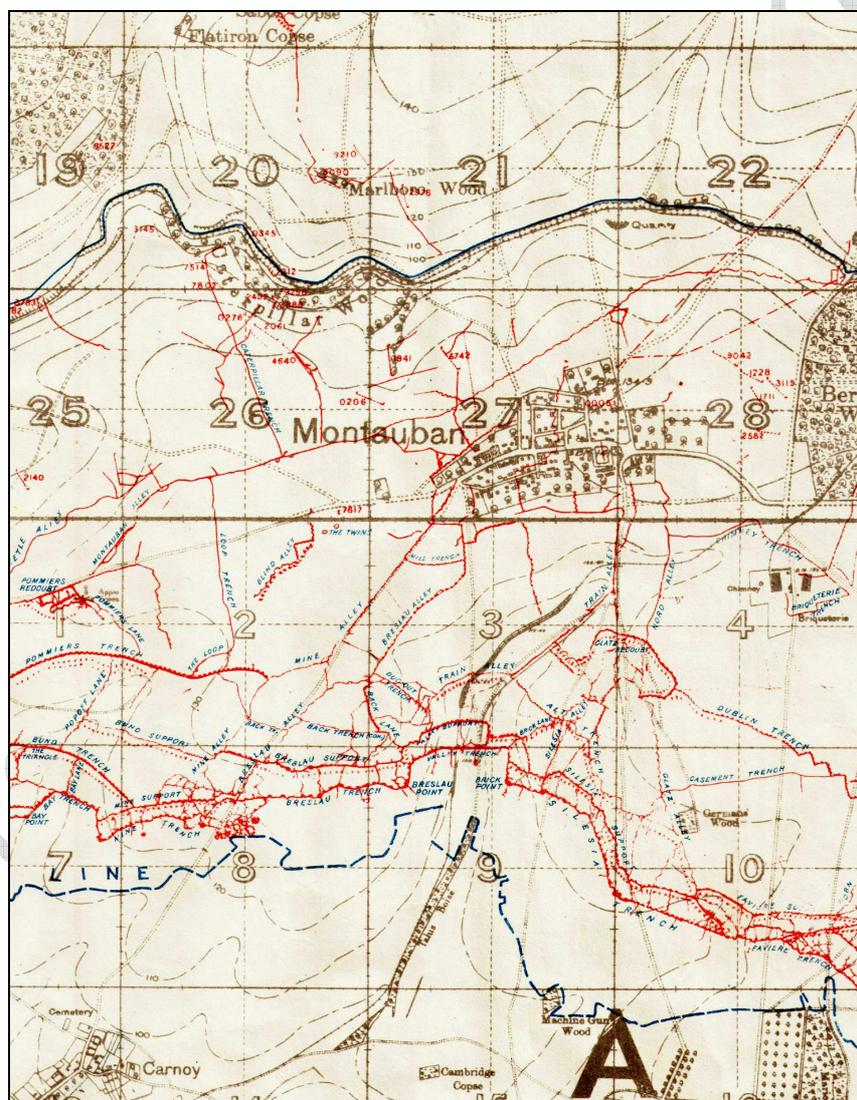
German morale was low in this sector. One German division, the Bavarian division, had only recently been transferred from the front at Verdun for a rest. Instead of resting the already exhausted troops were put to work improving the defences much to the detriment of their fighting ability.

Most of the German front line was only lightly held by small groups of troops and trenches had been filled with wire and stakes to delay the attackers. The British had managed to

clear most of the German wire in front of the trenches in advance but where it had not it would delay several British attacks while the wire was cleared under fire.

All along Fourth Army's front the British originally planned five days of bombardment to weaken the German lines. They hoped to so debilitate the Germans troops that they would simply have to walk over and occupy the trenches without any serious fighting. Bad weather reduced the intensity of the bombardment, which was extended for a further two days.

Unfortunately for the German defenders parts of their defences were in sight of the British artillery and they suffered greatly from the British bombardment which further weakened already weak German defensive lines. Casualties mounted and numbers dwindled. Communication ceased. Supplies like food, water and ammunition were very spasmodic.



The British bombardment destroyed the German morale in this sector resulting in large numbers of prisoners being taken. Troops advancing across German lines saw very clearly the effect the bombardment had on the Germans.

XIII Corps' attack is mainly famous for the use of the Livens Flame Projectors in front of the attack on Montauban. Two Projectors were positioned in Russian saps before the German lines. At 07:15 on July 1st the covers of the saps were removed and the Projectors sprayed the German trenches with flaming oil. As static weapons the projectors were of limited use and were only used once more in 1917.

As elsewhere the British detonated mines as part of their attack: one at Casino Point to the left of the Corps front and one at the Carnoy Craters. Smaller than elsewhere they still created confusion amongst the German defenders.

18th Division went "over the top" at 07.30 as planned using four footballs to encourage the troops to advance. Unfortunately the Casino Point mine was blown late causing high casualties amongst British and German troops alike: the British attack had reached the German trenches when it went up. Even so the first objective, the German front line, was taken quickly: the British found no wire in front of the trenches and only wire and stakes in the trenches. The position was quickly consolidated and the advance continued towards the Pommiers trench. The first attack was delayed by wire and cut down by entrenched machine guns. The wire in front of the trench had to be cut under fire. That done the trench was taken by 07.50am and consolidated by 08:30. Whilst this was underway the British second line cleared the German dugouts. Next the British attacked the Pommiers Redoubt itself. To avoid some remaining wire the British moved round the flank taking the redoubt by 09.30. Heavy losses then stopped any further advance. Some troops did manage to advance take, and consolidate, Beetle Valley trench by 14.30pm and join up with the 30th Division in the Montauban Alley Trench.

The 30th Divisions attack relied heavily on the success of the French attack to the South. At 07.27 the small Carnoy Craters mine was blown and the British positioned a group of machine guns in the resulting crater to support the attack. Furthermore the British artillery had direct sight of their targets so the initial British & French attacks met little resistance. By 08.00 the first trenches were taken. By 08.30 the Glatz redoubt had fallen. By early afternoon all objectives, including the village of Montauban, had been taken. By 15:00 the Divisional and Corps line of Montauban Alley trench had been consolidated. The British attack, against exhausted defenders with low morale, swept through the front line and got to the final line quickly. The Germans counterattacked twice in the evening but were beaten off.

Both Divisions had taken horrendous casualties but they had breached the German lines. The next day these captured positions were used to advance further. Haig even saw the potential for a much sought after breakthrough. Both New Army divisions fought well and proved that the New Army Divisions were as good as any other.

3. Setting Up The Game

The game uses one six sided die (1d6) and three different sets of cards: 9 Terrain, 38 British, and 34 German cards.

The British and German card decks contain a mixture of strategic and tactical cards. Sets of cards are supplied in the accompanying pdf and are sized to fit commercial card covers.

To start the game, shuffle the British and German decks. Do not mix the British and German decks.

Next lay out the numbered Terrain cards in a three by three grid to represent the three German defensive lines and the axes of the three British divisional attacks. The trenches run top to bottom and the divisional attacks run left to right.

British	Terrain Cards		
18th	#37	#38	#39
18th	#40	#41	#42
30th	#43	#44	#45
German	Front Line	Second Line	Support Line

In World War I British attacks were supported by troops fed through from “No Man’s Land”. The Germans learnt that, once it was clear the British were attacking, a bombardment of “No Man’s Land” was very effective in disrupting the British attack. To reflect this, the Germans may bombard “No Man’s Land” later in the game. So leave space for German “Barrage” cards to the left of the Front Line cards.

You are now ready to play the first turn.