



FIELD MARSHAL THE EARL OF

# CAVAN

Soldier and Fox Hunter



MICHAEL SENIOR

**Field Marshal  
the Earl of Cavan**



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Michael Senior



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‘They ought to give me the job of writing his biography – it would be a devilish good one, because it would be written in no spirit of blind hero worship.’

*[Sir Cuthbert Headlam, brother-in-law]*

‘A very unusual type of soldier, Master of Hounds, statesman, leader and friend, all rolled into one.’

*[Brigadier General H.P. Croft, Hertfordshire Regiment]*

‘As a soldier and a fox hunter my life had been far removed from the political arena.’

*[Lord Cavan]*



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Throughout the book I have quoted from numerous articles, monographs and memoirs and I have endeavoured to make the appropriate acknowledgements. My thanks go to all the authors concerned. The Lambart family photographs are from the private collection of Harry Stourton. Otherwise every effort has been made to use photographs that are unrestricted. If, inadvertently, restricted photographs have been used, I offer my sincere apologies.

Finally, I would like to thank the Pen & Sword team, particularly Harriet Fielding, Lisa Hooson, Sarah Cook, Noel Sadler, Rupert Harding and Jon Wilkinson, for their usual friendly help and advice.



# Abbreviations

ADC	Aide de Camp
AWM	Australia War Memorial
Bart.	Baronet
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGGs	Brigadier General General Staff
BOH	British Official History
CB	Companion of the Order of the Bath
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CinC	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
FM	Field Marshal
GBE	Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire
GCB	Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath
GCMG	Grand Cross of St Michael and St George
GCVO	Grand Cross of the Victorian Order
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOCRA	General Officer Commanding, Royal Artillery
HAC	The Honourable Artillery Company
HM	His/Her Majesty
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
HQ	Headquarters
HRH	His/Her Royal Highness
IEF	Italian Expeditionary Force
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KCLH	King's College, Liddell Hart Archive
KP	Knight of St Patrick
MFH	Master of Fox Hounds
MVO	Member of the Victorian Order
NAM	National Army Museum

NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OC	Officer Commanding
OE	Old Etonian
PM	Prime Minister
RAF	Royal Air Force
RE	Royal Engineers
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
TF	Territorial Force
TNA	The National Archives
VC	Victoria Cross
WFA	Western Front Association

# Nomenclature

Field Marshal the Right Honourable Frederick Rudolph Lambart, 10th Earl of Cavan, Viscount Kilcoursie, and Lord Lambart, Baron Cavan, KP, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, was born in 1865. He was known in his early years as Rudolph or Ru. At Eton he was generally addressed as Lambart. In 1887, on his father's succession to the Earldom, he took the courtesy title of Viscount Kilcoursie, which was frequently abbreviated to K. In 1900, on his father's death, he became the 10th Earl of Cavan and was generally referred to as Lord Cavan or Cavan. He continued to be addressed informally as K.



# Career Summary of Field Marshal the Earl of Cavan

- 1865 Born 16 October in Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire.
- 1875 School in Clevedon.
- 1878 Eton College.
- 1885 Sandhurst.  
Commissioned into Grenadier Guards (29 August).
- 1887 Became Viscount Kilcoursie.
- 1891 ADC to Governor General of Canada (April–July 1893).
- 1893 Married Inez Crawley.
- 1897 Promoted captain (16 October).
- 1900 Commanded a company in South African War; Biddulphsberg.  
Succeeded as 10th Earl of Cavan.
- 1902 Promoted major.
- 1903 Commandant School of Instruction (March–February 1904).
- 1904 Adjutant.
- 1906 Second in command, 1st Battalion.
- 1908 Lieutenant colonel in command of 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards.
- 1911 Full colonel.
- 1913 Retired from the army (8 November).  
Temporary command Guards Brigade manoeuvres.
- 1914 Temporary brigadier general, 2nd Brigade, 1st London Division (TF).  
Brigadier general. Recalled to command 4th Guards Brigade.  
First Battle of Ypres.
- 1915 Festubert.  
Major general, Commander of 50th Division (June).  
First Commander of the Guards Division.
- 1916 Appointed commander of XIV Corps; lieutenant general (January).  
The Somme.
- 1917 Third Ypres – Passchendaele.
- 1917 Transferred with XIV Corps to Italy (November).
- 1918 Battle of Asiago (June).  
Temporary full general, Commander 10th Italian army (October).  
Battle of Vittorio Veneto (November).

- 1920 Lieutenant of the Tower of London (March–November).  
First wife Inez dies (June).  
ADC to King George V (October–April 1922).  
GOC Aldershot.
- 1921 Appointed GOCinC Defence Force in the Metropolitan Area.  
Promoted to full general (November).  
Military adviser to Balfour in Washington.
- 1922 Chief of the Imperial General Staff.  
Married Lady Joan Mulholland.
- 1925 Colonel of Irish Guards.
- 1926 Retired from the army.
- 1927 Accompanied Duke and Duchess of York on world tour.
- 1928 Colonel of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment.
- 1929 Captain of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms.
- 1932 Appointed field marshal.
- 1937 Commanded troops at the coronation of George VI.
- 1939 Commanded Hertfordshire Local Defence Volunteers.
- 1946 Died in London; buried at Ayot St Lawrence.

# Orders and Decorations

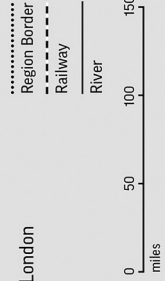
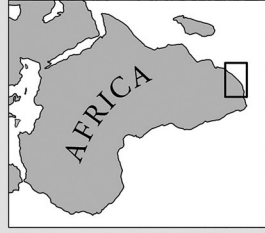
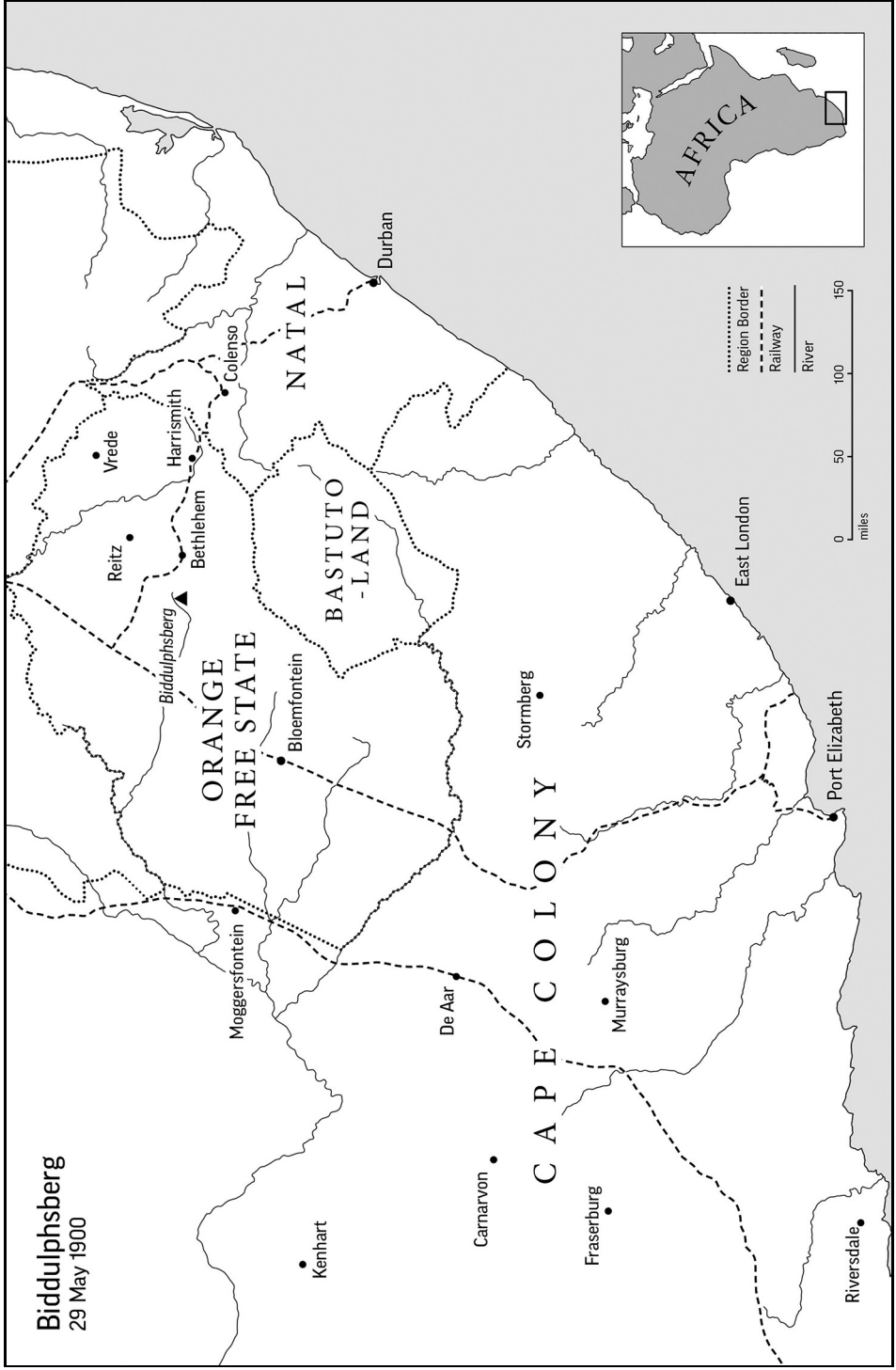
MVO, 1910; CB, 1915; KP, 1916; KCB, 1917; GCMG, 1919; GCVO, 1922; GBE, 1927.

Queen's Medal and King's Medal (South Africa); American DSO; Belgian Order of the Crown 2nd Class; Belgian War Cross; Order of Wen-Ku 1st Class; Legion of Honour 2nd and 3rd Class; French War Cross; Order of St Maurice and St Lazarus 1st Class; Military order of Savoy 2nd and 3rd Class; Italia War Cross; British War Medal; Victory War Medal.

Mentioned in Despatches: 10 September 1901; 30 November 1914; 16 February 1915; 17 February 1915; 1 January 1916; 15 June 1916; 4 January 1917; 11 December 1917; 30 May 1918.

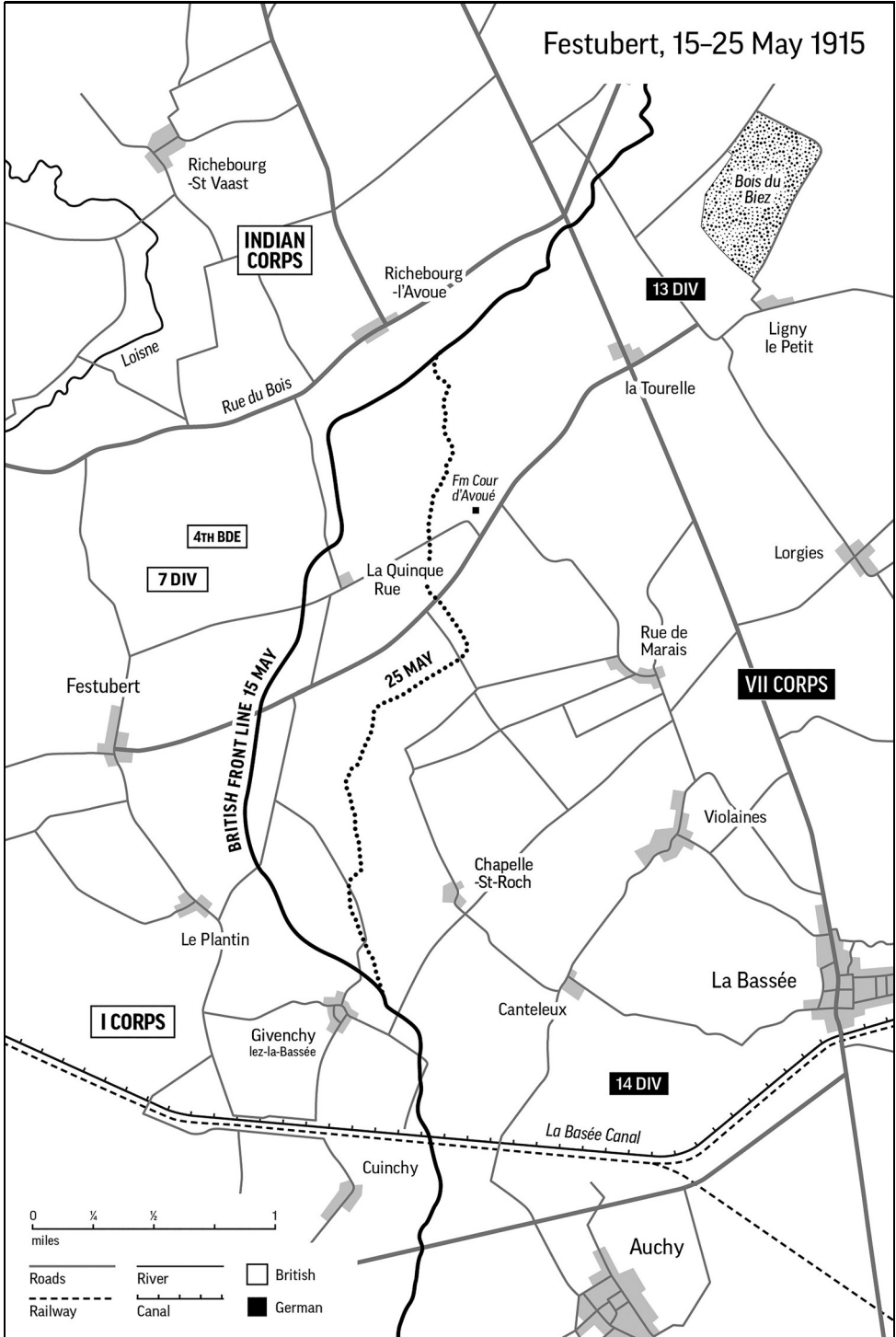


Biddulphsberg  
29 May 1900

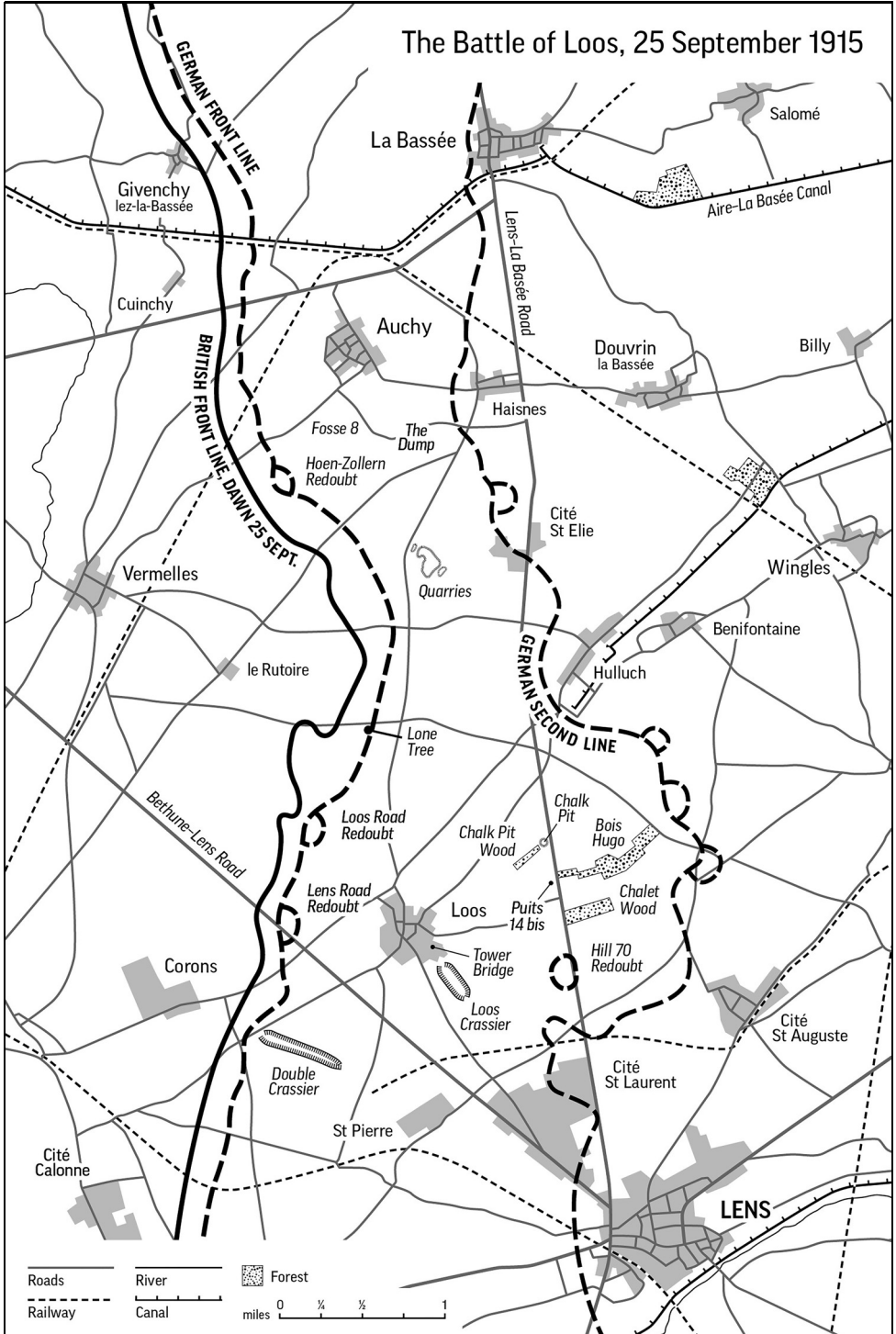




# Festubert, 15-25 May 1915

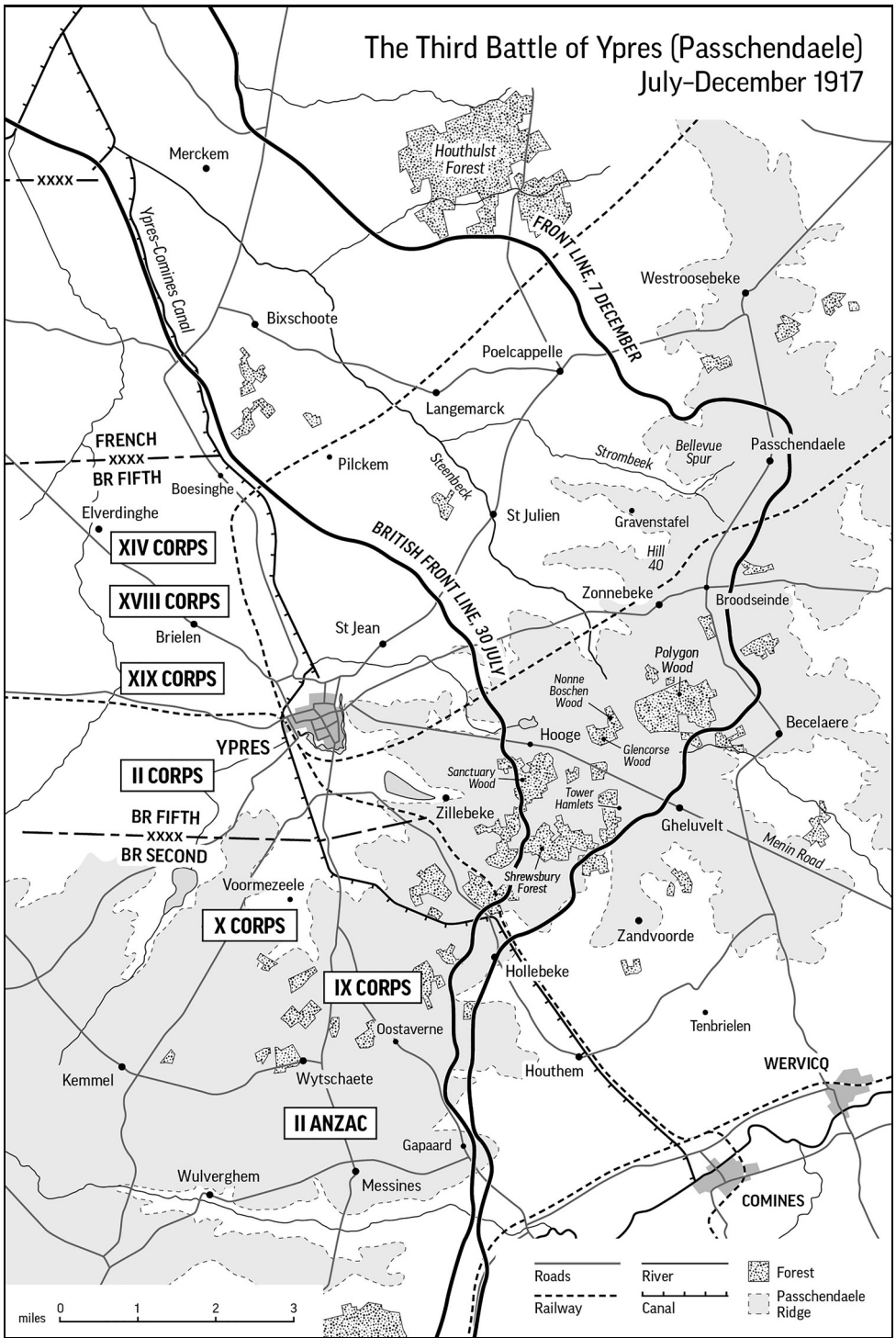


# The Battle of Loos, 25 September 1915

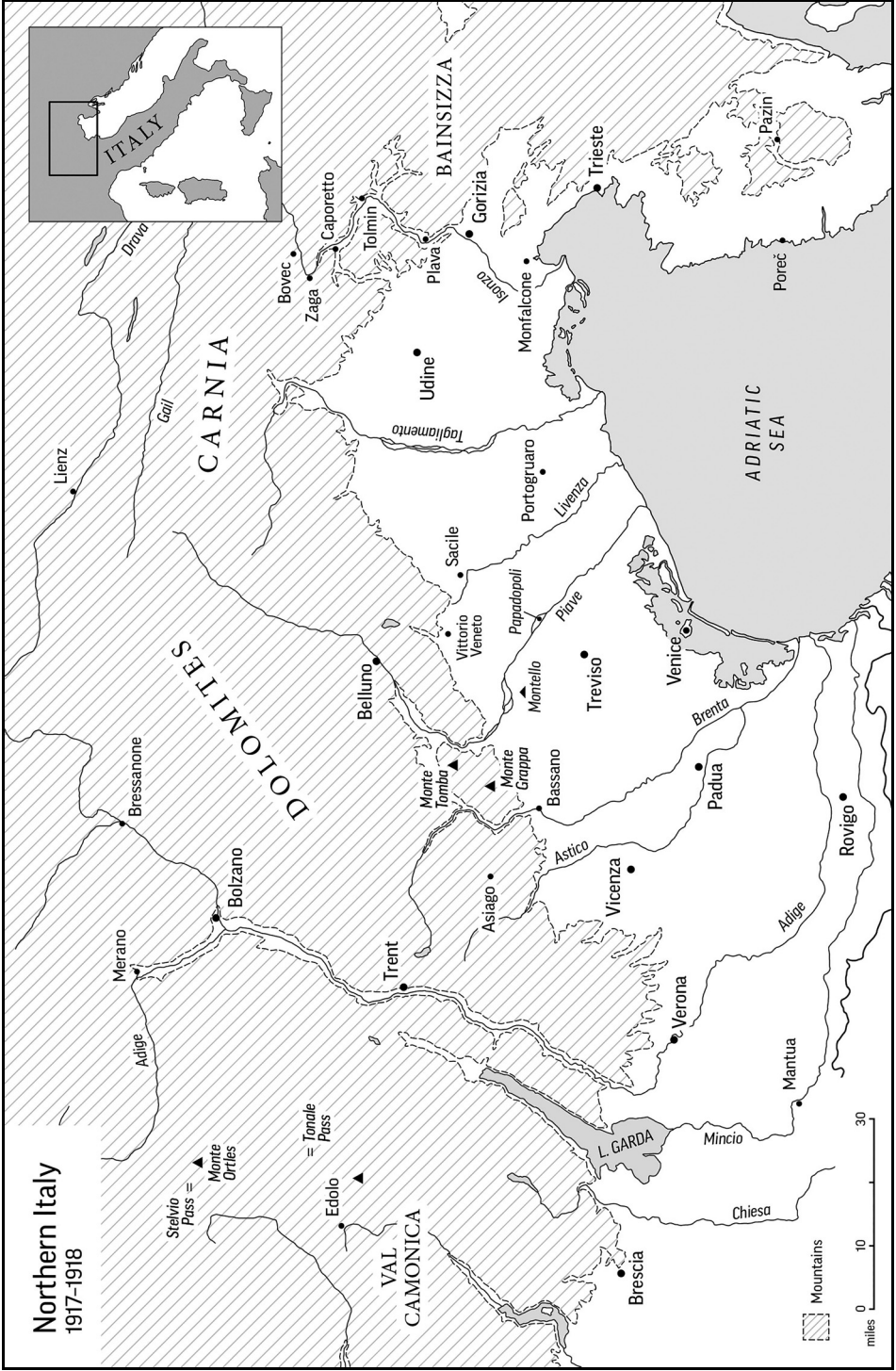




# The Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) July–December 1917



Northern Italy  
1917-1918





# Introduction

## **Cavan – A Conundrum**

The military career of Field Marshal the Lord Cavan presents a conundrum: what was it about Cavan's generalship on the Western Front (1914–1917) and in Italy (1917–1919) that gained widespread praise and commendation while other British senior commanders of the First World War, almost without exception, have attracted a torrent of criticism and disapproval?

Cavan rose from being a subaltern in the Grenadier Guards (1885) to become an army commander (1918). While it took twenty-seven years (1885–1912) to rise in rank from lieutenant to colonel, a not unusual rate of progression<sup>1</sup>, it took only four years (1914–1918) to move through the ranks of brigadier general, major general and lieutenant general to become a temporary general in command of the Tenth Army in Italy. In 1914 most of the BEF generals who were to become army commanders already held the rank of major general (Allenby, Birdwood, Byng, Gough, Horne, Monro and Rawlinson), while Haig and Plumer were lieutenant generals and Smith-Dorrien was a full general. Even allowing for the expansion of the British Army in the period 1914–1918, Cavan's rise was rapid.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, his progress through the senior officer ranks was accompanied by a stream of praise from all quarters for his military accomplishments. In November 1914 Captain F.S. Garwood wrote of Cavan: 'I was filled with admiration by the calm and quiet self-confidence of his manner. Here stood a man whose mere presence seemed equivalent to a brigade.'<sup>3</sup> Field Marshal French, the first commander of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914, commented that Cavan had 'a marvellous influence' on those under him, and that he served 'with the utmost gallantry and success'.<sup>4</sup> In July 1915 Major Herbert Trevor of the 50th Division, who in his letters home frequently passed critical judgement on his superior officers, commented about Cavan, then a major general: 'Our new General . . . is simply A1 and the whole show runs like a well-oiled machine. He knows exactly what he wants and says so, which is a most delightful change from the past eleven months.'<sup>5</sup> Also writing in 1915, General Horne considered Cavan 'a most excellent commander and a very nice man indeed . . . in whom I have perfect confidence'.<sup>6</sup> When the Guards Division left XI Corps in February 1916 Lieutenant General Haking

## 2 *Field Marshal the Earl of Cavan*

said of Cavan that he was an officer 'who had so greatly distinguished himself on every occasion'.<sup>7</sup> In August 1916, when the question of a successor to Sir Charles Monro of the First Army was being discussed, Sir William Robertson, CIGS, wrote that he had 'the highest opinion of Cavan and should myself select him' – although General Horne was later appointed.<sup>8</sup> In 1917 H.P. Croft, who had served in the Hertfordshire Regiment, described Cavan as

one of those exceptional personalities who gave confidence from the first moment you meet him, but unlike most famous Generals and Admirals he makes you feel his friendship at once and you realise that you are dealing with a very human man . . . a very unusual type of soldier, master of hounds, statesman, leader and friend all rolled into one.<sup>9</sup>

After the Italian defeat at Caporetto, the War Cabinet instructed Haig to send two divisions to Italy under 'a good man'. Haig selected the 23rd and 41st Divisions and appointed Cavan to command them.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after Cavan's transfer to Italy, the Guards Division, which had remained in France, was involved in a disastrous attack at Fontaine Notre Dame. This prompted Captain Dundas of the 1st Scots Guards to comment: 'Would to God we could have Cavan back!'<sup>11</sup> Lord Derby considered Cavan 'a first class soldier'.<sup>12</sup> General Diaz, the commander-in-chief of the Italian Army, praised Cavan as an 'illustrious leader'. These numerous and glowing testimonies from Cavan's contemporaries were summed up in the words of one commentator whose opinion was that Cavan 'hardly put a foot wrong throughout the war'.<sup>13</sup>

Comments from historians have supported the view that Cavan was a highly competent commander. Sheffield and Todman wrote that he was 'one of the outstanding Corps Commanders of the war'.<sup>14</sup> Richard Holmes noted with approval that Cavan was 'one of the few Corps Commanders who was known by name to more than divisional commanders'.<sup>15</sup> Commenting on Cavan's efforts to improve the operational skills of his troops, John Terraine wrote that 'XIV Corps was very well instructed'.<sup>16</sup> And Rudyard Kipling recorded the feelings of the Irish Guards when Cavan was transferred to the 50th Division in June 1915: 'They had known and loved him as a man who understood their difficulties, who bore his share, and more, of their hardships, and whose sympathy, unsparing devotion, and, above all, abounding cheery common-sense, had carried them at every turn.'<sup>17</sup>

It should also be remembered that, apart from receiving numerous international decorations and awards, faith in Cavan's ability was demonstrated by the support he received from those in the highest offices of state. It was Sir John French, the commander of the BEF, who asked that Cavan should be placed in command of the 4th Guards Brigade in 1914. Lord Kitchener, as