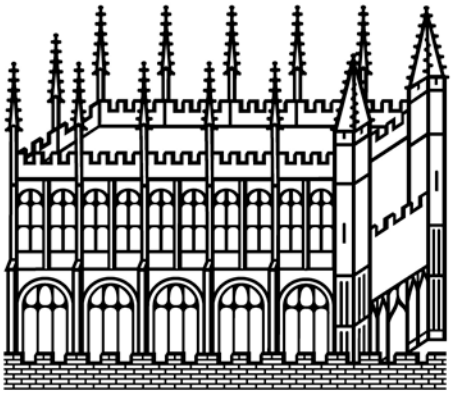

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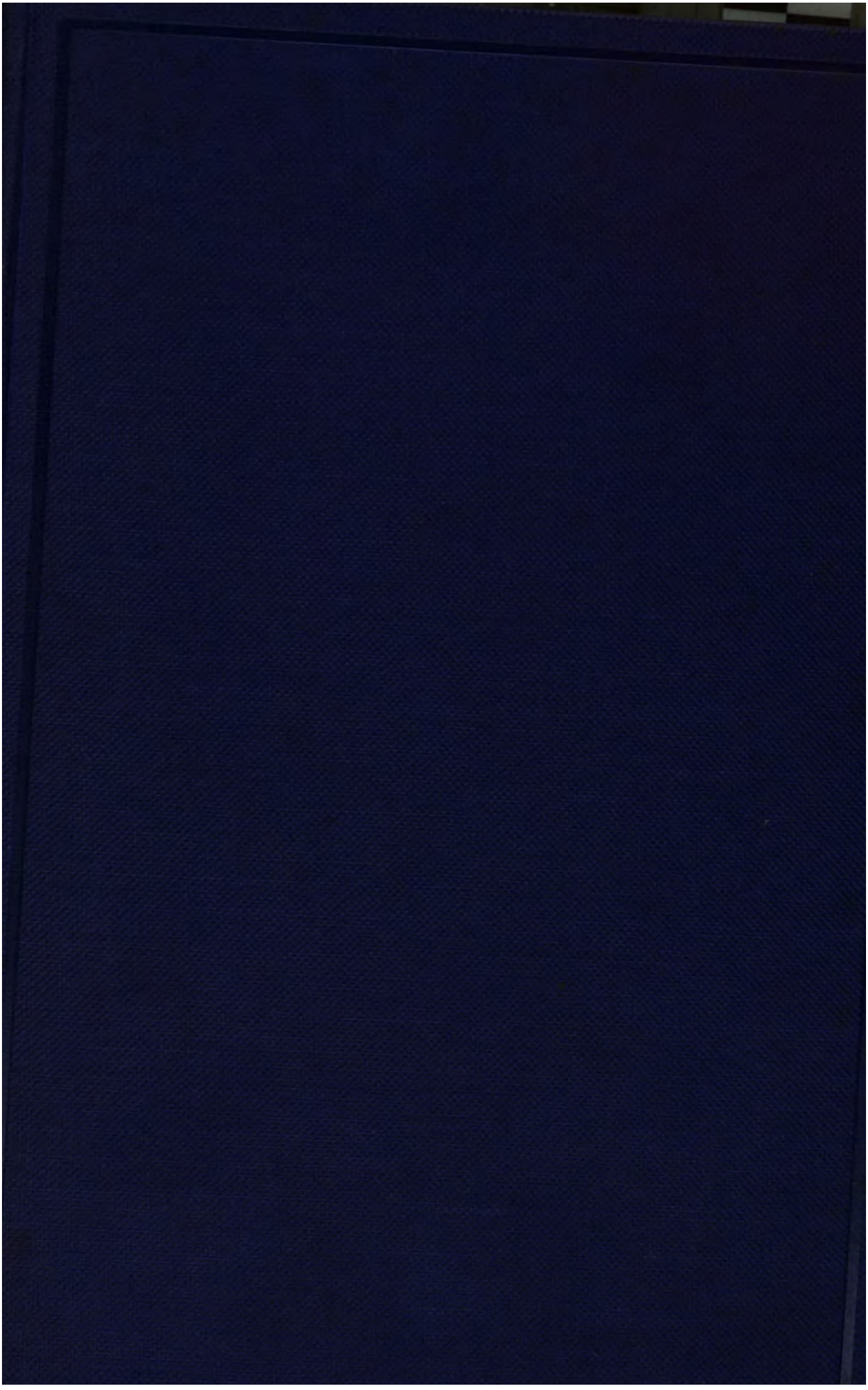

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THE BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN EUROPE
1914-1918

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN EUROPE

1914–1918

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Author of "The Great Boer War," &c., &c.

GEOFFREY BLES SUFFOLK STREET

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PREFACE

THE main part of this book has appeared as *British Campaigns in France and Flanders*. It has now been enlarged so as to include the Italian and Salonican Campaigns, so that the title had to be changed. Gallipoli has been omitted as coming rather within the Oriental than the European scene of action.

In the preface to the original work the following passage occurs, " I believe that the narrative will in the main stand the test of time, and that the changes of the future will consist of additions rather than of alterations or subtractions." It may be fairly said that this forecast has been fulfilled. Occasional corrections and additions have been made and are embodied in this single volume. The excisions which were deemed necessary by the Censor have all been restored, and many names which had been honourably mentioned are now to be found in the place from which they should never have been removed.

From the first days of the war I devoted much of my time to the accumulation of evidence from first-hand sources as to the various happenings of those great days. I built up my narrative from letters, diaries, and interviews from the hands or lips of men who have been leaders in our armies, the deeds of which it was my ambition to understand and to chronicle. In many cases I have been privileged to submit my descriptions of the principal incidents to prominent actors in them, and to receive their corrections or endorsement. As the years passed I was able to organise a perfect system by which I could be assured that my statements could never be shaken, and can say with certainty that they are not only accurate, but very precisely correct in their detail.

I would express my obligations to the excellent official account, compiled by General Sir James Edmonds, several volumes of which have appeared at this date. I should strongly advise the reader who desires fuller detail to study these volumes. With meticulous care one may make an account which is as accurate as Bradshaw—and as

interesting, but the official history, though too long for the casual reader, has many illuminating passages which give it a literary value of its own.

I greatly regret that I could not include maps dealing with Italy and Salonica, but some economies were needed to bring so large a book within the reach of the moderate purse. This applies also to the many omissions of names in the existing maps. These full corrections would have entailed an expense which would have prevented the book from fulfilling its purpose.

Finally, I would wish to express my obligations to the staff of the Historical Section of the War Office for their unvarying courtesy and to Major A. H. Wood for his care in revision of proofs.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

WINDLESHAM,
CROWBOROUGH,
1928.

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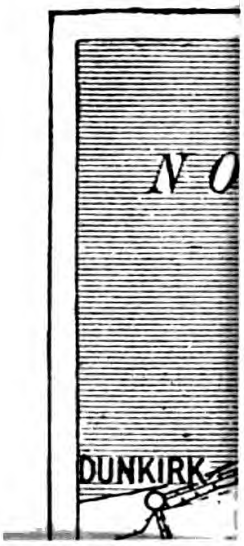
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CHAPTER I

THE BREAKING OF THE PEACE

The critical year—Growth of the German fleet—Minatory speeches and writings—Their effect upon British opinion—Bernhardi—Real causes of antagonism—Sarajevo—Bid for British neutrality—The Belgian pledge—The British ultimatum—Armageddon.

In the frank, cynical, and powerful book of General Bernhardi which has been so often quoted in connection with the war there is one statement which is both true and important. It is, that no one in Great Britain thought seriously of a war with Germany before the year 1902. As a German observer he has fixed this date, and a British commentator who cast back through the history of the past would surely endorse it. Here, then, is a point of common agreement from which one can construct a scheme of thought.

Why then should the British people in the year 1902 begin to contemplate seriously the possibility of a war with Germany? It might be argued by a German apologist that this date marks an appreciation by Great Britain that Germany was a great trade rival who might with advantage be crushed. But the facts would not sustain such a conclusion. The growth of German trade and of German wealth was a phenomenon with which the British were familiar. It had been constant since the days when Bismarck changed the policy of his country from free trade to protection, and it had competed for twenty years without the idea of war having entered the British minds. On the contrary, the prevailing economic philosophy in Great Britain was, that trade reacts upon trade, and that the successful rival becomes always the best customer. Up to the year 1896 there was a greal deal of sympathy and of respect in Great Britain for the German Empire. It was thought that of all Continental Powers she was the one which was most nearly allied to Britain in blood, religion, and character. The fact that in 1890 Lord Salisbury deliberately handed over to Germany Heligoland—an island which blockaded her chief commercial port and the harbour of her warships—must show once for all how entirely Germany lay outside of any possible world-struggle which could at that time be foreseen. France has always had its warm partisans in this country, but none the less it can most truthfully be said that during all the years that Britain remained in political isolation she would, had she been forced to take

sides, have assuredly chosen to stand by the Triple Alliance. It is hard now to recall those days of French pinpricks and of the evil effects which they produced. Germany's foreign policy is her own affair, and the German people are the judges of those who control it, but to us it must appear absolutely demented in taking a line which drove this great world-power away from her side—or, putting it at its lowest, away from an absolute neutrality, and into the ranks of her enemies.

In 1896 there came the first serious chill in the relations between the two countries. It arose from the famous telegram to Kruger at the time of the Jameson Raid—a telegram which bore the name of the Kaiser, but which is understood to have been drafted by Baron Marschall von Bieberstein. Whoever was responsible for it did his country a poor service, for British feelings were deeply hurt at such an intrusion into a matter which bore no direct relation to Germany. Britons had put themselves thoroughly in the wrong. Britain admitted and deplored it. Public opinion was the more sensitive to outside interference, and the telegram of congratulation from the Emperor to Kruger was felt to be an uncalled-for impertinence. The matter passed, however, and would have been forgiven and forgotten but for the virulent agitation conducted against us in Germany during the Boer War—an agitation which, it is only fair to say, appeared to receive no support from the Kaiser himself, who twice visited England during the course of the struggle. It could not be forgotten, however, that Von Bülow, the Chancellor, assumed an offensive attitude in some of his speeches, that the very idea of an Anglo-German Alliance put forward by Chamberlain in 1900 was scouted by the German Press, and that in the whole country there was hardly a paper which did not join in a chorus of unreasoned hatred and calumny against ourselves, our policy, and our arms. The incident was a perfectly astounding revelation to the British, who looked back at the alliance between the two countries, and had imagined that the traditions of such battles as Minden or Waterloo, where British blood had been freely shed in a common quarrel, really stood for something in their present relations. Britons were absolutely unconscious of anything which had occurred to alter the bonds which history had formed. It was clear, once for all, that this was mere self-deception, and as the British are a practical race, who are more concerned with what is than why it is, they resigned themselves to the situation and adjusted their thoughts to this new phase of their relations.

But soon a new phenomenon engaged their attention. They had already realised that the Germans, for some motive which appeared to them to be entirely inadequate, were filled with hatred, and would do the British Empire an injury if they had the power. Hitherto, they had never had the power. But now it was evident that they were forging a weapon which might enable them to gratify their malevolence. In 1900 was passed the famous German law regulating the increase of their navy. The British, preoccupied by their South African War, took no great

notice of it at the time, but from 1902 onwards it engaged their attention to an ever-increasing degree. The original law was ambitious and far-reaching, but it was subjected to several modifications, each of which made it more formidable. By a system as inexorable as Fate, year after year added to the force which was being prepared at Wilhelmshaven and at Kiel—a force entirely out of proportion to the amount of German commerce to be defended or of German coast-line to be protected. The greatest army in the world was rapidly being supplemented by a fleet which would be dangerously near, both in numbers and quality, to our own. The British Admiralty, more influenced by party politics than the German, showed at times commendable activity, and at other periods inexcusable indifference. On the whole, it was well ahead in its building programmes, for a wide circle of the public had become thoroughly awakened to the danger, and kept up a continual and most justifiable agitation for a broader margin of safety. Fortunately, the two final rulers of the Navy—McKenna and Churchill—rose to their responsibilities, and, in spite of a clamour from a section of their own party, insisted upon an adequate preponderance of naval construction. A deep debt of gratitude is owed also to the action of Lord Fisher, who saw the danger afar off and used all his remarkable powers of organisation and initiative to ensure that his country should be ready for the approaching struggle.

Great Britain, being much exercised in mind by the menacing tone of Germany, expressed not only in her great and rapid naval preparations, but in an astonishing outburst of minatory speeches and literature from professors, journalists, and other leaders of the people, began from 1902 onwards to look round her for allies. Had she continued to remain isolated, some turn of the political wheel might have exposed her to a Continental coalition under the leadership and inspiration of this bitter enemy. But for the threats of Germany, Britain would in all probability have been able to keep aloof from entanglements, but as it was, the enemies of her enemy became of necessity her friends. In an attempt to preserve her independence of action so far as was still possible, she refused to form an alliance, and only committed herself in a vague fashion to an ill-defined *entente*. By settling several outstanding causes of friction with France, an agreement was come to in the year 1903 which was extended to Russia in 1907. The general purport of such an arrangement was, that the sympathies of Great Britain were with the Dual Alliance, and that these sympathies would be translated into action if events seemed to warrant it. An aggressive policy on the part of France or Russia would be absolutely discountenanced by Britain, but if France were attacked Britain would pledge herself to do her utmost to prevent her from being overwhelmed. It was recognised that a victorious Germany would constitute a serious menace to the British Empire—a fact which neither the Pan-German fanatics nor the German national Press would ever permit us to forget. In this policy of insuring

against a German attack King Edward VII. took a deep interest, and the policy is itself attributed to him in Germany, but as a matter of fact it represented the only sane course of action which was open to the nation. Germans are fond of representing King Edward's action as the cause of subsequent events, whereas a wider knowledge would show them that it was really the effect of five years of German irritation and menace.

This, then, was the political situation up to the time of the actual outbreak of war. Upon the one side were the German and Austrian Empires in a solid alliance, while Italy was nominally allied, but obviously moved upon an orbit of her own. On the other hand, Russia and France were solidly allied, with Britain moving upon an independent orbit which had more relation with that of her friends than Italy's with that of Central Europe. It might clearly have been foreseen that Britain's fate would be that of France, while Italy would break away under any severe test, for a number of open questions divided her vitally from her secular enemy to the north-east. The whole story of the campaign of Tripoli in 1911 showed very clearly how independent, and even antagonistic, were the interests and actions of Italy.

Germany, in the meanwhile, viewed with considerable annoyance the formation of the elastic but very real ties which united France and Britain, while she did not cease to continue the course of action which had encouraged them. It had been one of the axioms of Wilhelmstrasse that whilst the British occupied Egypt, no friendship was possible between them and the French. Even now they were incredulous that such a thing could be, and they subjected it to a succession of tests. They desired to see whether the friendship was a reality, or whether it was only for fair-weather use and would fly to pieces before the stress of storm. Twice they tried it, once in 1905 when they drove France into a conference at Algeciras, and again in 1911, when in a time of profound peace they stirred up trouble by sending a gunboat to Agadir in south-western Morocco, an event which brought Europe to the very edge of war. In each case the *entente* remained so close and firm that it is difficult to imagine that they were really surprised by our actions in 1914, when the enormous provocation of the breach of the Belgian treaty was added to the promise to stand by France in any trouble not of her own making.

Allusion has been made to the campaign of threats and abuse which had been going on for many years in Germany, but the matter is of such importance in its bearing upon the outbreak of war that it requires some fuller discussion. For a long period before matters became acute between the two countries, a number of writers, of whom Nietzsche and Treitschke are the best known, had inoculated the German spirit with a most mischievous philosophy, which grew the more rapidly as it was dropped into the favourable soil of Prussian militarism. Nietzsche's doctrines were a mere general defence of might as against right, and of

violent brutality against everything which we associate with Christianity and Civilisation. The virile savage bulked larger in this perverted philosophy than the saint or the martyr. His views, however, though congenial to a certain class of every nation, had no special international significance. The typical brute whom he exalted was blonde, but a brute of any other tint would presumably suffice. It was different in the case of Treitschke. He was a historian, not a philosopher, with nothing indefinite or abstract about his teaching. He used his high position as Professor in the Berlin University to preach the most ardent Chauvinism, and above all to teach the rising generation of Germans that their special task was to have a reckoning with England and to destroy the British Empire, which for some reason he imagined to be degenerate and corrupt. He had passed away before he could see the ruin which he helped to bring about, for there is no doubt that his deeds lived after him, and that he was one of half a dozen men who were prominent in guiding their country along the path which has ended in the abyss. Scores of other lesser writers repeated and exaggerated his message. Prominent among these was General von Bernhardi, a man of high standing and a very great authority upon theoretical warfare. In the volume on *Germany and the Next War*, which has been already quoted, he declared in the year 1911 that Germany should and would do exactly what she actually did in 1914. Her antagonists, her allies, and her general strategy are all set forth with a precision which shows that German thinkers had entirely made up their minds as to the course of events, and that the particular pretext upon which war would be waged was a matter of secondary importance. These and similar sentiments naturally increased the uneasiness and resentment in Great Britain, where the taxation had risen constantly in the endeavour to keep pace with German preparations, until it was generally felt that such a state of things could not continue without some crisis being reached. The cloud was so heavy that it must either pass or burst.

The situation had been aggravated by the fact that in order to win popular assent to the various increases of the naval estimates in Germany constantly recurring anti-British agitations were deliberately raised with alarms of an impending attack. As Britain had never thought of attacking Germany during the long years when she had been almost defenceless at sea, it was difficult to perceive why she should do so now ; but none the less the public and the politicians were gulled again and again by this device, which, while it achieved its purpose of obtaining the money, produced a corresponding resentment in Great Britain.

So much for the causes which helped to produce an evil atmosphere between the two countries. Looking at the matter from the German point of view, there were some root-causes out of which this monstrous growth had come, and it is only fair that these should be acknowledged and recorded. These causes can all be traced to the fact that Britain stood between Germany and that world-empire of which she dreamed.

This depended upon circumstances over which this country had no control, and which she could not modify if she had wished to do so. Britain, through her maritime power and through the energy of her merchants, had become a great world-power when Germany was still a collection of petty States. When Germany became a powerful Empire with a rising population and an immense commerce, she found that the choice places of the world, and those most fitted for the spread of a transplanted European race, were already filled up. It was not a matter which Britain could help, nor could she alter it, since Canada, Australasia, and South Africa would not, even if she had desired it, be transferred to German rule. And yet it formed a national grievance, and if we can put ourselves in the place of the Germans we may admit that it was galling that the surplus of their manhood should go to build up the strength of an alien and possibly a hostile State. To this point we could fully see that grievance—or rather that misfortune, since no one was in truth to blame in the matter. It was forgotten by the people that the Colonial Empire of the British and of the French had been built up by much outlay of blood and treasure, extending over three centuries. Germany had existed as a united State for less than half a century, and already during that time had built up a very considerable oversea dominion. It was unreasonable to suppose that she could at once attain the same position as her fully grown rivals.

Thus this German discontent was based upon fixed factors which could no more be changed by Britain than the geographical position which has laid her right across the German exit to the oceans of the world. That this deeply rooted national sentiment, which for ever regarded Britain as the Carthage to which they were destined to play the part of Rome, would sooner or later have brought about war, is beyond all doubt. There are a score of considerations which show that a European war had long been planned, and that finally the very date, determined by the completion of the broadened Kiel Canal, had been approximately fixed. If it could not be effected on one pretext, it certainly would on another. As a matter of fact, an occasion was furnished by means which admirably suited the German book, since it enabled her to make her ally the apparent protagonist and so secure her fidelity to the bond. At the same time, by making the cause of quarrel one which affected only the Slavonic races, she hoped to discourage and detach the more liberal Western Powers and so divide the ranks of the Allies from the outset. It is possible, though not certain, that she might have effected this in the case of Great Britain, but for her own stupendous blunder in the infraction of Belgian neutrality, which left us a united nation in our agreement as to the necessity of war.

The political balance of the Great Powers of Europe is so delicately adjusted that any weakening of one means a general oscillation of all. The losses of Russia in a sterile campaign in East Asia in 1904 disturbed the whole peace of the world. Germany took advantage of it at once to

bully France over Morocco ; and in 1908, judging correctly that Russia was still unfit for war, Austria, with the connivance and help of Germany, tore up the Treaty of Berlin without reference to its other signatories, and annexed the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia immediately issued a futile protest, as did Great Britain, but the latter had no material interest at stake. It was otherwise with Russia. She was the hereditary guardian of Slav interests which were directly attacked by this incorporation of an unwilling Slav population into the Austrian Empire. Unable for the moment to prevent it, she waited in silent wrath for the chance of the future, humiliated and exasperated by the knowledge that she had been bullied at the moment of her temporary weakness. So great had been the indignity that it was evident that were she to tolerate a second one it would mean the complete abandonment of her leadership of the race.

On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austrian Empire, made a state visit to Sarajevo in the newly annexed provinces. Here he was assassinated, together with his wife. The immediate criminals were two youths named Princip and Cabrinovic, but what exact forces were at the back of them, or whether they merely represented local discontent, have never yet been clearly shown. Austria was, however, naturally incensed against Serbia, which was looked upon as the centre of all aggressive Slavonic action. Politics take fantastic shapes in this south-eastern corner of Europe, and murder, abduction, forgery, and perjury are weapons which in the past have been freely used by all parties. The provocation in this instance was so immense and the crime so monstrous that had it been established after trustworthy examination that Serbia had indeed been directly connected with it, there is no doubt that the whole of Europe, including Russia, would have acquiesced in any reasonable punishment which could be inflicted. Certainly the public opinion of Great Britain would have been unanimous in keeping clear of any quarrel which seemed to uphold the criminals.

Austria seems to have instantly made up her mind to push the matter to an extreme conclusion, as is shown by the fact that mobilisation papers were received by Austrians abroad, bearing the date June 30, so that they were issued within two days of the crime. An inquiry was held in connection with the trial of the assassins, which was reported to have implicated individual Serbians in the murder plot, but no charge was made against the Serbian Government. Had Austria now demanded the immediate trial and punishment of these accomplices, she would once again have had the sympathy of the civilised world. Her actual action was far more drastic, and gave impartial observers the conviction that she was endeavouring not to obtain reparation but to ensure war. It has now been clearly shown that the ultimatum was launched with the approval of Berlin, the Kaiser himself urging the most extreme measures, according to the Kautsky revelations.

The Austrian ultimatum was such a demand as one nation has never yet addressed to another. Indeed, it could hardly be said that Serbia would remain a nation if she submitted to it. Even these outrageous demands were not rejected absolutely by the Serbian Government, though it proclaimed itself to be unable to accept them in the crude form in which they were presented. A humble and conciliatory reply concluded with an expression of the desire to submit any point still open to impartial arbitration. The Austrian Government—or the forces behind it—had no desire at all to find a peaceful solution. So precipitate were they in their action, that on the receipt of the Serbian reply, in less than an hour the Austrian Minister had left Belgrade, and a diplomatic rupture, the immediate prelude to war, had taken place between the two countries. So far only two figures were on the stage, but already vast shadows were looming in the wings, and all the world was hushed by the presentiment of coming tragedy.

It has been shown that Russia, the elder brother of the Slav races, had once already been humiliated over Austrian policy and could not be indifferent to this new attempt to coerce a Slavonic people. The King of Serbia in his sore need appealed to the Czar and received a sympathetic reply. A moderate castigation of Serbia might have been condoned by Russia, but she could not contemplate unmoved a course of action which would practically destroy a kindred State. The Austrian army was already mobilising, so Russia also began to mobilise in the south. Events crowded rapidly upon each other. On July 28 came the declaration of war from Austria to Serbia. Three days later—days which were employed by Great Britain in making every possible effort to prevent the extension of the mischief—Germany as Austria's ally declared war upon Russia. Two days later Germany declared war upon France. The current ran swiftly as it drew nearer to Niagara.

The scope of this chronicle is more immediately concerned with the doings of Great Britain in this sudden and frightful misfortune which had fallen upon Europe. Her peaceful efforts were thrust aside, for she was dealing with those who had predetermined that there should be no peace. Even Austria, the prime mover in discord, had shown herself inclined to treat at the last moment, but Germany had hastened her onwards by a sudden ultimatum to Russia. From that instant the die was cast. The attitude of France was never in doubt. She was taken at a disadvantage, for her President was abroad when the crisis broke out, but the most chivalrous of nations could be relied upon to fulfil her obligations. She took her stand at once by the side of her ally. The one all-important question upon which the history of the world would depend, as so often before, was the action of Great Britain.

Sir Edward Grey had proposed a conference of ambassadors to deal with the situation, a suggestion which was set aside by Germany. In 1927 a document was published by Lichnowski, German Ambassador in London at the time of the war, showing that the Kaiser wrote insulting

and contemptuous comments upon the margin of Grey's peaceful suggestion. So long as the matter was purely Balkan it was outside the sphere of special British interests, but day by day it was becoming more clear that France would be involved, and a large party in Great Britain held that it would be impossible for us to stand by and witness any further dismembering of our neighbour. Thus the shadow which had settled so heavily upon the south-east of Europe was creeping across from east to west until it was already darkening the future of Britain. It was obviously the German game, whatever her ultimate designs might be upon the British Empire, to endeavour to keep it peaceful until she had disposed of her Continental opponents. For this reason a strong bid was made for British neutrality upon July 29, through the Ambassador at Berlin, Sir Edward Goschen. In an official conversation the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, declared that Germany was ready to pledge herself to take no territory from France in case of victory. He would make no promise as regards the French colonies, nor was anything said as to the French Fleet, nor as to the gigantic indemnity which was already discussed in some of the German papers. In a word, the proposition was that Great Britain was to abandon her friend at the hour of her need on condition that she should be robbed but not mutilated.

Sir Edward Grey refused the bait with as much warmth as the iced language of diplomacy will permit.

At a subsequent period the Premier, Mr. Asquith, voiced the sentiment of the whole nation when he declared that the proposal was infamous.

The immediate concern of the British Government was to ascertain the views of the rival Powers upon the question of Belgian neutrality, which had been solemnly guaranteed by France, Prussia, and ourselves. There were signs in advance that Germany proposed to turn the French defences by marching through Belgium. The arrangement of the new German strategic railways upon the frontier all pointed to such a plan. It was evident that such an action must at once bring Britain into the struggle, since it is difficult to see how she could ever hold up her head again if, after promising protection to a smaller nation, she broke her bond at the moment of danger. The French, too, who had left their northern frontier comparatively unfortified in reliance upon the integrity of Belgium, would have rightly felt that they had been betrayed by Britain if they suffered now through their confidence in the British guarantee. The Balkans were nothing to Great Britain, but she had more than her interests, she had her national honour at stake upon the Belgian frontier.

On July 31 the British Government asked France and Germany whether they were still prepared to stand by their pledge. France answered promptly that she was, and added that she had withdrawn her armies ten kilometres from the frontier, so as to prove to the world that her position was defensive only. From Germany there came an ominous

silence. Meanwhile, in Brussels the German representative, Herr von Below-Saleske, was assuring the Belgian Government that nothing was further from the intention of Germany than the infraction of the frontier. These assurances were continued almost to the moment of the arrival of German troops in Belgium.

Whether, if Belgian neutrality had been honoured, Great Britain would or would not have come into the war is an academic question which can never be decided. Certainly she would never have come in as a united nation, for public opinion was deeply divided upon the point, and the Cabinet is known to have been at variance. Only one thing could have closed the ranks and sent the British Empire with absolute unanimity into the fight. This was the one thing which Germany did. However great her military power may be, it seems certain that her diplomatic affairs were grievously mismanaged, and that, in spite of that cloud of spies who have been the precursors of her Uhlans in each of her campaigns, she was singularly ill-informed as to the sentiments of foreign nations. The columns of a single honest British paper would have told her more of the true views and spirit of the nation than all the eavesdroppers of her famous secret service.

We now come to the critical instant as regards Britain. Having received no reply to their request for a definite assurance about Belgium, the British Government instructed Sir Edward Goschen to ask for an immediate answer upon August 4. The startling reply from Von Jagow, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, was that the German troops had actually crossed the frontier. With a cynical frankness the German statesman explained that it was a matter of life or death to the Imperial Army to get their blow in quickly by the undefended route. In answer to the shocked remonstrance of the British Ambassador, he could only assert that it was now too late to reconsider the matter. About seven in the evening Sir Edward Goschen conveyed an ultimatum upon the subject to the German Government, declaring war unless by midnight a more satisfactory answer could be given.

From Herr von Jagow the Ambassador passed to the Chancellor, whom he found much agitated. He broke into a harangue in which he used the phrase, now become historic, that he could not understand the British Government making such a fuss about a mere scrap of paper, and declared that a breach of territorial neutrality was a matter of no great consequence. A recollection of the history of his own country would none the less have reminded him that it was precisely on account of an infringement of their frontier by the troops of Napoleon that Prussia had entered upon the ill-fated war of 1806. He continued by saying that he held Great Britain responsible for all the terrible events which might happen. Sir Edward pointed out that it was a matter of necessity that Great Britain should keep her engagements, and added with dignity that fear of the consequences could hardly be accepted as a valid reason for breaking them.

The populace of Berlin hastened to show its unamiable characteristics. Whereas the retiring Ambassadors in London, Paris, and also in Vienna, met with courteous treatment, the German mob surrounded the British Embassy and hurled vituperations, and finally stones, at its occupants. Defenceless people were hustled, assaulted, and arrested in the streets. A day or two previously the Russian Embassy had been brutally insulted by the populace upon its departure—a fact which produced some regrettable, but very natural reprisals in Petrograd, to use the new name for the Russian capital. The French Ambassador and his suite had also been very badly treated in their journey to the Dutch frontier. Thus it was shocking, but not surprising, to find that the Berlin mob indulged in excesses towards the British representatives, and that shameful scenes marked the final hours of Sir Edward Goschen's official duties. Truly, as Herr von Jagow admitted, such incidents leave an indelible stain upon the reputation of Berlin. It is pleasant to be able to add that Von Jagow himself behaved with propriety, and did what he could to mitigate the violence of the populace.

It is difficult for us to imagine how any German could possibly for an instant have imagined that Great Britain would stand by in silent acquiescence while the little country which she had sworn to protect was overrun by German troops; but that such a delusion existed is shown not only by the consternation of the Chancellor at Sir Edward's message, but also by the extreme irritation of the Emperor. He dispatched a verbal message by one of his aides-de-camp in the following terms:

"The Emperor has charged me to express to your Excellency his regret for the occurrences of last night, but to tell you at the same time that you will gather from those occurrences an idea of the feelings of his people respecting the action of Great Britain in joining with other nations against her old allies of Waterloo. His Majesty also begs that you will tell the King that he has been proud of the titles of British Field-Marshal and British Admiral, but that in consequence of what has occurred he must now at once divest himself of those titles."

The Ambassador adds feelingly that this message lost nothing of its acerbity by the manner of its delivery. Some artist of the future will do justice to the scene where the benign and dignified old diplomatist sat listening to the rasping utterances of the insolent young Prussian soldier. The actual departure of the Embassy was effected without molestation, thanks once more to the good offices of Herr von Jagow. On the same day, in the presence of a large but silent crowd, the German Ambassador left London and embarked for home in a vessel placed at his disposal by the British Government. His voyage back, via Flushing, was safely accomplished, but it is worth recording that it was only the warning from a British warship which prevented him and his staff from being blown up by the mines which had already, within a few hours of the outbreak of hostilities, been strewn thickly by his countrymen in the

path of neutral shipping across the highway of commerce in the North Sea. It was the first sign that old chivalrous conventions were dead, and that it was " all in " from the beginning with the Germans.

By a gross perversion of facts German publicists have endeavoured to show that Great Britain was to blame for the final rupture. The pretence is too absurd to deceive any one, and one can hardly think that they believed it themselves. One has only to ask what had Great Britain to do with the death of the Heir Apparent of Austria, with the sending of the fatal ultimatum, with the declaration of war against Russia and France, or, finally, with the infraction of the Belgian frontier ? She had nothing to do with any one of these things, which all, save the first, emanated from Vienna or Berlin, and were the obvious causes of the war. Britain was only involved because she remained true to her solemn contract, a breach of which would have left her dishonoured. It is mere effrontery to pretend that she desired war, or that she left anything undone which could have prevented it. We lay our record with confidence before foreign nations and posterity. We have nothing to conceal and nothing to regret.

On the other hand, supposing that one were to grant the whole of the German contention, suppose one were to admit that Germany did not know of the terms of the Austrian ultimatum or foresee its effect upon the other nations of Europe, that she took her stand by the side of Austria purely out of motives of chivalrous loyalty to an ally, and that she was forced, by so doing, to find herself at variance with Russia and France —suppose so inconceivable a hypothesis as this, even then it cannot in any way condone the admitted wrong which Germany did in invading Belgium, nor does it show any possible cause why, because Germany was false to her word in this matter, Britain should be so also. This point is so unanswerable that the only defence, if it can be called a defence, which Germany has ever put forward is, that if she had not infringed Belgian neutrality, somebody else would have done so. Not one shadow of evidence has ever been put forward to justify so monstrous an assertion, which is certainly not endorsed by the Belgians themselves.

In this connection one may allude to the so-called secret military engagements which were found and published by the Germans at Brussels and which were supposed to show that Great Britain herself contemplated the infraction of Belgian neutrality. One can only realise how bankrupt was Germany of all reason and argument when one considers such a contention as this. For years the German threats had been obvious to all the world. They had brought their strategic railways to the frontier of Belgium, and erected their standing camps there. Naturally Belgium was alarmed at such preparations and took counsel with Great Britain how her pledge should be redeemed and how her soil could be defended in case Germany proved perfidious. It was a simple military precaution which involved not the breach of a treaty but

the fulfilment of one—not the invasion of Belgium but its protection after it was invaded.

These attempts to confuse the issue irresistibly recall the message of Frederic to Podowils when he was about to seize Silesia even as William seized Belgium. " The question of right," he said, " is the affair of ministers. It is your affair. It is time to work at it in secret, for the orders to the troops are given." March first and find some justification later.

Germany would have stood higher in the world's esteem and in the estimate of history if, instead of playing in most grotesque fashion the wolf to the lamb, and accusing her unprepared and distracted neighbours of making a surprise attack upon her at the moment when she was at the height of her preparations, she had boldly stated her true position. Her dignity and frankness would have been undeniable if she had said, " I am a great power. I believe I am the greatest. I am willing to put it to the test of war. I am not satisfied with my geographical position. I desire a greater seaboard. You must give it to me or I shall take it. I justify my action by the fact that the position of every state rests ultimately upon its strength in war, and that I am willing to undergo that test."

Such a contention would have commanded respect, however much we might resent it. But these repeated declarations from the Emperor himself, the Chancellor, and so many others that they were deliberately attacked, coupled with appeals to the Almighty, made up the most nauseous mixture of falsehood and blasphemy which the world has ever known. The whole conception of religion became grotesque, and the Almighty, instead of a universal Father of the human race, was suddenly transformed into " our good old God," a bloodthirsty tribal deity worthy of those Prussian pagans who as late as the fourteenth century offered human sacrifices to their idols in the Eastern Mark. The phenomenon was part of that general national madness to which, it is to be hoped, the German of the future will look back with bewilderment and shame.

We have now seen how the great cloud which had hung so long over Europe burst at last, and the blast of war swept the land from end to end. We have passed through the years of hopes and alarms, of the *ententes* of optimists and the *détentes* of politicians, of skirmishes between journals and wrestles of finance, until we reach the end of it all —open primitive warfare between the two great branches of the Germanic family. In a purple passage Professor Cramb spoke of the days when the high gods of virility would smile as they looked down upon the chosen children of Odin, the English and the Germans, locked in the joy of battle. The hour had struck, and it is a record of those crowded and heroic days which is here set forth. Looking back after fourteen years, and searching the accounts of every high statesman engaged in these momentous negotiations, it is a comfort to a Briton to

know that even now nothing could be suggested which his country could have done for peace which was not done. If there be a doubter let him read the record not only of Sir Edward Grey, but of a great impartial and critical observer, Hines Page, the American Ambassador, and his last scruples will be set at rest.

CHAPTER II

THE OPENING OF THE WAR

Unity of Great Britain—Rally of the over-sea Britons—Lord Kitchener—Forces available—Their expansion—The Fleet—Invasion of Belgium—Liége—Namur—Situation in third week of August.

THERE can be no doubt that if Germany had confined her operations to an attack upon France without any infraction of Belgian neutrality, the situation in Great Britain would have been extraordinarily difficult. The Government was the most democratic that has ever been known in our political history, and it owed its power to an electorate, many of whom were passionate advocates for peace at almost any conceivable price. The preparations for naval war, necessitated by the ever-growing German power, had been accompanied and occasionally retarded by a constant murmur of remonstrance which swelled periodically into a menacing expostulation. McKenna and Churchill found their only opponents in the members of their own party, who persistently refused to look obvious facts in the face, and impatiently swept aside the figures of the German armaments while they indulged in vague and amiable aspirations towards international friendship. This large and energetic party would certainly have most strenuously resisted British interference in a Continental war. The statesmen who foresaw that the conquest of France would surely lead to the conquest of Britain might have carried the country with them, but none the less they would have gone to war with such an incubus upon them as the traitorous Charles James Fox and his party had been in the days of Napoleon. A disunited British against a united German Empire would have been at a grievous disadvantage, be our allies who they might, for, as Shakespeare sang, " If England to herself be true," it is then only that she is formidable.

This great misfortune, however, was obviated by the policy of Germany. The most peace-loving Briton could not face the national dishonour which would have been eternally branded upon him had his country without an effort allowed its guarantee to be treated as waste paper by a great military nation. The whole people were welded into one, and save for a few freakish individuals who obeyed their own perversity of mind or passion for notoriety, the country was united as it has never been in history.

The leaders of the Unionist party, Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, had already, on August 2, signified to the Government that they considered Britain to be honour-bound to France, and would support without hesitation every practical step to give effect to the alliance. Fortified by this assurance, the Government could go strongly forward. But after the Belgian infraction, its position was that of the executive of a united nation. Sir Edward Grey's analysis in Parliament of the causes which had brought us to war convinced the reason and claimed the sympathy of every political party, and even the most fervent advocates of peace found themselves silenced in the presence of the huge German aggression which could never admit of a peace founded upon mutual respect and equality, but only of that which comes from ascendancy on the one side and helplessness upon the other.

Should Britain ever be led into an unjust war, she will soon learn it from the fearless voices of her children. The independent young nations which are rising under the red-crossed flag will not be dragged, in the train of the Mother-Country, into any enterprise of which their conscience does not approve. But now their assent was whole-hearted. They were vehement in their approval of the firm stand made for the pledged word of the nation. From every quarter of the world deep answered deep in its assurance that the sword should not be sheathed until the wrong was righted.

On the very eve of the outbreak of hostilities one man was added to the home establishment whose presence was worth much. This was Lord Kitchener, whose boat was actually lying with steam up to bear him away upon a foreign mission, when, at the last instant, either the universal public demand or the good sense of the Government recalled him to take supreme charge of the war. It was a strange and a novel situation that a soldier who was no party politician should assume the rôle of War Minister in a political Cabinet, but the times called for decided measures, and this was among them. From that day onwards until the dark hour which called him from his uncompleted task the passer-by who looked up at the massive front of the War Office was gladdened by the thought that somewhere in the heart of it those stern, immutable eyes were looking out at Britain's enemies, and that clear, calculating brain was working for their downfall. With our fuller knowledge it may be admitted that there were points in which he was wanting in tact and in perception, but his virtues were all his own. Slow, safe, methodical, remorseless, carefully preparing the means at every stage that led him to the distant but preordained end, he had shown, both in the Soudan and South Africa, that the race of great British leaders was not yet extinct. He knew and trusted his instrument even as it knew and trusted him.

That instrument was an army which was remarkably well prepared for its work. It cannot be said that the Boer War had increased the prestige of the British forces, though only those who have studied the

subject can realise how difficult was the task with which they were then faced, or how considerable an achievement it was to bring it to a success. But the campaign had left behind it a valuable legacy, all the richer because so great a proportion of the land forces had been drawn into the struggle. In 1914 a large proportion of senior officers and a considerable number of non-commissioned officers and reservists had passed through that ordeal, and learned by experience what can be done, and, even more important, what cannot be done, in face of modern rifles in skilful hands.

The lesson had been well pressed home after the war, and every general, from Lord Roberts downwards, had laid emphasis upon the importance of cover and of accuracy of fire. Apart from the sound technical training of the soldiers, the administration of the Army had, after an experimental period, fallen into the hands of Lord Haldane, who has left his mark more deeply than any one since Cardwell upon the formation of the land forces. A debt of gratitude is owing to him for his clear thought and his masterful dispositions. In turning our haphazard, amateurish volunteers into the workmanlike Territorials, in forming the invaluable Officers' Training Corps which tapped our public schools for something better than athletic talent, and in rigidly defining our expeditionary corps and providing the special reserves for reinforcements, he did work for which he can never adequately be thanked. The weapon which he had fashioned was now thrust into the strong right hand of the new Minister of War.

It is well to survey this weapon before we show how it was used. The total personnel of the Army with its reserves called up was about 370,000 men. Of this 160,000 were set aside as an expeditionary force, but only a portion of this number could be counted as immediately available on the outbreak of war, though the system of mobilisation had been brought to a fine point. It was hoped that three army corps numbering about 110,000 men, with two divisions of cavalry, about 10,000 horsemen, would be immediately available, petty numbers as compared with the millions of the Continent, but highly trained professional soldiers, capable, perhaps, of turning the balance in the clash of equal hosts. The rest of the Regular Army had to provide garrisons for India, Egypt, Gibraltar, and other dependencies, but it was hoped that in time nearly all of it would be available for service.

Behind these first line troops was the special reserve, something under 100,000 in number, who were the immediate reinforcements to fill the gaps of battle. Next in order came the Territorials, whose full complement was 340,000 men. Unhappily at this time they were nearly 100,000 under strength, and there are many who think that if the National Service League in their earnest campaign, which was inspired by a clear vision of the coming danger, had insisted upon a great enlargement of this constitutional force, instead of agitating for a complete change which presented practical and political difficulties, their efforts

would have been more fruitful. These troops were raw, inexperienced, and only enlisted for home service, but with a fine spirit they set to work at once to make themselves efficient, and the great majority signified their readiness to go anywhere at the country's call. Many brigades were sent abroad at once to relieve the regulars in Egypt and India, while others were ready to join the fighting line on the Continent after a few months, where, as will be shown, they acquitted themselves remarkably well. The enthusiasm for the war rapidly sent the numbers of the Territorials up to nearly half a million. In addition to these troops there was the promise of 70,000 highly trained men (one quarter of whom were British regulars) from India. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand came forward to offer some 60,000 men between them, with the promise of as many more as should be called for. Brave and hardy, these were splendid raw material, though their actual technical training was not, save in some special corps, more advanced than that of the British Territorials. Altogether, the British War Lord could see, at the very beginning of hostilities, nearly 1,000,000 of men ready to his hand, though in very different stages of efficiency.

But already he saw there might be a campaign of attrition, and, looking forward into the years, he was convinced that these forces were insufficient. Some entirely new *cadres* must be organised, which should have no limitations, but be as reliable an instrument as the regular forces of the Crown. With a prescience which found no counterpart either among our friends or our foes he fixed three years as a probable term for the war, and he made preparation accordingly. Early in August he called for half a million fresh volunteers, and early in October he had got them. Still unsatisfied, he called for yet another half-million, and before Christmas his numbers were again complete. It was a wonderful autumn and winter in Britain. Every common and green was loud with the cries of the instructors, and bare with the tramp of the men. Nothing has ever been seen in the world's history which can compare in patriotic effort with that rally to the flag, for no bounty was offered, and no compulsion used. The spirit of the men was extraordinarily high. Regiments were filled with gentlemen who gave up every amenity of life in order to face an arduous and dangerous campaign, while even greater patriotism was shown by the countless thousands of miners, artisans, and other well-paid workmen who sacrificed high wages and a home life in order to serve for an indefinite time upon the humble pay of the soldier, leaving, very often, a wife and children in straitened circumstances behind them. It is at such times that a democratic country reaps the rich fruits of its democracy, for if you make the land such that it is good to live in, so also does it become good to die for. These forces could not be ready, even with the best of wills, and the most intensive culture, before the summer of 1915, but at that date, including her sea forces, Great Britain had not less than 2,000,000 volunteers under arms and ready for immediate use, a number which

had risen to 4,000,000 by the end of that year, and 5,000,000 by the spring of 1916.

So much for the wise provisions of Lord Kitchener, which would have been useless had they not been supported by a stern and self-sacrificing national spirit. The crisis was met with a cold determination which gave some superficial observers the impression that the nation was listless, when it was, in truth, far too earnest for mere shoutings or flag-waving. "Wakened at last!" cried some foreign cartoon when a German outrage aroused the country for an instant to some visible gleam of wrath. A deeper observer might have known that a country which finds 5,000,000 volunteer fighters, and which, instead of putting the expenses of the war upon future generations, as was done by others, elects to meet a considerable proportion of them by present taxation, is in grim earnest from the start. The income tax was doubled without a remonstrance by a unanimous vote of the Commons, thus finding an extra £40,000,000 a year for the prosecution of the war. Other taxes were levied by which the working classes bore their fair share of the burden, and they also elicited no complaints. Before Christmas no less than £450,000,000 had been raised by a loan, a gigantic financial effort which was easily borne at a charge of 4 per cent.

But if Britain was able to face the future with confidence, both in finance and in her military preparation, it was entirely to her silent, invisible, but most efficient Navy that she owed it. By wise foresight the Grand Fleet, numbering some 400 vessels, had been assembled for Royal inspection before the storm broke and when it was but a rising cloud-bank upon the horizon. This all-important move has been attributed to Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, but it could not have been done without the hearty concurrence and co-operation of Mr. Winston Churchill, who should share the honour, even as he would have shared the blame had we been caught unawares. The so-called inspection had hardly been completed at Spithead before war was upon us, and the Fleet, ready manned, provisioned and armed, moved straight away to take up its war stations. The main fighting squadrons vanished into a strategic mist from which they did not emerge for very many months, but it was understood that they were assembled at centres like Scapa Flow and Cromarty Firth which were outside the radius of the German torpedo-boats and smaller submarines, while they were near enough to the enemy's ports to be able to bring him to action should he emerge.

Numerous patrols of small vessels were let loose in the North Sea to keep in touch with our opponents, who were well known to be both daring and active. It is said that no less than 3000 ships, large and small, were flying the white ensign of St. George. A portion of these were told off for the protection of the great commercial sea-routes and for the hunting down of some score of German cruisers which were known to be at sea. Some of these gave a very good account of them-

selves and others were innocuous ; but the net result in loss, which had been discounted in advance as 5 per cent. of the merchant fleet at sea, worked out at less than half that figure, and, by the new year, the marauders had been practically exterminated.

Now as always—but now more than ever in the past—it was absolutely vital to hold the seas. Who wins the sea wins Britain. Of every five loaves in the country four come to us from abroad, and our position in meat is no better. It is victory or starvation when we fight upon the sea. It is ill to play for such stakes, however safe the game—worse still when it is a game where the value of some of the cards is unknown. We have little to fear from a raid, nothing from invasion, everything from interference with our commerce. It is one of the points in which our party politics, which blind so many people to reason, might well have brought absolute ruin upon the country. The cultivation of British food supplies should never have been a question of free trade or protection, but rather of vital national insurance.[1]

Had the war come ten years later we might have been in deadly danger, owing to the rapidly growing power of the submarine. These engines turned at once upon our food carriers might well have starved us out, especially if we had continued our national folly in being scared by bogeys from building a Channel tunnel. But by a merciful Providence the struggle came at a moment when the submarine was still half developed, and had not yet reached either the speed or the range of action which would make it the determining factor in a war. As it was, there came a time when the country was within an ace of being brought to its knees by the destruction of its vital supplies.

In their existing stage of development, the submarine could at first only annoy. With the great fleet in existence and with the shipbuilding facilities of Great Britain, nothing could vitally harm her save the loss of a pitched battle. The British superiority was rather in her small craft than in her large ones, but in capital ships she was able to place in line at the beginning of the war enough to give a sufficient margin of insurance. There was never any tendency to underrate the excellence of the hostile ships, nor the courage and efficiency of the men. It was well understood that when they came out they would give a good account of themselves, and also that they would not come out until the circumstances seemed propitious. They were under a disadvantage in that the Russian fleet, though small, was not negligible, and therefore some portion of the German force on sea as well as on land had always to face eastwards. Also the British had the French for their allies, and, though the great ships of the latter were nearly all in the Mediterranean, a swarm of small craft was ready to buzz out of her western ports should the war come down-channel.

Yet another advantage lay with the British in that their geographical position put a six-hundred-mile-long breakwater right across the

[1] These remarks apply to-day as much as ever.

entrance to Germany, leaving only two sally-ports north and south by which commerce could enter or raiders escape. The result was the immediate utter annihilation of Germany's sea-borne commerce. Altogether it must be admitted that Germany was grievously handicapped at sea, and that she deserves the more credit for whatever she accomplished, save when, as on land, she transgressed and degraded the recognised laws of civilised warfare.

It is not within the scope of this work to chronicle the deeds of our Allies, but an attempt must be made to indicate briefly the main phases of the struggle abroad, since its course reacted continually upon the British operations. It may be shortly stated, then, that so far as the western theatre of war was concerned, hostilities commenced by two movements, one an attack by the French upon the occupants of those lost provinces for which they had mourned during forty-four years, and the other the advance of the Germans over the Belgian frontier.

The main drama, however, quickly unfolded upon the Belgian frontier. Speed and secrecy were vital to the German plans. On July 31, before any declaration of war, and while the German representative at Brussels was perjuring his soul in his country's service by representing that no infringement was possible, three German army corps, the seventh ninth, and tenth, fully mobilised and highly equipped, were moving up from their quarters so as to be ready for a treacherous pounce upon their little neighbour whom they were pledged to defend. Von Emmich was in command. On the night of Saturday, August 1, the vanguard of the German armies, using motor traffic followed by trains, burst through the neutral Duchy of Luxemburg, and on August 3 they were over the Belgian line at Verviers. The long-meditated crime had been done, and, with loud appeals to God, Germany began her fatal campaigns by deliberate perjury and arrogant disdain for treaties. God accepted the appeal, and swiftly showed how the weakest State with absolute right upon its side may bring to naught all the crafty plottings of the strong.

For time was the essence of the situation. For this the innumerable motors, for this the light equipment and the lack of transport. It was on, on, at top speed, that there be no hindrance in the path of the great hosts that soon would be closing up behind. But time was life and death for the French also, with their slower mobilisation, their backward preparation, and their expectations from Great Britain. Time was the precious gift which little Belgium gave to the Allies. She gave them days and days, and every day worth an army corps. The Germans had crossed the Meuse, had taken Visé, and then had rushed at Liége.

Leman, the great soldier, defended the forts built by Brialmont. Both defender and designer were justified of their work. On August 5 the seventh German Corps attempted to rush the gaps between the forts. These gaps were three miles wide, but were filled with entrenched infantry. The attack was boldly pressed home, but it completely failed.

The German loss was considerable. Two other corps were called up, and again on August 6 the attack was renewed, with better result.

Liége had a fatal weakness. Its garrison was far too small to cover the ground. With twelve forts three miles apart it is clear that there were intervals of, roughly, thirty-six miles to be covered, and that a garrison of 25,000 men, when you had deducted the gunners for the forts, hardly left the thinnest skirmish line to cover the ground. So long as the Germans attacked upon a narrow front they could be held. The instant that they spread out there were bound to be places where they could march almost unopposed into the town. This was what occurred. The town was penetrated, largely through the leadership of General Ludendorf, but the forts were intact. General Leman, meanwhile, seeing that the town itself was indefensible, had sent the garrison out before the place was surrounded. Many a Belgian soldier fought upon the Yser and helped to turn the tide of that vital conflict who would have been a prisoner in Germany had it not been for the foresight and the decision of General Leman.

The Germans were in the town upon the 6th, but the forts still held out and the general advance was grievously impeded. Day followed day, and each beyond price to the Allies. Germany had secretly prepared certain monstrous engines of war. These were huge cannon of a dimension never before cast—42 centimetres in bore. More mobile and hardly less effective were some smaller howitzers of 28 centimetre calibre said to have come from the Austrian foundries at Skoda. Brialmont, when he erected his concrete and iron cupolas, had not foreseen the Thor's hammer which would be brought to crush them. One after another they were smashed like eggs. The heroic Leman was dug out from under the débris of the last fort and lived to tell of his miraculous escape.[1] Liége was at last in the hands of the invaders. But already the second week of August was at an end—the British were crowding into France, the French line was thickening along the frontier—all was well with the Allies. Little David had left a grievous mark upon Goliath.

The German mobilisation was now complete, and the whole vast host, over a million strong, poured over the frontier. Never was seen such an army, so accurate and scientific in its general conception, so perfect in its detail. Nothing had been omitted from its equipment which the most thorough of nations, after years of careful preparation, could devise. In motor transport, artillery, machine guns, and all the technique of war they were unrivalled. The men themselves were of high heart and grand physique. By some twisted process of reasoning founded upon false information they had been persuaded that this most aggressive and unnecessary of wars was in some way a war of self-defence, for it was put to them that unless they attacked their neighbours

[1] The author in 1925 went over this fort which is kept in its shattered condition as a fit memorial of the heroic general.

now, their neighbours would certainly some day or other attack them. Hence, they were filled with patriotic ardour and a real conviction that they were protecting their beloved Fatherland. One could not but admire their self-sacrificing devotion, though in the dry light of truth and reason they stood forth as the tools of tyranny, the champions of barbarous political reaction and the bullies of Europe.

The Allies had more than they expected from Liége. They had less from Namur. The grey-green tide of German invasion had swept the Belgian resistance before it, had flooded into Brussels, and had been dammed for only a very few days by the great frontier fortress, though it was counted as stronger than Liége. The fact was that the Germans had now learned their lesson. Never again would they imagine that the *Furor Teutonicus* alone could carry a walled city. The fatal guns were brought up again and the forts were crushed with mechanical precision, while the defenders between the forts, after enduring for ten hours a severe shelling, withdrew from their trenches. On August 22 the fortress surrendered, some of General Michel's garrison being taken, but a considerable proportion effecting its retreat with the French Army which had come up to support the town. By the third week of August the remains of the Belgian forces had taken refuge in Antwerp, and the Germans, having made a wide sweep with their right wing through Brussels, were descending in a two-hundred-mile line upon Northern France.

The French plans had in truth been somewhat disarranged by the Belgian resistance, for the chivalrous spirit of the nation would not permit that their gallant friends should be unsupported. Fresh dispositions had been made, but the sudden fall of Namur brought them to naught. Before that untoward event the French had advanced their line from Namur on the right to Charleroi on the left. With the fall of Namur their long wall had lost its corner bastion, and they were at once vigorously attacked by all the German armies, who forced the Sambre on August 22, carried Charleroi, and pushed the French back with considerable loss of guns and prisoners along the whole line. There was defeat, but there was nothing in the nature of a rout or of an envelopment. The line fell back fighting tooth and nail, but none the less Northern France was thrown open to the invaders. In this general movement the British forces were involved, and we now turn to a more particular and detailed account of what befell them during these most momentous days.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF MONS [1]

From August 23 to August 26, 1914

The landing of the British in France—The British leaders—The advance to Mons—The defence of the bridges of Nimy—The holding of the canal—The rearguard actions of Frameries, Wasmes, and Dour—The charge of the Lancers—The fate of the Cheshires—The 7th Brigade at Solesmes—The Guards in action—The Germans' rude awakening—The Connaughts at Pont-sur-Sambre.

THE bulk of the British Expeditionary Force passed over to France under cover of darkness on the nights of August 12 and 13, 1914. The movement, which included four infantry divisions and a cavalry division, necessitated the transportation of approximately 90,000 men, 15,000 horses, and 400 guns. It is doubtful if so large a host has ever been moved by water in so short a time in all the annals of military history. There was drama in the secrecy and celerity of the affair. Two canvas walls converging into a funnel screened the approaches to Southampton Dock. All beyond was darkness and mystery. Down this fatal funnel passed the flower of the youth of Britain, and their folk saw them no more. They had embarked upon the great adventure of the German War. The crowds in the streets saw the last serried files vanish into the darkness of the docks, heard the measured tramp upon the stone quays dying farther away in the silence of the night, until at last all was still and the great steamers were pushing out into the darkness.

No finer force for technical efficiency, and no body of men more hot-hearted in their keen desire to serve their country, have ever left the shores of Britain. It is a conservative estimate to say that within four months a half of their number were either dead or in the hospitals. They were destined for great glory, and for that great loss which is the measure of their glory.

It is well to state, once for all, the composition of this force, so that in the succeeding pages, when a brigade or division is under discussion, the diligent reader may ascertain its composition. This, then, is the First Army which set forth to France. Others will be chronicled as they appeared upon the scene of action, though the time came when the new formations were too large and complex for detailed enumeration.

[1] The map facing page 1 illustrates the narrative down to the close of the retreat (Sept. 6).

THE FIRST ARMY CORPS—GENERAL HAIG

DIVISION I.

General LOMAX.

1st Infantry Brigade—General Maxse.

1st Coldstream Guards.
1st Scots Guards.
1st Black Watch.
2nd Munster Fusiliers.

2nd Infantry Brigade—General Bulfin.

2nd Sussex.
1st N. Lancs.
1st Northampton.
2nd K.R. Rifles.

3rd Infantry Brigade—General Landon.

1st West Surrey (Queen's).
1st S. Wales Borderers.
1st Gloucester.
2nd Welsh.

Artillery—General Findlay.

25th Brig. R.F.A. 113, 114, 115.
26th Brig. R.F.A. 116, 117, 118.
39th Brig. R.F.A. 46, 51, 54.
43rd (How.) Brig. R.F.A. 30, 40, 57.

Engineers—Colonel Schreiber.

23 F. Co.
26 F. Co.
1 Signal Co.

DIVISION II.

General MONRO.

4th Infantry Brigade—General Scott-Kerr.

2nd Grenadier Guards.
2nd Coldstream Guards.
3rd Coldstream Guards.
1st Irish Guards.

5th Infantry Brigade—General Haking.

2nd Worcester.
2nd Ox. and Bucks. L.I.
2nd Highland L.I.
2nd Connaught Rangers.

6th Infantry Brigade—General Davies.

1st Liverpool (King's).
2nd S. Stafford.
1st Berks.
1st K.R. Rifles.

Artillery—General Perceval.

34th Brig. R.F.A. 22, 50, 70.
36th Brig. R.F.A. 15, 48, 71.
41st Brig. R.F.A. 9, 16, 17.
How. Brig. R.F.A. 47, 56, 60.
35th Batt. R.G.A.
R.E. 5, 11, Field Cos.

THE SECOND ARMY CORPS—GENERAL SMITH-DORRIEN

DIVISION III.

GENERAL HAMILTON.

7th Infantry Brigade—General McCracken.

3rd Worcester.
2nd S. Lancs.
1st Wilts.
2nd Irish Rifles.

8th Infantry Brigade—General B. Doran.

2nd Royal Scots.
2nd Royal Irish.
4th Middlesex.
1st Gordon Highlanders.

9th Infantry Brigade—General Shaw.

1st North. Fusiliers.
4th Royal Fusiliers.
1st Lincoln.
1st Scots Fusiliers.

Artillery—General Wing.

23rd Brigade 107, 108, 109.
30th Brigade (How.) 128, 129, 130.
40th Brigade 6, 23, 49.
42nd Brigade 29, 41, 45.
48th Batt. R.G.A.

R.E.—Colonel Wilson.

56, 57 F. Corps.
3 Signal Co.

DIVISION V.

General FERGUSSON.

13th Infantry Brigade—General Cuthbert.

2nd K.O. Scot. Bord.
2nd West Riding.
1st West Kent.
2nd Yorks. Light Infantry.

14th Infantry Brigade—General Rolt.

2nd Suffolk.
1st East Surrey.
1st D. of Cornwall's L.I.
2nd Manchester.

15th Infantry Brigade—General Gleichen.

1st Norfolk.
1st Bedford.
1st Cheshire.
1st Dorset.

Artillery—General Headlam.

15th Brig R.F.A. 11, 52, 80.
27th Brig. ,, 119, 120, 121.
28th Brig. ,, 122, 123, 124.
8 How. Brig. 37, 61, 65.
Heavy G.A. 108 Battery.

R.E.—Colonel Tulloch.

17th and 59th Field Cos.
5 Signal Co.

The Cavalry consisted of four Brigades forming the first cavalry division, and of one extra Brigade. They were made up thus :

1st Cavalry Brigade (Briggs).—2nd and 5th Dragoon Guards ; 11th Hussars.
2nd Cavalry Brigade (De Lisle).—4th Dragoon Guards ; 9th Lancers ; 18th Hussars.
3rd Cavalry Brigade (Gough).—4th Hussars ; 5th Lancers ; 16th Lancers.
4th Cavalry Brigade (Bingham).—3rd Hussars ; 6th Dragoon Guards ; Comp. Guards Regt.
5th Cavalry Brigade (Chetwode).—Scots Greys ; 12th Lancers ; 20th Hussars.

D, E, I, J, and L batteries of Horse Artillery were attached to these Brigades.

Such was the army which first set forth to measure itself against the soldiers of Germany. Prussian bravery, capacity, and organising power had a high reputation among us and yet we awaited the result with every confidence, if the odds of numbers were not overwhelming. At the same time there was no tendency to underrate the earnest patriotism of our opponents, and we were well aware that even the numerous Socialists who filled their ranks were persuaded, incredible as it may seem, that the Fatherland was really attacked, and were whole-hearted in its defence.

The crossing was safely effected. It has always been the traditional privilege of the British public to grumble at their public servants and to speak of " muddling through " to victory. No doubt the criticism has often been deserved. But on this occasion the supervising General in command, the British War Office, and the Naval Transport Department all rose to a supreme degree of excellence in their arrangements. So too did the Railway Companies concerned. The details were meticulously correct. Without the loss of man, horse, or gun, the soldiers who had seen the sun set in Hampshire saw it rise in Picardy or in Normandy. Boulogne and Havre were the chief ports of disembarkation, but many, including the cavalry, went up the Seine and came ashore at Rouen. The soldiers everywhere received a rapturous welcome from the populace, which they returned by a cheerful sobriety of behaviour. The admirable precepts as to wine and women set forth in Lord Kitchener's parting orders to the Army seem to have been most scrupulously observed. It is no slight upon the gallantry of France if it be said that she profited greatly at this strained, over-anxious time by the arrival of these boisterous over-sea Allies. It is probable that the beautiful tune, and even the paltry words of " Tipperary," will pass into history as the marching song, and often the death dirge, of that gallant host. The dusty, poplar-lined roads resounded with their choruses, and the quiet Picardy villages re-echoed their thunderous and superfluous assurances as to the state of their hearts. All France broke into a smile at the sight of them, and it was at a moment when a smile meant much to France.

Whilst the various brigades were with some deliberation preparing for an advance up-country, there arrived at the Gare du Nord in Paris a single traveller who may be said to have been the most welcome British visitor who ever set foot in the city. He was a short, thick man, tanned by an outdoor life, a solid, impassive personality with a strong, good-humoured face, the forehead of a thinker above it, and the jaw of an obstinate fighter below. Overhung brows shaded a pair of keen grey eyes, while the strong, set mouth was partly concealed by a grizzled moustache. Such was John French, leader of cavalry in Africa and now Field-Marshal commanding the Expeditionary Forces of Britain.

French might well appreciate the qualities of his immediate subordinates. Both of his army corps and his cavalry division were in good

hands. Haig, like his leader, was a cavalry man by education, though now entrusted with the command of the First Army Corps, and destined for an ever-increasing European reputation, culminating in the highest. Fifty-four years of age, he still preserved all his natural energies, whilst he had behind him long years of varied miltary experience, including the Soudanese and the South African campaigns, in both of which he had gained high distinction.

The Second Army Corps sustained a severe loss before ever it reached the field of action, for its commander, General Grierson, died suddenly of apparent heart failure in the train between Havre and Rouen on August 18. Grierson had been for many years Military Attaché in Berlin, and one can well imagine how often he had longed to measure British soldiers against the self-sufficient critics around him. At the very last moment the ambition of his lifetime was denied him. His place, however, was worthily filled by General Smith-Dorrien, another South African veteran whose brigade in that difficult campaign had been recognised as one of the very best.

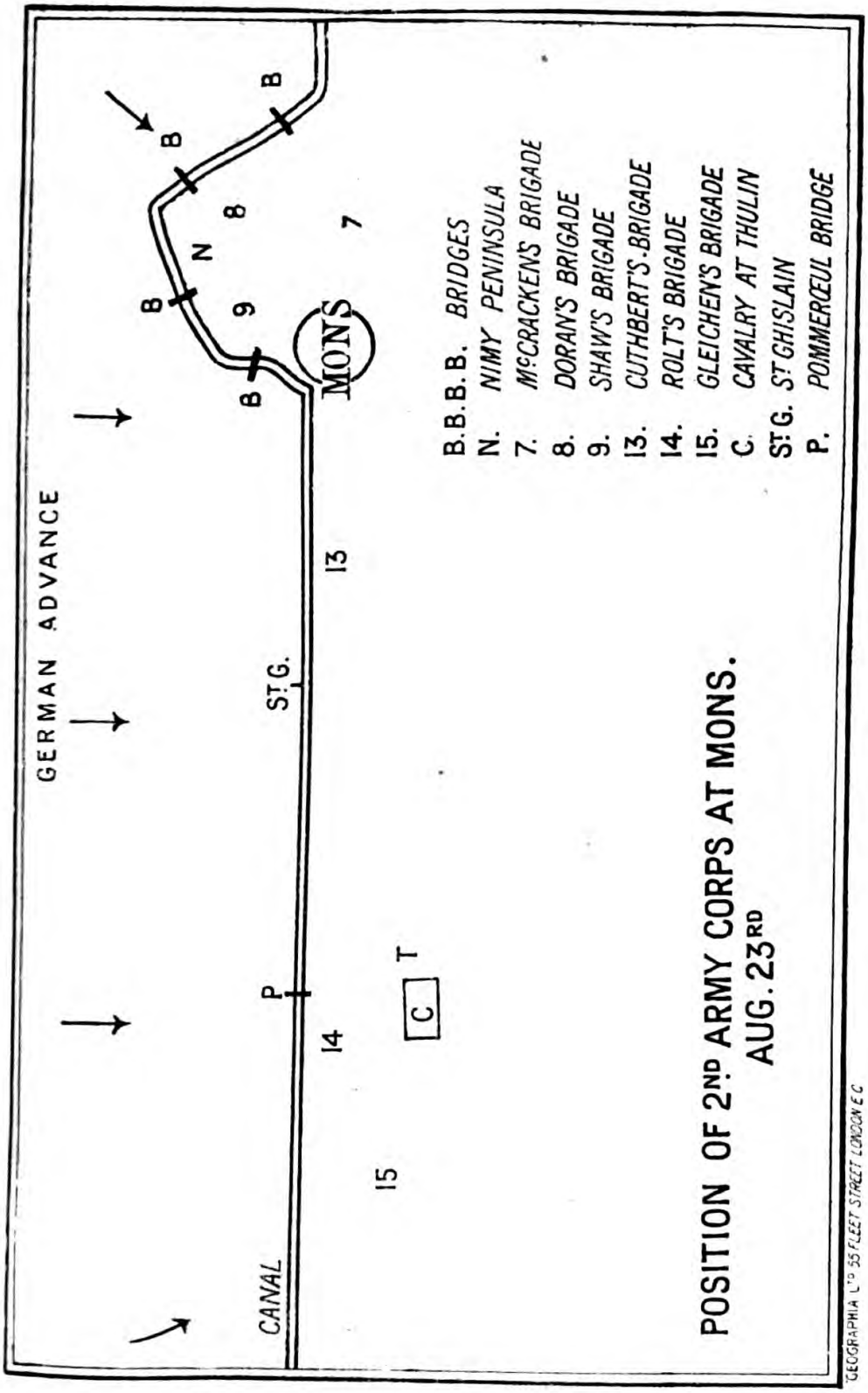
Haig and Smith-Dorrien were the two generals upon whom the immediate operations were to devolve, for the Third Army Corps was late, through no fault of its own, in coming into line. There remained the Cavalry Division, commanded by General Allenby, the future conqueror of the Turks, who was a column leader in that great class for mounted tactics held in South Africa a dozen years before. It is remarkable that of the four leaders in the initial operations of the German War —French, Smith-Dorrien, Haig and Allenby—three belonged to the cavalry, an arm which has usually been regarded as active and ornamental rather than intellectual. Pulteney, the commander of the Third Army Corps, was a product of the Guards, a veteran of much service and a well-known heavy-game shot. Thus, neither of the more learned corps were represented among the higher commanders on the actual field of battle, but brooding over the whole operations was the steadfast, untiring brain of Joffre, whilst across the water the silent Kitchener moved the forces of the Empire to the front. The last word in each case lay with the Sappers.

The general plan of campaign was naturally in the hands of General Joffre, since he was in command of far the greater portion of the Allied Force. It has been admitted in France that the original dispositions might be open to criticism, since a number of the French troops had engaged themselves in Alsace and Lorraine, to the weakening of the line of battle in the north, where the fate of Paris was to be decided. It is small profit to a nation to injure its rival ever so grievously in the toe when it is itself in imminent danger of being stabbed in the heart. A further change in plan had been caused by the intense sympathy felt both by the French and the British for the gallant Belgians, who had done so much and gained so many valuable days for the Allies. It was felt that it would be unchivalrous not to advance and do what was possible

to relieve the intolerable pressure which was crushing them. For this purpose the French Army advanced over the Belgian frontier, getting into touch with the enemy at Namur and Charleroi, so as to secure the passages of the Sambre. It was in fulfilling its part as the left of the Allied line that on August 18 and 19 the British troops began to move northwards into Belgium. The First Army Corps advanced to Rouveroy, which is a village upon the Mons-Chimay road. There it linked on to the right of the Second Corps, which had moved up to the line of the Condé-Mons Canal. On the morning of Sunday, August 23, all these troops were in position. The 5th Brigade of Cavalry (Chetwode's) lay out upon the right front at Binche, but the remainder of the cavalry was brought to a point about five miles behind the centre of the line, so as to be able to reinforce either flank. The first blood of the land campaign had been drawn on August 22 outside Soignies, when a reconnoitring squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards under Captain Hornby charged and overthrew a body of the 4th German Cuirassiers, bringing back some prisoners. The 20th Hussars had enjoyed a similar experience. It was a small but happy omen.

The forces which now awaited the German attack numbered about 86,000 men, who may be roughly divided into 76,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry, and 312 guns. The general alignment was as follows: The First Army Corps held the space between Mons and Binche, which was soon contracted to Bray as the eastward limit. Close to Mons, where the attack was expected to break, since the town is a point of considerable strategic importance, there was a thickening in the line of defence. From that point the 3rd Division and the 5th, in the order named, carried on the British formation down the length of the Mons-Condé Canal. The front of the Army covered nearly twenty miles, an excessive strain upon so small a force in the presence of a compact enemy.

The line of the canal was a most tempting position to defend from Condé to Mons, for it ran as straight as a Roman Road across the path of an invader. But it was very different at Mons itself. Here it formed a most awkward loop. A glance at the diagram will show this formation. It was impossible to leave it undefended, and yet troops who held it were evidently subjected to a flanking artillery fire from each side. The canal here was also crossed by at least three substantial road bridges and one railway bridge. This section of the defence was under the immediate direction of General Smith-Dorrien, who at once took steps to prepare a second line of defence, thrown back to the right rear of the town, so that if the canal were forced the British array would remain unbroken. The immediate care of this weak point in the position was committed to Beauchamp Doran's 8th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Royal Scots, 2nd Royal Irish, 4th Middlesex, and 1st Gordon Highlanders. On their left, occupying the village of Nimy and the western side of the peninsula, as well as the immediate front of Mons itself, was the 9th Brigade (Shaw's), containing the 4th Royal Fusiliers,


GERMAN ADVANCE
CANAL
MONS
ST. G.
P
T
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N
7
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B.B.B.B. BRIDGES
N. NIMY PENINSULA
7. McCRACKEN'S BRIGADE
8. DORAN'S BRIGADE
9. SHAW'S BRIGADE
13. CUTHBERT'S BRIGADE
14. ROLT'S BRIGADE
15. GLEICHEN'S BRIGADE
C. CAVALRY AT THULIN
ST. G. ST. GHISLAIN
P. POMMERŒUL BRIDGE
POSITION OF 2ND ARMY CORPS AT MONS.
AUG. 23RD
GEOGRAPHIA LTD 55 FLEET STREET LONDON E.C.

the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, together with the 1st Lincolns. To the left of this brigade, occupying the eastern end of the Mons-Condé line of canal, was Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, containing the 2nd Scottish Borderers, 2nd West Ridings, 1st West Kents, and 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. It was on these three brigades, and especially on the 8th and 9th, that the impact of the German army was destined to fall. Beyond them, scattered somewhat thinly along the line of the Mons-Condé Canal from the railway bridge west of St. Ghislain, were the two remaining brigades of the 5th Division, the 14th (Rolt's) and the 15th (Gleichen's), the latter being in divisional reserve. Still farther to the west the head of the newly arrived 19th Brigade just touched the canal, and was itself in touch with French Territorials at Condé. Sundry units of artillery and field hospitals had not yet come up, but otherwise the two corps were complete.

Having reached their ground, the troops, with no realisation of immediate danger, proceeded to make shallow trenches. Their bands had not been brought to the front, but the universal singing from one end of the line to the other showed that the men were in excellent spirits. Cheering news had come in from the cavalry, detachments of which, as already stated, had ridden out as far as Soignies, meeting advance patrols of the enemy and coming back with prisoners and trophies. The guns were drawn up in concealed positions within half a mile of the line of battle. All was now ready, and officers could be seen on every elevation peering northwards through their glasses for the first sign of the enemy. It was a broken country, with large patches of woodland and green spaces between. There were numerous slag-heaps from old mines, with here and there a factory and here and there a private dwelling, but the sappers had endeavoured in the short time to clear a field of fire for the infantry. In order to get this field of fire and to cover the incoming of the scouting cavalry, several of the battalions, such as the West Kents of the 13th and the Cornwalls of the 14th Brigades, had detachments across the canal with bridges in their rear. Thrilling with anticipation, the men waited for their own first entrance upon the stupendous drama. They were already weary and footsore, for they had all done at least two days of forced marching, and the burden of the pack, the rifle, and the hundred and fifty rounds per man was no light one. They lay snugly in their trenches under the warm August sun and waited. It was a Sunday, and more than one have recorded in their letters how in that hour of tension their thoughts turned to the old home church and the mellow call of the village bells.

A hovering aeroplane had just slid down with the news that the roads from the north were alive with the advancing Germans, but the estimate of the aviator placed them at two corps and a division of cavalry. This coincided roughly with the accounts brought in by the scouts and, what was more important, with the forecast of General Joffre. This force

might well seem within the British General's power of resistance, but he was already on August 22 disturbed by rumours of weakness in the French fifth army upon his immediate right. A staff officer had come in with the news that the Tenth French Corps had been driven in by the advancing Germans near Charleroi, and that though the main part of the French Fifth Army was still in position, it was on the point of retiring. It was clear under these circumstances that the British resistance could not be prolonged and that an advance was out of the question. French could only promise to hold his ground for twenty-four hours in any case while the situation developed. Had he been able to see the whole vast German sweep to the west his trenches would probably have been abandoned before a grey coat had appeared, and the whole army brought as swiftly as our duty to our Allies would admit to a safer strategic position. Even now as they waited expectantly for the enemy a vast steel trap was closing up for their destruction.

Let us take a glance at what was going on over that northern horizon. The American Powell had seen something of the mighty right swing which was to end the combat. Invited to a conference with a German general who was pursuing the national policy of soothing the United States until her own turn should come round, Mr. Powell left Brussels and chanced to meet Von Kluck's legions upon their western and southerly trek. He describes with great force the effect upon his mind of those endless grey columns, all flowing in the same direction, double files of infantry on either side of the road, and endless guns, motor-cars, cavalry, and transport between. The men, as he describes them, were all in the prime of life, and equipped with everything which years of forethought could devise. He was dazed and awed by the tremendous procession, its majesty and its self-evident efficiency. It is no wonder, for he was looking at the chosen legions of the most wonderful army that the world had ever seen—an army which represented the last possible word on the material and mechanical side of war. High in the van a Taube aeroplane, like an embodiment of that black eagle which is the fitting emblem of a warlike and rapacious race, pointed the path for the German hordes.

A day or two before, two American correspondents, Mr. Irvin Cobb and Mr. Harding Davis, had seen the same great army as it streamed westwards through Louvain and Brussels. They graphically describe how for three consecutive days and the greater part of three nights they poured past, giving the impression of unconquerable energy and efficiency, young, enthusiastic, wonderfully equipped. "Either we shall go forward or we die. We do not expect to fall back ever. If the generals would let them, the men would run to Paris instead of walking there." So spoke one of the leaders of that huge invading host, the main part of which was now heading straight for the British line. A second part, unseen and unsuspected, were working round by Tournai to the west, hurrying hard to strike in upon the British flank and rear.

The German is a great marcher as well as a great fighter, and the average rate of progress was little less than thirty miles a day.

It was after ten o'clock when scouting cavalry were observed falling back. Then the distant sound of a gun was heard, and a few seconds later a shell burst some hundreds of yards behind the British lines. The British guns one by one roared into action. Here and there, from observation points upon buildings and slag-heaps, the controllers of the batteries were able to indicate targets and register hits unseen by the gunners themselves. The noise was horrible, but no enemy had been seen by the infantry, and little damage done.

But now an ill-omened bird flew over the British lines. Far aloft across the deep blue sky skimmed the dark Taube, curved, turned, and sailed northwards again. It had marked the shells bursting beyond the trenches. In an instant, by some devilish cantrip of signal or wireless, it had set the range right. A rain of shells roared and crashed along the lines of the shallow trenches. The injuries were not yet numerous, but they were inexpressibly ghastly. Men who had hardly seen worse than a cut finger in their lives gazed with horror at the gross mutilations around them. "One dared not look sideways," said one of them. Stretcher-bearers bent and heaved while wet, limp forms were hoisted upwards by their comrades. Officers gave short, sharp words of encouragement or advice. The minutes seemed very long, and still the shells came raining down. The men shoved the five-fold clips down into their magazines and waited with weary patience. A senior officer peering over the end of a trench leaned tensely forward and rested his glasses upon the grassy edge. "They're coming!" he whispered to his neighbour. It ran from lip to lip along the line of crouching men. Heads were poked up here and there above the line of broken earth. Soon, in spite of the crashing shells overhead, there was a fringe of peering faces. And there at last in front of them was the German enemy. After all the centuries, Briton and Teuton faced each other at last for the test of battle.

A stylist among letter-writers has described that oncoming swarm as grey clouds drifting over green fields. They had deployed under cover whilst the batteries were preparing their path, and now over an extended front to the north-west of Mons they were breaking out from the woods and coming rapidly onwards. The men fidgeted with their triggers, but no order came to fire. The officers were gazing with professional interest and surprise at the German formations. Were these the tactics of the army which had claimed to be the most scientific in Europe? British observers had seen it in peace time and had conjectured that it was a screen for some elaborate tactics held up for the day of battle. Yet here they were, advancing in what in old Soudan days used to be described as the twenty-acre formation, against the best riflemen in Europe. It was not even a shoulder to shoulder column, but a vast crowd, shredding out in the front and dense in the rear. There was

nothing of the swiftly weaving lines, the rushes of alternate companies, the twinkle and flicker of a modern attack. It was mediaeval, and yet it was impressive also in its immediate display of numbers and the ponderous insistence of its onward flow. It was not many weeks before the stern lesson of war taught very different formations to those of the grand Kaiser manœuvres.

The men, still fingering their triggers, gazed expectantly at their officers, who measured intently the distance of the approaching swarms. The Germans had already began to fire in a desultory fashion. Shrapnel was bursting thickly along the head of their columns but they were coming steadily onwards. Suddenly a rolling wave of independent firing broke out from the British position. At some portions of the line the enemy were at eight hundred, at others at one thousand yards. The men, happy in having something definite to do, snuggled down earnestly to their work and fired swiftly but deliberately into the approaching mass. Rifles, machine-guns, and field-pieces were all roaring together, while the incessant crash of the shells overhead added to the infernal uproar. Men lost all sense of time as they thrust clip after clip into their rifles. The German swarms staggered on bravely under that leaden sleet. Then they halted, vacillated, and finally thinned, shredded out, and drifted backwards like a grey fog torn by a gale. The woods absorbed them once again, whilst the rain of shells upon the British trenches became thicker and more deadly.

There was a lull in the infantry attack, and the British, peering from their shelters, surveyed with a grim satisfaction the patches and smudges of grey which showed the effect of their fire. But the rest was not a long one. With fine courage the German battalions re-formed under the shelter of the trees, while fresh troops from the rear pushed forward to stiffen the shaken lines. " Hold your fire ! " was the order that ran down the ranks. With the confidence bred of experience, the men waited and still waited, till the very features of the Germans could be distinguished. Then once more the deadly fire rippled down the line, the masses shredded and dissolved, and the fugitives hurried to the woods. Then came the pause under shell fire, and then once again the emergence of the infantry, the attack, the check, and the recoil. Such were the general characteristics of the action at Mons over a large portion of the British line—that portion which extended along the actual course of the canal.

It is not to be supposed, however, that there was a monotony of attack and defence over the whole of the British position. A large part of the force, including the whole of the First Army Corps, was threatened rather than seriously engaged, while the opposite end of the line was also out of the main track of the storm. It beat most dangerously, as had been foreseen, upon the troops to the immediate west and vicinity of Mons, especially upon those which defended the impossible peninsula formed by the loop of the canal.

There is a road which runs from Mons due north through the village of Nimy to Jurbise. The defences to the west of this road were in the hands of the 9th Brigade. The 4th Royal Fusiliers, with the 1st Scots Fusiliers, were the particular battalions which held the trenches skirting this part of the peninsula, while half the Northumberland Fusiliers were on the straight canal to the westward. To the east of Nimy are three road bridges—those of Nimy itself, Lock No. 5, and Aubourg Station. All these three bridges were defended by the 4th Middlesex, who had made shallow trenches which commanded them. The Gordons were on their immediate right. The field of fire was much interfered with by the mines and buildings which faced them, so that at this point the Germans could get up unobserved to the very front. It has also been already explained that the German artillery could enfilade the peninsula from each side, making the defence most difficult. A rush of German troops came between eleven and twelve o'clock across the Aubourg Station Bridge. It was so screened up to the moment of the advance that neither the rifles nor the machine-guns of the Middlesex could stop it. At the same time, or very shortly afterwards, the other two bridges were forced in a similar manner, but the Germans in all three cases as they reached the farther side were unable to make any rapid headway against the British fire, though they made the position untenable for the troops in trenches between the bridges. The whole of the 8th Brigade, supported by the 2nd Irish Rifles from McCracken's 7th Brigade, which had been held in reserve at Ciply, was now fully engaged, covering the retirement of the Middlesex and Gordons. At some points the firing between the two lines of infantry was across the breadth of a road. Two batteries of the 40th Artillery Brigade, which were facing the German attack at this point, were badly mauled, one of them, the 23rd R.F.A., losing its gun teams.

It is well to accentuate the fact that though this was the point of the most severe pressure there was never any disorderly retirement, and strong reserves were available had they been needed. The 8th Brigade, at the time of the general strategical withdrawal of the Army, made its arrangements in a methodical fashion, and General Doran kept his hold until after nightfall upon Bois la Haut, which was an elevation to the east of Mons from which the German artillery might have harassed the British retreat, since it commanded all the country to the south. The losses of the Brigade had, however, been considerable, amounting to not less than three hundred and fifty in the case of the 4th Middlesex, many being killed or wounded in the defence, and some cut off in the trenches between the various bridge-heads. Majors Davey and Abell of the Middlesex were respectively wounded and killed, with thirteen other officers.

It has already been said that the line of the 4th Royal Fusiliers extended along the western perimeter up to Nimy Road Bridge, where Colonel MacMahon's section ended and that of Colonel Hull, of the

Middlesex Regiment, began. To the west of this point was the Nimy Railway Bridge, defended also by Captain Ashburner's company of the 4th Royal Fusiliers. This was assaulted early, and was held for nearly five hours against an attack of several German battalions. The British artillery was unable to help much in the defence, as the town of Mons behind offered no positions for guns, but the 107th Battery in the immediate rear did good work. The defence was continued until the Germans who had already crossed to the east were advancing on the flank. Lieutenant Maurice Dease, five times wounded before he was killed, worked his machine-gun to the end, and every man of his detachment was hit. Lieutenant Dease and Private Godley both received the Victoria Cross. The occupants of one trench, including Lieutenant Smith, who was wounded, were cut off by the rush. Captain Carey commanded the covering company and the retirement was conducted in good order, though Captain Bowden Smith, Lieutenant Mead, and a number of men fell in the movement. Altogether, the Royal Fusiliers lost five officers and about two hundred men in the defence of the bridge, Lieutenant Tower having seven survivors in his platoon of sixty. Captain Byng's company at the Glin Bridge farther east had severe losses and was driven in in the same way. As the infantry retired a small party of engineers under Captain Theodore Wright endeavoured to destroy this and other bridges. Lieutenant Day was twice wounded in his attempt upon the main Nimy Bridge. Corporal Jarvis received the V.C. for his exertions in preparing the Jemappes bridge for destruction to the west of Nimy. Captain Wright, with Sergeant Smith, made an heroic endeavour under terrific fire to detonate the charge, but was wounded and fell into the canal. Lieutenant Holt, a brave young officer of reserve engineers, also lost his life in these operations.

Having held on as long as was possible, the front line of the 9th Brigade fell back upon the prepared position on high ground between Mons and Frameries, where the 107th R.F.A. was entrenched. The 4th Royal Fusiliers reached the new line in good order and without further loss. The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, however, falling back to the same point on a different route through Flenu, came under heavy machine-gun fire from a high soil heap, losing Captain Rose and a hundred men.

The falling back of the 8th and 9th Brigades from the Nimy Peninsula had an immediate effect upon Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, which was on their left holding the line up to the railway bridge just east of St. Ghislain. Of this brigade two battalions, the 1st West Kent on the right and the 2nd Scottish Borderers on the left, were in the trenches while the 2nd West Riding and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry were in support, having their centre at Boussu. The day began by some losses to the West Kent Regiment, who were probably, apart from cavalry patrols, the first troops to suffer in the great war. A company of the regiment under Captain Lister was sent across the canal early as a

support to some retiring cavalry, and it held the village of Tertre against the head of the German Third Corps which consisted of a crack regiment, the 12th Brandenburg Grenadiers. The three battalions of this regiment, supported by five batteries of artillery, found the greatest difficulty in turning out the West Kent Company, and was finally brought to a complete halt by the fire of the remaining Companies on the line of the canal. Walter Bloem, the novelist, was a Company officer in this regiment, and he has described in very clear terms the absolute amazement of the troops when they found themselves in the evening cut to pieces by an enemy whom they had always been taught to despise. After the first the German attacks were easily held, though the German guns were within twelve hundred yards. The situation was changed when it was learned later in the day that the Germans were across to the right and had got as far as Flenu on the flank of the brigade. In view of this advance, General Smith-Dorrien, having no immediate supports, dashed off on a motor to Sir Douglas Haig's headquarters some four miles distant, and got his permission to use Haking's 5th Brigade, which pushed up in time to re-establish the line.

It has been shown that the order of the battalions closely engaged in the front line was, counting from the east, the 1st Gordons, the 4th Middlesex, the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Scots Fusiliers, half the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 1st West Kents, and the 2nd Scottish Borderers, the other battalions of these brigades being in reserve. The last-named battalion, being opposite a bridge, was heavily engaged all day, losing many men, but holding its position intact against repeated advances. On the left hand or western side of the Scottish Borderers, continuing the line along the canal, one would come upon the front of the 14th Brigade (Rolt's), which was formed by the 1st East Surrey on the right and the 1st Duke of Cornwall's on the left. The German attack upon this portion of the line began about 1 p.m., and by 3 p.m. had become so warm that the reserve companies were drawn into the firing line. Thanks to their good work, both with rifles and with machine-guns, the battalions held their own until about six o'clock in the evening, when the retirement of the troops on their right enabled the Germans to enfilade the right section of the East Surreys at close range. They were ordered to retire, but lost touch with the left section, which remained to the north of the canal where their trench was situated. Captain Benson of this section had been killed and Captain Campbell severely wounded, but the party of one hundred and ten men under Lieutenant Morritt held on most gallantly and made a very fine defence. Being finally surrounded, they endeavoured to cut their way out with cold steel, Lieutenant Ward being killed and Morritt four times wounded in the attempt. Many of the men were killed and wounded, and the survivors were taken. Altogether the loss of the battalion was five officers and one hundred and thirty-four men.

On the left of the East Surreys, as already stated, lay the 1st Duke of

Cornwall's of the same brigade. About four o'clock in the afternoon the presence of the German outflanking corps first made itself felt. At that hour the Cornwalls were aware of an advance upon their left as well as their front. The Cornwalls drew in across the canal in consequence, and the Germans did not follow them over that evening.

The chief point defended by the 14th Brigade upon this day had been the bridge and main road which crosses the canal between Pommeroeul and Thulin, some eight or nine miles west of Mons. In the evening, when the final order for retreat was given, this bridge was blown up, and the brigade fell back after nightfall as far as Dour, where it slept.

By the late afternoon the general position was grave, but not critical. The enemy had lost very heavily, while the men in the trenches were, in comparison, unscathed. Here and there, as we have seen, the Germans had obtained a lodgment in the British position, especially at the salient which had always appeared to be impossible to hold, but, on the other hand, the greater part of the Army, including the whole First Corps, had not yet been seriously engaged, and there were reserve troops in the immediate rear of the fighting line who could be trusted to make good any gap in the ranks before them. The German artillery fire was heavy and well-directed, but the British batteries had held their own. Such was the position when, about 5 p.m., a telegram from General Joffre was put into Sir John French's hand, which must have brought a pang to his heart. From it he learned that all his work had been in vain, and that far from contending for victory, he would be fortunate if he saved himself from utter defeat.

There were two pieces of information in this fatal message, and each was disastrous. The first announced that instead of the two German corps whom he had reason to think were in front of him, there were three—the Third, Fourth and Ninth—forming, with the second and fourth cavalry divisions, a force of nearly 200,000 men, while the Second Corps were bringing another 40,000 round his left flank from the direction of Tournai. The second item was even more serious. Instead of being buttressed up with French troops on either side of him, he learned that the Germans had burst the line of the Sambre, and that the Fifth French Army on his right were already in full retreat, while nothing substantial lay upon his left. It was a most perilous position. The British force lay exposed and unsupported amid converging foes who far outnumbered [1] it in men and guns. What was the profit of one day of successful defence if the morrow would dawn upon a British Sedan?

But it is no easy matter to disengage so large an army which is actually in action and hard pressed by a numerous and enterprising enemy. The front was extensive and the lines of retreat were limited. As dusk

[1] The German official account shows that the 3rd British Division was attacked by 3½ German Divisions (17, 18, 6, and half 5), while the 5th British Division was attacked by 2½ German Divisions (half 5, 7, 8). The First British Army Corps had its own set of opponents.

fell, a dusk which was lightened by the glare of burning villages, some of the battalions began slowly to draw off to the rear. In the early morning of the 24th the definite order to retire was conveyed to the corps commanders, whilst immediate measures were taken to withdraw the impedimenta and to clear the roads.

Such, in its bare outlines, was the action of Mons on August 23, interesting for its own sake, but more so as being the first clash between the British and German armies. It will always be a subject for speculation as to what would have occurred had the battle been fought to a finish. Allowing for the advantage that the defence has over the attack, it is possible that the odds might not have been too great and that Sir John French might have remained master of the field. That, however, is a matter of opinion. What is not a matter of opinion is that the other German armies to the east would have advanced on the heels of the retiring French, that they would have cut the British off from their Allies, and that the Army would have been hard put to it to reach the coast. Therefore, win or lose, the Army had no possible course open but to retire. The actual losses of the British were not more than sixteen hundred, mostly from the 8th Brigade, together with two guns of the 120th Battery. There are no means even now by which the German losses can be taken out from the general returns, but when one considers the repeated advances over the open and the constant breaking of the dense attacking formations, it is impossible that they should have been other than very heavy. Each army had for the first time an opportunity of forming a critical estimate of the other. German officers have admitted with soldierly frankness that the efficiency of the British came to them as a revelation, which is not surprising after the assurances that had been made to them. On the other hand, the British bore away a very clear conviction of the excellence of the German artillery and of the plodding bravery of the German infantry, together with a great reassurance as to their own capacity to hold their own at any reasonable odds.

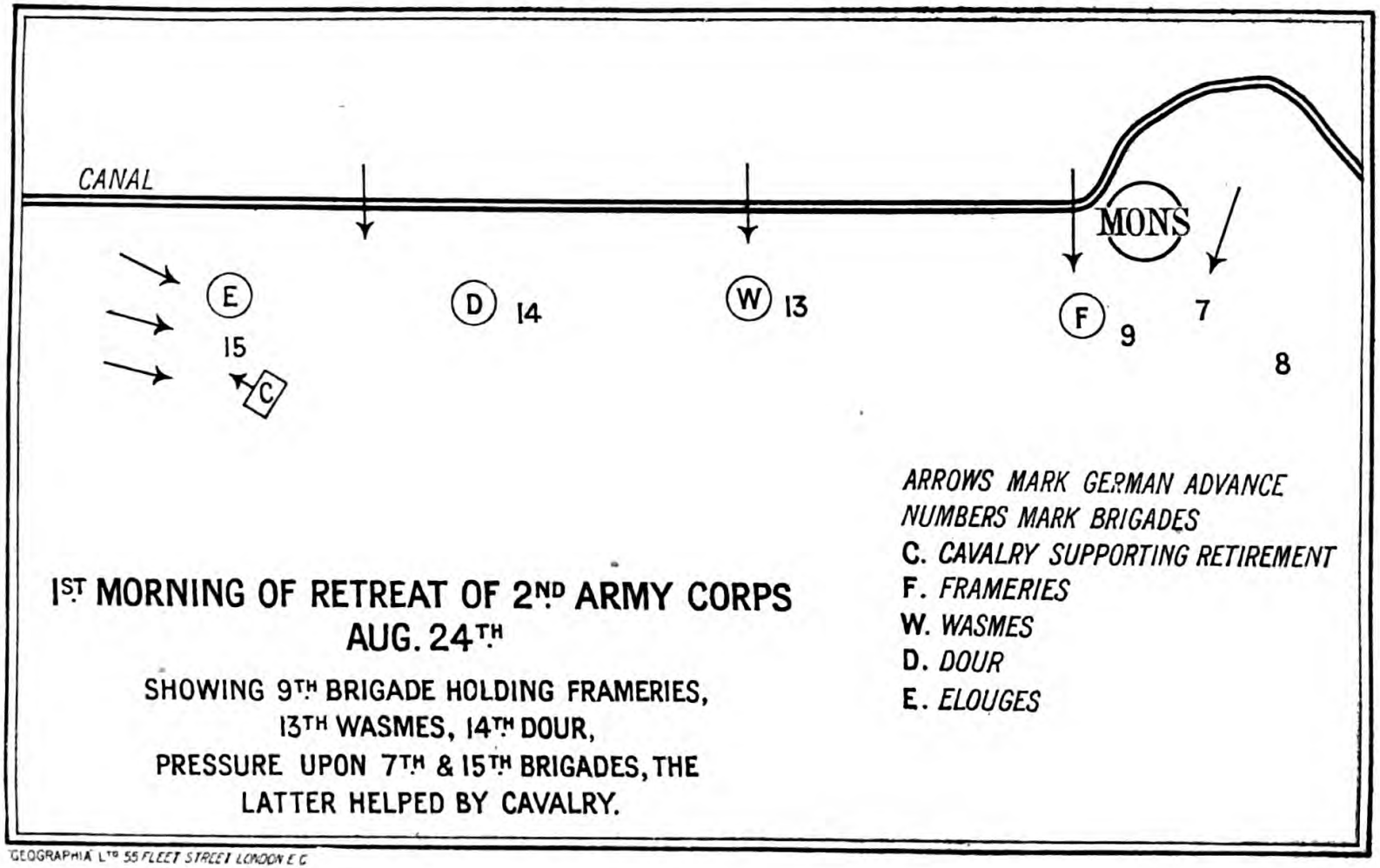
After a night of flames and of uproar the day dawned, a day of great anxiety to the British commanders and of considerable pressure upon a portion of the troops. Sir John French had given instructions that the First Corps, which had been only slightly engaged the day before, should pretend to assume the offensive upon the extreme right wing in the direction of Binche, whilst the Second Corps began its retirement. The enemy was following up rapidly, however, along the whole length of the British line, both flanks of which were exposed. The Second Corps began its retreat, helped by the feint which was carried out by General Haig upon the right, and by the bulk of the batteries of both corps, but the pursuit was vigorous and the shell-fire incessant. A shell from the rear is more intimidating than twenty in the front. Hamilton's 3rd Division, including the 8th and 9th Brigades, who had done such hard work the day before, sustained the most severe losses, especially at Frameries, four miles south of Mons. Shaw's 9th Brigade, which

covered the retreat, was closely pressed from dawn by the pursuing Germans, and was subjected to a very heavy shell-fire. A barricade, erected in the village and manned by Captain Sandilands, of the Northumberlands, with his company, held up the German advance, and they were never permitted to reach the line nor to hustle the retirement. The 109th Battery helped with its fire. The chief losses in this skilful covering action fell upon the 1st Lincolns and upon the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, each of which lost about 150 men, including Captain Rose, Lieutenants Bulbe, Welchman, and others. There was a stational ambulance in the village of Frameries, and a foreign nurse in its employ has left a vivid picture of the wounded British rushing in grimy and breathless to have their slighter wounds dressed and then running out, rifle in hand, to find their place in the firing line.

The remaining brigade of the 3rd Division, McCracken's 7th Brigade, had detached one battalion, the 2nd Irish Rifles, on the day before to reinforce the 8th Brigade, and this battalion had, as already mentioned, some severe fighting, holding back the German advance after the retirement from the Nimy Peninsula of the Middlesex and the Gordons. It did not find its way back to its brigade until the evening of the 24th. The brigade itself, during the first day of the retreat, held a position near Ciply, to the south of Mons, where it was heavily attacked in the early morning, and in some danger as its flank was exposed. At ten o'clock it was ordered to retire *via* Genly towards Bavai, and it carried out this difficult movement in the face of a pushful enemy, in perfect order, covered by the divisional artillery. The principal losses fell upon the 2nd South Lancashires, which came under heavy fire from German machine-guns posted upon slag-heaps. This battalion was very hard hit, losing several hundred men. The brigade faced round near Bavai and held off the pursuit.

Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, keeping in line with their comrades on the right, halted at Wasmes, some four miles from the canal, where they prepared some hasty entrenchments. Here, at the dawn of day, they were furiously attacked by the German vanguard at the same time that the 9th Brigade was hustled in Frameries, but for two hours the assailants were beaten back with heavy losses. The brunt of the fighting fell upon the 2nd West Riding Battalion, who lost heavily, were at one time nearly surrounded, and finally, with dour Yorkshire pertinacity, shook themselves clear after holding up six battalions. Their losses included their commander, Colonel Gibbs, their adjutant, 300 men, and all their officers save five. The 1st West Kents also lost about 100 men and several officers, including Major Pack-Beresford. For the remainder of the day and for the whole of the 25th the brigade, with the rest of the 5th Division, fell back with little fighting *via* Bavai to the Le Cateau line.

On the evening of the 23rd the 14th Brigade, still farther to the west, had fallen back to Dour, blowing up the bridge and road over the canal. After dark the Germans followed them, and Gleichen's 15th Brigade,


CANAL
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ARROWS MARK GERMAN ADVANCE
NUMBERS MARK BRIGADES
C. CAVALRY SUPPORTING RETIREMENT
F. FRAMERIES
W. WASMES
D. DOUR
E. ELOUGES
1ST MORNING OF RETREAT OF 2ND ARMY CORPS
AUG. 24TH
SHOWING 9TH BRIGADE HOLDING FRAMERIES,
13TH WASMES, 14TH DOUR,
PRESSURE UPON 7TH & 15TH BRIGADES, THE
LATTER HELPED BY CAVALRY.
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which had not yet been engaged, found itself in the position of rearguard and immediately exposed to the pressure of the German flanking movement. This was now threatening to envelop the whole of Fergusson's 5th Division. The situation was particularly difficult, since this General had to make a flank movement in the face of the enemy in order to close up with his comrades of the 3rd Division. Before noon he was compelled to call for assistance, and Allenby, with his cavalry division, was advanced to help him. It was evidently the intention of the enemy to strike in upon the western side of the division and pin it to its ground until it could be surrounded.

The first menacing advance in the morning of the 24th was directed against the flank of the British infantry who were streaming down the Elouges-Dour high road. The situation was critical, and a portion of De Lisle's 2nd Cavalry Brigade was ordered to charge near Andregnies, the hostile infantry being at that time about a thousand yards distant, with several batteries in support. The attack of the cavalry was vigorously supported by L Battery of Horse Artillery. The charge was carried out by three squadrons of the 9th Lancers, Colonel Campbell at their head, and by the 4th Dragoon Guards under Colonel Mullens, while the 18th Hussars covered them with dismounted fire. The cavalry rode forward amidst a heavy but not particularly deadly fire until they were within a few hundred yards of the enemy, when, being faced by a wire fence, they swung to the right and rallied under cover of some slag-heaps and of a railway embankment. Their menace and rifle fire, or the fine work of Major Sclater-Booth's battery, had the effect of holding up the German advance for some time, and though the cavalry were much scattered and disorganised they were able to reunite without any excessive loss, the total casualties being a little over two hundred. Some hours later the enemy's pressure again became heavy upon Fergusson's flank, and the 1st Cheshires and 1st Norfolks, of Gleichen's 15th Brigade, which formed the infantry flank-guard, incurred heavy losses. It was in this defensive action that the 119th R.F.A., under Major Alexander, fought itself to a standstill with only three unwounded gunners by the guns. The battery had silenced one German unit and was engaged with three others. Only Major Alexander and Lieutenant Pollard with a few men were left. As the horses had been destroyed the pieces had to be man-handled out of action. Captain F. Grenfell, of the Lancers, bleeding from two wounds, with several officers, Sergeants Davids and Turner, and some fifty men of the regiment, saved these guns under a terrible fire, the German infantry being within close range. During the whole long, weary day the batteries and horsemen were working hard to cover the retreat, while the surgeons exposed themselves with great fearlessness, lingering behind the retiring lines in order to give first aid to the men who had been hit by the incessant shell-fire. It was in this noble task—the noblest surely within the whole range of warfare—that Captain Malcolm Leckie, and

other brave medical officers, met with a glorious end, upholding to the full the traditions of their famous corps.

It has been stated that the 1st Cheshires, in endeavouring to screen the west flank of the Second Corps from the German pursuit, were very badly punished. This battalion, together with the Norfolks, occupied a low ridge to the north-east side of the village of Elouges, which they endeavoured to hold against the onflowing tide of Germans. About three in the afternoon it was seen that there was danger of this small flank-guard being entirely cut off. As a matter of fact an order had actually been sent for a retreat, but had not reached them. Colonel Boger of the Cheshires sent several messengers, representing the growing danger, but no answer came back. Finally, in desperation, Colonel Boger went himself and found that the enemy held the position previously occupied by the rest of Gleichen's Brigade, which had retired. The Cheshires had by this time endured dreadful losses, and were practically surrounded. A bayonet charge eased the pressure for a short time, but the enemy again closed in and the bulk of the survivors, isolated amidst a hostile army corps, were compelled to surrender. Some escaped in small groups and made their way through to their retreating comrades. When roll was next called, there remained 5 officers and 193 men out of 27 officers and 1007 of all ranks who had gone into action. It speaks volumes for the discipline of the battalion that this remnant, under Captain Shore, continued to act as a useful unit. These various episodes, including the severe losses of Gleichen's 15th Brigade, the attack of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and the artillery action in which the 119th Battery was so severely handled, group themselves into a separate little action occurring the day after Mons and associated either with the villages of Elouges or of Dour. The Second German Corps continued to act upon the western side of the Second British Corps, whilst the rest of General von Kluck's army followed it behind. With four corps close behind him, and one snapping at his flank, General Smith-Dorrien made his way southwards, his gunners and cavalry labouring hard to relieve the ever-increasing pressure, while his rear brigades were continually sprayed by the German shrapnel. The total losses of the day were 2600, the greater part being from the 5th Division owing to the disaster of the Cheshires. Again there is every reason to believe that the Germans lost very much more heavily.

A tiny reinforcement had joined the Army on the morning after the battle of Mons. This was the 19th Brigade under General Drummond, which consisted of the 1st Middlesex, 1st Scots Rifles, 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This detached brigade acted, and continued to act during the early part of the war, as an independent unit. It detrained at Valenciennes on August 23, and two battalions, the Middlesex and the Cameronians, may be said to have taken part in the battle of Mons, since they formed up at the east of Condé, on the extreme left of the British position, and received,

together with the Queen's Bays, who were scouting in front of them, the first impact of the German flanking corps. They fell back with the Army on the 24th and 25th, finally reaching Le Cateau, where they took up their position on the right rear of the British Army.

As the Army fell back, the border fortress of Maubeuge with its heavy guns offered a tempting haven of rest for the weary and overmatched troops, but not in vain had France lost her army in Metz. Sir John French would have no such protection, however violently the Germans might push him towards it. "The British Army invested in Maubeuge" was not destined to furnish the head-line of a Berlin special edition. The fortress was left to the eastward, and the tired troops snatched a few hours of rest near Bavai, still pursued by the guns and the searchlights of their persistent foemen. At an early hour of the 25th the columns were again on the march for the south.

It may be remarked that in all this movement what made the operation most difficult and complicated was, that in the retirement the Army was not moving direct to the rear, but diagonally away to the west, thus making the west flank more difficult to cover as well as complicating the movements of transport. It was this oblique movement which caused the 3rd Division to change places with the 5th, so that from now onwards it was to the west of the Army.

The greater part of the 4th Division of the Third Army Corps, coming up from the lines of communication, brought on this day a welcome reinforcement to the Army and did yeoman work in covering the retirement. The total composition of this division was as follows :

THIRD ARMY CORPS—GENERAL PULTENEY

DIVISION IV.—GENERAL SNOW.

10th Infantry Brigade—General Haldane.

1st Warwicks.
2nd Seaforths.
1st Irish Fusiliers.
2nd Dublin Fusiliers.

11th Infantry Brigade—General Hunter-Weston.

1st Somerset L. Infantry.
1st East Lancashires.
1st Hants.
1st Rifle Brigade.

12th Infantry Brigade—General Wilson.

1st Royal Lancaster Regiment.
2nd Lancs. Fusiliers.
2nd Innis. Fusiliers.
2nd Essex.

Artillery—General Milne.

XIV. Brig. R.F.A. 39, 68, 88.
XXIX. „ „ 125, 126, 127.
XXXII. „ „ 27, 134, 135.
XXXVII. „ (How.) 31, 35, 55.
Heavy R.G.A. 31 Battery.
R.E. 7, 9 Field Cos.

These troops, which had been quartered in the Ligny and Montigny area, received urgent orders at one in the morning of the 25th that they should advance northwards. They marched that night to Briastre, where they covered the retreat of the Army, the 3rd Division passing through their lines. The 4th Division then retired south again, having great difficulty in getting along, as the roads were choked with transport and artillery, and fringed with exhausted men. The 12th Brigade was acting as rearguard, and began to experience pressure from the pursuers, the Essex men being shelled out of the village of Bethencourt, which they held until it was nearly surrounded by the German cavalry. The route followed by the division brought them to the left of the Army at the line of Le Cateau. Such reinforcements were mere handfuls when compared with the pursuing hosts, but their advent heartened up the British troops and relieved them of some of the pressure. It has been remarked by officers of the 4th Division that they and their men were considerably taken aback by the worn appearance of the weary battalions from Mons which passed through their ranks. Their confidence was revived, however, by the undisturbed demeanour of the General Headquarters Staff, who came through them in the late afternoon of the 25th. " General French himself struck me as being extremely composed, and the staff officers looked very cheerful." These are the imponderabilia which count for much in a campaign.

Tuesday, August 25, was a day of scattered rearguard actions. The weary Army had rested on the evening of the 24th upon the general line Maubeuge–Bavai–Wargnies. Orders were issued for the retirement to continue next day to a position already partly prepared, in front of the centre of which stood the town of Le Cateau. The general conception was that the inner flanks of the two corps should be directed upon this point.

The British Commander has shown in his book, " 1914," that he was averse from fighting an action. On his right the French were already a day's march further south. On his left there was nothing to stop the German enveloping movement save two weak French divisions of reserve. Therefore he desired to get behind some river or natural obstacle and to refit. Hence it was that no strenuous effort seems to have been made to get the two corps into line for the battle. Circumstances were too strong for Sir John French and the fight took place with little more than half of the Army taking part.

Whilst the British had been falling back it was hoped that substantial French reinforcements were coming up from the south. The roads were much blocked during the 25th, for two divisions of French territorials were retiring along them, as well as the British Army. As a consequence progress was slow, and the German pressure from the rear became ever more severe. Allenby's cavalry and horse-guns splendidly handled covered the retreat, continually turning round and holding off the pursuers. Finally, near Solesmes, on the evening of the

25th, the cavalry were at last driven in, and the Germans came up against McCracken's 7th Brigade, who held them most skilfully until nightfall with the assistance of the 42nd Brigade R.F.A. and the 30th Howitzer Brigade. Most of the fighting fell upon the 1st Wiltshires and 2nd South Lancashires, both of which had substantial losses. The Germans could make no further progress, and time was given for the roads to clear and for the artillery to get away. The 7th Brigade then followed, marching, so far as possible, across country and taking up its position, which it did not reach until after midnight, in the village of Caudry, on the line of the Le Cateau–Courtrai road. As it faced north once more it found Snow's 4th Division upon its left, while on its immediate right were the 8th and the 9th Brigades, with the 5th Division on the farther side of them. Here we may leave them in position while we return to trace the fortunes of the First Army Corps.

Sir Douglas Haig's corps was cleverly disengaged from the enemy and fell back by alternate divisions. It was not an easy operation, and it was conducted under a very heavy shell-fire, which fell especially upon the covering guns of Colonel Sandilands' 34th Artillery Brigade. These guns were exposed to a concentration of fire from the enemy, which was so intense that a thick haze of smoke and dust blotted out the view for long periods at a time. It was only with difficulty and great gallantry that they were got away. An officer of the 6th Brigade, immediately behind them, writes: "Both going in and coming back the limbers passed my trench at a tearing gallop, the drivers lying low on the horses' necks and screaming at them to go faster, while on the return the guns bounded about on the stubble field like so many tin cans behind a runaway dog." The guns having been drawn in, the corps retired by roads parallel to the Second Corps, and were able to reach the line Bavai—Maubeuge by about 7 p.m. that evening, being on the immediate eastern flank of Smith-Dorrien's men. It is a striking example of the historical continuity of the British Army that as they marched that day many of the battalions, such as the Guards and the 1st King's Liverpool, passed over the graves of their predecessors who had died under the same colours at Malplaquet in 1709, two hundred and six years before.

On August 25 General Haig continued his retreat. During the day he fell back to the west of Maubeuge by Feignies to Vavesnes and Landrecies. The considerable forest of Mormal intervened between the two sections of the British Army. The weather was exceedingly hot during the day, and with their heavy packs the men were much exhausted, many of them being barely able to stagger. In the evening, footsore and weary, they reached the line of Landrecies, Maroilles, and Pont-sur-Sambre. The 4th Brigade of Guards, consisting of Grenadiers, Coldstream, and Irish, under General Scott-Kerr, occupied the town of Landrecies. During the day they had seen little of the enemy, and they had no reason to believe that the forest, which extended up to

the outskirts of the town, was full of German infantry pressing eagerly to cut them off.

The Guards at Landrecies were put into the empty cavalry barracks for a much-needed rest, but they had hardly settled down before there was an alarm that the Germans were coming into the town. It was just after dusk that a column of the 14th German infantry brigade debouched from the shadow of the trees and advanced briskly towards the town. A company of the 3rd Coldstream under Captain Monck gave the alarm, and the whole battalion stood to arms, while the rest of the Brigade, who could not operate in so confined a space, defended the other entrances of the town. The van of the approaching Germans shouted out that they were French, and actually got near enough to attack the officer of the picket and seize a machine-gun before the Guardsmen began to fire. There is a single approach to the village, and no means of turning it, so that the attack was forced to come directly down the road.

Possibly the Germans had the impression that they were dealing with demoralised fugitives, but if so they got a rude awakening. The advance party, who were endeavouring to drag away the machine-gun, were all shot down, and their comrades who stormed up to the houses were met with a steady and murderous fire which drove them back into the shadows of the wood. A gun was brought up by them, and fired at a range of five hundred yards with shrapnel, but the Coldstream, reinforced by a second company, lay low or flattened themselves into the doorways for protection. Presently, believing that the way had been cleared for them, there was a fresh surge of dark masses out of the wood, and they poured into the throat of the street. The Guards had brought out two machine-guns, and their fire, together with a succession of volleys from the rifles, held up the stormers.

From time to time there were fresh advances during the night, designed apparently rather to tire out the troops than to gain the village. Once fire was set to the house at the end of the street, but the flames were extinguished by a party led by Corporal Wyatt, of the 3rd Coldstream. The Irish Guards after midnight relieved the Coldstream of their vigil, and in the early morning the tired but victorious brigade went unmolested upon their way. They had lost 120 of their number, nearly all from the two Coldstream companies. Lord Hawarden and the Hon. Windsor Clive of the Coldstream and Lieut. Vereker of the Grenadiers were killed, four other officers were wounded. The Germans give 127 as their official losses. Their enterprise was a daring one, for they had pushed far forward to get command of the Landrecies Bridge, but their audacity became foolhardy when faced by steady, unshaken infantry. History has shown many times before that a retreating British Army still retains a sting in its tail.

At the same time as the Guards' Brigade was attacked at Landrecies there was an advance from the forest against Maroilles, which is four

miles to the eastward. A troop of the 15th Hussars guarding a bridge over the Sambre near that point was driven in by the enemy, and two attempts on the part of the 1st Berkshires, of Davies' 6th Brigade, to retake it were repulsed, owing to the fact that the only approach was by a narrow causeway with marshland on either side, where it was not possible for infantry to deploy. The 1st Royal Rifles were ordered to support the Berkshires, but darkness had fallen and nothing could be done. The casualties in this skirmish amounted to 124 killed, wounded, or missing. The Landrecies and Maroilles wounded were left behind with some of the medical staff. At this period of the war the British had not yet understood the qualities of the enemy, and several times made the mistake of trusting surgeons and orderlies to their mercy, with the result that they were inhumanly treated, both by the authorities at the front and by the populace in Germany, whither they were conveyed as starving prisoners of war. Five of them, Captains Edmunds and Hamilton, Lieut. Danks (all of the Army Medical Corps), with Dr. Austin and Dr. Elliott, who were released in January 1915, deposed that they were left absolutely without food for long periods. It is only fair to state that at a later date, with a few scandalous exceptions, such as that of Wittenberg, the German treatment of prisoners, though often harsh, was no longer utterly barbarous. For the first six months, however, it was brutal in the extreme. The German idea of a prisoner of war seems always to have been that he was a person upon whom hatred should be vented, and nothing has caused more after-war bitterness than the memory of these outrages. It should be remembered that in England the ration awarded a German prisoner was actually larger than that given to a British civilian.

A small mishap—small on the scale of such a war, though serious enough in itself—befell a unit of the First Army Corps on the morning after the Landrecies engagement. The portion of the German army which pursued General Haig had up to now been able to effect little, and that little at considerable cost to themselves. Early on August 26, however, a brisk action was fought near Pont-sur-Sambre, in which the 2nd Connaughts, of Haking's 5th Brigade, lost six officers, including Colonel Abercrombie, who was taken prisoner, and 280 men. The battalion was cut off by a rapidly advancing enemy in a country which was so thickly enclosed that there was great difficulty in keeping touch between the various companies or in conveying their danger to the rest of the brigade. By steadiness and judgment the battalion was extricated from a most difficult position, but it was at the heavy cost already quoted.

Dawn broke on August 26, a day upon which the exhausted troops were destined to be tried to the limit of human endurance. It was the date of Von Kluck's exultant telegram in which he declared that he held them surrounded, a telegram which set Berlin fluttering with flags. On this day the First Army Corps was unmolested in its march, reaching

the Venerolles line that night. There was woody country on the west of it, and from beyond this curtain of trees they heard the distant roar of a terrific cannonade, and knew that a great battle was in progress. It was on Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps and upon the single division of the Third Corps that the full storm of the German attack had broken. In a word, a corps and a half of British troops, with 225 guns, were assailed by four German corps, with 600 guns. It is no wonder that the premature tidings of a great German triumph were forwarded that morning to make one more item in that flood of good news which from August 21 to the end of the month was pouring in upon the German people. A glittering mirage lay before them. The French lines had been hurled back from the frontier, the British were in full retreat, and now were faced with absolute disaster. Behind these breaking lines lay the precious capital, the brain and heart of France. But Providence is not always with the big battalions, and the end was not yet.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU

From August 26 to September 6, 1914

The order of battle at Le Cateau—The stand of the 2nd Suffolks—Major Yate's V.C.—The fight for the quarries—The splendid work of the British guns—Difficult retirement of the 4th Division—The fate of the 1st Gordons—Results of the battle—Exhaustion of the Army—The destruction of the 2nd Munsters—A cavalry fight—The news in Great Britain—The views of General Joffre—Battery L—The action of Villars-Cotteret—Reunion of the Army.

SIR JOHN FRENCH had given up the idea of making a stand at Le Cateau, for reasons already given. He had moved with his staff during the evening of the 25th to St. Quentin, leaving word that the retirement should be continued early next morning. Smith-Dorrien spent the afternoon and evening going round the position, but it was not until 2 a.m. on the morning of the 26th that he was able to ascertain the whereabouts of all his scattered and weary units. About that time General Allenby reported that his cavalry had been widely separated, two and a half brigades being at Chatillon, six miles east of Le Cateau, the rest being near Ligny, four miles west of the same town. General Smith-Dorrien was in the position that his troops were scattered, weary, and in danger of losing their *moral* through continued retreat in the presence of an ever-pressing enemy. Even with the best soldiers such an experience too long continued may turn an army into a rabble. He therefore made urgent representations by telephone that the only hope of checking the dangerous German pursuit was to stagger them by a severe counter. " The only thing for the men to do when they can't stand is to lie down and fight," said he. Sir John, or the staff officer representing him, was understood to assent to the view, with the proviso that the retirement should be continued as soon as possible. Smith-Dorrien, taking under his orders the cavalry, the 4th Division, and the 19th Brigade, as well as his own corps, issued instructions for the battle which he knew must begin within a few hours.

Owing to the gap of eight miles between the nearest points of the two corps, both flanks of the position were in the air. Smith-Dorrien therefore requested the cavalry brigades from Chatillon to move in and guard the east flank, while the rest of the cavalry watched the west. He

was less anxious about the latter, as he knew that Sordet's French cavalry was in that direction.

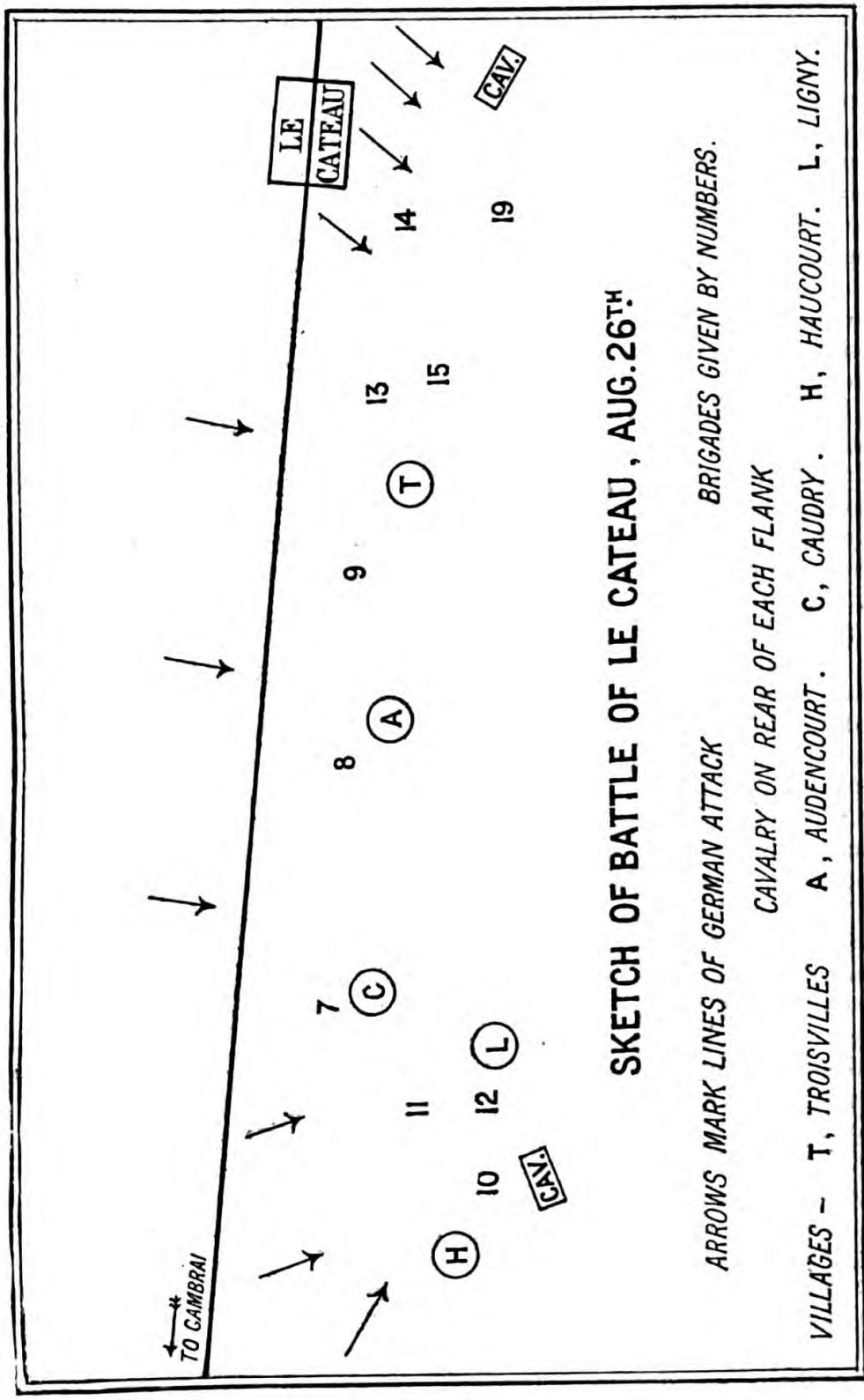
The exhausted infantry, who had now been marching for about a week, and fighting for three days and the greater part of three nights, flung themselves down where best they could, some to the north-east of Le Cateau, some in the town, and some along the line of very inadequate trenches hastily prepared by civilian labour. In the early dawn they took up their position, the 5th Division being to the right near the town. Of this division, the 14th Brigade was on the extreme right, the 13th to the left of it, and the 15th to the left again. To the west of the 5th Division lay the 3rd, their trenches covering the villages of Troisville (9th Brigade), Audencourt (8th Brigade), and Caudry (7th Brigade). Behind Caudry one and a half brigades of cavalry were in reserve to strengthen the left wing. From Caudry the line was thrown back to meet a flanking movement and extended to Haucourt. This portion was held by Snow's 4th Division. Sordet's cavalry had passed across the rear of the British position the day before, and lay now to the left flank and rear of the Army. There were rumours of approaching French forces from the south, which put heart into the weary men, but, as a matter of fact, they had only their own brave spirits upon which to depend. Their numbers, putting every unit at its full complement, were about 70,000 men. Their opponents were four army corps.

It has been said that Rolt's 14th Brigade was at the extreme right of the line. This statement needs some expansion. The 14th Brigade consisted of the 1st East Surrey, 2nd Suffolk, 2nd Manchester, and 1st Cornwalls. Of these four battalions, half of the East Surrey had been detached on escort duty and the other half, under Colonel Longley, with the whole of the Cornwalls, bivouacked in the northern suburbs of Le Cateau on the night of the 25th. In the early morning of the 26th the enemy's advanced guard got into the town, and this detachment of British troops were cut off from their comrades and fired upon as they assembled in the streets of the town. They made their way out, however, in orderly fashion and took up a position to the south-east of the town, where they fought an action on their own account for some hours, quite apart from the rest of the Army, which they could hear but not see. Eventually the division of cavalry fell back from Chatillon to join the Army and picked up these troops *en route*, so that the united body was able to make its way safely back to their comrades. These troops were out of the main battle, but did good work in covering the retreat. The whole signal section of the 14th Brigade was with them, which greatly hampered the brigade during the battle. Two companies of the 1st East Surreys under Major Tew had become separated from their comrades after Mons, but they rejoined the British line at Troisville, and on the morning of August 26 were able to fall in on the rear of the 14th Brigade, where, as will be seen later, they did good service.

The 19th Brigade had also bivouacked in Le Cateau and was nearly cut off, as the two battalions of the 14th Brigade had been, by the sudden intrusion of the enemy. It had been able to make its way out of the town, however, without being separated from the rest of the Army, and it took up its position on the right rear of the infantry line, whence it sent help where needed and played the part of a reserve until towards the close of the action its presence became very vital to the 5th Division. At the outset the 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands were in the front line of this brigade and the 1st Middlesex supporting them, while the other two battalions, the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers and 1st Scots Rifles, with a battery of artillery had been taken as a reserve by the force commander. No trenches had been prepared at this point, and the losses of the two front battalions from shell-fire were, from the beginning very heavy.

It was the 5th Division, on the right of the line, who first experienced the full effect of the heavy shelling which about seven o'clock became general along the whole position, but was always most severe upon the right. There was a dangerous salient in the trenches at the cross-roads one mile west of Le Cateau which was a source of very great weakness. Every effort was made to strengthen the trenches, the 15th Brigade and 59th Company R.E. working specially hard in the Troisville section. The Germans were moving round upon this right wing, and the murderous hail of missiles came from the flank as well as from the front, being supplemented by rifle and machine-gun fire. The 2nd Suffolks and 2nd Manchesters, the remaining half of the 14th Brigade, being on the extreme right of the line, suffered the most. The guns immediately supporting them, of the 15th and 28th Artillery Brigades, were quite overmatched and were overwhelmed by the devastating rain of shells, many of them being put out of action. The 11th Battery particularly distinguished itself, fighting till its last gun was silent and its last gunner on the ground. A heavy battery, the 108th, some little distance behind the line, kept up a steady and effective fire which long held back the German advance. The pressure, however, was extreme, and growing steadily from hour to hour until it became well-nigh intolerable. Especially it fell upon the 2nd Suffolks, who held their shallow trenches with splendid tenacity. Their Colonel, Brett, was killed, Major Doughty was wounded in three places, Captains Orford and Cutbill, with eight lieutenants, were on the ground. Finally, when the position of the brigade became untenable and it was ordered to retreat, the gallant Suffolks held on to their line with the desire of saving the disabled guns, and were eventually all killed, wounded, or taken, save for about 250 men, while their neighbours, the 2nd Manchesters, lost 14 officers and 350 of their men. In this way the extreme right of the British line was practically destroyed.

The 19th Brigade, in the rear of the 14th, were able to observe the fate of their comrades, and about midday the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland


SKETCH OF BATTLE OF LE CATEAU, AUG. 26TH.
ARROWS MARK LINES OF GERMAN ATTACK
BRIGADES GIVEN BY NUMBERS.
CAVALRY ON REAR OF EACH FLANK
VILLAGES – T, TROISVILLES A, AUDENCOURT. C, CAUDRY. H, HAUCOURT. L, LIGNY.
LE CATEAU
TO CAMBRAI
CAV.
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Highlanders, who had already lost a good many men from shell-fire, advanced in the chivalrous hope of relieving the pressure. The battalion went forward as if on parade, though the casualties were numerous. They eventually gained the shelter of some trenches near the remains of the 14th Brigade, but their gallant effort, instead of averting the threatened destruction, ended by partially involving them in the same fate. They could do nothing against the concentrated and well-directed artillery fire of the enemy. When eventually they fell back, part of two companies were cut off in their trench and taken. The rest of the battalion, together with the 1st Middlesex and two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers from the 9th Brigade, formed a covering line on a ridge in the rear and held back the German advance for a long time. This line did not retire until 5 p.m., when it was nearly enveloped. General Drummond, commanding the 19th Brigade, had met with an injury in the course of the action, and it was commanded during the latter part by Colonel Ward, of the Middlesex.

The retirement or destruction of the 14th Brigade exposed the flank of the 13th to a murderous enfilade fire, which fell chiefly upon the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. This brigade had defended itself successfully for six hours against various frontal attacks, but now the flank fire raked it from end to end and practically destroyed the Yorkshiremen, who were the most exposed to it. On them and on the 2nd Scottish Borderers fell the great bulk of the losses, for the West Kents and the survivors of the West Ridings were in reserve. Of the two companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry who held the foremost trenches, that on the right had only fifteen men left, with whom Major Yate attempted a final charge, finding his Victoria Cross in the effort, while the next company, under Major Trevor, had only forty-one survivors, the whole losses of the battalion being 600 men, with 20 officers. Both the Yorkshire and the Scottish Border battalions lost their colonels in the action. Their losses were shared by the two companies of the 1st East Surreys under Major Tew, who had been placed between the 14th and 13th Brigades, and who fought very steadily in shallow trenches, holding on to the last possible moment.

Whilst the battle was going badly on the right, the 3rd Division in the centre and the 4th Division on the left had held their own against a succession of attacks. The 8th and 9th Brigades drove off the German infantry with their crushing rifle-fire, and endured as best they might the shelling, which was formidable and yet very much less severe than that to which the 5th Division had been exposed. In the case of the 7th Brigade the village of Caudry, which it defended, formed a salient, since the 4th Division on the left was thrown back. The attack upon this brigade from daylight onwards was very severe, but the assailants could neither drive in the line nor capture the village of Caudry. They attacked on both flanks at short rifle range, inflicting and also enduring heavy losses. In this part of the field the British guns held their own

easily against the German, the proportion of numbers being more equal than on the right of the line.

Whilst the right flank was crumbling before the terrific concentration of German guns, and while the centre was stoutly holding its own, farther to the west, in the Haucourt–Ligny direction, the Germans were beating hard against Snow's 4th Division, which was thrown back to protect the left flank of the Army. Hunter-Weston's 11th Brigade was on the right, south of Fontaine, with Wilson's 12th upon its left, and Haldane's 10th in reserve at Haucourt. As the German attack came from the left, or western flank, the 12th Brigade received the first impact. The artillery of the division had not yet come up, and the 1st Royal Lancasters, having no cavalry scouts in front of them, were surprised by machine-guns while in close formation and were heavily punished, their Colonel Dykes being among those who fell. Some of the covering parties both of the Lancasters and of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were never seen again. At about seven the British guns came up, the 14th Brigade R.F.A. on the left, the 29th in the centre, and the 32nd on the right, with the howitzers of the 37th behind the right centre on the high ground near Selvigny. From this time onward they supported the infantry in the most self-sacrificing way. The German infantry advance began shortly afterwards, and was carried out by wave after wave of men. A company of the 2nd Essex Regiment, under Captain Vandeleur, on the British left, having good cover and a clear field of fire, inflicted very heavy losses on the Germans, though they were finally overwhelmed, their leader having been killed. The 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers in the front line were also heavily attacked, and held their own for several hours. About ten o'clock the pressure was so great that the defence was driven in, and two battalions lost their machine-guns, but a new line was formed in the Haucourt–Esnes road, the retirement being skilfully covered by Colonel Anley, of the Essex, and Colonel Griffin, of the Lancashire Fusiliers. There the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 1st Royal Lancasters, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, and the 2nd Essex held firmly on until the afternoon under very heavy and incessant fire, while the 11th Brigade on their right were equally involved in the fight. Two battalions of the 10th Brigade, the 1st Irish Fusiliers and 2nd Seaforths, had dug themselves in on the high ground just north of Selvigny and repulsed every attack, but two others, the 2nd Dublins and 1st Warwicks, had got involved with the 12th Brigade and could not be retrieved. The Signal Corps had not yet arrived, and the result was that General Snow had the greatest difficulty in ensuring his connections with his brigadiers, the orders being carried by his staff officers. At two o'clock, as there was a lull in the German advance, Wilson of the 12th Brigade made a spirited counter-attack with the Warwicks, recovering many of the wounded, but being finally driven back to the old position by intense artillery and machine-gun fire.

The 11th Brigade, on the right of the 12th, had meanwhile played a

very vital part in the fight. This brigade was defending a position called Les Carrières, or the quarry pits, which was east of Fontaine and to the north of the village of Ligny. It was a desperate business, for the British were four times driven out of it and four times came back to their bitter work amid a sleet of shells and bullets. Parties of the 1st Somersets and of the 1st East Lancashires held the quarries with the 1st Hants and 1st Rifle Brigade in immediate support, all being eventually drawn into the fight. Major Rickman, of the latter regiment, distinguished himself greatly in the defence, but was seriously wounded and left behind in the final retirement. Besides incessant gun-fire, the defenders were under infantry fire of a very murderous description from both flanks. In spite of this, the place was held for six hours until the retirement of the line in the afternoon caused it to be untenable, as the enemy was able to get behind it. The brigade then fell back upon Ligny under heavy shrapnel-fire, moving steadily and in good order. The Germans at once attacked the village from the east and north-east. Could they have taken it, they would have been upon the flank of the British line of retirement. They were twice driven back, however, by the fire of the infantry, losing very heavily upon both occasions. About four o'clock, the Army being in full retreat, the brigade received orders to abandon Ligny and march upon Malincourt. The effect of a heavy shrapnel-fire was minimised by this movement being carried out in small columns of fours. A loss of 30 officers, including Colonel Jackson of the Hampshires, and 1115 men in a single day's fighting showed how severe had been the work of Hunter-Weston's brigade. The 12th Brigade had also lost about a thousand men. Many of the guns had run short of shells. A spectator has described how he saw the British gunners under a heavy fire, sitting in gloomy groups round the guns which they had neither the shells to work nor the heart to abandon.

Such was the general fortune of the British left. At the extreme edge of it, in the gap between the left of the 4th Division and the town of Cambrai, Sordet's French cavalry had been fighting to prevent the British wing from being turned.

The narrative has now taken the movements of the left wing up to the point of its retirement, in order to preserve the continuity of events in that portion of the field, but the actual abandonment of their position by Snow's 4th Division was due to circumstances over which they had no control, and which had occurred at a considerable distance. Both the centre and the left of the Army could have held its own, though it must be admitted that the attack to which they were exposed was a very violent one gallantly pushed home.

All might have gone well had the Germans not been able to mass such an overpowering artillery attack upon the right of the line. It was shortly after mid-day that this part of the position began to weaken, and observers from the centre saw stragglers retiring over the low hill in the Le Cateau direction. At that hour the artillery on the right of the

British line was mostly silenced, and large masses of the German infantry were observed moving round the right flank. The salient of the Suffolks was in the possession of the enemy, and from it they could enfilade the line. It was no longer possible to bring up ammunition or horses to the few remaining guns. The greater part of the troops held on none the less most doggedly to their positions. A steady downpour of rain was a help rather than a discomfort, as it enabled the men to moisten their parched lips. But the situation of the 5th Division was growing desperate. It was plain that to remain where they were could only mean destruction. And yet to ask the exhausted men to retire under such a rain of shells would be a dangerous operation. Even the best troops may reach their snapping point. Most of them had by the afternoon been under constant shrapnel-fire for eight hours on end. Some were visibly weakening. Anxious officers looked eagerly over their shoulders for any sign of reinforcement, but an impassable gap separated them from their comrades of the First Army Corps, who were listening with sinking hearts to the rumble of the distant cannonade. There was nothing for it but to chance the retirement. About three o'clock the commanders called to officers and officers to men for a last great effort. It was the moment when a leader reaps in war the love and confidence which he has sown in peace. Smith-Dorrien had sent his meagre reserve, which consisted of one battery and two battalions, to take up a rearguard position astride the Le Cateau–St. Quentin road. Every available detail, that could pull a trigger, down to Hildebrand's signallers of the Headquarters Staff, who had already done wonderful work in their own particular line, were thrust into the covering line. One by one the dishevelled brigades were drawn off towards the south. At this stage both sides have been described by spectators as coolly carrying out their exercises as if in peace. The advancing Germans indulged in an occasional parade step of triumph, while the British retired in true Aldershot formation, turning every fifty paces to fire.

The 5th Division, with the 15th Brigade as rearguard, considerably disorganised by its long hammering, retreated along the straight Roman road via Maritz and Estrees. The 3rd Division fell back through Berthy and Clary to Beaurevoir, the 9th Brigade forming a rearguard. The cavalry, greatly helped by Sordet's French cavalry upon the west, flung itself in front of the pursuit, while the guns sacrificed themselves to save the retiring infantry. Every British battery was an inferno of bursting shells, and yet everyone fought on while breech-block would shut or gunner could stand. Many batteries were in the state of the 61st R.F.A., which fired away all its own shells and then borrowed from the limbers of other neighbouring batteries, the guns of which had been put out of action. Had the artillery gone the Army might have gone. Had the Army gone the Germans had a clear run into Paris. It has been said that on the covering batteries of Wing, Milne, and Headlam may, on that showery August afternoon, have hung the future history of Europe.

Wing's command included the 23rd, 30th, 40th, and 42nd Brigades, with the 48th Heavy Battery ; Headlam's were the 15th, 27th, 28th, and 8th, with the 108th Heavy ; Milne's the 14th, 29th, 32nd, and 37th, with the 31st Heavy. These numbers deserve to be recorded, for every gun of them did great service, though many were left in ruins on the field. Some, like those of the 37th R.F.A., were plucked from under the very noses of the Germans, who were within a hundred yards of them when they were withdrawn, a deed of valour for which Captain Reynolds of that battery received the Cross. One by one those batteries which could move were drawn off, the cavalry covering the manœuvre by their rifle-fire, and sometimes man-handling the gun from the field. Serving one day as charging cavaliers, another as mounted infantry in covering a retreat, again as sappers in making or holding a trench, or when occasion called for it as gun-teams to pull on the trace of a derelict gun, the cavalry have been the general utility men of the Army. The days of pure cavalry may have passed, but there will never be a time when a brave and handy fighting man who is mobile will not be invaluable to his comrades.

It was about four o'clock that the 4th Division, on the left flank, who had been maintaining the successful defensive already described, were ordered to begin their retirement. The 12th Brigade was able to withdraw with no great difficulty along the line Walincourt–Villiers-Vendhuile, reaching the latter village about nine-thirty. The doings of the 11th Brigade have been already described. There was considerable disintegration but no loss of spirit. One of the battalions of the 12th, the 2nd Royal Lancasters, together with about three hundred Warwicks, from the 10th Brigade, and some detachments of other battalions, were by some mischance, isolated in the village of Haucourt with no definite orders, and held on until ten o'clock at night, when the place was nearly surrounded. They fought their way out, however, in a most surprising fashion, and eventually made good their retreat. One party, under Major Poole of the Warwicks, rejoined the Army next day. Captain Clutterbuck, with a small party of Royal Lancasters, wandered into Haumont after it was occupied by the Germans. Summoned to surrender the gallant officer refused, and was shot dead, but his men charged with the bayonet and fought their way clear to a post which was held by Major Parker of the same regiment, to the immediate south of the village. This officer, finding that he was the last rearguard, withdrew in the face of heavy German forces. Being joined by Major Christie of the Warwicks with 200 men, they followed the Army, and, finally, by a mixture of good luck and good leadership, picked their way through the German advance guards, and on the third day rejoined the colours at Noyon.

Haldane's 10th Brigade had got split up during the confused fighting of the day, half of it, the 1st Warwicks and 2nd Dublins, getting involved with the 12th Brigade in the fighting on the Haucourt Ridge. The other

two battalions, the 2nd Seaforths and 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, kept guard as a reserve over the left flank of the division. Towards evening General Haldane, finding it hopeless to recover control of his lost regiments, collected the rest of his brigade, and endeavoured to follow the general line of retreat. He lost touch with the remainder of the Army, and might well have been cut off, but after a most exhausting experience he succeeded in safely rejoining the division at Roisel on the 27th. It may be said generally that the reassembling of the 4th Division after the disintegration they had experienced was a remarkable example of individualism and determination.

It is impossible to doubt that the Germans, in spite of their preponderating numbers, were staggered by the resistance which they had encountered. In no other way can one explain the fact that their pursuit, which for three days had been incessant, should now, at the most critical instant, have eased off. The cavalry and guns staved off the final blow, and the stricken infantry staggered from the field.

When extended formations are drawn rapidly in under the conditions of a heavy action, it is often impossible to convey the orders to men in outlying positions. Staying in their trenches and unconscious of the departure of their comrades, they are sometimes gathered up by the advancing enemy, but more frequently fall into the ranks of some other corps, and remain for days or weeks away from their own battalion, turning up long after they have helped to swell some list of casualties. Regiments get intermingled and pour along the roads in a confusion which might suggest a rout, whilst each single soldier is actually doing his best to recover his corps. It is disorganisation—but not demoralisation.

It has been remarked above that in the widespread formations of modern battles it is difficult to be sure of the transmission of orders. An illustration of such a danger occurred upon this occasion, which gave rise to an aftermath of battle nearly as disastrous as the battle itself. This was the episode which culminated in the loss of a body of troops, including a large portion of the 1st Gordon Highlanders. This distinguished corps defended a line of trenches in front of Audencourt. From nine o'clock the Gordons held their ground against a persistent German attack. About 3.30 an order was given for the battalion to retire. This message only reached one company, which acted upon it, but the messenger was wounded *en route*, and failed to reach the battalion headquarters. Consequently the remainder of the battalion did not retire with the Army, but continued to hold its trenches, greatly helped by the flank (D) Company of Royal Scots, until long after nightfall, when the enemy in great force had worked round both of its flanks. It should be understood that the withdrawal of the Royal Scots was under direct order emanating from brigade headquarters, but an officer of the Gordons, not knowing that such an order had been issued, and perceiving that their flank would be exposed if D Company left

their trench, said a few words to them which had such an effect upon their fiery souls that they rushed back to stand by the Highlanders, their Captain being shot dead as he waved his men back into their trench. From that time onwards this company of Royal Scots, finely led by two young lieutenants, Graves and Graham Watson, shared all the dangers and the ultimate fate of the Gordons, as did a handful of Royal Irish on the other flank. When it was dusk it became clear to Colonel Gordon, who was now in command of the mixed detachment, that he and his men were separated from the Army and surrounded on every side by the advancing Germans. At that time the men, after supreme exertion for several days, had been in action for twelve hours on end. He therefore decided, as against annihilation in the morning, that retreat was the only course open. The wounded were left in the trenches. The transport, machine-guns, and horses had already been destroyed by the incessant shelling. The detachment made a move towards the south, the operation being a most difficult one in pitch darkness with the enemy within a few hundred yards. The success attained in this initial stage was largely due to the way in which the Master of Saltoun conveyed the orders which drew in the flanks to the centre. Having made good the Audencourt–Caudry road at 1 a.m. on August 27, the troops managed to traverse some miles of road, with blazing villages all about them, and had a fair chance of reaching safety when unfortunately at Montigny they took a wrong turn, which brought them into Bertry which was held by the Germans. Some confusion was caused by the latter challenging in French. A confused fight followed in the darkness, in the course of which many individual acts of great bravery and devotion were performed. The enemy were now all round the Highlanders, and though the struggle continued for fifty minutes, and there was no official surrender, the little body of men was embedded in Von Kluck's army, and no escape could be found. The utmost discipline and gallantry were shown by all ranks. It must be some consolation to the survivors to know that it is freely admitted that their resistance in the trenches for so long a period undoubtedly facilitated the safe withdrawal of the 3rd, and to some extent of the 4th Divisions. Major Leslie Butler, Brigade-Major of the 8th Brigade, who had made a gallant effort to ride to the Gordons and warn them of their danger, was entangled among the Germans, and only succeeded six days later in regaining the British lines.

So ended the perilous, costly, and almost disastrous action of Le Cateau. The loss to the British Army amounted to 7800 killed, wounded and missing, while a considerable quantity of transport and 38 field-pieces, many in splinters, were abandoned to the enemy. It was an action which could hardly have been avoided, and from which the troops were extricated on better terms than might have been expected. It will always remain an interesting academic question what would have occurred had it been possible for the First Corps to line up with the rest

of the Army. The enemy's preponderance of artillery would probably have prevented a British victory, and the strategic position would in any case have made it a barren one, but at least the Germans would have been hard hit and the subsequent retreat more leisurely. As it stood, it was an engagement upon which the weaker side can look back without shame or dishonour. One result of it was to give both the Army and the country increased confidence in themselves and their leaders. Sir John French has testified to the splendid qualities shown by the troops, while his whole-hearted tribute to Smith-Dorrien, in which he said, "The saving of the left wing of the Army could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation," will surely be endorsed by history, in spite of those recriminations which came later and darkened the fair story.

It is difficult to exaggerate the strain which had been thrown upon Smith-Dorrien. On him had fallen the immediate direction of the action at Mons and of the retreat. He had been hard at work all night upon the eve of the battle; he superintended that trying engagement, he extricated his forces, and finally motored to St. Quentin in the evening, went on to Noyon, reached it after midnight, and was back with his Army in the morning, encouraging every one by the magnetism of his presence. It was a very remarkable feat of endurance.

Exhausted as the troops were, there could be no halt or rest until they had extricated themselves from the immediate danger. At the last point of human endurance they still staggered on through the evening and the night time, amid roaring thunder and flashing lightning, down the St. Quentin road. Many fell from fatigue, and having fallen, continued to sleep in ditches by the roadside, oblivious of the racket around them. A number never woke until they found themselves in the hands of the Uhlan patrols. Others slumbered until their corps had disappeared, and then, regaining their senses, joined with other straggling units so as to form bands, which wandered over the country, and eventually reached the railway line about Amiens with wondrous Bill Adams tales of personal adventures which in time reached England, and gave the impression of complete disaster. But the main body were, as a matter of fact, holding well together, though the units of infantry had become considerably mixed and so reduced that at least four brigades, after less than a week of war, had lost 50 per cent. of their *personnel*. Many of the men threw away the heavier contents of their packs, and others abandoned the packs themselves, so that the pursuing Germans had every evidence of a rout before their eyes. It was deplorable that equipment should be discarded, but often it was the only possible thing to do, for either the man had to be sacrificed or the pack. Advantage was taken of a forked road to station an officer there who called out, "3rd Division right, 5th Division left," which greatly helped the reorganisation. The troops snatched a few hours of rest at St. Quentin,

and then in the breaking dawn pushed upon their weary road once more, country carts being in many cases commandeered to carry the lame and often bootless infantry. The paved *chaussées*, with their uneven stones, knocked the feet to pieces, and caused much distress to the tired men, which was increased by the extreme heat of the weather.

In the case of some of the men the collapse was so complete that it was almost impossible to get them on. Major Tom Bridges, of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoons, being sent to round up and hurry forward 250 stragglers at St. Quentin, found them nearly comatose with fatigue. With quick wit he bought a toy drum, and, accompanied by a man with a penny whistle, he fell them in and marched them, laughing in all their misery, down the high road towards Ham. When he stopped he found that his strange following stopped also, so he was compelled to march and play the whole way to Roupy. Thus by one man's compelling personality 250 men were saved for the Army. But such complete collapse was rare. The men kept their *moral*. " Beneath the dirt and grime and weariness I saw clear eyes and grim jaws even when the men could hardly walk." So spoke Coleman, the gallant American volunteer.

Up to now nothing had been seen of the French infantry, and the exposed British force had been hustled and harried by Von Kluck's great army without receiving any substantial support. This was through no want of loyalty, for our gallant Allies were themselves hard pressed. Sir John French had sent urgent representations, especially to General Sordet, the leader of the cavalry operating upon the western side, and he had, as already shown, done what he could to screen Smith-Dorrien's flank, and it should not be omitted that D'Amade's army on the left engaged the German Second Corps which would otherwise have been at Le Cateau. Now at last the retiring Army was coming in touch with those supports which were so badly needed. But before they were reached, on the morning of the 27th, the Germans had again driven in the rearguard of the First Corps.

Some delay in starting had been caused that morning by the fact that only one road was available for the whole of the transport, which had to be sent on in advance. Hence the rearguard was exposed to increased pressure. This rearguard consisted of the 1st Brigade. The 2nd Munsters were the right battalion. Then came the 1st Coldstream, the 1st Scots Guards, and the 1st Black Watch in reserve. The front of the Munsters, as it faced round to hold back the too pushful Germans, was from the north of Fesmy to Chapeau Rouge, but Major Charrier, who was in command, finding no French at Bergues, as he had been led to expect, sent B and D Companies of Munsters with one troop of the 15th Hussars to hold the cross-roads near that place.

At about 12.30 a message reached Major Charrier to the effect that when ordered to retire he should fall back on a certain line and act as flank-guard to the brigade. He was not to withdraw his two companies from Chapeau Rouge until ordered. The Germans were already in

force right on the top of the Irishmen, the country being a broken one with high hedges which restricted the field of fire. A section of guns of the 118th R.F.A. were served from the road about fifty yards behind the line of the infantry. A desperate struggle ensued, in the course of which the Munsters, suffering heavily, overlapped on each flank, and utterly outnumbered, held on bravely in the hope of help from the rest of the brigade. They did not know that a message had already been dispatched to them to the effect that they should come on, and that the other regiments had already done so. Still waiting for the orders which never came, they fell back slowly through Fesmy before the attack, until held up at a small village called Etreux, where the Germans cut off their retreat. Meanwhile the Brigadier, hearing that the Munsters were in trouble, gave orders that the Coldstream should reinforce them. It was too late, however. At Oisy Bridge the Guards picked up sixty men, survivors of C Company. It was here at Oisy Bridge that the missing order was delivered at 3 p.m., the cycle orderly having been held up on his way. As there was no longer any sound of firing, the Coldstream and remnant of Munsters retired, being joined some miles back by an officer and some seventy men. Together with the transport guard this brought the total survivors of that fine battalion to 5 officers and 206 men. All the rest had fought to the end and were killed, wounded, or captured, after a most desperate resistance, in which they were shot down at close quarters, making repeated efforts to pierce the strong German force at Etreux. To their fine work and that of the two lost guns and of a party of the 15th Hussars, under Lieutenant Nicholson, who covered the retreat it may have been due that the pursuit of the First Corps by the Germans from this moment sensibly relaxed. Nine gallant Irish officers were buried that night in a common grave. Major Charrier was twice wounded, but continued to lead his men until a third bullet struck him dead, and deprived the Army of a soldier whose career promised to be a brilliant one. Among others who fell was Lieutenant Chute, whose masterly handling of a machine-gun stemmed again and again the tide of the German attack. One of the most vivid recollections of the survivors was of this officer lying on his face in six inches of water—for the action was partly fought in tropical rain—and declaring that he was having " the time of his life." The moral both of this disaster and that of the Gordons must be the importance of sending a message in duplicate, or even in triplicate, where the withdrawal of a regiment is concerned. This, no doubt, is a counsel of perfection under practical conditions, but the ideal still remains.

During the retreat of the First Corps its rear and right flank had been covered by the 5th Cavalry Brigade (Chetwode). On August 28 the corps was continuing its march towards La Fère and the cavalry found itself near Cerizy. At this point the pursuing German horsemen came into touch with it. At about five in the afternoon three squadrons of the enemy advanced upon one squadron of the Scots Greys, which had the

support of J Battery. Being fired at, the Germans dismounted and attempted to advance upon foot, but the fire was so heavy that they could make no progress and their led horses stampeded. They retired, still on foot, followed up by a squadron of the 12th Lancers on their flank. The remainder of the 12th Lancers, supported by the Greys, rode into the dismounted dragoons with sword and lance, killing or wounding nearly all of them. A section of guns had fired over the heads of the British cavalry during the advance into a supporting body of German cavalry, who retired, leaving many dead behind them. The whole hostile force retreated northwards, while the British cavalry continued to conform to the movements of the First Corps. In this spirited little action the German regiment engaged was the 2nd Guard Dragoons. The British lost 43 killed and wounded. Among the dead were Major Swetenham and Captain Michell of the 12th Lancers. Colonel Wormald of the same regiment was wounded. The excited troopers rode back triumphantly between the guns of J Battery, the cavalrymen exchanging cheers with the horse-gunners as they passed, and brandishing their blood-stained weapons.

The German cavalry still followed the Army upon its southerly march, but there was no longer any fear of a disaster, for the main body of the Army was unbroken, and the soldiers were rather exasperated than depressed by their experience. On the Friday and Saturday, however, August 28 and 29, considerable crowds of stragglers and fugitives, weary and often weaponless, appeared upon the lines of communication, causing the utmost consternation by their stories and their appearance. Few who endured the mental anxiety caused in Great Britain by the messages of Sunday, August 30, are likely to forget it. The reports gave an enormous stimulus to recruiting, and it is worthy of record and remembrance that, in the dark week which followed before the true situation was clearly discerned, every successive day brought as many recruits to the standards as are usually gained in a year. Such was the rush of men that the authorities, with their many preoccupations, found it very difficult to deal with them. A considerable amount of hardship and discomfort was the result, which was endured with good humour until it could be remedied. It is to be noted in this connection that it was want of arms which held back the new armies. He who compares the empty arsenals of Britain with the huge extensions of Krupp's, undertaken during the years before the war, will find the final proof as to which Power deliberately planned it.

To return to the fortunes of the men retreating from Le Cateau, the colonels and brigadiers had managed to make order out of what was approaching to chaos on the day that the troops left St. Quentin. The feet of many were so cut and bleeding that they could no longer limp along, so some were packed into a few trains available and others were hoisted on to limbers, guns, wagons, or anything with wheels, some carts being lightened of ammunition or stores to make room for helpless

men. In many cases the whole kits of the officers were deliberately sacrificed. Many men were delirious from exhaustion and incapable of understanding an order. By the evening of the 27th the main body of the troops were already fifteen miles south of the Somme river and canal, on the line Nesle–Ham–Flavy.

On the 28th the Army continued its retreat to the line of the Oise near Noyon. Already the troops were reforming, and had largely recovered their spirits, being much reassured by the declarations of the officers that the retreat was strategic to get them in line with the French, and that they would soon turn their faces northwards once more. As an instance of reorganisation it was observed that the survivors of a brigade of artillery which had left its horses and guns at Le Cateau still marched together as a single disciplined unit among the infantry. All day the enemy's horse artillery, cavalry, and motor-infantry hung on the skirts of the British, but were unable to make much impression. The work of the Staff was excellent, for it is on record that many of them had not averaged two hours' sleep in the twenty-four for over a week, and still they remained the clear and efficient brain of the Army.

On the next day, the 29th, the remainder of the Army got across the Oise, but the enemy's advance was so close that the British cavalry was continually engaged. Gough's 3rd Cavalry Brigade made several charges in the neighbourhood of Plessis, losing a number of men but stalling off the pursuit and dispersing the famous Uhlans of the Guard. On this day General Pulteney and his staff arrived to take command of the Third Army Corps, which still consisted only of the 4th Division (Snow) with the semi-independent 19th Infantry Brigade, now commanded by Colonel Ward, of the 1st Middlesex. It was nearly three weeks later before the Third Corps was made complete.

There had been a French advance of four corps in the St. Quentin direction, which fought a brave covering action, and so helped to relieve the pressure upon the British. It cannot be denied that there was a feeling among the latter that they had been unduly exposed, being placed in so advanced a position and having their flank stripped suddenly bare in the presence of the main German army. General Joffre must have recognised that this feeling existed and that it was not unreasonable, for he came to a meeting on this day at the old Napoleonic Palace at Compiègne, at which Sir John French, with Generals Haig, Smith-Dorrien, and Allenby, was present. It was an assemblage of weary, overwrought men, and yet of men who had strength enough of mind and sufficient sense of justice to realise that whatever weight had been thrown upon them, there was even more upon the great French engineer whose spirit hovered over the whole line from Verdun to Amiens. Shortly afterwards Joffre issued his kindly recognition of the work done by his Allies, admitting in the most handsome fashion that the flank of the long French line of armies had been saved by the hard fighting and self-sacrifice of the British Army.

The Army continued to fall back on the line of the Aisne, the general direction being through Crépy-en-Valois. The aeroplanes, which had conducted a fine service during the whole of the operations, reported that the enemy was still coming rapidly on, and streaming southwards in the Compiègne direction. That they were in touch was shown in dramatic fashion upon the early morning of September 1. The epic in question deserves to be told somewhat fully, as being one of those incidents which are mere details in the history of a campaign, and yet may live as permanent inspirations in the life of an army.

The 1st Cavalry Brigade, greatly exhausted after screening the retreat so long, was encamped near Nery, to the south of Compiègne, the bivouac being a somewhat extended one. Two units were close to each other and to the brigade headquarters of General Briggs. These were the hard-worked 2nd Dragoon Guards (the Bays) and L Battery of Horse Artillery. *Réveillé* was at four o'clock, and shortly after that hour both troopers and gunners were busy in leading their horses to water. It was a misty morning, and, peering through the haze, an officer perceived that from the top of a low hill about seven hundred yards away three mounted men were looking down upon them. They were the observation officers of three four-gun German batteries. Before the British could realise the situation the guns dashed up and came into action with shrapnel at point-blank range. The whole twelve poured their fire into the disordered bivouac before them. The slaughter and confusion were horrible. Numbers of the horses and men were killed or wounded, and three of the guns were dismounted. It was a most complete surprise, and promised to be an absolute disaster. A body of German cavalry had escorted the guns, and their rifles added to the volume of fire.

It is at such moments that the grand power of disciplined valour comes to bring order out of chaos. Everything combined to make defence difficult—the chilling hour of the morning, the suddenness of the attack, its appalling severity, and the immediate loss of guns and men. A sunken road ran behind the British position, and from the edge of this the dismounted cavalrymen brought their rifles and their machine-gun into action. They suffered heavily from the pelting gusts of shrapnel. Young Captain de Crespigny, the gallant cadet of a gallant family, and many other good men were beaten down by it. The sole hope lay in the guns. Three were utterly disabled. There was a rush of officers and men to bring the other three into action. Sclater-Booth, the major of the battery, and one lieutenant were already down. Captain Bradbury took command and cheered on the men. Two of the guns were at once put out of action, so all united to work the one that remained. What followed was Homeric. Lieutenant Giffard in rushing forward was hit in four places. Bradbury's leg was shattered, but he lay beside the trail encouraging the others and giving his directions. Lieutenant Mundy, standing wide as observation officer, was mortally wounded. The

limber could not be got alongside and the shell had to be man-handled. In bringing it up Lieutenant Campbell was shot. Immediately afterwards another shell burst over the gun, killed the heroic Bradbury, and wounded Sergeant Dorell, Driver Osborne, and Gunners Nelson and Derbyshire, the only remaining men. But the fight went on. The bleeding men served the gun so long as they could move, Osborne and Derbyshire crawling over with the shells while Nelson loaded and Dorell laid. Osborne and Derbyshire fainted from loss of blood and lay between limber and gun. But the fight went on. Dorell and Nelson, wounded and exhausted, crouched behind the shield of the thirteen-pounder and kept up an incessant fire. Now it was that the amazing fact became visible that all this devotion had not been in vain. The cluster of Bays on the edge of the sunken road burst out into a cheer, which was taken up by the staff, who, with General Briggs himself, had come into the firing line. Several of the German pieces had gone out of action. The dying gun had wrought good work, as had the Maxim of the Bays in the hands of Lieutenant Lamb. Some at least of its opponents had been silenced before the two brave gunners could do no more, for their strength had gone with their blood. Not only had the situation been saved, but victory had been assured.

About eight in the morning news of the perilous situation had reached the 19th Brigade. The 1st Middlesex, under Colonel Rowley, was hurried forward, followed by the 1st Scottish Rifles. Marching rapidly upon the firing, after the good old maxim, the Middlesex found themselves in a position to command the German batteries. After two minutes of rapid fire it was seen that the enemy had left their guns. Eight guns were captured, two of them still loaded. About a dozen German gunners lay dead or wounded round them. Twenty-five of the escort were captured, as was an ambulance with some further prisoners a mile in the rear. The cavalry, notably the 11th Hussars, endeavoured to follow up the success, but soon found themselves in the presence of superior forces. New wheels and new wheelers were found for the injured guns, and Battery L came intact out of action—intact save for the brave acolytes who should serve her no more. Bradbury, Nelson, and Dorell had the Victoria Cross, and never was it better earned. The battery itself was recalled to England to refit and the guns were changed for new ones. It is safe to say that for many a long year these shrapnel-dinted thirteen-pounders will serve as a monument of one of those deeds which, by their self-sacrifice and nobility, do something to mitigate the squalors and horrors of war.

The success was gained at the cost of many valuable lives. Not only had the *personnel* of the battery been destroyed, but the Bays lost heavily, and there were some casualties among the rest of the brigade who had come up in support. The 5th Dragoon Guards had 50 or 60 casualties, and lost its admirable commander, Colonel Ansell, who was shot down in a flanking movement which he had initiated. Major Cawley, of the

staff, also fell. The total British loss was not far short of 500 killed and wounded, but the Germans lost heavily also, and were compelled to abandon their guns.[1]

The German advance guards were particularly active on this day, September 1, the anniversary of Sedan. Although the Soissons Bridge had been destroyed they had possession of another at Vic, and over this they poured in pursuit of the First Corps, overtaking about 8 a.m. near Villars-Cotteret the rearguard, consisting of the Irish Guards and the 2nd Coldstream. The whole of the 4th Guards Brigade was drawn into the fight, which resolved itself into a huge rifle duel amid thick woods, Scott-Kerr, their Brigadier, riding up and down the firing line. The Guards retired slowly upon the 6th Infantry Brigade (Davies), which was aided by Lushington's 41st Brigade of Artillery, just south of Pisseleux. The Germans had brought up many guns, but could make no further progress, and the British position was held until 6 p.m., when the rearguard closed up with the rest of the Army. Lushington's guns had fought with no infantry in front of them, and it was a matter of great difficulty in the end to get them off, but it was accomplished by some very brilliant work under an infernal fire. After this sharp action, in which Colonel Morris of the Irish Guards lost his life, the retreat of the First Army Corps was not seriously interfered with. The losses at that date in this corps amounted to 81 officers and 2180 of all ranks.

So much attention is naturally shown to the Second Army Corps, which both at Mons and at Le Cateau had endured most of the actual fighting, that there is some danger of the remarkable retreat effected by the First Corps having less than its fair share of appreciation. The actual fighting was the least of the difficulties. The danger of one or both flanks being exposed, the great mobility of the enemy, the indifferent and limited roads, the want of rest, the difficulty of getting food cooked, the consequent absolute exhaustion of the men, and the mental depression combined to make it an operation of a most trying character, throwing an enormous strain upon the judgment and energy of General Haig, who so successfully brought his men intact and fit for service into a zone of safety.

On the night of September 1, the First and Second Army Corps were in touch once more at Betz, and were on the move again by 2 a.m. on the 2nd. On this morning the German advance was curiously interlocked with the British rear, and four German guns were picked up by the cavalry near Ermenonville. They are supposed to have been the remaining guns of the force which attacked Battery L at Nery. The movements of the troops during the day were much impeded by the French refugees, who thronged every road in their flight before the

[1] The German cavalry were the Fourth Cavalry Division, including the 2nd Cuirassiers, 9th Uhlans, 17th and 18th Dragoons. They published in their losses for the "Combat of Néry" 643 casualties. This is not the complete loss, as the artillery does not seem to have been included.

German terror. In spite of these obstructions, the rearward services of the Army—supply columns, ammunition columns, and medical transport—were well conducted, and the admiration of all independent observers. The work of all these departments had been greatly complicated by the fact that, as the Channel ports were now practically undefended and German troops, making towards the coast, had cut the main Calais-Boulogne line at Amiens, the base had been moved farther south from Havre to St. Nazaire, which meant shifting seventy thousand tons of stores and changing all arrangements. In spite of this the supplies were admirable. It may safely be said that if there is one officer more than another for whom the whole British Army felt a glow of gratitude, it was for Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Commissariat, who saw that the fighting man was never without his rations. Greatly also did they appreciate the work of his subordinates, who, wet or fine, through rainfall or shell-fall, passed the food forward to the weary men at the front.

A difficult movement lay in front of the Army which had to cross the Marne, involving a flank march in the face of the enemy. A retirement was still part of the general French scheme of defence, and the British Army had to conform to it, though it was exultantly whispered from officer to sergeant and from sergeant to private that the turn of the tide was nearly due. On this day it was first observed that the Germans, instead of pushing forward, were swinging across to the east in the direction of Chateau-Thierry. This made the task of the British an easier one, and before evening they were south of the Marne and had blown up the bridges. The movement of the Germans brought them down to the river, but at a point some ten miles east of the British position. They were reported to be crossing the river at La Ferté, and Sir John French continued to fall back towards the Seine, moving after sundown, as the heat had been for some days very exhausting. The troops halted in the neighbourhood of Presles, and were cheered by the arrival of some small drafts, numbering about 2000, a first instalment towards refilling the great gaps in the ranks, which at this date could not have been less than 15,000 officers and men. The Army was approaching the farthest point of its retreat and nearing that moment of advance for which every officer and man, from Sir John French to the drummer-boys, was eagerly waiting. With their left flank resting upon the extreme outer forts of Paris, the British troops had finally ended a retreat which will surely live in military history as a remarkable example of an army, retaining its cohesion and courage in the presence of an overpowering adversary, who could never either cut them off or break in their rearguard. The British Army was a small force when compared with the giants of the Continent, but when tried by this supreme test it is not mere national complacency for us to claim that it lived up to its own highest traditions.

It is interesting also to recall that when General Von Kluck met

Colonel Reddie in Berlin after the war he assured him that he did not know in military annals any operation which was finer than the retreat from Mons.

Major-General Leinveber in his book "Mit Clausewitz" writes: "Four and a half British divisions held a whole army of ten divisions effectively in check, and prevented it from enveloping and decisively beating the left wing of the French armies. France has to thank Great Britain, as Moltke pointedly said, that she was not overcome at the first onslaught." Such is the testimony of a hostile observer.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE [1]

From September 6 to September 12, 1914

The general situation—The turn of the tide—The Battle of the Ourcq—The British advance—Cavalry fighting—The 1st Lincolns and the guns—61h Brigade's action at Hautvesnes—9th Brigade's capture of Germans at Vinly—The problem of the Aisne—Why the Marne is one of the great battles of all time.

THERE are several problems connected with the strategical opening of the great war which will furnish food for debate among military critics for many years to come. One of these, already alluded to, is the French offensive which had such expensive results.

Another remarkable and questionable move now obtrudes itself, this time upon the part of the Germans. Very shortly after the outbreak of war, the Russians had pushed their covering armies over the frontier of East Prussia. Thereupon a considerable force was detached from the invading armies in France and dispatched to the Eastern front. They were the 11th and the Guards Reserve Corps. Such a withdrawal at such a time could only mean that the German general staff considered that the situation in France was assured, and that they had still sufficient means to carry on a victorious invasion. Events were to show that they were utterly mistaken in their calculation, but the inflated reports of their generals had given the general staff a false view of the situation. This is clearly shown in their official history. At the very moment that the Germans were withdrawing troops from their Western front the British and French were doing all they could to thicken their own line of resistance, especially by the transference of armies from Alsace and the south. Thus the net result was that, whereas the Germans had up to August 25 a very marked superiority in numbers, by the beginning of September the forces were more equal. From that moment the chance of their taking Paris became steadily more and more remote.

The first month of the war represented a very remarkable military achievement upon the part of Germany. In her high state of preparation as compared with the Allies, it was to be expected that the beginning

[1] Map, page 75, illustrates the Battle of the Marne and the advance to the Aisne.

of hostilities would be all in her favour, but the reality exceeded what could have been foreseen. Her great armies were ready to the last button. Up to the eve of war the soldiers did not themselves know what their field uniform was like. At the last moment two millions of men filed into the depots and emerged in half an hour clad in grey, with new boots, equipment, and every possible need for the campaign. On her artillery surprises she set special store, and they were upon a vast scale. The machine-gun had been developed to an extent unknown by other armies, and of these deadly little weapons it is computed that fifty thousand were available. From the tiny quick-firer, carried easily by two men upon a stretcher, to the vast cannon with a diameter of sixteen and a half inches at the mouth, taking three railway trucks for its majestic portage, every possible variety of man-killing engine was ready in vast profusion. So, too, was the flying service, from the little Taube to the huge six-hundred-foot Zeppelin. From these latter devices great results were expected which were not destined to materialise, for, apart from reconnaissances, they proved themselves to be machines rather for the murder of non-combatants than for honest warfare.

Making every allowance for the huge advantage which the nation that *knows* war is coming must always enjoy over those which merely fear that it may come, it would be foolish to deny the vast military achievement of Germany in the month of August. It reflects great credit upon the bravery and energy of her troops, as well as upon the foresight of her organisers and the capacity of her leaders. Though we are her enemies, our admiration would have been whole-hearted were it not for the brutalities which marked her advance both in Poland, in Belgium, and in France.

Our horror of the atrocities of Louvain, Aerschot, Dinard, and so many other places must not blind us to the superb military achievement.

It was not, it is true, an unbroken series of successes even in the West. The French in the early days won a victory at Dornach in Alsace, and another smaller one at Dinant in the Ardennes. They held the enemy in the neighbourhood of Nancy, and had some success at Guise. These, however, were small matters as compared with the sweeping tide of German victory. But gradually the impetus of the rush was being stayed. Neither the French nor the British lines were broken. They grew stronger from compression, whilst the invaders grew weaker from diffusion. Even as they hoped to reach the climax of their success, and the huge winning-post of the Eiffel Tower loomed up before their racing armies, the dramatic moment arrived, and the dauntless, high-hearted Allies had the reward of their constant, much-enduring valour.

There were, however, some last moments of tension and anxiety. Sir John French seems to have been dissatisfied at the support he had received and complained that the movements of the Fifth French Army upon his right were so sudden that his flank was continually exposed.

He was also requested to stand and fight, which he felt to be unwise in view of the heavy losses which his little force had sustained. No reinforcements had reached him as yet. He suggested the extreme measure of falling out of the line for a time and giving the Army time to refit. Such a course would certainly have been a serious blow to our Allies and left a most unpleasant impression, so Lord Kitchener was dispatched to Paris, where he interviewed the angry general, and finally all was arranged, the British Army continuing its retreat in line with the French forces.

September 6 was a day of great elation in the armies of the Allies, for it marked the end of the retreat and the beginning of their victorious return. It is clear that they could in no case have gone farther south without exposing Paris to the danger of an attack. The French Government had already been transferred to Bordeaux and the city put into a state which promised a long and stubborn defence, but after the surprising rapidity of the capture of Namur there was a general distrust of fortresses, and it was evident that if only one or two of the outer ring of forts should be overwhelmed by the German fire, the enemy would be in a position to do terrible damage to the city, even if they failed to occupy it. The constant dropping of bombs from German aeroplanes, one of which had already injured the Cathedral of Notre Dame, gave a sinister forecast of the respect which the enemy was likely to show to the monuments of antiquity.

Fortunately, the problem of investing Paris while the main French armies remained unbeaten in the field proved to be an insuperable one. The first German task, in accordance with the prophet Clausewitz, was to break the French resistance. Everything would follow after that, and nothing could precede it. Von Kluck and his army, comprising originally something over 200,000 men, had lost considerably in their conflicts with the British, and were much exhausted by rapid marching, but they were still in good heart, as the roads over which they passed seemed to offer ample evidence that their enemy was in full flight before them. Knowing that they had hit the British hard, they hoped that, for a time at least, they might disregard them, and, accordingly, they ventured to close in, by a flank march, on to the other German armies to the east of them, in order to combine against the main line of French resistance. But the allied bulldog, though weary and somewhat wounded, was still watching with bloodshot eyes. It now sprang suddenly upon the exposed flank of his enemy and got a grip which held firm for many a day to come.

General Joffre had assembled Maunoury's Sixth Army, which consisted of the Seventh Regular Corps, one reserve corps, and three territorial divisions, with Sordet's cavalry, in the neighbourhood of Amiens, and at the end of the month they lay with their right upon Roye. Thus, when Von Kluck swerved to his left, this army was on the flank of the whole great German line which extended to Verdun. Next to

this Sixth Army and more to the south-east were the British, now no longer unsupported, but with solid French comrades upon either side of them. Thence eastward stretched the mighty lines which were destined to swing and sway for an eventful week in the strain of a close-locked fight.

It was at the western end of the Allied line that the strategical position was most advantageous and the result most marked. In all other parts of that huge line the parallel battle prevailed. Only in the west were the Germans outflanked, and the shock of the impact of the Sixth French Army passed down from Meaux to Verdun as the blow of the engine's buffer sends the successive crashes along the line of trucks. This French army was, as already stated, upon the extreme outside right of Von Kluck's army, divided from it only by the River Ourcq. This was the deciding factor in the subsequent operations.

By mid-day on September 6, according to the dispatch of Sir John French, the Germans had realised their dangerous position. Von Kuhl says that the Germans up to then " had not the remotest idea that an offensive of the whole French Army was imminent. The continuation of the retreat was accepted as certain. Not a sign, not a word from prisoners, not a newspaper gave warning." The British Army, consisting of five divisions and five cavalry brigades, with its depleted ranks partly restored with reinforcements and some of its lost guns replaced, was advancing from the south through the forest of Crécy, men who had limped south with bleeding feet at two miles an hour changing their gait to three or four now that they were bound northward. The general movement of the Army cannot, however, be said to have been rapid. Von Kluck had placed a cavalry screen of two divisions in front of them, while he had turned his main force of infantry and artillery to fight a rearguard action against the Sixth French Army and prevent it from crossing the Ourcq.

The desperate struggle between Von Kluck and Maunoury was the first turning-point of the war. Von Kluck had originally faced the French on the defensive. Recognising how critical it was that Maunoury should be crushed, he now fell upon him with such violence that for two days it was impossible to say which side would win. Maunoury and his men fought magnificently, and the Germans showed equal valour. At one time the situation seemed desperate, but 20,000 men, odds and ends of every kind—Republican Guards, gendarmes, and others—were rushed out from Paris in a five mile line of automobiles, and the action was restored. Only on the morning of the 10th did the Germans withdraw in despair, held in their front by the brave Maunoury, and in danger of being cut off by the British to the east of them.

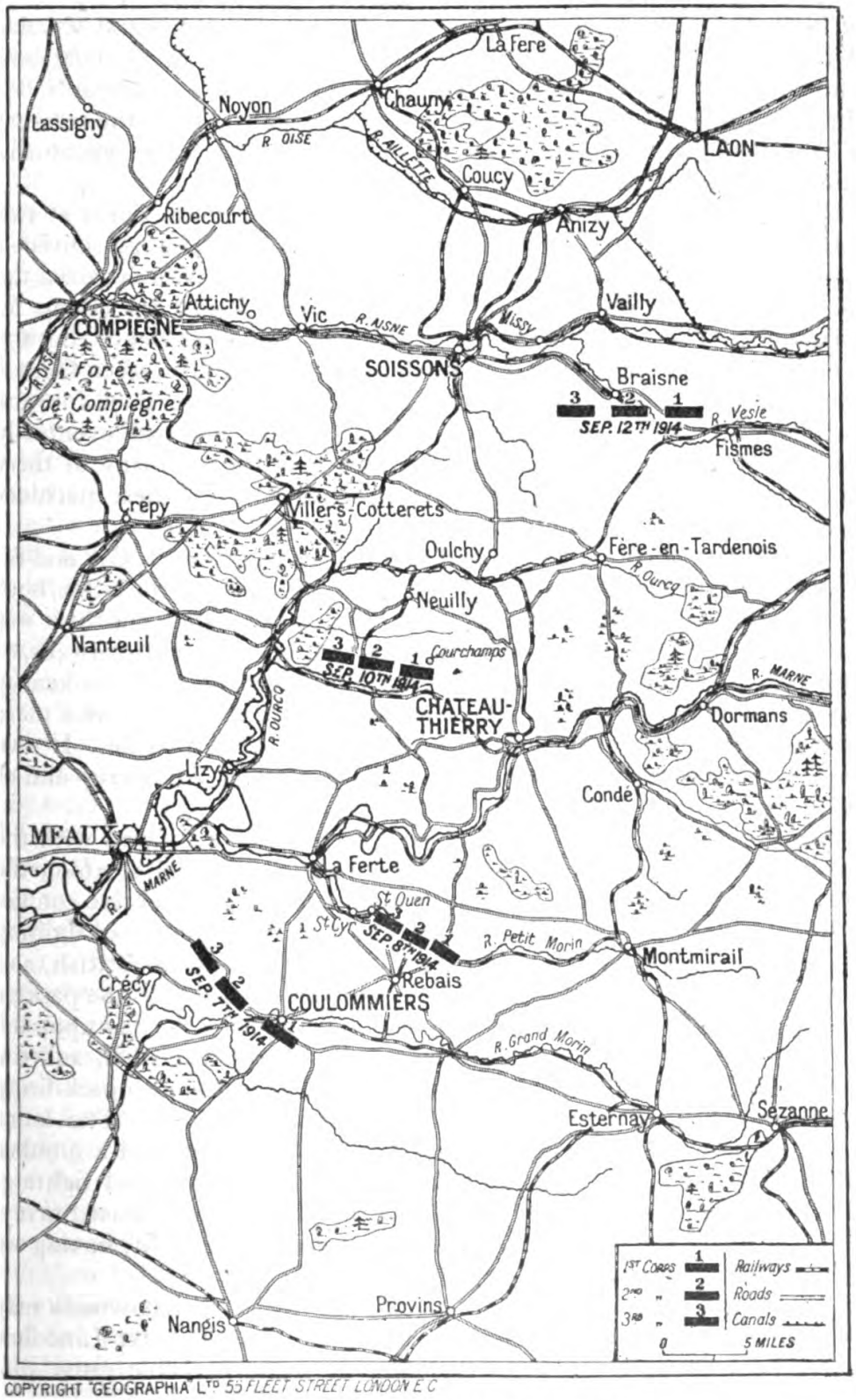
The advance of the British on September 6 was made in unison with that of the Fifth French Army on the right. The British advanced with the 4th Division on the left, the Second Corps in the centre and the First Corps on the right. The high banks of the Grand Morin were

occupied without serious fighting, and the whole line pushed forward for a considerable distance, halting on the Coulommiers-Maisoncelles front. The brunt of the fighting during the day was borne by the French on the right wing, the Third and Ninth German Corps being thrown back by them.

On September 7 the British and the Fifth French were still moving northwards, while the Sixth French were continuing their bitter struggle upon the Ourcq. The British infantry losses were not heavy, though a hidden battery cost the 2nd South Lancashires of the 7th Brigade forty-one casualties. Most of the fighting depended upon the constant touch between the British cavalry and the German. It was again the French armies upon each flank who did the hard work during this eventful day, the first of the German retreat. The Sixth Army were all day at close grips with Von Kluck, while the Fifth drove the enemy back to the line of the Petit Morin River, carrying Vieux-Maisons at the point of the bayonet. Foch's army, still farther to the east, was holding its own in a desperate defensive battle.

Of the cavalry skirmishes on this day one deserves some special record. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade (De Lisle) was acting at the time as flank guard with the 9th Lancers in front. Coming into contact with some German Dragoons near the village of Moncel, there followed a face to face charge between two squadrons, each riding through the other. The American, Coleman, who saw the encounter, reckons the odds in numbers to have been two to one against the Lancers. The British Colonel, Campbell, was wounded, and the adjutant, Captain Reynolds, transfixed through the shoulder by a lance. While drawing the weapon out Captain Alfrey was killed. The other casualties were slight, and those of the German Dragoons were considerably greater. This example of shock tactics was almost instantly followed by an exhibition of those mounted rifleman tactics which have been cultivated of late years. A squadron of the 18th Hussars, having dismounted, was immediately charged by a German squadron in close order. About 70 Germans charged, and 32 were picked up in front of the dismounted Hussars, while the few who passed through the firing line were destroyed by the horse-holders. It may fairly be argued that had the two squadrons met with shock tactics, no such crushing effect could possibly have been attained. It is interesting that in one morning two incidents should have occurred which bore so directly upon the perennial dispute between the partisans of the *arme blanche* and those of the rifle.

On the 8th the orders were to advance towards Château-Thierry and to endeavour to reach the Marne. The Germans were retreating fast, but rather on account of their generally faulty strategical position than from tactical compulsion, and they covered themselves with continual rearguard actions, especially along the line of the Petit Morin. It is one of the noticeable results, however, of the use of aircraft that the bluff of a rearguard has disappeared and that it is no longer possible to make such



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BRITISH ADVANCE—BATTLE OF MARNE

a retreat as Masséna from Torres Vedras, where the pursuer never knew if he were striking at a substance or a shadow. Gough's 2nd Cavalry Division, which consisted of the 3rd and 5th Brigades, swept along, and the infantry followed hard at the heels of the horses, Doran's 8th Brigade suffering the loss of about 100 men when held up at the crossing of the Petit Morin River near Orly, which they traversed eventually under an effective covering fire from J Battery, R.H.A.

The First Army Corps on this day forced the Petit Morin at two places, both near La Trétoire, north of Rebaix. The 1st Division secured the passage at Sablonnières, where the Black Watch seized the heights, causing the German rearguard some losses by taking 60 prisoners. The 2nd Division met with considerable resistance, but the 2nd Worcesters got over at Le Gravier and the 2nd Grenadier Guards at La Forge. The enemy was then driven from the river bank into the woods, where they were practically surrounded and had eventually to surrender. Eight machine-guns and 350 prisoners, many of them from the Guards' Jaeger Battalion, were captured. Six of these machine-guns fell to the Irish Guards.

The Second Army Corps passed the Petit Morin near St. Cyr and St. Ouen, the 13th Brigade attacking the former and the 14th the latter, both being villages on the farther side of the river. Such fighting as there was in this quarter came largely to the 1st East Surrey and 1st Cornwalls, of the 14th Brigade, but the resistance was not great, and was broken by the artillery fire. To the soldiers engaged the whole action was more like a route march with occasional deployments than a battle. It was, however, decisive, as it outflanked the opponents of D'Esperey and of Maunoury.

On the 9th the Army was up to the Marne and was faced with the problem of crossing it. The real hard fighting was falling upon the Sixth French Army north of Ligny, which was still in desperate conflict with the German right, and upon Foch's army, which was fighting magnificently at Fère-Champenoise. The advance of the British, and their own exertions, caused the Germans to retire and cleared the passage over the Ourcq for our Allies. The chief losses during the day upon the British side fell upon the Guards' Brigade, the 1st Lincolns, and the 1st Cornwalls, most of which were inflicted by invisible quick-firing batteries shrouded by the woods which flank the river. The latter regiment lost Colonel Turner, Major Cornish-Bowden, and a number of other killed or wounded in a brilliant piece of woodland fighting, where they drove in a strong German rearguard. The 1st East Surrey, who were very forward in the movement, were also hard hit, having six officers and about 120 men out of action.

The British infantry was able on this day to show that woods may serve for other purposes besides hiding batteries. The 1st Lincolns, being held up by a rapid and accurate fire from invisible guns, dispatched two companies, C and D, to make in single file a *détour* under

the shelter of the trees. Coming behind the battery, which appears to have had no immediate support, they poured in a rapid fire at two hundred and fifty yards, which laid every man of the German gunners upon the ground. The whole battery was captured. The casualties of the Lincolns in this dashing exploit included Captains Hoskyns and Ellison, with Lieutenant Thruston.

On this date September 9 both the First and the Second Army Corps were across the Marne, and advanced some miles to the north of it, killing, wounding, or capturing many hundreds of the enemy.

Pulteney's Third Corps, still a division short, had been held up by the destruction of the bridges at La Ferté, but on September 10 they were across and the whole Army sweeping northwards. They broke up all resistance and rounded up a number of prisoners, nearly 2000 in all. It was a strange reversal of fortune, for here within a fortnight were the same two armies playing the converse parts, the British eagerly pushing on with a flushed consciousness of victory, while the Germans, tired and dispirited, scattered in groups among the woods or were gathered up from the roadsides. It was a day of mist and rain, with muddy, sodden roads, but all weather is fine weather to the army that is gaining ground. An impression of complete German demoralisation became more widespread as transport, shells, and even guns were found littering the high roads, and yet there was really even less cause for it than when the same delusion was held by the Germans. The enemy were actually making a hurried but orderly retreat, and these signs of disaster were only the evidence of a broken rearguard resistance. German armies do not readily dissolve. There is no more cohesive force in the world. But they were undoubtedly hard pressed.

About eight o'clock on the morning of the 10th the 6th Brigade (Davies') observed a column of the enemy's infantry on a parallel road near the village of Hautvesnes. Artillery fire was at once opened upon them, and a vigorous infantry attack, the 1st Rifles advancing direct with the 1st Berkshires on their right, whilst the 1st King's Liverpool worked round each flank in Boer fashion. The 2nd South Staffords were in support. The Germans had taken refuge in a sunken road, but they were mercilessly lashed by shrapnel, and 400 of them ran forward with their hands up. The sunken road was filled with their dead and wounded. Some hundreds streamed away across country, but these were mostly gathered up by the 3rd Division on the left.

In this brisk little action the 50th R.F.A., and later the whole of the 34th Brigade R.F.A., put in some fine work, the shrapnel-fire being most accurate and deadly. The British had pushed their guns freely forward with their cavalry and did much execution with them, though they had the misfortune on the same date, the 10th, to lose, by the answering shell-fire of the enemy, General Findlay, artillery commander of the 1st Division. In this second action, in which the German rearguard, infantry as well as artillery, was engaged, the 2nd Sussex Regiment,

which was leading the 1st Division, sustained considerable losses near Courchamps or Priez, as did the 1st Northamptons and the 1st North Lancashires. Some 300 of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade were hit altogether, among whom was Colonel Knight, of the North Lancashires. The enemy came under heavy fire, both from the infantry and from the guns, so that their losses were considerable, and several hundred of them were captured. The country was very hilly and the roads so bad that in the exhausted state of men and horses the pursuit could not be sufficiently pressed.

On the same date the 9th Brigade captured 600 German infantry, the survivors of a battalion, at the village of Vinly. This seems to have been an incident of the same character as the loss of the Cheshires or of the Munsters in the British retreat, where a body of troops fighting a covering action was left too long, or failed to receive the orders for its withdrawal. The defence was by no means a desperate one, and few of the attacking infantry were killed or wounded. On this date the Fifth and Sixth French Armies were hardly engaged at all, and the whole Allied Force, including General Foch's Ninth French Army on the right of the Fifth, were all sweeping along together in a single rolling steel-crested wave, composed of at least twelve army corps, whilst nine German corps (five of Von Kluck and four of Bülow) retired swiftly before them, hurrying towards the chance of re-forming and refitting which the Aisne position would afford them.

On September 11 the British were still advancing upon a somewhat narrowed front. There was no opposition and again the day bore a considerable crop of prisoners and other trophies. The weather had become so foggy that the aircraft were useless, and it is only when these wonderful scouters are precluded from rising that a general realises how indispensable they have become to him. As a wit expressed it, they have turned war from a game of cards into a game of chess. It was still very wet, and the Army was exposed to considerable privation, most of the officers and men having neither change of clothing, overcoats, nor waterproof sheets, while the blowing up of bridges on the lines of communication had made it impossible to supply the wants. The undefeatable commissariat, however, was still working well, which means that the Army was doing the same. On the 12th the pursuit was continued as far as the River Aisne. Allenby's cavalry occupied Braine in the early morning, the Queen's Bays being particularly active, but there was so much resistance that the 3rd Division was needed to make the ground good. Gough's Cavalry Division also ran into the enemy near Chassemy killing or capturing several hundred of the German infantry. On this day the Sixth French Army was fighting a considerable action upon the British left in the vicinity of Soissons, the Germans making a stand in order to give time for their impedimenta to get over the river. In this they succeeded, so that when the Allied Forces reached the Aisne, which is an unfordable stream some sixty yards from bank to bank, the retiring

army had got across it, had destroyed most of the bridges, and showed every sign of being prepared to dispute the crossing.

Missy Bridge, facing the 5th Division, appeared at first to be intact, but a daring reconnaissance by Lieutenant Pennecuick, of the Engineers, showed that it was really badly damaged. Condé Bridge was intact, but was so covered by a high horse-shoe formation of hills upon the farther side that it could not be used, and remained throughout under control of the enemy. Bourg Bridge, however, in front of the First Army Corps, had for some unexplained reason been left undamaged, and this was seized in the early morning of September 13 by De Lisle's cavalry, followed rapidly by Bulfin's 2nd Brigade. It was on the face of it a somewhat desperate enterprise which lay immediately in front of the British general. If the enemy were still retreating he could not afford to slacken his pursuit, and, on the other hand, if the enemy were about to make a real resistance, then, at all hazards, the stream must be forced and the rearguard driven in. The German infantry could be seen streaming up the roads on the farther bank of the river, but there were no signs of what their next disposition might be. Air reconnaissance was still precluded, and it was impossible to say for certain which alternative might prove to be correct, but Sir John French's cavalry training must incline him always to the braver course. The officer who rode through the Boers to Kimberley and threw himself with his weary men across the path of the formidable Kronje was not likely to stand hesitating upon the banks of the Aisne. His personal opinion was that the enemy meant to stand and fight, but none the less the order was given to cross.

September 13 was spent in arranging this dashing and dangerous movement. The British got across eventually in several places and by various devices. Bulfin's men, followed by the rest of the 1st Division of Haig's Army Corps, passed the canal bridge of Bourg with no loss or difficulty. The 11th Brigade of Pulteney's Third Corps got across by a partially demolished bridge at Venizel, which had been saved by the great gallantry of Captain Roe of the Inniskilling Fusiliers. They were followed by the 12th Brigade, who established themselves near Bucy. The 13th Brigade was held up at Missy, but the 14th got across and lined up with the men of the Third Corps in the neighbourhood of Ste. Marguerite, meeting with a considerable resistance from the Germans. Later the 15th Brigade also got across. On the right Hamilton got over with two brigades of the 3rd Division, the 8th Brigade crossing on a single plank at Vailly and the 9th using the railway bridge, while the whole of Haig's First Corps had before evening got a footing upon the farther bank. So eager was the advance and so inadequate the means that Haking's 5th Brigade, led by the Connaught Rangers, was obliged to get over the broad and dangerous river, walking in single file along the sloping girder of a ruined bridge, under a heavy, though distant, shell-fire. The night of September 13 saw the main body of the Army across

the river, already conscious of a strong rearguard action, but not yet aware that the whole German Army had halted and was turning at bay. On the right De Lisle's cavalrymen had pushed up the slope from Bourg Bridge and reached as far as Vendresse, where they were pulled up by the German lines.

It has been mentioned above that the 11th and 12th Brigades of the 4th Division had passed the river at Venizel. These troops were across in the early afternoon, and they at once advanced, and proved that in that portion of the field the enemy were undoubtedly standing fast. The 11th Brigade, which was more to the north, had only a constant shell-fall to endure, but the 12th, pushing forward through Bucy-le-long, found itself in front of a line of woods from which there swept a heavy machine-gun- and rifle-fire. The advance was headed by the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, supported by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers. It was across open ground and under heavy fire, but it was admirably carried out. In places where the machine-guns had got the exact range the stricken Fusiliers lay dead or wounded with accurate intervals, like a firing-line on a field-day. The losses were heavy, especially in the Lancashire Fusiliers. Colonel Griffin was wounded, and 5 of his officers with 250 men were among the casualties. It should be recorded that fresh supplies of ammunition were brought up at personal risk by Colonel Seely, late Minister of War, in his motor-car. The contest continued until dusk, when the troops waited for the battle of next day under such cover as they could find.

The crossing of the stream may be said, upon the one side, to mark the end of the battle and pursuit of the Marne, while, on the other, it commenced that interminable Battle of the Aisne which was destined to fulfil Bloch's prophecies and to set the type of all great modern engagements. The prolonged struggles of the Manchurian War had prepared men's minds for such a development, but only here did it first assume its full proportions and warn us that the battle of the future was to be the siege of the past. Men remembered with a smile Bernhardi's confident assertion that a German battle would be decided in one day, and that his countrymen would never be constrained to fight in defensive trenches.

The moral effect of the Battle of the Marne was greater than its material gains. The latter, so far as the British were concerned, did not exceed 5000 prisoners, 20 guns, and a quantity of transport. The total German losses, however, were very heavy. The prisoners in the whole battle came to 38,000, and 200 guns were taken.

Apart from the losses, the mere fact that a great German army had been hustled across thirty miles of country, had been driven from river to river, and had finally to take refuge in trenches in order to hold their ground, was a great encouragement to the Allies. From that time they felt assured that with anything like equal numbers they had an ascendency over their opponents. Save in the matter of heavy guns and

machine-guns, there was not a single arm in which they did not feel that they were the equals or the superiors. Nor could they forget that this foe, whom they were driving in the open and holding in the trenches, was one who had rushed into the war with men and material all carefully prepared for this day of battle, while their own strength lay in the future. If the present was bright, it would surely be incomparably brighter when the reserves of France and the vast resources of the British Empire were finally brought into line.

The battle must also be regarded as a fixed point in military history, since it was the first time since the days of the great Napoleon that a Prussian army had been turned and driven. In three successive wars—against the Danes, the Austrians, and the French—they had lived always in the warm sunshine of success. Now, at last, came the first chill of disaster. Partly from their excellent military qualities, but even more on account of their elaborate and methodical preparations, joined with a want of scruple which allowed them to force a war at the moment when they could take their adversary at a disadvantage, they had established a legend of invincibility. This they left behind them with their cannon and their prisoners between the Marne and the Aisne. It had been feared that free men, trained in liberal and humane methods, could never equal in military efficiency those who had passed through the rigid discipline which is the heritage of the methods that first made Prussia great at the expense of her neighbours. This shadow was henceforth for ever lifted from men's minds, and it was shown that the kindly comradeship which exists in the Western armies between officers and men was not incompatible with the finest fighting qualities of which any soldiers are capable.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE [1]

From September 13 *to October* 3, 1914

The hazardous crossing of the Aisne—Wonderful work of the sappers—The fight for the sugar factory—General advance of the Army—The 4th (Guards) Brigade's difficult task—Cavalry as a mobile reserve—The 6th Division—Hardships of the Army—*Tâtez toujours*—The general position—Attack upon the West Yorks—Counter-attack by Congreve's 18th Brigade—Spies—The siege and fall of Antwerp.

THE stretch of river which confronted the British Army when they set about the hazardous crossing of the Aisne was about fifteen miles in length. It lay as nearly as possible east and west, so that the advance was from south to north. As the British faced the river the First Army Corps was on the right of their line, together with half the cavalry. In the centre was the Second Corps, on the left the Third Corps, which was still without one of its divisions (the 6th), but retained, on the other hand, the 19th Brigade, which did not belong to it. Each of these British corps covered a front of, roughly, five miles. Across the broad and swift river a considerable German army with a powerful artillery was waiting to dispute the passage. On the right of the British were the French Fifth and Seventh Armies, and on their left, forming the extremity of the Allied line, was the French Sixth Army, acting in such close co-operation with the British Third Corps in the Soissons region that their guns were often turned upon the same point. This Sixth French Army, with the British Army, may be looked upon as the left wing of the huge Allied line which stretched away with many a curve and bend to the Swiss frontier. During all this hurried retreat from the Marne, it is to be remembered that the Eastern German armies had hardly moved at all. It was their four armies of the right which had swung back like a closing door, the Crown Prince's Fifth Army being the hinge upon which it turned. Now the door had ceased to swing, and one solid barrier presented itself to the Allies. It is probable that the German preponderance of numbers was, for the moment, much lessened or even had ceased to exist, for the losses in battle, the detachments for Russia, and the operations in Belgium had all combined to deplete the German ranks.

[1] Map, page 85, illustrates the Battle of the Aisne.

The Belgian Army had retired into Antwerp before the fall of Brussels, but they were by no means a force to be disregarded, being fired by that sense of intolerable wrong which is the most formidable stimulant to a virile nation. From the shelter of the Antwerp entrenchments they continually buzzed out against the German lines of communication, and although they were usually beaten back, and were finally pent in, they still added to the great debt of gratitude which the Allies already owed them by holding up a considerable body, two army corps at least, of good troops. On the other hand, the fortress of Maubeuge, on the northern French frontier, which had been invested within a few days of the battle of Mons, had now fallen before the heavy German guns, with the result that at least a corps of troops under Von Zwehl and these same masterful guns were now released for service on the Aisne.

The more one considers the operation of the crossing of the Aisne with the battle which followed it, the more one is impressed by the extraordinary difficulty of the task, the swift debonair way in which it was tackled, and the pushful audacity of the various commanders in gaining a foothold upon the farther side. Consider that on the 12th the Army was faced by a deep, broad, unfordable river with only one practicable bridge in the fifteen miles opposite them. They had a formidable enemy armed with powerful artillery standing on the defensive upon a line of uplands commanding every crossing and approach, whilst the valley was so broad that ordinary guns upon the corresponding uplands could have no effect, and good positions lower down were hard to find. There was the problem. And yet on the 14th the bulk of the Army was across and had established itself in positions from which it could never afterwards be driven. All arms must have worked well to bring about such a result, but what can be said of the Royal Engineers, who built under heavy fire in that brief space nine bridges, some of them capable of taking heavy traffic, while they restored five of the bridges which the enemy had destroyed! September 13, 1914, should be recorded in their annals as a marvellous example of personal self-sacrifice and technical proficiency.

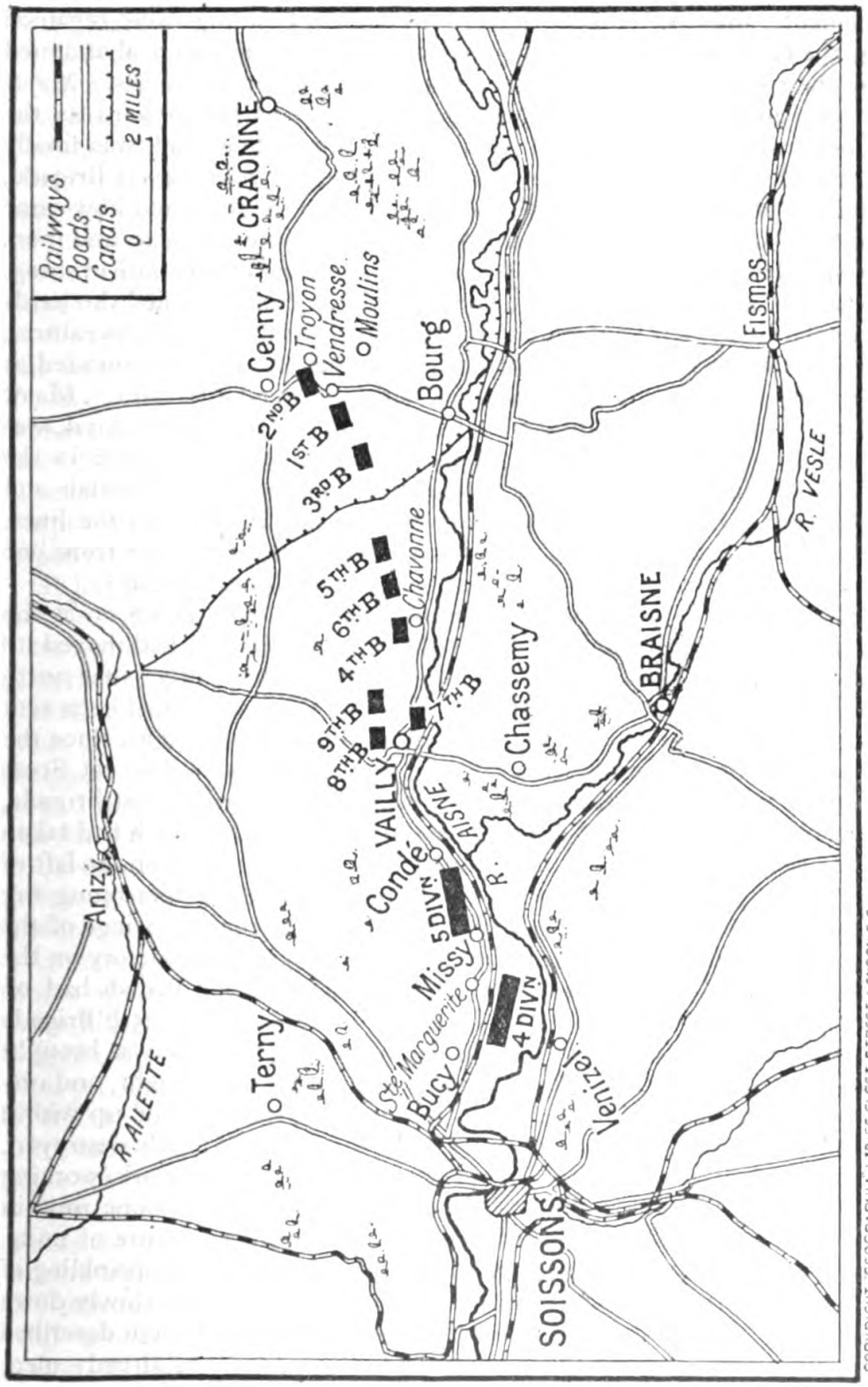
Sir John French, acting with great swiftness and decision, did not lose an hour after he had established himself in force upon the northern bank of the river in pushing his men ahead and finding out what was in front of him. The weather was still very wet, and heavy mists drew a veil over the German dispositions, but the advance went forward. The British right wing, consisting of the 1st Division of the First Corps, had established itself most securely, as was natural, since it was the one corps which had found an unbroken bridge in front of it. The 1st Division had pushed forward as far as Moulins and Vendresse, which lie about two miles north of the river. Now, in the early hours of the 14th, the whole of the 2nd Division got over. The immediate narrative, therefore, is concerned with the doings of these two divisions of the First

Corps, upon which fell the first and chief strain of the very important and dangerous advance upon that date.

On the top of the line of chalk hills which faced the British was an ancient and famous highway, the Chemin-des-dames, which, like all ancient highways, had been carried along the crest of the ridge. This was in the German possession, and it became the objective of the British attack. The 2nd Infantry Brigade (Bulfin's) led the way, working upwards in the early morning from Moulins and Vendresse through the hamlet of Troyon towards the great road. This brigade consisted of the 2nd Sussex, 1st Northamptons, 1st North Lancashire, and 2nd Royal Rifles. Just north of Troyon was a considerable deserted sugar factory, which formed a feature in the landscape. It lay within a few hundred yards of the Chemin-des-dames, while another winding road, cut in the side of the hill, lay an equal distance to the south of it, and was crossed by the British in their advance. This road, which was somewhat sunken in the chalk, and thus offered some cover to a crouching man, played an important part in the operations.

Lieutenant Balfour and a picket of the 2nd Royal Rifles, having crept up and reconnoitred the factory, returned with the information that it was held by the Germans, and that twelve guns were in position three hundred yards to the east of it. General Bulfin then—it was about 3.30 in the morning of a wet, misty day—sent the 2nd Rifles, the 2nd Sussex, and the 1st Northamptons forward, with the factory and an adjoining whitewashed farmhouse as their objective. The 1st North Lancashires remained in reserve at Vendresse. The attacking force was under the immediate command of Colonel Serocold of the Rifles. The three advanced battalions drove in the pickets of the Germans, and after a severe fight turned the enemy out of his front trench, A Company of the Sussex capturing several hundred prisoners. A number of men, however, including Colonel Montresor and Major Cookson, were shot while rounding up these Germans and sending them to the rear. The advanced line had suffered severely, so the North Lancashires were called up and launched at the sugar factory, which they carried with a magnificent bayonet attack in spite of a fierce German resistance. Their losses were very heavy, including Major Lloyd, their commander, but their victory was a glorious one. The two batteries of the enemy were now commanded by machine-guns, brought up to the factory by Lieutenant Dashwood of the Sussex. The enemy made a brave attempt to get these guns away, but the teams and men were shot down, and it was a German Colenso. The British, however, unlike the Boers, were unable to get away the prizes of their victory. The factory was abandoned as it was exposed to heavy fire, and the four battalions formed a firing-line, taking such cover as they could find, but a German shell fire developed which was so deadly that they were unable to get forward.

A small party of Rifles, under Cathcart and Foljambe, clung hard to the captured guns, sending repeated messages : " For God's sake bring



BRITISH ADVANCE AT AISNE

horses and fetch away these pieces!" No horses were, however, available, and eventually both the guns and the buildings were regained by the Germans, the former being disabled before they were abandoned by their captors, and the factory being smashed by the shells. Major Green and a company of the Sussex had got as far forward as the Chemin-des-dames, but fell back steadily when their flank was finally exposed. Two companies of the 1st Coldstream from the 1st Brigade, under Colonel Ponsonby, had also pushed on to the road, and now came back. Nothing could exceed the desperate gallantry of officers and men. Major Jelf, severely wounded, cheered on his riflemen until evening. Major Warre of the same regiment and Major Phillips rallied the hard-pressed line again and again. Lieutenant Spread, of the Lancashires, worked his machine-gun until it was smashed, and then, wounded as he was, brought up a second gun and continued the fight. Major Burrows rallied the Lancashires when their leader, Major Lloyd, was hit. Brigade-Major Watson, of the Queen's, was everywhere in the thick of the firing. A large number of wounded, both British and Germans, lay under the shelter of some haystacks between the lines, and crawled slowly round them for shelter, as the fire came from one side or the other—a fitting subject surely for a Verestschagin!

Meanwhile it is necessary to follow what had been going on at the immediate left of Bulfin's Brigade. Maxse's 1st Brigade had moved up in the face of a considerable fire until it came to be nearly as far north as the factory, but to the west of it. The 1st Coldstream had been sent across to help the dismounted cavalry to cover Bulfin's right, since the main German strength seemed to be in that quarter. The 1st Scots Guards was held in reserve, but the other battalions of the 1st Brigade, the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Camerons, a battalion which had taken the place of the brave but unfortunate Munsters, lined up on the left of the factory and found themselves swept by the same devastating fire which had checked the advance. This fire came from the fringe of the woods and from a line of trenches lying north-east of the factory on the edge of the Chemin-des-dames. Up to this time the British had no artillery support on account of the mist, but now Geddes' 25th Brigade R.F.A., comprising the 113th, 114th, and 115th Batteries, was brought to its assistance. It could do little good in such a dim light, and one battery, the 115th, under Major Johnstone, which pushed up within eight hundred yards of the enemy's position, was itself nearly destroyed. The 116th R.F.A., under Captain Oliver, also did great work, working its way up till it was almost in the infantry line, and at one time in advance of it. The whole infantry line, including a mixture of units, men of the Rifles, Sussex, and North Lancashires, with a sprinkling of Guardsmen and Black Watch from the 1st Brigade, came slowly down the hill—"sweating blood to hold their own," as one of them described it—until they reached the sunken road which has been already mentioned. There General Bulfin had stationed himself with the reserve,

and the line steadied itself, re-formed, and, with the support of the guns, made head once more against the advancing Germans, who were unable to make any progress against the fire which was poured into them. With such spades and picks as could be got, a line of shallow trenches was thrown up, and these were held against all attacks for the rest of the day.[1] It was the haphazard line of these hurriedly dug shelters which determined the position retained in the weeks to come. As this was the apex of the British advance and all the corps upon the left were in turn brought to a standstill and driven to make trenches, the whole line of the First Corps formed a long diagonal slash across the hillside, with its right close to the Chemin-des-dames and its left upon the river in the neighbourhood of Chavonne. The result was that now and always the trenches of the 2nd Brigade were in an extremely exposed position, for they were open not only to the direct fire of the Germans, which was not very severe, but to an enfilading fire from more distant guns upon each flank. Their immediate neighbours upon the right were the 1st Queen's Surrey of the 3rd Brigade, acting as flank-guard, and a Moroccan corps from the Fifth French Army, which had not reached so advanced a position, but was in echelon upon their right rear.

It has already been shown how the 1st Brigade was divided up, the 1st Coldstream being, until relieved, on the right of the 2nd Brigade. The rest of the 1st Brigade had carried out an advance parallel to that described, and many of the Black Watch, who were the right-hand battalion, got mixed with Bulfin's men when they were driven back to what proved to be the permanent British line. This advance of the 1st Brigade intercepted a strong force of the enemy which was creeping round the left flank of the 2nd Brigade. The counter-stroke brought the flank attack to a standstill. The leading battalions of the 1st Brigade suffered very severely, however, especially the Cameron Highlanders, whose gallantry carried them far to the front. This battalion lost Lieutenant-Colonel MacLachlan, 2 Majors, Maitland and Nicholson, 3 captains, 11 lieutenants, and about 300 rank and file in the action. Some of these fell into the hands of the enemy, but the great majority were killed or wounded. The 1st Scots Guards on the left of the brigade had also heavy casualties, while the Black Watch lost their Colonel, Grant Duff, their Adjutant, Rowan Hamilton, and many men. When the line on their right fell back, they conformed to the movement until they received support from two companies of the 1st Gloucesters from the 3rd Brigade upon their left rear.

The 4th (Guards) Brigade, forming the left of the 2nd Division, was across the river in battle array by ten o'clock in the morning and moving northwards towards the village of Ostel. Its task was a supremely difficult one. Dense woods faced it, fringed with the hostile riflemen, while a heavy shell-fire tore through the extended ranks. It is safe to

[1] Two German corps, the 3rd and 7th Reserve, were facing the First British Corps.

say that such an advance could not have been carried out in the heavy-handed German fashion without annihilating losses. As it was, the casualties were heavy, but not sufficient to prevent a continuance of the attack, which at one o'clock carried the farm and trenches which were its objective. The steep slopes and the thick woods made artillery support impossible, though one section of a battery did contrive to keep up with the infantry. The 3rd Coldstream being held up in their advance on the Soupir front, the 1st Irish were moved up on their right flank, but the line could do little more than hold its own. Captain Berners, Lord Guernsey, Lord Arthur Hay, and others were killed at this point. The German infantry advanced several times to counter-attack, but were swept back by the fire of the Guards.

At one period it was found that the general German advance, which had followed the holding of the British attack, was threatening to flow in between the two divisions of the First Army Corps. The 3rd Brigade (Landon's) was therefore deployed rapidly from the point about a mile south of Vendresse where it had been stationed. Two battalions of the brigade, the 2nd Welsh and the 1st South Wales Borderers, were flung against the heavy German column advancing down the Beaulne ridge and threatening to cut Haig's corps in two. The Welshmen, worthy successors of their ancestors who left such a name on the battlefields of France, succeeded in heading it off and driving it back so that they were able to extend and get in touch with the right of the 2nd Division. This consisted of the 5th Brigade with the 6th upon its left. Both of these brigades had to bear the brunt of continual German counter-attacks, involving considerable losses, both from shell and rifle fire. In spite of this they won their way for a mile or more up the slopes, where they were brought to a standstill and dug themselves into temporary shelter, continuing the irregular diagonal line of trenches which had been started by the brigades upon the right.

It is impossible not to admire the way in which the German commander observed and attempted to profit by any gap in the British line. It has already been shown how he tried to push his column between the two divisions of the First Corps and was only stopped by the deployment of the 3rd Brigade. Later, an even fairer chance presented itself, and he was quick to take advantage of it. The advance of the Guards Brigade to the Ostel ridge had caused a considerable gap bteewen them and the nearest unit of the Second Corps and also between the First Corps and the river. A German attack came swarming down upon the weak spot. From Troyon to Ostel, over five miles of ground, Haig's corps was engaged to the last man and pinned down in their positions. It was not possible to fill the gap. Not to fill it might have meant disaster—disaster under heavy shell-fire with an unfordable river in the rear. Here was a supreme example of the grand work that was done when the cavalry were made efficient as dismounted riflemen. Their mobility brought them quickly to the danger spot. Their training

turned them in an instant from horsemen to infantry. The 15th Hussars, the Irish Horse, the whole of Briggs' 1st Cavalry Brigade, and finally the whole of De Lisle's 2nd Cavalry Brigade, were thrown into the gap. The German advance was stayed and the danger passed. From now onwards the echelon formed by the units of the First Corps ended with these cavalry brigades near Chavonne to the immediate north of the river.

The 3rd Division, being on the immediate left of the operations which have been already described, moved forward upon Aizy, which is on about the same level as Ostel, the objective of the Guards. The 8th Brigade moved north by a tributary stream which runs down to the Aisne, while the 9th tried to advance in line with it on the plateau to the right. Both brigades found it impossible to get any farther, and established themselves in entrenchments about a mile north of Vailly, so as to cover the important bridge at that place, where the 7th Brigade was in reserve. The three Fusilier regiments of the 9th Brigade all lost heavily, and the Lincolns had at one time to recross the river, but recovered their position.

The attack made by the 5th Division near Missy was held up by a very strong German position among the woods on the Chivres heights which was fronted by wire entanglements. The battalions chiefly engaged were the Norfolks and Bedfords of the 15th Brigade, with the Cornwalls and East Surreys of the 14th Brigade, the remains of the Cheshires being in close support. They crossed the wire and made good progress at first, but were eventually brought to a stand by heavy fire at close range from a trench upon their right front. It was already dusk, so the troops ended by maintaining the position at Missy and Ste. Marguerite, where there were bridges to be guarded.

The 4th Division of Pulteney's Third Corps had no better success, and was only able to maintain its ground. It may be remarked, as an example of valiant individual effort, that this division was largely indebted for its ammunition supply to the efforts of Captain Johnston of the Sappers, who, upon a crazy raft of his own construction, aided by Lieutenant Flint, spent twelve hours under fire ferrying over the precious boxes. The familiar tale of stalemate was to be told of the Sixth French Army in the Soissons section of the river. Along the whole Allied line the position was the same, the greatest success and probably the hardest fighting having fallen to the lot of the Eighteenth French Corps, which had taken, lost, and finally retaken Craonne, thus establishing itself upon the lip of that formidable plateau which had been the objective of all the attacks.

In the Vailly region the 5th Cavalry Brigade found itself in a difficult position, for it had crossed the stream as a mounted unit in hope of a pursuit, and now found itself under heavy fire in the village of Vailly with no possibility of getting forward. The only alternative was to recross the river by the single narrow bridge, which was done at a later

date under very heavy fire, the troopers leading their horses over in single file. This difficult operation was superintended by Captain Wright of the Engineers, the same brave officer who had endeavoured to blow up the bridge at Mons. Unhappily, he was mortally wounded on this occasion. On the afternoon of the 14th—it being found that the British artillery was shelling their own advanced trenches—Staff-Captain Harter of the 9th Brigade galloped across the bridge and informed the gunners as to the true position.

Towards evening, in spite of the fact that there were no reserves and that all the troops had endured heavy losses and great fatigue, a general advance was ordered in the hope of gaining the high ground of the Chemin-des-dames before night. It was nearly sunset when the orders were given and the troops responded gallantly to the call, though many of them had been in action since daybreak. The fire, however, was very heavy, and no great progress could be made. The 1st Division gained some ground, but was brought to a standstill. The only brigade which made good headway was Haking's 5th, which reached the crest of the hill. General Haking sent out scouts, and finding German outposts upon both his flanks, he withdrew under cover of darkness.

Thus ended the sharp and indecisive action of September 14, the Germans holding their ground, but being in turn unable to drive back the Allies, who maintained their position and opposed an impassable obstacle to the renewed advance upon Paris. The battle was marked by the common features of advance, arrest, and entrenchment, which occurred not only in the British front, but in that of the French Armies upon either flank. When the action ceased, the 1st Northamptons and the 1st Queen's, sent to guard the pressure point at the extreme right of the line, had actually reached the Chemin-des-dames, the British objective, and had dug themselves in upon the edge of it. From this very advance spot the British line extended diagonally across the hillside for many miles until it reached the river. Several hundred prisoners and some guns were taken in the course of the fighting. When one considers the predominant position of the Germans, and that their artillery was able to give them constant assistance, whereas that of the British and French was only brought up with the utmost difficulty, we can only marvel that the infantry were able to win and to hold the ground.

The next day, September 15, was spent for the most part in making good the position gained and deepening the trenches to get some protection from the ever-growing artillery fire, which was the more intense as the great siege guns from Maubeuge were upon this day, for the first time, brought into action. At first the terrific explosions of these shells, the largest by far which had ever been brought into an actual line of battle, were exceedingly alarming, but after a time it became realised that, however omnipotent they might be against iron and concrete, they were comparatively harmless in soft soil, where their enormous excava-

tions were soon used as convenient ready-made rifle-pits by the soldiers. This heavy fire led to a deepening of the trenches, which necessitated a general levy of picks and shovels from the country round, for a large portion of such equipment had been lost in the first week of the campaign.

Only two active movements were made in the course of the day, one being that Hamilton's 3rd Division advanced once more towards Aizy and established itself a mile or more to the north in a better tactical position. The 7th Brigade suffered considerable casualties in this change, including Colonel Hasted, of the 1st Wilts. The other was that Fergusson's 5th Division fell back from Chivres, where it was exposed to a cross fire, and made its lines along the river bank, whence the Germans were never able to drive it, although they were only four hundred yards away in a position which was high above it. For the rest, it was a day of navvy's toil, though the men worked alternately with rifle and with pick, for there were continual German advances which withered away before the volleys which greeted them. By the 16th the position was fairly secure, and on the same day a welcome reinforcement arrived in the shape of the 6th Division, forming the missing half of Pulteney's Third Corps.

Its composition is here appended :

DIVISION VI.—General KEIR.

16th Infantry Brigade—General Ing. Williams.
1st East Kent.
1st Leicester.
1st Shropshire Light Infantry.
2nd York and Lancaster.

17th Infantry Brigade—General Walter Doran.
1st Royal Fusiliers.
1st N. Stafford.
2nd Leinsters.
3rd Rifle Brigade.

18th Infantry Brigade—General Congreve, V.C.
1st W. York.
1st E. York.
2nd Notts and Derby (Sherwood Foresters).
2nd Durham Light Infantry.

Artillery.
2nd Brig. 21, 42, 53.
12th ,, 43, 86, 87.
24th ,, 110, 111, 112.
38th ,, 24, 34, 72.
R.G.A. 24.

This division was kept in reserve upon the south side of the river. The French Commander-in-Chief had intimated that he intended to throw in reinforcements upon the left of the Sixth French Army, and so, as he hoped, to turn the German right. It was determined, therefore, that there should be no attempt at a British advance, but that the

Allies should be content with holding the enemy to his positions. The two armies lay facing each other, therefore, at an average distance of about five hundred yards. The pressure was still most severe upon the 2nd Brigade on the extreme right. Bulfin's orders were to hold on at all costs, as he was the pivot of the whole line. He and his men responded nobly to the responsibility, although both they and their neighbours of Maxse's 1st Brigade had sustained a loss of over 1000 men each upon the 14th—25 per cent. of their number. The shell-fire was incessant and from several converging directions. German infantry attacks were constant by night and by day, and the undrained trenches were deep in water. The men lay without overcoats and drenched to the skin, for the rain was incessant. Yet the sixth day found them on the exact ground upon which they had thrown their weary bodies after their attack. Nations desire from time to time to be reassured as to their own virility. Neither in endurance nor in courage have the British departed from the traditions of their ancestors. The unending strain of the trenches reached the limits of human resistance. But the line was always held.

On September 16 occurred an incident which may be taken as typical of the spirit in which chivalrous enemies make war. Close to the lines of the Guards a barn which contained fifty wounded Germans was ignited by the enemy's shells. Under a terrific fire a rescue party rushed forward and got the unfortunate men to a place of safety. Several of the British lost their lives in this exploit, including Dr. Huggan, the Scottish International footballer. The Germans used to mock at our respect for sport, and yet this is the type of man that sport breeds, and it is the want of them in their own ranks which stood between us.

September 17 was a day of incessant attacks upon the right of the line, continually repulsed and yet continually renewed. One can well sympathise with the feelings of the German commanders who, looking down from the heights, saw the British line in a most dangerous strategical position, overmatched by their artillery, with a deep river in their rear, and yet were unable to take advantage of it because of their failure to carry the one shallow line of extemporised trenches. Naturally they came again and again, by night and by day, with admirable perseverance and daring to the attack, but were always forced to admit that nothing can be done against the magazine rifle in hands which know how to use it. They tried here and they tried there, these constant sudden outpourings of cheering, hurrying, grey-clad men. They were natural tactics, but expensive ones, for every new attack left a fresh fringe of stricken men in front of the British lines.

On the afternoon of the same day, September 17, a more serious attack was made upon the right flank of the advanced British position, the enemy reoccupying a line of trenches from which they had previously been driven. It was a dismal day of wind, rain, and mist, but the latter was not wholly an evil, as it enabled that hard-worked regiment, the 1st

Northamptons, under their Colonel, Osborne Smith, to move swiftly forward and, with the help of the 1st Queen's, carry the place at the bayonet point. Half the Germans in the trench were put out of action, thirty-eight taken, and the rest fled. Pushing on after their success, they found the ridge beyond held by a considerable force of German infantry. The 2nd Rifles had come into the fight, and a dismounted squadron of the composite cavalry regiment put in some good work upon the flank. The action was continued briskly until dark, when both sides retained their ground with the exception of the captured line of trenches, which remained with the British. Seven officers and about 200 men were killed or wounded in this little affair.

The 18th found the enemy still acting upon the Napoleonic advice of *Tâtez toujours*. All day they were feeling for that weak place which could never be found. The constant attempts were carried on into the night with the same monotonous record of advance leading to repulse.

Now and again there were swift counters from the British, in one of which an enemy's trench was taken by the 1st Gloucesters with the two machine-guns therein. But there was no inducement for any general British advance. " We have nothing to lose by staying here," said a General, " whereas every day is of importance to the Germans, so the longer we can detain them here the better." So it seemed from the point of view of the Allies. There is a German point of view also, however, which is worthy of consideration. They were aware, and others were not, that great reserves of men were left in the Fatherland, even as there were in France and Britain, but that, unlike France and Britain, they actually had the arms and equipment for them, so that a second host could rapidly be called into the field. If these legions were in Belgium, they could ensure the fall of Antwerp, overrun the country, and seize the seaboard. All this could be effected while the Allies were held at the Aisne. Later, with these vast reinforcements, the German armies might burst the barrier which held them and make a second descent upon Paris, which was still only fifty miles away. So the Germans may have argued, and the history of the future was to show that there were some grounds for such a calculation. It was in truth a second war in which once again the Germans had the men and material ready, while the Allies had not.

This date, September 18, may be taken as the conclusion of the actual Battle of the Aisne, since from that time the operations defined themselves definitely as a mutual siege and gigantic artillery duel. The casualties of the British at the Aisne amounted, up to that date, to nearly 10,000 officers and men, the great majority of which were suffered by Haig's First Army Corps. The action had lasted from the 13th, and its outstanding features, so far as the British were concerned, may be said to have been the remarkable feat of crossing the river and the fine leadership of General Haig in the dangerous position in which he found himself. It has been suggested that the single unbroken bridge by

which he crossed may have been a trap purposely laid by the Germans, whose plans miscarried owing to the simultaneous forcing of the river at many other points. As it was, the position of the First Corps was a very difficult one, and a reverse might have become an absolute disaster. It was impossible for General French to avoid this risk, for since the weather precluded all air reconnaissance, it was only by pushing his Army across that he could be sure of the enemy's dispositions. The net result was one more demonstration upon both sides that the defensive force has so great an advantage under modern conditions that if there be moderate equality of numbers, and if the flanks of each be guarded, a condition of stalemate will invariably ensue, until the campaign is decided by economic causes or by military movements in some other part of the field of operations.

There is ample evidence that for the time the German Army, though able with no great effort to hold the extraordinarily strong position which had been prepared for it, was actually in very bad condition. Large new drafts had been brought out, which had not yet been assimilated by the army. The resistance of Maubeuge had blocked one of their supply railroads, and for some time the commissariat had partially broken down. Above all, they were mentally depressed by meeting such resistance where they had been led to expect an easy victory, by their forced retreat when almost within sight of Paris, and by their losses, which had been enormous. In spite of their own great superiority in heavy guns, the French light field-pieces had controlled the battlefields. There is ample evidence in the letters which have been intercepted, apart from the statements and appearance of the prisoners, to show the want and depression which prevailed. This period, however, may be said to mark the nadir of the German fortunes in this year. The fall of Maubeuge improved their supplies of every sort, their reserves and Landwehr got broken in by the war of the trenches, and the eventual fall of Antwerp and invasion of Western Belgium gave them that moral stimulus which they badly needed.

Some wit amongst the officers has described the war as " months of boredom broken by moments of agony." It is the duty of the chronicler to record, even if he attempts to alleviate, the former, for the most monotonous procession of events form integral parts of the great whole. The perusal of a great number of diaries and experiences leaves a vague and disconnected recollection behind it of personal escapes, of the terror of high explosives, of the excellence of the rear services of the Army, of futile shellings—with an occasional tragic mishap, where some group of men far from the front were suddenly, by some freak of fate, blown to destruction,—of the discomforts of wet trenches, and the joys of an occasional relief in the villages at the rear. Here and there, however, in the monotony of what had now become a mutual siege, there stand out some episodes or developments of a more vital character, which will be recorded in their sequence.

It may be conjectured that, up to the period of the definite entrenchment of the two armies, the losses of the enemy were not greater than our own. It is in the attack that losses are incurred, and the attack had, for the most part, been with us. The heavier guns of the Germans had also been a factor in their favour. From the 18th onwards, however, the weekly losses of the enemy were greater, since continually, night and day, they made onslaughts, which attained some partial and temporary success on the 20th, but which on every other occasion were blown back by the rifle-fire with which they were met. So mechanical and half-hearted did they at last become that they gave the impression that those who made them had no hope of success, and that they were only done at the bidding of some imperious or imperial voice from the distance. In these attacks, though any one of them may have only furnished a few hundred casualties, the total effect spread over several weeks must have equalled that of a battle, and amounted, since no progress was ever made, to a considerable defeat.

On the arrival of the 6th Division upon the 18th, Sir John French had determined to hold them in reserve and to use them to relieve, in turn, each of the brigades which had been so hard-worked during the previous week. Of these, there was none which needed and deserved a rest more than Bulfin's 2nd Brigade, which, after their attack upon the Chemin-des-dames upon the 14th, had made and held the trenches which formed both the extreme right and the advanced point of the British line. For nearly a week these men of iron had lain where the battle had left them. With the object of relieving them, the 18th Brigade (Congreve's) of the 6th Division was ordered to take their places. The transfer was successfully effected at night, but the newcomers, who had only arrived two days before from England, found themselves engaged at once in a very serious action. It may have been coincidence, or it may have been that with their remarkable system of espionage the Germans learned that new troops had taken the place of those whose mettle they had tested so often ; but however this may be, they made a vigorous advance on the afternoon of September 20, coming on so rapidly and in such numbers that they drove out the occupants both of the front British trenches—which were manned by three companies of the 1st West Yorkshires—and the adjoining French trench upon the right, which was held by the Turcos. The West Yorkshires were overwhelmed and enfiladed with machine-guns, a number were shot down, and others were taken prisoners.

Fortunately the rest of the brigade were in immediate support, and orders were given by General Congreve to advance and to regain the ground that had been lost. The rush up the hill was carried out by the 2nd Notts and Derby Regiment (Sherwood Foresters) in the centre, with the remainder of the West Yorks upon their right, and the 2nd Durham Light Infantry upon their left. They were supported by the 1st East Yorks and by the 2nd Sussex, who had just been called out of

the line for a rest. The 4th Irish Dragoon Guards at a gallop at first, and then dismounting with rifle and bayonet, were in the forefront of the fray. The advance was over half a mile of ground, most of which was clear of any sort of cover, but it was magnificently carried out and irresistible in its impetus. All the regiments lost heavily, but all reached their goal. Officers were hit again and again, but staggered on with their men. Captain Popham, of the Sherwood Foresters, is said to have carried six wounds with him up the slope. Fifteen officers and 250 men were shot down, but the lost trench was carried at the point of the bayonet and the whole position re-established. The total casualties were 1364, more than half of which fell upon the West Yorkshires, while the majority of the others were Sherwood Foresters, East Yorkshires, and Durhams. Major Robb, of the latter battalion, was among those who fell. The Germans did not hold the trenches for an hour, and yet the engagement may be counted as a success for them, since the British losses were certainly heavier than theirs. There was no gain, however, in ground. The action was more than a mere local attack, and the British line was in danger of being broken had it not been for the determined counter-attack of the 18th Brigade and of the Irish Dragoons. To the north of this main attack there was another subsidiary movement on the Beaulne ridge, in which the 5th and 6th Brigades were sharply engaged. The 1st King's, the 2nd H.L.I., and the 2nd Worcesters all sustained some losses.

About this period both the British and the French armies began to strengthen themselves with those heavy guns in which they had been so completely overweighted by the enemy. On the 20th the French in the neighbourhood received twelve long-range cannon, firing a 35 lb. shell a distance of twelve kilometres. Three days later the British opened fire with four new batteries of six-inch howitzers. From this time onwards there was no such great disparity in the heavy artillery, and the wounded from the monster shells of the enemy had at least the slight solace that their fate was not unavenged. The expenditure of shells, however, was still at the rate of ten German to one of the Allies. If the war was not won it was no fault of Krupp and the men of Essen. In two weeks the British lost nearly 3000 men from shell-fire.

Up to now the heavier end of the fighting had been borne by Haig's First Corps, but from the 20th onwards the Second and Third sustained the impact. The action just described, in which the West Yorkshires suffered so severely, was fought mainly by the 18th Brigade of Pulteney's Third Corps. On the 21st it was the turn of the Second Corps. During the night the 1st Wiltshire battalion of McCracken's 7th Brigade was attacked, and making a strong counter-attack in the morning they cleared a wood with the bayonet, and advanced the British line at that point. A subsequent attack upon the same brigade was repulsed. How heavy the losses had been in the wear and tear of six days continual trench work is shown by the fact that when on this date the 9th Brigade

was taken back for a rest it had lost 30 officers and 860 men since crossing the Aisne.

The German heavy guns on the 21st set fire to the village of Missy, but failed to dislodge the 1st East Surreys who held it. This battalion, in common with the rest of Fergusson's Division, were dominated night and day by a plunging fire from above. It is worth recording that in spite of the strain, the hardship, and the wet trenches, the percentage of serious sickness among the troops was lower than the normal rate of a garrison town. A few cases of enteric appeared about this time, of which six were in one company of the Coldstream Guards. It is instructive to note that in each case the man belonged to the uninoculated minority.

A plague of spies infested the British and French lines at this period, and their elaborate telephone installations, leading from haystacks or from cellars, showed the foresight of the enemy. Some of these were German officers, who bravely took their lives in their hands from the patriotic motive of helping their country. Others, alas, were residents who had sold their souls for German gold. One such—a farmer—was found with a telephone within his house and no less a sum than a thousand pounds in specie. Many a battery concealed in a hollow, and many a convoy in a hidden road, were amazed by the accuracy of a fire which was really directed, not from the distant guns, but from some wayside hiding-place. Fifteen of these men were shot and the trouble abated.

The attacks upon the British trenches, which had died down for several days, were renewed with considerable vigour on September 26. The first, directed against the 1st Queen's, was carried out by a force of about 1000 men, who advanced in close order, and, coming under machine-gun fire, were rapidly broken up. The second was made by a German battalion debouching from the woods in front of the 1st South Wales Borderers. This attack penetrated the line at one point, the left company of the regiment suffering severely, with all its officers down. The reserve company, with the help of the 2nd Welsh, retook the trenches after a hot fight, which ended by the wood being cleared. The Germans lost heavily in this struggle, 80 of them being picked up on the very edge of the trench. The Borderers also had numerous casualties, which totalled up to 7 officers and 182 men, half of whom were actually killed.

The Army was now in a very strong position, for the trenches were so well constructed that unless a shell by some miracle went right in, no harm would result. The weather had become fine once more, and the flying service relieved the anxieties of the commanders as to a massed attack. The heavy artillery of the Allies was also improving from day to day, especially the heavy British howitzers, aided by aeroplane observers with a wireless installation.

It was at this period that a great change came over both the object and the locality of the operations. This change depended upon two events which had occurred far to the north, and reacted upon the great armies

locked in the long grapple of the Aisne. The first of these controlling circumstances was that, by the movement of the old troops and the addition of new ones, each army had sought to turn the flank of the other in the north, until the whole centre of gravity of the war was transferred to that region. A new French army under General Castelnau, whose fine defence of Nancy had put him in the front of French leaders, had appeared on the extreme left wing of the Allies, only to be countered by fresh bodies of Germans, until the ever-extending line lengthened out to the manufacturing districts of Lens and Lille, where amid pit-shafts and slag-heaps the cavalry of the French and the Germans tried desperately to get round each other's flank. The other factor was the fall of Antwerp, which had released very large bodies of Germans, who were flooding over Western Belgium, and, with the help of great new levies from Germany, carrying the war to the sand-dunes of the coast. The operations which brought about this great change open up a new chapter in the history of the war. The actual events which culminated in the fall of Antwerp may be very briefly handled, since, important as they were, they were not primarily part of the British task, and hence hardly come within the scope of this narrative.

The Belgians, after the evacuation of Brussels in August, had withdrawn their army into the widespread fortress of Antwerp, from which they made frequent sallies upon the Germans who were garrisoning their country. Great activity was shown and several small successes were gained, which had the useful effect of detaining two corps which might have been employed upon the Aisne. Eventually, towards the end of September, the Germans turned their attention seriously to the reduction of the city, with a well-founded confidence that no modern forts could resist the impact of their enormous artillery. They drove the garrison within the lines, and early in October opened a bombardment upon the outer forts with such results that it was evidently only a matter of days before they would fall and the fine old city be faced with the alternative of surrender or destruction. The Spanish fury of Parma's pikemen would be a small thing compared to the *furor Teutonicus* working its evil deliberate will upon town-hall or cathedral, with the aid of fire-disc, petrol-spray, or other products of culture. The main problem before the Allies, if the town could not be saved, was to ensure that the Belgian Army should be extricated and that nothing of military value which could be destroyed should be left to the invaders. No troops were available for a rescue, for the French and British old formations were already engaged, while the new ones were not yet ready for action. In these circumstances, a resolution was come to by the British leaders which was bold to the verge of rashness and so chivalrous as to be almost quixotic. It was determined to send out at the shortest notice a naval division, one brigade of which consisted of marines, troops who are second to none in the country's service, while the other two brigades were young amateur sailor volunteers, most of whom had only been

under arms for a few weeks. It was an extraordinary experiment, as testing how far the average sport-loving, healthy-minded young Briton needs only his equipment to turn him into a soldier who, in spite of all rawness and inefficiency, can still affect the course of a campaign. This strange force, one-third veterans and two-thirds practically civilians, was hurried across to do what it could for the failing town, and to demonstrate to Belgium how real was the sympathy which prompted us to send all that we had. A reinforcement of a very different quality was dispatched a few days later in the shape of the 7th Division of the Regular Army, with the 3rd Division of Cavalry. These fine troops were too late, however, to save the city, and soon found themselves in a position where it needed all their hardihood to save themselves.

The Marine Brigade of the Naval Division under General Paris was dispatched from England in the early morning and reached Antwerp during the night of October 3. They were about 2000 in number. Early next morning they were out in the trenches, relieving some weary Belgians. The Germans were already within the outer enceinte and drawing close to the inner. For forty-eight hours the Marines held the line in the face of heavy shelling. The cover was good and the losses were not heavy. At the end of that time the Belgian troops, who had been a good deal worn by their heroic exertions, were unable to sustain the German pressure, and evacuated the trenches on the flank of the British line. The brigade then fell back to a reserve position in front of the town.

On the night of the 5th the two other brigades of the division, numbering some 5000 amateur sailors, arrived in Antwerp, and the whole force assembled on the new lines of defence. Mr. Winston Churchill showed his gallantry as a man, and his indiscretion as a high official, whose life was of great value to his country, by accompanying the force from England. The bombardment was now very heavy, and the town was on fire in several places. The equipment of the British left much to be desired, and their trenches were as indifferent as their training. None the less they played the man and lived up to the traditions of that great service upon whose threshold they stood. For three days these men, who a few weeks before had been anything from schoolmasters to tram-conductors, held their perilous post. They were very raw, but they possessed a great asset in their officers, who were usually men of long service. But neither the lads of the naval brigades nor the war-worn and much-enduring Belgians could stop the mouths of those inexorable guns. On the 8th it was clear that the forts could no longer be held. The British task had been to maintain the trenches which connected the forts with each other, but if the forts went the trenches must be out-flanked and untenable. The situation, therefore, was hopeless, and all that remained was to save the garrison and leave as little as possible for the victors. Some thirty or forty German merchant ships in the harbour were sunk and the great petrol tanks were set on fire. By the light of

the flames the Belgian and British forces made their way successfully out of the town, and the good service rendered later by these Allies upon the Yser and elsewhere is the best justification of the policy which strained every nerve in order to do everything which could have a moral or material effect upon them in their darkest hour. Had the British been able to get away unscathed, the whole operation might have been reviewed with equanimity if not with satisfaction, but, unhappily, a grave misfortune, arising rather from bad luck than from the opposition of the enemy, came upon the retreating brigades, so that very many of our young sailors after their one week of crowded life came to an end of their active service for the war.

On leaving Antwerp it had been necessary to strike to the north in order to avoid a large detachment of the enemy who were said to be upon the line of the retreat. Eventually it seemed to be impossible to get through, and as an alternative to capture Colonel Henderson had to lead his men over the Dutch frontier when they were interned for the rest of the war. These men belonged chiefly to three battalions of the 1st Brigade. The 2nd Brigade, with one battalion of the 1st, and the greater part of the Marines, made their way to the trains at St. Gilles-Waes, and were able to reach Ostend in safety. The remaining battalion of Marines, with a number of stragglers of the other brigades, were cut off at Morbede by the Germans, and about half of them were taken, while the rest fought their way through in the darkness and joined their comrades. The total losses of the British in the whole misadventure from first to last were about 2500 men—a high price, and yet not too high when weighed against the results of their presence at Antwerp, which may well have prevented the Germans from getting the Channel ports. On October 10 the Germans under General Von Beseler occupied the city. Mr. Powell, who was present, testifies that 60,000 marched into the town.

It has already been described how the northern ends of the two contending armies were endeavouring to outflank each other, and there seemed every possibility that this process would be carried out until each arrived at the coast. Late in September Sir John French represented to General Joffre that it would be well that the British Army should be withdrawn from the Aisne and take its position to the left of the French forces, a move which would shorten its line of communications very materially, and at the same time give it the task of defending the Channel coast. General Joffre agreed to the proposition, and the necessary steps were at once taken to put it into force. The Belgians had in the meanwhile made their way behind the line of the Yser, where a formidable position had been prepared. There, with hardly a day of rest, they were ready to renew the struggle with the ravagers of their country. The Belgian Government had been moved to France, and their splendid King, who will live in history as the most heroic and chivalrous figure of the war, continued by his brave words and noble example to animate the spirits of his countrymen.

CHAPTER VII

THE LA BASSÉE–ARMENTIÈRES OPERATIONS [1]

From October 11 to October 31, 1914

The great battle line—Advance of Second Corps—Death of General Hamilton—The farthest point—Fate of the 2nd Royal Irish—The Third Corps—Exhausted troops—First fight of Neuve Chapelle—The Indians take over—The Lancers at Warneton—Pulteney's operations—Action of Le Gheir.

In accordance with the new plans, the great transference began on October 3. It was an exceedingly difficult problem, since an army of more than 100,000 men had to be gradually extricated by night from trenches which were often not more than a hundred yards from the enemy, while a second army of equal numbers had to be substituted in its place. The line of retreat was down an open slope, across exposed bridges, and up the slope upon the southern bank. Any alarm of the Germans might have been fatal, since a vigorous night attack in the middle of the operation would have been difficult to resist, and even an artillery bombardment must have caused great loss of life. Cavalry went by road; infantry marched part of the way, trained part of the way, and did the last lap very often in motor-buses. One way or another the men were got across, the Aisne trenches were left for ever, and a new phase of the war had begun. From the chalky uplands and the wooded slopes there was a sudden change to immense plains of clay, with slow, meandering, ditch-like streams, and all the hideous features of a great coalfield added to the drab monotony of Nature. No scenes could be more different, but the same great issue of history and the same old problem of trench and rifle were finding their slow solution upon each. The stalemate of the Aisne was for the moment set aside, and once again we had reverted to the old position where the ardent Germans declared, "This way we shall come," and the Allies, "Not a mile, save over our bodies."

During the operations of the Aisne the French had extended the Allied line far to the north in the hope of outflanking the Germans. The new Tenth French Army, under General Foch, formed the extreme left of this vast manœuvre, and it was supported on its left by the French cavalry. The German right had lengthened out, however, to meet every fresh extension of the French, and their cavalry had been sufficiently

[1] Map, page 109, supplemented by map facing page 1, illustrates these operations.

numerous and alert to prevent the French cavalry from getting round. Numerous skirmishes had ended in no definite result. The British movement was, therefore, at the outset an aggressive out-flanking one. How it became defensive as new factors intruded themselves, and as a result of the fall of Antwerp, will be shown at a later stage of this account.

As the Second Corps arrived first upon the scene it will be proper to begin with some account of its doings from October 12, when it went into action, until the end of the month, when it found itself brought to a standstill by superior forces and placed upon the defensive. The doings of the Third Corps during the same period will be interwoven with those of the Second, since they were in close co-operation ; and, finally, the fortunes of the First Corps will be followed and the relation shown between its doings and those of the newly arrived 7th Division, which had fallen back from the vicinity of Antwerp and turned at bay near Ypres upon the pursuing Germans. Coming from different directions, all these various bodies were destined to be formed into one line, cemented together by their own dismounted cavalry and by French reinforcements, so as to lay an unbroken breakwater before the great German flood.

The task of the Second Corps was to get into touch with the left flank of the Tenth French Army in the vicinity of La Bassée, and then to wheel round its own left so as to turn the position of those Germans who were facing our Allies. The line of the Bethune–Lille road was to be the hinge, connecting the two armies and marking the turning-point for the British. On the 11th Gough's 2nd Cavalry Division was clearing the woods in front of the Aire—Bethune Canal, which marked the line of the Second Corps. By evening Gough had connected up the 3rd Division of the Second Corps with the 6th Division of the Third Corps, which was already at Hazebrouck. On the 12th the 3rd Division crossed the canal, followed by the 5th Division, with the exception of the 13th Brigade, which remained to the south of it. Both divisions advanced more or less north before swinging round to almost due east in their outflanking movement. The rough diagram gives an idea of the point from which they started and the positions reached at various dates before they came to an equilibrium. There were many weary stages, however, between the outset and the fulfilment, and the final results were destined to be barren as compared with the exertions and the losses involved. None the less it was, as it proved, an essential part of that great operation by which the British—with the help of their good allies —checked the German advance upon Calais in October and November, even as they had helped to head them off from Paris in August and September. During these four months the little British Army, far from being negligible, as some critics had foretold would be the case in a Continental war, was absolutely vital in holding the Allied line and taking the edge off the hacking German sword.

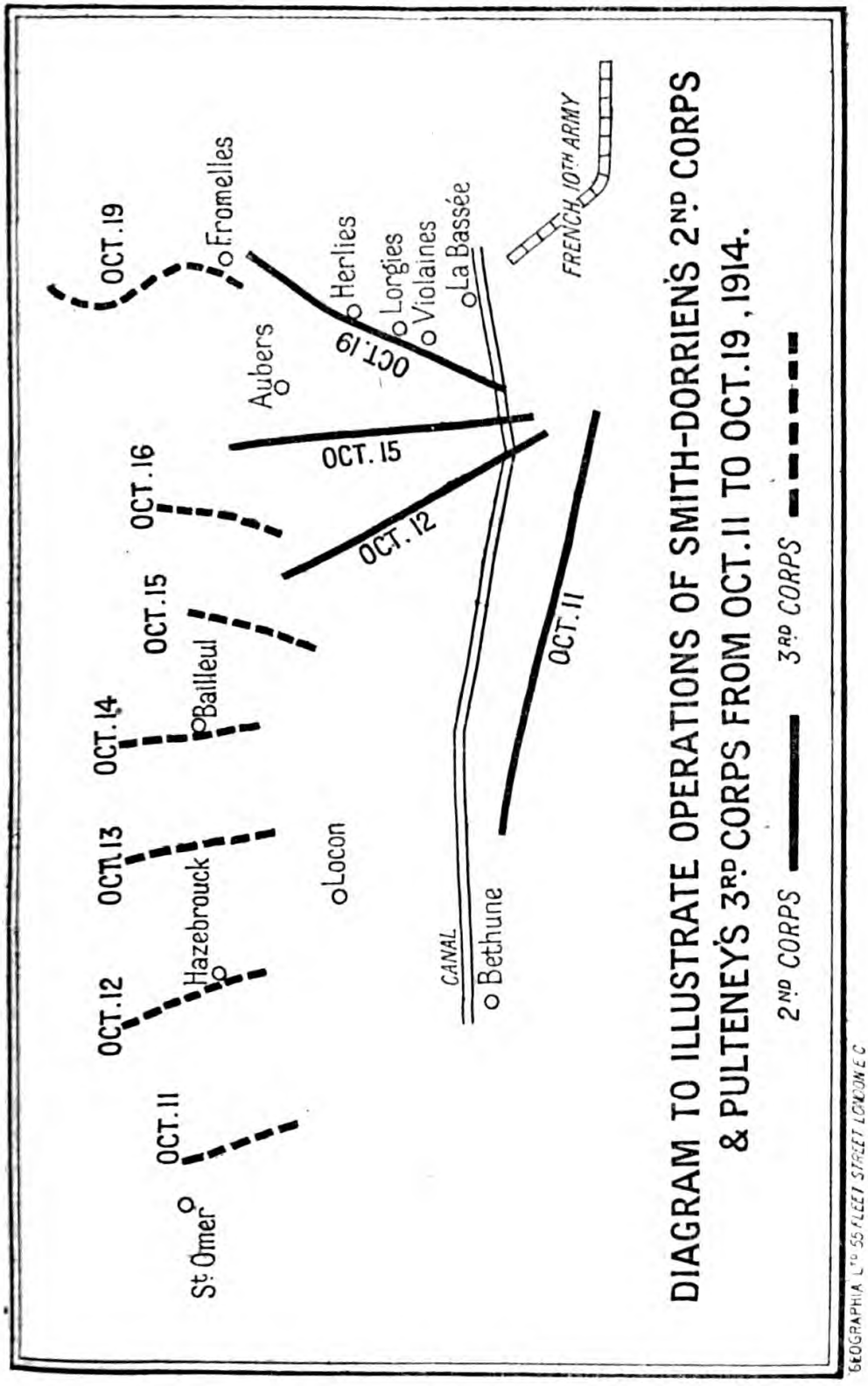


DIAGRAM TO ILLUSTRATE OPERATIONS OF SMITH-DORRIEN'S 2ND CORPS
& PULTENEY'S 3RD CORPS FROM OCT. 11 TO OCT. 19, 1914.
2ND CORPS
3RD CORPS
St Omer
Hazebrouck
Locon
Bailleul
Aubers
Fromelles
Herlies
Lorgies
Violaines
La Bassée
Bethune
CANAL
FRENCH 10TH ARMY
OCT. 11
OCT. 12
OCT. 13
OCT. 14
OCT. 15
OCT. 16
OCT. 15
OCT. 12
OCT. 19
OCT. 19
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The Third Corps, which had detrained at St. Omer and moved to Hazebrouck, was intended to move in touch with the Second, prolonging its line to the north. The 1st and 2nd British Cavalry Divisions, now under the command of De Lisle and of Gough, with Allenby as chief, had a rôle of their own to play, and the space between the Second and Third Corps was now filled up by a French Cavalry Division under Conneau, a whole-hearted soldier always ready to respond to any call. There was no strong opposition yet in front of the Third Corps, but General Pulteney moved rapidly forwards, brushed aside all resistance, and seized the town of Bailleul. On the evening of October 15 the Third Corps had crossed the Lys (a sluggish stream some 20 yards in width and five feet deep), and on the 18th they extended from Warneton in the north to almost within touch of the position of the Second Corps at Aubers upon the same date.

The country to the south in which the Second Corps was advancing on October 12 was an extraordinarily difficult one, which offered many advantages to the defence over the attack. It was so flat that it was impossible to find places for artillery observation, and it was intersected with canals, high hedgerows, and dykes, which formed ready-made trenches. The Germans were at first not in strength, and consisted for the most part of dismounted cavalry drawn from four divisions, but from this time onwards there was a constant fresh accession of infantry and guns. They disputed with great skill and energy every position which could be defended, and the British advance during the day, though steady, was necessarily slow. Every hamlet, hedgerow, and stream meant a separate skirmish. The troops continually closed ranks, advanced, extended, and attacked from morning to night, sleeping where they had last fought. There was nothing that could be called a serious engagement, and yet the losses—almost entirely from the 3rd Division—amounted to 300 for the day, the heaviest sufferers being the 2nd Royal Scots.

On the next day, the 13th, the corps swung round its left so as to develop the turning movement already described. Its front of advance was about eight miles, and it met resistance which made all progress difficult. Again the 8th Brigade, especially the Royal Scots and the 4th Middlesex, lost heavily. So desperate was the fighting that the Royal Scots had 400 casualties including 9 officers, and the Middlesex fared little better. The principal fighting, however, fell late in the evening upon the 15th Brigade, who were on the right of the line and in touch with the Bethune Canal. The enemy, whose line of resistance had been considerably thickened by the addition of several battalions of Jaeger and part of the Fourteenth Corps, made a spirited counter-attack on this portion of the advance. The 1st Bedfords were roughly handled and driven back, with the result that the 1st Dorsets, who were stationed at a bridge over the canal near Givenchy, found their flanks exposed and sustained heavy losses, amounting to 400 men, including Major Roper.

Colonel Bols, of the same regiment, enjoyed one crowded hour of glorious life, for he was wounded, captured, and escaped all on the same evening. Major Vandeleur was wounded and captured. A section of guns which was involved in the same dilemma as the Dorsets had to be abandoned after every gunner had fallen. The 15th Brigade was compelled to fall back for half a mile and entrench itself for the night. On the left the 7th Brigade had some eighty casualties in crossing the Lys, and a detachment of Northumberland Fusiliers, who covered their left flank, came under machine-gun fire, which struck down their adjutant, Captain Herbert, and a number of men. Altogether the losses on this day amounted to about twelve hundred men.

On the 14th the Second Corps continued its slow advance in the same direction. On this day the 3rd Division sustained a grievous loss in the shape of its commander, General Sir Hubert Hamilton, who was standing conversing with the quiet nonchalance which was characteristic of him, when a shell burst above him and a shrapnel bullet struck him on the temple, killing him at once. He was a grand commander, beloved by his men, and destined for the highest had he lived. He was buried that night after dark in a village churchyard. There was an artillery attack by the Germans during the service, and the group of silent officers, weary from the fighting line, who stood with bowed heads round the grave, could hardly hear the words of the chaplain for the whiz and crash of the shells. It was a proper ending for a soldier.

His division was temporarily taken over by General Colin Mackenzie. On this date the 13th Brigade, on the south of the canal, was relieved by French troops, so that henceforward all the British were to the north. For the three preceding days this brigade had done heavy work, the pressure of the enemy falling particularly upon the 2nd Scottish Borderers, who lost Major Allen and a number of other officers and men.

The 15th was a day of spirited advance, the 3rd Division offering sacrifice in the old warrior fashion to the shade of its dead leader. Guns were brought up into the infantry line and the enemy was smashed out of entrenched positions and loopholed villages in spite of a most manful resistance. The soldiers carried long planks with them and threw them over the dykes on their advance. Mile after mile the Germans were pushed back, until they were driven off the high road which connects Estaires with La Bassée. The 1st Northumberland and 4th Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, and the 2nd Royal Scots and 4th Middlesex of the 8th, particularly distinguished themselves in this day of hard fighting. By the night of the 15th the corps had lost 90 officers and 2500 men in the four days, the disproportionate number of officers being due to the broken nature of the fighting, which necessitated the constant leading of small detachments. The German resistance continued to be admirable.

On the 16th the slow wheeling movement of the Second Corps went steadily though slowly forward, meeting always the same stubborn

resistance. The British were losing heavily by the incessant fighting but so were the Germans, and it was becoming a question which could stand punishment longest. In the evening the 3rd Division was brought to a stand by the village of Aubers, which was found to be strongly held. The 5th Division was instructed to mark time upon the right, so as to form the pivot upon which all the rest of the corps could swing round in their advance on La Bassée. At this date the Third Corps was no great distance to the north, and the First Corps was detraining from the Aisne. As the 7th Division with Byng's 3rd Cavalry Division were reported to be in touch with the other forces in the north, the concentration of the British Army was approaching a successful issue. The weather up to now during all the operations which have been described was wet and misty, limiting the use of artillery and entirely preventing that of aircraft. The Seventh, reinforced by the Thirteenth German Corps, had now taken the place of the Cavalry.

On the 17th the advance was resumed and was destined to reach the extreme point which it attained for many a long laborious month. This was the village of Herlies, north-east of La Bassée, which was attacked in the evening by Shaw's 9th Brigade, and was carried in the dusk at the point of the bayonet by the 1st Lincolns and the 4th Royal Fusiliers. About the same time the Scots Fusiliers and Northumberlands had stormed Aubers. The 7th Brigade was less fortunate at the adjoining village of Illies, where they failed to make a lodgment, but the French cavalry on the extreme left, with the help of the 2nd Royal Irish, captured Fromelles. The 5th Division also came forward a little, the right flank still on the canal, but the left bending round so as to get to the north of La Bassée. The 1st Devons, who had taken the place of the Dorsets, pushed forward with such fire that they were half a mile ahead of the Army and in great danger of being cut off, but by individual coolness and resource they managed to get back to safety.

On the 18th Sir Charles Fergusson, who had done good work with the Army from the first gunshot of the war, was promoted to a higher rank and the command of the 5th Division passed over to General Morland. Thus both divisions of the Second Corps changed their commanders within a week. On this date the infantry of the 14th Brigade, with some of the 13th Brigade, were within eight hundred yards of La Bassée, but found it so strongly held that it could not be entered, the Scottish Borderers losing heavily in a very gallant advance. The village of Illies also remained impregnable, being strongly entrenched and loopholed. The 9th Brigade took some of the trenches, but found their left flank exposed, so had to withdraw nearly half a mile and to entrench. In this little action the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers bore the brunt of the fighting and the losses. Eight officers and nearly 200 men of this battalion were killed or wounded. A fresh German division came into action this day and their artillery was stronger, so that the prospects of future advance were not particularly encouraging. The

British artillery was worked very hard, being overmatched and yet undefeatable. The strain both upon the men and the officers was constant, and the observation officers showed great daring and tenacity.

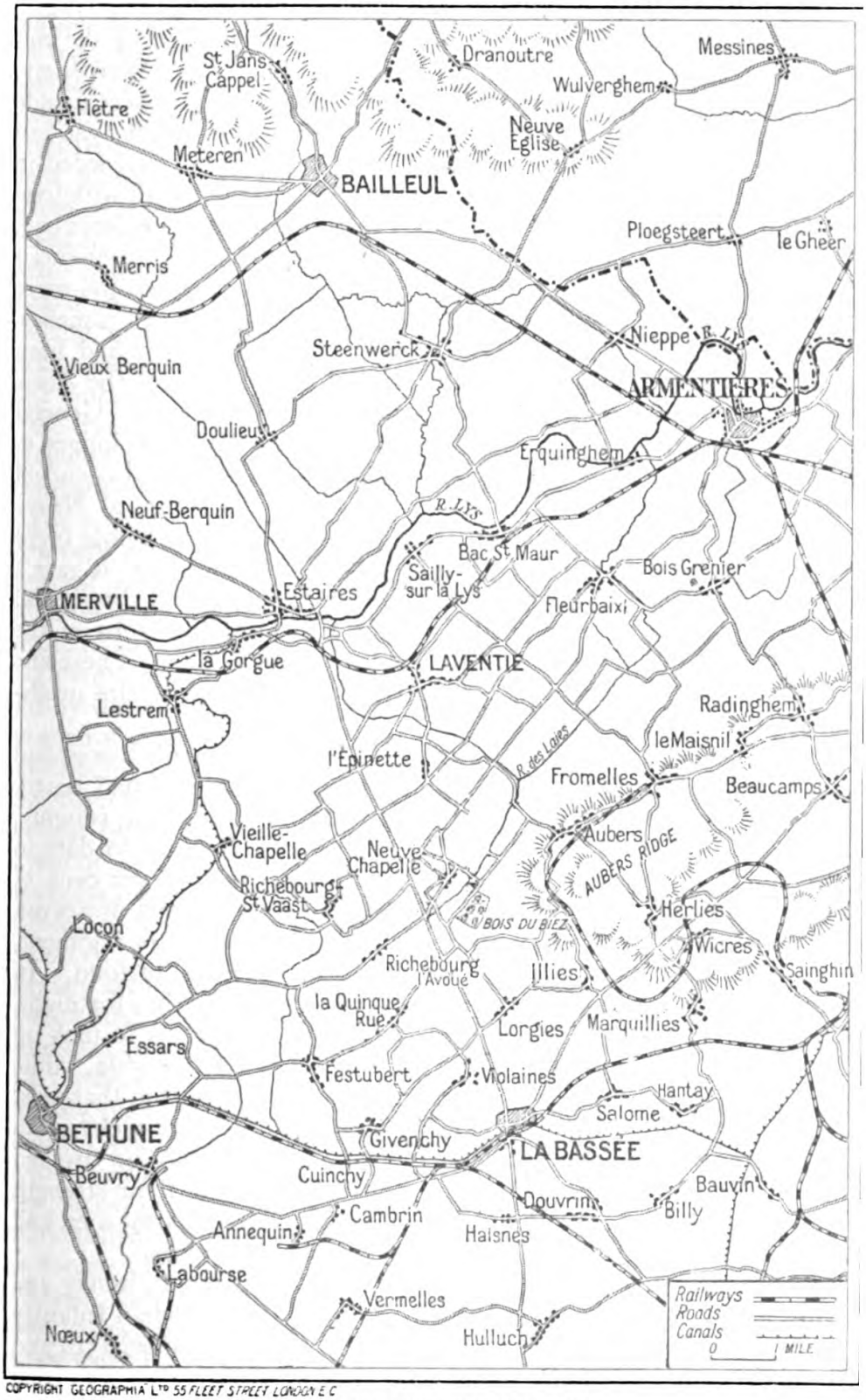
On the 19th neither the 3rd nor the 5th Divisions made any appreciable progress, but one battalion was heavily engaged and added a fresh record to its ancient roll of valour. This was the 2nd Royal Irish under Major Daniell, who attacked the village of Le Pilly rather forward from the British left in co-operation with the French cavalry. The Irish infantry charged over eight hundred yards of clear ground, carried the village by storm, and entrenched themselves within it. This advance and charge, which was carried out with the precision of an Aldershot field day, although 130 men fell during the movement, is said by experienced spectators to have been a great feat of arms. The 20th saw a strong counter-attack of the Germans, and by the evening their two flanks had lapped round Le Pilly, pushing off on the one side the French cavalry of Conneau, and on the other a too small detachment of the Royal Fusiliers who were flanking the Irishmen. All day the defenders of Le Pilly were subjected to a terrific shell-fire, and all attempts to get messages to them were unavailing. In the evening they were surrounded and only two or three men of the battalion were ever seen again. The gallant Daniell fell, and it is on record that his last audible words were a command to fix bayonets and fight to the end, the cartridges of the battalion being at that time exhausted. A German officer engaged in this attack and subsequently taken prisoner deposed that three German battalions attacked the Royal Irish, one in front and one on each flank, after they had been heavily bombarded in enfilade. Several hundred Irish dead and wounded were taken out of the main trench.

There was now ample evidence that the Germans had received large reinforcements, and that their line was too strong to be forced. The whole object and character of the operations assumed, therefore, a new aspect. The Second and Third Corps had swung round, describing an angle of ninety degrees, with its pivot upon the right at the La Bassée Canal, and by this movement it had succeeded in placing itself upon the flank of the German force which faced the Tenth French Army. But there was now no longer any flank, for the German reinforcements had enabled them to prolong their line and so to turn the action into a frontal attack by the British. Such an attack in modern warfare can only hope for success when carried out by greatly superior numbers, whereas the Germans were now stronger than their assailants.

The increased pressure was being felt by the Third Corps on the Lys, as well as by the Second to the south of them ; indeed, as only a few miles intervened between the two, they may be regarded as one for these operations. We have seen that, having taken the town of Bailleul, Pulteney's Corps had established itself across the Lys, and occupied a line from Warneton to Radinghem upon October 18. The latter village had been taken on that day by the 16th Brigade in an action in which the

1st Buffs and 2nd York and Lancasters lost heavily, the latter being ambushed as it pursued the enemy and losing 11 officers and 400 men. Colonel Cobbold fell back upon the village and held it successfully. Pulteney was now strongly attacked, and there was a movement of the Germans on October 20 as if to turn his right and slip in between the two British corps. The action was carried on into the 21st, the enemy still showing considerable energy and strength. The chief German advance during the day was north of La Bassée. It came upon the village of Lorgies, which was the point where the South Lancashires, of McCracken's 7th Brigade, forming the extreme right of the 3rd Division, were in touch with the East Surreys and Duke of Cornwall's of the 14th Brigade, forming the extreme left of the 5th Division. It is necessary to join one's flats carefully in the presence of the Germans, for they are sharp critics of such matters. In this instance a sudden attack near Illies drove in a portion of the 2nd South Lancashires. This attack also destroyed the greater part of a company of the 1st Cornwalls in support. An ugly gap was left in the line, but the remainder of the Cornwalls, with the help of a company of the 1st West Kents and the ever-constant artillery, filled it up during the rest of the day, and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry took it over the same night, the Cornishmen retiring with heavy losses but a great deal of compensating glory. The temporary gap in the line exposed the right flank of the 3rd Worcesters, who were next to the South Lancashires. They lost heavily in killed and wounded, their colonel, Stuart, being among the latter, though his injury did not prevent him from remaining in the battle line. Apart from this action at Lorgies, the 19th Brigade (Gordon's), upon the flank of Pulteney's Corps, sustained a very heavy attack, being driven back for some distance. It had been ordered to occupy Fromelles, and so close the gap which existed at that time between the left of the Second and the right of the Third Corps, situated respectively at Aubers and Radinghem. The chief fighting occurred at the village of Le Maisnil, close to Fromelles. This village was occupied by the 2nd Argylls and half the 1st Middlesex, but they were driven out by a severe shell-fire followed by an infantry advance. The Brigade fell back in good order, the battalions engaged having lost about 300 men. They took up a position on the right of the 16th Infantry Brigade at La Boutillerie, and there they remained until November 17, one severe attack falling upon them on October 29, which is described under that date.

On the morning of October 22 the Germans, still very numerous and full of fight, made a determined attack upon the 5th Division, occupying the village of Violaines, close to La Bassée. The village was held by the 1st Cheshires, who, for the second time in this campaign, found themselves in a terribly difficult position. The Cheshires inflicted heavy losses upon the stormers with rifle-fire, but were at last driven out, involving in their retirement the 1st Dorsets, who had left their own trenches in order to help them. Both battalions, but especially the



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SOUTHERN END BRITISH LINE

Cheshires, had grievous losses, in casualties and prisoners. On advancing in pursuit the Germans were strongly counter-attacked by the 2nd Manchesters and the 1st Cornwalls, supported by the 3rd Worcesters, who, by their steady fire, brought them to a standstill, but were unable to recover the ground that had been lost, though the Cornwalls, who had been fighting with hardly a pause for forty-eight hours, succeeded in capturing one of their machine-guns. In the night the British withdrew their line in accordance with the general rearrangement to be described.

On this date, October 22, not only had Smith-Dorrien experienced this hold-up upon his right flank, but his left flank had become more vulnerable, because the French had been heavily attacked at Fromelles, and had been driven out of that village. An equilibrium had been established between attack and defence, and the position of the Aisne was beginning to appear once again upon the edge of Flanders. General Smith-Dorrien, feeling that any substantial advance was no longer to be hoped for under the existing conditions, marked down and occupied a strong defensive position, from Givenchy on the south to Neuve Chapelle on the north. This involved a retirement of the whole corps during the night for a distance of from one to two miles, but it gave a connected position with a clear field of fire. At the same time the general situation was greatly strengthened by the arrival at the front of the Lahore Division of the Indian Army under General Watkis. These fine troops were placed in reserve behind the Second Corps in the neighbourhood of Locon.

It is well to remember at this point what Smith-Dorrien's troops had already endured during the two months that the campaign had lasted. Taking the strength of the corps at 37,000 men, they had lost, roughly, 10,000 men in August, 10,000 in September, and 5000 up to date in these actions of October. It is certain that far less than 50 per cent. of the original officers and men were still with the Colours, and drafts can never fully restore the unity and spirit of a homogeneous regiment, where every man knows his company leaders and his platoon. In addition to this they had now fought night and day for nearly a fortnight, with broken and insufficient sleep, laying down their rifles to pick up their spades, and then once again exchanging spade for rifle, while soaked to the skin with incessant fogs and rain, and exposed to that most harassing form of fighting, where every clump and hedgerow covers an enemy. They were so exhausted that they could hardly be awaked to fight. To say that they were now nearing the end of their strength and badly in need of a rest is but to say that they were mortal men and had reached the physical limits that mortality must impose.

The French cavalry divisions acting as links between Pulteney and Smith-Dorrien were now relieved by the 8th (Jullundur) Indian Infantry Brigade, containing the 1st Manchesters, 59th (Scinde) Rifles, 15th and 47th Sikhs, with the 34th Sikh Pioneers. It may be remarked that each Indian brigade is made up of three Indian and one British battalion.

On the night of October 24 determined attacks were made upon the trenches of the Second Corps at the Bois de Biez, near Neuve Chapelle, but were beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy, who had massed together twelve battalions in order to rush a particular part of the position. The main attack fell upon the 1st Wiltshires and the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, belonging to the 7th Brigade and also upon the 15th Sikhs, who seem to have been the first Indians to be seriously engaged, having nearly two hundred casualties. The 8th Brigade were also involved in the fight. The Germans had some temporary success in the centre of the trenches of the 3rd Division, where, in the darkness, they pushed back the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who lost very heavily. As the Highlanders fell back, the 2nd Royal Scots, upon their right, swung back its flank companies, covered the retirement, and then, straightening their ranks again, flung the Germans, at the point of their bayonets, out of the trenches. It was one of several remarkable feats which this fine battalion has performed in the war. Next morning the captured trenches were handed over to the care of the 4th Middlesex.

The pressure upon the exhausted troops was extreme on this day, for a very severe attack was made also upon the 5th Division, holding the right of the line. The soldiers, as already shown, were in no condition for great exertions, and yet, after their wont, they rose grandly to the occasion. The important village of Givenchy, destined for many a long month to form the advanced post on the right of the Army, was held by the 1st Norfolks and the 1st Devons, who defied all efforts of the enemy to dislodge them. Nevertheless, the situation was critical and difficult for both divisions, and the only available support, the 1st Manchesters from the Lahore Division, were pushed up into the fighting line and found themselves instantly engaged in the neighbourhood of Givenchy. It was dreadful weather, the trenches a quagmire, and the rifle-bolts often clogged with the mud. On the 26th Sir John French, realising how great was the task with which the weary corps was faced, sent up two batteries of 4.7 guns, which soon lessened the volume of the German artillery attack. At the same time General Maistre, of the Twenty-first French Corps, sent two of his batteries and two of his battalions. Thus strengthened, there was no further immediate anxiety as to the line being broken, especially as upon the 26th Marshal French, carefully playing card after card from his not over-strong hand, placed the 2nd Cavalry Division and three more Indian battalions in reserve to Smith-Dorrien's corps. The German advance had by no means spent itself, as on this day they came to close grips with the 2nd Irish Rifles and established themselves firmly in the village of Neuve Chapelle, near the centre of the British line, inflicting heavy loss upon the Royal Fusiliers, who tried to restore the position. A number of attacks were made to regain this village next day, in which as strange a medley of troops were employed as could ever before have found themselves as comrades in so minor an operation. There were South Lancashires,

Royal Fusiliers, 9th Bhopal Infantry, 47th Sikhs, Chasseurs Alpins, and other units. In spite of—or possibly on account of—this international competition the village remained with the Germans, who were strongly reinforced, and managed by their shell-fire to clear some of the nearest trenches and gain some additional ground, hitting the 1st Wiltshires and 2nd Irish Rifles hard and making a number of prisoners, two or three hundred in all. Again the times had become critical, the more so as the 8th Indian Brigade to the north had also been attacked and roughly handled. The indomitable Smith-Dorrien was determined to have his village, however, and in the neighbouring French cavalry commander, General Conneau, he found a worthy colleague who was ready to throw his last man into the venture. The 2nd Cavalry, now under General Mullens, was also ready, as the cavalry has always been, to spring in as a makeweight when the balance trembled. The German losses were known to have been tremendous, and it was hoped that the force of their attack was spent. On the 28th the assault was renewed, prefaced by a strong artillery preparation, but again it was brought to a standstill. The 47th Sikhs fought magnificently from loopholed house to house, as did the Indian sappers and miners, while the cavalry showed themselves to be admirable infantry at a pinch, but the defence was still too strong and the losses too severe, though at one time Colonel McMahon, with his Fusiliers, had seized the whole north end of the village.

Some 60 officers and 1500 men had fallen in the day's venture, including 70 of the cavalry. The night fell with Neuve Chapelle still in the hands of the enemy, and the British troops to the north, east and west of it in a semicircle. The 14th Brigade, coming up after dark, found the 1st West Kent Regiment reduced to 2 officers and 150 men, and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry at about the same strength, still holding on to positions which had been committed to them three days before. The conduct of these two grand battalions upon that and the previous days excited the admiration of everyone, for, isolated from their comrades, they had beaten off a long succession of infantry attacks and had been enfiladed by a most severe shell-fire. Second-Lieutenant White, with a still younger officer named Russell, formed the whole staff of officers of the West Kents. Major Buckle, Captain Legard, and many others having been killed or wounded, Penny and Crossley, the two sergeant-majors, did great work, and the men were splendid. These shire regiments, raised from the very soil of England, reflect most nearly her national qualities, and in their stolid invincibility form a fitting framework of a great national army. Speaking to the West Kents of this episode, General Smith-Dorrien said : " There is one part of the line which has never been retaken, because it was never lost. It was the particular trenches which your battalion held so grimly during those terrific ten days."

These determined efforts were not spent in vain, for the Germans would not bide the other brunt. Early on the 29th the British patrols

found that Neuve Chapelle had been evacuated by the enemy, who must have lost several thousand men in its capture and fine subsequent defence. In this village fighting the British were much handicapped at this time by the want of high explosive shells to destroy the houses. The enemy's artillery made it impossible for the British to occupy it, and some time later it reverted to the Germans once more, being occupied by the Seventh Westphalian Corps. It was made an exceedingly strong advance position by the Germans.

The southern or La Bassée end of the line had also been attacked on the 28th and 29th, and the 2nd Manchesters driven from their trenches, which they instantly regained, killing seventy of the enemy and taking a number of prisoners. It was in this action that Lieutenant Leach and Sergeant Hogan earned the V.C., capturing a trench at the head of ten volunteers and disposing of some fifty Germans. Morland's 5th Division had several other skirmishes during these days, in which the Duke of Cornwall's, Manchesters, and 1st Devons, who had taken the place of the Suffolks in the 14th Brigade, were chiefly engaged. The Devons had come late, but they had been constantly engaged and their losses were already as great as the others. For sixteen days they had held on with desperate resolution, their Colonel Gloster and a considerable proportion of the officers and men being hit. When they were at last relieved they received the applause of the Army. On the whole, the general line was held, though the price was often severe. At this period General Wing took command of the 3rd Division instead of General Mackenzie—invalided home—the third divisional change within a fortnight.

The arduous month of October was now drawing to a close, and so it was hoped were the labours of the weary Second Corps. Already, on the top of their previous casualties, they had lost 360 officers and 8200 men since on October 12 they had crossed the La Bassée Canal. The spirit of the men was unimpaired for the most part—indeed, it seemed often to rise with the emergency—but the thinning of the ranks, the incessant labour, and the want of sleep had produced extreme physical exhaustion. Upon October 29 it was determined to take them out of the front line and give them the rest which they so badly needed. With this end in view, Sir James Willcocks' Indian Corps was moved to the front, and it was gradually substituted for the attenuated battalions of the Second Corps in the first row of trenches. The greater part of the corps was drawn out of the line, leaving two brigades and most of the artillery behind to support the Indians. That the latter would have some hard work was speedily apparent, as upon this very day the 8th Gurkhas were driven out of their trenches. With the support of a British battalion, however, and of Vaughan's Indian Rifles they were soon recovered, though Colonel Venner of the latter corps fell in the attack. This warfare of unseen enemies and enormous explosions was new to the gallant Indians, but they soon accommodated themselves to

it, and moderated the imprudent gallantry which exposed them at first to unnecessary loss.

Here, at the end of October, we may leave the Second Corps. It was speedily apparent that their services were too essential to be spared, and that their rest would be a very nominal one. The Third Corps will be treated presently. They did admirably all that came to them to do, but they were so placed that both flanks were covered by British troops, and they were less exposed to pressure than the others. The month closed with this corps and the Indians holding a line which extended north and south for about twenty miles from Givenchy and Festubert in the south to Warneton in the north. We will return to the operations in this region, but must turn back a fortnight or so in order to follow the very critical and important events which had been proceeding in the north. Before doing so it would be well to see what had befallen the cavalry, which, when last mentioned, had, on October 11, cleared the woods in front of the Second Corps and connected it up with the right wing of the Third Corps. This was carried out by Gough's 2nd Cavalry Division, which was joined next day by De Lisle's 1st Division, the whole under General Allenby. This considerable force moved north on October 12 and 13, pushing back a light fringe of the enemy and having one brisk skirmish at Mont des Cats, a small hill, crowned by a monastery, where the body of a Prince of Hesse was picked up after the action. Still fighting its way, the cavalry moved north to Berthen and then turned eastwards towards the Lys to explore the strength of the enemy and the passages of the river in that direction. Late at night upon the 14th General De Lisle, scouting northwards upon a motor-car, met Prince Alexander of Teck coming southwards, the first contact with the isolated 7th Division.

On the night of the 16th an attempt was made upon Warneton, where the Germans had a bridge over the Lys, but the village was too strongly held. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade was engaged in the enterprise, and the 16th Lancers was the particular regiment upon whom it fell. The main street of the village was traversed by a barricade and the houses loop-holed. The Germans were driven by the dismounted troopers, led by Major Campbell, from the first barricade, but took refuge behind a second one, where they were strongly reinforced. The village had been set on fire, and the fighting went on by the glare of the flames. When the order for retirement was at last given it was found that several wounded Lancers had been left close to the German barricade. The fire having died down, three of the Lancers—Sergeant Glasgow, Corporal Boyton, and Corporal Chapman— stole down the dark side of the street in their stockinged feet and carried some of their comrades off under the very noses of the Germans. Many, however, had to be left behind. It is impossible for cavalry to be pushful and efficient without taking constant risks which must occasionally materialise. The general effect of the cavalry operations was to reconnoitre thoroughly all the west

side of the river and to show that the enemy were in firm possession of the eastern bank.

From this time onwards until the end of the month the cavalry were engaged in carrying on the north and south line of defensive trenches, which, beginning with the right of the Second Corps (now replaced by Indians) at Givenchy, was prolonged by the Third Corps as far as Frelingham. There the cavalry took it up and carried it through Comines to Wervicq, following the bend of the river. These lines were at once strongly attacked, but the dismounted troopers held their positions. On October 22 the 12th Lancers were heavily assaulted, but with the aid of an enfilading fire from the 5th Lancers drove off the enemy. That evening saw four more attacks, all of them repulsed, but so serious that Indian troops were brought up to support the cavalry. Every day brought its attack until they culminated in the great and critical fight from October 30 to November 2, which will be described later. The line was held, though with some loss of ground and occasional setbacks, until November 2, when considerable French reinforcements arrived upon the scene. It is a fact that for all these weeks the position which was held in the face of incessant attack by two weak cavalry divisions should have been, and eventually was, held by two army corps.

It is necessary now to briefly sketch the movements of the Third Corps (Pulteney's). Its presence upon the left flank of the Second Corps, and the fact that it held every attack that came against it, made it a vital factor in the operations. It is true that, having staunch British forces upon each flank, its position was always less precarious than either of the two corps which held the southern and northern extremities of the line, for without any disparagement to our Allies, who have shown themselves to be the bravest of the brave, it is evident that we can depend more upon troops who are under the same command, and whose movements can be certainly co-ordinated. At the same time, if the Third Corps had less to do, it can at least say that whatever did come to it was excellently well done, and that it preserved its line throughout. Its units were extended over some twelve miles of country, and it was partly astride of the River Lys, so that here as elsewhere there was constant demand upon the vigilance and staunchness of officers and men. On October 20 a very severe attack fell upon the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, who held the most advanced trenches of Congreve's 18th Brigade. They were nearly overwhelmed by the violence of the German artillery fire, and were enfiladed on each side by infantry and machine-guns. The 2nd Durhams came up in reinforcement, but the Foresters had already sustained grievous losses in casualties and prisoners, the battalion being reduced from 900 to 250 in a single day. The Durhams also lost heavily. On the same day, the 20th, the 2nd Leinsters, of the 17th Brigade, were also driven from their trenches and suffered severely.

On October 21 the Germans crossed the River Lys in considerable

force, and on the morning of the 22nd they succeeded in occupying the village of Le Gheir upon the western side, thus threatening to outflank the positions of the 2nd Cavalry Division to the north. In their advance in the early morning of the 22nd they stormed the trenches held by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, this unit enduring considerable losses. The trenches on the right were held by the 1st Royal Lancasters and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers. These two battalions were at once ordered by General Anley, of the 12th Brigade, to initiate a counter-attack under the lead of Colonel Butler. Anley himself, who is a hard-bitten soldier of much Egyptian fighting, moved forward his men, while General Hunter-Weston, the indefatigable blower-up of railway lines in South Africa, supported the counter-attack with the Somerset Light Infantry and the 1st East Lancashires. The latter battalion, under Colonel Lawrence, passed through a wood and reached such a position that they were able to enfilade the Germans in the open, causing them very heavy losses. The action was a brilliant success. The positions lost were reoccupied and the enemy severely punished, over a thousand Germans being killed or wounded, while 300 were taken prisoners. These belonged to the 104th and 179th Saxon regiments.

On October 25 the attacks became most severe upon the line of Williams' 16th Brigade, and on that night the trenches of the 1st Leicesters were raked by so heavy a gunfire that they were found to be untenable, the battalion losing 350 men. The line both of the 16th and of the 18th Brigades was drawn back for some little distance. There was a lull after this, broken upon the 29th, when Gordon's 19th Brigade was attacked with great violence by six fresh battalions—heavy odds against the four weak battalions which composed the British Brigade. The 1st Middlesex was driven from part of its trenches, but came back with a rush, helped by their comrades of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The Germans were thrown out of the captured trenches, 40 were made prisoners, and 200 were slain. This attack was made by the 223rd and 224th Regiments of the XXIV. German Reserve Corps. It was not repeated.

On the 30th another sharp action occurred near St. Yves, when Hunter-Weston's 11th Brigade was momentarily pierced after dusk by a German rush, which broke through a gap in the Hampshires. The Somerset Light Infantry, under Major Prowse, came back upon them and the trenches were regained. In all such actions it is to be remembered that where a mass of men can suddenly be directed against scattered trenches which will only hold a few, it is no difficult matter to carry them, but at once the conditions reverse themselves and the defenders mass their supports, who can usually turn the intruders out once more.

This brings the general record of the doings of the Third Corps down to the end of October, the date on which we cease the account of the operations at the southern end of the British line. We turn from this

diffuse and difficult story, with its ever-varying positions and units, to the great epic of the north, which will be inseparably united for ever with the name of Ypres. It marked the termination of the race for the sea, where each side had the same design of outflanking and rolling up the other, but where, as General Gallieni has remarked, the Germans were always at least one day and one army corps ahead of the Allies.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES [1]

The Actions of Langemarck and Gheluvelt

The 7th Division—Its peculiar excellence—Its difficult position—A deadly ordeal—Desperate attacks on 7th Division—Destruction of 2nd Wilts—Hard fight of 20th Brigade—Arrival of First Corps—Advance of Haig's Corps—Fight of Pilken Inn—Bravery of enemy—Advance of 2nd Division—Fight of Kruiseik cross-roads—Fight of Zandvoorde—Fight of Gheluvelt—Advance of Worcesters—German recoil—General result—A great crisis.

IT has already been seen that the 7th Division (Capper's), being the first half of Rawlinson's Fourth Army Corps, had retired south and west after the unsuccessful attempt to relieve Antwerp. It was made up as follows :

DIVISION VII.—General CAPPER.

20th Infantry Brigade—General Ruggles-Brise.
1st Grenadier Guards.
2nd Scots Guards.
2nd Border Regiment.
2nd Gordon Highlanders.

21st Infantry Brigade—General Watts.
2nd Bedfords.
2nd Yorks.
2nd Wilts.
2nd Scots Fusiliers.

22nd Infantry Brigade—General Lawford.
1st South Staffords.
2nd Warwicks.
2nd Queen's West Surrey.
1st Welsh Fusiliers.

Artillery.
22nd Brigade R.F.A., 104, 105, 106.
35th Brigade R.F.A., 12, 35, 58.
3rd R.G.A.
111th R.G.A.
112th R.G.A.
14th Brigade R.H.A., F. T.

Engineers.
54, 55, F. Co.
7 Signal Co.
Divisional Cavalry.
Northumberland Yeomanry.

[1] Map, p. 132, supplemented by map facing p. 1, illustrates the fighting round Ypres.

It is not too much to say that in an army where every division had done so well no single one was composed of such fine material as the 7th save the 29th in the East. The reason was that the battalions composing it had all been drawn from foreign garrison duty, and consisted largely of soldiers of from three to seven years' standing, with a minimum of reservists. In less than a month from the day when this grand division of 18,000 men went into action its infantry had been nearly annihilated, but the details of its glorious destruction furnish one more vivid page of British military achievement. The Army lost a noble division and gained a glorious record.

The 3rd Cavalry Division under General Byng was attached to the 7th Division, and joined up with it at Roulers upon October 13. It consisted of—

6th Cavalry Brigade—General Makings.

3rd Dragoon Guards. 1st Royals.
10th Hussars.

7th Cavalry Brigade—General Kavanagh.

1st Life Guards. R.H.A., C. K.
2nd Life Guards. 3rd Field Squadron R.E.
1st Horse Guards.

The First Army Corps not having yet come up from the Aisne, these troops were used to cover the British position from the north, the infantry lying from Zandvoorde through Gheluvelt to Zonnebeke, and the cavalry on their left from Zonnebeke to Langemarck from October 16 onwards. It was decided by Sir John French that it was necessary to get possession of the town of Menin, some distance to the east of the general British line, but very important because the chief bridge, by means of which the Germans were receiving their ever-growing reinforcements, was there. The 7th Division was ordered accordingly to advance upon this town, its left flank being covered by the 3rd Cavalry Division.

The position was a dangerous one. It has already been stated that the pause on the Aisne may not have been unwelcome to the Germans, as they were preparing reserve formations which might be suddenly thrown against some chosen spot in the Allied line. They had the equipment and arms for at least another 250,000 men, and that number of drilled men were immediately available, some being Landwehr who had passed through the ranks, and others young formations which had been preparing when war broke out. Together they formed no less than four new army corps, available for the extreme western front, more numerous than the whole British and Belgian armies combined. This considerable force, secretly assembled and moving rapidly across Belgium, was now striking the north of the Allied line, debouching not only over the river at Menin, but also through Courtrai, Iseghem, and Roulers. It consisted of the 22nd, 23rd, 26th, and 27th reserve corps. Of these the 22nd helped the 3rd reserve corps against the Belgians on the line of the Yser, but the other corps were all available for an attack

upon the flank of that British line which was faced by formidable opponents—a line which extended over thirty miles and had already been forced into a defensive attitude. That was the situation when the 7th Division faced round near Ypres. Sir John French was doing all that he could to support it, and Sir Douglas Haig was speeding up his army corps from the Aisne to take his place to the north of Ypres, but there were some days during which Rawlinson's men were in the face of a force six times larger than themselves.

On October 16 and 17 the division had advanced from Ypres and occupied the line already mentioned, the right centre of which rested about the ninth kilometre on the Ypres–Menin road, the order of the brigades from the north being 22nd, 21st, and 20th. On October 18 the division wheeled its left forward. As the infantry advanced, the covering cavalry soon became aware of grave menace from Roulers and Courtrai in the north. A large German force was evidently striking down on to the left flank of the advance. The division was engaged all along the line, for the 20th Brigade upon the right had a brisk skirmish, while the 21st Brigade in the centre was also under fire, which came especially heavily upon the 2nd Bedfords, who had numerous casualties. About ten o'clock on the morning of the 19th the pressure from the north increased, and the 7th Cavalry Brigade was driven in, though it held its own with great resolution for some time, helped by the fine work of K Battery R.H.A. The 6th Cavalry Brigade was held up in front, while the danger on the flank grew more apparent as the hours passed. In these circumstances General Rawlinson, fortified in his opinion by the precise reports of his airmen as to the strength of the enemy upon his left, came to the conclusion that a further advance would place him in a difficult position. He therefore dropped back to his original line. There can be little doubt that, if he had persevered, his force would have been in extreme danger. As it was, before he could get it back the 1st Welsh Fusiliers were hard hit, this famous regiment losing a major, 5 captains, 3 lieutenants, and about 200 men. The order to retire had failed to reach it, and but for the able handling of Colonel Cadogan it might well have been destroyed.

On October 20, the situation being still obscure, the 20th Brigade carried out a reconnaissance towards Menin. The 2nd Wilts and 2nd Scots Fusiliers, of the 21st Brigade, covered their left flank. The enemy, however, made a vigorous attack upon the 22nd Brigade to the north, especially upon the Welsh Fusiliers, so the reconnaissance had to fall back again, the 1st Grenadier Guards sustaining some losses. The two covering battalions were also hard pressed, especially the Wiltshires, who were again attacked during the night, but repulsed their assailants.

From this time onwards the 7th Division was to feel ever more and more the increasing pressure as the German army corps from day to day brought their weight to bear upon a thin extended line of positions held by a single division. It will be shown that they were speedily reinforced

by the First Corps, but even after its advent the Germans were still able to greatly outnumber the British force. The story from this time onwards is one of incessant and desperate attacks by day and often by night. At first the division was holding the position alone, with the help of their attendant cavalry, and their instructions were to hold on to the last man until help could reach them. In the case of some units these instructions were literally fulfilled. One great advantage lay with the British. They were first-class trained soldiers, the flower of the Army, while their opponents, however numerous, were of the newly raised reserve corps, which showed no lack of bravery, but contained a large proportion of youths and elderly men in the ranks. But though the ascendancy of the British infantry was so great that they could afford to disregard the inequality of numbers, it was very different with the artillery. The German gunners were as good as ever, and their guns as powerful as they were numerous. The British had no howitzer batteries at all with this division, while the Germans had many. It was the batteries which caused the terrific losses. It may be that the 7th Division, having had no previous experience in the campaign, had sited their trenches with less cunning than would have been shown by troops who had already faced the problem of how best to avoid high explosives. Either by sight or by aeroplane report the Germans got the absolute range of some portions of the British position, pitching their heavy shells exactly into the trenches, and either blowing the inmates to pieces or else burying them alive, so that in a little time the straight line of the trench was entirely lost, and became a series of ragged pits and mounds. The head-cover for shrapnel was useless before such missiles, and there was nothing for it but either to evacuate the line or to hang on and suffer. The 7th Division hung on and suffered, but no soldiers can ever have been exposed to a more deadly ordeal. When they were at last relieved by the arrival of reinforcements and the consequent contraction of the line, they were at the last pitch of exhaustion, indomitable in spirit, but so reduced by their losses and by the terrific nervous strain that they could hardly have held out much longer. From October 21 Haig's Corps was on the left, and those operations which will shortly be described covered the left wing of the 7th Division, and took over a portion of that huge German attack which would undoubtedly have overwhelmed the smaller unit had it not been for this addition of strength. It is necessary to get a true view of the operations, for it is safe to say that they are destined for immortality, and will be recounted so long as British history is handed down from one generation to another.

On the 21st the enemy got a clear conception of the salient in front of the 7th Division, and opened a vigorous attack, which lasted all day and assumed several different phases at different points. The feature of the morning of the 21st was the severe and, indeed, disastrous artillery fire upon Lawford's 22nd Brigade. The exact range of the British position

seems to have been discovered with deadly results. Men, trenches, and machine-guns were all blown to pieces together. The 2nd Warwicks and the 1st Welsh Fusiliers were the two battalions upon which the storm beat hardest, and each of them had some hundreds of casualties. In three days the Welsh Fusiliers, who were on the exposed left flank, lost three-quarters of their effectives, including twenty-three of their officers, and yet preserved their military spirit. It became clearer as experience accumulated that the best trenches, if they are once fairly located, can be made untenable or turned into the graves of their occupants by the use of high explosives. The German fire was so severe that it was reckoned that one hundred and twenty shells an hour into or round a trench was a not uncommon rate of fall. The 2nd Queen's also lost seven officers and many men in this day's fighting. In spite of the heavy losses from gun-fire the German infantry could make no progress, being held up by a flanking fire of the South Staffords.

In the afternoon of October 21 a strong attack was made upon the 21st Brigade in the centre of the line. The brigade was holding a front of two and a half miles, and, although the attack was generally beaten back, a certain number of stormers got through between the trenches and into the woods beyond. Here they lurked for a couple of days, during which time the 2nd Yorkshire Regiment, behind whose line they were lying, were often compelled to have each alternate man facing a different way to keep down the fire. The battalion sent itself reinforcements by hurrying its right company over to help to clear its left. This movement was successful, but was attended with heavy losses, including several officers. Some of the Royal Scots Fusiliers had been forced out of their trenches on the right, and made, under Major Ian Forbes, a gallant attempt to re-establish them, in which Captain Fairlie and many men were lost. The Wiltshires also endured a very severe attack, which they repulsed with great loss to the enemy. On this same eventful day, the 21st, the 2nd Cavalry Division had been pushed back at Holbeke, and the Germans got round the right flank of the hard-pressed infantry. It was then that General Rawlinson brought his 3rd Cavalry Division round and established it upon his right instead of his left flank. From this time until October 30 this cavalry division was holding Zandvoorde Ridge, sharing day by day in all the perils and the glories of their comrades of the 7th Division. There was no more dangerous point than that which was held by the cavalry, and their losses, especially those of the 10th Hussars, were in proportion to the danger. In the course of a few days the Hussars lost Colonel Barnes, Majors Mitford and Crichton and many officers and men.

On October 22 the 2nd Division of Haig's First Corps, which had been fully occupied to the north with operations which will be presently described, moved down to cover the ground vacated by the 3rd Cavalry Division and to relieve the pressure upon the infantry of the 7th Division. The 4th Guards Brigade took its position upon their immediate left. It

was time. For four days they had covered the enormous front of eight miles against at least four times their own number, with more than six times their weight of artillery. It was touch and go. They were nearly submerged. It was indeed a vision of joy when the worn and desperate men, looking over their shoulders down the Ypres–Menin road, saw the head of a British column coming swiftly to the rescue. It was the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Worcesters, dispatched from the 5th Brigade, and never was reinforcement more needed.

On this date (October 22) the 22nd Infantry Brigade of the 7th Division had fallen back to the railway crossings near Zonnebeke. Thus the salient which the Germans had been attacking was straightened out. Unhappily, the change caused another smaller salient farther south, at the point which was held by the 2nd Wiltshires. On the 22nd and 23rd there was a tremendous shelling of this sector, which was followed on the 24th by an infantry advance, in which the Wiltshires, who had been previously much reduced, were utterly overwhelmed and practically destroyed. The disastrous attack broke upon the British line just after daybreak. The enemy pushed through behind each flank of the Wiltshires, elbowing off the Scots Fusiliers on one side and the Scots Guards on the other. The Germans got in force into the Polygon Woods behind. There were no reserves available save the Northumberland Hussars, a corps which shares with the Oxford Hussars the honour of being the first British territorial corps to fight for its country. With the aid of some divisional cyclists, this handful of men held back the Germans until the 2nd Warwicks from the north were brought to stem the advance. The Warwicks charged through the wood, their gallant Colonel Loring riding his horse beside them without boot or legging, having been wounded some days before. " Where my men go I go as well," was his answer to medical remonstrance. He was killed by a bullet, but he died at a moment of victory, for his last earthly vision was that of his infantry driving the last Germans out of the wood. Besides their colonel, the battalion lost many officers and men in this fine advance, which was most vigorously supported by the 2nd Worcesters, the only reinforcement within reach. The Worcesters lost 6 officers and 160 men, but did much execution and took a number of prisoners.

At this time the 20th Brigade, being the extreme right of the 7th Division, held an extended line from Kruiseik cross-roads, about a mile east of Gheluvelt village, to near Zandvoorde, with a salient at the village of Kruiseik. On the night of the 25th the Germans planned a furious attack upon the whole salient. The assailants, who were mostly Saxons, broke through the 2nd Scots Guards just north of Kruiseik and got behind the line, which was pushed back for some distance, though Captain Paynter, with the right-hand company, held his position. A counter-attack by the Guards retook the line, together with 200 prisoners including 7 officers. On the morning of the 26th the Germans were back on them, however, and began by blowing in the trenches of the

Border Regiment south of Kruiseik. The German guns had found the exact range of the trenches, and the defenders had the same terrible and intolerable experience which had befallen some of their comrades two days before. It was simply impossible to stand up against the incessant shower of shattering shells. So great was the concussion and the nervous strain that many of the men exposed to it got completely dazed or even became delirious. Grenadiers, Scots Guards, and South Staffords, of the 20th Brigade, held the line until the front trenches were carried by the Germans and many of the occupants made prisoners. It was pitch dark, and it was impossible to tell friend from foe. Major Fraser of the Scots Guards, going forward to reconnoitre, was shot dead and his party destroyed. A house in a field taken by the Guards yielded no fewer than 200 prisoners, but in the confused fighting in the darkness the losses were greater than the gains. It was in this night-fighting or on the day that followed it that Lord Dalrymple, Colonel Bolton, and other officers, with some hundreds of men, fell into the hands of the enemy after a most heroic resistance to overpowering numbers and to a weight of artillery which was crushing in its effect. The King's Company of the 1st Grenadiers was isolated and in great danger, but managed to link up with the British line. The 1st South Staffords also lost some hundreds of men, and was only saved by fine handling on the part of Colonel Ovens. Kruiseik was abandoned, and a new line taken up some way farther back. It was a critical night, during which the energy and firmness of General Capper were splendidly employed in reforming and stiffening his sorely tried division. On the 27th the 20th Brigade, which had been so heavily hit the day before, was drawn out of the line for a rest, and the two other brigades closed up to cover a shorter line. The work of the 20th at Kruiseik had been magnificent, but their losses were appalling. Here, for the instant, we shall leave the 7th Division, though their ordeal was by no means done, and we shall turn to those other forces which had been forming in the northern or Ypres section of the long battle line.

The reader will remember, if he casts his mind back, that the whole British line, as it extended from the south about October 18, consisted of the Second Corps and the advance guard of the Indians near La Bassée; then, in succession, the Third Corps in the Armentières district, the 1st Cavalry and 2nd Cavalry near Messines and Wytschaete, the 7th Division near Gheluvelt, and finally the 3rd Cavalry on their left, joining up with the French, who carried the line to where the Belgians were reforming on the Yser. The First Corps had detrained from the Aisne, and was concentrated between St. Omer and Hazebrouck on October 18 and 19. They represented a last British reserve of about thirty-five thousand men to set against the large new armies who were advancing from the north. The urgent question to be decided was where they should be placed, since there were so many points which needed reinforcement.

Sir John French has explained in his dispatch the reasons which swayed him in deciding this question. " I knew," he said, " that the enemy were by this time in greatly superior strength upon the Lys and that the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry and the 7th Division were holding a much wider front than their strength and numbers warranted. Taking these facts alone into consideration, it would have appeared wise to throw the First Corps in to strengthen the line, but this would have left the country north and east of Ypres and the Ypres Canal open to a wide turning movement by the Third Reserve Corps and at least one Landwehr Division which I knew to be operating in that region. I was also aware that the enemy was bringing large reinforcements up from the east, which could only be opposed for several days by two or three French cavalry divisions, some French Territorials, and the Belgian Army."

He proceeds to state his opinion that the Belgian Army was in no condition to withstand unsupported such an attack, and that if it were allowed to sweep past it was very likely to wash away all opposition before it, and get into the Channel ports in the rear. With this consideration in his mind, Sir John French took the bold and dangerous, but absolutely necessary, step of leaving the long, thin, thirty-mile line to do the best it could, and prolonging it by another ten or twelve miles by forming up the First Corps on the same alignment, so as to present as long a British breakwater as possible to the oncoming flood. There was nothing else to be done, and the stronger the flood the more need there was to do it, but it is safe to say that seldom in history has so frail a barrier stood in the direct track of so terrible a storm.

In accordance with the resolution, Haig's First Corps moved, on October 20, through Poperinghe and Ypres and took their place upon the north or left side of the 7th Division. On their own left in this position was the French cavalry corps of General de Mitry, while the 3rd Division of British cavalry was on their right. As the movement commenced Sir John French had a personal interview with General Haig, in which he held out hopes that the greater part of the new German levies had been deflected to hold our southern advance, and that he would only find the Third Reserve Corps and some Landwehr in front of him to the north of Ypres. His object was to advance upon the line of Bruges and drive the enemy towards Ghent. Meanwhile the gallant little Belgian army, which was proving itself a glutton at fighting, was entrenched along the line of the Ypres Canal and the Yser River, where they held their own manfully in spite of all that they had endured, driving back an attack of the Third German Reserve Corps.

The first large landmark in the direction of Bruges was Thorout, and towards this the First Corps, with the 3rd Cavalry Division upon its right, took its first steps, unaware that it was butting forward against an approaching army of at least double its own strength. It was very quickly made to realise its position, however, and any dreams of a

victorious entry into Bruges were speedily dispelled. Only too fortunate would it be if it could hold its own line without retreat and disaster. Upon the 21st Haig's men attacked Poelcappelle and Passchendaele, French cavalry and Territorials (the 87th and 89th Divisions) under General Bidon advancing on their left, while the 7th Division, as already described, kept pace upon its right. There was strong opposition from the first, but the corps advanced in spite of it until the pressure from the north became too severe for the French, whose flank was exposed to the full force of it.

The British attack upon the morning in question was planned as follows. The 2nd Division was to advance upon Passchendaele. The 1st had orders to take Poelcappelle. The latter movement was headed by the 3rd Brigade, who were directed by General Landon to go forward about nine o'clock, the 1st Queen's having the station for their objective while the 1st South Wales Borderers attacked the village. The 1st Gloucesters were in reserve. The enemy met the attack with shell-fire, which it was difficult to locate, as the country was flat and enclosed. The progress of the movement, however, was steady though slow. About ten o'clock there were signs of a considerable hostile infantry advance from the north. The attack, however, made good progress up to midday, when there was a general retirement of the French Territorials, followed later by the French cavalry upon the British left. They moved back towards Bixschote. The Gloucester Regiment, who had been thrown out to reinforce that flank, were also driven back, and were in turn reinforced by the Coldstream Guards. This battalion executed a bayonet charge in clearing the small village of Koekuit, but later on had to retire, finding their flank exposed. It should be mentioned that one French corps, the 7th Cavalry Division, kept its position on the British left, and it is also only fair to point out that as the German advance was mainly from the north, it was on the left flank, covered by the French that it would fall. The 1st Camerons were now dispatched to the flank to stiffen the French resistance, taking up their position near the inn which is midway upon the road between Steenstraate and Langemarck, north of the village of Pilken—an inn with which they were destined to have stirring associations. With the support of the 46th Battery, the Highlanders held up a German brigade which was thrusting through behind the main line ; but farther west, in the Steenstraate direction, the defence against a northern advance was miserably thin, consisting only of one company of the Sussex Regiment and the 116th Battery. In the circumstances the more success Haig's troops attained in front, and the more they advanced, the more dangerous was their position upon the flank.

About 2.30 the German advance from the north became more formidable, and the 1st South Welsh Borderers, between Langemarck and Poelcappelle, were heavily counter-attacked and suffered considerable loss, between two and three hundred in all. Two companies of the 2nd

Welsh were pushed up to their help. It was clear, however, that the advance could not be continued. The 1st Brigade was therefore ordered to hold the line between Steenstraate and Langemarck, with their centre at the inn north of Pilken, so as to face the German advance from the north. Then from Langemarck the British line turned southwards, being carried on for two miles by the 3rd Brigade to hold the enemy who were coming from the east. The 2nd Brigade was in reserve at Boesinghe. During this long and difficult day the 2nd Division, operating on the right of the 1st, was not subjected to the same anxiety about its flank. It advanced upon its objective in the face of severe opposition, ending more than once in a brief bayonet encounter. Several counter-attacks were made by the Germans, but they were all beaten back with loss. About two o'clock, however, the 2nd Division learned of the flank pressure which was holding up the 1st Division, and also of the extreme need for help experienced by the 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division on their right. In these circumstances it was necessary to abandon the idea of further advance and to send south those reinforcements, the opportune arrival of which has been already described.

As a net result of the two days' operations General Haig was not able to attain the line of Passchendaele–Poelcappelle, as originally planned, but he gained sufficient ground to establish himself from Langemarck to Zonnebeke, more than halfway to his objective. The whole character of the operations during these days was more of the familiar British type, being conducted upon the surface of the earth rather than under it, and cavalry making its last appearance for many a long day. Many fine deeds of valour were done. In one of these Captain Rising, of the Gloucester Regiment, with ninety men, defended some point with such heroic tenacity that when, some days afterwards, the Brigadier attempted to get the names of the survivors for commendation not one could be found. Quaintly valorous also is the picture of Major Powell, of the North Lancashires, leading his wing with a badly sprained ankle, and using a cottage chair for a crutch, upon which he sat down between rushes. It is hopeless, however, and even invidious to pick instances where the same spirit animated all. The result was definite. It had been clearly shown that the enemy were in considerably greater strength than had been imagined, and instead of a rearguard action from weak forces the British found themselves in the presence of a strong German advance. All day large forces of the enemy were advancing from Roulers and were impinging upon different points of the Franco-British line. These troops were composed of partially-trained men, volunteers and reservists, but they attacked with the utmost determination, and endured heavy losses with great bravery. It is a remarkable proof of the elaborate preparations for war made by Germany that, behind all their original gigantic array, they still had ready within the country sufficient arms and uniforms to fit out these new army corps. He who plans finds it easy to prepare, and whoever will compare this profusion of munitions in

Germany with the absolute lack of them in the Allied countries will have no further doubt as to which Government conspired against the peace of the world.

On October 21, Sir John French began to feel that there were new factors in his front. In the evening, at a meeting with Haig and Rawlinson, he discussed the unexpected strength of the German reinforcements and admitted that the scheme of an advance upon Bruges must become impossible in the face of such numbers. Intelligence reports indicated that there was already a German corps in front of each British division. General Joffre had promised considerable French reinforcements on October 24, and all that could be done was for the British troops to hold their ground to the last man and to resist every pressure until the equality of the forces could be restored. Could they hold the line till then? That was the all-important question.

October 22 was the first day of that long ordeal of incessant attacks which the First Corps was called upon to endure, until by constant attrition it had become almost as worn as the 7th Division to the south. On this day the German attack, which had not yet attained the full volume of later days, spent itself here and there along the extended lines. Only at one point did the enemy have some success, which, however, was the prelude to disaster.

The line from Steenstraate to Langemarck, defending the British left flank, was held by the 1st Brigade, the Scots Guards upon the extreme left, then the Cameron Highlanders, and the Black Watch in reserve. In the middle of the line north of Pilken was a solitary inn, already mentioned. About 3 p.m. this position was driven in and captured by a sudden and determined advance of the enemy. The German charge was a fine feat of arms, for it was carried out largely by *Einjahrige*, of the 23rd Reserve Corps, who may be roughly compared to the Officers' Training Corps of our British system. These high-spirited lads advanced singing patriotic songs, and succeeded in carrying the trenches in the face of soldiers who are second to none in the British Army—soldiers, too, who had seen much service, while the German cadets were new to the work. The performance was much appreciated by British officers and men.

The Black Watch endeavoured without success to restore the line, and the 1st Northamptons were called upon from divisional reserve, while from all parts troops converged towards the gap. On the arrival of the Northamptons they pushed up towards the interval which now existed between the Scots Guards and the remains of the Camerons, but found the gap broader than had been thought, and strongly occupied. It was then evening, and it was thought best to delay the counter-attack until morning and so have time to bring up reinforcements. The 1st North Lancashires and the 2nd South Staffords were accordingly ordered up, together with the 1st Queen's Surrey and the 2nd Rifles, the whole operation being under the immediate command of General Bulfin.

The advance began at six in the morning, over very difficult ground which had been barb-wired during the night. The progress was slow but steady, and at eleven o'clock an assault upon the inn was ordered. The position was critical, since the enemy was now firmly lodged in the very centre of the flank of the British position, and was able to enfilade all the trenches of the 1st Division. The Queen's Surrey, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, and the 1st North Lancashires charged home with splendid energy, capturing the trenches round the inn, besides releasing sixty Camerons and taking over five hundred prisoners. The trenches were carried by the North Lancashires, led by Major Carter. It was the second time within six weeks that this battalion had made a decisive bayonet charge. The price paid was six officers and 150 men. The inn itself was rushed by Captain Creek's company of the Queen's, while Major Watson, of the same regiment, organised the final advance. The fighting at this point was not finished for the day. In the late evening the enemy, with fine tenacity of purpose, attacked the inn once more and drove the Queen's out of a salient. The line was then straightened on each side of the inn and remained firm. Both the attack on the inn and the defence of the line were splendidly supported by the field artillery and the 26th Heavy Battery.

Whilst the 1st Brigade had in this fashion got into and out of a dangerous position, there had been a severe attack upon two battalions of Landon's 3rd Brigade stationed at Langemarck. The defending units were the 2nd Welsh Regiment and the 1st Gloucesters. Aided by a strong artillery backing, they beat off these attacks and inflicted a very heavy loss upon the enemy. The Allied line to the north was solid and unbroken.

The British losses during these operations of the First Corps amounted to 1500 men, while those of the Germans were exceedingly heavy. These inexperienced troops advanced with an indiscriminating enthusiasm which exposed them to severe retaliation. It is doubtful if at any time in the campaign the British fire found so easy a mark. One thousand five hundred dead were counted in the vicinity of Langemarck. Correspondence afterwards captured showed that the Twenty-third Reserve Corps sustained such losses that for a time at least it was out of action. The Twenty-seventh Reserve Corps was also hard hit. A letter from a soldier in the 246th Regiment mentions that only eighty men were left of his battalion after the action of the 24th.

On October 24 and 25 the arrival of the French 17th Division allowed the British to shorten up their defensive line, which had been unduly extended. Before their arrival the 2nd Division was sharply attacked, but the Oxfords and Worcestershires blew back the assailants. 500 prisoners were taken and the French reported 740 dead Germans in front of the Oxfordshire trenches.

There was a movement forward of the 2nd Division from October 24 to 26, when the Guards' 4th Brigade were on the right, the 6th

Brigade on the left, with the French to the left of them. The 5th Brigade were in reserve. Two small villages were taken by storm, the Germans being driven out of loopholed houses, though at a considerable cost of officers and men. It was in this operation that Colonel Bannatyne, the gallant leader of the 1st King's Liverpool, was killed. Ten other officers and several hundred men of this corps were killed or wounded. The 1st Berkshires, fighting to the left of the King's, shared in its losses and in its success. The Irish Guards were held up before Reutel and separated from the rest of the force, but managed to extricate themselves after some anxious hours.

On October 27, Sir John French came in person to Hooge, at the rear of the fighting line, and inquired into the state of the hard-pressed troops. He found the 7th to be now such a skeleton division that it was thought best to join it with Haig's First Corps, forming one single command.

The attendant 3rd Cavalry Division was also attached to the First Corps. These readjustments took place on October 27. They were, of course, of a temporary character until the eagerly awaited 8th Division should arrive and so give General Rawlinson a complete Fourth Corps. At present there was a very immediate prospect that half of it might be annihilated before the second half appeared. The general arrangement of this section of the battlefield was now as depicted, the 7th Division being entirely south of the Ypres–Menin roadway.

This date, the 27th, was memorable only for an advance of the 6th Brigade. These continual advances against odds were wonderful examples of the aggressive spirit of the British soldiers. In this instance ground was gained, but at the cost of some casualties, especially to the 1st Royal Rifles, who lost Prince Maurice of Battenberg and a number of officers and men.

We have now an interlocked battle extending from La Bassée to the coast, in which Belgians, French, Indians and British are pushing hard to hold fast the door which the Germans are bent on forcing. The combat ebbs and flows, rising and falling, over a space of forty miles. It is really all one battle with one main purpose, but in order to bring some order out of chaos the British miltary authorities have divided it into six separate divisions. That which we have just described has been called the Battle of Langemarck, lasting roughly from October 18 to October 27. The fighting in the south which has been already described is the Battle of La Bassée. But now the great epic of the Ypres fighting was reaching its climax in the Battle of Gheluvelt, and the three days of supreme trial for the exhausted British Army was about to begin.

Early upon October 29, a very heavy attack developed upon the line of the Ypres–Menin road. There is a village named Gheluvelt, which is roughly halfway upon this tragic highway. It lay now immediately behind the centre of the British line. About half a mile in front of it the position ran through the important cross-roads which lead to the village

of Kruiseik, still in the British possession. The line through the Kruiseik cross-roads was that which was furiously assailed upon this morning, and the attack marked the beginning of a great movement to drive in the front continuing throughout the 30th and culminating in the terrible ordeal of the 31st, the crisis of the Ypres battle and possibly of the Western campaign.

FitzClarence's 1st Brigade lay to the north of the road, and the battered, much-enduring 20th Brigade upon the south. They were destined together to give such an example of military tenacity during that day as has seldom been equalled and never exceeded, so that the fight for the Kruiseik cross-roads may well live in history amongst those actions, like Albuera and Inkermann, which have put the powers of British infantry to an extreme test. The line was held by about five thousand men, but no finer units were to be found in the whole Army. The attack was conducted by an army corps with the eyes of their Emperor and an overpowering artillery encouraging them from the rear. Many of the defending battalions, especially those of the 20th Brigade, had already been terribly wasted. It was a line of weary and desperate men who faced the German onslaught.

The attack began in the mists of the early morning. The opening was adverse to the British, for the enemy, pushing very boldly forward upon a narrow front and taking full advantage of the fog, broke a way down the Menin road and actually got past the defending line before the situation was understood. The result was that the two battalions which flanked the road, the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Grenadiers, were fired into from behind and endured terrible losses. Among the Grenadiers Colonel Earle, Majors Forrester and Stucley, Lord Richard Wellesley, and a number of other officers fell, while out of 650 privates only 150 were eventually left standing. The 2nd Gordons, upon the right of the Grenadiers, suffered nearly as heavily, while the 1st Coldstream, upon the left of the Black Watch, was perhaps the hardest hit of all, for at the end of that dreadful day it had not a single officer fit for duty. The right company of the 1st Scots Guards shared the fate of the Coldstream. The line was pushed back for a quarter of a mile and Kruiseik was evacuated, but the dead and wounded who remained in the trenches far exceeded in numbers those who were able to withdraw.

Two small bodies who were cut off by the German advance did not fall back with their comrades, and each of them made a splendid and successful resistance. The one near Kruiseik was a mixed party under Major Bottomley of the 2nd Queen's West Surrey. The other was C Company of the 2nd Gordons under Captain B. G. R. Gordon and Lieutenant Laurence Carr. These small islands of khaki, in the midst of a broad stream of grey, lay so tight and fired so straight that they inflicted very great damage upon the enemy, and were able to hold their own, in ever-diminishing numbers, until under the protection of darkness the survivors regained the British line.

Railways
Roads
Canals
1 MILE
Poelkappelle
Spriet
Goeberg
Passchendaele
Wallemolen
St. Gravenstafel
Nieuwmolen
Broodseynde
Zonnebeke
Oosthoek
Reidelbeek
Becelaere
Veldhoek
Gheluvelt
Kruyseik
Stroombeek
Hanebeek
Frezenberg
Verlorenhoek
Extermest
HILL 60
Klein Zillebeke
Hooge
Zillebeke
Langemarck
Kersselaere
St. Julien
Wieltje
St. Jean
Potijze
Kruipendaerde
Verbranden Molen
Bixschoote
Broenbeek
Pilkem
Steenstraet
Het Sas
YSER CANAL
Kaeye
YPRES CANAL
YPRES
Kruysstraetbeek
Lizerne
Zuydschoote
Woesten
Boesinghe
Elverdinghe
Brielen
Vlamertinghe
Ravinghelst R.
Dickebusch

In the meantime, a number of small dashing counter-attacks by the indomitable infantry was bringing the British line forward again. South of the road the Gordons, under Colonel Uniacke, dashed themselves again and again against the host which faced them, driving them back, and then in their turn recoiling before the ponderous advance of the army corps. They were maddened by the sound of the rolling fire ahead of them, which showed that their own C Company was dying hard. In one of these counter-attacks Captain Brooke brought every straggler into the fray, and died while trying to cut his way through to his comrades. To the north of the road Captain Stephen, with the remains of the 1st Scots Guards, threw themselves upon the German flank and staggered it by their fire. The Germans, who had almost reached Gheluvelt, were now worried in this way on either flank, while the 2nd Border battalion and the Welsh Borderers with the rallied remains of the broken battalions were still facing them in front. The enemy was held, was stricken front and flank with a murderous fire, and recoiled back down the Menin road. Imperial eyes and overmastering guns were equally powerless to drive them through that iron defence. Five thousand British soldiers had held up an army corps, but had left more than half their number upon the scene of victory.

The 2nd Division, to the north of the road in the direction of Reutel, had been ordered to counter-attack, and the other brigades of the 7th Division to the south did the same. While Haig had a man standing he was ready to hit back. Between these two flanking forces there was a movement in the centre to follow the Germans back and to recover some of the lost ground. Landon's 3rd Brigade, less the Gloucester Regiment, was pushed forward. These troops moved past Gheluvelt and advanced along the line of the road, the 1st Queen's, their right-hand unit, linking up by a happy chance with their own 2nd Battalion, who were now on the left of the 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division. Left of the Queen's were the 2nd Welsh to the immediate south of the main road, while to their left again lay the 1st South Wales Borderers, in front of the village of Gheluvelt. By evening these troops had recovered some of the ground, but the village of Kruiseik, which had always constituted a salient, was now abandoned. The cross-roads also remained in the hands of the enemy. Landon's Brigade continued to bar the further German advance preparing in stern resignation for the renewed and heavier blow which all knew to be in readiness, and which was destined two days later to bring them a glorious annihilation.

It was clear on the evening of the 29th that serious mischief was afoot, for there were great signs of movement on the German side, and all night the continual rattle of wheels was heard to the eastward. These menacing sounds were actually caused by a very strong reinforcement, the Fifteenth German Corps (Strasburg) of the regular army, which, followed by the Thirteenth Corps and the Second Bavarian Corps, were coming into the battle line with the declared intention of

smashing their way through to Ypres. Correspondence, afterwards captured, showed that the German Emperor had issued a special appeal to these troops, declaring that the movement was one which would be of decisive importance to the war.[1] It was, of course, not the venerable town of Ypres which had assumed such a place in the mind of both the Emperor and his people, but it was Calais and the Channel coast to which it was the door. Once in the possession of these points, it seemed to their perfervid minds that they would be in a position to constrain Great Britain to an ignominious peace, a course which would surely have ruined the cause of the Allies and placed the whole world under the German heel. No less was the issue at stake. The British Army from Langemarck in the north to La Bassée in the south were resolutely determined that the road was barred, while to left and to right they had stout-hearted comrades of Belgium and of France.

At half-past six on October 30 a very heavy attack developed, which involved the whole line of the First Corps and also the French Ninth Corps upon its left. This attack upon the left was carried out by the Reserve Corps 26 and 27, with whom there had been previous dealings, and it was repulsed with considerable loss by the French and the 6th British Brigade. To the south, however, the British were very violently engaged down the whole line of trenches from the position of the 7th Division near the Ypres—Menin road, through Zandvoorde, where the 3rd Cavalry Division was holding on under great difficulties, and on southward still, past the position of the 2nd Cavalry down to Messines, where the 1st Cavalry Division was also heavily engaged. The front of battle was not less than twelve miles in length, with one continuous long-drawn rattle of small arms and roar of guns from end to end. According to German official figures Fabeck, who was in command between Langemarck and the Lys, had thirteen infantry divisions under him with several cavalry divisions.[2]

The first sign of success for the strenuous German efforts on October 30 was the driving in of Kavanagh's 7th Guards' Cavalry Brigade from their trenches at the Zandvoorde Ridge. On this ridge, which is not more than a hundred and twenty feet high, the Germans concentrated so tremendous and accurate a fire that the trenches were in many places

[1] It has been denied, probably with truth, that the Kaiser ever spoke of the "Contemptible" British Army. An order of the day (Oct. 30) is however quoted in the Official British history found on a dead German officer. It says, "The break through will be of decisive importance. We must and will conquer . . . and strike the decisive blow against our most detested foe. We will finish with the British, Indians, Canadians, Moroccans and other trash—feeble adversaries."

[2] Fabeck's army group, which had been secretly brought up to turn the balance in what had been an even contest, consisted of the 15th and 2nd Bavarian Corps, the 26th Division, a Jäger brigade, a Landwehr brigade, the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, Stettin's Cavalry Corps and the 19th Corps. Against this host there stood two divisions, with four weak divisions of dismounted cavalry. The days of miracles are *not* past.

demolished and became entirely untenable. The survivors of the Life Guards and Blues who made up this brigade withdrew steadily through the reserve trenches, which were held by the 6th Cavalry Brigade and reformed at Klein Zillebeke in the rear. Two squadrons, however, and Lord Worsley's machine-gun section were killed or taken by the assailants. The unoccupied trenches were seized by the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, who advanced rapidly in order to improve their advantage, while their artillery began to pound the reserves. The cavalry had been strengthened, however, by the Greys and 3rd Hussars upon the left, while the 4th Hussars lined up on the right, and C, I, and K Horse Artillery batteries vigorously supported. In spite of great pressure, the position was held. Farther south the 1st Cavalry Division was also at very close grips with the 26th Division of the Thirteenth German Army Corps, and was hard put to it to hold its own. Along the whole cavalry position there was extreme strain. A squadron of the 1st Royals were forced to evacuate the château of Holebeke, and the line in this quarter was pushed back as far as St. Eloi, thus flattening a considerable salient.

The danger of a position which consists of so long a line with few reserves is that any retirement at any point immediately exposes the flanks of the neighbouring units to right and left. Thus the evacuation of Zandvoorde threw open the right flank of the 7th Division, even as its left had been in the air upon the day before. On getting through, the Germans were on the right rear of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers and enfiladed them badly, destroying all the officers and a considerable proportion of the battalion, which had already been greatly reduced. Colonel Cadogan was among those who fell. The 22nd Brigade was forced to fall back, and the 2nd Yorkshires and 2nd Scots Fusiliers, of the 21st Brigade, being left in a salient, suffered heavily, especially the latter battalion, the conduct of which from first to last was remarkable even among such men as fought beside them. These two battalions held on with the greatest determination until orders to retire reached them, which were somewhat belated, as several orderlies were killed in bringing them. The 2nd Bedfords, who had themselves sustained very severe losses from the German artillery fire, covered the retirement of the remains of these two gallant units. The 7th Division then covered the line from the canal through Klein Zillebeke and along the front of the woods to near Gheluvelt.

The position was now most critical. The Germans were in possession of Zandvoorde Ridge on the British right flank, a most important position whence guns could command a considerable area. Ypres was only four miles distant. There was nothing but a line of weary and partially broken infantry to protect the flank from being entirely pierced. The whole of a German active army corps was attacking upon this line. The order was given to hold the new positions at all costs, but on the evening of the 30th the situation was full of menace for the morrow. The

German flood was still thundering against the barrier, and the barrier seemed to be giving. At about 2 p.m. on October 30 the 1st Irish Guards and the 2nd Grenadiers, who were in reserve to two battalions of the Coldstream in trenches in the Polygon Wood, near Reutel Village, were ordered to help the 7th Division. General Capper subsequently directed them to take the place of the cavalry on the right of his division. The Irish Guards were accordingly on the right of the 7th Division from now onwards, and the Grenadiers were on their right, extending down to the canal in front of Klein Zillebeke. The commander of the Ninth French Corps also, with that fine loyalty which his comrades have shown again and again during the war, easing many a difficult and perhaps saving some impossible situations, put three battalions and some cavalry at the disposal of the British. Two battalions of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade were also brought across and thrust into the gap. But the outlook that evening was not cheering. The troops had been fighting hard for two days without a break. The losses had been heavy. The line had been driven back and was greatly strained. It was known that the Germans were in great strength and that the attack would be renewed on the morrow. The troops and their leaders faced the immediate future in a spirit of sombre determination.

During the 30th Landon's Brigade had strengthened their position near Gheluvelt, and General Haig, realising that this was the key of his line, moved up the 2nd King's Royal Rifles and the 1st North Lancashires to form a reserve under the orders of General Landon. These battalions took a position south-west of Gheluvelt and connected up more closely between the 7th Division and the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division. It was well that a closely knitted line had been formed, for at the dawn of day on the 31st a most terrific attack was made, which was pushed with unexampled fierceness during the whole day, falling chiefly upon the centre and left of the 7th Division and upon the 1st Queen's and 2nd Welsh of the 3rd Brigade.

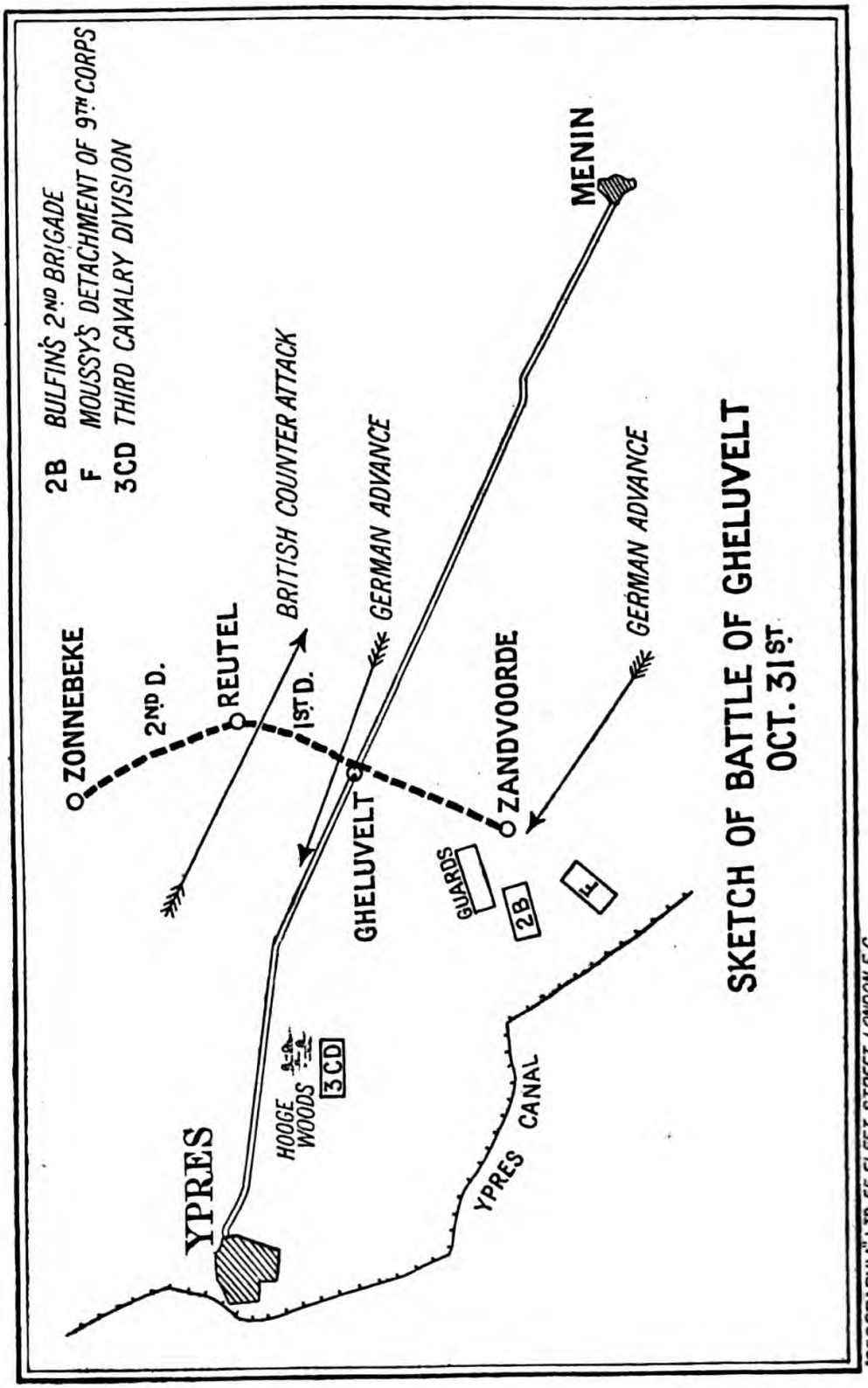
A weak point developed, unfortunately, in the front line of the 7th Division. They behaved with all their usual magnificent gallantry, but they were not numerous enough to hold the ground. The left was turned and the remains of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers were outflanked and surrounded in the early afternoon. A detachment was reinforcing the line elsewhere, and so survived, but the rest were killed, wounded, or taken, including their gallant colonel, Baird Smith, who had been hit the day before. The Picton tradition which disregards wounds unless they are absolutely crippling was continually observed by these stern soldiers. On the right of the Scots Fusiliers the 2nd Bedfords drew off with heavy losses.

The left wing of the 7th Division was in danger, and the 1st Queen's on the right of the 3rd Brigade had both flanks turned and were reduced to a handful under Major Watson and Lieutenant Boyd. It was a great morning in the history of this regiment, as the two battalions had fought

side by side, and their colonels, Pell and Coles, had both fallen in the action. Gheluvelt had been taken by midday, and the enemy were making rapid progress in spite of a brave counter-attack led by Major Gardner of the 1st Gloucesters, in which that officer and most of his men were shot down.

The line of the 3rd Brigade had been drawn up across the Menin road some four hundred yards to the east of the village. The road itself was held by the 2nd Welsh Regiment, supported by the 54th Battery (Major Peel), which was immediately behind the village. Both the battalion and the battery fought desperately in a most exposed situation. The Welsh Regiment were driven out of their trenches by a terrific shell-fire followed by an infantry attack. They lost during the day nearly six hundred men, with sixteen officers, killed, wounded, or missing. Colonel Morland was killed and Major Prichard badly wounded. Finally, after being pushed back, holding every possible point, they formed up under Captain Rees across the open in a thin skirmishing line to cover the battery, which was doing great work by holding back the German advance. One German gun was in action upon the Menin road. Lieutenant Blewitt took a British gun out on to the bare road to face it, and a duel ensued at five hundred yards, which ended by the German gun being knocked out at the second shot by a direct hit.

When the 1st Division at the centre of the British line were driven in, as already described, and the 7th Division were pushed back into the woods, the situation became most critical, for there was a general retirement, with a victorious enemy pressing swiftly on upon the British centre. The men behaved splendidly, and the officers kept their heads, taking every opportunity to form up a new line. The 2nd Royal Rifles and 1st North Lancashires in immediate support of the centre did all that men could to hold firm, and the Lancashire unit was practically exterminated. The German artillery lengthened their range as the British fell back, and the infantry, with their murderous quick-firers scattered thickly in the front line, came rapidly on. Communications were difficult, and everything for a time was chaos and confusion. It looked for an hour or two as if Von Deimling, the German leader, might really carry out his War Lord's command and break his road to the sea. It was one of the decisive moments of the world's history, for if the Germans at that period had seized the Channel ports, it is difficult to say how disastrous the result might have been both to France and to the British Empire. At that moment of darkness and doubt a fresh misfortune, which might well have proved overwhelming, came upon the hard-pressed forces. About 1.30 a shell exploded in the headquarters at the château of Hooge, and both General Lomax of the 1st Division, and General Monro, of the 2nd, were put out of action, the first being wounded and the second rendered unconscious by the shock. It was a brain injury to the Army, and a desperately serious one, for besides the two divisional commanders the single shell had killed or wounded


2B BULFIN'S 2ND BRIGADE
F MOUSSY'S DETACHMENT OF 9TH CORPS
3CD THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION
ZONNEBEKE
2ND D.
REUTEL
BRITISH COUNTER ATTACK
1ST D.
GERMAN ADVANCE
GHELUVELT
ZANDVOORDE
MENIN
GERMAN ADVANCE
GUARDS
2B
F
YPRES
HOOGE WOODS
3CD
YPRES CANAL
SKETCH OF BATTLE OF GHELUVELT
OCT. 31ST.
"GEOGRAPHIA" LTD. 55 FLEET STREET LONDON E.C.

Colonels Kerr and Perceval, Major Paley, Captains Ommany and Trench and Lieutenant Giffard. General Landon, of the 3rd Brigade, took the command of the 1st Division at a moment's notice, and the battle went forward. A line was hurriedly formed, men digging as for their lives, whilst broken units threw themselves down to hold off the rolling grey wave that thundered behind. The new position was three-quarters of a mile back and about four hundred yards in advance of Veldhoek, which is the next village down the Ypres road. The 7th Division had also been rolled back, but the fiery Capper, their divisional chief, who had been described as a British Samurai, was everywhere among his regiments, reforming and bracing them. The British soldiers, with their incomparable regimental officers, rose to the crisis, whilst General Haig was behind the line at Hooge, directing and controlling, like a great engineer who seeks to hold a dam which carries an overpowering head of water. By three o'clock the new line was firmly held.

Now General Haig, seeking round for some means of making a counter-attack, perceived that on his left flank he had some reserve troops who had been somewhat clear of the storm and might be employed. The 2nd Worcesters were ordered to advance upon Gheluvelt, the initiative in this vital movement coming from General FitzClarence of the 1st Brigade. On that flank the troops had not joined in the retirement, and, including the 1st South Wales Borderers of the 3rd Brigade, now under Colonel Lovett, were still in their original trenches, being just north of the swathe that had been cut in the British line, and just south of where the 2nd Division, extended to cracking point, with one man often for every eight or nine feet, and no supports, were defending the left flank of the Army.

When the village of Gheluvelt and the trenches to the north of it had been captured by the enemy, a gap had been left of about five hundred yards between the northern edge of the village and these tenacious South Wales Borderers. This gap the 2nd Worcesters were ordered to fill. They were in reserve at the time in the south-west corner of the Polygon Wood, but on being called upon they made a brilliant advance under Major Hankey. One company (A) was detached to guard the right flank of the advance. The other three companies came on for a thousand yards. At one point they had to cross two hundred and twenty yards of open under heavy shrapnel-fire. One hundred men fell, but the momentum of the charge was never diminished. Their rapid and accurate fire drove back the German infantry, while their open order formation diminished their own losses. Finally they dashed into the trenches and connected up the village with the line of the Welsh Borderers. Their right platoons, under Captain Williams, held the village until nearly midnight. Altogether the advance cost the battalion 187 casualties, including 3 officers, out of 450 who were in the ranks that day. Up to dusk the Worcesters were exposed to heavy shrapnel-fire, and small detached parties of the enemy came round their right flank,

but their position was strengthened and strongly held until the final readjustment of the line. It was a fine advance at a critical moment, and did much to save the situation, though the work of the Welsh Borderers under Colonel Leach must not be forgotten. The whole movement was strongly supported by the guns of the 42nd Battery, and by some of the 1st Scots Guards upon the left of the Welsh Borderers, who had shared in their resistance.

It has been stated that a line had been formed near Veldhoek. This was rather the final equilibrium established after a succession of oscillations. The British were worn to a shadow. The 2nd Queen's had 2 officers and 60 men left that night, the 2nd Welsh had 3 officers and 93 men. Little groups, who might have been fitted into a large-sized drawing-room, were settling a contention upon which the fate of the world might depend. But the Germans also had spent all their force. The rattle of musketry behind their advance was enough to tell them that the British were still in their trenches, and the guns of the 39th Brigade R.F.A. were for ever playing on them with deadly effect. Gradually they began to dissolve away among the thick woods which flank the road. They were learning that to penetrate the line of a resolute adversary is not necessarily the prelude to victory. It may mean that the farther you advance the more your flanks are exposed. So it was now, when the infantry to the north on one side and the 3rd Cavalry Division on the other were closing in on them. That long tentacle which was pushing its way towards Ypres had to be swiftly withdrawn once more, and withdrawn under a heavy fire from the 29th, 41st, and 45th field batteries.

The scattered German infantry who had taken refuge in the woods of Hooge, which lie to the south of the road, were followed up by mounted and dismounted men of the Royals, 10th Hussars, and 3rd Dragoon Guards, aided by some French cavalry. These troops advanced through the woods, killing or taking a number of the enemy. By nightfall the Germans had fallen back along the whole debated line; the various British units, though much disorganised, were in close touch with each other, and the original trenches had in the main been occupied, the Berkshire Regiment helping to close the gap in the centre. The flood had slowly ebbed away, and the shaken barrier was steady once more, thanks to the master-hands which had so skilfully held it firm. The village of Gheluvelt remained in the hands of the Germans, but the British trenches were formed to the west of it, and the road to the sea was barred as effectively as ever. These are the main facts of the action of Gheluvelt, which may well be given a name of its own, though it was only one supremely important episode in that huge contention which will be known as the First Battle of Ypres.

In the southern portion of the Ypres area at Klein Zillebeke a very sharp engagement was going on, which swung and swayed with as much violence and change as the main battle on the Menin road. The German attack here was hardly inferior in intensity to that in the north. Having

pushed back Lawford's weak brigade (22nd) it struck full upon part of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade, which had been detached from the 1st Division and sent to cover the right of the 7th Division. Its own flank was now exposed, and its situation for a time was critical. The German advance was sudden and impetuous, coming through a wood which brought the dense mass of the enemy's leading formation almost unseen right up to the British line. The position of the 2nd Brigade was pierced, and the two battalions present, the 2nd Sussex and the 1st Northamptons, were driven back with loss. Their brigadier rallied them some hundreds of yards to the rear, where they formed up into a skirmish line in the open, and, though unable to advance, kept back the Germans with their rifle-fire. The losses still continued, however, and the enemy came on again and again with numbers which seemed inexhaustible. Suddenly there was a charging yell from behind a low slope covering the rear, and over the brow there appeared the survivors of the 2nd Gordons, rushing at full speed with fixed bayonets. At the same moment the dismounted troopers of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, the Oxfords and the 46th company of sappers ran forward to join in the charge. The whole British force was not one to three of its opponents, but as the reinforcing line swept on, cheering with all its might, the survivors of the hard-pressed brigade sprang up with a shout and the united wave burst over the Germans. Next moment they had broken and were flying for their lives through the Zwartelen Wood. The pursuit lasted for some distance, and a great number of the enemy were bayoneted, while several hundreds were taken prisoners.

There have been few more critical occasions in the British operations than this action on October 31, when the Germans so nearly forced their way to Ypres. It is the peculiarity of modern warfare that, although vast armies are locked in a close struggle, the number of men who can come into actual contact at any one point is usually far more limited than in the old days, when each host could view the other from wing to wing. Thus the losses in such an action are small as compared with the terrific death-roll of a Napoleonic battle. On the other hand, when the operations are viewed broadly and one groups a series of actions into one prolonged battle, like the Aisne or Ypres, then the resulting losses become enormous. The old battle was a local conflagration, short and violent. The new one is a widespread smoulder, breaking here and there into flame. In this affair of Gheluvelt the casualties of the British did not exceed 2000 or 3000, while those of the Germans, who were more numerous and who incurred the extra loss which falls upon the attack, could not have been less than twice that figure. One thousand five hundred dead were actually picked up and six hundred prisoners were taken. Some hundreds of prisoners were also taken by the enemy. The British artillery, which worked desperately hard all day, had many losses both on the 30th and the 31st. The 12th Battery had all its guns silenced but one, and many others were equally hard hit.

On the night of the 31st considerable French reinforcements began to arrive, and it was high time that they did so, for the First Corps, including the 7th Division, were likely to bleed to death upon the ground that they were holding. It had stood the successive attacks of four German corps, and it had held its line against each of them. But its own ranks had been grievously thinned and the men were weary to death. The strain, it should be added, was equally great upon the Ninth French Corps to the north, which had its own set of assailants to contend with. Now that the line of the Yser, so splendidly guarded by the Belgians, had proved to be impregnable, and that the French from Dixmude in the north had repulsed all attacks, the whole German advance upon Calais, for which Berlin was screaming, was centred upon the Ypres lines. It was time, then, that some relief should come to the hard-pressed troops. For several days the French on the right and the left took the weight of the attack upon themselves, and although the front was never free from fighting, there was a short period of comparative rest for Haig's tired men. In successive days they had lost Kruiseik, Zandvoorde, and Gheluvelt, but so long as they held the semicircle of higher ground which covers Ypres these German gains availed them little.

Looking back at the three actions of the 29th, 30th, and especially of the 31st of October, one can clearly perceive that it was the closest thing to a really serious defeat which the Army had had since Le Cateau. If the Germans had been able to push home their attack once again, it is probable that they would have taken Ypres, and that the results would have been most serious. Sir John French is reported as having said that there was no time in the Mons retreat when he did not see his way, great as were his difficulties, but that there was a moment on October 31 when he seemed to be at the end of his resources. To Sir John at Ypres converged all the cries of succour, and from him radiated the words of hope and encouragement which stiffened the breaking lines. To him and to his untiring lieutenant, Douglas Haig, the Empire owed more that day than has ever been generally realised. The latter was up to the firing line again and again rallying the troops. The sudden removal of the two divisional commanders of the First Corps was a dreadful blow at such a moment, and the manner in which General Landon, of the 3rd Brigade, took over the command of the 1st Division at a moment's notice was a most noteworthy performance. The fact that three divisions of infantry with brigades which resembled battalions, and battalions which were anything from companies to platoons, destitute of reserves save for a few dismounted cavalry, barred the path to a powerful German army, is among the notable feats of military history. It was a very near thing. There was a time, it is said, when the breech-blocks had actually been taken from the heavy guns in order to disable them, and some of the artillery had been passed back through Ypres. But the line held against all odds. The struggle was not over. For a fortnight

still to come it was close and desperate. But never again would it be quite so perilous as on that immortal last day of October, when over the green Flemish meadows, beside the sluggish water-courses, on the fringes of the old-world villages, and in the heart of the autumn-tinted woods, two great Empires fought for the mastery.

Such was the British epic. There was another to the north which was no less wonderful, and which will be celebrated by the poets and historians of the lands to which the victors belong. It will tell of the glorious stand during this critical ten days of the Belgians, so weary, so battered, and yet so indomitable. It will tell how they made head against the hosts of the Duke of Würtemberg, and how in the end they flooded their own best land with the salt water which would sterilise it in order to cover their front. It will tell also of the splendid Frenchmen who fought at Dixmude, of Ronarch with his invincible marines, and of Grossetti, the fat and debonair, seated in an armchair in the village street and pointing the road to victory with his cane. Ten days the great battle swung and swayed, and then here as at Ypres the wave of the invaders ebbed, or reached its definite flood. It would be an ungenerous foe who would not admit that they had fought bravely and well. Not all our antagonism can prevent us from saluting those German officers and soldiers who poured out their blood like water in the attempt to do that which was impossible. "Flanders!" says their official account. "The name is heard by every one in the Fatherland with a silent shudder."

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES (*continued*)

The Actions of Messines and of Nonnebusschen.

Attack upon the cavalry—The struggle at Messines—The London Scots in action—Rally to the north—Terrible losses—Action of Zillebeke—Record of the 7th Division—Situation at Ypres—Attack of the Prussian Guard—Confused fighting—End of the First Battle of Ypres—Death of Lord Roberts—The 8th Division.

WHILST this severe fighting had been going on to the north of the British position, the centre, where the dismounted cavalry were holding the line of trenches, was so terribly pressed that it is an extraordinary thing that they were able to hold their own. The Second Corps, which at that time had just been withdrawn for a rest from the La Bassée lines, were the only available reinforcements. When news was flashed south as to the serious state of affairs, two battalions, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 2nd Scottish Borderers from the 13th Infantry Brigade, were sent up in motor-buses by road to the relief. Strange indeed was the sight of these vehicles flying along the Flemish roads, plastered outside with the homely names of London suburbs and crammed with the grimy, much-enduring infantry. The lines at Messines were in trouble, and so also were those at Wytschaete farther to the north. To this latter place went two battalions of Shaw's 9th Brigade, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and the 1st Lincolns. Hard work awaited the infantry at Messines and at Wytschaete, for in both places Allenby's troopers were nearly rushed off their feet.

It has already been shown that on October 30 a severe assault was made upon the 3rd Cavalry Division, when the 7th Brigade was forced out of Zandvoorde by the Fifteenth German Army Corps. Upon this same date a most strenuous attack, made in great force and supported by a terrific shell-fire, was directed along the whole line of the cavalry from Wytschaete to Messines. No British troops have been exposed to a more severe ordeal than these brave troopers, for they were enormously outnumbered at every point, and their line was so thin that it was absolutely impossible for them to prevent it from being pierced by the masses of infantry from the Second Bavarian Corps and other formations which were hurled against them. From the extreme left of the 2nd Cavalry Division near Wytschaete to the right of the 1st Cavalry

Division south of Messines the same reports came in to the anxious General, of trenches overwhelmed or enfiladed, and of little isolated groups of men struggling most desperately to keep a footing against an ever-surging grey tide which was beating up against them and flowing through every gap. In the north Gough's men were nearly overwhelmed, the 5th Irish Lancers were shelled out of a farmhouse position, and the 16th Lancers, shelled from in front and decimated by rifles and machine-guns from the flank, were driven back for half a mile until three French battalions helped the line to reform. The pressure, however, was still extreme, the Germans fighting with admirable energy and coming forward in never-ending numbers. An Indian regiment of the 7th (Ferozepore) Brigade, the 129th Baluchis, had been helping the cavalry in this region since October 23, but their ranks were now much decimated, and they were fought almost to a standstill. Two more British battalions from the Second Corps, the 1st Lincolns and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, together with their Brigadier, Shaw, who was a reinforcement in himself, were, as already stated, hurried off from the south in motor-buses to strengthen Gough's line. Advancing into what was to them an entirely strange position these two veteran battalions sustained very heavy losses, which they bore with extreme fortitude. They were attacked by the Germans on the road between Kemmel and Wytschaete on the night of October 31, the same night upon which the London Scottish to the south of them were so heavily engaged. Colonel Smith succeeded in extricating the Lincolns from what was a most perilous position. For forty-eight hours the battle swung backwards and forwards in front of Wytschaete, and in the end the village itself was lost, but the defensive lines to the west of it were firmly established. By November the second strong French reinforcements had appeared, and it was clear that this desperate attempt to break through the very centre of the British position had definitely failed.

The struggle at Messines, some five miles to the south, had been even more severe and sanguinary than at Wytschaete. In the early morning of the 31st the Bays and the 5th Dragoon Guards on the left of the Messines position, after a heavy shell-fire, were driven out of their trenches by a sudden furious advance of the German infantry. The front of the village of Messines was held by a wing of the 57th Wilde's Rifles, who were driven in by the same attack, every officer engaged being killed or wounded. A reserve company of Wilde's Rifles and a squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards endeavoured to restore the fight, but could not hold the torrent. The 9th Lancers, also in front of the village and to the right of the Indians, held on for a long time, repulsing the infantry attacks, until they were driven back by the deadly shell-fire. At one time they were enfiladed on both sides and heard the Germans roaring their war-songs in the dark all around them ; but they were able, owing to the coolness of Colonel Campbell and the

discipline of his veteran troopers, to fall back and to reform upon the western side of the village. Lance-Corporal Seaton distinguished himself by covering the retreat of his whole squadron, remaining single-handed in his trench until his maxim was destroyed, after he had poured a thousand shots into the close ranks of his assailants.

The situation was so serious after dawn on the 31st that General De Lisle had to call for help from Wilson's 4th Infantry Division, holding the line upon his right. The Inniskilling Fusiliers were extended so as to relieve his right flank. The struggle within Messines was still going forward with fighting from house to house, but the Germans, who were coming on with overpowering numbers and great valour, were gradually winning their way forward. The Oxfordshire Hussars, fresh from the base, were thrown into the combat. A second line of defence had been arranged a mile or so to the west, near Wulverghem, but if Messines must go the victors should at least pay the price down to the last drop of blood which could be wrung from them. Reinforcements were within sight, both French and British, but they were scanty in quantity though superb in quality. It was a most critical position, and one cannot but marvel at the load of responsibility which Sir John French had to bear upon this day, for on a stretch of twenty-five miles there was hardly a point which was not strained to the verge of cracking. Cool and alert, he controlled the situation from his central post and threw in such reinforcements as he could find, though, indeed, they could only be got by taking them from places where they were wanted and hurrying them to places where they were needed even more urgently. He was strengthened always by the knowledge that General Joffre behind him was doing all that a loyal colleague could to find fresh columns of his splendid infantrymen to buttress up the hard-pressed line.

For the moment, however, none of these were available, and Messines was still partly in British, partly in German hands. Briggs's 1st Brigade —Bays, 5th Dragoon Guards, and 11th Hussars—with the Oxfords, held on to the western edge of the town. To their left, linking up with Gough's men in the Wytschaete sector, were the 4th Dragoon Guards. Late in the afternoon the 2nd Scots Borderers and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, the joint detachment under Major Coke, arrived from the south, and were at once advanced upon Messines to stiffen the defence. Under heavy fire they established themselves in the village. Evening fell with desperate street fighting and the relative position unchanged. Twice the Bavarians stormed into the central square, and twice they fell back after littering it with their bodies. It seemed hopeless to hold the village against the ever-growing pressure of the Germans, and yet the loss of the village entailed the loss of the ridge, which would leave a commanding position in the hands of the enemy. Village and ridge were mutually dependent, for if either were lost the other could not be held.

As it proved, it was the ridge and not the village which could no longer

sustain the pressure. On the night of October 31 Mullen's 2nd Cavalry Brigade—9th Lancers, 4th Dragoon Guards, and 18th Hussars—took over the defence from Briggs. Of these, the 4th Dragoon Guards were to the left of the village upon the ridge. The London Scottish had been brought up, and they were placed on the left of the 4th Dragoon Guards, forming a link of the defence which connected up the 2nd Cavalry Division with the 1st. The right-hand battalion of the latter, the 6th Carbineers, of Bingham's 4th Brigade, were upon the left of the London Scottish. These two battalions held the centre of the ridge. The London Scottish had already suffered considerable losses. Hurried up from the lines of communication to St. Eloi, they were pushed forward at once into action, and were exposed for hours to all the nerve-racking horrors of a heavy shell-fire endured in most insufficient trenches. A more severe ordeal was in store for them, however, during the grim night which lay before them. The admirable behaviour of Colonel Malcolm's men excited the more attention as they were the first Territorial infantry to come into action, and they set a standard which has been grandly sustained by the quarter-million of their comrades who have from first to last come into the line. Considering that there were many Territorial Divisions at home and that several of the German Corps were raised since the war, it seems that it was only an exaggerated fear of invasion which prevented our hard-pressed line from getting reinforcements which would have relieved the terrific strain.

On the early morning of November 1 there had been a strong attempt within the village to improve the British position, and some ground was actually gained by the cavalrymen, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the Scots Borderers. What occurred, however, on the ridge to the north made all further effort a useless waste of life. The Bavarian infantry had come in the dusk with an irresistible rush against the thin British line. The order to hold their ground at all costs was given, and the London Scots answered it in a way which gained the highest praise from the many soldiers who saw it. It is not claimed that they did better than their Regular comrades. That would be impossible. The most that can be said is that they proved themselves worthy to fight in line with them. After being exposed for several hours to heavy shell-fire, it was no light task for any troops to be called upon to resist a direct assault. From nine in the evening of October 31 to two in the morning, under the red glare of burning houses, Colonel Malcolm's Scottish and Colonel Annesley's Carbineers held a ragged line. At two o'clock the Bavarians in greatly predominant force were all round the Scots, and even the reserve companies found work for their bayonets, preventing the enemy from encircling their companions. The losses were very heavy—400 men and 9 officers. In spite of the great pressure, the ground was held all night, and it was not till dawn, when the regiment found that it was outflanked on both sides and nearly surrounded, that, under cover of the fire of J Battery R.H.A., it fell back. The Carbineers and the Scots

were close together, and the Germans, with their usual quick ingenuity, approached the former with a cry of " We are the London Scots." A disaster might have occurred in the darkness but for the quickness and bravery of a young officer, Lieutenant Hope Hawkins, who rushed forward, discovered the identity of the Germans, and fell, riddled with bullets, even while he gave warning to his comrades.

The Germans had won the ridge, but the British line was still intact and growing stronger every hour. The village was held by the Scots Borderers and Yorkshiremen until nearly ten o'clock, when they were ordered to fall back and help to man the new line. The shock had been a rude one, but the danger-hour was passed here as in the north.[1]

The fateful November 1 had come and gone. The villages of Messines and Wytschaete were, it is true, in German hands, but French reinforcements of the Sixteenth Corps were streaming up from the south, the line, though torn and broken, still held firm, and the road to Calais was for ever blocked. There was still pressure, and on November 2 the 11th Hussars were badly cut up by shell-fire, but the line was impregnable. Sir John French summed up in a few terse words the true meaning of the operations just described, when he said afterwards, in addressing the 9th Lancers, " Particularly I would refer to the period, October 31, when for forty-eight hours the Cavalry Corps held at bay two German army corps. During this period you were supported by only three or four battalions, shattered and worn by previous fighting, and in so doing you rendered inestimable service." There have been few episodes in the war which have been at the same time so splendid and so absolutely vital. The 1st Cavalry Division lost 50 per cent. of its numbers between October 30 and November 2, and the 2nd Division was hardly in better case, but never did men give their lives to better purpose. Their heroism saved the Army.

Meanwhile the current of operations was evidently running strongly towards the northern end of the British line, where help was badly needed, as Haig's men had been fought almost to exhaustion. There was no British reinforcement available save only the weary Second Corps, the remains of which from this date began to be drafted northwards. It was already known that the German Emperor had appeared in person in that region, and that a great concentration of his troops was taking place. At the same time the French were making splendid exertions in order to stiffen their own line and help in those parts, like Messines, Wytschaete, and Ploegsteert, where the attack was most formidable. It was a great gathering towards the north, and clearly some hard blows were to be struck. Northwards then went General Morland, of the 5th Division, taking with him four more weak battalions. The whole line had moved upwards towards the danger spot, and these

[1] Lord French has left it on record that the worst moment of those bad days was in the early morning of November 1 at Messines, when only the arrival of the French Sixteenth Corps filled the gap in the line.

troops now found themselves east of Bailleul, close to the village of Neuve Eglise. For the moment General Smith-Dorrien was without an army, for half his men were now supporting General Willcocks in the south and half General Allenby or General Haig in the north. The British leaders all along the line were, as usual, desperately endeavouring to make one man do the work of three, but they were buoyed up by the knowledge that good Father Joffre, like some beneficent earthly Providence, was watching over them from the distance, and that fresh trainfuls of his brave little men were ever streaming into the danger zone. Day by day the line was thickening and the task of the Kaiser becoming more difficult. It was hoped that the crisis was past. If the troops were exhausted, so also, it was thought, were those of the enemy. We could feel elated by the knowledge that we had held our ground, while they could hardly fail to be depressed by the reflection that they had made little progress in spite of so many heroic efforts, and that Calais was as far from them as ever.

The narrative must now return to the defenders of the Ypres approaches, who were left in a state of extreme exhaustion by the critical action of October 31. On November 1 the First Corps was not in a condition to do more than to hold its line. This line was now near to Veldhoek, to the west of Gheluvelt village, and to that extent the Germans had profited by their desperate fighting, but this was a detail of small consequence so long as an unbroken British Army covered the town that was still the objective of the enemy. The Ninth French Corps to the north of the British had lost heavily, but to the south of the canal lay the Sixteenth French Corps, which was in comparatively good condition. This corps now made an advance to take some of the pressure off the British line, while Moussy's regiments to the north of the canal were to co-operate with Bulfin's men upon their left. Upon the left of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade were two battalions of the 4th Brigade of Guards.

One of these battalions had a terrible experience upon this morning. For some reason the trenches of the Irish Guards were exposed to an enfilading fire from the high explosives of the Germans, which wrought even more than their customary damage. For hours the Guardsmen lay under a terrific fire, to which they could make no reply, and from which they could obtain no protection. When at last, in the afternoon, they were compelled to fall back, their losses had been great, including their colonel, Lord Ardee, 7 other officers, and over 300 men. It is the hard fate of the side which is weaker in artillery to endure such buffetings with no possibility of return.

The French attack of the Sixteenth Corps had been brought to a speedy standstill, and a severe counter-attack, preceded by a heavy shell-fire, had fallen upon General Moussy's men and upon the half of the 2nd Brigade. Help was urgently needed, so the remains of the 7th Brigade from the 3rd Cavalry Division were hurried forward. The Germans were now surging up against the whole right and right-centre

of the line. It seems to have been their system to attack upon alternate days on the right and on the centre, for it will be remembered that it was on October 29 that they gained the Gheluvelt cross-roads, and on October 31 Gheluvelt village, both in the centre, while on October 30 they captured the Zandvoorde ridge upon the British right, and now, on November 1, were pressing hard upon the right once more.

That morning the Army sustained a loss in the person of General Bulfin, who was wounded in the head by shrapnel. Fortunately his recovery was not a lengthy one, and he was able to return in January as commander of the 28th Division. Upon his fall, Lord Cavan, of the 4th Brigade, took over the command upon the hard-pressed right wing. At half-past one the hundred survivors of the 2nd Gordons, on the right of the 7th Division, and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, were desperately hard pressed by a strong German infantry advance, and so were the remains of the Sussex and Northamptons. The only available help lay in the 23rd Field Company of Royal Engineers. The sappers proved, as they have so often done before, that their hearts are as sound as their heads. They pushed off the enemy, but incurred heavy losses. The situation was still critical when at the summons of Lord Cavan the 2nd Grenadiers advanced and cleared the Germans from the woods in the front and flank, while the 10th Hussars supported their advance. A gap had been left in the trenches from which the Irish Guards had been pushed, but this was now filled up by cavalry, who connected up with the French on their right and with the Guards upon their left. The general effect of the whole day's fighting was to drive the British line farther westward, but to contract it, so that it required a smaller force. Two battalions—the Gordons and the Sussex—could be taken out and brought into reserve. The centre of the line had a day's rest and dug itself into its new positions, but the units were greatly mixed and confused.

November 2 brought no surcease from the constant fighting, though the disturbance of these days, severe as it was, may be looked upon as a mere ground swell after the terrific storm of the last days of October. On the morning of the 2nd the Ninth French Corps on the British left, under General Vidal, sent eight battalions forward to the south and east in the direction of Gheluvelt. Part of this village was actually occupied by them. The Germans meanwhile, with their usual courage and energy, were driving a fresh attack down that Menin road which had so often been reddened by their blood. It was the day for a centre attack on their stereotyped system of alternate pushes, and it came duly to hand. An initial success awaited them as, getting round a trench occupied by the 1st Royal Rifles, they succeeded in cutting off a number of them, and also some of the Coldstream who fought beside them. The losses were 600 men. The 3rd Brigade was hurried up by General Landon to the point of danger, and a French Zouave regiment helped to restore the situation. After a day of confused and desultory fighting the situation

in the evening was very much as it had been in the morning. Both that night and the next day there was a series of local and sporadic attacks, first on the front of the 2nd Division and then of the 7th, all of which were driven back. The Germans began to show their despair of ever gaining possession of Ypres by elevating their guns and dropping shells upon the old Cloth Hall of that historic city. General Ruggles-Brise of the 20th Brigade was severely wounded this day.

November 4 was a day of menaces rather than of attacks. On this day, units which had become greatly mixed during the incessant and confused fighting during the last fortnight were rearranged and counted. The losses were terrible. The actual strength of the infantry of the 1st Division upon that date was : 1st Brigade, 22 officers, 1206 men ; 2nd Brigade, 43 officers, 1315 men ; 3rd Brigade, 27 officers, 970 men ; which make the losses of the whole division about 75 per cent. Those of the 2nd Division were very little lighter. And now for the 25 per cent. remainder of this gallant corps there was not a moment of breathing space or rest, but yet another fortnight of unremitting work, during which their thin ranks were destined to hold the German army, and even the Emperor's own Guard, from passing the few short miles which separated them from their objective. Great was the " will to conquer " of the Kaiser's troops, but greater still the iron resolve not to be conquered which hardened the war-worn lines of the soldiers of the King.

November 5 was a day of incessant shell-fire, from which the 7th Division, the 4th and the 6th Brigades were the chief sufferers. On this day the 7th Division, which had now been reduced from 12,000 infantry to 2333, was withdrawn from the line. In their place were substituted those reinforcements from the south which have already been mentioned. These consisted of eleven battalions of the Second Corps under General McCracken ; this corps, however, was greatly worn, and the eleven battalions only represented 3500 rifles. The 7th Division was withdrawn to Bailleul in the south, but Lawford's 22nd Brigade was retained in corps reserve, and was destined to have one more trial before it could be spared for rest.

On November 6, about 2 p.m., a strong German advance drove in those French troops who were on the right of Lord Cavan's Brigade—4th—which occupied the extreme right of Haig's position. The point was between Klein Zillebeke and the canal, where a German lodgment would have been most serious. The retirement of the French exposed the right flank of the 1st Irish Guards. This flank was strongly attacked, and for the second time in a week this brave battalion endured very heavy losses. No. 2 company was driven back to the support trenches, and No. 1 company, being isolated, was destroyed. Their neighbours on the left, the 2nd Grenadiers stood fast, to their own ultimate destruction, but a great and dangerous alley-way was left for the Germans round the British right wing, which brought them within two miles of Ypres. The situation was splendidly saved by Kavanagh's 7th Cavalry Brigade,

who galloped furiously down the road to the place where they were so badly needed. This hard-worked *corps d'élite*, consisting of the 1st and 2nd Life Guards supported by the Blues, now dismounted and flung themselves into the gap, a grimy line of weather-stained infantry with nothing left save their giant physique and their spurs to recall the men who are the pride of our London streets. The retiring French rallied at the sight of the sons of Anak. An instant later the Germans were into them, and there was a terrific *mêlée* of British, French, and Prussians, which swung and swayed over the marshland and across the road. Men drove their bayonets through each other or fired point-blank into each other's bodies in a most desperate fight, the Germans slowly but surely recoiling, until at last they broke. It was this prompt and vigorous stroke by Kavanagh's Brigade which saved a delicate situation. Of the three cavalry regiments engaged, two lost their colonels—Wilson of the Blues and Dawnay of the 2nd Life Guards. Sixteen officers fell in half an hour. The losses in rank and file were also heavy, but the results were great and indeed vital.

Early on the morning of November 7 Lawford's 22nd Brigade, which was now reduced to 1100 men, with 7 officers, was called upon to retake a line of trenches which the enemy had wrested from a neighbouring unit. Unbroken in nerve or spirit by their own terrific losses, they rushed forward, led by Lawford himself, a cudgel in his hand, carried the trench, captured three machine-guns, held the trench till evening, and then retired for a time from the line. Captains Vallentin and Alleyne, who led the two battalions into which the skeleton brigade had been divided, both fell in this feat of arms. After this action there remained standing the brigadier, 3 officers, and 700 men.

The 7th Division was now finally withdrawn from the fighting line. It has already been stated that there were reasons which made its units exceptionally fine ones. In General Capper they possessed a leader of enormous energy and fire, whilst the three brigadiers—Watts, Lawford, and Ruggles-Brise—could not be surpassed by any in the Army. Yet with every advantage of officers and men there will always be wonder as well as admiration for what they accomplished. For three days, before the First Corps had come thoroughly into line, they held up the whole German advance, leaving the impression upon the enemy that they were faced by two army corps. Then for twelve more days they held the ground in the very storm-centre of the attack upon Ypres. When at last the survivors staggered from the line, they had made a name which will never die.

The bulk of Smith-Dorrien's Corps had now been brought north, so that from this date (November 7) onwards the story of the First and Second Corps is intimately connected. When we last saw this corps it will be remembered that it had been withdrawn from the front, having lost some twelve thousand men in three weeks of La Bassée operations, and that the Indian Corps had taken over their line of trenches. Such

fighting men could not, however, be spared in the midst of such a fight. The hospital was the only rest that any British soldier could be afforded. Whilst they had still strength to stand they must line up to the German flood or be content to see it thunder past them to the coast. They were brought north, save only Bowes' 8th Brigade and Maude's 14th, which remained with the Indians in the south. Although the 7th Division had been drawn out of the line, its attendant cavalry division still remained to give its very efficient help to General Haig. The British position, though by no means secure, was getting stronger day by day, for General d'Urbal of the Eighth French Army to the north, and General Maud'huy to the south, had both been strongly reinforced, and with their usual good comradeship did all they could to strengthen the flanks and shorten the front of the British line.

The men of the Second Corps who had come north from the La Bassée district were not left long unmolested in their new sphere of operations. On the afternoon of November 7 there was a hot German attack upon that portion of the line which had just been vacated by the 7th Division. The trenches were now held by Morland's 5th Division.

The enemy may have hoped for some advantage from a change which they may well have observed, but they found that, though the units might be different, the same old breed still barred their path. On this occasion, after the early rush had spent itself upon the 1st Lincolns, it was the 2nd West Ridings who led the counter-charge. The line, however, was never fully re-established. A number of smaller attacks broke upon the front of the 2nd Division on the same day, leaving a few score of prisoners behind them as they ebbed. On the same day, November 7, the enemy got into the trenches of the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and remained in them, for all of them were bayoneted or taken. On this day the London Scottish were brought up into the Ypres line—a sign, if one were needed, that after the action described they were accepted as the peers of their comrades of the Regular Army, for no empty compliments are passed when the breaking of a unit may mean the enfilading of a line.

November 8 was a quiet day, but it was well known from every report of spy, scout, and aeroplane to be the lull before the storm. The 9th and the 10th were also uneventful, save for a sharp attack at Ploegsteert, and the tired troops rested on their arms, though never free for an hour from the endless pelting of shells. To the north and east the Eagles were known to be gathering. There were the Emperor, the Emperor's Guard, and a great fresh battle of the Germans ready for one grand final dash for Calais, with every rifle in the firing line and every cannon to support it. Grave messages came from headquarters, warning words were passed to anxious brigadiers, who took counsel with their colonels as to fire-fields and supports. Batteries were redistributed, depleted limbers refilled, strong points organised, and observation posts rushed to

the front, while the untiring sappers gave the last touches to traverse and to trench. All was ready for the fray. So close were the lines that at many points the conversations of the enemy could be heard.

The Germans had already concentrated a large number of troops against this part of the British line, and they were now secretly reinforced by a division of the Prussian Guard. Documents found afterwards upon the dead show that the Guard had had special orders from the Emperor to break the line at all costs. The brigades which attacked were made up of the 1st and 2nd Foot Guards, the Kaiser Franz Grenadiers No. 2, the Königin Augusta Grenadiers No. 4, and the battalion of Garde Jäger, with a picked division of the line—17,000 men in all. It was to be victory or death with the *corps d'élite* of the German Army, but it was no less victory or death with the men who opposed them. After an artillery preparation of appalling intensity for three hours along the line of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions, the infantry advance began about 9.30 on the morning of November 11 amid a storm of wind and rain. They are gregarious fighters, the Germans, finding comfort and strength in the rush of serried ranks. Even now the advance was made in a close formation, but it was carried out with magnificent dash, amazing valour, and a pedantic precision which caused, for example, the leading officers to hold their swords at the carry. The Prussian Guardsmen seemed to have lost nothing, and also to have learned nothing, since their famous predecessors lay dead in their ranks before St. Privat, forty-four years before. The attack was directed against the front of the two divisions of the First British Army Corps, but especially on the 1st Brigade, so that Guardsman faced Guardsman, as at Fontenoy. There were none of the chivalrous greetings of 1745, however, and a stern hatred hardened the hearts of either side. The German Guard charged on the north of the Menin road, while a second advance by Pomeranians of the 4th Division was made upon the south, which withered away before the fire of McCracken's Second Corps battalions. Nothing could stop the Guards, however. With trenches blazing and crackling upon their flank, for the advance was somewhat diagonal, they poured over the British position and penetrated it at three different points where the heavy shells had overwhelmed the trenches and buried the occupants, who, in some cases, were bayoneted as they struggled out from under the earth. It was a terrific moment. The yells of the stormers and the shrill whistles of their officers rose above the crash of the musketry fire and roar of the guns. The British fought in their customary earnest silence, save for the short, sharp directions of their leaders. "They did not seem angry —only business-like," said a hostile observer. The troops to the immediate north of the Menin road, who had been shelled out of their trenches by the bombardment, were forced back and brushed aside into the woods to the north, while the Germans poured through the gap. The 4th Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, upon the right of the point where the enemy had penetrated, were enfiladed and lost their gallant

colonel, MacMahon, a soldier who had done great service from the day of Mons, and had just been appointed to a brigade. The battalion, which had worked as hard and endured as great losses as any in the campaign, was reduced to 2 officers and 100 men.

The German Guard poured on into the woods which lay in the immediate rear of the British position, but their formation was broken and the individualism of the Briton began to tell. Next to MacMahon's battalion lay the 1st Scots Fusiliers, sister battalion to that which had been destroyed upon October 31. With fierce joy they poured volleys into the flank of the Guard as the grey figures rushed past them into the woods. Four hundred dead Germans were afterwards picked out from the underwood at this point. The Scots Fusiliers were also hard hit by the German fire, but they held up the advance. Further north, however, a Fusilier battalion of the Guards pushed on for 500 yards until it was met and practically annihilated by the 2nd West Ridings, who first shot it to pieces, and then broke it up by a bayonet charge in the heart of the Veldhoek Wood.

Whilst the position was critical at this point of the front, it was no less so upon the extreme right, where the French detachment, who still formed a link between the canal on the south and the British right flank, were shelled out of their trenches and driven back. Lord Cavan's 4th Brigade, their nearest neighbours, were too hard pressed to be able to help them. To the north of the Menin road a number of British units were intact, and these held up the German flood in that region. There are two considerable woods—the Polygon to the north and the Nonnebusch to the south-west of the Polygon—the edges of which have defined the British position, while their depths have harboured their artillery. The 1st King's Liverpool battalion held firm to the south of the Polygon Wood, while north of them were the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, with a field company of Engineers. Farther to the south-west were the 1st Connaught Rangers, while on the other side of the Nonnebusch road was the 7th Cavalry Brigade. In the afternoon of this day the enemy, skirting the south of the Polygon Wood, had actually entered the Nonnebusch Wood.

At this point they were close to the British artillery, which they threatened to overwhelm. The 41st Brigade R.F.A., and especially the 16th Field Battery, were in the immediate line of their advance, and the gunners looking up saw the grey uniforms advancing amid the trees. Colonel Lushington, who commanded the artillery brigade, hurriedly formed up a firing line under his adjutant, composed partly of his own spare gunners and partly of a number of Engineers, reinforced by cooks, officers' servants, and other odd hands who are to be found in the rear of the army, but seldom expect to find themselves in the van of the fight. It was a somewhat grotesque array, but it filled the gap and brought the advance to a halt, though the leading Germans were picked up afterwards within seventy yards of the guns.

In the Polygon Wood, when the enemy penetrated the trenches of the 1st Brigade, they had the King's Liverpool Battalion on their right, which refused to move, so that for some time the Prussian Guard and the King's lay side by side with a traverse between them. "Our right is supported by the Prussian Guard," said the humorous adjutant of the famous Lancashire battalion. While the main body of the Guard passed on, some remained all day in this trench.

The German Guardsmen had been prevented from submerging the 41st Brigade of Artillery, and also the 35th Heavy Battery, by the resistance of an improvised firing line. But a more substantial defence was at hand. The 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, which had been in divisional reserve near Ypres, had been brought forward and found itself at Westhoek, near the threatened guns. This battalion is the old 52nd, of the Peninsular Light Division, a famous corps which threw itself upon the flank of Napoleon's Guard at Waterloo and broke it in the crisis of the battle. Once again within a century an Imperial Guard was to recoil before its disciplined rush. Under Colonel Davies the battalion swept through the wood from north-west to south-east, driving the Germans (1st and 3rd Guard regiments) who had already been badly shaken by the artillery fire, in a headlong rout. Many threw down their arms. The loss to the Oxfords was surprisingly small, well under fifty in all. As they emerged from the wood they were joined by some of the 1st Northamptons from the 2nd Brigade on the right, while on the left there was a rush of Connaughts and Highland Light Infantry and of Engineers of the 25th Field Company, who showed extraordinary initiative and gallantry pushing on rapidly, and losing all their officers save one and a number of their men without flinching for an instant. A party of the Gloucesters, too, charged with the Northamptons upon the right, for by this time units were badly mixed up, as will always happen in woodland fighting. "It was all a confused nightmare," said one who tried to control it. The line of infantry dashed forward, a company of the Oxfords under Captain H. M. Dillon in the lead, and the khaki wave broke over a line of trenches which the Germans had taken, submerging all the occupants. There was another line in front, but as the victorious infantry pushed forward to this it was struck in the flank by a fire from French batteries, which had been unable to believe that so much progress could have been made in so short a time.

It was now nearly dark, and the troops were in the last stage of exhaustion. Of the 1st Brigade something less than 400 with 4 officers could be collected. It was impossible to do more than hold the line as it then existed. Save for one small corner of the Polygon Wood, the Germans had been completely cleared out from the main position. At twelve and at four, during the night, the British made a forward movement to regain the advanced trenches, but in each case the advance could make no progress. At the very beginning of the second attempt General FitzClarence, commanding the 1st Brigade, who had been the

very life and soul of the British battle, was killed, and the movement fizzled out. Besides General FitzClarence, the Army sustained a severe loss in General Shaw of the 9th Brigade, who was struck by a shell splinter, though happily the wound was not mortal. The German losses were exceedingly severe: 700 of their dead were picked up within a single section of the British line, but the main loss was probably sustained in the advance before they reached the trenches. Killed, wounded, and prisoners, their casualties cannot have been less than 10,000 men.[1] It was a fine attack, bravely delivered by fresh troops against weary men, but it showed the German leaders once for all that it was impossible to force a passage through the lines. The Emperor's Guard, driven on by the Emperor's own personal impetus, had recoiled broken, even as the Guard of a greater Emperor had done a century before from the indomitable resistance of the British infantry. The constant fighting had reduced British brigades to the strength of battalions, battalions to companies, and companies to weak platoons, but the position was still held. They had, it is true, lost about five hundred yards of ground in the battle, but a shorter line was at once dug, organised, and manned. The barrier to Ypres was as strong as ever.

The strain upon the men, however, had been terrific. "Bearded, unwashed, sometimes plagued with vermin, the few who remained in the front line were a terrible crew," says the American, Coleman. "They were like fierce, wild beasts," says another observer. So great was the pressure that the reason not infrequently gave way, and a general officer has described how he saw men dancing and singing in the road from pure insanity. They had given their all, almost to their humanity, to save Britain. May the day never come when Britain will refuse to save them.

The action of Nonnebosschen, as the British have styled it, represents the absolute high-water mark of the German efforts in this battle, and the ebb was a rapid one. On November 12 and the remainder of the week, half-hearted attempts were made upon the British front, which were repulsed without difficulty. To the north of the line, where the French had held their positions with much the same fluctuations which had been experienced by their Allies, the German assault was more violent and met with occasional success, though it was finally repelled with very great loss. The weather throughout this period was cold and tempestuous, which much increased the strain upon the weary troops. Along the whole line from Ypres to Bethune there were desultory shellings with an occasional dash by one side or the other. It was in one of these sporadic German attacks in the Klein Zillebeke section that the 2nd King's Royal Rifles held their trench against heavy odds, and their machine-gun officer, Lieutenant Dimmer, thrice wounded and still fighting, won the coveted Cross by his valour. Each gallant

[1] The German returns for the Guard alone at this battle are reported at 1170 dead, 3991 wounded, 1719 missing.

advance and capture of the Germans was countered by an equally gallant counter-attack and recapture by the British. The long line sagged and swayed, but never bent or broke. The era of battles had passed, but for thirty miles the skirmishes were incessant. So mixed and unbroken had been the fighting that it was a very difficult task during these days to tidy up the line and get each scattered group of men back to its own platoon, company, and battalion.

The two exhausted armies lay now like two weary game-cocks, almost impotent, but with their red beaks still turned upon each other.

On Tuesday, November 17, the fighting suddenly assumed a more important character. The attack was again in the Ypres section and fell chiefly upon the battalions of the Second Corps, if so dignified a name as " battalion " can be given to bodies of men which consisted very often of less than a normal company, commanded, perhaps, by two junior officers. The 4th Brigade of Guards was also heavily engaged this day, and so were the cavalry of the 3rd Division. The general locale of the action was the same as that which had been so often fought over before, the Second Corps being to the south of the Ypres—Menin road, with Lord Cavan's Guardsmen upon their right and the cavalry upon the right of the Guards. After a severe shelling there was a serious infantry advance, about one o'clock, which took some trenches, but was finally driven back and chased for a quarter of a mile. McCracken's 7th Brigade bore a chief part in this fighting, and the 1st Wiltshires particularly distinguished themselves by a fine charge led by Captain Cary-Barnard. The 2nd Grenadiers did great work during the day.

An even heavier advance was made in the afternoon to the south of that which was broken in the morning. This involved an oblique advance across the British front, which was stopped and destroyed before it reached the trenches by the deadly fire of rifles and machine-guns. Over a thousand dead were left as a proof of the energy of the attack and the solidity of the resistance. Farther to the south a similar attack was beaten back by the cavalry after a preliminary shelling in which the 3rd Dragoon Guards suffered severely. This attack was repelled by the 3rd Cavalry Division, to which the Leicestershire and North Somerset Yeomanry were now attached. The latter did fine service in this action. Altogether, November 17 was a good day for the British arms and a most expensive one for the Germans.

We have now reached the end of the Battle of Ypres, which attained its maximum fury, so far as the British line was concerned, from October 29 to November 11. This great contest raged from the sand dunes of the north, where the Belgians fought so well, through the French Marine Brigade at Dixmude, and the Ninth French Corps, to General Haig's Corps, which was buttressed on the right towards the latter part of the battle by the Sixteenth French Corps. Farther south yet another French corps supported and eventually took the place of the British cavalry opposite the lost villages of Wytschaete and Messines.

From there ran the unbroken lines of the imperturbable Third Corps, which ended to the south in the trenches originally held by the Second British Corps, and later by the Indians. Across the La Bassée Canal the French once again took up the defence.

It is not an action, therefore, which can be set down to the exclusive credit of any one nation. Our Allies fought gloriously, and if their deeds are not set down here, it is not from want of appreciation. But, turning to the merely British aspect of the fight—and beyond all doubt the heavier share fell upon the British, who bore the brunt from the start to the end,—it may be said that the battle lasted a clear month, from October 12, when Smith-Dorrien crossed the La Bassée Canal, to November 11, when the German Guard reeled out of the Nonnebusch Wood. The battle, in its duration, the space covered, the numbers engaged, and the losses endured, was far the greatest ever fought up to that time by a British Army. At Waterloo the losses were under 10,000. In this great fight they were little short of 50,000. The fact that the enemy did not recoil and that there was no sensational capture of prisoners and guns has obscured the completeness of the victory. In these days of nations in arms a beaten army is buttressed up or reabsorbed by the huge forces of which it is part. One judges victory or defeat by the question whether an army has or has not reached its objective. In this particular case, taking a broad view of the whole action, a German force of at least 500,000 men set forth to reach the coast, and was opposed by a force of less than half its numbers who barred its way. The Germans did not advance five miles in a month of fighting, and they lost not less than 150,000 men without any military advantage whatever, for the possession of such villages as Gheluvelt, Wytschaete, or Messines availed them not at all. If this is not a great victory, one does not know what military achievement would deserve the term. Ypres was a Plevna—but a Plevna which remained for ever untaken.

It is an unfortunate fact that the German account of these operations is uniformly unfair to its opponents and flattering to itself. It still holds to the view that the Germans were in numerical inferiority and that they were less provided with munitions than the Allies. The latter contention is too absurd to be argued. The former has been excellently met by the industry of the British official historian, General Edmonds, who has carefully enumerated by name every formation upon either side at the various decisive dates. On November 10 at the critical portion of the line, from the Comines Canal to the south-west corner of Polygon Wood, the odds were a nominal 35 battalions of Allies, most of which were worn to shadows, against 51 battalions of Germans who in the case of the Guards and the 4th Division, who headed the attack, were at full strength. In actual numbers of men the odds could not have been less than 4 to 1. It may well be urged that the advantage of defence against attack is to be counted against such discrepancy of force, and no one

could say a word against the bravery of the attackers. To pretend, however, that the numbers were approximately equal is to falsify history.

On November 15 Lord Roberts died whilst visiting the Army, having such an end as he would have chosen, within earshot of the guns and within the lines of those Indian soldiers whom he loved and had so often led. The last words of his greatest speech to his fellow-countrymen before the outbreak of that war which he had foreseen, and for which he had incessantly tried to prepare, were that they should quit themselves like men. He lived to see them do so, and though he was not spared to see the final outcome, his spirit must at least have been at rest as to the general trend of the campaign. The tradition of his fascinating character, with its knightly qualities of gentleness, bravery, and devotion to duty, will remain as a national possession.

About this time, though too late for the severe fighting, there arrived the 8th Division, which would enable Sir Henry Rawlinson to complete his Fourth Corps.

The 8th Division was composed as follows :

DIVISIONAL GENERAL—General DAVIES.

23rd Infantry Brigade—General Penny.

2nd Scots Rifles.
2nd Middlesex.
2nd West Yorkshires.
2nd Devons.
5th Black Watch.

24th Infantry Brigade—General Carter.

1st Worcesters.
2nd East Lancashires.
1st Notts and Derby.
2nd Northamptons.
4th Camerons.

25th Infantry Brigade—General Lowry Cole.

2nd Lincolns.
2nd Berkshires.
1st Irish Rifles.
2nd Rifle Brigade.
13th London (Kensingtons).

Artillery.

5th Brigade R.H.A., G.O.Z.
45th Brigade R.F.A.
33rd Brigade R.F.A.
Heavy Batteries 118, 119.
2, 15, F. Cos. R.E.
8 Signal Co.
Divisional Cavalry.
Northampton Yeomanry.
8th Cyclists.

We have now arrived at what may be called the great winter lull, when the continuation of active operations was made impossible by the weather conditions, which were of the most atrocious description. It

was the season which in a more classic age of warfare was spent in comfortable winter quarters. There was no such surcease of hardship for the contending lines, who were left in their trenches face to face, often not more than fifty yards apart, and each always keenly alert for any devilry upon the part of the other. The ashes of war were always redly smouldering, and sometimes, as will be seen, burst up into sudden furious flame. It was a period of rain-storms and of frost-bites, of trench mortars and of hand grenades, of weary, muddy, goat-skinned men shivering in narrow trenches, and of depleted Brigades resting and recruiting in the rearward towns. Such was the position at the Front. But hundreds of miles to the westward the real future of the war was being fought out in the rifle factories of Birmingham, the great gun works of Woolwich, Coventry, Newcastle, and Sheffield, the cloth looms of Yorkshire, and the boot centres of Northampton. In these and many other places oversea the tools for battle were forged night and day through one of the blackest and most strenuous winters that Britain has ever known. And always on green and waste and common, from Cromarty to Brighton, wherever soldiers could find billets or a village of log huts could be put together, the soldier citizens who were to take up the burden of the war, the men of the Territorials and the men of the new armies, endured every hardship and discomfort without a murmur, whilst they prepared themselves for that great and glorious task which the future would bring. Even those who were too old or too young for service formed themselves into volunteer bands, who armed and clothed themselves at their own expense. This movement, which sprang first from the small Sussex village of Crowborough, was co-ordinated and controlled by a central body of which Lord Desborough was the head. In spite of discouragement, or at the best cold neutrality from Government, it increased and prospered until no fewer than a quarter of a million of men were mustered and ready—a valuable national reserve which allowed of a better use of the more mobile forces.

These were the main incidents of the world's war during the months which have been under review. As the months passed the terrific nature of the task which they had undertaken became more and more clear to the British, but further reflection had confirmed them in their opinion that the alternative course of abandoning their friends and breaking their pledge to Belgium was an absolutely unthinkable one, so that however great the trials and sacrifices in blood and treasure, they were not further embittered by the reflection that they could possibly have been avoided. Very greatly were they cheered in that dark hour by the splendid, whole-hearted help from India, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, help which was even more valuable from a moral than from a material standpoint. With this brief digression we will now return to those operations which are the proper subject of this narrative.

CHAPTER X

THE WINTER LULL OF 1914

Increase of the Army—Formation of the Fifth Corps—The visit of the King—3rd Division at Petit Bois—The fight at Givenchy—Heavy losses of the Indians—Fine advance of 1st Manchesters—Advance of the 1st Division—Singular scenes at Christmas.

THE winter lull was a period of alternate rest and discomfort for the troops with an ever-present salt of danger. For days they found themselves billeted with some approach to comfort in the farmhouses and villages of Flanders, but such brief intervals of peace were broken by the routine of the trenches, when, in mud or water with a clay cutting before their faces and another at their backs, they waited through the long hours, listening to the crack of the sniper's rifle, or the crash of the bursting shell, with an indifference which bordered upon thankfulness for anything that would break the drab monotony of their task. It was a scene of warfare which was new to military experience. The vast plain of battle lay in front of the observer as a flat and lonely wilderness, dotted with ruined houses from which no homely wreath of smoke rose into the wintry air. Here and there was an untidy litter of wire; here and there also a clump of bleak and tattered woodland; but nowhere was there any sign of man. And yet from the elevation of an aeroplane it might be seen that the population of a large city was lurking upon that motionless waste. Everywhere the airman would have distinguished the thin brown slits of the advance trenches, the broader ditches of the supports and the long zigzags of the communications, and he would have detected that they were stuffed with men—grey men and khaki, in every weird garment that ingenuity could suggest for dryness and for warmth—all cowering within their shelters with the ever-present double design of screening themselves and of attacking their enemy. As the German pressure became less, and as more battalions of the Territorials began to arrive, taking some of the work from their comrades of the Regulars, it was possible to mitigate something of the discomforts of warfare, to ensure that no regiments should be left for too long a period in the trenches, and even to arrange for week-end visits to England for a certain number of officers and men. The streets of London got a glimpse of the rugged, war-hardened faces, and of uniforms caked with the brown mud of Flanders, or supplemented by strange Robinson

Crusoe goatskins from the trenches, which brought home to the least imaginative the nature and the nearness of the struggle.

Before noting those occasional spasms of activity—epileptic, sometimes, in their sudden intensity—which broke out from the German trenches, it may be well to take some note of the general development of those preparations which meant so much for the future. The Army was growing steadily in strength. Not only were the old battalions reinforced by fresh drafts, but two new divisions of Regulars were brought over before the end of January. These formed the 27th and 28th Divisions under Generals Snow and Bulfin, two officers who had won a name in the first phase of the war. The two Divisions together formed the Fifth Army Corps under General Plumer, the officer who had worked so hard for the relief of Mafeking in 1900. The Divisions, composed of splendid troops who needed some hardening after tropical service, were constituted as follows, the list including territorial battalions attached, as well as the four original regular units in each brigade :

FIFTH ARMY CORPS.

GENERAL PLUMER.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DIVISION—General SNOW.

80th Brigade—General Fortescue.

Princess Pat. Canadians.
4th Rifle Brigade.
3rd King's Royal Rifles.
4th King's Royal Rifles.
2nd Shrop. Light Infantry.

81st Brigade—General MacFarlane.

9th Royal Scots (T.F.).
2nd Cameron Highlanders.
1st Argyll and Sutherlands.
1st Royal Scots.
2nd Gloucesters.
9th Argyll and Sutherlands (T.F.).

82nd Brigade—General Longley.

1st Leinsters.
2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers.
2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.
1st Royal Irish.
1st Cambridge (T.F.).
Army Troops, 6th Cheshires.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DIVISION—General BULFIN.

83rd Brigade—General Boyle.

2nd E. Yorkshires.
1st King's Own York. Light Infantry.
1st Yorks. and Lancasters.
2nd Royal Lancasters.
3rd Monmouths (T.F.).
5th Royal Lancasters (T.F.).

84th Brigade—General Winter.
2nd Northumberland Fusiliers.
1st Suffolks.
1st Welsh.
2nd Cheshires.
12th London Rangers (T.F.).
1st Monmouths (T.F.).

85th Brigade—General Chapman.
2nd East Kent.
2nd East Surrey.
3rd Middlesex.
3rd Royal Fusiliers.
8th Middlesex (T.F.).

Besides this new Fifth Army Corps, there had been a constant dribble of other territorial units and Yeomanry to the front, where they were incorporated with various regular brigades.

To take events in their order: beyond numerous gallant affairs of outposts, there was no incident of importance until the evening of November 23, when the Germans showed signs of returning animation. On this day, some eight hundred yards of trench held by Indian troops in the neighbourhood of Armentières were made untenable by the German artillery, especially by the *minen-werfer*—small mortars which threw enormous bombs by an ingenious arrangement whereby the actual shell never entered the bore but was on the end of a rod outside the muzzle. Some of these terrible missiles, which came through the air as slowly as a punted football, were 200 lbs. in weight and shattering in their effects. There was an advance of the 112th German Regiment, and the empty trenches were strongly occupied by them—so strongly that the first attempt to retake them was unsuccessful in the face of the rifle and machine-gun fire of the defenders. A second more powerful counter-attack was organised, and this time the Germans were swept out of their position and the line re-established. The fighting lasted all night, and the Garwhalis with their formidable knives proved to be invaluable for such close work, while a party of Wilde's Rifles, led by Captain Acworth and Lieutenant Robson, R.E., with hand-bombs did great execution—a strange combination of the most primitive of weapons and the most recent. It was a substantial victory as such affairs go, for the British were left with a hundred prisoners, including three officers, three machine-guns, and two mortars.

The first week of December was rendered memorable by a visit of the King to the Army. King George reviewed a great number of his devoted soldiers, who showed by their fervent enthusiasm that one need not be an autocratic War-lord in order to command the fierce loyalty of the legions. After this pleasant interlude there followed a succession of those smaller exploits which seem so slight in any chronicle, and yet collectively do so much to sustain the spirit of the Army. Now this dashing officer, now that, attempted some deed upon the German line,

and never failed to find men to follow him to death. On November 24 it was Lieutenant Impey, with a handful of 2nd Lincolns ; on November 25, Lieutenants Ford and Maurice with a few Welsh Fusiliers and sappers ; on November 26, Sir Edward Hulse with some Scots Guards ; on the same day, Lieutenant Durham with men of the 2nd Rifle Brigade —in each case trenches were temporarily won, the enemy was damaged, and a spirit of adventure encouraged in the trenches. Sometimes such a venture ended in the death of the leader, as in the case of Captain the Honourable H. L. Bruce of the Royal Scots. Such men died as the old knights did who rode out betwixt the lines of marshalled armies, loved by their friends and admired by their foes.

On December 14 a second and more sustained effort was made to get possession of the Petit Bois at Wytschaete, which had been attacked by the Lincolns upon the 9th. D'Urbal's Eighth French Army was co-operating upon the left. The British attack was conducted by Haldane's 3rd Division, and the actual advance was carried out, after a considerable artillery preparation from the batteries of two Corps, by Bowes' 8th Brigade, with the 2nd Royal Scots and the 1st Gordons in the lead. At 7.45 the guns were turned upon the big wood beyond Petit Bois, through which the supports might be advancing, and at the same hour the two battalions named swarmed forward, the Lowlanders on the left and the Highlanders on the right. The Royal Scots, under Major Duncan, carried Petit Bois with a rush, taking fifty prisoners and two machine-guns, while the Germans fled out at the other end of the wood. The Scots at once entrenched themselves and got their own machine-guns into position. The Gordons, under Major Baird, advanced with splendid dash and gained some ground, but found the position such that they could not entrench upon it, so they were forced to fall back eventually to their original position. Both they and the 4th Middlesex, who supported them, lost considerably in the affair. The total casualties in the Petit Bois action came to over four hundred, with seventeen officers, figures which were considerably swollen by the losses of the Suffolks and Irish Rifles, who continued to hold the captured position in the face of continued bombing. The French in the north had no particular success and lost 600 men. The importance of such operations is not to be measured, however, by the amount of ground won, but by the necessity of beating up the enemies' quarters, keeping them pinned to their positions, and preventing them from feeling that they could at their own sweet wills detach any reinforcements they chose to thicken their line upon the Eastern frontier, where our Russian Allies were so insistently pressing.*

On the morning of December 19 an attack was made upon the German lines in the Festubert region by Willcock's Indian Corps, the Meerut Division, under General Anderson, attacking upon the left, and the Lahore, under General Watkis, upon the right. The object of the movement was to co-operate with the French in an advance which they

had planned. The Meerut attack was successful at first, but was driven back by a counter-attack, and some hundreds of Indian infantry were killed, wounded, or taken. In the case of the Lahore attack the storming party consisted of the 1st Highland Light Infantry and the 4th Gurkhas. Both of these units belong to the Sirhind Brigade, but they were joined in the enterprise by the 59th Scinde Rifles of the Jullundur Brigade. These latter troops had a long night march before reaching the scene of the operations, when they found themselves upon the right of the attack and within two hundred and fifty yards of the German trenches. Judging the operations from the standard reached at a later date, the whole arrangement seems to have been extraordinarily primitive. The artillery preparation for a frontal attack upon a strong German line of trenches lasted exactly four minutes, being rather a call to arms than a bombardment. The troops rushed most gallantly forward into the dark of a cold wet winter morning, with no guide save the rippling flashes of the rifles and machine-guns in front of them. Many were so sore-footed and weary that they could not break into the double. Some of the Indians were overtaken from behind by a line of British supports, which caused considerable confusion. An officer of Indians has left it on record that twice running he had a revolver clapped to his head by a British officer. All of the battalions advanced with a frontage of two companies in columns of platoons. Both the Gurkhas and Highlanders reached the trench in the face of a murderous fire. The left of the 59th, consisting of Punjabi Mahomedans, also reached the trench. The right, who were Sikhs, made an equally gallant advance, but were knee-deep in a wet beetroot field and under terrific machine-gun fire. Their gallant leader, Captain Scale, was struck down, as was every Indian officer, but a handful of the survivors, under a Sikh Jemadar, got into a German sap, which they held for twenty-four hours, taking a number of prisoners.

Day had dawned, and though the British and Indians were in the enemy trenches, it was absolutely impossible to send them up reinforcements across the bullet-swept plain. The 59th discovered a sap running from their left to the German line, and along this they pushed. They could not get through, however, to where their comrades were being terribly bombed on either flank by the counter-attack. It was an heroic resistance. Colonel Ronaldson, who led the party, held on all day, but was very lucky in being able to withdraw most of the survivors after nightfall. Of the hundred Punjabis who held one flank, only three returned, while thirteen wounded were reported later from Germany. The others all refused to surrender, declaring that those were the last orders of their British officers, and so they met their honoured end. It had been a long and weary day with a barren ending, for all that had been won was abandoned. The losses were over a thousand, and were especially heavy in the case of officers.

The Germans, elated by the failure of the attack, were in the mood

for a return visit. In the early dawn of the next day, December 20, they began a heavy bombardment of the Indian trenches, followed by an infantry attack extending over a line of six miles from south of the Bethune Canal to Festubert in the north. The attack began by the explosion of a succession of mines which inflicted very heavy losses upon the survivors of the Gurkhas and Highland Light Infantry. The weight of the attack at the village of Givenchy fell upon the exhausted Sirhind Brigade, who were driven back, and the greater part of Givenchy was occupied by the enemy. General Brunker fell back with his Brigade, but his line was stiffened by the arrival of the 47th Sikhs of the 8th Jullundur Brigade, who were in divisional reserve. These troops prevented any further advance of the Germans, while preparations were made for an effective counter-stroke.

Little help could be given from the north, where the line was already engaged, but to the south there were considerable bodies of troops available. The situation was serious, and a great effort was called for, since it was impossible to abandon into the hands of the enemy a village which was an essential bastion upon the line of defence. The German attack had flooded down south of Givenchy to the Bethune Canal, and a subsidiary attack had come along the south of the Canal with the object of holding the troops in their places and preventing the reinforcement of the defenders of Givenchy. But these advances south of the village made no progress, being held up by the 9th Bhopals and Wilde's 57th Rifles of the 7th Ferozepore Brigade between Givenchy and the Canal, while the 1st Connaught Rangers of the same brigade stopped it on the southern side of the Canal. Matters were for a moment in equilibrium. To the south of the Canal energetic measures were taken to get together a force which could come across it by the Pont Fixe or road bridge, and re-establish matters in the north.

The struggle had broken out close to the point of junction between the British forces and those of General Foch of the Tenth French Army, so that our Allies were able to co-operate with us in the counter-attack. It was directed by General Carnegy, and the assault was made by the 1st Manchesters, the 4th Suffolk Territorials, and some French territorials. The Manchesters, under the leadership of Colonel Strickland, made a most notable attack, aided by two companies of the Suffolks, the other companies remaining in reserve on the north bank of the Canal. So critical was the position that the 3rd Indian Sappers and Miners were set the dangerous task, under very heavy shell-fire, of mining the bridge over the Canal. The situation was saved, however, by Colonel Strickland's fine advance. His infantry, with very inadequate artillery support, pushed its way into Givenchy and cleared the village from end to end. Three hundred of the Manchesters fell in this deed of arms. Not only did they win the village, but they also regained some of the lost trenches to the north-east of Givenchy. This was the real turning-point of the action. There was at the time only the one very wet, very weary, and

rather cut-up Jullundur Brigade between the Germans and Bethune—with all that Bethune stood for strategically. To the east the 9th Bhopals and 57th Rifles still held on to their position. It was only to the north that the enemy retained his lodgment.

But the fight to the north had been a bitter one all day, and had gone none too well for the British forces. The Indians were fighting at an enormous disadvantage. As well turn a tiger loose upon an ice-floe and expect that he will show all his wonted fierceness and activity. There are inexorable axioms of Nature which no human valour nor constancy can change. The bravest of the brave, our Indian troops were none the less the children of the sun, dependent upon warmth for their vitality and numbed by the cold wet life of the trenches. That they still in the main maintained a brave, uncomplaining, soldierly demeanour, and that they made head against the fierce German assaults, is a wonderful proof of their adaptability.

About ten o'clock on the morning of the 20th the German attack, driving back the Sirhind Brigade from Givenchy, who were the left advanced flank of the Lahore Division, came with a rush against the Dehra-Dun Brigade, who were the extreme right of the Meerut Division. This Brigade had the 1st Seaforth Highlanders upon its flank, with the 2nd Gurkhas upon its left. The Gurkhas were forced to retire, and the almost simultaneous retirement of the defenders of Givenchy left the Highlanders in a desperate position with both flanks in the air. Fortunately the next Brigade of the Meerut Division, the Garhwal Brigade, stood fast and kept in touch with the 6th Jats, who formed the left of the Dehra-Dun Brigade, and so prevented the pressure upon that side from becoming intolerable. The 9th Gurkhas came up to support the 2nd Gurkhas, who had not gone far from their abandoned trenches, and the 58th Indian Rifles also came to the front. These battalions upon the left rear of the Highlanders gave them some support. None the less the position of the battalion was dangerous and its losses heavy, but it faced the Germans with splendid firmness, and nothing could budge it. Machine-guns are stronger than flesh and blood, but the human spirit can be stronger than either. You might kill the Highlanders, but you could not shift them. The 2nd Black Watch, who had been in reserve, established touch towards nightfall with the right of the Seaforths, and with the left of the Sirhind Brigade, so that a continuous line was assured.

In the meantime a small force had assembled under General MacBean with the intention of making a counter-attack and recovering the ground which had been lost on the north side of Givenchy. With the 8th Gurkhas and the 47th Sikhs, together with the 7th British Dragoon Guards, an attack was made in the early hours of the 21st. Colonel Lempriere of the Dragoon Guards was killed, and the attack failed. It was renewed in the early hours of the morning, but it again failed to dislodge the Germans from the captured trenches.

December 21 dawned upon a situation which was not particularly rosy from a British point of view. It is true that Givenchy had been recovered, but a considerable stretch of trenches were still in the hands of the Germans, their artillery was exceedingly masterful, and the British line was weakened by heavy losses and indented in several places. The one bright spot was the advance of the 1st Division of Haig's Corps, who had come up in the night-time. The three brigades of this Division were at once thrown into the fight, the 1st being sent to Givenchy, the 2nd given as a support to the Meerut Division, and the 3rd directed upon the trenches which had been evacuated the day before by the Sirhind Brigade. All these brigades won their way forward, and by the morning of the 22nd much of the ground which had been taken by the Germans was reoccupied by the British. The 1st Brigade, led by the Cameron Highlanders, had made good all the ground between Givenchy and the Canal. Meanwhile the 3rd Brigade had re-established the Festubert position, where the 2nd Welsh and the 1st South Wales Borderers had won their way into the lost trenches of the Gurkhas.

This was not done without very stark fighting, in which of all the battalions engaged none suffered so heavily as the 2nd Munsters (now attached to the 3rd Brigade). This battalion, only just built up again after its practical extermination at Etreux in August, made a grand advance and fought without cessation for nearly forty-eight hours. Their losses were dreadful, including their gallant Colonel Bent, both Majors, Day and Thomson, five other officers, and several hundreds of the rank and file. So far forward did they get that it was with great difficulty that the survivors, through the exertions of Major Ryan, were got back into a place of safety.

Meanwhile the lines upon the flank of the Seaforths which had been lost by the Dehra-Dun Brigade were carried by the 2nd Brigade (Westmacott), the 1st North Lancashire and 1st Northamptons leading the attack with the 2nd Rifles in support. Though driven back by a violent counter-attack in which both leading battalions, and especially the Lancashire men, lost heavily, the Brigade came again, and ended by making good the gap in the line. Thus the situation on the morning of the 22nd looked very much better than upon the day before. On this morning, as so many of the First Corps were in the advanced line, Sir Douglas Haig took over the command from Sir James Willcocks. The line had been to some extent re-established and the firing died away, but there were some trenches which were not retaken till a later date.

Such was the scrambling and unsatisfactory fight of Givenchy, a violent interlude in the drab records of trench warfare. It began with a considerable inroad of Germans into British territory and heavy losses of the Indian Contingent. It ended by a general return of the Germans to their former lines, and the resumption by the veteran troops of the 1st Division of the main positions which had been lost. Neither

side had gained any ground of material value, but the balance of profit in trophies was upon the side of the Germans, who may fairly claim that the action was a minor success for their arms, since they captured some hundreds of prisoners and several machine-guns. The Anglo-Indian Corps had 2600 casualties, and the First Corps 1400, or 4000 in all. The Indian troops were now withdrawn for a rest, which they had well earned by their long and difficult service in the trenches. To stand day after day up to his knees in ice-cold water is no light ordeal for a European, but it is difficult to imagine all that it must have been to a Southern Asiatic. The First Corps took over the La Bassée lines.

About the same date as the Battle of Givenchy there was some fighting farther north at Rouge Banc, where the Fourth Corps was engaged and some German trenches were taken. The chief losses in this affair fell upon those war-worn units, the 2nd Scots Guards and 2nd Borderers of the 20th Brigade. Henceforward peace reigned along the lines for several weeks—indeed Christmas brought about something like fraternisation between British and Germans, who found a sudden and extraordinary link in that ancient tree worship, long anterior to Christianity, which Saxon tribes had practised in the depths of Germanic forests and still commemorated by their candle-lit firs. For a single day the opposing forces mingled in friendly conversation and even in games. It was an amazing spectacle, and must arouse bitter thoughts concerning those high-born conspirators against the peace of the world, who in their mad ambition had hounded such men on to take each other by the throat rather than by the hand. For a day there was comradeship. But the case had been referred to the God of Battles, and the doom had not yet been spoken. It must go to the end. On the morning of the 26th dark figures vanished reluctantly into the earth, and the rifles cracked once more. It remains one human episode amid all the atrocities which have stained the memory of the war.

So ended 1914, the year of resistance. During it the Western Allies had been grievously oppressed by their well-prepared enemy. They had been over-weighted by numbers and even more so by munitions. For a space it had seemed as if the odds were too much for them. Then with a splendid rally they had pushed the enemy back. But his reserves had come up and had proved to be as superior as his first line had been. But even so he had reached his limit. He could get no further. The danger hour was past. There were now coming the long, anxious years of equilibrium, leading up to the distant victory.

That victory might not have been so distant had the wise councils of Sir John French been followed. He saw clearly the deadly effects upon the Allied cause which a prolonged occupation of the Belgian coast would produce, and the menace to shipping which would follow. It was the realisation of this menace which very nearly cost us the war in 1917, when our food and munitions were intercepted by the submarines. Sir John was of opinion—and he was seconded by Winston Churchill

and by Grey, that a strong movement along the coast, supported by flanking monitors, was the best strategy we could follow. All were agreed that Ostend and Zeebrugge might well be recaptured. Unhappily the French, both the politicians and the generals, were averse for some reason which is unintelligible. The alternative, as laid down by Joffre, was that interminable trench warfare which could only win to victory by a slow process of exhaustion. The British Government did not press the point, and thus we failed to use the British forces of land and sea in the way which would have best protected British and in the long run Allied interests. Such a trial should certainly have had precedence of the Gallipoli venture and would have needed far less effort.

There can be no doubt from our fuller information that these operations of 1914 were more costly to the Allies than to the Germans. Mr. Winston Churchill has given the losses as 939,000 for the Allies and 677,000 for the Germans. If one accepts these figures, and if one considers the advantage which the defence should have over the attack with modern weapons, one can only conclude that the bravery of the French, which was always heroic, was accompanied by a surprising ignorance of how best to use the resources which should have been at their command. Barbed wire, entrenched positions and good marksmanship, with their excellent field artillery to support it, should have made any deep penetration of their country by the German armies too expensive to be carried out.

CHAPTER XI

THE OPENING MONTHS OF 1915

Conflict of the 1st Brigade at Cuinchy, and of the 3rd Brigade at Givenchy—Heavy losses of the Guards—Michael O'Leary, V.C.—Relief of French Division by the 27th and 28th British—Pressure on the Fifth Corps—Force subdivided into two armies—Disaster to 16th Lancers—The dearth of munitions.

THE weather after the new year was atrocious, heavy rain, frost, and gales of wind succeeding each other with hardly a break. The ground was so sodden that all movements of troops became impossible, and the trench work was more difficult than ever. The British, with their steadily increasing numbers, were now able to take over some of the trenches of the French and to extend their general line. This trench work came particularly hard upon the men who were new to the work and often fresh from the tropics. A great number of the soldiers contracted frost-bite and other ailments. The trenches were very wet, and the discomfort was extreme. There had been some thousands of casualties in the Fifth Corps from this cause before it can be said to have been in action. On the other hand, the medical service, which was extraordinarily efficient, did everything possible to preserve the health of the men. Wooden troughs were provided as a stance for them in the trenches, and vats heated to warm them when they emerged. Considering that typhoid fever was common among the civilian residents, the health of the troops remained remarkably good, thanks to the general adoption of inoculation, a practice denounced by a handful of fanatics at home, but of supreme importance at the front, where the lesson of old wars, that disease was more deadly than the bullet, ceased to hold good.

On January 25 the Germans again became aggressive. If their spy system is as good as is claimed, they must by this time have known that all talk of bluff in connection with the new British armies was mere self-deception, and that if ever they were to attempt anything with a hope of success, it must be speedily, before the line had thickened. As usual there was a heavy bombardment, and then a determined infantry advance—this time to the immediate south of the Bethune Canal, where there was a salient held by the 1st Infantry Brigade with the French upon their right. The line was thinly held at the time by a half-battalion

1st Scots Guards and a half-battalion 1st Coldstream, a thousand men in all. One trench of the Scots Guards was blown up by a mine and the German infantry rushed it, killing, wounding, or taking every man of the 130 defenders. Three officers were hit, and Major Morrison-Bell, a member of parliament, was taken after being buried in the debris of the explosion. The remainder of the front line, after severe losses both in casualties and in prisoners, fell back from the salient and established themselves with the rest of their respective battalions on a straight line of defence, one flank on the canal, the other on the main Bethune–La Bassée highroad. A small redoubt or keep had been established here, which became the centre of the defence.

Whilst the advance of the enemy was arrested at this line, preparations were made for a strong counter-attack. An attempt had been made by the enemy with their heavy guns to knock down the lock gates of the canal and to flood the ground in the rear of the position. This, however, was unsuccessful, and the counter-attack dashed to the front. The advancing troops consisted of the 1st Black Watch, part of the 1st Camerons, and the 2nd King's Royal Rifles from the reserve. The London Scottish supported the movement. The enemy had flooded past the keep, which remained as a British island in a German lake. They were driven back with difficulty, the Black Watch advancing through mud up to their knees and losing very heavily from a cross fire. Two companies were practically destroyed. Finally, by an advance of the Rifles and 2nd Sussex after dark the Germans were ousted from all positions in advance of the keep, and this line between the canal and the road was held once more by the British. The night fell, and after dark the 1st Brigade, having suffered severely, was withdrawn, and the 2nd Brigade remained in occupation with the French upon their right. This was the action of Cuinchy falling upon the 1st Brigade, supported by part of the 2nd.

Whilst this long-drawn fight of January 25 had been going on to the south of the canal, there had been a vigorous German advance to the north of it, over the old ground which centres on Givenchy. The German attack, which came on in six lines, fell principally upon the 1st Gloucesters, who held the front trench. Captain Richmond, who commanded the advanced posts, had observed at dawn that the German wire had been disturbed, and was on the alert. Large numbers advanced, but were brought to a standstill about forty yards from the position. These were nearly all shot down. Some of the stormers broke through upon the left of the Gloucesters, and for a time the battalion had the enemy upon their flank and even in their rear, but they showed great steadiness and fine fire discipline. A charge was made presently upon the flank by the 2nd Welsh aided by a handful of the Black Watch under Lieutenant Green, who were there as a working party, but found more congenial work awaiting them. Lieutenant Bush of the Gloucesters with his machine-guns did particularly fine work. This attack was

organised by Captain Rees, aided by Major MacNaughton, who was in the village as an artillery observer. The upshot was that the Germans on the flank were all killed, wounded, or taken. A remarkable individual exploit was performed by Lieutenant James and Corporal Thomas of the Welsh, who took a trench with 40 prisoners. A series of attacks to the north-east of the village were also repulsed, the South Wales Borderers doing some splendid work.

Thus the results of the day's fighting was that on the north the British gained a minor success, beating off all attacks, while to the south the Germans could claim an advantage, having gained some ground. The losses on both sides were considerable, those of the British being principally among Scots Guards, Coldstream and Black Watch to the south, and Welsh to the north. The action was barren of practical results.

There were some days of quiet, and then on January 29 the Fourteenth German Corps buzzed out once more along the classic canal. This time they made for the keep, which has already been mentioned, and endeavoured to storm it with the aid of axes and scaling ladders. Solid Sussex was inside the keep, however, and ladders and stormers were hurled to the ground, while bombs were thrown on to the heads of the attackers. The Northamptons to the south were driven out for an instant, but came back with a rush and drove off their assailants. The skirmish cost the British few casualties, but the enemy lost heavily, leaving two hundred of his dead behind him. " Having arranged a code signal we got the first shell from the 40th R.F.A. twelve seconds after asking for it." So much for the co-operation between the guns and the infantry.

On February 1 the Guards who had suffered in the first fight at Cuinchy got back a little of what was owing to them. The action began by a small post of the 2nd Coldstream of the 4th Brigade being driven back. An endeavour was made to reinstate it in the early morning, but it was not successful. After daylight there was a proper artillery preparation, followed by an assault by a storming party of Coldstream and Irish Guards, led by Captain Leigh Bennett and Lieutenant Graham. The lost ground and a German trench beyond it were captured with 32 prisoners and 2 machine-guns. It was in this action that Michael O'Leary, the gallant Irish Guardsman, shot or bayoneted eight Germans and cleared a trench single-handed, one of the most remarkable individual feats of the War, for which a Victoria Cross was awarded. Again the fight fell upon the 4th Brigade, where Lord Cavan was gaining something of the reputation of his brother peer, Lord " Salamander " Cutts, in the days of Marlborough. On February 6 he again made a dashing attack with a party of the 3rd Coldstream and Irish, in which the Germans were driven out of the Brickfield position. The sappers under Major Fowkes rapidly made good the ground that the infantry had won, and it remained permanently with the British.

Another long lull followed this outburst of activity in the region of the La Bassée Canal, and the troops sank back once more into their muddy ditches, where, under the constant menace of the sniper, the bomb and the shell, they passed the weary weeks with a patience which was as remarkable as their valour. The British Army was still gradually relieving the French troops, who had previously relieved them. Thus in the north the newly-arrived 27th and 28th Divisions occupied several miles which had been held on the Ypres salient by General D'Urbal's men. Unfortunately, these two divisions, largely composed of men who had come straight from the tropics, ran into a peculiarly trying season of frost and rain, which for a time inflicted great hardship and loss upon them. To add to their trials, the trenches at the time they took them over were not only in a very bad state of repair, but had actually been mined by the Germans, and these mines were exploded shortly after the transfer, to the loss of the new occupants. The pressure of the enemy was incessant and severe in this part of the line, so that the losses of the Fifth Corps were for some weeks considerably greater than those of all the rest of the line put together. Two of the veteran brigades of the Second Corps, the 9th Fusilier Brigade (Douglas Smith) and the 13th (Wanless O'Gowan), were sent north to support their comrades, with the result that this sector was once again firmly held. Any temporary failure was in no way due to a weakness of the Fifth Army Corps, who were to prove their mettle in many a future fight, but came from the fact, no doubt unavoidable but none the less unfortunate, that these troops, before they had gained any experience, were placed in the very worst trenches of the whole British line. " The trenches (so called) scarcely existed," said one who went through this trying experience, " and the ruts which were honoured with the name were liquid. We crouched in this morass of water and mud, living, dying, wounded and dead together for 48 hours at a stretch." Add to this that the weather was bitterly cold with incessant rain, and more miserable conditions could hardly be imagined. In places the trenches of the enemy were not more than twenty yards off, and the shower of bombs was incessant.

The British Army had now attained a size when it was no longer proper that a corps should be its highest unit. From this time onwards the corps were themselves distributed into different armies. At present, two of these armies were organised. The First, under General Sir Douglas Haig, comprised the First Corps, the Fourth Corps (Rawlinson), and the Indian Corps. The Second Army contained the Second Corps (Fergusson), the Third Corps (Pulteney), and the Fifth Corps (Plumer), all under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. The new formations as they came out were either fitted into these or formed part of a third army. Most of the Brigades were strengthened by the addition of one, and often of two territorial battalions. Each army consisted roughly at this time of 120,000 men. The Second Army was in charge of the line to the north, and the First to the south.

On the night of February 14 Snow's 27th Division, which had been somewhat hustled by the Germans in the Ypres section, made a strong counter-attack under the cover of darkness, and won back four trenches near St. Eloi from which they had been driven by a German rush. This dashing advance was carried out by the 82nd Brigade (Longley's), and the particular battalions which were most closely engaged were the 2nd Cornwalls, the 1st Royal Irish, and 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers. They were supported by the 80th Brigade (Fortescue's). The losses amounted to 300 killed and wounded. The Germans lost as many and a few prisoners were taken. The affair was of no great consequence in itself, but it marked a turn in the affairs of Plumer's Army Corps, whose experience up to now had been depressing. The enemy, however, was still aggressive and enterprising in this part of the line. On the 20th they ran a mine under a trench occupied by the 16th Lancers, and the explosion produced most serious effects. 5 officers killed, 3 wounded, and 60 men *hors de combat* were the fruits of this unfortunate incident, which pushed the trenches back for 40 yards on a front of 150 yards. The Germans had followed up the explosion by an infantry attack, which was met and held by the remains of the 16th, aided by a handful of French infantry and a squadron of the 11th Hussars. On this same day an accidental shot killed General Gough, chief staff officer of the First Corps, one of the most experienced and valuable leaders of the Army.

On the 21st, the 28th Division near Ypres had a good deal of hard fighting, losing trenches and winning them, but coming out at the finish rather the loser on balance. The losses of the day were 250 killed and wounded, the greatest sufferers being the Royal Lancasters. Somewhat south of Ypres, at Zwarteleen, the 1st West Kents were exposed to a shower of projectiles from the deadly *minenwerfer*, which are more of the nature of aerial torpedoes than ordinary bombs. Their losses under this trying ordeal were 3 officers and 19 men killed, 1 officer and 18 men wounded. There was a lull after this in the trench fighting for some little time, which was broken upon February 28 by a very dashing little attack of the Princess Patricia's Canadian regiment, which as one of the units of the 80th Brigade had been the first Canadian battalion to reach the front. Upon this occasion, led by Lieutenants Crabb and Papineau, they rushed a trench in their front, killed eleven of its occupants, drove off the remainder, and levelled it so that it should be untenable. Their losses in this exploit were very small. During this period of the trench warfare it may be said generally that the tendency was for the Germans to encroach upon British ground in the Ypres section and for the British to take theirs in the region of La Bassée.

With the opening of the warmer weather great preparations had been made by Great Britain for carrying on the land campaign, and these now began to bear fruit. Apart from the numerous Territorial regiments which had already been incorporated with regular brigades—some fifty

battalions in all—there now appeared several divisions entirely composed of Territorials. The 46th North Midland and 48th South Midland Divisions were the first to form independent units, but they were soon followed by others. It had been insufficiently grasped that the supply of munitions was as important as that of men, and that the expenditure of shell was something so enormous in modern warfare that the greedy guns, large and small, could keep a great army of workmen employed in satisfying their immoderate demands. The output of shells and cartridges in the month of March was, it is true, eighteen times greater than in September, and 3000 separate firms were directly or indirectly employed in war production; but operations were hampered by the needs of batteries which could consume in a day what the workshops could at that time hardly produce in a month. Among the other activities of Great Britain at this period was the great strengthening of her heavy artillery, in which for many months her well-prepared enemy had so vast an advantage. Huge engines lurked in the hearts of groves and behind hillocks at the back of the British lines, and the cheery news went round that even the heaviest bully that ever came out of Essen would find something of its own weight stripped and ready for the fray. In actual numbers, however, we were still far behind, and Sir John French found his chief cause for uneasiness in the fact that his artillery supplies were for a long time inadequate.

CHAPTER XII

NEUVE CHAPELLE AND HILL 60 [1]

The opening of the spring campaign—Surprise of Neuve Chapelle—The new artillery—Gallant advance and terrible losses—The Indians in Neuve Chapelle—A sterile victory—The night action of St. Eloi—Hill 60—The monstrous mine—The veteran 13th Brigade—A bloody battle—London Territorials on the Hill—A contest of endurance—The first signs of poison.

WE now come to the close of the long period of petty and desultory warfare, which is only relieved from insignificance by the fact that the cumulative result during the winter was a loss to the Army of not less than twenty thousand men. With the breaking of the spring and the drying of the water-soaked meadows of Flanders, an era of larger and more ambitious operations had set in, involving, it is true, little change of position, but far stronger forces on the side of the British. The first hammer-blow of Sir John French was directed, upon March 10, against that village of Neuve Chapelle which had, as already described, changed hands several times, and eventually remained with the Germans during the hard fighting of Smith-Dorrien's Corps in the last week of October. The British trenches had been drawn a few hundred yards to the west of the village, and there had been no change during the last four months. Behind the village was the Aubers Ridge, and behind that again the whole great plain of Lille and Turcoing.

The secret was remarkably well kept. Few British and no Germans knew where the blow was to fall. The boasted spy system was completely at fault. The success of Sir John in keeping his secret was largely dependent upon the fact that above the British lines an air space had been cleared into which no German airman could enter save at his own very great peril. No great movement of troops was needed since Haig's Army lay opposite to the point to be attacked, and it was to two of his corps that the main assault was assigned. On the other hand, there was a considerable concentration of guns, which were arranged, over three hundred in number, in such a position that their fire could converge from various directions upon the area of the German defences.

It was planned that Smith-Dorrien, along the whole line held by the Second Army to the north, should demonstrate with sufficient energy to hold the Germans from reinforcing their comrades. To the south of

[1] Map p. 229 illustrates Neuve Chapelle. Map p. 197 Ypres and its environs.

the point of attack, the First Army Corps in the Givenchy neighbourhood had also received instructions to make a strong demonstration. Thus the Germans of Neuve Chapelle, who were believed to number only a few battalions, were isolated on either side. It was advisable also to hinder their reinforcements coming from the reserves in the northern towns behind the fighting lines. With this object, instructions were given to the British airmen at any personal risk to attack all the railway points along which the trains could come. This was duly done, and the junctions of Menin, Courtrai, Don, and Douai were attacked, Captain Carmichael and other airmen bravely descending within a hundred feet of their mark.

The troops chosen for the assault were Rawlinson's Fourth Army Corps on the left and the Indian Corps on the right, upon a front of half a mile, which as the operation developed broadened to three thousand yards. The object was not the mere occupation of the village, but an advance to the farthest point attainable. The 2nd Division of Cavalry was held in reserve, to be used in case the German line should be penetrated. All during the hours of the night the troops in single file were brought up to the advanced trenches, which in many cases were less than a hundred yards from the enemy. Before daylight they were crammed with men waiting most eagerly for the signal to advance. Short ladders had been distributed, so that the stormers could swarm swiftly out of the deep trenches.

The obstacle in front of the Army was a most serious one. The barbed wire entanglements were on an immense scale, the trenches were bristling with machine-guns, and the village in the rear contained several large outlying houses with walls and orchards, each of which had been converted into a fortress. On the other hand, the defenders had received no warning, and therefore no reinforcement, so that the attackers were far the more numerous. It is said that a German officer's attention was called to the stir in the opposing trenches, and that he was actually at the telephone reporting his misgivings to headquarters when the storm broke loose.

It was at half-past seven that the first gun boomed from the rear of the British position. Within a few minutes three hundred were hard at work, the gunners striving desperately to pour in the greatest possible number of shells in the shortest period of time. It had been supposed that some of the very heavy guns could get in forty rounds in the time, but they actually fired nearly a hundred, and at the end of it the huge garrison gunners were lying panting like spent hounds round their pieces. From the 18-pounder of the field-gun to the huge 1400-pound projectile from the new monsters in the rear, a shower of every sort and size of missile poured down upon the Germans, many of whom were absolutely bereft of their senses by the sudden and horrible experience. Trenches, machine-guns, and human bodies flew high into the air, while the stakes which supported the barbed wire were uprooted, and

the wire itself torn into ribbons and twisted into a thousand fantastic coils with many a gap between. In front of part of the Indian line there was a clean sweep of the impediments. So also to the right of the British line. Only to the left of the line, to the extreme north of the German position, was the fatal wire still quite unbroken and the trenches unapproachable. Meanwhile, so completely was the resistance flattened out by the overpowering weight of fire that the British infantry, with their own shells flowing in a steady stream within a few feet of their heads, were able to line their parapets and stare across at the wonderful smoking and roaring swirl of destruction that faced them. Here and there men sprang upon the parapets waving their rifles and shouting in the hot eagerness of their hearts. "Our bomb-throwers," says one correspondent, "started cake-walking." It was but half an hour that they waited, and yet to many it seemed the longest half-hour of their lives. It was an extraordinary revelation of the absolute accuracy of scientific gunfire that the British batteries should dare to shell the German trenches which were only a hundred yards away from their own, and this at a range of five or six thousand yards.

At five minutes past eight the guns ceased as suddenly as they had begun, the shrill whistles of the officers sounded all along the line, and the ardent infantry poured over the long lip of the trenches. The assault upon the left was undertaken by Pinney's 23rd Infantry Brigade of the 8th Division. The 25th Brigade of the same division (Lowry-Cole's) was on the right, and on the right of them again were the Indians. The 25th Brigade was headed by the 2nd Lincolns (left) and the 2nd Berkshires (right), who were ordered to clear the trenches, and then to form a supporting line while their comrades of the 1st Irish Rifles (left) and the 2nd Rifle Brigade (right) passed through their ranks and carried the village beyond. The 1st Londons and 13th London (Kensingtons) were pressing up in support. Colonel McAndrew, of the Lincolns, was mortally hit at the outset, but watched the assault with constant questions as to its progress until he died. It was nothing but good news that he heard, for the work of the brigade went splendidly from the start. It overwhelmed the trenches in an instant, seizing the bewildered survivors, who crouched, yellow with lyddite and shaken by the horror of their situation, in the corners of the earthworks. As the Berkshires rushed down the German trench they met with no resistance at all, save from two gallant German officers, who fought a machine-gun until both were bayoneted.

It was very different, however, with the 23rd Brigade upon the left. Their experience was a terrible one. As they rushed forward, they came upon a broad sheet of partly-broken wire entanglement between themselves and the trenches which had escaped the artillery fire. The obstacle could not be passed, and yet the furious men would not retire, but tore and raged at the edge of the barrier even as their ancestors raged against the scythe-blades of the breach of Badajoz. The 2nd Scottish

Rifles and the 2nd Middlesex were the first two battalions, and their losses were ghastly. Of the Scottish Rifles, Colonel Bliss was killed, every officer but one was either killed or wounded, and half the men were on the ground. The battalion found some openings, however, especially B Company (Captain Ferrers), upon their right flank, and in spite of their murderous losses made their way into the German trenches, the bombardiers, under Lieutenant Bibby, doing fine work in clearing them, though half their number were killed. The Middlesex men, after charging through a driving sleet of machine-gun bullets, were completely held up by an unbroken obstacle, and after three gallant and costly attacks, when the old " Diehards " lived up to their historic name, the remains of the regiment were compelled to move to the right and make their way through the gap cleared by the Scottish Rifles. " Rally, boys, and at it again ! " they yelled at every repulse. The 2nd Devons and 2nd West Yorkshires were in close support of the first line, but their losses were comparatively small. The bombers of the Devons, under Lieutenant Wright, got round the obstacle and cleared two hundred yards of trench. On account of the impregnable German position upon the left, the right of the brigade was soon three hundred yards in advance and suffered severely from the enfilade fire of rifles and machine-guns, the two flanks being connected up by a line of men facing half left, and making the best of the very imperfect cover.

It should be mentioned that the getting forward of the 23rd Brigade was largely due to the personal intervention of General Pinney, who, about 8.30, hearing of their difficult position, came forward himself across the open and inspected the obstacle. He then called off his men for a breather while he telephoned to the gunners to reopen fire. This cool and practical manœuvre had the effect of partly smashing the wires. At the same time much depended upon the advance of the 25th Brigade. Having, as stated, occupied the position which faced them, they were able to outflank the section of the German line which was still intact. Their left flank having been turned, the defenders fell back or surrendered, and the remains of the 23rd Brigade were able to get forward into an alignment with their comrades, the Devons and West Yorkshires passing through the thinned ranks in front of them. The whole body then advanced for about a thousand yards.

At this period Major Carter Campbell, who had been wounded in the head, and Second Lieutenant Somervail, from the Special Reserve, were the only officers left with the Scottish Rifles ; while the Middlesex were hardly in better case. Of the former battalion only 150 men could be collected after the action. The 24th Brigade was following closely behind the other two, and the 1st Worcesters, 2nd East Lancashires, 1st Sherwood Foresters, and 2nd Northamptons were each in turn warmly engaged as they made good the ground that had been won.

Whilst the British brigades had been making this advance upon the left the Indians had dashed forward with equal fire and zeal upon the

right. It was their first real chance of attack upon a large scale, and they rose grandly to the occasion. The Garhwali Brigade attacked upon the left of the Indian line, with the Dehra Duns (Jacob) upon their right and the Bareillys (Southey) in support, all being of the Meerut Division. The Garhwalis, consisting of men from the mountains of Northern India, advanced with reckless courage, the 39th Regiment upon the left, the 3rd Gurkhas in the centre, the 2nd Leicesters upon the right, while the 8th Gurkhas, together with the 3rd London Territorials and the second battalion of the Garhwalis, were in support. Part of the front was still covered with wire, and the Garhwalis were held up for a time, but the Leicesters, on their right, smashed a way through all obstacles. Their Indian comrades endured the loss of 20 officers and 350 men, but none the less they persevered, finally swerving to the right and finding a gap which brought them through. The Gurkhas, however, had passed them, the agile little men slipping under, over, or through the tangled wire in a wonderful fashion. The 3rd Londons closely followed the Leicesters, and were heavily engaged for some hours in forcing a stronghold on the right flank, held by 70 Germans with machine-guns. They lost 2 officers, Captain Pulman and Lieutenant Mathieson, and 50 men of A Company, but stuck to their task, and eventually, with the help of a gun, overcame the resistance, taking 50 prisoners. The battalion lost 200 men and did very fine work. Gradually the Territorials were winning their place in the Army. "They can't call us Saturday night soldiers now," said a dying lad of the 3rd Londons; and he spoke for the whole force who had endured perverse criticism for so long.

The moment that the infantry advance upon the trenches had begun, the British guns were turned upon the village itself. Supported by their fire, as already described, the victorious Indians from the south and the 25th Brigade from the west rushed into the streets and took possession of the ruins which flanked them, advancing with an ardour which brought them occasionally into the zone of fire from their own guns. By twelve o'clock the whole position, trenches, village, and detached houses, had been carried, while the artillery had lengthened its range and rained shrapnel upon the ground over which reinforcements must advance. The Rifles of the 25th Brigade and the 3rd Gurkhas of the Indians were the first troops in Neuve Chapelle.

It is not to be imagined that the powerful guns of the enemy had acquiesced tamely in these rapid developments. On the contrary, they had kept up a fire which was only second to that of the British in volume but inferior in effect, since the latter had registered upon such fixed marks as the trenches and the village, while the others had but the ever-changing line of an open order attack. How dense was the fall of the German shells may be reckoned from the fact that the telephone lines by which the observers in the firing line controlled the gunners some miles behind them were continually severed, although they had been laid down in duplicate, and often in triplicate. There were heavy

losses among the stormers, but they were cheerfully endured as part of the price of victory. The jovial exultation of the wounded as they were carried or led to the dressing stations was one of the recollections which stood out clearest amid the confused impressions which a modern battle leaves upon the half-stunned mind of the spectator.

At twelve o'clock the position had been carried, and yet it was not possible to renew the advance before three. These few hours were consumed in rearranging the units, which had been greatly mixed up during the advance, in getting back into position the left wing of the 25th Brigade, which had been deflected by the necessity of relieving the 23rd Brigade, and in bringing up reserves to take the place of regiments which had endured very heavy losses. Meanwhile the enemy seemed to have been completely stunned by the blow which had so suddenly fallen upon him. The fire from his lines had died down, and British brigades on the right, forming up for the renewed advance, were able to do so unmolested in the open, amid the horrible chaos of pits, mounds, wire tangles, splintered woodwork, and shattered bodies which marked where the steel cyclone had passed. The left was still under very heavy fire.

At half-past three the word was given, and again the eager khaki fringe pushed swiftly to the front. On the extreme left of the line of attack Watts's 21st Brigade pushed onwards with fierce impetuosity. This attack was an extension to the left of the original attack. The 21st was the only brigade of the 7th Division to be employed that day. There is a hamlet to the north-east of Neuve Chapelle called Moulin-du-Piètre, and this was the immediate objective of the attack. Several hundreds of yards were gained before the advance was held up by a severe fire from the houses, and by the discovery of a fresh, undamaged line of German trenches opposite to the right of the 21st Brigade. Here the infantry was held, and did no more than keep their ground until evening. Their comrades of the 8th Division upon their right had also advanced, the 24th Brigade (Carter's) taking the place of the decimated 23rd in the front line; but they also came to a standstill under the fire of German machine-guns.

The Bois du Biez is an important wood on the south-east of Neuve Chapelle, and the Indians, after their successful assault, directed their renewed advance upon this objective. The Garhwali Brigade, which had helped to carry the village, was now held back, and the Dehra Dun Brigade of 1st and 4th Seaforths, Jats, and Gurkhas, supported by the Jullundur Brigade from the Lahore Division, moved forward to carry the wood. They gained a considerable stretch of ground by a charge over the open, but were held up along the line of the river as their European comrades had been to the north. More than once the gallant Indians cleared the wood, but could not permanently hold it. The German post at the bridge was able to enfilade the line, and the artillery was unable to drive it out. Three battalions of the 1st Brigade were brought up to Richebourg in support of the attack, but darkness came

on before the preparations were complete. The troops slept upon the ground which they had won, ready and eager for the renewal of the battle in the morning. The losses had been heavy during the day, falling with undue severity upon a few particular battalions ; but the soldiers were of good heart, for continual strings of German prisoners, numbering nine hundred in all, had been led through their lines, and they had but to look around them to assure themselves of the loss which they had inflicted upon the enemy. In that long winter struggle a few yards to west or east had been a matter for which a man might gladly lay down his life, so that now, when more than a thousand yards had been gained by a single forward spring, there was no desire to flinch from the grievous cost.

The British had made demonstrations to right and to left in order to hold the enemy in their trenches. To the north a bombardment along the line was sufficient for the purpose. To the south, however, at Givenchy, the first Corps made an attack upon the trenches two hundred yards in front of them, which had no success, as the wire had been uncut. This attack was carried out by Fanshawe's 6th Infantry Brigade, and if it failed the failure was not due to want of intrepid leading by the officers and desperate courage of the men. The 1st King's (Liverpool) suffered very heavily in front of the impassable wire. " Our boys took their bayonets and hacked away. It was impossible to break through." Colonel Carter was wounded, but continued to lead his men. Feveran and Snatt, who led the assault, were respectively killed and wounded. The officers were nearly all hit, down to the young Subaltern Webb, who kept shouting " Come on, the King's ! " until he could shout no more. A hundred were killed and 119 wounded in the ranks. Both the 2nd South Staffords and the 1st King's Royal Rifles joined in this brave, but ineffectual, attack, and lost very heavily. The total loss of the brigade was between six and seven hundred, but at least it had prevented this section of the line from reinforcing Neuve Chapelle. All along the line the night was spent in making good the ground that had been won.

The morning of the 11th broke with thick mist, a condition which continued during the whole of the day. Both the use of the aircraft and the direction of the artillery were negatived by the state of the weather —a grievous piece of ill-fortune, as it put a stop to any serious advance during the day, since it would have been a desperate business to march infantry against a difficult front without any artillery preparation. In this way the Germans gained a precious respite during which they might reinforce their line and prepare for a further attack. They essayed a counter-attack from the Bois du Biez in the morning, but it was easily repulsed by the Indians. Their shell-fire, however, was very murderous. The British infantry still faced Moulin-du-Piètre in the north and the Bois du Biez in the south, but could make no progress without support, while they lost heavily from the German artillery. The Indians were still at the south of the line, the 24th Brigade in the

middle and the 21st in the north. Farther north still, at a point just south of Armentières, a useful little advance was made, for late at night, or early in the morning of the 12th, the 17th Infantry Brigade (Harper's) had made a swift dash at the village of l'Epinette, calculating, no doubt, that some of its defenders had been drafted south to strengthen the stricken line. The place was carried by storm at the small cost of five officers and thirty men, and the line carried forward at this point to a depth of three hundred yards over a front of half a mile. A counter-attack upon the 13th was driven off with loss.

So far as the main operation was concerned, the weather on the 12th was hardly more favourable than on the 11th. The veil of mist still intervened between the heavy artillery and its target. Three aeroplanes were lost in the determined efforts of the airmen to get close observation of the position. It also interfered with the accuracy of the German fire, which was poured upon an area held by the British troops, but inflicted small damage upon them. The day began by an attack in which the Germans got possession of a trench held by the 1st Sherwood Foresters. As the mist rose the flank company of the 2nd West Yorks perceived these unwelcome neighbours and, under the lead of Captain Harington, turned them out again. Both the Indians on the right and the 7th Division on the left lost a number of men during the morning in endeavouring, with poor success, to drive the German garrisons out of the various farmhouses, which were impregnable to anything but artillery. The gallant 20th Brigade, which had done such great work at Ypres in October, came into action this day and stormed up to the strongholds of the Moulin-du-Piètre. One of them, with three hundred Germans inside, was carried by the 2nd Borders, the defenders being made prisoners. All the battalions of the brigade—the 2nd Scots Guards, the 1st Grenadiers, the 2nd Gordons, and their Territorial comrades, the 6th Gordons—lost heavily in this most desperate of all forms of fighting. Colonel McLean of the latter regiment died at the head of his men. " Go about your duty," was his last speech to those who tended him. The Grenadiers fought like heroes, and one of them, Corporal Fuller, performed the extraordinary feat of heading off fifty Germans by fleetness of foot, and single handed compelling the surrender of all of them. At the other end of the line, the 25th Brigade, led by the Rifle Brigade, also made desperate efforts to get on, but were brought to a standstill by the trenches and machine-guns in the houses. The losses of the British upon this day were heavy, but they were a small matter compared to those of the Germans, who made several counter-attacks in close formation from dawn onwards in the vain hope of recovering the ground that had been lost. In front of the 1st Worcesters, of the 24th Brigade, alone more than a thousand dead were counted. From the ridge of Aubers, half a mile to the eastward, down to the front of the Indian and British line, the whole sloping countryside was mottled grey with the bodies of the fallen. All that the British had

suffered in front of the barbed wire on the 10th was repaid with heavy interest during the counter-attacks of the 12th. Gradually they faded away and were renewed no more. For the first time in the war the Germans finally abandoned a position that they had lost, and made no further attempt to retake it. The Battle of Neuve Chapelle was at an end, and the British, though their accomplishment fell far short of their hopes, had none the less made a permanent advance of a thousand yards along a front of three thousand, and obtained a valuable position for their operations in the future. The sappers were busy all evening in wiring and sand-bagging the ground gained, while the medical organisation, which was strained to the uttermost, did its work with a bravery and a technical efficiency which could not be surpassed.

Upon the last day of the fighting some 700 more prisoners had been taken, bringing the total number to 30 officers and 1650 men. The original defenders had been men of the Seventh German Corps, raised from Karlsruhe in Westphalia ; but the reinforcements which suffered so heavily were either Saxons or Bavarians. The losses of the Germans were estimated, and possibly overestimated, at 18,000 men. The British losses were very heavy, consisting of 562 officers and 12,239 men, 4000 of which were Indian.

Of the six brigades of the Fourth Corps, all suffered about equally, except the 22nd, which was not so hard hit as the others. The remaining brigades lost over 25 per cent. of their numbers, but nothing of their efficiency and zeal, as they were very soon to show in the later engagements. When one remembers that Julius Caesar describes an action as a severe one upon the ground that every tenth man was wounded, it may be conjectured that he would have welcomed a legion of Scottish Rifles or Sherwood Foresters. Certainly no British soldier was likely to live long enough to have his teeth worn down by the ration bread, as was the case with the Tenth Legion. The two units named may have suffered most, but the 2nd Lincolns, 2nd Berkshires, 2nd Borders, 2nd Scots Fusiliers, 1st Irish Rifles, 2nd Rifle Brigade, the two battalions of Gordons, and the 1st Worcesters were all badly cut up. Of the five commanding officers of the 20th Brigade, Uniacke of the 2nd Gordons, McLean of the 5th Gordons, and Fisher Rowe of the Grenadiers were killed, while Paynter of the 2nd Scots Guards was wounded. The only survivor, the Colonel of the Borders, was shot a few days later. It was said at the time of the African War that the British colonels had led their men up to and through the gates of Death. The words were still true. Of the brave Indian Corps, the 1st Seaforths, 2nd Leicesters, 39th Garhwalis, with the 3rd and 4th Gurkhas, were the chief sufferers. The 1st Londons, 3rd Londons, and 13th (Kensingtons) had also shown that they could stand punishment with the best.

So ended the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, a fierce and murderous encounter in which every weapon of modern warfare—the giant howitzer, the bomb, and the machine-gun—was used to the full, and

where the reward of the victor was a slice of ground no larger than a moderate farm. And yet the moral prevails over the material, and the fact that a Prussian line, built up with four months of labour, could be rushed in a couple of hours, and that by no exertion could a German set foot upon it again, was a hopeful first lesson in the spring campaign.

On March 12 an attack was made upon the enemy's trenches south-west of the village of Wytschaete—the region where, on November 1, the Bavarians had forced back the lines of our cavalry. The advance was delayed by the mist, and eventually was ordered for four in the afternoon. It was carried out by the 1st Wilts and the 3rd Worcesters, of the 7th Brigade (Ballard), advancing for two hundred yards up a considerable slope. The defence was too strong, however, and the attack was abandoned with a loss of 28 officers and 343 men. It may be said, however, to have served the general purpose of diverting troops from the important action in the south. It is to be hoped that this was so, as the attack itself, though fruitless, was carried out with unflinching bravery and devotion.

On March 14, two days after the battle of Neuve Chapelle, the Germans endeavoured to bring about a counter-stroke in the north which should avenge their defeat, arguing, no doubt, that the considerable strength which Haig's First Army had exhibited in the south meant some subtraction from Smith-Dorrien at the other end of the line. This new action broke out at the hamlet of St. Eloi, some miles to the south-east of Ypres, a spot where many preliminary bickerings and a good deal of trench activity had heralded this more serious effort. This particular section of the line was held by the 82nd Brigade (Longley's) of the 27th Division, the whole quarter being under the supervision of General Plumer. There was a small mound in a brickfield to the south-east of the village with trenches upon either side of it which were held by the men of the 2nd Cornish Light Infantry. It is a mere clay dump about seventy feet long and twenty feet high. After a brief but furious bombardment, a mine which had been run under this mound was exploded at five in the evening, and both mound and trenches were carried by a rush of German stormers. These trenches in turn enfiladed other ones, and a considerable stretch was lost, including two support trenches west of the mound and close to it, two breastworks and trenches to the north-east of it, and also the southern end of St. Eloi village.

So intense had been the preliminary fire that every wire connecting with the rear had been severed, and it was only the actual explosion upon the mound—an explosion which buried many of the defenders, including two machine-guns with their detachments—which made the situation clear to the artillery in support. The 19th and 20th Brigades concentrated their thirty-six 18-pounders upon the mound and its vicinity. The German infantry were already in possession, having overwhelmed the few survivors of the 2nd Cornwalls and driven back a company of the 2nd Irish Fusiliers, who were either behind the

mound or in the adjacent trenches to the east of the village. The stormers had rushed forward, preceded by a swarm of men carrying bombs and without rifles. Behind them came a detachment of sappers with planks, fascines, and sand-bags, together with machine-gun detachments, who dug themselves instantly into the shattered mound. The whole German organisation and execution of the attack were admirable. Lieutenants Fry and Aston of the Cornwall Light Infantry put up a brave fight with the handful of shaken men. As the survivors of the British front line fell back, two companies of the 1st Cambridge Territorials took up a rallying position. The situation was exceedingly obscure from the rear, for, as already stated, all wires had been cut, but daring personal reconnaissance by individual officers, notably Captain Follett and Lieutenant Elton, cleared it up to some extent. By nine o'clock preparations had been made for a counter-attack, the 1st Leinsters and 1st Royal Irish, of the 82nd Brigade, being brought up, while Fortescue's 80th Brigade was warned to support the movement.

It was pitch-dark, and the advance, which could only be organised and started at two in the morning, had to pass over very difficult ground. The line was formed by two companies of the Royal Irish, the Leinster Regiment, and the 4th Rifles in general support. The latter regiment was guided to their position by Captain Harrison, of the Cornwalls, who was unfortunately shot, so that the movement, so far as they were concerned, became disorganised. Colonel Prowse, of the Leinsters, commanded the attack. The Irishmen rushed forward, but the Germans fought manfully, and there was a desperate struggle in the darkness, illuminated only by the quick red flash of the guns and the flares thrown up from the trenches. By the light of these the machine-guns installed upon the mound held up the advance of the Royal Irish, who tried bravely to carry the position, but were forced in the end, after losing Colonel Forbes, to be content with the nearest house, and with gaining a firm grip upon the village. The Leinsters made good progress and carried first a breastwork and then a trench in front of them, but could get no farther. About 4.30 the 80th Brigade joined in the attack. The advance was carried out by the 4th Rifle Brigade upon the right and the Princess Patricia's (Canadians) upon the left, with the Shropshires and the 3rd Rifles in support. It was all-important to get in the attack before daylight, and the result was that the dispositions were necessarily somewhat hurried and incomplete. The Canadians attacked upon the left, but their attack was lacking in weight, being confined to three platoons, and they could make no headway against the fire from the mound. They lost 3 officers and 24 men in the venture. Thesiger's 4th Rifle Brigade directed its attack, not upon the mound, but on a trench at the side of it. This was carried with a rush by Captain Mostyn Pryce's company. Several obstacles were also taken in succession by the Riflemen, but though repeated attempts were made to get possession of the mound, all of them were repulsed. One company,

under Captain Selby-Smith, made so determined an attack upon one barricade that all save four were killed or wounded, in spite of which the barricade was actually carried. A second one lay behind, which was taken by Lieutenant Sackville's company, only to disclose a third one behind. Two companies of the Shropshires were brought up to give weight to the further attack, but already day was breaking and there was no chance of success when once it was light, as all the front trenches were dominated by the mound. This vigorous night action ended, therefore, by leaving the mound itself and the front trench in the hands of the Germans, who had been pushed back from all the other trenches and the portion of the village which they had been able to occupy in the first rush of their attack. The losses of the British amounted to 40 officers and 680 men—killed, wounded and missing, about 100 coming under the last category, who represent the men destroyed by the explosion. The German losses were certainly not less, but it must be admitted that the mound, as representing the trophy of victory, remained in their hands. In the morning of the 15th the Germans endeavoured to turn the Leinsters out of the trench which they had recaptured, but their attack was blown back, and they left 34 dead in front of the position.

It is pleasing in this most barbarous of all wars to be able to record that all German troops did not debase themselves to degraded standards. On this occasion the Bavarian general in charge consented at once to a mutual gathering in of the wounded and a burying of the dead—things which have been a matter of course in all civilised warfare until the disciples of Kultur embarked upon their campaign. It is also to be remarked that in this section of the field a further amenity can be noted, for twice messages were dropped within the British lines containing news as to missing aviators who had been brought down by the German guns.

A month of comparative quiet succeeded the battle of Neuve Chapelle, the Germans settling down into their new position and making no attempt to regain their old ones. Both sides were exhausted, though in the case of the Allies the exhaustion was rather in munitions than in men. The regiments were kept well supplied from the depots, and the brutality of the German methods of warfare ensured a steady supply of spirited recruits. That which was meant to cow had in reality the effect of stimulating. It is well that this was so, for so insatiable are the demands of modern warfare that already after eight months the whole of the regiments of the original expeditionary force would have absolutely disappeared but for the frequent replenishments, which were admirably supplied by the central authorities. They had been far more than annihilated, for many of the veteran corps had lost from one and a half times to twice their numbers. The 1st Hants at this date had lost 2700 out of an original force of 1200 men, and its case was by no means an exceptional one. Even in times of quiet there was a continual toll

exacted by snipers, bombers, and shells along the front which ran into thousands of casualties per week. The off-days of Flanders were more murderous than the engagements of South Africa. Now and then a man of note was taken from the Army in this chronic and useless warfare. The death of General Gough, of the staff of the First Army, has already been recorded. Colonel Farquhar, of the Princess Patricia Canadians, lost his life in a similar fashion. The stray shell or the lurking sniper exacted a continual toll, General Maude of the 14th Brigade, Major Leslie Oldham, one of the heroes of Chitral, and other valuable officers being killed or wounded in this manner.

On April 17 there began a contest which was destined to rage with great fury, though at intermittent intervals, for several weeks. This was the fight for Hill 60. Hill 60 was a low ridge about fifty feet high and two hundred and fifty yards from end to end, which faced the Allied trenches in the Zillebeke region to the south-east of Ypres. This portion of the line had been recently taken over by Smith-Dorrien's Army from the French, and one of the first tasks which the British had set themselves was to regain the hill, which was of considerable strategic importance. The British had directed their mines towards the hill, and ran six underneath it, each of them ending in a chamber which contained a ton of gunpowder. This work, begun by Lieutenant Burnyeat and a hundred miners of the Monmouth battalions, was very difficult owing to the wet soil. It was charged by Major Norton Griffiths and the 171st Mining Company Royal Engineers. At seven in the evening of Saturday, April 17, the whole was exploded with terrific effect. Before the smoke had cleared away the British infantry had dashed from their trench and the hill was occupied. A handful of dazed Germans were taken prisoners and 150 were buried under the debris.

The storming party was drawn from two battalions of the veteran 13th Brigade, and the Brigadier Wanless O'Gowan was in general control of the operations under General Morland, of the 5th Division. The two battalions immediately concerned were the 1st Royal West Kents and the 2nd Scottish Borderers. Major Joslin, of the Kents, led the assault, and C Company of that regiment, under Captain Moulton Barrett, was actually the first to reach the crest while it was still reeking and heaving from the immense explosion. Sappers of the 2nd Home Counties Company raced up with the infantry, bearing sand-bags and entrenching tools to make good the ground, while a ponderous backing of artillery searched on every side to break up the inevitable counter-attack. There was desperate digging upon the hill to raise some cover, and especially to cut back communication trenches to the rear. Without an over-crowding which would have been dangerous under artillery fire, there was only room for one company upon the very crest. The rest were in supporting trenches immediately behind. By half-past one in the morning of the 18th the troops were dug in, but the Germans, after a lull which followed the shock, were already thickening for the attack.

Their trenches came up to the base of the hill, and many of their snipers and bomb-throwers hid themselves amid the darkness in the numerous deep holes with which the whole hill was pocked. Showers of bombs fell upon the British line, which held on as best it might.

At 3.30 a.m. the Scots Borderers pushed forward to take over the advanced fire trench from the Kents, who had suffered severely. This exchange was an expensive one, as several officers, including Major Joslin, the leader of the assault, Colonel Sladen, and Captains Dering and Burnett, were killed or wounded, and in the confusion the Germans were able to get more of their bombers thrown forward, making the front trench hardly tenable. The British losses up to this time had almost entirely arisen from these bombs, and two attempts at regular counter-attacks had been nipped in the bud by the artillery fire, aided by motor machine-guns. As the sky was beginning to whiten in the east, however, there was a more formidable advance, supported by heavy and incessant bombing, so that at half-past five the 2nd West Ridings were sent forward, supported by the 1st Bedfords from the 15th Brigade. A desperate fight ensued. In the cold of the morning, with bomb and bayonet men stood up to each other at close quarters, neither side flinching from the slaughter. By seven o'clock the Germans had got a grip of part of the hill crest, while the weary Yorkshiremen, supported by their fellow-countrymen of the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, were hanging on to the broken ground and the edge of the mine craters. From then onwards the day was spent by the Germans in strengthening their hold, and by the British in preparing for a renewed assault. This second assault, more formidable than the first, since it was undertaken against an expectant enemy, was fixed for six o'clock in the evening.

At the signal five companies of infantry, three from the West Ridings and two from the Yorkshire Light Infantry, rushed to the front. The losses of the storming party were heavy, but nothing could stop them. Of C Company of the West Ridings only Captain Barton and eleven men were left out of a hundred, but none the less they carried the point at which their charge was aimed. D Company lost all its officers, but the men carried on. After a fierce struggle the Germans were ejected once again, and the whole crest held by the British. The losses had been very heavy, the various craters formed by the mines and the heavy shells being desperately fought for by either party. It was about seven o'clock on the evening of the 18th that the Yorkshiremen of both regiments drew together in the dusk and made an organised charge across the whole length of the hill, sweeping it clear from end to end, while the 59th Company Royal Engineers helped in making good the ground. It was a desperate tussle, in which men charged each other like bulls, drove their bayonets through each other, and hurled bombs at a range of a few yards into each other's faces.

From early morning of that day till late at night the Brigadier-General O'Gowan was in the closest touch with the fighting line, feeding it,

binding it, supporting it, thickening it, until he brought it through to victory. His Staff-Captain Egerton was killed at his side, and he had several narrow escapes. The losses were heavy and the men exhausted, but the German defence was for the time completely broken, and the British took advantage of the lull to push fresh men into the advanced trenches and withdraw the tired soldiers. This was done about midnight on the 18th, and the fight from then onwards was under the direction of General Northey, who had under him the 1st East Surrey, the 1st Bedfords, and the 9th London (Queen Victoria) Rifles. Already in this murderous action the British casualties had been 50 officers and 1500 men, who lay, with as many of the Germans, within a space no larger than a moderate meadow.

During the whole of the daylight hours of April 19 a furious bombardment was directed upon the hill, on and behind which the defenders were crouching. Officers of experience described this concentration of fire as the worst that they had ever experienced. Colonel Griffith of the Bedfords held grimly to his front trench, but the losses continued to be heavy. During that afternoon a new phenomenon was observed for the first time—an indication of what was to come. Officers seated in a dug-out immediately behind the fighting line experienced a strong feeling of suffocation, and were driven from their shelter, the candles in which were extinguished by the noxious air. Shells bursting on the hill set the troops coughing and gasping. It was the first German experiment in the use of poison—an expedient which is the most revolting in the history of warfare. Attacked by this new agent, the troops still held their ground.

Tuesday, April 20, was another day of furious shell-fire. A single shell upon that morning blew in a parapet and buried Lieutenant Watson with twenty men of the Surreys. The Queen Victorias under Colonel Shipley upheld the rising reputation of the Territorial troops by their admirable steadiness. Major Lees, Lieutenant Summerhays, and many others died an heroic death ; but there was no flinching from that trench which was so often a grave. As already explained, there was only one trench and room for a very limited number of men on the actual crest, while the rest were kept just behind the curve, so as to avoid a second Spion Kop. At one time upon this eventful day a handful of London Territorials under a boy officer, Woolley of the Victorias, were the only troops upon the top, but it was in safe keeping none the less. This officer received the Victoria Cross. Hour after hour the deadly bombardment went on. About 7.30 in the evening the bombers of the enemy got into some folds in the ground within twenty yards and began a most harassing attack. All night, under the sudden glare of star shells, there were a succession of assaults which tried the half-stupefied troops to the utmost. Soon after midnight in the early morning of Wednesday, April 21, the report came in to the Brigadier that the 1st Surreys in the trenches to the left had

lost all their officers except one subaltern. As a matter of fact, every man in one detachment had been killed or wounded by the grenades. It was rumoured that the company was falling back, but on a message reaching them based upon this supposition, the answer was, " We have not budged a yard, and have no intention of doing so." At 2.30 in the morning the position seemed very precarious, so fierce was the assault and so worn the defence. Of A Company of the Surreys only 55 privates were left out of 180, while of the five officers none were now standing, Major Paterson and Captain Wynyard being killed, while Lieutenant Roupell, who got the Cross, and two others were wounded. It was really a subalterns' battle, and splendidly the boys played up.

All the long night trench-mortars and mine-throwers played upon them, while monstrous explosions flung shattered khaki figures amid a red glare into the drifting clouds of smoke, but still the hill was British. With daylight the 1st Devons were brought up into the fight, and an hour later the hill was clear of the enemy once more, save for a handful of snipers concealed in the craters of the north-west corner. In vain the Germans tried to win back a foothold. Nothing could shift that tenacious infantry. Field-guns were brought up by the attackers and fired at short range at the parapets hastily thrown up, but the Devons lay flat and held tight. It had been a grand fight. Heavy as were the strokes of the Thor hammer of Germany, they had sometimes bent but never shattered the iron line of Britain. Already the death-roll had been doubled, and 100 officers with 3000 of our men were stretched upon that little space, littered with bodies and red with blood from end to end. But now the action was at last drawing to its close. Five days it had raged with hardly a break. British guns were now run up and drove the German ones to cover. Bombers who still lurked in the craters were routed out with the bayonet. In the afternoon of the 21st the fire died gradually away and the assaults came to an end. Hill 60 remained with the British. The weary survivors were relieved, and limped back singing rag-time music to their rest-camps in the rear, while the 2nd Cameron Highlanders, under Colonel Campbell, took over the gruesome trenches.

It was a fine feat of arms. It was not a question of the little mound—important as that might be, it could not justify so excessive a loss of life, whether German or British. Hill 60 was a secondary matter. What was really being fought for was the ascendancy of the British or the Prussian soldier—that subtle thing which would tinge every battle which might be fought thereafter. Who would cry " Enough ! " first ? Who would stick it to the bitter end ? Which had the staying-power when tried out to a finish ? The answer to that question was of more definite military importance than an observation post, and it was worth our three thousand slain or maimed to have the award of the God of battles to strengthen us hereafter.

Many anecdotes were current in the Army as to the extraordinary

daring and energy of the subterranean workers, who were never so happy as when, deep in the bowels of the earth, they were planning some counter-mine with the tapping of the German picks growing louder on their ears. One authentic deed by Captain Johnston's 172nd Mining Company may well be placed upon record. The sapping upon this occasion was directed against the Peckham Farm held by the Germans. Finding that the enemy were countermining, a *camouflet* was laid down which destroyed their tunnel. After an interval a corporal descended into the shaft, but was poisoned by the fumes. An officer followed him and seized him by the ankles, but became unconscious. A private came next and grabbed the officer, but lost his own senses. Seven men in succession were in turn rescuers and rescued, until the whole chain was at last brought to the surface. Lieutenants Severne and Williams, with Corporal Gray and Sappers Hattersley, Hayes, Lannon, and Smith, were the heroes of this incident. It is pleasant to add that though the corporal died, the six others were all resuscitated.

It is with a feeling of loathing that the chronicler turns from such knightly deeds as these to narrate the next episode of the war, in which the gallant profession of arms was degraded to the level of the assassin, and the Germans, foiled in fair fighting, stole away a few miles of ground by the arts of the murderer. So long as military history is written, the poisoning of Langemarck will be recorded as an incident by which warfare was degraded, and a great army, which had long been honoured as the finest fighting force in the world, became in a single day an object of horror and contempt, flying to the bottles of a chemist to make the clearance which all the cannons of Krupp were unable to effect. The crime was no sudden outbreak of spite, nor was it the work of some unscrupulous subordinate. It could only have been effected by long preparation, in which the making of great retorts and wholesale experiments upon animals had their place. Our generals, and even our papers, heard some rumours of such doings, but dismissed them as being an incredible slur upon German honour. It proved now that it was only too true, and that it represented the deliberate, cold-blooded plan of the military leaders, in spite of the definite agreement among civilised nations by which such devices were expressly barred. Their lies, which are as much part of their military equipment as their batteries, represented that the British had themselves used such devices in the fighting on Hill 60. Such an assertion may be left to the judgment of the world.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

The Battle of St. Julien

Situation at Ypres—The poison gas—The Canadian ordeal—Gravenstafel Ridge—The fight in the wood of St. Julien—The French recovery—Miracle days—The glorious Indians—The Northern Territorials—Hard fighting—The net result—Loss of Hill 60.

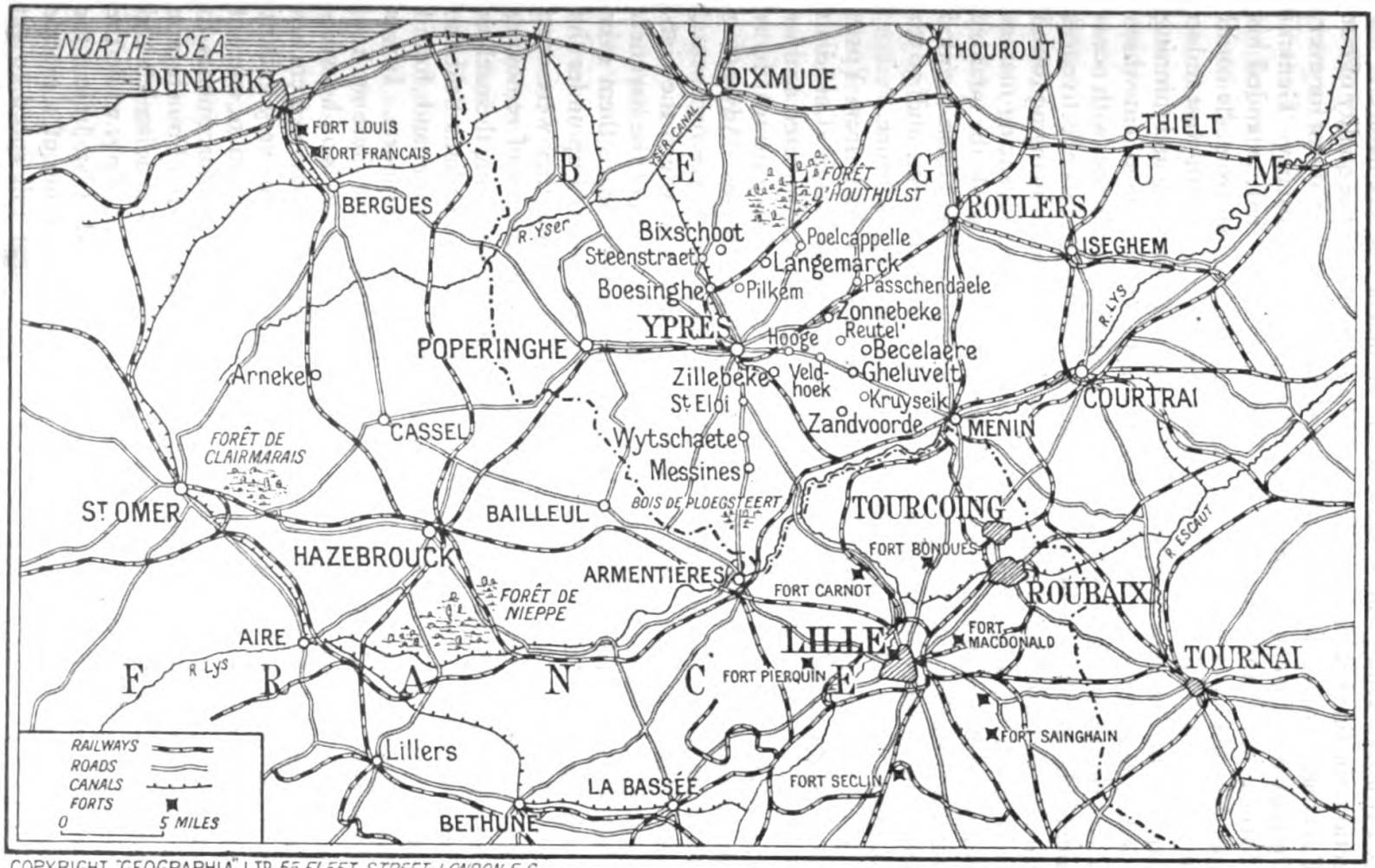
THE Belgians still held the flooded Yser Canal up to the neighbourhood of Bixschoote. There the line was carried on by the French Eighth Army, now commanded by General Putz in the place of General d'Urbal. His troops seem to have been all either Colonial or Territorial, two classes which had frequently shown the utmost gallantry, but were less likely to meet an unexpected danger with steadiness than the regular infantry of the line. These formations held the trenches from Bixschoote on the canal to the Ypres-Poelcapelle road, two thousand yards east of Langemarck, on the right. At this point they joined on to Plumer's Fifth Corps, the Canadian, 28th and 27th British Divisions, forming a line which passed a mile north of Zonnebeke, curling round south outside the Polygon Wood to the point where the 5th Division of the Second Corps kept their iron grip upon Hill 60. The average distance from Ypres to all these various lines would be about five miles. Smith-Dorrien, as commander of the Second Army, was general warden of the district.

About 5 p.m. on Thursday, April 22, a furious artillery bombardment from Bixschoote to Langemarck began along the French lines, including the left of the Canadians, and it was reported that the 45th French Division was being heavily attacked. At the same time a phenomenon was observed which would seem to be more in place in the pages of a romance than in the record of an historian. From the base of the German trenches over a considerable length there appeared jets of whitish vapour, which gathered and swirled until they settled into a definite low cloudbank, greenish-brown below and yellow above, where it reflected the rays of the sinking sun. This ominous bank of vapour, impelled by a northern breeze, drifted swiftly across the space which separated the two lines. The French troops, staring over the top of their parapet at this curious screen which ensured them a temporary relief from fire,

were observed suddenly to throw up their hands, to clutch at their throats, and to fall to the ground in the agonies of asphyxiation. Many lay where they had fallen, while their comrades, absolutely helpless against this diabolical agency, rushed madly out of the mephitic mist and made for the rear, over-running the lines of trenches behind them. Many of them never halted until they had reached Ypres, while others rushed westwards and put the canal between themselves and the enemy. The Germans, meanwhile, advanced, and took possession of the successive lines of trenches, tenanted only by the dead garrisons, whose blackened faces, contorted figures, and lips fringed with the blood and foam from their bursting lungs, showed the agonies in which they had died. Some thousands of stupefied prisoners, eight batteries of French field-guns, and four British 4.7's, which had been placed in a wood behind the French position, were the trophies won by this dubious victory. The British heavy guns belonged to the 2nd London Division, and were not deserted by their gunners until the enemy's infantry were close upon them, when the strikers were removed from the breech-blocks and the pieces abandoned. It should be added that both the young officers present, Lieuts. Sandeman and Hamilton Field, died beside their guns after the tradition of their corps.

By seven o'clock the French had broken. Under the shattering blow which they had received, a blow particularly demoralising to African troops, with their fears of magic and the unknown, it was impossible to rally them effectually until the next day. It is to be remembered in explanation of this disorganisation that it was the first experience of these poison tactics, and that the troops engaged received the gas in a very much more severe form than our own men on the right of Langemarck. For a time there was a gap five miles broad in the front of the position of the Allies, and there were many hours during which there was no substantial force between the Germans and Ypres. They wasted their time, however, in consolidating their ground, and the chance of a great *coup* passed for ever. They had sold their souls as soldiers, but the Devil's price was a poor one. Had they had a corps of cavalry ready, and pushed them through the gap, it would have been the most dangerous moment of the war.

A portion of the German force, which had passed through the gap left by the retirement of the French, moved eastwards in an endeavour to roll up the Canadian line, the flank of which they had turned. Had they succeeded in doing this the situation would have become most critical, as they would have been to the rear of the whole of the Fifth Army Corps. General Alderson, commanding the Canadians, took instant measures to hold his line. On the exposed flank were the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 15th (48th Highlanders), both of the 3rd Brigade. To the right of these were the 8th Canadians and 5th Canadians in the order named. The attack developed along two-thirds of a front of five thousand yards, but was most severe upon the left, where it had become a flank as well



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as a frontal assault ; but in spite of the sudden and severe nature of the action, the line held splendidly firm. Any doubt as to the quality of our Canadian troops—if any such doubt had existed—was set at rest for ever, for they met the danger with a joyous and disciplined alacrity. General Turner, who commanded the 3rd Brigade upon the left, extended his men to such an extent that, while covering his original front, he could still throw back a line several thousand yards long to the south-west and so prevent the Germans from breaking through. By bending and thinning his line in this fashion he obviously formed a vulnerable salient which was furiously attacked by the Germans by shell and rifle fire, with occasional blasts of their hellish gas, which lost something of its effectiveness through the direction of the wind. The Canadian guns, swinging round from north to west, were pouring shrapnel into the advancing masses at a range of two hundred yards with fuses set at zero, while the infantry without trenches fired so rapidly and steadily that the attack recoiled from the severity of the punishment. The British 118th and 365th Batteries did good work in holding back this German advance.

Two reserve battalions had been brought up in hot haste from Ypres to strengthen the left of the line. These were the 16th (Canadian Scottish) and the 10th Canadians. Their advance was directed against the wood to the west of St. Julien, in which lay the four guns which, as already described, had fallen into the hands of the Germans. Advancing about midnight by the light of the moon, these two brave regiments, under Colonels Leckie and Boyle, rushed at the wood which the Germans had already entrenched and carried it at the point of the bayonet. Following at the heels of the flying Germans, they drove them ever deeper into the recesses of the wood, where there loomed up under the trees the huge bulk of the captured guns. For a time they were once again in British hands, but there was no possible means of removing them, so that the Canadians had to be content with satisfying themselves that they were unserviceable. For some time the Canadians held the whole of the wood, but Colonel Leckie, who was in command, found that there were Germans on each side of him and no supports. It was clear, since he was already a thousand yards behind the German line, that he would be cut off in the morning. With quick decision he withdrew unmolested through the wood, and occupied the German trenches at the south end of it. Colonel Boyle lost his life in this very gallant advance, which may truly be said to have saved the situation, since it engaged the German attention and gave time for reinforcements to arrive. The immediate pressing necessity was to give the French time to re-form, and to make some sort of line between the Canadian left and the French right. As early as half-past two in the morning, while the two Canadian regiments were struggling in the wood of St. Julien, the 1st Cavalry Division were showing once again the value of a mobile reserve. De Lisle's horsemen were despatched at full speed to get across the Canal, so as to act as a support and an immediate reserve for

the French. The 2nd East Yorks from the 28th Division was also sent on the same errand.

With the dawn it became of most pressing importance to do something to lessen, if not to fill, the huge gap which yawned between the left of the Canadians and the canal, like a great open door five miles wide leading into Ypres. Troops were already streaming north at the call of Smith-Dorrien from all parts of the British lines, but the need was quick and pressing. The Canadian 1st Brigade, which had been in reserve, was thrown into the broad avenue down which the German army was pouring. The four battalions of General Mercer's Brigade—the 1st (Ontario), 4th, 2nd, and 3rd (Toronto)—advanced south of Pilken. Nearer still to St. Julien was the wood, still fringed by their comrades of the 10th and the 16th, while to the east of St. Julien the remaining six battalions of Canadians were facing north-eastwards to hold up the German advance from that quarter, with their flank turned north-west to prevent the force from being taken in the rear. Of these six battalions the most northern was the 13th Royal Canadian Highlanders, and it was on the unsupported left flank of this regiment that the pressure was most severe, as the Germans were in the French trenches alongside them, and raked them with their machine-guns without causing them to leave their position, which was the pivot of the whole line.

Gradually, out of the chaos and confusion, the facts of the situation began to emerge, and in the early morning of April 23 French saw clearly how great an emergency he had to meet and what forces he had with which to meet it. The prospect at first sight was appalling if it were handled by men who allowed themselves to be appalled. It was known now that the Germans had not only broken a five-mile gap in the line and penetrated two miles into it, but that they had taken Steenstraate, had forced the canal, were close to Lizerne upon the farther side, and had descended the eastern side as far south as Boesinghe. At that time it became known, to the great relief of the British higher command, that the left of the Canadian 1st Brigade, which had been thrown out, was in some sort of touch with six French battalions—much exhausted by their terrible experience—on the east bank of the canal, about a mile south-east of Boesinghe. From that moment the situation began to mend, for it had become clear where the reinforcements which were now coming to hand should be applied. A line had been drawn across the gap, and it only remained to stiffen and to hold it, while taking steps to modify and support the salient in the St. Julien direction, where a dangerous angle had been created by the new hasty rearrangement of the Canadian line.

It has been said that a line had been drawn across the gap, but scattered dots rather than a line would have described the situation more exactly. Patrols had reached the French, but there was no solid obstacle to a German advance. This was partially remedied through the sacri-

fices of a body of men, who have received the less credit in the matter because, being a mere chance collection of military atoms, they had no representative character. No finer proof of soldierly virtue could be given than the behaviour of these British regiments which were now pushed up out of their rest camps near Ypres, many of them wearied from recent fighting. The battalions were the 2nd Buffs, half of the 3rd Middlesex, the 1st York and Lancasters, the 5th Royal Lancasters, the 4th Rifle Brigade, the 2nd Cornwalls, the 9th Royal Scots, and half the 2nd Shropshires. These odd battalions were placed under the command of Colonel Geddes of the Buffs, and may be described as Geddes' Detachment. These scattered units, hardly conscious of each other's presence, were ordered upon April 23 not only to advance and fill the gap, but actually to attack the German Army, so as to give the impression of strength, and bring the assailants to a halt while reinforcements were being hurried to the Ypres front. These battalions, regardless of fire and gas, marched straight across country at the Germans, got right up to their line, and though unable to break it, held them fast in their positions. The 1st Royal Irish, under Colonel Gloster, had done the same farther to the eastward. For three days these battalions played their part in the front line, deliberately sacrificing themselves for the sake of the army. The losses of some of these stubborn units were so heavy that it is reported that an observer approached a long row of prostrate men, whom he took to be the 1st York and Lancaster, only to find that it was the helpless swathe of their dead and wounded filling a position from which the survivors had been moved. The other battalions were in no better case, but their audacity in attacking at a time when even a defence might seem a desperate business, had its effect, and held up the bewildered van of the enemy. Nearly all these battalions were in reserve to the 27th or 28th Divisions, who were themselves holding a long line in face of the enemy, and who, by turning their reserves to the west, were like a bank which transfers money to a neighbour at a time when it may have to face a run upon its own resources. But the times were recognised as being desperate, and any risk must be run to keep the Germans out of Ypres and to hold the pass until further help should come from the south. It was of course well understood that, swiftly as the reinforcements could come, the movement of the German troops, all swirling towards this sudden gap in the dam, would necessarily be even swifter, since they could anticipate such a situation and the British could not. The remains of these battalions had by the evening of the 23rd dug themselves in on a line which roughly joined up the French and the Canadians.

In the afternoon of the 23rd a small portion of the French troops who had escaped the gas attack advanced gallantly to recover some of their ground, and their movement was shared by the Canadian troops on the British left wing, by Geddes' detachment, and by the 13th Brigade. The advance was towards Pilken, the French being on the left of the

Ypres-Pilken road and the British on the right. The strain of this difficult advance upon a victorious enemy fell largely upon the 1st and 4th Battalions of Mercer's 1st Canadian Brigade. Burchall, of the latter regiment, with a light cane in his hand, led his men on in a debonair fashion, which was a reversion to more chivalrous days. He fell, but lived long enough to see his infantry in occupation of the front German line of trenches. No further progress could be made, but at least the advance had for the moment been stayed, and a few hours gained at a time when every hour was an hour of destiny.

A line had now been formed upon the left, and the Germans had been held off. But in the salient to the right in the St. Julien section the situation was becoming ever more serious. The gallant 13th Canadians (Royal Highlanders) were learning something of what their French comrades had endured the day before, for in the early dawn the horrible gasses were drifting down upon their lines, while through the yellow mist of death there came the steady thresh of the German shells. The ordeal seemed mechanical and inhuman—such an ordeal as flesh and blood can hardly be expected to bear. Yet with admirable constancy the 13th and their neighbours, the 15th, held on to their positions, though the trenches were filled with choking and gasping men. The German advance was blown back by rifle fire, even if the fingers which pulled the triggers were already stiffening in death. No soldiers in the world could have done more finely than these volunteers, who combined the dashing American spirit with the cool endurance of the North. Little did Bernhardi think when he penned his famous paragraph about our Colonial Militia and their uselessness upon a European battlefield that a division of those very troops were destined at a supreme moment to hold up one of the most vital German movements in the western campaign.

The French upon the left were not yet in a position to render much help, so General Alderson, who was in command of this movement, threw back his left wing and held a line facing westwards with the 4th Rifle Brigade and a few Zouaves, so as to guard against a German advance between him and the canal. When the night of the 23rd fell it ended a day of hard desultory fighting, but the Allies could congratulate themselves that the general line held in the morning had been maintained, and even improved.

Reinforcements were urgently needed by the advanced line, so during the early hours of the morning of April 24 two battalions of the York and Durham Territorial Brigade—the 4th East Yorkshires and another —were sent from the west to Ypres to reinforce the weary 13th Brigade, much reduced by its exertions at Hill 60, which was heavily engaged near Brielen. There was no fighting at this point during the night, but just about daybreak some of the 2nd Canadian Brigade upon the right of the British line, who were still holding their original trenches, were driven out of them by gas, and compelled to re-form a short distance behind them.

Though the British advance upon the left had gained touch with the Canadian 3rd Brigade, the latter still formed a salient which was so exposed that the edge of it, especially the 13th and 15th battalions, were assailed by infantry from the flank, and even from the rear. To them it seemed, during the long morning of April 24, as if they were entirely isolated, and that nothing remained but to sell their lives dearly. They were circumstances under which less spirited troops might well have surrendered. So close was the fighting that bayonets were crossed more than once, Major Norsworthy, of the 13th, among others, being stabbed in a fierce encounter. Very grim was the spirit of the Canadians. "Fine men, wonderful fellows, absolutely calm, and I have never seen such courage," wrote a Victoria Rifle Territorial, who had himself come fresh from the heroic carnage of Hill 60. It may be added that, good as the Canadian infantry was, their artillery was worthy to stand behind it.

It was clear on the morning of April 24 that the advanced angle, where the French and Canadians had been torn apart, could no longer be held in face of the tremendous shell-fire which was directed upon it and the continuous pressure of the infantry attacks. The 3rd Canadian Brigade fell slowly back upon the village of St. Julien. This they endeavoured to hold, but a concentrated fire rained upon it from several sides and the retreat continued. A detachment of the 13th and 14th Canadians were cut off before they could get clear, and surrounded in the village. Here they held out as long as their cartridges allowed, but were finally all killed, wounded, or taken. The remainder of the heroic and decimated 3rd Brigade rallied to the south of St. Julien, but their retirement had exposed the flank of the 2nd Canadian Brigade (Currie's), even as their own flank had been exposed by the retirement of the French 45th Division. This 2nd Brigade flung back its left flank in order to meet the situation, and successfully held its ground.

In doing this they were greatly aided by supports which came from the rear. This welcome reinforcement consisted of three battalions of the 84th Brigade, under Colonel Wallace. These three battalions were ordered to advance about four o'clock in the afternoon, their instructions being to make straight for Fortuin. Their assault was a desperate one, since there was inadequate artillery support, and they had to cross two miles of open ground under a dreadful fire. They went forward in the open British formation—the 1st Suffolks in the van, then the 12th London Rangers, and behind them the 1st Monmouths. Numerous gassed Canadians covered the ground over which they advanced. The losses were very heavy, several hundred in the Suffolks alone, but they reached a point within a few hundred yards of the enemy, where they joined hands with the few Canadians who were left alive in those trenches. They hailed their advent with cheers. The whole line lay down at this point, being unable to get farther, and they were joined at a later date by the 9th Durhams, who came up on the right. This body, which

may be called Wallace's detachment, remained in this position during the night, and were exposed to severe attack next day, as will be seen later. So perilous was their position at the time the 9th Durhams came up that preparations had been made for destroying all confidential records in view of the imminent danger of being overwhelmed.

In this and subsequent fighting the reader is likely to complain that he finds it difficult to follow the movements or order of the troops, but the same trouble was experienced by the generals at the time. So broken was the fighting that a regimental officer had units of nine battalions under him at one moment. The general situations both now and for the next three days may be taken to be this : that certain well-defined clumps of British troops—28th Division, 10th Brigade, Canadians, and so forth—are holding back the Germans, and that odd battalions or even companies are continually pushed in, in order to fill the varying gaps between these ragged forces and to save their flanks, so far as possible, from being turned. These odd battalions coalesced into irregular brigades which are named here Geddes', Tuson's, or Wallace's detachment, after their senior officer.

Every hour of this day was an hour of danger, and fresh ground had been abandoned and heavy losses incurred. None the less it may be said that on the evening of Saturday, April 24, the very worst was over. From the British point of view it was a war of narrow escapes, and this surely was among the narrowest. The mystics who saw bands of bowmen and of knights between the lines during the retreat from Mons did but give definite shape to the undeniable fact that again and again the day had been saved when it would appear that the energy, the numbers, or the engines of the enemy must assure a defeat. On this occasion the whole front had, from an unforeseen cause, fallen suddenly out of the defence. Strong forces of the Germans had only five miles to go in order to cut the great nerve ganglion of Ypres out of the British system. They were provided with new and deadly devices of war. They were confronted by no one save a single division of what they looked upon as raw Colonial Militia, with such odds and ends of reinforcements as could be suddenly called upon. And yet of the five miles they could only accomplish two, and now after days of struggle the shattered tower of the old Cloth Hall in front of them was as inaccessible as ever. It needs no visions of overwrought men to see the doom of God in such episodes as that.

Reinforcements were now assembling to the immediate south of St. Julien. By evening the Northumberland Brigade and the Durham Light Infantry Brigade—both of the 50th Territorial Division—had reached Potijze. More experienced, but not more eager, was Hull's 10th Regular Brigade, which had come swiftly from the Armentières region. All these troops, together with Geddes' detachment and two battalions of the York and Durham Territorials, were placed under the hand of General Alderson for the purpose of a strong counter-attack

upon St. Julien. This attack was planned to take place on the morning of Sunday, April 25. When night fell upon the 24th the front British line was formed roughly as follows :

The 27th and 28th Divisions held their original trenches facing eastwards. In touch with their left was the 2nd Canadian Brigade, with one battalion of the 1st, Canadian Brigade. Then came Wallace's detachment with two battalions of the York and Durham Territorials joining with the remains of the 3rd Canadian Brigade. Thence Geddes' detachment and the 13th Brigade prolonged the line, as already described, towards the canal. Behind this screen the reinforcements gathered for the attack.

The advance was made at 6.30 in the morning of April 25, General Hull being in immediate control of the attack. It was made in the first instance by the 10th Brigade. The fighting line reached a point within 100 yards of St. Julien, but it became clear that there was not weight enough behind the advance to crush a way through the obstacles in front. Two flank battalions retired, and the 2nd Seaforths were exposed to a terrible cross-fire. " We shouted to our officers (what was left of them) to give the order to charge, knowing in our minds that it was hopeless, as the smoke was so thick from their gas shells that we could see nothing on either side of us." Finally a brigade of Northumberland Territorials came in on the right to sustain the hard-pressed line, passing over some two miles of open country under heavy fire on their advance. It was then nearly midday. From that point onwards the attackers accepted the situation and dug themselves in at the farthest point which they could reach, about 600 yards south of St. Julien.

It will be remembered that Wallace's detachment had upon the day before already reached this point. They sustained several German assaults, which they drove back while thrusting wet rifle rags into their mouths to keep out the drifting gas. From their right trenches they had the curious experience of seeing clearly the detraining of German reserves at Langemarck Station, and even of observing a speech made by a German general before his troops hurried from the train into the battle. This advanced line was held by these troops, not only during the 25th, but for three more days, until they were finally relieved after suffering very heavy losses, but having rendered most vital service.

Whilst the British were vainly endeavouring to advance to the north, a new German attack developed suddenly from the north-east in the region of Broodseinde, some five miles from St. Julien. This attack was on a front of eight hundred yards. The trenches attacked were those of the 84th and 85th Brigades of the 28th Division, and no doubt the Germans held the theory that these would be found to be denuded or at least fatally weakened, their occupants having been drafted off to stiffen the Western line. Like so many other German theories, this particular one proved to be a fallacy. In spite of a constant shower of poison shells, which suffocated many of the soldiers, the enemy were

vigorously repulsed, the 2nd East Surrey Regiment getting at one time to hand-to-hand fighting. The few who were able to reach the trenches remained in them as prisoners. Great slaughter was caused by a machine-gun of the 3rd Royal Fusiliers under Lieutenant Mallandain. Still, the movement caused a further strain upon the resources of the British General, as it was necessary to send up three battalions to remain in reserve in this quarter in case of a renewal of the attack. On the other hand, the 11th Brigade (Hasler), less the 1st East Lancashires, came up from the south to join the 10th, and Indian troops were known to be upon the way. The flank of the 85th Brigade was in danger all day, and it was covered by the great devotion of the 8th Durham Light Infantry to the north of it. This battalion lost heavily both in killed, wounded, and prisoners, but it fought with remarkable valour in a very critical portion of the field, and had a special message of praise and thanks from General Bulfin. Early in the morning of the 26th the 1st Hants, on the right of the newly-arrived 10th Brigade, joined up with the 3rd Royal Fusiliers on the left of the 85th Brigade, and so made the line nearly complete. Shortly after the arrival of the Hampshires the enemy charged through the dim dawn with a shout of "Ve vos the Royal Fusiliers." Wily Hampshire was awake, however, and the trick was a failure.

Up to the evening of Sunday, April 25, the 2nd Canadian Brigade had succeeded in holding its original line, which was along a slight eminence called the Gravenstrafel Ridge, which is the official British name for the action. All the regiments had fought splendidly, but the greatest pressure had been borne by Colonel Lipsett's 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles), who had been gassed, enfiladed, and bombarded to the last pitch of human endurance. About five o'clock their trenches were obliterated by the fury of the German bombardment, and the weary soldiers, who had been fighting for the best part of four days, fell back towards Wieltje. That evening a large part of the Canadian Division, which had endured losses of 5,400 men and established a lasting reputation for steadfast valour, were moved into reserve, while the Lahore Indian Division (Keary) came into the fighting line. It is a remarkable illustration, if one were needed, of the unity of the British Empire that, as the weary men from Montreal or Manitoba moved from the field, their place was filled by eager soldiers from the Punjab and the slopes of the Himalayas.

That evening a fresh French Division, the 152nd, came up from the south, and two others were announced as being on their way, so that a powerful French offensive was assured for next day upon the further side of the canal.

The Lahore Division having now arrived, it was directed to advance on the left of the British and on the right of the French, along the general line of the Ypres-Langemarck road. Encouraged by this reinforcement, and by the thickening line of the French, General

Smith-Dorrien, who had spent several nightmare days, meeting one dire emergency after another with never-failing coolness and resource, ordered a general counter-attack for the early afternoon of April 26. There was no sign yet of any lull in the German activity which would encourage the hope that they had shot their bolt. On the contrary, during the whole morning there had been confused and inconclusive fighting along the whole front, and especially along the Gravenstrafel Ridge, where the British 10th and 11th Brigades were now opposing the advance. About two o'clock the counter-attack was set in motion, all forces co-operating, the general idea being to drive the enemy back from the line between Boesinghe on the left and Zonnebeke on the right. Of the French attack on the east of the Canal one can only say that it kept pace generally with the British, but on the west of the Canal it was pushed very strongly in the direction of the village of Lizerne, where the Germans had established an important bridge-head.

The Indians advanced to the right of the French, with the Jullundur Brigade upon the right and the Ferozepore Brigade upon the left, the Sirhind Brigade in reserve. This Indian advance was a fine one over fifteen hundred yards of open under a very heavy shell-fire. They had nearly reached the front line of German trenches, and were making good progress, when before them there rose once more the ominous green-yellow mist of the poisoners. A steady north-east wind was blowing, and in a moment the Indians were encircled by the deadly fumes. It was impossible to get forward. Many of the men died where they stood. The mephitic cloud passed slowly over, but the stupefied men were in no immediate condition to resume their advance. The whole line was brought to a halt, and the survivors were eventually supported and relieved by the Sirhind Brigade, who, with the help of the 3rd Sappers and Miners and the 34th Pioneers, consolidated the old front line. General Smith-Dorrien tersely summed up the characteristics of this advance of the Lahore Division when he said that it was done " with insufficient artillery preparation, up an open slope in the face of overwhelming shell, rifle, and machine-gun fire and clouds of poison gas, but it prevented the German advance and ensured the safety of Ypres." The 1st Manchesters and 1st Connaughts fought magnificently, but it cannot be said that there was any great difference of gallantry between Briton and Indian.

Farther to the eastwards another fine advance had been made by the 149th Northumberland Brigade of Territorials (Riddell) of the 50th Division, who had just arrived from England. Some military historian has remarked that British soldiers never fight better than in their first battle, and this particular performance, carried out by men with the home dust still upon their boots, could not have been improved upon. In this as in other attacks it was well understood that the object of the operations was rather to coerce the Germans into suspending their dangerous advance than to actually gain and permanently hold any of

the lost ground. The brigade advanced in artillery formation which soon broke into open order. The fire, both from the German guns, which had matters all their own way, and from their riflemen, was incessant and murderous. The 6th Northumberland Fusiliers were on the left with the 7th upon the right, the other two battalions being nominally in second line but actually swarming up into the gaps. In spite of desperately heavy losses the gallant Geordies won their way across open fields, with an occasional rest behind a bank or hedge, until they were close to the actual outbuildings of St. Julien. They were at the edge of the village for some time, but they had lost their Brigadier, the gallant Riddell, and two-thirds of their officers and men. Any support would have secured their gains, but the 151st Durham Light Infantry Brigade behind them had their own hard task to perform. The battalions which had reached the village were compelled to fall back. Shortly after six in the evening the survivors had dropped back to their own trenches. Their military career had begun with a repulse, but it was one which was more glorious than many a facile success.

On their right the 28th Division had been severely attacked, and the pressure was so great that two and a half battalions had been sent to their help, thus weakening the British advance to that extent. Had these battalions been available to help the Northumbrians, it is possible that their success could have been made good. The strain upon the over-matched artillery may be indicated by the fact that on that one afternoon the 366th Battery of the 28th Division fired one thousand seven hundred and forty rounds. The troops in this section of the battlefield had been flung into the fight in such stress that it had been very difficult to keep a line without gaps, and great danger arose from this cause on several occasions. Thus a gap formed upon the left of the Hampshire Regiment, the flank of the 11th Brigade, through which the Germans poured. Another gap formed on the right of the Hampshires between them and the 3rd Royal Fusiliers of the 85th Brigade. One company of the 8th Middlesex was practically annihilated in filling this gap, but by the help of the 8th Durham Light Infantry and other Durham and Yorkshire Territorials the line was restored. The 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry also co-operated in this fierce piece of fighting, their Colonel Bridgford directing the operation.

It was a day of heavy losses and uncertain gains, but the one vital fact remained that, with their artillery, their devil's gas, and their north-east wind, the Germans were not a yard nearer to that gaunt, tottering tower which marked the goal of their desire.

The night of the 26th was spent by the British in reorganising their line, taking out the troops who were worn to the bone, and substituting such reserves as could be found. The French had been unable to get forward on the east of the Canal, but on the west, where they were farther from the gas, they had made progress, taking trenches between Boesinghe and Lizerne, and partially occupying the latter village. In

the early afternoon of the 27th our indomitable Allies renewed their advance upon the left. They were held up by artillery fire, and finally, about 7 p.m., were driven back by gas fumes. The Sirhind and Ferozepore Indian Brigades kept pace with the French upon the right, but made little progress, for the fire was terrific. The losses of the Sirhind Brigade were very heavy, but they held their own manfully. The 1st and 4th Gurkhas had only two officers left unwounded in each battalion. The 4th King's also made a very fine advance. Four battalions from corps reserve—the 2nd Cornwalls, 2nd West Ridings, 5th King's Own, and 1st York and Lancaster—were sent up at 3 p.m., under Colonel Tuson, to support the Indians. The whole of this composite brigade was only one thousand three hundred rifles, three out of the four battalions having been with Geddes' decimated force. The advance could not get forward, but when in the late evening the Turcos recoiled before the deadly gas, the left of the Sirhind Brigade would have been in the air but for the deployment of part of Tuson's detachment to cover their flank. At 9 p.m. the Morocco Brigade of the French Division came forward once more and the line was re-formed, Tuson's detachment falling back into support. Once again it was a day of hard fighting, considerable losses, and inconclusive results, but yet another day had gone and Ypres was still intact. On the right of the British the 10th and 11th Brigades had more than held their own, and the line of the Gravenstrafel Ridge was in their hands. Across the Canal also the French had come on, and the Germans were being slowly but surely pushed across to the farther side. By the evening of the 28th a continuation of this movement had entirely cleared the western side, and on the eastern had brought the French line up to the neighbourhood of Steenstraate.

At this point the first phase of the second battle of Ypres may be said to have come to an end, although for the next few days there was desultory fighting here and there along the French and British fronts. The net result of the five days' close combat had been that the Germans had advanced some two miles nearer to Ypres. They had also captured the four large guns of the London Battery, eight batteries of French field-guns, a number of machine-guns, several thousand French, and about a thousand British prisoners. The losses of the Allies had been very heavy, for the troops had fought with the utmost devotion in the most difficult circumstances. The casualties up to the end of the month in this region came to nearly 20,000 men, and at least 12,000 French would have to be added to represent the total Allied loss. No British or Canadian guns were lost save the four heavy pieces, which were exposed through the exceptional circumstance of the gas attack. The saving of all the Canadian guns was an especially fine achievement, as two-thirds of the horses were killed, and it was necessary to use the same teams again and again to get away pieces which were in close contact with the enemy.

The airmen, too, did great work during this engagement, bombarding

Steenstraate, Langemarck, Poelcapelle, and Paschendaale. In so short an account of so huge an operation it is difficult to descend to the individual, but no finer deed could be chronicled in the whole war than that of Lieutenant Rhodes-Moorhouse, who, having been mortally wounded in the execution of his duty, none the less steered his machine home, delivered her at the hangar, and made his report before losing consciousness for ever.

As to the German losses, they were very considerable. The Twenty-sixth Corps returned a casualty list of 10,572, and the Twenty-seventh of 6101. These are great figures when one considers that it was almost entirely to their rifles that the British had to trust. There were many other units engaged, and the total could not have been less than 25,000 killed, wounded, or taken.

The numbers of infantry engaged were probably about the same, but the Germans had a great preponderance in artillery. The surprise of their gas gave them a great though an unworthy advantage. It is suggestive that in none of their despatches at the time was the use of gas mentioned.

The gain of ground by the Germans from north to south in this engagement necessitated a drawing-in of the line from east to west over a front of nearly eight miles in order to avoid a dangerous projecting salient at Zonnebeke. It was hard in cold blood to give up ground which had been successfully held for so many months, and which was soaked with the blood of our bravest and best. On the other hand, if it were not done now, while the Germans were still wearied out by their exertions, it might be exposed to an attack by fresh troops, and lead to an indefensible strategic position.

On Sunday, May 2, there was a fresh attack on the north of Ypres along the front held by the French to the immediate south of Pilken and along the British left to the east of St. Julien, where the newly arrived 12th Brigade (Anley) and the remains of the 10th and 11th were stationed. The 12th Brigade, which came up on May 1, consisted at that time of the 1st King's Own Lancasters, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd Essex, 5th South Lancashires (T.F.), 2nd Monmouths (T.F.), and 2nd Royal Irish. The attack was in the first instance carried out by means of a huge cloud of gas, which was ejected under high pressure from the compressed cylinders in their trenches, and rapidly traversed the narrow space between the lines. As the troops fell back to avoid asphyxiation they were thickly sprayed by shrapnel from the German guns. The German infantry followed on the fringe of their poison cloud, but they brought themselves into the zone of the British guns, and suffered considerable losses. Many of the troops in the trenches drew to one side to avoid the gas, or even, in some cases, notably that of the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, waited for the gas to come, and then charged swiftly through it to reinforce the front line. The result was that neither on the French nor on the British front did the enemy gain

any ground. Two battalions of the 12th Brigade—the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2nd Essex—suffered heavily, many of the men being poisoned. The Lancashire Fusiliers lost 450 men from this cause, among them the heroic machine-gunner, Private Lynn, who stood without a respirator in the thick of the fumes, and beat off a German attack almost single-handed, at the cost of a death of torture to himself.

It was found that even when the acute poisoning had been avoided, a great lassitude was produced for some time by the inhalation of the gas. In the case of Hull's 10th Brigade, which had been practically living in the fumes for a fortnight, but had a specially bad dose on May 2, it was found that out of 2500 survivors, only 500 were really fit for duty. The sufferings of the troops were increased by the use of gas shells, which were of thin metal with highly-compressed gas inside. All these fiendish devices were speedily neutralised by means of respirators, but a full supply had not yet come to hand, nor had the most efficient type been discovered, so that many of the Allies were still poisoned. None the less it had been shown that a line could be held even against a bad gas attack.

On May 3 the enemy renewed his attack upon the 11th Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier-General Prowse, and the 1st Rifle Brigade, which was the right flank regiment, was badly mauled, their trenches being almost cleared of defenders. The 1st Somersets also suffered heavily. Part of the 1st York and Lancasters and the 5th King's Own Lancasters were rushed up to the rescue from the supports of the 28th Division. The gallant Colonel of the latter battalion, Lord Richard Cavendish, was wounded while waving on his men with his cane and shouting, "Come along, King's Own." At the same time the German infantry tried to push in between the 11th Brigade on the left and the 85th on the right, at the salient between the 4th and 28th Divisions, the extreme north-east corner of the British lines. The fight was a very desperate one, being strongly supported by field-guns at short range. Three more British battalions—the 2nd Buffs, 3rd Fusiliers, and 2nd East Yorks—were thrown into the fight, and the advance was stopped. That night the general retirement took place, effected in many cases from positions within a few yards of the enemy, and carried out without the loss of a man or a gun. The retirement was upon the right of the British line, and mainly affected the 27th, and to a less degree the 28th Divisions. The 4th Division on the left or north hardly moved, but was the hinge upon which the others swung. During the whole of these and subsequent operations the 4th Division was splendidly supported by the French artillery, which continually played upon the attacking Germans.

Before closing this chapter, dealing with the gas attacks to the north of Ypres, and beginning the next one, which details the furious German assault upon the contracted lines of the Fifth Army Corps, it is necessary to interpolate some account of the new development at Hill 60. This

position was a typical one for the German use of gas, just as the Dardanelles lines would have been for the Allies, had they condescended to such an atrocity upon a foe who did not themselves use such a weapon. Where there is room for flexibility of manœuvre, and a temporary loss of ground is immaterial, the gas is at a discount ; but where there is a fixed and limited position it is without efficient respirators practically impossible to hold it against such an agency. Up to now the fighting at Hill 60 had furnished on both sides a fine epic of manliness, in which man breasted man in honest virile combat. Alas, that such a brave story should have so base an ending ! Upon the evening of May 1 the poisoners got to work, and the familiar greenish gas came stealing out from the German trenches, eddied and swirled round the base of the hill, and finally submerged the summit, where the brave men of the Dorsets in the trenches were strangled by the chlorine as they lay motionless and silent, examples of a discipline as stern as that of the Roman sentry at Herculaneum. So dense were the fumes that the Germans could not take possession, and it was a reinforcement of Devons and Bedfords under Colonel E. C. Williams of the 15th Brigade who were the first to reach the trenches, where they found the bodies of their comrades, either fixed already in death or writhing in the agonies of choking. It is said that the instructions of the relieving force were to carry up munitions and to carry down the Dorsets. One officer and 50 men had been killed at once, while 4 officers and 200 men were badly injured, many of them being permanently incapacitated. The 59th Company of Royal Engineers were also overwhelmed by the fumes, three officers and many men being poisoned.

The gas attack upon Hill 60 on May 1 may have been a mere experiment upon the part of the Germans to see how far they could submerge it, for it was not followed up by a strong infantry advance. A more sustained and more successful attack was made by the same foul means on May 5. Early in the morning the familiar cloud appeared once more, and within a few minutes the British position was covered by it. Not only the hill itself, but a long trench to the north of it was rendered untenable, and so was another trench two thousand yards north of Westhoek.

The 2nd West Ridings were holding the front trench at the time, and suffered horribly from the poison. Mr. Valentine Williams, in his admirable account of the episode, says : " There appeared staggering towards the dug-out of the commanding officer of the Duke's in the rear two figures, an officer and an orderly. The officer was as pale as death, and when he spoke his voice came hoarsely from his throat. Beside him his orderly, with unbuttoned coat, his rifle clasped in his hand, swayed as he stood. The officer said slowly, in his gasping voice, ' They have gassed the Duke's. I believe I was the last man to leave the hill. The men are all up there dead. They were splendid. I thought I ought to come and report.' That officer was Captain Robins.

. . . They took him and his faithful orderly to hospital, but the gallant officer died that night." His two subalterns, Lieutenant Miller and another, both remained in the front trench until they died.

Such was the upshot of the fighting at Hill 60. What with the shells and what with the mines, very little of the original eminence was left. The British still held the trenches upon the side while the Germans held the summit, if such a name could be applied. The British losses, nearly all from poison, had been considerable in the affair, and amounted to the greater part of a thousand men, the Dorsets, Devons, Bedfords, and West Ridings being the regiments which suffered most heavily. When the historian sums up the deeds of the war he can find nothing more remarkable than the patient endurance with which the troops faced a death of torture from the murderous gas in the days when no protection had yet been afforded them.

There was considerable difference of opinion at this stage whether the Ypres salient should be held or not. It had become a perfect shell trap, and it was clear that heavy losses must always be sustained in its defence. General Smith-Dorrien and many others were in favour of making the line of the Canal and of the walls of Ypres the front British line. On purely military considerations it would certainly have been wiser to do so. But there were political reasons, and especially the effect of an abandonment upon vacillating neutral Powers which led to its continued retention, though the new retirement would reduce its area.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

The Battles of Frezenberg and Bellewaarde Ridge

The second phase—Attack on the 4th Division—Great stand of the Princess Pats—Breaking of the line—Desperate attacks—The cavalry save the situation—The ordeal of the 11th Brigade—The German failure—Terrible strain on the British—The last effort of May 24—Result of the battle—Sequence of events.

THE second phase of this great battle is dated from the time that the British line was readjusted. The Germans were naturally much encouraged by so general a withdrawal, and it seemed to them that, with a further effort, they would be able to burst their way through and take possession at last of this town which faced them, still inviolate, after nearly eight months of incessant attack. Their guns, aided by their aeroplanes, after wasting a day in bombarding the empty trenches, hastened to register upon the new line of defences.

During the 5th, 6th and 7th the enemy were perfecting their new arrangements, but no peace or rest was given to the northern portion of the line. The bombardment was turned on to this or that battalion in turn. On the evening of the 5th it was the 5th South Lancashires, on the right of the 12th Brigade, who were torn to pieces by jets of steel from the terrible hose. The battalion was relieved by the 2nd Monmouths, who beat off an attack next morning. All day upon the 7th the Germans were massing for an attack, but were held back by the steady fire of the French and British batteries. On the 8th, however, the new preparations were complete, and a storm, destined to last for six unbroken days—days never to be forgotten by those who endured them—broke along the whole east, north-east, and north of the British line.

It has been shown in the last chapter that during the long and bitter fight which had raged from the 22nd to the 28th of April the two British divisions which together formed the Fifth Army Corps had not only been closely engaged in their own trenches, but had lent battalions freely to the Canadians, so that they had at one time only a single battalion in their own reserve. During the period of the readjustment of the line nearly all these troops returned, but they came back grievously weakened and wearied by the desperate struggle in which they had been involved. None the less, they got to work at once in forming and

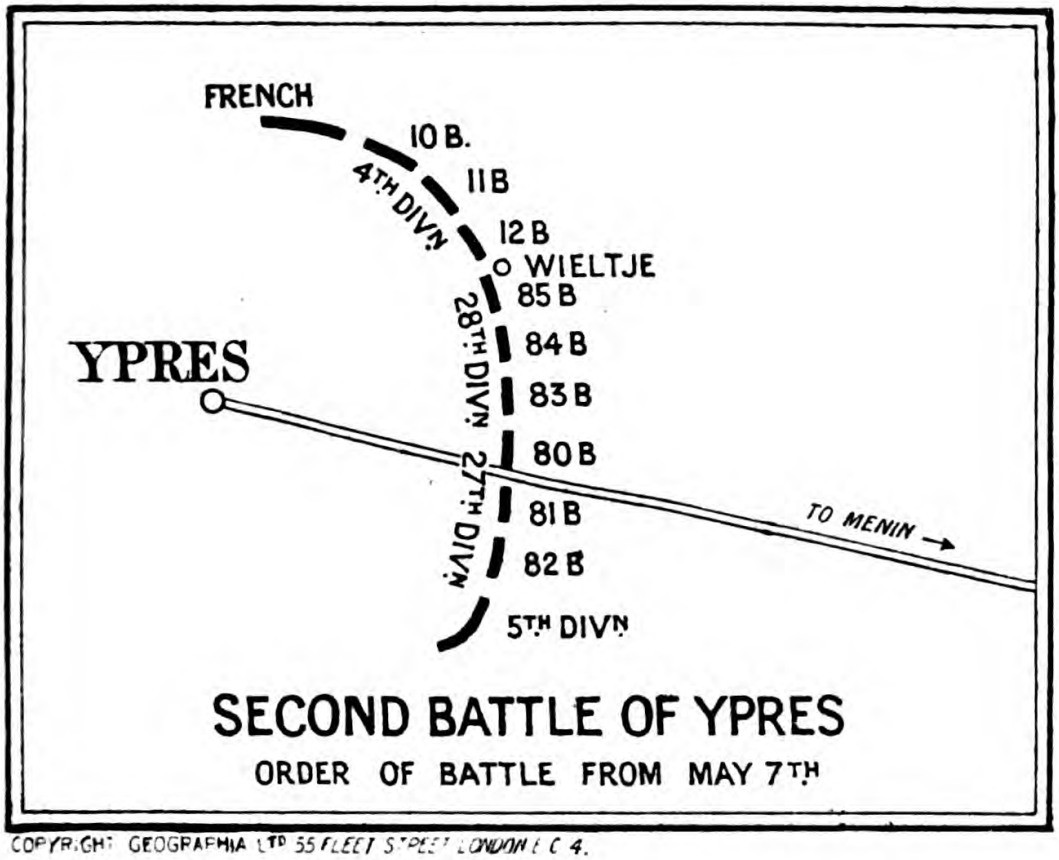
strengthening the new dyke which was to keep the German flood out of Ypres. Day and night they toiled at their lines, helped by working parties from the 5th Division, the 50th Northumbrian Division, and two field companies of sappers from the 4th Division. All was ready when the German attack broke upon the line. The left of this attack was borne by the 4th Division, the centre, in the Frezenberg sector, was held by the 28th Division, and the right by the 27th Division, who joined up with the 5th Division in the south. This was at first almost entirely an artillery attack, and was of a most destructive character. Along the whole line of the three divisions for hour after hour an inexhaustible rain of huge projectiles fell with relentless precision into the trenches, smashing them to pieces and burying the occupants in the graves which they had prepared for themselves. It was with joy that the wearied troops saw the occasional head of an infantry assault and blew it to pieces with their rifles. For the greater part it was not a contest between men and men, but rather one between men and metal, in which the defenders were faced by a deserted and motionless landscape, from which came the ceaseless downpour of shells and occasional drifting clouds of chlorine. At one point, near Frezenberg, the trenches had been sited some 70 yards down the forward slope of a hill, with disastrous results, as part of the 3rd Monmouths and of the 2nd Royal Lancasters who held this section were almost destroyed.

About seven o'clock the German infantry attack developed against that part of the line—the northern or left wing—which was held by the 4th Division. The advance was pushed with great resolution and driven back with heavy losses, after getting within a hundred yards of the trenches. "Company after company came swinging forward steadily in one long, never-ending line," says an observer of the 11th Brigade, describing the attack as it appeared from the front of the 1st East Lancashires and of the 5th London Rifle Brigade. "Here and there their attack slackened, but the check was only temporary. On they came again, and the sight was one that almost mesmerised us. They were near enough for us to hear the short, sharp cries of the officers, and the rain of bullets became more deadly than ever. It was simple murder." The barbed wire in front of the defences was choked and heaped with dead and wounded men. This desperate German attack had more success farther to the south.

At this part of the line the Germans had pushed through a gap and had seized the village of Wieltje, thus getting behind the right rear of the 12th Brigade. It was essential to regain the village, for it was a vital point in the line. The 1st Royal Irish, which had been attached to this brigade, together with two companies of the 5th South Lancashire, were ordered to advance, while two reserve battalions of the 1st Irish Fusiliers and the 7th Argyll and Sutherlands, all under General Anley, supported the attack. It is no light matter with an inferior artillery to attack a village held by German troops, but the assault was brilliantly successful

and the village was regained, while the dangerous gap was closed in the British line. That night there was some desperate fighting round Wieltje, which occasionally got down to bayonet work. The 1st Hants and 1st East Lancashire from the 11th Brigade had come up and helped in the fierce defence, which ended where it began, with the British line still intact.

So much for the fighting on May 8 in front of the 4th Division. Farther down the line to the south the situation was more serious. A terrific bombardment had demolished the trenches of the Fifth Corps,



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and a very heavy infantry advance had followed, which broke the line in several places.

The weight of this attack fell upon the 28th Division in front of Frezenberg, and very particularly upon the 83rd Brigade, which formed the unit on the right flank. The German rush was stemmed for a time by the staunch North of England battalions which made up this brigade —the 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry on the extreme right, and their neighbours of the 5th Royal Lancasters, the 2nd Royal Lancasters, and the 2nd East Yorkshires. Great drifts of gas came over, and the gasping soldiers, with their hands to their throats and the tears running down their cheeks, were at the same time cut to pieces by every kind of shell

beating upon them in an endless stream. Yet they made head against this accumulation of horrors. The East Yorkshires were particularly badly cut up, and the 2nd Monmouths, who were in support, endured a terrible and glorious baptism of fire while advancing in splendid fashion to their support. But the losses from the shell-fire had been very heavy, and the line was too weak to hold. Of 2500 men in the Frezenberg trenches only 600 men were left standing. The brigade had to fall back. The left flank of the 80th Brigade of the 27th Division on the right was consequently exposed and in the air. A glance at the accompanying diagram will show the situation created by the retirement of any unit.

The flank trench was held by the Princess Patricia Canadians, and their grand defence of it showed once more the splendid stuff which the Dominion had sent us. Major Gault and all the other senior officers were killed or wounded, and the command devolved upon Lieutenant Niven, who rose greatly to the occasion. Besides the heavy shelling and the gas, the trenches were raked by machine-guns in neighbouring buildings. So accurate was the German artillery that the machine-guns of the Canadians were buried again and again, but were dug up and spat out their defiance once more. Corporal Dover worked one of these guns till both his leg and his arm had been shot away. When the trenches were absolutely obliterated the Canadians manned the communication trench and continued the desperate resistance. The 4th Rifle Brigade sent up a reinforcement and the fight went on. Later a party of the 2nd Shropshires pushed their way also into the fire-swept trenches, bringing with them a welcome supply of cartridges. It was at this hour that the 83rd Brigade on the right of the 28th Division had to fall back, increasing the difficulty of holding the position. The enemy charged once more and got possession of the trench at a point where all the defenders had been killed. There was a rush, however, by the survivors in the other sections, and the Germans were driven out again. From then until late at night the shell-fire continued, but there was no further infantry advance. Late that night, when relieved by the Rifles, the Canadian regiment, which had numbered nearly 700 in the morning, could only muster 150 men. Having read the service over their comrades, many of whom had already been buried by the German shells, they were led back by Lieutenants Niven, Clark, Vandenburg, and Papineau after a day of great stress and loss, but of permanent glory. "No regiment could have fought with greater determination or endurance," said an experienced British general. "Many would have failed where they succeeded."

It has already been described how the 83rd Brigade had been driven back by the extreme weight of the German advance. Their fellow brigade upon the left, the 84th (Bowes), had a similar experience. They also held their line under heavy losses, and were finally, shortly after midday, compelled to retire.

At this time the 1st Suffolk was so reduced by the losses sustained when it had formed part of Wallace's detachment, as described in the last chapter, that there were fewer than 300 men with the Colours. When the Germans broke through the left flank of the 83rd Brigade they got partly to the rear of the Suffolk trenches. The survivors of the Suffolks were crowded down the trench and mixed up with the 2nd Cheshires, who were their immediate neighbours. The parapets were wrecked, the trenches full of debris, the air polluted with gas, and the Germans pushing forward on the flank. It is little wonder that in these circumstances this most gallant battalion was overwhelmed. Colonel Wallace and 130 men were taken. The 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers and the 1st Monmouths sustained also very heavy losses, as did the 12th London Rangers. The shattered remains of the brigade were compelled to fall back in conformity with the 83rd upon the right, sustaining fresh losses as they were swept with artillery fire on emerging from the trenches. This was about 11.30 in the morning. The 1st Monmouths upon the left of the line seem, however, to have kept up their resistance till a considerably later hour, and to have behaved with extraordinary gallantry. Outflanked and attacked in the rear after the Germans had taken the trenches on the right, they still, under their gallant Colonel Robinson, persevered in what was really a hopeless resistance. The Germans trained a machine-gun upon them from a house which overlooked their trench, but nothing could shift the gallant miners who formed the greater part of the regiment. Colonel Robinson was shot dead while passing his men down the trench one by one in the hope of forming a new front. Half the officers and men were already on the ground. The German stormers were on the top of them with cries of "Surrender! Surrender!" "Surrender be damned!" shouted Captain Edwards, and died still firing his revolver into the grey of them. It was a fine feat of arms, but only 120 men out of 750 reassembled that night.

After this severe blow battalions held back in reserve were formed up for a counter-attack, which was launched about half-past three. The attack advanced from the point where the 4th and 28th Divisions adjoined, and two battalions of the 4th Division—the 1st Warwicks and the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers—together with the 2nd East Surreys, 1st York and Lancasters, and 3rd Middlesex, of the 85th Brigade, took part in it, pushing forwards towards the hamlet of Frezenberg, which they succeeded in occupying. On their left the 12th London Regiment (the Rangers) won their way back to the line which their Brigade, the 84th, had held in the morning, but they lost very heavily in their most gallant attack. Two other reserve battalions, the 1st East Lancashires, of the 11th Brigade, and the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, of the 10th, fought their way up as already mentioned on the extreme left in the neighbourhood of Wieltje, and spliced the line at the weak point of the junction of divisions. All these attacks were made against incessant

drifts of poison-gas, as well as heavy rifle and shell fire. It was a day of desperate and incessant fighting, where all General Plumer's skill and resolution were needed to restore and to hold his line. The Germans claimed to have taken 800 prisoners, mostly of the 84th Brigade.

The net result of the fighting on May 8 was that the area held in the north-east of Ypres was further diminished. Early on the 9th the Germans, encouraged by their partial success, continued their attack, still relying upon their massive artillery, which far exceeded anything which the British could put against it. The attack on this morning came down the Menin road, and the trenches on either side of it were heavily bombarded. At ten o'clock there was an infantry advance upon the line of the 81st Brigade (Croker), which was driven back by the 2nd Cameron Highlanders and the 2nd Gloucesters. The shell-fire was continued upon the same line until 4 p.m., when the trench was obliterated, and a second advance of the German infantry got possession of it. A counter-attack of the Gloucesters was held up with considerable loss, the advance of the regiment through the wood being greatly impeded by the number of trees cut down by shells and forming abattis in every direction, like the windfalls of a Canadian forest. This trench was the only capture made by the Germans during the day, and it did not materially weaken the position. The Gloucesters lost Colonel Tulloh, five other officers, and 150 men.

These attacks along the line of the Menin road and to the north of Lake Bellewaarde were all directed upon the 27th Division, but the 28th Division immediately to the north, which had been defending the sector which runs through Frezenberg and Wieltje, had also been most violently shelled, but had held its line, as had the 4th Division to the north. All these divisions had considerable losses. The general result was a further slight contraction of the British line. It could not be broken, and it could not be driven in upon Ypres, but the desperate and (apart from the gas outrages) valorous onslaughts of the Germans, aided by their overpowering artillery, gained continually an angle here and a corner there, with the result that the British position was being gradually whittled away.

On the 10th the Germans again attacked upon the line of the Menin road, blasting a passage with their artillery, but meeting with a most determined resistance. The weight of their advance fell chiefly upon the 80th Brigade to the north of the road, the 4th Rifle Brigade and the 4th Rifles bearing the brunt of it and suffering very severely, though the 2nd Camerons and 9th Royal Scots, of the 81st Brigade, were also hard hit. So savage had been the bombardment, and so thick the gas, that the German infantry thought that they could safely advance, but the battalions named, together with the 3rd Battalion of Rifles, drove them back with heavy loss. It was always a moment of joy for the British infantry when for a brief space they were faced by men rather than machines. The pitiless bombardment continued; the garrison of the

trenches was mostly killed or buried, and the survivors fell back on to the support trenches west of the wood. This defence of the Riflemen was as desperate a business as that of the Canadians on the 8th. Several of the platoons remained in the shattered trenches until the Germans had almost surrounded them, and finally shot and stabbed a path for themselves till they could rejoin their comrades. It was on this day that the 9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered heavy losses, including their splendid Colonel, James Clark.

On May 11 the attack was still very vigorous. The 27th Division was strongly pressed in the morning. The 80th Brigade was to the north and somewhat to the west of the 81st, which caused the latter to form a salient. With their usual quickness in taking advantage of such things, the Germans instantly directed their fire upon this point. After several hours of heavy shelling, an infantry attack about 11 a.m. got into the trenches, but was driven out again by the rush of the 9th Royal Scots. The bombardment was then renewed, and the attack was more successful at 4 p.m.—an almost exact repetition of the events of the day before, save that the stress fell upon the 81st instead of the 80th Brigade. During the night the Leinsters of the 82nd Brigade drove the Germans out again, but found that the trench was untenable on account of the shell-fire. It was abandoned, therefore, and the line was drawn back into the better cover afforded by a wood. Afterwards the trench was partly re-occupied by a company of the 2nd Gloucestershires under Captain Fane.

By this date many of the defending troops had been fighting with hardly a break from April 22. It was an ordeal which had lasted by day and by night, and had only been interrupted by the labour of completing the new lines. The losses had been very heavy, and reinforcements were most urgently needed. Some idea of the stress may be gathered from the fact that at the time the six battalions of the 83rd Brigade had been formed into one composite battalion under Colonel Worsley Gough. At the same time it was impossible to take any troops from the northern sector, which was already hardly strong enough to hold a violent German attack. In the south the Army had, as will be shown, become involved in the very serious and expensive operations which began at Richebourg on May 9. In these difficult circumstances it was to the never-failing cavalry that General Plumer had to turn. It is sinful extravagance to expend these highly-trained horsemen, who cannot be afterwards improvised, on work that is not their own, but there have been many times in this war when it was absolutely necessary that the last man, be he who he might, should be put forward. So it was now, and the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, under General de Lisle, were put into the firing line to the north of Lake Bellewaarde, taking the place of the 28th Division, which at that time had hardly a senior regimental officer left standing. The 1st Cavalry Division took the line from Wieltje to Verlorenhoek, while the 3rd carried it on to Hooge, where it touched the 27th Division. Their presence in the front firing line was a sign of

British weakness, but, on the other hand, it was certain that the Germans had lost enormously, that they were becoming exhausted, and that they were likely to wear out the rifling of their cannon before they broke the line of the defence. A few more days would save the situation, and it was hoped that the inclusion of the cavalry would win them.

They took over the lines just in time to meet the brunt of what may have been the most severe attack of all. The shelling on May 12 can only be described as terrific. The Germans appeared to have an inexhaustible supply of munitions, and from morning to night they blew to pieces the trenches in front and the shelters behind which might screen the supports.

It was a day of tempestuous weather, and the howling wind, the driving rain, and the pitiless fire made a Dantesque nightmare of the combat. The attack on the right fell upon the 3rd Cavalry Division. This force had been reorganised since the days in October when it had done so splendidly with the 7th Infantry Division in the fighting before Ypres. It consisted now of the 6th Brigade (1st Royals, 3rd Dragoon Guards, North Somerset Yeomanry), the 7th Brigade (1st and 2nd Life Guards and Leicestershire Yeomanry), and the 8th Brigade (Blues, 10th Hussars, and Essex Yeomanry). This Division was exposed all morning to a perfectly hellish fire, which was especially murderous to the north of the Ypres–Roulers road. At this point the 1st Royals, 3rd Dragoon Guards, and Somerset Yeomanry were stationed, and were blown, with their trenches, into the air by a bombardment which continued for fourteen hours. "The North Somerset Yeomanry on the right of the brigade," says the General, "although suffering severely, hung on to their trenches throughout the day and actually advanced and attacked the enemy with the bayonet." The Royals came up in support, and the brigade held its own. On one occasion the enemy got round the left of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, who were the flank regiment, upon which Captain Neville, who was killed later upon the same day, gave the order, "Even numbers deal with the enemy in the rear, odd numbers carry on!" which was calmly obeyed with complete success. On the right the flank of the 27th Division had been exposed, but the 2nd Irish Fusiliers were echeloned back so as to cover it. So with desperate devices a sagging line was still drawn between Ypres and the ever-pressing invaders. The strain was heavy, not only upon the cavalry, but upon the 27th Division to the south of them. There was a time when the pressure upon the 4th Rifle Brigade, a battalion which had endured enormous losses, was so great that help was urgently needed. The Princess Patricia's had been taken out of the line, as only 100 men remained effective, and the 4th Rifles were in hardly a better position, but the two maimed battalions were formed into one composite body, which pushed up with a good heart into the fighting line and took the place of the 3rd Rifles, who in turn relieved the exhausted Rifle Brigade.

On the left of the cavalry line, where the 1st Cavalry Division joined on to the 4th Infantry Division, near Wieltje, the artillery storm had burst also with appalling violence. The 18th Hussars lost 150 men out of their already scanty ranks. The Essex Regiment on their left helped them to fill the gap until the 4th Dragoon Guards came up in support. This fine regiment and their comrades of the 9th Lancers were heavily punished, but bore it with grim stoicism. To their right Briggs' 1st Brigade held splendidly, though all of them, and especially the Bays, were terribly knocked about. In the afternoon the 5th Dragoon Guards were momentarily driven in by the blasts of shell, but the 11th Hussars held the line firm.

The situation as the day wore on became somewhat more reassuring. The British line had been badly dented in the middle, where the cavalry had been driven back or annihilated, but it held firm at each end. South of the Menin road the 27th Division, much exhausted, were still holding on, officers and men praying in their weary souls that the enemy might be more weary still. These buttressed the right of the line, while three miles to the north the 4th Division, equally worn and ragged, was holding the left. The 10th Brigade had sustained such losses in the gas battle that it was held, as far as possible, in reserve, but the 11th and 12th were hard pressed during the long, bitter day, in which they were choked by gas, lashed with artillery fire, and attacked time after time by columns of infantry. The 11th Brigade in that dark hour showed to a supreme degree the historic qualities of British infantry, their courage hardening as the times grew worse. The 1st East Lancashires had their trenches destroyed, lost Major Rutter and many of their officers, but still, under their gallant Colonel Lawrence, held on to their shattered lines. Every point gained by the stubborn Germans was wrenched from them again by men more stubborn still. They carried a farmhouse near Wieltje, but were turned out again by the indomitable East Lancashires after desperate fighting at close quarters. It is said to have been the fourth time that this battalion mended a broken line. Severe attacks were made upon the trenches of the 1st Hampshires and the 5th London Rifle Brigade, but in each case the defenders held their line, the latter Territorial battalion being left with fewer than 200 men. It was in this action that Sergeant Belcher, of the London Rifle Brigade, with eight of his Territorials and two Hussars, held a vital position against the full force of a German infantry attack, losing half their little band, but saving the whole line from being enfiladed.

The 12th Brigade had been drawn back into reserve, but it was not a day for rest, and the 2nd Essex was hurried forward to the relief of the extreme left of the cavalry, where their line abutted upon the 4th Division. The battalion made a very fine counter-attack under a hail of shells, recovering some trenches and clearing the Germans out of a farmhouse, which they subsequently held against all assailants. This attack was ordered on the instant by Colonel Jones, of the Essex, and

was carried out so swiftly that the enemy had no time to consolidate his new position.

Whilst each buttress held firm, a gallant attempt was made in the afternoon to straighten out the line in the centre where the 3rd cavalry Division had been pushed back. The 8th Brigade of Cavalry, under Bulkeley-Johnson, pushed forward on foot and won their way to the original line of trenches, chasing the Germans out of them and making many prisoners, but they found it impossible to hold them without supports under the heavy shell-fire. They fell back, therefore, and formed an irregular line behind the trenches, partly in broken ground and partly in the craters of explosions. This they held for the rest of the day.

Thus ended a truly desperate conflict. The Germans had failed in this, which proved to be their final and supreme effort to break the line. On the other hand, the advance to the north of the Bellewaarde Lake necessitated a further spreading and weakening of the other forces, so that it may truly be said that the prospects never looked worse than at the very moment when the Germans had spent their strength and could do no more. From May 13 the fighting died down, and for some time the harassed and exhausted defenders were allowed to re-form and to recuperate. The 80th Brigade, which had suffered very heavily, was drawn out upon the 17th, the 2nd Cavalry Division, under Kavanagh, taking its place. Next day the 81st Brigade, and on May 22 the 82nd, were also drawn back to the west of Ypres, their place being taken by fresh troops. The various units of the 28th Division were also rested for a time. For the gunners and sappers there was no rest, however, but incessant labour against overmastering force.

The second phase of this new Battle of Ypres may be said to have lasted from May 4 to May 13. It consisted of a violent German attack, pushed chiefly by poison and by artillery, against the 27th and 28th Divisions of the Fifth British Corps and the 4th Division to the north of them. Its aim was, as ever, the capture of Ypres. In this aim it failed, nor did it from first to last occupy any village or post which gave it any return for its exertions. It inflicted upon the British a loss of from 12,000 to 15,000 men, but endured itself at the very least an equal slaughter without any compensating advantage. The whole operation can only be described, therefore, as being a costly failure. Throughout these operations the British infantry were provided with respirators soaked in alkalis, while many wore specially constructed helmets to save them from being poisoned. To such grotesque expedients had Germany brought the warfare of the twentieth century.

There is no doubt that the three British regular divisions and the cavalry were worn to a shadow at the end of these operations. Since the enemy ceased to attack, it is to be presumed that they were in no better case. The British infantry had been fighting almost day and night for three weeks, under the most desperate conditions. Their superiority

to the infantry of the Germans was incontestable, but there was no comparison at all between the number of heavy guns available, which were at least six to one in favour of the enemy. Shells were poured down with a profusion, and also with an accuracy, never before seen in warfare, and though the British infantry continually regained trenches which had been occupied by the German infantry, it was only to be shelled out of them again by a fire against which they could make no adequate answer. An aerial observer has described that plain as simply flaming and smoking from end to end with the incessant beat of the shells, and has expressed his wonder that human life should have been possible under such a fire. And yet the road to Ypres was ever barred.[1]

All the infantry losses, heavy as they were, are eclipsed by those of the 3rd Cavalry Division, which bore the full blast of the final whirlwind, and was practically destroyed in holding it back from Ypres. This splendid division, to whom, from first to last, the country owes as much as to any body of troops in the field, was only engaged in the fighting for one clear day, and yet lost nearly as heavily in proportion as either of the infantry divisions which had been in the firing line for a week. Their casualties were 91 officers and 1050 men. This will give some idea of the concentrated force of the storm which broke upon them on May 12. It was a most murderous affair, and they were only driven from their trenches when the trenches themselves had been blasted to pieces. It is doubtful whether any regiments have endured more in so short a time. These three brigades were formed of *corps d'élites*, and they showed that day that the blue blood of the land was not yet losing its iron. The casualty lists in this and the succeeding action of the 24th read like a society function. Colonel Ferguson, of the Blues, Colonel the Hon. Evans-Freke, Lord Chesham, Captain the Hon. J. Grenfell, Lord Leveson-Gower, Sir Robert Sutton, Lord Compton, Major the Hon. C. B. Mitford, the Hon. C. E. A. Phillips, Viscount Wendover—so runs the sombre and yet glorious list. The sternest of Radicals may well admit that the aristocrats of Britain have counted their lives cheap when the enemy was at the gate. Colonel Smith-Bingham, of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, Colonel Steele, of the 1st Royals, Colonel Freke, of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and many other senior officers were among the dead or wounded. The Leicester Yeomanry suffered very severely, but their comrades of Essex and of Somerset, the Blues and the 1st Royals, were also hard hit. The losses of the 1st Cavalry Division were not so desperately heavy as those of the 3rd, but were none the less very serious, amounting to 54 officers and 650 men.

It is possible that the German attack desisted because the infantry were exhausted, but more probable that the great head of shells accumu-

[1] In speaking of the infantry fighting, the sober and measured British official history especially mentions as remarkable the exploits of the 4th King's Royal Rifles, the Patricias, the 1st K.O. Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 3rd Monmouths, and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, with the 12th London Rangers.

lated had been brought down to a minimum level, and that the gas cylinders were empty. For ten days, while the British strengthened their battered line, there was a lull in the fighting.

There was no change, however, in the German plan of campaign, and the fight which broke out again upon May 24 may be taken as the continuation of the battle which had died down upon the 13th. Fresh reservoirs of poison had been accumulated, and early in the morning in the first light of dawn the infernal stuff was drifting down wind in a solid bank some three miles in length and forty feet in depth, bleaching the grass, blighting the trees, and leaving a broad scar of destruction behind it. A roaring torrent of shells came pouring into the trenches at the instant that the men, hastily aroused from sleep, were desperately fumbling in the darkness to find their respirators and shield their lungs from the strangling poison. The front of this attack was from a farm called " Shell-trap," between the Poelcapelle and Langemarck roads on the north, to Bellewaarde Lake on the south. The surprise of the poison in that weird hour was very effective, and it was immediately followed by a terrific and accurate bombardment, which brought showers of asphyxiating shells into the trenches. The main force of the chlorine seems to have struck the extreme right of the 4th Division and the whole front of the 28th Division, but the 27th and the cavalry were also involved in a lesser degree.

Anley's 12th Brigade was on the left of the British line, with Hull's 10th Brigade upon its right, the 11th being in reserve. On the 12th and 10th fell the full impact of the attack. The 12th, though badly mauled, stood like a rock and blew back the Germans as they tried to follow up the gas. " They doubled out of their trenches to follow it up half an hour after the emission," wrote an officer of the Essex. " They were simply shot back into them by a blaze of fire. They bolted back like rabbits." All day the left and centre of the 12th Brigade held firm. The Royal Irish upon the right were less fortunate. The pressure both of the gas and the shells fell very severely upon them, and the few survivors were at last driven from their trenches, some hundreds of yards being lost, including the Shell-trap Farm. The Dublin Fusiliers, in the exposed flank of the 10th Brigade, were also very hard hit. Of these two gallant Irish battalions only a handful remained, and the Colonels of each, Moriarty and Loveband, fell with their men. Several of the battalions of the 10th Brigade suffered severely, and the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were left with only 2 officers and 76 men standing. These two officers, by some freak of fate, were brothers named Scott, the sole hale survivors of thirty-six who had been attached to the battalion.

This misfortune upon the right left the rest of the 12th Brigade in a most perilous position, attacked on the front, the flank, and the right rear. No soldiers could be subjected to a more desperate test. The flank battalion was the 1st Royal Lancasters (Colonel Jackson), who

lived up to the very highest traditions of the British Army. Sick and giddy with the gas, and fired into from three sides, they still stuck doggedly to their trenches. The Essex battalion stood manfully beside them, and these two fine battalions, together with the East Lancashires and Rifle Brigade, held their places all day and even made occasional aggressive efforts to counter-attack. At eight in the evening they were ordered to form a new line with the 10th Brigade, five hundred yards in the rear. They came back in perfect order, carrying their wounded with them. Up to this moment the 4th Division had held practically the same line which they had occupied from May 1.

To return to the events of the morning. The next unit from the north was the 85th Brigade (Chapman), which formed the left flank of the 28th Division. Upon it also the gas descended with devastating effect. There was just enough breeze to drift it along and not enough to disperse it. The 2nd East Surrey, the flank battalion, held on heroically, poison-proof and heedless of the shells. Next to them, just south of the railway, the 3rd Royal Fusiliers were so heavily gassed that the great majority of the men were absolutely incapacitated. The few who could use a rifle resisted with desperate valour while two companies of the Buffs were sent up to help them, and another company of the same regiment was despatched to Hooge village, where the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade were very hard pressed. On the left of the cavalry, between Hooge and Bellewaarde, was the Durham Territorial Brigade, which was pushed forward and had its share of the gas and of the attack generally, though less hard pressed than the divisions of regular troops upon their left. In a war of large numbers and of many brave deeds it is difficult and perhaps invidious to particularise, but a few sentences may be devoted to one isolated combat which showed the qualities of the disciplined British soldier. Two platoons of the 7th Durhams, under two 19-year-old lieutenants, Arthur Rhodes and Pickersgill, were by chance overlooked when the front line was withdrawn 200 yards. They were well aware that a mistake had been made, but with a heroic if perhaps Quixotic regard for duty they remained waist-deep in water in their lonely trench waiting for their certain fate, without periscopes or machine-guns, and under fire from their own guns as well as those of the enemy. Both wings were of course in the air. In the early morning they beat back three German attacks but were eventually nearly all killed or taken. Rhodes was shot again and again, but his ultimate fate is unknown. Pickersgill was wounded, and the survivors of his platoon got him to the rear. The loss of such men is to be deplored, but the tradition of two platoons in cold blood facing an army is worth many such losses.

The Durham Territorial Artillery did excellent work in supporting the cavalry, though they were handicapped by their weapons, which were the ancient fifteen-pounders of the South African type. These various movements were all in the early morning under the stress of the

first attack. The pressure continued to be very severe on the line of the Royal Fusiliers and Buffs, who were covering the ground between the railway line on the north and Bellewaarde Lake on the south, so the remaining company of the Buffs was thrown into the fight. At the same time, the 3rd Middlesex, with part of the 6th and 8th Durham Light Infantry, advanced to the north of the railway line. The German pressure still increased, however, and at midday the Buffs and Fusiliers, having lost nearly all their officers and a large proportion of other ranks, fell back into the wood to the south of the railway.

A determined attempt was at once made to recapture the line of trenches from which they had been forced. The 84th Brigade (Bowes), hitherto in reserve, was ordered to move along the south of the line, while the whole artillery of the Fifth Corps supported the advance. Meanwhile, the 80th Brigade (Fortescue) was pushed forward on the right of the 84th, with orders to advance upon Hooge and restore the situation there. It was evening before all arrangements were completed. About seven o'clock the 84th advanced with the 2nd Cheshires upon the left and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers upon the right, supported by the 1st Welsh, the Monmouths, and the feeble remains of the 1st Suffolks. Darkness had fallen before the lines came into contact, and a long and obstinate fight followed, which swayed back and forwards under the light of flares and the sudden red glare of bursting shells. So murderous was the engagement that the 84th Brigade came out of it without a senior officer left standing out of six battalions, and with a loss of 75 per cent. of the numbers with which it began. The machine-gun fire of the Germans was extremely intense, and was responsible for most of the heavy losses. At one time men of the Welsh, the Suffolks, and the Northumberland Fusiliers were actually in the German trenches, but at dawn they were compelled to retire. Late in the evening the 3rd and 4th Brigades of Cavalry were pushed into the trenches on the extreme right of the British position, near Hooge, to relieve the 1st and 2nd Brigades, who had sustained heavy losses for the second time within ten days.

The general result of the attack of May 24 was that this, the most profuse emission of poison, had no more solid effect than the other recent ones, since the troops had learned how to meet it. The result seems to have convinced the Germans that this filthy ally which they had called in was not destined to serve them as well as they had hoped, for from this day onwards there was no further attempt to use it upon a large scale in this quarter. In this action the British endured a loss of some thousands of men killed, wounded, or poisoned, but their line, though forced back at several points, was as firm as ever.

In all the fighting which forms the second half of this great battle one is so absorbed by the desperate efforts of regimental officers and men to hold on to their trenches that one is inclined to do less than justice to the leaders who bore the strain day after day of that uphill fight.

Plumer, of the Second Army; Fergusson, of the Fifth Army Corps; Wilson, Snow, and Bulfin, of the 4th, 27th, and 28th Divisions, De Lisle of the Cavalry—these were the men who held the line in those weeks of deadly danger.

On May 25 the line was consolidated and straightened out, joining the French at the same point as before, passing through Wieltje, and so past the west end of Lake Bellewaarde to Hooge. At this latter village there broke out between May 31 and June 3 what may be regarded as an aftermath of the battle which has just been described. The château at this place, now a shattered ruin, was the same building in which General Lomax was wounded and General Monro struck senseless in that desperate fight on October 31. Such was the equilibrium of the two great forces that here in May the fight was still raging. Château and village were attacked very strongly by the German artillery, and later by the German infantry, between May 30 and June 3, but no impression was made. The post was held by the survivors of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, and the action, though a local one, was as fine an exhibition of tenacious courage as has been seen in the war. The building was destroyed, so to a large extent was the regiment, but the post remained with the British.

This narrative is a brief outline of the series of events which make up the second phase of that battle which, beginning in the north of the Allied lines upon April 22, was continued upon the north-eastern salient, and ended, as shown, at Hooge at the end of May. In this fighting at least 100,000 men of the three nations were killed or wounded. The advantage with which the Germans began was to some extent neutralised before the end, for our gallant Allies had never rested during this time, and had been gradually re-establishing their position, clearing the west of the canal, recapturing Steenstraate and Het Sas, and only stopping short of Pilken. On the other hand, the British had been compelled to draw in for two miles, and Ypres had become more vulnerable to the guns of the enemy. In this hard-fought war it would be difficult to say that any action was more hard-fought than this, and it will survive for centuries to come if only in the glorious traditions of the Canadian Division, who first showed that a brave heart may rise superior to bursting lungs. These were the greatest of all, but they had worthy comrades in the Indians, who at the end of an exhausting march hurled themselves into so diabolical a battle; the Northern Territorial Division, so lately civilians to a man, and now fighting like veterans; the 13th Brigade, staggering from their exertions at Hill 60, and yet called on for this new effort; the glorious cavalry, who saved the situation at the last moment; and the much-enduring 4th, 27th and 28th Divisions of the line, who bore the buffetings of the ever-rising German tide. Their dead lie at peace on Ypres plain, but shame on Britain if ever she forgets what she owes to those who lived, for they and their comrades of 1914 have made that name a symbol of glory for ever.

CHAPTER XV

ACTIONS OF AUBERS RIDGE AND FESTUBERT

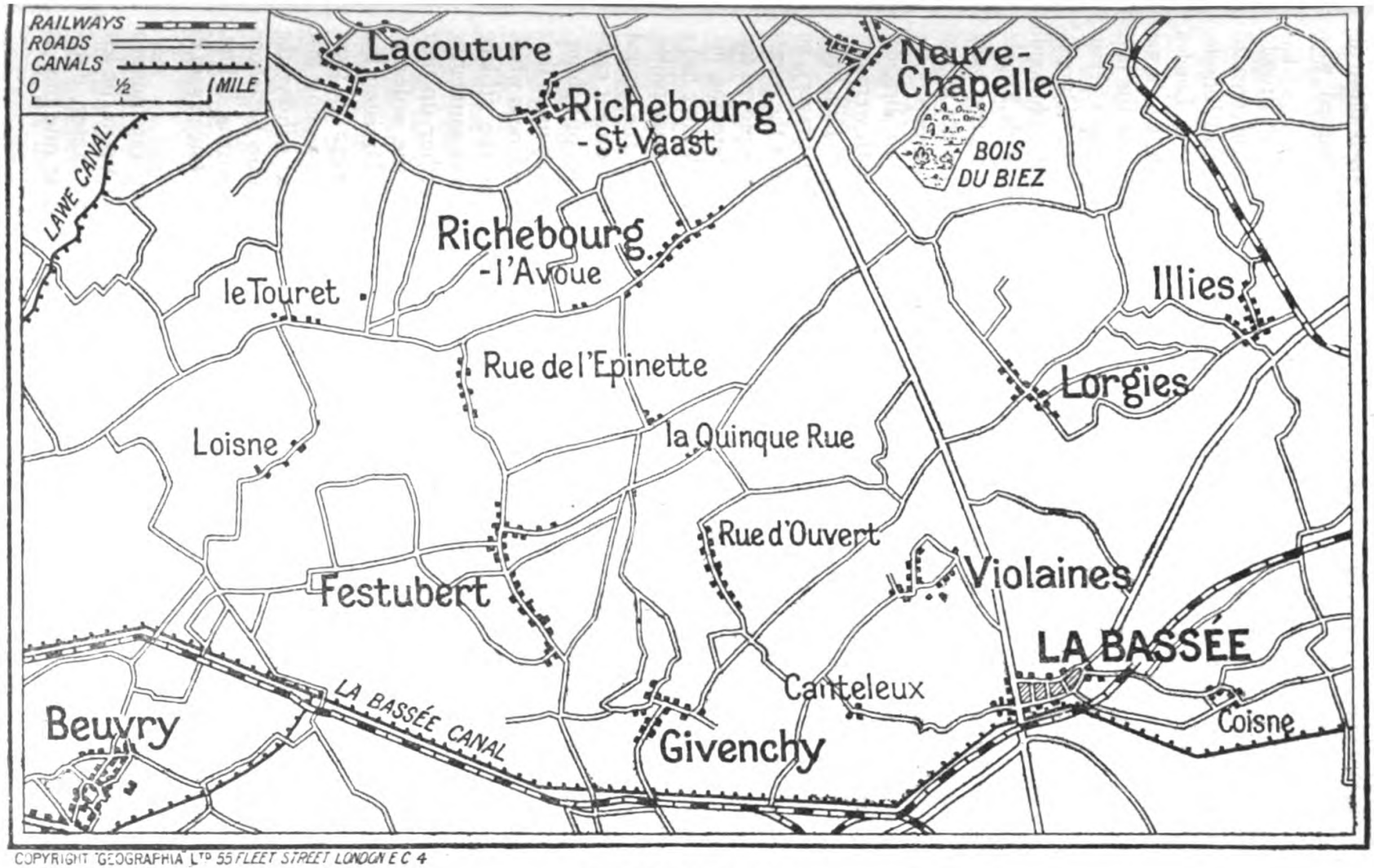
(*May* 9–24)

The New Attack—Ordeal of the 25th Brigade—Attack of the 1st Division—Fateful days—A difficult situation—Attack of the 2nd Division—Attack of the 7th Division—British success—Good work of Canadians—Advance of the 47th London Division—Lull before the storm.

WHILST this desperate fighting was going on in the north a very extensive and costly operation had been begun in the south, a great attack being made by the First Army, with the main purpose of engaging the German troops and preventing them from sending help to their comrades, who were hard pressed by the French near Arras. For some days the results were entirely barren, but the patient determination of Sir John French and of Sir Douglas Haig had some reward, and by May 25, when the movement had been brought to a close, there had been a general advance of 600 yards over a front of four miles, with a capture of 10 machine-guns and some 800 prisoners. These meagre trophies of victory, however, cannot be said to compensate us for the severe and unavoidable losses which must always in the case of the attack be heavier than those of the defence.

This important attack was begun upon May 9, over a front of about ten miles from the Laventie district in the north to that of Richebourg in the south. In the case of the northern attack it was carried out by Rawlinson's Fourth Corps. The southern attack was allotted to the Indian Corps (Willcocks) and the First Corps acting together. These two efforts represented the real foci of activity, but a general action was carried on from one end of the line to the other in order to confuse the issue and hold the enemy in his trenches.

Both in the north and in the south the special attack was opened by a sudden and severe bombardment, which lasted for about forty minutes. This had been the prelude to the victory of Neuve Chapelle, but there it had been a complete surprise, whereas in this action of May 9 there is ample evidence that the Germans were well informed as to the impending movement, and were prepared for it. Their trenches were very deep, and more vulnerable to high explosives, in which we were deficient, than to shrapnel. None the less, the bombardment was



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severe and accurate, though, as it proved, insufficient to break down the exceedingly effective system of defence, based upon barbed wire, machine-guns and the mutual support of trenches.

The attack in the north was confided to Lowry-Cole's 25th Brigade, supported by the remainder of the 8th Division. This brigade consisted of the 1st Irish Rifles, 2nd Berkshires, 2nd Rifle Brigade, 2nd Lincoln, and two Territorial battalions—the 1st London and the 13th London (Kensington). The latter regiment was given a special task, which was to seize and hold a considerable mine-crater upon the left of the line. The rest of the brigade were ordered at 5.30 to charge the German trenches, which was done with the greatest dash and gallantry. Through a terrific fire of rifles and machine-guns the wave of men rolled forward, and poured into the trench, the 1st Irish Rifles and the 2nd Rifle Brigade leading the assault. It was found, however, that further progress could not be made. As the men sprang over the parapets they were mowed down in an instant. Long swathes of dead marked the sweep of the murderous machine-guns. The Brigadier himself with his Brigade-major at his heels, sprang forward to lead the troops, but both were shot down in an instant, Lowry-Cole being killed and Major Dill badly wounded. It was simply impossible to get forward. No bravery, no perseverance, no human quality whatever could avail against the relentless sleet of lead. The 1st Londons coming up in support deployed and advanced over 400 yards of open with the steadiness of veterans, but lost nearly half their numbers. The Kensingtons in their crater had a similar experience, and could only hold on and endure a most pitiless pelting. For a long day, until the forenoon of the 10th, the ground which had been won was held. Then at last the bitter moment came when the enfeebled survivors, weakened by thirty-six hours of fighting, and fiercely attacked on all sides, were compelled to fall back upon their original lines. The retirement was conducted with a steadiness which verged upon bravado. "These God-like fools!" was the striking phrase of a generous German who observed the thin ranks sauntering back under a crushing fire, with occasional halts to gather up their wounded. The casualty figures show how terrific was the ordeal to which the men had been exposed. Altogether the 8th Division lost 4500 men, a single brigade (the 25th) accounting for 2232 of these casualties. Deplorable as they are, these figures must at least show that officers and men had done all that could be attempted to achieve the victory. When it is remembered that these were the same battalions which had lost heavily at Neuve Chapelle just two months before, one can but marvel at the iron nerve which enabled them once again to endure so searching a test.

It has been stated that the Kensingtons were given a separate mission of their own in the capture and defence of a mine-crater upon the left of the British line. They actually carried not only the crater, but a considerable section of the hostile trenches, penetrating at one time as

deep as the third line ; but reinforcements could not reach them, their flanks were bare, and they were at last forced to retire. " It was bitter and damnable ! " cries one of them out of his full heart. It was with the greatest difficulty that the remains of the gallant band were able to make their way back again to the British line of trenches.

This attack and bloody repulse began the battle. At the same hour the Indians and the First Corps had advanced upon the German lines to the north of Givenchy with the same undaunted courage, the same heavy losses, and the same barren result. The events of May 9 will always stand in military history as among the most honourable, but also the most arduous, of the many hard experiences of the British soldiers in France.

In the case of the Indians, the attack was checked early, and could make no headway against the terribly arduous conditions. Their advance was upon the right of that already described of the Fourth Corps. Farther still to the right or to the south in the region of Richebourg l'Avoué was the front of the 1st Division, which was fated to be even more heavily punished than the 8th had been in the north. In this case also there was a prelude of forty minutes' concentrated fire—a period which, as the result showed, was entirely inadequate to neutralise the many obstacles with which the stormers were faced. During the night the sappers had bridged the ditches between the front trenches and the supports, and had also crept out and thrown bridges over the ditches between the two lines. The 2nd Brigade (Thesiger), consisting of the 1st Northamptons, 2nd and 5th Sussex, 2nd Rifles, 1st North Lancashires, and 9th Liverpools, attacked upon the right—indeed, they formed at that moment the extreme right of the whole British Army, save for the 47th London Division to the south. The weather was bright and clear, but the effect of the bombardment was to raise such a cloud of dust that two men from each platoon in the front line were able to carry forward a light bridge with which they gained a line about eighty yards from the enemy's parapet. The instant that the guns ceased, the infantry dashed forward, but were met by a withering fire. The 1st Northamptons and 2nd Sussex were in the lead, and the ground between the armies was littered with their bodies. In a second wave came the 2nd Rifles and the 5th Sussex, but human valour could do nothing against the pelting sleet of lead. The wire had been very imperfectly cut, and it was impossible to get through. The survivors fell back into the front trenches, while their comrades lay in lines and heaps upon the bullet-swept plain. The 5th Sussex Territorials had their baptism of fire, the first and last for many, and carried themselves like men. A line of German machine-guns was posted in a very close position almost at right angles to the advance, and it was these which inflicted the heaviest losses. Hardly a single man got as far as the German parapet. At 6.20 the assault was a definite failure.

On the left, the 3rd Brigade had kept pace with the 2nd, and had

shared its trials and its losses. The van of the charging brigade was formed by the 2nd Munsters and the 2nd Welsh. The 1st Gloucesters, 1st South Wales Borderers, and 4th Welsh Fusiliers were in close support. Their attack was on the German line at the Rue des Bois, 300 yards away. They reached the trenches, though Colonel Richard of the Munsters and very many of his men were killed. This was the third Munster Colonel—Charrier, Bent, Richard—to be killed or disabled in the war. The men surged over the parapet, Captain Campbell-Dick standing on the crest of it, and whooping them on with his cap as if they were a pack of hounds. He fell dead even as they passed him. The trenches were taken, but could not be held, as there were no supports and the assault had failed on either side. Under cover of a renewed artillery fire the survivors came slowly and sullenly back. Once more, and for the third time, the 2nd Munsters were reduced to 200 rank and file. Three officers emerged unhurt from the action.

A second attack was ordered for midday, the regiments being shifted round so as to bring the supports into the front line. It was soon found, however, that the losses had already been so heavy that it was impossible, especially in the 2nd Brigade, to muster sufficient force for a successful advance. The 1st Guards Brigade (Lowther) was therefore brought to the front, and after a renewed bombardment at 4 o'clock the two leading battalions—the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Cameron Highlanders—rushed to the assault over the bodies of their fallen comrades. It is on record that as the Highlanders dashed forward, a number of the wounded who had been lying in the open since morning, staggered to their feet and joined in the charge. It was a desperate effort, and the khaki wave rolled up to the trenches, and even lapped over them in places; but the losses were too heavy, and the advance had lost all weight before it reached the German line. At one point a handful of Black Watch got over the line, but it was impossible to reinforce them, and they were compelled to fall back. The 3rd Brigade on their flank had pushed forward the 1st Gloucesters and 1st South Wales Borderers. They found the enemy "standing 3 and 4 deep in their breastworks and fighting like demons." The British threw themselves down, and their guns showered shrapnel on the crowded German trenches. The enemy losses were great, but the machine-guns were intact and no advance was possible. At 6 o'clock the survivors of both Brigades were back in their trenches once more. Late the same night the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division was brought up to take over the line, and the remains of the 1st Division were withdrawn to the rear.

If the loss of the Indian Corps be included, the number of casualties in this assault cannot have been less than from 12,000 to 13,000 men; while the losses to the enemy inflicted by the artillery could not possibly have approximated to this figure, nor had any advantage been obtained.

It is impossible not to marvel at the tenacity of Sir John French under the very difficult circumstances in which he was now placed. His troops

at Ypres were still fighting with their backs to the wall. Their position on May 10 was precarious. The only reinforcements they could hope for in case of disaster were from the south. And yet the south had itself received a severe rebuff. Was it best to abandon the attack there, and reassume the defensive, so as to have the men available in case there should come an urgent call from the north? A weaker general would have said so, and accepted his check at Festubert. Sir John, however, was not so easily to be deflected from his plans. He steadied himself by a day or two of rest, during which he not only prepared fresh forces for striking, but got the measure of the enemy's power at Ypres. Then it was determined that the action should proceed, but that it should be directed to the more southerly area of the British position, where it would be in closer touch with the French, and receive some support from their admirable artillery.

The centre of the British movement was still at Richebourg l'Avoué, but the direction of the advance was to the south and west. It had already been shown that the passage of open spaces under machine-gun fire was difficult and deadly by daylight, so it was determined that night should be used for the advance. Several successive nights were unfavourable, but the days were spent in a deliberate artillery preparation until the action was recommenced on May 15. In the interval, the 2nd Division had taken the place of the 1st in the Givenchy sector, and the 7th Division of the Fourth Corps had been brought round from the Laventie district, and was now upon the right of their comrades of the First Corps. The Canadian Division was brought up in support, while the Indian Corps still preserved its position upon the left. The general line of attack was from Richebourg by the Rue des Bois, and so south in front of Festubert.

The advance was made by the Indians on the left, and Horne's 2nd Division on the right at 11.30 on the night of May 15. The Indians were held up, and maintained from that time onwards a defensive position. When it is remembered that the Meerut Division had suffered heavily at Neuve Chapelle, that the Lahore Division had been very hard hit at Ypres, and that there was only a limited facility for replacing the losses of the native regiments, it is not to be wondered at that the Corps had weakened. The 2nd Division, however, would take no denial. The attack was in the hands of the 5th and 6th Brigades, with the 4th Guards Brigade in support. It was to sweep over the ground, which had been the scene of the repulse of the 9th, but it was to be screened by darkness. Soon after ten o'clock the men passed silently over the front trench, and lay down in four lines in the open waiting for the signal. At 11.30 the word was passed, and they advanced at a walk. The front line of the 5th Brigade was composed of the 2nd Worcesters upon the left, and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers (taken from the 12th Brigade) upon the right. The leading battalions of the 6th Brigade were the 1st Rifles, the 1st King's Liverpools, 1st Berkshires, and upon the extreme right two

companies (A and B) of the 7th King's Liverpools. Flares were suddenly discharged from the German trenches, and a ghostly flickering radiance illuminated the long lines of crouching men. There were numerous ditches in front, but the sappers had stolen forward and spanned them with rude bridges. The German fire was terrific, but the uncertain quivering light made it less deadly than it had been during the daytime, though very many fell. It was insufficient to stop the determined rush of the British infantry. The rifles could not hold them back, and sweeping jets from machine-guns could not kill them fast enough : nothing but Death could hold that furious line. In three minutes they had swarmed across the open, and poured into the trenches, killing or taking all the Germans who were in the front line. The 2nd Worcesters on the left were held up by unbroken barbed wire, and were unable to get forward ; but all the other battalions reached the trench, and cleared it for a considerable distance on either flank, the bombers rushing along it and hurling their deadly weapons in front of them. The remainder rushed down the communication trench, and seized the second line of defences some hundreds of yards behind the first. On the morning of Sunday, May 16, the 2nd Division had gained at heavy cost about half a mile in breadth and a quarter of a mile in depth of the German trenches. There was still an open plain in the rear between the advanced troops and their supports, which as the light grew clearer was so swept by German fire that it was nearly impossible to get across it. About 8.30 in the morning, the remainder of the 7th King's Liverpools with some of their comrades of the 5th King's Liverpools endeavoured to join the others in front, but were shot to pieces in the venture. During the whole of the morning, however, single volunteers kept running forward carrying fresh supplies of bombs and bandoliers of cartridges for the men in front. The names of most of these brave men are to be found in the casualty lists, and their memory in the hearts of their comrades.

Four hours after this partially successful attack by the 2nd Division, at 3.30 on the morning of Sunday, May 16, another assault was made by the 7th Division just to the north of Festubert. The attack was made by the 20th Brigade (Heyworth) upon the left and the 22nd (Lawford) upon the right. The 2nd Borderers and 2nd Scots Guards led the rush of the 20th, supported later by the 1st Grenadiers and 2nd Gordons ; while the 1st Welsh Fusiliers and 2nd Queen's Surrey were in the van of the 22nd with the 2nd Warwicks, 8th Royal Scots, and 1st South Staffords behind them.

In the case of the 20th Brigade the Borderers upon the left were held up for a time, but the Scots Guards advanced with a fury which took them far beyond the immediate objective, and was carried to such an extent that one company outdistanced all their comrades, and being isolated in the German position, were nearly all cut off. The rest of the Guards, however, having crossed the trench line, swung across, so

that they were in the rear of the Germans who were holding up the Borderers, so that the defenders were compelled to surrender. The 1st Grenadiers came up in support and the ground was made good. Meanwhile the 22nd Brigade upon the right had some desperate fighting. The 2nd Queen's Surrey had been temporarily stopped by heavy machine-gun fire, but two companies of the Welsh Fusiliers rushed the trenches opposite them and were quickly joined by the rest of the battalion. The Queen's Surrey refused to be rebuffed, and with the support of the 1st Staffords they again came forward, and dashing through a sleet of bullets got to the German line. Colonel Gabbett of the Fusiliers and Major Bottomley of the Queen's, one of the heroes of Gheluvelt, both met their death in this fine attack. On reaching the trenches the South Staffords sent their bombers under Lieutenant Hassell down the alleys of the Germans, gathering in many prisoners. A surprising feat was performed by Sergeant-Major Barter of the Welsh Fusiliers, while engaged in similar work, for he and seven men brought back 94 Germans including 3 officers. The leading companies of the South Staffords under Major Lord and Captain Bearman got well forward into the enemy's ground, and held on there for three days under a terrible shell-fall, until they handed the position over to the 21st Brigade. Meanwhile, upon the left a mixed lot of men from the Welsh Fusiliers, Scots Guards, and Warwicks, all under Captain Stockwell, struggled along, actually swimming one ditch which was too deep to wade, and got into the Orchard which had been assigned as their objective. These men were afterwards withdrawn to the German front line trenches in order to escape from the very severe bombardment on the Orchard. Great difficulty was experienced in bringing in the wounded, owing to the space covered and to the incessant and extreme shelling. It is on record that the men of the field ambulance, under Lieutenant Greenlees of the Royal Medical Corps, were at work for thirty-six hours with three hours' break, always in the open and always under fire. These are the men who have all the dangers of war without its thrills, working and dying for the need of their comrades and the honour of their corps.

In this hard day's work, in which the 7th Division lived up to its own reputation, Colonel Wood of the Borderers and Colonel Brook of the 8th Royal Scots were killed, making four losses in one day among commanding officers of battalions.

On the night of May 16 the Germans formed a second line of defence and withdrew from the front. The British had now cut two holes in the German line over a distance of about three miles; but between the two holes into which the heads of the 2nd and 7th Divisions had buried themselves, there lay one portion called "The Quadrilateral" strongly defended by intricate works and machine-guns. Desperate endeavours had been made upon the 16th to get round the north of this position by the 2nd Division, but the fire was too murderous, and all were repulsed. At half-past nine in the morning of the 17th the attempt was

renewed from both sides with a strong artillery support. On the north the Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks made a strong attack, while on the south the 21st Brigade pushed to the front. The 4th Camerons, a Gaelic-speaking battalion of shepherds and gillies, kept fair pace with the veteran regular battalions of the Brigade, but lost their gallant Colonel, Fraser. The fiery valour of the Camerons is shown by the fact that afterwards bodies of the fallen were found far ahead of any point reached that day by the main advance. Gradually the valiant defenders were driven from post to post, and crushed under the cross fire. About midday the position was in the hands of the British, 300 survivors having been captured. After this consolidation of their front, the two attacking divisions drove on together to the eastward, winning ground all the day, but meeting everywhere the same stark resistance. Farmhouse after farmhouse was carried. At one point a considerable body of Germans rushed out from an untenable position ; but on their putting up their hands and advancing towards the British, they were, whether deliberately or not, decimated by the shell fire of their own guns. South of Festubert the thick spray of bombers and bayonet men thrown out by the 7th Division into the German trenches were also making ground all day, and the enemy's loss in this quarter was exceedingly heavy. The 57th Prussian Regiment of Infantry, among others, lost more than two-thirds of its numbers during these operations.

By the evening of Monday, May 17, the hostile front had been crushed in for a space of over two miles. If a larger tale of prisoners was not forthcoming as a proof of victory, the explanation lay in the desperate nature of the encounter. The sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the attacks by poison-gas, were in the thoughts and on the lips of the assaulting infantry, and many a German made a vicarious atonement. At the same time the little mobs of men who rushed forward with white flags in one hand, and in some cases their purses outstretched in the other, were given quarter and led to the rear, safe from all violence save from their own artillery. There were many fierce threats of no quarter before the engagement, but with victory the traditional kindliness of the British soldier asserted itself once more.

On the evening of the 17th the men in the front line were relieved, Lord Cavan's 4th Guards Brigade taking over the advanced trenches in which the 1st King's Liverpools and other battalions of the 5th and 6th Brigades were lying. The Guards had to advance a considerable distance under very heavy fire to reach their objective, and there is a touch of other days in the fact that the Bishop of Khartoum stood by the trenches and blessed them as they passed. They lost many men from the terrible artillery fire, but in spite of this they at once advanced in a most gallant attack which won several hundred yards of ground. The Irish and 2nd Grenadiers were the attacking battalions with the Herts Territorials in close support. The Irish Guards were especially forward and

held the ground gained, but lost 17 officers and several hundred men. All day of the 18th the Guards held the advanced front line until relieved at midnight of that date by the advance of another Division.

The 18th saw the general advance renewed, but it was hampered by the fact that the heavy weather made it difficult to obtain the artillery support which is so needful where buildings have to be carried. The Indians upon the left sustained a heavy attack upon this day, the losses falling chiefly upon the Sirhind Brigade, and especially on the 1st Highland Light Infantry and the 15th Sikhs. It was in this action that Lieutenant Smyth and Private Lal Singh of the latter regiment saved the fight at a critical moment by bringing up a fresh supply of bombs. Ten men started on the venture, and only the two won home. The 19th was wet and misty. It was upon this date that the two hard-working and victorious Divisions, the 2nd and the 7th, were relieved respectively by the 51st Highland Territorial Division and by the Canadians, the guns of the two regular divisions being retained. The operations which had hitherto been under Monro of the First Corps, were now confided to Alderson of the Canadians. At this time, the general level of the advance was the road which extends from La Quinque to Bethune.

The change of troops did not entail any alteration in strategy, and the slow advance went forward. On the night of May 20-21 the Canadians continued the work of the 7th Division, and added several fresh German trenches to the area already secured. From Richebourg to the south and east there was now a considerable erosion in the German position. The first objective of the Canadians was an orchard in the Quinque Rue position, which was assaulted by the 14th Montreal Regiment (Meighen) and the 16th Canadian Scottish (Leckie), after a gallant reconnaissance by Major Leckie of the latter regiment. The Canadians were thrust in between the 3rd Coldstream Guards of the 2nd Division on their left, and the 2nd Wiltshires of the 7th Division on their right. The orchard was cleared in most gallant fashion, and a trench upon the flank of it was taken, but the Canadian loss was considerable in the battalions named and in the 13th Royal Canadian Highlanders in support. Another Canadian battalion, the 10th, had attacked the German line a mile to the south of the orchard, and had been repulsed. A heavy bombardment was organised, and the attempt was renewed upon the following day, two companies of the 10th, preceded by a company of grenade-throwers, carrying 400 yards of the trench at a very severe cost. It was partly recaptured by the Germans upon May 22, while part remained in the hands of the Canadians. Several counter-attacks were made upon the Canadians during this day, but all withered away before the deadly fire of the Western infantry.

On May 24 the Canadians were attacking once more at the position where the 10th Battalion had obtained a partial success upon the 22nd. It was a strongly fortified post, which had been named " Bexhill " by the British. The assault was carried out at daybreak by two companies

of the 5th Battalion under Major Edgar, with a company of the 7th British Columbians in support. Before six o'clock the position had been carried, and was held all day in face of a concentrated shell-fire from the German guns. It was a terrible ordeal, for the Brigade lost 50 officers and nearly 1000 men, but never their grip of the German trench. On the same night, however, another Canadian attack delivered by the 3rd Battalion (Rennie) with great fire, was eventually repulsed by the machine-guns.

This long-drawn straggling action, which had commenced with such fury upon May 9, was now burning itself out. Prolonged operations of this kind can only be carried on by fresh relays of troops. The 47th London Territorial Division was brought up into the front line, and found itself involved at once in some fierce fighting at the extreme right of the British line near Givenchy. The 47th Division (formerly the 2nd London Division) was in reality the only London division at that time, since the battalions which composed the 1st, the Artists, Victorias, Rangers, Westminsters, etc., had already been absorbed by regular brigades. The division commanded by General Barter consisted of the 140th (Cuthbert), 141st (Thwaites), and 142nd (Willoughby) Brigades. On the evening of May 25 the latter Brigade, which occupied the front-line trench, was ordered to make an attack upon the German line opposite, whilst the 18th London of the 141st Brigade made a strong feint to draw their fire. The first-line battalions were the 23rd and 24th (Queen's), of which the 23rd on the left had some 300 yards of open to cross, while the 24th on the right had not more than 150. Both battalions reached their objective in safety, and within three minutes had established telephonic communications with their supports of the 21st and 22nd Battalions. The capture of the trenches had not been difficult, but their retention was exceedingly so, as there was a ridge from which the German machine-guns commanded the whole line of trench. Each man had brought a sandbag with him, and these were rapidly filled, while officers and men worked desperately in building up a defensive traverse—a labour in which Sergeant Oxman greatly distinguished himself. Three German counter-attacks got up within ten yards of the 24th, but all were beaten back. The German bombers, however, were deadly, and many officers and men were among their victims. The 21st Battalion had followed up the 23rd, and by 10.30 they were able to work along the line of the German trench and make good the position. All day upon May 26 they were exposed to a very heavy and accurate German fire, but that afternoon about 4 p.m. they were relieved by the 20th London from Thwaites' 141st Brigade. The line was consolidated and held, in spite of a sharp attack on the afternoon of May 28, which was beaten off by the 20th Battalion.

Whilst the London Division had been thrust into the right of the British line, the Canadian infantry had been relieved by bringing forward into the trenches the dismounted troopers of King Edward's and Strathcona's

Horse, belonging to Seely's Mounted Canadian Brigade, who fought as well as their fellow-countrymen of the infantry—a standard not to be surpassed. From this time onwards there was a long lull in this section of the British line. The time was spent in rearranging the units of the Army, and in waiting for those great reinforcements of munitions which were so urgently needed. It was recognised that it was absolutely impossible to make a victorious advance, or to do more than to hold one's ground, when the guns of the enemy could fire six shells to one. In Britain, the significance of this fact had at last been made apparent, and the whole will and energy of the country were turned to the production of ammunition. Not only were the old factories in full swing, but great new centres were created in towns which had never yet sent forth such sinister exports. Mr. Lloyd George threw all his energy and contagious enthusiasm into this vital work, and performed the same miracles in the organisation and improvisation of the tools of warfare that Lord Kitchener had done in the case of the New Armies. They were services which his country can never forget. Under his energy and inspiration the huge output of Essen and the other factories of Germany was equalled by the improvised and largely amateur munition workers of Britain. The main difficulty in the production of high explosives had lain in the scarcity of picric acid. Our Free Trade policy, which has much to recommend it in some aspects, had been pushed to such absurd and pedantic lengths that this vital product had been allowed to fall into the hands of our enemy, although it is a derivative of that coal tar in which we are so rich. Now at last the plants for its production were laid down. Every little village gasworks was sending up its quota of toluol to the central receivers. Finally, in explosives as in shells and guns, the British were able to supply their own wants fully and to assist their Allies. One of the strangest, and also most honourable, episodes of the War was this great economic effort which involved sacrifices to the time, comfort, and often to the health of individuals so great as to match those of the soldiers. Grotesque combinations resulted from the eagerness of all classes to lend a hand. An observer has described how a peer and a prize-fighter have been seen working on the same bench at Woolwich, while titled ladies and young girls from cultured homes earned sixteen shillings a week at Erith, and boasted in the morning of the number of shell cases which they had turned and finished in their hours of night shift. Truly it had become a National War. Of all its strange memories none will be stranger than those of the peaceful middle-aged civilians who were seen eagerly reading books upon elementary drill in order to prepare themselves to face the most famous soldiers in Europe, or of the schoolgirls and matrons who donned blue blouses and by their united work surpassed the output of the great death factories of Essen.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRENCHES OF HOOGE

The British line in June 1915—Canadians at Givenchy—Attack of the 154th Brigade—8th Liverpool Irish—3rd Division at Hooge—11th Brigade near Ypres—Flame attack on the 14th Light Division—Victory of the 6th Division at Hooge.

THE spring campaign may be said to have ended at the beginning of June. It had consisted, so far as the British were concerned, in three great battles. The first was that of Neuve Chapelle. The second, and incomparably the greatest, was the second Battle of Ypres, extending from April 22 to the end of May, in which both sides fought themselves to a standstill, but the Germans, while gaining some ground, failed to reach their final objective. The third was the Battle of Festubert, from May 9 to May 18, which began with a defeat and ended by a definite but limited advance for the British. There now followed a prolonged lull, during which the Germans were content to remain upon the defensive upon the west while they vigorously and successfully attacked the Russians in the east, combining their forces with those of Austria, and driving their half-armed enemy from the passes of the Carpathians right across Poland until the line of the Vistula had been secured. The Allies meanwhile pursued their ill-fated venture in the Dardanelles, while they steadily increased their numbers and, above all, their munitions of war in France and Flanders, having learned by experience that no bravery or devotion can make one gun do the work of six, or enable infantry who have no backing from artillery to gain ground from infantry which are well supported. For a long period to come the most important engagements were a series of fights upon June 16, July 30, and August 9, which may be looked upon as a single long-drawn-out engagement, since they were all concerned with the successive taking and retaking of the same set of trenches near Hooge, in the extreme northern section of the line. Before giving some account of these events it would be well to interrupt the narrative for a time in order to describe that vast expansion of the British Army which was the most unexpected, as it was the most decisive, factor in the war.

By the summer of 1915 it consisted of not less than 440,000 men in the line, with 120,000 more engaged in rear service, the whole extending from north of Ypres to the north of Arras.

When one contemplates this magnificent force and remembers that ten months earlier the whole British Army at Mons had been four divisions, that at the Aisne there were six, that in the days of the first Ypres battle there were eight, and that now there were twenty-two, one marvels at the extraordinary powers of creation and organisation which had created so efficient and powerful a machine. It was rapidly made, and yet in no way was it crude or feeble. Of the quality of this great force it is superfluous to speak. The whole of this chronicle is a record of it. One observation, however, should in justice be made. With that breadth and generosity of mind which make them the truly imperial people of the world, the English and the English press have continually extolled the valour of the Scots, Irish, Welsh, or men of the Overseas Dominions. There has seldom been a mention of the English as such, and the fact has given rise to some very false impressions. It is for the reader to bear in mind, none the less, that four-fifths of this great army was purely English, and that the English Divisions, be they North or South, have shown a sobriety of discipline and an alacrity of valour which place them in the very first place among fighting races. The New Army like the Old Fleet was in the main a triumph of England. Of its first thirty-three divisions all but five were predominantly English.

The men and the generals were there. The delay was still with the guns and the munitions. A heavy gun is not the product of a week or of a month, and before a great increase can be made in the output of shells the machinery for producing them has itself to be produced. But energetic minds and capable hands were busied with the problem from one end of Britain to the other, and the results were rapidly taking form. A considerable amount of the product was being despatched to Archangel to help our hard-pressed Russian Allies, and constant supplies were being despatched to the Dardanelles ; but an accumulation was also being stored behind the lines in Flanders. The whole progress of the campaign depended upon this store being sufficient to sustain a prolonged attack, and the time had not yet come.

Before turning to the trenches of Hooge, where the greater part of the fighting occurred during this period of the war, some description must be given of a brisk action upon June 15, opposite Givenchy, immediately to the north of the La Bassée Canal, where the Canadian Division attacked with great gallantry and partly occupied a position which it was not found possible to retain. In this attack the Canadians displayed their usual energy and ingenuity by bringing up two eighteen-pounder field-pieces into their front trench, and suddenly opening fire point-blank at the German defences only seventy-five yards away. Captain Stockwell, with Lieutenants Craig and Kelly and their men, obviously took their lives in their hands, as their guns became the immediate mark of the German artillery, with the result that one was destroyed by a direct hit, and the crew of the other were put out of action by a shrapnel-burst. But before they were silenced the two guns did great

damage to the German front-line defence, knocking out several machine-guns and cutting the barbed-wire to pieces. After a quarter of an hour of glorious activity they were out of action ; but they had smoothed the path for the infantry, who at six in the evening were over the parapet and into the trench opposite. The attack was made by the 1st Ontario Battalion, supported by the rest of the 1st Canadian Brigade. The storming-party was checked for a moment by the explosion of their own mine, which threw back with disastrous results, killing Lieutenant-Colonel Beecher and burying the bomb-store of the front line. Having seized the German trench, some remained to reverse the parapet, while others rushed on to the second trench, which they also carried. The supply of bombs ran short, however, and could not be replenished. Four messengers in succession rushing back for more were shot dead by the enemy's fire. A fort upon the left had not been taken, and the machine-guns from its loopholes swept down the captured trench and made it untenable. Slowly the Canadians were forced back, and before ten o'clock what was left of the Ontarios were back in their own trench once more. When it is stated that of 23 officers who took part in the advance 20 were killed or wounded, no further proof is needed of the stern insistence of the attack.

This gallant though fruitless attack of the Canadians at Givenchy was, as it appears, intended to coincide with an advance by the 7th Division on their left, and of the 51st upon the right of them. In the case of the 7th Division there were two advances, one by day and one by night, in which single battalions were employed and no result achieved. In the second of these the 2nd Gordons lost heavily, having occupied a deserted trench which proved to be so commanded as to be untenable. Before regaining their own lines D Company was cut off and destroyed. On the right the 51st Highland Territorial Division had an experience which was equally unsatisfactory. Hibbert's 154th Brigade made an advance which was bravely urged and bloodily repelled. The preparatory bombardment was answered by a very intense German fire, which was so heavy and accurate that it buried a number of men in the advance trenches, destroyed the bomb-stores, and made all communication nearly impossible. The secret of this extreme readiness of the Germans was divulged by a deserter who came over into the British trenches at the last moment, and said that they all knew that the attack was for six o'clock that day. It was at that very hour that the 6th Scottish Rifles and the 4th North Lancashires, of the Brigade, rushed the German position. Each battalion lost its commanding officer and its adjutant in the first few minutes, but the line of trenches was carried at one tiger-spring. The enemy's shell-fire was exceedingly heavy, and the losses were considerable. Having cleared the trench, the attacking line, especially the Scottish Rifles upon the left, came on unbroken wire, so they dug themselves in in the open and awaited supports. These for some reason were slow in coming up, and as the Germans were in force

on either side, and the North Lancashires were also held up by wire, there was a danger lest the forward line might be cut off. It fell back, therefore, closely followed by the enemy, until an advance of the 4th Royal Lancasters helped them to form a line. The whole night was spent in a prolonged rifle duel, the two sides being at very close quarters, and the action resolving itself into a series of stubborn encounters by little groups of men holding shell-craters or fragments of trenches, and offering a sullen resistance to the considerable forces which were now pressing upon them. All order had been lost, the three battalions were hopelessly mixed together, and the command of each little group fell into the hands of any natural leader who won the confidence of the comrades round him. Slowly the ragged line retired, until they found themselves in the early morning back in the position from which they had started, having suffered and inflicted grievous losses, but with no gain of ground to justify them.

It might well have seemed that the attack had failed, or at least that another brigade would be needed to put matters right; but a reserve battalion had not yet gone into action, and to this unit was given the hard task of putting the Germans out once more from the trench which they had re-occupied. There have been days when the Liverpool Irish have proved themselves to be pugnacious in riotous times at home, but now they were to efface all such memories by their splendid bearing at this critical hour. It was 4 p.m. on June 16, when, with a true Celtic yell, the 8th King's Liverpool, led by Major Johnson, dashed over the parapet and stormed through a hellish sleet of shrapnel to the German trenches. "It was pattering like hail upon a window-pane." Officers and men went down in heaps, but nothing could stop the glorious impetuosity of the charge, delivered in the full light of a summer afternoon. "It's sure death, but remember we are Irish!" yelled a sergeant as he bounded on to the sand-bags. Next instant he had been blown to pieces. Captain Finegan, leading the rush, was shot down, as were the greater number of the regimental officers. Finegan's body was found afterwards at the extreme point of the advance, with twelve of his men lying round him. The Germans were swept out of the front trenches once more, and the Irishmen held desperately on to it for a long time against all the shell-fire of the enemy. It was a great day for Liverpool, July 16, when two of their citizen battalions, the 8th in the south and the 10th in the north, helped to stem the tide of two separate battles. The 8th King's lost nearly 500 men, and gained a reputation which will not easily die. The survivors were too few, however, to hold the shell-raked trench which they had gained. The 153rd Brigade, consisting of Gordons and Black Watch, relieved them in the front line, and the exhausted and decimated battalion was drawn off. In the meantime the 152nd Brigade, on the left, had been unable to make progress. Of the attackers of the 51st Division some 1500 men had fallen, and there was no permanent gain of ground.

On Wednesday, June 16, there occurred a brisk action to the immediate north of Hooge, at a point to the west and south-west of the Château, where the German line formed somewhat of a salient. This it was determined to straighten out in the familiar fashion, and a considerable force of artillery was secretly concentrated. The assault was assigned to the 3rd Division, and was carried out by Bowes' 8th Brigade on the left, and on the right by the 9th Brigade, which consisted of the three Fusilier battalions and the Lincolns, together with the 10th Liverpool Scottish. The latter battalion had been seven months at the Front, doing every sort of hard work, but never getting an opportunity for distinction in action. The 9th Brigade, now commanded by General Douglas Smith, was in reserve near Poperinghe, but it was brought forward through Ypres for the assault. They marched through the shattered town on the Tuesday evening. "The sight of the ruined beauties of that once glorious old town did lots to make us just long to get at the Vandals who had done this wanton act of destruction." It was a longing which was soon to be appeased. By midnight the troops were in position, and at three in the morning of June 16 the bombardment began. It lasted with terrific intensity for about an hour, and was helped by the guns of the French Thirty-sixth Corps firing towards Pilken, whence the supports might come. Black and yellow clouds covered the whole line of the front German trench, which lay at the fringe of a wood, and out of this mist of death trees, sand-bags, and shattered human bodies flew high in the air. The barbed wire was smashed to pieces and the front parapets knocked to atoms. Then, in an instant, the guns lifted on to the more distant support trenches, and the infantry, swarming over the low barricades, dashed in perfect order over the two hundred yards which separated them from the Germans.

It was an admirable advance, and could not have been better carried out. The front of the assault was about a quarter of a mile. The three Fusilier battalions in one long line, Northumberland Fusiliers on the left, Royals in the centre, and Scots on the right, rushed forward with terrific impetus, the rising sun glinting upon their lines of bayonets. They were over the lip of the front trench without a check, and rushed on for the second one. The supports, who were the Lincolns on the right and the Liverpool Scots on the left, followed closely after them, and seizing the German survivors, sent them to the rear, while they did what they could to reverse the parapet and prepare for a counter-attack. As they charged forward, it had been observed that one German trench upon the left was at right angles to the line of advance, and that it had been untouched by the bombardment. It was only about forty yards in length, but the fire from it was very murderous as it swept across the open ground. With quick decision the rear company of the Liverpool Scottish turned aside, and in spite of unbroken barbed wire carried the trench, capturing all the occupants.

Meanwhile the German artillery had opened with an intensity which

was hardly inferior to that of the British, and they shelled with great accuracy the captured trench. The Fusiliers had dashed onwards, while the Liverpool Scots and Lincolns followed swiftly behind them, leaving the captured trench to the leading battalions of the 7th Brigade, which was immediately in the rear of the attackers. So eager was every one that the van of the supporting brigade was mixed with the rear of the attacking one. Thus the Honourable Artillery Company were exposed to a baptism of fire only second in severity to that of their Territorial comrades from Liverpool. They and the 3rd Worcesters, together with the 1st Wiltshires upon the flank, endured a very violent shelling, but held on for many hours to the captured positions. The Worcesters had over 300 casualties, including their Colonel, Stuart, who had led them ever since Mons. The Honourable Artillery Company and Wiltshires suffered almost as heavily.

The advance still continued with great fury. It should have ended on the taking of the second line of trenches, but it was impossible to restrain the men, who yelled, " Remember the *Lusitania !* " to each other as they surged over the parapets and dashed once more at the enemy with bayonet and bomb. The third trench was carried, and even the fourth. But the assault had gone too far. The farther spray of stormers had got as far as the Bellewaarde Lake. It was impossible to hold these advanced positions. The assailants dropped sullenly back, and finally contented themselves by settling into the first line and consolidating their position there on a front of a thousand yards. The losses had been heavy, especially from the high explosive shells, which, as usual, blew both trenches and occupants to pieces. Men died happy, however, with the knowledge that the days were past when no artillery answer could be made, and that now at least they had given the enemy the same intolerable experience which they had themselves so often endured.

A pause of nearly three weeks followed, broken only by the usual bickerings up and down the line, where opposite trenches ran mines up to each other or exchanged fusillades of hand-bombs. There was no serious movement upon either side, the Germans being concentrated upon their great and successful Eastern advance ; while the Allies in the West were content to wait for the day when they should have accumulated such a head of shell as would enable them to make a prolonged effort which would promise some definite result. More and more it had become clear, both from the German efforts and our own, that any *coup de main* was impossible, and that a battle which would really achieve a permanent gain must be an affair which would last a month or so, with steady, inexorable advance from day to day. This could only be hoped for by the storage of a very great quantity of ammunition. Hence the pause in the operations.

The lull was broken, however, by a sharp fight upon July 6, in which Prowse's 11th Brigade of the 4th Division took, and permanently held, a section of the German line. This considerable action was fought at

the extreme northern end of the British line, where it joined on to the French Moroccan troops to the north of Ypres. The sudden and swift advance of the 1st Rifle Brigade, the leading British battalion, seems to have taken the Germans by surprise, and, dashing forwards, they seized two lines of trenches and established themselves firmly within them. The 1st Somerset Light Infantry shared the credit and the losses of the charge. They were in immediate support of the Rifle Brigade, their task being to dig a communication trench. A hundred prisoners and a number of mortars and machine-guns were the immediate trophies. Three times during the day did the Germans counter-attack in force, and three times they were driven back with heavy loss.

Part of the 12th Brigade (Anley) took over some of the captured trenches from the 11th, and came in for some of the German anger in consequence. The 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were very heavily shelled, losing their commanding officer, Colonel Griffin, the machine-gun officer, and the adjutant on the morning of July 7. A sap ran up to the trench, and this was the scene of desperate bomb-fighting, the Fusiliers expending eight thousand bombs in two days. So great was the pressure that part of the 1st Warwicks came up in support. There were several infantry advances of the enemy, which were all crushed by the British fire. No dervishes could have shown more devoted courage than some of the Germans. In one rush of sixty men all were shot down, which did not prevent another forty from emerging later from the same trench. Gradually they learned that their task was impossible, and the position remained with the British. Altogether the Lancashire Fusiliers lost 8 officers and 400 men in this action.

The succession of small British successes which have been recorded in their order was broken at this point by a temporary reverse, which involved no permanent loss of ground, but cost many valuable lives.

The attack fell upon that section of trench which had been taken by the British in the Hooge district on June 16. It was held now by a brigade of the 14th Light Infantry Division, which had the distinction of being the first unit of the New Army to be seriously engaged. Nothing could have been more severe—indeed, terrific—than the ordeal to which they were subjected, nor more heroic than the way in which it was borne. Under very desperate conditions, all the famous traditions of the British rifle regiments were gloriously upheld. They were destined for defeat—but such a defeat as shows the true fibre of a unit as clearly as any victory.

Nugent's 41st Brigade, which held this section of trench, consisted of the 7th and 8th King's Royal Rifles, with the 7th and 8th Rifle Brigade. The position was a dangerous little salient, projecting right up to the German line.

It is clear that the Germans mustered great forces, both human and mechanical, before letting go their attack. For ten days before the onset they kept up a continuous fire, which blew down the parapets and caused

great losses to the defenders. On July 29 the 7th King's Royal Rifles and the 8th Rifle Brigade manned the front and supporting trenches, taking the place of their exhausted comrades. They were just in time for the fatal assault. At 3.20 in the morning of July 30 a mine exploded under the British parapet, and a moment afterwards huge jets of flame, sprayed from new diabolical machines, rose suddenly from the line of German trenches and fell in a sheet of fire into the front British position. The distance was only twenty yards, and the effect was complete and appalling. Only one man is known to have escaped from this section of trench. The fire was accompanied by a shower of aerial torpedoes from the *minenwerfer*, which were in themselves sufficient to destroy the garrison. The Germans instantly assaulted and occupied the defenceless trench, but were held up for a time by the reserve companies in the supporting trenches. Finally these were driven out by the weight of the German attack, and fell back about two hundred yards, throwing themselves down along the edges of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, in the immediate rear of the old position. What with the destruction of the men in the front trench and the heavy losses of the supports, the two battalions engaged had been very highly tried, but they still kept their faces to the foe, in spite of a terrific fall of shells. The British artillery was also in full blast. For many hours, from dawn onwards, its shells just skimmed over the heads of the front British line, and pinned the Germans down at a time when their advance might have been a serious thing, in the face of the shaken troops in front of them. It is said that during fourteen hours only five of their shells are known to have fallen short, though they fired from a distance of about three miles, and only a couple of hundred yards separated the lines—a testimony to the accuracy of the munition-workers as well as of the gunners.

The position gained by the Germans put them behind the line of trenches held upon the British right by two companies of the 8th Rifle Brigade. These brave men, shot at from all sides and unable to say which was their parapet and which their parados, held on during the whole interminable July day, until after dusk the remains of them drew off into the shelter of the prophetically-named Sanctuary Wood. Another aggressive movement was made by the German stormers down the communication trenches, which enabled them to advance while avoiding direct fire ; but this, after hard fighting, was stopped by the bombers of the Riflemen.

The two battalions of the 41st Brigade, which had just been relieved and were already on their way to a place of rest, were halted and brought back. They were the 8th King's Royal Rifles and the 7th Rifle Brigade. These two battalions had been eight days under incessant fire in the trenches, with insufficient food, water, and sleep. They were now hurried back into a hellish fire, jaded and weary, but full of zeal at the thought that they were taking some of the pressure off their comrades. An order for an instant counter-attack had been given, but it was

recognised that two brigades at least were necessary for such a task, and that even then, without a very thorough artillery preparation, the affair was desperate, since the Germans had already consolidated the position, and their artillery, large and small, was very masterful. For some reason, however, instead of a brigade, only two fresh battalions could be spared. These were the 9th King's Royal Rifles, of the 42nd Brigade, and the 6th Cornwalls, of the 43rd. Of these the 9th King's Royal Rifles attacked, not from the wood, but from the Menin road upon the left.

There had been three-quarters of an hour of intense bombardment before the attack, but it was not successful in breaking down the German resistance. At 2.45 p.m. the infantry advance began from the wood, all four units of the 41st Brigade taking part in it. It is difficult to imagine any greater trial for troops, since half of them had already been grievously reduced and the other half were greatly exhausted, while they were now asked to advance several hundred yards without a shadow of cover, in the face of a fire which was shaving the very grass from the ground. " The men behaved very well," says an observer, " and the officers with a gallantry no words can adequately describe. As they came out of the woods the German machine-gun fire met them and literally swept them away, line after line. The men struggled forward, only to fall in heaps along the edge of the woods." The Riflemen did all that men could do, but there comes a time when perseverance means annihilation. The remains of the four battalions were compelled to take shelter once more at the edge of the wood. Fifty officers out of 90 had fallen. By 4 p.m. the counter-attack had definitely failed.

The attack of the 9th King's Royal Rifles, along the Menin road, led by Colonel Chaplin, had rather better success, and was pushed home with great valour and corresponding loss. At one time the stormers reached the original line of trenches and took possession of one section of it. Colonel Chaplin was killed, with many of his officers and men, by a deadly machine-gun fire from the village of Hooge. A gallant lad, Lieutenant Geen, with a handful of men, charged into this village, but never emerged. The attack was not altogether unproductive, for, though the advanced position was not held, the 9th retained trenches which linked up the Menin road with the left of the Zouave Wood. With the darkness, the wearied and thinned ranks of the 41st Brigade were withdrawn into reserve.

It was not destined, however, that Nugent's hard-worked brigade should enjoy the rest that they needed so badly. They had left the 10th Durham Light Infantry and the 6th Cornwall Light Infantry to defend the wood, but at 2.20 in the morning the Germans renewed their original tactics with liquid fire, which blazed over the trenches and scorched the branches overhead. This time the range was farther and the effect less deadly. An attack was evidently impending, and the Riflemen were hurried back to reinforce the two battalions left in possession. There was a night of alarms, of shell-fire, and of losses, but

the German infantry advance was not serious, and those who reached the woods were driven out again. For some days afterwards there was no change in the general situation. Sixty officers and 2000 men were the losses of the 41st Brigade during this battle.

This difficult and trying action was fought under the immediate supervision of General Nugent, of the 41st Brigade, who was with the firing-line in the woods during the greater part of it. When the brigade, or the shattered remains of it, were withdrawn upon August 1, General Nugent remained behind, and consulted with General Cockburn, of the 43rd Brigade, as to the feasibility of a near attack. The consultation took the form of a reconnaissance conducted on hands and knees up to a point close to the enemy line. After this inspection it was determined that the position was far too formidable for any merely local attempt. It was settled that General Congreve, of the 6th Division, should take the matter over, that several days should be devoted to preparatory bombardment, and that the whole division should be used for the assault.

All foul advantages, whether they be gas, vitriol, or liquid fire, bring with them their own disadvantages. In this case the fall of their comrades filled the soldiers with a righteous anger, which gave them a fury in the assault which nothing could withstand. The preparations were completed in a week, and the signal was given in the early morning of August 9. Artillery had been concentrated during the interval, and the bombardment was extraordinarily intense and accurate. So perfect was the co-ordination between the infantry and the guns, that the storming battalions dashed out of the trenches whilst the German lines were still an inferno of exploding shells, with the certain conviction that the shell-fire would have ceased before they had actually got across the open. The cease-fire and the arrival of the panting, furious soldiers were practically simultaneous.

The infantry assault had been assigned to the 6th Division, who advanced at 3.15, with two brigades in front and one in support. The 18th Brigade was upon the right. Colonel Towsey was in immediate command. The 2nd Durham Light Infantry were in the lead, and got across two companies in front with little loss ; while the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, who followed, were caught in shell-fire and had very many casualties. The attack on this flank was supported by the 1st East Yorks and the Westminsters, who lay in the woods to the rear, the East Yorks being speedily engaged. The wave of infantry were over the German parapet in an instant. All resistance was vain, and those who stood were bayoneted, while the fugitives were pelted with bombs from traverse to traverse wherever they attempted to make head against their pursuers. So sudden had been the British rush that many of the Germans were found in the dug-outs and in the old mine-crater, from which they had not time to emerge and to meet the assault for which they were waiting. Over a hundred of these were taken prisoners. The

whole place was a perfect charnel-house, for there were 200 German dead in the crater, 300 in front of the line, and a great number also of the Riflemen who had been killed nine days before.

On the left of the line a no less dashing attack had been made by the 16th Brigade (Nicholson), and the trenches were carried in line with those now held by the 18th. This successful advance was carried out by the 1st Shropshires, the 1st Buffs, and the 2nd York and Lancasters, with the 1st Leinsters in support. The distance between the lines at this point was very much less than on the right, which partly accounts for the smaller casualties.

When the trenches had been taken, the sappers, with their usual cool disregard of danger, sprang forward into the open and erected barbed wire. The gains were rapidly consolidated, men were sent back to avoid overcrowding, and protective cover raised against the heavy shelling which always follows swiftly upon the flight of the German infantry. It came in due course, and was succeeded by an attempt at a counter-attack. "At about 10 o'clock the enemy was observed creeping in four parties towards us. They were very near us, and came forward on their hands and knees, laden with bombs and hand-grenades. We opened fire with rifles and machine-guns. Our bomb-throwers worked like machines, and splendid work they did. The Germans were all mowed down and blown to atoms, or else ran for their lives."

During the long day the Germans strove hard, by an infernal shell-fire, raking all the trenches from the direction of Hill 60, to drive the infantry from the captured position. They clung desperately to what they had won, but they were cut off from all supplies. Many of the Westminsters lost their lives in heroically bringing up water and food to the advanced line. For fourteen hours the men were under a murderous fire, and for the same period the British artillery worked hard in supporting them. Men can endure punishment far more cheerfully when they hear the roar of their own shells overhead and know that the others are catching it also. "The guns put heart into us," said one of the survivors. Finally, night put an end to the slaughter and the uproar. Under the shadow of darkness relieving troops crept to the front, and the weary, decimated, but triumphant brigades were drawn off to the rear.

A considerable change in the general arrangement of the Army was carried out early in August. This consisted in the formation of a third army under General Monro. This army consisted of the Seventh Corps (Snow) and the Tenth Corps (Morland). The rearrangement would be of little importance, since most of the units have already been mentioned, but it was accompanied by a large extension of the British line. Up to this date it had joined the French about six miles south of the La Bassée Canal. Now the Tenth French Army (Foch) was left in position before Lens, and the British took up the line again upon the farther side of

them, carrying it from the south of Arras to the neighbourhood of Albert, thus adding a dozen miles or so to the British region, and bringing the total to about fifty—a small proportion, it is true, but a very vital sector, and the one most free from any natural feature of protection.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE OF LOOS [1]

(*The First Day—September* 25)

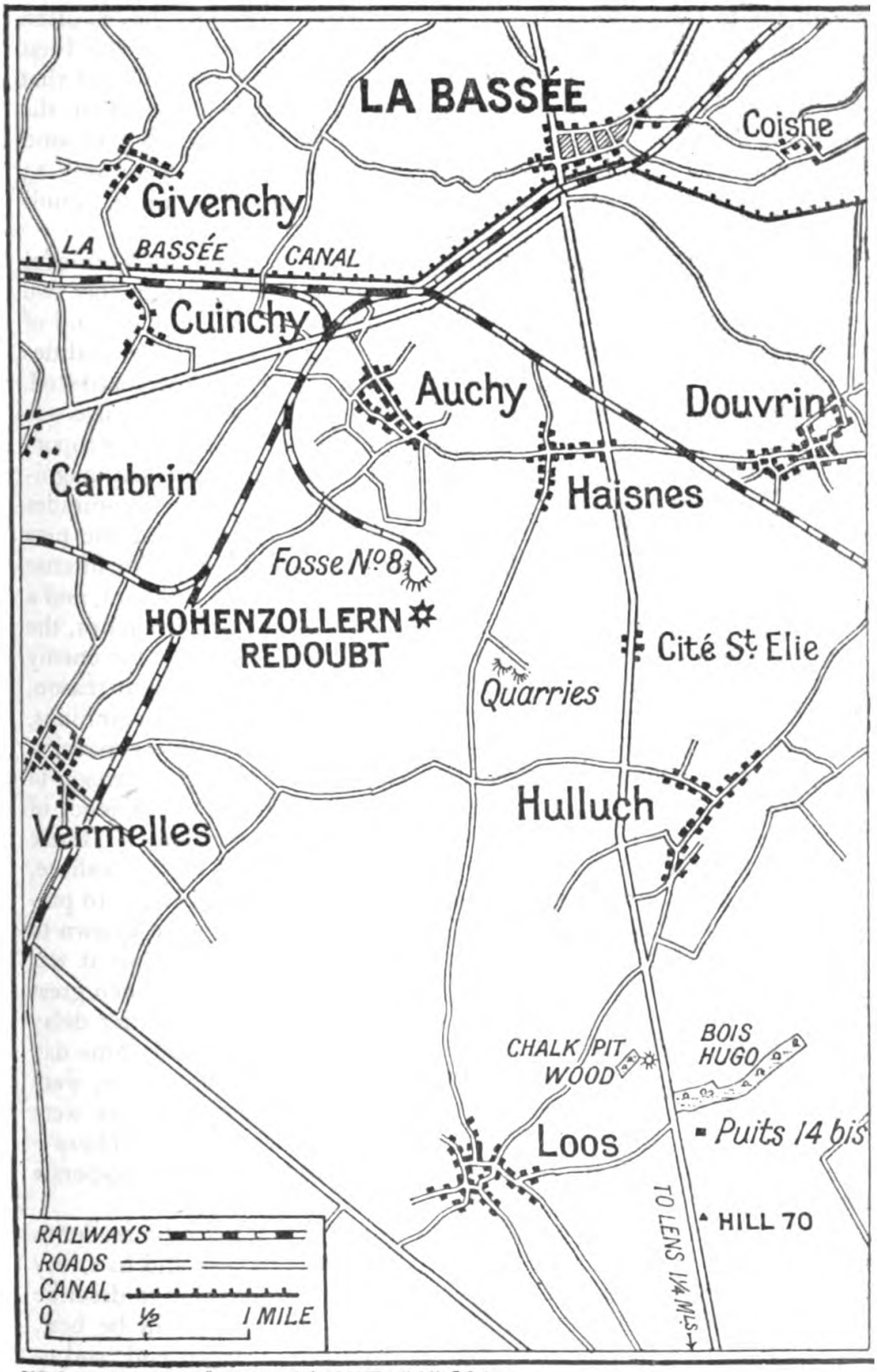
General order of battle—Check of the 2nd Division—Advance of the 9th and 7th Divisions—Advance of the 1st Division—Fine progress of the 15th Division—Capture of Loos—Work of the 47th London Division.

WHILST the Army had lain in apparent torpidity during the summer great preparations for a considerable attack had been going forward. For several months the sappers and the gunners had been busy concentrating their energies for a serious effort which should, as it was hoped, give the infantry a fair chance of breaking the German line. Similar preparations were going on among the French, both in Foch's Tenth Army, which was practically part of the British line, and also on a larger scale in the region of Champagne. Confining our attention to the British effort, we shall now examine the successive stages of the great action in front of Hulluch and Loos—the greatest battle, both as to the numbers engaged and as to the losses incurred, which had ever up to that date been fought by our Army.

The four days which preceded the great attack of September 25 were days of great activity. An incessant and severe bombardment was directed upon the German lines along the whole front, but especially in the sector to the immediate south of the La Bassée Canal, where the main thrust was to be made. To this severe fire the Germans made hardly any reply. On each of the days a feint attack was made upon the German line so far as could be done without actually exposing the men. The troops for the assault were gradually brought into position, and the gas-cylinders, which were to be used for the first time, were sunk in the front parapets. No less than 5000 were employed.

The assault in the main area was to extend from the La Bassée Canal in the north to the village of Grenay in the south, a front of about seven miles, and it was to be supported and supplemented by many subsidiary attacks along the whole line up to the Ypres salient, and northwards still to where the monitors upon the coast held the German coastguards to their sand-dunes. For the moment we will deal only with the fortunes of the main attack. This was to be delivered by two army corps, both

[1] Map p. 253 and the two Loos diagrams illustrate this battle.



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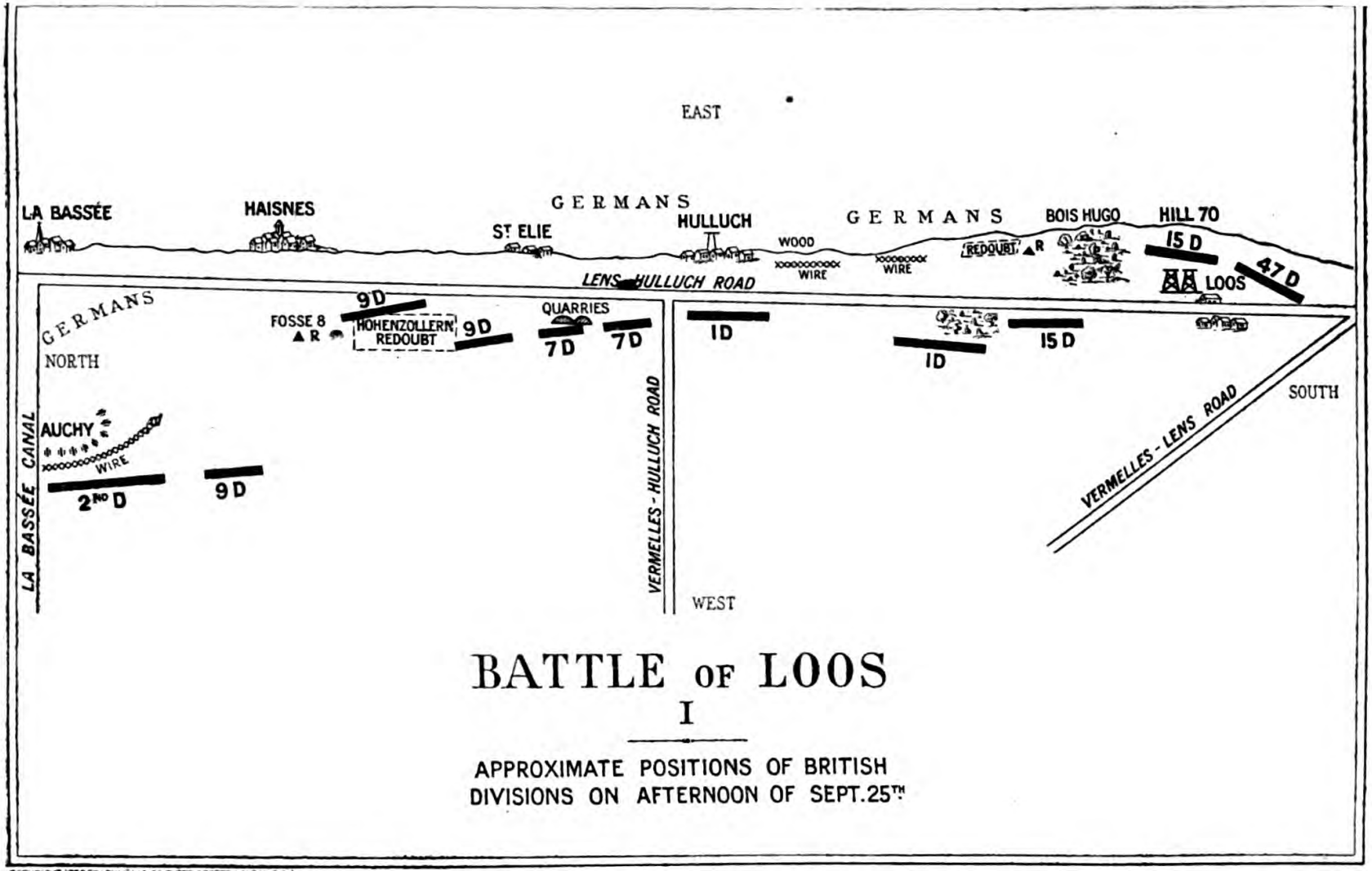
LOOS DISTRICT

belonging to Haig's First Army, that tempered steel which has so often been the spearhead for the British thrust. The corps were the First (Gough's) and the Fourth (Rawlinson's). It will be remembered that a British army corps now consisted of three divisions, so that the storming line was composed of six divisions, or about seventy thousand infantry. The Germans opposed to them at the outset were only 13 battalions, but they were heavily entrenched and had unlimited munitions.

The line of the advance was bisected by a high road from Vermelles to Hulluch. This was made the boundary line between the two attacking corps. To the left, or north of this road, was the ground of the First Corps ; to the right, or south, of the Fourth. The qualities of the Regular and Territorial regiments had already been well attested. This was the first occasion, however, when, upon a large scale, use was made of those new forces which now formed so considerable a proportion of the whole. Let it be said at once that they bore the test magnificently, and that they proved themselves to be worthy of their comrades to the right and the left. It had always been expected that the new infantry would be good, for they had in most cases been under intense training for a year, but it was a surprise to many British soldiers, and a blow to the prophets in Berlin, to find that the scientific branches, the gunners and the sappers, had also reached a high level. " Our enemy may have hoped," said Sir John French, " not perhaps without reason, that it would be impossible for us, starting with such small beginnings, to build up an efficient artillery to provide for the very large expansion of the Army. If he entertained such hopes he has now good reason to know that they have not been justified by the result. The efficiency of the artillery of the new armies has exceeded all expectations." These were the guns which, in common with many others of every calibre, worked furiously in the early dawn of Saturday, September 25, to prepare for the impending advance. The high explosives were known to have partly broken down the German system of defences, but it was also known that there were areas where the damage had not been great and where the wire entanglements were still intact. No further delay could be admitted, however, if the advance was to be on the same day as that of the French. The infantry, chafing with impatience, were swarming in the fire trenches. At 5.40 a.m. the gas-cylinders were turned on. At 6.30 a.m. the guns ceased fire, and the ardent soldiers—Regulars, New, and Territorials—dashed forward upon their desperate venture.

The rough diagram of the action on page 255 will help the reader to understand the order in which the six divisions attacked, and in a very rough way the objectives in front of them. It is impossible to describe simultaneously the progress of so extended a line. It will be best, therefore, to take the various divisions from the northern end, and to follow the fortunes of each until it reached some definite limit. After-



BATTLE OF LOOS

I

APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF BRITISH DIVISIONS ON AFTERNOON OF SEPT. 25TH

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BATTLE OF LOOS—I

wards an attempt will be made to co-ordinate these results and show their effects upon each other.

Horne's 2nd Regular Division, acting upon the extreme left of the main attack, had two brigades north of the La Bassée Canal and one to the south. The most northern was the 5th, and its operations really formed part of the subsidiary attacks, and will be treated under that head. South of it was the 6th, to the immediate north of the canal. The gas, drifting slowly up the line before a slight southern breeze, had contaminated the air in this quarter, and many of the men were suffering from the effects. None the less, at half-past six the advance was made in a most dashing manner, but the barbed wire defences were found to be only partially damaged and the trenches to be intact, so no progress could be made. The 2nd South Staffords and 1st King's Liverpools on the left and right reached the German position, but in face of a murderous fire were unable to make good their hold, and were eventually forced back to their own trenches after enduring heavy losses, shared in a lesser degree by the 1st Rifles and 1st Berks in support. Upon their right, south of the canal, was the 19th Brigade. The two leading battalions, the 1st Middlesex and 2nd Argylls, sprang from the trenches and rushed across the intervening space, only to find themselves faced by unbroken and impassable wire. For some reason, probably the slope of the ground, the artillery had produced an imperfect effect upon the defences of the enemy in the whole sector attacked by the 2nd Division, and if there is one axiom more clearly established than another during this war, it is that no human heroism can carry troops through uncut wire. They will most surely be shot down faster than they can cut the strands. The two battalions lay all day, from morning till dusk, in front of this impenetrable obstacle, lashed and scourged by every sort of fire, and losing heavily. Two companies of the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, who gallantly charged forward to support them, shared their tragic experience. It was only under the cover of dusk that the survivors were able to get back, having done nothing save all that men could do. Their difficult situation was rendered more desperate by the fact that the wind drifted the gas—that filthy and treacherous ally—over a portion of the line, and some of our soldiers were poisoned by the effects. The hold-up was the more unfortunate, as it left the Germans the power to outflank the whole advance, and many of the future difficulties arose from the fact that the enemy's guns were still working from Auchy and other points on the left rear of the advancing troops. In justice to the 2nd Division, it must be remembered that they were faced by the notoriously strong position called " the railway triangle," and also that it is on the flanking units that the strain must especially fall, as was shown equally clearly upon the same day in the great French advance in Champagne.

The advance of the next division, Thesiger's 9th Scottish Division of the new armies, was of a most energetic nature, and met with varying fortunes according to the obstacles in their path. The valour and per-

severance of the men were equally high in each of its brigades. By an unfortunate chance, General Landon, the officer who had played so essential a part on the fateful October 31, 1914, and who had commanded the 9th Division, was invalided home only two days before the battle. His place was taken by General Thesiger, who had little time in which to get acquainted with his staff and surroundings. The front to be assaulted was of a most formidable nature. This Hohenzollern Redoubt jutted forward from the main German line, and was an enclosure seamed with trenches, girdled with wire, and fringed with machine-guns. Behind and to the north of it lay the slag-heap Fosse 8. The one favourable point lay in the fact that the attacking infantry had only a hundred yards to cross, while in the other parts of the line the average distance was about a quarter of a mile.

The attack of the 9th Division was carried out by two brigades, the 26th and 28th, with the 27th in close support.

Continuing the plan of taking each unit from the north, we will follow the tragic fortunes of the 28th Brigade on the left. This brigade seems to have been faced by the same unbroken obstacles which had held up their neighbours of the 2nd Division upon the left, and they found it equally impossible to get forward, though the attack was urged with all the constancy of which human nature is capable, as the casualty returns only too clearly show.

The most veteran troops could not have endured a more terrible ordeal or preserved a higher heart than these young soldiers in their first battle. The leading battalions were the 6th Scottish Borderers and the 11th Highland Light Infantry. Nineteen officers led the Borderers over the parapet. Within a few minutes the whole nineteen, including Colonel Maclean and Major Hosley, lay dead or wounded upon the ground. Valour could no further go. Of the rank and file of the Borderers some 500 out of 1000 were lying in the long grass which faced the German trenches. The Highland Light Infantry had suffered very little less. Ten officers and 300 men fell in the first rush before they were checked by the barbed wire of the enemy. Every accumulation of evil which can appal the stoutest heart was heaped upon this brigade—not only the two leading battalions, but their comrades of the 9th Seaforths and 10th H.L.I. who supported them. The gas hung thickly about the trenches, and all of the troops, but especially the 10th H.L.I., suffered from it. Colonel Graham of this battalion was found later incoherent and half unconscious from poisoning, while Major Graham and four Lieutenants were incapacitated in the same way. The chief cause of the slaughter, however, was the uncut wire, which held up the brigade while the German rifle and machine-gun fire shot them down in heaps. It was observed that in this part of the line the gas had so small an effect upon the enemy that their infantry could be seen with their heads and shoulders clustering thickly over their parapets as they fired down at the desperate men who tugged and raved in front of the wire entanglement.

An additional horror was found in the shape of a covered trench, invisible until one fell into it, the bottom of which was studded with stakes and laced with wire. Many of the Scottish Borderers lost their lives in this murderous ditch. In addition to all this, the fact that the 2nd Division was held up exposed the 28th Brigade to fire on the flank. In spite of every impediment, some of the soldiers fought their way onwards and sprang down into the German trenches; notably Major Sparling of the Borderers and Lieutenant Sebold of the H.L.I. with a handful of men broke through all opposition. There was no support behind them, however, and after a time a few survivors were compelled to fall back to the trenches from which they had started, both the officers named having been killed. The repulse on the left of the 9th Division was complete. The mangled remains of the 28th Brigade, flushed and furious but impotent, gathered together to hold their line against a possible counter-attack. Shortly after midday they made a second attempt at a forward movement, but 50 per cent. of their number were down, all the battalions had lost many of their officers, and for the moment it was not possible to sustain the offensive.

A very different fate had befallen the 26th Brigade upon their right. The leading battalions of this brigade were the 5th Camerons on the left, gallantly led by Lochiel himself, the hereditary chieftain of the clan, and the 7th Seaforths on the right. These two battalions came away with a magnificent rush, closely followed by the 8th Gordons and the 8th Black Watch. It was a splendid example of that *furor Scoticus* which has shown again and again that it is not less formidable than the Teutonic wrath. The battalions were over the parapet, across the open, through the broken wire, and over the entrenchment like a line of Olympic hurdlers. Into the trenches they dashed, seized or killed the occupants, pressed rapidly onwards up the communications, and by seven o'clock had made their way as far as Fosse 8, a coal-mine with a long, low, slag-heap lying in the rear of the great work, but linked up to it in one system of defences. It was a splendid advance, depending for its success upon the extreme speed and decision of the movement. Many officers and men, including Colonel Gainsford of the Seaforths, and Lord Sempill, the gallant Colonel of the Black Watch, were left upon the ground, but the front of the brigade rolled ever forwards. Not content with this considerable success, one battalion, the 8th Gordons, with a handful of the Black Watch, preserved sufficient momentum to carry it on to Pekin Trench at the edge of the fortified village of Haisnes, in the rear of the German position. The reserve brigade, the 27th, consisting of the 11th and 12th Royal Scots, 10th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and 6th Scots Fusiliers, swept onwards in support of this movement. This brigade had varying fortunes, part of it being held up by wire. It did not get so far forward as the brigade upon its left, but it reached and took Fosse Alley, to the immediate west of the Lens–Hulluch road. This position it held against bombing attacks upon

each flank until the morning of Monday the 27th, as will be described later. The Highlanders on their left, who had got nearly to Haisnes, dropped back when they found themselves unsupported, and joined the rest of their brigade in the neighbourhood of Fosse 8.

It should be mentioned that the field-guns of the 52nd Brigade R.F.A. pushed up in the immediate rear of the firing line of the 9th Division, and gave effective support to the infantry. The fact that they could do this across the open tends to show that infantry supports could be pushed up without being confined unduly to the communication trenches. The spirited action of these guns was greatly appreciated by the infantry.

For the moment we will leave the 9th Division, its left held up in line with the 2nd Division, its right flung forward through the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse 8 until the spray from the wave had reached as far as Haisnes. Let us turn now to the veterans of the 7th Division, the inheritors of the glories of Ypres, who filled the space between the right of the 9th Division and the road from Vermelles to Hulluch which divided Gough's First and Rawlinson's Fourth Corps. This division was constituted as before, save that the 8th and 9th Devons of the New Army had taken the place of the two Guards battalions in the 20th Brigade. Upon receiving the word to advance, " Over the top and the best of luck ! " the men swarmed on short ladders out of the fire trenches and advanced with cool, disciplined valour over the open ground. On reaching the German wire the leading brigades—the 22nd on the left with the 2nd Warwicks and 1st South Staffords in the lead, the 20th on the right with the 2nd Gordons and 8th Devons in the place of honour —lay down for a short breather, while each soldier obeyed instructions by judging for himself the point at which the broken, tangled mass of writhing strands could most easily be penetrated. Then once more the whistles blew, the men rushed forward, and, clearing the wire, they threw themselves into the front trench. The garrison of 200 men threw their arms down and their hands up with the usual piteous but insincere cry of " Kameraden ! " Flooding over the line of trenches, the division pushed rapidly on without a check until they reached the Quarries, a well-marked post in front of the village of Hulluch. Here more prisoners and eight field-guns were taken by the 20th Brigade. From the Quarries to the village is roughly half a mile of uphill ground, devoid of cover. The impetus of the advance carried the men on until they were at the very edge of the village, where they were held up by the furious fire and by a line of barbed wire, which was bravely cut by Private Vickers of the 2nd Warwicks and other devoted men. Another smaller village, Cité St. Elie, to the north of Hulluch, was also reached by the 2nd Queen's Surrey. At both these points the division had reached its limit, but still farther to the north its left-hand brigade was at the southern outskirts of Haisnes in touch with the gallant men of the 9th Division, who were to the west of that important village. These

advanced lines could not be held without supports; the 21st Brigade had already been absorbed farther back, and the men of the 7th Division fell back about 4 p.m. as far as the Quarries, where for a time they remained, having lost many officers and men, including Colonel Stansfield of the 2nd Gordons, a gallant officer who was hit by a shell in the first advance, but asked only that he should be let lie where he could see his men. Colonel Heath of the Surreys was also killed, as was Colonel Lefroy of the Warwicks.

Thus the advance of the First Army Corps ended in a bloody repulse upon the left of the line and a hardly less bloody success upon the right. Across the Vermelles—Hulluch highroad, the Fourth Army Corps had been advancing on the same line, and its fortunes had been very similar to those of its neighbour. The 1st Division was operating on the left of the corps, with the 15th Scottish Division (New) in the centre and the 47th Territorial (London) on the right. Thus the 1st Division was advancing upon Hulluch on the immediate right of the 7th Division, so that its operations are the next to be considered.

The attack of this division was carried out by the 1st Brigade upon the left and by the 2nd upon the right, while the 3rd was in support. Two battalions, the 9th King's Liverpool and the London Scottish, acted as a small independent unit apart from the brigades. The respective objectives for the two leading brigades were the Chalk Pit and Fosse 14 for the 2nd, while the 1st was to aim at Hulluch. These objectives were somewhat diverging, and the two Territorial battalions, forming what was called Green's Force, were to fill up the gap so occasioned, and to prevent any German counter-attack coming through.

Both brigades soon found great difficulties in their path. In the case of each the wire was but imperfectly cut, and the German trenches were still strong. We will first follow the fortunes of the 1st Brigade. Their rush was headed by two brave battalions of the New Army, the 8th Berkshires on the left and the 10th Gloucesters on the right. Both of these units did extraordinarily well, and after bearing down a succession of obstacles got as far as the edge of Hulluch, capturing three lines of trenches and several guns upon the way. The 1st Camerons pressed close at their heels, lending them the weight to carry them over each successive difficulty. The advance took some time and was very costly. The Berkshires alone in the course of the day lost 17 officers and 400 men, and were led by a young sub-lieutenant, Lawrence, at the close. The Gloucesters and Camerons suffered almost as heavily.

The experience of the 2nd Brigade to the immediate south was still more trying, and it was held up to an extent which had a serious bearing upon the fortunes of the day. The German trenches near Lone Tree, which faced the brigade, were found to be intact and strongly covered by wire. They were attacked by the 2nd Rifles and 1st North Lancashires, with the 2nd Sussex in immediate support, but no progress could be made. The 1st Northamptons threw themselves into the fight, but

still the trench was held at a time when it was vital that the 2nd Brigade should be at its post in the general scheme of advance. The ground was taken, however, on each flank of the Lone Tree position, and Green's Force, whose function had been to link up the diverging operations of the two brigades, was brought up for the attack. The two battalions advanced over six hundred yards by platoon rushes under heavy gusts of fire. They also were held up, and it was not until the 2nd Welsh working from the flank had got in their rear that a few grey-clad, battle-stained infantrymen clambered slowly on to the parapet with outstretched hands. Upon the British ceasing their fire a party of 3 officers and 400 men were marched out of the trenches and gave themselves up. Their stout resistance is a lesson in the effect which a single obstinate detachment can exert in throwing a large scheme out of gear.

The 1st Brigade had now got through upon the left, and the 2nd was able to follow them, so that the whole force advanced as far as the Lens–Hulluch road, getting in touch with the 20th Brigade of the 7th Division on the left. Here the resistance was strong and the fire heavy. The division had lost very heavily. Of the 9th King's Liverpool only Colonel Ramsay, 4 subalterns, and 120 men were left, while many of the other battalions were almost as hard hit. It was now raining and the light was failing. The men dug themselves in near the old German trenches, the 3rd Brigade coming up and taking its position on the right flank, where late that night it connected up by means of its outer unit, the 2nd Welsh, with the 24th Division, which had come up in support.

The temporary check to the advance of the 1st Division had exposed the left flank of its neighbour to the south, the 15th (McCracken's) Scottish Division of the New Army. The two divisions were to have met at Fosse 14, but the 15th Division arrived there some hours before the others, for the reason already stated. In spite of this a very fine advance was made, which gained a considerable stretch of ground and pierced more deeply than any other into the German line. The 46th Brigade was on the left, consisting of the 7th Scots Borderers and 12th Highland Light Infantry in front, with the 8th Borderers and 10th Scottish Rifles behind them. It was upon the parapet in front of this brigade that Piper Laidlaw marched up and down before the attack under heavy fire, warming the blood of the crouching men with the maddening scream of his war-pipes. Not until he was shot down did this gallant man cease to urge forward his comrades. The 46th Brigade dashed forward at the signal, and with a fine fury flooded over the German trenches, which they carried at a rush, storming onwards across the Lens road and up the long slope of Hill 70, taking Fosse 14 upon the way, and eventually reaching the summit of the incline. The 45th supporting Brigade came along after them, detaching, as they passed, 100 bombers of the 6th Camerons to help the 1st Division to get forward. These brave Highlanders held the advanced line for some hours under heavy fire from the Lens batteries.

The 44th Brigade on the right of the 46th had made an advance which was equally fiery and successful. In this brigade the 9th Black Watch and 8th Seaforths were in the lead, with the 7th Camerons and 10th Gordons behind. This brigade dashed into the main street of Loos, where they met the Londoners of Barter's 47th Division. They helped to consolidate this flank and to clear the houses of Loos, while some of them pushed forward towards Hill 70. When they reached the crest of the hill they found the remains of the 46th Brigade, consisting of remnants of the 12th H.L.I., 7th Scots Borderers, and 10th Scottish Rifles, upon their left. It is possible that they could have dug in and held their own, but they most gallantly continued to advance, losing direction as they did so. A village faced them with scattered houses. These crackled at every window with machine-gun fire. Of the devoted band who rushed forward none reached the houses. The few survivors fell back upon the crest, and then, falling back about one hundred and fifty yards, they dug in upon the slope on the west side of it. Their position was an extraordinarily dangerous one, for they had no protection upon the left flank, where lay a thick wood—the Bois Hugo—through which a German attack might come which would cut them off from the Army. Colonel Purvis, of the Highland Light Infantry, with quick foresight, built up a thin line of resistance upon this side from Fosse 14 in the south to the advanced left point, manning it with a few of his own men under Lieutenant McNeil. A welcome reinforcement of the 6th Camerons and 7th Scots Fusiliers from the 45th Brigade was thrown in to strengthen this weak point. This was done about 1 p.m. It was only just in time, for in the afternoon the German infantry did begin to debouch from the wood, but finding organised resistance they dropped back, and their advance on this line was not renewed until the next morning, when it fell upon the 21st Division. For a time the pressure was very great, but the men rallied splendidly round a tattered flag bearing the Cameron tartan, and, although it was impossible to get forward, they still, in a mixed and straggling line with hardly any officers, held firmly to their ground. Late in the evening the 13th Royal Scots and the 11th Argyll and Sutherlands came up to thicken the line.

Leaving the 15th Division holding on desperately to that advanced position where, as Captain Beith has tersely said, a fringe of Jocks and Sandies lie to mark the farthest point of advance, we turn to the remaining division upon the right—the 47th London, under General Barter. This division upheld splendidly upon this bloody day the secular reputation of the Cockney as a soldier. With a keen, quick brain, as well as a game heart, the Londoner, like the Parisian, has proved that the artificial life of a great city does not necessarily dull the primitive qualities which make the warrior. The cream of the London Territorial regiments had already been distributed among regular brigades, and had made themselves an individual name, but this was

the first occasion upon which a whole division was engaged in a really serious operation.

The left of the division was formed by Thwaites' 141st Brigade with the 18th London Irish in the front line and the 20th Blackheath Battalion in immediate support. To their right was Cuthbert's 140th Brigade, which formed the extreme right of the whole attack, a position which caused them to think as much of their flank protection as of their frontal advance. This brigade had the 6th and 7th Londons in the van, with the 8th and 15th (Civil Service) in support. The 142nd Brigade was in the second line.

The advance of the 141st Brigade was a splendid one. At the whistle the 18th London Irish, with a fighting yell, flooded over the parapet with their regimental football kicked in front of them, and were into the German trench like a thunderbolt. A few minutes later they were followed by the Blackheath men, who passed the captured trench, rushed on to the second, and finally won the third, which opened for them the road to Loos. Into the south end of Loos they streamed, while the 44th Brigade of the 15th Division rushed the north end, turning out or capturing the 23rd Silesians, who held the post. The 19th St. Pancras Battalion followed up the attack, while the 17th (Poplar) were in reserve. Meanwhile, the 140th Brigade had done most useful work by making a lodgment on the Double Crassier, formidable twin slag-heaps which had become a German fort. The ground to the immediate south of Loos was rapidly seized and consolidated by the Londoners, several guns being captured in the chalk pits near the village. A strong bombing attack upon the 7th London was repulsed, Major Casson being killed in the struggle. This operation was of permanent importance, as the successful British advance would inevitably form a salient projecting into the hostile lines, which would be vulnerable if there were not some good defensive position on the flank. The work of the 47th Division partly assured such a line in the south.

By midday, as has been shown, the British advance had spent its momentum, and had been brought to a standstill at all points. The German lines had been almost—but not quite—shattered. A map of the photographed trenches shows that beyond the point reached by the advanced troops there was only the last line which held them up. To the east of that was open country. But the German reserves were hurrying up from all quarters in the rear, from Roulers, from Thielt, from Courtrai and Menin and Douai. At the latter place was a division of Guards just brought across from the Russian front. These also were hurried into the fight. The extreme British line was too thin for defence, and was held by exhausted men. They were shelled and bombed and worn down by attack after attack until they were compelled to draw slowly back and re-form on interior lines. The grand salient which had been captured with such heroic dash and profuse loss of life was pared down here and contracted there. The portion to the south held by the

Londoners was firmly consolidated, including the important village of Loos and its environs. An enormous mine crane, three hundred feet high, of latticed iron, which had formed an extraordinarily good observation point, was one of the gains in this direction. The 15th Division had been driven back to the western side of Hill 70, and to the line of the Lens–Hulluch–La Bassée road. The 7th and 9th Divisions had fallen back from Haisnes, but they still held the western outskirts of Hulluch, the edge of St. Elie, the Quarries, and Fosse 8. It was at this end of the line that the situation was most dangerous, for the failure of the 2nd Division to get forward had left a weak flank upon the north, which was weaker because the heavily-gunned German position of Auchy lay to the north-west of it in a way that partially enfiladed it.

The struggle was particularly desperate round the slag-heaps which were known as Fosse 8. This position was held all day by the 5th Camerons, the 8th Black Watch, and the 7th Seaforths of the 26th Brigade, the remaining battalion of which, the 8th Gordons, were with the bulk of the 27th Brigade in the direction of Haisnes. These three battalions, under a murderous fire from the Auchy guns and from the persistent bombers, held on most tenaciously till nightfall. When the welcome darkness came, without bringing them the longed-for supports, the defenders had shrunk to 600 men, but their grip of the position was not relaxed, and they held it against all attacks during the night. About five next morning the 73rd Brigade of the 24th Division—a unit straight from home—pushed up to their help under circumstances to be afterwards explained, and shared their great dangers and losses during the second day of the fighting.

The battalions of the 9th Division, chiefly the 8th Gordons, which had got as far as the outskirts of Haisnes held on there until evening. By that time no reinforcements had reached them and they had lost very heavily. Their rifles were clogged with mud and clay, and their bombs were very inferior to the stick bombs of the Germans. Both their flanks were turned, and at nightfall they were driven back in the direction of the Quarries, which was held by those men of the 7th Division who had also been compelled to fall back from Hulluch. During the night this position was wired by the 54th Company of Royal Engineers, but the Germans, by a sudden and furious attack, carried it, driving out the garrison and capturing some of them, among whom was General Bruce, the Brigadier of the 27th Brigade. After the capture of the Quarries, the flanks of the 27th Brigade were again turned, and it was compelled to return as far as the old German front line. The 20th Brigade had fallen back to the same point. These misfortunes all arose from the radically defective position of the northern British line, commanded as it was by German guns from its own left rear, and unprotected at the flank.

Whilst this set-back had occurred upon the left of the attack, the right had consolidated itself very firmly. The position of the 47th Division

when darkness fell was that on their right the 140th Brigade had a strong grip of part of the Double Crassier. On their left the 19th Battalion (St. Pancras), which had lost its Colonel, Collison-Morley, and several senior officers, was holding South-east Loos in the rear of the right flank of the 15th Division. The 20th was holding the Loos Chalk Pit, while the 17th and 18th were in the German second-line trenches.

Leaving the front line holding hard to, or in some cases recoiling from, the advanced positions which they had won, we will turn back and follow the movements of the 21st and 24th Divisions which were in support. It is well to remember that these divisions had not only never heard the whistle of a bullet, but they had never even been inside a trench, save on some English down-side. It is perhaps a pity that it could not be so arranged that troops so unseasoned in actual warfare should occupy some defensive line, while the older troops whom they relieved could have marched to battle. Apart, however, from this inexperience, which was no fault of their own or of their commanders, there is no doubt at all that the men were well-trained infantry and full of spirit. To bring them to the front without exciting attention, three separate night marches were undertaken, of no inordinate length, but tiring on account of the constant blockings of the road and the long waits which attended them. Finally they reached their allotted positions on the night of September 24, but by ill-fortune their cookers came late, and they were compelled in many cases to move on again without a proper meal. After this point the cookers never overtook them, and the men were thrown back upon their iron rations. Providence is not a strong point of the British soldier, and it is probable that with more economy and foresight at the beginning these troops would have been less exhausted and hungry at the end. The want of food, however, was not the fault of the supply services.

The troops moved forward with no orders for an instant attack, but with the general idea that they were to wait as a handy reserve and go forward when called upon to do so. The 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division was sent on first about eleven o'clock of the 25th, but the other brigades were not really on the road till much later. The roads on which they moved—those which lead through Vermelles to Hulluch or to Loos—were blocked with traffic: guns advancing, ambulances returning, troops of all sorts coming and going, Maltese carts with small-arm ammunition hurrying forward to the fighting-line. The narrow channel was choked with the crowd. The country on either side was intersected with trenches and laced with barbed wire. It was pouring with intermittent showers. The soldiers, cold, wet, and hungry, made their way forward with many stoppages towards the firing, their general direction being to the centre of the British line.

"As we got over this plain," writes an officer, "I looked back, and there was a most extraordinary sight; as far as you could see there were thousands and thousands of our men coming up. You could see them

for miles and miles, and behind them a most colossal thundercloud extending over the whole sky, and the rain was pouring down. It was just getting dark, and the noise of our guns and the whole thing was simply extraordinary."

Early on the march the leading brigade, the 73rd, was met by a staff officer of the First Army, who gave the order that it should detach itself, together with the 129th Field Company of Sappers, and hasten to the reinforcement of the 9th Division at Fosse 8. They went, and the 24th Division knew them no more. The other two brigades found themselves between 9 and 10 p.m. in the front German trenches. They had been able to deploy after leaving Vermelles, and the front line were now in touch with the 63rd Brigade of the 21st Division upon the right, and with the 2nd Welsh Regiment, who represented the right of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division, on their left. The final orders were that at eleven o'clock next day these three divisions—1st, 24th, and 21st—were to make a united assault past Hulluch, which was assumed to be in our hands, and on to the main German line. This, then, was the position of the reserves on the night of September 25-26. Had they been there in the morning as Haig desired, and not far in the rear as French had ordered, the fate of the day might have been altered.

It was a nightmare night in the advanced line of the Army. The weather had been tempestuous and rainy all day, though the men had little time to think of such matters. But now they were not only tired and hungry, but soaked to the skin. An aggressive enemy pelted them with bombs from in front, and their prospects seemed as black as the starless sky above them. It is, however, at such a time that the British soldier, a confirmed grumbler in his hours of ease, shows to the best advantage. The men knew that much ground had been gained. They had seen prisoners by hundreds throwing up their hands, and had marked as they rushed past them the vicious necks of the half-buried captured cannon. It was advance for the Army, whatever might be their own discomfort. Their mood, therefore, was hilarious rather than doleful, and thousands of weary Mark Tapleys huddled under the dripping edges of the parapets. "They went into battle with their tails right up, and though badly mauled have their tails up still." So wrote the officer of a brigade which had lost more than half its effectives.

The day had been a terribly expensive one. No less than 470 officers and 15,000 men had fallen. Once again it was shown how desperate a thing it is to advance against unshaken troops, even when they are outnumbered, if they are behind unbroken wire. It had been a near thing to a great victory. There was deep penetration but never quite that last impetus which meant everything. One more fresh division might well have turned the scale. But the reserves were too far to the rear and the golden chance was lost for ever. Lord Kitchener's instructions had been: "Act with energy even though we may suffer very heavy losses." There was no want of energy or of losses, but the result was disappointing.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BATTLE OF LOOS

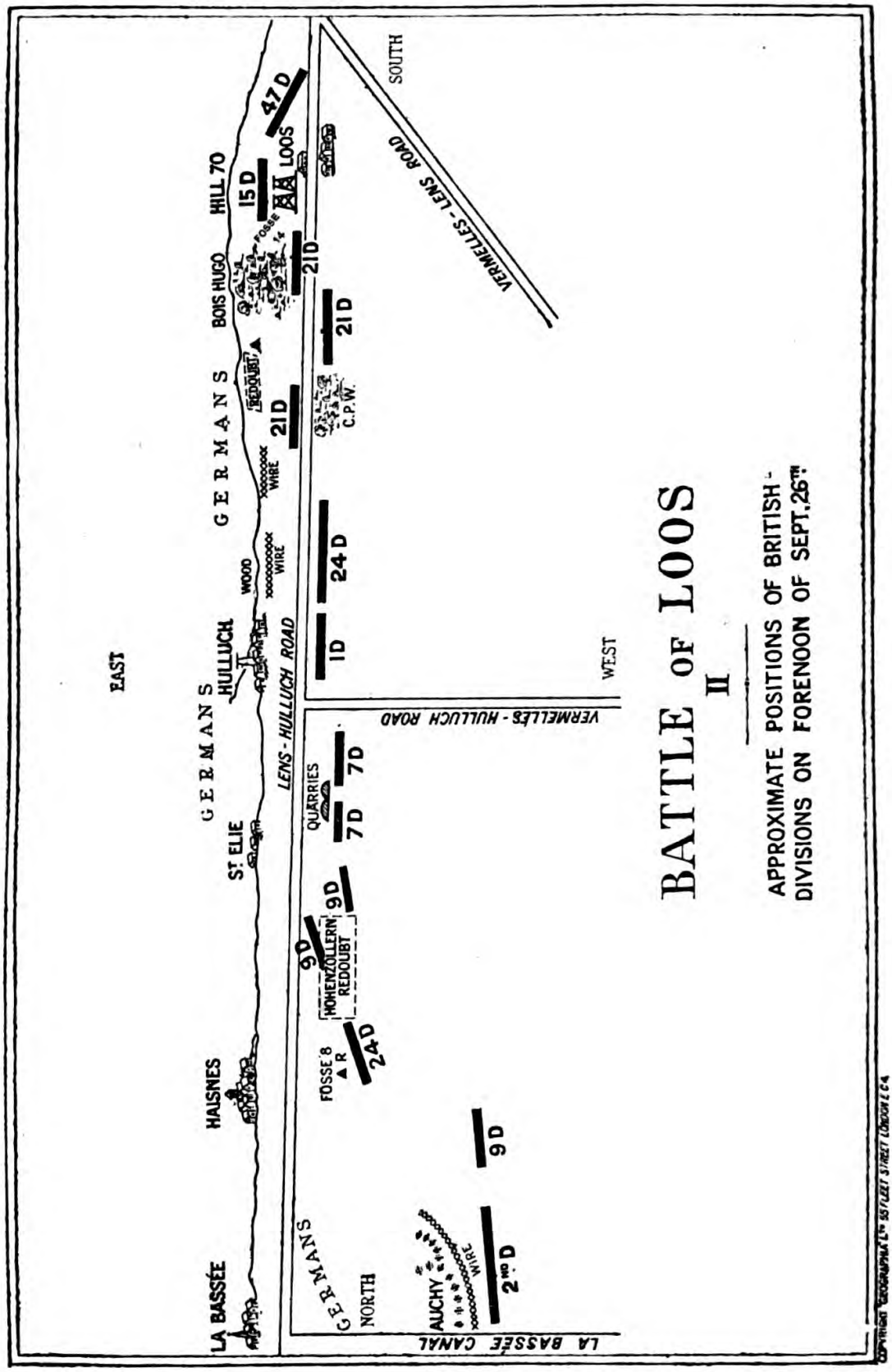
The Second Day—September 26

Death of General Capper—Retirement of the 15th Division—Advance of the 24th Division—Heavy losses— 21st Division before Bois Hugo—Desperate struggle—General retirement on the right—Rally round Loos—Position on the evening of September 26.

SUNDAY the 26th was a day of hard fighting and of heavy losses, the reserves streaming up from the rear upon both sides, each working furiously to improve its position. From early in the day the fighting was peculiarly bitter round Fosse 8 in the section carried and held by the 9th Division. It has been already mentioned that the 5th Camerons, 7th Seaforths and 8th Black Watch of the 26th Brigade, held this place all the evening of the 25th and all night, until reduced to less than the strength of a battalion. It has also been stated that the 73rd Brigade had been detached from the 24th Division to their aid. These men, with no preliminary hardening, found themselves suddenly thrust into one of the very hottest corners of a desperate fight. Under these circumstances it is all to the credit of these troops that they were able to hold their position all day, though naturally their presence was not of the same value as that of a more veteran brigade.

The 73rd Brigade were put into German trenches to the east of Fosse 8, their order from the left being 7th Northamptons, 12th Royal Fusiliers and 9th Sussex, with the 13th Middlesex echeloned on their right rear. They were constantly attacked, but were suffering more from cold, hunger, and exhaustion than from the Germans. All night and day they and the remains of the Scots held the place against intermittent assaults, which occasionally had some partial success, but never quite enabled the enemy to re-establish his position. It was not, however, until the morning of the 27th, as will afterwards be narrated, that their most severe ordeal was to come.

Close to Fosse 8, and on the south of it, was the position of the Quarries, from which the 7th Division had been driven by a sudden rush of the Germans during the night. This attack on the Quarries which succeeded, and that on Fosse 8 which failed, were really parts of the same great counter-attack, formed by the 117th and 2nd Guards


BATTLE OF LOOS
II
APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF BRITISH DIVISIONS ON FORENOON OF SEPT. 25TH
EAST
SOUTH
WEST
NORTH
GERMANS
HULLUCH
ST ELIE
HAISNES
LA BASSÉE
BOIS HUGO
HILL 70
LOOS
QUARRIES
WOOD
WIRE
REDOUBT
FOSSE 8
C.P.W.
AUCHY
LENS - HULLUCH ROAD
VERMELLES - HULLUCH ROAD
VERMELLES - LENS ROAD
LA BASSÉE CANAL
1D
15D
21D
24D
47D
9D
7D
2ND D

Reserve Divisions, and sent forward by Von Arnim in the dead of night or early morning of the 26th. After an abortive but very gallant and expensive attack by the 9th Norfolks next morning, there was a more serious effort by a body of mixed troops, including several units of the 2nd Division, notably the 2nd Worcesters and 1st Rifles. These battalions pushed their way up to the Quarries, and although they were unable to evict the Germans they established themselves firmly close to the south-western edge and there awaited events. The loss of the Quarries caused the 27th Brigade on the left to fall back to avoid being outflanked. It was on this day that the 7th Division lost their heroic leader, Sir Thomson Capper, the fine soldier who had so often braced by word and example their ever-thinning lines during the black days of Ypres, with which his name and that of his division will be eternally associated. There was no more valiant or trusted leader in the Army. He was shot through the lungs, was carried to the rear, and died in hospital next day. "We are here to do the impossible" was one of the fiery aphorisms which he left to the Army.

On the southern front of the British there was also an inclination to contract the line on the morning of the 26th. The fact that the French attack on the right on the day before had made no advance rendered that wing very open to a flank attack. The 15th Scottish Division still held on hard to the slopes of Hill 70, but early in the day their line had been driven somewhat to the westward. At nine o'clock they had renewed their attack upon Hill 70, supported by some reinforcements. They were not strong enough, nor was their artillery support sufficiently powerful to enable them to carry the crest of the hill. When their advance was checked the Germans turned upon them with a series of counter-attacks which gradually drove them down the hill. In the desperate series of rallies in which they made head against the Germans it is difficult to distinguish regiments, since the men fought for the most part in a long, scattered fringe of mixed units, each dour infantryman throwing up his own cover and fighting his own battle. The 6th Camerons preserved their cohesion, however, and particularly distinguished themselves, their gallant leader, Douglas Hamilton, falling at their head in the thick of the fight. "I must get up! I must get up!" were his last words before he expired. The final effect of these episodes was to drive [1] the British off the greater part of the slope of Hill 70, and down towards the village of Loos. On the night of the 25th two German attacks were repulsed by the 7th Royal Scots Fusiliers, but a counter-attack in the morning to recover the position of Hill 70 was not successful.

It will be remembered that the weary 24th Division (Ramsay), with its comrade the 21st (Forestier-Walker) on its right and the Regular 1st

[1] Fuller information seems to show that the Scots were never driven off the Hill, and that the evacuation was caused by the receipt of an order, founded upon a misunderstanding of the situation.

Division on its left, had received its orders to advance at eleven o'clock. It had been supposed that Hulluch was in British hands, but this was found not to be so. The orders, however, still held good. The 24th Division had already been stripped of the 73rd Brigade, and now it was further denuded by two battalions of the 71st, the 9th Norfolks and 8th Bedfords, who were told off to help retake the Quarries.

The hour had now come for the general advance. General Mitford with the 72nd Brigade was leading, with two battalions of the 71st Brigade behind, and his pioneer battalion in support. On his left was the 2nd Welsh, and, as he imagined, the whole of the 1st Division. On his right was the 63rd Brigade and the rest of the 21st Division, less the 62nd Brigade, as afterwards explained. It should have formed a solid wall of 20,000 infantry which might well turn the tide of a great battle. As a fact it only included six battalions.

We shall follow this advance of the 24th Division upon the left, who were compelled to go forward with their flank exposed on account of an hour's delay in the attack by the 1st Division. Afterwards we shall return to consider the movements of the 21st Division on their right. The leading brigade, the 72nd, moved forward with the 8th West Kents upon the left, and the 9th East Surreys upon the right. Behind them were the 8th Queen's Surreys and the 8th Buffs, with the pioneer battalion, the 12th Sherwood Foresters, in support. They were followed by the two remaining battalions of the 71st Brigade, the 9th Suffolks and the 11th Essex. As the advance continued the second line joined the first, and the 11th Essex from behind also pushed its way abreast of the foremost. The line of advance was to the south of Hulluch, and this line was preserved. As matters turned out, the numerous guns in the south of that village were all available for defence against the advance of the 24th Division. This caused them very heavy losses, but in spite of them they swept onwards with an unfaltering energy which was a monument to those long months of preparation during which Sir John Ramsay had brought his men to a high state of efficiency. Under every possible disadvantage of hunger, cold, exhaustion, and concentrated fire, they behaved with a steadiness which made them worthy of the honoured names which gleamed upon their shoulder-straps. One platoon of the Essex diverged into Hulluch in a vain attempt to stop the machine-guns and so shield their comrades. Hardly a man of this body survived. The rest kept their eyes front, took their punishment gamely, and pushed on for their objective. The breadth of the attack was such that it nearly covered the space between Hulluch in the north and the Bois Hugo in the south.

About midday the 24th Division had reached a point across the Lens–Hulluch road which was ahead of anything attained in this quarter the day before. They were up against unbroken wire with an enfilade rifle and machine-gun fire from both flanks and from Hulluch on their left rear, as well as a heavy shell-fire of asphyxiating shells. A

gallant attempt was made to pierce the wires, which were within fifty yards of the German position, but it was more than flesh and blood could do. They were driven back, and in the retirement across the long slope which they had traversed their losses were greatly increased. Their wounded had to be left behind, and many of these fell afterwards into the hands of the Germans, receiving honourable treatment from them. The losses would have been heavier still had it not been that the Suffolks in support lined up in a sunken road three hundred yards south of Hulluch, and kept down the fire of the machine-guns. Some of these raw battalions endured losses which have never been exceeded in this war before they could finally persuade themselves that the task was an impossible one. The 8th West Kents lost their Colonel, Vansittart, 24 officers, and 556 men ; the 8th Buffs their Colonel, Romer, 24 officers, and 534 men ; the other battalions were nearly as hard hit. These figures speak for themselves. Mortal men could not have done more. The whole brigade lost 78 officers and 2000 men out of about 3600 engaged in the attack. When these soldiers walked back—and there is testimony that their retirement was in many cases at a walk—they had earned the right to take their stand with any troops in the world. The survivors resumed their place about 1.30 in the German trenches, where for the rest of the day they endured a very heavy shelling. Some 600 men, mostly of the 8th Buffs, remained in front of the German wire and were eventually surrounded and captured.

The movements of the 21st Division on the right were of a very much more complex nature.

Wilkinson's 62nd Brigade, consisting of the 8th East Yorks, 10th Yorks, 12th and 13th Northumberland Fusiliers, with the 14th Northumberland Fusiliers as pioneer battalion, was hurried away separately and taken to the south and east of Loos to reinforce the 15th Division, which had sustained such losses on the 25th that they could not hold both the front and the flank.

The 62nd pushed on, reached the point of danger as early as the late afternoon of the 25th, and occupied a line of slag-heaps to the south-east of Loos, where there was a gap through which the enemy could penetrate from the flank. It was a prolongation of the same general defensive line which had been established and held by the 47th Division, and it was the more important as the French advance upon the right had not progressed so far, leaving the right flank in the air, exactly as the left flank had been left open by the holding up of the 2nd Division. The 62nd Brigade was heavily engaged from the time it appeared upon the field. The attack fell mainly upon the 8th East Yorkshires and the 10th Yorkshires, who were driven back from the farther side of the great dump which was the centre of the fight, but held on after very heavy losses to the Loos side of it with the support of the 13th Northumberland Fusiliers. This line was held all day of the 26th. So severe was the fighting that the Fusiliers lost 17 officers and 400 men, while the 8th

East Yorkshires at the slag-heaps lost the same heavy proportion of officers and 300 men. More than once the fighting was actually hand to hand, especially with the East Yorkshires. Colonel Hadow, together with Majors Noyes and Dent, all of the 10th Yorkshires, were killed, while Colonel Way of the East Yorkshires was wounded. It will be noted, then, that the 62nd Brigade was working independently of the rest of the 21st Division on one flank, as the 73rd of the 24th Division was upon the other.

We turn to the remainder of the 21st Division, the 63rd and 64th Brigades, the only ones which remained under the command of General Forestier-Walker. A formidable line of obstacles faced them as they formed up, including the Chalk Pit and the Chalk Pit Wood, and on the other side of the Lens–Hulluch road, upon their right front, Fosse 14 and the Bois Hugo, the latter a considerable plantation. This wood was cleared and could have been occupied, but unhappily it was not so, and the Germans taking possession of it during the night found themselves in a position to pour their fire into the flank of the 63rd Brigade on one side and of the 46th on the other. The 63rd was situated with the 8th Lincolns upon the right and the 12th Yorkshires upon the left. These battalions lay at a point just east of the Lens–Hulluch road. In support, on the immediate west of the road, lining the Chalk Pit Wood, were the 10th Yorks and Lancasters, with the 8th Somersets. For several hours this position was maintained under a heavy and deadly fire. "The shells ploughed the men out of their shallow trenches as potatoes are turned from a furrow," says an officer. Two companies of the 8th Somersets, however, seem to have lost direction and wandered off to Hill 70, where they were involved in the fighting of the 15th Division. Two companies of the Yorks and Lancasters were also ordered up in that direction, where they made a very heroic advance. A spectator watching them from Hill 70 says: "Their lines came under the machine-guns as soon as they were clear of the wood. They had to lie down. Many, of course, were shot down. After a bit their lines went forward again and had to go down again. They went on, forward a little and then down, and forward a little and then down, until at last five gallant figures rose up and struggled forward till they, too, went down. . . . The repeated efforts to get forward through the fire were very fine."

These four companies having left, there remained only two of the Somersets and two of the Yorks and Lancasters in the defending line. The men of Yorkshire and of Lincolnshire fought desperately against heavy masses of troops, thrown forward with great gallantry and disregard of loss. For once the British rifle-fire had a chance, and exacted its usual high toll. "We cut line after line of the enemy down as they advanced." So rapid was the fire that cartridges began to run low, and men were seen crawling up to their dead comrades to ransack their pouches. The enemy was dropping fast, and yet nothing could stop him. Colonel Leggatt of the West Yorks was hit. Brigadier Nicholls

walked up to the firing line with reckless bravery and gave the order to charge, but he fell, shot in the thigh and stomach, and the position became impossible. The Lincolns had suffered the appalling loss of all their officers and 500 men. The Yorkshires were in no better case. The survivors fell back rapidly upon the supports.

Fortunately, these were in close attendance. As the remains of the Lincolns and the West Yorkshires, after their most gallant and desperate resistance to the overwhelming German attack, came pouring back with few officers and in a state of some confusion from the edge of the Bois Hugo and over the Lens–Hulluch road, the four companies under Majors Howard and Taylor covered their retreat and held up for a time the German swarms behind them, the remains of the four battalions fighting in one line.

One party of mixed Lincolns and Yorkshires held out for about seven hours in an advanced trench, which was surrounded by the enemy about eleven, and the survivors, after sustaining very heavy losses—" the trench was like a shambles "—did not surrender until nearly six o'clock, when their ammunition had all been shot away. Colonel Walter of the Lincolns, with Major Storer, Captains Coates and Stronguist, and three lieutenants, are known to have been killed, while almost all the others were wounded.

The 64th Brigade was in support some little distance to the right rear of the 63rd, covering the ground between the Lens–Hulluch road and Loos. About noon a message was received by them to the effect that the 63rd was being very strongly pressed, and that help was urgently needed. The 14th Durham Light Infantry was moved forward in support, and came at once under heavy fire, losing Colonel Hamilton, 17 officers, and about 200 men. The 15th Durham Light Infantry was then thrown into the fight, and sustained even heavier losses. Colonel Logan, 18 officers, and 400 men were killed or wounded. About one o'clock the two Durham battalions were in the thick of the fight, while Captain Liebenrood, machine-gun officer of the 64th Brigade, did good work in keeping down the enemy fire. The two battalions of Yorkshire Light Infantry (9th and 10th) were held in reserve. About 2.30 the pressure upon the front of the 63rd Brigade had become too great, and both it and the two Durham battalions were driven back. Their resistance, however, seems to have taken the edge off the dangerous counter-attack, for the Germans did not come on past the line of the road and of the Chalk Pit Wood.

When the two advanced brigades of the 15th Division established themselves in hastily-dug trenches upon the western slope of Hill 70, they threw back their left flank obliquely down the hill towards Fosse 14 in order to avoid being at the mercy of any force which endeavoured to get behind them on this side. Only a very thin line of men could be spared for this work, under a young Australian subaltern named McNeil. These soldiers held the post for twenty-four hours, but when the heavy

German attack—which drove in the 21st Division and cut off the Lincolns—struck up against them, they were all killed or wounded, including their gallant leader, who managed, with several bullets in him, to get back to the British line. This led to the final retirement down Hill 70 of the men of the Scotch Division, who dug themselves in once more at the foot of the hill, not far from the village of Loos.

It may be noted that the losses of the two supporting divisions were about 8000 men. Their numbers in infantry were about equal to the British troops at Waterloo, and their casualties were approximately the same. Mention has already been made of the endurance of Mitford's 72nd Brigade. The figures of the 63rd and their comrades of the 64th are little inferior. Of these troops more than 40 per cent. of the rank and file, 65 per cent. of their officers, and 75 per cent. of their commanders lay upon the field of battle. When one recollects that 33 per cent. was reckoned a high rate of loss by the greatest authorities upon warfare, and when one remembers that these were raw troops fighting under every possible discomfort and disadvantage, one feels that they may well be excused if their severe ordeal left them shaken, despondent, and in some cases demoralised. Their true worth under happier conditions was shown on many a subsequent battlefield.

The divisional artillery of the 21st Division had come into action in the open behind the advancing infantry, and paid the price for their gallant temerity. The 94th Brigade R.F.A. lost especially heavily, eight of its guns being temporarily put out of action. Major Dobson of this brigade was among the killed. It is to be feared that the guns did not always realise the position of the infantry, and that many of the 64th Brigade especially were hit by their own shrapnel. Such painful incidents seem almost inseparable from modern warfare. The artillery kept its place, and afterwards rendered good service by supporting the advance of the Guards.

Whilst this check had taken place in the centre and right centre of the British position, the London Division, upon the extreme right, was subjected rather to bombardment than to assault. A heavy fall of asphyxiating shells was experienced a little after 9 a.m., and many men were gassed before they were able to put on their helmets. The second German line of captured trenches was held very firmly by General Thwaites with the rest of the 141st Brigade, while the 140th retained a defensive flank, the whole forming a strong *point d'appui* for a rally and reorganisation. Men of the 21st Division re-formed upon this line, and the battle was soon re-established. This re-establishment was materially helped by the action of the 9th and 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry battalions previously mentioned of the 21st Division, who had become a divisional reserve. These two battalions now advanced and gained some ground to the east of Loos on the enemy's left flank. The movement covered the reorganisation which was going on behind them. One small detachment under Captain Laskie of the 10th Y.L.I. did

especially good work. The Yorkshiremen were aided by men of the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 62nd Brigade, who held on to the trenches to the east of Loos. A cavalry detachment from Campbell's 6th Cavalry Brigade, under Campbell himself, had also appeared about 4 p.m. as a mobile reserve and thrown itself into Loos to strengthen the defence.

The evening of this day, September 26, found the British lines contracted as compared with what they had been in the morning. The 47th Division had, if anything, broadened and strengthened their hold upon the southern outskirts of Loos. The western slope of Hill 70 was still held in part. Thence the line bent back to the Loos–La Bassée road, followed the line of that road for a thousand yards, thence onwards to near the west end of the village of Hulluch, and then as before. But the exchanges would seem to have been in favour of the Germans, since they had pushed the British back for a stretch of about a mile from the Lens–Hulluch road, thus making a dent in their front. On both sides reserves were still mustering. The Guards' Division had been brought up by Sir John French, and were ready for operations upon the morning of the 27th, while the 28th Division was on its way. The Germans, who had been repeatedly assured that the British Army extension was a bluff, and that the units existed only upon paper, must have found some food for thought as the waves rolled up. They had themselves brought up 27 fresh battalions in the course of the day's fighting.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE OF LOOS

From September 27 to the end of the year

Loss of Fosse 8—Death of General Thesiger—Advance of the Guards—Attack of the 28th Division—Arrival of the 12th Division—German counter-attacks—Attack by the 46th Division upon Hohenzollern Redoubt—Subsidiary attacks—General observations—Return of Lord French to England.

THE night of September 26 was a restless and tumultuous one, the troops being much exhausted by their long ordeal, which involved problems of supply unknown in any former wars. The modern soldier must be a great endurer as well as an iron fighter. The Germans during the night were very pushful in all directions. Their reserves are said to have been very mixed, and there was evidence of forty-eight battalions being employed against the British line, but their attacks were constant and spirited. The advanced positions were, however, maintained, and the morning of the 27th found the attackers, after two days of incessant battle, still keeping their grip upon their gains.

The main part of the day began badly for the British, however, as in the early morning they were pushed off Fosse 8, which was an extremely important point and the master-key of the whole position, as its high slag-heap commanded Slag Alley and a number of the other trenches to the south of it, including most of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. The worn remains of the 26th Brigade were still holding the pit when morning dawned, and the units of Jelf's 73rd Brigade were in a semi-circle to the east and south of it. These battalions, young troops who had never heard the whizz of a bullet before, had now been in close action for thirty-six hours, and had been cut off from all supplies of food and water for two days. Partly on account of their difficult tactical position, and partly because they were ignorant of how communications are kept up in the trenches, they had become entirely isolated. It was on these exhausted troops that the storm now broke. The northern unit consisted of the 7th Northamptons, whose left wing seems to have been in the air. Next to them were the 12th Royal Fusiliers. There had been several infantry attacks, which were repulsed during the night. Just at the dawn two red rockets ascended from the German lines, and

at the same moment an intense bombardment opened upon Fosse 8, causing great loss among the occupants. It was at this time that General Thesiger, Commander of the 9th Division, together with his Staff-Major, Burney, was killed by a shell. Colonel Livingstone, Divisional C.O. of Engineers, and Colonel Wright, of the 8th Gordons, were also hit. In the obstinate defence of the post the 90th Company R.E. fought as infantry, after they had done all that was possible to strengthen the defences.

A strong infantry attack had immediately followed the bombardment. They broke in, to the number of about a thousand, between the Northamptons and Fusiliers. By their position they were now able to command Fosse 8, where the 9th Sussex had been, and also to make untenable the position of the 27th Brigade, which occupied the trenches to the south which could be enfiladed. General Jelf telephoned in vain for the support of heavy guns, and even released a carrier pigeon with the same urgent request. Seeing that Fosse 8 was lost, he determined to hold on hard to the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and lined its trenches with the broken remains of his wearied brigade. The enemy at once attacked with swarms of well-provided bombers in the van, but were met foot to foot by the bombers of the 73rd Brigade, who held them up. The 26th Brigade endeavoured to counter-attack, but were unable to get forward against the machine-guns, but their bombers joined those of the English brigade and did splendid work. The ground was held until the troops, absolutely at the limit of human endurance, were relieved by the 85th Brigade of the 28th Division, as will be described later. The trench held by the Sussex was commanded from above and attacked by bombers from below, so that the battalion had a very severe ordeal. Lieutenant Shackles defended a group of cabarets at one end of the position until he and every man with him was dead or wounded. Having taken that corner, the Germans bombed down the trench. Captain MacIvor and thirty men on that flank were all killed or wounded, but the officer leading the bombers was shot by Captain Langden and the position saved. Nineteen officers and 360 men fell in this one battalion. "We gained," said one of them, "two Military Crosses and many wooden ones." It had been an anxious day for all, and most of all for General Jelf, who had been left without a staff, both his major and his captain having fallen.

Up to midday of the 27th the tide of battle had set against the British, but after that hour there came into action a fresh force, which can never be employed without leaving its mark upon the conflict. This was Lord Cavan's newly-formed division of Guards, consisting of the eight battalions which had already done such splendid service from Mons onwards, together with the newly-formed Welsh Guards, the 3rd and 4th Grenadier Guards, the 2nd Coldstream, and the 2nd Irish.

On September 25 the Guards reached Nœux-les-Mines, and on September 26 were at Sailly-la-Bourse. On the morning of the 27th

they moved forward upon the same general line which the previous attack had taken—that is, between Hulluch on the left and Loos on the right—and relieved the two divisions which had suffered so heavily upon the previous day. The general distribution of the Guards was that Fielding's 1st Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Grenadiers, 2nd and 3rd Coldstream, and 1st Irish, were on the left. They had taken over trenches from the 1st Division, and were now in touch upon their left with the 7th Division. On the right of the 1st Guards' Brigade was the 2nd, consisting of the 3rd Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, 1st Scots, and 2nd Irish. On their right again, in the vicinity of Loos, was the 3rd Brigade, the 1st and 4th Grenadiers, 2nd Scots, and 1st Welsh. These last two brigades, upon which the work fell—for the 1st Brigade remained in a holding position—were operating roughly upon the same ground as the 21st Division had covered the day before, and had in their immediate front the same wood—the Chalk Pit Wood and the Chalk Pit near the Lens–Hulluch road, while a little more to the right was the strong post of Fosse 14 and the long slope of Hill 70, tne whole of which had passed back into the hands of the enemy. These formidable obstacles were the immediate objective of the Guards. During the night of the 26th-27th many stragglers from the 21st and 24th Divisions passed through the Guards, informing them that their front was practically clear of British troops, and that they were face to face with the enemy.

At 2.30 p.m. the British renewed their heavy bombardment in the hope of clearing the ground for the advance. There is evidence that on the 25th the enemy had been so much alarmed by the rapid advance that they had hurriedly removed a good deal of their artillery on the Lens side. This had now been brought back. At four o'clock the heavy guns eased off, and the two brigades of Guards (2nd and 3rd) advanced, moving forward in artillery formation—that is, in small clumps of platoons, separated from each other.

The 2nd Irish were given their baptism of fire by being placed in the van of the 2nd Brigade with orders to make good the wood in front. The 1st Coldstream were to support them. Advancing in splendid order, they reached the point without undue loss, and dug themselves in according to orders. As they lay there their comrades of the 1st Scots passed on their right under very heavy fire in salvos of high-explosive shells, and carried Fosse 14 by storm in the most admirable manner, while the Irish covered them with their rifle-fire. Part of the right-hand company of the Irish Guards got drawn into this attack and rushed forward with the Scots. Having taken Fosse 14, this body of men pushed impetuously forward, met a heavy German counter-attack, and were driven back. Their two brave young leaders, Lieutenants Clifford and Kipling, were seen no more. The German attack came with irresistible strength, supported by a very heavy enfilade fire. The remains of the Scots Guards were driven with heavy losses out of Fosse

14, and both they and the Irish were thrown back as far as the line of the Loos–Hulluch road.

The remains of the shaken battalions were joined by two companies of the 2nd Coldstream and re-formed for another effort. In this attack of the 2nd Brigade upon Fosse 14, the Scots were supported by two companies of the 3rd Grenadiers, the other two being in general reserve. These two companies, coming up independently somewhat later than the main advance, were terribly shelled, but reached their objective, where they endured renewed losses. The officers were nearly all put out of action, and eventually a handful of survivors were brought back to the Chalk Pit Wood by Lieutenant Ritchie, himself severely wounded.

Captain Alexander, with some of the Irish, had succeeded also in holding their ground in the Chalk Pit Wood, though partly surrounded by the German advance, and they now sent back urgently for help. A fresh advance was made, in the course of which the other two companies of Coldstreamers pushed forward on the left of the wood and seized the Chalk Pit. It was hard soil and trenching was difficult, but the line of the wood and of the pit was consolidated as far as possible. A dangerous gap had been left between the 1st Coldstream, who were now the extreme left of the 2nd Brigade, and the right of the 1st Brigade. It was filled up by 150 men, hastily collected, who frustrated an attempt of the enemy to push through. This line was held until dark, though the men had to endure a very heavy and accurate shelling, against which they had little protection. In the early morning the 1st Coldstream made a fresh advance from the north-west against Fosse 14, but could make no headway against the German fire. The line of Chalk Pit Wood now became the permanent line of the Army.

Heyworth's 3rd Brigade of Guards had advanced at the same time as the 2nd, their attack being on the immediate right on the line of Fosse 14 and Hill 70. It may indeed be said that the object of the 2nd Brigade attack upon Fosse 14 was very largely to silence or engage the machine-guns there and so make it easier for the 3rd Brigade to make headway at Hill 70. The Guardsmen advanced with great steadiness up the long slope of the hill, and actually gained the crest, the Welsh and the 4th Grenadiers in the lead, but a powerful German redoubt which swept the open ground with its fire made the summit untenable, and they were compelled to drop back 100 yards over the crest line, where they dug themselves in and remained until this section of the line was taken over by the 12th Division.

The Guards had lost very heavily during these operations. The total loss of the division could have been little short of 3000. They continued to hold the front line until September 30, when the 35th and 36th Brigades of the 12th Division relieved them for a short rest. The 15th Division had also been withdrawn, after having sustained losses which had probably never been excelled up to that hour by any single division in one section during the campaign. It is computed that no fewer than

6000 of these gallant Scots had fallen, the greater part upon the blood-stained slope and crest of Hill 70. Of the 9th Black Watch little more than 100 emerged safely, but an observer has recorded that their fierce and martial bearing was still that of victors.

The curve of the British position presented a perimeter which was about double the length of the arc which marked the original trenches. Thus a considerably larger force was needed to hold it, which was the more difficult to provide as so many divisions had already suffered heavy losses.

The French attack at Souchez having come to a standstill, Sir John French asked General Foch, the Commander of the Tenth Army, to take over the defence of Loos, which was done from the morning of the 28th by our old comrades of Ypres, the Ninth Corps. During this day there was a general rearrangement of units, facilitated by the contraction of the line brought about by the presence of our Allies.

Bulfin's 28th Division, of Ypres renown, had reached Vermelles in the early morning of Monday the 27th—the day of the Guards' advance. The general plan seems to have been that it should restore the fight upon the left half of the battlefield, while the Guards' Division did the same upon the right. General Bulfin, the able and experienced Commander of the 28th, found himself suddenly placed in command of the 9th also, through the death of General Thesiger. The situation which faced him was a most difficult one, and it took cool judgment in so confused a scene to make sure where his force should be applied. Urgent messages had come in to the effect that the defenders of Fosse 8 had been driven out, that as a consequence the whole of the Hohenzollern Redoubt was on the point of recapture, and that the Quarries had been wrested from the 7th Division by the enemy. A very strong German attack was surging in from the north, and if it should advance much farther the advance line would be taken in the rear. It was clear that the 28th Division had only just arrived in time.

The 85th Brigade under General Pereira was hurried forward, and found things in a perilous state in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, where the remains of the 26th and 73rd Brigades, driven from Fosse 8 and raked by guns from the great dump, were barely holding on to the edge of the stronghold. The 2nd Buffs dashed forward with all the energy of fresh troops, swept the enemy out of the Redoubt, pushed them up the trench leading northwards, which is called " Little Willie " (" Big Willie " leads eastward), and barricaded the southern exit. Matters were hung up for a time by the wounding both of General Pereira and of his Brigade-Major Flower, but Colonel Roberts of the 3rd Royal Fusiliers carried on. The Royal Fusiliers relieved the Buffs, and the 2nd East Surrey took over the left of the line.

An attack was organised upon the powerful position at Fosse 8, but it had to be postponed until the morning of September 28. At 9 a.m. the 2nd Buffs delivered a very strong assault. The 3rd Middlesex were

to have supported them, but came under so heavy a fire in their trenches that they were unable to get forward. The Buffs, in the face of desperate opposition, scrambled up the difficult side of the great dump—a perfect hill self-erected as a monument of generations of labour. They reached the summit, but found it swept by gusts of fire which made all life impossible. Colonel Worthington and fifteen of his officers were killed or wounded in the gallant venture. Finally, the remains of the battalion took cover from the fire in Dump Trench at the bottom of the hill. It was in this trench that the Middlesex men had been held. Their Colonel, Neale, had also been killed. From this time onwards Fosse 8 was left in the hands of the Germans, and the action of the 28th Division became more of a defensive one to prevent any further whittling away of the ground already gained.

As the pressure was still great from the direction of Fosse 8, two battalions of the 83rd Brigade, the 1st York and Lancasters and 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry, were sent up to reinforce the line. On the 29th they helped to repel two attacks all along the front of the redoubt, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, when the Germans came on to the surface only to be shot back into their burrows again. On the same day the 83rd and 84th Brigades relieved the weary 7th Division in the Quarries.

Whilst these operations had been carried on upon the north half of the field of battle, to the left of the bisecting road, the 12th Division, a South of England unit of the New Army, had moved forward into the space to the right of the road, taking over the trenches held by the Guards, and connecting up with the French at Loos. Save in the sector occupied by the 28th Division the action had died down, and the British, aided partly by those pioneer battalions which had been formed out of ordinary infantry regiments to do the work usually assigned to the sappers, strengthened their hold upon the ground that they had won, in the sure conviction that they would soon have to defend it. The shell-fire continued to be heavy upon both sides, and in the course of it General Wing, of the 12th Division, was unfortunately killed, being struck by a shell outside his divisional headquarters. He had been one of the artillery officers who had most to do with the fine handling of the guns of the Second Corps at Le Cateau, and was a very rising soldier of the most modern sort. Three divisional generals killed—Capper, Wing, and Thesiger—and one brigadier a prisoner! Such losses in the higher ranks are hardly to be matched in our history. To equal them one has to go back a hundred years to that supreme day when Picton, De Lancy, Ponsonby, and so many others died in front of their troops upon the historic plateau of Waterloo.

On October 1, at eight in the evening, Bulfin's men were hard at work once more. It will be remembered that the "Little Willie" Trench had been plugged at the southern end by the Buffs three days before. The Germans still held the main line of it, but could not get down it into

the Hohenzollern Redoubt. It was charged most brilliantly and carried by the 1st Welsh, of the 84th Brigade, but after holding it for a day they lost so heavily that they were compelled to resume their old position once more. The 1st Suffolks tried to win the ground back, but without success.

Upon the afternoon of Sunday, October 3, the fighting, which had died down, broke out once more. The front line at this date was formed by the Ninth French Corps upon the right, occupying Loos and that portion of the slopes of Hill 70 which had remained in our hands. On their left was the 12th British Division up to the Vermelles–Hulluch road, and to their left Bulfin's 28th Division, holding the northern area, including the Hohenzollern Redoubt. For several days the bombing parties of the enemy had been eating their way into this fortress, and on the 3rd the greater part of it reverted into their hands, the enemy driving in the 84th Brigade. These attacks were based upon their strong positions in the north, and supported by the machine-guns of Fosse 8 and the heavy artillery of Auchy. On the same day a strong force advanced against the right of the 28th Division between the Quarries and the Vermelles–Hulluch road, but this attack was repulsed with heavy loss.

On October 4 and 5 the 28th Division was withdrawn, and the Guards, after three days' rest, were called upon once more, the 3rd Guards Brigade taking its position at the section of the Hohenzollern Redoubt which we held, while the 1st was on their right, and the 2nd in reserve at Vermelles. At the same time the 1st Division moved to the front on the right of the Guards, relieving the 12th Division. All these troops were keenly alive to the fact that the Germans were unlikely to sit down under their defeat, and that the pause was only the preliminary to a great counter-attack. All efforts were therefore made to consolidate the ground.

The expectations were fulfilled, for on October 8 the enemy brought up their reserves from far and near, determined to have back the ground that they had lost. The British and French were no less inexorable in their grip of that which had cost them so much to win. It is the attacker in modern warfare who pays the price. Sometimes he gets the value of his blood, sometimes he pays it freely and gets nothing whatever in exchange. So it was in this instance. Along the whole long curve of the defence, from the southern trenches of the Hohenzollern Redoubt in the north to the French position in the south, the roar of the battle went up. On the left of the French was the 1st Division, on their left the 12th, on theirs the Guards, on theirs the 7th, stout fighters all. The Germans rushed on boldly, swarms of bombers in front, lines of supporting infantry behind. Everywhere they were cut down and brought to a stand by the sleet of bullets. It was the British machine-gunner who now crouched under cover and spread death fanwise before him, while it was the German infantryman who rushed and

tripped and rose and fell in the desperate effort to carry out the plans of his chiefs. All honour to him for the valour of his attempt.

To appreciate the nature of a great deal of this fighting one must remember that the whole scene of it was intersected by a perfect maze of trenches which belonged to the original German third line of defence, and were therefore familiar to them, while they were strange to those British troops who now occupied them. All along these zigzag lines the two parties were only from thirty to fifty yards apart, so that the broad, deserted plain was really intersected with narrow runways of desperately active life. Attacks developed in an instant, bombing parties sprang forward at any moment, rifles were used at point-blank range, so that an exposed bayonet was often snapped off by a bullet. " Close to the bombers' keep fifty small bayonet periscopes, four bayonets, and five foresights of rifles were shot off in an hour and a half," says an officer present. Over traverses men pelted each other with anything that was deadly, while above their heads the great shells for ever screamed and rumbled.

A great effort was made against the trench called " Big Willie," running out from the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which had been taken over by the Guards. In the afternoon of the 8th, after a heavy bombardment had flailed the position for four hours, there was a determined rush of bombers upon these trenches, the Germans, our old friends of the Seventh Westphalian Corps, coming on in three battalions, each of them down a different communication trench. The general direction of the attack was from the north and east. The trenches assaulted were held by the 1st and 2nd Brigades of Guards, both of which were heavily engaged. The riflemen, however, were useless, as only a bomber can meet a bomber. At first the stormers had some success, for, pushing along very valiantly and with great technical precision, they broke into the section of trench held by the 3rd Grenadiers, putting out of action most of the bombers and machine-gunners of that corps. " Our fellows were being bombed back from traverse to traverse, and we could just see the top of the Boche helmets going along the trench." Lieut. Williams, with a machine-gun, stopped the rush, but was soon shot through the head. General Ponsonby, commanding the 2nd Brigade, called, however, for the bombers of the 3rd Coldstream, who swept down the trench, pelted the Germans out of it, and gloriously avenged the prostrate Grenadiers. The 2nd Coldstream had themselves been driven back, and their bomb-store was temporarily captured, but they came back and regained it after some stark face-to-face fighting, in which Sergeant Brooks, a British berserker, won his V.C. The remains of the 3rd Grenadiers also came back, led by Lieut. Geoffrey Gunnis, and cleared the last corner of what they had lost. The Guards lost 100 men in this action, many of them blown to pieces by the bombs, but they entirely cleared the trenches and regained every inch of lost ground. The fight lasted for two hours and a half, in the course of which 9000

bombs were thrown by the British. These bombs were of the new Mills pattern which put our men more on an equality with the Germans.

Another focus of strife on October 8 was the Chalk Pit upon the Lens–Hulluch road, that tragic spot which had seen in turn the advance of the 15th Division, of the 21st, and of the Guards. It had now been taken over by the 1st Division, who had come back into the line after a rest. Across that road of death, the Loos–Hulluch highway, lay the ill-omened Bois Hugo, which offered a screen for the German advance. Twelve battalions were attacking, and as many more on the line held by the French. Here the Germans lost very heavily, going down in heaps before the rifle-fire of the 1st Gloucesters, 2nd Munster Fusiliers, and 9th King's Liverpools, the battalions in the 1st Division firing line. The French 75's had been equally deadly and successful. Between the position held by the Guards near the Hohenzollern Redoubt on the left and that of the 1st Division at the Chalk Pit on the right, the ground was held by the 12th Division, the 37th Brigade of which was briskly engaged. The 6th Buffs of this brigade was immediately to the right of the Vermelles–Hulluch road, with the 6th Royal West Kent continuing the line northwards down to the Quarries. The 6th Queen's Surrey and 7th East Surrey were in support. Somewhat to the right front of this brigade was a position one hundred and fifty yards wide, called Gun Trench, which was one of the scattered forts which the enemy held to the west of the Loos–Hulluch road. An attack was organised upon this position by Colonel Venables of the West Kents, who was badly wounded in the venture. The British, led by Captain Margetts, reached the trench in spite of terrific fire and corresponding losses, including the whole crew of a machine-gun of the East Surreys which had been most gallantly rushed to the front by Lieutenant Gibson. Half the trench was cleared, but the Germans had themselves been on the point of attacking, and the communications leading eastwards were stuffed with men—a prolongation, no doubt, of the same attack which was breaking to the north upon the Guards. The weak spray of British stormers could make no progress against the masses in the supporting trenches, and were bombed back to their own position. It was a brave but fruitless attempt, which was destined to be renewed with greater success a few days later, when Gun Trench passed completely into the hands of the British. The West Kents lost 200 killed and wounded in this affair. At night the whole line of the French and British defences was inviolate.

Though the Germans had gained no ground on the 8th, the British were averse from allowing them to remain in undisputed possession of that which they had won on the 3rd. It was especially upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt that the British fighting line fixed a menacing gaze, for it had long been a centre of contention, and had now passed almost completely into the possession of the enemy. It was determined to make a vigorous attempt to win it back. The 46th North Midland

Territorial Division, who were veterans of nine months' service at trench warfare, but had not yet been heavily engaged, were brought up from the rear, and upon October 12 they relieved the Guards Division on the left of the front line. At the same time it was planned that there should be an attack of the 1st Division to the west of Hulluch, and of the 12th Division in the region of the Quarries. Of these we shall first describe the attack of the Territorials upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

On October 13, at noon, a severe bombardment was opened which concentrated upon the enclosure of the redoubt, and the space between that and Fosse 8. This bombardment for some reason does not seem to have been effective, and even while it went on the sniping and machine-guns were active in the enemy line. An hour later there was an emission of gas, borne by a brisk breeze towards the German trenches, and later still a smoke cloud was sent out to cover the advance. At two o'clock the troops dashed over the parapet, the 138th Brigade, consisting of men of Lincoln and Leicester, on the left, while the 137th, men of Stafford, were on the right. In immediate support was the 139th, a Sherwood Forester Brigade. The line on the left was headed by the 4th Leicesters and 5th Lincolns, the men, with light-hearted courage singing, " Here we are, here we are, here we are again ! " as they vaulted out of their trenches. The attack upon the right was led by the 5th North and 5th South Staffords. The advance was splendidly executed, and won the critical admiration of some of the Guards who were privileged to see it. In the face of a murderous fire the attacking line swept, in an order which was only broken by the fall of stricken men, up to the front-line trench, two hundred yards in front.

Here, however, the attack was held up by an overwhelming fire. The 5th North Staffords, whose objective was " Big Willie," were exterminated for all immediate military purposes, their losses being 19 officers and 488 men. The gallant survivors succeeded in getting as far as a communication trench which led to " Big Willie," and held on there. The advance of the 5th South Staffords on the right was conditional upon the success of their comrades to the left. The officer commanding the left companies saw that little progress had been made, and exercised his discretion in holding back his men. The officer on the right of the South Staffords could not see what was going on, and advanced his company, with the result that they ran into the same fatal fire, and lost terribly. The two reserve companies coming up were only able with great difficulty to reach the British front-line trenches, dropping half their number in the venture. The result of all this slaughter, which seems to have been entirely due to inadequate artillery preparation, was that the second line of attack upon the right, consisting of the 6th North and 6th South Staffords, could do no more than garrison the front-line trenches, and lost very heavily in doing so.

On the left, however, things had gone better, for at that part the guns seem to have made more impression. The advance of the 4th Leicesters

and 5th Lincolns swept over the Hohenzollern Redoubt and carried the whole of this formidable work up to Fosse Trench. About a hundred yards short of this point the advance was held up by concentrated machine-gun fire. The losses had been very heavy, especially in officers. The rear companies won forward to the front none the less, and the 4th Lincolns came up also to thicken the attenuated firing-line. They held their ground with difficulty, but were greatly helped by their pioneer battalion, the 1st Monmouths, veterans of Ypres, who rushed forward with rifle and with spade to consolidate the captured ground.

Bombing parties had been sent out by the British, those on the right to reach and bomb their way down " Big Willie," those on the left to clear Fosse Trench. The parties upon the right, drawn from the various Stafford battalions, got into " Big Willie," and stuck to their work until they were all destroyed, officers and men. The enemy bombers then counter-attacked, but were met by Lieutenant Hawkes with a party of the 5th South Staffords, who drove them back again. The pressure was very severe, however, until about four in the afternoon, when the action upon the right died down into a duel of heavy guns upon either side.

On the left, however, where the gallant Territorial infantry held hard to its gains, the action was very severe. The bombing attacks went on with varied fortunes, a company of the 5th Leicesters bombing its way for more than two hundred yards up " Little Willie " Trench before its supplies ran out and it had to retire. At three o'clock there was a fresh infantry advance, the 7th Sherwood Foresters of the reserve 139th Brigade endeavouring to get forward, but losing so many in crossing the redoubt that they were unable to sally out from the farther side. The redoubt was now so crowded with mixed units all under heavy fire that there might have been a Spion Kop but for the steadiness of all concerned. At one time the men, finding themselves practically without officers, began to fall back, but were splendidly rallied by Colonel Evill of the 1st Monmouths and a few other survivors. The advent of two companies of the 5th Leicesters retaining their disciplined order helped to avert the danger, and the line was formed once again along the western face of the redoubt. During this movement the 7th Sherwood Foresters who remained in the north-east of the redoubt were cut off, but with splendid pertinacity they held their ground, and made their way back when darkness fell. In the early morning of the 14th, Captain Checkland, with a company of the 5th Sherwood Foresters, pushed an advance up to the place where their comrades of the 7th Battalion had been, and found Captain Vickars of that regiment, who, with a bravery which deserves to be classical, defended almost single-handed a barrier, while he ordered a second one to be built behind him, cutting him off from all succour. He was desperately wounded, but was brought back by his comrades.

The 8th Sherwood Foresters had also come to the front, and made a spirited attack in the early morning of the 14th, driving the enemy from the western side of the redoubt and firmly establishing the British gains

in that quarter. This gain was permanent, though it proved to be rather a visible prize for valour than a useful strategic addition to the line. So long as the sinister, low-lying dump of Fosse 8 overlooked it and was itself untaken, it was impossible to make much use of the redoubt. For forty-eight hours the advanced line was held by the 139th Brigade against several brisk counter-attacks. At the end of that time the position was handed over to the safe custody of the Guards, while the 46th North Midland Division withdrew from that front line which was of their own creation. Colonel Martin of the 4th Leicesters, who was shot through the knee, but refused to move until he saw the result of the attack, Colonel Fowler of the 8th Sherwoods, Colonel Sandall of the 5th Lincolns, Major Cooper of the 4th Lincolns, and nearly 4000 officers and men, were among the casualties during the forty-eight hours of exposure.

The action was a very desperate one, and nothing could have been finer than the conduct of all engaged. " It was not the actual advance, but the holding of the position afterwards, that was dreaded, as the Germans are so quick at counter-attacking." So wrote one of the combatants. The dread was well founded, for the Germans proved to be very numerous and aggressive, and there can be little doubt that at this period their bombers had a technical proficiency which was superior to our own, whether their opponents were Guards or Territorials. It is characteristic of the unique warfare now prevailing that the contending parties had practically abandoned rifles, save as so many pikes, and that each Briton carried a pouch full of projectiles, the size of an orange, and capable of disabling a dozen in a single burst. It may be added that both sides wore leathern helmets, sometimes with the visors up and sometimes with the face entirely concealed, so that it appeared to be a murderous strife of the strange, goggle-eyed, mask-faced creatures of a nightmare. Such were the extraordinary products of modern European warfare, in the 20th century after Christ.

Could all the ground taken have been permanently held, this would have been a fine little victory. So constant has been the phenomenon that the extreme point cannot be held that it could now be stated as an axiom for either side, and seemed to suggest that the methods of attack should be in some way modified. Each successive line of resistance has decreased the momentum of the stormers and has helped to lessen their store of bombs, while the farther they have advanced the more difficult it is for fresh men or supplies to reach them. Then, again, their diminished numbers have caused a contraction and bunching of the line, so enabling the counter-attack to get round their flanks. Add to this the physical exhaustion caused by extreme exertions while carrying a considerable weight, and one has the factors which always produce the same result, and which led eventually to the more fruitful tactics of the limited objective.

When the 46th Midland Division advanced upon the Hohenzollern

Redoubt on October 13, there was a brisk attack also by the 12th Division upon their right, and by the 1st Division on the right of the 12th. In the case of the 12th Division, now commanded by General Scott, the 37th Brigade was heavily engaged. The 7th East Surreys of this brigade carried and permanently held the Gun Trench, a position which had cost them the lives of many officers and men upon the 8th. Attacking the same line of trenches to the left, the 6th Buffs lost heavily under oblique fire, without any appreciable gain. Of three companies who went out, 11 officers and 400 men were left upon the ground, and a photograph has revealed the perfect alignment of the dead. The 35th Brigade had a similar experience to the left near the Quarries, the losses falling most heavily upon the 5th Berkshires and the 7th Norfolks.

At the same hour the 1st Division, with a smoke and gas screen before them, had attacked the German lines to the south-west of Hulluch, near the Hulluch–Lens road, but the wire was uncut and the shell-fire so murderous that it was found to be impossible to reach them. On the whole, it must be admitted that the losses were so heavy and the results so barren that there was no adequate return for the splendid efforts of the men. The attack was urged by Territorials upon the left, New Army men in the centre, and Regulars upon the right, and at all points it was equally gallant.

The operations at the main seat of action, the Loos sector, have been treated continuously in order to make a consecutive narrative, but we must now return to consider the subsidiary attacks along the line upon September 25.

While the First and Fourth Corps, supported by the Eleventh, had been delivering this great attack between La Bassée and Grenay, a series of holding actions had been fought from the coast downwards, so as to pin the Germans so far as possible to their places. Some of these attacks were little more than demonstrations, while others in less serious times would have appeared to be considerable engagements.

Horne's 2nd Regular Division, acting upon the extreme left of the main attack, was astride of the La Bassée Canal. The most northern brigade, the 5th, was opposite to Givenchy, and its advance seems to have been intended rather as a distraction than as a serious effort. It took place half an hour or so before the general attack in the hope of misleading the enemy as to the British plans. At the signal the three leading battalions, the 1st Queen's Surrey's, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, and the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, dashed forward and carried the trench line which faced them. The 9th Glasgow Highlanders advanced upon their right. The attack was unable to make any further progress, but the fight was sustained for several hours, and had the desired effect of occupying the local forces of the enemy and preventing them from detaching reinforcements to the south.

The same remark would apply to the forward movement of the 58th Brigade of the 19th Division to the immediate north of Givenchy. This

division of the New Army was mainly English in composition, but on this their first serious engagement the work fell chiefly upon two Welsh battalions, the 9th Welsh and the 9th Welsh Fusiliers. Both sustained heavy losses, but sacrificed themselves, as so many others were obliged to do, in keeping up the appearance of an attack which was never seriously intended.

Taking the subsidiary attacks from the south upwards, we come next to that of the Indians in the vicinity of Neuve Chapelle. This was a very brilliant affair, carried out with the true Indian tiger spring. Had it been possible to support by adequate reserves of men and an unrestricted gun-fire, it had in it the possibility of a fine victory. The attack was carried out by the Meerut Division, with the Garhwali Brigade on the right and the Bareilly upon the left, the Dehra Dun being in reserve. On the right the Garhwalis were partly held up by wire, but the Bareillys came through everything and swept into the front-line trenches, taking 200 unwounded prisoners of the Seventh Westphalian Corps. Two battalions of the Black Watch, the 2nd and 4th, with the 69th Sikhs, were in the lead, a combination which has broken many a battle line before. The 58th Rifles (Vaughan's) and a second Sikh battalion, the 33rd, thickened the attack, and they swept forward into the second-line trenches, which they also cleared. They were now half a mile within the enemy's position, and both their flanks were open to attack. The reserve brigade was hurried up, but the trenches were blocked with wounded and prisoners, so that progress was very difficult. The German counter-attack was delivered with great energy and valour. It took the form of strong bombing parties acting upon each exposed flank. The 8th Gurkhas, who had been the only battalion which succeeded in breaking through on the right, linked up with the 4th Black Watch, holding back the flank advance to the south, but to the north the Germans got so far forward that the advanced Indians were practically cut off. The immediate neighbours of the Indians to the north were the 60th Brigade of the 20th Division, another English division of the New Army. Two battalions of this brigade, the 12th Rifle Brigade and the 6th Shropshires, were thrown into the fight, and covered the threatened flank until their supply of bombs—more and more an essential of such warfare—was exhausted. It was clearly necessary that the advanced troops should be drawn back, since the reserves could not be got up to support them, and the need was becoming very great. In a little they might be attacked on the front and rear with the chance of disaster. The Sikhs and Highlanders fell back, therefore, with great steadiness, but enduring heavy losses. In the end no ground was gained, but considerable punishment was inflicted as well as suffered, the German trenches being full of their dead. The primary purpose of holding them to their ground was amply fulfilled. It cannot be denied, however, that in this, as in so many other episodes of the Battle of Loos, the German showed himself to be a stubborn fighter, who rises superior

to temporary defeat and struggles on while there is still a chance of victory. His superior supply of bombs had also a good deal to do with the success of his counter-attack.

Whilst this very sharp conflict had been raging on the Indian line, the 8th Division to the north was engaged in a very similar operation in the region of Bois-Grenier. The course of events was almost exactly the same in each instance. The attack of the 8th Division was carried out by the 25th Brigade. The 2nd Rifle Brigade were on the right, the 2nd Berks in the centre, and the 2nd Lincolns upon the left. The front trench was carried, and 120 men of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division fell into the hands of the stormers. Part of the second line was also captured. The positions were held for the greater part of the day, and it was not until four in the afternoon that the increasing pressure of the counter-attack drove the British back to their original line. Here again the object of detention had been fully achieved.

The most important, however, of all the subsidiary attacks was that which was carried out to the extreme north of the line in the district of Hooge. This attack was made by the Fifth Corps, which had changed both its general and its divisions since the days of its long agony in May. It was now commanded by General Allenby, and it consisted of the 3rd Regular Division (Haldane), the 14th Light Infantry Division of the New Army (Couper), and the 46th Division of Midland Territorials (Stuart-Wortley), the fine work of which at a later stage of the operations has already been described. The first two of these units bore the brunt upon September 25. The advance, which was across the old bloody ground of Bellewaarde, was signalled by the explosion of a large mine under the German position in the trenches immediately south of that Via Dolorosa, the Ypres–Menin road.

The attack upon the left was made by the 2nd Brigade, all four battalions, the 5th Oxford and Bucks, 5th Shropshires, 9th Rifle Brigade, and 9th Rifles being strongly engaged. The German trenches were reached and occupied, but after some hours the counter-attack proved to be too strong, and the brigade fell back to its original line.

Two brigades of the 3rd Division attacked in the centre in the direction of Bellewaarde Lake. The 7th Brigade upon the left ran into unbroken wire, before which the leading battalions, the 2nd Irish Rifles and the 2nd South Lancashire, sustained heavy losses while making no progress. The 8th Brigade to the south of them had better fortune, however. This brigade, strengthened by the 1st Scots Fusiliers, made a fine advance immediately after the great mine explosion. Some 200 prisoners and a considerable stretch of trench were captured. A redoubt had been taken by the 4th Gordons, and was held by them and by the 4th Middlesex, but the bombardment in the afternoon was so terrific that it had to be abandoned. By evening the original line had been reoccupied, the division having certainly held the Germans to their ground, but at very

heavy cost to themselves. As these various attacks from the 5th Brigade at the La Bassée Canal to the 14th Division at Ypres never entered into the scheme of the main fight, it is not to be wondered at that they ended always as they began. Heavy loss of life was doubtless incurred in nearly every case. Sad as it is that men should die in movements which are not seriously intended, operations of this kind must be regarded as a whole, and the man who drops in an attack which from the beginning has been a mere pretence has made as heroic an end as he who falls across the last parapet with the yell of victory in his dying ears.

A modern battle is a sudden furious storm, which may blow itself out in two or three days, but leaves such a tempestuous sea behind it that it is difficult to say when the commotion is really over. In the case of the Battle of Loos it may be said to have begun with the British advance upon September 25, and to have ended with the establishment of an equilibrium on the northern flank of the salient on October 13. From that time onwards for many weeks comparative peace rested upon this sector. A time therefore has come when the operations may be reviewed as a whole. The net result was a gain to the British of nearly seven thousand yards of front and four thousand of depth, though if one be asked what exact advantage this gain brought, save as a visible sign of military virtue, it is hard to find an answer. The trophies were 3000 prisoners, including 57 officers, 18 field-guns, and 40 machine-guns. On the other hand, in the mixed fighting of the 26th we lost not fewer than 1000 prisoners, including a brigadier-general. Altogether the losses to the Army during the three weeks of fighting were not less than 50,000 men and 2000 officers. A large proportion of these were wounded. The German losses were about a third of that number.

There are some consolations for the limited success in this venture. Having started to endeavour to break the German line in one movement, it was natural to persevere, but now that one can see from how strong a hand our enemy played, one may well ask whether a more successful advance upon the 26th and 27th might not have led to grave troubles. The French had been held on the right ; the 2nd Division was stationary upon the left. Therefore we were advancing from a contracted base, and the farther the advance went the more it resembled a long, thin tongue protruded between the jaws of the enemy. There was considerable danger that the enemy, closing in on either flank while holding the advance in front, might have bitten it off, for there were none of those successive rolling waves of reinforcement coming up which would turn an ebb to a flood. However, as it was we had much for which to be thankful. When one thinks of the almost superstitious reverence with which the German army used to be regarded—an army which had never once been really beaten during three European campaigns—it is surely a just cause for sober satisfaction that a British force, half of which consisted of new formations, should have driven such an enemy with loss of prisoners and guns out of a line of fortifications, strengthened by

every device of modern art, and should afterwards have permanently held the greater part of the field against every effort at reconquest.

It is known now that both French and Haig were opposed to this action and that it was urged by Lord Kitchener against their judgment. His sense of loyalty to the French led to a very heavy sacrifice which may or may not have had justification.

Before settling down into the inactivity enforced by the Flemish mud, there was one further brisk skirmish upon October 20 in that old battle-ground, the Hohenzollern Redoubt. This was a bombing attack, organised by the 2nd Irish Guards and led by Captain Hubbard. The Irishmen were new to the game, and somewhat outclassed at first by the more experienced Germans, but under the gallant encouragement of Lieutenant Tallents, who rallied them after being himself badly wounded, they turned the tide, and, aided by the Coldstream, made good the section attacked. Major Hamilton was killed and 60 men killed or wounded in this brisk encounter.

So, for a second time, wet, foggy winter settled down upon the water-logged, clay-bottomed trenches. Little did those who had manned them at Christmas of 1914 imagine that Christmas of 1915 would find them in the same position. Even their brave hearts would have sunk at the thought. And yet a move back of a couple of miles at Ypres, and a move forward of the same extent in the south, were all that either side could show for a year's hard work and the loss of so many thousand lives. Bloch, the military prophet of 1898, had indeed been justified of his wisdom. Far off, where armies could move, the year had seen great fluctuations. The Russians had been pushed out of Poland and far over their own borders. Serbia had been overrun. Montenegro was on the verge of utter destruction. The great attempt upon the Dardanelles had been made and had failed, after an epic of heroism which will surely live for ever in our history and in that of our brave Australian and New Zealand brothers. We had advanced in Mesopotamia to within sight of the minarets of Bagdad, and yet again we had been compelled to leave our task unfinished and our little force was besieged at Kut. The one new gleam of light in the whole year had been the adhesion of Italy to the cause of the Entente. And yet, though nearly every detail had been adverse to us, our deepest instincts told us that the stream did in truth move with us, however great and confusing might be the surface current. Here on the long western line, motionless but not passive, locked in a vast strain which grew ever more tense, was the real war. All others were subsidiary. And here in this real war, the one theatre where decisive results could be looked for, our position was very different in the opening of 1916 from that which 1915 had shown us. In the year the British Army in France had grown three- and fourfold. The munitions had increased in far greater porportions. The days had gone for ever when a serious action meant three months of shell economy before the fight and three months of recuperation after it. To the gunners it was

like an evil dream to look back to the days when three shots per day was the allowance, and never save on a definite target. Now, thanks to the driving power of Lloyd George and his admirable band of assistants, there would never again be a dearth, and no attack should ever languish for want of the means to follow it up. Our guns, too, were clustering ever more thickly and looming ever larger. Machine-guns were pouring forth, though there, perhaps, we had not yet overtaken our enemy. Above all, our Fleet still held the seas, cries of distress or at least of discomfort from within Germany rose ever more clearly, and it was certain that the sufferings which she had inflicted upon others were beginning to be repaid to her. " Gott " does indeed " strafe," and needs no invocation, but now, as always, it is on the guilty that the rod falls. The close of 1915 found the Empire somewhat disappointed at the past, but full of grim resolution for the future.

One event had occurred in the latter end of the year which cannot be allowed to pass without comment. This was the retirement of Sir John French, and his return as Lord French to take command of the home forces. The name of John French will go down to history for the sterling work that he had done during sixteen months of extreme military pressure. His was the preparation of the troops before the campaign, his the responsibilities of mobilisation, and his the primary credit that they were in the fighting line by August 22, 1914—they who, upon August 4, had been scattered without their reserves or full equipment over a dozen garrison towns. This alone was a great feat. Then came the long, desperate fight to make head against a superior foe, the rally, the return, the fine change of position, the long struggle for the coast, the victory saddened by the practical annihilation of the old Regular Army, the absorption and organisation of the new elements, the resumption of the offensive, and that series of spirited actions which, if they never attained full success, were each more formidable than the last, and were all preparatory exercises for the great Somme battles of 1916. This was the record which Lord French took back with him to the Horse Guards, and it is one which will ever exalt his memory.

Sir Douglas Haig, who succeeded to the chief command, was the leader who would undoubtedly have been called to the vacant post by both Army and public had leaders been chosen in the old Pretorian fashion. From the beginning he and Smith-Dorrien had been the right and left hands of the Chief, and now that circumstances had unhappily eliminated the latter, Haig's claim was paramount. Again and again he had borne the heaviest part in the fighting, and had saved the situation when it seemed desperate. He was a man of the type which the British love, who shines the brighter against a dark background. Youthful for so high a command, and with a frame and spirit which were even younger than his years, with the caution of a Scotchman and the calculated dash of a leader of cavalry, he was indeed the ideal man for a great military crisis. No task might seem impossible to the man who

had held back the German tide at Ypres. With Haig in command and with an Army which was ever growing in numbers, in quality, and in equipment, the British waited in quiet confidence for the campaign of 1916.

Looking back upon the experience of the last strenuous year one is forced to admit that the losses endured by the attacking British were greater than those of the defending Germans, and that even where the Germans attacked, as in the poison gas battle, the balance was still, in some strange way, in their favour. As Winston Churchill has clearly shown us, the policy of attrition, if official figures are correct, was not working as it should. It was to remedy this and to avoid our losses that he and others were in favour of leaving those interlocked lines to hold each other in a more or less stable equilibrium, and to open up the war elsewhere where sea power and mobility might be in favour of the Allies. The weak point of all such arguments lay in the fact that the Germans were actually in possession of a vital portion of France and the whole of Belgium. Had the equilibrium of the rival armies been established upon the frontier then no one could have contested Mr. Churchill's view. Even as matters stood it might well be right in theory, but human nature being as it is the householder cannot say to the burglar, "You may remain in possession of the best room of my house, and I will not disturb you save to take some distant steps which may in the end dislodge you." The temptation to take him by the throat where he stands is more than one can be expected to resist. Then again go where one would the same stolid German with his wire and his machine-gun would still await you. On the whole, with all the wisdom acquired after the event, it seems to the writer that the point which was nearest home was the point at which the real main battle had to be fought.

In the meantime British troops had been engaged on two other European fronts. The first was the ill-fated Dardanelles affair which, though nominally in Europe, was really part of the oriental struggle. The other was at Salonica, some account of which should be given.

In the autumn of 1915 it was determined to join the French in an expedition based upon that port, which should offer at least a show of help to the hard-pressed Serbians, and should also encourage the pro-ally section of Greece, which was under the influence of Venezelos, and so prevent that country from falling into the hands of the Central Powers. Greece had already broken away from the treaty which should have bound its interest to those of Serbia, and it was feared that King Constantine, unduly influenced by the fact that the Kaiser was his brother-in-law, might throw his weight into the wrong scale. That weight might not be very great in itself, but the central position of Greece, with its long seaboard so well adapted for submarine warfare and on the flank of our Mediterranean communications might make it very serious. The presence of a considerable allied force would help to steady him. Hence by October 1915 three French divisions under General Sarrail

had been despatched and they were joined early in October by the British 10th Division with details from Suvla under the command of Sir B. Mahon, the energetic leader of cavalry who was responsible for that pursuit and death of the Khalifa which rounded off Lord Kitchener's victory and ended the war in the Soudan.

It has been represented that this invasion of Grecian territory was just as great an infraction of the rights of a weaker power as the German invasion of Belgium. Such an argument, however, is not admissible. There were actually treaty rights in existence by which the Allies had the right, as guardian powers, to land troops in Grecian territory should the latter be threatened. As Bulgaria had now joined in the war, and as an Austro-German army was advancing into Serbia from the north and the Serbians were moving to the Albanian coast, it was clear that Greece actually was threatened, and even on the presumption that such a threat might not be unwelcome, the allied Powers were none the less within their technical rights in their interference.

It was the more necessary as ample signs of Greek treachery had already been shown. It was certain that submarine bases had been established in a way which could only have been done with the connivance of the Government. The officer class had constant pressure put upon it to turn its sympathies towards Germany, and the army itself was in such a state that it was not prepared to offer any resistance to an invader.

But the allied expedition had hardly landed before its more immediate objective had disappeared. The Serbians had been driven into the western mountains and there was no possibility of making a junction with them. General Sarrail had advanced up the valley of the Vardar, and the British division was guarding his right wing from a Bulgarian attack. Presently it was understood that further advance was without an object, and that the only immediate use of the force was to cover Salonica and prevent so formidable a centre from falling into German hands. Before the allied force could retreat and take up covering positions round the Grecian port they were attacked by the Bulgarians, the attack falling upon the British contingent which covered the right wing. For a time the pressure was severe, but fortunately the 22nd Division under General Duncan had arrived at Salonica and was able to send up reinforcements which relieved a dangerous situation.

The allied line at the time of the attack was over the Serbian border, some 60 miles from Salonica with which it was connected by a single-track railway, so that most of the transport was done by pack mules. The British line ran through a range of rocky heights, and the cold was so great that no fewer than 1600 men were sent to the rear with frost-bite in the first week of December. During that week various small bodies of Bulgars had been seen among the hills, but there was little warning of the very severe attack which broke on the 7th upon the British—or rather upon the Irish, for the 10th was an Irish Division.

This attack was so fierce and delivered in such force that the battalions upon which it fell, depleted as they were, were unable to hold it. These battalions were the 5th Connaught Rangers and the 7th Munster Fusiliers of Cox's 30th Brigade. The 10th Hants, the only English battalion, was also shelled out of its trenches. This retirement exposed the flank of the 31st Brigade, which was compelled also to fall back. For a time it was feared that a disaster might ensue, but the pursuit of the enemy was checked upon the morning of December 8 by a very gallant stand on the part of a rearguard of the 6th Dublin Fusiliers, who lost heavily but held up the enemy for seven hours. Meanwhile Herbert's 65th Brigade had been hurried up from the base and the situation was restored. A small force under Colonel Fair held the Dedeli Defile, and the Army was able to fall back to its appointed position in the spacious perimeter of Salonica. Altogether in the retreat it had lost 1600 men and 8 guns.

Three other British divisions had now arrived, the 26th, 27th and 28th, the two latter from the French front. There was no longer any fear that the town would fall either to treachery within or to invasion from without. Henceforth for a weary while the only foe was the Struma mosquito, and a very formidable one he was, as many a malaria-haunted man can still testify. General Gordon had succeeded General Mahon, and General Milne supplanted General Gordon, but save for such changes, and for occasional wrangles with General Sarrail, all was quiet upon the Salonica front for many months.

CHAPTER XX

JANUARY TO JULY 1916 [1]

General situation—The fight for the Bluff—The Mound of St. Eloi—Fine performance of 3rd Division and Canadians—Feat of the 1st Shropshires—Attack on the 16th Irish Division—Canadian Battle of Ypres—Death of General Mercer—Recovery of lost position—Eve of the Somme.

THE Great War had now come into its second winter—a winter which was marked by an absolute cessation of all serious fighting upon the Western front. Enormous armies were facing each other, but until the German attack upon the French lines of Verdun at the end of February, the infantry of neither side was seriously engaged. There were many raids and skirmishes, with sudden midnight invasions of hostile trenches and rapid returns with booty or prisoners. Both sides indulged in such tactics upon the British front. Gas attacks, too, were occasionally attempted, some on a large scale and with considerable result. The condition of the troops, though it could not fail to be trying, was not so utterly miserable as during the first cold season in the trenches. The British had ceased to be a mere fighting fringe with nothing behind it. The troops were numerous and eager, so that reliefs were frequent. All sorts of devices were adopted for increasing the comfort and conserving the health of the men. Steadily as the winter advanced and the spring ripened into summer, fresh divisions were passed over the narrow seas, and the shell-piles at the bases marked the increased energy and output of the workers in the factories. The early summer found everything ready for a renewed attempt upon the German line.

In January 1916 Britain gave her last proof of the resolution with which she was waging war. Already she had shown that no question of money could diminish her ardour, for she was imposing direct taxation upon her citizens with a vigour which formed the only solid basis for the credit of the Allies. Neither our foes nor our friends have shown such absolute readiness to pay in hard present cash, that posterity might walk with a straighter back, and many a man was paying a good half of his income to the State. But now a sacrifice more intimate than that of money had to be made. It was of that personal liberty which is as the very breath of our nostrils. This also was thrown with a sigh into the common cause, and a Military Service Bill was passed by which

[1] Maps on pp. 197 and 320 for this chapter.

every citizen from 19 to 41 was liable to be called up. It is questionable whether it was necessary as yet as a military measure, since the enormous number of 5,000,000 volunteers had come forward, but as an act of justice by which the burden should be equally distributed, and the shirker compelled to his duty, it was possible to justify this radical departure from the customs of our fathers and the instincts of our race. Many who acquiesced in its necessity did so with a heavy heart, feeling how glorious would have been our record had it been possible to bring forward by the stress of duty alone the manhood of the nation. As a matter of fact, the margin left over was neither numerous nor important, but the energies of the authorities were now released from the incessant strain which the recruiting service had caused.

The work of the trenches was made easier for the British by the fact that they had at last reached an equality with, and in many cases a superiority to, their enemy, in the number of their guns, the quantity of their munitions, and the provision of those smaller weapons such as trench mortars and machine-guns which count for so much in this description of warfare. Their air supremacy, which had existed for a long time, was threatened during some months by the Fokker machines of the Germans, and by the skill with which their aviators used them, but faster models from England soon restored the balance. There had been a time also when the system and the telescopic sights of the German snipers had given them an ascendancy. Thanks to the labours of various enthusiasts for the rifle, this matter was set right and there were long stretches of the line where no German head could for an instant be shown above the parapet. The Canadian sector was particularly free from any snipers save their own.

The first serious operation of the spring of 1916 upon the British line was a determined German attack upon that section which lies between the Ypres-Comines Canal and the Ypres-Comines railway on the extreme south of the Ypres salient ; Hill 60 lies to the north of it. In the line of trenches there was one small artificial elevation, not more than thirty feet above the plain. This was called the Bluff, and was the centre of the attack. It was of very great importance as a point of artillery observation. During the whole of February 13 the bombardment was very severe, and losses were heavy along a front of several miles, the right of which was held by the 17th Division, the centre by the 50th, and the left by the 24th. Finally, after many of the trenches had been reduced to dirt heaps five mines were simultaneously sprung under the British front line, each of them of great power. The explosions were instantly followed by a rush of the German infantry. In the neighbourhood of the Bluff, the garrison, consisting at that point of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, were nearly all buried or killed. To the north lay the 10th Sherwood Foresters and north of them the 8th South Staffords, whose Colonel, Barker, though four times wounded, continued to direct the defence. It was impossible, however, to hold the whole

line, as the Germans had seized the Bluff and were able to enfilade all the trenches of the Sherwoods, who lost twelve officers and several hundred men before they would admit that their position was untenable. The South Staffords being farther off were able to hold on, but the whole front from their right to the canal south of the Bluff was in the hands of the Germans, who had very rapidly and skilfully consolidated it. A strong counter-attack by the 7th Lincolns and 7th Borderers, in which the survivors of the Lancashire Fusiliers took part under Major Torrens, had some success, but was unable to permanently regain the lost sector, six hundred yards of which remained with the enemy. 40 bombers of the Lincolns, 38 of whom fell, did heroic work.

The attack had extended to the north, where it had fallen upon the 50th Division, and to the 24th Division upon the left of it. Here it was held and eventually repulsed. Of the company of the 9th Sussex who held the extreme left of the line, a large portion were blown up by a mine and forty were actually buried in the crater. Young Lieutenant McNair, however, the officer in charge, showed great energy and presence of mind. He held the Germans from the crater and with the help of Colonel Langdon, who had rushed up some supports, drove them back to their trenches. For this McNair received his Victoria Cross. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, a veteran regular battalion, upon the right of the Sussex, had also put up a vigorous resistance, as had the central 50th Division, so that in spite of the sudden severity of the attack it was only at the one point of the Bluff that the enemy had made a lodgment—that point being the real centre of their effort. They held on strongly to their new possession, and a vigorous fire with several partial attacks during the next fortnight failed to dislodge them.

Early in March the matter was taken seriously in hand, for the position was a most important one, and a farther advance at this point would have involved the safety of Ypres. The 17th Division still held the supporting trenches, and these now became the starting point for the attack. A considerable artillery concentration was effected, two brigades of guns and two companies of sappers were brought up from the 3rd Division, and the 76th Brigade of the same Division came up from St. Omer, where it had been resting, in order to carry out the assault. General Pratt of this brigade was in immediate command of the operations.

The problem was a most difficult one, as the canal to the south and a marsh upon the north screened the flanks of the new German position, while its front was covered by shell-holes which the tempestuous weather had filled with water. There was nothing for it, however, but a frontal attack, and this was carried out with very great gallantry upon March 2, at 4.30 in the morning. The infantry left their trenches in the dark and crept forward undiscovered, dashing into the enemy's line with the first grey glimmer of the dawn. The right of the attack formed by the 2nd Suffolks had their revenge for Le Cateau, for they carried

the Bluff itself with a rush. So far forward did they get that a number of Germans emerged from dug-outs in their rear, and were organising a dangerous attack when they were pelted back into their holes by a bombing party headed by Sergeant Theobald. Beyond the Bluff the Suffolks were faced by six deep shelters for machine-guns, which held them for a time but were eventually captured. The centre battalion consisted of the 8th Royal Lancasters, who lost heavily from rifle fire but charged home with great determination, flooding over the old German front line and their support trenches as well as their immediate objective. The left battalions in the attack were the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who had a most difficult task, being exposed to the heaviest fire of all. For a moment they were hung up, and then with splendid spirit threw themselves at the hostile trenches again and carried everything before them. They were much helped in this second attack by the supporting battalion, the 7th Lincolns, whose bombers rushed to the front. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers, who were supporting on the right, also did invaluable service by helping to consolidate the Bluff, while the 9th West Ridings on the left held the British front line and repulsed an attempt at a flanking counter-attack.

In spite of several counter-attacks and a very severe bombardment the line now held firm, and the Germans seem to have abandoned all future designs upon this section. They had lost very heavily in the assault, and 250 men with 5 officers remained in the hands of the victors. Some of the German trench taken was found to be untenable, but the 12th West Yorkshires of the 8th Brigade connected up the new position with the old and the salient was held. So ended a well-managed and most successful little fight. Great credit was due to Major Congreve who passed through the terrible German barrage again and again to link up the troops with headquarters. Extreme gallantry was shown also by brigade-runners, many of whom lost their lives in the all-important work of preserving communications.

Students of armour in the future may be interested to note that this was the first engagement in which British infantry reverted after a hiatus of more than two centuries to the use of helmets. Dints of shrapnel upon their surfaces proved in many cases that they had been the salvation of their wearers. Several observers have argued that trench warfare implies a special trench equipment, entirely different from that for surface operations.

In the middle of March the pressure upon the French at Verdun had become severe, and it was determined to take over a fresh section of line so as to relieve troops for the north-eastern frontier. General Foch's Tenth Army, which had held the sector opposite to Souchez and Lorette, was accordingly drawn out, and twelve miles were added to the British front. From this time forward there were four British armies, the Second (Plumer) in the Ypres district, the First (Monro) opposite to Neuve Chapelle, the Third (Allenby) covering the new French

sector down to Arras, the Fourth (Rawlinson) from Arras to the Somme.

A brisk skirmish which occurred in the south about this period is worthy of mention—typical of many smaller affairs the due record of which would swell this chapter to a portentous length. In this particular instance, a very sudden and severe night attack was directed by the Germans against a post held by the 8th East Surreys at the points where the British and French lines meet just north of the Somme. This small stronghold, known as Ducks' Post, was at the head of a causeway across a considerable marsh, and possessed a strategic importance out of all proportion to its size. A violent bombardment in the darkness of the early morning of March 20 was followed by an infantry advance, pushed well home. It was an unnerving experience. "As the Huns charged," says one who was present, "they made the most hellish screaming row I ever heard." The Surrey men under the lead of a young subaltern stood fast, and were reinforced by two platoons. Not only did they hold up the attack, but with the early dawn they advanced in turn, driving the Germans back into their trenches and capturing a number of prisoners. The post was strengthened and was firmly held.

The next episode which claims attention is the prolonged and severe fighting which took place from March 27 onwards at St. Eloi, the scene of so fierce a contest just one year before. A small salient had been formed by the German line at this point ever since its capture, and on this salient was the rising known as the Mound (not to be confounded with the Bluff), insignificant in itself since it was only twenty or thirty feet high, but of importance in a war where artillery observation is the very essence of all operations. It stood just east of the little village of St. Eloi. This place was known to be very strongly held, so the task of attacking it was handed over to Haldane's 3rd Division, which had already shown at the Bluff that they were adepts at such an attack. After several weeks of energetic preparation, five mines were ready with charges which were so heavy that in one instance 30,000 pounds of ammonal were employed. The assault was ordered for 4.15 in the morning of March 27. It was known to be a desperate enterprise and was entrusted to two veteran battalions of regular troops, the 4th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. A frontal attack was impossible, so it was arranged that the Royals should sweep round the left flank and the Northumberlands the right, while the remaining battalions of the 9th Brigade, the 12th West Yorks and 1st Scots Fusiliers, should be in close support in the centre. At the appointed hour the mines were exploded with deadly effect, and in the pitch darkness of a cloudy rainy morning the two battalions sprang resolutely forward upon their dangerous venture. The trenches on each flank were carried, and 5 officers and 193 men of the 18th Reserve Jaeger fell into our hands. As usual, however, it was the retention of the captured position which was the more difficult and costly part of the operation. The Northumberlands

had won their way round on the right, but the Fusiliers had been partially held up on the left, so that the position was in some ways difficult and irregular. The guns of the 3rd Division under General Uniacke threw forward so fine a barrage that no German counter-attack could get forward, but all day their fire was very heavy and deadly upon the captured trenches, and also upon the two battalions in support. On the night of the 27th the 9th Brigade was drawn out and the 8th took over the new line, all access to it being impossible save in the darkness, as no communication trenches existed. The situation was complicated by the fact that although the British troops had on the right won their way to the rear of the craters, one of these still contained a German detachment, who held on in a most heroic fashion and could not be dislodged. On March 30 the situation was still unchanged, and the 76th Brigade was put in to relieve the 8th. The 1st Gordons were now in the line, very wet and weary, but declaring that they would hold the ground at all costs. It was clear that the British line must be extended and that the gallant Germans in the crater must be overwhelmed. For this purpose, upon the night of April 2, the 8th Royal Lancasters swept across the whole debatable ground, with the result that 4 officers and 80 men surrendered at daylight to Brigade-Major Congreve and a few men who summoned them from the lip of the crater. General Haldane had himself gone forward to see that the captured ground was made good. "We saw our Divisional General mid-thigh in water and splashing down the trenches," says an observer. "I can tell you it put heart into our weary men." So ended the arduous labours of the 3rd Division, who upon April 4 handed over the ground to the 2nd Canadians.

The episode of the St. Eloi craters was, however, far from being at an end. The position was looked upon as of great importance by the Germans, apart from the military observation, for their whole aim was the contraction, as that of the British was the expansion, of the space contained in the Ypres salient. "Elbow room! More elbow room!" was the hearts' cry of Plumer's Second Army. But the enemy grudged every yard, and with great tenacity began a series of counter-attacks which lasted with varying fortunes for several weeks.

Hardly had the 3rd Division filed out of the trenches when the German bombers were buzzing and stinging all down the new line, and there were evident signs of an impending counter-attack. Upon April 6 it broke with great violence, beginning with a blasting storm of shells followed by a rush of infantry in that darkest hour which precedes the dawn. It was a very terrible ordeal for troops which had up to then seen no severe service, and for the moment they were overborne. The attack chanced to come at the very moment when the 27th Winnipeg Regiment was being relieved by the 29th Vancouvers, which increased the losses and the confusion. The craters were taken by the German stormers with 180 prisoners, but the trench line was still held. The 31st Alberta

Battalion upon the left of the position was involved in the fight and drove back several assaults, while a small French Canadian machine-gun detachment from the 22nd Regiment under Lieutenant Brown distinguished itself by an heroic resistance in which it was almost destroyed. About noon the bombardment was so terrific that the front trench was temporarily abandoned, the handful of survivors falling back upon the supports. The 31st on the left under Major Daly were still able to maintain themselves, however, and after dusk they were able to reoccupy three out of the five craters in front of the line. From this time onwards the battle resolved itself into a desperate struggle between the opposing craters. During the whole of April 7 it was carried on with heavy losses to both parties. On one occasion a platoon of 40 Germans in close formation were shot down to a man as they rushed forward in a gallant forlorn hope. For three days the struggle went on, at the end of which time four of the craters were still held by the Canadians. Two medical men, Captains Carr and Cullum, particularly distinguished themselves by their constant passage across the open space which divided the craters from the trench. The consolidation of the difficult position was admirably carried out by the C.R.E. of the 2nd Canadian Division.

The Canadians were left in comparative peace for ten days, but on April 19 there was a renewed burst of activity. Upon this day the Germans bombarded heavily, and then attacked with their infantry at four different points of the Ypres salient. At two they were entirely repulsed. On the Ypres-Langemarck road on the extreme north of the British position they remained in possession of about a hundred yards of trench. Finally, in the crater region they won back two, including a more important one which was on the Mound. Night after night there were bombing attacks in this region, by which the Germans endeavoured to enlarge their gains. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were now opposed to them and showed the same determination as the men of the West. The sector held by the veteran First Canadian Division was also attacked, the 13th Battalion having 100 casualties and the Canadian Scots 50. Altogether this fighting had been so incessant and severe, although as a rule confined to a very small front, that on an average 1000 casualties a week were recorded in the corps. The fighting was carried on frequently in the heavy rain, and the disputed craters became deep pools of mud in which men fought waist deep, and where it was impossible to keep rifle or machine-gun from being fouled and clogged. Several of the smaller craters were found to be untenable by either side, and were abandoned to the corpses which lay in the mire.

The Germans did not long remain in possession of the trench which they had captured upon the 19th in the Langemarck direction. Though it was almost unapproachable on account of the deep mud, a storming column of the 1st Shropshires waded out to it in the dark up to their waists in slush, and turned the enemy out with the point of the bayonet. Upon April the 21st the line was completely re-established, though a

sapper is reported to have declared that it was impossible to consolidate porridge. In this brilliant affair the Shropshires lost a number of officers and men, including their gallant Colonel, Luard, and Lieutenant Johnstone, who was shot by a sniper while boldly directing the consolidation from outside the parapet without cover of any kind. The whole incident was an extraordinarily fine feat of arms which could only have been carried out by a highly disciplined and determined body of men. The mud was so deep that men were engulfed and suffocated, and the main body had to throw themselves down and distribute their weight to prevent being sucked down into the quagmire. The rifles were so covered and clogged that all shooting was out of the question, and only bombs and bayonets were available for the assault. The old 53rd never did a better day's work.

During the whole winter the Loos salient had been simmering, as it had never ceased to do since the first tremendous convulsion which had established it. In the early part of the year it was held by cavalry brigades, taking turns in succession, and during this time there was a deceptive quiet, which was due to the fact that the Germans were busy in running a number of mines under the position. At the end of February the 12th Division took over the north of the section, and for ten weeks they found themselves engaged in a struggle which can only be described as hellish. How constant and severe it was may be gauged from the fact that without any real action they lost 4000 men during that period. As soon as they understood the state of affairs, which was only conveyed to them by several devastating explosions, they began to run their own mines and to raid those of their enemy. It was a nightmare conflict, half above ground, half below, and sometimes both simultaneously, so that men may be said to have fought in layers. The upshot of the matter, after ten weeks of fighting, was that the British positions were held at all points, though reduced to an extraordinary medley of craters and fissures, which some observer has compared to a landscape in the moon. The 1st Division shared with the 12th the winter honours of the dangerous Loos salient.

In May, General Alderson, who had commanded the Canadians with such success from the beginning, took over new duties and gave place to General Sir Julian Byng, the gallant commander of the 3rd Cavalry Division.

Upon June 2 there began an action upon the Canadian front at Ypres which led to severe fighting extending over several weeks, and put a very heavy strain upon a corps the 1st Division of which had done magnificent work during more than a year, whilst the other two divisions had only just eased up after the fighting of the craters. Knowing well that the Allies were about to attack, the Germans were exceedingly anxious to gain some success which would compel them to disarrange their plans and to suspend that concentration of troops and guns which must precede any great effort. In searching for such a success it was natural

that they should revert to the Ypres salient, which had always been the weakest portion of the line—so weak, indeed, that when it is seen outlined by the star shells at night, it seems to the spectator to be almost untenable, since the curve of the German line was such that it could command the rear of most of the British trenches.[1] It was a region of ruined cottages, shallow trenches commanded by the enemy's guns, and shell-swept woods so shattered and scarred that they no longer furnished any cover. These woods, Zouave Wood, Sanctuary Wood, and others lie some hundred yards behind the front trenches and form a rallying-point for those who retire, and a place of assembly for those who advance.

The Canadian front was from four to five miles long, following the line of the trenches. The extreme left lay upon the ruined village of Hooge. This part of the line was held by the Royal Canadian Regiment. For a mile to the right, in front of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, the Princess Patricia's held the line over low-lying ground. In immediate support was the 49th Regiment. These all belonged to the 7th Canadian Brigade. This formed the left or northern sector of the position.

In the centre was a low hill called Mount Sorel, in which the front trenches were located. Immediately in its rear was another elevation, somewhat higher, and used as an observing station. This was Observatory Hill. A wood, Armagh Wood, covered the slope of this hill. There was about two hundred yards of valley between Mount Sorel and Observatory Hill, with a small stream running down it. This section of the line was essential for the British, since in the hands of the enemy it would command all the rest. It was garrisoned by the 8th Brigade, consisting of Canadian Mounted Rifles.

The right of the Canadian line, including St. Eloi upon the extreme limit of their sector, was held by troops of the 2nd Canadian Division. This part of the line was not involved in the coming attack. It broke upon the centre and the left, the Mount Sorel and the Hooge positions.

The whole operation was very much more important than was appreciated by the British public at the time, and formed a notable example of anticipatory tactics upon the part of the German General Staff. Just as they had delayed the advance upon the west by their furious assault upon Verdun on the east, so they now calculated that by a fierce attack upon the north of the British line they might disperse the gathering storm which was visibly banking up in the Somme Valley. It was a bold move, boldly carried out, and within appreciable distance of success.

Their first care was to collect and concentrate a great number of guns and mine-throwers on the sector to be attacked. This concentration occurred at the very moment when the British heavy artillery was in a

[1] Note. The author can never forget his view by night of this ghastly place of death, outlined by flashes of fire, and with all the noises of the pit rising out of it.

transition stage, some of it going south to the Somme. Hardly a gun had sounded all morning. Then in an instant with a crash and a roar several mines were sprung under the trenches, and a terrific avalanche of shells came smashing down among the astounded men. It is doubtful if a more hellish storm of projectiles of every sort had ever up to that time been concentrated upon so limited a front. There was death from the mines below, death from the shells above, chaos and destruction all around. The men were dazed and the trenches both in front and those of communication were torn to pieces and left as heaps of rubble.

One great mine destroyed the loop of line held by the Princess Patricia's and buried a company in the ruins. A second exploded at Mount Sorel and did great damage. At the first outburst Generals Mercer and Williams had been hurried into a small tunnel out of the front line, but the mine explosion obliterated the mouth of the tunnel and they were only extricated with difficulty. General Mercer was last seen encouraging the men, but he had disappeared after the action and his fate was unknown to friend or foe until ten days later his body was found with both legs broken in one of the side trenches. He died as he had lived, a very gallant soldier. For four hours the men cowered down in what was left of the trenches, awaiting the inevitable infantry attack which would come from the German lines fifty yards away. When at last it came it met with little resistance, for there were few to resist. Those few were beaten down by the rush of the Würtembergers who formed the attacking division. They carried the British line for a length of nearly a mile, from Mount Sorel to the south of Hooge, and they captured about 500 men, a large proportion of whom were wounded. General Williams, Colonel Usher, and twelve other officers were taken.

When the German stormers saw the havoc in the trenches they may well have thought that they had only to push forward to pierce the line and close their hands at last upon the coveted Ypres. If any such expectation was theirs, they must have been new troops who had no knowledge of the dour tenacity of the Canadians. The men who first faced poison gas without masks were not so lightly driven. The German attack was brought to a standstill by the withering rifle-fire from the woods, and though the assailants were still able to hold the ground occupied they were unable to increase their gains, while in spite of a terrific barrage of shrapnel fresh Canadian battalions, the 14th and 15th from the 3rd Canadian Brigade, were coming up from the rear to help their exhausted companions.

The evening of June 2 was spent in confused skirmishing, the advanced patrols of the Germans getting into the woods and being held up by the Canadian infantry moving up to the front. Some German patrols are said to have got as far as Zillebeke village, three-quarters of a mile in advance of their old line. By the morning of June 3 these intruders had been pushed back, but a counter-attack before dawn by the 9th Brigade was held up by artillery fire, Colonel Hay of the 52nd

(New Ontario) Regiment and many officers and men being put out of action. The British guns were now hard at work, and the Würtembergers in the captured trenches were enduring something of what the Canadians had undergone the day before. About 7 o'clock the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades, veterans of Ypres, began to advance, making their way through the woods and over the bodies of the German skirmishers. When the advance got in touch with the captured trenches it was held up, for the Würtembergers stood to it like men, and were well supported by their gunners. On the right the 7th and 10th Canadians under Colonel Rattray got well forward, but had not enough weight for a serious attack. It became clear that a premature counter-attack might lead to increased losses, and that the true method was to possess one's soul in patience until the preparation could be made for a decisive operation. The impatience and ardour of the men were very great, and their courage had a fine edge put upon it by a churlish German official communiqué, which asserted that more Canadian prisoners had not been taken because they had fled so fast. Canadians could smile at the insult, but it was the sort of smile that is more menacing than a frown. The infantry waited grimly while some of the missing guns were recalled into their position. Up to this time the losses had been about 80 officers and 2000 men.

The weather was vile, with incessant rain which turned the fields into bogs and the trenches into canals. For a few days things were at a standstill, for the clouds prevented aeroplane reconnaissance and the registration of the guns. The Corps lay in front of its lost trenches like a wounded bear looking across with red eyes at its stolen cub. The Germans had taken advantage of the lull to extend their line, and on June 6 they had occupied the ruins of Hooge, which were impossible to hold after all the trenches to the south had been lost. In their new line the Germans waited the attack which they afterwards admitted that they knew to be inevitable. The British gun-fire was so severe that it was very difficult for them to improve their new position.

On the 13th the weather had moderated and all was ready for the counter-attack. It was carried out at two in the morning by two composite brigades under Generals Lipsett and Tuxford. The 3rd (Toronto) and 7th Battalions led upon the right, while the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 16th (Canadian Scots) were in the van of the left, with their pipers skirling in front of them. Colonel Brutinel's machine-guns supported the whole advance. The right flank of the advance, being exposed to the German machine-guns, was shrouded by the smoke of 200 bombs. The night was a very dark one and Colonel Leckie of the Canadian Scots had taken advantage of it to get his men beyond the front line, and, as it proved, inside the German barrage zone, so that heavy as it was it did them no scathe. The new German line was carried with a magnificent rush, and a second heave lifted the wave of stormers into the old British trenches—or the place where they had been. Nine machine-guns and 150

prisoners from the 119th, 120th, 125th, and 127th Würtemberg Regiments were captured. To their great joy the Canadians discovered that such munitions as they had abandoned upon June 2 were still in the trenches and reverted into their hands. It is pleasant to add that evidence was found that the Würtembergers had behaved with humanity towards the wounded. From this time onwards the whole Canadian area from close to Hooge (the village still remained with the enemy) across the front of the woods, over Mount Sorel, and on to Hill 60, was consolidated and maintained. Save the heavy reciprocal losses neither side had anything to show for all their desperate fighting, save that the ruins of Hooge were now German. The Canadian losses in the total operations came to about 7000 men—a figure which is eloquent as to the severity of the fighting. They emerged from the ordeal with their military reputation more firmly established than ever.

There was one other happening of note which may in truth be taken as an overture of that gigantic performance. This was the action of the Seventeenth Corps upon June 30, the eve of the Somme battle, in which the 39th Division, supported by guns from the 35th and 51st Divisions upon each side of it, attacked the German trenches near Richebourg at a spot known as the Boar's Head. The attack was so limited in the troops employed and so local in area that it can only be regarded as a feint to take the German attention from the spot where the real danger was brewing.

After an artillery preparation of considerable intensity, the infantry assault was delivered by the 12th and 13th Royal Sussex of the 116th Brigade. The scheme was that they should advance in three waves and win their way to the enemy support line, which they were to convert into the British front line, while the divisional pioneer battalion, the 13th Gloster, was to join it up to the existing system by new communication trenches. For some reason, however, a period of eleven hours seems to have elapsed between the first bombardment and the actual attack. The latter was delivered at three in the morning after a fresh bombardment of only ten minutes. So ready were the Germans that an observer has remarked that had a string been tied from the British batteries to the German the opening could not have been more simultaneous, and they had brought together a great weight of metal. Every kind of high explosive, shrapnel, and trench mortar bombs rained on the front and support line, the communication trenches and No Man's Land, in addition to a most hellish fire of machine-guns. The infantry none the less advanced with magnificent ardour, though with heavy losses. On occupying the German front line trenches there was ample evidence that the guns had done their work well, for the occupants were lying in heaps. The survivors threw bombs to the last moment, and then cried, "Kamerad!" Few of them were taken back. Two successive lines were captured, but the losses were too heavy to allow them to be held, and the troops had eventually under heavy shell-fire

to fall back on their own front lines. Only three officers came back unhurt out of the two battalions, and the losses of rank and file came to a full two-thirds of the number engaged. "The men were magnificent," says one who led them, but they learned the lesson which was awaiting so many of their comrades in the south, that all human bravery cannot overcome conditions which are essentially impossible. A heavy German bombardment continued for some time, flattening out the trenches and inflicting losses, not only upon the 39th but upon the 51st Highland Territorial Division.

A second attack made with the same object of distracting the attention of the Germans and holding up their guns was made at an earlier date at a point called the triangle opposite to the Double Crassier near Loos. This attack was started at 9.10 upon the evening of June 10, and was carried out in a most valiant fashion by the 2nd Rifles and part of the 2nd Royal Sussex, both of the 2nd Brigade. There can be no greater trial for troops, and no greater sacrifice can be demanded of a soldier, than to risk and probably lose his life in an attempt which can obviously have no apparent result, and is merely intended to ease pressure elsewhere. The gallant stormers reached and in several places carried the enemy's line, but no lasting occupation could be effected, and they had eventually to return to their own line. The Riflemen, who were the chief sufferers, lost 11 officers and 200 men.

A word should be said as to the raids along the line of the German trenches by which it was hoped to distract their attention from the point of attack, and also to obtain precise information as to the disposition of their units. It is difficult to say whether the British were the gainers or the losers on balance in these raids, for some were successful, while some were repelled. Among a great number of gallant attempts, the details of which hardly come within the scale of this chronicle, the most successful perhaps were two made by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, both of the 33rd Division. In both of these cases very extensive damage was done and numerous prisoners were taken. When one reads the intimate accounts of these affairs, the stealthy approaches, the blackened faces, the clubs and revolvers which formed the weapons, the ox-goads for urging Germans out of dug-outs, the dark lanterns and knuckle dusters—one feels that the age of adventure is not yet past and that the spirit of romance was not entirely buried in the trenches of modern war. There were 70 such raids in the week which preceded the great attack.

Before plunging into the huge task of following and describing the various phases of the mighty Battle of the Somme a word must be said about an epic which reacted so closely upon the military situation as the Battle of Jutland. The fact that there was little change in itself shows upon which side the victory lay, since the whole object of the movements of the German Fleet was to produce a relaxation in these conditions. Through the modesty of the British bulletins, which was

pushed somewhat to excess, the position for some days was that the British, who had won everything, claimed nothing, while the Germans, who had won nothing, claimed everything. It is true that a number of our ships were sunk and of our sailors drowned, including Hood and Arbuthnot, two of the ablest of our younger admirals. The whole affair may be summed up by saying that after making an excellent fight the German ships were saved from total destruction by the haze of evening, and fled back in broken array to their ports, leaving the North Sea now as always in British keeping. At the same time it cannot be denied that here as at Coronel and the Falklands they were well fought, the gunnery was good, and the handling of the fleet, both during the battle and especially under the difficult circumstances of the flight in the darkness to avoid a superior fleet between themselves and home, was of a high order. It was a good clean fight, and in the general disgust at the flatulent claims of the Kaiser and his press the actual merit of the German performance did not perhaps receive all the appreciation which it deserved.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Seventh and Eighth Corps on Gommecourt, Serre, and Beaumont Hamel

Line of battle in the Somme sector—Great preparations—Advance of 46th North Midland Division—Advance of 56th Territorials (London)—Great valour and heavy losses—Advance of 31st Division—Advance of 4th Division—Advance of 29th Division—Complete failure of the assault.

THE continued German pressure at Verdun which had reached a high point in June called insistently for an immediate allied attack at the western end of the line. With a fine spirit of comradeship General Haig had placed himself and his armies at the absolute disposal of General Joffre, and was prepared to march them to Verdun, or anywhere else where he could best render assistance. The solid Joffre, strong and deliberate, was not disposed to allow the western offensive to be either weakened or launched prematurely on account of German attacks at the eastern frontier. He believed that Verdun could for the time look after herself, and the result showed the clearness of his vision. Meanwhile, he massed a considerable French army, containing many of his best active troops, on either side of the Somme. General Foch was in command. They formed the right wing of the great allied force about to make a big effort to break or shift the iron German line, which had been built up with two years of labour, until it represented a tangled vista of trenches, parapets, and redoubts mutually supporting and bristling with machine-guns and cannon, for many miles of depth. Never in the whole course of history have soldiers been confronted with such an obstacle. Yet from general to private, both in the French and in the British armies, there was universal joy that the long stagnant trench life should be at an end, and that the days of action, even if they should prove to be days of death, should at last have come. Our concern is with the British forces and so they are here set forth as they stretched upon the left or north of their good allies.

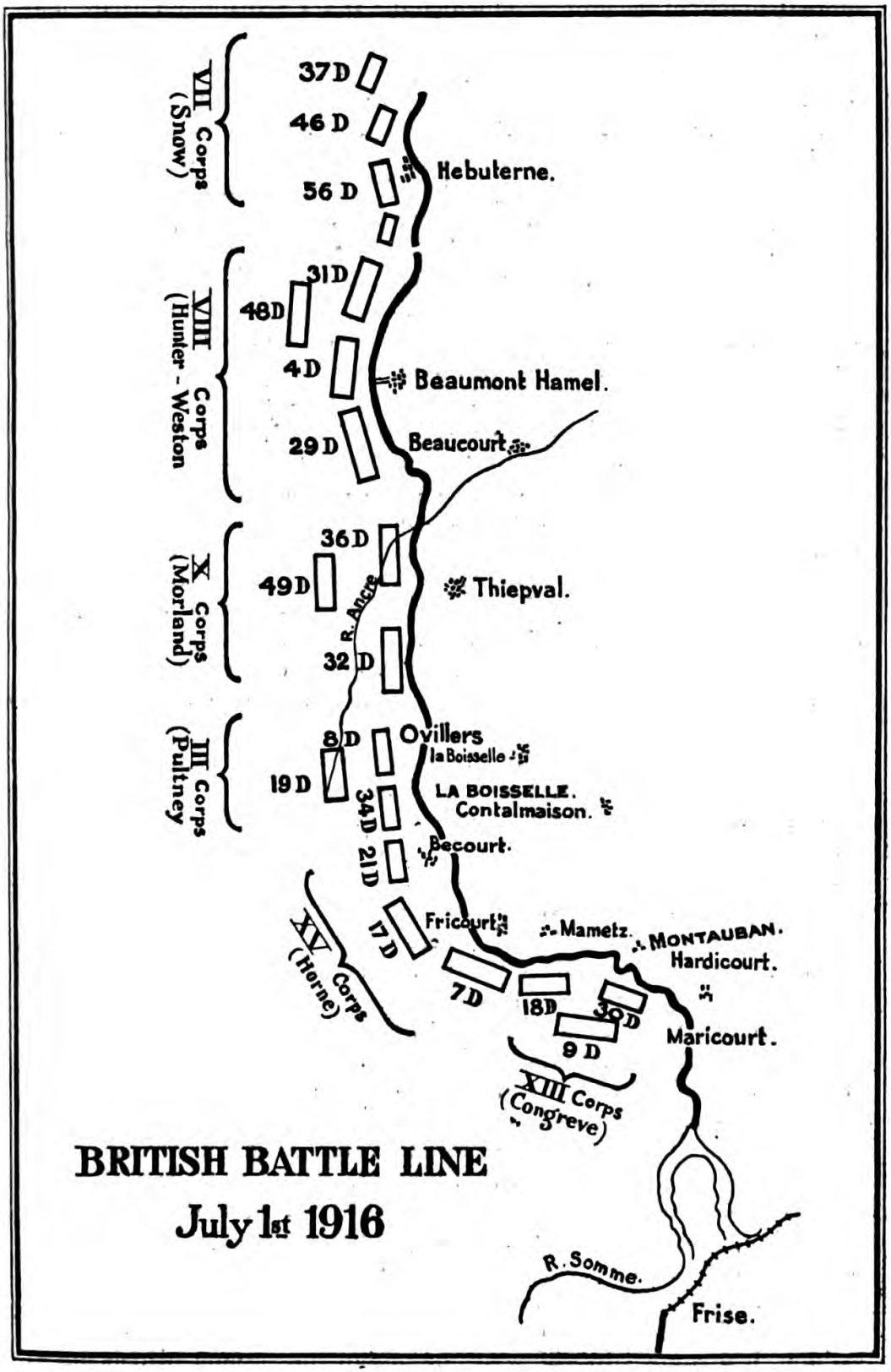
The southern end of the whole British line was held by the Fourth Army, commanded by General Rawlinson, an officer who has always

been called upon when desperate work was afoot. His army consisted of five corps, each of which included from three to four divisions, so that his infantry numbered about 200,000 men, many of whom were veterans, so far as a man may live to be a veteran amid the slaughter of such a campaign. The Corps, counting from the junction with the French, were, the Thirteenth (Congreve), Fifteenth (Horne), Third (Pulteney), Tenth (Morland), and Eighth (Hunter-Weston). Their divisions, frontage, and the objectives will be discussed in the description of the battle itself.

North of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, and touching it at the village of Hébuterne, was Allenby's Third Army, of which one single corps, the Seventh (Snow), was engaged in the battle. This added three divisions, or about 30,000 infantry, to the numbers quoted above.

It had taken months to get the troops into position, to accumulate the guns, and to make the enormous preparations which such a battle must entail. How gigantic and how minute these are can only be appreciated by those who are acquainted with the work of the staffs. As to the Chief Staff of all, if a civilian may express an opinion upon so technical a matter, no praise seems to be too high for General Kiggell and the others under the immediate direction of Sir Douglas Haig, who had successively shown himself to be a great Corps General, a great Army leader, and now a great General-in-Chief. The preparations were enormous and meticulous, yet everything ran like a well-oiled piston-rod. Every operation of the attack was practised on similar ground behind the lines. New railheads were made, huge sidings constructed, and great dumps accumulated. The corps and divisional staffs were also excellent, but above all it was upon those hard-worked and usually overlooked men, the sappers, that the strain fell. Assembly trenches had to be dug, double communication trenches had to be placed in parallel lines, one taking the up-traffic and one the down, water supplies, bomb shelters, staff dug-outs, poison-gas arrangements, tunnels and mines—there was no end to the work of the sappers. The gunners behind laboured night after night in hauling up and concealing their pieces, while day after day they deliberately and carefully registered upon their marks. The question of ammunition supply had assumed incredible proportions. However, by the end of June all was in place and ready. The bombardment began about June 23, and was at once answered by a German one of lesser intensity. The fact that the attack was imminent was everywhere known, for it was absolutely impossible to make such preparations and concentrations in a secret fashion. "Come on, we are ready for you," was hoisted upon placards on several of the German trenches. The result was to show that they spoke no more than the truth.

There were limits, however, to the German appreciation of the plans of the Allies. They were apparently convinced that the attack would come somewhat farther to the north, and their plans, which covered


VII Corps (Snow)
37D
46D
56D
Hebuterne.
VIII Corps (Hunter-Weston)
31D
48D
4D
Beaumont Hamel.
29D
Beaucourt
X Corps (Morland)
36D
49D
R. Ancre
Thiepval.
32D
III Corps (Pultney)
8D
19D
Ovillers
la Boisselle
LA BOISSELLE.
Contalmaison.
34D
21D
Becourt.
XV Corps (Horne)
17D
Fricourt
Mametz.
MONTAUBAN.
Hardicourt.
7D
18D
30D
9D
Maricourt.
XIII Corps (Congreve)
BRITISH BATTLE LINE
July 1st 1916
R. Somme.
Frise.

more than half of the ground on which the attack actually did occur, had made that region impregnable, as we were to learn to our cost. Their heaviest guns and their best troops were there. They had made a far less elaborate preparation, however, at the front which corresponded with the southern end of the British line, and also on that which faced the French. The reasons for this may be surmised. The British front at that point is very badly supplied with roads, and the Germans may well have thought that no advance upon a great scale was possible. So far as the French were concerned they had probably over-estimated the pre-occupation of Verdun and had not given our Allies credit for the reserve vitality which they were to show. The French front to the south of the Somme was also faced by a great bend of the river which must impede any advance. Then again it is wooded, broken country down there, and gives good concealment for masking an operation. These were probably the reasons which induced the Germans to make a miscalculation which proved to be an exceedingly serious one.

It is, as already stated, difficult to effect a surprise upon the large scale in modern warfare. There are still, however, certain departments in which with energy and ingenuity effects may be produced as unforeseen as they are disconcerting. The Air Service of the Allies, about which a book which would be one long epic of heroism could be written, had been growing stronger, and had dominated the situation during the last few weeks, but it had not shown its full strength nor its intentions until the evening before the bombardment. Then it disclosed both in most dramatic fashion. Either side had lines of stationary airships from which shell-fire is observed. To the stranger approaching the lines they are the first intimation that he is in the danger area, and he sees them in a double row, extending in a gradually dwindling vista to either horizon. Now by a single raid and in a single night, every observation airship of the Germans was brought in flames to the earth. It was a splendid coup, splendidly carried out. Where the setting sun had shone on a long German array the dawn showed an empty eastern sky. From that day for many a month the Allies had command of the air with all that it means to modern artillery. It was a good omen for the coming fight, and a sign of the great efficiency to which the British Air Service under General Trenchard had attained. The various types for scouting, for artillery work, for raiding, and for fighting were all very highly developed and splendidly handled by as gallant and chivalrous a band of heroic youths as Britain has ever enrolled among her guardians.

July 1 broke calm and warm with a gentle south-western breeze. The day had come. All morning from early dawn there was intense fire, intensely answered, with smoke barrages thrown during the last half-hour to such points as could with advantage be screened. At 7.30 the guns lifted, the whistles blew, and the eager infantry were over the parapets. The great Battle of the Somme, the fierce crisis of Armageddon, had come. In following the fate of the various British forces

during this eventful and most bloody day we will begin at the northern end of the line, where Snow's Seventh Corps faced the salient of Gommecourt.

This corps consisted of the 37th, 46th, and 56th Divisions. The former was not engaged and lay to the north. The others were told off to attack the bulge on the German line, the 46th upon the north and the 56th upon the south, with the village of Gommecourt as their immediate objective. Both were well-tried and famous territorial units, the 46th North Midland being the division which carried the Hohenzollern Redoubt upon October 13, 1915, while the 56th was made up of the old London territorial battalions which had seen so much fighting in earlier days while scattered among the regular brigades. Taking our description of the battle always from the north end of the line we shall begin with the attack of the 46th Division.

The assault was carried out by two brigades, each upon a two battalion front. Of these the 137th Brigade of Stafford men were upon the right, while the 139th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were on the left, each accompanied by a unit of sappers. The 138th Brigade, less one battalion, which was attached to the 137th, was in reserve. The attack was covered so far as possible with smoke, which was turned on five minutes before the hour. The general instructions to both brigades were that after crossing No Man's Land and taking the first German line they should bomb their way up the communication trenches, and so force a passage into Gommecourt Wood. Each brigade was to advance in four waves at fifty yards interval, with six feet between each man. Warned by past experience of the wastage of precious material, not more than 20 officers of each battalion were sent forward with the attack, and a proportional number of N.C.O.'s were also withheld. The average equipment of the stormers, here and elsewhere, consisted of steel helmet, haversack, water-bottle, rations for two days, two gas helmets, tear-goggles, 220 cartridges, two bombs, two sandbags, entrenching tool, wire-cutters, field dressings, and signal-flare. With this weight upon them, and with trenches which were half full of water, and the ground between a morass of sticky mud, some idea can be formed of the strain upon the infantry.

Both the attacking brigades got away with splendid steadiness upon the tick of time. In the case of the 137th Brigade the 6th South Staffords and 6th North Staffords were in the van, the former being on the right flank where it joined up with the left of the 56th Division. The South Staffords came into a fatal blast of machine-gun fire as they dashed forward, and their track was marked by a thick litter of dead and wounded. None the less, they poured into the trenches opposite to them but found them strongly held by infantry of the 52nd German Division. There was some fierce bludgeon work in the trenches, but the losses in crossing had been too heavy and the survivors were unable to make good. The trench was held by the Germans and the assault repulsed. The North

Staffords had also won their way into the front trenches, but in their case also they had lost so heavily that they were unable to clear the trench, which was well and stoutly defended. At the instant of attack, here as elsewhere, the Germans had put so terrific a barrage between the lines that it was impossible for the supports to get up and no fresh momentum could be added to the failing attack.

The fate of the right attack had been bad, but that of the left was even worse, for at this point we had experience of a new German procedure. This device was to stuff their front-line dug-outs with machine-guns and men, who would emerge when the wave of stormers had passed, attacking them from the rear, confident that their own rear was safe on account of the terrific barrage between the lines. In this case the stormers were completely trapped. The 5th and 7th Sherwood Foresters dashed through the open ground, carried the trenches and pushed forward on their fiery career. Instantly the barrage fell, the concealed infantry rose behind them, and their fate was sealed. With grand valour the leading four waves stormed their way up the communication trenches and beat down all opposition until their own dwindling numbers and the failure of their bombs left them helpless among their enemies. Thus perished the first companies of two fine battalions, and few survivors of them ever won their way back to the British lines. Brave attempts were made during the day to get across to their aid, but all were beaten down by the terrible barrage. In the evening the 5th Lincolns made a most gallant final effort to reach their lost comrades, and got across to the German front line which they found to be strongly held. So ended a tragic episode. The cause which produced it was, as will be seen, common to the whole northern end of the line, and depended upon factors which neither officers nor men could control, the chief of which were that the work of the artillery, both in getting at the trench garrisons and in its counter-battery effects had been far less deadly than we had expected. The losses of the division came to about 2700 men.

The attack upon the southern side of the Gommecourt peninsula, though urged with the utmost devotion and corresponding losses, had no more success than that in the north. The advance was upon a two-brigade front, the 168th being on the right and the 169th upon the left. The London Scottish and the 12th London Rangers were the leading battalions of the 168th, while the Westminsters and Victorias led the 169th with the 4th London, 13th Kensingtons, 2nd London and London Rifle Brigade in support. The advance was made with all the fiery dash with which the Cockney soldiers have been associated. The first, second, and third German lines of trench were successively carried, and it was not until they, or those of them who were left, had reached the fourth line that they were held. It was powerfully manned, bravely defended, and well provided with bombs—a terrific obstacle for a scattered line of weary and often wounded men. The struggle was a

heroic one. Even now had their rear been clear, or had there been a shadow of support, these determined men would have burst the only barrier which held them from Gommecourt. But the steel curtain of the barrage had closed down behind them, and every overrun trench was sending out its lurking occupants to fire into their defenceless backs. Bombs, too, are essential in such a combat, and bombs must ever be renewed, since few can be carried at a time. For long hours the struggle went on, but it was the pitiful attempt of heroic men to postpone that retreat which was inevitable. Few of the advanced line ever got back. In the late afternoon the remains of the two brigades were back in the British front line, having done all, and more than all, that brave soldiers could be expected to do. The losses were very heavy. Never has the manhood of London in one single day sustained so grievous a loss. It is such hours which test the very soul of the soldier. War is not all careless slang and jokes and cigarettes, though such superficial sides of it may amuse the public and catch the eye of the descriptive writer. It is the most desperately earnest thing to which man ever sets his hand or his mind. Many a hot oath and many a frenzied prayer go up from the battle line. Strong men are shaken to the soul with the hysteria of weaklings, and balanced brains are dulled into vacancy or worse by the dreadful sustained shock of it. The more honour then to those who, broken and wearied, still hold fast in the face of all that human flesh abhors, bracing their spirits by a sense of soldierly duty and personal honour which is strong enough to prevail over death itself.

It is pleasing to be able to record an instance of good feeling upon the part of the enemy. Some remains of the old German spirit would now and again, though with sad rarity, shake itself free from the acrid and poisonous Prussian taint. On this occasion a German prisoner was sent back from our lines after nightfall with a note to the officer in command asking for details as to the fate of the British missing. An answer was found tied on to the barbed wire in the morning which gave the desired information. It is fair to state also that the wounded taken by the enemy appear to have met with good treatment.

General Snow, addressing his men after the battle, pointed out that their losses and their efforts had not been all in vain. "I can assure you," he said, "that by your determined attack you managed to keep large forces of the enemy at your front, thereby materially assisting in the operations which were proceeding farther south with such marked success." No doubt the claim is a just one, and even while we mourn over the fate of four grand Army corps upon the left wing of the Allied Army, we may feel that they sacrificed themselves in order to assure the advance of those corps of their comrades to the south who had profited by the accumulation of guns and men to the north of them in order to burst their way through the German line.

The Eighth Corps, a magnificent body of troops, was under the command of General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston. It consisted of

Fanshawe's 48th South Midland Territorial Division, Lambton's 4th Regular Division, De Lisle's 29th Regular Division, and Wanless O'Gowan's 31st Division of the New Army. Their front extended from Hébuterne in the north, where they joined on to the 56th Division, down to a point just north of the Ancre, and it faced the very strong German positions of Serre in the north, and of Beaumont Hamel in the centre. The latter was an exceptionally difficult place, for it contained enormous quarries and excavations in which masses of Germans could remain concealed, almost immune to shell-fire and ready to sally out when needed. In spite of the terrific bombardment the actual damage done to the enemy was not excessive, and neither his numbers, his *moral*, nor his guns had been seriously diminished.

The order of battle was as follows : the 48th Division was in reserve, save for Dent's 143rd Warwick Brigade. Of this brigade two battalions, the 5th and 6th Warwicks, were placed on a defensive line with orders to hold the trenches for about a mile south of Hébuterne. The 7th and 8th Warwicks were attached to the 4th Division for the assault.

Immediately south of the defensive line held by the two Warwick battalions was the 31st Division, having Serre for its objective. South of this, and opposite to Beaumont Hamel, was the 4th, and south of this again was the 29th Division, which had returned from the Dardanelles, bearing with it a high reputation for efficiency and valour. Incorporated with it was a regiment of Newfoundlanders, men recruited from among the fishers and farmers of that northern land, the oldest colony of Britain. Such was the force, comprising nearly 50,000 excellent infantry, who set forth upon the formidable adventure of forcing the lines of Beaumont Hamel. They were destined to show the absolute impossibility of such a task in the face of a steadfast unshaken enemy, supported by a tremendous artillery, but their story is a most glorious one, and many a great British victory contains no such record of tenacity and military virtue.

Before giving in detail the circumstances which determined the result in each division, it may be well to avoid wearisome iteration by giving certain facts which are common to each. In every case the troops advanced in an extended formation of companies in successive waves. In nearly every case the German front line was seized and penetrated, in no case was there any hesitation or disorder among the advancing troops, but the highest possible degree of discipline and courage was shown by regulars, territorials, and men of the New Army, nor could it be said that there was any difference between them. In each case also the Germans met the assault with determined valour ; in each case the successive lines of trenches were more strongly held, and the assailants were attacked from the rear by those who emerged from the dug-outs behind them, and above all in each case a most murderous artillery fire was opened from a semicircle all round the German position, but especially from one huge accumulation of heavy guns stationed on the

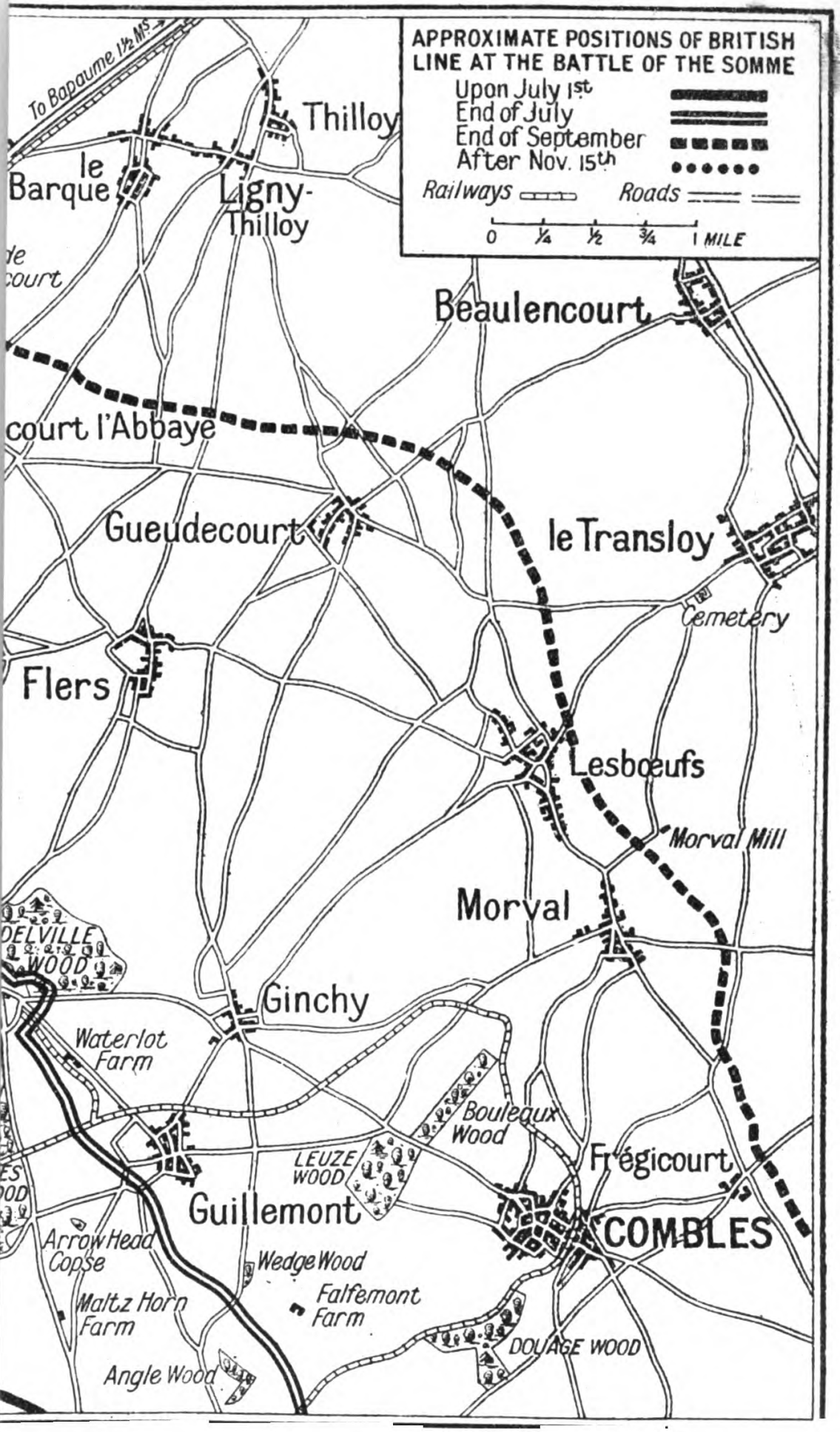
high ground near Bucquoy and commanding the British position. These guns formed successive lines of barrage with shrapnel and high explosives, one of them about 200 yards behind the British line, to cut off the supports; another 50 yards behind; another 50 yards in front; and a fourth of shrapnel which was under observed control, and followed the troops in their movements. The advanced lines of assault were able in most cases to get through before these barrages were effectively established, but they made it difficult, deadly, and often impossible for the lines who followed.

None the less it is the opinion of skilled observers that the shell-fire alone, however heavy, could not have taken the edge from the inexorable insistence of the British attack. It is to the skill and to the personal gallantry of the German machine-gunners that the result is to be traced. The bombardment of the German line had been so severe that it was hoped that most of the machine-guns had been rooted out. So indeed they had, but they had been withdrawn to the safety of excavations in the immediate rear. Suspecting this, the British artillery sprayed the ground behind the trenches with showers of shrapnel to prevent their being brought forward again. This barrage was not sufficient to subdue the gunners, who dashed forward and established their pieces at the moment of the assault upon the various parapets and points of vantage, from which, regardless of their own losses, they poured a withering fire upon the infantry in the open. These brave Würtembergers were seen, with riflemen at their side, exposed waist-deep and dropping fast, but mowing the open slope as with a scythe of steel. "I cannot," said a general officer, who surveyed the whole scene, "adequately express my admiration for the British who advanced, or for the Germans who stood up under such a heavy barrage to oppose them." It was indeed that contest between the chosen children of Odin in which Professor Cramb has declared that the high gods of virility might well rejoice.

We will now turn to the left of the line and carry on the detailed description of the general assault from that of the 56th Territorials in the north, who were linked up by the defensive line of the Warwicks. The 31st Division was on the left of the Eighth Corps. Of this division, two brigades, the 93rd and the 94th, were in the line, with the 92nd in reserve. The 93rd, which consisted of the 15th, 16th, 18th West Yorks, and the 18th Durhams, was on the right, the 94th, including the 11th East Lancashires, and the 12th, 13th, and 14th York and Lancasters, was on the left. The advance was made upon a front of two companies, each company on a front of two platoons, the men extended to three paces interval. On the left the leading battalions were the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, the latter on the extreme left flank of the whole division. That this position with its exposed flank was the place of honour and of danger, may be best indicated by the fact that Major Plackett and six orderlies were the only men who could be collected of this heroic Sheffield battalion upon the next

morning. On the right the leading troops were the 15th and 16th West Yorks. These grand North-countrymen swept across No Man's Land, dressed as if on parade, followed in succession by the remaining battalions, two of which, the 13th and 14th York and Lancasters, were the special town units of Barnsley. "I have never seen and could not have imagined such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline, and determination," said the observer who has been already quoted. The men fell in lines, but the survivors with backs bent, heads bowed, and rifles at the port, neither quickened nor slackened their advance, but went forward as though it was rain and not lead which lashed them. Here and elsewhere the German machine-gunners not only lined the parapet, but actually rushed forward into the open, partly to get a flank fire, and partly to come in front of the British barrage. Before the blasts of bullets the lines melted away, and the ever-decreasing waves only reached the parapet here and there, lapping over the spot where the German front lines had been, and sinking for ever upon the farther side. About a hundred gallant men of the East Lancashires, favoured perhaps by some curve in the ground, got past more than one line of trenches, and a few desperate individuals even burst their way as far as Serre, giving a false impression that the village was in our hands. But the losses had been so heavy that the weight and momentum had gone out of the attack, while the density of the resistance thickened with every yard of advance. By the middle of the afternoon the survivors of the two attacking brigades were back in their own front line trenches, having lost the greater part of their effectives.

The experiences of all the troops engaged upon the left of the British attack were so similar and their gallantry was so uniform, that any variety in description depends rather upon the units engaged than upon what befell them. Thus in passing from the 31st Division to the 4th upon their right, the general sequence of cause and effect is still the same. In this instance the infantry who rushed, or rather strode, to the assault were, counting from the right, the 1st East Lancs, the 1st Rifle Brigade, and the 8th Warwicks, who were immediately followed by the 1st Hants, the 1st Somersets, and the 6th Warwicks, advancing with three companies in front and one in support. The objective here as elsewhere upon the left was the capture of the Serre-Grandcourt Ridge, with the further design of furnishing a defensive flank for the operations lower down. The troops enumerated belonged to the 11th Brigade, led by the gallant Prowse, who fell hit by a shell early in the assault. Again the front line was carried and again the thin fringe of survivors had no weight to drive the assault forward, whilst they had no cover to shelter them in the ruined lines which they had taken. The Somerset men had the honour of reaching the farthest point attained by the division. But both their flanks were in the air, and their position was an impossible one, while the right of the attack north of Beaumont Hamel had been entirely held up. Two units of the 10th Brigade advanced about 9


APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF BRITISH LINE AT THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
Upon July 1st
End of July
End of September
After Nov. 15th
Railways
Roads
0 ¼ ½ ¾ 1 MILE
To Bapaume 1½ Ms.
Thilloy
le Barque
Ligny-Thilloy
Beaulencourt
court l'Abbaye
Gueudecourt
le Transloy
Cemetery
Flers
Lesbœufs
Morval Mill
Morval
DELVILLE WOOD
Ginchy
Waterlot Farm
Bouleaux Wood
LEUZE WOOD
Frégicourt
Guillemont
COMBLES
Arrow Head Copse
Wedge Wood
Maltz Horn Farm
Falfemont Farm
DOUAGE WOOD
Angle Wood

o'clock on the right, and two of the 12th on the left. These were in their order, the 2nd Dublins, 2nd Seaforths, 2nd Essex, and 1st King's Own Lancasters. All went forward with a will, but some could not get beyond their own front trenches, and few got over the German line. All the weight of their blood so lavishly and cheerfully given could not tilt the scale towards victory. Slowly the survivors of the Somersets and Rifle Brigade were beaten back with clouds of bombers at their heels. The 8th Warwicks, who, with some of the 6th Warwicks, had got as far forward as any of the supporting line, could not turn the tide. Late in the afternoon the assault had definitely failed, and the remainder were back in their own front trenches, which had now to be organised against the very possible counter-attack. Only two battalions of the division remained intact, and the losses included General Prowse, Colonel the Hon. C. W. Palk of the Hampshires, Colonel Thicknesse of the Somersets, Colonel Wood of the Rifle Brigade, and Colonel Franklin of the 6th Warwicks, all killed; while Colonels Innes of the 8th Warwicks, Hopkinson of the Seaforths, and Green of the East Lancashires were wounded. For a long time a portion of the enemy's trench was held by mixed units, but it was of no value when detached from the rest and was abandoned in the evening. From the afternoon onwards no possible course save defence was open to General Lambton. There was considerable anxiety about one company of Irish Fusiliers under Captain Barefoot who were in a detached portion of the German trench, but they succeeded in getting back next morning, bringing with them not only their wounded but some prisoners.

Immediately to the right of the 4th Division was the 29th Division,[1] which rivalled in its constancy and exceeded in its losses its comrades upon the left. The 86th Brigade and the 87th formed the first line, with the 88th in support.

The van of the attack upon the right of the division was formed by the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Welsh Borderers, while the van upon the left was formed by the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. The other battalions of the brigades formed the supporting line, and two battalions of the 88th Brigade, the Essex and the Newfoundlanders, were also drawn into the fight, so that, as in the 4th Division, only two battalions remained intact at the close, the nucleus upon which in each case a new division had to be formed.

Parties of the leading regiments were speedily up to the German

[1] Since the constituents of this famous regular Division have not been given in full (as has been done with their comrades in preceding chapters) they are here enumerated as they were on July 1, 1916:

86th Brigade.—2nd Royal Fusiliers, 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, 16th Middlesex.

87th Brigade.—1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st South Wales Borderers, 1st Scottish Borderers, 1st Border Regiment.

88th Brigade.—1st Essex, 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, Newfoundland Regiment.

front-line trench, but their advance beyond it was delayed by the fact that the dug-outs were found to be full of lurking soldiers who had intended no doubt to rush out and attack the stormers in the rear, as in the case of the 46th and 56th Divisions in the north, but who were discovered in time and had to fight for their lives. These men were cleared out upon the right, and the advance then made some progress, but on the left by 9 o'clock the 86th Brigade had been completely held up by a murderous machine-gun fire in front of Beaumont Hamel, a position which, as already explained, presented peculiar difficulties. The Essex and Newfoundland men of the 88th Brigade were ordered forward and charged with such splendid resolution that the advance was carried forward again, and the whole situation changed for the better. By 10.15 the casualties had become so great, however, through the fire of flanking machine-guns, that it was clear that the attack could not possibly reach its objective. By half-past ten the action had resolved itself into a bombardment of the German front line once more, and the assault had definitely failed. There was an attempt to renew it, but when it was found that the 86th Brigade and the 87th Brigade were equally reduced in numbers, it was recognised that only a defensive line could be held. It is true that the Divisional General had the Worcesters and the Hants still in hand, and was prepared to attack with them, but a further loss might have imperilled the Divisional line, so no advance was allowed.

All the troops of the 29th Division had lived up to their fame, but a special word should be said of the Newfoundlanders, who, in their first action, kept pace with the veterans beside them. This battalion of fishermen, lumbermen, and farmers proved once more the grand stuff which is bred over the sea—the stuff which Bernhardi dismissed in a contemptuous paragraph. "They attacked regardless of loss, moving forward in extended order, wave behind wave. It was a magnificent exhibition of disciplined courage." Well might General Hunter-Weston say next day after visiting the survivors: "To hear men cheering as they did, after undergoing such an experience, and in the midst of such mud and rain, made one proud to have the command of such a battalion." The losses of the Newfoundlanders were severe. Losses are always the index of the sorrow elsewhere, but when they fall so heavily upon a small community, where every man plays a vital part and knows his neighbour, they are particularly distressing. From Cape Race to the coast of Labrador there was pride and mourning over that day. The total losses of the division were heavy, and included Colonels Pierce and Ellis of the Inniskillings and Borderers.

It must have been with a heavy heart that General Hunter-Weston realised, with the approach of night, that each of his divisions had met with such losses that the renewal of the attack was impossible. He, his Divisional Commanders, his officers and his men had done both in their dispositions and in their subsequent actions everything which wise

leaders and brave soldiers could possibly accomplish. If a criticism could be advanced it would be that the attack was urged with such determined valour that it would not take 'No' until long after 'No' was the inevitable answer. But grim persistence has won many a fight, and no leader who is worthy to lead can ever have an excess of it. They were up against the impossible, as were their companions to right and left. But this at least was proved for all time, that, given clear ground, unshaken troops, prepared positions, and ample artillery, no human fire and no human hardihood can ever hope to break such a defensive line. It should be added that here as elsewhere the British artillery, though less numerous than it became at a later date, was admirable both in its heavy and in its lighter pieces. Observers have recorded that under its hammer blows the German trenches kept momentarily changing their shape, while the barrage was as thick and accurate and the lifting as well-timed as could have been wished. There was no slackness anywhere, either in preparation or in performance, and nothing but the absolute impossibility of the task under existing conditions stood in the way of success.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Tenth and Third Corps, July 1, 1916

Magnificent conduct of the Ulster Division—Local success but general failure—Advance of 32nd Division—Advance of 8th Division—Advance of 34th Division—The turning-point of the line.

MORLAND'S Tenth Corps consisted of the 36th, 49th, and 32nd Divisions. It lay between Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps upon the left and Pulteney's Third Corps upon the right. It covered a front from a mile north of Hamel to a mile north of Ovillers. At its northern end it was cut by the River Ancre, a sluggish canalised stream, running between two artificial dykes which the Germans periodically cut by their artillery fire and the British mended as best they might. This sector of attack, together with the one farther south which faced the Third Corps, presented peculiar difficulties to the assailants, as the ground sloped upward to the strong village of Thiepval with the ridge behind it, from which German guns could sweep the whole long glacis of approach. Nowhere were there more gallant efforts for a decision and nowhere were they more hopeless.

The division to the north of the Tenth Corps was the 36th Ulster Division. This division was composed of magnificent material, for the blend of Scot and Celt to be found in the North of Ireland produces a soldier who combines the fire of the one with the solidity of the other. These qualities have been brought to a finer temper by the atmosphere of opposition in which they have lived, and the difficult economical circumstances which they have overcome in so remarkable a way. Long ago in unhappy civil strife they had shown their martial qualities, and now upon a nobler and wider stage they were destined to confirm them. It might well seem invidious to give the palm to any one of the bands of heroes who shed their blood like water on the slopes of Picardy, but at least, all soldiers would agree that among them all there was not one which could at its highest claim more than equality of achievement that day with the men of Ulster.

The objective of this division was the German position from Beaucourt-sur-Ancre on the north to the northern edge of Thiepval. When the signal was given the two leading brigades, the 108th and the 107th,

came away at a deliberate pace which quickened into the rush of a released torrent, and went roaring over the German trenches. "They were like bloodhounds off the leash." Like every one else they were horribly scourged by shrapnel and machine-fire as they rushed across, but whether it was that some curve in the ground favoured part of their line, or whatever the cause, they suffered less than the other divisions, and struck on to the German front-line with their full shattering momentum, going through it as though it were paper. The 108th Brigade, consisting of the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the 11th, 12th, and 13th Irish Rifles, was on the left. Two of these, the Fusiliers and one of the Irish Rifle battalions, were on the north side of the Ancre, and were acting rather with the 29th Division upon their left than with their own comrades on the right. This detachment fought all day side by side with the regulars, made their way at one time right up to Beaucourt Station, and had finally to retire to their own trenches together with the rest of the line north of the Ancre. Next morning the survivors crossed the Ancre, and from then onwards the Eighth Corps extended so as to take over this ground.

South of the Ancre the two remaining battalions of the 108th Brigade, and the whole of the 107th Brigade, consisting of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 15th Irish Rifles, advanced upon a front of 3000 yards. The men had lost very heavily in the assembly trenches, and two companies of the 10th Irish Rifles had dwindled to two platoons before ever they got clear of the shattered wood in which they gathered. None the less, the fire and fury of their onset was terrific and sustained. "The place was covered with smoke and the explosion of heavy shells," says one who saw the scene from a front observation post. "I felt that no attack was possible, when suddenly out of the clouds I saw men advancing as if on parade, quite slowly. It seemed impossible, and yet they went on, stormed at on the left by high explosive and shrapnel, and on the right by enfilade machine-gun fire. Suddenly they charged, and when I could next see through the clouds on the slope (less than a mile away) I saw that they had taken the front trench, and in another minute the trench behind was taken, as our fellows shouting, 'No surrender!' got through—God knows how! As they advanced the fire of the guns became more and more enfilade, but nothing could stop their steady progress."

The long line of Irish Riflemen had rolled over every obstacle, and although their dead and wounded lay thick behind them they still stormed forwards with the same fury with which they started. Bunching up into platoons in artillery formation they pushed on and carried the third line. Ahead of them, across a considerable interval, was a fourth line, with a large redoubt upon the flank. They steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then dashing onwards once again they captured both the fourth line and the redoubt. So far forward were they now that they had reached regions north of Thiepval which were never trodden by a British foot again until three months of constant fighting had cleared

a way to them. It was the great Schwaben Redoubt which was now before them. The reserve brigade, the 109th, consisting of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Inniskilling Fusiliers, with the 14th Irish Rifles, had dashed forward at 10.40, leaving only the pioneer battalion, the 16th Irish Rifles, to guard the trenches. With the additional weight of the survivors of this reinforcing line the fringe of stormers, for they were now a fringe and nothing more, again rushed forward and threw themselves into the Schwaben trenches. This was their limit, and for most of them their grave. They had no further supports, no ammunition could reach them, and they were embedded in the depths of the German line at a point far deeper than any unit upon the left of the line had attained. The village of Thiepval commanded them from their right rear. Some remained in little groups, huddling in some coign of vantage, and fighting to the last cartridge, absolutely refusing to take one step to the rear. To the Germans they were as dangerous as so many cornered wolves. Others fell back in orderly fashion, but not an inch further than was needful, for they held on all day to the frontage taken by them. The first two lines were kept in their fierce grip till nightfall of the next day, when they handed them over to the relieving division.

In this splendid deed of arms the 36th Division left half its number upon the battlefield. The instances of gallantry were innumerable, and so equally distributed that General Nugent, when asked to name a special battalion, could only answer that the whole twelve had done equally well. Had the divisions to right and left been able to get as far, the whole gain would have been permanent. As it was, 540 prisoners were brought in, and few were lost save the wounded, chief of whom was Colonel Craig, who directed the movements of his men long after he was unable to direct his own. Colonel Bernard of the 10th Rifles, Captain Davidson, who worked his machine-gun after his leg was shattered, Colonel Crozier, Captain Gaffikin, who died while leading his company with an orange handkerchief waving in his hand, Captain Woods, who led the relief party, are but a few of the outstanding names.

A very detailed account would be necessary to bring home to the reader the full gallantry of this deed of arms. Experienced soldiers who saw it were moved to the limit of human speech. " I wish I had been born an Ulsterman," cried one of them. " But I am proud to have been associated with these wonderful men." To have penetrated all alone for two miles into the German line, and to withdraw from such a salient in military order, holding fast to all that could be retained, was indeed a great feat for any troops to have performed. The requiem for their fallen was best expressed by one of the survivors, who wrote that " they died for the cause of Liberty, Honour, and Freedom, for the Old Flag, the emblem of Britain, died for Ireland, died for Ulster ! "

The 32nd Division was on the immediate right of the men of Ulster. Their advance was carried out with the 96th Brigade on the left, the 97th upon the right, and the 14th in support. The reader may be warned

that from this time onwards he will often find, as in this case, that old brigades have been added to new formations, so that the former simplicity of numbering is often disturbed. The front line of attack taken from the north, or left, consisted of the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 16th Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 16th and 17th Highland Light Infantry. Of these four battalions the 16th Northumberland Fusiliers came under very heavy fire, and were unable to press their attack home. On the right the Highlanders had crawled up to within a hundred yards of the Leipzig salient and were into it with a rush the moment that the barrage lifted. The 15th Lancashire Fusiliers upon the left made a particularly brilliant advance. The right company was held up in front of Thiepval village, but the left company swept on with the 36th Division, keeping pace with their magnificent advance. It appears to have reached the east end of Thiepval, but there it was buried deeply in the enemy's position and was never heard of again. The supporting battalions of the 96th Brigade, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, tried hard to regain touch with their lost comrades, but in vain. These various gallant bodies who, at different points of the line, pushed forward into impossible positions, were no doubt for the greater part killed or wounded, but from among them came the 850 prisoners whom the Germans claimed to have taken on the northern part of the line on that day. The left of the divisional line was so weakened by these losses that they were compelled to withdraw to their own front trenches.

On the right the Highlanders were able to hold on to a part of the Leipzig salient. The losses, however, upon this flank had been very heavy, not only in the front wave, but among the 1st Dorsets and the 11th Borderers as they came out from a wood in support. Colonel Machell, gallantly leading his Borderers, was shot dead, his adjutant, Lieutenant Gordon, was badly wounded as he stooped over his body, Major Diggle was wounded, and the greater number of the officers were on the ground. Colonel Machell, it may be remarked, was a high civil official of the Egyptian Government, Under Secretary for the Interior, whose patriotism had led him to join the New Armies and thus to meet his death upon the field of battle. The 1st Dorsets lost nearly as heavily as the men of the Border ; their leader, Major Shute, was disabled, and their ranks thrown into temporary confusion. They were splendidly rallied, however, by Butcher the adjutant, who led them on and succeeded with the survivors in reaching the Leipzig Redoubt. Colonel Laidlaw, of the 16th Highland Light Infantry, had also been wounded, the third commanding officer killed or injured on this wing of the attack.

Under the desperate circumstances, it might well be considered a remarkable result that a stretch of the Leipzig Redoubt should be won and permanently held by the Highlanders, especially by the 17th Highland Light Infantry. Colonel Brooker of the sappers had prepared a Russian sap running up to the enemy line, and this was invaluable as

a communication trench. On the 2nd and 3rd the enemy endeavoured to turn out the intruders, but the 2nd Manchesters and 15th Highland Light Infantry not only held their ground, but enlarged it. On the night of the 3rd the division was relieved by the 25th Division and withdrew to refit after its tragic but splendid exertions.

The Third Corps, under General Pulteney, occupied the front immediately to the east of Albert. This large town was almost exactly in the centre of its rear, and the important road from Albert to Bapaume bisected the British position. Ovillers to the north, within the German lines, and Bécourt to the south, in the British, marked roughly the two ends of the sector. It was a comparatively narrow stretch, so that only two divisions were in the firing line, and one in reserve. These were respectively the 8th Regular Division to the north, the 34th of the New Army to the south, and the 19th, also of the New Army, in support.

Had the 32nd Division succeeded in holding its grip upon Thiepval upon the north, there might have been some chance of success, but as it was, the machine-guns from that quarter shaved the whole of No Man's Land as a mower may shave a lawn, and after the first rush, which carried the brave fellows of the 8th Division over the trenches, it proved to be absolutely impossible to send them either supports or supplies. The main body of this magnificent division disappeared into the smoke and haze of the battle, and their comrades in the trenches waited with aching hearts, their eyes fixed upon their front where the roar of battle rose from the other side of the pelting sleet of bullets. All day they waited, dashing out occasionally and being beaten back with ever-dwindling numbers. After dusk, they searched the shell-holes and brought in some 400 wounded. A few bewildered men came staggering in during the night, half-delirious with fatigue and strain, and unable themselves to say how they had got back across the enemy's front line from the depths to which they had penetrated.

This tragic but heroic attack in which the whole force who went forward fought literally to the death, was carried out in the following order :

On the right was the 23rd Brigade, in the centre the 25th, and on the left the 70th. The 23rd and 25th were the old hard-working units of Neuve Chapelle and many another fray. The 70th was a particularly fine brigade of the New Army.

Following the plan of describing operations always from the north, we will first picture from such reliable material as is available the attack of the 70th Brigade, which contained some of the finest North-country stuff that ever fought the battles of the country. This brigade was separated on the north by a clear space of about 300 yards from the Highland Light Infantry of the 97th Brigade, who formed the extreme right of the 32nd Division. The 8th York and Lancaster was the flank battalion, with the 8th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon its right. The

9th York and Lancaster were behind their comrades, and the 11th Sherwood Foresters behind the Light Infantry.

As it is impossible to give with any fulness the story of any one regiment, and as each may be taken as typical of the others, we may follow the front flank battalion on its advance. This, the 8th York and Lancaster, consisted almost entirely of miners, a class of men who have furnished grand military material to the New Armies. This unit came chiefly from the Rotherham district. The frontage of the battalion was 750 yards.

As the hour of attack approached, the enemy's counter-bombardment became so violent that there was the utmost difficulty in getting the men into the front-line trenches. Many were killed and even buried before the advance had begun. When the whistles blew the stormers went forward in four waves with 50 yards between, the supporting battalions following instantly. The machine-guns were sweeping the ground and about 350 yards had to be covered between the lines. Officers and men went down in heaps under the enfilade fire from four lines of guns, one behind the other, in the Thiepval district. The approach was over a billiard-table glacis with no cover of any kind. The ranks kept formation and trudged steadily forward, throwing themselves headlong into the front German trenches. There they steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then advancing once more sprang down into the second German line which was strongly held. Colonel Maddison had been shot down early in the attack. Captain Dawson, the adjutant, had been wounded, but staggered on with the men until he was killed at the second line of trenches. "Come on, boys! let's get at 'em and clear 'em out!" were his last words. On this second line the battalion, together with its support, beat itself to pieces. A few survivors unable to get back were taken prisoners, and a German report has stated that they were very proud and defiant when marched away. At night a number of wounded were carried in along the whole divisional front from No Man's Land, but many lives were lost in the gallant work, and many of the wounded also lost their lives in trying to crawl back, for the Germans turned their machine-guns during the daytime upon everything that moved in front of their lines.

To show how uniform was the experience, one may quote the doings of a battalion of the 23rd Brigade. This brigade was on the right of the 8th Division line, and the 2nd Middlesex, the battalion in question, formed the right battalion joining on with the Tyneside Scottish of the 34th Division to the south. Upon its left was the 2nd Devons. The supporting troops, two companies of the 2nd West Yorkshires and the 2nd Scottish Rifles, seem to have been held back when it was seen how fatal was the advance, and so in part escaped from the catastrophe. The Middlesex advanced almost opposite to La Boiselle. There was a slight dip in the ground to the immediate front which formed a partial protection from the machine-guns, so that although the losses were very

heavy, about 300 men with six Lewis guns made good their footing in the German front-line trench. Their gallant commander, Colonel Sandys, was wounded twice, but still kept at their head while they swept onwards to the second line. It was stuffed with Germans, but the handful of British stormers flung themselves in among them and cleared a standing place in the trench. The German guns, however, had the exact range, and four out of the six Lewis guns were blown into the air. Finally, only five men and a sergeant were left unwounded in this trench. This handful made its way back. One hundred and thirty of the Middlesex men seem to have got through or round on to the Pozières Road, but their fate was never cleared up. Finally, only 30 men of this grand battalion answered the roll-call that night.

The space between the two attacks described from the point of view of the two wing battalions of the division was occupied by the 25th Brigade, whose advance and losses were exactly similar to those which have been narrated. The 2nd Lincolns and 2nd Berkshires were the leading battalions, and their devotion in attempting the impossible was as great as that of their comrades to right and left.

Both battalions suffered heavily, and it is probable that the Berkshires went deeper than any other. The 1st Irish Rifles had occupied the trenches for six days in dreadful weather, and had suffered heavily from the retaliatory bombardment of the Germans. They were therefore held in reserve, but none the less made repeated efforts and with great loss to cross the barrage and help their comrades, for which they afterwards received a special message of thanks from General Hudson, the Divisional Commander.

Up to this point the writer has been faced by the painful and monotonous task of one long record of failure from Gommecourt in the north to La Boiselle in the south. It cannot be doubted that the British had over-estimated the effects of our bombardment, and that the German guns were intact to a degree which was unexpected. The one consolation must be that the German reserves were held in their position, and that improved prospects were assured for the remainder of the British line and for the whole of the French line. Had the front of the battle covered only the region which has been treated up to now, the episode would have been a tragic one in British military history. Thousands of men had fallen, nor could it be truthfully said that anything of permanence had been achieved. Next day the remains of the 8th Division were withdrawn, the 70th Brigade was restored to the 23rd Division, to which it rightfully belonged, and Scott's 12th Division came forward to fill the gap in the line, helped by the gunners and sappers of the 8th, who remained at their posts until July 4.

On the right of the 8th Division was the 34th, a unit which consisted of one mixed English and Scotch Brigade; while the other two were raised respectively from the Tyneside Irish and from the Tyneside

Scots, hardy and martial material from the coalpits and foundries of the North. They attacked upon the front between the Albert-Bapaume Road on the north and the village of Bécourt on the south. The idea was to storm La Boiselle village, and to push the attack home both north and south of it upon Contalmaison, which lay behind it. Immediately before the assault two great mines were blown, one of which, containing the unprecedented amount of 60,000 lbs. of gun-cotton, threw hundreds of tons of chalk into the air. Within a few minutes of the explosion the 34th Division were out of their trenches and advancing in perfect order upon the German trenches. The 101st Brigade, consisting of the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, the 10th Lincolns, and 11th Suffolks, were on the right, the Tyneside Scots upon the left, and the Tyneside Irish in support behind the right brigade. In the immediate rear lay the 19th Division with instructions to hold and consolidate the ground gained.

In no part of the line was the advance more gallant, and it marks the point at which unalloyed failure began first to change to partial success, ripening into complete victory in the southern section. Some slight cover seems to have helped the troops for the first few hundred yards, and it would appear also that though the small-arm fire was very severe the actual shell-fire was not so heavy as that which devastated the divisions in the north. None the less, the obstacles were sufficient to test to the highest any troops in the world, and they were gloriously surmounted by men none of whom had been in action before. " I, their commander," wrote the Divisional General, " will never forget their advance through the German curtain of fire. It was simply wonderful, and they behaved like veterans." The scream of the war-pipes, playing " The Campbells are coming," warmed the blood of the soldiers. Upon the left, the Tyneside Scots penetrated two lines of trenches and found themselves to the north of the village of La Boiselle, where further progress was made impossible by a murderous fire from front and flank. Of the four battalions of the 101st Brigade, the two English units were nearly opposite the village, and though they advanced with great resolution, they were unable to get a permanent lodgment. The two Royal Scots battalions upon the flank got splendidly forward, and some of them made their way deeper into the German line than any organised body of troops, save only the Ulster men, had succeeded in doing, getting even as far as the outskirts of Contalmaison. Major Stocks, the valiant leader of the advanced party of the 15th Royal Scots, was wounded, but continued to encourage his men and to try to consolidate his desperate position, which was nearly a mile within the German lines. He was again severely wounded, and Lieutenant Hole was killed, upon which the only remaining officer, Lieutenant Robson, fell back to a point some hundreds of yards westward, called Round Wood or Round Alley. Here the Scots stuck fast, and nothing could budge them. Germans were in front of them, were in La Boiselle upon their left rear, and were

behind them in the trenches, which led from the village. By all the laws of war, the detachment was destroyed ; but in practice the Germans found that they could not achieve it. A small reinforcement of the 27th Northumberland Fusiliers (from the 103rd Brigade), under Major Temple, had joined them, and their situation was less forlorn because they were in slight touch with the skirts of the 64th Brigade of the 21st Division, who had also, as will presently be shown, won a very forward position. By means of this division communication was restored with the isolated detachment, and Sir George McCrae of the 16th Royal Scots, a very well-known volunteer officer of Edinburgh, succeeded in reaching his men. His advent gave them fresh spirit, and under his leadership they proceeded next morning not only to hold the position, but to enlarge it considerably, sending bombers down every sap and endeavouring to give the impression of great numbers. Two companies of the East Lancashire Regiment from the 19th Division made their way forward, and joined with effect in these attacks. This small body of men held their own until the afternoon of July 3, when the advance of the 19th Division upon La Boiselle enabled them to be relieved. It was time, for the water was exhausted and munitions were running low. It was a glad moment when, with their numerous German captives, they joined up with their cheering comrades. It should be said that in this fine feat of arms a small party of the 11th Suffolks under Captain Brown played a valiant part. General Pulteney issued a special order thanking these troops for their stout defence, and the matter was in truth of wider importance than any local issue, for it had the effect of screening the left flank of the 21st Division, enabling them to make good their hold upon Crucifix Trench and the Sunken Road, as will now be told.

We have now completed our survey of that long stretch of line in which a gallant advance was broken against an equally gallant resistance. The account has necessarily had to concern itself with incessant details of units and orders of battle, since these are the very essence of such an account, and without them it might read, as contemporary descriptions did read, like some vague combat in the moon. But, casting such details aside, the reader can now glance up that long line and see the wreckage of that heroic disaster—the greatest and also the most glorious that ever befell our arms. For the moment we look only on the darkness in the North and have turned our backs upon the dawning brightness of the South. It is indeed an appalling sight. For ten long miles No Man's Land is littered with the bodies of our bravest and best. Every shell hole has its dead and wounded. Between them crawl the broken men who seek under a relentless fire the safety of their own lines. Behind the sandbags the wearied survivors lie panting and rave with futile curses at the enemy or mourn with begrimed faces buried in their hands as they think of what they have seen. Haggard officers, stained with mud and blood, run from bay to bay exhorting the spent soldiers

to stand to arms and face the counter-attack which at any moment may come rolling across, while Generals with set faces give rapid orders for the pushing forward of the firing line of their reserve battalions. So lay the British line from Hébuterne in the north to La Boiselle in the south as the sun of that bloody day sloped to the westward.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Attack of the Fifteenth and Thirteenth Corps, July 1, 1916

The advance of the 21st Division—64th Brigade—First permanent gains—50th Brigade at Fricourt—Advance of 7th Division—Capture of Mametz—Fine work by 18th Division—Capture of Montauban by the 30th Division—General view of the battle—Its decisive importance.

IMMEDIATELY to the south of Pulteney's Third Corps, and extending from Bécourt in the north to a point opposite Fricourt village, lay Horne's Fifteenth Corps. The general task of this Corps was to attack Mametz on the right, contain Fricourt in the centre, and attack between there and La Boiselle towards Mametz Wood. It consisted of the 21st, the 7th, and the 17th Divisions. Of these, the most northerly was Campbell's 21st, that fine North-country division which had so terrible an ordeal when it came up in support upon the second day of Loos. The 50th Brigade of the 17th Division was attached to the 21st Division for the purpose of the attack, and will be included with it in this summary of the operations. The rest of the 17th Division was in reserve.

The attack was on a three-brigade front, the 64th Brigade upon the north, just south of La Boiselle, and in close touch with the 24th Division. To the right of the 64th was the 63rd Brigade, and to the right of that the 50th, which advanced straight upon Fricourt. The 62nd Brigade was in reserve. It will be best to deal with the attack of the 64th Brigade with some detail, as its exploits had a very direct bearing upon the issue of the battle.

This brigade advanced upon the signal with the 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the left in touch with the Royal Scots of the 101st Brigade. On their right was their 9th namesake battalion. Behind them in immediate support were the 1st East Yorks (left) and 15th Durhams (right). The advance was greatly helped by the formation of a Russian sap between the lines on which the front companies could assemble. It was found, however, upon the men advancing that the fire was so severe that they could only get forward by crawling from hole to hole, with the result that the barrage lifted before they could reach the front trenches, and the Germans were able to mount the parapet and slate them with rifle-fire. Colonel Lynch of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry

was killed by a shell between trenches, as were all four captains, but the men stuck to their work and finally the leading battalions swept over the German lines, which had been greatly disorganised by the artillery, and killed or captured the occupants with no very severe resistance. Two fixed points lay in front of the brigade, which were part of the definite objectives of the division. The first was a sunken road 1100 yards from the British front, the second was a trench 400 yards farther, on which, by the irony of Fate, a large wayside crucifix looked down, so that it was called Crucifix Trench. Beyond these on the left front were several shattered woods, Shelter Wood and Birch-tree Wood, which gave the enemy good cover, and to the right was a large ruined building, Fricourt Farm, which raked the advance with its snipers and machine-guns.

On passing the front German line the successive British waves lost their formation and clubbed together, so that a long loose line of Yorkshire and Durham men scrambled onwards into, out of and over the successive impediments, beating down all resistance as they went. When the fire became too hot, the men crawled forwards upon their stomachs or made short sharp rushes from one shell hole to another, but the advance was steady and unbroken. The smoke from the shells was as dense as a Scotch mist. Every now and then through the haze the flashes of a machine-gun would be spied and possibly the vague figures of the German gunners as they swept it across in their deadly traverse, but a rush of furious infantry put each in turn out of action. Now and again the ragged line of men would stumble suddenly upon a section of proper trench, would spring down into it, clear up the occupants, and then sit in flushed, hard-breathing groups until a whistle from the officer and a cheer from their comrades would call them on once more.

In this sector there appears, however, to have been a systematic, if superficial, examination of the dug-outs before a trench was passed. One does not hear of those surprise attacks from the rear which were so common and so fatal to the north. The examination usually took the form of a sharp summons at the mouth of the burrow, quickly followed —if there were no response—by a Mills bomb. Then, as often as not, there would crawl out of the black orifice eight or ten terrified and bleeding men, who would join the numerous small convoys trailing backwards to the rear. These prisoners were nearly all from the 110th and 111th Reserve Bavarian Regiments, and the alacrity with which they made for the rear with their hands above their heads formed the only comic touch in a tragic day. One made a grab for a rifle. " He lived about five seconds," says the narrator. " They were thin, unshaven, and terrified," says an officer, talking of the particular batch he handled. " Most had dark hair—a very different type from the Prussians."

Having overrun the German trenches, the infantry were now faced with a considerable stretch of open which lay between them and the Sunken Road, leading from Fricourt to Contalmaison. Many were hit

upon this perilous passage. A subsidiary line of German trenches lay in front of this road, and into this the British tumbled. Colonel Fitz-Gerald of the 15th Durhams was the senior officer who had got up, and he took command at this point, rallying the weary men of all four battalions for a fresh advance. A few of the Royal Scots of the 34th Division were found already in possession, the fringe of that body who have previously been described as making so invaluable a stand at Round Wood.

At this point the 64th Brigade was found to be some distance in front of the main body of the 34th Division on the left and of their comrades on the right, so that they could get no farther for the moment without their flanks being badly exposed. In front through the haze they could dimly see the Crucifix which was their ultimate objective. The men had to cower low, for the bullets were coming in a continuous stream from Fricourt Farm on the right and from the woods on the left. The Sunken Road was ten or twelve feet deep at the spot, and though it was exposed at the sides, by rapid digging the men got some cover, though many dropped before they could make a shelter. Here the survivors of the advance waited for some hours, spending some of the time in ransacking the enormous thirty-foot deep dug-outs which the Germans had excavated at certain points along the side of the road. Into these the wounded were conveyed, and refreshed by the good things of life, from Seltzer-water to gold-tipped cigarettes, which were found within.

In the afternoon General Headlam had come up as far as the Sunken Road, and had examined the position for himself. The 63rd Brigade was now well forward upon the right and the advance could be resumed. It was pushed swiftly onwards and Crucifix Trench was occupied, nearly a mile from the British front line. Lieutenant Day of the 9th Yorkshires, though wounded by shrapnel, seems to have been the first to lead a party into this advanced trench, but soon it was strongly occupied. The pressing need was to consolidate it, for it was swept by gusts of fire from both flanks. Lieutenant Gordon of the Yorkshires, also a wounded man, took over the direction, and the men, with very little cover, worked splendidly to strengthen the position. Their numbers were so reduced that a counter-attack would have been most serious, but the splendid support given by the artillery held the German infantry at a distance.

Captain Santer of the 10th Yorkshires took over the advanced command and sent back to the colonel of the Durhams, who had meantime been wounded at the Sunken Road, to ask for instructions. The answer was to hold on and that help was at hand. This help was in the form of the 62nd Reserve Brigade, the leading battalions of which, the 1st Lincolns and 10th Yorkshire Regiment, came swinging splendidly across the open and flung themselves into Crucifix Trench. From that time the maintenance of the ground was assured. The men of the

64th Brigade who had done so finely were drawn back into the Sunken Road, having fully secured their objective. One cannot but marvel here, as so often elsewhere, at the fine work done by young subalterns when the senior officers have been disabled. Lieutenant Gordon of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry found himself in command of the whole battalion at the most critical moment of the engagement, and on leaving could only hand it over to a brother subaltern, Spicer, who carried on with equal courage and ability. The brigade was drawn back to the German first line, where it lay for forty-eight hours, and finally acted as reserve brigade to the successful advance undertaken by the 62nd Brigade, by which Shelter Wood was captured on July 3.

Such, in some detail, were the adventures of the 64th Brigade, which may be taken as parallel to those of the 63rd upon the right, who were faced by much the same obstacles, having the Sunken Road ahead and the Fricourt houses upon their right. The 8th Somersets were on the left in touch with the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry, and supported by the 8th Lincolns. On the right were the 4th Middlesex and the 10th York and Lancasters. They were able to get well up to Fricourt Farm upon the left of the village, but the ground was unfavourable and they never got as far forward as their comrades on the left. Of the German resistance on this front, it can be said that it was worthy of the reputation which the Bavarians have won in the War. The men were of splendid physique and full of courage. They fought their machine-guns to the last. All was ready for a vigorous advance next morning. The artillery of the 21st Division, which has won a name for exceptional efficiency, was up nearly level with the infantry at 10 p.m. that night, a road having been laid in that time from the original gun position to a point half a mile inside the German front line.

On the immediate right of the 63rd Brigade, in front of Fricourt, was the 50th Brigade (Glasgow), to which was assigned the task of attacking the village while the 21st Division got part of it upon the north. The brigade advanced gallantly, the front line consisting of two fine Yorkshire battalions, the 10th West Yorks and the 7th East Yorks, with part of the 7th Yorkshires. The attack reached and partly occupied the front trenches, but the fire and the losses were both very heavy, the 10th West Yorkshires being specially hard hit. The survivors behaved with great gallantry, and some of them held on all day, though surrounded by enemies. In the afternoon a second advance was made by Yorkshires and East Yorkshires, with 6th Dorsets in support, but again the losses were heavy and no solid foothold could be got in the village. When dusk fell some of the troops who held their own all day were able to get back to the British trenches bringing prisoners with them. A notable example is that of Lieutenant Marsden of the West Yorks, who managed to stagger back with three wounds upon him and three Germans in front of him. The 51st Brigade was brought up in the evening to continue the assault, but with the morning of the 2nd it was found that the

work had been done, and that the advance upon both flanks had caused the evacuation of the village.

The line of trenches takes a very peculiar turn just south of Fricourt, which is shown in the diagram of the battle, so that the attack of the 7th Division, which was the next in the line, was from almost due south, whilst all the others had been from due west. The project was that a holding attack to engage the defenders should be made upon Mametz, whilst the remaining divisions in the line, the 7th of the Fifteenth Corps, with the 18th and 30th of the Thirteenth Corps, should advance upon the line Mametz-Montauban. Their success would obviously make the position both of Fricourt and of Mametz impossible, the more so if the 21st Division could maintain its position at the Sunken Road to the north of Fricourt. This was the calculation, and it worked to perfection, so that both these villages fell eventually with a minimum loss of life to the assailants. Every honour is due to the leaders who devised and to the soldiers who carried out the scheme, but it should at the same time be understood that in the case of these southern divisions, and also of the French Army of General Foch upon the right, they were attacking a portion of the line which was far less organised, and manned by very inferior troops to those in the north. All this section of attack seems to have been a complete surprise to the Germans.

The famous 7th Division was now commanded by General Watts, one of the three Brigadiers who had led it during its heroic days at Ypres. Its units, however, had changed considerably, and the 91st Brigade had taken the place of the 21st. This Brigade, consisting partly of Manchester battalions and partly of old units of the 7th Division (2nd Queen's Surreys, 1st South Staffords, 21st and 22nd Manchesters), attacked upon the right, while the 20th Brigade advanced upon the left, having the 2nd Gordons and 9th Devons in the van, with the 8th Devons and 2nd Borderers in support. The front trenches were overrun without much difficulty. The order of battle was the 22nd Manchesters upon the right with the 1st South Staffords in close support. In the centre were the 2nd Gordons and upon their left the 9th Devons. The right got forward with comparatively small losses and overran the front German line. The Gordons had their left company held up by uncut wire, but got forward none the less with considerable losses. The 9th Devons were the most exposed and suffered very severely, but in spite of a casualty list which included half the officers and men, they never winced or wavered for an instant, showing, what had been often shown before, that the spirit of old days still lives in the country of Drake and of Raleigh. The survivors seized and held Tirpitz Trench. The 2nd Borderers had also seized Danube Support, and the whole front line was in British hands.

The 91st Brigade were now closing in upon the right of Mametz village and had entered Danzig Alley, from which they were for a time driven by a brisk counter-attack. The 1st South Staffords had won

their way into the outskirts of Mametz, but the losses were heavy, and half of the 21st Manchesters came racing up to reinforce. At one o'clock the Danzig Alley had again been occupied by the Manchesters. Half the 2nd Warwicks were sent up to reinforce the Gordons and the line of infantry dashed forward upon the village, 600 of the enemy throwing up their hands in front of them. The 20th Manchesters also advanced, losing heavily by the fire from Fricourt, but pushing on as far as the Sunken Road on the extreme left of the advance. There is a tangle of trenches at this point, the chief of which is the Rectangle, but with the aid of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers they were all cleared and the flank of the Division made good, and consolidated, since it had advanced farther than the troops to the left. In the morning, however, when it was found that Fricourt had been evacuated, the whole division was able to get forward, and by July 3 had occupied Bottom Wood, while the 2nd Royal Irish had actually penetrated Mametz Wood, taking two guns and 50 prisoners. Some days later, Mametz Wood had become a different proposition, but the general orders at the time were that it should not be seriously attacked.

Altogether in these Mametz operations the 7th Division took 1500 prisoners, seven field-guns, and much booty of different kinds.

We have now recorded in succession the repulse of the Seventh Corps at Gommecourt, that of the Eighth Corps at Serre and Beaumont Hamel, and that of the Tenth Corps at Thiepval. The record of heroic disaster was then alleviated by the partial success of the Third Corps at La Boiselle, the considerable success of the Fifteenth Corps at Mametz, and now by the complete success of the Thirteenth Corps at Montauban. South of this point along the whole French line the victory was never in doubt.

The Thirteenth Corps was commanded by General Congreve, who, it will be remembered, gained his V.C. in the affair of the guns where young Roberts met his death at Colenso. It consisted of the 18th, the 30th, and the 9th Divisions of the New Army. Of these the 18th was on the left in touch with the victorious 7th, the 30th was on the right in touch with the French, and the 9th was in reserve.

Maxse's 18th Division, which had done no serious fighting before, established a remarkable record for good service during the whole course of the Somme battle, into which it was thrust again and again, never without leaving its mark. It was entirely an English division. Some complex and successful trench-digging had been done on this part of the front. Eight covered saps had been driven forward and reached a point within twenty yards of the German trenches without their knowledge. Upon the advance being ordered the ends of these were opened up, machine-guns and flame-throwers were thrust through, and the saps behind were quickly unroofed and turned into communication trenches.

The 54th Brigade had the 7th Bedfords on the right, the 11th Royal

Fusiliers on the left, the 6th Northants in support, and the 12th Middlesex in reserve. As they rushed forward they faced a feeble barrage, but a heavy machine-gun fire. It was found, however, here, and along the whole divisional front, that the German wire was utterly destroyed, thanks largely to the work of the trench mortars which had supplanted field-guns for this particular purpose. The first trenches were taken without a pause, and parties remained behind to clear out the dug-outs.

The first serious check was in front of a strong point called the Pommiers Redoubt. The wire here had been invisible from long grass so that its presence was a surprise. Again and again the machine-guns swept away the leading files of the attack. The redoubt could be outflanked, however, and Captain Johnston of the Fusiliers brought his bombers round and eventually to the rear of it. Snipers held him for a time, but they were rushed by Lieutenant Savage and a few men. The Germans still held bravely to their point, but Bedfords and Fusiliers swarmed in upon them until their arms went down and their hands up. From this strong point bombing parties were sent down the communication trenches, the infantry following closely and occupying the new ground.

The 53rd Brigade was on the right of the 54th. Its assaulting line was formed by the 8th Norfolks upon the right, and the 6th Berkshires upon the left, with the 10th Essex in support and the 8th Suffolks in reserve. The first two lines were taken in their stride with little loss. A strong point behind these lines held them up for a short time, but was rushed, and its garrison of the 109th Regiment was captured. Further progress of the Norfolks was made difficult, however, by a flanking fire and by a second redoubt in front. As in the case of the 53rd Brigade it was found that the way round is often the shorter. Two bombing parties under Grundley White and Miall Smith worked up the trenches on the flank, while that murderous weapon, a Stokes gun, was brought up and opened fire. The combined effect was decisive and 150 Germans threw down their arms. Sixty more were taken in another redoubt to the left.

Whilst the Norfolks had been fighting their way forward in this fashion the Berkshires upon their left, following very closely upon their own barrage, had attained their objective in twenty minutes, and had to hold it for some hours until the Norfolks had made good. During this time their right flank was necessarily exposed. This flank was defended successfully by Captain Fenner by means of bombing parties and a Lewis gun, while the left company, instead of resting, lent a hand to their neighbours of the 54th Brigade in carrying Pommiers Redoubt.

Meanwhile the Norfolks had come ahead again, but the advance of the Berkshires was held up by a small but determined band of bombers and snipers in a strong position. A Stokes mortar drove back the bombers, but the snipers still held fast, and killed in succession Lieutenant Rushton and Lieutenant Saye who gallantly attacked them.

Sergeant-major Sayer of the Berkshires was more fortunate, however, and killed the chief sniper whose automatic rifle had played the part of a machine-gun. In doing so he was severely wounded himself. The Essex had come up into the firing line, but progress was still slow until an invaluable Stokes mortar was again brought to bear and with its shower of heavy bombs blasted the strong point out of existence. When night fell the whole line of Montauban Alley had been successfully won and the various units were in close touch and were busily organising their position.

Great obstinacy was shown by the Germans in their defence, which was a gallant one, and might well have been successful against a less skilful attack. Among other instances of their tenacity was one in which a sniper in a trench behind the stormers continued to fire from some subterranean retreat and defied all efforts to get at him, until it was found necessary to blow in the whole face of the dug-out and so to bury him within his own stronghold.

The hardest fighting of any fell to the lot of the 55th Brigade on the right. The advance was made with the 8th East Surreys and 7th Queen's Surreys in front, the latter to the left. The 7th Buffs were in support and the 7th West Kents in reserve. No sooner had the troops come out from cover than they were met by a staggering fire which held them up in the Breslau Trench. The supports had soon to be pushed up to thicken the ranks of the East Surreys—a battalion which, with the ineradicable sporting instinct and light-heartedness of the Londoner, had dribbled footballs, one for each platoon, across No Man's Land and shot their goal in the front-line trench. A crater had been formed by a mine explosion, forming a gap in the German front, and round this crater a fierce fight raged for some time, the Germans rushing down a side sap which brought them up to the fray. Into this side sap sprang Lieutenant Tatham and Sergeant Upton of the Buffs, and killed 12 of the Germans, cutting off their flow of reinforcements, while Captain Kenchington and half a company of the same battalion cleared up the crater and captured a machine-gun which had fought to the last cartridge. It is worth recording that in the case of one of these machine-guns the gunner was actually found with a four-foot chain attaching him to the tripod. Being badly wounded and unable to disengage himself, the wretched man had dragged himself, his wound, and his tripod for some distance before being captured by the British. The fact was duly established by a sworn inquiry.

The Brigade was winning its way forward, but the hard resistance of the Germans had delayed it to such a point that there was a danger that it would not be in its place so as to cover the left flank of the 90th Brigade, who were due to attack Montauban at 10 a.m. Such a failure might make the difference between victory and defeat. At this critical moment Major Irwin commanding the East Surreys dashed to the front, re-formed his own men with all whom he could collect and led them on-

wards. Captain Neville was killed in gallantly leading the rush, but the wave went forward. There was check after check, but the point had to be won, and the Suffolks of the 53rd Brigade were brought round to strengthen the attack, while the West Kents were pushed forward to the fighting line. By midday two platoons of West Kents were into Montauban Alley, and had seized two houses at the western end of Montauban, which were rapidly fortified by a section of the 92nd Field Company. The flank of the 90th was assured. Lieutenant Janion, a South African officer, led the first group of Surrey men who seized Montauban. He is said during the action to have slain seventeen of the enemy.

The rest of the brigade, however, had desperate work to get into line with the village. The East Surreys and Buffs were coming along well, but the Queen's Surreys had lost heavily and were held up by a strong point called Back Trench. Major Kemp-Welsh of the Queen's gathered his men together, called up a bombing party from the 8th Sussex, the pioneer battalion of the brigade, and then by a united front and flank attack carried the position. One hundred and seventy Germans remained alive in the trench. The infantry then surged forward to the line of the Mametz-Montauban Road, where they lay under machine-gun fire with their left in the air, for a considerable gap had developed between them and the 53rd Brigade. The main line of Montauban Alley in front of them was still strongly held by the enemy.

Once again the Stokes guns saved what looked like a dangerous situation. They blasted a hole in Montauban Alley, and through the hole rushed a furious storming party of the Queen's, headed by Lieutenant Tortoise. As evening fell, after that long day of fighting, the weary 18th Division, splendid soldiers, splendidly led, held the whole line from Montauban to the junction with the 7th Division near Mametz. One does not know which to admire most—the able dispositions, the inflexible resolution of the troops, or the elastic adaptability which enabled the initiative of the officers upon the spot to use ever-varying means for getting over the successive difficulties. The losses were very heavy, amounting to about 3000 officers and men, something under 1000 being fatal. Of the Germans 700 were captured, 1200 were buried after the action, and the total loss could not possibly have been less than those incurred by the British. It should be added that a great deal of the success of the attack was due to the 82nd, 83rd, 84th, and 85th Brigades, Royal Field Artillery, forming the divisional artillery under General Metcalfe, who earned the deepest gratitude of the infantry, the highest reward to which the gunner can attain. Some of the artillery of the 9th Division was also engaged.

A few words may be said of the immediate future of the 18th Division before the narrative of July 1 is completed by a consideration of the work of the 30th Division. The ground captured included part of what may be called the Montauban Ridge, and the possession of this point proved to be of great service for observation in connection with the immediate

operations at Bottom, Shelter, and Mametz Woods by the Fifteenth Corps. The guns were at once advanced and patrols were thrown out in front which penetrated and eventually occupied Caterpillar Wood, a long winding plantation on the immediate front of the Division. These various patrols picked up no less than twelve German field-guns abandoned by the enemy. The front was held until July 8, when the 18th was relieved by the 3rd Division.

As to the fighting of the Germans upon this front, it was excellent as usual—but it is needful to accentuate it, as there is a tendency to depreciate the enemy at a point where he is beaten, which is an injustice to the victors. The latter had no doubts about the matter. " There is one thing we have all learned, and that is that the Hun is a jolly good soldier and engineer, so don't listen to any other nonsense. If you get hand-to-hand with him he gives in at once, but he practically never lets you get so close. As long as Fritz has a trench and a gun he will stick there till he is made crows' rations. We know we are just slightly better than he is, but there's nothing much in it—nothing to justify contempt or liberties." Such was the considered opinion of an experienced soldier.

If the advance of the 18th Division was successful, that of Shea's 30th upon its right was not less so. This division had been raised originally from Liverpool and Manchester, the battalions being all of the King's Liverpool or of the Manchester Regiments. The greater part of these battalions, which owe their origin largely to Lord Derby, were recruited on the " pal " system, by which friends in peace would be comrades in war. So close was Lord Derby's connection with the division that his brother commanded one brigade, and three of his family served with the guns, one of them commanding an artillery unit. It may be explained that it had exchanged its 91st Brigade for the 21st of the 7th Division, and that several of the veteran battalions of the old 7th now served with the 30th.

The objective of this division was the important village of Montauban deep within the enemy's line. It seemed an ambitious mark in a war where every yard means an effort, but it was accomplished with surprising ease, for the advance was as determined as the defence was slack. On the right opposite Maricourt the attack fell to the 89th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Bedfords and the 17th, 19th, and 20th King's Liverpool battalions. On their left was the 21st Brigade, while the 90th Brigade was in immediate support with orders to go through and seize the village itself. From the start the attack went like clockwork. The artillery was admirable, the infantry inexorable, and the leading all that could be desired. The ever-ready machine-guns put up a fierce defence, especially on the left flank, where the 18th King's Liverpools, led by their popular colonel, lost three-quarters of their effectives but carried their objective none the less. The 2nd West Yorks behind them were also terribly scourged, but gained the line of the Glatz Redoubt all the same. Here, as with the 18th Division, there

was every sign that the garrison of the front trenches had been surprised. "The Germans gave us plenty of machine-gun fire while we were advancing upon them; when we reached the trench only a few showed fight. The rest flung up their arms and cried: 'Mercy, Kamerad!'" It was clear they had been taken by surprise, for many of them were barefooted, none of them had any equipment. When there was no attack at 4 a.m. they were then told that they could lie down and have a rest, "as the British would not now come out till four in the afternoon." It is abundantly clear that the famous German intelligence department was absolutely at fault in the southern sector of the great battle.

Although the first three trenches were carried without a hitch, the garrison of the fourth had time to stand to arms, and were greatly assisted in their defence by a flank fire from the still untaken village of Mametz, and from machine-guns in the southern corner of Mametz Wood which lies to the north of Montauban. The resistance caused considerable losses, including that of Colonel Johnson of the 17th Manchesters, but the advance was irresistible, and swept over every obstacle until they had reached their objective. On the right, the Liverpool brigade, the 17th and 18th King's Liverpools in the lead, fought their way up to the brickfields, which lie nearly level with Montauban, but to the south of it. A company seized these and a good bunch of prisoners. There it consolidated in close touch with the famous "iron corps" of the French Army upon their right, while on the left the blue and yellow advance flags of the 30th formed a continuous line with the red and yellow of the 18th Division. On the left of the Liverpools the Manchesters with the Scots Fusiliers of the 90th Brigade had stormed their way into Montauban, the first of that long list of village fortresses which were destined in the succeeding months to fall into the hands of the British. It was carried with a rush in spite of the determined resistance of small groups of Germans in various houses, which had already been greatly mauled by our artillery. The British fought their way from room to room, drove their enemies down into the cellars, and hurled bombs on to them from above. The German losses were heavy, and several hundreds of prisoners were sent to the rear. By the early afternoon the whole village was in the hands of the 90th Brigade, who had also occupied Montauban Alley, the trench 200 yards upon the farther side of it, whence by their rifle-fire they crushed several attempts at counter-attack. These were feeble during the day, but a very heavy one came during the night, aided by a powerful shrapnel fire. The Germans, advancing in the closest order, for a time won a lodgment in the new British front trench, killing a party of the 17th Manchesters, but they were unable to hold it, and with daylight they were ejected once more. The reader who is weary of hearing of British losses will be interested to know, on the authority of Colonel Bedell of the 16th Bavarians, that out of a garrison of 3500 men from the 6th Bavarian Reserve Regiment only 500 escaped from the Montauban front. All

these operations were carried out in close touch with the French upon the right, so close indeed that Colonel Fairfax of the 17th King's Liverpools, seeing that the French colonel of the flank battalion was advancing beside his men, sprang out and joined him, so that the two colonels shook hands in the captured position.

Some stress has in this narrative been laid upon the fact that the difficulties to be overcome in the south were less than those in the north. Such an assertion is only fair to the gallant men who failed. At the same time nothing should detract from the credit due to those splendid southerly divisions who really won the battle and made the hole through which the whole army eventually passed.

Though the French operations do not primarily come within the scope of this record, it is necessary to give some superficial account of them, since they form an integral and essential part of the battle. So important were they, and so successful, that it is not too much to say that it was the complete victory upon their line which atoned for our own want of success in the north, and assured that the balance of this most bloody day should be in our favour. It is true, as they would be the first to admit, that the troops of General Foch had none of those impassable barrages, concentrations of machine-guns, and desperately defended inner lines of trenches which inflicted such losses on our stormers. Both the positions and the men who held them were less formidable. On the other hand, it is for us to bear in mind that the French had already made their great effort in the common cause at Verdun, and that this attack upon the West was primarily a British offensive in which they were playing a subsidiary part. It is the more remarkable that their success should have been so great and that they should have been able for months to come to play so notable a part in the battle that the tale of their prisoners and booty was not less than our own.

The attack of the British was roughly upon a twenty-mile front, from the Gommecourt salient to Maricourt. On this stretch they broke the German lines for 7 miles from the north of Fricourt to Montauban. The French front was about 8 miles long, and moved forward for its whole extent. Thus it may be said that the whole battle line was 28 miles, and that more than one-half, or 15 miles, represented the line of victory. During the whole operations for many months the French Army was cut in two by the marshy valley of the Somme, the detachment to the north of it acting in close unison with the British Thirteenth Corps upon their left. We will call these the northern and the southern French armies, both being under the direction of General Foch.

It may briefly be stated that the advance of the French Army was carried out with great dash and valour on both banks of the river. After carrying several lines of trenches at very little loss to themselves, the northern army found itself, on the evening of July 1, holding the outskirts of the villages of Curlu and of Hardecourt. On July 2 Curlu was entirely occupied, and shortly afterwards Hardecourt also fell. The

southern army, which consisted of the fiery Colonial Division upon the left and the 20th upon the right, under the immediate leadership of General Fayolle, had even greater success. Not only all the lines of trenches but the villages of Dompierre, Becquincourt, Bussu, and Fay were stormed upon July 1. On the 2nd Frise and the Moreaucourt Wood had also been taken, and several counter-attacks repelled. On that evening the French were able to report that they had taken 6000 prisoners, while the British operations had yielded 3500—or 9500 in all.

When the sun set upon that bloody day the higher command of the Allies must have looked upon the result with a strange mixture of feelings in which dismay at the losses in the north and pride at the successes in the south contended for the mastery. The united losses of all the combatants, British, French, and German, must have been well over 100,000 between the rising and the setting of one summer sun. It is a rout which usually swells the casualties of a stricken army, but here there was no question of such a thing, and these huge losses were incurred in actual battle.

When one considers the enormous scale of the action, the desperate valour of the troops engaged, and the fact that the German line was fairly and permanently broken for the first time, one feels that this date will be for ever marked in British military annals. It was in fact the turning point of the war, which from that time onwards, so far as the British line was concerned, was always a war of successful aggression, wearing down with remorseless activity the strength of the enemy, and interrupted only by the three months of German recovery in 1918.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

From July 2 to July 14, 1916

General situation—Capture of La Boiselle by 19th Division—Splendid attack by 36th Brigade upon Ovillers—Siege and reduction of Ovillers—Operations at Contalmaison—Desperate fighting at the Quadrangle by 17th Division—Capture of Mametz Wood by 38th Welsh Division—Capture of Trones Wood by 18th Division.

THE terrible fighting just described, during which the German line was broken at its southern end, was but the opening of a most desperate battle, which extended over many months. This, while it cost very heavy losses to both sides, exacted such a toll from the Germans in prisoners and lost material, as well as in casualties, that it is probable that their army would have been largely disorganised had not the wet weather of October come to hamper the operations. As it was, the letters of the soldiers and the intercepted messages of the Generals show an amount of demoralisation which proves the mighty pressure applied by the allied armies.

Standing on the edge of this welter, and gazing at this long haze into which vigorous divisions continually plunge, relieving exhausted units, only to stagger out in their turn, rent and torn, while yet others press to the front, one feels appalled at the difficulty of following such complex operations and of conveying them clearly and in their due order to the mind of the reader. Some fixed system must evidently be followed if the narrative is to remain intelligible and the relation of the various actions to each other to be made evident. Therefore the course of events will still, so far as possible, be traced from the north, and each incident be brought to some sort of natural pause before we pass onwards down the line.

The second German main line ran through the Bazentins and Longueval, and it was reached and carried by the British Army on July 14. The intervening fortnight between the battle of the front and of the second line was occupied in clearing the many obstacles, consisting for the most part of woods and subsidiary trenches which filled the space between the two lines, and also in attacking the two villages of Ovillers and Contalmaison, which hampered operations upon the left wing. It will help the reader very much to understand these apparently complex

movements if he will realise that they divide themselves into three distinct groups of activity, counting from the north of the line. The first group is concerned with the capture of Ovillers, and in it the 12th, 19th, 32nd, and 25th Divisions were concerned. The second group is connected with the capture of the strong position which is bastioned by Contalmaison upon one side and Mametz Wood at the other, with the Quadrangle system of trenches between. In this very severe conflict the 23rd, 17th, 7th, and 38th Divisions were engaged. Finally there is the group of operations by which the right wing was advanced through Bernafoy Wood and up to Trones Wood. In these, the 9th, 30th, and 18th Divisions were chiefly concerned. We shall now take each of these in turn, beginning with the northern one, the taking of Ovillers, and carrying each narrative to a definite term. Before embarking upon this account it should be mentioned that the two northern corps of Rawlinson's army—the Eighth and Tenth—were from now onwards detached as a separate Fifth Army under Sir Hubert Gough, one of the most rising commanders in the Service. The functions of this Army were to hold the line from La Boiselle to Serre, and to form a defensive flank and pivot for the Third, Fifteenth, and Thirteenth Corps to the south.

We shall first follow the further fortunes of the troops which operated in the north. On July 3 there was a short but severe action upon that part of the old British line immediately to the left of the gap which had been broken. In this action, which began at 6 a.m., Rycroft's 32nd Division, already greatly weakened by its exertions two days before, together with the 75th Brigade, lent them by Bainbridge's 25th Division, tried to widen the rent in the German line by tearing open that portion of it which had been so fatal to the 8th Division. The attack failed, however, though most bravely delivered, and the difficulties proved once more to be unsurmountable. The attempt cost us heavy casualties, a considerable proportion of which fell upon the 75th Brigade, especially upon the 11th Cheshires, whose colonel was killed, and upon the 2nd South Lancashires, who ran into wire and were held up there. The 8th Borderers reached their objective, but after one-and-a-half hours were forced to let go of it. The operation proved that whatever misfortunes had befallen the Germans to the south, they were still rooted as firmly as ever in their old positions. The same lesson was to be taught us on the same morning at an adjacent portion of the line.

This episode was at the immediate south of the unsuccessful attack just described. It has already been stated that Scott's 12th, the English division which had seen so much hard fighting at Loos, had taken over part of the trenches of the 8th Division, and so found themselves facing Ovillers. Their chances of a successful advance upon the village were increased by the fact that the 19th Division, after hard fighting, had got into La Boiselle to the south, and so occupied a flank to their advance.

Some further definition is required as to the situation at La Boiselle, how it was brought about, and its extreme importance to the general

plan of operations. When the left of the 34th Division had failed to hold the village, while some mixed units of the right brigade had established themselves within the German lines as already narrated, it became very vital to help them by a renewed attempt upon the village itself. For this purpose the 19th Division had moved forward, a unit which had not yet been seriously engaged. It was under the command of Bridges, the fighting Irish dragoon, whose whimsical expedient for moving forwards the stragglers at St. Quentin has been recorded in a previous chapter. On the evening of July 1, one battalion of this division, the 9th Cheshires, had got into the German front line trench near the village, but they were isolated there and hard put to it to hold their own during a long and desperate night. On the following afternoon, about 4 o'clock, two of their fellow-battalions of the 58th Brigade, the 9th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the 6th Wilts, charged suddenly straight across the open at the village, while by a clever device the British barrage was turned elsewhere with the effect of misleading the German barrage which played upon the wrong area. By 9 p.m. on July 2 the south end of the village had been captured, but the resistance was still very fierce. Early next morning the whole of the division was drawn into this street fighting, and gradually the Germans were pushed back. There was one desperate counter-attack during which the British line was hard put to it to hold its own, and the house-to-house fighting continued throughout the whole day and night. Two British colonels, one of the 7th South Lancashires and the other of the 8th Gloucesters, particularly distinguished themselves in this close fighting. The latter, Colonel de Wiart, was a hard soldier who had left an eye in Somaliland and a hand at Ypres, but the sight of him in this day of battle, tearing out the safety-pin of bombs with his teeth and hurling them with his remaining hand, was one which gave heart to his men. Slowly the Germans were worn down, but the fighting was fierce and the British losses heavy, including three commanding officers, Wedgwood of the North Staffords, Royston Piggott of the 10th Worcesters, and Heath of the 10th Warwicks, the first two killed, the latter wounded. In the midst of the infantry fighting a single gun of the 19th Battery galloped with extraordinary gallantry right into the village and engaged the enemy point-blank with splendid effect. For this fine performance Captain Campbell and ten men of the gun's crew received decorations. By the evening of the 6th the whole village was solidly consolidated by the 19th Division, they had broken up a strong counter-attack from the direction of Pozières, and they had extended their conquest so as to include the redoubt called Heligoland. We must turn, however, to the attack which had in the meanwhile been prepared upon the line to the immediate north of La Boiselle by the 12th Division.

This attack was carried out at three in the morning of July 7 by the 35th and the 37th Brigades. The fighting line from the right consisted of the 5th Berks, 7th Suffolks, 6th Queen's Surreys, and 6th West Kents,

with the other battalions in close support. Unhappily, there was a group of machine-guns in some broken ground to the north of La Boiselle, which had not yet been reached by the 19th Division, and the fire of these guns was so deadly that the battalions who got across were too weak to withstand a counter-attack of German bombers. They were compelled, after a hard struggle, to fall back to the British line. One curious benefit arose in an unexpected way from the operation, for part of the 9th Essex, losing its way in the dark, stumbled upon the rear of the German defenders of the northern edge of La Boiselle, by which happy chance they took 200 prisoners, helped the 19th in their task, and participated in a victory instead of a check.

It was evident that before the assault was renewed some dispositions should be made to silence the guns which made the passage perilous. With this in view, another brigade, the 74th from the 25th Division, was allotted to the commander of the 12th Division, by whom it was placed between his own position and that held by the 19th at La Boiselle. It was arranged that these fresh troops should attack at eight o'clock in the morning of July 7, approaching Ovillers from the south, and overrunning the noxious machine-guns, while at 8.30 the 36th Brigade, hitherto in reserve, should advance upon Ovillers from the west. By this difference of half an hour in the attack it was hoped that the 74th would have got the guns before the 36th had started.

After an hour's bombardment the signal was given and the 74th Brigade came away with a rush, headed by the 13th Cheshires and 9th North Lancashires, with the 2nd Irish Rifles and 11th Lancashire Fusiliers in support. The advance found the Germans both in front and on either flank of them, but in spite of a withering fire they pushed on for their mark. Nearly every officer of the 13th Cheshires from Colonel Finch down to Somerset, the junior subaltern, was hit. Halfway between La Boiselle and Ovillers the attack was brought to a halt, and the men found such cover as they could among the shell-holes. Their supporting lines had come up, but beyond some bombing parties there was no further advance during the day. Fifty yards away the untaken machine-gun emplacements lay in front of them, while Ovillers itself was about 500 yards distant upon their left front.

In the meantime, after waiting half an hour, Boyd-Moss' 36th Brigade had advanced. The machine-guns were, however, still active on either flank of them, and on their immediate front lay the rubbish-heap which had once been a village, a mass of ruins now. But amid those ruins lay the Fusiliers of the Prussian Guard—reputed to be among the best soldiers in Europe, and every chink was an embrasure for rifle or machine-gun.

The advance was one which may have been matched in the glorious annals of the British infantry, but can never have been excelled. The front line consisted of the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers, one upon each wing, the 7th Essex in the centre, and the 11th Middlesex in support—

south-country English battalions all. They had lain waiting for the signal in trenches which were beaten to pieces by a terrific German shelling. There were considerable casualties before the first man sprang from fire step to parapet. As they crossed No Man's Land bullets beat upon them from every side. The advance was rendered more frightful by the heavy weather, which held down the fumes of the poison shells, so that the craters in which men took refuge were often found to be traps from which they never again emerged. Many of the wounded met their death in this terrible fashion. Still the thin lines went forward, for nothing could stop them save death or the voice of their company officers. They were up and over the first German line. A blast of fire staggered them for a moment, and then with a splendid rally they were into the second trench, and had seized the line of hedges and walls which skirt the western edge of the village. Five hundred men were left out of those who had sprung from the British trench ; but the 500 still went forward. The two Fusilier battalions had hardly the strength of a company between them, and the leaders were all down—but every man was a leader that day. Their spirit was invincible. An officer has recorded how a desperately wounded man called out, " Are the trenches taken, sir ? " On hearing that they were, he fell back and cried, " Thank God ! for nothing else matters." In the centre the Sussex men still numbered nearly 300, and their colonel aided and directed while they consolidated the ground. One hundred and fifty were hit as they did so, but the handful who were left defied every effort of shell, bomb, or bayonet to put them out. A lodgment had been made, and nothing now could save the village. By a wise provision, seeing that no supplies could reach them, every man had been loaded up with twenty bombs, and had been instructed to use every captured German bomb or cartridge before any of his own. As dusk fell, two companies of the supporting Middlesex battalion were sent up, under heavy fire, to thicken the line, which was further strengthened next day by two battalions from the 37th Brigade, while the 75th Brigade prolonged it to the south. In the morning of July 9 the 12th Division, sorely stricken but triumphant, was drawn from the line, leaving the northern half of the Ovillers front to the 32nd Division and the southern half to the 25th, the scattered brigades of which were now reunited under General Bainbridge.

That commander had found himself during these operations in a difficult position, as the 74th Brigade had been moved from him and allotted to the 12th Division, and the 75th to the 32nd Division. None the less, he had carried on vigorously with his remaining brigade—the 7th, and had enlarged and strengthened the British position in the Leipzig salient.

When upon Sunday, July 9, the 32nd Division had entirely taken over from the 12th on the west of Ovillers, the 14th Brigade were in the post of honour on the edge of the village. The 2nd Manchesters on the

left and the 15th Highland Light Infantry on the right formed the advanced line with the 1st Dorsets in support, while the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers were chiefly occupied in the necessary and dangerous work of carrying forward munitions and supplies. Meanwhile, the pioneer battalion, the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers, worked hard to join up the old front trench with the new trenches round Ovillers. It should be mentioned, as an example of the spirit animating the British Army, that Colonel Pears of this battalion had been invalided home for cancer, that he managed to return to his men for this battle, and that shortly afterwards he died of the disease.

On July 10 at noon the 14th Brigade advanced upon Ovillers from the west, carrying on the task which had been so well begun by the 36th Brigade. The assailants could change their ranks, but this advantage was denied to the defenders, for a persistent day and night barrage cut them off from their companions in the north. None the less, there was no perceptible weakening of the defence, and the Prussian Guard lived up to their own high traditions. A number of them had already been captured in the trenches, mature soldiers of exceptional physique. Their fire was as murderous as ever, and the 2nd Manchesters on the north or left of the line suffered severely. The 15th Highlanders were more fortunate and made good progress. The situation had been improved by an advance at 9 p.m. on this date, July 10, by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers from the 6th Division, higher up the line, who made a lodgment north-west of Ovillers, which enabled a Russian sap to be opened up from the British front line. The Inniskillings lost 150 men out of two companies engaged, but they created a new and promising line of attack.

The British were now well into the village, both on the south and on the west, but the fighting was closer and more sanguinary than ever. Bombardments alternated with attacks, during which the British won the outlying ruins, and fought on from one stone heap to another, or down into the cellars below, where the desperate German Guardsmen fought to the last until overwhelmed with bombs from above, or stabbed by the bayonets of the furious stormers. The depleted 74th Brigade had been brought back to its work on July 10, and on the 12th the 14th Brigade was relieved by the 96th. On the night of July 12 fresh ground was gained by a surge forward of the 2nd South Lancashires, and of the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers, these two battalions pushing the British line almost up to Ovillers Church. Again, on the night of the 13th the 3rd Worcesters and 8th Borderers made advances, the latter capturing a strong point which blocked the way to further progress. On the 14th, however, the 19th Cheshires had a set-back, losing a number of men. Again, on the night of July 14 the 1st Dorsets cut still further into the limited area into which the German resistance had been compressed. On the night of the 15th the 32nd Division was drawn out, after a fortnight of incessant loss, and was replaced by the 48th Division of South Midland

Territorials, the 143rd Brigade consisting entirely of Warwick battalions, being placed under the orders of the General of the 25th Division. The village, a splintered rubbish-heap, with the church raising a stumpy wall, a few feet high, in the middle of it, was now very closely pressed upon all sides. The German cellars and dug-outs were still inhabited, however, and within them the Guardsmen were as dangerous as wolves at bay. On the night of July 15-16 a final attack was arranged. It was to be carried through by the 74th, 75th, and 143rd Brigades, and was timed for 1 a.m. For a moment it threatened disaster, as the 5th Warwicks got forward into such a position that they were cut off from supplies, but a strong effort was made by their comrades, who closed in all day until 6 p.m., when the remains of the garrison surrendered. Two German officers and 125 men were all who remained unhurt in this desperate business; and it is on record that one of the officers expended his last bomb by hurling it at his own men on seeing that they had surrendered. Eight machine-guns were taken. It is said that the British soldiers saluted the haggard and grimy survivors as they were led out among the ruins. It was certainly a very fine defence. After the capture of the village, the northern and eastern outskirts were cleared by the men of the 48th Territorial Division, which was partly accomplished by a night attack of the 4th Gloucesters. From now onwards till July 29 this Division was engaged in very arduous work, pushing north and east, and covering the flank of the Australians in their advance upon Pozières.

So much for the first group of operations in the intermediate German position. We shall now pass to the second, which is concerned with the strongly fortified line formed by the Quadrangle system of trenches between Contalmaison upon the left and Mametz Wood upon the right.

The 51st Brigade of the 17th Division passed through the deserted village of Fricourt on the morning of July 2, taking about 100 prisoners.

On debouching at the eastern end they swung to the right, the 7th Lincolns attacking Fricourt Wood, and the 8th South Staffords Fricourt Farm. The wood proved to be a tangle of smashed trees, which was hardly penetrable, and a heavy fire stopped the Lincolns. Colonel Forest, however, surmounted the difficulty by detaching Major Metcalfe and a party of men to outflank the wood, which had the effect of driving out the Germans. The South Staffords were also successful in storming the farm, but could not for the moment get farther. Several hundreds of prisoners from the 111th Regiment and three guns were captured during this advance, but the men were very exhausted at the end of it, having been for three nights without rest. Early next day (July 3) the advance was resumed, the 51st Brigade still to the fore, working in co-operation with the 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division upon their left. By hard fighting, the Staffords, Lincolns, and Sherwoods pushed their way into Railway Alley and Railway Copse, while the 7th Borderers

established themselves in Bottom Wood. The operations came to a climax when in the afternoon a battalion of the 186th Prussian Regiment, nearly 600 strong, was caught between the two brigades in Crucifix Trench and had to surrender ; altogether Fell's 51st Brigade had done a very strenuous and successful spell of duty. The ground gained was consolidated by Fleming's 77th Field Company, Royal Engineers.

The 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division, supported by the 63rd, had moved parallel to the 51st Brigade, the 1st Lincolns, 10th Yorkshires, and two battalions of Northumberland Fusiliers advancing upon Shelter Wood and carrying it by storm. It was a fine bit of woodland fighting, and the first intimation to the Germans that their fortified forests would no more stop British infantry than their village strongholds could do. The enemy, both here and in front of the 17th Division, were of very different stuff from the veterans of Ovillers, and surrendered in groups as soon as their machine-guns had failed to stop the disciplined rush of their assailants. After this advance, the 21st Division was drawn out of the line for a rest, and the 17th extending to the left was in touch with the regular 24th Brigade, forming the right of Babington's 23rd Division, who were closing in upon Contalmaison. On the right the 17th were in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division, which was pushing up towards the dark and sinister clumps of woodland which barred their way. On the night of July 5 an advance was made, the 7th Division upon Mametz Wood, and the 17th upon the Quadrangle Trench, connecting the wood with Contalmaison. The attack upon the wood itself had no success, though the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers reached their objective, but the 52nd Brigade was entirely successful at Quadrangle Trench, where two battalions—the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers—crept up within a hundred yards unobserved and then carried the whole position with a splendid rush. It was at once consolidated. The 23rd Division had advanced upon the left and were close to Contalmaison. On the night of July 5 the 7th Division was drawn out and the 38th Welsh Division took over the line which faced Mametz Wood.

The 17th Division, after its capture of the Quadrangle Trench, was faced by a second very dangerous and difficult line called the Quadrangle Support.

It was clear that if either Mametz Wood or Contalmaison were to fall, this trench would become untenable for the Germans, but until those two bastions, or at least one of them, were taken, there was such a smashing fire beating down upon an open advance of 600 yards, that no harder task could possibly be given to a Division. The trench was slightly over the brow of a slope, so that when the guns played upon it the garrison were able to slip quickly away and take refuge in Mametz Wood, coming back again in time to meet an assault which they were well aware could only be delivered by troops which had passed through an ordeal of fire which must shake and weaken them.

It seemed that the best chance to bring a striking force up to the trench was to make the attempt at night, so at 2 a.m. of July 7 the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, the same battalions which had already taken Quadrangle Trench, advanced through the darkness of an inclement night upon their objective. The enemy proved, however, to be in great force, and their trench was stuffed with men who were themselves contemplating an attack. A party of Lancashire Fusiliers under Lieutenant Pegrum got into Pearl Alley, which is on the left near Contalmaison, but the village stands on a slight eminence, and from it the trench and the approaches can be swept by fire. The British attack was driven back with loss, and was followed up by the 9th Grenadiers of the Prussian Guard, who were in turn driven back by the left of the British line, consisting of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers and some of the 1st Worcesters. In the morning another attempt was made upon Quadrangle Support, this time by the 9th West Ridings and the 12th Manchesters. Small parties got up to Acid Drop Copse, close to Contalmaison, but they were too weak to hold on. At the end of this attack the 52nd Brigade, which had been so badly mauled, was drawn out and the 51st put back in its place.

This severe fighting at the Quadrangle was part of a wider action, which was to include an attack by the 23rd Division upon Contalmaison and an attack by the 38th upon Mametz Wood. The Contalmaison attack won its way into the north-west side of the village at 11 o'clock on the morning of July 7, but by 12 o'clock it had been held and eventually repulsed. By 4.30 the Brigade of the 23rd Division, which was on the immediate left of the 17th Division, had been driven back to its trenches, the 1st Northamptons suffering heavily.

Whilst the Contalmaison attack had failed upon the left, that upon Mametz Wood had no better success upon the right. It was to have been carried out by the 38th Welsh Division, but in its approach such opposition was encountered that the 16th Welsh (City of Cardiff) and 10th South Wales Borderers could not get forward. Meanwhile, the 50th Brigade from the 17th Division had been told off to co-operate with this attack, and naturally found themselves with their right flank in the air, the 7th East Yorks suffering severely in consequence. None the less, some advance was made upon this side.

In the night of July 7 a third attack was made upon Quadrangle Support, with no better result than the others. On this occasion the 51st Brigade had relieved the 52nd, and it was the 10th Sherwood Foresters which endured the heavy losses, and persevered until they were within bomb-throw of their objective, losing Major Hall Brown, a gallant Ceylon planter, and many officers and men. At the same hour the 50th Brigade had again tried to gain ground in the direction of Mametz Wood, but had failed on account of uncut wire. The military difficulties of the situation during this day were greatly enhanced by the state of the ground, owing to most unseasonable heavy rain, which left

four feet of mud in some of the trenches. Altogether, when one considers the want of success at Ovillers, the repulse at Contalmaison, the three checks in one day at the Quadrangle, and the delay of the attack on Mametz Wood, the events of July 7 showed that the task of the British, even inside a broken German line, was still a very heavy one. General Horne upon the line and Sir Douglas Haig behind it must both have felt the strain that night.

At six in the morning of July 8 the undefeatable 17th Division was again hard at work encompassing the downfall of its old opponents in Quadrangle Support. Since it could not be approached above ground, it was planned that two brigades, the 51st and the 50th, should endeavour to bomb their way from each side up those trenches which were in their hands. It is wonderful that troops which had already endured so much, and whose nerve might well be shattered and their hearts broken by successive failures, should still be able to carry out a form of attack which of all others calls for dash and reckless courage. It was done, none the less, and with some success, the bombers blasting their way up Pearl Alley on the left to the point where it joins on to the Quadrangle Support. The bombers of the 7th Lincolns did particularly well. "Every attempted attack by the Boche was met by them with the most extraordinary Berserker fury. They utterly cowed the enemy." So wrote an experienced spectator. On the right the 50th Brigade made some progress up Quadrangle Alley. Artillery fire, however, put a term to the advance in both instances, the guns of Contalmaison dominating the whole position. In the evening a fresh bombing attack was made by the same troops, whose exertions seem really to have reached the limit of human capacity. This time the 7th Borderers actually reached Quadrangle Support, but were unable to get farther. The same evening some of the 50th Brigade bombed down Wood Trench towards Mametz Wood, so as to facilitate the coming attack by the 38th Division. On July 9 both Brigades again tried to bomb their way into Quadrangle Support, and were again held up by the enemy's fire. This was the sixth separate attempt upon the same objective by the same soldiers—an example surely of the wonderful material of which the New Armies were composed.

But their labours were not yet done. Though both brigades were worn to shadows, it was still a point of honour to hold to their work. At 11.20 that night a surprise attack was made across the open under the cover of night. The 8th South Staffords on the left—charging with a yell of "Staffords!"—reached the point where Pearl Alley joins the Quadrangle Support, and held on most desperately. The 50th Brigade on the right were checked and could give no assistance. The men upon the left strove hard to win their way down Quadrangle Support, but most of the officers were down, the losses were heavy, and the most that they could do was to hold on to the junction with Pearl Alley. The 50th were ready to go forward again to help them, and the

Yorkshire men were already on the move ; but day was slowly breaking and it was doubtful if the trench could be held under the guns of Contalmaison. The attack upon the right was therefore stopped, and the left held on as best it might, the South Staffords having lost grievously, nearly all their officers, including the Adjutant, Coleridge, being on the ground.

We may now leave this heroic tragedy of the Quadrangle and turn our attention to what had been going on at Mametz Wood upon the right, which was really the key to the situation. It has already been stated that the wood had been attacked in vain by a brigade of the 7th Division, and that the 38th Welsh Division had found some difficulty in even approaching it. It was indeed a formidable obstacle upon the path of the Army. An officer has described how he used to gaze from afar upon the immense bulk, the vast denseness and darkness of Mametz Wood, and wonder, knowing the manifold dangers which lurked beneath its shadows, whether it was indeed within human power to take it. Such was the first terrible task to which the Welshmen of the New Army were called. It was done, but one out of every three men who did it found the grave or the hospital before the survivors saw the light shine between the further tree-trunks.

As the Welshmen came into the line they had the 17th Division on their left, facing Quadrangle Support, and the 18th on their right at Caterpillar Wood. When at 4.15 on the morning of July 10 all was ready for the assault, the 3rd Division had relieved the 18th on the right, but the 17th was, as we have seen, still in its position, and was fighting on the western edge of the wood.

The attack of the Welshmen started from White Trench, which lies south-east of the wood and meanders along the brow of a sharp ridge. Since it was dug by the enemy it was of little use to the attack, for no rifle fire could be brought to bear from it upon the edge of the wood, while troops coming over the hill and down the slope were dreadfully exposed. Apart from the German riflemen and machine-gunners, who lay thick among the shell-blasted stumps of trees, there was such a tangle of thick undergrowth and fallen trunks lying at every conceivable angle that it would take a strong and active man to make his way through the wood with a fowling-piece for his equipment and a pheasant for his objective. No troops could have had a more desperate task—the more so as the German second line was only a few hundred yards from the north end of the wood, whence they could reinforce it at their pleasure.

The wood is divided by a central ride running north and south. All to the west of this was allotted to the 113th Brigade, a unit of Welsh Fusilier battalions commanded by Price-Davies, a young brigadier who is more likely to win honour than decorations, since he started the War with both the V.C. and the D.S.O. Marden's 114th Brigade, comprising four battalions of the Welsh Regiment, was to carry the eastern half of the wood, the attack being from the south. The front line of attack,

counting from the right, consisted of the 13th Welsh (2nd Rhonddas), 14th Welsh (Swansea), with its left on the central ride, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the van of the 113th Brigade. About 4.30 in the morning the barrage lifted from the shadowy edge of the wood, and the infantry pushed forward with all the Cymric fire which burns in that ancient race as fiercely as ever it has done, as every field of manly sport will show. It was a magnificent spectacle, for wave after wave of men could be seen advancing without hesitation and without a break over a distance which in some places was not less than 500 yards.

The Swansea men in the centre broke into the wood without a check, Lieutenant Hawkins of that battalion charging down two machine-guns and capturing both at the cost of a wound to himself. The 13th on the right won their way also into the wood, but were held for a time, and were reinforced by the 15th (Carmarthens). Here for hours along the whole breadth of the wood the Welsh infantry strove desperately to crawl or burst through the tangle of tree-trunks in the face of the deadly and invisible machine-guns. Some of the 15th got forward through a gap, but found themselves isolated, and had great difficulty in joining up with their own battle line once more. Eventually, in the centre and right, the three battalions formed a line just south of the most southern cross ride from its junction with the main ride.

On the left, the 16th Welsh Fusiliers had lost heavily before reaching the trees, their colonel, Carden, falling at the head of his men. The circumstances of his death should be recorded. His Welsh Fusiliers, before entering action, sang a hymn in Welsh, upon which the colonel addressed them, saying, " Boys, make your peace with God ! We are going to take that position, and some of us won't come back. But we are going to take it." Tying his handkerchief to his stick he added, " This will show you where I am." He was hit as he waved them on with his impromptu flag ; but he rose, advanced, was hit again, and fell dead.

Thickened by the support of the 15th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the line rushed on, and occupied the end of the wood until they were abreast of their comrades on the right. Once among the trees, all cohesion was lost among the chaos of tangled branches and splintered trunks, every man getting on as best he might, with officers rallying and leading forward small groups, who tripped and scrambled onwards against any knot of Germans whom they could see. On this edge of the wood some of the Fusiliers bombed their way along Strip Trench, which outlines the south-western edge, in an endeavour to join hands with the 50th Brigade on their left. At about 6.30 the south end of the wood had been cleared, and the Welshmen, flushed with success, were swarming out at the central ride. A number of prisoners, some hale, some wounded, had been taken. At 7 o'clock the 113th were in touch with the 114th on the right, and with the 50th on the left.

Further advance was made difficult by the fact that the fire from the

untaken Wood Support Trench upon the left swept across the ride. The losses of the two Fusilier battalions had been so heavy that they were halted while their comrades of the 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under Colonel Flower, who was killed by a shell, attacked Wood Support—eventually capturing the gun which had wrought such damage and about 50 Germans. This small body had succeeded, as so often before and since, in holding up a brigade and disorganising an advance. Until the machine-gun is checkmated by the bullet-proof advance, the defensive will maintain an overpowering and disproportionate advantage.

The 10th Welsh had now come up to reinforce the left of the 114th Brigade, losing their colonel, Rickets, as they advanced into the wood. The 19th Welsh Pioneer Battalion also came forward to consolidate what had been won. There was a considerable pause in the advance, during which two battalions—the 17th Welsh Fusiliers and the 10th South Wales Borderers from Evans' Reserve Brigade, 115th—came up to thicken the line. At about four, the attack was renewed, until at least two-thirds of the wood had been gained. The South Wales Borderers worked up the eastern side, pushing the defenders into the open, where they were shot down by British machine-guns in Caterpillar Wood and Marlborough Wood. About 50 yards from the northern end the khaki line was at last held up and remained there, crouching in shell-holes or behind broken trunks. The main resistance came from a trench outside the wood, and it was eventually determined to bombard it, for which purpose the troops were withdrawn some hundreds of yards. Late in the evening there was another gallant attempt to get the edge of the wood, but the trench was as venomous as ever, and the main German second line behind it was sweeping the underwood with bullets, so the advance was halted for the night.

During the night the 115th Brigade had come to the front, and in the morning of July 11 had relieved the 113th and 114th Brigades. The relief in a thick wood, swept by bullets, and upon a dark night in the close presence of a formidable enemy, was a most difficult operation. The morning was spent in reconnaissance, and it was only at 3.15 p.m. that the advance could be made upon the main German defence, a trench just outside the north end of the wood. About 4 o'clock the Brigade swept on, and after a sharp bayonet fight gained the trench towards the north-east, but the Germans still held the centre and swept with their fire the portion in British possession. The 11th South Wales Borderers (2nd Gwents) held on splendidly, in spite of their heavy losses. The situation was now such, with only 300 yards to go to reach the German second line, that it was deemed well to relieve the 38th Division by the 21st Division, who had been selected for the coming battle. This change was carried out by the morning of July 12.

The action of the 38th Division in capturing Mametz Wood had been a very fine one, and the fruit of their victory was not only an important advance, but 398 prisoners, one field gun, three heavy guns, a howitzer

and a number of smaller pieces. It was the largest wood in the Somme district, and the importance attached to it by the Germans may be gathered from the fact that men of five different German regiments, the 3rd Lehr, 16th Bavarians, 77th, 83rd, and 122nd, were identified among our opponents. Among many instances of individual valour should be mentioned that of Colonel Rhys Pryce of the Divisional Staff, who twice, revolver in hand, led the troops on where there was some temporary check or confusion. It is impossible to imagine anything more difficult and involved than some of this fighting, for apart from the abattis and other natural impediments of a tangled wood, the place was a perfect rabbit-warren of trenches, and had occasional land mines in it, which were exploded—some of them prematurely, so that it was the retreating Germans who received the full force of the blast. Burning petrol was also used continually in the defence, and frequently proved to be a two-edged weapon. Some of the garrison stood to their work with extraordinary courage, and nothing but the most devoted valour upon the part of their assailants could have driven them out. "Every man of them was killed where he stood," said a Welsh Fusilier, in describing the resistance of one group. "They refused offers of quarter right to the last, and died with cheers for the Kaiser or words of defiance on their lips. They were brave men, and we were very sorry indeed to have to kill them, for we could not but admire them for their courage." Such words give honour both to victors and vanquished.

Though the Welsh Division had overrun Mametz Wood from south to north, there was still one angle in the north-west which had lain out of their course, and had not been taken by them. This part of the wood was occupied on the evening of July 11 by the 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division, which had already performed such notable services upon the Somme. Eight field-guns were discovered in this part of the wood and were captured by the Brigade.

The situation had now greatly improved for the 17th Division in front of Quadrangle Support, for not only was Mametz Wood mostly in the hands of the Welsh, but the 23rd Division on the left now came forward again and occupied Bailiff Wood on the north of Contalmaison. Under these circumstances, the 50th Brigade on the right again attempted to get forward in order to keep level with the Welsh in the wood. Connection had not yet been made at that point, however, and the 7th East Yorks, who were the leading battalion, suffered heavy losses before being compelled to abandon the attempt.

Victory, however, was at last coming to reward the living and vindicate the dead. At four in the afternoon of July 10, the 23rd Division advanced from Bailiff Wood for its second assault upon Contalmaison. This time everything went to perfection, and the much-enduring infantry were able to take possession of the village, while a counter-attack by the 3rd Reserve Division of the Prussian Guards came under concentrated artillery fire, and was completely disorganised and destroyed.

It was the wounded of the Guard from this attack who were seen at Potsdam, and described by Mr. Curtin, the American journalist, in one of the most brilliant articles of the War. Carried into furniture vans, they were conveyed to their hospitals with every secrecy, in order to conceal from the populace the results of the encounter between the famous Corps and those men of the New Army who for more than a year had been the favourite butt of the *Witz-Blätter* of Berlin. Old Father Time has a humour of his own, and his laugh is usually the last. Besides the Guard the 70th Jaeger and the 10th, 114th, and 119th Regiments were included in this defeat.

The two bastions having fallen, the problem of the Quadrangle Support became a very different one, and the 51st Brigade, joining up with the right of the 23rd Division in the evening, was able to get hold of the left end of it. Even now, however, the Germans fought hard to the right, and both the 7th East Yorks and the 6th Dorsets had to push strongly before they could win through. They were encouraged in their efforts when, in the waning light, they were able to see small bodies of the enemy retiring in the distance out of the fringe of the wood. By ten o'clock that night the long task had been accomplished, and the dead might sleep in peace, for Quadrangle Support was in the hands of the 17th Division. They were relieved by the 21st Division on July 11.

At or about the same time as the relief of the 17th Division, the 23rd on their left were also relieved, their line being taken over by Strickland's 1st Division. Since the capture of Contalmaison and the heavy repulse of the German Guard Division the British had made further progress, so that both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa to the north of the village were firmly in their hands. The instructions to the 1st Division were to endeavour to improve this advantage, and an advance was at once made which, occurring as it did upon the night of July 15, may be best described under the heading which treats of the breaking of the second German line.

Having dealt with the operations upon the left and those in the centre of the intermediate German position, we will now turn to those upon the right, which are concerned with the 18th and the 30th Divisions, supported by the 9th. After the fall of Montauban, these Divisions advanced, the one upon Caterpillar Wood and the other to Bernafoy Wood, both of which were occupied. For the occupation of Bernafoy Wood the 27th Brigade of the 9th Division had been put at the disposal of General Shea of the 30th, and this force occupied the position without much loss, but were exposed afterwards to a most deadly shell-fire, which caused heavy losses to the two front battalions—the 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers and the 6th Scots Rifles. The wood was held, however, together with three guns, which were found within it. On July 5 the 30th Division handed over that line to the 9th. On that date they sustained the heavy loss of Colonels Trotter and Smith—both killed by distant shell-fire.

The rest of the 30th Division only lasted for a very few days, and on July 7 they were facing the enemy position from Malzhorn Farm upon the right to Trones Wood upon the left, and were about to be initiated in that terrible wood fighting which cost so dear. There is no fighting in the world which is more awesome to the mind and more exhausting to the body than such combats as these amid the ghostly atmosphere of ruined woods, with Death lurking in the shadows on every hand, and the thresh of the shells beating without cessation by night and by day. Trones, Mametz, High Wood, Delville—never has the quiet, steadfast courage of the British soldier been put to a more searching test than in those haunts of gloom and horror. In the case of Trones Wood some account must be given of the peculiar tactical difficulties of the situation, and then we shall turn to the sombre but glorious narrative of the successive attacks.

The tactical problem was a remarkable one. The wood was connected up on the German side by good lines of trenches with Malzhorn Farm on the south, with Guillemont on the east, and with Waterlot Farm on the north—each of these points being from 400 to 700 yards away. It was also commanded by a large number of heavy guns. The result was that if the British stormers held the wood in strength, they were shelled out with heavy losses. If, on the other hand, the wood were lightly held, then the German infantry pouring in from the east and north could drive them out. The British, on the other hand, had no trenches leading up to the wood, though in other respects the Germans found the same difficulties in holding the place that they did. It was a terrible contest in tenacity between the infantry of the two nations, and if in the end the British won, it must at least be admitted that there was no evidence of any demoralisation among the Germans on account of the destruction of their main line. They fought well, were well led, and were admirably supported by their guns.

The first attack upon Trones Wood was carried out from the south on July 8 by the 21st Brigade. There was no suspicion then of the strength of the German position, and the attack was repulsed within a couple of hours, the 2nd Yorks being the chief sufferers.

There was more success upon the right of the line where the French were attacking Malzhorn Farm. A company of the 2nd Wilts made their way successfully to help our Allies, and gained a lodgment in the German trenches which connect Malzhorn Farm with the south end of Trones Wood. With the aid of some of the 19th Manchesters this position was extended, and two German counter-attacks were crushed by rifle-fire. The position in this southern trench was permanently held, and it acted like a self-registering gauge for the combat in Trones Wood, for when the British held the wood the whole Southern Trench was British, while a German success in the wood always led to a contraction in the holding of the trench.

At one o'clock upon July 8 the 21st Brigade renewed their attempt,

attacking with the 2nd Wiltshires in the lead from the side of Bernafoy Wood. The advance was a fine one, but Colonel Gillson was badly wounded, and his successor in command, Captain Mumford, was killed. About three o'clock the 18th and 19th Manchesters came up in support. German bombers were driving down from the north, and the fighting was very severe. In the evening some of the Liverpools came up to strengthen the line, and it was determined to draw out the weakened 21st, and replace it by the 90th Brigade. At the same time a party of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers of this Brigade took over Malzhorn Trench, and rushed the farmhouse itself, capturing 67 prisoners. The whole of the trench was afterwards cleared up with two machine-guns and 100 more prisoners. It was a fine bit of work, worthy of that splendid battalion.

On July 9 at 6.40 a.m. began the third attack upon Trones Wood led by the 17th Manchesters. They took over the footing already held, and by eight o'clock they had extended it along the eastern edge, practically clearing the wood of German infantry. There followed, however, a terrific bombardment, which caused such losses that the 17th and their comrades of the 18th were ordered to fall back once more, with the result that the Scots Fusiliers had to give up the northern end of their Malzhorn Trench. An enemy counter-attack at 4.30 p.m. had no success. A fresh British attack (the fourth) was at once organised, and carried out by the 16th Manchesters, who at 6.40 p.m. got into the south end of the wood once more, finding a scattered fringe of their comrades who had held on there. Some South African Highlanders from the 9th Division came up to help them during the night. This fine battalion lost many men, including their colonel, Jones, while supporting the attack from Bernafoy Wood. In the morning the position was better, but a gap had been left between the Manchesters in the wood and the Scots in the trench, through which the enemy made their way. After much confused fighting and very heavy shelling, the evening of July 10 found the wood once more with the Germans.

In the early morning of July 11 the only remaining British Brigade, the 89th, took up the running. At 3.50 the 2nd Bedfords advanced to the attack. Aided by the 19th King's Liverpools, the wood was once again carried and cleared of the enemy, but once again a terrific shell-fall weakened the troops to a point where they could not resist a strong attack. The Bedfords fought magnificently, and had lost 50 per cent. of their effectives before being compelled to withdraw their line. The south-east corner of the wood was carried by the swarming enemy, but the south-west corner was still in the hands of our utterly weary and yet tenacious infantry. At 9.30 the same evening the 17th King's Liverpools pushed the Germans back once more, and Colonel Fairfax consolidated the ground won at the southern end. So the matter stood when the exhausted division was withdrawn for a short rest, while the 18th Division took up their difficult task. The Lancashire men had left it unfinished, but their conduct had been heroic, and they had left their

successors that one corner of consolidated ground which was needed as a jumping-off place for a successful attack.

It was the 55th Brigade of the 18th Division which first came up to take over the fighting line. A great responsibility was placed upon the general officer commanding, for the general attack upon the German line had been fixed for July 14, and it was impossible to proceed with it until the British held securely the covering line upon the flank. Both Trones Wood and the Malzhorn Trench were therefore of much more than local importance, so that when Haig found himself at so late a date as July 12 without command of this position, it was a very serious matter which might have far-reaching consequences. The orders now were that within a day, at all costs, Trones Wood must be in British hands, and to the 55th, strengthened by two battalions of the 54th Brigade, was given the desperate task. The situation was rendered more difficult by the urgency of the call, which gave the leaders no time in which to get acquainted with the ground.

The German defence had become a strong one. They had formed three strong points, marked S1, S2, and S3 in the Diagram, p. 366. These, together with several trenches, dotted here and there, broke up every attack, and when once order was broken it was almost impossible in the tangle and obscurity for the troops to preserve any cohesion or direction. Those troops which penetrated between the strong points found themselves with the enemy in their rear and were in a disorganised condition, which was only overcome by the individual bravery of the men who refused to be appalled by the difficult situation in which they found themselves.

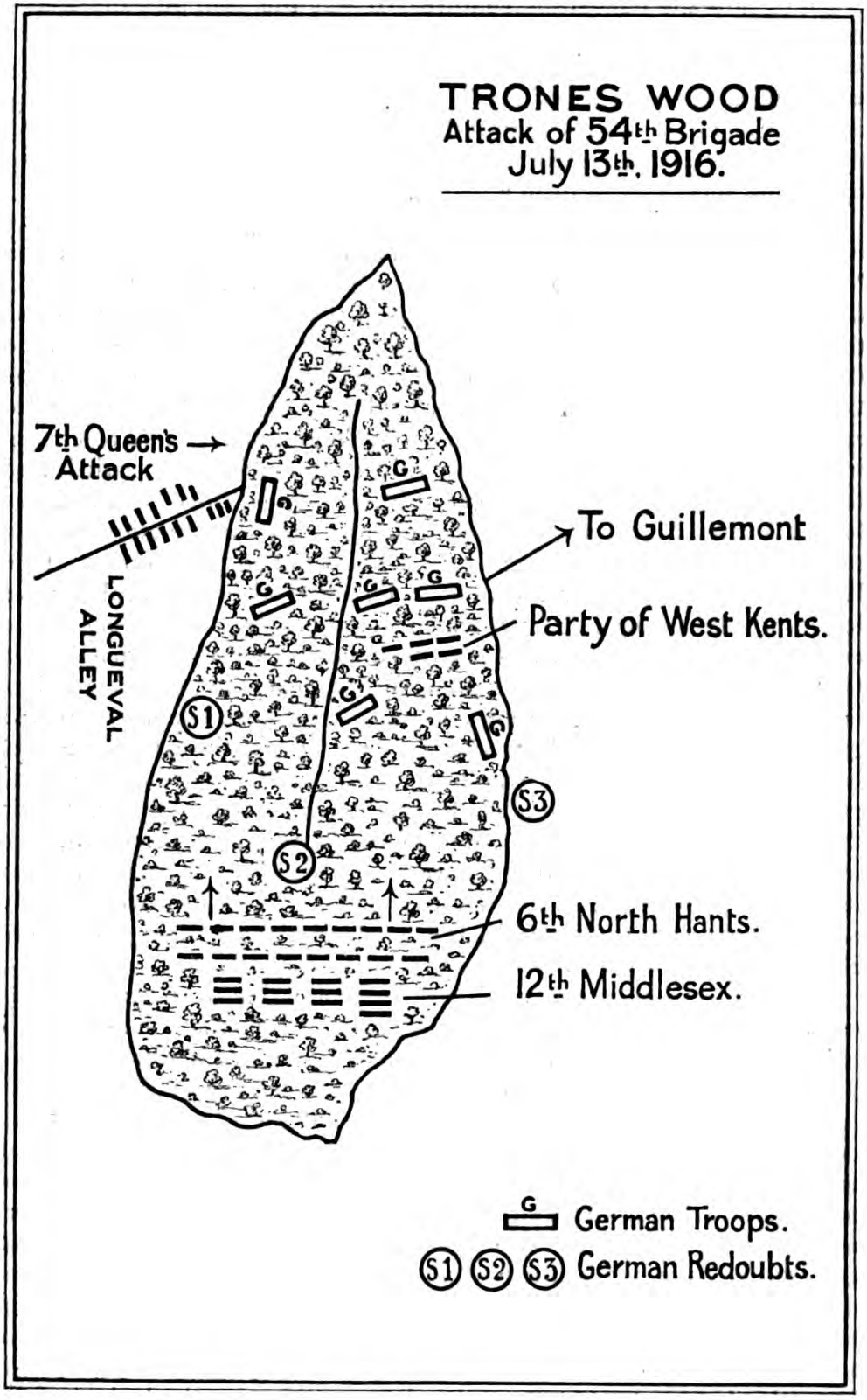
The attack of the 55th Brigade was made from the sunken road immediately south of the wood, and it ran at once into so heavy a barrage that it lost heavily before it had reached even the edge of its objective. The 7th West Kents, who formed the attacking force, were not to be denied, however, and they pushed forward through a deepening gloom, for it was seven in the evening before the signal had been given. While the Kents fought up from the south, the Queen's Surreys attempted to win a lodgment on the north-west where the Longueval Alley led up from Bernafoy Wood. They also suffered heavily from the barrage, and only a few brave men reached the top of the wood and held on there for some hours. The West Kents passed the line of strong points and then lost touch with each other, until they had resolved themselves into two or three separate groups holding together as best they could in the darkness with the enemy all round them, and with the communications cut behind them. The telephone wires had all been broken by the barrage, and the anxious commanders could only know that the attack had failed, that no word came back from the front, and that a British battalion had been swallowed up by the wood.

The orders were peremptory, however, that the position should be taken, and General Maxse, without hesitation, threw a second of his

brigades into the dangerous venture. It was the 54th Brigade which moved to the attack. It was just past midnight when the soldiers went forward. The actual assault was carried out from south to north, on the same line as the advance of the West Kents. The storming battalions under Colonel Maxwell were the 6th Northamptons and 12th Middlesex, the former to advance direct through the wood and the latter to clean up behind them and to form a defensive flank on the right.

The attack was a fine feat of arms. Though heavily hit by the barrage, the Northamptons, closely followed by two companies of the Middlesex, pushed their way into the wood and onwards. It was pitch dark, and the men were stumbling continually over the fallen trees and the numerous dead bodies which lay among the undergrowth. None the less, they kept touch, and plodded steadily onwards. The gallant Clark was shot, but Captain Shepherd led the Northamptons against the central strong point, for it had been wisely determined to leave no enemy in the rear. Shortly after dawn on July 14 this point was carried, and the Northamptons were able to get forward. By 8 o'clock the wood was full of scattered groups of British infantry, but the situation was so confused that the colonel went forward and rallied them into a single line which formed across the wood. This line advanced until it came level with the strong point S3, which was captured. A number of the enemy then streamed out of the eastern side of the wood, making for Guillemont. These men came under British machine-gun fire and lost heavily. The remaining strong point at S1 had been taken by a mixed group of Buffs and Middlesex about 9 a.m. These three strong points having been occupied, the whole wood was now swept clear and was permanently occupied, though still subjected to very heavy shell-fire by the enemy. Thus, the right flank of the army was covered, and the important operations of July 14 were enabled to go forward without danger of molestation. Of the two gallant battalions who mainly achieved this important result, the losses of the Northamptons were about 300, and of the Middlesex about half that amount.

There was an epilogue which was as honourable to the troops concerned as the main attack had been. This concerns the fate of the men of West Kent, who, as will be remembered, had been cut off in the wood. The main body of these, under the regimental adjutant, Captain Anstruther, together with a few men of the Queen's, formed a small defensive position and held out in the hope of relief. They were about 200 all told, and their position seemed so hopeless that every excuse might have been found for surrender. They held out all night, however, and in the morning they were successfully relieved by the advance of the 54th Brigade. It is true that no severe attack was made upon them during the night, but their undaunted front may have had something to do with their immunity. Once, in the early dawn, a German officer actually came up to them under the impression that they were his own men—his last mistake upon earth. It is notable that the badges of six


TRONES WOOD
Attack of 54th Brigade
July 13th, 1916.
7th Queen's
Attack
LONGUEVAL
ALLEY
To Guillemont
Party of West Kents.
6th North Hants.
12th Middlesex.
S1
S2
S3
G
German Troops.
S1 S2 S3 German Redoubts.

different German regiments were found in the wood, which seemed to indicate that it was held by picked men or volunteers from many units. " To the death ! " was their password for the night, and to their honour be it said that they were mostly true to it. So also were the British stormers, of whom Sir Henry Rawlinson said : " The night attack on and final capture of Trones Wood were feats of arms which will rank high among the best achievements of the British Army."

An account of this fortnight of desperate and almost continuous fighting is necessarily concerned chiefly with the deeds of the infantry, but it may fitly end with a word as to the grand work of the artillery, without whom in modern warfare all the valour and devotion of the foot-soldier are but a useless self-sacrifice. Nothing could exceed the endurance and the technical efficiency of the gunners. No finer tribute could be paid them than that published at the time from one of their own officers, which speaks with heart and with knowledge : " They worked their guns with great accuracy and effect without a moment's cessation by day or by night for ten days, and I don't believe any artillery have ever had a higher or a longer test or have done it more splendidly. And these gunners, when the order came that we must pull out and go with the infantry—do you think they were glad or willing ? Devil a bit ! They were sick as muck and only desired to stay on and continue killing Boches. And these men a year ago not even soldiers—much less gunners ! Isn't it magnificent—and is it not enough to make the commander of such men uplifted ? " No cold and measured judgment of the historian can ever convey their greatness with the conviction produced by one who stood by them in the thick of the battle and rejoiced in the manhood of those whom he had himself trained and led.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Breaking of the Second Line. July 14, 1916

The great night advance—The Leicester Brigade at Bazentin—Assault by 7th Division—Success of the 3rd Division—Desperate fight of 9th Division at Longueval—Operations of 1st Division on flank—Cavalry advance.

WITH the fall of Mametz Wood, the impending capture of Trones Wood upon the right, and the close investment of Ovillers upon the left flank, the army could now face the second line of German defences. The ground in front of them sloped gently upwards until it reached the edge of a rolling plateau. Upon this edge were three villages: Little Bazentin upon the left, Grand Bazentin in the centre, and Longueval upon the right, all nestling among orchards and flanked by woods. Through these lay the enemy's position, extending to Pozières upon the one side, and through Guillemont to the French junction on the other. These two flanks were for the time to be disregarded, and it was determined to strike a heavy frontal blow which would, as it was hoped, crush in the whole middle of their line, leaving the sides to be dealt with at our leisure. It was a most formidable obstacle, for all three villages were as strong as the German sappers could make them, and were connected up with great lines of trenches, the whole front which was to be attacked covering about 6000 yards. A small wood screened Little Bazentin on the left, while behind Longueval, facing the right attack, was a larger plantation which, under the name of Delville Wood, has won for itself a terrible and glorious name in British military history.

The heavy guns had been advanced and the destruction of the German wire and trenches had begun upon July 11. On the evening of the 13th the troops mustered for the battle. They were all divisions which had already been heavily engaged, and some of them had endured losses in the last fortnight which might have seemed to be sufficient to put them out of action. None the less they were not only eager for the fight, but they were, as it proved, capable of performing the most arduous and delicate of all operations, a night march in the face of the enemy. More than a thousand yards of clear ground lay at many points between the British outposts and the German trenches. To cover it in daylight meant, as they had so often learned, a heavy loss. It was

ordered, therefore, that the troops should move up to within striking distance in the darkness, and dash home with the first glimmer of morning light. There was no confusion, no loss of touch as 25,000 stormers took up their stations, and so little sound that the Germans seem to have been unaware of the great gathering in their immediate front. It was ticklish work, lying for hours within point-blank range with no cover, but the men endured it as best they might. With the first faint dawn the long line sprang to their feet and with a cheer dashed forward at the German trenches, while the barrage rose and went roaring to eastward whence help might come to the hard-pressed German defence.

On the extreme right of the section attacked was Strickland's 1st Regular Division, which took no part in the actual advance but held the flank in the neighbourhood of Contalmaison Villa, and at one period of the day sent forward its right hand battalion, the 1st North Lancashires, to aid their neighbours in the fight.

The left of the line of actual attack was formed by Campbell's 21st Division opposite to Bazentin-le-Petit. This attack was carried out upon a single brigade front, and the Brigade in question was the 110th from the 37th Division. This division made no appearance as a unit in the Battle of the Somme, but was several times engaged in its separate brigades. On this occasion the 110th, consisting entirely of men of Leicester, took the place of the 63rd Brigade, much reduced by previous fighting. Their immediate objective was the north end of Bazentin-le-Petit village and the whole of the wood of that name. Led by the 8th and 9th Leicesters the brigade showed, as has so often been shown before, that the British soldier never fights better than in his first engagement. Owing to the co-operation of the 1st Division and to a very effective smoke screen upon their left, their advance was not attended with heavy loss in the earlier stages, and they were able to flow over the open and into the trenches opposite, capturing some 500 prisoners. They continued to fight their way with splendid steadiness through the wood and held it for the remainder of the day. Their greatest trouble came from a single German strong point which was 200 yards away from the corner of the wood, and, therefore, beyond their objective. The machine-guns in this redoubt caused great loss whenever the edge of the wood was approached. This strong point was destroyed next day, but meanwhile the position was consolidated and was firmly held for the next four days, after which the division was withdrawn for a rest.

On the right of the 21st Division lay the 7th Division, to which had been assigned the assault of Bazentin-le-Petit village. The leading brigade was Deverall's 20th, and the storming battalions, the 8th Devons and 2nd Borderers crept up to their mark in the darkness of a very obscure night. At 3.25 the barrage was lifted, and so instantaneous was the attack that there was hardly an interval between the last of the shrapnel and the first of the stormers. The whole front line was

captured in an instant, and the splendid infantry rushed on without a pause to the second line, springing into the trenches once more at the moment that the gunners raised their pieces. In ten minutes both of these powerful lines had fallen. Several dug-outs were found to be crammed with the enemy, including the colonel of the Lehr Battalion, and with the machine-guns which they had been unable to hoist into their places before the wave had broken over them. When these were cleared, the advance was carried on into Bazentin-le-Grand Wood, which was soon occupied from end to end. A line in front of the wood was taken up and consolidated.

In the meanwhile Steele's 22nd Brigade had taken up the work, the 2nd Warwicks pushing forward and occupying, without any opposition from the disorganised enemy, the Circus Trench, while the 2nd Royal Irish advanced to the attack of the village of Bazentin-le-Petit. Their leading company rushed the position with great dash, capturing the colonel commanding the garrison, and about 100 of his men. By 7.30 the place was in their hands, and the leading company had pushed into a trench on the far side of it, getting into touch with the Leicesters on their left.

The Germans were by no means done with, however, and they were massing thickly to the north and north-east of the houses where some scattered orchards shrouded their numbers and their dispositions. As the right of the brigade seemed to be in the air, a brave sergeant, Pulteney of the 2nd Warwicks, set off to establish touch with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, who formed the left unit of the 3rd Division upon the right. As he returned he spotted a German machine-gun in a cellar, entered it, killed the gunner, and captured four guns. The wings of the two divisions were then able to co-operate and to clear the ground in front of them.

The Irishmen in the advance were still in the air, however, having got well ahead of the line, and they were now assailed by a furious fire from High Wood, followed by a determined infantry assault. This enfilade fire caused heavy losses, and the few survivors of those who garrisoned the exposed trench were withdrawn to the shelter afforded by the outskirts of the village. There and elsewhere the Lewis guns had proved invaluable, for every man of intelligence in the battalion had been trained to their use, and in spite of gunners being knocked out, there was never any lack of men to take their place. The German counter-attack pushed on, however, and entered the village, which was desperately defended not only by the scattered infantrymen who had been driven back to it, but also by the consolidating party from the 54th Field Company Royal Engineers and half the 24th Manchester Pioneer Battalion. At this period of the action a crowd of men from various battalions had been driven down to the south end of the village in temporary disorganisation due to the rapidity of the advance and the sudden severity of the counter-attack. These men were re-formed by

Captain Lowe, the adjutant of the Irish, and were led by him against the advancing Germans, whom they drove back with the bayonet, finally establishing themselves on the northern edge of the Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, which they held until relieved later by the 2nd Gordons of the 20th Brigade. At the same time the village itself was cleared by the 2nd Warwicks, while the 1st Welsh Fusiliers drove the Germans out of the line between the windmill and the cemetery. The trench held originally by the Irish was retaken, and in it was found Captain Rutherford, who had been badly wounded and left for a time in the hands of the enemy. He reported that they would not dress him, and prodded at him with their bayonets, but that an officer had stopped them from killing him. No further attempt was made by the Germans to regain the position of Bazentin. The losses, especially those of the Royal Irish, had been very heavy during the latter part of the engagement.

Much had been done, but the heavy task of the 7th Division was not yet at an end. At 3.20 p.m. the reserve Brigade (91st) were ordered to attack the formidable obstacle of High Wood, the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division (Landon) co-operating from the left side, while a handful of cavalry from the 7th Dragoon Guards and 20th Deccan Horse made an exhilarating, if premature, appearance upon the right flank, to which some allusion is made at the end of this chapter. The front line of the 91st Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Queen's Surreys and 1st South Staffords, marched forward in the traditional style of the British line, taking no notice of an enfilade fire from the Switch Trench, and beating back a sortie from the wood. At the same time the Brigadier of the 100th Brigade upon the left pushed forward his two leading battalions, the 1st Queen's Surreys and the 9th Highland Light Infantry, to seize and hold the road which led from High Wood to Bazentin-le-Petit. This was done in the late evening of July 14, while their comrades of the 7th Division successfully reached the south end of the wood, taking three field-guns and 100 prisoners. The Queen's and part of the Highland Light Infantry were firmly in possession of the connecting road, but the right flank of the Highlanders was held up owing to the fact that the north-west of the wood was still in the hands of the enemy and commanded their advance. We will return to the situation which developed in this part of the field during the succeeding days after we have taken a fuller view of the doings upon the rest of the line during the battle of July 14. It may be said here, however, that the facility with which a footing was established in High Wood proved to be as fallacious as the parallel case of Mametz Wood, and that many a weary week was to pass, and many a brave man give his heart's blood, before it was finally to be included in the British lines. For the present, it may be stated that the 91st Brigade could not hold the wood because it was enfiladed by the uncaptured Switch Trench, and that they therefore retired after dusk on the 15th.

To return to the story of the main battle. The centre of the attack

was carried out by Haldane's 3rd Division, one of the most famous units in the Army, though it now only retained three of the veteran battalions which had held the line at Mons. The task of the 3rd Division was to break the centre of the German line from Grand Bazentin upon the left where it touched the 7th to Longueval on the right where it joined with the 9th Division. The 8th Brigade was on the right, the 9th upon the left, while the 76th was in support. The attacking troops advanced in the darkness in fours, with strong patrols in front, and deployed within 200 yards of the German wire, capturing a German patrol which blundered into their ranks. Upon the word being given at the first faint gleam of dawn, the leading battalions trudged forward in the slow, determined fashion which had been found to be more effective than the spectacular charge. From the left the front line consisted of the 12th West Yorkshires, the 13th King's Liverpools, the 7th Shropshires, and the 8th East Yorks. The wire upon the right was found to be very partially cut, and the line of stormers was held up under a murderous fire. There were gaps here and there, however, so that Colonel Negus, at the head of his Shropshires, was able to force a passage at one point, while two gallant platoons of the East Yorkshires got through at another, and pushed boldly on into the German line. The main body, however, were forced for a time to take cover and keep up a fire upon the enemies' heads as they peered occasionally from over the parapets.

The left brigade had been more fortunate, finding the wire to be well cut. The front trench was not strongly held, and was easily carried. Both the King's Liverpools and the West Yorkshires got through, but as they had separated in the advance the greater part of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers were thrust into the gap and restored the line. These men, supported by Stokes guns, carried the village of Grand Bazentin by 6.30 a.m. There was a deadly fire from the Grand Bazentin Wood upon the left, but as the 7th Division advanced this died away, and the 12th West Yorkshires were able to get round to the north edge of the village but could get no farther on account of the hold-up of the 8th Brigade upon the right. There was a considerable delay, but at last by 1 p.m. a renewed bombardment had cut the wires, and strong bombing parties from the supporting battalions, the 2nd Royal Scots and 1st Scots Fusiliers, worked down the front trench from each end. The whole brigade was then able to advance across the German front line, which was at once consolidated.

The losses in this attack had been heavy, the 12th West Yorkshires alone having 15 officers, including their colonel, and 350 men out of action. The results, however, were solid, as not only was the whole front of the German position crushed in, but 36 officers with 650 men were taken, together with four small howitzers, four field-guns, and fourteen machine-guns. A counter-attack was inevitable and consolidation was pushed forward with furious energy. " Every one was digging like madmen, all mixed up with the dead and the dying." One counter-

attack of some hundreds of brave men did charge towards them in the afternoon, but were scattered to the winds by a concentration of fire. The position was permanently held.

Furse's 9th Division was on the immediate right of the 3rd, facing Longueval, a straggling village which lay against the sinister background of Delville Wood. The Division was, as will be remembered, the first of the new armies, and had distinguished itself greatly at Loos. It had been entirely a Highland Division, but it had undergone a picturesque change by the substitution of the South African Infantry Brigade in place of the 28th. The attack upon Longueval was carried out by the 26th Brigade, the 8th Black Watch and 10th Argyll and Sutherlands in the lead, with the 9th Seaforths in support and the 5th Camerons in reserve. The advance was so fine as to rouse the deepest admiration from an experienced French officer who observed it. " Who would believe," he wrote, " that only a few months ago not one of these men knew anything of the soldier's profession ? They carried themselves as superbly as the Old Guard. Once I was near enough to see their faces as they deployed for attack under the devastating fire rained on them. . . . Their teeth were set and their eyes were fixed firmly on the goal towards which they were advancing. They were determined to achieve their object, and nothing but death would stop them. . . . Only those who were seriously hit thought of dropping out. The others pressed proudly on, regardless of the pain they suffered, and took part in the final charge in which the enemy were driven from the position." Such a tribute from a soldier to soldiers is indeed a glory.

The village and the trenches around it were taken with a splendid rush, but the fighting among the houses was of a desperate character, " more so," says the same observer, " than any I had seen before." The Germans refused to give or take quarter. When the Highlanders broke the line they cut off those who held the trench. The officer in command offered quarter. The German commander refused. " I and my men," he replied, " have orders to defend this ground with our lives. German soldiers know how to obey orders. We thank you for your offer, but we die where we stand." When the Highlanders finally took possession of the trench, all but a mere handful of the defenders were dead.

The defence was not everywhere equally desperate. As the Highlanders dashed past the trenches and into the scattered group of houses which marked the village, grey figures darted round corners, or rushed out with hands to heaven. Many prisoners were taken. Here and there groups of brave men sold their lives dearly, especially in some ruins at the east end of the village. The blast of fire from this place was so hot that for a moment the advance was staggered ; but a brave piper ran to the front, and the joyous lilt of " The Campbells are coming " sent the clansmen flooding onwards once more. Neither bullets, bombs, nor liquid fire could stop them, and the last German was stabbed or shot amid the broken walls of his shattered fort.

The main part or west of Longueval was now in the hands of the Scotsmen, but the place is peculiarly shaped, tailing away in a thin line to the northwards, the scattered houses in that direction being commanded by the wood, which runs right up to them on their southern side. It was clear that no complete conquest could be made until this wood also was in the hands of our stormers. The operation was a difficult one, and far too large to be carried out that day. The South African Brigade was therefore ordered up from Montauban, with instructions that they should attack Delville Wood at dawn of July 15.

Here we may break off the narrative of the battle of July 14, though it is difficult to do so, since these operations shade imperceptibly into each other, and the fighting never really came to an end. The main results, however, had become clear by that evening, and they amounted to a very great success, unalloyed by any failure. Every division had carried its point and added to its glories. Four villages, three woods, 6000 yards of front, and 2000 of depth had been added to our lines. Two thousand more prisoners had been taken, bringing the total for the fortnight to the substantial figure of 10,000; while twelve heavy and forty-two field-guns had also been taken during that time. Above all, the British had got their grip firmly upon the edge of the plateau, though many a weary day of fighting was to follow before the tenacious enemy had been driven from it, and the whole position was in British hands.

The reader is to understand clearly that though the operations of July 14 crushed in the face of the German line along the whole central position, the flanks both to the right and to the left were still inviolate. Upon the German right the whole range of powerful fortifications which extended through Pozières to Thiepval was untouched, while upon the German left the equally formidable line stretching from Longueval through Waterlot Farm and Guillemont to Falfemont Farm was also intact. It is correct, then, to say that the German second line had been stormed and penetrated, but it had not been captured throughout its full extent, and the greater part of the autumn campaign was to pass before this had been accomplished. The reduction of the German right wing will be recounted in the chapters which deal with Gough's Army, to whom the task was assigned. That of the left wing is covered by the narrative, which gives some details of the numerous, bloody, and protracted attacks which ended in the capture of Guillemont.

Meanwhile a word may be said as to the operations of the 1st Division, who had been upon the left of the attack on July 14, and had covered that flank without attempting an advance. On the night of July 15 they moved forward to attack the continuation of the German second line system between the captured Bazentin and the uncaptured Pozières. The attack was made by the 3rd Brigade, the 2nd Munsters being to the left, the 1st South Wales Borderers to the right, and the 1st Gloucesters in the centre with the 2nd Welsh in reserve. No less than 1200

yards of No Man's Land had to be crossed, but this was the more easy since both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa were occupied. A daring daylight reconnaissance by Colonel Pagan of the Gloucesters greatly helped the advance. The men were marched silently in platoons along the road, and then re-formed into line on the far side of the enemy's barrage, a manœuvre which in the darkness called for great steadiness and discipline, the line being dressed on a shaded lamp in the wood. On the word the eager troops pushed on with such speed that they crossed the German front trenches and were into the second before their own barrage had properly lifted. Pushing forward again, they were soon some hundreds of yards past their objective, where they halted close to the formidable Switch Line, having occupied all of the second line system in their front. Their formation was now so dense, and they were so close to the German machine-guns, that there was a possibility of disaster, which was increased by the Welsh Borderers losing direction and charging towards a body of men whom they dimly saw in front of them, who proved to be the Gloucesters. Fine restraint upon both sides prevented a catastrophe. Officers and men were now keen to push on and to attack the Switch Line, from which flares were rising ; but prudence forbade the opening up of an entirely new objective, and the men were drawn back to the captured German trenches. So ended a successful and almost bloodless operation.

It has been stated in the account of the action of July 14 that at one stage of the battle the cavalry advanced, but it was impossible to stop the description of a large movement to follow the fortunes of this small tactical stroke. None the less the matter was important, as being the first blood lost or drawn by cavalry, as cavalry, since the early months of the War. The idea was, that by a sudden move forward a small body of horse might establish itself in advance of the general line, and occupy a position which it could hold until the slower infantry came forward to take it over. This was actually done, and the movement may therefore be claimed as a successful experiment. The two detachments from the Deccan Horse and 7th Dragoon Guards galloped three miles from the rear, so as to be under observation as short a time as possible, passed swiftly through the lines of the astonished and jubilant infantry, and riding right into the enemy's position upon our right centre, established themselves in a strong point, and, aided by a friendly monoplane, beat off the German attacks. The advance was at six in the evening, and it was able to hold on until nightfall and to hand over in the early morning to the infantry. Some 40 Germans fell to lance or sabre, and a few were taken prisoners by the daring cavaliers, who suffered somewhat heavily, as they might well expect to do in so novel and desperate a venture.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

July 14 *to July* 31

Gradual advance of 1st Division—Hard fighting of 33rd Division at High Wood —The South Africans in Delville Wood—The great German counter-attack—Splendid work of 26th Brigade—Capture of Delville Wood by 99th Brigade—Indecisive fighting on the Guillemont front.

THE central fact of the situation after the battle of Bazentin was that although the second German line had been broken, the gap made was little more than three miles wide, and must be greatly extended upon either flank before a general advance upon the third line could take place. This meant that the left wing must push out in the Pozières direction, and that the right wing must get Ginchy and Guillemont. For the time the central British position was not an advantageous one, as it formed a long salient bending from High Wood through Delville Wood to Guillemont, so placed that it was open to direct observation all along, and exposed to converging fire which could be directed with all the more accuracy as it was upon points so well known to the Germans, into which the guns, communications, and reserves were now crammed. Sir Douglas Haig's great difficulties were increased by a long spell of wet and cloudy weather, which neutralised his advantages in the air. Everything was against the British General except the excellence of his artillery and the spirit of his troops. The French upon the right, whose tally of guns and prisoners was up to date higher than those of the British, had an equally hard front to attack, including the four strong villages of Maurepas, Le Forest, Raucourt, and Fregicourt, with many woods and systems of trenches. Their whole work in the battle had been worthy of their military history, and could not be surpassed, either in the dispositions of General Foch or in the valour of his men. Neither their infantry nor ours had ever relinquished one square yard that they had wrenched from the tight grip of the invader.

In each area of the battle of July 14 some pressing task was left to be accomplished, and the fighting was very severe at certain points for some days later. We shall first turn to the north of the line, where new divisions had come into action. One of these already mentioned was the 1st Division. It was indeed pleasing and reassuring to observe how

many of the new divisional generals were men whose names recalled good service as regimental officers. Many who now wore the crossed swords upon their shoulders had been battalion commanders in 1914. It is indeed well with an army when neither seniority nor interest but good hard service upon the field of battle puts officers in charge of the lives of men.

The 1st Division had taken the place of the 23rd after the fall of Contalmaison, and had pushed their way up until they were level with the line of their comrades on the right, whence in the manner described at the end of the last chapter they drove their line forward upon July 15. On the 20th they received a rebuff, however, the 1st Northants being held up by a very formidable German trench called Munster Alley. The ground already gained was consolidated, however, and the division lay with its left touching the Australians on the right of Gough's army, and its right connected with the 33rd Division, whose doings at High Wood will presently be considered. For the purpose of continuity of narrative it will be best to continue with a short summary of the doings of the 1st Division upon the left wing of the advance, their general task being to hold that flank against German counter-attacks, and to push forward wherever possible. It was continuous hard work which, like so many of these operations, could gain little credit, since there was no fixed point but only a maze of trenches in front of them. The storming of a nameless ditch may well call for as high military virtue as the taking of a historic village, and yet it seems a slighter thing in the lines of a bulletin. Munster Alley and the great Switch Line faced the 1st Division, two most formidable obstacles. On July 23, in the early morning, the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division attacked the Switch Line, in conjunction with the Australians, on the left, and the 19th Division to the right. The attack was held up, Colonel Bircham of the 2nd Rifles and many officers and men being killed. Colonel Bircham was a particularly gallant officer, who exposed himself fearlessly upon every occasion, and it is on record that when remonstrated with by his adjutant for his reckless disregard of danger, he answered, " You know as well as I do where a colonel of the 60th ought to be." Such lives are an example and such deaths an inspiration. Altogether the 2nd Rifles lost about 250 men in this night attack, and the other first line battalions—the 2nd Sussex, 10th Gloucesters, and 1st Cameron Highlanders—were all hard hit. The failure seems to have been partly due to misdirection in the dark.

On July 25 the 1st South Wales Borderers of the 3rd Brigade attacked Munster Alley, but were again unable to get forward on account of the machine-guns. Nothing daunted, the 2nd Welsh had another fling at Munster Alley next day, and actually took it, but had not weight enough to consolidate and to hold it. On the other hand, the British line was held inviolate, and a strong German attack on July 25 towards Pozières was repulsed with loss.

Babington's 23rd Division relieved the 1st and were in turn relieved by MacCracken's 15th in this sector, which faced the Switch Trench and Martinpuich. The Switch Line was exposed to a very heavy fire for several days, at the end of which it was attacked by this famous division, the same in number at least as that which had left nearly two-thirds of its rank and file upon the bloody slopes of Hill 70. On August 12 the advance was carried out with great dash, the 45th Brigade on the left and the 46th on the right. The attack was only partially successful, and the 46th Brigade was held up through the fact that the Germans had themselves been in the act of attack, so that the trenches were very strongly held. The operations continued, however, and the initial gains were enlarged, until on August 20 the whole Switch Line fell and was permanently consolidated.

Leaving this left sector we must turn to Landon's 33rd Division on its right, two battalions of which had got forward on July 15, as far as the line of the road connecting High Wood with Little Bazentin. The right flank of the Highland Light Infantry had been held up by fire from this wood, and in the evening the 91st Brigade of the 7th Division had evacuated the southern edge of the wood in order to allow of bombardment. That was the position on the night of July 15.

The line of the road was held all night, and early next morning the advance was ordered upon the German Switch Trench in front. It was hoped that the wood had been cleared during the night, but in the morning the Highlanders found themselves still galled by the continual fire upon their right. It was clear that the attack could not go forward with such an impediment upon the flank—one more instance of a brigade being held up by a handful of concealed men. It was hoped that the enemy had been silenced, and the attack was made, but no sooner had it developed than a murderous fire burst from the wood, making it impossible for the Highlanders to get along farther than the road. The 1st Queen's, however, being farther from the wood were able to get on to the Switch Trench, but found it heavily wired and stiff with men. Such a battalion does not take " No " easily, and their colonel, with a large proportion of their officers and men, was stretched in front of the fatal wire before it became evident that further perseverance would mean destruction. The 16th Rifles and half the 2nd Worcesters, the remaining battalions of the 100th Brigade, were brought up, but no further advance was possible until the wire could be cut by the guns. About four in the afternoon of July 16 the remains of the brigade were back in the road from which they had started. The attack had failed, partly from the enfilade fire of High Wood, partly from the impassable wire.

Carleton's 98th Brigade was on the left of the 100th, filling up the gap to Bazentin village. They had extended their right in order to help their sorely-tried comrades, and they had themselves advanced upon the line of the Switch Trench—the 1st Middlesex leading, with the 4th

Suffolks in support. The 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands with the 4th King's Liverpools were in reserve. They got well forward, but ceased their advance when it was found that no progress could be made upon the right. Thus, for the time, the division was brought to a stand. That night Mayne's 19th Brigade relieved the 100th, which had been very hard hit in this action. After the change the 1st Scottish Rifles and the 20th Royal Fusiliers formed the front line of the 19th Brigade, the Rifles in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the 7th on their right, while the Fusiliers were in touch with the 98th Brigade on their left.

The general situation did not admit of an immediate attack, and the Germans took advantage of the pause to strengthen and slightly to advance their position. On July 17 the hard-worked 21st Division on the left was drawn out, and both the 33rd and 7th had to extend their fronts. On the other hand, the 1st Division came in upon the left and occupied a portion of the Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The position at that time was roughly that the 7th Division covered the front from High Wood to Bazentin-le-Grand, the 33rd Division from Bazentin-le-Grand to Bazentin-le-Petit, and the 1st was from their left to Pozières.

On July 18 there was a very heavy German attack upon Delville Wood, which is treated elsewhere. This was accompanied by a severe barrage fire upon the Bazentins and upon Mametz Wood, which continued all day. That night Bridge's 19th Division came into line, taking over Bazentin-le-Petit, both village and wood. The 33rd Division moved to the right and took some pressure off the 7th, which had done such long and arduous service. These incessant changes may seem wearisome to the reader, but without a careful record of them the operations would become chaos to any one who endeavoured to follow them in detail. It is to be emphasised that though divisions continually changed, the corps to which they temporarily belonged did not change, or only at long intervals, so that when you are within its area you can always rely upon it that in this particular case Horne of the Fifteenth Corps is the actual brain which has the immediate control of the battle.

As the pressure upon Congreve's Thirteenth Corps on the right at Delville Wood and elsewhere was considerable, it was now deemed advisable to attack strongly by the Fifteenth Corps. The units for attack were the 33rd Division on the left, and the depleted 7th on their right. There was to be no attack on the left of the 33rd Division, but the 56th Brigade of the 19th Division was handed over to the 33rd Division to strengthen the force. The objectives to be attacked were once again High Wood (Bois des Foureaux), Switch Trench, and the connecting trench between them. The 7th Division attacked east of the wood on the line between it and Delville Wood.

The assault upon High Wood was assigned to the 19th Brigade. The 2nd Worcesters of the 98th Brigade were pushed out so as to cover the left flank of the assaulting column. At 2 a.m. of July 20 the two advance battalions of stormers, the 5th Scottish Rifles on the right, the 1st

Scottish Rifles upon the left, were formed up in open ground outside the British wire. Preceded by scouts, they went silently forward through the gloom until they approached the south-western edge of the wood. A terrific bombardment was going on, and even those stout northern hearts might have quailed at the unknown dangers of that darksome wood, lit from moment to moment by the red glare of the shells. As the barrage lifted, the wave of infantry rushed forward, the 5th Scottish Rifles making for the eastern edge, while the 1st Regular Battalion pushed on in the endeavour to win through and secure the northern edge.

It was speedily found that the tenacious enemy had by no means loosened his grip of the wood. A portion of the Switch Trench runs through it, and this was strongly held, a line of spirting flames amid the shadow of the shattered trees. Machine-guns and wire were everywhere. None the less, the dour Scots stuck to their point, though the wood was littered with their dead. Both to east and to north they slowly pushed their way onwards to their objectives. It was a contest of iron wills, and every yard won was paid for in blood. By 9 o'clock the whole of the southern half of the wood had been cleared, the leading troops being helped by the 20th Fusiliers, who followed behind them, clearing up the lurking Germans. At that hour the northern end of the wood was still strongly held by the enemy, while the stormers had become much disorganised through loss of officers and through the utter confusion and disintegration which a night attack through a wood must necessarily entail.

The remaining battalion of the 19th Brigade, the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, was, at this critical moment, thrown into the fight. A heavy barrage was falling, and considerable losses were met with before the wood was entered, but the Fusiliers went forward with splendid steadiness and dash, their colonel, Crawshay, taking entire local command. In the early afternoon, having got abreast of the exhausted Scottish Rifles, who had been under the hottest fire for nearly twelve hours, the Welsh attacked the north end of the wood, their advance being preceded by a continuous fire from our Stokes mortars, that portable heavy artillery which has served us so well. The enemy was still unabashed, but the advance was irresistible, and by 7 p.m. the British were for a time in possession of the whole of the blood-sodden plantation. It was a splendid passage of arms, in which every devilry which an obstinate and ingenious defence could command was overcome by the inexorable British infantry. The grim pertinacity of the Scots who stood that long night of terror, and the dash of the Welsh who carried on the wave when it was at the ebb, were equally fine ; and solid, too, was the work of the public school lads of the 20th Fusiliers, who gleaned behind the line. So terrific was the shell-fire of the disappointed Germans upon the north end of the wood, that it was impossible to hold it, but the southern part was consolidated by the 18th Middlesex Pioneer Battalion and by the 11th Company Royal Engineers.

Whilst the 33rd Division stormed High Wood, their neighbours on

the right, the 7th Division, depleted by heavy losses but still full of spirit, had been given the arduous and important task of capturing the roads running south-west from High Wood to Longueval. The assaulting battalions, the 2nd Gordons on the left and the 8th Devons on the right, Aberdeen and Plymouth in one battle line, advanced and took their first objective through a heavy barrage. Advancing farther, they attempted to dig in, but they had got ahead of the attack upon the left, and all the machine-guns both of Switch Trench and of High Wood were available to take them in flank and rear. It was a deadly business—so deadly that out of the two leading platoons of Gordons only one wounded officer and five men ever got back. Finally, the whole line had to crawl back in small groups to the first objective, which was being consolidated. That evening Stephen's 5th Division took over the lines of the 7th, who were at last drawn out for a rest. The relief was marked by one serious mishap, as Colonel Gordon, commanding a battalion of his clansmen, was killed by a German shell.

It has been stated that the 56th Brigade of the 19th Division had been placed under the orders of the 33rd Division during these operations. Its rôle was to cover the left flank of the attack and to keep the Germans busy in the Switch Line position. With this object the 56th Brigade, with the 57th Brigade on its left, advanced its front line on the night of July 22, a movement in which the 7th South Lancashires on the right of the 56th Brigade were in close touch with the 2nd Worcesters on the left of the 100th Brigade. Going forward in the darkness with German trenches in front of them and a raking fire from High Wood beating upon their flank the Lancashire men lost heavily and were unable to gain a footing in the enemy's position. This brigade had already suffered heavily from shell-fire in its advance to the front trenches. Two deaths which occurred during this short episode may be cited as examples of the stuff which went to the building up of Britain's new armies. Under the shell-fire fell brave old Lieutenant Webber, a subaltern in the field, a Master of Foxhounds at home, father of another dead subaltern, and 64 years old. In the night operation, gallantly leading his company, and showing his comrades in the dark how to keep direction by astronomy, fell Captain Gerard Garvin, student, poet, essayist, and soldier, just 20 years of age. A book might be written which would be a national inspiration dealing with the lives of those glorious youths who united all that is beautiful in the mind with all that is virile in the body, giving it unreservedly in their country's cause. They are lives which are more reminiscent of Sidney, Spenser, and the finer of the Elizabethans than anything we could have hoped to evolve in these later days. Raymond Asquith, Rupert Brooke, Charles Lister, Gerard Garvin, Julian Grenfell, Donald Hankey, Francis Ledwidge, Neil Primrose, these are some at least of this finest flower of British culture and valour, men who sacrificed to the need of the present their inheritance as the natural leaders of the future.

Though the 19th Division was able to make no progress on the night of July 22, on the next night one of their brigades, the 58th, reinforced by two other battalions, made a strong movement forward, capturing the strong point upon the edge of the wood which had wrought the mischief the night before, and also through the fine work of the 10th Warwicks and 7th King's Own carrying the whole British line permanently forward on the right, though they could make no headway on the left. Some conception of the services of the 19th Division may be gathered from the fact that during the month of July it had 6500 casualties.

The 33rd Division was given a well-deserved rest after their fine exploit in High Wood. During seven days' fighting it had lost heavily in officers and men. Of individual battalions the heaviest sufferers had been the two Scottish Rifle battalions, the 20th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Queen's Surreys, 9th Highland Light Infantry, and very specially the 16th King's Royal Rifles.

Whilst this very severe fighting had been going on upon the left centre of the British advance, an even more arduous struggle had engaged the troops upon the right, where the Germans had a considerable advantage, since the whole of Delville Wood and Longueval formed the apex of a salient which jutted out into their position, and was open to a converging artillery fire from several directions. This terrible fight, which reduced the 9th Scottish Division to about the strength of a brigade, and which caused heavy losses also to the 3rd Division, who struck in from the left flank in order to help their comrades, was carried on from the time when the Highland Brigade captured the greater part of the village of Longueval, as already described in the general attack upon July 14.

On the morning after the village was taken, the South African Brigade had been ordered to attack Delville Wood. This fine brigade, under Lukin, a South African veteran, was composed of four battalions, the first representing the Cape Colony, the second Natal and the Orange River, the third the Transvaal, and the fourth the South African Scotsmen. If South Africa could only give battalions where others gave brigades or divisions, it is to be remembered that she had campaigns upon her own frontiers in which her manhood was deeply engaged. The European contingent was mostly British, but it contained an appreciable proportion of Boers, who fought with all the stubborn gallantry which we have good reason to associate with the name. Apart from the infantry, it should be mentioned that South Africa had sent six heavy batteries, a fine hospital, and many labour detachments and special services, including a signalling company which had the reputation of being the very best in the army, every man having been a civilian expert.

The South Africans advanced at dawn, and their broad line of skirmishers pushed its way rapidly through the wood, sweeping all opposition before it. By noon they occupied the whole tract with the

exception of the north-west corner. This was the corner which abutted upon the houses north of Longueval, and the murderous machine-guns in these buildings held the Africans off. By night the whole perimeter of the wood had been occupied, and the brigade was stretched round the edges of the trees and undergrowth. Already they were suffering heavily, not only from the Longueval guns upon their left, but from the heavy German artillery which had their range to a nicety and against which there was no defence. With patient valour they held their line, and endured the long horror of the shell-fall during the night.

Whilst the South Africans were occupying Delville Wood, Dickens' 27th Brigade had a task which was as arduous, and met in as heroic a mood as that of their comrades on the day before. Their attack was upon the orchards and houses to the north and east of Longueval, which had been organised into formidable strong points and garrisoned by desperate men. These strong points were especially dangerous on account of the support which they could give to a counter-attack, and it was thus that they did us great mischief. The Scottish Borderers, Scots Fusiliers, and Royal Scots worked slowly forward during the day, at considerable cost to themselves. Every house was a fortress mutually supporting every other one, and each had to be taken by assault. " I saw one party of half a dozen Royal Scots rush headlong into a house with a yell, though there were Germans at every window. Three minutes later one of the six came out again, but no more shots ever came from that house." Such episodes, with ever-varying results, made up that long day of desperate fighting, which was rendered more difficult by the heavy German bombardment. The enemy appeared to be resigned to the loss of the Bazentins, but all their energy and guns were concentrated upon the reconquest of Longueval and Delville Wood. Through the whole of the 16th the shelling was terribly severe, the missiles pitching from three separate directions into the projecting salient. Furious assaults and heavy shell-falls alternated for several days, while clouds of bombers faced each other in a deadly and never-ending pelting match. It was observed as typical of the methods of each nation that while the Germans all threw together with mechanical and effective precision, the British opened out and fought as each man judged best. This fighting in the wood was very desperate and swayed back and forwards. " It was desperate hand-to-hand work. The enemy had no thought of giving in. Each man took advantage of the protection offered by the trees, and fought until he was knocked out. The wood seemed swarming with demons, who fought us tooth and nail." The British and Africans were driven deeper into the wood. Then again they would win their way forwards until they could see the open country through the broken trunks of the lacerated trees. Then the fulness of their tide would be reached, no fresh wave would come to carry them forwards, and slowly the ebb drew them back once more into the village and the forest. In this mixed fighting the Transvaal battalion took 3 officers and

130 men prisoners, but their losses, and those of the other African units, were very heavy. The senior officer in the firing line, Colonel Thackeray, behaved with great gallantry, rallying his ever-dwindling forces again and again. A joint attack on the evening of July 16 by the Cape men, the South African Scots, and the 11th Royal Scots upon the north-west of the wood and the north of the village was held up by wire and machine guns, but the German counter-attacks had no better fate. During the whole of the 17th the situation remained unchanged, but the strain upon the men was very severe, and they were faced by fresh divisions coming up from Bapaume. Brigadier Lukin himself made his way into the wood and reported to Furse, the Divisional Commander, the extremely critical state of affairs.

On the morning of July 18 the 3rd Division were able to give some very valuable help to the hard pressed 9th. At the break of day the 1st Gordons, supported by the 8th King's Liverpools, both from the 76th Brigade, made a sudden and furious attack upon those German strong points to the north of the village which were an ever-present source of loss and of danger. " Now and again," says a remarkable anonymous account of the incident, " during a lull in the roar of battle, you could hear a strong Northern voice call out: ' On, Gor-r-r-dons, on ! ' thrilling out the r's as only Scotsmen can. The men seldom answered save by increasing their speed towards the goal. Occasionally some of them called out the battle cry heard so often from the throats of the Gordons: ' Scotland for ever ! ' . . . They were out of sight over the parapet for a long time, but we could hear at intervals that cry of ' On, Gor-r-r-dons, on ! ' varied with yells of ' Scotland for ever ! ' and the strains of the pipes. Then we saw Highlanders reappear over the parapet. With them were groups of German prisoners."

The assault won a great deal of ground down the north-west edge of Delville Wood and in the north of the village ; but there were heavy losses, and two of the strong points were still intact. All day the bombardment was continuous and deadly, until 4.30 in the afternoon, when a great German infantry attack came sweeping from the east, driving down through the wood and pushing before it with an irresistible momentum the scattered bodies of Scottish and African infantry, worn out by losses and fatigue. For some time it submerged both wood and village, and the foremost grey waves emerged even to the west of the village, where they were beaten down by the Lewis guns of the defenders. The southern edge of the wood was still held by the British, however, and here the gallant 26th Brigade threw itself desperately upon the victorious enemy, and stormed forward with all the impetuosity of their original attack. The Germans were first checked and then thrown back, and the south end of the wood remained in British hands. A finer or more successful local counter-attack has seldom been delivered, and it was by a brigade which had already endured losses which made it more fit for a rest-camp than for a battle line. After this second exploit

the four splendid battalions were but remnants, the Black Watch having lost very heavily, while the Argylls, the Seaforths, and the Camerons were in no better case. Truly it can never be said that the grand records of the historic regular regiments have had anything but renewed lustre from the deeds of those civilian soldiers who, for a time, were privileged to bear their names.

Whilst this severe battle had been in progress, the losses of the South Africans in Delville Wood had been terrible, and they had fought with the energy of desperate men for every yard of ground. Stands were made in the successive rides of the wood by Colonel Thackeray and his men. During the whole of the 19th these fine soldiers held on against heavy pressure. The colonel was the only officer of his regiment to return. Even the Newfoundlanders had hardly a more bloody baptism of fire than the South Africans, or emerged from it with more glory.

The situation now was that the south of the wood was held by the British, but the north, including the greater part of the village, was still held by the Germans. The worn-out 9th Division, still full of spirit, but lacking sadly in numbers, was brought out of the line on July 19, and Maxse's 18th English Division, fresh from its own great ordeal in Trones Wood, came forward to take its place. At seven in the morning of the 19th Higginson's 53rd Brigade attacked from the south, the situation being so pressing that there was no time for artillery preparation. The infantry went forward without it, and no higher ordeal could be demanded of them. It was evident that there was great danger of the strong German column breaking through to westward and so outflanking the whole British line. Only a British attack from north and from south could prevent its progress, so that the 3rd Division were called upon for the one, and the 18th for the other. This wood of infamous memory is cut in two by one broad ride, named Princes Street, dividing it into two halves, north and south (*vide* p. 388). The southern half was now attacked by the 5th Norfolks, who worked their way steadily forward in a long fringe of bombers and riflemen. The Brigade-Major, Markes, and many officers and men fell in the advance. After a pause, with the help of their Lewis guns, the Norfolks pushed forward again, and by two o'clock had made their way up to Princes Street along most of the line, pushing the enemy down into the south-eastern corner. The remaining battalions of the brigade, the 10th Essex on the right and the 6th Berkshires on the left, tried to fight their way through the northern portion, while the 8th Suffolks attacked the village. Half of the village up to the cross-roads in the centre was taken by the Suffolks, but their comrades on the right were held up by the heavy machine-gun fire, and at 5 p.m. were compelled to dig themselves in. They maintained their new positions, under a terrific shell-fire, for three weary and tragic days, at the end of which they were relieved by the 4th Royal Fusiliers, a veteran battalion which had fired some of the first shots of the War.

These Fusiliers belonged to the 3rd Division which had, as already

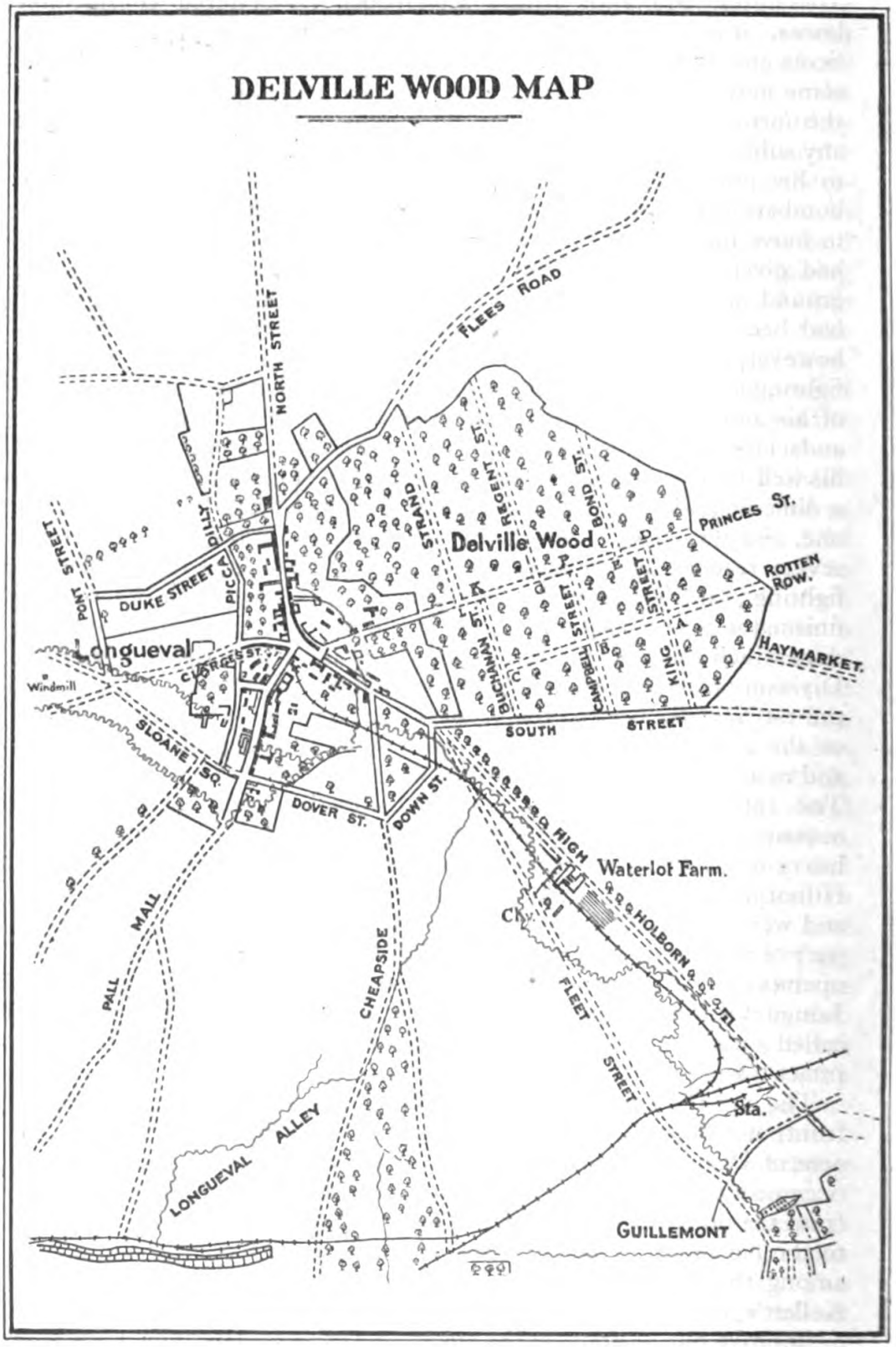
said, been attacking from the north side of the wood, while the 18th were on the south side. On July 19 this attack had been developed by the 2nd Suffolks and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the two remaining battalions of the 76th Brigade. The advance was made at early dawn, and the Welsh Fusiliers were at once attacked by German infantry, whom they repulsed. The attack was unfortunate from the start, and half of the Suffolks who penetrated the village were never able to extricate themselves again. The Welsh Fusiliers carried on, but its wing was now in the air, and the machine-guns were very deadly. The advance was held up and had to be withdrawn. In this affair fell one of the most promising of the younger officers of the British Army, a man who would have attained the very highest had he lived, Brigade-Major Congreve, of the 76th Brigade, whose father commanded the adjacent Thirteenth Corps. His death arose from one of his many acts of rash and yet purposeful valour, for he pushed forward alone to find out what had become of the missing Suffolks, and so met his end from some lurking sniper.

On July 20 matters had come to a temporary equilibrium in Delville Wood, where amid the litter of corpses which were strewn from end to end of that dreadful grove, lines of British and German infantry held each other in check, neither able to advance, because to do so was to come under the murderous fire of the other. The 3rd Division, worn as it was, was still hard at work, for to the south-west of Longueval a long line of hostile trenches connected up with Guillemont, the fortified farm of Waterlot in the middle of them. It was to these lines that Haldane's battle-weary men were now turned. An attack was pending upon Guillemont by the 30th Division, and the object of the 3rd Division was to cut the trench line to the east of the village, and so help the attack. The advance was carried out with great spirit upon July 22 by the 2nd Royal Scots, and though they were unable to attain their full objective, they seized and consolidated a post midway between Waterlot Farm and the railway, driving back a German battalion which endeavoured to thrust them out. On July 23 Guillemont was attacked by the 21st Brigade of the 30th Division. The right of the attack, consisting of the 19th Manchesters, got into the village, but few got out again; and the left made no progress, the 2nd Yorkshires losing direction to the east and sweeping in upon the ground already held by the 2nd Royal Scots and other battalions of the 8th Brigade. The resistance shown by Guillemont proved that the siege of that village would be a serious operation and that it was not to be carried by the *coup-de-main* of a tired division, however valiantly urged. The successive attempts to occupy it, culminating in complete success, will be recorded at a later stage.

On the same date, July 23, another attempt was made by mixed battalions of the 3rd Division upon Longueval. This was carried out with the co-operation of the 95th Brigade, 5th Division, on the left. The attack on the village itself from the south was held up, and the battalions engaged, including the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 12th West

Yorkshires, and 13th King's Liverpools, all endured considerable losses. Two battalions of the 35th Division (Bantams), the 17th Royal Scots and 17th West Yorks, took part in this attack. There had been some movement all along the line during that day from High Wood in the north-east to Guillemont in the south-west, but nowhere was there any substantial progress. It was clear that the enemy was holding hard to his present line, and that very careful observation and renewed bombardment would be required before the infantry could be expected to move him. Thus, the advance of July 14, brilliant as it had been, had given less durable results than had been hoped, for no further ground had been gained in a week's fighting, while Longueval, which had been ours, had for a time passed back to the enemy. No one, however, who had studied General Haig's methods during the 1914 fighting at Ypres could, for a moment, believe that he would be balked of his aims, and the sequel was to show that he had lost none of the audacious tenacity which he had shown on those fateful days, nor had his well-tried instrument of war lost its power of fighting its way through a difficult position. The struggle at Longueval had been a desperate one, and the German return upon July 18 was undoubtedly the most severe reaction encountered by us during the whole of the Somme fighting ; and yet after the fluctuations which have been described it finished with the position entirely in the hands of the British. On the days which followed the attack of July 23 the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division pushed its way gradually through the north end of the village, the 1st Norfolks bearing the brunt of the fighting. They were relieved on the 27th by the 95th Brigade, who took the final posts on the north and east of the houses, the 1st East Surreys holding the northern front. The 12th Gloucesters particularly distinguished themselves on this occasion, holding on to three outlying captured posts under a very heavy fire. The three isolated platoons under Lieutenants Fitzgerald, Hilborne, and Ryland maintained themselves with great constancy, and were all retrieved, though two out of three officers and the greater part of the men were casualties. This battalion lost 320 men in these operations, which were made more costly and difficult by the fact that Longueval was so exaggerated a salient that it might more properly be called a corner, the Germans directing their very accurate fire from the intact tower of Ginchy Church.

The 2nd Division had now been brought down to the Somme battle-front, and upon July 26 they took over from the 3rd Division in the area of Delville Wood. So complicated was the position at the point occupied, that one officer has described his company as being under fire from the north, south, east, and west, the latter being presumably due to the fact that the distant fire of the British heavies fell occasionally among the front line infantry. At seven in the morning of July 27 Kellett's 99th Brigade, now attached to the 2nd Division, was ordered to improve our position in the wood, and made a determined advance


DELVILLE WOOD MAP
NORTH STREET
FLEES ROAD
PONT STREET
DILLY
DUKE STREET
PICCA
Longueval
CLARGES ST.
Windmill
SLOANE SQ.
DOVER ST.
DOWN ST.
STRAND
REGENT ST.
BOND ST.
Delville Wood
PRINCES ST.
ROTTEN ROW.
HAYMARKET
BUCHANAN ST.
CHARRING CROSS ROAD
KING STREET
SOUTH STREET
HIGH
Waterlot Farm.
HOLBORN
FLEET STREET
Sta.
PALL MALL
CHEAPSIDE
LONGUEVAL ALLEY
GUILLEMONT

with the 1st Rifles upon the right and the 23rd Fusiliers upon the left, the 1st Berkshires and 22nd Royal Fusiliers being in support. Moving forward behind a strong barrage, the two battalions were able with moderate loss to force their way up to the line of Princes Street, and to make good this advanced position. A trench full of dead or wounded Germans with two splintered machine-guns showed that the artillery had found its mark, and many more were shot down as they retired to their further trenches. The 1st Berkshires held a defensive flank upon the right, but German bombers swarmed in between them and the Rifles, developing a dangerous counter-attack, which was finally beaten off after a sharp fight, in which Captain Howell of the latter battalion was mortally wounded after organising a splendid defence, in which he was greatly helped by Sergeant Woodward. At 11 o'clock the left flank of the advance was also heavily attacked at short range, and the two companies of the Rifles on that side were in sore straits until reinforced by bombers from the 23rd Fusiliers, and also by the whole of the 22nd Fusiliers. The German barrage fell thickly behind the British advance, and it was a difficult and costly matter to send forward the necessary supports, but before evening part of the 17th Fusiliers and of the 17th Middlesex from the 5th Brigade had pushed forward and relieved the exhausted front line. It was a most notable advance and a heroic subsequent defence, with some of the stiffest fighting that even Delville Wood had ever witnessed. The East Anglian Field Company Royal Engineers consolidated the line taken. The 1st Rifles, upon whom the greater part of the pressure had fallen, lost 14 officers, including their excellent adjutant, Captain Brocklehurst, and more than 300 men. The immediate conduct of the local operations depended upon Colonel Denison of this battalion. The great result of the fight was that Delville Wood was now in British hands, from which it never again reverted. It is a name which will ever remain as a symbol of tragic glory in the records of the 9th, the 3rd, the 18th, and finally of the 2nd Divisions. Nowhere in all this desperate war did the British bulldog and the German wolf-hound meet in a more prolonged and fearful grapple. It should not be forgotten in our military annals that though the 99th Brigade actually captured the wood, their work would have been impossible had it not been for the fine advance of the 95th Brigade of the 5th Division already recorded upon their Longueval flank.

We shall now turn our attention to what had been going on in the extreme right-hand part of the line, where in conjunction with the French three of our divisions, Jeudwine's 55th Lancashire Territorials, the 35th Bantams, and the hard-worked 30th, had been attacking with no great success the strong German line which lay in front of us after the capture of Trones Wood. The centre of this defence was the village of Guillemont, which, as already mentioned, had been unsuccessfully attacked by the 21st Brigade on July 23. About this date the 35th

Bantam Division had a repulse at the Malzhorn Farm to the south of Guillemont, both the 104th and 105th Brigades being hard hit, and many of the brave little men being left in front of the German machine-guns. A week later a much more elaborate attack was made upon it by the rest of the 30th Division, strengthened by one brigade (the 106th) of the 35th Division. This attack was carried out in co-operation with an advance of the 2nd Division upon Guillemont Station to the left of the village, and an advance of the French on the right at Falfemont and Malzhorn.

The frontal advance upon Guillemont from the Trones Wood direction appears to have been about as difficult an operation as could be conceived in modern warfare. Everything helped the defence and nothing the attack. The approach was a glacis 700 yards in width, which was absolutely commanded by the guns in the village, and also by those placed obliquely to north and south. There was no cover of any kind. Prudence would no doubt have suggested that we should make good in the north at Longueval and thus outflank the whole German line of defence. It was essential, however, to fit our plans in with those of the French, and it was understood that those were such as to demand a very special, and if needs be, a self-immolating effort upon the right of the line.

The attack had been arranged for the morning of July 30, and it was carried out in spite of the fact that during the first few hours the fog was so dense that it was hard to see more than a few yards. This made the keeping of direction across so broad a space as 700 yards very difficult ; while on the right, where the advance was for more than a mile and had to be co-ordinated with the troops of our Allies, it was so complex a matter that there was considerable danger at one time that the fight in this quarter would resolve itself into a duel between the right of the British 30th and the left of the French 39th Division.

The 89th Brigade advanced on the right and the 90th on the left, the latter being directed straight for the village. The two leading battalions, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers and the 18th Manchesters, reached it and established themselves firmly in its western suburbs ; but the German barrage fell so thickly behind them that neither help nor munitions could reach them. Lieutenant Murray, who was sent back to report their critical situation, found Germans wandering about behind the line, and was compelled to shoot several in making his way through. He carried the news that the attack of the 2nd Division upon the station had apparently failed, that the machine-gun fire from the north was deadly, and that both battalions were in peril. The Scots had captured 50 and the Manchesters 100 prisoners, but they were penned in and unable to get on. Two companies of the 17th Manchesters made their way with heavy loss through the fatal barrage, but failed to alleviate the situation. It would appear that in the fog the Scots were entirely surrounded, and that they fought, as is their wont, while a cartridge

lasted. Their last message was, that their ranks and munition supply were both thin, their front line broken, the shelling hard, and the situation critical. None of these men ever returned, and the only survivors of this battalion of splendid memories were the wounded in No Man's Land and the Headquarter Staff. It was the second time that the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers had fought to the last man in this war. Of the 18th Manchesters few returned, and two companies of the 16th Manchesters were not more fortunate. They got into the village on the extreme north, and found themselves in touch with the 17th Royal Fusiliers of the 2nd Division, but neither battalion could make good its position. It was one of the tragic episodes of the great Somme battle.

The 89th Brigade upon their right had troubles of their own, but they were less formidable than those of their comrades. As already described, they had the greatest difficulty in finding their true position amid the fog. Their action began successfully by a company of the 2nd Bedfords, together with a French company, rushing an isolated German trench and killing 70 men who occupied it. This was a small detached operation, for the front line of the advancing brigade was formed by the 19th Manchesters on the left and by the 20th on the right, the latter in touch with the French 153rd of the line. The 19th reached the south-eastern corner of Guillemont, failed to get in touch with the Scots Fusiliers, and found both its flanks in the air. It had eventually to fall back, having lost Major Rolls, its commander, and many officers and men. The 20th Manchesters advanced upon the German Malzhorn Trenches and carried the front one, killing many of the occupants. In going forward from this point they lost 200 of their number while passing down a bullet-swept slope. Three out of four company commanders had fallen. Beyond the slope was a sunken road, and at this point a young lieutenant, Musker, found himself in command with mixed men from three battalions under his orders. Twelve runners sent back with messages were all shot, which will give some idea of the severity of the barrage. Musker showed good powers of leadership, and consolidated his position in the road, but was unfortunately killed, the command then devolving upon Lieutenant Worsley. The Bedfords came up to reinforce, and some permanent advance was established in this quarter—all that was gained by this very sanguinary engagement, which cost about 3000 men. The Bantams lost heavily also in this action though they only played the humble rôle of carriers to the storming brigades.

The whole of the fighting chronicled in this chapter may be taken as an aftermath of the action of July 14, and as an endeavour upon our part to enlarge our gains and upon the part of the Germans to push us out from what we had won. The encroachment upon High Wood upon the left, the desperate defence and final clearing of Delville Wood in the centre, and the attempt to drive the Germans from Guillemont upon the right—an attempt which was brought later to a successful conclusion —are all part of one system of operations designed for the one end.

It should be remarked that during all this fighting upon the Somme continual demonstrations, amounting in some cases to small battles, occurred along the northern line to keep the Germans employed. The most serious of these occurred in the Eleventh Corps district near Fromelles, opposite the Aubers Ridge. Here the 2nd Australians on the left, and the 61st British Division on the right, a unit of second-line Territorial battalions, largely from the West country, made a most gallant attack and carried the German line for a time, but were compelled on July 20, the day following the attack, to fall back once more, as the gun positions upon the Aubers Ridge commanded the newly-taken trenches. It was particularly hard upon the Australians, whose grip upon the German position was firm, while the two brigades of the 61st, though they behaved with great gallantry, had been less successful in the assault.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Operations of Gough's Army upon the Northern Flank up to September 15

Advance, Australia !—Capture of Pozières—Fine work of 48th Division—Relief of Australia by Canada—Steady advance of Gough's Army—Capture of Courcelette.

ALL the fighting which has been described was carried out by Rawlinson's Fourth Army, consisting of the Third, the Fifteenth, and the Thirteenth Corps. A new element was now, however, introduced upon the left flank. It will be remembered that Sir Hubert Gough had been given a Fifth or reserve army, consisting of the Eighth and Tenth Corps, with which to hold the flank. Of these, the Tenth, including the 49th, 48th, and 1st Australian Divisions, was now pushed forward into the fighting, with the intention of attacking Pozières and widening the British front.

This was the first serious appearance of the Australians upon a European battle-field, and it may be said at once that the high reputation which they had gained as dogged and dashing fighters in the Gallipoli campaign was fully endorsed in France. From General Birdwood, their admirable leader, down through every unit of their divisions, there ran an indomitable spirit, united to an individuality and readiness of resource which made them soldiers of the highest type. Their physique, too, was extraordinarily fine, and even the stay-at-home Londoner who had seen the lithe figures and the eager, clean-cut, aquiline faces under the broad-rimmed hats, bringing a touch of romance into our drab streets, would need no assurance that the men were splendid. A nation of sportsmen had changed themselves very easily into a nation of soldiers. Of all the strange turns of fate in this extraordinary war, surely there are few more quaint than that the blackfellow call of " Cooee ! " should many a time have resounded at the crisis of a European battle.

As the 1st Australian Division lay on July 22, it had the straggling and strongly entrenched village of Pozières in front of it. On the right they were in touch with the 1st Division filling the gap between Pozières and Bazentin, as described at the beginning of Chapter XXVI. On

their left was the 48th Division of South Midland Territorials. The village had been reduced to a mere rubbish-heap by the guns, but was none the less dangerous on that account.

On the early morning of July 23, before it was light, the Australians made their first eruption into the Somme fighting. "The difficulty," as their chronicler truly declares, "was not to get the men forward, but to hold them." With an eager rush the men of New South Wales overwhelmed the front trench across the face of the village. It was dotted with German bodies, killed by the artillery. The second trench in the village itself was found to be obliterated in places. It was occupied as far as possible after a sharp hand-to-hand fight, and daylight found the Australians, chiefly Victorians, in full possession of the southern and western end of the village. There was no counter-attack during July 23, and the day was spent in consolidating and in rounding-up prisoners from the dug-outs. For three days there was very heavy German shelling, but the division had served too long an apprenticeship to be shaken by such means. They lay low and held on tightly.

On Tuesday, July 25, came the first German attack, but it was broken up so completely by the British barrage that the Australians had only distant glimpses of the enemy infantry crawling from under the sleet which beat upon them. The merciless pounding of the bombardment continued, and then again in the late afternoon came another infantry attack, which was again scattered by the dominant all-observing guns. Up to now 150 prisoners, including two German colonels, had fallen into our hands.

Whilst the Australians had been attacking Pozières from the south, the 48th Division had made a similar advance from the south-west, and had made good the ground on the left side of the Albert-Bapaume Road, including the western outskirts of the village and part of the Leipzig salient. In our admiration for our kinsmen from across the seas we must not forget, nor will they, that these lads from the very heart of rural England went step by step with them up Pozières Hill, and shared the victory which awaited them upon it.

The 143rd Brigade, consisting entirely of Warwick battalions (5, 6, 7, and 8), the 144th of Glosters (4 and 6) and Worcesters (7 and 8), and the 145th from Gloucester (5), Buckingham, Oxford and Buckingham (4), and Berkshire (4), took it in turns to surge up against the formidable German line, showing the greatest valour and perseverance, overcoming difficulty after difficulty, and always getting slowly forward from the first movement on July 22, until on July 26 they had overcome every obstacle and joined hands with the Australians at the cemetery which marks the north end of the village of Pozières. Many prisoners and a fine extension of the line were the fruits of their exertions. The 5th Royal Sussex Pioneer Battalion, amidst considerable difficulties and heavy shell-fire, consolidated all that had been won. The 4th Gloucesters and 7th Worcesters particularly distinguished themselves at this

time by their persistent day-by-day work against the German trench line.

On the morning of July 26 the Australian advance was resumed. There were two obstacles immediately in front—the one a strong redoubt, the other a line of trench. The redoubt was most gallantly attacked by the men of Queensland and of South Australia, and was overwhelmed, by their bombs. The Victorians, meanwhile, had won their way into the trench, but as it communicated by many runways with the main German system behind, an endless flow of reinforcements was able to come into it, and the length of the trench enabled the Germans to attack upon both flanks. It was a most bloody and desperate conflict which swung and swayed down the long ditches, and sometimes over the edges of them into the bullet-swept levels between. Men threw and threw until they were so arm-weary that not another bomb could be lifted. If ever there were born natural bombers it must surely be among the countrymen of Spofforth and Trumble—and so it proved at that terrible international by Pozières village. A British aeroplane swooped down out of the misty morning, and gave signals of help and advice from above, so as to dam that ever-moving stream of reinforcement.

The trenches in dispute were of no vital importance themselves, but they were the outposts of the great German second line which stretched behind its broad apron of barbed wire within a few hundred yards to the north-east of the village. The ground sloped upwards, and the Germans were on the crest. This was the next objective of the Australians, and was attacked by their 2nd Division on July 29. On the flank of the hill to the left the Victorians won a lodgment, but the main position was still impregnable—and almost unapproachable. Sullenly and slowly the infantry fell back to their own trenches, leaving many of their best and bravest before or among the fatal wires.

The position had been improved upon the left, however, by an advance of the 48th Division. The Warwick Brigade on their right made no great progress, but the 145th Brigade on the left took the trench in front of it and pushed that flank well forward. This successful attack was at seven in the evening of July 27. The leading battalions were the 4th Berks upon the right and the 6th Gloucesters on the left, and these two sturdy battalions captured all their objectives. A number of the 5th Regiment of the Prussian Guard were killed or captured in this affair. As the whole line had to turn half left after leaving the taking-off trench, it was a fine piece of disciplined fighting. General Gough was a personal witness of the attack.

On August 4, six days later, the Australians came back to the attack with all the dour pertinacity of their breed. This time their success was triumphant. A steady bombardment had laid the German front open, and in the dark of the night the Australian infantry, advancing over their own dead, rushed the position, surprising the Germans at a moment when a relief was being carried out. Many of the Germans who had

been expecting a rest from their labours got one indeed—but it was in England rather than in their own rear. With the early morning the Australians were on the Pozières Ridge, and one of the few remaining observation posts of the enemy had passed from him for ever. In front of them was the land of promise—the long slope seamed by German trenches, the distant German camps, the churches and villages of that captive France which they had come so far to redeem.

Once again the left flank of the Australians was in close co-operation with a British Division. The 48th had been withdrawn and replaced by the 12th, a division which was rapidly acquiring a very solid reputation in the army. The men of the 7th Sussex on the right and those of Surrey and of Kent on the left were in the front of the battle-line, which rolled slowly up the slope of Pozières, continually driving the German resistance before it. The ground gained early in August was some 2000 yards of frontage with a depth of 400 yards, and though the whole ridge, and the Windmill which marks it, had not yet been cleared, the fact that the British had a good foothold upon it was of the utmost strategical importance, apart from the continual stream of prisoners who fell into their hands. The Sussex battalion linked up with the Australians, and nothing could have been closer than the co-operation between the two, so much so that it is on record that with a glorious recklessness a bunch of Australians pushed forward without orders in order to keep the Sussex men company in one of their attacks. The South Saxons have again and again shown that there is no more solid military material in England. It is said that a rampant pig with " We won't be druv ! " as a motto was an old emblem of that ancient county. Her sons assuredly lived up to the legend during the War.

On the morning of the 6th and of the 7th two counter-attacks stormed up to the new British line. The first was small and easily repelled, a sporadic effort by some gallant hot-headed officer, who died in the venture, clicking his Mauser to the last. The second was serious, for three battalions came very gallantly forwards, and a sudden rush of 1500 Germans, some of whom carried *flammenwerfer*, burst into the trenches at two separate points, making prisoners of some 50 Australians who were cut off from their comrades. The attack was bravely delivered in broad daylight, the enemy coming on in good line in the face of severe fire ; but the Australians, with their usual individuality, rallied, and not only repulsed the enemy, but captured many of them, besides recapturing the prisoners whom they had taken. This was the supreme German attempt to recapture the position, but they were by no means able to reconcile themselves to the loss of it, and came on again and again in smaller assaults spread over several days, which had no result save to increase their already very heavy losses in this region.

This *flammenwerfer* attack had broken also upon the outposts of the 36th Brigade to the left, eight of these infernal machines coming forward with a throng of bombers behind them. The captain of the 9th Royal

Fusiliers, instead of awaiting the attack in a crowded trench, rushed his men forward in the open, where they shot down the flame-bearers before they could bring their devilish squirts to bear. The bombers, who had followed the advance, led the flight. On this day 127 Germans who had been caught in a pocket between the British trenches were forced to surrender, after a very creditable resistance.

On August 12 the 12th Division attacked once more upon a broad front, the 35th Brigade on the right, the 37th on the left. The result of the attack was a satisfactory accession of ground, for although the Surreys and West Kents were held up, the Norfolks and Essex attained their objective and held it. Some 40 prisoners and a useful line of trench were the results. That night the 48th South Midlanders replaced the 12th Division once more, resuming their old station on the left of the Australians, whose various divisions rang changes upon each other, men from every corner of the great island continent, from the burning plains of the Northern Territories to the wind-swept hills of Tasmania, relieving each other in the ever-advancing line of trenches and strong points which slowly ate into the German front. One day it was the West Australians who blew back an attack with their rifle fire. On the next it was the Melbourne men who had rushed another position. On the summit of the Ridge was the stump of an old windmill, which lay now between the two lines, and it was towards this and along the slope of the crest that the advance was gradually creeping. It is worth noting that in this part of the line some sort of amenity was introduced concerning the wounded, and that neither party sniped the other so long as a Red Cross flag was shown. It is grievous to think that such a condition needs to be recorded.

August 10 and 11 witnessed two night attacks by the 4th and 6th Gloucesters respectively, neither of which made much progress. The Territorials of the 48th Division still kept step, however, with the Australians in all that desperate advance up the long slope of Pozières Hill, the two units striving in a generous rivalry of valour, which ended in deep mutual confidence and esteem.

On August 14 the enemy counter-attacked with some vigour, and momentarily regained a trench near the windmill. On the 15th the line had been restored. On the 17th there was a strong attack in six successive lines upon the 48th British and the 1st Australian Divisions, but it had no result. On the 18th, however, the 5th and 6th Warwicks paid a return visit with great success, carrying three lines of trenches and capturing 600 prisoners. This was a very fine exploit, carried out at 5 p.m. of a summer evening.

It was about this date that a new movement began upon the British left, which extended their line of battle. Since the capture of Ovillers, a month before, the flank of the army to the left of the attack upon Pozières had been guarded by the 49th Division of Yorks Territorials, but no attack had been attempted in this quarter. On August 18 the

25th Division relieved the 49th, and an advance upon a small scale which gradually assumed more importance was started in the direction of Thiepval, the German village fortress of sinister reputation, which lay upon the left flank on the hither side of the River Ancre. Upon this General Gough had now fixed a menacing gaze, and though his advance was gradual, it was none the less inexorable until his aim had been attained ; and not only Thiepval itself but the important heights to the north and east of it which dominate the valley of the Ancre were in the hands of his persevering troops. The first obstacles in his path were a stronghold named the Leipzig Redoubt, and to the east of it a widespread farm, now spread even wider by British shells. This nest of snipers and machine-guns was known as Mouquet Farm. On the 19th, as part of the general attack along the line, which will be more fully dealt with elsewhere, not only was the Pozières front pushed forward past the windmill for 300 yards, but the 1st Wiltshires of the 25th Division, operating on the left of the 48th, which in turn was on the left of the Australians, made an important lodgment upon the high ground to the south of Thiepval. The 48th Division also made some advance, the 4th Gloucesters on the night of the 19th capturing 400 yards of trench with 200 prisoners. Their comrades of the 6th Battalion had less fortune, however, in an attack upon the German trenches on August 22, when they had two companies partially destroyed by machine-gun fire, while every officer engaged was hit, including Major Coates, who was killed. On this same day there was again an Australian advance near Pozières, whilst at the other end of the line, which was biting like acid into the German defences, the 25th Division began to encroach upon the Leipzig salient, and were within 1000 yards of Thiepval. In this entirely successful attack a new invention, the push pipe-line, was used for the first time with some success, having the double effect of blowing up the enemy's strong point, and of forming a rudimentary communication trench in the track of its explosion. In this connection it may be stated generally that when the Germans, with their objects clear in front of them, had used before the War far greater ingenuity than the British in warlike invention, as witness the poison-gas, *minenwerfer* and flame-throwers, their methods became stereotyped after War broke out ; while the more individual Britons showed greater ingenuity and constructive ability, so that by the end of 1916 they had attained a superiority on nearly every point. Their heavy artillery, light machine-guns, aeroplanes, bombs, trench-mortars, and gas apparatus were all of the very best ; and in their tanks they were soon to take an entirely new departure in warfare. It is as difficult in our British system to fix the responsibility for good as for evil, but there is ample evidence of a great discriminating intelligence in the heart of our affairs.

The Hindenburg Trench was the immediate object of these attacks, and on August 24 a stretch of it, containing 150 occupants, was carried. A pocket of Germans was left at one end of it, who held on manfully

and made a successful resistance against a company of the 8th North Lancashires, who tried to rush them. Ultimately, however, these brave men were all taken or killed.

Day by day the line crept on, and before the end of the month the 1000 yards had become 500, whilst every advance yielded some new trench with a crop of prisoners. The enemy was fully alive, however, to the great importance of the Thiepval position, which would give the British guns an opportunity of raking Beaumont Hamel and their other strongholds upon the north of the Ancre. A very strong counter-attack was made, therefore, by some battalions of the Prussian Guard on the evening of August 25, preceded by a shattering bombardment. The attack—the edge of which was blunted by the British barrage—fell mainly upon the 7th Brigade of the 25th Division. The result was a German defeat, and the menacing line drew ever nearer to Thiepval, though an attack by the North Lancs upon the Prussian Fusilier Guards on August 28 was not successful. On the day before, however, the 48th Division on the right of the 25th made a successful advance, taking a good line of trench with 100 of the redoubtable Guards. Between Thiepval and Pozières the ruins of Mouquet Farm had been taken by the West Australians and the Tasmanians, and was found to be a perfect warren of snipers, so that it was some time before it was absolutely clear. On the Pozières Ridge ground and prisoners were continually being gained, and the trenches between the Ridge and Mouquet Farm were cleared by Queensland on the right and by Tasmania on the left. It was a most spirited fight, where Australian and Prussian stood up to each other within short bomb-throw. But nothing could stand against the fire of the attack. The whole line of trench upon the right was captured. There was a dangerous gap, however, on the Tasmanian left, and this the Tasmanians were compelled to endure for two days and nights, during which they were hard pressed by never-ending shelling and incessant German attacks. It is on record that their constant reports of their parlous state sent on to headquarters concluded always with the words : " But we will hold on." If Tasmania needs a motto, she could find no better one, for her sons lived and died up to it during those terrible hours. When at last they were relieved, their numbers were sorely reduced, but their ground was still intact. At the other side of the gap, however, the West Australians, hard pressed by an overpowering bombardment, had been pushed out from Mouquet Farm, which came back into German hands, whence it was destined soon to pass.

It was during this severe fighting that a little scene occurred which, as described by Mr. Bean, the very able Australian chronicler, must stir the blood of every Imperialist. A single officer " of middle age, erect, tough as wire, with lines on his face such as hard fighting and responsibility leave on every soldier," appeared in the Australian communication trenches, asking to see the officer-in-charge. He spoke the same tongue but with a different intonation as he explained his mission. He was the

forerunner of the relieving force, and the 1st Division of Canada was taking over the line from Australia—a line which was destined to bring glory to each of them. Surely a great historical picture might be made in more peaceful times of this first contact of the two great nations of the future, separated by half the world from each other, and yet coming together amid blood and fire at the call of the race. An hour later, Canadian Highlanders in a long buoyant line were pushing swiftly forward to occupy the trenches which Australia had won and held. "Australians and Canadians," says Mr. Bean, "fought for thirty-six hours in those trenches inextricably mixed, working under each other's officers. Their wounded helped each other from the front. Their dead lie, and will lie, through all the centuries, hastily buried, beside the tumbled trenches and shell-holes where, fighting as mates, they died." So ended the Australian epic upon the Somme. It is to be remembered that the New Zealanders formed an entirely separate division, whose doings will presently be considered.

Whilst the overseas troops had been fighting hard before Pozières, there had been a considerable movement upon their left to attack northwards along the Thiepval Spur. This was carried out by the 39th Division north of the Ancre, the 49th and the 25th on September 3. Some ground was gained, but the losses were heavy, especially in the 75th Brigade, where the 2nd South Lancashires suffered considerably. This battalion had been in shallow trenches exposed to fire and weather for six days previous to the attack, and was greatly worn. This attack was part of the general battle of September 3, but from Mouquet Farm northwards it cannot be said to have given any adequate return for the losses.

The narrative of the events on the left wing of the army has now got in front of the general account, but as the operations of General Gough's force have definite objectives of their own, the story may be continued up to September 15, after which we can leave this flank altogether for a time and concentrate upon the happenings in the centre, and especially upon the right flank where Delville Wood, Ginchy and Guillemont had presented such impediments to the advance. At or about the time, September 4, when the Canadians took over the lines of the Australians at Pozières and Mouquet Farm, the 11th British Division, the 1st English Division of the New Army, which had come back from hard service in the East, relieved the 25th Division on the Canadian left. For a week there was quiet upon this part of the line, for a great forward move along the whole eleven-mile front had been planned for September 15, and this was the lull before the storm. On the evening before this great assault, the 11th Division crept up to and carried the main German stronghold, called the Wonderwork, which lay between them and Thiepval. There was some sharp bayonet work, and the defeated garrison flying towards Thiepval ran into the barrage so that the enemy losses were heavy, while the British line crept up to

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within 350 yards of the village. This advance stopped for ever the flank fire by which the Germans were able to make Mouquet Farm almost untenable, and the Canadians were able to occupy it. The capture of the Wonderwork was carried out by Price's 32nd Infantry Brigade of Yorkshire troops. The most of the work and the heaviest losses fell upon the 9th West Yorks, but the 8th West Ridings and the 6th Yorks were both engaged, the latter losing their colonel, Forsyth. The total casualties came to 26 officers and 742 men.

On September 15 the 11th Division held the flank in front of Thiepval, but the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions shared in the general advance, and pushed forward their line over the Pozières Ridge and down for 1000 yards of the slope in front, joining hands with the 15th Scottish Division in Martinpuich upon the right. This fine advance crossed several German trenches, took the fortified position of the Sugar Refinery, and eventually included in its scope the village of Courcelette, which had not been included in the original scheme. All Canada, from Halifax in the east to Vancouver in the west, was represented in this victory ; and it was particularly pleasing that the crowning achievement —the capture of Courcelette—was carried out largely by the 22nd Battalion of the 5th Brigade French Canadians of the 2nd Division. French Canada, like Ireland, has been diverted somewhat by petty internal influences from taking a wide and worthy view of the great struggle against German conquest, but it can truly be said in both cases that the fine quality of those who came did much to atone for the apathy of those who stayed. Thirteen hundred German prisoners were brought back by the Canadians. During the Courcelette operations, the 3rd Canadian Division was working on the left flank of the 2nd as it attacked the village, protecting it from enfilade attack. The work and the losses of this useful movement fell chiefly upon the 8th Brigade.

This considerable victory was, as will afterwards be shown, typical of what had occurred along the whole line upon that great day of battle and victory. It was followed, so far as the Canadians were concerned, by a day of heavy sacrifice and imperfect success. The 3rd Division, still operating upon the left of the 2nd, endeavoured to carry the formidable Zollern Trench and Zollern Redoubt to the north of Courcelette. The 7th and 9th Brigades were in the attacking line, but the former was held up from the beginning. The latter got forward, but found itself confronted by the inevitable barbed wire, which stayed its progress. No good was done, and two gallant battalions, the 60th (Montreal) and the 52nd (New Ontario), lost 800 men between them. The operation was suspended until it could be renewed upon a larger scale and a broader front.

At this point we may suspend our account of the operations of Gough's Fifth Army, while we return to the Fourth Army in the south, and bring the record of its work up to this same date. Afterwards, we

shall return to the Fifth Army and describe the successful operations by which it cleared the Thiepval Ridge, gained command of the Ancre Valley, and finally created a situation which was partly responsible for the great German retreat in the early spring of 1917.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

August 1 *to September* 15

Continued attempts of 33rd Division on High Wood—Co-operation of 1st Division—Operation of 14th Division on fringe of Delville Wood—Attack by 24th Division on Guillemont—Capture of Guillemont by 47th and 59th Brigades—Capture of Ginchy by 16th Irish Division.

AFTER the very hard fighting which accompanied and followed the big attack of July 14, continuing without a real break to the end of the month, there was a lull of a couple of weeks, which were employed by the German commentators in consoling articles to prove that the allied offensive was at an end, and by the Allies in bringing forward their guns and preparing for a renewed effort. The middle of August heard the drum fire break out again and the operations were continued, but on a local rather than a general scale. Many isolated positions had to be mastered before a general surge forward could be expected or attempted, and experience was to prove that it is precisely those isolated operations which are most difficult and costly, since they always mean that the whole concentration of the German guns can be turned upon the point which is endangered.

It will simplify the following operations to the reader if he will remember that the whole left wing of the army is excluded, being treated separately as Gough's flank advance. We only deal therefore with Rawlinson's Army. The front which faces us may be divided into several well-defined areas, each of which is in turn subjected to attack. There is High Wood on the extreme left, with the Intermediate Trench and the Switch Trench within it, or to its north. There is the line of trenches, Switch Trench, Wood Trench, Tea Trench, etc., linking up High Wood with Delville Wood. There is the north-eastern fringe of Delville Wood, there are the trenches between Delville Wood and Ginchy, there is Ginchy itself, there are the trenches between Ginchy and Guillemont, there is Guillemont itself, and finally there is a stretch of trench between Guillemont and the French left at Falfemont. This is the formidable barrier which was attacked again and again at various points between August 1 and September 15 as will now be told.

August 16 witnessed another attack by the 33rd Division upon High Wood, a position which had once already been almost entirely in their

hands, but which had proved to be untenable on account of the concentration of fire which the German guns could bring to bear upon its limited space. None the less, it was determined that it should be once again attempted, for it was so situated that its machine-guns raked any advance between it and Delville Wood. The attack on this occasion was carried out on the southern side by the 98th Brigade, strengthened for the work by the addition of the 20th Royal Fusiliers and a wing of the 1st Middlesex. It might well seem depressing to the soldiers to be still facing an obstacle which they had carried a month before, but if this portion of the British line was stationary it had gained ground upon either wing, and it might also be urged that in a combat destined to be ended by military exhaustion it is the continued fighting rather than the local result that counts. If High Wood had cost and was to cost us dearly to attack, it assuredly was not cheap to defend ; and if their artillery had made it too deadly for our occupation our own guns must also have taken high toll of the German garrison. Such broader views are easy for the detached reasoner in dug-out or in study, but to the troops who faced the ill-omened litter of broken tree-trunks and decaying bodies it might well seem disheartening that this sinister grove should still bar the way.

At 2.45 in the afternoon the infantry advanced, the 4th King's Liverpools on the left and the 4th Suffolks on the right, keeping well up to the friendly shelter of their own pelting barrage. The enemy, however, had at once established a powerful counter-barrage, which caused heavy losses, especially to the King's, most of whose officers were hit early in the action. The two leading company commanders were killed and the advance held up. The Suffolks had got forward rather better, and part of them seized the German trench called Wood Lane to the south-east of the wood, but unhappily the only surviving officer with the party was killed in the trench, and the men being exposed to bombing attacks and to heavy enfilade fire from the eastern corner of High Wood were compelled to fall back after holding the trench for fifty minutes.

These two battalions had attacked upon the flank of the wood. The wood itself was entered by three companies of the Argyll and Sutherlands, who found it laced with wire and full of machine-guns. The Highlanders stuck gamely to their task, and some of them—little groups of desperate men—actually crossed the wood, but their losses were heavy and, as is usual in forest fighting, all cohesion and direction became impossible. The whole attack was hung up. The 20th Royal Fusiliers, one of the public school battalions, was sent forward therefore to get the line moving once again. They shared in the losses, but were unable to retrieve the situation. So worn were the battalions that there was some question whether the 98th Brigade could hold its own line if there should be a vigorous counter-attack. The 19th Brigade was therefore brought up to support and eventually to relieve their comrades. The losses of the 98th amounted to over 2000 men, showing how man-

fully they had attempted a task which the result showed to be above their strength. The causes of the failure were undoubtedly the uncut wire in the wood, and that the gunners had been unsuccessful in beating down the machine-guns of the enemy.

Whilst the 33rd Division had been making these vigorous attacks upon High Wood, a corresponding movement had taken place upon the north side of the wood, where the 1st Division had come into line on August 15, taking the place of the 34th Division. They plunged at once into action, for the 2nd Brigade upon August 16 made a successful advance, the 1st Northants and 2nd Sussex pushing the line on for some hundreds of yards at considerable cost to themselves, and driving back a half-hearted counter-attack, which endeavoured to throw them out of their new gains. This attack was renewed with much greater weight, however, upon August 17, and both the 1st and 2nd Brigades were driven back for a few hours. In the afternoon they rallied and regained most of the lost ground. Immediately in front of them stretched a long German trench termed the Intermediate Trench, being the chief one between the second and third lines. Towards evening the 1st Brigade attacked this trench, the 1st Black Watch being the most advanced battalion. There was a hard fight, but the position was still too strong. Next morning, August 18, the gallant Highlanders were back at it once more, but the day was very misty, and the advance seems to have lost its exact bearings. The left company stumbled upon a pocket of 30 Germans, whom it took or killed, but could not find the trench. The right company got into the trench, but were not numerous enough to resist a very vigorous bombing attack, which re-established the German garrison. The 8th Berkshires pushed forward to try their luck, but a smoke cloud thrown out by a division on the left came drifting down and the attack was enveloped in it, losing both cohesion and direction. The Intermediate Trench was still German in the evening.

Although the 1st Brigade had been held up at this point the 2nd Brigade had made some progress on their right, for a successful attack was made by the 1st Northamptons and by the 1st North Lancashires upon a German trench to the north-west of High Wood. Colonel Longridge of the staff, a valuable officer, was killed in this affair, but the place was taken, and a strong point established. During the night two platoons of the Northamptons made an audacious attempt to steal an advance by creeping forwards 400 yards and digging in under the very noses of the Germans, on a small ridge which was of tactical importance. There was a considerable bickering all day round this point, the Sussex endeavouring to help their old battle-mates to hold the fort, but the supports were too distant, and eventually the garrison had to regain their own line.

On August 20 there was a severe German attack upon the line of the 1st Division, which was held at the time by the 1st Northamptons and

the 2nd Rifles. The advance developed in great force, driving in the outpost line and part of the Northamptons. The brave old "Cobblers" were a very seasoned battalion, and took a great deal of shifting from their shallow trench, hand-to-hand fighting taking place along the line. With the help of two companies of the Rifles the advance was stayed on the Northampton front, but a second attack developed out of High Wood upon the right flank of the Rifles. Two platoons under Lieutenant Stokes showed great gallantry in holding up this sudden and dangerous incursion. The platoons were relieved by the Gloucesters, but as there was no officer with the relief, Stokes remained on with the new garrison, and helped to drive back two more attacks, showing a splendid disregard for all danger, until he was finally killed by a shell. Captain Johnstone, who had led the Riflemen in their relief of the Northamptons, was also killed, while Major Atkinson and 130 men of the Rifles were hit. The losses of the Northamptons were even more heavy, but the German advance came to nought.

At the risk of carrying the account of the operations near High Wood and between High Wood and the west edge of Delville Wood to a point which will compel a considerable return in order to bring up the narrative of the rest of the line, we shall still continue them to the date of the great advance of September 15, when the whole vast array from Pozières on the left to Leuze Wood on the right heaved itself forward, and local attacks gave place to a big concerted movement. We shall therefore continue to follow the fortunes of the 1st Division in their hard task in front of the Intermediate Trench. After the failure of their attempt to get forward upon August 19 the action died down, and for four days there was no fresh advance. The 3rd Brigade had come up into the front line, and upon August 24 the Munsters made an attempt upon the German trench without success. Colonel Lyon lost his life in this affair. On August 25 another battalion of the Brigade, the South Wales Borderers, made a bombing attack, and again were in the trench and once again were driven out. They were not to be denied, however, and on August 26 actually occupied 180 yards of it, taking one of the deadly guns which had wrought such damage. On the 27th a German counter-attack was heavily repulsed, but an attempt of the South Wales Borderers to improve their success was also a failure. On the evening of this day the 15th Scottish Division took over the position in front of the Intermediate Trench, the 1st Division moving to the right and enabling the 33rd Division upon its flank to move also to the right. The 15th Division was able in very tempestuous weather partly to outflank the Intermediate Trench, with the result that upon the afternoon of August 30 the remains of the garrison, finding that they were in a trap, surrendered. Two machine-guns with 140 men were taken.

On August 12 Cooper's 14th Light Division came up into line. Its first station was in the Delville Wood area, which was still a most difficult section, in spite of our occupation of the wood. Orchards lay upon its

fringes, and the German trenches around it swept the edges with fire, while several German strong points lay just outside it. An attempt was made by the 14th Division to enlarge an area outside Longueval upon August 18. At 2.45 that day the 41st Brigade advanced on the right of the 33rd Division with Orchard Trench as an objective, while the 43rd Brigade kept pace with them to the north and east of the wood. The German front trenches were carried without much difficulty, but, as usual, the process of consolidation was an expensive one. The men in small groups dug themselves in as best they could under fire from both flanks. The 7th Rifle Brigade upon the extreme left of the line was in the air, and their left company was almost entirely destroyed. The new line was held, however, and knotted together with three strong points which defied German attack. This was attempted on the 19th, but was a total failure. In these operations the 14th Division took 279 prisoners.

For the sake of consecutive narrative, the doings in the High Wood and Delville Wood district have been given without a break, but in order to bring the rest of the chronicle level one has to turn back a few days and turn our attention to the long right flank of the army, from Longueval in the north to Falfemont, where we joined on to the French in the south. The northern angle of this position was, as has already been explained, extremely disadvantageous to us, forming an almost fantastic peninsula, which jutted out into the German positions. Even if their infantry could not carry it, their guns could at all times rake it from three sides, and could command the whole Montauban valley, along which our supplies were bound to pass. Therefore it became very necessary to get more elbow room along this line.

South-east of Delville Wood was the strongly-fortified village of Ginchy, and between the wood and the village were what may be called the Alcoholic system of trenches, where the long and powerful Beer Trench, stretching a few hundred yards north of the wood, was connected up with Vat Alley, Hop Alley, and Ale Alley, the whole forming a formidable labyrinth. To the south of Ginchy lay the very strongly organised village of Guillemont, which could not be approached save over a long quarter of a mile of open ground. Ginchy and Guillemont were linked up in a strong line, of which Waterlot Farm and Guillemont Station were two nodal points. South of Guillemont came Wedge Wood and finally Falfemont Farm, where the right of Rawlinson's Fourth Army joined on to the French. The whole of this long line was most powerfully defended, both by material appliances and by that constant human valour without which all appliances are useless. How to push it back was the pressing and difficult question which now faced the British commanders.

Guillemont had already been attacked on July 30 by the 30th Division as described in a previous chapter. This attack had been most valiantly urged, but the losses had been heavy, and the gains small. The 2nd Division had relieved the 30th on this point, and were in turn relieved

on August 10 by the 24th, a division which had seen a good deal of rough service in that famous forcing-house for young soldiers—the Ypres salient.

A few days later it closed in upon Guillemont with orders to reconnoitre and then attack. A partial attack was made on August 16 upon the outskirts of the village by the 72nd Brigade, which was rather in the nature of a reconnaissance in force. The place was found to be very strong and the advancing troops drew off after incurring some losses, which were heaviest in the 9th East Surreys, who came under a blast of machine-gun fire, and dropped nine officers and over 200 men. The division drew off, broadened their front of attack, and came on again upon August 18 in a wide advance which covered the whole enemy line, striking not only at the village itself, but at the station, quarry, and farm to the north of it, covering a front of nearly a mile.

The 73rd Brigade attacked the village and the quarry. The right attack was led by the 13th Middlesex and supported by the 2nd Leinster, but it had no success, and ended in heavy losses, especially to the English regiment. The men who got across were unable to penetrate, and after a hand-to-hand fight were driven back. Upon the left of the brigade things went better. The attack on that side was led by the 7th Northants, supported by the 9th Sussex. The Cobblers had lost their colonel from a wound in the morning. This colonel was the famous international three-quarter Mobbs, who gave one more illustration of the fact that the fine sportsman turns rapidly into the fine soldier. His successor, King, had only been a few hours in command. The direction of the fight was none the less admirable. The Midlanders dashed with great fire across the 300 yards of open which separated them from the Quarries, while the Sussex crowded up into the advanced trenches, sending on company after company in response to demands for help. The British barrage had lifted, and it was no easy matter in face of the flank fire to get the men across, so that only a percentage reached the hard-pressed firing-line upon the other side. The colonel of the Sussex held back, therefore, and sent his third company over as dusk fell, so that they came in on the flank of the Northamptons with little loss, while the fourth followed later with supplies. The lodgment made by the leading battalions was secured, and some ground to the north of the village passed into British hands.

Although Guillemont itself remained for the moment with the Germans, the assault of the 24th Division had a success along the whole of the rest of the line and greatly improved the position of the British upon this flank. The 17th Brigade had attacked the station and after a severe fight had captured it, the 3rd Rifle Brigade especially distinguishing itself in this affair. Farther still to the north the line of trenches leading up to and in front of Waterlot Farm had fallen also to the 17th Brigade, the 8th Buffs having the heavier share of the work. These attacks, which cost the division more than 3000 men, were carried out

in co-operation with French attacks to the south and east of Guillemont, the net result being partly to isolate that stubborn village and turn it into a salient on the German line.

Capper's 24th Division was now drawn out for a short period, and Douglas Smith's 20th replaced it and held firmly to the conquered line.

The Germans were acutely uneasy as to the erosion of their line which was going on from Longueval to Guillemont, and on August 23 endeavoured to win back the ground gained at Guillemont Station, but their counter-attack, stronger as usual in its artillery preparation than in its infantry advance, had no success, though it cost the 20th Division some heavy losses. It was one clear sign of the degeneration of the German soldier that the overture should so continually be better than the performance. The machines were as formidable as ever, but the human element was slowly wilting, and that subtle sentiment was developing upon either side which means the ascendancy of one and the decline of the other. The ease with which the prisoners surrendered, the frequent failure to hold ground and the constant failure to gain it, all pointed to the same conclusion.

On August 24 a very widespread and determined attempt was made by the British to enlarge their area on the right wing, and the attack extended along the whole line to the north of Guillemont. It was carried out by three divisions, the 33rd which had side-stepped to the right, and now covered the ground to the immediate left of Delville Wood, the 14th Light Division which covered the north of Delville Wood and the Alcohol system of trenches, and finally the 20th Division covering Ginchy and the rest of the line down to Guillemont.

Describing these operations from the left of our line the first unit of attack was the 100th Brigade, which had for its objective Tea Trench and other German defences which were to the north-west of Delville Wood. The Longueval-Flers road separated their right flank from the left flank of the 42nd Brigade of the 14th Division. In order to carry out the attack the three leading battalions of the Brigade had to be crowded forward into a narrow front before daylight upon August 24.

All day they lay there, but towards evening the bombardment which they endured changed into an immense barrage which fell like a steel guillotine in front of the line, the British counter battery work being unable to check it. Shortly before 7 o'clock in the evening the leading companies of the attack belonging from the left to the 1st Queen's, 16th Rifles and 2nd Worcesters, crept forward until they were on the edge of the barrage. At 7 o'clock they took the plunge, advancing with brisk alacrity into that terrible pelt of missiles. By 7.30 the Queen's had established themselves in the German position and were bombing their way up Wood Lane Trench. The other two battalions had also at that hour got well forward, and the 42nd Brigade of the 14th Division on the right had been equally successful. The new positions were at once consolidated by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by parties of the

222nd Field Company, together with the 18th Middlesex Pioneers, under a very heavy fire. The Worcesters were in good touch with the 16th Rifles upon their left, but a considerable and dangerous gap had formed between the left of the Rifles and the right of the Queen's—a gap which might have let in a fatal counter-attack had it not been for the admirable barrage of the artillery, which beat down each attempted advance. A trench was at once put in hand to link up the new line, the sappers under Lieutenant Appleyard labouring at it during the night, but the gap had not been entirely closed by the morning. The assaulting battalions were then relieved, and the 98th Brigade took the place of their comrades of the 100th. Thus ended this very successful little advance, the result being to push forward and strengthen our position between the two woods. The casualties were not high, and this fact was due to the fine co-operation of the guns, and to a very effective smoke barrage thrown out between the left wing of the attack and the machine-guns of High Wood.

The 14th Division had advanced upon the immediate right of the Longueval-Flers road, the 42nd Brigade upon the left keeping in touch with the 100th, while the 41st Brigade on the right had not only to reach its own objective, but to act as a protective flank against the Germans in the village of Ginchy. The 43rd Brigade was in reserve, but contributed one battalion, the 6th Yorkshire Light Infantry, to strengthening the reserve of the 42nd Brigade, whose formidable task was the carrying of the outlying fringe of Delville Wood. At last that tragic grove, the scene of such a prolonged struggle, was to be utterly cleared from our front. The three gallant battalions of the 42nd Brigade—the 5th Oxford and Bucks on the left, the 5th Shropshires in the centre, and the 9th Rifles upon the right—swept forward with the bayonet in the good old style and cleared it from end to end, helped greatly by the accurate barrage behind which they advanced. The German counter-barrage was heavy, but the troops tramped through it with no more deflection than if it had been a rainstorm, though a trail of dead and wounded marked their path. Every officer of the Rifle battalion was hit. The first barrier was a trench cut 150 yards from the north of the wood and called Inner Trench. This was taken at the first rush, the enemy surrendering freely. Two gallant N.C.O.'s of the Rifles, Sergeant Hamp and Corporal Ord, rushed up a machine-gun at the cost of their own lives. One party of 50 men of the enemy seem to have taken up arms again after three of the storming lines had passed, and to have blazed into their backs with a machine-gun, but a fourth line swept over them and all were engulfed. The Oxford and Bucks on the left of the line moved forward splendidly, picking up 200 prisoners as they passed, clearing the edge of the wood and digging in about 200 yards to the north of it, the 89th F Company Royal Engineers and the 11th King's Liverpool consolidating the position. The enemy's opposition on the right flank had, however, been very much sterner and more successful,

so that the flank battalion of the 42nd Brigade and the Rifle battalions of the 41st Brigade had all fallen short of their final objectives.

Altogether the day was a great success, for the losses were not excessive, and the gains though not sensational were general all along the line and prepared the way for the successful assaults of the next week. The fact that the right flank had not come on as far as the left, caused each successive battalion to find itself with its right flank exposed, but the line was held by a clever readjustment under heavy fire, carried out chiefly by Lieutenants Jacks and Ashman, by which the flank battalions faced half right with the Oxfords still in the advanced position joining up with the 33rd Division, while the line slanting, but unbroken, sloped backwards to Inner Trench upon the right.

The eastern corner of Delville Wood was still dominated by a strong point, but upon the rain-swept evening of August 27 this was finally cleared out by the 43rd Brigade of the 14th Division, the 6th Somerset, Yorkshire and Cornwall battalions of light infantry, together with the 10th Durhams, all doing good service.

The remains of the hard-worked 7th Division had been thrust in front of those Alcohol trenches which still remained intact, filling up the gap separating Delville Wood from Ginchy. The 22nd Brigade was on the left, and shared in the advance of the 43rd, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers capturing Hop Alley, Beer Trench, and part of Vat Alley. The impending attack upon Ginchy, which was to co-operate with the attack upon Guillemont farther south, was forestalled and postponed by a very strong advance of the German infantry upon the north and north-east of Delville Wood. The 91st Brigade had relieved the 22nd, and the brunt of this attack outside the wood fell upon the 1st South Staffords, who repulsed the onslaught on three separate occasions, enduring a heavy shelling between each German advance. Upon the fourth attack the persevering German infantry succeeded in penetrating the north-east corner of the wood and regaining Hop Alley. The 2nd Queen's relieved the exhausted Staffords, and at noon of September 2 made a vigorous bombing attack which had some success, though the assailants were considerably mystified by the appearance of a party of Germans who had dressed themselves in the khaki and helmets taken the night before. This powerful attack fell also upon the 20th Division, and upon the 14th to the right of the 7th, but although it inflicted heavy losses, especially upon the 60th Brigade of the 20th Division, it failed to gain any ground or to obtain any strategic advantage.

On September 3 at noon the attack upon Ginchy was carried out by the 22nd Brigade, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers attacking to the north of the village, the 20th Manchesters moving on to the village itself, and the 2nd Warwicks on to the trenches to the west of the village. The Manchesters succeeded about one o'clock in forcing their way into the village, sending back 200 of the garrison as prisoners. The first rush behind the barrage sustained few casualties, and it was not until the Manchesters in their

fiery eagerness began to push on beyond their mark that they ran into a very severe fire from the north, which mowed down their ranks, including nearly all their officers. The Welsh Fusiliers upon the left had been unable to get forward, and as a consequence the Manchester men were in so precarious a position and so reduced in numbers that they had to fall back through the village, while the 2nd Royal Irish, who had passed on as far as Ginchy Telegraph, had now to retire, as their rear was in danger. The 2nd Warwicks, however, held on to the south of the village, and refused to be dislodged, keeping their position there against all attacks until the night of September 5. In the afternoon, two companies of the Irish attempted to retrieve the situation by a renewed advance upon the village, but their losses were heavy, and they could not get farther than the western outskirts. The casualties during the day were severe, and in the night it was thought advisable to replace the 22nd by the 20th Brigade. The latter made a fresh attack upon the village at eight in the morning of September 4 by the 9th Devons, but again it was found impossible, in the face of the inexorable machine-guns, to effect a permanent lodgment. The 2nd Queen's, however, on the left of the Brigade, improved the position at the north-eastern corner of Delville Wood. There was a short lull in the fighting, and then at 5.30 a.m. upon the 6th the 2nd Gordons stormed into the orchards round the village, but had to dig themselves in upon the western edge. At 2 p.m. they again attacked, aided by two companies of the 9th Devons, getting as far as the middle of the village, and capturing some prisoners, but the Germans came back with so heavy a counter-attack that the evening found our troops back in their own front line once more. On the night of September 7 the division was taken out—the 16th (Irish) and 55th moving up to the Ginchy Front.

This severe fighting by the 7th Division from the 3rd onwards was an excellent example of how a force may be called upon to sacrifice itself without seeing the object of its sacrifice until it learns the general plans of the Commander. The assaults upon Ginchy, unsuccessful at the moment, were of the greatest value as leading to the capture of Guillemont in the south. The task allotted to the 7th Division was a very difficult one, involving an advance from a salient with the left flank exposed, and the magnitude of this task was greatly increased by the truly execrable weather. If no successful efforts were made to counter-attack upon Guillemont, the reason undoubtedly lay in the absorption of the German strength at Ginchy.

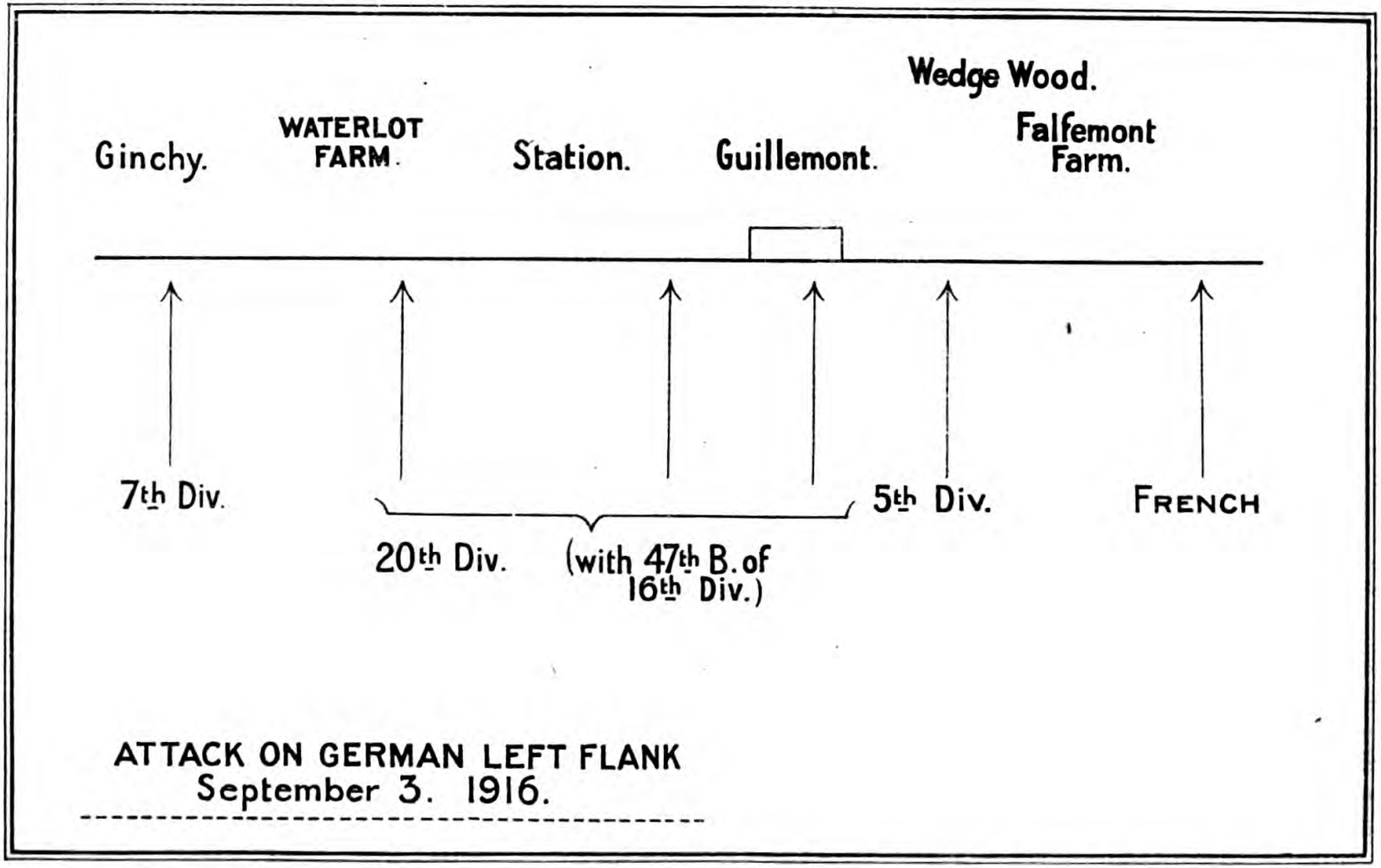
On this same day the battle raged from Ginchy along the whole right of the line through Waterlot Farm, Guillemont and Falfemont Farm to the left flank of the French. The annexed diagram will give some idea of the forces engaged and their several objectives on September 3.

As will be seen by this plan, the 5th Division formed the unit next to the French, and the 13th Brigade were ordered to help our gallant allies in attacking the extreme southern point at Falfemont, while the

95th Brigade covered the ground between their comrades of the 13th and the village of Guillemont. The advance was made shortly after midday, and though the operations were long, bloody, and difficult, the famous old division, inheritors of the glories of Mons and Le Cateau, was not to be denied. The resistance was very strenuous, and only the most devoted constancy could have eventually overcome it. To follow the fortunes of the 13th Brigade first it may be briefly stated that upon Sunday, September 3, they first gained the Falfemont Farm, and then lost it again. That night they were reinforced by three battalions of the 15th Brigade, and were able next day to push in between the Farm and Guillemont, pressing the defenders upon every side. It was a wide-spread building, with many loopholed outhouses, and one of these fell after the other until only the central ruin, still spouting fire like an anchored battleship, remained in the hands of the defenders. Their position was hopeless, however, and by the morning of September 5 the changes in the line to the north of them, and especially the loss of Guillemont, caused them to evacuate the position.

The advance of the 95th Brigade on the left of the 5th Division had been a very gallant one, though the objectives which they so bravely won were nameless lines of trenches and a sunken road. The first line of the attack was formed by the 1st Duke of Cornwall's on the left, and the 12th Gloucesters upon the right, closely followed by the 1st Devons and 1st East Surreys. They were in close touch with the 59th Brigade of the 20th Division, who were attacking Guillemont upon their left. Within two hours of the first attack all three objectives had been captured, and the remains of the victorious battalions were digging in upon the line Ginchy-Wedge Wood. The losses were heavy in each battalion, but particularly so in the 12th Gloucesters. For a time they were under fire from both the British and the German batteries. Yet they held on to their ultimate objective, and the following extract from the impression which they produced upon an experienced regular colonel is worth quoting, if only to show the pitch of soldiership to which our amateur volunteers had reached. " The battalion came on in their extended lines as steadily as on parade, and, without wavering, though suffering heavy losses, passed through a hot German barrage in the most gallant manner. The lines were also much troubled by long-range machine-gun fire from the direction of Falfemont, but although gaps appeared and the lines were rapidly thinning out, I never saw the slightest sign of wavering. No troops could have carried through such a difficult task with more indifference to consequences." Gloucester-shire was once the favourite forcing-ground for the champions of the British ring. The old fighting breed still lives. Altogether the 95th Brigade advanced 3000 yards in this action, and was responsible for the capture both of Wedge Wood and of Leuze Wood.

Upon the left of the 5th Division the difficult task of storming Guillemont had been entrusted to the Rifle and Rifle Brigade battalions



ATTACK ON GERMAN LEFT FLANK
September 3. 1916.

of the 59th Brigade upon the right, and to the 47th Brigade of the 16th Irish Division. This brigade had come temporarily under the command of General Douglas Smith on the left, taking the place of the 60th Brigade, which had lost heavily in strength from cold, wet, and continual German gassing and bombardment. The 61st was in divisional reserve. The attack was ordered for noon. Profiting by previous experiences it was planned that the whole village should not be rushed at once, but that the attack should proceed with method in three definite stages. The guns of the 6th and of the 24th Divisions joined in the preliminary bombardment. At noon, the infantry leapt over their parapets and charged home. The enemy was taken unawares. The 10th and 11th Rifle Brigade with the 10th and 11th King's Royal Rifles, supported by the 6th Oxford and Bucks, carried all before them on the south and west of the village, while the Leinsters, Connaughts, and Royal Irish did as much in the north. The Quarries, which was a nest of machine-guns, was taken in their stride. No more valiant or successful advance had been seen during the War, and it may take a place beside the attack of the 36th Brigade at Ovillers as a classical example of what British infantry can do with all the odds against them. The Riflemen fought in grim silence, but the Irish went through with a wild Celtic yell, which, blending with the scream of their pipes, must have added one more to the horrors of the shaken and hard-pressed garrison. Neck and neck the two brigades, English and Irish, went through the German line. Hand-to-hand fights took place in the village, but all resistance was soon beaten down. By 12.30 the first objectives were solid, and at 1.20 the whole village was taken and the survivors of the enemy streaming out to eastward. The English losses were heavy and equally distributed. The Irish were also heavy, especially in the case of the 6th Connaughts, who also lost their colonel. At this time, through the failure of recruiting in Ireland, these brave battalions were below full strength, in spite of which within six days they stormed or helped to storm two of the strongest villages upon the line. One hardly knows which emotion is stronger —one's pride in those who went, or one's contempt for those who bided at home. No one admired the splendid dash of the Irish stormers more heartily than the British Riflemen, who kept pace with them in their desperate venture. Equally brave, they were more deliberate in their methods, with the result that more than once pockets of fighting Germans who had been overrun by the Irish, but were still venomous, were cleared up by the Riflemen on the flank. So infectious, however, was the fiery dash of the Irish, that Mr. Philip Gibbs has left it on record in one of his admirable letters that an English sergeant of Rifles complained that he had almost blown his teeth away in whistling his men back from overrunning their objectives. The garrison, it may be remarked, were chiefly Hanoverian, and our men were amused and amazed to see "Gibraltar" printed upon their hats, a reminiscence of the days when they formed part of the British army.

Whilst the attack had been in progress, two battalions of the 61st Brigade, the 7th Somersets and 12th King's Liverpools, were in close support, advancing steadily through the German barrage. The enemy were, as already shown, strongly held at Ginchy on the left flank of the Guillemont advance, but in spite of their preoccupations they made strong attempts at a counter-attack from this direction, which fell upon the Connaughts, who had been reinforced by two companies of the 12th King's. This small flanking force pushed out posts which behaved with great gallantry, holding off the enemy until evening, though at considerable loss to themselves. One of these posts, under Sergeant Jones of the 12th King's, was cut off by the Germans and held out for two days without food or water—a deed for which the sergeant received the Victoria Cross. On September 4 the positions were put into a state of defence, and on the 5th the 20th Division drew out of the line after their fine deed of arms.

The 14th Division had been in support on the left during the attack upon Guillemont, and the 43rd Brigade had moved up to the northern edge of the village itself, losing a number of officers and men, including Colonel Troyte-Bulloch of the 6th Somersets, who, though badly wounded, remained with his battalion until it had consolidated its new position. A German advance was attempted at this point about 8 p.m., but the 43rd Brigade helped to drive it back. It may be said that the whole of September 3 was a series of small victories, making in the aggregate a very considerable one, and breaking down the whole of the flank German defences.

The Irish Division was now brought up to face Ginchy, the one point still untaken upon the German second line, whilst the 5th Division pursued its victorious way up to Leuze Wood and to the lower corner of Bouleaux Wood, always in close touch with the French upon their right. The 47th Brigade of the Irish had already lost near half its numbers, and other units of the division, both infantry and sappers, especially the 7th and 8th Irish Fusiliers, had lost heavily in supporting the 5th Division in its attack, but the battalions were still full of fight.

In the late afternoon of September 9 the final attack upon Ginchy by the Irish tore that village from the close grip of its Bavarian and Pomeranian garrison. The 55th Division made a supporting attack on the left, but the main advance was left for the now depleted but indomitable division. It dashed forward upon a two-brigade front, the 47th on the right and the 48th on the left, the brigades being strengthened by three battalions of the 49th, so that practically all the reserves were in the line from the start, but the commander had the comforting assurance that the Guards were moving up in his rear. On the right the first wave consisted of the 6th Royal Irish and the 8th Munsters, who dashed forward with great gallantry but were held up by machine-guns. The same fire held up the 1st Munsters upon the right of the 48th Brigade, but some natural cover was found which enabled them to continue to

advance. On their left the 7th Irish Rifles and 7th Irish Fusiliers had broken into the German line in the first determined advance. By six in the evening the 8th and 9th Dublins had reinforced the attack and had pushed on into the village, where the 156th Field Company Royal Engineers at once consolidated—a swift measure which was fully justified since two attacks stormed out of the darkness of the night and were beaten back into it again. Next morning the 16th Division was relieved by the Guards and returned for the time from the line which they had so materially helped to enlarge and consolidate. Their losses had been heavy. Five battalion commanders were among the casualties. The 16th fell out of the line on September 10. A few days earlier the 5th Division had been relieved by the 56th.

The total effect of these operations had been to extend the whole British position for several thousand yards in frontage and nearly a mile in depth. At least 2000 more prisoners had fallen into their hands. The attack of July 14 had broken in the centre of the German second line, but the two flanks had held firm. The fall of Pozières on the left before the Australians and the 48th Division, and of Guillemont on the right before the 20th and 5th, meant that the flanks also had gone, and that the whole front was now clear. A third strong line ran through Warlencourt and Le Transloy, but very numerous impediments—woods, villages, and trenches—lay in front of the army before they could reach it. It proved, however, that the worst impediments of all—vile weather and a premature winter—were to be the only real obstacle to the complete success of the army.

In order to complete this description of these widespread operations, which are difficult to synchronise and bring into any settled plan, one must return to what was going on upon the left of Delville Wood. Towards the end of August the 33rd Division, which had covered the line between Delville and High Woods, was relieved by the 24th. Upon the left of the 24th the 1st Division was still continuing that series of operations upon High Wood which have been already described. On their left in turn was the 15th Scottish Division, the left unit of Rawlinson's Army. They were busy from this time onwards in digging their assembly trenches for the great assault.

The first incident which calls for attention was a very sudden and violent German attack on August 31 upon the 24th Division. The German onslaught met with some success at first, as it burst through the line of the 13th Middlesex, a battalion which had lost heavily in the attack upon Guillemont ten days before, and was for the moment more fit for a rest-camp than the forefront of the battle. The 9th Sussex, who were on the right of the Middlesex, stood firm, and the German advance, which had penetrated some distance down the long communication trench which is known as Plum Street, was eventually brought to a halt. This result was partly brought about by the initiative and determination of a 2nd Lieutenant of the Middlesex named Green,

" a little pale-faced fellow," who carried off a Lewis gun, and worked it from different positions down the trench, continually holding up the Germans and giving time for the Sussex men to gather such a force at the end of Plum Street as prevented the Germans from debouching into the larger trenches which led down towards Longueval. The attack had been equally severe upon the 72nd Brigade, who held the right of the division, which included the northern end of Delville Wood. They entirely repulsed the Germans with great loss, the 8th Queen's Surreys being the battalion which bore the brunt of the fight.

On the next day, September 1, the 17th Brigade came up to restore the situation on the left, and by evening the position had been almost cleared. On the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th there were fresh German attacks, but the line was now firmly held and no impression was made. None the less, the fighting had been costly, and the depleted division had 2000 more names upon its roll of honour. It was drawn out shortly afterwards, but its artillery, which was left in the line, had the misfortune to lose its distinguished chief, General Phillpotts, on September 8.

We shall now move a mile eastwards to follow the 1st Division in its difficult and, as it proved, impossible task of improving our position as regards High Wood, a spot which caused more delay and loss than any other upon the German line.

On September 3 a strong attack by the whole of the 1st Brigade was made upon the wood, which was gridironed with trenches and studded with strong points. The immediate objectives were the main trench in the wood and the trenches to the south-east of the wood. The 1st Camerons, supported by the 8th Berks, advanced on the right, the Black Watch, supported by the 10th Gloucesters, on the left. The attack had considerable success, which could not, however, be maintained. The battalions on the right won home, but the consolidating parties were delayed. On the left, the attack was only partially successful, being held up at a large mine-crater. When eventually a strong German counter-attack swept forward from the north-east of High Wood, the British had to fall back to their own original line, taking, however, 80 German prisoners with them. The ground had been won, but there had not been weight enough to hold it. The losses of the two Highland battalions were severe.

On September 8 the 3rd Brigade penetrated into the western part of High Wood, but again it was found impossible to make more than a temporary lodgment. The 2nd Welsh, 1st South Wales Borderers and 1st Gloucesters were all involved in this affair, as was the 9th Black Watch of the 15th Division, who played a very gallant part. Next day the attack was renewed with the 2nd Brigade on the right, the 3rd on the left. In the centre the 1st Northants captured the crater, but were driven out of it later in the day, after a hard fight. On the left the Munsters and Gloucesters were held up by machine-gun fire. On the right the advance of the 2nd Sussex and of the 2nd Rifles met with

gratifying success. The important trench called Wood Lane was stormed, with a loss to the assailants of a couple of hundred men, after the hostile machine-guns had been deftly put out of action by trench-mortars. The Rifles were in touch not only with their comrades of Sussex on the left, but with the 5th King's Liverpools on the right, so that the line was complete. It was consolidated that night by the 1st North Lancashires and was permanently held, an attempt at counter-attack next day being crushed by the barrage. After this little victory the 1st Division was relieved on the evening of September 10 by the New Zealanders.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Breaking of the Third Line, September 15

Capture of Martinpuich by 15th Division—Advance of 50th Division—Capture of High Wood by 47th Division—Splendid advance of New Zealanders—Capture of Flers by 41st Division—Advance of the Light Division—Arduous work of the Guards and 6th Divisions—Capture of Quadrilateral—Work of 56th Division on flank—Début of the tanks.

THE Army had been temporarily exhausted by its extreme efforts and the consequent losses, but was greatly buoyed up by the hope that with their excellent artillery and their predominant air service they were inflicting more punishment than they were receiving. Steadily from week to week the tale of prisoners and of captured guns had been growing, the British and the French keeping curiously level in the numbers of their trophies. Fresh divisions, ardent for battle, were streaming down from the northern line, while old divisions, already badly hammered, filled up rapidly with eager drafts, and were battle-worthy once again in a period which would have been pronounced absolutely impossible by any military critic before the War. All the rearward villages were choked with the supports. There was rumour also of some new agency to be used, and wondrous stories were whispered as to its nature and its powers. The men were in high heart, therefore, and by the middle of September Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which now included three corps, was ready to spring forward once again. The main German line was miles behind them, and the headquarters of British brigades and divisions now nested comfortably in those commodious dug-outs which two years of unremitting German labour had constructed—monuments for many a year to come of their industry and of their failure. It was realised that the obstacles in front, however formidable, could not possibly be so difficult as those which had already been surmounted ; and yet the aeroplanes were able to report that the whole country was still slashed across and across in a fanciful lacework of intricate patterns in which fire, support, and communication trenches formed one great network of defence.

The left flank of the Army was formed by Gough's Fifth Army, which had pushed forward in the manner already described, Jacob's Second

Corps and Byng's Canadians being in the line upon September 15. On their immediate right, and joining them in the trenches which face Martinpuich, was Pulteney's Third Corps, which covered the whole line down to High Wood. From the north-west of High Wood to the trenches opposite Flers, Horne's long-suffering Fifteenth Corps still urged the attack which it had commenced upon July 1. The units, it is true, had changed, but it is difficult to exaggerate the long strain which had been borne by this commander and his staff. An appreciation of it was shown by his elevation to the command of the First Army at the conclusion of the operations. From the right of Horne's Corps to the point of junction with the French the line was filled by the Fourteenth Corps under Lord Cavan of Ypres fame. In the movement, then, which we are immediately considering, it is the Third, Fifteenth, and Fourteenth Corps which are concerned. We shall take them as usual from the left, and follow the fortunes of each until their immediate operations reached some definite term. It is a gigantic movement upon which we look, for from the 11th Division in the Thiepval sector to the left, along ten miles of crowded trenches to the 56th Division near Combles upon the right, twelve divisions, or about 120,000 infantry, were straining on the leash as the minute hand crawled towards zero and the shell streams swept ever swifter overhead.

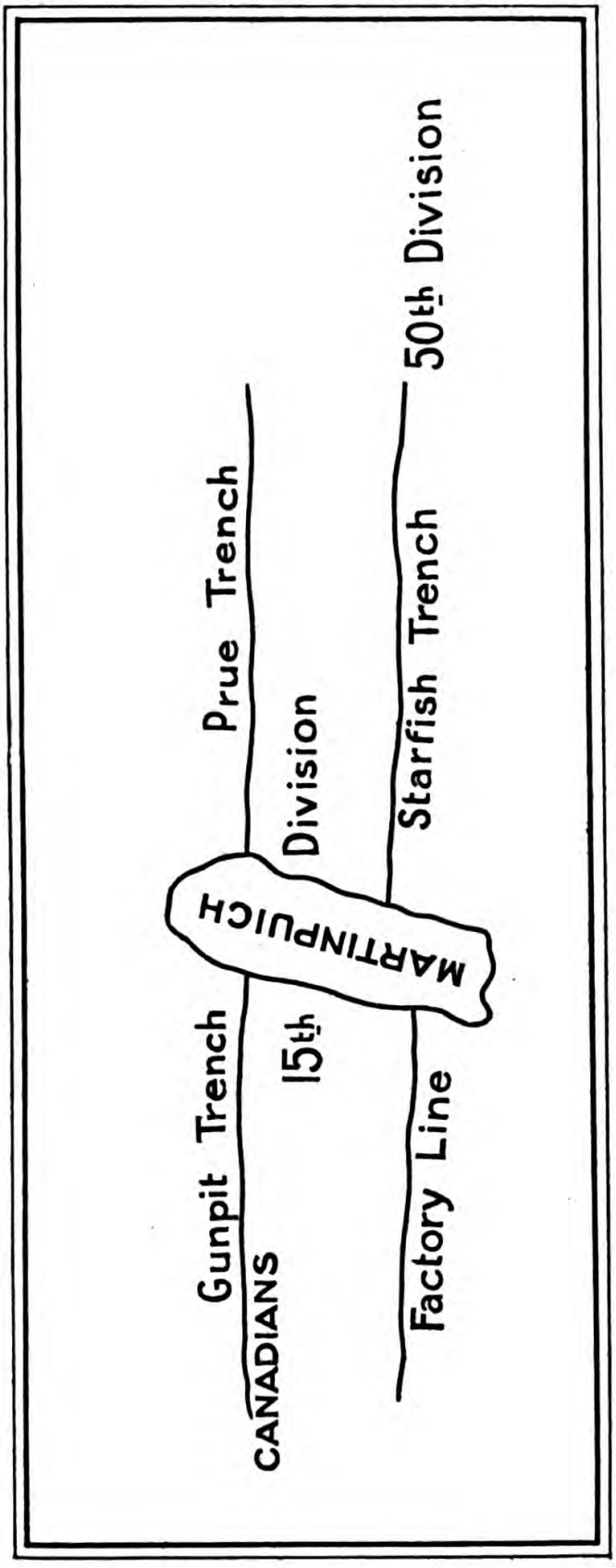
The three divisions which formed the Third Corps were, counting from the left, the 15th, the 50th, and the 47th. Of these, the Scots Division was faced by the strong line of defence in front of Martinpuich and the village of that name. The north of England territorials were opposite to the various German trenches which linked Martinpuich to High Wood. The Londoners were faced by the ghastly charnel-house of High Wood itself, taken and retaken so often, but still mainly in German hands. At 6.20 a.m. the assault went forward along the line.

The 15th Division, which had been strengthened by the 103rd Brigade, advanced upon the line of trenches which separated them from Martinpuich, the 46th Brigade being upon the left and the 45th upon the right. The 10th Highland Light Infantry on the left of the 46th Brigade were in close touch with the Canadians on their left, forming the right-hand unit of Gough's Army. This Brigade, consisting of Highland Light Infantry, Scots Borderers, and Scottish Rifles, swarmed over the German defences, while their comrades upon the right, including Royal Scots, Scots Fusiliers, Camerons, and Argylls, were no less successful. The fact that the whole line was engaged removed the old bugbear of enfilade fire which had broken up so many advances. The German barrage was heavy, but the advance was so swift and the close fight of the trenches came so quickly, that it was less effective than of old. A creeping barrage from the British guns, going forward at a pace of fifty yards a minute, kept in front of the infantry, whose eager feet were ever on the edge of the shrapnel. With the 44th Highland Brigade in close support the whole division swept roaring over the trenches, and

with hardly a pause flooded into Martinpuich, where they met the fringe of the Canadians, whose main advance was to the north-west of the village. It was a magnificent advance, and the more noteworthy as the men of the 15th Division had already been for six unbroken weeks in the line, digging, working, fighting, and continually under shell-fire. Some groups of Germans in the village attempted a short and hopeless resistance, but the greater number threw their arms down and their hands up. It is said that a detachment of six Argylls got into Martinpuich some little time before their comrades, owing to some gap in the defences, and that they not only held their own there, but were found when reinforced to be mounting guard over fifty prisoners. Among many anecdotes of military virtue may be cited that of Sergeant Cunningham of this same battalion, which combined within one episode all the qualities which distinguish the very best type of British soldier. He first attacked single-handed a number of German dug-outs. From one of these a German officer was emerging with his hands up. A soldier dashed forward in act to kill him, upon which the sergeant threatened his comrade with the bomb which he held in his hand. The German officer, as a sign of gratitude, presented Cunningham on the spot with his Iron Cross, which the sergeant at once despatched home to be sold for the benefit of the wounded. It was a quaintly beautiful exhibition of a noble nature.

Immediate steps were taken to consolidate the village and to connect up firmly with the 50th Division on the line of Starfish Trench, and with the Canadians on the line of Gunpit Trench. The trophies upon this occasion amounted to 13 machine-guns, 3 field-guns, 3 heavy howitzers, and about 700 prisoners. There was a counter-attack upon the morning of September 16, which was easily repulsed, and afterwards, save for constant heavy shelling, the village was left in the hands of the victors. A few days later the 15th was relieved by the 23rd Division.

Whilst this brilliant advance had been conducted on their left, the 50th Division, the same north country Territorial Division which had done such vital service during the gas battle at Ypres, had carried the trenches opposed to them. They had no village or fixed point at their front with which their success can be linked ; but it may be said generally that they kept the centre level with the two victorious wings, and that in the evening of September 15 they extended from the Starfish Trench on the left to the new position of the 47th Division upon the right. This position was a magnificent one, for High Wood had been finally taken, and the British line had been carried forward by these splendid London battalions, until in the evening the 140th Brigade on the right had been able to join up with the New Zealanders upon the Flers line. Advancing on a one-brigade front, with the 6th and 15th London in the lead, the London territorials, after one slight check, rushed the wood, and by 11 o'clock not only had it in their complete possession but had



FINAL POSITION AT MARTINPUICH

won 150 yards beyond it, where they consolidated. Two tanks which had been allotted to them were unfortunately unable to make their way through that terrible chaos of fallen trees, irregular trenches, deep shell-holes, and putrescent decay, which extended for a third of a mile from south to north. The wood now passed permanently into British hands, and the 47th Division has the honour of the final capture ; but in justice to the 33rd and other brave divisions which had at different times taken and then lost it, it must be remembered that it was a very much more difficult proposition to hold it when there was no general attack, and when the guns of the whole German line could concentrate upon the task of making it uninhabitable.

So much for the capture of High Wood by the 47th Division. Speaking generally, it may be said that each of the three divisions forming Pulteney's Third Corps was equally successful in reaching and in retaining the objectives assigned for the attack.

The dividing line between the Third Corps and Horne's Fifteenth Corps was to the south of High Wood in the neighbourhood of Drop Trench. The order of the divisions in the latter corps from the left was the New Zealanders, the 41st Division, and the 14th Light Division. We shall follow each in its turn.

The New Zealand Division had confirmed in France the high reputation which their predecessors had founded in South Africa, and which they had themselves renewed on the Gallipoli peninsula. They were troops with a splendid spirit, and no Londoner who has seen their tall lithe figures with the crimson hat-bands which distinguish them from other oversea troops, needs to be told how fine was their physique. They were fortunate, too, in a divisional commander of great dash and gallantry. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that in this, their first serious battle, they carried themselves with great distinction and made good the objective which had been assigned to them.

This objective was the famous Switch Trench between High Wood and Delville Wood, a section which was held by the 4th Bavarian Division. Good as the Bavarians are, they had no chance when it came to close quarters with the stalwart men of Auckland and Otago, who formed the 2nd Brigade in the front line of the New Zealand battle. The machine-gun fire which they had to face was heavy and deadly, especially for the Otagos, who were on the left near High Wood. They poured on, however, in an unbroken array, springing down into Switch Trench, bayoneting part of the garrison, sending back the survivors as prisoners, and rapidly forming up once more for a fresh advance. The New Zealand Rifle Brigade passed over the captured trench and lay down under the barrage 300 yards beyond it, whence at 6.40 they went forward upon a new advance with such impetuosity that they could hardly be kept out of the friendly fire in front of them. The next obstacle, Fat Trench, was easily surmounted, and by noon the Flers Trench and Flers Support Trench had both fallen to this fine advance.

The village of Flers was not in the direct line of the advance, but the fringe of the New Zealanders passed through the edge of it, and connected up with the 41st Division who had occupied it.

When, as will presently be shown, the left-hand brigade of this division was temporarily driven back by a sharp German counter-attack, the New Zealanders were bare upon their right, while a gap existed also upon their left. In spite of this they held on to their advanced position to the north-west of the village, the line being strengthened by battalions from Wellington, Hawke's Bay, and West Coast, who pushed forward into the fight.

In the morning of the 16th the reserve brigade had come up and the advance was renewed as far as Grove Alley upon the left, the Canterbury battalion clearing and holding the new ground, with the Aucklanders and Otagos in immediate support. With this new advance the New Zealanders had come forward 3000 yards in two days—a notable performance—and were within short striking distance of the great German systems of Gird Trench and Gird Support. Two German counters that evening, one upon the Rifle Brigade and the other on the 1st Wellington battalion, had no success.

On the right of the New Zealanders was the 41st Division under General Lawford, one of the heroes of the original 7th Division. His objective after surmounting the German trench lines was the fortified village of Flers. His artillery support was particularly strong, for Lushington, his C.R.A., had under him the very efficient guns of the 21st Division, as well as those of his own unit. The infantry advance was carried out with Towsey's 122nd Brigade on the left, Clemson's 124th on the right, and Davidson's 123rd in reserve. All the battalions save one were South of England, and most of them from the home counties, a district which has furnished some of the finest infantry of the War. As they advanced they were in close touch with the 2nd New Zealanders upon the left and with the 41st Brigade upon the right. The first objective, Tea Support Trench, was rapidly overrun by the Royal Riflemen, Hampshire, and Queen's Surrey battalions who formed the front line. The garrison surrendered. The continuation of Switch Trench stretched now in front of them, and both front brigades, with a ten minutes' interval in favour of the left one, made good the sections in front of them. The division was fortunate in its tanks, for seven out of ten got over the first line, and some survived for the whole day, spreading dismay in front of them and amused appreciation behind. The resistance was by no means desperate save by a few machine-gunners, who were finally scared or butted out of their emplacements by the iron monsters. Two tanks did good service, cutting the wire to the west of Flers Road, and the village was opened up to the stormers, who rushed into it shortly after eight o'clock. One tank went up the east side of the village and crushed in two houses containing machine-guns, while another one passed down the main street ; and yet another

cleared up the west side. Nowhere upon this day of battle did these engines of warfare justify themselves so well as at Flers.

By ten o'clock the village was cleared and consolidated, but the German guns were very active, and there was a strong counter-attack from fresh infantry, which fell heavily upon the already worn troops who had now passed beyond the village and got as far as the Box and Cox Trenches. There had been a large number of officer casualties. Shortly after ten o'clock Captain Baskell of the 18th King's Royal Rifles had got far forward with a mixed party of 100 men with some Lewis guns, and had established a strong point at Box and Cox, which he held until about one. During those three hours the shell-fall was very severe. The division had become somewhat scattered, partly owing to the street fighting in Flers and partly because the 124th Brigade upon the right, although it had kept touch with the 41st Brigade, had lost touch with its own comrades upon the left. Finding that its left flank was open, it fell back and took up the line of the Sunken Road, a quarter of a mile south of Flers, where it remained.

Meanwhile the 122nd Brigade was in some trouble. The pressure of counter-attack in front of it had become so heavy that there was a general falling back of the more advanced units. This retrograde movement was stopped by the Brigade-Major, Gwyn Thomas, who collected a section of the 228th Field Company of Royal Engineers, together with little groups of mixed battalions in Flers Trench, and sent them forward again, working in conjunction with the New Zealand 3rd (Rifle) Brigade to the north end of the village. Avoiding the centre of Flers, which was flaring and flaming with shells like the live crater of a volcano, these troops skirted the flanks of the houses and by 2 p.m. had arrived once more at the north and north-west of the hamlet. Five Vickers guns were brought up, and the position made good by 2 p.m., the Brigadier-General being personally most active in this reorganisation of his line.

Whilst the 122nd Brigade had met and overcome this momentary set-back, the 124th on the right had endured a similar experience and had come out of it with equal constancy. Shortly after one they had fallen back to Flers Trench, where they were rallied by their Brigadier, and moved forward again accompanied by some stray units of the 14th Division. About 3 p.m. they were reinforced by two fresh companies of the 23rd Middlesex from the reserve brigade. By half-past four the whole of the remains of the division were north of Flers in a ragged but indomitable line, steadily winning ground once more, and pushing back the German attack. By half-past six they had got level with Flea Trench and Hogshead, and were close to the great Gird Trench. Some of the 124th, led by Colonel Lord Faversham, tried hard to establish themselves in this important work, but lost heavily from a machine-gun established in a cornfield on their right. At seven o'clock the advanced line was consolidated, and the scattered units reorganised so far as the

want of officers would permit. Very many of the latter, including Colonel Ash of the 23rd Middlesex, had been killed or wounded. The 11th Queen's, from the reserve brigade, was sent up to strengthen the front posts, while an officer of the same battalion was placed in charge of the Flers defences. No tank was left intact in the evening, but they had amply justified themselves and done brilliant work in this section of the battlefield.

The morning of September 16 saw a forward movement in this quarter upon the Gird Trench, which was shared in by the divisions upon both wings. The 64th Brigade of the 21st Division had been placed under the orders of the General commanding the 41st for the purpose of this attack, so that the subsequent losses fell upon the North-countrymen. The advance got forward about 200 yards and established itself close to the great trench, but the losses were heavy, the machine-guns active, and farther progress was for the moment impossible. The 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry and 15th Durham Light Infantry were the chief sufferers in this affair. On September 17 the 55th Division relieved the 41st, whose record for the battle was certainly a glorious one, as in one day they had taken Tea Support, Switch Trench, Flers Trench, Flers village, Box and Cox and Flea Trench, any one of which might be considered an achievement. How great their efforts were may be measured by the fact that nearly 50 per cent. of the 122nd Brigade had fallen. The losses of the 124th were almost as heavy, and those of the 123rd were considerable. Altogether 149 officers out of 251 and 2994 out of about 7500 were killed or wounded. The opponents both of the 41st and of the 14th Divisions were the 5th Bavarian Division, who held the German line from Flers to Ginchy, and must have been well-nigh annihilated in the action.

The story of the 14th Light Division has been to some extent told in recounting the experiences of the 41st Division, as the two advanced side by side upon prolongations of the same trenches, with equal dangers and equal successes. No village fell within the sphere of their actual operations, though a complete victory would have brought them to Guedecourt, but it was part of their task to sweep up the German trenches to the north of Delville Wood, especially the Tea Support and the Switch Trench. This task was committed to the 41st Brigade consisting entirely of Rifle Brigade and Royal Rifle Battalions. The advance was for 500 yards downhill, and then up a long slope of 700 yards, which leads to a plateau about 200 yards across, with the Switch Trench in the centre of it. The Riflemen swept over this space with a splendid dash which showed that they had inherited all those qualities of the old 60th which were cultivated by Sir John Moore and celebrated by Napier, qualities which were always shared by their comrades of the Rifle Brigade. Regardless of the enemy's fire, and so eager that they occasionally were struck on the backs by their own shrapnel, the long thin lines pushed forward in perfect formation, the 8th Rifles and 8th

Rifle Brigade in front, with the 7th Battalions of the same regiments in close support.

By ten o'clock they had cleared the network of trenches in front of them and gone forward 2000 yards. The main attack was carried on by the 42nd Brigade, composed also of Riflemen with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 5th Shropshires. This brigade pushed on, keeping in close touch with the 41st Division on the left, but gradually losing touch with the Guards on their right, so that a dangerous gap was created. It was covered by the 7th Divisional Artillery as well as by its own guns. In its advance it passed through the ranks of its fellow-brigade, which had cleared the first trenches up to and including the line of the Switch Trench. The front line from the left consisted of the 5th Shropshires and 9th Rifle Brigade, with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 9th Rifles behind. From the beginning the brigade was under heavy fire, and Colonel Webb of the Oxfords was twice wounded, which did not prevent him from still leading his battalion. The first obstacle, Gap Trench, was safely carried, and the line swept onwards to Bull's Road where they were cheered by the sight of a tank engaging and silencing a German battery, though it was itself destroyed in the moment of victory. The losses in the two rifle battalions were especially heavy as the right flank was exposed owing to the gap which had formed. This deadly fire held up the flank, with the result that the Shropshires and Oxfords who were less exposed to it soon found themselves considerably in advance of their comrades, where they formed a line which was extended about midday by the arrival of the 9th Rifles. At this period large reinforcements of the enemy were seen flocking into Gird Trench and Gird Support Trench in front. So strong were they that they attempted a counter-attack on the right front of the 42nd Brigade, but this was brought to a stand, and finally broken up by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. The supporting 43rd Brigade came up in the evening and took over the ground gained, together with four German guns which had been captured. The final result, therefore, was that the division had won its way to the edge of that Gird Trench which represented the next great task which should be attempted by the Army—a task which, as already shown, was attempted by three divisions on the morning of September 16, but proved to be too formidable for their depleted and wearied ranks.

This fine advance of the 14th Division brought them over the low ridge which had faced them. " It was a grand sight," says a Rifleman, " to see the promised land lying green at one's feet, with Germans moving across the open, and ammunition waggons going at a trot to and from their batteries, but the grandest sight of the day was seeing the battalions advance, the men dancing along only too anxious to get to close grips with the enemy."

Among many brave deeds recorded of the division there was none finer than those of Captain Morrison and Corporal Taylor, both of the

Medical Service, who stayed in the open all day in spite of wounds, tending those who were hardly worse than themselves.

On the evening of September 16 there was an advance of the 43rd Brigade, consisting of Somerset, Durham, Cornish, and Yorkshire Light Infantry, which succeeded in establishing itself in the Gird Trench, though they found it impossible to get as far as the Gird Support. This successful advance was supported by the Shropshire and Oxford battalions of the 42nd Brigade, who established flank protections and got into touch with the Guards in Gap Trench upon the right. The 14th Division was withdrawn from the line after this, and their place taken by the 21st.

We have now briefly considered the operations carried out during this great battle by Horne's Fifteenth Corps. Upon their right, stretching from the neighbourhood of Ginchy to the left of the French Army in the neighbourhood of Combles, was Cavan's Fourteenth Corps, which contained in its battle line the Guards, the 6th Division, and the 56th London Territorial Division. Taking them, as always, from the left, we will begin by tracing the progress of the Guards.

The Guards Division had taken over the Ginchy Section some days previously from the Irish Division, and had at once found themselves involved in very heavy fighting, which left them a good deal weakened for the great advance. They were faced by a strong system of trenches, and especially by one stronghold upon their right front, called the Quadrilateral, which was a most formidable thorn, not only in their side but also in that of the 6th Division on the right. On September 13 and 14 these two divisions strove hard, and sustained heavy losses in the endeavour to clear their front of, and to outflank, this serious obstacle, and some account of these preliminary operations may be here introduced, although, as explained, they were antecedent to the general engagement. The attack upon the German trenches on the evening of September 13 was begun by Ross' 6th Division, which advanced with the 71st Brigade on the left, the 16th on the right, and the 18th in reserve. For 500 yards the advance was successful until it reached the sunken road which leads from Ginchy to Leuze Wood. Here the leading battalions of the 71st Brigade, the 2nd Sherwood Foresters upon the left and the 9th Suffolks upon the right, were held up by a furious fire which caused them heavy losses. The 8th Bedfords, one of the leading battalions of the 16th Brigade, was also heavily punished. Many officers fell, including Major Mack of the Suffolks, a civilian-bred soldier over sixty years of age, who had distinguished himself by his fiery courage. The 2nd Brigade of Guards had advanced on the left, near Ginchy Telegraph, and had also forced their way as far as the road, where they were held up partly by a terrific barrage from the north-east and partly by the murderous fire from the Quadrangle. The whole line dug in upon the ground they had won and waited for a farther push in the

morning. In this action No. 2 Company of the 2nd Irish Guards suffered heavy casualties from close-range fire.

On September 14 a second attempt was made to get forward, the action being a purely local one, but extending over a considerable space from Ginchy to near Leuze Wood, with its centre on the line of Ginchy Telegraph. The 3rd Brigade of Guards came into action this morning and made some progress in the orchard north of Ginchy. At the same time, the 2nd Sherwoods got astride of the little railway which intersected their position. The gains were inconsiderable, however, which could not be said for the losses, mostly due to machine-gun fire from the Quadrangle. The fact that this point was still untaken gave the whole Fourteenth Corps a very difficult start for the general action upon September 15 to which we now come.

On the signal for the general advance the Guards Division advanced to the front between Delville Wood and Ginchy. The 1st Guards Brigade was on the left, the 2nd on the right, and the 3rd in reserve. The front line of battalions counting from the left were the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Coldstream with the 3rd Grenadiers as right flank. Behind, in the second line from the left, were the 1st Irish, 2nd Grenadiers, 2nd Irish, and 1st Scots. Disregarding the Quadrilateral upon their right, which was holding up the 6th Division, the Guards swept magnificently onwards, losing many officers and men, but never their direction or formation. From 6.20 in the morning until 4 p.m. they overcame one obstacle after another, and continually advanced, though the progress was unequal at different points on the line. There was a short sharp bout of hand-to-hand fighting in the front line trench, but the rush of the heavy disciplined Guardsmen was irresistible, and the defenders were soon overwhelmed. In this mêlée the battalions got badly mixed up, part of the 2nd Irish getting carried away by the 1st Brigade. The 1st Brigade found a more formidable obstacle in front of them in Vat Alley, but this also was cleared after a struggle, the left-hand units getting mixed with the right-hand units of the 14th Division. About one o'clock the 3rd Coldstream on the extreme left were held up by a wired strong point. They were weak in numbers and almost without officers, so they dug in as best they could and waited. On the right the 2nd Brigade made good progress, and about midday its leading line topped the low ridge and saw the land of promise beyond, the green slope leading up to Lesbœufs, and in the middle of the slope, not more than a thousand yards away, a battery of field-guns raining shrapnel upon them. They could get no farther, and they consolidated at this point, digging in under heavy shell-fire. The German infantry was seen at one time marching down in artillery formation for a counter-attack, but the movement was soon dispersed. In the evening the front line, terribly worn and consisting of a jumble of exhausted men, held on firmly to the last inch that they had won. Too weak to advance and too proud to retire, they lay under the torment of the shells and waited

for dusk. Colonel Campbell of the 3rd Coldstream, in temporary command of his brigade, had sent back during the afternoon for help, and the 2nd Scots were sent up from the 3rd Brigade, but the German barrage was so terrific that they sustained very heavy losses, including Colonel Tempest, Wynne-Finch, the adjutant, and many other officers. The battalion, or what remained of it, arrived in time to help to crush a dangerous counter-attack, which was sweeping down from between Guedecourt and Lesbœufs, a repulse which was entirely inflicted by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. Lieutenant Boyd seems to have been the senior officer present at this critical moment, and to have met it as our subalterns have so often met large emergencies during the War. The advanced line was held until upon the next day the 60th Brigade, and finally the whole of the 20th Division, took over the new positions, which may be regarded as a protective flank line in continuation of that of the 56th Division. It should be mentioned that the 61st Brigade of the 20th Division had been lent to the Guards during the battle, and had done very sterling and essential work. For a short time the Guards were rested after this splendid but costly service.

In the meantime the gallant 6th Division was left face to face with the hardest problem of all, the Quadrilateral trenches, which, as the name would indicate, were as formidable in the flanks or rear as in front. With a tenacity which was worthy of the traditions of this great division it settled down to the task of clearing its front, meeting with check after check, but carrying on day and night until the thing was done. On the first assault upon September 15, the 1st Leicesters of the 71st Brigade were able to make some progress, but the 8th Bedfords of the 16th Brigade, who shared the attack, were completely held up at the starting-point by the terrific fire, while the first Buffs had heavy losses in endeavouring to come up to their aid. By about midday a mixture of battalions, which numbered about 200 of the York and Lancasters, 50 Buffs and 50 Bedfords, had made their way into the advanced German line, but the Quadrilateral was still intact. General Ross, seeing the certain losses and uncertain results which must follow from a frontal attack, determined to work round the obstacle, and before evening the 16th Brigade, which had already lost 1200 men, was ready for the advance. The 18th Brigade had gone forward past the Quadrilateral upon the left, working up to the Ginchy-Morval Road, and in close touch with the 1st Scots Guards on the extreme flank of the Guards Division. It now worked down towards the north face of the German stronghold, and in the course of September 16 the 2nd Durham Light Infantry under Colonel Irvine, by a bold advance, laid hold of the northern trench of the Quadrilateral down to within a hundred yards of the Ginchy-Morval Road. Here they were relieved by the 1st West Yorks, who took over the task on the 17th, keeping up constant pressure upon the garrison whose resistance was admirable. These brave men belonged to the 185th German Division. By this time they were isolated, as the

British wave had rolled far past them on either side, but their spirit was as high as ever. A second trench to the north of the work was rushed on September 17 by the Leicesters, who bayoneted fifty Germans in a hand-to-hand conflict. Early in the morning of September 18 came the end, when the British battalions, led by the 1st Shropshire Light Infantry, closed suddenly in and stormed the position. Seven machine-guns (five of which fell to the Shropshires) and a few hundred exhausted or wounded prisoners represented the trophies of this very difficult operation. The 6th Division now connected up with the 20th upon their left, and with the 56th upon their right, after which, on September 19, they handed over their front for a time to the 5th Division.

There now only remains the 56th Division upon the extreme right of the Army—the division which contained many of the crack London Territorial Battalions, re-formed and reinforced since its terrible losses at the Gommecourt Salient on July 1. In following the fortunes of this fine division on September 15, it is necessary to go back for some days, as a series of operations had been undertaken before the great battle, which were as arduous as the battle itself. On coming into the line on September 9, the division had at once been given the task of advancing that wing of the Army. Upon that date the 168th and 169th Brigades were attacking upon the line of the road which connects Ginchy with Combles, the general objects of the advance being gradually to outflank Combles on the one side and the Quadrilateral on the other. Some ground was permanently gained by both brigades on that day, the Victoria Rifles and the 4th London doing most of the fighting.

On September 10 the advance was continued, a scattered clump of trees called Leuze Wood being the immediate obstacle in front of the right-hand brigade, while the left-hand brigade was trying to get into touch with the division on their left, and were confronted by the continuation of the same system of trenches. The 169th Brigade on the right was advancing through Leuze Wood, and suffered heavy losses before reaching its objective. On the left the London Scottish and the Rangers were extending east along the Ginchy Road, endeavouring to link up with the Guards, for there was an awkward gap at that date between the divisions. This was filled, however, by the advent of the 5th and subsequently of the 6th Division. The object of all the above operations was to get the right flank of the Army into its allotted position for the battle to come.

On September 15 the London Division went forward with the whole line at 6.20 in the morning, the 167th Brigade on the left, the 169th upon the right. The original direction of advance had been north and south, but it soon became almost from west to east as the division, pivoting upon Leuze Wood, swung round to attack Bouleaux Wood to the north of it, and to hold a defensive flank for the whole army. Their front was a very narrow one to allow for the fact that their essential work was lateral.

The 167th Brigade fought its way bravely into Bouleaux Wood, where they endured the usual horrors of this forest fighting, which came especially upon the 7th Middlesex battalion, who lost 400 men, chiefly from the fire of unseen machine-guns. There was a very heavy barrage between Ginchy and Bouleaux Wood, so that all reserves and supports endured heavy losses before they could get up. By midday the 1st London and the 8th were involved in the wood and some progress was being made, while the 2nd London of the 169th Brigade had taken and consolidated a trench near the Sunken Road, but a further attack upon a second trench to the east of Leuze Wood, two days later, was a failure. On this same day, September 18, the 168th Brigade relieved the 167th in Bouleaux Wood, while the whole division, like one blade of a scissors, edged its way eastwards towards Combles to meet the French 2nd Division, who were closing in from the other side. Already rumours were current that the Germans were evacuating this important little town, but many very active German trenches and strong points still lay all round it, through which the Allies, from either side, were endeavouring to force their way. On the night of September 18-19, the 5th Cheshires, pioneer battalion of the division, under the direction of Major Neame, R.E., constructed a long trench parallel to Bouleaux Wood, which formed a defensive flank for the operations. The whole of this wood had now been cleared with the exception of the extreme northern corner. Here we may leave the 56th Division, for the fall of Combles will fit in more properly to our next survey, when we shall have once again to go down the whole line from left to right and to show one more stage in the advance.

This Battle of Flers may be said to mark an epoch in military history on account of the use of the so-called tank, an instrument which had no vital effect upon the course of the fight, but which was obviously capable of being much enlarged, and of being made in every way more formidable. It had been a common criticism up to this date that our military equipment had always been an imitation, very belated, of that of our enemy. Now at last Great Britain, warming to the War, was giving her inventive and manufacturing as well as her military talents full scope—and the tank was the first-born of her fancy. It is a matter of history that Britain has been the inventor of processes and Germany the adapter of them, so that there was a valuable asset in that direction could one break through the bonds of red tape and get without hindrance from the thinker in his study to the fighter in the trench. Those who have had the experience of discussing any military problem in the Press, and have found by the next post fifty letters from men of all ranks and professions, presenting solutions for it, can best understand how active is the inventive brain of the country. In this instance, Mr. Winston Churchill is said, during his tenure of office, to have first conceived the idea of the tanks, but the actual details were worked out by a number of men. Especially they are owing to Colonel Stern, a

civilian before the War, who used his knowledge of motor manufacture and his great organising ability to put the construction through in the shortest time, to Commander d'Eyncourt of the Navy, and to Colonel Swinton, R.E., who looked after the crews and equipment. On an average six of these engines, strange modern resuscitations of the war-chariots of our ancestors, were allotted to each division. The whole affair was frankly experimental, and many got into trouble through the breakdown of machinery, the limits of carrying capacity, and the slipping of the caterpillar driving-bands at the sides. Their pace, too, was against them, as they could only go twenty yards per minute as against the fifty of the infantry. Hence they had to be sent ahead down lanes in the barrage, with the result that the element of surprise was lessened. Their vision also was very defective, and they were bad neighbours, as they drew fire. The result was a very mixed report from various Divisional Commanders, some of whom swore by, and others at them. The net result, however, was summed up by the words of commendation from General Haig in his despatch, and there were some cases, as at Flers itself, where the work done was simply invaluable, and the machine-guns were nosed out and rooted up before they could do any damage. The adventures of individual tanks could fill a volume to themselves, some of them, either in ignorance or recklessness, wandering deep into the enemy's lines, and amazing rearward batteries by their sudden uncouth appearance. Several were destroyed, but none actually fell into the German hands. Enough was done to show their possibilities, and also to prove that the Navy and the Flying Service had not sufficed to exhaust our amazing supply of high-spirited youths ready to undertake the most nerve-shaking tasks so long as a touch of sport gave them a flavour. The very names of these land cruisers, Crême de Menthe and the like, showed the joyous, debonair spirit in which their crews faced the unknown dangers of their new calling.

Summing up the events of September 15, it was without any doubt the greatest British victory, though not the most important, which had been gained up to date in the War. July 1 was the most important, and all subsequent ones arose from it, since it was then that the Chinese Wall of Germany was breached. July 14 was also a considerable victory, but it was only a portion of the line which was attacked, and that portion was partly regained for a time by the German counter-attacks. The battle of September 15, however, was on as huge a scale as that of July 1, but was devoid of those long stretches of untaken trench which made us pay so heavy a price for our victory. From the Pozières Ridge upon the left to Bouleaux Wood upon the right twelve divisions moved forward to victory, and save in the small section of the Quadrilateral, everything gave way at once to that majestic advance. The ultimate objectives had been carefully defined, for the Battle of Loos had taught that the infantry must not outrun the guns, but this pre-ordained limit was attained at almost every spot. Martinpuich, High Wood, Flers, Delville Wood, and

Leuze Wood, all passed permanently within the British lines, and the trophies of victory amounted to 5000 prisoners and a dozen guns. A this stage no less than 21,000 prisoners had been taken by the British and 34,000 by the French since the great series of battles was commenced upon July 1.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GAINING OF THE THIEPVAL RIDGE

Assault on Thiepval by 18th Division—Heavy fighting—Co-operation of 11th Division—Fall of Thiepval—Fall of Schwaben Redoubt—Taking of Stuff Redoubt—Important gains on the Ridge.

HAVING treated the successful advance made by Rawlinson's Fourth Army upon September 15, it would be well before continuing the narrative of their further efforts to return to Gough's Army in the north, the right Canadian wing of which had captured Courcelette, but which was occupied in the main with the advance upon the Thiepval Ridge.

The actual capture of Thiepval was an operation of such importance that it must be treated in some detail. The village, or rather the position, was a thorn in the side of the British, as it lay with its veteran garrison of Würtembergers, girdled round and flanked by formidable systems of trenches upon the extreme left of their line. Just above Thiepval was a long slope ending in a marked ridge, which was topped by the Schwaben Redoubt. Both armies recognised the extreme importance of this position, since its capture would mean a fire-command over all the German positions to the north of the Ancre, while without it the British could never reap the full result of their success in breaking the line on July 1. For this reason, instructions had been given to the picked German troops who held it to resist at all costs, even to the death. They had massed at least four hundred guns in order to beat down every assault. Yet the attempt must be made, and it was assigned to Jacob's Second Corps, the actual divisions engaged being Maxse's 18th and Ritchie's 11th, both of them units recruited in the South of England. The latter was distinguished as the first English Division of the New Armies, while the former had already gained great distinction in the early days of the Somme battle when they captured Trones Wood. They were supported in their difficult venture by a considerable concentration of artillery, which included the guns of the 25th and 49th Divisions as well as their own. Jacob, their Corps leader, was an officer who had risen from the command of an Anglo-Indian Brigade to that of a Corps within two years. The whole operation, like all others in this region, was under the direction of Sir Hubert Gough.

Every possible preparation was made for the assault, and all the

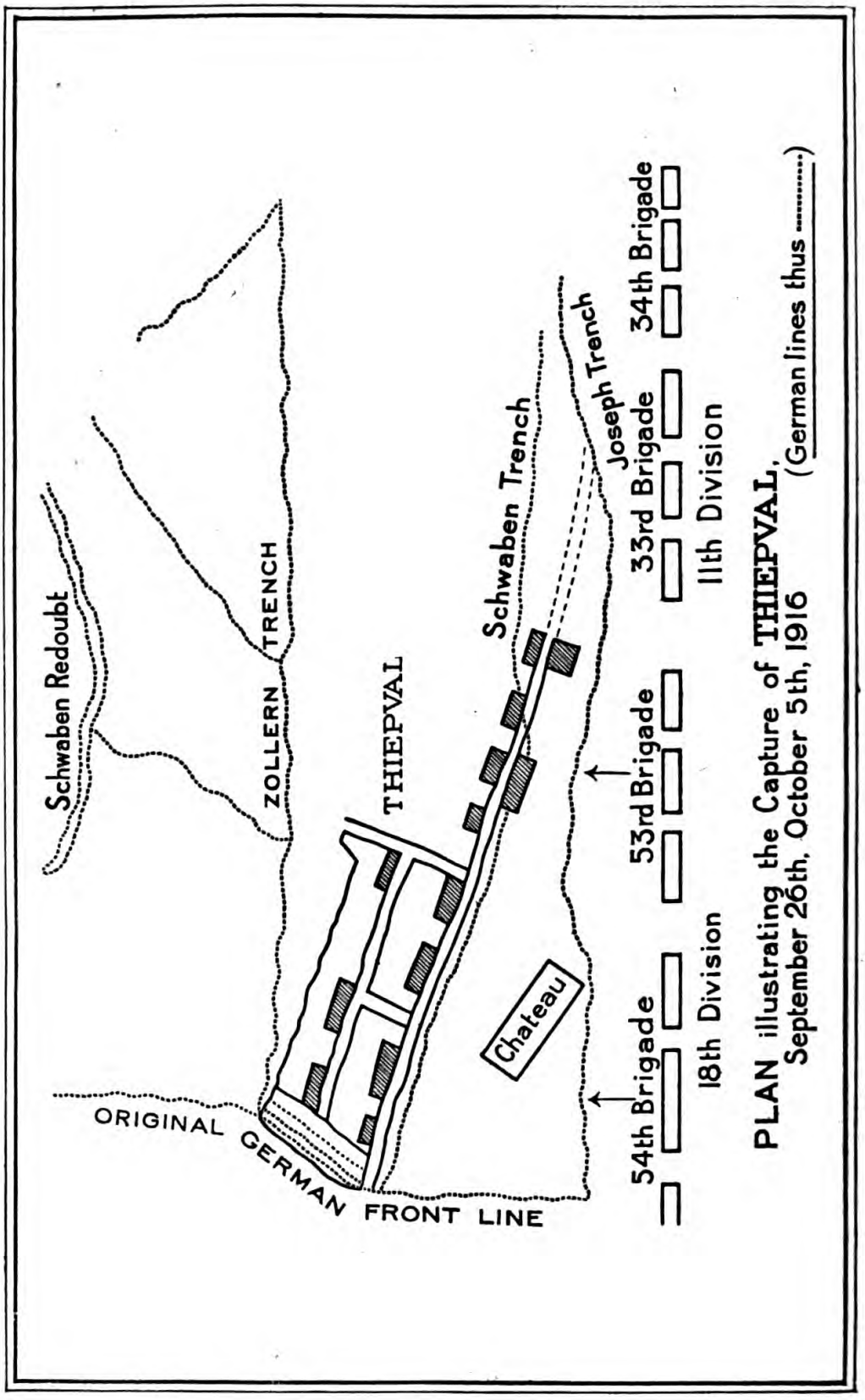
requirements of prolonged warfare were used to minimise the losses and ensure the success of the storm-troops. Four tanks were brought up to co-operate, and one of them, as will be shown, was of vital use at a critical moment. Instructions were given to the advancing battalions to let their own shrapnel strike within a few yards of their toes as they advanced, huddling in a thick line behind the screen of falling bullets which beat down the machine-guns in front. With fine judgment in some cases the supports were taken out of the advanced trenches and concealed here and there so that the answering barrage of the enemy fell upon emptiness. So war-wise were the British, and so cool their dispositions, that certain enemy trenches were actually exempted from bombardment, so that they might form an intact nucleus of defence when the place was taken.

The Canadian Corps were to attack from Courcelette upon the right, but their advance was only indirectly concerned with Thiepval village, being directed towards the ridge which runs north-west of Courcelette to the Schwaben Redoubt. Next to the Canadians on the left was the 11th Division, and on their left the 13th, which had been strengthened by the addition of the 146th Brigade of the 49th Division. The latter brigade held the original British front line during the action so as to release the whole of the 18th Division for the advance. The immediate objective of this division was Thiepval village, to be followed by the Schwaben Redoubt. Those of the 11th Division on its right were Zollern and Stuff Redoubts.

The 18th Division assaulted with two brigades, the 53rd on the right, the 54th on the left, each being confronted by a network of trenches backed by portions of the shattered village. The advance was from south to north, and at right angles to the original British trench line. The hour of fate was 12.35 in the afternoon of September 26.

The average breadth of No Man's Land was 250 yards, which was crossed by these steady troops at a slow, plodding walk, the pace being regulated by the searching barrage, which lingered over every shell-hole in front of them. Through the hard work of Lothbinière's sappers and the Sussex pioneers the assembly trenches had been pushed well out, otherwise the task would have been more formidable.

Following the fortunes of the 53rd Brigade on the right, its movements were supposed to synchronise with those of the 33rd Brigade on the left flank of the 11th Division. The right advanced battalion was the 8th Suffolks, with the 10th Essex on the left, each of them in six waves. Close at their heels came the 8th Norfolks, whose task was to search dug-outs and generally to consolidate the ground won. The front line of stormers rolled over Joseph Trench, which was the German advanced position, but before they had reached it there was a strange eruption of half-dressed unarmed Germans yelling with terror and bolting through the barrage. Many of them dashed through the stolid Suffolks, who took no notice of them, but let them pass. Others lost their nerve like


Schwaben Redoubt
ZOLLERN TRENCH
THIEPVAL
Schwaben Trench
Joseph Trench
34th Brigade
33rd Brigade
11th Division
53rd Brigade
Chateau
54th Brigade
18th Division
ORIGINAL GERMAN FRONT LINE
PLAN illustrating the Capture of THIEPVAL, September 26th, October 5th, 1916
(German lines thus ----------)

rabbits at a battue, and darted here and there between the lines until the shrapnel found them. It was an omen of victory that such clear signs of shaken *moral* should be evident so early in the day. There was sterner stuff behind, however, as our men were speedily to learn.

The advance went steadily forward, cleaning up the trenches as it went, and crossing Schwaben Trench, Zollern Trench, and Bulgar Trench, in each of which there was sharp resistance, only quelled by the immediate presence of Lewis guns, or occasionally by the rush of a few determined men with bayonets. It was 2.30 before the advance was brought to a temporary stand by machine-gun fire from the right. After that hour a small party of Suffolks under Lieutenant Mason got forward some distance ahead, and made a strong point which they held till evening, this gallant young officer falling under the enemy's fire.

The success of the Suffolks on the right was equalled by that of the Essex on the left, passing through the eastern portion of Thiepval without great loss, for the usual machine-gun fire seemed to have been stamped out by the British guns. The whole of this fine advance of the 53rd Brigade covered about 1000 yards in depth and accounted for a great number of the enemy in killed, wounded, and prisoners. The advance made and the cost paid both showed that both officers and soldiers were learning the lessons of modern warfare with that swift adaptability which Britain has shown in every phase of this terrific and prolonged test. This old, old nation's blood has flowed into so many younger ones that her own vitality might well be exhausted; but she has, on the contrary, above all the combatants, given evidence of the supple elasticity of youth, moulding herself in an instant to every movement of the grim giant with whom she fought.

Great as had been the success of the 53rd Brigade, it was not possible for them to get on to the Schwaben Redoubt, their ultimate objective, because, as will be shown, matters were more difficult upon the left, and one corner of the village was still in German possession. They ended the day, therefore, with two battalions consolidating the Zollern Line, a third in support in the Schwaben Trench, and a fourth, the 6th Berks, bringing up munitions and food to their exhausted but victorious comrades. The front line was much mixed, but the men were in good heart, and a visit from their Brigadier in the early morning of the 27th did much to reassure them. To carry on the story of this brigade to the conclusion of the attack it may be added that the whole of the 27th was spent on consolidation and on a daring reconnaissance by a captain of the 53rd Trench Mortar Battery, who crawled forward alone, and made it clear by his report that a new concerted effort was necessary before the Brigade could advance.

We shall now return to 12.35 p.m. on September 26, and follow the 54th Brigade upon the left. The advance was carried out by the 12th Middlesex, with instructions to attack the village, and by the 11th Royal Fusiliers, whose task was to clear the maze of trenches and dug-outs

upon the west of the village, while the 6th Northamptons were to be in close support. So difficult was the task, that a frontage of only 300 yards was allotted to the Brigade, so as to ensure weight of attack—the Fusiliers having a front line of one platoon.

The advance ran constantly into a network of trenches with nodal strong points which were held with resolution and could only be carried by fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Captain Thompson, Lieutenants Miall-Smith and Cornaby, and many of their Fusiliers in the leading company, were killed or wounded in this desperate business. So stern was the fight that the Fusiliers on the left got far behind their own barrage, and also behind their Middlesex comrades on the right, who swept up as far as the château before they were brought to a temporary halt. Here, at the very vital moment, one of the tanks, the only one still available, came gliding forward and put out of action the machine-guns of the château, breaking down in the effort, and remaining on the scene of its success. Across the whole front of the advance there were now a series of small conflicts at close quarters, so stubborn that the left wing of the Fusiliers was held stationary in constant combat for the rest of the day. Extraordinary initiative was shown by privates of both leading battalions when left without officers in this scattered fighting, and here, no doubt, we have a result depending upon the formed educated stuff which went to the making of such troops as these London units of the new armies. Private Edwards and Private Ryder each gained their V.C. at this stage of the action by single-handed advances which carried forward the line. Corporal Tovey lost his life in a similar gallant venture, bayoneting single-handed the crew of a machine-gun and silencing it. Fierce battles raged round garrisoned dug-outs, where no quarter was given or taken on either side. One considerable garrison refused to surrender and perished horribly in the flames of their wood-lined refuge. Those who fled from their refuges were cut down by Lewis guns, Lieutenant Sulman of the Fusiliers getting 50 in this manner. This officer also distinguished himself by his use of a captured map, which enabled him to lead his men to the central telephone installation, where 20 operators were seized by a corporal and two files of Fusiliers, who afterwards put the wires out of gear.

These great results had not been obtained without heavy losses. Colonel Carr of the Fusiliers, Major Hudson, and the Adjutant had all fallen. About three in the afternoon the village had all been cleared save the north-west corner, but the battalions were very mixed, the barrage deadly, the order of the attack out of gear, and the position still insecure. The 54th Brigade was well up with the 53rd upon the right, but upon the left it was held up as already described. The German egg bombs were falling in this area as thick as snowballs in a schoolboy battle, while the more formidable stick bombs were often to be seen, twenty at a time, in the air.

A great deal now depended upon the supports, as the front line was

evidently spent and held. The immediate support was the 6th Northamptons. In moving forward it lost both Colonel Ripley and the Adjutant, and many officers fell, two companies being left entirely to the charge of the sergeants, Pullen and Partridge, who rose finely to their responsibilities. When by four o'clock the battalion had got up through the barrage, there were only two unwounded company officers left standing, both second lieutenants. It was one more demonstration of the fact that a modern barrage can create a zone through which it is practically impossible for unarmoured troops to move. The result was that the battalion was so weak by the time it got up, that it was less a support to others than a unit which was in need of support. The three depleted battalions simply held their line, therefore, until night, and under the cover of darkness they were all drawn off, and the remaining battalion, the 7th Bedfords, took their place. That this could be done at night in strange trenches within a few yards of the German line is a feat which soldiers will best appreciate. The result was that as day broke on the 27th the Germans were faced not by a fringe of exhausted men, but by a perfectly fresh battalion which was ready and eager for immediate attack. Colonel Price of the Bedfords was in immediate charge.

The whole of Thiepval had been taken on the 26th, save only the north-west corner, and it was upon this that two companies of the Bedfords were now directed, their objectives being defined for them by Captain Johnson, who had fought over the ground the day before. Thanks to the gallant leadership of Captain Keep and of Lieutenant Adlam (the latter gaining his Victoria Cross), the place was carried at small loss, and this last refuge of the Thiepval Germans was cleared out. It was a glorious achievement, for by it this very strong point, held against all attacks, French or British, for two years, passed permanently into our hands. The losses were not excessive for such a gain, amounting to about 1500 men. Those of the Germans were very much heavier, and included 600 prisoners drawn from four different regiments. Over 1000 dead were counted.

We will now hark back to 12.35 p.m., the hour of assault, and follow the fortunes of the 11th or first English Division of the New Armies which was advancing on the right of the 18th Division. Within half an hour of the assault the 33rd Brigade and the 34th had crossed both the Joseph and the Schwaben Trenches, the 6th Borderers, 9th Sherwood Foresters, 8th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 9th Lancashire Fusiliers forming the front line. Keeping some sort of touch with Maxse's men on the left they pushed on until their right wing was held up by violent machine-gun fire from the Zollern Redoubt and from Mouquet Farm, the losses falling especially upon the 5th Dorsets. Between six and seven in the evening a mixed body of troops from the division, assisted by the machine-guns of two stranded tanks, attacked Mouquet and finally carried it.

The 18th Division had still a very formidable task before it to be undertaken with the co-operation of the 11th upon its right. This was the capture of the formidable stronghold, made up of many trenches and called the Schwaben Redoubt. It was a thousand yards distant up a long broken slope. No time was lost in tackling this new labour, and at 1 p.m. on September 28 the troops moved forward once again, the same brigades being used, but the worn battalions being replaced by fresh units drawn from the 55th Brigade. The 53rd Brigade on the right had the undefeatable Suffolks and the 7th Queen's Surreys in the van with the Norfolks and Essex behind. The 54th upon a narrower front had the 7th Bedfords in front, with the 5th West Yorks from the 49th Division in immediate support, the Buffs and East Surreys being in Divisional Reserve. The Germans had a captive balloon in the air, but their gunnery was not particularly improved thereby.

At the first rush the Suffolks and Queen's on the right took Bulgar and Martin Trenches, while the 11th Division took Hessian. By 2.30 Market Trench had also fallen. The troops were now well up to Schwaben, and small groups of men pushed their way home in spite of a furious resistance, Captain Walter of the Queen's being one of the first men up. Captain Longbourne of the same battalion, after a long personal duel with a machine-gun, also made a lodgment, capturing with the aid of Sergeant Punter and Private Waldron 46 unwounded prisoners. The 11th Division had won home on the right, and the Suffolks were in touch with them and with the Queen's, so that the position before evening was thoroughly sound. Part of this enormous stronghold was still in German hands, however, and all our efforts could not give us complete control.

Upon the left the 7th Bedfords, leading the 54th Brigade, had made a very notable advance, crossing Market Trench and getting well up to the western face of the great Redoubt. The Reserves, however, lost direction amid the chaos of shell-holes and trenches, drifting away to the left. The Schwaben was occupied at several points, and the first-fruits of that commanding position were at once picked, for the light machine-guns were turned upon the German fugitives as they rushed with bent backs down the sloping trenches which led to St. Pierre Divion. The West Yorkshires were well up, and for a time these two battalions and the Germans seem to have equally divided this portion of the trench between them. There was stark fighting everywhere with bomb and bayonet, neither side flinching, and both so mixed up that neither German nor British commanders could tell how the units lay. In such a case a General can only trust to his men, and a British General seldom trusts in vain.

As night fell in this confused scene where along the whole line the 18th Division had reached its objective but had not cleared it, attempts were made to bring up new men, the Berkshires, a battalion of young drafts, relieving the Suffolks on the right. In the morning two local

counter-attacks by the Germans succeeded in enlarging their area. At the same time the 55th Brigade took over the front, the four battalions being reunited under their own Brigadier. It was clear that the German line was thickening, for it was a matter of desperate urgency to them to recover the Redoubt. They still held the northern end of the labyrinth. On September 30 the East Surreys, moving up behind a massive barrage, took it by storm, but were driven out again before they could get their roots down. The Germans, encouraged by their success, surged south again, but could make no headway. On October 1 the tide set northwards once more, and the Buffs gained some ground. From then till October 5, when the 18th Division was relieved by the 39th, there were incessant alarms and excursions, having the net result that at the latter date the whole Redoubt with the exception of one small section, afterwards taken by the 39th, was in our hands. So ended for the moment the splendid service of the 18th Division. Nearly 2000 officers and men had fallen in the Schwaben operations, apart from the 1500 paid for Thiepval. It is probable, however, that the Schwaben garrison had suffered as much, and they left 232 prisoners in the hands of the victors.

For the purpose of continuity of narrative, we have kept our attention fixed upon the 18th Division, but the 11th Division, which we have left at Mouquet Farm some pages before, had been doing equally good work on the right. In the afternoon of September 27 the 6th Borderers, rushing suddenly from Zollern Trench, made a lodgment in Hessian Trench, to which they resolutely clung. On their left the 6th Yorks and 9th West Yorks had also advanced and gained permanent ground, winning their way into the southern edge of Stuff Redoubt. Here they had to face a desperate counter-attack, but Captain White, with a mixed party of the battalions named, held on against all odds, winning his V.C. by his extraordinary exertions. During the whole of September 29 the pressure at this point was extreme, but the divisional artillery showed itself to be extremely efficient, and covered the exhausted infantry with a most comforting barrage.

The 32nd Brigade was now brought up, and on September 30 the advance was resumed, the whole of this brigade and the 6th Lincolns and 7th South Staffords of the 33rd being strongly engaged. The results were admirable, as the whole of Hessian Trench and the south of Stuff Redoubt were occupied. That night the 11th Division was relieved by the 25th, and it will now be told how the conquest of the Ridge was finally achieved. The 11th withdrew after having done splendid work and sustained losses of 144 officers and 3500 men. Their prisoners amounted to 30 officers and 1125 of all ranks, with a great number of machine-guns and trench mortars.

After the fall of Thiepval and the operations which immediately followed it the front British line in this quarter ran approximately east and west along the Thiepval-Courcelette ridge. So far as part of the front was concerned there was observation over the Valley of the Ancre,

but in another part the Germans still held on to the Stuff Redoubt, and thence for a stretch they were still on the crest and had the observation. The Stuff Redoubt itself on the southern face had been occupied by the 11th, when the Schwaben Redoubt was taken by the 18th Division, but the northern faces of both were still in the hands of the enemy. These had now to be taken in order to clear up the line. A further stronghold, called The Mounds, immediately to the north, came also within the operation.

The 25th Division had, as stated, relieved the 11th, and this new task was handed over to it. On October 9 the first attack was made by the 10th Cheshires, and although their full objective was not reached, the result was satisfactory, a lodgment being made and 100 of the garrison captured, with slight casualties to the stormers, thanks to the good barrage and the workmanlike way in which they took advantage of it. A strong attempt on the part of the Germans to prevent consolidation and to throw out the intruders was quite unsuccessful.

The 8th North Lancs were now placed in the position of the Cheshires, while the 39th Division upon the left joined in the pressure. On October 10 an attack was made by the 16th Sherwoods supported by the 17th Rifles of the 117th Brigade, but it had no success. On the 12th there was a renewed attack by units of the 118th Brigade, chiefly the 4th Black Watch. This succeeded in advancing the line for a short distance, and on October 15 it repulsed two local counter-attacks. Upon the right the 8th North Lancs on October 14 had a very successful advance, in which they carried with moderate loss the stretch of line opposite, as well as the position called The Mounds. Two machine-guns and 125 prisoners were taken.

The British now had observation along the whole ridge with a line of observation posts pushed out beyond the crest. There were formidable obstacles on their right front, however, where the Regina Trench and a heavily fortified quadrilateral system lay in front of the troops already mentioned, and also of the Canadians on the Courcelette line. In order to get ready for the next advance there was some side-stepping of units, the hard-worked 18th coming in on the right next the Canadians, the 25th moving along, and the 39th coming closer on the left. On October 8 the Canadians had a sharp action, in which the Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Winnipeg Battalions showed their usual resolution, and took a couple of hundred prisoners, but were unable to gain much ground. A concerted movement of the whole line was now organised.

The great Stuff Trench, which was roughly a continuation of the Regina, was opposite the centre of the attack, and was distant some 300 yards from the British front. The barrage arrangements co-ordinated by Jacob's Second Corps, to which these units now belonged, worked most admirably. The attack was made all along the line and was eminently successful. At 12.35 on October 21 the general advance

began, and at 4.30 the whole objective, including Stuff and Regina, was in the hands of the British and Canadians. It was a fine victory, with 20 machine-guns and 1000 prisoners of the 5th Ersatz and 28th Bavarian Divisions as trophies. So rapid was the consolidation that before morning trenches were opened out between the captured line and the old British position. A curious incident in this most successful attack was that the 8th Border Regiment advanced at least a thousand yards beyond its objective, but was successful in getting back. By this brilliant little action the enemy was finally driven down upon the three-mile front north of Thiepval and Courcelette, until he had no foothold left save the marshes to the south of the Ancre, where he cowered in enfiladed trenches for that final clearing up which was only delayed by the weather. It should be added that on this same date, October 21, the left of the British line, formed by the 39th Division, was attacked by storm-troops of the German 28th Reserve Division, armed with *flammenwerfer* and supported by 60 light batteries. The attack was formidable, and twice got into the British line, but was twice driven out again, leaving many prisoners and trophies behind. The Sussex and Hampshire troops of the 116th Brigade, aided by the 17th Rifles, stood splendidly to their work, and ended by holding every inch of their ground, and adding a new German trench which was carried by the 14th Hants.

From this time onwards this northern section of the line was quiet save for small readjustments, until the great effort upon November 13, which brought the autumn campaign to a close with the considerable victory of Beaumont Hamel. From the point which the Second Corps had now reached it could command with its guns the valley of the Ancre to the north of it, including some of those positions which had repulsed the attack upon July 1 and were still in German hands. So completely were they now outflanked from the south that it must have been evident to any student of the map that Haig was sure, sooner or later, to make a strong infantry advance over the ground which was so completely controlled by his artillery. It was the German appreciation of this fact which had caused their desperate efforts at successive lines of defence to hold him back from gaining complete command of the crest of the slope. It will be told in the final chapter of this volume how this command was utilised, and a bold step was taken towards rolling up the German positions from the south—a step which was so successful that it was in all probability the immediate cause of that general retirement of the whole German front which was the first great event in the campaign of 1917.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

From September 15 to the Battle of the Ancre

Capture of Eaucourt—Varying character of German resistance—Hard trench fighting along the line—Dreadful climatic conditions—The meteorological trenches—Hazy Trench—Zenith Trench—General observations—General von Arnim's report.

HAVING described the Battle of Flers, which began on September 15 and which extended over one, two, or three days according to the completeness of the local victory, or the difficulty of reaching any definite limit, we will now turn once more to the left of the line (always excepting Gough's flanking army, which has been treated elsewhere), and we shall follow the deeds of the successive divisions in each sector up to the end of the operations. We will begin with the Third Corps, who abutted upon the Canadians in the Martinpuich sector, and covered the line up to Drop Alley, north-east of High Wood, where they joined up with the Fifteenth Corps.

The line on the western section was less active than on the right, where the great villages of Combles, Lesbœufs, and Morval were obvious marks for the advance. After the battle of September 15, the 23rd Division, relieving the 15th, took its station at the extreme left of the line, just north of Martinpuich. To the right of the 23rd, occupying the Starfish and Prue system of trenches, was the 50th Division. On their right was the 1st, who had relieved the 47th Division, the victors of High Wood. These three divisions, 23rd, 50th, and 1st, now formed the Third Corps. Their fighting patrols were thrown well out during the days after the battle, and their front posts were as far north as Crescent Alley and Hook Trench. The general attack of September 25, which amounted to a considerable battle, did not seriously affect this portion of the line. The only operation of note before the end of the month was an attack upon a farm in the front of their line by the 70th Brigade of the 23rd Division—a brigade which had greatly distinguished itself during the time it had fought with the 8th Division upon July 1. This attack failed the first time, but it was repeated with success at dawn upon September 29, and the line moved forward to that limited extent. Another small advance was made by the 1st Division on the night of

September 25, east of Eaucourt, when a piece of trench was carried by the gallantry of a platoon of the 2nd Rifles, consisting almost entirely of Rhodesian volunteers, samples of those wandering Britons who have played a part in this War which can never be chronicled. The way in which the distant sons, prodigal or otherwise, came back to the help of their hard-pressed mother is one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of the Empire.

The Flers front-line trench bends away from the British position as it trends towards the north-west, so that although it had been made good over a large portion in the Battle of Flers, it was still intact opposite the Third Corps. On October 1, however, it was attacked, and was taken without any great difficulty, though the 50th in the centre had to fight hard for their section. The storming battalions, after re-forming, continued their advance, and occupied the line between Le Sars and Flers. The village of Eaucourt lay in their path, and was well guarded upon the west by uncut wire, but a tank rolled its majestic path across it and the shouting infantry crowded close behind. The 141st Brigade of the 47th Division, which had come back once again into the line, was the first to enter this village, which was the sixteenth torn by the British from the grip of the invaders since the breaking of the line, while the French captures stood at an even higher figure. There was a strong counter-attack upon Eaucourt during the night, accompanied by a shortage of bombs owing to the fact that the store had been destroyed by an unlucky shell. The Germans for the time regained the village, and the ruins were partly occupied by both armies until October 3, when the British line, once more gathering volume and momentum, rolled over it for the last time. It had been stoutly defended by men of a German reserve division, and its capture had cost dear. One of the mysteries of the fighting at this stage was the very varied quality of the resistance, so that the advancing British were never sure whether they would find themselves faced by demoralised poltroons, capable of throwing up their hands by the hundred, or by splendid infantry, who would fight to the death with the courage of despair.

Having won Eaucourt, the next village which faced the British line in this sector was Le Sars, immediately to the north-west. The advance upon this was carried out amid rain and slush which made military operations almost impossible. It was again found that the resistance was very spirited, but the place was none the less carried and consolidated on October 7.

In the week preceding the final assault there was hard fighting, during which the 70th Brigade won its way forward into a favourable position for the attack. The 8th York and Lancasters particularly distinguished themselves by their gallantry in clearing by bombing the outlying German defences, Major Sawyer and Lieutenant de Burgh of that battalion winning the Cross for their fine leadership upon that occasion. The decisive attack was carried out by the other two brigades of the

23rd Division, which advanced upon the village, whilst the 47th Division made an attempt upon the formidable Butte of Warlencourt. The latter venture met with no success, but the former was brilliantly carried out. The advance was made by the 68th Brigade on the right and the 69th on the left, the Martinpuich-Warlencourt Road being the dividing line between the two divisions. The attack was at 1.45 p.m., and in broad daylight the battalions concerned, notably the 12th and 13th Durhams and the 9th Yorks, clambered over their sodden sandbags and waded through the mud which separated them from the Germans. The numbers were so reduced that the companies formed only two weak platoons, but none the less they advanced very steadily. Captain Blake, leading the first company of Durhams, was shot dead, but Captain Clarke took over both companies and led them straight at the village, both the 12th Durhams and 9th Yorks reaching the sunken road in front of the houses at about the same moment. They worked their way down this and bombed many Germans in their dug-outs. Here, as elsewhere, experience proves that this system of taking refuge from shell-fire in deep burrows has very serious military disadvantages, not merely on account of the difficulty of getting out, but from the more serious objection that the men, being trained to avoid danger, continued to shrink from it when it was essential that they should rush out and face it. The yellow faces and flaccid appearance of the prisoners showed also the physical results of a troglodytic life.

A single tank which had accompanied the advance was set on fire by a shell, but the infantry pressed on undismayed, and well backed up by the 10th and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers and 8th Seaforths, they soon seized the whole village and firmly consolidated their position. The success was partly due to the fine handling of machine-guns by Lieutenant Bell and others, which turned the favourite weapon of the Germans against themselves. Five of these guns, 8 officers, and 450 men were taken during the operation.

The 47th Division, meanwhile, in attempting to make similar progress on the right, was held up by very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Immediately afterwards, this division, much worn by its splendid service, was taken out of the line, being replaced by the 9th Scottish Division. Their companion Division, the 15th, had come back upon their left. The weather now became so abominable and the mud so abysmal, that all prospect of farther progress in this section had to be abandoned. The old prehistoric mark called the Butte of Warlencourt, which had long stood up as a goal in front of the British trenches, proved really to be the final mark of their advance until a new season should dawn. Upon October 12 there was an attempt to get forward, but the conditions were impossible, and the results unsatisfactory. In this affair the gallant 9th Division had considerable losses, their advance being conducted with the 26th Brigade upon the right and the South Africans upon the left. Some small gain was achieved by the former,

but the latter were held up by a deadly machine-gun fire. The 30th Division was upon the right of the 9th at this period, and twice endeavoured to get forward—once on the 12th and once on the 18th; but neither of these attempts had good success, partly owing to the very bad weather, and partly to the excellent resistance of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, which is described by those who have fought against it as one of the very best divisions in the German army. On the 20th a fresh attack was made by the 27th Brigade with no success and heavy losses to the 6th Scottish Borderers. Early in November a renewed attempt was made by the 50th Division to advance in this quarter, but the country was a morass and no progress was possible. The Canadians, 48th and 50th Divisions, who held the Le Sars front, were condemned to inactivity. From that time onwards the line of the Third Corps was undisturbed, save for a strong counter-attack on November 6, which neutralised a small advance made on the 5th. Le Sars and Eaucourt were consolidated and continued to be the British advanced posts in this quarter. The conditions of mud and discomfort can only be described as appalling.

Having briefly traced the work of the Third Corps from the action of September 15 to the coming of the winter, we shall now turn to the Fifteenth Corps upon the right and follow their operations from the same date. It will be remembered that the New Zealanders formed the left-hand division, and that they had advanced so finely that by the evening of September 16 they were up to, but not in, Goose Alley and Factory Corner, from which they were within striking distance of the Gird System.

Before attacking this, however, it was necessary to get a firmer hold of Flers Trench, which in its western reaches was still in the hands of the Germans. It was a desperate business of bombing from traverse to traverse and overcoming successive barricades upon a very narrow front where a few determined men could hold up a company. This difficult business was taken in hand at 8.30 on the night of September 21 by the 2nd Canterbury Battalion, who advanced down the trench. It was a Homeric conflict, which lasted for the whole night, where men stood up to each other at close quarters, clearing away the dead and dying in order to make room for fresh combatants in the front line. Down Flers Trench and Drop Alley raged the long struggle, with crash and flare of bombs, snarl of machine-guns, shrill whistles from rallying officers, and shouts from the furious men. The New Zealand Black Watch had gained a portion of the trench, but the German reinforcements streamed down a communication trench which opened behind them, and found themselves between the two bodies of New Zealanders. It was a great fight, but by morning it had been definitely decided in favour of the men from oversea. The long section of Flers Trench was cleared and part of Goose Alley, opening out of it, was held. No less than 350 German dead were picked up, and a handful of prisoners was left

with the victors. The New Zealand losses were about 150 of all ranks.

On September 25 the New Zealanders tightened their grip upon Goose Alley, which connects up the Flers and the Gird Systems of trenches. In the meantime the divisions upon their right were moving to the north-east of Flers towards the village of Guedecourt, which lay upon the farther side of the Gird Trenches. The actual attack upon the village was committed to the 21st Division, who advanced on a two-brigade front, the 110th Leicester Brigade making straight for the village itself, while the 64th Brigade on its right, strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Lincolns, was ordered to occupy 1000 yards of front to the right. The two brigades were not equally fortunate. The Leicester brigade, by a fine advance, pierced the Gird Trench, and made their way beyond it. The 64th Brigade was held up by uncut wire, which they could not penetrate. The result was that the Leicesters, being heavily counter-attacked, and having their flanks open, were forced back as far as the Gird Trench, to which they clung. The position in the evening was a curious one, for Gird Trench was held at two different points, but between them lay a stretch of 1000 yards still occupied by the Germans and faced with uncut wire. Orders reached General Campbell during the night that at all costs the position must be carried. By a happy inspiration he sent for a tank from Flers, and ordered the Leicesters to bomb down Gird Trench in co-operation with the tank, which crawled along the parapet. A strong point had been erected at the far end of the trench, and the Germans as they rushed away from the danger ran into a deadly machine-gun fire. The upshot was that a great number were killed, while 8 officers and 362 men were taken, with a loss to the attackers of 5 wounded. To add to the quaintness of the operation, an aeroplane flew low over the trench during its progress, helping with its bombs to make the victory complete. The result was far more than the capture of the trench, for the 64th Brigade, led by the Durhams, at once swept forward and captured their objective, while the 110th Brigade upon the left reached Guedecourt under happier auspices and remained in possession of the village.

Although the Gird line had been pierced at this point, it was held in its western length, and this was attacked on September 27 by the New Zealanders and the 55th Lancashire Territorial Division, both of which gained their objectives, so that the whole end of this great trench system from a point north of Flers passed definitely into the British possession.

On October 1 there was a fresh general advance which led to no great change in this part of the line, save that both the New Zealanders and the 21st Division improved their position, the latter getting as far as Bayonet Trench. Shortly afterwards the New Zealanders were drawn out, having been 23 consecutive days in the line, and earned themselves a great reputation. "The division has won universal confidence and

admiration," said Sir Douglas Haig. " No praise can be too high for such troops."

We now turn to the Fourteenth Corps, which filled the remainder of the British line up to the point of its junction with the French. During the battle the division of Guards had, as will be remembered, held the left of this line, but on the day after it was replaced for a short time by the 20th Division, whose 61st Brigade, especially the 7th Cornwalls and 12th King's, were heavily engaged. The 60th Brigade had pushed up into the fighting line, and received a strong German counter-attack in the morning of the 17th, which broke down before the rifles of the 6th Shropshire Light Infantry. In the afternoon the 59th Brigade advanced on the left and the 60th on the right, closing in upon the Morval position. The 12th King's Royal Rifles of the latter brigade was held up by a strong point and lost heavily, but the general effect was to bring the British line nearer to the doomed village. Twice upon the 18th, German counter-attacks swarmed down upon the exposed right flank of the 60th Brigade, but each time they were blown back by the fire of the 12th Rifle Brigade and the 12th Rifles. The 59th Brigade had made no progress, the two Rifle Brigade battalions (10th and 11th) having particularly heavy losses upon the 17th, but they were holding their line strongly. It was impossible to do more for the moment, for the 6th Division upon their right was still hung up, as already described, by the Quadrilateral. Shortly after that obstacle had been overcome, the Guards took over once more from the 20th, and were ready in conjunction with the 6th and 5th Divisions for a serious advance upon Morval and Lesbœufs.

On September 22 the 3rd Guards Brigade was in touch with the 21st Division on the left, which was now holding Gird Trench and Gird Support as far north as Watling Street. On this day the 4th Grenadiers, reverting after centuries to the weapon which their name implies, were bombing their way up Gas Alley, which leads towards Lesbœufs. On the 23rd the 21st on the left, the Guards in the centre, and the 6th Division were advancing and steadily gaining ground to the north-east, capturing Needle Trench, which is an offshoot from the Gird System. On the 24th the Germans counter-attacked the 16th Brigade, the blow falling upon the 1st Buffs, who lost four bays of their trench for a short period, but speedily drove the intruders out once more. The 14th Durham Light Infantry also drove off an attack. The 5th Division was now coming up on the right of the 6th, and played a considerable part in the decisive attack on September 25.

On this date an advance of the four divisions on this section of the line carried all before it, the 21st being north of Delville Wood, the 3rd Brigade of the Guards operating on the German trenches between Guedecourt and Lesbœufs, the 1st Brigade of Guards on the left of the village of Lesbœufs, the 6th Division on the right of Lesbœufs, and the 5th Division on Morval.

In this attack the 4th Grenadiers upon the extreme left of the Guards were badly punished, for the 21st on their left had been held up, but the rest came along well, the 1st Welsh forming a defensive flank on the left while the other battalions reached their full objective and dug in, unmolested save by their own barrage. The 1st Irish and 3rd Coldstream, who were on the left of the 1st Brigade, also got through without heavy loss and occupied the trenches to the immediate north and north-east of Lesbœufs. The 2nd Grenadiers, who led the right of the brigade, with their supporting battalion the 2nd Coldstream, headed straight for the village, and were held up for a time by uncut wire, but the general attack upon the right was progressing at a rate which soon took the pressure off them.

The British infantry were swarming round Lesbœufs in the early afternoon, and about 3.15 the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade penetrated into it, establishing touch with the Guards on their left. They were closely followed by their old battle companions, the 2nd Durham Light Infantry. The German resistance was weaker than usual, and the casualties were not severe. On the Morval front the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division, with the 95th Brigade on their right, were making a steady and irresistible advance upon Morval. The 1st Norfolks and 1st Cheshires were in the front, and the latter battalion was the first to break into the village with the 1st Bedfords, 2nd Scots Borderers, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in close support. The 1st Cheshires particularly distinguished itself; and it was in this action that Private Jones performed his almost incredible feat of capturing single-handed and bringing in four officers and 102 men of the 146th Würtemberg Regiment, including four wearers of the famous Iron Cross. The details of this extraordinary affair, where one determined and heavily-armed man terrorised a large company taken at a disadvantage, read more like the romantic exploit of some Western desperado who cries "Hands up!" to a drove of tourists, than any operation of war. Jones was awarded the V.C., and it can have been seldom won in such sensational fashion.

Whilst the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division attacked the village of Morval the 95th Brigade of the same division carried the German trenches to the west of it. This dashing piece of work was accomplished by the 1st Devons and the 1st East Surreys. When they had reached their objective, the 12th Gloucesters were sent through them to occupy and consolidate the south side of the village. This they carried out with a loss of 80 men. In the evening a company of the 6th Argylls, together with the 2nd Home Company Royal Engineers, pushed on past the village and made a strong point against the expected counter-attack, while the 15th Brigade extended and got into touch with the 2nd York and Lancasters of the 6th Division on their left. It was a great day of complete victory with no regrets to cloud it, for the prisoners were many, the casualties were comparatively few, and two more village sites

were included by one forward spring within the British area. The Town Major of Morval stood by his charge to the last and formed one of the trophies. On the 26th the Germans came back upon the Guards at about one o'clock, but their effort was a fiasco, for the advancing lines came under the concentrated fire of six batteries of the 7th Divisional Artillery. Seldom have Germans stampeded more thoroughly. "Hundreds of the enemy can be seen retiring in disorder over the whole front. They are rushing towards Beaulencourt in the wildest disorder." Such was the report from a forward observer. At the same time a tank cleared the obstacles in front of the 21st Division and the whole line was straight again. The British consolidated their positions firmly, for it was already evident that they were likely to be permanent ones. The Guards and 5th Division were taken out of the line shortly afterwards, the 20th Division coming in once more on September 26, while on September 27 the French took over part of the line, pushing the 20th Division to the left, where they took over the ground formerly held by the 21st. On October 1 the 61st Brigade was ordered to push forward advanced posts and occupy a line preparatory to future operations. This was well carried out and proved of great importance when a week later attacks were made upon Cloudy and Rainbow Trenches.

Leaving this victorious section of the line for the moment, we must turn our attention to the hard-worked and splendid 56th Division on their right, whose operations were really more connected with those of the French on their right than with their comrades of the Fourteenth Corps upon the left. By a happy chance it was the French division of the same number with which they were associated during much of the time. It will be remembered that at the close of the Flers action (September 15 and on), the 56th Division was holding a defensive flank to the south, in the region of Bouleaux Wood, part of which was still held by the Germans. They were also closing in to the southwards, so as to co-operate with the French, who were approaching Combles from the other side. On September 25, while the 5th were advancing upon Morval, the 56th played an important part, for the 168th, their left brigade, carried the remainder of Bouleaux Wood, and so screened the flank of the 5th Division. One hundred men and four machine-guns were captured in this movement. On the 26th, as the woods were at last clear, the division turned all its attention to Combles, and at 3.15 in the afternoon of that day fighting patrols of the 169th Brigade met patrols of the French in the central square of the town. The Germans had cleverly evacuated it, and the booty was far less than had been hoped for, but none the less its capture was of great importance, for it was the largest place that had yet been wrenched out of the iron grasp of Germany. After the fall of Combles the French, as already stated, threw out their left wing upon that side so as to take over the ground which had been covered by the 56th Division, and afterwards by the 5th Division.

On September 30 the 56th Division took over from the Guards, and again found itself upon the right of the British line, and in touch with the new dispositions of the French. On its left was the 20th Division, and on their left the 6th. These three divisions now found themselves opposite to a long line of trenches, to which various meteorological names had been given, though the actual meteorological conditions at the time formed a greater obstacle than the defences in front of them.

It may well seem to the reader that the defenders are bound to have the best of the argument when they can thus exchange one line for another, and as quickly as they are beaten out of one set of strongholds confront their enemy with another one. No doubt so long as the lines are stoutly held this is true as regards the rate of advance. But as far as it concerns the losses which mark that vital attrition which was wearing Germany to the bone it was very different. These trenches were not like the old permanent fortifications where German officers in a 30-foot dug-out could smile over the caricatures in *Ulk* and smoke an indolent cigarette, while the impotent British shells pitted the earth-surface far above them. There was no such shelter in these hastily-constructed burrows, while the guns which raked and pounded them grew stronger and more numerous from day to day. Let the machine-gun do its worst, the heavy gun is still the master of the field, for the machine-gun can only levy its toll when circumstances favour it, while day or night the heavy gun is a constant dread. We have had to mourn the swathes of our dead in the open, but the Germans lay as thick amid the clay and chalk of the Picardy ditches. With fine manhood they clung to them and beat back our infantry where they could, but the tales of deserters, the letters found on the wounded, and the condition of the trenches when taken, all told the same story of terrible loss.

On October 7 there was an infantry attack upon this trench system in which the 41st, 12th, 20th, and 56th Divisions, together with the French, all took part in the order named from the left. The weather was most execrable, and its vileness told entirely against the Allies, since it was they who had to move, and since the superior gun-power needed for a modern attack was largely neutralised by the difficulty in using aircraft observation. The attack was at 1.45 p.m., when the troops advanced under a heavy barrage along the whole sodden and slippery front. The results were unequal, though the infantry behaved everywhere with their wonted valour and perseverance.

The 122nd Brigade on the extreme left of the attack could only get on about a hundred yards, so heavy was the fire ; while the 124th to the right of them could do little better, and eventually dug in at a point 200 yards short of the Bayonet Trench, which was their immediate objective. Seventy officers and nearly 1300 men fell during this attack of the 41st Division, which was handicapped in many ways, for the men were weary, it was too cloudy for reconnaissance, the battalions were already depleted, and the enemy was fresh and unshaken. The success of the

12th Division on the right of the 41st was little better. The 36th and 37th Brigades endured heavy losses, especially in the case of the two Royal Fusilier battalions and of the 6th Buffs, whose colonel, Pope, greatly distinguished himself. In spite of every effort and considerable loss there were no permanent gains of importance at this point.

Things went better, however, with the 20th Division on the right. The two brigades in the front line were the 61st on the left and the 60th on the right. The leading battalions, counting from the left, were the 7th Yorks Light Infantry, 12th King's Liverpools, 6th Oxford and Bucks, and 12th Rifle Brigade. The troops had to endure a considerable shelling before leaving their trenches, but it seemed only to add additional fire to their advance, which swept over the low ridge in front of them, and took a long stretch of Rainbow Trench. The right attack was slower than the left, as it ran into a dip of the ground in which the Germans had some cleverly-sited wire entanglement, unseen and untouched by the guns. Nothing daunted, the Oxford and Bucks proceeded to cut lanes through the wire under heavy fire, and one officer of the battalion had actually succeeded in crawling under it when he was shot at point-blank range from the German trench. The front line had now done its work and rested in Rainbow, while the second line —consisting, from the left, of the 7th Somersets, 7th Cornwalls, 6th Shropshires, and 12th Rifles—swept onwards in splendid form, capturing both Cloudy and Misty Trenches. There the victorious infantry dug themselves in on the forward slope of the ridge. The brigades were ahead of their comrades, with the result that their flanks were exposed, they suffered from enfilade fire, and it was necessary to form defensive flanks. Two counter-attacks were made during the day, but both were beaten off. The prisoners captured in this fine advance were 5 officers and 187 men, with 5 machine-guns and 2 trench-mortars. By the morning of the 8th strong points had been made and the whole line was defiant of recapture.

The 56th Division had advanced with equal valour on the right and had made good progress, though its gains had not been so substantial as those of the 20th. The 167th Brigade had attacked upon the left and the 168th upon the right. They ended with the 7th Middlesex, their flank battalion upon the left in touch with the 20th Division in Rainbow, while the London Scots on the extreme right were in touch with the French in Hazy Trench. The fighting was bitter, however, the men wearied, and the conditions abominable. All the battalions lost heavily, the 4th London being the chief sufferer, for it was on the left flank of the 168th Brigade and was held up by a particularly murderous machine-gun. In the evening a strong German counter-attack, rushing in upon Hazy Trench behind a thick shower of bombs, drove back both the 168th Brigade and the French to their own original line. For the time the advance had failed upon the right.

The 167th Brigade had held on to Rainbow and were now bombing

their way down Spectrum. They held their ground there during the night, and on October 8 were still advancing, though the 3rd London coming up to reinforce ran into a heavy barrage and were sadly cut up. The British barrage was found to be practically useless because the guns had been brought up too near. The 169th Brigade had come up on the right and was hotly engaged, the London Rifle Brigade getting up close to Hazy and digging in parallel to it, with their left in touch with the Victorias. The Germans, however, were still holding Hazy, nor could it be said in the evening that the British were holding either of the more advanced trenches, Dewdrop or Rainy. In the evening the London Rifle Brigade were forced to leave their new trench because it was enfiladed from Hazy, and to make their way back to their old departure trenches as best they could, dragging with them a captured machine-gun as a souvenir of a long and bloody day's work. On October 9 the British held none of the points in dispute in this section on the right, save only a portion of Spectrum. There was a pause in this long and desperate fight which was conducted by tired infantry fighting in front of tired guns, and which left the survivors of both sides plastered with mud from head to heel. When it was resumed, the two British divisions, the 20th and 56th, which had done such long service in the line, and were greatly reduced, had been withdrawn. The 4th Division had taken the place of the Londoners, while the 6th, itself very worn, had relieved the 20th.

On October 12 both these divisions delivered an attack together with the French and with the Fifteenth Corps upon their left. The 14th Durham Light Infantry were in Rainbow on the left and were in touch with the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade on their right, but could find no one on their left, while the German pressure was very strong. The 18th Brigade worked along Rainbow, therefore, until it got into touch with the 12th Division upon their left. The 12th Division had been lent the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division, and this gallant body, so terribly cut up on July 1, had an instalment of revenge. They won their objective, and it is pleasant to add that the Newfoundlanders especially distinguished themselves. The 16th Brigade upon the right attacked Zenith Trench, the 2nd York and Lancaster leading the rush. The position could not be held, however, by battalions which were depleted by weeks of constant strain and loss. A report from a company officer says: "The few unwounded sheltered in trench holes and returned in the dusk. The fire was too strong to allow them to dig in. The Brigade line is therefore the same as before the attack."

Whilst the 6th Division had been making this difficult and fruitless attack the 4th Division on their right had been equally heavily engaged in this horrible maze of mud-sodden trenches, without obtaining any more favourable result. The 12th Brigade fought on the immediate right of the 16th, some of them reaching Spectrum, and some of them Zenith. The 2nd West Ridings and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were the

heaviest sufferers, the latter holding a line of shell-holes in front of Spectrum where they were exposed to a terrible barrage. The 10th Brigade were on their right, and one battalion, the 1st Warwick, reached Foggy, but was unable to hold it under the crushing fire. By the evening of October 13, however, the whole of Spectrum had at last been seized, and the enemy, who attempted to bomb along it from Dewdrop, were repulsed. On October 18, the 88th Brigade again had a success, the 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters doing particularly well. For a time the fighting died down, the British licking their wounds and sharpening their claws for a fresh grapple with these redoubtable trenches.

This came on October 23, when there was an advance at 2.45 in the afternoon by the 4th Division on the right and the 8th Division on the left. The three-brigade front covered by the 8th Division is indicated by the fact that the 2nd East Lancashires, the left battalion of the left brigade (24th), was directed upon the junction between Mild and Cloudy, while the right brigade (23rd) had Zenith for its objective. The first attack of the left brigade failed, but the second brought them into Cloudy. By 4.15 the 2nd Scots Rifles of the 23rd Brigade had penetrated the right of Zenith, and some small parties had even moved on to Orion beyond. The central brigade (25th) had won its way up to Misty, the 2nd Lincolns, 2nd Berks, and 2nd Rifle Brigade in the lead. In the meantime the East Lancashires on the left were endeavouring to bomb their way down the maze of trenches, filled with yard-deep mud, which separated them from their comrades. The fighting was desperate, however, and the losses considerable. The 2nd Lincolns had got detached in the labyrinth, and were out of touch with their companions. At 6.45 the Germans came again in strength and those of the Scots Rifles who had gained Orion were driven back. The casualties in this splendid battalion, which had suffered so often and so much, were once again very severe.

The 4th Division had also had a hard fight upon the right and had made no great progress. The French on their right had been held up after an initial advance. The 12th Brigade attacked Dewdrop, but were unable to hold it. The 11th had seized Hazy, but their grip of it was still precarious. Every position was raked with machine-guns and clogged with the all-pervading and often impassable morass. In mud and blood and driving rain, amid dirt and death, through day and night, the long death-grapple never ceased until exhaustion and winter brought a short surcease.

On the 24th the hard-earned gains in these trenches were consolidated. In the sector of the 8th Division they were substantial and justified the hope that this obdurate line would go the way of all the others which had barred the army. Had it been earlier in the season it would have been easy to wait for clear weather, beat them into pulp with heavy guns, and then under a good barrage capture them by assault. But this could not be done, for Sir Douglas Haig could not afford to wait, with winter

coming on and only a few weeks or days left in which to bring his men forward to their final line. The general position upon October 24 was that the 2nd Middlesex of the 24th Brigade held Zenith in part, that the 25th Brigade was in Gusty and held part of Misty, while the 23rd Brigade had made no advance upon the right but their left was in Cloudy and Mild.

Upon this date the 33rd Division came up to relieve the 4th, and on September 28 it made a brilliant advance which altered the whole situation in this section. At 7 a.m. on that date the 4th King's Liverpools of the 98th Brigade by a sudden dash carried the whole of Dewdrop, taking 100 prisoners. The 19th Brigade upon the right kept up with the advance, and before evening Frosty, Gunpits, and Dewdrop had all been included in the British line.

There was a pause after this advance, and then on November 5 there was another advance of the 33rd, together with the French. Again there was a good gain, which was effected by the 100th Brigade on the right, and the 19th on the left. Mirage, Boritzka, and Hazy were all reported as being at last in our hands. The 5th Scottish Rifles, 16th King's Royal Rifles, and 20th Fusiliers all distinguished themselves, and all—especially the last named—met with considerable losses in this attack. The 17th Division, which had for a few days taken the place of the 8th, joined in this advance and extended the ground upon their front, the fighting falling chiefly to the 50th Brigade, in which the 7th Yorks and 7th East Yorks were the principal sufferers. Great work was also done by the 51st Brigade, the 7th Borderers and the 7th Lincolns particularly distinguishing themselves. These battalions not only cleared up Zenith Trench, but upon the Germans countering they reserved their fire until the stormers were within 40 yards of them, and then mowed down several hundreds of them. "The men marched back seven miles last night," wrote one of the officers, "after fighting for forty-eight hours without sleep, singing at the tops of their voices all the way. Priceless fellows!"

On November 7 the 8th Division was at work again, taking 1100 yards of front, 5 machine-guns, and 80 prisoners. The season was now far advanced and prematurely wet and cold, so that winter lines were formed by the British in this quarter with the village of Le Transloy in their immediate front. Over the rest of the line facing north there had been no serious attempt at advance during this period, and the only fighting to be recorded was on the part of the Anzac Corps, who came in at the end of October, and took over the whole front of the Fifteenth Corps in the centre of the line. These troops joined the attack already recorded on November 5, and captured that portion of Gird Support Trench which was not yet in our possession. For a time they held Bayonet Trench, but were driven out by a strong bombing attack by the 5th Regiment of the 4th Prussian Guards Division. The Australians and the 50th Brigade worked in close co-operation during these hard days, and it is pleasing to find the high opinion which they entertained

of each other. "On several occasions," says an Australian, "we had to rely on Yorkshire grit to support our division at critical moments, and the Tikes never failed us once. We owe a big debt to the East Yorkshires in particular. We found them the most loyal of comrades." This sentiment was heartily reciprocated by the Imperial troops.

The fighting now died down in this quarter and the winter lull had set in, leaving the front British trenches some hundreds of yards from Le Transloy and the Bapaume Road. It would be an ungenerous Briton who would not admit that in holding us off from it so long, even if we make every allowance for the weather and its disastrous consequences to the attack, the Germans performed a fine feat of arms. It was done by fresh units which had not suffered from the gruelling which their comrades had received upon the Somme, and which would no doubt have been worn down in time, as the others had been, but they fought with great tenacity and certainly prevented the winter line from being as far forward as had been hoped.

Whilst giving the German army every credit for its tenacious resistance and for the hard digging by which it constructed so many lines of defence that five months of hard fighting and a dozen separate victories had been unable to carry the attackers through them, one must still insist upon the stupendous achievement of the British. Nearly every division had passed through the fiery ordeal of the Somme, many of them twice and thrice, and each had retired with fresh honour and new records of victory. Apart from great days of battle like July 1, July 14, September 15, and September 26, when many miles of German trench were carried with a corresponding number of prisoners and guns, there was a separate epic round each village and wood, so that the names of many of them will find permanence in military history. High Wood, Trones Wood, Mametz Wood, and Delville Wood each represents a very terrible local battle. So, too, do such village names as Ovillers, Contalmaison, Pozières, Thiepval, Longueval, Ginchy, and especially Guillemont. Every one of these stern contests ended with the British infantry in its objective, and in no single case were they ever driven out again. So much for the tactical results of the actions. As to the strategic effect, that was only clearly seen when the threat of renewed operations in the spring caused the German army to abandon all the positions which the Somme advance had made untenable, and to fall back upon a new line many miles to the rear. The Battle of the Marne was the turning-point of the first great German levy, the Battle of the Somme that of the second. In each case the retirement was only partial, but each clearly marked a fresh step in the struggle, upward for the Allies, downward for the Central Powers.

In the credit for this result the first place must be given to the efficiency of British leadership, which was admirable in its perseverance and in its general conception, but had, it must be admitted, not yet attained that skill in the avoidance of losses which was gradually taught

by terrible experiences and made possible by the growing strength in artillery. The severe preliminary bombardment controlled by the direct observation which is only possible after air supremacy has been attained, the counter-battery work to reduce the enemy's fire, the creeping barrage to cover the infantry, the discipline and courage which enable infantry to advance with shrapnel upon their very toes, the use of smoke clouds against flank fire, the swift advance of the barrage when a trench has fallen so as to head off fugitives and stifle the counter-attack, all these devices were constantly improving with practice, until in the arts of attack the British Army stood ahead even of their comrades of France. An intercepted communication in the shape of a report from General von Arnim, commanding the Fourth German Army, giving his experience of the prolonged battle, speaks of British military efficiency in every arm in a manner which must have surprised the General Staff if they were really of opinion that General Haig's army was capable of defence but not of attack. This report, with its account of the dash and tenacity of the British infantry and of the efficiency of its munitions, is as handsome a testimonial as one adversary ever paid to another, and might be called magnanimous were it not that it was meant for no eye save that of his superiors.

In retrospect, however much one deplores the terrible losses, one feels that the remarks made at the end of the 1915 campaign still hold good. One could not force the Germans back by any method save force, and half-hearted force is the worst of all methods. Once committed to such a battle it must be put through to a finish. It is true that the finish did not come with a breaking of the German line, but it did come with a weakening if not a breaking of the German spirit. Their leaders have testified that their troops were never quite the same after that prolonged ordeal in which they had sustained with heroic courage a long drawn battle which ended always with a recession of their line. It may be that a capital mistake was made by a premature disclosure of the tanks, but here again it may well be argued that to build these instruments by the thousand when you have not tested them by the score would be a strange inversion of the usual practice.

Speaking of the Somme Battle, Von Hentig, one of the best balanced German writers upon the war, says, "The Somme was the muddy grave of the German field army and of the faith in the infallibility of German leading dug by British industry and its shells." The monograph on the Somme in the Reich's Archiv says, "It would be a mistake to measure the results of this battle by mere local gain of ground.... The battle of attrition gnawed terribly into the vitals of the defenders.... The consequences were a frightful death-roll of the finest soldiers whose replacement was impossible. It is in this that the root of the tragedy of the battle lies." The Archiv estimates the loss of the allies at 750,000, and of the Germans at 500,000. A million and a quarter in one battle!

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE

November 13, 1916

The last effort—Failure in the north—Fine work of the 39th, 51st, and 63rd Divisions—Surrounding of German Fort—Capture of Beaumont Hamel—Commander Freyberg—Last operations of the season—General survey—"The unwarlike Islanders."

THIS considerable British victory may well have a name of its own, though it was merely an extension of the gigantic effort upon the Somme. The fact, however, that it was fought upon the banks of a small subsidiary stream, and also that it was separated by a month or more from any other serious engagement, give it a place of its own in the narrative of the War.

It has already been shown at the conclusion of the chapter which deals with the flank operations by the Fifth Army, commanded by Sir Hubert Gough, that the British position after the capture of the Schwaben and other redoubts which defended the high ground to the north of Thiepval was such that the guns were able to take the German front line to the north of the Ancre in enfilade and almost in rear. Under such circumstances it might well seem that their trenches were untenable, but their position, although difficult, was alleviated by the fact that they had been able partly to find and partly to make a series of excavations in the chalk and clay soil of the district which gave them almost complete protection against the heaviest shell-fire. Whole battalions led a troglodytic life in subterranean caverns from which they were trained to rush forth upon the alarm of an infantry advance. It was clear, however, that if the alarm should be too short their refuges might very easily become traps, as has so often been the case in the German lines of defence. The safety from shells is dearly paid for when a squad of furious stormers with Mills bombs in their hands and death in their faces glare in from the door. Their minds were kept easy, however, by the knowledge that broad fields of barbed wire, so rusty and so thick that they resembled ploughland from a distance, lay between them and the British. A very large garrison drawn from seven divisions, one of them being the 2nd Guards Reserve, held this dangerous salient in the German line.

For the attack General Gough had mustered two Army Corps of six

divisions, three of which, forming the Second Corps, were to advance from the south under General Jacob, having the almost impassable mud slopes of the Ancre in front of them. Three others of the Fifth Corps, under General E. A. Fanshawe, were to storm the German line north of the Ancre. This latter movement was to be directed not only from the new British positions, but also from the old lines as far north as Serre. The advance from the west divided the enemy's gun-power, and distracted his attention from the south, so that its failure and the loss which that failure involved, were part of the price paid for the victory.

After a two days' bombardment, which started on November 11, and which uprooted the greater part of the German wire, the actual attack was made at six in the foggy, misty morning of November 13. It is inconceivable that the Germans were not standing to arms, since dawn had long been the hour of doom, and the furious drum-fire was certainly the overture to a battle. The thick weather, however, shrouded the British movements, and the actual rush of the infantry seems at the end to have been a surprise. Both in the western and southern advance, which covered respectively 5000 and 3000 yards, every refinement of artillery barrage which years of experience could suggest was used to form such a downpour as would protect the assailants, and beat the German riflemen and gunners back into their burrows.

Of the three divisions which attacked the old German line from the west, the northern was the 31st, with as objective the second and third German line, and to form a defensive flank between Gommecourt and Serre. This division, which contained some splendid North-country battalions from great Yorkshire towns, advanced with great intrepidity. So skilfully was the barrage arranged that the 12th East Yorkshires on the left and 13th East Yorkshires on the right (10th and 11th East Yorkshires in reserve), belonging to the 92nd Brigade, had little difficulty in reaching the German front line, which was quickly mopped up. The going between the first and second line was so heavy and the German snipers so numerous, that the barrage got ahead of the advancing waves, but after a sharp rifle fight the second line was captured. which was the final objective of the left (12th East Yorkshires) battalion. The 13th East Yorkshires, whose final objective was the third German line, had a very severe fight before reaching that position. Owing to the failure of the division on the right of the 13th East Yorkshires to get forward, the Germans later on put in several heavy bombing counter-attacks against their right flank, which eventually drove them back to the second line, where they took up their position alongside the 12th, and for the remainder of the day repulsed numerous counter-attacks. As soon as the 12th East Yorkshires on the left had reached their objective they consolidated it, and with the aid of the 93rd Brigade, to whom was attached the Machine-Gun Sections of the Lucknow and Sialkote Cavalry Brigades, beat off a very strong counter-attack which developed

about 9.30 a.m., practically wiping it out and several minor ones during the day.

At 2.30 p.m. the German bombardment against the 92nd became very intense, and was kept up till 5.30 p.m., in spite of which the 12th and 13th East Yorkshires stuck to their gains. It was only at 9 p.m. when the Divisional General saw that there was no prospect of the division on the right advancing that the 12th and 13th were ordered to fall back to their original line.

The experience of the 3rd Division on the right or south of the 31st was a very trying one. There is a strip of Picardy between those lines from Serre to the Ancre, where more Britons have given their lives for their country and for the cause of humanity than in any area in this or any other war. Twice it has been the scene of tragic losses, on July 1, and yet again on November 13, though, as already said, it is well in each case to regard the general result rather than the local tragedy. Once again the 3rd Division gave itself freely and unselfishly for the common cause. In this case, also, the cause of the scanty results lay in the heavy ground and the uncut wire. In the case of the 76th Brigade, which may be taken as typical of its neighbours, it advanced to the immediate south of the 93rd, and experienced even more difficult conditions. The 2nd Suffolks and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers were in the van, but the 8th Royal Lancasters and 1st Gordons came up in support, the whole thick line of men clustering in front of the wire and endeavouring to hack a way. Sergeants and officers were seen in front of the obstacle endeavouring to find some way through. Here and there a few pushful men, both from the 76th Brigade and from the 9th upon its right, did succeed in passing, but none of these ever returned. Finally, a retreat was ordered through a pelting barrage, and even in their own front line trenches the troops were exposed to a furious shell-fall. It was an unfortunate business and the losses were heavy.

Immediately upon the right of the 3rd Division was the 2nd Division, which attacked with the 5th and 6th Brigades in the van, the latter being on the immediate flank of the 3rd Division, and sharing in the obstacles which faced that division and the check which resulted from them. The immediate objective was the great Munich Trench lurking within its far-flung spider-web of wire. Although all of the 6th Brigade save the right-hand battalion were brought to a stand, and wound up in their own trenches, the 5th Brigade got well forward and might have got farther had it not meant the exposure of their left flank. In the evening the 99th Brigade, the victors of Delville Wood, were brought up with orders to form a defensive flank to the north, while they furnished two battalions for a farther advance to continue the success gained by the 5th Brigade. In the early morning of November 14 these two units, the 1st Rifles and 1st Berkshires, advanced in a proper November fog, which caused some misdirection, and eventually the failure of the attack, for two smaller trenches were carried under the impression that each was

the Munich. Some ground and prisoners were, however, gained, but not the main objective.

Meanwhile, to return to the narrative of the previous day, a very different tale was to be told of those divisions which were operating farther to the south, where the ridge between Serre and Beaumont Hamel sheltered the attack from the formidable German gun-power at Pusieux and Bucquoy in the north.

Of the three divisions attacking from the south the 39th was to the south of the Ancre, the 63rd Naval Division on its left on the north bank of the Ancre, and the 51st Highland Division still farther to the left opposite Beaumont Hamel. The task of the 39th Division was to clear out the Germans who held on to the Hansa line, the last German trench system between the British front and the river. Their chief protection was the almost incredible condition of the ground, which consisted of tenacious mud of varying and occasionally of dangerous depth. Munitions could only be got across it on pack-horses, on special paths. In spite of these difficulties, the 39th Division carried the lines of trenches and the village of St. Pierre Divion as well, the resistance being far from heroic. The attack was made by the 117th Brigade, which advanced with such speed that the front waves, consisting of the 16th Rifle Brigade upon the right and the 17th Sherwood Foresters upon the left, were into the German trenches before the barrage could fall. It did fall, however, and did great harm to the supports, both the 17th Rifles and 16th Sherwoods losing heavily, especially the former. The British line was pushed right up to the river, and the survivors of the garrison—some 1400 in number—were compelled to lay down their arms. This attack to the south of the river was an isolated, self-contained operation, apart from the larger and more serious movement on the north bank.

The right of the main assault was carried out by the gallant 63rd Royal Naval Division, whose emergency baptism of fire at Antwerp has been mentioned in this narrative, though its subsequent splendid services at Gallipoli have not come within its scope. After the evacuation of Gallipoli and the subsequent redistribution of the eastern army, at least three fine divisions, the 11th, the 42nd, and the Naval, besides the splendid Australian and New Zealand infantry, were transferred to the French front, though some did not get into action there before the spring of next year. This action of the Ancre was the first opportunity which these volunteer sailors had had of showing upon a large European stage those qualities which had won them fame elsewhere.

The Naval Division attacked to the immediate north of the Ancre, having the river upon their right. The lines of assault were formed under cover of darkness, for the assembly trenches were inadequate and the ground occupied was under direct observation from the German lines. The division in this formation was a thick mass of 10,000 infantry on a front of about 1600 yards with a depth of 300. Fortunately, the screen of the weather covered them completely, and there was little and random

shelling during the night, but the men were stiff and chilled by their long vigil, during which they might neither speak nor smoke. At last, just before dawn, the crash of the barrage told that the hour had come, and the lines moved forward, keeping well up to the shower of shrapnel which crept on at the rate of 100 yards in five minutes, searching every hollow and crevice of the ground.

The first objective was the enemy's front-line system of triple trenches. The second was a road in the hollow behind called Station Road, with trenches on either side of it. The third was the trenches which fringed the village of Beaucourt. The fourth, which was only to be attempted after the third was consolidated, was the village itself, which lies among trees upon the north side of the river.

The advance of the 189th Brigade on the right of the Naval Division, consisting of the Hood, Hawke, Nelson, and Drake battalions, was comparatively easy, as they were partly protected from flank fire by the dead ground formed by the low-lying northern slope down to the river. With great dash and vigour they carried the successive lines of trenches, and before midday they were consolidating the third objective with the village in their immediate front.

A much more difficult task confronted the centre of the advance, consisting of the left half of the right brigade, and the right half of the 188th Brigade, which contained the 1st and 2nd battalions of Marines, the Ansons and the Howes. In the very track of their course lay a formidable German redoubt, bristling with machine-guns, and so concealed that neither the observers nor the bombardment had spotted it. This serious obstacle caused heavy losses to the central attack, and as it completely commanded their advance it held them to such cover as they could find. The left of the advance got past the redoubt, however, and reached the sunken road, where they were in close touch with the Scotsmen upon their left. Thus at this period of the advance the Naval Division formed a deep curve with its right wing well forward, its centre held back, and its left wing nearly as far advanced as its right. The mist was so thick that it was very difficult to tell from the rear what was going on in the battle, but the 190th Brigade held in reserve was aware that some hitch had occurred, and pushing forward in the hope of retrieving it, found itself involved in the fierce fighting round the redoubt, where it also was exposed to heavy loss. This brigade, it may be mentioned, was not naval, but contained the 1st Honourable Artillery Company, the 4th Bedfords, 7th Royal Fusiliers, and 10th Dublins. The German fort could not be reduced, nor could progress be made in the centre in face of its machine-guns ; but the infantry, which had passed it on either side, extended along the Sunken Road behind it, and joined hands so as to cut it off. The whole German second line was then in their possession, and the right third of their third line as well. The enemy still held firm, however, in the centre of the first line system, and showed no signs of weakening, although they must have known that British

troops were in their rear. An attempt was made to rebombard this portion of the line, but it was difficult for the gunners without aerial observation to locate the exact portion of the line which still remained with the enemy, and there was great danger of the shells falling among the infantry. About three in the afternoon the conclusion was reached that it was better for the time to leave this great pocket of Germans alone, cutting them off from either escape or reinforcement.

The 111th Brigade from the 37th Division was therefore sent up, battalion by battalion, along the river-bank until it passed the central obstacle and reached the Sunken Road. Thence the 13th Rifles were sent forward with orders to reach the advanced line, where the Hoods and Drakes, somewhat reduced in numbers but not in spirit, were lying in front of Beaucourt. It was dark before these changes could be made. The Riflemen, when they had attained their position, rested their right upon the Ancre, and prolonged their left, clearing the Germans out in that direction. This movement to the left was strengthened in the early morning when the 13th Rifle Brigade and the 13th Royal Fusiliers of the same brigade came up to join in, whilst the H.A.C. also advanced and took up a position on the right of the naval men.

About seven o'clock the assault upon the village was ordered, under the direction and leadership of Commander Freyberg of the Hoods, already twice wounded, and wounded once again before his task was finished. Sailors and Riflemen rushed forward at the signal, and dashed with fierce impetuosity over the German line and down the streets of the hamlet. The Honourable Artillery Company upon the right joined in the charge. It was completely successful, the houses were rapidly cleared, the dug-outs taken, and many hundreds of prisoners secured. The Riflemen emerging on the farther side of the village immediately dug in under the direction of Captain Stocks, their only remaining company officer. A footbridge was at the same time thrown across the Ancre, so as to connect up with the 39th Division on the south.

The German redoubt had held out manfully until its line of retreat was entirely cut off, and even then showed signs of continued resistance. The tanks had already won such a position in the army that they had become one of the last resources of the commander who was in difficulties. During the night of November 13 three of these engines were sent for to help in reducing the intractable German centre. Their performance was typical both of their weakness and of their value in this early stage of their evolution. One was hit and disabled before it crossed the lines. A second stuck in the mud and refused to budge. The third won its way over the German front line and so terrorised the obstinate garrison that they were finally induced to lay down their arms. Eight hundred prisoners came from this one pocket, and the whole capture of the Naval Division amounted to nearly 2000 men.

The advance of Harper's 51st Highland Territorial Division on the immediate left of the Naval Division had been equally successful, and

had ended in the capture of the important village of Beaumont Hamel with all its network of caverns, a great store of machine-guns, and 1500 of the garrison. The objectives of the division may be said to have been the continuation of those of the Naval Division, substituting Beaumont Hamel for Beaucourt, but the position was complicated by a deep ravine, called after its shape the Y Ravine, which ran down from the village to the German trenches. The ground over which the advance was made was still littered with the skeletons clad in rags which represented the men who had fallen in the attack on July 1. Now, after five months, they were gloriously avenged. The rush of the division was headed by the 153rd Brigade, with the 4th and 7th Gordons in the lead. These two fine battalions carried the front German lines, but on reaching the Sunken Road they gave place to the 6th and 7th Black Watch behind them, who carried the attack up the Y Ravine and on to Beaumont, while the Seaforths and Argylls of the other Brigades, with their staunch Lowland comrades of the 9th Royal Scots, thickened the line of attack, and gave it the weight to carry each successive obstacle. Only in the Y Ravine was there any momentary check to the fiery advance. There for a short time the Germans stood stoutly to their task, and there was some of that man-to-man work which the Scotsman loves. Then the last signs of resistance died out, and before the late afternoon the whole position was in the hands of the assailants, who pushed on and occupied the low ridge to the north which separates it from Serre. One curious incident connected with the close of the action was, that a mopping-up party of Gordons in one of the front lines of trenches was suddenly surprised and captured by a considerable body of Germans, who emerged from an underground tunnel. In the evening, however, the positions were reversed, and the prisoners were rescued, while the Germans had to surrender to the victors. Fifteen hundred prisoners and 54 machine-guns were the spoils of the 51st Division, but these were considerably increased when the dug-outs were more carefully examined next day. Altogether nearly 7000 officers and men were captured in the course of the action.

Whilst the considerable action of Beaumont Hamel was fought upon the left, the various divisions upon the south of the river forming the remainder of Gough's Fifth Army all made a forward movement and gained ground. Of these divisions, the 39th, whose doings have already been described, was nearest to the main battle, and was most heavily engaged, winning a complete success. Upon its right in the order given were the 19th and the 18th, connecting up with Rawlinson's Fourth Army on the right. These various divisions all moved their lines forward in the direction of the river-bank, with the villages of Grandcourt and Petit Miraumont in their front. These movements were rather in the nature of a feint and a demonstration, so that they were not accompanied by any severe fighting. It had been planned, however, that as these divisions advanced to the north the space which would be left

between Gough's right and Rawlinson's left should be filled up by the 32nd Division, which should push on in the direction of Pys. This movement gave rise to some severe fighting in which the historical 14th Brigade sustained some heavy losses. The immediate obstacle in front of the division was a powerful system of trenches lying amid morasses caused by the recent heavy rains, and known as the Munich Line, with the Frankfort Line behind it. On November 17 the division took over the advanced trenches, while the 18th Division side-stepped to the left. The 32nd Division had formed its line for attack, with the 14th Brigade on the left and the 97th on the right, the leading battalions from left to right being the 15th Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Manchesters, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, and another battalion of H.L.I. The advance was to have been upon the 17th, but from the beginning a series of misfortunes occurred, arising largely from the weather, the condition of the trenches, and the severe German barrage behind the line, which made all preparations difficult and costly. The attack was postponed till the 18th, and even then the advancing battalions were short of bombs, without which trench fighting becomes impossible. The ground behind the troops was so awful that one mile in an hour was considered remarkable progress for an unladen messenger, while the enemy's fire was so severe that of six runners sent with a dispatch only the last arrived unwounded. The Germans in front appeared to be both numerous and full of fight, and on the 17th they made a vain attack upon the advanced line of the 14th Brigade. Two companies of the Manchesters sustained upon this day the losses of half their number as they lay, an object lesson in silent patient discipline in the muddy bottom of a shell-swept ditch.

At 6.10 in the morning of the 18th an advance was made, but the bomb supplies had not yet come up and the disadvantages were great. None the less, the first line of German trenches was successfully carried by the Manchesters, but the 15th Highland Light Infantry were held up by wire and were unable to get forward, while the Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the right got through at some points and were held at others. The Manchesters even penetrated to the second line of trenches and sprang into them, but the fatal want of bombs tied their hands, and a counter-attack of the Germans re-took the position. The Highland Light Infantry had fallen back upon Serre Trench, and were pressed by a party of the enemy, but fortunately some of the 1st Dorsets came up from the rear with some bombs, and the situation was saved. In the meantime the position of those Manchesters and Yorkshiremen who had got forward as far as the second trench, and were exposed without bombs to a bombing attack, was very serious. They had taken a number of prisoners, and some of these they managed to send back, but the greater part of the British were bombed to pieces, and all died where they fought or were taken by the enemy. A single survivor who returned from the final stand made by these gallant men stated that he

was the last man who had crawled out of the trench, and that his comrades lay dead or dying in a group in front of a blazing dug-out, the woodwork of which had taken fire. A patrol next day came upon the bodies of an officer and forty men who had died fighting to the last in a single group.

On the left of the 32nd Division some movement forward had been necessary upon the part both of the 18th Division and of the 19th, in order to keep the left flank of Jacob's Second Corps on the south of the river level with the right flank of Fanshawe's Fifth Corps upon the northern bank. This operation did not involve much work upon the part of the 18th, but the movement of the 19th was difficult and complex, with Grandcourt as a possible objective. It meant an attack upon a maze of trenches under the worst possible terrestrial conditions, while the advance had really to be in three different directions—due north, north-east, and almost due east. The 57th Brigade, strengthened by the 7th South Lancashires of the 56th Brigade, was chosen for the difficult task. At 6 a.m. on November 18 in a sharp snow-storm the advance began.

It was the last concerted operation of the year, but it was not, unfortunately, destined for success. The garrison of the trenches appear to have been as numerous as the stormers and far more advantageously placed. The ground was such that an advance over it without opposition would have been no easy matter. Upon the left two battalions, the 7th South Lancs and the 8th Gloucesters, old battle companions of La Boiselle, pushed vigorously forward and seized the western outskirt of Grandcourt, where they held on against every attempt to dislodge them. Stick bombs, egg bombs, rifle-grenades, and every sort of evil missile crashed and splintered around them, but they had in command two leaders who might be trusted to hold what they had taken. Only next evening when the rest of the attack had definitely failed did these two battalions withdraw to a new line on the immediate west of the village, taking 150 prisoners with them.

The other three battalions had fared ill owing to numerical weakness, lack of knowledge of the ground, loss of direction, bad weather, and deadly machine-guns. Half of the 8th North Staffords won their way through to the objective, but their comrades could not support them, and they were so isolated that, after a gallant resistance, they were nearly all destroyed or captured, under very much the same circumstances as the 2nd Manchesters on the preceding day. The commander of the North Staffords, Colonel Anderson, a gallant South African, and several other officers were wounded and taken. Colonel Torrie of the 7th East Lancashires was also killed in this engagement. An attempt upon the part of the 9th Cheshires later in the evening to get into touch with their lost comrades only served to swell the casualty lists, for it was dark before it was initiated, and all direction was impossible amid the labyrinth of mud-channels which faced them. Two days later the

19th Division was relieved by the 11th. It is difficult to exaggerate the extreme hardships which had been endured by the whole of Jacob's corps during these operations amid the viscid mud slopes of the Ancre. Napoleon in Poland had never better cause to curse the fourth element. The front trenches were mere gutters, and every attempt to deepen them only deepened the stagnant pool within. The communications were little better. The mud was on the men's bodies, in their food, and for ever clogging both their feet and their weapons. The hostile shelling was continuous. It was a nightmare chapter of the campaign.

These successive operations, wearisome to read of or to describe, and yet in their entirety forming an all-important whole, had really a deep effect upon the war. Colonel Gudmund Schnitler, who was military attaché for Norway with the German armies, writes in *Der Weltkrieg*, "If the battle of the Somme in the tactical and strategic sense had no direct importance, its consequences nevertheless were great, particularly in the moral aspect. It gave the Western powers confidence. The confidence of the German troops in victory was no longer so great as before.... The old steadfast highly-trained body of the German army, particularly in the Infantry, had disappeared. A great part of the best, most experienced and reliable officers and men were absent from their places. A remarkable decrease of moral force had shown itself. This was all the more the case as the heavy losses had made it necessary to send to the front a great number of young soldiers whose training was defective." This is the considered opinion of a well-informed spectator.

And now as the year drew to its close, Germany, wounded and weary, saw as she glared round her at her enemies, a portent which must have struck a chill to her heart. Russian strength had been discounted and that of France was no new thing. But here upon her Western flank was a host raised, as it seemed, from nowhere, and yet already bidding fair to be equal to her own? Her public were still ignorant and blind, bemused by the journals which had told them so long, and with such humorous detail, that the British army was a paper army, the creature of a dream. Treitschke's foolish phrase, "The unwarlike Islanders," still lingered pleasantly in their memory. But the rulers, the men who knew, what must have been their feelings as they gazed upon that stupendous array, that vision of doom, a hundred miles from wing to wing, gleaming with two million bayonets, canopied with aeroplanes, fringed with iron-clad motor monsters, and backed by an artillery which numbered its guns by the thousand? Kitchener lay deep in the Orkney waves, but truly his spirit was thundering at their gates. His brain it was who first planted these seeds, but how could they have grown had the tolerant long-suffering British nation not been made ready for it by all those long years of Teutonic insult, the ravings of crazy professors, and the insults of unbalanced publicists? Among them they had put life and spirit into this avenging apparition, where even now it could be

said that every man in the battle line had come there of his own free will. Years of folly and of crime were crying for a just retribution. The instrument was here and the hour was drawing on.

The greater part of 1916 was consumed rather in politics than in war upon the Balkan front. The defection of Greece, or rather of the Cabal who influenced Grecian policy, became more pronounced as time went on. The important Rupel Pass upon the extreme right of the allied position was given up without a shot and a whole Grecian army corps laid down its arms, and was conveyed to Germany in a manner which was more suggestive of friends than of prisoners. An allied force landing at Athens was attacked and lost heavily. Finally the Allies asserted themselves more strongly, the Greek forces were demobilised, and Constantine was forced to abdicate. From that time the flanks and rear of the army were freed from menace and it had to think only of the enemy in front.

By August 1916 the British forces had taken over the line of defences which lay to the south and west of Lake Doiran. An attack upon Monastir by the French and the reconstituted Serbian army was in contemplation and the object of the British attack was to hold the left of the Bulgarian line in position. In this fighting our Allies bore all the brunt, and save for one small successful attack by the 7th Oxford and Bucks with the 7th Royal Berkshires, both of the 78th Brigade, upon an outlying position, there was nothing worth mention upon the British line.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GERMAN RETREAT

The Hindenburg retreat—Atrocious devastations—Preparations at Arras.

In the latter days of 1916 and the beginning of 1917 the British Army, which had in little more than two years expanded from seven divisions to over fifty, took over an increased line. The movement began about Christmas time, and early in the New Year Rawlinson's Fourth Army, side-stepping always to the south, had covered the whole of the French position occupied during the Somme fighting, had crossed the Somme, and had established its right flank at a point near Roye. The total front was increased to 120 miles, which may seem a small proportion as compared to the whole. In making such a comparison, however, one must bear in mind the difference in the effort of sustaining an army in one's own country and in a foreign land with all communications by water. The task of the British was continually made more difficult by the precarious nature of their connexion with their base. Dullness of vision may be as dangerous to a nation as treason, and no enemies could have harmed the country more than those perfectly sincere and patriotic individuals who had for so long opposed the construction of a Channel Tunnel.

The general disposition of the British forces after this prolongation to the south was as follows. Plumer's Second Army still held that post of danger and of honour which centred round the Ypres salient. South of Plumer, in the Armentières district, was the First Army, now commanded by General Horne, whose long service with the Fifteenth Corps during the Somme Battle had earned him this high promotion. Allenby's Third Army carried the line onwards to the south of Arras. From the point upon which the British line had hinged during the Somme operations Gough's Fifth Army took over the front, and this joined on to Rawlinson's Fourth Army near the old French position. From the north, then, the order of the armies was two, one, three, five and four.

The winter was spent by both sides in licking their wounds after the recent severe fighting and in preparing for the greater fighting to come. These preparations upon the part of the British consisted in the addition to the army of a number of fresh divisions, and the rebuilding of those

divisions, fifty-two in number, which had taken part in the Somme fighting, most of them more than once. As the average loss in these divisions was very heavy indeed the task of reconstructing them was no light one. None the less, before the campaign reopened, though the interval was a short three months, the greater part of the battalions were once again at full strength, while the guns and munitions were very greatly increased. A considerable addition to the strength of the army was effected by the civilian railway advisers under Sir Eric Geddes who, by the simple expedient of pulling up their own lines at home and relaying them in France, enormously improved the communications of the army.

In the case of the Germans their army changes took the form of a considerable new levy from those classes which had been previously judged to be unfit, and a general comb-out of every source from which men could be extracted. A new law rendered every citizen liable to national service in a civilian capacity, and so released a number of men from the mines and the factories. They also increased the number of their divisions by the doubtful expedient of reducing the brigades, so that the divisions were shorn of a third of their strength. The battalions thus obtained were formed into new divisions. In this way it was calculated that a reserve force had been created which would be suddenly thrown in on one or the other front with dramatic effect. Some such plan may have been in contemplation, but, as a matter of fact, the course of events was such that the German generals required every man and more for their own immediate needs during the whole of the year.

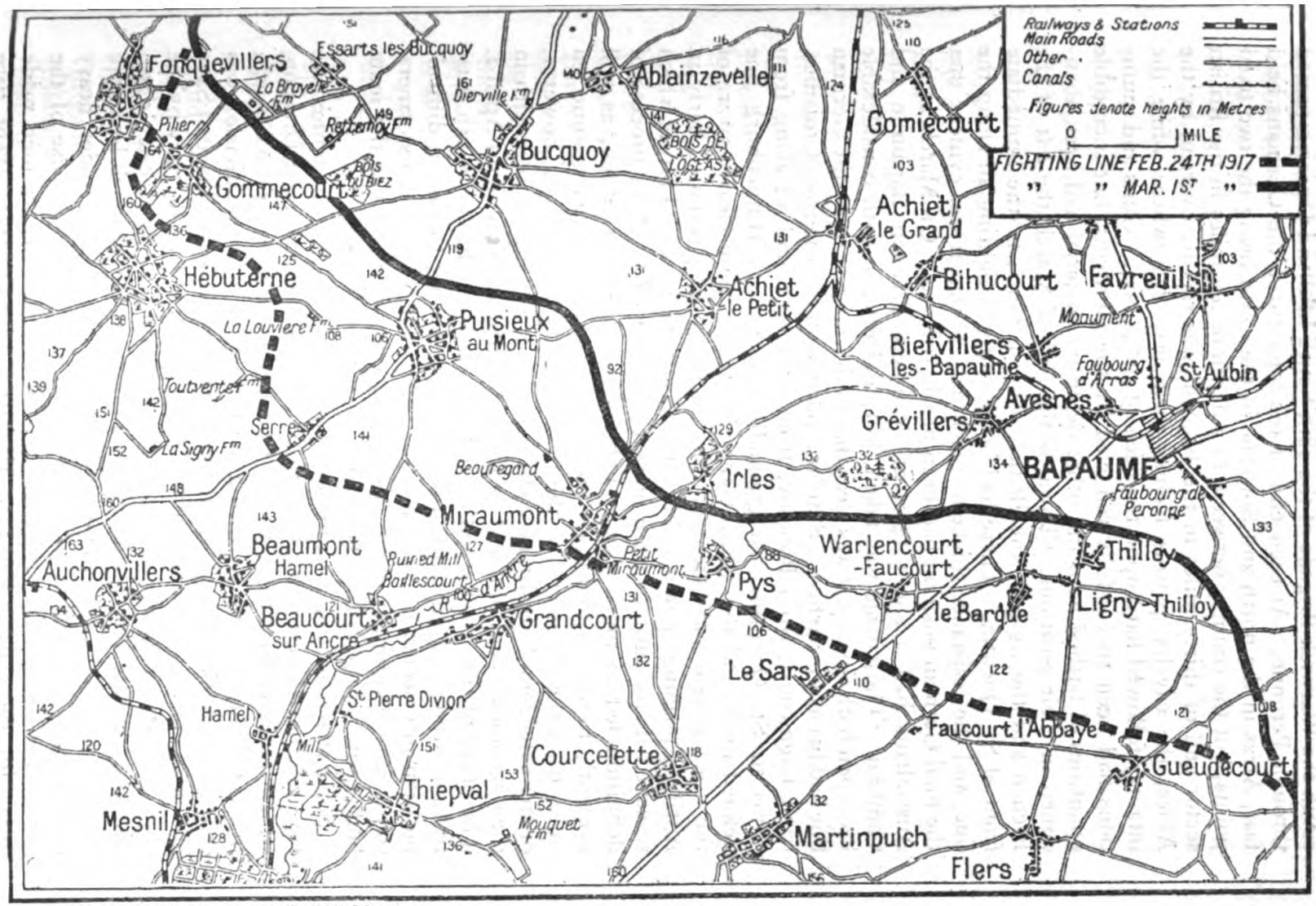
Although the whole line from the sea to the Somme was a scene of activity during the winter, and though hardly a day, or rather a night, went by that some stealthy party did not cross No-Man's-Land to capture and to destroy, still for the purposes of this narrative the three northern armies may be entirely ignored in the succeding operations, since they had no occasion to alter their lines. We shall fix our attention in the first instance upon Gough's army in the district of the Ancre, and afterwards upon Rawlinson's, which was drawn into the operations.

In order to understand these operations one has to realise the general strategical position. Joffre's plan had been for a combined attack upon the German line early in this year, and, though he was superseded by Nivelle, the plan was altered only in the direction of making it more ambitious. The attack was to be almost universal, but would, it was hoped, be especially deadly in that salient which the Somme operations had caused in the Bapaume district. By an unfortunate chance the whole details of Nivelle's " surprise " scheme fell into the hands of the Germans who made their preparations for the coming storm. One of these preparations was to withdraw from the whole salient and to fall back upon their rear line, which was strongly fortified. By this means they placed a hundred kilometres of that line out of reach of assault, since the Allied rail system could not supply munitions in front of it,

and thus they liberated large bodies of troops for the defence of those other portions of the line where they knew that the Allied blows were about to fall. Early in the year the retreat commenced in front of Gough's army and was closely followed up, though it was not until late in February that it was fully realised that our troops were fighting a covering rearguard and that the main body of the German army was in full temporary retreat. Rawlinson's men in the south were also conscious that the resistance had weakened and began to advance over the old German lines.

On March 19 and 20 the whole movement had become much more pronounced, and the French as well as the British were moving over a seventy mile front, extending from Arras in the north to Soissons in the south. Each day now was a day of joy in France, as some new strip of the fatherland was for a time recovered, but the joy was tempered by sorrow and anger as it was learned with what barbarity the Germans had conducted their retreat. To lay a country waste is no new thing in warfare. It has always been held to be an occasional military necessity, though the best commander was he who used it least. In all Napoleon's career it is difficult to recall an instance when he devastated a district. At the same time it must be admitted that it comes within the recognised chances of war, and that when Sherman's army, for example, left a black weal across the South the pity of mankind was stirred but not its conscience. It was very different here. The Germans, with a malignity for which it would be hard to find a parallel, endeavoured by every means at their command to ruin the country for the future as well as for the present. Buildings were universally destroyed, including in many cases the parish churches. Historical monuments, such as the venerable Castle of Courcy, were blown to pieces. Family vaults were violated and the graves profaned. The furniture of the most humble peasants was systematically broken. The wells were poisoned and polluted. Worst of all, the young fruit trees were ringed so as to destroy them for future seasons. It was considered the last possibility of savagery when the Mahdi's men cut down the slow-growing palm trees in the district of Dongola, but every record has been swept away by the German invaders.

Turning from the deeds of savages to those of soldiers, we have now to trace the progress and scope of the great German retreat, the first pronounced movement upon either side on the Western front since September 1914. From Arras to Roye the British army was advancing while the movement was carried on to Soissons by the French. On the curve of the trenches the front measured more than a hundred miles. So close was the touch between the two allied armies that the patrols of French and British cavalry rode together into Nesle. On March 18 the Australians had occupied Bapaume, with the 7th Division moving on their left and the 20th on their right, the cavalry fringe being formed by the Indian Lucknow Cavalry Brigade of the 4th Division. To the



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FIGHTING LINE, FEBRUARY 24

south the Warwick Brigade of the 48th South Midland Division passed through Peronne. At each end of the long curve the Germans held fast, Arras in the north and Soissons in the south being the two fixed points, but the country between, to a depth of ten miles in the British sector and of thirty miles in the French, was rapidly overrun by the Allies, the cavalry patrols feeling their way everywhere while the infantry followed hard upon the heels of the horses. Guns and munitions had been successfully removed by the Germans, but incredible quantities of barbed wire and other defensive material had been abandoned in their positions. Towards the end of March the left of the French and the right of the British were in touch in the immediate front of St. Quentin. There had been scattered fighting all along the line, and the resistance thickened each day, so that it was evident that the final German position had been nearly reached. On March 24 the Australians had a sharp fight at Beaumetz between Bapaume and Cambrai. The village was taken, lost, and retaken with considerable loss upon both sides. It was clear that in this quarter a definite German line had been approached. Similar reports soon came in from Croisilles, from Lagnicourt, from Roussoy, from Jeancourt, and all along from Arras to St. Quentin. So gradually the famous Hindenburg line defined itself, and the allied Generals became more clearly aware of the exact nature and extent of this new German position. Early in April, by pushing up to it and brushing aside the advanced forces which screened it, its outlines were more clearly mapped. This process of definition led to more serious fighting, the worst of which, as will presently be shown, fell upon the Australians at Bullecourt, some ten miles from the Arras end of the new line. Some foretaste, however, of the considerable resistance which they were about to meet with in their section was encountered by the Australians at Noreuil on April 2. The brunt of the attack upon the village was borne by the South Australians, who behaved with great gallantry, having to rush a difficult position intersected by sunken roads. A small body of the stormers, some sixty in number, were cut off and overwhelmed, but the main body captured the village, taking 137 German prisoners.

Some sharp fighting took place at Savy and Selency to the immediate west and north-west of St. Quentin, on the front of the 32nd Division, which, together with the 35th and 61st, had been pressing the German line. On the morning of April 2 the 14th Brigade of this division was ordered to attack Selency. On the two previous days the village of Savy had been taken, and a strong attack made upon the Bois de Savy by the 96th and 97th Brigades. The advance of April 2 was at early dawn and the veteran 2nd Manchester Battalion under Colonel Luxmore was in the lead. The whole operation was conducted under heavy machine-gun fire, but by swift movement and a judicious use of the ground the losses were minimised. Whilst the Lancashire men made direct for the village the 15th Highland Light Infantry kept pace

with them on their right flank. A battery of six German field-guns opened fire in the very faces of the stormers, but C Company of the Manchesters, with admirable steadiness and presence of mind, swerved to each side and rushed the guns from the flank, capturing them all. The attack was at 5 a.m., and by 6.30 the whole objective had been captured. No further advance was possible as the front line was already close to St. Quentin, which was a German stronghold. The position at the end of the action was that the village was in the hands of the British, but that the six guns with their caissons were in the open where the Germans could cover them with their fire. The victors were determined to have their trophies, and their enemy was no less eager to make it impossible. The moment that darkness had fallen a party of Manchesters, under the lead of Lieut. Thomas, the adjutant, and Lieut. Ward of the 161st R.F.A., endeavoured to man-handle the guns into the British lines, but directly they began to haul, so sharp a fire of shrapnel was opened at a range of 800 yards that they were compelled to desist. A covering party of the 15th Highland Light Infantry lay round the guns till dawn, and during the day they remained safe under the rifles of the infantry. At eight o'clock on April 3 a further attempt to bring them in was made by Major Lumsden of the Staff with Lieutenants Ward and Lomax of the gunners. Horse teams were brought down, and amid a terrific barrage the gun wheels began at last to revolve. Maddened by the sight seen under the glare of their star shells, the German infantry surged forward and for a time were all round the Highlanders who still guarded the guns. One small party of Germans dashed in upon the guns with a charge of dynamite and managed to blow in the breech of one of them. They were driven off, however, and the six guns were all brought in, while upon April 4 the six artillery caissons were also salved. So ended a most satisfactory little operation for which Major Lumsden received a Victoria Cross and later the command of a brigade, while the other officers were decorated.

On April 2 in the north of the new line, near the spot where very great things were pending, Snow's Seventh Corps had taken Henin and Croisilles, with the aid of the Fifth Army on their right. It was a small operation in itself, but it was preparing the jumping-off place for the great battle of April 9. There was continued bickering along the line where the British were pushing in the German outliers.

A more serious action was that which began on April 13, when the 32nd Division was ordered to support the left of the French in their unsuccessful attack upon St. Quentin. The task assigned to the British division, with the 35th Division co-operating on its left, was to attack the village of Fayet. This was carried out very gallantly by the 97th Brigade, with the 2nd York Light Infantry and the 16th Highland Light Infantry in the lead. The village with 100 prisoners was taken at the first rush, but it was found to be more difficult to get possession of a wood, called the Twin Copses, beyond the village. So severe was the

fighting that the General of the 97th Brigade had seven battalions under his command before it was finished. Finally, the Twin Copses were splendidly carried by the 11th Borderers. The total of prisoners came to 5 officers and 334 men in this very spirited operation.

We have it upon the authority of Sir Douglas Haig that the great local retreat of the Germans had no very great effect in modifying the British plans. Those plans, so far as they were concerned, were to make a combined assault from the north and from the south upon the Ancre salient, Gough attacking from the south and Allenby from the north. As the salient had now ceased to exist, the rôle of Gough was confined to following up the German retreat until he came to the new Hindenburg line, which was an obstacle of so formidable a character that it checked anything short of a very powerful attack. Allenby's part of the programme was still feasible, however, and resolved itself into an attack upon the high ground held by the Germans and their whole line down to the point where the new positions began.

Though the British operations were not greatly affected by the German retreat the same cannot be said for our Allies. Joffre had planned a very large operation in the spring, and, though he was supplanted by Nivelle, the plans of the new Commander were on an even more extensive scale. These were naturally altogether dislocated when it was found that the German line was now far away from all the elaborate preparations which had been made. Thus it arose that the French attack was delayed and that the opening of the campaign devolved entirely upon their British allies.

Meanwhile the forcing of America into the war by the unlimited submarine campaign was destined to affect deeply the military situation. Great as was the privation caused to Great Britain the accession of the powerful United States to the cause of democracy was far more than a sufficient make-weight. As events progressed and as it became evident that Russia counted for less and less as an ally, it became more clear that the help of America was needed to save the allied powers, not indeed from defeat but from that inconclusive peace which only leads to other wars in the future.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

April 9 to April 23, 1917

Vast preparations—Attack of Snow's Seventh Corps—The Ibex Trench—Attack of Haldane's Sixth Corps—Attack of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps—A Scottish Front—The splendid Canadians—Capture of Monchy—Essex and Newfoundland—A glorious episode—The Chemical Works—Extension of the battle to the north—Desperate fight of the Australians at Bullecourt.

WHILST the German line was falling back to its new positions, and the Allies were eagerly following it across the ravished countryside until the increased resistance and the familiar lines of barbed wire warned them that the immediate retreat had come to an end, Sir Douglas Haig had managed, without relaxing his pursuit, to collect a strong striking force at the point of junction between the new German line and the old. The blow which he contemplated was no small local advance, but was a wide movement extending from the neighbourhood of Lens in the north to Arras in the south, a front of more than twelve miles. Upon this sector a tremendous concentration of artillery had been effected, and four corps were waiting the signal for the assault, the three southern ones forming Allenby's Third Army, while the fourth or northern one was the right-hand corps of Horne's First Army. The southern corps were the Seventh (Snow), which operated to the south of Arras, having Croisilles for its southern boundary; the Sixth (Haldane), which advanced due east from Arras with the Scarpe for its northern boundary; the Seventeenth (Fergusson), which had its right on the Scarpe and its left on Thelus, with its front facing the three spurs which form this end of the Vimy Ridge; and finally the Canadian Corps (Byng), which faced this long and sinister slope, the scene of so much bloodshed in the past. Each corps was marshalled with three divisions in front and one in reserve, so that there were roughly 120,000 men in the storming line with 40,000 advancing behind them. Maxse's Eighteenth Corps was in reserve in the rear of the Third Army, while McCracken's Thirteenth Corps was behind the First Army. The Germans had six divisions, the 11th Prussian, 14th Bavarian, 1st Bavarian Reserve, and the 17th, 18th

and 79th reserve in the line. Their guns also were numerous, as subsequent captures were to prove, but it is probable that an extension of the Hindenburg retreat was in contemplation, and that some of the heavy artillery was already on the move. A second strong line from Drocourt to Quéant was known to exist, and its occupation would form a natural sequel to the retirement in the south.

One of the most difficult problems of this attack was how to arrange it upon that section which was covered by the town of Arras. It is true that the German line was 1700 yards east of the market-place, but the suburbs extended right up to it, and it was fringed with houses. The town itself, in which the storming troops must assemble and through which all supports and supplies must pass, was full of narrow streets within easy range of the German guns, and previous French experience had proved that each exit was so carefully and accurately barraged by the German fire that it was most difficult for the troops to debouch from it. This problem was solved by a fine piece of military engineering. The large cellars and other subterranean excavations with which the place abounded were connected up and fresh tunnels constructed, so that it was eventually found to be possible to put three whole divisions underground, with permanent headquarters and every necessary detail, including water, electric light, and a three-foot tramway. This fine work was carried out by the New Zealand, the 179th and the 184th Tunnelling Companies. A huge dressing-station with 700 beds was also constructed. In this great underground place of assembly the greater part of the Sixth Corps was assembled, while many of the tunnels on the south side of the town were allotted to the use of the Seventh Corps. All this had been carried out during the winter in the anticipation of a big attack being made at this point. For purposes of communication, over 1000 miles of twin cable was buried in six-foot trenches or secured to the sides of tunnels. Besides these special preparations, the usual immense labour of preparing for a modern attack had been thoroughly carried out along the whole line, including the construction of very many gun positions, trench mortar emplacements, dressing-stations, and innumerable dumps of munitions and engineering stores. Some dislocation had been caused in the plans by a partial withdrawal in the enemies' front trenches upon March 18, opposite the right end of the British lines. The abandoned works were occupied and linked up with the old system, so that upon April 9 all was in order for the assault. The extreme difficulties caused by the formidable defensive preparations of the enemy were fully realised, but everything which human forethought could suggest had been done to meet them. Above all, two great lessons taught by the Somme experience had been thoroughly assimilated ; the one that the broader the attack the more successful it is likely to be, as it prevents a concentration of the German guns upon a single area ; the other that it is wiser, even in the heat of battle and the glow of victory, to limit your objective to an area

which is well within the range of your guns. That last blue line so far forward upon the map had been the cause of many a rebuff.

The British bombardment, which came in gusts during the days preceding the attack, did enormous damage to the German defences. The evidence of prisoners showed that for several days they had been reduced to their emergency rations. The wire, which in places was a hundred yards thick, was mostly destroyed in the first line, and greatly damaged in the second, though in the third it was found to be largely intact, save upon the left of the line. The space between the first and second German lines was roughly 500 yards. Between the second and third it was about 3000. The usual forms of bombardment were varied upon April 4 by the use of a large number of Liven's gas projectors, throwing drums of compressed gas, which were seen to burst in the second German line. Fifteen hundred of these were discharged upon the front of a single corps, and they were said to have considerable effect, the reports of prisoners stating that in the suburb of Blangy alone there were 460 casualties from this cause. On April 8 there was a severe gas bombardment from 4-inch trench mortars. Finally, in the early morning of April 9, came the fearful whirlwind of fire which was the prelude to the attack. Some idea of its intensity may be gathered from the fact that the number of guns was so great that they could have rubbed wheels from end to end of the line had they been so placed. At 5.30 the word was given, and in the first dim grey of a rainy, windy, and sleety morning, the infantry dashed forward to the attack—" wave after wave of grimy, mud-covered, determined men, with hearts as hard as steel and as light as feathers," to use the words of one of them. The events may best be described from the south of the line as being the nearest to Arras from which the battle derives its name.

Snow's Seventh Corps had Campbell's 21st North Country Division on the extreme right, Shea's 30th Lancashire Division in the centre, the 56th London on their left, and Cowper's 14th Light Division upon the extreme northern wing. The soldiers, soaked to the skin, with the rain beating upon their backs, and their feet ankle-deep in the mud, set about their task in a calm, businesslike fashion which would take no denial. No village or notable fixed points lay in their path, but they plodded without a check or halt over the first two lines of entrenchments, finding no very strong resistance, save at one point upon the left of their line, and suffering little loss from the German artillery. Considerable numbers of the enemy were found scattered in their shattered trenches or cowering in the dug-outs. Over a thousand of these were sent to the rear. The advance was at the point where the new German line branched away from the old one, the 21st Division on the right joining the left of Gough's Army in the neighbourhood of the Cojeul River, while the 14th Division was in touch with the 3rd Division on the north.

The immediate objectives of the various divisions of this Seventh

Corps were Telegraph Hill in the north opposite to the 14th Division, Neuville Vitasse opposite to the 56th Division, St. Martin-sur-Cojeul opposite the 30th Division, and the Hindenburg line opposite the 21st Division. Taking them in turn from the south, we shall first follow the fortunes of the north countrymen of Campbell's Division. This division on the first day was not expected to do more than make a strong demonstration, because both it, and to a less extent the division upon its left, had in front of it sheets of uncut wire and all the devilries of the fixed German line. The object, therefore, was that they should make a holding attack in the hope that the northern divisions of the corps should get well forward to the east, and then swing to the south in such a way as to make the German position untenable. This was eventually done, and a way was cleared so that the two divisions in the south should be able to advance with the remainder of the line. The whole operation of the Seventh Corps has to be continually judged by the fact that they were on the edge of the abandoned area, and that therefore their southern front bulged out to the east in a way which brought the successive divisions almost into an echelon formation.

On the left of the 21st Division were the Lancashire pals of the 30th Division. Upon April 8 they had made a good start, as the 2nd Bedfords carried the village of St. Martin, an outlier of the Hindenburg line, but on the same date the 21st Brigade was held up in an attempt to advance upon the left. They advanced on April 9 with the 21st Brigade upon the left and the 90th upon the right. The first dash behind a splendid barrage was most successful, but the 21st Brigade, after passing the front German lines, ran into uncut wire and was held, the 18th Liverpools suffering severely. The brigade upon the right managed, however, to get forward for some distance, but it also was faced by uncut wire, and was compelled to dig in as best it could. The attack was renewed two days later with the aid of four tanks, but the wire still held, though the devoted infantry tried again and again. Finally, however, the 56th Division having cleared its own front sent the Victoria Rifles bombing down the front of the 30th Division, who in turn cleared the front of the 21st Division on their right, and so by the evening of April 11 the line was finally advanced. The clearing of the front of the 21st was done by the 18th Manchesters, who, unsupported, bombed their way down 1700 yards of Hindenburg line, a very notable achievement.

To Hull's 56th Division, the next upon the north, was assigned the capture of Neuville Vitasse and the strong works which surrounded it. The advance was carried out at 7.45—the zero time was earlier as it travelled up the line—and was led by the 167th Brigade upon the right and by the 168th Brigade upon the left, while the 169th were in support. "The bombardment and the covering fire were magnificent," says one who marched in the ranks; "I almost felt sorry for the poor old Hun, only, after all, he is such a Hun." The chief fighting was on the right,

where the 3rd London and 8th Middlesex stormed the main portion of the village. At 10.30 all the eastern edge had been secured, and the 1st London moved forward to take the Cojeul Switch line. Unfortunately, they struck up against uncut wire and a very heavy belt of fire. Colonel Smith, the commanding officer, and the great majority of the other officers were killed or wounded, and the advance was brought to a stand. The 18th Liverpools of the 21st Brigade upon the right had also been halted by the uncut wire. Colonel King of the 7th Middlesex took command of this difficult situation so far as it affected the advance of his brigade, and threw his battalion in to strengthen the 1st Londons, so that together they captured the Cojeul Switch Trench. The Londoners were then well ahead of the Liverpool men on their right, so the 1st London threw back a defensive flank while the 7th Middlesex stormed forward against the powerful Ibex Trench. Three separate attempts were made, much impeded by the deep mud, and all ending in failure, so that darkness fell before the task had been accomplished, but with true British tenacity, at 3 a.m., in the darkest hour before dawn, the Middlesex men tried once more and carried Ibex, taking a number of prisoners. The 168th Brigade had with varying fortunes kept pace upon the left, and in the early morning the London Scottish on its right were in touch with Ibex Trench. The position of the 167th was still dangerous on the flank, as it was always ahead of its southern neighbours, so that instead of advancing eastwards, Colonel King now turned south, his depleted ranks being strengthened by the 9th London (Victorias) from the reserve brigade. The enemy were only forty yards off upon the flank, with a perfect warren of trenches, and the mud was so dreadful that some men who got in could hardly be dragged out again alive. In spite of every difficulty the Londoners, after an initial check, swept triumphantly down Ibex and Zoo trenches clearing in one wild, glorious rush the whole position, capturing 197 more prisoners of the 31st Prussian Regiment with several machine-guns. Captain Cousens, who led this charge, after being badly wounded, was unhappily killed by a sniper in the moment of victory. The Victorias were too late to join in the victorious charge which stands to the credit of the 7th Middlesex, but they helped to hold and to extend what had been won. The general effect of the advance of this division was to turn the flank of the southern German defences and to open up a road for the 30th and 21st Divisions upon the right.

The 14th Light Division to the north of the Londoners was faced by the slight slope and formidable defences of Telegraph Hill. They went forward in close conformity with the Sixth Corps upon their left, the 42nd Brigade being on the left and the 43rd on the right. Their movement during the day was a particularly fine one, and they not only took the strong position of Telegraph Hill, but they carried the British line to a point far to the east of it. Their whole advance was largely regulated by the situation upon their northern flank, and they were

exposed to such an enfilade fire whenever they got at all ahead, that they found it impossible to act entirely upon their own.

Upon the left of the front was a strong German position called " The Harp," which was very gallantly carried by the 42nd Brigade. Sixteen tanks which were to have lent them a hand in this difficult operation failed for some reason to arrive in time, and the infantry had to advance with no help save their own stout hearts. The attack was carried out by the 9th K.R.R. with the 4th Royal Fusiliers of the 3rd Division acting on their left, and their comrades of the 6th Oxford and Bucks on their right. Their only serious opponents here as elsewhere were snipers and machine-gunners, but these were all of the best, and caused heavy losses before the whole objective with its garrison had been captured. By 9.15 in the morning it was entirely in British hands, and as the day wore on the division kept steadily improving their position, though still short of their final objective, the elusive line, which is so easy to draw and so hard to attain. In the evening, an attempt was made by the 14th Division to struggle still further eastwards. This advance had no success, and so the forward units of the whole Seventh Corps dug in on the general line from Feuchy Chapel Road in the north to near Croisilles in the south, having after a desperate day's fighting achieved a gain which averaged two or three miles, and a total of nearly 2000 prisoners with a number of guns. Concerning these prisoners, it may be unsafe to generalise, but it is certain that many of them surrendered very readily. As to their general type the opinion of a commanding officer who handled many of them may be quoted : " The officers were mild persons, none of the bullet-headed, bristly-moustached, truculent Prussian type. The prisoners generally do not inspire one with respect. Braggarts and bullies in prosperity, in adversity they cringe."

Haldane's Sixth Corps was to the immediate left of the Seventh, and its operations were directed due east of Arras. The three front divisions, counting from the south, were Deverell's 3rd, Scott's 12th South of England and McCracken's 15th Scottish, with Williams' 37th English in reserve. The troops of the assaulting divisions had been assembled for three days in the caves under Arras, but on the night of April 8 they were silently passed into the assembly trenches, an operation which was carried through with little interference or loss. The vile weather may have been a blessing in disguise, as it covered all the preparations from the German observation.

The right of the attacking line was formed by the 76th Brigade of the 3rd Division, a unit which had distinguished itself greatly in previous fighting. The 8th and 9th Brigades were in close support. Its front was south of the Arras-Cambrai Road. To the left of the 76th Brigade the line was carried on by the 37th and 36th Brigades of the 12th Division. Their right rested on the Arras-Cambrai Road. To their left were the 44th and 45th of the 15th Division. Their left rested upon the Scarpe. Nothing could have gone more smoothly than the

advance, which kept well up with the barrage. Only at Observation Hill was vigorous resistance encountered, and the German barrage was so belated that it fell upon empty trenches after the stormers had left them. The line of infantry as it swept forward in its irresistible advance was formed, counting from the south, by the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the 1st Gordons, the 6th Queen's, the 7th East Surreys, the 11th Middlesex, the 7th Sussex, the 8/10th [1] Gordons, the 9th Black Watch, the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers, and the 11th Argyll and Sutherlands. To the courage which had always been their birthright, the infantry now added all the cool war wisdom which experience of many battles must bring with it, and all those devices for overcoming the scattered forts of the enemy and avoiding their machine-guns, which had been learned on the Somme and the Ancre, were now practised to keep down the losses of the assault.

The advance of Porter's 76th Brigade had been to the south of the great high road which leads from Arras to Cambrai—a road which was destined to be second only to the Menin Road as a centre of hard fighting. The Gordons led the attack and took the front line with a number of the Prussian 38th Regiment. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers then passed through the ranks of the Highlanders and captured Devil's Wood. So swift were these movements that the German barrage was always in the rear. Having thus secured the first objective, Potter's 9th Brigade, strengthened by the 2nd Suffolks, stormed forward to the next line of defence. The 4th Royal Fusiliers on the right took Nomeny, Spring, and Lynx Trenches, when the Suffolks passed through them and took Neuilly Trench. The 12th West Yorkshires took Tilloy village. The 13th Liverpools, after being held up on the left, carried the line forward, and, by getting its machine-gun on to the roof of Tilloy Château, dominated the country to the extreme discomfort of the German snipers. Besides these numerous trenches and strong points the 9th Brigade helped to take the fortified position known as The Harp, an exploit in which they were much assisted by a couple of tanks. Here a considerable number of prisoners were made, including most of a battalion of the 162nd Regiment, together with its commander.

It will save confusion if we follow the fortunes of each division for the day, regardless of what is going on upon its flank, as it is impossible to understand a narrative which switches continually from one portion of the line to another. The whole operation of the Sixth Corps was somewhat behind the time appointed, as each division had met with some delays, but the advance towards the third objective was begun about one o'clock in this southern area. The 8th Brigade had now taken up the running, and the 9th had fallen into support. Reinforced by the two reserve battalions of the 76th Brigade, the victorious advance was resumed, the 2nd Royal Scots and 7th Shropshires carrying the Bois des Bœufs to the south of the Cambrai Road, together with five guns which

[1] Where two numbers are given for one battalion, it means that two battalions with these numbers have been telescoped into one.

had been concealed in it. To those who had experienced what the capture of a wood meant in the Somme fighting, it was indeed a promise for the future that this considerable plantation should offer so slight a resistance. The 8th Brigade fought its way onwards for another mile or more until it had attained the line of Feuchy Chapel. Here the German resistance had thickened and the artillery fire had increased in the same ratio as the British had weakened. A halt was called, therefore, and the infantry consolidated their advanced position. An attempt by the Gordons and the 8th Royal Lancasters to reach the extreme final objective was checked in the evening by a very heavy fire upon both flanks.

In the centre, Scott's 12th Division had met with strong resistance at several points, which caused the assault to fall behind the barrage. These centres of German resistance were usually isolated houses or small redoubts, so that it was possible in may cases to mask them and to push onwards. No village or large fixed defence lay in their path, and in spite of a check for some time at the estaminet upon the Cambrai Road, they were able to line up with their comrades to the south upon the second objective about half-past twelve o'clock. At this point Vincent's 35th Brigade passed through the advanced lines and moved to the front. A number of difficult positions were taken, including Observation Hill, and the ground was so thoroughly cleared that the assailants were able to go forward with the assurance that their wounds would not be in the back. It was found, however, as they neared the line of the third German position, that considerable stretches of wire had been imperfectly cut, and that the machine-gun fire was so severe as to make the final assault impossible. The infantry dug in, therefore, and waited for further support from the guns, many of which were already on the move. The 9th Essex upon the right actually reached the Feuchy Chapel Work and held their grip of it, keeping in line with the 8th Brigade upon the south.

The 15th Division to the north of the Corps' front had before them the very strong position called the Railway Triangle, where the line to Lens branches away from the line to Douai. This formidable place was attacked by the Scotch infantry, and after a severe struggle it was captured about 11.30 save for its eastern side, which was finally taken later in the morning, the artillery aiding the assailants by some extraordinarily good shooting. The advance was then resumed, and the division found itself shortly after noon in the line of the second objective. Six brigades of field artillery had followed closely upon the heels of the infantry and managed, in spite of the unfavourable state of the ground, to take up a position to cover the further attack. When one recalls the dreadful weather and the shell-pocked state of the countryside, it was a remarkable feat upon the part of the gun-teams to get their pieces so rapidly forward. Several tanks came forward also, and did good work not only upon this front, but at Tilloy and The Harp.

The 15th Division was now somewhat behind the others, but shortly after two o'clock the 46th Lowland Brigade advanced upon the third objective. These splendid soldiers brushed aside every obstacle, and when fired upon at short range by German guns rushed onwards with a yell and captured the battery. By 4 p.m. they had fully reached their final line and had pushed out their patrols some hundreds of yards to the eastwards. This fine advance, which was the only one to reach the extreme limit upon this front, was carried out by the 7th Scots Borderers, 10th Scots Rifles, and 12th Highland Light Infantry, with the 10/11th Highland Light Infantry mopping up behind them.

At 7 p.m. an attempt was made by the two southern divisions to get forward from the Feuchy Chapel Line and gain a position level with the 46th Brigade. Evening was setting in, however, the men were weary and the difficulties manifold, so that no progress was made, both the 3rd and the 14th Divisions suffering additional losses in the attempt.

The 37th Division, composed entirely of English troops, North, South, and Midland, had moved up in the rear of the fighting line, and in the middle of the afternoon it found itself in the German second line system, while the Corps' mounted troops had followed behind the 15th Division, as far as the Railway Triangle. As evening fell, the 37th Division pushed forward with the intention of reaching the extreme point attained by the 15th Division and then swinging to the right in the hope of capturing Monchy. The advance seems, however, to have taken a direction rather too much to the south, with the result that instead of finding the opening made by the 46th Brigade they came upon the more contracted Feuchy line held by the 12th and 3rd Divisions. Here they were held up by a field of wire as their comrades had already been, and the two brigades concerned—the 111th upon the left and the 112th upon the right—remained in line with the 35th and the 8th Brigades, the units being considerably intermingled. The 63rd Brigade, however, which was now a brigade of the 37th Division, though the reader will associate it with the 21st Division in the past, was able to keep its true direction, and before night had finally established itself at the north end of Orange Hill well up to the third objective and in touch with the 46th Brigade. The Corps' cavalry also pushed forward along the south bank of the Scarpe, capturing three 8-inch howitzers upon the way, and halting opposite Fampoux, where they were in touch with the 4th Division upon the northern bank of the river.

Such was the splendid day's work of Haldane's Corps. It is true that in the south the uncut wire had made it impossible for them to reach their ultimate objective, but they had in the space of the one Easter day captured the villages of Feuchy and of Tilloy, the strong redoubts of The Harp and the Railway Triangle, gained some thirty-six square miles of ground, and taken 2000 prisoners with 60 guns. It was a most notable achievement. We shall now pause on the evening of this first

day of battle and we shall go back to reconstruct the operations upon the northern bank of the Scarpe.

The Seventeenth Corps (Fergusson) was upon the left of the Sixth. Its right-hand unit, Lukin's 9th Division, consisting of two Scottish and one South African brigade, was operating upon the immediate north of the Scarpe. This division was to attack with three brigades in line, the 26th on the right, 27th on the left, and South Africans between. Upon the left of the 9th was Nicholson's 34th Division, drawn largely from Scotland and Tyneside, the same fine division which had been the very pivot upon which the battle of July 1 had turned. Upon the left of the corps was Harper's 51st Highland Territorial Division which had distinguished itself so greatly at Beaumont Hamel five months before. It may be said, therefore, that the fighting line of the Seventeenth Corps upon this great day was predominantly Scottish, but Lambton's veteran 4th Division was in immediate support. The whole battle-front was from the right bank of the Scarpe near Arras up to the post known as the Commandant's House, just south of Thelus. There were no villages over the greater part of this front, but there were great numbers of fortified farms and strong posts of every description, besides the usual lines of wired trenches. The ground was in successive ridges and a big tactical obstacle existed in the Lens-Arras railroad in its alternate cuttings and embankments. The long eager line of Highlanders, Tynesiders, and South Africans rolled over every obstacle, and by ten o'clock had mastered all the first objectives, which were the three lines of German trenches. In the south the 9th Division, led by the well-known South African Imperial soldier, had carried first Blangy and then Athies by storm. There was a time when the 26th Brigade upon the right was hung up, but with fine initiative the right flank of the Transvaal Regiment worked down along the railway cutting and helped to clear the front of its neighbours. In the centre, the 34th Division, after a short check at a network of trenches called " The Pump," had reached its allotted positions. In the north the clansmen, who as Territorials were sprung from the very soil of the Highlands, had swiftly advanced to the south of Thelus and had covered the right wing of the 1st Canadians while they captured that village. It was victory all along the line, and victory without those excessive losses which have made many of our greatest successes as tragic as they are glorious. The artillery barrage had been found to be a powerful antidote against the deadly machine-guns. " When our barrage lifted off the railway cutting, the machine-guns had been silenced and all the gunners were found to be dead." Such was the report of a South African officer.

Allusion has been made to the check caused by the strong point called " The Pump " and the trenches called the Kleemanstellung just east of it. Some detail should be added in this matter, for it retarded the attack of the flanks of two divisions, and the delay caused by it had the effect that the Canadians on the left and the 9th upon the right were

further forward in the late afternoon than part of the 51st and the 34th, which might have caused a dangerous situation. The 34th Division had advanced on a three-brigade front, which consisted from the south of Gore's 101st, Ternan's 102nd, and Trevor's 103rd. On the north of the 103rd was the 152nd Brigade of the 51st Division with the Seaforths as the flank battalion. This pestilent strong point, armed with well-served and well-concealed machine-guns, lay between the two brigades and held up the flanks of both, inflicting considerable losses not only on the Seaforths, but on the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers, who were on the left of the 34th Division. For a considerable time the advance was held. The 27th reserve battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers were sent up, and one of its companies, led with a fine mixture of valour and cunning, carried the place by storm. The whole line then got forward, but the losses had been heavy, including Colonel Hermon of the 24th Northumberland Fusiliers. In the evening it was found that the final objective had not yet been fully attained at this quarter of the field, for it had been marked at a farm called Maison de la Côte, from which the front line was still a thousand yards distant. A brilliant little attack, however, by Trevor's Brigade, in the early morning of April 10, captured the whole position. Besides the check at The Pump, there had been another on the 51st divisional front at a post called the "Deutsche Haus." The consequence of this was a loss of the barrage and a delay which led to the isolated left of the 51st losing direction entirely and wandering round in a half-circle. The circumstances were so complex that it was not until next morning that they could be cleared up. Had the Germans had the spirit for a counter-attack, they would certainly have found a considerable gap in the line.

These events were in the northern area of the Seventeenth Corps. In the southern portion, at about eleven o'clock, the reserve division came forward, and, passing through the weary ranks of the 9th, pushed on along the northern bank of the river. The advance had already been a splendid one, the 9th Division having 2000 prisoners to its credit, but this movement of Lambton's Division against an enemy who was already badly shaken was a very fruitful one. The 12th Brigade was nearest the Scarpe, with the 11th upon the left, while the 10th moved forward in close support. Two obstacles faced the division, the straggling village of Fampoux upon the bank of the river, and the Hyderabad Redoubt, a considerable fort to the north of the village. The 12th Brigade moved swiftly forward in the nearest approach to open warfare that had been seen for years. The 1st Royal Lancasters were on the right of the swift flexible line, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers in the centre, and the 2nd Essex upon the left. The brigade fought its way in the teeth of a very hot fire to the outskirts of Fampoux, where the reserve battalion, the 2nd West Ridings, passed through the King's Own and carried the village in splendid style late in the evening at the point of the bayonet. It is a remarkable fact that the wire in front of the village had not been

cut by the artillery, and the infantry passed in single file through the gaps in it, after disposing of the only German machine-gunner who offered resistance. At the same time the 11th Brigade kept pace upon their left flank—the Hampshires to the left and Somersets to the right, while the 1st Rifle Brigade, passing through them, rushed the strong position of the Hyderabad Redoubt, and the East Lancashires formed a defensive flank. Communication was at once opened across the Scarpe with Haldane's Corps upon the south side. By this fine advance of the 4th Division the right of the Seventeenth Corps had got considerably further forward than the centre, so that a defensive line had to be formed sloping back from this advanced point. This was the position upon the evening of the first day of battle, and it was destined to remain so in the south for many a day to come, for the formidable Chemical Works lay immediately to the east on either side of the Arras-Douai railway track, and these were to prove a very grave obstacle to a further advance on this line. Meanwhile, 3500 prisoners with 50 captured guns testified to the success of the Seventeenth Corps.

Following upon this brief sketch of the work done by the Seventh, Sixth, and the Seventeenth Corps on the first day of the Battle of Arras, we must now turn to the splendid achievement of the Canadian Corps upon the left. The reputation of the Canadians as brilliant soldiers, as dashing in attack as they were steady in defence, had already been solidly established by a long series of military feats beginning with the ever-memorable second battle of Ypres and continuing on to the capture of Courcelette and the fine fighting of the Somme. Hitherto they had acted in comparatively small bodies, but now the whole might of Canada was drawn together in the four fine divisions which lay facing the historic Vimy Ridge—a long gradual slope which reaches a height of more than 450 feet at the summit. They were arranged in their numerical order from the south, the 1st (Currie) being in touch with the 51st British Division, while the 4th (Watson) had upon its left Holland's First Corps, which was not engaged in the first day's operations. The front covered by the Canadians was from the south end of the Ridge to the Souchez River, close to Lens. Nothing could have been more magnificent or more successful than their advance, the 2nd and 3rd Divisions (Burstall and Lipsett) attaining their full objectives at every point, and the 1st doing the same after a short check. There was no rebuff save in the extreme north of the line. Sweeping onwards with irresistible fury, they overran three lines of German trenches, including the famous La Folie Farm, captured the village of Farbus, and secured the splendid total of 70 officers and 3500 men as prisoners, the same number as were taken by their British comrades to the immediate south. They not only crowned the redoubtable ridge, but they made their way down the eastern slope and established their line beyond it. Many of the German infantry were captured in the great chalk excavations in which they had taken refuge, two large tunnels in particular—the

Volker and the Prinz Arnault Tunnels—being crammed with men. Incredible incidents happened in these subterranean burrows, where small bodies of Canadian moppers-up were faced suddenly by large numbers of armed Germans in hiding. In one well-authenticated case four Canadians bluffed and captured 2 officers and 70 men from a Bavarian unit who were found in such a pocket, an incident which meant a V.C. for Major Macdowell. When the Kaiser in prophetic mood had spoken about what would happen when his Bavarians met the British, such an incident was far from his thoughts. It should be mentioned that the 5th British Division was in close support of the Canadians, and that the 13th Brigade of this division was incorporated with the 2nd Canadians upon that day. It was used in conjunction with the 6th Canadian Brigade on its right to take the final objectives, the eastern slopes of the Ridge, just north of Farbus Wood, which they did successfully with slight losses.

During the night of the 9/10th April there was fighting at several points, notably at the north end of the Vimy Ridge. Here the 4th Canadian Division had some difficulty in holding its ground against several strong counter-attacks of the Germans. It is probable that no body of troops in the whole battle had a harder task, or stuck to it more tenaciously, than this 4th Canadian Division. Hill 145, which was an outlier of the Ridge, was very strongly held and desperately defended, so that it would have turned any but first-class troops. The final clearing of this point was effected upon April 10, and led to further operations in conjunction with British troops to the north, which will be afterwards described.

The second day of the Battle of Arras, April 10, was spent partly in the consolidation of the ground gained and partly in increasing the area now occupied. The troops were in high heart, for although the full extent of the victory had not yet been realised, it was already known that at least 10,000 prisoners and 100 guns had fallen into their hands, figures which showed that the battle had been the most serious military disaster which had yet befallen the enemy. A fuller enumeration taken some days later gave 13,000 men, 3 howitzers, 28 heavy guns, 130 field-guns, 84 trench-mortars, and 250 machine-guns as the total capture. It may be mentioned that over 1000 prisoners were taken from each of the six different German divisions already enumerated, which disposes of their assertion that only two divisions occupied their front. It was certainly the greatest blow delivered by the British Army up to that date, and the only other day's fighting at all comparable in its results was the French attack upon the Champagne front on September 25, 1915, where the number of prisoners was greater but the capture of guns was less.

The Battle of Arras may be considered as having been in truth a one-day battle in the same sense as the succeeding Battle of Messines, for in each case the attack was delivered in order to gain a definite objective, which was the ridge from which observation could be obtained. The

extreme limit of advance had not, however, been reached either in the south or in the north, and so in both these areas hard fighting continued, due partly to the efforts of the British to enlarge their gains and partly to the rally of the Germans and their attempts at counter-attack. There was no concentration of troops or guns, however, upon the side of the British, and no attempt at any considerable advance. We shall first follow these operations in the south where they centred chiefly round the village of Monchy and Wancourt in the areas of the Sixth and Seventh Corps. These we shall weave into a connected narrative, after which we shall return to the Vimy region and trace the movements which led to hard fighting in that quarter.

In the Seventh Corps to the south the 56th Division of London Territorials had, as already described, enlarged the area which it had taken the day before in the Neuville Vitasse sector. The general curve of the line was such that it was not possible for the units of the Seventh Corps to get forward until the Sixth Corps to the north had won some ground, but upon the afternoon of the 12th a very fine advance was made, by which the 169th Brigade stormed Heninel. The Cojeul River was crossed by the 14th Light Division, and the heights upon the eastern bank were occupied. The 41st Brigade of this unit had now come into the line. The first attempt upon the heights failed with heavy losses. Next morning it was found that Hill 90 had been evacuated, and they were able to advance and seize Wancourt. This brought the left flank of the Seventh Corps up to the right flank of the Sixth Corps, and ensured close co-operation in those operations to the north which will presently be more fully described. This storming of the German position in this section was the more important as the troops were faced by the new Hindenburg Line. It was well known that an alternative line from Drocourt to Quéant existed some miles to the eastward, but none the less the fall of the front section at a period when much of its wire was still intact proved to the Germans how impossible it was to hold off British troops by mere passive obstacles. The tanks were of great assistance to the assailants in this difficult operation. On April 13 and 14 the 21st Division, with the aid of the 19th Brigade from the 33rd Division, carried forward the line to the high ground about 1000 yards east of the stream at Henin, astride of that portion of the Hindenburg Line. Here all further attempts to advance were stopped by fresh German troops, until the operations were renewed upon April 23. This advance of the 21st Division on April 13 and 14 was in connection with a general movement of Snow's Corps, but neither the 56th London Territorials in the centre nor the 50th North Countrymen on the left, both of them enfiladed from the north, could make much progress beyond the line of Wancourt Tower, and there was little to show for a hard day's work. The 33rd Division (Pinney) now took over the front from the 21st.

The immediate task which lay before the Sixth Corps on April 10 was to get the 3rd and 12th Divisions forward to the same line which

the 15th Division had reached. It will be remembered that the 46th Brigade of the latter division, together with the 63rd Brigade from the supporting 37th Division, had pushed on as far as Orange Hill, half a mile farther eastward than the Feuchy Line which formed the front of the two southern Divisions. Six brigades of field artillery had been hurried up, and with the help of these guns, aided by trench-mortars, the wire which held up the advance was partly blown away. The 3rd and 12th Divisions were then able to move forward and to make one line with the 15th—an operation which was completed by midday, the 8th Brigade doing some brilliant work. The strongly fortified village of Monchy, elevated above the plain, lay immediately in front of the Sixth Corps, and its capture was their next task. With this object in view, the 63rd Brigade was swung round from the north and worked its way south and east, getting into touch with the other brigades of the 37th Division which passed through the newly captured third objective and occupied the ground upon the west of the village. A general advance was then made on each side of the village, the 112th Brigade occupying La Bergère upon the Cambrai road due south of Monchy, while the 111th Brigade, with the 9th and 10th Royal Fusiliers in the lead, in the face of a considerable opposition, pushed onwards until it gained a footing on the outskirts of the village and on the high ground to the north of it, where the 154th Company R.E. dug a temporary line. This was the position on the evening of April 10, while the British line had been strengthened by the presence of the 7th Brigade of Cavalry from the 3rd Cavalry Division, who were following closely behind the 37th Division. In all these operations the weather greatly impeded progress, as it prevented the advance of the guns needed to break down wire and other obstacles.

During the night of April 10 the 12th Division was withdrawn into reserve, and the advance was resumed in the early morning by the remaining divisions and the cavalry. At 5 a.m. the infantry was closing in upon Monchy under a heavy fire. The line of advance extended right across the Cambrai road, the 76th Brigade finding itself opposite to the village of Guémappe. Here they were exposed to a very heavy fire of machine-guns, and this famous brigade sustained heavy losses, which were increased by a second attempt to get forward in the afternoon. The 76th Brigade finally entrenched itself some half a mile to the west of Guémappe and waited for developments. The 8th Royal Lancasters were particularly hard hit in their attack.

In the meantime the 111th Brigade of the 37th Division had advanced directly upon Monchy, and after severe fighting, in which the splendid infantry struggled onwards in the face of every possible difficulty of German resistance and of driving snow-storms, the place was carried by assault. The three regiments of cavalry from the 8th Brigade, the Royal Horse Guards, 10th Hussars, and Essex Yeomanry, advanced at a gallop and did splendid service by taking part in the attack, following

closely upon the infantry, and helping to consolidate the village. By nine o'clock in the morning the 13th the K.R.R. and 13th Rifle Brigade, greatly aided by a very active and efficient tank, had driven their way to the farthest houses upon the eastern side. About 150 of the garrison remained in their hands, while very many lay dead among the ruins of the shattered buildings. The cavalry, who lost their brave leader, General Bulkeley Johnson, emerged on the eastern side of the village and lost heavily at that point, especially in horses, some 500 of which were hit. They had the satisfaction, however, of getting their light guns fairly on to the Germans, as they streamed across the open. One who was present says: "The cavalry filled the gap between us and the 112th Brigade. They lost heavily, and their conduct was magnificent."

The 15th Division on the left of the 37th had been fighting its way forward upon the north, endeavouring to keep in line with the 37th. It had got somewhat ahead of the 4th Division, however, which was to the north of the Scarpe, and in consequence had to face the whole fire from the strong village of Rœux, which held them up. The general line of the corps that night was La Bergère, Monchy, and then the line of the Monchy-Fampoux road as far as the Scarpe. To the north of the Scarpe there had been no forward movement, as the Chemical Works to the east of Fampoux presented an obstacle which was beyond the immediate scope of Sir Charles Fergusson's operations.

On the night of April 11 the 37th Division, which had suffered considerably in the capture of Monchy, and the 15th, which had lived up to its reputation during fifty-six hours of incessant fighting under most inclement conditions, were withdrawn for a short rest, while the 12th Division returned into the line, and the 17th took the place of the 37th. April 12 was spent in consolidation and in bringing up heavy howitzer batteries along the Cambrai road, and placing them in positions between Feuchy and Tilloy where they could support the coming operations.

From the time that the British had captured the village, both it and the whole front line in that area had been subjected to a most severe German bombardment, which tried the troops extremely, but did not prevent them from repulsing several attempts at counter-attack, none of which reached the front trenches. On the night of April 12 the 12th Division, which was considerably worn from its exertions, was drawn out and was replaced by De Lisle's famous 29th Regular Division, which had gained such honour and suffered such losses at Gallipoli and on the Somme. There was no forward movement on April 13 in the region of Monchy, but farther south the 9th Brigade, which had taken the place of the 76th in front of Guémappe, endeavoured to reach that village, but were met and checked by the same murderous machine-gun fire which had held up their comrades, a fire which came both from the hamlet itself and from the high ground to the south which lay within the area of

the Seventh Corps. The 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and 12th West Yorks, which led the attack, both suffered severely.

As no large movement was contemplated upon this front it was now held by only two divisions, the 29th to the south and the 17th to the north, covering the whole broad area from the north of the Cojeul River to the south of the Scarpe. At 5.30 on April 14 both divisions advanced in order to test the German strength and, if possible, to push them farther back from Monchy. It was an unsuccessful day, and yet it was one of those failures which will be remembered where facile successes have been forgotten, for it brought with it one episode which elicited in the highest degree the historical qualities of British infantry. It had been arranged that Cayley's 88th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, 1st Essex, and the Newfoundland Regiment, should attack due east of Monchy, while another brigade of the 29th Division should advance to their right, and the 17th Division guard their flank upon the left. Both of the flank attacks failed, however, and the result was that the storming line of the 88th Brigade, consisting of the Essex men on the left and the Newfoundlanders on the right, found themselves in possession of the German trenches on Infantry Hill, east of Monchy, but with both wings exposed and with so terrific a barrage behind them that they were practically cut off from assistance. This might have mattered little under ordinary circumstances, since two such battalions might be counted upon to hold their ground, but by an evil chance their advance had coincided with a considerable German counter-attack from the Bois du Sart, made by a whole Bavarian division with the intention of retaking Monchy. The result was a Homeric contest in which two battalions held up a whole division, shattered a considerable attack, and were practically annihilated in doing so. Of some companies not a single man returned and yet few were ever reported as prisoners in Germany. No more gallant feat of arms has been performed in the war. The 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters in support did their best to help their comrades, and sustained considerable losses themselves in the attempt, but they were never able to reach the real front line, and it is undoubtedly true that the two battalions alone received and broke the full strength of the Bavarian Division It was difficult in the barrage and confusion—the ground being unreconnoitred—to direct reinforcements to the points where they were so urgently needed, but Lieutenant Lawson of the Essex passed through the German barrage and managed to bring up one company of the 2nd Hants, who came too late to retrieve the fight, but were able to take up the defence of the northern flank and to prevent the Germans from getting round in that quarter. Small parties of the enemy got up to the fringes of the village, but the edge had been taken completely from their assault, and in spite of the heavy barrage, the staff of the brigade headquarters, who were the only troops available, were sufficient to hold them off, Colonel Forbes Robertson doing particularly good work with a Lewis gun. No German set foot in

Monchy. Of the headquarter staff there were only nine survivors, each of whom was decorated.

Apart from the attack so heroically repelled, a second had developed to the south-east of Monchy which was driven back by rifles and machine-guns. The total German losses during the day must have been very heavy, and they had nothing to show for it, though the British casualties amounted to some 4000, chiefly in the 29th Division.

It must be admitted that the Germans, who had been strongly reinforced in men and in guns, were fighting with great resolution on this front, and their defence and counter-attacks were equally gallant.

From this date onwards until April 22, there was no particular forward movement, and every effort was concentrated upon the improvement of defences and communications. There were no fresh German counter-attacks, but there was constant and heavy bombardment upon both sides, the Germans pouring shells into Monchy and raking every road which led to the front, while the British overwhelmed Guémappe, Rœux, and Pelves with their fire. The only change of troops was that upon the night of April 19 the 15th Scottish Division, after its short rest, pushed in upon the right of the 29th Division, taking over the ground between La Bergère on the north and the Cojeul River on the south. The order of battle of the Sixth Corps was therefore from the north the 17th, 29th, and 15th Divisions.

We shall now retrace our steps to glance at what had been going on since the first day of the battle upon the front of the Seventeenth Corps to the immediate north of the Scarpe. It has already been recorded how the flank unit, the 4th Division, after relieving the 9th Division found itself faced with the strongly-fortified Chemical Works and the village of Rœux. The position was a very formidable one, as future tragic experiences were to prove. Two brigades of the 9th Division, the 27th Lowlanders on the left and the South Africans on the right, were ordered to pass the line of the 4th Division and to endeavour to carry the place by assault. The attempt was not successful, though it was urged with great valour. The wastage of the division had already been such that neither brigade numbered 2000 bayonets. The average strength of the South African regiments was about 400 men. As a result, the attack was wanting in weight, and was repulsed with considerable loss, which fell chiefly upon the 1st Cape and 2nd Natal battalions in the front line of the South Africans. The attackers endured heavy losses in debouching from the narrow exits of Fampoux under fire, and they were afterwards faced with 700 yards of open ground swept by bullets. In spite of this, some of the stormers did actually penetrate the German lines, as was proved later by the discovery of their bodies.

To the north of this section of fierce fighting the line, which had sagged on the evening of April 9, had been brought level on April 10 by the readjustment of the 51st Division, and by the attack of the 103rd

Brigade of Tyneside Scottish upon the Maison de la Côte position. From that time the British front was firm in this region, and a strong counter-attack of four German battalions, who could be seen streaming westwards in lines of motor 'busses, was broken to pieces on the night of April 11 by the steady rifle-fire of Temple's 27th Northumberland Fusiliers who occupied the front trenches.

Facing this section of the line was the village of Bailleul which was abandoned by the Germans, and was taken over by Pereira's 2nd Division, who had relieved the Highland Territorials on April 13. Shortly afterwards the 63rd Naval Division took over from the 34th. These two divisions belonged to the Thirteenth Corps (McCracken), which from now onward occupied a space in the line between the Seventeenth to the south and the Canadians to the north. The strong villages of Oppy and of Gavrelle lay now in front of the British in this quarter, but the German line was destined to remain unbroken for a considerable period. An attack was made upon Gavrelle by the 190th Brigade, the landsman unit of the Naval Division, but this was only partially successful. Farther to the north the 2nd Division had no better fortune against Oppy, which was attempted more than once. The further advance against these places will be found recorded further on, where it will fit into its place among the other incidents of the renewed general attack on April 23.

The Canadians in the Vimy Ridge area were occupied during three days of dreadful weather in consolidating their new positions, and in pushing the Germans out of that northern portion which they still held. The 4th Canadian Division had suffered much from machine-gun fire from Hill 145 in the Souchez district, but this was taken on April 10. There was still a good deal of work to be done, however, at that end of the line, and on April 12 a joint attack of Canadians and British cleared the ground in this quarter. Attacking at dawn in a snowstorm, the resolute Canadian infantry drove their way over the northern limits of Vimy Ridge, capturing among other positions an outlier of the Vimy Ridge, the venomous little hill called The Pimple, which had been a thorn in their side. At the same time the 24th British Division moved forward nearly opposite to Lens, the river Souchez separating them from the Canadians. The immediate obstacle which faced the British troops was a scattered wood, the Bois-en-Haches, which was most gallantly attacked by the 73rd Brigade. The front line in this fine advance was formed by the 9th Sussex on the left and the 2nd Leinsters upon the right, supported by the 13th Middlesex and 7th Northamptons. Both the Sussex and the Irish battalions, especially the latter, had heavy losses, but they never faltered until their objective was won. On April 13 there was a general forward movement along the whole Canadian line, in the course of which they occupied Willerval in the south and both Vimy and Givenchy-en-Gohelle in the north. On the same date the 15th and 95th Brigades of the British 5th Division took over from the 4th Canadian

Division from the Souchez River to south of Givenchy-en-Gohelle. These two brigades actually took over on the move forward, and did not stop until they had reached a line Cité-des-Petits-Bois to the Vimy-Lens Road just short of La Coûlotte.

Bols' 24th Division in the north joined in this attack as, to a limited extent, did Ross' 6th Division upon its left. It may be explained that both of these divisions, together with Thwaites' 46th in support of them, formed Holland's First Corps. The 24th Division advanced upon a three-brigade front, the 72nd, 17th, and 73rd Brigades in that order from the left, sweeping forward in one line. Complete success attended their efforts. Angres, Lievin, and Cité St. Pierre were all stormed and occupied. The 17th Brigade, which had been strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Marine Battalion, did particularly well, for it was faced by two dangerous strong points called Crook and Crazy, both of which were carried, the 3rd Rifle Brigade being conspicuous in each operation. Some days later, the 46th Division took over from the 24th and the new line was firmly held, the area of the 46th being from the Souchez River in the south to Fosse 12 de Lens in the north. Farther to the north the 6th Division had made some progress, but had not been able to surmount the old enemy, Hill 70, the long, clear glacis of which had cost the British such losses at Loos. The 24th Division had lost 3000 men in these operations, but their services had been of great value, for the grip upon Lens was appreciably tighter, and according to Sir Douglas Haig's dispatch it was the capture of this position which prevented the Germans from attempting the retaking of the positions which they had lost. The British Army was close to the great mining centre, one of the springs of wealth in France. Ominous explosions and dense plumes of dark smoke seemed to show that it was a spring which would be sealed for many a day. So precipitate had been the German retreat in this area that candles were found burning in the dug-outs, meals were half consumed, and large stores of engineering materials and grenades were left behind.

Pausing for a moment at this instant, with the line advanced from three to six miles along the whole front, one may take a glance at the practical results of this great battle. As a mere military triumph it was a considerable one, since the total booty in the immediate battle came by this date to some 14,000 men and 180 guns. Its strategical result was to win the high ground along the whole of a front which had been considered impregnable, and so to give both better observation and drier foothold to the army. It was clear that it must entail a prolongation of the same operation to the north, and this was manifested two months later at the victory of Messines. That again pointed to a fresh prolongation towards the higher ground round Ypres, which led to the severe fighting in the autumn. Thus the Arras Battle was the prologue to the whole campaign of 1917.

It is impossible, even in so brief an account as this, to turn away from

this great victory without a word as to the splendid service of the airmen, and the glorious efforts by which they secured the supremacy over their brave adversaries. The air, the guns, the infantry—those are the three stages which lead from one to the other in a modern battle. Starting with every possible disadvantage, our knight-errants of the air, as without hyberbole they may well be called, by a wonderful mixture of reckless dare-devil bravery and technical skill brought their side to victory. The mixture of the Berserk fighter and of the cool engineer, as ready with the spanner and oil-can as with the pistol and machine-gun, is indeed a strange product of modern tactics. No mention of these grand men, most of them hardly more than boys in their years, could be complete which did not specially name one who is likely to remain as a great memory and inspiration in the Service, Captain Albert Ball, a gallant youth whose bravery and modesty were equally beautiful. He brought down not less than forty-three German planes in single combat before meeting his own glorious end.

Whilst this battle had been raging along the Arras front, the great southern curve which marked the eventual halting-place of the German retreat was the scene of continual fighting, which attained no great intensity save at Bullecourt, but smouldered all along the line, as the British drove in the outlying German posts. This brought the army in this section up to the front Hindenburg Line, which the Australians with little support behind them proceeded at once to break, a most valiant but rather rash undertaking, as it was clear that the task was one which required the massed batteries of several army corps to bring it to success. The attack, which began upon April 12, was directed against the line at a point between Bullecourt village upon the left and Lagnicourt upon the right. A broad apron of barbed wire covered the whole German front, and the only means of piercing it, in the absence of heavy gun power, was by the crushing force of tanks. The attack was delivered across the snow in the early morning by men many of whom had never seen snow in their lives until they entered the war zone. In some places the tanks broke the wire, but for the greater part the infantry —West Australians and New South Welshmen on right, Victorians on left—with extraordinary gallantry and with considerable loss worked its way through it, taking the village of Riencourt. On the further side, however, they were met with repeated bombing attacks which continued through the morning and afternoon with such pertinacity that the Australian supply of bombs was exhausted. There were only three tanks, and though they behaved with the greatest audacity they were all put out of action. The artillery support being inadequate, the infantry had to fall back, and one considerable party, some 700 in number, were unable to get through the wire, so that after doing all that men could do they were compelled to surrender. Several of these men escaped later with fresh tales of that German brutality to prisoners which has been their constant policy, with a few honourable exceptions, since

the first days of the war. This temporary repulse upon the Hindenburg Line by no means disheartened the Australians, who argued that if with so little support they could effect so much, a more deliberate assault could hardly fail of success. Within three weeks, as will be shown, they were to prove the truth of their contention.

In the meantime, a considerable German attack had been prepared which fell upon the Australian line in the early morning of April 15. Two Guards Divisions and two ordinary divisions took part in it, so that it was no small matter. The outposts were weak and a number of the field-guns had been brought well forward into the front line, so that the first onset crashed through the defences and brought about a situation which might have been dangerous. The front line rallied, and with the aid of supports advanced so swiftly upon the Germans that they had little time to injure the guns which had come for the moment into their power. The front of the attack was nearly six miles, from Hermies to Noreuil, with its centre at Lagnicourt, and all along this extended position the stormers had rushed forward in heavy masses into the Australian line. It was easier to break than to destroy, for every scattered post spat out bullets from rifles and Lewis guns, fighting viciously until it was either submerged or rescued. In some posts, notably that of Subaltern Pope, an old warrant-officer of the Navy from West Australia, the men fired away every cartridge and then all died together, stabbing and thrusting with their bayonets into the grey clouds which hemmed them in. Seventy German dead were found round his position. In front of Lagnicourt, the Germans had the advanced guns in their hands for nearly two hours, but they had been dismantled by the gunners before they were abandoned, and the Prussian Guardsmen had apparently no means of either moving or of destroying them. All of them, save five, were absolutely intact when retaken. A rush of Queenslanders and New South Welshmen drove back the intruders, retrieved the guns, and followed the fugitives into Lagnicourt. Large numbers of the Germans were shot down in their retreat, especially in their efforts to get back through the gaps in their own wire. Both sides took several hundred prisoners in this action, but the German losses were heavy, and nothing at all was gained.

The full objects of the Arras battle, so far as they could be attained, had been reached after a week of fighting. Had he only himself to consult, Sir Douglas would have assumed a strict defensive from that time onwards and begun at once to transfer his forces for those operations which he had planned in Flanders. It was essential, however, that he should hold and use up as many German divisions as possible in order to help the French offensive which was about to start in the south. How successful the British General had been already in this design is shown by his own statement that after this week of fighting the Germans had twice as many divisions opposite to him as they had at the beginning, and were driven into constant counter-attacks which cost

them heavy losses. The whole aftermath of the Battle of Arras, extending until the end of May, is to be judged from this point of view, and though we may be inclined to wince at the heavy losses and the limited results, we have to bear in mind continually the wider strategic meaning of the operations.

CHART OF
ORDER OF BATTLE—ARRAS
April 9, 1917

LIMIT OF ADVANCE
CROISILLES
WANCOURT
GUÉMAPPE
MONCHY
FEUCHY
BLAGNY
SCARPE RIVER
RŒUX
FAMPOUX
GAVRELLE
OPPY
THELUS
FARBUS
VIMY
SOUCHEZ RIVER
LENS

Divisions	6	46	24	4	3	2	1	51	34	9	15	12	3	14	30	21
Corps	1st C. (Holland)			Canadian Corps (Byng)				17th C. (Fergusson)			6th C. (Haldane)			7th C. (Snow)		
	First Army (Horne)							Third Army (Allenby)			ARRAS					Gough's Fifth Army
	Reserve of First Army							Reserve of Third Army								
	13th C. (Congreve)	63	31	5	2			18th C. (Maxse)	33	50	17	29	I	II	III	Div. Cav.

CHAPTER XXXV

OPERATIONS IN THE ARRAS SECTOR FROM APRIL 23 ONWARDS

Advance of April 23—Middlesex and Argyll—Grand fighting of the 15th Division—H.A.C. at Gavrelle—Operations of May 3—The Gavrelle Windmill—Loss of Fresnoy—Capture of Rœux—The long fight at Bullecourt.

On April 16 the great French offensive had broken out upon the Aisne, directed against the line of Chalk Downs which the British had learned to know so well in 1914, and aiming at that ancient road, the Chemin des Dames, which some of the 1st Division had actually reached in that year. The attack was very successful in the outset, a haul of prisoners and guns being secured which brought their victory to a level with that at Arras. After a time, however, the defence became too strong for the attack, and the French losses became very serious, while there was a temporary but serious disorganisation of their forces caused by treason from within. Whilst they were gathering their strength for a fresh blow, which was brilliantly delivered later in the year, it was necessary for Sir Douglas to keep up his pressure to the north, and to engage guns and troops which should, according to his original plan, have been diverted long ago to the Flemish front. This had the effect of delaying the operation there, and this in turn brought us into the premature rainy season which began upon August 1 and lasted with very few breaks for the rest of the autumn. Thus the circumstances at this date, unavoidable as they were, had a malign effect upon the year's campaign, which was greatly increased by the wild proceedings of the new Russian rulers, if the organisers of anarchy can be known by such a name. These preposterous people, who began their career of democracy by betraying all the democracies of the world, and exemplified their morality by repudiating the loans which had been made to Russia in her need, reduced the armies to such a state of impotence that they were useless as allies, so that the Latin and Anglo-Saxon races had to fight with the full weight of the military autocracies. This fact made the situation both upon the Italian and upon the Western fronts infinitely more serious than it would otherwise have been, since not only the men, but the munitions of the Germans, could be concentrated upon their undoing.

On April 23 there was a renewal of the advance all along the British line, which took for its objectives, counting from the south, Bois du Vert, Bois de Sart, Pelves, Rœux, Gavrelle, Oppy, Acheville, etc.

Upon this date, Snow's Seventh Corps in the south had Pinney's 33rd Division on its right, Shea's 30th in the centre, and Williamson's 50th on the left. It was a day of hard fighting and of very limited gains, for General Snow experienced all the disadvantages which the attack has against the defence, when there is no overwhelming artillery to blast a road for the infantry. All three divisions made some progress in the early hours of dawn, but the whole of the two northern divisions and the centre of the 33rd Division were soon held up and were finally driven back to their starting point by very heavy machine-gun fire. About 11 a.m. a heavy German counter-attack, preceded by a terrific shower of shells, came rolling down the Cojeul Valley, driving back the 50th Division after their very fine initial advance. The obstacle in front of the troops was nothing less than the Hindenburg front line, so that they might well find it a difficult nut to crack. The 30th Division fell back in touch with the 50th, but the 33rd managed to hold on to its gain of ground on the flank which had brought it into the German front line south of the Sensée River.

The position at this part of the line had become serious, and was ever more so as the evening passed into night, for the forward position of the 33rd Division had exposed its whole left flank, its advanced units were cut off, and the Germans, pushing back the Lancashire men of the 30th Division, had worked forward to an extent which threatened the guns. If the advance continued, the 33rd Division must either fall back under most difficult conditions or be overwhelmed. General Pinney held his ground, and was comforted in doing so by the sounds all night of a brisk rifle-fire on his front, though it was impossible to ascertain what troops were in so isolated a position. With the first light of morning, two battalions of the 19th Brigade, the 20th Royal Fusiliers and 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, were pushed forward to clear up the situation. They came after advancing 1200 yards upon the remains of two grim, battle-stained companies, one of the 1st Middlesex and one of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had spent some fifteen hours in the heart of the enemy's advance, seeing their attacks sweeping past them, but keeping as steady as two rocks in a stream. Apart from the other hardships of their position, they had endured the whole of the British barrage put down to stop the German advance. This stout defence not only screened the face of the 33rd Division, but to some extent covered the flank of the 30th—a striking example of what may be accomplished by a small body of determined men who refuse to despair, be the situation ever so desperate. In their shell-holes were found a score or so of German prisoners whom they had held in their clutch. Lieutenant Henderson of the Highlanders received the V.C. over the fine stand made by his troops, and Lieut. Archibald of the same battalion, together with Captain Belsham and Lieut. Rutter of the Middlesex, received decorations for valour, as did many of their brave followers. It was a deed which was worthy of the famous 91st and of the old Die-Hards of

Albuera. Altogether on this day the 33rd Division gained great distinction, and, as a visible sign of its prowess, 750 prisoners from the German 61st Division.

The attack, so far as the Sixth Corps was concerned, was launched in the early morning of April 23, with the 44th and 45th well-tried Scottish Brigades on the right; on their left were the 88th and 87th Brigades of Regulars, and farther north still was the 51st Brigade with one battalion of the 50th. The remaining brigades were in reserve, with the 3rd Division in support behind them.

The German resistance was very strong from the first, and though a fair amount of ground was gained, it was at a considerable cost, which was only justified by the fact that the enemy in their counter-attacks suffered even more heavily. At nightfall, a portion only of the first objective had been won. Bavarian and Scot had fought till they were weary round Guémappe, and never had the dour tenacity of our northern troops been more rudely tested. It was a fine exhibition of valour on both sides, but the village stayed with the Scots.

The Seventeenth Corps on the other side of the Scarpe had very similar experiences upon this day of battle as their neighbours in the south.

The Thirteenth Corps had attacked Oppy and Gavrelle to the north, with the result that the 63rd Division captured the latter. Oppy had proved to be, for the time, inviolable; but the assault upon Gavrelle was brilliantly successful, the village being stormed with a splendid rush, in spite of the most deadly fire, by the 189th and 190th Brigades of the 63rd Naval Division. The German losses were greatly increased upon this occasion by their unsuccessful counter-attacks, which spread over several successive days, and never made an impression. It is on record that one gathering of 2000 men, collected in a hollow, was observed and signalled to the guns, with the result that they were simply shot to pieces by a sudden concentration of fire. An officer who observed this incident has made a statement as to the complete nature of the catastrophe. More than 1000 prisoners were taken on this front, and nearly 3000 in all. On the whole, in spite of the prisoners and in spite of Guémappe and Gavrelle, it was doubtful if the gains made up for the losses upon the day's balance, and the same might be said for the two days of scrambling and inconclusive fighting which followed.

April 28 had been fixed for a forward movement of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps on the north of the Scarpe, so the 12th Division on the south bank advanced in sympathy with it. This attack gained possession of part of Bayonet Trench, a formidable line which crossed the front, but a further attack was unable to clear the whole of it, on account of the very severe machine-gun fire down the Scarpe Valley.

Although the progress had been very limited at the southern end of the line, there were better results to the north. The Canadians, whose staying power in this long-drawn fighting was as remarkable as their

valour, had taken Arleux, together with a considerable section of trench upon either side of it. This fine assault was opposed by wire, by sunken roads, and by a desperate hand-to-hand encounter amid the ruins, all of which failed to hold the Canadian infantry. On their right the 5th and 6th Brigades of the 2nd Division were heavily engaged in front of Oppy and Oppy Wood with some success at first, but this was neutralised by a strong German counter-attack. Some progress had been made also by the 37th Division on the left, and by the 34th Division to the right of the Seventeenth Corps to the north of Gavrelle, and on the slopes of the long incline known as Greenland Hill between Gavrelle and Rœux. In these two days of defensive fighting the German bulletins claimed a victory, but the fact that they had lost ground and nearly 1000 prisoners was sufficient to show how hollow was the pretence. Their losses were greatly increased by the continual unsuccessful counter-attacks which they threw against the new positions in the Oppy line, which had now reached the edge of the village. Gavrelle village was attacked no less than seven times, and each time the stormers were completely repulsed.

One particular deed of valour connected with these operations demands some fuller exposition. The front of the German line which had been breached between Gavrelle on the south and the Bailleul-Gavrelle railway upon the north was a narrow one, and the Naval Division had penetrated here to a depth of nearly 1000 yards, thus creating a narrow salient into the German defences with its apex at a fortified windmill. The 4th Bedfords, supported by the 7th Royal Fusiliers, were responsible for this advance. The attacks at the north had failed. Thus the troops in the salient had a most difficult task in holding the position in view of the determined counter-attacks, which had continued with hardly a check from April 23, when the salient was formed. The pressure fell upon the 190th Brigade, and very especially upon the 7th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Honourable Artillery Company.

The orders had been given to endeavour to widen the base of the salient by bombing up the German trenches to the northward, and this work was committed to Major Osmond of the H.A.C. The attack was to be carried on in two parallel lines—the one up the original front trench and the other up the original support trench. Three young lieutenants—Pollard, O'Brien, and Haine—led the bombers, and they came away with a rush which would have gladdened the hearts of the many generations of soldiers who have served in this ancient corps. The railway to the north was their limit, and they had almost reached it when Haine's party found itself held up by a fortress containing 200 of the Fusilier Guards. He sat down before it, repulsed a severe counter-attack, sent back for trench mortars, and upon April 28, after a rest during which the 1st Marine Battalion maintained and enlarged the line, he attacked it in due form. After a short but vigorous bombardment he captured it with two machine-guns and fifty of the garrison. He was

ordered to leave a platoon in the captured post, but they, in turn, were beseiged by an attacking force of the German Guards coming down-trench, and driving in the extreme right of the 2nd Division in the north. The platoon, or what was left of it, blew up the guns and retreated upon the main body of their Company, who were assembled, under Haine, just south of the railway. There they established a block and remained fast, while Pollard threw out his bombers on the left to form a defensive flank.

Whilst the Royal Marines had held the line they had endeavoured to push the Germans to the north and had lost heavily in the venture. They—or the scanty remains of them—were now relieved by the 4th Bedfords and 7th Royal Fusiliers. Encouraged by this strengthening of the general line, the indefatigable Haine, whose company now numbered only thirty-five men, assembled his miniature siege-train, beleaguered the fort once more, and captured it for the second time with its garrison. Pollard with his men then pushed past, and took the northern objective which had already cost so dearly. Having seized it, he called to his aid men of the Bedfords, the 7th Fusiliers, and of the 22nd Royal Fusiliers of the 2nd Division to hold the new line. The battle swung and swayed for a time as the Germans made successive efforts, but the whole Naval Division front and part of the 2nd Division front were cleared. The total trench line taken by Pollard was about a mile, and 1000 yards of this he cleared with the help of four bombers, while Haine repelled no fewer than fourteen attacks. Altogether it was a remarkable example of what audacity and initiative can do, and both these young officers obtained the V.C. for their determined valour, while Major Osmond, in local charge of the operation, won his D.S.O.

May 3 was a day of general battle upon the British front, the attack being arranged to help the coming French advance due upon May 5. The main action raged from Vimy in the north to the Scarpe, while to the south of the Scarpe the Sixth Corps and Seventh Corps still continued their indefatigable struggles to get forward past the Monchy-Guémappe line on to Pelves and Cherisy. The upshot of the long day's fighting was the capture of Fresnoy by the Canadians at one end of the line, and of a part of the new German line by the Australians at the other end. The Oppy position was also enlarged and strengthened, and progress was made all along the front as far south as Croisilles. Nearly a thousand additional prisoners were taken by the Seventh Corps.

The operations in the southern area upon May 3 were carried out by the hard-worked 21st Division on the right, the 18th in the centre, and the 14th on the left. Good progress was made all along the line, which extended in the evening roughly from the St. Rohart Factory through a point 1000 yards west of Cherisy to the west edges of Fontaine. All three divisions had hard fighting, and all three lived up to their high reputations. At one time, the 53rd Eastern County Brigade of the 18th Division had actually entered and passed Cherisy, but the pressure of the

counter-attacks and of the guns was too strong, and they had to relax their grip. In commenting upon this achievement, General Snow remarked : " I have never met a division which so persistently pushed its way forward during the intervals between heavy fighting, and the ground (over 1000 yards) won in this manner stands to its credit." The 8th Norfolk and 10th Essex did particularly well. In the 14th Division the 42nd Brigade were in close touch with the Londoners on their left, while the 44th were on the right. The first 1500 yards' advance of this division was easy going, but here as elsewhere the darkness caused loss of touch and some confusion, which was not improved by the severe fire into which the troops came with the breaking of the dawn. It is a dismal experience at any time to trudge through that leaden sleet, but most dismal surely in that cold ghostly hour of early morning. The 8th Rifle Brigade and the 7th K.R.R. did all that men could do, and held a flank for the 18th Division when they advanced upon Cherisy, but when at last the latter were forced back the 14th Division retired also, and found themselves by 10.30 in the morning little advanced from where they started.

The advance to the immediate south of the Scarpe was started at an hour before dawn, and was carried out by the 56th, 3rd, and 12th Divisions of the Sixth Corps in the order named from south to north. This attack from the onset met with the same terrific machine-gun fire which had limited all our gains and made them so costly upon this front. On the extreme right the 69th Brigade made a most dashing advance, passing through Cavalry Farm in the darkness, and making good their footing in the German system of trenches to the east of it. In this quarter the gain of ground was permanent, but the 167th Brigade upon the left was not so successful, and was held up by wire and machine-guns, as was the 8th Brigade upon its left. All the leading battalions in this quarter sustained crushing losses, especially the 1st London, the 7th Middlesex, and the 2nd Royal Scots. For some reason the British artillery preparation seems to have been entirely inadequate. " As soon as the first wave topped the ridge between our front line and the German trench, it was obvious that the latter had never been adequately dealt with, and had apparently escaped the barrage, as it was full of infantry standing shoulder to shoulder, and waiting for our men to come on. In consequence, while isolated groups got forward, the great bulk of our men were attacked by a withering fire, and pinned down into shell holes from which they were unable to emerge until darkness."

The hostile shelling in this St. Rohart area was almost incessant during the day, and of so heavy a volume that it was such as had hardly ever been witnessed by any one present. " If we had another day of it I verily believe we should have been reduced to idiocy." So wrote a brave veteran who endured it. It was therefore clear that the British counter-battery work had been at fault. Add to this that the start before dawn had the same effect as in other parts of the line, causing clubbing of

units with loss of direction, and it must be admitted that the experience of the soldiers on May 3 was not a happy one. Deverell's 3rd Division on the left of the 56th found much the same conditions and could make little progress. On the extreme left, however, the 36th Brigade of the 12th Division, the same unit which had done so well at Ovillers, made a fine advance, gaining the position known as Scabbard Trench. They lost it temporarily to a counter-attack, but it was again taken and permanently held by the 7th Sussex.

To the north, the 4th and 9th Divisions gained ground east of the Chemical Works and penetrated into Rœux, but were driven out once more, the 10th and 11th Brigades, especially the 1st Somersets and 2nd Seaforths, having very heavy losses.

To the north of the 9th Division, two divisions of the Thirteenth Corps, the 31st to the south and the 5th to the north, had beaten furiously against the German line upon the Oppy-Gavrelle sector. The efforts of these divisions were greatly handicapped, as in the case of others, by the very early hour at which the action had begun, and by moonlight in the earlier hours, which exposed the assembly of the troops. Starting in pitch darkness the brigades lost touch and direction, so that they were unable to reach their objectives with the speed and precision which is so necessary if barrages and machine-guns are to be avoided. The 92nd East Yorkshire Brigade of the 31st Division advanced upon Oppy Wood, and found itself among trees in the darkness with criss-cross lacings of barbed wire from the branches in every direction, and a heavy fire beating on their ranks. The obstacles would have been difficult in day-time, but were impossible at night. The battalions got completely mixed up, and finally a strong German attack drove them back to their trenches, in spite of a most strenuous resistance, notable for many deeds of valour, for one of which, the single-handed attack upon a machine-gun, Lieutenant Harrison of the 11th East Yorks received a posthumous Victoria Cross.

The 93rd West Yorkshire Brigade had got off well and had reached its objective, but this successful German attack exposed the 16th West Yorkshires, who were the flank battalion, to pressure upon its left rear, so that they had eventually to fall back. This exposed the 15th and part of the 18th West Yorkshires, who were now holding Gavrelle village and the trenches to the immediate north of it. For a time things were very critical, and the windmill which commanded the village was retaken by the enemy. Colonel Taylor of the 15th West Yorks collected sixty men of his battalion and held splendidly to the east side of the village for the whole day. One company of the 18th Durhams under Lieutenant Hitchings was sent to retake the windmill, which they did, but were driven out again by the shattering fire of the enemy. They re-formed at the foot of the slope and attacked and recaptured the mill once more, only to be driven out for the third time. Again they took the mill, and this time they drove back the German counter-attack and held on to the

position. Sixty out of a hundred in the British ranks had fallen, but when the battle painter of the future is in search for a subject, he will find none better that that of the forty survivors under their boy leader, wearied, blood-stained, but victorious in their shot-torn mill. The whole Gavrelle position was now held, the 93rd being strengthened by two battalions from the 94th York and Lancaster Brigade.

The one outstanding success of the day was the capture of Fresnoy by the 1st Division of Canadians, which was carried out with the usual dash and gallantry of this veteran unit, whose worth had now been proved upon so many battlefields. The fighting was the more severe as the village was full of German troops mustered for an attack. Fresnoy was, however, most difficult to hold and in the early dawn of May 8 the garrison of the village was driven out by a powerful attack from three German divisions. This attack fell at the point of contact between the left of the British and the right of the Canadians, and was so severe that both were pushed back. The 95th Brigade of the 5th Division, which had moved down from the Lens area, was the particular one which bore the brunt upon the British line, and the two front battalions, the 1st East Surrey and 12th Gloucesters, lost heavily under the terrible concentrated shellfire which a survivor who had tested both described as being "as bad as Longueval." For some reason the artillery support was deficient, and the S.O.S. signals were unanswered. The infantry were driven out by the German rush, and a gallant counter-attack led by Major Allison and Captain Parr of the Gloucesters, with some of their men and some of the 1st Cornwalls, failed to recover the position. The Canadians made no less desperate efforts, but it was impossible to stand against the concentrated bombardment. "You could not see for mud in the air," says an observer. Fresnoy became once more a part of the German line. The price paid, however, was a very heavy one, for it was only the second attacking division, who were the famous 5th Bavarians, which effected a lodgment after the leading division had been broken and driven back with very heavy losses by the rapid fire of the defenders. Upon the British side a large proportion of the small garrison was killed or wounded, while 300 were taken.

Up to this point the new British offensive which had started upon April 9, and had now come practically to an end, had in spite of heavy losses yielded the splendid results of 400 officers and 19,100 men prisoners, 98 heavy guns, and 159 field-pieces captured, together with 227 trench mortars, 464 machine-guns, and other material.

The battle of May 3, which had ended by some gain of ground, and by the capture of nearly 1000 prisoners (as against some 300 which were lost upon that day), was the last general action along the new line, though it was followed by numerous local engagements, which may be very shortly epitomised.

On May 10, in the dusk of the evening, the lull upon the Scarpe was broken by a most successful attack by the 4th Division upon Rœux.

The value of this success may be judged by the fact that this was the ninth assault upon the position, a fact which gives an index both of the pertinacity of British infantry and of the steadfast courage of the successive German garrisons. The 10th Brigade, led by that man of many wounds and honours, de Wiart, took the village. The place was defended by the 362nd Brandenburgers, who were nearly all killed or taken, the prisoners being over 500 in number.

In the dim light of the very early morning of May 16, after a heavy shell-fall, a new division of the enemy was thrust forward just north of the Scarpe. In a long day's fighting it was practically destroyed, for though in its first ardent advance it flowed over the shot-shattered advance posts, it was finally held, and then after a long tussle was shot out of its new positions by the rifles and Lewis guns, until before evening it was back whence it started. In this brisk action thousands of the assailants were killed or wounded with nothing to show for it save the substantial losses which they inflicted. This very severe attack fell mainly upon the 51st Division, who showed once more that British formations, even if penetrated, are very far from being defeated.

May 20 marked a successful advance of the 33rd Division on the right of the Seventh Corps, against the Hindenburg Line in the Sensée Valley and southwards towards Bullecourt. The result was the capture of more than a mile of the front line on either side of the Sensée River, with half a mile of the support line, and 170 prisoners, with many machine-guns. The losses in this well-managed affair were well under a thousand.

The Seventeenth Corps had a brisk day upon June 5, which extended into three days of fighting. On this date the 9th Division on the right and 34th upon the left moved forward suddenly in the evening, covering the space between Rœux and Gavrelle. The attack was directed against a dangerous network of trenches called Curly, Charlie, and Cuthbert, which guarded the rising slope known as Greenland Hill. The brunt of the fighting was borne by the 27th or Lowland Brigade in the south, and by the 102nd Tyneside Brigade in the north. In the latter brigade the 20th and 21st Northumberland Fusiliers carried the trenches opposite to them, while the Scottish infantry kept pace with them upon the right. After hard fighting the whole front German position fell into the hands of the stormers, who had to defend it against a long series of desultory counter-attacks, which lasted until June 7, when the enemy finally gave up the attempt to regain the ground which he had lost. Six officers and 217 men were captured, and the German losses in killed were very heavy, each front battalion reckoning that there were between three and four hundred enemy dead scattered in front of it. It was a spirited local action attended by complete success.

It is necessary now to go back in point of time and pick up the narrative at the northern end of the line.

On Thursday, May 24, the operations at Lens, in abeyance since

April 23, broke out once more, when the 46th Division, which had extended its left so as to occupy much of the ground formerly held by the 6th Division, made an attempt upon Nash Alley and other trenches in front of it. The attack was made by the 137th Stafford Brigade, and was launched at seven in the evening. The objectives with twenty-eight prisoners were easily secured. It was found impossible, however, to hold the captured ground, as every German gun within range was turned upon it, and a furious succession of assaults wore down the defenders. Captain McGowan beat off five of these onslaughts before he was himself blown to pieces by a bomb. Every officer being down, Major MacNamara came forward from Headquarters to take command, and in the morning withdrew the detachment, an operation which was performed with great steadiness, the men facing back and firing as they retired. Major MacNamara was himself killed in conducting the movement.

The operations of the Australians and of the British divisions were renewed upon May 3 in front of Bullecourt and Lagnicourt, the scene of the brave but unsuccessful attack of April 11, when the Australian infantry with little support penetrated the Hindenburg Line. On this second occasion the British gun-power was very much heavier and cleared a path for the attack, while laying down an excellent barrage. The original advance was in the first glimmer of daylight, and by 6.30 it had penetrated well into the Hindenburg Line, the wire having been blown to pieces. The advance made its way by successive rushes to the right of Bullecourt village, where it clung for the rest of the day, the infantry engaged being almost entirely men from Victoria. Laterally by their bombing parties they extended their hold upon the two front lines of German trenches to the right, in which quarter the attack had originally been held up. In the meantime the 62nd Yorkshire Territorial Division had fought their way up to the village and were engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting among the shattered brick houses. An English aviator, flying at a height of only 100 feet or so, passed up and down the Australian battle-line helping with his machine-gun, and finally dropping a message, " Bravo, Australia ! " a few moments before a bullet through the petrol tank brought him at last to earth. The greeting of this brave lad might well have been the voice of the Empire, for the Australian infantry wrought wonders that day. The British division having been held at Bullecourt, the result was that the Australians projected as a salient into the Hindenburg Line, and that they were attacked on both flanks as well as in front, but they still held on not only for May 3, but for two days that followed, never losing their grip of the trenches which they had won. On the right the Germans made counter-attacks which have been described by the admirable Australian Official Chronicler as being done in " School of Seals " formation, where a hundred grey-backs all dived together from one shell crater to another. None of these attacks got up, owing to the rapid and accurate rifle fire

which met them. The German bombing attacks down the trenches were met by showers of trench-mortar bombs, which broke them up. The Germans had trench-mortars also, however, and by their aid they made some of the right-hand positions untenable, but West Australian bombers restored the fight, and the New South Welshmen added further to the gains. In vain a battalion of Prussian Guards and a column of picked storm-troops beat up against that solid defence. The position once taken was always held. The 7th Division had relieved the 62nd, and had tightened its grip upon the outskirts of Bullecourt, and from this time onwards its daily task was on the one hand to push farther into the ruins and to eradicate more of the scattered German posts, and on the other to move out upon the right and get close touch with the Australians so as to cover one side of their dangerous salient. Each object was effected in the midst of fighting which was local and intermittent, but none the less very desperate and exhausting. During a week continual counter-attacks moving up from Reincourt broke themselves upon either the British or Australian lines. Though the operations were upon a small scale as compared with great battles like Arras, no finer exploit was performed upon the Western front during the year than this successful advance, in which the three British divisions and the Australians shattered no less than fifteen attacks delivered by some of the best troops of Germany. Sir Douglas Haig, who is not prodigal of praise, says in his final dispatch: "The defence of this 1000 yards of double trench line, exposed to attack on every side, through two weeks of constant fighting, deserves to be remembered as a most gallant feat of arms." The losses were naturally heavy, those of the three British divisions—the 7th, 58th and 62nd—being approximately the same. They had been opposed by Guards Regiments and Brandenburg Grenadiers, the very cream of the Prussian Army, and had rooted them out of their carefully prepared position.

There can be no doubt that this period marked the danger point for the Allies, though the public at the time were unaware how near their cause was to complete disaster. The French under Nivelle had failed grievously in their great Soissons attack in April, and a large number of the troops had mutinied, and refused to make further sacrifices. It was essential therefore that the British should continue to attack in order to distract the Germans from the weakened lines of our brave but exhausted Allies. Again the U-boat menace was darker than ever, and it was a question whether food and munitions could long continue to reach us from overseas. On the larger field of strategy Russia had collapsed and American aid would clearly be slow in coming. It was a very dark hour, and the more honour is due to the brave hearts of those who led us through the crisis and brought us at last to happier days to come. It was not long before improved methods of dealing with U boats, the adoption of the convoy system, and the reinforcement of our light vessels by the very efficient American destroyers brought a marked amelioration in the situation.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES [1]

June 7, 1917

Plumer's long vigil—The great mines—Advance of Australians—Of New Zealanders—Of the 25th Division—Of the Irish Divisions—Death of Major Redmond—Advance of 19th Division—Of the 41st Division—Of the 47th Division—Of the 24th Division—General results—The fight in the sand dunes.

THE operations upon the Somme in the autumn of 1916 had given the British command of the high ground in the Somme district. The next move was to obtain a similar command in the continuation of the same high ground to the north. This was accomplished from Arras to Lens in the great battle which began on April 9, 1917. After the complete conquest of this Vimy position, the next step was obviously to attack the prolongation of the same ridge in the Ypres direction. This was carried out with great success on June 7 in the Battle of Messines, when nine miles of commanding country were carried and permanently held, from the neighbourhood of Ploegstrate in the south to Hill 60 and Mount Sorel in the north. Thus many spots which will for ever be associated with the glorious dead—Hill 60 itself, with its memories of the old 13th and 15th Brigades ; Wytschaete, where the dismounted troopers fought so desperately in the fall of 1914 ; Messines, sacred also to the memory of the cavalry and of the British and Indian infantry who tried hard to hold it ; finally the long, gently sloping ridge which was reddened by the blood of the gallant London Scots when they bore up all night amid fire and flame against the ever-increasing pressure of the Bavarians—all these historic places came back once more into British keeping. It is this action, so splendid both in its execution and in its results, which we have now to examine, an action which was a quick sequel to the order of the German command that " the enemy must not get Messines Ridge at any price."

For two thankless years Sir Herbert Plumer, the officer who in his younger days had held on in such bulldog fashion to the country north of Mafeking, had been the warden of the Ypres salient. His task had been a peculiarly difficult and responsible one—indeed, many a military

[1] Map p. 197.

critic might have said *a priori* that it was an impossible one. The general outline of the British trenches formed a loop rather than a salient, and there was no point in it which could not be shot into from behind. Add to this that all the rising ground, and therefore all the observation, lay with the enemy, and that the defending troops were very often skeleton divisions which had come up exhausted from the south. Taking all these circumstances together, one can understand the facts which turned General Plumer's hair white during these two years, but never for an instant weakened the determination of his defence. There was no one in the Army who did not rejoice, therefore, when it was learned that the Second Army had been chosen for the next attack, and that the long-suffering Plumer was at last to have a chance of showing that he could storm a line as well as hold one.

Preparatory to the attack, some twenty great mines had been driven into the long, low hill, which is really little more than a slope, attaining a height of 259 feet at the summit. These mines contained 600 tons of explosives, and had been the work of constant relays of miners during many months. These tunnelling companies of miners, drawn from all sorts of material and officered by mining engineers and foremen, did some splendid work in the war, and the British finally outfought the Germans under the earth as completely as they did both on it and above it. The accumulation of guns was even greater than at Arras, and they were packed into about half the length of front, so that the effect of the massed fire when it broke out in the morning of June 7 was crushing to an extent never before known in warfare. What with the explosions of the mines and the downpour of shells, the German front line with its garrison may be said to have utterly disappeared, so that when at 3.20 in the first faint flush of a summer morning the infantry dashed forward to the attack, the path of victory had already been laid out before them. Let us examine the general composition of the British line before we follow the fortunes of the various units.

General Plumer's Army had been moved down the line so as to cover all its objectives, and Gough's Fifth Army from the south had been put in to the north of it, occupying the actual salient. This Army was not in the first instance engaged. The Second Army consisted of three Corps. The northern of these was Morland's Tenth Corps, which was in the region of St. Eloi. This Corps consisted, counting from the north, of the 23rd, 47th and 41st Divisions with the 24th in reserve. Upon its right, facing Wytschaete, was Hamilton Gordon's Ninth Corps, containing from the north the 19th, 16th and 36th Divisions, with the 11th in reserve. Still farther to the right was the Second Anzac Corps (Godley) facing Messines with the 25th British Division, the New Zealanders, and the 3rd Australians in line from the north, and the 4th Australians in reserve. This was the British battle-line upon the eventful dawn of June 7, 1917.

To take the work of individual units, we shall begin with the 3rd

Australian Division (Monash) upon the extreme right. The men, like their comrades all along the line, had endured very heavy shelling in their assembly trenches, and sprang eagerly forward when the word to advance was given. The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions had given so splendid an account of themselves already in the Hindenburg Line that it was no surprise to find that their mates were as battleworthy as any troops in the Army. The whole country in front of them was drenched with gas, which hung heavy with the mists of morning, but the weird lines of masked men went swiftly onwards in open order through the poison region, dashed over the remains of the German trenches, crossing the small river Douve upon the way, and then pushing on from one shot-shattered building to another, keeping well up to the roaring cloud of the barrage, occupied without a hitch the whole of their allotted position. With a single pause, while Messines was being occupied upon their left, the leading line of Victorians and Tasmanians drove straight on for their ultimate goal, sending back a stream of captured prisoners behind them. Only at one trench was there a sharp hand-to-hand fight, but in general so splendid was the artillery and so prompt the infantry that the enemy had never a chance to rally. It was a perfect advance and absolutely successful. Some indications of counter-attacks came up from the Warneton direction during the afternoon and evening, but they were beaten out so quickly by the sharpnel that they never came to a head. Half-a-dozen field-guns, as well as several hundred prisoners, fell to the lot of the Australians.

Upon the immediate left of the Australians was the New Zealand Division (Russell), which had done so splendidly at the Somme. Their Rifle Brigade had been given the place of honour exactly opposite to Messines, and by eight o'clock they had occupied the village and were digging in upon the farther side. Thirty-eight machine-guns and a number of prisoners were the trophies of their advance. There was no severe fighting, so well had the mines and the guns together done their work ; but the men who stormed the village found numerous cellars and dug-outs still occupied, into which they swiftly penetrated with bayonet or bomb. In one of these regimental headquarters was found a message from General von Laffert ordering the 17th Bavarian Regiment to hold the village at all costs. It is certainly extraordinary how these unfortunate and gallant Bavarians were thrust into every hot corner, and if the reason lies in the fact that their Prince Rupprecht had the honour of commanding the German Army of Flanders, then it is an honour which will leave its grievous trace upon his country for a century to come. It is an extraordinary historical fact that the Bavarians, who were themselves overrun and crushed by the conquering Prussians in 1866, should have paid without demur the enormous blood tribute to their conquerors in a cause in which they had no direct interest, since no annexation of Briey metals or Belgian lands would bring prosperity to Bavaria.

The losses of the New Zealanders in their fine advance were not

heavy, but they had a number of casualties that evening and next morning in their newly consolidated position, which included unfortunately Brigadier-General Brown, one of the finest officers in the force, who was killed by a burst of sharpnel.

Upon the immediate left of the New Zealanders was the 25th (Bainbridge), a sound, hard-working British Division, which had a fine and a very long record of service upon the Somme. The task allotted to this division was a formidable one, consisting of an attack upon a 1200-yard front, which should penetrate 3000 yards and cross nine lines of German trenches and the concealed Steenebeek Valley, and crush the resistance of a number of fortified farms. In spite of these numerous obstacles, the advance, which was well-covered by General Kincaid-Smith's guns, was splendidly successful. The 74th Brigade was on the right, the 7th on the left, with the 75th in reserve. Observers have recorded how at the very instant that the men surged forward under their canopy of shells, six miles of S.O.S. rockets rose in one long cry for help from the German line. From the right the British wave of stormers consisted of the 2nd Irish Rifles, the 13th Cheshires, the 3rd Worcesters, and the 8th North Lancashires, veterans of Ovillers and the Leipzig Redoubt. Keeping close behind a barrage of sixty guns they flooded over the enemy trenches, just missing the answering barrage which came pattering down behind them. These troops advanced without a check to the line of the Steenebeek, where the work was taken up by the second wave, consisting of the 9th Lancs., 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, 10th Cheshires, and 1st Wilts, the order being taken from the right. For a time there was a dangerous gap between the Wiltshires and the flank of the Ulstermen to the left, but this was bridged over, and the advance rolled on, with a constant capture of prisoners and machine-guns. Only at one point, named Middle Farm, was there a notable resistance, but the Lancashire Fusiliers and Irish Rifles combined to crush it. All this attack had been carried out in a dim light, half mist and half dust-laden from explosions, where obstacles were hardly seen until they were reached, and where it took fine leading and discipline to preserve direction, so that numbers of men lost touch with their own battalions and went forward as best they might. These are the times when shirkers have their chance and when the true individual quality of troops is most highly tested. Out of touch with officers on either side the British advanced and the Germans surrendered.

On the capture of all the first objectives the 8th South Lancashires and 11th Cheshires of the 75th Brigade passed through the victorious ranks of their fellow brigades and pushed on against the strong October system of trenches beyond. The 8th Borderers followed closely behind consolidating the ground won by the forward line. It was still only four in the morning. As the 75th Brigade swept forward it found the 1st New Zealand Brigade on its right, and the 107th Ulster Brigade on its left, all moving swiftly in one great line. By eight o'clock all immediate

opposition had been beaten down, and the full objectives were being consolidated by the 106th Field Company Royal Engineers, five field-guns having been added to the other trophies. These might have been got away by the enemy had not the machine-guns knocked out the gun teams. The 110th and 112th Brigades of British artillery had been pushed up after the infantry, and though some delay was caused by the unfortunate destruction of Major Campbell and his whole battery staff by a single shell, the batteries were in action within the German lines by 11 a.m.

About midday a counter-attack began to develop along the front of the Second Anzac Corps, involving British, New Zealanders, and Australians, but the blow already received had been too severe, and there was no resilience left in the enemy. The attempt died away under a withering fire from rifles and machine-guns. By 2 p.m. all was quiet once more.

The British effort was not yet at an end, however. The long summer day was still before them, and there was a good reserve division in hand. This was the 4th Australian Division (Holmes), two brigades of which passed through the ranks of the 25th and New Zealand Divisions, about 3.15 p.m. Their objective was a further system of trenches 500 yards to the east and well down the other slope of the Messines Hill. The advance of each brigade was admirable, but unfortunately they diverged, leaving a dangerous gap between, in which for two days a party of the enemy, with machine-guns, remained entrenched. At the end of that time two battalions of the 13th Australian Brigade, the 50th and 52nd, carried the place most gallantly by storm and solidified the line.

Passing from the area of the Anzac Corps to that of the Ninth Corps, we come first upon Nugent's 36th Ulster Division, which had not reappeared in any battle since its day of glory and of tragic loss in front of Thiepval. It was now, by a happy chance or by a beneficent arrangement, fighting upon the right flank of the 16th Southern Irish Division (Hickie) and the two may be treated as one, since they advanced, step by step, in the same alignment up the bullet-swept slope, and neither halted until they had reached their full objectives. The Ulstermen went forward with the 107th Brigade of Irish Rifles upon the right in close touch with the 25th Division, while the 108th was on the left, keeping line with their fellow-countrymen, both Irish divisions dashing forward with great fire and resolution.

The 16th Irish Division for the purpose of the attack consisted of four brigades, having been strengthened by the addition of the 33rd Brigade from the 11th Division. In the attack the 47th Brigade was on the right and the 49th on the left. If some further detail may be permitted in the case of men who were playing so loyal a part at a time when part of Ireland had appeared to be so disaffected, it may be recorded that the Irish line counting from the right consisted of the 6th Royal Irish, the 7th Leinsters, the 7/8th Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the 7th Inniskilling

Fusiliers. These battalions sprang up the Wytschaete slope, closely followed by their second line, which was formed by the 1st Munster Fusiliers, 6th Connaught Rangers, 2nd Royal Irish and 8th Inniskillings. In this order, in close touch with the Ulstermen on their right and the English 19th Division on their left, they swept up the hill, their Celtic yell sounding high above the deep thunder of the guns. The explosion of the huge mines had a disconcerting effect at the first instant, for great masses of *débris* came showering down upon the men in the advanced positions, so that the dense smoke and the rain of falling earth and stones caused confusion and loss of direction. The effect was only momentary, however, and the eager soldiers dashed on. They swarmed over Wytschaete village and wood, which had already been badly shaken by the accurate fire of General Charlton's guns, beating down all resistance. It was in the assault of the village that that great Irishman, Major Willie Redmond, fell at the head of his men. "He went in advance when there was a check. He was shot down at once. As he fell, he turned towards his men and tried to say something. No words came, but he made an eloquent gesture with his right arm towards the German line, and the Irish swept forward." The profound gratitude of every patriot is due to him, to Professor Kettle, to Mr. Stephen Gwynn, M.P., and to all those Nationalists who had sufficient insight to understand that Ireland's true cause was the cause of the Empire, and that it was the duty of every Irishman of all shades of opinion to uphold it in arms.

By 3.45 a.m. the first objective had been taken, and by five the second, save in front of the Leinsters, where there was a stout resistance at a German machine-gun post, which was at last overcome. It was at this period that a dangerous gap developed between the retarded wing of the right-hand brigade and the swiftly advancing flank of the left, but this opening was closed once more by seven o'clock. By 7.30 the third objective had been cleared by the 1st Munsters on the right and the 2nd Irish Rifles on the left, for the second line had now leap-frogged into the actual battle. By eight o'clock everything had fallen, and the field-guns of the 59th and 113th Brigades R.F.A. had been rushed up to the front, well-screened by the slope of the newly conquered hill. The new position was swiftly wired by the 11th Hants and Royal Engineers.

There now only remained an extreme line which was, according to the original plan, to be the objective of an entirely new advance. This was the Oostaverne Line, so called from the hamlet of that name which lay in the middle of it. Its capture meant a further advance of 2000 yards, and it was successfully assaulted in the afternoon by the 33rd Brigade, consisting of the 7th South Staffords, 9th Sherwoods, 6th Lincolns, and 6th Borderers. It has been frequently remarked, and Guillemont might be quoted as a recent example, that both Englishmen and Irishmen never fight better than when they are acting together and

all national difference is transmuted suddenly into generous emulation. So it was upon the field of Messines, for the advance of the 33rd Brigade was a worthy continuation of a splendid achievement. Keeping pace with the 57th Brigade of the 19th Division to their north, they dashed aside all obstacles, and by 5.45 were in complete possession of the farthest point which had ever been contemplated in the fullest ambition of the Generals.

The enemy had been dazed by the terrific blow, but late in the evening signs of a reaction set in, for the German is a dour fighter, who does not sit down easily under defeat. It is only by recollecting his constant high qualities that one can appreciate the true achievements of the soldiers who, in all this series of battles—Arras, Messines, and the Flanders Ridges—were pitch-forking out of terribly fortified positions the men who had so long been regarded as the military teachers and masters of Europe. Nerved by their consciousness of a truly national cause, our soldiers fought with a determined do-or-die spirit which has surely never been matched in all our military annals, while the sagacity and adaptability of the leaders was in the main worthy of the magnificence of the men. As an example of the insolent confidence of the Army, it may be noted that on this, as on other occasions, all arrangements had been made in advance for using the German dumps. "This should invariably be done," says an imperturbable official document, "as the task of rapidly getting forward engineer stores is most difficult."

A line of mined farms formed part of the new British line, and upon this there came a series of German bombing attacks on June 8, none of which met with success. The 68th Field Company of the Engineers had inverted the position, turning the defences from west to east, and the buildings were held by the Lincolns and Sherwoods, who shot down the bombers before they could get within range even of the far-flying egg-bomb which can outfly the Mills by thirty paces, though its effect is puny in comparison with the terrific detonation of the larger missile. From this time onwards the line became permanent. In this long day of fighting the captures amounted to 8 officers and 700 men with 4 field-guns and 4 howitzers. The losses were moderate for such results, being 1100 men for the Irish and 500 for the 33rd Brigade. Those of the Ulster Division were also about 1000.

Upon the left of the Irishmen the advance had been carried out by Shute's 19th Division. Of this hard fighting division, the same which had carried La Boiselle upon the Somme, the 56th Lancashire Brigade and the 58th, mainly Welsh, were in the line. The advance was a difficult one, conducted through a region of shattered woods, but the infantry cleared all obstacles and kept pace with the advance of the Irish upon the right, finally sending forward the reserve Midland Brigade as already stated to secure and to hold the Oostaverne Line. The ground to be traversed by this division, starting as it did from near Wulverghem, was both longer and more exposed than that of any other,

and was particularly open to machine-gun fire. Without the masterful artillery the attack would have been an impossibility. None the less, the infantry was magnificently cool and efficient, widening the front occasionally to take in fortified posts, which were just outside its own proper area. The 9th Cheshires particularly distinguished itself, gaining part of its second objective before schedule time and having to undergo a British barrage in consequence. This fine battalion ended its day's work by blowing to shreds by its rifle-fire a formidable counter-attack. The Welsh battalions of the same 58th Brigade, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, 9th Welsh, and 5th South Wales Borderers fought their way up through Grand Bois to the Oostaverne Line with great dash and gallantry. The village of that name was itself taken by the 19th Division, who consolidated their line so rapidly and well that the German counter-attack in the evening failed to make any impression. Particular credit is due to the 57th Brigade, who carried on the attack after their own proper task was completed.

We have now roughly sketched the advance of the Ninth Corps, and will turn to Morland's Tenth Corps upon its left. The flank Division of this was the 41st under Lawford, the heroic leader of the old 22nd Brigade at Ypres. This unit, which was entirely English, and drawn mostly from the south country, had, as the reader may remember, distinguished itself at the Somme by the capture of Flers. It attacked with the 122nd and 124th Brigades in the line. They had several formidable obstacles in their immediate front, including the famous Dammstrasse, a long causeway which was either trench or embankment according to the lie of the ground. An estaminet upon this road was a lively centre of contention, and beyond this was Ravine Wood with its lurking guns and criss-cross of wire. All these successive obstacles went down before the steady flow of the determined infantry, who halted at their farthest line in such excellent condition that they might well have carried the attack forward had it not been prearranged that the 24th, the reserve division, should pass through their ranks, as will presently be described.

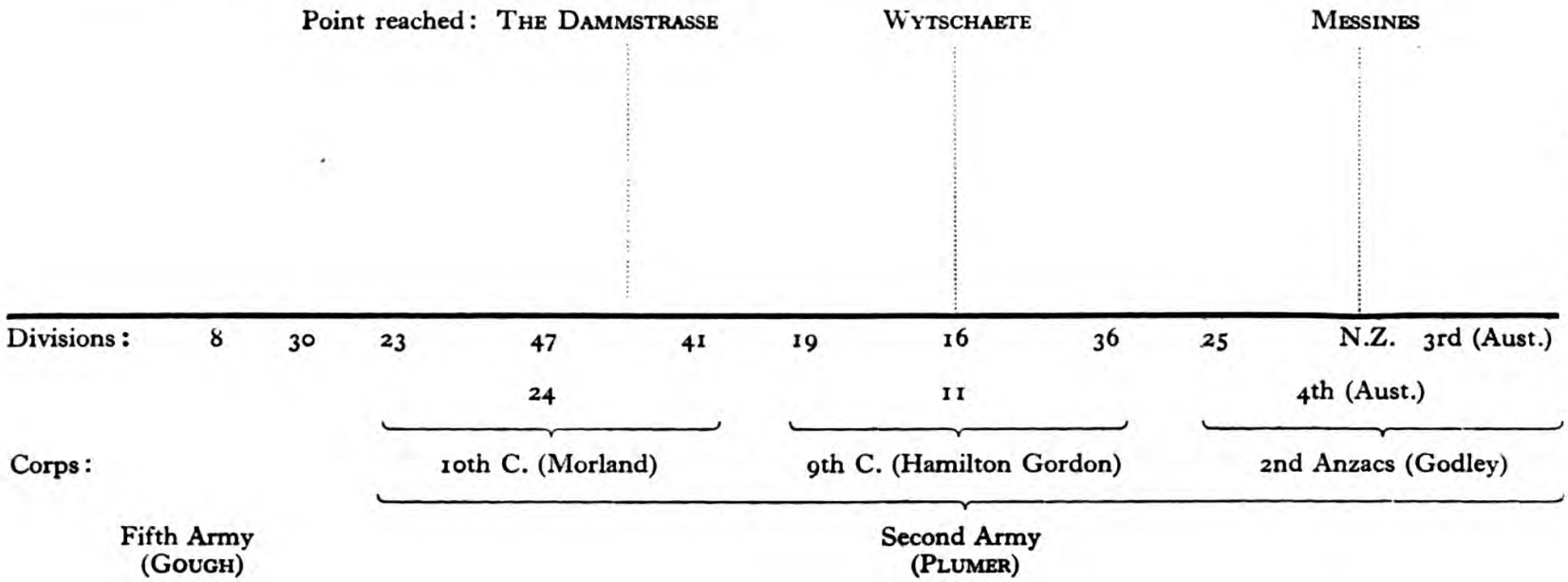
To the left of the 41st was Gorringe's 47th London Territorial Division containing the victors of Loos and of High Wood. The effect of the mines had been particularly deadly on this front, and one near Hill 60 is stated by the Germans to have taken up with it a whole Company of Wurtembergers. The position attacked by the Londoners was on each side of the Ypres-Comines Canal, and included some formidable obstacles, such as a considerable wood and a ruined country-house named " The White Château." Again and again the troops were held up, but every time they managed to overcome the obstacle. Around the ruined grandeur of the great villa, with all its luxuries and amenities looking strangely out of place amid the grim trimmings of rusty wire and battered cement, the Londoners came to hand-grips with the Prussians and Wurtembergers who faced them. In all 600 prisoners were sent to the rear.

To the left of the 47th London Division, and forming the extreme flank of the attack, was the 23rd Division (Babington) of Contalmaison fame, a unit which was entirely composed of tough North of England material. It was in touch with the regular 8th Division upon the left, this being the flank division of the Fifth Army. The latter took no part in the present advance, and the 23rd had the task of forming a defensive flank in the Hooge direction, while at the same time it attacked and conquered the low ridges from which the Germans had so long observed our lines, and from which they had launched their terrible attack upon the Canadians a year before. No long advance was expected from this division, since the object of the whole day's operations was to flatten out an enemy salient, not to make one upon our own side. Sufficient ground was occupied, however, to cover the advance farther south, and without this advance it would have been impossible for the supporting division to carry on, without exposing its flank, the work which had been done by the two divisions on the right. At 3.10 in the afternoon, the 24th Division under General Bols, an officer whose dramatic experience in the La Bassée fighting of 1914 has been recounted in a previous chapter, advanced through the ranks of the 41st and 47th Divisions at a point due east of St. Eloi, its attack being synchronised with that upon the Oostaverne line farther south. The operation was splendidly successful, for the 73rd Brigade upon the left and the 17th upon the right, at the cost of about 400 casualties, carried that section of the Dammstrasse and the whole of the historic, blood-sodden ground upon either side of it, so rounding off the complete victory of the Second Army. So close to the barrage was the advance of the infantry, that the men of the 1st Royal Fusiliers and 3rd Rifle Brigade, who led the 17th Brigade, declared that they had the dust of it in their faces all the way.

It only remains to be added that on the extreme left of the line the Germans attempted a counter-attack while the main battle was going on. It was gallantly urged by a few hundred men, but it was destined to complete failure before the rifles of the 89th Brigade (Williams) of the 30th Division. Few of these Germans ever returned.

It was a one day's battle, a single hammer-blow upon the German line, with no ulterior operations save such as held the ground gained, but the battle has been acclaimed by all critics as a model and masterpiece of modern tactics, which show the highest power of planning and of execution upon the part of Sir Herbert Plumer and General Harington, his able Chief-of-Staff, soon to be a larger figure on the world's stage. The main trophy, of course, was the invaluable Ridge, but in the gaining it some 7200 prisoners fell into British hands, including 145 officers, which gives about the same proportion to the length of front attacked as the Battle of Arras. The Germans had learned wisdom, however, as to the disposition of their guns in the face of " the unwarlike Islanders," so that few were found within reach. Sixty-

ORDER OF BATTLE
MESSINES
June 7, 1917



seven pieces, however, some of them of large calibre, remained in possession of the victors, as well as 294 machine-guns and 94 trench mortars. The British losses were about 16,000. The military lesson of the battle has been thus summed up in the words of an officer who took a distinguished part in it: "The sight of the battle-field with its utter and universal desolation stretching interminably on all sides, its trenches battered out of recognition, its wilderness of shell-holes, *débris*, tangled wire, broken rifles, and abandoned equipment, confirms the opinion that no troops, whatever their morale or training, can stand the fire of such overwhelming and concentrated masses of artillery. With a definite and limited objective and with sufficient artillery, complete success may be reasonably guaranteed." It is the big gun then, and not, as the Germans claimed, the machine gun which is the Mistress of the Battle-field. The axiom laid down above is well proved, but it works for either side, as will be shown presently where upon a limited area the weight of metal was with the Germans and the defence with the British.

So fell Messines Ridge. Only when the British stood upon its low summit and looked back upon the fields to westward did they realise how completely every trench and post had been under German observation during these years. No wonder that so much of the best blood of Britain has moistened that fatal plain between Ypres in the north and Ploegstrate in the south. "My God!" said an officer as he looked down, "it is a wonder that they let us live there at all." "It is great to look eastwards," said another, "and see the land falling away, to know that we have this last height and have wrested it from them in three hours." It was a nightmare which was lifted from the Army upon June 7, 1917.

For a time there was no considerable action along the British line, but there were large movements of troops which brought about an entirely new arrangement of the forces, as became evident when the operations were renewed. Up to the date of the Battle of Messines the Belgians had held the ground near the coast, and the five British Armies had lain over their hundred-mile front in the order from the north of Two, One, Three, Five, and Four. Under the new arrangement, which involved a huge reorganisation, it was the British Fourth Army (Rawlinson) which came next to the coast, with the Belgians upon their immediate right, and an interpolated French army upon the right of them. Then came Gough's Fifth Army in the Ypres area, Plumer's Second Army extending to the south of Armentières, Horne's First Army to the south end of the Vimy Ridge, and Byng's Third Army covering the Cambrai front, with dismounted cavalry on their right up to the junction with the French near St. Quentin. Such was the general arrangement of the forces for the remainder of the year.

A successful advance was made by the 46th Division and by the Canadians on the evening of June 28, which carried them into the village

of Avion and ended in the capture of some hundred prisoners. This operation was undertaken in conjunction with the 5th Division near Oppy, on the right of the Canadians. Their advance was also attended with complete success, the 95th and 15th Brigades clearing by a sudden rush more than a mile of German line and killing or taking the occupants. To the north of them both the 4th Canadians and the 46th Midlanders carried the success up the line. The advance was an extraordinary spectacle to the many who looked down upon it from the Vimy heights, for a violent thunderstorm roared with the guns, and a lashing downpour of rain beat into the faces of the Germans. They were tired troops, men of the 11th Reserve division, who had already been overlong in the line, and they could be seen rushing wildly to the rear before the stormers were clear of their own trenches. An unfired and brand-new machine-gun was found which had been abandoned by its demoralised crew. The flooded fields impeded the advance of the Canadians, but the resistance of the enemy had little to do with the limits of the movement.

On June 30 the 6th North Staffords and 7th Sherwood Foresters made a fresh advance and gained their objectives, though with some loss, especially in the case of the latter battalion. This operation was preparatory to a considerable attack upon July 1. This was carried out upon a three-brigade front, the order being 139th, 137th, 138th from the north. The 139th were in close touch with the 6th Division, who had lent two battalions of the 71st Brigade to strengthen the assailants. The objective was from the Souchez River in the south, through Aconite and Aloof Trenches, to the junction point of the 6th Division, north-west of Lens. The day's fighting was a long and varied one, some ground and prisoners being gained, though the full objective was not attained. The dice are still badly loaded against the attack save when the guns throw their full weight into the game. The Lincoln and Leicester Brigade in the south had the suburb of Cité du Moulin as their objective, and the 4th Lincolns next to the Canadians got well up, but the 5th Lincolns on their left were held up by wire and machine-guns. Through the gallantry of Sergeant Leadbeater one party penetrated into the suburb and made a lodgment in outlying houses, although their flank was entirely in the air. As the day wore on the line of the 138th Brigade was driven in several times by the heavy and accurate shell-fire, but was each time reoccupied by the enduring troops, who were relieved in the morning by the 4th and 5th Leicesters, who spread their posts over a considerable area. One of these small posts, commanded by Lieutenant Bowell, was forgotten, and held on without relief, food, or water until July 5, when finding himself in danger of being surrounded this young officer effected a clever withdrawal—a performance for which he received the D.S.O.

Whilst the 138th Brigade had established itself in the fringes of Cité du Moulin, the Stafford men upon their left (137th Brigade) had captured Aconite Trench and also got among the houses. A number

of the enemy were taken in the cellars, or shot down as they escaped from them, the Lewis guns doing efficient work. About one o'clock, however, a strong attack drove the Stafford men back as far as Ague Trench. The support companies at once advanced, led by Major Graham of the 5th North Staffords, who was either killed or taken during the attack, which made no progress in face of the strong masses of German infantry. The result of this failure was that the remnants of two companies of the 5th North Staffords, who had been left behind in Aconite Trench, were cut off and surrounded, all who were not killed being taken. In spite of this untoward result, the fighting on the part of the battalions engaged had been most spirited, and the conflict, after the fall of most of the officers and sergeants, had been carried on with great ardour and intelligence by the junior non-commissioned officers.

On the left, the Sherwood Forest Brigade (strengthened by the 2nd Regular battalion of their own regiment) advanced upon the Lens-Liéven Road and the network of trenches in front of them. It was all ideal ground for defence, with houses, slag-heaps, railway embankments, and everything which the Germans could desire or the British abhor. The brigade had advanced upon a three-battalion front, but as the zero hour was before dawn, and the ground was unknown to the Regular battalion upon the right, the result was loss of direction and confusion. Separated parties engaged Germans in isolated houses, and some very desperate fighting ensued. In the course of one of these minor sieges Captain Chidlow-Roberts is said to have shot fifteen of the defenders, but occasionally it was the attackers who were overpowered by the number and valour of the enemy.

This hard-fought action concluded the services of the North Midland Division in this portion of the front. It had been in the line for ten weeks, and under constant fire for the greater part of that time. The strength of the battalions had been so reduced by constant losses that none of them could muster more than 300 men. On July 2 the 46th Division handed over their line to the 2nd Canadians and retired for a well-earned rest.

The Germans had strengthened the defence of Lens by flooding the flats to the south of the town, submerging the Cité St. Augustin, so that the 4th Canadians on the right of the 46th Division could not push northwards, but they had advanced with steady perseverance along the south bank of the Souchez. No actual attack was made until the middle of August, but for the sake of continuity of narrative we may reach forward and give some short account of the operations upon that occasion. After constant pressure, and the drifting of a good deal of gas over the huge house-covered area which faced them, the Canadians made an attack upon August 15, which brought them into the very suburbs of the town, while advancing their line both to the north and to the south of it. Two Canadian divisions, the 1st on the left and the 2nd on the right, made the main attack, while the 4th Division guaranteed

their southern flank. The 1st Division found itself in what was practically the old British line, as it was defined at the end of the Battle of Loos in September 1915, nearly two years before. This veteran division had not far to go to find its enemy, for the German trenches were not more than 120 yards away. Flooding over them after a heavy discharge of flaming oil drums, the Canadians swept with little loss up that deadly slope of Hill 70, sacred to the memory of the Scots of the 15th Division and of many other brave men who found their last rest upon it. The 3rd Brigade on the left and the 2nd on the right topped the low hill and charged roaring down into the Cité St. Auguste beyond. There was a fierce fight at Cinnebar Trench and the other points which made up the German second line. The enemy infantry stood up stoutly to the push of bayonet, and there was some bloody work before the line was finally taken and consolidated by the Canadians. The 2nd Division in the meanwhile, advancing with the 5th Brigade upon the left and the 4th upon the right, had carried their charge right up to the edge of the city itself, and had established themselves among the shattered houses. As the 5th Brigade rushed forward they encountered a body of German infantry advancing as if to an attack, so that for a few glorious minutes there was close bludgeon work in No-Man's Land before the German formation was shattered and the stormers rushed on. A counter-attack developed about midday in front of the 1st Division, and the grey-clad troops could be clearly seen marching up in fours, breaking into artillery formation and finally deploying in line, all after the most approved British fashion—a fact which was explained later by the discovery in the dug-outs of official copies of a translation of the latest Aldershot regulations—surely a most unexpected result of the clash of the two nations, and one which is a compliment to our military instructors. The British methods of defence, however, proved upon this occasion to be more efficient than those for attack, and the Germans were shot back into the rubble-heaps behind them. The losses of the Canadians in this advance were not heavy, save in the 5th Brigade, which had in front of it a network of trenches in front of Cité St. Emile and carried a hard task through with great valour and perseverance. From this time forward the advanced line was held, and it was only the deflection of the Canadian Corps to the north which prevented them from increasing their gains at Lens.

The seven weeks of comparative peace between the conclusion of the Battle of Messines and the beginning of those long-drawn operations which may be called the Battle of the Ridges, was broken by one tragic incident, which ended in the practical annihilation of two veteran battalions which held a record second to none in the Army. As misfortunes of this sort have been exceedingly rare in the progress of the war it may be well to narrate this affair in greater detail than the general scale of this chronicle would justify.

Strickland's 1st Division had taken over the sector which was next

the sea, close to the small town of Nieuport. The frontage covered was 1400 yards and extended to Lombardzyde, where Shute's 32nd Division carried the line along. The positions had not been determined by the British commander, but were the same as those formerly occupied by the French. It was evident that they were exceedingly vulnerable and that any serious attempt upon the part of the Germans might lead to disaster, for the front line was some six hundred yards beyond the Yser River, and lay among sand dunes where the soil was too light to construct proper trenches or dug-outs. The river was crossed by three or four floating bridges, which, as the result showed, were only there so long as the enemy guns might choose. The supporting battalions were east of the river, but the two battalions in the trenches were to the west, and liable to be cut off should anything befall the bridges behind them. It was indeed a very difficult situation both for Strickland and Shute, for the Germans had complete local supremacy both in guns and in the air.

On July 10, the day of the tragedy, the two battalions in front were the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, next the sea, and the 1st Northamptons on their right. General Hubback of the 2nd Brigade had been wounded only a few days before, and General Kemp was in local command. The story of what actually occurred may be told from the point of view of the Riflemen, who numbered about 550 on the day in question. Three companies, A, D, and B, in the order given from the left, were in the actual trenches, while C Company was in immediate support. The night of July 9-10 was marked by unusually heavy fire, which caused a loss of seventy men to the battalion. It was clear to Colonel Abadie and his officers that serious trouble was brewing. An equal shellfall was endured by the Northamptons on the right, and their casualties were nearly as heavy. So weakened was A Company in its post along the sand dunes that it was drawn into reserve in the morning of July 10, and C Company took its place. During this night an officer and twenty men, all Rhodesians, from B Company, were pushed forward upon a raid, but lost nine of their number on their return. From 8.50 in the morning until 1 p.m. the fire was exceedingly heavy along the whole line of both battalions, coming chiefly from heavy guns, which threw shells capable of flattening out any dug-out or shelter which could be constructed in such loose soil. For hour after hour the men lay motionless in the midst of these terrific ear-shattering explosions, which sent huge geysers of sand into the air and pitted with deep craters the whole circumscribed area of the position. It was a horrible ordeal, borne by both battalions with the silent fortitude of veterans. Many were dead or shattered, but the rest lay nursing the breech-blocks of their rifles and endeavouring to keep them free from the drifting sand which formed a thick haze over the whole position. The two supporting battalions across the canal, the 2nd Sussex and 1st North Lancashire, were also heavily shelled, but their position was more favourable to taking cover. There was no telephone connection between the Rifles' Headquarters and the advanced

trenches, but Lieutenant Gott made several journeys to connect them up, receiving dangerous wounds in the attempt. About twelve, the dug-out of B Company was blown in, and a couple of hours later that of C Company met the same fate, the greater part of the officers in each case being destroyed. An orderly brought news also that he had found the dug-out of D Company with its inmates dead, and a dead Rifleman sentry lying at its door. As the man was staggering and dazed with shell-shock, it was hoped that his message was an exaggeration. The telephone wire to the rear had long been cut, and the doomed battalions had no means of signalling their extreme need, though the ever-rising clouds of sand were enough to show what they were enduring. No message of any sort seems to have reached them from the rear. The fire was far too hot for visual signalling, and several pigeons which were released did not appear to reach their destination. With sinking hearts the shaken and dazed survivors waited for the infantry attack which they knew to be at hand. There were really no means of resistance, for, in spite of all care, it was found that the all-pervading sand, which nearly choked them, had put out of gear the mechanism of all the machine-guns and most of the rifles. The divisional artillery was doing what it could from the other side of the Yser, but the volume of fire from the heavies was nothing as compared with the German bombardment. To add to the misery of the situation, a number of German aeroplanes were hawking backwards and forwards, skimming at less than 100 feet over the position, and pouring machine-gun fire upon every darker khaki patch upon the yellow sand.

Both the battalion commanders behaved with the utmost intrepidity and coolness. Of Colonel Abadie of the Rifles, it was said by one of the few survivors : " He inspired all with the utmost confidence. He did everything in his power and was splendid the whole time." Great hopes were entertained that some diversion would be effected by the gunboats upon the flank, but for some reason there was no assistance from this quarter. Hour after hour passed, and the casualties increased until the dead and wounded along the line of both battalions were more numerous than the survivors. At 3 p.m. the regimental dug-out of the Rifles showed signs of collapse under the impact of two direct hits. Those who could move betook themselves to an unfinished tunnel in the sand in which a handful of Australian miners were actually working. These men had changed their picks for their rifles, and were ready and eager to help in the defence of the position. In little groups, unable to communicate with each other, each imagining itself to be the sole survivor, the men waited for the final German rush. At 7.15 it came. A division of German marines made the attack, some skirting the British line along the seashore and approaching from the flank or even from the rear. As many Riflemen as could be collected had joined the Australians in the tunnel, but before they could emerge the Germans were dropping bombs down the three ventilation shafts, while they

sprayed liquid fire down the entrance. The men who endured this accumulation of horrors had been under heavy fire for twenty-four hours with little to eat or drink, and it would not have been wonderful if their nerve had now utterly deserted them. Instead of this, every one seems to have acted with the greatest coolness. "The Colonel called to the Riflemen to sit down, and they did so with perfect discipline." By this means the spray of fire passed over them. The entrances were blown in, and the last seen of Colonel Abadie was when, revolver in hand, he dashed out to sell his life as dearly as possible. From this time the handful of survivors, cut off from their Colonel by the fall of part of the roof, saw or heard no more of him. The few groups of men, Rifles or Northamptons, who were scattered about in the sandy hollows, were overwhelmed by the enemy, the survivors being taken. Four officers, who had been half-buried in the tunnel, dug their way out, and finding that it was now nearly dark and that the Germans were all round them, proceeded to make their way as best they could back to the bank of the river. Lieut. Richards, an artillery liaison officer made a gallant reconnaissance and reported to the others that there was a feasible gap in the new line which the enemy was already digging. Captain Butler, the adjutant of the battalion, with the second-in-command, and his few comrades, who included an Australian corporal, crept forward in the dusk, picking their way among the Germans. Altogether there were 4 officers, 20 Australians, and 15 Riflemen. One of the Australians, named McGrady, was particularly cool and helpful, but was unfortunately killed before the party reached safety. Even at this crisis the military code was strictly observed, and the confidential documents of the battalion carefully destroyed by Butler and Captain Smith. As the British emerged into the gloom from one end of the tunnel, a party of Germans began to enter at the other, but were so skilfully delayed by Rifleman Smart and another, acting as rearguard, that they were unable to stop the retreat. The men streamed out at the farther end under the very noses of their enemies, and crept swiftly in small parties down to the river, which at this point is from 70 to 100 yards broad. Across their path lay a camouflage screen some twelve feet high, which had been set on fire by the shells. It was a formidable obstacle, and held them up for some time, but was eventually crossed. Here they were faced by the problem of the broken bridges, and several were shot while endeavouring to find some way across. Finally, however, the swimmers helping the others, the greater number, including the four Rifle officers, got safely across, being nearly poisoned by gas shells as they landed upon the farther side. Of the Northamptons, it would appear that only one officer, Captain Martin, made his escape, though badly wounded. Colonel Tollemache was heard calling out to his men: "It may be the last time, but fight like Englishmen!" He and all his staff became casualties or prisoners. The Northampton front was not more than forty yards from that of the Germans, and the rifle-fire of the latter swept the parapet to such an

extent that it was impossible to stop the rush. Private Parker, who was No. 1 of a machine-gun, with two other men, who knew nothing of the mechanism, rushed a gun out upon the flank and held up the grey wave for a minute or so before being submerged, while a sergeant also distinguished himself by a determined resistance and by finally crossing the canal to explain the situation to those in command there.

So ended an experience which can have had few parallels even in this era of deadly adventure. Of the Riflemen, it was found next day that 3 officers and 52 men had rejoined their brigade. If so many got away it was largely due to the action of Rifleman Wambach, who swam the canal with a rope in his mouth, and fixed it for his more helpless comrades. Even fewer of the Northamptons ever regained the eastern bank. " Like the Spartans at Thermopylae the men of Northampton and the Riflemen had died where they had been posted. Heroism could do no more." Out of about 1200 men, nearly all, save the casualties, fell into the hands of the victors. Every officer seems to have behaved with the utmost possible gallantry, and not least the battalion surgeon, Captain Ward, who stood by his wounded until both he and they fell into the hands of the Germans. Such was the deplorable affair of Nieuport, a small incident in so great a war, and yet one which had an individuality of its own which may excuse this more extended account. The total German advance was 600 yards in depth, upon a front of three-quarters of a mile.

The attack had extended to the eastward upon the farther side of the Geleide Creek, but here the positions were more favourable for defence, as there were supports available and the communications had not been broken. It is a most significant sign of the enormous respect which the German authorities entertained for the British Army, that this limited action in which only two weak British battalions were overwhelmed was solemnly announced by them in their official bulletin to be " a great and magnificent victory." When one remembers how the British in turn would have dismissed so small an action as a mere incident in the campaign, had they been the victors, it is indeed a most memorable tribute. The main cause of the defeat, apart from the faulty position, appears to have been that the infantry took over the new line more quickly than the artillery, and that the French heavies had withdrawn before the British heavies were ready for action. A British officer, afterwards released, was informed by the Germans that they had 182 batteries concentrated upon the position, while there were only 13 ready for the defence.

It was hoped in Germany and feared in Britain that the new position gained by the Germans at the north of the Yser River would enable them to outflank the British defences at Lombardzyde, and to destroy the 97th Brigade, which lay to the north of the river. The situation certainly looked most alarming in the map, and no military critic could have imagined that the position could be held. The British soldier has

a way of doing, however, what the lecture-rooms would denounce, and after some very desperate fighting the lines were maintained. The attack was not on so overwhelming a scale as on the left, but it was severe and long continued, from 7.30 p.m. till the evening of July 11. The enemy had at one time won three lines of defence, but they were eventually thrust back, General Shute feeding his fighting line from his reserves until he had the upper hand. The main strain fell upon the 11th Borderers and 16th H.L.I., but as the action went on the 17th Highland Light Infantry, 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, and 16th Northumberland Fusiliers were all in turn involved. It was a real infantry fight, often in the dark and sometimes at close grips, and it ended with the line as it was before the attack commenced. The severity of the action may be judged by the fact that the brigade had nearly a thousand casualties. From this time the line remained unchanged until the great Battle for the Flanders Ridges turned the thoughts of both parties to larger issues.

The facts disclosed by this attack seem to the chronicler to bear very directly upon the wisdom of Sir John French in advising an attack along the coast line at the end of 1914. The success of such an attack, and the extension of the allied line to the Dutch frontier would have profoundly altered the western war. The fact that the sand under a bombardment would itself have made a smoke-screen, and that it would clog the weapons of the unprepared defenders are strong arguments for the success of such a venture.

This month of July was signalised by the last efforts of the Russian Army so long as it remained a serious force. Under Brusiloff and Korniloff they made an attack upon the Austro-German lines, but after initial successes they were paralysed by the growing disaffection and disorganisation of the soldiery, who had all the want of discipline of the old French republicans without the fiery valour and patriotism. From this time onward Russia played no real military part in the great war, save as the betrayer of Roumania, the deserter of Serbia, and the absorber of such ill-spared supplies as she could get from her former allies.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES[1]

July 31, 1917

Attack of July 31—Advance of the Guards—Of the Welsh—Capture of Pilkem —Capture of St. Julien by 39th Division—Advance of 55th Division—Advance of Jacob's Second Corps—General results.

It had been accepted as an axiom at this stage of the war that no great operation could be in the nature of a surprise—an axiom which, like most other axioms, was shown later in the year to have some startling exceptions. To pack the base of the historic Ypres salient with guns, and to assemble within and behind its trenches the storming troops for a great advance was, however, an operation which could not possibly be concealed. British aircraft might have an ascendency in observation, but that did not prevent the German fliers from being both daring and skilful. All camouflage, therefore, was thrown aside, and throughout the month of July Sir Douglas Haig openly assembled his forces for the widening or destruction of the iron bands which had so long constricted him in this northern area. The Fifth Army gathered for the venture, still commanded by Sir Hubert Gough. On his left, opposite Bixschoote, on the edge of the inundations, was a French army under General Antoine, a genial giant who impresses those who meet him as a mixture of Porthos and d'Artagnan. The general rôle of the French Army was to cover the British from counter-attack from the north, especially from Houthulst Forest, in the depths of which great reserves might lurk, for it covers no less than 600 acres. Upon the right, and engaged in a subsidiary degree in the operations, was the Second Army, under Sir Herbert Plumer, fresh from the triumph of Messines.

The direction of this new attack against the ridges of Flanders was the logical sequence from the preceding operations of the year. The high ground of the Ancre had been taken late in 1916. The high ground of Vimy fell into British hands in April. In June the Germans had been driven in one strenuous day from the high ground of Messines. The whole line of ridges from end to end was in British hands save only those which girt in Ypres and dominated it from the north and north-east. It is true that these so-called ridges were often little more than undulations,

[1] Maps on p. 197 for this and subsequent chapters.

but they meant firmer ground, artillery observation, self-concealment, and everything which makes for military advantage. For these reasons Sir Douglas Haig turned his strength now in that direction, hoping that a real victory would even enable his army to wheel to the left and clear the Belgian coast. It had been represented with doubtful truth that such an operation would stop or at least alleviate that U-boat campaign which was the most formidable of all dangers to Great Britain. This, and the relief of the pressure upon the French were the two main objects of this operation.

In attacking a salient like that of Ypres and in endeavouring to flatten it out, it is obvious that the efforts must be made at the sides rather than in the centre, since success in the latter case would simply mean a larger salient. Of the two sides of the Ypres salient the success of Messines had already relieved the pressure in the south, and this area was clearly less important than the north, since it was farther from the sea. It was evident that any considerable success upon the northern side would advance the British line towards Bruges, and an occupation of Bruges would surely mean the abandonment by Germany of the Flemish coast. For these reasons the effort of the British was chiefly directed towards the north-east, a tract of ground which was difficult when dry, but which became grotesque in its difficulties when it rained and the small low-lying streams or " beeks " which meandered through it spread out into broad marshy bottoms. These all-pervading morasses, when ploughed up with innumerable shell-holes, were destined to form an almost insuperable military obstacle. In attacking at such a point Sir Douglas could only hope that the weather would abide as a neutral, but as a fact, now as so often before, its action was bitterly hostile. Up to the very day of the advance it smiled deceitfully only to break into a month of rain from the very hour of the attack. If Berlin needs one more monument in her " Sieges-Allee," she may well erect one to the weather, which has more than once saved her cause as surely as the geese of old saved Rome.

So notorious were the British preparations, culminating in the usual terrific bombardment, that the approaching conflict was discussed in the German papers weeks before it occurred. Their preparations had been gigantic, and took a new form which called for corresponding ingenuity upon the side of the stormers if it was to be successfully countered. The continuous trench had, save in the old system, been discarded as offering too evident a mark for the shattering guns. The ground was held by numerous disconnected trenches, and strong points arranged in depth rather than in breadth, so that the whole front should form one shock-absorber which would yield at first, but must at the last bring any pressure to a stand. Scattered thickly among these small posts there were concrete forts, not unlike the Martello towers of our ancestors, but sunk deeply into the ground, so as to present a small mark to gun-fire. These forts were made of cement and iron with walls so

enormously thick that a direct hit from anything less than a six-inch gun could not possibly harm them. The garrisons of each were composed of twenty or thirty men, with two or three machine-guns. There was usually no visible opening, the entrance being approached by a tunnel, and the windows mere slits which gave a broad traverse for a machine-gun. They were contrivances which might well hold up an army, and it was a fine example of British adaptability as well as courage that they were able to make progress against them. The days of the gallant bull-headed rush were over, and the soldiers had learned in a cruel school that the fighting man must be wary as well as brave.

At four o'clock in the first grey light of a rainy morning, under a canopy of grey sweeping clouds, and in a fog-girt landscape of be-draggled fields and brown patches of mire, the French and British infantry sprang forward with splendid alacrity upon this dangerous venture which should culminate in taking the last dominant ridge upon the British front from those who had held it so long.

The French attacked on the extreme left of the line, and had an extremely difficult task, which they accomplished with a dash and spirit which won the unstinted admiration of their British comrades. In front of them was the canal, but they had succeeded in throwing across some troops in the days before the battle. It was fitting that they should advance the line in this sector, for they were starting from the very spot to which their comrades had been pushed in the poison-gas battle of April 22, 1915, more than two years before. The ground in front of them was very marshy, and as a background to the German position loomed the great forest of Houthulst, which was known to be a strong gun position and place of arms. It was subjected, however, to such a shattering bombardment that it was nearly silent when the attack advanced, and the French poilus pushing rapidly on from point to point, seized the village of Steenstraate, and finally the larger village of Bix-schoote, establishing their line well to the north of that point.

The British line of battle was formed by five Corps, the Fourteenth (Cavan) to the north, the Eighteenth (Maxse) on its right, the Nineteenth (Watts) on the right of that, the Second (Jacob) came next, and then on the southern edge of the area, and hardly engaged in the main fighting, was the Tenth (Morland). Each Corps had two divisons in the line and two in reserve. We will take each in turn, starting from the north. It should be noted that the four first Corps made up Gough's Fifth Army, and that the Tenth Corps was the only part of Plumer's Army to be engaged.

Cavan's Fourteenth Corps was next to the French, with the Guards in immediate touch with our allies, and the 38th Welsh Division on its right. The 20th and the 29th Divisions were in support. We shall now follow the splendid advance of the Guards, a division which more and more as the war progressed reasserted its position as the very cream of the Army.

On the days preceding the action a number of bridges had been thrown across the canal, and the attacking brigades had been passed over this impediment, so that they were able to deploy rapidly and escape the German barrage which fell, for the most part, behind them. This most useful work was carried out by the 1st Guards Brigade, especially by the 3rd Coldstream and 1st Irish, who got across the first. This brigade was relieved, and on the day of battle the 3rd Brigade was on the left in close liaison with the French, while the 2nd Brigade was on the right with their flank touching the Welshmen. Two " Hate Companies," as they were called, were thrown out on the divisional front, whose task it was to make special discharges of oildrums, thermite, and other missiles which might smooth the way for the advance of the infantry. At 4.24 the whistles of fate were heard shrilly all along the line, and the Guards rose up from their wet assembly ditches, and went forward in their usual sedate and inexorable fashion. The front line of battle of the two brigades, counting from the French flank, were the 1st Welsh, 1st Grenadiers, 2nd Irish, and 1st Scots, while behind them in the second line were their comrades of the 2nd Scots, 4th Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, and 3rd Grenadiers. Each platoon of the Irish carried a green flag adorned with the Irish harp.

The attack at first was so strong or the opposition so weak that in ten minutes the first-line objective had been gained. From this point the shock-absorber system began to act, a system which must prevail save where the attackers know when to suspend their effort so that the spring of resistance is never pressed back to the uttermost. The British generals had learned this lesson and the aims of any one day's battle were strictly limited. Thus, although the losses grew and the difficulties increased, the Guards were well within their powers, in gradually pushing forwards to the Steenbeek stream, which was the extreme limit assigned to them. As they advanced sections were told off to deal with the various concrete forts and other strong points, a method of attack which gave great scope for the initiative of individual junior officers or non-commissioned officers, and which was fruitful in acts of valour. About six o'clock the German machine-guns in Hey Wood held up the line for a time, and the 2nd Brigade had the chagrin of seeing some German guns limbering up and withdrawing in front of them, while their own barrage fell as an invisible steel curtain which covered them from seizure. It was remarked generally of the British barrage that though extremely accurate as a rule, it still consisted too much of shrapnel and not enough of high explosives, so that it had not the shattering and uprooting effect which was needful. The Germans had read the lessons differently, for at this period of the war their barrage consisted almost entirely of 5.9 " crumps " with a small admixture of shrapnel.

By the early afternoon the front lines of the Guards had fulfilled their programme, and a number of prisoners, including the commanding

officer and adjutant of the 73rd Hanoverians, had been conducted to the rear. The losses of the Guards had not been excessive, save in the right flank battalions, especially the 1st Scots, but they included many valuable officers killed or wounded, including Colonel Greer of the 2nd Irish, Colonel Romilly of the 1st Scots, and Colonel Lord Gort of the 4th Grenadiers. Among many deeds of valour which were added to the records of the division that morning there may be mentioned that of the heroic surgeon David Lees, who was decorated for passing five times through the barrage carrying wounded, and of the brave Irish priest, Father Knapp, who absolutely refused to take shelter when his men were exposed, and met his death rather than leave them. It is invidious, however, to mention brave men where all were brave. About three o'clock the 1st Guards Brigade passed through the ranks of their comrades and carried the advance forward to its limit. The order of their advance from the left was the 2nd Coldstream, with the 2nd Grenadiers on the right, while the 3rd Coldstream and 1st Irish took the corresponding places in the second line. The 2nd Grenadiers lost heavily from a flank fire, its difficulties and those of all the right flank being increased by the fact that the railway line, dotted with German strong points, ran as the boundary between divisions. Captain Ritchie, of Loos fame, was among the casualties. The Grenadiers got so far ahead that the protective barrage became thin and erratic, hardly existing in many places. The whole brigade moved forward in close touch with the 113th Brigade of Welshmen upon their right. The latter after the final objective was reached were shelled for a time out of their position, so that the Irish and Grenadiers had to throw back a defensive flank, but the Welsh with dogged spirit came back to their work and re-established their line late in the evening. Their work will presently be described, but so far as the Guards are concerned it may be added that, with the help of the 55th and 76th Field Companies R.E., all they took they kept, although the physical surroundings were appalling, for they found themselves for three days lying on the forward slope of a low ridge under heavy rain in deep puddles of water, exposed to German shelling and to the constant stinging of invisible German snipers. No conditions could have been more trying, but the Guards stuck it out with a quiet patient discipline which was as fine as the valour of their assault. " We are just lying in a snipe bog in the rain," wrote an Irish officer. Due dispositions were made for relief among the three brigades, and the line was held until a farther advance should become possible—an event which was continually postponed by the incredible weather.

Passing to the 38th Welsh Division on the right of the Guards, their battle line consisted of the 113th Brigade upon the left, consisting entirely of battalions of Welsh Fusiliers, while the 114th Brigade, formed from the Welsh Regiment, was on the right. The order of the foremost battalions taken from the left was the 16th and 13th Welsh

Fusiliers, with the 13th and 10th Welsh. The experiences of the division upon its advance were, as might be expected, not unlike those of the Guards. "It was still dark," says one graphic correspondent, "and all we had to guide us was our barrage moving forward like a living line of fire, from left to right as far as the eye could see." The first objective was captured with little loss, a fair number of prisoners being taken in the Caesar Support Trench. In attacking the second objectives the reserve line came through the front one, so that the order of the troops, taken again from the left in the 114th Brigade, was the 15th and 14th Welsh, while in the 113th Brigade, which had a less difficult task, there was a mere change of companies in the units already engaged. The opposition now became fiercer and the losses more severe. Marsouin Farm, and Stray Farm on the right, and the village of Pilkem upon the left poured bullets upon the advancing infantry, who slipped from shell-hole to shell-hole, taking such cover as they could, but resolutely pushing onwards. Again and again the machine-gun forts were isolated, surrounded, and compelled to surrender. The Welshmen had reached their second objective in the scheduled time. The 15th Welsh Fusiliers were now pushed into the firing-line upon the left, and the advance went forward. A gap had formed between the Welshmen and the Highlanders of the 51st Division on their right. In this gap lay Rudolph Farm, spitting from every cranny and window. A platoon of the 15th Welsh turned aside from their path and captured or killed all who were in the German post. To the immediate left of this point lay another stronghold called Iron Cross. This was rushed by the 14th Welsh, at considerable loss to themselves, but twenty of the garrison were bayoneted, forty captured, and three machine-guns secured. Just beyond the Iron Cross was a German dressing-station which yielded forty more prisoners.

The 15th Welsh Fusiliers on the left had in the meanwhile a severe ordeal, for so heavy a fire poured upon them from the clump of trees known as Battery Copse that they were left with hardly an officer and with their protective barrage rapidly receding into the distance. The men were staggered for a time, but struggled forward again with fine resolution, and at last established themselves upon the same line as Iron Cross.

Whilst the fighting line had been getting forward as described, the 113th carrying among other obstacles the village of Pilkem, and both brigades, but especially the 114th, bursting through three separate battalions of the famous Käferlein regiment of the Guards, the reserve brigade had been keeping in close attendance in spite of the German barrage. Now two battalions of the 115th Brigade were slipped into the front, the 11th S.W. Borderers and the 17th Welsh Fusiliers. These fine fresh troops took up the running and made for the final objective, which was the Steenbeek stream. This was successfully reached, in spite of the ever-growing resistance, and the final line was formed with posts

upon the farther side of the Steenbeek. Shortly after three o'clock a strong counter-attack broke upon this Welsh line, and for a time the Borderers were forced from the post at " Au bon gîte " which they had occupied and were thrown across the river. Aided by a good barrage of artillery and machine-guns the attack was finally beaten off, about a hundred Germans who had charged through the barrage being shot down by rifle fire. After this there was no attempt on this day to disturb the new front of the Welsh Division, though on August 1 in the afternoon there was some sign of a counter-attack, which was broken up by the British artillery before it could materialise. From then onwards the weather made further operations impossible. On August 6 the 20th Division took over this new line.

The advance of the Welsh Division, including as it did the two exploits of capturing the strongly fortified village of Pilkem, and of utterly scattering three battalions of one of the most famous regiments in the Prussian service, was worthy of the great reputation which they had won at Mametz Wood. The way in which the men followed up the barrage and tackled the concrete forts was especially worthy of mention. The Cockchafers mentioned above were the dandy regiment of Berlin, and their utter defeat at the hands of a brigade of the New Army must indeed have been bitter to those who remembered the cheap jests which had been made at that Army's expense. Four hundred prisoners from this regiment found their way to the cages. Altogether 700 prisoners were taken, nearly all Guardsmen from the 3rd Division. The Welsh had about 1300 casualties, including Colonels Radice, Norman, and Taylor. Among the dead was one, Private Ellis H. Evans of the 15th Welsh Fusiliers, whose position and importance were peculiarly Cymric, since he was the winner of the Bardic chair, the highest honour of the Eisteddfod. An empty Bardic chair was afterwards erected over his grave. It is only in Wales that the traditions of Athens are preserved, and contests of the body and of the mind are conducted in public with equal honour to the victors.

To the south of Cavan's Fourteenth Corps lay Maxse's Eighteenth Corps, extending from the right of the 38th Division to a point opposite to the village of St. Julien. Maxse's Eighteenth Corps consisted of four divisions, the 51st supported by the 11th being on the left, and the 39th supported by the 48th on the right. South of the St. Julien front they connected up with Watts' Nineteenth Corps to the south. It should be mentioned that the whole Corps' front was occupied for some weeks before the battle by the 33rd Brigade, who at great strain and loss to themselves held this long stretch in the face of constant gassings and shellings, in order that the attacking divisions might be able to practice for the day of battle.

Taking the narrative once more from the north, the 51st Highland Territorial Division (Harper), a unit which has seen an extraordinary amount of service during the war, advanced with the usual dash of these

magnificent clansmen. Everything went down before their disciplined rush. There was no particular geographical point in the area which they conquered, but their whole front was covered by fortified posts, some of which fell with ease, while others put up a considerable resistance. Prominent among the latter was Rudolph Farm, which was on the line between the 38th and 51st Divisions, pouring a flanking fire upon each and holding up the left of the 51st. This post was eventually stormed by the Welsh. Finally the Highlanders, clearing the ground carefully behind them, reached their full day's objective, which was the line of the Steenbeek. Here they dug themselves in and beat off an enemy counter-attack.

On the right of the Highland Territorial Division was the 39th Division, consisting of the 116th Sussex Brigade, the 117th Rifle and Sherwood Foresters Brigade, and the 118th mixed Territorial Brigade. The attack was undertaken by the 117th Brigade on the north in touch with the Highlanders, and the 116th on the south. Both of these brigades got forward in excellent style, but the position was strong and the losses were heavy. Canadian Farm was taken by the 117th Brigade, and the 116th also attained its full objective. Finally, the spare brigade, the 118th, passed through the ranks of the others, and fought their way into St. Julien, where no British foot had been placed since April 24, 1915, when the heroic remnant of the Canadians had been cut off and overpowered in its streets.

The operation would have been entirely successful had it not been for the attempt to advance beyond the village. This was carried out by the same brigade, the 118th, with the 6th Cheshires upon the right, the 1st Herts in the centre, and the 4/5th Black Watch upon the left. The Cambridge Battalion was in support. The attack was extraordinarily gallant, but was held up by uncut wire and very severely punished. No permanent gain was effected, but greater constancy has seldom been seen. The Hertfordshire men were particularly fine. Their Colonel Page and their adjutant were both killed, and every combatant officer was on the casualty list, so that it was the serjeant-major who withdrew the 120 men who had gone forth as a strong battalion. The doctor was wounded, and only the chaplain was left, who distinguished himself by being the last man to recross the Steenbeek with a wounded man slung over his shoulder. Such was the experience of the Herts, and that of the Cheshires and of the Highlanders differed only in detail.

A counter-attack along the whole Corps' front was beaten back upon the evening of July 31, but the concentration of German artillery upon St. Julien was so terrific that it was found necessary next day to withdraw the 1st Cambs who garrisoned the village, the adjacent bridge over the Steenbeek being retained. Next day the village was reoccupied.

The 39th Division, very hard hit by its victorious but strenuous service, was relieved on August 4, after a terrible four days of constant rainfall and shell-fall, by the 48th South Midland Territorial Division,

while a few days later their Highland comrades were relieved by the 11th Division. So battered was the 39th Division that it was taken forthwith out of the line and its place in the Corps was filled by the 58th.

To return to the order of the advance, Watts' Nineteenth Corps, which was the next one to the south, consisted of the 55th West Lancashire Territorials with the 36th Ulsters on the left, while the 15th Scottish Division supported by the 14th Light Division were on the right. Of these we will deal first with the attack of the men of Lancashire.

The advance was made by the 166th Brigade on the left, and by the 165th on the right. The first German line was rapidly carried, and the only serious fighting was at the strong point known as Pommern Redoubt, which held out for some time but was eventually captured about 10 a.m. The 166th Brigade, which covered the space between St. Julien in the north and the Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road in the south, was led by the 5th King's Royal Lancasters and the 5th North Lancashires, while the 165th Brigade, with their left upon the road and their right in touch with the 15th Division, were composed entirely of battalions of the King's Liverpool Regiment, the 5th and 6th in front, the 7th and 9th in the second line. This brigade upon being counter-attacked used its liquid fire apparatus with good results. " From under the mantle of fire ran blazing Huns with heartrending cries, but I cannot say we had any sympathy for them. We remembered John Lynn and the other Lancashire lads who had been gassed and roasted round Ypres in the battles of other days, and we felt that the Huns were only being paid back in their own coin." The losses in the first stages of the advance were not severe and came chiefly from the machine-gun fire of the three strongholds of Bank Farm, Spree Farm, and Pommern Castle. The latter was very formidable, spouting bullets on three sides, so that the 165th Brigade was held up by it for a time. In the second stage of the attack the 164th Brigade with the 4th North Lancashires on their right and the 5th Lancs Fusiliers upon their left pushed through the ranks of their comrades and carried the advance on, taking Hindu Cott and Gallipoli, and finally reaching the most advanced objective, whence they pushed out patrols to Toronto and Aviatik Farms. They were exposed to strong counter-attacks, as will be shown.

This fine advance had been matched by Reed's 15th Scots Division on the right. Of their conduct that day it can only be said that it was worthy of the reputation which they had gained at Loos and at the Somme. The Scottish bands who fought under Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years' War left a renown in Germany which lingers yet, and it is certain that some memory of the terrible " Hellhags," as they were called by the German soldiers, will preserve the record of Scotch military prowess so long as any of their adversaries are alive to speak of it. Two brigades led the advance, Marshall's 44th on the right and Sladen's 46th on the left. As in the case of the Lancashire men on their left the first stages of the attack were easy. On getting past the German

line, however, the full blast of fire struck the infantry from Douglas Villa, Frezenberg Redoubt, Pommern Castle, Low Farm, Frost House, and Hill 37. By ten o'clock, however, the second objectives had been taken. The 45th Brigade now pushed through, and though held up on the right by Bremen Redoubt, they attained the full objective upon the left, and kept in close touch with the 164th Brigade. The position, however, was perilous and, as it proved, impossible, for Watts' Corps was now well ahead of either of its neighbours. About two o'clock a violent German drive struck up against the exposed flank of the 55th Division, causing great losses, especially to the 4th Royal Lancasters, some of whom were cut off. Another counter-attack beat against the left of the enfeebled 45th Brigade. As a result the remains of the four front line battalions were pushed back some hundreds of yards, but at 5 p.m. the edge was taken off the attack and the German infantry were seen to be retiring. About 1 p.m. next day this attack was renewed down the line of the Ypres-Roulers Railway, and again the 15th Division bore a heavy strain which forced it back once to the Frezenberg Ridge, but again it flooded forward and reoccupied its line. So severe had been the exertions and the losses of these two divisions that they were drawn out of the line as soon as possible, their places being taken by the 36th Ulsters on the left and the 16th Irish on the right.

We now come to Jacob's Second Corps lying to the south of the Nineteenth with its left resting upon the Ypres-Roulers Railway. It contained no less than five divisions, three of which were in the line and two in support. Those in the line, counting from the north, were the 8th Regular Division with its left on the railway and its right at Sanctuary Wood, the 30th Lancashire Division in the centre, and the 24th Division opposite Shrewsbury Forest with its right resting upon the Zillebeke-Zandvoorde Road. In support was the 25th Division on the left, and the 18th Division on the right.

The 8th Division advanced upon a two-brigade front, the 23rd on the left and the 24th on the right. Many strong posts including several woods faced the assailants, and from the beginning the resistance was very obstinate. None the less, in spite of numerous checks and delays, the advance was carried forward for half a mile and captured the whole of the front line trenches without much loss, for the German barrage was slow and late, whereas the British artillery support was excellent. Indeed it may be remarked that one of the features of the battle was the remarkable preparation by which General Jacob, with the aid of Kirkby and Logan, his two artillery leaders, managed to place nearly a thousand pieces into a line which was fully exposed to enemy observation. It was done at a considerable loss of men and guns, but it was absolutely essential to the advance.

The low rising called the Bellewaarde Ridge was the first objective of the division and was easily taken. The two magnificent Regular brigades swept onwards with a perfect order which excited the admiration

of spectators. As they passed over the curve of the ground they came into heavy fire from the farther rise near Westhoek, but it neither slowed nor quickened their gait. Hooge, Bellewaarde Lake, the White Château, all the old landmarks were passed. When the full objective had been reached after more than half a mile of steady advance Coffin's 25th Brigade passed through the ranks of their comrades and carried on until, as they neared Westhoek, they ran into a very heavy flank fire from Glencorse Wood in the south. This was in the area of the southern division, so that the 25th Brigade were aware that their flank was open and that the 30th Division had not come abreast of them. They halted therefore just to the west of Westhoek, and as their flank remained open all day they had to content themselves with consolidating the ground that they had won and beating back two counter-attacks. The left of the division kept their station well forward upon the Ypres-Roulers Railway, with their left in close touch with the Scotsmen to the north. The division was relieved next day by Bainbridge's 25th Division. All the battalions had done great things in the action, but some specially fine work was put in by the 1st Sherwood Foresters upon the left of the advance of the 24th Brigade. At one point it was necessary to cut through wire which held up the advance, and the gallantry of the wire-cutting detachment was such that the dying continued to snip at the strands, while even the dead contrived to fall forward in an attempt to screen with their bodies their living comrades. The losses were very heavy, but the historic old 45th Foot, the " old Stubborns " of the Peninsula, never in its long career carried through more gallantly in so fierce a fight. The 2nd Northamptons also increased their high reputation upon this arduous day, during which they took many prisoners.

The 30th Division, which consisted, as will be remembered, to a large extent of " Pal " battalions from Liverpool and Manchester, advanced to the south of the 80th. Sanctuary Wood and other strong points lay in front of the 90th and 21st Brigades which provided the first lines of stormers. The resistance was strong, the fire was heavy, and the losses were considerable, so that the assailants were held up and were unable to do more than carry the front trenches, whence they repulsed repeated counter-attacks during the rest of the day. In the initial advance the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, that phoenix of a battalion, so often destroyed and so often renewed, wandered in the dusk of the morning away from its allotted path and got as far north as Château Wood in the path of the 24th Brigade. This caused some dislocation of the front line, but the Manchester men on the right of the Scots pushed on and struck the Menin Road as far forward as Clapham Junction. The 21st Brigade in the meantime had to pass a great deal of difficult woody ground and met so much opposition that they lost the barrage, that best friend of the stormer. Bodmin Copse was reached, but few penetrated to the eastern side of it. The strong point of

Stirling Castle was, however, taken by the Manchesters of the 90th. It was the line of Dumbarton Lakes which proved fatal to the advance, and though two battalions of the 89th and finally the East Anglians of Higginson's 53rd Brigade from the supporting 18th Division were thrown into the fight, the latter winning forward for some distance, they found that it was finally rather a question of holding ground than gaining it. The ultimate line, therefore, was across from Clapham Junction. Since neither of the divisions on either side was in any way held up, save perhaps at one point, it is probable that the southern advance would have been more successful but for the limited advance of the 30th Division.

On August 2, much exhausted, they were drawn out of the line and the 18th Division took their place, and held Clapham Junction and Glencorse Wood, which their own 53rd Brigade had largely been instrumental in winning, against repeated attacks.

Upon the right of the 30th Division was the 24th, a famous fighting unit which was the only division able to boast that it had been present at Vimy Ridge, Messines, and Ypres—three great battles in the one year. The ground in front of this division was broken and woody, including Shrewsbury Forest and other natural obstacles. None the less good progress was made, expecially on the right, while the left was only retarded by the fact of the limited advance in the north. The advance was made upon a three-brigade front, the 17th on the left, the 73rd in the centre, and the 72nd on the right. The 17th, advancing with that fine battalion the 3rd Rifle Brigade alone in the front line, carried all before it at first, but found both flanks exposed and was compelled to halt. The 73rd, led by the 2nd Leicesters and the 7th Northamptons, were held up by a strong point called Lower Star Post in front of them. On the right the 72nd, with the 8th Queen's and the North Staffords in the lead, gained the house called the Grunenburg Farm, which marked the line of their immediate objective. There they dug in and held firmly, connecting up with the left of Plumer's Army to the south. Several unsuccessful counter-attacks were made in the succeeding days upon this point, in one of which on August 5 Colonel de la Fontaine of the 9th East Surreys was killed.

If the attack of the Second Corps on this and other occasions met with limited success, it is to be remembered that the long clear slope leading to Glencorse and Inverness Woods upon either side of the Menin Road represented as impossible a terrain for an advancing force as could be imagined. When finally these woods were won, officers who stood among the tree-stumps and looked back were amazed to think that such ground could have been taken, and were filled with surprise that the Ypres salient could have been held so long under an observation from which nothing could be concealed. When such positions are held by troops which have a world-wide reputation, in concrete fortifications, one should be surprised, not that the assailants should have failures,

but that they should have the dour resolution which brought them at last to success.

All the four Corps already mentioned, covering the front from the junction with the French in the north to Shrewsbury Forest in the south, belonged to Gough's Fifth Army. Of Plumer's Second Army only a portion of the extreme left, consisting of Morland's Tenth Corps, was engaged on July 31. The flank unit, the 41st English Division, was in the front line opposite Basseville, with the New Zealanders on their right. There was no intention to advance the line to any distance in this locality, but the whole task assigned to the troops was completely carried out, and the front was pushed forward until it was level with the right of the 24th Division. It has been explained by Sir Douglas Haig, however, that the attack in this quarter had never any serious intentions, and that it was in the nature of a feint in order to distribute the German reserve of men and guns. None the less the ground captured by the 123rd Brigade of the 41st Division represented a substantial gain, including the village of Hollebeke and all the broken and difficult country to the north of the bend of the Ypres-Comines Canal and east of Battle Wood. The advance along this portion of the front varied from 200 to 300 yards, while the New Zealanders at the right of the line covered the short area assigned to them in their usual workmanlike fashion, taking after a short fight the hamlet of La Basseville. On the right of the New Zealanders were the Australians, whose movement, in accordance with the general plan was a small one, including the capture of a ruined windmill opposite their position. This was captured, retaken, and captured once again in a spirited little fight, and August 1 saw more fighting in this sector under very trying conditions of weather and ground.

We have now briefly reviewed the work of each of the twelve divisions which were in line on the 31st of July. In some places success was absolute, in some it was partial, in none was there failure. Speaking generally it may be said that the 39th, 51st, Welsh, and Guards, had captured their full objectives, including the villages of St. Julien, Pilkem, and the Pilkem Ridge; that the 55th and 15th had carried the first and second lines, with the villages of Verlorenhoek and Frezenberg and the all-important ridge; finally that the units on their right had captured the German first lines, including Hooge, Hollebeke, Stirling Castle, and a line of woods. Apart from the gain of important and dominant positions, 6000 prisoners and 133 officers were taken, together with 25 guns, exclusive of those which had been captured by General Antoine to the north. The progress of the French had been admirable, and they had not only reached their full objectives but had gone beyond them and seized the village of Bixschoote, driving back one severe German counter-attack which surged up to the point of junction between them and the Guards. With such results the first day of the third Battle of Ypres was undoubtedly a British victory, but it was a victory

which was absolutely complete in the north, and incomplete in the south. Only one British disaster occurred during the day, and that was the appearance of that constant and formidable ally of the Central Powers, the autumn rain. That night it began, and for many weeks it continued in a dreary downpour upon a land which at the best of times is water-laden and soft. For two months to come it may be said that operations were really impossible, and that if they were occasionally driven forward by the fiery determination of the British leaders, they were undertaken at such a desperate disadvantage that large results were out of the question. Impassable mud and unfordable craters covered the whole German front, and a swimming collar might well have been added to those many appliances with which the patient British soldier was already burdened.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

August 1 *to September* 6

Dreadful weather—German reaction—Attack of August 16—Advance of Cavan's Corps—Capture of Langemarck—Dreadful losses of the two Irish Divisions—Failure in the south—Splendid field-gunners—The 42nd Division on September 6.

FROM the evening of July 31 till that of August 1 there were intermittent and sporadic German attacks along the whole of the new line, which were the more dangerous as the wretched weather made it impossible for the aircraft to operate and the artillery support was therefore unreliable. None the less, the wet and weary infantry huddling in the puddles and ditches were not to be forced back. Only at St. Julien, as already described, was there a temporary loss of ground. In this quarter, the 39th Division, especially the 118th Brigade, sustained very heavy losses, some of the battalions being almost annihilated for military purposes. For days in succession they lay in improvised trenches sodden and cold in the pitiless rain, and when the rising waters drove them out they were shot down by the enemy. None the less, the ground was held and the abandoned village regained.

Another point at which the German reaction was particularly severe on August 1 was near Bremen Redoubt and the Roulers Railway. Here at 3.30 p.m. the enemy attacked with great valour, the blow falling chiefly upon the 24th Brigade on the left of the 8th and the 44th on the right of the 15th Division. The 10th Gordons, 2nd Northamptons, and 1st Sherwood Foresters were for a time fighting for their lives, the regimental staff of the Gordons having to defend the burrow which served as Headquarters. The 7th Camerons were also engaged in this desperate conflict which was fought ankle-deep in mud and under driving rain-clouds. Finally a body of Highlanders under Captain Geddes of the Gordons made so fierce a charge that the Germans were driven back and abandoned the attempt in despair. Their advance, however, had been so sudden and so fierce that there was a time when the line was in grave danger. Captain Symon of the Camerons did great work also in the charge which turned the tide. Both Geddes and Symon were decorated for their valour.

From the first day of the battle the front had been quiet in the sector of the Second Corps, save for constant reciprocal bombardments, the Germans endeavouring to hinder consolidation, while the British prepared for an advance upon Glencorse and Inverness Woods. On August 10 an attempt was made to carry the line forward, the 25th Division advancing on the left opposite to Westhoek and the 18th Division coming forward on the right. The operation was a local one, but was attended with some success, the 25th reaching their full objective and occupying the village of Westhoek. This attack was carried out by the 74th Brigade, and was a model operation of the kind. Westhoek itself was rushed by the 2nd Irish Rifles, but the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers on the north did equally well, fighting their way to the advanced line and capturing several houses with their garrisons. The 9th North Lancashires had also a very fine day's work, but the 13th Cheshires, coming up in support, lost heavily from the barrage which had been too slow to catch the main attack. None the less the survivors made their way to the extreme line, where they joined up with some 7th Bedfords from the 54th Brigade to the south, and held a covering flank so as to block any attack upon Westhoek. The Cheshires did particularly well in this strenuous day's work, they and the Fusiliers having repeated hand-to-hand fights with the German counter-attacks. At one time a body of the Cheshires were quite cut off, but they held their own with determined bravery until their comrades rescued them. The 18th Division were held up by the heavy flanking fire from Inverness Copse. The left of the advance got into the south-western edge of Glencorse Wood, touching the 74th Brigade south of Westhoek, but the right brigade could not get farther than the road east of Stirling Castle. On the whole, however, it was a good advance, and in the meantime the 24th Division had drawn closer to Lower Star Post, the obstinate strong point which had held up the 73rd Brigade upon July 31. The Germans showed their resentment at these new advances by five counter-attacks on the evening of August 10, all of which, especially the last, were strongly pressed. These attacks were most strongly made against the 76th Brigade on the left, but by the exertions of the 106th and 130th Field Companies Royal Engineers, and their pioneers, the 6th South Wales Borderers, they had consolidated to such an extent that they held out against extreme pressure. The 7th Bedfords and 7th Queen's in the front of the 18th Division had also much to endure, and were pushed to the very edge of Glencorse Wood. All day the Irish Riflemen in Westhoek could see the Germans in small bodies dribbling over into the Nannebeek valley in front of them until in the evening a large force had accumulated. From ten in the morning the drift had been going on. The 10th Cheshires and 3rd Worcesters of the 7th Brigade had come up to thicken the attenuated line, but the danger was threatening, and rockets and pigeons were sent up to warn the guns. A very heavy barrage was laid down by them and stopped the attack. The

enemy could be seen running for safety in every direction. At the same time an attack broke upon the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers to the north. An isolated house, which was occupied by a small party of this battalion, was so closely attacked that three Germans were shot as they clambered through the windows, but the North Countrymen stood fast, and forty-eight dead were picked up round this post in the morning. This ended the enemy's attempts to recover the lost ground. The fighting had been severe, and the British losses were heavy. For a second time within a year the 13th Cheshires had their commanding officer and every other officer of the battalion upon the casualty list. When one reads such figures one can ask with confidence whether all the exclusiveness of a special caste with its codes of honour and appeals to violence can exceed the quiet courage of those civilian gentlemen who undertook the leading of our new armies.

Six field-guns with 8 officers and 300 men were taken in this Westhoek operation. The enemy consisted of the German 54th Reserve Division, and all accounts agree that both in defence and in counter-attack their conduct was admirable.

The ground was still very wet and the conditions deplorable, but the advance must be continued at all costs if the preparations were not to be thrown away and winter to find us still within the old pent-house of Ypres. By the end of the second week in August the higher ground was beginning to dry, though the bogs in between were already hardly passable. One more fortnight would be invaluable, but Sir Douglas could not afford to waste another day. On August 16 the advance was renewed.

As the original attack had been from a concavity which was almost a semicircle, and as it had encroached upon the German area round the whole circumference, the result was that the front was now too large for simultaneous attack, and the whole of the units of Plumer's Army which had formerly taken part in the battle were now to the south of the storm-area. The line of battle extended from the French positions in the north down to the north-west corner of Inverness Wood. Along this line the four corps of Cavan (Fourteenth), Maxse (Eighteenth), Watts (Nineteenth), and Jacob (Second), were extended in their former order. In each case the divisions which had borne the brunt of July 31 were now in support, while the old supporting divisions were in the line. As before, we will take the Corps in their order from the north, premising that after the usual heavy bombardment the attack began at 4.45 in the morning.

Of the French upon the extreme left of the line it can only be said that they did all and more than they were asked to do. With the grand, swift dash which is the characteristic of their infantry they stormed the various fortified farms along the line of the Steenbeek, though some of them held out long after the main lines of our Allies had passed them. The two ends of the bridge which crosses the stream at the village of

Drie-Grachten were secured, and the whole of the peninsula made good.

The front of Cavan's Fourteenth Corps was formed by the grand old 29th Division on the left, and the 20th Light Division, the heroes of many fights, on the right. Both divisions lived up to their highest that day, which means that many a brave man died at his highest to carry on the record. On the whole, the Mebus or pill-boxes, the new German concrete forts, were less effective in the north than in the south, which may have depended upon the general lie of the country which gave them a shorter area of fire. Small bodies of brave men—sometimes a single brave man—managed to get up to them and to silence them by hurling a sudden bomb through the porthole from which the gun protruded.

The advance of the 29th Division was begun by crossing in the early dawn the bridges thrown over the Steenbeek. Starting from the line of the stream, the advanced mud-beplastered lines, extending as they crossed country, coalescing as they concentrated upon any obstacle, moved swiftly forwards to their objectives, which were taken in their entirety. Passerelle Farm was carried by the veterans of the 29th, and so was Martin's Mill upon the right, many prisoners being sent to the rear. Another heave took them across the grass-grown lines of the abandoned railway and on into the hamlet of Wijdendrift, the line being established well to the north-east of that place.

Whilst the 29th Division had made this fine advance on the left, the 20th had done equally well on the right, and had ended their brilliant attack by storming after a short but sharp contest the village of Langemarck, that old battle centre of 1914.

The start of the attack was as fine as its execution, for the two brigades were marshalled into their positions in pitch darkness upon ground which was bewildering in its badness, close under the untaken redoubt of Au Bon Gîte, whose garrison at any moment might give the alarm. So silent was the operation that the enemy was utterly ignorant of it, though they kept up a continual machine-gun fire all night which made the assemblage even more difficult. In the early dawn the German fort was rushed by two companies of the 11th Rifle Brigade under Captain Slade.

Then keeping within thirty yards of the barrage the attack moved forward as best it might through the swamps. The 60th Brigade was on the right and the 61st upon the left. The latter had never yet failed to carry its objective, and now it surged through the village of Langemarck and out at the farther side. The 12th King's Liverpools with the 7th Battalion of the Sussex, Durham and Yorkshire Light Infantry were the heroes of this exploit. The German colonel commanding the 3rd Battalion 261st Regiment, and a crowd of very shaken prisoners from the 79th Prussian Reserve Division were picked out of the ruins. On the right the 60th Brigade had made an equally fine advance, the King's Royal Rifles being on the flank in touch with the 12th King's Liverpools,

LINE OF BATTLE
August 16, 1917

with the 6th Shropshires on their right, while the 6th Oxford and Bucks cleared up the numerous pill-boxes at Au Bon Gîte on the banks of the Steenbeek. There were many casualties in the advance, including Colonel Prioleau of the Rifle Brigade, caused chiefly by the fire of the murderous Mebus which studded the ground. These were engaged by small groups of men, specially trained for the work, who frequently, by their cool, purposeful courage, succeeded in silencing what would seem to be an impenetrable stronghold. Sergeant Cooper of the Rifles attacked one of these places with twelve men, and had his whole party shot down. None the less, he closed with it, and firing through the loop-hole with a borrowed revolver, he caused the surrender of the garrison of forty men with seven guns, winning his V.C. Such deeds were done all along the line, and without them the advance must have been held up. Finally the 60th Brigade established themselves upon the line of Langemarck, in touch with the captors of the village, but in the late afternoon a heavy German attack broke in between the King's Liverpools and the Rifles, annihilating the left flank Company of the latter battalion, which fought desperately to the end under Captain Dove, who was among those who fell. So critical was the situation at one time that a defensive flank 200 yards in length was held by an officer and fifteen men, with hardly any cartridges in their pouches. Touch was kept, however, between the two Brigades, and before evening they had dug in and consolidated the new position. There had been victory along all this front, and by sunset the whole of the objectives of the Fourteenth Corps, with the exception of a small length of trench to the north-east of Langemarck, were in the hands of Cavan's infantry.

Maxse's Eighteenth Corps was formed by the 11th Division on the left, and the 48th South Midland Territorials on the right. The advance was over the Langemarck-Zonnebeke Road, and on over broken Mebus-studded country with no village nor even any farm-house to give a name and dignity to the considerable gain of ground. The advance was, though not complete, of great tactical importance, as it screened the flank of the successful corps in the north.

Brilliant success had marked the operations of the 14th Corps, and modified success those of the 18th. In the case of the four gallant divisions which formed the front of the Nineteenth and Second Corps, it can hardly be said that they had any gains, while their losses were always heavy, and in some cases simply disastrous. Yet conditions of weather, and ground and position being what they were, it was impossible to impute a shadow of blame to officers or men, who faced a difficult and often an impossible task with the spirit of heroes. To show how desperate that task was, and the extraordinary punishment which was endured by the infantry, the narrative of the 16th and 36th Divisions which formed Watts' Corps may be told at greater length. The 16th which is treated first was on the right of the Corps in the Frezenberg sector of the attack.

This division, which had occupied under torrential rain and heavy fire the Frezenberg Ridge since August 4, was much exhausted before the advance began. The losses had fallen mainly upon the 47th Brigade, which had held the line, but the attacking brigades which now took its place were by no means immune. On the day before the battle, Brigadier-General Leveson-Gower of the 49th Brigade and practically all his staff became casualties from gas poisoning, and the command had to be taken over by the C.O. of the Irish Fusiliers. So heavy was the pressure upon the division that 107 officers and 1900 men were on the casualty lists before the advance had begun. None the less, the spirit of the troops was high, and all were eager for the clash. On August 16 the attack was made at 4.45 in the morning, the 36th North of Ireland Division being on the left and the 8th on the right of the 16th Division. It was upon a two-brigade front, the 48th being on the right and the 49th on the left. So difficult were the conditions that it was only a quarter of an hour before zero that the concentration was complete, most of the troops being more fit for a rest than for a battle.

The line of advance was formed by the 7th Irish Rifles and 9th Dublin Fusiliers upon the right, while the 7th and 8th Inniskilling Fusiliers were on the left. At the signal they went forward over very heavy ground, the barrage slowing down to five minutes per hundred yards. We shall first follow the right attack.

Both the Irish Rifles and the Dublin Fusiliers found themselves at once within the sweep of numerous machine-guns which caused very heavy casualties. The Rifles for a time were in touch with the 2nd Middlesex of the 8th Division upon their right, but the latter got caught in their own barrage with the result that it had to fall back. The Rifles, who had lost practically every officer, moved down the railway and across the Hannebeek, but were so reduced in number that it was not possible for the few survivors to hold the German counter-attack advancing about 4 p.m. from Zonnebeke. The Dublin Fusiliers, who had wilted under a heavy enfilade fire from Vampire Farm and Bremen Redoubt, were in equally bad case, and all officers and orderlies who tried to get forward to the assaulting companies were killed or wounded. Two companies of the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers which came up in support shared in the catastrophe and were practically annihilated. Of one company two officers and three men survived unscathed. Of another one non-commissioned officer and ten men. Such figures will show the absolute devotion with which the Irishmen stuck to their work and are not, so far as can be known, exceeded by any losses endured by considerable units during the war. Some of these scattered remains lay out until the evening of August 17, endeavouring to hold a new line, until after dusk they fell back to the trenches from which they had started.

On the left the Inniskilling Fusiliers got away in fine style with the 7/8th Irish Fusiliers in close support moving so swiftly that they

avoided the German barrage. Beck House and other strong points were rapidly taken. A fort named Borry Farm upon the right could not be reduced, however, and its five machine-guns raked the advancing lines. Three separate attacks upon the concrete emplacements of this position all ended in failure. Part of the attacking force remained in front of the untaken position, while another portion passed it on the north side working on to the neighbourhood of Zevenkote. At this side there had been more success as the 7th Inniskillings had taken Iberian Trench and consolidated it. Thence they moved forward to the eminence called Hill 37, but met with heavy blasts of fire from that position and from Zonnebeke. The enemy now counter-attacked from Hill 37, and as the left flank of the Inniskillings was entirely exposed, since they had outrun the Ulster men upon their left, they were forced to retire to a position at Delva Farm. This was untenable, however, since both flanks were now exposed, so the whole line fell back to Iberian Trench. This, however, proved to be also impossible to hold on account of the truly terrible losses. In the whole force in that quarter of the field only one officer seems to have been left standing. Both the 8th Fusiliers on the right and the Ulster men on the left had retired, and by 9.30 a.m. there was no alternative for the shattered remnants of the 49th Brigade but to seek the shelter of their own line, while the 6th Connaughts and 7th Leinsters were brought up to support them. Of the 7th Inniskillings there were left one wounded officer and no formed body of men at all, while no other battalion of the brigade was of greater strength than half a company. It was indeed a dreadful day in all this Southern section of the line. The losses had been so heavy that no further attack could be organised, and in spite of the fact that scattered men were still lying out, it was impossible to form a new line. Upon the night of August 17 the 15th Division came forward again to relieve the exhausted but heroic infantry, who had done all that men could do, and more than men could be expected to do, but all in vain.

Nor had their brother Irishmen of Nugent's 36th Division on their left any better fortune. The failure of one division may always be due to some inherent weakness of its own, but when four divisions in line, of the calibre of the 36th, 16th, 8th and 56th all fail, then it can clearly be said, as on the first day of the Somme Battle, that they were faced by the impossible. This impossible obstacle took the immediate form of many concrete gun emplacements arranged chequer-wise across the front, each holding five guns. But the contributory causes in the case of all the divisions except the 56th was their long exposure in dreadful weather to a sustained bombardment which would have shaken the nerves of any troops in the world, apart from thinning their ranks. In the 16th Division alone 1200 men were under treatment for trench fever and swollen feet, besides the heavy losses from shell fire.

The fortunes of the 36th Ulster Division were in all ways similar to

those of the 16th. There was the same initial advance, the same experience of devastating fire from concrete strong points, the same slaughter, and the same retreat of a few survivors over ground which was dotted with the bodies of their comrades. Upon the right the attack was urged by the 108th Brigade with the 9th Irish Fusiliers on the right and the Irish Rifles on the left, with two other battalions of the same regiment in support. The attack starting from the line of Pommern Castle got forward as far as Gallipoli Farm, but there it was faced by a machine-gun fire, coming chiefly from Hill 35, which was simply annihilating in its effect. Only the remains of the 9th Irish Fusiliers ever got back to their original line. For many hours the Irish Rifles held on to the rising ground to the north-east of Pommern Castle, but by four in the afternoon the shattered 108th Brigade was back in its own trenches.

The attack of Jacob's Second Corps was carried out upon August 16 by two divisions, the 8th which had relieved the 25th in the Ypres-Roulers Railway-Westhoek line, and the 56th London Territorials which had relieved the 18th Division in the Glencorse Wood-Stirling Castle line.

The 8th Division advanced with the 23rd Brigade on the left and the 25th on the right. The barrage was excellent, the infantry were on the top of their form, and all went well. Starting at 4.45 a.m., within an hour they had taken Zonnebeke Redoubt, Iron Cross Redoubt, and Anzac. This marked their limit, however, for heavy machine-gun fire was sweeping across from machine-gun emplacements of concrete in Nonneboschen Wood in the south. The right flank of the 25th Brigade fell back therefore to the line of the Hannebeek, and the stormers of Zonnebeke Redoubt, men of the 2nd West Yorkshires, were compelled to fall back also to the same line. The Germans were now in an aggressive mood, and were seen several times advancing in large numbers down the wooded slopes in front of the British positions, but were always stopped by the heavy barrage. About 2.30 p.m. their pressure caused a short retirement, and the situation was made more difficult by the failure of the 23rd Brigade to find touch with the division upon their left. The pressure of the counter-attacks still continued, and the German losses were heavy, but the machine-gun fire was so deadly in the exposed Hannebeek Valley that a further withdrawal was ordered until the troops were almost in the line from which they had started.

The advance of the 56th Division on the right could not be said to be more successful. The 167th Brigade were on the left, the 169th in the centre with the desperate task of carrying Nonnebosch and Glencorse, while the hard-worked 53rd Brigade of the 18th Division was detailed to form a defensive flank upon the south. It was really the failure of this attack which contributed greatly to the failure of the whole, for there was a strong point at the north-west corner of Inverness Copse with

machine-gun emplacements which could sweep the area to the north over a wide arc. Thus all the troops north of this point were faced from the start by a devastating fire. The 167th Brigade got well forward to Nonneboschen, but was stopped by bogs and so fell behind the barrage. On the left they reached Albert Redoubt, but were driven in by a strong counter-attack. The 169th reached the east end of Glencorse Wood where they killed many Germans and captured sixty gunners, but the counter-attacks gradually drove the line back to whence it started. A German officer captured a few days later has described how he saw the London men, mostly without officers, walking slowly back in front of his advance. It was a day of hard slogging upon this sector with very little to show for it. So serious were the losses of the 56th Division that the 14th Division took its place next day, while the other London Territorial unit, the 47th Division (Gorringe), took over the line of the hard-worked 8th.

Thus we have passed down the whole line on August 16, and have noted the victory of the north, the stalemate of the centre, and the failure on the south. There can be no doubt that the losses of the British were very much in excess of those of the Germans, for the line of the latter could be held cheaply owing to the Mebus system which presented a new and formidable problem for the British generals. On the other hand the actual but rather scanty trophies of victory lay with the attack, since in the north they had possessed themselves of the German third line, and had captured 30 guns with more than 2000 prisoners.

During the wet and miserable fortnight which followed this engagement the British line was advanced at many points by local operations, each small in itself but yielding in the aggregate some hundreds of prisoners, and representing a gain of ground of about 800 yards for two miles upon the St. Julien front. The 11th and 48th Divisions which still held this sector were responsible for the greater part of this advance which was carried out by three efforts, on August 19, 22, and 27. On the earlier date the advance of the South Midlanders was particularly fine, when the 145th Brigade was heavily engaged, the Gloucesters and Buckinghams leading a fine assault which gained an appreciable section of ground. The bombing parties of the 4th Berkshires, a battalion recruited from Reading, did particularly good service, following up the first line and reducing a number of strong points which had been left untaken. The losses among the stormers were heavy, but the results were substantial and there were some hundreds of prisoners. Especially fine during this and subsequent actions was the conduct of the field-gunners, British, Canadian, and Australian, who habitually worked their guns in the open with their horses in attendance, changing positions, advancing and unlimbering in the good old fashion with no attempt at camouflage, and defiant of the German shells or aeroplanes. The team-drivers had little to do in the war up to now, but when their chance

came they and their gallant horses went through the barrage and the poison clouds as if they were no more than London fogs. The admiration of the gunners for each other was mutual. Mr. Bean, the Australian chronicler, narrates how a British artillery Major complimented the neighbouring Australian battery saying: "We could not believe you could carry on in such a fire": to which the Australian Major replied: "Well, do you know, we were thinking exactly the same thing about you." Of such are the ties of Empire.

On August 22 the 14th Division carried out an attack upon Glencorse and Inverness Woods, going over the top at 7 a.m. The 42nd Brigade was on the left facing Glencorse, the 43rd on the right facing Inverness. The light infantry battalions went forward in fine style, the 5th Shropshires and 6th Cornwalls upon the left carrying all before them and attaining their full objective, which was strictly limited in its extent. This was held and consolidated. The 6th Somersets and 10th Durhams went forward on the right, but the fighting was severe and the progress slow. None the less it was sure, and before evening the greater part of Inverness Copse was in the hands of these four battalions, together with nearly 200 prisoners. An attempt next morning, August 23, to capture FitzClarence Farm, just north of Inverness Copse, though supported by three tanks, was not a success, two of the tanks being hit by gun-fire and the third reaching the Farm without any infantry at its heels. At the same time a counter-attack upon the 5th Shropshires was beaten back by rifle fire. On the next day there was still heavy fighting in this sector, for the Germans could not bear to give up this wood, and made many attempts to regain it. The 42nd Brigade held every inch of their line in Glencorse, but the 43rd were pushed back to the western edge of Inverness where they held on.

There had been a slight forward movement upon each side of the 14th Division during these three days of battle, the 47th Division taking an advanced line in the north, while the steadfast 24th, still in the line of battle, came forward in the south. The 17th Brigade on the right of the 14th Division guarded its flank during the advance, and a dashing exploit was performed by one of its officers, Lieutenant Stonebanks of the 1st Royal Fusiliers, who took a strong point with its garrison by a sudden attack, so gaining his cross.

Among the other operations which were carried out between the larger engagements in the hope of improving the local position were a series which covered the ground from Fortuin in the north to the south of the Roulers Railway. This point, which was still occupied by the Nineteenth Corps, was covered upon the left by the 61st Division, a second line English Territorial unit, which faced Hill 35, while on the right the 15th Division had come back into the battle once more. These two divisions made two advances on August 22 and on August 27 in an endeavour to enlarge their front, but neither was successful. Early in September Mitford's 42nd Division, which had returned with a con-

siderable reputation from Gallipoli, took the place of the hard-worked 15th. On September 6 they endeavoured to get forward, but the fact that Hill 37 on their left flank had not been taken proved fatal to their advance. The ground was swept from this position of vantage so that when the 42nd Division went forward on September 6 to try and storm the line of farms, Iberian, Beck, and Borry, which lay in front of them, they were smitten on their left flank by this deadly fire and suffered heavy losses—the more heavy because with heroic tenacity they held to their task long after its failure was inevitable. Fergus' 125th Brigade showed an intrepidity in this attack which in any former war would have been historical, but in this prolonged exhibition of human and military virtue does but take its place among many as good. The 5th and 6th Lancashire Fusiliers who led the stormers had practically ceased to exist after the action, while the 7th and 8th in support had heavy losses. The general lesson of such attacks would seem to be here, as on the Somme, that it is better to wait for a general advance in order to rectify inequalities of the line, rather than to approach them by local attacks—also that an untaken strong point upon the flank is absolutely fatal to any isolated effort. From this time onwards the line was quiet, making preparation for the great coming attack.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

September 6 *to October* 3, 1917

Engagement of Plumer's Second Army—Attack of September 20—Fine advance of 58th Division—Advance of the 9th Division—Of the Australians—Strong counter-attack upon the 33rd Division—Renewed advance on September 26—Continued rain—Desperate fighting.

THE attack of August 16, with its varying and not wholly satisfactory results, had been carried out entirely by the armies of Antoine and of Gough. It was clear now to Sir Douglas Haig that the resistance of the Germans was most formidable along the line of the Menin Road, where the long upward slope and the shattered groves which crowned it made an ideal position for defence. To overcome this obstacle a new force was needed, and accordingly the Second Army was closed up to the north, and the command in this portion of the field was handed over to General Plumer. This little white-haired leader with his silky manner, his eye-glass, and his grim, inflexible resolution, had always won the confidence of his soldiers, but the complete victory of Messines, with the restraint which had prevented any aftermath of loss, had confirmed the whole army in its high appreciation of his powers.

These changes in the line, together with the continued rain, which went from bad to worse, had the effect of suspending operations during the remainder of the month save for the smaller actions already recorded. Fresh dispositions had to be made also in order to meet the new German method of defence, which had abandoned the old trench system, and depended now upon scattered strong points, lightly held front lines, and heavy reserves with which to make immediate counter-attacks upon the exhausted stormers. The concrete works called also for a different artillery treatment, since they were so strong that an eighteen-pounder or even a 5.9 gun made little impression. These new problems all pressed for solution, and the time, like the days, was growing shorter.

The front of the new attack on September 20 was about eight miles in length, and corresponded closely with the front attacked on July 31, save that it was contracted in the north so that Langemarck was its limit upon this side. Upon the south the flank was still fixed by the Ypres-Comines Cana., just north of Hollebeke. The scheme of the limited

objective was closely adhered to, so that no advance of more than a mile was contemplated at any point, while a thousand yards represented the average depth of penetration which was intended. The weather, which had given a treacherous promise of amendment, broke again upon the very night of the assembly, and the troops were drenched as they lay waiting for the signal to advance. Towards morning the rain stopped, but drifting clouds and a dank mist from the saturated soil deprived the attackers of the help of their aircraft—so serious a handicap to the guns. But the spirits of the men rose with the difficulties, after the good old British fashion, and at 5.40 on this most inclement morning, wet and stiff and cold, they went forward with cheerful alacrity into the battle.

The field of operations was now covered by two British armies, that of Gough in the north extending from beyond Langemarck to the Zonnebeke front, while Plumer's Army covered the rest of the line down to Hollebeke. It may be said generally that the task of the men in the south was the more difficult, since they had farther to advance over country which had seemed to be almost impregnable. None the less the advance in the north was admirably executed and reached its full objectives. Cavan's Fourteenth Corps still held the extreme north of the British line, but neither they nor the French upon their left were really engaged in the advance. They covered the front as far south as Schreiboom, where the right of the 20th Division joined on to the left of the 51st Highlanders. This latter division formed the left flank of the main advance, though the 59th Brigade, the 60th Brigade, and the 2nd Brigade of Guards did push their line some short distance to the front, on either side of the Ypres-Staden Railway, the 59th Brigade capturing Eagle Trench and the 60th Eagle House. This was a very formidable position, crammed with machine-guns, and it took four days for its conquest, which was a brilliant feat of arms carried out by men who would be discouraged by no obstacle. The garrison were picked troops, who fought desperately, and everything was against the attack, but its pertinacity wore down the defence and eventually, on Sept. 23, the 10th Rifle Brigade and the 12th Royal Rifles cleared up the last corner of the widespread stronghold.

The hard-worked Highland Territorials of the 51st Division were worn with service but still full of fire. Their advance was also an admirable one, and by nine o'clock they had overcome all obstacles and dug in upon their extreme objective. Quebec Farm was a special stronghold which held the Highlanders up for a time, but finally fell to their determined assault. Rose Farm, Delva Farm, and Pheasant Farm were also strongly defended. About 10 a.m. many strong counter-attacks were made in this area, one of which for a time drove back the line of the Highlanders, but only for a short period. This particular attack was a very gallant one effected by Poles and Prussians of the 36th and 208th Divisions. It was noted on this day that the Prussians fought markedly better than the Bavarians, which has not always been the case.

The method adopted both by the Highland Division and in some other parts of the line in order to overcome strong points, such as farms, was a concentration of portable trench-mortars firing heavy charges with a shattering effect. Pheasant Farm was a particularly difficult proposition, and yet it was so smothered by a cloud of these missiles that the distracted garrison was compelled to surrender. This use of what may be called a miniature and mobile heavy artillery became a feature of the last year of the war.

Next to the 51st Division, and covering the ground to the north and east of St. Julien was Cator's 58th Division, a new unit of second line London Territorials which had done a good deal of rough service in the line, but had not yet been engaged in an important advance. Upon this occasion it bore out the old saying that British troops are often on their top form in a first engagement. Their advance was a brilliant one and attained its full objective, taking upon the way the strongly-fortified position of Wurst Farm. Nowhere in the line was the ground more sodden and more intersected with water jumps. The 173rd Brigade was on the right, the 174th upon the left, the former being led by General Freyberg, the young hero of the Ancre Battle and the youngest Brigadier, save perhaps one, in the whole army. It was a magnificent battle *début* for the Londoners and their coolness under fire was particularly remarkable, for in facing the difficult proposition of Wurst Farm they avoided making a frontal attack upon it by swinging first left and then right with all the workmanlike precision of veterans. The capture of Hubner Farm by the 2/6th and 2/8th London was also a particularly fine performance, as was the whole work of Higgins' 174th Brigade.

The two divisions last mentioned, the 51st and the 58th, formed the fighting line of Maxse's Eighteenth Corps on this day. On their right was Fanshawe's Fifth Corps, which had taken the place of the Nineteenth Corps. The most northern division was that sterling West Lancashire Territorial Division, Jeudwine's 55th, which had now been in and out of the fighting line but never out of shell-fire since the evening of July 31, or seven weeks in all. In spite of its long ordeal, and of the vile ground which lay at its front, it advanced with all its usual determination, the 164th Brigade on the left and the 165th on the right, each of them being stiffened by one battalion from the Reserve Brigade. The 8th Liverpool Irish were on the extreme left, which moved down the left bank of the Hannebeek and struck up against the difficult obstacle of Schuber Farm, which they succeeded, with the co-operation of the 2/4th London and of two tanks, in carrying by assault. Farther south a second farm-house, strongly held, called the Green House, was carried by the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, while the 4th North Lancashires took Fokker Farm upon the right. When one considers that each of these was a veritable fortress, stuffed with machine-guns and defended by the 2nd Guards Reserve regiment, one cannot but marvel at the efficiency to which these Territorial soldiers had attained. The

4th Royal Lancasters kept pace on the right. The advance of the 165th Brigade was equally successful in gaining ground, and there also were formidable obstacles in their path. After crossing the Steenbeek they had to pass a very heavy barrage of high explosives and shrapnel which, however, burst upon percussion and was neutralised to some extent by the softness of the ground. The line of advance was down the Gravenstafel Road. A formidable line of trenches was carried and Kavnorth Post was captured, as were Iberian and Gallipoli, strong points on the right. A counter-attack in the afternoon, which moved down against the two brigades, was broken by their rifle-fire, aided by the advent of the two supporting battalions, the 5th South Lancashires and 5th North Lancashires. The ground thus taken was strongly held until next evening, September 21, when under cover of a very heavy fire the enemy penetrated once more into the positions in the area of the 164th Brigade. Just as darkness fell, however, there was a fine advance to regain the ground, in which the whole of the headquarters staff, with bearers, signallers, runners, and men-servants swept up to the position which was captured once more. Among other positions taken on September 20 was Hill 37, which had been so formidable a stronghold for the Germans in the murderous fighting of August 16. This commanding point was taken and held by the 5th, 6th and 9th King's Liverpools, with part of the 5th South Lancashires, all under the same officer who led the 36th Brigade in their fine attack upon Ovillers. The position was strongly organised, and on the next day it beat back a very determined German counter-attack.

The 9th Division was on the right of the 55th with the South Africans on the left flank. At the opening of the attack the 3rd (Transvaal) and 4th (Scottish) South African regiments advanced upon the German line. Within an hour the latter had carried Borry Farm, which had defied several previous assaults. At eight o'clock both these regiments had reached their full objectives and the supporting units, the 1st (Cape) and 2nd (Natal) regiments went through their ranks, the men of the Transvaal cheering the men of Natal and the Cape as they passed. By 9.30 the second objectives, including Beck House, had also fallen. There was a considerable concentration of Germans beyond, and the 5th Camerons came up in support, as an attack appeared to be imminent. The artillery fire dispersed the gathering, however, and the 2nd Regiment spreading out on the left to Waterend House established touch with the Lancashire men to their north. Bremen Redoubt had been captured, and this was made a nodal point against any counter-attack, as was Vampire Redoubt. By midday the 1st Regiment on the right had lost heavily and was forced to dig in and act upon the defensive as German concentrations were visible in the Hannebeek Woods. A second battalion of the 26th Brigade, the 7th Seaforths, were at this time sent up in support. The left flank was also checked and a defensive post organised at Mitchell's Farm. The shelling from the direction of

Hill 37 was very heavy, the more so as the Africans were ahead of the 165th Brigade upon their left. A number of German aeroplanes flying low and using their machine-guns complicated a situation which was already sufficiently serious, for the small-arm ammunition was running low and only a few hundred exhausted men with a thin sprinkling of officers remained in the fighting line. The artillery played up splendidly, however, and though the enemy massed together at Bostin Farm he could never get a sufficient head of troops to carry him through the pelting British barrage. Thus the day drew to a close with heavy losses cheerfully borne, and also with a fine gain of ground, which included several of the most sinister strong points upon the whole line. The South Africans have been few in number, but it cannot be disputed that their record in the field has been a superb one.

In the meantime the 27th Brigade, on the right of the South Africans, had also done a splendid day's work. In the first dash the battalion on the left front, the 12th Royal Scots, had taken Potsdam Redoubt with its garrison. Thence the line rolled on, the Scots Fusiliers and Highland Light Infantry joining in turn in the advance, until evening found them with the same difficulties and also with the same success as their African comrades. As night fell this right wing was in touch with the Australians near Anzac, and thence passed through the wood and along the railway bank to the junction with the left brigade, which in turn stretched across to Gallipoli and to Hill 37, which was now in the hands of their Lancashire neighbours and bristling with their machine-guns. That night the 9th Division lay upon the ground that they had won, but the men had been without sleep or warm food for three days and nights under continual fire, so that, hardy as they were, they had nearly reached the limit of human endurance. It is worthy of remark that the wounded in this part of the field were attended to in many cases by captured German surgeons, and that one of these had an experience of Prussian amenities, for his brains were scattered by a sniper's bullet.

The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions joined the left unit of Plumer's Army, but worked in close co-operation with the 9th Division on their right. In a day of brilliant exploits and unqualified successes there was nothing to beat their performance, for they were faced by that which tries the nerves of the stoutest troops—an area which has already been tested and found to be impregnable. With all the greater fire did the brave Australian infantry throw itself into the fray, and they had the advantage over their predecessors in that the line was well up on either side of them, and that enemy guns upon their flanks were too busy upon their own front to have a thought of enfilading. The result of the Australian advance was instant and complete, for the remainder of Glencorse Wood and Nonneboschen were overrun and by ten o'clock the " Diggers " were through the hamlet of Polygonveld and into the original German third line beyond it. The western part of Polygon Wood was also cleared, and so, after a sharp fight, was the strong point

called " Black Watch Corner," which is at the south-western extremity of the wood. At this point the advance of the Australians was not less than a mile in depth over ground which presented every possible obstacle. Over at least one of their captured redoubts their own Australian flag with the Southern Cross upon it was floating proudly in the evening. The losses of the division were serious, the greater part being due to an enfilade fire from the right, coming probably from the high ground in the south near Tower Hamlets, which struck their flank as they approached the south of Polygon Wood. Anzac upon the left marked their northern limit. Nothing could have been finer than the whole Australian attack. " They went into battle," says their scribe, " not singing and laughing like many British regiments, but very grim, very silent, with their officers marching quietly at the head of each small string of men." They are dour, determined fighters, flame-like in attack, iron in defence, and they have woven a fresh and brilliant strand into the traditions of the Imperial armies. It should be mentioned that it was the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 7th Brigades which carried forward the line to victory.

Good as the Australian advance had been it could not be said to have been better than Babington's 23rd Division on their right. They, too, had to cross ground which had been littered by the bodies of their comrades, and to pass points which brave men had found impassable. But all went well upon this day, and every objective was seized and held. Inverness Copse, of evil memory, was occupied at the first rush, and the advance went forward without a check to Dumbarton Lakes and on past them until the Veldhoek Ridge had fallen. A counter-attack which broke upon them was driven back in ruin. The advance was across the marshy Basseville Beek and through the dangerous woods beyond, but from first to last there was never a serious check. It was on the Yorkshires, the West Yorkshires, and the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 68th and 69th Brigades that the brunt of the early fighting fell, and as usual the North-country grit proved equal to the hardest task which could be set before it. The final stage which carried the Veldhoek Ridge was also a North-country exploit in this section of the line, as it was the 10th West Ridings and the 12th Durhams, who with fixed bayonets cleared the ultimate positions, reaching the western slopes of the upper Steenbeek Valley where they dug in the new temporary lines.

On the extreme south of the line the advance had been as successful as elsewhere, and at nearly every point the full objective was reached. Upon the right of the 23rd Division was the 41st, a sound English Division which had distinguished itself at the Somme by the capture of Flers. The leading brigades, the 122nd and 124th, with Royal Fusiliers, King's Royal Rifles, and Hampshires in the lead, lost heavily in the advance. The snipers and machine-guns were very active upon this front, but each obstacle was in turn surmounted, and about 8.30 the Reserve Brigade, the 123rd, came through and completed the morning's

work, crossing the valley of the Basseville Beek and storming up the slope of the Tower Hamlets, a strong position just south of the Menin Road. Among the points which gave them trouble was the Papooje Farm, which was found to be a hard nut to crack—but cracked it was, all the same. This same brigade suffered much from machine-guns east of Bodmin Copse, both it and the 124th Brigade being held up at the Tower Hamlet Plateau, which exposed the wing of the 122nd, who had reached all their objectives. So great was the pressure that the Brigadier of the 124th Brigade came up personally to reorganise the attack. The 11th West Kent, the southern unit of the 122nd, had their right flank entirely exposed to German fire. Two young subalterns, Freeman and Woolley, held this dangerous position for some time with their men, but Freeman was shot by a sniper, the losses were heavy, and the line had to be drawn in. Colonel Corfe of the 11th West Kent and Colonel Jarvis of the 21st K.R.R. were among the casualties. In spite of all counter-attacks the evening found the left of the 41st Division well established in its new line, and only short of its full objective in this difficult region of the Tower Hamlets, where for the following two days it had to fight hard to hold a line. The losses were heavy in all three brigades.

On the right of the 41st and joining the flank unit of Morland's Tenth Corps was Feetham's 39th Division. This Division attacked upon a single brigade front, the 117th having the post of honour. The 16th and 17th Sherwood Foresters, the 17th Rifles, and the 16th Rifle Brigade were each in turn engaged in a long morning's conflict in which they attained their line, which was a more limited one than that of the divisions to the north.

South of this point, and forming the flank of the whole attack, was the 19th Division, which advanced with the West-countrymen of the 57th Brigade on the right, and the Welshmen of the 58th Brigade on the left. Their course was down the spur east of Zillebeke and then into the small woods north of the Ypres-Comines Canal. The 8th Gloucesters, 10th Worcesters, 8th North Staffords, 6th Wiltshires, 9th Welsh, and 9th Cheshires each bore their share of a heavy burden and carried it on to its ultimate goal. The objectives were shorter than at other points, but had special difficulties of their own, as every flank attack is sure to find. By nine o'clock the work was thoroughly done, and the advance secured upon the south, the whole Klein Zillebeke sector having been made good. The captors of La Boisselle had shown that they had not lost their power of thrust.

This first day of the renewed advance represented as clean-cut a victory upon a limited objective as could be conceived. The logical answer to the German determination to re-arrange his defences by depth was to refuse to follow to depth, but to cut off his whole front which was thinly held, and then by subsequent advances take successive slices off his line. The plan worked admirably, for every point aimed at was

gained, the general position was greatly improved, the losses were moderate, and some three thousand more prisoners were taken. The Germans have been ingenious in their various methods of defence, but history will record that the Allies showed equal skill in their quick modifications of attack, and that the British during this year's campaign had a most remarkable record in never being once held by any position which they attacked, save only partially at Cambrai. It is true that on some sections, as in the south of the line on August 16, there might be a complete check, but in every action one or other part of the attack had a success. In this instance it was universal along the line.

The Germans did not sit down quietly under their defeat, but the reserve counter-attack troops came forward at once. Instead, however, of finding the assailants blown and exhausted, as they would have been had they attempted a deep advance, they found them in excellent fettle, and endured all the losses which an unsuccessful advance must bring. There were no less than eleven of these attempts upon the afternoon and evening of September 20, some of them serious and some perfunctory, but making among them a great total of loss. They extended over into September 21, but still with no substantial success. As has already been recorded, the front of the 55th Division, at Schuler Farm, east of St. Julien, was for a time driven in, but soon straightened itself out again. In this advance, which embraced the whole front near St. Julien, the German columns came with the fall of evening driving down from Gravenstafel and following the line of the Roulers Railway. They deployed under cover of a good barrage, but the British guns got their exact range and covered them with shrapnel. They were new unshaken troops and came on with great steadiness, but the losses were too heavy and the British line too stiff. Their total lodgment was not more than 300 yards, and that they soon lost again. By nine o'clock all was clear. Among the British defences the ex-German pill-boxes were used with great effect as a safe depository for men and munitions. This considerable German attack in the north was succeeded next day by an even larger and more concentrated effort which surged forward on the line of the Menin Road, the fresh 16th Bavarian Division beating up against the 33rd and the Australian Divisions. There was some fierce give-and-take fighting with profuse shelling upon either side, but save for some local indentations the positions were all held. The Victorians upon the right flank of the Australians' position at Polygon Wood were strongly attacked and held their ground all day. Pinney's 33rd Division had come into line, and the German attack on the morning of September 25 broke with especial fury upon the front of the 98th Brigade, which fought with a splendid valour which marks the incident as one of the outstanding feats of arms in this great battle. Small groups of men from the two regular battalions, the 1st Middlesex and the 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands, were left embedded within the German lines after their first successful rush, but they held out with the greatest determination

and either fought their way back or held on in little desperate groups until they were borne forward again next day upon the wave of the advancing army.

The weight of the attack was so great, however, that the front of the 98th Brigade was pushed back, and there might have been a serious set-back had it not been for the iron resistance of the 100th Brigade, who stretched south to the Menin Road, joining hands with the 11th Sussex of the 39th Division upon the farther side. The 100th Brigade was exposed to a severe assault all day most gallantly urged by the German 50th Reserve Division and supported by a terrific bombardment. It was a terrible ordeal, but the staunch battalions who met it, the 4th Liverpools who linked up with their comrades of the 98th Brigade, the 2nd Worcesters, 9th Highland Light Infantry, and 1st Queen's, were storm-proof that day. On the Menin Road side the two latter battalions were pushed in for a time by the weight of the blow, and lost touch with the 39th Division, but the Colonel of the Queen's, reinforced by some of the 16th K.R.R., pushed forward again with great determination, and by 9 a.m. had fully re-occupied the support line, as had the 9th Highland Light Infantry upon their left. So the situation remained upon the night of the 25th, and the further development of the British counter-attack became part of the general attack of September 26. It had been a hard tussle all day, in the course of which some hundreds in the advanced line had fallen into the hands of the enemy. It should be mentioned that the troops in the firing-line were occasionally short of ammunition during the prolonged contest, and that this might well have caused disaster had it not been for the devoted work of the 18th Middlesex Pioneer Battalion who, under heavy fire and across impossible ground, brought up the much-needed boxes and bandoliers. The resistance of the 33rd Division was greatly helped by the strong support of the Australians on their flank. It was remarkable, and typical of the inflexibility of Sir Douglas Haig's leadership and the competence of his various staffs, that the fact that this severe action was raging did not make the least difference in his plans for the general attack on September 26.

At 5.50 in the morning of that date, in darkness and mist, the wonderful infantry was going forward as doggedly as ever over a front of six miles, extending from the north-east of St. Julien to the Tower Hamlets south of the Menin Road. The latter advance was planned to be a short one, and the real object of the whole day's fighting was to establish a good jumping-off place for an advance upon the important Broodseinde Ridge. Some of the war-worn divisions had been drawn out and fresh troops were in the battle line. The Northern Corps was not engaged, and the flank of the advance was formed by Ritchie's 11th Division with the 58th Londoners on their right, the two forming the fighting front of Maxse's Eighteenth Corps. Their advance, which was entirely successsful and rapidly gained its full objectives, was along

the line of St. Julien-Poelcapelle Road. The total gain here, and in most other points of the line, was about 1000 yards.

On the right of Maxse's Corps was the 58th Division, which also secured its full objective. The German line upon this front was held by the 23rd Saxon Division (Reserve), which yielded a number of prisoners. The Londoners fought their way down the line of the Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road, overcoming a series of obstacles and reaching the greater portion of their objectives. There were no notable geographical points to be captured, but the advance was a fine performance which showed that the 58th was a worthy compeer of those other fine London territorial divisions which had placed the reputation of the mother city at the very front of all the Imperial Armies. The 47th, the 56th, the 58th, and the 60th in Palestine had all shown how the citizen-soldier of the Metropolis could fight.

Fanshawe's Corps consisted on this date of the 59th Division on the left, and the 3rd upon the right. The 59th Division, which consisted of second-line battalions of North Midland Territorials, made a fine advance on the right of the Gravenstafel Road, keeping touch with the Londoners on the left. Here also almost the whole objective was reached. The German positions, though free from fortified villages, were very thick with every sort of mechanical obstruction, in spite of which the attack went smoothly from start to finish. It is clear that the British advance was fully expected at the south end of the line, but that for some reason, probably the wretched state of the ground, it was not looked for in the north.

The 3rd Division had kept pace with the Australians to the south and with the Midlanders to the north, and had captured the village and church of Zonnebeke, which formed their objective. Very strong counter-attacks upon all the part of the line to the immediate north of Polygon Wood were beaten down by the masterful fire of the British artillery.

To the right of the Fifth Corps the Australians pursued their victorious career, going to their full limit, which entailed the possession of the whole of Polygon Wood. The 4th and 5th Divisions were now in the battle line. Pushing onwards they crossed the road which connects Bacelaer with Zonnebeke, and established themselves firmly on the farther side south of Zonnebeke. Some 300 prisoners with a number of machine-guns were taken in this fine advance. The pressure upon the Australians was especially heavy on the right flank of the 5th Australian Division, since the left of the 33rd Division had been driven in, as already described, by the very heavy German attacks on September 25, so that the Victorians of the 15th Australian Brigade at the south end of the line started with their flank exposed. They were in close touch throughout with the 19th Brigade of the British Division, and the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers found themselves intermingled with the Victorians in the advance, with whom they co-operated in the capture of Jut Farm.

It was a fine feat for the Victorians to advance at all under such circumstances, for as they went forward they had continually to throw out a defensive flank, since the Germans had re-occupied many of the trenches and Mebus, from which they had been ejected upon the 20th. This strip of ground remained for a time with the Germans, but the 33rd Division had also advanced upon the right of it, so that it was left as a wedge protruding into the British position. Cameron House was taken at the joining point of the two divisions, and gradually the whole of the lost ground was re-absorbed.

To the right of the Australians the 33rd Division went forward also to its extreme objective, gathering up as it went those scattered groups of brave men who had held out against the German assault of the preceding day. This gallant division had a particularly hard time, as its struggle against the German attack on the day before had been a very severe one, which entailed heavy losses. Some ground had been lost at the Veldhoek Trench north of the Menin Road, where the 100th Brigade was holding the line, but this had been partially regained, as already described, by an immediate attack by the 1st Queen's West Surreys and 9th Highland Light Infantry. The 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands were still in the front line, but for the second time this year this splendid battalion was rescued from the desperate situation which only such tried and veteran soldiers could have carried through without disaster. Immediately before the attack of September 26, just after the assembly of the troops, the barrage which the Germans had laid down in order to cover their own advance beat full upon the left of the divisional line, near Glencorse Wood, and inflicted such losses that it could not get forward at zero, thus exposing the Victorians, as already recorded. Hence, although the 100th Brigade succeeded in regaining the whole of the Veldhoek Trench on the right, there was an unavoidable gap on the left between Northampton Farm and Black Watch Corner. The division was not to be denied, however, and by a splendid effort before noon the weak spot had been cleared up by the Scottish Rifles, the 4th King's Liverpools, and the 4th Suffolks, so that the line was drawn firm between Veldhoek Trench in the south and Cameron House in the north. A counter-attack by the 4th Guards Division was crushed by artillery fire, and a comic sight was presented, if anything can be comic in such a tragedy, by a large party of the Guards endeavouring to pack themselves into a pill-box which was much too small to receive them. Many of them were left lying outside the entrance.

Farther still to the right, and joining the flank of the advance, the 39th Division, like its comrades on the left, found a hard task in front of it, the country both north and south of the Menin Road being thickly studded with strong points and fortified farms. It was not until the evening of September 27, after incurring heavy losses, that they attained their allotted line. This included the whole of the Tower Hamlets spur with the German works upon the farther side of it. The extreme

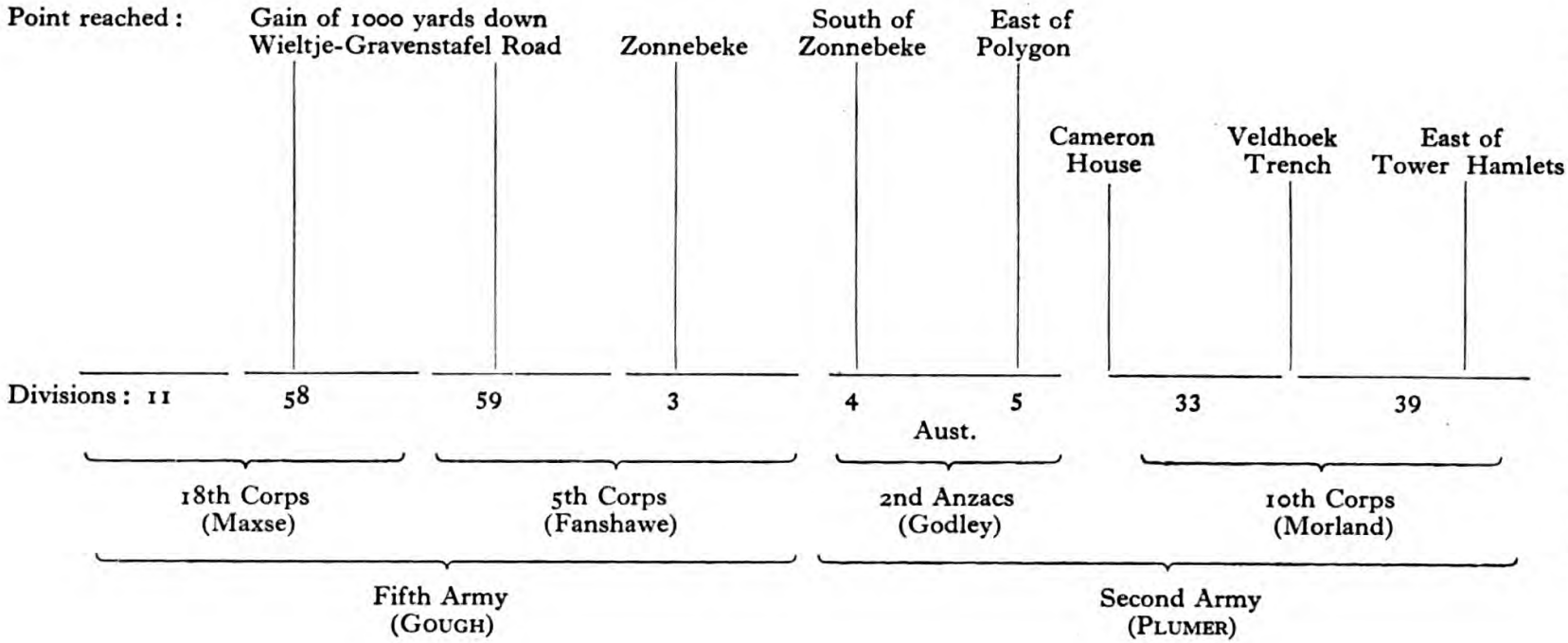
right flank was held up owing to German strong points on the east of Bitter Wood, but with this exception all the objectives were taken and held by the 116th and 118th, the two brigades in the line. The fighting fell with special severity upon the 4th Black Watch and the 1st Cambridge of the latter brigade, and upon the 14th Hants and the Sussex battalions of the former, who moved up to the immediate south of the Menin Road. The losses of all the battalions engaged were very heavy, and the 111th Brigade of the 37th Division had to be sent up at once in order to aid the survivors to form a connected line.

The total result of the action of September 26 was a gain of over half a mile along the whole front, the capture of 1600 prisoners with 48 officers, and one more proof that the method of the broad, shallow objective was an effective answer to the new German system of defence by depth. It was part of that system to have shock troops in immediate reserve to counter-attack the assailants before they could get their roots down, and therefore it was not unexpected that a series of violent assaults should immediately break upon the British positions along the whole newly-won line. These raged during the evening of September 26, but they only served to add greatly to the German losses, showing them that their ingenious conception had been countered by a deeper ingenuity which conferred upon them all the disadvantages of the attack. For four days there was a comparative quiet upon the line, and then again the attacks carried out by the 19th Reserve Division came driving down to the south of Polygon Wood, but save for ephemeral and temporary gains they had no success. The Londoners of the 58th Division had also a severe attack to face on September 28 and lost two posts, one of which they recovered the same evening.

Up to now the weather had held, and the bad fortune which had attended the British for so long after August 1 seemed to have turned. But the most fickle of all the gods once more averted her face, and on October 3 the rain began once more to fall heavily in a way which announced the final coming of winter. None the less the work was but half done, and the Army could not be left under the menace of the commanding ridge of Paschendaale. At all costs the advance must proceed.

THIRD YPRES BATTLE

September 26



CHAPTER XL

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

October 4 to November 10, 1917

Attack of October 4—Further advance of the British line—Splendid advance of second-line Territorials—Good work of H.A.C. at Reutel—Abortive action of October 12—Action of October 26—Heavy losses at the south end of the line—Fine fighting by the Canadian Corps—Capture of Paschendaale—General results of third Battle of Ypres.

AT early dawn on October 4, under every possible disadvantage of ground and weather, the attack was renewed, the infantry advancing against the main line of the ridge east of Zonnebeke. The front of the movement measured about seven miles, as the sector south of the Menin Road was hardly affected. The Ypres-Staden railway in the north was the left flank of the Army, so that the Fourteenth Corps was once more upon the move. We will trace the course of the attack from this northern end of the line. Cavan's Corps had two divisions in front—the 29th on the left and the 4th on the right, two fine old regular units which had seen as much fighting as any in the Army. The Guards held a defensive flank together with the French between Houthulst Forest and the Staden railway. The advance of the 29th was along the line of the railway, and it covered its moderate objectives without great loss or difficulty. Vesten Farm represented the limit of the advance.

The 4th Division (Matheson) started from a point east of Langemarck and ended from 1000 to 1500 yards farther on. They advanced upon a two-brigade front with the 11th Brigade on the right, with the northern edge of Poelcapelle as its objective, while the 10th Brigade on the left moved upon the line of 19-Metre Hill. The fire from this strong point was very severe, and it drove back the 2nd Seaforths, who were the right battalion of the 10th Brigade, thus exposing the flank of the 1st Hants, who were on the left of the 11th. The veteran Highlanders soon rallied, however, and the line was strengthened at the gap by the advance into it of the 1st East Lancashires. Both the Seaforths and the Lancashire men lost very heavily, however, by a devastating fire from machine-guns. The 1st Somersets upon the right had a misadventure through coming under the fire of British artillery, which caused them for a time to fall back. They came on again, however, and established touch with the

33rd Brigade, who had occupied Poelcapelle. There the 4th Division lay on their appointed line, strung out over a wide front, crouching in heavy rain amid the mud of the shell-holes, each group of men unable during the day to see or hold intercourse with the other, and always under fire from the enemy. It was an experience which, extended from day to day in this and other parts of the line, makes one marvel at the powers of endurance latent in the human frame. An officer who sallied forth to explore has described the strange effect of that desolate, shell-ploughed landscape, half-liquid in consistence, brown as a fresh-turned field, with no movement upon its hideous expanse, although every crevice and pit was swarming with life, and the constant snap of the sniper's bullet told of watchful, unseen eyes. Such a chaos was it that for three days there was no connection between the left of the 4th and the right of the 29th, and it was not until October 8 that Captain Harston of the 11th Brigade, afterwards slain, together with Lieut. Conan Doyle[1] ran the gauntlet of the sharp-shooters, and after much searching and shouting saw a rifle waved from a pit, which gave him the position of the right flank of the 16th Middlesex. It was fortunate he did so, as the barrage of the succeeding morning would either have overwhelmed the 4th Division or been too far forward for the 29th.

Upon the right of the 4th Division was the 11th. Led by several tanks, the 33rd Brigade upon the left broke down all obstacles and captured the whole of the western half of the long straggling street which forms the village of Poelcapelle. Their comrades upon the right had no such definite mark before them, but they made their way successfully to their objective.

Upon the right of the 11th Division, the 48th South Midland Territorials had a most difficult advance over the marshy valley of the Stroombeek, but the water-sodden morasses of Flanders were as unsuccessful as the chalk uplands of Pozières in stopping these determined troops. Warwicks, Gloucesters, and Worcesters, they found their way to the allotted line. Winchester Farm was the chief centre of resistance conquered in this advance.

To the right of the Midland men the New Zealanders—that splendid division which had never yet found its master, either on battlefield or football ground—advanced upon the Gravenstafel spur. Once more the record of success was unbroken and the full objective gained. The two front brigades, drawn equally from the North and South Islands, men of Canterbury, Wellington, Otago, and Auckland, splashed across the morass of the Hannebeek and stormed their way forward through Aviatik Farm and Boetleer, their left co-operating with the Midlanders in the fall of the Winzic strong point. The ground was thick with pill-boxes, here as elsewhere, but the soldiers showed great resource and

[1] In the original edition I had made this incident anonymous as I knew my son's modesty. As he has passed away, his constitution undermined by wounds and work, I may now replace the name.—A. C. D.

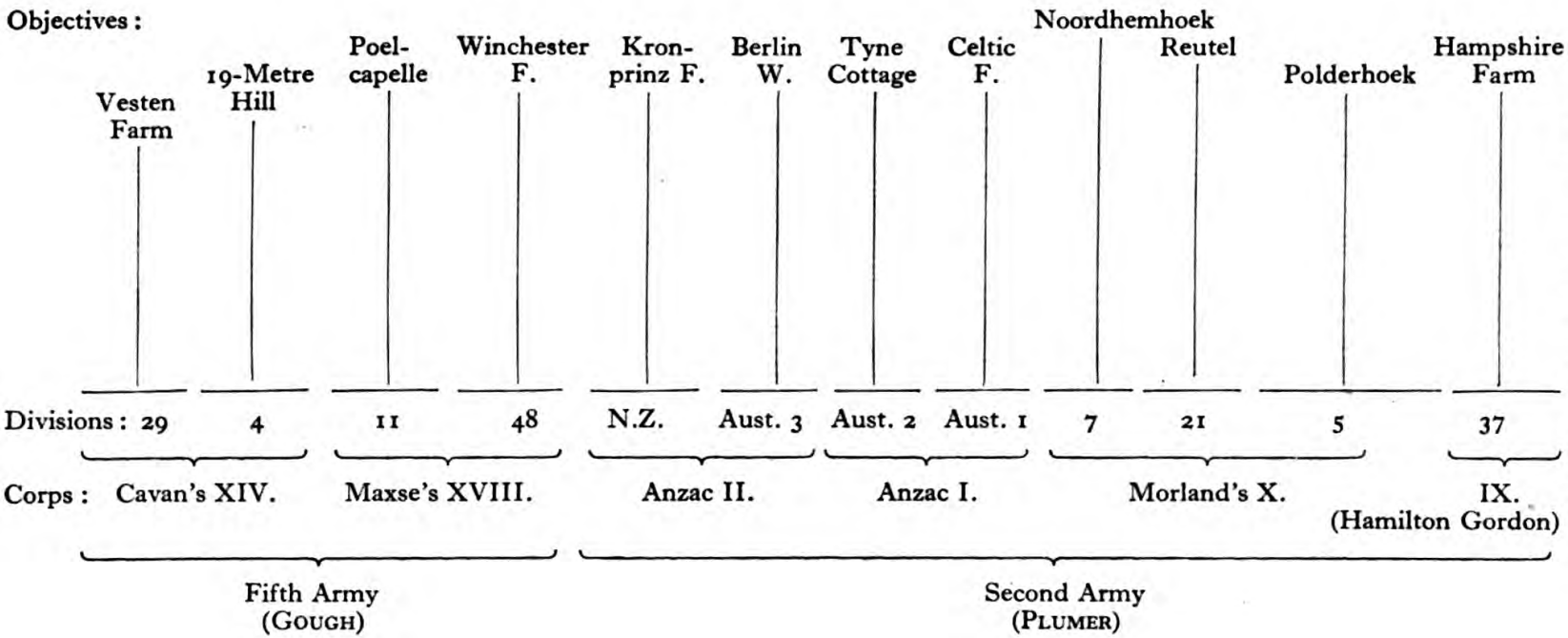
individuality in their methods of stalking them, getting from shell-hole to shell-hole until they were past the possible traverse of the gun, and then dashing, bomb in hand, for the back door, whence the garrison, if they were lucky, soon issued in a dejected line. On the right, the low ridge magniloquently called " Abraham's Heights " was carried without a check, and many prisoners taken. Evening found the whole of the Gravenstafel Ridge in the strong hands of the New Zealanders, with the high ruin of Paschendaale Church right ahead of them as the final goal of the Army.

These New Zealanders formed the left unit of Godley's Second Anzac Corps, the right unit of which was the 3rd Australian Division. Thus October 4 was a most notable day in the young but glorious military annals of the Antipodean Britons, for, with the First Anzac Corps fighting on the right, the whole phalanx made up a splendid assemblage of manhood, whether judged by its quality or its quantity. Some 40,000 infantry drawn from the islands of the Pacific fronted the German and advanced the British line on October 4. Of the 3rd Australians it can only be said that they showed themselves to be as good as their comrades on either flank, and that they attained the full objective which had been marked as their day's work. By 1.15 the final positions had been occupied and held.

Gravenstafel represents one end of a low eminence which stretches for some distance. The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, attacking on the immediate right of the Second Anzac Corps, fought their way step by step up the slope alongside of them and established themselves along a wide stretch of the crest, occupying the hamlet of Broodseinde. This advance took them across the road which leads from Bacelaer to Paschendaale, and it did not cease until they had made good their grip by throwing out posts upon the far side of the crest. The fighting was in places very sharp, and the Germans stood to it like men. The official record says : " A small party would not surrender. It consisted entirely of officers and N.C.O.'s with one medical private. Finally grenades drove them out to the surface, when the Captain was bayoneted and the rest killed, wounded, or captured. One machine-gunner was bayoneted with his finger still pressing his trigger." Against such determined fighters and on such ground it was indeed a glory to have advanced 2000 yards and taken as many prisoners. In one of the captured Mebus a wounded British officer was found who had been there for three days. His captors had treated him with humanity, and he was released by the Australians, none the worse for his adventure. There is no doubt that in all this portion of the line the Germans were themselves in the very act of advancing for an assault when the storm broke loose, and the British lines trampled down and passed over the storm troops as they made for their allotted objectives.

On the immediate right of the Australians was Morland's Tenth Corps, with the 7th, 21st, and 5th Divisions in the battle line. The

ORDER OF BATTLE
October 4, 1917



7th Division had stormed their way past a number of strongholds up the incline and had topped the ridge, seizing the hamlet of Noordhemhoek upon the other side of it. This entirely successful advance, which maintained the highest traditions of this great division, was carried out by the Devons, Borderers, and Gordons of the 20th Brigade upon the left, and by the South Staffords and West Surreys of the 91st Brigade upon the right. The full objectives were reached, but it was found towards evening that the fierce counter-attacks to the south had contracted the British line in that quarter, so that the right flank of the 91st Brigade was in the air. Instead of falling back the brigade threw out a defensive line, but none the less the salient was so marked that it was clear that it could not be permanent, and that there must either be a retirement or that some future operation would be needed to bring up the division on the right.

To the right of Noordhemhoek the 21st Division had cleared the difficult enclosed country to the east of Polygon Wood, and had occupied the village of Reutel, but encountered such resolute opposition and such fierce counter-attacks that both the advancing brigades, the 62nd and the 64th, wound up the day to the westward of their full objectives, which had the effect already described on the right wing of the 7th Division. Both front brigades had lost heavily, and they were relieved in the front line by the 110th Leicester Brigade of their own division. During the severe fighting of the day the losses in the first advance, which gained its full objectives, fell chiefly upon the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry. In the second phase of the fight, which brought them into Reutel, the battalions engaged were the 8th East Yorks and 12th Northumberland Fusiliers, which had to meet a strong resistance in difficult country, and were hard put to it to hold their own. The German counter-attacks stormed all day against the left of the line at this point around Reutel, making the flanks of the 5th and 7th Divisions more and more difficult, as the defenders between them were compelled to draw in their positions. A strong push by the Germans in the late afternoon got possession of Judge Copse, Reutel, and Polderhoek Château. The two former places were recovered in a subsequent operation.

On the flank of the main attack the old 5th Division, going as strongly as ever after its clear three years of uninterrupted service, fought its way against heavy opposition up to Polderhoek Château. The Germans were massed thickly in this quarter and the fighting was very severe. The advance was carried out by those warlike twins, the comrades of many battles, the 1st West Kents and 2nd Scots Borderers upon the right, while the 1st Devons and 1st Cornwalls of the 95th Brigade were on the left, the latter coinciding with the edge of Polygon Wood and the former resting upon the Menin Road. The 13th actually occupied Polderhoek Château, but lost it again. The 95th was much incommoded by finding that the Reutelbeek was now an impassable swamp, but they swarmed round it and captured their objectives, while its left

got beyond Reutel, and had to throw back a defensive flank on its left, and withdraw its front to the west of the village. The chief counter-attacks of the day were on the front of the 5th and 21st Divisions, and they were both numerous and violent, seven in succession coming in front of Polderhoek Château and Reutel. This fierce resistance restricted the advance of Morland's Tenth Corps and limited their gains, but enabled them to wear out more of the enemy than any of the divisions to the north.

Upon the flank of the attack the advance of the 37th Division had been a limited one, and had not been attended with complete success, as two of the German strongholds—Berry Cottages and Lewis House—still held out and spread a zone of destruction round them. The 8th Somersets, 8th Lincolns, and a Middlesex battalion of the 63rd Brigade all suffered heavily on this flank. On the northern wing the 13th Rifles, 13th Rifle Brigade, and the Royal Fusiliers of the 111th Brigade drove straight ahead, and keeping well up to the barrage were safely led by that stern guide to their ultimate positions into which they settled with a comparative immunity from loss, but the battalions were already greatly exhausted by long service and scanty drafts, so that the 13th Rifles emerged from the fight with a total strength of little over a hundred. It must be admitted that all these successive fights at the south of the Menin Road vindicated the new German systems of defence and caused exceedingly heavy losses which were only repaid by scanty and unimportant gains of desolate, shell-ploughed land.

The total result of this Broodseinde action was a victory gained under conditions of position and weather which made it a most notable accomplishment. Apart from the very important gain of ground, which took the Army a long way towards its final objective, the Paschendaale Ridge, no less than 138 officers and 5200 men were taken as prisoners. The reason for this considerable increase in captures, as compared to recent similar advances, seems to have been that the Germans had themselves contemplated a strong attack upon the British line, expecially the right sector, so that no less than five of their divisions had been brought well up to the front line at the moment when the storm burst. According to the account of prisoners, only ten minutes intervened between the zero times allotted for the two attacks. The result was not only the increase in prisoners, but also a very high mortality among the Germans, who met the full force of the barrage as well as the bayonets of the infantry. In spite of the heavy punishment already received, the Germans made several strong counter-attacks in the evening, chiefly, as stated, against the lines of the 5th and 21st Divisions north of the Menin Road, but with limited results. An attack upon the New Zealanders north of the Ypres-Roulers railway had even less success. Victorious, and yet in the last extremity of human misery and discomfort, the troops held firmly to their advanced line amid the continued pelting of the relentless rain.

The bravery and the losses of the British artillery were among the outstanding incidents of this and subsequent fighting. It was not possible on that water-sodden soil to push forward the great guns. Therefore it became necessary to make the very most of the smaller ones, and for this object the 18-pounder batteries were galloped up all along the line and then unlimbered and went into action in the open within a mile of the enemy. By this spirited action the infantry secured a barrage which could not otherwise have been accurately laid down. It should be emphasised that in this and other advances the numbers of the German were very little inferior to those of the British, which makes the success of the attacks the more surprising. Thus, in this instance, Plumer had eight divisions in line in the southern area of the battle, while opposed to him he had the 10th Ersatz, 20th Division, 4th Guards, part of 45th, part of 16th, the 19th Reserve, and the 8th Division.

In Sir Douglas Haig's long and yet concise dispatch, we are told frankly the considerations which weighed with the British Higher Command in not bringing the Flanders Campaign to an end for the year with the capture of the Gravenstafel-Broodseinde Ridge. The season was advanced, the troops were tired, the weather was vile, and, worst of all, the ground was hardly passable. All these were weighty reasons why the campaign should cease now that a good defensible position had been secured. There were however some excellent reasons to the contrary. The operations had been successful, but they had not attained full success, and the position, especially in the north, was by no means favourable for the passing of the winter, since the low-lying ground at Poelcapelle and around it was exposed to fire both from the Paschendaale Ridge and from the great forest upon the left flank and rear. If the troops were weary, there was good evidence that the Germans were not less so, and their minds and morale could not be unaffected by the fact that every British attack had been attended by loss of ground and of prisoners. Then again, it was known that the French meditated a fresh attack in the Malmaison quarter, and good team play called for a sustained effort upon the left wing to help the success of the right centre. Again, the rainfall had already been abnormally high, so that on a balance of averages there was reason to hope for better weather, though at the best it could hardly be hoped that the watery October sunshine would ever dry the fearsome bogs which lay between the armies. Of two courses it has always been Sir Douglas Haig's custom to chose the more spirited, as his whole career would show, and therefore his decision was now given for the continuance of the advance. In the result the weather failed him badly, and his losses were heavy. Looking back with the wisdom that comes after the event, one can clearly see that had the whole operation stopped when the rains fell after the first day, it would have been the wisest course, but when once such a movement is well under way it is difficult to compromise.

Since the line had already been established upon high ground to the

south, it was evidently in the north that the new effort must be made, as the front of advance was contracted to six miles from the extreme left wing, where the French were still posted, to a point east of Zonnebeke. The wind was high, the rain intermittent, and the night cloudy and dark ; but in spite of all these hindrances the storming troops were by some miracle of disciplined organisation ready in their assembly trenches and the advance went forward at 5.20 on the morning of October 9.

On the left an extremely successful advance was carried out by the French and by the Guards. Of our gallant Allies it need only be said that on this day as on all others they carried out to the full what was given them to do, and established their advanced posts a mile or so to the eastward on the skirts of Houthulst Forest, taking St. Janshoek and pushing on, up to their waists sometimes in water, to the swamps of Corverbeek.

Cavan's Corps consisted of the Guards on the left, the 29th in the centre, and the 4th Division on the right. The advance of the Guards was as usual a magnificent one, and the 1st Brigade on the right, the 2nd on the left, pushed forward the line on their sector for more than a mile, beginning by the difficult fording of the deep flooded Brombeek and then taking in their stride a number of farmhouses and strong points, as well as the villages of Koekuit and Veldhoek—the second hamlet of that name which had the ill-fortune to figure upon the war-map. Four hundred prisoners were left in their hands, mostly of the 417th Regiment, who had only taken over the line at four that morning. The 2nd Brigade of Guards worked all day in close touch with the French, amid the dangerous swamps in the north, while the 1st Brigade kept their alignment with the 4th Worcesters, who formed the left unit of the 88th Brigade on their right. Even under the awful conditions of ground and weather the work of the Guards was as clean and precise as ever.

The ground in front of the Guards was sown very thickly with the German concrete forts, but it was the general opinion of experienced soldiers that, formidable as were these defences, they were less so than the old trench systems, which in some cases could not be passed by any wit or valour of man. At this stage of its development the Mebus could usually be overcome by good infantry, for if its loopholes were kept buzzing with the rifle bullets of the stormers, and if under cover of such fire other parties crawled round and girt it in, its garrison had little chance. The infantry attained considerable proficiency in these operations, and " to do in a pill-box " became one of the recognised exercises of minor tactics. The losses of the Guards in this brilliant affair were not very heavy, though towards the later stage the 1st Irish upon the right got ahead of the Newfoundlanders and were exposed to a severe flank fire in the neighbourhood of Egypt House. The 1st Coldstream upon the extreme left flank were also held up by a strong point near Louvois Farm. It was eventually taken with its forty inmates. The gallant German officer absolutely refused to surrender, and it was

necessary to bayonet him. Altogether the two brigades lost 53 officers and 1300 men. In connection with their advance and with the subsequent operations it should be mentioned that the Guards artillery was worthy of the infantry, and that the way they followed up in order to give protective barrages, slithering anywhere over the wet ground so long as they could only keep within good slating distance of the counter-attacks, was a fine bit of work. The pioneer battalion, the 4th Coldstream, and the three R.E. Companies, 55, 75, and 76, put in a great deal of thankless and unostentatious work in the elaborate and difficult preparations for the advance.

The 29th Division on the right of the Guards had the 88th Brigade in front, with the Newfoundlanders behind the Worcesters on the left flank. Their task was to push along the Langemarck-Staden railway and reach the forest. They carried the line forward to Cinq Chemins Farm, where they established their new line. The 1st Essex and 2nd Hants were also heavily engaged, and all four battalions lived up to their high reputation.

To the right of the 29th was the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division, who had taken over the front line from their comrades in that fearsome wilderness already described. The line of advance was along the Ypres-Staden railway, and the front was kept level with that of the Guards. Reinforced by the 1st Rifle Brigade, the advance went swiftly forward over dreadful ground until it reached its limits at Landing Farm, about half a mile north-east of Poelcapelle.

Maxse's Corps upon the right still consisted of the 11th and 48th Divisions. The 11th Division had already captured the half of the long village of Poelcapelle, and now after some very hard fighting the second half up to the Eastern skirts fell into the hands of the 32nd Brigade. As they advanced, the 48th Midland men kept pace with them upon the right. These troops had the very worst of the low-lying ground, though they had the advantage of being in position and not having to assemble in the dark and rain, as was the fate of the more southern troops. The gallant Yorkshire battalions of the 32nd Brigade made several attempts to carry the strong point at the Brewery, east of the village, and the Midlanders had the same difficulties at a machine-gun centre called Adler Farm and Burn's House. These two points, both still untaken, marked the furthest limits of the advance in either case, and in the evening the ground gained was contracted not so much on account of German action as because it was impossible to get supplies up to the extreme line under the observation from the ridge.

Upon the right of Maxse's Corps and forming the left of the Second Anzac Corps was another Territorial Division, the 49th, drawn from the County of Broad Acres. This division, although it has seldom appeared up to now in the central limelight of battle, had done a great amount of solid work near the Ancre during the Somme battle, and on other occasions. All that will be said about the difficulties of the 66th

Division apply also to the 49th, and it may be added that in the case of both units the barrage was too fast, so that it was impossible for the infantry to keep up with it. None the less, they struggled forward with splendid courage, and if they did not win their utmost objective, at least they gained a broad belt of new ground. A limit was put to their advance by Bellevue, a stronghold on one of the spurs under Paschendaale, which was so tough a nut to crack that the weary fighting line was brought at last to a halt. The 16th Rhineland Division, who held this part of the line, won the respect of their adversaries by their tenacity. The West Yorkshires of the 146th Brigade and the York and Lancasters and Yorkshire Light Infantry of the 148th bore the brunt of the battle.

On the immediate right of the Yorkshire men was the 66th Division, a second-line unit of East Lancashire Territorials only recently arrived upon the seat of war, and destined, like many other new arrivals, to do conspicuously good work on their first venture. General Lawrence, who commanded the Division would be the first to admit his obligations to the officers who had sent over these battalions in so battle-worthy a condition. Indeed the country owes more than it ever knew to these retired officers, veterans of the old Imperial wars, who, far from the honours and excitements of the line, devoted their time and strength to the training of the raw material at home. They lead no charges and capture no villages, and their names are read in few gazettes, and yet it is their solid work, based upon their own great experience, which has really led many a charge to victory and proved the downfall of many a village. "If there be a procession through London, the 'dug-outs' should lead the van," said a soldier who had that broader vision which sees both the cause and the effect.

In the case of all these divisions the conditions before the attack were almost inconceivable. For four days and nights the men were in shell-holes without shelter from the rain and the biting cold winds, and without protection from the German fire. At 6 p.m. on the evening of October 13 the 66th and also the 49th fell in to move up the line and make the attack at dawn. So dark was the night and so heavy the rain that it took them eleven hours of groping and wading to reach the tapes which marked the lines of assembly. Then, worn out with fatigue, wet to the skin, terribly cold, hungry, and with weapons which were often choked with mud, they went with hardly a pause into the open to face infantry who were supposed to be second to none in Europe, with every form of defence to help them which their capable sappers could devise. And yet these men of Yorkshire and Lancashire drove the Prussians before them and attained the full limit which had been given them to win.

The 66th Division advanced with the 197th Brigade on the right of the Ypres-Roulers railway. It consisted entirely of battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers, a regiment which from Minden onwards has been in the van of England's battles. Upon the left was the 198th Brigade, consisting half of East Lancs and half of Manchester battalions. So

covered with mud were the troops after their long night march that the enemy may well have wondered whether our native soldiers were not once more in the line. Savagely they stuck to their task with that dour spirit which adverse conditions bring out in our soldiers ; every obstacle went down before them ; they reached their utmost limit, and then, half buried in the mud and stiff with cold, their blue and cramped fingers still held steady to their triggers and blew back every counter-attack which the Germans could launch. It was a fine performance, and the conditions of the attack cannot be defined better than by the following extract from the account of an officer engaged : " After advancing through the mud for a further three hours, I halted the Company in shell-holes to enable me to discover our exact whereabouts ; this was a bad mistake, because when I found the direction we had to go in I could not awake the poor fellows, who had fallen asleep as soon as they had sat down. I had to slave-drive, and somehow got them a little further forward before getting blown up myself." It should be added that at a later date some Australians who got up close to Paschendaale reported that they found " not far from the village some of the dead of the second-line Lancashire Territorials, who had fought beside us in an earlier battle."

Upon the south of the Second Anzac Corps were the Australian divisions, who carried forward the movement they had so splendidly initiated. The advance set before them on this day was not a deep one, but such as it was it was carried 600 yards over the ground north of Broodseinde. Owing to the difficult lie of the ground, the attacking troops were particularly exposed to machine-gun fire, especially at the cutting of the Roulers railway which at this point comes through the low ridge. The result was a considerable loss of men. The Australians had been a week in the line without rest in continual fighting, and they were very weary, but still full of dash and zeal and sympathy for others. " We met one British officer," says Mr. Bean, " stumbling back with both his puttees long since lost in the mud. ' Bitterly disappointed we were late,' he said. ' Hard luck, too, upon the Australians.' One thought to oneself when one heard of the conditions, that it was only due to their undiluted heroism that they ever got there at all." It was the 2nd Australian Division which was chiefly engaged in this difficult battle, and it was they who carried Daisy Wood, the chief obstacle in that area. The 1st Australian Division were hardly included in the original scheme, being too far to the right ; but being unable to witness a fight without joining in it they advanced upon Celtic Wood, passed through it, and had some excellent fighting with a strong German trench on the further side of it. The operation was a raid rather than an advance, but it was very useful, none the less, as a distraction to the Germans.

On the extreme south of the line Reutel, which had been left in German hands on October 4, was now carried by storm in a very

brilliant operation which removed the salient of the 7th Division to which allusion has already been made. This advance was carried out by two battalions, the 2nd Warwicks upon the left and the 2nd Honourable Artillery Company upon the right. The former took, after hard fighting, the outlying woods and trenches to the north of the village, but the Londoners achieved the more difficult task of carrying the village itself. It was a desperate enterprise, carried out under heavy fire, which was so deadly that when the depleted ranks reached their further objective not an officer was left standing. The high quality of the rank and file is shown in the prompt way in which they took the necessary steps upon their own initiative, by which the new line should be held. As to their losses, they can be best indicated by the dry official comment: "The remnants of A, C and D Companies were withdrawn to Jolting Trench and organised into two platoons under Sergeant Jenkinson." Colonel O'Connor might well be proud of his men, and London of her sons.

The extreme right of the British attacking line on October 9 was formed by the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division. Once again they got into the Polderhoek Château, and once again they had to retire from it and resume the position in front of it. There have been few single points in the War which have been the object of such fierce and fluctuating strife.

The net effect of this battle in the mud was to fling the whole line forward, the advance being much more shallow in the south than in the north. The line had rolled down from the Broodseinde Ridge, crossed the shallow valley, and now established itself upon the slope of Passchendaale. Two thousand one hundred prisoners had been taken in this advance. It was judged, however, that matters could not remain so, and that, be the weather what it might (and worse it could not be!) Sir Douglas was bound to plant his men upon the higher ground of Passchendaale before he called his halt for the winter.

On October 12, under conditions which tended to grow worse rather than better, Sir Douglas Haig made a fresh attempt to get forward. As the Passchendaale Height became more clearly the final objective, the attack narrowed at the base, so that instead of extending from the Menin Road in the south, it was now flanked by the Ypres-Roulers railway, and so had a front of not more than five miles. The new attack was carried out largely by the same troops as before in the north, save that the 51st Brigade of the 17th Division was pushed in between the Guards on the left and the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division on the right. Advancing along the line of the Ypres-Sladen railway, the 3rd Brigade of Guards and their comrades of the Fourteenth Corps got forward to their limited objectives, where they sank once more into the sea of mud through which they had waded. On both sides the making of trenches had entirely ceased, as it had been found that a few shell-holes united by a small cutting were sufficient for every purpose as long as the head

of the soldier could be kept out of the water. So useful were those holes as shelters and rifle-pits that it became a question with the British artillery whether they should not confine their fire entirely to shrapnel, rather than run the risk of digging a line of entrenchments for the enemy.

In this advance the 51st Brigade did remarkably well, advancing 1200 yards and securing two objectives. It is amongst the curiosities of the campaign that Major Peddie of the 7th Lincolns, with another officer and four men, took 148 prisoners from a farm—a feat for which he received the D.S.O.

On Maxse's front the 18th and 9th Divisions had taken over the front line. The 18th made some progress, and the 9th, of which it can truly be said that they never leave a front as they found it, took the village of Wallemolen, making a good advance.

The New Zealanders were on the right of the 9th Division, covering a front of 1600 yards from Adler House on the left to the Ravebeek on the right, where they joined the Australian Division. They were faced partly by uncut wire in the Bellevue position and partly by marsh. The conditions for the Australians upon their right were no better. The matter was made worse by the impossibility of getting the heavier guns forward, while the light ones slid their trails about in the mud after every discharge in a manner which made accurate shooting well-nigh impossible. The losses were heavy in the attack, two Colonels of New Zealand battalions being among the dead. The New Zealand Rifle Brigade were particularly hard hit. It was found that progress was impossible under such conditions, and the attack was called off. So far as the Germans went, 1000 more were added to the occupants of the cages—so far as the mud and weather went, they gained a clear victory over the British Army, for the losses were heavy, and there was very little gain of ground in exchange.

On October 22, the ground having dried a little, there was some movement at the northern end of the line, the position being improved and 200 prisoners taken. The two operations which effected these results were carried out in the north by Franks' 35th Division co-operating with the French, and in the Poelcapelle region by the 53rd Brigade of the 18th Division, which carried the point known as Meunier Hill, the Essex, Suffolks, and Norfolks of this splendid unit covering themselves once more with glory. The 34th Division, which had taken the place of the 4th on the right of Cavan's corps, also moved forward in correspondence with the flanking units, the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade keeping touch with the 8th Norfolks of the 53rd.

Some hard fighting was associated with the attack of the 35th Division in the north. It may be remarked that the Bantam idea had not proved to be a successful one. It had been abandoned, and the 35th was now undistinguishable from any division either in its physique or in its spirit. Upon this occasion both the 105th Brigade on the left and the 104th on the right fought with magnificent courage. The advance of

the former brigade was particularly fine in the region of Panama House. The 14th Glosters and 16th Cheshires attained their fullest objective, and though the latter were finally bent back by the strong German attacks in the afternoon, the Glosters under Captain Russell, reinforced by some of the 16th Sherwood Foresters, held fast under the most desperate circumstances. Colonel Foord might plume himself on the fact that in an attack carried out by one French and two British divisions his battalion of Glosters was the only one which remained rooted and unshaken upon the ultimate line. The Lancashire Fusiliers shone greatly also in the attack, though they were unable to maintain their most advanced positions. The German shell-fire, and especially the German snipers from the wood on the left, and from the covered road, were the cause of heavy losses, but the troops were in excellent fettle, and the 104th Brigade actually executed a little raid on its own during the night, bringing back a machine-gun and five more prisoners.

On October 26, the rain still pouring down as heavily as ever, and the earth about as liquid as the heavens, the advance was once again renewed upon a narrow front which was mostly on the slope of the hill and therefore offered some foothold for the struggling infantry. Passchendaale was but a few hundreds of yards away, and it should be held before the season ended. Haig's troops were weary, and several fresh divisions which he could have called upon were already earmarked for the surprise attack which he was planning in the south. It was imperative, however, to have some fresh thrusting force which could be trusted to break down the remaining obstacles and not only seize the dominant village, but hold it after seizure. For this object the close Canadian beleaguerment of Lens, which was to have ended in an assault, was abandoned, and the Canadian Corps was brought round to the Ypres front, taking the place of the Anzac Corps. In the new advance it occupied, therefore, the central position of the line.

There had been several divisional changes in the north. The front of General Cavan's line consisted now of the 50th Division next the French, the 35th Division, and the 57th Division. Maxse's battle line was the 58th London Division and the 63rd Naval. In spite of every possible disadvantage, fresh ground was gained by these units, and Varlet Farm, Bray Farm, and Banff House were added to the British area.

The conditions of these low-lying valleys to the north, which had long been difficult, had now become really impossible, and this was the last attempt to advance in the Houlthulst Forest area. It takes personal and detailed narrative to enable the reader to realise the situation which the troops had to face. An officer of the 170th Brigade, a Lancashire unit which displayed great valour and lost half its numbers upon this date, writes : " I have never seen such a sight as that country was in the valley of the Broombeek and Watervlietbeek just south of Houlthulst Forest. Nothing on earth but the wonderful courage of the Lancashire

lads enabled them to get so far as they did. We went over with our rifles and Lewis guns bound up with flannel so as to keep the mud out, and with special cleaning apparatus in our pockets, but you can't clean a rifle when your own hands are covered an inch thick! We killed a great number—one of the Sergeants in the 'Loyals' laid out 13 with his bayonet; altogether we actually killed over 600 with the bayonet; but, as I say, the ground was too heavy to allow us to out-manœuvre the pill-boxes, and though we took three or four, the rest did us in. In one box we got 38 Boche, killed them all with a Lewis gun through the porthole." After that day no more advance was tried in the low-lying valleys named. The impossibility was seen.

The Canadian Corps went forward with one brigade of the 4th Division on the right and two brigades of the 3rd Division on the left. A brigade of the 1st Australian Division supported their left upon the Ypres-Roulers railway, and the 63rd Naval Division continued the attack. Each of these units gained ground under the most desperate conditions. The Australians captured Decline Wood, so securing the flank of the attack. The Canadians pushed forward on each side of the Revebeek, one of the innumerable streams which meander through this country. The 3rd Canadian Division advanced finely, but their right-hand brigade was held up by the machine-gun fire from Bellevue Spur, which had wrought such damage in a former attack, and was compelled to fall back upon its original line. The Canadians rallied for a second spring, and in the afternoon by a splendid effort, when all their Northern grit and energy were needed, they flooded over the obstacle and lined up with their comrades. They were now right astride of the main ridge and close up to the edge of the village. To the north, the 63rd Naval Division, which formed the right unit of Maxse's Corps, pushed forward to the line of the Paddebeek, while the Londoners of the 58th Division kept their place upon the left. The German artillery had greatly increased in strength, thanks to the Russian collapse, and every fresh idiocy of Petrograd was transmuted into showers of steel and iron in the plains of Flanders. Their infantry also became more aggressive with this stronger support, and two heavy counters broke upon the Canadians in the afternoon of October 26. In spite of every obstacle, it was an important day in this section of the line for Passchendaale was almost reached, and the Germans must have viewed with despair the ever-advancing line, which neither they nor Nature had been able to stop.

In the south the operations during the day were not so successful, and the subsidiary aims were not attained. In the morning, the 5th Division attacked and once again captured the Wood and Château of Polderhoek. The 1st West Kents and 13th Warwicks of the 13th Brigade carried out this dashing and arduous operation, and took some 200 men, who formed the garrison. The 7th Division meanwhile had advanced upon Gheluvelt, the 2nd West Surreys, 1st South Staffords and Manchesters of the 91st Brigade advancing to the south of the Menin Road in order

to guard the flank of their comrades who followed the line of the road which would lead them to this famous village. The flanking brigade was held up, however, at the old stumbling-block near Lewis House and Berry Cotts, where the German fire was very deadly. This failure enabled the enemy to bring a very heavy cross-fire upon the 2nd Borderers and 2nd Gordons of the 20th Brigade, forming the column of attack. In spite of this fire, the stormers forced their way into Gheluvelt, but found themselves involved in very hard fighting, while their guns were choked with mud, and useless save as pikes or clubs. Under these circumstances they were forced back to their own line. Encouraged by this success, the Germans then advanced in very heavy masses and attacked the new positions of the 5th Division with such fury that they also had to loose their grip of the precious twice-conquered Château and fall back on the line whence they started. It cannot be denied, therefore, that though the British gained ground in the north on October 26, they sustained nothing but losses after their great exertions in the south on that date. The two outstanding features of the fighting seem to have been the extreme difficulty of keeping the weapons in a serviceable condition, a factor which naturally told in favour of the stationary defence, and also the innocuousness of percussion shells, since in such a swamp they bury themselves so deeply that their explosion does little harm. Some 500 prisoners were made in the southern area, but many more in the north.

On October 30, in cold and windy weather, the attack was renewed upon a comparatively narrow front, with the 1st Australian Division on the extreme right, then the 4th Canadians, then the 3rd Canadians, and finally the 63rd Division on the left. The Canadians advancing along the ridge towards the doomed village were faced by a terrific concentration of German guns upon that limited space and by strong infantry attacks, none of which turned them from their purpose. The direction of the attack was from west and south-west. The 4th Canadians soon had all their objectives and held them firmly, taking Crest Farm on the edge of the village. The 3rd Canadians had heavy resistance to overcome, but captured the spur in front of them and joined up with their comrades at Graf. The 63rd Division found it very difficult to get forward, however, and this held back the left wing of the Canadians. Five severe attacks were made upon the Canadians, but were all beaten off by their steady fire. In some cases, notably at Crest Farm, the machine-guns captured from the Germans were turned upon their late owners as they debouched from the village. There was considerable evidence of demoralisation among the German infantry upon this occasion whenever the British could get to grips with it, and some sections actually ran away at the outbreak of the fight, which is a very unusual occurrence in so disciplined and brave an army. The latter part of the action was fought in driving rain, which hardly allowed vision of more than a couple of hundred yards.

All these heroic exertions were consummated at six in the morning of November 6, when the Canadian infantry, advancing with heroic dash, flung themselves upon the village and carried the British line right through it, emerging upon the naked ridge beyond. The advance on the left was made by the 1st Brigade, while the 5th Brigade took the village. Many strong points lay just north of the hamlet, but each of them was rushed in turn. It was a splendid success, and wrought by splendid men. The chronicler cannot easily forget how by a wayside Kentish station he saw the wounded from this attack lying silent and patient after their weary journey, and how their motionless, clay-spattered figures, their set, firm faces and their undaunted eyes, gave him an impression of military efficiency and virtue such as none of the glitter and pride and pomp of war have ever conveyed. So fell Passchendaale, and so, save for some minor readjustments upon the Ridge, ended the great battle which can only be all included in the title " The Third Battle of Ypres."

Thus, after a continuance of three months, the long struggle came to an end. Only the titanic Battle of the Somme had exceeded it in length and severity. The three great Battles of Ypres are destined to become classical in British history, and it will be a nice question for the judgment of posterity which of the three was the most remarkable military performance. Though the scene was the same, the drama was of a very different quality in each act, but always equally intense. In the first, inferior numbers of the British troops with a vastly inferior artillery held up the German Army in its first rush for the coast, and, by virtue of the high training and close cohesion of the old regulars, barred their path even at the cost of their own practical annihilation. In the second, a less homogeneous and less trained British force, still with a very inferior artillery, held back a German line which was formidable, less for its numbers than for the sudden use of new methods of warfare against which their opponents could neither guard nor reply. The line receded under the pressure, but the way was still barred. In the third, the British advanced and steadily pushed back the German Army which was probably inferior in numbers—and certainly was so in gun-power—but which held a series of predominating positions stiffened by every method which experience could suggest or ingenuity devise. Their resistance was helped by the most adverse weather conditions which could be conceived. The net result of the fighting was not only the capture of the crest of the final ridge, but the taking of 24,000 prisoners and 72 guns. It would be vain to pretend that we did not hope for a greater gain of ground in this great autumn movement, but the reach of a General must often exceed his grasp, and here it was no small prize which still remained with the victor.

One can only sum up the matter by quoting the measured words of the Field-Marshal in Command : " This offensive, maintained for three and a half months under the most adverse conditions of weather, had

entailed almost superhuman exertions on the part of the troops of all arms and services. The enemy had done his utmost to hold his ground, and in his endeavours to do so had used up no less than seventy-eight divisions, of which eighteen had been engaged a second or third time in the battle, after being withdrawn to rest and refit. Despite the magnitude of his efforts, it was the immense natural difficulties, accentuated manifold by the abnormally wet weather, rather than the enemy's resistance, which limited our progress and prevented the complete capture of the ridge." In the German account of the war it is admitted that it was the Somme and Passchendaale which bled them to exhaustion, and that but for the Russian collapse and subsequent treachery the situation would have been impossible. Things now were clearly hastening to an end, though that end was still uncertain ; Russia was definitely out, the French were demoralised and in partial mutiny, the Italians were on the verge of a great disaster, the Germans were reeling, the Americans were not yet available. The British were sorely spent but still had reserves of strength to meet the needs of the future. General von Mozer says—" Since 1917, not only politically but in a military sense, the British were the most obstinate and most dangerous of our enemies." That no doubt is true, but we were each essential to the other, and let no Briton ever be guilty of uttering that unsportsmanlike banality " we won the war."

CHAPTER XLI

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI [1]

First phase, November 20—Tanks *en masse*—Attack on the Tunnel Trench—Byng's great advance—Fine work of Braithwaite's 62nd Division—Hard fighting of Pulteney's Third Corps—Exploit of Fort Garry Horse—Second day of battle—Rally of Germans—Capture of Bourlon Wood by 40th Division—Attack by the Guards on La Fontaine.

THE year 1917 had begun with high hopes for the Allies since they had planned a common offensive which could hardly have failed to break the German resistance. Both France and England had honourably carried out their share in the common contract. It was the sudden and absolute break down of Russia which caused the year to set in gloom rather than in glory. The phenomenon of that great fermenting putrefying country was more like some huge cataclysm of nature, some monstrous convulsion of the elements, than any ordinary political movement, so that anger and contempt were softened into pure amazement as the gradual dissolution of the vast organism took place from week to week before a wondering world. It was as though a robust man had suddenly softened into liquid putrescence before one's eyes. But from the military standpoint it was a disaster of the first order for the Allies and checked their victorious career in the West, where the failing German line could always be buttressed up by fresh guns and fresh divisions from the East. Now on the top of this misfortune another unforeseen and almost incredible occurrence placed them at a further disadvantage. The Italian army had done so splendidly well and had won such unfailing ascendency over the Austrians that their stability seemed as firm as the mountains amid which they fought. It seems, however, that insidious and treasonable propaganda of the familiar type had spread disaffection in the ranks, and the Second Army, which held the very centre of the Gorizian line, collapsed suddenly. The result was a very great success for the Austrian and German forces, who pushed through the breach, and with little loss to themselves captured more than 200,000 prisoners and nearly 2000 guns. It was a very severe blow for the Allies, and never was their fine spirit better shown than by the instant steps which they took to hold Italy up in the moment of her extreme need. By road and by rail reinforcements poured

[1] Map p. 609 for this and subsequent chapter.

through the passes of the Alps and along the shores of the Mediterranean. Whilst the flanking armies of the Italians fell back upon new lines French and British divisions were hastening forward to share their pressing danger. The Isonzo and the Tagliamento had been in succession abandoned, for a severe flanking attack from the north threatened to break through the passes and debouch upon the Friulian Plain. Finally the line of the Piave was reached which still covered Venice. Here the steadier troops were halted. In the First Army on the right there had been little disorganisation, and their retreat along the coast under constant pressure was a fine bit of work. Ten batteries of British heavies were among the artillery of this army, and every one of them was man-handled to the new positions. By mid-winter two French and two British Corps, veterans of many battles, were lined up on or near the Piave, waiting eagerly to try conclusions with these new adversaries. This detached British army was commanded by General Plumer, with Generals Lord Cavan and Haking as his Corps commanders. The two Corps, the Eleventh and Fourteenth, were made up of the 5th, 7th, 23rd, 41st, and 48th Divisions, grand units all. It was a sore loss to the battle-line of Flanders—a loss which in the case of two of them was but temporary.[1]

We shall now descend the line to the section which extends from Bullecourt in the north to Villers-Ghislain in the south, opposite to the important town of Cambrai, some seven miles behind the Hindenburg Line. It was here that the Field-Marshal had determined to strike his surprise blow, an enterprise which he has described in so lucid and detailed a dispatch that the weary chronicler has the rare experience of finding history adequately recorded by the same brain which planned it. The plan was a very daring one, for the spot attacked was barred by the full unbroken strength of the Hindenburg main and support lines, a work so huge and solid that it seems to take us back from these superficial days to the era of the Cyclopean builder or the founder of the great monuments of antiquity. These enormous excavations of prodigious length, depth, and finish are object lessons of the strength of the Germans and the skill of their engineers. Besides this terrific barricade there was the further difficulty that the whole method of attack was experimental, and that to advance without artillery fire against such a position would appear to be a most desperate venture. On the other hand it was known that the German line was thin and that their man-power had been attracted northwards by the long epic of the Passchendaale attack. There was a well-founded belief that the tanks would prove equal to the task of breaking the front, and sufficient infantry had been assembled to take advantage of any opening which might be made. The prize, too, was worth a risk, for apart from the possibility of capturing the important centre of Cambrai, the possession

[1] A detached chapter has been added to preserve the record of the divisions sent to the Italian Front.

of the high ground at Bourlon would be of great strategic value. The enterprise was placed in the hands of General Byng, the famous leader of the 3rd Cavalry Division and afterwards of the Canadian Corps, who had taken Allenby's place at the head of the Third Army. Under him were from the north, the Sixth, Fourth, Third, and Seventh Corps under Haldane, Woolcombe, Pulteney, and Snow, containing some of the most seasoned fighting material in the army. The troops were brought up stealthily by night, and the tanks which were crawling from every direction towards the trysting place were carefully camouflaged. The French had been apprised of the attack, and had made arrangements by which, if there were an opening made to the south some of their divisions should be available to take advantage of it.

The tanks were about four hundred in number and were under the separate command of General Elles, a dashing soldier who inspired the utmost enthusiasm in his command. It had always been the contention of the tank designers in England that their special weapon needed, what it had never yet found, virgin ground which was neither a morass nor a wilderness of shell-holes. The leading lines of tanks had been furnished with enormous faggots of wood which they carried across their bows and which would be released so as to fall forward into any ditch or trench and form a rude bridge. These ready-made weight-bearers were found to act admirably.

One difficulty with which the operations were confronted was that it was impossible for the guns to register properly without arousing suspicion. It was left to the gunners, therefore, to pick up their range as best they might after the action began, and this they did with a speed and accuracy which showed their high technical efficiency.

Taking the description of the operations on November 20 from the north end of the line we shall first deal with the subsidiary but very important and successful attacks carried out by Haldane's Sixth Corps in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. The Hindenburg Line at this point consisted of a front trench with a second or support trench 300 yards behind it, and many scattered Mebus or concrete machine-gun forts. The British had already a lodgment in part of the front trench, and the main objective now was the support trench which was called "Tunnel Trench" because it had a tunnel 30 or 40 feet down along its whole length with staircase entrances every 25 yards. The units to whom the attack was entrusted were the 3rd Division on the right and the 16th Irish Division on the left.

The morning of November 20 was overcast but not actually raining, with low visibility, which may account for the fact that the German barrage was feeble, slow, and inaccurate.

The advance of the 16th Division was by three brigades, the 47th on the right, the 48th in the centre, and the 49th on the left. Every up-to-date infantry-saving device, the artillery barrage, the machine-gun barrage, and the Stokes-mortar smoke-screen was used to the full.

The guns had been reinforced by a portion of the artillery of the 34th Division, and the support which they gave was admirably effective. We will trace the attack from the right.

The flank battalion was the 6th Connaughts with the 1st Munsters on their left. Their objective was taken with a spring. The Munsters were able to consolidate at once. The Connaughts had more trouble, as a rush of German bombers came down upon their right, driving the flank company in and forcing it back down the sap. For several hours there was hard fighting at this point, which was often hand-to-hand when the Irish bayonet men rushed at the German bomb-throwers. Finally a block and a defensive flank were formed, and two big Mebus, Mars and Jove, were left in the hands of the stormers.

In the centre the advance of the 10th Dublin Fusiliers and of the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers was entirely successful. So sudden was the attack that many of the enemy were found wearing their gas masks. Two large Mebus, Juno and Minerva, with a good stretch of tunnel trench remained, together with many prisoners, in the hands of the stormers. The position was rapidly wired with concertina wire and new trenches dug for defence and communication by the 155th Field Co. R.E. and the 11th Hants Pioneer Battalion.

On the left the storming battalions were the 2nd Royal Irish and the 7/8th Irish Fusiliers. The Royal Irish carried both tunnel and support trenches with the Flora Mebus, taking 200 prisoners. Many Germans retreated into the tunnel, but were pelted out again by Mills grenades. The Fusiliers were equally successful, but had one short hold-up owing to the determined resistance of a single officer and ten men. This little party made a brave fight, and were so situated that they commanded two lines of trench. Eventually they were all killed. The support trench was occupied, the tunnel cleared by the 174th Tunnelling Company, and the whole position made good in a most workmanlike way. A series of counter-attacks were stamped out by the barrage before they could get properly going.

The tunnel, as explained, was a continuous gallery opening into the trench and extending eastwards. It had numerous chambers leading off, fitted with wire bunks, tables, etc. This section was elaborately mined, but the position of the leads had been accurately disclosed by a deserter, and they were soon cut by the sappers.

In this swift and successful operation some 635 prisoners of the 470th and 471st Regiments were taken, with many minor trophies. Many Germans had been killed, 330 bodies being counted in the trenches alone. Altogether it was a remarkably smooth-running operation, and the model of an attack with limited objective, upon which General Haldane and all concerned might be congratulated. It was the more remarkable as it was carried out without preliminary bombardment, and no help from the tanks.

While the Irish had attacked on the left a single brigade of the 3rd

Division, the 9th, advanced on their right, and keeping pace with their comrades carried out a most successful attack, securing a further length of the tunnel trench. There was no further fighting of consequence in this area of the battle, save for some movement forward on the part of the Irish division and one short counter-attack by the Germans.

It will be understood that this attack was some miles to the north of the main battle, and that a long section of unbroken Hindenburg Line intervened between the two. Along this line the 56th Division kept up a spirited Chinese attack all day. The real advance was upon a frontage of six miles which covered the front from Hermies in the north to Gonnelieu in the south. Every company of the advancing units had been instructed to fall in behind its own marked tank. At 6.20, just after dawn, in a favouring haze, General Elles gave the signal, his ironclad fleet flowed forward, the field of wire went down with a long splintering rending crash, the huge faggots were rolled forward into the gaping ditches, and the eager infantry crowded forward down the clear swathes which the monsters had cut. At the same moment the guns roared out, and an effective smoke-barrage screened the whole strange spectacle from the German observers.

The long line of tanks magnified to monstrous size in the dim light of early dawn, the columns of infantry with fixed bayonets who followed them, all advancing in silent order, formed a spectacle which none who took part in it could ever forget. Everything went without a hitch, and in a few minutes the whole Hindenburg Line with its amazed occupants was in the hands of the assailants. Still following their iron guides they pushed on to their further objectives. As these differed, and as the fortunes of the units varied, it will be well to take them in turn, always working from the left of the line.

The British front was cut across diagonally by a considerable canal with deep sides, the Canal du Nord. Upon the north side of this was one division. This flank unit was the famous 36th Ulsters, who behaved this day with their usual magnificent gallantry. Advancing with deliberate determination, they carried all before them, though exposed to that extra strain to which a flank unit must always submit. Their left was always enfiladed by the enemy and they had continually to build up a defensive line, which naturally subtracted from their numbers and made a long advance impossible. None the less, after rushing a high bank bristling with machine-guns they secured the second Hindenburg Line, where they were firmly established by 10.30 after a sharp contest with the garrison. They then swept forward, keeping the canal upon their right, until by evening they had established themselves upon the Bapaume-Cambrai Road. It was the brigade moving parallel to the 62nd Division upon which the heavier work fell.

On the immediate right of the Irishmen was Braithwaite's 62nd Division of West Riding Yorkshire Territorials—one of those second line units whose solid excellence has been one of the surprises of the war.

Six of them had already come to the front, and not one of the six which had not made its mark. On this occasion the men of the West Riding made an advance which was the admiration of the army, and which the Field-Marshal, who weighs his words carefully, described as " a brilliant achievement." The first obstacle in front of the 185th West Yorkshire Brigade on the right was the village of Havrincourt, which, with the aid of the tanks, they carried in dashing style, though the resistance from the Château was very fierce. Behind it lay the reserve German line, which also was taken at the point of the bayonet. On the left the 187th Brigade, containing two Yorks and Lancaster and two Yorkshire Light Infantry battalions, swept gloriously forward and got every objective, including the northern half of Havrincourt. The 2/5th Yorkshire Light Infantry was particularly fine, as it charged without tanks and yet kept up with the line. The 186th Brigade, consisting of four battalions of the West Riding Regiment, then passed through in a splendid rush which carried them up to the village of Graincourt, regardless of the fact that Flesquières on the right was untaken. Surging on the 188th Reserve Brigade reached and captured the important village of Graincourt, much aided by two audacious tanks. With an energy which was still unabated they pushed on to Anneux, where they reached the fringe of the houses. It was a truly splendid day's work, in which four and a half miles of every devilry which German sappers could build or German infantry defend was inexorably beaten down. In all these operations they were aided and supported, not only by the tanks, but by the 11th Hussars, and also by a body of King Edward's Horse. Thirty-seven guns and 2000 prisoners were the fine trophies of this one division.

On the right of Braithwaite's Yorkshiremen was the 51st Highland Territorial Division. They also made a fine advance, but were held up by the strongly organised village of Flesquières. The approach to it was a long slope swept by machine-gun fire, and the co-operation of the tanks was made difficult by a number of advanced field-guns which destroyed the slow-moving machines as they approached up the hill. If the passage of the Hindenburg Line showed the strength of these machines, the check at Flesquières showed their weakness, for in their existing state of development they were helpless before a well-served field-gun, and a shell striking them meant the destruction of the tank, and often the death of the crew. It is said that a single Prussian artillery officer, who stood by his gun to the death and is chivalrously immortalised in the British bulletin, destroyed no less than sixteen tanks by direct hits. At the same time the long and solid wall of the Château formed an obstacle to the infantry, as did the tangle of wire which surrounded the village. The fighting was very severe and the losses considerable, but before evening the Highlanders had secured the ground round the village and were close up to the village itself. The delay had, however, a sinister effect upon the British plans, as the defiant village, spitting out

flames and lead from every cranny and window, swept the ground around and created a broad zone on either side, across which progress was difficult and dangerous. It was the resistance of this village, and the subsequent breaking of the bridges upon the canal, which prevented the cavalry from fulfilling their full rôle on this first day of battle. None the less as dismounted units they did sterling work, and one small mounted body of Canadian Cavalry, the Fort Garry Horse from Winnipeg, particularly distinguished itself, getting over every obstacle, taking a German battery, dispersing a considerable body of infantry, and returning after a day of desperate adventure without their horses, but with a sample of the forces which they had encountered. It was a splendid deed of arms, for which Lieutenant Henry Strachan, who led the charge after the early fall of the squadron leader, received the coveted Cross.

On the right of the 51st Division was the 6th, which was faced by the village of Ribecourt. Into this it stormed, and after some heavy street and house fighting it cleared it of its German garrison. The advance was carried out with the 71st Brigade upon the right and the 18th upon the left. The village was carried by storm by the 9th Norfolks of the 71st Brigade passing through the 1st Leicesters, who, together with the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, had stormed the Hindenburg Line, following close upon the tanks, upon whose iron flanks they could hear the rifle bullets patter liks hailstones. The losses of the division were light, as their instructions were to dig in upon the further side of the village and act as a connecting link. The Foresters, however, had at least one sharp tussle before they gained their full objective. A shock battalion charged them, and there was a period of desperate fighting during which the Germans displayed a valour which sometimes was almost that of fanatics. "One of their companies was cut off. We offered them quarter, but they would not hear of it. The last to go was a young sub. When he saw that all was up he drew his revolver and shot himself. As he fell I ran forward in the hope to save him, for he was a brave lad. When I got to his side he looked at me with a look of intense hate and tried to take aim with his pistol. It fell from his hand and he fell dead with that look of hate still on his face."

In connection with this advance of the 6th Division it should be stated that the 2nd Durham Light Infantry upon the left charged a battery and captured the guns, a fine feat of arms.

On the right of the 6th Division was the 29th Regular Division which was held back from the advance until its flank was secured on the right. When this had been accomplished by the 12th Division it dashed swiftly forward upon a three-brigade front, the 87th and 86th Brigades seizing respectively Marcoing and Neuf Wood, which is immediately beyond it. Here they found themselves in very close collaboration with the 6th Division, through whom they passed in their advance. On the right the 88th Brigade, after hard fighting in the Hindenburg support

line, captured Les Rues Vertes and part of Mesnières. The taking of these two villages was really of great importance in the general scheme of operations, and the advances of the divisions upon either flank may be looked upon as simply a screen to cover the 29th while it sped forward upon its venture. The reason of this was that the Canal de l'Escaut, a very formidable obstacle, covered the whole German front south of Cambrai, and that unless it were taken all advance in this direction was impossible. There were bridges at Mesnières and Marcoing, and these were the nearest points to the British line. Hence it was that the flanks of the 29th were carefully covered and a clear opening made for it, that with one tiger-spring it might seize this vital position. The bridge at Marcoing was captured intact, the leading tank shooting down the party who were engaged in its demolition. At Mesnières, which is the more important point, the advancing troops were less fortunate, as the bridge had already been injured and an attempt by a tank to cross it led to both bridge and tank crashing down into the canal. This proved to be a serious misfortune, and coupled with the hold-up at Flesquières, was the one untoward event in a grand day's work. Both the tanks and the cavalry were stopped by the broken bridge, and though the infantry still pushed on, their advance was slower, as it was necessary to clear that part of the village which lay north of the canal and then to go forward without support over open country. Thus the Germans had time to organise resistance upon the low hills from Rumilly to Crevecœur and to prevent the advance reaching its full limits. A footbridge was secured by the Newfoundlanders at Mesnières, and it may be mentioned as a curious example of the wide sweep of the British Empire that the first man to get across it, and to lose his life in the gallant deed, was an Esquimaux from Labrador. The centre brigade got about 1500 yards beyond Marcoing, but there the Germans from Cambrai had formed a new line which could not be forced. The enemy recognised this advance as being for the moment the most menacing part of the British line, and at once adopted the very strongest measures to push it back and secure the bridgeheads of the canal. Several times on November 21 they raged against this point of the line and made desperate attempts to gain the two villages. Noyelle, which was held by the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, was also strongly attacked upon that day, but with the aid of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and 16th Middlesex the village was held against a series of onslaughts, one position changing hands seven times. Some of these counter-attacks were delivered by Prussian Guards, hastily brought from Lens, and the fighting was as severe as it usually is when the Kaiser's own men put in an appearance. These events, however, were on the 21st, and we must return to the first day of the battle.

On the right of the 29th was the 20th Division. In front of them, upon the farther side of the line, had lain the powerfully fortified farm of La Vacquerie, and this they had taken with their first rush. Beyond lay a long slope, strongly held by the Germans, called the Welsh Ridge.

This also was stormed by the 20th, who kept pace with the right flank of the 29th, and pushed their advance forward as far as the canal. At the same time the 59th Brigade was thrown out upon the right to make a prolongation of the defensive flank built up by the 12th Division and so screen the main attack. All went well with the right of this advance, but the left, consisting of the 10th K.R.R., was held for a time by a strong point which eventually surrendered and yielded 200 prisoners. Some of this battalion saw the enemy running towards Mesnières and pursued them to the main bridge. The troops received a most affectionate welcome from the inhabitants of the houses along the Cambrai Road. The attack on the left was carried out by the 12th K.R.R. and 6th Oxfords of the 60th Brigade, which swept with little resistance over the Hindenburg Line, but had some trouble with strong points beyond. One of these points of resistance which was carried by the 12th K.R.R. accounted for all the officers of the party and 62 out of 96 men, before it was put out of action by the survivors. Captain Hoare, a veteran Rifleman who had risen from the ranks, was killed at this point, and his orderly, a lad of twenty named Shepherd, took over the direction of the party and carried the operation through with such dash and valour that he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

We now come to Scott's 12th Division on the flank, the first English division of the New Army, a unit which had greatly distinguished itself at Ovillers and elsewhere. Its task was in some ways the most difficult of any, as it had not only to advance upon important objectives but to build up a flank line of resistance as it went, since the whole attack might have been checked and brought to ruin by an enemy assault from the south. The 36th Brigade on the left advanced with the 9th Royal Fusiliers and 7th Sussex in their front line, while two companies of the 8th Fusiliers were thrown out upon the left to aid in the attack upon La Vacquerie. On the right by the Banteaux Spur was the 35th Brigade with the 9th Essex and 5th Berkshires in the front. The latter battalion lost heavily from the fire of guns on their right. When on the line of Bleak House the supporting battalions, two companies of Fusiliers and the 11th Middlesex upon the left, the 7th Suffolks and part of the 7th Norfolks upon the right, passed on to the objective. The 37th Brigade then passed through upon the right and settled in an echelon of battalions along the flank, the 7th East Surreys and 6th Buffs starting the line, while the 6th West Kents and 6th West Surreys prolonged it. While executing this delicate and complicated movement the battalions were under heavy fire and had to clear Lateau Wood of the enemy, so that it was a fine bit of work on the part both of the leaders and of the men. The two chief points of German resistance outside the wood were the forts of Pam-Pam and Bonavis, both of which were attacked by tanks and then carried by storm by the Kentish infantry. By 11 o'clock the whole advance, covering a front of 2000 with a depth of 5500 yards, had reached its full objectives at every point. The total losses of the division

were about 1300 men. Major Alderman, commanding the West Kents, was among those who fell. It may be added that from this day until the fateful 30th the division was out of the battle and made no move, save that on November 24 the 35th and 36th Brigades pushed a short way down the slope eastwards to the St. Quentin Canal.

Some allusion has already been made to the dispositions of the cavalry. The original plan was that the 1st and 5th Cavalry Divisions, closely supported by the 2nd, should, the instant that the way was clear, push forward to surround and isolate Cambrai, and also to isolate and threaten Bourlon Wood from the north and east. The situation was never such, however, as to allow any large body of cavalry to get through. At dawn on the morning of the 21st a patrol of 5th Lancers ascertained that the Germans still held the Marcoing-Beaurevoir line in force. On the left, however, the success of the 51st Division had made more open space, and on this side the Bays and the 4th Dragoon Guards penetrated on the 21st as far as Fontaine and did some useful work.

The 12th Division formed the flank of Pulteney's Third Corps. On its right was Snow's Seventh Corps, the left-hand unit of which was the 55th Division of Lancashire Territorials, which had not been involved in the advance, and indeed was nominally resting after its supreme exertions at Ypres where it had taken a notable part in battle after battle. It had been planned, however, that some demonstration should be made upon this front in order to divert the enemy's forces and to correspond with the attack at Bullecourt in the north. This was carried out by the 164th Brigade and may have had the desired effect, although it gave no permanent gain. A point called the Knoll, with an adjacent farm, was carried by the stormers and was held for most of the day, but they were forced back to their own old lines in the evening, after a long day of battle in which they incurred such heavy losses that the brigade was seriously crippled at a later date when the full strength of the division was urgently needed.

This ended the first day of the battle, which represented a considerable victory, and one which vindicated the enterprise and brain-power of the British inventor and engineer as much as the valour of the soldier. The German line was deeply indented over a front of 6 miles and to a depth of 4½ miles. More than 5000 prisoners with many guns had been taken. The villages of Havrincourt, Graincourt, Ribecourt, Marcoing, Noyelle, and Mesnières were all in British hands. It was a good beginning, so good that it was determined not to suspend the operations, but to try the results of a second day and see what could be attained before the arrival of the full German supports. Even with their excellent rear organisation and their great junction at Cambrai, it was hoped that a clear forty-eight hours must pass from the opening of the battle before they could build up a really formidable line.

There were no operations of any importance during the night of the 20th, but early on November 21 the British line began to move forward

once more, the same divisions being engaged in the advance. In the north the Ulstermen, who had attained the line of the Cambrai-Bapaume Road, crossed that boundary and pushed onwards up the slope for about a mile until they reached the outskirts of the village of Mœuvres which they were unable to retain. It was soon apparent, both here and at other points along the line, that the Germans with their usual military efficiency had brought up their reserves even more rapidly than had been expected, and the resistance at Mœuvres was so determined that the tired division was unable to overcome it. The 169th Brigade of the 56th Division pushed up on the left of the Ulstermen and occupied the German outpost line, from which they were able later to attack the main Hindenburg Line.

The 62nd Division on the right of the Ulstermen had got to the edge of Anneux on the night before, and now the 2/4th West Ridings were able to complete their conquest. The 186th Brigade then drove across the Cambrai Road and reached the edge of the considerable plantation called Bourlon Wood which rises upon a swelling hill, the summit being so marked in that gently undulating country that it becomes a landmark in the distance. Here there was very strong opposition, with so murderous a machine-gun fire that all progress was arrested, though a number of tanks drove their way in among the trees in an effort to break down the resistance. In the meantime the flank of the Yorkshiremen had been protected by the capture of the village of Cantaing with several hundred more prisoners.

Early in the day the 51st had got round the northern edge of Flesquières, the village which had held up the centre of the advance on the first day. As a consequence it fell and the front was cleared for a further advance. The Scotch infantry was then able to make a rapid advance of nearly three miles, taking Cantaing with 500 prisoners on the way, and winding up in front of the village of Fontaine-Notre-Dame, which they stormed in a very brilliant fashion with the aid of tanks and of some squadrons of the 1st Cavalry Division as already noted.

Farther south the 6th and 29th Divisions acting in close co-operation had pushed their way through Mesnières, where they met and defeated a counter-attack from the direction of Rumilly. It was clear that every hour the German line was thickening in this quarter. Whilst the 6th cleared the ground on the left, the 29th pushed forward and reached Noyelle, where with the aid of those useful allies, the dismounted troopers of the 1st and 5th Cavalry Divisions, including the Umballa Brigade of Indians, they made good the village as already described.

In the meantime the 10th Rifle Brigade of the 20th Division on the right had first taken and then lost Les Rues de Vignes, an important position on the British side of the canal. In the afternoon the 11th Rifle Brigade managed to cross the canal and endeavoured to push up towards Crevecœur, but at this point the River Scheldt ran on the farther side and offered an impediment which could not be crossed.

BODLEIANA

Orders were issued by General Byng that a fresh attempt should be made next morning, but the troops were weary and the losses heavy so the instructions were cancelled and the line remained unaltered at this point.

The end of the second day of battle found the British Command faced with a difficult problem, and we have the Field-Marshal's own lucid analysis of the alternative courses open, and the reasons which prompted his decision. The capture of Cambrai had never been the goal of the operations, though a cavalry raid which would have disorganised the communications with that town had at one time seemed possible. A turning of the line to the south with the co-operation of some French divisions which were ready on the spot, was part of the original conception, and was baulked by the insufficient hold established upon the farther side of the Canal de l'Escaut. But the central idea had been the capture of the high ground of Bourlon Hill and Wood for with this in British possession a considerable stretch of the defensive German line would lie open to observed artillery fire, and its retention would probably mean a fresh withdrawal to the east. It had been hoped that the goal would have been attained within forty-eight hours, but this time had elapsed and the assailants were at the bottom instead of the summit of the hill, with a resistance in front which was continually growing more obstinate. What was to be done? The troops could not remain where they were, for the Bourlon Hill overlooked their position. They must carry it or retire. There was something to be said for the latter policy, as the Flesquières Ridge could be held and the capture of 10,000 prisoners and over 100 guns had already made the victory a notable one, while the casualties in two days were only 9000. On the other hand, while there is a chance of achieving a full decision it is hard to abandon an effort; reinforcements were coming up, and the situation in Italy demanded a supreme effort on the Western Front. With all these considerations in his mind the Field-Marshal determined to carry on.

November 22 was spent in consolidating the ground gained, in bringing up reinforcements, and in resting the battle-weary divisions. There was no advance upon the part of the British during the day, but about one o'clock in the afternoon the Germans, by a sudden impetuous attack, regained the village of Fontaine and pushed back the 51st Division in this quarter. No immediate effort was made to regain it, as this would be part of the general operations when the new line of attack was ready to advance. Earlier in the day the Germans had thrown themselves upon the front of the 62nd, driving back its front line, the 2/6th and 2/8th West Yorkshires, to the Bapaume-Cambrai Road, but the Yorkshiremen shook themselves together, advanced once more, and regained the lost ground with the help of the 2/4th York and Lancasters. The Germans spent this day in building up their line, and with their better railway facilities had probably the best of the bargain, although the British air service worked with their usual utter self-abnegation to make the operation difficult.

The new advance began on the night of November 22, when the 56th Londoners reinforced the Ulsters upon the left of the line on the outskirts of the village of Mœuvres. To the west of the village, between it and the Hindenburg Line, was an important position, Tadpole Copse, which formed a flank for any further advance. This was carried by a surprise attack in splendid style by the 1st Westminsters of the 169th Brigade. During the day both the Londoners and the Ulstermen tried hard, though with limited success, to enlarge the gains in this part of the field.

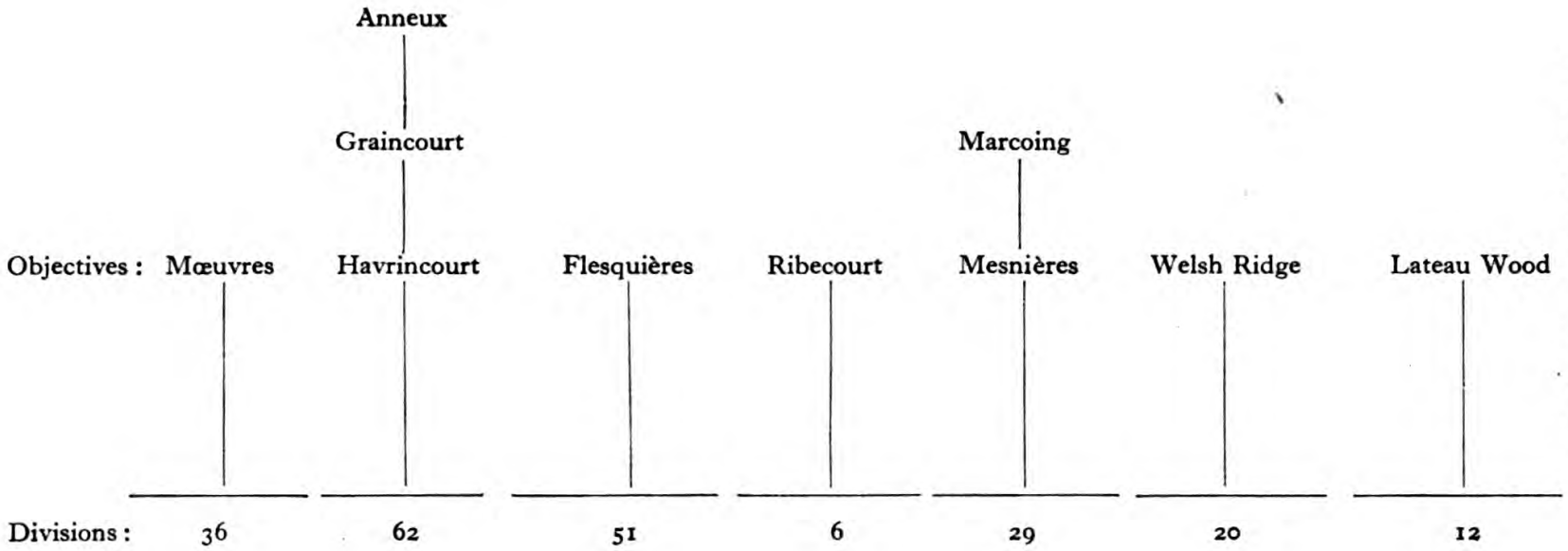
The attack was now pointing more and more to the north, where the wooded height of Bourlon marked the objective, the ultimate object being to clear a path for the Cavalry to Cambrai which was only four miles distant. In the southern part the movements of the troops were rather holding demonstrations than serious attacks. The real front of battle was marked by the reverse side of the Hindenburg Line on the left, the hill, wood, and village of Bourlon in the centre, and the flanking village of Fontaine on the right. All of these were more or less interdependent, for if one did not take Bourlon it was impossible to hold Fontaine, which lay beneath it, while on the other hand any attack upon Bourlon was difficult while the flanking fire of Fontaine was unquenched. From Mœuvres to Fontaine was a good six miles of most difficult ground, so that it was no easy task which a thin line of divisions was asked to undertake—indeed only four divisions were really engaged, the 36th and 56th on the left, the 40th in the centre, and the 51st on the right.

The operations of November 23 began by an attack by the enduring 51st Division, who had now been four days in the fighting line, against Fontaine Village—an attempt in which they were aided by a squadron of tanks. Defeated in the first effort, they none the less renewed their attack in the afternoon with twelve more tanks, and established themselves close to the village, but had not sufficient momentum to break their way through it. There they hung on in most desperate and difficult fighting, screening their comrades in the main Bourlon attack, but at most grievous cost to themselves.

Meanwhile the 36th Division had again attacked Mœuvres, and at one time had captured it all save the north-west corner, but heavy pressure from the enemy prevented them retaining their grasp of it. The two brigades of this division on the east of the canal were unable, unfortunately, to make progress, and this fact greatly isolated and exposed the 40th Division during and after its attack.

This main attack was entrusted to Ponsonby's 40th Division, a unit which had never yet found itself in the full lurid light of this great stage, but which played its first part very admirably none the less. It was a terrible obstacle which lay in front of it, for the sloping wood was no less than 600 acres in extent, a thick forest with autumn foliage, hardly touched by shell-fire, while the village on its north-western flank came

BATTLE LINE OF THE THIRD ARMY
November 20, 1917.



also within the area of their attack. The men, however, had been specially exercised in wood fighting, a precaution which all agree to have been of the greatest possible value in the day of battle. When at 10.30 a.m. the signal was given to advance the 121st Brigade went forward with alacrity on the left, while on the right the 119th Brigade plunged into the wood, the brigadier, Crozier, a dare-devil little warrior, setting an example to his men which none who followed him will forget. About thirty tanks under Colonel Baker-Carr lumbered forward in front of the advancing lines. The west edge of the wood formed the dividing line between the right and left attack.

It was arranged that the tanks should, so far as possible, go down those rides which are so conspicuous a feature of every French forest, while the infantry should move up between them. The 119th Brigade moved forward with the 19th Welsh Fusiliers upon the right, the 12th South Wales Borderers on the left, while the 17th Welsh were in close reserve. It was the second occasion in the war when a splendid piece of woodland fighting was carried through by the men of the Principality, and even Mametz was not a finer performance than Bourlon. They rapidly broke through the German front line, capturing numerous prisoners and machine-guns. Colonel Plunkett of the Fusiliers pushed his way forward to the north edge where he established posts, while the flank of the Welsh Borderers brushed the village of Bourlon and got north of that point. The 17th Welsh meanwhile formed defensive flanks upon either side, while the 18th Welsh came up to reinforce, and pushed ahead of their comrades, with the result that they were driven in by a violent counter-attack. The line was re-established, however, and before one o'clock the 119th Brigade were dug in along the whole northern edge of the forest. It was a fine attack and was not marred by excessive losses, though Colonel Kennedy of the 17th Welsh was killed. Among many notable deeds of valour was that of Sergeant-Major Davies of the 18th Welsh, who knelt down in the open and allowed his shoulder to be used as the rest for a Lewis gun, until a bullet struck him down.

It was clear that the Germans would make every effort to regain the wood, and immediate steps were taken to strengthen the defence, which was already firmly established. The 14th Argyll and Sutherlands were sent up to thicken the line, as were the 15th Hussars, who were doing great service as a mobile foot battalion. More machine-guns were also pushed to the front. The result of these measures, all taken before nightfall, was that the inevitable counter-attacks, which materialised before dawn, were shot back by a blaze of fire from the fringe of brushwood. Early in the morning of November 24, a resolute endeavour of the German stormers gained a lodgment for them to the right of the British line, where they captured some of the machine-guns. During the whole of this day the enemy pressed hardly upon the weakening line, and at three in the afternoon had pushed them back from the whole

of the right half of the wood, but Welshmen, Highlanders, and Hussars gathered themselves for a supreme effort, and dashing at the Germans swept them back once more to their old position. We shall leave the 119th Brigade still holding fast on the evening of the 24th to their advanced position, while we follow the fortunes of the 121st Brigade from the time of the original attack on November 23.

This brigade had, as already stated, advanced upon the village of Bourlon with the 20th Middlesex on the right and the 13th Yorkshires on the left, the latter in close touch with the 107th Brigade of Ulstermen on the west of their front, the whole line to swing round and attack the western edge of the village. The 21st Middlesex were in close support to give weight to the left of the line, while the 12th Suffolks were in reserve. The Ulstermen had been held up by heavy machine-gun fire which exposed the left flank of the Yorkshires, who in turn could not get forward. This in turn brought the two Middlesex battalions to a halt, who were already well up to the village. Three out of six tanks on this flank were put out of action by armour-piercing bullets. After a pause both the Yorkshires and some of the Middlesex got into the village, but their flank was always bare, and the best they could do was to hold on to the southern edge. None the less the line was firm and formidable, as was found by a German attack carried out by the 9th Grenadier Regiment in the late afternoon, which was swept back by the British fire. All day the enemy strove hard to clear the village, and all day the 121st Brigade held splendidly to its gains. Where all were fine the non-commissioned officers were particularly splendid. Sergeant-Major Hall of the 21st Middlesex, three times wounded and still rallying his company, was but one of the many. Some critic has finely said that if the Day of Judgment were to come a British non-commissioned officer would still be found imploring his neighbours not to get the wind up. It is an interesting fact that the attack by the 121st Brigade had been countermanded, but the wires were broken and the message miscarried, so that the whole fine episode was strictly unofficial.

During the night the hard-pressed line was thickened by the arrival of the 19th Hussars and Bedford Yeomanry, who took over the left of the position. The 14th H.L.I. were also brought up from the reserve brigade, and five more tanks came into line. The 12th Suffolks had formed up on the left of the Highlanders, and these two battalions with the cavalry and tanks made a united attack upon the remaining portion of the village of Bourlon on the morning of the 24th, which was countered by the Germans in the afternoon. In the confusion of house-to-house combat the two battalions were separated, the Suffolks getting penned in at the south corner of the village, while the Highlanders, who had made a splendid advance, were isolated in the north-east. The situation was serious, and two reserve battalions, the 13th Surreys and 12th Royal Lancasters, were brought up after dusk. A body of dismounted cavalry drawn from the 2nd and 5th Dragoon Guards and the 11th

Hussars were also pushed into the fight. With these troops the Brigadier made a strong attempt on the morning of November 25 to force his way through the village, which was now mostly in German hands, but the tanks which he had expected did not arrive, and his infantry were not strong enough for the task. Colonel Battye of the Highlanders had been killed, and Colonel Warden of the East Surreys, who had assumed local command, did all that a man could do, but the losses were too heavy, and the Highlanders were seen no more. Up to the 26th Colonel Warden, with his headquarters on the fringe of the village, was able to send up rations to the survivors of the three isolated companies who had made a wonderful resistance for nearly two days. In the end it was only by great skill that his own battalion, the East Surreys, were rescued from their dangerous position, for the forces of the Germans were in overwhelming strength, and overlapped the village on both sides. Some of the East Surreys were cut off for two days in the south-eastern part of the village before the survivors could be got clear. Colonel Warden received the D.S.O. for his splendid work.

In the meantime, from the morning of the 25th, the 119th Brigade had made a splendid fight in the wood against fierce attacks which beat up against their right flank. The Guards had come up to relieve the 51st Highlanders, and on this date three battalions of the 3rd Guards Brigade, the 2nd Scots Guards, 1st and 4th Grenadier Guards, were thrown in to help the 40th Division in its heavy task. Two companies of the 11th Royal Lancasters were also brought forward, and succeeded, under Captain Lucas, in doing some very brilliant work. The flank was held during the day. On that night the weary division was drawn out, being relieved by the 62nd Yorkshire Division, which by some miracle after only two days of rest was judged to be battleworthy once more. It was indeed a case of the tired relieving those who were only a little less tired than themselves; but the line had to be held and not another man was available. The artillery of the 40th Division, under General Nicholson, which had shown remarkable efficiency and co-operated very closely with the infantry, remained in action. During its brilliant spell of service the 40th Division had taken 750 prisoners, but its casualties were very heavy, amounting to 172 officers and more than 3000 men.

The British position was now a difficult one, for the enemy held the ridge above Fontaine and also the high ground between Bourlon and the Hindenburg Line, so that they had commanding observation upon both sides. With great persistence, however, in spite of the continual thickening of the German line, the British commanders determined, after a pause for breath, to make one more effort to capture both Fontaine, which had relapsed into enemy hands, and the village of Bourlon with the whole of the Ridge. The Guards, the 47th London Territorials, and the 2nd Division had all appeared upon the scene, so that the striking force was stronger than before. On November 27 the Guards made a strong effort upon Fontaine, having relieved the 51st

Division in that sector. The 3rd Guards Brigade had already become involved, as described, in the defence by the 40th Division of Bourlon Wood. It was the 2nd Brigade which was now marshalled to attack upon a very wide front from Fontaine village on the right to Bourlon village on the left, this latter advance being in support of the attack by the 62nd Division upon the position which had been lost. This attack, made at 6.20 in the morning of November 27, was carried out by the 186th and 187th Brigades, the object being to get back Bourlon wood and village. The latter brigade got half-way through the village at one time, but could not make good the ground. The 186th, working through the woods to the north-west of Fontaine, gained their objectives, but had both flanks in the air, and were eventually in the evening compelled to fall back, all the West Riding battalions having lost heavily. Meanwhile the 2nd Brigade of Guards had been fighting hard in support of the 62nd. This attack was carried out by the 2nd Irish, while the 3rd Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, and 1st Scots were respectively upon the left, centre, and right of the advance on the village, which came down the line of the Cambrai Road.

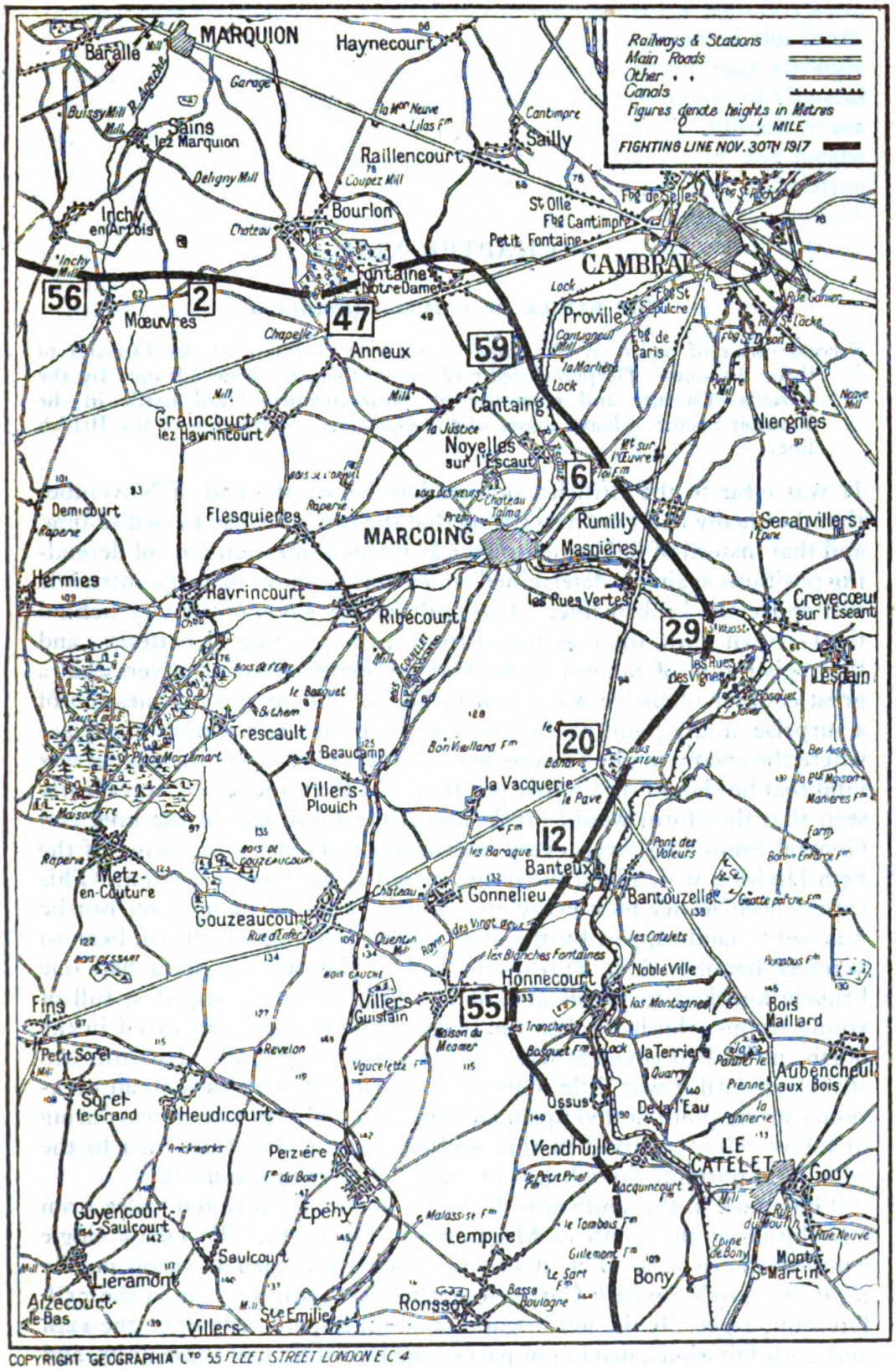
The attack started at 6.20 in the morning after a night of snow and tempest. The flank battalion of Scots Guards by the use of a sunken road got well up to the village without heavy loss, but a blast of machine-gun fire from a small house about 200 yards away played havoc with the 3rd Grenadiers, who none the less rushed forward, stormed the house, and secured their first objective. The Coldstreams also suffered heavily from machine-gun fire from a post north of the railway, and half their numbers were on the ground before they also reached their objective. The remains of these two gallant battalions cleared the whole village and captured about a thousand prisoners, but were unable to get more than six hundred to the rear. By ten o'clock the whole position had been taken, but the victors had suffered so severely that they were unable to cover so large a perimeter, and about eleven o'clock the Germans, passing through the numerous gaps in the defence, bade fair to cut off the whole British force. The 4th Grenadiers of the 3rd Brigade was sent up under Lord Gort to reinforce, and the remains of the 2nd Brigade was drawn clear of the village and settled into trenches in front of it. The attack was in many ways a very difficult one, for the village was strongly fortified, there was much wire intact south of the Cambrai Road, and the machine-gun fire from La Folie Wood swept all the approaches. Eventually the force of the enemy was so strong, and it had penetrated so far round the flanks of the battalions that Lord Fielding, who commanded the Guards Division, gave orders that they retire to their original line. The brigade lost heavily in the venture.

Meanwhile the gallant Yorkshiremen of the 62nd, together with the 2nd Irish Guards, drove their way through Bourlon Wood in spite of a desperate resistance from a German line which included several battalions of the Guards. Many prisoners were taken, but many others

escaped in the confused fighting among the brushwood and tree-trunks. Once again the counter-attacks were too strong for the thin ranks who had reached their goal, and the British, after reaching both the village and the north end of the wood, were pushed out once more. At the same time the British held a strong position on the hill and in the wood, so that there were still hopes of a successful issue if the German resistance could be outworn. It should be remarked that through all the fighting the battle line was greatly strengthened by the fact that a dismounted battalion was formed from each brigade of cavalry, or nine in all, who relieved and supported the very weary infantry. The trophies of the battle up to date had been over 100 German guns, 10,500 prisoners, 350 machine-guns, and, above all, the valuable stretch of Hindenburg's Line.

It was in this last phase of the advance, and indeed after the fighting had ended, that General Bradford was killed by a chance shell. This young soldier, who at the age of twenty-five commanded one of the brigades of the 62nd Division, was one of the great natural leaders disclosed by the war. It was indeed a cruel fate which took him away between full promise and full performance. "He had the dash and enthusiasm of youth tempered by the knowledge and experience which comes to most men only with later years." So wrote his immediate commander. England could ill spare such a man at such a time.

All was quiet for the next few days, during which the 59th Division relieved the Guards, while the 47th Division relieved the 62nd Yorkshiremen.



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CHAPTER XLII

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI (*continued*)

Second phase of battle on November 30—Great German attack—Disaster to three divisions—Desperate fight of 29th Division—Fine advance by the Guards—Capture and recapture of Gouzeaucourt—Hard battle in the Bourlon Sector—Heavy losses of the Germans—Retraction of the British line.

IT was clear to the British Commanders before the end of November that the enemy had grown so strong that the initiative had passed to him, and that instead of following up attacks it was a question now of defending positions against a determined endeavour to shove back the intruders and splice the broken line. The multifarious signs of activity behind the German lines, the massing of troops, the planting of batteries, and the registration of ranges, all warned the experienced observers that a great counter-offensive was about to begin. There was no question of a surprise at any point of the line, but Bourlon was naturally the place where the enemy might be expected to be at his full strength, since it was vital that he should regain that position. At the same time it was clearly seen that the storm would break also at the south end of the line, and General Snow had given every instruction to General Jeudwine of the 55th Division which held the position next to the scene of action. This experienced leader took every step which could be thought of, but he was sadly handicapped by the state of his division, which had been so severely hammered at Ypres, and had in the last few days had one brigade knocked to pieces at Knoll. With only two brigades, full of young troops who had taken the place of the casualties incurred in the north, he had to cover at least 10,000 yards of ground. His line was stretched until it was little more than a string of sentries with an occasional strong point dotted up and down. We will begin by endeavouring to follow what occurred in this southern sector, and then turn to the equally important, though less dramatic, doings in the north.

The attack in the south was delivered upon a front of ten miles from Vendhuille in the south to Mesnières in the north. To take a single comprehensive view of it, it hardly affected the 24th Division on the right of Snow's Seventh Corps, it crashed with full force upon the 55th Division, especially the left brigade, it swept impetuously upon the 12th and 20th Divisions, driving in part of the line of each of these units, and

finally it raged with equal fury but less success against the 29th Division, in the region of Mesnières. The weight and swiftness of the blow, coming with the shortest possible artillery preparation, and strongly supported by low-flying aeroplanes, added to the reputation of General von Marwitz who planned it. It was a success, and it is difficult to see how it could have been prevented from being a success by any means which the defenders had it in their power to adopt. The undulating country in which troops could assemble, and the morning mist which screened them from observation were two factors which contributed to the result.

Shortly after seven in the morning the tempest suddenly broke loose. The surprise was so well carried out that though the British General was expecting an attack, and though he had his wire patrols pushed up to the German trenches only a hundred yards off, still their reports at dawn gave no warning of any sound to herald the coming rush. It came like a clap of thunder. An experienced officer in the front British trench said : " My first impression was that of an earthquake. Then it seemed to me that an endless procession of aeroplanes were grazing my head with their wheels. On recovering from the first shock of my surprise the Germans were far behind me." There was no question of protective barrage, for the quickest answer to the most urgent S.O.S. would have been too late to help.

This account refers particularly to the 166th Brigade, on the left of the 55th Division, which got the full blast of the storm. It and the guns behind it were overrun in an instant by the weight and speed of the advance. The General in command did all that could be done in such an emergency, but it was impossible to form a fixed line. The alternative was to swing back hingeing upon the right of the division, and this was done so that there was always a flank formed on the left of the stormers. There was a ravine, called Ravine 22 on the maps, which ran down between the 55th and 12th Divisions. With the terrific force of a flood the Germans poured down this natural runway, destroying the British formations on each side of it. The 55th Division was shattered to pieces at this point by so terrific an impact upon their feeble line, but the small groups into which they were broken put up as good a fight as they could, while the line formed anew between the village of Villers-Guislain and the farm Vaucelette which was a strong pivot of resistance. In this part of the field units of the 165th Brigade of Liverpool battalions, together with the 5th Royal Lancasters and the 10th Liverpool Scottish of the 166th Brigade, stood stoutly to their work, and though the enemy after penetrating the lines were able to get the village of Villers-Guislain, which they had turned and surrounded, they were never able to extend their advance to the south on account of this new line of defence through Vaucelette, though it was composed entirely of infantry with no artillery support. However, even with this limitation the situation was bad enough, since the 166th Brigade was almost cut to pieces, and so com-

plete was the destruction on the extreme left that one battalion, the 5th South Lancashires, was entirely destroyed, and nothing heard of it until its leader, Colonel James, was reported as a badly wounded prisoner in Germany. Of the division generally it was said by a higher General that " they fought like tigers," as might be expected of men who had left a great name on the battle of Ypres, and who were destined for even greater fame when four months later they held Givenchy at the critical moment of the terrible battle of Armentières. Here, as always, it is constancy in moments of adversity and dour refusal to accept defeat which distinguish both the British soldier and his leaders.

We shall now see what happened to the 12th Division on the left of the 55th. When the German stormers poured down Ravine 22 their left-handed blow knocked out the 166th Brigade, while their right-handed crushed in the side of the 12th Division. From the ravine in the south to Quarry Farm in the north, the German infantry surged round the position like a mountain spate round some rock-hearted islet, where the edges might crumble and be washed out by the torrent, but the solid core would always beat back the waters. The line of the division was a curved one, with the 35th Brigade on the right, the 36th in the centre, and the 37th on the left. It was upon the right-hand brigade that the storm burst with its full shattering force. The 7th Suffolks next to the fatal ravine shared the fate of the 5th South Lancashires on the southern edge of it. By a coincidence the Colonel had been invalided for appendicitis the day before, but Major Henty who was in command was killed. The 5th Berks and 9th Essex, broken up into small parties and enveloped in a smoke cloud through which they could only catch dim glimpses of rushing Germans, were pushed back to the north and west, still keeping some sort of cohesion, until they reached the neighbourhood of Bleak House, where they rallied once more and gathered for a counter-attack. Everywhere over this area small parties were holding on, each unconscious of all that was passing outside its own little smoke-girt circle. Close to Villers-Guislain on the south side of the ravine Sapper Company 70, together with the 5th Northampton Pioneers, held on bravely for many hours, shooting into the flank of the German advance which poured over the British gun positions which were well forward at this point in order to support the troops in Mesnières and Marcoing. Some of the incidents round the guns were epic in character, for the British gunner does not lightly take leave of his piece. Many were fought to the last instant with their crews hacking at them with pickaxes and trenching tools to disable them even while the Germans swarmed in. Lieut. Wallace, of the 363rd Battery, with five men served three guns point-blank, their trails crossing as they covered three separate fields of fire. Each of this band of heroes received a decoration, their leader getting the V.C. The 92nd R.F.A. near La Vacquerie also repulsed four separate attacks, firing with open sights at a range of 200 yards, before they were forced to dismantle their guns and retire.

The 7th Norfolks on the left edge of the 35th Brigade were farthest from the storm-centre, and stoutly beat off all attacks. Only one lieutenant was left upon his feet at the end of the day. Separated from their comrades the Norfolks were rather part of the 36th Brigade upon their left, who were also fiercely attacked, but were more happily situated as regarded their flank. The 9th Royal Fusiliers were pushed back to the Cambrai Road on the north, but with some of the Norfolks built up a solid line of resistance there. Next to them on the left the two companies of the 8th Royal Fusiliers, which were in the line, were practically annihilated in spite of a splendid attempt to rescue them made by the other two companies led by their heroic Colonel, Elliott Cooper. In this brave effort the leader gained his Victoria Cross, but also unhappily a wound from which he eventually died. This counter-attack drove the Germans back for the first time in this terrible morning, but their lines were reinforced and they came on once more.

The 37th Brigade on the left had their own set of troubles to contend with. The Germans had beaten hard upon the neighbouring 20th Division, breaking into their line on the right of their flank 59th Brigade. In this way they got into Lateau Wood and on to the Bonavis Ridge, which placed them on the left rear of the 37th Brigade. This unit was in imminent danger of being cut off, but held strongly to its line, the pressure falling particularly heavily upon the 7th East Surreys and upon the 6th Buffs. Pam-Pam Farm was the centre of some very desperate fighting on the part of these two units. The Brigade was sorely tried and forced backwards, but still held its own, facing upon two and even three different fronts, as the enemy drifted in from the north and east.

In the meantime a train of independent circumstances had built up a reserve line which was destined to be of great importance in limiting the German advance until reinforcements could arrive. Their stormers had within an hour or two reached not only Villers-Guislain and Gonnelieu, but had even entered Gouzeaucourt, three miles deep in the British line. This village, or rather a quarry on its eastern edge, was the Headquarters of the 29th Division, and the Germans were within an ace of capturing General de Lisle, its famous commander. The amazed Commandant of the local hospital found a German sentry at his door instead of a British one, and with the usual British good humour sent him out a cup of tea. No doubt he did the same to the Irish Guardsman who in turn relieved the German in the afternoon. The C.R.A. of the 29th Division was wounded and taken, and Captain Crow of the Staff was killed. General de Lisle with quick decision organised a temporary defence for the south end of the village, and then hurried up to join his hard-pressed men at Marcoing. General Scott of the 12th Division had energetically hurried up the two battalions which he held in reserve. They were the 6th West Surreys and the 11th Middlesex. Some hundred of odds and ends near Headquarters were also formed into a unit and pushed to the front. These went forward towards the firing with

the vaguest notion of the situation, meeting broken groups of men and catching occasional glimpses of advancing Germans. Brigadier Vincent of the 35th Brigade had been nearly caught in Gonnelieu, and found the enemy between him and his men. As he came back with his staff, still very lightly clad, pausing occasionally to fire at the advancing Germans, he passed Gauche Wood and there met the advancing battalions, which he helped to marshal along a low ridge, the Revelon Ridge. The Northumberland Hussars lined up on the right of these troops and two brigades of cavalry coming up from the south formed on the left of them at a later hour. The whole held firm against all enemy attacks and made a bulwark until the time when the Guards advanced in the afternoon. As will afterwards be described, when that event occurred this Revelon line formed roughly a prolongation of the new line established by the Guards and Cavalry, so that a long dam was formed. Commanding officers in this critical part of the field gave a sigh of relief in the early afternoon as they realised that the worst was over.

The 20th Light Division was on the left of the 12th, and its experience was equally trying. It was upon the riflemen of the 59th Brigade that the main shock fell, and it came with such sudden violence that the Germans were through the right unit and in the rear of the rest before the situation was fully realised. The 61st Brigade on the left had also a most desperate time, their flank being penetrated and turned so that for a time they were cut off from their comrades of the 29th Division at Mesnières. By this determined German attack the south bank of the canal was partially cleared for their advance, which put them in the position that they could possibly push along that bank and get hold of Les Rues Vertes and the southern ends of the bridges so as to cut off those British troops who were across the canal. In this dangerous movement they nearly had success, and it was only the desperate fighting of some of the 86th Brigade which saved the situation. The prospects were even worse on the right of the Division, for the Germans broke through Lateau Wood, and so got completely behind the 10th K.R.R., who were the flank battalion. From the desperate struggle which ensued only 4 officers and 16 Riflemen ever emerged, for the battalion was attacked on three sides and was overwhelmed after a long and splendid defence, which twice repulsed heavy frontal attacks before the flank advance rolled up the line. The battalion got separated from its own headquarters in Lateau Wood, and Colonel Sheepshanks, with the twenty odd men who composed the Staff, fought a little battle of his own against the stormers coming down towards the Bonavis-Mesnières Road. The survivors of the brigade rallied upon the reserve battalion, the 11th R.B. on the Hindenburg Line. The 11th K.R.R. on the left of the brigade front had endured a similar experience, but their losses were not so terribly severe. The aeroplane attack worried the troops almost as much as the infantry, so that it is no exaggeration to say that there were times when they were assailed from four sides, the front, each flank and

above at the same instant. These aeroplanes gave the impression of being armour-clad and invulnerable to rifle-fire.

On the left of the 20th Division, with its centre at the village of Mesnières, was the 29th Division, a good unit to have in the heart of such a crisis. The 29th and 6th Divisions held the centre of the British line that day, and were the solid nucleus upon which the whole battle hinged both to left and right of them. Both divisions were seriously compromised by the push back to the south of them, and their battery positions were taken in reverse, but they held the whole of their ground without giving an inch and completely beat off every German attack. A Guernsey battalion made its mark in the fighting that day and rendered most excellent service, as did the Newfoundlanders; but the main strength of the divisions lay of course in their disciplined British veterans, men whose war-hardened faces, whether in Gallipoli or Flanders, had never been turned from an enemy. It is no light matter to drive such a force, and the four German divisions who drove in from Mesnières to Bauteaux were unable to make even a dint in that formidable line. For two days the villages, both Marcoing and Mesnières, were firmly held, and when at last a readjustment of the line was ordered it was carried out voluntarily and deliberately in accordance with the new plans made necessary by the events in north and south.

In this great fight the 86th Brigade was on the right at Mesnières with the 16th Middlesex on their right, the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers on their left, and the 2nd Royal Fusiliers by the sugar factory east of the village. The 87th Brigade extended to the left, covering a wide front as far as the Cambrai Road. The 1st Inniskillings were on their right, the 1st Borderers on their left, and the 2nd South Wales Borderers in support. The 88th Brigade was in reserve at the time of the attack, but quickly moved up and was in the heart of the subsequent fighting.

Masses of German infantry were reported at Crevecœur, and within a very short time a rush of grey infantry was swirling down past the flank of the Middlesex men, and breaking the connection with the 20th Division on the right. Some of the assailants got along the south bank, and actually seized Les Rues Vertes at the same moment that a counter-attack by the Guernsey men swept into the village and drove them out again. This was a really vital point, as the capture and retention of the village would have been most serious. Many soldierly actions were performed in this clash of arms, showing that the mechanical side of modern warfare can never quite eliminate the brave pushing heart and the strong arm. Captain Gee of the Staff, among others, rescued an ammunition dump armed with a revolver and a heavy stick, with which he beat down all opposition at the cost of a serious wound to himself—a fair price to pay for a subsequent V.C. The Germans were foiled for the moment, but they had found the weak spot in the line, and all day they hammered at it with characteristic tenacity, while all day the men of the 29th stood up to one attack after another, their dwindling line

fraying to the last degree, but never breaking before the enemy. Les Rues Vertes became a Golgotha of Germans, but it was still in the evening safe in the hands of the British defenders. One of the classical examples of British courage and discipline during the war, fit to rank with Colonel Pears and his cancer at Ovillers, was furnished by Colonel Forbes Robertson of the 16th Middlesex, now a V.C., who, stricken in both eyes and temporarily blind, was still led by his orderly up and down the line in order to steady it. Let such a story help our descendants to realise the kind of men who stood between Germany and the conquest of the world.

Next morning saw no surcease of the fighting in this quarter of the field. If anything, the ranks of the assailants were thicker and their rushes more insistent on the morning of the 21st. But the 29th had called up its reserves, and stood with every bristle on end across the German path. The trouble behind the line had greatly weakened the artillery support, but the trench-mortars gave all the help possible to the hard-worked infantry. The villages were knocked to pieces by the enemy guns, but the British stuck like leeches to the ruins. General Jelf of the 86th Brigade was among his men in the front of the battle, encouraging them to dwell upon their aim and steadying their weary ranks. The 87th Brigade in the north, though itself attacked, spared some reinforcements for the hard-pressed men in the south. Once Les Rues Vertes was lost, but a counter-attack led by the Brigade-Major won it back again. This was still the position when on the night of December 1 the orders were given for the general readjustment of the line by the evacuation of the Mesnières salient. Well might Sir Douglas Haig send a special order to General de Lisle thanking him for the magnificent services rendered during two days and a night by the 29th Division.

It has been stated that the Mesnières salient was evacuated, but two battalions of the 29th Division, the Newfoundlanders and the South Wales Borderers, had been left on the north bank of the canal—with them was the 16th Brigade of the 6th Division who had been sent up to aid and relieve the 29th. These troops had a cruel experience, as the enemy on December 3 concentrated so heavy a fire upon them that they were driven back across the canal, the 16th Brigade being partly broken by the severity of the attack. This incident led to a retraction of the line in this quarter.

For the sake of continuity of narrative we shall now, before turning to the very important episodes in the north, show how the Guards came up in the south and how the new line was firmly established in this critical quarter of the field. The reader will therefore carry back his mind to that fateful hour when the left of the 55th had been swept away, the 12th and 20th shattered, and the 29th was holding on with all its strength in the first spate of the German flood.

The Guards, who had been drawn out after their hard spell of service in the Bourlon attack, were moving into a rest camp behind the lines

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when they were stopped by the amazing tidings that the British line was broken and that the Germans were scattered anywhere over the undulating country in front of them. It was 11.15 and they were marching from the hamlet of Metz when the first news of disaster reached them —news which was very quickly followed by signs as gunners were met coming back with the sights and sometimes the broken breech-blocks of their abandoned guns in their hands. Over the ridge between Metz and the Gouzeaucourt Wood a number of gunners, sappers, and infantry came in driblets, none of them hurrying, but all with a bewildered air as though uncertain what to do. To these worried and broken prople the sight of the taut lines of the Guards must indeed have been a great stay in their trouble. " There were a good many men," says one officer, " coming towards us without arms or equipment, but these I presumed to belong to some unit resting in the vicinity." It is only fair to state that several labour companies had been caught in the sudden storm and that many of the broken formations seem to have been from their ranks, though others behaved with extraordinary valour, and exchanged their spades for rifles with the greatest alacrity. The Guards moved forward in the direction of the turmoil, but their progress was slow, as there were gun-teams upon the narrow road. The 1st Brigade under General de Crespigny was leading, being the unit which had suffered least in the Bourlon fighting. The young Brigadier, a famous sportsman as well as a dashing but cool-headed soldier, galloped ahead in an effort to clear up the situation, and after doing a mile or so across country he suddenly saw the grey coats of German infantry among the trees around him. Riding back he halted his brigade in a hollow by Gouzeaucourt Wood, fixed bayonets, and then, deploying them into the line, advanced them in extended order across the fields. There was no artillery support at all, but from the front there came an occasional shell, with the constant cracking of machine-guns, which increased as they topped the low ridge before them. " We advanced into the blue in perfect lines," says one who was present. Once under fire the brigade went forward in short rushes of alternate companies. " Our fellows were not shouting," says the same witness, " but chatting among themselves, and smiling in a manner that boded ill for the Huns." The 3rd Coldstream were on the right, the 2nd in the centre, and the 1st Irish on the left, with the 2nd Grenadiers in close support. As de Crespigny's brigade came upon the fringes of the German advance they swept them up before them, keeping the Metz-Gouzeaucourt Road as their right boundary, while a force of dismounted cavalry moved up on the farther side. The Irish upon the left passed through the wood and broke with a yell about 2 p.m. into Gouzeaucourt village, which was not strongly held. The Germans bolted from the eastern exits and the Guardsmen passing through made a line beyond, getting in touch on the left with the 4th Grenadier Guards of the 3rd Brigade, which formed up and advanced on that side. They were aided in this advance by a small detached body representing the

Headquarters' Guard of the 29th Division and by a company of North Midland R.E. who held their post inviolate all day, and were now very glad to join in an offensive. As the line advanced beyond the village they came into a very heavy fire, for the St. Quentin Ridge faced them, and it bristled with machine-guns. Field-guns and 5.9's were also playing upon them, but nothing could check that fine advance, which was in time to save a number of heavy guns which could by no possibility be removed. It was itself aided in the later stages by the 20th Hussars upon the right and by a brigade of guns of the 47th London Division which swung into action straight from the line of march and did good service in supporting the attack. By nightfall the total ground gained was over two miles in depth, and a definite line of Guardsmen and cavalry of the 2nd and 5th Divisions covered all this section of the field, limiting and defining the German advance. General Byng must surely have breathed more freely when the good news reached his Headquarters for, but for this energetic operation, there was nothing to prevent the Germans flooding into the country behind and getting to the rear of the whole northern portion of the 3rd Army.

The real work of the Guards had been done when once they had dammed the stream, and their strength after their recent labours was hardly sufficient to carry them through a long battle, but in spite of this they were advancing once more on the morning of December 1. The same two brigades were in front, but the 2nd Grenadiers and 3rd Coldstream formed the fighting line of the 1st Brigade, joining up on the left with the Welsh Guards of the 3rd Brigade. Cavalry was moving on the right of them, while on the left they were in touch with the Rifle battalions of the 60th Brigade covering the village of La Vacquerie. The two brigades had different objectives, the left brigade being directed upon Gonnelieu, while the right moved upon Gauche Wood, the divisional tanks supporting the advance. The first brigade advanced with the battalions already named, and they swept in magnificent order up to the fringe of the wood where they were met by two successive counter-attacks which they repelled. The wood was cleared, but there were many snipers in the trees, and the losses of officers and N.C.O.'s were proportionately high. The tanks were held up by the denseness of the forest. Cavalry came up upon the right, and with their assistance the wood was finally secured, together with some guns and several hundred prisoners.

The 2nd Brigade had a difficult task at Gonnelieu and the Quentin Ridge. The 1st Welsh on the right and the 4th Grenadiers on the left headed the advance, but they were held up at once by machine-guns on the right until a tank lumbered up and saved the situation. Isolated parties of the second Grenadiers forced their way into the village, but it bristled with machine-guns and could not be held. Finally the line was formed 200 yards from the western edge.

That night the Guards were drawn out after their onerous and splen-

did service, being relieved by the 9th Division. In the week they had lost 125 officers and 3000 men, but they had turned the tide of battle at the critical instant of a critical day, when, amid commencing disorganisation, the presence of the most highly disciplined and steadiest force in the British Army was particularly needed. Few of the units can be fairly said to have added to their laurels in this sector of the second phase of Cambrai, but at least the 29th Division and the Guards can look back to it with every satisfaction.

At La Vacquerie village and its environs, to the left of the Guards' advance, some very fierce fighting had broken out on the morning of December 1. The enemy began by endeavouring to outflank the village on the right, pressing down from Gonnelieu and attacking the sunken road known as Forster Lane which is north of Gonnelieu. A company of the 9th Essex, somewhat shaken by its previous experience, and the 12th Rifles held this position. The Colonel and the Headquarters Staff of the Rifle battalion found itself engaged in a very lively free fight with the heavy masses of enemy infantry who were pouring down Fusilier Ridge. By trickling forward small parties they managed to capture Forster Lane, but all their attempts to get beyond it were beaten back. Captain Lloyd of the Rifles, who was prominent in the defence, fell mortally wounded, but the line, though heavily shelled and hard pressed, still held its ground. All this occurred to the south of the village which had itself been heavily attacked after a very heavy shell-fall. The German bombers, who came on very bravely, drove their way into the village, but were ejected once more, the Riflemen leaving their trenches to pelt them with bombs. A second attack was even more fiercely pressed. " The Germans who attacked La Vacquerie," says one who was present, " were brave and determined men and their bombers were well trained, but our men had been told to hold the village at all costs, and gallantly led by their officers and N.C. officers they carried out their orders." In the evening the Riflemen still held the shattered ruins of the village, but they were utterly exhausted by their splendid exertions, and never was a relief more welcome than when the 183rd Brigade of the 61st South Midland Division came up after nightfall and took over the hazardous charge. In the final readjustment of the British line the village of La Vacquerie remained with the Germans.

The enemy had suffered heavily, and as will be shown gained absolutely nothing in the north, but in the south it must be admitted that he had substantial trophies, including a strip of British line, some thousands of prisoners, and over 100 guns.

It was the first truly successful offensive on a large scale which he had made since the gas attack on April 22, 1915, nearly two and a half years before, and it would be a sign of a poor spirit if we did not admit it, and applaud the deftness and courage of the attack.

After several days of quiet the Germans tried one other taste of the quality of the Guards by a sudden assault upon their new line on

December 5. They advanced bravely in two lines from Gonnelieu, but were beaten off by close rifle-fire. As they turned their flight was greeted with a volley of bombs from their own people behind them. It was observed that the stormers on this occasion carried their packs as though they meant to stay. A good many of them did so. Next day the Guards were relieved by the 9th Division.

We shall now turn to Woolcombe's Fourth Corps in the northern sector which extended from Tadpole Copse upon the left to that solid centre of resistance furnished by the two veteran divisions at Marcoing and at Mesnières. It was on the left of this curve that the German attack broke on November 30 from the Hindenburg Line to the village of Fontaine, a front of about six miles, the object being to cut off the whole Bourlon salient. The attack, which began about nine o'clock, differed from that on the south, because the element of surprise was wanting and because the ground was such that the attacking troops could be plainly seen. The final result was to push back the British line, but this was mainly as a readjustment to correspond to the change in the south. If, on the balance, the British lost the day in the south, they gained it in the north, for with limited loss to themselves they inflicted most severe punishment upon the enemy.

The arrangement of the troops on the northern curve of the battle line was as follows. Forming a defensive flank between the old British line and Tadpole Copse was the 168th Brigade, and to its right, facing Mœuvres, the 169th Brigade, both of them of the 56th London Territorial Division, which had been a week in the fighting line and was very worn. Next to them on the right was the 2nd Regular Division under General Pereira, from Mœuvres to Bourlon, with elements of the 5th, 6th, and 99th Brigades in front. On their right was the 47th London Territorial Division occupying the line drawn through Bourlon Wood. On their right again was the 59th South Midland Territorials near Fontaine, who in turn linked up with the left of the 6th Division, thus completing the semicircle of battle.

After a short but very severe bombardment the German infantry advanced upon the line from Tadpole Copse to Bourlon Wood, a front of about four miles. There were four fresh German divisions, with three others in reserve, and the attack was driven on with the utmost resolution, falling upon the outlying British outposts with a force which often destroyed them, although the furious resistance of these scattered bodies of men took all the edge off the onslaught. It was also beaten into the earth by the British artillery, which had wonderfully fine targets as the stormers in successive lines came pouring over the open ground between Mœuvres and Bourlon. The artillery of the 40th Division had been left in the line, and a gunner officer of this unit described how his guns swung round and enfiladed the German attack on the right as it stormed up to the line of the 47th Division. " It was howitzer battery D 178 that first tumbled to the fact that the Boches were attacking and

had driven in some of the 2nd Division posts. This battery swung its guns round at right angles, getting on to the advancing enemy in enfilade and over open sights. Every other battery in the country opened within five minutes." Every observer agrees that the targets were wonderful, and that it was only in places where the ground gave him protection that the German storm troops could reach the expectant British infantry, who received him with such a murderous fire of rifles and Lewis-guns that his dead were heaped thickly along the whole front. Seven brigades of British artillery were enjoying themselves.

Taking the action from the left the outposts of the 169th Brigade were driven in, but put up a series of desperate fights. From Mœuvres to Tadpole Copse the action raged, and then the enemy poured out from the back of that portion of the Hindenburg Line which ran upon the flank of the 168th Brigade so that both units were involved in heavy fighting with a limited field of fire which gave fewer advantages to the defence than were found on the rest of the line. The Westminsters, the London Scottish, the 8th Middlesex, and the 2nd Londons all bore themselves with special bravery in a long day of desperate fighting during which Commanding Officers were in at least one instance compelled to stand, bomb in hand, defending their own headquarters. It was a grim battle, and the losses were heavy, coming upon troops which had already lost enough to shake the morale of any ordinary infantry, but the thin ranks held firm and the positions were retained. At one time the Germans were round the right flank of the 169th Brigade, and so cut off a company of the 13th Essex. There is a wonderfully dour military spirit amongst these East Saxons. It was an anxious situation, and it was saved by the utter self-abnegation of the company in question, who held a hurried council of war in which they swore to fight to the death. This grim gathering, which might furnish a theme for a great artist, consisted of Captain Robinson, Lieutenant Corps, Sergeant-Major Edwards, Platoon-Sergeants Phillips, Parsons, Fairbrass, Lodge, and Legg. With a hand-clasp they returned to their work, and during the whole night their rifle-fire could be heard, though no help could reach them. In the morning they lay with their faces to the sky and their men around them, all true to their vow to death.

The left flank of the 2nd Division was held by this same 13th Essex, the 2nd South Stafford, and 17th Middlesex battalions of the 6th Brigade. This brigade was cut into two parts by the Canal du Nord, a huge trough of brickwork without any water, eighty feet across, with steep sloping sides. The bridges across were swept by German fire, and the only transit was by ropes to help the climber. All day the fight raged furiously here, the Germans within bombing distance of the defence, which was never penetrated for an instant. Save for one small isolated trench with about seventy men this whole line held firm against every form of attack. Snipers and bombers fired across from bank to bank, while down in the dried bed of the canal there was constant close-

range fighting. All night the difficult post was held, as was the line on the extreme left where the 17th Middlesex were blowing back every attack with their well-sustained fire. There was no more wonderful individual record in the battle than that of Captain MacReady-Diarmid of the 17th Middlesex, who fought like a d'Artagnan of romance, and is said to have killed many of the enemy in two days of fighting before he at last himself met that fate from which he had never shrunk. A V.C. was assigned to his family.

On the right of the 6th Brigade was the 99th Brigade, the victors of Delville Wood, who were also furiously engaged, meeting such waves of German infantry as were able to get past the zone of the British barrage. German field-guns unlimbered suddenly on the crest looking down on the British lines only a few hundred yards off. The crews were shot down so swiftly that only one gun got in three rounds. Then there came a rush of two battalions in full marching order, debouching in fours from Bourlon village, and deploying in the open. These also were shot to bits. The whole front of the brigade was dotted with broken guns and huddled grey figures, while many, despairing of getting back, threw up their hands and sought refuge in the British lines. Battalion after battalion was thrown in at this point, until the best part of a division was spread bleeding over some twenty acres of ground. The three battalions chiefly engaged, the 1st Berkshires, 17th Royal Fusiliers, and 1st Rifles from right to left, had such a day as trench warfare could never afford.

At the outset the force of the attack pressed back the 1st Berkshires on the right, together with the left wing of the 47th Division. For a few moments the situation was alarming. However, after three hours of ding-dong fighting the volume of fire was too much for the stormers and they fell back. At the same time the 17th Royal Fusiliers, who had rallied under cover of their outposts, shot down everything in front of them. The 1st K.R. Rifles had a day of wonderful fighting—snipers, rifle grenadiers, Lewis gunners, and machine-gunners were all equally glutted with slaughter. " The Germans in mass formation came on in waves offering a splendid target at a range from 1500 to point-blank. In addition they were enfiladed by the machine-gunners and subjected to very heavy fire from our guns for two and a half hours. The second attempt never looked like succeeding and was smothered in a very short time."

The 17th Royal Fusiliers have been mentioned as being in the line at this point though they really belonged to the 5th Brigade. The fact was that in a previous operation they had won a long trench advancing at right angles to the British position and leading up to the Germans. This was called the " Rat's Tail " on account of its shape, and it was still occupied by the Royals when the attack broke out, so that they were placed in a most difficult position and were pressed back down this long trench, fighting a desperate rearguard action as will be told later. Their

presence in the " Rat's Tail " was the more unfortunate as it helped to screen the Germans, and to contract the fire-field of the main line behind them. After clearing the " Rat's Tail " the remains of the battalion found themselves on the right of the 1st K.R.R.

The remaining brigade of the division, the 5th, had some of its men also in the front line and as busy as its comrades. It is stated in the account already quoted that even the wounded men of the 2nd H.L.I. were propped up, so that they might continue to fire upon the Germans. It was a brigade which had suffered many an evil quarter of an hour in the past, and it is no wonder that the men took a fierce joy in such a fight when at last they could meet their hated enemy face to face. Side by side with the Highlanders were those veterans of 1914, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, the battalion that broke the Prussian Guard. They also had many an arrear to wipe off, nor were their less experienced comrades of the Royal Fusiliers less intent upon the work in hand.

In the evening, save for the one loss at the Canal lock which has been already recorded, the whole 3500-yard front of the 2nd Division stood inviolate, and was clearly defined when the British force withdrew by the thick pile of German dead which marked it. Indeed it is claimed that at the end of the day the posts which were thrown forward by the defenders were more advanced than before the attack had broken. Those posts which had been overwhelmed in the morning were found to have perished most gloriously, for in almost every case the British dead were ringed round with the bodies of their assailants. Among the many epics of these isolated posts none is more glorious than that of a platoon of the 17th Fusiliers under the two Company Officers, Captain Stone and Lieutenant Benzeery, both mentioned in dispatches, who fought absolutely to the last man in order to give time for the main body behind them to get ready for the assault. The official report of the officer commanding says: " The rearguard was seen fighting with bayonet, bullet, and bomb to the last. There was no survivor." The annals of war can give few finer examples of military virtue.

Another splendid epic had been furnished by the posts of the 1st Berkshire battalion on the right of the 2nd Division. They were all drawn from one Company under the command of Lieutenant Valentin, also mentioned for his gallantry. The Germans surged in upon them in the afternoon, and there was a most grim and terrible fight. Three of the posts were destroyed, but when the ground was regained it was difficult to find the British bodies on account of the piles of German dead which were heaped round and over them. Six other posts remained intact after six hours of close fighting, in which they were continually attacked by superior numbers who fell in heaps before the steady fire of these experienced soldiers. Rapid fire had been brought to perfection by the training system of the 2nd Division, and General Periera was justified of his wisdom. The six weary posts which remained intact

after the storm had passed are said to have killed not less than five hundred of their assailants.

Gorringe's 47th London Territorial Division on the right had endured a similar experience to that of their comrades of the 2nd Division, and Kennedy's 140th Brigade on the left had been particularly strongly engaged. The 6th London Rifles and the 15th Civil Service Rifles held the post of honour, and the conditions were much the same as those already described, save that the field of fire was more restricted. In the afternoon attack, a gap was formed between these two battalions, but was quickly closed by one of those heterogeneous musters of signallers, orderlies, and general utility men who have so often done good and unobtrusive service—silent supers who suddenly spring into the limelight, play the part of the hero, and then fade away to the wings once more. This attack of the afternoon fell with great force upon the right unit of the division, the 141st Brigade who lay in their gas-masks half poisoned with mephitic vapours among the brushwood of Bourlon Forest. These fine troops, the London Irish, Poplar, St. Pancras, and Blackheath battalions, endured all that gun or gas could do, and held their whole line intact until the evening.

In the early morning Woolcombe's Fourth Corps, exhausted in body but triumphant in the knowledge of the terrible losses which they had inflicted upon the enemy, withdrew unmolested and in absolute order to the smaller perimeter which had been marked out for them by General Byng when he had time to realise the exact effect of the German gains upon the south end of his line. Everything portable was carried off by the retiring troops, who made it a point of honour to leave nothing at all to the enemy. Three days later, in conformity with the general plans, the lines were laid down afresh along the Flesquières Ridge, so that the whole salient was smoothed out, and yet Byng's troops held all the solid advantages gained on November 20 in the shape of a long stretch of the Hindenburg Line. This continued to be the permanent position of the Third Army during the winter, and up to the fateful 21st of March, 1918, when the great German thunderbolt was hurled. In the movements entailed by this withdrawal there was no molestation from the enemy save that the rearguards of the 47th Division were strongly engaged. Two companies of the 15th Civil Service Rifles were for a time cut off, but broke their way through all resistance and rejoined the main body.

On the north of that new portion of the line which had been established by the Guards and taken over by the 9th Division there was a long ridge called Welsh Ridge, running up from La Vacquerie Farm. The enemy was still strong in this quarter where the British artillery was particularly weak—a defect which was partly compensated for by the loyalty of the neighbouring French Commander. The 61st South Midland Territorial Division had taken over from the 12th in this area and found themselves involved in several days of hard fighting, in the course of

which La Vacquerie Farm was lost to the Badeners, but the general line of the ridge was maintained, consolidated, and turned into the permanent front of the Army.

So ended the swaying fortunes of this hard-fought and dramatic battle, beginning with a surprise attack of the British upon the Germans, and ending by an attack of the Germans upon the British which, if not a surprise to the commanders, at least produced some surprising and untoward results. The balance of these varied actions was greatly in favour of the British, and yet it could not be denied that much of the glory and satisfaction of Byng's splendid original victory were dimmed by this unsatisfactory epilogue which was only made less disastrous to the British cause by the very heavy losses which their enemy incurred on the northern sector. On the balance in ground gained the British had a solid grip of 11,000 yards of the famous Hindenburg Line, as against an unimportant British section between Vendhuille and Gonnelieu. In prisoners the British had 11,000 as against 6000 claimed by the Germans. In guns the British took or destroyed 145 against 100 taken or destroyed by their enemies. In the larger field of strategy the whole episode was fruitful as it stopped all reinforcement of the Germans in Italy during the critical weeks while the Italians were settling down upon the line of the Piave. One result of the action was a reorganisation of the British machine-gun system which was found to have acted in an unequal fashion during the operations, some formations giving excellent results while others were less satisfactory.

The year 1917 had been a very glorious though a very exhausting one both to the French and to the British Armies. The victories of Arras, Messines, Langemarck, Passchendaale, and Cambrai were added to the great record of Sir Douglas Haig and his men, while the French, save for the losses incurred in their great April attack, had an unbroken record of success. And yet in spite of these results in the West the year was a disappointing one for the Allies, since the Russian defection which involved Roumania in ruin, greatly weakened their position and clearly showed that the year 1918 would find them confronted with the whole force of Germany aided by contingents of her Allies. Storm clouds piled high in the East. Only from over the far Western rim of the Atlantic came a slowly waxing light.

CHAPTER XLIII

EVENTS UPON THE BRITISH FRONT UP TO MARCH 21, 1918

The prospects of the Allies—Great dangers from the Russian collapse—State of the British line—Huge German preparations—Eve of the Great Offensive.

THE New Year of 1918, the fourth of the world war, opened with chequered prospects for the Allies. Upon all subsidiary fields of action the developments were good. But these distant campaigns had only a remote and indirect effect upon the war in Europe.

As a result of the huge defection of Russia the whole force of Germany and of Austria, together with a good deal of captured Russian artillery, was available for the Western war, and from November to March an endless succession of troop trains were bearing the divisions which had extended from the Baltic to the southern frontiers of Russia, in order to thicken the formidable array already marshalled across France. A great Austrian army assembled on the line of the Piave, where the Italians had formed their new front, while a second force in the mountains upon their flank seemed to hang suspended like an avalanche, ready at any instant to crash down into the valleys. In spite of this imminent danger the situation was so threatening in France that half of the British and French force in Italy had to be recalled, while the gallant Italians actually sent some divisions of their own best troops to aid the Allies in the more vital theatre of war. It was not only the vast concentration of infantry which formed the immediate menace, but it was the addition to the German gun power, in which the Austrians greatly assisted. The enemy was acting also upon internal lines and with excellent radiating communications, so that by assembling large bodies in certain central points he could hurl them against any portion of a long arc of the Allied line and depend upon several days of battle before the reinforcements could intervene. This, as it proved, was a very great advantage. He had also used his Russian experiences to initiate and improve a new form of attack by which he was confident, with a confidence which proved to be well justified, that he could certainly make a deep impression upon the Allied line, and turn the war, for a time at least, into one of open movement. Such was the very favourable position of the German army at the opening of the tremendous campaign of 1918.

The Allies were not without their consolations, though they lay rather in the future than in the present. Their veteran armies, though somewhat outnumbered, had done so well in the offensive of the year before that they had good reason to believe that, acting upon the defensive, they would either hold the German onslaught, or at worst inflict such losses that they would gradually bring them to an equilibrium. Neither France nor Britain had called upon its last reserves to the same extent as Germany, and behind both was the mighty power of America. Up to date the American forces landed in France had not been sufficiently trained or numerous to influence the course of events, but from the spring onwards there was a steady flow, and hardly a day elapsed without one or more transports laden with troops arriving in the British or French ports. The men were of splendid spirit and physique, and the mere sight of them revived the weary souls of those who had fought the hard fight so long. It was the knowledge of these reinforcements and the constant drafts from Britain which stiffened men's courage and steeled their breasts in the desperate days to come.

Turning our eyes now from the general prospect and concentrating our attention upon the dispositions of the British army, it may be said that the ranks had been filled once more after the very expensive fighting of the autumn. Divisions were, however, weaker than before, for, following the German model, one battalion had been taken out of each brigade, so that in future a division consisted of nine ordinary units and one pioneer. Of the six divisions lent to Italy three had been brought back in view of the German menace. The line still ran from Houthulst Forest and Passchendaale in the north along the familiar curve by La Bassée and Lens to the east of Vimy Ridge, and thence along the first Hindenburg Line, with the one six-mile breach in front of Cambrai. The Third Army, under Sir Julian Byng, covered the ground between Arras and Cambrai, whilst the Fifth, under Sir Hubert Gough, carried it south from that point. His junction with the French was an indeterminate one and was twice moved to the south, the second move on February 15 carrying his right wing across the Oise as far south as Barisis, eight miles beyond La Fère. There is no doubt that in lengthening his line to this extent Sir Douglas Haig took on more ground than his troops could be reasonably expected to hold, and that General Gough was given a hard task. It was done, as shown in the subsequent debate, against the better judgment of the British at the urgent behest of M. Clemenceau, who had even demanded with a threat of resignation a further 30 mile extension to Berry-au-Bac. We must remember, however, that our Allies had frequently taken risks in order to help us, and that it was for us to reciprocate even though it might occasionally, as in this instance, lead to trouble. There was a tendency at the time for soldiers and politicians to put the blame upon each other, whereas all were equally the victims of the real cause, which was the crushing burden placed upon us by the defection of our Ally.

Before referring in detail to the tremendous storm which was visibly banking up in the East, and which broke on March 21 along the British lines from the Scarpe to the Oise, some allusion should be made to one or two sharp German attacks in the extreme north, by which the enemy endeavoured to draw the attention of the Allies away from the district in which their first real attack was planned. In the first of these, delivered on March 8 to the south of Houthulst Forest, in the area formerly occupied by the Second Army, the German stormers, attacking on a mile of front, gained a footing in the advanced trenches over a space of 500 yards, but were driven out again and past their own front line by a spirited counter-attack. The losses of the 36th Reserve Division, who carried out the operation, were considerable, and their gains were nil. The second attack was made on the same evening in the neighbourhood of Polderhoek Château, to the south of the Ypres front. Here again some trench elements were secured in the first rush, but were entirely regained by the 10th K.R.R. and 13th Fusiliers of the 111th Brigade, who restored the line. Neither attempt was serious, but they were operations on a considerably larger scale than any others during the winter. These attacks were delivered upon the front of Jacob's Second Corps, which belonged to Rawlinson's Fourth Army, but within a few days Plumer had returned from Italy, and he, with the Second Army, took over this sector once again.

We must now turn to the long stretch from Monchy in the north to La Fère in the south, a front of fifty miles, upon which the great German blow was about to fall. After a tour of the whole line General Ludendorff determined upon this as being the most favourable region for a grand attack. Colonel Joachim in discussing the point of attack from the German side remarks, "England was the soul of the war and all depended upon her attitude. She would have to be defeated before America became effective. Then Italy would give in and France would be left isolated." Granting that for general motives of policy the assault should be on the British rather than on the French army, it is clear that he could have come to no other decision since Flanders at that time of year might have been a morass, and the rest of the line was to a large extent upon commanding ground. On the other hand the desolate country which had been already occupied and abandoned by the Germans was in front of their new advance, and it was likely that this would act as a shock absorber and take the momentum off a victorious advance before it could reach any point of vital strategic importance. The German Staff seems, however, to have placed great confidence upon their secrecy, their numbers, and their new methods. Their ambitious plan was to break right through to Amiens, to seize the line of the Somme so as to divide the Allied armies, and then to throw their weight to right or to left as might seem best, the one movement threatening the Channel ports and the other Paris.

Looking first upon their side of the line one can appreciate in a general

way the efficient methods which they took to secure success. The troops had been exercised in the back areas during the whole winter in the new arts of attack, which will be more fully indicated when the battle opens. They were then assembled at various railway junctions, such as Valenciennes, Maubeuge, Wassigny, and Vervins, sufficiently far from the front to escape direct observation. Then for seven nights in successive marches the troops were brought forward, finally reaching the front lines on the night before the attack, while the guns, the mine-throwers, and the munition dumps had already been prepared. The whole affair was upon a gigantic scale, for sixty divisions, or half a million of infantry, were thrown into the battle upon the first day, with half as many in immediate reserve. Secrecy was preserved by every possible precaution, though the British aeroplanes, casting down their flare lights upon crowded roads, gave few hopes that it could be sustained. Three of the most famous generals in the German service were in immediate charge of the operations. General Otto von Below, the victor of the Italian disaster, with the Seventeenth Army in the north; General von Marwitz, who had distinguished himself at Cambrai, with the Second Army in the centre; and General von Hutier, the conqueror of Riga and the inventor of the new tactics, with the Eighteenth Army in the south. It was to the last, which was under the nominal command of the Crown Prince, that the chief attack was allotted. Forty divisions, with large reserves, were placed under his command for an assault upon General Gough's lines between Cambrai and the Oise, while twenty divisions, with corresponding reserves, were thrown against the British Third Army, especially that section of it opposite Croisilles and Bullecourt. Never in the history of the world had a more formidable force been concentrated upon a fixed and limited objective. The greatest possible expectations were founded upon the battle, which had already been named the "Kaiser Schlacht," while the day chosen had been called Michael's day, or the day of Germany's revenge.

We shall now turn from the German preparations and examine that British position upon which the attack was about to fall. It was divided into two sections, a point north of Gauche Wood upon the Cambrai front being roughly the point of division between the Third and the Fifth Armies. These armies were of equal strength, each having twelve divisions of infantry in the line or in immediate support. These divisions with their respective positions and varying experiences will presently be enumerated. For the moment it may be stated that the Third Army consisted of four Corps, the Seventeenth (Fergusson) in the Arras-Monchy sector, the Sixth (Haldane) carrying the line past Bullecourt, the Fourth (Harper) continuing it to near the Cambrai district, and the Fifth (Fanshawe) covering that important point where the gap in the Hindenburg Line seemed to make an attack particularly likely. The Fifth Army in turn consisted of the Seventh Corps (Congreve) in the southern part of the Cambrai district the Nineteenth

Corps (Watts) from south of Ronssoy to Maissemy, the Eighteenth Corps (Maxse) in front of St. Quentin, and the Third Corps (Butler) covering the great frontage of 30,000 yards from Urvillers, across the Oise, down to Barisis, eight miles south of La Fère. This long curve of fifty miles was strongly fortified throughout its whole length, but the position was stronger in the north where the British had been in their lines for a year or more. In the southern sector the new ground which had been taken over was by no means so strongly organised as its defenders desired, either in the portion formerly held by the British or in the French sector, where only two lines existed. In the north a system of successive lines had been adopted, called respectively the forward line, the corps line, and the army line. In the south there was less depth to the defence, but every possible effort was made to improve it, the work proceeding night and day, and the soldiers being tied to it to an extent which gave little time for military exercises. In this work the cavalry and special entrenching battalions gave valuable help. As a result, by the third week of March the south was as well prepared as the number of men available would allow. There were not enough to man continuous lines of trenches over so great a front. A system was adopted, therefore, by which there was an advanced zone, consisting of a thin line of infantry supported by numerous small redoubts, each of which contained several machine-guns and a company of infantry. These were to take off the edge of the assault, and it was hoped, as half a mile separated the two armies, and the fields of fire were good, that before reaching the position at all the enemy would suffer severely. A thousand yards behind the advance zone was the true battle zone, where the main body of the infantry lay behind barbed wire with the support of isolated forts. Beyond these again was a third zone, 2000 yards farther to the rear, but this had not yet been completed. Behind the whole position in the southern part of the line was the great bend of the River Somme, which was also being organised as a reserve line, but was very incomplete. It should be emphasised that these deficiencies were in no way due to the British command, which was so assiduous in its preparations that it rather raised the ridicule of certain unimaginative people upon the spot who cannot see a danger until it actually materialises in front of them.

The general situation then on the night of March 20, when the German preparations were complete, was that along the whole front the Germans were crouching for their spring, and that their first line consisted of sixty divisions, or more than half a million infantry, against the twenty-four divisions, or about 200,000 infantry, who awaited them. The odds were greatly increased by the fact that the Germans held some thirty divisions in immediate reserve, whereas the British reserves, especially in the south of the line, were few and distant. The German concentration of gun power was more than twice that of the British.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack upon the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps

Disposal of the Third Army—Attack upon the 3rd Division—Upon the 34th Division—Upon the 59th Division—Terrible losses—Loss of Henin Hill—Arrival of 31st Division—Hard fighting of the 40th Division—The East Yorkshires at Ervillers—The 15th West Yorks at Moyenneville—Recapture of Ayette—Grand resistance of 3rd, 15th, and 4th Divisions before Arras—Final German check in the north.

TAKING the account of this great action on March 21 from the north, we shall begin with Sir Julian Byng's Third Army. The left of this force joined the Thirteenth Corps, which formed the flank of the First Army, to the north of Fampoux, while the extreme right touched the left of the Seventh Corps, the northern unit of the Fifth Army to the east of Metz-en-Couture opposite to Cambrai.[1]

The Seventeenth Corps consisted of the 15th and 4th Divisions with the Guards Division in reserve. They extended as far south as the Sensée River, and were not seriously engaged on March 21, though exposed to heavy shelling. We may for the time leave them out of the narrative. It was immediately to the south of them, upon the Sixth Corps commanded by General Haldane, that the storm burst in its full fury. Nothing can exaggerate the concentrated weight of the blow which fell upon this and the next portion of the line. The divisions from the north were the old fighting 3rd upon the Sensée section, the 34th to the south of it, and the 59th North Midland Territorials on the right. The 40th Division was in close support. These were the devoted units who upon that terrible day had to bear the heavy end of the load in the northern half of the line. Let us turn first to the arduous experiences of the 3rd Division.

This veteran division, still commanded by General Deverell, had all three brigades in the line, the 76th on the left, the 8th in the centre, and the 9th on the right, the battalions in the advanced line being the 2nd Suffolks, 2nd Royal Scots, and 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. The front covered was 8000 yards from Croisilles to the Arras-Cambrai Road in the north, both inclusive. This front had been strengthened by every

[1] See Map, p. 651, for the early and p. 736 for the later fighting. The text should be read with these maps unfolded.

device which experience could suggest, and was organised, as already explained upon three lines, which may be called the front, support, and reserve lines. Its backing of artillery was formidable, its moral high, and it offered a solid barrier to any enemy, however numerous.

The preliminary bombardment here as elsewhere broke out shortly after five in the morning, and contained a large proportion of gas-shells which searched the rear lines and battery positions as well as the front defences. So far as the 76th Brigade in the north was concerned no serious infantry attack followed, and save for some sporadic advances which were easily shot to pieces, there was no organised attempt upon their sector. The same applies, though in a less degree, to the central unit, the 8th Brigade. Here there were continual blasts of heavy fire during the day which decimated but were unable to shake the Royal Scots in the front trenches. Several times the enemy infantry made what was rather a menace than an attack, but on each occasion it dissolved into nothing. It is clear that nothing serious was intended and that these demonstrations were to hold the troops to their ground. On the right, however, in front of the 9th Brigade, the attempts were far more deadly and earnest. The first of these lasted from 7.30 till 10, and gained a footing in the front trenches, but failed before a determined attack by bombing parties of the Northumberland Fusiliers. In the afternoon an intermittent shelling became very severe, the trench mortar fire upon the front lines being so heavy as to knock them to pieces and stop all lateral communication. It was a nerve-shattering ordeal to the garrisons of these posts, crouching hour after hour in the midst of these terrible explosions. The bravest man on earth may find his spirit wilt under such conditions. Finally, about half-past three, there came a forward surge of grey infantry from Fontaine Wood which reached and occupied the front line, or the irregular hummocks where the front line had been. Every effort to extend this advantage was crushed almost before it could get started. There was complete stability here, but it was known that things were not altogether well with the 34th Division on the right, and masses of German infantry were seen moving down the Cherisy valley in that direction, a fair mark for the heavy guns. The 4th Royal Fusiliers were brought forward to reinforce their old comrades of Northumberland, and the line on the right was thrown back to get touch with the 11th Suffolks of the 101st Brigade. In this support position they were solidly linked with the units to right and left, so that the close of the day found the whole of this portion of the front absolutely intact, save for the loss of the obliterated front line.

We shall now turn to the fortunes of the next unit on the right, the 34th Division, a composite hard fighting body composed of Northumbrians, Scots, and East Anglian troops. General Nicholson, commanding this division, had learned from a prisoner that the coming German attack would begin at Bullecourt and then turn to the north. Such incidents make one doubtful of the wisdom of that policy of " teaching

men to take an intelligent interest in the operations " which is so often advocated. In this case flank defences were arranged and all due preparation was made.

The blow fell even as had been foretold, but the portion of the line which was crushed in was on the front of the 59th Division, to the right of the 34th. The result was, however, that after the capture of Bullecourt, which occurred about ten, the German stormers began to work round the right rear of the 102nd Brigade, the nearest unit of the 34th Division. The flanking line of defence was manned by the 22nd Northumberland Fusiliers and strengthened by many Lewis guns, so that it took heavy toll from the masses of German infantry who were moving across. This flanking line was thickened by the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers and by the 1st East Lancashires. The heavy blow had forced back the 59th Division, and by one o'clock Ecoust also was in the hands of the enemy, bringing them considerably to the rear of the 34th. Up to 4.30 in the afternoon the Germans were attacking the 102nd Brigade from the flank, but up to that hour they had not succeeded in shifting the solid Tynesiders who held the improvised line. Nevertheless the heavy and constant shelling reduced the strength of the defenders who in many cases were quite cut off, and had to hold their positions with bombs and rifles as best they could. Farther south the Germans, passing Noreuil in their western advance, had turned in considerable numbers to the north, well to the rear of the flanking line, so that the British in reserve found themselves facing south-west, but fought on none the less, the 22nd, 23rd, and 25th Northumberland Fusiliers in a mixed line holding firmly to their ground at the imminent risk of being cut off, while the 160th Brigade R.F.A. were firing at ranges of 800 yards. As the German flood rolled on it engulfed these guns, but the gunners withdrew the blocks and retired slowly, fighting in line with the infantry. This movement in turn affected the British garrisons of the more forward trenches, who in any case were very severely pressed by the German bombers, so that there was a general retirement towards the north in the direction of Croisilles. Outside this village the remains of the 101st and 102nd Brigades formed a line, and with the aid of the 10th Lincolns and 9th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade held the enemy off from occupying it. The 40th Division was, as will be shown, coming up to fill the gap, and thus, although the 34th had been curled backwards as if a huge steel plough had driven a furrow to the south of them, there was still no absolute fracture of the line. Towards evening patrols of the enemy had succeeded in filtering through into the village of Croisilles but General Haldane had already seen that his corps front needed reorganisation in view of what had occurred to the south. Orders were given, therefore, to the 15th Royal Scots, who were still holding on near Croisilles, to abandon the village and take up new positions to the west of it. With the help of the 119th Brigade of the 40th Division these changes were made, and a line built up in front of Henin Hill for the

next day's battle. The general result, therefore, of the day's fighting was, so far as the 34th Division was concerned, that the left flank was still in touch with the 3rd Division in the northern support line, but that the right and centre had to hinge back upon it on account of the break through to the south of them, and had been compelled to uncover Croisilles and abandon it to the enemy. The casualties had been high, especially in the 102nd Brigade upon the defensive flank. Of these, about 1200 out of a total trench strength of 1800 were lost, some being cut off but the greater number injured by the bombardment. Three companies of the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers were engulfed in the German tide and submerged, as were the field guns already mentioned, which were fought by their crews until the very last instant. The 11th Suffolks upon the left flank of the 101st Brigade held absolutely fast all day, and by their fire gave great help to the 3rd Division to their north.

The next unit in the line was the 59th North Midland Division (Romer) which had a front of over 5000 yards. They covered the important villages of Bullecourt, Ecoust, and Noreuil, the former being in the very front line. The 178th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were on the right and the 176th of Staffords on the left, with the 177th of Lincolns and Leicesters in reserve. In the southern section of this position was the long shallow slope of the Noreuil valley, the nearer half of which came within the 59th area, while the farther was held by the 6th Division. It was speedily apparent by the intensity of the bombardment and by the rumoured concentration of the infantry that this was the centre of danger. About ten o'clock a demonstration was made against the 2/6 Sherwood Foresters on the left, but the real attack came later when on the right centre a heavy mass of the enemy surged through the outpost line and established itself within the support line. At about the same hour the German infantry struck in great force up the channel of the Noreuil valley, and having pushed their way as far as the western edge of Noreuil turned to the north-west, working along a hollow road between Noreuil and Longatte. Two companies of the 2/5 Sherwoods, together with the 470th Field Company R.E., were caught between the pincers of this double German attack, and were entirely destroyed on the Noreuil-Ecoust Road, only one officer and six sappers making their way safe to Vraucourt. The 2/5 Lincolns of the supporting brigade, moving up to the support of their comrades, were themselves involved in the tragedy and three companies were practically annihilated. This rapid German advance, with the heavy British losses, had all taken place by 11 a.m., and created the situation which reacted so unfavourably upon the 34th in the north. The Germans having got so far forward in the south were able to assail the flank of the 176th Brigade in the north, which threw out a defensive line as far as Ecoust and defended itself strongly. Their position, however, was an almost impossible one, and when later in the day the enemy took Ecoust and swung round to their rear these battalions, already much reduced, were overwhelmed by the attack, the

survivors joining up with the 34th Division in their retreat. The machine-guns, so long as they were in action, caused heavy casualties to the enemy, but the latter were swarming on all sides, and eventually the guns had either to withdraw or were captured.

With the two front brigades destroyed and the whole position occupied, the Germans may well have thought that a long advance was within their power, but in this they were soon undeceived. The support brigade, the 177th, still barred their way, and it had been strengthened by Headquarters staffs, bands, transport men and others, and very especially by the pioneer battalion, the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers. These men occupied the third defence line, and from the Hog's Back on which it was sited, they defied every effort of the Germans to get forward from Ecoust. This position was well covered by artillery and supported by machine-guns. So strong was the defence that the enemy were beaten back three times, and on the last occasion, late in the afternoon, fairly took to their heels. Shortly afterwards the 120th Brigade from the 40th Division came into support, and the situation was saved for the day. How terrific had been the strain upon the 59th Division may be reckoned from the fact that their losses were close upon 5000 out of a ten-battalion unit. It is true that they had been driven by vastly superior numbers out of their two front lines with the attendant villages, but evening found them still defiant, and, for the time, victorious, with their right still linked up with the 6th Division and their left with the 34th. There could not have been a finer recovery under more arduous circumstances. It was the last of the 59th Division, however, for many a day to come, for the 40th (Ponsonby) taking charge in this sector, gathered to itself the fifteen field-guns still left of the artillery and the only remaining brigade. It was as well, for they would need every gun and every rifle in the dark days to come. Four German divisions, the 111th, 221st, 6th Bavarians, and 2nd Guards Reserve, had been engaged in the attack. Even admitting that some of these divisions were concerned also with the attack upon the 34th Division, the latter had the 234th and some smaller units in front of it, so that it is within the mark to say that five German had attacked two British divisions, and by the aid of a vastly superior light and heavy artillery equipment had pushed them back to their reserve line, but had failed to break them. It was not a fight of which either nation need be ashamed.

This completes a superficial view of the experiences of the Sixth Corps upon March 21. In order to get the full picture one should understand that the 6th Division on the right had also been driven from their sector, including several important villages. For the sake of continuity of narrative it will be best to merely indicate this fact for the moment, and to continue to follow the fortunes of Haldane's Corps during the fateful days which followed, casting a glance also to the north where the Seventeenth Corps was gradually involved in the fight. We shall bear in mind, then, the long slanting front from the old

positions on the left to Henin Hill and the Hog's Back on the right, and we shall return to the 3rd Division at the northern end of the line.

The night had been quiet along the whole corps front, which seemed to imply some exhaustion of the attack. In the morning this lull still continued in the region of the 3rd Division, which had up to now been just outside the track of the storm. During the morning and afternoon of March 22 no serious attack was made upon this point, but in the evening the enemy, having made a lodgment upon Henin Hill in the south-west, was able to make a powerful onslaught from the flank which met with very little success. Its first onrush pushed back the 20th K.R.R., pioneer battalion of the division, in the trench called Hind Avenue, but the ground was regained by the 13th King's Liverpools, while the 4th Royal Fusiliers loosened the German grip of another small corner of trench. Up to nightfall the attempts continued, alternating with bombardments, but no progress was made, the 9th Brigade beating down every new advance.

About ten o'clock at night orders reached the division that as the Seventeenth Corps were falling back for strategic reasons to the west of Monchy on the north, while the 34th were also retreating on the south, the 3rd Division must retire in conformity with them. It was no easy task under a heavy shell-fall and with an elated enemy in close contact. It was of importance that the telephoned orders should not be tapped, and it is suggestive of the world-wide services of the British soldier that they were sent over the wires in Arabic and Hindustani. Before morning the weary troops had been quickly withdrawn without confusion or mishap, and all were safely aligned in their new positions. Their defence of their battle-ground had been a splendid one, and though they had no huge mass attack to contend with, such as had dashed the line of the 59th to pieces, still they had constant severe pressure and had withstood it completely.

We left the 34th Division on the evening of March 21 still holding its reserve lines, with its three brigades in line, the 103rd on the right in touch with the 40th Division, and the 101st on the left where the 3rd Division joined it. A spirited little body, the J Special Company R.E., had joined the fighting line of the 34th, and did good work with it. About 8 a.m. on March 22 the enemy attacked the 102nd Brigade in the Croisilles sector, but two attempts had no result, though the general British line was now 500 yards west of the village. About ten o'clock a misfortune occurred, for a heavy column of the enemy, moving up through a dense mist, broke through the 101st Brigade and carried the greater part of Henin Hill, a most important strategic point. The possession of the hill was, however, contested most strongly by the 40th Division machine-gun company and by the 11th Suffolks, who by their valiant resistance prevented the enemy from gaining the whole crest, though they could not stop them from extending north and south, which turned the line of the troops at the flanks and caused them to fall back.

The troops to the south, the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, withdrew slowly to a new position west of Boyelles ; the remains of the 102nd Brigade (it was about 500 strong at the beginning of the action) fell back upon the supports ; while the valiant men of Suffolk, aided by Colonel Roberts' machine-guns, still fought stoutly upon the top of the incline, though entirely isolated on the right flank. Finally the shattered remains of this staunch battalion withdrew towards the north-west, their slow retreat being covered by Lieutenant Woods, who met his death in the venture, and by a handful of machine-gunners.

The chief evil result from the capture of Henin Hill was in the south, where it enabled the enemy by a joint frontal and flank attack at the junction of the 34th and 40th Divisions, to push back the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 13th Yorkshires, and to get possession of the village of St. Leger. The 103rd Brigade moved back to Judas' Farm to the west of St. Leger, while the 119th Brigade prolonged the line to the south. A few machine-guns, with their feed blocks removed, were lost on Henin Hill, but otherwise no booty was obtained by the enemy. On the evening of the 22nd the infantry of the 31st Division was rushed to the front, and the 34th Division, after their two days of desperate and honourable battle, were drawn back for a rest. During March 22 the 103rd Brigade held on to St. Leger and St. Leger Wood, and so blocked the valley of the Sensée.

To the south of the 34th Division the 59th Division had now been entirely replaced by the 40th, save for the 177th Brigade, the artillery, and machine-guns, some of which rendered splendid service during the day. There was little fighting in the morning of March 22, but about midday it was found that some hundreds of Germans with a profusion of machine-guns (" many bullets but few men " was the key-note of the new advanced tactics) were close to the divisional front in the region of St. Leger Wood. These were driven back, and fourteen of their guns taken, after some confused but vigorous fighting, in which Lieutenant Beal captured four guns himself before meeting a glorious death. Several times the enemy pushed strong patrols between the 6th and 40th Divisions in the Vaux-Vraumont sector, but these were always expelled or digested. Shortly after midday, however, a very strong attack broke upon this line, pushing back the left of the 6th Division and causing heavy losses to the Highlanders of the 120th Brigade on the right of the 40th Division. The 14th Argyll and Sutherlands, with the 10/11th Highland Light Infantry, were the units concerned, and they restored their line, which had been bent backwards. Finding, however, that they had lost touch with the 6th Division to the south, they fell back until communication was restored. All day groups of German machine-gunners could be seen rushing forward, their crouching figures darting from cover to cover, while all day also the guns of the division observed and shattered the various nests which were constructed. Major Nesham distinguished himself in this work. Towards evening of the 22nd it was

known that Vraumont to the south was in German possession, and orders were given to withdraw to the new general line which this change and the capture of Henin Hill must entail. In the new position the 40th was still in close touch with the 6th in the neighbourhood of Beugnatre, the general line of the withdrawal being in a south-westerly direction. The losses had been heavy during the day, and included Colonel Eardley-Wilmot of the 12th Suffolks.

The line of the Seventeenth and of the Sixth Corps, on the morning of March 23, stretched from the south of Fampoux, west of Heninel and of St. Leger down to Mory. The Seventeenth Corps had not yet been seriously attacked. We shall continue with the record of the Sixth Corps, which now consisted of the 3rd Division in the north, part of the Guards Division, which had formed up to their right, the 31st Division north of Mory, and the 40th Division to the west of Mory, with outposts in the village. We shall again trace the events from the northern flank. No serious movement occurred during the day in front of the 3rd Division or of the Guards, but there was a report of concentrations of infantry and other signs which indicated that the storms of the south would soon spread upwards in that direction.

The 31st Division, the well-tried Yorkshire unit, still retained two of its old brigades, but had an additional 4th Brigade of Guards, cut from the old Guards Division by the new system of smaller units. General Bridgford had taken over command just before the battle and would be the first to admit that the splendid efficiency of his troops was due to General Wanless O'Gowan, who had been associated with them so long. They carried a high reputation into this great battle and an even higher one out of it. On the morning of March 23 the division faced the Germans to the north of Mory Copse, having the 4th Guards Brigade upon the right and the 93rd Brigade upon the left. Two German divisions which had already been engaged, the 111th and the 2nd Guards Reserve, tried to break this fresh line and were each in turn broken themselves, as were the German batteries which pushed to the front and found themselves under the double fire of the 31st and 34th divisional artillery. Prisoners taken in this repulse gave the information that the Germans were already a full day behind their scheduled programme in this quarter. All attacks upon the 31st met with the same fate during the day, but the enemy, as will be shown, had got a grip of Mory for a time, and pushed back the 40th in the south. Instead of a retirement the 92nd Brigade was brought from reserve and placed upon the exposed flank, while the Guards and Yorkshiremen still stood firm. In the evening the general line extended from north of Ervillers, where the 92nd Brigade was on watch, to the region of Hamelincourt, where the 93rd had their line.

The heaviest work of the day had fallen upon the 40th Division, which had dug itself in west of Mory and of Mory Copse, with strong posts in the village itself. The enemy attacked in the morning of March 23 in

great force and got complete possession of Mory. A splendid counter-attack, however, by the 13th East Surreys and 21st Middlesex at 2.30 p.m. regained the village. A deep cutting ran up to Mory from Vraucourt in the south-east, and along this the Germans sent their reinforcements, but the artillery of the British got the range of it and caused heavy losses. The village was held all day, under the local direction of Colonel Warden of the Surreys, and was violently attacked by the enemy after dark, with the result that desultory hand-to-hand fighting went on among the houses during the whole night. At one time the British had won to the eastern edge, and then again they were forced back to the centre. When one remembers that these men had been fighting for three days, with little food and less sleep, it was indeed a fine performance. One small post of 18th Welsh under Sergeant O'Sullivan was isolated for nearly two days and yet cut its way out, the gallant Irishman receiving a well-deserved honour. The morning of March 24 found little change along the line of the corps. If the Germans were already a day behind they showed no signs of making up their time. The 40th Machine-gun Battalion had done particularly fine work during the day. As an example of the gallantry which animated this unit it may be recorded that two of the guns having been rushed by the Germans near Ervillers, Lance-Corporal Cross volunteered to recover them single-handed, which he did in such fashion that seven German prisoners appeared carrying them and marching at the point of his revolver, an exploit for which he was decorated.

March 24 was marked by considerable activity in the Mory district, but no strong attack developed to the north of it. On the front of the 31st and 40th Divisions, however, the battle raged with great intensity. The enemy had full possession of Mory by 9 a.m., and was attacking the depleted battalions opposed to them along the whole divisional front so that they were compelled to fall slowly back, and by the late afternoon held a line about half a mile east of the Arras-Bapaume Road. The situation to the south had been such that the Fourth Corps had to arrange to withdraw to the west of Bapaume, so that in any case the Sixth Corps would have been compelled to throw back its right flank. The 6th Division on the immediate right had been relieved by the 41st, but touch had been lost and a gap formed, the enemy pushing on to Favreuil. The 42nd Division was on the march up, however, in order to relieve the 40th, and two brigades of this formed a defensive line covering Gomiecourt.

These events had their reaction upon the 31st Division to the north. When the enemy were seen in Mory at 9 a.m. they were upon the flank of the 4th Guards Brigade, which at the same time could see heavy columns massing to the east of St. Leger. The Guards at once dug in a new support switch line towards Ervillers and so kept touch with the 40th in its new position. The 93rd on the left was in the meanwhile heavily attacked in front, the enemy coming on again and again with a

powerful support from trench mortars. These attacks were all beaten back by the stout Yorkshire infantry, but nothing could prevent the enemy from working round in the south and occupying Behagnies and Sapignies. The British artillery was particularly masterful in this section and no direct progress could be made by the Germans.

In the late afternoon of the 24th the Germans made a new and violent attack upon the exhausted 40th Division and upon the 4th Guards Brigade on the right of the 31st. In this attack the enemy succeeded in forcing their way into Ervillers, while the 40th reformed upon the west of it, so as to cover Hamelincourt and Moyenneville. The situation in the morning of March 25 was exceedingly critical for the two advanced brigades of the 31st, the Guards and the 93rd, who had not budged from their position. The enemy were now to the right rear, and if they advanced farther northwards there was imminent danger that the defenders would be cut off. As usual the best defence of a dashing commander is an attack, so the reserve brigade, the 92nd, was ordered to advance upon Ervillers, which had already been consolidated by the 91st German Infantry Regiment. The 10th East Yorkshires led the attack and seized the village once again, but the situation was still critical, for the enemy were round the south-west, so that they enveloped the whole right wing of the division, which was stretched to cracking point with every man in the line. Touch had for the moment been lost with the troops on the right. As the Germans poured past the right wing of the 31st they presented a menace for the future, but a most tempting mark for the present, and ten machine-guns were kept in continuous action for three hours upon ideal targets ranging from 300 to 1500 yards. The enemy losses on this occasion were undoubtedly very heavy, but with fine persistency they kept upon their way, as one-idea'd and undeviating as a swarm of ants in a tropical forest. A thick trail of their dead marked their westward road.

There had been comparative quiet at the north of the line so that the narrative may still concern itself with the situation which centred round the 31st Division. The relief of the 40th upon the right was now long overdue, and the men had been worked to the bone, but the fact that Solly-Flood's 42nd Division had been deflected to the south withheld their succours. The 41st (Lawford), however, was gradually coming into action and thickening their shredded lines. Sapignies in the extreme south of the Corps area had been taken by the Germans, but was recaptured in the morning of March 25 by parts of the 120th Brigade working with the 127th Brigade of the 41st Division. Strong German reinforcements came up, however, and the British line was pushed back in this quarter to the north-west until it crossed the high ground east of Gomiecourt. This southern sector was handed over before noon from the Sixth Corps to the Fourth, and in the evening the remains of the 40th Division were finally drawn out, having finished a splendid spell of service. The strain upon General Ponsonby, and upon his

three Brigadiers, Crozier, Campbell, and Forbes, had been enormous, but under the most extreme pressure their units had always maintained the line. Part of the 126th Brigade of the 42nd Division was now on the immediate right of the 31st Division, the 10th Manchesters connecting up with the 11th East Yorks and doing great work in covering that flank.

It has already been recorded how the 92nd Brigade, all of East Yorkshire, had beaten the 91st Prussian Regiment out of the village of Ervillers. A second regiment of the 2nd Guards Reserve Division, the 77th, essayed the adventure of turning the Yorkshiremen out, but met with a bloody repulse. "It was a sight to see," says one who was present. "We were only a battalion, probably 800 strong, while he had massed artillery and many thousands of infantry. They came over to us in columns, and they kept coming. They swarmed towards us, but they made no progress, and we could not shoot fast enough. For three and a half hours they came, and for three and a half hours we knocked them out. They were falling like ripe corn before the reaper. As fast as they fell others took their places, but they could not move the East Yorks." The 2nd Guards Reserve were worn out by this experience, and it must be admitted that their service in the battle had been long and arduous. They were relieved by the 16th Bavarians and the 239th Division, so that there was no surcease in the endless pressure.

At 1.15 the 93rd West Yorkshires upon the left of the line were attacked, but could no more be shifted than their brother Tykes in the south. The German stormers never reached the line, partly owing to the excellent barrage and partly to the steady rifle-fire. After a long interval of following false gods, such as bombs and rifle grenades, the British soldier was reasserting himself once more as the best average shot of all the forces engaged, though it must be admitted that the specialised German snipers with their weapons of precision were of a high excellence. All day the division stood its ground and hit back hard at every attack, but by evening the salient had become so extreme that it was necessary to readjust the line. They fell back, therefore, the 92nd covering the operation, and took up the line from Moyenneville to Ablainzeville, where they faced round on the morning of March 26, the 92nd on the right of the line, the 93rd upon the left, and the 4th Guards in reserve. On their north lay the division of Guards, on their south the 42nd Division.

It was on this morning that an incident occurred leading to the loss of a village, but also to a singular instance of military virtue. It is the episode of Moyenneville and of the 15th West Yorkshire Battalion. It appears that an officer in a state of concussion from the explosion of a shell, sent an order to the left of the line that they should retire. The Guards and other observers were surprised to see two British battalions walking back with sloped arms under no pressure from the enemy. By some chance the mistaken order did not reach the 15th West Yorkshires, who remained isolated in their position, and Colonel Twiss

refused to follow the brigade until a positive command should arrive. In their loneliness they extended each flank in search of a friend, and finally stretched their left into Moyenneville village, which they found already strongly occupied by the Germans. To many minds this would have appeared to be an excellent excuse for retirement, but its effect upon the Yorkshire temperament was that they instantly attacked the village and drove the intruders out. One considerable body of Germans was driven down into a hollow and pelted with bullets until the survivors raised the white flag. Very large numbers of German wounded lay in and around the village, but it was not possible to send them to the rear. The enemy attacked Moyenneville again, but the battalion covered the western exits and denied all egress. For the whole of that day, the whole night, and up to the afternoon of March 27, this heroic body of infantry held their ground, though shot at from every side and nearly surrounded. Not one yard backwards would they budge without a definite written order. Not only did they hold their own front but their machine-guns played upon nine successive waves of Germans advancing from Courcelles to Ayette, and sorely hampered their movements to the south. They covered 2000 yards for thirty-six hours and relieved the front of the 31st Division from pressure during that time. When at last the survivors made their way back only four officers and forty men represented that gallant battalion. Colonel Twiss was among the missing. "This battalion," says the official record, "by its brave action relieved the pressure on our front throughout the whole day and gave the division time to establish its position near Ayette." It was as well that this pressure should have been taken off, for both on the 26th and the 27th the ammunition question had become serious, and disaster might have followed a more extended action.

If we continue to follow the fortunes of the 31st Division, so as to bring them to their natural term, we find it now covering the line from Ayette in the south to Ablainzeville. The enemy were driving up on the right of the division between Courcelles and Ablainzeville, a space which was covered by the 92nd Brigade, who were fighting as brilliantly as ever. Touch had been lost with the 42nd upon March 27. The East Yorkshires lost their outpost line four times this morning and four times they cleared it with the bayonet. Colonel Rickman, the senior officer on the spot, fought for every inch of ground as he retired before the ever-increasing pressure. Finally the 92nd, worn to rags, were ordered to reform behind the 4th Guards Brigade at Ayette, but so high was their spirit that when during the night there was word that the Guards were themselves hard pressed they eagerly sent help forward to them, while the Guards, with equal chivalry of spirit, strictly limited the number who should come. About six in the evening the Guards threw out a line to the south and joined up with the 10th Manchesters of the 42nd Division to the west of Ablainzeville, so that the line was once more complete.

March 28 found the battle still raging in front of the division, which had now been engaged for four days without a break and had beaten off the attacks of five separate German divisions. Two attacks were made, the one upon the 93rd Brigade, the other upon the Guards. Each attack got into the line and each was pitchforked out again. So broken was the enemy that they were seen retiring in crowds towards the north-east under a canopy of shrapnel. The British barrage was particularly good that day, and many assaulting units were beaten into pieces by it. The division was terribly worn, and the men could hardly stand for exhaustion, and yet it was a glad thought that the last glimpse which their weary and bloodshot eyes had of their enemy was his broken hordes as they streamed away from the front which they had failed to break. So thin were the ranks that the pioneer battalion, the 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry, was brought up to form the line. The Guards had taken their position somewhat to the west of Ayette, and some of the enemy from the south filtered into the village, but they were shortly afterwards put out again by Shute's 32nd Division, which had come up for the relief. There was no attack on the 29th, and on the 30th the 31st was able to withdraw, having established a record which may have been equalled but cannot have been surpassed by any division in this great battle. Five German divisions, the 111th, 2nd Guards Reserve, 239th and 16th Bavarians, and 1st Guards Reserve, had been wholly or partially engaged with the 31st. Both sides had lost heavily and were exhausted. It was here, near Ervillers, that a German war correspondent has described how he saw the long line of German and British wounded lying upon either side of the main road.

It has been stated that the 32nd Division carried Ayette after this unit had relieved the 31st Division, and the operation may be treated here to preserve continuity of narrative. It was of more than local importance, as it was one of the earliest indications that the British army was still full of fight and that in spite of every disadvantage it meant to hit back at every opportunity. On taking over this section of the front, General Shute found before him the village of Ayette, which was strongly held, but was on the forward slope of a hill so that it could obtain little help from the German guns. He at once determined to attack. The 15th Highland Light Infantry of the 14th Brigade were directed upon the village on the night of April 2, while the 96th Brigade continued the attack to the south. The result was a very heartening little success. Three companies of the Highlanders, numbering under 300 in all, carried the village, though it was held by a German battalion. On the right, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers made the attack, and in spite of one check, which was set right by the personal intervention of General Girdwood of the 96th Brigade, the objectives were reached. The two attacks were skilfully connected up by the 5/6th Royal Scots, while a party of sappers of the 206th Field Company under Lieutenant Cronin followed on the heels of the infantry and quickly consolidated.

Whilst these stirring events had been in progress in the south, the north of the line had slowly drawn back in order to preserve conformity. The Seventeenth Corps, as already stated, were to the west of Monchy, and the left of the Sixth Corps was on the line of Henin, where the 3rd Division occupied a strong defensive position. This was strongly attacked upon the forenoon of March 24, especially on the 8th Brigade front, which was the right of the line, the Germans swarming up from the south-east of Henin and trying hard to work up the Henin-Neuville Vitasse Road. This attack fell particularly upon the 1st Scots Fusiliers, and it was completely repulsed with heavy losses, though it was facilitated by the sunken roads which converged upon Henin. The Germans in their retirement had to pass along a slope where once again they lost heavily.

Shortly after noon the left of the 3rd Division was also attacked, and the enemy obtained a temporary footing between the 1st Gordons and 8th Royal Lancasters of the 76th Brigade. From this he was very soon ejected, and though many bombing attacks were pushed with great resolution they had no results. March 25 was quiet on the front of the 3rd Division, though the right of the Guards Division to the south near Boyelles was subjected to one heavy unsuccessful attack. That evening both the Guards and the 3rd Division had to make some retraction of their line in order to conform to the situation already described in the south, but March 26 passed without an attack, the soldiers listening with anxious impatience to the roar of battle on their right, unable to see the fight, and yet keenly conscious that their own lives might depend upon its results. The 27th was also a day of anxious expectancy, culminating upon the 28th in a very severe battle, which was the greater test coming after so long a period of strain. All three brigades were in the line, the 8th on the right, 9th in the centre, and 76th in the north. Still farther to the north was the 44th Highland Brigade of Reed's 15th Division upon which the storm first burst.

This brigade at 6.45 was assailed by a bombardment of so severe a character that its trenches were completely destroyed. The German infantry pushed home behind this shattering fire and drove back the front line of the Highlanders. This enabled them to get behind the left flank of the 2nd Suffolks and nearly surround them, while at the same time they pierced the front of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers on their right. The front line of the 8th Royal Lancasters had also been penetrated, and the British infantry were pushed back and split up into various small squads of men, intermingled in the north with Highlanders of the 44th Brigade, and all fighting desperately with the enemy swarming thickly upon them. By 9.45 the whole front was in German hands. Enemy field-guns were lining Wancourt Ridge, and as the shattered formations tried to form a new line they were heavily shelled by them. The loss in officers and men was very heavy, Colonel James of the Royal Lancasters being among the dead. The withdrawal was

made to the reserve line, which the 44th Brigade had already occupied in the north. This included the village of Neuville Vitasse which became untenable from shell-fire, and into the northern portion of which the enemy was able to push, but in the main the reserve system was occupied, the movement being covered by some of the 1st Gordons. At this point an equilibrium was attained and the enemy held after as desperate a conflict as any troops could be called upon to endure.

On the right of the 76th Brigade the 9th Brigade had also been fighting very hard, and been compelled to yield some ground before the overpowering weight of the attack, especially that of the preliminary trench-mortar fire. The first enemy advance in the morning was completely beaten off with great loss. A second attack had driven in the 8th Brigade on the right, which enabled the Germans to get behind the two companies of the 13th King's Liverpools who were in the front line. These men fought to the end and were last seen standing on the parapet without a thought of surrender. At the same time a company of the Northumberland Fusiliers on their left shared their fate, save for one officer and twelve men who survived. The front line of the 8th Brigade had now ceased to exist, but the reserve line still held. An attack upon the 7th Shropshires who, with the remains of the other battalions, held on to it, was successfully shattered, even the battalion headquarters being brought into the desperate battle, while the guns on each side fought as hard as the infantry, barrage and attack succeeding each other with mechanical accuracy, and being answered by an equally efficient barrage and defence, for the British guns were extraordinarily well handled that day. About midday the enemy got a lodgment on the right of the reserve line, but the Fusiliers, whose Colonel, Moulton Barrett, had been hit, and the 13th King's still fought furiously for what was left, and retained their ground until dusk, when they were drawn back into the reserve line in order to conform with the 76th Brigade.

The 8th Brigade upon the extreme right of the division had also endured heavy losses in men and some loss in ground. The front line was held by companies of the 1st Scots Fusiliers and of the 7th Shropshires. The enemy, after an unsuccessful attempt, got into the trenches of the latter and bombed their way along them, clearing that section of the front. It was bomb against rifle in the tortuous ditches, and the bomb proved the more handy weapon. The Scots Fusiliers, who were the next to be assailed, made shift with rifle grenades, but these also ran short, and they were forced back, so that the survivors of the two front companies were driven across the Arras-Bapaume Road. Finally, as in the case of the other brigades, the reserve line was successfully maintained until evening.

No soldiers could have fought with greater bravery and skill than did the 3rd Division on March 28. They were assailed by at least three German divisions and by a crushing artillery, but they disputed every inch of ground, and finally fought their formidable adversary to such a

complete standstill that he could not, with several hours of daylight at his disposal, and disorganised ranks before him, continue his attacks. It is true that he secured Henin and Neuville Vitasse, but he paid a rich price in blood. So broken were the enemy that the British wounded came back through their ranks without let or hindrance. A strong counter would have swept them out of the ground that they had gained, but neither the 3rd nor the 15th, which had endured an equal attack upon the left, was in a condition to advance, while the Guards had been already withdrawn in accordance with the situation on their right. The blow which the Germans had received was shown even more clearly by their failure to attack on the next day. On March 30 the 3rd Division was relieved by the 2nd Canadians. Their record was a great one, and their losses, 139 officers and 3500 men, were a measure of their services. In nine days, before a vastly superior force, they had only gone back 7000 yards, most of which was strategic withdrawal. Well might General Byng say, " By their conduct they have established a standard of endurance and determination that will be a model for all time."

This desperate German attack on March 28 to the north of the British line had spread right across the face of the 15th Scottish Division through the line of Orange Hill and on to Telegraph Hill, finally involving the 4th Division on the other side of the Scarpe, and the right-hand unit of the Thirteenth Corps on their left, so that Horne's First Army was now drawn into the fray, which reached as far north as Oppy and Gavrelle. Along the whole of this long front there was constant fighting, which in the case of the 15th Division was as desperate as that of the 3rd. All three brigades were in the line, each of them having two battalions in front and one in reserve. Never has the grand tough Scottish fibre been more rudely tested than on this terrible day of battle, and never has it stood the strain more splendidly. General Reed's men undoubtedly saved Arras and held up at least six German divisions which broke themselves on that rugged and impenetrable line, formed in the first instance by the 7th Camerons upon the right, the 13th Royal Scots in the centre, the 9th Black Watck and 7/8th Scots Borderers on the left. As already told, the shattering bombardment destroyed a large part of the right front, burying the garrison amid the ruins of their trenches, near their junction with the 3rd Division. Some fifty Camerons, under Colonel MacLeod, fought most desperately round their head-quarters, and then fell back slowly upon the 8/10th Gordons, who were holding the Neuville Vitasse trench behind them. This was about 6 a.m. By 7.40 the whole front line, shot to pieces and with their right flank gone, readjusted their line to correspond, winding up near the Feuchy Road. There was no rest nor respite, however, for the whole German plan of campaign depended upon their getting Arras, so they poured forward their waves of attack regardless of losses. It was a really desperate battle in which the Scots, lying in little groups among the shell-holes and ditches, mowed the Germans down as they swarmed up

to them, but were themselves occasionally cut off and overpowered as the stormers found the gaps and poured through them. The pressure was very great on the front of the Black Watch, north of the Cambrai Road, and there General Reed determined upon a counter-attack, for which he could only spare a single company of the 10th Scottish Rifles. In spite of the small numbers it was carried out with such dash, under the personal lead of Colonel Stanley Clarke, that the front was cleared for a time, and the Germans thrown back east of Feuchy.

Meanwhile the Germans had made some advance to the north of the Scarpe, and the 7/8th Scots Borderers on the left wing had to fall back to preserve the line. At 11 a.m. the enemy were raging in the centre of the line, and the 6th Camerons, north of the Cambrai Road, were forced backwards, the enemy piercing their front. Up to 1.45 the weight of the attack was mostly in the north, and ended by all three brigades moving back, with the enemy still striving with the utmost fury and ever fresh relays of men to burst the line. At 3 p.m. the German stormers had won the Bois des Bœufs, but were driven out again by the 9th Black Watch and by the 11th Argylls, who had lost their C.O., Colonel Mitchell. The division was worn to a shadow, and yet the moment that the German attack seemed to ease both they and the 4th Division on their north advanced their front. In this single bloody day the 15th Division lost 94 officers and 2223 men, but there can be no doubt that their action, with that of the 3rd Division and the 4th on either side of them, was the main determining factor in the whole of this vast battle. General Reed (a V.C. of Colenso) with his Brigadiers, Hilliard, Allgood, and Lumsden, might well be proud of the way they held the pass.

North of the Scarpe all three brigades of the 4th Division were exposed to a furious attack, and lost the village of Rœux, which was defended literally to the death by the 2nd Seaforths of the 10th Brigade, but the 1st Hants in the front line of the 11th Brigade and the 2nd Essex of the 12th stood like iron, and in a long day's fighting the enemy was never able to make any serious lodgment in the position, though the rushes of his bombing parties were said by experienced British officers to have been extraordinarily determined and clever. Very little ground was gained by the Germans, and of this a section upon the left flank near Gavrelle was regained by a sudden counter-attack of the 4th Division.

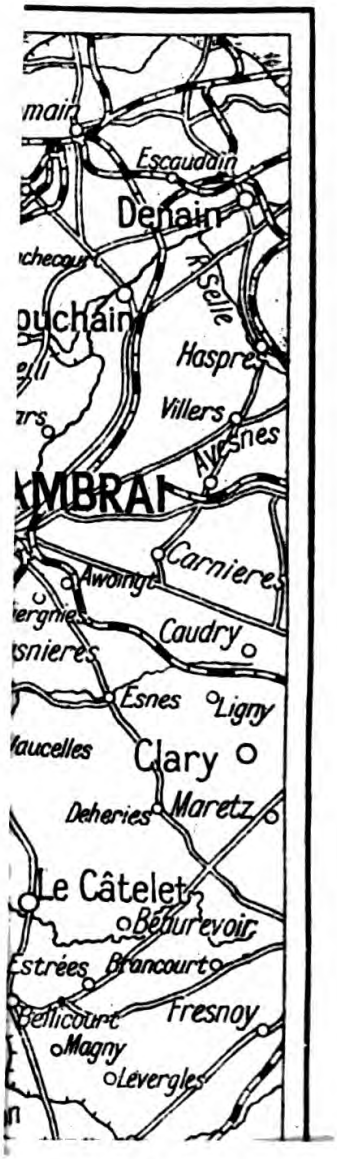
Of the attack to the north of the Third Army in the Bailleul and Oppy district, it should be noted that it fell upon the 56th London Territorial Division, who for once had the pleasant experience of being at the right end of the machine-gun. They took every advantage of their opportunity, and there are few places where the Germans have endured heavier losses with no gains to show in return. The Westminsters and L.R.B. of the 169th Brigade were particularly heavily engaged, and a party of the former distinguished themselves by a most desperate defence of an outlying post, named Towy Post, near Gavrelle, which they held long after it was passed by the enemy, but eventually fought

their way to safety. The attack lasted from seven in the morning till six at night, and the Londoners had full vengeance for their comrades of July 1916 or August 1917, who had died before the German wire even as the Germans died that day.

It was a successful day for the British arms, so successful that it marked the practical limit of the German advance in that quarter, which was the vital section, covering the town of Arras. There is no doubt that the attempt was a very serious one, strongly urged by six divisions of picked infantry in front and four in support, with a very powerful concentration of artillery, which was expected to smash a way through the three divisions chiefly attacked. The onslaught was whole-hearted and skilful, but so was the defence. The German losses were exceedingly high, and save for a strip of worthless ground there was really nothing to show for them. It was the final check to the German advance in this quarter of the field, so that the chronicler may well bring his record to a pause while he returns to the first day of the battle and endeavours to trace the fortunes of the Fourth and Fifth Corps, who formed the right half of the Third Army. We have fixed the northern sector of the battle-field from Bailleul in the north right across the Scarpe and down to the Cojeul in its position, from which it was destined to make no change for many months to come. It was the first solidification of the lines, for to the south all was still fluid and confused.

A word should be said before one finally passes from this portion of the great epic as to the truly wonderful work of the Army Medical Corps. In spite of the constant fire the surgeons and bearers were continually in the front line and conveying the wounded to the rear. Many thousands were saved from a German prison camp by the devotion which kept them within the British lines. It may be invidious to mention examples where the same spirit of self-sacrifice animated all, but one might take as typical the case of the 40th Division, some details of which are available. Colonel McCullagh and his men conveyed to the rear during five days, always under heavy fire, 2400 cases of their own or other divisions, the whole of the casualties of the 40th being 2800. McCarter, a British, and Berney, an American surgeon, both had dressing-posts right up to the battle-line, the latter being himself wounded twice. Wannan, a stretcher-bearer, carried thirty cases in one day, and ended by conveying a wounded friend several miles upon his shoulders. Private McIntosh, attacked by a German while binding an injured man, killed the cowardly fellow with his own bayonet, and then completed his task. It is hard to work detail into so vast a picture, but such deeds were infinitely multiplied along that great line of battle. Nor can one omit mention of the untiring work of the artillery, which was in action often for several days and nights on end. Occasionally in some soldier's letter one gets a glimpse of the spirit of the gunners such as no formal account can convey: "Our battery fired two days and nights without ceasing until spotted by the German observers. They

then kept up a terrible fire until the British guns were silenced in succession. One officer was left standing when I was wounded. He shook my hand as they carried me away. I went leaving him with about seven men and two guns, still carrying on as if nothing had happened. This is only one battery among hundreds which showed as great pluck and tenacity as we did."


Escaudain
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Villers
Carnieres
Caudry
Esnes
Ligny
Clary
Maretz
Le Câtelet
Fresnoy
Magny
Levergies

CHAPTER XLV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack on the Fourth and Fifth Corps

Attack on 6th and 51st Divisions—Engagement of the 25th and 41st Divisions—Attack on 47th, 63rd, 2nd, and 19th Divisions—The German torrent—Serious situation—Arrival of 62nd Division—Fighting before Albert—Gallant defence by 12th Division—Arrival of the New Zealanders, of the Australians, of the 35th Division—Equilibrium.

To the immediate south of the Sixth Corps the front line on March 21 was held by Harper's Fourth Corps, which consisted of the 6th Division (Marden) opposite to Lagnicourt with the 51st Highland Division to the right of them, which famous unit was now under the command of General Carter-Campbell, whose name has been recorded in a previous chapter as the only officer left standing in his battalion after the action of Neuve Chapelle. To the south of the Fourth Corps was the Fifth Corps (Fanshawe) with the 17th Division (Robertson) on the left, the 63rd (Lawrie) in the centre, and the 47th (Gorringe) on the right covering the whole Cambrai salient from Flesquières in the north to the point near Gouzeaucourt Wood where the Third Army met the left flank of the Fifth. The line took a considerable bend at this point, marking the ground gained at the battle of Cambrai, and it was part of the German scheme to break through to the north and south, so that without attacking the Fifth Corps they would either cause it to fall back or else isolate and capture it. Had their advance been such as they had hoped for, they would certainly have placed it in great peril. Even as it was, it was necessary to withdraw the line, but without undue haste or confusion. Great pressure was laid upon the Fifth Corps in later stages of the battle, but beyond a considerable shell-fall and demonstration there was no actual attack on March 21. It was by holding certain sections of the line in this fashion that the Germans were able to pile up the odds at those places which were actually attacked.

It will be possible to describe the sequence of events with considerably less detail in this and other sectors of the line, since the general conditions of attack and defence may be taken as similar to that already described. Here also the bombardment began with its full shattering force of high explosive, blue cross invisible gas, mustard gas, phosgene,

and every other diabolical device which the German chemist had learned to produce and the British to neutralise. In the case of the British infantry, many of them had to wear their gas masks for eight hours on end, and the gunners were in even worse plight; but these appliances were of a surprising efficiency, and hampered the experienced soldier far less than would have been thought. The total casualties from gas were about 12 per cent of the whole.

The infantry advance was at 9.45, the Germans swarming in under the cover of Nature's smoke barrage, for here, as in several other parts of the line, a thick morning mist greatly helped the attack and screened the stormers until they were actually up to the wire, which had usually been shattered in advance by the trench-mortars. The line from Flesquières to Dernicourt in the region of the 51st Division was less seriously attacked, and remained inviolate, but the northern stretch from Dernicourt to Lagnicourt was struck with terrific impact, and gave before the blow to very much the same extent as the divisions to the immediate north. The 71st Brigade in the Lagnicourt sector was especially hard hit, and was very violently assailed by a strong force of Germans, which included the 1st Prussian Guard. This famous regiment was at one time all round the 9th Norfolks, who succeeded at last in fighting themselves clear, though their Colonel, Prior, and the great majority of the officers and men in the battalion were killed or wounded. Even these wounded, however, were safely carried off, thanks to the devotion of Captain Failes and a handful of brave men. In this desperate struggle the whole brigade was decimated. The 16th and 18th Brigades had also suffered severely, but the division, in spite of its losses, was splendidly solid, and fell back slowly upon the support of the 75th Brigade of the 25th Division, which had hastened up to the danger point. By evening, the Germans, advancing in great numbers and with fine resolution, had occupied the four villages of Doignies, Boursies, Louverval, and Lagnicourt, their total penetration from Boursies in the south to Ecoust in the north, a stretch of seven miles, averaging about 3000 yards. This advance had completely turned the left wing of the 51st, which was compelled to fall back in consequence, after stopping several attacks from across the Canal du Nord. All three brigades of the 51st Division were in line, and of the three the left and centre had been seriously engaged, the enemy entering the front line of both before midday, and finally reaching the second system between Louverval and Lagnicourt, so that the defence lay along the Beaumetz-Morchies line. The 19th Division was in general support in this quarter, and the 57th Brigade became practically the right of the 51st Division. About 7 in the evening two battalions of it, the 8th Gloucesters and 10th Worcesters of the 57th Brigade, tried to turn the tide of fight by a counter-attack, with the aid of tanks, against the village of Doignies. This attack was successful in retaking half the village, but in the course of the night it was found necessary to withdraw before

the increasing pressure of the enemy, who brought many machine-guns into the village. During the night it was arranged that the Fifth Corps should fall back from its dangerous position in the Cambrai salient, and by eleven next day the divisions which composed it were ranged from Highland Ridge through Havrincourt and Hermies, in touch with the Fourth Corps in the north and with the left of the Fifth Army in the south.

Whilst this very heavy attack had been made upon the Fourth Corps, Bainbridge's 25th Division had been in close support of the two divisions in the front line. While the 75th Brigade, as already stated, was pushed up under very heavy fire to strengthen the 6th Division in their desperate resistance, the 74th was allotted to the 51st Division, which was in less serious need of help during the day. Griffin's 7th Brigade remained in reserve in front of Morchies, where upon the following morning its presence was valuable as a solid unshaken nucleus of resistance. Eight German divisions were identified that day among those which attacked the two British divisions in the front line of the Fourth Corps.

There was no attack during the night, but the Germans thickened their advanced line and were all ready for another strenuous day, while the British, though hustled and overborne by the tremendous onslaught which had pushed them back, were still within their battle positions and as doggedly surly as British infantry usually are in hours of stress and trial. Three strong attacks were made in the morning and early afternoon between Hermies and Beaumetz, all of which were driven back. There is no method of gauging the losses of the enemy upon such occasions, but when one knows that the machine-guns fired as many as 9000 rounds each, and that a single Lewis gun discharged 30,000 bullets, one can say with certainty that they were very heavy. These attacks fell upon the Highlanders on the right, the 7th Brigade in the centre, and the remains of the 6th Division upon the left. Unhappily, a chain of defence is no stronger than its weakest link, which finds itself so often at points of juncture. Upon this occasion the Germans, continually filtering forward and testing every possible orifice, found a weakness between the 120th Brigade of the 40th Division in the north and the 6th in the south. This weak point was to be mended by the 41st Division, which had been hurried up from Favreuil, but the time was too short, or the rent was too wide, so that the Germans pushed rapidly through and seized the village of Vaulx-Vraumont, separating the Fourth Corps from the Sixth. It was an anxious moment, and coupled with the German success at Henin Hill in the north it might have meant the isolation of the Sixth Corps ; but the necessary changes were rapidly and steadily effected, so that before evening the Highlanders of the 120th Brigade feeling out upon their right and fearing all would be void, joined hands suddenly with the 15th Hampshires of the 41st Division in the neighbourhood of Beugnâtre. Before night had fallen on March 22 the line had been restored and built up once more,

though some five thousand yards westward of where it had been in the morning. That evening the 6th Division was drawn out, weak and dishevelled, but still full of fight. With all the hammering and hustling that it had endured, it had saved its heavy guns and nearly all its field batteries. The 41st Division took its place, and incorporated for the time the 7th Brigade, a unit which had endured hard fortune, for it had held its ground splendidly with little loss until, after the fashion of modern war, events upon the other side of the horizon caused it to get the order to retire, an order which could not be obeyed without complete exposure and very heavy casualties, including Colonel Blackall of the 4th South Staffords.

Each day of arduous battle was followed by a no less arduous night, during which, under heavy fire and every conceivable difficulty, the various divisions were readjusted so that the morning light should show no impossible salients, no outlying indefensible positions, no naked flanks, and no yawning gaps. How easy are such exercises over a map upon a study table, and how difficult when conducted by dazed, overwrought officers, pushing forward their staggering, half-conscious men in the darkness of a wilderness of woods and fields, where the gleam of a single electric torch may mean disaster to all! And yet, as every morning dawned, the haggard staff-captain at the telephone could still report to his anxious chief that all was well, and his battle line still intact between the enemy and his goal.

On the morning of the battle the general disposition of the Fifth Corps had been that the 17th Division (Robertson) was in the line on the left, the 63rd Naval Division (Lawrie) in the centre, and the 47th Division (Gorringe) on the right, being the southern unit of the Third Army, in close liaison with the 9th Division, the northern unit of the Fifth Army. Two divisions were in close reserve, the 2nd (Pereira) on the right, and the 19th (Jeffreys) on the left.

The 47th Division was in a particularly important position, since it was the flank unit and the liaison between the two armies depended upon it. It had only come into line the day before the battle, taking the place of the 2nd Division, which was now in immediate support. On March 21 the 140th Brigade covered the right of the divisional front, and the 141st the left, the sector being that of La Vacquerie. In view of the menacing attitude of the enemy both the 142nd Brigade and the 4th Welsh Fusiliers Pioneer Battalion were brought nearer to the front line. So heavy was the gas bombardment in the morning that the front battalion of the 140th Brigade, the 17th London, had to evacuate some advanced trenches and to wear their gas masks for hours on end. The front line trenches were blown to fragments, and so also were many of their garrison. The following infantry advance, however, though vigorously conducted, had no great weight, and seems to have been the work of two battalions carrying out a subsidiary attack. By a counter-attack of the 19th London they were driven out once more.

Whilst this partial attack had been made upon the 47th Division, similar assaults had been made upon the 63rd in the centre, and upon the 17th in the northern sector of the Fifth Corps. None of them made more than petty gains, but in each case the bombardment was formidable chiefly with trench-mortar bombs and with gas. In the case of the 47th Division there was a considerable interval between the front brigades, because a number both of the 18th and 17th London had been absolutely destroyed, together with their trench. There were several other partial attacks during the day, but the pressure was never extreme, and the withdrawal to Highland Ridge after dusk was carried out on account of the general tactical position. All wounded men were carried back, and no booty left to the enemy.

Meanwhile the left flank of the Fifth Corps had been covered by the 58th Brigade of the 19th Division, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers being heavily engaged. During March 22, Havrincourt, Hermies, and the Beaumetz-Hermies line were held by the 17th, 19th, and 51st Divisions against repeated German attacks, and in the evening the 19th was in touch with the 41st on its left and with the 2nd on its right.

On this night of March 22 the principal change was this movement backwards of the whole Fifth Corps. The retirement of the Fifth Corps continued during the day of March 23, and was caused by the necessity of conforming with the Seventh Corps to the south of it which, after valiant exertions, soon to be described, had lost Nurlu, so placing the enemy upon the right rear of the divisions in the north. Fins had also been taken in the same neighbourhood. The Fifth Corps was now heavily pressed in its retreat, all five divisions enduring considerable losses and having the menace of the enemy constantly upon their right flank. At noon the general line was east of Equancourt, and this line was held for a time, but the enemy was still thundering on in the north, his fresh divisions rolling in like waves from some inexhaustible sea. At 1.30 they were pushing their attack most desperately upon the weary fringes of riflemen and groups of tired machine-gunners, who formed the front of the 41st Division between Beugny and Lebucquière. In all, this division, with the 19th and 51st upon their right, sustained five strong attacks in the afternoon of this day, most of them from Vaulx-Vraumont. Eventually Lebucquière was taken, the enemy breaking their way at this point through the line of the exhausted 51st Division, who had fought with splendid resolution. This German success placed the 19th Division south of Beaumetz and at Beugny in a very serious position, as the enemy infantry got behind the 9th Welsh Fusiliers and 6th Wiltshires, who were only saved from total destruction by the staunch support of the 9th Welsh at Beugny, who held on desperately until the remains of the 58th Brigade could get back to them. These remains when the three battalions were reunited were only a few hundred men. The case of the 57th Brigade, which was fighting a hard rearguard action all afternoon, was little better, and both the 8th Gloucesters and

10th Worcesters were almost overwhelmed by the swarms of Germans who poured up against their front and flank. A splendid stand was made by this brigade north-east of Velu, in which the men of Gloucester especially distinguished themselves, Captain Jones of A Company receiving the V.C. for his heroic resistance. Colonel Hoath of the 10th Warwicks conducted this arduous retreat, and his own battalion shares in the honours of a fight which was tragic in its losses, but essential for its effect upon the fortunes of the army. Captain Gribble of this battalion also received the V.C., his D Company falling to the last man after the best traditions of the British Army. The 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division, on the right of the 19th Division, shared in the honours of this desperate business, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks being very heavily engaged. After the prolonged action the final line of the 19th Division ran west of Bertincourt, the movement of retreat being to the south-west. So confused had been the fighting of the last two days that the 19th Division which had been on the right of the 51st was now upon their left. Still keeping a closely-knit line and their faces to the foe, the Third Army stretched that night from Sailly in the south to the west of Henin and Monchy. The Fourth Corps, which had been so badly mauled, was strengthened that evening by the inclusion of the 42nd Division. The towers of Bapaume in the rear showed how far across the ravaged and reconquered land the British line had retreated.

The pressure here described had been upon the left of the Fifth Corps, but the situation on its right flank had also been very awkward. The terrific weight thrown upon the 9th Division had, as will be described, driven them farther westward than their left-hand companions of the 47th Division. The result was a most dangerous gap which exposed the whole rear of the Third Army. The 99th Brigade in the Equancourt district endeavoured after the fall of Fins to fill this front, but they were not nearly numerous enough for the purpose. The result was that the 47th Division, which moved back on the night of March 22 from Highland Ridge to the Metz-Dessart Wood line, had to reach out more and more upon the right in order to save the situation. In this operation two battalions, the 4th Welsh Fusiliers Pioneers and the 23rd London, sustained most of the attack and suffered very heavily on March 23, while in the preliminary fighting on March 22 the 18th London had many losses. By the morning of March 24, the 47th, beating off all attacks and keeping their position in the unbroken line, had fallen back to a new position, the 142nd Brigade, which formed the rearguard, fighting hard in its retreat, and having to brush aside those groups of Germans who had slipped in at the rear.

The morning of March 24 found the German torrent still roaring forward in full spate, though less formidable than before, since the heavier guns were far to the rear. Their light artillery, trench-mortars, and machine-guns were always up with the storming columns, and the latter were relieved in a manner which showed the competence of their

higher command. It was a day of doubt and difficulty for the British, for the pressure was everywhere severe, and the line had frayed until it was very thin, while officers and men had reached the last limits of human endurance. At 8.30 in the morning the enemy was pressing hard upon the 17th and 47th Divisions in the region of Bus and Le Mesnil, where they were endeavouring to keep in touch with the worn remains of the heroic 9th Division on the left of the Seventh Corps. Sailly Saillisel was still clear of the enemy, but the tide was flowing strongly towards it. The 51st Brigade of the 17th Division occupied this village and threw out its left to the Londoners on the north of them. Bertincourt, which had become a dangerous salient, was evacuated, and the line now ran east of Haplincourt and Rocquigny, the three brigades of the 17th Division occupying this latter village, Barastre, and Villers-au-Flos. On their north were two brigades of the 47th, the remaining brigade being south of Le Transloy. North of the 47th Division the 63rd Naval Division and the 2nd Division carried the line on to the junction with the Fourth Corps, where the exhausted 19th Division lay across the Cambrai Road, with the even more shattered 51st Division at Riencourt to the north of them. There was some very furious fighting in front of Rocquigny about midday, in which the 12th Manchesters of the 17th Division, and the three battalions (18th, 19th, 20th London) of the 141st Brigade made a very desperate resistance. The fighting was continued until the defenders found themselves in danger of being surrounded, when they were withdrawn. The 140th Brigade, under Colonel Dawes, also did great service that day in holding the Germans from getting behind the line. The enemy was so far round that there was the greatest difficulty in clearing the transport, which was only accomplished by the fine rearguard work of the 4th Welsh Fusiliers, aided by the 11th Motor Machine-gun Battery, and 34th Brigade R.F.A.

It was, however, to the south, where the Third and Fifth Armies were intermittently joined and vaguely interlocked, that the danger chiefly lay. About noon, the enemy, finding the weak spot between the two armies, had forced his way into Sailly Saillisel in considerable force, and pushed rapidly north and west from the village. So rapid was the German advance upon the right rear of the Fifth Corps that Rancourt and even Combles were said to have fallen. In vain the 17th Division overstretched its wing to the south, trying to link up with the Seventh Corps. Early in the afternoon Morval and Les Bœufs had gone, and the troops were back upon the mud-and-blood areas of 1916. For the moment it seemed that the British line had gone, and it was hard to say what limit might be put to this very serious advance. By midnight the enemy were north of Bapaume, and had reached Ervillers, while in the south they had taken Longueval, the key village of Delville Wood. It was indeed a sad relapse to see all that the glorious dead had bought with their hearts' blood reverting so swiftly to the enemy. In the north, however, as has already been shown in the story of the Sixth Corps, the

enemy's bolt was shot, and in the south his swift career was soon to be slowed and held.

In the Favreuil, Sapignies, and Gomiecourt district, north of Bapaume, the advance was mainly accomplished through the pressure of fresh German forces upon the exhausted and attenuated line of the 41st Division, which still struggled bravely, and in the end successfully, against overwhelming odds. In the effort to hold a line the divisions which had been drawn out as too weak for service turned back once more into the fray like wounded men who totter forward to strike a feeble blow for their comrades in distress. The 6th Division was led in once more, and sustained fresh and terrible losses. Its left fell back to Favreuil, exposing the right wing of the 40th Division. The 25th Division to the east of Achiet found itself also once more overtaken by the battle. By evening the line had been built up again in this quarter, and the dead-weary British infantry snatched a few hours of sleep before another day of battle. The 19th Division, reduced to 2000 rifles, lay from Le Barque to Avesnes, with the 2nd on their right and the 41st on their left, while the whole of this difficult retreat had been covered by the weary but indomitable Highlanders of the 51st.

The really serious situation was to the south of Bapaume upon the old Somme battle-field, where the Germans had made sudden and alarming progress. Their temporary success was due to the fact that the losses in the British lines had contracted the ranks until it was impossible to cover the whole space or to prevent the infiltration of the enemy between the units. The situation required some complete and vigorous regrouping and reorganisation if complete disaster was to be avoided. Up to this point the British Higher Command had been unable to do much to help the two hard-pressed armies, save to supply them with the scanty succours which were immediately available. Now, however, it interfered with decision at the vital spot and in the vital moment. To ensure solidity and unity, Congreve's Seventh Corps, which had been the northern unit of the Fifth Army, became from this time onwards the southern unit of the Third Army, passing under the command of General Byng. With them went the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, which had been doing really splendid service in the south. Everything north of the Somme was now Third Army. At the same time the three fine and fresh Australian Divisions, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th, were assembling near Doullens in readiness to strike, while the 12th British Division was also hurried towards the place of danger. The future was dark and dangerous, but there were also solid grounds for hope.

On the morning of March 25 the line of the Third Army, which had defined itself more clearly during the night, ran from Curlu near the Somme, east of Bazentin, west of Longueval, east of Martinpuich, through Ligny Thilloy, Sapignies, Ervillers, and hence as before. The enemy, whose cavalry were well up and in force, at once began his thrusting tactics in the southern section of the field, and may have

expected, after his advance of the day before, to find some signs of weakening resistance. In this he was disappointed, for both the 47th Londoners in front of Contalmaison and the 2nd Division at Ligny Thilloy beat off several attacks with very great loss to the assailants. The units were much broken and mixed, but the spirit of the individuals was excellent. The pressure continued, however, to be very great, and in the afternoon the line was once more pushed to the westwards. There was severe fighting between Bapaume and Sapignies, where mixed and disorganised units still held the Germans back, but in the late afternoon three distinct gaps had appeared in the line, one between the Seventh and Fifth Corps, one in the Fifth Corps itself in the Pozières area of the 63rd Division, and one between the Fifth and the Fourth Corps. Fortunately, the resistance had been so desperate that by the time the Germans had their opportunity they were so bedraggled themselves that they could not take full advantage of it. The general order of divisions in this area, counting from the south of Contalmaison, was 17th, 47th, 63rd, 2nd, on the morning of March 25.

The Seventh Corps, the previous adventures of which will be described under the heading of the Fifth Army, had now become the right wing of the Third Army. It had been strengthened by the advent of the 35th Division, and this unit now covered from west of Curlu to east of Maricourt, where it touched the right of the 9th Division—if the thin ranks of that gallant band can be dignified by so imposing a title. The Highlanders covered the front to Montauban, where they touched the 1st Cavalry Division, but beyond that the enemy were pouring round their flank at Bernafoy and Mametz Woods. It was under these trying conditions that the 12th Division was ordered up, about noon, to secure the left of the Seventh Corps, and entirely stopped the dangerous gap.

Another had formed farther north. The 17th Division, who were on the right of the Fifth Corps, held from Mametz to Contalmaison. Thence to Pozières was held by the 47th. A gap existed, however, upon their left, between them and the 63rd Division, who were gradually falling back upon Courcelette. The left of the Naval Division was also in the air, having lost touch with the right of the 2nd Division who were covering Le Sars. North of them the 19th Division extended from the west of Grevillers to the south of Bihucourt. The 57th Brigade in the north, under the local command of Colonel Sole, fought a fine rearguard action as the enemy tried to debouch from Grevillers. Considering how terribly mauled this brigade had been a few days before, this was a really splendid performance of these brave Midlanders, and was repeated by them more than once during the day. From their left flank to the north stretched a new division, Braithwaite's 62nd, which had upheld the honour of Yorkshire so gloriously at Cambrai. Their line ran west of Sapignies and joined the 42nd Division at the point where they touched the Sixth Corps, east of Ervillers.

The front of the 62nd stretched from Bucquoy to Puisieux. The

enemy kept working round the right flank, and the situation there was very dangerous, for everything to the immediate south was in a state of flux, shreds and patches of units endeavouring to cover a considerable stretch of all-important country. South of Puisieux there was a gap of four or five miles before one came to British troops. Into this gap in the very nick of time came first the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division, and later the New Zealand Division in driblets, which gradually spanned the vacant space. It was a very close call for a break through without opposition. Being disappointed in this the Germans on March 26 spent the whole afternoon in fierce attacks upon the 62nd Division, but got little but hard knocks from Braithwaite's Yorkshiremen. The 186th Brigade on the right threw back a flank to Rossignol Wood to cover the weak side.

Meanwhile the enemy had made a spirited attempt to push through between the Seventh Corps and the Fifth. With this design he attacked heavily, bending back the thin line of the 9th Division, who were supported by the 21st Division, numbering at this period 1500 men. At four in the afternoon the German stormers got into Maricourt, but they were thrust out again by the 35th Division. They had better success farther north, where in the late evening they got round the left flank of the 47th Division and occupied Pozières. The Londoners threw out a defensive line to the north and awaited events, but the general position between the Fifth and Fourth Corps was serious, as the tendency was for the gap to increase, and for the Fourth Corps to swing north-west while the other turned to the south-west. The 12th Division was transferred therefore from the Seventh to the Fifth Corps, and was given a line on the west bank of the Ancre from Albert to Hamel. This move proved in the sequel to be a most effective one. In the evening of this day, March 25, the line from Bray to Albert exclusive was allotted to the Seventh Corps, which was directed to leave a covering party as long as possible on a line from the River Somme to Montauban, in order to safeguard the retirement of the Fifth Army. Then came the 12th Division covering Albert, then the remains of the 47th and of the 2nd from Thiepval to Beaumont Hamel, all moving across the Ancre. It is said that during the retreat from Moscow an officer having asked who were the occupants of a certain sledge, was answered: "The Royal Regiment of Dutch Guards." It is in a somewhat similar sense that all mentions of battalions, brigades, and divisions must be taken at this stage of the battle. The right of the Fourth Corps was threatened by an irruption of the enemy at Pys and Irles, who threatened to get by this route round the flank of the 62nd Division, but found the 25th Division still had vitality enough left to form a defensive flank looking south. At the same time the 42nd Division had been driven back west of Gomiecourt, and was out of touch with the right of the Sixth Corps. Things were still serious and the future dark. Where was the retreat to be stayed? Was it destined to roll back to Amiens or possibly to

Abbeville beyond it? The sky had clouded, the days were mirk, the hanging Madonna had fallen from the cathedral of Albert, the troops were worn to shadows. The twilight of the gods seemed to have come.

It was at that very moment that the first light of victory began to dawn. It is true that the old worn divisions could hardly be said any longer to exist, but the new forces, the Yorkshiremen of the 62nd in the north, the New Zealanders and the 12th in the centre, and very particularly the three splendid divisions of Australians in the area just south of Albert, were the strong buttresses of the dam which at last held up that raging tide. Never should our British Imperial troops forget the debt which they owed to Australia at that supreme hour of destiny. The very sight of those lithe, rakish dare-devils with their reckless, aggressive bearing, or their staider fresh-faced brethren with the red facings of New Zealand, was good for tired eyes. There was much still to be done before an equilibrium should be reached, but the rough outline of the permanent positions had even now, in those hours of darkness and danger, been traced across the German path. There was but one gap on the morning of March 26, which lay between Auchonvillers and Hebuterne, and into this the New Zealand Division and one brigade of the 2nd Australians were, as already stated, hurriedly sent, the New Zealanders supporting and eventually relieving the 2nd British Division, while the Australians relieved the 19th. The line was attacked, but stood firm, and the New Zealanders actually recaptured Colincamps.

The chief fighting both of this day and of the next fell upon Scott's 12th Division, which lay before Albert, and was occupying the western side of the railway line. So vital was the part played by the 12th in this quarter, and so strenuous their work, that a connected and more detailed account of it would perhaps not be out of place. The 37th Brigade was in the north-east of Mesnil and Aveluy Wood, the 36th in the centre, and the 35th on the west bank of the Ancre, with outposts to cover the crossings at Albert and Aveluy. The men were fresh and eager, but had only their rifles to trust to, for they had neither wire, bombs, rifle-grenades, Very lights, or signals, having been despatched at the shortest notice to the battle-field. Their orders were to hold their ground at all costs, and most valiantly they obeyed it. It is only when one sees a map of the German forces in this part of the field, with the divisions marked upon it like flies upon fly-paper, that one understands the odds against which these men had to contend. Nor was the efficiency of the enemy less than his numbers. "The Germans scouted forward in a very clever manner, making full use of the old chalk trenches," says an observer. In the north upon the evening of March 26 the enemy crept up to Mesnil, and after a long struggle with the 6th Queen's forced their way into the village. Shortly after midnight, however, some of the 6th Buffs and 6th West Kents, together with part of the Anson battalion from the 63rd Division, won back the village once more, taking twelve machine-guns and a number of prisoners. The other two

brigades had not been attacked on the 26th, but a very severe battle awaited them all on March 27. It began by a heavy shelling of Hamel in the morning, by which the garrison was driven out. The Germans then attacked southwards down the railway from Hamel, but were held up by the 6th West Kents. The pressure extended, however, to the 9th Royal Fusiliers of the 36th Brigade on the right of the West Kents, who had a long, bitter struggle in which they were assisted by the 247th Field Company of the Royal Engineers and other elements of the 188th Brigade. This brigade, being already worn to a shadow, was withdrawn, while another shadow, the 5th Brigade, took its place, one of its battalions, the 24th Royal Fusiliers, fighting stoutly by the side of the West Kents. There was a time when the pressure was so great that all touch was lost between the two brigades, but the line was held during the whole of the day and night of the 27th and on into the 28th. At eleven o'clock in the morning of this day a new attack by fresh troops was made upon the West Kents and the 7th Sussex, and the men of Kent were at one time driven back, but with the aid of the 24th Royal Fusiliers the line was entirely re-established. The whole episode represented forty-eight hours of continual close combat until, on March 29, this front was relieved by the 2nd Division. Apart from the heavy casualties endured by the enemy, this gain of time was invaluable at a crisis when every day meant a thickening of the British line of resistance.

The fight on the right wing of the 36th Brigade had been equally violent and even more deadly. In the fight on March 27, when the Royal West Kents and 9th Fusiliers were so hard pressed in the north, their comrades of the 5th Berks and 7th Sussex had been very heavily engaged in the south. The Germans, by a most determined advance, drove a wedge between the Berkshires and the Sussex, and another between the Sussex and the Fusiliers, but in each case the isolated bodies of men continued the desperate fight. The battle raged for a time round the battalion headquarters of the Sussex, where Colonel Impey, revolver in hand, turned the tide of fight like some leader of old. The losses were terrible, but the line shook itself clear of Germans, and though they attacked again upon the morning of March 28, they were again beaten off, and heavily shelled as they plodded in their sullen retreat up the hillside to La Boisselle.

Meanwhile, the 35th Brigade had also been fighting for its life to the south. Albert had fallen to the Germans, for it was no part of the plan of defence to hold the town itself, but the exits from it and the lines on each side of it were jealously guarded. At 7 p.m. on March 26 the Germans were in the town, but they had practically reached their limit. Parties had crossed the Ancre, and there were attacked by the 7th Norfolks, who were supported in a long fight on the morning of the 27th by the 9th Essex and the 5th Northants Pioneer Battalion. The line was held, partly by the aid given by the 51st Brigade of the 17th Division, who numbered just 600 men and were led by Major Cubbon.

Whilst the line was held outside Albert, the Germans in the town had a very deadly time, being fired at at short ranges by the 78th and 79th Brigades Royal Field Artillery. The 7th Suffolks were drawn into the infantry fight, which became a more and more desperate affair, involving every man who could be thrown into it, including two battalions, the 1st Artists and 10th Bedfords from the 190th Brigade of the 63rd Division. These latter units suffered very heavily from machine-gun fire before ever they reached the firing-line. At 8 a.m. on March 28 the Germans were still pouring men through Albert, but were utterly unable to debouch upon the other side under the murderous fire of the British. A single company of the 9th Essex fired 15,000 rounds, and the whole slope which faced them was dotted with the German dead. The town of Albert formed a covered line of approach, and though the British guns were still pounding the buildings and the eastern approaches, the Germans were able to assemble in it during darkness and to form up unseen in great numbers for the attack. At ten in the morning of the 28th another desperate effort was made to get through and clear a path for all the hordes waiting behind. The British artillery smothered one attack, but a second broke over the 7th Norfolks and nearly submerged them. Both flanks were turned, and in spite of great work done by Captain Chalmers with his machine-guns the battalion was nearly surrounded. The losses were terrible, but the survivors formed up again half a mile to the west, where they were again attacked in the evening and again exposed to heavy casualties, including their commanding officer. Few battalions have endured more. Late that night the 10th West Yorkshires of the 17th Division came to their relief. The whole of the 12th Division was now rested for a time, but they withdrew from their line in glory, for it is no exaggeration to say that they had fought the Germans to an absolute standstill.

We shall now return to March 26, a date which had been darkened by the capture of Albert. Apart from this success upon the German side, which brought them into a town which they had not held for years, the general line in this quarter began to assume the same outline as in 1916 before the Somme battle, so that Hebuterne and Auchonvillers north of Albert were in British hands, while Serre and Puisieux were once more German. The existence of the old trenches had helped the weary army to hold this definite line, and as already shown it had received reinforcements which greatly stiffened its resistance. The dangerous gap which had yawned between the Fourth and Fifth Corps was now successfully filled. In the morning of March 27 all was solid once more in this direction. At eleven on that date, an inspiriting order was sent along the line that the retreat was over and that the army must fight out the issue where it stood. It is the decisive call which the British soldier loves and never fails to obey. The line was still very attenuated in parts, however, and it was fated to swing and sway before it reached its final stability.

The fighting upon the front of the 62nd Division at Bucquoy on March 27 was as heavy as on the front of the 12th to the south, and cost the Germans as much, for the Lewis guns had wonderful targets upon the endless grey waves which swept out of the east. The 5th West Ridings, east of Rossignol Wood, were heavily engaged, the Germans bombing their way very cleverly up the old trenches when they could no longer face the rifle-fire in the open. There were three separate strong attacks on Bucquoy, which covered the slopes with dead, but the persistent attempts to get round the right wing were more dangerous. These fell chiefly on the 2/4th Yorks Light Infantry between Rossignol Wood and Hebuterne, driving this battalion in. A dangerous gap then developed between the British and the Australians, but a strong counter-attack of the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry after dark, with the Australians and four tanks co-operating, recovered nearly all the lost ground.

On March 28 there was again a very heavy attack upon the 186th Brigade. The stormers surged right up to the muzzles of the rifles, but never beyond them. Over 200 dead were found lying in front of one company. One isolated platoon of the 5th West Ridings was cut off and was killed to the last man. Farther to the right there were several determined attacks upon the 187th Brigade and the 4th Australian Brigade, the latter being under the orders of the 62nd Division. These also were repulsed in the open, but the bombing, in which the Germans had the advantage of a superiority of bombs, was more difficult to meet, and the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry were driven from Rossignol Wood and the ground which they had so splendidly captured the night before.

About 11 a.m. on this day the 41st Division had been ordered up to man the east of Gommecourt. A brigade of this division, the 124th, co-operated with the 8th West Yorkshires and some of the Australians in a fresh attack upon Rossignol Wood, which failed at first, but eventually, after dark, secured the north end of the wood, and greatly eased the local pressure. On March 29 and 30 the positions were safely held, and the attacks less dangerous. On the evening of the latter date the 62nd Division was relieved by the 37th.

Whilst these events had occurred upon the front of the 62nd Division Russell's New Zealanders were holding the line to the south in their usual workmanlike fashion. From March 26 they held up the Germans, whose main attacks, however, were north and south of them, though March 27 saw several local advances against the Canterburys and the Rifles. On March 30 the New Zealanders hit back again at La Signy Farm, with good results, taking 295 prisoners. It was a smart little victory at a time when the smallest victory was indeed precious.

Reverting now to the general situation on March 27, the weak point was north and south of the Somme to the south of Albert. Between the river and Harbonnière the left wing of the Fifth Army had been broken, as will be told when we come to consider the operations in that area. The German advance was pouring down the line of the river with the

same fierce rapidity with which it had recently thundered forward over the old Somme battle-fields. Having annihilated the local resistance on the left bank of the river, where Colonel Horn and 400 nondescripts did all that they could, they were pushing on from Cerisy to Corbie. General Watts of the Nineteenth Corps, whose defence was one of the outstanding features of the whole operations, was hard put to it to cover his left wing, so in loyal co-operation the Third Army north of the river detached the hard-worked Cavalry Corps, who were always called upon at moments of supreme crisis, and who never failed to answer the call. It was actually engaged to the north of the river at the time, but disengaged itself in part, though the enemy was holding Cerisy and Chipilly and had got a bridge across the river which would enable them to get to the rear of General Watts' Corps. The means by which this very dangerous German move was kept within bounds comes within the history of the Fifth Army. Suffice it to say that the cavalry passed over the river and that the Seventh Corps, north of the river, extended to cover the wider front, throwing out a defensive flank along the north bank from Sailly-le-Sec to Aubigny.

Along the whole line to the north the pressure was great all day on March 27, but the attacks upon the Fourth Corps, which were particularly severe, were repulsed with great loss at Beaumont Hamel, Bucquoy, north of Puisieux, and at Ablainzeville. Near Bucquoy the 62nd Division in these two days repelled, as already narrated, eight separate German attacks. This fighting has to be fitted in with that recounted in the previous chapter near Ayette, in connection with the 31st Division, in order to get a complete view of the whole German effort and the unbroken British line. Hamel was the only fresh village to the north of Albert which was taken by the Germans that day.

March 28 was remarkable for the very desperate engagement upon the front of the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps, which has been already described, and which marked the limit of the whole German advance in the northern area. The Fourth Corps farther south had its own share of the fighting, however, as already told in connection with the defence of Bucquoy by the 62nd Division. The line was held, however, and save for a small strip of Rossignol Wood, no gain at all came to solace the Germans for very heavy losses.

All through these operations it is worthy of note that an important part was played by reorganised bodies of men, so mixed and broken that no name can be assigned to them. Officers stationed in the rear collected these stragglers, and led them back into gaps of the line, where their presence was sometimes of vital importance. A divisional general, speaking of these curious and irregular formations, says : " There was no panic of any kind. The men of all divisions were quite willing to halt and fight, but as the difficulty of orders reaching them made them uncertain as to their correct action, they came back slowly and in good

order. Once they received some definite orders they fell into line and dug themselves in at once." At one point 4000 men were collected in this fashion.

In the Australian area the enemy occupied Dernancourt, but otherwise the whole line was intact. It was still necessary, however, to keep a defensive line thrown back along the north bank of the Somme, as the situation to the south, especially at Marcelcave, was very dangerous. Thus, the Seventh Corps covered this flank from Corbie to Sailly, and then ran north to Treux on the Albert-Amiens Railway. The arrival of the cavalry to the south of the river had spliced the weak section, so that on the morning of March 29 the British commanders from north to south had every cause to be easier in their minds. An inactive day was the best proof of the severity of the rebuff which the Germans had sustained the day before, nor were matters improved from their point of view when upon March 30 they attacked the Australians near Dernancourt and lost some thousands of men without a yard of gain, or when the New Zealanders countered them, with the capture of 250 prisoners and many machine-guns.

This small chronicle of huge events has now brought the southern half of the Third Army to the same date already reached in the previous chapter by the northern half. The narrative has by no means reached the limit of the fighting carried on by this portion of the line, but equilibrium has roughly been attained, and if the story be now continued it leaves too wide a gap for the reader to cross when he has to return to the history of the Fifth Army on the 21st of March. Therefore we shall leave the Third Army for the time and only return to it when we have followed the resistance of the Fifth Army up to the same date.

Before starting upon this new epic, it would be well to remind the reader of the general bearing of the events already described, as it is very easy in attention to detail to lose sight of the larger issues. The experience of the Third Army then, put in its briefest form, was that the attack on March 21 fell with terrific violence upon the two central corps, the Sixth and Fourth ; that these, after a most valiant resistance, were forced to retire ; that the strategical situation thus created caused the Seventeenth Corps in the north and the Fifth Corps in the south to fall back, and that both of them were then pressed by the enemy ; that for six days the army fell slowly back, fighting continual rearguard actions against superior numbers ; that this movement involved only a short retreat in the north, but a longer one in the south, until in the Albert region it reached its maximum ; that finally the Germans made a determined effort on March 28 to break the supple and resilient line which had always faced them, and that this attempt, most gallantly urged, involved the Corps in the north as well as the whole line of the Third Army. The result of this great battle was a bloody defeat for the Germans, especially in the northern sector, where they made hardly any gain of ground and lost such vast numbers of men that their whole

enterprise was brought to a complete standstill and was never again resumed in that quarter.

The losses of the Third Army during that week of desperate fighting when, in spite of the heroic efforts of the Medical Corps, the wounded had frequently to be abandoned, and when it was often impossible to get the guns away intact, were very severe. Many divisions which numbered their 9000 infantry on March 21 could not put 1500 in the line on March 28. These losses were not, however, so great as they might appear, since the constant movement of troops, carried on very often in pitch darkness, made it impossible to keep the men together. An official estimate taken at the time and subject to subsequent revision put the loss of guns at 206, only 23 of which were above the 6-inch calibre. Forty-three others were destroyed. The casualties in the Third Army during the period under review might be placed approximately at 70,000, divided into 10,000 killed, 25,000 missing, and 35,000 wounded. The heaviest losses were in the 59th Division, which gave 5765 as its appalling total, but the 6th Division was little behind it, and the 42nd, 47th, and 51st were all over 4000. The 35th Division had also a most honourable record, enduring very heavy losses in which the numbers of missing were comparatively small. Its work, however, was chiefly done at a later date than that which closes this chapter. In the estimate of losses there has to be included practically the whole personnel of the devoted battalions who held the forward line upon the first day of the German attack. In connection with the large number of stragglers, who were afterwards gathered together and showed by their conduct that they had no want of stomach for the fight, it is to be remembered that the men had been accustomed to the narrow routine of trench operations, that most of them had no idea of open warfare, and that when they found themselves amidst swift evolutions over difficult country, carried on frequently in darkness, it was very natural that they should lose their units and join the throng who wandered down the main roads and were eventually rounded up and formed into formations at the river crossings or other places where they could be headed off. Among the casualties were many senior officers, including General Bailey of the 142nd Brigade.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack upon the Fifth Army. March 21 [1]

The Fifth Army front—The story of a Redoubt—Attack upon Congreve's Seventh Corps—Upon Watts' Nineteenth Corps—Upon Maxse's Eighteenth Corps—Upon Butler's Third Corps—Terrific pressure—Beginning of the Retreat—Losses of Guns.

IN dealing with the German attack upon the Fifth Army, the first point which should be emphasised is, that heavy as the fighting was in the north, still it was this southern advance which was the main one. The official account of the disposition of the German forces brings this fact out very clearly. From the Sensée River to the Bapaume-Cambrai Road they are stated to have had nine divisions in line and eight in close reserve, covering a front of nine miles. In the eight miles from Cambrai Road to La Vacquerie they had four divisions. In the southern area from La Vacquerie down to La Fère they had twenty-three divisions in the line and seventeen in reserve, covering a front of over forty miles. This front was defended by eleven British divisions, with three divisions of infantry and three of cavalry in reserve. So far as infantry was concerned the odds were 40 to 14, while the German guns numbered about 3500 to 1300 on the British line. These odds were serious enough if directed equally along the whole area, but when thrown in on special sectors they became more crushing. To add to the total picture of German strength, it should be added that twenty-five fresh divisions were thrown into the fight during the first week, nine upon the Scarpe front, three between the Ancre and the Somme, seven between the Somme and Montdidier, and six between Montdidier and the Oise. Against these have to be set British reinforcements, and the influx of French from the south. It was only on the first five days of battle that the odds were so overpoweringly with the Germans.

In this chapter we shall endeavour to gain a superficial view of the general course of events upon the whole front of the Fifth Army on the fateful March 21. We shall then be in a position to appreciate the situation as it was in the evening and to understand those decisions on

[1] Maps facing pp. 651 and 736 illustrate the battle fortunes of the Fifth Army. These maps are essential to the understanding of the account.

the part of General Gough and his subordinates which influenced the subsequent operations.

The front of the Fifth Army extended from its junction with the Third Army in the neighbourhood of La Vacquerie to Barisis, a village some miles south of the Oise, the total frontage being nearly forty miles. This was occupied by four Corps. The northern was the Seventh, under General Congreve, a well-known soldier, whose V.C. and shattered arm proclaimed his past services to the Empire. This corps covered the southern part of the dangerous Cambrai salient and extended to the region of Ronssoy. From this point to Maissemy the line was held by General Watts with the Nineteenth Corps. Upon his right, extending as far as north of Essigny, was General Maxse with the Eighteenth Corps. From thence to Barisis lay the Third Corps under General Butler. All four were soldiers of wide experience, as was their leader, General Gough, and the troops in the line comprised some of the flower of the British army, so that in spite of all disparity of numbers there was a reasonable hope for success. Arrangements had been made by which the French or British could send lateral help to each other ; but it must be admitted that the liaison work proved to be defective, and that the succours were far slower in arriving, and less equipped for immediate action, than had been expected.

The fortifications along the front of the Fifth Army were of various degrees of strength, depending upon the nature of the ground and upon the time that it had been in British possession, the north being stronger than the south. The Oise, which had been looked upon as an obstacle, and the presence of which had seemed to justify the extraordinarily long sector held by the Third Corps, had to some extent dried up and had ceased to be a real protection. In the main, the defences consisted of a forward line, a chain of small redoubts, each with four machine-guns and all connected by posts ; a battle-line which was strongly wired and lay about 3000 yards behind the forward line ; and a rear zone, the fortifications of which were not complete. If anything were wanting in the depth of the defences it has to be remembered that we are speaking of a vast tract of country, and that to dig a serviceable trench from London, we will say, to Guildford, furnishing it with sandbags and wire, is a mighty task. For months before the attack the troops, aided by the cavalry and by several special entrenching battalions, were digging incessantly. Indeed, the remark has been made that their military efficiency was impaired by the constant navvy work upon which they were employed. There is no room for criticism upon this point, for everything possible was done, even in that southern sector which had only been a few weeks in British possession.

Before beginning to follow the history of March 21, it would be well to describe the position and number of the reserves, as the course of events depended very much upon this factor. Many experienced soldiers were of opinion that if they had been appreciably more numerous

and considerably nearer the line, the positions could have been made good. The three infantry divisions in question were the 39th, which was immediately behind the Seventh Corps, the 20th, which was in the neighbourhood of Ham, and was allotted to the Eighteenth Corps, and the 50th, which was in general army reserve, and about seven hours' march from the line. The 1st Cavalry Division was in the rear of the Nineteenth Corps, while the 2nd Cavalry Division was on the right behind the Third Corps. The 3rd Cavalry Division was in billets upon the Somme, and it also was sent to the help of the Third Corps. Besides these troops the nearest supports were at a distance of at least three days' journey, and consisted of a single unit, the 8th Division.

The German preparations for the attack had not been unobserved and it was fully expected on the morning of the battle, but what was not either expected or desired was the ground mist, which seems to have been heavier in the southern than in the northern portion of the line. So dense was it that during the critical hours when the Germans were pouring across No Man's Land it was not possible to see for more than twenty yards, and the whole scheme of the forward defence, depending as it did upon machine-guns, placed in depth and sweeping every approach, was completely neutralised by this freak of nature, which could not have been anticipated, for it was the first time such a thing had occurred for two months. Apart from the machine-guns, a number of isolated field-guns had been sown here and there along the front, where they had lurked in silence for many weeks waiting for their time to come. These also were rendered useless by the weather, and had no protection from the German advance, which overran and submerged them.

The devastating bombardment broke out along the line about five o'clock, and shortly after ten it was known that the German infantry had advanced and had invaded the whole of the forward zone, taking a few of the redoubts, but in most cases simply passing them in the fog, and pushing on to the main British line. As it is impossible to give the experiences of each redoubt in detail, the story of one may be told as being fairly typical of the rest. This particular one is chosen because some facts are available, whereas in most of them a deadly silence more eloquent than words covers their fate. The Enghien redoubt was held by Colonel Wetherall with a company of the 2/4th Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry on the front of the 61st Division. The redoubt formed the battalion headquarters, and was connected to brigade headquarters by a cable buried eight feet deep. In front were two companies of the battalion in the outpost line ; behind was the fourth company ready for counter-attack. Early in the morning heavy trench-mortar fire was raining bombs upon the redoubt, and the wire was flying in all directions. At 6 the redoubt was so full of gas that even the masks could not hold it out, so the men were ordered below and put up gas blankets to fend it off. This could be safely done, as when gas is so thick it is not

possible for the stormers to advance. At 6.15, what with fog and gas and blurred respirators, it was hardly possible to see anything at all. At 7.30 the gas cleared and there was a shower of high explosive shells with shattering effect. At 9.30 the barrage lifted and the garrison rushed up from their shelters and manned their posts, but the fog rolled white and thick across their vision. The cloud banked right up to their wire, while from behind it came all the noises of the pit. So nerve-shaking was the effect that some of the outlying men came creeping into the redoubt for human company. At 9.40 the whizzing of bullets all around showed that the infantry was on the move. The garrison fired back into the mist, whence came vague shoutings and tramplings. A request was cabled back for a protective barrage, but the inadequate reply showed that the British guns had suffered in the shelling. Suddenly the mist darkened at one point; it broke into running figures, and a wave of men rushed forward, scrambled through the broken wire, and clambered into the redoubt. The Oxfords rushed across and bombed them back into the mist again. There was a pause, during which the attack was reorganised, and then at 11 o'clock the German stormers poured suddenly in from three sides at once. The garrison stood to it stoutly and drove them out, leaving many bodies on the broken wire. The fort was now entirely surrounded, and there was a fresh attack from the rear which added fifty or sixty more to the German losses. At 11.45 there was some lifting of the fog, and Colonel Wetherall endeavoured to get across to the village, 300 yards behind him, to see if help could be obtained. He found it deserted. Stealing back to his fort he was covered suddenly by German rifles, was dragged away as a prisoner, but finally, late in the evening, escaped and rejoined the main body of his own battalion. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Cunningham had taken over the defence of Enghien redoubt, assisted by Lieutenant Richards with the machine-guns. Hour after hour fresh attacks were repelled, but showers of bombs fell in the confined space, and the garrison were continually thinned out. Despairing messages—" What shall we do? What shall we do? "—were sent back over the cable, but nothing could be done, for these outliers are the *enfants perdus* of the army, marked from the first for destruction. Finally, at 4.30, the great deep all around them sent one heavy wave to submerge them, and the cable was for ever silent.

This is the typical history of a redoubt. Some succumbed more readily, some survived until the afternoon of the next day; but the difference may sometimes have depended upon the various degrees of severity of attack, which was by no means the same upon all sectors. The total effect was the complete destruction of the eleven gallant battalions which held the advanced line of the Fifth Army, and the loss of all material therein. One can but hope that the enemy paid a full price. Occasionally a sudden rise of the mist gave the defence a splendid opening for their machine-guns. On one occasion such a

chance exposed a German officer standing with a large map in his hand within thirty yards of the fort, his company awaiting his directions beside him. Few of them escaped.

We shall now follow the line of the Fifth Army from the north. The Seventh Corps on the left consisted of the 9th (Tudor), the 21st (Campbell), and the 16th (Hull) Divisions in the order named, and it carried the line down as far as Ronssoy, where it joined on to Watts' Nineteenth Corps. The 9th Division had two brigades in the line, and all the battalions both of the 26th and of the South Africans were in the forward zone and exposed to the usual devastating losses. Their front joined that of the 47th Division at Fifteen Ravine in the north, and the 21st at Chapel Hill in the south. About eleven o'clock the main advance of the Germans struck up against this front. There was no action upon the left between Gauche Wood and the canal, though the bombardment was exceedingly heavy. On the right in the neighbourhood of Gauche Wood the fighting was very severe all day, and the stormers were able to make little progress, although they attacked again and again with the utmost resolution. This attack fell mainly upon the South African Brigade, who held on with the same firm courage which they had shown at Delville Wood, and proved once more that there are no better soldiers in all the vast army of the Empire. It was only at this point, however, near the junction with the 21st Division that the 9th Division was attacked, for the German infantry was crushed by the artillery fire on the left in front of Gonnelieu, so that the total losses of the 9th on this murderous day were probably less than those of other divisions in the Fifth Army. Gauche Wood was continually attacked, but the Quentin redoubt to the immediate north of it was left alone during the whole day. It was the 2nd or Natal South African regiment which held the extreme front, and after a very fine resistance they were driven through the wood, until at 11.30 the Germans held it all, but the Africans still clung to the system of Chapel trenches to the immediate west and south of it. To this they held all day, being much helped by a local rise in the mist about eleven, which enabled the guns in Quentin redoubt to see their targets in the south. Finally, the Germans were compelled to dig in in Gauche Wood, and give up the attempt to get farther. No other point was gained upon the 9th Divisional front. Meanwhile, the enemy had pressed their attack with great violence upon the immediate right, where it fell with special strength upon the 2nd Lincolns of the 21st Division. At 12 they were well behind the right rear of the Africans, who were compelled to throw back a flank. The Lincolns held on splendidly, however, and the danger was arrested. At 3.30 a new concentration of the enemy developed in front of Vaucelette Farm, and was heavily shelled by the British guns. At 5 o'clock the fight was very desperate upon Chapel Hill on the southern limit of the South African area, where the Lincolns were still holding out but were being gradually pressed back. The 4th South African Regiment (South African Scots)

was therefore ordered to counter-attack in this direction, which was done with great dash, the position upon Chapel Hill being re-established. This was the general situation when at 8.15 orders were issued for the withdrawal of all units to the rear zone. This was done during the night, the general line of retirement being towards Sorel and Heudicourt, while the Scottish Brigade kept position upon the left. The order to retire came as a complete surprise, as all was well upon the immediate front, but the reason given was the penetration of the line at other points.

On the right of the Scots and South Africans of the 9th Division the line was held by Campbell's 21st Division, consisting of the Leicester Brigade and two brigades of North Country troops, all of them the veterans of many battles. They covered the ground from south of Gauche Wood in the north to Epehy in the south. Two brigades were in the line, the 62nd in the north and the 110th in the south, and were exposed all day to a very severe attack which they held up with great steadiness and resolution. Heudicourt, Peizière, and Epehy were the scenes of particularly severe fighting. In the evening these places, and the whole line through Quentin Ridge and east of Gouzeaucourt, were still firmly held by the defenders. It may truly be said that along the whole fifty-mile front of battle there was no point where the enemy met with a more unyielding resistance than in the area of the 21st Division. During the long day three German divisions essayed the task of forcing Epehy and overcoming the defence of Chapel Hill, but as the night drew in all three lay exhausted in front of their objectives, and there would certainly have been no British retirement had it not been for the movements in the other sections of the line. Only at one post had the enemy made any lodgment, namely at Vaucelette Farm, and here he could have been thrown out by a counter-attack had the general situation permitted it. The Leicesters and the Northumberland Fusiliers upheld the fame of their historic regiments on this day of battle, but two of the outstanding exploits in the fight lie to the credit of the Lincolns, who kept an iron grip upon Chapel Hill, and to the 15th Durhams, who made a dashing counter-attack which swept back the German advance when it tried to penetrate between Epehy and Chapel Hill. The village of Peizière was held by the 7th Leicesters of the 110th Brigade, who fought as this brigade has always fought and held the Germans out. Once with the help of flame-throwers they gained a lodgment among the houses, but the brave Midlanders came back to it and threw them out once more. It was a party of this same Leicester regiment which held the farm of Vaucelette, and fought it out to the very last man before they suffered it to pass from their keeping.

The fighting upon Chapel Hill was particularly severe, and was the more important as this eminence, lying almost upon the divisional boundary, enfiladed the 9th Division to the north. There was a trench in front of the hill, called Cavalry Trench, and a farm behind called Revelon Farm, and the battle swung and swayed all day, sometimes

the British holding all the ground, and sometimes being pushed back as far as the farm. The 1st Lincolns gained great honour that day, but they could not have held the hill were it not for the co-operation of the South Africans, who twice helped to retake it when it had been temporarily lost. The 11th Royal Scots from the 9th Division Reserve Brigade struck in also with effect when the enemy filtered round the north edge of the hill and worked to the rear of it. They had got as far as Genin Copse when the Royal Scots attacked and hunted them back once more. The weak point of the 21st Division lay upon their right where they had to throw out a defensive flank 3000 yards deep. They had not troops enough to cover this ground, and it was only the splendid work of the batteries of the 94th Brigade R.F.A. which prevented a disaster.

The 16th Irish Division (Hull) lay on the right of the 21st Division, carrying the line to the south of Ronssoy. This division had two brigades in the line, the 48th to the left and the 49th to the right, and it appears to have sustained an attack which was of a peculiarly crushing nature. Every soldier will admit that the men who carried Guillemont and breasted the slope of the Messines Ridge have proved themselves to be capable of rising to the highest exercise of military virtue. If, therefore, they gave way on this occasion while others stood, the reason is to be sought rather in the extra severity of the attack, which had the same crushing effect upon other divisions both in the north and in the south of the line. All these brigades were desperately engaged during the day, as was the 116th Brigade of the 39th Division which came to the help of the Irish, while the other two brigades of this supporting division endeavoured to strengthen the line of defence in the rear zone with a switch line from Saulcourt to Tincourt Wood. On the right the attack was too severe to be withstood, and not only the advance line but the battle position also was deeply penetrated, the Germans pouring in a torrent down the Catelet valley and occupying Ronssoy and Lempire, by which they turned the flanks both of the 21st in the north and of the 66th Division in the south. Especially fierce was the resistance offered by the 48th Brigade in the north, some units of which were swung round until they found themselves sharing with the 21st Division in the defence of Epehy. The 2nd Munsters lived up to their high reputation during a long day of hard fighting, and were for the third or fourth time in the war practically destroyed. Colonel Ireland was hit about 10.30 in the morning, and one company, which counter-attacked near Malassise Farm, was annihilated in the effort ; but the survivors of the battalion were undismayed, and under Major Hartigan they continued to oppose every effort of the stormers. One of the features of the battle in this area was the fight maintained all day by C Company scattered in little parties over Ridge Reserve and Tetard Wood. Lieutenant Whelan was the soul of this fine defence, contesting every bay of his trench, and continuing to rally and lead his dwindling band until noon of the next

day. A road ran past this position, and it was all-important for the enemy to move their artillery down it in order to press the retreat, but the Irishmen shot down the horse teams as they came up, until the passage was blocked with their bodies. Finally, all the scattered bands rallied near Epehy village, where, under Captain Chandler, who was killed in the contest, they fought to the last, until in the late evening their cartridges gave out, and the gallant Hartigan, with the headquarter staff of the battalion, was overwhelmed. Lieutenant Whelan, meanwhile, held his post near Epehy until noon of March 22, when he and his men fired their last round and threw their last bomb before surrender. The defence of Malassise Farm by Lieutenant Kidd and his men was also a glorious bit of fighting to the last man and the last cartridge.

The general situation on the front of the Seventh Corps on the night of March 21 was that the 16th Division, reinforced by the 116th Brigade, held the main battle positions, save on the extreme right, as far north as St. Emilie. Thence the line followed approximately the railway round and east of Epehy, in the region of the 21st Division. East of Chapel Hill and Chapel Crossing it entered the holding of the 9th Division, and passed west of Gauche Wood, through Quentin redoubt and so to the original line. Behind this indented position the 118th and 117th Brigades with the Sappers and Pioneers of the 39th Division were hard at work upon the switch line, which should form a cover for retreat or a base for reorganisation.

On the right of the Seventh Corps lay Watts' Nineteenth Corps, which had two divisions in the line, the 66th Lancashire Territorial Division (Malcolm) in the north, and the 24th Division (Daly) in the south. They covered a front from south of Ronssoy to south of Maissemy. The Lancashire Division, the same which behaved so splendidly in the mud battle of Broodseinde, had all three brigades in the front, covering 4000 yards, and were exposed all day to a most terrific assault. From the north they were in the order 197th, 199th, 198th. To the south of them an even more strenuous attack was launched upon the 24th Division, which had two brigades in the line. These were the 17th on the left and the 72nd on the right, with the 1st North Staffords, 8th West Kents, 1st Rifle Brigade, and 8th Queen's in front. About 11 o'clock the news came that the enemy was pushing through at the point of junction with the Eighteenth Corps on the right, where there seems to have been a gap of some hundreds of yards between divisions, and later that they had penetrated into the village of Hargicourt in the rear of the 66th Division. There was heavy fighting all day, and by evening the whole forward zone held by the 2/3rd Lancs Fusiliers, East Lancashires, and Manchesters had passed into the hands of the enemy, Colonel Stokes-Roberts of the former battalion being among the casualties. The twelve redoubts which constituted the main defences of the battle zone held out stoutly all day, all three brigades fighting with

great valour. The Germans were continually pushing in, however, upon the right of the 24th Division and enlarging their gains in that direction, so that the 1st Cavalry Division was called up, and the Pioneer Battalion of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was thrown in on the right of the 66th Division near Roisel to form a defensive flank. By 1 o'clock the battle zone of the 24th Division was seriously compromised. The 72nd Brigade on the right had been turned and the village of Maissemy had been taken by the Germans. Stone's 17th Brigade kept a tight grip, however, upon the hamlet of Le Verguier, and though many assaults were made upon it the place remained untaken in the evening. In the area of the 66th Division the enemy was still gaining ground, however, and they had pushed on from Hargicourt to Templeux, where a counter-attack by the 6th Lancashire Fusiliers held them for a time. The fighting continued to be very bitter until late in the evening, for though the Germans had infiltrated all the ground between the redoubts, they were unable to overcome their resistance, or to take possession of their gains. At 10.15 the order from General Watts was that there should be no retreat, and that however great the odds against them—and it was manifest that they were indeed very great—the two divisions should prepare for a fight to a finish. Meanwhile, the 50th Division (Stockley) in the army reserve had been ordered, after a march of seven hours, to support the line of the Nineteenth Corps, taking up a position in the rear from the Omignon River to the Cologne River, on a front which had been partly wired. With the early morning of March 22 there came a renewed German attack which forced back the left of the 66th, who were always much handicapped by the deep incursion the enemy had made into the area of the 16th Division to the north, which continually endangered their flank and even their rear. The battle was soon general along the whole front, and everywhere the resistance was most desperate, though the troops were gradually pressed back by the ever-increasing weight of the attack as Hindenburg's legions came rolling in from the east. Many a bitter curse went up that day from overwrought men against the perjured traitors on the Russian front, who to ease their own burden had thrown a double weight upon those who had helped and trusted them. At 11.30 in the morning the post of Le Verguier, which had been held so long and so gallantly by the 8th West Surreys, was at last carried by storm and its brave garrison destroyed or taken, though Colonel Peirs, who had been the soul of this defence, dashed out, revolver in hand, at this last moment, and got away in the mist. The whole line of the 24th Division was shaken by the gap thus created. The pressure was very great also at Roisel, and the 151st Brigade from the 50th Division had to be hurried up in order to hold back the advance down the valley of the Cologne, which would have turned the right flank of the Lancashire men to the north. The 9th Sussex was heavily engaged in this quarter and suffered severely. About noon a valiant attempt was also made by some tanks and dismounted troopers to turn

the tide by recapturing the village of Hervilly, which had some temporary success. The German penetration had been too deep, however, and there was very pressing danger of isolation unless the corps fell back. This they did in the late afternoon and evening, passing through the ranks of the 50th Division behind them. " They were nearly all gassed and dead weary," said one who observed them as they passed. The 11th Hussars and 19th Entrenching Battalion most gallantly covered the retreat. The enemy were close at their heels, however, in great force and most aggressive mood, as the 50th Division soon discovered. This unit will be remembered as the famous Yorkshire Territorial Division who helped to turn the tide at the second battle of Ypres, and had shown their worth upon many fields ; but on this occasion the odds were too heavy, though they held the enemy for the rest of the day. The lower half of the line between the Omignon and the Cologne rivers was held by Riddell's 149th Brigade of Northumberland Fusiliers, while the northern half was held by Rees' 150th Brigade of Yorkshiremen. Against this thin wall dashed the full tide of the German advance as it swept on in the wake of the Nineteenth Corps. It was a long and hard fight in which the enemy had heavy losses, especially in front of Pœuilly, where considerable sheets of wire lay in front of the position of the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers. It was a most gallant affair—gallant on both sides. Their Colonel, Robinson, laid out his machine-guns in the long grass upon each side of this wire and enfiladed the German line with most murderous results. In the south the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers were attacked in front and on the right flank, and the pressure was so great that they had to abandon Caulaincourt, which was then recaptured and again abandoned by the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers from the supporting line. The enemy, with his usual wile, telephoned from the mausoleum, a central building, that reinforcements be sent to that point. Upon asking the name of the officer and getting no reply, General Riddell, in local command, turned on five batteries of 18-pounders and blew the mausoleum to pieces. At Pœuilly also there had been two successful counter-attacks, but the enemy was swarming round the southern flank in great numbers, and the river, which is not more formidable than an average South of England trout stream, was of little use as a protection. An important point named Nobescourt Farm, lying near the junction of brigades, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and the village of Pœuilly was also taken. By evening the 50th Division had done its work, however, as it had held up the pursuit and enabled the Nineteenth Corps to reach the line of the Somme without severe pressure. That night they received orders to withdraw, which were carried out in the morning of March 23, Martin's 149th Brigade in the south making a show of fighting in order to cover the movements of their companions in the north who were moving over a perfectly flat plain from Mons to Brie. Finally, General Riddell destroyed Tertry bridge and dropped back to

St. Christ. During all these operations the German infantry were moving slowly forward in successive lines of skirmishers, about a thousand yards from the British, who retired in leisurely fashion, continually turning and holding them up, so that the whole spectacle was exactly that of a well-ordered field-day. When the main body had reached the bridges, a single company of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers lay out in the higher ground, under the leadership of Captain Proctor, who received the D.S.O. for his able conduct of the operation. This company held up a brigade for two hours, and then, their comrades being safely across, they withdrew in their turn, leaving half their number behind them. Every one being across, both the St. Christ and Brie bridges were blown up. The latter was a brand new construction and was in charge of an American officer of engineers who distinguished himself by his cool courage, starting out alone, and bringing across the river a train full of ammunition which lay upon the farther side. The 24th Division had crossed at Falvy, the rearguard action being fought by the depleted battalions of the 72nd Brigade. Colonel Pope of the 1st North Staffords, Colonel Charlton of the 4th Yorks, and Colonel Le Fleming of the 9th East Surreys were among those who had fallen.

The Nineteenth Corps was now covering a total front of 20,000 yards along the western bank of the stream, which is shallow and marshy in these reaches. Their line was from Rouy-le-Crane in the south to near Peronne, with some small outposts to the east of the river. The 8th Division (Heneker) had come up on the morning of March 23, and occupied the southern end of the line, with the remains of the 24th, the 66th, and the 50th extending to the north. There we shall leave them while we return to the history of the front line on March 21.

On the right of the Nineteenth Corps was Maxse's Eighteenth Corps covering the ground from the Omignon valley to a point just west of St. Quentin, with three divisions in the line. These were the 61st on the left, the 30th in the centre, and the 36th in the south. The 61st Division, under General Colin Mackenzie, was one of those fine second-line Territorial units which have done so well in the later stages of the war. All three brigades were in the line, the 183rd Brigade of Scottish troops in the north, the 184th in the centre, and the 182nd in the south, both of the last being from the South Midlands. The 2/4th Oxfords, 2/5th Gordons, and 2/8th Worcesters were the devoted battalions which held the forward line, and so fierce was their defence that the battle-line was able to maintain itself along the whole divisional front, in spite of very valiant efforts upon the part of the German stormers, who showed absolute contempt of death in their efforts to cut the wire at those points where their artillery had failed to do so. The story of the Enghien redoubt and its devoted defence has already been told, but belongs to the record of this division. The battle zone ran in the main along the eastern edge of the Bois d'Holnon, and this was desperately defended from morning to night. In the afternoon the high ground south of Maissemy, in the

left rear of the division and outside their area, had been captured, and the 2/4th Berkshires endeavoured to help the 24th Division in their counter-attack. The Berkshires lost heavily in this venture, and their gallant Colonel, Dimmer, who had won the V.C. in the early days of the war, was shot through the head leading his men on horseback to the very lip of a trench full of Germans. Horse and groom fell before the same volley. The 61st resumed its line after this action in the north, and it maintained it intact until evening, the three divisions of the German attack being practically held up by the three heroic battalions in the front line, so that the full weight of attack never reached the main line. It was as solidly established in the evening as in the morning. The position of the enemy on their left rear had become more and more menacing, as after taking Maissemy they had pressed on to Villescholes. This led to dangerous attacks from the north on the early morning of March 22, in the course of which the 183rd Brigade had to fight desperately to preserve the flank of the division. The weight of this fighting fell chiefly upon the 8th Argyll and Sutherlands, who counter-attacked most valiantly, aided by the remains of the gallant 2/4th Berkshires, who had suffered so severely the day before. Colonel McAlpine Downie of the Argylls was wounded, and died next day. Even when the enemy had got as far westward as Vermand, the 61st Division was still rooted to its ground, and the Highlanders on the left flank recovered by a spirited advance nine guns which had been overrun by the German advance between Maissemy and Villescholes. The 9th Royal Scots extended their line to the westward, and facing north presented an unbroken front to the constant hordes of Germans who were moving down the northern slopes of the Omignon valley in the direction of Caulaincourt. It was not until late in the afternoon of March 22 that the 61st Division retired, still fighting, to a prepared position north of Vaux.

Next to the 61st Division was the 30th under General Williams. This division had two brigades—the 21st (Goodman) and the 90th (Poyntz)—in the line, the latter officer being known to all sportsmen as the famous Somerset batsman. The front of 4000 yards was from the immediate west of St. Quentin to the Somme, and included two notable strong points, Manchester Hill and the Épine du Dallon. The 89th Brigade under General Stanley was in the immediate rear. It was not used as a unit during the day, but the three fine battalions of the King's Liverpool Regiment, the 17th, 18th, and 19th, were dispersed in the evening to reinforce three separate units.

The fighting along the front of the 30th Division was of a very desperate character. The forward battalions were the 2nd Wilts and the 16th Manchesters. Rushing through the gaps in their line of defence the Germans flung themselves upon the battle zone, where after long fighting which lasted into the afternoon they gained possession of the two posts already mentioned, and worked into the main battle-line at

Savy. Both brigades lost very heavily during these attacks, but the addition of the 18th and 19th King's from Stanley's brigade helped them to carry on under most trying conditions. Both these reinforcing battalions came in for severe fighting in the evening, and the 18th King's which joined in a counter-attack by the 21st Brigade, was particularly hard hit, while the 19th had hardly an officer left, the colonel falling at the head of his men. As a final result of the day's battle both the brigades were somewhat driven in upon the front, but each held its line and was ready to renew the battle next morning. The 2nd Bedfords particularly distinguished themselves during this day of incessant fighting, making no less than six successful counter-attacks in order to clear their sector when it was partly occupied by the Germans. Up to 4 o'clock in the afternoon of March 22 the 30th were still firm in their positions, and it was only the general situation of the Army which finally compelled them to abandon them. They dropped back upon the general line of Ham, where the three scattered battalions of the 89th Brigade had been ordered to form one unit once more. Of the Manchester men in the front rank upon the day of battle hardly a man ever got away, and their splendid Colonel Elstob lay dead with the greater part of his battalion around him. He had said : " The Manchesters will defend Manchester Hill to the last," and he lived and died true to his word. A superior officer reporting upon this episode said : " At about 11 o'clock Colonel Elstob informed me that the Germans had broken through and were swarming round the redoubt. At about 2 p.m. he said that most of his men were killed or wounded, including himself, that they were all getting dead beat, that the Germans had got into the redoubt and hand-to-hand fighting was going on. He was still quite cheery. At 3.30 he was spoken to on the telephone and said very few were left and that the end was nearly come. After that no further answer could be got."

On the right of the 30th Lancashire Division was the 36th Ulster Division under the command of General Nugent, one of the many good soldiers who were trained by South Africa for this greater ordeal. The Ulster division had all three brigades in the line, the 109th (Ricardo) to the north, the 107th (Witteycombe) in the centre, and the 108th (Griffiths) in the south. The three outlying battalions were the 12th and 15th Irish Rifles and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, which suffered the common fate of all who held that post of danger. Not a man returned, save a few of the Irish Rifles, who swam down the canal that night.

The front held by the Ulstermen was from the Somme on the left to the neighbourhood of Urvillers on the right, a distance of 6000 yards. Three German divisions attacked upon this frontage, but the edge of their onslaught was blunted by the splendid resistance of the three doomed battalions in the van. None the less, it surged with great violence all along the edge of the battle zone, but it was everywhere held

save only at the hamlet of Contescourt, where the Germans obtained a lodgment. The whole defence of the division was imperilled, however, by the fact that the Germans had bitten deeply into the British line to the south of the 108th Brigade, getting as far as Essigny on their right rear, with the effect that a deep defensive flank had to be thrown back in this direction, which used up all the reserves of the division. Thus, when the Germans late that day and in the following morning pressed their advantage at Contescourt, and were stopped by the magnificent resistance of the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers at the neighbouring village of Fontaine-les-Clercs, they should have been permanently held, as they were driven back in twelve successive attacks. As there were no reserves available for a counter-attack, however, the defence was gradually worn down by a great disparity of numbers, so that by March 22 the Germans had advanced into the sector of the line which ran down the course of the rivulet which is dignified by the name of the Somme.

This, in brief, was the experience of the three divisions which held the line of the Eighteenth Corps on March 21. The 20th Division in reserve was not employed during the day, nor were its services needed, for Maxse's Corps, though attacked by eight German divisions, was able to hold its ground, thanks largely to the splendid resistance of the shock-absorbing battalions in the front line. Up to 4 p.m. of March 22 the enemy had made no permanent advance into the battle zone, but at that hour both flanks of the Corps had been turned at Maissemy in the north and at Essigny in the south, and the alternative was retirement or absolute isolation and destruction. It may then briefly be said that, thanks to the resolute resistance of the battalions in the forward zone, and to the solidity of those in the battle zone, the Eighteenth Corps was able to maintain its ground until it was ordered to leave it, and that save for some indentation of its front, especially at Contescourt, its main positions remained inviolate.

Upon the right of the Eighteenth Corps lay the Third Corps, which covered the enormous front of 30,000 yards. Of the nine brigades in the corps, eight were in the line and only one in reserve, so that between the tenuity of the line and its want of support it was an extremely tempting mark for the German assault, especially as by ignoring the two brigades south of the Oise they could concentrate their whole force upon the six brigades in line in the north. It is true that the wide marshes of the Oise offered an impediment which covered part of the British line, but as already remarked, the waters were exceedingly low for the time of year, and the Germans very cleverly overcame whatever obstacle was left.

The three divisions which formed Butler's Third Corps were the 14th Light Division (Cowper), which extended as far south as Moy, the 18th Division (Lee) covering the ground between Moy and Travecy, and finally the 58th Division (Cator) extending to Barisis, five or six miles south of the Oise. As usual, we will take them from the north, confining

the narrative to the point at which the fighting in the front line came to an end.

The 14th Division had all three brigades in the line, their order being 41st, 42nd, and 43rd from the north. This division, composed entirely of light infantry battalions, has had more than its share of desperate adventures during its service in France. Again and again, notably in the fire-attack before Ypres in 1915, in the third battle of Ypres, and upon the present occasion, they have been exposed to ordeals of the most tremendous kind. Their frontage was 5500 yards, which was not excessive as compared with that of other divisions, and it contained some high ground north of Essigny which should have been valuable for observation and defence, but none the less the attack was so severe and so concentrated that it rapidly made an impression upon the defence, which became more serious as the day wore on. The three outlying battalions were the 8th and 9th King's Royal Rifles and the 6th Somerset Light Infantry, and these, as usual, were sacrificed almost to a man. The enemy then stormed in upon the line, making his advance here, as elsewhere, with a systematic skill which showed how thoroughly he had been drilled and exercised behind the line. This process of infiltration by which small bodies here, there, and everywhere extend their advance where they find a cranny into which to push and establish machine-gun posts which, unless they be instantly rooted out, soon grow into formidable positions, shows the remarkable adaptability of the German soldier—a quality with which, it must be admitted, the world had not credited him in the past. It may also be admitted that we yielded too easily to such tactics, and that there was a tendency, as was pointed out in a memorandum from the Higher Command, to consider a position as untenable because it was outflanked, instead of closing in upon the intruders and pressing each side of the nut-crackers against the intrusive nut. In many cases this was done, but in others small bodies of daring men with a few machine-guns were able to dislodge whole lines which they had managed to enfilade. On this occasion the Germans pushed in upon both flanks of the 14th Division, but their most serious gains occurred about midday, when they captured Manufacture Farm north of Essigny, and shortly afterwards the weighbridge west of that village. The 41st Brigade on the left were driven out of their headquarters, while the 43rd on the right were pushed back to the Gibercourt Road. A very weak point was evidently developing, so General Butler hurried up part of the 2nd Cavalry Division (Greenly), and also his only spare infantry brigade, the 54th, in order to make a line of resistance at the switch line between Camas and Lizerolles. About 1.30 the Germans had got in between Essigny and Benay and taken Lambay Wood. In view of their accelerating advance and the ominous reports which were also coming in from the 173rd Brigade on the right, General Butler continued to build up his rear line, putting into it not only all three brigades of the 2nd Cavalry and the 54th Infantry Brigades, but also the 12th and 13th

Entrenching Battalions, thus covering the whole rear zone of the corps. Isolated parties of the 41st Brigade were holding out in the main position upon the left, but Hinacourt had also fallen and the line was slowly rolling westward, so that by evening the 14th Division had practically lost its hold of the whole of its battle position.

Things were going better, however, with the 18th Division, which held 9000 yards of front in the centre of the Third Corps. As this great frontage was maintained by only two brigades, the 53rd (Higginson) in the north and the 55th (Wood) in the south, it must have been very thinly held, and even admitting that the pressure was less than on either of the wing divisions, it was none the less a fine achievement to keep a grip on so wide an area. Three battalions were in the forward zone, the 8th Berks on the left, the 7th West Kents in the centre, and the 7th Buffs on the right, all of whom did splendidly, so that the defence of Fort Vendeuil, Cork, Cardiff, Durham, and other redoubts upon this point form a whole series of epics. Besides the infantry, the 79th Company Royal Engineers shared in the peril and the glory of this defence. The wires connecting up these forward garrisons were speedily cut, and no news came back all day, save the rattle of their rifle-fire. The first definite tidings of the German advance came back through the fog about 12 o'clock, when some gunners emerged from its folds and announced that the advanced guns had been overrun by the enemy. Soon after came a runner with a message from Colonel Crosthwaite of the West Kents to say that his headquarters was surrounded, and asking for a barrage on one side of it. A second message arrived from him : " Still holding, 12.30 p.m. Boche all round within fifty yards except rear. Can only see forty yards, so it is difficult to kill the blighters." It was the last word from the post. At 1.30 the enemy had closed in on the battle zone, and the high ground at Cerisy in the area of the 53rd Brigade had been lost. On the front of the 55th Brigade at the same hour strong parties of the enemy who had pushed between the redoubts in the fog had occupied Vendeuil, while a section of guns in Ronquenet Wood had been rushed by them. The reserve company of the Buffs in front of the battle zone fought desperately against these intruders, while near the Dublin redoubt Captain Dennis fought his guns till 5 p.m., inflicting heavy losses upon the Germans, who collected in masses in front of the wire at this point. Eventually his gun-pits were rushed, all the gunners being killed or taken.

The main weight of the attack fell upon the 53rd Brigade upon the left, and by the middle of the afternoon all the redoubts upon this front had gone, while the 55th was still well covered. The battle zone, however, was still intact, though the enemy massed heavily in front of Moulin Farm and opposite the switch line from Vendeuil to Ly-Fontaine. They came forward several times, but the mist had risen and the rifle-fire was accurate so that they made no progress. At Caponne Farm there was also a brisk attack, but the 10th Essex, the only battalion

left in the brigade, held firmly to its position, though much plagued by low-flying aeroplanes who skimmed their very heads, while the British Headquarters was equally disturbed by a captured anti-tank gun with which the Germans kept up a point-blank fire. To ease the pressure upon this wing, General Lee put in the 8th East Surreys from divisional reserve to thicken the line in the neighbourhood of Remigny.

At 3.30 the covering forts upon the front of the 55th Brigade were still holding out. Fort Vendeuil had made a particularly fine defence and broke up a heavy attack. There was lamp signalling from this fort till 6 p.m., when the lamp went out for ever. The 7th Buffs, who had charge of all this portion of the battle front, did a magnificent day's work, and the famous regiment to which this battalion belongs has won no prouder laurels in all the centuries. Little is known of their fate save the pregnant facts that the front was screened all day, that repeated messages for help were received up to 8.30 in the evening, and that rifle-fire was heard from their posts till midnight. Bald words—and yet to him who can see they convey a sure picture of fading light, dwindling cartridges, and desperate men, baited from all sides and dying with clenched teeth amid the ever-flowing German hordes.

About 4 o'clock the Germans had not only penetrated deeply into the battle zone of the 14th Division to the north, but had also dented that of the 58th in the south, so that both wings of the 18th were in a perilous state. The East Surreys were pushed forward, therefore, into the switch line from Gibercourt to Ly-Fontaine. Two regiments of dismounted cavalry from the 2nd Division were sent also to form a defensive flank on the right of the 55th Brigade. At 6 p.m. the attack upon the battle zone of the 18th had ceased, but it was being pushed hard upon the two wing divisions, and the 58th had lost both Quessy and Fargniers. Orders were then issued to get behind the Crozat Canal after dark, this having always been chosen as the second line of defence. The 54th Brigade, which behaved with great steadiness, was directed to cover the retirement of the 14th Division, and the guns were withdrawn first, so as to cover the infantry at the canal crossings. A few of the outlying posts were gathered up and brought back in safety. The East Surreys covered the withdrawal of the poor remains of the 53rd Brigade, while the 3rd Hussars covered the 55th Brigade on the right. It was a most difficult and delicate operation with a victorious and elated enemy swarming upon the rear, but it was successfully carried out, and by 6 a.m. the Third Corps were all across the canal, and the bridges in that sector had been destroyed.

The performance of the 18th Division had been a very fine one, and it was one of the units which could boast that on the evening of that terrible day they still held the main position which they had covered in the morning. The chief German attack seems to have been conducted by four divisions, the 34th, 37th, 103rd, and 211th, while four more were identified as either partly engaged or in immediate reserve. The

direction of the attack was mainly from the north and came upon the front and flank of the 53rd Brigade, which could hardly call itself a battalion in the evening. The gunners had to fire by guess until the mist lifted, after which time they did great execution, and stuck to their pieces to the last moment. A particularly notable performance was that of Captain Haybittle of C Battery, 83rd Brigade Royal Field Artillery, whose guns, just south of Benay, were rushed in the mist at noon. He and his crews removed the blocks and held a neighbouring position with their rifles, directing at the same time the fire of two guns in the rear which played upon the German masses as they debouched from Lambay Wood. Afterwards he and his men fell back upon these guns and fought them until late in the evening, when both of them were knocked out. Nineteen hundred rounds were fired, and this stubborn defence did much to hold the northern flank of the battle zone.

It only remains now to give some account of the events upon the front of the 173rd Brigade (Worgan) of the 58th London Division (Cator) upon the extreme right, in order to complete this rapid bird's-eye view of the events of March 21 upon the front of the Fifth Army. This brigade, which filled the space between Travecy on the left and the Oise on the right, had the 2/1st Londons in the forward zone, the 2/4th Londons in the battle zone opposite La Fère, and the 2/3rd Londons in the rear zone upon the Crozat Canal.[1] The single battalion in front was attacked by the impossible odds of three German divisions, but held out for a long time with great constancy. Their brave Colonel, Richardson, was last seen surrounded by the enemy, but still fighting with his headquarters troops around him. The Germans stormed forward to the battle zone, but there on the high ground across the Oise they also met with a very vigorous resistance from the 4th Londons, aided by some sappers and a company of pioneers. It was indeed a great achievement of Colonel Dann and his men to hold up the attack with such disparity of numbers, for according to the official German account several divisions took part in the attack. Finally, as the afternoon wore on the enemy obtained a lodgment in the left of the position, and before evening they had occupied Travecy and part of Fargniers, winding up by the capture of Quessy. The 2/3rd Londons had been drawn into the fight, and now the 2/8th Londons from the 174th Brigade were brought north and placed in reserve along the line of the Crozat Canal, across which the troops were now ordered to fall back. This battalion with the 18th Entrenching Battalion guarded the whole canal line from Condren Crossing on the right to the junction with the 18th Division on the left. By 5 a.m. all troops were across and the bridges had been destroyed. The 2/4th Londons succeeded in removing all their stores and munitions, and their remarkable achievement in holding the

[1] When two numbers are given to a Territorial battalion, for instance 2/4th Londons, it means that the 4th Londons have two battalions and that this is the second of them.

high ground of La Fère against ten times their numbers for as many hours, during which they inflicted very heavy losses upon their assailants and repulsed six separate attacks, was among the outstanding military feats of that difficult day.

It is needless to say that the losses in men were very heavy on March 21, though it is difficult to separate them from the general losses of the retreat, which will be recorded later. Among senior officers of note who died for their country that day, besides those already mentioned, were Colonels Acklom of the Northumberland Fusiliers, Thorne of the North Staffords, Wrenford of the East Lancashires, and Stewart of the Leicesters.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Retreat of the Seventh and Nineteenth Corps

Problem before General Gough—His masterful action—Arrival of 39th, 20th, and 50th Divisions—Retreat of Tudor's 9th Scottish Division—Destruction of the South Africans—Defence of the Somme—Arrival of the 8th Division—Desperate fighting—The Carey line—Death of General Feetham "Immer fest daran"—Advance Australia—Great achievement of General Watts.

THE reader is now in a position to form some conception of the situation of the Fifth Army on the evening of March 21, and to understand the problems which confronted its commander. He was of opinion, and the opinion was shared by some at least of his corps commanders, that had he had four or five divisions of reserves within easy call, he could unquestionably have held the line. He had, however, to deal with the situation as it stood, and no man could have had a more difficult and responsible task. His own reserves were already practically engaged. On the other hand, both his air service and the reports of prisoners assured him that those of the enemy were numerous and near. His line had been deeply dented in four places: in the sector of the 16th Division at Ronssoy, in that of the 24th Division at Maissemy, in that of the 14th Division at Essigny, and in that of the 58th Division opposite La Fère. These various points are, it will be observed, almost equidistant along the line, which tends to show that the German attack was conducted upon a plan which threw such forces upon limited areas that the result was almost a certainty, whatever troops might be holding them. It was the misfortune and not the fault of these gallant divisions that their thin ranks were in the very places which huge masses of the enemy had marked in advance as their objectives.

It must have been clear to General Gough and to his corps commanders that a second day of battle, with the German reserves pouring up, would certainly mean a penetration of the line at these various weak points, and that the enemy would then be in a position to cut off large portions of the force. These units, be they divisions or corps, would no doubt fight to the last, but the end must surely be annihilation. In that case the general situation would have been an appalling one. It might indeed have been decisive for the whole war. There was nothing

between the Germans and Amiens. Pouring westwards they would have destroyed all reserves almost before they could have alighted from their trains or their motors, and within a few days would have entirely cut off the British from the French, with the estuary of the Somme between the two armies. Any hesitation would have been fatal. An immediate decision was imperative. That decision could only be that the British Army should retard the German advance by an obstinate rearguard action, that it should endeavour to preserve its line, and allow no unit to be cut off, that it should fall back in an orderly fashion upon its reserves, and that when it met them it should turn at bay and prevent the enemy from reaching his objective. This was the plan which General Gough instantly formed, and which he proceeded with firmness and moral courage to carry out. Orders were at once given that the weaker portions of the line should drop back behind the obstacles which had already been marked out as the best defensive lines. At the same time with great foresight he gave orders that the old French Somme trenches, from the river southwards, should be set in order as a last line of defence. He despatched his chief army engineer, General Grant, to carry out this order, and it was eventually a very vital one in ensuring the safety of the army in the last stages of its retreat.

The orders to each corps commander were given in the form of general indications, the details being left to his own judgment, for the position of each corps and the pressure upon it formed a number of independent problems. We shall turn to the north, therefore, where, upon the whole, the situation was least critical, and we shall follow first the Seventh and then the Nineteenth Corps in their various movements until a condition of equilibrium was at last safely established. Let it be at once stated that the design was duly carried out along the whole line, and that the operation, which at the time was designated as a disaster, was really a remarkable example of how by the coolness of commanders and the discipline of their men, the most desperate situation may be saved and the most powerful and aggressive foe foiled in his attempts. What complicated the military problem of the Fifth Army was that the German threat was really aimed at Paris as much as at Amiens, and that if they could have got through at Essigny and cut off the 58th Division there were hardly any reserves between them and the all-important metropolis.

The morning of March 22 again presented those conditions of fog and low visibility which are favourable to the attack. There was no advance in the early hours upon the new positions of the 9th Division, but the enemy directed his attention entirely to the Chapel Hill front of the 21st Division upon the right, which was still held by the Lincolns. An attempt was made to relieve them by the Scots battalion of the South Africans, who took over some of the northern line. The defence was a splendid one, but by 4 o'clock in the afternoon the Germans had gained most of this high ground by outflanking it, and the South

Africans at Revelon Farm, who had been reinforced by the 11th Royal Scots Battalion from the 27th Brigade, were badly enfiladed in consequence by rifle and machine-gun fire from the south. Colonel McLeod of the South African Scots, and many officers and men, were among the casualties. There was a withdrawal therefore of the right of the 9th Division, and about 6.30 p.m. the Germans had got as far as Heudicourt, and the brigade staff at Sorel had to line up in order to resist his turning movement to the north. So far round had the Germans penetrated that the Africans were compelled to fall back due north for some distance until their rear was clear, when they retreated with the rest of the division westwards towards Nurlu. By two in the morning of March 23 the new positions had been reached, and the attenuated South African Brigade, which had borne the brunt of the fighting, was taken into divisional reserve. This difficult retreat was rendered possible by the desperate resistance offered by the 6th Scots Borderers, who formed a defensive flank south of Sorel and gave the troops to the north time to gain the new position. One company of the 11th Royal Scots was cut off in Revelon Farm, but managed to fight its way back, bringing with it an officer and eighteen other prisoners. No guns were lost by the 9th Division save ten, which were without teams and were therefore destroyed.

At this period there was some dislocation between the left of the 9th Division and the right of the 47th, as is likely to occur where each belongs to a different corps and army. For a time there was a gap between them. This was partly overcome, however, on the evening of the 22nd by means of the 2nd Division, which lay in reserve behind the 47th and put its 99th Brigade under the orders of the 9th Division so as to ensure unity of command in this position of danger.

Turning to the right wing of the Seventh Corps allusion has been made in the last chapter to the severe pressure upon the 16th Division and its determined resistance. It will be remembered that it was reinforced by the 116th Brigade of the 39th Division, and all three brigades were involved in the same heavy fighting on the morning of March 22, the German attack being relentless in its vigour. In the course of this severe action the village of St. Emilie was lost, and was afterwards retaken in a very gallant fashion by the 1st Hertfords, a battalion which had greatly distinguished itself already at St. Julien and elsewhere. The orders were to retreat, however, and in this movement the switch line from Saulcourt dug and manned by the 117th and 118th Brigades proved invaluable. The army policy was to fight rearguards and delay the enemy, and this was most efficiently done during the evening of March 22, the flank of the 21st Division being covered in its retirement, and the line held against vigorous attacks. Many of the guns of the 39th Divisional artillery were lost through their extreme devotion in covering the retreat of the 16th Division, for they frequently carried on until the infantry were behind them. The enemy was pressing his

attacks with great vigour, and every withdrawal was followed up by strong bodies of troops and of field artillery.

During these operations General Hornby had been in command of the division, but on March 23 General Feetham returned from leave and took over the duties. All day the 39th Division was fighting rearguard actions as it fell back upon the Somme. In the course of them General Hornby, now in command of the 116th Brigade, was severely wounded. The roads running westwards to Peronne and Clery were crowded with traffic, but the 39th Division turned at bay again and again, giving them time to get clear. By evening the remains of the 16th Division had been practically squeezed out of the line, and the 39th had the 66th Division on its right and the 21st on its left. At night it held a line from La Maisonnette along the canal to south of Ommiecourt. The enemy appeared to be much exalted by the capture of Peronne, and the 118th Brigade on the right heard them singing lustily during the night.

On March 23 the German attack continued to be very heavy upon the front of the two Scottish brigades of the 9th Division, which were in touch with the Fifth Corps in the north and with the 21st Division in the south. So close and violent was the fighting that the 6th Scots Borderers were only extricated with difficulty. At 2 p.m. the line was east of Bouchavesnes, but by 4 p.m. the 21st Division on the right had lost ground, and the flank and even the rear of the 9th was for a time exposed until the Natal Regiment was thrown out south of Bouchavesnes to cover it. The three brigades of the 21st Division were engaged all day as they slowly retreated before the swarming enemy.

March 23 was a most arduous day for both the Highland and the Lowland brigades, for each of them was attacked again and again with the utmost violence. Though the attacks were repulsed each of them had the effect of weakening still further these units which were already much exhausted by hard fighting and incessant exertion. Gradually they were pushed to the westward until they found themselves lining the eastern edge of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, and manning the ridge which extended from that forest to the ruins of Saillisel. Their left at this period seems to have been in the air, as the 99th Brigade had been returned to its division, and they had failed to make contact with the 17th Division, who were at the time just west of Saillisel. At this period the front of the 9th Division seems to have covered 11,000 yards, and to have extended for at least two miles into the area of the Third Army, showing how desperate were the exertions needed to cover the ground and to prevent a break through.

In the morning of March 24 the Scots could see the German infantry streaming forward over the open ground which had been evacuated upon the evening before. It was clear that a great attack was imminent, and at 9 o'clock, after a very heavy cannonade, it developed along the whole line. For three hours the Germans made repeated efforts to force their way through the 9th Division, but on each occasion they were

repulsed, and their losses at this point were exceedingly heavy. About midday, however, they had gained so much ground upon the flanks that the South Africans were almost surrounded, and shot into from north and south. The general British line had fallen back to the ridge east of Combles, 1000 yards behind, but General Dawson found it impossible to withdraw in daylight, so that his brigade was compelled to defend itself in its isolated position at Marrières Wood as best it could. The result was a disaster, but one of a most glorious kind, for the men fought until their last cartridges had been expended, and a large proportion of the survivors were wounded men. General Dawson was among the prisoners. It was reported afterwards from German sources that he was taken while working a machine-gun with his brigade-major lying dead beside him. From that time forward the South African Brigade had practically ceased to exist until it was reorganised in Flanders. The supporting parties alone were left, and these were formed at once into a composite battalion under Colonel Young, for no rifle could be spared from the fighting line at such a time. Whilst the South Africans had been engaged in this death struggle the 27th Lowland Brigade had been in a similar plight. All these battalions, the 6th Scots Borderers and the 11th and 12th Royal Scots, were very hard pressed, particularly the former. The Lowlanders extricated themselves from an almost desperate situation and fell back from St. Pierre Vaast to the position covering Combles. So great was the general dislocation of troops that one portion of the 5th Camerons found themselves that evening fighting with the 47th Division, while another was with the 17th.

The main effort of the enemy on March 24 was directed against the Fifth and Seventh Corps in the centre of the British line, though his energy at other points was sufficient to engage the full attention of all the other units. Heavy and fresh masses were poured in at the centre and the pressure was great. For the Seventh Corps it was the fourth day of incessant and desperate fighting. There were few men left, and these were very exhausted. Towards evening the left of the Seventh had been turned, and had been compromised by the occupation of Sailly Saillisel. All attempts at counter-attack, however gallant, were destined to failure, or at the best evanescent success, for there was not the weight to carry them through. At 4.15 the report was : " The enemy is through on the right flank and has occupied Combles, Morval, and Lesbœufs." The Seventh Corps then fell back to the line Hem-Maurepas and threw out every stray unit it could get together—troops of cavalry, Canadian motor-guns, crews and machine-guns of tanks, and all the powdered débris of broken formations, in the direction of Bernafoy Wood to cover the exposed flank. It was still out of touch with the Fifth Corps. This movement gave the line an awkward angle from Peronne and made it almost impossible to hold the stretch of river. For the time the right of the Third Army was a good five miles behind the left of the Fifth Army—the result, as Sir Douglas Haig has stated, of an unauthorised

local withdrawal due to misunderstanding of orders. The line near Peronne was still held by the 39th Division. Throughout the morning of the 24th strong enemy forces were seen by them pushing forwards between Clery and Rancourt, where they were harassed by the British fire in enfilade, particularly on the roads, where the artillery of the 16th and 39th Divisions caused much havoc and confusion, doing great work at short range over open sights. Many excellent targets were missed, however, owing to that difficulty in liaison between the infantry and the guns, which was one of the greatest problems of the operations. During the day the average number of rounds fired per battery was 3000, most of which were observed fire.

As March 24 wore on the position of the 39th Division became untenable, as they heard upon one side of the loss of Saillisel, and on the other of the forcing of the Somme at Brie, Pagny, and Bethencourt. They moved back, therefore, at night with orders to hold the line from Buscourt to Feuilleres. The average strength of brigades at this time was not more than 20 officers and 600 men. From the morning of March 25 the 39th Division passed to the command of the Nineteenth Corps, and its further arduous work will be found under that heading. During all this day the 21st Division, still fighting hard in a succession of defensive positions, had its right upon the Somme, while its left was in intermittent touch with the 9th Division.

The 9th Division had fallen back, the two Scottish brigades being continually in action until they reached the Maricourt-Montauban line, where they supported the 1st Cavalry Division who were in front of Bernafoy Wood. The general line at this period from Montauban southwards was held by the 9th Division, the 1st Cavalry, the newly-arrived and most welcome 35th Division (Franks), the 21st Division, now reduced to a single composite brigade under General Headlam, and then some oddments under Colonel Hunt. This brought the line to the Somme, on the south side of which were the remains of the 16th and 39th Divisions. This might sound an imposing force upon so short a front, but save for the 35th each division was *nominis magni umbra*, none of them stronger than brigades. The 47th Division was retiring at this time upon Contalmaison, and a gap of several miles was appearing between the Fifth and Seventh Corps. During the movements on March 24 the guns of the 65th and 150th R.F.A. did great work and earned the warm gratitude of the weary infantry. The enemy targets round Combles were all that a gunner could wish.

All troops north of the Somme were on March 25 transferred to the Fifth Corps, and became part of the Third Army. The 27th Brigade was drawn out of the line, and the 26th was under the orders of the 35th Division which took over the defence of this sector, relieving the exhausted 21st Division. March 25 saw heavy attacks on Bernafoy which was lost once, but regained by the 106th Brigade. There was still a gap to the north, and no touch had been made with the 17th

Division, though the cavalry had built up a defensive flank in that direction. At 2 p.m. the Germans attacked from Ginchy towards Trones Wood, names which we hoped had passed for ever from our war maps. In the first onset they pressed back the 12th and 18th Highland Light Infantry of the 106th Brigade, but there was a strong counter-attack headed by the 9th Durhams which re-took Favière Wood and restored the situation. A second attack about 3 p.m. upon the 35th Division was also repulsed. The German pressure was so great, however, that the line of defence was taken back during the night to the Bray-Albert position. The enemy followed closely at the heels of the rearguards, though the guns were active to the last so as to conceal the retreat as long as possible. Early in the morning of March 26 the Lowland Brigade was again attacked with great violence, but the 12th Royal Scots, upon whom the main assault fell, drove it back with loss. Changes in other parts of the line, however, necessitated a withdrawal across the Ancre, so as to keep in touch with the 12th Division which had now come up on the left. The 9th Division on this date numbered 1540 rifles with 20 machine-guns. It was shortly afterwards drawn from the line after as severe a spell of service as troops could possibly endure. The story of the retreat of the Seventh Corps has been indicated mainly from the point of view of this northern unit, but it will be understood that the 21st Division, as tried and as worn as its Scottish neighbour, was keeping its relative position to the south, while the 16th was conforming in the same way until the time when it passed into the Nineteenth Corps.

The 35th Division, newly arrived from Flanders, did great and indeed vital work in upholding the weakening line at the moment of its greatest strain. A consecutive account of its work may make this clear. Pushing through the remains of the 21st Division on March 24, Franks threw his men instantly into the thick of the fight, attacking the Germans in front of Clery. Marindin's 105th Brigade did great work that day, the 15th Cheshires on the right and 15th Sherwood Foresters on the left, attacking and, for a time, carrying the ridge of Clery, though it was impossible in view of the general retreat to hold it for long. The Germans were staggered by the sudden, unexpected blow, and they poured troops against their new antagonist, losing very heavily in their reconquest of the ridge. Finally the front line of the Sherwoods was practically annihilated, and the Cheshires were in almost as bad a way, but with the help of some Sussex men who were formed into an emergency unit, together with some signallers, they were able to draw off, and a line of defence was organised under General Marindin, but general orders arrived for a withdrawal to the front Curlu-Maurepas, which was safely carried out, the 17th Royal Scots covering the rear. It was a most ticklish business, as touch had been lost with the 9th Division, but the wounded were safely evacuated, and all withdrew in good order, the 12th Highland Light Infantry finally bridging the gap upon the left.

This battalion had lost in these operations its splendid Colonel, Anderson, whose work has earned a posthumous V.C. The enemy followed closely, and attacked again before dusk, but was driven off. The attack was renewed on the morning of March 25, but still without success, the 4th North Staffords bearing the brunt. The weary troops of the Scottish Division, who had been engaged for four long days, were rallied here and formed into provisional fighting units, which did good service by relieving the 106th Brigade at Maricourt, when it was forced back. The pressure upon the division was desperately severe, but was slightly eased by the arrival of a Northumberland Fusilier battalion from the 21st Division. That night the order was to withdraw to the line Bray-Albert.

The general command of the retiring line in this section, including the 9th, 21st, and 35th Divisions had for the time fallen to General Franks, who handed his own division over to General Pollard. The position was exceedingly critical, as not only were the units weak, but ammunition had run low. The line was still falling back, and the enemy was pressing on behind it with mounted scouts in the van. In this retreat tanks were found of the greatest service in holding the German advance. The route was through Morlancourt and Ville-sur-Ancre to a defensive position upon the right bank of the Ancre in the Dernancourt area, the orders being to hold the line between that village and Buire. Both villages were attacked that evening, but the 35th Division on the right and the 26th Brigade on the left, drove back the enemy. By the morning of March 28 the line seemed to have reached equilibrium in this part, and the welcome sight was seen of large bodies of troops moving up from the rear. This was the head of the Australian reinforcements. During the day the enemy got into Dernancourt, but was thrown out again by the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers Pioneer Battalion. The 104th Brigade also drove back an attack in front of Treux Wood. It was clear that the moving masses were losing impetus and momentum. That same evening the Australians were engaged on the right and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. On the night of March 30 the 35th Division, which had lost nearly half its numbers, was relieved by the 3rd Australians.

We shall now follow the Nineteenth Corps in its perilous retreat. It will be remembered that on the evening of the first day of the battle it had been badly outflanked to the north, where the 66th Division had made so stout a resistance, and had also lost a great deal of the battle zone in the south, which was made more disastrous by the fall of Le Verguier at nine on the morning of March 22. The supporting line formed by the 50th Division had also been pushed in at Pœuilly and other points, and it was with no little difficulty that the depleted and exhausted corps was able to get across the Somme on the morning of March 23, where they were ordered to hold the whole front of the river, including the important crossings at Brie. This, as a glance at the map

will show, was a very considerable retreat, amounting to no less than ten miles in two days, but it was of the first importance to get a line of defence, and also to lessen the distance between the sorely tried army and its reserves. It was hard indeed to give up ground and to be back on the line of Peronne, but there was at least the small solace that this was the ravaged ground which the Germans had themselves turned into a waste land, and that there was no town of any consequence nor any military point of importance in its whole extent.

By the late afternoon of March 23 the bulk of the Nineteenth Corps was across the Somme. The Germans had followed closely, and there was rearguard fighting all the way in which the 50th Division slowed down the pursuit of the enemy. The officers who were entrusted with the defence of the line of river soon realised that they had a difficult task, for the dry weather had shrunk it into insignificance in this section, and owing to trees and thick undergrowth the fields of fire were very limited, while the thin line of defenders scattered over some twelve miles of front offered, even after the advent of the 8th Division, an ineffective screen against the heavy advance from the east. Heneker's 8th Division, a particularly fine unit consisting entirely of Regular battalions, had made heroic exertions to reach the field of battle, and fitted itself at once into its correct position in that very complicated operation in a way which seemed marvellous to soldiers on the spot.

In the evening of March 23 a number of Germans, some of them cavalry, were observed upon the farther side of the Somme and were heavily punished by artillery fire. None got across before dark, but during the night numerous bodies established themselves upon the western side. Local reserves had been placed near the probable crossings, and these in several cases hunted the enemy across again ; but the fact was that the river could be forded anywhere, and that a German concentration on a given point could always overpower the thin local defence. The line of resistance was further weakened by the 1st Cavalry Division, which had linked up the Nineteenth Corps with the Eighteenth Corps on the south, being now ordered to join the Seventh Corps in the north. The general order of the troops at this moment was, that the newly arrived 8th Division was on the extreme right touching elements of the Eighteenth Corps at Bethencourt and extending with the aid of one brigade of the 50th as far as Eterpigny, nearly eight miles. From Eterpigny to Biaches, south of Peronne, were the remains of the 66th Division, covering about four miles, and joining the 39th Division on the right of the Seventh Corps near that point. The 24th was lining up between Hattencourt and Chaulnes.

It was on the front of the 8th Division, at Bethencourt, at Pargny, and at St. Christ, that the Germans made their chief lodgments upon the western banks of the river on the morning of March 24. The Bethencourt attack was particularly formidable, both for its energy and because it aimed at the junction of the two corps. By two in the

afternoon the German infantry were across in considerable numbers, and had forced back the right flank of the 8th Division, which fell back hinging upon the river farther north, so as to oppose the repeated efforts which were made to enfilade the whole line. General Watts' responsibilities were added to next morning, March 25, for the two much exhausted divisions of the Seventh Corps which were holding the northern bend of the river from Biaches to beyond Frise were handed over to him when the rest of Congreve's Corps was incorporated in the Third Army. These two divisions were the 39th and the 16th, the former holding as far as Frise and the latter the Somme crossings to the west of that point. March 25 was a day of great anxiety for General Watts, as the enemy were pressing hard, many of his own units were utterly exhausted, and the possibilities of grave disaster were very evident. A real fracture of the line at either end might have led to a most desperate situation. The French were now at the south end of the river position, but their presence was not yet strongly felt, and with every hour the pressure was heavier upon the bent line of the 8th Division, on which the whole weight of the central battle had fallen. By 10 o'clock on the morning of March 25, the defensive flank of the 8th Division had been pushed back to Licourt, and had been broken there, but had been mended once more by counter-attack, and was still holding with the aid of the 50th. The cyclists of the Nineteenth Corps, the armoured-car batteries, and other small units were thrust in to stiffen the yielding line, which was still rolled up, until after one o'clock it lay back roughly from Cizancourt to Marchelepot and the railway line west of that place. Later in the day came the news of fresh crossings to the north at St. Christ and Eterpigny where the 66th Division had been pushed back to Maisonette. It was evident that the line was doomed. To stay in it was to risk destruction. At 4.15 the order was given to withdraw to a second position which had been prepared farther westward, but to retain the line of the Somme as the left flank. During these operations the 8th Division had performed the remarkable feat of holding back fourteen separate German divisions during thirty-six hours on a nine-mile front, and finally withdrew in perfect order. Every unit was needed to cover the ground, and the general disposition of divisions was roughly as drawn :

R.	Hattencourt.	Chantres.	Estrees.	Assevillers.	Herbecourt.	Frise.	*L.*
	24	8	50	66	39	16	

It will be seen that General Watts' command had increased from two divisions to six, but it is doubtful whether the whole six had the normal strength of two. The new line had not yet been completed and was essentially unstable, but none the less it formed a rallying point for the retreating troops. It should be noted that from the morning of March 25 General Fayolle took over the command south of the Somme.

The 24th Division, which had suffered so severely in the first two

days of the action, was again heavily engaged during this arduous day. In the morning it had been directed to counter-attack in the direction of Dreslincourt in co-operation with the French 22nd Division. In the meantime, however, the whole situation had been changed by the right flank of the 8th Division being turned, so that General Daly's men as they went up for the attack were themselves heavily attacked near Curchy, while the junction with the French could not be made. They fell back therefore upon their original position where hard fighting ensued all day, and a most anxious situation developed upon the southern flank, where a wide gap existed and the enemy was mustering in force. Colonel Walker, C.R.E. of this division, was killed that day.

On the morning of March 26 the new line had been occupied. The Seventeenth Corps had retired in the night to the Bray-Albert line, which left a considerable gap in the north, to the west of Frise, but this was filled up by an impromptu line made up of stragglers and various odds and ends from the rear of the army. It was in the south, however, that the attack was most severe, and here it soon became evident that the line was too long and the defenders too weak, so that it could not be maintained against a determined assault. Before the sun had risen high above the horizon it had been shaken from end to end, the 24th Division being hard put to it to hold Fonches, while the 66th were driven out of Herbecourt. At 9.30 the order was given to withdraw, and with their brave rearguards freely sacrificing themselves to hold back the swarming enemy, the troops—some of them in the last stage of exhaustion—fell back upon the second position. It was at this period of the battle that Major Whitworth, the gallant commander of the 2/6th Manchesters, stood at bay with his battalion, which numbered exactly 34 men. He and 17 of his men were dead or wounded after this last stand, and 17 survivors were all that could be mustered that evening.

Before the right wing fell back to Vrely there had been a good deal of fighting. The 24th Division, which was now a mere skeleton, was strongly attacked in the morning of March 27, and Dugan's 73rd Brigade was pushed back towards Caix, the 8th Sussex having very heavy losses, including Colonel Hill, and Banham, the second-in-command.

The situation on the other flank of the 24th Division was also particularly desperate, and the 9th East Surreys, under Major Clark, sacrificed itself to cover the withdrawal of the 72nd Brigade. There were few more gallant actions in the war. Major Clark, writing from a German prison, gave a small account which enables us to get a glimpse of the actual detail of such a combat. The enemy's infantry were in force, he says, within 100 yards of his scattered line. " We managed to get back some hundred yards when I saw that our position was really desperate. The enemy were sweeping up from the south, and several lines of them were in between us and our next defensive line. . . . We were seen and the enemy began to surround us, so I decided to fight it out. We took

up position in a communication trench, and used our rifles with great effect. Grant was doing good work till shot through the head, and Warre-Dymond behaved admirably. It was a fine fight, and we held them until ammunition gave out. They then charged and mopped up the remainder. They were infuriated with us. My clothing had been riddled with shrapnel, my nose fractured, and my face and clothing smothered with blood. There are 3 officers and 59 men unwounded. The rest of the battalion are casualties. It was a great fight, and the men were simply splendid. I have the greatest admiration for them. It was a glorious end." It speaks well for the class of men whom the East End of London sent into the New Army.

The new position on March 26 may be depicted as follows :

R.	Rouvroy.	Rosières.	Vauvillers.	Framerville.	Proyart.	Froissy.	*L.*
	24	8	50	66	39	16	

The Germans followed up closely all along the line, the pressure being great everywhere, but greatest on the left, where the 39th and 66th disengaged themselves with difficulty, both of them being heavily attacked, and the Cambridgeshires fighting a fine rearguard action in Biaches. About two in the afternoon the troops were solidly established in their new positions, but the extreme north of the line was in a very unstable condition, as the 16th were fired upon from the north of the river and their left was in no condition to meet an attack. On the right, however, there was earlier in the day some very spirited fighting, for the 8th and 50th Divisions, though very worn, were in far better shape than their comrades who had endured the gassings and the losses of the first day.

The 50th Division fought particularly hard to stop the enemy's advance, turning at every rise, and hitting back with all the strength that was left it. A very fine little delaying action was fought by its rearguard this day upon the line Lihons-Vermandovillers-Foucaucourt. The 5th and 8th Durhams, with a few of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and a couple of batteries, held up the advance for several hours and stood their ground with such resolution that two platoons of the Northumberlands were never seen again, for they held on to Foucaucourt until both they and the village were submerged. As the day wore on and the pressure increased, the 66th Division was forced to let go of Framerville, for these men had fought without sleep for five days and nights. They staggered back through the rear ranks of the 50th Division, consisting of the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers, who at once, under the personal leading of General Riddell and Colonel Anstey, both of them on horseback and in red-banded caps, rushed the village once again. It was a fine advance which was much helped by the way in which Captain Thompson in Vauvillers brought his machine-guns to bear upon the flank of the Germans advancing to the south of him. Brigade-Major Paget, a very rising officer, was killed in this spirited affair.

No gains could ever be held, as the general line was receding, but all such successful blows were of use as slowing down the German advance, teaching him caution, and gaining time—for time was the very essence of the matter. If there were time the line could be built up behind. If there were no time Amiens must fall. " I will fight before Amiens, in Amiens, or behind Amiens ! " cried Foch. Brave words, but if Amiens went, the future was dark indeed.

At eight on the morning of March 27 the Germans were raging once more along the whole line of the British breakwater. The gallant weary 8th Division was heavily attacked near Rosières and the stormers reached the village, but Heneker's men counter-attacked in most heroic fashion, and cleared them out again, taking a number of prisoners. The 2nd Devons, 1st Sherwoods, and 22nd Durham Light Infantry were the units engaged in this fine action.

News was bad from the north end of the line, and it was understood that the Germans were in Proyart, so both the 8th and 50th Divisions, out of their scanty ranks, sent reinforcements (R.E. details and the 2nd Devons) to help the 39th Division. At 3 p.m. on March 27 the Germans were in Framerville, and an hour later were on the top of the 8th and 50th once more, in front of Harbonnière. The rearguard of the latter were the 4th and 6th Northumberland Fusiliers. The German guns were in full blast that morning, and the infantry full of ginger, but they could not break that protective line, thin, disciplined, and flexible. The two battalions could not cover the ground, and the Germans streamed past their flank. In order to support the advanced line every available man was assembled on the reverse slope of a rise, just out of sight of the Germans. In front of them they could hear the roar of battle, ever growing nearer as the British line was rolled back. " We were a mixed crowd," says one who was among them. " Staff officers in red caps, clerks in spectacles, signalling officers, cooks, sappers, and that extraordinary never-beaten infantry." It was indeed one of the crises of the war, for the situation was desperate just south of the Somme, and if the enemy was through at this point also the line would be in fragments. The whole array waited over the curve of the hill, and as the enemy, in eight or ten waves, poured over the brow they fired at close range in the traditional Busaco fashion of the peninsula. A bayonet charge as of old completed the transaction, and the enemy broke and fled, with a barrage beating down upon his supports. The British infantry from the top of the rise was treated to the welcome, and, as it must be confessed, unusual sight of a large force of Germans all shredded out and hurrying for the nearest shelter, " like a football crowd caught in the rain." The losses had been heavy, both Colonel Robinson of the 6th and Colonel Wright of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers being among the casualties. Each of the battalions now numbered little more than a hundred men.

This brisk counter-attack was a healthy little reminder to the Germans

upon this section of the line that the British infantry might be overborne by numbers or by strategy, but that they were still the men who had in the previous year chased them again and again from the most formidable positions which they could construct. But these points of aggressive resistance were now rare and the men were worn out. It does indeed seem to be an extreme example of the weakness of the reserves at this period in France, that in spite of the fact that the battle broke out on March 21, no help save the one division had in the course of a week reached the overmatched and exhausted troops. It is true that the Higher Command may well have reckoned upon the French as reserves, and this would have been perfectly true had they been able to take over the ground in the south and contract the British line. They did take over the ground, but they took over most of the two British Corps as well, so that the Nineteenth Corps was little the better for their presence. Unaided by either their own people or by the French, the Nineteenth Corps still held on desperately with dwindling numbers to a line which was far beyond their strength.

Bad as was the position of the Nineteenth Corps, it was made worse by the ever-changing position in the north. When the Seventh Corps fell back to the line of Bray it was behind the left flank of the Nineteenth Corps. But now it was compelled to make a further move to the line Chipilly-Morlancourt, while all bridges were ordered to be destroyed up to Cherisy. This disposition was absolutely necessary in view of what was happening in the Third Army area ; but it made the position more and more difficult for the men in the south, who had either to fall back or to see the gap of undefended river upon their left rear grow wider and wider. General Watts is a stubborn fighter with no idea of going back if it can be in any way avoided, so he held on in the south and fought a brisk, successful action there, while he sent such poor reinforcements as he could to the 16th Division in the north, stopping the dangerous rent with any odds and ends upon which he could lay his hands. Three hundred improvised infantry, six Lewis guns, and a battery in armoured cars were the best that he could do, and these troops actually did hold the river line in the north from the early morning of March 27 until nightfall, against an ever-growing menace. But they could not cover all the ground, and the enemy, as was foreseen, was coming over the river and getting behind the British line. The 16th Division was practically destroyed, and the 39th was in little better case, though General Feetham showed great energy in re-organising all the debris of units upon the road, so that the line of resistance was very weak. In the afternoon a considerable party of Germans with machine-guns had got across the river at Cherisy, west of Morcourt, held by seventy men of the 16th Division, and pushed on in the most daring way south-west to Lamotte and Bayonvillers. They were right across the rear of the Nineteenth Corps, and a great disaster seemed inevitable, but weary as the men were, and tired as were their leaders,

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they were still capable of clear decision and swift action. The river was for the moment abandoned, the left of the line was swung south, and early upon March 28 they faced north in this sector, along the track of the Amiens-La Fère railway. Roughly, the new position may be traced as follows :

R.	Warvillers.	Vrely.	Caix.	Gillancourt.	Wiencourt.	Marcelcave.	*L.*
	24	8	50	66	39		

This very difficult and remarkable disengagement was particularly trying for the 39th Division since it had farthest to go and was in close contact with the enemy. It was carried out in broad daylight in the morning of March 28, and with such skill that there was no great loss in the 118th Brigade which covered it, but so close was the enemy that both General Bellingham and his brigade-major, Major F. Gunner, were captured while personally supervising the withdrawal. After this operation the remains of the 39th Division were occupying the line from Marcelcave to Wiencourt inclusive, along the railway track. Germans were found in Wiencourt, and the two brigades, now reduced to two composite battalions under Colonel Saint, attacked them with success, but eventually occupied a line to the west. All the guns had been saved and were in action once more.

On the occasion of the reforming of the line as already described on March 28, the 50th Division had fallen back upon Caix, where it held fast to the important bridge across the River Luce upon which a number of troops from various units were converging. Many of these were disorganised, and some, to use the expression of a spectator, " stone-cold " ; but the same witness has recorded the splendid moral effect produced by one battalion which, marching in fours and with everything in most precise order, came swinging down the road, with no change after its seven days of purgatory save that two-thirds of its personnel had disappeared. This was Colonel Hancock's 1st Battalion of Royal Fusiliers from the 24th Division—an object-lesson to all who saw it as to how discipline can outlast the most terrific tests which a soldier can be asked to endure.

The enemy, still working down from the north, had threatened the new defensive flank at a point between Caix and Cayeux, but were held by a very spirited attack made by the men of the 22nd Entrenching Battalion. With considerable loss both to themselves and to the Germans, they held the line of the river until reinforcements arrived. The 39th from the north and the 8th and 24th from the south were all converging upon the one point to take up their new positions. A Brigadier in command of the infantry, with 800 men and 3 batteries, held the bridge ; but the Germans might have rushed it had it not been for a charge by the 151st Brigade, when the 5th and 7th Durhams drove back their advancing line. This spirited attack was led by General Jackson in person, who encouraged his men by blasts upon his hunting-horn.

Speaking of one of their military heroes, a French historian has said: "Il avait la graine de folie dans sa bravoure que les Français aiment." All soldiers love it, and it is a wise leader who knows how to employ it. It was a time when every possible device was needed to hold the men, for the enemy was close upon the bridge, and the safety of the remains of several divisions depended upon the bridge being held.

Returning to the general survey of the line of the Nineteenth Corps the 16th Division was now rather a crowd of warlike particles than an organised unit. It was ordered, however, that every individual particle should be reassembled at Hamel so that the nucleus of a division should exist once more. Hard marching and hard fighting had reduced the 24th Division to almost the same condition, though, thanks to a miraculous survival of most of the senior officers, the unit was still efficient. On the other hand, the 61st Division from the Eighteenth Corps, numbering at this period 2400 men, was given to General Watts to help to form his new line. It was at first intended with the aid of these new troops to endeavour to clear the left flank, and for this purpose a counter-attack upon Lamotte was ordered. The newly-arrived men from the south, the 183rd and 184th Brigades, who could hardly stagger a mile, did actually carry the twin village of Warfusee and hold the edge of it for a time under very heavy fire—an operation in which Major Bennett of the Oxfords did conspicuously fine work. Several grand soldiers fell in this attack, including Captain Willick who had commanded the 2/4th Berkshires after the fall of the heroic Dimmer. His last speech to his men is worth recording. It was, "I know how you feel, boys, tired and worn out, but we have to stop them from breaking through." The support to this brave attack is said to have been "one gun, firing wildly."

The line sloped back now from Demuin in the south to the Somme at a point opposite Sailly-le-Sec, the 61st occupying the general sector just south of the Lamotte-Amiens Road. From there to the river had been a gap which it was absolutely vital to fill. An old line of trench existed here, extending from the river to Demuin, and early in the battle General Gough, amid all his preoccupations, had realised that it might be of great importance to have it ready as a rallying place. He had therefore deputed General Grant, his own chief of engineers, together with Colonel Harvey, his chief of staff, to organise it and to endeavour to man it, with any spare troops that they could find. This had been done, and after three days of feverish work, Grant had prepared a line and had thrust into it a most curious assortment of all sorts of details, made up of entrenching troops, American sappers, the staffs of various army schools, reinforcing units, and stragglers. On the third day General Grant was recalled to his official duties, but General Carey happened to be passing from the front to take over a divisional command, and he was deflected and placed in charge of this assembly of military samples, which included 500 cases out of hospital. There was a sprinkling of machine-guns with trained instructors to use them, but the line

was thin and there was a want of cohesion in the elements which formed it. The great thing, however, was that the gulf was spanned between Watts in the south and Congreve in the north. There was still a trench and a line of British soldiers between the Germans and the open country that led to Amiens.

March 28 was a day of destiny along the line, for upon that date were the first definite signs that the assault had failed so far as its ultimate objective was concerned, and that the Germans were not destined to overcome the British resistance. In the north, this was clearly indicated by the victory in front of Arras. In the south, the situation was still obscure and dangerous ; but the mere fact that the day was got over without a catastrophe was in itself a success, for on March 27 the prospects were very ominous. The line now ran from Demuin to Marcelcave, and thence the impoverished trench garrison carried it on to the river. The 1st Cavalry Division, which had come across from the north bank, formed a link between the 61st in the north of Watts' line and what we will now call the Carey line. The cavalry men were still full of fight, but they had done wonderful work since the first day of the battle, cementing every weak seam, and they were terribly reduced in numbers if not in spirit. Nothing can exaggerate the debt which the infantry owed to all three divisions of cavalry for their tireless support during that awful week. They now tried to advance towards Lamotte, but they came upon the right flank of a very strong German force moving south-west from Cherisy, and though they endeavoured to harass it they were unable to make much impression. The 61st was also terribly worn. Upon this day the 184th Brigade lost Colonel Belton, its fifth commander, and was taken over by Colonel Pagan of the Gloucesters.

The southern end of the British line had troubles enough before, but they were now accentuated by the fact that the Germans had made a very rapid advance in the Montdidier sector which placed them in the right rear of the Nineteenth Corps. On this right flank there was much confused fighting, and a mixture of units which reached such a point before the morning of March 29 that the 24th, or what remained of it, found that it had unwittingly changed from the right to the left flank of the 8th Division. There could perhaps be no clearer illustration of the dimensions to which the division had shrunk. These confused movements caused loss of touch, and there was a time when Corps Headquarters had completely lost the right of the line, which was badly disorganised. It was a time of great danger. Yet another division, however, the 20th, was given to Watts, and though it was already worn to the bone, and could not reckon a thousand men in all three brigades, it was still battleworthy and formed an invaluable asset at such a time. They were lined up, or perhaps dotted along would be a fitter term, upon the front of Mezières-Demuin, and formed a frail barrier behind which the hard-pressed men could have a brief breathing-space while

they endeavoured to re-form. By the late afternoon of March 28 this operation was in progress, and before 11 p.m. the new positions were actually occupied. The line, which was partly wired, now ran from Mezières, through Demuin, Marcelcave, and Hamel to the Somme, but it would be hard to add the exact alignment of the units, as in many places they were inextricably mixed. The 61st and the Cavalry had been placed behind Carey's line in order to support it should it weaken. South of this was the 20th Division, reinforced by fragments of other divisions, which among them had the strength and spirit to beat off a strong German attack delivered by the force which had been engaged by the cavalry in the morning. The country here was seamed by the old French trenches, which were woefully out of repair but none the less were of great value to the defence. Carey's force was involved in this German attack on March 28, but with the help of the 1st Cavalry Division they managed to hold their line. Upon that date the exhausted troops received the following well-timed message from the Fifth Army commander : " By the grand and stubborn way you are holding out and delaying the advance of the enemy, the British and French reserves are being given the necessary time to come up and assume the offensive. Your great exertions and sacrifices are not being thrown away ; they are of immense importance, and your resistance and your deeds in this great battle will live for all time, and will save our country."

March 29 was another eventful and critical day for the Nineteenth Corps, and began badly for them, since the remains of the 8th and 24th Divisions had, as already explained, been thrust out of their positions and were mostly on the west side of the Avre and out of the line. The 50th Division was only partly in position, the fighting strength of the 66th was reckoned at 750 bayonets, and that of the 39th at 500 bayonets. The Nineteenth Corps at this moment was nominally composed of eight infantry divisions—8th, 20th, 24th, 16th, 39th, 50th, 61st, and 66th ; but it is questionable whether their united strength greatly exceeded that of a single full division, to such a point had the army been reduced. On the other hand, there was a constant renewal of units upon the part of the Germans, who could be seen in large well-organised bodies moving in front of the British lines. The one consolation lay in the fact that their heavy guns, and even a good many of their field-guns, had been left behind. The machine-guns, however, and their newly-developed light field artillery were as energetic as ever. The British artillery had been weakened by capture and destruction, but it was greatly supplemented by several armoured-car batteries, Canadian and British, which did splendid service during these all-important days.

About midday on March 29 the French, and the remains of the 30th Division under the French Higher Command, had abandoned Mézières upon the right flank of the Nineteenth Corps, and by so doing they exposed the right of the steadfast 20th Division. The fighting extended from the River Avre to Demuin. The 59th Brigade, which was in the

south of the line, was forced to fall back, but two battalions of the 60th Brigade were thrown out to cover the flank and hold the German advance from getting behind the British line. At 2 o'clock these two brigades gathered their thin ranks together for a counter-attack, aided by the 50th Division, which had now been telescoped into a single weak brigade. It was a remarkable attack, for most of the men were stumbling with utter fatigue, and could hardly totter forward with their rifles at the port. It was the Riflemen and Shropshires who made the advance upon Mézières while their comrades stormed the surrounding woods. The 5th Durhams, 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 22nd Entrenching Battalion of the 50th Division also did great things. There is evidence from the prisoners that the Germans at that particular point had lost very heavily and were much distressed, so that the combat was like those closing rounds of a hard-fought boxing contest, where the two exhausted combatants can but push and paw as they lurch against each other. The village was actually carried by the British, and a temporary easement secured, together with a handful of the 352nd Regiment, who stated that they had lost three entire companies in their first advance upon Mézières. This spirited counter-attack was covered by the guns of the 50th Division which, under Major Johnson, had worked very hard during those last trying days.

About 2 o'clock on March 29 Watts' Corps was reinforced by another skeleton division, the 18th—2000 bayonets in all. It was merged with the 61st and placed in the Berteaucourt-Bois de Blangy line. The thin ranks of the 24th were still able to muster at the south end of the position, but only one brigade of the 8th Division, the 25th, was in a condition for service. This unit moved to the edge of Moreuil Wood, and co-operated with the French 133rd Division which was holding the line at that point. From this time onwards the Moreuil-Ailly-sur-Noye Road and everything south of it was French. As the British force dwindled its front also contracted, otherwise the situation would have indeed been impossible.

As it was, it continued to be desperately critical, for beyond the telescoping of units and the contraction of front there was no help for the British line, while the assailants were still very numerous and aggressive. About noon on this day, March 29, the 39th Division, and indeed the whole army, sustained a severe loss in the person of General Feetham, a leader of great valour and experience, who was killed by a shell while walking with Colonel Gosset, his chief of staff, in the village of Demuin. His death was to some extent revenged at once by his devoted troops, for a German attack which followed at once down the valley of the Luce was driven back with heavy loss by the rifles of the infantry. General Feetham was replaced next day by General Blacklock. It is a remarkable fact that Feetham was the second commander of the 39th Division killed within a fortnight, for General Cape, his *locum tenens*, fell on the 13th of March.

On the morning of March 30 the 61st Brigade of the 20th Division was on the south end of the line covering the bridge over the Luce at Hangard, while the 59th covered that at Dornart, the 60th lining up from Dornart to Berteaucourt. The 50th Division had been now incorporated in the 20th. All the bridges had been prepared for demolition. The enemy were slowly pushing the French out of the Moreuil Wood upon the extreme right, small bodies of infantry gradually infiltrating the whole position. The Germans soon developed activity also in the Luce valley, and finally along the whole corps front. The 2nd Cavalry Division was sent into Moreuil Wood to help the French, but the whole right of the line began gradually to crumble in face of the repeated assaults. The remains of the 66th and 20th Divisions were bent back, though the latter continued for a long time to hold the Demuin-Marcelcave line of road, but about 8 a.m. the 66th Division was pushed out of Aubercourt. There was some weakness farther north also, between Villers and Marcelcave, but the never-failing 1st Cavalry Division stiffened the yielding line. At 10 o'clock the situation had improved in Moreuil Wood, where Seely's Canadian Cavalry, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade in support, were making their presence felt. They held the line along the edge of the wood from east of Moreuil, but had lost touch with the 20th upon their left. Later in the morning there was a strong German counter in this quarter which drove the cavalry back into the wood. Here at a later hour they were reinforced by the 8th Division, if such a sonorous name can be given to a handful of dazed and exhausted men. The line at midday ran roughly as follows :

Moreuill Wood.	Demuin.	W. of Aubercourt.	W. of Marcelcave.
2nd Cav.	20th. 66th.	Carey.	61st. 1st Cav.

The great bulk of the British force lay to the north of the Luce River, and the Germans were making every effort to push the flank backwards or aside and to ford the stream. A wood named Little Wood lay in such a position as to help or hinder such an attempt, and it was the scene of some fierce fighting. It was first occupied by one of the enemy's advanced parties. It was then retaken by some of the West Yorkshires of the 60th Brigade. These in turn were pushed out by the enemy. Finally, in the evening the 12th Rifles and 12th Rifle Brigade, with some French and scattered units of the 50th Division, charged forward through the twilight, recaptured the wood, and re-established the whole line in this quarter. Nine machine-guns and fifty-three prisoners were taken. Well might General Watts telegraph : " Well done, the 20th ! Such a counter-attack after all your hard work is splendid."

Now at last there were signs of some relaxation in the dreadful strain. On this, the ninth day of the battle, the first British reserves, save only the 8th Division, began to appear in the line. They were the 9th Australian Brigade, who came into the fight between Demuin and Aubercourt with their usual brisk gallantry. Their attack made some progress,

and the 12th Lancers who advanced with them shared something of the glory. Although the final objectives were not attained, the line north of the Luce was stayed by their presence and made firm for the morrow. On this evening several of those heroic units which had fought themselves to the last point of human endurance from the beginning of the battle were taken from that stage where they had played so glorious and tragic a part. The remains of the 39th, the 50th, the 16th, and the 66th were all drawn back for re-organisation. It was theirs to take part in what was a defeat and a retreat, but their losses are the measure of their endurance, and the ultimate verdict of history upon their performance lies in the one single undeniable fact that the Germans could never get past them. Speaking of these troops an observer remarked : " They had been fighting for nine days, but were very cheerful and still full of vigour." The losses of some units and the exertions of the individuals who composed them can seldom have been matched in warfare. The 2/6th Lancashire Fusiliers, for example, had fought in the rearguard of the 66th Division for the whole retreat under Captain Porter, the only officer left standing. They were now reduced to about a hundred men. Many battalions were in no better condition. Carey's nondescript force was also broken up on the evening of March 30. They had served a most useful purpose at a critical moment of the battle, and their formation may have prevented a disaster, but it should be emphasised that their existence was not some impromptu effort, but had been pre-arranged by the wise foresight of General Gough.

On March 31 there were signs that the German flood was reaching full tide. They had acted to a wonderful degree up to their own saying : " Immer fest daran ! " but they had now far outstripped their artillery support and the tenacious elastic British defence had worn them down. There was no attack on the morning of this day, but about noon the fighting broke out once more in the Moreuil Woods, the enemy pushing their way through them and slowly driving back the line of the 8th and the 20th, while the French were again driven out of the village of Moreuil. North of Marcelcave there was a day of quiet and re-organisation. The 61st was still holding the Berteaucourt-Gentilles line, while the 18th was holding the line of the Luce. In the evening the 8th and 20th were again reinforced by the cavalry, and by the supreme and heroic exertions of every one concerned the position on the right flank was maintained. The 2nd Berkshires distinguished themselves in this fighting. There is something more than a name even in this stage of the war in the old Regular battalions, for the chronicler finds that they stand out amidst the other units out of all proportion to their numbers. The 2nd Bedfords, 1st Royal Fusiliers, 2nd Scots Fusiliers, and many others upheld the honour of the grand old force.

The right wing had been considerably hustled in the Moreuil quarter on March 31, but on April 1 the 2nd Cavalry Division, which included the Canadian Brigade, made a sudden fierce counter-attack which threw

the enemy back. Fifty prisoners and thirteen machine-guns were the fruits of this action. The British guns had played upon the wood during the whole night, and the enemy had suffered severely, for the assailants found the brushwood to be full of dead Germans. There was no other movement of importance on this day. The reformed 14th Division was brought back into the battle and took the place of the 20th, the 50th, and of the cavalry upon the front to the south of the Luce. Speaking of the latter troops after their nine days of martyrdom, a senior officer who saw them at this stage said : " In the last attack they were driven back about a mile towards Amiens, but after the first Boche onrush they stood like rocks, repelling attack after attack, counter-attacking and regaining ground in such a manner that every day I marvelled at the doing of it, and at the men who did it."

April 2 and 3 were quiet days, but on the 4th there was a very violent and general attack along the line of the Nineteenth Corps, and of the Thirty-sixth French Corps (General Nollet) which lay to the immediate south. The main weight of the battle fell upon the 14th Division in their new positions, and by nine o'clock in the morning the Germans had gained some success to the north of the main Amiens Road. The Australian 9th Brigade, which was south of the road, held their line, but had to fall back 500 yards in order to conform with the general position. At 11.30 the enemy was still making progress, mostly on the front of the 14th Division, and had reached the east edge of Hamel and of Bois de Vaire. The 3rd Cavalry Division, those indomitable troops, were thrown in to thicken the line of the 14th, and the Canadian motor guns from Villers-Bretonneux were also brought into the battle. Later two battalions of the invaluable Australian infantry came up at the double from the 15th Australian Brigade. If ever the arrival of strong loyal men in a time of darkness brought joy and comfort with it, it was when the Australians relieved the British line in these later days of the second battle of the Somme. " God bless them ! " was the silent prayer that went down the weary line. Ground had been lost south of Villers-Bretonneux, and the line was bent, but the whole of the 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions were streaming down to their places in the defence. The end of the retreat was at hand.

Upon the evening of April 4, the line which was to be permanent for many months to come began to define itself, and order gradually evolved out of ever-shifting chaos. Lee's 18th Division was now in touch with the Thirty-sixth French Corps at Hangard. Then at the Bois l'Abbé lay the 9th Australian Brigade. North of this, at the Bois de Gentilles, was the 3rd Cavalry Division. Thence in succession came the 15th Australian Brigade, the 43rd Brigade, the remains of the 24th Division, the 8th Australian Brigade, the other elements of the 14th Division, the 5th Australian Division near Aubigny, and the 58th Division in the north. This summary will show how Australia had braced the line. On the next day, April 5, Butler's Third Corps took over the

whole area of the Nineteenth Corps, and the episode was at an end.

The retreat of General Watts across the ravaged country, his attempt to hold the long front of the Somme, his successive short retreats, his continual stands, and his eventual success, will always remain one of the most remarkable incidents of the war. This officer, who at the beginning of hostilities was a " dug-out," hardly rescued from a premature ending of his military career, showed in the highest degree those qualities of never despairing, and of rapidly adapting means to an end, which mark the competent soldier. He began with two units under his control, and he ended with fifteen, but no general ever had to handle more weary troops, or had more need of a clear head and a high heart. The strain upon him had been extraordinary—though indeed that is true of every corps and divisional commander in the line. As to the special features of this operation, it may be said to be remarkable for the improvisations of troops, for the continual use of entrenching battalions as combatants, for the work of the dismounted cavalry, for the self-sacrifice and energy of the motor batteries, and very specially for the degree of mobility attained by the heavy artillery and the rapidity with which it came into action in successive positions. Military critics will draw many deeper lessons from these operations, but these at least are sufficiently obvious to catch the eye of the least experienced student.

The total losses of the Nineteenth Corps during this fourteen days of battle came to from 35,000 to 40,000 killed, wounded, and missing. The losses in guns were 41 heavy pieces and 73 field-guns, twelve of which were anti-tank guns in the forward line. The pressure sustained by some of the divisions would be incredible if the facts were not fully authenticated. Thus the 8th English Division was attacked from first to last by eighteen different German divisions, including three of the Guards. Prisoners were taken from each so that their identity could not be disputed. Yet this same 8th Division was engaged within three weeks in the victorious advance at Villers-Bretonneux. The German oracle Clausewitz has said that a retreating army should go back not like a hunted deer but like a wounded lion. His commentators would hardly find a better example than the British armies in the second battle of the Somme.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Retreat of the Eighteenth Corps, March 21-29

Retreat of the 61st Division—The Gloucesters at Beauvais—Fall of Ham—Retreat of the 30th and 36th Divisions—Great privations of the men—Fine feat at Le Quesnoy—Summary of the experience of Maxse's Corps.

It has been shown that Maxse's Eighteenth Corps, covering the St. Quentin front, maintained its whole position on March 21, thanks to the splendid conduct of the three battalions in the forward line, and to the stout resistance in the zone of battle. It has also been told how the 61st Division, the most northern unit, withdrew on the afternoon of March 22, very attenuated but still full of fight, to a prepared position between Vaux and Villéveque. At 4 p.m. that day the three brigades, or what was left of them, were in line 1500 yards east of Beauvais, the 184th being in the centre, with the 182nd on its right, and the 183rd on its left. As they faced their pursuers they could plainly see the Germans pouring in successive waves from Atilly. The central brigade was commanded by General the Hon. Robert White, one of two gallant brothers who sowed their military wild oats in the Jameson Raid, and this unit, reduced now to a mere handful of Gloucesters, Berkshires, and Oxfords, was exposed to a scourging fire of shrapnel, which further thinned their ranks, their General being one of the casualties. No field ambulances were available at the moment, and as General White was led away badly wounded he saw the German cavalry breaking into the south side of Beauvais, while a large artillery dump west of the village was exploded by the enemy fire. The whole situation was chaotic, but the British infantry still hung together, retreating slowly and turning continually upon their pursuers. Some twenty German aeroplanes were quartering the district like so many fierce hawks, and diving with great daring from time to time into the very streets of the village, while the British falling back into cover fired up at them with their rifles and light machine-guns. Two of them came crashing down upon the roofs of the houses. It was rumoured that the enemy had already got close to Ham upon the right rear of the division, and they were round the left flank in the region of Holnon Wood. There was little artillery support available, for sixty per cent. of the forward guns had been taken or

destroyed in Holnon Wood, and the remaining batteries were getting away with their reduced teams, so that the retreat of the infantry was correspondingly slow in order to cover the withdrawal. In the north the Scotsmen of the 183rd Brigade were moving back near Villescholles in touch with the 72nd Brigade of the 24th Division, both of them being much helped in their retirement by the 11th Hussars. All along the line the Germans were pressing very closely, but the 61st kept wonderfully steady, though at Beauvais, where Colonel Wetherell had taken over the command when General White was wounded, the two parties were continually intermingled, so ardent was the pursuit and so leisurely the retreat. So mixed were the combatants that Major Howitt, brigade-major of the 184th, was dragged out from among his men, and was in the hands of the Germans for some exciting and instructive hours. "I must say the officers treated me well, though the escorts were very rough," says he. "For all my hatred I could not help admiring them intensely, for their deployment, discipline, and preparation were an eye-opener. They extended into battle order with hardly a sound and lay down preparatory for the next assault, bringing up mules dragging light trench-mortars, machine-guns, and ammunition." Major Howitt finally broke away from his escort, and by keeping so near to a burning ammunition dump that no one dared to follow him, he succeeded in regaining his own lines.

The defence of the line in front of Beauvais was kept up with remarkable tenacity and ended by 150 men of the 2/5th Gloucester battalion performing what was an extraordinary feat, even in this war of miracles, for they held on to a line 2000 yards in length until 3.30 in the morning of March 23, holding up the whole German advance. All night the enemy tried to rush or to bomb this thin line of determined men, but it was not until the cartridges ran low that the British made their retreat, sneaking round the outskirts of the village which blazed behind them, and making their way to Longuevoisin where they joined their comrades, who had already given them up as lost, for they had been five miles behind the army. Colonel Lawson was in command during this heroic episode, and was ably supported by his two lieutenants, Rickerby and Dudbridge. Of the latter, it is recorded that in a later stage of the retreat he was in such a condition of absolute exhaustion that he was wounded three times in the course of a single day without ever observing it until evening. Utter nerve fatigue has its compensations as well as its terrors.

The 30th Division had held on to its ground until four in the afternoon of March 22. Some units lingered to cover the retreat, the 2nd Yorkshires and the 17th Manchesters holding on to their redoubts until six o'clock, when they were in danger of isolation.

During their withdrawal both the 61st Division and the 30th Division to the south of it were covered by the 59th and 60th Brigades of the 20th Division. These two fine brigades, still intact and full of fight, allowed

the weary soldiers to pass through their ranks, while they opposed a tenacious resistance to the pursuing Germans. When the 61st and 30th were across the canal of the Somme the covering division fell back in orderly fashion, and itself crossed the canal between Canizy and Bethencourt, the 60th Brigade being on the right and the 59th on the left. The 60th Brigade was compelled to fight hard to make good its retirement, and it struck back again and again at the German vanguard. In this fighting the 12th Rifle Brigade particularly distinguished itself, but its losses were heavy, and included its gallant Colonel, Maclachlan.

Early in the morning of March 23 it was known that the enemy had crossed the line of the Somme at Ham. The 30th Division had retreated upon this important little town, which had been thrown into a state of defence by General Stanley of the 89th Brigade, but his garrison was so utterly inadequate to cover the ground that his dispositions were useless, as the Germans could get round him on either side. He had with him in the first instance two entrenching battalions, the 21st and 23rd, two companies of gas engineers, the corps cyclists, and a mere handful of infantry. Late on March 22 he was joined, however, by his own three attenuated battalions of the King's, each of which had been heavily engaged in different parts of the battle. At the same time the 90th Brigade dropped back to the left of Ham and the 21st to the right. The division was bare on both flanks, however, and it was determined to continue the retreat. The bridges were blown up and such rolling stock as was possible was destroyed, but there were very many stores in the town which had to be abandoned to the enemy. It was a very great disaster, for it supplied him with much, and indeed served him as an advanced base, all ready-made for his operations in this part of the field. As to the loss of the river line, it has already been explained that in these higher reaches it was a very slight barrier.

When the enemy had taken Ham he pushed along swiftly towards Esmery-Hallon on the heels of the retiring 30th Division. The 36th Division, which had been assisted in its retreat by the 61st Brigade of the 20th, had crossed the Somme to the east of Ham, and was now to the right of the 30th (right and left being used all through these operations on the supposition that the unit is turning and facing the enemy). The 36th Division crossed the Somme Canal at St. Simon, closely pressed by the enemy, and the 121st Field Company Royal Engineers and other sapper units performed great work under heavy fire, destroying no less than twenty-seven bridges. After the passing of the river by the Germans there were constant rearguard actions, one of the most spirited of which was at Villeselve, where the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the Royal Dragoons fought together and drove in the German vanguard. The general situation of Maxse's Corps upon the forenoon of March 23 was that the 36th Division was over the Somme and near Golancourt and Bronchy, that the 30th Division was dropping back

upon Esmery-Hallon, and that the 61st Division, retreating in the direction of Nesle had crossed the Somme at Voyennes and Offoy, continuing its retreat to the Nesle Canal. Between the 30th and 61st Divisions were the 60th Brigade on the right and the 59th on the left, who were also covering the Nesle Canal, but were quite ready to counter-attack should an opening present itself.

A British Corps does not allow itself to be driven without hitting back, however great the odds may seem. A series of brisk skirmishes was going on all along the line. In one of these, just south of Ham, Colonel Watson with the 17th King's Liverpools came back on his pursuers and held them up for a time. More serious was the counter-attack orgainsed by the main body north of Esmery-Hallon. This attack struck southwards from Canizy and hit upon the right flank of the Germans, staggering them for the instant. It was carried out by the 60th Brigade and the 182nd Brigade, both under General Duncan of the former unit. This spirited advance was led upon the field by Colonel Bilton of the 61st Division, and was delivered with such force that this small British detachment drove back for some distance the great army which was rolling westwards. It was impossible, of course, to recover ground permanently, but it gained invaluable time and eased the pressure upon the south of the line for the whole of a critical evening. It was clear, however, that the capture of Ham and the crossing of the stream had turned the flank of the 20th and 61st Divisions, who were defending the higher reaches of the same river. They were not to be frightened prematurely out of their positions, however, and at Bethencourt the 11th Rifle Brigade drove back a German attempt at crossing, while at Offoy the 12th Rifles also inflicted a sharp repulse upon the pursuers. That evening, March 23, the 61st Division was practically amalgamated with the 20th, and both were concentrated near Nesle. They received at this time a most useful reinforcement in the shape of two batteries (16 guns) of Canadian motor machine-guns under Captain Meerling. There is not an officer or man of these much-tried battalions who would not admit a deep debt of gratitude to these splendidly efficient and energetic guns, which had such mobility that they were always where they were most wanted.

The troops had on the morning of March 24 got behind the Somme Canal, which runs beside the river, all bridges had been broken, and patrols were pushed across where practicable so as to keep in touch with the enemy. It was not in this southern area, however, but at Bethencourt that the Germans did actually get across in force, by which they turned the flank of the 26th Brigade of the 8th Division in the north and of the 59th Brigade in the south. An attack was instantly organised by the 11th Rifle Brigade, who had lost their Colonel Cotton, the day before, and were now led by Major Bertie. They succeeded by a fine effort in driving the Germans for the time across the canal and gaining touch with the 8th Division. The Germans pushed across once more

at Pargny, upon the other flank of the 8th Division, and also renewed their attempt in greater force at Bethencourt, getting possession of the higher ground there. This time it was the Highlanders and Royal Scots of the 183rd Brigade who counter-attacked, acting as part of the 20th Division, and by half-past two in the afternoon the position had once more been re-established. The Canadian motor-guns were invaluable in this operation.

Upon the morning of March 24 the 61st Division was barring the road from Ham to Nesle. The German progress had been checked in this direction by a spirited counter-attack carried out by the 5th Cornwalls, the pioneer battalion of that division, together with a mixed array of police, bandsmen, and other details, who advanced from Offoy to a depth of five miles, under Major Bennett. This little improvised force held on all night, and seems eventually to have joined up with the French in the neighbourhood of Esmery-Hallon.

The British were still holding the crossings at Voyennes and Offoy, but very hard fighting had broken out to the south, and the Germans, who had poured over in the neighbourhood of Ham, were now thrusting hard for Canizy. The road bridges had all been destroyed, but there was a railway bridge at Ham which had been taken out of the hands of the army authorities and left in charge of the railway department. This was either uninjured or at any rate inadequately destroyed, and was of immediate use to the enemy, enabling him to keep uninterrupted pressure upon the retiring troops. Canizy was now taken, but the 12th Rifles made an immediate counter-attack and forced the Germans back from the village. In this spirited operation they lost their gallant Colonel, Moore, who had led them with the utmost fearlessness.

Whilst the Germans were pushing forward at Canizy they had also maintained strong and continuous pressure upon the 30th Division near Moyencourt, and upon the 36th Division at Golancourt, causing the Ulster men, whose left wing was entirely in the air, to fall back westwards. The next line of defence, after the Somme had been forced, was along what is called the Libermont Canal between Nesle and Libermont. It was necessary to fall back, fighting as best they could, and to place this obstacle, narrow as it was, between the weary soldiers and their pursuers. It was the third day since the men had had a decent meal or an uninterrupted rest, and they were very disorganised and broken. "Hundreds of men were streaming back," says one observer. "They had been without food for days and were done in completely. They were stopped and reformed at the bridges, where as many as 2000 were collected." It is such plain sobering sentences which help one to realise that war is not, as large scale descriptions might seem to imply, a question of the moving of pieces upon a board, but that underneath the strategy lie the countless human tragedies, the tortured frames, the broken nerves, the prayers of brave men that they may still be brave, the torturing anxiety of officers, the ever-pressing burden which

sometimes breaks the weary back which tries to hold it. Strategy reckons nothing of these things, but their accumulation makes up the terrible human tragedy of war, which brings humility to the most proud and fear to the most valiant. All equally feel the weakness of nature, but he is blessed who has the strength of spirit to cover and to combat it.

By midday on March 24 the 30th Division was over the Libermont Canal, holding from Buverchy to Libermont, with the village and bridge of Raincourt as a joining point between the 90th Brigade to the north and the 89th to the south. It may be recorded, to descend suddenly from divisions to individuals, that the first sign of the new German advance was a single scout who appeared in the open in front of the canal, and was engaged in a prolonged and deliberate rifle duel by Lieutenant Harrop, with the result that he was finally brought in as a wounded prisoner. The 20th Division had also fallen back, the orders of brigades from the south being the 60th with its flank on Buverchy, the 59th resting on Quiquery, and the 183rd to link up with the 8th Division near Mesnil St. Nicaise. The 36th Division prolonged the line to the south of Libermont. The French reinforcements from the south were beginning by the afternoon of this day to get as far north as this section, and if not very weighty at the moment they were of great moral use as a promise for the future.

From the new positions of the British line the German infantry could now be seen advancing in platoon columns in three lines on each side of the Voyenne Road and heading for the Libermont Canal. Several parties of horsemen could be seen also, who were conjectured to be battery staffs, keeping up with the fight. The weak point was still near Bethencourt, between the 20th and the 8th Divisions, where the gap tended to be wider as the enemy got more troops across and endeavoured to push the 25th Brigade north as has been described in dealing with the experiences of the Nineteenth Corps. They were reported before evening as having got as far as Morchain. The flank brigade of the Eighteenth Corps, the 183rd, was ordered to extend as far to the north-west as Potte in the hope of regaining touch, but though they reached that village they were still unable to bridge the gap. During the night there were heavy attacks upon Mesnil St. Nicaise in this region, which fell chiefly upon the Rifle battalions of the 59th Brigade, which had been reinforced by the 20th Entrenching Battalion and the 11th Durhams, the divisional pioneer battalion. The general result was to force the British line some little distance to the westward. At Buverchy in the evening the German infantry also advanced in great numbers, but came under the very efficient guns of the 30th Division, and lost very heavily. The enemy artillery was also very active so that both the 30th near Buverchy and the 36th farther south had many casualties. The French relief was making itself more felt, however, in this southern section, where they were already outnumbering the British. The latter were greatly worn—so much so that the 21st Brigade of the 30th Division

could hardly be said to exist, only about 100 of the Yorkshires being left in the line. By evening the centre of the position was near Moyencourt, some little distance to the west.

In spite of the French reinforcements, which were not accompanied with artillery, the attack was still markedly stronger than the defence, so that March 25 was a most dangerous and critical day in this quarter of the field. To trace the developments from the north the enemy continued to press through the gap between the two corps, the Nineteenth and the Eighteenth, making a series of heavy attacks towards Mensil-le-Petit and Nesle from the direction of Potte. This movement, powerfully followed up, pushed back the left flank from Quiquery to a point on the high ground 1000 yards west of Nesle. The 183rd Brigade, which was now a mere handful of Scottish infantry, superb in quality but reduced to the last stage of exhaustion, together with the thin ranks of the 59th Brigade of Rifles, could not, even with the aid of the Canadian motor-guns, hold the heavy masses who pressed down upon them. The French 133rd Division moving up in support had dug a line between Billancourt and Herly, but Nesle was abandoned to the enemy, the 22nd French Division retiring from this sector and falling back towards Roye. The 60th Brigade of the 20th Division, much helped by the 23rd Entrenching Battalion—these valiant diggers made their presence felt all along the line—still held stoutly to their positions from Quiquery to Buverchy, but their left and left rear were so compromised that it was clear they could not hold out longer. To the south the French, who had relieved the 36th Division at Libermont, had been pushed back, and the British position was turned in their direction also. By the afternoon the French had taken over the line as far north as Buverchy, and the 30th Division was ordered to fall back, but the Germans had advanced so rapidly from Libermont and got so far to their right rear that it was no easy matter either for the British or the French to get past them. Many had to swim the canals which striate this part of the country, and the 2nd Bedfords were especially hard-pressed before they were able to get away. The 22nd French Division was doing all it could to cover the approaches to Nesle upon the south, and the 184th Brigade cheered them loudly as they passed through their ranks. "They looked very fine men and seemed very much for it." General Wetherall of this brigade was badly wounded by a shell splinter in this period of the battle. And we have a vivid pen-picture drawn by a spectator of Brigade-Major Howitt, some of whose adventures have already been recorded, holding Wetherall's wounded artery with one hand, while he wrote brigade orders with the other, for more than two hours on end. The 184th lost five commanders during the retreat.

Even if the local pressure had not caused a rapid withdrawal at this portion of the line, it would have been enforced by the general strategic position, for the German advance in the south had been so masterful that on this night of March 25 Roye was taken, which is far to the

south-west of Nesle. The 61st Brigade had been sharing the hard fortunes of the 36th Division, but now, as the latter had been drawn out, it was restored to the 20th Division. So severe had been the strain upon it that it only numbered about 500 bayonets, and some battalions, such as the 2/6th Royal Warwicks, had not a single combatant officer left standing. None the less, it was at once sent to man a supporting line stretching through Gruny, Cremery, and Liancourt, and had hardly reached it before the Germans were also at Liancourt. The brigade held them, however, and so enabled the front line to fall back upon an organised position whence, on the next morning, a swift retreat became necessary.

After dark on March 25 the 133rd French Division had come up to relieve the 20th and 61st, but the situation was such along the line of the Nesle Canal that no fixed line could be formed, and the three divisions were finally greatly mixed up in the darkness and there was a good deal of confusion in their councils, since the general directions of the French were to fall back to the south, while the line of retreat of the British lay rather to the west. There was little time for deliberation, for word had come in that the Germans were closing in upon Liancourt, pressing south and west, in a way which threatened to cut off the whole forward line. At midnight, the British, many of them hardly able to move for fatigue, staggered off in such formations as they could assemble, with orders to concentrate north and east of Roye. Thanks largely to the presence of the remnants of the 61st Brigade near Liancourt, this most hazardous march was successfully accomplished, but as Roye was within the grasp of the enemy the movement was continued so as to reach a line between Hangest and Le Quesnel. The Germans were close upon them in the north, so the 61st Brigade, now down to 400 men, acted as flankguard, fending off their constant attacks. The war has shown few finer instances of disciplined and tenacious valour than in the case of the three handfuls of men who represented what had once been the 12th King's, 7th Somersets, and 7th Cornwalls. The enemy were in Liancourt, and their patrols were in actual hand-to-hand fighting with a French detachment aided by some of the Somersets. Other German troops pouring down from the north and using to the utmost the gap which had opened between the corps, endeavoured to cut in and to seize Le Quesnoy (not to be confused with Le Quesnel towards which the troops were marching). It was, however, upon their line of retreat, and about halfway to their destination, so that a German occupation would have been serious. The post was most desperately defended by Captain Combe, the brigade-major of the 61st Brigade, with two Lewis guns and 100 men. Only eleven were left standing at the end of this defence, but the village was held for the necessary time, and the survivors only withdrew upon receipt of a positive order. Thus the flank march of the British from Roye to Le Quesnel upon the morning of March 26 was successfully accomplished, owing to the devotion of their

covering party to the north. "It was very much of a rabble," says an officer, "and there was great difficulty in sorting out the men and arranging the units." None the less the future was to show that the force was no more beaten than the old contemptibles after Mons.

The 30th Division had been drawn out of the line on the arrival of the French, but they were hardly started on their movement towards the rest which they had earned so well, when this great pressure arose, and every man who could still carry a rifle was needed once more in the line. On the morning of March 26 they were back then, between Bouchoir and Rouvroy. The 21st Brigade had now entirely disappeared, but the remains of the 2nd Yorks and the South Lancashire Pioneer Battalion were added to the 89th Brigade which was in the north at Rouvroy, while the 90th, under General Poyntz, filled the gap to Bouchoir. The 30th Division had got considerably to the west of this line before they were recalled, and it was only by some splendid marching that they were able at last to throw themselves down upon the coveted ground before the German armies, which were streaming along the Roye-Amiens road, were able to reach it. As they faced the Germans the 24th, now the mere shadow of a division, was on their left at Warvillers, while the 61st and 20th were in support at Beaufort and Le Quesnel. Near Erches the 36th Ulster men, whose relief, like that of the 30th, had proved to be impossible, were still battling bravely, retaking the village of Erches after it had fallen to the enemy. The 109th Brigade also distinguished itself greatly in this area, the Irish Fusilier Battalions of which it is composed holding on most desperately to the village of Guerbigny, at the extreme south of the corps front, and continuing a heroic defence during March 26, and long after it was isolated upon March 27. The artillery of the Ulster Division was particularly good in its covering fire during these operations, gaining the very grateful acknowledgments of the French troops and generals who were more and more concerned with this southern sector of the line. Speaking generally the troops had now reached the region of the old French trenches, which grid-ironed a considerable area of country, so that it was certain that if men could be found to man them, the pursuit would no longer continue at the pace of the last two days.

Great work was done at this period by four of the Canadian motor-guns at the cross-roads, north-west of Rouvroy, where they not only inflicted heavy losses upon the enemy but delayed his advance while the exhausted troops were settling down into this new position. Every hour was of importance as giving reinforcements time to come up from the rear, and the general orders to the divisional generals were to hold on at all costs wherever defence was possible. A small body of Corps cyclists under Lieutenant Quartermain co-operated splendidly with the motor-guns and did good service at this critical period of the retreat, during which there was very little artillery support behind the thin line of infantry.

The German pressure on March 27 fell chiefly, as already shown, upon the 24th Division and the other units on the extreme south of the Nineteenth Corps, which were forced back for some distance, and so threatened the stability of the line in the south. The 17th King's Liverpools, which was the flank battalion, held fast, however, and flung back their left to form a defensive line to the north. A small body of German cavalry performed a brilliant piece of audacious work in the darkness of the early morning of this date, pushing through the outposts of the 36th Division in the south near Guerbigny, and capturing the Brigade Headquarters of the 109th Brigade, and also the chief staff officer of the division.

The future was full of menace, for the Germans were pressing on in great numbers. An observer near Bouchoir that evening (March 27) says : " I have never seen so many Germans in all my life—one huge dark mass about a mile away. With glasses one could see howitzers, machine-guns, trench-mortars, and field batteries, as well as infantry. It was a most wonderful sight. They seemed to be coming down the Roye Road, then moving off to the south, and some stopping in a mass."

The main German attack upon the extreme south of the corps line on March 27 fell upon the 36th Division in the direction of Erches, with the result that the Ulster men fell slowly back upon Arvillers, the 60th Brigade throwing back a defensive flank to correspond. By 12.30 Bouchoir, held by the 90th Brigade, was gained by the Germans, but the British formed a new line to the immediate westward of the village. An attack upon Folies was thrown back by the 59th Brigade. Towards evening some order came out of a rather tangled position, which may well be obscure both to writer and reader, since soldiers upon the spot found the greatest difficulty in separating the various confused elements. As night fell upon March 27 after much desultory and inconclusive local fighting, there was no great change in the British line which ran from Warvillers, still held by the 24th Division, to the west of Bouchoir, where the 30th held the line, and down to Arvillers held by the 60th Brigade of the 20th Division, which was temporarily out of touch with the 36th Division. Hangest was held by the 61st Division, and Le Quesnel by the 61st and the French. That night the 20th Division was ordered to join the Nineteenth Corps, and their record under this new command will be found in the preceding chapter. One would have thought that they had reached the limits of human endurance, and their total numbers were not more than a thousand, and yet they were but at the beginning of a new chapter in their glorious history. The same words apply to their comrades of the 61st Division, who were also ordered north. They were relieved by the French at Arvillers, and this portion of the line was on March 28 pressed back to the west of Hangest.

The removal of the 20th Division at so critical a time could only be justified by the extreme and pressing need of the Nineteenth Corps, for it had the effect of producing an almost impossible position for the

line in the south. Had it been possible to replace it at once with a solid French division, it would have mattered less, but as matters stood the 133rd French Division had itself been involved in the retreat and was greatly worn. There was so little time also to get it into its new positions that there was never any solid bastion upon that corner of the line. The result was speedily seen in the morning of March 28, when the 30th Division were first subjected to a very heavy bombardment, and then looking south saw a general retreat going on from Arvillers, while their left flank at Warvillers was also very weak, since the 24th Division was hardly strong enough to maintain itself. By 2 p.m. both flanks were bare, and the enemy were well round them in the north and in the south at Hangest. At one time it seemed impossible for the division to get clear, and even now their extrication seems miraculous to the officers who effected it. A rapid retreat was made through Mézières and on to Moreuil, which only just avoided the closing pincers of the German advance. The French, who were in the act of relieving the 30th Division, came away with them and had the same narrow escape. The block upon the road which formed the only egress is described as having been appalling, fugitives, refugees, and small disciplined columns of troops being crowded together from one end of it to the other. "The men were excellent," says an officer of the 30th Division. "Their discipline was not a bit shaken." Such words could not truthfully be said of every unit, and yet soldiers can have seldom been more highly tried in any operation in history. Even the Imperial Guard may reach its breaking point, as the retreat from Moscow has shown. At Moreuil there is only one bridge, and had the German artillery been able to find it the result would have been a Beresina. As it was, the troops got across and speedily reformed upon the farther side of the River Avre.

This may be taken as the limit of the retreat of the Eighteenth Corps, since the stand in the north of the line and the thickening French resistance in the south brought the momentum of the German advance to a halt. How terrible the ordeal had been may be gathered from the fact that the 20th Division, as already mentioned, was not more than 1000 strong, the 30th Division about 2000 strong, the 61st Division 2100 strong, and the 36th Division only a little stronger at the end of it. Again and again it had been on the brink of absolute disaster, but always by the wise dispositions of General Maxse and his divisional generals, seconded by the splendid tenacity of his men, the worst consequences had been avoided. Rapid readjustments had been needed, but a fatal break was always averted. The troops were handicapped in every possible way, for not only was their artillery far below strength, but for some reason the British Air Service during these days of stress was very weak in this southern area, while the German machines were very numerous and aggressive. The artillery officers were splendidly cool and efficient all through, and in the case of the 92nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery near Esmery-Hallon, it is said that the last gun was just 25 yards

from the Germans when it limbered up. For two days the whole Corps artillery was with the French, and did fine work with them, but to the great detriment of their own infantry. Some of the batteries remained for a long time with the French, and one French general has left it upon record that the failure of the Germans to capture Moreuil on April 4 was almost entirely due to the splendid shooting of the 306th Brigade Royal Field Artillery. After the first two days of the retreat no guns were abandoned by the Eighteenth Corps. The total losses of guns might be put at about 90 field pieces and 4.5 howitzers, with about 50 heavier pieces.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Retreat of the Third Corps

Movement across the Crozat Canal—Fight of the 173rd Brigade—Forcing of the Canal Line—Arrival of the French—Fight of Frières Wood—Splendid work of the Cavalry—Loss of Noyon—Final equilibrium—General retrospect of the battle.

WE shall now complete this slight survey of a vast subject by following the fortunes of Butler's Third Corps upon the extreme right of the whole British Army. It has already been shown that the condition of this corps at the end of the first day of battle was most perilous, as its left flank in the region of Essigny, where the battle zone of the 14th Division had been deeply pierced, was completely turned. The 18th Division in the centre had, it is true, retained its ground, but the left brigade of the 58th Division on the right, the only brigade of that unit which was engaged, had also after a very desperate resistance lost their front positions at Quessy opposite to La Fère. Therefore orders had been given to draw off the troops during the night of March 21 across the Crozat Canal, and a covering line had been built up from the 54th Brigade, the 2nd Cavalry Division, and the 12th and 18th Entrenching Battalions in order to hold the German pursuit and to give the somewhat dishevelled troops time to reorganise their ranks. By 5 a.m. on March 22 they were over the canal and the bridges had been destroyed. The artillery had been got over first to cover the crossings, and the 54th Brigade, which had covered the rear of the 14th Division, was lined up from Jussy to Mennessis. The 18th Division (less the 54th Brigade) fell back in the line of Frières Wood, behind the canal. Many guns had been lost, but the cavalry had thrown the 3rd and 5th Brigades of the R.H.A. into the firing line to support the infantry, and two new batteries of the 96th R.F.A., only arrived the day before from England, came in at the nick of time.

It was of the first importance to destroy the bridges along the canal, but this was found to be no easy matter. They had all been mined and prepared for destruction some time before by the French, but either the lapse of time or faulty material had caused such deterioration that the charges failed to explode, and had to be renewed and discharged under

circumstances of great difficulty and danger. It was carried out none the less with great tenacity by the British sappers, but several weak points remained, notably a canal lock which had been so injured that the bed of the canal was exposed for some distance. The railway bridges here, as elsewhere, were also a source of weakness.

As the corps turned to face the enemy upon the south side of the canal the general line of battle showed the 41st Brigade just south of St. Simon, connected up on the left by the only surviving battalion of the 42nd Brigade with the 61st Brigade of the 20th Division who were in support of the 36th Ulsters at that place. Then came the 43rd and 54th Brigades, facing Jussy and Mennessis with the 3rd and 5th Dismounted Cavalry Brigades in support. South of this point were the 4th Cavalry Brigade, the 55th Brigade, and the 53rd Brigade, all in the Frières area. Then came the 173rd Brigade in the Vouel neighbourhood with the 18th Entrenching Battalion and the 6th Dismounted Cavalry Brigade. This force had already lost heavily, and many of the men were suffering from gas, but they were sustained by the certainty that French reinforcements would speedily reach them from the south, as a system of mutual lateral support had been agreed upon between the commanders.

A line of trenches had been begun in this neighbourhood by the French some time before, and it had been carried on by Italian labour, but it was still very unfinished, with many gaps, so that the tired soldiers had to lay down their rifles and take to their trenching tools to get some cover. It was already clear that they would need it, for with early daybreak on March 22 the Germans showed that they had reached the north bank of the canal at Jussy. It was again very misty, and they were able to bring up their machine-guns and small artillery with perfect impunity and place them under cover. It was not until between 10 and 11 a.m. that the mist began to lift, and the British outposts peering through it could see the flash of the guns among the plantations on the farther side. At an earlier hour the Germans had tried to cross at Jussy, but had been driven back. It was already evident, however, that they were in a position to repair the bridges in such a way as to find a passage wherever they desired.

The French Sixth Army on the right had acted with loyal promptitude, and the 125th Division, under General Diebold, was already moving up from the south. One would have imagined that the most efficient relief would have been to replace the two British brigades in the south of the Oise, and so re-unite the 58th Division. For some reason this was not done, and General Worgan's 173rd Brigade continued to be a lone unit. A very welcome reinforcement consisted of nine batteries of French 75's. It was understood also that the whole Fifth French Corps, under General Pellé, was due at Noyon that evening, and that the Third British Corps would be relieved by it as soon as possible, but further help was slow in materialising.

At about 1 p.m. on March 22 the enemy made their first crossing of

the canal in the region of the 173rd Brigade. They advanced from Fargniers in the direction of Tergnier village. The range of vision in this water-sodden region was not more than fifty yards, which greatly handicapped Colonel Dervicke-Jones of the 8th London, who was in local command of this sector, as it put his machine-gun defence out of action. The troops were spread over a front of 3000 yards, so that the various companies were widely separated. The first German advance was made across a lock gate by a number of men dressed in the uniforms of some of the 1st London, taken the day before—a ruse which was the more successful as a number of genuine stragglers had actually been coming in in this fashion during the morning. An attack followed during which C Company of the 8th Londons, while holding the enemy in front, were attacked by these pretended comrades upon the right rear, so that they were almost entirely destroyed. A road was thus opened across the canal, and the enemy opened out both north and south of the Quessy-Tergnier Road, cutting off those of the 3rd and 8th London who were on the farther side. These men fought to a finish, and only a few of them ever got back. Colonel Dervicke-Jones had taken up a position in an old French reserve line called the Butt line, with two companies of his battalion and some machine-guns, and was able to hold up the enemy all day in his immediate front, and to prevent several battalions from deploying out of Tergnier. The artillery also got on to the German infantry in this part of the field with good results. This Butt position was maintained until the morning of March 23. Farther up the line, in the region of the 14th Division, other troubles had developed, and the pressure of the enemy was great. At 4.30 p.m. the defenders were reinforced, but the enemy were already across at several points and were advancing upon Cugny. There was desultory fighting along the whole corps front, and though there was promise of immediate French relief, no French troops seem to have been actually engaged upon March 22. About 6 o'clock in the evening the enemy was across at Jussy Bridge and also at Montagne, but a fine counter-attack was made at this point by the 7th Bedfords and 6th Northamptons of the 54th Brigade, aided by the 16th Lancers, which drove the German infantry across once more and caused considerable losses. In spite of this success the general situation on the evening of March 22 was not cheering, and the task of the Third Corps, which had been ordered to stand fast and form the southern hinge upon which the whole retreat should turn, was clearly a very difficult one. It was the more alarming, as the rapid progress of the enemy at Beauvais and Vaux at the centre of the army led to a demand for cavalry which could not be complied with without denuding the line to a dangerous and almost impossible extent.

It was soon clear on the morning of March 23 that the Butt position on the right could not be maintained. The French had taken it over, but they were unable to hold it. A line was built up near Noreuil, where the remains of the 8th and 3rd Londons, aided by some French details,

endeavoured all day to check the German advance. The main attacks were driving down from the north, and were heralded by a very severe machine-gun barrage, which rained bullets over the British position. The defence was much aided by a French armoured car upon the Quessy-Rouez road, and by a battery of 75's. The 4th London were to the south of the village and less exposed to the force of the advance. About six, after an hour of intense shelling, the Germans closed in upon Noreuil, the defenders, after a stout resistance which occasionally came to hand-to-hand fighting, being driven westwards. Colonel Burt, commanding the 6th Cavalry Brigade, barricaded his headquarters in the village and held the Germans off a long time by his deadly fire. It was not until long after the lines had been withdrawn that this brave officer had to be specially summoned to leave his post and fall back on Chauny. Finally, the retreat became general, but was rallied at the end of the Noreuil valley, where some 200 men collected, and with a good field of fire to help them, remained for some time on the defence. Late at night this small force was ordered to fall back to a new line at Chauny.

It has already been stated that two companies (C and D) of the 8th London (Post Office Rifles) had been cut off when the Germans got across the lock gate on the afternoon of March 22. These men, under Captain Gunning, had made a remarkable defence, crawling out with Lewis guns on to the lock gates in order to enfilade the advancing Germans. In the afternoon of March 23 they found themselves with the Germans on three sides of them and the canal on the fourth. Captain Gunning and Captain Kelly with the survivors then fought their way through to Condren, where they still continued their resistance. These soldiers, who made so admirable a resistance, were largely men who had been combed from the Army Service Corps.

Whilst the 23rd of March had brought this heavy fighting to the 173rd Brigade, it had been a day of severe trial to all the other units of the Corps front. The 54th Brigade was still covering the crossing at Jussy and Montagne, but the pressure was rapidly increasing as fresh German divisions made their presence felt. The situation was the more serious as General Butler already knew that the enemy were across the canal at Ham and had turned his left flank, but it was still hoped that a counter-attack in this quarter might throw him back, and so it was determined to hold on to the line. An emergency force of odds and ends, dismounted troopers, labour men, and returned leave men were gathered together at Crisolles and placed under the command of General Harman to co-operate with General Greenly, who now led the remains of the 14th Division, in guarding the left wing. Meanwhile there was very brisk fighting at Jussy, where the German infantry had once again, under the cover of many guns, got a footing upon the south side of the canal. They were at once vigorously attacked by a small body of the 11th Royal Fusiliers and of the Scots Greys and penned up in the village of Jussy. At 11 a.m. the Germans had also got across at Mennessis, but

came under the fire of four machine-guns of the Canadian Mounted Brigade which inflicted heavy losses upon them. None the less at a second effort the Germans were across once more, driving back by the weight of their attack the worn ranks of the 7th Bedfords and of the 9th Scottish Rifles. At 11.30 they were half a mile south of Jussy, and might have got round the flank of the Bedfords but for the interposition of 200 Canadian dragoons. "These grim, square-faced men, with their parchment skins and their granite features, were a glad sight to our weary eyes," says one who was fighting beside them. There was a time when it was doubtful whether in this quarter there was anything but a line of dismounted troops between the enemy and Paris.

Every man who could be spared was hurried up to hold the weak points of the line, including the 8th Sussex, the pioneer battalion of the 18th Division, the rest of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and the 7th Cavalry Brigade, but the mischief had gone too far, and the situation on the right of the line was even worse than at Jussy. The counter-attack of the French 125th Division in the direction of Tergnier had not been a success, which is not to be wondered at, for the French infantry had come fast and far, their ammunition was not plentiful, and they were working over strange ground against an aggressive and victorious enemy. Next to the French on that front was the 7th Queen's. Colonel Bushell found himself at one period in command of the left of the French as well as of his own Surrey men, and he led on this mixed following under an intense fire, being himself severely wounded and yet rallying them again and again. Little progress could be made, but at least he held the line firm for a time. This gallant colonel, after having his wound dressed, returned to the field of battle, fell insensible, and had at last to be carried off. Next to the 7th Queen's was the 8th East Surreys (both of 55th Brigade), which was also in the thick of the battle, as was the neighbouring 12th Entrenching Battalion. This line made a very fine resistance, but was slowly pressed back by weight of numbers until at 4 p.m. they were on the line Noreuil-Frières-Faillouel, to the left of the spot where the 173rd Brigade was still holding its ground. The remains of the 7th Buffs fell back also with the rest of the 55th Brigade, fighting hard, through Frières Wood, where to the south-west of the wood they found some old French trenches, in which, with the aid of the survivors of the Queen's, they, under Colonel Ransome, organised a line for the rest of that arduous day. This resistance held up some strong drives of the enemy which were evidently intended, in conjunction with the attack from Jussy in the north, to cut off all the troops in the woody country round Frières, and it acted as a most efficient screen during the withdrawal of the rest of the line.

The whole eastern limit of the British area was spotted at this period by small bodies of men who were working desperately to keep the German infantry from sweeping it from that side. At Noreuil, as has been shown, were the remains of the 173rd Brigade. At Frières Wood were

the decimated 55th Brigade. Opposite Jussy were the 54th Brigade and the dismounted cavalry, slowly retiring before the ever-increasing pressure. In between these organised bodies were many smaller units all striving hard for the same end. Among these may be mentioned two companies of sappers, 80th and 92nd Field Companies R.E., who were extended upon the road north of Noreuil in touch with the 173rd Brigade on one side. These valiant men not only held their position all day, but actually made a counter-attack under Lieutenant Richardson in the evening, when they advanced until they were nearly surrounded. Finally they fought their way back to the Caillouel area.

As evening drew in the situation had become more and more difficult. The enemy had been driving in from every quarter all day without a respite, and the troops, many of whom had been engaged for more than two days without a moment for rest or re-organisation, were in a great state of exhaustion. Only a handful of several battalions remained as a fighting force. The confusion was made worse by the fact that the light blue uniforms of the French were mistaken for the grey of the Germans, so that misleading and alarming reports were continually brought in to the commanders. All reserves were in the fight, and the need of relief was urgent. About 4 o'clock the Faillouel position was found to be no longer tenable, and the troops fell back through the village, which was immediately occupied by the enemy who were pushing up their troops in motor lorries in this quarter. By 5 o'clock the right wing had come back 500 yards, and by evening the main position was at Caillouel, when the 54th assembled, numbering 650 bayonets all told, the three battalions of Bedfords, Northamptons, and Royal Fusiliers being each a little over 200 strong. Detachments of the Scots Greys and 20th Hussars joined them at that village.

The 53rd Brigade, fighting upon the left of the 55th Brigade, was as heavily engaged on March 23 as the other units of the Third Corps on the south side of the canal. At noon they had lent the 10th Essex to support their neighbours, and they consisted henceforth of only two weary battalions, the 6th Berks and 7th West Kents. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon they were heavily attacked and were pushed slowly back, struggling hard to keep the line. Major Tween led the counter-attack of his battalion headquarters, and checked the German advance at a critical moment, but was mortally wounded in the gallant endeavour. The two battalions were so weak that they had been telescoped into one, but good steel remains tough be it ever so thin, and the line still held. At 5.30 the 9th French Cuirassiers, long-booted giants, came up to help them, as did the 79th Field Company and various small details. At 7 the remains of the 55th Brigade were falling back through their ranks. When they had passed, the 53rd was also withdrawn as far as Commenchon, while the 55th reassembled at Bethencourt to the north. Three gallant Cuirassier regiments of the 1st French Cavalry Division covered the rear. All the troops that night were worn to rags, for it is to be

remembered always that the great local disparity of force enabled the Germans to bring up perpetually lines of perfectly fresh men with a new impetus and inspiration, against men, many of whom had been gassed on the first day, and who were now weary to death and hardly able either to stand or to think, to order or to understand an order. On the whole long, tormented, struggling line there was no time or place where the pressure was greater than here. In spite of all the ardour of the attack the stubborn constancy of the defence may be measured by the fact that, save for one battery which was destroyed by shell-fire upon the afternoon of the 23rd, no guns were lost in this corps either upon March 22 or 23. On the other hand, so great had been the destruction of machine-guns, especially upon the first day, that only two were left out of forty-eight in the 18th Division, though these were augmented by six new ones on March 24.

The Sixth French Army, on the right of the British, was sending up help, but it seems certain that none of this force was actually engaged before March 23, though it is stated upon good authority that in the liaison plans of the army the aid from the south was promised for the very first day. Any delay was not due to want of energy or loyalty of officers and men upon the spot. By the evening of March 23 the French units in the fighting-line were the 125th Division, which made the unsuccessful counter-attack towards Tergnier, the 1st French Dismounted Cavalry Division, who fought side by side with the 18th British Division, the 9th and the 10th French Divisions, both of which were on the extreme left of the Third Corps, and can hardly be said to have been engaged. As the French troops were now predominating in this sector, the command passed on the evening of March 23 to General Humbert, a dark, wiry little French veteran, commanding the Third Army. General Butler continued, of course, to command his own Corps.

On the morning of March 24 the situation to the south of the Crozat Canal was as follows. The 58th Division still held its original line from Barisis to the Buttes de Rouy, with a party holding the bridgehead at Condren. Then on the general line north and north-east of Chauny were the broken but indomitable remains of the Londoners of the 173rd Brigade, mixed up with fragments of the French 125th Division, the 18th Entrenching Battalion, and troopers of the 6th Dismounted Cavalry Brigade, together with the dust of smaller broken units. Up to La Neuville was covered by the worn brigades of the 18th Division supporting the French Cuirassiers. North of that was the 326th Regiment of the 9th French Division, and north of that what was left of the British 14th Division up to a point within a mile of Cugny, which was in German hands. On the extreme left flank on this sector the 36th Division and the 61st Brigade were in Ollezy and Eaucourt. There had been some fighting on the front of the 58th Division during the night, but otherwise it was quiet, and the soldiers were able to snatch a few hours of sleep.

Once again there was a thick morning fog, under cover of which the German infantry broke suddenly upon the 125th French Division, north-east of Chauny, driving them back towards Abbecourt. This placed the British troops at Condren in a perilous position, but it was essential to hold the line of the Oise, and any abandonment of the bridge would have been fatal. The 58th Division was ordered to stand fast therefore, and the 173rd Brigade was reinforced by the 16th and 18th Entrenching Battalions. These entrenching battalions are, it may be remarked, entirely apart from the Labour Corps, and were soldiers, well officered and organised, formed from those units which remained over after the re-organisation of the three-battalion brigades. Apart from these were the labour battalions who also in those hard days were occasionally the final weight which tilts the balance where the fate of armies and finally of empires was in the scale. Manfully they rose to the occasion, and the Empire owes them a very special word of thanks. During the afternoon all the British and French troops in this quarter passed over the Oise, mostly in the Abbecourt district, blowing up the bridges behind them and passing under the command of General Duchesne of the Sixth French Army. This left a blank upon the right of the 18th Division upon the north of the river, but General Seely brought up his cavalry and endeavoured to cover it, while the 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division was pushed out upon the left of the 14th Division in the north, to preserve the connection between the Third and Eighteenth Corps. The 3rd Cavalry Division under General Harman was thrown in also at this point, and about 2.30, having mounted their horses, they charged most gallantly in order to re-establish the line north of Villeselve on the front of the Ulster Division. The Royal Dragoons were prominent in this fine charge in which they sabred many of the enemy, took over 100 prisoners, and relieved the pressure upon the Irish Fusiliers of the 109th Brigade at a time when it was very heavy.

The whole Corps front was slowly falling back during the day, partly on account of the steady pressure of the German attack and partly in order to conform with the line to the north. The 14th Division, moving south-west through Crisolles, found itself in the evening on the west side of the Noyon Canal, covering the two crossings at Haudival and Beaurains. A vamped-up detachment of stragglers and nondescripts under Colonel Curling were placed to fill up the gap between the 14th Division and Noyon. The left of the 14th Division at Guiscard was covered by General Harman's detachment, and it is characteristic of the adaptability of the British soldier that seventy Northumberland Hussars who had become cyclists were suddenly whipped off their machines, put upon horses and sent up to reinforce the thin ranks of the cavalry.

The centre of the line covering Caillouel was held all day by the 18th Division, with the 1st French Cavalry Division still acting as a break-

water before the advancing flood. In spite of the gallant Cuirassiers the pressure was very great from the 54th Brigade who were in the north, through the 55th and down to the 53rd, which covered the north of Noyon. Some of the edge was taken from the German attack by the efficient work of the 82nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery and the 3rd and 5th Royal Horse Artillery, who were hard at it from morning to night. The French infantry on the left of the 18th Division lost Guivry towards evening, but they held fast to Beaugies until after nightfall. About ten o'clock, however, the German infantry was into Beaugies, and the situation became dangerous as they were getting round the left flank of the 18th Division, so that there was a general retreat to the rearward position called the Crepigny Ridge, which was not fully reached and occupied until 3 a.m. on March 25. That evening the 58th Division reported that early in the day they had blown up all bridges and also the Royal Engineer dump at Chauny. So intersected is the whole country at the back of the line of the Fifth Army by watercourses, that the total number of bridges blown up during the retreat amounted to about 250; and only in two cases, that of the Ham Road bridge and that at Chipilly, was the result unsatisfactory.

In the early morning of March 25 the Germans, who were still marching rapidly and fighting hard, were close to Guiscard, pushing on so swiftly that special troops had to be detailed to cover the heavy guns. General Butler had so far as possible pulled his dismounted troopers out of the fight and had restored them to their proper rôle, so that now he possessed a force of about 2000 horsemen, who were ready to execute the all-important functions of mounted infantry, so invaluable in a retreat. Under Generals Greenly and Pitman these horsemen did great work during the remainder of the operations.

Since the German pressure was still very heavy and the enemy were sweeping onwards in the north, it was necessary to continue the withdrawal of the line north of the Oise, while holding fast to the southern bank along its whole length. The first movement in this withdrawal was to the line Mondescourt-Grandru, and the second to the line Appilly-Babœuf-Mont de Béthéricourt. By 8.30 the 18th Division in the middle of the line was effecting this retirement, the northern flank, which was the post of danger, being covered by the 11th Royal Fusiliers of the 54th Brigade. It was a most difficult and delicate business with the enemy pressing down continually through the woods and villages with which the country is studded. On the south the 53rd Brigade and the French Cuirassiers were withdrawing through Mondescourt in some disorder. When the troops were rallied and rearranged, there were no French troops upon the right. At 10 a.m. the 54th Brigade had reached the Grandru position, but were out of touch both with the French on their left and with the 55th Brigade on their right. They therefore continued to fall back upon Béthéricourt. At 1 o'clock a strong German infantry attack, in many lines, developed upon the right

near Appilly and a heavy machine-gun barrage burst out over the 53rd Brigade and their immediate comrades upon the right, the 289th French Regiment. Up to 3 o'clock the Allies in this quarter were retiring under a very heavy fire, much helped by four valiant cars of the French Cavalry's Mitrailleuses Automobiles, who did splendid service in covering the exhausted infantry. The German infantry, pressing eagerly forward in expectation of that general débacle which never occurred, was riddled by the fire of these motor-guns and left swathes of dead behind them. The attack had the effect, however, of driving back the Allied line to such a point that a French force which was defending Mont Béthéricourt was entirely isolated and in great peril of destruction. Under these circumstances the French officer in command appealed to General Sadleir-Jackson of the 54th Brigade to make a great effort to rescue his imperilled men. Sadleir-Jackson without hesitation led back his men into the village of Babœuf, cleared it of the Germans, captured ten machine-guns with nearly 300 prisoners, and regained touch with the French, who were enabled to withdraw. The 7th Bedfords and 11th Royal Fusiliers were the heroes of this chivalrous exploit, where we were able to repay the loyalty which the French have so often shown to us. It should be added that a company of the 12th Entrenching Battalion, which like all the other entrenching units had gone through this severe infantry fighting without light artillery, signals, or any of the ordinary adjuncts of well-equipped infantry, was still so full of military spirit that without orders it joined in this victorious charge.

On March 25 the Germans were within shelling distance of Noyon, and the British evacuated successfully nearly 2000 wounded from that town. The counter-attack of the 54th Brigade had stopped the German advance for a time, and the 18th Division was able to get across the River Oise, the guns and transport passing in the afternoon while the infantry got across that night and in the morning of March 26, without serious molestation, being covered by their sappers and pioneers, who blew up the bridges as soon as the troops were safely across. At two in the morning of March 26 the French abandoned Noyon. At this time there were no British troops upon the north of the river save the remains of the 14th Division which were finally relieved on this date, and the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, now under Generals Pitman and Portal, who harassed the German advance at every opportunity, and rendered constant help to the French rearguards. The 2nd Cavalry Division secured the high ground immediately west of Noyon, and held it until it could be handed over to the French infantry. The general line of the cavalry was facing north-east from west of Noyon, through Suzoy to Lagny, where they were in touch with the 10th French Division. The left of the 2nd Cavalry Division had been prolonged by the addition of the Canadian Dismounted Brigade. These men soon found themselves involved in some hard fighting, for the Germans attacked the French at Lagny and drove them out. On one occasion

this day, at the Bois des Essarts, the troopers of the 2nd British Cavalry Division galloped through the French infantry to hold off the attacking Germans, an episode in which Lieutenant Cotton and other officers gained the honour of mention in the French order of the day. The left of the cavalry was compelled to fall back finally to Dives, and the Canadians after a determined struggle were driven out of the woods which they occupied. Finally, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade (Bell-Smyth), consisting of the 5th and 16th Lancers with the 4th Hussars were nearly surrounded, and had the greatest difficulty in fighting their way out. Before night they were in touch once more both with the French and with their comrades of the 4th Brigade. On the morning of March 27 word came that the British cavalry was imperatively needed at the junction between the French and British armies. It was despatched forthwith to do splendid service in the north after having played a glorious part in the south.

From now onwards the fighting on the Roye and Montdidier front (both towns passed soon into German possession) was no longer connected with the Third Corps. The position to the south of the Oise showed that the 58th British Division held from Barisis to Manicamp. Thence to Bretigny was the 125th French Division. Thence to the east of Varennes were the 55th French Division, with cavalry, and the 1st French Division up to Sempigny. Thence the line ran in an irregular curve through Lassigny to Canny, the enemy being well past that line on the north, and the direction of attack being rather from the north-west. On the morning of March 28 orders were issued that the remains of the Third Corps should be transferred to the north, where they should join their comrades of the Fifth Army, from whom they were now separated by a considerable distance. Within the next two days, after some difficulties and delays in extricating the artillery, these orders were carried out, though it was not till some days later that the 58th London Division could be relieved. This unit had not, save for the 173rd Brigade, been engaged in the recent fighting, but it had held a line of over ten miles of river, along the whole of which it was within touch with the enemy. One effort of the Germans to get across at Chauny on March 31 was met and repelled by the 16th Entrenching Battalion, who killed many of the assailants and captured nearly 100 prisoners.

So ended the vicissitudes of the Third Corps, which had the strange experience of being swept entirely away from the army to which it belonged, and finding itself under French command, and with French troops fighting upon either wing. Its losses were exceedingly heavy, including 20 heavy and 100 field-guns, with about 15,000 killed, wounded, or missing. The 14th Division was the chief sufferer with 5880 casualties, 4500 of which came under the head of " Missing," and represent the considerable detachments which were cut off in the first day of the battle. The losses of some of the battalions approached annihilation. In spite of all pressure and all misfortunes there was

never a time when there was a break, and the whole episode was remarkable for the iron endurance of officers and men in the most trying of all experiences—an enforced retirement in the face of an enemy vastly superior both in numbers and in artillery support. When we realise how great was the disparity it is amazing how the line could have held, and one wonders at that official reticence which allowed such glorious epics to be alluded to as if it were some blameworthy collapse. Against the two and a half British divisions which were in the line on March 21 there were arrayed seven German divisions, namely, the 5th Guards, 1st Bavarians, 34th, 37th, 103rd, 47th, and 3rd Jaeger. There came to the Third Corps as reinforcements up to March 26 two British cavalry divisions, one French cavalry division, and three French infantry divisions, making eight and a half divisions in all, while seven more German divisions, the 10th, 211th, 223rd, 11th Reserve, 241st, 33rd and 36th came into line, making fourteen in all. When one considers that these were specially trained troops who represented the last word in military science and efficiency, one can estimate that an unbroken retreat may be a greater glory than a victorious advance.

Every arm—cavalry, infantry, and artillery—emerged from this terrible long-drawn ordeal with an addition to their fame. The episode was rather a fresh standard up to which they and others had to live than a fault which had to be atoned. They fought impossible odds, and they kept on fighting, day and night, ever holding a fresh line, until the enemy desisted from their attacks in despair of ever breaking a resistance which could only end with the annihilation of its opponents. Nor should the organisation and supply services be forgotten in any summing up of the battle. The medical arrangements, with their self-sacrifice and valour, have been already dealt with, but of the others a high General says : " A great strain was also cast upon the administrative staffs of the army, of corps and of divisions, in evacuating a great mass of stores, of hospitals, of rolling stock, of more than 60,000 non-combatants and labour units, while at the same time supplying the troops with food and ammunition. With ever varying bases and depots, and eternal rapid shifting of units, there was hardly a moment when gun or rifle lacked a cartridge. It was a truly splendid performance." [1]

We have now traced the movements and the final positions of the eight Corps which were involved in this terrible battle from the foggy morning which witnessed the German attack, up to those rainy days of early April which showed a stable line—a line which in spite of occasional oscillations continued from that date until the great British victory in August, to mark the point of equilibrium of the giant forces which leaned from east and from west. In this account we have seen the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps in the north fall back upon Arras and the

[1] The author may be forgiven if he states that his brother, Brig.-General Doyle, serving as Assistant Adjutant-General to the Third Corps, was largely responsible for this salvage on the right wing of the Army.

Vimy Ridge, where they turned and dealt their pursuers such a blow that the battle in that sector was at an end. We have seen the Fourth, Fifth, and Seventh Corps struggling hard to make a line from Arras to Albert and down to the Somme ; we have seen the Nineteenth Corps covering a huge front and finally holding firm near Villers-Bretonneux, and we have seen the Eighteenth and Third Corps intermixed with our French Allies helping to determine the line in the southern area of the great field of battle. That line running just to the west of Montdidier, Moreuil, and Albert was destined for four months to be a fixed one, though it was advanced during that time by the splendid audacity of the Australians, who gave their opponents no rest, and finally, with the help of the British 8th Division, entirely re-won the town of Villers-Bretonneux when it was temporarily lost, and extended their outposts a mile or more to the east of it, as will be presently described. Save for this action there was no movement of importance during that time, though the general set of the tide was rather eastwards than westwards.

One cannot leave so vast a theme as the second battle of the Somme without a few words as to the general impression left upon the mind of the writer by the many documents bearing upon the subject which he has had to peruse. In the first place, we cannot possibly deny that it was a great German victory, and one which was well earned, since it depended upon clever and new dispositions entailing laborious preparation with the intelligent and valiant co-operation of officers and men. The overpowering force of the blow, while it removed all reproach from those who had staggered back from it, depended upon the able way in which it was delivered. Having said so much, we must remind the German commentator that he cannot have it both ways, and that if a gain of guns, prisoners, and ground which fails to break the line is, as we admit, a victory to the Germans, then a similar result is a victory to the British also. He cannot claim the second battle of the Somme to be a victory, and yet deny the term to such battles as Arras, Messines, and Passchendaale—though it be on a more modest scale.

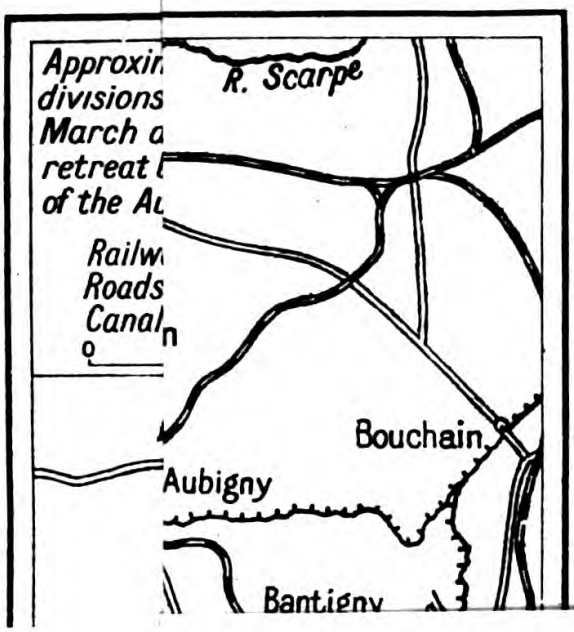
There was a regrettable tendency after the battle to recriminations in the Press, and General Gough, who had been the head of the Fifth Army, was sacrificed without any enquiry as to the dominant force which he had to face, or as to the methods by which he mitigated what might have been a really crushing disaster. It can be safely stated that in the opinion of many of those who are in the best position to know and to judge, there was absolutely nothing upon the military side which could have been bettered, nor has any suggestion ever been made of anything which was left undone. The entrenching had been carried out for several months with an energy which raised protests from the men who had to do it. There might almost be room for the opposite criticism that in the constant work of the navvy the training of the soldier had been unduly neglected ; but that was the result of the unavoidable scarcity of non-military labour. The extension of the front

was undoubtedly too long for the number of men who had to cover it; but this was done at the express request of the French, who had strong military reasons for drawing out and training a number of their divisions. It was taking a risk undoubtedly, but the risk was forced upon the soldiers, and in any case the French had taken risks before then for us. The blowing up of the bridges was well done, and the only exception seems to have been in the case of railway bridges which, for some reason, were taken out of the hands of the army commander. The reserves were insufficient and were perhaps too far back, but the first item at least depended upon the general weakness of man-power. Nowhere can one lay one's hand upon any solid ground for complaint, save against the rogues and fools of Brest-Litovsk, who by their selfish and perjured peace enabled the Germans to roll a tidal wave of men from east to west, with the certainty that they would wash away the first dam against which they struck. If there is any military criticism to be made, it lies rather in the fact that the French help from the south was nearly sixty hours before it made itself felt at the nearest part of the British line and also in the surprising number of draft reserves kept in England at that date. Within a month of the battle 350,000 had been sent to the front—a very remarkable feat, but a sign, surely, of an equally remarkable omission. Had ten emergency divisions of infantry been made out of the more forward of these drafts, had they been held ready in the rear zones, and had the actual existing reserves been pushed up to the front, it is safe to say that the German advance would have been stopped earlier and would probably not have got beyond the Peronne-Noyon line. If, as was stated in Parliament, it was confidently expected that the German attack would strike exactly where it did, then it does seem deplorable that the nearest reserve to the Fifth Army, a single division, had, through our weak man-power, to be kept at a three-days' journey from the point of danger. If, instead of searching the record of the General for some trace of weakness, our critics had realised the rapidity of his decision, with the moral courage and grasp of actuality which he showed by abandoning his positions—no easy thing for one of his blood and record—and falling back unbroken upon a new line of defence beyond the German heavy artillery, they could not have failed to admit that the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to General Gough. Had he hesitated and his army been isolated and destroyed, the whole war might well have taken a most sinister turn for the worse.

Granting, however, that the disaster was minimised by the prompt appreciation of the situation by the General in command, by the splendid work of his four Corps-commanders, and by the co-operation of every one concerned, it is still undeniable that the losses were very heavy, and the result, even after making every allowance for German wastage, a considerable military disaster. In killed, wounded, and missing in the Fifth Army alone the figures could not be less than 50,000, including Feetham and Malcolm, army divisional generals, with

Dawson, Bailey, White, Bellingham, and numerous other brigadiers and senior officers. In field-guns 235 were lost or destroyed out of 600, in medium heavies 108 out of 494, in 8-inch or over pieces 19 out of 98. Great quantities of stores, especially at Ham, fell into the hands of the enemy, but so far as possible they were burned or made useless. Bad as the episode seemed at the time, it is clear now to any one who looks back upon it that it had no evil effect upon the result of the war. The Germans were exposed to very heavy losses which they could ill afford. They were drawn away from their famous lines to which they did not return until they were so reduced that they could not hold them. Finally, it led to that concentration of power in the hands of Marshal Foch which was worth many sacrifices to attain. Sir Douglas Haig, from his many services and long experience, might well have put forward claims to the supreme place, and it is characteristic of the nobility of this great soldier that it was in response to a telegram from him to the Prime Minister, in which he named General Foch for the position, that the change was eventually carried through.

General von Kuhl, who was in the closest touch with Ludendorff during all the preparations, has written this year (1928) an account of the whole matter. He says that the varying policies of an attack on the French at Verdun, on the British in Flanders, and on the British in the St Quentin area were debated for months. His idea was to rapidly gain the line of the Somme, and then roll up the whole British line towards the North-West. As early as March 23rd he saw that this could not be done, and he then tried to exploit the success of Hutier upon the left and so to divide the French and British. When this also failed he ran amok and sent his armies in all directions with no strong central idea. There were divergent attacks by five armies, the sixth towards Boulogne, the seventh, second and eighteenth towards Doullens and Amiens, the seventh towards the Aisne. Finally by March 30th the driving power was all dissipated and the huge machine was held by the elastic but unbreakable British buffers which faced it.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CHAPTER L

THE SOMME FRONT FROM APRIL 1 ONWARDS

The last waves of the storm—The 12th Division at Albert—The 47th Division at Aveluy Wood—The Australians in the south—Capture of Villers-Bretonneux by the Germans—Re-capture by Australians and 8th Division—Fierce fighting—The first turn of the tide.

THE limit and results of the second battle of the Somme had been defined when the Australians, New Zealanders, 2nd Canadians, and fresh British divisions took the place of their exhausted comrades towards the end of March. The German reserves, great as they were, were nearly exhausted, and they had no more men to put into the fight. The final line began to clearly define itself, running from a few miles east of Arras where the Seventh and Sixth Corps had struck back so heavily at the German pursuit, through Neuville Vitasse, Boyelles, Ayette, Bucquoy, Hebuterne, Auchonvillers, Aveluy, just west of Albert, Denancourt, Warfusee, and Marcelcave. The worst storm was over, but even as the sinking sea will still send up one great wave which sweeps the deck, so the German battle front would break from time to time into a spasm of energy, which could effect no great purpose and yet would lead to a considerable local engagement. These episodes must at least be indicated in the order of their occurrence.

One great centre of activity was the ruined town of Albert, for the Germans were able to use it as a covered approach, and thus mass their troops and attempt to break through to the westward. The order of divisions in this sector showed that the 63rd and 47th, still fighting in spite of their wounds, were to the immediate north-west. The 12th Division was due west. South-west was the 3rd Division of Australians and south of these the 4th. On each of these, and sometimes upon all of them, the strain was very great, as the Germans struggled convulsively to burst the bonds of Albert. It should be noted that the Fifth Army had for the time passed out of being, and that all the southern end of the line was now held by the Fourth Army under General Rawlinson.

The main attack upon the Albert sector was on April 4, when the Germans made a violent effort, and the affair reached the proportions of a considerable battle. About eight in the morning the action began by a severe and sudden attack upon the Australian Division 1000 yards south of Albert, and also on the railway near Denancourt. The

Australians fought as Australians have always fought in this war, but the onset was very heavy, supported by a shattering fire, and they were forced to yield some ground.

North of the Australians was the 12th Division with the 35th and 36th Brigades in the line, in that order from the south. The temporary recoil of the Australians rendered the 35th Brigade vulnerable, and the Germans with their usual quick military perception at once dashed at it. About 1 o'clock they rushed forward in two waves, having built up their formation under cover of the ruined houses of Albert. The attack struck in between the 7th Suffolks and 9th Essex, but the East Anglians stood fast and blew it back with their rifle-fire, much helped by the machine-guns of the 5th Berks. Farther north the attack beat up against the left of the 47th and the right of the 63rd Divisions, but neither the Londoners nor the naval men weakened. The pressure was particularly heavy upon the 47th, and some details of the fighting will presently be given. The next morning, April 5, saw the battle still raging along the face of these four divisions. The Germans attempted to establish their indispensable machine-guns upon the ridge which they had taken on the south, but they were driven off by the Australians. The 36th Brigade in the north of the Albert sector had lost some ground at Aveluy, but about noon on April 5 the 9th Royal Fusiliers with the help of the 7th Sussex re-established the front, though the latter battalion endured very heavy losses from an enfilade fire from a brickfield. The 5th Berks also lost heavily on this day. So weighty was the German attack that at one time the 4th Australians had been pushed from the high ground, just west of the Amiens-Albert railway, and the 35th Brigade had to throw back a defensive wing. The position was soon re-established, however, though at all points the British losses were considerable, while those of the Germans must have been very heavy indeed.

It has been stated that to the north of the 12th Division, covering Bouzincourt and partly occupying Aveluy Wood, was the 47th Division which had been drawn out of the line, much exhausted by its prolonged efforts, some days before, but was now brought back into the battle. It stood with the 15th and 20th London of the 140th Brigade on the right, while the 23rd and 24th of the 142nd Brigade were on the left. Units were depleted and the men very weary, but they rose to the crisis, and their efforts were essential at a time of such stress, for it was felt that this was probably the last convulsive heave of the dying German offensive. It was on April 5 that the German attack from the direction of Albert spread to the front of the 47th Division. The bombardment about 8 a.m. reached a terrific pitch of intensity and was followed by an infantry advance through clouds of gas and smoke. The main attack fell upon the left of the divisional line, and was met by a sustained rifle, Lewis gun, and artillery fire, which could not be faced by the stormers. At one time the left of the 23rd London was penetrated, but a rally re-established the position. The enemy were rushing forward in mass

formations, and their desperate tactics offered targets which ensured very heavy losses.

About 9 o'clock the right brigade was also involved in the fighting, the enemy advancing in force towards Aveluy Wood. Here also the assault was very desperate and the defence equally determined. The 15th (Civil Service Rifles) was heavily attacked, and shortly afterwards the Blackheath and Woolwich men of the 20th Battalion saw the enemy in great numbers upon their front. The whole line of the division was now strongly engaged. About 10 a.m. a company of the 24th London was driven from its position by concentrated rifle-grenade fire, but a support company sprang to the front and the line was unbroken. At 10.30, however, things took a grave turn, for a sudden rush brought the assailants into the line between the two left flank battalions, outflanking and destroying the outlying company of the 23rd London. These men fought bravely to the end and took heavy toll of the enemy. At the same time the 20th London came under a shattering shell-fire which put every Lewis gun out of action. It was also enfiladed by machine-guns from the corner of Aveluy Wood, where the Germans had penetrated the line. The 20th threw out a defensive flank and held on. The 15th on their right were still in their original positions.

At 11.40 the 23rd London, which had suffered from the German penetration of its left company, was exposed all along its line to machine-gun fire from its left rear, where the enemy had established three posts. The result was that the position in Aveluy Wood had to be abandoned. The 22nd London from the reserve brigade was now pushed up into the firing-line where the pressure was very great. The weight of the attack was now mainly upon the 20th, who held their posts with grim determination in spite of very heavy losses, chiefly from trench mortars and heavy machine-guns. It was a bitter ordeal, but the enemy was never able to get nearer than 300 yards to the line of the 20th, and if they caused heavy losses they endured as much from the British fire. About 12.40 the enemy seemed to be mustering at the south end of the wood for a grand final attack, but the gathering was dispersed by the machine-guns of the Londoners.

At four in the afternoon, after a truly terrible day, the 47th Division determined to counter-attack, and the 22nd Battalion was used for this purpose. They had already endured heavy losses and had not sufficient weight for the purpose, though eight officers and many men had fallen before they were forced to recognise their own inability. The failure of this attack led to a further contraction of the line of defence. The 63rd Division on the left had endured a similar day of hard hammering, and it was now very exhausted and holding its line with difficulty. For a time there was a dangerous gap, but the exhausted Germans did not exploit their success, and reserves were hurried up from the Marines on the one side and from the 142nd Brigade on the other to fill the vacant position.

When night fell after this day of incessant and desperate fighting the line was unbroken, but it had receded in the area of Aveluy Wood and was bent and twisted along the whole front. General Gorringe, with true British tenacity, determined that it should be re-established next morning if his reserves could possibly do it. Only one battalion, however, was available, the pioneer 4th Welsh Fusiliers, who had already done conspicuous service more than once during the retreat. An official document referring to this attack states that "no troops could have deployed better or advanced more steadily under such intense fire, and the leadership of the officers could not have been excelled." The casualties, however, were so heavy from the blasts of machine-gun fire that the front of the advance was continually blown away and no progress could be made. Two platoons upon the left made some permanent gain of ground, but as a whole this very gallant counter-attack was unavailing.

This attack near Albert on April 4 and 5 was the main German effort, but it synchronised with several other considerable attacks at different points of the line. One was just north of Warfusee in the southern sector, where once again the Australians were heavily engaged and prevented what at one time seemed likely to be a local break-through. As it was the line came back from Warfusee to Vaire, where the Australian supports held it fast. Farther north the 4th Australian Division was sharply attacked opposite Denancourt, and had a very brisk fight in which the 13th Brigade, and more particularly the 52nd Regiment, greatly distinguished itself. The object of the fight was to hold the railway line and the position of the Ancre. The tenacity of the Australian infantry in the face of incessant attacks was most admirable, and their artillery, ranging upon the enemy at 1500 yards, as they came over the higher ground behind Denancourt, inflicted very heavy losses. One gun fired 1250 rounds without a stop.

The village of Hangard and Hangard Wood were at that time the points of junction between the French and British armies. The extreme right unit of the British was Smith's 5th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division (Rosenthal). The 20th Battalion on the southern flank was involved on this and the following days in a very severe and fluctuating fight in which Hangard Wood was taken and lost several times. Colonel Bennett, an Australian veteran whose imperial services go back as far as the Suakin expedition, had to cover 3500 yards with 600 men, knowing well that there were no reserves behind him and that the point was vital. With heavy losses he managed, with the 19th Battalion beside him, to dam the German flood until help could arrive. So fierce was the fighting that 750 dead Germans were picked up in the Hangard Wood. On April 7 the wood was abandoned, but under no compulsion and in accordance with the general movement of the line.

About 10 a.m. on April 6 the enemy renewed his attack upon the junction between the 47th and 63rd Divisions, but it was the British

turn to mow down advancing lines with machine-gun fire. No progress was made, and there were such signs of German weakening that the British made a sudden local advance, capturing two machine-guns and some prisoners. In this affair it is characteristic of the spirit which still remained in the weary British troops, that Corporal March of the 24th London went forward and shot the opposing German officer, bringing back his maps and papers.

The German commanders were well aware that if the line was to be broken it must be soon, and all these operations were in the hope of finding a fatal flaw. Hence it was that the attacks which began and failed upon April 4 extended all along the northern line on April 5. Thus the New Zealand Division on the left of the points already mentioned was involved in the fighting, the right brigade, consisting of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, being fiercely attacked by some 2000 storm troops who advanced with great hardihood, and at the second attempt recaptured the farm of La Signy. The German officers seem on this occasion to have given an example to their men which had sometimes been lacking. " A tall Würtemburger," says the New Zealand recorder, " ran towards our line with nine of his men. In one hand he carried a cane and over his arm a light waterproof coat. He was a fine big fellow over six feet high. . . . Just at the critical moment some Lewis-gunners took a hand in the business, the officer was shot dead, and most of the others were killed or wounded."

On the left of the New Zealanders the attack was extended to the road between Ayette and Bucquoy. Here a brigade of the 37th Division in the south and of the 42nd in the north were heavily attacked and Bucquoy was taken, but before the evening the defenders returned and most of the lost ground was regained. The right of the 37th Division had advanced in the morning upon Rossignol Wood, that old bone of contention, and had in a long day's struggle got possession of most of it. Three machine-guns and 130 men were the spoils.

From this time onwards there were no very notable events for some weeks in the Somme line, save for some sharp fighting in the Aveluy Wood sector on April 21 and 22, in which the 17th, 35th, and 38th Divisions were all involved. The enemy tried hard to improve his position and did succeed in gaining some ground. The attacks were costly to both sides but the results were futile. The British outposts, and particularly those of the Australians, maintained an aggressive attitude throughout, and it was more and more impressed upon the German mind that in spite of his considerable advance and large captures, it was an unbeaten army which lay before him.

On the morning of April 24 a very determined attack was made by the Germans upon the front of Butler's Third Corps in the area of Villers-Bretonneux. This small town is of great importance, as it stands on a curve of the rolling downs from which a very commanding view of Amiens is obtained, the cathedral especially standing out with great

clearness. Already the city had suffered great damage, but the permanent loss of Villers-Bretonneux would mean its certain destruction. The attack was urged by four German divisions and was supported by tanks which did good service to the enemy and broke the British line, held mainly at this point by Heneker's 8th Division which had hardly recovered from its heroic services upon the Somme.

It is suggestive of the value of the tanks whether in German or in British hands that where the attack was unsupported by these machines it broke down under the British fire, as on the right of Cator's 58th Division to the south and on the left of the 8th Division. There were fifteen German tanks in all, so their array was a formidable one, the more so in a mist which was impenetrable at fifty yards. It was for the British now to experience the thrill of helpless horror which these things can cause even in brave hearts when they loom up out of the haze in all their hideous power. The 2/4th Londons on the south of the village were driven back to the line Cachy-Hangard Wood, so that their neighbours of the 2/2nd London had to conform. The 2/10th London counter-attacked at once, however, and penetrated Hangard Wood, doing something to ease the situation. The 2nd Middlesex and 2nd West Yorks were overrun by the tanks, much as the Roman legionaries were by the elephants of Pyrrhus, and even the historical and self-immolating stab in the belly was useless against these monsters. The 2nd Rifle Brigade were also dislodged from their position and had to close up on the 2nd Berkshires on their left. The 2nd East Lancashires had also to fall back, but coming in touch with a section of the 20th Battery of divisional artillery they were able to rally and hold their ground all day with the backing of the guns.

The 2nd Devons in reserve upon the right were also attacked by tanks, the first of which appeared suddenly before Battalion Headquarters and blew away the parapet. Others attacked the battalion, which was forced to move into the Bois d'Aquenne. There chanced to be three heavy British tanks in this quarter, and they were at once ordered forward to restore the situation. Seven light whippet tanks were also given to the 58th Division. These tanks then engaged the enemy's fleet, and though two of the heavier and four of the light were put out of action they silenced the Germans and drove them back. With these powerful allies the infantry began to move forward again, and the 1st Sherwood Foresters carried out a particularly valuable advance.

Shortly after noon the 173rd Brigade of the 58th Division saw the Germans massing behind tanks about 500 yards east of Cachy, with a view to attacking. There were three whippets still available, and they rushed out and did great work, catching two German battalions as they deployed.

The 58th had good neighbours upon their right in the shape of the Moroccan corps, a unit which is second to none in the French Army for

attack. These were not engaged, but under the orders of General Debeney they closed up on the left so as to shorten the front of General Cator's division, a great assistance with ranks so depleted. His troops were largely lads of eighteen sent out to fill the gaps made in the great battle, but nothing could exceed their spirit, though their endurance was not equal to their courage.

On the evening of April 24 General Butler could say with Desaix, " The battle is lost. There is time to win another one." The Germans not only held Villers-Bretonneux, but they had taken Hangard from the French, and held all but the western edge of Hangard Wood. The farthest western point ever reached by the Germans on the Somme was on this day when they occupied for a time the Bois l'Abbé,[1] from which they were driven in the afternoon by the 1st Sherwoods and 2nd West Yorks. They had not attained Cachy, which was their final objective, but none the less it was very necessary that Villers-Bretonneux and the ground around it should be regained instantly before the Germans took root.

For this purpose a night attack was planned on the evening of April 24, and was carried out with great success. The operation was important in itself, but even more so as the first sign of the turn of the tide which had run so long from east to west, and was soon to return with such resistless force from west to east.

For the purposes of the attack the fresh 13th Australian Brigade (Glasgow) was placed under the General of the 8th Division, and was ordered to attack to the south of Villers, while the 15th Australian Brigade made a similar advance upon the north. Each of these was directed to pass beyond the little town, which was to be cleared by an independent force. On the right of the Australians was the balance of the 8th Division, which had to clear up the Bois d'Aquenne.

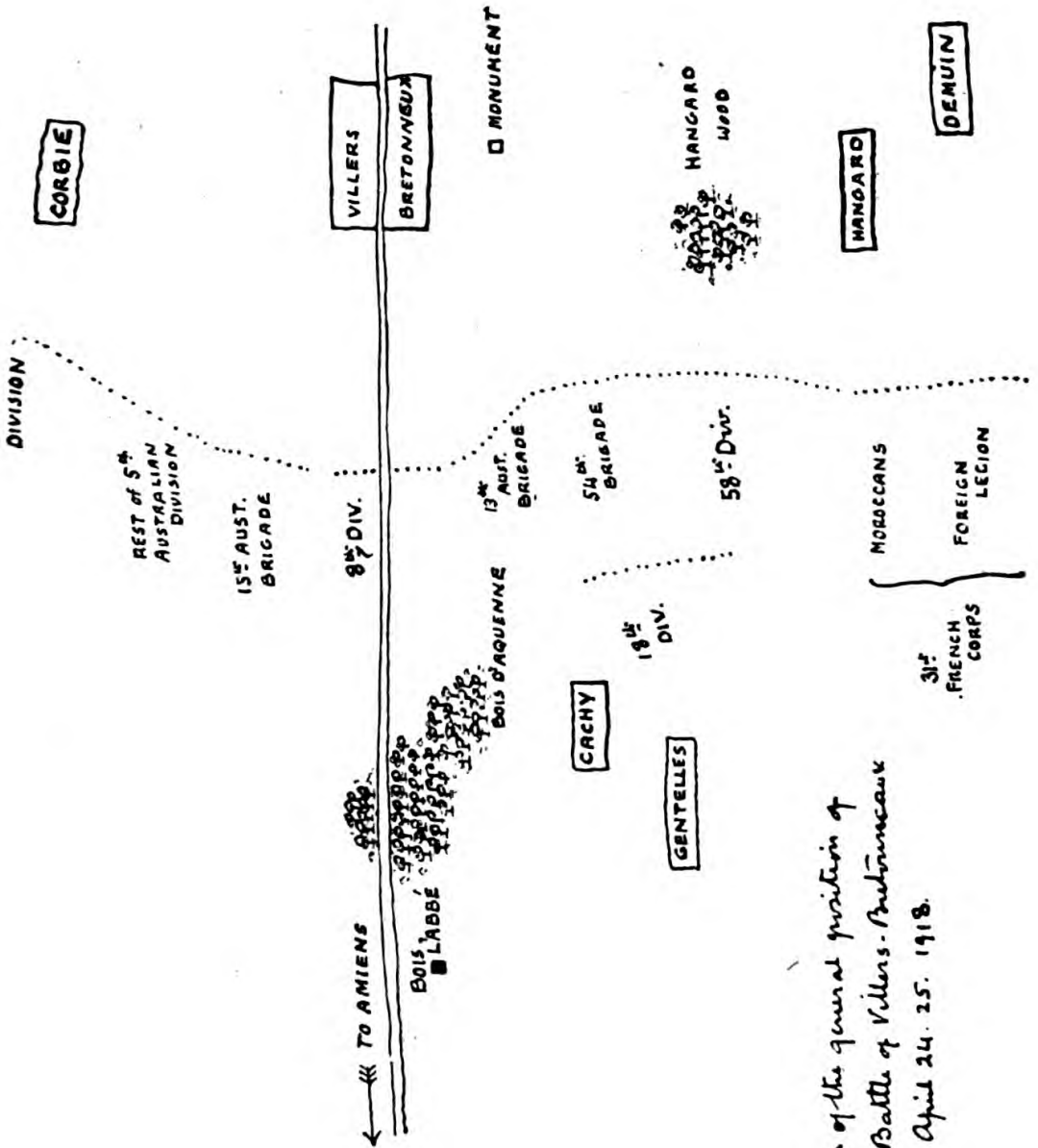
The attack was carried out at 10 p.m., the infantry having white arm-bands for identification in the darkness. There was no artillery preparation, and the advance was across unknown country, so that it may be placed among the most hazardous operations in the war. In the case of the 13th Australian Brigade, the 52nd Battalion was on the right in touch with the British, while the 51st was on the left, with the 50th in support. From the onset the machine-gun fire was very severe, especially against the 51st Regiment, but the admirable individuality of the Australian soldiers was of great service to them, every man getting forward through the darkness as best he could. The weather was ideal, for there was sufficient moon to give direction, but not enough to expose the troops to distant fire. The German flares were rather a help to the attack by defining the position. The Australian front got as far forward as Monument Wood, level with the village, but the 173rd Brigade on their right was in some difficulty, and they themselves were badly

[1] The author has stood in their advanced post, which was still littered with their cartridge cases.

enfiladed from the town, so they could not maintain their more advanced position. The 2nd Northamptons, attached to the 13th Australian Brigade, had been told off to take the town itself, but both their colonel and their adjutant were killed during the assembly, and some confusion of orders caused the plans to miscarry. On the north of the town the 15th Australian Brigade, with the 22nd Durhams attached, had been an hour late in starting, but the 60th and 59th Regiments got up, after some confused fighting, to a point north of the town, which was entered after dawn and cleared up by the 2nd Berkshires, aided by a company of the Australian 58th Battalion.

The German tanks had done good work in the attack, and some of the British tanks were very useful in the counter-attacks, especially three which operated in the Bois d'Aquenne and broke down the obstinate German resistance in front of the 8th Division. Daylight on April 25 found the British and Australian lines well up to the village on both sides, and a good deal of hard fighting, in which the troops got considerably mixed, took place. One unusual incident occurred as two blindfolded Germans under a flag of truce appeared in the British line, and were brought to Colonel Whitham of the 52nd Australian Regiment. They carried a note which ran: "My Commanding Officer has sent me to tell you that you are confronted by superior forces and surrounded on three sides. He desires to know whether you will surrender and avoid loss of life. If you do not he will blow you to pieces by turning his heavy artillery on to your trenches." No answer was returned to this barefaced bluff, but the messengers were detained, as there was considerable doubt as to the efficiency of the bandages which covered their eyes.

By 4 p.m. on April 25 the village had been cleared, and the troops were approximately in the old front line. The 22nd Durham Light Infantry had mopped up the south side of the village. About a thousand prisoners had been secured. The 54th Brigade of Lee's 18th Division, which had been in support, joined in the fighting during the day, and helped to push the line forward, winning their way almost to their final objective south of the village and then having to yield 200 yards to a counter-attack. The fast whippet tanks were used during this action, and justified themselves well, though, as in the case of all tanks, the value of the instrument depends mainly upon the courage of the crew who handle it. One British tank, under the command of a leader named Craig, seems to have been all over the field wherever it was most needed, so that some weeks after the fight the present chronicler in visiting the field of battle still heard the legend of his prowess. As to the German resistance a skilled observer remarks: "The enemy handled his machine-guns with great boldness. The manner in which he pushes forward numbers of guns, relying upon the daring and initiative of the crews to use them to best advantage, may lead to a greater number being lost, but he certainly inflicts enormous casualties in this way."



Rough sketch of the general position of troops at the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux April 24. 25. 1918.

There was an aftermath of the battle on April 26 which led to some very barren and sanguinary fighting in which the losses were mainly incurred by our gallant Allies upon the right. There was a position called The Monument, immediately south of Villers, which had not yet been made good. The Moroccan Division had been slipped in on the British right, and their task was to assault the German line from this point to the north edge of Hangard Wood. Part of the 58th Division was to attack the wood itself, while on the left the 8th Division was to complete the clearance of Villers and to join up with the left of the Moroccans. The 8th Division had already broken up three strong counter-attacks on the evening of April 25, and by the morning of April 26 their part of the programme was complete. The only six tanks available were given to the Moroccans. At 5.15 on the morning of April 26 the attack opened. It progressed well near the town, but on the right the Foreign Legion, the very cream of the fighting men of the French Army, were held by the murderous fire from the north edge of Hangard Wood. The 10th Essex and 7th West Kents, who had been lent to the 58th Division by the 53rd Brigade, were held by the same fire, and were all mixed up with the adventurers of the Legion, the losses of both battalions, especially the West Kents, being terribly heavy. The Moroccan Tirailleurs in the centre were driven back by a German counter-attack, but were reinforced and came on again. Hangard village, however, held up the flank of the French. In the evening about half the wood was in the hands of the Allies, but it was an inconclusive and very expensive day.

The Battle of Villers-Bretonneux was a very important engagement, as it clearly defined the *ne plus ultra* of the German advance in the Somme valley, and marked a stable equilibrium which was soon to turn into an eastward movement. It was in itself a most interesting fight, as the numbers were not very unequal. The Germans had five divisions engaged, the 4th Guards, 228th, 243rd, 77th Reserve, and 208th. The British had the 8th, 58th, 18th, and 5th Australian, all of them very worn, but the Germans may also have been below strength. The tanks were equally divided. The result was not a decided success for any one, since the line ended much as it had begun, but it showed the Germans that, putting out all their effort, they could get no farther. How desperate was the fight may be judged by the losses which, apart from the Australians, amounted to more than 9000 men in the three British divisions, the 58th and 8th being the chief sufferers.

As this was the first occasion upon which the Germans seem to have brought their tanks into the line of battle, some remarks as to the progress of this British innovation may not be out of place—the more so as it became more and more one of the deciding factors in the war. On this particular date the German tanks were found to be slow and cumbrous, but were heavily armed and seemed to possess novel features, as one of them advanced in the original attack upon April 24 squirting

out jets of lachrymatory gas on each side. The result of the fighting next day was that two weak British tanks were knocked out by the Germans while one German tank was destroyed and three scattered by a British tank. The swift British whippet tanks were used for the first time on April 24, and seem to have acted much like Boadicea's chariots, cutting a swathe in the enemy ranks and returning mottled with blood.

Treating the subject more generally, it may be said that the limited success attained by the tanks in the shell-pocked ground of the Somme and the mud of Flanders had caused the Germans and also some of our own high authorities to underrate their power and their possibilities of development. All this was suddenly changed by the Battle of Cambrai, when the Germans were terrified at the easy conquest of the Hindenburg Line. They then began to build. It may be said, however, that they never really gauged the value of the idea, being obsessed by the thought that no good military thing could come out of England. Thus when in the great final advance the tanks began to play an absolutely vital part they paid the usual price of blindness and arrogance, finding a weapon turned upon them for which they had no adequate shield. If any particular set of men can be said more than another to have ruined the German Empire and changed the history of the world, it is those who perfected the tank in England, and also those at the German head-quarters who lacked the imagination to see its possibilities. So terrified were the Germans of tanks at the end of the war that much of their artillery was directed to knocking them out, to the very great relief of the long-suffering infantry.

From this time onwards this front was the scene of continuous aggressive action on the part of the Australians, which gradually nibbled away portions of the German line, until the day came for the grand advance of August 8. One of the most successful of these was on May 19, when the village of Ville-sur-Ancre was taken by a sudden assault with 20 machine-guns and 360 prisoners. A second very sharp fight was on July 1 and following days in the Aveluy sector, near the Ancre, where the 12th and 18th Divisions had three bouts of attack and counter-attack, in which the 37th and 54th Brigades were heavily engaged, the honours of the action being about equally divided between the British and the Germans.

It should be remarked that while this whole great contest is the second Battle of the Somme it has been officially divided into the Battle of St. Quentin, the Battle of Bapaume, the Battle of Rosières, the second Battle of Arras, the Battle of the Avre, and the Battle of the Ancre, but these all merge into one.

CHAPTER LI

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS [1]

April 9-12, 1918

The Flanders front—Great German onslaught—Disaster of the Portuguese—Splendid stand at Givenchy of the 55th Division—Hard fight of the 40th Division—Loss of the Lys—Desperate resistance of the 50th Division—34th Division is drawn into the Battle—Attack in the north upon the 9th, 19th, and 25th Divisions—British retreat—General survey of the situation.

NEARLY a hundred German divisions had been used against the British alone in the great Somme offensive which began on March 21 and ended in the first week of April. At this time the British forces in France, including Portuguese and Overseas divisions, numbered sixty in all. Of these no less than forty-four had been engaged in the great battle, and all of these were either still in the line, tied to the Amiens front, or else had been drawn out in a shattered and disorganised condition, having lost on an average not less than from 4000 to 5000 men each. It will be seen that there was only a very small margin over, and that if the Germans by a supreme effort had burst the line and reached the estuary of the Somme, it would have been possible to have caused a great military disaster. Especially would this have been the case if the northern flank of the British could have been driven in as well as the southern, for then the mutilated and shaken army would have been hurled in upon itself and would have found itself crowded down upon a seacoast which would have given few facilities for embarkation. In the hopes of a débacle in the south the Germans had prepared out of their huge reserves a considerable force in the north which would have formed the second claw of their deadly embrace. When the first claw missed its grip and could get no farther it was determined that the other should at least go forward and endeavour to reach the Channel ports. Although the Somme estuary had not been attained, none the less the Germans knew well that three-quarters of the whole British force had been engaged, and that most of it was not fit to take its place in a renewed battle. Therefore they had reason to hope for great results from their new offensive in Flanders, and they entered upon it with a good heart.

The omens were certainly propitious, but there were two factors which were in favour of the British—factors which could not yet have been

[1] Map facing page 750 is essential in reading these operations.

adequately appreciated by the Germans. The first was the new unity of command under General Foch, a soldier famous for his writings in peace and for his deeds in war. This great leader, who had distinguished himself again and again since the first month of the war, when he had played a vital part in checking the German rush for Paris, was selected with the cordial consent of every one concerned, and especially of Sir Douglas Haig, as Generalissimo of the Allied forces. Therefore a common control and a common policy were ensured, so that the German chiefs could not turn their whole force upon half of the Allies with the assurance that the other half would find the operations outside their war map. Hence the British in Flanders, though they would have to fight their own battle for a week or two, could count confidently upon receiving help at the end of that time.

The second and more immediate factor, was that by a fine national effort a splendid stream of efficient drafts had been despatched from England during the great battle—young soldiers it is true, but full of spirit and most eager to meet the Germans and to emulate the great deeds of their elders. Their training had been short, but it had been intense and practical, with so excellent a result that one could but marvel at the old pre-war pundits who insisted that no soldier could be made under two years. These high-spirited lads flocked into the depleted battalions, which had often to be reformed from the beginning, with a skeleton framework of officers and N.C.O.'s upon which to build. It was of course impossible to assimilate these drafts in the few days at the disposal of the divisional generals, but at least they had adequate numbers once more, and they must be taught to be battle-worthy by being thrown into the battle, as Spartan fathers have taught their boys to swim.

One more sign of the times was the quick appreciation by the American authorities of the desperate nature of the crisis all along the Allied line. With magnanimous public spirit they at once gave directions that such American troops as were available and had not yet been formed into special American divisions should be placed under British or French command and fitted temporarily into their organisation. The few complete organised American divisions in France had been on the Alsace line, but some of these were now brought round to thicken the French army on the Oise. But most important of all was the effect upon the shipment of American troops, which had averaged about 50,000 a month and now rose at a bound to 250,000, a number which was sustained or increased for several months in succession. This result was helped by the whole-hearted co-operation of the British mercantile marine, which was deflected from its other very pressing tasks, including the feeding of the country, in order to carry these troops, and actually handled about two-thirds of them, whilst the British Navy helped to find the escorts. So efficiently were the transport arrangements carried out both by British and Americans, that when a million men had been conveyed they were still able to announce that the losses upon the voyage were practi-

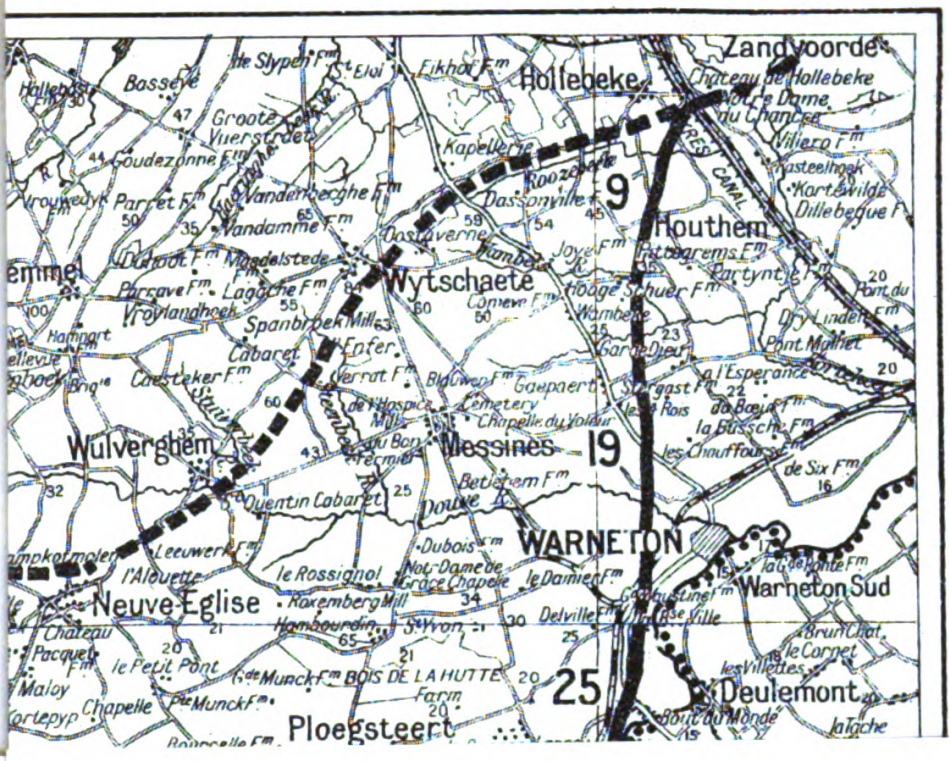
cally nil, save indeed from influenza which was particularly deadly. Even the misinformed German public began to realise in the face of this fact that their much boomed submarines were only one more of their colossal failures.

The German attack upon the British lines by the army of General von Quast in Flanders broke on the morning of April 9. There had been considerable shelling on the day before along the whole line, but as the hour approached this concentrated with most extreme violence on the nine-mile stretch from the village of Givenchy in the south to Fleurbaix, which is just south of Armentières in the north. This proved to be the area of the actual attack, and against this front some eight German divisions advanced about 6 o'clock of a misty morning. So shattering had been their bombardment and so active their wire-cutters, who were covered by the fog, that the advanced positions could hardly be said to exist, and they were able to storm their way at once into the main defences.

The point upon which this attack fell was held by four divisions, all of which formed part of Horne's First Army. The general distribution of the troops at that time was that the Second Army stretched from the junction with the Belgians near Houthulst Forest down to the Messines district where it joined the First Army. The First Army had weakened itself by an extension to the south, and Plumer's force was about to extend also, and take over the Laventie district, when the storm suddenly burst upon the very point which was to be changed.

Two Corps were involved in the attack, the Fifteenth (De Lisle) in the Armentières region, and the Eleventh (Haking) in the region of Givenchy. The latter had two divisions in the line, Jeudwine's 55th West Lancashire Territorials defending the village and adjacent lines, while the Portuguese 2nd Division (Da Costa) covered the sector upon their left. The depleted 50th Division (Jackson) was in immediate reserve. On the left of the Portuguese was Ponsonby's 40th Division which had lost five thousand men in the Somme battle only a fortnight before, and now found itself plunged once more into one of the fiercest engagements of the war, where it was exposed again to very heavy losses.

The main force of the German attack fell upon the Portuguese line, and it was of such strength that no blame can be attached to inexperienced troops who gave way before so terrific a blow, which would have been formidable to any soldiers in the world. The division held the line from 2000 yards south of Richebourg l'Avoué to the east of Picantin, a frontage of 9350 yards, or more than half of the total front of the assault. The division had all three brigades in the line, and even so was very extended to meet a serious assault. The 3rd Brigade from the 1st Portuguese Division was in immediate support. The 5th Brigade was on the right, covering Le Touret, the 6th in the middle, and the 4th on the left, covering Laventie. Behind the whole position lay the curve of the River Lys, a sluggish stream which moves slowly through this


Zandvoorde
Hollebeke
Houthem
Wytschaete
Wulverghem
Messines
WARNETON
Neuve-Eglise
Warneton Sud
Deulemont
Ploegsteert
9
19
25

desolate plain, the Golgotha where so many men have died, Indians, French, British, and German, since the first months of the war. In all that huge flat canalised space it was only at Givenchy that some small ridge showed above the dreary expanse.

The Portuguese had been in the line for some months, but had never experienced anything to approach the severity of the shattering bombardment which poured upon them from four in the morning. When an hour or two later the storming columns of the German infantry loomed through the thick curtain of mist, the survivors were in no condition to stand such an attack. All telephone and telegraph wires had been cut within the first half hour, and it was impossible to direct any protective barrage. The artillery in the rear, both British and Portuguese, had been much weakened by a concentration of gas-shells extending as far as Merville, so that the infantry were left with insufficient support. The gunners stood to their work like men, and groups of them continued to fire their guns after the infantry had left them exposed. These brave men were killed or captured by the enemy, and their batteries were taken. In the rear the roads had been so shattered by the German fire that it was impossible to get a tractor or lorry up to the heavy guns, and there was no way of removing them. All observers agree that the crews of the heavy guns did excellently well. The whole front had fallen in, however, and in spite of scattered groups of infantry who showed the traditional Portuguese courage—that courage which had caused the great Duke to place them amongst his best soldiers—the position was in the hands of the enemy. By midday they were at Le Touret upon the right, and the guns there were blown up and abandoned. About the same time they had reached Estaires upon the left and Bout Deville in the centre. Before evening the German line was four miles from its starting-point, and had reached the River Lawe, a small affluent of the Lys. From this time onwards the 50th Division, coming up from the rear, had taken over the front, and the Portuguese were out of the battle. The Germans in their day's work had taken 6000 prisoners and 100 guns, many of them in ruins. It should be mentioned that the Portuguese ordeal was the more severe, as breast-works had taken the place of trenches in this sector. All were agreed that General da Costa did what was possible. " He is a fine man, who does not know what fear is," said a British officer who was with him on the day of the battle.

The caving in of the front of the line had a most serious effect upon the two British divisions, the 55th and the 40th, who were respectively upon the right and the left of the Portuguese. Each was attacked in front, and each was turned upon the flank and rear. We shall first consider the case of Jeudwine's 55th Division which defended the lines of Givenchy with an energy and success which makes this feat one of the outstanding incidents of the campaign. This fine division of West Lancashire Territorials, containing several battalions from Liverpool, had some scores to settle with the Germans, by whom they had been

overrun in the surprise at Cambrai at the end of the last November. At Givenchy they had their glorious revenge.

The position of the 55th Division was a strong one, extending for some thousand yards from the hamlet of Le Plantin in the south to Cailloux in the north, with a section of the old British line a thousand yards in front, a deserted trench half full of water and festooned with rusty wire. There were outpost companies along the scattered line of ruined houses, and a few posts were thrown far out near the old trench. The village line consisted of a series of well-concealed breast-works and loopholed walls without any continuous trench, the whole so cunningly arranged that it was difficult to get the plan of it from the front. Each post or small fort had its own independent scheme of defence, with good enfilade fire, concrete emplacements, belts of wire, and deep ditches.

Very early in the day the left flank of the position had been entirely exposed by the retirement of the Portuguese, so that during the whole long and desperate struggle the general formation of the division was in the shape of an L, the shorter arm being their proper front, and the longer one facing north and holding up the German attack from inside the old lines. The northern defensive flank does not seem to have been entirely improvised, as some precautions of this nature had already been taken. The new front extended from the hamlet of Loisne upon the stream of that name, through a second hamlet called Le Plantin, and so down to the canal. The first strain of the fighting fell chiefly upon the 165th Brigade (Boyd-Moss), consisting of three battalions of the famous King's Liverpool Regiment. The 6th and 7th Battalions were in the line with the 5th in support at Gorre, but as the day wore on and the pressure increased, units from both the other Brigades were drawn into the fight, so that all participated in the glory of the victory. By 8.30 the flank was entirely naked, and the Germans in small but audacious bodies, with a constant rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire, were pushing in between the outer posts of the British division, overwhelming and obliterating some of them by a concentrated fire of trench mortars. Some of these isolated garrisons held out in the most desperate fashion, and helped to take the pressure off the main village line. One particularly brilliant example was that of Captain Armstrong of the 1/4th South Lancashires, who with A Company of that battalion defended a moated farm, literally to the death, having been warned that it was a key position.

About midday the German attack was still creeping in, and had gained one important outpost called Prince's Island. The 10th Liverpool Scots from the 166th Brigade, a battalion which had a great record in the war, had come up to thicken the line of defenders. Amid the crash and roar of constant shells, and a storm of bullets which beat like hail upon every wall and buzzed through every crevice, the stubborn infantry endured their losses with stoic patience, firing steadily through their shattered loopholes at any mark they could see. At 1 o'clock some audacious

stormers had got so far forward on the left that they were in the rear of the Brigade Headquarters, and were only held there by spare men from the transport lines who chanced to be available. The attack was drifting down more and more from the new ground, so about this hour the 5th South Lancashires, also of the 166th Brigade, were sent across to the north of Loisne to hold the stream. Each flank was attempted in turn by the wily assailants, so that when the left proved impervious they charged in upon the right, and captured Windy Corner, which is near the canal on that side, continuing their advance by attacking Le Plantin South from the rear and the flank, so that the defenders were in an impossible position. Having taken this point it seemed as if the Germans would roll up the whole long thin line from the end, and they actually did so, as far as Le Plantin North. Here the British rallied, and the survivors of the 6th and 7th King's made a furious advance, pushed the Germans back, retook Le Plantin South, and captured a number of prisoners. The position was still serious, however, as the Germans held Windy Corner, and had penetrated between the British right and the canal, so as to get into the rear of the position. A great effort was called for, and the men responded like heroes. The 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers from Stockwell's 164th Brigade had come up, and these fine soldiers, with the weary remains of the two King's Liverpool battalions, rushed the whole German position, dragging them out from the pockets and ruins amid which they lurked. In this splendid counter-attack more than 700 prisoners were taken in all, with a number of machine-guns. At the end of it the British right was absolutely intact.

Whilst these stirring events had taken place on the right flank, there had been heavy fighting also on the left. Here the British defence had been based upon two small but strong forts, called Cailloux North and Route A Keep. The latter fell early in the action, the German infantry coming upon it so unexpectedly in the fog that the machine-guns were at the moment mounted on the parapet and elevated for indirect fire. They were put out of action, and the place was surrounded and taken. This greatly weakened the left wing of the defence. Farther still to the left the Germans were pushing through Loisne, and the fort called Loisne central was heavily engaged. This portion of the line was held by the 166th Brigade. Once the German wave actually lapped over into the little fort, but the place was not taken, and its machine-guns still clattered and flashed. All day the Germans were held at this point, though the pressure was great. During the night the 13th King's Liverpools from the 9th Brigade were sent as a reserve to the weary line. At 7.40 on the morning of April 10 the enemy, under cover of a murderous barrage, attacked Loisne once more, striving hard to break in the left of the British defence. The garrison suffered terribly, but none the less the stormers were shot back into their shell-holes and lurking-places. Two successive attacks on the forts of Cailloux and Festubert had no better success and were less strongly urged. At seven in the evening

they again, with a sudden rush, got a footing in the fort of Loisnes, and again were driven out, save for twenty-one who remained as prisoners. Another day had passed, and still Lancashire stood fast and the lines were safe. On April 11 the whole position was swept by a heavy shell-storm, and the German infantry clustered thickly in front of the crumbling barricades. The guns both of the 55th and the 11th Divisions played havoc with them as they assembled, so that the attack was paralysed on the right, but on the left the two little forts of Festubert East and Cailloux were both overwhelmed. The former, however, was at once retaken by a mixed storming party from the 5th and 13th King's Liverpools. Late in the evening Cailloux Keep was also stormed, and once more the position was intact.

There was now only Route A Keep in possession of the enemy, and it was determined to regain it. The guns had quickly registered upon it during the day, and at midnight they all burst into a concentrated bombardment which was followed by a rush of two companies, one drawn from the Liverpool Scots and the other from the 13th King's Liverpools. The place was carried by assault, and the garrison held it strongly on the 12th and 13th against a series of attacks. It was a most murderous business, and the brave little garrison was sadly cut about, but it held on with the utmost determination, having vowed to die rather than give the fort up. The survivors were still there, crouching among the ruins and exposed to constant heavy shelling, when on April 15 the old epic was ended and a new one was begun by the relief of the 55th Division by Strickland's 1st Division. The episode will live in history, and may match in tenacity and heroism the famous defence of Ovillers by the German Guards. The casualties were heavy, but it may be safely said that they were small compared with those of the attacking battalions.

The story has been carried forward in this quarter for the sake of connected narrative, but we must now return to the events of April 9, and especially to the effect produced upon the 40th Division by the exposure of their southern flank. This fine unit, with its terrible wounds only half healed, was exposed all day to a desperate attack coming mainly from the south, but involving the whole of their line from Laventie to Armentières. The division, which is predominantly English, but contains one brigade of Highland troops, fought most valiantly through the long and trying day, enduring heavy losses, and only yielding ground in the evening, when they were attacked in the rear as well as in front and flank.

In the morning the 40th Division had the 119th Brigade (18th Welsh, 21st Middlesex, and 13th East Surreys) on the right, while the 121st Brigade (20th Middlesex, 12th Suffolks, and 13th Yorks) was on the left, joining up with Nicholson's 34th Division which held the Armentières front. The right of the 40th was involved in the heavy initial bombardment and also in the subsequent infantry advance, which established a

footing in the front trenches of the 119th Brigade. Whilst a counter-attack was being organised to drive the stormers out, it was found that the right and the rear of the position were threatened by the advance through the Portuguese. The 120th Scottish Brigade in reserve was ordered to form a defensive flank, but the 10/11th Highland Light Infantry, the nearest unit, found itself almost overlapped, and the brigade had to fall back upon the bridges at Nouveau Monde in order to protect the river crossings. The 2nd Scots Fusiliers covered the bridge-head, while the whole of the 119th Brigade fell back to the line of the Lys, save only the garrison of Fleurbaix. The 121st Brigade was still holding its line in the Bois Grenier sector. By 1 o'clock the bulk of the 40th Division was across the Lys, the bridges being destroyed one by one as the day advanced. The destruction was not in all cases complete, and in that of the Pont Levis at Estaires was absolutely checked by a chance shell which destroyed the leads, and prevented the explosion. The enemy, under cover of machine-guns mounted in the houses of Bac St. Maur, were able to cross the river here and get a footing upon the northern bank. The 74th Brigade from the 25th Division and the 150th from the 50th were coming up, however, and it was still hoped that the German advance might be checked. So severe had the fighting been that the 18th Welsh had only 5 officers and 120 men standing in the evening.

The 121st Brigade were in the meanwhile endeavouring to hold the Fleurbaix defences on the left of the line. At 11.30 a.m. the Germans were in the east of the village, but the 12th Suffolks, who formed the garrison, put up a most determined resistance, in which they were aided by a company of the 12th Yorkshire Pioneer Battalion. It was not till 5.30 that the village was nearly enveloped, and the troops had to make their way as best they could to the north bank of the Lys. The 20th Middlesex and 13th Yorkshires, with their flank badly compromised, still held on to the Bois Grenier sector. These battalions on the left were taken over by the 34th Division, with whom they were now in close liaison.

On the morning of April 10 the two brigades which had crossed the river were in very evil case, having sustained heavy losses. They were concentrated about Le Mortier. The 74th Brigade was in position south of Croix du Bac in touch on the right with the 150th Yorkshire Territorials. All day the enemy were pushing west and north, but meeting a strong resistance from the British who had an excellent trench, the Steenwerck switch, to help them. Some ground was lost, but much of it was regained in the evening by a spirited counter-attack of the 14th and 10/11th Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, and the 21st Middlesex, which advanced over 600 yards. The pressure was great and unceasing, however, so that the morning of April 11 found the line farther back again. The two brigades were reduced to about 1000 men, who were concentrated at Strazeele, while the 92nd and 93rd Brigades of the 31st Division came up in their place. A brave counter-

attack by the 93rd Brigade at Le Verrier gained its objective, but created a dangerous gap between it and the 92nd Brigade on its right, which was filled, however, by the 11th East Yorkshires. On the 12th the remains of all three brigades were strung out to cover Strazeele and Hazebrouck from the east and south-east, but next day they were relieved by the welcome appearance of the 1st Australian Division, whose advent will afterwards be explained. It had been a very desperate term of service, in which for three days the sappers of the 224th, 229th, and 231st Field Companies Royal Engineers had to fight as hard as the infantry. The 40th, like the other divisions described, were driven back, but only as the buffer is driven back, with the ultimate result of stopping the force which drove it. They were much aided by the guns of the 57th Division under General Wray. The losses of the division were 185 officers and 4307 other ranks. When one reflects that the losses on the Somme three weeks before had been equally heavy, one can but marvel.

We shall now follow the fortunes of the 34th Division (Nicholson), which was on the immediate left of the 40th, covering a sector of 8000 yards, including the town of Armentières. On the north, near Frelinghien, it joined the right of the 25th Division. On the night of April 7 the enemy fired an enormous number, 30,000 or 40,000, gas-shells into Armentières, and soaked it to such an extent with mephitic vapours that it became uninhabitable. Otherwise there was no warning of an impending attack, which came indeed as a surprise to all the forces engaged.

On April 9 the division lay with the 103rd Brigade upon the right section and the 102nd upon the left, with the guns of the 38th Division behind them. The main attack on this day was entirely upon the two divisions, the Portuguese and the 40th, to the south. There was heavy shelling, however, of the back areas, especially Armentières and Erquinghem. When as the day advanced everything on the right had given way or weakened, the 103rd Brigade threw back a long thin defensive line, facing south, which ended in the direction of Fleurbaix. At the same time the reserve 101st Brigade was ordered up to cover Bac St. Maur Bridge. One battalion of the Reserve Brigade, the 11th Suffolks, got into Fleurbaix, where by a happy chance they were able to reinforce their own comrades of the 12th Battalion. These two sturdy East Anglian units held the village in a very desperate fight for many hours. The 15th and 16th Royal Scots of the same brigade had some hard fighting also as they continued the defensive line formed by the 103rd Brigade, and tried to prevent the victorious Germans from swarming round and behind the 34th Division. Some idea of the danger may be gathered from the fact that of two brigades of artillery engaged one was firing south-west and the other due east. The original front was never in danger, but it was a desperate conflict upon the refused flank.

During the afternoon the Germans crossed the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur, though the bridge of the latter place had been destroyed.

Their progress, however, had slowed down and become uncertain. The 74th Brigade of the 25th Division had come under the orders of General Nicholson, and was at once directed against the village of Croix du Bac, with the ultimate design of recovering the Bac St. Maur crossing. The 74th Brigade succeeded in clearing Croix du Bac of the enemy, but night fell before they could get farther. The morning found this brigade sandwiched in between the 40th and 34th Divisions, while the 147th Brigade had also moved up in support. It was soon found, however, that the enemy had got so far west in the south that they outflanked the 74th Brigade, who had to retire on April 10 through Croix du Bac and Steenwerck. On the same morning the 25th Division had been attacked near Frelinghien, and the Germans penetrated as far as the northern bend of the Lys, north of Armentières. The left of the 34th Division was now entirely in the air. It was clear, therefore, that a retirement north of the Lys was necessary, and about 3 p.m. in a sedate and orderly fashion it was started and carried through, covered by the fire of the 147th Brigade. The 34th drew off in fine order, the rearguards stopping from time to time, especially in the streets of Armentières, for the purpose of beating back the advancing German patrols. All bridges were destroyed, and no unwounded prisoners were left. The men of the 34th were loud in praise of the way in which the Yorkshire Territorrials of the 147th Brigade covered their right flank during this difficult and dangerous extrication. We will now, having traced the effects upon the 55th to the south, and upon the 40th and 34th Divisions to the north, return to the situation created on April 9 by the breaking of the Portuguese.

Jackson's 50th Division, without its artillery, had only arrived from the Somme on April 8, having lost half its old soldiers, so that 50 per cent. of the personnel were drafts. It had also suffered severely in officers, and was very battle-weary and exhausted. It was placed in billets at Merville, with two battalions of the 151st Brigade holding redoubts at Lestrem south of the Lys close to Estaires.

As soon as it was seen that the situation was serious, about 8 o'clock in the morning, the division was put in motion. The 151st Brigade was ordered to extend its left into Estaires, while the 150th prolonged the line north of Estaires. The 149th was held in reserve, though one of its battalions, the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers, was sent in to strengthen the right. The intention was that the 50th Division should hold the line until the reserves could be brought to the point of danger.

By two in the afternoon the Germans could be seen all along the front, and some of the Portuguese had made their way through and between the ranks. A very heavy fire was opened by both lines of infantry, and the Germans advancing by short rushes made continuous progress towards the eastern bank of the stream. Yorkshire and Durham stood solid upon the farther side, however, and 5000 recruits endured a long and terrible baptism of fire from the afternoon to the evening of that

spring day. It was on the right at Lestrem, where the British were to the east of the Lys, that the pressure was most severe, and eventually the 151st Brigade found it impossible to hold this point, while farther to the north, on the left of the Yorkshiremen, the German infantry of the 370th Regiment had won a footing upon the western bank of the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur. The British guns were beginning to concentrate, however, and invaluable time had been gained by the resistance of the 50th Division. As night fell the 5th Durhams were still holding Estaires, while the 5th and 6th Northumberland Fusiliers from the reserve were standing firm along the stretch north and east of Estaires. Farther north still were the 4th East Yorks, 4th Yorks, and 5th Yorks in that order from the south, all very weary, but all holding tenaciously to their appointed line. During the night the 51st Highland Division (Carter-Campbell) came up on the right of the 151st Brigade to cover the weak point at Lestrem and all the line to the south of it. A brigade of the 25th Division also came up to Steenwerck north of where the river line had been broken, but it was too late for an effective counter-attack, as considerable forces were already across, which were spreading out north and south on the western bank.

The fall of night made no change in the battle, and the darkness was lit up by the red glare of the incessant fire. For many hours the line was held, though the Germans had brought up fresh divisions for their attack. Early in the morning of April 10, however, they won a footing in Estaires, which was desperately defended by the 5th Durhams. By 8.45, after long-continued street fighting, the Germans held the whole town, with the exception of the south-western extremity. The fight raged all day backwards and forwards through this little straggling place, the infantry upon either side showing the most determined valour. About 9.30 the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, under Colonel Temperley, made a brilliant counter-attack, crossing 1500 yards of open country with only three batteries to cover the movement. Before 10 o'clock they were into Estaires and had cleared the main street, rushing house after house and driving the Germans down to the river edge, where they rallied and remained. The 149th Brigade had promptly sent forward its machine-guns, and these were mounted on the highest houses at the south end of the town, to fire on any enemy reserves coming up south of the Lys. They raked the Germans on the farther bank and caused heavy losses. All day the remains of the 5th Durhams and 6th Northumberlands fought desperately in Estaires, and held nearly all of it in the evening, which was in a way a misfortune, since it allowed the Germans to concentrate their heavies upon it during the night in a whole-hearted fashion which rendered it absolutely untenable. The morning of April 11 found Estaires a No Man's Land between the lines of infantry. In spite of a fresh advance by the 4th and 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, it was found impossible to regain the place, while the Germans gradually extended their line from the river crossings which

they had retained all through. By midday on April 11, the British line was 500 yards west of the town.

In the southern portion of the line the 151st Brigade of Durhams had been slowly forced back from the Lestrem sector until they were on the line of the Lys, which they reached in the evening of April 10. At that date the 150th Yorkshire Brigade was still firm upon the river, but the left-hand battalion, the 5th Yorks, had thrown back its flank, since the enemy, brushing aside the right wing of the 40th Division, had crossed the stream and turned the 50th from the north. The 40th was still fighting hard, as already described, and endeavouring to hold back the attack, so that the German advance was slow. Early in the morning of April 11 the attack became very severe, and broke through to the west of Estaires—the river at this point runs from west to east—driving back the Durham Brigade, which was absolutely exhausted after forty-eight hours of ceaseless fighting without assistance. Their resistance had been an extraordinarily fine one, but there comes a limit to human powers. The whole division was at the last extremity, but fortunately at 12 o'clock on the 11th, two brigades of the 29th Division (Cayley) came up in relief. So close was the fighting, however, and so desperate the situation, that General Riddell of the 149th Northumberland Fusiliers Brigade refused to disengage his men from the battle, since the confusion of a relief might have led to disaster. He was at the time holding the line astride the Meteren Becque, north of Estaires, covering about 1000 yards of vital ground. Here the Germans attacked all day, making prodigious efforts to push the 4th and 5th Northumberland Fusiliers out of Trou Bayard. The ground between this point and Pont Levis, the bridge at the east end of Estaires, was dead flat, and afforded no particle of cover. Fifteen British machine-guns stationed beside the infantry swept all this expanse, and cut down each wave of attack. Four times the place was supposed to have fallen, and four times the Germans fell back, leaving long grey swathes of their dead. It was not until 3 p.m. that the stubborn Northumbrians found that their right was completely exposed, and were forced to retire from a position which they had sold at a terrible price.

Instead of dying down the German advance was attaining a greater proportion with every day that passed, for it seemed to their commanders that with so favourable an opening some very great success lay within their power. In spite of the arrival of the 51st and 29th Divisions the battle raged most furiously, and the weight of the attack was more than the thin line could sustain. The Germans had rapidly followed up the 151st Brigade as it drew out, and there was a fierce action round Merville and Robermetz in the early afternoon of April 11. The exhausted Durhams turned furiously upon their pursuers, and there was fierce hand-to-hand work in which even General Martin and his Headquarters Staff found themselves handling rifles and revolvers. The 31st Division (Bridgford) had come up and taken position in the rear of the 29th, with

their left flank facing east to hold off the enemy, who were now close to Steenwerck in the north. By nightfall Merville had gone, and so had Neuf Berquin, which lay between the 151st and the 149th Brigades, rather in the rear of the latter's right. At this period the 29th Division, with the 31st behind it, was on the left or north of the 149th Brigade, covering the ground between Neuf Berquin and Steenwerck. The enemy had turned the right of this line as already described, and now through the events in the north, which will soon be narrated, the left of the 29th Division was also turned, and the situation became most dangerous, for the enemy was in great force in front. A consultation was held by the various general officers affected, and it was decided to make a side slip under the cover of darkness to the line of Vierhouck—Meteren Becque. The British had to fight, however, to gain this position, so far had the enemy outflanked them, and when the 149th Brigade, with their indomitable Northumbrians, now reduced to a few hundred men, had cut their way through to Vierhouck it was only to find it empty and the British line about 1000 yards to the west of it, where the 4th Guards Brigade of the 31st Division had just begun to arrive. The Northumbrians held on to Vierhouck none the less on the morning of April 12, and the Guards Brigade came forward.

Whilst this stern fighting had been in progress, and while the 55th kept its iron grip upon Givenchy and Festubert, the 51st Highland Division to its north, along the line of the Lawe Canal, had been very hard pressed. All three brigades had been engaged in most desperate defence and counter-attack, the fighting being so close that two at least of the Brigadiers had been compelled to drop maps and binoculars, while they seized rifles from their orderlies. The canal was half dry and offered a poor front, but it was held until the Germans got across in the north where the left flank of the 153rd Brigade was turned and had to fall back. The Gordons and Black Watch of this unit fought most fiercely in the neighbourhood of Vieille Chapelle, and the Germans will long remember their meeting with the clansmen. Finally their line swung back west of Lestrem, keeping in touch with the right flank of the 50th Division.

At this period the 184th Brigade was the only one in the Highland Division which was still capable of service, for the others had lost so heavily and were so wearied that rest was absolutely necessary. The 61st Division (Colin Mackenzie), still very weak after its service on the Somme, came up in the Robecq sector, and, with the aid of the surviving Highland Brigade, formed a barrier to the terrific German pressure, the whole coming under General Mackenzie. This line was held by these troops up to the 23rd of April.

Meanwhile, to revert to the early days of the battle, the German attack was raging with great fury upon the centre and left of this line, and finding a gap between the 29th Division and the 149th Brigade it poured through it with most menacing results, but the 4th Guards

Brigade counter-attacked and retrieved the situation west of the Vieux Berquin-Neuf Berquin Road, as will be told in detail in the next chapter. Farther north, however, the German attack made more progress and rolled forward to the south of the village of Merris. The 6th Northumbrians with only two officers left standing—one of them their gallant Colonel, Temperley—still held on to their old stance at Vierhouck, though reduced to the strength of a company, and in such a state of physical exhaustion that the men fell to the ground fast asleep between the attacks. One young soldier woke up during his nap to find the Germans among them, on which he sprang up, shot the German officer, and organised a charge which re-established the line. As darkness fell on the evening of April 12 the survivors of the 50th Division were drawn from the line, though some were so entangled with other units that they stayed and shared in the severe fighting of April 13.

As already shown the Givenchy bastion was held firm, which meant that the 51st Division was also to some extent helped to resist attack, since an enfilade fire from the 55th would beat upon any advance against them. Such advances were repeatedly made upon April 11 and were splendidly countered. North of this point the 50th, 29th, and 31st Divisions had all suffered heavily, while the line had been bent back in a curve from the La Bassée Canal to a maximum depth of ten miles, ending on the night of April 12 in a position from west of Merville through the two Berquins to Merris. The 29th Division, which is a particularly good comrade in a tight place, had been very hard pressed, with its brigades sent hither and thither wherever a leak was to be stopped. It was in this action that Colonel Forbes Robertson, one of the heroes of Cambrai, earned the coveted Cross by fighting on horseback at the head of his men like some knight of old, and repeatedly restoring the line when it was broken. In spite of all valour, however, the general movement was westwards. Whilst these misfortunes had occurred in the southern sector, others not less serious had occurred in the north, owing to the great extension of the German attack. It is to these that we must now turn.

The enemy had achieved a considerable success upon April 9 when they succeeded in establishing themselves across the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur, because by doing so they had got to the south-west of Armentières. They had prepared another attack in the north, and it was evident that if it had any success the Armentières position would be impossible. Early in the morning of April 10 the usual shattering and pulverising bombardment which preceded a full-dress German attack broke out upon the right of the Second Army, involving the front from the Ypres-Comines Canal in the north down to the Lys River at Armentières, thus joining up with the battle of yesterday, and turning the ten-mile front into one of twenty. The chief points in this line are Hollebeke in the north, Wytschaete in the centre, and Messines in the south, with Ploegsteert Wood and village and Nieppe as the final connecting links

with Armentières. It was all classic and sacred ground drenched with the blood of our bravest. There can be few regiments in the British Army which have not at one time or another left their dead upon this shell-pitted slope, or upon the levels which face it.

The order of the Second Army from the north at this time was Twenty-second, Eighth, Second, and Ninth Corps. It was the Ninth Corps (Hamilton-Gordon) which was now attacked. The order of divisions upon this front was Campbell's 21st Division astride the Ypres-Menin Road, the 9th (Tudor) in the Hollebeke district, the 19th (Jeffreys) covering 6000 yards east of Messines and Wytschaete from Ravine Wood in the north to the Douve in the south, and finally the 25th Division (Bainbridge) on the right, which was already in a most unfavourable position, as its right flank was menaced by the driving in of the 40th and threat to the 34th on the preceding day, while one of its brigades, the 74th, had been taken away to cover Steenwerck from the German advance at Bac St. Maur. It was upon these divisions, and, in the first instance, upon the two southern ones that the new German attack from the Fourth Army of our old enemy General von Armin broke on April 10. It should be remembered that, like so many of their fellow-units, both of these divisions had been very heavily engaged in the south, and that their losses within the last few weeks had been very great. Verily we have travelled far from the day when it was laid down as an axiom that a Corps which had lost a quarter of its numbers would not stand to its work until time had effaced the shock.

Since the main assault on April 10 fell upon the 19th Division the story can be most plainly told from their central point of view. The left of their line was held by the 58th Brigade (Glasgow), consisting of the 6th Welsh and 9th Welsh Fusiliers. The right was held by the 57th Brigade (Cubitt) which contained the 10th Warwicks, 8th Gloucesters, and 10th Worcesters. The 56th (Heath) was in reserve. It was upon these troops that there fell the strain of an attack which can seldom have been exceeded in severity. The total German force on the Corps front was eleven divisions, and of these no less than five were directed on the morning of April 10 upon the depleted ranks of General Jeffreys' unit.

A very thick mist prevailed, and through this protective screen the German infantry advanced about 6 o'clock, driving swiftly through all the forward posts, and putting them out of action in exactly the same fashion as on March 21. The enemy were in great numbers, and their advance was swift and resolute. Within half an hour of the first alarm they had made a lodgment in the main position of the 57th Brigade, and had also broken in the face of the left wing of the 25th Division to the south. The garrisons of the outlying posts were never seen again, and it was observed that they were greatly hampered by their camouflage screens which they had no time to tear away in the face of so rapid and overwhelming an attack. At 6.40 the enemy were deep in the position of the 57th Brigade, especially near Gapard Spur, which marked the

centre of that unit. At 7.30 the whole brigade was in difficulties, which was more marked in the centre than on either flank, but was serious at every point of the line. The 8th North Staffords of the Reserve Brigade were brought up at this hour to help in the defence of this weakening sector. Before they could arrive upon the scene the enemy had made such progress that he had reached the crest of the ridge and had occupied the village of Messines. The 58th Brigade in the north had not yet been attacked, but General Glasgow seeing his right flank entirely exposed had thrown back a defensive line. Close to this line was a post named Pick House, and upon this the mixed elements of the left of the 57th Brigade, chiefly men of the 10th Warwicks, now rallied and formed a strong centre of resistance. The 25th Division to the south had been also very hard pressed, and was in immediate danger of losing the important knoll, Hill 63, so that the reserve brigade of the 19th Division had to send the two remaining battalions, the 4th Shropshires and 9th Cheshires, to strengthen their defence. There was thus no longer any support for the 19th Divisional fighting line in their great need, save for the 5th South Wales Borderers, their pioneer battalion, and the 81st Field Company R.E., both of whom were thrown into the battle, the pioneers pushing bravely forward and connecting up with the 10th Warwicks at Pick House. Meanwhile the 8th North Staffords had made a fine attempt to retake Messines, and had actually reached the western edge of the village, but were unable to gain a permanent footing. Their right was in touch with the 8th Gloucesters, and some sort of stable line began to build itself up before the Germans. They had been unable to occupy Messines in force, owing to the rifle-fire which became more deadly with the rising of the mist. The scattered groups of infantry lying upon the ridge on either side of Messines were greatly heartened by the splendid work of A Battery, 88th R.F.A., under Captain Dougall, which remained among them, firing over open sights at the advancing Germans. " So long as you stick it I will keep my guns here ! " he shouted, and the crouching men cheered him in return. He was as good as his word, and only withdrew what was left of his battery, man-handling it across almost impossible ground, when he had not a shell in his limbers. This brave officer received the Victoria Cross, but unhappily never lived to wear it.

The 8th North Staffords, still lying opposite Messines, extended their left down the Messines-Wytschaete Road in an endeavour to join up with the men at Pick House. Thus a frail curtain of defence was raised in this direction also. Shortly after midday things began to look better, for the gallant South African Brigade (Tanner) of the 9th Division was despatched to the rescue. So severe had been its losses, however, that it numbered only 1600 bayonets, and had hardly been reorganised into battalions. Late in the afternoon it advanced, the 1st Battalion on the left, the 2nd on the right, and though it had not the weight to make any definite impression upon the German front it entirely re-established the

line of the road from Messines to Wytschaete, and reinforced the thin fragments of battalions who were holding this precarious front. The South Africans incurred heavy losses from machine-gun fire in this very gallant attack.

The 9th Division had hardly relinquished its reserve brigade when it found that it was itself in urgent need of support, for about 2 o'clock on April 10 the attack spread suddenly to the northern end of the line, involving the 25th, 26th, and 58th Brigades, all under General Tudor, who was now responsible for the Wytschaete front. So infernal was the barrage which preceded the attack, that the right of the 9th Division in the vicinity of Charity Farm was driven in, and the 58th Brigade, with both flanks in the air and smothered under a rain of shells, was compelled also to fall back upon its support line. About 4 p.m. the 58th Brigade was broken near Torreken Farm, and the 6th Wiltshires, who were the flank battalion on the right, were cut off and lost heavily. The enemy were driving hard at this period towards Wytschaete, but the 9th Welsh stood fast in a cutting to the south of the village, and held the Germans off with their rifle-fire. So ended a most trying and unfortunate day, where the overborne troops had done all that men could do to hold their ground, fighting often against five times their own number. The prospects for the morrow looked very black, and the only gleam of light came with the advent, about midnight, of the 108th Brigade (Griffiths) from the Ulster Division, with orders to fight alongside the exhausted 57th, whose commander, General Cubitt, was now directing the local operations to the west of Messines. The Wytschaete front was also strengthened by the inclusion in the 9th Division of the 62nd and later of the 64th Brigade of the 21st Division. Farther south the 75th Brigade north of Armentières had been driven back by the enemy's attack, and the 7th Brigade on its left, finding its flank uncovered, had hinged back upon Ploegsteert Wood, where it held its line as best it might. Thus on the left, the centre, and the right there had been the same story of unavailing resistance and loss of valuable, dearly-bought ground. Even more serious, however, than the local loss was the strategical situation which had been created by the German advance in the lower sector, by their crossing the Lys, and by the fact that on the night of April 10 they were closing in upon Steenwerck and La Crêche far to the right rear of the defenders of the Messines line. It was a situation which called for the highest qualities of generals as of soldiers.

By the morning of April 11 General Plumer, dealing out his reserves grudgingly from his fast diminishing supply, placed the 147th Brigade of the 49th Yorkshire Territorial Division (Cameron) behind the 25th Division in the Ploegsteert region, and a brigade of the 29th Division to the north of it. Such succours were small indeed in the face of what was evidently a very great and well-prepared attack which had already shaken the whole northern front to its foundations. The Higher Command had, however, some points of consolation. If the vital sectors could be

held there was the certainty that strong reinforcements would arrive within a few days from the south. The Amiens line was now certainly stabilised, and if once again an equilibrium could be secured then the last convulsive efforts of this titanic angel of darkness would have been held. With no illusions, but with a dour determination to do or die, the British line faced to the east.

The immediate danger was that a gap had opened between Messines and Wytschaete, while another was threatened farther south between Ploegsteert and the Nieppe-Armentières Road. The pressure upon the Damstrasse was also very great in the region of the 9th Division. The first disposition in the Messines area was to strengthen the line of resistance by pushing up the three battalions of the 108th Brigade, the 1st Irish Fusiliers on the left near Pick House, the 9th Irish Fusiliers west of Messines, and the 12th Irish Rifles in the Wulverghem line. The attack on the morning of April 11 was not heavy in this direction, but was rather directed against the 25th Division in the Ploegsteert district, where it came ominously close to Hill 63, a commanding point from which the Messines position of the British would be taken in reverse. General Jeffreys of the 19th Division determined none the less to stand his ground, but he threw out a defensive flank along the Messines-Wulverghem Road, and mounted machine-guns to hold any attack from the south. Meanwhile the 57th, South African, and 108th Brigades, in spite of this menace to their right rear continued to hold the Messines front. There was severe fighting on this sector during the afternoon in which the remains of the 2nd and 4th (Transvaal Scots) Battalions were pushed back for some distance, but counter-attacked under the lead of Captain Green, regaining most of the ground that they had lost, and connecting up with the 5th South Wales Borderers, who were still holding fast near Pick House. This line was maintained until the general withdrawal. It was further strengthened by the 146th Brigade, one of the three units of the 49th Division, which were all engaged at different points. One battalion, the 7th West Yorkshires, called on suddenly to fill a gap, made a very fine advance under heavy fire, and restored the situation. It remained in the line until, on April 16, it was almost annihilated by a terrific German attack upon it.

But the situation on the right rear was getting worse and worse. In the evening it was definitely known that Hill 63 had at last fallen after a long and obstinate struggle. The 25th, and later the 34th Division had held up against great odds, but the main force of the enemy was now striking upon that line, and the British were forced to withdraw from Le Bizet towards Nieppe. These German gains enforced a completely new re-arrangement of the forces in the north if they were to avoid being taken in the rear. This change of a wide and far-reaching character was quickly and safely effected during the night of April 11-12. It involved moving back the three northern Corps into their battle zones, leaving only outposts in advance. They still covered Ypres,

but the retirement meant that all that had been won in the mud-and-blood struggle of 1917 had passed into German keeping, and coupled with the loss of Messines it seemed to threaten that the old salient might be renewed in as disastrous a fashion as ever. This retirement was rather in the nature of a precaution against the possibilities of the future. What was of most immediate importance was the withdrawal of the lines which were at such close grips with the enemy to the west of Messines. By the morning of April 12 the general line of the 19th Corps was Steenwerck Station, Pont-d'Achelles, Neuve Eglise, Wulverghem, Wytschaete. No immediate German attack followed on the withdrawal. This abstention on the part of the enemy was due in part to the wonderful work done by a small nest of four machine-guns on the Messines-Wulverghem Road under the command of Lieutenant Hodgson. This small unit had already fought for forty-eight hours, but on this third day of the battle their services were invaluable, for they shot down hundreds of Germans as they endeavoured to debouch from Messines and descend the slope. Save for two wounded men none of this band of heroes ever returned. Among other detachments who behaved with great heroism were a few men of the 5th South Wales Borderers, B Company, under Captain Evans, who maintained themselves at Pick House, north and east of Messines, for three days, until they were at last rescued by the 58th Brigade from the north.

Whilst these fresh dispositions and general retrogressions had been made on this front the 34th Division to the south had also been compelled to rearrange its positions. It has already been described how, under cover of the 147th Brigade, they withdrew in absolute order across the Lys. April 11 saw such continued pressure, however, on the right of the 25th and the whole of the 34th Division that it became clear early in the afternoon of April 11 that further retirement was imperative. This began at dusk, the three brigades retiring by the Armentières-Bailleul Road, while the 147th still acted as rearguard. They retired through the 74th and 88th Brigades near Bailleul Station, fighting back all the way and considerably harassed by the German guns. On the morning of the 12th the general line was Steam-mill-Bailleul Station-southern border of La Crêche to a point about 500 yards north-east of Pont d'Achelles on the Bailleul Road. Along this line the order of battle from the south was the 147th, 75th, 101st, 74th, 102nd, and 88th Brigades. Nieppe, which had been evacuated, was occupied by the enemy later in the day, and on the evening of April 12 the line was pushed a little farther back to De Seule.

There was no fighting on the new line opposite Messines on April 12, but the battle was, as has been shown, raging furiously elsewhere, and the situation in the south, where the enemy was making progress, must deeply affect that in the north. Had an aviator taken a swift flight from Hollebeke to Givenchy on this day, following the deep curve which had formed in the British line, his observations would have been roughly as

follows: in the Hollebeke district he would have found no extreme pressure, and that the 9th Division, reinforced by the 58th Brigade, was holding the line not far westward of their original position. From there onwards he would have skirted the new line of the Ninth Corps, as already indicated, and would have seen the remains of the 19th Division covering the north of it, the 25th Division, also in fragments, about Neuve Eglise, and the 34th Division near Steenwerck. He would next observe with consternation or joy according to his colours, that there was a considerable gap before Bailleul. At the other side of this gap he would come upon elements of the 31st and 29th Divisions, hard-pressed and worried by the advance which the enemy had made through Merville on their right. He would catch a glimpse also of some thin lines of resistance, still farther south, which represented all that was left of the 50th Division. Finally, he would see the 51st and the 55th on the extreme south, both of them standing firm in their positions. Looking eastwards he would see pouring across the Lys the legions of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, hurrying to improve their blow, while behind the British lines he would see new divisions, the 59th Midlanders at Wulverghem, the 33rd near Bailleul, the 61st near Robecq, the 4th Guards Brigade followed by the 1st Australians near Hazebrouck, all hastening with heavy hearts but the most grim determination to throw themselves across the path of this German invasion which already threatened the most vital points in Flanders. Far to the south also our aviator would perhaps have seen the smoke of many trains, and out at sea might have made out the little dots, which marked in the one case French, in the other British reinforcements. Such was the general panorama upon the Flanders front on the evening of April 12.

CHAPTER LII

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS

April 13-*May* 8, 1918

Desperate situation—Sir Douglas Haig's " win or die " message—Epic of the 4th Guards Brigade at Hazebrouck—Arrival of 1st Australian Division—Splendid services of 33rd Division—Loss of Armentières, Bailleul, and Neuve Eglise—The 1st Division at Givenchy—Fall of Kemmel—Battle of Ridge Wood—Great loss of ground—Equilibrium.

UP to April 13 twenty-eight German divisions had been traced in the battle of Flanders. Since the whole British Army consisted of sixty divisions, and only thirteen had been engaged in Flanders, one can gather how terrible had been their task.

By the fourth day of the battle the purpose of the enemy became more clear. It was evident now that his attack consisted really of three movements. The northern of these, consisting of about six divisions, had for its task to drive through Wytschaete and Messines to Bailleul. At present it was held up in the north by the 9th Division, but had made its way in the south until Neuve Eglise was the only village which intervened between it and Bailleul. The central attack, consisting of the main force, had taken Armentières and penetrated ten miles deep, capturing Merville, reaching the Clarence River, touching Robecq, and threatening St. Venant. This deep penetration reacted upon the British flanks to north and south of it. Finally, there was an advance by seven or eight divisions in the south, which had been held at Givenchy, but had bent the line back from that point, Bethune being the immediate objective. The hammering of the Germans was remorseless and terrific. All that the British needed was a little time, but it seemed as if it would be denied them. Help was coming, but it did not arrive so quickly as the new divisions which Von Armin and Von Quast were pouring over the Messines Ridge and across the plain of the Lys.

The position was very menacing, as was shown by an order of the day from the British Commander-in-Chief which is unique perhaps in our military annals—a stern call to duty and to death, pitched on the very note which would arouse the historical tenacity of the British soldier. Documents have been avoided in this chronicle, but this one at least must be quoted in full. It was addressed to all ranks of the British Army under his command.

"Three weeks ago to-day," said Sir Douglas Haig, "the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports, and destroy the British Army.

"In spite of throwing already 106 divisions into the battle, and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has, as yet, made little progress towards his goals. We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops.

"Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our army under the most trying circumstances.

"Many amongst us now are tired. To these I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest.

"The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

"There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end.

"The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind depend alike upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment."

No words can describe the danger of the crisis more clearly than this clear call from a leader remarkable for his judgment and restraint, exhorting his men to fight to the death with their faces to the raging German line, and their backs to those all-important harbours on which the fate of the world was now depending. The German vanguard was forty miles from Calais on the day that the appeal was made, and there was no strong line to be forced, save that strongest of all lines which was formed by Plumer and his men.

A new unit had come into line on April 13. This was the 33rd Division under General Pinney. It was at once thrust in to fill the gap in front of Bailleul, where it found itself involved from that date onwards in most desperate fighting, in which it was associated with the 31st Division. The narrative of the services and trials, both of them very great, which were rendered and endured by these divisions may be best told in consecutive form, as a too strict cohesion to the order of dates makes it difficult to follow the actual happenings. We shall first consider the operations at Hazebrouck and Meteren, where these two divisions and the 1st Australian Division were chiefly concerned, and we shall afterwards return to the north and follow the fortunes of the 19th, 25th, 49th, 34th, and other divisions which were holding the northern curve.

The line was very weak on April 12 in front of Hazebrouck, and yet it was absolutely vital that this important railway junction should not fall into German hands. The need was pressing and desperate, for the German attack was furious and unremitting, while the British line was

so thin, and composed of such weary units, that it seemed impossible that it could hold. The exhausted remains of the 50th Division, who had been at it continually ever since the breaking of the Portuguese front, were hardly capable now of covering or defending any serious front. Yet if the ground could be held, the 1st Australian Division, brought hurriedly back from the Somme and in the act of detraining, would be in the line within twenty-four hours. There have been few moments more heavy with fate during the whole of the campaign. Everything depended for the moment upon Pinney's 33rd Division, upon the worn remnants of the 29th Division, upon the 92nd and 93rd Brigades, and upon the 4th Guards Brigade of the 31st Division who were brought up from Pradelles, and thrown hurriedly across the path of the advancing Germans.

Of the 31st Division the 92nd and 93rd Brigades had already been heavily engaged on April 11 as already recorded. The Guards Brigade had been delayed in its journey and was still fresh. General Reedman of the 92nd Brigade was in local command, and the situation was a particularly difficult one. At all costs Hazebrouck must be covered until reinforcements could arrive, for if the line were cut there was no end to the possible evils. When Merris fell General Reedman still held the heights west of Merris with the 10th East Yorkshires, while the 11th East Lancashires were to the south, and the remnants of the 86th and 87th Brigades of the 29th Division held on to Vieux Berquin. This line held until 5 p.m. on April 13 in spite of very stormy attacks and very little help from the guns. About that hour the right of the line gave way under severe pressure, and Vieux Berquin was taken, but the Germans were bottled up in it and were unable to get forward. There they remained until the great turn of the tide. We must now, however, turn our gaze to the immediate south and follow the phases of the wonderful stand made by the remaining brigade of the 31st Division, the 4th Guards Brigade, who found themselves involved in a desperate battle in front of Hazebrouck.

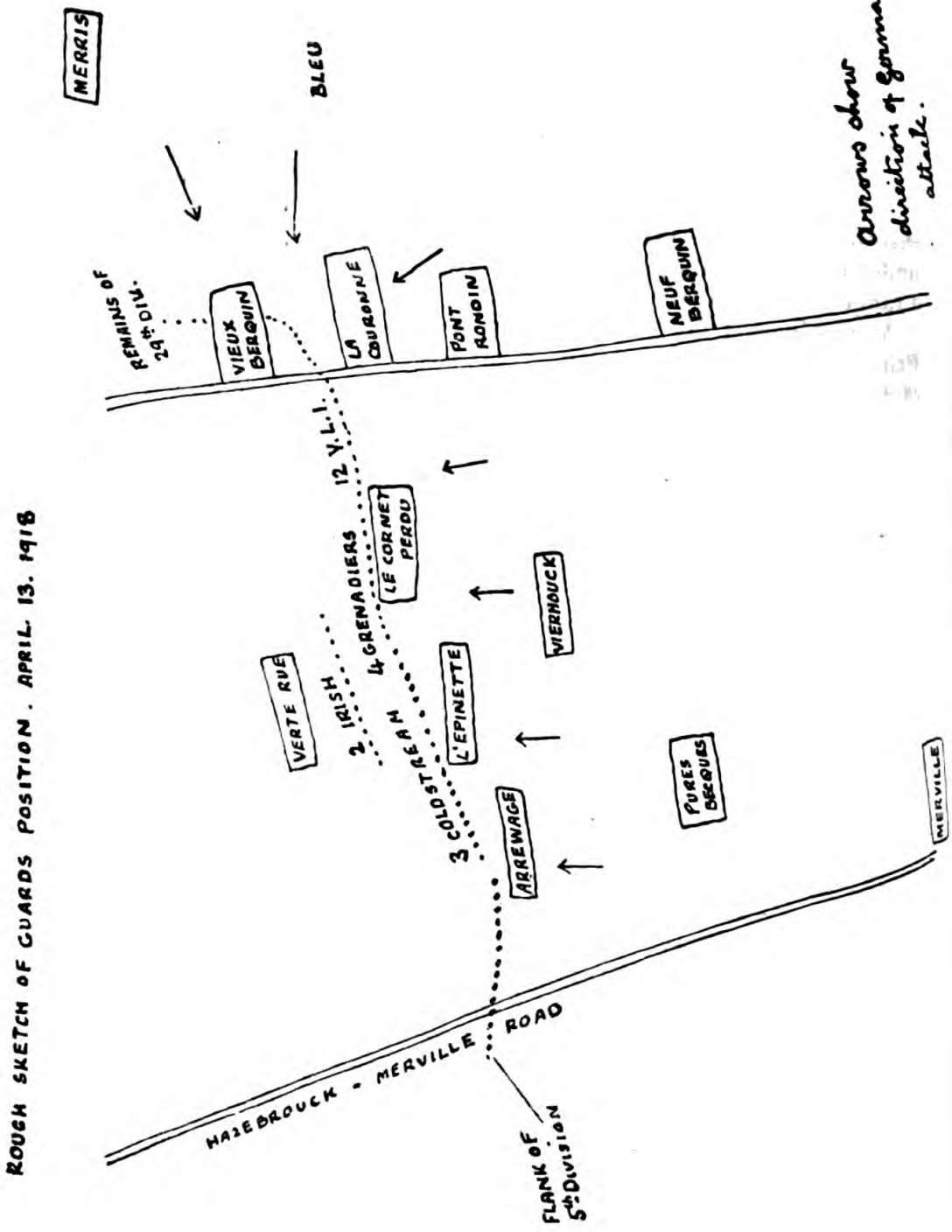
Without enumerating a number of obscure hamlets which are rather confusing than helpful, it may be said that the brigade under General Leslie Butler covered the north of the main road from Merville to Hazebrouck, with their right resting upon the Bourre, a small sluggish stream. Vierhouck represented roughly the centre of their line. It was a country of flat cultivated fields, with many roads and watercourses lined with willows, which cut the view. There were untouched farms with their human and animal occupants on every side. To the west lay the great forest of Nieppe. On the right were the 3rd Coldstream, on the left the 4th Grenadiers, with the 2nd Irish in close support. They were in position on the morning of April 12, and at once found the enemy in front of them, who after a strong preliminary bombardment advanced in great numbers along the whole line. The rifle-fire of the Guardsmen was too deadly, however, and the attack dissolved before it. The

German machine-gunners were exceedingly aggressive, " not to say impudent " as a Guards officer explained it, and many losses were sustained from their fashion of pushing forward upon the flanks, and worming their way into every unoccupied crevice. Nothing could exceed both the gallantry and intelligence of these men. Having cleared their front the Guards endeavoured to advance, but the Coldstream on the right met with murderous fire from the village of Pures Becques, and the movement could get no farther, nor were the Grenadiers much more fortunate on the left, though Captain Pryce with his company broke into some outlying houses, killing a number of Germans, seven of whom fell to that officer's own automatic. This whole gallant episode occurred under the very muzzles of a German battery, firing with open sights at a range of 300 yards.

At this period the brigade seems to have got ahead of the general British line, and to have had both flanks entirely exposed to every sort of enfilade fire. About four in the afternoon the right company of the Coldstream, numbering only forty men, had to turn south to face the enemy. The Germans had thrust into the centre of the Coldstream also, but No. 2 Company of the supporting Irish, acting without orders upon the impulse of the moment, and aided by the surviving Coldstream, completely re-established the line. The Irish, who were led by Captain Bambridge, were almost annihilated in their dashing effort to ease the pressure upon their English comrades. Their leader was wounded, Lieutenant Dent was killed, and only eleven men of the company were left standing. On the left the Germans were 500 yards in the rear, and here a rearrangement was called for and steadily carried out. An hour later another violent attack was made at the junction of the two battalions, but it also was driven back in disorder. The Germans had brought their guns well forward and into the open, but they met their match in Lieutenant Lewis of the 152nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery, who directed the scanty British artillery, and handled his pieces in a way which was much appreciated by the weary Guardsmen.

The readjustment of the line enabled the 4th Guards Brigade to link up with the 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry, pioneer battalion of their own division, which was holding the line at La Couronne, and fought that day with the utmost tenacity and resolution. On the left flank of the Yorkshiremen, near Vieux Berquin, were the worn remains of the 29th Division.

Night fell upon a sorely-tried but unconquered line. The two front battalions had lost at least a third of their effectives. Under the screen of darkness the position was re-organised, and it was hoped that the 5th Division, drawn back from Italy, would be able to effect a relief. This could not be fully accomplished, however, and at best only a small contraction of the front could be effected, so that the morning of April 13 found the exhausted Coldstream and Grenadiers still facing the German attack. Their line had been strengthened by the 210th Field



ROUGH SKETCH OF GUARDS POSITION. APRIL 13. 1918

Company of the Royal Engineers. The front to be held was still very wide for so weakened a force.

It had been a hard day, but it was only the prelude of a harder one. On April 13 the morning began with thick mist, of which the Germans took advantage to rush their machine-guns to very close quarters. At early dawn the Coldstream found themselves once more heavily attacked, while an armoured car came down the road and machine-gunned the outposts at a range of ten yards. After severe mixed fighting the attack was driven back. At 9.15 it was renewed with greater strength, but again it made no progress. It is typical of the truly desperate spirit of the men, that when every man save one in an outpost had been killed or wounded, the survivor, Private Jacotin of the Coldstream, carried on the fight alone for twenty minutes before he was blown to pieces with a grenade.

The left flank of this battalion had also been heavily attacked, the enemy, with their usual ingenuity, shouting as they advanced through the fog that they were the King's Company of the Grenadier Guards. They were blown back none the less into the mist from which they had emerged. The 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry was also four separate times attacked, but held to its appointed line. This gallant unit fairly earned the title of the " Yorkshire Guards " that day, for they were the peers of their comrades. Meanwhile, however, outside the area of this grim fight the Germans had taken Vieux Berquin, pushing back the scanty line at that point, so that they were able to bring up trench-mortars and guns to blast the Yorkshire battalion at La Couronne out of its shallow trenches. Captain Pryce, on the extreme left of the Guards found the Germans all round him, and his Grenadiers were standing back to back and firing east and west. The company was doomed, and in spite of the gallant effort of a party of Irish Guards, who lost very heavily in the venture, the whole of them perished, save for Sergeant Weedon and six men who reported the manner in which their comrades had met their end. Captain Pryce had led two bayonet charges, first with eighteen men, which was entirely successful, and later with fourteen men, who buried themselves in the grey of the German ranks, and there remained. This was the end of No. 2 Company of the 4th Grenadiers, and of its commander. This brave man received a posthumous V.C. in the record of which it is stated that with forty men he had held up a German battalion for ten hours and so saved a break through.

Apart from this flank company the centre company of the Grenadiers at this period consisted of six unwounded men, while the right company was twenty strong. All the officers were down. They were hemmed in on two sides by the enemy, but they were still resisting when the shades of night fell upon them. By dawn the Grenadier battalion had ceased to exist.

The 3rd Coldstream on the right were hardly in better case. The right company was surrounded, and fought until there was only a hand-

ful left. A few survivors fell back upon the 5th Division and the Australians who were now well up to the line. The orders to the Guards had been to keep the Germans out until the Australians could arrive. They had been faithfully obeyed. The total casualties had been 39 officers and 1244 rank and file, the greater part from two weak battalions; 17 per cent. of the brigade mustered after the action. Soldiers will appreciate the last words of the official report which are: "No stragglers were reported by the A.P.M." It is an episode which needs no comment. Its grandeur lies in the bare facts. Well might General de Lisle say: "The history of the British Army can record nothing finer than the story of the action of the 4th Guards Brigade on April 12 and 13."

Whilst the Guards had made their stand to the east of Hazebrouck, the rest of the 31st Division, covering a front of 9000 yards, had a most desperate battle with the German stormers. The fine north country material which made up the 92nd and 93rd Brigades had never been more highly tried, for they were little more than a long line of skirmishers with an occasional post. In some parts of the line they were absolutely exterminated, but like their comrades of the Guards, they managed somehow or other to retain the positions and prevent a penetration until reinforcements arrived. The remains of the 29th Division on the left had also fought with utmost devotion and held the line at the price of a heavy drain upon their weakened ranks.

It would be well to continue the action upon the Hazebrouck front by giving at once an account of the operations of the 1st Australian Division under General Sir Harold Walker, which had the remarkable experience of being sent from Flanders to the Amiens front, being engaged there, and now being back in the Flanders front once more, all in little over a week. They detrained on April 12, and on the 13th their 2nd Brigade (Heane) found themselves in front of Hazebrouck with the remains of the 92nd British Brigade on their left and with the hard-pressed 4th Guards Brigade in front of them. In the evening the remains of the Guards were withdrawn through their line, and they were facing the pursuing Germans. On their left the Australians were in touch with the 1st Cameronians of the 19th Brigade in the Meteren area.

This fierce fighting was going on in a country which was new to war, with unbroken soil, whole cottages, and numerous refugees, who by their flight before the German vanguard complicated a situation which was already so chaotic that it was very difficult for the generals on the spot to grasp the relative positions of the attack and the defence.

On April 14 the Germans, advancing behind a deadly barrage, came forward through Merris and Vieux Berquin. They soon found, however, that they had before them fresh and steady troops who were not to be driven. The immediate German objective was the high ground from Mont de Merris to Strazeele. The 2nd Australian Brigade was on the right and the 1st (Leslie) on the left. Both were equally attacked,

and both met their assailants with a shattering fire which piled the level plain with their bodies. Three lines swept forward, but none reached the shallow trenches of the " digger " infantry. The 3rd and 4th Battalions held the line to the north where the pressure was greatest. The 123rd French Division was in support, but there was never any need to call for their co-operation. Strazeele, however, was blown to pieces by the German guns.

April 15 and 16 were comparatively quiet, and the Australians busily strengthened their lines. On the 17th a sharp attack was made upon the 1st and 4th Battalions on the left and centre of the 1st Australian Brigade, the advance coming up the valley between Merris and Meteren. This also was cut to pieces by rifle and gun-fire, so that it made no progress whatever.

The 3rd Australian Brigade (Bennett) had been in reserve, but it was destined for severe service after Meteren had passed out of the hands of the 33rd Division in the manner elsewhere described. They had actually relieved some of the worn elements of the British 33rd Division to the west of Meteren, and on April 22 and 23 they endeavoured by two separate movements upon either flank to fight their way back into the little town. The first operations carried out by the 11th and 12th Battalions were successful, but the final push into the town by the 9th and 10th met with heavy opposition, and the casualties were so great that the attempt had to be abandoned. The three Australian brigades were shortly relieved, after their very valuable spell in the line. They were destined soon to find themselves with their comrades on the Somme once again.

Whilst the 1st Brigade had won a complete defensive victory in the north of the line, the 2nd Brigade had done equally well in the south. The 7th and 8th Battalions were in the line, and both were heavily engaged, especially the latter, which faced Vieux Berquin. The German attack was once again a complete failure, and it was clear that the Australians had the historical honour in Flanders as well as on the Somme, of saying, " Thus far and no farther," upon the sector which they manned.

We pass on to the movements of the 33rd Division, which arrived upon the scene of action on April 11, and from that time onwards played an ever increasing part in this great world crisis. General Pinney had the experience of first being denuded of a large part of his own proper force, which was given away, brigade by brigade, to points of danger, and afterwards of not only seeing them reunited under his hand, but of having the remains of four divisions and a great number of details under him, and so being in actual command of the whole operations to the south and west of Bailleul. To his coolness, firmness, and well-tried fortitude, the nation owed much during those few desperate days.

Baird's 100th Brigade was moved forward at once to come under the orders of General Bainbridge, who, with his 25th Division, had

endured so much in the Ploegsteert district and was in urgent need of help. We shall follow them from the date of their detachment to that of their return to their own unit. On April 11, after dusk, they took their position, covering Neuve Eglise, the 16th King's Royal Rifles on the right of the line, the 2nd Worcesters in the centre, and the 9th Highland Light Infantry in reserve, the 148th Brigade being on the left, and the 75th Brigade on their right, the latter much exhausted by two days of battle. Immediately to the north lay the much enduring battle line of the 19th Division, which has already been fully described. Two points can hardly be described simultaneously, but these facts are to be read in conjunction with those already given in the last chapter, and it is to be understood that the whole situation at Neuve Eglise reacted from hour to hour upon that farther north, since a German capture of the town would place the enemy in the rear of General Jeffreys and his men.

On April 12 there was no direct attack upon this area, but about 4 p.m. the 75th Brigade on the right, which was much worn, was driven back and a gap created, which was filled in by such reserves as could be got together at the shortest notice. In the morning of April 13 it was found that this flank was still very open, the nearest organised unit being the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division, which was also stretching out its *left* in the hope of making connection. The enemy, however, pushed through early on April 13, getting to the rear of the 100th Brigade, and swinging north into Neuve Eglise which they captured. The Glasgow Highlanders, the only battalion of the Highland Light Infantry which wears Highland costume, attacked at once with all the vigour of fresh troops, and cleared the Germans out of the town at the point of the bayonet. The enemy had filtered into the brigade line, however, and parties of them were in the rear of the Worcesters. The hardest part of all was borne by the 16th King's Royal Rifles, who, being the flank battalion, bore all the weight of an advance which had enveloped them upon three sides, front, flank, and rear. Of this gallant battalion there were hardly any survivors. The Worcesters threw back their right flank, therefore, in order to cover Neuve Eglise upon the south and south-east, while the 25th Division were on the north and north-east.

The mishaps of a dark day were still not over, for the enemy about 4.30 made a determined attack and again punctured the over-stretched line. Some of them drove their way once more into Neuve Eglise, brushing aside or scattering the thin line of defence. Another strong force broke into the front of the 100th Brigade and drove a wedge between the Glasgow Highlanders and the Worcesters. The head-quarters of the latter battalion was in the Municipal Building of Neuve Eglise, and put up a desperate, isolated resistance for many hours, Colonel Stoney and his staff finally making their way back to their comrades. In this defence the Chaplain, the Rev. Tanner, greatly distinguished himself. The survivors of the 2nd Worcesters had also maintained themselves in Neuve Eglise as house neighbours to the

German stormers, but after midday on April 14, finding themselves entirely cut off, they fought their way out, leaving the square round the Church and Mairie piled with corpses. The town was now entirely German, with results already described upon the northern section of the outflanked line. Once more the Worcesters, the heroes of the old Gheluvelt battle, had placed fresh laurels upon their faded and battle-stained colours. The remains of the 100th Brigade were now reassembled on the Ravelsberg Ridge, west of Neuve Eglise, where they faced their enemy once more. So worn was it that the survivors of the Rifles and of the Highlanders were clubbed together to form one very weak composite battalion. On their right now was a collection of odds-and-ends under General Wyatt about a thousand strong, while on their left was the 103rd Brigade of the 34th Division, with the 148th in support.

This latter brigade had aided in the defence of Neuve Eglise, and done very severe service, two of the battalions, the 4th Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 4th York and Lancasters, having sustained heavy losses. During the two days in which the fate of the village hung in the balance these battalions were engaged in constant defence and counter-attack, especially on April 13, when in one desperate sally they captured a German colonel and nearly a hundred of his men. When the village fell on April 14 the gallant Yorkshiremen still held on close to it and gave no ground until they were ordered that night into reserve. The other battalion of the brigade, the 5th York and Lancasters, had been ordered to Steenwerck, where also it had borne a distinguished part in the fight.

The Germans were now nursing their wounds and also digesting their gains, so that there was a very welcome pause which was mainly in favour of the defence, who had good hope of reinforcement. A number of French batteries appeared as the forerunners of relief, and helped to break up an advance upon the Ravelsberg on the morning of April 16. A second attack had no better luck. Some posts were taken but were won back again with the help of the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade.

April 17 saw a fresh attack which was preceded by a barrage which tore gaps in the thin line of the Highlanders. It developed into an infantry attack, which gave the enemy possession of an orchard near the line. The Highlanders, aided by some of the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers of the 177th Brigade, tried hard to win it back, but could at best only block the exits. After dark that night the brigade was relieved by the 148th Brigade, and staggered out of the line with only 800 men unscathed. General Baird's infantry had endured an ordeal which exceeded what the most disciplined troops could be expected to survive: 58 officers and 1424 men had fallen in their splendid defence of Neuve Eglise.

The other brigades of the 33rd Division had meanwhile been involved in situations hardly less critical than those which had faced Baird's Brigade at Neuve Eglise. Maitland's 98th Brigade, which found itself on April 12 in the Ravelsberg area, was placed to the north of Bailleul as

a support to that place, and the narrative of its doings will be found in the subsequent account of the defence of Meteren.

The 19th Brigade (Mayne) of the 33rd Division had been detailed to cover Meteren to the west of Bailleul against the northward sweep of the Germans. At 9.40 on April 12 it was known that the enemy had got through at Merville, that their cavalry had been seen at Neuf Berquin, and by noon that this swiftly advancing tide was submerging Merris only three miles south of Meteren. General Pinney, deprived of two of his brigades, had only under his hand the 19th Brigade, with the 18th Middlesex Pioneers, 11th and 222nd Field Companies Royal Engineers, and the 33rd British Machine-gun Corps under Colonel Hutchinson, an officer who until he was gassed was a tower of strength to the defence. At midday the place was under heavy shell-fire. There is a windmill in a prominent position south of the town overlooking the dead flats of Flanders. In and around this was stationed the 1st Queen's West Surreys. East of the town, facing Bailleul, was the 5th Scottish Rifles, while the 1st Scottish Rifles (The Cameronians) were in reserve. The whole situation was under the direct control of General Pinney, and he was reinforced in the course of the day by several very welcome units—9th Corps Cyclists, 22nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, and others. Strazeele was included in the line of defence, which joined up in the night with the hard-worked 29th Division.

The situation on April 12 in this quarter of the field was most alarming. Everything in the south seemed to be in a state of chaos, and the line was for the moment absolutely fluid. The fall of Merville and of Estaires had been exploited with extraordinary energy by the Germans, who were rushing on at the very heels of the retiring and often disorganised troops, who were dead-beat after two days and nights of constant exertion. It was all important to build up some sort of line south of Meteren, but events were moving so fast that it was doubtful if it could be done. It was here that the value of the new machine-gun organisation, perfected during the winter, was brilliantly exemplified. Colonel Hutchinson was able to throw forward the whole of his guns to make up for the local weakness of the infantry, and he ran great risks in doing so, since he had only broken men and stragglers to man the gaps between his gun positions. The crisis was such, however, that any risk had to be taken, and the 33rd Battalion of the Machine-gun Corps saved the situation. On the other hand it is not too much to say that a humble hero, Driver Sharples, whose motor-lorry was handy, saved the 33rd Battalion, for he not only rushed up eight guns under heavy fire, with their crews, but he brought up afterwards on his own initiative the wire and other essentials which enabled them to hold their position. It was a supreme example of what can be done by one brave, clear-headed man. The German tide was flowing at a rate which was measured as 1½ miles in forty minutes, but now it was to reach its limit, when it came under the fire of these eight guns upon Windmill Hill. The advance was not

only from Merris in the south but even more along the Bailleul-Meteren Road, which was crowded with their troops. By dusk the infantry of the 19th Brigade had taken the place of the weary fragments who lined the front, and the immediate danger of a complete rupture of the line was over.

At 5.30 a.m. on April 13 the attack upon Meteren commenced with a strong advance against the 1st Queen's at the Windmill, and gained some ground in the centre. The usual tactics of rushing up machine-guns was tried, but in spite of the mist they had very limited success. The 98th Brigade was now in support, and the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were ordered forward to cover Meule Houck Hill on that side. At 10.30 the Queen's were again fiercely attacked, and after changing hands three times the windmill in their position remained with the stormers. At noon the well-knit line had been formed in front of Meteren, with the Yorkshiremen of the 92nd Brigade in touch on the right, while their brother Yorkshiremen of the 147th Brigade were on the left, drawn respectively from the 31st and the 49th Divisions. There were cheering rumours that the 1st Australians and the 133rd French were both speeding upon their way, but the need of the present was very great, for the German guns were many, while there was hardly one to aid in the defence.

At 4 p.m. the Germans were beating once more along the whole front of the division, but by 5.30 were back in their own line, what was left of them, much the worse for the venture. News came, however, that Vieux Berquin had fallen, and that Meteren was to be taken next day at all costs. Meanwhile, in spite of the severe fighting, the losses had not been heavy, save in the 1st Queen's, which had borne all the brunt of three separate attacks. Colonel Kemp-Welch and his men had a very severe ordeal that day. Cavalry appeared more than once in front of the position, and one body, 200 strong, were cut to pieces by a sudden concentration of machine-guns. The splendid machine-guns still played a prominent part in the battle. One of them having been submerged by a rush of the enemy, Corporal Hurd returned single-handed, advancing 200 yards beyond the line, and brought it back upon his shoulder. At one time the supplies of belts ran short, but they were brought up in most dashing fashion. " At noon," says an officer, " the fighting limbers with belt-boxes, barrels, and S.A.A. were galloped through a hail of shell to our gun positions in a style reminiscent of the Royal Horse Artillery upon an Aldershot field-day." The result was great. " Gunners and gun-commanders report having piled the dead enemy before their guns."

Shortly after dawn on April 14 the 1st Queen's was in the wars once more, and from six to eight there were constant attacks along the whole line from Strazeele on the right to Bailleul Station on the left, the latter forming the front of the 34th Division. The 1st Cameronians, those stern descendants of the Covenanters, beat the enemy away from

Strazeele about noon. At one time there were renewed attacks upon both the Queen's and the Cameronians. It is difficult to know which was the more admirable, the perseverance of the attacks or the tenacity of the defence. About five in the evening another fierce wave of storm-troops swept up from the south, and for one critical moment found a gap in the line. Two companies of the stalwart labourers of the 2nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion threw themselves into the breach, and the position was restored. When night fell, the whole line, though shaken, was still intact, and the assault had been a complete and a costly failure. Such operations, which littered the fields of Flanders with their dead, go far to explain the German weakness in the latter part of this campaign of 1918, and meant, as Mr Winston Churchill has shown, the final loss of the war.

April 15 was quiet in the morning on the front of Meteren, but the afternoon proved to be disastrous at Bailleul, since Ravelsberg and Mont de Lille were stormed by the Germans, with the result that the town had to be vacated. The 34th Division had been withdrawn from this position, and the 59th North Midlanders (Romer) had taken their place, but this division had, as already described, suffered extraordinary losses on the Somme front, and was in no condition to undertake another considerable operation. It had already been partly engaged in Flanders, and its losses had been increased. Under these conditions it is not surprising that the determined assault of the Germans should have forced the line. It would appear upon the map that this German success entirely outflanked the position of the 33rd Division, but fortunately a switch line had been constructed which was now manned by the remains of the 34th Division, while the 59th passed through it and concentrated in the rear. In this way an extension of the German success was prevented, in spite of great energy upon the part of the enemy, who had his patrols a kilometre to the west of the town before night. The 98th Brigade had now taken the place of the 19th in the line, the 4th King's Liverpools relieving the Queen's at the Windmill, while the 5th Scottish Rifles relieved the Cameronians near Strazeele.

In the efforts to stop the German advance from Bailleul the 147th Brigade of Cameron's 49th Yorkshire Division played an important part. This unit, containing the 4th, 6th, and 7th Battalions of the West Riding Regiment, found themselves in the front line on the evening of April 15, and held hard to a defensive position north-west of Bailleul. For two more days, April 16 and 17, they maintained the fight, inflicting and receiving heavy losses, but with the balance well in their favour. The dour Yorkshiremen made it clear at last to their equally dour assailants, that there was no road through their ranks, however they might thin them.

In the early morning of April 16 the enemy by a very sudden and violent attack broke through the switch line and made a lodgment in the eastern outskirts of Meteren. In spite of determined counter-attacks

made during the morning by the 1st Middlesex, the 4th King's, and the gallant New Zealand Trench Battalion, it was not possible to clear these houses to which the enemy's machine-gun parties clung with great bravery. Evening found them still in possession, but all efforts to debouch to the north and west had been stopped. The Australians were coming up on the right, so that the 33rd were able to shorten their line.

One farm west of Meteren was penetrated by a pushful party of Germans, but they were beaten out of it and destroyed by the 11th Field Company of sappers, who took a number of prisoners.

On April 17 the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had come into the line, relieving the 18th Middlesex Pioneers. About 10 a.m. this battalion was violently attacked, but drove back its assailants, as did the 34th Division on the left at about the same hour. At six in the evening another very severe attack developed upon the front of the 4th King's. For a time the line appeared to be penetrated, but the 1st Middlesex and units of the 133rd French Division, which had newly arrived, made a brisk counter-attack, and the situation was completely restored. It must indeed have been discomposing to the enemy to find that each success which he won, whether it was the taking of Neuve Eglise, of Bailleul, or later of Mount Kemmel, instead of being an opening which led to victory, was only a passage to further trials and further losses in an unending vista. The edge of the attack had now been completely blunted in this quarter. April 18 was quiet, and on the 19th, as the Australians and French were up, arrangements were made for drawing the 33rd out of the line which they had so splendidly made good. Their losses in the six days amounted to 145 officers and 3302 men. A few days later Monsieur Clemenceau arrived to convey to General Pinney and his battle-worn men the thanks of the French Republic for their iron defence of an essential line.

The 34th Division was last mentioned in this narrative when it fell back from Nieppe on April 12, and was afterwards compelled to take position on the right of the 25th Division in the De Seule neighbourhood. Among other losses during the retreat was a tried soldier, General Gore of the 101st Brigade.

On the 13th the enemy made several tentative attacks, but had no success. Late in the afternoon, however, he had succeeded in penetrating the line of the 25th Division between Neuve Eglise and De Seule. This success left the left flank of the 34th in the air. The 103rd Brigade had moved to the Ravelsberg Ridge, however, and so gave a definite line upon which to withdraw, extending from Bailleul Station to Crucifix Corner, which was a very important position. The 103rd Brigade was now on the left of the line, and the 102nd on the right. There followed, on April 15, a day of very severe fighting, the enemy making continual and very fiery attacks along the whole line, especially upon the three points, Steam Mill, Mont de Lille, and Crucifix Corner. The latter was carried by the enemy and then was retaken by the 9th Northumberland

Fusiliers. Mont de Lille was held by the 74th Brigade, and Steam Mill by the 147th, each the centre of a very deadly combat. Steam Mill was lost and yet again retaken by the Yorkshire Territorials who were aided by the 1st Middlesex from the 33rd Division. It was a long and arduous day of battle, inexpressibly trying to the wearied troops engaged. General Nicholson had under his hand six brigades that day, and senior officers upon the spot have testified to the masterly use which he made of them. That night the 59th came up into the front line and relieved the exhausted infantry. The relief, however, was but a momentary one, for on the afternoon of April 15 the Germans delivered yet another strong attack upon the Ravelsberg line, now held by the 49th, 59th, and 33rd Divisions. The 59th, as already described, fell back through the 34th Division, which again found itself in the front line. The two flank divisions both fell back to conform, and lined up with the remains of the 34th on the new line near St. Jans Cappel, which held firm from April 16.

On April 17 there was yet another day of heavy fighting upon this line, both flanks and the Meule Hook being strongly attacked, but the position was successfully held, and one more limit seemed to have been reached in the advance. The same six brigades under General Nicholson, reduced now to the strength of battalions, were still throwing an iron bar across the German path. From the right the 147th, 74th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, and 88th, all of them with set teeth, held on to the appointed line which receded under pressure and was yet again re-established. The 88th, under that remarkable young soldier, General Freyberg, had some especially hard work to do.

Late on April 20 this goodly fellowship in arms was dissolved, the three separate brigades returned to their divisions, and the 34th was relieved by the French. The artillery of the 38th Welsh Division fought throughout these awful days at the back of the infantry, who could not say too much for these guns or for General Topping who commanded them. Save two howitzers hit on April 9, no gun of this division was lost during all this close and severe fighting. South of the Lys many of the Royal Army Medical Corps remained with their wounded, and were taken prisoners, sharing with their charges the wretched treatment which was still meted out to British captives, especially behind the lines and before reaching the camps in Germany.

It should be added that the sappers of the 207th, 208th, 209th Field Companies and the 18th Northumberland Fusiliers Pioneers fought like ordinary infantry, and did splendid and essential service in holding the line.

We shall now turn to Jeffreys' 19th Division which we left on the 12th of April, holding on to the Wulverghem-Wytschaete front, with formidable enemies in front of them, but an even more formidable menace upon their right flank, whence came constant rumours that the enemy had at last penetrated the hard-pressed 25th Division, had occupied Neuve Eglise, and was pushing up along the lines of the

northward roads which would turn the whole of the position. Late at night on April 12 it had been ascertained that these reports were premature. The units of the 108th Ulster Brigade on the right of the line and connecting with the 25th Division had been penetrated and driven back, but were strengthened and stayed by the advent of the 8th Gloucesters. The situation was obscure on the right, and there was a dangerous gap which was filled early in the morning of April 13 by the energy and initiative of Captain Macintosh of the 94th Field Company Royal Engineers, who with a handful of the 10th Worcesters pushed his way in, and showed a bold front to the enemy.

The 2/5th Sherwood Foresters from the 178th Brigade (Stansfeld) of the 59th North Midland Division had also been ordered to face south and with the help of some machine-guns to hold off the turning movement from that quarter. All these movements were carried out in pitch darkness and amid a situation so confused that it was impossible to define which was the attacking line and which the line of defence. The general scheme of the battle in this area on the morning of April 13 was that the 25th Division, with the help of the 148th Brigade of Yorkshire Territorials, was fighting desperately in and around Neuve Eglise to the north of those units of the 100th Brigade, whose defence of the town has already been described. Next to them on the north lay the remains of the 108th Brigade, then the battalion of Sherwood Foresters, and then the 57th Brigade with the 8th Gloucesters on the southern flank. All the morning the roar of battle rose from Neuve Eglise where the German stormers fought hand to hand with the British infantry, who had been strengthened by the addition of that fine battalion, the 4th Shropshires from the 19th Division. The contest swung and swayed as fresh German troops were thrown into the struggle, but at last about half-past ten in the morning the attack was defeated, the German infantry fell back in sullen groups under the constant fire of the defenders, and the British line was pushed forward to the south of the village.

During the day, which was spent under heavy fire of artillery and the imminent menace of attack from the grey clouds seen gathering upon the Messines Ridge, the remaining battalions of the 178th Brigade, the 2/6th and the 7th Sherwood Foresters, were pushed into the line to relieve the exhausted 108th Brigade. It was clear that great German concentrations were being made upon Neuve Eglise, and that the village was in danger, so every arrangement was made to accommodate the line to the situation which would arise if that important point were taken, and the Wulverghem position became in consequence untenable. This new line would run from Meteren through Kemmel and Spy Farm to Spanbrockmolen.

The night of April 13 would have been quiet upon the front of the 19th Division had it not been for the constant pre-occupation and alarm caused by the varying fortunes of the fighting at Neuve Eglise, in which they were well aware that their own fate was concerned. The attack had

been renewed with fresh forces, and the 25th Division was extremely exhausted and could only be helped by other units which were in no better case. Again and again the Germans were deep in the village. Again and again they were evicted. It seemed to be the beginning of the end, however, when it was announced towards morning that the 25th Division was out of touch with the British troops upon its south flank, and that the Germans filtering through this gap had got to Nordhoek, west of Neuve Eglise, and were pushing to the north in the rear of the British position. By morning of April 14 Neuve Eglise had been abandoned, though it does not appear to have been solidly occupied by the enemy until midday, and snipers of both armies infested the ruins.

The loss of the village and of the low ridge which adjoined it had a most sinister effect upon the general strategic position to the north, and it was indeed fortunate that measures had been taken in advance to deal with the new situation. The 19th Division on April 14 found itself shelled heavily all day, while it was machine-gunned and trench-mortared from the right where its flank was now in the air. The position of the right-hand unit, the 4th Shropshires, south of the Neuve Eglise-Wulverghem Road, became impossible, as the Germans were in the rear, and indeed upon three sides of them.

Major Wingrove stuck to his position till midday, and no battalion could have given more cogent example of steadiness and fortitude in adversity. About 2 p.m. the Germans began to emerge in force from the village, beating up against the gallant Shropshires, who retired slowly and steadily, taking toll of their assailants, while the Sherwood Foresters of the 178th Brigade helped them to hold the enemy at arm's length.

As the day wore on the pressure became more insistent, until about seven in the evening Major Wingrove, of whom it has been stated by his General that " his tenacity, gallantry, and determination had held the much-tried and isolated line up to this time," was severely wounded. When his inspiring presence was removed there was a break to the north of Neuve Eglise, and the 25th Division, now reduced to a handful, were retreating westwards, while the 19th was being rolled up from the south.

General Jeffreys' force was now in so dangerous a position that it had actually to form a front to the west as well as to the east, a difficult manœuvre which was carried out with great coolness and skill by Colonel Sole of the 10th Worcesters, who was in charge of the new line, aided by Major Parkes of the 8th Gloucesters. The men were rallied, led into their new positions, and a dangerous penetration was narrowly averted. Later a new line was built up with the 49th Yorkshire Territorial Division in the place of the 25th Division on the right, reinforced by the 71st Brigade from the 6th Division. Next to them on the left was the 178th Sherwood Foresters Brigade, then the 108th Brigade, and finally the 58th Brigade, standing just in their old positions. The changes in

the British line were such that whereas it used to face east, it now faced almost south from near Meteren to Kemmel and Spanbrockmolen. The latter marked the point of junction upon the left with the right of the 9th Division. This line was not fully occupied till April 16.

On April 15 the intermediate positions were attacked, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, on the extreme left of the line, and the remains of the 6th Wiltshires being heavily engaged. No impression was made. At a different point the Germans had better results to show with the 108th Brigade, and made some progress, but the Sherwood Foresters once more mended the line. In the evening it was reported that the enemy had taken Crucifix Corner and were moving westwards. The strength of all battalions had now fallen to such a point, owing to constant shelling and incessant attacks, that it was very difficult to form more than a line of outposts. By evening of April 15 all the troops concerned, the remains of the 25th, the 49th, and the 19th Divisions were on the general line Meteren-Kemmel, facing south to the German advance, but also threatening the German right flank if they should press too far to the west. The remnant of the 108th Ulsters was relieved that night.

A heavy attack was made at 6 a.m. on the morning of April 16 upon the front of the 9th Division, which had withdrawn in conformity with the new northern line. The 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division had, as already stated, been put under the orders of General Tudor of the 9th Division, for his unit had been greatly weakened by the terrible losses of the South Africans. The North Countrymen of the 62nd fought desperately against great odds, but they were pushed out of Spanbrockmolen, and later out of Wytschaete.

They found a new line to the north, however, and the Germans tried in vain to bend it. The 58th Brigade had thrown back its own line to correspond, and joined up with the 62nd at Lacache Farm. Late that evening the worn and weary troops were deeply comforted by the sight of a small group of blue-clad men with classical helmets surveying the German lines through their glasses. It was the vanguard and the observers of the 28th and 133rd French Divisions which were coming up to the aid of the 9th.

It was clear that the commanding position of Kemmel, a hill which overlooks a wide range of country, was the immediate objective of the enemy in this quarter. About 10 a.m. on April 17 they put down a heavy barrage, and then pushed on in force with the intention of breaking in the British line and capturing the hill. The battalions attacked were the three Sherwood Foresters units, with the 8th North Staffords and 10th Warwicks of the 57th Brigade. This attack was a complete failure. Weary as they were the sturdy Englishmen stood fast to their lines, and beat their assailants back in blood and ruin. Machine-gun fire from the crest of the hill contributed to the result, and the guns also did their share. The only German gain was a post called Donegal Farm between the 19th and the 49th Divisions. A fresh attack was made upon the 10th

Warwicks in the evening, but this also was thrown back with heavy loss.

Meanwhile, on the northern sector, the 9th Division endeavoured to regain the ground which they had lost the day before, but their efforts had no great success, save that the 7th Seaforths of the 26th Brigade in a very brilliant advance fought their way into Wytschaete once more, and took possession of the village which they held until the following day, when the general position forced them to abandon it. On April 18 the fighting died down upon this front, and in the evening the gallant 19th Division, after most glorious service, was relieved by the French 28th Division, which took over the defence of Kemmel Hill. The total losses of this division had been nearly 4000 men, which, coming on the top of the heavy losses on the Somme in the previous fortnight, formed such a record as had seldom been equalled. Nor was their ordeal yet at an end, and many a stout battle was still to be fought before a rest should come.

All these stirring episodes, including the glorious destruction of the 4th Brigade of Guards, the formation of a permanent line by the Australians, the defence of Meteren and Bailleul by the 33rd and other divisions, the fighting at Neuve Eglise, and the defence of the Wytschaete and Messines fronts by the 19th and 9th Divisions with odd brigades to help them, all came within the area of Plumer's Second Army, which still consisted of the Ninth and Fifteenth Corps in the line. It should be mentioned that of fourteen divisions contained in this army on March 21 no less than twelve had been sent down to the Somme, while the remaining two, the 49th and 29th, were under orders to go at the moment when the great battle in Flanders broke out.

We shall now for a moment turn to the left flank of the First Army in the south which had so far, in spite of heavy attacks, lost very little ground. It has already been described how the 55th Lancashire Division stood like a rock at Givenchy and Festubert, while the 51st and afterwards the 4th Division struggled desperately to hold back the attack on their left. The former had been relieved on April 16 by Strickland's 1st Division, while the Highlanders and 4th Division also had been drawn out, and gave place to Deverell's 3rd Division, which had done so splendidly and lost so heavily upon the Somme.

After the repulse from the 55th Division, the Germans had contented themselves with shelling Givenchy, but they had pushed on, as already narrated, to the north of the position, and had got as far as Locon. The result was that the 1st Division had a long frontage which faced due north and a shorter frontage to the east.

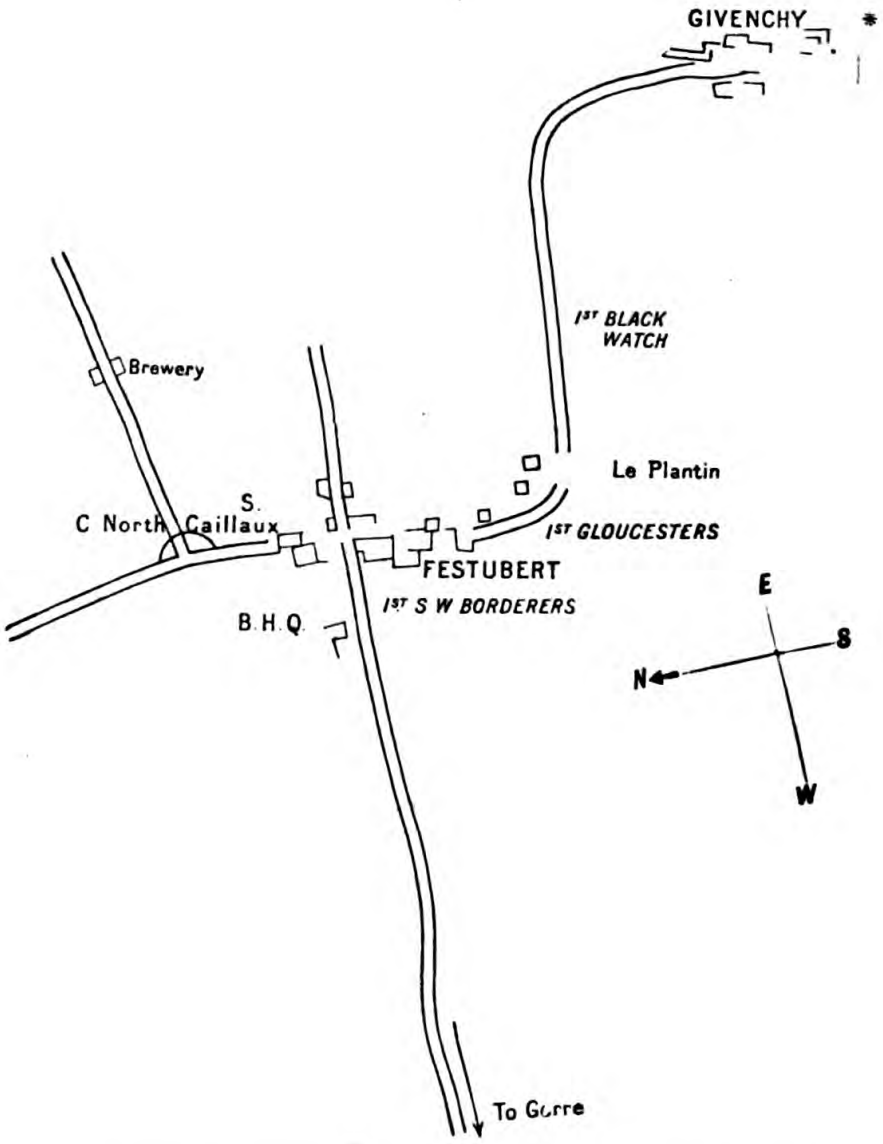
The 4th Division held the front at this period to the east of Robecq, being on the right of the 61st, with the 184th Brigade between them. It was used on April 14 for a counter-attack which was carried out at night, and which achieved a local success by the recapture of the village of Riez, with 150 prisoners. This operation was carried out by the 11th

Brigade, with the 1st Hants and 1st Somersets in the lead, and was a very workmanlike little action which was the more valuable when coming at a period of general recoil.

On April 18 the new German attack upon the 1st Division at Givenchy began with a bombardment of great violence. Their plan upon this day was to carry Givenchy and Festubert by storm, and to win the line of the canal as far west as Gorre. They would then capture the high ground at Hinges, and so command the canal right up to Robecq. No doubt they calculated, and with justice, that if they could overcome the men on the spot they would find that the reserves had all been drawn away to the north. Their plan was wrecked, however, by the fact that the men on the spot were not to be overcome. Eighteen German battalions moved forward to the attack, and all of them suffered heavily without gaining any appreciable advantage. So heavy was the slaughter that many German companies were reduced before evening to twenty or thirty effectives, while the three battalions of one regiment were left under the respective command of one lieutenant and two sub-lieutenants. There have been few more costly failures, considering the scale of the operations, in the whole campaign.

The infantry attack was on the two flanks of the British line which looked northwards, the one attack being in front of Hinges and the other covering the space from Loisne to the south of Givenchy, including Festubert. Three German regiments, the 98th, 361st, and 202nd Reserve, advanced in this quarter. They had constructed two bridges during the night to cross a broad ditch in front of the British line, but machine-guns were trained upon them, and the troops which tried to cross were exposed to heavy losses, which left both the bridges and the banks heaped with bodies. The mist, the smoke, and the dust from the shells were so thick, however, that a hundred yards was the limit of visibility. The German shell-storm continued to be very heavy, but the British were snugly ensconced in trenches with a parapet and parados, both of which were several feet thick, so that no very great harm was done. The worst losses were at the advanced keep at Festubert, which was blown to bits, only eight men of the garrison surviving.

The 1st Division had two brigades in the line, the 1st on the right holding from Givenchy to Le Plantin, and the 3rd to the left from Le Plantin to Festubert. The fighting was particularly severe in the latter sector of the line. As the garrison looked north they saw through the rising mist about 8.15 in the morning the enemy advancing in small groups of light machine-guns, coming over a slight rise some 900 yards east of Festubert. These troops pushed bravely on, though they had no cover but shell-holes, and they suffered very severely. The 1st Gloucesters, under Colonel Tweedie, on the right and the 1st South Wales Borderers on the left, battalions with the halo of the first Ypres battle round their heads, held the line and littered the open ground with their steady rifle-fire. There was a gap in the defences at a point called



DEFENCE OF GIVENCHY BY THE 1ST DIVISION, APRIL 18, 1918

* This rough plan was drawn by an officer engaged in the action.

Willow Road, and into this the enemy poured more quickly than they could be shot down. Their rush carried them through, and into the houses and gardens of Le Plantin. A company of the Gloucesters under Captain Handford was cut in two, but both sections stood fast, Lieutenant Hall on one side, and the company commander on the other, closing in on the centre and preventing reinforcement, while Lieutenant Gosling attacked with the reserve company. The Germans ran field-guns right up, but the crews were shot down. So matters remained until the afternoon, the stormers being in the British position, but so pinned down by rifle-fire that they could not raise their heads. On the other hand, German snipers in the houses and trees were very deadly to any runners or other exposed defenders. Whilst matters were in this stage in the Le Plantin area, they were even more critical at Festubert. The enemy, moving up behind a good barrage, overran a part of the South Wales Borderers and forced their way into an orchard just south of the keep known as Route A. Thence they tried to get into the rear of the defence. About eleven Sergeant-Major Biddle of D Company ran the gauntlet to Brigade Headquarters to explain the situation and ask for help. Captain Smith got together a party of odds and ends, under twenty in number, who made their way up the west side of Festubert and prevented the extension of this dangerous German movement.

By two o'clock the attack was definitely defeated, and by three the Germans were retiring along the whole line. They found it, however, very difficult to disengage themselves from their advance positions. They tried to crawl back from shell-hole to shell-hole, while the British stood up all along the parapets and shot them in scores. Absolutely demoralised, many of the Germans threw away their arms. Their retirement probably cost as much as their advance. Those who had got into Le Plantin had to run the gauntlet between two halves of the Gloucesters in getting out, and few of them escaped. The performance of the 1st Gloucesters was remarkable, for they were at one time attacked front, flank, and rear by a force estimated at four battalions. It is recorded that the barrels of their new Lewis guns were worn smooth by the intensity of one day of battle.

The 1st Brigade on the right of the defence from the canal to Le Plantin was also heavily attacked, though their ordeal was not so long or severe as that of their comrades on the left. The 1st Black Watch, the flank battalion next to the Gloucesters, had some especially heavy fighting, but kept their ground intact, and did their full share towards the victorious result. The whole affair was a fine feat of arms, for the German gun power had greatly increased since April 9, while the repulse was even more decisive. It proved to be a final one, as the Germans made no further attempt to force their passage to Bethune. During all this long fight the 3rd Division beyond Loisne on the left was holding the line firmly against all German pressure. So ended April 18.

Before the evening of the 20th all outlying posts had been cleared of the Germans.

On the same date, April 18, there was a sharp action to the immediate left of this Givenchy fighting, when the 4th Division held up a German attack, and afterwards countered, capturing the Bois Paquan in the Robecq sector. Two hundred prisoners were the fruits of this action, but they were dearly bought, for many officers and men were killed or wounded. Among the former were two grand soldiers, Colonel Armitage of the 1st Hants and Brigade-Major Harston of the 11th Brigade. This forward movement was continued later by the 61st Division, who did very good work on April 23, General Pagan of the 184th Brigade being a leader in the advance, which was notable for a fine attack by the 2/5th Gloucesters under Colonel Lawson. Shortly afterwards General Colin Mackenzie of this division, who had done splendid work from the first days of the war, was wounded while reconnoitring in front of his line and had to return to England.

There now followed a short pause in the German attack, and we may look around and follow the general line of the defence at this period before the action was renewed. On the extreme north of the Second Army the Belgians had relieved the 30th Division, and thus shortened the British line. Then came the 9th and 21st British Divisions near Wytschaete. South and west of this point the front line had been taken over by General de Mitry with the Thirty-sixth French Corps, which now succeeded the Ninth British Corps in this sector. The 34th and 133rd French Divisions were in the line, with the Second French Cavalry Corps in co-operation. This most welcome and indeed vital reinforcement had taken over Kemmel, Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, Mont Vidaigne, and Mont des Cats, the range of kopjes which screen the Ypres plain from the south. On the right of the French was the weary Fifteenth Corps, with the 1st Australian Division as the flank unit near Meteren. The British divisions in the north were in close support to the French, the 19th and 34th being near Poperinghe, and the 25th behind Kemmel. Such was the general position in that northern sector, to which the battle was now more and more confined. Before following the further events it should be mentioned that on April 17 the Belgians in the neighbourhood of Bixschoote had been exposed to a very severe attack from four German divisions, which would have shaken the whole line of defence had it succeeded. It was met, however, with very great courage, and the Belgians proved themselves to be valiant soldiers, well worthy to be admitted upon entirely equal terms into the battle-line of the larger nations. They fought the action with heroic gallantry, and gave the Germans a severe check, killing some 2000 of them, and taking 700 prisoners with several guns. It was a notable performance, and the more welcome in a period of such stress.

On April 25, at an early hour of the morning, the Germans made an attack upon the northern line from a point north of Bailleul to the east

of Wytschaete, a distance of about ten miles. The whole of this front, save the extreme eastern portion, was held by the French, who made a very gallant resistance to as fierce an assault as the war has seen. The main German objective was the very important height of Mount Kemmel, a bluff five hundred feet high, wooded upon the sides. This was held by the 28th French Division, who fought most gallantly, but were finally overpowered by the four German divisions which were brought against it, including a division of Alpine troops, especially trained for hill fighting. The Allied line was pushed back along its whole front, Dranoutre and St. Eloi falling into the hands of the Germans, together with 6000 prisoners. It was the darkest hour of the Flemish battle, and was the more depressing as it came after a week of equilibrium in which the tide of invasion seemed to have been finally dammed. The German infantry had penetrated through the joining point of the French and British near Wytschaete, and at the same time through the French at Dranoutre, so that they were able to assail Kemmel Hill from both sides. It had fallen by nine o'clock. The 9th Division in the north was forced to fall back upon the line of La Clytte, after enduring heavy losses in a combat lasting nine hours, during which they fought with their usual tenacity, as did the 64th and 146th Brigades, who fought beside them.

The Germans, having got through the French upon the right flank, had got round to the rear of the 27th Brigade, with the result that the 12th Royal Scots were almost entirely destroyed, and the Scottish Borderers were also very hard hit. None the less, with the enemy in front and rear, the Lowland infantry held out, finally making their way back in orderly fashion during the night. Farther north the line of the 64th and the 146th Brigades was broken and the remnants reformed in Cheapside, where their reserve battalions thickened their array. The 26th Highland Brigade threw back all attacks in front, and formed a defensive flank to the south, withdrawing at leisure and in order after dark.

Even the 9th Division has seldom had a harder day, or a more honourable one. On the 26th General Cameron of the 49th Division took over this sector, and the 9th went out of the line with very special messages of thanks from both the British and the French marshals.

Some small British units were involved in the disaster of Mount Kemmel as they were on the hill helping in the defence. Among these were the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers (Pioneers), the 456th Field Company R.E., and part of the 49th Battalion Machine-gun Corps, all drawn from the 49th Division.

A determined effort was at once made to retrieve the situation, and a counter-attack upon the new German line was ordered for 3 a.m. on April 26. It was carried out by the 39th French Division on the right, and by the 25th Division (Bainbridge) on the left. The French advance was held by severe machine-gun fire on the line of the Kemmel Brook. The British advancing from La Clytte had more success, but were

unable to maintain the ground which they had won. They went forward with Griffin's 7th Brigade on the left and Bethell's 74th on the right. The water was up to the men's waists as in the cold of the early morning they splashed their way across the Kemmel Brook. It was dismal and desperate work, but the spirit of the men, in spite of all that this division had endured, was still high, and they beat down all obstacles until they had forced their way into the village of Kemmel, where they secured 200 prisoners. Their own losses were heavy, however, including Colonel Cade of the 1st Wilts, Colonel Stewart of the 4th South Staffords, Colonel Reade of the 10th Chesters, and several other senior officers. It was now found that the flanks of both brigades were in the air, and as the losses were increasing through the enfilade fire, they were ordered to withdraw. It was still early, and the morning mist screened what would otherwise have been a very murderous operation. The final line held by the 25th Division was about 1000 yards in advance of the starting-point.

It should be remembered that in this difficult and gallant night attack against a victorious enemy the young 19-year-old recruits, who now made up a considerable proportion of the decimated division, showed a very fine spirit and kept up with the veterans beside them.

Having repulsed the counter-attack of the French and of the 25th Division, the enemy tried with great energy to improve his advantage, and Von Armin thundered during the whole of April 26 against the Allied line, trying especially to drive in the northern sector at Wytschaete and Eloi. The fighting on this line was very desperate during the day, and in spite of every effort the troops were pushed back from their forward positions. The strain fell chiefly upon the remains of the 26th Brigade of the 9th Division, the 21st Division, the 21st Brigade of the 30th Division, and the 39th Division. The 21st Brigade defended the northern portion of the line, and one of the outstanding feats of the day was the defence of the Old Bluff from morning to dusk by that grand battalion, the 2nd Bedfords. Farther south the two points called the Brasserie and the Spoil-Bank were eventually won by the Germans, but they were defended with great determination by units of the 39th Division, the 1st Herts, the Cambridgeshires, and the Sussex battalions. It was a day of struggle, and the most that the Allies could say was that they had prevented a break in their line. That night there was another general withdrawal along the front which brought the Allied position into very much the same trenches as had been occupied in the autumn of 1914. Such a result of four years fighting might well have caused depression, and yet these brave hearts never for one instant relinquished their high hopes of the victory to come.

The enemy had gained a spectacular advantage at Kemmel, and high hopes were raised in Germany that some great ulterior result would come of it, but in spite of strong efforts it was not destined that there should be any particular consequences from their victory. Observation can be

obtained from a balloon as easily as from a hill, and the space upon the summit was so limited that the Allied guns could make it almost untenable. Strong efforts were at once made to push on upon the line Locre-La Clytte, which was held by the French. They repulsed three strong attacks on April 27, and though in the evening the Germans got into Locre, they were thrown out again by our tenacious Allies. Again on the morning of April 29 the enemy attacked along the whole line from Mont Vidaigne to Zillebeke Lake. This attack was repulsed with severe loss to the enemy, and must have gone far to convince him that he was not destined to develop his Kemmel success. The battle involved not only the front of the Thirty-sixth French Corps, but also that of the 25th, 49th, and 21st Divisions, all of which stood like a wall and beat off every assault. These attacks extended from north of Kemmel to Voormezeele. The 25th Division was next to the French on the right of the line, in the British centre was the 49th, while on the left the 21st Division connected up with the 9th, which was out of the direct line of attack.

The 75th Brigade formed the fighting line of the 25th Division on this day of battle. They found themselves on the western side of the Kemmel Brook, while the 3rd Prussian Guards lay on the farther side and advanced to the attack. To do this they had to pass over the smooth slope which led down to the stream, and they fell in heaps in the attempt. They huddled for shelter behind a group of huts, but the guns got on to them and blew them to pieces. Four distinct attacks were all equally murderous and unsuccessful. The 8th Border Battalion was particularly conspicuous in the defence. Next to them, near Ridge Wood, were the well-tried Yorkshiremen of the 49th. For some reason the Germans at this point advanced in close formation with bayonets fixed. Such tactics received the slating which they deserved. Both the West Riding Battalions of the 147th Brigade and the York and Lancasters of the 148th were in the firing line, and they amply repaid themselves for many a distressful hour. Once for three minutes the Germans made a lodgment, but at the end of that time a rush of bayonet-men pitch-forked them out of their only gain. The 21st Division held the line above Ridge Wood and on towards Voormezeele. Upon them came the heaviest attack of all, and the slaughter of the Germans, coming on at a range of 400 yards under machine-gun and rifle fire, was very murderous. The Leicester Brigade did particularly well this day, and so did the worn 89th Brigade of the 30th Division, which had come under the orders of General Campbell of the 21st Division. The German attack struck very hard against the front of this unit near the Brasserie on the Vierstraat-Ypres Road, and all three battalions, the 17th, 18th and 19th King's Liverpools, had desperate fighting, the 17th coming in for particularly rough treatment. It had each flank penetrated and one company surrounded, but still managed to shake itself clear.

The Belgians were also involved in this widespread attack, and both their lines in the north and those of the French round the Sharpenberg and Mont Rouge were held intact. This severe check, inflicted upon a force which was not less than twelve divisions, marked the beginning of the collapse of the great German offensive in Flanders, which had now lasted for twenty days of constant battle.

Early in May the Franco-British line still lay from Kemmel village in the south to Ypres in the north, taking Voormezeele upon the way. If the Germans could succeed in bursting through here they would partly encircle Ypres, and would probably cause an evacuation, an event which might be of no great military importance, but could not fail to have a moral and political repercussion. Ypres stood like an oriflamme of war amid the ranks of the British Army. Here it was that in October 1914 they had said to the Germans, " Thus far and no farther ! " Now in the fourth year the words still held good. If after all the efforts, all the self-sacrifice, all the good blood so cheerfully shed, it was now to pass from their hands, no consoling lectures upon strategy could soften the heavy blow which it would be to those who relaxed the grip which their comrades had held so firmly. Yet it was this and no less which was at stake in these early days of May. A crushing German victory with the capture of the coast was no longer to be feared. But an important local success, which would reverberate through the world, was still well within their hopes and their power.

At the moment of this important attack the southern sector of this line was held by the 129th and 32nd French Divisions, the latter being next to the British just to the south of Vierstraat. To the north of the French lay the 30th Composite Brigade (Currie), which had been formed by telescoping the remains of the 30th Division into a single unit. It had two splendid though attenuated regular battalions, the 2nd Bedfords and 2nd Yorkshires in the line with the 17th King's Liverpools in immediate support. Still farther to the north lay Pinney's well-tried 33rd Division with the 98th Brigade (Maitland) in front. Their battle line consisted of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the 4th King's Liverpools, and the 1st Middlesex, from south to north. Farther north still from the Voormezeele region to the southern suburbs of ruined Ypres lay Marden's 6th Division which was not involved to any great degree in the fighting.

In the centre of the position was a well-marked line of trees forming the edge of Ridge Wood. Behind the British line was the village of Dickebush with the Dickebush Lake. These two points were the first objectives of the German attack, which broke with great violence at 7.30 in the morning of May 8. It was preceded by a lavish use of mustard gas shells, a hellish device which was used more and more from this time forward. This poison may be kept out of the lungs by a mask, but cannot be kept from the body, where it raises such blisters and irritation as may prove fatal in the same fashion as a bad burn. When enough has

been poured into any position it can be made untenable by troops, since in heavy weather it hangs about for days, and has the unpleasant property of appearing to have vanished and yet becoming active again when exposed to moisture. Many a battalion which has crossed a dew-moistened field within the battle area has had reason afterwards to regret it.

Coming after so deadly a preparation the first rush of the Germans met with success, and they penetrated the line, both of the 32nd French Division and of the 30th Composite Brigade. Their advance brought them roughly to the south end of Dickebush Lake, whereupon the 98th Brigade threw back a flank from Ridge Wood to the lake, so as to cover themselves from a southern attack.

At seven in the evening a strong attempt was made to re-establish the line, Mayne's 19th Brigade being thrown into the battle. The counter-attack was made by the 1st Cameronians, advancing across the Hallebast-La Clytte Road, but they were in full view of the enemy whose machine-gun fire was sweeping the very grass from the ground in front of their feet. They could not get forward, and many of them never got back. A fine advance was made, however, by the composite King's Liverpools with the help of some of the Bedfords. It actually reached the old front line, but had lost so heavily that it was unable to retain it in the face of a renewed German assault, but stuck on as near as it could.

It should be explained that this King's Liverpool unit was really the old 89th Brigade which had been worn down to such an extent that the 17th, 18th, and 19th King's were now compressed into one battalion, 750 strong. Their heavy losses upon the Somme had been greatly increased in Flanders, and included Colonel Watson, the gallant and veteran leader of the 17th Battalion. Now under Colonel Rollo their sentiment was that of one of their officers who wrote, " We are still the 89th Brigade, call us what they like and put us in what division they please. The old spirit remains as ever." This was the unit whose swan song is here recorded. Next day the survivors made good their line, and handed it over intact to their relief.

To the north of this composite battalion (which was independent of the 30th Divisional Brigade already mentioned) the counter-attack was made by the 5th Scottish Rifles near Dickebush Lake, and by the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at Ridge Wood. Both of these battalions won home and gained their full objectives. The great German local effort, urged by four strong divisions, the 52nd and 56th in front, the 29th and 31st in support, had been held. Each of these convulsive efforts of Von Armin's tired army brought the final equilibrium and ultimate retirement more close.

The fighting died down entirely in this quarter, and the 14th French Division took it over from the British. Indeed this day of strenuous battle may be said to have marked the end of the great Battle of the Lys, which had raged ever since April 9. The Germans had been fought to

a standstill. They had in the course of a month's fighting won ground, prisoners, and guns, but it is possible in winning a battle to lose a war, and this is exactly what they had accomplished. An expensive and barren success had been achieved by a lavish use of their reserves, and on the day when those reserves were vitally needed, they had been wastefully strewn over the plains of the Somme and of Flanders. Never had the British Army been more severely tried than at this time when their General issued his famous " back to the wall " appeal, and never had the individual soldier risen to a greater height. " The British Army," says an Italian observer who was present throughout the crisis, " impresses one with its inherent moral soundness. The German," he adds, " uses almost exclusively machine-guns and bombs, but the Englishman loves his rifle, and knows much better how to use it. He is a better marksman, he is more contemptuous of danger, and he is calmer, steadier, and feels himself individually superior to his enemy. The cheerfulness of the men is due in great measure to the noble, dignified, serene example of their officers, so simple in their gentlemanly bearing, so conscious of the reasons and the end of the war, so proud of their country and of its unshakeable prestige." It is a noble tribute, but none who know the men could say that it was a strained one.

No account of the battle of the Lys can close without a word as to the splendid work done by General Plumer, never wearied, never flurried, during those fateful days. Hardly less arduous was the experience of General Horne in the southern sector. The three corps commanders, too, who bore the brunt, and very especially General de Lisle, who only took over his command on the second day of the battle, will always be associated with one of the most desperate incidents of the war. But above and behind all is the commanding and heroic figure of Douglas Haig, impassive, serene, still working as he had worked four years before, at the mending of broken lines and the bracing of weak ones, until the hour should strike for his tremendous revenge.

Here, as on the Somme, the operations have been subdivided by the official authorities, and the one great Battle of the Lys is broken up into the Battles of Estaires, Messines (1918), Hazebrouck, Bailleul, Kemmel Ridge, and the Scharpenberg.

CHAPTER LIII

THE BATTLES OF THE CHEMIN DES DAMES AND OF THE ARDRES [1]

May 27-June 2 1918

The rest cure of the Aisne—Attack upon the 50th Division—Upon the 8th—Upon the 21st—5th Battery R.F.A.—Glorious Devons—Adventure of General Rees—Retreat across the Aisne—Over the Vesle—Arrival of 19th Division—Desperate fighting—Success of 4th Shropshires—General Pellé's tribute—General prospect of the Allies midway through 1918.

It had been determined to rest four of the crippled British divisions which had been heavily engaged first on the Somme and then in the Battle of the Lys. These divisions were the 25th, 21st, 8th, and 50th, all forming the Ninth Corps (Hamilton-Gordon). Each of them had been cut to pieces twice in the course of little more than a month, and should by every pre-war precept have been incapable of exertion for a long time to come. They were reconstituted with numbers of recruits under fresh officers, both leaders and men with slight experience of actual warfare. They were then sent, *via* the outskirts of Paris, the direct route being under fire from the German guns in front of Amiens, and they were thrust into the French line just north of the Aisne in the region of the Chemin des Dames. The intention was to give them repose, but the change was looked upon with misgiving by the divisional generals, one of whom wrote to the present chronicler at the time saying, " They think it will be a rest cure, but to my mind it is more likely to be a fresh centre of storm."

As a matter of fact the Germans, who had now made two colossal thrusts, the one on March 21 on the Somme, the other at the Lys on April 9, were planning a third desperate attack at this very point. The line at this position had few natural advantages and was not strongly held. In the opinion of British generals it would have been wise if it could have been drawn south of the Aisne, since a broad river is a good friend in one's front, but a treacherous enemy in one's rear. There were reasons, however, why it was not easy for the French to abandon the north bank, for they had spent much time, labour, and human life in capturing Craonne, the California Plateau, and other positions within that area, and it was a dreadful thing to give them up unless they were

[1] Map facing page 800 is essential for this narrative.

beaten out of them. They held on, therefore—and the British divisions, now acting as part of the French army, were compelled to hold on as well. The 50th Northern Territorial Division had a frontage of 7000 yards from near Craonne to Ville-aux-Bois, including the famous California Plateau ; on their immediate right was the Regular 8th Division, and to the right of that in the Berry-au-Bac sector, where the lines cross the Aisne, was the 21st Division, this British contingent forming the Ninth Corps, and having French troops on either side of them. The 25th Division was in reserve at Fismes to the south of the river. The total line of attack from Crecy-au-Mont to Berry was about thirty miles, a quarter of which—the eastern quarter—was held by the British.

Confining our attention to the experience of the British troops, which is the theme of these pages, we shall take the northern unit and follow its fortunes on the first day with some detail, remarking in advance that the difficulties and the results were much the same in the case of each of the three front divisions, so that a fuller account of one may justify a more condensed one of the others. The position along the whole line consisted of rolling grass plains where the white gashes in the chalk showed out the systems of defence. The Germans, on the other hand, were shrouded to some extent in woodland, which aided them in the concentration of their troops. The defences of the British were of course inherited, not made, but possessed some elements of strength, especially in the profusion of the barbed wire. On the other hand there were more trenches than could possibly be occupied, which is a serious danger when the enemy comes to close grips. The main position ran about 5000 yards north of the Aisne, and was divided into an outpost line, a main line of battle, and a weak system of supports. The artillery was not strong, consisting of the divisional guns with some backing of French 75's and heavies.

The 50th Division, like the others, had all three brigades in the line. To the north Rees' 150th Brigade defended Craonne and the slab-sided California Plateau. On their right, stretching across a flat treeless plain, lay Martin's 151st Brigade. To the right of them again was Riddell's 149th Brigade, which joined on near Ville-aux-Bois to the 24th Brigade (Grogan) of the 8th Division. It may give some idea of the severity with which the storm broke upon the 50th Division, when it is stated that of the three brigadiers mentioned one was killed, one was desperately wounded, and a third was taken before ten o'clock on the first morning of the attack.

The German onslaught, though very cleverly carried out, was not a complete surprise, for the experienced soldiers in the British lines, having already had two experiences of the new methods, saw many danger signals in the week before the battle. There was abnormal aircraft activity, abnormal efforts also to blind our own air service, occasional registering of guns upon wire, and suspicious movements on the roads. Finally with the capture of prisoners in a raid the suspicions

became certainties, especially when on the evening of May 26 the Germans were seen pouring down to their front lines. No help arrived, however, for none seems to have been immediately available. The thin line faced its doom with a courage which was already tinged with despair. Each British brigade brought its reserve battalion to the north bank of the Aisne, and each front division had the call upon one brigade of the 25th Division. Otherwise no help was in sight.

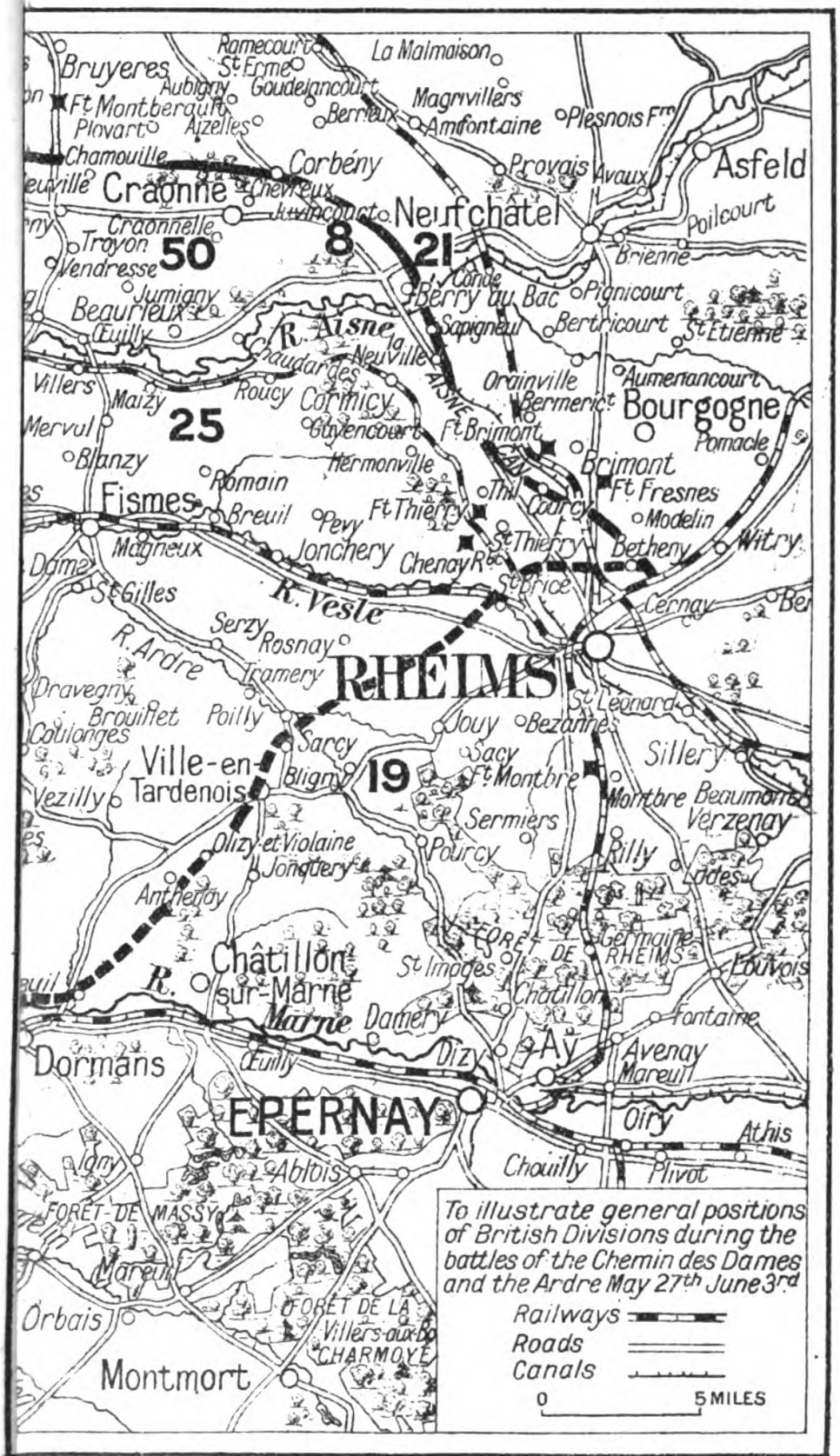
The bombardment began early in the morning of May 27, and was said by the British veterans to be the heaviest of the war. Such an opinion meant something, coming from such men. The whole area from Soissons to Rheims was soaked with gas and shattered with high explosives, so that masks had to be worn ten kilometres behind the lines. Life was absolutely impossible in large areas. The wire was blown to shreds and the trenches levelled. The men stuck it, however, with great fortitude, and the counter-barrage was sufficiently good to hold up the early attempts at an infantry advance. The experiences of the 149th Infantry Brigade may be taken as typical. The front battalion was the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers under Colonel Gibson. Twice the enemy was driven back in his attempt to cross the shattered wire. At 4 a.m. he won his way into the line of outposts, and by 4.30 was heavily pressing the battle line. His tactics were good, his courage high, and his numbers great. The 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, under Colonel Temperley, held the main line, and with the remains of the 4th made a heroic resistance. At this hour the Germans had reached the main lines both of the 151st Brigade on the left and of the 24th on the right. About five o'clock the German tanks were reported to have got through on the front of the 8th Division and to be working round the rear of the 149th Brigade. Once again we were destined to suffer from the terror which we had ourselves evolved. The main line was now in great confusion and breaking fast. The 5th Northumberland Fusiliers were pushed up as the last reserve. There was deep shadow everywhere save on the California Plateau, where General Rees, with his three Yorkshire battalions, had repulsed repeated assaults. The French line had gone upon his left, however, and the tanks, with German infantry behind them, had swarmed round to his rear, so that in the end he and his men were all either casualties or captives.

Colonel Gibson meanwhile had held on most tenaciously with a nucleus of his Fusiliers at a post called Centre Marceau. The telephone was still intact, and he notified at 5.45 that he was surrounded. He beat off a succession of attacks with heavy loss to the stormers, while Temperley was also putting up a hopeless but desperate fight. Every man available was pushed up to their help, and they were ordered to hold on. A senior officer reporting from Brigade Headquarters says: "I could hear Gibson's brave, firm voice say in reply to my injunctions to fight it out, 'Very good, sir. Good-bye!'" Shortly afterwards this gallant man was shot through the head while cheering his men to a final effort.

The experience of the Durhams of the 151st had been exactly the same as that of the Northumberlands of the 149th. Now the enemy were almost up to the last line. The two brigadiers, Generals Martin and Riddell, together with Major Tweedy of the reserve battalion, rushed out to organise a local defence, drawing in a few scattered platoons for the purpose. As they did so they could see the grey figures of the Germans all round them. It was now past six o'clock, and a clear sunny morning. As these officers ran forward, a shell burst over them, and General Martin fell dead, while Riddell received a terrible wound in the face. In spite of this, he most heroically continued to rally the men and form a centre of resistance so as to cover Pontavert as long as possible. The 5th Northumberland Fusiliers with a splendid counter-attack had regained the position of Centre d'Evreux, and for the moment the pressure was relieved. It was clear, however, both to General Jackson and to General Heneker that both flanks were exposed, and that their general position was an acute salient far ahead of the Allied line. The 21st Division was less affected since it already lay astride of the river, but the French line on the left was back before midday as far as Fismes, so that it was absolutely necessary if a man were to be saved to get the remains of the two British divisions across the Aisne at once.

Pontavert, with its bridges over river and canal, was in the hands of the Germans about 7 a.m., but the bridge-heads at Concevreux and other places were firmly held, and as the men got across, sometimes as small organised units, sometimes as a drove of stragglers, they were rallied and lined up on the south bank. The field-guns had all been lost, but the heavies and machine-guns were still available to hold the new line. Some of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers were entirely cut off, but fought their way through the Germans, and eventually under Major Leatheart reported themselves at the bridges.

The 150th Brigade, under General Rees, which was defending the Craonne position, had endured an even heavier ordeal than the others. It was on the extreme left of the British line, on the right of the French 118th Regiment. This latter seems to have been entirely destroyed or taken early in the attack. The British Brigade lay in front of Craonne upon the edge of the California Plateau, with the 5th Yorks on the right and the 4th East Yorks on the left. The 4th Yorks were in brigade reserve in Craonelle immediately behind the fighting line. The Germans got through the French on the left, also through a gap down the Corbeny railroad on the right of the 150th and left of the 151st Brigade. Colonel Thomson of the 5th Yorks, a very brave and experienced soldier who was said by those who knew him best to be worth half a battalion in his own person upon the day of battle, was in charge on the right, and hung on with tooth and claw to every inch of ground, but his little force already greatly weakened by the cannonade, was unable to resist the terrible onslaught of the German infantry. Two counter-attacks were attempted by reserve companies, but each was swept away. The Germans


Bruyeres
Ramecourt
St Erme
La Malmaison
Aubigny
Goudelancourt
Magnivillers
Ft Montberquit
Berrieux
Amfontaine
Plesnois Frm
Plovart
Aizelles
Chamouille
Corbény
Provais
Avaux
Asfeld
Craonne
Chevreux
Craonnelle
Neufchatel
Poilcourt
Trayon
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50
8
21
Brienne
Jumigny
Conde
Berry au Bac
Pignicourt
Beaurieux
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R. Aisne
Sapigneul
Bertricourt
St Etienne
Chaudardes
Villers
Maizy
Roucy
Cormicy
Orainville
Aumenancourt
Bermericl
Bourgogne
Mervul
25
Guyencourt
Ft Brimont
Pomacle
Blanzy
Hermonville
Bcimont
Romain
Fismes
Breuil
Pevy
Ft Thierry
Ft Fresnes
Modelin
Magneux
Jonchery
Chenay
Betheny
Witry
Dame
St Gilles
R. Vesle
St Brice
Cernay
Serzy
Rosnay
R. Ardre
Tramery
RHEIMS
Dravegny
St Leonard
Brouillet
Poilly
Jouy
Bezanne
Coulonges
Sarcy
Sacy
Sillery
Ville-en-
Tardenois
Bligny
19
Ft Montbre
Montbre
Beaumont
Vezilly
Sermiers
Verzenay
Olizy et Violaine
Pourcy
Rilly
Jonquery
Antheuil
Châtillon
sur-Marne
St Imoges
Germaine
R. Marne
Damery
Fontaine
Dormans
Diz
Ay
Avenay
Mareuil
Œuilly
EPERNAY
Oiry
Athis
Jony
Ablois
Chouilly
Pivot
FORET DE MASSY
Mareuil
Orbais
FORET DE LA CHARMOYE
Villers-aux-Bo
Montmort
To illustrate general positions of British Divisions during the battles of the Chemin des Dames and the Ardre May 27th June 3rd
Railways
Roads
Canals
0
5 MILES

were on the flank in Craonne and enfiladed the line with a machine-gun. Colonel Thomson's last words over the telephone to Headquarters were, " Good-bye, General, I'm afraid I shall not see you again." He was killed shortly afterwards. Major Haslett of the East Yorks made an equally desperate resistance on the other flank, and finally he and a wounded sergeant-major were captured with their empty pistols in their hands. Meanwhile the Brigade Headquarters at La Hutte were practically surrounded and under a terrible fire. General Rees endeavoured to get into touch with his only remaining battalion, the 4th Yorks, but they had already been overrun by the enemy. Colonel Kent, with sixteen men, had thrown himself into a house in Craonelle, and had fought until the whole party were killed or wounded. The enemy was now several miles to the rear of the few survivors of the 150th Brigade, who endeavoured to make their way back as best they might. It gives some idea of how completely they were cut off that General Rees, after many adventures and escapes, was finally stopped and taken by encountering the main line of the German traffic coming down the road which he had to cross. This was late in the day of May 27, when the enemy was well across the Aisne. It may be of interest to add that General Rees was taken before the Kaiser next morning, whom he found upon the California Plateau. The emperor behaved with courtesy to his prisoner, though he could not refrain from delivering a monologue of the usual type upon the causes of the war and the iniquity of Great Britain in fulfilling her treaty obligations.

Some account must now be given of the experiences of Heneker's 8th Division which occupied the centre of the British line. This division, like the others, had been sent to the Aisne for a rest cure after its terrific exertions upon the Somme. Full of raw soldiers and inexperienced officers it would have seemed to be entirely unfit for battle, but it had the two solid assets of experienced leading in the senior officers and great regimental traditions, that ever present stand-by of the British Army. Young as were the troops they took General Heneker's orders literally when he issued the command that the posts were to be held at all costs, and, as a consequence, hardly a single battalion existed as a fighting unit after the engagement.

The British field-batteries were mostly to the north of the river, and were greatly damaged by the preliminary German fire. They were accurately located by the enemy, and were smothered in poison and steel. So were the Gernicourt defences, which formed an important tactical position with a permanent garrison on the right of the division. All three brigades were in the line, the 25th on the right, the 24th in the centre, and the 23rd on the left. The outpost line was utterly overwhelmed in the first rush, the experience being much the same as on March 21, for each small body of men found itself isolated, and could only do its best to hold its own patch of ground. Thus at 5.15 a.m. a pigeon message was sent, " H.Q. 2nd Berks, consisting of Colonel

Griffin, Captain Clare, and staff, are surrounded. Germans threw bombs down dug-out and passed on. Appeared to approach from right rear in considerable strength. No idea what has happened elsewhere. Holding on in hopes of relief." Their position was typical of many similar groups along the front, marooned in the fog, and soon buried in the heart of the advancing German army. The right of the 25th Brigade had been thrust back, but on the left the 2nd Berkshires made a desperate resistance. The whole front was intersected by a maze of abandoned trenches, and it was along these that the enemy, shrouded in the mist, first gained their fatal footing upon the flank. The 2nd East Lancashires were brought up in support, and a determined resistance was made by the whole brigade within the main zone of battle. The German tanks were up, however, and they proved as formidable in their hands as they have often done in our own. Their construction was cumbrous and their pace slow, but they were heavily armed and very dangerous when once in action. Eight of them, however, were destroyed by the French anti-tank artillery. At 6.30 the 25th Brigade, in shattered remnants, was back on the river at Gernicourt.

The attack on the front was developing from the right, so that it came upon the 24th Brigade an hour later than upon its eastern neighbour. The 2nd Northamptons were in front, and they were driven in, but rallied on the battle zone and made a very fine fight, until the German turning movement from the south-east, which crossed the Miette south of the battle zone, took the line in flank and rear. In the end hardly a man of the two battalions engaged got away, and Haig, the brigadier, with his staff, had to cut their way out at the muzzle of their revolvers, shooting many Germans who tried to intercept them.

The 23rd Brigade was attacked at about the same time, and the 2nd West Yorkshires managed to hold even the outpost line for a time. Then falling back on the battle position this battalion, with the 2nd Devons and 2nd Middlesex near the Bois des Buttes, beat off every attack for a long time. The fatal turning movement threatened to cut them off entirely, but about 7.30 General Grogan, who had set his men a grand example of valour, threw out a defensive flank. He fell back eventually across the Aisne south of Pontavert, while the enemy, following closely upon his heels, occupied that place.

Many outstanding deeds of valour are recorded in all the British divisions during this truly terrible experience, but two have been immortalised by their inclusion in the orders of the day of General Berthelot, the French general in command. The first concerned the magnificent conduct of the 5th Battery R.F.A., which, under its commander, Captain Massey, stuck to its work while piece after piece was knocked out by an overwhelming shower of German shells. When all the guns were gone Captain Massey, with Lieutenants Large and Bution and a handful of survivors, fought literally to the death with Lewis guns and rifles. One man with a rifle, who fought his way back, and three unarmed

gunners who were ordered to retire, were all who escaped to tell the heroic tale. The other record was that of the 2nd Devons, who went on fighting when all resistance round them was over, and were only anxious, under their gallant Colonel, Anderson-Morshead, to sell their lives at the price of covering the retreat of their comrades. Their final stand was on a small hill which covered the river crossing, and while they remained and died themselves they entreated their retiring comrades to hurry through their ranks. Machine-guns ringed them round and shot them to pieces, but they fought while a cartridge was left, and then went down stabbing to the last. They were well avenged, however, by one post of the Devons which was south of the river and included many Lewis guns under Major Cope. These men killed great numbers of Germans crossing the stream, and eventually made good their own retreat. The main body of the battalion was destroyed, however, and the episode was heroic. In the words of the French document : " The whole battalion, Colonel, 38 officers, and 552 in the ranks, offered their lives in ungrudging sacrifice to the sacred cause of the Allies." A word as to the valour of the enemy would also seem to be called for. They came on with great fire and ardour. " The Germans seemed mad," says one spectator, " they came rushing over the ground with leaps and bounds. The slaughter was frightful. We could not help shooting them down."

Whilst this smashing attack had been delivered upon the 50th and 8th Divisions, Campbell's 21st Division on the extreme right of the British line had also endured a hard day of battle. They covered a position from Loivre to Berry-au-Bac, and had all three brigades in action, six battalions in the line, and three in reserve. Their experience was much the same as that of the other divisions, save that they were on the edge of the storm and escaped its full fury. The greatest pressure in the morning was upon the 62nd Brigade on the left, which was in close liaison with the 25th Brigade of the 8th Division. By eight o'clock the posts at Moscou and the Massif de la Marine had been overrun by the overpowering advance of the enemy. About nine o'clock the 7th Brigade from the 25th Division came up to the St. Aubœuf Wood within the divisional area and supported the weakening line, which had lost some of the outer posts and was holding on staunchly to others. The Germans were driving down upon the west and getting behind the position of the 21st Division, for by one o'clock they had pushed the 1st Sherwood Foresters of the 8th Division, still fighting most manfully, out of the Gernicourt Wood, so that the remains of this division with the 75th Brigade were on a line west of Bouffignereux. This involved the whole left of the 21st Division, which had to swing back the 62nd Brigade from a point south of Cormicy, keeping in touch with the 7th Brigade which formed the connecting link. At 3.20 Cormicy had been almost surrounded and the garrison driven out, while the 64th Brigade on the extreme right was closely pressed at Cauroy. At six in the evening

the 7th Brigade had been driven in at Bouffignereux, and the German infantry, beneath a line of balloons and aeroplanes, was swarming up the valley between Guyencourt and Chalons le Vergeur, which latter village they reached about eight, thus placing themselves on the left rear of the 21st Division. Night fell upon as anxious a situation as ever a harassed general and weary troops were called upon to face. The 21st had lost few prisoners and only six guns during the long day of battle, but its left had been continually turned, its position was strategically impossible, and its losses in casualties were very heavy. It was idle to deny that the army of General von Boehm had made a very brilliant attack and gained a complete victory with, in the end, such solid trophies as 45,000 Allied prisoners and at least 400 guns. It was the third great blow of the kind within nine weeks, and Foch showed himself to be a man of iron in being able to face it, and not disclose those hidden resources which could not yet be used to the full advantage.

The capture of Pontavert might have been a shattering blow to the retreating force, but it would seem that the Germans who had pushed through so rapidly were strong enough to hold it but not, in the first instance, strong enough to extend their operations. By the afternoon of May 27 they were over at Maizy also, and the force at Concevreux, which consisted of the remains of the 50th and part of the 8th and 25th Divisions, was in danger of capture. At 2 p.m. the Germans had Muscourt. The mixed and disorganised British force then fell back to near Ventelay, where they fought back once more at the German advance, the 50th Division being in the centre, with the 75th and 7th Brigades on its right. This latter brigade had been under the orders of the 21st Division and had helped to hold the extreme right of the position, but was now involved in the general retreat. Already, however, news came from the west that the Germans had not got merely to the Aisne but to the Vesle, and the left flank and rear of the Ninth Corps were hopelessly compromised. Under continuous pressure, turning ever to hold up their pursuers, the remains of the three divisions, with hardly any artillery support, fell back to the south. On the western wing of the battle Soissons had fallen, and Rheims was in a most perilous position, though by some miracle she succeeded in preserving her shattered streets and desecrated cathedral from the presence of the invaders.

The 8th Division had withdrawn during the night to Montigny, and, in consequence, the 21st Division took the general line, Hermonville-Montigny Ridge, the 64th Brigade on the right, with the 62nd and 7th in succession on the left. Every position was outflanked, however, touch was lost with the 8th on the left, and the attack increased continually in its fury. Prouilly fell, and the orders arrived that the next line would be the River Vesle, Jonchery marking the left of the 8th Division. On the right the 21st continued to be in close touch with the French 45th Division. All units were by this time very intermingled, tired, and disorganised. The 15th Durhams, who had fought a desperate

rearguard action all the morning upon the ridge north of Hervelon Château, had almost ceased to exist. The one gleam of light was the rumoured approach of the 134th French Division from the south. It had been hoped to hold the line of the River Vesle, but by the evening of May 28 it was known that the Germans had forced a passage at Jonchery, where the bridge would have been destroyed but for the wounding of the sapper officer and the explosion of the wagon containing the charges. On the other hand, the 45th French Division on the right was fighting splendidly, and completely repulsed a heavy German attack. When night fell the British were still for the most part along the line of the Vesle, but it was clear that it was already turned upon the west. Some idea of the truly frightful losses incurred by the troops in these operations may be formed from the fact that the 8th Division alone had lost 7000 men out of a total force of about 9000 infantry.

About eight in the morning of May 29 the enemy renewed his attack, pushing in here and there along the line in search of a gap. One attempt was made upon the 21st Division, from Branscourt to Sapicourt, which was met and defeated by the 1st Lincolns and 6th Leicesters. Great activity and movement could be seen among the German troops north of the river, but the country is wooded and hilly, so that observation was difficult. Towards evening, the right flank of the fighting line was greatly comforted by the arrival of the French Division already mentioned, and the hearts of the British were warmed by the news that one of their own divisions had come within the zone of battle, as will now be described.

When the Ninth Corps was sent to the Aisne, another very weary British division, the 19th (Jeffreys), had also been told off for the French front with the same object of rest, and the same actual result of desperate service. So strenuous had the work of this division been upon the Somme and in Flanders, that the ranks were almost entirely composed of new drafts from England and Wales. Their destination was the Chalons front, where they remained for exactly twelve days before the urgent summons arrived from the breaking line on the Aisne, and they were hurried westwards to endeavour to retrieve or at least to minimise the disaster. They arrived on the morning of May 29, and found things in a most critical condition. The Germans had pushed far south of the Aisne, despite the continued resistance of the survivors of the 8th, 25th, and 50th British Divisions, and of several French divisions, these debris of units being mixed up and confused, with a good deal of mutual recrimination, as is natural enough when men in overwrought conditions meet with misfortunes, the origin of which they cannot understand. When troops are actually mixed in this fashion, the difference in language becomes a very serious matter. Already the Allied line had been pushed far south of Fismes, and the position of the units engaged was very obscure to the Higher Command, but the British line, such as it was, was north of Savigny on the evening of May 28. Soissons had fallen,

Rheims was in danger, and it was doubtful whether even the line of the Marne could be held. Amid such chaos it must, indeed, have been with a sense of relief that the Allied generals found a disciplined and complete division come into the front, however young the material of which it was composed.

A gap had opened in the line between the 13th French Division at Lhery and the 154th near Faverolles, and into this the 57th and 58th Brigades were thrust. The artillery had not yet come up, and the rest of the Allied artillery was already either lost or destroyed, so there was little support from the guns. It was a tough ordeal for boys fresh from the English and Welsh training camps. On the left were the 10th Worcesters and 8th Gloucesters. On the right the 9th Welsh Fusiliers and 9th Welsh. It was hoped to occupy Savigny and Brouillet, but both villages were found to be swarming with the enemy. Remains of the 8th and 25th Divisions were still, after three days of battle, with their faces to the foe on the right of the 19th Division. They were very weary, however, and the 2nd Wiltshires were brought up to thicken the line and cover the divisional flank north of Bouleuse. This was the situation at 2 p.m. of May 29.

The tide of battle was still rolling to the south, and first Savigny and then Faverolles were announced as being in German hands. A mixed force of odd units had been formed and placed under General Craigie-Hackett, but this now came back through the ranks of the 19th Division. On the right also the hard-pressed and exhausted troops in front, both French and British, passed through the 2nd Wiltshires, and endeavoured to reform behind them. The 19th Division from flank to flank became the fighting front, and the Germans were seen pouring down in extended order from the high ground north of Lhery and of Treslon. On the right the remains of the 8th Division had rallied, and it was now reinforced by the 2nd Wilts, the 4th Shropshire Light Infantry, and the 8th Staffords, the latter battalions from the 56th Brigade. With this welcome addition General Heneker, who had fought such a long uphill fight, was able in the evening of May 29 to form a stable line on the Bouleuse Ridge. By this time the guns of the 19th Division, the 87th and 88th Brigades Royal Field Artillery, had roared into action—a welcome sound to the hard-pressed infantry in front. There was a solid British line now from Lhery on the left to the eastern end of the Bouleuse Ridge, save that one battalion of Senegal Tirailleurs was sandwiched in near Faverolles. Liaison had been established with the 13th and 154th French Divisions to left and right.

The early morning of May 30 witnessed a very violent attack along all this portion of the line. By 6 a.m. the enemy had worked round the left flank of the 10th Worcesters at Lhery, driving before them some of the troops, French and British, who were exhausted from the long battle. It is difficult for either writer or reader to imagine the condition of men who have fought a losing battle for three days without cessation. If

Foch saved up his reserves during these weeks of agony, it was surely at a precious cost to the men who bore the weight. The left company of the 10th Worcesters lost all its officers and 60 per cent. of its men, and Lhery had to be left to the enemy. Meanwhile, the Senegalese, who, like all tropical troops, are more formidable in attack than in defence, were driven in near Faverolles, the Germans making a frontal attack in eight lines. They pushed through the gap, outflanked the 9th Welsh Fusiliers on the left and the 2nd Wiltshires on the right, cutting off a platoon of the former battalion. Both these battalions suffered very heavily, the Welsh Fusiliers especially being cut to pieces. At both ends of the line the remains of the front battalions had to fall back upon their supports. The 74th Composite Brigade, already referred to as being under General Craigie-Hackett, fought on the left of the 19th Division, and was ordered to hold the Lhery-Rohigny Road. The pressure, however, upon these tired troops and upon the remains of the 10th Worcesters continued to be very great, and by 11 a.m. the situation was critical on the left of the line, the flank having been driven in, and the 8th Gloucesters enfiladed so that the D'Aulnay Wood could no longer be held. These changes enabled the Germans to close in upon the 9th Welsh and the remains of the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, attacking them in front and flank. The troops on their right gave way, and the assailants were then able to get round the other flank of these two devoted battalions, and practically to surround them, so that very few won their way back. The whole front line had gone with the exception of the 10th Warwicks on the left. For a time it seemed as if there was nothing to limit this powerful thrust of the enemy, but in the usual miraculous fashion a composite party of odds and ends, drawn from stragglers and details, hastily swept together by General Jeffreys, were hurried up to the high ground south of Ville-en-Tardenois. With the aid of four machine-guns from the 19th Division this force held the victorious enemy from coming further, covered the left flank of the 10th Warwicks, and formed a bastion from which a new wall could be built. A second bastion had been made by the 5th South Wales Borderers, pioneers of the 19th Division, who had dug in south of Rohigny and absolutely refused to shift. Up to 2 p.m. the 2nd Wilts also held their ground north of Bouleuse. Between these fixed points the 57th and 58th Brigades were able to reorganise, the 15th Warwicks and 9th Cheshires covering the respective fronts. On the right the 28th French Division had relieved the 154th, while the 4th Shropshires and 8th North Staffords, both still intact, formed a link between the two Allies. Touch had been lost on the left, and patrols were sent out to endeavour to bridge the gap. At this period General Jeffreys of the 19th Division commanded the whole British line. A serious loss had been caused by the wounding of General Glasgow, the experienced leader of the 58th Brigade. General Heath of the 56th Brigade took over the command of both units.

The Germans had reached their limit for the day, though some attempt at an attack was made in the afternoon from the wood of Aulnay, which was beaten back by the British fire. It was rumoured, however, that on the left, outside the British area, he was making progress south of Rohigny, which made General Jeffreys uneasy for his left wing. Up to now the British had been under the general command of the Ninth British Corps, but this was now withdrawn from the line, and the 19th Division passed to the Fifth French Corps under General Pellé, an officer who left a most pleasant impression upon the minds of all who had to deal with him. On May 31 the front consisted of the French 40th on the left, the French 28th on the right, and the British 19th between them, the latter covering 12,000 yards. The weary men of the original divisions were drawn out into reserve after as severe an ordeal as any have endured during the whole war. The 74th Composite Brigade was also relieved. Some idea of the losses on the day before may be gathered from the fact that the two Welsh battalions were now formed into a single composite company, which was added to the 9th Cheshires.

The morning of the 31st was occupied in a severe duel of artillery, in which serious losses were sustained from the German fire, but upon the other hand a threatened attack to the south-west of Ville-en-Tardenois was dispersed by the British guns. About two o'clock the enemy closed once more upon the left, striking hard at the 6th Cheshires, who had been left behind in this quarter when the rest of the 74th Composite Brigade had been relieved. The 10th Warwicks were also attacked, and the whole wing was pushed back, the enemy entering the village of Ville-en-Tardenois. The Warwicks formed up again on high ground south-east of the village, the line being continued by the remains of the 10th Worcesters and 8th Gloucesters. Whilst the left wing was driven in, the right was also fiercely attacked, the enemy swarming down in great numbers upon the French, and the 9th Cheshires. The former were driven off the Aubilly Ridge, and the latter had to give ground before the rush.

General Jeffreys, who was on the spot, ordered an immediate counter-attack of the 2nd Wilts to retrieve the situation. Before it could develop, however, the French were again advancing on the right, together with the 4th Shropshires. A local counter-attack had also been delivered by the 9th Cheshires, led on horseback with extreme gallantry by Colonel Cunninghame. His horse was shot under him, but he continued to lead the troops on foot, and his Cheshire infantry followed him with grim determination into their old positions. The ground was regained though the losses were heavy, Colonel Cunninghame being among the wounded.

The attack of the 2nd Wiltshires had meanwhile been developed, and was launched under heavy fire about seven in the evening, moving, up to the north of Chambrecy. The position was gained, the Wiltshires connecting up with the Cheshires on their right and the

Gloucesters on their left. Meanwhile, advances of the enemy on the flank were broken up by artillery fire, the 87th and 88th Brigades of guns doing splendid work, and sweeping the heads of every advance from the Tardenois-Chambrecy Road. So ended another very severe day of battle. The buffer was acting and the advance was slowing. Already its limit seemed to be marked.

On the morning of May 31 the British position extended from a line on the left connecting Ville-en-Tardenois and Champlat. Thence the 57th Brigade covered the ground up to the stream which runs from Sarcy to Chambrecy. Then the 56th Brigade began, and carried on to 1000 yards east of the River Ardres. The line of battalions (pitiful remnants for the most part) was from the left, 10th Warwicks, 10th Worcesters, 8th Gloucesters, 2nd Wilts, 9th Cheshires, 8th Staffords, and 4th Shropshires. Neither brigade could muster 1000 rifles, while the 58th Brigade in reserve was reduced to 350. The three sapper field companies, the personnel of the trench-mortar batteries, and every straggler who could be scraped up was thrust forward to thicken the line.

The German attack was launched once more at 4 p.m. on June 1, striking up against the 40th French Division and the left of the British line. Under the weight of the assault the French were pushed back, and the enemy penetrated the Bonval Wood, crossed the Tardenois-Jonchery Road, and thrust their way into the woods of Courmont and La Cohette. Here, however, the attack was held, and the junction between the French and the Warwicks remained firm. The front of the 57th Brigade was attacked at the same time, the 8th Gloucesters and the 2nd Wilts on their right being very hard pressed. The enemy had got Sarcy village, which enabled them to get on the flank of the Gloucesters, and to penetrate between them and the Wiltshires. It was a very critical situation. The right company of the Gloucesters was enfiladed and rolled up, while the centre was in deadly danger. The left flank and the Worcesters held tight, but the rest of the line was being driven down the hill towards Chambrecy. A splendid rally was effected, however, by Captain Pope of B Company, who led his west countrymen up the hill once more, driving the enemy back to his original line. For this feat he received the D.S.O. At this most critical period of the action, great help was given to the British by the 2nd Battalion of the 22nd French Regiment, led in person by Commandant de Lasbourde, which joined in Pope's counter-attack, afterwards relieving the remains of the Gloucesters. Lasbourde also received the D.S.O. The success of the attack was due partly to the steadiness of the 10th Worcesters on the left, who faced right and poured a cross-fire into the German stormers. It was a complete, dramatic little victory, by which the high ground north of Chambrecy was completely regained.

A withdrawal of the whole line was, however, necessary on account of the German penetration into the left, which had brought them complete possession of the Wood of Courmont on the British left rear. The

movement was commenced at seven in the evening, and was completed in most excellent order before midnight. This new line, stretching from Cuisles to Bligny, included one very important position, the hill of Bligny, which was a prominence from which the enemy could gain observation and command over the whole valley of the Ardres, making all communications and battery positions precarious.

The general order of units in the line on June 2 was much the same as before, the 5th South Wales Borderers being held in reserve on the left, and the 2/22nd French on the right of the 19th Division. These positions were held unbroken from this date for a fortnight, when the division was eventually relieved after its most glorious term of service. The British Ninth Corps was busily engaged during this time in reorganising into composite battalions the worn and mixed fragments of the 8th, 25th, and 50th Divisions, which were dribbled up as occasion served to the new battle-line. A composite machine-gun company was also organised and sent up.

Several days of comparative quiet followed, during which the sappers were strengthening the new positions, and the Germans were gathering fresh forces for a renewed attack. Congratulatory messages from General Franchet d'Esperey, the French Army Commander, and from their own Corps General put fresh heart into the overtaxed men. There was no fresh attack until June 6. On that date the line of defence from the left consisted of the 40th French Division, the 8th Division Composite Battalion (could a phrase mean more than that?), the 10th Warwicks, 10th Worcesters, 8th Gloucesters, 58th Brigade Composite Battalion, 9th Cheshires, 8th North Staffords, 4th Shropshires, and 28th French Division. At 3 a.m. there began a tremendous bombardment, mostly of gas-shell, which gave way to the infantry advance at 4 a.m., the attack striking the right and centre of the British line, in the section of the all-important Bligny Hill. As the enemy advanced upon the front of the 58th Composite Battalion, the men who were the survivors of the 2nd Wilts, 9th Welsh Fusiliers, and 9th Welsh, fired a volley, and then, in a fashion which would have delighted the old Duke, sprang from their cover and charged with the bayonet, hurling the Germans down the slope. It was a complete repulse, as was a second attack upon the front of the Gloucesters and Worcesters who, with a similar suggestion of the legendary Peninsula tactics, waited till they could see their foemen's eyes before firing, with the result that the storming column simply vanished, flinging itself down in the long grass and hiding there till nightfall. There was no attack on the left of the line, but the 9th Cheshires and the North Staffords both had their share in the victory. The 28th French Division on the right had given a little before the storm, and the British line was bent back to keep touch. Otherwise it was absolutely intact, and the whole terrain in front of it was covered with German dead.

The German is a determined fighter, however, and his generals well

knew that without the command of Bligny Hill no further progress was possible for him in the general advance. Therefore they drew together all their strength and renewed the attack at 11 a.m. with such energy and determination that they gained the summit. An immediate counter by the 9th Cheshires, though most gallantly urged, was unable to restore the situation, but fortunately a battalion was at hand which had not lost grievously in the previous fighting. This was the 4th Shropshires, which now charged up the hill, accompanied by the remains of the undefeated 9th Cheshires. The attack was delivered with magnificent dash and spirit, and it ended by the complete reconquest of the hill. For this feat the 4th Shropshires received as a battalion the rare and coveted distinction of the Croix de Guerre with the palm. This local success strengthened the hands of the French on the right, who were able in the late afternoon to come forward and to retake the village of Bligny. June 6 was a most successful day, and gave fresh assurance that the German advance was spent.

There was no further close fighting in this neighbourhood up to June 19, when the young soldiers of the 19th and other divisions were withdrawn after a sustained effort which no veterans could have beaten. In the official report of General Pellé to his own Higher Command, there occurs the generous sentence : " L'impression produite sur le moral des troupes françaises par la belle attitude de leurs alliés a été très bonne." Both Allies experienced the difficulty of harmonising troops who act under different traditions and by different methods. At first these hindrances were very great, but with fuller knowledge they tended to disappear, and ended in complete mutual confidence, founded upon a long experience of loyalty and devotion to the common end.

From this date until the end of June no event of importance affecting the British forces occurred upon the Western Front. The German attack extended gradually in the Aisne district, until it had reached Montdidier, and it penetrated upon the front as far south as the forest of Villers-Cotteret, where it threatened the town of Compiègne. In the middle of June the German front was within forty miles of Paris, and a great gun specially constructed for the diabolical work was tossing huge shells at regular intervals into the crowded city. The bursting of one of these projectiles amidst the congregation of a church on a Sunday, with an appalling result in killed and wounded, was one of those incidents which Germans of the future will, we hope, regard with the same horror as the rest of the world did at the time.

The cause of the Allies seemed at this hour to be at the very lowest. They had received severe if glorious defeats on the Somme, in Flanders, and on the Aisne. Their only success lay in putting limits to German victories. And yet with that deep prophetic instinct which is latent in the human mind, there was never a moment when they felt more assured of the ultimate victory, nor when the language of their leaders was prouder and more firm. This general confidence was all the stronger,

since we can see as we look back that the situation was on the face of it most desperate, and that those factors which were to alter it—the genius of Foch, the losses of the Germans, and the numbers and power of the American Army—were largely concealed from the public. In the midst of the gloom the one bright light shone from Italy, where, on June 17, a strong attack of the Austrians across the Piave was first held and then thrown back to the other bank. In this most timely victory Lord Cavan's force played a glorious part. Some account should be given here of this battle and how it came about that we were involved in the operations.

In the dark hour after the Caporetto defeat the Italians naturally turned to their Allies for aid, and it was given with great promptitude. Six French divisions under Generals Maistre and Fayolles were at once despatched, and the same number of British divisions were under orders. The pressure upon the British line following the Cambrai action caused one of these to be detained. The other five, forming the second British Army under General Plumer, set off by rail and road upon their long journey. This army consisted of Haking's Eleventh and Cavan's Fourteenth Corps. The former contained the 5th and 41st Divisions. The latter was composed of the 7th, the 23rd, and the 48th. Early in December all these troops, together with the French, were actually in the line in the Montello section, which is near the centre where the mountainous stretch upon the north joins on to the broad plain which extends to the sea.

In the early spring it became increasingly evident that a German attack upon a huge scale was about to break upon the Western front, and that every available man would be needed to meet it. In March General Plumer and the Eleventh Corps were recalled. Lord Cavan's three divisions were then assembled upon the edge of the Asiajo plateau, which is in the centre of the mountainous section of the defence. There was no protective river at this point, and the two armies lay face to face in a country of wooded hills with abrupt valleys. It may be taken as a compliment that the British were chosen to share the defence of this section of the line, for it was a very vital one. On the plain ground could be lost without any fatal result, but the mountain belt was a narrow one now, not more than a few miles in depth, and it would be fatal if the Allies lost their grip of it. They were already perilously near the edge. Field Marshal Conrad, the Austrian commander, compared their situation to that of "a shipwrecked man, clinging to a board, who would immediately sink were his fingers to be chopped off." The fingers in this instance were Monesi's 12th Italian Division upon the left, Fanshawe's 48th, Shoubridge's 7th, and Babington's 23rd in the centre, with the 24th French Division upon the right. It was upon these that in the middle of June General Conrad tried his chop, with disastrous results—to the chopper.

This battle, which broke out in the early morning of June 15, extended along the whole Italian line from the Astico in the mountains down to the marshes where the Piave finds its way into the Adriatic. It swung

and swayed for several days, the Austrians having forced their way across the river at several points, and established bridge heads, which they defended with great tenacity. The Italian defence proved, however, to be too strong, and the discomfiture of the enemy was completed by the loyal Piave rising in their rear. At the end of a week they were all driven back, leaving 24,000 prisoners, and 70 guns behind them. In this large action the British fight was but a local engagement, but deserves some attention as being the first clash with the enemy.

The Austrian attack was carried out by four divisions upon a frontage of 8000 yards. The two British divisions in the line were Fanshawe's 48th South Midland Territorials on the left, and Babington's 23rd on the right. At three o'clock in the morning of June 15 there broke out a severe bombardment of the front line, the communication trenches, and the rear positions by gas shells, heavy explosives, and shrapnel. At four o'clock the fire died down, but at six it was renewed, and shortly after seven the Austrian infantry could be seen, so far as vision was possible amid the dust and fumes, pouring down the Ambrosini Hill opposite, and streaming forward to the assault.

This assault, so far as the 23rd Divisional part is concerned, may be easily described. It was, in most places, not so much repulsed as entirely nipped in the bud by the destructive fire of the 11th Sherwood Foresters, the 9th York and Lancasters, the 13th and 12th Durham Light Infantry, and the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers, which were the battalions counting from the right which manned the trenches. There were two points where the attack came to a head, the one being opposite to the Sherwood Foresters. Aided by a French battalion of the 102nd Regiment, under Colonel Fargues, the Foresters had no difficulty in clearing their front, save at one point where the Austrians succeeded in occupying 150 yards of front trench. From this they debouched in an effort to increase their gains, but they were headed off by Colonel Hudson himself, with the personnel of the Headquarters Staff, and a handful of brave Italian trench-mortar gunners. These stopped the rush, though Colonel Hudson was himself wounded in the struggle. For a time the Austrians remained in the captured trench, but shortly after a concentrated attack was organised by a company of the 8th Yorkshire Light Infantry, who retook the trench. From that moment the whole front of the 23rd Division was intact.

The other danger point was on the extreme left flank, where the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers might well have been involved in the troubles which had befallen the 48th Division, if it had not rapidly thrown back a defensive flank under Major Gill, which by its rapid and accurate fire put a stop to that process of outflanking and rolling-up which is the dangerous sequel to a penetration, and had already made the trenches to the left untenable.

We have now to follow the more varied fortunes of the 48th Division. In their first rush, delivered swiftly and with determination, the

Austrians had broken in upon two separate points. The first of these was on the extreme left, where, in spite of the spirited co-operation of the 11th Italian Division, the stormers effected a lodgment in the area defended by the 5th Warwicks. This battalion seems to have had a very long stretch committed to its care, and the two companies in the front trenches were scattered in thin groups along the line. The main break was at a small cluster of houses named Perghele, upon the right of the line. The fight here was severe, Major Bindloss commanding the battalion being killed, and Captain Watson wounded. The head of the Austrian storming column, after penetrating the line, turned to the south-east, that is, to their own left, and proceeded to outflank the next British unit upon the right. This unit was the 5th Gloucesters. The two companies in the trenches were enveloped, both from flank and rear, only about sixty fighting their way out. Even these could not have got away but for a gallant Lewis gunner, Private Oliver, who, in the words of the official report, sacrificed both his gun and himself in his successful endeavour to cover the retreat of his comrades.

Having in this fashion overwhelmed the Gloucesters, the Austrian wave now passed on through the woods, with a spray of rifle grenades and light machine-gun fire in front of them. They struck now upon the flank of the 4th Oxford and Bucks, who were the right-hand unit of the divisional front, and at the same time a party pushed in between the two divisions. After a stout resistance the Oxford men were driven from their trenches about nine o'clock, and in spite of a rally, in which they temporarily regained them, they were again driven back, although they had been reinforced by a company of the 4th Royal Berkshires. At 3.30 they established a line in front of their own regimental headquarters, some hundreds of yards to the rear, and this they held until the final victorious advance next morning. The enemy reports showed that no fewer than seven Austrian battalions attacked the Oxfords. Meanwhile the outflanking and rolling-up movement of the Austrians had lost its impetus, and had been finally stopped by the company of the Northumberlands, which had been thrown back as described.

But although the flank movement was stopped there was none the less a gap 2000 yards wide in the British line, through which the stormers were pushing, driving before them the straggling fringe of infantry which survived from the trenches. The furthest penetration of the Austrian wedge was about a thousand yards. With the foresight born of experience, two switch trenches, called respectively the Cesuna and the Lamerle, had been prepared for just such an emergency and these became the rallying points for the defence.

The pressure was strongest upon the remains of the 5th Gloucesters, now reduced to less than two companies. Fired into from the front and flanks they fell back through the woods. For a time the companies were separated, but about 1.30 they got into touch, and linked up also with the Warwicks upon their left. Three guns of the 102nd Battery came

up to their help, partly manhandled by the infantry, and these, firing over open sights, did good work in restoring the line. This was in the area of the Lamerle switch, and the temporary line covered the space between this and a building upon the left, called the Casa del Guardiana. Three other Warwick battalions, the 6th, 7th, and 8th, had been ordered up to reinforce this line. A Company of the 6th, under Captain Linfoot, pushed their way forward about midday as far as the battalion headquarters of their comrades of the 5th, which had been gallantly defended by Sergeant Townley and a handful of men, and relieved the pressure upon it. On the right the battle was beginning slowly to turn. Colonel Knox, with the 7th Warwicks, carried the Guardiana House by storm, and Major Jardine brought up the 12th Battery R.F.A. and strengthened the British line, which began to advance slowly through the woods. The enemy in the pocket had, however, been strongly reinforced, and the results were still doubtful, though many scattered bodies passing back over No Man's Land gave promise of victory, and offered a tempting mark to the artillery.

As the afternoon advanced, however, the British predominance became more clearly established. Battalion after battalion came into action. The 6th Gloucesters and 7th Worcesters of Tomkinson's 144th Brigade came up to help the 7th Warwicks, while the 4th Berkshires and 1st Bucks relieved the pressure upon the 5th Gloucesters. At 4.30 the front line was still held by the enemy, but the pocket was being contracted on every side. Night fell with the British well up to their lost position, and eager for an assault in the morning. When, however, that assault was delivered, it was found that there was hardly any resistance, and that the enemy had fallen back to their own lines during the night. British patrols were pushed forward at once to explore the position, and some of the front Austrian trenches were found deserted, but a heavy barrage fell upon them, and they were ordered back to their old line.

Such was the battle of the Asiago Plateau, a conflict which was honourable to both parties, and which displayed the respective national qualities of fiery courage upon the side of the Austrians, and of dour, invincible persistence on that of the British. It was, of course, on a small scale compared with the great conflicts of France, but it was of vital strategic moment, since a break through would have imperilled the whole position. The losses give no indication of the real importance of the struggle. These losses upon the side of the British were 1700, 351 of whom were missing. The latter represent the two companies of Gloucesters, who were cut off. As the average strength of the British battalions that day was under 500, the proportion of losses was a heavy one. Eleven hundred of the enemy were captured, and their casualty list was undoubtedly a high one. Seven mountain guns and seventy-two machine-guns were among the trophies of the victors. The British reports were emphatic in their praise of those Italian batteries which were working in liaison with their own.

CHAPTER LIV

THE OPENING OPERATIONS

From July 1 *to August* 8, 1918

The general position—German attack of July 16—French counter-attack of July 18—Turn of the tide—51st and 62nd Divisions on the Ardres—Desperate fighting—The 15th Scots Division at Buzancy—Le Glorieux Chardon d'Écosse—Nicholson's 34th Division at Oulchy-le-Château.

WHEN the year 1918 had run half its course the Germans appeared to be triumphantly in the ascendant. In Flanders they had pushed back the British to positions which were, on an average, to the rear of those occupied in 1914. On the Somme they had more than neutralised all the Allied gains of 1916, and were stretched now from Arras to Montdidier, covering ground which they had not touched since the early days of the war. On the Aisne they had reconquered all that the French had so laboriously won in three campaigns, and were back along the Marne and within gun-shot of Paris. These results had been achieved in three great battles which had cost the Allies some 200,000 prisoners and nearly 2000 guns. In July it would have seemed that the German Empire was victorious, and yet ere the year had ended the very name had changed its meaning in the map of Europe, and was known only in the list of things which have had their day and then have passed.

There were certain factors which even at the zenith of Germany's fortunes may have prepared a cool-headed critic for a swing of the scales, though the wisest and best informed could not have conceived how violent the oscillation would be. In the first place, the ever-pressing strangle-hold of the Navy, combined with an indifferent harvest and the exhaustion of certain stocks within the German Empire, notably of copper, rubber, wool, and lubricants, produced great internal difficulties which grew worse with every month. Then again German successes had been bought in reckless fashion at a very heavy price, and if they brought a million men across from the Russian frontier it is probable that they had squandered nearly as many in the three great battles. Finally, there was the all-important factor of the American reinforcements which had been speeded up to meet the pressing emergency. By splendid international co-operation the Americans put all their proverbial energy into marshalling and equipping the men, while Great Britain threw every available unit of her sea power, mercantile or naval, into the task of getting them

across. The long-suffering people of this island gladly cut down their requirements in every possible direction so as to secure the tonnage for this marvellous transfer. At a steady rate of a quarter of a million every month the Americans flowed into France—magnificent raw material which was soon to show how quickly it could develop into the most highly finished article. This constant addition to the Allied forces, with the moral confidence which they brought with them, was the third contributory cause to the sudden change of fortune. It would be ungenerous, however, not to add that a fourth, without which all others might have been vain, lay in the commanding personality and extraordinary genius of the great Frenchman who now controlled the whole Allied battle front from the sea to the Alps, while two great civilians, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, rallied the home fronts of the two weary nations which had borne the brunt of the war.

In the first half of 1918 the sun of victory had never once in Western Europe rested upon the standards of the Allies save in Italy, where the Austrians had been defeated upon the Piave. June 17 was in truth the turning-point of the war, for from that date everything went well with the forces of freedom. The change in the West came later, however, than in Italy, and on July 16 the Germans attempted a new advance upon the largest scale, which seemed to have some small success at first though it was in truth the starting-point of all their misfortunes. Their previous advances had brought them forward on the line from Montdidier to Rheims, and now they enlarged their front by 25 miles on the eastern side of Rheims, while their attack also covered about the same distance to the west of that city, making some progress in this latter sector, which led them down the valley of the Oise, towards Villers-Cotterets, Compiègne, and finally Paris. The whole world held its breath in a hush of horror as it saw Foch's soldiers desperately struggling and yet losing mile after mile of the short stretch which separated the Teutonic invaders from the centre of the world's civilisation and culture. They had crossed the Marne that evening and had pushed the French and American line back for some miles, but the latter rallied and regained some of the ground. The most important point of the struggle, however, was to the east of Rheims, where that splendid soldier, General Gouraud, a one-armed bearded veteran of Gallipoli, created a false front which the enemy captured, and then whilst they were still in disorder attacked them from the real front, pushing them back with great loss. This development on the east of the line fully compensated for the German advance on the west, which was brought to a final halt within two days. Foch had now bled the Germans until they had lost some of their power of resistance. The moment for his great counter-attack was at hand, and the carefully husbanded reserves were ready for the crisis —those reserves which it was his supreme merit to have hoarded up when the temptation to spend them was more than the firmest will could have been expected to resist.

On July 18 the blow fell, and the Germans recoiled in a movement which was destined never to stop until they had crossed the Rhine. All important as the operations were they are only indicated here since this chronicle is necessarily confined to the British action, and no British troops were as yet engaged. Issuing under the cover of a storm from the great forest of Villers-Cotterets which had screened his preparations, the French Marshal hurled his line of tanks upon the enemy, clearing a path for his infantry. At the same moment the French-American line went forward over a front of 27 miles from the Oise to the Marne, striking the whole flank of the German advance. The attack extended from Vingre in the north to Château-Thierry. Everywhere the German flank fell back, their front had to withdraw across the Marne, Château-Thierry was reoccupied and 20,000 prisoners with 400 guns were left in the hands of the victors. Gradually, as the attack developed from day to day, a huge pocket was formed, bulging southwards from the Aisne, with its lower edge upon the Marne, the whole assuming much the shape which Spain does upon the map of Europe. This protrusion, instead of being a menacing point directed towards Paris, was now a much battered salient attacked simultaneously upon all sides, by Mangin in the west and by Gouraud in the south and east. Americans and French were on the Marne, French alone to the west of it, and British with French on the east of it. All were fighting with the cold fury of men who have reached a crisis where death is nothing and victory all. Nurses at the forward hospitals have testified how the French wounded were brought in mutilated and dying, but delirious with joy because they knew that the tide had turned. What matter anything else? What matter life or limb? The grey cloud was slowly, slowly drifting back whence it came.

But it was very slow, for the German soldier had never fought better, nor had his leaders ever shown greater skill in drawing him out from danger and yet selling every rearward position at the highest price of Allied blood. All three Allies were tried to their utmost, for the enemy had not yet learned that he was fated to retreat. The British, who had their own great task already planned, were in weak force, though that force was of the highest quality, for two better divisions than Campbell's 51st Highlanders and Braithwaite's 62nd Yorkshiremen did not exist in the Army.

They occupied a point on the eastern face of the attack, nearly midway between the Marne and Rheims, and it was their task to force their way up that valley of the Ardres down which the remains of the British Ninth Corps had retreated from the disaster of the Aisne, and across which the 19th Division had been drawn when it stopped the German advance near Bligny. Some memory of island valour should linger in that valley, for much good British blood has been shed there. The two divisions which were now hurried up to take their place in the French line formed the Twenty-second Corps under Sir John Godley, and were accompanied by some New Zealand and Australian cavalry. They

relieved a mauled Italian corps, while they had Frenchmen on their left and Algerians on their right, so that it would be difficult to imagine a more cosmopolitan line of defence. The country in front was hilly and very difficult, and the line was bisected by the River Ardres, the 62nd advancing on the right of the stream and the 51st on the left.

It was a very desperate and difficult business, which lasted for ten days, during which each division showed the most splendid courage and endurance, as can be proved by the fact that their united losses came to 8000 men out of about 16,000 engaged, and that they met and defeated four German divisions, capturing 1500 prisoners, 140 machine-guns, and 40 cannon. The opening attack, during which the advancing lines passed through the ranks of the Second Italian Corps, was greatly stimulated by the news of the splendid Allied advance of the two previous days, July 18 and 19.

The fighting of both divisions was made very difficult by the underwood and the standing corn which lay before them, thickly sown with German machine-guns. On July 20 the 2/4th York and Lancasters, on the extreme right of the British line, captured Bouilly, but were driven out again. At the same time the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry was held up and lost heavily in front of the Château of Commetreuil. It was a long, difficult, and expensive day for the 187th Brigade, and its only remaining battalion, the 2/4th Yorkshire Light Infantry, lost heavily as well.

The 185th Brigade on July 20 occupied the left of the divisional line, with the Highlanders on the other side of the Ardres. Marfaux and Cuitron lay before them, but neither could be quite reached, though again and again the assailants were on the very edge of the villages. Once some of the men of the 2/4th Hampshires from the supporting brigade actually penetrated the village, but they were seen no more. The 2/4th West Ridings, south of the village, were also held up. Meanwhile the 5th West Ridings attempted to work around Marfaux from the north, through the wood of Petit Camp. All attempts to debouch from the wood were vain, however, and again the attack was brought to nought. Some ground had been gained during the day, but both main efforts had failed, and all three brigades of the 62nd Division had been badly mauled. With no British reserves behind, General Braithwaite must have been sorely exercised in his mind that night.

On July 21 the attack eased down on the left, but on the right the 187th Brigade deployed and attacked the Bouilly Ridge. The 9th Durham Pioneers made a very fine advance, as did the 2/4th York and Lancasters, and some valuable ground was taken, but none of the villages. The attackers were encouraged, however, by learning from prisoners that the Germans had endured heavy losses, and had been compelled to demand reinforcements.

On July 22 the situation began to clear a little as Burnett's 106th Brigade, represented mainly by the 5th West Ridings, attacked the

wood of Petit Camp, an ominous grove, already littered with British dead. So deliberate was their advance, in consequence of the difficult ground to be searched, that the barrage was at the rate of 100 yards in ten minutes. The place was one long succession of gun posts "en echelon," which were so concealed that they had no field of fire, and were the more deadly on that account as they fired by sound out of the bushes, and could not possibly be seen until one walked up to them. None the less the Yorkshiremen, helped by a wing of the 5th Devons, fought their way through this dreadful wood, dropping small posts as they went. Two hundred prisoners and 41 machine-guns remained in their hands, with 700 yards of new ground. The German losses were heavy, but so were the British, Captain Cockhill's company of the West Ridings emerging with two officers and six men able to report for duty. It was a fine operation, well conceived and well carried through. The Germans fought with great tenacity all day.

On July 23 the south-western corner of the Petit Camp Wood, which was still in German hands, was cleared by the 6th West Ridings. The main attack, however, on Marfaux and Cuitron was carried out by the Durhams and the New Zealand Cyclist Battalion with magnificent success. Marfaux fell to the New Zealanders. The stormers broke through both villages and made their line 400 yards beyond. Two French tanks did good service in this assault. Two hundred prisoners and eight French 75's, taken previously by the Germans, were among the trophies of this fine advance. The 77th French Division had attacked upon the right with equal success.

Up to this period the Highlanders of the 51st Division had been striving hard on the southern side of the Ardres, with a task which was not less difficult than that of their English comrades on the north.

On July 20 they found the enemy opposite to them in great strength, as was shown by the fact that prisoners from three divisions, the 22nd (Saxe-Meiningen), the 103rd (Hessian), and the 123rd (Saxon) were taken that day. The great straggling wood of Courton, with a fringe of farms, mills, and other buildings, formed a strong advanced position. The attack was supported by French artillery and also by the guns of the 255th and 256th Brigades R.F.A.

The advance was a most arduous one, especially after the first victorious rush when the troops found themselves involved in the thick brushwood which prevented co-operation to such an extent that the two brigades were entirely separated, but each struggled on independently, small knots of determined men fighting their way forward as best they might. The progress was better upon the left than on the right, but the casualties were heavy, for the German machine-guns had survived the barrage and were very deadly. Colonel Bickmore of the 4th Gordons led a company of his battalion against a German post but was brought down by a bomb, and his men driven back. When the ground was recovered the Colonel had been carried off as a prisoner.

The German infantry seem to have taken hardly any part in the battle, which was fought between the splendid Scottish infantry on one side, and the determined German machine-gunners on the other. The Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade found an even blacker watch fighting on their flank, for the Senegalese infantry of the French 9th Division went forward with them and did good work during the whole arduous day. So sweeping was the machine-gun fire that at many points it was found to be impossible even to creep forward through the two-foot corn.

By evening the attack had been definitely held, and the Highlanders were forced to be content with their initial gains, while the French on the left, who had been assaulting the hamlet of Paradis all day, were also stationary. At 6.30 a company of German infantry attacked the Argylls, but were driven back with heavy loss. So the long day ended, the troops being much exhausted. The capture of 8 officers and 360 men, with many machine-guns, was an inadequate return for such heroic exertions. All day the enemy had been withdrawing upon the Marne front, and the holding of his flanks was so vitally essential that he was prepared to make any sacrifice for the purpose.

The attack was continued next morning, the 152nd Brigade pushing forward into the front line, while the other depleted units supported it and guarded its flanks. Things went badly at the outset, for the line had been altered during the night and the barrage was miscalculated in consequence, so that it was no great help to the 6th Gordons in their advance. All day mixed fighting went on in the wood, and it was most difficult to determine the exact position of the various units, groups of men stalking the machine-guns as hunters might stalk tigers, the fight ending as often in the death of the hunter as of the tiger. Once again the evening of a bloody day found things very much as they had been in the morning. It cannot be denied that the German resistance was a very stern one.

After a pause of a day the Highland Division renewed its attack along a portion of its front, the main advance being carried out by the 152nd Brigade. Once more the deadly woods were penetrated, and once more there was a limited advance and considerable losses. On this occasion the barrage was more useful, though some French batteries on the left fell short and caused heavy casualties to a company of the 6th Gordons in their point of assembly. Such are the unavoidable chances of modern warfare. The 8th Royal Scots were thrown into the fight, and made a fine advance. Altogether there were signs this day of a weakening on the German front, which was confirmed in the patrol fighting of the next few days. There were many casualties in the 152nd Brigade, including Major Moir, C.O. of the 5th Seaforths, who was badly wounded.

Major operations were in abeyance until July 27, when severe fighting broke out once again upon the south side of the Ardres. The 187th Brigade had been sent across by General Braithwaite, and it now took

its place in General Carter-Campbell's sector, with the 152nd on its right and the 153rd on its left, with the intention of making a vigorous attack upon the German line on this front. Tanks had been allotted, but rain had set in, the ground was marshy, and the monsters immovable. All immediate objectives were easily taken. The villages of Espilly and Nappes had both been occupied. So soft did the front appear that the Australian horsemen were pushed forward, while the troops north of the river moved on in sympathy. The final line was north-west of Chaumuzy. Here, on July 28, a very stiff German resistance was encountered, and Chambrecy on the left flank represented the No Man's Land between the armies.

The Montagne de Bligny position, where the 19th Division had distinguished itself in June, now lay immediately ahead, and the 8th West Yorkshires (Leeds Rifles) were ordered to attack it. They went forward so swiftly and with such spirit that they were into and over the position before the Germans realised what had happened. It was a notable performance, for the place was of great strength and strategic significance. The French Government bestowed a special mark of honour upon the 8th West Yorks for this deed, and it is certainly a singular coincidence that, of the few British battalions thus honoured, two should have won it at the same spot. There was no artillery support, and the casualties were heavy, but Yorkshire won home in spite of it. The enemy tried to regain it until the high corn was full of his dead, but it was all in vain. This day, with the co-operation of the French, Bligny village was also taken. No further ground was gained on July 29, as a new German division, the 240th, had come into line with orders to hold on at all costs. The fighting was very severe at the junction between the French and British, where the liaison was so close between the two nations that it is on record that, when at a critical moment the French ran out of cartridges, the rifles and ammunition of the British casualties were handed over to them and saved the situation. Shortly afterwards the two British divisions were drawn from the line and returned to their own army. In a generous appreciation of their services General Berthelot, after enumerating their captures, said : " Thanks to the heroic courage and proverbial tenacity of the British, the continued efforts of this brave Army Corps have not been in vain. . . . You have added a glorious page to your history. Marfaux, Chaumuzy, Montagne Bligny—all those famous names will be written in letters of gold in the annals of your regiments." The French official bulletins offered also a very special tribute of praise to the 6th Black Watch, a Perthshire battalion, which, under Colonel Tarleton, had done particularly fine work during the long and arduous service of the 51st Division.

Whilst the Twenty-second British Corps had, as described, distinguished itself greatly in the valley of the Ardres on the east of the German salient, the 15th Scottish Division under General H. L. Reed, V.C., had been detailed to aid the French line in its advance on Buzancy

on the western German flank. This veteran division was thrown into the fight on July 28, and made its mark at once upon the formidable German position which faced it. It had relieved the 1st American Division which was much worn by its long and splendid service in General Mangin's Tenth Army. The Americans left their guns in the line to cover the advance, so that, for the first time in history, British, Americans, and French were all engaged as allies upon the same battle-ground. The village was very strongly held, and the high ground to the east of it was bristling with machine-guns, but the Scots infantry would take no denial. The 44th Brigade (Thomson) had attacked the village itself, the 5th Gordons and 8th Seaforths leading the assault. The latter battalion lost its commander, Colonel Smith, but was the first into the objective, while the Gordons held and consolidated the ground to the north of it. Farther north still the 45th Brigade had advanced its whole line, while at the south flank of the attack the 91st French Infantry was clearing the woods in front of it. The machine-gun fire at this point was very heavy, however, and the French, after a gallant struggle, were forced back to their original line, with the result that the right of the attack was in the air. The Seaforths had carried the Château of Buzancy as well as the village, and the orders were at all costs to hold on to these important points ; so part of the 4/5th Black Watch was pushed forward to strengthen the defenders, who were hard pressed and heavily gassed. There was desperate fighting all round the village, which was declared by a veteran French flammenwerfer section attached to the Highlanders to be the most bloody work seen by them in the war. With their flank naked the remains of the brave battalions were exposed about six o'clock in the evening to an overpowering German counter-attack which rolled up from the south-east and drove them, still fighting tooth and claw, through the village, from which six German officers and 200 men were brought as prisoners. Thus by seven in the evening the 44th Brigade, after their day of most heroic effort, were back on their original line. It was a sad end to a splendid deed of arms, but there was no disposition to blame the 87th French Division on the right, who were already worn with much fighting, and who were faced with very difficult country. Many of the Highlanders wept bitter tears of rage and mortification when they found that the deaths of so many of their comrades had not bought the village for which they gave their blood so willingly.

Orders were now received from the French Corps that the Scots 15th Division should change place with its neighbour, the 87th French Division, a difficult operation which was successfully accomplished, the artillery in each case being left in position. The new operation was to consist of an attack upon Hartennes Forest, the 12th French Division working round the south and the 15th Scots Division round the north end of it, both meeting to the east, with Droisy as an ultimate objective. The attacking troops were concealed so far as possible in the cornfields on July 31, and went forward about eight o'clock in the morning of

August 1, after the completion of a successful French advance further down the line. The brunt of this new advance was borne by the 6th Camerons and 13th Royal Scots of the 45th Brigade (Orr-Ewing), together with the 10th Scots Rifles and 7/8th Scottish Borderers of the 46th Brigade (Fortune). The left of the line made fine progress and reached the east side of the Soissons Road, but the 45th Brigade on the right was held up by terrible machine-gun fire, part of which came from several derelict French tanks. These were dealt with and blown to pieces by trench mortars. The advance was then resumed, the French 12th Division coming forward also in the south. About midday the Camerons had reached their mark, but were out of touch with the Borderers on their right, so that they were compelled to form a defensive flank from the cemetery to the road. The Germans lay in a series of wooded hills upon the right, and though these were smothered with shells the brave machine-gunners still clung to their position. So heavy was their fire that the right flank could get no farther, and it was determined to hold on to the ground gained. During the night the 44th Brigade, in spite of its heavy losses three days before, took the place of the 46th.

It was evident on the morning of August 2 that the stern combat of the previous day had not been without its effect. The enemy was retreating all along the line, and his positions were being rapidly evacuated. The 12th French Division on the right was able to advance almost without opposition past the Hartennes Wood. There followed an exhilarating pursuit up to the banks of the Crise River. The 9th Gordon Pioneer Battalion pushed in with great dash, and was in Villeblain before evening, while the French 87th Division reached the river east of Buzancy. The 15th Division was then relieved by the 17th French Division, and was restored to the First British Army amid a shower of congratulatory messages from French Generals and comrades. So deep was the feeling among the French over the magnificent fighting and heavy losses of the Scots Division that a monument was at once raised in their honour in front of the old German position with the inscription : " Ici fleurira toujours le glorieux Chardon d'Écosse parmi les Roses de France." Many brave Scots will lie for ever round this monument. Three splendid battalion commanders, Smith of the Gordons, Turner of the Royal Scots, and Kennedy of the Seaforths, were slain, while Hart of the Scots Borderers and Macleod of the Camerons were incapacitated—five Colonels out of ten battalions. The sufferings from gas were very severe, and all the Brigade Headquarters were severely affected, General Thomson and his staff holding on for the duration of the battle, but collapsing on the evening of August 2.

Whilst the 15th Division had been performing this notable service the 34th British Division (Nicholson) had also been incorporated for the moment into Mangin's Fifteenth Army, and was heavily engaged in the battle line opposite Grand Rozoy, rather south of the point where the Scots were fighting.

So great had been the losses of this splendid Tyneside division in the terrible contests of the Somme and of Flanders that it was now entirely reconstituted with nothing of its previous personnel save its veteran commander and a handful of war-worn officers. The infantry were mostly Territorials from the Palestine campaign. On July 18 the 34th became part of the Tenth French Army near Senlis. On the 22nd it was incorporated into General Penet's Thirtieth Corps, and relieved the French 38th Division in the battle zone, on a line parallel to the Château-Thierry-Soissons Road, having its right just west of Coutremain and its left in Parcy Tigny. Woodcock's 101st Brigade was on the right, Hilliam's 102nd on the left, while Chaplin's 103rd Brigade was in support. French divisions, the 19th and the 58th, were on either side, so that Nicholson's men formed a curious isolated little bit of fighting England.

At 6 a.m. on the morning of July 25 the whole line in this section attacked with the intention of carrying the important road already mentioned from Château-Thierry to Soissons. It was a hard and disappointing day, for the French divisions on either side were held by the heavy fire from the Bois de Plessier and Tigny. The 101st Brigade was not more successful, but the 102nd on the left got forward nearly a mile, and then lay with its left flank thrown back to connect up with its French neighbours. Considering that it was the first experience which these men had had of German artillery and machine-guns, General Nicholson was well satisfied with his new material.

On July 27 the division was relieved by the extension of the flanks of its two neighbours, but it was at once fitted into the line again, filling a battle-front of 1500 yards, with its right east of Oulchy-le-Château. It was just in time for an attack which opened at 5 a.m. on July 29, and it was only by great exertions that the guns were registered and the infantry in their places. The objective was a horse-shoe ridge from Beugneux in the east to Grand Rozoy in the west. The 103rd Brigade was on the right, the 101st upon the left.

The barrage was not as deadly as usual on account of the pressure of time which had hampered the preparation and registration. The slopes were long and open, swept by the deadly machine-guns. It was all odds against the attack. The 103rd Brigade got to the outskirts of Beugneux, but was held up by the murderous fire from an adjacent mill. The 101st surmounted the ridge between Grand Rozoy and Beugneux, but could get no farther, for it was all open ground to the north.

In the early afternoon the 102nd Brigade advanced from the wood in which it lay with the intention of helping the 101st to storm Beugneux, but as it came forward it met the 101st falling back before a strong counter-attack. This movement was checked by the new-comers and the line was sustained upon the ridge.

The net result of an arduous day was that the division was still short of the coveted road, but that it had won about 2000 yards of ground,

including a good position for future operations. Casualties were heavy, and included Colonel Jourdain of the 2nd North Lancashires as well as Captain Weeks, C.O. of the 4th Royal Sussex. The French had got Grand Rozoy upon the left flank, and though they were driven out of it again they won their way back in the early morning of July 30. All this day and the next the troops prepared for a new effort, lying under heavy shell-fire which, among other casualties, killed Colonel Dooner, the chief staff officer of the division.

On August 1 the attack was renewed under a very heavy and efficient barrage, which helped the infantry so much that within two hours all objectives had been won. Beugneux fell after the hill which commanded it had been stormed by the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in a very gallant advance. Colonel Barbow fell while leading his men to victory. On the left the French 25th Division had been held up by the deadly fire from a knoll, but Major Atkinson of the 2nd North Lancashires realised the situation and diverted his reserve company to storm the obstacle, enabling the French right to get forward. It was planned that two British battalions should push on beyond their objectives in order to cover the flanks of a further French advance. One of these, the 4th Cheshires, carried out its part to perfection in spite of heavy losses, which included Colonel Swindells, its commander. The 1st Herefords, however, whose rôle was to cover the left of the 68th French Division, was unable to do so, as that division was itself held up. That night the enemy was in full retreat all along this line, and falling back upon the River Vesle. On August 3 the 34th Division was returned to the area of the Second British Army, having done a fine spell of service which brought the warmest compliments from the French commanders, not only to the infantry, but to General Walthall's guns (152nd and 160th Brigades) as well as Colonel Dobson's 207th, 208th, and 209th Field Companies.

The northward advance of the French, Americans, and British was slow up to the end of July, but became accelerated in the first week of August, Soissons falling to the French on August 2, and the Germans being driven to the line of the Vesle, where they held on very tenaciously for a time, their rearguards showing their usual high soldierly qualities. The Americans had a particularly hard struggle, being faced by some of the élite of the German Army, including the 4th Prussian Guards, but winning their way steadily forward in spite of many strong counter-attacks. The situation upon the Vesle and the Aisne seemed for the moment to have reached an equilibrium, when Marshal Foch called Marshal Haig to his assistance and a new attack was launched in which British troops were once more employed on the grand scale. Their great march had started which was to end only at the bank of the Rhine.

CHAPTER LV

ATTACK OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY

The Battle of Amiens, August 8-22

Great British victory—Advance of the Canadians—Of the Australians—Of the Third Corps—Hard struggle at Chipilly—American assistance—Continuance of the operations—Great importance of the battle.

IN the tremendous and decisive operations which we are now about to examine, it is very necessary to have some fixed scheme in the method of description lest the reader be inextricably lost in the long line of advancing corps and armies. A chapter will be devoted, therefore, to the attack made by Rawlinson's Fourth Army whilst it was operating alone from August 8 to August 22. At that date Byng's Third Army joined in the fray, and subsequently, on August 28, Horne's First Army came into action. For the present, however, we can devote ourselves whole-heartedly to the record of Rawlinson's Army, all the rest being inactive. When the others come in, that is, after August 22, a definite system of narrative will be adopted.

Before describing the great battle some reference should be made to the action of Le Hamel fought on July 4, noticeable as having been the first Allied offensive since the early spring. Its complete success, after the long series of troubles which had plunged all friends of freedom into gloom, made it more important than the numbers engaged or the gain of ground would indicate. It was carried out by the Australian Corps, acting as part of the Fourth Army, and is noticeable because a unit from the 33rd American Division took part in the operations. Le Hamel was taken and the Vaire Wood to the immediate south of the Somme. The gain of ground was about a mile in depth on a front of several miles, and the advance was so swift that a considerable number of prisoners, 1500 in all, were taken, many of them still encumbered by their gas-masks. Some sixty tanks took part in the advance, and did splendid work in rolling out the machine-gun nests of the Germans. Sir John Monash has attributed some of the efficiency of the Australian arrangements and their cunning in the mutual support of guns, tanks, and infantry, so often to be shown in the next four months, to the experience gained in this small battle.

The front of the new and most important attack, which began in the

early morning of August 8, was fifteen miles in length, and extended from near Morlancourt in the north to Braches upon the Avre River to the south. The right of the attack from Hangard onwards was formed by General Debeney's First French Army, while General Rawlinson's Fourth Army formed the left, the British portion being roughly three-fourths of the whole. The entire battle was under the command of Marshal Haig.

The preparations had been made with the skill which the British Command has so often shown in such operations, so that the Germans were swept off their feet by an attack which came upon them as a complete surprise. It was half-past four on a misty morning when the enemy's advanced line heard the sudden crash of the gun-fire, and a moment later saw the monstrous forms of the tanks looming up through the grey light of dawn. Behind the tanks and almost in touch of them came the grim war-worn infantry. Everything went down before that united rush. The battle was won as soon as begun. The only question was how great the success would be.

Taking a bird's-eye view of the advance, before examining the operations more closely, one may say that the Canadian Corps, now under a Canadian commander, General Currie, was on the extreme right of the British line, in touch with the French. Next to them, in the Morlancourt district, where they had never ceased for the last four months to improve their position and to elbow the invaders away from Amiens, were the indomitable and tireless Australians under General Monash. On their left, just south of Albert, was Butler's Third Corps, burning to avenge itself for the hustling which it had endured during that perilous and heroic week in March. These were the three units concerned in the new advance.

The opening barrage, though only a few minutes in length, was of a shattering severity, and was directed against very different defences from those which had defied the Army two years before upon the Somme. Everything flattened out before it, and even the German guns seemed to have been overwhelmed, for their reply was slow and ineffective. Only the machine-guns remained noxious, but the tanks rolled them down. Nowhere at first was there any check or delay. The French on the right of the line had done equally well, and by midday were storming forward upon the north bank of the Avre, their victory being the more difficult and honourable because the river prevented the use of tanks at the first attack.

The Canadians were on the top of their form that day, and their magnificent condition gave promise of the splendid work which they were to do from that hour until almost the last day of the war. They were probably the most powerful and efficient corps at that moment in the whole Army, for they had lain in front of Lens with few losses, while nearly every other corps had been desperately engaged and sustained heavy casualties, hastily made good by recruits. They had also kept

their brigades up to four battalion standard, and their divisions had that advantage of permanence denied to all British Corps. When to these favouring points are added the great hardihood and valour of the men, proved in so many battles, it is probable that in the whole world no finer body could on that day have been let loose behind a barrage. They were weary from long marches before the battle began, but none the less their great spirit rose high above all physical weakness as they pushed forward against the German line.

They were faced at the outset by a problem which might well have taxed the brains of any staff and the valour of any soldiers. This was the crossing of the River Luce, which was covered upon the farther bank by several scattered woods, ideal haunts of machine-guns. So difficult was this operation that the French to the south had to pause for an hour after the capture of the front German line, to give time for it to be carried out. At the end of that period the very complex operation had been carried through, and the whole Allied front was ready to advance. The Canadians had three divisions in the line, the 3rd (Lipsett) next to the French, the 1st (Macdonell) in the middle, and the 2nd (Benstall) on the left. The 2nd and 3rd British Cavalry Brigades with the 4th Canadian Infantry Division (Watson) were in reserve. There was also a mobile force, called the Canadian Independent Force, which was kept ready to take advantage of any opening. This consisted of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Motor Machine-gun Brigades, with the Corps Cyclists, and some movable trench mortars on lorries.

The width of the Canadian attack was some 5000 yards, from the Amiens-Roye Road to the Villers-Bretonneux Railway. Once across the river the whole line came away with a grand rush and every objective was soon attained, each division sweeping forward without a check. The prisoners reported that an attack had indeed been expected, but not so soon, and we can readily believe that the German Army, which had been so repeatedly assured that the British were finally dead and out of the war, must have been greatly amazed by this vigorous resurrection. By 10.40 Caix, which is a good five miles to the eastward, was reported by contact aeroplanes to be surrounded by tanks. The Cavalry and the Independent Force were both pushing to the front, and the latter deviated to the right in order to help the French, who were temporarily in difficulties near Mezières. In the afternoon the Cavalry Division had passed through the victorious and cheering lines of the 2nd Canadians, and were carrying out a number of spirited enterprises upon the German supporting lines. About the same time the 4th Canadian Infantry Division pushed forward and was reported to the east of Beaufort and Cayeux. By evening all along the line the full objectives had been reached save at one point near Le Quesnel. In their splendid day's work men of the Dominion had taken some 5000 prisoners and great quantities of booty. Many of the prisoners and guns were taken by the cavalry, who had their best day in the war. "The best hunt we ever

had, forty minutes and a kill in the open," was the characteristic description of one hard-riding dragoon.

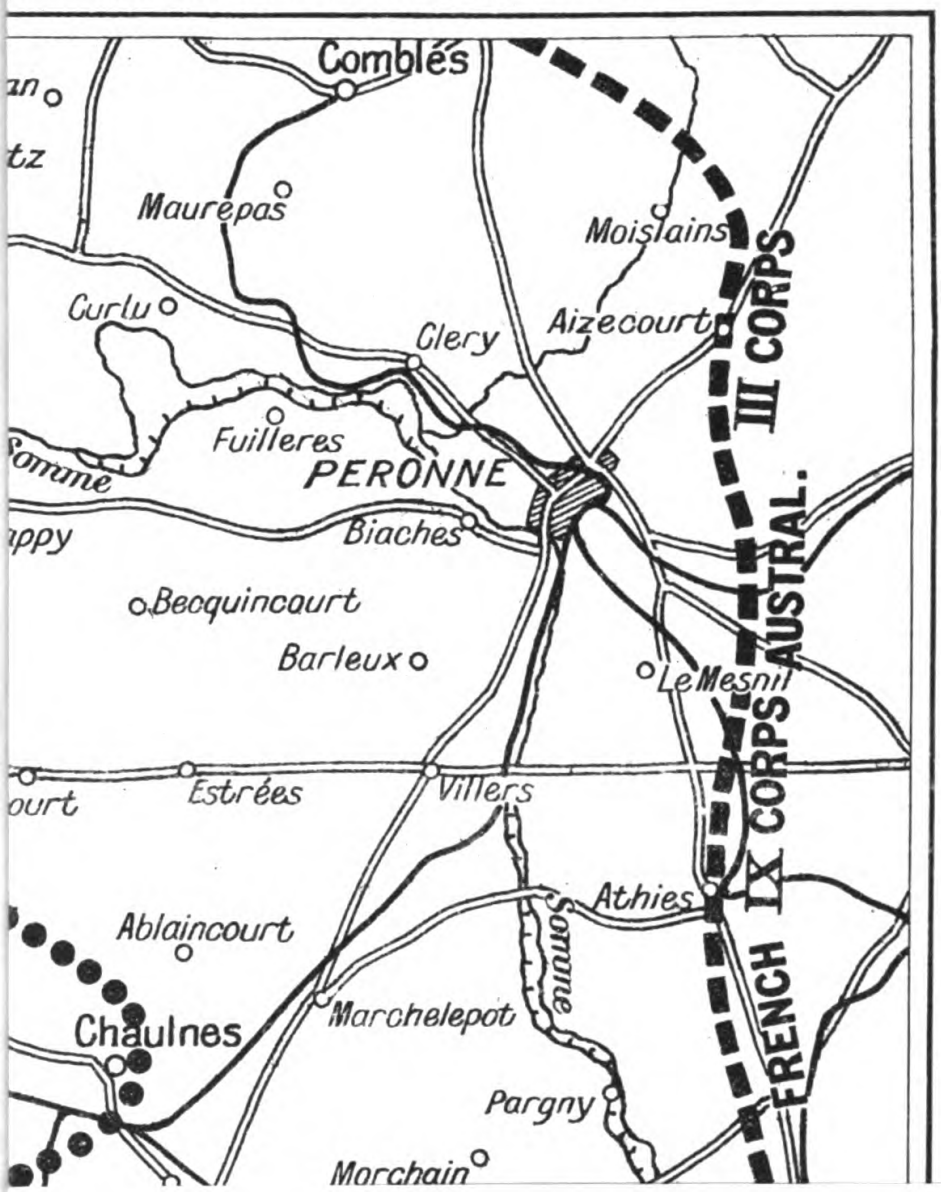
We shall now turn to the advance of Monash's Australians in the centre of the British line. Fate owed Monash a great victory in this sector, for, during months of quiet but ceaseless work, he had been improving his position as the keen runner ensures his foothold and crouches his body while he awaits the crack of the pistol. For once Fate paid its debts, and with such a corps under his hand it would have been strange had it not been so. All those advantages already described in the case of the Canadians applied equally to the Australians, and if the former outlasted the others, it must be remembered that the Australians had been in the line for four months before the fighting began—months which included the severe action of Villers-Bretonneux. They were a grand corps, and they did grand work for the Empire—work which we can never forget so long as our common history endures.

The order of battle of the Australian Corps on August 8 was that the 2nd Division (Smyth) was on the right in touch with the Canadians, while the 3rd Division (Gillibrand) was on the left in touch with the 58th British Division, the Somme being the dividing line between them. Behind the 2nd Australians was the 5th (Hobbs), and behind the 3rd the 4th (Maclagan), with orders in each case to leapfrog over their leaders when the first objectives were carried. The 1st Division (Glasgow) was in the immediate rear. Thus at least 50,000 glorious infantry marched to battle under the Southern Cross Union Jack upon this most historic day—a day which, as Ludendorff has since confessed, gave the first fatal shock to the military power of Germany.

All depended upon surprise, and the crouching troops waited most impatiently for the zero hour, expecting every instant to hear the crash of the enemy's guns and the whine of the shrapnel above the assembly trenches. Every precaution had been taken the day before, the roads had been deserted by all traffic, and aeroplanes had flown low during the night, so that their droning might cover the noise of assembling tanks. Some misgiving was caused by the fact that a sergeant who knew all about it had been captured several days before. By a curious chance the minutes of his cross-examination by the German intelligence officer were captured during the battle. He had faced his ordeal like a Spartan, and had said no word. It is not often that the success of a world-shaking battle depends upon the nerve and the tongue of a single soldier.

Zero hour arrived without a sign, and in an instant barrage, tanks, and infantry all burst forth together, though the morning mist was so thick that one could only see twenty or thirty yards. Everywhere the enemy front posts went down with hardly a struggle. It was an absolute surprise. Now and then, as the long, loose lines of men pushed through the mist, there would come the flash of a field-piece, or the sudden burst of a machine-gun from their front ; but in an instant, with the coolness born of long practice, the men would run crouching forward, and then

AL POSITION AFTER THE FALL OF PERONNE.



quickly close in from every side, shooting or bayoneting the gun crew. Everything went splendidly from the first, and the tanks did excellent service, especially in the capture of Warfusée.

The task of the two relieving divisions, the 4th on the left and the 5th on the right, was rather more difficult, as the Germans had begun to rally and the fog to lift. The 4th Australians on the south bank of the Somme were especially troubled, as it soon became evident that the British attack on the north bank had been held up, with the result that the German guns on Chipilly Spur were all free to fire across from their high position upon the Australians in the plain to the south. Tank after tank and gun after gun were knocked out by direct hits, but the infantry was not to be stopped and continued to skirmish forward as best they might under so deadly a fire, finishing by the capture of Cerisy and of Morcourt. The 5th Division on the right, with the 8th and 15th Brigades in front, made an equally fine advance, covering a good stretch of ground.

Having considered the Canadians and the Australians, we turn now to the Third Corps on the north of the line. They were extended from Morlancourt to the north bank of the Somme, which is a broad canalised river over all this portion of its course. On the right was the 58th London Division (Ramsay), with Lee's 18th Division to the north of it, extending close to the Ancre, where Higginson's 12th Division lay astride of that marshy stream. North of this again was the 47th Division (Gorringe), together with a brigade of the 33rd American Division. Two days before the great advance, on August 6, the 27th Wurtemburg Division had made a sudden strong local attack astride of the Bray-Corbie Road, and had driven in the 18th Divisional front, taking some hundreds of prisoners, though the British counter-attack regained most of the lost ground on the same and the following days. This unexpected episode somewhat deranged the details of the great attack, but the 18th played its part manfully none the less, substituting the 36th Brigade of the 12th Division for the 54th Brigade, which had been considerably knocked about. None of the British prisoners taken seem to have given away the news of the coming advance, but it is probable that the sudden attack of the Wurtemburgers showed that it was suspected, and was intended to anticipate and to derange it.

In the first phase of the attack the little village of Sailly-Laurette on the north bank of the Somme was carried by assault by the 2/10th Londons. At the same moment the 174th Brigade attacked Malard Wood to the left of the village. There was a difficulty in mopping up the wood, for small German posts held on with great tenacity, but by 9 o'clock the position was cleared. The 173rd Brigade now went forward upon the really terrible task of getting up the slopes of Chipilly Hill under the German fire. The present chronicler has looked down upon the line of advance from the position of the German machine-guns and can testify that the affair was indeed as arduous as could be imagined.

The village of Chipilly was not cleared, and the attack, after several very gallant attempts, was at a stand. Meanwhile the 53rd Brigade on the left had got about half-way to its objective and held the ground gained, but could get no farther in face of the withering fire. Farther north, however, the 12th Division, moving forward upon the northern slopes of the Ancre, had gained its full objectives, the idea being that a similar advance to the south would pinch out the village of Morlancourt. There was a time in the attack when it appeared as if the hold-up of the 18th Division would prevent Vincent's 35th Brigade, on the right of the 12th Division, from getting forward, but the situation was restored by a fine bit of work by the 1st Cambridgeshires, who, under Colonel Saint, renewed the attack in a most determined way and finally were left with only 200 men standing, but with 316 German prisoners as well as their objective. A wandering tank contributed greatly to this success.

The partial nature of the local victory was due not only to the excellent German dispositions and resistance, but to some want of liaison between tanks and infantry, as well as to the total disability of the flying service to furnish any reports before 12 o'clock. This want was partly made good by the excellent scouting of the Northumberland Hussars. The remainder of the day was spent in clearing the ground gained and holding a series of counter-attacks, one of which drove back an advanced line of the 53rd Brigade.

Summing up, then, the result of the first day's fighting, it may be briefly said that seven German Divisions had been cut to pieces, that 10,000 prisoners and 200 guns had been counted, and that an advance had been made which in the French sector reached Beaufort, and laid the British line well up to Caix, Framerville, and Chipilly. To those who associated those village names with the dark days when the Fifth Army, exhausted and decimated, was compelled to retreat through them, it was indeed an added joy that they should be the milestones of victory. The whole penetration, though not more than three miles north of the Somme, was seven or eight miles at the deepest point, which is the greatest ever yet attained on the first day of any Allied attack.

The battle was vigorously renewed on the morning of August 9, and once more the tide flowed eastwards, carrying the average depth of progress two or three miles farther. In the south the French directed their general advance rather to the right and reached Arvillers as their final point. Their take of prisoners had amounted altogether to 4000, and their depth of advance was over eight miles. To their north the Canadians had reached Rosières, and the Australians Rainecourt and Morcourt. To the north of the Somme the Third Corps had been temporarily hung up by the very vigorous German resistance in a strong position between Chipilly and Morlancourt. Before evening General Rawlinson was able to report the capture of a total for the two days of 17,000 prisoners and 250 guns.

To take the events of this second day of battle in closer detail, the

Canadians resumed their attack at 10 a.m. with the same order of divisions in the line, but with their 4th Division acting with the Independent Force upon the right, where in the early morning it captured Le Quesnel. There was heavy fighting all day along the Corps front, but the advance was pushed forward for another 2500 yards. Many villages were contained in this area, the 3rd Canadians on the right getting Folies and Bouchoir, the 2nd Canadians on the left Vrely, Rosières, and Meharicourt, while the 1st Canadians in the centre got Warvillers, Beaufort, and Rouvroy. The Germans had rushed up their anti-tank guns, and the casualties were heavy that day, especially near Le Quesnel, where many tanks were destroyed by direct hits from concealed batteries. To make a complete and connected narrative of the doings upon this front it may here be added that on August 10 the resistance thickened and the advance slowed. Le Quesnoy was taken early by the 3rd Canadians, upon which the 32nd British Division passed through their ranks and carried the advance on to the outskirts of Parvillers and Damery. The 4th Canadian Division in turn had very stubborn fighting and considerable losses, but it ended the day in possession of Fouquescourt, Maucourt, Chilly, and Hallu. At night, great fires reddening the whole eastern sky gave promise of a further German retreat. On August 11 it was clear, however, that no further important advance could be made without fresh preparation, and orders were given for consolidation. A French attack on the right had no success, nor was the 32nd Division able to take Damery. Instead of advance it was rather a day of strong counter-attacks, against which the attenuated lines, after three days of battle, were hard put to it to hold their own, a flank fire from Lihons helping the German attack at Hallu and Chilly. The line was in the main held, however, and a total take of 8000 prisoners was in the Canadian cages that evening, while 167 guns had been taken by the one Corps. We shall now turn back and follow the fortunes of the Australians on the second and third days of the battle.

On August 9 General Monash's Corps still carried forward its victorious career, though a halt was called for the 4th Division on the left which awaited developments upon the north bank of the river. On the right the 2nd Division passed through the 5th in order to continue the advance, while the 1st Division thrust itself in upon the right flank, next to the Canadians. Progress was slower everywhere, but none the less it was substantial, Framerville being taken by the 7th Brigade. There was a misunderstanding about time, with the result that the 1st Division advanced some hours before their Canadian neighbours, with tragic consequences to their own right flank, formed by the 2nd Brigade. The advance was over open country, with the Lihons ridge and village in front, from which heavy gun-fire played upon the attack and caused considerable losses, while on the right a deadly fire was maintained from Rosières Station. So heavy were the casualties in the 1st and 2nd Divisions that reinforcements had to be sent up when the advance was

resumed. In the evening some relief was obtained, for the region of the old French trenches was reached and the men were at last able to get some cover. Many of the Australians who fought through this long hot day had marched for five hours in order to reach the field of battle, so that it was a remarkable test of endurance. Finally Crepy and Crepy Wood were taken and held against three severe counter-attacks which broke upon them next day. On August 11 Lihons Ridge fell and the village was occupied by the 2nd Brigade, which again had to face determined attacks. The Germans fully appreciated the vital worth of this position, which commanded the plain both to west and east, so they strained every nerve first to hold and afterwards to recover it, but it was in stronger hands than theirs. The 3rd Brigade on the left of Lihons was particularly heavily attacked but threw back its assailants in confusion. Every yard gained was held. A final very serious German counter-attack in successive waves, with 400 in a wave, drove down from Lihons Wood in the north-east and actually penetrated the front Australian lines, but the 8th Battalion in support threw itself into the fight and soon the position had been completely restored.

In the meantime, the 4th Australian Division had been released by the fact that the remains of the 58th Division and the 131st American Infantry Regiment had, as will be told, cleared the Chipilly Ridge north of the river. Part of the 4th Australians had crossed the river, fraternising greatly with the Americans, so that the officers on both sides had some trouble in sorting out their men—the more so as the comradeship had often taken the form of an exchange of hats and coats. On the night of August 10 the whole of the 4th Australians had crossed to the north bank of the Somme near Sailly-le-Sec, and their commander, General Maclagan, had taken under him the Americans and also the 173rd and 174th Brigades of the British 58th Division, much the worse for wear.

The 3rd Australian Division had taken the place south of the Somme vacated by their fellow-countrymen, and on the morning of August 11 they continued the attack in the direction of Proyart, that village being eventually carried by the 10th Brigade. It is needless to say that books might be written as to individual adventures and deeds of heroism, which in their aggregate supplied the driving force which carried the line ever more and more to the eastward. In giving a condensed account of the effects one can hardly get down to the more human story of the causes. Yet few greater deeds of valour can have been anywhere done than that of Sergeant Statton of the 40th Battalion, who in this engagement of Proyart seeing a neighbouring battalion, the 37th, held up by a nest of machine-guns, ran across to their aid, shot all the gunners at one gun, captured three guns single-handed, and chased the crews from two others. Many a battalion has spent itself in doing less.

We shall now turn to the British Third Corps on the north of the Somme and so complete the account of the attack of the Fourth Army. It will be remembered that on the evening of August 8 they had made

headway along the whole line but had been held up on the Chipilly Spur.

The attack upon Chipilly was renewed at 4.15 next afternoon, the delay being caused by the need of assembling the reserves, which consisted of the remainder of the 58th Division and of the 131st Regiment of Bell's 33rd Division of the United States Army. The assault was made by the 6th and 2/10th London Battalions, but they were opportunely and very efficiently aided by two companies of the Americans, who had lost their direction for the main attack planned to the north, but who seemed indifferent which fight they were in so long as they were fighting. There was a check at the outset, but the attack, while demonstrating from the west, really materialised from the north, and both village and ridge were captured with a number of prisoners. This was a very important little victory from the point of view of the Australians to the south who had been commanded by the German guns from this elevated position.

The main attack was north of the Chipilly Spur, and was planned to gain Cressaire Wood and a line across from the Somme to the Ancre corresponding with such an advance. The assault was made by two weak brigades of the 58th Londoners upon the right, the 131st American Regiment in the centre, and the remains of the 58th upon the left. Farther north the 12th Division, with the 37th Brigade in front, carried on the line. Both Londoners and Americans advanced with equal valour, and after a stiff fight the main portion of the objectives was won, though it took three hours of hard work to win them. Much credit was due to all, but most to the American infantry, who had their first experience of modern fighting and who were naturally embarrassed by the disappearance of two of their companies which had drifted into the Chipilly affair. For a time there was a gap between divisions, but before evening the 12th extended to the right and all was well. The correction was very necessary, for at 3 a.m. on August 10 a German counter-attack broke without effect upon this very point of junction. The 12th Division had had a very good day on August 9, Incledon-Webber's 37th Brigade especially distinguishing itself. The 6th Buffs and 6th West Kents had heavy losses, but took 350 prisoners, two field-guns, and a number of machine-guns. Two of these were taken single-handed by Sergeant Harris of the West Kents, who met his death in attacking a third. The Victoria Cross was his posthumous reward.

On August 10 the Third Corps front was pushed forward in the morning by a system of infiltration, British and American patrols scouting and fighting through the eastern portion of Cressaire Wood. Before evening, without any serious fighting, they reached the old French Amiens defence line, which was the original full objective upon this front. Having entirely accomplished his arduous task General Butler, who had been handicapped by an illness which he disregarded while his work called for his presence, took a short spell of rest, his place

being taken by General Godley. The 47th Division (Gorringe) came across to the right wing, relieving the 18th Division, while shortly after the 33rd American Division, to the great regret of their British comrades, entrained for the south to join the main American Army, but not before their 133rd Regiment, acting with the 13th Australian Brigade, had taken Etinehem Spur, to the north of the River Somme. The action now died down in this quarter. In the three days of fighting General Butler's Corps had taken 90 guns and 3000 prisoners, while, in the words of General Rawlinson, "in protecting the left flank of the Fourth Army they were given a difficult task which was carried out with a determination and gallantry beyond all praise." The losses had been 6500, 500 of which were from the American Regiment. The general result of the battle by the night of August 11 was that the French had taken 8000 and the British 21,000 prisoners with 400 guns, so that it was already clear that the greatest victory which the British Army had yet won was that which initiated the final advance. In spite of all this success it is to be borne in mind, however, that the Allies had only reached the old German front line trenches of 1916, which were now a valuable barrier for the rear of the retreating army. There was a pause now while the Fourth Army was waiting for their comrades of the Third Army on the left to develop their extension of the attack. Meanwhile many small actions and local advances on Rawlinson's front kept his opponents from having time to reorganise. On August 13, as already mentioned, Americans and Australians advanced the line to the north of the river along the strip which is bounded upon the left by the Bray-Corbie Road. On August 14 the Canadian 7th Brigade took Parvillers after some very stiff local fighting. They were driven out again that night by the heavy concentration of the German artillery, but next morning, with the co-operation upon their flank of their comrades of the 9th Brigade, they won it once more. In this operation the 52nd Battalion took Damery, while the French carried the wood to the south of the village. There was a strong counter-attack in the afternoon by the German 121st Division, but it was beaten back, leaving a number of prisoners. About August 20 the Canadians began to slip quietly out of the line, and were conveyed, unknown to the Germans, to a new front where they came under the command of General Horne of the First Army. Their exploits upon this new stage will be described later. The French were now on the immediate right of the Australians until the time came for the advent of the British Ninth Corps.

Amid the tremendous events which followed each other in a stupendous historical procession during the latter half of 1918 it is hard to select those which were decisive from those which were merely great. It may safely be said, however, that three dates stand out as great military crises—the turn of the tide on July 18, the British advance on August 8, and the breaking of the Hindenburg Line on September 29. It has been admitted by General Ludendorff that it was the second of these which

broke the confidence of the German Staff and finally convinced them that the war must go against them. A very special honour rests, therefore, with the three Corps, British, Australian, and Canadian, who brought about this victory, as well as with the tanks, the cavalry, and the airmen who led or followed the victorious infantry, and the masterful guns, during these days of doom. The German military writers before the war, and the German journals during the war, were never weary of sneering at British military power. It was a just retribution that the mortal wound to their own armies was inflicted by the very forces which they had minimised and held in contempt.

CHAPTER LVI

CONTINUATION OF THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY

From August 22 to the Battle of the Hindenburg Line, September 29, 1918

Further advance of the Australians—Of the Third Corps—Capture of Albert—Advance across the old Somme battlefield—Capture of Mont St. Quentin—Splendid Australian exploit—Fall of Peronne—Debut of the Yeomanry Division—Attack on the outliers of the Hindenburg Line—Appearance of the Ninth Corps—Eve of the Judgment.

WE have now reached the date when Byng's Third Army joined in the fray, and it is necessary to find some means of co-ordinating the narrative and carrying it on in definite stages. The next well-marked crisis which affects each of the armies engaged is the great general attack on September 29, which broke the Hindenburg Line. Therefore, in separate chapters the operations of each army will be brought up to that date, and then further chapters will cover the doings of each up to the date of the Armistice. Since we have dealt with the Fourth Army, we may as well continue with it now until we are in close touch with the Hindenburg Line, premising only that instead of an inert neighbour upon the left we have a very active advancing British Army. We shall then go on to the Third and to the First Armies, and bring each of them in turn up to the same point.

On August 22 and the following days, the Fourth Army, with only two Corps—the Third and the Australians—in front, renewed its attack, greatly strengthened by the movement of the Third Army on its left, which ensured that at least five British Corps were all moving forward together, distributing the advance over so wide an area that the Germans were less able to concentrate reserves of men or of guns at any one point—a result which was much aided by the fine work of General Mangin's Army on the right.

The main part of the fighting on the front of the Fourth Army on August 22 was north of the Somme, where the 3rd Australian Division covered the right flank of the Third Corps. On the south of the river the Australian Corps advanced on a front of 4½ miles, and took all their limited objectives, which represented a depth of 1½ miles. This was effected by the 5th Australian Division on the right and the 4th on the

left, supported and finally supplanted by the 1st Australian and Lambert's 32nd British Divisions, the latter on the right. The advance, which began at dawn, was no easy one, as the country was much cut about with many obstacles, seamed with trenches, and dotted with scattered woods. The determined infantry would take no denial, however, and Herleville, Chuignies, and several other small village sites were captured. The heaviest fighting was in the woods, but a skilful system of encircling points of danger had been carefully worked out, and the losses were less than might have been anticipated. Sixteen guns, 80 officers, and 2463 men were the trophies of the day. Early in the morning of August 24 the 3rd Australian Division moved suddenly forward north of the river, captured the town of Bray, and formed a permanent line upon the further side. On August 25 this same unit advanced 3000 yards on a 4000-yard front with very little resistance, always covering the right of the Third Corps.

Let us now follow the work of this Corps from August 22 onwards.

It covered the ground from Albert in the north, where it was working in close liaison with the Welsh Division on the right of the Fifth Corps, down to a point near the Somme where it was in touch with the Australians. The immediate object of the operations was to eject the enemy from the positions in and around Albert which he had held for four months, and also from his whole defensive system opposite to the Amiens defence line, which latter had been regained in the previous fighting. On the day of battle the 47th London Division was on the right of the Corps line, the 12th Division in the centre, and the 18th Division on the left. To this last was confided the difficult and important operation of clearing Albert, and of establishing light bridges over the Ancre so as to cross that stream and attack the high ground east of the town on the Becourt Road. There was to be no preliminary bombardment, but machine-gun and artillery barrages were to cover the infantry.

The zero hour was 4.45, and at the signal the 47th and 12th Divisions advanced behind a creeping barrage, moving at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes, and as thick as 250 field-guns could make it. With such a van of destruction in front the infantry came forward without undue losses, though a particular strong point named the Pear Tree just on the interdivisional boundary held fast and was destined to give trouble for several days to come. As an observer remarked, " Anything British, from a helmet to a tank, which showed over the crest was met by the sweeping fire of many machine-guns, while shells from trench mortars fell in the ranks of men following up. It was only when the general attack was continued that this hornet's nest could be cleared." Save for this point the general objectives marked out for these divisions, which meant an advance of between two and three miles, were successfully made good, but an attempt to follow up with cavalry and whippet

tanks could not be persevered in, so stiff was the opposition. It was soon found that the enemy in the 47th Division sector was not only capable of defence, but of aggression, for about 4 in the afternoon his infantry advanced in a strong attack with a powerful artillery backing, and drove with such violence into the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th Londons, forming the 142nd Brigade, that they were temporarily thrown back. Their right held firm, however, as did the 3rd Australian Division to the south, so that no gap was formed. Being reinforced by the 175th Brigade from the 58th Division in reserve, the Londoners soon reformed their ranks, greatly thinned both by their advance in the morning and by the German onslaught in the afternoon. The enemy's front was so menacing that the rest of the day and part of August 23 were spent in reorganisation and consolidation.

Meanwhile on the left, Lee's 18th Division, a famous all-English unit of the type which, however brilliant its comrades, has always formed the solid core of the magnificent tireless Imperial Army, was carrying out its difficult task at Albert. It had two brigades in the line, the 54th to the south and the 55th to the north of the town. The Germans in front held the line of the Ancre, with Albert as a bridgehead, the ruins and cellars of the town being sown with snipers and machine-guns. To clear the town, to occupy the high ground to the east, and by these operations to cover the flanks of two armies was the function of this division, and also to secure crossings at Albert by which the Welsh on their left could get across.

The stream in this part was 6 feet deep and 14 wide, with swampy banks strongly held by the enemy. There were unguarded bits, however, and patrols got across on the 21st, which simplified the task, though it deranged at the last moment all the preparations for barrage. Part of the 6th Northamptons and the 11th Royal Fusiliers crossed early on the 22nd and formed up along the edge of the Albert-Meaulte Road, while the rest of the 6th Northamptons fought hard for elbow-room on the right flank, working in close liaison with the 36th Brigade on the left of the 12th Division who were attacking Meaulte. About 6 the whole front line advanced in this quarter, flooding over the scattered German posts, and capturing eighty machine-guns with their crews. At the same time the 8th East Surreys on the left had rushed Albert, and after some fine confused fighting had cleared the ruins and taken the whole town, with the river crossings. The 7th Buffs at once pushed out on the Albert-Pozières road, but were held up by very heavy fire. The 11th Royal Fusiliers further south had also been held up by the guns on the summit of Shamrock Hill, east of the town, but a company of the 2nd Bedfords, led by Captain Drake, captured this strong point and the line went forward. Altogether it was a good day's work, and save on the extreme left most of the objects were attained at the cost of reasonable casualties, which included General Sadleir-Jackson of the 54th Brigade, who was badly wounded in the leg. The 53rd Brigade continued their

advance up to 10 p.m., so as to gain the high ground on the Becourt Road, and thus prepare for the next day's operations.

The 113th Brigade of the Welsh Division on the left had been passed over by the Albert bridges, and the 53rd had also passed in the night. The plan of August 23 was that these two brigades should attack Usna and Tara Hills respectively, on the high ground to the west of Becourt Wood. The Usna attack is described under the operations of the Fifth Corps. The Tara attack was completely successful, and four tanks rendered conspicuous service. The work was carried out by the 10th Essex, 7th West Kents, and the 7th Queen's from the 55th Brigade. It was a fine military feat, far more important than 350 prisoners would imply, for it broke the girdle round Albert and cleared the road for the advance. No progress was made at the other portions of the Corps front on this date, save for some advance on the left of the 12th Division near Meaulte.

It had been determined to keep up incessant pressure, and to test Hindenburg's incautious maxim that the side with the best nerves would wear down the other. At 1 a.m. on August 24 the whole line burst into flame once more, and under a clear moon the Army rolled forward. On the right the 47th Division had ample revenge for its temporary check, as its 140th, together with the 175th Brigade of the 58th Division, Londoners all, swept across the debated land of the Happy Valley and secured it. The 18th Division also made good its objectives, the chief impediment being the historical mine craters of 1916 at La Boiselle; 250 prisoners were taken out of these by the 8th Royal Berks, a party of whom under Captain Nicholson, covered by Captain Sutherst's 53rd Trench Mortar Battery, cleared up this difficult point. In the morning the 18th Division was well to the east of Becourt. The only check was in the centre, where the general advance of the 12th Division was still held up by that Pear Tree strong point which had already caused so much trouble. Before evening, however, it was clear that the enemy was effecting a general retreat, and the 37th Brigade was able to take possession of this very well-defended portion of the ridge.

It was clear now that the German front was crumbling, and the whole British line was pushing ahead. The chief obstacle on the morning of August 25 came from an all-pervading mist. There was no check, however, anywhere in the advance up to 2 p.m., when the general line of the front was up to Mametz. The hardest fighting of the day was done at Billon Wood by the 173rd Brigade, all three battalions, the 2/2nd, 3rd, and 2/4th London, having real hard work, and standing to it like men. The place was strongly held with powerful artillery support, but it had been cleared before nightfall. By the same hour the 12th Division was east of Mametz, and the 8th East Surreys were on the far side of Mametz Wood. As these familiar places came once more into their possession the troops felt that the tide had indeed turned. On August 26 the 18th Division had cleared the ruins of Montauban,

and the 12th Carnoy, while the 58th pushed on from Billon Wood, and wound up within a few hundred yards of Maricourt. This village was passed the next day, and altogether, on August 27 and 28, another three miles were added to the advance of the 12th and 58th Divisions, the progress never ceasing, but being continually accompanied by fighting and maintained always against severe artillery fire. The Germans had thrown in three fresh divisions upon this front and the resistance was still very stiff.

This was especially evident at Trones Wood, which was carried for the second time in this way by the 18th Division on August 27. This fine assault was made by the 8th Berks and 7th West Kents, who carried it out with both flanks open to the enemy since the Welsh had been held in front of Delville. So heavy were the losses that the Berkshires were in danger of not being strong enough to hold what they had gained, so the 10th Essex were pushed into the fight. At 8 a.m. on August 27 a German Guards battalion drove through Trones Wood and pushed out the British stormers, but they held on by their teeth to the eastern edge of Bernafoy Wood. Here General Barker of the 53rd Brigade reorganised his very weary ranks, which had been greatly mixed in the advance and retreat. Just as evening was falling the remains of the gallant brigade darted forward once more and came to grips with the Francis Joseph Prussian Guards, who lay with many a machine-gun among the brushwood. Led by Colonel Banks of the 8th Berkshires, the English infantry rushed into the wood and poured over the German position, taking forty machine-guns and completely overcoming the resistance. It was a fine exploit, and when the 53rd Brigade gave place to the 54th on the morning of August 28 they handed over to them the whole of this terrible grove, which has been so drenched by the bravest blood of two great nations. There was no further action in this quarter on August 28, but on the 29th the 54th Brigade, now under Colonel Perceval, was heavily engaged. Guillemont was passed, though no trace of this large village could be distinguished, and all day the 2nd Bedfords on the left and the 6th Northants on the right were working forward across the grim old battlefield. On August 28 the 12th Division took Hardecourt, and General Higginson, who may well have been disturbed by the constant flow of youngsters into his ranks to take the place of his disabled veterans, must have had his fears removed and his heart gladdened by the splendid conduct that day of 250 men of the 9th Royal Fusiliers under Colonel Van Someren, none of whom had been in France more than three weeks. On August 30 a great centre of German resistance was Priez Farm, which held up the 11th Royal Fusiliers and also the 47th Division which had taken the place of the 12th in the centre of the Corps. The enemy was clinging hard to Morval, also in the Welsh area, and this made any advance on the front of the 18th Division impossible. It was clear that a regular battle with artillery preparation was needed, and this was arranged for September 1. The right wing of the Corps had in the

meantime got to the line of Maurepas, and on August 31 the 47th Division in the centre made a good advance up to Long Wood with a number of prisoners to show for it. The 58th Division closed in upon Marrières Wood, which they took after some heavy fighting, avenging the brave South Africans who had died so gallantly there five months before. It was clear that the enemy were now standing in a strong line, and were by no means beaten, which was shown also by the bearing of the prisoners, whose morale was high, and who spoke with as much pride and assurance as ever of the ultimate military success of their country. Yet during the last week they had been steadily driven back some 3000 yards every day by the remorseless barrage of the British guns followed by the disciplined rush of the British infantry.

We shall now leave the Third Corps for a time at this line of fixed resistance and return to consider the advance of the Australians to the south. This had been victorious and unbroken, though no very serious resistance had to be overcome. Smoke by day and fire by night, with explosions at all hours, heralded the German retreat. On August 26 Cappy was occupied. On the 27th Vaux Wood was occupied north of the river, while Foucaucourt and Vermandovillers were submerged to the south, villages no longer, but at least marks of progress upon the map. On the 28th the Germans were still retreating with the toes of the Australians upon their very heels, but the heavier shelling warned General Monash that there was a fixed line ahead, as might well be expected, since his men were now nearing the point where the bend of the Somme brought the river right across their front. Dompierre, Fay, Estrées, and other old centres of contention were taken that day. On the 29th the 3rd Australians got Hem, while on the south the rest of the Corps advanced 2000 yards to the banks of the river, taking the whole line of villages from Biaches to Villers-Carbonnel. The task of capturing such places was much complicated by the difficulty of knowing where they were after you had got them. The present writer was in Carbonnel, which was a considerable place, some weeks later, and was unable to find any trace of habitation save a signboard upon which was printed the words : " Here was the village of Villers-Carbonnel."

At the end of August the resistance had stiffened, and it was clear that the Germans meant to take advantage of the unique situation of Peronne in order to make it a strong centre of resistance. To the civilian observer it would have seemed that such a place was impregnable against assault, for it is girt in with reedy marshes on the west, and with a moat on the north, while the south is defended by the broad river, even as in the days when Quentin Durward formed part of the garrison. Yet the Australians took it in their stride by a mixture of cleverness and valour which must have greatly rejoiced General Rawlinson, who saw so formidable an obstacle removed from his path. As a preliminary operation the 3rd Australian Division had taken Clery in the north, which they held against a vigorous counter-attack on August 30. Halles was after-

wards captured. The question now was how to approach the town. Immediately to the north of it there lies a formidable hill, well marked, though of no great height. This place, which is called Mont St. Quentin, commanded all approaches to the town as well as the town itself. The Germans had recognised the importance of the position and had garrisoned it with picked troops with many machine-guns. Standing upon its pitted crest, where one was often ankle-deep in empty cartridges, one could not imagine as one looked west how a rabbit could get across unscathed. This was the formidable obstacle which now faced the Australians.

They went at it without a pause and with characteristic earnestness and directness, controlled by very skilful leadership. Two brigades, the 5th and 6th of Rosenthal's 2nd Australian Division, had been assembled on the north of the Somme bend, the men passing in single file over hastily constructed foot-bridges. By this means they had turned the impassable water defences which lie on the westward side of Peronne, but they were faced by a terrible bit of country, seamed with trenches, jagged with wire, and rising to the village of St. Quentin, which is a little place on the flank of the hill. The hill itself is crowned by a ragged wood some acres in extent. Mont St. Quentin lies about equidistant, a mile or so, from Peronne in the south, and from the hamlet of Feuillaucourt in the north. On this front of two miles the action was fought.

Early in the morning of August 31 the 5th Brigade, under General Martin, advanced upon the German position. The 17th Battalion was in the centre opposite to Mont St. Quentin. The 19th was on the right covering the ground between that stronghold and Peronne, the 20th on the left, extending up to Feuillaucourt, with that village as one of its objectives. The 18th was in close support. A very heavy and efficient artillery bombardment had prepared the way for the infantry assault, but the defending troops were as good as any which Germany possessed, and had endured the heavy fire with unshaken fortitude, knowing that their turn would come.

From the moment that the infantry began to close in on the German positions the battle became very bitter and the losses very serious. The 19th Battalion on the right were scourged with fire from the old fortified walls of Peronne, from St. Denis, a hamlet north of the town, and from scattered woods which faced them. Every kind of missile, including pineapple-bombs and rifle-grenades, poured down upon them. The long thin line carried on bravely, halted, carried on once more, and finally sank down under such poor cover as could be found, sending back a message that further artillery bombardment was a necessity. On the left of the attack the 20th Battalion seems to have had a less formidable line before it, and advancing with great speed and resolution, it seized the village of Feuillaucourt. In the centre, however, a concentration of fire beat upon the 17th Battalion, which was right under the guns of Mont St. Quentin. Working on in little groups of men, waiting,

watching, darting forward, crouching down, crawling, so the scattered line gradually closed with its enemy, presenting a supreme object lesson of that individual intelligence and character which have made the Australian soldier what he is. A little after 7 o'clock in the morning the survivors of two companies drew together for the final rush, and darted into the village of Mont St. Quentin, throwing out a line of riflemen upon the far side of it. On that far side lay the culminating slope of the hill crowned with the dark ragged trees, their trunks linked up with abattis, laced with wire and covering machine-guns. The place was still full of Germans and they had strong reserves on the farther side of the hill.

The 17th had reached their goal, but their situation was very desperate. Their right was bent back and was in precarious contact with the 19th Battalion. Their left flank had lost all touch. They were a mere thin fringe of men with nothing immediately behind them. Two companies of the supporting battalion had already been sent up to stiffen the line of the 19th Battalion, and the remaining two companies were now ordered forward to fill the gap between the 17th and 20th. Not a rifle was left in reserve, and the whole strength of the Brigade was in the firing-line. It was no time for hedging, for everything was at stake.

But the pressure was too severe to last. The Australian line could not be broken, but there comes a point when it must bend or perish. The German pressure from the wood was ever heavier upon the thin ranks in front of it. A rush of grey infantry came down the hill, with showers of bombs in front of them. One of the companies in the village had lost every officer. The fire was murderous. Guns firing over open sights had been brought up on the north of the village, and were sending their shells through the ruined houses. Slowly the Australians loosened their clutch upon their prize and fell back to the west of the village, dropping down in the broken ground on the other side of the main Peronne Road, and beating back five bombing attacks which had followed them up. Still the fire was murderous, and the pressure very heavy, so that once more, by twos and threes, the survivors fell back 250 yards west of the road, where again they lay down, counting their dwindling cartridges, and dwelling upon their aim, as the grey crouching figures came stealthily forward. The attack was at an end. It had done splendidly, and it had failed. But the scattered survivors of the 5th Brigade still held on with grim tenacity, certain that their comrades behind would never let them down.

All night there was spasmodic fighting, the Germans pushing their counter-attack until the two lines were interlocked and the leading groups of the 5th Brigade were entirely cut off. In some places the more forward Germans finding a blank space—and there were many—had pushed on until they were 500 yards west of the general line of the 5th Brigade. Thus when Robertson's 6th Brigade attacked at an early hour of September 1, they came on German infantry posts before they

connected up with the main line of their own comrades. Their advance had been preceded by a crashing bombardment from everything which would throw a projectile, so that the crest of the hill was fairly swept with bullets and shells. Then forward went the line, the 23rd Battalion on the right, the 24th on the left, 21st and 22nd in support. From the start the fire was heavy, but all opposition was trampled down, until the two leading battalions were abreast of the hill. Then once more that terrible fire brought them to a halt. The 23rd on the right was held by the same cross-fire which had beaten upon the 19th the day before. Its losses were heavy. The 24th got forward to Feuillaucourt and then, having occupied it, turned to the right and endeavoured to work down to Mont St. Quentin from the north. But the fire was too murderous and the advance was stopped. Other elements were coming into action, however, which would prevent the whole German effort being concentrated upon the defence of the one position. In the north the 10th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division, with the 229th British Yeomanry Brigade upon their left, were swinging round and threatening to cut in on the German flank and rear. In the south the 14th Australian Brigade of the 5th Division was advancing straight upon the town of Peronne, attacking from the south and east simultaneously. But even now the nut was too hard for the crackers. The British and the 10th Australian Brigades were fighting their way round in the north and constant progress was being made in that indirect pressure. But the 6th Brigade after its splendid advance was held up, and old Peronne, spitting fire from its ancient walls, was still keeping the 14th Brigade at a distance. At 8 o'clock the attack had again failed. Orders were then given for the reorganisation of the troops and for a renewed effort at half-past one. The artillery had been brought up and reinforced, so that it now fairly scalped the hill. At the hour named the direct advance of the 6th Brigade resumed, the fresh 21st Battalion being pushed into the centre, between the 23rd and 24th which had both suffered severely in the morning. This time General Rosenthal was justified of his perseverance. At the signal the troops poured forward and under a hail of bullets seized the ruins of the village once more, streaming out at the further side and falling into a long skirmish line on the western edge of the wood. The brave German defenders were still unabashed and the losses were so heavy that the wood could not instantly be carried, but the position was consolidated and held, with the absolute certainty that such close grips in front with the threatening movements on his flank must drive him from the hill. So it proved, for when on the morning of September 2 the 7th Brigade passed over the fatal plain, which was sown with the bodies of their comrades, they went through the village and on past the wood with little opposition, forming up at last in a defensive line facing south-east, while the 5th Division on the south drove home its attack upon Peronne, where the defence was already hopelessly compromised by the various movements to the north.

Thus fell Mont St. Quentin, and as a consequence Peronne. Sir Henry Rawlinson in his official dispatch remarked that he was " filled with admiration for the surpassing daring " of the troops who had taken a position of the greatest " natural strength and eminent tactical value." Men of the 2nd Guards Division and of four other German Divisions were found among the prisoners. The Australian exploit may be said to have been of a peculiarly national character, as there was not one of the Australian communities—Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, West Australia, Tasmania—which did not play some honourable part in the battle.

Passing northward from the victorious Australians, September 1 saw the attack carried on all along the line, the 3rd Corps advancing upon Rancourt, Priez Farm, and the line to Bouchavesnes. On the left the hard-worked 54th and 55th Brigades did splendidly, especially the 8th East Surreys under Colonel Irwin. Surrey men and Germans lay thick round Priez Farm, but this key position remained in the hands of the English, after a very bitter struggle. The 7th Queen's took Fregicourt, while the 7th West Kents helped the Welshmen at Sailly-Sallisel. The trench mortar batteries, pushing right up regardless of all risk and smothering the German strong points by their concentrated fire, did great work in these operations, especially the 142nd T. M. Battery near Priez Farm. All these various advances were as remarkable for their tactical skill as for the valour shown by all ranks. The latter had been a constant asset, but the former grew with time.

Meanwhile the 47th and 58th Divisions had each done splendidly and secured their objectives, including Rancourt and Bouchavesnes. The main road from Bapaume to Peronne had been passed and the whole of the old Somme battlefield been cleared in this direction. Prisoners were taken from four different divisions in the course of the fight. It had taken four months' fighting in 1916 to conquer the ground which had been now cleared by the Fifth and Third Corps inside ten days.

The advance was continued on September 2, as it was argued that however exhausted the victors might be the vanquished would surely be even more so. A new actor made a first appearance in the greatest of all dramas about this time, for the 74th Division, which had done good service in Palestine under General Girdwood, made its first attack in a European line of battle. This unit was originally composed entirely of Yeomanry, and it had still retained a large proportion of this splendid material in the ranks, with a broken spur as their witty and picturesque divisional emblem. The tale of the British Yeomanry in the East is one which is among the most romantic in the war ; and the way in which farmers' sons from Dorset or Fife charged with cold steel and rode down the Eastern cavalry or broke the ranks of the Turkish infantry is as fantastic an incident as the mind of a prophetic novelist could have furnished. Indeed it may be said generally that none of the many imaginary forecasts of the coming war equalled the reality in the

broad sweep of its incidents and the grotesque combinations which ensued.

The 74th had now taken over from the 58th Division. They were pushed at once into heavy fighting, advancing rapidly down the western slope of the Tortille valley, through Moislains, and over the canal. In their eager zeal they had not mopped up sufficiently, and they soon found themselves under a fire from front and rear which no troops could endure. They were driven back to near the point from which they started and their losses were considerable. The Australians formed a defensive flank on the south, and the 47th on the north, and a line of resistance was built up between them from Haut Allaines on the right to the western bank of the Tortille. The Yeomanry had before evening endured a very terrible welcome to the Western front.

The 18th Division on the left had also had some severe fighting which fell chiefly upon the depleted 53rd Brigade. It secured the high ground in the north of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, the whole of which was cleared by the 8th Berkshires. On September 3 and 4 the division continued to advance across the canal and the Tortille upon the line of Nurlu. On the evening of September 4 its long term of hard and glorious service was ended and the 12th Division took its place. Its losses had been 2700, while it had captured during the battle some 1800 prisoners and many guns.

From this date until September 10, which saw them in front of the outposts of the Hindenburg Line, the record of the Third Corps was one of steady and uninterrupted progress. The German machine-guns were now, as always, a cause of constant worry, loss, and delay, but the remorseless drive of the British infantry was for ever beating in the obstinate rearguards. September 6 marked an advance of nearly three miles along the whole Corps front, the 12th, 47th, and 74th moving in line and flooding over the village sites of Nurlu, Templeux, Driencourt, and Longavesnes. The work of Owens' 35th Brigade at Nurlu was particularly trying, for it was held up by wire and machine-guns, the 7th Sussex, 7th Norfolks, and 9th Essex all losing heavily in some very desperate fighting which gave little result. Finally, on September 6, the 1st Cambridge and 5th Berkshires reinforced the troops already mentioned and, under a renewed barrage, they broke the line and carried the position. On this date the 47th Londoners, who had done such solid work, were ordered off to join another Corps, the 58th moving up once more to take their place.

On September 7 the weather, which had been excellent since August 22, broke badly, but the Corps improved its position in spite of wind and rain, closing up to what was known to be the German fixed position. On the 8th both Epèhy and Peiziéres were touched, but the Germans were fairly at bay now, and instant counter-attacks showed that their resistance would be serious. The final position was about 1000 yards west of these villages. The 58th Division on September 10 endeavoured

to gain more ground in this quarter, but neither they nor the 74th on their right could make any impression upon the strong German line. There was a definite pause, therefore, while tanks, guns, and all other appliances for a serious assault upon a fortified position were hurried to the front. On this date, September 12, General Butler was able to resume his command of the Third Corps, while General Godley, after his term of brilliant service, returned to his own unit, the Twenty-second Corps.

We must now return to the Australian Corps on the right, whom we left in the flush of victory after their fine conquest of Peronne. Up to the end of August, Monash and his men had accounted for 14,500 prisoners and 170 guns since the beginning of the advance. On September 1, as already mentioned, Peronne had been penetrated by the 5th Australian Division, but after the fall of Mont St. Quentin, and the failure of their efforts at recovery, the Germans must have seen that it was hopeless to hold the place, so that the stormers were eventually only faced by a rearguard of stalwarts. Anvil Wood to the north-east was taken on the same day. The order of the Divisions upon the Australian front at this time was that the 3rd was on the extreme left, acting with the Third Corps, the 2nd was just north of Peronne, the 5th was opposite to Peronne, and the 32nd British Division was on the extreme right, near Brie and St. Christ, in touch with the French.

Early in the morning of September 2 Rosenthal's indefatigable 2nd Division continued to advance from Mont St. Quentin, attacking to the north-east so as to get possession of the high ground south-west of Aizecourt. They attained their objectives and formed a flank along the spur from Mont St. Quentin to Aizecourt in order to protect the Third Corps in the difficult operations already described. By this movement to the north the 2nd Australian got in front of the 3rd Australian Division, which was crowded out of the line, all but two battalions. The 5th Australians spent the day in clearing up Peronne. Altogether some 500 additional prisoners fell into their hands during the day.

There was some readjustment and reorganisation necessary after this strenuous work, but by September 5 the advance was going forward again and Flamicourt was taken. It is an open rolling country of large horizons, and the Germans were slowly retreating with strong rearguards. Doingt, Le Mesnil, and the river crossings of Brie and St. Christ were all occupied, though the latter cost a severe fight, with 150 prisoners as trophies. On the 6th and 7th the Corps were sweeping on with their own 13th Australian Light Horse doing the cavalry work in front of them, fit representatives of those splendid horsemen who have left an enduring reputation in Egypt and Palestine. Late in the afternoon of September 7 the Corps front crossed the railway between Vermand and Vendelles, and began to approach the historic point which had marked the British line before March 21. On September 10 Strickland's 1st British Division arrived in this area, and with the 32nd Division and

some other units began to form the nucleus of another Corps, the Ninth, which should operate under General Braithwaite to the right of the Australians. On the 12th the Australians took Jeancourt, and were in touch with the outlying defences of the Great Hindenburg Line, which they at once proceeded to attack. On September 13 there was a sharp fight round Le Verguier, and an advance all along the line in which the objectives were taken and the tanks did some particularly fine work. Tanks and barrages that day combined to keep the Australian losses at a very low figure, and yet some 40 guns and 4500 prisoners had been taken before next morning. The 1st Australian Division on the left secured all the front defences which guarded the main Hindenburg position, while the 4th on the right worked its way well forward, though hardly level with its neighbours. The Ninth Corps on the right had also come on, though it was also rather behind the Australians. The average advance of the latter amounted to three miles in depth on a four-mile front.

Nothing could be more in-and-out than the German fighting during all this stage of the war. Sometimes their conduct was heroic in the extreme, sometimes it was exceedingly cowardly and slack. The observer could not but recall the famous description which an American General of old gave of his militia when he said with native raciness that " they either fought like the devil or ran like hell." The machine-gunners were usually, however, in the former category, and they, with the heavy guns, represented the real resistance, while the infantry only needed to be reached—in some cases not even that—to throw up their hands and come over as joyful captives. There were already two Germans in British hands for every Briton in Germany, in spite of the heavy losses in March and April.

Returning to the Third Corps, which we left in front of the Hindenburg system in the second week of September in the Epéhy district, the obstacle in front of the British was very formidable, for it consisted of their own old trench lines of March, with the Hindenburg system behind them. They had now reached the former British reserve line which had Ronssoy, Lempire, Epéhy, and Peizières as *points d'appui*. It was a front so strong that in March it is doubtful if the Germans could have carried it had the line not given way elsewhere. It was particularly necessary that the enemy should hold on to this stretch, because it covered the point where the great Canal du Nord ran under a tunnel for six miles between Bellicourt and Vandhuille—the only place where tanks could be used for an advance. The Germans had therefore massed strong forces here, including their famous Alpine Corps.

The first task of the Third Corps was to get possession of the old British line in front of it, whence observation could be got of the Hindenburg position. This attack would form part of a general movement by the two southern Corps of the Third Army, the three Corps of the Fourth Army, and the northern portion of the First French Army.

On that great day of battle, September 18, there was a universal advance along the line, which was carried out in the case of the Third Corps by the 74th Division (Girdwood) on the right, the 18th (Lee) right centre, the 12th (Higginson) left centre, and the 58th Division left. Many of the characteristics of old trench warfare had come back into the battle, which was no longer open fighting, but is to be conceived as an attack upon innumerable scattered trenches and posts very strongly held by the Germans, and their ultimate reduction by independent platoons and companies acting under their own regimental officers.

The advance was at 5.20 in the morning, with a thick mist and driving rain to cover, and also to confuse, the movement. The Yeomen of the 74th on the right came away in excellent style, keeping in close touch with the Australian left, and were soon in possession of the Templeux quarries, a very formidable position. At the other end of the line a brigade of the 58th Londoners did excellently well, and by 10 o'clock had a good grip upon the village of Peizières. In the centre, however, the resistance was very stiff and the losses heavy. None the less the 18th Division, which has always been a particularly difficult unit to stop, made their way through Ronssoy and Lempire. The 18th Division did wonderful work that day, and though nominally only the 54th and 55th Brigades were engaged, they were each strengthened by a battalion from the spare brigade. There were particular difficulties in the path of the 55th Brigade, but General Wood personally accompanied the leading battalion and so kept in touch with the situation, varying his activities by throwing bricks and old boots down a German dug-out, and so bringing out 20 prisoners as his own personal take. He was wounded in the course of the day. Ronssoy, which fell to the 55th Brigade, was held by the Alexander Regiment of Prussian Guards, several hundred samples being taken for the British cages. The taking of Lempire, carried out mainly by the 11th Royal Fusiliers, was also a very gallant affair, though it was a day or two before it was completely in British possession. The 12th, which is also an all-English division with a splendid fighting record, was held for a time before Epéhy, but would take no denial, and after heavy losses and severe fighting was east of that village by 11 o'clock. Thus by midday the whole line of villages was in the hands of General Butler's Corps. The left was out of touch with the Fifth Corps, but all else was in perfect order. These positions were full of wire and concrete, and were defended by the hardy German Alpine Corps who fought to the death, so that the achievement was a great one.

All four divisions endeavoured to improve their positions in the afternoon, but they had no great success. The 74th Division did the best, as on the right it was able to secure Benjamin's Post, but on the left it was held up by the general stagnation of the line. The centre divisions met a German counter-attack delivered by the 121st Division, who had been rushed up in buses from Maretz, and this they entirely dispersed,

but neither they nor the 58th on the left were able to make any notable advance.

The troops were now faced by a perfect warren of trenches and posts which were held with great gallantry by the Alpine Corps. There was no rest for the British, and the night of the 18/19th was spent by the same men who had been fighting all day in bombing up the trenches and endeavouring to enlarge their gains. The same sort of fighting, carried on by small groups of determined men led by subalterns or non-commissioned officers, and faced by other small groups equally determined, went on along the whole line during September 19 and 20. In those two days the advance went steadily on, in spite of many a local rebuff and many a temporary check. On September 21 the battle was renewed still in the same fashion with heavy losses upon both sides. At one time the steady flow of the British tide turned for a time to an ebb, as a very strong German counter-attack came rolling into it, and swept it back along the whole front from the positions which it had overflowed in the morning. The 74th was forced out of Quinnemont Farm, the 18th out of Doleful Post, the 12th were checked at Bird Trench, while the 58th, intermingled with men from the right wing of the Fifth Corps, could not get past Kildare Avenue. These fanciful names, unseen on any save a large-scale trench map, bulked large in this bloody battle, for they were master points which controlled the ground around. The sun set with the Germans in the ascendant, and the British clawing desperately at a series of posts and farms which they could just hold against very heavy pressure. One of the most severe engagements was that of the 10th Essex of the 53rd Brigade when they attempted the Knoll, a position from which the whole Hindenburg Line would have been exposed. It was said by experienced soldiers that more severe machine-gun fire had seldom been seen than on this occasion, and the tanks engaged were unable to use their own guns, so thick were the driving storms of bullets which beat upon their iron sides and searched every aperture. The Essex men lost heavily, and the Knoll was not taken. This and the other posts mentioned above were the cause of much trouble to the Americans on September 27.

It was a disappointing day, but the British soldiers, dog-weary as they were, were in no mood to leave matters undecided. The operations must be carried to a successful end. " Hard pounding, gentlemen," as the great Duke said, " but we shall see who can pound longest ! " Just after midnight the tired ranks were stumbling forward once more, determined to have those posts back if human resolution could win them. They had their reward, and it was a conspicuous illustration of the maxim that, however weary you may be, the enemy may be even more so. Before the full light of morning half the line of posts was in the hands of the persevering British. The capture of Bracton Post by Colonel Dawson's 6th West Kents was a particularly brilliant bit of work. The success stretched along the whole Corps front, and though

the afternoon of September 22 saw a whole series of counter-attacks, especially upon the 74th and 18th Divisions, there was no weakening of the new line. One German battalion engaged in one of these counter-attacks was literally annihilated as a barrage fell behind them through which they could not retire. It is on record that in spite of the very arduous service the spirits and morale of the men were never higher. Twice after a German repulse the men of the 6th Northants and 11th Royal Fusiliers could not be held back from jumping out of the trenches and tearing after them, while a stretcher-bearer was observed to run up and down the parados of the trench throwing cartridges down to the defenders and shouting, " Shoot, boys, shoot ! "

By September 23 the Third Corps had gained most of those posts which had been its objectives on September 18, and if the battle took longer than had been anticipated it was all the greater drain upon the worn resources of the Germans. They were still intent upon making machines do the work of men, and it was no unusual thing to take about as many machine-guns as prisoners in some of their posts. The situation was still not quite clear on the left, where the right flank of the Fifth Corps was engaged in severe local fighting in the neighbourhood of Kildare and Limerick Post. The Egg Post on the front of the 18th Division had also been able to maintain itself in the German line. These various isolated strong points were the same which had held out with such unavailing gallantry on March 21, when, instead of forming the German rear, they were the extreme outliers of Gough's Army.

Whilst the Third Corps on the left of the Fourth Army had been gradually fighting its way forward from September 18 onwards, beating down one after the other the outposts and obstacles which, like the moraine before a glacier, formed a rugged line in front of the great main Hindenburg system, Sir John Monash and his men were keeping pace with them, step by step, on their right, the 1st Australian Division being in close liaison on September 18 with the 74th Yeomanry.

At 5.20 on September 18 the Australians went forward with a rapidity which seems to have completely taken aback the German defenders, who in many cases ran from their guns, or threw up their hands in detachments, when they saw the active figures of the infantrymen springing eagerly forward behind the line of tanks. The weather was bad, the ground slippery with rain, and the attack expected, but none of these factors interfered with the result. The 1st Australians, as stated, were in the line on the left, the 1st and 3rd Brigades in the van, while on the right were the 11th and 12th Brigades of the 4th Australian Division in close touch with the British 1st Division on their right. By midday everything had gone down before them, and the measure of their success was the 146 officers and 3900 men with 77 guns which formed their trophies before evening. On one side they had reached Le Verguier, and on the other they were past Templeux. A minefield containing thirty-five mines was found in front of the 4th Australian

Division, another instance of the fact that the tanks had brought a nautical element into warfare. The Australian casualties were surprisingly light considering their splendid results, for they did not amount to more than a thousand men.

Some description must now be given of the work of the Ninth Corps, which had assembled under General Braithwaite on the extreme right of the British Army and which first came into action on September 18 in this hard fight for the Hindenburg Outpost Line. The Corps consisted at this time of three divisions, the 1st, 6th, and 32nd, under Strickland, Marden, and Lambert. On September 18 the Corps attacked with the 6th Division in touch with the French on the right, and the 1st Division with the 4th Australians on the left. The order of brigades from the right was 71, 16, 1, and 2. It was known that two German divisions, the 79th and 25th, with two others in reserve, were lying opposite behind strong defences, so that a hard battle might well be expected.

The 34th French Division on the immediate right brought off a very useful and successful coup on September 17 by capturing Round Hill and part of Savy Wood, which reassured General Marden as to the safety of his right flank. This division appeared to have the more difficult task as Badger Copse, the village of Fresnoy, and part of the very strong system known as the Quadrilateral came within their area.

The attack went forward under pelting rain at 5.20 in the morning of September 18. Following the operations from the north we have to deal first with the 2nd Brigade on the flank. The left-hand battalion, the 2nd Sussex, kept up with the Australians, who had advanced without a check and carried every obstacle. The 2nd King's Royal Rifles, on the other hand, had lost direction and, wandering too far south across the face of their neighbours, found themselves mixed up with the 6th Division in its fruitless attempt upon the powerfully defended village of Fresnoy. The advance to the south was led by the 1st Camerons and the 1st Loyal North Lancashires. The former stormed on, breaking through all opposition and throwing out defensive flanks as their valour carried them ahead of the line. Meanwhile the failure of the 6th Division to take Fresnoy made it impossible to pass along the valley which is overlooked by that village, so that the right of the 1st Division was entirely hung up. On the other hand, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles recovered their bearings as the day went on, and fought their way up the right side of the Omignon valley in splendid style until they were in touch with the 2nd Sussex on the northern slope. In the south, however, the task of the 6th Division continued to be a very hard one, and the 79th German Division resisted with great determination. The Quadrilateral consisted of a system of trenches sited on the highest part of the plateau between Holnon and Fayet, its northern face at this time forming part of the German front line. This proved to be an exceedingly

difficult work to silence, as reinforcements could be dribbled up through cleverly concealed communication trenches. In spite of everything, however, the 71st Brigade and their French neighbours captured Holnon village and the western edge of the Quadrilateral by 8 a.m. The main body of the work was not yet taken, however, so the East Anglians of the 71st Brigade had to form a defensive line facing towards it and the village of Selency, to meet any counter-attack which might sweep up against the flank of the Corps. The left of the line then got forward in safety, and the 2nd Brigade was able to report at noon that both they and the 4th Australians were on their extreme objective. Indeed the latter, having completely crumpled up the 119th German Division, were now considerably ahead of the allotted line.

Berthaucourt had been captured by the 1st Division, but progress in the Fresnoy direction was still very slow. About 3.30 p.m. hostile counter-attacks were launched south of Berthaucourt and opposite Fresnoy. These were repulsed by steady rifle-fire, but the general situation was still obscure. All the afternoon there was very heavy fighting on the front of the 6th Division, especially east of Holnon village, and on the west side of the Quadrilateral. The French had been held up on the right. So matters remained until evening. It had been a day of hard work and varying success on this portion of the line, but the capture of 18 officers and 541 men with 8 field-guns showed that some advance had been made. It was short, however, of what had been hoped.

The next morning saw the battle renewed. The neighbourhood of Fresnoy and of the Quadrilateral was now more strongly held than ever, the Germans being encouraged, no doubt, by their successful defence of the day before. The fighting during this day was desultory, and no particular advance was made by either division. In the south the French failed to capture Manchester Hill, which was an ugly menace to the right flank of the Ninth Corps.

Boyd's 46th Division had been added to the strength of the Ninth Corps, and when this welcome addition had been put in upon the left wing it enabled the others to contract their front and thicken their array. At 7 p.m. on September 22 the Germans attacked the 46th Division in its new position, just east of Berthaucourt, but they were driven back after a slight initial success.

There was a fresh attack on September 24 in which the Ninth Corps tried to overcome the German strongholds on the right of their front which were holding them off from the Hindenburg Line. The order of the British line was that the 6th Division was on the right, the 1st in the centre, and the 46th on the left.

Although this attack, which was launched at 5 a.m., was expected by the enemy, good progress was made along the whole front. The Quadrilateral again proved, however, that it was a very formidable obstacle, and there was stout resistance from Pontruet village, just east of Berthau-

court. The 6th Division had closed in on the Quadrilateral from north, west, and south, and were at close grips with it at all three quarters. There was continuous bomb-fighting all day in this neighbourhood, but the situation was still obscure, and until it cleared no progress could be made towards Selency. The 1st Division in the centre had made splendid progress, but the 46th Division had been unable to take Pontruet, and the guns from this village struck full against the left flank of the 2nd Brigade in its advance, causing very heavy losses to the 1st Northamptons. So murderous were the casualties in this portion of the field that the position of the forward troops was untenable, and the remains of the Northamptons had to throw back a protective flank to the north to cover the approaches from Pontruet. The 2nd Sussex on their right managed to retain their advanced position, and one company, though very weak and short of cartridges, baffled a counter-attack by a sudden bayonet charge in which they took 50 prisoners.

The attack upon Fresnoy village was made by the 3rd Brigade, the 1st Gloucesters being immediately opposite to it. Advancing under a strong barrage the West Country men went straight for their objective, taking both the village and the strongly organised cemetery to the south of it. On the left of the village the British were held up by strong wire and several vicious machine-guns, but the Germans made the gallant mistake of running out in front of the wire with bombs in their hands, upon which they were charged and many of them were taken by the Gloucesters. The German gunners in the rear then turned their pieces upon both captors and captives, so the company concerned was held down in shell holes all day and withdrew as best they could after dark. The 3rd Brigade then extended, getting into touch with the 2nd Brigade near Cornovillers Wood.

On the left of the 3rd Brigade the strong position of Fresnoy Cemetery had been carried, and the tireless infantry swarmed on into Marronnières Wood, which was full of lurking machine-guns and needed careful handling. It was finally surrounded by the 3rd Brigade, who mopped it up at their leisure, taking out of it a large number of prisoners. The 2nd King's Royal Rifles of the 2nd Brigade kept parallel with their advance, and also cleared a considerable stretch of woodland, while the 3rd Brigade, seeing signs of weakening on the German front, pushed forward and seized Gricourt, a most important point, the 2nd Welsh gaining the village and driving back a subsequent counter-attack. Finally, the complete victory in this portion of the field was rounded off when, after dark, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles secured a dangerous sunken road across the front which had been a storm-centre all day.

Meanwhile the 46th Division had fought its way to the north of Pontruet, but as this unit was relied upon for the great pending operations on the Hindenburg Main Line, it was thought impolitic to involve it too deeply in local fighting. The line was drawn, therefore, to the west of the village. The total captures of the day had been 30 officers

and 1300 men. The French to the south had also had a good day, capturing all their objectives except Manchester Hill.

The 6th Division had not yet cleared the Quadrilateral, and the whole of September 25 was devoted to that desperate but necessary work. It was a case of bomb and bayonet, with slow laborious progress. Finally, about 6 p.m., General Marden was able to announce that the whole wide entanglement had been occupied, though not yet mopped up. The village of Selency had also fallen, while on the right the French had attacked and captured Manchester Hill. Strong resistance was encountered by the 1st Division near Gricourt. The German soldiers were again and again seen to hold up their hands, and then to be driven into the fight once more by their officers with their revolvers. Late on the 26th, after a short hurricane bombardment, the 3rd Brigade rushed forward again. The enemy had disappeared into their dug-outs under the stress of the shells, so that the British infantry were able to get on to them before they could emerge and to make many prisoners. Colonel Tweedie of the Gloucesters was in local command of this well-managed affair. Altogether it was a good day for the 1st Division, which had gained a line of positions, repelled heavy counters, and secured 800 prisoners, 600 falling to the 3rd Brigade, who had done the heavy end of the work.

All was now ready for the great move which should break the spine of the whole German resistance. There was still some preliminary struggling for positions of departure and final readjustments of the line, but they were all part of the great decisive operation of September 29 and may best be included in that account. The chronicler can never forget how, late upon the eve of the battle, he drove in a darkened motor along pitch-black roads across the rear of the Army, and saw the whole eastern heaven flickering with war light as far as the eyes could see, as the aurora rises and falls in the northern sky. So terrific was the spectacle that the image of the Day of Judgment rose involuntarily to his mind. It was indeed the day of Judgment for Germany—the day when all those boastful words and wicked thoughts and arrogant actions were to meet their fit reward, and the wrong-doers to be humbled in the dust. On that day Germany's last faint hope was shattered, and every day after was but a nearer approach to that pit which had been dug for her by her diplomatists, her journalists, her professors, her junkers, and all the vile, noisy crew who had brought this supreme cataclysm upon the world.

The reader will note then that we leave the Fourth Army, consisting from the right of the Ninth Corps, the Australians, and the Third Corps, in front of the terrific barrier of the main Hindenburg Line. We shall now hark back and follow the advance of Byng's Third Army from its attack on August 21 until, five weeks later, it found itself in front of the same position, carrying on the line of its comrades in the south.

CHAPTER LVII

THE ATTACK OF BYNG'S THIRD ARMY

August 21, 1918, *to September* 29, 1918

Advance of Shute's Fifth Corps—Great feat in crossing the Ancre—Across the old battlefield—Final position of Fifth Corps opposite Hindenburg's Main Line—Advance of Haldane's Sixth Corps—Severe fighting—Arrival of 52nd Division—Formation of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps—Recapture of Havrincourt—Advance of Harper's Fourth Corps—Great tenacity of the troops—The New Zealanders and the Jaeger—Final position before the decisive battle.

On August 20 General Mangin had pushed forward the Tenth French Army, which formed the left of his force, and attacked along a sixteen-mile front from the Oise to the Aisne, thus connecting up the original operations with those initiated by Marshal Haig. The movement was very successful, taking some 10,000 prisoners and gaining several miles of ground. We have now to turn to the left of Rawlinson's advance, and to consider the new movement which brought Byng's Third British Army into the fray.

Upon the left of the Third Corps, which was, as already described, fighting its way along the north bank of the Somme, there lay Shute's Fifth Corps. On its left was Harper's Fourth Corps, and north of that Haldane's Sixth Corps. It was to these three units that the opening of the attack was entrusted. The frontage was about ten miles, extending from Moyenneville in the north to the Ancre in the south, so that it just cleared the impossible country of the first Somme battlefield —which for years a spectator could not survey without a feeling of wondering horror, so churned up was it from end to end by the constant thresh of shells, burst of mines, and the spade-work of three great armies. The result of the first day's fighting was an advance of several miles along the whole front, with the capture of Beaucourt, Bucquoy, Moyenneville, and other villages, the farthest advance coming close to the Arras-Albert Railway, and to the village of Achiet-le-Grand.

There had been some recent retirement of the German line at Serre, which gave the clue to the British Commanders that a general retreat might take place on this particular portion of the front. It was very necessary, therefore, to strike at once while there was certainly something solid to strike against—and all the more necessary if there was a chance of catching the enemy in the act of an uncompleted withdrawal.

It was nearly five o'clock when the battle began, and it was the turn of the Germans to find how fog may disarrange the most elaborate preparations for defence. The mist was so thick that it could only be compared to that which had shrouded the German advance on March 21. Several miles of undulating country lay immediately in front of the attackers, leading up to a formidable line of defence, the old Albert-Arras Railway lying with its fortified embankments right across the path of the British Army. Bucquoy in the centre of the line, with the Logeast Wood to the east of it, and the muddy, sluggish Ancre with its marshy banks on the extreme right, were notable features in the ground to be assaulted.

The Fifth Corps, under General Shute, followed the curve of the River Ancre on a front of 9000 yards. It was poorly provided with guns as the Corps to the left required a concentration of artillery, and it had no tanks since the marshy valley and sluggish stream lay before it. The 38th Welsh Division (Cubitt) lay on the right and Campbell's 21st on the left, each of them with two brigades in front and one in reserve. The 17th Division (Robertson) was in support. The problem in front of General Shute's Corps was a most difficult one. Before it lay this evil watercourse which had been flooded by the Germans and was 300 yards wide at one part. All bridges were gone, and the banks were low and boggy. The main stream was over six feet deep, and its channel could not be distinguished from the general flood. The whole morass was covered by a tangle of fallen trees, reeds, and artificial obstructions. To the east of the river ran high ground, strongly held and fortified, from Tara Hill above Albert to the Thiepval Height, south of Grandcourt. The west bank was so overlooked that no one could move unscathed. And yet it was clear that until this formidable obstacle was surmounted it was neither possible for Rawlinson to advance from Albert, nor for the Fourth Corps on the left to assault Miraumont.

The movements of Shute's Corps on August 21 were preliminary to their real attack. On that date the 21st Division advanced on the left flank, in close touch with the 42nd Division of the Fourth Corps. Beaucourt was taken in the movement. By this operation the 21st Division reached a point where the flood was narrower at St. Pierre Divion, and here some bridges could be constructed and preparations made for the passage.

In the case of Harper's Fourth Corps on the left the advance on August 21 was limited, since no serious attack could be made upon Miraumont while the high ground to the south was untaken. At this date Harper's Corps consisted of five divisions, the 5th, 37th, 42nd, 63rd, and the New Zealanders. Of these the 37th Division (Williams) was on the left, covering the flank of the Sixth Corps, while the 42nd (Solly-Flood) was on the right. We shall now follow in the first instance the work of the Fifth Corps on the extreme right from the beginning of the battle until the pause preceding the attack of September 18. There are, it is true,

objections to continuous narrative, since it stands in the way of a bird's eye view of the whole operation ; but on the other hand the object and scope of any series of advances become unintelligible unless they are linked up from day to day. We shall therefore take the Fifth Corps as one story until it reaches the Hindenburg Line. We shall then follow the work of the other flank corps of Byng's Third Army, which was Haldane's Sixth Corps, bringing it up to the same point. It will finally, after we have established two solid bastions, be easy to deal with the central unit, Harper's Fourth Corps, which filled up the space between. We shall then have a narrative which will cover four strenuous weeks in which the Third Army carried out a notable advance.

It has been explained that Shute's Fifth Corps found itself with 9000 yards of river in front of it, and that on August 21 the 21st Division had seized a favourable point for crossing near St. Pierre Divion. There was no further advance on the morning of the 22nd, but to the south Rawlinson's left was fighting its way to the eastern exits of Albert, and the bridges in the town were being got ready for use. All day a heavy fire was kept up on the German lines east of the river, and especially upon the rising ground called Usna Hill. As the day passed small bodies of troops began to cross the Ancre from the Fifth Corps front and to make a lodgment at the farther side. South-west of Thiepval part of the 14th Welsh from the 114th Brigade, wading over breast deep with their rifles and pouches held high, got into a trench on the farther bank and held their own The 21st Division also got some companies across at St. Pierre, while it beat off several attacks on the north side of the river. During the night the 50th Brigade of the 17th Division was slipped into the line, between Campbell's North Countrymen on the left and Cubitt's Welshmen on the right. General Shute was now ready for his great effort in crossing the river.

The first stage in this difficult operation was carried out early on August 23, when the 113th Welsh Brigade, which had quickly passed over the Albert bridges, made a sudden attack about dawn on Usna Hill, at the same time as the 18th Division to the south attacked Tara Hill. The position was taken with 200 prisoners, while the 115th Welsh Brigade got up to the chalk-pit, east of Aveluy, where they joined hands with their comrades on the Usna line. Thus, before evening of August 23 the 38th Division was east of the river from Albert to Aveluy, while the 21st still held its bridgeheads at St. Pierre Divion. The slope of the Thiepval Ridge with all its fortifications still lay in front, and this was the next objective of the Fifth Corps. It was carried by a night attack on August 23-24.

A large portion of the central line was so flooded that no advance was possible. It was planned, therefore, that the assault should be on both wings, the area around Authuille being nipped out and cleared at a later stage. The operation began on the evening of August 23 by a movement along the northern bank of the river to the south-east of Miraumont,

so as to partly encircle that village and help forward the Fourth Corps on the left, who were still held up in front of it. The main Ancre attack was carried out by the 113th Brigade on the right, who came away with a fine impetus on the eastern slopes of Usna Hill, capturing La Boiselle and reaching a point 1100 yards west of Ovillers. The 114th Brigade on the left had with great difficulty and corresponding valour crossed the Ancre under machine-gun fire and had established themselves on the slopes, fighting their way forward all day until they reached a point north-west of Pozières. All around Thiepval there was close fighting in which this brigade acted in close liaison with the 50th Brigade. In this struggle many gallant deeds were done, and it is recorded, among others, how Lieutenant Griffiths of the Welsh Regiment advanced using his Lewis gun as if it were a rifle. He is said to have slain sixteen Germans in this novel fashion before his own wounds brought him fainting to the ground. According to the plan the two converging brigades left a large central section untouched, which was promptly mopped up by the 115th Brigade, so that every man of the 38th Division was engaged in this fine operation.

Farther to the left the 6th Dorsets of the 50th Brigade, in spite of gas clouds and machine-guns had crossed the Ancre in its narrowest reach, where some sort of bridges had been prepared. With great energy and initiative they cleared up the front trenches and pockets so as to give room for a deployment, pushing their patrols out towards Thiepval, but they were driven in again by an attack from the Schwaben Redoubt. The rest of the 50th Brigade had followed, most of the infantry wading across in the dark up to their waists in mud and water. Pushing on, as part of the general advance, all three battalions of the 50th Brigade went forward, capturing several hundred prisoners, but deviating so far from their course that when they thought and reported that they had captured Courcelette it was really Pozières which they had got. In the early afternoon Allason's 52nd Brigade was pushed in on the right of the 50th Brigade, connecting them up with the Welshmen. The mistake in the direction of the 50th Brigade was not an unmixed evil, for while it left the 21st Division with its right flank exposed and in considerable difficulty, it made a pocket of a large number of Germans in front of the Welshmen, 900 of whom were captured. General Robertson saved the situation on the left by pushing in his reserve brigade, the 51st, and so filling the gap between his division and that of General Campbell.

The latter division, especially the 64th Brigade, which had pushed on to Miraumont the night before, had some desperate fighting. The whole brigade was passed in single file over two foot-bridges. At 11.30 p.m. they were assembled upon the south bank and ready to start. A barrage had been arranged for their attack, but owing to changes in plan it was not thick or effective. The advance was made by the 15th Durhams on the right and the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry on the left

with the 1st East Yorks in support, the column being guided by means of compass bearing, and by the presence of the Ancre on the left flank. This nocturnal march in the face of the enemy was a very remarkable and daring one, for the ground was pitted with craters and there were two ravines with sheer sides at right angles to the advance. Touch was kept by shouting, which seems to have confused rather than informed the enemy, who only fought in patches. Grandcourt was overrun with 100 prisoners, 20 machine-guns, and 4 field-pieces. Early in the morning General McCulloch, who had conducted the operation, was badly wounded and the command passed to Colonel Holroyd Smith of the Durhams. When full daylight came the brigade was deeply embedded in the German line, and the enemy closed in upon it, but their attacks were repulsed. The soldiers were compelled to lie flat, however, in order to escape from the heavy fire. The 110th Brigade of the same division had advanced on the right, but it was acting in close liaison with the 17th Division, and independent of the isolated unit, which was now completely alone on the hill south of Miraumont, their East Yorkshire supports being at Grandcourt, and so much out of touch with the advanced line that the Officer Commanding imagined the stragglers to be all that was left of the brigade. The first intimation of the true state of affairs was given by the wounded Brigadier as he passed on his way to the casualty station. About 10.30 Captain Spicer, the Brigade Major, got back by crawling, and reported that the advanced line still held, though weak in numbers. Aeroplane reconnaissance confirmed the report. All day the valiant band held out until in the evening the advance of the 42nd Division on their left, and of their own comrades of the 110th Brigade on their right, rescued them from a desperate situation. Their work had been exceedingly useful, as their presence had partially paralysed the whole German system of defence. Great credit in this remarkable affair was due not only to General Campbell and his staff, upon whom the initial responsibility lay, but to the gallant and inspiring leading of General McCulloch and of the battalion leaders, Holroyd Smith and Greenwood. It was indeed a wonderful feat to advance three miles over such country upon a pitch-dark night and to reach and hold an objective which was outflanked on both sides by the successful German defence. The troops had been heartened up by messages with promises of speedy succour which were dropped by aeroplanes during the day.

The 62nd Brigade had now pushed in between the 64th on the right and the 42nd Division on the left, touching the latter in the neighbourhood of Pys, so that by the late afternoon of August 24 the whole line was solid and the crossing of the Ancre with the capture of the ridge were accomplished facts. There have been few more deft pieces of work in the war. The German fixed line had been driven back and the remaining operations consisted from this date onwards in a pursuit rather than an attack. It was a pursuit, however, where the retreat was always covered

by an obstinate rearguard, so that there was many a stiff fight in front of the Fifth Corps in the days to come.

Divisions had been instructed that the pursuit was to be continued in a relentless fashion, and Corps cavalry, drawn from the 8th and 20th Hussars, were told off to throw out patrols and keep in close touch with the German rearguard. The immediate objectives of the infantry were Longueval and Flers for the Welshmen, Gueudecourt for the 17th, and Beaulencourt for the 21st Division. The general movement was extraordinarily like the advance in the spring of 1917, but the British were now more aggressive and the Germans were less measured and sedate in their dispositions. On August 25 the pressure was sustained along the whole line, and the Germans, fighting hard with their machine-guns which swept the exposed ridges, were none the less being pushed eastwards the whole day. The Welsh took Contalmaison and reached the edge of Mametz Wood, where so many of their comrades had fallen just two years before. The 17th, fighting hard, captured Courcelette and Martinpuich. The 21st got Le Sars and the Butte de Warlencourt, that strange old tumulus which now marked the joining point with the Fourth Corps still advancing on the left. At no point was there a battle and at no point was there peace, but a constant ripple of fire rose and fell along the thin fluctuating line. It is noted in the diaries of some of the British Generals as being the first day of purely open warfare in offensive fighting which their troops had ever experienced.

On the morning of August 26 the Welsh overran Bazentin-le-Grand, but the 115th Brigade were held up for a time at the old stumbling-block High Wood. Later in the day it was taken, however, while the 113th Brigade got as far as the edge of Longueval, meeting a severe counter-attack which was rolled back in ruin by rifles and machine-guns. The 17th Division gained some ground, but both brigades, the 51st and 52nd, were held up by a withering fire before reaching Flers. The 64th Brigade on their left met with equal opposition and could not get forward. Everywhere there were signs of a strong German rally for the evident purpose of covering the removal of their guns and stores. It was well maintained and well organised, so that the object was attained. It became clearer with every day that an artillery barrage was still a necessity for an infantry advance.

On August 27 the advance was continued. Outside the Fifth Corps boundaries the Fourth Corps on the left was encircling Bapaume and pushing advanced guards on to Maplecourt and Frémicourt, while Rawlinson's men on the right were facing Trones Wood and the Guillemont Ridge. In the early morning, with a moon shining brightly, the whole front of the Fifth Corps was on fire once more and rolling eastwards. By 9 a.m. the 113th Brigade were through Longueval and in touch with the Fourth Army near the Sugar Refinery. The 114th Brigade attempted to pass north of Delville Wood, but after some confused fighting were held on the line of the Flers-Longueval Road.

Flers, however, had been taken by the 50th Brigade, though the Germans made a strong fight of it and at one time re-occupied the village. Whatever the general morale of the enemy may have been there was no immediate weakening in the actual fighting power of his line. The 21st Division made only a moderate advance, but they got ahead of their neighbours. The 6th Dragoon Guards, who were now furnishing the patrols, were withdrawn, as it was clear that the Germans meant to stand.

On the morning of August 28 they were still in position, and the day was mainly devoted to reorganising the infantry and bombarding the German lines, together with all the roads which lay eastwards. Early next morning the Welsh advanced once more, the 113th Brigade on one side of Delville Wood and the 114th on the other, with the result that this sinister graveyard was surrounded and the line carried definitely to the east of it. Morval still held out, but Lesbœufs was overrun. There was weakening all along the German line, which meant no doubt that they had completed the withdrawal of their more essential impedimenta. Flers and Gueudecourt both fell to the 17th Division, almost without a battle. The 21st Division was also able to move forward with no great difficulty as far as Beaulencourt and the line of the road from that village to Bapaume. This new line was held with great determination by the enemy, who were still, as must be admitted, masters of the situation to the extent that though forced to retire they would still retire in their own fashion. The Welsh attacking Morval that night found the place was strongly held and no progress possible.

August 30 was to show that the German rearguards were by no means demoralised and were not to be unduly hustled. It is impossible not to admire the constancy in adversity of Hans and Fritz and Michel, whatever one may think of the mentality of the Vons who had placed them in this desperate position. Morval still held its own against the Welsh, and the 17th Division could not reach the clear line in front of them which is furnished by the Peronne-Bapaume Road. Beaulencourt was also retained by the enemy, as the patrols discovered to their cost. The line was still strong and menacing. There was inaction on August 31, which was spent in bombardment and preparation.

At 2 a.m. on September 1 the 21st Division attacked Beaulencourt and carried it with a rush, and a strong attempt to regain it after dawn cost the enemy heavy losses. During the morning the Welshmen on the right flank attacked Morval and were at last successful in taking this strong position. There was very heavy fighting all day round Sailly-Sallisel, where the 113th and 115th Welsh Brigades made repeated efforts to envelop and capture the village. There were several checks, but the gallant Welshmen stuck to their task, and before evening the place had fallen and the general British line was well to the east of it. On the other hand, the 17th and 21st Divisions had a bad day in front of Le Transloy and the Sugar Factory, having nothing to show for

considerable losses, the 9th West Ridings being especially hard hit. None the less the 17th was hard at it again next morning, for it was imperative to keep up the pressure without any relaxation. On this day, September 2, the plan was that the 50th and 52nd Brigades should work round on each side of the village while the artillery kept the defenders from interfering. This attack, though delayed for some time, eventually succeeded, the 6th Dorsets clearing up the ruins, while the 21st Division, after several brave attempts, drove the tenacious German garrison out of the Sugar Factory. The 10th West Yorkshires, under Colonel Thomas, did particularly good work in linking up the two divisions. Altogether it was a very satisfactory morning's work, and the 50th Brigade added to it in the evening by capturing in a fine attack the village of Rocquigny, and pushing patrols on into Barastre, which was found to be empty. On this day, as the Corps front had contracted, the 21st Division was drawn back into reserve. It may be remarked that in all these operations Robertson's 17th Division had the supreme satisfaction of hurling the enemy out of a long series of villages which they had themselves been forced to relinquish under the pressure of the great March advance.

It was clear now that the Germans, either of their own will or driven by the constant pressure, were withdrawing their rearguards, so that in the early morning of September 3 no touch could be gained by patrols. By 6 a.m. the British advance guards were well on their way, streaming forward to the Canal du Nord, from the eastern bank of which the eternal machine-guns were rapping away once more, stopping the 50th Brigade in an attempt to make a direct advance. There were no bridges left, so nothing further could be done that day, which brought the corps front up to the western bank from Manancourt to the north-east of Etricourt. On September 4, however, the crossing was effected without any very great difficulty, and bridge-heads established by both the divisions in the line.

On September 5 the 114th Brigade attacked the trench system round Equancourt without success. The 51st Brigade had better luck to the north of the village and gained a good bit of ground. The 7th Lincolns were held up with considerable loss in the first advance on account of some misunderstanding about the starting-point and insufficient touch with the 42nd Division on their left. The 7th Borderers, a battalion made up of Cumberland and Westmorland Yeomanry, carried on the attack and found the village deserted. The day ended with the right flank of the Fifth Corps in touch with the Third Corps to the north-west of Nurlu, while the left flank joined the Fourth Corps north of Vallulart Wood. That night the 21st Division came back into line, taking the place of the Welshmen who had done such splendid and strenuous service since August 22.

September 6 and 7 were occupied in a slow but steady advance which absorbed Equancourt, Fins, and Sorel-le-Grand. On September 8

matters were less one-sided, as the 21st Division, acting in close liaison with Rawlinson at Peizières, attacked Vaucelette Farm and Chapel Crossing. It must have been with peculiar ardour and joy that General Campbell and his men flung themselves upon the positions which they had held so heroically on March 21. Here after six months were their complete vindication and revenge. The fighting was carried on into September 9, the 17th Division joining in on the left in close touch with the New Zealanders of the Fourth Corps. It was clear that the Germans meant standing if they could and the struggle was a very hard one, but before evening much of the ground had reverted to the two divisions which were both, by a peculiar coincidence, more or less in their old positions. There was attack and counter-attack, and a good price paid for all that was gained. There are days when land is cheap and days when it is the dearest thing upon earth. At the end of this fight the Germans were in a continuous trench on one side of the ridge and the British in a corresponding position on the other. It became more and more clear that the days of pursuit and rearguard actions were over, and that the whole British front in this quarter was up against a fixed battle position of the enemy—or at the least against the strong outposts in front of a fixed battle position. This important fact regulates the whole situation up to the great attack of September 29.

September 10 and 11 were spent in local encounters in the Chapel Crossing and Vaucelette Farm district, the Germans striving hard by these outpost engagements to prevent the British line from getting within striking distance of the old Hindenburg position, behind which they hoped to rally their dishevelled forces. The British were equally eager to break down this screen and get at the solid proposition behind it. The weather was terrible, rising at one time to the height of a cyclone, which disarranged the assembly. On September 12 there was more serious British advance, the Fourth Corps on the left attacking the Trescault Spur, while the Welsh, who had now relieved the 17th Division, were to go forward on their flank. The Germans clung desperately to their ground, however, and after a long day of alternate advance and retreat the British line was where it had been in the morning. A position called African Trench lay in front of the Welshmen and it was not possible to carry it in face of the very severe machine-gun fire. From this date until September 18 there was no advance and no change on the front of the Fifth Corps save that Pinney's 33rd Division came in to patch its worn array.

On September 18 the Fifth Corps attacked once more in conjunction with Rawlinson's Army on its right, the final objective being the trench lines south of Villers-Guislain–Gauche Wood. The advance was made by the Welsh Division opposite to Gouzeaucourt, the 17th in front of Gauche Wood, and the 21st to the immediate south. It was preceded by field barrage, heavy barrage, machine barrage, trench mortar bombardment, and every refinement of artillery practice as elaborated in this

long war. The results of a hard day's fighting were rather mixed. The Welsh Division was held near Gouzeaucourt and finished up in its own original line, leaving the left flank of the 52nd Brigade exposed. The two other divisions were able, after hard fighting, to reach their objectives including Gauche Wood. The 21st Division had a particularly trying and yet successful day, all three brigades being heavily engaged and enduring considerable losses in capturing the very ground which they had held on March 21. Their advance was complicated by a mine-field, laid down by themselves and so well laid that it was still in a very sensitive condition, while the dug-outs had been so undisturbed that the 1st Lincolns actually found their own orderly papers upon the table. In the fighting the 62nd Brigade led the way with complete success, and it was not until the 64th and the 110th Brigades passed through it and began to debouch over the old No Man's Land that the losses became serious, Epéhy and Peizières being thorns in their flesh. Colonel Holroyd Smith of the 15th Durhams was killed, but the 64th Brigade made good its full objective, the 1st East Yorks capturing a German howitzer battery, together with the horses which had just been hooked in. At one time the Germans got round the left flank of the Division and the situation was awkward, but Colonel Walsh of the 9th Yorks Light Infantry, with his H.Q. Staff, made a dashing little attack on his own, and drove the enemy back, receiving a wound in the exploit. The 21st Division, save on the right, had all its objectives. The left of the Third Corps had not prospered equally well, so that a defensive line had to be built up by Campbell in the south, while Roberston did the same in the north, the whole new position forming a marked salient. Two efforts of the enemy to regain the ground were beaten back. The southern divisions had been much troubled by flanking fire from Gouzeaucourt, so an effort was made that night to get possession of this place, the 6th Dorsets and 10th West Yorkshires of the 60th Brigade suffering in the attempt. This attack was led by General Sanders, who had succeeded Gwyn Thomas as Brigadier of the 50th, but he was himself killed by a shell on September 20. Some 2000 prisoners and 15 field-guns were the trophies taken in this operation by the Fifth Corps. Gouzeaucourt was shortly afterwards evacuated, but there was no other change on the front until the great battle which shattered the Hindenburg Line and really decided the war. All of this fighting, and especially that on September 18, has to be read in conjunction with that already narrated in the story of the Fourth Army on the right.

Having brought Shute's Fifth Corps up to the eve of the big engagement we shall now ask the reader to cast his mind back to August 21, the first day of General Byng's advance, and to follow Haldane's Sixth Corps on the northern flank of the Army during these same momentous and strenuous weeks. It will then be more easy to trace the operations of Harper's Fourth Corps, which was intermediate between Shute and Haldane.

Haldane's Sixth Corps, like its comrades of the Third Army, had gone through the arduous days of March and had many a score to pay back to the Germans. It was a purely British Corps, consisting upon the first day of battle of five fine divisions, the 2nd (Pereira), 3rd (Deverell), 62nd (Braithwaite), 59th (Whigham), and the Guards. With four Regular units out of five, Haldane's Sixth Corps might have been the wraith of the grand old Mons army come back to judgment. The 1st Cavalry Division, also reminiscent of Mons, was in close support, ready to take advantage of any opening.

The first advance in the early morning was made by the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division on the south, and the 2nd Guards Brigade on the north, the latter being directed upon the village of Moyenneville, while the 99th Brigade was to carry Moyblain Trench, the main German outpost position, 1000 yards in front of the line. The right of the line was formed by the 1st Berks and the left by the 23rd Royal Fusiliers, the latter having a most unpleasant start, as they were gas-shelled in their assembly places and had to wear their masks for several hours before zero time. Any one who has worn one of these contrivances for five consecutive minutes will have some idea what is meant by such an ordeal, and how far it prepares a man for going into battle. Only a very expert man can keep the goggles clean, and one is simultaneously gagged, blinded, and half smothered, with a horrible death awaiting any attempt at amelioration.

At five o'clock nine tanks moved forward behind a crashing stationary barrage, and the infantry followed eagerly through a weak German fire. In spite of all precautions the Fusiliers had lost 400 men from gas, but otherwise the casualties were very small. It may be remarked that many of these serious gas cases occurred from the reek of the gas out of the long grass when the sun dried the dew, showing how subtle and dangerous a weapon is this distillation of mustard. Some small consolation could be gained by the British soldier suffering from these hellish devices, by the knowledge that our chemists, driven to retaliate, had in mustard gas, as in every other poison, produced a stronger brew than the original inventor. Well might the German garrison of Lens declare that they wished they could have dropped that original inventor into one of his own retorts.

The advance of the Guards kept pace on the left with that of the 2nd Division. The 2nd Brigade went forward with Moyenneville for its immediate objective. The 1st Coldstreams in the north were to carry the village, while the 1st Scots were to assemble in the low ground north of Ayette, and to carry the attack to the Ablainzeville-Moyenneville Ridge. The 3rd Grenadiers were then to pass through the Scots and to capture the line of the railway. The opening of the attack was much the same as in the case of the troops on the right, save that no difficulty was experienced from gas. There were few losses in the two leading battalions, which took many prisoners, and it was only the 3rd Grena-

diers who, as they neared the railway, met a good deal of machine-gun fire, but pushed on in spite of it and made good the line of their objective.

In the meantime the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Division had moved through the ranks of the 99th Brigade, and had carried on the advance in the southern area. They advanced with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers on the right and 4th Royal Fusiliers behind them. The latter had the misfortune to lose Colonel Hartley and 50 men from a shell-burst while moving into position. The left front of the brigade was formed by the 13th King's Liverpools. The whole line advancing in open order passed on without a check, save from mist which caused loss of direction and constant reference to the compass. Over a series of trenches the line plodded its way, clearing up occasional machine-guns and their crews. By 9.15 they were on the railway embankment.

The 8th Brigade (Fisher) of the 3rd Division had also advanced on the left of the 9th, keeping pace with it so far as the fog would allow. The 7th Shropshires were on the left, in touch with the Guards. The 1st Scots Fusiliers were on the right and the 2nd Royal Scots in support. The attack was directed upon Courcelles, which was carried by the Scots Fusiliers and mopped up by the 8th Royal Lancasters. From the village a sharp slope leads down to the railway line and here the opposition was very strong, the ground being closely swept by rifle and machine-gun fire. Behind two tanks the leading battalions stormed forward and the railway was rushed, with 200 prisoners. The position was organised, and touch established with the Guards on the left and with the 9th Brigade on the right. The 9th Brigade found it difficult, however, to get touch with the 63rd Naval Division on their right, that unit having experienced considerable difficulties and losses. The 76th Brigade, the remaining unit of the 3rd Division, had the 2nd Suffolks and 1st Gordons close up to the line, and all of these battalions were much mixed up owing to the persistent fog.

A very determined pocket of German infantry and machine-gunners had remained in front of the left flank of the 63rd Division, formed by the 188th Brigade. These men were now on the right rear of the 9th Brigade, but the situation was obscure and nothing was certain save that the British line was not yet continuous and solid. In spite of a concentration of artillery the Germans were still holding out next morning, being the only hostile units to the left of the railway line on the Sixth Corps sector.

An attempt had been made to get forward to Achiet-le-Grand, in which part of the 63rd Division on the right and two companies of the Gordons participated. The Ansons and the Gordons both lost considerably in this attack and were unable to reach the village, though they advanced the line by 500 yards. Lack of artillery support, while the enemy guns were numerous and active, was the cause of the check.

The night of August 21 was quiet on most parts of this new front of the Third Army, but at early dawn a counter-attack developed before

the 63rd Division and before the 8th Brigade. An S.O.S. barrage was called for and promptly given in each case, which entirely extinguished the attack upon the 63rd. On the 8th Brigade front some of the German infantry got as far forward as the railway line but were quickly hurled back again by bombs and the bayonet. At 7.45 a.m. the enemy again made a rush and occupied one post of the railway, from which, as well as from the posts on the right of the 9th Brigade where the railway line was not yet in British hands, he enfiladed the front defences during the day, causing many casualties, until in the evening the post was retaken by the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. Among the gas cases sent to the rear this day, though his injuries had been incurred during the assembly, was General Fisher of the 8th Brigade.

The Guards in the north had also encountered the attack of the early morning of August 22, which seems to have been general along the line, though at no part very vigorous. This particular section of it was delivered near Hamelincourt by the 40th Saxon Division, who suffered terribly in the venture. The rest of the day was comparatively quiet and was spent in arranging the attack for the morrow. This attack was planned with the idea of outflanking the German position at Achiet-le-Grand, which had shown itself to be dangerously strong. It was determined to outflank it both in the north and the south. With this intention the 3rd Division was to capture Gomiecourt during the night of August 22. Farther north two fresh divisions, the famous 56th London Territorials and the 52nd from Palestine, were ordered to prolong the line of the Guards, all under General Haldane, and to capture Hamelincourt, Boyelles, and Boiry Becquerelle, with as much more as they could get, on the early morning of August 23. On the front of the Fourth Corps on the right the advance was entrusted to the 37th Division and to the 42nd Division on the bank of the Ancre.

The attack upon Gomiecourt, which was to be the prelude of the day's work, since all advance to the south was impossible while that village was in German hands, was carried out by the well-tried 76th Brigade, the 8th Royal Lancasters and 2nd Suffolks in the front line, with the 1st Gordons in close support. Tanks were to lead the van, but they were unable to get across the railway embankment in time. The assault, which began at 4 in the morning, was preceded by a short crashing bombardment of heavy shells upon the doomed village. It had hardly ceased before the Suffolks and Lancasters were swarming down the street, and the place was secured with little loss. Whilst this brisk and successful affair was going on, the 13th King's Liverpools of the 9th Brigade on the right made an advance to keep the line level, taking some prisoners and three guns. This was the more important as the weak point of the situation had always been to the south and most of the damage sustained was by enfilade fire from this direction.

The 8th Brigade, now under the command of Colonel Henderson, kept pace with the 76th Brigade in their advance, occupying the ground

north of Gomiecourt. The 2nd Royal Scots and 7th Shropshires were in the lead. There was very heavy fire and the losses were considerable, but the machine-gun nests were rooted out with the bayonet, and the full objective was attained. Farther north the attack was carried on by the 3rd Grenadier Guards and the 1st Scots. These were successful in taking the village of Hamelincourt and the trench system south of it, while keeping in touch with the 56th Division to the north of them. The 1st Coldstream was then pushed through and crossed the Arras-Bapaume Road, gaining a position eventually from which they looked south upon Ervillers.

Farther north still both the 56th and the 52nd Divisions had joined in the advance, moving forward to the line of the great high road which runs from north to south. Bridges had been thrown over the Cojeul River by the sappers of the 59th Division, who had held this front—the workers having to wear gas masks during their labours. To the 470th Field Company R.E. belongs the credit of this most difficult job, under the direction of Colonel Coussmaker. Over these bridges passed the 52nd Division, while south of them the attack was urged by the 168th Brigade of the 56th Division, with several villages for their objective. The 13th London (Kensingtons) were on the right, the 4th London in the centre, and the 14th London (London Scottish) on the left. The advance went without a hitch, save that touch was lost with the Guards on the right. This was regained again in the evening, however, when the Brigade found itself to the north of Croisilles and close to the old Hindenburg Line. The 52nd Division had also reached the line where it runs across the Sensée valley.

The main advance in front of Haldane's Corps had been entrusted to the 2nd Division, who advanced through the ranks of the 3rd Division after the capture of Gomiecourt. This advance was on a three-brigade front. On the right was the 99th Brigade, in touch with the 63rd Brigade of the 37th Division to the south of them. This Brigade was told off to keep the flank, but it captured 500 prisoners in the process. On the left was the 6th Brigade, which had been ordered, with the help of eight whippets, to attack Ervillers. In the centre the 5th Brigade with ten whippets was to carry Behagnies and Sapignies. This considerable attack was timed for 11 o'clock.

Gomiecourt having fallen, the 5th Brigade used it as a screen, passing round to the north of it and then turning south to Behagnies. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry headed for that village, while the 24th Royal Fusiliers advanced to the storm of Sapignies. The 2nd Oxford and Bucks were in reserve. The ten light tanks which led the attack had a series of adventures. Three were knocked out by a gun on the railway. The other seven under heavy gun-fire swerved to the right, got out of the divisional area, and on the principle that any fight is better than no fight, joined with the 37th Division in their attack upon Achiet-le-Grand, where they did good service. In the meantime, the tankless

5th Brigade moved round Gomiecourt, coming under very heavy fire on their left flank. Colonel Brodie, a most gallant V.C. officer of the Highland Light Infantry, was killed, and Colonel Cross of the Oxfords wounded, by this fire. The day was very hot, the men exhausted, and the losses severe. The new position was organised, therefore, and the advance suspended for the time.

The 6th Brigade had advanced on the left of the 5th, heading for Ervillers, with the 1st King's Liverpools and the 2nd South Staffords in the lead. The front waves, assisted by light tanks, rapidly broke down all opposition, and Ervillers was taken about 2 p.m. All movement beyond the village was checked by very heavy fire from the high ground to the north-east, so that Mory Copse, the next objective, was found to be unattainable. The object of the British Commanders was never to pay more for a position than it was worth, or buy a machine-gun at the cost of half a battalion. On the other hand, papers captured during the day showed beyond all doubt that the object of the Germans was to make an orderly retreat as far as the Hindenburg Line, so that it was clearly the game to hustle and bustle them without cessation.

August the 24th was a heavy day in the Sixth Corps, who were ordered to push on and gain ground to the utmost extent along the whole front. In order to strengthen the movement, the Canadian Corps had been very quietly and deftly removed from the right wing of Rawlinson's Army and transferred to the left wing of Byng's Army, in touch with the 52nd Division.

It will be remembered that the 2nd Division, though they had taken Ervillers, had been pinned down there by German fire, while they had failed to take Behagnies or Sapignies. Both these movements were now resumed. In the night of August 23-24 the 1st King's Liverpools advanced from Ervillers upon Mory, but were held up by very heavy fire. The 3rd Guards Brigade on the north was advancing successfully upon St. Leger and this had the effect of outflanking the Mory position on that side. St. Leger was taken by the 2nd Scots Guards and the 1st Welsh, who cleared it in the course of the afternoon. They could get no farther, however, until the 2nd Division had completed its task at Mory. This was now in the hands of the 99th Brigade, who, headed by the 1st Berkshires, with the 1st Royal Rifles behind them, and a spear-head of tanks in front, broke down all opposition and captured Mory Copse, a very formidable position full of emplacements and dug-outs. By this success the threat was removed from the right of the Guards, and all was clear for their further advance upon Ecoust.

The 62nd Yorkshire Division had now moved up to relieve the 2nd Division, but the latter were determined before their withdrawal to complete their unfinished tasks. In the early morning of August 25 the attacks upon the two obdurate villages were resumed, after a very heavy bombardment. The new venture was splendidly successful. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 24th Royal Fusiliers rushed into

Behagnies while it was still dark and cleared out the whole village. This enabled the force to get to the rear of Sapignies, which was stormed by the 2nd Oxfords—a battalion with such proud traditions that even now in semi-official documents it is still the 52nd Light Infantry. 300 prisoners and 150 machine-guns were taken in the village, a proportion which illustrates how far machines were taking the places of men in the depleted German Army. Having gloriously tidied up its front the 2nd Division now stood out while the 62nd took its place.

It will be remembered that the 52nd and 56th Divisions had fought their way to the Hindenburg Line on August 23. This was too formidable an obstacle to be taken in their stride, and the most that could be hoped was that they should get into a good position for the eventual attack. The 52nd Division had shown the metal of the Palestine Army by a very fine advance which made them masters of Henin. On their right was the 167th Brigade, with the 1st Londons and the 7th and 8th Middlesex in the line. These troops pushed right into the outskirts of Croisilles, but it was clear that new German divisions were in the line, and that the resistance had very much hardened. The Londoners were unable to hold the village, and the 52nd Division was also held up on Henin Hill by very strong fire. Matters seemed to have come to a stand in that quarter.

Early in the morning of the 25th the Guards 3rd Brigade and the 186th and 187th Brigades of the 62nd Division made a resolute advance to clear their front and get nearer to that terrible paling which was meant to enclose the German domain. It was a day of very hard fighting for all three brigades, and they had ample evidence that the German line had indeed been powerfully reinforced, and had no intention of allowing General Byng to establish himself in the very shadow of their fortifications if they could hold him off. The opening was inauspicious, for by some mistake there was an error of half an hour in starting-time between the two divisions. As a result the Guards found themselves on the line of road between Mory and St. Leger with an open flank and under heavy enfilade fire, which made many gaps in the ranks of the 1st Grenadiers. At the same time the leading tanks were put out of action on that flank. In the centre the tanks lost their way in the mist, but the 2nd Scots Guards pushed ahead in spite of it. Banks Trench, however, in front of them was very strongly held and the assault was not pressed. On the left the 1st Welsh were in St. Leger Wood, but Croisilles was still untaken and the advance could not be carried forward as the machine-guns from this village swept the country. About 9 a.m. the enemy buzzed out of the Hindenburg Line and fell upon the Scots Guards, but were shot back again into their cover. During these operations the Guards captured a battery of field-guns.

The 62nd West Yorkshire Territorials on the right of the Guards had an equally arduous day. They had found the same difficulties in getting forward, but at 5 p.m. the enemy had the indiscretion to counter-attack,

and when once he masks his own machine-guns he has ceased to be formidable. His attack was near Mory Copse and aimed at the junction between the two divisions, but it was heavily punished and shredded away to nothing. About 7 p.m. he tried another advance upon the right of the 62nd Division and won his way up to the line, but was thrown out again by the 5th West Ridings and driven eastward once more. The 186th Brigade, forming the right of the Division, co-operated with the Fourth Corps in their attack upon Favreuil, which place was captured.

On the evening of August 25 Haldane's Sixth Corps, which had become somewhat unwieldy in size, was limited to the north on a line just south of Croisilles, so that the 52nd, 56th, and 57th Divisions all became Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps, which was thus thrust between the Sixth Corps and the Canadians, who had not yet made their presence felt upon this new battle-ground. The Seventeenth Corps was now the left of the Third Army, and the Canadians were the right of the First Army. The immediate task of both the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps was the hemming in and capture of Croisilles, and the reoccupation of the old army front line. August 26 was a quiet day on this front, but on August 27 the Guards and the 62nd Division were ordered forward once more, the former to attack Ecoust and Longatte, the other to storm Vaulx-Vraucourt. The First German Division encountered was easily driven in. The second, however, the 36th, was made in a sterner mould and was supported by a strong artillery, large and small. The 2nd Grenadiers and 2nd Coldstreams in the front line of the Guards 1st Brigade got forward for nearly a mile on each flank, but were held up by a withering fire in the centre, so that the flanks had eventually to come back. The 56th Division of the Seventeenth Corps had not yet captured Croisilles, from which a counter-attack was made upon the left flank of the 2nd Coldstreams, which was handsomely repulsed.

On the whole, however, it had been an unsatisfactory day and the 62nd had been equally unable to get forward, so that none of the objectives had been gained. The Seventeenth Corps and the Canadians in the north were both advancing, however, and it was possible that the position in the south might alter as a consequence.

Such was indeed found to be the case on August 28, for the 56th Division was able this day to get possession of Croisilles, which eased the situation to the south. The Guards and the 62nd pushed forwards, following always the line of least resistance, so that by evening they were 1200 yards forward at some points, though the right of the 62nd Division was still pinned to its ground. That evening the 3rd Division replaced the Guards, and the same tactics were pursued on the following day. The 76th Brigade was now in the front line to the south of Croisilles, with the hard-worked 62nd Division still on their right. A sugar factory was the chief impediment in front of the latter. The right of the division got forward during the day and occupied the old army trenches.

August 30 was once again a day of heavy fighting, the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps, represented by the 56th, 3rd, and 62nd Divisions, closing in upon the Hindenburg Line and attacking the last villages which covered its front. The tanks had miscarried, and the infantry at 5 a.m. had to go forward alone. On the right the 185th and 186th Brigades of the 62nd Division both made good progress, the obnoxious sugar factory was taken, and though Vaulx could not be cleared it was partly occupied. Next day saw the dour Yorkshiremen still sticking to their point, and fighting with varying success in and out of the village. At times they had flooded through it, and yet again they were beaten back. By the morning of September 1 the 186th Brigade had possession of Vaulx-Vraucourt and were on the high ground to the east of the village. Next morning they had Vaux Trench as well, but about ten o'clock in the forenoon of September 2 a strong counter-sent them reeling back in some disorder. Gathering themselves together in grim North Country fashion they went forward again and cleared Vaulx Wood before evening. That night, after a very desperate and costly term of service, the 62nd was relieved by the 2nd Division.

The experiences of the 3rd Division from the August 30 attack were as arduous as those already described. On that morning the 76th Brigade, with the Suffolks and Gordons in the lead, got forward well at the first, though they lost touch with the Londoners to the north. The Suffolks were on that side and the gap enabled the Germans to get round to their left rear with disastrous results, as the losses were heavy and the battalion had to fall back. The Gordons had to adjust their line accordingly. This rebuff had lost most of the ground which had been gained early in the day. General Deverell now sent up the 9th Brigade, as the 76th was much worn, but the 1st Gordons remained in the fight.

On August 31 the 9th Brigade attacked the Vraucourt position, with the 1st Gordons, battle-weary but still indomitable, on the right, the 4th Royal Fusiliers in the centre, and the 13th King's Liverpools on the left. It was known that no less than three new German divisions had been thrown in, and however the fighting might turn it was certain that the attrition was going merrily forward. The assembly was unfortunately much disturbed by the German barrage, which fell with particular severity upon the Fusiliers in the centre. At 5.15 a.m. the line moved forward, but again the luck was against the Fusiliers, who were opposed by a particularly dangerous machine-gun nest in a sunken road. One company endeavoured to rush it, but all the officers save one, and most of the men, were mown down. A tank which endeavoured to help them met with a strange fate, as a German officer managed, very gallantly, to get upon the top of it, and firing through the ventilation hole with his revolver, put the whole crew out of action—a feat for which in the British service he would certainly have had his V.C.

The Fusiliers were hung up, but the King's on the left had carried the village of Ecoust, getting in touch with the right of the 56th Division

in Bullecourt Avenue. Many hundreds of the enemy were taken, but some pockets still remained on the southern edge of the village, and fired into the flank of the unfortunate Fusiliers. The King's then attempted during the long day to throw out their right flank and get in touch with the left of the Gordons so as to obliterate the sunken road, which was the centre of the mischief. The ground was absolutely open, however, and the fire commanded it completely. Under these circumstances Colonel Herbert of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, which was in reserve, suggested that the attack be postponed until dusk. This was done, and at 8 p.m. Herbert's men overran the sunken road, capturing the guns. Ecoust was also completely cleared of the enemy. So ended this day of vicissitudes in which the 9th Brigade, with heavy loss, had struggled through many difficulties and won their victory at the last. A further advance during the night by both the 9th and the 76th Brigades straightened the whole line from Ecoust to the south.

On the morning of September 1 the 52nd Division had relieved the 56th Division, both of the Seventeenth Corps, in the Croisilles sector, and was in close touch with the 3rd Division to the south. Both divisions went forward with no great difficulty at the appointed hour, the three battalions of the 9th Brigade being all in the line once more. The important trench known as Noreuil Switch was captured in this advance. It may well seem to the reader that the gains were tardily and heavily bought at this stage of the operations, but it is to be always borne in mind that Fergusson and Haldane in particular were up against the old intricate trench system, and away from that open fighting which can alone give large results. To others there was always some way round, but here there was an unbroken obstacle which must be frontally attacked and broken down by pure persistence. In these operations the new machine-gun organisation proved to be particularly efficient, and B Company of the 3rd Battalion Machine-Gun Corps did essential work in winning the way for the 9th Brigade. The whole battle was a long steady contest of endurance, in which the Germans were eventually worn out by the persistence of their opponents.

The advance was renewed along this area on September 2, the object of the 52nd Division being to encircle Quéant from the south and west, while that of the 3rd and 62nd Divisions was to gain the east of Lagnicourt and the high ground east of Morchies. The fortunes of the 62nd Division have already been briefly described. On the front of the 3rd Division the 8th Brigade, strengthened by one battalion from each of the other brigades, took up the heavy task, the 7th Shropshires, 2nd Royal Scots, and 1st Scots Fusiliers forming from right to left the actual line of battle. The last-named battalion by a happy chance joined up on the left with its own 5th Battalion in the 52nd Division. They assembled under heavy shelling, some of which necessitated the use of box-respirators. No sooner had the advance begun than the Shropshire men came under machine-gun fire and lost the three tanks which

led them. They had gained some ground, but were first brought to a halt and then compelled to retire. In the centre the Royal Scots took Noreuil, which was found to be lightly held. In attempting to get on to the east of this village they found the trenches strongly manned and the fire, both of rifles and machine-guns, so murderous that it was impossible to get forward. The Scots Fusiliers were also faced with strong resistance, including a belt of wire. Three company and eight platoon commanders were down before this obstacle and the sunken road behind it were crossed. Without the aid of tanks the depleted battalion moved on under very heavy fire, and eventually halted in a line with the Royal Scots on their right. To the right of these, as already shown, the 62nd Division had also been brought to a stand. A formidable trench, called in the old British days Macaulay Avenue, barred the way and had only been reached by a few of the assailants. It is a fact, however, that Lieutenant R. R. MacGregor of the Scots Fusiliers with five men did force their way in upon this morning, and tenaciously held on to their position until after dark, forming just that little nucleus of determined men by whom great battles are so often won.

There was a momentary check, but it was retrieved by Captain Nagle's company of the 2nd Suffolks, who charged with two companies of Royal Scots and won a section of the trench. The utmost difficulty was experienced by the Brigadier in keeping in touch with the action, as the ground was so exposed that nearly every runner sent back from the front line was killed or wounded. Colonel Henderson came forward, therefore, about three o'clock and reorganised his dispositions, with the result that before evening the line had been straightened and advanced, with the capture of many prisoners and machine-guns. Meanwhile Quéant to the north had been captured by the 52nd Division, and the whole German system of defence was weakening and crumbling, the Seventeenth Corps strongly co-operating with the Canadians upon their left. The enemy's purpose during all this very hard contest was to sacrifice his rearguards if necessary, in order to cover the retreat of his main body across the Canal du Nord. There were few more difficult problems in local fighting during the whole war than how to carry these successive positions, bravely held and bristling with machine-guns. That it was finally done was a great achievement upon the part both of those who commanded and those who obeyed. Colonel Vickery's guns, covering the infantry, had much to do with the final success. How great that success was could only be judged upon the following morning when the new divisions which had taken over the front, the Guards on the left and the 2nd on the right, found that all the kick had been taken out of the Germans, and that a substantial advance could be made with little loss.

Neither the Guards nor the 2nd Division encountered serious opposition on September 3, and a steady, if cautious, forward movement went on all day. The Seventeenth Corps upon the left had turned south

in order to clear Mœuvres and Tadpole Copse. By midday the 2nd Division had cleared both Hermies and Demicourt. Before evening the 2nd Guards Brigade was in the old British front line, which was held during the night. The Canal du Nord was just ahead, and it was realised that this would mark what the Germans intended to make their permanent line. It was all-important to push the rearguard across it and to get any bridges with their eastern exits, if it were in any way possible.

The advance on September 4 was resumed in the face of some sporadic opposition, but by the evening of the 6th the enemy was all across the Canal, and the Sixth Corps was awaiting developments elsewhere. On September 11 steps were taken, however, to get into striking position for the final fracture of the Hindenburg Line, in view of which it was necessary to gain the Hindenburg front system west of the Canal. On September 12 the main attack was delivered, though on September 11 the 2nd Division had secured the western ends of the Canal crossings. The centre of the new operation was the attack upon Havrincourt by Braithwaite's 62nd Division. This operation was carried out by the 186th and 187th Brigades, the pioneer battalion, 9th Durham Light Infantry, being attached to the former, while eight brigades of field-guns and three groups of heavies lent their formidable assistance. The right of the 62nd was in close touch with the 37th Division, which was attacking Trescault. The advance of both brigades was continuous, though strongly opposed. The 2/4th Hants and 5th West Ridings on the right, and the 2/4th York and Lancasters with the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry on the left, trampled down all opposition. The individual is almost lost to sight in the scale of such operations, but a sentence must be devoted to Sergeant Calvert of the last-named battalion, who attacked two machine-guns, bayoneted four and shot three of the crews, taking the rest prisoners. At 7.30, the western edge of the village of Havrincourt had fallen, but the fortified château on the south, in the area of the 186th Brigade, still held its own. It was attacked by the 2/4th West Riding Battalion, who had a most difficult task in the tangled gardens which surrounded the house. At the same time the 2/4th Hants pushed into the village and fought their way right through it. They had to sustain a heavy counter-attack delivered about 7 in the evening by the 20th Hanoverian Division, supported by a flight of low-flying aeroplanes. This attack was broken up with great loss by the steady fire of the men of Hampshire and Yorkshire.

In the early morning of September 13 the village was strongly attacked by the enemy, who effected a lodgment in the cemetery and pushed back the British line for 200 yards. A fine return was made by the 5th Devons of the 185th Brigade, who cleared the village once again. Two of the divisional machine-guns held out close to the posts occupied by the Germans—so close that the sergeant in charge shot the battalion leader of the enemy with his revolver. From this time the

62nd were left in possession of Havrincourt, which they had thus won for the second time, since it was carried by them in the Cambrai battle of November 20, 1917. General Braithwaite, who was the victor upon each occasion, remarked that if his men had to take it a third time they should, on the cup-tie principle, be allowed to keep it for ever.

Meanwhile the 2nd Division on the left had made its way slowly but without any serious check as far as London Trench, which brought them nearly level with the 62nd, while the 37th in the south had captured Trescault and were also well up to the Hindenburg Line. There was no further serious fighting for several days on this front save that the 185th Brigade advanced its line to Triangle Wood on the morning of September 14. This attack was carried out by the 2/20th Londons and was completely successful, as was their subsequent defence against a brisk counter-attack. On September 16 the 62nd Division was relieved by the 3rd, and the 2nd Division by the Guards. There was no further fighting until September 18, that general day of battle, when a very severe German attack was made about 6 o'clock in the evening, which covered the whole front of the 3rd Division and involved the left of the 37th Division in the area of the Fourth Corps. After a heavy bombardment there was a determined advance of infantry, having the recapture of Havrincourt for its objective. A number of low-flying aeroplanes helped the German infantry. The attack fell chiefly upon the 1st Scots Fusiliers and 2nd Royal Scots, and some gain was effected by a rush of bombers aided by flame-throwers, but they were finally held and eventually driven back, while 100 prisoners were retained. C Company of the Royal Scots particularly distinguished itself in this action, forming a solid nucleus of resistance round which the whole defence was organised. Nothing further of importance occurred until September 29, the day of the general advance, in this northern portion of the British line.

In order to complete this account of the doings of Byng's Third Army from August 21 onwards, some account must now be given of what was originally the central unit, Harper's Fourth Corps, though its general progress has already been roughly defined by the detailed description of the two Corps on its flanks.

The first task set for this Corps on August 21 was to capture the general line between Irles in the south and Bihucourt in the north, while the flank of this main attack was to be guarded by a subsidiary advance along the valley of the Ancre, and between Puisieux and Miraumont. The first objective of the main attack was Bucquoy, Ablainzeville, and the important high ground to the immediate east of these villages.

The advance commenced in a thick mist, and was undertaken in the case of the main attack by Williams' 37th English Division. It was completely successful, and aided by the fire of six heavy and fifteen field brigades of artillery, it swept over its first objectives, the tanks helping

materially to break down the opposition. The moral effect of a tank in a fog can be pictured by the least imaginative. Two field-guns and many lighter pieces were taken. The veteran 5th Division on the right and the 63rd Naval Division on the left then passed through the ranks of the 37th to enlarge the opening that they had made, carrying the advance on to the limit of the field artillery barrage, and halting at last just west of Achiet-le-Petit. The naval men met with a blaze of machine-gun fire from the edge of Logeast Wood, but they rooted out the nests and occupied the position, though the passage through the tangled brushwood and trees disorganised the units, and progress became slow. The railway line ran right across the front, and this, as usual, had become a formidable and continuous obstacle, which could not be turned. The reserve brigade of the 5th Division on the right carried Achiet-le-Petit, but could not get over the railway. The 63rd was also unable to reach the railway, and found a considerable concentration of Germans opposite to them in the brickworks and cemetery west of Achiet-le-Grand. The tanks had wandered off in the mist, and for the moment the advance had reached its limit. Many of the tanks, as the mist lifted, were hit by the anti-tank guns of the enemy, though some most gallantly crossed the railway line and penetrated the German positions, doing such harm as they could, until they were eventually destroyed.

Meanwhile, the subsidiary attack on the right flank had also been successful up to a point. The New Zealanders on the immediate south of the 5th Division had gone forward in their usual workmanlike fashion, and had taken Puisieux. Upon their right, and next to the Fifth Corps who were beginning their arduous crossing of the Ancre, was the 42nd Division (Solly-Flood), an ex-Palestine unit of Lancashire Territorials which had won laurels in the March fighting. It had come away with a flying start, and had got as far as the important point named Beauregard Dovecote. There it remained until the early morning of August 22, when the enemy regained it by a spirited attack from a new division. The total effect of the day's work along the whole front of the Fourth Corps had been the capture of 1400 prisoners, of a number of guns, and of an extent of ground which was important, though less than had been hoped for. The main resistance had always been the railway, and the German guns behind it, so that to that extent his line was really inviolate. Indeed from his point of view the whole work of the Third Army on that date might be represented as an attack upon a false front, the real position remaining intact.

The enemy was by no means abashed, and early in the morning of August 22 showed that he did not propose to surrender the field until he had fought to regain it. At dawn the 52nd German Division deployed through Miraumont and fell upon the left of the 5th Division in one direction, and the 42nd in the other. As already stated they succeeded in driving back the latter, and Beauregard Dovecote remained as a prize of victory. Some three hundred Germans pushed through between

the 5th Division and the New Zealanders, but were at once attacked by a party of the 1st Devons, assisted by some of the New Zealanders. Corporal Onions of the Devons showed great initiative in this affair, which ended in the capture of the whole of the intruders. He received the V.C. for his gallantry.

It was a day of reaction, for the 63rd Division in the north was strongly attacked, and was at one time pushed as far as Logeast Wood. They rallied, however, and came back, but failed to regain the railway at Achiet-le-Grand. Early in the morning of August 23 the Beauregard Dovecote was finally captured by units of the 42nd and New Zealanders, the enemy falling back to Miraumont. About the same hour in the morning the Sixth Corps in the north had taken Gomiecourt as already described, which strengthened the general position.

Early on August 23 the 37th Division came up on the left and relieved the Naval Division. Guns had been pushed into position, so at 11 o'clock in the forenoon it was possible to deliver a strong attack under an adequate barrage upon the line of the railway. The result was a complete success, in spite of the formidable nature of the defences. The imperturbable English infantry flooded over every obstacle, took its inevitable losses with its usual good humour, and established itself upon the farther side of the position, while the tanks, taking advantage of a level crossing, burst through and did very great work. Both Achiet-le-Grand and Bihucourt fell to the 37th Division, while the 5th captured the high ground overlooking Irles, and subsequently pushed on eastwards as far as Loupart Wood. Since Miraumont was still German the flank of Ponsonby's Division was scourged by the machine-guns, and an attempt by the 42nd Division to relieve the pressure by taking the village had no success, but the 5th maintained all its gains in spite of the heavy enfilading fire. In this fine operation the 37th Division alone captured 1150 prisoners. There were signs, however, of German reaction, especially on the southern flank, where a new division, the 3rd Naval, had been brought into line.

August 24 was another day of victory. The New Zealanders passed through the depleted ranks of the 5th Division and made good not only the whole of Loupart Wood, but also Grevillers to the north-east of it. An even more useful bit of work was the storming of Miraumont by the 42nd Division in the south. This village, which had been nearly surrounded by the advance on the flanks, gave up 500 prisoners and several guns. The 42nd continued its career of victory to Pys, which they took, and were only stopped eventually by the machine-guns at Warlencourt. This advance greatly relieved the situation on the right flank, which had been a cause for anxiety, and it also, by winning a way to the Ancre, solved the water problem, which had been a difficult one. This day of continued victorious advance was concluded by the occupation of Biefvillers by the united action of the 37th and of the New Zealanders.

At 5 a.m. on August 25 the advance was resumed, with the 63rd Division on the right, the New Zealanders in the centre, and the 37th on the left. The naval men found a head wind from the first, for the Germans were holding Le Barque and Thilloy in great strength. No great progress could be made. On the left the New Zealanders and the 37th both reached the very definite line of the Bapaume-Arras Road, where they were held by very heavy fire from Bapaume on the right and Favreuil on the left. The splendid 37th, with some assistance from the New Zealanders on their south, rushed the wood and village of Favreuil and helped to beat off a German counter-attack by the fresh 111th Division, which was so mauled by aircraft and artillery that it never looked like reaching its objective. Many dead, and some abandoned guns marked the line of its retirement.

On August 26 these indefatigable troops were still attacking. It was indeed a most marvellous display of tenacity and will-power. The general idea was to encircle Bapaume from the north and to reach the Cambrai Road. In this the 5th Division and the New Zealanders were successful, the former reaching Beugnatre, while the latter got as far as the road, but sustained such losses from machine-gun fire that they could not remain there. In the south Thilloy still barred the advance of the Naval Division, which was again repulsed on August 27, when it attacked after a heavy bombardment. There was a pause at this period as the troops were weary and the supplies had been outdistanced. On August 28 the 63rd left the Fourth Corps and the 42nd took over their line and repeated their experience, having a set-back before Thilloy. On August 29 there was a general withdrawal of the German rearguards, the whole opposition dissolved, Thilloy fell to the 42nd Division, and the New Zealanders had the honour of capturing Bapaume. Up to this time the advance of the Fourth Corps had yielded 100 guns and 6800 prisoners.

On August 30 the whistles were sounding once more and the whole British line was rolling eastwards. It will mark its broader front if we say that on this date the Fifth Corps on the right was in front of Beaulencourt, while the Sixth Corps on the left had taken Vraucourt. The 42nd Division on this day was unable to hold Riencourt, but the rest of the line got well forward, always fighting but always prevailing, until in the evening they were east of Bancourt and Frémicourt, and close to Beugny. Always it was the same programme, the exploring fire, the loose infantry advance, the rapping machine-guns, the quick concentration and rush—occasionally the summoning of tanks or trench mortars when the strong point was obstinate. So the wave passed slowly but surely on.

On August 31 the Germans, assisted by three tanks, made a strong attack upon the New Zealanders, and a small force pushed in between them and the 5th Division. They were surrounded, however, a German battalion commander was shot and some sixty of his men were taken.

The whole line was restored. On this day the Lancashire men on the right took Riencourt with some prisoners and a battery of guns.

September 2 was a day of hard battle and of victory, the three Corps of General Byng's Army attempting to gain the general line Barastre-Haplincourt-Le Bucquière. The 42nd Division captured Villers-au-Flos and advanced east of it, while the New Zealanders made good the ridge between there and Beugny. Some 600 prisoners were taken. There was some very fierce fighting round Beugny in which the 5th Division lost six tanks and many men with no particular success. The place was afterwards abandoned.

The British line was now drawing close to the Hindenburg position, and the Fourth Corps like all the others was conscious of the increased effort which the Germans were making in order to prevent the attackers from gaining all the outlying posts, and being able to carry the main line before every preparation had been made for its defence. For several days there were wrestles for this position or that, which culminated on September 9 in a very sharp tussle between the New Zealanders and a German Jaeger Division at African Trench on the ridge west of Gouzeaucourt. It was a very desperate fight, which some of the old New Zealanders declared to have been the most intense and close which they had experienced since they met the Turks at Gallipoli—a compliment to the Jaeger, but somewhat a reflection upon other units of the German army. In the end the New Zealanders were unable to hold African Trench and had to be content with African Support. The 5th Division shared in this fighting. This engagement was part of a local co-operation in an attack made by the Fifth Corps in the south.

On September 12 there was a combined attack, which has already been mentioned, by which the Fourth and Sixth Corps should capture Trescault Spur and Havrincourt. It will be remembered that the latter was captured by the 62nd Yorkshire Division. The New Zealanders advanced upon the Spur, where they met with very vigorous opposition from their old enemies, the Jaeger, who fought with great tenacity. The 37th Division turned the Spur from the south, however, capturing both Trescault and Bilhem. Two guns and 500 prisoners were captured. On September 18 the 5th Division together with the Welsh Division of the Fifth Corps undertook a local operation against African Trench, but the indefatigable German Jaeger still remained masters of the situation. At 5.20 p.m. on that day the initiative passed to the enemy, who broke suddenly into a very heavy bombardment, followed by a furious attack upon the left of the 37th Division. It made some progress at first and the British losses were heavy, especially in the case of the 1st Herts, a battalion which has many times shown great steadiness and gallantry. Lieutenant Young of this unit rallied his men and counter-attacked at a critical moment, dying single-handed amid the German ranks but winning a posthumous V.C.

We have now brought the record of the Fourth Corps level with that

of the Fifth to the south and of the Sixth to the north. It is necessary to give some fuller account of the Seventeenth Corps which had been formed on the left of the Sixth. This will complete the account of General Byng's operations with his Third Army from their inception on August 21 until the eve of the great general battle which was to break out at the end of September.

It has already been stated that on August 25 Sir Charles Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps was formed on the left of General Byng's Third Army and became the northern unit in that force, having the Sixth Corps on its right and the Canadian Corps on its left. It contained at first three divisions, the 52nd (Hill), 56th (Hull), and 57th (Barnes). Two of these had already been heavily engaged in the new advance before becoming part of the Seventeenth Corps. Indeed on the day preceding the entrance of the Corps into the line, the evening of August 24, the 56th Division had attacked the Hindenburg Line at Summit Trench and Hill Switch, near Croisilles, without effect. They had now established themselves near their objective and were waiting orders to try again.

The 52nd Division, one of the fine units which had been released from Palestine owing to the reinforcements of Indian troops in that country, had also tried for the Hindenburg Line and taken a bit of it on August 24, but they had found it too hot to hold. They were now lying low on the western borders of Henin Hill, hoping to co-operate with the Canadians of the First Army on their left at some later date. A line of British divisions was now crouching in front of Hindenburg's bars all ready for a spring.

In the new attack it was planned that the 56th Londoners should co-operate with the Sixth Corps on their right, and clear the village of Croisilles by outflanking it, while the 52nd Division should work on the north of the Cojeul stream in close touch with the big Canadian attack, advancing towards Fontaine-les-Croisilles. The effect of these movements would be that the portion of the Hindenburg Line which faced the Seventeenth Corps would be attacked from the rear instead of the front.

On August 26 at 3 a.m. the Canadians went forward, as will be told under the head of their operations. The 52nd Division kept its place on their right flank, working up along the Cojeul River, and carrying all the objectives allotted to them. By 10.35 a.m. their task had been completed and they were still in close touch with the Canadians. In the afternoon the 155th Brigade on the extreme left, consisting of Scottish Territorials, attacked Henin Hill from the north-west, capturing a succession of machine-gun positions. The crews of these guns got—and indeed accepted—little quarter, fighting staunchly to the last. By 4 o'clock the 52nd Division was well into the Hindenburg Line from the Cojeul northwards; and by 5 o'clock the 155th Brigade was across Henin Hill, moving south-east. The whole of this very important position was now in British possession, though there were pockets of

the enemy scattered here and there who were holding out to the last. The 56th Division on the right was still in front of Croisilles, sending out occasional patrols which reported that the village was still strongly held. Its orders were to maintain pressure but not to advance until the development of the movement in the north should shake the enemy's resistance.

On August 27 Croisilles and the strong trenches around it were kept under bombardment. The 56th Division began to thrust forward its left flank, and made some progress, but was eventually held by very heavy fire from the south. At midday the 52nd Division was driving down from the north, getting to the Sensée River about Fontaine and endeavouring to help the left of the 56th Division by moving along the Hindenburg Line. This was partly accomplished, but it was impossible for the 56th to get ahead as the troops on their right in the Ledger Trenches had also been held up. That evening the 52nd Division after a fine term of service was drawn out and the 57th took its place.

Early on August 28 it was evident that the scheme for pinching out Croisilles had been successful. At 8 a.m. a contact aeroplane reported the village to be empty, and at 8.30 the Londons' patrols were in the main street. There now lay Bullecourt in front of the 56th, and Hendecourt and Riencourt in front of the 57th Division. At 12.30 the attack was in full swing, lines of the gallant Territorials of London and Lancashire streaming across the low dun-coloured curves which are cut by the famous trenches. It was a long uphill fight, but by 4.30 in the afternoon the 169th Brigade, containing the London Rifle Brigade, the 2nd Londons, and the Westminsters, had fought their way into Bullecourt. There they were held, however, for there were numerous pockets of Germans in their rear, and the machine-guns pelted them from every side, while the village was far from clear. The 167th Brigade on the right had also been held up by machine-guns, all three battalions, the 1st Londons and the 7th and 8th Middlesex, having heavy losses and being forced back for a time. The 57th Division on the left of the line encountered the same desperate resistance, which could only have been overcome by troops who would take no denial. Hendecourt was not reached, but all the gains of the morning were held as a basis for a future advance. The liaison on either flank with the Sixth Corps and the Canadians was complete. It had been a day of very hard and expensive fighting and of no very marked success.

The battle was renewed about midday on August 29, the morning having been devoted to repulverising the powder-heap of Bullecourt with heavy artillery, and to clearing up some of the pockets in the immediate front of the advance. The 56th Division advanced once more, the 168th Brigade having taken the right of the line. The machine-guns were still very destructive, and the right and centre were held up, though the left made some progress. The general result was to get the British line all round Bullecourt, but the village itself was still defiant. The

57th Division on the left had another day of desperate fighting, in which the Lancashire Territorials showed their usual valour. At 4.30 some of them had got through Hendecourt and had penetrated, with great difficulty and suffering heavily, into Riencourt. It was afterwards found that some ardent spirits had even forced their way into the Drocourt-Quéant line, and left their dead there as a proof for those who followed after. Their line in the evening was the western outskirts of Hendecourt, where they were in touch with the right of the Canadian Division.

At 5 a.m. on the morning of August 30 the Germans, who had a perfectly clear vision of the fact that the loss of the Hindenburg Line must entail the loss of the war, attacked in great force along the general line Ecoust-Bullecourt-Hendecourt, and made some considerable dents in the British front, especially at Bullecourt, which had to be evacuated. The 57th were pushed back to the line of the Hendecourt-Bullecourt Road, and abandoned the ruins of an old factory, which is a marked position. This attack corresponds with the one already detailed when the 3rd Division were driven out of Ecoust, and it is heavy weather indeed when the 3rd Division begins to make leeway. The 56th tried very gallantly to regain Bullecourt by a bombing attack, but it could not be done. The Germans got a footing in Hendecourt, but could not clear it, and the evening saw the Lancashire Territorials and their enemy at close grips among the ruins.

On the morning of August 31 the indefatigable Londoners attacked once more, the 4th Londons, London Scottish, and Kensingtons of the 168th Brigade carrying on the work. The factory was soon retaken and so was the Station Redoubt, but Bullecourt itself, squirting flames from every cranny, was still inviolate. On the right the 3rd Division had recaptured Ecoust, which relieved the general situation. The British bombers got into Bullecourt in the afternoon and before evening they had made good the greater part of the ruins, a handful of Germans still clinging manfully to the eastern edge. That night the 52nd came to the front and relieved the 56th. In the five days' battle the London division had lost 123 officers and 2600 men. On the other hand they had captured 29 officers and over a thousand men, while they had inflicted very heavy losses upon the enemy.

September 1 saw this long-drawn battle still in full progress. There is nothing more amazing than the way in which the British divisions at this stage of the war without reinforcements carried on the fight from day to day as though they were sustained by some prophetic vision of the imminent victory which was so largely the result of their heroic efforts. With the early morning the 57th Division was into Hendecourt, and before seven o'clock the 171st Brigade had completely cleared the village and joined hands with the Canadians on the farther side. There was a great deal of actual bayonet work in this assault, and Lancashire came out triumphant. On the right the 52nd Division had a busy morning in clearing out the dug-outs and cellars of Bullecourt. In the

afternoon they advanced eastwards and cleared another 500 yards of ground, when they came under very heavy fire from Noreuil on their right flank. The 155th Brigade was lashed with a pelting rain of bullets, one battalion, the 4th Scots Borderers, losing 10 officers and 140 men in a few minutes. The advance was continued, however, until Tank Avenue, the immediate objective, was reached and cleared. It was a splendid example of indomitable perseverance.

The 171st Brigade, which was still advancing on the left, had also undergone the torment of the machine-guns, but some skilful flanking movements by supporting platoons enabled progress to be made and the German posts soon surrendered when there was a danger of being surrounded. Riencourt fell, and by 6.30 the extreme objectives had been gained and touch established on either flank.

The success of this spirited attack, with the heavy losses inflicted, seemed to have cowed the enemy before the 57th Division, for the night passed quietly on that front, which was very helpful in allowing the preparations to go forward for the considerable operation planned for next morning.

September 2 was the date for the main attack by the First Army upon the Drocourt-Quéant line south of the Scarpe, to which all the fighting which has been detailed was but a preliminary. The rôle assigned to the Seventeenth Corps was to co-operate with the Canadians by thrusting forward their left flank so as to gain position for an attack upon Quéant from the north. The Sixth Corps on their right was ordered to attack Morchies and Lagnicourt and then push forward vigorously towards Beaumetz. The 1st Canadian Division, with Gagnicourt for its objective, was on the immediate left of the Seventeenth Corps. The orders to the Seventeenth Corps were that the 57th Division should support the Canadian attack, that the 52nd Division should conform to the movements of the 57th on its left and of the 3rd on its right, and finally that the 63rd Naval Division, now added to the Corps, should move up in support and improve whatever advantages were gained.

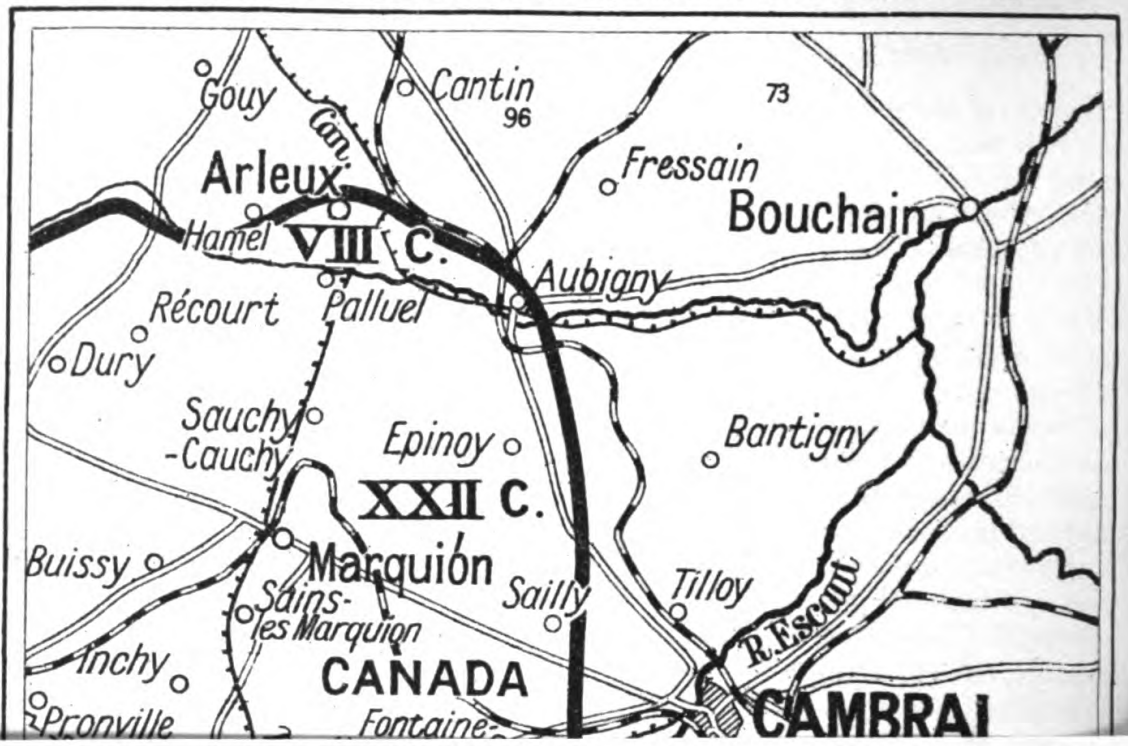
At 5 a.m. the barrage fell and the troops moved forward upon one of the critical battles of the war. The grand part played by the Canadians in the north is described elsewhere. The 172nd Brigade of the 57th Division advanced splendidly towards the gap which had been formed, a storm of gas shells bursting among their stolid ranks. The leading battalion, the 1st Munster Fusiliers, followed the men of the Dominion through the breach which they had made in the Drocourt-Quéant switch, and then according to plan swung sharply to the right, smashing their way with bomb and bayonet down the whole line of the German position and so clearing the front for their comrades. It was a fine exploit and worthy of the great battalion which carried it out. They were strongly counter-attacked at the moment when, panting and weary, they had reached their full objective, and yet they retained sufficient vitality to drive back the German stormers.

Other elements of the 172nd Brigade had worked south on the right of the Munsters, and got forward as far as Possum Lane, so that they formed a useful defensive flank on the left of the 52nd Division. Meanwhile the 171st Brigade had advanced directly from Riencourt Ridge and had cleared up the trenches opposite, which were enfiladed by their comrades.

The 63rd Division was now brought forward to play its part, with the 188th Brigade, consisting of Ansons, Marines, and Royal Irish, in the van. At 9 a.m. it passed through the left of the 57th Division about a mile south of Gagnicourt. From this point it was continually advancing during the day, being in touch with the 1st Canadians on the left and with the 57th on the right. By nine in the evening it was seated firmly in the Hindenburg Line. The switch line of Drocourt-Quéant had been ruptured as early as 8 in the morning, which was the signal for the 52nd Division on the south to advance upon the main Hindenburg Line south-west of Quéant. The 156th Brigade was in the van. Some few parties reached the main objective, but by 10 o'clock the advance had been suspended, as operations had not yet progressed sufficiently elsewhere. The 52nd continued, however, to exert pressure at the point of junction between the switch and the Hindenburg support line. All day progress was being made in proportion as the attack drove down from the north, so that by 3 p.m. the front line had been cleared, and before midnight the whole of the German defences, a perfect maze of trenches and wire, were in the hands of the British infantry. At this hour patrols had penetrated into Quéant and found it clear. This was the close, so far as the Seventeenth Corps was concerned, of one of the most decisive days' fighting in the whole final advance. Late that night the tireless 63rd Division had reached Pronville, where they added more prisoners to their considerable captures. Altogether about a thousand were taken by the Corps during the day, with a large amount of material.

September 3 saw the 63rd Division still adding to its gains. In the morning it occupied Tadpole Copse and advanced upon the Canal du Nord. It then captured Inchy, but was held up in front of Mœuvres by strong enemy rearguards. This marked a definite line of equilibrium which was maintained until the general dispositions of the Army allowed a further advance. For a considerable time the only fighting on this Corps front was in connection with Mœuvres, a village which remained as a sort of No Man's Land until, on September 19, a spirited attack by the 155th Scottish Brigade of the 52nd Division put it finally into British hands. After this there was quiet on the left flank of the Third Army until the great operations at the end of the month.

POSITION OF BRITISH CORPS, END OF SEPTEMBER 1918.



CHAPTER LVIII

THE ADVANCE OF HORNE'S FIRST ARMY

From August 26 to September 27, 1918

The indefatigable 51st Division—Capture of Greenland Hill—Fine advance of the Canadians—Breaking of the Drocourt-Quéant line—Good work of the 63rd Naval Division—Great day for the Dominion—Demeanour of German prisoners.

On August 8 Rawlinson had attacked on the south with the Fourth Army. On August 22 Byng followed on his left with the Third Army. Four days later Horne took it up in turn south of the Scarpe with his First Army. The general function of that Army was to co-operate with the attack of the Third Army on its right, and to cover the flank of that Army from the north. Therefore the First and Eighth Corps stood fast, while the Canadians, who had been brought up from the southern sector, advanced. They formed the right unit of the First Army, and were in touch to the south with Fergusson's newly formed Seventeenth Corps, which was the left unit of the Third Army. As only the Canadians were seriously engaged up to the end of September the narrative of the First Army can be easily summarised.

It will be necessary first to explain some preliminary operations. After its return from its hard fighting in the French line, where it had co-operated with the 62nd Division in attacking the great German salient upon the Ardres, the famous 51st Highland Division had only a few days' rest before it was in action once more. It was now placed on the north bank of the Scarpe in the Arras sector. The 170th Brigade of the 57th Lancashire Territorial Division lay to the south of the stream, and this was placed under the command of Carter-Campbell, General of the 51st, so that he had four brigades under him, with instructions to advance along the line of the river, as opportunity served, in order to screen the left of the attack now about to break out in the south. Carter-Campbell covered from Feuchy in the south to the east of Bailleul, about 8000 yards.

It was known that the enemy was withdrawing its advanced positions in front of the Army, and it was therefore very necessary for Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps to keep in touch with the Germans in that region. With this object in view the 170th Brigade in conjunction with the 15th

Division on their right moved along the south bank of the river to seize the advanced German trenches. This was done at 1 a.m. of August 19, when a considerable stretch of ground was occupied with little opposition. An endeavour to increase their gains on the next night was met by a sharp counter-attack. On the same night two brigades of the 51st Division pushed forwards north of the river, but met with very strong resistance. On August 20 there was another German attack upon Moray Trench, south of the Scarpe, but the Lancashire men broke it up by artillery and rifle-fire. By 9 p.m., however, the 170th Brigade were ordered back from their advanced position, having been badly harried all day. On August 24 in the early morning the 57th Division advanced with good results, the 153rd Brigade capturing Pippin Trench and other important points. The 152nd Brigade lay to the immediate west of Fampoux, and did not move, but the advance was again carried on upon the left on August 25 with some gain of ground.

Meanwhile the Canadian Corps had quietly taken the place of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps to the south of the Scarpe, pushing them to the south, and all was ready for the big battle which broke out on August 26, and was a continuation to the north of the large movement already going on down the line. In this important attack, the 3rd Canadian Division was on the left, and the 2nd on the right, the two of them bridging the space between the Scarpe and the left of the Third Army. It was stated by prisoners that the attack had been foreseen, and that they had withdrawn 2000 yards the day before. However that may be, everything went very well, and the men of the Dominion showed their usual determined valour. The 7th and 8th Canadian Brigades, just south of the river, swept along with hardly a check, save for a time when the 8th was held up behind Orange Hill. At 7.35, Monchy, important as a place of observation, was in British hands once more. At 10.45, the 4th Canadian Brigade had captured Guémappe, and in the afternoon Wancourt Ridge had also fallen to the 2nd Canadian Division. Here, as elsewhere, a single day had given what weeks of effort had once failed to achieve; 2000 prisoners were taken.

On the north bank, the 51st Division, which was now part of the Canadian Corps, made a similar advance, both the 152nd and 153rd Brigades sweeping forward, and occupying Rœux, Gavrelle and the Chemical Works, with little opposition. The 8th Division was to the north of the 51st, and it also pushed forward its line, its patrols occupying Oppy after dusk.

The 8th Division, reconstituted under its veteran commander, General Heneker, after its murderous and heroic experience upon the Aisne, was the right-hand unit of Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps, which was the next unit of the First Army. The front of this Corps was formed by the 20th Division in the north and the 8th in the south, and its rôle at this period was to stand fast, but by a succession of well-conducted enterprises the 8th Division was continually encroaching

upon the German lines. Presently, as will be seen, when the line was advanced on the south, the Eighth Corps was unleashed and sprang forward in combination with the general advance on either flank. On its left, and following its general movements, was Holland's First Corps, which was allotted, after September 20, to the Fifth Army, so that instead of being Horne's northern unit it became the southern Corps of Birdwood.

On August 27 the Canadians went forward once more, the 9th Brigade on the left near the river, while the 4th and 5th were on the right. Again there was a day of steady advance, which was rather a slow pursuit than a battle. In the evening the line ran east of Cherisy, but west of Pelves and Haucourt. In the north the 51st Division attacked Greenland Hill, which was a most important piece of high ground—so important that it may be said to be the point on which the whole great advance to the Canal du Nord pivoted. The attack was delivered with great spirit by the 7th Gordons and 6th Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade, but they were unable to get the summit, while the 6th Seaforths to the south of them were also held up by machine-gun fire. Some advance was made, however, by the 154th Brigade, which had now come in on the north of the line. That night the 25th Brigade of the 8th Division took over this northern section.

August 28 saw the Canadians still continuing their slow but inexorable advance. On that morning their 7th Brigade took Pelves and Boiry. There were two strong counter-attacks upon the 2nd Canadian Division in the evening near Artillery Hill, and for a time the front line was pushed back, but it soon recovered and held firm. There was quiet now on the Canadian front, but on August 29 the 154th Brigade of the Highland Division made a fresh attack upon Greenland Hill, which was captured by the 4th Gordons and 7th Argyll and Sutherlands with only slight losses. This important success caused the evacuation by the enemy of several positions commanded by the hill, especially Delbar Wood. This capture screened the left flank of the Canadians and drew from their General a generous message of thanks, in which he said, "That your division after its continuous fighting for the last year was able to take and keep the strong position of Greenland Hill, testifies to the fact that the fighting qualities of the 51st are second to none in the Allied armies."

There were some changes of troops at this date in preparation for the big attack upon the Hindenburg switch line which was impending. Godley's Twenty-second Corps now formed on the left of the Canadians, took over the 51st Division, and also occupied the south bank of the Scarpe with the 11th Division. It retained Cameron's 49th Division in reserve. On the other hand, the 4th British Division was attached to the Canadians, and came into their centre at Remy and Haucourt. At dawn on August 30 the Canadian 1st Division attacked Upton Wood and the trenches near, with the object of straightening the

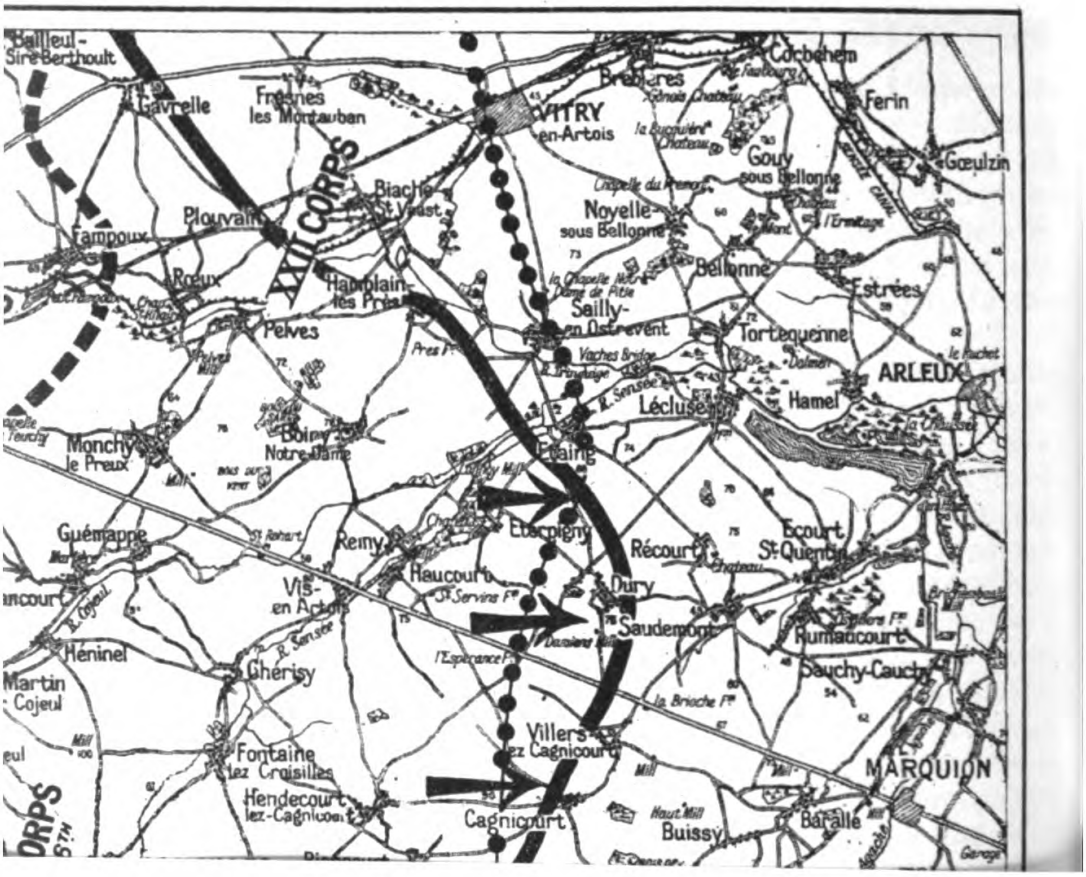
line and maintaining close touch with the Seventeenth Corps on the right. This movement was splendidly successful, and 500 prisoners were taken. The 4th British Division advanced at the same time and their line in the evening was just east of Eterpigny. Next day they were held up once at St. Servin Farm, but took it at the second attempt. Meanwhile, the 11th Division was moving steadily forward on the south bank of the river. It was relieved on October 1 by the 56th London Division, acting under the Twenty-second Corps.

On September 1 the Canadian Corps was outside the Arras-Cambrai Road, with the 4th British Division forming its left flank, the 4th Canadian its centre, and the 1st Canadian on the right. It was a day of local attacks and bickerings, but great preparations were on foot for the morrow. The first light of dawn had hardly begun to glimmer in front of the eager lines of infantry before the signal was given for the advance upon the Drocourt-Quéant line. This line is not the main Hindenburg Line, but it is a northern extension of the Hindenburg system, and it may be said to cover the towns of Douai and Cambrai. The advance of the First Army was on a front of five brigades—one belonging to the British 4th Division on the left, and two of each first line Canadian Division to their right. The general idea of the day's operations—among the most important of the war—was to break through the German line upon a narrow front, and afterwards to roll up the flanks of the enemy, both north and south. This having been done, the main attack was to push through, seize the higher ground overlooking the Canal du Nord, and if possible cross the Canal and seize the farther bank.

The attack should be from the Sensée River, southwards, and the function of the Twenty-second Corps was to form a defensive flank on the left of the attack, taking up consecutive positions eastwards along the River Sensée, and working in close collaboration with the British 4th Division.

There was a preliminary bombardment, but the guns had been busy wire-cutting during the last three days, so that the great metal aprons which extended from the German position were ragged and torn. Hence they offered small impediment to the infantry, who dashed through at the first rush, and easily captured the outlying trenches which stretched across a low hill. The village of Gagnicourt lay imbedded in the German trenches, and this was a centre both of attack and resistance. By 8 o'clock the Canadian infantry of the 1st Division had carried the village, while the Canadian 4th Division was in Dury on the left, and had made its way into Dury Wood. The advance had already covered about 3000 yards. Both the barrage and the tanks were admirable, and the combination beat down the German defence which at first was not formidable—indeed many of the German front-liners escaped the shrapnel by running in front of it and surrendering the moment the battle began.

ES FROM AUGUST 21ST 1918 TO SEPTEMBER 2ND 1918.



As the advance progressed the German resistance grew stiffer, especially in front of the 4th Canadian Division at Dury Wood, where there was some very desperate fighting. All along the line, pockets of German snipers and machine-gunners did what they could to redeem the honour of the German Army. Astride the Cambrai Road there was a particularly strong point of opposition. The defenders were numerous all along the line—so much so that prisoners from six different German divisions were captured, including the 1st and 2nd Guards Reserve, and the 3rd Division which had only arrived the night before with orders to advance into the Canadian area. Many of them did so as far as the prisoners' cage.

This splendid advance of the Canadians had been covered and supported on the right by the 57th Lancashire Division of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps, which had cleared up the villages of Riencourt and Hendecourt in a preliminary operation on September 1. The Lancashire men made good the Canadian flank, and then the 63rd Naval Division of the same Corps skirted the southern edge of Gagnicourt, passing the Canadian troops, and pushed on to Buissy, nearly two miles further east. This advance was on a front of a mile, and brought the victors into contact with six other German divisions, each of which provided samples for the cages. Not content with this fine performance, the Naval Division, who were now ahead of their guns and without tanks, pushed on again in the evening, and, as already stated, they captured the village of Pronville, thus getting to the east of Quéant, which was still held by the Germans. The Drake, Anson, Hood, and Hawke battalions, together with the Royal Marine units, were all heavily engaged during this long day of fighting.

Meanwhile the Canadians had carried on along the original line of advance, the 1st Canadian Division clearing the woods of Loison and Bouche. On the extreme left the 4th British Division added to its great fighting record another strenuous day of battle. It had in front of it a very strong position, Prospect Farm, which offered a desperate resistance, but was eventually taken. It was afternoon, however, before the place fell, which prevented the attainment of the full objectives of the day. They were still advancing in the morning of September 3, and before noon they had taken all their original objectives, including Etaing and Lecluse, while on the same morning the 4th Canadians got as far forward as Rumancourt.

It was a fine victory, which will make September 2, 1918, memorable to Canadians. Great work was done by the British divisions on either side of them, but the stress of the attack and the consequent credit lay with our comrades from across the Atlantic. More than 10,000 prisoners were taken during the day. Their demeanour as described by Mr. Perry Robinson, the well-known correspondent of *The Times*, is of interest as reflecting the softening and disintegrating influences in the German Army. " As the newcomers arrived they were greeted with

shouts of laughter and welcome by their comrades already behind the wires, and greetings and badinage and names were called back and forth. Those inside were mostly eating, and held up bully-beef tins and biscuits for the new arrivals to see, and the latter cheered responsively. . . . Many were very tired, but the whole scene suggested a new train-load of revellers at some annual bean-feast being welcomed by fellow-holiday-makers."

The Germans had dammed the river which flows down the Trinquis valley in front of the Twenty-second Corps, and this had now formed a considerable lake which hampered operations to the north. The Fresnes-Rouvroy line when tested by patrols seemed to be still strongly held. It soon became evident, however, that on the south the Germans had withdrawn behind the Canal du Nord. The Canadians on September 3 closed up to the western bank, occupying with little resistance Recourt and Baralle. During the day the 1st British Division relieved the 4th British Division, while the 2nd and 3rd Canadians relieved respectively the 1st and 4th Canadians. The Canal was found to be full, and all the bridges down, so that progress was for the time suspended, and a period of inaction followed, which was accompanied by a bad spell of boisterous weather, lasting for more than a week. During this time the 1st British Division was sent south to form part of the Ninth Corps on the extreme south of the line next to the French. The 56th London Division took its place on the right of the Twenty-second Corps, and on September 19 it extended so as to take over the ground held by the 3rd Canadians, thus contracting the Canadians' front on that flank, while it was extended to the south, where it took over from the 52nd Division on the left of the Seventeenth Corps. The Cambrai Road became the dividing line between the British and the Canadians. To preserve uniformity of treatment we shall now return to Rawlinson's Fourth Army in the south, and we shall carry each successive Army forward from the end of September to the date of the German surrender.

CHAPTER LIX

THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY

From the Battle of the Hindenburg Line (*September* 29) *to the Battle of the Selle, October* 17, 1918

The first American operations—The rupture of the Hindenburg Line—Predicament of 27th American Division—Their gallant resistance—Great Australian attack—Remarkable feat by the 46th North Midland Territorial Division—Exeunt the Third Corps and the Australians—Entrance of the Thirteenth Corps—Rupture of the Beaurevoir line—Advance to the Selle River.

TURNING to Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which were last seen in contact with the old Hindenburg Line along its formidable front from Vandhuile on the left to Gricourt on the right, it will be remembered that it consisted of Butler's Third Corps on the left, the Australian and American Corps in the centre, and Braithwaite's Ninth Corps on the right in contact with the French. The time had now come for an attack on the largest scale in order to endeavour to carry this Chinese Wall of Germany by storm. The part assigned to the Third Corps in this important operation was not a large one, and their front was now contracted to 2000 yards, while two of their divisions, the 58th Londoners and the 74th Yeomanry, were transferred to another area. There remained only the 12th and 18th Divisions in line, which had to cover the left flank of the main attack which was to be made by the Australian and Second American Corps, and by Braithwaite's Ninth Corps to the south of them.

At this point the great Canal de l'Escaut passes under a tunnel which is nearly six miles in length. Thus it is the only place in the whole line where tanks could be used to advantage. The general plan was that this section of the line should be carried by the Second American Corps as far north as the northern entrance of the tunnel. This done they would extend their gains to the left in a north-easterly direction beyond Vandhuile, so as to open up a way for the Fifth Corps. After the line had been taken Australian divisions were to move forward through the Americans and push the advantage to the east. The rôle of the Third Corps was to cover the left of the Americans, and then, when the latter had moved northwards, to mop up Vandhuile, establish bridge-heads east of that point, and bridge the canal for the 38th Welsh Division on the right of the Fifth Corps to get across.

Before the general attack which took place on that *dies irae*, September 29, the Americans had a brisk fight of their own, which deserves some special mention as it was the first large operation of an American force acting as part of a British Army. The Second American Army Corps (General Read) had been specially selected to lead the attack on September 29, and as a preparation for this great effort they were ordered to make some advance along their whole front in order to gain an advantageous point from which to start. They lay roughly along the front of the Hindenburg outpost line, but they needed to draw up closer to the main line before the day of battle. On the night of September 24, General O'Ryan's 27th American Division from New York on the left relieved the 18th and 74th British Divisions, taking over a front of 4500 yards opposite to Gouy. The defences immediately before them were particularly strong, including the notorious danger points, the Knoll, Quinnemont Farm, and Guillemont Farm. Pierce's 53rd American Brigade took over the line, with the 106th Infantry Regiment in front and the 105th in support. The entire American front was from near Vandhuile in the north to Bellicourt in the south.

The tunnel, which formed a special feature in the next great battle, deserves some description, as it was a remarkable feature dating back to the First Empire, and still bearing upon its arches the laconic **N** of the great Corsican. It is 6000 yards long and averages 50 feet below the surface, with a breadth of about 70 feet. The Germans had converted it into an extraordinary military work, for it was stuffed with barges in which a whole division could take absolute refuge from the heaviest barrage ever launched. There were all sorts of bolt-holes in every direction for getting in or out, and there were powerful machine-gun emplacements along the top. Altogether it was as awkward a nut to crack as any military engineer could conceive. The main Hindenburg Line lay a couple of hundred yards west of the tunnel, a heavily-wired system of trenches. About a mile farther east was a strong support line joining the villages of Nauroy and Le Catelet, while two or three miles farther on was yet another strong position, known as the Beaurevoir line. The way in which Americans, Australians, and British combined with equal valour to hunt the Germans out of this terrific series of positions is a story which will go down in the common traditions of the English-speaking race.

At 5.30 a.m. on September 27 there was the preliminary operation, already mentioned, which should gain the ground necessary for the jumping-off place. This was done by Lewis' 30th American Division on the right with little difficulty. It was different with the 27th on the left. On this flank a depth of about 1100 yards had to be gained, coinciding roughly with the rearmost trenches of the Hindenburg outpost line. This task was carried out by the 106th Infantry with all three battalions in line and four tanks ahead of each battalion. The leading companies, following the barrage, reached their objectives in

most cases, but were involved in desperate fighting at the points already mentioned, which were connected by cross-cuts with the main German line, from which there flowed the endless supply of reinforcements. All day attack and counter-attack followed each other, both parties fighting with great valour and enduring heavy loss. By night the 53rd American Brigade was well advanced on its right, but its left was still battling hard to reach the allotted line ; 8 officers and 259 Germans had been taken in the fighting. That night Blanding's 54th Brigade took over the new front and lay ready for the coming battle, with the 108th Infantry on the right and the 107th on the left. On the front of the 30th Division Faison's 60th Brigade was in line, with the 119th and 120th Infantry in the van, the latter to the right, in touch with the British Ninth Corps to the south of them.

The task which lay before the New Yorkers of the 27th American Division on the 29th was particularly difficult, because the men were so scattered over 1100 yards of depth that the barrage had to be thrown forward to cover that area of ground. Thus the main body of the stormers had to cross that space before getting the full protection of the artillery. There were no American guns in action, but the British artillery was as splendidly efficient as ever, crashing down at 5.30 a.m. upon the starting line, where it lingered for four minutes and then advanced at the rate of 100 yards in every four minutes. The German barrage came down instantly in reply, and though it was not very heavy it inflicted considerable damage upon the supporting troops. What with fog and smoke it was difficult to see more than a few feet in any direction, and this was a great advantage to the stormers, the more so to troops who are so individual as the Americans. The 30th Division on the right, a unit raised in the Carolinas and Tennessee, dashed through the main Hindenburg Line in the most gallant fashion, capturing Bellicourt on the way, while the veteran Australian 5th Division passed through their cheering ranks after they had reached their allotted limit. The 117th American Regiment on the right was in close touch to the south with the 46th British Division, whose fine advance is chronicled elsewhere, so that the British, American, and Australian dead lay along the same battle-line. The 120th American Regiment on the left had taken and held Nauroy, but had been forced to bend its line back at the north end as far as the tunnel, on account of the fire which beat upon them on that flank.

The 27th American Division had met with grave difficulties from the start, for the tanks encountered mines and traps, while the infantry as already explained had practically no barrage, and found a strongly posted enemy in front of them. The men behaved with the utmost gallantry and the officers led them with great devotion, but no troops in the world could have carried the defences under such circumstances. For a thousand yards north of the inter-divisional boundary, near the village of Bony, they got into the main line, and from point to point all

along the front bold parties pushed forward as far as Gouy and Le Catelet, many of whom never got back. The more successful were ruined by their own success, for as the mist rose it was found that in their swift advance they had left many pockets and strong points behind them which fired into their backs when they rose to advance. The 3rd Australians, following up the attack, could do little to make matters better, for all this part of the field of battle was such a complete mix-up, and the two armies were so dovetailed into each other, that it was impossible to use artillery, and yet the situation was such that without artillery it was quixotic madness for the infantry to advance. The reinforcing Australians were held up on the line between the Knoll and Guillemont Farm. Groups of brave men gathered together from time to time, and stormed up to Guillemont and Quinnemont Farms, which were among the most deadly of the German strongholds. A British Divisional General assured the present chronicler immediately after the action that he had never seen the dead lie so thick at any spot during the war as the Americans lay round Guillemont Farm. Neither the blue-clad infantry of Grant nor the grey Confederates of Lee showed a higher spirit than the khaki-clad lads who fought alongside the British that day. The best that could be done, however, was to hold such ground as had been gained, and to wait until the advance of the 5th Australians from the south, and of the 18th British Division from the north, should make all their section of line untenable for the Germans. The 27th Americans and 3rd Australians had in the meantime held on to every inch of ground they had gained, and also to every prisoner whom they had taken. On the night of September 30, the Americans, shattered in numbers but with unabated spirit, were withdrawn from the line. Altogether 40 officers and 1100 men had been taken from the enemy.

It is necessary now to state the difficult and confused events of September 29 from the point of view of the 5th Australian Division, who had almost as severe a day as their compatriots on the left. General Hobbs' Division went forward with the 8th Brigade on the right, which was in constant touch with the British troops. On the left was the 15th Brigade, which eventually found its northern flank in the air on account of the hold-up in that quarter. At 9.40 the line of the 8th Brigade passed Bellicourt, which the Americans had cleared. As they advanced, however, they were scourged by a very heavy fire from the direction of Nauroy. At midday the 32nd Battalion of Australians on the right were in touch with the 4th Leicesters on Knobkerry Hill. As the brigade advanced they came upon concrete pill-boxes of the familiar type behind Nauroy which caused heavy losses. Joncourt on the right was taken by the 32nd Battalion, and at 8 in the evening the general line of Nauroy-Le Catelet had been reached.

The 15th Brigade on the left had the harder task. The fog and the rapidity of the American advance had combined to leave a number of machine-guns still active, and there was constant opposition. Touch

was maintained with the 44th Battalion of the 3rd Australian Division on the left. A great many scattered groups of Americans were reached, most of whom came on with the Australians. The Brigade had been well provided with tanks, but in the space of fifteen minutes all the heavies and most of the whippets had been knocked out. So mixed were the conditions and so thick the clouds over the battlefield that for a time the 59th Australian Battalion on the left was altogether lost, but the 57th and 58th fought on together, and with their American friends reached the Le Catelet line, a bunch of Germans remaining in the trench between the two battalions. The 59th was afterwards found to have trended northwards and to be in close liaison with the right of the 3rd Australian Division.

The fighting had been mixed on September 29, but it became still more so next day. The rôle of the 15th Brigade was simple as it was directed to make good the rest of the Nauroy-Le Catelet line, which was in time accomplished. The 14th Brigade was ordered to attack northwards in order to help the left flank which had encountered such difficulties on the first day, while the 11th Brigade was also directed towards the north-east, and ordered to take a strong impediment called the Knob, which was eventually done. The 53rd Battalion which led the 14th Brigade distinguished itself greatly, advancing with a steady persistence which always gained its ends, and overflowing the German field-guns. It was finally held up, however, and a strong counter-attack drove it to take refuge in that part of the Le Catelet-Nauroy line which was already in British hands. There was a good deal of close fighting in this quarter, but the gains were held by the 15th Brigade, which failed, however, to get Cabaret Wood Farm. On October 1 the 56th Australian Battalion, with the aid of tanks, carried Estrées.

We shall now follow the work of General Braithwaite's Ninth Corps on the extreme right of the whole British Army on this great day of battle. This Corps consisted now of the 1st, 6th, 32nd, and 46th Divisions. Of these, Marden's 6th Division was in touch with the French, the 1st (Strickland) was in the centre, and the 46th (Boyd) was on the left. Opposite the Corps lay the broad and deep St. Quentin Canal, and the storm troops of the 46th Division were fitted up with 3000 life-belts, having proved by experiment that they were buoyant enough to support a fully-equipped man. Since the Spanish infantry of Alva waded out neck-deep to attack the Dutch defences on the Frisian Islands there has surely never been a more desperate enterprise than this, when one remembers that on the farther side of the Canal was every devilment which German sappers could construct, while no tanks could lead the van of the stormers. The general plan was that the 46th North Midlanders should take the whole position between Bellenglise and Riqueval; that Lambert's 32nd Division should then pass through their ranks and push onwards to Tronquoy and beyond; while the 1st Division should carry out a difficult turning movement by swinging its

left flank north-east to form a defensive line between Pontruet and the Canal at the right of the 46th Division's advance. The 6th Division was to make threatening demonstrations.

The very special obstacles which lay in the path of the Ninth Corps had led to a reinforcement of their artillery, so that it was after a two days' bombardment from 500 pieces of all calibres that the assault was made at the same hour as that of the Americans on the left. The Stafford men of the 137th Brigade led, with the 1st Regular Brigade covering their right flank. An advance line of German trenches intervened between the British and the Canal. Favoured by the thick mist the attackers were able to overrun these without any great loss, killing most of the garrison who fought bravely for every inch of ground, and winning their way to the Canal. In the meantime the 1st North Lancashires cleared the trenches on their right, while farther south the 1st Black Watch pushed forward from Pontruet, cleared the trenches north-east of that place, and finally, squeezing out the North Lancashires, fought their way down to the right flank of the Stafford stormers.

The 3rd Infantry Brigade had also become strongly engaged on the right of the 1st Division. The 1st Gloucesters were pushed along the high ground a mile south-east of Pontruet. Here they were held up for the time, but the 1st South Wales Borderers came in on their left and connected up with the Black Watch. All day the 3rd Brigade threw back a long flank north of Gricourt to the 6th Division, which was ordered to hold its ground.

The 137th Brigade having fought its way to the banks of the St. Quentin Canal proceeded now to force the passage. The 6th South Staffords on the right found the water low and there was little swimming to be done, but the 5th South Staffords in the centre, and the 6th North Staffords on the left were hard put to it to get across. The men dashed backwards and forwards on the bank, like hounds that are balked, looking for the most hopeful spot, and then springing into the water, sink or swim, with their gallant officers trailing ropes behind them as they got across. Soon the whole smooth surface of the Canal for a mile or more was dotted with the heads of the English infantry, while cables, broken bridges, extempore rafts, and leaking boats were all pressed into the service. Within a few minutes the dripping ranks were into the trenches on the eastern bank, where the moral effect of their dashing achievement took all the iron out of the defenders. At Riqueval the bridge was intact and the enemy pioneers in the act of blowing it up when the British sappers and infantry swarmed in upon them and bayoneted them with the lanthorns in their hands. This bridge and a second pontoon bridge made later by the engineers and pioneers of the 46th and 32nd Divisions, were invaluable as a means of communication.

The trenches and the tunnel entrance at Bellenglise were soon occupied and the perilous passage had been safely made. The advance

then continued, the teams of four guns being shot down as they tried to get away. The 138th Lincolns and Leicesters with the 139th Sherwood Forester Brigade had relieved the Stafford battalions, which dropped back after having performed one of the most notable feats of the war. These two brigades began to go forward preceded by twelve tanks which had made their way round over the solid ground on the Australian front. The advance was much impeded, however, by some German guns on the west side of the Canal, to the south of the point where it had been crossed. These guns, firing into the back of the 139th Brigade on the right, knocked out by direct fire every one of the six tanks allotted to it. A party of the Foresters then recrossed the Canal, shot or bayoneted these gunners, and extinguished the opposition in the rear.

The 138th Brigade on the left advanced well, and by 12.30 was near Magny and Le Haucourt, but it was necessary to call a halt, as the failure to hold Nauroy upon the left had exposed the north flank of the division, while the south flank had always been somewhat in the air. During the delay the barrage got ahead, but the infantry soon overtook it once more, racing eagerly for the protection of that slowly-moving cyclone. By 3 p.m. all objectives allotted to the 46th Division had been taken, and by 4 p.m. the 32nd Division had passed through their ranks—a glorious military picture on a day of victory—with the old 14th Brigade in the van. The leading lines of the infantry were now well up with the German guns, and it is on record that the German gunners fought with the greatest valour and continued to fire their guns at point-blank range up to the last. Many great deeds were done as small bodies of infantry closed in on these guns, often dashing through their own pelting barrage in their determination that the enemy should not have time to limber up and get away. Nauroy had now fallen save only the one end, which was still a scourge to the left flank of Braithwaite's Corps. Late in the afternoon the 97th Brigade captured the southern half of Joncourt, and before night Le Tronquoy had fallen also. From there the final line ran west of Le Vergies, and then back to Etricourt, where it was in touch with the 30th American Division.

Late at night the 6th Division on the extreme right, which had endured heavy fighting all along its front during the day, was relieved by the extension northwards of the Fifteenth French Corps. The 6th Division went into reserve. All night there was a bickering of machine-guns and rifle-fire along the front, and before morning the 14th Brigade had completed the mopping up of the villages which it had captured.

It was a most glorious day's work which reflects great credit upon General Braithwaite and his men, who were allotted a task which it seemed presumptuous to demand and yet carried it out to the last inch. The stormers captured 90 guns and 5400 prisoners during the day, the vast majority of which (70 guns and 4000 prisoners) fell to the Midland Territorials. It was fitting that in so intimate a struggle as that between

Great Britain and Germany it was men from the very inner heart of England who at the critical moment struck the most deadly blow.

On September 30 there was a continued forward movement on the front of the Ninth Corps. The 1st Division took Thorigny and the 32nd Division took Le Vergies during the day, with some 700 prisoners. The general movement of troops was from the south, the French taking ground to the left in order to release the British for that north-eastern movement which promised the more decisive results.

On the morning of October 1 the 32nd Division, in close liaison with the Australians, completed the capture of Joncourt, and made progress towards Sequehart. During the afternoon the glad news arrived that the French were progressing splendidly in the south and that their pioneers were in St. Quentin. All day the 32nd Division was flowing slowly onwards, taking Sequehart and establishing its van in the Fonsomme line, which extends from that village to Beaurevoir. The Germans had given fanciful names to all of these lines which were taken with such unfailing regularity by the Allies. There were the Siegfried line, the Wotan line, and other Wagnerian titles, which led some wit to remark at the time that if they went far enough through the list of that composer's operas, they would certainly come, sooner or later, to the Flying Dutchman. There was some confused fighting in the line south of Ramicourt, but the setting sun found the 32nd Division in full possession. It was clear, however, that heavy fighting was ahead, as the Intelligence Department learned that three fresh divisions, the 84th, 221st, and 241st, had come forward to buttress the line of defence. These new-comers were strong enough to bar the way successfully to the weary 32nd Division on the morning of October 2. In the evening the Germans passed to the attack and, backed by strong gun-fire, they got temporary possession of Sequehart, the British line being drawn across the high ground to the west of that village. We must now pause to consider what was going on in the north.

As regards the part played by the Third Corps in these operations it was mainly limited to the action of the 54th and 55th Brigades of the 18th Division, with elements of the 12th Division. On the left the 54th Brigade attacked the position known as the Knoll, which was occupied by the 6th Northants who repelled several severe counter-attacks. Any further movement was hampered, however, by the deadly fire of the enemy from Guillemont Farm. The 55th Brigade was unable, as planned, to get down the Macquincourt valley as the Hindenburg Line, which commanded it, was still intact. Next morning, however (September 30), it was found possible to get forward as far as Guillemont Farm and Vandhuile village, which were occupied with little loss, but the enemy was still in force in the Hindenburg Line behind it, and attempts to cross the Canal were checked by the German machine-guns. The 37th Brigade of the 12th Division held the front line to the north-west of Vandhuile, with outposts along the Canal, which they also were un-

able to cross. On October 1 it was realised that the Australians working north were in contact with the remains of the 27th American Division, and also with the 55th Brigade in the Macquincourt valley. On the left the Fifth Corps had also reached the Canal. At noon on October 1 the long term of service of the Third Corps was at an end, and their section was taken over by Morland's Thirteenth Corps. The work of the Third Corps during that time had been very brilliant. Between August 8 and September 30 the five divisions which composed it met and overthrew twenty German divisions, including a number of the very best troops which the enemy retained in the field. They pushed them back over 25 miles of difficult country, and captured 15,700 prisoners in all with 150 guns. The achievement was the more remarkable as the troops employed were mostly young and untried, the successors of those veterans who had laid the foundations of the great reputation of these grand divisions. 1100 officers and 24,000 men in the list of casualties attest the severity of the service. In estimating the work of the latter period it is to be remembered that the Germans were in the line which they had been taught to consider impregnable, with very heavy artillery support, so that it is not surprising that it took six days to drive them back 4000 yards to the main outpost line, and another week to gain the Canal 2000 yards farther east. This remark applies equally to the Corps on either side.

Braithwaite's Ninth Corps having passed the St. Quentin Canal in the dashing way already described, had established itself firmly upon the other side during the first two days of October. On October 3 it made a further forward movement in close liaison with the Australians on the left. The two very tired divisions which had fought incessantly for four days, the 46th on the left and the 32nd on the right, were still in the van. There was some hope of a break from these repeated hammer-blows, so the 5th Cavalry Brigade were close behind the infantry, waiting hopefully for the developments of the day. The 1st Division on the right was told off to keep in touch with the French Fifteenth Corps which was joining in the attack.

Both divisions, starting at 6.25 in the morning, made excellent progress. Ramicourt was carried by the Midlanders in the first rush, and it had been cleared before 7.30. By 8, Sequehart, with 200 prisoners, had fallen to the 32nd Division. The final objective was the village of Montbrehain and Mannequin Hill. On the left the 2nd Australian Division, advancing with irresistible dash, had occupied Wiancourt and were making good progress towards Beaurevoir. By 11, some of the 46th Division were on Mannequin Hill, and some on the left were in the outskirts of Montbrehain, but the Australians had been held up to the north of that village, which made the situation very difficult. By 3 p.m., however, the whole of this important point had fallen, with the large capture of 70 officers and 2000 men. There was very severe and close fighting in the village all day, and the northern flank of the

Midland Territorials was still bare to enfilade fire, so they were drawn back to the western outskirts, which are on the reverse slope of the hill east of Ramicourt. At 7 p.m. the Germans counter-attacked on the British right and for a time regained the crest of Mannequin Hill, but they were pushed off again after dark. Another counter-attack against the 32nd Division about the same hour at Sequehart was a complete failure. During the night one brigade of the 1st Division and a dismounted section of the 5th Cavalry Brigade reinforced the utterly weary 46th Division on the left. In the meantime the French Fifteenth Corps, which had attacked with no marked success during the day, elongated its line to the north so as to relieve the 1st Division.

The breach made during this day's fighting in the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line, together with the action of the New Zealanders, presently to be described, in keeping their grip of Crevecœur in the north, had completely destroyed the resistance of the last of the great organised defences of the Hindenburg system to which the enemy had trusted as being impregnable. Officers who went over these works immediately after the fighting were amazed at the breadth and strength of the wire and the depth of the dug-outs and trenches. Their final destruction was due to the action of many forces, British, American, and Australian, all equally heroic, but it would seem that the outflanking forces at either end, the New Zealanders in the north and the Englishmen of the Midland Division in the south, stand pre-eminently out in this wonderful achievement. Sir Douglas Haig visited the Ninth Corps on October 4 and congratulted it upon the vital work which it had accomplished.

October 3 had been a day of desperate fighting for the 2nd Australian Division on the left of the Ninth Corps, which had taken the place of the 5th Australians, while the 18th British had relieved the 3rd. Their attack was upon the Beaurevoir line, including the village of Beaurevoir, and though the latter was not taken considerable progress was made. The advance was made with the 5th Brigade on the right, while the 7th Brigade was in touch with the 50th British Division on the left. Sixteen tanks lumbered in front of the line of infantry. The honours of the day rested with the 18th, 19th, and 25th Battalions, in that order from the right, who swept forward against the formidable German position. So terrible was the fire and the wire that the two right-hand battalions drew back and lay down while the guns were again turned on. They then rushed the line almost before the flying fragments of splintered wire had reached the ground. Two hundred prisoners and eighteen machine-guns were the fruits, while the 25th on the left got the village of Lormisset. The first phase of the action ended with the possession of the German line from this village to the divisional boundary on the right, and the formation of a defensive flank by the 7th Brigade, facing north. The 17th and 20th Battalions then pushed in and got Wiancourt. Altogether eleven battalions, with an average strength of 200, were

concerned in this operation, and they took 6500 yards of double-trenched system. They lost roughly 1000 men, but killed as many Germans, besides taking 1200 prisoners, 11 guns, and 163 machine-guns. A German officer summed up the enemy view by saying, "You Australians are all bluff. You attack with practically no men and are on the top of us before we know where we are."

The total effect of the fighting on October 3 in this section of the line had been extraordinarily good, though all objectives had not been taken. As the net result the British held the line for 10,000 yards from Sequehart to the west of Beaurevoir. At one time the gains had been greater, but the enemy had countered with great valour, the 21st Reserve Division, 25th, and 119th all making very strong attacks, so that the advanced line was retaken all along. On October 5, however, the division in the north got Beaurevoir while the 6th Australian Brigade carried out a very dashing attack by which the village of Montbrehain, which had already been taken and lost, was now permanently occupied. This hard struggle was begun by the 21st and 24th Battalions, but both were very worn, and there was not sufficient weight and impetus to drive the attack home. It was at this crisis that the 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion, which had never been in action, made a fine advance, losing 400 of its number but saving the situation and capturing the village with 600 prisoners.

Immediately after this battle the Second American Corps took over the whole line from the Australians, who retired for a rest which proved to be a final one. So exit from the world's drama one of its most picturesque figures, the lithe, hawk-faced, dare-devil man of the South. His record had always been fine, and twice on a day of doom his firm ranks stood between the Empire and absolute disaster. The end of March on the Somme, and the middle of April in Flanders, are two crises in which every man who speaks the English tongue the whole world over owes a deep debt of gratitude to the men who stemmed the rush of German militarism which might have submerged the world. But their supreme effort lay in those last hundred days when, starting from the Abbé Wood, west of Villers-Bretonneux and close to Amiens, they carried their line forward in an almost constant succession of battles until they were through the last barrier of the desperate and redoubtable enemy. The men were great; the officers, chosen only by merit, were also great; but greatest of all, perhaps, was their commander, Sir John Monash, a rare and compelling personality, whose dark, flashing eyes and swarthy face might have seemed more in keeping with some Asiatic conqueror than with the prosaic associations of a British Army. He believed in his men, and his men believed in him, and their glorious joint history showed that neither was deceived in the other. So exit Australia. *Ave et vale!*

It has been already stated that Morland's Thirteenth Corps took over the sector which formed the left of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, after the

Third Corps which had occupied this position was drawn out for a rest and reorganisation. The same relative positions were maintained, so that from October 1 when they first came into action till the end of the war the Thirteenth Corps had the Fifth Corps of the Third Army on their left, and the Australians and their successors on their right. They came into line at that very critical moment when the great Hindenburg Line had been broken on their south by the Americans and Australians, but when the situation was difficult on account of a large body of the former, the remains of the 27th Division, being embedded in the German lines, having advanced with such speed that the trenches had not been cleared, so that they found themselves with as many enemies on their rear as in their front. That under these circumstances there was no great surrender speaks volumes for the spirit and constancy of the men.

The Thirteenth Corps took over Lee's seasoned 18th Division from the Third Corps. It contained also the 25th Division, which had been practically annihilated in the three desperate battles described in the previous pages, but had now been rebuilt largely of men from the Italian front where the reduction of brigades to the three-battalion scale had liberated a number of trained and veteran soldiers. It was now commanded by General Charles, an officer who had signalised his professional youth by riding round the rear of the Boer army in the company of young Captain Hunter-Weston. There was also the 50th Division (Jackson) which has so often been described in the van of the battle. It had also been reconstituted after its practical destruction, and now contained no less than six Regular battalions from the East, full of experience and also, unfortunately, of malaria. Finally there was Bethell's 66th Division, a Lancashire Territorial unit which had played a fine part on several historic occasions. The South African Brigade now formed part of this Division. Altogether General Morland had a sound hard-working team under his hand, with a strong backing of artillery.

The Fourth Army was now across the line of the Canal de l'Escaut, but it was necessary to clear a way for General Byng's Third Army to cross on the north. With this object it was wise to push the attack in the south and so to outflank the Germans that they would have to abandon the whole position. It was with this object that the Ninth Corps and the Australians were ordered to attack on October 3 as already described in order to secure the high ground east and north of Beaurevoir and the villages of Montbrehain and Sequehart, while the Thirteenth Corps conformed, pivoting on its left, and capturing, as will be shown, the villages of Gouy and Le Catelet and the rising ground known as Prospect Hill. The two villages which lie in a basin surrounded by hills were powerfully held and fortified. To the west of Le Catelet the St. Quentin Canal runs between steep banks, which rise 50 feet above the water at that part, but come down to the normal at Vandhuile.

On the front of Morland's Corps only one division, the 50th, was in the line, the others being arranged in depth behind it. Sugden's 151st Brigade was on the right in close touch with the Australians, the 149th on the left. The latter was to hold its ground and form a hinge round which everything in the south should swing.

Early on October 3 the attack started in a thick mist, which made observation impossible—not an unmixed evil when a strong defensive position is to be stormed. The troops went forward with splendid dash, meeting with varied experiences as they encountered the strong posts of the enemy, but continually getting forward, though they had not attained the level of the Australians when about 9 a.m. the latter had occupied the Masnières-Beaurevoir line. The 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers who had been told off to take Prospect Hill had been drawn into the fighting in the village of Gouy, but the 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry pushed in on their right and sweeping past the village, caught up the barrage and captured the hill which it at once consolidated. By 10 o'clock the whole of the original objective, including both villages, had been occupied, while the Australians were in Estrées to the south. The rest of the day was spent, however, in holding the new line against very vigorous counter-attacks which drove down from the north-east and pushed the 4th King's Royal Rifles of the 150th Brigade, who had already lost heavily, out of Gouy. They rallied, however, and reinforced by the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers they restored the situation after some heavy fighting which came to close grips among the houses. The 2nd Australian Division on the right had also lost its hold of Beaurevoir and been driven by a heavy counter-attack to Beaurevoir Mill. The night closed down upon these lines, the British having failed to hold all their furthest points, but having greatly enlarged their foothold on the far side of the St. Quentin Canal, which had now been crossed and held from a point 400 yards south-east of Vandhuile. The 50th Division had used seven battalions and incurred heavy losses, but it had won Gouy, Le Catelet, and Prospect Hill, with some 300 prisoners. The tactical success was complete, but the strategic aim was not yet attained, as the Germans still held the Canal in front of the Third Army to the left. It was decided, therefore, to renew the operations at once, bringing in the 25th Division on the right. There was a marked salient in the German line which included the villages of Beaurevoir and Ponchaux. The plan was to cut in to the north and south of this salient and pinch it out. The 151st Brigade came into line on the left and Hickie's 7th Brigade of the 25th Division on the right, while it was arranged with General Shute on the left that the 38th Welsh Division should support the attack of the 151st Brigade. There were nests of trenches upon the high ground north of Gouy and Le Catelet and these were the main obstacles in front.

At 6 o'clock on October 4 the attack went forward in thick fog, so thick that it was not until 11 that the position of the Divisions could be defined. At that hour it was learned that the right of the 7th Brigade

was in the high ground west of Ponchaux and in touch with the Australians on the Torrens Canal. They were also holding the line of railway near the cemetery, but were under very heavy fire from the villages which raked their position. Neither of the villages had fallen, so that the attack on the left seemed to have miscarried. The reports from the 50th Division were that some progress had been made towards La Pannerie, but that the left was held up by heavy fire. At 1 o'clock La Pannerie was reported as taken, but the situation was still unsatisfactory, and the troops were under the guns of the Germans to the north, especially from Hargival Farm, which, however, was taken in the late afternoon. About 6 o'clock the glad news came in from General Jackson that the enemy appeared to be weakening, and he suggested a further advance. This was held over until the Welsh Division should be available, while all preparations were made for a fresh attack upon the salient and the villages next morning.

At 6 a.m. on October 5 the untiring infantry were off once more, through the usual dense obscurity which shrouds that region of marshes and canals. At 9 it cleared. The 7th Brigade had been held on the right, but the 74th Brigade of the 25th Division under Craigie-Hackett, had fought its way past Beaurevoir Mill, and its left-hand battalion, the 11th Sherwood Foresters, had reached its objective in a sunken road north-east of Guisancourt Farm. Some small parties were reported by the aeroplanes to be on the east side of Beaurevoir, but the Germans were still in the village. They were fighting with fine resolution, and a heavy counter-attack once more re-established their line, save that Bellevue Farm remained in the hands of the 74th Brigade. Further British efforts met with no better success, so it was decided to reorganise and attack again at dusk. The good news had arrived that in the north the Welsh Division had found all clear in front of it and that the Fifth Corps was streaming across the Canal. The 50th Division then fell into line, with the Welsh sharing in their advance. Fryell's 75th Brigade was now assembled in the dead ground west of Beaurevoir, and about 6.30 dashed at it with levelled bayonets and a determination which would take no denial. The enemy were swept out of it and the line carried forward 500 yards to the east of it, while junction was established with the Australians upon the Estrées-Le Cateau Road. Nearly 600 prisoners were taken during this day. That night the Second American Corps took over from the Australians on the right of the Thirteenth Corps.

There was now in front of General Morland a high waterless plateau extending from the St. Quentin Canal to the Selle River. As it is a country of large, open spaces intersected with sunken roads, it offers great facilities for the use of machine-guns. It is dotted with villages nestling in their orchards, but the wide stretches between are given over to beetroot cultivation. As the German rearguards were still hanging on to their position, a big attack was arranged for October 8 which would entail an advance of the Thirteenth Corps to the Premont-Serain-

Walincourt Road, meaning a depth of 6000 yards on a 4000-yard frontage. The 25th Division had one brigade on the right in touch with the Americans, the 66th were in front of Serain with two brigades, while the 50th Division with one brigade was on the left.

The general fight was preceded by a local attack by units of the 50th Division, at 1 o'clock in the morning of October 8, upon the strong German post called Villers Farm which overlooked their line. This was successfully taken, but a simultaneous attack by the 38th Division upon the village of Villers-Outreaux to the north was held up, with the unfortunate sequel that a heavy German barrage fell upon the troops as they assembled for the main attack. They endured tragic casualties with silent patience, carrying through their preparations with absolute disregard of the shower of projectiles. The attack was launched at 5.20, the order of brigades from the right being the 7th, the South Africans, the 198th, and the 151st.

This attack was a complete success. There was a stiff fight at Ponchaux, but the village was soon carried. The whippet tanks moved up with great daring in front of the infantry but suffered severely from shells and anti-tank rifles. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, who were eagerly awaiting a chance to be unleashed, found no opening during the day. The infantry got forward finely, however, and by 11 a.m. all objectives were held save on the front of Hunter's 198th Brigade, which was badly handicapped by the fact that Villers-Outreaux was still in German hands. By 3 p.m. the Fifth Corps had taken this village and the left of the Thirteenth Corps got forward to its extreme point. The 25th and 66th Divisions were at once ordered to push forward and improve the success in every way, and the final line was from the eastern outskirts of Premont and Serain up to the distillery on the Elincourt-Malincourt Road. Some 800 prisoners had been taken.

The battle was continued on the morning of October 9 with a prompt vigour which was amazing considering the continual exertions of the troops. It was speedily evident that these attacks had shaken the enemy and that he had been unable to get his roots down in his new positions. Much ground was gained with little loss, Elincourt, Avelu, and Maretz all passing into British hands. It was hoped at one time that the passages of the Selle River might be seized that day, but the infantry were too exhausted and the distances too great. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, pressing forward in small parties, got past Reumont and cut off some of the Germans, but larger bodies of cavalry were faced always with murderous machine-gun fire from scattered positions. The 66th Division had overtaken the Canadian Cavalry before evening, and the line of the Corps was west of Escaufort but clear of the eastern edge of Honnechy towards Bertry Station. They were coming at last into the old battle-ground of 1914. The wheel had swung full circle.

At 5.30 on October 10 these indefatigable soldiers were off again. They made good progress until the western slopes of the Selle valley

were reached. Here the 25th Division was checked by the fire from St Benin, which appeared to be strongly held. At noon the 66th Division was in Le Cateau, but under heavy fire from the south-west of Forest. About 2 p.m. the 74th Brigade, consisting of the 9th Yorkshires, 11th Sherwood Foresters, and 13th Durhams, made a very dashing assault upon the village of St. Benin, and drove the enemy at the point of the bayonet across the river. It was a fine achievement but led to no immediate advance, as the stream was unbridged and strongly defended. The 66th Division meanwhile attacked the ridge to the east of Le Cateau, going forward with the 6th Connaught Rangers on the left and the 18th King's Liverpools on the right. The Irishmen rushed the town with great gallantry and got through to the railway cutting on the far side. The latter battalion got as far as Montay, but found the banks of the river heavily wired and were unable to cross. The Connaught men were ordered back, therefore, after dusk, as both their flanks were in the air. They continued to hold the western bank of the Selle, where it passes through the town of Le Cateau.

There we may leave them preparing for the important battle of the Selle River, while we bring up the Second American and Ninth British Corps on the right until they also are in line upon the Selle. These two Corps worked in close liaison, forming the extreme right of the whole line of the British Armies, which was now rolling forward in an unbroken wave more than a hundred miles in length, gathering speed and volume as it went. Some half-cynical Italian critic had remarked early in the war that the British may only win one battle in a war but it is always the final one. The hour had now struck and the line was irresistible in its cold and purposeful determination.

October the 8th was a great day of battle, in which the Second Americans on the left, the Ninth British in the centre, and the Fifteenth French on the right were all heavily engaged, the men advancing with ardour from the knowledge that at last the open land of France lay before them, and that the nightmares of barbed wire and permanent lines were behind. Taking the line from the north, the immediate object of the Americans was to capture Brancourt and Premont, including a total advance of 6000 yards. The attack was made by the 59th Brigade of the 30th Division, with the 60th Brigade in support. The advance was supported by a number of heavy tanks and whippets. The machine-guns were numerous and deadly, but the Americans would take no denial, fighting with that grim earnestness which is as much their national characteristic in battle, as is the débonnaire light-heartedness of the British, or the exalted abandonment of the French. By evening both villages had fallen and all objectives attained. Early next morning the 59th American Brigade advanced once more, maintaining the fight until the early afternoon when the 60th American Brigade passed through their thin ranks, taking the towns of Busigny and Becquigny. To carry on a connected narrative of the American Corps it may be

added that they were still attacking on October 10, endeavouring to secure the command of the Selle River and the high ground beyond. The 119th American Regiment in the north captured Escaufort and St. Souplet, and in collaboration with Morland's Corps got possession of St. Benin in face of a very hot fire. Finally the 119th Regiment forced its way to the western bank of the Selle. The 120th American Regiment on the right had been checked by enfilade fire near Vaux Andigny, and had to throw out a defensive line to the south, being for the moment ahead of the general line. This regiment had suffered very heavily in its fine advance, and it was relieved on the early morning of October 11 by the 118th Regiment, who found their comrades so stretched out that they were covering a front of 5000 yards. The left American sector then remained stationary, but the 118th Regiment swept forward and took at the point of the bayonet the villages of Vaux Andigny and La Haie Manneresse, making an advance of 1000 yards. That night the 27th Division came forward and relieved the 30th. We shall now return and follow the movements of the Ninth Corps on the right during these five days of battle.

This Corps had joined vigorously in the attack on October 8, advancing with the 71st Brigade of the 6th Division on the left, the 16th Brigade in the centre, and the 139th Sherwood Foresters Brigade on the right, the function of the latter being to keep in touch with the French. The line sped forward without a check for 2000 yards, a squadron of whippets leading them gallantly on. The 16th Brigade had the hardest task, but they forced their way eastwards, and by midday Mannequin and Doon Hills with Beauregard Farm were all within the British lines. The cavalry tried to get through, but the machine-guns were still their masters, and it could only have been done at the cost of unjustifiable losses. Cerise Wood was a serious obstacle, but the resistance there suddenly collapsed before the stern insistence of the 16th Brigade, and 190 prisoners gave themselves up. Mericourt also was taken. Out of Mannequin Wood 200 more Germans were extracted. Altogether it was a very successful day, as 4 guns, 35 machine-guns, and 1200 prisoners remained with the victors. The Corps line on the left was well forward on its objectives, though on the right the advance had not been as far as was expected.

In order to strengthen the right the 46th Division was put in between the 6th Division and the French. With this greater weight of attack things went very much better on October 9. The new-comers captured Fresnoy-le-Grand, while the 6th Division took Jonnecourt Farm which had been a lion in the path upon the previous day. A railway lay across the front and the Germans tried to build up a fresh line upon it, but in the afternoon they had lost their grip. The usual organised retreat of the Germans showed signs now of hurry and demoralisation. Late in the evening the 6th Division occupied Bohain, which was found to contain several thousands of civilians, many of whom

had not touched food for three days, but who forgot their hunger in the joys of liberty.

The next day, October 10, the whole Corps front was moving forward, but resistance thickened as it advanced, and finally in the evening they appeared to be once more faced by an organised line of battle. The 6th Division was now in touch with the 30th Americans at Vaux Andigny. On October 11 a fresh German division, the 5th Reserve, had come into line, and it was very difficult to get forward in face of their fire. The casualties were low, however, and indeed it may be remarked that the greater tactical skill acquired by years of practice showed itself now, not merely by the defeat of the enemy but also by the cheapness of the cost. The iron front of the tank took many a bullet which in earlier days would have found the breast of the stormer, for brain work in England had come to the aid of valour in France. Up to now, in all these momentous operations from the 18th of September, the total casualties of the Ninth Corps had only been 6000, less than those of many a futile trench attack in the early years. On the other hand their prisoners were 12,000, a most remarkable record.

CHAPTER LX

THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY

From the Battle of the Selle, October 17, 1918, to the end

Attack upon the line of the Selle River—Stubborn work by the Second American Corps—Success of the Ninth Corps—Hard fighting at Le Cateau—Great feat of the South Africans—Continued advance—Delay-action mines—Capture of Landrecies—Dramatic exit of the German machine-gunner—Splendid work of the 1st Division.

THERE was a pause now on the front of the Fourth Army, and a period of preparation and reorganisation which was badly needed after the rapid and unremitting advance. The Selle River in front of the American section of the line had been carefully reconnoitred and was found to be fordable except for occasional deep holes. The position opposite to this Corps was very difficult, the enemy holding the east bank strongly, with outposts near St. Souplet in the north and Molain in the south. Across the stream and parallel with it was the railway, which had an embankment rising in places as high as thirty feet. Behind the railway was rising ground.

The Americans attacked with both their divisions in the line, the 30th being on the right. The 301st American Tank Battalion led them on. The attack was on a three-brigade front, the 27th Division having both its units in the fighting line. It should be explained that an American division had only two brigades as against the three in the British system, but that each brigade is very much stronger, consisting nominally of 6000 bayonets. These particular brigades, however, were already very worn, and a great strain was thrown upon them by the failure of the reinforcing organisation which, for some reason, had been unable to make good the very serious casualties already incurred.

The battle began at 5.20 in the morning of October 17. The left of the American line had its jumping-off place in the partially destroyed village of St. Souplet, and it was no easy matter to get forward from the beginning. None the less the whole line fought its way across the stream and up to the high railway embankment beyond. This, as in the area of the Thirteenth Corps, proved to be a very formidable obstacle, the more so as the fog made cohesion of attack and accurate observation equally impossible. Bandoval Farm on the left of the line poured out a destructive volume of machine-gun fire, but it was eventually rushed

by the American Infantry. The right of the 27th Division got the village of Arbre Guernon. The difficulties of this unit were greatly increased by the fact that their tanks could not ford the stream, and though it had been arranged that they should join them from the south, where there was a crossing, only two did eventually arrive, both of which were destroyed by shell-fire. In spite of everything, however, the 27th Division fought their way forward to the Le Cateau-Arbre Guernon Road, where they finally halted, as both of their flanks were, for the moment, in the air.

The 30th American Division had encountered a fierce resistance from the start at the villages of Molain and St. Martin, so that they were held up in crossing the river. After taking these villages they were faced by heavy fire from the ridge across the river. They formed a defensive flank, however, up to the point which their comrades had reached on the left. The total achievement of the Second American Corps was a fine one, for their prisoners amounted to nearly 1500 men, while their front had been advanced 4000 yards.

Next morning, October 18, the attack was renewed by General Read, the 30th Division bringing up the 60th Brigade which had been in reserve on the day before. In front of it was a line of well-fortified villages, two of which, Ribeauville and Ecaillon, were captured before evening, while a third, Mazinghien, was ringed round and American patrols were in the streets. This success represented a further advance of 1500 yards. The last-named village was completely cleared by the bayonet on the morning of October 19 and the advance was carried on for a further distance of 3000 yards. The objective of this day's attack was the high ground overlooking the Canal, and by night the west slope of this ridge had been reached all along the divisional front.

The 27th Division had advanced on the left and had taken Jonquière Farm, pushing its patrols across the St. Maurice River and up to the ridge beyond, behind which lay Le Catillon. A pause was now ordered while fresh dispositions were made all along the British front, and during this pause the two American divisions, which had fought a succession of severe actions ever since September 27, were drawn out. Their losses had been very heavy, and as already stated no replacements had been received. In their term of service the Second American Corps had taken 81 German guns, 6000 prisoners, and a large amount of material, while their own casualties amounted to the very honourable total of 364 officers and 12,826 men. They left the line with the deep respect and affection of their British comrades, who well appreciated the difficulties which new-comers, however brave, must meet with in work which calls for so terrible an apprenticeship.

We will now return to the operations of the Ninth Corps, on the right flank of the Americans, from October 17 onwards. The action was started with the 46th Division on the right and the 6th on the left, while the 1st Division was in close support, ready to come through when

needed. A great forest lay on their front and the general idea was that the Ninth Corps should encircle this from the north and join beyond the wood with the Fifteenth French Corps, General Braithwaite coming forward with his headquarters to the immediate rear of the battle so as to keep control of what would be a delicate and difficult operation. One battalion of the 139th Brigade, attacking on the right of the British line, lost its direction in the fog and got into so false a position that upon the fog suddenly lifting it was exposed to very heavy loss from the German machine-guns. The splendid Sherwood Foresters have seldom had a more severe ordeal. The left of the battalion swung round, however, and changed direction, with the result that the situation was restored. Without any loss of spirit the brigade rushed on and captured Regnicourt, driving back a heavy counter-attack which rolled in from the east about 11.30. The other three brigades in the line, which were, counting from the right, the 138th, 18th, and 16th, all made good progress, though in the fog they left several lively machine-guns in their rear. Each captured all the objectives in front, including the wood of St. Pierre.

The 1st Division was now coming up behind the 6th with the intention of passing through them, but they ran into very heavy fire before they had reached their allotted positions. Both the 1st and 2nd Brigades had to advance for 2000 yards under the constant thrashing of the machine-guns, in spite of which these veteran battalions maintained their cohesion and direction, arriving at their starting-point in the battle line at the time arranged. Passing through the 6th Division they continued the advance, with the 1st Brigade on the right and the 2nd in touch with the Americans on the left. The village of La Vallée Mulatre was very sternly defended, but nothing could stop the fire of the attack, and by 2.30 it had been entirely occupied. The 46th Division on the right had fought their way through the woody country, and had finally completed the whole scheme by joining hands with the French at the outskirts of the great Forêt Domanial just north-west of Mennevret. It was a good day for the Ninth Corps, and the prisoners amounted to 150 officers and 1500 men, a proportion of officers which suggests that the demoralisation of the German Army had not stopped at the ranks. Among the prisoners were samples from six divisions, 13 regiments, and 31 battalions, indicating the urgency with which reinforcements had been hurried up to prevent a complete fracture of the line.

In the early morning of October 18 the 46th Division in co-operation with the French captured Mennevret and Le Repas. On the same morning the 3rd Brigade advanced in co-operation with the Americans on the left and pushed the line forward as far as Ribeauville. The French had come on well in the south and were now in touch with the 1st Brigade, while the 46th and 6th Divisions were drawn out of the line. By evening of October 19 the 1st Division had made its way forward and was lining the western bank of the Canal. The 6th Division now

came in again on the left, and got in touch with the Thirteenth Corps, thus covering the gap left by the withdrawal of the Americans.

Returning to the Thirteenth Corps, who were on the left of the Fourth Army at the battle of the Selle River on October 17, the weary 25th Division had been drawn into reserve, while the 50th, their heavy losses made good by reinforcements, were put into the right of the line once more, while the 66th carried on to the left. The river was at once reconnoitred and found to be a serious impediment, especially in the immediate neighbourhood of Le Cateau, where it had been dammed and deepened, while it was commanded by high ground in the east and also by numerous strongly-built houses in the town. Arrangements were made, therefore, that the main attack should be lower down where the facilities were greater. The 50th Division held this right sector, with St. Souplet as its southern limit for the 151st Brigade, while the 149th was near St. Benin. The 66th covered the ground up to Le Cateau, the South African Brigade under General Tanner being north of the town. The South Africans with great skill and daring arranged their assembly within fifty yards of the German outposts on the other side of the stream, at a point where they were absolutely commanded by the German guns in case of discovery. There they lay in silence until, at the first twinkle of dawn, they sprang to their feet and rushed forward to the eight bridges which the sappers with their usual splendid efficiency had prepared for them during the night. So well had the bridge-makers worked, that in the region of the main attack they had actually been able to throw across bridges which would carry forward the ten tanks allotted for the assault.

The fog was so dense and the communications so precarious that the officers in charge of the operations had the nerve-trying experience of seeing their whole force vanish into the gloom and knowing nothing of what had become of them, save that the deafening roar of guns told of a deadly struggle. Soon there came news of disasters to the tanks. Three drove into a morass and were embedded there. Two developed engine trouble and collapsed. One never got across. The others lost their place in the fog and all hope of useful co-operation with the infantry was at an end. Then came belated news of the storm troops. The leading battalions of the 50th Division had got across in safety but had been swallowed up in the fog, shrouding several German posts containing machine-guns, which opened on the supports after the front files had passed them. On the left the formidable obstacle of the station with its heavy loop-holed out-buildings held up the flank battalion of the 151st Brigade, and the whole advance was stopped and greatly disorganised at this point. The railway was a strong line of German resistance, and especially a wooded mound on its eastern side, which bristled with guns. The attack being held, the reserve of the 50th Division, the 150th Brigade, was thrown into the fight which in the early afternoon was still in a condition of equilibrium.

In the meanwhile a great deed of arms had been wrought in the northern part of the line. Tanner's South African Brigade, having reached the eastern bank of the river, had penetrated the German wire and stormed through the fog up the hill on the north of the town. The second wave was held by the concentrated fire, and the first wave was so utterly lost that the patrols could find no trace of where it had got to. Just as all hope had been given up, and it had been arranged to restart the barrage, a brave runner got through with the news that the leading South Africans were right through the town and engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand fight in the deep cutting on the farther side. In order to reach this place they had been compelled to force their way through another broad apron of untouched wire, a most remarkable achievement. Gradually the very strenuous German resistance was overcome, small bodies of South Africans dribbling up in support of their comrades. By noon this part of the German line had fallen, with a corresponding weakening along the rest of their front, for the bravest man is less brave when he begins to think that the day is already lost and that his self-sacrifice is manifestly vain.

With a view to helping the 50th Division the 198th Brigade of the 66th was now ordered to cross the river to the south of the town, and to strike in on the left of the long-drawn struggle at the station, where the assailants were now so mixed up that the two brigades were telescoped into one and all battalion order had been lost. A strong counter-attack had developed about 3 o'clock on the right of the line, where the British and American Corps joined, and this had some success, though the 4th King's Royal Rifles held on desperately to their ground. It was necessary to send in the 150th Brigade to steady the line. The 7th Wiltshires and the Munster Fusiliers were the reinforcing battalions and by their aid the position was once more restored. It was a dangerous crisis, for with the river in the rear any sort of retreat would have been disastrous.

There was now a concentrated bombardment of the obdurate station, and this seems to have broken down finally the spirit of the brave defenders. Shortly after dusk patrols forced their way into the buildings, and by 8 p.m. the whole place was in British hands, and Le Cateau, save for the extreme eastern outskirt, was cleared of the enemy. It had been a very desperate battle, the laurels of which rest with the South African Brigade, who had carried out so remarkable an assault, and also with the 50th Division which had held on with such a bulldog grip to its purpose.

The day's work had not been quite completed, as the neighbouring village of Bazuel had not been captured, and this was undertaken on October 18 by the 50th Division, strengthened by the inclusion of the 75th Brigade. This operation was carried out with perfect success. There was considerable opposition from scattered machine-gun posts, but before noon Bazuel and the whole ridge to the east of Le Cateau had been secured, while the 66th Division had cleared up the suburbs of the town. Thus the whole capture and command of the Selle River had

been triumphantly accomplished. To get a complete view of the battle these operations are to be read in connection with the fighting of the Third Army, as later recounted, on the left, and that of the remainder of the Fourth Army on the right.

After a pause of a few days for reorganisation and readjustment the active operations of the Thirteenth Corps were resumed in the country between the Selle and Mormal Forest, a district which was less open than the plains to the west, but presented special difficulties of its own, for it was well wooded and was also cut up into numerous small compounds with thick hedges which presented serious obstacles to any advance. However, the obstacle had never yet been found in France or Belgium which would permanently stop a British Army, so the troops moved forward with a high heart to this new attack. The Ninth British Corps had taken the place of the Americans on the right, and was to advance to the line of the Sambre and Oise Canal, while the Thirteenth, in conjunction with the Fifth Corps of the Third Army on the left, was to reach the main Le Quesnoy-Landrecies Road, near the western edge of Mormal Forest. The larger aspect of this movement was that it should cover the right flank of the Third Army while it carried out its own important attack.

The attack was launched in bright moonlight at 1.20 in the morning of October 23. The 7th Brigade advanced on the right, with the 53rd and 54th Brigades of the 18th Division in the order given on its left. The first objective was the village of Pommereuil, and it was attained in the face of heavy fire from the mills and farms along the banks of the Richemont River. On the right the 7th West Kents did particularly well, especially an independent company under Captain MacDonald which attacked with such vigour that it captured Garde Hill and Garde Copse, extending its gains outside the divisional area, and taking many prisoners. The 10th Essex and 2nd Bedfords were also in the leading line. The second objective facing the 18th Division was Les Tilleuls Farm, with the great Bois l'Êvêque beyond it, which covered four square miles. By 9 o'clock the 18th Division had got the farm and was established in the north-east corner of the wood. Wood's 55th Brigade coming through had got well forward and was advancing upon the village of Bousies in close co-operation with the 33rd Division of the Fifth Corps. By 11.30 the 25th Division was also in Bois l'Êvêque and the British infantry was crashing through the brushwood which makes up the greater part of the plantation. All these various points were made good, but it was found that beyond them the enemy had a fixed line of defence with wire and every other defensive arrangement, so, as the soldiers were much exhausted from a long day's labour, the attack was pushed no further. Bousies had been taken after a hard fight among the surrounding orchards, by those old battle-comrades, the 7th Buffs and 8th East Surreys of the 55th Brigade, and the woods were completely cleared. Two field-guns had been captured near the Richemont River,

and the bodies of 30 men of the 8th Royal Berks within 60 yards of their muzzles showed how fierce had been both attack and defence. Altogether 50 guns and nearly 1000 prisoners had been taken.

The attack was resumed before dawn on October 24. On the right, the village of Malgarni was the first objective and this was carried and passed by the 74th Brigade. Fontaine-aux-Bois was also captured, but the Germans held part of their line on the Englefontaine-Landrecies Road and could not be dislodged. On the left the 18th Division, using the same brigades as the evening before, took Robersart and some scattered farms, but had to fight very hard for everything they got. The 7th Queen's were the first into the captured village. The new ground was consolidated and patrols thrown out to report any weakening of the enemy line. That night General Wood, who had done such long and fine service with the 55th Brigade, was invalided and Colonel Irwin of the East Surreys took over the command.

On October 26, a day of rain and mist, the Fifth Corps was attacking Englefontaine, and the 18th Division conformed by throwing forward its left, which involved the 7th West Kents and 8th Berkshires in some hard fighting. Much work was thrown upon the Thirteenth Corps on this and the following days in evacuating the civilians who swarmed in the villages, and who had no protection against the noxious fumes of the gas shells which the Germans with their usual thorough-going brutality showered amongst them. If in the peace terms the Germans found that the hearts of the Allies were hard and their thoughts stern, they have only to read the details of their own military history in order to understand the reasons.

A very large attack had now been planned in which the First French Army, the Fourth, Third, and a portion of the First British Armies should all participate. The Germans were known to be tottering and one more good blow might bring them down. It was necessary to act at once, for the German delay-action mines, which were usually in the shape of one shell set to explode among a dump of shells by the road or railway, were making the communications almost impossible. Fortunately the ingenuity of the British sappers discovered the private mark—a small star upon the cap of the fuse—by which the danger-shell could be distinguished among its neighbours, and so many a disaster was averted. It should be mentioned that on October 30 two gallant senior officers of the gunners, Colonels Thorpe and Burnyeat, were both killed by the same shell.

The general line of advance of the Fourth Army, which had been north-east, was now changed to east. The orders given to the Thirteenth Corps were to advance in that direction, astride of the Sambre and Oise Canal, to the line of the Cartignies-Dompierre-Bavai Road. The Ninth Corps was to cross the Canal simultaneously on the right of the Thirteenth at Catillon and Ors, advancing on the same objective. The general proposition before the Thirteenth Corps was a total advance

of about ten miles, part of it through the south end of Mormal Forest, with the forcing of the Canal crossings thrown in.

The frontage of the Corps attack was 7500 yards, narrowing down as it advanced, so three divisions were put into the line. On the right was the 25th Division, with the task of forcing the passage of the Canal opposite Landrecies, of capturing that town, and of clearing the country up to Maroilles. The 66th Division was then to carry on the advance to the ultimate objective.

The 50th Division was in the centre and was to fight a way through Mormal Forest, while the 18th Division on the left was to storm the village of Sassegnies. The desperate determination of the Army may be gauged from the fact that a large number of life-belts were served out to the leading brigade in case it should be necessary to swim the Canal for want of bridges.

The attack, the last great concerted movement of the war, was launched at 6.15 in the morning of November 4—a day of thick, all-pervading mist. The order of brigades from right to left in the initial advance was 75, 149, 150, 54, and 53. Good progress was made from the beginning all along the line, and the news from the Ninth Corps was uplifting. They were across south of Catillon and Ors, but the 32nd Division, on the immediate right of the 25th Division, had been held up, so that they were ordered to move south and pass by the crossings already established. The 25th and 50th Divisions both got well away, the former at 9 a.m. being within 300 yards of Landrecies, while the latter was well up to the old bugbear, the Englefontaine-Landrecies Road, though Robinson's 149th Brigade, and especially the 13th Black Watch, had lost heavily. The 18th Division had also attained its first objectives and drove off a half-hearted counter-attack. The 7th West Kents had a desperate house-to-house fight in the village of Hecq, which remained in their hands, while the 2nd Bedfords had a similar hard victory in Preux, where they were much helped by the 10th Essex.

The 75th Brigade had forced its way down to the Canal bank. The 5th Gloucesters had the good fortune to discover two German foot-bridges and poured across. It was indeed a proof of German deterioration that such an oversight should have occurred, for it is in attention to detail that the merit of German soldiering lies. The 8th Worcesters followed their comrades and these two battalions began to encircle the town from the south. There was no bridge higher up the Canal, but a fine feat of arms was performed by a small party of the 122nd Tunnelling Company, who dashed forward, seized the lock gates, and cut the wires which were meant to blow them up. On the extreme left some of the 1/8th Warwicks discovered another forgotten bridge and pushed across to the north of the town, which was now practically surrounded so that the garrison was soon taken or killed. The official report remarks : " The capture of Landrecies was an operation which might well have absorbed the energies of a whole division. Success was

accomplished with a single brigade and was due to the spirited leading of the officers, the bravery of the troops, and that element of good fortune which any well-planned and boldly-executed enterprise deserves."

The 18th and 50th Divisions had pushed on through the forest with hardly a check and surrounded a considerable number of Germans, who for the most part put up a very resolute resistance. About two o'clock there were signs, however, that the whole line was shaking, but it was impossible to advance farther until the Ninth Corps was in line. The final position on this most successful day was east of Landrecies, through Le Preseau, along the west bank of the Sambre to Hachette, and on to Locquignol.

It was guessed that the enemy was in a bad way, but on this evening it was confirmed by the capture of a cavalry orderly bearing a message ordering the troops to withdraw to the Sambre during the night, and to continue the retirement upon Maubeuge. Their skeleton rearguards still hung on, however, and put up a spirited resistance. Next morning, November 5, the Corps advanced once more, the 74th Brigade taking La Rosière, while Maroilles fell before noon to the same division. The 18th Division had pushed ahead and occupied Sassegnies, while the Fifth Corps were in Berlaimont on their left and were crossing the Sambre. The 50th Division had more difficulty as the ground was very water-logged and the resistance considerable. The day's advance finished by the 74th Brigade, still in the van, capturing Basse Noyelle, while at dusk the 149th Brigade got across the Grande Helpe, a stream behind which the Germans were expected to build up a new line.

A steady advance was maintained next morning, November 6, though the constant tapping of machine-guns in front told of the German sporadic resistance. That night the line of the Thirteenth Corps was east of Marbaix and Dompierre. It was found that the small enclosed fields were very helpful in dealing with German machine-guns, as a concealed flank attack could always be carried out. Armoured cars on the roads were also found to be of great help to the infantry. On November 8 there was a sharp fight on the line of the Avesnes-Maubeuge Road. After the road was won there was a very spirited counter-attack, the German machine-gunners coming forward with great heart, though the infantry would not face the fire. The 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers and 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry bore the brunt of this engagement, which lasted several hours.

The state of supplies made it impossible for the Corps to advance farther, but the 12th Lancers went on as cavalry, supported by small mobile columns. A line was reached which ran north and south through Hestrud, and this proved to be the farthest east of the Thirteenth Corps, as it was gathering itself there for an attack when the final white flag was hoisted. Up to the last moment there was local skirmishing and even a small German attack, which was driven back and added a few more to

the monstrous death-roll of the war. The whole British Army has an admiration for the German machine-gunner, and one closing incident of the war may be recorded. At two minutes from the moment of the Armistice a machine-gun opened up about 200 yards from the British line, and fired a whole belt without a pause. The gunner was then seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and turning about walk slowly to the rear. In his person there vanished from the stage a brave and formidable character in the war. His last action was as typical of the remorseless valour of his corps as that of the British infantry who refrained from shooting him was characteristic of their chivalrous and sporting instincts. When the hour of fate struck, the line of the vanguard of the Thirteenth Corps was just west of Montbliart and Sautain, being the most eastern point of any troops in the British Armies in France.

During the five weeks that Morland's Corps had been in the line it had captured 8554 prisoners and 340 guns, while its take of machine-guns was at least 2500. It had engaged units of no less than forty-four divisions, which gives a vivid idea of the state of disruption which the German Army had reached. From thirteen of these divisions prisoners varying from 100 to 1000 had been taken, showing that these at least had been substantially engaged.

Having brought Morland's Thirteenth Corps to the goal of all its hopes and efforts, we shall now turn back to the days after the battle of the Selle River and carry the Ninth Corps on the right on to the same goal.

On October 23 broke out the general engagement which will be known as the battle of the Oise-Sambre Canal. The order of battle of the Ninth Corps on this day was the 1st Division on the right, with the 2nd and 3rd Brigades in the line, and the 6th Division on the left, with the 18th and 71st in the line. It was a night attack launched at 1 in the morning, and though a heavy German barrage, mixed with gas, beat upon it, none the less both divisions made good progress at first, though many obstinate strong points had to be reduced. By 8 in the morning the 1st Division was reported as being on all its objectives from Catillon southwards, with patrols pushed into the town. The 6th Division had great difficulty on its left flank while endeavouring to clear Bois l'Êvêque, but late in the afternoon they got forward again. It was clear by night, however, that the Germans, who were battling hard, still held some parts of the west bank of the Canal, including Catillon and Ors. Next morning the 6th Division, working in close liaison with the 25th Division on the flank of Morland's Corps, got well forward, but were still short of their full objective on the left. Every day after this in a series of minor operations the Corps improved its footing on the west side of this great obstacle, which was of a most formidable nature, 60 feet wide, unfordable, with steep slippery banks and wire mixed with wooden abattis along the farther edge. This was the new line of defence

behind which the German Army had rallied, and which offered a fresh problem to the victorious British leaders.

Most of the western bank had been occupied by November 2, including the village of Ors, but there were points where deep marshes and German redoubts on this side had prevented the assailants from reaching the edge of the Canal. There was also a spur at the bend of the Canal which enfiladed the line, but this was taken as a preliminary operation by the 32nd Division. It was retaken, however, by the Germans in a very strong counter-attack supported by an overwhelming drum-fire. On November 3 the British again got the spur known as Happe-Garbes, but once again in the afternoon of the same day the Germans regained it in a very determined advance. This heavy fighting fell upon the 96th Brigade and specially upon the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, who were exposed to great pressure all day. Among many brave records that of Sergeant John Clarke of this battalion is pre-eminent, who took four machine-guns single-handed, bayoneting the crews, and fighting with desperate courage at the head of his platoon from morning till night. The idea of capturing the place before the general attack of November 4 was then given up, and other steps were taken to neutralise it. The main crossing of the Canal was planned to be at Ors, just south of Ors, and at two other points.

This the last great battle of the war broke out as already stated at 5.45 on November 4, the infantry advance being covered by a tremendous barrage. The 1st Division attacked on the right, the 32nd on the left, while the 46th was in close support. On the left and in the centre of the 32nd Division two bridges were thrown across the Canal under intense machine-gun fire, only to be destroyed immediately, before any large number of troops could get across. On the right of the division, however, the 14th Brigade gained a considerable success, the 1st Dorsets getting across over a bridge of kerosene tins which was most cleverly constructed by the Engineers and laid down in the darkness and mist, so that it was a complete surprise to the enemy. A smoke barrage and a concentration of machine-guns helped the stormers to get across. No praise can be too great for the sappers who worked amid clouds of poison gas in the completion of this essential bridge upon which the fate of the battle might depend. To one of them, Sapper Adams, of the 21st Field Company, the V.C. was awarded, but there was not a man round him who did not deserve the same honour.

In the meantime the 1st Division had advanced under cover of a thick mist, and four bridges having been thrown across, the two leading battalions got over the Canal, just escaping the German barrage which came roaring down behind them. The further experiences of this division, and especially of the 3rd Brigade at Catillon, should be told in some detail.

A special task was assigned to the brigade, which was to clear the outlying portion of the town, to occupy the rest of it, and to force

the crossing of the Sambre Canal at the broken bridge. The order of the battalions on the east side of the Canal was that the 2nd Welsh were on the right, the 1st Gloucesters in the centre, and the 1st South Wales Borderers on the left, good old comrades who had fought together from the first. There were still strong enemy posts on the west of the Canal, and the enemy had fought tenaciously for every inch of ground. On the far side of the Canal were many houses which contained machine-guns, and their fire was always heavy and accurate. The actual attack upon the town began at 5.45 in the morning of November 4, and was carried out in the midst of a very dense fog by the 1st Gloucesters under Major Guild. The portion of the town to the west of the bridge was first conquered, with the efficient aid of an aggressive tank. Many machine-guns were taken in the suburban orchards and in the town itself. The bridge was commanded by a heavy machine-gun, but its position was spotted and the tank put it out of action by accurate fire. The British barrage was falling thickly across the Canal, and the British regimental leaders, those wonderful men on the spot who adapt themselves to every emergency, crossed at once, so that when the Germans emerged from their cellars as the barrage lifted they were received into the expectant arms of the Gloucesters. Over a hundred were taken at this spot. The battalion then, having formed a bridge-head, pushed on through the town, mopping up as they went, while the Welshmen cleared the orchards on both sides. The captures in this well-managed affair amounted altogether to 550 Germans, while of the British only 70 casualties were reported. No less than ten different German regiments were identified by the 2nd Brigade during this operation, which indicates how mixed and broken the hostile army had become under the constant pounding.

At the same time as the 3rd Brigade were capturing Catillon, the 2nd Brigade on their right had shown great gallantry in forcing their section of the Canal. They had been ordered to cross by a lock south of the town, but it was a desperate business, for the lock itself was hard to reach, with banks and water in front of it, all strenuously defended. The infantry, with their attendant bridging parties of sappers, were held up for a time, but Colonel Johnson of the 2nd Sussex restored the situation, personally leading the assault forward. It was again checked by the hurricane of fire, but he again rallied it and eventually led it across. In the subsequent official report attached to his V.C., it was stated that the offensive spirit that he had inspired in his Sussex men was entirely responsible for the successful crossing.

By 8.45 the 32nd Division reported that their right brigade had got across, but owing to the enfilade fire two battalions of the left brigade had been unable to do the same. About midday, however, they were all over and had established themselves in a position south-west of Landrecies. The 1st Division was now touching Mezières with its left, where it was pushing on to Fesmy, while the German line seemed to be

dissolving in front of it. It was a great day for the old division which had fought so gallantly from the first gunshot of the war to this which was so nearly the last one. Much of the credit of the victory was due to General Cartwright, the Corps Engineer, upon whom the weight of these various arrangements had fallen.

The Germans were now so fluid that a light cavalry screen was pushed out in front of the Corps, and the 46th Division advanced on November 5 behind it. By 9 a.m. the 32nd Division was in Favril, in touch with the 25th on their left. Late on November 6 Cartignies was occupied. The advance rolled forward without serious interruption, though there was some bickering round Avesnes, and on November 8 the 32nd Division was established upon the high ground east of that town. At this time, as already recorded, the operations of the Fourth Army were confined to the single mobile column commanded by General Bethell, which was all that could be sent forward on account of the want of every sort of supply. Two days later came the sudden news of the signing of the Armistice. Never was there so sudden and wonderful a change. From dark cloud to bright sunshine seemed to have been the work of an hour. The long hurricane had blown out at last and left only the weals across the country which marked its passage. British officers have recorded how they sped eastwards in motor cars, and noted as far as the eye could range the white flags of joy and enfranchisement flying from the farm-houses and the village spires. The only signs of the invaders were the litter of abandoned equipment, lorries, and guns along the roads. For many a week, however, they left terrible marks of their passage in their delay-action mines, which, with ruthless and reckless brutality, they had left in railway stations and other crowded points along the line of their operations, and which exploded long after the Armistice had been declared.

So ended the splendid work of Braithwaite's Ninth Corps. Its total advance since September 18 had been 50 miles, during which time it had captured nearly 17,000 prisoners and 318 guns.

CHAPTER LXI

OPERATIONS OF BYNG'S THIRD ARMY

From the Battle of the Hindenburg Line (*September* 29) *to the Battle of the Selle* (*October* 12), 1918

Fighting at L'Escaut Canal—Dash of the New Zealanders—The Guards in a hot corner—Crossing of the Canal—Back on the old ground—Great work by all four Corps of the Third Army.

HAVING for the sake of continuous narrative carried the Fourth Army to the end of its labours, we shall now return to the Third Army, which we last saw on September 18 and following days, when it made good its way through the outposts of the enemy, and closed with the Hindenburg Line. We shall begin with the Fifth Corps on the right of the line, which was acting in close liaison with the Third Corps on the left of the Fourth Army.

On September 27 there was no particular action on the front of the Fifth Corps, save that the 21st Division, that hard-bitten old scrapper, had a prolonged fight in front of African Trench, which it alternately took and lost, until on September 28 it got its iron claws fairly fastened in it. On this day it also pushed patrols to the east of Gouzeaucourt.

On September 29, the day of general battle along the line, Pinney's 33rd Division and Campbell's 21st attacked at half-past three in the morning, advancing upon the Hindenburg Line on the front Honnecourt-Bantouzelle, while the Welsh Division operated to the north of that point. There was some progress at first and Villers-Guislain was occupied, but the enemy was strong and aggressive, so that the advance was first held and then forced back to its starting-point. It was not a successful day, and there seemed no choice but to settle down and subject these powerful lines to a renewed bombardment. On the morning of September 30 it was found, however, that the enemy had withdrawn his immediate front on account of the success in the south, and the Corps was able to push forward to the western bank of the Canal de l'Escaut. The Germans were still standing on guard on the eastern side. All bridges were destroyed, and for three days General Shute prepared for the difficult task of forcing this broad waterway—a formidable obstacle, it is true, but not one which was likely to stop the men who had carried the line of the Ancre. We shall now pass to the Fourth Corps on the left and bring them to the same point.

On September 27 Harper's Fourth Corps had been given the task to capture Beauchamp Ridge and Highland Ridge, and clear the front system of the Hindenburg Line as far as the Couillet valley. The assault was launched at 5.20 in the morning. The 5th Division on the right was from the outset sadly hampered by the fire from African Trench, which struck upon its flank and inflicted heavy losses. The division showed its usual gallantry, but the position was an impossible one until the Fifth Corps got farther forward. The left of the division, however, and the 42nd Division made good progress, though the fighting was very severe about Beauchamp, which was taken but could not be held, as a fresh German division, advancing about 7 o'clock in the evening, drove the defenders back to the west of it. The success of the Sixth Corps in the north, however, at Flesquières, had an encouraging effect upon the whole line, and about 2.30 p.m. of September 28 both the 5th and 42nd Divisions came on once more, the latter being particularly successful in getting prisoners and guns. The 5th Division got Beauchamp and Highland Ridge, but was still held up on the right. By evening the line was well forward on the western slopes of Welsh Ridge, and some 1700 prisoners had come in. It was clear that the German line was sagging, so in order to press the advantage General Harper ordered up Russell's New Zealanders to carry the battle on through the night. There could be no more stringent test of the quality and discipline of troops, for the advance had to be made over unknown country covered with trenches and wire entanglements, with only a fitful, sinking moon to guide them. At 3 a.m. of a dark, cold night the splendid Colonials passed through the ranks of the 42nd Division and, driving forward, thrust the enemy off Welsh Ridge and Bonavis Ridge beyond it, captured 1600 prisoners, and made good the line of the Canal de l'Escaut. North and South Island brigades kept line in the advance. More than thirty guns were among the trophies of this magnificent achievement. The 5th Division on their right swept forward at the same time near La Vacquerie, but as Gonnelieu upon their flank had not yet been captured by the Fifth Corps, their attack was limited on that side. This was remedied shortly after dawn, when the 5th Division, weary as it was, cleared their own right flank, captured Gonnelieu, and finally took Banteux with 250 prisoners. The indefatigable New Zealanders had also gone forward after dawn as blithely as though it was their first attack, clearing the whole of the west bank of the Canal, and penetrating at one time into Crevecœur, where, however, they were unable to remain. They did great work here, however, by holding and partly saving the bridge, all others having been destroyed, and establishing some sort of bridgehead.

The total result of these attacks since September 27 on the front of the Fourth Corps had been the taking of the whole front system of the Hindenburg Line from Havrincourt Wood to the Canal, and the capture of 40 guns with 4000 prisoners. Beyond the Canal, however, lay

formidable dangers. Only the Crevecœur Bridge remained British. Beyond was a strongly-wired line of trenches known as the Beaurevoir-Masnières line, which ran roughly southwards from Crevecœur. On October 1 the New Zealanders had got a footing, however, in Crevecœur, and had begun to push troops over the bridge, but it was desperate work, and the attacking brigade suffered heavy losses. It was, however, work of the first importance, as it turned the whole of the Beaurevoir line. There we may leave them, level with the Fifth Corps on their right, while we turn to follow the progress of the Sixth Corps to the north, which completes our survey of the Third Army.

The old 3rd Division—the "Iron" Division, as its admirers had begun to call it—attacked on the right, and the Guards on the left. Deverell's men went forward in splendid form, the 8th and 9th Brigades overrunning the first objectives, and the 76th passing through them to the further positions. They captured Flesquières, the village which had held us up in the Cambrai battle, and by the afternoon they were east of Ribecourt, with 1000 prisoners trailing back to the rear. The Guards meanwhile had the 2nd Brigade in front, who had some very tough work at the onset, but fought their way forward, and were succeeded by the 1st Brigade who had reached by the afternoon the old British front line. Continuing from here they captured Orival Wood, and reached Premy Chapel, though this farthest point could not be maintained, as the party which had won it had lost touch with the main body. The whole advance presented a notable gain of ground. The losses were heavy, and were partly due to the fact that the flank of the Guards passed Graincourt before the 57th Division in the Seventeenth Corps had captured that place, so that they were exposed to heavy fire. Even the Guards have seldom been in a hotter corner or shown more conspicuous examples of personal courage than during this long and trying day, which brought three Victoria Crosses to the battalions engaged. Lord Gort, who commanded the 1st Grenadiers, the leading unit of the 3rd Brigade, was wounded as the troops formed up, but took no notice of his injury, led on in the advance upon the Canal, was wounded again, lay for a time half unconscious upon a stretcher, struggled once more to his feet, and continued to lead his victorious Guardsmen through a hellish fire with the final result of large captures of the men and guns who were opposing them. The crossing of the Canal was signalised also by a remarkable exploit by Captain Frisby and Corporal Jackson, who, with two other Coldstream Guardsmen, climbed down one side and up the other of the dry Canal in order to capture a machine-gun with a crew of nine who were lying amid the broken end of a bridge on the farther bank. Jackson unhappily did not survive to receive the Cross which he had won.

In the meantime the 62nd Division, now under General Whigham, passed through the 3rd Division, and continued their victorious career. Two companies of the 8th West Yorkshires got forward as far as the

north-west outskirts of Marcoing and Nine Wood, but were exposed to a raking fire from the high ground on the south side of the Ribecourt valley, so had finally to fall back. That night the 62nd continued to hold its advanced line while the 2nd Division took the place of the Guards, and all was ready for the further advance next morning.

On September 28 the 62nd dashed forward as soon as it was light, and were soon in possession of Marcoing. There was no severe resistance. The 2nd Division on the left kept well in line with the Yorkshiremen, and were soon the masters of Nine Wood. By 10 o'clock the steady flow of the British infantry had enveloped Marcoing Copse, and the 186th Brigade had reached the Canal, where several bridges were found to be still intact. Noyelles had fallen to the 2nd Division, who were now fighting over the ground which they had held in the old Bourlon days, only nine months ago in time, and yet seeming so far off on account of the great succession of events which had intervened. Some attempts were made to get across the Canal, but the Germans were there in strength, and nothing could be done without deliberate preparation. In the evening the 62nd extended its boundaries, and consolidated what it held. A small party of the 2nd Division got across the Canal during the night, but were unable to establish any permanent bridge-head. In the morning of September 29, however, one brigade of this division made a lodgment upon the farther side, and remained there, though with wire and machine-guns before them. Pontoons were brought up during the day and many bridges thrown across. The 62nd meanwhile had cleared Les Rues Vertes and Masnières and was well to the east of those villages.

No progress was made on September 30, and the day was mainly spent in strenuous preparations by General Harper for his renewed advance. The 62nd Division cleared some more ground, and the 2nd Division failed in a village attack, but neither movement was important. During the evening the 3rd Division was brought forward on the right and took the place of the 62nd, so that they might advance next morning in conjunction with the New Zealanders on their right. This was duly carried out, the 5th Brigade leading on the left, and the 76th on the right. It was a day of heavy fighting and of stout resistance. The immediate object was the capture of Rumilly, which was entered, but could not be entirely cleared by the 76th Brigade. The 5th Brigade found Mont sur l'Œuvre, which faced them, a particularly tough proposition, and could make no headway. Altogether the losses on this day were greater than the gains, but the troops were undismayed and eager to get forward again on the morrow.

In the morning of October 1 they came back to their work, the 5th Brigade still carrying on, while the 8th Brigade took the place of the 76th. By 10 o'clock Rumilly had fallen, which gave the British a most important point as regards the passages over the river and canal. It took a great deal of clearing, for it was honeycombed with cellars and

dug-outs, and there were continual outflames of unexpected fire. Before evening it was solidly British. No action of importance took place during the next few days, and the 4th of October found the Sixth Corps in the same position as the rest of Byng's Army, solidly established upon the western bank of the Escaut Canal and River, and with some bridge-heads on the farther side.

On September 27 Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps, which had done such splendid work in breaking a section of the main Hindenburg Line on September 2, was called into vigorous action once more. Its rôle was to advance in the general attack which was made on that date by the First and Third Armies in order to drive the enemy over the Canal de l'Escaut. The 52nd Lowland Scottish Territorial Division was on the right of the Seventeenth Corps, and the 63rd Naval Division on the left, while to the 57th Lancashire Territorials had been assigned the duty of following up the initial advance, and passing through the 63rd Division to reach the final objective. On the immediate right of the Corps were the Guards Division of the Sixth Corps, while on the left were the 4th Canadians. The first line of objectives was the Hindenburg support line, the second included the villages of Anneux and Graincourt, while the third, if it could indeed be attained, would include Fontaine, Cantaing, and the west edge of La Folie Wood.

A very desperate day of fighting lay ahead of the Seventeenth Corps before this ambitious programme could be carried through, and yet the fire and ardour of the troops carried them eventually to the farthest limit. The 156th Brigade crossed the Canal du Nord on the right of the 63rd Division, in spite of clouds of gas and very heavy shelling upon their places of assembly. The 4th Royal Scots led the advance, and were soon in the first objective. Here they were heavily attacked, however, and there was no further forward movement until the 7th Scottish Rifles came up to thicken the line. Meanwhile the 157th Brigade was dealing with that portion of the Hindenburg Line which was west of the Canal, their operations being on the extreme right flank of the Corps in close liaison with the Guards. This heavy work fell upon the 6th Highland Light Infantry aided by three tanks, and they got well forward, but the 7th Highland Light Infantry on their left were badly held up by thick wire and impossible conditions. The 7th Scottish Rifles in the north had more success, however, and they now worked south, which gave invaluable help to their comrades in that quarter. Before midday all the ground east of the Canal attacked by the 156th Brigade, between the Mœuvres-Graincourt Road and the Bapaume-Cambrai Road, was in the possession of the Scottish infantry.

On the left of the 52nd Division the 63rd had got off in excellent style, with the 190th Brigade leading, and the 188th immediately behind it. They were encouraged by constant good news from the north, where the 4th Canadians were in Bourlon Wood. In front of the 63rd Division lay an important point called the Factory, an old bone of contention in

the days of the Cambrai battle of 1917. This point was reached by the Anson Battalion, but they were driven out of it again, and the Germans put in a heavy garrison. It was then methodically bombarded, and shortly after 4 o'clock it was again attacked by the 188th Brigade with complete success, 11 guns and many prisoners being taken. Shortly afterwards both Graincourt and Anneux were overrun by the advancing waves of the 63rd Division. About 5 o'clock the 57th Division was ordered up to take the place of the 63rd, moving round their north flank with the intention of attacking Cantaing. The German resistance had very much stiffened, however, and there was a menace of counter-attack, so that this final movement did not fully develop. The night fell with the 171st and 172nd Brigades in the advanced line which represented the farthest east of the 63rd Division. A thousand prisoners were taken during the day. Of the eleven tanks employed no less than nine were knocked out by the German fire—a proportion which shows how great the risks are which are taken by the brave men who form the crews. Each had done splendid work before it met its fate, and ever more and more the infantry learned, when at the last extremity before impassable wire and death-dealing trenches, to look behind them in the hope of catching sight of one of these lumbering ironclad monsters which had so often been their salvation.

On the morning of September 28 the two brigades of the 57th Division were ordered to continue their advance and to force the passage of the Canal de l'Escaut, while the 63rd were to follow up and exploit any success which was gained. The immediate task of the 171st Brigade was to clear the ground between Anneux and Fontaine, and to establish touch with the Canadians on their left. This they had done while the day was still young. From about midday, however, the attack slowed up in this section of the line. The Marcoing position was very strong, and it held the 171st Brigade. By 2 o'clock a small force from the 57th Division had got across the Canal, and at about the same hour the Drake Battalion of the 189th Brigade advanced upon Cantaing. The orders were to push on and cross the Canal, thrusting forward as far as was possible, while the cavalry were held in leash at the south end of La Folie Wood. It was soon clear, however, that the line of the canal and river could not be easily rushed, for all the possible crossings were swept by a deadly fire. The 171st Brigade was held under fire upon the spur east of Fontaine, and the Canadians on the left had not yet made good the Marcoing line. Two battalions of the 189th Brigade, the Drake and Hood, were in Folie Wood, endeavouring to force a crossing, but the night fell before it could be accomplished. Before morning two companies of Drakes had established posts upon the farther side, others getting across the river as well over a broken bridge. Farther to the right the Sixth Corps had three companies of the 2nd Division also across the Canal. A thousand more prisoners had been taken during the day.

On September 29 all three brigades of the 63rd Division were across the Canal. Before midday the 57th Division had managed to clear the Marcoing line from the Bapaume-Cambrai Road to the Canal. The men were getting terribly worn, but it was reckoned that the Germans were even more so and that, at all costs, the long-drawn fight should continue. Therefore on September 30 both the 57th and 63rd Divisions made some advance east of the Canal de l'Escaut. On October 1 the 57th Division pushed out to the north and north-east of Proville, but the advance was not successful. Later in the day there was a renewed advance, but again it was not pushed, and did not get very far. The nearest enemy post, the Faubourg de Paris, was strongly held, and there were several small counter-attacks, one of which overwhelmed a British trench containing 40 men and 2 machine-guns. There followed a considerable pause while fresh dispositions and reorganisations were made along the whole line of the Army. These changes included very radical alterations in the Seventeenth Corps, which lost the 52nd Division, while it was strengthened by the addition of the 19th (Jeffreys), the 24th (Daly), and the 61st (Duncan). With this strong reinforcement General Fergusson turned with confidence to his next task.

We shall now return to the operations of the rest of Byng's Third Army from the time that they fairly settled down to the crossing of the Escaut Canal to the final occupation of the whole of the Hindenburg Line. We shall begin as before with Shute's Fifth Corps on the right. The attack of this Corps on October 4 was largely dependent upon the success of the Second American Corps, and as this was only partial some modifications had to be made. The immediate result of the American operations was that Morland's Thirteenth Corps, which was on their left and on the right of the Fifth Corps, had to undertake an advance against Le Catelet and Gouy on October 3. During this movement the 50th Division on the left of Morland's Corps was to take possession of the high ground 1500 yards north of Le Catelet, and was then to be relieved by the Welsh Division of the Fifth Corps. This was duly carried out by the evening of October 4. The rôle of the Welsh Division was afterwards to attack northwards across the front of the Fifth Corps so as to clear the Hindenburg Line as far north as Rancourt Farm. It was found, however, on October 5 that as a result of the operations of the Fourth Army the enemy had withdrawn and crossings were effected by the 21st and 33rd Divisions along the whole Corps front, while the Welshmen east of Vandhuile found that the line to the north of them had been abandoned. They pushed on, therefore, and took possession of the Nauroy-Le Catelet line, finishing up to the east of the village of Aubencheul, while the 64th Brigade of the 21st Division moved forward and occupied the same line on their left. So far all had gone splendidly, but it was soon found that the enemy's retreat was not unlimited, for the Masnières-Beaurevoir line was strongly held, and the Welsh Division on October 6 was unable to penetrate it, though the 21st

gained a limited footing at one point, which gave good hopes for the future. After a day of reorganisation the attack was vigorously resumed on October 8, the objectives being Malincourt on the right and Walincourt on the left. The troops were now in green and virgin country unscarred by any previous battles, and a most pleasant contrast to that terrible wilderness in which they had marched and fought so long. The attack of October 8 was made by night, the zero hour being 1 o'clock in the morning. All three brigades of the Welsh Division were concerned in the advance on the right, and all had heavy fighting and some setbacks, but persevered with fine valour, and succeeded before evening in piercing the Beaurevoir line, driving in the strong German rearguards and establishing their final position to the east of Malincourt. The 21st Division on the left also came away with great dash and made rapid progress in their moonlight advance. By dawn most of the high ground in front of them, including Angles Château and Hurtebise Farm, had been taken and the 62nd Reserve Brigade moved forward to continue the operation, which resulted in the capture of the whole Beaurevoir line on that front. Before evening, after several temporary checks, the 21st Division had reached a line 500 yards west of Walincourt, though the left of their advance had not passed the Sargrenon River. Nearly 1000 Germans were taken during this long day of battle. That night the 17th Division took over from the 21st, while the 33rd moved through the ranks of the 38th, so as to be all ready for a continuation of the pressure in the morning.

On this October 8, when the enemy was reported to be withdrawing from the front of the Fifth and Fourth Corps and it was probable that the movement would spread across the face of the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps, it was very necessary, if possible, to catch them in the very act. An attack was therefore ordered in which the 3rd Division to the south should move, supported by the Guards, upon Wambaix, while the Seventeenth Corps should take Niergnies as its general objective. The 63rd Division made the actual attack on a front of about a mile, with seven tanks in the van. The 188th Brigade on the right had Niergnies in front of it, approaching it from the north-east, while one battalion of the 189th Brigade attacked from the south, the rest forming a protective flank. The 57th Division was at the same time to make a subsidiary attack. The advance started at 4.30, but by 6.30 the 57th Division had made little progress, its tank being ditched and its 170th Brigade held up by an obstinate trench. By 8 o'clock the line had got forward, and all the first objectives were gained, but the Germans were still firing from the edge of the Faubourg de Paris. A little later a very spirited counter-attack was launched by the enemy from the direction of Awoingt, which was supported by seven British-made tanks, captured in the March operations. For a time the 188th Brigade and the 2nd Division on the right were thrown back, but by 10 o'clock they were going forward once again, and at that hour, or shortly afterwards, a very

welcome pigeon message arrived from the Hoods of the 189th Brigade to say that they were through Niergnies. By the late afternoon every objective had been captured, but the evening saw another strong German attack which struck upon the right of the Seventeenth Corps and upon the front of the 2nd Division. The Naval men stood fast, however, and not only cleared their own front, but by their enfilade fire were of great assistance to their neighbours in the south. Nearly a thousand prisoners had been captured during the day, and the little flags had moved eastwards once more upon the war maps.

On October 9 the troops were going forward shortly after dawn. It was soon found that the Germans had retreated, leaving only a few devoted machine-gunners to impede the pursuit. Gard Wood and Clary were occupied by the 33rd Division, who came on so rapidly that they picked up a battery of field-guns near the village and captured the officers drinking in an estaminet, quite unconscious that their enemy was upon them. Bertry was occupied by the 19th Brigade, and before evening Troisvilles had also been captured. On the left without any opposition at all the 51st Brigade of the 17th Division passed through Malincourt, Selvigny, and Caullery. The German machine-guns made some show at Montigny, but the place was soon occupied, as was Tronquoy. There was no barrage this day in front of the Fifth Corps, and the advance was one long cross-country chase of six or seven miles with an occasional skirmish. Early on the morning of October 10 the 33rd Division crossed the Inchy-Le Cateau Road, and with the mention of the latter name that huge circle seemed at last to be nearing completion, the line of which had begun to describe its strange curve in August 1914. The soldiers knew that the graves of their comrades were at last within their reach. The 17th Division on this day flowed through Audencourt and Inchy, and the 7th East Yorkshires actually got up to Neuvilly in a fine attack, but had to be withdrawn. The Selle River in its shallow valley lay right across the Corps front, and this, as was clear from the increasing artillery fire, marked the new German front. Here we may leave the Fifth Corps while we hark back to bring up their comrades of the Third Army. On the evening of October 11, the situation was that the 33rd Division on the right had established one strong post upon the farther river bank, the 17th on the left were lining the western bank of the Selle, while the enemy were reported to be holding the line of the Le Cateau-Solesmes railway in strength, and especially the village of Neuvilly to the east of the river.

Turning now to Harper's Fourth Corps on the left, and harking back to October 5, it became evident on that morning that the enemy was withdrawing from that point, as a result of the success of Rawlinson's Army to the south, and even more so to the possession of Crevecœur by Russell's New Zealanders. The retreat was closely followed by the 37th and the New Zealand Divisions, and Vaucelles, with a portion of the Masnières line south of Crevecœur, was occupied without resistance.

The Masnières line was still strongly held, though the glow of great fires in the east at night seemed to proclaim a coming retreat. October 6 and 7 were spent in preparing for a great attack upon the 8th, in which it was hoped that the Masnières line would be forced. This assault made by the 37th and New Zealanders was completely successful, in spite of belts of wire which were often thirty yards wide and had to be crossed in the dim light of dawn. There was hard fighting round Briseaux Wood, but everywhere the attack prevailed and the Germans were beaten out of their positions. Lesdin fell to the New Zealanders and Rifle Brigade. Once the enemy tanks advanced, and there was a short check, but the forward movement was soon resumed. Over 2100 prisoners were taken in this successful day.

On the 9th and 10th the advance was as swift and successful as in the case of the Fifth Corps already described. The 37th occupied Caudry, Bethencourt, and Viesly, while the New Zealanders, men of Otago and Canterbury, took Esnes, and finally crossed the Cambrai-Le Cateau Road. Up to now this district of France might have been a land without inhabitants, an empty stage for the drama of war; but now considerable numbers of the French civilians were liberated, no less than 2500 at Caudry. In the early morning, the 37th and their comrades of New Zealand were opposite the Selle River and had passed some elements across on each side of Biastre. We may leave them here on the eve of the battle of the Selle River and extend our view so as to take in the work of the Sixth Corps to the north of them.

In the case of Haldane's Sixth Corps there was a general German withdrawal on October 5, which did not prevent a very firm front being shown upon the general line which was held on October 8. The attack upon that day was made by the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Division on the right, and by the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division on the left. The village of Seranvillers was the immediate objective of the 9th Brigade, which was strengthened by the 2nd Suffolk Battalion. Both the 9th and 99th Brigades got well forward at the start, but had very hard fighting, and at one time were driven back by a German counter-attack supported by tanks. The village had been taken, but the cellars were still full of Germans. La Targatte, the other village on the front, repulsed two attacks and was vigorously defended, the 2nd Suffolk having heavy losses in front of it. Later in the day, however, it was taken by a fine advance of the 8th Royal Lancasters and the 1st Gordons of the 76th Brigade. On the left flank both the 99th Brigade and the 63rd Division upon their left had encountered strong opposition from the village of Forenville and had suffered from the counter-attack already mentioned, but three of the German tanks were destroyed, and the advance was resumed with the result that before evening Forenville had been taken, and the whole line of the original objective secured. It was only attained, however, after a day of very desperate battle and heavy losses. During the evening the Guards came up, with their 1st

and 2nd Brigades in the line, and early in the morning, supported by the fire of nine brigades of field artillery, they reached the line of railway along the whole Corps front, and took the village of Wambaix. News from the north now showed that the enemy was retreating upon a broad front and in no half-hearted manner. Patrols of the Seventeenth Corps were reported to have passed through Cambrai, while north of that the troops of the First Army had crossed the Canal at Ramillies with little opposition. Previous experience had shown that such a retreat would certainly be conducted in an orderly fashion, and would be covered by rearguards composed mainly of machine-gun units. The main thing, however, was to sustain the pressure and keep as close to the retiring masses as possible. Led by that veteran body, the Oxfordshire Hussars, acting as advanced scouts, the infantry of the Sixth Corps hurried forward in pursuit with much the same general experience as the two Corps on their right. Estourmel, Igniel, and Boistrancourt marked the main line of the advance, and were occupied by the Guards, who were in touch with the New Zealanders of the Fourth Corps on their right and with the 24th Division of the Seventeenth Corps on their left. On October 10 the Guards were through St. Hilaire, and up to St. Vaast, which latter village was cleared after a stiff local skirmish on October 11. The Germans still seemed inclined to fight in this quarter to the west of the Selle River, especially at St. Aubert and Solesmes. They were brushed aside, however, and on October 13 the Guards gained that portion of St. Python which is west of the Selle, a stream about thirty feet across and of some depth. It was evident that an organised full-scale attack would have to be made at this point, so the Sixth Corps waited for the general signal.

Returning to the Seventeenth Corps: On the morning of October 9 the attack was renewed by Daly's 24th Division, a unit which has always been in the heart of the fighting in the past, and now was in the line once more. It was a great day, for early in the morning, as is recorded elsewhere, the Canadians and the 57th Division had entered Cambrai. The situation seemed fluid, and the enemy disorganised, so the 6th Dragoon Guards were ordered forward to work towards Cagnoncles, while the 72nd Brigade, having taken Awoingt, gave way to the 73rd Brigade, who advanced towards Cauroir and west of Romilly. The Germans, however, were in a strong line of rifle-pits behind triple wire, so that the cavalry could gain no ground. The infantry were also unable to get forward very far on that day, but evening saw them in close touch with the German covering rearguards, the 24th Division touching the Guards on the right and the Canadians on the left. In the morning of October 10 the screen had dissolved and the leading lines of the Seventeenth Corps, consisting of the 17th Brigade, were soon to the east of Cagnoncles, which fell to the 7th Northamptons, while the Dragoon Guards were pushing ahead once more. Rieux and Avesnes were both taken by the 24th Division during the day, and before evening the line was well to

the east of Cambrai, General Daly pushing the advance with great vigour.

On October 11 it was found that the Germans were in strength and apparently meant to make a serious stand. At about ten o'clock they counter-attacked with tanks, and pushed back both the Canadians on the left and the 24th Division on the right. The former had taken Iwuy in the morning. No further advance was made during the day, but general orders were issued that the way should be cleared up to the Selle River, and that the high ground over the river should be secured in order to safeguard the crossings. On October 12 the Canadian Corps on the left was drawn out of the line, and the Seventeenth Corps found themselves with the Twenty-second Corps as their northern neighbours. On this day the Germans again began to retreat, and the Corps front was advanced down to the Selle River, between Haussy and Saulzoir. There was hardly any opposition. All day the 24th Division was advancing with the 49th on their left and the Guards on their right. That evening the 17th Brigade of the 24th Division made progress over the river, entering Montrecourt and securing the undamaged bridge. The posts on the farther side were swept by machine-gun fire and driven back next morning, that portion of the bank being commanded by rising ground to the east.

We have thus traced all four Corps of the Third Army from the date August 21, when it started from the line of Albert, until October 13, when it found itself after seven weeks of immense and continuous exertion and of uninterrupted victory upon the western bank of the Selle. In the compressed narrative of this chronicle it might seem no more complex than the forward movement of pieces upon a board, but no detailed account could ever make real the problems, the anxiety, the organisation, the unwearied heroic efforts which such an advance must entail when the great German army, now composed of veterans deeply skilled in every wile of modern warfare, were beaten out of position after position, and could find no safe refuge anywhere from the nation whose military weakness had for so long been its standing jest.

CHAPTER LXII

OPERATIONS OF BYNG'S THIRD ARMY

From the Battle of the Selle, October 12, 1918, *to the end*

The Battle of the Selle River—Reversion to open warfare—The valour of Lancashire—Haig's incessant blows—Weakening of the German morale—The Battle of Mormal Forest—New Zealanders and the mediaeval fortress—Capture of the great forest—The Sambre bridged—A grand Division—Advance of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps—The last phase.

THE River Selle is a small stream, only thirty feet across but of some depth, and it ran right athwart the course of the Army, with every indication that the enemy had built up a line of resistance behind it. How far this was a strong rearguard or how far it was a do-or-die line of battle could only be determined by actual assault. The river runs through swampy meadows from Neuvilly past Biastre to Solesmes. On the far bank the ground slopes up uniformly to a hog-backed ridge, with a road and railway running between Neuvilly and Solesmes, rather more than half-way up the slope. The railway joined other lines south of the latter town, forming a triangular embankment of great strength strongly defended by machine-guns, as was the whole railway line and the string of villages across the Army front, which was the northern prolongation of that described previously. It was a position of great natural strength, made more awkward by the presence of civilians in the villages, and by a damming of the river which broadened it in parts into a lake. The first move of General Byng was to endeavour to seize the high ground on the east of the river, so as to make a strong point which would cover the bridge-building operations. We shall describe the successive operations from the south or right, beginning with Shute's Fifth Corps, still working in close liaison with Morland's Thirteenth Corps on the right, the flank unit of the Fourth Army. It may be premised that the warfare from now onwards was very different from that which had preceded the capture of the great German lines. The trench, the bomb, and the wire all played subsidiary parts. An officer of pre-war Aldershot experience, or even the great Duke himself with his Peninsular prejudices, would have found himself able to appreciate the situation. That great shade, could he have ridden Copenhagen in the heart of this wonderful army, would have seen, as of yore, shells which burst over the enemy's position; he would have seen cavalry

scouts who were the advanced posts of the marching army ; he would have seen lines of skirmishers behind them ; he would have seen mounted officers who carried personal reports ; and he would have seen columns of route marching in fours down every road, and breaking up into small clumps of artillery formation as they came under fire. All this would have been familiar, and all this he would have seen had he been present in these later phases of the great war.

The attack was launched at 5 a.m. on October 12, when the advanced guard of the 33rd and 17th Divisions under Generals Pinney and Robertson, attacked the high ground which faced them. They were working in close liaison with the 37th on the left, and with the 66th Lancashire Territorials on the right, these being the flank units of the Fourth and Thirteenth Corps respectively. The line of the advance was to the north of Montay, and it went very well at first, so that by 7.45 Pinney's men were far forward and consolidating on the left, though on the right they were unable to penetrate beyond the railway line. The attack of the 17th on the left reached the high ground 1000 yards north-east of Neuvilly, but on the south side of that village could not get past the line of the Montay-Neuvilly Road, where the 9th West Ridings of the 52nd Brigade were heavily engaged. Neuvilly was gained, but while the troops were mopping it up a strong German counter-attack drove down from the Amerval direction, dashed up against the left of Pinney's Division and threw it back to the line of the railway. So great was the pressure and so continuous, that the 33rd could not hold any of its gains, and found itself in the afternoon on the west of the Selle River once more, save for the right-hand battalion, who held tight all day along the line of the road between the railway and the river.

The 17th Division on the high ground north-east of Neuvilly was now in a very dangerous position, as the 37th had not come up on its left, so that both its flanks were in the air. The 12th Manchesters stood firm, however, with little support, until about 3 p.m., when a creeping barrage with an infantry attack behind it drove them west of the railway, with serious losses, to a point 200 yards east of the river. The result was that the final line, when night fell upon this long and trying day, was across the river at both extreme flanks, but west of the river in the middle.

From the point of view of the Fourth Corps on the left the 12th had not been a very satisfactory day either. The 37th had reached the crest of the opposite hill, but the New Zealanders on their left had not taken Bellevue, while Neuvilly on the right had never been thoroughly cleared. About 5 p.m. the German counter-attack, made in four waves, came down upon the 37th, supported by flank fire from both villages. It reached Neuvilly in the 17th Division sector, and then turned right so as to enfilade the 37th, with the result that the latter were forced to evacuate both the hill and the railway line, but still held on to the east bank of the river, where a steep escarpment gave some protection. Thus

ended this weary day, which had not involved the Sixth Corps on the north, but had exposed both the southern Corps of the Third Army to heavy losses with barren results.

A week now elapsed, which was marked by very heavy artillery work on both sides, the Germans endeavouring to prevent the British from assembling, while the British tried to break down the machine-gun nests and strong points which faced them, especially in Neuvilly. There were several daring minor engagements in which patrols endeavoured to widen or strengthen the front, so keen being the contest that sometimes posts were taken and retaken several times in one night. There was, it must be admitted, no obvious local sign of any failure in German morale. It was not until October 20 that the offensive was resumed upon a large scale by the Fifth and Fourth Corps, in conjunction with a full-dress attack by the whole of the Fourth Army in the south.

The Fifth Corps advanced with Cubitt's 38th Welsh on the right, and the 17th Division on the left. Neither line had far to go before clashing with the enemy, for the outposts were almost touching each other. The attack began in the dark at 2 in the morning, the British having indulged in previous heavy shoots at night, in the hope, which was justified by the result, that the real barrage would be taken as being of a similar temporary nature. The Welshmen had a desperate experience at first, a quarry, a farm, and the old railway embankment all forming difficult obstacles. In the case of the quarry, every man of the original storming party became a casualty, but it was taken by their successors. The rain was heavy, the slopes slippery, the mud deep, and the whole of the conditions about as bad as they could be, which was the more serious as the tanks were put out of action thereby.

The 50th Brigade of the 17th Division, with the 7th East Yorks and 6th Dorsets in the lead, had been launched upon Neuvilly with instructions to avoid a frontal attack, but to endeavour to get round to north and south so as to pinch it out, while the guns bombarded it and kept the machine-gunners in their lairs. South of the village the attack advanced rapidly through the mirk of a most inclement night. The first lines of machine-guns were overrun and destroyed. The wave of men then fought their way through some wire, and got as far as the embankment, which was thickly garnished with light artillery. Before dawn the 10th West Yorkshires closed in upon Neuvilly, and in spite of several obstinate machine-guns cleared the place and took the survivors prisoners, most of them being dragged out of cellars. Pushing on, the 17th Division after several vicissitudes captured the village of Amerval, but were pushed out of it again by a counter-attack, finally regaining it after dark. The 7th Borderers took this village, but lost both their commander and their adjutant in doing so. The 38th had kept its line all through, so that by evening the whole objective was practically in the hands of the British after a very prolonged and stubborn fight, in the course of which the Corps had taken four guns and 600 prisoners.

Meanwhile Harper's Fourth Corps on the left had also gone forward at 2 a.m., their objective being the high ground to the south of Solesmes. The plan was that the Sixth Corps should take the ground to the north of the village, but the whole operations were made very difficult by the knowledge that the civilian inhabitants were still there, and that the guns had therefore to be used sparingly. When once the points on both sides had been occupied it was hoped that the 62nd Division of the Sixth Corps would be able to capture the place. The advance of the Fourth Corps was made with the 5th Division on the right and the 42nd on the left. The line of the railway and the high ground east of it were successively occupied, though the fire was heavy and the finest qualities were needed in the soldiers who breasted the hill with lines of machine-guns flashing at them from the hawthorn hedges of the embankment. In the attack upon the hamlet of Marou the 127th Brigade of the 42nd Division showed the usual Lancastrian gallantry. There are no finer, tougher soldiers in the world, either in attack or defence, than these North Countrymen. On one occasion on this day, a company of the 5th Manchesters being pinned down, it was essential to convey news of their position to their supports. Four volunteers started in succession across the open bullet-swept plain, and all four were shot down. None the less Private Wilkinson volunteered as the fifth and actually got through unscathed and saved the situation. For this and other exertions during the day he received the Victoria Cross. The 1st and 3rd Guards Brigade had gone forward on the front of the Sixth Corps, with the 2nd Brigade in immediate support, and these magnificent troops, taking St. Python in their stride, beat down all opposition and by 7.30 were in their appointed place to the north of the village. The two flanks being thus secured, the 62nd went in between them with their usual vigour and, according to plan, assaulted the place from the west, fighting their way into it and out at the other side, the 186th Brigade taking the village while the 185th passed through it for a fresh advance. The 2/4th York and Lancasters aided in mopping up the village, which entailed some very severe fighting from house to house, as dangerous often as entering a cave in which lurks some wounded beast of prey. It was on this occasion that Corporal Daykins won his Cross, leading the twelve men, who were the only survivors of his platoon, with that mixture of wile and courage which is the ideal combination. He not only cleared the front of his own platoon, but perceiving that his neighbours were held up he started out alone to their assistance, with such success that he brought back a machine-gun and 25 prisoners as the prize of his own unaided effort.

The 3rd Guards Brigade on the extreme left attempting to make good the Solesmes-Valenciennes Road, were checked for a time by very heavy fire, but overcame the difficulty, and soon the Guards had their full objective, and were in touch with the 19th Division on the flank of the Seventeenth Corps on their left at Maison Blanche. The 42nd

Division on the right had got well forward, but was checked at last on the line of the Beart brook, which caused the 62nd on their left to throw out a defensive flank and put limits to their advance. The 5th Division on the extreme right had also been held, and were finally driven off the high ground south of Marou by a sharp counter-stroke of the enemy. By evening the 5th and 42nd had secured almost their full objectives, the Manchester battalions having borne the brunt of the fighting. The Fourth Corps had taken over 1000 prisoners. The Sixth Corps had also gone to its full limit, the Guards and 62nd having cleared everything in front of them and sent back 700 prisoners. It had been a most successful day; but the hardest work had fallen upon the Fourth Corps, both divisions having been badly knocked about. It was determined to spend a day therefore in consolidating the gains, and to continue the advance on October 23.

On that date the Fifth Corps on the right went forward once again, with the 33rd Division on the right and the 21st on the left. If we attempt to describe the action from the broad point of view of the whole Army front, the order of battle from the right was the 33rd, 21st, 5th, 42nd, 3rd, and 2nd. On the front of the Sixth Corps there was a sudden outburst of artillery fire during the assembly of the troops, which unhappily caught the 3rd Division and caused many casualties. It is a hard test even for the most veteran troops to be under a hurricane of shells in the dark and cold of an autumn night, but the men of the Iron Division came into the battle as blithely as ever. The Harpies River, and a whole screen of villages and of woods, with the great Forest of Mormal at their back, were the immediate obstacles which confronted the Army. On the right the village of Forest was soon secured, though an obstinate pocket held out for some time to the north-east of it. The enemy in this quarter could be seen retiring in small parties towards Vendegies and the wood near that village. The 33rd Division on the flank had a greater volume of fire to contend with and was rather slower than the 21st, which never halted until it was close to Vendegies, reaching it at 10 a.m. The defence was thickening, however, and both divisions had very heavy going in the afternoon, though the 19th Brigade of the 33rd Division fought its way along the north of Vendegies Wood, and reached its allotted line, while the 98th Brigade was held up by the fire from Bousies. As the farther line was reached the two reserve brigades of each division—the 62nd and the 100th Brigades—were pushed up to take the burden from those who were wearied out by the long and strenuous day. Nearly 800 prisoners had fallen to the Fifth Corps.

The Fourth Corps had the preliminary task of clearing the south side of the St. Georges River, and taking the village of Beaurain. This was allotted to the 5th and 42nd Divisions, but the leading brigade of the former was caught in the artillery attack already alluded to, with the result that it sustained losses which seriously crippled it. None the less the attack started up to time and was successfully carried out, save that

Beaurain could not be cleared—a fact which necessitated a change in barrage, no easy matter after a great action is launched. The 125th Lancashire Fusilier Brigade of the 42nd Division did particularly fine work. The 37th Division and the New Zealanders, Canterbury and Otago in the van, had now passed through the ranks of their comrades, and as there were signs of German disorganisation the pressure was strenuously maintained. As a result the New Zealanders captured the crossings over the Ecaillon River before they could be destroyed, and reached the edge of Le Quesnoy, while the 37th seized Ghissignies with its bridge. It was a great day's work for Harper's Corps.

On the left the 3rd and 2nd Divisions had advanced on single-brigade fronts, the 76th and 5th being in the lead. The 1st Gordons of the 76th, advancing rapidly, cleared the village of Romeries after a very sharp tussle. A battalion commander and 600 men were taken. The rest of the brigade then passed through it and carried the line forward. It was evident this day that the Germans, though hard in patches, were really becoming demoralised under the pounding of the British, and that they had lost all stomach for the fray. Several well-placed machine-guns were abandoned by their crews without a shot being fired, and serious opposition seemed at places to be at an end. Both the 8th Royal Lancasters and the 2nd Suffolks went through every defence like paper. The 8th Brigade then took up the running, and the 2nd Royal Scots carried Vertain with 200 more prisoners, while the 1st Scots Fusiliers took Escarmain also with 200 Germans. Patrols were sent forward as far as the Ecaillon River and few of the enemy appeared to be left upon the southern bank.

Meanwhile the 5th Brigade on the left had passed to the north of Vertain and swept forward, keeping level with the 19th Division on their left. They co-operated in the capture of Escarmain, and the rest of the 2nd Division made its way through Capelle, and lined the Capelle-St. Martin Road, the latter village having been taken by the 19th Division. So demoralised did the Germans appear on this flank, with their gun-teams all out in the open ready to limber up, that it appeared as if unlimited progress could be made by Haldane's Corps, but it was known that the enemy were in a sterner mood to the south and that the Fourth and Fifth Corps, though victorious, had no assurance of an easy advance. It was determined therefore to renew the battle next morning before daylight.

At that hour the 33rd and 21st Divisions again went forward on the right, but the opposition in this quarter was still very stiff. Poix du Nord was captured by the 21st and some 3000 inhabitants were found cowering in the cellars. Englefontaine was at the same time attacked by the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division, but the machine-guns were busy and it was some time before they could get a lodgment. The 21st was at the same time held up on the road north of the village. About 4 p.m. the line moved forward again behind a fresh barrage, that refreshing

shower which revives the exhausted infantry. The men of the 100th Brigade got half-way through Englefontaine and remained there at close grips with their tenacious adversaries, while the 21st fought their way forward to the south-east of Ghissignies, where they were again pulled up. The resistance on this southern section of the Corps front was certainly very different from that experienced by Haldane's Corps in the left flank. Meanwhile the Fourth and Sixth Corps were waiting for the Fourth Army and the Fifth Corps to swing into line, but they made a short forward movement on October 24, the 3rd Division passing through Ruesnes, while the New Zealanders on their right kept pace with them. Both the Fifth Corps on the right and the Seventeenth Corps on the left were for the time rather behind the general line, so that a long defensive flank had to be formed by each of the Corps between them. The 61st Division had come in on the right of the Seventeenth Corps, but it had at once run into a sharp attack which drove it for the time out of Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon. During this day some attempt was made by the Sixth Corps to push cavalry through, but every horse of two strong patrols of Oxfordshire Hussars was shot, so that it was impossible to persevere.

The village of Englefontaine had not yet been cleared, so after a breathing-space of one day the 33rd Division attacked once more, while its neighbour to the south, the 18th Division, co-operated by advancing upon Mount Carmel. This attempt was entirely successful, the 100th Brigade flooding over the village and capturing 450 prisoners. The 21st Division at the same time advanced its line on the north.

The Army had now outrun its communications and a halt was necessary. It was Haig's policy, however, to continue raining down hammer blows upon his reeling antagonist, so that all was ready for a big fresh advance on November 4, which should be on an immense scale, involving the fronts of the Fourth, Third, and First Armies.

The immediate objective in front of the right of the Third Army was the formidable bulk of the Mormal Forest, the same obstacle which had separated Haig and Smith-Dorrien on the eve of Le Cateau, four years before. The advance on the front of the Fifth Corps was made by the 38th Welsh on the right and the 17th Division on the left, each brigade succeeding the other, as the various objectives were reached. The edge of the Forest was strongly held, but when once it had been penetrated the progress along the sides was rapid and the enemy freely surrendered. So fair were the prospects that the troops were ordered not to confine themselves to the allotted objectives but to push on as far as they could. The ultimate aim was to gain a passage over the Sambre, though this seemed to be more than one day's work could possibly accomplish.

The 38th Division attained its full objectives, but the 17th met with a lively resistance in Locquignol, and was held up for a time. The weather had broken and the rain was falling, but in spite of the depressing surroundings the fighting line pressed on. The 13th Welsh Regiment

moving forward with great dash pushed patrols into Sarbaras, where many rifles scattered over the ground pointed to the German demoralisation. All night the Welshmen pushed forward, and Berlaimont was taken in the early morning. At the same hour the 17th Division, having overcome their difficulties, were nearly as far forward on their left. The Forest had been expected to form a greater obstacle than was really the case, for when once it was entered it was found that the clearings were so extensive that save in patches it was hardly an obstacle at all.

The Fourth Corps had gone forward on November 4 with the 37th Division on the right and the New Zealanders on the left. The latter were to advance upon either side of Le Quesnoy, which was to be encircled and taken. The town, which was an old-fashioned walled fortress, was not shelled on account of the inhabitants, but smoke- and oil-drums were fired on to the ramparts.

The attack was a complete success and swept over every obstacle without a check, save for some short delay caused by a strong point missed by the barrage in front of the 37th Division. Louvignies and Jolimetz were taken by the 37th, which pushed on to establish itself within the Forest. The New Zealanders left Hart's Brigade to invest Le Quesnoy and also advanced rapidly into the Forest, capturing many prisoners and guns. Le Quesnoy was now completely isolated, but the ancient walls and gateways were strongly defended by all modern devices, and a machine-gun clattered through the slit where a bow may have been bent. An officer with a flag of truce got no response. An aeroplane was then sent over, which dropped the message that our troops were in the Forest far to the east, and that a surrender would be the wisest course. The enemy, however, would have none of it. A forlorn hope of New Zealanders then approached with a scaling-ladder in the good old style, and swarmed up the walls. There was only one ladder and three successive walls, but in some miraculous fashion the whole of the 4th New Zealand Battalion reached the top of the rampart, with the loss of one man. This was accomplished by sweeping the walls round with such a fire that the defenders could not even peep over. On seeing that they had reached the rampart the German commander at last hoisted the white flag. The garrison consisted of about 1000 men.

The Sixth Corps advanced with the 62nd on the right and the Guards on the left, each on a two-brigade front. Both divisions went forward from the beginning without a hitch, prisoners streaming back. As they advanced, however, they came into heavy machine-gun fire from the orchards south-west of Frasnoy and south of Wargnies, where for a time the Guards were held up. The country here was very enclosed and thickly hedged, which made progress slow. By evening, however, the objectives had been reached, the orchards cleared, with Frasnoy, Preux-au-Sart, and 1000 prisoners to show for their day's work. Altogether this battle of Mormal Forest had been a day of triumph for the Third Army, and especially for the Fourth Corps in the centre. It was

a great victory, in which on this front alone some 7000 prisoners and about 100 guns were taken, while the Germans had been beaten, with great loss, out of a position which, in their old form, they would have held for a month. So complete was the German break-up that several batteries were taken by the Fourth Corps, with horses, mounted officers, and all complete, and were then despatched in full working order to the rear. When one recalls how their papers and critics had clamoured for open warfare against the untrained British levies the result must have surprised them. At the end of the fight the British line was well up to the great forest.

In the evening the old 5th Division, now at last reaching the end of those labours which had lasted for more than four terrible years without a break, came into the field once more. It would be interesting to know whether there was a single man left in the ranks of those who had skirted Mormal Forest in August 1914 among the eager battalions which now faced the same obstacle. It is of course true that even the units had been largely altered in the interval, and yet some of the grand old battalions still marched in their honoured formations, changed in all save that eternal spirit which has made and kept them famous. The 5th Division was ordered to pass through the ranks of the 37th after dawn at the western edge of Mormal Forest, and to push onwards to the east. General Oldman of the 15th Brigade on the left advanced on a one-battalion front, and kept the 1st Bedfords, 1st Norfolks, and 1st Cheshires leap-frogging through each other as often as possible in order to minimise the difficulties of the Forest. General Norton of the 95th Brigade on the right of the line attacked with the 1st East Surreys and 1st Cornwalls in the van, and the 1st Devons in reserve. All day the 5th Division clove its way through the great forest, the British front, like a line of beaters, putting up the game as it went. For the most part it was but a faint-hearted quarry, but here and there it stood fiercely at bay, and trench mortars had to be rushed up and strong points blown down, before the infantry could get forward. The 3rd Hussars kept pace and connected up with the New Zealanders on the left. Pelting rain, deep mud, and broken tracks delayed, but could not stop, the ardent advance, which continued until the leading line was down on the bank of the Sambre, where they were joined next day by the van of the 42nd Division, which had relieved the New Zealanders. One bridge at Quartes was found intact and was ready for demolition, but Major Cloutman of the Sappers, commanding the 59th Field Company, with extraordinary gallantry rolled across the tow-path, swam the river, and cut the leads of the charge, all under very heavy fire. It was a most daring deed, which was rewarded by a V.C., but unhappily a small party of the enemy with equal gallantry succeeded in repairing the leads and destroying the bridge.

The operations on the right and centre of the Third Army front now took the form of an advance to complete the possession of the Forest of Mormal. On November 5 the 33rd and 21st Divisions were back in line,

and, working in close liaison with the 18th Division on the left of the Fourth Army, they pushed the advance up to the bank of the Sambre. Here it was found that all bridges had been destroyed, and there was a check while the 21st to the north were making good the rest of the Forest and breaking out in little groups of khaki from the eastern edge. That night they threw light bridges across the Sambre and got some infantry across, the line running from north of Leval to east of Berlaimont. The left of the 21st Division was still west of the river. Next day, November 6, the remorseless advance still went on. Transport was failing, for the roads through the Forest were impossibly bad, but nothing could stop the eager infantry, who were in full cry with their quarry in the open. A number of villages were taken, each of which was full of machine-guns and showed some fight. By dusk the line of the Avesnes-Bavay Road had been made good. On November 7 the German retreat still continued, but the British had still to fight their way and their progress was far from being a walking-tour. Both the 33rd and 21st had a sharp fight before they could dislodge the rearguards from the Bois du Temple, Ecuelin, and Limont-Fontaine. Campbell's men had a particularly hard task with the latter, which was strongly garrisoned and stoutly defended, while the neighbouring village of Eclaises also presented a bold front. There was a real close infantry battle, with some savage house-to-house fighting, before these points could be cleared. 130 prisoners were taken. The war had now left the open arable country and come into the country of small enclosed orchards with high hedges, which blinded the German observers, since they had already lost command of the air. This was a very vital point. On November 8 the Welsh and 17th were in the front line once more, and the enemy was found to be still very organised and resolute on this sector, fighting hard and with some success to hold the line of a watercourse. Finally this opposition weakened, or it might be more fair to say that the brave rearguard, having done its work, was withdrawn. On November 9 the Fifth Corps got along rapidly, gaining the eastern edge of the Bois du Temple and the high ground east of Beaufort. For a time all contact was lost with the enemy, who were rapidly retreating, and they were not located again until they were on the line of the River Thure. The roads had been blown up, and pursuit was much retarded. The difficulties of the advance were much aggravated by the impossibility of getting the supplies forward. Many delay-action mines had gone up in the railways in the rear, which prevented rail-heads from being rapidly advanced. It was determined, therefore, in order to economise supplies, that a single Corps, the Sixth, should form the whole front of the Third Army from this time onwards. This change was accomplished, and the vanguard had just got in touch with the Germans on the River Thure, when the historic November 11 came to end the hostilities.

The troops of the Fourth Corps had moved forward from November 4 onwards in close liaison with the advance just recorded. The 5th

Division captured Pont-sur-Sambre, Boussières, and St. Remy, while the 42nd occupied Hautmont, so that on November 9 the Corps line was the Avesnes-Maubeuge Road. There they found themselves when the bugles sounded the final " Cease fire." The record of Harper's Corps since August 21 can be tersely summed up in a few figures. They had lost 30,000 men. They had captured 22,500 prisoners and 350 guns, fighting for ten weeks without rest or break, and often in the worst of weather. The record of all the divisions was splendid, but this is perhaps the place to say a special word about the New Zealanders', which, in the judgment of many soldiers, was, if it be not invidious to say so, equal to the very best division in France. When it is stated that during the war they lost 57,632 men, and that the total number of prisoners taken from them is reported to have been 45, these extraordinary figures make all further comment superfluous. But what was particularly remarkable was their appreciation of a military situation which more than once altered the whole strategic situation. Thus it was their discovery that the Crevecœur bridge was intact, and their rapidity in seizing it and tenacity in holding it and the village, which threatened the whole Beaurevoir line and helped to reduce to nullity one of the greatest defences ever created by German engineers. These men return to their island homes bearing with them the deep admiration of their comrades and the gratitude of the Empire. They joined discipline in peace to valour in war, and England was the poorer when the last red hat-band was seen in the streets of her cities.

The Sixth Corps, after the battle of Mormal Forest, pushed on to the east, and was rather impeded by the water-logged country than by the German resistance. On November 6 there was a counter-attack upon the 62nd Division, which made no headway and had heavy losses. Bavisaux, Obies, and many other villages were taken, the church in the latter place containing thirty machine-guns. The Guards on the left took Buvignies, while the 24th Division upon their north held the line of the Hongnau River. On November 7 the resistance was still negligible, but the continuous rain and the wooded nature of the country made rapid progress almost impossible. That evening General Haldane received the surprising news that it was probable that the enemy would send emissaries through the Allied lines with a view to negotiating an armistice, his instructions being that if they approached his front they should be detained pending instructions from higher authority. In the evening it was learned that they had actually reached the French lines. The fighting still continued, however, and on November 9 the 62nd Division had reached the Sambre. The Guards on the same day pushed forward rapidly and entered the citadel of Maubeuge in the afternoon. It was difficult to get touch with the enemy, who were reported to be standing at Boussois. At this period, as already told, the Sixth Corps took over the whole Army front, and was advancing upon the Maubeuge-Charleroi front when the fateful hour struck.

The record of the Sixth Corps during their ten final weeks of work had been a magnificent one, and was strangely parallel to that of the Fourth Corps on their right. Their losses had been almost identical, about 30,000 men. Their prisoners came to over 20,000 and their captured guns were 350. The Fifth Corps, on the other hand, had endured more than its neighbours, having lost no less than 34,000 men. It had captured 13,000 prisoners. Altogether the losses of the Third Army during the final ten weeks had been 100,000 men, while they had taken about 60,000 prisoners with nearly 1000 guns.

We have considered the advance of the three southern Corps of the Third Army. In order to complete the record it is necessary to return to October 13, and to trace the operations of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps, which were left on that date in front of the Selle River. On October 14 the 72nd Brigade of the 24th Division, which was in the van, gained a footing at the edge of Haussy village, which straddles the river. On October 16 this same brigade took the whole village on either bank. The left of the line was held up, however, by a particularly heavy gas screen. Later in the day the Germans were into Haussy once more, but again were pushed out from the western section of it, on which they gas-shelled it, to the destruction of a number of unfortunate civilians who had been unable to get away. 400 prisoners were taken during the day. October 17 saw the British line where it had been on the 15th, as the gas clouds hanging low over the river valley made the position down there untenable.

On October 20, a rainy and tempestuous day, the general advance of the whole Third Army was resumed. The 19th Division, having relieved the 24th, carried out the advance on the front of the Seventeenth Corps, having in touch with it the 4th Division of the Twenty-second Corps on the left, and the Guards of the Sixth Corps on the right. The attack of the 19th Division had for its first objective the bridging of the Selle, the capture of the railway and high ground beyond, and of the village of East Haussy. The second stage should be the ridge to the east. Two brigades advanced—the 57th on the left and the 58th on the right—behind a fine barrage from eleven brigades of artillery.

The attack was started at 2 in the morning, and before 4 a.m. the 57th Brigade were in the whole of Haussy, the resistance having been slight. At 6 o'clock the 8th Gloucesters, on the extreme right, had reached their final objective, where they were endeavouring to get touch with the Guards in the neighbourhood of Maison Blanche. The 10th Warwicks were held up on the left, but soon cleared out the obnoxious pocket. By 9 o'clock the 58th Brigade was also on its extreme limit, and an obstinate strong point was surrounded and destroyed. In this brigade the 2nd Wiltshires had the worst ordeal, but they won through at last. Patrols on the right had reached the banks of the Harpies. The blow had, as must be admitted, been delivered in the air, but the river line had been won, and that was the essential.

On October 23 the part played by the Seventeenth Corps was subsidiary to that of the Corps to the north and to the south. On this date the 19th Division was ordered to protect the left flank of the Sixth Corps in its advance on Romeries and Escarmain. This was duly carried out by the 8th Gloucesters and 10th Warwicks, and contributed greatly to the victory in the south. That night the 61st South Midland Division took over from the 19th Division, with an ambitious programme for next day, October 24. In the course of this attack the 183rd Brigade advanced on the right and the 182nd on the left, their objectives including the villages of Bermerain, Vendegies, and Sommaing. There followed a confused day of hard fighting, the general movement being always from west to east. All three villages were most hotly contested. Vendegies proved to be a special centre of resistance, but on the morning of October 25 it was found to be unoccupied, and the whole resistance had relaxed to such an extent that the front of the Army flowed slowly forward with hardly a check, submerging fresh areas and villages until it had reached the Rhonelle River, where a bridge-head was established on the front of the Twenty-second Corps.

On November 1 the advance was resumed, when Maresches was attacked by the 61st Division, the Warwicks and Worcesters of the 182nd Brigade being in the lead. The village was taken with about three hundred of the garrison. Preseau on the left had fallen. This was the centre of a violent counter-attack in the afternoon, which involved the right of the 4th and the left of the 61st Divisions. Four German tanks co-operated, two of which were destroyed by the British guns. This attack pressed back the advance from its furthest point, but made no material change in the situation, though Preseau was regained by the Germans, with the effect that their machine-guns from this point held up the left flank of the 184th Brigade in their further advance. Nearly 800 prisoners were made during the day.

The advance was renewed next morning, November 2, and again the resistance seemed to wane, so that by midday the full objectives planned, but not attained, on the previous day had been reached with little loss, the 61st moving onwards in close touch with the 4th on their left and the 2nd on their right. The 61st were now drawn out of the line, and the 19th and 24th each sent up a brigade to take their place.

November 3 found the front of the Corps still pushing forward without undue opposition. In the late afternoon the 9th Cheshires of the 56th Brigade were in Jenlain in touch with the 11th Division upon their left. The whole of the Jenlain-Le Quesnoy Road had been reached along the Corps front, and once again it seemed as if the cavalry might get their long-sought opportunity. Next morning, however, November 4, found the stubborn German still standing grimly on the defensive, and the infantry went forward once more to pitch-fork him a little farther to the east. It was a great general attack in which the three Armies, First, Third, and Fourth, all moved forward against the

Avesnes-Maubeuge-Mons line. On the front of the Seventeenth Corps there was no very outstanding objective, and yet it was of course essential that they should keep well up with the line, if only in order to cover the flanks of their neighbours.

The right of the Corps when the advance began consisted of the 73rd Brigade of the 24th Division. On its left was the 56th Brigade, and to the left of that the 58th, both of the 19th Division. Both infantry and artillery had to find their battle stations in pitch darkness, but all were in their places at zero. At 6 o'clock the line went forward, faced in the first instance by a small stream, the Petit Aunelle, which was safely crossed, though its banks were in places 30 feet deep. At 10 o'clock both divisions had gained the higher ground beyond the stream. By midday the 24th Division had reached the Great Aunelle River, and a party of the 7th Northamptons drove away with their accurate rifle-fire the German sappers who were endeavouring to destroy the bridge, but could not themselves cross on account of the heavy German fire. The 2nd Wilts of the 19th Division had their patrols in Eth. To the north the 11th Division was over the river, and the German position was rapidly becoming impossible, though they were counter-attacking with great valour upon the farther bank of the stream. Before evening Wargnies had fallen to the 9th Cheshires, and the whole British front was up to or over the Aunelle. The advance was carried on in pouring rain on November 5, a further area being gained up to the Hongnau River and the position strengthened, though the amount of ground on the farther side of the river was still limited and varied with the German counter-attacks which occasionally swept back the intrusive bridge-heads, but only to have them re-established once more. The troops were soaked, the ground was sodden, the infantry were over the ankles in mud, and every one was exhausted.

On the morning of November 7 this line of the Hongnau had been abandoned by the Germans and the advance was resumed. It must surely have been at this period of the war one of the most impressive sights in the whole history of the world, could one with a single sweeping glance have seen that gigantic line from the left wing of the Belgians on the Dutch frontier to the right wing of the French within view of the Swiss, moving forward every day, millions of men advancing together, with the flash of their bayonets before them and the red glare of their shells in front of them, while along that whole front of four hundred miles the grey cloud, like some visible thing of evil, rolled slowly back in front, leaving bare the ground which it had blighted and poisoned. It was clear to all men that the end was near, and yet few dared to hope how near it actually proved to be.

On November 7 the 24th Division took over Bavay, which had just been captured by the Guards. The weather conditions were more serious than the German opposition, and the advance was held back by the dreadful roads. None the less a long succession of villages was

wrenched from the enemy—Taisnières, Feignies, and others—while on November 9 the Guards were in Maubeuge on the right. From this time there was practically no more fighting, and only a slow advance on the one side and a slow retreat on the other until the fateful November 11. To quote the memorandum of a General Officer upon the spot: "The moral effect of retirement upon the enemy was very marked, and it was found that even his machine-gunners, who had fought very well all through our advance, were beginning to feel the effect, and would not stand once a field-gun was brought up to deal with them."

CHAPTER LXIII

THE ADVANCE OF HORNE'S FIRST ARMY

From September 27, 1918, to the end

The Canadians at the Canal du Nord—Hard fighting at Bourlon—Strong counter-attack at Abancourt—Canadian valour—Godley's Twenty-Second Corps—The Ecaillon valley—Forcing of the Rhonelle—General Heneker's attack—Capture of Douai.

On September 27 the Canadian Corps, with the 11th British Division, attacked once more, the advance joining the left flank of that huge movement in which the First, Third, and Fourth Armies were all engaged. The Twenty-second and Eighth Corps to the north were not engaged, but made a vigorous demonstration in support. The Canadian attack, which began at early dawn, was on a 6000-yard front, from Mœuvres in the south to the Arras-Cambrai Road. In this advance the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions were, in the first instance, to cross the Canal du Nord and to capture Bourlon Wood and village with the high ground about Pilgrim's Rest. This attack was in conjunction with one upon the right made by the Seventeenth Corps, where the 15th and 63rd Divisions stormed the line of the Canal du Nord east and south-east of Mœuvres, as already recorded. This movement was entirely successful, though there was very obstinate resistance at Graincourt, which held up the advance for a time. The 57th Division passed through, however, to the north of this village and gained Cantaing and Fontaine, so that the defenders of Graincourt, finding British troops behind them, were forced to surrender.

The Canal du Nord had been emptied by the blowing up of sluice-gates, and was quickly passed by the Canadian troops, who scrambled down one side and up the other, with or without the aid of scaling-ladders. At the other side they found much less resistance than had been expected, which was greatly the result of a barrage which has seldom been equalled for accuracy and intensity. Captured German officers declared that nothing could live under it. The German guns were slow and feeble in their reply, and the whole work of the enemy artillery at this period showed how nervous it had become through the recent heavy captures, and how much they appreciated the necessity of keeping well to the rear. The Canadian line poured on with little

loss and did not halt until it had seized its whole objective, including the ground about Bourlon, which had been the scene of such bitter and fruitless fighting ten months before. Guardsmen and Highlanders, men of Surrey and of Yorkshire, all who had fallen upon and still lay within the soil of that sinister grove, were finally justified and avenged that day. The whole manœuvre, by which a large part of the German line was taken in the rear, elicited expressions of surprise and admiration from captured German officers.

In the second stage of the Canadian attack the 1st Canadian and the 11th British Divisions—the latter on the extreme left—took up the running, and carried the line forward in the direction of Raillencourt and Haynecourt. In the afternoon the 169th Brigade of the 56th Division also came in upon the left, near the Arras-Cambrai Road, to clear the area between the 11th Division and the Canal du Nord, the latter division having taken Oisy-le-Verger. There was constant fighting during the day in this quarter, the 168th Brigade coming into action to the left of the 169th, and next morning the 8th Middlesex took Palluel. They also crossed the River Sensée and captured Arleux, but a strong barrage, followed by an infantry attack, drove them out again at 3.30 on the morning of September 29. All these attacks, both of the 11th and 56th Divisions, were made, after crossing the Canal du Nord, from south to north, so as to extend the left flank of the Canadians.

One of the predominating factors in these operations was the great flood caused by the blocking of the Trinquis and Sensée Rivers by the Germans, which created wide lakes shown upon no map, across the front of the Twenty-second Corps. As a matter of fact this development was regarded with some complacency by General Godley, for there had always been a chance that the Germans, by driving a really strong counter-attack along the line of the Scarpe, might checkmate the whole British advance to the south. The effect of the inundations was to free the British higher command from any fears of the kind and to enable them to hold that part very lightly, while they thickened their line elsewhere.

We have left the Canadian line on September 28. On this date the 3rd Canadian Division, which had relieved part of the 4th British on the right of the Corps front, attacked with the 7th and 9th Brigades in the van. On its left was the 10th Canadian Brigade, which in turn had the second Canadian Brigade to the north of it. The 3rd Canadian Division made good progress and pushed through as far as Raillencourt, but the 1st Canadian Division remained motionless, as it was already rather in front of the general line. The 11th British Division was doing continuous good work in the north, but on the morning of September 29 its 32nd Brigade was held up by a strong field of wire, and the advance was checked in that quarter, but later in the day the whole line pushed on once more, the order of brigades from the north being 32 (British), 2, 12, 7, 9 (all four Canadian). A mist covered the front, and from the

heart of this impenetrable cloud came the constant rattle of the German fire, while their bullets swept every avenue of approach. The progress was irregular, but by 9.45 in the morning the 12th Canadian Brigade had taken Sancourt and had entered Blecourt, where some fierce bludgeon work was going on. At 10 a.m. the 2nd Brigade had reached Abancourt station, but the 11th Division were again held up in the north, which exposed the left flank of the Canadians. South of the Bapaume Road the 9th Brigade was making steady progress, while the 7th had reached Neuville St. Remy. For a moment the 12th Canadian Brigade was staggered by a heavy counter which broke upon it, but the ranks soon rallied and the ground was regained. It was desperately hard fighting, however, and it was to continue day after day until all the northern grit of General Currie's Corps was needed to sustain it. Early in the morning of September 30 they were at it again, the immediate objects of the operations being the capture of the bridge-heads on the Canal de l'Escaut by the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, and secondly, that the high ground over the River Sensée should be secured by the 1st Canadians and 11th British.

The attack began well, as the 3rd Canadian Division got Tilloy and the 4th got Blecourt. There was some progress also along the Cambrai Road, when the 3rd Canadians got Petit Fontaine. It was " do or die " with the Germans, however, who were keenly alive to the fact that at all costs they must hold the bridge-heads of the Canal. They had put out a great effort, and had brought up three new fighting divisions, making seven in all between Cambrai and the Sensée River. Counter-attacks rolled one after the other from the east, but the Canadians showed themselves as stiff in defence as they were ardent in attack. They might well be in high heart, for since September 27, 200 guns and 5500 prisoners were visible signs of their victory.

On October 1 the 56th Division relieved the 11th and both reverted to the Twenty-second Corps. At 5 a.m. on that date the Canadian attack was renewed, synchronising with that of the Seventeenth Corps in the south and the Twenty-second in the north. The order of brigades on the Canadian front was, from the north, 1, 3, 11, and 9. The advance was made under heavy barrage, but it met with a most desperate resistance. In this and the following day the Canadians experienced as heavy fighting as any in their great record. By 8 o'clock the general line had got as far as Canal bank-Morenchies Wood-Cuvillers-Bantigny-Abancourt. Shortly afterwards a very heavy German attack struck the whole Corps front, rolling chiefly up the Bantigny valley, the hostile infantry emerging from Paillencourt and thence pouring forward with great determination in several lines. The 1st Canadian Brigade in the north was bare upon its left flank and was in sore straits, but the 3rd Brigade held on fast to the slope which leads down to the Canal. While swarms of men attacked the British line a number of pockets developed in all the ground which had been taken that day, so that the troops were

shot at from all sides. The British artillery came to the rescue, however, and caught the German masses as they advanced with murderous results—one battery of heavies firing 1600 rounds. None the less the enemy won back Abancourt, and gained some ground along the whole front, the battle centring upon Blecourt.

That night the British line, which was already much weakened by prolonged fighting, and which was clearly opposed by superior forces, halted for a time for reorganisation and reinforcement. It has since been proved that no fewer than thirteen German divisions were thrown in upon this section of the line.

The work of the Canadian Corps in crossing the Nord Canal, following upon their splendid work in breaking the Quéant-Drocourt line, reasserted the fact, so often demonstrated before, that there are no better soldiers in the world than those of the Dominion. It has been impossible to specify the innumerable acts of valour performed by these brave men, but looking at the highest record of all, as chronicled during these days of battle, one finds that the Victoria Cross was awarded to Captain MacGregor and Lieutenant Kerr of the 1st Central Ontario Regiment, the first, after being himself wounded, having killed four and taken eight of the enemy, while the latter rushed a strong point single-handed and captured four machine-guns with thirty-one prisoners. Lieutenant Gregg, of the Nova Scotians, killed or wounded eleven of the enemy and took twenty-five prisoners on September 28. Lieutenant Honey, of the 78th Manitobas, captured a whole nest of guns single-handed, with ten prisoners, dying of wounds on the last day of the attack, while Sergeant Merisfield of the 4th Central Ontarios cleared out two posts by his own initiative, and fought after being wounded until a second wound left him senseless upon the ground. Such were the iron men who have made the name of Canada great in the battlefields of Europe.

For the sake of connected narrative we may carry on the story of the Canadians from October 2, when their weakened ranks, after their great and continuous exertions, were held by the strong German array in front of Abancourt. For the next few days, while gathering for a fresh spring, the Canadians saw heavy palls of smoke over Cambrai, while at night the dull red glow from great fires hinted at an approaching retreat. During the week which followed, the Seventeenth Corps was, as has been told in their own chronicle, making splendid progress to the south. On October 7 the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions, rested and strengthened, renewed their advance. On that date they advanced with the old design of securing the bridge-heads over the Canal, Pont d'Aire and Ramillies being their objectives, the latter a name of good omen for any British operation. Rapid progress was made, and it was soon evident that, be the machine-guns ever so numerous and spiteful, it was still only a rear screen which faced the attack. The light of day had hardly come before the 5th Brigade, after a short, sharp tussle, had

possession of Pont d'Aire, while the 6th Brigade got Ramillies. The 8th Brigade, to its own amazement, crossed the Canal without opposition and pushed its patrols into Cambrai. It seems that at the moment of the attack the Germans were caught in the confusion of their changes. On October 8 Cambrai was cleared, huge fires were extinguished, and wires, by which the destruction of the town might be completed, were traced and cut. An air reconnaissance at dawn on October 9 showed that the enemy had cleared away from the whole area between the Sensée Canal and the Canal de l'Escaut, having destroyed all the Sensée bridges. The Seventeenth Corps sent the 24th Division into Cambrai to take it over, while there was an immediate pursuit of the retreating enemy, in which General Currie pushed forward a mobile column, called Brutinel's Brigade, which contained light guns and the Canadian Light Horse. Villages fell rapidly all along the line both to the Canadians and to the British 11th Division on their left.

On October 10 a fresh line of resistance was reached, and the Canadian Corps instantly attacked it, in conjunction with the 11th Division. The 4th Canadian Brigade advanced swiftly and got Naves with little opposition. The 6th Canadian Brigade took Thun St. Martin. The 11th Division got Estrun and reached the edge of Hem Lenglet.

On October 11 the 2nd Canadian Division, together with the 49th Yorkshire Territorials, who had relieved the 11th, continued their advance. The Canadians met with heavy opposition from Iwuy, and in the forenoon there came a strong counter-attack, led by seven tanks, six of which paid the penalty. On October 12 the 1st Canadian Division in the north found that their front was apparently clear, so they swiftly advanced and took Arleux and Estrées, while the Twenty-second Corps attacked on their right and reached Hordain. On this day was the fine attack, recorded elsewhere, of the 56th British Division, which got across the Canal at Aubigny. On October 17 the whole line of the Canal was clear, and the 1st Canadian Division advanced towards Douai, which was occupied by the 8th British Division from the north.

No further important services were exacted from the Canadian Corps, which had done its share, and more than its share, of the work, so that it retired from the line presently with the warm admiration and respect of every British soldier who had had experience of it. From its first dreadful baptism of fire, when it faced without masks the unknown horrors of the poison gas, down to the campaign in which it broke the great Quéant switch line, and forced the Canal du Nord, there was never one single occasion upon which the Canadians did not rise to the highest point of military virtue in actual battle. Their record will be fully set out in many a book which will deal fully and in detail with their great deeds. Such a chronicle as this can only hope to help the reader to fit that fuller and more worthy record into the general plan.

We shall now follow the work of Godley's Twenty-second Corps from the time that its right flank crossed the Canal du Nord in the Marquion

sector, taking its operations consecutively, and linking them up with the Canadians on the south, who were now, as already recorded, advancing upon Cambrai, bursting through every obstacle as they went. Early in October Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps extended down to the Scarpe. There was great preparation for the future, but no actual fighting, save for some outpost bickerings between the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division and the Germans on the north of the Trinquis brook, in the course of which the British posts were attacked—one of them as many as eight times—but remained untaken. On October 7 the guns of the Twenty-second Corps co-operated in the attack made on that day by the Eighth Corps in the north which captured Biache St. Vaast, and a portion of the Fresnes-Rouvroy line. On October 9 there was a reconnaissance of the northern part of the Drocourt-Quéant line by strong patrols, but it was found that it was still strongly held. It was at this period that the Canadian Corps was brought across to the left of the Twenty-second Corps, while the latter moved south, so that it now lay between the Cambrai-Saulzoir Road and the Canal de l'Escaut. Whilst this considerable movement was in progress, on October 11 the Eighth Corps on the north captured the portion of the Drocourt line which was opposite to it. The 56th Division and 1st Canadians, who were on the immediate south, took some part in the fray, the Londoners capturing Fresnes, and the Canadians the high ground which faced them. After the change was carried out, the front east of Cambrai was held by the 49th Yorkshire Division on the right and by the 51st Highlanders on the left.

Immediately before these fresh dispositions were carried out in the south, there was a sharp action in this sector, in which, under the direction of General Currie, the 2nd Canadians and the 49th British attacked Iwuy and the ground south-west of it. This was on October 11. The attack gained ground and some hundreds of prisoners, but the losses were in excess of the gains, especially in the case of the Yorkshire Territorials, who suffered considerably in a counter-attack which was urged with the help of tanks. On the morning of October 12 the 51st Highlanders had taken over from the Canadians and carried on the operation. All day there was sharp fighting in front of the British divisions. The 49th made good progress and followed up the retreating enemy, but the 51st found a stiff opposition on the left, where the Germans held fast to Lieu St. Amand, powerfully supported by their guns on the north bank of the Canal de l'Escaut. The right of the Highland Division captured Avesnes-le-Sec, and so came level with the left of the 49th. This latter division had continual fighting at Haspres and Saulzoir and on to the line of the Selle.

On October 13 the action was renewed, both the British divisions striving hard to push through the German rearguards, which were very strong and were backed by powerful artillery from north and east. Progress was slow, for the country was an open plain without a vestige

of cover. The enemy were holding the Canadians to the north of the Escaut Canal, and so were able to keep their guns well forward on that side, to enfilade the advance to the south, and to support their position on the Selle. The British had come into the region of the civil population, so that they had to be chary and discriminating in the use of their guns, while gas shells could hardly be used at all. The Third Army had now got so far ahead that it was compelled to pause for supplies, and the First Army was forced to conform.

Cameron's 49th Division was much exhausted by its exertions, so the 4th British Division came up about October 15 to relieve it. It met with sad misfortune immediately after it had taken its place in the line, as its commanding officer, General Lipsett, was killed while carrying out a reconnaissance in front of the line. He had recently been transferred from a Canadian division, and had a great war record, extending back to near the beginning. It is indeed tragic when one who has played a great part in the drama leaves before the final curtain falls. General Lucas took over the division.

There was no change in the situation so far as the Twenty-second Corps was concerned until October 19, when the enemy began to retire in front of the Highland Division, in conformity with a movement which had already begun north of L'Escaut, and which spread down to the front of the 4th Division. The Germans had prepared a line of defence upon the Ecaillon River in the rear, and were now letting go of the Selle in order to reassemble their forces upon this even stronger front. The withdrawal was irregular, so that some parts of his array remained hard when others had almost ceased to exist. Thus at Haspres and the part of the Selle to the north of it, there was still some stiff fighting. He abandoned Saulzoir, however, and the 4th Division promptly established a bridge-head which should be the base for a future advance. On the 51st Divisional front the pursuit was so rapid, both by the Highlanders and by the Corps Cavalry, that there was not much time for reorganisation.

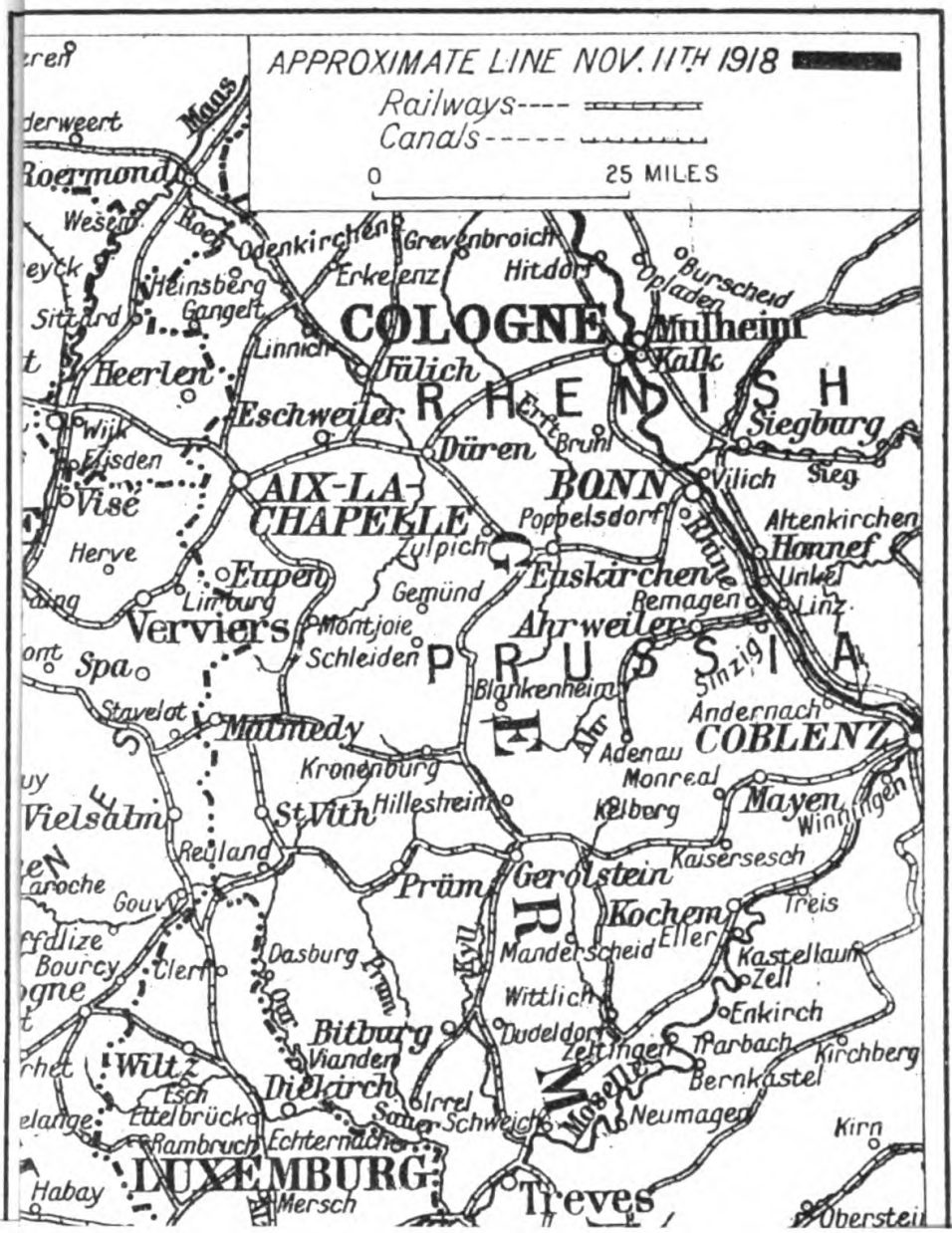
During October 20 and 21 the Germans were slowly pressed back from the high ground east of the Selle into the Ecaillon valley, and artillery was pushed up to prepare for a further attack upon the new line. The sappers did some great work in throwing, under fire, many bridges over the Selle. Noyelles and Douchy were occupied on the morning of October 20. The river was found to be strongly wired, and there were scattered lines of trenches on the farther side, which made up a strong, fortified position, called by the Germans the Hermanstellung. It was clearly a more elaborate position than that of the Selle. None the less the infantry was not to be denied and the troops crossed the river by wading, the water in many cases being up to the armpits of the men. The 10th and 11th Brigades of the 4th Division fought their way halfway up the north-eastern slope of the valley, past the villages of Verchain and Moncheaux. The 1st Somersets and 1st Hants occupied the latter

and pushed through it, securing the high ground east of the villages, but they found that their comrades of the 2nd West Riding and 1st Warwicks were held up by the German main line upon the crest of the hill, and that the 61st Division, the nearest unit on their right, were temporarily checked at Vendegies. The 2nd West Riding got forward, however, and occupied a position on the crest called " The Pimple," whilst the 51st Division on the north of the 11th Brigade also got well forward up to the village of Maing. In the morning of October 25 the 12th Brigade took up the task in this sector, the 1st King's Own on the right and the 2nd Essex on the left advancing without any very serious opposition, being in touch with the left of the Seventeenth Corps. In the late afternoon the Germans reacted strongly, and there was a counter-attack upon the front of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and upon the Highlanders to their left, but it had little effect. The 154th Brigade of Highlanders was very heavily engaged during this strenuous day, and the 6/7th Argyll and Sutherlands, among others, had serious losses. Among many brave deeds that of Lieutenant Bissett is conspicuous, for he won the V.C. by repeated acts of gallantry, leading his men in a desperate bayonet charge, after all their ammunition was expended, and so saving the line. Before evening the village of Querenaing had been occupied and the line of the Artres-Famars Road ; 1200 more prisoners were in the Corps cage.

The attack upon the Ecaillon position was a difficult military operation, and one which showed very clearly the marked ascendancy which the British soldier had gained over his German rival. Every factor was in favour of the defence, and yet the line was rapidly shattered by the determined advance of the two divisions concerned. The object of the action was not merely the gain of ground, though that was considerable, but it was to cover the left of the Third Army and also to assist in the advance of the Canadian Corps towards Valenciennes, all of which aims were fully carried out. The action of the infantry was all the finer because they entirely lost the time-table barrage, and had to depend upon their own fine courage and the tactical skill of their leaders. In the actual crossing of the river all ranks showed great gallantry and determination. The method in which the advance was pressed and the victory followed up by very weary soldiers was remarkable, and resulted, among other things, in the capture of the bridge-head of Artres by the 4th Division, which proved of great value both to the Seventeenth and to the Twenty-second Corps.

A railway from Valenciennes to Le Quesnoy ran across the front of the Corps, and this was made the forming-up point for the renewed attack next morning, when the 4th and the tireless 51st went forward again under a heavy barrage. Having lost the successive lines of the Selle and the Ecaillon, the Germans were now lining up on the east bank of the Rhonelle, prepared to make a resolute defence. A party of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers got across, however, on the morning of the

STICE OF NOVEMBER 11TH 1918.



26th, established a bridge-head, and joined hands with a party from the 61st Division on their right, who had also forded the stream. This point held firm, but when the 2nd Essex on the left attempted also to cross, there was a stubborn resistance. With field-guns in face of them and a raking fire from machine-guns at Gaumont Farm on their left flank, this brave battalion had a bad half-hour. The Germans then counter-attacked, falling upon both the Highlanders and the Essex men, but both stood firm, though the gas with which the whole position was drenched made the defence difficult. In this action the leading battalion of Highlanders at the point attacked, the 6th Argyll and Sutherlands, dashed forward with the bayonet at the advancing Germans and drove them pell-mell back; 212 more prisoners were secured.

The situation on October 26 was that the Corps front was well up to the River Rhonelle, that the 4th Division had taken Artres and established a post across the river, and that the 51st had got as far as Famars, which it had occupied. Attempts of the 4th Division to enlarge their holding on the east of the stream had no good result, but the bridge-head was still held against all attacks. On the 27th the Germans attacked the Highlanders and forced their way into Famars, but were again met with the cold steel, this time by the 4th Gordons, and thrown out of the village. Next morning, October 28, the 51st advanced its line, making a lodgment upon Mont Houy on its left flank, and capturing Poirier station. Here they were stopped by a strong German attack. It must be admitted that, considering the incessant retreats and the heavy punishments which they had received, the German troops showed a fine constancy in these numerous but useless efforts to throw back the advance. On October 30 the 51st Division was drawn into reserve and the 49th took their place in the line. Although there had been no eastward movement during the last few days, the Highlanders had spent them in an incessant pressure to the north-east, to aid the advance upon Valenciennes. By this means a good jumping-off place was secured, from which a Canadian brigade was to attack Valenciennes from the south, in conjunction with the main attack upon the Rhonelle line. The Highlanders withdrew from the line in great heart but very exhausted by a long spell of ceaseless work.

On November 1, under a tremendous artillery barrage, the Twenty-second Corps advanced to the forcing of the Rhonelle, the third river front within a fortnight. If the operation were successful it would be decisive of the fate of Valenciennes. The men were very weary and their ranks had been thinned by the influenza microbe as much as by bullets, but they were cheered by victory and the visible signs of progress in the virgin country all around them. The 4th Division were still on the right, and the 49th Yorkshire Territorials on the left. The 11th Brigade held the all-important bridge-head, and across it went the 1st Rifle Brigade, while the 1st Hants forded the river on their left. The crossing was accomplished with no great difficulty, and once across

the advance was rapidly pushed. Preseau village was the first objective on this wing of the attack. The resistance was unequal and was soon disposed of, and the village was taken, together with the line of the Preseau-Marly Road. About ten o'clock there came a strong German counter-attack, which got round both flanks of the Rifle Brigade and practically surrounded them, so that the leading companies were hard put to it to fight their way back into the village and out to the west of it. The machine-gun fire was very severe. This attack was purely local, and did not affect the Hampshires or the 49th Division. Low-flying aeroplanes aided the German infantry, but were more alarming than dangerous. Eventually the Rifle Brigade dug in about 400 yards west of the village ; 1700 prisoners were taken during the day.

Following the policy of giving the Germans no rest, both divisions attacked again next morning. The 2nd Seaforths of the 10th Brigade were on the right and the 1st King's Own of the 12th Brigade on the left of the 4th Division's front. The German resistance, which was expected to be strong after the counter-attacks of the day before, suddenly collapsed, and Preseau was taken once more. So was the dangerous high ground 700 yards to the east, which was bristling with machine-guns. The Yorkshiremen on the left had advanced with equal bravery, and had taken the steel works south of Marly. Altogether about 1000 more prisoners were taken. That night the 11th Division relieved the 4th, while the 56th took the place of the 49th. The latter division was very weak in numbers, so Blacklock's 63rd Naval Division was transferred to the Twenty-second Corps in order to help cover the widening front.

It is worth recording that in all this recent fighting, with its approximation to open warfare, the youths who now made up the bulk of the fighting divisions were found to acquit themselves manfully. Their only deterioration from the older type was in their power of endurance and of resistance to weather, so that after two rough days there was a distinct weakening of their powers. They were trained to use their individual minds in the assault, advancing in small independent sections in single file. " In open country the employment of waves in the attack is criminal "—such was one of the last military notes of the war.

Early on the morning of November 3 the enemy showed clear signs of having had enough, and was withdrawing along the whole front, closely pursued by mounted troops and by infantry. Curgies and Saultain were taken, and the line rapidly extended. On November 4 the pace accelerated, and the crossings of the River Aunelle were forced, the 11th Division having a sharp fight at Sebourg. On November 5 the Belgian frontier was crossed and the villages of Mesaurain, Boïsin, and Angre were occupied. There was some fighting on this day, the 168th Brigade having a sharp skirmish at Angre. Three tanks of British pattern were captured during the day. On November 6 the Grande Aunelle River had to be crossed, and the Germans made a resistance

which at one time was both strenuous and successful. There was a good deal of gas, and all troops had to wear their masks. The 11th Division was unable to reach the river on account of the long open slope down which any advance must be made. The 56th Division got across south of Angre, and reached the high ground to the east, the 2nd Londons and London Rifle Brigade in the lead. The former battalion was heavily counter-attacked in the Bois de Beaufort and was driven back to the river, while the London Rifle Brigade also suffered heavy casualties from machine-gun fire from Angre. Forty men of the 2nd Londons were entirely cut off but held on in a deep ditch in the wood, and were surrounded by the enemy. None the less they managed to cut their way out and rejoin their battalion.

On the left of the attack the Kensingtons and London Scottish crossed the river and got possession of Angre. They found themselves involved in a very fierce fight, which swayed backwards and forwards all day, each side attacking and counter-attacking with the utmost determination. Twice the Londoners were driven back and twice they regained their objectives, ending up with their grip still firm upon the village, though they could not retain the high ground beyond. Late at night, however, the 168th Brigade established itself almost without opposition upon the ridge.

On November 7 the opposition had wilted away and the Twenty-second Corps advanced with elements of three divisions in front, for the naval men were now in line on the left, " on the starboard bow of the 2nd Canadians," to quote their own words. The river was crossed on the whole front and a string of villages were occupied on this and the following days. The rain was pouring down, all bridges had been destroyed, the roads had been blown up, and everything was against rapidity of movement. None the less the front flowed ever forward, though the food problem had become so difficult that advanced troops were supplied by aeroplane. The 16th Lancers had joined the Australian Light Horse, and the cavalry patrols pushed far ahead. Bavay was taken on November 10, and the Corps front had reached one mile east of Villers St. Ghislain when, on November 11, the " cease-fire " was sounded and the white flag appeared.

The general experience of the Twenty-second Corps during these last weeks of the war was that the German rearguards consisted mainly of machine-guns, some of which were fought as bravely as ever. The infantry, on the other hand, were of low morale and much disorganised. Need for mounted troops who could swiftly brush aside a thin line and expose a bluff was much felt. The roads were too muddy and broken for the cyclists, and there was no main road parallel with the advance. Owing to his machine-guns and artillery the enemy was able always to withdraw at his own time. 3200 prisoners had been taken by the Twenty-second Corps in the final ten days.

In dealing with the advance of Horne's First Army we have examined

the splendid work of the Canadian Corps and of the Twenty-second Corps. We must now turn to the operations of Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps on the extreme north of this Army, linking up on the left with the right of Birdwood's Fifth Army in the neighbourhood of Lens. Up to the end of September, save for local enterprises, neither the 8th Division on the right nor the 20th on the left had made any serious movement. The time was not yet ripe. At the close of September, however, when the line was all aflame both to the south and in Flanders, it was clear that the movement of the British Armies must be a general one. At that date the 8th Division extended its flank down to the Scarpe, where it was in touch with the 49th Division, forming the left of Godley's Twenty-second Corps. Before effecting this change Heneker, on September 21, carried out a spirited local attack with his own division, by which he gained important ground in the Oppy and Gavrelle sectors. It was a hard fight, in which the 2nd Berks had specially severe losses, but a considerable area of important ground was permanently gained.

Early in October General Heneker proceeded to carry out an ambitious scheme which he had meditated for some time, and which had now received the approbation of his Corps Commander. This was an attack by his own division upon the strong Fresnes-Rouvroy line, to the north-east of Arras. His plan was to make a sudden concentrated assault upon the south end of this formidable deeply-wired line, and then to work upwards to the north, avoiding the perils and losses of a frontal advance. This enterprise was begun at 5 a.m. on October 7, and was carried through with that mixture of dash and skill which marks the ideal operation. The 23rd and 25th Brigades supplied the storm-troops, who were drawn from the 2nd Middlesex, 2nd West Yorks, and 2nd Devons, and attacked on a front of 3500 yards. The gain of ground was nearly two miles ; the line was broken and Biache was taken. On the next day, October 8, the northward turning movement was carried through, the 1st Worcesters, 1st Sherwood Foresters, and 2nd Berkshires pushing into the front line, the work being mainly carried out by bombing. Altogether 37 machine-guns and 250 prisoners were taken, together with the villages of Fresnes and Neuvireuil, so that the divisional front was now brought opposite the Drocourt-Quéant line.

This strong triple system of the Hindenburg type was attacked in the early morning of October 11 in this sector by Grogan's 23rd Brigade, and by 7 a.m. both the 2nd Middlesex and 2nd Devons were through it, holding the whole front before them, with the exception of the town of Vitry on the Scarpe. The 12th Division had taken the place of the 20th on the left of the 8th, and it had also fought its way forward, but it was still short of striking distance and could not take part in the attack. The chief danger was from the south, as the floods in the Trinquis River were holding up the 1st Canadian Division in that quarter, so that the German guns could all swing their muzzles to the north. This was obviated by a free use of smoke and gas, so that the

British infantry were shrouded on their right flank. The barrage, by a very ingenious device, was not put down in such a fashion as to pin the Germans to their positions and make it more dangerous to fly than to stand, but it was poured upon one spot, and then moved slowly up the line at the rate of 100 yards in eight minutes, giving the garrison plenty of time to see and to avoid it by a timely flight, which most of them preferred to do. When the new position, which soon included Vitry, had been occupied, some of the 2nd Middlesex scrambled across the Scarpe by a broken bridge and took Mont Metier, the strong point on the left front of the Canadians, so as to help their future advance. The total gain was not less than an average of three miles, with Cuincy in the centre as the most advanced point. The German line was now shattered, and though there were sporadic bickerings and resistance, with a constant resource to the ignoble warfare of land mines and booby traps, there was no serious battle. In a single day the Tunnelling Companies, which were always ready for any desperate service, removed 300 mines. On October 14 the 12th Division, after a spirited attack, captured Auby on the left, while the Canadians on the right had got up to the Douai Canal. On the 17th the German line was clearly recoiling, and a personal reconnaissance by Colonel Roberts of the 1st Worcesters showed that there was hope for an advance over the canal. At 2 p.m. accordingly the 2nd Rifle Brigade went forward, and their patrols, with those of the 2nd Middlesex, entered the historic old city of Douai, taking down the German flag which was still flying from the town hall. " The town was found to be fairly intact," says a general officer on the spot, " but the inside of every house had been stripped of everything of value, and what had not been removed had been smashed to atoms. . . . The inside and reeds of the beautiful organ in the Cathedral had been torn out, and lay in a heap on the floor." There is no doubt that President Wilson's note on this subject had an effect in preventing the destruction of towns from this time onwards, and that it was the salvation of Douai. No inhabitants had been left in the town.

From this period the advance on this front was a slow but steady triumphant progress. By the end of October the 8th Division had gone forward more than thirty miles since it started, and had captured thirty-five towns and villages, including Douai, Marchiennes, and St. Amand. Beyond being greatly plagued by murderous explosive traps, 1400 of which were discovered, and being much incommoded by the destruction of roads and bridges and by the constant canals across its path, there was no very serious resistance. Great floods early in November made the situation even more difficult. On November 5 the 8th Division was relieved by the 52nd, and quitted the line for the last time.

This splendid division has had some injustice done to it, since it was the one Regular division in France in 1914 which was somewhat invidiously excluded from the very special and deserved honours which

were showered upon " the first seven divisions." But even in 1914 it had done splendid work, and as to its performance in the following years, and especially in 1918, when it was annihilated twice over, it will live for ever, not only in the records of the British Army, but in that of the French, by whose side it fought in the direst crisis and darkest moment of the whole campaign. There were no further movements of importance on the front of the 8th Corps, and the completion of their history covers the whole operation of Horne's First Army in this final phase of the war. It was indeed a strange freak of fate that this general, who commanded the guns of the right wing at Mons in that momentous opening battle, should four and a half years later be the commander who brought his victorious British Army back to that very point.

CHAPTER LXIV

OPERATIONS OF THE SECOND AND FIFTH ARMIES

September 28, 1918, *to the end*

King Albert in the field—Great Belgo-Franco-British advance—The last act on the old stage—The prophet of 1915—Renewed advance—Germans desert the coast—Relief of Douai and Lille—The final stage of the subsidiary theatres of war.

WE have followed the operations of the three southern British Armies from the first blow on August 8—a blow which Ludendorff has stated made him surrender the last hope of ultimate victory—through all their uninterrupted progress until the final armistice. We shall now turn to the northern end of the British line, where the two remaining Armies, the Fifth in the Nieppe district and the Second in the area of Ypres, were waiting impatiently for their share in the advance. Flanders was a convalescent home for divisions, and there was not a unit there which was not stiff with half-healed wounds, but these Armies included many of the grand old formations which had borne the stress of the long fight, and they were filled with the desire to join in the final phase. Their chance came at last, though it was a belated one.

There were many indications in the third week of July that the Germans had planned one of their great attacks upon the front of Birdwood's Fifth Army in the Nieppe district. The succession of blows which rained upon Hindenburg's line in the south made it impossible, however, for him to attempt a near offensive. There was considerable activity along the British line, and a constant nibbling which won back by successive ventures much of the ground which had been gained by the Germans in April. Early in July the 5th Division, forming the left unit of the Fifth Army, advanced from the edge of Nieppe Forest, where they had lain since their return from Italy, and gained a stretch of ground —the first sign of the coming recoil in the north. To the left of them lay De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps, which moved forward in turn, effecting a series of small but important advances which were eclipsed by the larger events in the south, but reacted upon those events, since they made it impossible for the Germans to detach reinforcements. On July 19 the 9th Division with a sudden spring seized Meteren with 453 prisoners, while on the same date the 1st Australian Division occupied

Merris to the south of it. On August 9 the movement spread farther south, and the 31st Division took Vieux Berquin. There was a slow steady retraction of the German line from this time onwards, and a corresponding advance of the British. On August 30 the ruins of Bailleul passed into the hands of the 29th Division. On September 1 Neuve Eglise was submerged by the creeping tide, while on the 3rd Nieppe also was taken. Finally on September 4 two brigades of the 29th Division, the 88th under Freyberg and the 86th under Cheape, captured Ploegsteert by a very smart concerted movement in which 250 prisoners were taken. Up to this date De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps had advanced ten miles with no check, and had almost restored the original battle line in that quarter—a feat for which M. Clemenceau awarded the General special thanks and the Legion of Honour.

All was ready now for the grand assault which began on September 28 and was carried out by the Belgians and French in the north and by Plumer's Second British Army in the south. The left of this great force was formed by nine Belgian and five French infantry divisions, with three French cavalry divisions in reserve. The British Army consisted of four Corps: Jacob's Second Corps covering Ypres, Watts' Nineteenth Corps opposite Hollebeke, Stephens' Tenth Corps facing Messines, and De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps to the south of it. The divisions which made up each of these Corps will be enumerated as they come into action. To complete the array of the British forces it should be said that Birdwood's Fifth Army, which linked up the First Army in the south and the Second in the north, consisted at that date of Haking's Eleventh and Holland's First Corps covering the Armentieres-Lens front, and not yet joining in the operations. The whole operation was under the command of the chivalrous King of the Belgians, who had the supreme satisfaction of helping to give the *coup de grâce* to those who had so long ill-used his unfortunate subjects.

The operations of the Belgians and of the French to the north of the line do not come within the scope of this narrative save in so far as they affected the British line. General Plumer's attack was directed from the Ypres front, and involved on September 28 two Corps, the Second on the north and the Nineteenth on the south. The order of divisions from the left was the 9th (Tudor) and the 29th (Cayley), with the 36th Ulsters (Coffin) in reserve. These constituted Jacob's Second Corps, which was attacking down the old Menin Road. South of this point came the 35th (Marindin) and the 14th Division (Skinner), with Lawford's 41st Division in support. These units made up Watts' Nineteenth Corps. On the left of Jacob's was the Belgian 6th Division, and on the right of Watts' the British Tenth Corps, which was ordered to undertake a subsidiary operation which will presently be described. We shall now follow the main advance.

This was made without any bombardment at 5 in the morning of September 28, behind a heavy barrage which swept eastwards at the

rate of 100 yards every three minutes. The Germans had clearly sent away reinforcements to the south and were weak in numbers as well as in spirit. The result was a very complete victory all along the line, and before evening Plumer's men had passed over all the ground which had been previously contested. For the last time the roar of battle went down the old Menin Road and rose from historic Gheluvelt. The 9th and 29th Divisions with the 35th on the flank swept everything before them, and before evening not only Gheluvelt but Zandvoorde, Kruiseik, and Becelaere had fallen. The Belgians on the left had cleared the whole of Houthulst Forest, that lowering menace which had hung so long before their line. Zonnebeke and Poelcappelle had also passed into the hands of the Allies. It was a great victory, and it was not marred by heavy losses to the victors. Those of Jacob's Corps were not more than 1100, while their prisoners were 2100. The total of prisoners came to 10,000, with more than 100 guns.

On September 29 the advance was resumed with ever-increasing success all along the line. The Scots of the 9th Division, working in close liaison with the Belgians, got Waterdamhoek, and detached one brigade to help our Allies in taking Moorslede, while another took Dadizeele, both of them far beyond our previous limits. The 29th Division still pushed along the line of the Menin Road, while the 36th Ulsters fought their way into Terhand. In this quarter alone in front of Jacob's Second Corps fifty guns had been taken. Meanwhile the Nineteenth Corps on the right was gaining the line of the Lys River, having taken Zandvoorde and Hollebeke, while the 34th and 30th Divisions of the Tenth Corps were into Wytschaete and up to Messines, and the 31st Division of the Fifteenth Corps was in St. Yves. In these southern sectors there was no attempt to force the pace, but in the north the tide was setting swiftly eastwards. By the evening of September 29 Ploegsteert Wood was cleared and Messines was occupied once again. The rain had started, as is usual with Flemish offensives, and the roads were almost impossible, but by the evening of October 1 the whole left bank of the Lys from Comines southward had been cleared, Marindin's 35th Division doing some splendid work. On that date there was a notable hardening of the German resistance, and the Second Corps had some specially fierce fighting. The Ulsters found a tough nut to crack in Hill 41, which they gained twice and lost twice before it was finally their own. The 9th Division captured Ledeghem, but was pushed to the west of it again by a strong counter-attack. Clearly a temporary equilibrium was about to be established, but already the advance constituted a great victory, the British alone having 5000 prisoners and 100 guns to their credit.

In the meantime Birdwood's Fifth Army, which had remained stationary between the advancing lines of the Second Army in Flanders and of the First Army south of Lens, began also to join in the operations. The most successful military prophet in a war which has made military

prophecy a by-word, was a certain German regimental officer who was captured in the La Bassée district about 1915, and who, being asked when he thought the war would finish, replied that he could not say when it would finish, but that he had an opinion as to where it would finish, and that would be within a mile of where he was captured. It was a shrewd forecast based clearly upon the idea that each side would exhaust itself and neither line be forced, so that a compromise peace would become necessary. For three years after his dictum it still remained as a possibility, but now at last, within six weeks of the end, La Bassée was forced, and early in October Ritchie's 16th Division, the 55th West Lancashire Territorials, and the 19th Division under Jeffreys, were all pressing on in this quarter, with no very great resistance. South of Lens the 20th Division (Carey) had been transferred from the left of the First Army to the right of the Fifth, and this had some sharp fighting on October 2 at Mericourt and Acheville. Both north and south of the ruined coal capital the British infantry was steadily pushing on, pinching the place out, since it was bristling with machine-guns and very formidable if directly attacked. The 12th Division (Higginson), fresh from severe service in the south and anaemic from many wounds, occupied 11,000 yards between Oppy and Lens from October 7 onwards. Their orders were to press the enemy at the first sign of retreat. All three brigades were in the line, each with its own artillery, to give greater independence. The German withdrawal was gradual, but there was some hard rearguard fighting, especially at the strong line of the Haute Deule Canal. There was little cover for the troops at this point save where some ruined hamlets screened their ranks. These flat levels leading up to wire and water could have been made a Golgotha had the Germans been of the old temper, but they were oppressed by the general wilting of their line. The 1st Cambridge captured Auby on October 14 and so got to the edge of the Canal. On the 16th the 5th Berks got across the broken bridge at Pont-a-Sault, though they could hardly deploy upon the farther side. After this date the only obstacle to the advance was the supply question, for the villagers were all clamouring for food and sharing the scanty rations of the soldiers. On October 23 the Scarpe was crossed, Lieutenant Egerton of the 87th Field Company R.E. gallantly bridging the stream and losing his life in the effort. The 6th West Kents got across at Nivelle, but had the misfortune to lose their splendid commander, Colonel Dawson, who had already been wounded six times in the course of the war. Upon October 23 the 12th was relieved by the 52nd Division upon this front.

The attack in the north had been held partly by the vile weather and partly by the increased German resistance. The 29th Division had got into Gheluvelt but was unable to retain it. The enemy counter-attacks were frequent and fierce, while the impossible roads made the supplies, especially of cartridges, a very serious matter. The worn and rutted Menin Road had to conduct all the traffic of two Army Corps. No

heavy artillery could be got up to support the weary infantry, who were cold and wet, without either rest or cover. Time was needed, therefore, to prepare a further attack, and it was October 14 before it was ready. Then, as before, the Belgians, French, and British attacked in a single line, the advance extending along the whole Flemish front between the Lys River at Comines and Dixmude in the north, the British section being about ten miles from Comines to the Menin-Roulers Road.

Three British Corps were engaged, the Second (Jacob), the Nineteenth (Watts), and the Tenth (Stephens), the divisions, counting from the south, being the 30th, 34th, 41st, 35th, 36th, 29th, and 9th. The three latter divisions, forming the front of Jacob's Corps, came away with a splendid rush in spite of the heavy mud and soon attained their immediate objectives. Gulleghem, in front of the Ulsters, was defended by three belts of wire, garnished thickly with machine-guns, but it was taken none the less, though it was not completely occupied until next day. Salines had fallen to the 29th Division, and by the early afternoon of October 15 both divisions were to the east of Heule. Meanwhile Cuerne and Hulste had been cleared by the 9th Division, the 1st Yorkshire Cyclists playing a gallant part in the former operation. The net result was that in this part of the line all the troops had reached the Lys either on the evening of September 15 or on the morning of September 16.

The advance in the south had been equally successful, though there were patches where the resistance was very stiff. The 103rd Brigade on the left of the 34th Division enveloped and captured Gheluwe and were afterwards held up by field-guns firing over open sights until they were taken by a rapid advance of the 5th Scottish Borderers and the 8th Scottish Rifles. The 102nd Brigade made a lodgment in the western ourskirts of Menin, which was fully occupied on the next day, patrols being at once pushed across the Lys. These were hard put to it to hold on until they were relieved later in the day by the 30th Division. Wevelghem was cleared on the 15th, and on the 16th both the 9th and 36th Divisions established bridge-heads across the river, but in both cases were forced to withdraw them. In the north the Belgians had reached Iseghem and Cortemarck, while the French were round Roulers. By the night of October 15 Thourout was surrounded, and the Germans on the coast, seeing the imminent menace to their communications, began to blow up their guns and stores preparatory to their retreat. On October 17 the left of the Allied line was in Ostend, and on the 20th it had extended to the Dutch border. Thus after four years of occupation the Germans said farewell for ever to those salt waters of the west which they had fondly imagined to be their permanent advanced post against Great Britain. The main tentacle of the octopus had been disengaged, and the whole huge, perilous creature was shrinking back to the lairs from which it had emerged.

Events were now following each other in very rapid succession as the

pressure upon the flanks increased. On the one side it was Ostend ; on the other, as already recorded, it was Douai, which the 8th Division had entered on October 17. Finally, on the morning of October 18, Haking's Eleventh Corps from Birdwood's Army held Lille in their grasp. The 57th and 59th Divisions were north and south of the town, which was occupied before evening, to the immense joy of the liberated inhabitants. Meanwhile De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps pushed on in the north and occupied both Roubaix and Tourcoing. There was little resistance to these operations, for the Flemish advance on one side and that to Le Cateau on the other had made the position of the German garrisons impossible. By October 22 the troops were on the line of the Escaut from Valenciennes to Avelghem.

Though the advance of Birdwood's Army was comparatively bloodless there was still some obstinate fighting in the north, and the divisions which forced the Lys had by no means a holiday task. This operation was carried out on October 20 and 21, and owing to some delay on the part of the French Seventh Corps in getting into position the flank of the 36th Ulster Division was exposed to enfilade fire which caused great loss. As the Ulsters advanced across the river they had to throw back a defensive flank 6000 yards deep before evening of the 21st. On the 22nd the Germans were still fighting stoutly, and delivered at least one dangerous counter-attack by storm-troops, while on the 25th they brought a new division, the 23rd Reserve, an old opponent of early Ypres days, into the line, and held their ground well. There were changes in the British fighting line also, as the 31st relieved the 29th, while the 34th, coming from the south, took the place of the Ulsters.

These two divisions attacked once more on October 31, the 31st surrounding Caster while the 34th captured Anseghem, the 8th Scottish Rifles forcing their way into the town, and joining up with the French at Winterkan. That evening the enemy retired across the Escaut, and the line was definitely made good. The bridges over the river had been destroyed, but the French were advancing rapidly from the north, and on November 2 had reached Driesen and Peterghem. They then extended south and took over the whole front of the Second Corps, joining up with the left of the Nineteenth Corps. The Second Corps drew out from its last battle, having since the advance began captured 7500 prisoners and 150 guns, at a loss to itself of 11,000 casualties. At this period the operations of the north may be said to have reached their term.

The weight of the campaign never fell fully upon Birdwood's Fifth Army, but it was comprised of divisions which had been knocked to pieces elsewhere and which would not have been battle-worthy at all had they not been of splendid individual material. Some of them were actually called B divisions, but upon one of them doing thirty-three miles in thirty hours it was decreed by their General that such an invidious title must cease. The Portuguese troops accompanied the

British in the Fifth Army. There was a good deal of discontent in the ranks of this contingent, largely due to the fact that it was impossible to grant the men the same privileges in the way of leave as were given to the officers. By a great concession they were broken up, however, among the British brigades, with the result that they did very well during the last phases of the fighting. The fact that General Birdwood with his depleted and inexperienced divisions was able to drive the Germans through Merville, Estaires, La Bassée, and on over the Aubers Ridge and out of Lille, forcing the Scheldt and reaching as far as Ath, will always be a memorable military exploit. It is on record that the last bag of prisoners by this Army was at 10.57 on the 11th November, three minutes before time.

On November 15 Marshal Foch visited the Headquarters of the Fifth Army, and his remarks on that occasion were meant, no doubt, to apply to the whole British line. "Your soldiers," he said, "continued to march when they were exhausted, and they fought, and fought well, when they were worn out. It is with such indomitable will that the war has been won. At the moment of ceasing hostilities the enemy troops were demoralised and disorganised and their lines of communication were in a state of chaos. Had we continued the war for another fortnight we might have won a most wonderful and complete military victory. But it would have been inhuman to risk the lives of one of our soldiers unnecessarily. The Germans asked for an armistice. We renounced the certainty of further military glory and gave it to them. I am deeply sensible of the fact that Lille was delivered without damage to the town, and I am grateful for the help given so generously to the inhabitants."

So ended the Great War in the northern sector. It need not be said that while the British had been attacking again and again in the manner described, taking no heed of their own losses and exhaustion so long as they could bring the tottering giant to his knees, the French and the Americans were advancing in unison. The work of the latter in the wooded region of the Argonne was especially difficult and also especially vital, as its effect was to cut in upon the German rear and to narrow the pass through which the great multitude must make their escape from the lands which they had so wantonly invaded. On September 12 the Americans had shown their quality by their successful attack upon the St. Mihiel salient. In the advance of the Argonne the American attack extended over several weeks, was often held up, and furnished more than a hundred thousand casualties, but General Pershing and his men showed a splendid tenacity which carried them at last through all their difficulties, so that the end of the war, which their exertions had undoubtedly helped to hasten, found them with their line in Sedan and biting deeply into the German flank.

Before entering upon the terms of the Armistice and describing the subsequent conditions of peace, representing the final fruits of all the terrible sacrifices of these years of alternate hope and fear, one last glance

must be cast round at the other fields of the great struggle—Italian, Salonican, Syrian, and Mesopotamian—all of which were decided at the same moment. It could almost be believed that some final spiritual fiat had gone forth placing an allotted term upon the slaughter, so simultaneous was the hostile collapse on every front. We shall take up the story of the British Contingent in Italy from the place where we dropped it in the record of February 1918. After the great changes produced by German pressure in France only three British divisions, the 7th, 23rd, and 48th, were in that country. Early in October an important change was made in the British dispositions. Lord Cavan was asked by General Diaz to take over the command of the Tenth Anglo-Italian Army, which should include not only the Fourteenth British, but also the Eleventh Italian Corps. As a consequence General Babington became Corps Commander, and General Thuillier took his place at the head of the 23rd Division.

Great secrecy was observed as to the approaching attack, which was confidently expected to be a final one. The two British divisions concerned were only moved up into the front line on October 21, where they had their Corps companions, the Eleventh Italians, upon their right. On their left was the Eighteenth Italian Corps, forming the right unit of the Eighth Italian Army. The general scheme was that three Italian armies, the Twelfth, Eighth, and Tenth should cross the Piave. Of these the Tenth (Lord Cavan's) should hold Livenza between Portobuffole and Sicile. They should then act as a flank protection for the two armies on their left, or upstream, who should hinge upon the Tenth, and move northwards so as to drive a wedge between the Fifth and Sixth Austrian Armies, and threaten their communications which ran through the Valmarino Valley. The whole operation was under the direct charge of General Caviglia, who commanded the Eighth or central Army.

In the third week of October the British had been concentrated in the Treviso district, and their presence there was concealed as far as possible by the use of Italian uniforms for the outposts. It was clear that their task in crossing the river would be a very difficult one. The Piave at this point is a mile and a half wide, broken into numerous channels which flow with a considerable current between a number of islands, some of which are mere sandbanks, while others are of a considerable size. The largest of these was called the Grave di Papadopoli, which was three miles long and one mile broad. This was held by the Austrians as an advance post, and it was clear that the army could not cross until it was in British hands. This operation was carried out on the night of October 23. Though small in itself, it was of vital importance to the general scheme, as no advance could be attempted until it had been carried through.

Twelve boats had been assembled, each of which was capable of holding six infantry men in addition to the two Italian Pontiere, who

rowed them. These Italian boatmen, together with the Italian officers who had been detailed to superintend them, were of great service during the operations. Shortly before midnight on October 23 the men began to embark, but it was a most ticklish operation. The current ran strong and deep, there were two shoals in mid stream which had to be waded, it took at the fastest some twenty minutes to get across, and the leading platoons had to be dumped on the shore, and left to their fate while the boats went back for more. The orders were that no shot should be fired, that the positions should be carried by the bayonet, and that the storming parties, landing at the extreme end of the island, should work down the line of the Austrian trenches, taking them all from the flank.

The operation was carried out by two units of the 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division, three companies of the Honourable Artillery Company furnishing the attacking party, while three companies of the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers were in support, the whole being under the command of Colonel O'Connor of the former corps. All went well from the first. The surprise was complete. The first two platoons under Lieutenant Foster crept in silence down the scattered line of Austrian posts, and had occupied several hundred yards before the enemy realised what had befallen them, and sent up their first frantic S.O.S. signals. By that time two whole companies of the H.A.C. under Captains Woollam and Garrard, were on the prowl, the one down the front, and the other down the support trench. There was the usual confusion of direction inseparable from a night attack, but when day dawned the whole northern half of the island with more than 200 of its defenders were in British hands.

The river was fordable between the island and the Austrian lines, so that it was possible for them to pass over reinforcements, and also to concentrate their fire upon that part of the island which had been cleared of the enemy. So disproportionate were the numbers at some points of the straggling conflict that Austrian officers offered handsome terms of surrender to the British, assuring them that they would not be killed. The evening of the next day, however, saw the completion of the operations, 300 more prisoners had been taken, and the big stepping stone was cleared for the passage of the Fourteenth Corps. Meanwhile the sappers had been working desperately upon the construction of a foot-bridge across the swollen rushing torrent. Rain was falling heavily, and the river rising, but in spite of all obstacles a narrow swaying bridge had been erected by the 26th, and by the 27th the whole of the 7th Division was on the island. The occupation of this main island had made the general situation easier, and a second bridge had been constructed to a smaller island, the Lido, to facilitate the passage of the 23rd Division.

Early in the morning of October 27 the great advance began. It was to continue for days without a break, and was part of that great contest which was the final blow in the long duel between Italy and

Austria. In the grey, cold, raining dawn, the British lines advanced to the attack. The river was waist high, turbid and strong. The men were weighted with rifles, a hundred rounds of ammunition, trenching tools, food, overcoats and other needs. It was only by linking arms and shuffling their feet along the pebbly bottom that they could hold their places. Several were swept away and drowned. In front of them were zones of uncut wire with a line of trenches behind them. Nothing, however, could stop the inexorable advance.

Wading out through the shallows, the waterlogged, bedraggled stormers came first upon a broad belt of shingle which was spurting in all directions from the impact of the machine-gun bullets. Then came two hundred yards of scrub, and then a long embankment ten feet high called "The Bund." Behind the Bund were the Austrian trenches and in front the wire. On the right the leading battalions of the 7th Division were the 1st Gordons upon the flank and the 22nd Manchesters on the inner wing, the other battalions of each brigade being formed in depth behind them. The Gordons went forward with their accustomed dash, and found the wire rather more open than their comrades on the left. They carried the Bund with a rush, and moved on to the second line of objectives, where they were held back for a time by the absence of the Italians on their right, who had been delayed by the failure of their bridge. It was at this time that the Gordons lost their Colonel, Ross, and six officers, with many men. As soon as their flanks were secure, however, they dashed forward again, the men advancing in little groups under artillery formation until they had attained the furthest point marked out for the day's attack. Here they were relieved by the 2nd Borderers who had moved up in their support.

The 22nd Manchesters on their left had also been held up by the wire, but Colonel English-Murphy of the Staffordshires moved swiftly forward to their assistance, and the two battalions smashed their way through the obstacle and carried the Bund. From there onwards they overran the Austrian position up to the limit which had been marked out as the extreme range of the protective barrage. Nearly 3000 prisoners and 15 guns had been secured by the 7th Division before evening.

The work of the 23rd Division on the left was in some ways more onerous, for apart from the common obstacle of the Bund they had no flank protection on the left. This had been anticipated and a strong artillery support was provided on that side, but none the less the handicap was a very heavy one.

The Division advanced with four battalions in the line. They were, from right to left, the 8th Yorks, 10th West Ridings, 12th Durham Light Infantry, and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers. Those on the right shared the fortunes, and kept the general alignment of the 7th Division. It was different, however, upon the vulnerable left. Here the flank of the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers was fired into with deadly effect

by the Austrian machine-guns. Colonel Hill was killed, Major Gill was severely wounded, and soon every senior officer was down and the battalion, which had lost over 200 men, was led by Lieutenant Robertson. The pressure was eased, however, by the action of the 10th Battalion of the same regiment. It had already spread out two companies to form a defensive flank, and one of these companies gallantly led by Lieutenant Wrighton, now rushed forward to thicken the thin array of the advancing line. This company had more than 50 casualties, but before evening the Fusiliers had also carried out the whole advance planned for the day.

On the 28th the whole line moved forward after a miserable night, in which the weary men, wet and chilled to the bone, tried to get snatches of sleep in the damp ditches or trenches in which they lay. But soon it was evident that complete success lay before them. In many cases there was no resistance at all. In others there were short, sharp fights round some strong point or machine-gun nest, which always ended in surrender when the flanks were turned. So demoralised had the enemy become that on the front of the 2nd Borderers a whole company surrendered to two men with a Lewis gun. The 104th Battery R.F.A. had in some miraculous fashion got across the river, and so had a number of Italian mountain guns, which were invaluable for breaking down the resistance in fortified buildings. The 56th Italian Division had now come into line on the left of the 23rd, so that the weak flank was now protected. The Monticano River afforded a strong line of resistance, but the bridges were seized by the rapid advance of the scanty corps cavalry, consisting of the North Hants Yeomanry and the 14th Cyclists. This daring little body under Colonel Lowther reached the town of Sacile on the 29th, and actually caused 2000 Austrian infantry to hold up their hands, until at last they realised the weakness of these impudent assailants, and drove them for the moment out of the town. One fine deed of arms signalised the crossing of the Monticano. The 12th Durhams had crossed, and were held up under heavy fire from a fortified Austrian position. The 11th Northumberland Fusiliers joined up on their left, attacked across 300 yards of open, cleared the whole front in a final rush, bayonetted 4 officers and 70 men of the Austrian garrison, and secured 156 prisoners.

Once the River Monticano was passed, an operation which was facilitated by the gallantry of the 8th Yorkshires, the battle became a rout, and the whole Austrian front dissolved into ruin. From that time onwards it was no longer a chronicle of fighting, but rather an inventory of captures. The weary British Divisions who had been marching and fighting for three days were replaced by fresh Italian troops, who continued the pursuit across the Livenza and up to the Tagliamento, the forcing of which gave its baptism of fire to the 332nd American Regiment, the only American troops in Italy. On the evening of the 3rd November the white flag went up, and on the 4th Austria had

declared an armistice, and the war on this point had reached its victorious end.

In the whole action the British losses were not severe. Those of the 23rd Division were 1000, of which an undue proportion fell upon the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers. The 7th Divisional losses were rather less. The number of prisoners taken was 28,000 with 210 guns.

Walker's 48th Division on the Asiago front had been much stimulated by the good news from the south, and the Twelfth Italian Corps, comprising Italians, British, and French, were straining on their leash to break the line which had confronted them so long. The main Austrian trench position at this point was called Winter-Stellung, and this was very strongly held, and formidable in every way. It was argued, however, that the weakening in the south must produce a corresponding reaction in the north. It was therefore determined that an attack should be made. So far as the British division was concerned, this advance was carried out by the 1st Bucks and 4th Berkshires of the 145th Brigade on the right, and by the 4th and 6th Gloucesters of the 144th Brigade on the left. The Gloucesters were held up by intense fire, and made no progress, but the night attack was so successful that General Walker determined to throw his whole weight in that direction. The 7th Worcesters were sent up to support the movement, and the 143rd Brigade was assembled in support. Early on November 2 the new attack was launched, and was completely successful, the 7th Worcesters and 4th Oxfords carrying all before them, and causing the evacuation of those trenches on the left which had held up the Gloucesters on the previous day. The Oxfords among other exploits reached the cloud-capped summit of Mt. Nicatta, 6000 feet above the sea, and captured after a sharp fight the 100 Austrians who formed the garrison.

The way being cleared, the 143rd Brigade at once began to advance down the Val d'Assa, one of the most important of those rocky corridors which led to the central town of Trent, capital of all that mountain district. The roads had been broken up, but the 474th and 475th Companies of Royal Engineers soon repaired the mischief, and the advance was amazingly rapid. It was rumoured that the Austrians would make a last desperate stand at the gate of the pass. In the morning, however, this menace dissolved into nothing, the opposition was brushed aside, and 14 Austrian battalions with the Third Corps Commander and three divisional generals were surrounded and captured.

The same evening the white flag went up, and the 48th Division was in the same victorious position as its comrades in the south. Its success had been great, but it had been shared by the 24th French Division on its right, and by the 30th Italians on its left. Its chief trouble now was how to handle the enormous mass of prisoners, and above all, how to feed them. Colonel Barnett, in his *48th Division in Italy*, has given an excellent account of the situation, and also of the

steps which he and others took to meet it. When one remembers that the British line was at that time 70 miles from railhead, that this distance was filled with rugged mountains and valleys, and that the swift advance, so necessary for military reasons, could not have been foreseen and prepared for, one wonders that the strain was not too great for those who had to meet it. Altogether it was a remarkable performance, which, like many other wonderful things, was lost sight of in view of the gigantic overwhelming fact of the Armistice. The Duke of Braganza, who commanded the 6th Austrian Cavalry Division, is quoted as having spoken of the " wonderful marching powers of this magnificent division" and added that the feat of Walker's men would be recorded in military history.

On September 12 began the great Franco-Serbian advance on the Salonican front—which will presently be described in some detail. On September 30 the Bulgarian nation, misled by its own unscrupulous ambitions and by its unsavoury king, sent in its surrender, retired from the conflict, and waited to hear what the final punishment of its misdeeds might be. Thus fell the first of the four pillars of the Central Alliance.

The fate of Turkey was not long delayed. On September 19 General Allenby, who had halted long upon the line of Jerusalem while he gathered his forces for a supreme and final effort, gave the word for a fresh advance. The victory which followed will perhaps be accounted the most completely scientific and sweeping of the whole war. With his mixed force of British, Indians, Australians and smaller Allied contingents, Allenby broke through the enemy's lines near the coast, and then despatched his splendid cavalry towards Damascus in a wild pursuit which can hardly be matched for calculated temerity. Some of the troopers in that wonderful ride are said to have accomplished seventy to eighty miles in the twenty-four hours. The result was that a strong force was thrown across the Turkish rear and that their Seventh and Eighth Armies were practically annihilated. In the final tally no less than 80,000 men and 250 guns were in the hands of the victors. It was a shattering blow. Damascus was occupied, the Turks were driven pell-mell out of Syria, General Marshall advanced in Mesopotamia, and Turkey was finally brought to her knees after a battle on the Tigris in which her last army was destroyed. On October 30 she signed an armistice by which the Allied fleets might enter the Dardanelles and occupy Constantinople, while all Allied prisoners should at once be returned. As in the case of the Germans the feelings with which the Allies, and especially the British, regarded the Turks were greatly embittered by their consistent brutality to the unfortunate captives whom the fortune of war had placed in their hands. The last spark of sympathy which Britain retained for her old Oriental ally was extinguished for ever by the long-drawn murder of the prisoners of Kut.

As to naval matters there is nothing to be said save that the submarine trouble had been greatly ameliorated by the splendid work of the Navy, much assisted by the American destroyers. The blockade was still rigorously enforced, and had much to do with the general German collapse. There was some hope that the German fleet would come out and that a more decisive Jutland might adorn the finish of the war, but the plans of the German officers were marred by the insubordination of the German men, and there was no heroic gesture to dignify the end of the great useless fleet, the most fatal and futile of all Germany's creations, for its possession led her to her ruin.

In the autumn of 1918 the crisis was approaching in the Balkan as in the other seats of war. The Allies had now built up a formidable line right across the peninsula some 400,000 strong, with the Italians at Valona on the extreme left wing, the French in the section of Monastir, the Serbians carrying on the line from Monastir to the Vardar River, the British covering a hundred miles to the south of Lake Doiran, and the Greeks, a well-equipped and workmanlike force, forming the extreme right of the line. The general idea was that the Serbians, who constituted a solid mass of about 70,000 hardy fighting men, should make a strong frontal attack upon the Bulgarian centre, while their Allies should advance all along the line so as to hold them to their trenches and prevent reinforcement of the real point of danger. Such was the plan of General Franchet d'Esperéy who was now in supreme command.

The plan succeeded to perfection, and the Serbian attack, which began on September 15, was so impetuous and pushed home with such activity and valour, that the Bulgarian centre was broken, and its right wing isolated and destroyed. The battle, however, proved to be a very murderous one for the British contingent who attacked fearlessly upon a front which was defended by rock-cut trenches with innumerable machine-guns and a strong backing of heavy artillery.

The force under General Milne consisted at that date of four divisions of infantry, who had suffered much from the endemic diseases of that marshy country so that they were greatly depleted in strength. These divisions were the 22nd (General Duncan), the 26th (General Gay), the 27th (General Forestier Walker), and the 28th (General Croker), the two latter being regular troops. Five Greek divisions were also placed under the orders of General Milne and carried themselves well in the subsequent fighting.

There was a preliminary operation on September 1 in which an attack was made upon an outlying position of the enemy between Lake Doiran and the Vardar River. This small but important advance was made by the 2nd Gloucesters and the 10th Hampshires, who carried the position with a rush and held on to it against repeated counter-attacks.

The main British attack began upon September 18. The general idea was that there should be a frontal attack upon that part of the Bulgarian

line which was to the west of the lake, while there should be a turning movement upon the east of the lake. On the west the River Vardar divided the British forces. On its right bank was the 27th Division, and on its left, between the river and lake, the 22nd and 26th Divisions with one Grecian division, all under the immediate command of General H. F. M. Wilson. To the east of the lake lay the 28th Division and one Grecian Division (Cretan) under General C. J. Briggs, General Milne being in supreme command.

The British line upon the left was faced by a most formidable ridge which was defended by every possible device of modern warfare, being seamed with trenches and bristling with machine-guns and light artillery. After four days of bombardment the attack was made early upon the 18th.

The action was an important one, and few divisions in the whole course of the war have undergone a more terrible ordeal, and endured it with greater constancy that the 22nd. The attack was made upon a front of 10,000 yards, and was preceded by a bombardment which blew effective but limited gaps in the wire. There was also a spell of poison shells and an emission of smoke. The Bulgarians stood to it like men, however, and none of these terrors caused them to flinch from their guns. They amply upheld their reputation as excellent soldiers. Their 17th and 33rd Regiments, three battalions of each, held the position.

The right attack of the British was made by MacPherson's 67th Brigade, consisting of the 11th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 11th Welsh, and 7th South Wales Borderers. These troops had been in their gas masks for hours, and were exhausted before ever the advance began. None the less they charged with Celtic impetuosity and carried two lines of trenches in front of them. At least half of their number and nearly all of their officers were casualties, however, and after holding their gains for some time they fell back half-way to the original line. The valour of the troops and the severity of the ordeal may be gauged from the fact that of the Borderers only 18 unwounded men with one wounded officer were mustered after the action. Colonel Dan Burges of this battalion received the Victoria Cross. After being wounded three times he was picked up by the enemy and carried within their lines. Colonel Trist of the Welsh Regiment was also amongst the wounded.

The centre of the attack was made by the 3rd Greek Regiment of the Seres Division. The Greeks in this battle showed that they had not lost the virtues of their ancestors, and all of their troops did well. They got forward as far as their Welsh comrades, but they could not hold what they had gained, and they also were compelled to fall back.

On the left, which was allotted to General Montague Bates' 66th Brigade, the advance was most gallantly urged by the 12th Cheshires, whose Colonel, Clegg-Hill, fell mortally wounded among the enemy's wire. The cross fire of machine-guns was terrific and the battalion was practically annihilated. So too was the 9th South Lancashire in support;

Colonel Bishop fell at the head of his men. The 8th Shropshire Light Infantry was also grievously stricken and only a handful was brought out of the action by Colonel Erskine. Sixty-five per cent. of the Brigade were left upon the field.

The one unqualified success that morning was gained by the 1st Greek Regiment upon the extreme right, who made an independent attack supported by the 2nd Royal Lancasters and the British artillery. These gallant troops, more accustomed perhaps to hill work than our own, made good use of the ravines and other dead ground so that they penetrated the Bulgarian position with comparatively slight loss, taking 700 prisoners and holding their gains until it was clear that the failure of the attack upon the left made it untenable.

It was a severe rebuff, but the British would not take no, and the action was renewed early upon the 19th, the 77th Brigade moving up upon the right. Their flank was to be covered by the 2nd Bis Zouaves, but the French for once were wanting upon the field of battle and Blake's Scotch Brigade, consisting of the 12th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 8th Scots Fusiliers and 11th Scottish Rifles, were terribly punished.

The attack was as fiery as, and the slaughter even greater than, on the previous day. The position was carried, but both flanks were open and many machine-guns played at close range upon the infantry, who disdained to fly and yet were unable to advance. The Colonels of each of the three battalions, Stewart, Lindesay, and Scougal, were hit and no less than 70 per cent. of the Highlanders were casualties. Upon their left in an effort to cover and relieve them the 9th King's Own dashed to the front. Colonel Jackson fell, but the troops rushed on, gallantly led by Captain Whitehead, who staggered on after being twice wounded. The poor remnants of the battalion were rallied after the action by 2nd Lieutenant Gleave. The 9th East Lancashires also threw itself into the flank attack, but only added to the losses, its Colonel, Campbell, being badly wounded. Human constancy could not do more than the British infantry did that day. In the two days the British 22nd Division, including the forces temporarily included in it, had lost 155 officers and 3710 men while the brave Greeks had lost 1350 in addition.

But the sacrifice was not in vain. It was a bloody battle, but it ended in victory none the less. The Bulgarian losses had been also severe, and their confidence had been among them. They felt that this indomitable foe in front of them would come and come again until it cleared a path for itself. There had been a diversion at the other end of Lake Doiran by the Greek Cretan Division and the 28th British which added to our losses, but also to the enemy's troubles. No doubt the news from other parts of the line helped to dishearten them, but there was no question of their retreat being cut off, and no reason why they should not hold their positions save that they had no hope of ultimate victory. Their last stand had been a most stubborn one, but already upon the 20th

there were explosions and fires behind their line which told their own tale. Two days later they were in full retreat, with cavalry behind them and bombing planes above them. Then, on September 28, a white flag was seen approaching the British lines, and the beginning of the end had come.

CHAPTER LXV

THE END

BEFORE entering into the terms of the Armistice it may be instructive to give some short outline of the course of events at the German Headquarters which led to so sudden and dramatic a collapse. No doubt the political and economic state of Germany was very bad, but the disaster was primarily a military one, as is clearly shown by the subsequent White Book published after the Declaration of Peace. This compilation shows that the arrogance with which the military leaders spoke during their successful offensive, and down to the middle of July, had changed in the short space of ten weeks to such utter despair that on October 1 they were sending urgent messages to Berlin that the war was to be closed down at any cost, and that even such questions as the loss of the German colonies and the cession of Alsace-Lorraine were not to weigh in the balance against the imperative necessity of staving off a tremendous military disaster. The inclined plane seems to have taken an abrupt tilt on August 14, after the first successful British advance, when it was decided to take the opportunity of the next German success to ask for peace. No success arrived, however, but rather a long succession of disasters, and Hertling, the aged Chancellor, was unable to make up his mind what to do, so that matters were allowed to drift from bad to worse. Early in October it was announced from General Headquarters that a break through might occur at any moment. Prince Max of Baden had been made Chancellor on the understanding that he would at once appeal to President Wilson for a cessation of hostilities, which was the more urgent as Bulgaria had already dropped out of the war and Austria was on her last legs. As might have been foreseen, President Wilson refused to treat without the concurrence of his Allies, and some improvement in the German defensive line enabled them to hold on until early November, when their needs once again became overpowering and the great twin-brethren, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, finally admitted defeat. Then followed in quick succession events which are political and outside the scope of this record—the revolution in the Fatherland, the flight of the Kaiser and of the Crown Prince into Holland, and the advance of the Allied armies, under the terms of the Armistice, to the left bank of the Rhine.

Some account should, however, be given of the circumstances under

which the Armistice was signed, and the drastic terms which were exacted by the Allies. It was at nine o'clock on the evening of Thursday, November 7, that the German delegates, led by the ambiguous and scheming Erzberger, travelling along shell-broken roads, under the glare of searchlights and signal-fires, entered within the French lines near La Capelle. The roar of the battle in their rear was a constant reminder of the urgency of their mission. They came no further than Marshal Foch's travelling headquarters, where they were met by the Marshal himself, with Admiral Wemyss to represent that British sea-power which had done so much to promote this interview. The proceedings were short and strained. A proposition for a truce was waved aside by the victors, and a list of terms was presented which made the German delegates realise, if they had failed to do so before, the abyss into which their country had been precipitated by two generations of madmen. Disgrace abroad, revolution at home, a fugitive monarch, a splitting empire, a disbanding army, a mutinous fleet—these were the circumstances under which Germany ended her bid for the dictatorship of the world.

At 5 a.m. on Monday, November 11, the Armistice was signed, and at 11 a.m., as already recorded, the last shot of the greatest war that ever has been, or in all probability ever will be, had been fired. London and Paris were at last relieved from their terrific strain, and none who witnessed them can forget the emotions and rejoicings of the day. Those who had not realised the complete collapse of the Colossus were surprised at the severity of the terms which had been accepted in such haste. All invaded territory had to be cleared within fourteen days. All Allied prisoners to be at once returned, while those of Germany were retained. The left bank of the Rhine, together with ample bridge-heads, was to be handed over, as a temporary measure, to the Allies, the Belgians holding the north, the British the Cologne area, the Americans the Coblentz area, and the French, Strasburg, with all Alsace-Lorraine. All danger of a continuation of the struggle was averted by the immediate surrender of 5000 guns, 30,000 machine-guns, and 2000 aeroplanes, together with great numbers of locomotives, lorries, waggons, and barges. All Roumanian, Russian, and other forced treaties were abrogated. East Africa was to be evacuated. All submarines and a large portion of the German navy were to be handed over to the care of the Allies until peace terms should decide their ultimate fate. The blockade was to continue. Such were the main points of the Armistice which foreshadowed the rigorous peace to come.

It was not until January 11, 1919, that the delegates from the various interested nations assembled in Paris, and their deliberations, which seemed long to us, but may appear hasty and ill-considered to our descendants, terminated on May 7. So stringent were the terms that the Scheidemann Government resigned and left the unpleasant task of ratification to a cabinet of nobodies, with Herr Bauer at their head. So

long as the firm signed, it mattered nothing to the Allies which particular partner was the representative. There was higgling and wriggling up to the last moment, and some small concessions were actually gained. The final results were briefly as follows :

1. Two new countries shall be formed—Poland in the north and Czecho-Slovakia in the south, the former largely at the expense of Germany, the latter of Austria. Germany shall contribute to the building up of Poland those districts of Prussia which are historically Polish. The important district of Upper Silesia—the prized conquest of Frederick from Maria Theresa—was left indeterminate, its fate to be decided by the people's will.

2. The northern portion of Schleswig shall revert to Denmark, from which it was taken.

3. Alsace-Lorraine shall be returned to France, and that country shall receive for a time the produce of the Saar coal-fields as recompense for the destruction of her own coal-fields by the Germans.

Thus on each side, Germany was trimmed down to the lands inhabited by Germans, the Danes, the Poles, and the French borderers being emancipated. When next they march to war they will not swell their ranks by unwilling conscripts forced to fight against their own friends and interests.

4. Every effort was made by the treaty to disarm Germany, and to prevent her in the future from plotting the destruction of her neighbours. Those sudden irruptions of 1864, 1866, 1870, and 1914 were to be stopped once and for ever—if indeed we can place final terms upon a phenomenon which dates back to the days of the Roman republic.

The German General Staff—that dangerous *imperium in imperio*—was to be dissolved. The army should be only sufficiently powerful to keep internal order and to control the frontiers. Compulsory service was abolished, and the manhood of Germany—to the probable detriment of all trade competitors—was dedicated to the arts of peace. The import and export of war material were forbidden, and the great war-god, Krupp, lay prostrate in his shrine at Essen. All submarines were forbidden. The navy was limited to thirty-six vessels of mediocre strength. Zeppelins were to be handed over. German cables, fourteen in number, and all German oversea possessions passed into the hands of the Allies. With such terms, if the Allies continue to stand together and guarantee their enforcement, the Frenchman may look eastward without a tremor, and the mists of the North Sea can cloud no menace for our islands. For many a long year to come the formidable military history of Germany has reached its close. A clause which dealt with the trial of all military offenders, including the Kaiser, concluded the more important items of the Treaty—a clause which proved in actual operation to be inoperative.

So at last the dark cloud of war, which had seemed so endless and so impenetrable as it covered the whole heavens from the Eastern horizon

to the Western, passed and drifted beyond us, while a dim sun in a cold sky was the first herald of better times. Laden with debt, heart-heavy for its lost ones, with every home shaken and every industry dislocated, its hospitals filled with broken men, its hoarded capital all wasted upon useless engines—such was the world which the accursed German Kultur had left behind it. Here was the crop reaped from those navy bills and army estimates, those frantic professors and wild journalists, those heavy-necked, sword-trailing generals, those obsequious, arrogant courtiers, and the vain, swollen creature whom they courted. Peace had come at last—if such a name can be given to a state where international bitterness will long continue, and where within each frontier the bulk of mankind, shaken by these great events from the ruts of custom, contend fiercely for some selfish advantage out of the general chaos. In the East, Russia, like some horrible invertebrate creature, had entangled itself with its own tentacles, and wrestled against itself with such intricate convulsions that one could hardly say which attacked or which defended, which was living or which already dead. Now after ten years its fate is still in shadow. But the world swings on the divine cycle. He who made the planet from the fire-mist is still at work moulding with set and sustained purpose the destinies of a universe which at every stage can only reach the higher through its combat with the lower.

Here the historian's task is done. It has occupied and alleviated many heavy days. It should surely contain some trace of the spirit of the times, since many a chapter was written to the audible rumble of the distant guns, and twice the author was able to leave his desk and then return with such inspiration as an actual view of the battle-fields could afford him. The whole British line in 1916, the Soissons and Ardennes positions of the French, the Carnic Alps, the Trentino, and the Isonzo positions of the Italians were all visited in turn, while in 1918, as recorded, the crowning mercy of September 29 was actually witnessed by the writer. Now after ten years he has revised his work with such changes and additions as fresh knowledge could suggest. He lays down his pen at last with the deep conviction that the final results of this great convulsion are meant to be spiritual rather than material, and that upon an enlightened recognition of this depends the future history of mankind. Not to change rival frontiers, but to mould the hearts and spirits of men—there lie the explanation and the justification of all that we have endured. The system which left seven million dead upon the fields of Europe must be rotten to the core. Time will elapse before the true message is mastered, but when that day arrives the war of 1914 may be regarded as the end of the dark ages and the start of that upward path which leads away from personal or national selfishness towards the City Beautiful upon the distant hills.

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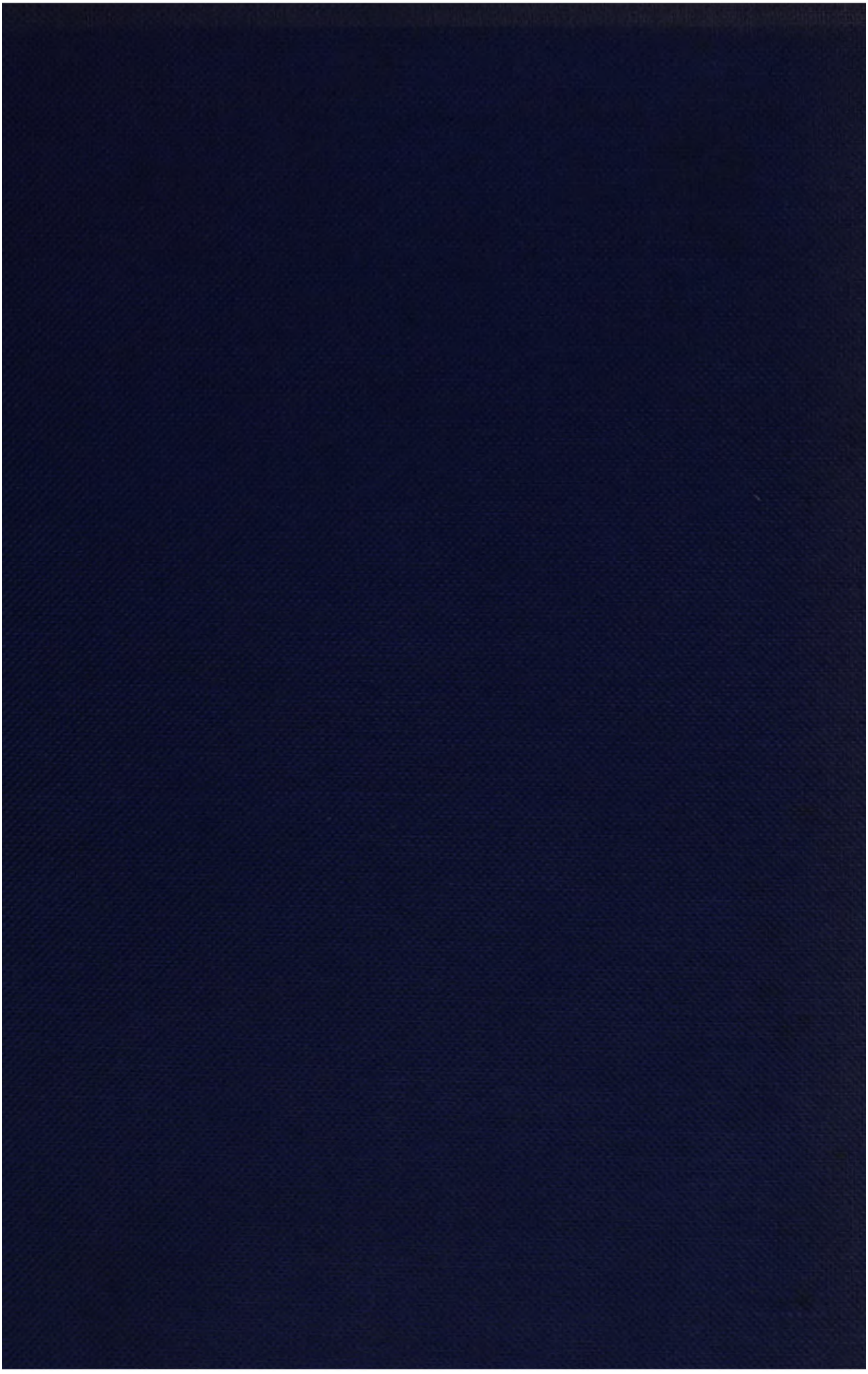
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