



SEVENTH SUPPLEMENT

TO

The London Gazette.

Of FRIDAY, the 3rd of JANUARY, 1919.

Published by Authority.

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TUESDAY, 7 JANUARY, 1919.

War Office,
7th January, 1919.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following despatch from Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, K.T., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E., Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France:—

21st December, 1918.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit the following report on the operations of the forces under my command since the successful termination of the great defensive battles on the Somme and Lys Rivers, which were described in my last despatch.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

(1) *State of the British Armies.*

At the end of April, 1918, though the onrush of the German Armies had been stemmed for the time being, the situation on the Western Front, and particularly on the British portion of it, was still critical.

The immense weight of the enemy's first and heaviest onslaughts in March and April, and the unprecedented masses of men and ma-

terial employed by him had called for practically the whole strength of the British Armies to withstand them, and had left our forces greatly weakened. Although prompt steps had been taken by the home authorities to despatch to France as rapidly as possible all reinforcements then available in England, as well as to recall considerable bodies of troops from other theatres of war, these reinforcements required time to arrive. A further period was needed to complete their training and equipment, to allow troops brought from abroad to become acclimatised, and to enable the new drafts to become assimilated within their various units.

Meanwhile it had become impossible to maintain at an effective strength the full number of our divisions. At the beginning of May no less than eight divisions had been reduced to cadres and were temporarily written off altogether as fighting units. Two other divisions were holding positions in line with reduced cadres which it was not yet possible to bring up to establishment.

Arrangements had been made at the end of April to hand over to the French for employment on a quiet part of their front a further