

During the 15th and 16th this reconnaissance was most skilfully and energetically carried out in the face of great opposition, especially along the lower line of the river.

These operations were continued throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th; but, although valuable information was gained, and strong forces of the enemy held in check, the Cavalry Corps was unable to secure passages or to establish a permanent footing on the eastern bank of the river.

5. At this point in the history of the operations under report it is necessary that I should return to the co-operation of the forces operating in the neighbourhood of Ghent and Antwerp under Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, as the action of his force about this period exercised, in my opinion, a great influence on the course of the subsequent operations.

This force, consisting of the 3rd Cavalry Division, under Major-General the Hon. Julian Byng, and the 7th Division, under Major-General Capper, was placed under my orders by telegraphic instructions from your Lordship.

On receipt of these instructions I directed Sir Henry Rawlinson to continue his operations in covering and protecting the withdrawal of the Belgian Army, and subsequently to form the left column in the eastward advance of the British Forces. These withdrawal operations were concluded about the 16th October, on which date the 7th Division was posted to the east of Ypres on a line extending from Zandvoorde through Gheluvelt to Zonnebeke. The 3rd Cavalry Division was on its left towards Langemarck and Poelcappelle.

In this position Sir Henry Rawlinson was supported by the 87th French Territorial Division in Ypres and Vlamertinghe, and by the 89th French Territorial Division at Poperinghe.

On the night of the 16th I informed Sir Henry Rawlinson of the operations which were in progress by the Cavalry Corps and the Third Corps, and ordered him to conform to those movements in an easterly direction, keeping an eye always to any threat which might be made against him from the north-east.

A very difficult task was allotted to Sir Henry Rawlinson and his command. Owing to the importance of keeping possession of all the ground towards the north which we already held, it was necessary for him to operate on a very wide front, and, until the arrival of the First Corps in the northern theatre—which I expected about the 20th—I had no troops available with which to support or reinforce him.

Although on this extended front he had eventually to encounter very superior forces, his troops, both Cavalry and Infantry, fought with the utmost gallantry, and rendered very signal service.

On the 17th four French Cavalry Divisions deployed on the left of the 3rd Cavalry Division, and drove back advanced parties of the enemy beyond the Forêt d'Houthulst.

As described above, instructions for a vigorous attempt to establish the British Forces east of the Lys were given on the night of the 17th to the Second, Third and Cavalry Corps.

I considered, however, that the possession of Menin constituted a very important point of

passage, and would much facilitate the advance of the rest of the Army. So I directed the General Officer Commanding the Fourth Corps to advance the 7th Division upon Menin, and endeavour to seize that crossing on the morning of the 18th.

The left of the 7th Division was to be supported by the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, and further north by the French Cavalry in the neighbourhood of Roulers.

Sir Henry Rawlinson represented to me that large hostile forces were advancing upon him from the east and north-east, and that his left flank was severely threatened.

I was aware of the threats from that direction, but hoped that at this particular time there was no greater force coming from the north-east than could be held off by the combined efforts of the French and British Cavalry, and the Territorial troops supporting them until the passage at Menin could be seized and the First Corps brought up in support.

Sir Henry Rawlinson probably exercised a wise judgment in not committing his troops to this attack in their somewhat weakened condition; but the result was that the enemy's continued possession of the passage at Menin certainly facilitated his rapid reinforcement of his troops and thus rendered any further advance impracticable.

On the morning of the 20th October the 7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division had retired to their old position extending from Zandvoorde through Kruseik and Gheluvelt to Zonnebeke.

6. On the 19th October the First Corps, coming from the Aisne, had completed its de-trainment and was concentrated between St. Omer and Hazebrouck.

A question of vital importance now arose for decision.

I knew that the enemy were by this time in greatly superior strength on the Lys, and that the Second, Third, Cavalry and Fourth Corps were holding a much wider front than their numbers and strength 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 3rd 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 Territorial troops, and the Belgian Army.

After the hard fighting it had undergone the Belgian Army was in no condition to withstand, unsupported, such an attack; and unless some substantial resistance could be offered to this threatened turning movement, the Allied flank must be turned and the Channel Ports laid bare to the enemy.

I judged that a successful movement of this kind would be fraught with such disastrous consequences that the risk of operating on so extended a front must be undertaken; and I directed Sir Douglas Haig to move with the First Corps to the north of Ypres.

From the best information at my disposal I judged at this time that the considerable reinforcements which the enemy had undoubtedly