



FIFTH SUPPLEMENT

TO

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MONDAY, 21 AUGUST, 1916.

War Office, S.W.,
21st August, 1916.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following despatch from Field-Marshal Viscount French:—

General Headquarters,
Home Forces,
Whitehall, S.W.,
31st July, 1916.

SIR,

I have the honour to forward a despatch covering the operation of the military forces under my command in France between the date of my last despatch (15th October) and 19th December, the date upon which I left France and assumed the command of the Forces in the United Kingdom.

The exhaustion in men and material, which results after a great battle, necessarily leads up to a time of comparative inactivity, and the period under review was, therefore, somewhat barren in incidents of military importance.

Up to the end of October the most important operation was an attack, which commenced about noon of the 13th, by troops of the 11th and 4th Corps against Fosse No. 8, the Quarries, and the German trenches on the Lens-La Bassee Road.

The Divisions chiefly engaged were the 1st

Division (4th Corps) and the 12th and 46th Divisions (11th Corps).

Speaking generally, the objective of the 1st Division was the enemy's trenches on the Lens-La Bassee Road; that of the 12th Division was the Quarries; whilst the troops of the 46th Division attacked the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse No. 8.

The day's fighting commenced with an artillery bombardment of the objectives of the attack, and in this bombardment the French artillery on our right collaborated.

Shortly before the attack was launched at 2 p.m. smoke was turned on all along our front from the Bethune-La Bassee Road southwards, and under cover of this smoke the attack was delivered. At the same time the heavy artillery lifted to further objectives while the enemy's front trench system was subjected to shrapnel fire.

At 2.10 p.m. it was reported that our infantry had passed the Hohenzollern Redoubt and were bombing up a trench towards the dump of Fosse 8; they were, however, opposed by heavy machine-gun fire from that point and such success as the original attack gained at the Fosse was only of a temporary nature.

At 2.45 p.m. the 4th Corps reported having captured 1,200 yards of trenches on the Lens-La Bassee Road, but as the left battalion of

this corps had failed to get possession of the enemy's trenches the General Officer Commanding did not think it practicable to undertake any further offensive towards Hulluch.

The information received during the remainder of the day was very conflicting, and at nightfall the General Officer Commanding 1st Army was unable to define the exact position of the leading troops of the 1st Division.

One Battalion of the 12th Division had gained the south-westerly edge of the Quarries.

The fight for the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse No. 8 was still proceeding with varying fortunes, but it appeared clear that none of our troops were in the Fosse or on the dump.

In the course of the next two days the whole attack died down without attaining the objective aimed at, and the situation in that part of the line remained much the same throughout the period covered by the present despatch.

During the night of October 16th-17th the enemy made two bombing attacks against the Guards Division in the vicinity of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Both these attacks were easily repulsed.

On 19th October the enemy was seen to be massing in the Quarries near the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and after artillery preparation made a determined attack against our lines to the south-west of the former place. This attack was repulsed with heavy loss to the enemy.

A bombing attack of two hours' duration in the same vicinity met with a similar fate.

On 16th November the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade carried out a brilliant little operation near La Petite Douve Farm in raiding the enemy's trenches with bombing parties.

They caused considerable damage to the enemy, brought away 12 prisoners, and only suffered one accidental casualty themselves.

On 25th November the Royal Flying Corps carried out an effective raid on the enemy's cantonments at Achiet Le Grand, and this was followed a few days later by a similar raid on Don Station and the adjoining stores, in the course of which several fires and an explosion were observed.

Another air raid against the quay and stores near Miraumont was also reported as having been effective on 30th November.

Throughout the period under review mining activity was constant on both sides; this, as well as almost continuous shelling of varying intensity, has become a practically permanent condition of warfare along the entire length of the line which we now occupy.

I do not propose, in this short despatch, written only in order that the official published narrative of the war may be continuous, to make special mention of the services of individuals under my command, other than those which have already appeared.

The encomiums passed in my despatch of 15th October are proved to be more than justified by the conduct of all ranks of the Army in France up to the time of my handing over the command.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

FRENCH,

Field-Marshal,

Commanding-in-Chief.