



## FIFTH SUPPLEMENT

TO

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TUESDAY, 8 JANUARY, 1918.

*War Office,  
8th January, 1918.*

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

*General Headquarters,  
British Armies in the Field.  
25th December, 1917.*

My Lord,

I have the honour to submit the following Report on the operations of the Forces under my Command from the opening of the British offensive on the 9th April, 1917, to the conclusion of the Flanders offensive in November. The subsequent events of this year will form the subject of a separate Despatch, to be rendered a little later.

### INTRODUCTORY.

#### THE GENERAL ALLIED PLAN.

(1) The general plan of campaign to be pursued by the Allied Armies during 1917 was unanimously agreed on by a conference of mili-

tary representatives of all the Allied Powers held at French General Headquarters in November, 1916.

This plan comprised a series of offensives on all fronts, so timed as to assist each other by depriving the enemy of the power of weakening any one of his fronts in order to reinforce another.

A general understanding had also been arrived at between the then French Commander-in-Chief and myself as to the rôles of our respective Armies in this general plan, and with the approval of His Majesty's Government preparations based upon these arrangements had at once been taken in hand.

(2) Briefly stated, my plan of action for the Armies under my command in the proposed general offensive was as follows:—

In the spring, as soon as all the Allied Armies were ready to commence operations, my first efforts were to be directed against the enemy's troops occupying the salient between the Scarpe and the Ancre, into which they had been pressed as a result of the Somme battle.

It was my intention to attack both shoulders of this salient simultaneously, the Fifth Army

operating on the Ancre front while the Third Army attacked from the north-west about Arras. These converging attacks, if successful, would pinch off the whole salient, and would be likely to make the withdrawal of the enemy's troops from it a very costly manoeuvre for him if it were not commenced in good time.

The front of attack on the Arras side was to include the Vimy Ridge, possession of which I considered necessary to secure the left flank of the operations on the south bank of the Scarpe. The capture of this ridge, which was to be carried out by the First Army, also offered other important advantages. It would deprive the enemy of valuable observation and give us a wide view over the plains stretching from the eastern foot of the ridge to Douai and beyond. Moreover, although it was evident that the enemy might, by a timely withdrawal, avoid a battle in the awkward salient still held by him between the Scarpe and the Ancre, no such withdrawal from his important Vimy Ridge positions was likely. He would be almost certain to fight for this ridge and, as my object was to deal him a blow which would force him to use up reserves, it was important that he should not evade my attack.

(3) With the forces at my disposal, even combined with what the French proposed to undertake in co-operation, I did not consider that any great strategical results were likely to be gained by following up a success on the front about Arras and to the south of it, beyond the capture of the objectives aimed at as described above. It was therefore my intention to transfer my main offensive to another part of my front after these objectives had been secured.

The front selected for these further operations was in Flanders. They were to be commenced as soon as possible after the Arras offensive, and continued throughout the summer, so far as the forces at my disposal would permit.

(4) The positions held by us in the Ypres salient since May, 1915, were far from satisfactory. They were completely overlooked by the enemy. Their defence involved a considerable strain on the troops occupying them, and they were certain to be costly to maintain against a serious attack, in which the enemy would enjoy all the advantages in observation and in the placing of his artillery. Our positions would be much improved by the capture of the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge and of the high ground which extends thence north-eastwards for some seven miles and then trends north through Broodseinde and Passchendaele.

The operation in its first stages was a very difficult one, and in 1916 I had judged that the general situation was not yet ripe to attempt it. In the summer of 1917, however, as larger forces would be at my disposal, and as, in the Somme battle, our new Armies had proved their ability to overcome the enemy's strongest defences, and had lowered his power of resistance, I considered myself justified in undertaking it. Various preliminary steps had already been taken, including the necessary development of railways in the area, which had been proceeding quietly from early in 1916. I therefore hoped, after completing my spring offensive further south, to be able to develop this Flanders attack without great delay, and to strike hard in the north before the enemy realised that the attack in the south would not be pressed further.

(5) Subsequently, unexpected developments in the early weeks of the year necessitated certain modifications in my plans above described.

New proposals for action were made by our French Allies which entailed a considerable extension of my defensive front, a modification of the rôle previously allotted to the British Armies, and an acceleration of the date of my opening attack.

As a result of these proposals, I received instructions from His Majesty's Government to readjust my previous plans to meet the wishes of our Allies. Accordingly, it was arranged that I should commence the offensive early in April on as great a scale as the extension of my front would permit, with due regard to defensive requirements on the rest of my line. The British attack, under the revised scheme, was, in the first instance, to be preparatory to a more decisive operation to be undertaken a little later by the French Armies, in the subsequent stages of which the British Forces were to co-operate to the fullest extent possible.

It was further agreed that if this combined offensive did not produce the full results hoped for within a reasonable time, the main efforts of the British Armies should then be transferred to Flanders as I had originally intended. In this case our Allies were to assist me by taking over as much as possible of the front held by my troops, and by carrying out, in combination with my Flanders attacks, such offensives on the French front as they might be able to undertake.

(6) My original plan for the preliminary operations on the Arras front fortunately fitted in well with what was required of me under the revised scheme, and the necessary preparations were already in progress. In order to give full effect, however, to the new rôle allotted to me in this revised scheme, preparations for the attack in Flanders had to be restricted for the time being to what could be done by such troops and other labour as could not in any case be made available on the Arras front. Moreover, the carrying out of any offensive this year on the Flanders front became contingent on the degree of success attained by the new plan.

(7) The chief events to note during the period of preparations for the spring offensive were the retirement of the enemy on the Arras-Soissons front and the revolution in Russia.

As regards the former, the redistribution of my forces necessitated by the enemy's withdrawal was easily made. The front decided on for my main attack on the Arras front lay almost altogether outside the area from which the enemy retired, and my plans and preparations on that side were not deranged thereby. His retirement, however, did enable the enemy to avoid the danger of some of his troops being cut off by the converging attacks arranged for, and to that extent reduced the results which might have been attained by my operation as originally planned. The rôle of the Fifth Army, too, had to be modified. Instead of attacking from the line of the Ancre simultaneously with the advance of the Third Army from the north-west, it had now to follow up the retiring enemy and establish itself afresh in front of the Hindenburg line to which the enemy withdrew. This line had been very strongly fortified, and sited with great care and skill to deny all advantages of position to any force attempting to attack it.

The adjustments necessary, however, to enable me to carry out the more subsidiary role which had been allotted to my Armies since the formation of my original plans, were comparatively simple, and caused no delay in my preparation for the spring offensive.

My task was, in the first instance, to attract as large hostile forces as possible to my front before the French offensive was launched, and my forces were still well placed for this purpose. The capture of such important tactical features as the Vimy Ridge and Monchy-le-Preux by the First and Third Armies, combined with pressure by the Fifth Army from the South against the front of the Hindenburg Line, could be relied on to use up many of the enemy's divisions and to compel him to reinforce largely on the threatened front.

The Russian revolution was of far more consequence in the approaching struggle. Even though the Russian Armies might still prove capable of co-operating in the later phases of the 1917 campaign, the revolution at once destroyed any prospect that may previously have existed of these Armies being able to combine with the spring offensive in the West by the earlier date which had been fixed for it in the new plans made since the conference of November, 1916. Moreover, as the Italian offensive also could not be ready until some time after the date fixed by the new arrangement with the French for our combined operation, the situation became very different from that contemplated at the Conference.

It was decided, however, to proceed with the spring offensive in the West notwithstanding these serious drawbacks. Even though the prospects of any far-reaching success were reduced, it would at least tend to relieve Russia of pressure on her front while she was trying to reorganise her Government; and if she should fail to reorganise it, the Allies in the West had little, if anything, to gain by delaying their blow.

Preparations were pushed on accordingly, the most urgent initial step being the development of adequate transport facilities.

### THE SPRING CAMPAIGN.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR THE ARRAS OFFENSIVE.

(8) When transport requirements on the front in question were first brought under consideration, the neighbourhood was served by two single lines of railway, the combined capacity of which was less than half our estimated requirements. Considerable constructional work, therefore, both of standard and narrow gauge railway, had to be undertaken to meet our programme. Roads also had to be improved and adapted to the circumstances for which they were required, and preparations made to carry them forward rapidly as our troops advanced.

For this latter purpose considerable use was made both in this and in the later offensives of plank roads. These were built chiefly of heavy beech slabs laid side by side, and were found of great utility, being capable of rapid construction over almost any nature of ground.

By these means the accumulation of the vast stocks of munitions and stores of all kinds required for our offensive, and their distribution to the troops, were made possible. The numberless other preparatory measures taken for the Somme offensive were again repeated, with such improvements and additions as previous

experience dictated. Hutting and other accommodation for the troops concentrated in the area had to be provided in great quantity. An adequate water supply had to be guaranteed, necessitating the erection of numerous pumping installations, the laying of many miles of pipe lines, and the construction of reservoirs.

Very extensive mining and tunnelling operations were carried out. In particular, advantage was taken of the existence of a large system of underground quarries and cellars in Arras and its suburbs to provide safe quarters for a great number of troops. Electric light was installed in these caves and cellars, which were linked together by tunnels, and the whole connected by long subways with our trench system east of the town.

A problem peculiar to the launching of a great offensive from a town arose from the difficulty of ensuring the punctual debouching of troops and the avoidance of confusion and congestion in the streets both before the assault and during the progress of the battle. This problem was met by the most careful and complete organisation of routes, reflecting the highest credit on the staffs concerned.

#### THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES.

(9) Prior to our offensive, the new German lines of defence on the British front ran in a general north-westerly direction from St. Quentin to the village of Thilloz-lez-Mofflaines, immediately south-east of Arras. Thence the German original trench systems continued northwards across the valley of the Scarpe River to the dominating Vimy Ridge, which, rising to a height of some 475 feet, commands a wide view to the south-east, east and north. Thereafter the opposing lines left the high ground, and, skirting the western suburbs of Lens, stretched northwards to the Channel across a flat country of rivers, dykes and canals, the dead level of which is broken by the line of hills stretching from Wytchaete north-eastwards to Passchendaele and Staden.

The front attacked by the Third and First Armies on the morning of the 9th April extended from just north of the village of Croisilles, south-east of Arras, to just south of Givenchy-en-Gohelle at the northern foot of Vimy Ridge, a distance of nearly 15 miles. It included between four and five miles of the northern end of the Hindenburg Line, which had been built to meet the experience of the Somme Battle.

Further north, the original German defences in this sector were arranged on the same principle as those which we had already captured further south. They comprised three separate trench systems, connected by a powerful switch line running from the Scarpe at Fampoux to Lievin, and formed a highly organised defensive belt some two to five miles in depth.

In addition, from three to six miles further east a new line of resistance was just approaching completion. This system, known as the Drocourt-Queant Line, formed a northern extension of the Hindenburg Line, with which it linked up at Queant.

#### FINAL PREPARATIONS.—FIGHT FOR AERIAL SUPREMACY.

(10) The great strength of these defences demanded very thorough artillery preparation, and this in turn could only be carried out effectively with the aid of our air services.

Our activity in the air, therefore, increased with the growing severity of our bombardment. A period of very heavy air fighting ensued, culminating in the days immediately preceding the attack in a struggle of the utmost intensity for local supremacy in the air. Losses on both sides were severe, but the offensive tactics most gallantly persisted in by our fighting aeroplanes secured our artillery machines from serious interference and enabled our guns to carry out their work effectively. At the same time bombing machines caused great damage and loss to the enemy by a constant succession of successful raids directed against his dumps, railways, aerodromes, and billets.

#### THE BOMBARDMENT.

(11) Three weeks prior to the attack the systematic cutting of the enemy's wire was commenced, while our heavy artillery searched the enemy's back areas and communications. Night firing, wire cutting, and bombardment of hostile trenches, strong points, and billets continued steadily and with increasing intensity on the whole battle front, till the days immediately preceding the attack when the general bombardment was opened.

During this latter period extensive gas discharges were carried out, and many successful raids were undertaken by day and night along the whole front to be attacked.

Organised bombardments took place also on other parts of our front, particularly in the Ypres sector.

#### THE TROOPS EMPLOYED.

(12) The main attack was entrusted to the Third and First Armies, under the command of General Sir E. H. H. Allenby, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., and General Sir H. S. Horne, K.C.B., respectively.

Four Army Corps were placed at the disposal of General Allenby, with an additional Army Corps Headquarters to be used as occasion might demand. Cavalry also was brought up into the Third Army area, in case the development of the battle should give rise to an opportunity for the employment of mounted troops on a considerable scale.

The attack of the First Army on the Vimy Ridge was carried out by the Canadian Corps. It was further arranged that, as soon as the Vimy Ridge had been secured, the troops in line on the left of the Canadian Corps should extend the area of attack northwards as far as the left bank of the Souchez River. An additional Army Corps was also at the disposal of the First Army in reserve.

The greater part of the divisions employed in the attack were composed of troops drawn from the English counties. These, with Scottish, Canadian, and South African troops, accomplished a most striking success.

My plans provided for the co-operation of the Fourth and Fifth Armies, under the command respectively of General Sir Henry S. Rawlinson, Bart., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., and General Sir H. de la P. Gough, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., as soon as the development of my main assault should permit of their effective action.

#### THE METHOD OF ATTACK.

(13) The attack on the front of the Third and First Armies was planned to be carried out by a succession of comparatively short advances the separate stages of which were

arranged to correspond approximately with the enemy's successive systems of defence. As each stage was reached a short pause was to take place, to enable the troops detailed for the attack on the next objective to form up for the assault.

Tanks, which on many occasions since their first use in September of last year had done excellent service, were attached to each Corps for the assault and again did admirable work in co-operation with our infantry. Their assistance was particularly valuable in the capture of hostile strong points, such as Telegraph Hill and the Harp, two powerful redoubts situated to the south of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines and Railway Triangle, a stronghold formed by the junction of the Lens and Douai Lines, east of Arras.

#### THE ARRAS BATTLE.

(14) The general attack on the 9th April was launched at 5.30 a.m. under cover of a most effective artillery barrage. Closely following the tornado of our shell fire, our gallant infantry poured like a flood across the German lines, overwhelming the enemy's garrisons.

Within forty minutes of the opening of the battle, practically the whole of the German front line system on the front attacked had been stormed and taken. Only on the extreme left fierce fighting was still taking place for the possession of the enemy's trenches on the slopes of Hill 145 at the northern end of the Vimy Ridge.

At 7.30 a.m. the advance was resumed against the second objectives. Somewhat greater opposition was now encountered, and at the hour at which these objectives were timed to have been captured strong parties of the enemy were still holding out on the high ground north of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines, known as Observation Ridge, and in Railway Triangle.

North of the Scarpe, North-country and Scottish Territorial troops, attacking east of Roclincourt, were met by heavy machine-gun fire. Their advance was delayed, but not checked. On the left, the Canadians rapidly overran the German positions, and by 9.30 a.m., in spite of difficult going over wet and sticky ground, had carried the village of Les Tilleuls and La Folie Farm.

By 12 noon men from the Eastern counties of England had captured Observation Ridge and, with the exception of Railway Triangle, the whole of our second objectives were in our possession, from south of Neuville Vitasse, stormed by London Territorials, to north of La Folie Farm. A large number of prisoners had already been taken, including practically a whole battalion of the 162nd German Regiment at the Harp.

Meanwhile our artillery had begun to move forward to positions from which they could support our attack upon our third objectives. The enemy's determined resistance at Observation Ridge, however, had delayed the advance of our batteries in this area. The bombardment of the German third line on this front had consequently to be carried out at long range, with the result that the enemy's wire was not well cut.

None the less, when the advance was resumed shortly after mid-day, great progress was made all along the line. In the course of this attack many of the enemy's battery positions were captured, together with a large number of guns.

South of the Scarpe, Manchester and Liverpool troops took St. Martin-sur-Cojeul, and our line was carried forward between that point and Feuchy Chapel on the Arras-Cambrai road. Here a counter-attack was repulsed at 2 p.m., and at about the same hour Scottish troops carried Railway Triangle, after a long struggle. Thereafter this division continued their advance rapidly and stormed Feuchy village, making a breach in the German third line. An attempt to widen this breach, and to advance beyond it in the direction of Monchy-le-Preux, was held up for the time by the condition of the enemy's wire.

North of the Scarpe our success was even more complete. Troops from Scotland and South Africa, who had already stormed St. Laurent Blagny, captured Athies. They then gave place, in accordance with programme, to an English Division, who completed their task by the capture of Fampoux village and Hyderabad Redoubt, breaking another wide gap in the German third line system. The North-country troops on their left seized the strong work known as the Point du Jour, in the face of strong hostile resistance from the German switch line to the north.

Further north, the Canadian Divisions, with an English brigade in the centre of their attack, completed the capture of the Vimy Ridge from Commandant's House to Hill 145, in spite of considerable opposition, especially in the neighbourhood of Thelus and the high ground north of this village. These positions were taken by 1 p.m., and early in the afternoon our final objectives in this area had been gained. Our troops then dug themselves in on the eastern side of Farbus Wood and along the steep eastern slopes of the ridge west and north-west of Farbus, sending out cavalry and infantry patrols in the direction of Willerval and along the front of their position.

The left Canadian Division, meanwhile, had gradually fought their way forward on Hill 145, in the face of a very desperate resistance. The enemy defended this dominating position with great obstinacy, and his garrison, reinforced from dug-outs and underground tunnels, launched frequent counter-attacks. In view of the severity of the fighting, it was decided to postpone the attack upon the crest line until the following day.

At the end of the day, therefore, our troops were established deeply in the enemy's positions on the whole front of attack. We had gained a firm footing in the enemy's third line on both banks of the Scarpe, and had made an important breach in the enemy's last fully completed line of defence.

During the afternoon cavalry had been brought up to positions east of Arras, in readiness to be sent forward should our infantry succeed in widening this breach sufficiently for the operations of mounted troops. South of Feuchy, however, the unbroken wire of the German third line constituted a complete barrier to a cavalry attack, while the commanding positions held by the enemy on Monchy-le-Preux Hill blocked the way of advance along the Scarpe. The main body of our mounted troops were accordingly withdrawn in the evening to positions just west of the town. Smaller bodies of cavalry were employed effectively during the afternoon on the right bank of the Scarpe to maintain touch with our

troops north of the river, and captured a number of prisoners and guns.

#### THE ADVANCE CONTINUED.

(15) For some days prior to the 9th April the weather had been fine, but on the morning of that day heavy showers had fallen, and in the evening the weather definitely broke. Thereafter for many days it continued stormy, with heavy falls of snow and squalls of wind and rain. These conditions imposed great hardships on our troops and greatly hampered operations. The heavy snow, in particular, interfered with reliefs, and rendered all movements of troops and guns slow and difficult. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of the resultant delay in bringing up our guns, at a time when the enemy had not yet been able to assemble his reserves, or to calculate the influence which a further period of fine weather might have had upon the course of the battle.

North of the Scarpe little remained to be done to complete the capture of our objectives. South of the river we still required to gain the remainder of the German third line and Monchy-le-Preux. Despite the severity of the weather, our troops set themselves with the utmost gallantry to the accomplishment of these tasks.

During the night English troops made considerable progress through the gap in the German defences east of Feuchy and occupied the northern slopes of Orange Hill, south-east of the village.

Throughout the morning of the 10th April every effort was made to gain further ground through this gap, and our troops succeeded in reaching the enclosures north-west of Monchy-le-Preux.

At noon the advance became general, and the capture of the whole of the enemy's third line system south of the Scarpe was completed. The progress of our right beyond this line was checked by machine-gun fire from the villages of Heninel, Wancourt, and Guemappe, with which our artillery were unable to deal effectively. Between the Arras-Cambrai Road and the Scarpe English and Scottish troops pushed on as far as the western edge of Monchy-le-Preux. Here our advance was held up as a result of the unavoidable weakness of our artillery support, and for the same reason an attempt to pass cavalry south and north of Monchy-le-Preux and along the left bank of the Scarpe proved impossible in the face of the enemy's machine-gun fire.

Meanwhile, on the left flank of our battle front the Canadians had renewed their attack at 4 p.m. on the portion of Hill 145 still remaining in the enemy's possession, and captured it after sharp fighting, together with over 200 prisoners and a number of trench mortars and machine guns.

#### MONCHY-LE-PREUX.

(16) Heavy fighting, in which cavalry again took part, continued south of the Scarpe on the 11th April. Two English infantry brigades, acting in co-operation with cavalry, attacked Monchy-le-Preux at 5 a.m., and, after hard fighting in which tanks arrived at an opportune moment, carried the position. As our men pushed through the village, the enemy was seen retreating eastwards over the open, and many casualties were inflicted on him by our machine guns. By 9 a.m. the whole of Monchy-le-

Preux was in our hands, with a number of prisoners. During the afternoon and evening several determined counter-attacks were beaten off by our infantry and cavalry, assisted by the fire of our artillery.

On other parts of the front our attacks had to be made across open forward slopes, which were swept from end to end by the enemy's machine guns. The absence of adequate artillery support again made itself felt, and little ground was gained.

In combination with this attack on the Third Army front, the Fifth Army launched an attack at 4.30 a.m. on the 11th April against the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. The Australian and West Riding Battalions engaged showed great gallantry in executing a very difficult attack across a wide extent of open country. Considerable progress was made, and parties of Australian troops, preceded by tanks, penetrated the German positions as far as Riencourt-lez-Cagnicourt. The obstinacy of the enemy's resistance, however, in Heninel and Wancourt, which held up the advance of the Third Army at these points, prevented the troops of the two Armies from joining hands, and the attacking troops of the Fifth Army were obliged to withdraw to their original line.

#### HENINEL, WANCOURT, AND THE SOUCHEZ RIVER.

(17) On the 12th April the relief of a number of Divisions most heavily engaged was commenced, and on the same day the cavalry were withdrawn to areas west of Arras. Great efforts were made to bring forward guns, and, in spite of the difficulties presented by weather and ground, several batteries of howitzers and heavy guns reached positions in rear of the old German third line.

On this day our attacks upon Heninel and Wancourt were renewed, and our troops succeeded in carrying both villages, as well as in completing the capture of the Hindenburg Line for some 2,000 yards south of the Cojeul River. North of the Scarpe attacks were made against Roeux Village and the chemical works near Roeux Station, and proved the commencement of many days of fierce and stubbornly-contested fighting.

On our left flank operations of the First Army astride the Souchez River met with complete success. Attacks were delivered simultaneously at 5 a.m. on the 12th April by English and Canadian troops against the two small hills known as the Pimple and the Boisen-Hache, situated on either side of the Souchez River. Both of these positions were captured, with a number of prisoners and machine guns. Steps were at once taken to consolidate our gains and patrols were pushed forward to maintain touch with the enemy.

#### WITHDRAWAL OF THE ENEMY.

(18) The results of this last success at once declared themselves. Prior to its accomplishment there had been many signs that the enemy was preparing to make strong counter-attacks from the direction of Givenchy and Hirondelle Woods to recover the Vimy Ridge. The positions captured on the 12th April commanded both these localities, and he was therefore compelled to abandon the undertaking. His attitude in this neighbourhood forthwith ceased to be aggressive, and indications of an

immediate withdrawal from the areas commanded by the Vimy Ridge multiplied rapidly.

The withdrawal commenced on the morning of the 13th April. Before noon on that day Canadian patrols had succeeded in occupying the southern portion of Givenchy-en-Gohelle, had pushed through Petit Vimy, and had reached the cross-roads 500 yards north-east of the village. That afternoon English patrols north of the Souchez River crossed No Man's Land and entered Angres, while Canadian troops completed the occupation of Givenchy-en-Gohelle and the German trench system east of it. Further south our troops seized Petit Vimy and Vimy, and Willerval and Bailleul were occupied in turn.

Our patrols, backed by supports, continued to push forward on the 14th April, keeping contact with the retreating enemy, but avoiding heavy fighting. By mid-day the general line of our advanced troops ran from a point about 1,000 yards east of Bailleul, through Mont Foret Quarries and the Farbus-Mericourt road, to the eastern end of Hirondelle Wood. North of the river we had reached Riaumont Wood and the southern outskirts of Lievin. By the evening the whole of the town of Lievin was in our hands, and our line ran thence to our old front line north of the Double Crassier. Great quantities of ammunition of all calibres, as well as several guns, and stores and materials of every kind were abandoned by the enemy in his retreat.

Meanwhile, on the 13th and 14th April, fighting south of the Scarpe continued, and some progress was made in the face of strong hostile resistance. On the right of our attack our troops fought their way eastwards down the Hindenburg Line till they had reached a point opposite Fontaine-lez-Croisilles, about seven miles south-east of Arras. In the centre a Northumberland brigade, advancing in open order, carried the high ground east of Heninel and captured Wancourt Tower. Three counter-attacks against this position were successfully driven off, and further ground was gained on the ridge south-east of Heninel.

On other parts of our line heavy counter-attacks developed on the 14th April, the most violent of which were directed against Monchyle-Preux. The struggle for this important position was exceedingly fierce. The enemy's attacks were supported by the full weight of his available artillery, and at one time parties of his infantry reached the eastern defences of the village. To the south and the north, however, our posts held their ground, and in the end the enemy was completely repulsed, with great loss.

#### RESULTS OF FIRST ATTACKS.

(19) Our advance had now reached a point at which the difficulty of maintaining communications and of providing adequate artillery support for our infantry began seriously to limit our progress. Moreover, the enemy had had time to bring up reserves and to recover from the temporary disorganisation caused by our first attacks. Both the increasing strength of his resistance and the weight and promptness of his counter-attacks made it evident that, except at excessive cost, our success could not be developed further without a return to more deliberate methods.

Already a very remarkable success had been gained, whether measured by our captures in territory, prisoners and guns, or judged by the

number of German divisions attracted to the front of our attack.

At the end of six days' fighting our front had been rolled four miles farther east, and all the dominating features, forming the immediate objects of my attack, which I considered it desirable to hold before transferring the bulk of my resources to the north, had passed into our possession. So far, therefore, as my own plans were concerned, it would have been possible to have stopped the Arras offensive at this point, and, while maintaining a show of activity sufficient to mislead the enemy as to my intentions, to have diverted forthwith to the northern theatre of operations the troops, labour and material required to complete my preparations there.

At this time, however, the French offensive was on the point of being launched, and it was important that the full pressure of the British offensive should be maintained in order to assist our Allies and that we might be ready to seize any opportunity which might follow their success. Accordingly, active preparations were undertaken to renew my attack, but, in view both of the weather and of the strength already developed by the enemy, it was necessary to postpone operations until my communications had been re-established and my artillery dispositions completed. The following week, therefore, saw little change in our front, though the labours of our troops continued incessantly under conditions demanding the highest qualities of courage and endurance.

So far as my object was to draw the enemy's reserves from the front of the French attack, much had already been accomplished. In addition to the capture of more than 13,000 prisoners and over 200 guns, a wide gap had been driven through the German prepared defences. The enemy had been compelled to pour in men and guns to stop this gap, while he worked feverishly to complete the Drocourt-Queant Line. Ten days after the opening of our offensive the number of German infantry engaged on the front of our attack had been nearly doubled, in spite of the casualties the enemy's troops had sustained. The massing of such large forces within the range of our guns, and the frequent and costly counter-attacks rendered necessary by our successes, daily added to the enemy's losses.

#### SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS.

(20) In addition to the main attack east of Arras, successful minor operations were carried out on the 9th April by the Fourth and Fifth Armies, by which a number of fortified villages covering the Hindenburg Line were taken, with some hundreds of prisoners, and considerable progress was made in the direction of St. Quentin and Cambrai.

Throughout the remainder of the month the two Southern Armies maintained constant activity. By a succession of minor enterprises our line was advanced closer and closer to the Hindenburg Line, and the enemy was kept under the constant threat of more serious operations on this front.

The only offensive action taken by the enemy during this period in this area occurred on the 15th April. At 4.30 a.m. on that morning the enemy attacked our positions from Hermies to Noreuil with considerable forces, estimated at not less than sixteen battalions. Heavy fighting took place, in the course of which parties of German infantry succeeded in

penetrating our lines at Lagnicourt for some distance, and at one time reached our advanced battery positions. By 1 p.m., however, the whole of our original line had been re-established, and the enemy left some seventeen hundred dead on the field as well as 360 prisoners in our hands. During the attack our heavy batteries remained in action at very close range and materially assisted in the enemy's repulse.

#### THE ATTACK RESUMED.—GUEMAPPE AND GAVRELLE.

(21) On the 16th April our Allies launched their main offensive on the Aisne, and shortly after that date the weather on the Arras front began to improve. Our preparations made more rapid progress, and plans were made to deliver our next attack on the 21st April. High winds and indifferent visibility persisted, however, and so interfered with the work of our artillery and aeroplanes that it was found necessary to postpone operations for a further two days. Meanwhile local fighting took place frequently, and our line was improved slightly at a number of points.

At 4.45 a.m. on the 23rd April British troops attacked on a front of about nine miles from Croisilles to Gavrelle. At the same hour a minor operation was undertaken by us south-west of Lens.

On the main front of attack good progress was made at first at almost all points. By 10 a.m. the remainder of the high ground west of Cherisy had been captured by the attacking English brigades, and Scottish troops had pushed through Guemappe. East of Monchyle-Preux British battalions gained the western slopes of the rising ground known as Infantry Hill. North of the Scarpe Highland Territorials were engaged in heavy fighting on the western outskirts of Roeux Wood and the chemical works. On their left English county troops had reached the buildings west of Roeux Station and gained the line of their objectives on the western slopes of Greenland Hill, north of the railway. On the left of our main attack the Royal Naval Division had made rapid progress against Gavrelle, and the whole of the village was already in their hands.

At mid-day and during the afternoon counter-attacks in great force developed all along the line, and were repeated by the enemy with the utmost determination, regardless of the heavy losses inflicted by our fire. Many of these counter-attacks were repulsed after severe fighting, but on our right our troops were ultimately compelled by weight of numbers to withdraw from the ridge west of Cherisy and from Guemappe. North of the Scarpe fierce fighting continued for the possession of Roeux, the chemical works, and the station to the north, but without producing any lasting change in the situation. Not less than five separate counter-attacks were made by the enemy on this day against Gavrelle, and on the 24th April he thrice repeated his attempts. All these attacks were completely crushed by our artillery barrage and machine-gun fire.

As soon as it was clear that the whole of our objectives for the 23rd April had not been gained, orders were issued to renew the advance at 6 p.m. In this attack Guemappe was retaken, but further south our troops were at once met by a counter-attack in force, and made no progress. Fighting of a more or less intermittent character continued in this area all night.

In the early morning of the 24th April the enemy's resistance weakened all along the front of our attack south of the Arras-Cambrai Road. Our troops reaped the reward of their persistence, and gained their objectives of the previous day without serious opposition.

After twenty-four hours of very fierce fighting, therefore, in which the severity of the enemy's casualties were in proportion to the strength and determination of his numerous counter-attacks, we remained in possession of the villages of Guemappe and Gavrelle, as well as of the whole of the high ground overlooking Fontaine-lez-Croisilles and Cherisy. Very appreciable progress had also been made east of Monchy-le-Preux, on the left bank of the Scarpe, and on Greenland Hill.

In the minor operations south-west of Lens Cornish troops established themselves on the railway loop east of Cité des Petit Bois, and succeeded in maintaining their position in spite of numerous hostile counter-attacks.

In the course of these operations of the 23rd and 24th April we captured a further 3,000 prisoners and a few guns. On the battle field, which remained in our possession, great numbers of German dead testified to the costliness of the enemy's obstinate defence.

#### POLICY OF SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS AT ARRAS.

(22) The strength of the opposition encountered in the course of this attack was in itself evidence that my offensive was fulfilling the part designed for it in the Allied plans. As the result of the fighting which had already taken place twelve German divisions had been withdrawn exhausted from the battle or were in process of relief. A month after the commencement of our offensive the number of German divisions so withdrawn had increased to twenty-three. On the other hand, the strengthening of the enemy's forces opposite my front necessarily brought about for the time being the characteristics of a wearing-out battle.

On the Aisne and in Champagne, also, the French offensive had met with very obstinate resistance. It was becoming clear that many months of heavy fighting would be necessary before the enemy's troops could be reduced to a condition which would permit of a more rapid advance. None the less, very considerable results had already been achieved, and our Allies continued their efforts against the long plateau north of the Aisne traversed by the Chemin des Dames.

In order to assist our Allies, I arranged that until their object had been attained I would continue my operations at Arras. The necessary readjustment of troops, guns and material required to complete my preparations for my northern operations was accordingly postponed, and preparations were undertaken for a repetition of my attacks on the Arras front until such time as the results of the French offensive should have declared themselves.

#### THE FINAL ARRAS ATTACKS.—ARLEUX.

(23) The first of these attacks was delivered on the 28th April on a front of about eight miles north of Monchy-le-Preux. With a view to economising my troops, my objectives were shallow, and for a like reason, and also in order to give the appearance of an attack on a more imposing scale, demonstrations were continued southwards to the Arras-Cambrai road and northwards to the Souchez River.

The assault was launched at 4.25 a.m. by British and Canadian troops, and resulted in heavy fighting, which continued throughout the greater part of the 28th and 29th April. The enemy delivered counter-attack after counter-attack with the greatest determination and most lavish expenditure of men. Our positions at Gavrelle alone were again attacked seven times with strong forces, and on each occasion the enemy was repulsed with great loss.

In spite of the enemy's desperate resistance, the village of Arleux-en-Gohelle was captured by Canadian troops, after bitter hand-to-hand fighting, and English troops made further progress in the neighbourhood of Oppy, on Greenland Hill, and between Monchy-le-Preux and the Scarpe. In addition to these advances, another 1,000 German prisoners were taken by us in the course of the two days' fighting.

#### FRESNOY.

(24) Five days later, at 3.45 a.m. on the 3rd May, another attack was undertaken by us of a similar nature to that of the 28th April, which in the character of the subsequent fighting it closely resembled.

In view of important operations which the French were to carry out on the 5th May, I arranged for a considerable extension of my active front. While the Third and First Armies attacked from Fontaine-lez-Croisilles to Fresnoy, the Fifth Army launched a second attack upon the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. This gave a total front of over sixteen miles.

Along practically the whole of this front our troops broke into the enemy's positions. Australian troops carried the Hindenburg Line east of Bullecourt. Eastern county battalions took Cherisy. Other English troops entered Roeux and captured the German trenches south of Fresnoy. Canadian battalions found Fresnoy full of German troops assembled for a hostile attack which was to have been delivered at a later hour. After hard fighting, in which the enemy lost heavily, the Canadians carried the village, thereby completing an unbroken series of successes.

Later in the day, strong hostile counter-attacks once more developed, accompanied by an intense bombardment with heavy guns. Fierce fighting lasted throughout the afternoon and far into the night, and our troops were obliged to withdraw from Roeux and Cherisy. They maintained their hold, however, on Fresnoy and the Hindenburg Line east of Bullecourt, as well as upon certain trench elements west of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles and south of the Scarpe.

Nine hundred and sixty-eight prisoners, including 29 officers, were captured by us in these operations.

#### SITUATION REVIEWED.

(25) On the 5th May the French delivered their attack against the Chemin des Dames and successfully achieved the objects they had in view. This brought to an end the first half of our general plan, and marked the close of the spring campaign on the Western front. The decisive action which it had been hoped might follow from the French offensive had not yet proved capable of realisation; but the magnitude of the results actually achieved strengthened our belief in its ultimate possibility.



On the British front alone, in less than one month's fighting, we had captured over 19,500 prisoners, including over 400 officers, and had also taken 257 guns, including 98 heavy guns, with 464 machine guns, 227 trench mortars, and immense quantities of other war material. Our line had been advanced to a greatest depth exceeding five miles on a total front of over twenty miles, representing a gain of some sixty square miles of territory. A great improvement had been effected in the general situation of our troops on the front attacked, and the capture of the Vimy Ridge had removed a constant menace to the security of our line.

I was at length able to turn my full attention and to divert the bulk of my resources to the development of my northern plan of operations. Immediate instructions were given by me to General Sir Herbert Plumer, commanding the Second Army, to be prepared to deliver an attack on the 7th June against the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, the capture of which, owing to the observation from it over our positions farther north in the Ypres salient, was an essential preliminary to the completion of the preparations for my principal offensive east and north of Ypres.

In order to assist me to concentrate troops on the new scene of operations, it was agreed that the French should take over once more a portion of the front taken over by me from them at the commencement of the year. This relief was completed without incident on the 20th May, the French extending their front to the Omignon River.

#### ARRAS ACTIVITY MAINTAINED.

(26) A necessary part of the preparations for the Messines attack was the maintenance of activity on the Arras front, sufficient to keep the enemy in doubt as to whether our offensive there would be proceeded with. I therefore directed the Armies concerned to continue active operations with such forces as were left to them. The required effect was to be attained by a careful selection of important objectives of a limited nature, deliberate preparation of attack, concentration of artillery and economy of infantry.

Importance was to be given to these operations by combining them with feint attacks, and by the adoption of various measures and devices to extend the apparent front of attack. These measures would seem to have had considerable success, if any weight may be attached to the enemy's reports concerning them. They involved, however, the disadvantage that I frequently found myself unable to deny German accounts of the bloody repulse of extensive British attacks which in fact never took place.

#### BULLECOURT AND ROEUX.

(27) To secure the footing gained by the Australians in the Hindenburg Line on the 3rd May it was advisable that Bullecourt should be captured without loss of time. During the fortnight following our attack, fighting for the possession of this village went on unceasingly; while the Australian troops in the sector of the Hindenburg Line to the east beat off counter-attack after counter-attack. The defence of this 1,000 yards of double trench line, exposed to counter-attack on every side, through two weeks of almost constant fighting, deserves to be remembered as a most gallant feat of arms.

On the morning of the 7th May, English troops gained a footing in the south-east corner of Bullecourt. Thereafter gradual progress was made, in the face of the most obstinate resistance, and on the 17th May London and West Riding Territorials completed the capture of the village.

On other parts of the Arras front also heavy fighting took place, in which we both lost and gained ground.

On the 8th May the enemy regained Fresnoy Village. Three days later London troops captured Cavalry Farm, while other English battalions carried Roeux Cemetery and the chemical works. Further ground was gained in this neighbourhood on the 12th May, and on the night of the 13th-14th our troops captured Roeux.

On the 20th May fighting was commenced for the sector of the Hindenburg Line lying between Bullecourt and our front line west of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. Steady progress was made, until by the 16th June touch had been established by us between these two points. Ten days prior to this event, on the 5th and 6th June, Scottish and Northcountry regiments captured the German positions on the western face of Greenland Hill and beat off two counter-attacks.

In these different minor operations over 1,500 prisoners were captured by us.

#### THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN.

##### PREPARATIONS FOR THE MESSINES ATTACK.

(28) The preparations for the attack on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge were necessarily as elaborate as those undertaken before either the Somme or the Arras Battles, and demanded an equal amount of time, forethought, and labour. They were carried out, moreover, under circumstances of exceptional difficulty, for the enemy's positions completely overlooked our lines, and much of the area behind them.

Neither labour nor material were available in sufficient quantity for the Messines offensive until the prior demands of the Arras operations had been satisfied. Nevertheless, our preparations in the northern area had been proceeded with steadily, so far as the means at our disposal would allow, ever since the formation of definite plans in the late autumn of 1916.

A large railway programme had been commenced, and as soon as it was possible to divert larger supplies northwards, work was pushed on with remarkable speed. Great progress was made with road construction, and certain roads were selected for extension as soon as our objectives should be gained. Forward dumps of material were made for this purpose, and in the days following the 7th June roads were carried forward with great rapidity to Messines, Wytschaete, and Oostaverne, across country so completely destroyed by shell fire that it was difficult to trace where the original road had run.

A special problem arose in connection with the water supply. Pipe lines were taken well forward from existing lakes, from catch pits constructed on the Kemmel Hills, and from sterilizing barges on the Lys. Provision was made for the rapid extension of these lines. By the 15th June they had reached Messines, Wytschaete, and the Dam Strasse, and were supplying water at the rate of between 450,000 and 600,000 gallons daily.

In addition, arrangements were made for the transport of water, rations, and stores by pack animals and carrying parties. So efficiently did these arrangements work that during the attack water reached the troops within twenty to forty minutes of the taking of new positions, while in one case carrying parties arrived with packs, and dumps were formed within four minutes of the capture of the objective.

#### UNDERGROUND WARFARE.

(29) A special feature of the attack on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, and one unique in warfare, was furnished by the explosion of nineteen deep mines at the moment of assault.

The inception of a deep mining offensive on the Second Army front dated from July, 1915; but the proposal to conduct offensive mining on a grand scale was not definitely adopted till January, 1916. From that date onwards, as the necessary labour became available, deep mining for offensive purposes gradually developed, in spite of great difficulties from water-bearing strata and active counter-mining by the enemy.

In all, twenty-four mines were constructed, four of which were outside the front ultimately selected for our offensive, while one other was lost as the result of a mine blown by the enemy. Many of these mines had been completed for twelve months prior to our offensive, and constant and anxious work was needed to ensure their safety. The enemy also had a deep mining system, and was aware of his danger.

At Hill 60 continuous underground fighting took place for over ten months prior to our attack, and only by the greatest skill, persistence and disregard of danger on the part of our tunnellers were the two mines laid by us at this point saved from destruction. At the time of our offensive the enemy was known to be driving a gallery which ultimately would have cut into the gallery leading to the Hill 60 mines. By careful listening it was judged that if our offensive took place on the date arranged the enemy's gallery would just fail to reach us. So he was allowed to proceed.

At the Bluff, also, underground fighting went on incessantly. Between the 16th January, 1916, and the 7th June, 1917, twenty-seven camouflets were blown in this locality alone, of which seventeen were blown by us and ten by the enemy. After the 1st February, 1917, the enemy showed signs of great uneasiness, and blew several heavy mines and camouflets in the endeavour to interfere with our working. One of these blows destroyed our gallery to the Spanbroekmolen mine. For three months this mine was cut off, and was only recovered by strenuous efforts on the day preceding the Messines attack. The Spanbroekmolen mine formed the largest crater of any of those blown, the area of complete obliteration having a diameter of over 140 yards.

A total of 8,000 yards of gallery were driven in the construction of these mines, and over one million pounds of explosives were used in them. The simultaneous discharge of such an enormous aggregate of explosive is without parallel in land mining, and no actual experience existed of the effects which would be produced. In these circumstances, the fact that no hitch of any kind occurred in the operation, and that the effects of the discharges were precisely such as had been foretold, reflects the very highest credit upon those respon-

sible for the planning and construction of the mines.

#### THE MESSINES BATTLE.—DESCRIPTION OF FRONT.

(30) The group of hills known as the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge lies about midway between the towns of Armentieres and Ypres. Situated at the eastern end of the range of abrupt, isolated hills which divides the valleys of the River Lys and the River Yser, it links up that range with the line of rising ground which from Wytschaete stretches north-eastwards to the Ypres-Menin road, and then northwards past Passchendaele to Staden.

The village of Messines, situated on the southern spur of the ridge, commands a wide view of the valley of the Lys, and enfiladed the British lines to the south. North-west of Messines the village of Wytschaete, situated at the point of the salient and on the highest part of the ridge, from its height of about 260 feet commands even more completely the town of Ypres and the whole of the old British positions in the Ypres salient.

#### THE GERMAN DEFENCES.

(31) The German front line skirted the western foot of the ridge in a deep curve from the River Lys opposite Frelinghien to a point just short of the Menin road. The line of trenches then turned north-west past Hooge and Wieltje, following the slight rise known as the Pilckem Ridge to the Yser Canal at Boesinghe. The enemy's second-line system followed the crest of the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, forming an inner curve.

In addition to these defences of the ridge itself, two chord positions had been constructed across the base of the salient from south to north. The first lay slightly to the east of the hamlet of Oostaverne, and was known as the Oostaverne Line. The second chord position, known as the Warneton Line, crossed the Lys at Warneton, and ran roughly parallel to the Oostaverne Line a little more than a mile to the east of it.

The natural advantages of the position were exceptional, and during more than two years of occupation the enemy had devoted the greatest skill and industry to developing them to the utmost. Besides the villages of Messines and Wytschaete, which were organised as main centres of resistance, numerous woods, farms and hamlets lent themselves to the construction of defensive points.

Captured documents and the statements of prisoners proved the importance attached by the enemy to the position. His troops in the line were told that the coming battle might well prove decisive, and that they were to resist to the last. They were assured that strong reserves were available to come to their assistance and to restore the battle should the British attack succeed in penetrating their lines.

#### PREPARATIONS COMPLETED.

(32) The final preparations for the assault on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge were completed punctually, and with a thoroughness of organisation and attention to detail which is beyond praise. The excellence of the arrangements reflects the highest credit on the Second Army Commander, General Sir Herbert Plumer, and his Staff, as well as on the Com-

manders and Staffs of the various formations engaged.

The actual front selected for attack extended from a point opposite St. Yves to Mount Sorrel inclusive, a distance, following the curve of the salient, of between nine and ten miles. Our final objective was the Oosttaverne Line, which lay between these two points. The greatest depth of our attack was therefore about two and a half miles.

As the date for the attack drew near fine weather favoured the work of our airmen, and artillery and wire cutting, the bombardment of the enemy's defences and strong points, and the shelling of his communications, billets, and back areas continued steadily. Counter-battery work was undertaken with great energy and with striking success.

#### THE ASSAULT.

(33) At 3.10 a.m. on the 7th June the nineteen mines were exploded simultaneously beneath the enemy's defences. At the same moment our guns opened and our infantry assault was launched. Covered by a concentrated bombardment, which overwhelmed the enemy's trenches and to a great extent neutralised his batteries, our troops swept over the German foremost defences all along the line.

The attack proceeded from the commencement in almost exact accordance with the timetable. The enemy's first trench system offered little resistance to our advance, and the attacking brigades—English, Irish, Australian, and New Zealand—pressed on up the slopes of the ridge to the assault of the crest line.

At 5.30 a.m. Ulster regiments had already reached their second objectives, including l'Enfer Hill and the southern defences of Wytschaete, while on their left a South of Ireland Division fought their way through Wytschaete Wood. At 7 a.m. New Zealand troops had captured Messines. Men from the western counties of England had cleared the Grand Bois. Other English county regiments had reached the Dam Strasse, and all along the battle front our second objectives had been gained.

Only at a few isolated points did the resistance of the enemy's infantry cause any serious delay. North-east of Messines our infantry were held up for a time by machine-gun fire from a strong point known as Fañny's Farm, but the arrival of a tank enabled our progress to be resumed. So rapid was the advance of our infantry, however, that only a few tanks could get forward in time to come into action. Heavy fighting took place in Wytschaete, and further north London troops encountered a serious obstacle in another strong point known as the White Chateau. This redoubt was captured while the morning was yet young, and before mid-day the two Irish Divisions had fought their way side by side through the defences of Wytschaete.

Our troops then began to move down the eastern slopes of the ridge, and the divisions in the centre of our attack who had farthest to go, gradually drew level with those on either flank. About 2,000 prisoners had already been brought in, and Australian and English troops had reached the first of the enemy's guns. Our own guns had begun to move forward.

Further fighting took place in Ravine Wood, where English county regiments and London troops killed many Germans, and short-lived

resistance was encountered at other points among the many woods and farm houses. Bodies of the enemy continued to hold out in the eastern end of Battle Wood and in strong points constructed in the spoil banks of the Ypres-Comines Canal. Except at these points, our troops gained their final objectives on both flanks early in the afternoon. In the centre we had reached a position running approximately parallel to the Oosttaverne Line and from 400 to 800 yards to the west of it. The guns required for the attack upon this line had been brought forward, and the troops and tanks detailed to take part were moving up steadily. Meanwhile the bridges and roads leading out of the triangle formed by the River Lys and the canal were kept under the fire of our artillery.

The final attack began soon afterwards, and by 3.45 p.m. the village of Oosttaverne had been captured. At 4 p.m. troops from the northern and western counties of England entered the Oosttaverne Line east of the village and captured two batteries of German field guns. Half an hour later other English battalions broke through the enemy's position further north. Parties of the enemy were surrendering freely, and his casualties were reported to be very heavy. By the evening the Oosttaverne line had been taken, and our objectives had been gained.

The rapidity with which the attack had been carried through, and the destruction caused by our artillery, made it impossible at first to form more than a rough estimate of our captures. When the final reckoning had been completed, it was found that they included 7,200 prisoners, 67 guns, 94 trench mortars and 294 machine guns.

#### SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS.

(34) During the night our infantry consolidated the captured positions; while tanks patrolled the ground east of the Oosttaverne Line, and in the early morning of the 8th June assisted in the repulse of an enemy counter-attack up the Wambeke Valley. At 4 a.m. on the same morning our troops captured a small portion of German trench near Septieme Barn, where the enemy had resisted our first attack. That evening, at 7 p.m., after an intense bombardment, the enemy counter-attacked along practically the whole of our new line, but was repulsed at all points.

Consolidation and the establishment of advanced posts continued during the following four days, in the course of which Australian troops captured La Potterie Farm, south-east of Messines, and the hamlet of Gapaard was occupied.

Our progress on the right of the battle front made the enemy's positions between the Lys River and St. Yves very dangerous, and he now gradually began to evacuate them. Our patrols kept close touch with the enemy, and by the evening of the 14th June the whole of the old German front and support lines north of the Lys had passed into our possession.

That evening we again attacked south and east of Messines and on both sides of the Ypres-Comines Canal, and met with complete success. The strong points in which the enemy had held out north of the canal were captured, and our line was advanced on practically the whole front from the River Warnave to Klein Zillebeke.

By this operation the Second Army front was pushed forward as far as was then desirable. Henceforward our efforts in this area were directed to putting the line gained in a state of defence and establishing forward posts.

#### THE NORTHERN OPERATIONS.—PREPARATIONS RENEWED.

(35) As soon as this preliminary operation had been successfully accomplished, it became possible to take in hand our final dispositions for our main offensive east and north of Ypres. Owing to the great extent of front to be dealt with, the Fifth Army took over command of the front from Observatory Ridge to Boesinghe on the 10th June, and the whole of our available resources were directed to completing the preparations for the attack.

It had been agreed that French troops should take part in these operations, and should extend my left flank northwards beyond Boesinghe. The relief by British troops of the French troops holding the coast sector from St. Georges to the sea was accordingly arranged for, and was successfully completed ten days later. In the first week of July the Belgian troops holding the front from Boesinghe to Noordschoote were relieved by the First French Army, under the command of General Anothoine.

The various problems inseparable from the mounting of a great offensive, the improvement and construction of roads and railways, the provision of an adequate water supply and of accommodation for troops, the formation of dumps, the digging of dug-outs, subways and trenches, and the assembling and registering of guns, had all to be met and overcome in the new theatre of battle, under conditions of more than ordinary disadvantage.

On no previous occasion, not excepting the attack on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, had the whole of the ground from which we had to attack been so completely exposed to the enemy's observation. Even after the enemy had been driven from the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, he still possessed excellent direct observation over the salient from the east and south-east, as well as from the Pilckem Ridge to the north. Nothing existed at Ypres to correspond with the vast caves and cellars which proved of such value in the days prior to the Arras battle, and the provision of shelter for the troops presented a very serious problem.

The work of the Tunnelling Companies of the Royal Engineers deserves special mention in this connection. It was carried on under great difficulties, both from the unreliable nature of the ground and also from hostile artillery, which paid particular attention to all indications of mining activity on our part.

#### MINOR OPERATIONS CONTINUED.

(36) Meanwhile the policy of maintaining activity on other parts of my front was continued.

Further ground was gained on Greenland Hill, and on the 14th June British troops captured by a surprise attack the German trench lines on the crest of Infantry Hill, east of Monchy-le-Preux, with 175 prisoners. This important position had already been the scene of a great deal of fierce fighting, and during the following six weeks was frequently counter-attacked. Our advanced posts changed hands

frequently; but the principal line, giving the observation which lent importance to the position, remained consistently in our possession.

Early in May local attacks had been undertaken by Canadian troops in the neighbourhood of Souchez River, which formed the prelude to a long-sustained series of minor operations directed against the defence of Lens. Substantial progress was made in this area on the 5th and 19th June, and five days later North Midland troops captured an important position on the slopes of a small hill south-west of Lens, forcing the enemy to make a considerable withdrawal on both sides of the river. Canadian troops took La Coulotte on the 26th June, and by the morning of the 28th June had reached the outskirts of Avion.

On the evening of the 28th June a deliberate and carefully-thought-out scheme was put into operation by the First Army, to give the enemy the impression that he was being attacked on a twelve-mile front from Gavrelle to Hulluch.

Elaborate demonstrations were made on the whole of this front, accompanied by discharges of gas, smoke, and thermit, and a mock raid was successfully carried out south-east of Loos. At the same time real attacks were made, with complete success, by English troops on a front of 2,000 yards opposite Oppy, and by Canadian and North Midland troops on a front of two and a half miles astride the Souchez River. All our objectives were gained, including Eleu dit Leauvette and the southern half of Avion, with some 300 prisoners and a number of machine guns.

#### THE LOMBARTZYDE ATTACK.

(37) The appearance of British troops on the coast seems to have alarmed the enemy and caused him to launch a small counter-offensive.

The positions which we had taken over from the French in this area included a narrow strip of polder and dune, some two miles in length and from 600 and 1,200 yards in depth, lying on the right bank of the canalised Yser between the Plasschendaele Canal, south of Lombartzyde, and the coast. Midway between the Plasschendaele Canal and the sea these positions were divided into two parts by the dyke known as the Geleide Creek, which flows into the Yser south-west of Lombartzyde. If the enemy could succeed in driving us back across the canal and river on the whole of this front, he would render the defence of the sector much easier for him.

Early on the morning of the 10th July an intense bombardment was opened against these positions. Our defences, which consisted chiefly of breastworks built in the sand, were flattened, and all the bridges across the Yser below the Geleide Creek, as well as the bridges across the creek itself, were destroyed.

At 6.30 p.m. the enemy's infantry attacked, and the isolated garrison of our positions north of the Geleide Creek, consisting of troops from a Northamptonshire battalion and a Rifle battalion, were overwhelmed after an obstinate and most gallant resistance. Of these two battalions some 70 men and four officers succeeded during the nights of the 10th-11th and 11th-12th July in swimming across the Yser to our lines.

On the southern half of the point attacked, opposite Lombartzyde, the enemy also broke into our lines; but here, where our positions had greater depth, and communication across

the Yser was still possible, his troops were ejected by our counter-attack.

#### THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES.—PRELIMINARY STAGES.

(38). By this date the preparations for the combined Allied offensive were far advanced, and the initial stages of the battle had already begun.

A definite aerial offensive had been launched, and the effective work of our airmen once more enabled our batteries to carry out successfully a methodical and comprehensive artillery programme.

So effective was our counter-battery work, that the enemy commenced to withdraw his guns to places of greater security. On this account, and also for other reasons, the date of our attack, which had been fixed for the 25th July, was postponed for three days. This postponement enabled a portion of our own guns to be moved farther forward, and gave our airmen the opportunity to locate accurately the enemy's new battery positions. Subsequently a succession of days of bad visibility, combined with the difficulties experienced by our Allies in getting their guns into position in their new area, decided me to sanction a further postponement until the 31st July.

In addition to our artillery bombardment, gas was used extensively during the fortnight preceding the attack, and a number of highly successful raids were carried out along the whole front north of the Lys.

#### THE YSER CANAL CROSSED.

(39) As the date of the attack drew near, careful watch was maintained lest the enemy should endeavour to disarrange our plans by withdrawing to one of his rear lines of defence. On the 27th July the German forward defence system was found to be unoccupied on the northern portion of the Fifth Army front. British Guards and French troops seized the opportunity to cross the Yser Canal, and established themselves firmly in the enemy's first and support trenches on a front of about 2,000 yards east and north of Boesinghe. All hostile attempts to eject them failed, and during the night seventeen bridges were thrown across the canal by our troops.

This operation greatly facilitated the task of the Allied troops on this part of the battle front, to whose attack the Yser Canal had previously presented a formidable obstacle. Whether the withdrawal which made it possible was due to the desire of the German infantry to escape our bombardment, or to their fear that our attack would be inaugurated by the explosion of a new series of mines is uncertain.

#### PLAN OF FIRST ATTACK.

(40) The front of the Allied attack extended from the Lys River opposite Deulemont northwards to beyond Steenstraat, a distance of over fifteen miles, but the main blow was to be delivered by the Fifth Army on a front of about seven and a half miles, from the Zillebeke-Zandvoorde Road to Boesinghe, inclusive.

Covering the right of the Fifth Army, the task of the Second Army was to advance a short distance only. Its principal object at this stage was to increase the area threatened by the attack and so force the enemy to distribute the fire of his artillery. I had other tasks in view for it at a later period.

On the left of the Fifth Army the First French Army was to advance its right in close touch with the British forces and secure them from counter-attack from the north. This entailed an advance of considerable depth over difficult country, and ultimately involved the capture of the whole peninsula lying between the Yser Canal and the floods of the St. Jansbeek and the Martjevaart.

The plan of attack on the Fifth Army front was to advance in a series of bounds, with which the right of the First French Army was to keep step. These bounds were arranged so as to suit as far as possible both the position of the principal lines of the enemy's defences and the configuration of the ground.

It was hoped that in this first attack our troops would succeed in establishing themselves on the crest of the high ground east of Ypres, on which a strong flank could be formed for subsequent operations, and would also secure the crossings of the Steenbeek. For this purpose four Army Corps were placed at the disposal of General Sir Hubert Gough.

#### THE BATTLE OPENED.

(41) At 3.50 a.m. on the morning of the 31st July the combined attack was launched. English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh troops delivered the main assault on the British front.

Preceded at zero hour by discharges of thermit and oil drums, and covered by an accurate artillery barrage from a great number of guns, the Allied infantry entered the German lines at all points. The enemy's barrage was late and weak, and our casualties were light.

On the greater part of the front of the main attack the resistance of the German infantry was quickly overcome and rapid progress was made. The difficult country east of Ypres, where the Menin Road crosses the crest of the Wytshaete-Passchendaele Ridge, formed, however, the key to the enemy's position, and here the most determined opposition was encountered. None the less, the attacking brigades, including a number of Lancashire battalions, regiments from all parts of England, and a few Scottish and Irish battalions, fought their way steadily forward through Shrewsbury Forest and Sanctuary Wood and captured Stirling Castle, Hooge and the Belleward Ridge.

Farther north British and French troops carried the whole of the first German trench system with scarcely a check, and proceeded in accordance with the time-table to the assault of the enemy's second line of defence. Scottish troops took Verlorenhoek, and, continuing their advance, by 6 a.m. had reached Frezenberg, where for a short time stiff fighting took place before the village and the strong defences round it were captured. South of Pilckem a Prussian Guard battalion was broken up by Welsh troops after a brief resistance and Pilckem was taken. Sharp fighting occurred also at a number of other points, but in every instance the enemy's opposition was overcome.

At 9 a.m. the whole of our second objectives north of the Ypres-Roulers Railway were in our possession, with the exception of a strong point north of Frezenberg, known as Pommern Redoubt, where fighting was still going on. Within an hour this redoubt also had been captured by West Lancashire Territorials. On our left French troops made equal progress,

capturing their objective in precise accordance with programme and with little loss.

By this time our field artillery had begun to move up, and by 9.30 a.m. a number of batteries were already in action in their forward positions. The Allied advance on this portion of our front was resumed at the hour planned. English county troops captured St. Julien, and from that point northwards our final objectives were reached and passed. Highland Territorials, Welsh and Guards battalions secured the crossings of the Steenbeek, and French troops, having also taken their final objectives, advanced beyond them and seized Bixschoote. A hostile counter-attack launched against the point of junction of the French and British Armies was completely repulsed.

Meanwhile, south of the Ypres-Roulers Railway, very heavy and continuous fighting was taking place on both sides of the Menin Road.

After the capture of the German first line system our troops on this part of our front had advanced in time with the divisions on their left against their second objectives. Great opposition was at once encountered in front of two small woods known as Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, while further south a strong point in Shrewsbury Forest held out against our attacks till the morning of the 1st August. North of Glencorse Wood English troops continued their advance in spite of the enemy's resistance and reached the village of Westhoek.

Later in the day heavy counter-attacks began to develop from south of the Menin Road northwards to St. Julien. Our artillery caused great loss to the enemy in these attacks, although the weather was unfavourable for aeroplane work, and observation for our batteries was difficult. At Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood a few tanks succeeded in reaching the fighting line, in spite of exceedingly bad ground, and came into action with our infantry. Fierce fighting took place all day, but the enemy was unable to shake our hold upon the ridge.

#### RESULTS OF FIRST DAY.

(42) At the end of the day, therefore, our troops on the Fifth Army front had carried the German first system of defence south of Westhoek. Except at Westhoek itself, where they were established on the outskirts of the village, they had already gained the whole of the crest of the ridge and had denied the enemy observation over the Ypres plain. Farther north they had captured the enemy's second line also as far as St. Julien. North of that village they had passed beyond the German second line, and held the line of the Steenbeek to our junction with the French.

On our left flank our Allies had admirably completed the important task allotted to them. Close touch had been kept with the British troops on their right throughout the day. All and more than all their objectives had been gained rapidly and at exceptionally light cost, and the flank of the Allied advance had been effectively secured.

Meanwhile, the attack on the Second Army front had also met with complete success. On the extreme right New Zealand troops had carried La Basse Ville after a sharp fight lasting some fifty minutes. On the left English troops had captured Hollebeke and the difficult ground north of the bend of the Ypres-Comines Canal and east of Battle Wood. Between these two points our line had been advanced on the whole

front for distances varying from 200 to 800 yards.

Over 6,100 prisoners, including 133 officers, were captured by us in this battle. In addition to our gains in prisoners and ground we also captured some 25 guns, while a further number of prisoners and guns were taken by our Allies.

#### EFFECT OF THE WEATHER.

(43) The weather had been threatening throughout the day, and had rendered the work of our aeroplanes very difficult from the commencement of the battle. During the afternoon, while fighting was still in progress, rain began, and fell steadily all night. Thereafter, for four days, the rain continued without cessation, and for several days afterwards the weather remained stormy and unsettled. The low-lying, clayey soil, torn by shells and sodden with rain, turned to a succession of vast muddy pools. The valleys of the choked and overflowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except by a few well-defined tracks, which became marks for the enemy's artillery. To leave these tracks was to risk death by drowning, and in the course of the subsequent fighting on several occasions both men and pack animals were lost in this way. In these conditions operations of any magnitude became impossible, and the resumption of our offensive was necessarily postponed until a period of fine weather should allow the ground to recover.

As had been the case in the Arras battle, this unavoidable delay in the development of our offensive was of the greatest service to the enemy. Valuable time was lost, the troops opposed to us were able to recover from the disorganisation produced by our first attack, and the enemy was given the opportunity to bring up reinforcements.

#### HOSTILE COUNTER-ATTACKS.—ST. JULIEN AND WESTHOEK.

(44) During the night of the 31st July and on the two following days, the enemy delivered further counter-attacks against our new line, and in particular made determined efforts to dislodge us from the high ground between the Menin Road and the Ypres-Roulers Railway, and to recover his second line system between Frezenberg and St. Julien. In this he completely failed. The violence of his artillery fire compelled us, however, to withdraw temporarily from St. Julien, though we retained a bridgehead across the Steenbeek, just north of the village.

In spite of these counter-attacks and the great but unavoidable hardships from which our troops were suffering, steady progress was made with the consolidation of the captured ground, and every opportunity was taken to improve the line already gained.

On the 3rd August St. Julien was re-occupied without serious opposition, and our line linked up with the position we had retained on the right bank of the Steenbeek further north. A week later a successful minor operation carried out by English troops gave us complete possession of Westhoek. Seven hostile counter-attacks within the following four days broke down before our defence.

During this period certain centres of resistance in the neighbourhood of Kortkeer Cabaret were cleared up by our Allies, and a number of fortified farm houses, lying across

the front of the French position, were reduced in turn.

#### LENS OPERATIONS RESUMED.—HILL 70.

(45) Towards the middle of August a slight improvement took place in the weather, and advantage was taken of this to launch our second attack east of Ypres. Thereafter unsettled weather again set in, and the month closed as the wettest August that has been known for many years.

On the day preceding this attack at Ypres a highly successful operation was carried out in the neighbourhood of Lens, whereby the situation of our forces in that sector was greatly improved. At the same time the threat to Lens itself was rendered more immediate and more insistent, and the enemy was prevented from concentrating the whole of his attention and resources upon the front of our main offensive.

At 4.25 a.m. on the 15th August the Canadian Corps attacked on a front of 4,000 yards south-east and east of Loos. The objectives consisted of the strongly fortified hill known as Hill 70, which had been reached, but not held, in the battle of Loos on the 25th September, 1915, and also the mining suburbs of Cité Ste. Elizabeth, Cité St. Emile, and Cité St. Laurent, together with the whole of Bois Rase and the western half of Bois Hugo. The observation from Hill 70 had been very useful to the enemy, and in our possession materially increased our command over the defences of Lens.

Practically the whole of these objectives were gained rapidly at light cost, and in exact accordance with plan. Only at the farthest apex of our advance a short length of German trench west of Cité St. Auguste resisted our first assault. This position was again attacked on the afternoon of the following day and captured after a fierce struggle lasting far into the night.

A number of local counter-attacks on the morning of the 15th August were repulsed, and in the evening a powerful attack delivered across the open by a German reserve division was broken up with heavy loss. In addition to the enemy's other casualties, 1,120 prisoners from three German divisions were captured by us.

#### THE YPRES BATTLE.—LANGEMARCK.

(46) Close upon the heels of this success, at 4.45 a.m. on the 16th August our second attack was launched east and north of Ypres; on a front extending from the north-west corner of Inverness Copse to our junction with the French south of St. Janshoek. On our left the French undertook the task of clearing up the remainder of the Bixchoote peninsula.

On the left of the British attack the English brigades detailed for the assault captured the hamlet of Wijdendrift and reached the southern outskirts of Langemarck. Here some resistance was encountered, but by 8.0 a.m. the village had been taken, after sharp fighting. Our troops then proceeded to attack the portion of the Langemarck-Gheluvelt Line which formed their final objective, and an hour later had gained this also, with the exception of a short length of trench north-east of Langemarck. Two small counter-attacks were repulsed without difficulty.

The attack of the First French Army delivered at the same hour was equally successful.

On the right a few fortified farms in the neighbourhood of the Steenbeek again gave trouble, and held out for a time. Elsewhere our Allies gained their objectives rapidly, and once more at exceptionally light cost. The bridge-head of Drie Grachten was secured, and the whole of the peninsula cleared of the enemy.

In the centre of the British attack the enemy's resistance was more obstinate. The difficulty of making deep-mined dug-outs in soil where water lay within a few feet of the surface of the ground had compelled the enemy to construct in the ruins of farms and in other suitable localities a number of strong points or "pill-boxes" built of reinforced concrete often many feet thick.

These field forts, distributed in depth all along the front of our advance, offered a serious obstacle to progress. They were heavily armed with machine guns and manned by men determined to hold on at all costs. Many were reduced as our troops advanced, but others held out throughout the day, and delayed the arrival of our supports. In addition, weather conditions made aeroplane observation practically impossible, with the result that no warning was received of the enemy's counter-attacks, and our infantry obtained little artillery help against them. When, therefore, later in the morning a heavy counter-attack developed in the neighbourhood of the Wieltje-Passchendaele road, our troops, who had reached their final objectives at many points in this area also, were gradually compelled to fall back.

On the left centre West Lancashire Territorials and troops from other English counties established themselves on a line running north from St. Julien to the old German third line due east of Langemarck. This line they maintained against the enemy's attacks, and thereby secured the flank of our gains further north.

On the right of the British attack the enemy again developed the main strength of his resistance. At the end of a day of very heavy fighting, except for small gains of ground on the western edge of Glencorse Wood and north of Westhoek, the situation south of St. Julien remained unchanged.

In spite of this partial check on the southern portion of our attack, the day closed as a decided success for the Allies. A wide gap had been made in the old German third line system, and over 2,100 prisoners and some thirty guns had been captured.

#### EFFECT OF HOSTILE RESISTANCE.—METHODS REVISED.

(47) The strength of the resistance developed by the enemy at this stage in the neighbourhood of the Menin road decided me to extend the flank of the next attack southwards. It was undesirable, however, either to increase the already wide front of attack for which the Fifth Army was responsible or to divide between two Armies the control of the attack against the main ridge itself. I therefore determined to extend the left of the Second Army northwards, entrusting the attack upon the whole of the high ground crossed by the Menin road to General Sir Hubert Plumer as a single self-contained operation, to be carried out in conjunction with the attacks of the Fifth Army farther north.

During the wet weather which prevailed throughout the remainder of the month, our efforts were confined to a number of small operations east and north-east of Ypres,

designed to reduce certain of the more important of the enemy's strong points. In the meantime the necessary rearrangements of the British forces were pushed on as rapidly as possible so that our new attack might be ready directly the weather should improve sufficiently to enable it to be undertaken.

These arrangements included a modification of our artillery tactics, to meet the situation created by the change in the enemy's methods of defence.

Our recent successes had conclusively proved that the enemy's infantry were unable to hold the strongest defences against a properly mounted attack, and that increasing the number of his troops in his forward defence systems merely added to his losses. Accordingly, the enemy had adopted a system of elastic defence, in which his forward trench lines were held only in sufficient strength to disorganise the attack, while the bulk of his forces were kept in close reserve, ready to deliver a powerful and immediate blow which might recover the positions over-run by our troops before we had had time to consolidate them.

In the heavy fighting east of Ypres, these tactics had undoubtedly met with a certain measure of success. While unable to drive us back from the ridge, they had succeeded in combination with the state of the ground and weather in checking our progress. This new policy, for our early knowledge of which, as well as for other valuable information concerning the enemy's dispositions and intentions throughout the battle much credit is due to the zeal and efficiency of my Intelligence Service, necessarily entailed corresponding changes in our method of attack.

#### MINOR OPERATIONS.

(48) In the interval, on the 19th, 22nd and 27th August, positions of considerable local importance in the neighbourhood of St. Julien were captured with some hundreds of prisoners, as the result of minor attacks conducted under the most unfavourable conditions of ground and weather. The ground gained represented an advance of about 800 yards on a front of over two miles. In combination with the attack of the 22nd August, English troops also attacked astride the Menin road, and after six days of continuous local fighting established themselves in the western edge of Inverness Copse.

Meanwhile, in pursuance of my policy of compelling the enemy to guard himself on other fronts, successful minor operations had been undertaken elsewhere. On the Lens front, Canadian troops attacked on the 21st August, and carried the line of German trenches skirting the town to the south-west and west, taking 200 prisoners. Farther south, North-country troops attacked on the 26th August east of Hargicourt, and captured the enemy's advanced positions on a front of a mile. In this operation 136 prisoners were taken, and on the 9th and 11th September our gains were extended and further prisoners secured.

#### THE YPRES BATTLE.—PREPARATIONS FOR THE THIRD ATTACK COMPLETED.

(49) At the beginning of September the weather gradually improved, and artillery and other preparations for my next attack proceeded steadily. Both the extent of the preparations required, however, and the need

to give the ground time to recover from the heavy rains of August rendered a considerable interval unavoidable before a new advance could be undertaken. The 20th September was therefore chosen for the date of our attack, and before that day our preparations had been completed.

The front selected extended from the Ypres-Comines Canal north of Hollebeke to the Ypres-Staden Railway north of Langemarck, a distance of just over eight miles along the line then held by us. The average depth of our objectives was 1,000 yards, which increased to a depth of a mile in the neighbourhood of the Menin road. Australian, English, Scottish and South African troops were employed in the attack, and gained a success conspicuous for precision and thoroughness of execution.

#### THE MENIN ROAD RIDGE.

(50) During the night of the 19th/20th September rain again fell steadily, and when dawn broke thick mist made observation impossible. Despite this disadvantage, the assembling of our troops was carried out in good order, and at 5.40 a.m. on the 20th September the assault was launched.

Good progress was made from the start, and as the morning wore on the mist cleared. Our aeroplanes were able to establish contact with our infantry, to assist them by engaging parties of the enemy with machine-gun fire, and to report hostile concentrations and counter-attacks to our artillery.

On our right Welsh and west country troops advanced down the spur east of Klein Zillebeke, and after sharp fighting in the small woods north of the Ypres-Comines Canal gained the whole of their objectives. English battalions pushed through the eastern portions of Shrewsbury Forest and reached their objectives in the valley of the Bassevillebeek. Regiments from the south-east counties of England had some trouble from snipers and machine-guns early in their advance, but ultimately fought their way forward across the upper valley of the Bassevillebeek and up the slopes of Tower Hamlets. Here strong opposition was encountered, with heavy machine-gun fire from Tower Hamlets and the Veldhoek Ridge.

In the meantime, however, north country troops had already carried Inverness Copse, and after beating off a counter-attack in the neighbourhood of Dumbarton Lakes captured Veldhoek and the line of their final objectives some 500 yards farther east. Their progress assisted the south-east county battalions on their right to establish themselves across the Tower Hamlets Spur.

On the left of the North country division Australian troops carried the remainder of Glencorse Wood and Nonne Boschen. Before 10 a.m. they had taken the hamlet of Polygonveld and the old German third line to the north of it. This advance constituted a fine performance, in which the capture of a difficult piece of ground that had much delayed us was successfully completed. Sharp fighting took place at a strong point known as Black Watch Ctrner at the south-western end of Polygon Wood. By mid-day this had been captured, the western portion of Polygon Wood had been cleared of the enemy, and the whole of our objectives on this part of our front had been gained.

On the Fifth Army front our attack met with equal success. Scottish and South African



troops, advancing on both sides of the Ypres-Roulers Railway, stormed the line of fortified farms immediately in front of their position, and, pressing on, captured Zonnebeke and Bremen Redoubts and the hamlet of Zevenkote. By 8.45 a.m. our final objectives on this front had been gained.

West Lancashire Territorial battalions found the ground south-east of St. Julien very wet and heavy after the night's rain. None the less, they made steady progress, reaching the line of their final objectives early in the afternoon. North of the Zonnebeke-Langemarck Road London and Highland Territorials gained the whole of their objectives by mid-day, though stiff fighting took place for a number of farms and strong places.

As the result of this most successful operation the whole of the high ground crossed by the Menin Road, for which such desperate fighting had taken place during our previous attacks, passed into our possession. Important positions were won also on the remainder of our front, by which the right of our attack was rendered more secure, and the way opened for the advance of our left. In the attack, as well as in the repeated counter-attacks which followed, exceedingly heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy, and 3,243 prisoners, together with a number of guns, were captured by us.

#### COUNTER-ATTACKS.

(51) The enemy did not abandon these important positions without further severe struggles. During the afternoon and evening of the 20th September no less than eleven counter-attacks were made without success against different parts of our new front, in addition to several concentrations of hostile infantry, which were broken up by our artillery before any attack could be launched.

East of St. Julien the enemy at his third attempt succeeded in forcing back our troops to the west of Schuler Farm, but on the following day the farm was retaken by us and our line re-established. North-east of Langemarck stubborn fighting took place for the possession of the short length of trench which, as already recounted, had resisted our attacks on the 16th August. It was not till the morning of the 23rd September that the position was finally captured by us.

Fierce fighting took place also on the 21st September in the neighbourhood of Tower Hamlets. In the course of this and the following four days three powerful attacks were launched by the enemy on wide fronts between Tower Hamlets and Polygon Wood, and a fourth north-east of St. Julien. All these attacks were repulsed, except that on the 25th September parties of German infantry succeeded in entering our lines north of the Menin Road. Heavy and confused fighting took place in this area throughout the day, in which English, Scottish, and Australian troops gradually drove the enemy from the limited foothold he had gained.

The enemy's casualties in these many counter-attacks, as well as in all those subsequently delivered by him on the Ypres front, were consistently very heavy. Our constant successful resistance reflects the greatest credit on the high fighting qualities of our infantry, on the courage and devotion of our airmen, and upon the excellence of our artillery arrangements.

#### POLYGON WOOD AND ZONNEBEKE.

(52) All this heavy fighting was not allowed to interfere with the arrangements made for a renewal of the advance by the Second and Fifth Armies on the 26th September.

The front of our attack on that date extended from south of Tower Hamlets to north-east of St. Julien, a total distance of rather less than six miles; but on the portion of this front south of the Menin Road only a short advance was intended. North of the Menin Road, our object was to reach a position from which a direct attack could be made upon the portion of the main ridge between Noordemdhoeck and Broodseinde, traversed by the Becelaere-Passchendaele Road.

The assault was delivered at 5.50 a.m., and, after hard and prolonged fighting, in which over 1,600 prisoners were taken by us, achieved a success as striking as that of the 20th September.

Australian troops carried the remainder of Polygon Wood, together with the German trench line to the east of it, and established themselves on their objectives beyond the Becelaere-Zonnebeke Road. On the left of the Australians, English troops took Zonnebeke Village and church, and North Midland and London Territorial battalions captured a long line of hostile strong points on both sides of the Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road.

South of Polygon Wood an obstinate struggle took place for a group of fortified farms and strong points. English, Scottish, and Welsh battalions of the same Divisions that had borne the brunt of the enemy's attacks in this area on the previous day gallantly fought their way forward. In their advance they effected the relief of two companies of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who, with great courage and resolution, had held out in our forward line all night, although isolated from the rest of our troops. It was not until the evening of the 27th September, however, that the line of our objectives in this locality was completely gained.

#### FURTHER COUNTER-ATTACKS.

(53) As had been the case on the 20th September, our advance was at once followed by a series of powerful counter-attacks.

There is evidence that our operations had anticipated a counter-stroke which the enemy was preparing for the evening of the 26th September, and the German troops brought up for this purpose were now hurled in to recover the positions he had lost. In the course of the day at least seven attacks were delivered at points covering practically the whole front from Tower Hamlets to St. Julien. The fiercest fighting prevailed in the sector between the Reutelbeek and Polygon Wood, but here, as elsewhere, all the enemy's assaults were beaten off.

On the 30th September, when the enemy had recovered from the disorganisation caused by his defeat, he recommenced his attacks. Two attempts to advance with flammenwerfer north of the Menin Road were followed on the 1st October by five other attacks in this area, and on the same day a sixth attack was made south of the Ypres-Roulers Railway. Except for the temporary loss of the two advanced posts south-east of Polygon Wood, all these attacks were repulsed with great loss. At dawn on the 3rd October another attempt in the neighbourhood

of the Menin Road broke down before our positions.

#### A FURTHER ADVANCE ON THE MAIN RIDGE. BROODSEINDE.

(54) The spell of fine weather was broken on the evening of the 3rd October by a heavy gale and rain from the south-west. These conditions serve to emphasise the credit due to the troops for the completeness of the success gained by them on the following day.

At 6.0 a.m. on the 4th October our advance was renewed in accordance with plan, against the main line of the ridge east of Zonnebeke. The front of our principal attack extended from the Menin Road to the Ypres-Staden Railway, a distance of about 7 miles. South of the Menin Road a short advance was undertaken on a front of about a mile, with the object of capturing certain strong points required to strengthen our position in this sector.

The attack was carried out by Australian, New Zealand, and English Divisions, including among the latter a few Scottish, Irish and Welsh battalions, and was successful at all points.

On the right of the main attack troops from Kent, Devon and Cornwall, and a battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers carried their objectives after heavy fighting in the neighbourhood of Polderhoek Chateau. Battalions from Yorkshire, Northumberland, Surrey and Lincolnshire cleared the small enclosures east of Polygon Wood and seized the village of Reutel, meeting with strong opposition. On their left Surrey, Staffordshire, Devon, Border and Highland troops, advancing across the crest of the ridge, captured the hamlet of Noordemdhoeck.

Farther north, Australian troops advanced beyond the Becelaere-Passchendaele Road, storming Molenaarelsthoek and Broodseinde, and established themselves well to the east of the crest line. New Zealand troops carried Gravenstafel, and drove the enemy from a network of trenches and strong points on the Gravenstafel Spur.

On the whole of this front the enemy was met in great strength. In addition to the two German Divisions already in line, the enemy had brought up three fresh Divisions, with a view to launching an attack in force upon the positions captured by us on the 26th September. Our advance anticipated this attack by ten minutes, and the German infantry were forming up for the assault when our artillery barrage opened. Very serious casualties were inflicted on the enemy by our artillery, and our infantry advancing with the bayonet quickly overcame the resistance of those of his troops who had escaped our shell fire. Great numbers of prisoners were taken.

On the left of our attack South Midland troops forced their way across the valley of the Stroombeek, in spite of difficulties due to the rain of the previous night, and gained their objectives according to programme, with the exception of a single strong point at the limit of their advance. Other English Divisions, advancing on both sides of the Poelcappelle Road, stormed the western half of that village, including the church, and captured the whole of their objectives for the day. Tanks took part in the attack on Poelcappelle and contributed to the success of our troops.

On the extreme left considerable opposition was met with, and determined fighting took

place for the possession of the rising ground known as 19 Mètre Hill. Early in the afternoon a hostile counter-attack forced us back from a portion of this position, but later in the day our troops returned to the attack and recovered the lost ground.

Meanwhile, south of the Menin Road English troops had gained the whole of their limited objectives with the exception of two strong points. Soon after mid-day our final objectives had been gained, and large numbers of prisoners had already been brought in. The final total of German prisoners captured in these operations exceeded 5,000, including 138 officers. A few guns and many machine guns and trench mortars were also taken by us.

The destruction of the Divisions which the enemy had assembled for his intended attack made immediate serious counter-attacks impossible for him on a great part of our front. Between the Menin Road and the neighbourhood of Reutel, however, no less than seven counter-attacks were beaten off in turn. Exceedingly heavy fighting took place in this area, and later in the day an eighth attack succeeded in dislodging us from Polderhoek Chateau and from the eastern portions of Reutel. Another determined counter-attack delivered in three waves early in the afternoon north of the Ypres-Roulers Railway was broken up by our artillery, rifle and machine gun fire. Hostile concentrations east of Zonnebeke and west of Passchendaele were dispersed by our artillery.

#### RESULTS OF THIS ATTACK.

(55) The success of this operation marked a definite step in the development of our advance. Our line had now been established along the main ridge for 9,000 yards from our starting point near Mount Sorrel. From the farthest point reached the well-marked Gravenstafel Spur offered a defensible feature along which our line could be bent back from the ridge.

The year was far spent. The weather had been consistently unpropitious, and the state of the ground, in consequence of rain and shelling combined, made movement inconceivably difficult. The resultant delays had given the enemy time to bring up reinforcements and to organise his defence after each defeat. Even so, it was still the difficulty of movement far more than hostile resistance which continued to limit our progress, and now made it doubtful whether the capture of the remainder of the ridge before winter finally set in was possible.

On the other hand, there was no reason to anticipate an abnormally wet October. The enemy had suffered severely, as was evidenced by the number of prisoners in our hands, by the number of his dead on the battlefield, by the costly failure of his repeated counter-attacks, and by the symptoms of confusion and discouragement in his ranks.

In this connection, documents captured in the course of the battle of the 4th October throw an interesting light upon the success of the measures taken by us to meet the enemy's new system of defence by counter-attack. These documents show that the German Higher Command had already recognised the failure of their methods, and were endeavouring to revert to something approximating to their old practice of holding their forward positions in strength.

After weighing these considerations, as well as the general situation and various other fac-

tors affecting the problem, among them the desirability of assisting our Allies in the operations to be carried out by them on the 23rd October in the neighbourhood of Malmaison, I decided to continue the offensive further and to renew the advance at the earliest possible moment consistent with adequate preparation.

Accordingly, I determined to deliver the next combined French and British attack on the 9th October.

#### HOUTHULST FOREST REACHED.

(56) Unfortunately, bad weather still persisted in the early part of October, and on the 7th October heavy rain fell all day. The unfavourable conditions interfered with our artillery preparations; but every effort was made to engage the enemy's batteries in their new positions, and on the date last mentioned our artillery co-operated effectively in the repulse of two hostile attacks.

On the 8th October rain continued, and the slippery state of the ground, combined with an exceptionally dark night, made the assembling of our troops a matter of considerable difficulty. No interference, however, was encountered from the enemy's artillery, and at 5.20 a.m. on the 9th October our attack was renewed on a front of over six miles, from a point east of Zonnebeke to our junction with the French north-west of Langemarck. On our left our Allies prolonged the front of attack to a point opposite Draaibank. At the same time, minor operations were undertaken on the right of our main attack, east and south-east of Polygon Wood.

The greatest depth of our advance was on the left, where the Allied troops penetrated the German positions to a distance of nearly one and a half miles. French troops and British Guards crossed the flooded valley of the Broenbeek, and, making steady progress towards their objectives, captured the hamlet of Koekuit, Veldhoek, Mangelare, and St. Janshoek, besides woods and a great number of farmhouses and strong points. Early in the afternoon both French and British troops had established themselves on their final objectives on the outskirts of Houthulst Forest.

On the right of the Guards, other English Divisions made equal progress along the Ypres-Staden Railway, and secured a line well to the East of the Poelcappelle-Houthulst Road. Stiff fighting took place around certain strong points, in the course of which a hostile counter-attack was repulsed.

Farther south, English battalions fought their way forward in the face of great opposition to the eastern outskirts of Poelcappelle village. Australian troops and East Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Midland Territorials carried our line forward in the direction of Passchendaele and up the western slopes of the main ridge, capturing Nieuwemolen and Keerselaarhoek and a number of strong points and fortified farms.

In the subsidiary attack east of Polygon Wood Warwickshire and H.A.C. battalions successfully regained the remainder of Reutel.

Over 2,100 prisoners were taken by the Allies in the course of these operations, together with a few guns.

#### PROGRESS CONTINUED.

(57) Though the condition of the ground continued to deteriorate, the weather after this

was unsettled rather than persistently wet, and progress had not yet become impossible. I accordingly decided to press on while circumstances still permitted and arrangements were made for a renewal of the attack on the 12th October. On the night of the 11th/12th October, however, heavy rain commenced again, and after a brief interval during the morning continued steadily throughout the whole of the following day.

Our attack, launched at 5.25 a.m. on the 12th October between the Ypres-Roulers Railway and Houthulst Forest, made progress along the spurs and higher ground; but the valleys of the streams which run westward from the main ridge were found to be impassable. It was therefore determined not to persist in the attack, and the advance towards our more distant objectives was cancelled.

Certain strong points and fortified farms on the western slopes of the ridge were captured on this day, and were incorporated in our line. Farther north, on both sides of the Ypres-Staden Railway, English County Divisions and the Guards gained their objectives in spite of all difficulties. Though for many hours the position of our advanced troops on this part of our front was uncertain, communication was at length established and the captured ground maintained.

Over 1,000 prisoners were taken by us in this attack, in which the troops employed displayed remarkable gallantry, steadfastness and endurance in circumstances of extreme hardship.

#### PLAN OF SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS.

(58) By this time the persistent continuation of wet weather had left no further room for hope that the condition of the ground would improve sufficiently to enable us to capture the remainder of the ridge this year. By limited attacks made during intervals of better weather, however, it would still be possible to progress as far as Passchendaele, and in view of other projects which I had in view it was desirable to maintain pressure on the Flanders front for a few weeks longer.

To maintain his defence on this front the enemy had been obliged to reduce the garrison of certain other parts of his line to a degree which justified the expectation that a sudden attack at a point where he did not expect it might attain a considerable local success. The front for such an attempt had been selected and plans had already been quietly made. But certain preparations and movements of troops required time to complete, and the 20th November had been fixed as the earliest date for the attack.

No large force could be made available for the enterprise. The prospects of success therefore depended on complete secrecy and on maintaining sufficient activity in Flanders to induce the enemy to continue his concentration of troops in that theatre.

As has been indicated above, our Allies also had certain limited operations in view which would be likely to benefit by the maintenance of pressure on my front, and, reciprocally, would add to the prospects of success of my intended surprise attack. Accordingly, while preparing for the latter, operations of limited scope were continued in Flanders.

#### THE MERCKEM PENINSULA.

(59) After the middle of October the weather improved, and on the 22nd October two suc-

cessful operations, in which we captured over 200 prisoners and gained positions of considerable local importance east of Poelcappelle and within the southern edge of Houttuist Forest, were undertaken by us, in the one case by East County and Northumberland troops, and in the other by West County and Scots battalions in co-operation with the French.

The following two days were unsettled, but on the 25th October a strong west wind somewhat dried the surface of the ground. It was therefore decided to proceed with the Allied operations which had been planned for the 26th October.

At an early hour on that morning rain unfortunately began again and fell heavily all day. The assembling of our troops was completed successfully none the less, and at 5.45 a.m. English and Canadian troops attacked on a front extending from the Ypres-Roulers Railway to beyond Poelcappelle.

The Canadians attacked on the right on both sides of the small stream known as the Ravebeek, which flows south-westwards from Passchendaele. On the left bank of the stream they advanced astride the main ridge and established themselves securely on the small hill south of Passchendaele. North of the Ravebeek strong resistance was met on the Bellevue spur, a very strong point which had resisted our efforts in previous attacks. With splendid determination the Canadians renewed their attack on this point in the afternoon, and captured it. Two strong counter-attacks south and west of Passchendaele were beaten off, and by nightfall the Canadians had gained practically the whole of their objectives.

On the left of the Canadians the Royal Naval Division and battalions of London Territorials also advanced, and, in spite of immense difficulties from marsh and floods in the more low-lying ground, made progress.

In a subsidiary attack undertaken by us at the same hour English troops entered Gheluveld and recaptured Polderhoek Chateau, with a number of prisoners. Our men's rifles, however, had become choked with mud in their advance, and when later in the morning strong German counter-attacks developed, they were obliged to withdraw.

The operations of our Allies on this day were limited to establishing bridgeheads across the floods of the St. Jansbeek. This was successfully accomplished, in spite of considerable opposition. Next day the French continued their advance in concert with Belgian troops, who crossed the Yser opposite Knockehoek, and captured Aschhoop, Kippe, and Merckem. The southern end of Blankaart Lake was reached on the same day, and early on the 28th October French and Belgian troops completed the capture of the whole Merckem peninsula.

Over 400 prisoners were taken by our Allies in these operations, bringing the total Allied captures since the commencement of our attacks on the 26th October to over 1,200.

#### PASSCHENDAELE.

(60) At this date the need for the policy of activity outlined above had been still further emphasised by recent developments in Italy. Additional importance was given to it by the increasing probability that a time was approaching when the enemy's power of drawing reinforcements from Russia would increase con-

siderably. In pursuance of this policy, therefore, two short advances were made on the 30th October and the 6th November, by which we gained possession of Passchendaele.

In the first operation Canadian and English troops attacked at 5.50 a.m. on a front extending from the Ypres-Roulers Railway to the Poelcappelle-Westroosebeke Road.

On the right the Canadians continued their advance along the high ground and reached the outskirts of Passchendaele, capturing an important position at Crest Farm on a small hill south-west of the village. Fighting was severe at all points, but particularly on the spur west of Passchendaele. Here no less than five strong counter-attacks were beaten off in the course of the day, our troops being greatly assisted by the fire of captured German machine guns in Crest Farm.

Farther north, battalions of the same London and Naval Divisions that had taken part in the attack on the 26th October again made progress wherever it was possible to find a way across the swamps. The almost impassable nature of the ground in this area, however, made movement practically impossible, and it was only on the main ridge that much could be effected.

During the succeeding days small advances were made by night south-west of Passchendaele, and a hostile attack on both sides of the Ypres-Roulers Railway was successfully repulsed.

At 6 a.m. on the 6th November Canadian troops renewed their attack and captured the village of Passchendaele, together with the high ground immediately to the north and north-west. Sharp fighting took place for the possession of "pill-boxes" in the northern end of the village, around Mosselmarkt, and on the Goudberg Spur. All objectives were gained at an early hour, and at 8.50 a.m. a hostile counter-attack north of Passchendaele was beaten off.

Over 400 prisoners were captured in this most successful attack, by which for the second time within the year Canadian troops achieved a record of uninterrupted success. Four days later, in extremely unfavourable weather, British and Canadian troops attacked northwards from Passchendaele and Goudberg, and captured further ground on the main ridge, after heavy fighting.

#### GENERAL REVIEW.

(61) These operations concluded our Flanders offensive for the time being, although considerable activity was still continued for another fortnight for purposes already explained.

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.

What was actually accomplished under such adverse conditions is the most conclusive proof that, given a normally fine August, the capture of the whole ridge, within the space of a few weeks, was well within the power of the men who achieved so much. They advanced every time with absolute confidence in their power to overcome the enemy, even though they had sometimes to struggle through mud up to their waists to reach him. So long as they could reach him they did overcome him, but physical exhaustion placed narrow limits on the depth to which each advance could be pushed, and compelled long pauses between the advances. The full fruits of each success were consequently not always obtained. Time after time the practically beaten enemy was enabled to reorganise and relieve his men and to bring up reinforcements behind the sea of mud which constituted his main protection.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties, much has been achieved. Our captures in Flanders since the commencement of operations at the end of July amount to 24,065 prisoners, 74 guns, 941 machine guns and 138 trench mortars. It is certain that the enemy's losses considerably exceeded ours. Most important of all, our new and hastily trained Armies have shown once again that they are capable of meeting and beating the enemy's best troops, even under conditions which favoured his defence to a degree which it required the greatest endurance, determination and heroism to overcome.

In this respect I desire once more to lay emphasis upon the supreme importance of adequate training prior to placing troops in the line of battle, whether for offence or defence. It is essential, if preventable sacrifice is to be avoided and success assured, that troops that are going into battle should first be given an opportunity for special training, under the officers who are to command them in the fight, for the task which they are to be called upon to perform.

Owing to the necessity, already referred to, of taking over line from the French, our offensive at the beginning of the year was commenced under a very definite handicap in this respect. This initial disadvantage was subsequently increased by the difficulty of obtaining adequate drafts a sufficient length of time before Divisions were called upon to take their place in the battle, to enable the drafts to be assimilated into Divisions and Divisions to be trained.

The general conditions of the struggle this year have been very different from those contemplated at the conference of the Allied Commanders held in November, 1916. The great general and simultaneous offensive then agreed on did not materialise. Russia, though some of her leaders made a fine effort at one period, not only failed to give the help expected of her, but even failed to prevent the enemy from transferring some forty fresh Divisions from her front in exchange for tired ones used up in the Western theatre, or from replacing losses in his Divisions on this side by drafts of fresh and well-trained men drawn from Divisions in the East.

The combined French and British offensive in the spring was launched before Italy could be ready; and the splendid effort made by Italy at a later period was, unfortunately, followed by developments which resulted in a weakening of the Allied forces in this theatre before the conclusion of our offensive.

In these circumstances the task of the British and French Armies has been a far heavier one throughout the year than was originally anticipated, and the enemy's means of meeting our attack have been far greater than either he or we could have expected.

That under such conditions the victories of Arras, Vimy, Messines and Flanders were won by us, and those at Moronvilliers, Verdun and Malmaison by the French, constitutes a record of which the Allied Armies, working in close touch throughout, have a right to be proud.

The British Armies have taken their full share in the fighting on the Western front. Save for such short intervals as were enforced by the weather or rendered necessary for the completion of the preparations for our principal attacks, they have maintained a vigorous and continuous offensive throughout practically the whole of the period covered by this Despatch. No other example of offensive action on so large a scale, so long and so successfully sustained, has yet been furnished by the war.

In the operations of Arras, Messines, Lens and Ypres as many as 131 German Divisions have been engaged and defeated by less than half that number of British Divisions.

The number of prisoners and guns captured by us is an indication of the progress we have made. The total number of prisoners taken between the opening of our Spring offensive on the 9th April, 1917, and the conclusion of the Flanders offensive, exclusive of prisoners captured in the Cambrai Battle, is 57,696, including 1,290 officers. During the same period and in the same offensives we have also captured 393 guns, including 109 heavy guns, 561 trench mortars and 1,976 machine guns.

Without reckoning, therefore, the possibilities which have been opened up by our territorial gains in Flanders, and without considering the effect which a less vigorous prosecution of the war by us might have had in other theatres, we have every reason to be satisfied with the results which have been achieved by the past year's fighting. The addition of strength which the enemy has obtained, or may yet obtain, from events in Russia and Italy has already largely been discounted, and the ultimate destruction of the enemy's field forces has been brought appreciably nearer.

#### THE DEFENSIVE FRONTS.

(62) Before passing from the subject of the operations of the past eight months, tribute must be paid to the work accomplished on the defensive portions of our line.

In order to meet the urgent demands of battle, the number of divisions in line on other fronts has necessarily been reduced to the minimum consistent with safety. In consequence, constant vigilance and heavy and unremitting labour have been required at all times of the troops holding these fronts.

The numerous feint attacks which have been organised from time to time have called for great care, forethought and ingenuity on the part of Commanders and Staffs concerned, and have demanded much courageous, skilful and arduous work from the troops entrusted with the task of carrying them out. In addition, raids and local operations have continued to form a prominent feature of our general policy on our defensive front, and have been effectively combined with our feint attacks and with gas discharges. In the course of the 270 successful raids carried out by us during the period

covered by this Despatch, the greatest enterprise and skill have been displayed by our troops, and many hundreds of prisoners, together with much invaluable information, have been obtained at comparatively light cost.

#### OUR TROOPS.

(63) In my Despatch dealing with the Somme Battle I endeavoured to express something of the profound admiration inspired in me by the indomitable courage, tireless energy and cheerful endurance of the men by whose efforts the British Armies in France were brought triumphantly through that mighty ordeal. To-day the Armies of the Empire can look back with yet greater pride upon still severer tests successfully withstood and an even higher record of accomplishment.

No one acquainted with the facts can review the general course of the campaigns of 1916 and 1917 without acquiring the sense of a steady progression, in which the fighting superiority of the British soldier has been asserted with ever-increasing insistence. This feeling permeates the troops themselves, and is the greatest guarantee of victory.

#### INFANTRY.

Throughout the northern operations our troops have been fighting over ground every foot of which is sacred to the memory of those who, in the first and second battles of Ypres, fought and died to make possible the victories of the armies which to-day are rolling back the tide stayed by their sacrifice. It is no disparagement of the gallant deeds performed on other fronts to say that, in the stubborn struggle for the line of hills which stretches from Wytschaete to Passchendaele, the great armies that to-day are shouldering the burden of our Empire have shown themselves worthy of the regiments which, in October and November of 1914, made Ypres take rank for ever amongst the most glorious of British battles.

Throughout the months of strenuous fighting which have wiped the old Ypres salient from the battle map of Flanders, the finest qualities of our infantry have been displayed. The great material disadvantages of the position from which they had to attack, the strength of the enemy's fortifications, and the extraordinary hardships imposed by the conditions of ground and weather during August and throughout the later stages of the attack, called for the exercise of courage, determination and endurance to a degree which has never been surpassed in war.

#### ARTILLERY.

The courage of our infantry would have been in vain but for the skill, steadfastness and devotion of the artillery. Their task in the Ypres Battle was again a peculiarly hard one. The long preparatory bombardments had to be conducted from a narrow and confined space, for the most part destitute alike of cover and protection, and directly overlooked by the enemy.

As our infantry advanced, our guns had to follow, at the cost of almost incredible exertion, over ground torn by shell fire and sodden with rain. When at length the new positions had been reached, our batteries had to remain in action, practically without protection of any kind, day after day, week after week, and even month after month, under a continuous bombardment of gas and high explosive shell.

It would be easy to multiply instances of individual heroism, to quote cases where, when the signal from our infantry for urgent artillery support and the warning of German gas have been given at the same moment, our gunners have thrown aside their half-adjusted gas masks and, with full knowledge of the consequences, have fought their guns in response to the call of the infantry till the enemy's attack has been beaten off.

A single incident which occurred during the preparation for the attack of the 31st July may be taken as a general example. A howitzer battery had received orders to cut a section of German wire in the neighbourhood of Hooge, and 400 rounds had been allocated for the purpose. The battery, situated in an unavoidably exposed position in the neighbourhood of Zillebeke Lake, had already been subjected to constant shelling. On the occasion referred to, not more than 50 rounds had been fired at the German wire, when a hostile 15 cm. battery opened a steady and accurate fire in enfilade. Each time the British battery opened, salvos of 15 cm. shells raked its position. Four of its six guns were put out of action, and two ammunition dumps were blown up, but the remaining two guns continued in action until the last of the 400 rounds had been fired. A few days later, when our infantry advanced over the sector this battery had shelled, the enemy's wire was found to have been completely cut.

The debt owed to the artillery throughout the whole of this year's fighting, and particularly in the Ypres Battle, is very great. Despite the extraordinary strain to which the gunners have been subjected, yet, wherever conditions of weather and light have made accurate shooting possible, they have never failed to dominate the German batteries. As the result of their close and loyal co-operation through long periods of continuous fighting, hostile artillery has never succeeded in stopping our attacks. Our infantry would be the first to acknowledge their admirable devotion and self-sacrifice.

#### ROYAL FLYING CORPS.

During the past year the part played by the Royal Flying Corps in modern battles has grown more and more important. Each successive attack has served to demonstrate with increasing clearness the paramount necessity for the closest co-operation between air and land arms. All must work together on a general plan towards our end—the defeat of the enemy's forces.

In accordance with this governing consideration, co-operation with artillery, photography, and reconnaissance have been greatly developed and actively continued. Air fighting has taken place on an ever increasing scale in order to enable the machines engaged upon these tasks to carry out their work. In addition, a definite aerial offensive, in which long distance raiding has taken a prominent place, has become a recognised part of the preparations for infantry attack.

Throughout the progress of the battle itself low flying aeroplanes not only maintain contact with our advancing infantry, reporting their position and signalling the earliest indications of hostile counter-attack, but themselves join directly in the attack by engaging the enemy's infantry in line and in support with machine-gun fire and bombs, by assisting our artillery to

disperse hostile concentrations, and by spreading confusion among the enemy's transport, reinforcements and batteries.

In answer to the concentrations of hostile machines on our front and the strenuous efforts made by the enemy to reassert himself in the air, the bombing of German aerodromes has been intensified, and has been carried out at great distances behind the enemy's lines. In more than one instance the enemy has been compelled to abandon particular aerodromes altogether as the result of our constant raids.

Besides his aerodromes the enemy's railway stations and communications, his dumps and billets have also been attacked with increasing frequency and with most successful results.

The persistent raiding by hostile aeroplanes and airships of English cities and towns, and the enemy's open disregard of the losses thereby caused to civilian life and property, have recently decided our own Government to adopt counter measures. In consequence of this decision a series of bombing raids into Germany were commenced in October, 1917, and have since been continued whenever weather conditions have permitted.

In the discharge of duties, constantly increasing in number and importance, the Royal Flying Corps throughout the whole of the past year has shown the same magnificent offensive spirit which characterised its work during the Somme Battle, combined with unsurpassed technical knowledge and practical skill.

The enemy, however, shows no sign of relaxing his endeavours in this department of war. While acknowledging, therefore, most fully the great effort that has been made to meet the ever increasing demands of this most important service, I feel it my duty to point out once more that the position which has been won by the skill, courage and devotion of our pilots can only be maintained by a liberal supply of the most efficient machines.

Before passing from the artillery and air services I wish to refer to the increasingly efficient work of the Anti-Aircraft and Searchlight Sections in France. The growing activity of the enemy's bombing squadrons has thrown a corresponding strain on these units. They have responded to the call with considerable success, and the frequency with which hostile aircraft are brought down by our ground defences shows a satisfactory tendency to increase.

#### CAVALRY.

During the first days of the Battle of Arras the depth of our advance enabled a limited use to be made of bodies of mounted troops. The cavalry showed much promptness and resource in utilising such opportunities as were offered them, and at Monchy-le-Preux, in particular, performed most valuable service in support of and in co-operation with the infantry.

#### SPECIAL SERVICES.

The gradual development of modern warfare during the past year has shown a very definite tendency to emphasise the importance of the various Special Services, while at the same time bringing their employment into closer co-ordination with the work of the principal arms.

#### TANKS.

Although throughout the major part of the Ypres Battle, and especially in its latter stages,

the condition of the ground made the use of tanks difficult or impossible, yet whenever circumstances were in any way favourable, and even when they were not, very gallant and valuable work has been accomplished by tank commanders and crews on a great number of occasions. Long before the conclusion of the Flanders offensive these new instruments had proved their worth and amply justified the labour, material and personnel diverted to their construction and development.

In the course of the various operations in which tanks have taken part, at Arras, Messines and Ypres, officers and men have given frequent examples of high and self-sacrificing courage as well as strong esprit-de-corps.

#### TRENCH MORTARS.

Trench mortars have continued to play an important part in supplementing the work of our artillery in trench warfare, and have also been used most effectively in the preliminary stages of our offensives. The personnel concerned have shown great skill and enterprise in obtaining the best results from the various types of mortars.

#### MACHINE GUN CORPS.

During the past year the use of the machine gun in offensive warfare has been considerably extended. The machine gun barrage has taken a definite place with the artillery barrage in covering the advance of our infantry, while the lighter forms of machine guns have proved of great assistance in the capture of hostile strong points. In these directions, as well as in the repulse of hostile counter-attacks, great boldness and skill have been shown, and very valuable work has been done by all ranks of the machine gun corps.

#### ROYAL ENGINEERS.

The prolonged period of active fighting and the vast amount of work involved by our different offensives have thrown a peculiarly heavy burden on the Royal Engineers, both preparatory to and during operations.

The Field, Signal, Army Troops, and Tramway Companies, together with Pioneer and Labour Battalions, from home and overseas, have played an increasingly important part, not only in the preparation for our offensives, but also during the latter stages of the battles. The courage and enduring self-sacrifice displayed by all ranks, whether in the organisation of captured positions or in the maintenance of forward communications under heavy shell fire, are deserving of the highest praise.

The Tunnelling Companies have maintained their superiority over the enemy underground, and the important tactical success achieved by the Messines mines is a sufficient testimony of their untiring efforts. They have taken a large share in the construction of dug-outs and road-making during operations, and have worked with great courage and cheerfulness under conditions of much hardship and danger.

The successful manner in which the difficult problem of water supply during operations was overcome reflects great credit upon the Royal Engineers. My thanks are also due to the War Office Staff concerned, and the manufacturers and their employees, for the special efforts made by them to meet the demands of the Army in respect of the necessary machinery and plant.

The other Engineer units, both in forward areas and on the lines of communication, have discharged their various special duties with an equal skill and perseverance. The increased demand for accommodation, hospitals and workshops on the lines of communication has been met with commendable promptitude, and the supply of Engineer stores and materials, now required in vast quantities, has throughout been most efficiently maintained. A notable feature also is the progress which has been made in the devices for the concealment of troops and material.

#### SIGNAL SERVICES.

The Signal Service, which at the end of the battle of the Somme had already grown into a great and intricate organisation, has had even larger demands made upon it during the past year.

Apart from the perfecting and maintenance of rear communications, special provision has had to be made for carrying our communications forward as our troops have advanced. The measures adopted to this end have been skilfully devised and admirably carried out. In many cases within a few hours of a successful operation large numbers of buried telephone circuits have been extended into the captured zone under very trying conditions; the provision of communications for artillery Forward Observation Officers, etc., proceeding simultaneously with the organisation of the new line. Thanks to the rapidity with which communications in the forward areas have been established information of hostile concentrations has frequently been transmitted by their means from the front in time to enable the artillery to break up impending counter-attacks.

The success which has attended the establishment of these forward communications has been largely due to the untiring energy and devotion to duty of the officers and men of the numerous small Signal Sections and Detachments. On them has devolved, in circumstances of great difficulty and danger, the execution of the complicated schemes of communication necessitated by the present form of warfare.

The Carrier Pigeon Service has also been greatly developed during the present year, and has proved extremely valuable for conveying information from attacking units to the headquarters of their formations.

#### GAS SERVICES.

Reference has been made earlier in this despatch to the valuable services rendered by the Special Brigade, both on the defensive fronts and in the battle areas where large quantities of gas were successfully discharged in preparation for our different offensives. These special troops have taken an active part also in our feint attacks and in the various measures taken to harass German Divisions sent by the enemy to recuperate on the quieter portions of his front. Gas discharges have become matters of almost nightly occurrence, and have been carried out with success on all portions of the front from the right of our line to the sea. In the period covered by this Despatch a total weight of nearly 2,000 tons of gas has been liberated in the course of 335 separate discharges.

Numerous new methods and devices have been put into practice with excellent results. Many of these have entailed very heavy work and great courage and devotion on the part of the personnel employed; but all demands have been met with unfailing cheerfulness and carried out with the greatest efficiency. Evidence of the serious casualties inflicted on the enemy by gas and kindred methods of offence continues to accumulate.

#### FIELD SURVEY COMPANIES.

Special mention again deserves to be made of the Field Survey Companies, who throughout the year's operations have carried out their important functions with the utmost zeal and efficiency. With the assistance of the Ordnance Survey they have enabled an adequate supply of maps to be maintained in spite of the constant changes of the battle front. Their assistance has also been invaluable to our artillery in locating the enemy's new battery positions during the actual progress of battle.

#### METEOROLOGICAL SECTION.

The Meteorological Section has kept me furnished with valuable information concerning the probable course of the weather, in spite of the limited area from which the necessary data are now procurable.

#### TRANSPORTATION SERVICES.

In describing the preparations for our offensives, constant reference has been made in the body of this Despatch to the work of the Transportation Services. The year has been one of rapid expansion in all branches of the various Transportation Services, and the manner in which the calls made upon them have been met is deserving of the highest praise.

During the present year the dock capacity allotted to the British Armies in France has been thoroughly organised, and its equipment, efficiency of working and capacity greatly improved. In the first nine months of this year the number of working cranes was more than doubled, and during the year the discharging capacity of the docks has proved equal to the maximum import requirements. The rate of discharge of vessels has been accelerated by 100 per cent., and the weekly average of ship-days lost has been reduced to nearly one-fifth of its January figures.

As regards railway expansion, the number of imported broad gauge locomotives in traffic in France in October, 1917, was nearly ten times as great as at the end of 1916. The number of imported broad gauge waggons in traffic shows a corresponding growth, and the necessary erecting and repairing shops for this increased rolling stock have been provided and equipped. Many hundred miles of broad gauge track have been laid, also, both in immediate connection with our offensives and for the general service of our Armies.

The result of these different measures has naturally had a most marked effect upon the traffic carrying capacity of the broad gauge railway system as a whole. The average number of trains run daily during October, 1917, showed an increase of nearly 50 per cent. on the daily average for March.

Light railways have grown with a like rapidity, and the track operated at the end of October was already eight times as great as that working at the commencement of the year.



During the same period the plant used in the making and upkeep of roads has been multiplied nearly seven times, rendering possible a very considerable improvement in the conditions of road transport. At the same time, the possibilities of Inland Water Transport have been further developed, resulting in October, 1917, in an increase of 50 per cent. in the weekly traffic handled, as compared with the figures for January, 1917.

#### FORESTRY AND QUARRY UNITS.

In the spring of 1917 the activities of the Army were extended by the formation of a Forestry Directorate, controlling Royal Engineer and Canadian Forestry Companies, to work certain forest areas in France and provide material for the use of our own and the French Armies. Quarry companies have also been formed in immediate connection with the Transportation Services.

Some idea of the magnitude of the work involved can be gained from the fact that from quarries worked in a single locality over 600,000 tons of material were produced in the nine months ending 31st August, 1917. Between March and October of this year the total weekly output of road metal received in the Army areas has nearly doubled. The average area of new and re-made roads completed weekly during October was seven and a half times greater than the weekly average for March.

By September, 1917, the Army had become practically self-supporting as far as regards timber, and during the active period of working, from May to October, over three-quarters of a million tons of timber were supplied for the use of the British Army. Included in this timber was material sufficient to construct over 350 miles of plank roads and to provide sleepers for 1,500 miles of railway, besides great quantities of sawn timber for hutting and defences and many thousand tons of round timber for fascines and fuel. The bulk of the fuel wood is being obtained from woods already devastated by artillery fire.

These Forestry and Quarry units have proved of great value, and have been the source of very considerable economy. My special thanks are due to the French Forestry authorities, as well as to the Comité inter-Allié des Bois de Guerre, for their assistance in our negotiations regarding the acquisition of woods and forest areas.

#### ARMY SERVICE CORPS.

The long period of active fighting, combined with the magnitude of our operations, has once more placed a heavy strain upon the personnel of the Army Service Corps and of the Administrative Services and Departments generally. The difficulties of supply have been increased by the unavoidable congestion of the areas in which operations were taking place, as well as by the inevitable deterioration of roads and by long-distance shelling and bombing by the enemy.

In spite of all difficulties the Army Service Corps has never failed to meet the needs of our troops in food, ammunition, material and stores of all kinds. Particularly good work has been done by the Motor Transport drivers, who have shown the greatest gallantry and devotion to duty in getting forward the requisites of the Army under heavy shell fire and during long hours of exposure.

#### ORDNANCE CORPS.

The energy and zeal of the Ordnance Corps have also been admirable. The intensity of our artillery preparations and bombardments has placed the heaviest demands upon the Ordnance workshops in the repair and the overhauling of guns of all calibres. Work has been continued by day and night in order to keep our guns in action, and the unsparing efforts of officers and men have contributed in no small degree to the success of our operations.

#### MEDICAL SERVICES.

The work of the Medical Service in all its branches has continued to afford me most valuable assistance. The high standard of efficiency displayed by all ranks of the Medical Service has resulted in an almost entire freedom from epidemic disease, and has been the cause of much saving of life and limb amongst the wounded.

The devotion and gallantry of the Royal Army Medical Corps and of the Medical Corps of the Overseas Dominions during the recent operations have earned universal admiration and praise. Their work of collecting the wounded from the front has been of an exceptionally arduous nature, owing to the condition of the ground and weather. I regret that so many gallant officers and men have lost their lives in carrying out their duties.

The Medical Service of the United States of America has shared in the work of the British Medical Service, and has given very valuable help.

I am much indebted to the devotion and work of the consulting surgeons and physicians and to the Auxiliary Services of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

The Nursing services, several of whose members have unfortunately lost their lives from hostile air raids, have, as always, devoted themselves with untiring care and zeal to their work of mercy.

The excellent organisation and administrative work of the Medical Services as a whole have given me entire satisfaction.

#### VETERINARY CORPS.

The work of the Army Veterinary Corps and of the Mobile Veterinary Sections has been ably carried out, and has contributed largely to the general efficiency of the Army.

#### THE CHAPLAINS' DEPARTMENT.

I take this opportunity to express, on behalf of all ranks of the British Armies in France, our great appreciation of the devotion and self-sacrifice of the Army Chaplains serving in France. No considerations of personal convenience or safety have at any time interfered with their work among the troops, the value of which is incalculable.

#### ARMY COMMANDERS.

My thanks are again due to the Army Commanders for the complete loyalty and conspicuous ability with which they have carried out my plans during the past year. The task of launching three great offensives on different sectors of the British front, in addition to the almost constant fighting that has taken place in the neighbourhood of Lens, has demanded professional knowledge, determination and soundness of judgment of a very high order on

the part of the Commanders of the Armies concerned. It required, moreover, the most willing and unselfish co-operation between Armies, and an absolute subservience of all personal interests to the common good.

In all these respects the different Army Commanders have most completely fulfilled the high standard of character and ability required of them.

#### STAFF.

In the heavy and responsible work which they have so admirably performed the Army Commanders have been most loyally supported and assisted by their Staff Officers and Technical Advisers, as well as by the Commanders and Staffs of the units serving under them.

My Chief of the General Staff, Lieut.-General Sir L. E. Kiggell, K.C.B., my Adjutant-General, Lieut.-General Sir G. H. Fowke, K.C.B., and my Quartermaster-General, Lieut.-General Sir R. C. Maxwell, K.C.B., as well as the other officers of my Staff and my Technical Advisers at General Headquarters and on the Lines of Communication, have given me the greatest and most valuable assistance. I am glad once more to place on record the debt that I owe to them.

The entire absence of friction or discord which characterised the work of all Services and Departments during the Somme Battle has constituted a most pleasing feature of the operations of the past year. There could be no better evidence of the singleness of purpose and determination of the Armies as a whole and no stronger guarantee of victory.

#### THE ARMY'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

##### To the Navy.

(64) The debt which the Army owes to the Navy grows ever greater as the years pass, and is deeply realised by all ranks of the British Armies in France. As the result of the unceasing vigilance of the Navy, the enemy's hope that his policy of unrestricted submarine warfare would hamper our operations in France and Flanders has been most signally disappointed. The immense quantities of ammunition and material required by the Army, and the large numbers of men sent to us as drafts, continue to reach us with unflinching regularity.

##### To Home Authorities.

In this connection, I desire once more to record the obligation of the Army in the Field to the different authorities at home, both civil and military, and to the great mass of men and women in Great Britain and throughout the Empire who are working with such loyalty to enable our manifold requirements to be met.

The confidence which is felt throughout the Army that the enemy can and will be beaten is founded on the firm conviction that their own efforts in the field will be supported to the limits of their power and resources by all classes at home.

##### To our Allies.

At the close of another year of fighting in France and Belgium, it is a source of great gratification to me to be able to record that nothing has occurred to mar the happy relations existing between the Allied Armies, or between our troops and the civil population in France and Belgium.

The feelings of good will and comradeship which existed between the French and British Armies on the Somme have been continued in Flanders, where the same excellent relations have characterised the combined operations of the Belgian, French and British troops.

During the present year the Portuguese Expeditionary Force has taken its place in the line, and for many months has held a sector of the British front. Though they have not been engaged in major offensive operations, yet in a number of raids and minor engagements the officers and men of the Portuguese Expeditionary Force have shown themselves gallant and efficient soldiers.

During the present year, also, the United States of America have entered the war, and have taken up their part in it with all the well-known energy and ability of that great nation. Already many thousands of American soldiers are in France. Warm as is the welcome they have received from the French people, nowhere will they find a more genuine or a more friendly greeting than among all ranks of the other great English-speaking Armies.

I have the honour to be, My Lord,  
Your Lordship's obedient Servant,  
D. HAIG, Field Marshal.  
Commanding-in-Chief, British Armies in France.

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