

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 Thilloy-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.