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MONDAY, 4 MARCH, 1918.

War Office,
4th March, 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,
20th February, 1918.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit the following Report on the operations on the Cambrai front during November and December, 1917.

GENERAL PLAN.

(1) As pointed out in my last Despatch, the object of these operations was to gain a local success by a sudden attack at a point where the enemy did not expect it. Our repeated attacks in Flanders and those of our Allies elsewhere had brought about large concentrations of the enemy's forces on the threatened fronts, with a consequent reduction in the garrisons of certain other sectors of his line.

Of these weakened sectors the Cambrai front had been selected as the most suitable for the surprise operation in contemplation. The ground there was, on the whole, favourable for the employment of tanks, which were to play an important part in the enterprise, and facilities existed for the concealment of the necessary preparations for the attack.

If, after breaking through the German defence systems on this front, we could secure Bourlon to the north, and establish a good flank position to the east, in the direction of Cambrai, we should be well placed to exploit the situation locally between Bourlon and the Sensee River and to the north-west. The capture of Cambrai itself was subsidiary to this operation, the object of our advance towards that town being primarily to cover our flank and puzzle the enemy regarding our intentions.

The enemy was laying out fresh lines of defence behind those which he had already completed on the Cambrai front; and it was to be expected that his troops would be redistributed as soon as our pressure in Flanders was relaxed. He had already brought large forces from Russia in exchange for Divisions exhausted in the struggle in the Western theatre,