

and it was practically certain that heavy reinforcements would be brought from East to West during the winter. Moreover his tired Divisions, after a winter's rest, would recover their efficiency.

For all these reasons, if the existing opportunity for a surprise attack were allowed to lapse, it would probably be many months before an equally favourable one would again offer itself. Furthermore, having regard to the future, it was desirable to show the enemy that he could not with impunity reduce his garrisons beyond a certain point without incurring grave risks.

Against these arguments in favour of immediate action I had to weigh the fact that my own troops had been engaged for many months in heavy fighting, and that, though their efforts had been uniformly successful, the conditions of the struggle had greatly taxed their strength. Only part of the losses in my Divisions had been replaced, and many recently arrived drafts, still far from being fully trained, were included in the ranks of the Armies. Under these conditions it was a serious matter to make a further heavy call on my troops at the end of such a strenuous year.

On the other hand, from the nature of the operation, the size of the force which could be employed was bound, in any case, to be comparatively small, since success depended so much on secrecy, and it is impossible to keep secret the concentration of very large forces. The demand made upon my resources, therefore, should not be a great one.

While considering these different factors, preparations were quietly carried on, so that all might be ready for the attack if I found it possible to carry it out. The success of the enemy's offensive in Italy subsequently added great force to the arguments in favour of undertaking the operation, although the means at my disposal for the purpose were further reduced as a consequence of the Italian situation.

Eventually I decided that, despite the various limiting factors, I could muster enough force to make a first success sufficiently sure to justify undertaking the attack, but that the degree to which this success could be followed up must depend on circumstances.

It was calculated that, provided secrecy could be maintained to the last moment, no large hostile reinforcements were likely to reach the scene of action for forty-eight hours after the commencement of the attack. I informed General the Hon. Sir Julian Byng, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., M.V.O., to whom the execution of the plans in connection with the Cambrai operations was entrusted, that the advance would be stopped by me after that time, or sooner if necessary unless the results then gained and the general situation justified its continuance.

The general plan of attack was to dispense with previous artillery preparation, and to depend instead on tanks to smash through the enemy's wire, of which there was a great quantity protecting his trenches.

As soon as the advance of the tanks and infantry, working in close co-operation, began, the artillery was to assist with counter-battery and barrage work; but no previous registration of guns for this purpose could be permitted, as it would rouse the enemy's suspicions. The artillery of our new Armies was therefore necessarily subjected to a severe test in this opera-

tion, and proved itself entirely worthy of the confidence placed in it.

The infantry, tanks, and artillery thus working in combination were to endeavour to break through all the enemy's lines of defence on the first day. If this were successfully accomplished and the situation developed favourably, cavalry were then to be passed through to raid the enemy's communications, disorganise his system of command, damage his railways, and interfere as much as possible with the arrival of his reinforcements. It was explained to all Commanders that everything depended on secrecy up to the moment of starting, and after that on bold, determined and rapid action. Unless opposition could be beaten down quickly, no great results could be looked for.

The Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, to whom I secretly communicated my plans, most readily agreed to afford me every assistance. In addition to the steps taken by him to engage the enemy's attention elsewhere, he arranged for a strong force of French infantry and cavalry to be in a position whence they could be moved forward rapidly to take part in the exploitation of our success, if the situation should render it possible to bring them into action. On the 20th November certain of these French units were actually put in motion. The course of events, however, did not open out the required opportunity for their employment, but the French forces were held in readiness and within easy reach so long as there appeared to be any hope of it. Had the situation on the 20th November developed somewhat more favourably in certain directions, the nature of which will become apparent in the course of this report, the presence and co-operation of these French troops would have been of, the greatest value.

THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES.

(2) The German defences on this front had been greatly improved and extended since the opening of our offensive in April, and comprised three main systems of resistance.

The first of these three trench systems, constituting part of the Hindenburg Line proper, ran in a general north-westerly direction for a distance of six miles from the Canal de l'Escaut at Banteux to Havrincourt. There it turned abruptly north along the line of the Canal du Nord for a distance of four miles to Mœuvres, thus forming a pronounced salient in the German front.

In advance of the Hindenburg Line the enemy had constructed a series of strong forward positions, including La Vacquerie and the north-eastern corner of Havrincourt Wood. Behind it, and at distances respectively varying from a little less to rather more than a mile, and from three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half miles lay the second and third main German systems, known as the Hindenburg Reserve Line, and the Beurevoir, Masnières, Marquion Lines.

THE ATTACK.

(3) All necessary preparations were completed in time, and with a secrecy reflecting the greatest credit on all concerned. At 6.20 a.m. on the 20th November, without any previous artillery bombardment, tanks and infantry attacked on a front of about six miles