

After a bombardment of exceptional intensity, which started at 3.10 a.m., a series of strong attacks were launched about 5 a.m. against the French and British positions from west of Dranoutre to Voormezele. Very heavy fighting rapidly developed on the whole of this front, and ended in the complete repulse of the enemy with the heaviest losses to his troops.

At Locre and to the north of that village the enemy made desperate attempts to overcome the resistance of our Allies and gain possession of the high ground known as the Scherpenberg. At one time parties of his troops entered Locre, and penetrated to the cross roads between the Scherpenberg and Mont Rouge, but in both localities successful French counter-attacks drove him out after bitter fighting.

On the British front the positions held by the 21st, 49th and 25th Divisions were strongly attacked between 5 a.m. and 5.30 a.m. On the failure of these attacks bodies of German infantry advanced at 6 a.m. in mass formation, with bayonets fixed, against the 49th Division, and were repulsed with the heaviest losses. The 25th Division was again attacked at 8.35 a.m., and during the morning repeated attacks were made without result on this Division and the 49th Division, as well as on the 21st Division and attached troops of the 30th and 39th Divisions. At all points the attack was pressed vigorously with massed bodies of troops, and the losses suffered by the German infantry were very great. Throughout the whole of the fighting our infantry and artillery fought magnificently, and in more than one instance our troops went out to meet the German attack and drove back the enemy with the bayonet.

At the end of the day, except for a small loss of ground about Voormezele, our line was intact, and the enemy had undergone a severe and decided check.

In concert with this operation, the Belgian positions astride the Ypres-Staden Railway were again attacked, and once more vigorous counter-strokes by Belgian troops promptly ejected the German infantry from such ground as had been gained by them in their first assault. Here also the enemy's failure was complete.

On the 30th April the French retook Locre early in the morning, but beyond this no infantry action of importance took place, and the month closed with the enemy definitely held on both the southern and the northern battle fronts.

#### *The Task of the British Armies.*

(69) It has been seen that in the Somme battle, by the end of March, in addition to some ten German divisions engaged against the French, a total of 73 German divisions were engaged and fought to a standstill by 42 British infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions. In order to complete the comparison between the forces engaged and to enable the nature of the task accomplished by our troops to be realised, it will be of value to give similar figures for the battle of the Lys.

In the Lys battle, prior to the 30th April the enemy engaged against the British forces a total of 42 divisions, of which 33 were fresh

and nine had fought previously on the Somme. Against these 42 German divisions 25 British divisions were employed, of which eight were fresh and 17 had taken a prominent part in the Somme battle.

In the six weeks of almost constant fighting, from the 21st March to the 30th April, a total of 55 British infantry divisions and 3 cavalry divisions was employed on the battle fronts against a force of 109 different German divisions. During this period a total of 141 different German divisions were engaged against the combined British and French forces.

#### *Our Troops.*

(70) The splendid qualities displayed by all ranks and services throughout the Somme and Lys battles make it possible to view with confidence whatever further tests the future may bring.

On the 21st March the troops of the Fifth and Third Armies had the glory of sustaining the first and heaviest blow of the German offensive. Though assailed by a concentration of hostile forces which the enemy might well have considered overwhelming, they held up the German attack at all points for the greater part of two days, thereby rendering a service to their country and to the Allied cause the value of which cannot be over-estimated. Thereafter, through many days of heavy and continuous rearguard fighting, they succeeded in presenting a barrier to the enemy's advance until such time as the arrival of British and French reinforcements enabled his progress to be checked.

In the battle of the Lys, as has been pointed out above, many of the same divisions which had just passed through the furnace of the Somme found themselves exposed to the full fury of a second great offensive by fresh German forces. Despite this disadvantage they gave evidence in many days of close and obstinate fighting that their spirit was as high as ever and their courage and determination unabated. Both by them and by the divisions freshly engaged every yard of ground was fiercely disputed, until troops were overwhelmed or ordered to withdraw. Such withdrawals as were deemed necessary in the course of the battle were carried out successfully and in good order.

At no time, either on the Somme or on the Lys, was there anything approaching a breakdown of command or a failure of morale. Under conditions that made rest and sleep impossible for days together, and called incessantly for the greatest physical exertion and quickness of thought, officers and men remained undismayed, realising that for the time being they must play a waiting game and determined to make the enemy pay the full price for the success which for the moment was his.

In the course of this report it has been possible to refer to a very few of the many instances in which officers and men of all arms and services have shown courage and skill of the highest order. On countless other occasions officers and men, of whose names there is no record, have accomplished actions of the greatest valour, while the very nature of the fighting shows that on all parts of the wide battle fronts unknown deeds of heroism were performed without number.