

yards. In the sides of the cuttings the enemy had constructed numerous tunnelled dug-outs and concrete shelters. Along the top edge of them he had concealed well sited concrete or armoured machine-gun emplacements. The tunnel itself was used to provide living accommodation for troops, and was connected by shafts with the trenches above. South of Bellicourt the canal cutting gradually becomes shallow, till at Bellenglise the canal lies almost at ground level. South of Bellenglise the canal is dry.

On the western side of the canal south of Bellicourt two thoroughly organised and extremely heavily wired lines of continuous trench run roughly parallel to the canal, at average distances from it of 2,000 and 1,000 yards respectively. Except in the tunnel sector the double line of trenches known as the Hindenburg line proper lies immediately east of the canal, and is linked up by numerous communication trenches with the trench lines west of it.

Besides these main features, numerous other trench lines, switch trenches and communication trenches, for the most part heavily wired, had been constructed at various points to meet local weaknesses or take advantage of local command of fire. At a distance of about 4,000 yards behind the most easterly of these trench lines lies a second double row of trenches known as the Beurevoir-Fonsomme line, very thoroughly wired and holding numerous concrete shelters and machine-gun emplacements. The whole series of defences, with the numerous defended villages contained in it formed a belt of country varying from 7,000 to 10,000 yards in depth, organised by the employment of every available means into a most powerful system, well meriting the great reputation attached to it.

#### (34) *The Battle of Cambrai and the Hindenburg Line.*

(27th September-5th October.)

The battle of Cambrai, which on the 5th October culminated in the capture of the last remaining sectors of the Hindenburg line, was commenced by the First and Third Armies.

Between the neighbourhood of St. Quentin and the Scheldt the Fourth, Third and First Armies in the order named occupied on the evening of the 26th September a line running from the village of Selency (west of St. Quentin) to Gricourt and Pontruet and thence east of Villeret and Lempire to Villers Guislain and Gouzeaucourt, both exclusive. Thereafter the line continued northwards to Havrincourt and Mœuvres and thence along the west side of the Canal du Nord to the floods of the Sensee at Ecourt St. Quentin.

On the First and Third Army fronts strong positions covering the approaches to Cambrai between the Nord and Scheldt canals, including the section of the Hindenburg line itself north of Gouzeaucourt, were still in the enemy's possession. His trenches in this sector faced south-west, and it was desirable that they should be taken in the early stages of the operation, so as to render it easier for the artillery of the Fourth Army to get into position. On the Fourth Army front, where the heaviest blow was to fall, the exceptional strength of the enemy's position made a prolonged bombardment necessary. I therefore decided that a very heavy bombardment, opened during the

night of the 26th/27th September along the whole front of all three armies, should be followed on the morning of the 27th September by an attack delivered only by the First and Third Armies. In this way the enemy might be deceived as to the main point of attack, the First and Third Armies would be enabled to get nearer to their final objective, and the task of the Fourth Army artillery would be simplified.

#### (35) *The Battle Opened.*

On the morning of the 26th September French and American forces attacked on both sides of the Argonne, between the Meuse and the Suipe rivers.

At 5.20 a.m. on the 27th September the Third and First British Armies attacked with the IV., VI., XVII. and Canadian Corps in the direction of Cambrai on a front of about 13 miles from Gouzeaucourt to the neighbourhood of Sauchy Lestree. The success of the northern part of the attack depended upon the ability of our troops to debouch from the neighbourhood of Mœuvres, and to secure the crossings of the Canal du Nord in that locality. The northern portion of the Canal was too formidable an obstacle to be crossed in the face of the enemy. It was therefore necessary for the attacking divisions to force a passage on a comparatively narrow front about Mœuvres, and thereafter turn the line of the Canal farther north by a divergent attack developed fanwise from the point of crossing. This difficult manœuvre was carried out successfully, and on the whole front of attack our infantry, assisted by some sixty-five tanks, broke deeply into the enemy's position.

The attack proceeded according to plan from the commencement. On the right strong resistance was encountered at Beaucamp. Several strong counter-attacks were made during the day in this neighbourhood, but in spite of them troops of the 5th and 42nd Divisions successfully established the right flank of our attack between Beaucamp and Ribecourt. The 3rd Division moved forward with the Guards, forcing the crossings of the Canal in face of heavy fire from machine guns and forward field guns, and captured Ribecourt and Flesquieres. The Guards Division (Major-General T. G. Matheson) took Orival Wood and reached the neighbourhood of Premy Chapel, where the 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) took up the advance.

In the centre the 52nd Division (Major-General F. J. Marshall), passing its troops across the Canal by bridgeheads previously established by the 57th Division, on the opening of the assault carried the German trench lines east of the Canal and gained the high ground overlooking Graincourt. On their left the 63rd Division and the 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions (under command of Major-Generals Sir D. Watson and A. C. MacDonell) moved under cover of darkness down the west bank of the Canal between Mœuvres and Sains-lez-Marquion. In the half light of dawn these three divisions stormed the line of the Canal itself, and advanced on Graincourt, Anneux, Bourlon and the slopes to the north of the latter village.

As soon as the line of the Canal had been secured our engineer troops commenced the construction of bridges, completing their task with remarkable speed and working with great