

wood's Fifth Army made certain small advances south of the Lys. On the *2nd October*, however, the enemy once more began an extensive withdrawal, falling back on the whole front from south of Lens to Armentieres. In the sector south of Lens, indeed, patrols of the 20th Division (Major-General G. G. S. Carey) met with considerable resistance on this day about Acheville and Mericourt, but progress was made. During the next two days the movement continued, under vigorous pressure from our troops. By the evening of the *4th October* north of Lens we had reached the general line Vendin le Vieil—Wavrin—Erquinghem—Houplines, where the increasing strength of the enemy's resistance indicated that he intended to stand at any rate for a time. South of Lens the withdrawal slackened about this date on the general line Fresnoy—Sallaumines—Vendin le Vieil, but shortly afterwards the development of our operations on the St. Quentin—Cambrai front forced upon the enemy a further retreat in this sector.

#### SECOND PHASE: THE FIGHTING IN OPEN COUNTRY.

##### THE SECOND BATTLE OF LE CATEAU.

(6th—12th October.)

(41) The second and concluding phase of the British offensive now opened, in which the Fourth and Third Armies and the right of the First Army moved forward with their left flank on the canal line which runs from Cambrai to Mons and their right covered by the French First Army. This advance, by the capture of Maubeuge and the disruption of the German main lateral system of communications, forced the enemy to fall back upon the line of the Meuse and realised the strategic plan of the Allied operations.

The fighting which took place during this period, being in effect the development and exploitation of the Hindenburg Line victory, falls into three stages, the breaks between the different battles being due chiefly to the depth of our advances and the difficulties of re-establishing communications.

In the first of these stages, the battle of Le Cateau, certain incomplete defences still held by the enemy were captured, and his troops compelled to evacuate Cambrai and fall back behind the line of the Selle River. In the second stage, the Selle River was forced, and by a development of this operation our front pushed forward to the general line Sambre Canal—west edge of the Mormal Forest—Valenciennes, where we were in position for the final assault upon Maubeuge.

(42) Having completed their arrangements, at 4.30 a.m. and 5.10 a.m. respectively on the *8th October* the Third and Fourth Armies attacked on a front of over 17 miles from Sequehart to south of Cambrai. French troops continued the line of attack on our right as far south as St. Quentin. Farther south, French and American troops attacked on this day east of the Meuse and in Champagne, and made important progress.

On the British battle front our infantry and Tanks penetrated the enemy's positions to a depth of between three and four miles, passing rapidly over the incomplete trench lines above referred to and gaining the open country beyond. Strong at the outset of our attack, during the later stages opposition weakened. Brancourt and Premont were taken by the 30th American Division, while to the north of them

the 66th Division (Major-General H. K. Bethell), attacking beside the 25th Division (Major-General J. R. E. Charles), captured Serain. Villers Outreaux was cleared by the 38th Division with the assistance of Tanks after heavy fighting, and late in the afternoon Malincourt was captured. The New Zealand Division passed through Lesdain and took Esnes, while on the left of the attack, the 3rd, 2nd and 63rd Divisions captured Seranvillers, Forenville and Niergnies after very heavy fighting, in the course of which the enemy counter-attacked with Tanks. On the extreme left the 57th Division made progress in the southern outskirts of Cambrai.

As the result of this attack the enemy's resistance temporarily gave way. His infantry became disorganised and retired steadily eastwards, while our airmen reported that the roads converging on Le Cateau were blocked with troops and transport. Several thousand prisoners and many guns fell into our hands. During the following night the Canadian Corps captured Ramillies and crossed the Scheldt Canal at Pont d'Aire. Canadian patrols entered Cambrai from the north and joined hands with patrols of the 57th Division working through the southern portion of the town. Next morning at 5.20 a.m. the Fourth and Third Armies resumed the attack on the whole front, cavalry assisting in the advance. By nightfall our troops were within two miles of Le Cateau, had captured Bohain, and were attacking Caudry from the south. Cambrai was in our hands, and our troops were three miles to the east of the town.

In this day's fighting cavalry again did valuable and gallant work, hurrying the enemy in his retreat and preventing him from completing the destruction of the railway which runs from St. Quentin to Busigny and Cambrai. When our infantry were held up by heavy machine-gun fire from Cattigny Wood and Clary, a dashing charge by the Fort Garry Horse gained a footing in Cattigny Wood and assisted our infantry to press forward. Farther east, Dragoon Guards and Canadian Cavalry were instrumental in the capture of Honnechy, Reumont and Troisvilles.

On the *10th October* our progress continued, though the enemy's resistance gradually stiffened as our troops approached the line of the river Selle, and attempts made by the cavalry to cross that stream had to be abandoned. That night we had reached the outskirts of Riquerval Wood, and held the west bank of the Selle river thence as far as Viesly, whence our line ran past St. Hilaire and Avesnes, taken by the Guards and 24th Divisions, to the Scheldt at Thun St. Martin.

During these days the French First Army on our right advanced its line east of St. Quentin, clearing the west bank of the Oise-Sambre Canal as far north as Bernot.

(43) *The Withdrawal from Laon.*

By this advance, in which 20 British infantry, two British cavalry, and one American infantry division routed 24 German divisions and took from them 12,000 prisoners and 250 guns, we gained full possession of the important lateral double line of railway running from St. Quentin through Busigny to Cambrai. During the repair of such portions of it as had been destroyed and the removal of delay action mines left by the enemy, our line was carried forward by local operations. By the *13th October* we had reached the Selle river at all