

October, after much severe fighting, the enemy had been driven across the Sambre et Oise Canal at practically all points south of Catillon, whence our line followed the valley of the Richemont east and north of Le Cateau.

This success was followed at 2 a.m. on the 20th October by an attack upon the line of the Selle river north of Le Cateau. The troops employed were the 38th, 17th, 5th, 42nd, 62nd, Guards and 19th Divisions of the Third Army, and the 4th Division on the right of the First Army in that order from right to left.

On this occasion also the enemy's resistance was serious, and he had been able to erect wire entanglements along the greater part of the line. Our advance was strongly contested at every point, frequent counter-attacks being made. Supported by a number of Tanks which had successfully crossed the river, our infantry, after severe fighting about Neuville, Amerval, Solesmes and Haspres, gained their objectives on the high ground east of the Selle, pushing out patrols as far as the river Harpies. North of Haspres other troops of the First Army continued to make progress on both sides of the Scheldt Canal, reaching the slopes overlooking the left bank of the Ecaillon River and occupying Denain.

(47) The capture of the Selle positions was followed almost immediately by the larger operation for the attainment of the required general line above mentioned running from the Sambre Canal along the edge of the Mormal Forest to the neighbourhood of Valenciennes.

The original front of attack stretched from east of Mazinghien to Maison Bleue, north-east of Haussy, a distance of some fifteen miles. The assault was opened by the Fourth Army at 1.20 a.m. on the 23rd October and was delivered by the IX. and XIII. Corps, employing respectively the 1st and 6th Divisions and the 25th and 18th Divisions. The Third Army again attacked with the V., IV., VI. and XVII. Corps, employing respectively the 33rd and 21st Divisions, the 5th, 42nd, 37th and New Zealand Divisions, the 3rd and 2nd Divisions, and the 19th Division. On the second day the 61st Division of the XVII. Corps and the 4th Division and 51st Division of the XXII. Corps, First Army, extended the line of attack for a further five miles northwards to the Scheldt.

The unfavourable weather of the preceding days had made it difficult to locate the enemy's batteries, and during the earlier stages of the battle hostile artillery fire was heavy. Despite this, and in spite of determined opposition at many points from the German machine-gunners, in two days our infantry and Tanks realised an advance of six miles over difficult country. About many of the woods and villages which lay in the way of our attack there was severe fighting, particularly in the large wood known as the Bois l'Eveque and at Pommereuil, Bousies, Forest and Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon. This latter village held out till the afternoon of the 24th October, when it was taken by an enveloping attack by troops of the 19th Division and 61st Division.

At the end of that day the western outskirts of the Forêt de Mormal had been reached, our troops were within a mile of Le Quesnoy and to the north-west of that town had captured the villages of Ruesnes and Maing. Local operations during the following three days gave us Englefontaine and established our line well to the north and east of the Le Quesnoy—

Valenciennes railway, from the outskirts of Le Quesnoy, past Sepmeries and Artres to Famars.

#### (48) *The Enemy's Position at the End of October.*

By this time the rapid succession of heavy blows dealt by the British forces had had a cumulative effect, both moral and material, upon the German Armies. The difficulty of replacing the enemy's enormous losses in guns, machine-guns and ammunition had increased with every fresh attack, and his reserves of men were exhausted. In the Selle Battle the twenty-four British and two American Divisions engaged had captured a further 20,000 prisoners and 475 guns from the thirty-one German divisions opposed to them, and had advanced to a great depth with certainty and precision. Though troops could still be found to offer resistance to our initial assault, the German infantry and machine-gunners were no longer reliable, and cases were being reported of their retiring without fighting in front of our artillery barrage.

The capitulation of Turkey and Bulgaria and the imminent collapse of Austria—consequent upon Allied successes which the desperate position of her own armies on the western front had rendered her powerless to prevent—had made Germany's military situation ultimately impossible. If her armies were allowed to withdraw undisturbed to shorter lines the struggle might still be protracted over the winter. The British Armies, however, were now in a position to prevent this by a direct attack upon a vital centre, which should anticipate the enemy's withdrawal and force an immediate conclusion.

#### THE BATTLE OF THE SAMBRE

(1st-11th November.)

(49) The principal British attack was to take place at the beginning of November, as soon as possible after the capture of Valenciennes, which I regarded as a necessary preliminary. In view of the likelihood of fresh withdrawals, time was of importance. Accordingly, at 5.15 a.m. on the 1st November, the XVII. Corps of the Third Army and the XXII. and Canadian Corps of the First Army attacked on a front of about six miles south of Valenciennes, and in the course of two days of heavy fighting inflicted a severe defeat on the enemy. During these two days the 61st Division (Major-General F. J. Duncan), 49th Division (Major-General H. J. G. Cameron) and 4th Division (Major-General C. H. T. Lucas) crossed the Rhonelle river, capturing Maresches and Preseau after a stubborn struggle, and established themselves on the high ground two miles to the east of it. On their left the 4th Canadian Division captured Valenciennes and made progress beyond the town.

As a consequence of this defeat the enemy on the 3rd November withdrew on the Le Quesnoy—Valenciennes front and our line was advanced. There were indications that a further withdrawal was contemplated both in the Tournai salient, where the line of the Scheldt was turned by our progress on the battle front, and also in the area to the south of us, where the enemy's positions were equally threatened by our advance. Our principal attack was ready.

(50) The front of the decisive attack delivered by the Fourth, Third and First Armies