

Sir Douglas Haig's 2nd Despatch (Somme), 23 December 1916 covering from 19th May 1916

General Headquarters

23rd December, 1916

My Lord;

I have the honour to submit the following report on the operations of the Forces under my Command since the 19th May, the date of my last Dispatch.

The General Situation Towards the End of May

1. The principle of an offensive campaign during the summer of 1916 had already been decided on by all the Allies. The various possible alternatives on the Western front had been studied and discussed by General Joffre and myself, and we were in complete agreement as to the front to be attacked by the combined French and British Armies.

Preparations for our offensive had made considerable progress; but as the date on which the attack should begin was dependent on many doubtful factors, a final decision on that point was deferred until the general situation should become clearer.

Subject to the necessity of commencing operations before the summer was too far advanced, and with due regard to the general situation, I desired to postpone my attack as long as possible. The British Armies were growing in numbers and the supply of munitions was steadily increasing.

Moreover a very large proportion of the officers and men under my command were still far from being fully trained, and the longer the attack could be deferred the more efficient they would become. On the other hand the Germans were continuing to press their attacks at Verdun, and both there and on the Italian front, where the Austrian offensive was gaining ground, it was evident that the strain might become too great to be borne unless timely action were taken to relieve it.

Accordingly, while maintaining constant touch with General Joffre in regard to all these considerations, my preparations were pushed on, and I agreed, with the consent of H.M. Government, that my attack should be launched whenever the general situation required it with as great a force as I might then be able to make available.

2. By the end of May the pressure of the enemy on the Italian front had assumed such serious proportions that the Russian campaign was opened early in June, and the brilliant successes gained by our Allies against the Austrians at once caused a movement of German troops from the Western to the Eastern front.

This, however, did not lessen the pressure on Verdun. The heroic defence of our French Allies had already gained many weeks of inestimable value and had caused the enemy very heavy losses; but the strain continued to increase. In view, therefore, of the situation in the various theatres of war, it was eventually

agreed between General Joffre and myself that the combined French and British offensive should not be postponed beyond the end of June.

The object of that offensive was threefold

- 1. To relieve the pressure on Verdun.*
- 2. To assist our Allies in the other theatres of war by stopping any further transfer of German troops from the Western front.*
- 3. To wear down the strength of the forces opposed to us.*

3. While my final preparations were in progress the enemy made two unsuccessful attempts to interfere with my arrangements. The first, directed on the 21st May against our positions on the Vimy Ridge, south and south-east of Souchez, held by the 47th and 25th Divisions (Major-Generals Sir C. St. L. Barter and E. G. T. Bainbridge commanding), resulted in a small enemy gain of no strategic or tactical importance; and rather than weaken my offensive by involving additional troops in the task of recovering the lost ground, I decided to consolidate a position in rear of our original line.

The second enemy attack was delivered on the 2nd June on a front of over one and a half miles from Mount Sorrell to Hooge, held by the 3rd Division (Major-General L. J. Lipsett), and succeeded in penetrating to a maximum depth of 700 yards. As the southern part of the lost position commanded our trenches I judged it necessary to recover it, and by an attack launched on the 13th June, carefully prepared and well executed, this was successfully accomplished by the troops on the spot (1st Canadian Division, Major-General A. W. Currie).

Neither of these enemy attacks succeeded in delaying the preparations for the major operations which I had in view.

Preparations for the Somme Battle

- 4. These preparations were necessarily very elaborate and took considerable time.*

Vast stocks of ammunition and stores of all kinds had to be accumulated beforehand within a convenient distance of our front. To deal with these many miles of new railways - both standard and narrow gauge - and trench tramways were laid. All available roads were improved, many others were made, and long causeways were built over marshy valleys.

Many additional dug-outs had to be provided as shelter for the troops, for use as dressing stations for the wounded, and as magazines for storing ammunition, food, water, and engineering material. Scores of miles of deep communication trenches had to be dug, as well as trenches for telephone wires, assembly and assault trenches, and numerous gun emplacements and observation posts.

Important mining operations were undertaken, and charges were laid at various points beneath the enemy's lines.

Except in the river valleys, the existing supplies of water were hopelessly insufficient to meet the requirements of the numbers of men and horses to be concentrated in this area as the preparations for our offensive proceeded.

To meet this difficulty many wells and borings were sunk, and over one hundred pumping plants were installed. More than one hundred and twenty miles of water mains were laid, and everything was got ready to ensure an adequate water supply as our troops advanced.

Much of this preparatory work had to be done under very trying conditions, and was liable to constant interruption from the enemy's fire. The weather, on the whole, was bad, and the local accommodation totally insufficient for housing the troops employed, who consequently had to content themselves with such rough shelter as could be provided in the circumstances.

All this labour, too, had to be carried out in addition to fighting and to the everyday work of maintaining existing defences. It threw a very heavy strain on the troops, which was borne by them with cheerfulness beyond all praise.

The Enemy's Position

5. The enemy's position to be attacked was of a very formidable character, situated on a high, undulating tract of ground, which rises to more than 500 feet above sea-level, and forms the watershed between the Somme on the one side and the rivers of south-western Belgium on the other.

On the southern face of this watershed, the general trend of which is from east-south-east to west-north-west, the ground falls in a series of long irregular spurs and deep depressions to the valley of the Somme. Well down the forward slopes of this face the enemy's first system of defence, starting from the Somme near Curlu, ran at first northwards for 3,000 yards, then westwards for 7,000 yards to near Fricourt, where it turned nearly due north, forming a great salient angle in the enemy's line.

Some 10,000 yards north of Fricourt the trenches crossed the River Ancre, a tributary of the Somme, and still running northwards passed over the summit of the watershed, about Hebuterne and Gommecourt, and then down its northern spurs to Arras.

On the 20,000 yards front between the Somme and the Ancre the enemy had a strong second system of defence, sited generally on or near the southern crest of the highest part of the watershed, at an average distance of from 3,000 to 5,000 yards behind his first system of trenches.

During nearly two years' preparation he had spared no pains to render these defences impregnable. The first and second systems each consisted of several lines of deep trenches, well provided with bomb-proof shelters and with numerous communication trenches connecting them. The front of the trenches in each system was protected by wire entanglements, many of them in two belts forty yards broad, built of iron stakes interlaced with barbed wire, often almost as thick as a man's finger.

The numerous woods and villages in and between these systems of defence had been turned into veritable fortresses. The deep cellars usually to be found in the villages, and the numerous pits and quarries common to a chalk country, were used to provide cover for machine guns and trench mortars.

The existing cellars were supplemented by elaborate dug-outs, sometimes in two storeys, and these were connected up by passages as much as thirty feet below the surface of the ground. The salients in the enemy's line, from which he could bring enfilade fire across his front, were made into self-contained forts, and often protected by mine fields; while strong redoubts and concrete machine gun emplacements had been constructed in positions from which he could sweep his own trenches should these be taken. The ground lent itself to good artillery observation on the enemy's part, and he had skillfully arranged for cross fire by his guns.

These various systems of defence, with the fortified localities and other supporting points between them, were cunningly sited to afford each other mutual assistance and to admit of the utmost possible development of enfilade and flanking fire by machine guns and artillery. They formed, in short, not merely a series of successive lines, but one composite system of enormous depth and strength.

Behind his second system of trenches, in addition to woods, villages and other strong points prepared for defence, the enemy had several other lines already completed; and we had learnt from aeroplane reconnaissance that he was hard at work improving and strengthening these and digging fresh ones between them, and still further back.

In the area above described, between the Somme and the Ancre, our front line trenches ran parallel and close to those of the enemy, but below them. We had good direct observation on his front system of trenches and on the various defences sited on the slopes above us

Between his first and second systems; but the second system itself, in many places, could not be observed from the ground in our possession, while, except from the air, nothing could be seen of his more distant defences.

North of the Ancre, where the opposing trenches ran transversely across the main ridge, the enemy's defences were equally elaborate and formidable. So far as command of ground was concerned, we were here practically on level terms; but, partly as a result of this, our direct observation over the ground held by the enemy was not so good as it was further south.

On portions of this front the opposing first line trenches were more widely separated from each other; while in the valleys to the north were many hidden gun positions from which the enemy could develop flanking fire on our troops as they advanced across the open.

Arrangement

6. The period of active operations dealt with in this Despatch divides itself roughly into three phases. The first phase opened with the attack of the 1st July, the success of which evidently came as a surprise to the enemy and caused considerable confusion and disorganization in his ranks.

The advantages gained on that date and developed during the first half of July may be regarded as having been rounded off by the operations of the 14th July and three following days, which gave us possession of the southern crest of the main plateau between Delville Wood and Bazentin-le-Petit.

We then entered upon a contest lasting for many weeks, during which the enemy, having found his strongest defences unavailing, and now fully alive to his danger, put forth his utmost efforts to keep his hold on the main ridge.

This stage of the battle constituted a prolonged and severe struggle for mastery between the contending armies, in which, although progress was slow and difficult, the confidence of our troops in their ability to win was never shaken. Their tenacity and determination proved more than equal to their task, and by the first week in September they had established a fighting superiority that has left its mark on the enemy, of which possession of the ridge was merely the visible proof.

The way was then opened for the third phase, in which our advance was pushed down the forward slopes of the ridge and further extended on both flanks, until, from Morval to Thiepval, the whole plateau and a good deal of ground beyond were in our possession. Meanwhile our gallant Allies, in addition to great successes south of the Somme, had pushed their advance, against equally determined opposition and under most difficult tactical conditions, up the long slopes on our immediate right, and were now preparing to drive the enemy from the summit of the narrow and difficult portion of the main ridge which lies between the Combles Valley and the River Tortille, a stream flowing from the north into the Somme just below Peronne.

The Somme Battle - First Phase

The Overrunning of the German Entrenched Positions

7. Defences of the nature described could only be attacked with any prospect of success after careful artillery preparation. It was accordingly decided that our bombardment should begin on the 24th June, and a large force of artillery was brought into action for the purpose.

Artillery bombardments were also carried out daily at different points on the rest of our front, and during the period from the 24th June to 1st July gas was discharged with good effect at more than forty places along our line, upon a frontage which in total amounted to over fifteen miles. Some 70 raids, too, were undertaken by our infantry between Gommecourt and our extreme left north of Ypres during the week preceding the attack, and these kept me well informed as to the enemy's dispositions, besides serving other useful purposes.

On the 25th June the Royal Flying Corps carried out a general attack on the enemy's observation balloons, destroying nine of them, and depriving the enemy for the time being of this form of observation.

The Opening Assault - 1 July

8. On July 1st, at 7.30 am, after a final hour of exceptionally violent bombardment, our infantry assault was launched. Simultaneously the French attacked on both sides of the Somme, co-operating closely with us.

The British main front of attack extended from Maricourt on our right, round the salient at Fricourt, to the Ancre in front of St. Pierre Divion. To assist this main attack by holding the enemy's reserves and occupying his artillery, the enemy's trenches north of the Ancre, as far as Serre inclusive, were to be assaulted simultaneously; while further north a subsidiary attack was to be made on both sides of the salient at Gommecourt.

I had entrusted the attack on the front from Maricourt to Serre to the Fourth Army, under the command of General Sir Henry S. Rawlinson, with five Army Corps at his disposal. The subsidiary attack at Gommecourt was carried out by troops from the Third Army commanded by General Sir E. H. H. Allenby.

Just prior to the attack the mines which had been prepared under the enemy's lines were exploded, and smoke was discharged at many places along our front. Through this smoke our infantry advanced to the attack with the utmost steadiness, in spite of the very heavy barrage of the enemy's guns. On our right our troops met with immediate success, and rapid progress was made.

Before midday Montauban had been carried by the 30th Division, and shortly afterwards the Briqueterie to the east, and the whole of the ridge to the west of the village were in our hands (18th Division). Opposite Mametz part of our assembly trenches had been practically levelled by the enemy artillery, making it necessary for our infantry (7th Division) to advance to the attack across 400 yards of open ground.

None the less they forced their way into Mametz, and reached their objective in the valley beyond, first throwing out a defensive flank towards Fricourt on their left. At the same time the enemy's trenches were entered by the 21st Division north of Fricourt, so that the enemy's garrison in that village was pressed on three sides.

Further north, though the villages of La Boisselle and Ovillers for the time being resisted our attack, our troops (34th and 8th Divisions) drove deeply into the German lines on the flanks of these strongholds, and so paved the way for their capture later. On the spur running south from Thiepval the work known as the Leipzig Salient was stormed by the 32nd Division, and severe fighting took place for the possession of the village and its defences.

Here and north of the valley of the Ancre as far as Serre on the left flank of our attack, our initial successes were not sustained. Striking progress was made at many points and parties of troops penetrated the enemy's positions to the outer defences of Grandcourt (36th Division), and also to Pendant Copse (4th Division) and Serre (31st Division); but the enemy's continued resistance at Thiepval and Beaumont Hamel (29th Division) made it impossible to forward reinforcements and ammunition, and, in spite of their gallant efforts, our troops were forced to withdraw during the night to their own lines.

The subsidiary attack at Gommecourt also forced its way into the enemy's positions; but there met with such vigorous opposition that as soon as it was considered that the attack had fulfilled its object our troops were withdrawn.

The Attack Continued

9. In view of the general situation at the end of the first day's operations, I decided that the best course was to press forward on a front extending from our junction with the French to a point halfway between La Boiselle and Contalmaison, and to limit the offensive on our left for the present to a slow and methodical advance. North of the Ancre such preparations were to be made as would hold the enemy to his positions, and enable the attack to be resumed there later if desirable.

In order that General Sir Henry Rawlinson might be left free to concentrate his attention on the portion of the front where the attack was to be pushed home, I also decided to place the operations against the front, La Boiselle to Serre, under the command of General Sir Hubert de la P. Gough, to whom I accordingly allotted the two northern corps of Sir Henry Rawlinson's Army.

My instructions to Sir Hubert Gough were that his Army was to maintain a steady pressure on the front from La Boiselle to the Serre Road, and to act as a pivot on which our line could swing as our attacks on his right made progress towards the north.

10. During the succeeding days the attack was continued on these lines. In spite of strong counter-attacks on the Briqueterie and Montauban, by midday on the 2nd July our troops (17th Division, Major-General T. D. Pitcher) had captured Fricourt, and in the afternoon and evening stormed Fricourt Wood and the farm to the north.

During the 3rd and 4th July Bernafay and Caterpillar Woods were also captured, and our troops pushed forward to the railway north of Mametz. On these days the reduction of La Boiselle was completed after hard fighting (19th Division, Major-General G. T. M. Bridges), while the outskirts of Contalmaison were reached on the 5th July (the 23rd Division, Major-General J. M. Babington, taking part in this fighting with the 17th and 7th Divisions).

North of La Boiselle also the enemy's forces opposite us were kept constantly engaged, and our holding in the Leipzig Salient was gradually increased.

To sum up the results of the fighting of these five days, on a front of over six miles, from the Briqueterie to La Boiselle, our troops had swept over the whole of the enemy's first and strongest system of defence, which he had done his utmost to render impregnable. They had driven him back over a distance of more than a mile, and had carried four elaborately fortified villages.

The number of prisoners passed back to the Corps cages at the close of the 5th July had already reached the total of ninety-four officers and 5,724 other ranks.

11. After the five days' heavy and continuous fighting just described it was essential to carry out certain readjustments and reliefs of the forces engaged. In normal conditions of enemy resistance the amount of progress that can be made at any time without a pause in the general advance is necessarily limited.

Apart from the physical exhaustion of the attacking troops and the considerable distances separating the enemy's successive main systems of defence, special artillery preparation was required before a successful assault could be delivered. Meanwhile, however, local operations were continued in spite of much unfavourable weather. The attack on Contalmaison and Mametz Wood was undertaken on the 7th July by the 38th Division (Major-General I. Philipps), and the 17th, 23rd and 19th Divisions.

After three days' obstinate fighting, in the course of which the enemy delivered several powerful counter-attacks, the village and the whole of the wood, except its northern border, were finally secured. On the 7th July also a footing was gained in the outer defences of Owillers (25th and 12th Divisions, Major-General A. B. Scott commanding the 12 Division), while on the 9th July on our extreme right Maltz Horn Farm - an important point on the spur north of Hardecourt - was secured.

A thousand yards north of this farm our troops (30th Division) had succeeded at the second attempt in establishing themselves on the 8th July in the southern end of Trones Wood. The enemy's positions in the northern and eastern parts of this wood were very strong, and no less than eight powerful German counter-attacks were made here during the next five days. In the course of this struggle portions of the wood changed hands several times; but we were left eventually, on the 13th July, in possession of the southern part of it.

12. Meanwhile Mametz Wood had been entirely cleared of the enemy (by the 21st Division), and with Trones Wood also practically in our possession we were in a position to undertake an assault upon the enemy's second system of defences. Arrangements were accordingly made for an attack to be delivered at daybreak on the morning of the 14th July against a front extending from Longueval to Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, both inclusive.

Contalmaison Villa, on a spur 1,000 yards west of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, had already been captured to secure the left flank of the attack, and advantage had been taken of the progress made by our infantry to move our artillery forward into new positions. The preliminary bombardment had opened on the 11th July. The opportunities offered by the ground for enfilading the enemy's lines were fully utilised and did much to secure the success of our attack.

The Attack of 14 July

13. In the early hours of the 14th July the attacking troops moved out over the open for a distance of from about 1,000 to 1,400 yards, and lined up in the darkness just below the crest and some 300 to 500 yards from the enemy's trenches. Their advance was covered by strong patrols, and their correct deployment had been ensured by careful previous preparations.

The whole movement was carried out unobserved and without touch being lost in any case. The decision to attempt a night operation of this magnitude with an Army, the bulk of which has been raised since the beginning of the war, was perhaps the highest tribute that could be paid to the quality of our troops.

It would not have been possible but for the most careful preparation and forethought, as well as thorough reconnaissance of the ground which was in many cases made personally by Divisional, Brigade and Battalion Commanders and their staffs before framing their detailed orders for the advance.

The actual assault was delivered at 3.25 a.m. on the 14th July, when there was just sufficient light to be able to distinguish friend from foe at short ranges, and along the whole front attacked our troops, preceded by a very effective artillery barrage, swept over the enemy's first trenches and on into the defences beyond.

On our right the enemy was driven by the 18th Division from his last foothold in Trones Wood, and by 8.0 a.m. we had cleared the whole of it, relieving a body of 170 men (Royal West Kents and Queens) who had maintained themselves all night in the northern corner of the wood, although completely surrounded by the enemy.

Our position in the wood was finally consolidated, and strong patrols were sent out from it in the direction of Guillemont and Longueval. The southern half of this latter village was already in the hands of the troops who had advanced west of Trones Wood (9th Division, Major-General W. T. Furze). The northern half, with the exception of two strong points, was captured by 4.0 p.m. after a severe struggle.

In the centre of our attack Bazentin-le-Grand village and wood were also gained by the 3rd and 7th Divisions (Major-General J. A. L. Haldane commanding the 3rd Division), and our troops pushing northwards captured Bazentin-le-Petit village, and the cemetery to the east. Here the enemy counter-attacked twice about midday without success, and again in the afternoon, on the latter occasion momentarily reoccupying the northern half of the village as far as the church.

Our troops immediately returned to the attack and drove him out again with heavy losses. To the left of the village Bazentin-le-Petit Wood was cleared by the 21st Division, in spite of the considerable resistance of the enemy along its western edge where we successfully repulsed a counter-attack. In the afternoon further ground was gained to the west of the wood (1st Division, Major-General E. P. Strickland), and posts were established immediately south of Pozieres by the 34th Division.

The enemy's troops, who had been severely handled in these attacks and counter-attacks, began to show signs of disorganization, and it was reported early in the afternoon that it was possible to advance to High Wood. General Rawlinson, who had held a force of cavalry in readiness for such an eventuality, decided to employ a part of it.

As the fight progressed small bodies of this force had pushed forward gradually, keeping in close touch with the development of the action and prepared to seize quickly any opportunity that might occur. A squadron (7th Dragoon Guards, Secunderabad Brigade with the Deccan Horse operating with them) now came up on

the flanks of our infantry (7th Division), who entered High Wood at about 8.0 p.m., and, after some hand-to-hand fighting, cleared the whole of the wood with the exception of the northern apex. Acting mounted in cooperation with the infantry, the cavalry came into action with good effect, killing several of the enemy and capturing some prisoners.

14. On the 15th July the battle still continued, though on a reduced scale. Arrow Head Copse, between the southern edge of Trones Wood and Guillemont, and Waterlot Farm on the Longueval-Guillemont Road, were seized, and Delville Wood was captured and held against several hostile counter-attacks (18th and 9th Divisions).

In Longueval fierce fighting continued until dusk for the possession of the two strong points and the orchards to the north of the village. The situation in this area made the position of our troops in High Wood somewhat precarious, and they now began to suffer numerous casualties from the enemy's heavy shelling. Accordingly orders were given for their withdrawal, and this was effected during the night of the 15/16th July without interference by the enemy. All the wounded were brought in.

In spite of repeated enemy counter-attacks, further progress was made by the 1st Division on the night of the 16th July along the enemy's main second line trenches north-west of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood to within 500 yards of the north-east corner of the village of Pozieres, which our troops were already approaching from the south.

Meanwhile the operations further north had also made progress. Since the attack of the 7th July the enemy in and about Ovillers had been pressed relentlessly, and gradually driven back by incessant bombing attacks and local assaults (25th and 32nd Divisions), in accordance with the general instructions I had given to General Sir Hubert Gough.

On the 16th July a large body of the garrison of Ovillers surrendered, and that night and during the following day, by a direct advance from the west across No Man's Land, our troops (48th Division, Major-General R. Fanshawe) carried the remainder of the village and pushed out along the spur to the north and eastwards towards Pozieres.

Results, 17 July

15. The results of the operations of the 14th July and subsequent days were of considerable importance. The enemy's second main system of defence had been captured on a front of over three miles.

We had again forced him back more than a mile, and had gained possession of the southern crest of the main ridge on a front of 6,000 yards. Four more of his fortified villages and three woods had been wrested from him by determined fighting, and our advanced troops had penetrated as far as his third line of defence. In spite of a resolute resistance and many counter-attacks, in which the enemy had suffered severely, our line was definitely established from Maltz Horn Farm, where we met the French left, northwards along the eastern edge of Trones Wood to Longueval, then westwards past

Bazentin-le-Grand to the northern corner of Bazentin-le-Petit and Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, and then westwards again past the southern face of Pozieres, to the north of Ovillers. Posts were established at Arrow Head Copse and Waterlot Farm, while we had troops thrown forward in Delville Wood and towards High Wood, though their position was not yet secure.

I cannot speak too highly of the skill, daring, endurance and determination by which these results had been achieved. Great credit is due to Sir Henry Rawlinson for the thoroughness and care with which this difficult undertaking was planned; while the advance and deployment made by night without confusion, and the complete success of the subsequent attack, constitute a striking tribute to the discipline and spirit of the troops engaged, as well as to the powers of leadership and organization of their commanders and staffs.

During these operations and their development on the 15th a number of enemy guns were taken, making our total captures since the 1st July 8 heavy howitzers, 4 heavy guns, 42 field and light guns and field howitzers, 30 trench mortars and 52 machine guns. Very considerable losses had been inflicted on the enemy, and the prisoners captured amounted to over 2,000 bringing the total since the 1st July to over 10,000.

The Second Phase - The Struggle for the Ridge

16. There was strong evidence that the enemy forces engaged on the battle front had been severely shaken by the repeated successes gained by ourselves and our Allies; but the great strength and depth of his defences had secured for him sufficient time to bring up fresh troops, and he had still many powerful fortifications, both trenches, villages and woods, to which he could cling in our front and on our flanks.

We had, indeed, secured a footing on the main ridge, but only on a front of 6,000 yards; and desirous though I was to follow up quickly the successes we had won, it was necessary first to widen this front.

West of Bazentin-le-Petit the villages of Pozieres and Thiepval, together with the whole elaborate system of trenches round, between and on the main ridge behind them, had still to be carried. An advance further east would, however, eventually turn these defences, and all that was for the present required on the left flank of our attack was a steady, methodical, step by step advance as already ordered.

On our right flank the situation called for stronger measures. At Delville Wood and Longueval our lines formed a sharp salient, from which our front ran on the one side westwards to Pozieres, and on the other southwards to Maltz Horn Farm. At Maltz Horn Farm our lines joined the French, and the Allied front continued still southwards to the village of Hem on the Somme.

This pronounced salient invited counter-attacks by the enemy. He possessed direct observation on it all round from Guillemont on the south-east to High Wood on the north-west. He could bring a concentric fire of artillery to bear not only on the wood and village, but also on the confined space behind, through which ran the French communications as well as ours, where great numbers of guns, besides ammunition and impedimenta of all sorts, had necessarily to be crowded together.

Having been in occupation of this ground for nearly two years he knew every foot of it, and could not fail to appreciate the possibilities of causing us heavy loss there by indirect artillery fire; while it was evident that, if he could drive in the salient in our line and so gain direct observation on to the ground behind, our position in that area would become very uncomfortable.

If there had not been good grounds for confidence that the enemy was not capable of driving from this position troops who had shown themselves able to wrest it from him, the situation would have been an anxious one. In any case it was clear that the first requirement at the moment was that our right flank, and the French troops in extension of it, should swing up into line with our centre. To effect this, however, strong enemy positions had to be captured both by ourselves and by our Allies.

From Delville Wood the main plateau extends for 4,000 yards east-north-east to Les Boeufs and Morval, and for about the same distance south-eastwards to Leuze and Bouleaux Woods, which stand above and about 1,000 yards to the west of Combles. To bring my right up into line with the rest of my front it was necessary to capture Guillemont, Falfemont Farm and Leuze Wood, and then Ginchy and Bouleaux Wood.

These localities were naturally very strong, and they had been elaborately fortified. The enemy's main second line system of defence ran in front of them from Waterlot Farm, which was already in our hands, south-eastwards to Falfemont Farm, and thence southwards to the Somme. The importance of holding us back in this area could not escape the enemy's notice, and he had dug and wired many new trenches, both in front of and behind his original lines. He had also brought up fresh troops, and there was no possibility of taking him by surprise.

The task before us was therefore a very difficult one and entailed a real trial of strength between the opposing forces. At this juncture its difficulties were increased by unfavourable weather. The nature of the ground limited the possibility of direct observation for our artillery fire, and we were consequently much dependent on observation from the air.

As in that element we had attained almost complete superiority, all that we required was a clear atmosphere; but with this we were not favoured for several weeks. We had rather more rain than is usual in July and August, and even when no rain fell there was an almost constant haze and frequent low clouds.

In swinging up my own right it was very important that the French line north of the Somme should be advanced at the same time, in close combination with the movement of the British troops. The line of demarcation agreed on between the French commander and myself ran from Maltz Horn Farm due eastwards to the Combles Valley and then north-eastwards up that valley to a point midway between Sailly-Saillisel and Morval.

These two villages had been fixed upon as the objectives, respectively, of the French left and of my right. In order to advance in cooperation with my right, and eventually to reach Sailly-Saillisel, our Allies had still to fight their way up that portion of the main ridge which lies between the Combles Valley on the west and the River Tortille on the east.

To do so they had to capture, in the first place, the strongly fortified villages of Maurepas, Le Forest, Rancourt and Fregicourt, besides many woods and strong systems of trenches. As the high ground on each side of the Combles Valley commands the slopes of the ridge on the opposite side, it was essential that the advance of the two armies should be simultaneous and made in the closest cooperation. This was fully recognised by both armies, and our plans were made accordingly.

To carry out the necessary preparations to deal with the difficult situation outlined above, a short pause was necessary to enable tired troops to be relieved and guns to be moved forward; while at the same time old communications had to be improved and new ones made. Entrenchments against probable counter-attacks could not be neglected, and fresh dispositions of troops were required for the new attacks to be directed eastwards.

It was also necessary to continue such pressure on the rest of our front, not only on the Ancre but further south, as would make it impossible for the enemy to devote himself entirely to resisting the advance between Delville Wood and the Somme. In addition it was desirable further to secure our hold on the main ridge west of Delville Wood by gaining more ground to our front in that direction.

Orders were therefore issued in accordance with the general considerations explained above, and, without relaxing pressure along the enemy's front from Delville Wood to the west, preparations for an attack on Guillemont were pushed on.

Attack and Counterattack

17. During the afternoon of the 18th July the enemy developed his expected counter-attack against Delville Wood, after heavy preliminary shelling. By sheer weight of numbers and at very heavy cost he forced his way through the northern and north-eastern portions of the wood and into the northern half of Longueval, which our troops (3rd Division) had cleared only that morning.

In the south-east corner of the wood he was held up by a gallant defence (9th and 18th Divisions), and further south three attacks on our positions held by the 35th Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney) in Waterlot Farm failed.

This enemy attack on Delville Wood marked the commencement of the long, closely contested struggle which was not finally decided in our favour till the fall of Guillemont on the 3rd September, a decision which was confirmed by the capture of Ginchy six days later. Considerable gains were indeed made during this period

but progress was slow and bought only by hard fighting. A footing was established in High Wood by the 33rd Division (Major-General H. J. S. Landon) on the 20th July, and our line linked up thence with Longueval by the 7th and 5th Divisions (Major-General R. B. Stephens commanding the 5th Division).

A subsequent advance by the Fourth Army on the 23rd July on a wide front from Guillemont to near Pozieres found the enemy in great strength all along the line, with machine guns and forward troops in shell holes and newly constructed trenches, well in front of his main defences. Although ground was won, the strength of the

resistance experienced showed that the hostile troops had recovered from their previous confusion sufficiently to necessitate long and careful preparation before further successes on any great scale could be secured.

An assault delivered simultaneously on this date by General Gough's Army (1st Australian Division, Major-General H. B. Walker, and 48th Division) against Pozieres gained considerable results, and by the morning of the 25th July the whole of that village was carried, including the cemetery, and important progress was made along the enemy's trenches to the north-east.

That evening (24th July), after heavy artillery preparation, the enemy launched two more powerful counter-attacks, the one directed against our new position in and around High Wood (51st Division, Major-General G. M. Harper) and the other delivered from the northwest of Delville Wood. Both attacks were completely broken up with very heavy losses to the enemy.

On the 27th July the remainder of Delville Wood was recovered by the 2nd Division (Major-General W. G. Walker), and two days later the northern portion of Longueval and the orchards were cleared of the enemy by the 5th Division, after severe fighting, in which our own and the enemy's artillery were very active.

The Problem of Guillemont

18. On the 30th July the village of Guillemont and Falfemont Farm to the south-east were attacked, in conjunction with a French attack north of the Somme. A battalion (2nd Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, 30th Division) entered Guillemont, and part of it passed through to the far side; but as the battalions on either flank did not reach their objectives, it was obliged to fall back, after holding out for some hours on the western edge of the village.

In a subsequent local attack on the 8th August our troops again entered Guillemont, but were again compelled to fall back owing to the failure of a simultaneous effort against the enemy's trenches on the flanks of the village.

The ground to the south of Guillemont was dominated by the enemy's positions in and about that village. It was therefore hoped that these positions might be captured first, before an advance to the south of them in the direction of Falfemont Farm was pushed further forward.

It had now become evident, however, that Guillemont could not be captured as an isolated enterprise without very heavy loss, and, accordingly, arrangements were made with the French Army on our immediate right for a series of combined attacks, to be delivered in progressive stages, which should embrace Maurepas, Falfemont Farm, Guillemont, Leuze Wood and Ginchy.

An attempt on the 16th August to carry out the first stage of the prearranged scheme met with only partial success, and two days later, after a preliminary bombardment lasting thirty-six hours, a larger, combined attack was undertaken. In spite of a -number of enemy counter-attacks-the most violent of which, levelled at the point of junction of the British with the French, succeeded in forcing our Allies and ourselves back from a

part of the ground won very valuable progress was made, and our troops (3rd Division) established themselves in the outskirts of Guillemont Village and occupied Guillemont Station.

A violent counter-attack on Guillemont Station was repulsed on the 23rd August by the 35th Division, and next day further important progress was made on a wide front north and east of Delville Wood (33rd and 14th Divisions).

Minor Operations

19. Apart from the operations already described, others of a minor character, yet involving much fierce and obstinate fighting), continued during this period on the fronts of both the British Armies. Our lines were pushed forward wherever possible by means of local attacks and by bombing and sapping, and the enemy was driven out of various forward positions from which he might hamper our progress.

By these means many gains were made which, though small in themselves, in the aggregate represented very considerable advances. In this way our line was brought to the crest of the ridge above Martinpuich, Pozieres Windmill and the high ground north of the village were secured, and with them observation over Martinpuich and Courcellette and the enemy's gun positions in their neighbourhood and around Le Sars. At a later date our troops reached the defences of Mouquet Farm, north-west of Pozieres, and made progress in the enemy's trenches south of Thiepval.

The enemy's counter-attacks were incessant and frequently of great violence, but they were made in vain and at heavy cost to him. The fierceness of the fighting can be gathered from the fact that one regiment of the German Guard Reserve Corps, which had been in the Thiepval salient opposite Mouquet Farm, is known to have lost 1,400 men in fifteen days.

Guillemont Taken

20. The first two days of September on both Army fronts, were spent in preparation for a more general attack, which the gradual progress made during the preceding month had placed us in a position to undertake. Our assault was delivered at 12 noon on the 3rd September on a front extending from our extreme right to the enemy trenches on the right bank of the Ancre, north of Hamel. Our Allies attacked simultaneously on our right.

Guillemont was stormed and at once consolidated, and our troops pushed on unchecked to Ginchy and the line of the road running south to Wedge Wood. Ginchy was also seized (7th Division), but here in the afternoon we were very strongly counter-attacked. For three days the tide of attack and counter-attack swayed backwards and forwards amongst the ruined houses of the village, till, in the end, for three days more the greater part of it remained in the enemy's possession.

Three counter-attacks made on the evening of the 3rd September against our troops in Guillemont (47th Infantry Brigade, 16th Division) all failed with considerable loss to the enemy. We also gained ground north of Delville Wood and in High Wood, though here an enemy counter-attack recovered part of the ground won.

On the front of General Gough's Army, though the enemy suffered heavy losses in personnel, our gain in ground was slight.

21. In order to keep touch with the French who were attacking on our right, the assault on Falfemont Farm on the 3rd September was delivered, by the 5th Division, three hours before the opening of the main assault. In the impetus of their first rush our troops reached the farm, but could not hold it. Nevertheless, they pushed on to the north of it, and on the 4th September delivered a series of fresh assaults upon it from the west and north.

Ultimately this strongly fortified position was occupied piece by piece, and by the morning of the 5th September the whole of it was in our possession. Meanwhile further progress had been made to the north-east of the farm, where considerable initiative was shown by the local commanders. By the evening of the same day our troops were established strongly in Leuze Wood, which on the following day was finally cleared of the enemy.

The Barrier Broken - Ginchy

22. In spite of the fact that most of Ginchy and of High Wood remained in the enemy's hands, very noteworthy progress had been made in the course of these four days' operations, exceeding anything that had been achieved since the 14th July.

Our right was advanced on a front of nearly two miles to an average depth of nearly one mile, penetrating the enemy's original second line of defence on this front, and capturing strongly fortified positions at Falfemont Farm, Leuze Wood, Guillemont, and south-east of Delville Wood, where we reached the western outskirts of Ginchy.

More important than this gain in territory was the fact that the barrier which for seven weeks the enemy had maintained against our further advance had at last been broken. Over 1,000 prisoners were made and many machine guns taken or destroyed in the course of the fighting.

23. Preparations for a further attack upon Ginchy continued without intermission, and at 4.45 p.m. on the 9th September the attack was reopened on the whole of the Fourth Army front. At Ginchy and to the north of Leuze Wood it met with almost immediate success. On the right (56th Division) the enemy's line was seized over a front of more than 1,000 yards from the south-west corner of Bouleaux Wood in a north-westerly direction to a point just south of the Guillemont-Morval tramway.

Our troops (49th Infantry Brigade, 16th Division) again forced their way into Ginchy, and passing beyond it, carried the line of enemy trenches to the east. Further progress was made east of Delville Wood and south and east of High Wood.

Over 500 prisoners were taken in the operations of the 9th September and following days, making the total since the 1st July over 17,000.

Results Achieved

24. Meanwhile the French had made great progress on our right, bringing their line forward to Louage Wood (just south of Combles) - Le Forest - Clery-sur-Somme, all three inclusive. The weak salient in the Allied line had therefore disappeared, and we had gained the front required for further operations.

Still more importance, however, lay in the proof afforded by the results described of the ability of our new Armies not only to rush the enemy's strongest defences, as had been accomplished on the 1st and 14th July, but also to wear down and break his power of resistance by a steady, relentless pressure, as they had done during the weeks of this fierce and protracted struggle.

As has already been recounted, the preparations made for our assault on the 1st July had been long and elaborate; but though the enemy knew that an attack was coming, it would seem that he considered the troops already on the spot, secure in their apparently impregnable defences, would suffice to deal with it. The success of that assault, combined with the vigour and determination with which our troops pressed their advantage, and followed by the successful night attack of the 14th July, all served to awaken him to a fuller realisation of his danger.

The great depth of his system of fortification, to which reference has been made, gave him time to reorganise his defeated troops, and to hurry up numerous fresh divisions and more guns. Yet in spite of this, he was still pushed back, steadily and continuously. Trench after trench, and strong point after strong point were wrested from him.

The great majority of his frequent counter-attacks failed completely, with heavy loss; while the few that achieved temporary local success purchased it dearly, and were soon thrown back from the ground they had for the moment regained.

The enemy had, it is true, delayed our advance considerably, but the effort had cost him dear; and the comparative collapse of his resistance during the last few days of the struggle justified the belief that in the long run decisive victory would lie with our troops, who had displayed such fine fighting qualities and such indomitable endurance and resolution.

The Third Phase - Exploitation of Success

25. Practically the whole of the forward crest of the main ridge, on a front of some 9,000 yards from Delville Wood to the road above Mouquet Farm, was now in our hands, and with it the advantage of observation over the slopes beyond. East of Delville Wood, for a further 3,000 yards to Leuze Wood, we were firmly established on the main ridge; while further east, across the Combles Valley, the French were advancing victoriously on our right. But though the centre of our line was well placed, on our flanks there was still difficult ground to be won.

From Ginchy the crest of the high ground runs northwards for 2,000 yards, and then eastwards, in a long spur, for nearly 4,000 yards. Near the eastern extremity of this spur stands the village of Morval, commanding a wide field of view and fire in every direction.

At Leuze Wood my right was still 2,000 yards from its objective at this village, and between lay a broad and deep branch of the main Combles Valley, completely commanded by the Morval spur and flanked not only from its head north-east of Ginchy, but also from the high ground east of the Combles Valley, which looks directly into it.

Up this high ground beyond the Combles Valley the French were working their way towards their objective at Saily-Saillisel, situated due east of Morval and standing at the same level. Between these two villages the ground falls away to the head of the Combles Valley, which runs thence in a south-westerly direction.

In the bottom of this valley lies the small town of Combles, then we fortified and strongly held, though dominated by my right at Leuze Wood, and by the French left on the opposite heights. It had been agreed between the French and myself that an assault on Combles would not be necessary, as the place could be rendered untenable by pressing forward along the ridges above it on either side.

The capture of Morval from the south presented a very difficult problem, while the capture of Saily-Saillisel, at that time some 3,000 yards to the north of the French left, was in some respects even more difficult.

The line of the French advance was narrowed almost to a defile by the extensive and strongly fortified wood of St. Pierre Vaast on the one side, and on the other by the Combles Valley, which, with the branches running out from it and the slopes on each side, is completely commanded, as has been pointed out, by the heights bounding the valley on the east and west.

On my right flank, therefore, the progress of the French and British forces was still interdependent, and the closest cooperation continued to be necessary in order to gain the further ground required to enable my centre to advance on a sufficiently wide front.

To cope with such a situation unity of command is usually essential, but in this case the cordial good feeling between the Allied Armies, and the earnest desire of each to assist the other, proved equally effective and removed all difficulties.

On my left flank the front of General Gough's Army bent back from the main ridge near Mouquet Farm down a spur descending south-westwards, and then crossed a broad valley to the Wonderwork, a strong point situated in the enemy's front-line system near the southern end of the spur on the higher slopes of which Thiepval stands.

Opposite this part of our line we had still to carry the enemy's original defences on the main ridge above Thiepval and in the village itself, defences which may fairly be described as being as nearly impregnable as nature, art and the unstinted labour of nearly two years could make them.

Our advance on Thiepval and on the defences above it had been carried out up to this date in accordance with my instructions given on the 3rd July, by a slow and methodical progression, in which great skill and much patience and endurance had been displayed with entirely satisfactory results. General Gough's Army had, in fact, acted most successfully in the required manner as a pivot to the remainder of the attack.

The Thiepval defences were known to be exceptionally strong, and as immediate possession of them was not necessary to the development of my plans after the 1st July, there had been no need to incur the heavy casualties to be expected in an attempt to rush them. The time was now approaching, although it had not yet arrived, when their capture would become necessary; but from the positions we had now reached and those which we expected shortly to obtain, I had no doubt that they could be rushed when required without undue loss.

An important part of the remaining positions required for my assault on them was now won by a highly successful enterprise carried out by the 11th Division (Major-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe) on the evening of the 14th September, by which the Wonderwork was stormed.

26. The general plan of the combined Allied attack which was opened on the 15th September was to pivot on the high ground south of the Ancre and north of the Albert-Bapaume road, while the Fourth Army devoted its whole effort to the rearmost of the enemy's original systems of defence between Morval and Le Sars.

Should our success in this direction warrant it, I made arrangements to enable me to extend the left of the attack to embrace the villages of Martinpuich and Courcellette. As soon as our advance on this front had reached the Morval line, the time would have arrived to bring forward my left across the Thiepval Ridge.

Meanwhile on my right our Allies arranged to continue the line of advance, in close cooperation with me, from the Somme to the slopes above Combles; but directing their main effort northwards against the villages of Rancourt and Fregicourt, so as to complete the isolation of Combles and open the way for their attack upon Saily-Saillisel.

The Attack - 15 September

27. A methodical bombardment was commenced at 6 a.m. on the 12th September and was continued steadily and uninterruptedly till the moment of attack.

At 6.20 a.m. on the 15th September the infantry assault commenced and at the same moment the bombardment became intense. Our new heavily armoured cars, known as "Tanks," now brought into action for the first time, successfully co-operated with the infantry, and coming as a surprise to the enemy rank and file, gave valuable help in breaking down their resistance.

The advance met with immediate success on almost the whole of the front attacked. At 8.40 a.m. tanks were seen to be entering Flers, followed by large numbers of troops. Fighting continued in Flers for some time, but by 10.0 a.m. our troops had reached the north side of the village, and by midday had occupied the enemy's trenches for some distance beyond.

On our right our line was advanced to within assaulting distance of the strong line of defence running before Morval, Les Boeuufs and Gueudecourt, and on our left High Wood was at last carried after many hours of very severe fighting, reflecting great credit on the attacking battalions of the 47th Division. Our success made it possible to carry out during the afternoon that part of the plan which provided for the capture of Martinpuich and Courcellette, and by the end of the day both these villages were in our hands (taken respectively by the 15th Division, and 2nd Canadian Division, Maj.- Gen. R. E. W. Turner).

On the 18th September the work of this day was completed by the capture by the 6th Division of the Quadrilateral, an enemy stronghold which had hitherto blocked the progress of our right towards Morval. Further progress was also made between Flers and Martinpuich.

28. The result of the fighting of the 15th September and following days was a gain more considerable than any which had attended our arms in the course of a single operation since the commencement of the offensive. In the course of one day's fighting we had broken through two of the enemy's main defensive systems and had advanced on a front of over six miles to an average depth of a mile.

In the course of this advance we had taken three large villages, each powerfully organised for prolonged resistance. Two of these villages had been carried by assault with short preparation in the course of a few hours' fighting. All this had been accomplished with a small number of casualties in comparison with the troops employed, and in spite of the fact that, as was afterwards discovered, the attack did not come as a complete surprise to the enemy.

The total number of prisoners taken by us in these operations since their commencement on the evening of the 14th September amounted at this date to over 4,000, including 127 officers.

The Advance Renewed - Combles

29. Preparations for our further advance were again hindered by bad weather, but at 12.35 p.m. on the 25th September, after a bombardment commenced early in the morning of the 24th, a general attack by the Allies was launched on the whole front between the Somme and Martinpuich.

The objectives on the British front included the villages of Morval (5th Division), Les Boeuufs (6th and Guards Divisions) and Gueudecourt (21st Division), and a belt of country about 1,000 yards deep, curving round the north of Flers, to a point midway between that village and Martinpuich. (55th Division, Major-General H. S. Jeudwine, and New Zealand and 1st Divisions). By nightfall the whole of these objectives were in our hands, with the exception of the village of Gueudecourt, before which our troops met with very serious resistance from a party of the enemy in a section of his fourth main system of defence.

On our right our Allies carried the village of Rancourt, and advanced their line to the outskirts of Fregicourt, capturing that village also during the night and early morning. Combles was therefore nearly surrounded by the Allied forces, and in the early morning of the 26th September the village was occupied simultaneously by the Allied forces, the British to the north and the French to the south of the railway.

The capture of Combles in this inexpensive fashion represented a not inconsiderable tactical success. Though lying in a hollow, the village was very strongly fortified and possessed, in addition to the works which the enemy had constructed, exceptionally large cellars and galleries at a great depth underground, sufficient to give effectual shelter to troops and material under the heaviest bombardment. Great quantities of stores and ammunition of all sorts were found in these cellars when the village was taken.

On the same day Gueudecourt was carried by the 21st Division, after the protecting trench to the west had been captured in a somewhat interesting fashion. In the early morning a tank started from the north-west down the portion of the trench held by the enemy, firing its machine guns and followed by bombers. The enemy could not escape, as we held the trench at the southern end. At the same time an aeroplane flew down the length of the trench, also firing a machine gun at the enemy holding it.

These then waved white handkerchiefs in token of surrender, and when this was reported by the aeroplane the infantry accepted the surrender of the garrison. By 8.30 a.m. the whole trench had been cleared, great numbers of the enemy had been killed, and 8 officers and 362 other ranks made prisoners. Our total casualties amounted to five.

Thiepval

30. The success of the Fourth Army had now brought our advance to the stage at which I judged it advisable that Thiepval should be taken, in order to bring our left flank into line and establish it on the main ridge above that village, the possession of which would be of considerable tactical value in future operations.

Accordingly at 12.25 p.m. on the 26th September, before the enemy had been given time to recover from the blow struck by the Fourth Army, a general attack was launched against Thiepval and the Thiepval Ridge. The objective consisted of the whole of the high ground still remaining in enemy hands, extending over a front of some 3,000 yards north and east of Thiepval, and including, in addition to that fortress, the Zollern Redoubt, the Stuff Redoubt, and the Schwaben Redoubt, with the connecting lines of trenches.

The attack was a brilliant success. On the right our troops (2nd and 1st Canadian Divisions of the Canadian Corps, Lieut.-General Sir J. H. G. Byng) reached the system of enemy trenches which formed their objectives without great difficulty.

In Thiepval and the strong works to the north of it the enemy's resistance was more desperate. Three waves of our attacking troops (11th and 18th Divisions, II. Corps, Lieut.-General C. W. Jacob) carried the outer defences of Mouquet Farm, and, pushing on, entered Zollern Redoubt which they stormed and consolidated. In the strong point formed by the buildings of the farm itself, the enemy garrison, securely posted in deep cellars, held out until 6.0 p.m., when their last defences were forced by a working party of a Pioneer Battalion acting on its own initiative.

On the left of the attack fierce fighting, in which tanks again gave valuable assistance to our troops (18th Division), continued in Thiepval during that day and the following night, but by 8.30 a.m. on the 27th September the whole of the village of Thiepval was in our hands.

Some 2,300 prisoners were taken in the course of the fighting on the Thiepval Ridge on these and the subsequent days, bringing the total number of prisoners taken in the battle area in the operations of the 14th-30th September to nearly 10,000. In the same period we had captured 27 guns, over 200 machine guns, and some 40 trench mortars.

Further Successes

31. On the same date the south and west sides of Stuff Redoubt were carried by our troops (11th Division), together with the length of trench connecting that strong point with Schwaben Redoubt to the west, and also the greater part of the enemy's defensive line eastwards along the northern slopes of the ridge.

Schwaben Redoubt was assaulted during the afternoon of the 28th September (18th Division), and in spite of counter-attacks, delivered by strong enemy reinforcements, we captured the whole of the southern face of the redoubt and pushed out patrols to the northern face and towards St. Pierre Divion.

Our line was also advanced north of Courcellette, while on the Fourth Army front on the 27th September a further portion of the enemy's fourth system of defence north-west of Gueudecourt was carried on a front of a mile by the 55th and New Zealand Divisions. Between these two points the enemy fell back upon his defences running in front of Eaucourt l'Abbaye and Le Sars, and on the afternoon and evening of the 27th September our troops were able to make a very considerable advance in this area without encountering serious opposition until within a few hundred yards of this line.

The ground thus occupied extended to a depth of from 500 to 600 yards on a front of nearly two miles between the Bazentin-le-Petit, Lingy Thillois and Albert-Bapaume roads.

Destremont Farm, south-west of Le Sars, was carried by a single company (23rd Division) on the 29th September, and on the afternoon of the 1st October a successful attack was launched (15) against Eaucourt l'Abbaye and the enemy defences to the east and west of it, comprising a total front of about 3,000 yards.

Our artillery barrage was extremely accurate, and contributed greatly to the success of the attack. Bomb fighting continued among the buildings during the next two days, but by the evening of the 3rd October the whole of Eaucourt l'Abbaye was in our hands.

32. At the end of September I had handed over Morval to the French, in order to facilitate their attacks on Sailly-Saillisel, and on the 7th October, after a postponement rendered necessary by three days' continuous rain, our Allies made a considerable advance in the direction of the latter village. On the same day the Fourth Army attacked along the whole front from Les Boeufs to Destremont Farm, in support of the operations of our Allies.

The village of Le Sars was captured by the 23rd Division, together with the quarry to the north-west, while considerable progress was made at other points along the front attacked. In particular, to the east of Gueudecourt, the enemy's trenches were carried by the 20th Division on a breadth of some 2,000 yards, and a footing gained on the crest of the long spur which screens the defences of Le Transloy from the south-west. Nearly 1,000 prisoners were secured by the Fourth Army in the course of these operations.

The Situation

33. With the exception of his positions in the neighbourhood of Sailly-Saillisel, and his scanty foothold on the northern crest of the high ground above Thiepval, the enemy had now been driven from the whole of the ridge lying between the Tortille and the Ancre.

Possession of the north-western portion of the ridge north of the latter village carried with it observation over the valley of the Ancre between Miraumont and Hamel, and the spurs and valleys held by the enemy on the right bank of the river. The Germans, therefore, made desperate efforts to cling to their last remaining trenches in this area, and in the course of the three weeks following our advance made repeated counter-attacks at heavy cost in the vain hope of recovering the ground they had lost.

During this period our gains in the neighbourhood of Stuff and Schwaben Redoubts were gradually increased and secured in readiness for future operations; and I was quite confident of the ability of our troops, not only to repulse the enemy's attacks, but to clear him entirely from his last positions on the ridge whenever it should suit my plans to do so. I was, therefore, well content with the situation on this flank.

Along the centre of our line from Gueudecourt to the west of Le Sars similar considerations applied. As we were already well down the forward slopes of the ridge on this front, it was for the time being inadvisable to make any serious advance. Pending developments elsewhere, all that was necessary or indeed desirable was to carry on local operations to improve our positions and to keep the enemy fully employed.

On our eastern flank, on the other hand, it was important to gain ground. Here the enemy still possessed a strong system of trenches covering the villages of Le Transloy and Beaulencourt and the town of Bapaume; but, although he was digging with feverish haste, he had not yet been able to create any very formidable defences behind this line.

In this direction, in fact, we had at last reached a stage at which a successful attack might reasonably be expected to yield greater results than anything we had yet attained. The resistance of the troops opposed to us had seriously weakened in the course of our recent operations, and there was no reason to suppose that the effort required would not be within our powers.

This last completed system of defence, before Le Transloy, was banked to the south by the enemy's positions at Sailly-Saillisel, and screened to the west by the spur lying between Le Transloy and Les Boeufs. A necessary preliminary, therefore, to an assault upon it was to secure the spur and the Sailly-Saillisel heights.

Possession of the high ground at this latter village would at once give a far better command over the ground to the north and north-west, secure the flank of our operations towards Le Transloy, and deprive the enemy of observation over the Allied communications in the Combles Valley. In view of the enemy's efforts to construct new systems of defence behind the Le Transloy line, it was desirable to lose no time in dealing with the situation.

Unfortunately, at this juncture, very unfavourable weather set in and continued with scarcely a break during the remainder of October and the army part of November. Poor visibility seriously interfered with the work of our artillery; and constant rain turned the mass of hastily dug trenches for which we were fighting into channels of deep mud.

The country roads, broken by countless shell craters, that crossed the deep stretch of ground we had lately won, rapidly became almost impassable, making the supply of food, stores and ammunition a serious problem. These conditions multiplied the difficulties of attack to such an extent that it was found impossible to exploit the situation with the rapidity necessary to enable us to reap the full benefits of the advantages we had gained.

None the less my right flank continued to assist the operations of our Allies against Saillisel, and attacks were made to this end whenever a slight improvement in the weather made the cooperation of artillery and infantry at all possible. The delay in our advance, however, though unavoidable, had given the enemy time to reorganise and rally his troops.

His resistance again became stubborn and he seized every favourable opportunity for counter-attacks. Trenches changed hands with great frequency, the conditions of ground making it difficult to renew exhausted supplies of bombs and ammunition, or to consolidate the ground won, and so rendering it an easier matter to take a battered trench than to hold it.

Other Minor Operations

34. On the 12th and 18th September further gains were made to the east of the Les Boeufs-Gueudecourt line and east of Le Sars, and some hundreds of prisoners were taken. On these dates, despite all the difficulties of ground, the French first reached and then captured the village of Sailly-Saillisel, but the moment for decisive action was rapidly passing away, while the weather showed no signs of improvement.

By this time, too, the ground had already become so bad that nothing less than a prolonged period of drying weather, which at that season of the year was most unlikely to occur, would suit our purpose.

In these circumstances, while continuing to do all that was possible to improve my position on my right flank, I determined to press on with preparations for the exploitation of the favourable local situation on my left flank. At midday on the 21st October, during a short spell of fine, cold weather, the line of Regina Trench and Stuff Trench, from the west Courcelette-Pys road westward to Schwaben Redoubt, was attacked with

complete success by the 4th Canadian, 18th and 15th Divisions, and the 39th Division (Major-General R. Dawson).

Assisted by an excellent artillery preparation and barrage, our infantry carried the whole of their objectives very quickly and with remarkably little loss, and our new line was firmly established in spite of the enemy's shell fire. Over 1,000 prisoners were taken in the course of the day's fighting, a figure only slightly exceeded by our casualties.

On the 23rd October, and again on the 5th November, while awaiting better weather for further operations on the Ancre, our attacks on the enemy's positions to the east of Les Boeufs and Gueudecourt were renewed, in conjunction with French operations against the Sailly-Saillisel heights and St. Pierre Vaast Wood. Considerable further progress was achieved by the 4th and 8th Divisions (Major-Generals the Hon. W. Lambton and H. Hudson).

Our footing on the crest of the Le Transloy spur was extended and secured, and the much contested tangle of trenches at our junction with the French left at last passed definitely into our possession. Many smaller gains were made in this neighbourhood by local assaults during these days, in spite of the difficult conditions of the ground. In particular, on the 10th November, after a day of improved weather, the portion of Regina Trench lying to the east of the Courcelette-Pys road was carried by the 4th Canadian Division on a front of about 1,000 yards.

Throughout these operations the enemy's counter-attacks were very numerous and determined, succeeding indeed in the evening of the 23rd October in regaining a portion of the ground east of Le Sars taken from him by our attack on that day. On all other occasions his attacks were broken by our artillery or infantry, and the losses incurred by him in these attempts, made frequently with considerable effectives, were undoubtedly very severe.

Beaumont Hamel

35. On the 9th November the long-continued bad weather took a turn for the better, and thereafter remained dry and cold, with frosty nights and misty mornings, for some days. Final preparations were therefore pushed on for the attack on the Ancre, though, as the ground was still very bad in places, it was necessary to limit the operations to what it would be reasonably possible to consolidate and hold under the existing conditions.

The enemy's defences in this area were already extremely formidable when they resisted our assault on the 1st July, and the succeeding period of four months had been spent in improving and adding to them in the light of the experience he had gained in the course of our attacks further south.

The hamlet of St. Pierre Divion and the villages of Beaucourt-sur-Ancre and Beaumont Hamel, like the rest of the villages forming part of the enemy's original front in this district, were evidently intended by him to form a permanent line of fortifications, while he developed his offensive elsewhere. Realising that his position in them had become a dangerous one, the enemy had multiplied the number of his guns covering this part of his

line, and at the end of October introduced an additional division on his front between Grandcourt and Hebuterne.

The Assault

36. At 5 a.m. on the morning of the 11th November the special bombardment preliminary to the attack was commenced. It continued with bursts of great intensity until 5.45 a.m. on the morning of the 13th November, when it developed into a very effective barrage covering the assaulting infantry.

At that hour our troops advanced on the enemy's position through dense fog, and rapidly entered his first line trenches on almost the whole of the front attacked, from east of Schwaben Redoubt to the north of Serre. South of the Ancre, where our assault (19th and 39th Divisions) was directed northwards against the enemy's trenches on the northern slopes of the Thiepval Ridge, it met with a success altogether remarkable for rapidity of execution and lightness of cost.

By 7.20 a.m. our objectives east of St. Pierre Divion had been captured, and the Germans in and about that hamlet were hemmed in between our troops and the river. Many of the enemy were driven into their dug-outs and surrendered, and at 9.0 a.m. the number of prisoners was actually greater than the attacking force. St. Pierre Divion soon fell, and in this area nearly 1,400 prisoners were taken by a single division (the 39th Division) at the expense of less than 600 casualties. The rest of our forces operating south of the Ancre attained their objectives with equal completeness and success.

North of the river the struggle was more severe, but very satisfactory results were achieved. Though parties of the enemy held out for some hours during the day in strong points at various places along his first line and in Beaumont Hamel, the main attack pushed on.

The troops attacking close to the right bank of the Ancre (the 63rd Division, Major-General C. D. Shute) reached their second objectives to the west and north-west of Beaucourt during the morning, and held on there for the remainder of the day and night, though practically isolated from the rest of our attacking troops. Their tenacity was of the utmost value, and contributed very largely to the success of the operations.

At nightfall our troops were established on the western outskirts of Beaucourt, in touch with our forces south of the river, and held a line along the station road from the Ancre towards Beaumont Hamel (51st Division), where we occupied the village.

Further north the enemy's first line system for a distance of about half a mile beyond Beaumont Hamel was also in our hands (2nd Division). Still further north - opposite Serre - the ground was so heavy that it became necessary to abandon the attack at an early stage; although, despite all difficulties, our troops (3rd Division, Major-General C. J. Deverell, and 31st Division) had in places reached the enemy's trenches in the course of their assault.

Next morning, at an early hour, the attack was renewed between Beaucourt and the top of the spur just north of Beaumont Hamel. The whole of Beaucourt was carried, and our line extended to the north-west along the

Beaucourt road across the southern end of the Beaumont Hamel spur. The number of our prisoners steadily rose, and during this and the succeeding days our front was carried forward eastwards and northwards up the slopes of the Beaumont Hamel spur.

The results of this attack were very satisfactory, especially as before its completion bad weather had set in again. We had secured the command of the Ancre Valley on both banks of the river at the point where it entered the enemy's lines, and, without great cost to ourselves, losses had been inflicted on the enemy which he himself admitted to be considerable. Our final total of prisoners taken in these operations, and their development during the subsequent days, exceeded 7,200, including 149 officers.

Our Other Armies

37. Throughout the period dealt with in this Despatch the role of the other armies holding our defensive line from the northern limits of the battle front to beyond Ypres was necessarily a secondary one, but their task was neither light nor unimportant. While required to give precedence in all respects to the needs of the Somme battle, they were responsible for the security of the line held by them and for keeping the enemy on their front constantly on the alert.

Their role was a very trying one, entailing heavy work on the troops and constant vigilance on the part of Commanders and Staffs. It was carried out to my entire satisfaction, and in an unflinching spirit of unselfish and broad-minded devotion to the general good, which is deserving of the highest commendation.

Some idea of the thoroughness with which their duties were performed can be gathered from the fact that in the period of four and a half months from the 1st July some 360 raids were carried out, in the course of which the enemy suffered many casualties and some hundreds of prisoners were taken by us. The largest of these operations was undertaken on the 19th July in the neighbourhood of Armentieres. Our troops penetrated deeply into the enemy's defences, doing much damage to his works and inflicting severe losses upon him.

General Review

Our Main Objects Achieved

38. The three main objects with which we had commenced our offensive in July had already been achieved at the date when this account closes; in spite of the fact that the heavy autumn rains had prevented full advantage being taken of the favourable situation created by our advance, at a time when we had good grounds for hoping to achieve yet more important successes.

Verdun had been relieved; the main German forces had been held on the Western front; and the enemy's strength had been very considerably worn down.

Any one of these three results is in itself sufficient to justify the Somme battle. The attainment of all three of them affords ample compensation for the splendid efforts of our troops and for the sacrifices made by

ourselves and our Allies. They have brought us a long step forward towards the final victory of the Allied cause.

The desperate struggle for the possession of Verdun had invested that place with a moral and political importance out of all proportion to its military value. Its fall would undoubtedly have been proclaimed as a great victory for our enemies, and would have shaken the faith of many in our ultimate success.

The failure of the enemy to capture it, despite great efforts and very heavy losses, was a severe blow to his prestige, especially in view of the confidence he had openly expressed as to the results of the struggle.

Information obtained both during the progress of the Somme battle and since the suspension of active operations has fully established the effect of our offensive in keeping the enemy's main forces tied to the Western front. A movement of German troops eastward, which had commenced in June as a result of the Russian successes, continued for a short time only after the opening of the Allied attack.

Thereafter the enemy forces that moved East consisted, with one exception, of divisions that had been exhausted in the Somme battle, and these troops were always replaced on the Western front by fresh divisions. In November the strength of the enemy in the Western theatre of war was greater than in July, notwithstanding the abandonment of his offensive at Verdun.

It is possible that if Verdun had fallen large forces might still have been employed in an endeavour further to exploit that success. It is, however, far more probable, in view of developments in the Eastern theatre, that a considerable transfer of troops in that direction would have followed. It is therefore justifiable to conclude that the Somme offensive not only relieved Verdun, but held large forces which would otherwise have been employed against our Allies in the East.

The third great object of the Allied operations on the Somme was the wearing down of the enemy's powers of resistance. Any statement of the extent to which this has been attained must depend in some degree on estimates. There is, nevertheless, sufficient evidence to place it beyond doubt that the enemy's losses in men and material have been very considerably higher than those of the Allies, while morally the balance of advantage on our side is still greater.

During the period under review a steady deterioration took place in the moral of large numbers of the enemy's troops. Many of them, it is true, fought with the greatest determination, even in the latest encounters, but the resistance of still larger numbers became latterly decidedly feebler than it had been in the earlier stages of the battle.

Aided by the great depth of his defences, and by the frequent reliefs which his resources in men enabled him to effect, discipline and training held the machine together sufficiently to enable the enemy to rally and reorganise his troops after each fresh defeat.

As our advance progressed, four-fifths of the total number of divisions engaged on the Western front were thrown one after another into the Somme battle, some of them twice, and some three times; and towards the

end of the operations, when the weather unfortunately broke, there can be no doubt that his power of resistance had been very seriously diminished.

The total number of prisoners taken by us in the Somme battle between the 1st July and the 8th November is just over 38,000, including over 800 officers. During the same period we captured 29 heavy guns, 96 field guns and field howitzers, 136 trench mortars, and 54 machine guns.

Our Troops

So far as these results are due to the action of the British forces, they have been attained by troops the vast majority of whom had been raised and trained during the war. Many of them, especially amongst the drafts sent to replace wastage, counted their service by months, and gained in the Somme battle their first experience of war. The conditions under which we entered the war had made this unavoidable.

We were compelled either to use hastily trained and inexperienced officers and men, or else to defer the offensive until we had trained them. In this latter case we should have failed our Allies. That these troops should have accomplished so much under such conditions, and against an Army and a nation whose chief concern for so many years has been preparation for war, constitutes a feat of which the history of our nation records no equal.

The difficulties and hardships cheerfully overcome, and the endurance, determination and invincible courage shown in meeting them, can hardly be imagined by those who have not had personal experience of the battle, even though they have themselves seen something of war.

The events which I have described in this Despatch form but a bare outline of the more important occurrences. To deal in any detail even with these, without touching on the smaller fights and the ceaseless work in the trenches continuing day and night for five months, is not possible here.

Meanwhile, it must suffice to say that troops from every part of the British Isles, and from every Dominion and quarter of the Empire, whether Regulars, Territorials, or men of the New Armies, have borne a share in the Battle of the Somme. While some have been more fortunate than others in opportunities for distinction, all have done their duty nobly.

Among all the long roll of victories borne on the colours of our regiments, there has never been a higher test of the endurance and resolution of our infantry. They have shown themselves worthy of the highest traditions of our race, and of the proud records of former wars.

Against such defences as we had to assault - far more formidable in many respects than those of the most famous fortresses in history - infantry would have been powerless without efficient artillery preparation and support. The work of our artillery was wholly admirable, though the strain on the personnel was enormous.

The excellence of the results attained was the more remarkable, in view of the shortness of the training of most of the junior officers and of the N.C.O.'s and men. Despite this, they rose to a very high level of technical and tactical skill, and the combination between artillery and infantry, on which above everything victory

depends, was an outstanding feature of the battle. Good even in July, it improved with experience, until in the latter assaults it approached perfection.

In this combination between infantry and artillery the Royal Flying Corps played a highly important part. The admirable work of this Corps has been a very satisfactory feature of the battle. Under the conditions of modern war the duties of the Air Service are many and varied.

They include the regulation and control of artillery fire by indicating targets and observing and reporting the results of rounds; the taking of photographs of enemy trenches, strong points, battery positions, and of the effect of bombardments; and the observation of the movements of the enemy behind his lines.

The greatest skill and daring has been shown in the performance of all these duties, as well as in bombing expeditions. Our Air Service has also co-operated with our infantry in their assaults, signalling the position of our attacking troops and turning machine guns on to the enemy infantry and even on to his batteries in action.

Not only has the work of the Royal Flying Corps to be carried out in all weathers and under constant fire from the ground, but fighting in the air has now become a normal procedure, in order to maintain the mastery over the enemy's Air Service. In these fights the greatest skill and determination have been shown, and great success has attended the efforts of the Royal Flying Corps.

I desire to point out, however, that the maintenance of mastery in the air, which is essential, entails a constant and liberal supply of the most up-to-date machines, without which even the most skilful pilots cannot succeed.

The style of warfare in which we have been engaged offered no scope for cavalry action, with the exception of the one instance already mentioned in which a small body of cavalry gave useful assistance in the advance on High Wood.

Intimately associated with the artillery and infantry in attack and defence, the work of various special services contributed much towards the successes gained.

Trench mortars, both heavy and light, have become an important adjunct to artillery in trench warfare, and valuable work has been done by the personnel in charge of these weapons. Considerable experience has been gained in their use, and they are likely to be employed even more frequently in the struggle in future.

Machine guns play a great part - almost a decisive part under some conditions - in modern war, and our Machine Gun Corps has attained to considerable proficiency in their use, handling them with great boldness and skill. The highest value of these weapons is displayed on the defensive rather than in the offensive, and we were attaching.

Nevertheless, in attack also machine guns can exercise very great influence in the hands of men with a quick eye for opportunity and capable of a bold initiative. The Machine Gun Corps, though comparatively recently formed, has done very valuable work and will increase in importance.

The part played by the new armoured cars-known as "tanks" in some of the later fights has been brought to notice by me already in my daily reports. These cars proved of great value on various occasions, and the personnel in charge of them performed many deeds of remarkable valour.

The employment by the enemy of gas and of liquid flame as weapons of offence compelled us, not only to discover ways to protect our troops from their effects, but also to devise means to make use of the same instruments of destruction. Great fertility of invention has been shown, and very great credit is due to the special personnel employed for the rapidity and success with which these new arms have been developed and perfected, and for the very great devotion to duty they have displayed in a difficult and dangerous service.

The Army owes its thanks to the chemists, physiologists and physicists of the highest rank who devoted their energies to enabling us to surpass the enemy in the use of a means of warfare which took the civilised world by surprise. Our own experience of the numerous experiments and trials necessary before gas and flame could be used, of the great preparations which had to be made for their manufacture, and of the special training required for the personnel employed, shows that the employment of such methods by the Germans was not the result of a desperate decision, but had been prepared for deliberately.

Since we have been compelled, in self-defence, to use similar methods, it is satisfactory to be able to record, on the evidence of prisoners, of documents captured, and of our own observation, that the enemy has suffered heavy casualties from our gas attacks, while the means of protection adopted by us have proved thoroughly effective.

Throughout the operations Engineer troops, both from home and overseas, have played an important role, and in every engagement the Field Companies, assisted by Pioneers, have cooperated with the other arms with the greatest gallantry and devotion to duty.

In addition to the demands made on the services of the Royal Engineers in the firing line, the duties of the Corps during the preparation and development of the offensive embraced the execution of a vast variety of important works, to which attention has already been drawn in this Despatch. Whether in or behind the firing line, or on the lines of communication, these skilled troops have continued to show the power of resource and the devotion to duty by which they have ever been characterised.

The Tunnelling Companies still maintain their superiority over the enemy underground, thus safeguarding their comrades in the trenches. Their skill, enterprise and courage have been remarkable, and, thanks to their efforts, the enemy has nowhere been able to achieve a success of any importance by mining.

During the Battle of the Somme the work of the Tunnelling Companies contributed in no small degree to the successful issue of several operations.

The Field Survey Companies have worked throughout with ability and devotion, and have not only maintained a constant supply of the various maps required as the battle progressed, but have in various other ways been of great assistance to the artillery.

The Signal Service, created a short time before the war began on a very small scale, has expanded in proportion with the rest of the Army, and is now a very large organization.

It provides the means of inter-communication between all the Armies and all parts of them, and in modern war requirements in this respect are on an immense and elaborate scale.

The calls on this Service have been very heavy, entailing a most severe strain, often under most trying and dangerous conditions. Those calls have invariably been met with conspicuous success, and no service has shown a more whole-hearted and untiring energy in the fulfilment of its duty.

The great strain of the five months' battle was met with equal success by the Army Service Corps and the Ordnance Corps, as well as by all the other Administrative Services and Departments, both on the Lines of Communication and in front of them. The maintenance of large armies in a great battle under modern conditions is a colossal task.

Though bad weather often added very considerably to the difficulties of transport, the troops never wanted for food, ammunition, or any of the other many and varied requirements for the supply of which these Services and Departments are responsible. This fact in itself is the highest testimony that can be given to the energy and efficiency with which the work was conducted.

In connection with the maintenance and supply of our troops, I desire to express the obligation of the Army to the Navy for the unflinching success with which, in the face of every difficulty, the large numbers of men and the vast quantities of material required by us have been transported across the seas.

I also desire to record the obligation of the Army in the Field to the various authorities at home, and to the workers under them

women as well as men by whose efforts and self-sacrifice all our requirements were met. Without the vast quantities of munitions and stores of all sorts provided, and without the drafts of men sent to replace wastage, the efforts of our troops could not have been maintained.

The losses entailed by the constant fighting threw a specially heavy strain on the Medical Services. This has been met with the greatest zeal and efficiency. The gallantry and devotion with which officers and men of the Regimental Medical Service and Field Ambulances have discharged their duties is shown by the large number of the R.A.M.C. and Medical Corps of the Dominions who have fallen in the field.

The work of the Medical Services behind the front has been no less arduous. The untiring professional zeal and marked ability of the surgical specialists and consulting surgeons, combined with the skill and devotion of the medical and nursing staffs, both at the Casualty Clearing Stations in the field and the Stationary and General Hospitals at the Base, have been beyond praise. In this respect also the Director-General has on many occasions expressed to me the immense help the British Red Cross Society have been to him in assisting the R.A.M.C. in their work.

The health of the troops has been most satisfactory, and, during the period to which this Despatch refers, there has been an almost complete absence of wastage due to disease of a preventable nature.

The Army Commanders and Staffs

With such large forces as we now have in the field, the control exercised by a Commander-in-Chief is necessarily restricted to a general guidance, and great responsibilities devolve on the Army Commanders.

In the Somme Battle these responsibilities were entrusted to Generals Sir Henry Rawlinson and Sir Hubert Gough, commanding respectively the Fourth and Fifth Armies, who for five months controlled the operations of very large forces in one of the greatest, if not absolutely the greatest struggle that has ever taken place.

It is impossible to speak too highly of the great qualities displayed by these commanders throughout the battle. Their thorough knowledge of their profession, and their cool and sound judgment, tact and determination proved fully equal to every call on them. They entirely justified their selection for such responsible commands.

The preparations for the battle, with the exception of those at Gommecourt, were carried out under Sir Henry Rawlinson's orders. It was not until after the assault of the 1st July that Sir Hubert Gough was placed in charge of a portion of the front of attack, in order to enable Sir Henry Rawlinson to devote his whole attention to the area in which I then decided to concentrate the main effort.

The Army Commanders have brought to my notice the excellent work done by their Staff Officers and Technical Advisers, as well as by the various commanders and staffs serving under them, and I have already submitted the names of the various officers and others recommended by them.

I desire also to record my obligation to my own Staff at General Head Quarters and on the Lines of Communication, and to the various Technical Advisers attached thereto for their loyal and untiring assistance.

Throughout the operations the whole Army has worked with a remarkable absence of friction and with a self-sacrifice and wholehearted devotion to the common cause which is beyond praise. This has ensured and will continue to ensure the utmost concentration of effort. It is indeed a privilege to work with such officers and with such men.

Our Allies

I cannot close this Despatch without alluding to the happy relations which continue to exist between the Allied Armies and between our troops and the civil population in France and Belgium. The unfailing cooperation of our Allies, their splendid fighting qualities and the kindness and goodwill universally displayed towards us have won the gratitude, as well as the respect and admiration, of all ranks of the British Armies.

Future Prospects

In conclusion, I desire to add a few words as to future prospects.

The enemy's power has not yet been broken, nor is it yet possible to form an estimate of the time the war may last before the objects for which the Allies are fighting have been attained. But the Somme battle has placed beyond doubt the ability of the Allies to gain those objects.

The German Army is the mainstay of the Central Powers, and a full half of that Army, despite all the advantages of the defensive, supported by the strongest fortifications, suffered defeat on the Somme this year. Neither the victors nor the vanquished will forget this; and, though bad weather has given the enemy a respite, there will undoubtedly be many thousands in his ranks who will begin the new campaign with little confidence in their ability to resist our assaults or to overcome our defence.

Our new Armies entered the battle with the determination to win and with confidence in their power to do so. They have proved to themselves, to the enemy, and to the world that this confidence was justified, and in the fierce struggle they have been through they have learned many valuable lessons which will help them in the future.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

D. HAIG, General,

Commanding-in-Chief, British Armies in France.

FOOTNOTES

(1) This Despatch was published as a supplement to the London Gazette dated 29 December 1916.

(2) The choice of front for the Allied offensive was governed by the consideration that neither the French nor ourselves were at the moment deemed strong enough to undertake unaided an offensive on a really large scale. It was therefore necessary to deliver a combined attack.

(3) Between January, 1916, and July, 1916, the strength of the British Armies on the Western front in bayonets and sabres increased from 450,000 to 660,000.

(4) On the 14th May, 1916, the Austrians attacked in the Trentino and by the end of May had advanced to Arsiero and Asiago.

(5) Brusilov's offensive on the Galician front in which Lutsk and Czernowitz were taken by the Russians.

(6) The disposition of our forces from south to north at the moment of attack was as follows :

Fourth Army

XIII. Corps Lt.-Gen. W. N. Congreve.

30th Div. *Maj.-Gen. J. S. M. Shea.*

18th Div. *Maj.-Gen. F. I. Maxse.*

XV. Corps *Lt.-Gen. H. S. Horne.*

7th Div. *Maj.-Gen. H. E. Watts.*

21st Div. *Maj.-Gen. D. G. M. Campbell.*

III. Corps *Lt.-Gen. Sir W. P. Pulteney.*

34th Div. *Maj.-Gen. E. C. Ingouville-Williams.*

8th Div. *Maj.-Gen. H. Hudson.*

X. Corps *Lt.-Gen. Sir T. L. N. Morland.*

32nd Div. *Maj.-Gen. W. H. Rycroft.*

36th Div. *Maj.-Gen. O. S. W. Nugent.*

VIII. Corps *Lt.-Gen. Sir A. G. Hunter-Weston.*

29th Div. *Maj. Gen. H. de B. de Lisle.*

4th Div. *Maj.-Gen. Hon. W. Lambton.*

31st Div. *Maj.-Gen. R. Wanless O'Gowan.*

Third Army

VII. Corps *Lt.-Gen. Sir T. D'O. Snow.*

56th Div. *Maj.-Gen. C. P. A. Hull.*

46th Div. *Maj.-Gen. E. J. Montagu Stuart-Wortley.*

(7) In the course of this fighting, a brigade of the 49th Division, Major-General E. M. Percival, made a gallant attempt to force Thiepval from the north.

(8) White tapes were laid out on the ground earlier in the night, to assist the attacking troops to form up in their proper positions.

(9) On the 18th July the enemy had 138 battalions engaged is and behind the line north of the Somme, as compared with 62 at the commencement of the battle. By the end of August, 30 German divisions had been brought is to reinforce the 6 divisions located on the front of our attack on the 1st July.

(10) The 1st, 12th, 15th Divisions (Major-General F. W. N. McCracken commanding the 15th Division); 19th, 23rd, 25th and 34th Divisions (Major-General C. L. Nicholson commanding the 34th Division); 48th, 51st, 1st Australian, 2nd Australian and 4th Australian Divisions (Major-General Sir H. V. Cox commanding the 4th Australian Division), were engaged in this fighting.

(11) 20th Division, Major-General W. D. Smith, and attached brigade of 16th Division, Major-General W. B. Hickie.

(12) At this time, the success of our attack had compelled the enemy to relax his pressure at Verdun. The forces at the disposal of the French were correspondingly increased. The British Armies south of the Ancre still constituted, however, the striking force of the offensive.

(13) The order of battle of the Fourth Army, from south to north, was as follows :

Fourth Army

XIV. Corps Lt.-Gen. the Earl of Cavan.

56th Div. Maj.-Gen. C. P. A. Hull.

6th Div. Maj.-Gen. C. Ross.

Guards Div. Maj.-Gen. G. P. T. Feilding.

XV. Corps Lt.-Gen. H. S. Horne.

14th Div. Maj.-Gen. V. A. Couper.

41st Div. Maj.-Gen. S. T. B. Lawford.

N.Z. Div. Maj.-Gen. A. H. Russell.

III. Corps Lt.-Gen. Sir W. P. Pulteney.

47th Div. Maj.- Gen. Sir C. St. L. Barter.

50th Div. Maj.-Gen. P. S. Williams.

15th Div. Maj.-Gen. F. W. N. McCracken.

(14) In spite of the secrecy maintained, the enemy appears to have obtained some information regarding our intended use of tanks, and had issued warnings.

(15) By the New Zealand Division, the 4th Division, Major-General Sir G. F. Goringe, and the 50th and 23rd Divisions.

(16) The scheme of the Allied operations, if events went well, included an advance to the general line Le Transloy - south of Bapaume-Bois Loupart. The British forces would then have developed their successes in a northerly and north-easterly direction, turning the enemy's defences south of the Scarpe, and threatening his troops in that area with capture or destruction.

The unfavourable weather, and consequent delay in the Allied advance against Saily-Saillisel and Le Transloy, made it necessary to abandon this plan at the moment when our September successes seemed to have brought it almost within our grasp.

As the season advanced and the bad weather continued the scope of our plan had constantly to be reduced, until finally it was only possible to undertake the much store limited operation of the 13th November against Beaumont Hamel.

The brilliant success of this attack, carried out as it was under most difficult conditions of ground, affords some indication of what might have been accomplished had the weather permitted us to give fuller effect to our original plan.

(17) In the original Despatch, which does not mention divisions or other units by name, the following passage occurs here: "Nor have I deemed it permissible in this Despatch, much as I desired to do so, to particularise the units, brigades, or divisions especially connected with the different events described.