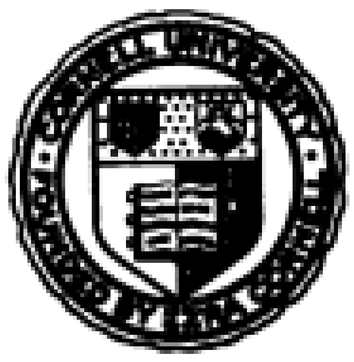
Digitized by Google
Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

D
546
.D75
v.4

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
OF THE SAGE ENDOWMENT
FUND GIVEN IN 1891 BY
HENRY WILLIAMS SAGE

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
3 1924 088 059 690

The Arrows
William and
Aug 26th 1919

DATE DUE

APR -7			

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN

IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

1917

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

BOOKS BY A. CONAN DOYLE

THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE.
THE WHITE COMPANY.
THE MYSTERY OF CLOOMBER.
MICAH CLARKE.
THE REFUGEES.
THE CAPTAIN OF THE "POLESTAR."
THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW.
THE GREAT SHADOW.
THE PARASITE.
A STUDY IN SCARLET.
THE SIGN OF FOUR.
THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.
THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.
THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.
ROUND THE RED LAMP.
THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD.
THE STARK-MUNRO LETTERS.
RODNEY STONE.
THE TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO.
UNCLE BERNAC.
THE GREEN FLAG.
SONGS OF ACTION.
SONGS OF THE ROAD.
THE GREAT BOER WAR.
A DUET, WITH AN OCCASIONAL CHORUS.
THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES.
THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD.
SIR NIGEL.
THE VALLEY OF FEAR.
THE LAST GALLEY.
THE NEW REVELATION.
THE VITAL MESSAGE.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN

IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

1917

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF
'THE GREAT BOER WAR,' ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
MCMXIX

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S
HISTORY OF THE WAR

Uniform with this Volume.

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS
1914

THE BREAKING OF THE PEACE.
THE OPENING OF THE WAR.
THE BATTLE OF MONS.
THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU.
THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE.
THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE.
THE LA BASSÉE-ARMENTIÈRES OPERATIONS.
THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES.
A RETROSPECT AND GENERAL SUMMARY.
THE WINTER LULL OF 1914.

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS
1915

THE OPENING MONTHS OF 1915.
NEUVE CHAPELLE AND HILL 60.
THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.
THE BATTLE OF RICHEBOURG-FESTUBERT.
THE TRENCHES OF HOOGE.
THE BATTLE OF LOOS.

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS
1916

JANUARY TO JULY 1916.
THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.
THE GAINING OF THE THIEPVAL RIDGE.
THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.
THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE.

With Maps, Plans, and Diagrams.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON, NEW YORK, AND TORONTO

810821-3
72
S

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

PREFACE

THIS, the fourth volume of *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, carries the story through the long and arduous fighting of 1917, which culminated in the dramatic twofold battle of Cambrai. These events are cut deep into the permanent history of the world, and we are still too near it to read the whole of that massive and tremendous inscription. It is certain, however, that this year marked the period in which the Allies gained a definite military ascendancy over the German forces, in spite of the one great subsequent rally which had its source in events which were beyond the control of the Western powers. So long as ink darkens and paper holds, our descendants, whose freedom has been won by these exertions, will dwell earnestly and with reverence upon the stories of Arras, Messinés, Ypres, Cambrai, and other phases of this epic period.

I may be permitted to record with some thankfulness and relief, that in the course of three thick volumes, in which for the first time the detailed battle-line of these great encounters has been set out, it has not yet been shown that a brigade has ever been out of its place, and even a battalion has seldom gone amiss. Such good fortune cannot last for ever. *Absit omen!* But the fact is worth recording, as it

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

may reassure the reader who has natural doubts whether history which is so recent can also lay claim to be of any permanent value.

The Censorship has left me untrammelled in the matter of units, for which I am sufficiently grateful. The ruling, however, upon the question of names must be explained, lest it should seem that their appearance or suppression is due to lack of knowledge or to individual favour or caprice. I would explain, then, that I am permitted to use the names of Army and Corps Commanders, but only of such divisional Generals as are mentioned in the Headquarters narrative. All other ranks below divisional Generals are still suppressed, save only casualties, in connection with the action where they received the injury, and those who won honours, with the same limitation. This regulation has little effect upon the accuracy of the narrative, but it appears in many cases to involve some personal injustice. To record the heroic deeds of a division and yet be compelled to leave out the name of the man who made it so efficient, is painful to the feelings of the writer, for if any one fact is clearer than another in this war it is that the good leader makes the good unit.

The tremendous epic of 1918 will call for two volumes in its treatment. One of these, bringing the story up to June 30, 1918, is already completed, and should appear by the summer. The other may be ready at the end of the year.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

CROWBOROUGH,
January 20, 1919.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front

PAGE

Hindenburg's retreat—The advance of the Fifth and Fourth Armies—Capture of Bapaume and Peronne—Atrocious devastation by the Germans—Capture of guns at Selency—Definition of the Hindenburg Line—General survey 1

CHAPTER II

The Battle of Arras

April 9 to April 23, 1917

Vast preparations—Attack of Snow's Seventh Corps—The Ibex Trench—Attack of Haldane's Sixth Corps—Attack of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps—A Scottish Front—The splendid Canadians—Capture of Monchy—Essex and Newfoundland—A glorious episode—The Chemical Works—Extension of the battle to the north—Desperate fight of the Australians at Bullecourt 20

CHAPTER III

Operations in the Arras Sector from April 23 onwards

Advance of April 23—Middlesex and Argyll—Grand fighting of the Fifteenth Division—H.A.C. at Gavrelle—Operations of May 3—The Gavrelle Windmill—Loss of Fresnoy—Capture of Rœux—The long fight at Bullecourt 64

CHAPTER IV

The Battle of Messines

Plumer's long vigil—The great mines—Advance of Australians—Of New Zealanders—Of the Twenty-fifth Division—Of the Irish Divisions—

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

PAGE

Death of Major Redmond—Advance of Nineteenth Division—Of the Forty-first Division—Of the Forty-seventh Division—Of the Twenty-fourth Division—General results 94

CHAPTER V

Operations from June 10 to July 31

Fighting round Lens—Good work of Canadians and Forty-sixth Division—Action on the Yser canal—Great fight and eventual annihilation of 2nd K.R.R. and 1st Northamptons—An awful ordeal—Exit Russia 113

CHAPTER VI

The Third Battle of Ypres

July 31, 1917

Attack of July 31—Advance of the Guards—Of the Welsh—Capture of Pilkem—Capture of St. Julien by Thirty-ninth Division—Advance of Fifty-fifth Division—Advance of Jacob's Second Corps—General results 133

CHAPTER VII

The Third Battle of Ypres

August 1 to September 6

Dreadful weather—German reaction—Attack of August 16—Advance of Cavan's Corps—Capture of Langemarck—Dreadful losses of the two Irish Divisions—Failure in the south—Splendid field-gunners—The Forty-second Division upon September 6 . . 158

CHAPTER VIII

The Third Battle of Ypres

September 6 to October 3, 1917

Engagement of Plumer's Second Army—Attack of September 20—Fine advance of Fifty-fifth Division—Advance of the Ninth Division—

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

PAGE

Of the Australians—Strong counter-attack upon the Thirty-third Division—Renewed advance on September 26—Continued rain—Desperate fighting 179

CHAPTER IX

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

October 4 to November 10, 1917

Attack of October 4—Further advance of the British line—Splendid advance of second-line Territorials—Good work of H.A.C. at Reutel—Abortive action of October 12—Action of October 26—Heavy losses at the south end of the line—Fine fighting by the Canadian Corps—Capture of Paschendaale—General results of third battle of Ypres 202

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

First phase, November 20—Tanks *en masse*—Attack on the Tunnel Trench—Byng's great advance—Fine work of the Sixty-second Division—Hard fighting of Pulteney's Third Corps—Exploit of Fort Garry Horse—Second day of battle—Rally of Germans—Capture of Bourlon Wood by Fortieth Division—Attack by the Guards on La Fontaine 285

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

Second phase of battle on November 30—Great German attack—Disaster to three divisions—Desperate fight of Twenty-ninth Division—Fine advance by the Guards—Capture and recapture of Gouzeaucourt—Hard battle in the Bourlon Sector—Heavy losses of the Germans—Retraction of the British line 269

INDEX 301

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

MAPS AND PLANS

	PAGE
Fighting Line, February 24, 1917, and Fighting Line, March 1, 1917	*Face page* 8
The Arras Front	39
Chart of Order of Battle, Arras, April 9, 1917	63
Order of Battle, Messines, June 7, 1917	111
Line of Battle, August 16, 1917	165
The Ypres Front	178
Third Ypres Battle, September 26	201
Order of Battle, October 4, 1917	207
Fighting Line, November 20, 1917	239
Battle Line of Third Army, November 20, 1917	259
Fighting Line, November 30, 1917	269
Battle Order of Third Army, November 30, 1917	281
Map to illustrate the British Campaign in France and Flanders	*At end*

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN RETREAT UPON THE ARRAS–SOISSONS FRONT

Hindenburg's retreat—The advance of the Fifth and Fourth Armies—Capture of Bapaume and Peronne—Atrocious devastation by the Germans—Capture of guns at Selency—Definition of the Hindenburg Line—General survey.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

IN the latter days of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, the British Army, which had in little more than two years expanded from seven divisions to over fifty, took over an increased line. The movement began about Christmas time, and early in the New Year Rawlinson's Fourth Army, side-stepping always to the south, had covered the whole of the French position occupied during the Somme fighting, had crossed the Somme, and had established its right flank at a point near Roye. The total front was increased to 120 miles, which may seem a small proportion as compared to the whole. In making such a comparison, however, one must bear in mind the difference in the effort of sustaining an army in one's own country and in a foreign land with all communications by water. The task of the British was continually made more difficult by the precarious nature of their connection with their base. Dulness of vision may be as dangerous to a nation as treason,

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

and no enemies could have harmed the country more than those perfectly sincere and patriotic individuals who had for so long opposed the construction of a Channel Tunnel.

The general disposition of the British forces after this prolongation to the south was as follows. Plumer's Second Army still held that post of danger and of honour which centred round the Ypres salient. South of Plumer, in the Armentières district, was the First Army, now commanded by General Horne, whose long service with the Fifteenth Corps during the Somme Battle had earned him this high promotion. Allenby's Third Army carried the line onwards to the south of Arras. From the point upon which the British line had hinged during the Somme operations Gough's Fifth Army took over the front, and this joined on to Rawlinson's Fourth Army near the old French position. From the north then the order of the armies was two, one, three, five, and four.

The winter was spent by both sides in licking their wounds after the recent severe fighting and in preparing for the greater fighting to come. These preparations upon the part of the British consisted in the addition to the army of a number of fresh divisions, and the rebuilding of those divisions, fifty-two in number, which had taken part in the Somme fighting, most of them more than once. As the average loss in these divisions was very heavy indeed, the task of reconstructing them was no light one. None the less before the campaign re-opened, though the interval was a short three months, the greater part of the battalions were once again at full strength, while the guns and munitions were very greatly in-

Digitized by Google Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

creased. A considerable addition to the strength of the army was effected by the civilian railway advisers, under Sir Eric Geddes, who by the simple expedient of pulling up their own lines at home, and relaying them in France, enormously improved the communications of the army.

In the case of the Germans their army changes took the form of a considerable new levy from those classes which had been previously judged to be unfit, and a general comb-out of every source from which men could be extracted. A new law rendered every citizen liable to national service in a civilian capacity, and so released a number of men from the mines and the factories. They also increased the numbers of their divisions by the doubtful expedient of reducing the brigades, so that the divisions were shorn of a third of their strength. The battalions thus obtained were formed into new divisions. In this way it was calculated that a reserve force had been created which would be suddenly thrown in on one or the other front with dramatic effect. Some such plan may have been in contemplation, but as a matter of fact the course of events was such that the German generals required every man and more for their own immediate needs during the whole of the year.

It has been shown in the narrative of 1916 how the British had ended the campaign of that year by the brilliant little victory of Beaumont Hamel, which gave them not merely 7000 prisoners, but command of both sides of the Valley of the Ancre. This victory had been the sequel to the capture of the Thiepval Ridge, and this again had depended upon the general success of the Somme operations, so that the turn of

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

events which led to such considerable results always traces back to the tragic and glorious 1st of July. It was clear that whenever the weather permitted the resumption of hostilities, Sir Douglas Haig was in so commanding a position at this point that he was perfectly certain to drive the enemy out of the salient which they held to the north of Beaumont Hamel. The result showed that this expectation was well founded, but no one could have foreseen how considerable was the retreat which would be forced upon the enemy—a retreat which gave away for nothing the ground which cost Hindenburg so much to regain in the following year.

Although the whole line from the sea to the Somme was a scene of activity during the winter, and though hardly a day, or rather a night, went by that some stealthy party did not cross No-Man's-Land to capture and to destroy, still for the purposes of this narrative the three northern armies may be entirely ignored in the succeeding operations since they had no occasion to alter their lines. We shall fix our attention in the first instance upon Gough's Army in the district of the Ancre, and afterwards upon Rawlinson's which was drawn into the operations.

Gough's Army consisted, at the beginning of the year, of three corps, the Fifth (E. A. Fanshawe) to the left covering the ground to the north of the Ancre, the Second Corps (Jacob) immediately south of the river, and the First Australian Corps (Birdwood) extending to the junction with Rawlinson's Army, and covering the greater part of the old British line upon the Somme. It was upon the Fifth and the Second Corps that the immediate operations which opened the campaign were to devolve.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

The Fifth Corps was formed at this period of three divisions, the Eleventh, Thirty-first, and Seventh. Each of these divisions by constant pressure and minor operations, backed by a powerful artillery fire, played a part in the wearing process of constant attrition which ended in making the position of the Germans impossible. On January 10, the Jan. 32nd Yorkshire Brigade of the Eleventh Division carried an important trench due east of Beaumont Hamèl, taking 140 prisoners. On the next day the movement extended farther north, where three-quarters of a mile of trench with 200 prisoners was the prize. On January 17, another 600 yards north of Beaumont fell into British hands. Of the 1228 prisoners who were taken in January a considerable proportion came from this small section of the line, though the largest single haul consisted of 350 men who were captured by a brilliant advance of the Australians in the Le Transloy sector upon January 29.

The movement along the valley of the Ancre was continued in February, but at an accelerated pace, the Second Corps, which consisted of the Sixty-third, Eighteenth, and Second Divisions, moving in conformity with Fanshawe's men upon the northern bank. The chief initiative still rested with the latter, and upon February 3 another push forward of 500 yards upon a mile front yielded a hundred more prisoners, while two sharp counter attacks by the Germans only served to increase their losses. A number of small spurs run down to the river upon the northern bank, and each of these successive advances represented some fresh ridge surmounted. Upon February 6 the Second Corps was moving upon Beaucourt, which is to the immediate

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

south of the river, and upon the 7th the village was evacuated—the first of that goodly list which was to adorn the official communiqués during the next two months. On the 9th the advance crept onwards upon both banks, gathering up a hundred prisoners, while eighty more were taken in Baillescourt Farm upon the north bank. These men were Hamburgers of the 85th Regiment. Upon February 10 the left of the Fifth Corps began to feel out towards Serre, that village of sinister memories, and 215 prisoners were taken from the trenches to the south of the hamlet. This provoked a new counter from the enemy which was beaten back upon February 12. A period of impossible weather suspended the advance, but again upon February 17 the British tide swelled suddenly into a wave which swept forward on either bank, engulfing some crowded trenches north of Baillescourt Farm, which yielded 12 officers and 761 men of the 65th, 75th, and 395th Prussians. The main success was gained by the Sixty-third Division upon the left of the Second Corps, but it was aided by the work of the Eighteenth and Second Divisions to the south of the Ancre. The latter met with strong resistance and had considerable losses. The burden of this work fell chiefly upon the 99th and 54th Brigades, both of which reached their objectives in the face of mist, darkness, uncut wire, heavy fire, and vigorous resistance. This blow stung the enemy into a sharp reaction, and three waves of infantry stormed up to the lost position, which for a time they entered, but were again beaten out of. During their temporary success they claim to have taken 130 prisoners.

Feb.

All these advances, with their accompanying and

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

ever-extending bombardments, had been like those multiplied causes, each small in itself, which eventually loosen and start a great landslide. The effect must undoubtedly have been begun some weeks before when the Germans perceived that they could no longer hold on, and favoured by wind, rain, and fog, started their rearward movement to the great per- Feb. manent second line, the exact position of which was still vague to the Allies. Upon February 25 the whole German front caved in for a depth of three miles both north and south of the Ancre. Wading through seas of mud Gough's infantry occupied Serre, Pys, Miraumont, Eaucourt, Warlencourt, and all the ground for eleven miles from Gomiecourt in the north to Gueudecourt in the south. On February 28 Gomiecourt itself had been occupied by the North Country troops of the Thirty-first Division, while Puisieux and Thilloy had also been added to the British line. The advance was not unopposed. The battle-patrols continually extended to attack some trench of snipers or nest of machine-guns. Mined roads and all manner of obstructions impeded the onward flow of the army. The retreat was orderly and skilful, and the pursuit was necessarily slow and wary. By a pleasing coincidence the Thirty-first Division, which occupied Serre, was the same brave North Country Division which had lost so heavily upon July 1 and November 13 on the same front. On entering the village they actually found the bodies of some of their own brave comrades who had got as far forward seven months before.

On March 4 the advance which had steadily continued in the north spread suddenly southwards to Bouchavesnes north of Peronne, the sector held

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

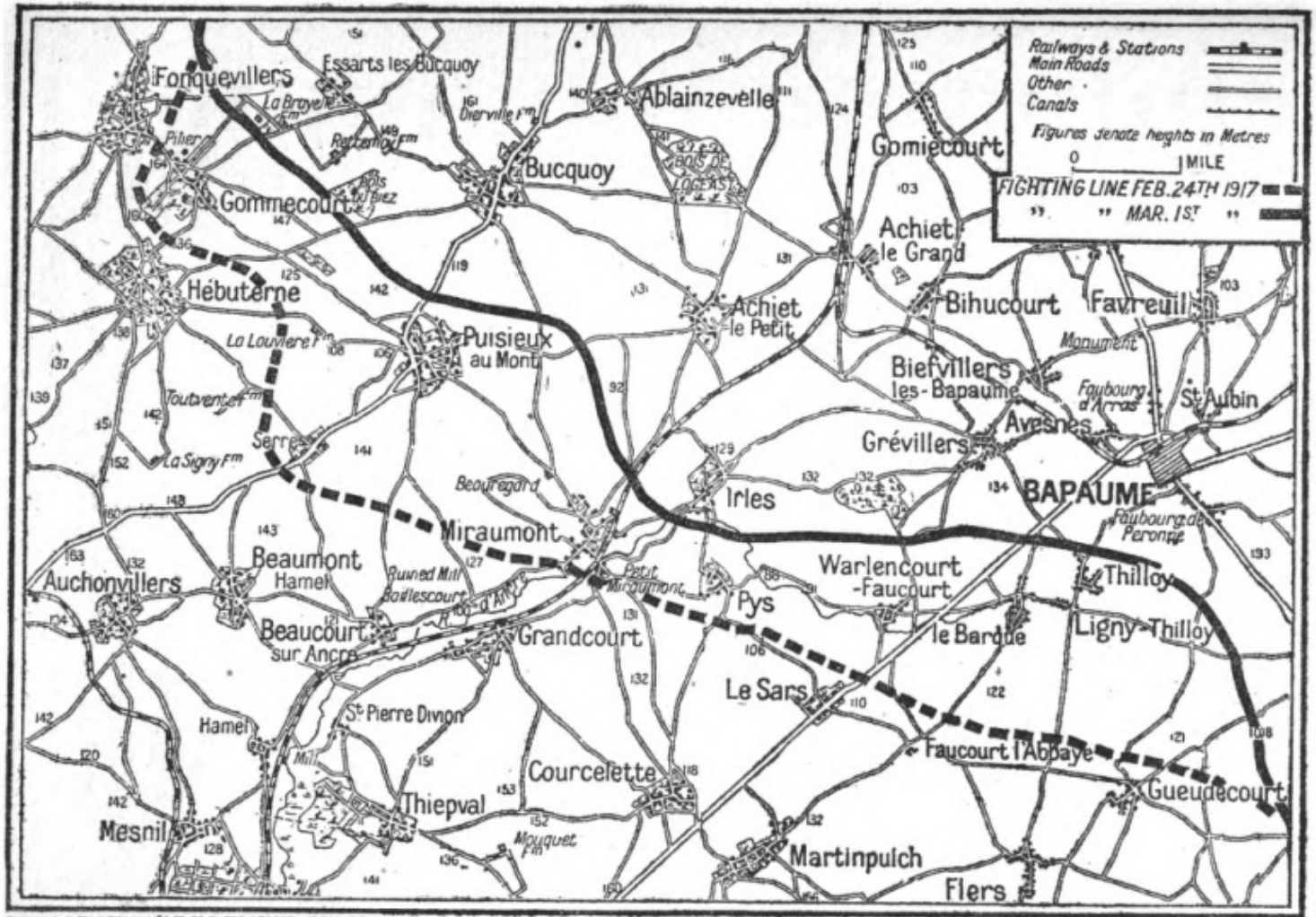
by the Twentieth and Forty-eighth Divisions of Rawlinson's Army, which from this time onward was more and more engaged in the forward movement. Three machine-guns and 172 prisoners were taken. There was some interruption of the operations at this stage owing to severe snowstorms, but upon March 10

March.

Irles, west of Bapaume, was taken by assault by the Eighteenth Division. This was a formidable point, well wired and trenched, so that the artillery in full force was needed for preparation. The infantry went forward before sunrise, and within an hour the village with 15 machine-guns and 290 prisoners was in British hands. The losses were light and the gain substantial. Grevillers also fell next day. This advance in front of Bapaume was of importance as it turned Loupart Wood, forming part of a strong defensive line which might have marked the limit of the German retreat. It was clear from that day onwards that the movement was not local but far reaching. The enemy was still too strong to be hustled, however, especially upon the northern sector of the operations, where Jacob's Second Corps was feeling the German line along its whole front. An attempt at an advance at Bucquoy upon the night of March 13, carried out by the 137th Brigade of the Forty-sixth North Midland Division, met with a check, though most bravely attempted. The two battalions concerned, the 5th South Staffords and 5th North Staffords, found themselves entangled in the darkness amid uncut wire and suffered considerable loss before they could extricate themselves from an impossible position.

On March 19 and 20 the whole movement had become much more pronounced, and the French as

Digitized by Google Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY



COPYRIGHT "GEOGRAPHIA" LTD 55 FLEET STREET LONDON E C 4.

To face page 8

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front. March.

well as the British were moving over a seventy-mile front, extending from Arras in the north to Soissons in the south. Each day now was a day of joy in France as some new strip of the fatherland was for a time recovered, but the joy was tempered by sorrow and anger as it was learned with what barbarity the Germans had conducted their retreat. To lay a country waste is no new thing in warfare. It has always been held to be an occasional military necessity though the best commander was he who used it least. In all Napoleon's career it is difficult to recall an instance when he devastated a district. At the same time it must be admitted that it comes within the recognised chances of war, and that when Sherman's army, for example, left a black weal across the South the pity of mankind was stirred but not its conscience. It was very different here. These devils —or to be more just—these devil-driven slaves, with a malignity for which it would be hard to find a parallel, endeavoured by every means at their command to ruin the country for the future as well as for the present. Buildings were universally destroyed, including in many cases the parish churches. Historical monuments, such as the venerable Castle of Coucy, were blown to pieces. Family vaults were violated and the graves profaned. The furniture of the most humble peasants was systematically broken. The wells were poisoned and polluted. Worst of all, the young fruit-trees were ringed so as to destroy them for future seasons. It was considered the last possibility of savagery when the Mahdi's men cut down the slow-growing palm-trees in the district of Dongola, but every record upon earth has been swept away by the barbarians of Europe. As usual these outrages

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

March.

reacted upon the criminals, for they confirmed those grim resolutions of the Allies which made that peace by compromise for which the Germans were eternally working an absolute impossibility. Their Clausewitz had taught them that it is of supreme importance to make peace before there comes a turn of the tide, but he had not reckoned upon his descendants being so brutalised that a peace with them was a self-evident impossibility.

Turning from the deeds of savages to those of soldiers, we have now to trace the progress and scope of the great German retreat, the first pronounced movement upon either side on the Western Front since September 1914. From Arras to Roye the British Army was advancing while the movement was carried on to Soissons by the French. On the curve of the trenches the front measured more than a hundred miles. So close was the touch between the two Allied armies that the patrols of French and British cavalry rode together into Nesle. On March 18 the Australians had occupied Bapaume, with the Seventh Division moving upon their left and the Twentieth upon their right, the cavalry fringe being formed of the Indian Lucknow Cavalry Brigade of the Fourth Division. To the south the Warwick Brigade of the Forty-eighth South Midland Division passed through Peronne. At each end of the long curve the Germans held fast, Arras in the north and Soissons in the south being the two fixed points, but the country between, to a depth of ten miles in the British sector and of thirty miles in the French, was rapidly overrun by the Allies, the cavalry patrols feeling their way everywhere while the infantry followed hard upon the heels of the horses. Guns and

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

munitions had been successfully removed by the Germans but incredible quantities of barbed wire and other defensive material had been abandoned in their positions. Towards the end of March the left of the French and the right of the British were in touch in the immediate front of St. Quentin. There had been scattered fighting all along the line, and the resistance thickened each day, so that it was evident that the final German position had been nearly reached. On March 24 the Australians had a sharp fight at Beaumetz between Bapaume and Cambrai. The village was taken, lost, and retaken with considerable loss upon both sides. It was clear that in this quarter a definite German line had been approached. Similar reports soon came in from Croisilles, from Lagnicourt, from Ronssoy, from Jeancourt, and all along from Arras to St. Quentin. So gradually the famous Hindenburg line defined itself, and the Allied Generals became more clearly aware of the exact nature and extent of this new German position. Early in April, by pushing up to it and brushing aside the advanced forces which screened it, its outlines were more clearly mapped. This process of definition led to more serious fighting, the worst of which, as will presently be shown, fell upon the Australians at Bullecourt, some ten miles from the Arras end of the new line. Some foretaste, however, of the considerable resistance which they were about to meet with in their section was encountered by the Australians at Noreuil on April 2. The brunt of the attack upon the village was borne by the South Australians, who behaved with great gallantry, having to rush a difficult position intersected by sunken roads. A small body of the stormers, some sixty in number, were cut off

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front. March.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

and overwhelmed, but the main body captured the village, taking 137 German prisoners. Among other brisk skirmishes occurring at the beginning of April was one at Epehy, fifteen miles north of St. Quentin, where the 144th Brigade of the Forty-eighth South Midland Division cleared the hamlet and sugar factory of St. Emilie. In this operation, which was carried out chiefly by the 4th Gloucesters, 5 officers and 80 men fell, but the German loss was considerable. A few days later the 145th Brigade of the same division distinguished itself by the capture after sharp fighting of Ronssoy and of Lempire, the first village being carried by the 4th Berks and the latter by the 5th Gloucesters. This brought the British line in that quarter up to the final German position.

April.

Some sharp fighting had also taken place at Savy and Selency to the immediate west and north-west of St. Quentin, upon the front of the Thirty-second Division, which, together with the Thirty-fifth and Sixty-first, had been pressing the German line. On the morning of April 2 the 14th Brigade of this division was ordered to attack Selency. On the two previous days the village of Savy had been taken, and a strong attack made upon the Bois de Savy by the 96th and 97th Brigades. The advance of April 2 was at early dawn and the veteran 2nd Manchester Battalion was in the lead. The whole operation was conducted under heavy machine-gun fire, but by swift movement and a judicious use of the ground the losses were minimised. Whilst the Lancashire men made direct for the village the 15th Highland Light Infantry kept pace with them upon their right flank. A

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front. April.

battery of six German field-guns opened fire in the very faces of the stormers, but C Company of the Manchesters, with admirable steadiness and presence of mind, swerved to each side and rushed the guns from the flank, capturing them all. The attack was at 5 A.M., and by 6.30 the whole objective had been captured. No further advance was possible as the front line was already close to St. Quentin, which was a German stronghold. The position at the end of the action was that the village was in the hands of the British but that the six guns with their caissons were in the open where the Germans could cover them with their fire. The victors were determined to have their trophies, and their enemy was no less eager to make it impossible. The moment that darkness had fallen a party of Manchesters, under the lead of Lieut. Thomas, the adjutant, and Lieut. Ward of the 161st R.F.A., endeavoured to man-handle the guns into the British lines, but directly they began to haul so sharp a fire of shrapnel was opened at a range of 800 yards that they were compelled to desist. A covering party of the 15th Highland Light Infantry lay round the guns till dawn, and during the day they remained safe under the rifles of the infantry. At eight o'clock on April 3 a further attempt to bring them in was made by Major Lumsden of the Staff, with Lieutenants Ward and Lomax of the gunners. Horse teams were brought down, and amid a terrific barrage the gun wheels began at last to revolve. Maddened by the sight seen under the glare of their star shells, the German infantry surged forward and for a time were all round the Highlanders who still guarded the guns. One small party of Germans dashed in upon the guns with a charge of dynamite and managed to

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

April.

blow in the breech of one of them. They were driven off, however, and the six guns were all brought in, while upon April 4 the six artillery caissons were also salved. So ended a most satisfactory little operation for which Major Lumsden received a Victoria Cross and later the command of a brigade, while the other officers were decorated.

On April 2 in the north of the new line, near the spot where very great things were pending, Snow's Seventh Corps had taken Henin and Croisilles, with the aid of the Fifth Army upon their right. It was a small operation in itself, but it was preparing the jumping-off place for the great battle of April 9. There was continued bickering along the line where the British were pushing in the German outliers. In this work the Thirty-fifth Division in the Epehy district distinguished itself greatly during the early summer. One attack upon a hill held by the Germans and carried by the 15th Chesters and 15th Sherwoods of the 105th Brigade was particularly brilliant. In addition, upon April 4, the village of Metz with the adjoining position was taken after a sharp fight. by the 59th Brigade of the Twentieth Division. The 10th and 11th K.R.R. were the battalions chiefly engaged in this fight, which at one time had an ugly aspect, as the Germans slipped into a gap between the Twentieth on the left and the Eighth Division on the right. They were cleared out, however, and the line was advanced beyond the village to the right of the Australians.

A more serious action was that which began upon April 13, when the Thirty-second Division was ordered to support the left of the French in their unsuccessful attack upon St. Quentin. The task

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

assigned to the British division, with the Thirty-fifth Division co-operating upon its left, was to attack the village of Fayet. This was carried out very gallantly by the 97th Brigade, with the 2nd York Light Infantry and the 16th Highland Light Infantry in the lead. The village with 100 prisoners was taken at the first rush, but it was found to be more difficult to get possession of a wood called the Twin Copses, beyond the village. So severe was the fighting that the General of the 97th Brigade had seven battalions under his command before it was finished. Finally, the Twin Copses were splendidly carried by the 11th Borders. The total of prisoners came to 5 officers and 334 men in this very spirited operation. April.

With the conclusion of the German retreat and the solidification of the new line, some more general view may be taken of the whole operation. It cannot be denied that it was cleverly planned and deftly carried out, though it can hardly be said to have deserved the ecstasies of admiration which were bestowed upon it by the German Press. It was not, for example, as formidable an operation as the British withdrawal from Gallipoli, an extraordinarily clever manœuvre which received less than its fair share of recognition at home, because it was associated with the sad ending of high hopes. It was also universally taken for granted in Germany that Hindenburg was going to "reculer pour mieux sauter" as he had done once before at Tannenberg, and that some extraordinary burst of energy at some other point would soon change the exultation of the Allies into despair. Nothing of the sort occurred during that year, and it speedily became evident that the old

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

April.

Marshal had simply moved because his lines were untenable, and because by shortening them he could make some compensation for the terrific losses of men at the Somme. That he ever regained the ground was due only to the subsequent Russian debacle.

We have it upon the authority of Sir Douglas Haig that the great local retreat of the Germans had no very great effect in modifying the Allied plans. Those plans, so far as the British were concerned, were to make a combined assault from the north and from the south upon the Ancre salient, Gough attacking from the south and Allenby from the north. As the salient had now ceased to exist, the rôle of Gough was confined to following up the German retreat until he came to the new Hindenburg line, which was an obstacle of so formidable a character that it checked anything short of a very powerful attack. Allenby's part of the programme was still feasible, however, and resolved itself into an attack upon the high ground held by the Germans and their whole line down to the point where the new positions began. How Allenby carried out this task, and the great success which attended his efforts, will be described in the coming chapters.

Before passing to this and the other great battles which will make the year 1917 for ever memorable in our history, it would be well to briefly enumerate those world events which occurred during these three months and which directly or indirectly influenced the operations in France. The French line had remained stationary save for the forward movement already described. In Russia the lines had also remained firm, and there was no outward indication of the convulsions into which that unhappy country

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

was about to be thrown by the revolution which broke out on March 12 of this year. From Italy also there was nothing momentous to report. The most cheering news which reached the Allies was from the British Eastern lines of battle, where both in the Sinai Peninsula to the east of Egypt, and in Mesopotamia, good progress was being made. The Sinai desert had been practically cleared of that enemy who had advanced so boastfully to the capture of Egypt, and the British lines were now upon the green terrain which faces Gaza upon the frontier of Palestine. The chief success, however, lay in Mesopotamia. A great soldier had apparently appeared in the person of General Maude, whose name may be recalled by the reader as the Commander of the 14th Brigade upon the Western front. Leaving his limited activities in the prosaic trenches of Flanders, he had suddenly reappeared, moving swiftly along the track of so many of the old conquerors, and leading his picturesque force of Britons and Indians against the ancient capital of Haroun-el-Raschid. In February he had avenged Townshend by recapturing Kut with more than 2000 prisoners. Following up his victory with great speed, he entered Bagdad upon March 11 at the heels of the defeated Turks, and chased them north along the line of the German railway, the constructors of which had never dreamed what strange stationmaster might instal himself at their terminus. The approach of a Russian force seemed to hold out hopes for further combined operations, but meanwhile the whole of southern Mesopotamia remained in the hands of the British, and no Turk was left within forty miles of the ancient capital.

The chief event in Great Britain was the successful

Digitized by Google Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER I.

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

flotation of the great war loan, which attained proportions never heard of before, and ended by bringing in the huge total of one thousand million pounds.

Beyond the usual skirmishes of light craft and isolated sinkings of warships by mine or submarine, there was nothing of importance in naval warfare, but an immense influence was brought to bear upon the course of the war by the German decision in February to declare a war zone round the allied countries, and to torpedo every merchant ship, whether neutral or hostile, which entered it. The measure was a counsel either of ignorance or of despair, for no one who knows the high spirit of the American people could imagine for a moment that they would permit their vessels to be destroyed and their fellow-citizens to be killed in such a manner. Within two days of the declaration of unlimited submarine warfare the President of the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, an act which was the precursor of war, though this was not formally declared until April 5. Great as were the loss, discomfort, and privation caused to Great Britain, and in a less degree to the other Allies, the accession of the United States with its enormous reserves of men and money to the cause of Democracy was far more than a sufficient make-weight. As events progressed, and as it became evident that Russia, swinging from the extreme of autocracy to the extreme of individualism, had ceased for a long time to come to be a useful ally, it grew more and more clear that the help of America was likely to save the Western Powers, not indeed from defeat, but from that pernicious stalemate and inconclusive peace which could only be the precursor of other

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

wars to follow. Apart from the vast material help, the mere thought that the great race which has inherited our speech and so many of our traditions was lined up with us upon the day of Armageddon was a joy and an inspiration to every Briton.

CHAPTER I

The German Retreat upon the Arras-Soissons Front.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

April 9 to April 23, 1917

Vast preparations—Attack of Snow's Seventh Corps—The Ibex Trench—Attack of Haldane's Sixth Corps—Attack of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps—A Scottish Front—The splendid Canadians—Capture of Monchy—Essex and Newfoundland—A glorious episode—The Chemical Works—Extension of the battle to the north—Desperate fight of the Australians at Bullecourt.

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

WHILST the German line was falling back to its new positions, and the Allies were eagerly following it across the ravished countryside until the increased resistance and the familiar lines of barbed wire warned them that the immediate retreat had come to an end, Sir Douglas Haig had managed, without relaxing his pursuit, to collect a strong striking force at the point of junction between the new German line and the old. The blow which he contemplated was no small local advance, but was a wide movement extending from the neighbourhood of Lens in the north to Arras in the south, a front of more than twelve miles. Upon this sector a tremendous concentration of artillery had been effected, and four corps were waiting the signal for the assault, the three southern ones forming Allenby's Third Army, while the fourth or northern one was the right-hand corps of Horne's

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

First Army. The southern corps were the Seventh (Snow), which operated to the south of Arras, having Croisilles for its southern boundary; the Sixth (Haldane), which advanced due east from Arras with the Scarpe for its northern boundary; the Seventeenth (Fergusson), which had its right on the Scarpe and its left on Thelus, with its front facing the three spurs which form this end of the Vimy Ridge; and finally the Canadian Corps (Byng), which faced this long and sinister slope, the scene of so much bloodshed in the past. Each corps was marshalled with three divisions in front and one in reserve, so that there were roughly 120,000 men in the storming line with 40,000 advancing behind them. Maxse's Eighteenth Corps was in reserve in the rear of the Third Army, while M'Cracken's Thirteenth Corps was behind the First Army. The Germans had six divisions, the Eleventh Prussian, Fourteenth Bavarian, First Bavarian Reserve, and the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Seventy-ninth reserve in the line. Their guns also were numerous, as subsequent captures were to prove, but it is probable that an extension of the Hindenburg retreat was in contemplation, and that some of the heavy artillery was already on the move. A second strong line from Drocourt to Quéant was known to exist, and its occupation would form a natural sequel to the retirement in the south.

The German strategists had imagined that by withdrawing their troops over a long front they would throw out of gear all the preparations of the Allies for the spring offensive. What they actually did was to save their force in the Gommecourt peninsula from being cut off, which would surely have been their fate had they waited. But in the

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

larger issue they proved to be singularly ill-informed, for they had stayed their retreat at the very points of the line on which the offensive had been prepared, so that the plans of attack were neither modified nor delayed. That this is true is evident, since such tremendous blows as Arras in the north and Rheims in the south could not possibly have been delivered had the preparations only begun after the Hindenburg retreat.

One of the most difficult problems of this attack was how to arrange it upon that section which was covered by the town of Arras. It is true that the German line was 1700 yards east of the market-place, but the suburbs extended right up to it, and it was fringed with houses. The town itself, in which the storming troops must assemble and through which all supports and supplies must pass, was full of narrow streets within easy range of the German guns, and previous French experience had proved that each exit was so carefully and accurately barraged by the German fire that it was most difficult for the troops to debouch from it. This problem was solved by a fine piece of military engineering. The large cellars and other subterranean excavations with which the place abounded were connected up and fresh tunnels constructed, so that it was eventually found to be possible to put three whole divisions underground, with permanent headquarters and every necessary detail, including water, electric light, and a three-foot tramway. This fine work was carried out by the New Zealand, the 179th, and the 184th Tunnelling Companies. A huge dressing-station with 700 beds was also constructed. In this great underground place of assembly the greater part of the Sixth

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Corps was assembled, while many of the tunnels on the south side of the town were allotted to the use of the Seventh Corps. All this had been carried out during the winter in the anticipation of a big attack being made at this point. For purposes of communication, over 1000 miles of twin cable was buried in six-foot trenches or secured to the sides of tunnels. Besides these special preparations, the usual immense labour of preparing for a modern attack had been thoroughly carried out along the whole line, including the construction of very many gun positions, trench mortar emplacements, dressing-stations, and innumerable dumps of munitions and engineering stores. Some dislocation had been caused in the plans by a partial withdrawal in the enemies' front trenches upon March 18, opposite the right end of the British lines. The abandoned works were occupied and linked up with the old system, so that upon April 9 all was in order for the assault. The extreme difficulties caused by the formidable defensive preparations of the enemy were fully realised, but everything which human forethought could suggest had been done to meet them. Above all, two great lessons taught by the Somme experience had been thoroughly assimilated; the one that the broader the attack the more successful it is likely to be, as it prevents a concentration of the German guns upon a single area; the other that it is wiser, even in the heat of battle and the glow of victory, to limit your objective to an area which is well within the range of your guns. That last blue line so far forward upon the map has been the cause of many a rebuff.

The British bombardment, which came in gusts during the days preceding the attack, did enormous

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

damage to the German defences. The evidence of prisoners showed that for several days they had been reduced to their emergency rations. The wire, which in places was a hundred yards thick, was mostly destroyed in the first line, and greatly damaged in the second, though in the third it was found to be largely intact, save upon the left of the line. The space between the first and second German lines was roughly 500 yards. Between the second and third it was about 3000. The usual forms of bombardment were varied upon April 4 by the use of a large number of Liven's gas projectors, throwing drums of compressed gas, which were seen to burst in the second German line. Fifteen hundred of these were discharged upon the front of a single corps, and they were said to have considerable effect, the reports of prisoners stating that in the suburb of Blangy alone there were 460 casualties from this cause. On April 8 there was a severe gas bombardment from 4-inch trench mortars. Finally, in the early morning of April 9, came the fearful whirlwind of fire which was the prelude to the attack. Some idea of its intensity may be gathered from the fact that the number of guns was so great that they could have rubbed wheels from end to end of the line had they been so placed. At 5.30 the word was given, and in the first dim grey of a rainy, windy, and sleety morning, the infantry dashed forward to the attack—"wave after wave of grimy, mud-covered, determined men, with hearts as hard as steel and as light as feathers," to use the words of one of them. The events may best be described from the south of the line as being the nearest to Arras from which the battle derives its name.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Snow's Seventh Corps had the Twenty-first North Country Division upon the extreme right, the Thirtieth Lancashire Division in the centre, the Fifty-sixth London on their left, and the Fourteenth Light Division upon the extreme northern wing. The soldiers, soaked to the skin, with the rain beating upon their backs, and their feet ankle-deep in the mud, set about their task in a calm, businesslike fashion which would take no denial. No village or notable fixed points lay in their path, but they plodded without a check or halt over the first two lines of entrenchments, finding no very strong resistance, save at one point upon the left of their line, and suffering little loss from the German artillery. Considerable numbers of the enemy were found scattered in their shattered trenches or cowering in the dug-outs. Over a thousand of these were sent to the rear. The advance was at the point where the new German line branched away from the old one, the Twenty-first Division on the right joining the left of Gough's Army in the neighbourhood of the Cojeul River, while the Fourteenth Division was in touch with the Third Division on the north.

The immediate objectives of the various divisions of this Seventh Corps were Telegraph Hill in the north opposite to the Fourteenth Division, Neuville Vitasse opposite to the Fifty-sixth Division, St. Martin-sur-Cojeul opposite the Thirtieth Division, and the Hindenburg line opposite the Twenty-first Division. Taking them in turn from the south, we shall first follow the fortunes of the north countrymen of Campbell's Division. This division upon the first day was not expected to do more than make a strong demonstration, because both it, and to a less extent

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

the division upon its left, had in front of it sheets of uncut wire and all the devilries of the fixed German line. The object, therefore, was that they should make a holding attack in the hope that the northern divisions of the corps should get well forward to the east, and then swing to the south in such a way as to make the German position untenable. This was eventually done, and a way was cleared so that the two divisions in the south should be able to advance with the remainder of the line. The whole operation of the Seventh Corps has to be continually judged by the fact that they were on the edge of the abandoned area, and that therefore their southern front bulged out to the east in a way which brought the successive divisions almost into an echelon formation.

On the left of the Twenty-first Division were the Lancashire pals of the Thirtieth Division. Upon April 8 they had made a good start, as the 2nd Bedfords carried the village of St. Martin, an outlier of the Hindenburg line, but on the same date the 21st Brigade was held up in an attempt to advance upon the left. They advanced on April 9 with the 21st Brigade upon the left and the 90th upon the right. The first dash behind a splendid barrage was most successful, but the 21st Brigade, after passing the front German lines, ran into uncut wire and was held, the 18th Liverpools suffering severely. The brigade upon the right managed, however, to get forward for some distance, but it also was faced by uncut wire, and was compelled to dig in as best it could. The attack was renewed two days later with the aid of four tanks, but the wire still held, though the devoted infantry tried again and again. Finally, however, the Fifty-

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

sixth Division having cleared its own front sent the Victoria Rifles bombing down the front of the Thirtieth Division, who in turn cleared the front of the Twenty-first Division on their right, and so by the evening of April 11 the line was finally advanced. The clearing of the front of the Twenty-first was done by the 18th Manchesters, who, unsupported, bombed their way down 1700 yards of Hindenburg line, a very notable achievement.

To Hull's Fifty-sixth Division, the next upon the north, was assigned the capture of Neuville Vitasse and the strong works which surrounded it. The advance was carried out at 7.45—the zero time was earlier as it travelled up the line—and was led by the 167th Brigade upon the right and by the 168th Brigade upon the left, while the 169th were in support. "The bombardment and the covering fire were magnificent," says one who marched in the ranks; "I almost felt sorry for the poor old Hun, only, after all, he is such a Hun." The chief fighting was on the right, where the 3rd London and 8th Middlesex stormed the main portion of the village. At 10.30 all the eastern edge had been secured, and the 1st London moved forward to take the Cojeul Switch line. Unfortunately, they struck up against uncut wire and a very heavy belt of fire. Colonel Smith, the commanding officer, and the great majority of the other officers were killed or wounded, and the advance was brought to a stand. The 18th Liverpools of the 21st Brigade upon the right had also been halted by the uncut wire. The colonel of the 7th Middlesex took command of this difficult situation so far as it affected the advance of his brigade, and threw his battalion in to strengthen the 1st Londons, so that

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

together they captured the Cojeul Switch Trench. The Londoners were then well ahead of the Liverpool men upon their right, so the 1st London threw back a defensive flank while the 7th Middlesex stormed forward against the powerful Ibex Trench. Three separate attempts were made, much impeded by the deep mud, and all ending in failure, so that darkness fell before the task had been accomplished, but with true British tenacity, at 3 A.M., in the darkest hour before dawn, the Middlesex men tried once more and carried Ibex, taking a number of prisoners. The 168th Brigade had with varying fortunes kept pace upon the left, and in the early morning the London Scottish on its right were in touch with Ibex Trench. The position of the 167th was still dangerous upon the flank, as it was always ahead of its southern neighbours, so that instead of advancing eastwards, the colonel of the Middlesex now turned south, his depleted ranks being strengthened by the 9th London (Victorias) from the reserve brigade. The enemy were only forty yards off upon the flank, with a perfect warren of trenches, and the mud was so dreadful that some men who got in could hardly be dragged out again alive. In spite of every difficulty the Londoners, after an initial check, swept triumphantly down Ibex and Zoo trenches, clearing in one wild, glorious rush the whole position, capturing 197 more prisoners of the 31st Prussian Regiment with several machine-guns. Captain Cousens, who led this charge, after being badly wounded, was unhappily killed by a sniper in the moment of victory. The Victorias were too late to join in the victorious charge which stands to the credit of the 7th Middlesex, but they helped to hold and to extend what had been won.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The general effect of the advance of this division was to turn the flank of the southern German defences and to open up a road for the Thirtieth and Twenty-first Divisions upon the right.

The Fourteenth Light Division to the north of the Londoners was faced by the slight slope and formidable defences of Telegraph Hill. They went forward in close conformity with the Sixth Corps upon their left, the 42nd Brigade being upon the left and the 43rd upon the right. Their movement during the day was a particularly fine one, and they not only took the strong position of Telegraph Hill, but they carried the British line to a point far to the east of it. Their whole advance was largely regulated by the situation upon their northern flank, and they were exposed to such an enfilade fire whenever they got at all ahead, that they found it impossible to act entirely upon their own.

Upon the left of the front was a strong German position called "The Harp," which was very gallantly carried by the 42nd Brigade. Sixteen tanks which were to have lent them a hand in this difficult operation failed for some reason to arrive in time, and the infantry had to advance with no help save their own stout hearts. The attack was carried out by the 9th K.R.R. with the 4th Royal Fusiliers of the Third Division acting upon their left, and their comrades of the 6th Oxford and Bucks upon their right. Their only serious opponents here as elsewhere were snipers and machine-gunners, but these were all of the best, and caused heavy losses before the whole objective with its garrison had been captured. By 9.15 in the morning it was entirely in British hands, and as the day wore on the division kept steadily improving

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

their position, though still short of their final objective, that elusive line, which is so easy to draw and so hard to attain. In the evening, an attempt was made by the Fourteenth Division to struggle still further eastwards. This advance had no success, and so the forward units of the whole Seventh Corps dug in on the general line from Feuchy Chapel Road in the north to near Croisilles in the south, having after a desperate day's fighting achieved a gain which averaged two or three miles, and a total of nearly 2000 prisoners with a number of guns. Concerning these prisoners, it may be unsafe to generalise, but it is certain that many of them surrendered very readily. As to their general type the opinion of a commanding officer who handled many of them may be quoted: "The officers were mild persons, none of the bullet-headed, bristly-moustached, truculent Prussian type. The prisoners generally do not inspire one with respect. Braggarts and bullies in prosperity, in adversity they cringe."

Haldane's Sixth Corps was to the immediate left of the Seventh, and its operations were directed due east of Arras. The three front divisions, counting from the south, were the Third, the Twelfth South of England, and the Fifteenth Scottish, with the Thirty-seventh English in reserve. The troops of the assaulting divisions had been assembled for three days in the caves under Arras, but on the night of April 8 they were silently passed into the assembly trenches, an operation which was carried through with little interference or loss. The vile weather may have been a blessing in disguise, as it covered all the preparations from the German observation.

The right of the attacking line was formed by the

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

76th Brigade of the Third Division, a unit which had distinguished itself greatly in previous fighting. The 8th and 9th Brigades were in close support. Its front was south of the Arras—Cambrai Road. To the left of the 76th Brigade the line was carried on by the 37th and 36th Brigades of the Twelfth Division. Their right rested on the Arras—Cambrai Road. To their left were the 44th and 45th of the Fifteenth Division. Their left rested upon the Scarpe. Nothing could have gone more smoothly than the advance, which kept well up with the barrage. Only at Observation Hill was vigorous resistance encountered, and the German barrage was so belated that it fell upon empty trenches after the stormers had left them. The line of infantry as it swept forward in its irresistible advance was formed, counting from the south, by the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the 1st Gordons, the 6th Queen's, the 7th East Surreys, the 11th Middlesex, the 7th Sussex, the 8/10th[1] Gordons, the 9th Black Watch, the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers, and the 11th Argyll and Sutherlands. To the courage which had always been their birthright, the infantry now added all the cool war wisdom which experience of many battles must bring with it, and all those devices for overcoming the scattered forts of the enemy and avoiding their machine-guns, which had been learned on the Somme and the Ancre, were now practised to keep down the losses of the assault.

The advance of the 76th Brigade had been to the south of the great high road which leads from Arras to Cambrai—a road which was destined to be second only to the Menin Road as a centre of hard fighting.

[1] Where two numbers are given for one battalion, it means that two battalions with these numbers have been telescoped into one.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The Gordons led the attack and took the front line with a number of the Prussian 38th Regiment. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers then passed through the ranks of the Highlanders and captured Devil's Wood. So swift were these movements that the German barrage was always in the rear. Having thus secured the first objective, the 9th Brigade, strengthened by the 2nd Suffolks, stormed forward to the next line of defence. The 4th Royal Fusiliers on the right took Nomeny, Spring, and Lynx Trenches, when the Suffolks passed through them and took Neuilly Trench. The 12th West Yorkshires took Tilloy village. The 13th Liverpool, after being held up on the left, carried the line forward and, by getting its machine-gun on to the roof of Tilloy Château, dominated the country to the extreme discomfort of the German snipers. Besides these numerous trenches and strong points, the 9th Brigade helped to take the fortified position known as The Harp, an exploit in which they were much assisted by a couple of tanks. Here a considerable number of prisoners were made, including most of a battalion of the 162nd Regiment, together with its commander.

It will save confusion if we follow the fortunes of each division for the day, regardless of what is going on upon its flank, as it is impossible to understand a narrative which switches continually from one portion of the line to another. The whole operation of the Sixth Corps was somewhat behind the time appointed, as each division had met with some delays, but the advance towards the third objective was begun about one o'clock in this southern area. The 8th Brigade had now taken up the running, and the 9th had fallen into support. Reinforced by the two reserve

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

battalions of the 76th Brigade, the victorious advance was resumed, the 2nd Royal Scots and 7th Shropshires carrying the Bois des Bœufs to the south of the Cambrai Road, together with five guns which had been concealed in it. To those who had experienced what the capture of a wood meant in the Somme fighting, it was indeed a promise for the future that this considerable plantation should offer so slight a resistance. The 8th Brigade fought its way onwards for another mile or more until it had attained the line of Feuchy Chapel. Here the German resistance had thickened and the artillery fire had increased in the same ratio as the British had weakened. A halt was called, therefore, and the infantry consolidated their advanced position. An attempt by the Gordons and the 8th Royal Lancasters to reach the extreme final objective was checked in the evening by a very heavy fire upon both flanks.

In the centre, the Twelfth Division had met with strong resistance at several points, which caused the assault to fall behind the barrage. These centres of German resistance were usually isolated houses or small redoubts, so that it was possible in many cases to mask them and to push onwards. No village or large fixed defence lay in their path, and in spite of a check for some time at the estaminet upon the Cambrai Road, they were able to line up with their comrades to the south upon the second objective about half-past twelve o'clock. At this point the 35th Brigade passed through the advanced lines and moved to the front. A number of difficult positions were taken, including Observation Hill, and the ground was so thoroughly cleared that the assailants were able to go forward with the assurance that their

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

The Battle of Arras.

wounds would not be in the back. It was found, however, as they neared the line of the third German position, that considerable stretches of wire had been imperfectly cut, and that the machine-gun fire was so severe as to make the final assault impossible. The infantry dug in, therefore, and waited for further support from the guns, many of which were already on the move. The 9th Essex upon the right actually reached the Feuchy Chapel Work and held their grip of it, keeping in line with the 8th Brigade upon the south.

The Fifteenth Division to the north of the corps' front had before them the very strong position called the Railway Triangle, where the line to Lens branches away from the line to Douai. This formidable place was attacked by the Scotch infantry, and after a severe struggle it was captured about 11.30 save for its eastern side, which was finally taken later in the morning, the artillery aiding the assailants by some extraordinarily good shooting. The advance was then resumed, and the division found itself shortly after noon in the line of the second objective. Six brigades of field artillery had followed closely upon the heels of the infantry and managed, in spite of the unfavourable state of the ground, to take up a position to cover the further attack. When one recalls the dreadful weather and the shell-pocked state of the countryside, it was a remarkable feat upon the part of the gun-teams to get their pieces so rapidly forward. Several tanks came forward also, and did good work not only upon this front, but at Tilloy and The Harp.

The Fifteenth Division was now somewhat behind the others, but shortly after two o'clock the 46th Lowland Brigade advanced upon the third objective.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

These splendid soldiers brushed aside every obstacle, and when fired upon at short range by German guns rushed onwards with a yell and captured the battery. By 4 P.M. they had fully reached their final line and had pushed out their patrols some hundreds of yards to the eastwards. This fine advance, which was the only one to reach the extreme limit upon this front, was carried out by the 7th Scots Borderers, 10th Scots Rifles, and 12th Highland Light Infantry, with the 10/11th Highland Light Infantry mopping up behind them.

At 7 P.M. an attempt was made by the two southern divisions to get forward from the Feuchy Chapel Line and gain a position level with the 46th Brigade. Evening was setting in, however, the men were weary and the difficulties manifold, so that no progress was made, both the Third and the Fourteenth Divisions suffering additional losses in the attempt.

The Thirty-seventh Division, composed entirely of English troops, North, South, and Midland, had moved up in the rear of the fighting line, and in the middle of the afternoon it found itself in the German second line system, while the corps' mounted troops had followed behind the Fifteenth Division, as far as the Railway Triangle. As evening fell, the Thirty-seventh Division pushed forward with the intention of reaching the extreme point attained by the Fifteenth Division and then swinging to the right in the hope of capturing Monchy. The advance seems, however, to have taken a direction rather too much to the south, with the result that instead of finding the opening made by the 46th Brigade they came upon the more contracted Feuchy line held by the

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

Twelfth and Third Divisions. Here they were held up by a field of wire as their comrades had already been, and the two brigades concerned—the 111th upon the left and the 112th upon the right—remained in line with the 35th and the 8th Brigades, the units being considerably intermingled. The 63rd Brigade, however, which was now a brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division, though the reader will associate it with the Twenty-first Division in the past, was able to keep its true direction, and before night had finally established itself at the north end of Orange Hill well up to the third objective and in touch with the 46th Brigade. The corps' cavalry also pushed forward along the south bank of the Scarpe, capturing three 8-inch howitzers upon the way, and halting opposite Fampoux, where they were in touch with the Fourth Division upon the northern bank of the river.

Such was the splendid day's work of Haldane's Corps. It is true that in the south the uncut wire had made it impossible for them to reach their ultimate objective, but they had in the space of the one Easter day captured the villages of Feuchy and of Tilloy, the strong redoubts of The Harp and the Railway Triangle, gained some thirty-six square miles of ground, and taken 2000 prisoners with 60 guns. It was a most notable achievement. We shall now pause on the evening of this first day of battle and we shall go back to reconstruct the operations upon the northern bank of the Scarpe.

The Seventeenth Corps (Fergusson) was upon the left of the Sixth. Its right-hand unit, Lukin's Ninth Division, consisting of two Scottish and one South African brigade, was operating upon the immediate north of the Scarpe. This division was to attack with

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

three brigades in line, the 26th on the right, 27th on the left, and South Africans between. Upon the left of the Ninth was Nicholson's Thirty-fourth Division, drawn largely from Scotland and Tyneside, the same fine division which had been the very pivot upon which the battle of July 1 had turned. Upon the left of the corps was the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division which had distinguished itself so greatly at Beaumont Hamel five months before. It may be said, therefore, that the fighting line of the Seventeenth Corps upon this great day was predominantly Scottish, but Lambton's veteran Fourth Division was in immediate support. The whole battle-front was from the right bank of the Scarpe near Arras up to the post known as the Commandant's House, just south of Thelus. There were no villages over the greater part of this front, but there were great numbers of fortified farms and strong posts of every description, besides the usual lines of wired trenches. The ground was in successive ridges and a big tactical obstacle existed in the Lens—Arras railroad in its alternate cuttings and embankments. The long eager line of Highlanders, Tynesiders, and South Africans rolled over every obstacle, and by ten o'clock had mastered all the first objectives, which were the three lines of German trenches. In the south the Ninth Division, led by a well-known South African Imperial soldier, had carried first Blangy and then Athies by storm. There was a time when the 26th Brigade upon the right was hung up, but with fine initiative the right flank of the Transvaal Regiment worked down along the railway cutting and helped to clear the front of its neighbours. In the centre, the Thirty-fourth Division, after a short check at a network

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

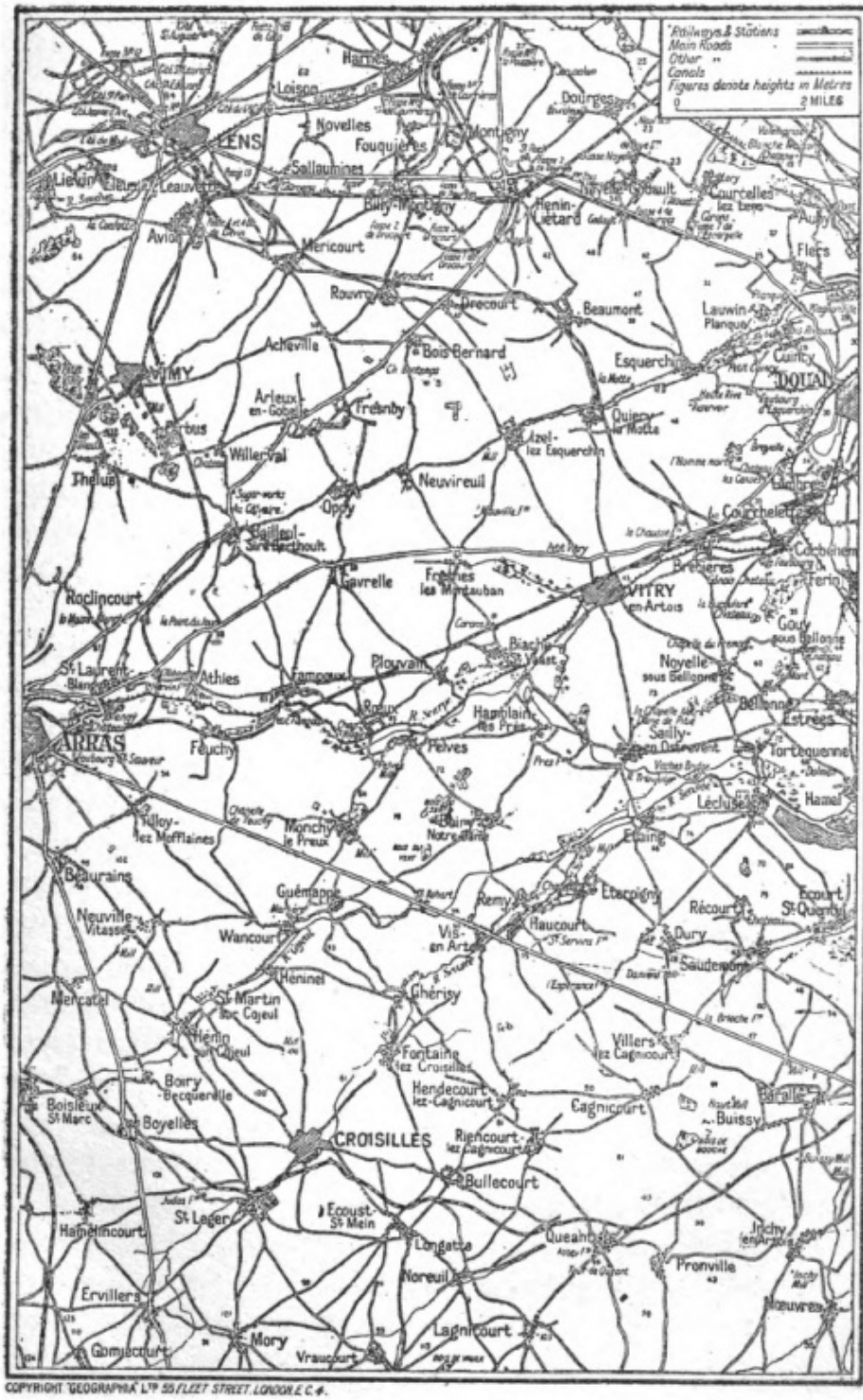
CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

of trenches called "The Pump," had reached its allotted positions. In the north the clansmen, who as Territorials were sprung from the very soil of the Highlands, had swiftly advanced to the south of Thelus and had covered the right wing of the First Canadians while they captured that village. It was victory all along the line, and victory without those excessive losses which have made many of our greatest successes as tragic as they are glorious. The artillery barrage had been found to be a powerful antidote against the deadly machine-guns. "When our barrage lifted off the railway cutting, the machine-guns had been silenced and all the gunners were found to be dead." Such was the report of a South African officer.

Allusion has been made to the check caused by the strong point called "The Pump" and the trenches called the Kleemanstellung just east of it. Some detail should be added in this matter, for it retarded the attack of the flanks of two divisions, and the delay caused by it had the effect that the Canadians on the left and the Ninth upon the right were further forward in the late afternoon than part of the Fifty-first and the Thirty-fourth, which might have caused a dangerous situation. The Thirty-fourth Division had advanced upon a three-brigade front, which consisted from the south of the 101st, the 102nd, and the 103rd. On the north of the 103rd was the 152nd Brigade of the Fifty-first Division with the Seaforths as the flank battalion. This pestilent strong point, armed with well-served and well-concealed machine-guns, lay between the two brigades and held up the flanks of both, inflicting considerable losses not only on the Seaforths, but

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY



COPYRIGHT 'GEOGRAPHIA' LTD 55 FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

THE ARRAS FRONT

To face page 89.

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

on the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers, who were on the left of the Thirty-fourth Division. For a considerable time the advance was held. The 27th reserve battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers were sent up, and one of its companies, led with a fine mixture of valour and cunning, carried the place by storm. The whole line then got forward, but the losses had been heavy, including Colonel Hermon of the 24th Northumberland Fusiliers. In the evening it was found that the final objective had not yet been fully attained at this quarter of the field, for it had been marked at a farm called Maison de la Côte, from which the front line was still a thousand yards distant. A brilliant little attack, however, by the 103rd Brigade, in the early morning of April 10, captured the whole position. Besides the check at The Pump, there had been another on the Fifty-first divisional front at a post called the "Deutsche Haus." The consequence of this was a loss of the barrage and a delay which led to the isolated left of the Fifty-first losing direction entirely and wandering round in a half-circle. The circumstances were so complex that it was not until next morning that they could be cleared up. Had the Germans had the spirit for a counter-attack, they would certainly have found a considerable gap in the line.

These events were in the northern area of the Seventeenth Corps. In the southern portion, at about eleven o'clock, the reserve division came forward, and, passing through the weary ranks of the Ninth, pushed on along the northern bank of the river. The advance had already been a splendid one, the Ninth Division having 2000 prisoners to its credit, but this

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

movement of the Fourth Division against an enemy who was already badly shaken was a very fruitful one. The 12th Brigade was nearest the Scarpe, with the 11th upon the left, while the 10th moved forward in close support. Two obstacles faced the division, the straggling village of Fampoux upon the bank of the river, and the Hyderabad Redoubt, a considerable fort to the north of the village. The 12th Brigade moved swiftly forward in the nearest approach to open warfare that had been seen for years. The 1st Royal Lancasters were on the right of the swift flexible line, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers in the centre, and the 2nd Essex upon the left. The brigade fought its way in the teeth of a very hot fire to the outskirts of Fampoux, where the reserve battalion, the 2nd West Ridings, passed through the King's Own and carried the village in splendid style late in the evening at the point of the bayonet. It is a remarkable fact that the wire in front of the village had not been cut by the artillery, and the infantry passed in single file through the gaps in it, after disposing of the only German machine-gunner who offered resistance. At the same time the 11th Brigade kept pace upon their left flank—the Hampshires to the left and Somersets to the right, while the 1st Rifle Brigade, passing through them, rushed the strong position of the Hyderabad Redoubt, and the East Lancashires formed a defensive flank. Communication was at once opened across the Scarpe with Haldane's Corps upon the south side. By this fine advance of the Fourth Division the right of the Seventeenth Corps had got considerably further forward than the centre, so that a defensive line had to be formed sloping back from this advanced point. This was the position

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

upon the evening of the first day of battle, and it was destined to remain so in the south for many a day to come, for the formidable Chemical Works lay immediately to the east on either side of the Arras—Douai railway track, and these were to prove a very grave obstacle to a further advance on this line. Meanwhile, 3500 prisoners with 50 captured guns testified to the success of the Seventeenth Corps.

Following upon this brief sketch of the work done by the Seventh, Sixth, and the Seventeenth Corps upon the first day of the Battle of Arras, we must now turn to the splendid achievement of the Canadian Corps upon the left. The reputation of the Canadians as brilliant soldiers, as dashing in attack as they were steady in defence, had already been solidly established by a long series of military feats beginning with the ever-memorable second battle of Ypres and continuing on to the capture of Courcelette and the fine fighting of the Somme. Hitherto, they had acted in comparatively small bodies, but now the whole might of Canada was drawn together in the four fine divisions which lay facing the historic Vimy Ridge—a long gradual slope which reaches a height of more than 450 feet at the summit. They were arranged in their numerical order from the south, the First (Currie) being in touch with the Fifty-first British Division, while the Fourth (Watson) had upon its left Holland's First Corps, which was not engaged in the first day's operations. The front covered by the Canadians was from the south end of the Ridge to the Souchez River, close to Lens. Nothing could have been more magnificent or more successful than their advance, the Second and Third Divisions (Burstall and Lipsett) attaining their full objectives

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

at every point, and the First doing the same after a short check. There was no rebuff save in the extreme north of the line. Sweeping onwards with irresistible fury, they overran three lines of German trenches, including the famous La Folie Farm, captured the village of Farbus, and secured the splendid total of 70 officers and 3500 men as prisoners, the same number as were taken by their British comrades to the immediate south. They not only crowned the redoubtable ridge, but they made their way down the eastern slope and established their line beyond it. Many of the German infantry were captured in the great chalk excavations in which they had taken refuge, two large tunnels in particular —the Volker and the Prinz Arnault Tunnels—being crammed with men. Incredible incidents happened in these subterranean burrows, where small bodies of Canadian moppers-up were faced suddenly by large numbers of armed Germans in hiding. In one well-authenticated case four Canadians bluffed and captured 2 officers and 70 men from a Bavarian unit who were found in such a pocket, an incident which meant a V.C. for Major Macdowell. When the Kaiser in prophetic mood had spoken about what would happen when his Bavarians met the British, such an incident was far from his thoughts. It should be mentioned that the Fifth British Division was in close support of the Canadians, and that the 13th Brigade of this division was incorporated with the Second Canadians upon that day. It was used in conjunction with the 6th Canadian Brigade on its right to take the final objectives, the eastern slopes of the Ridge, just north of Farbus Wood, which they did successfully with slight losses.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

The Battle of Arras. April 10.

During the night of the 9/10th April there was fighting at several points, notably at the north end of the Vimy Ridge. Here the Fourth Canadian Division had some difficulty in holding its ground against several strong counter-attacks of the Germans. It is probable that no body of troops in the whole battle had a harder task, or stuck to it more tenaciously, than this Fourth Canadian Division. Hill 145, which was an outlier of the Ridge, was very strongly held and desperately defended, so that it would have turned any but first-class troops. The final clearing of this point was effected upon April 10, and led to further operations in conjunction with British troops to the north, which will be afterwards described.

The second day of the Battle of Arras, April 10, was spent partly in the consolidation of the ground gained and partly in increasing the area now occupied. The troops were in high heart, for although the full extent of the victory had not yet been realised, it was already known that at least 10,000 prisoners and 100 guns had fallen into their hands, figures which showed that the battle had been the most serious military disaster which had yet befallen the enemy. A fuller enumeration taken some days later gave 13,000 men, 3 howitzers, 28 heavy guns, 130 field-guns, 84 trench-mortars, and 250 machine-guns as the total capture. It may be mentioned that over 1000 prisoners were taken from each of the six different German divisions already enumerated, which disposes of their mendacious assertion that only two divisions occupied their front. It was certainly the greatest blow delivered by the British Army up to that date, and the only other day's fighting at all comparable in its results was the French attack upon the Champagne

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 10.

front on September 25, 1915, where the number of prisoners was greater but the capture of guns was less.

The Battle of Arras may be considered as having been in truth a one-day battle in the same sense as the succeeding Battle of Messines, for in each case the attack was delivered in order to gain a definite objective, which was the ridge from which observation could be obtained. The extreme limit of advance had not, however, been reached either in the south or in the north, and so in both these areas hard fighting continued, due partly to the efforts of the British to enlarge their gains and partly to the rally of the Germans and their attempts at counter-attack. There was no concentration of troops or guns, however, upon the side of the British, and no attempt at any considerable advance. We shall first follow these operations in the south where they centred chiefly round the village of Monchy and Wancourt in the areas of the Sixth and Seventh Corps. These we shall weave into a connected narrative, after which we shall return to the Vimy region and trace the movements which led to hard fighting in that quarter.

In the Seventh Corps to the south the Fifty-sixth Division of London Territorials had, as already described, enlarged the area which it had taken the day before in the Neuville Vitasse sector. The general curve of the line was such that it was not possible for the units of the Seventh Corps to get forward until the Sixth Corps to the north had won some ground, but upon the afternoon of the 12th a very fine advance was made, by which the 169th Brigade stormed Heninel. The Cojeul River was crossed by the

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Fourteenth Light Division, and the heights upon the eastern bank were occupied. The 41st Brigade of this unit had now come into the line. The first attempt upon the heights failed with heavy losses. Next morning it was found that Hill 90 had been evacuated, and they were able to advance and seize Wancourt. This brought the left flank of the Seventh Corps up to the right flank of the Sixth Corps, and ensured close co-operation in those operations to the north which will presently be more fully described. This storming of the German position in this section was the more important as the troops were faced by the new Hindenburg Line. It was well known that an alternative line from Drocourt to Quéant existed some miles to the eastward, but none the less the fall of the front section at a period when much of its wire was still intact proved to the Germans how impossible it was to hold off British troops by mere passive obstacles. The tanks were of great assistance to the assailants in this difficult operation. Upon April 13 and 14 the Twenty-first Division, with the aid of the 19th Brigade from the Thirty-third Division, carried forward the line to the high ground about 1000 yards east of the stream at Henin, astride of that portion of the Hindenburg Line. Here all further attempts to advance were stopped by fresh German troops, until the operations were renewed upon April 23. This advance of the Twenty-first Division upon April 13 and 14 was in connection with a general movement of Snow's Corps, but neither the Fifty-sixth London Territorials in the centre nor the Fiftieth North Countrymen on the left, both of them enfiladed from the north, could make much progress beyond the line of Wancourt Tower, and there was little to

April 10.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 10.

show for a hard day's work. The Thirty-third Division (Pinney) now took over the front from the Twenty-first.

The immediate task which lay before the Sixth Corps upon April 10 was to get the Third and Twelfth Divisions forward to the same line which the Fifteenth Division had reached. It will be remembered that the 46th Brigade of the latter division, together with the 63rd Brigade from the supporting Thirty-seventh Division, had pushed on as far as Orange Hill, half a mile farther eastward than the Feuchy Line which formed the front of the two southern Divisions. Six brigades of field artillery had been hurried up, and with the help of these guns, aided by trench-mortars, the wire which held up the advance was partly blown away. The Third and Twelfth Divisions were then able to move forward and to make one line with the Fifteenth—an operation which was completed by mid-day, the 8th Brigade doing some brilliant work. The strongly fortified village of Monchy, elevated above the plain, lay immediately in front of the Sixth Corps, and its capture was their next task. With this object in view, the 63rd Brigade was swung round from the north and worked its way south and east, getting into touch with the other brigades of the Thirty-seventh Division, which passed through the newly captured third objective and occupied the ground upon the west of the village. A general advance was then made on each side of the village, the 112th Brigade occupying La Bergère upon the Cambrai road due south of Monchy, while the 1/11th Brigade, with the 9th and 10th Royal Fusiliers in the lead, in the face of a considerable opposition, pushed onwards until it gained a footing on the out-

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

skirts of the village and on the high ground to the north of it, where the 154th Company R.E. dug a temporary line. This was the position on the evening of April 10, while the British line had been strengthened by the presence of the 7th Brigade of Cavalry from the Third Cavalry Division, who were following closely behind the Thirty-seventh Division. In all these operations the weather greatly impeded progress, as it prevented the advance of the guns needed to break down wire and other obstacles.

During the night of April 10 the Twelfth Division was withdrawn into reserve, and the advance was resumed in the early morning by the remaining divisions and the cavalry. At 5 A.M. the infantry was closing in upon Monchy under a heavy fire. The line of advance extended right across the Cambrai road, the 76th Brigade finding itself opposite to the village of Guémappe. Here they were exposed to a very heavy fire of machine-guns, and this famous brigade sustained heavy losses, which were increased by a second attempt to get forward in the afternoon. The 76th Brigade finally entrenched itself some half a mile to the west of Guémappe and waited for developments. The 8th Royal Lancasters were particularly hard hit in their attack.

In the meantime the 111th Brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division had advanced directly upon Monchy, and after severe fighting, in which the splendid infantry struggled onwards in the face of every possible difficulty of German resistance and of driving snowstorms, the place was carried by assault. The three regiments of cavalry from the 8th Brigade, the Royal Horse Guards, 10th Hussars, and Essex Yeomanry, advanced at a gallop and did splendid service by taking

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 11.

part in the attack, following closely upon the infantry, and helping to consolidate the village. By nine o'clock in the morning the 13th K.R.R. and 13th Rifle Brigade, greatly aided by a very active and efficient tank, had driven their way to the farthest houses upon the eastern side. About 150 of the garrison remained in their hands, while very many lay dead among the ruins of the shattered buildings. The cavalry, who lost their brave leader, General Bulkeley Johnson, emerged on the eastern side of the village and lost heavily at that point, especially in horses, some 500 of which were hit. They had the satisfaction, however, of getting their light guns fairly on to the Germans, as they streamed across the open. One who was present says: "The cavalry filled the gap between us and the 112th Brigade. They lost heavily, and their conduct was magnificent." The new gain was instantly consolidated by the Colonel of the Rifles.

The Fifteenth Division upon the left of the Thirty-seventh had been fighting its way forward upon the north, endeavouring to keep in line with the Thirty-seventh. It had got somewhat ahead of the Fourth Division, however, which was to the north of the Scarpe, and in consequence had to face the whole fire from the strong village of Rœux, which held them up. The general line of the corps that night was La Bergère, Monchy, and then the line of the Monchy—Fampoux road as far as the Scarpe. To the north of the Scarpe there had been no forward movement, as the Chemical Works to the east of Fampoux presented an obstacle which was beyond the immediate scope of Sir Charles Fergusson's operations.

On the night of April 11 the Thirty-seventh

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Division, which had suffered considerably in the capture of Monchy, and the Fifteenth which had lived up to its reputation during fifty-six hours of incessant fighting under most inclement conditions, were withdrawn for a short rest, while the Twelfth Division returned into the line, and the Seventeenth took the place of the Thirty-seventh. April 12 was spent in consolidation and in bringing up heavy howitzer batteries along the Cambrai road, and placing them in positions between Feuchy and Tilloy where they could support the coming operations.

From the time that the British had captured the village, both it and the whole front line in that area had been subjected to a most severe German bombardment, which tried the troops extremely, but did not prevent them from repulsing several attempts at counter-attack, none of which reached the front trenches. On the night of April 12 the Twelfth Division, which was considerably worn from its exertions, was drawn out and was replaced by the famous Twenty-ninth Regular Division, which had gained such honour and suffered such losses at Gallipoli and on the Somme. There was no forward movement upon April 13 in the region of Monchy, but farther south the 9th Brigade, which had taken the place of the 76th in front of Guémappe, endeavoured to reach that village, but were met and checked by the same murderous machine-gun fire which had held up their comrades, a fire which came both from the hamlet itself and from the high ground to the south which lay within the area of the Seventh Corps. The 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and 12th West Yorks, which led the attack, both suffered severely.

As no large movement was contemplated upon

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 14.

this front it was now held by only two divisions, the Twenty-ninth to the south and the Seventeenth to the north, covering the whole broad area from the north of the Cojeul River to the south of the Scarpe. At 5.30 upon April 14 both divisions advanced in order to test the German strength and, if possible, to push them farther back from Monchy. It was an unsuccessful day, and yet it was one of those failures which will be remembered where facile successes have been forgotten, for it brought with it one episode which elicited in the highest degree the historical qualities of British infantry. It had been arranged that the 88th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, 1st Essex, and the Newfoundland Regiment, should attack due east of Monchy, while another brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division should advance to their right, and the Seventeenth Division guard their flank upon the left. Both of the flank attacks failed, however, and the result was that the storming line of the 88th Brigade, consisting of the Essex men on the left and the Newfoundlanders on the right, found themselves in possession of the German trenches on Infantry Hill, east of Monchy, but with both wings exposed and with so terrific a barrage behind them that they were practically cut off from assistance. This might have mattered little under ordinary circumstances, since two such battalions might be counted upon to hold their ground, but by an evil chance their advance had coincided with a considerable German counter-attack from the Bois du Sart, made by a whole Bavarian division with the intention of retaking Monchy. The result was a Homeric contest in which two battalions held up a whole division, shattered a considerable attack, and

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

were practically annihilated in doing so. Of some companies not a single man returned and yet few were ever reported as prisoners in Germany. No more gallant feat of arms has been performed in the war. The 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters in support did their best to help their comrades, and sustained considerable losses themselves in the attempt, but they were never able to reach the real front line, and it is undoubtedly true that the two battalions alone received and broke the full strength of the Bavarian Division, which was entirely fresh, having taken no part in any previous fighting. It was difficult in the barrage and confusion—the ground being unreconnoitred—to direct reinforcements to the points where they were so urgently needed, but a lieutenant of the Essex passed through the German barrage and managed to bring up one company of the 2nd Hants, who came too late to retrieve the fight, but were able to take up the defence of the northern flank and to prevent the Germans from getting round in that quarter. Small parties of the enemy got up to the fringes of the village, but the edge had been taken completely from their assault, and in spite of the heavy barrage, the staff of the brigade headquarters, who were the only troops available, were sufficient to hold them off; Colonel Forbes Robertson doing particularly good work with a Lewis gun. No German set foot in Monchy. Of the headquarter staff there were only nine survivors, each of whom was decorated.

Apart from the attack so heroically repelled, a second had developed to the south-east of Monchy which was driven back by rifles and machine-guns. The total German losses during the day must have been very heavy, and they had nothing to show for

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 14.

it, though the British casualties amounted to some 4000, chiefly in the Twenty-ninth Division.

It must be admitted that the Germans, who had been strongly reinforced in men and in guns, were fighting with great resolution on this front, and their defence and counter-attacks were equally gallant.

From this date onwards until April 22, there was no particular forward movement, and every effort was concentrated upon the improvement of defences and communications. There were no fresh German counter-attacks, but there was constant and heavy bombardment upon both sides, the Germans pouring shells into Monchy and raking every road which led to the front, while the British overwhelmed Guémappe, Rœux, and Pelves with their fire. The only change of troops was that upon the night of April 19 the Fifteenth Scottish Division, after its short rest, pushed in upon the right of the Twenty-ninth Division, taking over the ground between La Bergère on the north and the Cojeul River on the south. The order of battle of the Sixth Corps was therefore from the north the Seventeenth, Twenty-ninth, and Fifteenth Divisions.

We shall now retrace our steps to glance at what had been going on since the first day of the battle upon the front of the Seventeenth Corps to the immediate north of the Scarpe. It has already been recorded how the flank unit, the Fourth Division, after relieving the Ninth Division found itself faced with the strongly-fortified Chemical Works and the village of Rœux. The position was a very formidable one, as future tragic experiences were to prove. Two brigades of the Ninth Division, the 27th Lowlanders upon the left and the South Africans upon the right, were ordered to pass the line of the Fourth Division

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

and to endeavour to carry the place by assault. The attempt was not successful, though it was urged with great valour. The wastage of the division had already been such that neither brigade numbered 2000 bayonets. The average strength of the South African regiments was about 400 men. As a result, the attack was wanting in weight, and was repulsed with considerable loss, which fell chiefly upon the 1st Cape and 2nd Natal battalions in the front line of the South Africans. The attackers endured heavy losses in debouching from the narrow exits of Fampoux under fire, and they were afterwards faced with 700 yards of open ground swept by bullets. In spite of this, some of the stormers did actually penetrate the German lines, as was proved later by the discovery of their bodies.

To the north of this section of fierce fighting the line, which had sagged upon the evening of April 9, had been brought level upon April 10 by the readjustment of the Fifty-first Division, and by the attack of the 103rd Brigade of Tyneside Scottish upon the Maison de la Côte position. From that time the British front was firm in this region, and a strong counter-attack of four German battalions, who could be seen streaming westwards in lines of motor 'buses, was broken to pieces upon the night of April 11 by the steady rifle-fire of the 27th Northumberland Fusiliers who occupied the front trenches.

Facing this section of the line was the village of Bailleul which was abandoned by the Germans, and was taken over by Pereira's Second Division, who had relieved the Highland Territorials upon April 13. Shortly afterwards the Sixty-third Naval Division took over from the Thirty-fourth. These two divi-

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 13.

sions belonged to the Thirteenth Corps (M'Cracken), which from now onward occupied a space in the line between the Seventeenth to the south and the Canadians to the north. The strong villages of Oppy and of Gavrelle lay now in front of the British in this quarter, but the German line was destined to remain unbroken for a considerable period. An attack was made upon Gavrelle by the 190th Brigade, the landsman unit of the Naval Division, but this was only partially successful. Farther to the north the Second Division had no better fortune against Oppy, which was attempted more than once. The further advance against these places will be found recorded further on, where it will fit into its place among the other incidents of the renewed general attack upon April 23.

The Canadians in the Vimy Ridge area were occupied during three days of dreadful weather in consolidating their new positions, and in pushing the Germans out of that northern portion which they still held. The Fourth Canadian Division had suffered much from machine-gun fire from Hill 145 in the Souchez district, but this was taken upon April 10. There was still a good deal of work to be done, however, at that end of the line, and upon April 12 a joint attack of Canadians and British cleared the ground in this quarter. Attacking at dawn in a snowstorm, the resolute Canadian infantry drove their way over the northern limits of Vimy Ridge, capturing among other positions an outlier of the Vimy Ridge, the venomous little hill called The Pimple, which had been a thorn in their side. At the same time the Twenty-fourth British Division moved forward nearly opposite to Lens, the river Souchez separating them from the Canadians. The immediate obstacle which

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

faced the British troops was a scattered wood, the Bois-en-Haches, which was most gallantly attacked by the 73rd Brigade. The front line in this fine advance was formed by the 9th Sussex on the left and the 2nd Leinsters upon the right, supported by the 13th Middlesex and 7th Northamptons. Both the Sussex and the Irish battalions, especially the latter, had heavy losses, but they never faltered until their objective was won. Upon April 13 there was a general forward movement along the whole Canadian line, in the course of which they occupied Willerval in the south and both Vimy and Givenchy-en-Gohelle in the north. On the same date the 15th and 95th Brigades of the British Fifth Division took over from the Fourth Canadian Division from the Souchez River to south of Givenchy-en-Gohelle. These two brigades actually took over on the move forward, and did not stop until they had reached a line Cité-des-Petits-Bois to the Vimy—Lens Road just short of La Coulotte.

The Twenty-fourth Division in the north joined in this attack as, to a limited extent, did the Sixth Division upon its left. It may be explained that both of these divisions, together with the Forty-sixth in support of them, formed Holland's First Corps. The Twenty-fourth Division advanced upon a three-brigade front, the 72nd, 17th, and 73rd Brigades in that order from the left, sweeping forward in one line. Complete success attended their efforts. Angres, Lievin, and Cité St. Pierre were all stormed and occupied. The 17th Brigade, which had been strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Marine Battalion, did particularly well, for it was faced by two dangerous strong points called Crook and Crazy, both of which were carried, the 3rd Rifle Brigade

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 13.

being conspicuous in each operation. Some days later, the Forty-sixth Division took over from the Twenty-fourth and the new line was firmly held, the area of the Forty-sixth being from the Souchez River in the south to Fosse 12 de Lens in the north. Farther to the north the Sixth Division had made some progress, but had not been able to surmount the old enemy, Hill 70, the long, clear glacis of which had cost the British such losses at Loos. The Twenty-fourth Division had lost 3000 men in these operations, but their services had been of great value, for the grip upon Lens was appreciably tighter, and according to Sir Douglas Haig's despatch it was the capture of this position which prevented the Germans from attempting the retaking of the positions which they had lost. The British Army was close to the great mining centre, one of the springs of wealth in France. Ominous explosions and dense plumes of dark smoke seemed to show that it was a spring which would be sealed for many a day. So precipitate had been the German retreat in this area that candles were found burning in the dug-outs, meals were half consumed, and large stores of engineering materials and grenades were left behind.

Pausing for a moment at this instant, with the line advanced from three to six miles along the whole front, one may take a glance at the practical results of this great battle. As a mere military triumph it was a considerable one, since the total booty in the immediate battle came by this date to some 14,000 men and 180 guns. Its strategical result was to win the high ground along the whole of a front which had been considered impregnable, and so to give both better observation and drier foothold to the army.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

It was clear that it must entail a prolongation of the same operation to the north, and this was manifested two months later at the victory of Messines. That again pointed to a fresh prolongation towards the higher ground round Ypres, which led to the severe but successful fighting in the autumn. Thus the Arras Battle was the prologue to the whole campaign of 1917.

It is impossible, even in so brief an account as this, to turn away from this great victory without a word as to the splendid service of the airmen, and the glorious efforts by which they secured the supremacy over their brave adversaries. The air, the guns, the infantry—those are the three stages which lead from one to the other in a modern battle. Starting with every possible disadvantage, our knight-errants of the air, as without hyberbole they may well be called, by a wonderful mixture of reckless dare-devil bravery and technical skill brought their side to victory. The mixture of the Berserk fighter and of the cool engineer, as ready with the spanner and oil-can as with the pistol and machine-gun, is indeed a strange product of modern tactics. No mention of these grand men, most of them hardly more than boys in their years, could be complete which did not specially name one who is likely to remain as a great memory and inspiration in the Service, Captain Albert Ball, a gallant youth whose bravery and modesty were equally beautiful. He brought down not less than forty-three German planes in single combat before meeting his own glorious end.

Whilst this battle had been raging along the Arras front, the great southern curve which marked the eventual halting-place of the German retreat was

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 2–12.

the scene of continual fighting, which attained no great intensity save at Bullecourt, but smouldered all along the line, as the British drove in the outlying German posts and impinged upon the main Hindenburg position from Croisilles to St. Quentin. Detail of these smaller operations hardly comes within the scale of this narrative, but some indication of their nature and sequence may be given. On April 2 had been the successful advance upon Ecoust, Noreuil, Louverval, and Doignies, which was carried out to the immediate south of the Seventh Corps area by the left of Gough's Fifth Army. The troops engaged were the British Divisions — the Seventh, Fifty-eighth, and Sixty-second upon the left near Croisilles, the Fourth Australians at Noreuil, and the Fifth Australians at Doignies and Hermies. This brought the army in this section up to the front Hindenburg Line, which the Australians with little support behind them proceeded at once to break, a most valiant but rather rash undertaking, as it was clear that the task was one which required the massed batteries of several army corps to bring it to success. The idea was to connect up with the flank of the Third Army in its new positions and the Sixty-second British Division advance on the left for the same purpose. The attack, which began upon April 12, was directed against the line at a point between Bullecourt village upon the left and Lagnicourt upon the right. A broad apron of barbed wire covered the whole German front, and the only means of piercing it, in the absence of heavy gun power, was by the crushing force of tanks. The attack was delivered across the snow in the early morning by men many of whom had never seen snow

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

in their lives until they entered the war zone. In some places the tanks broke the wire, but for the greater part the infantry—West Australians and New South Welshmen on right, Victorians on left—with extraordinary gallantry and with considerable loss worked its way through it, taking the village of Riencourt. On the farther side, however, they were met with repeated bombing attacks which continued through the morning and afternoon with such pertinacity that the Australian supply of bombs was exhausted. There were only three tanks, and though they behaved with the greatest audacity they were all put out of action. The artillery support being inadequate, the infantry had to fall back, and one considerable party, some 700 in number, were unable to get through the wire, so that after doing all that men could do they were compelled to surrender. Several of these men escaped later with fresh tales of that German brutality to prisoners which has been their constant policy, with a few honourable exceptions, since the first days of the war. When the large national issues have been settled or forgotten, these smaller villainies will leave Germans as outcasts among the civilised nations of the earth, with no living men save the murderers of Armenia with whom they can hold equal converse. This temporary repulse upon the Hindenburg Line by no means disheartened the Australians, who argued that if with so little support they could effect so much, a more deliberate assault could hardly fail of success. Within three weeks, as will be shown, they were to prove the truth of their contention.

In the meantime, a considerable German attack had been prepared which fell upon the Australian line

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 15.

in the early morning of April 15. Two Guards Divisions and two ordinary divisions took part in it, so that it was no small matter. The outposts were weak and a number of the field-guns had been brought well forward into the front line, so that the first onset crashed through the defences and brought about a situation which might have been dangerous. The front line rallied, and with the aid of supports advanced so swiftly upon the Germans that they had little time to injure the guns which had come for the moment into their power. The front of the attack was nearly six miles, from Hermies to Noreuil, with its centre at Lagnicourt, and all along this extended position the stormers had rushed forward in heavy masses into the Australian line. It was easier to break than to destroy, for every scattered post spat out bullets from rifles and Lewis guns, fighting viciously until it was either submerged or rescued. In some posts, notably that of Subaltern Pope, an old warrant-officer of the Navy from West Australia, the men fired away every cartridge and then all died together, stabbing and thrusting with their bayonets into the grey clouds which hemmed them in. Seventy German dead were found round his position. In front of Lagnicourt, the Germans had the advanced guns in their hands for nearly two hours, but they had been dismantled by the gunners before they were abandoned, and the Prussian Guardsmen had apparently no means of either moving or of destroying them. All of them, save five, were absolutely intact when retaken. A rush of Queenslanders and New South Welshmen drove back the intruders, retrieved the guns, and followed the fugitives into Lagnicourt. Large numbers of the Germans were shot down in their retreat,

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

especially in their efforts to get back through the gaps in their own wire. Both sides took several hundred prisoners in this action, but the German losses were heavy, and nothing at all was gained.

April 15.

The units which have been mentioned, the Seventh Fifty-eighth, and Sixty-second Divisions, with the Fourth and Fifth Australian Divisions, constituted for the moment the whole of Gough's Fifth Army. To its south, extending from the right of the Australians at Hermies down to the junction with the French at St. Quentin, lay Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which consisted at this period of the Fifteenth Corps (Du Cane) upon the left, with the Twentieth, Eighth, and Forty-eighth Divisions in the line. To the south of this was the Third Corps with the Fifty-ninth, Thirty-fifth, and Thirty-second Divisions in the line. Their general instructions were to push the enemy back so as to gain complete observation of the Hindenburg system. The Twentieth Division pushed up into Havrincourt Wood, and gradually by many skirmishes cleared it of the enemy, an operation which extended over some time, but was not accompanied by any hard fighting.

A sharp little action, already described, was fought at the extreme south of the British line upon April 13, in which the Thirty-second Division was engaged. This unit captured Fayet, which is only one mile north of St. Quentin. At the same time, the two divisions upon the left, the Thirty-fifth and the Fifty-ninth, advanced and captured the ground in front of them. After some fighting, these two divisions occupied the Gricourt—Pontruet line. This section of the line ceased after April to concern the

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II.

The Battle of Arras.

April 13.

British commanders, for the St. Quentin end of it was taken over by the French, while the trenches north of that were occupied by Canadian and Indian cavalry, so as to release fresh divisions for the operations in the north.

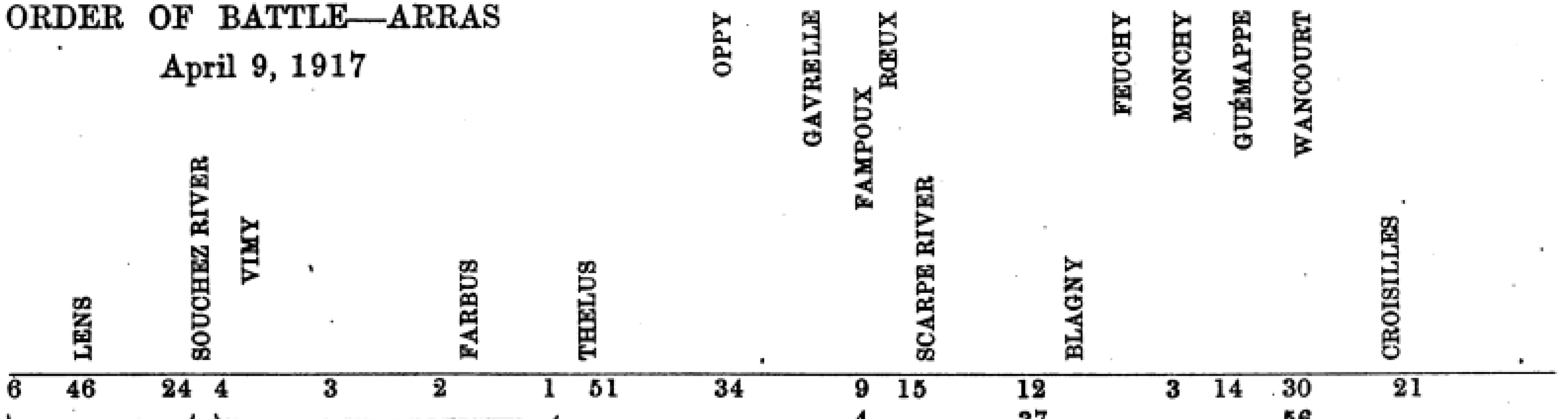
The full objects of the Arras battle, so far as they could be attained, had been reached after a week of fighting. Had he only himself to consult, Sir Douglas would have assumed a strict defensive from that time onwards and begun at once to transfer his forces for those operations which he had planned in Flanders. It was essential, however, that he should hold and use up as many German divisions as possible in order to help the French offensive which was about to start in the south. How successful the British General had been already in this design is shown by his own statement that after this week of fighting the Germans had twice as many divisions opposite to him as they had at the beginning, and were driven into constant counter-attacks which cost them heavy losses. The whole aftermath of the Battle of Arras, extending until the end of May, is to be judged from this point of view, and though we may be inclined to wince at the heavy losses and the limited results, we have to bear in mind continually the wider strategic meaning of the operations.

Digitized by Google

Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Chart of
ORDER OF BATTLE—ARRAS
April 9, 1917



Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

OPERATIONS IN THE ARRAS SECTOR FROM APRIL 23 ONWARDS

Advance of April 23—Middlesex and Argyll—Grand fighting of the Fifteenth Division—H.A.C. at Gavrelle—Operations of May 3—The Gavrelle Windmill—Loss of Fresnoy—Capture of Roeux—The long fight at Bullecourt.

CHAPTER III.

Operations in the Arras Sector.

UPON April 16 the great French offensive had broken out upon the Aisne, directed against the line of Chalk Downs which the British had learned to know so well in 1914, and aiming at that ancient road, the Chemin des Dames, which some of the First Division had actually reached in that year. The attack was very successful in the outset, a haul of prisoners and guns being secured which brought their victory to a level with that at Arras. After a time, however, the defence became too strong for the attack, and the French losses became very serious. Whilst they were gathering their strength for a fresh blow, which was brilliantly delivered later in the year, it was necessary for Sir Douglas to keep up his pressure to the north, and to engage guns and troops which should, according to his original plan, have been diverted long ago to the Flemish front. This had the effect of delaying the operations there, and this in turn brought us into the premature rainy season which began upon

Digitized by Google
Original from CORNELL UNIVERSITY